



Red Rope Socialist Walking and Climbing Club

Bulletin 40, December 2020

www.redrope.org.uk

A long weekend in Beddgelert, September 17th to 20th, 2020

This is not exactly a trip report, but five Red Rope members plus a guest did spend a Thursday to Sunday at the Cae Ysgubor hut, paying a banded charge, and had a good time in the hills.

The party consisted of Damien Connor and myself from London, Steve and Sue Wright from Birmingham, and Heather Morris and Andy Martin from Leicester. Damien and I got in an extra day by spending the Wednesday night at the independent hostel in Llangollen. There are no huts near Llangollen, so many of us will have just driven through on our way to Snowdonia, but it is a great walking area. On Wednesday afternoon we had a short walk on the Berwyns south of the town, and on Thursday did a bigger circuit to the north, taking in Valle Crucis abbey and the very impressive Castell Dinas Bran, originally a hill fort and later a palace of the Welsh kings, high above Llangollen.

We met up with Heather and Andy at Cae Ysgubor on Thursday evening, and on Friday did a circuit round to the east, returning to Beddgelert through the Pass of Aberglaslyn, where the path winds through the rocks of this river gorge, staying close to the river. We ended with a visit to the excellent ice cream shop. Steve and Sue arrived that evening for a shorter stay.

On Saturday, Heather, Andy and I went up Moel Hebog, a proper mountain (782 m.) directly overlooking Beddgelert. Gale force hail had defeated me the year before, and as we neared the summit the wind was pretty fierce but we made it to the top. We returned by a more roundabout route through the woods, stopping off this time at the busy tea garden in Beddgelert. Sunday was the day to go home, so most of us did a shorter walk north of Capel Curig, having lunch overlooking Llyn Crafnant.

So how was any of this possible in the time of covid?

This was not a “two fingers to the pandemic” trip: we were closely following government guidelines and the British Mountaineering Council’s advice on the use of huts, and one constant in that guidance was that outdoor exercise is needed for health, and pretty safe in informal groups of up to six. The problems are with where you stay overnight, and how you get there:

Most climbing clubs are currently not accepting outside bookings. We have access to the Lancashire Mountaineering Club’s huts at Cae Ysgubor and Blea Tarn, in the Lake District, because we partnered with them in developing Cae Ysgubor.

The LMC huts were completely closed during lockdown and since then access has been “covid-safe”: each sleeping room may be used by only one person, unless people are from a single household or bubble. Our trip worked because Cae Ysgubor had three sleeping rooms available and we were from

two households, plus Damien and myself as a support bubble.

The huts are kept empty for four nights between each visit, which removes the need for “deep cleaning” (we still left it clean and tidy).

Each person or pair had to stick to not just a sleeping room but also one particular shower/washroom. The same principle was followed at the Llangollen hostel: the communal kitchen etc was closed, Damien and I had to stick to a particular bathroom, and some bedrooms were closed off because there were not enough bathrooms.

If you share a sleeping platform for several nights with someone with covid, you will probably catch it, and the same is true of long car journeys, even if you wear a mask. Each pair came in their own car, and there was no swapping round (our main walks were from the hut anyway).

The most problematic aspect was that we were sitting down to eat evening meals together, but the kitchen/living room at CY is big and airy, and the dining table is also pretty big, so with six people there could be quite a bit of distancing. Each night one pair took all responsibility for the meal.

Everyone in the party was asked to broadly isolate for a fortnight before the trip, and I discussed this by phone with everyone. We were still going shopping etc beforehand, but this attempt at quarantine was coupled with substantial distancing within the trip.

Clearly, this was different from a proper Red Rope trip, and significantly less communal, but it did feel like a trip and, as the weather was great, it also felt like a holiday. It was unavoidably smaller than a club trip, and having even six people was possible only because of our being three pairs, and because Cae Ysgubor is unusually well equipped not just with separate bedrooms but also bathrooms. However, we could maybe have a bigger “meet” in the area based on some people camping, and joining up for day walks.

At the time of writing, you cannot go to Cae Ysgubor because Wales is in lockdown, but it will almost certainly be possible for individual members to book the LMC huts long before we can book club trips into other huts, or do large scale car sharing. You can check which weekends are available on the LMC web site:

<https://lanctmc.org/lmc/huts/>

However, to make a booking you need to go through Red Rope’s Hut Liaison and Booking Secretary (bednight@redrope.org.uk). For your first visit, you will need to pay £20 for your own digital key to the hut, as well as a banded overnight charge. (See ‘Club Hut’ under ‘Quick Links’ on RR homepage for details.)

Humphrey Southall

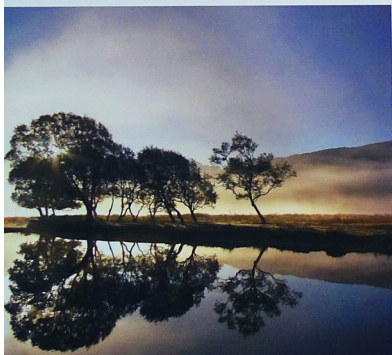


Views of Snowdonia

- all the photos here were taken within ten miles of Cae Ysgubor

Left - the Snowdon Horseshoe

The summits are, from the left: Y Lliwedd, Snowdon (Yr Wyddfa), Crib Goch and Crib y Ddysgl



