

A History Of Stroud Rambling Club



1953-2003 50th Anniversary

*By
Maurice & Marion Teal*

Foreword by Tony Drake M.B.E

It is a pleasure and privilege to be asked to write this foreword to the history o half a century ago. Has anyone tried to estimate the number of rambler/days of pleasure it has given in the glorious countryside we have around us?

Maurice Teal's painstaking research makes fascinating reading in the following pages. What was so unusual for a rambling club was the proliferation of sections which George Watkins masterminded. I have not heard of any other rambling club that developed in quite the same way. It is interesting to note how the various sections were popular for a while but then, some of them waned and ceased, but the rambling side carried on and has gone from strength to strength.

One section that George Watkins did not attempt to form was a footpath section to deal with rights of way problems and because of this the Gloucestershire Area of the Ramblers Association formed the Stroud and District Footpath Group in 1973. George seemed to regard the group as a potential rival to the Stroud Rambling Club but he need not have worried. It was some years after formation that the Footpath Group started to organise rambles itself and, now called the South Cotswold Group of the Ramblers Association, has over 400 members supporting the Association's vital work for walkers, and has a full rambling programme. Meanwhile the Stroud Rambling Club still goes strong and may it continue to do so.

Tony Drake

Preface



Tony Drake M.B.E

To appreciate fully the splendour of the five Stroud valleys, in the southern area of the Cotswolds Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the limestone grasslands and common, the steep hill sides, rivers & streams that provided the power for the mills of the 19th century woollen industry, it is necessary to walk the many footpaths and tracks that abound in the area. For this reason, on 19th July 1953 the Stroud Rambling Club held its inaugural ramble.

This book is written to celebrate the 50th anniversary of that first ramble and charts the history & development of the club as its activities expand to encompass cycling, caving, canoeing, sailing, mountaineering and riding.

The club acknowledges with gratitude the hard work of the co-authors Maurice & Marion Teal who have compiled this record, and the many hundreds of members who have made this story possible. The club welcomes enquiries from prospective members who will, themselves continue to take the club into the 21st century.

Jim White Chairman Stroud Rambling Club

The Early days

The Cotswold Rambling Club was formed in the early 1920's and a little later, in the 1940's Cheltenham Rambling Club began its activities. Both clubs drew its members from Gloucester and Cheltenham and the Ramblers Association became concerned that the area round Stroud was not catered for. It was argued that here, in magnificent rambling country, was a population large enough to support another rambling club. Mr. A.J.Drake (Tony) as secretary of the Association's Gloucestershire Committee was heavily involved from the outset and it was largely due to his efforts that Stroud Rambling Club finally got off the ground.

Public transport, upon which most people relied in 1953, played its part in the formation of the Club.

It had been noted by a member that the only Sunday morning public transport in those days was the Stroud to Gloucester /Cheltenham train service. Unfortunately the only convenient train ran from Gloucester to Stroud, and it was therefore nearly impossible for ramblers from Stroud to get to Gloucester in time for a morning meet but Gloucester & Cheltenham ramblers could get to Stroud railway station – one assumes the return journey was possible in the afternoon!

Letters were sent to members of the R.A. who lived in the Stroud area and recent clients of the Holiday Fellowship and Co-operative Holidays Association were also circulated. It was accepted, however, that the early activities of the new club would be supported by members of the established clubs. This was borne out when the inaugural ramble was staged on July 19th 1953. Of the eleven who took part only two were from the Stroud area. One of these was Jean Reid, who was a Librarian at Stroud's Public Library, and she agreed to become the secretary during the new clubs early months.

The first ramble was led by Tony Drake and started at Stroud GWR Railway Station. The route was by way of Selsley, Nymphsfield, Owlpen, Kingscote, Tiltups End and Nailsworth, everyone returning to Stroud by bus. Not only did Tony lead the first ramble, he led the next two and on these the number of local ramblers was increased. Altogether in the first year of the club's existence, twelve full day rambles and one half day ramble were arranged.



