

OREAD MOUNTAINEERING CLUB

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL

Two mountaineering tragedies occurred almost simultaneously during the last few days of 1956, one on the highest peak in Britain and the other on the highest peak in Europe. In neither case was anyone hurt in a fall; in both cases uninjured parties attempting to descend were killed by exposure. And there the parallel ends.

The Nevis victims were inexperienced in Scottish winter mountaineering, although they were all good rock-climbers and one had led an ascent of the Matterhorn - but the weather on Nevis at Christmas is likely to be more violent than that on the Matterhorn in midsummer, and the snow and ice conditions much worse. And although one newspaper said they intended to spend the night on the summit, they were not equipped for sleeping out. They also made a number of errors of judgment. First, it was rash to continue with their ascent of South Castle Gully in a blizzard when they could at least have got to the C.I.C. hut or the distillery, if not Fort William. Benighted in vile weather and unable to descend they chose a poor place for a bivouac and failed to construct any kind of a shelter. And perhaps the lone survivor erred in leaving his friends while he went for help, instead of flogging them into some kind of physical activity. But no-one who was not there can pass judgment on that. However that may be, as soon as the alert was given parties set out from Fort William and spent three days searching the mountain in bad weather for the four youths. Even when three bodies were found and it was certain that the fourth was also dead, the search for his body went on, at no small risk to the searchers, who knew that their efforts must be in vain. This reflects great credit on all concerned, but who would have backed out? It is both a natural reaction and a moral obligation for a man to do all he can to help persons in desperate circumstances. No swimmer would refuse to go to the help of a drowning man; nor would any mountaineer fail to do all in his power to save fellow-mountaineers when they were threatened by death. Or so one would have said a month ago.

Vincedon and Henri slowly froze to death on Mont Blanc because a whole town full of expert mountaineers refused to lift a hand to help them. It was known by the evening of December 26th that the two students must be in serious difficulty, but although December 27th and 28th were gloriously fine, not a solitary guide set off to look for them. The French Air Force made several attempts to rescue them by helicopter, which continued during the bad weather of the last days of December, and which might have succeeded but for the crash in which a pilot was injured. Terray arrived in

Chamonix on the 29th and went up the mountain the next day in foul weather with four others - all the support he could find. This gallant but pathetically small party turned back without reaching the doomed men, after misunderstanding a message shouted from a helicopter. Their leader declared that if the guides had gone up in the good weather of December 27th, when the alarm was first raised, they could have effected a rescue without great danger or difficulty, for the snow conditions were not bad four days later, when blizzards had raged on and off for two days. But the guides of Chamonix had failed in their trust. They had let two men die without raising a finger to help them. Morally it was murder.

The Nevis victims were comparatively inexperienced and ill-equipped. They got into difficulties because of their inexperience and consequent misjudgment. They died in spite of the endeavours of their would-be rescuers.

The Mont Blanc victims on the other hand were experienced Alpinists, well-equipped technically and materially. They got into difficulties in spite of their skill and knowledge, and they died because those most able to help them refused to do so. Their deaths were tragic; but more tragic still was the shameful manner of their dying.

D.C.C.

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SEEN THROUGH A PLASTIC MACKINTOSH - DARKLY BY H.PRETTY

Should anyone approach you, offering a pint in one hand whilst placing forefinger of the other squarely on the map east of Bleaklow and, should he make a certain suggestion, you will probably treat him with profound suspicion for one (or all) of several reasons. If you are wise you will first drink his pint - just in case. You should next remove his finger and examine the precise point on which his suggestion was based. If it turns out to be Bull Stones Cabin you will (being even wiser) examine the person in case it should be R.G.Pettigrew in disguise. If it is - have nothing more to do with the fellow. It is likely that a suggestion of your own in "other quarters" will be more profitable.

However, having taken all the basic precautions and recognised my assailant as none other than Lord Jim Kershaw, disguised as a minor Restoration poet, I took fresh interest in his proposal. A weekend with Jim would almost certainly be balanced nicely between the physical and the cultural.

"Mike Moore is coming", he said. I began to amend my ideas about culture. "---- So are Len Hatchett and Laurie Burns". This seemed a slight amendment on the side of culture. "Geoff Hayes and some of his friends will probably join us as well", he added. This sounded a distinctly physical note, but the balance seemed to be reasonably maintained.