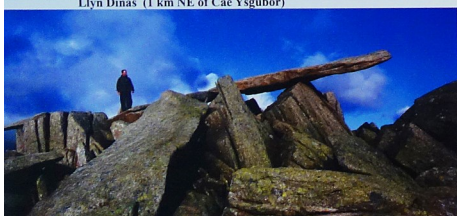
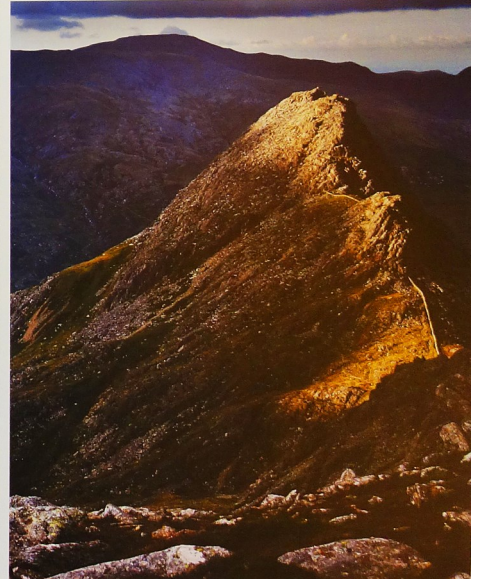
Llyn Dinas (1 km NE of Cae Ysgubor)



Llyn y Gader (Rhyd Ddu)



Cnicht



West Mids/National Trip Report, 27 September - 1 October, 2018

(One of three articles in this edition which were not written recently. Ed.)

Eight Red Rope members walked part of the South West Coastal Path taking in interesting geology, stunning scenery and wildlife.

Thursday 27/9/2018

Elmscott Youth Hostel is located 1.5 miles from the SW Coast path on the Hartland Heritage Coast, Bideford, Devon. It is a renovated Victorian School surrounded by beautiful scenic coast line with a view of the Atlantic Ocean and Lundy Island. On arrival four of us quickly unpack then head for a cliff top, prior to the evening pub meal.

Friday 28/9/2018 Clovelly to Elmscott, 12.5 miles

The serious walking began. We park two cars at Hartland, catch a bus to Clovelly and walk the coastal path back to Elmscott Y.H. taking in the different strata in the rocks, the varied coastal scenery, the worrying coastal erosion and a sunset. I have read about coastal erosion, but am unprepared for the vast chunks of cliff that had dropped away. I recall the report of a woman walking along a beach when the cliff dropped away and buried her alive. She died. Now I measure the height of the cliff with my eye and make sure I am at least that distance away from the cliff. High tide may make this impossible. The charred trees on the beach were like something out of a science fiction film, quite extraordinary. We are lucky to have people on our group who explain the geology of the rocks, pointing out how the rock had 'folded' in places, and that Lundy Island is volcanic. The slower walkers are rewarded with a magnificent sunset as we amble back to the hostel.

Saturday 29/9/2018 Elmscott to Bude, 14 miles

At 0530 hours, I cross the court yard to shower in the annexe, so as not to disturb sleepers. Through the trees I see the promise of a spectacular sunrise. Walking into the road to get a better view, I wrap my towel around me, for tiny warmth. Witches' fingers poked the sky, zapping the sun beams from below and along the horizon, leaking violent blood red into the sky. The cold spreads into my feet and bones but I refuse to fetch a coat in case I miss the moment the sun rises.

I must have looked a bizarre sight standing in a gateway in my pyjamas and wild hair but very soon I am joined by another guest, who has the sense to wear a cap and coat. It soon transpires that he has a degree in physics as he tries to explain how the

colours vary due to change in atmosphere and the light bending. When the sun did arrive it was ordinary in comparison to the prior light display. Chilled to the bone I was glad to stand under a hot shower. Meanwhile the ceiling fell down in the ladies' dorm.

"Double rations of fruit and snacks. Today is a tough walk." According to the guide book, this is the toughest part of the SW Coast Path and we are ambitious to walk such a long stretch of inclines and declines and hundreds of steps in warm weather.



I see meadow pipits and ravens. Two walkers take a taxi for the final stint from Duckpool. "This stretch is the equivalent of walking Ben Nevis," the driver tells them. The ground is hard and unforgiving, some of the steps built for a giant, and my feet perspire (women perspire, men sweat) rubbing them in damp socks. Back at Bude before any food can be prepared a taxi has to be organised to take drivers to their cars. It is a very long day and we realise that our bodies are older than they used to be. The evening meal tastes magnificent. Delayed gratification!

Sunday 30/9/2018 Crackington to Bude, 10 miles

Today some opt to be tourists, some choose a short route. 9 miles into the walk only three of us remain. In the fading light on the cliff top, right on SW Coast path is a wheelbarrow overflowing with books. It is a surreal moment. "You had better leave me here". I am late arriving back after spending a delicious 30 minutes rummaging through the contents of the barrow and choosing two books.

Monday 1/10/2018 Crackington to Boscastle, 7 miles

Once again we use the reliable bus service and walk the path at a more leisurely pace, marvelling at the different geology and architecture each bay boasts, and try to understand the stripes of quartz in the cliff faces. I spend the lunch break watching two kestrels through my binoculars, and at one point, watch the kestrel from above with the sun highlighting its colours. We take time to walk to each viewpoint and absorb the views in a sea sparkling in the sun, and unoccupied beaches. We observe a lone grey seal pup on a secluded beach. Perhaps its mum was fishing.



There is a welcome cream tea at Boscastle before catching the bus to Cracking Haven, a paddle in the sea, then drive home to the Midlands.