Coffee Break (Bear pools)

On the 3rd September 1954 the first Annual General Meeting was called, the venue being the Blue Door Cafe at Cirencester. At this time there were thirty two members of which seventeen were from the Stroud area. The subscription was fixed at two shillings and six pence (12 1/2p in today's money), and Harry Smith was elected as the first Chairman.

Jean Reid agreed to carry on as secretary and Marjorie Lasbury took on the role of Treasurer.

At the following AGM (1955) the duties of General Secretary and Treasurer were merged and this position was filled by several people over the years, notably Elizabeth Clough (late Baker) who was Secretary/Treasurer for seven.

At the 1967 AGM the post was again split. Meanwhile the Club had several chairmen. Harry Smith remained in charge for a second term and was followed by Douglas Hebbes. Tony Drake held the position for a year and was followed by Marjorie Lasbury who chaired meetings for three. She remembers that in the days when few members had cars the Club occasionally hired Beavis' coaches for rambles in the Mendips, Forest of Dean etc.

Early days of S.R.C



1/3/59 (Tom Stephenson with group on Spruce Drive)



(Anne Vick, Harry Smith, Jean Reid,
Mary Greening, David Goodman)

After Marjorie, Norman Roberts became Chairman for a couple of years. It was towards the end of his term that Stroud Rambling Club staged the first weekend in its history, an event in which Norman was a prime mover. Marling School had the use of a cottage in the Black Mountains, named Beili Bach, for the older students. Norman in his capacity as a teacher at the school was able to "twist an arm or two" with the result that the SRC had "Beili Bach" for a weekend. Not only that, but Norman led the two rambles, one in the Brecon Beacons and one in the "Blacks". One remembers the absence of electricity; (it was oil lamps only) and the odd glass or two of homemade wine! The weekend took place on 4th - 6th October 1963 and a fortnight later at the AGM Norman Roberts stood down as Chairman to be replaced by George Watkins, who was to remain in the post until his untimely death in early 1991.



1st Club Weekend

Oct 1963 Weekend at Beili Bach

There had been at least one other weekend based on Beili Bach but the weekend of March 25th - 27th 1966 was of great significance. This was the Club's first hostel weekend being based on the Youth Hostel at Minehead. Walking was on the Quantock Hills led by George Watkins and the event was declared a great success.

1st Hostel Weekend Minehead 26/3/66



L to R George Watkins, Martin Tozer, Alie Watkins, Kath Sturgess, Margaret Clough

Although hostel weekends had not been George Watkins' brainchild (the idea had been mooted years before) he was an enthusiastic supporter. He turned out to be an energetic leader who was prepared to break new ground and get things done.

For instance, various sections were formed within the club, sections for climbing and pony-trekking, and later on canoeing, caving and cycling. These sections are dealt with in more detail in later pages.

George was also keen on the club having a constitution. This was drawn up and adopted at the 1967 AGM. It included provision for the Stroud Rambling Club to be regarded as the local group of (a) the Holiday Fellowship (b) Countrywide Holidays Association (c) Galleon World Travel Fellowship and (d) the Youth Hostel Association.*

During the long weekend of April 4 - 7th 1969 the Club staged its first ever Easter Meet in Snowdonia based on the youth hostel of Idwal Cottage. The venture was well supported and though the rambles were rough and at altitude the personnel was by no means restricted to climbing section members. During the weekend several peaks of over 3000 feet were reached and the culmination was a traverse of the Snowdon Horseshoe by several members of the party.

* *Stroud rambling Club is no longer the local group of these organisations*

The following Easter found the Club again in Snowdonia, this time at the end of March and based on Corris Youth Hostel. It was a very cold weekend and the heating arrangements at Corris were not too efficient. An abiding memory is taking lunch on a block of ice on the summit of Cader Idris.