Laurie Burns, seated on the 12.40 bus to Bakewell seemed

symbolic of the times. He seemed not too unhappy.

A brief external view was obtained of an exclusively motorised festival in Allestree. We raised our hats as a mark of respect before resuming our conversation on M.J.M. and the latest gift of a benign providence.

In Bakewell it had been raining - the weather was sadly deteriorating. There were just thirty minutes for Moore to purchase a torch, bread, chops, socks - and cheese sandwiches with beer for the President. Len had been waiting over two hours and was on his third circuit of the licensed premises when intercepted. He looked a trifle glassy and was speaking of Buenos Aires in a loud voice. Ten minutes later Moore's handsome new 12/- torch rolled down the bus and, on recovery, refused to work. It was a good start.

Like veterans we looked at the lowering sky; assessed the amount of remaining daylight; made an introspective note of our physical condition and, without a word, chose the low route along the east side of the reservoirs.

There was but little direct light, though the water shone like old pewter. Darkness gathered in the folding hills. The enclosing moors ran across one's vision in bare unyielding shapes and, for once, unobsessed with dramatic spired and pinnacled summit, one could feel the quiet and heavy broodiness of older hills. Upon a little promontory a group of ragged pines were feathery black against the metallic patina of water. A strange melancholy, like that sometimes found in Gothic art, came upon us, but there was space and greatness there as well. "Trees like these always make me feel sad", said Mike, "---- they seem to have seen so much."

Above Slippery Stones the ghost of Gibson returned to haunt us and never completely disappeared throughout the night that followed; for this was Gibson Land and we recalled the slightly bowed lean legs and a voice coming out of the night "----- I know this rock!"

At 6.15 p.m. our torches illumined the rotting carcass of a sheep. This was in the lower cabin which was otherwise quite clean. By 6.30 p.m. we were seated among the usual chaos of food and gear in the adjoining wooden hut. A brew was on; Moore was temporarily under control; in fact the situation was normal except that Geoff Hayes had not been seen. We thought that he might have "gone a little Pettigrew." We therefore dismissed any anxious thoughts and concentrated on the important matters of food, on Len's unique experience of life below stairs in B.A., and the November 28th edition of "Punch". Recollection of the past was obviously exciting Len more than somewhat and having overturned a full pan of hot brussels he forthwith capsized an entire billy of tea. The squalor was by now profound.

By 9 p.m. four of us had retired to sleeping bags "Bullstones style", and Lord Jim, by dint of sheer piracy, had laid his lean frame along two wooden forms.

At this stage we entered the cultured phase. After the usual preliminaries a conversation developed on "Women through the Ages", and it was quickly apparent that some were more qualified to speak than others - though in all the Oread it would be difficult to find more ripeness of experience than was enclosed between the four walls of Bullstones Cabin on that particular night. Laurie read a magnificent paper on the development of a garment which he referred to with delicacy as "panties". We were staggered by his erudition and were quite sure that such comprehensive knowledge could only stem from an experience which can only be described as historical.

But it was Lord Jim who offered us the pearl (cultured of course) when he spoke of Dylan Thomas. If you should see Moore equipped with a green plastic mackintosh, you will know that the wheel has come full circle. In any case it is probably sheer exhibitionism.

That night I dreamed. I was occupying a castle (of which R.A.Hodgkin spoke) and as I remember it, Jim Bury was drawing the rent. There were men about me, dark and cadaverous, when suddenly a door was flung open and upon the threshold stood one, more lean, dark and cadaverous than any man I had ever seen. He wore a wolf-skin cap and hung about his neck was a board on which was written in bold Trojan letter "JOHN WELBOURN, BAILIFF." There rose a great cry and amid the noise of thunderclaps I awoke to hear another voice from the outer darkness shouting "----- Is Mike Moore there?" It all seemed a bit inconsequential for I knew that Moore had been living in castles like this for years. On coming to I recognised the voice of Geoff Hayes - my watch gave the time as 1 a.m.

Moore, who thought the intruder was a gamekeeper, kept on confusing the issue, but the facts were gradually established.