I very much enjoyed the continuity of walking a long distance path, the scenery, company and as always the superb food. I would have liked more time to visit other Cornish villages such as Tintagel where it is claimed that King Arthur was conceived. Maybe another year. Text by **Janey Hewitt**

Photos by Janet Saunders

<https://www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk>

Red Rope Zoomsters, 2020

John Dickie and Jon Marsden, seen on the right brilliantly disguised as 1930s German police radio operators, successfully launched Red Rope into the stratosphere, sort of, by chairing and hosting the club's first Zoom enhanced AGM on October 3. (They assured me that they were wearing the club T shirt under their uniforms. I am relieved to say they did not reveal any other details about their underwear.)

It was gratifying that this bold step paid off big time, with 68 attendees, over twice the number needed to make the meeting quorate! Thanks to everyone who tuned in, turned on and listened to several hours of Wagner's Ring Cycle... or was it a very constructive set of discussions leading to the club deciding to adopt the calendar year as our financial year, aligning it to the BMC year and the 21st century in general ???

There have also been two National Committee meetings *and* a Q&A session with the BMC's Dave Turnbull conducted reasonably effectively via Zoom! This may be where I say, '**We have the technology!**' an expression so old that I can't remember where it originated - possibly because *I'm* so old. Aaargh.

Sincerely (not), **His Excellency, Alf Veeda-Just-Sehen!**

bulletin@redrope.org.uk

Thanks to everyone who has rallied round to make this edition possible. I wasn't sure what could be featured with our activities being almost on hold, so it's great to have been able to assemble 16 sides of what I'm sure you'll agree is jolly interesting reading! **David Symonds**

Volunteering: if you are in a region where one individual has ended up feeling obliged to do everything, please lend a hand if you can. They deserve your support.

The **Obituaries:** with a national club it can be difficult to know the best way to share upsetting information. We've been discussing how to let members know that a Red Rope member has died. It seems best to share this information as soon as it is public (i.e. after family members know) so that other Red Ropers hear at the same time and can support each other. If you hear that a member has died we would encourage you to first contact those members who were close to that person. Next you could get the message out via the Red Rope lists. You can use the regional email list plus the national email list (if the person was known across regions) without asking anyone's permission. Following this, the regional committee could ensure that someone writes an obituary to circulate and to go in the Bulletin. Thanks, **The National Committee**



Covid and national trips

Although our usual style of RR trips are looking fairly unlikely to be possible into the early part of 2021, and the February trip to Scotland has now been postponed, we wanted to look at the main issues around trips and Covid security with the aim of enabling national trips of some sort to take place as soon as possible. The following ideas were discussed at a Zoom meeting with Janet Sanders and Adrian Jones, and subsequently agreed by National Committee.

In order to enable trips as soon as possible we discussed the possibility of 'short notice' trips – members would choose to be on an email list and receive information about trips organised 2 weeks to a month in advance, and according to any restrictions in place. No early booking discount would apply to these trips.

We are initially hoping to organise a trip for up to 6 in England in Jan./Feb. and possibly, also, for Easter 2021. Please get in touch via nationaltrips@redrope.org.uk if you want to be on a list to receive details of any such trips.

Transport:

Members will be given a choice between shared cars or public transport which will both be banded, or taking their own car which would not be banded.

Accommodation:

- In advance of a trip we will need to clarify how many people are 'currently' allowed to meet up and share accommodation. (Regional restrictions, if in place, would also be taken into account).

- At the time of writing it is unknown as to the situation regarding huts; for example, when they will be open/open to non-members/ available for sole bookings by small groups of non-members/ available for sole booking of small groups at an affordable cost.

Sketch by Lynne Newark

We are looking at possibilities for using cottages, bunkhouses, National Trust Basecamps or similar for small groups (up to 6 or depending on future restrictions). Thanks to Mark Ryle (Scotland East) and Dermot McKibbin (London) for some good suggestions. (If anyone else has any ideas for reasonably priced (up to £15pppn) possible 'venues' for 6 or fewer, please get in touch via nationaltrips@redrope.org.uk.)

- In some cases trip charges may be increased by up to 20% to cover costs.

In the case of accommodation being more costly, the National Committee have agreed to subsidise trip costs (to an agreed maximum amount).

Food:

Members may be asked to provide their own breakfast and lunch ingredients, but to share a hot evening meal (which will not include salad). Trip charges would be altered accordingly. Personal ingredients would be labelled and stored separately.

Cooking could be done in 'bubbles' to provide the main meal for the whole group (bubbles may take into account car-shares or room-shares (to minimise contact and risk.)

An alternative would be to remove food from the nightly charge and ask members to cater for themselves (but this seems less likely to work due to time- and space-critical pressure.)

Details of arrangements (considering the above points) can be agreed between trip organiser and participants.

Becky and Sarah Bates (Nov. 2020)



The wettest of walks: strange sightings on the Soar!

As we all know, every Red Rope trip has always enjoyed impeccable sunny weather, so none of us have ever had to make use of our Gore-Tex jackets or wicking knickers.

But the lockdowns have brought many challenges and with them greatly reduced opportunities for enjoying trips to the mountains and beyond. As such, in an attempt to generate a new diversion for myself, I began to wonder what it must be like to actually be cold and wet in the great outdoors, and it soon became obvious that I would have to experience this personally in order to understand it.

So, at the start of October, Gwenneth and I swapped our Gore-Tex for neoprene and the green dotted line of a footpath on our local O.S. map for a big blue wobbly one and took the plunge into autumnal wild swimming.