On May 17th 1970 the "Cotswold Way" was formally opened, the entire length being walked by members of various rambling clubs. Each club was allocated a section of the Way; Stroud's being at the northern end, finishing in Chipping Campden.

Towards the end of that summer, August 23rd actually, members of Stroud Rambling Club left to take part in the very first Club holiday. Travel was by rail to the venue at Zermatt. There were twelve in the group including three year old Adrian Teal, and since Alie Watkins had an injured knee there were always "A" and "B" parties and sometime even "C" party. The weather was mostly kind and several summits were reached, notably the Breithorn (13661 feet) and the Rimpfischhorn (13773 feet). On the same day that the latter peak was attained four members of the group attempted Monte Rosa without reaching the summit. It is probable, however, that they reached a height in excess of 14000 feet.

Without going into detail, the programmes that were being arranged, with something on every weekend, attracted an ever increasing number of new members. At the end of September 1970 the membership stood at 109, but even this figure was to be dwarfed during subsequent years.



Theodul Pass above Zermatt



George Watkins in Zermatt 2/9/70

George Watkins had not been content with his efforts on behalf of Stroud Rambling Club. During the early 70's he led holidays for other organisations such as CHA, HF etc. some of them abroad. During these he had aroused the interest of some of the participants in the Stroud club. These in turned formed their own "Gentian Club" although being under the umbrella of the S.R.C, a sort of club within a club. As time went on a reciprocal agreement grew whereby members of the Gentian Club became members of the SRC and visa versa. This resulted in an explosion in membership numbers. No figures are available but at one stage the membership of the combined clubs was said to be in excess of 500.

However, the two organisations gradually grew apart and in 1982 it became obvious that the Gentians wanted to split from the SRC. Negotiations followed and from 30th September 1982 the two clubs went their separate ways, there having been a satisfactory financial settlement.

Returning to the early 70's, on 3rd Jan 1971 a party of SRC members travelled by car to the northern slopes of the Brecon Beacons. They climbed up through deep snow and emerged from the cloud into dazzling sunshine from whence they enjoyed a perfect ridge walk. This was the first of a series in which the mountains were visited on the first Sunday in the year "in search of snow". More often than not they found it. The series was carried on for many a year.



Approaching Cribyn, winter walking in the Brecon Beacons 2/1/77

Later in the year, on 11th July SRC members visited the Black Mountains with a particular object in view. This date had been nominated for the formal opening of the "Offas Dyke" Long Distance Footpath and as with the Cotswold Way it was to be walked in its entirety by various rambling clubs. Stroud had been allotted the section from Llanthony to Whitecastle which entailed a starting climb to the ridge to the east of the

Honddu Valley. It was one of the hottest days of the summer, so much so, that a pub for lunch seemed an absolute necessity. The group had fallen behind time and with closing time of two o'clock approaching a runner was despatched to the inn at Pandy to get the drinks in.



Opening Day of Offas Dyke 11/7/71

In April 1972 three members of SRC appeared on Television - Twice. BBC West staged a knock out quiz entitled "You Can't Lose", in which teams from different towns took part. Not only that but each team was from a different activity. There were ten teams altogether, the one from Stroud being drawn from SRC. Each team was of three persons and SRC's threesome was Christine Heppell, George Watkins and Maurice Teal. On Tuesday 4th April they travelled to Bristol to play a team from Devizes Motor Club. They won that, so as one of the two highest scorers were in the final the following Tuesday to play Bridgewater Rugby Football Club. They won that too, so winning the prize of £150. It had, however, to go to a charity of the winner's choice. We chose the Mountain Rescue Committee.

Another "first" happened during the weekend of 29th and 30th June 1973. This was the first camping trip in the Clubs history and the site chosen was Harmons Cross just three miles short of Swanage. The location demanded coastal walking and Dorset provides some of the best. The weekend was declared a success and from then on camping became one of the Clubs activities. Eventually SRC acquired two Force 10 tents which were available for hire.