Geoff, with three companions, had come the hard way via Derwent Edge and Margery Hill. It had taken them six and a half hours from Yorkshire Bridge. Having found us in the course of a solo reccy, Geoff returned to fetch his party who were awaiting his return in the shelter of rocks some distance away.

Outside, the wind was getting up and it was raining in earnest. Inside, peace and quiet returned. Only the ghost of Gibson roamed abroad.

Sunday was damned from the start. Rain came driving in from the west and there was little enthusiasm for anything but a quick bash down the valley, whence we came.

A late start saw Kershaw and Hayes hell-bent for Ladybower before closing time. Somewhere behind were Burns, Moore and others and, behind them, trod I.

With unaccountable blisters on both feet, from toes to heel, I trod as though on broken glass. Rain-sodden and wrapped in misery I hobbled the weary miles and it is well to draw a merciful veil. Gone was the sombre beauty of yesternight - I saw only the road ahead. A quenched and ribald party found me sitting in a gutter bootless and sockless. They cheerfully informed me that the torture must be prolonged. Amford Station became the ultimate Eldorado.

Two complete strangers were witness of the final scene. They observed with open incredulity the efforts of Len to heat soup on the rocking floor of a third class compartment. One can only assume that Len put on a special show for their benefit for his stove had behaved with perfect propriety among the draughts of Bullstones Cabin - and in defiance of his efforts to drown us all in a nauseous mess of tea and brussels. Within a space of ten minutes he produced every kind and size of flame but the right one, and managed to engulf us in dense blue smoke. The strangers left us at the next stop. They spoke as though it was their destination but we thought that they were seeking air to breathe and the company of persons less addicted to pyromania. It is perhaps fortunate that Jim was not wearing his plastic mac; that Len never so much as mentioned Buenos Aires; and Mike spilled sardine oil only on himself and the President. Otherwise they might have thought us very odd.

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A CHRISTMAS GIFT FOR THE FROGGATTS

The Froggatts, of Moorside Farm below Birchens, have been having a more than usually hard time recently, and just before Christmas we decided to send them a food parcel. The contents were chosen by the lady members of the Committee and consisted of:

- 1 tin of shortbread
- 2 tins of Nestle's Cream
- 1 tin of peaches
- 1 tin of strawberries
- 1 lb. of tea
- 1 tin of Nescafe
- 2 packets of jellies
- 2 lbs. of castor sugar
- 1 packet of orange and lemon slices
- 1 lb. of Cadbury's Milk Tray chocolates
- 1 lb. of Cadbury's chocolate biscuits
- 1 tin of tongue

Subsequently the following letter was received by the Secretary:-

Moorside Farm,
Baslow,
Bakewell.
Dec.29, 56.

Dear Mr. Cooke,

Myself and my wife wish to thank the Club for their kindness in sending us such a lovely parcel. We have enjoyed it very much.

She came out of hospital the day it arrived. She is still in bed but progressing slowly.

Again we thank all the Club members for their kindness and we both wish them all a Happy & Prosperous New Year.

Yours faithfully,
B. & M. Froggatt.

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OR E A D S I N S H O R T S

Trevor Panther was recently elected Vice-President of the North London M.C. True to his word, Trevor spent a week from December 28th onwards in the Dinas Mot cave.

The Phillips', Handleys and Langworthys are having a skiing holiday in Galtur starting March 3rd.

About 24 people spent Christmas at Bryn-y-Wern, but no account of their activities has been received.

The Cookes spent their New Year holiday in Langdale but the weather discouraged excursions outside the O.D.G.

The Hon.Ed. recently satisfied a long-standing ambition by riding along the High Road in Beeston on the pillion seat of a motor-bike, playing a trombone.

No-one else has done anything for weeks. Or so one would think, judging by the negligible correspondence arriving at the Editorial abode. If you can write, please do.

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BAGSHAWE MEET, 12th JANUARY by ERNIE PHILLIPS

As everyone knows by now, this Meet had to be cancelled "for reasons beyond our control." I had approached Rowland Revell who, together with his brother, owns the cave, about visiting it during the New Year, and he asked me to get in touch with him again nearer to the proposed date, which I did. Unfortunately, the cave proved to be full of water as a result of the recent snowfall, and aqualungs would be necessary for a successful visit.