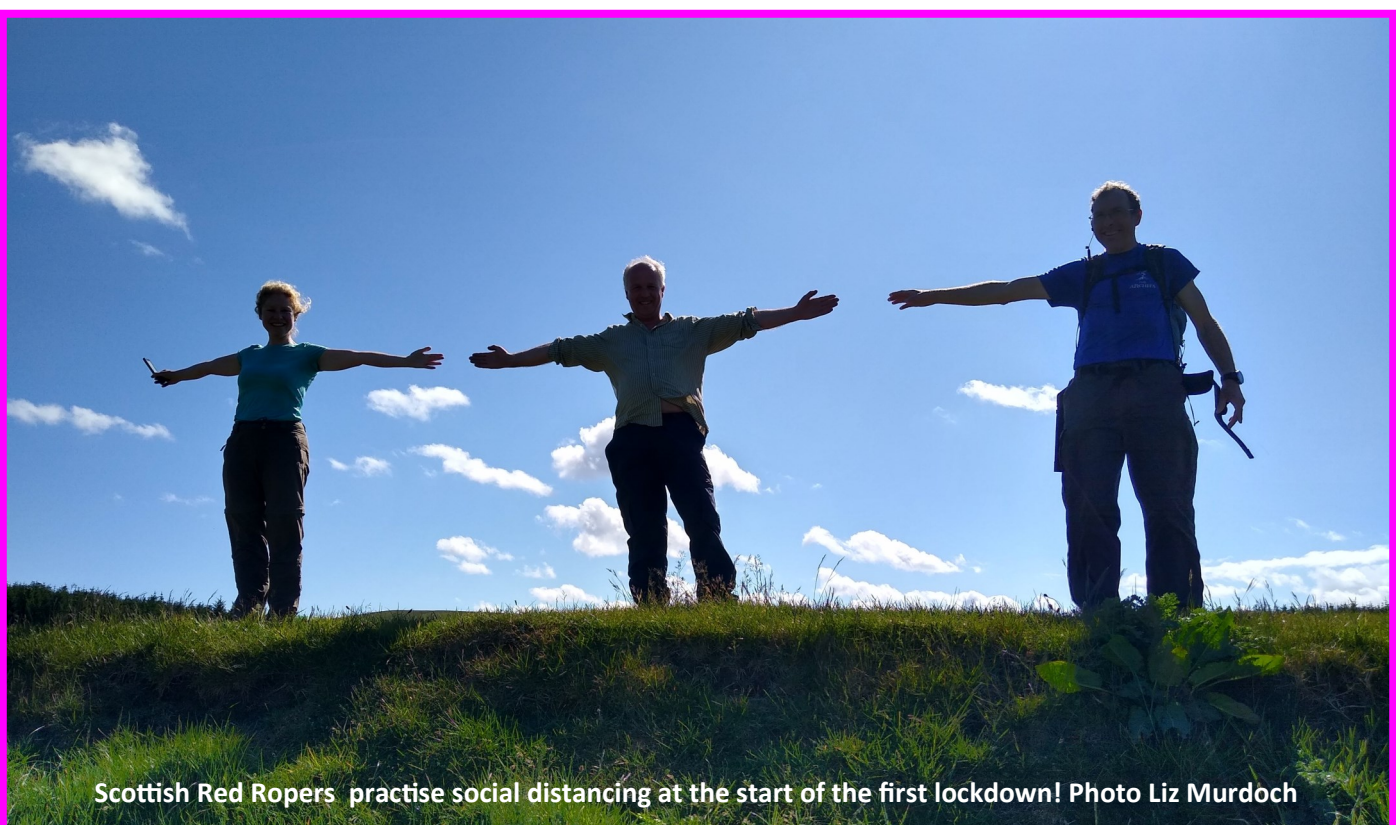
The Lower Soar is perhaps not the first river that would spring to mind when it comes to a dip in nature, but its relative obscurity keeps it quiet and underused, and the autumnal colours of the reddening trees under a sunny blue sky and with the call of river birds in our ears, in we went to do our mile. Gwenneth's claims about being a slow swimmer were nothing compared to the reality of my total lack of speed in the water. While she cruised off away in front of me, I struggled to give a passing asthmatic moorhen with some heavy shopping much of a run for its money. Things weren't even any quicker when I was swimming back with the current rather than against it!

But for someone like me who is not so much a testosterone-fuelled alpha male, more a real-ale fuelled beta hippy, it's never been about how fast or how far, but the experience of being immersed that makes wild swimming what it is.

In the absence of any convenient mountains to climb it has become something wonderful to look forward to and share with old friends, while making some new ones.

Many claims about the physical and mental health benefits of wild swimming have been made, but on reflection I have come to the conclusion that most dippers are in it for the cake afterwards. However, one thing is for certain: Gwenneth and I certainly rock that neoprene look!

Simon Skerritt



Scottish Red Ropers practise social distancing at the start of the first lockdown! Photo Liz Murdoch

How Regions Have Managed Since March: the Lockdown Lowdown!

London region is unusual in that its weekly Sunday walks are almost completely based on public transport. We had our first post-lockdown walk on June 7th, and our first few walks were inside London, in parks and on commons.

By August we were pretty much back to our usual frequency and we were going out into the country using trains, but our meeting point was usually the start of the walk rather than a central London terminus, and members had to make their own minds up about how they were willing to travel, and how far.

Our walks often get more than six people but seldom more than twelve, so like other regions we adopted a policy of splitting into two separate groups when necessary. **Humphrey Southall**

One of the London walks in September visited Rainham marshes, with a bird reserve and some interesting signs...