1978 was the Clubs Silver Jubilee year, clearly the time for something special. The first event was a repeat of the very first ramble of July 1953. This took place on January 7th and was led by George Watkins. Another important function was the jubilee dinner held at "The Hill" on Nov 11th. Guest of Honour was Sir Jack Longland, famous mountaineer and former Everest.

The idea of a club hut situated in ideal walking country was first mooted during 1977. It really captured the imagination of many members in 1978 and was a recurring topic at committee meetings. Consequently a fund was set up known as the silver jubilee fund with the aim of eventually financing the hut and other projects.

During 1978 and subsequent years several properties in a variety of locations were considered and in some cases visited. In every case, though, there was some objection, either the size was inappropriate; the access was poor or the asking price too high.

As time went on, however, committee members began asking themselves if the club really needed a hut. Increasingly the answer was "No" and the reason is not hard to find. To a climbing club which stages most of its meets in say, Snowdonia, a hut there is a useful asset. But to a rambling club whose members like to walk in a variety of different areas, a hut in a fixed location would soon become a liability.

After 1982 the subject doesn't seem to have been debated. The silver jubilee fund became part of the clubs capital in a deposit account making the SRC a very well off club. The interest derived from the investment has played a large part in keeping the level of subscriptions down.

When the Gentians broke away the number of members dropped as was expected. When in subsequent years numbers were reduced further, the chairman was concerned for the future of the club. However, the membership levelled off at about the 250 mark. This level was sustained and even increased to about 300 in the mid nineties, a far cry from the fifties and sixties when the number of members hovered around forty.

In February 1991 George Watkins died after a short illness, his funeral being attended by many members, past and present, plus representatives of the organisations he was associated with. Vice chairman Bill Birch took over the chairmanship and one topic that was discussed at subsequent committee meetings was a suitable memorial for George who had been chairman for over 27 years.

It was finally decided to have a walk named the "George Watkins Walk" and a route eventually evolved, with John Sharp the chief architect. It was a figure of eight route so that it could be taken as a full day or two half days. The start, finish and cross over were at Bisley, one half going via Througham Slad and the other taking in the Toadsmoor Valley. A leaflet describing the route was produced and 500 copies printed. On Sunday March 14th 1993 the whole route was walked by members divided up into several groups.

At the 1991 AGM Alie Watkins stood down as general secretary, having held the post since 1968. Also at the same meeting Bill Birch was elected as chairman, but in 1992 a rule was added to the constitution to the effect that no-one could be elected as Chairman for more than five consecutive years, with the proviso that after twelve months an individual would again be eligible for election.



George Watkins Memorial Walk 14/3/93



L to R Bill Birch, Marguerite Govier, Tony Bennett, Caroline White, Mavis Rollins, Jim White

George Watkins Memorial Walk 14/3/93



**George Watkins Memorial Walk
L to R Maurice Teal, Alie Watkins, Martin Tozer, Neil Derbyshire**



George Watkins Memorial Walk 31st December 2000

1993 was Ruby Anniversary Year. Two celebratory events were arranged. The first was a repeat of the Club's first ever ramble, and was led by Tony Drake, the original leader. Twenty took part and this time public transport was not used for the return from Nailsworth, cars being shunted around beforehand. The second event was a special dinner which took place on 10th September at Edge Village Hall.



Ruby Anniversary Walk Selsley Common 25/7/93

Also in 1993 the SRC approved a new badge replacing the old one with a rucksack motif that had been originally introduced in 1976. The new one was of circular format and had a ram's head motif. It had been chosen from a number submitted to the committee. In early 1994 a number of green sweatshirts incorporating the new badge were ordered..