However, as we may have a Meet there later on in the year, a few details of the place may be of interest. I first heard of Bagshawe when I used to go to Whitehall, and on enquiring after Cyril Machin, Peter Mosedale would reply, "Oh, he's taken a shower to Bagshawe", or words to that effect. I often dropped a hint that I would like to go there myself one weekend, but somehow there always seemed to be somewhere else that required my presence.

Eventually, I persuaded George Sutton to organise things so that we could go with him on one of his frequent visits, and so became acquainted with the system. The cave itself is, to be sure, a show cave in a sense, but a show cave with a difference. The use of this term conjures up in the mind places like the Blue John Mine and the Speedwell Mine at Castleton, but the Revell brothers are cavers in the true sense of the word, and their cave is certainly no place for a Sunday School treat.

I believe that it was originally opened by miners seeking galena, for there is no natural entrance as far as I know, and one gains access through a door in a wooden shed, and then down a flight of rude steps. A series of artificial passages lead to the natural system, which is quite extensive, and probably as long as any in Derbyshire. There are fine calcite formations, and I was particularly impressed with the grotto known as the Birdcage. In the main the cave is quite clean, as caves go in this part of the world, but the exponent of mud plugging should be more than satisfied with the "Glory Hole". Revell told us that the best formations are to be found in a section which is shut off behind an iron gate, being rarely accessible due to the water, which usually forms a "trap" or syphon.

This part is said to be in its original condition, and one can hardly blame the owners for wanting to keep it this way; the vandals could reduce it to a complete shambles in a matter of minutes. He said that very few people outside his own family had been in there, but that Cyril who, of course, knows him very well, was familiar with the place.

The Revells make a nominal charge for visiting the cave, about a shilling or so per head, but this can scarcely pay for the Magnesium ribbon which they skillfully use to display the natural beauty to the best advantage.

It would not be proper to compare the place with the great systems of South Wales, Yorkshire, or Mendip, but, being fairly near at hand, it is well worth a visit by anyone who is prepared to go into one good cave. If I am able to organise a visit later on, I hope you will try and come.

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ORNITHOLOGY by "GALSWORTHY"

"Come fly into my orchard", said the Gardener to the Bird.
 "Oh, willingly! Oh, willingly!" the answer that he heard.
 "Come settle on my finger, that I may stroke your breast.
 "I wish that I were smaller and so could share your nest."
 His wish it then was granted, and by the Bird he lay
 All snug and warm he nestled, the whole of Christmas Day,
 Smiling sweet contentment with the Birdie in his arms,
 Free from all his worries, and all the worldly qualms.
 Then his peace was shattered as he fell from off his bunk,
 He found that he'd been dreaming with all the wine he'd drunk!
 Now dreams are fact and fantasy, all mixed up like a potion,
 How much was dream, how much was fact, you shouldn't have a notion.

STOP PRESS

Betty Bird and Paul Gardiner are engaged to be married. We hear that Paul "popped the question" at two o'clock in the morning on the train on the way home from B-y-W after Christmas. This tankard business will soon be getting out of hand!

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BETTER LATE THAN NEVER! ANON.

The alert reader of the Newsletter will probably have noticed that the erudite and witty contributions from Peter Janes are usually about three months out of date when they appear in print, and others are not without their faults in this respect. They can, however, console themselves in the fact that the record for all time will no doubt be held by the following effort :-

THE SNAIL.

He pops his little eyes out,
 They're as tiny as a pin;
 And if anyone should touch them
 He quickly draws them in.

Peter Janes (Aged nine.)

Who would have thought that we had such infant prodigies in our midst?

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CORRESPONDENCE

To The Editor, Oread Newsletter -

Sir,

The Vice-President's letter in the December Newsletter was interesting, very much to the point and, to a large extent, reflected upon certain recent words and actions of myself. It was apparently designed to evoke response - and response there shall be.

Firstly, however, should anyone conceive the idea that they are about to witness the unusual (if amusing) spectacle of the President and Vice-President exchanging acrimonious words in public, I must disabuse them. In the past Sutton and myself have disagreed more bitterly and violently than most people do in a lifetime - but our friendship has never been more real than it is today. I don't think George will mind my saying this and it does help to put my following remarks into proper perspective.