Bristol/SW restarted our monthly walks as soon as groups of six were allowed, which we planned to stick to, on a first come, first served basis. In fact, there have never been more than six people interested, so no-one missed out. Most of us were happy to have two people per car, with one in the back, windows open, and wearing masks. But we are short on cars in the relevant parts of Bristol, so having tried that once we decided to stick with public transport. We certainly didn't want anyone to be excluded from any walks and those of us with cars have generally joined others on the train or bus. Bristol is fairly compact with most Red Rope members able to get to the train or bus station by bus, bike or a 30-40 minute walk. We are fortunate in having a couple of suburban train lines which are cheap and get us out of the city in less than half an hour.

Using public transport means that our routes are more limited (no decent hills) and need to be shorter to allow for a couple of additional miles at either end, but we can live with that for the time being. A big advantage is that anyone wanting a longer walk can often return from a different stop on a later service, without the need to fit in with others travelling in the same car. **Barbara Segal**



West Midlands started regular group (no more than 6) walks on August 2nd with a short walk in Sutton Park, led by Liz Anderton our Regional Secretary. This was the first of a trial of monthly series of 2 hour walks on a Sunday. The first three were all held in different parts of Sutton Park (Liz lives on the Park's doorstep) some tracks of which none of us had ever visited before. The new lockdown occurred just before we planned to branch out into short walks.

Our longer walk series also restarted in August, on the 15th, with a 10/11 mile walk in West Worcestershire, starting in Little Witley and walking south to Martley and the River Teme, with return north over the splendid Rodge Hill ridge. Weather was really kind to us with no rain and quite a lot of sunshine - the gods were clearly on our side!

Our next longer walk outing was six weeks later when Gill Cox took us to the Breidden Hills in the far north west of Shropshire. Some steep climbs and good views ending with walking by the Severn. This route kept crossing in and out of Wales - on the OS map the border is tricky to see, so it was hard to know if we were keeping to the covid rules. Some of the locals in that area are none too co-operative either. We were told of one farm where they had put up a notice about them self-isolating then objected when the walkers trespassed to avoid going through the farmyard!

Then in October we ventured into 'foreign' country with an 11 mile autumn colours walk in the western Chilterns, starting from the car park on Watlington Hill and taking in a variety of woodlands and grassland, ending with a 'stroll' up on to the top of Watlington Hill for a rather misty panoramic view over Oxfordshire. No problems with locals there, but one we chatted with did query whether Birmingham people were allowed to be there - we were!

Covid rules have not been too restrictive as for the last couple of years we have rarely had more than six people on our longer walks. One difficulty has been with transport, with the need to ensure space for up to six cars. Furthermore a few of our members have no personal transport. So with the ban on car-sharing

and little or no public transport to preferred walking areas they have not been able to enjoy our longer walks. This something we shall need to review come the end of Lockdown version 2. **Steve Wright**

Steve chill-axing in the Chilterns. Invent your own caption!



Manchester formally resumed their day walks (first Sunday of the month) in August. So far we have had 4 walks which have averaged about 8 people. As the Peak District is so busy now this has prompted us to discover walks much nearer to home! **Aileen Somerset**





Adventures Elsewhere

Here's some stuff I wrote 16 years ago (SIXTEEN! I don't look old enough, I know) from my time in China, which involved walking and socialism - at least as it was at the time...

The Lonely Planet is normally a valued and well-informed traveling companion, but I felt let down badly when I visited Emei Shan two hours out of Chengdu. True, the book warns that adverse weather conditions on the mountain can make it treacherous underfoot, but it fails to make clear that, outside summer, treachery is no risk but a certainty. For the privilege of endangering my life, I also had to pay twice the expected admission fee for access to the mountain range – a price hike to deter a surfeit of summer hikers, but scarcely necessary in January, when I met fewer than fifteen hardy souls all day.

A particular feature of Emei Shan is the monkeys that live semi-wild on the upper slopes. Only semi-wild because the nature of tourism is such that it's become customary for visitors to ply the primates with food in exchange for photo opportunities, before the beasts are beaten off with sticks by guides when the "fun" and photos are over. While I was surveying the view (which most tourists access by cable car) one adult monkey, maybe fifteen kilos, approached me along the guardrail and proceeded to pull open the Velcro on my jacket to see if I had any hidden food. The stick-wielding stewards moved towards us, but neither of us did anything untoward and the primate eventually moved on.

The summit affords ethereal views of distant snow capped peaks peering above an immense lush carpet of white cloud, but after that it was all downhill. Though boasting an impressive catalogue of summer flora and fauna, the routes up and around the mountain consist of an immense number of precipitous stone steps – tens of thousands of them - which become an absolute death trap when the snow turns to ice. I've white-water rafted, parachute jumped, and cycled in London, but this descent gave me the willies big style, and I can say now that I wouldn't attempt it again unless Ian Botham's life depended on my staying at the top. Although kitted out in stout walking boots supplemented with strap-on spikes, I nearly plunged to my death at least twice, once only saving myself by hooking my walking stick around the foot of the handrail as I careered over the edge of the mountainside. And many sections don't have handrails. I pondered whether the safest means of descent might be to eat the snow from the top steps and, when it passed through my system, pee on the next steps down to melt them.

Accommodation on the mountain can be found in one of the dozen or so Buddhist Temples, if you can find them, and just as the heavy mist was filtering out the last vestiges of daylight, such a cluster of buildings loomed before me, clinging to the mountainside in a cowl of fog and snow and darkness and foliage. To the distant tolling of a bell accompanied by the wafting odour of incense, and with my breath hanging in the air in front of me, I sought out some hint of hospitality amidst the labyrinth of temple buildings, still clutching my walking stick, and waddling spike-and-splay-footed in the manner which had proved most propitious for negotiating the steps: Charlie Chaplin walking onto the set of *The Name of the Rose*.