Referring back to Sutton's letter - nobody would deny that White Hall is one of Jack Longland's finest experiments. I would say that it is an additional reason for his having been elected an Hon. Member and one shouldn't forget that Alf Bridge was very active in the inauguration of this particular experiment. There are a great many reasons, in addition to those I mentioned during my speech at the Annual Dinner, why these two men should have been elected to the Oread peerage, but I still maintain that the joint contribution of Bridge and Longland in bringing together climbers from widely separated streams of social life is the most potent thing either of them has ever accomplished. Shepherding porters down to the North Col of Everest in a blizzard, forcing tremendous advances in the technique of rock climbing, setting new standards of bog-trotting, and putting in enormous work on behalf of the two major post-war British Himalayan expeditions, are all matters of history and have been recorded for posterity elsewhere. This other thing - this sustained effort to force reality and truth into places where twenty years ago it would not have been recognised is not likely to be recorded so easily. It is an almost intangible accomplishment unless you have a long memory or take the trouble to look up the speeches and articles from another age.

I am glad therefore that we of the Oread have placed our appreciation on record that others might note.

I personally feel that we would not have been justified in electing an Hon. Member on the principal basis of his having founded White Hall. Is not the latter place primarily an educational establishment - a school - a place which gives youngsters an opportunity of learning more fundamental truths than they will find in the traditional school room. The value of White Hall is therefore for educationists to assess, and hardly falls within the scope of a mountaineering club. Mountaineers

from northern clubs have certainly made the running of weekend courses a possibility and have been closely associated with its entire development, but I doubt whether many of them really give much thought to the real significance of the place. There have been, and still are, a few Oreads sincerely interested in the real aims of White Hall but, in all honesty, we must admit that they are very much in the minority. On this basis I am sure that we would not have been justified, or even completely honest, in proclaiming White Hall "the most spectacular of his (Jack Longland) qualifications for becoming an Hon. Member."

In discussing the claims of White Hall at length, I might seem to have drifted on to slightly irrelevant ground - but it is intentional since it does connect with my following remarks.

In his letter the Vice-President has enlarged on the theme of apparent apathy to White Hall and linked it with the lack of new youngsters coming into the Club. Now I don't think there is much doubt in the correctness of his conclusion that the Oread are, generally speaking, "White Hall apathetic", and furthermore are far too "self sufficient". I will go even further and say that most of the Oread don't even care and do admit it in one way or another. They have joined a club to climb or "go about" with their particular friends who are also members or on the membership fringe and there is no compulsion to make them do any more than just that. A person has first to accept responsibility towards others, towards the interests of his club, or towards the climbing world at large before he is even likely to make any effort outside self-enjoyment or the enjoyment of his (or her) particular clique. The great majority of members of all clubs are, I think, rather like this. They feel no compulsion whatsoever to give of themselves in order to produce something in others who are outside their own tight little world. Persons of this type can be so blind and uncaring that it is usually worthless to argue or even ask anything of them. It is a platitude and every kind of cliché to say that the members of a club who are prepared to exert themselves on behalf of their fellow members etc. etc. etc. - are few indeed etc. etc. - but it is absolutely true, and probably has been since Noah, being the first man to make the descent of a mountain without first climbing it, found himself with transport problems. Having accepted this, one has to go a little further in examining our particular weaknesses for, as I have suggested, most of the above applies to all voluntary group organisations and not solely to us.

We seem to be an ageing club at present - and it is bad - the worst thing that can happen to a mountaineering club if it is to be a living force rather than a stationary pableau. Perhaps, again, most of you don't care. Well, I do for one, and I think there are a sufficient number of Oreads who care enough to do something about it. There seems to have been a tendency for youngsters, who are beginning to find their climbing feet, to leave us. This even applies to a few older members who want to climb more seriously than the majority of the active membership.

This is a very disturbing thing. In the first place it is (if it is true) an awful reflection that a man cannot find a sufficient number of climbing partners from a club of over eighty members. In the second place, we need members with more real loyalty to the Oread than those who talk of resigning on such grounds. Only if these same people, who moan at present, help in getting together and keeping a first class nucleus of enthusiastic youngsters will the Oread see something of a real rejuvenation. Only then will we again see young Oreads thinking in terms larger than a weekend on Stanage or in Llanberis, and raising their eyes to mountains other than those sewn together with dotted lines in little books.

We must preserve the first class youngsters we have with us and help as far as possible the others who inevitably collect around them if they once get started. There are Oreads like Geoff Hayes, John Russell, Walter and Brian Richards (let us not be frightened of using names) - Tony Smith, John Fisher, Derek Burgess - and many others who have enormous potential. They are all young enough to achieve something above average in the next few years. Be certain that whether or not the Oread isto be a first class mountaineering club in ten years' time depends more upon them and those they gather about them than it does upon me and my contemporaries.

It is a good thing in many ways that the administration of Club affairs is in the hands of older and perhaps more balanced persons and, oddly enough, it is nearly always this type who is prepared to spend a great deal of his time (which grows more valuable as he grows older) in running the club as a going concern. The younger element must support them however and by their demands, and from their initiative, make their committee feel that what they do is worthwhile. For example - it must be a bit depressing for those who edit, or print and publish this Newsletter and have to write half of it themselves.

I do disagree with our Vice-President that the overdeveloped self-sufficiency of the club arises from the same origin as the apparent "White Hall apathy". It is worth noting that quite a few people, who were fairly regular White Hall instructors as far back as 1950, now seem to have little interest. Personally, I think that this is due more to the changed character of White Hall than change in the basic attitudes of the persons concerned. There is, I suppose, no secret in the fact that Peter Mosedale exerted some kind of magnetism and built up a wonderful sense of "belonging" among the best of his instructors. He seemed very capable of estimating his men and getting the best out of them. People say to me - "But White Hall isn't what it was" - and I think that although this may be true in some respects, at least they should give it several chances by spending the odd weekend there. The great tragedy about the Oread and White Hall is that within our ranks we have many first-rate mountaineers with outstanding personalities who have much more to offer White Hall than the pure rock climber. One of our best has recently spent a period there as an Assistant Warden and from what one gathers in the schools (where the opinion of the youngsters, who have been, can be heard

saying what is really important about White Hall) he is just about the best they've ever had. It would be a great loss to both us and White Hall if contact was completely lost.

This letter which started as a reply to one or two specific points has overflowed into all kinds of channels - but I suggest that they are all interconnected in one way or another, and a few of the things I've said should arouse some emotion in the breast of anyone to whom the Oread means more than just a social clique. I personally don't give a damn what you think as long as you think something - a sure sign that at least you do care.

Yours faithfully,
Harry Pretty.

To the Editor, Oread M.C. Newsletter.

Dear Sir,

"Look into yourself".

I have just received the latest issue of the Newsletter and was delighted to read that Jack Longland and Alf Bridge have become Honorary Members and that Cyril is with us again. I also read George Sutton's article with much pleasure.

Now although I have had a good laugh over Ernie Phillips' article entitled the "Panther Putsch" I have also spent a little while thinking over its implications. A joke is a joke and I can take any number against myself and enjoy them but some of the cracks in his "Putsch" need replying to.

It is a pity to make fun of a man's Himalayan ambitions especially when he has done much to try to bring them into reality and is still doing so. It is a pity also to be amused that a man spend a week of his holidays in teaching an enthusiastic youngster to climb. Perhaps some of us are too selfish and important to "stoop" to this sort of thing. Remember! I was an Assistant Warden and Climbing Instructor at White Hall in which time about two thousand people passed through my hands, as they have with George Sutton and Cyril Machin. All three of us have enjoyed seeing young ones enjoying what we live for, and I still like to teach the odd exceptional person to climb.

Now with all my respects to those who have built up Bryn-y-Wern I still maintain as I have always done, that it is a beautiful place but terribly out of the way. Who is Ernie Phillips to joke at me, saying "and Panther will have a dunlopillo bed six feet long" etc. when he spends as much time as anyone living in the luxury of B-y-W? Personally, I do not like any hut although sometimes they have obvious advantages. I prefer to live in the closest possible harmony with mountains by living in a tent, a cave or under great boulders.

Nobody should make fun of a man's keenness in any field lest he become very angry. I can see that it is a good thing at least to have Bryn-y-Wern, just so Ernie Phillips can continue to be funny and write childish drivel about other people from an armchair by the fireside.

Yours faithfully,
Trevor S. Panther.

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