Aware that I had little choice, half way up a frozen mountain with night not just fallen but pinned down by the throat, the decidedly un-Buddhist caretaker tried to charge me eighty yuan for a bed, but we eventually settled on forty. For this I was ushered to a room where the cup of water I put on my bedside table was frozen the next morning. The bed itself was warm enough though, courtesy of my plastic bottles filled with hot water from the thermos which is de rigeur wherever you go in China. The only fault with this otherwise excellent tradition is that the mouth of these flasks are so designed that it's impossible to pour the contents into anything narrower than the Yangtze River; experience has led me to suspect that this phenomenon may be the origin of the concept of Chinese Burns.

Mike Shearing

A Bare Di's View of the Pyrenees...or "Staggers in Catatonia!"

(from an early '80s RR bulletin and the 'lockdown special')

A fair crowd of Red Ropers took themselves to the Pyrenees this summer. Carefully labeling the trip 'unofficial' (i.e. we all paid the same) Ted Ashby masterfully recruited and coordinated nine intrepid walkers from around the country.

A pre-trip meeting primed us for the confusion of including two Chris Smiths, but some of us met for the first time in Gerona, afflicted as we were by jet-lag or hangover. By train and bus, enjoying a local carnival on the way, we reached the small, but well-stocked mountain town of Benasque. There we divided amoeba-like into two parties, thankfully not exclusive or irreversible. The slow party were not so much slow as existential, responding to the mood of the moment (i.e. stopping when they felt like it) and conversing on love and life, which earned them the description of being like "a troupe of wandering philosophers". The 'fast party', alternatively referred to as "headbangers" were reputed never to talk at all!

After four day treks of magnificent scenery and solitude, fast and slow re-met to recount the joys of mountains and weather (varied, with 'exciting' thunderstorms but sunny mornings) and to frequent the local disco; we predict a new fashion of shorts and day-sacks for groovers on the dance floors of Catalonia. An early start followed the riotous night, but in good spirits we all headed east together, slogging, breathless in the rarefied air, up to the Moulrier's Ridge (and some to the peak, which felt more like the top of the world than anywhere I have been). We descended rather chaotically by a combination of rope work, scrambling, portage and sharing ice-axes. That evening found us camped at a chilly altitude, rather incongruously singing Auld Lang Syne in Catalan, with a friendly group of indigenous walkers.

A large and prolonged lunch at the refuge, "Hospital de Viella", led to another split (foolhardy vs "we know when to stop"). For the next two days the parties repeatedly overtook each other, reaching the next base within a couple of hours of each other. A flat and picturesque campsite was located; said to be a mere eight minutes away from the refuge but discovered to be a v. diff. descent when attempted in the pitch dark when pissed. Moreover, those less danger-seeking than Ted and myself (who ascended, slept on and completed the renowned Besiberi Ridge in less than ideal conditions) found the campsite also less than ideal. Flooded out and invaded by cows, they broke camp

(with help from the cows) and descended to a warmer, dryer location. Despite changes to the plans, we managed met up in time to wave Val off on her premature journey back to work - she almost didn't make it !

After a day's sightseeing, bird and insect spotting, we pressed on. Around this time we were starting to lose members who struck off in search of independence (but rejoined us in Barcelona, wiser if not poorer.) Those who remained enjoyed a "last-outing" and an evening of mutual massage and socialist songs around a mesmerizing log fire. The pleasantly derelict building in which we stayed was less pleasantly afflicted by wild beasties and bangs in the night. Yet we survived, even if, as I found myself, increasingly weary. Not ashamed to hitch a lift into Espot, I became less than good company as I vomited into plastic bags half the agonizingly winding journey on to Barcelona.

Thankfully that city of extraordinary Gaudi architecture, superb museums and somewhat insalubrious nightlife brought me back on form; those with stamina and the desire were to be seen out "looking for a good time" in the early hours of the morning – and some were not in vain. A novel line in chat-up was thus experienced: "What sex are you by the way?" (He asked me in the W.C.)

As will any group who spend three weeks together, we were developing ability to laugh repeatedly over those in-jokes and catchphrases which confuse and appear totally unfunny to the outsider – therefore I shall mention only the "Direct Route" (Di leading – off the path) and "bijoux scenettes" (something Mike seemed to know a lot about). More relevantly and constructively, we worked on a plan to improve the Red Rope booking form, expanding it to include the choice: Do you prefer a) walking b) climbing c) eating and drinking d) going to discos, plus the chance to state one's sexual preferences and availability.

We were sorry that Val missed this final phase of jocularity. The remaining eight of us parted good friends (some better than others) after a final day in and around Gerona, including a rapid and bizarre visit to the Salvador Dali museum in Figueres on the very day that the same artist set fire to himself and his bed. We accept no responsibility . . . after all, this was an unofficial trip!

Di Chisholm



Remembering Alan



Alan Armstrong was from Newcastle and had the accent to prove it! He was an A&E consultant in a hospital in north Liverpool for many years and was married to Jane, a nurse. They had three children, two of whom now work in the NHS. He was devoted to his family, gregarious, mischievous and very popular, with a great sense of the absurd.

We met through Merseyside Red Rope about 15 years ago. I had the pleasure of doing two trips to the Alps with him. In 2011 we did a 6 day trek in Switzerland, with Barbara Segal and Don Kinniburgh, from near Interlaken to Steckelberg, at the head of the dramatically glaciated Lauterbrunnen valley.

We stayed in a hostel there for a week and were joined by some other Red Ropers. Stechelberg (910m) is near the Schilthorn (2970m), the summit of which can be reached by cable car. Alan decided to walk it. Not surprisingly, as the ascent is twice that of Snowdon, no one else was keen to join him! To his credit he was successful, beating the guide book times and coming down on the cable car. The next day, in very good weather, a group of us decided to do another ascent of about 1000m from the village. (I took the photo on the front cover that day.) Alan came with us but dropped out after about 750m, apologising profusely for not getting to the top. I was surprised that he had managed to get out of bed!

A few years later me, Barbara and Alan spent a fortnight trekking in the Dolomites, which was also very enjoyable. Unfortunately, by that time he was on medication for high blood pressure; it took the edge off his fitness but he could still do the walks. One night we were in a hostel with a pleasantly rustic bar displaying bottles of local spirits. Alan decided to investigate, drinking a glass of a vicious looking emerald green liquid in one gulp, leaving me thinking it might be time for bed! He would have been at home on the Pyrenees trip in the '80s, as described by Di Chisholm on the previous page!

During retirement he had a chance to pursue his interests in literature and the theatre. He also successfully completed an A Level in philosophy, whilst always ,somehow, declaring his love of Abba!

He and Jane both had covid during the first lockdown. He sent me a short email to say that we'd have to meet up once he'd recovered, which we did in the middle of August. He was pale and still feeling the after-effects of the virus, but otherwise seemed on good form. It was great to see him.

I was consequently really shocked to hear that he had died in early September. He worked hard and played hard. I feel privileged to have known him.

David Symonds

Responses to the news of Alan's death. The first four are by members from a variety of regions, followed with others by members of Merseyside Red Rope.

This is really sad news, and it feels like that's all there is at the moment. Alan was one of those instantly likeable people and I always had a blast with him on trips. He was great fun to sit and chat to whether on a walk or in the hut afterwards. Strangely enough a little while back I was looking at some trip photos and he was on one and I wondered how he was doing, as I had not seen him for a while. What more will 2020 throw at us? **Simon Skerritt**

Alan has been on a couple of the enjoyable treks I've done in the Alps with other Red Ropers and I've met up with him on UK trips and occasionally in Liverpool. With his eclectic mix of enthusiasms – serious philosophical and political ideas, interests in 'high' and popular culture, and a relish for a good booze-up Alan was a person of extremes. This could sometimes prove difficult but was never boring! I've always looked forward to seeing him and will really miss the occasional times that we got together. **Barbara Segal**

That's shocking - he hadn't been retired long. I remember him with affection not least with his medicine chest at The Cabin in Balgowan, and on that wet Skye week when he went with John and Clare to the distillery. He was a lovely man. **Sherry McLiver**

Just to add to Sherry's medicine chest memory - I think of Alan each time I pack my rucksack and his advice: 'Never go up a hill without Imodium!' We are so sad and sorry. **Becky Bates**

How terribly sad. Merseyside RR will miss him. He was always curious about your opinions and views on life. I tried to impress him on a walk with the news that I had completed my Outdoor First Aid Certificate and had my kit with me. He was greatly amused and assured me that gaffer tape was all that was needed! **Pat Nicholl**

I am so sorry about Alan...I only knew him for a few years but he was a special man...he had a big heart and he always made me smile...he will be missed by so many. **Mo Peacock**

That's such a shock and such sad news. I was in contact with Alan via email, swapping covid stories and encouraging him to take his recovery more gently than I did. It's probably about 6 weeks since I last heard from him - such a very sad loss. I'll miss his dark sense of humour, the bizarre but never dull conversations I had with him, his company on walks and at the theatre. **Sarah Thwaites**

Photos, from left, taken in 2010, 2018, 2014 and 2019.

Alan was one of those people whose presence always livened up a group. When he was on a walk you knew there were going to be sparky conversations. I will miss him. Irreplaceable. **Jennifer Mirdamadi**

I always have fond memories of the walk he led around Carnforth from Grange over Sands - fairly chaotic in best RR tradition and a lovely walk. **Peter Walker**

The news of Alan's death is really shocking and sad. I would like to suggest Merseyside Red Rope marks this somehow because so many of us were fond of him. **Susan Leask**

Yes, the news about Alan is a shock. Very sad. How about a memorial walk - for when we can actually meet together and get out in the hills? Maybe our inaugural 'normal' walk could be in his memory? **Andy Scott**

It was collectively decided to do the Grange over Sands walk, near Arnside, which Alan's widow, Jane, said was their favourite. We hope she will join us.



Remembering Rob



'A return to Elphin, 2014.' Rob is on the right. Elphin is on the Scottish west coast near Ullapool.

What do we hope for in a walking companion: energy, enthusiasm, thoughtfulness, stimulating conversation, a geographer's knowledge of the landscape and care for the environment? All who knew Rob Steel will treasure memories of such companionship and share a deep sadness at his premature death.

I met Rob in 2007 on a Red Rope trip to Elphin in Sutherland. We had some glorious days of long walks culminating in a very wet ascent of Suilven. It was June but I swear it was the coldest I have ever been on a mountain. The lasting memory is of walking into a pub in Lochinver and the landlord looking at us, saying 'Ah, a Suilven day' and fetching his mop. Towards the end of the week we found that Rob was also planning a night in Edinburgh and were treated to an educational tour of its historic pubs.

In the following year I saw just how much you can fit into life if you can go at it a bit quicker, that is unless there are beetles on the path. Commitments to teaching, writing articles and books, Green politics, CAMRA, looking after two allotments and his Dad still left time for cycling and walking. There were trips to the Lakes, Peaks, Yorkshire Dales, Pembrokeshire and a return to Scotland where he

introduced me to winter mountaineering. We had compacted snow and blue skies for Bidean and the Carn Mor Dearg Arete - Rob was delighted and sure footed in his crampons.

He shared his appreciation of landscape, architecture and unspoilt pubs through leading walks and organising trips and did more than his share of both for our club. He knew what he liked: Glenbrittle on Skye didn't meet with approval as 'it has the wrong sort of trees' and, as all who have eaten his nut roast will know, it does taste better made with lentils instead of bread.

I visited Rob in Carshalton 'What was that doing in there?' as he tipped up the toaster and a burning battery fell out, and he visited us in Kent where he added our village local to the national inventory of unspoilt pubs. Rob got in touch in March about joining our October trip to the Lakes, he hadn't been well but 'Have we got an organiser yet?' showed he was still willing to help out.

Plan for brighter days ahead by ordering one of his CAMRA walking guides - life is too short to find all the best places for yourself. **Becky Bates** (with love and prayers to Jacqui)

Rob was the expert on the River Wandle. He guided a walk for a history group I belong to, the Port of London Study Group. It was much appreciated by members of the group, as was the pub we visited at the end, which he also had a hand in. He will be missed.

Sheila Dobner

I remember Rob as being very entertaining during the long winter evenings in a hut after a wet and tiring walk.

Debbie Singer

Really great guy who lived up to his principles and acted on them. I remember some lovely walking, on the North Downs and further afield.

Val Gorbould

Rob's walks encouraged me out of my comfort zone, I always felt I was in safe hands. I also enjoyed meeting him at RR socials in crowded south London restaurants on Friday nights. He always had something interesting to say, and said it in a way that made me sit up and listen.

Polly Denton

I remember him earlier this year on a River Wandle walk when he gave me a signed copy of his book "The River Wandle Companion". He was so knowledgeable.

Miriam Beeks

As a geography teacher his love and respect for nature was evident in the interesting stories he would tell about our beautiful countryside on walks. They will be remembered.

Sara Leon

I haven't seen Rob in the last decade as I had a nasty knee injury from mountaineering, however, I have fond memories of him as a lively person who was good company in a hut and helped make trips a success. I remember his keenness on cycling and the various interesting transport discussions (uniting Rob and bike and trip)! I was sorry to hear of his death and condolences to his friends and family.

Gerry Matthews

I remember Rob as a walker, mountaineer & cyclist but also an energetic political activist in the Green Party & more recently in Extinction Rebellion. But he was also good fun and a mine of information on geography/ industrial architecture - and of course good beer. On top of all that he taught in a comprehensive school for many years and I admired and respected him for that. So very sorry that he's gone. **Pam Case**

The two of us ascending Tryfan, Bristly Ridge, the Glyders, and enjoying a swim at the end of a beautiful August day is my fondest memory. Also strong opinions about how he was served his tipple. Finally, a mutual fascination with mid 1970's pub rock. Rob was your man. **Damien Connor**



The other LMC Hut! The Loft at Blea Tarn

Lots of Red Rope members have visited Cae Ysgubor, the LMC hut in Beddgelert, but few current members will have been to their other hut, The Loft at Blea Tarn. So here's a bit about it!

In terms of luxury (well, as mountain huts go!) the two huts couldn't be more different. CY was built less than 10 years ago and is extremely comfortable, with good heating, several dorms and showers, and a kitchen with all mod cons. The Loft is at the other end of the scale, but what it lacks in comfort it more than makes up for in location, on the rise between Great Langdale and Little Langdale, with great walks from the door, stunning views, and good country pubs a few kilometres away in both directions.

At present the facilities are fairly basic - a single room on the first floor of a former cowshed adjacent to Blea Tarn House - reached by an external staircase. Sleeping is on 'shelves' around the wall, there are washbasins but no shower, and the toilet is outside and down the stairs. So, fine in summer but probably not for the faint-hearted in winter, despite a heater and decent cooking facilities.

But all that is set to change! LMC have ambitious plans to turn The Loft into a sought-after hut, year round, by extending into the ground floor below the current hut, known by LMC as The Byre. The new accommodation will have a large kitchen/dining area and dorm on the upper floor, with an additional dorm, drying room, toilets and showers on the ground floor. Plans for the work have been drawn up and approved, but the building is owned by the

National Trust and negotiations over the lease are currently on hold due to Coronavirus. LMC will have to commit to a 15 year lease, so need to be sure that the work can be carried out. Despite a lot of volunteer labour it will prove expensive, probably at least £95,000. The club runs a monthly sweepstake to raise money for hut maintenance and improvements. Red Rope has contributed £2,000, of which around £500 has come from members' donations. After the lease has been finalised LMC will need to apply for grants, so major work is not imminent, but once it's done we will have preferential access to what should be a fabulous resource.

In 'normal times' individuals or small groups of members who want to go informally must check that the hut is free and leave a week to receive a key from the Red Rope 'bed night booker'. There is a slight possibility that LMC members might already be there, on the same basis, so there may not be room, and if there is you might have to share. During the pandemic only a single 'bubble' is allowed and you need to book through the LMC hut secretary, obviously respecting national and local rules on social mixing, travel etc. Unlike the situation with CY don't need to buy a key of your own. For details on booking see the Red Rope and LMC websites. **Barbara Segal**

<https://www.redrope.org.uk/activities/club-hut/>

<https://lanccsmc.org/lmc/huts/>