Later in 1994 Bill Birch and his wife Jo decided to move to Scotland which meant that his tenure of the chairmanship would end at the AGM of that year. He had been a magnificent servant of the Club having been treasurer for thirteen years and chairman for almost four, apart from having been leader more than 250 times. A farewell dinner was arranged at Stuart House in Minchinhampton on the 9th Dec. Eighty nine members attended. At the 1994 AGM Frank Heathcote was elected as the new chairman.

The period of Frank's chairmanship was one of consolidation. Membership was maintained in the upper two hundreds and a full and varied programme was enjoyed by all who took part.

Not the least important section of this was the social agenda. Margery van Zyl was largely responsible for this, her fertile mind devising many interesting evenings and indeed daytime visits.

At the 1999 AGM Frank Heathcote stepped down and was succeeded by Philip Andrew whose exploits in the field of Triathlon were well known.

Early in 2001 the Foot and Mouth epidemic reared its ugly head. 1967 had seen an outbreak but its impact on the club wasn't that dramatic. This time it was different. The whole country was involved and this led to a blanket closure of footpaths, so much so that normal rambling was completely washed out. The club had no alternative but to suspend the outdoor programme. This included a multiactivity weekend in the Brecon area and a return visit to Stroud by the German Alpine Club (Reutlingen Section).

Club visit to Reutlingen 1999



The Foot and Mouth crisis lasted several months and an emergency programme was devised. It included a walk across the Severn Bridge, beach walks, canal towpath walks, and a visit to the "Big Pit" etc. Also, cycle rides were increased to two per month and kept to roads only. Gradually though, more and more footpaths became open to the public and rambling programmes started to take on a more familiar look.

The year's end was approaching, however, before normal service was resumed.



At 'The Big Pit' 29/4/01 Photo Paul Thomas



Severn Bridge 10/6/01 Photo Paul Thomas

The Foot and Mouth outbreak had claimed a casualty. Philip Andrew, whose business concerned farming became so busy that, as 2002 dawned, he handed control of the club to his vice chairman, Adrian Roberts. Later on, he announced that he would be standing down at the November AGM.

2002 cannot be passed over without mentioning the return visit of the Reutlingen section of the German Alpine Club. This event took place in May, having been postponed the previous year due to the Foot and Mouth outbreak. A full programme of walks was organised and the visit was wound up by a Barn Dance at King's Stanley's fine village hall.

At the 2002 AGM Jim White was elected as Chairman and part of his job will be to preside over the 50th anniversary celebrations, of which publication of this booklet is part.

THE SECTIONS

There is little doubt that the emergence of the various sections contributed to the surge in membership that the SRC enjoyed in the seventies. For several years the Club could justifiably claim to be a multi activity organisation, and still can to a degree. With climbing and pony trekking established and caving coming along each section elected its own organising committee to arrange the programmes. The various secretaries were invited to join the general committee meetings. George Watkins, in his capacity as chairman, was enthusiastic about all the sections and took part in each activity except cycling.

Towards the end of the seventies there were murmurs about the setting up of a skiing section. There had been some visits organised to the artificial slope at Matson and trips further afield had been suggested. But there had never been enough interest in the activity to justify a new group so the skiing section never came into being.

CLIMBING

It is difficult to allocate a date to the formation of the climbing section. In the late sixties several club members had arranged their own trips to the rock faces, generally to Wintours Leap, near Chepstow. Quite a few of the more prominent club members were interested in rock climbing and/or mountain walking. This accounts for the fact that the early Easter meets and even the first club holiday were slanted towards mountains and climbing. The first official climbing item on the club programme was to Cleeve Hill on 24th August 1969, not that Cleeve Hill was a prime climbing ground. There was Castle Rock which had several single pitch routes of reasonably high standard that could all be done on a rope, then there were a few more climbs spaced round the hill that afforded belaying practice.

Wintours Leap began to appear on the programme. This was a much more serious proposition possessing a variety of routes involving several pitches. The various bits of rock in the Symonds Yat area provided some diversity and there was the occasional visit

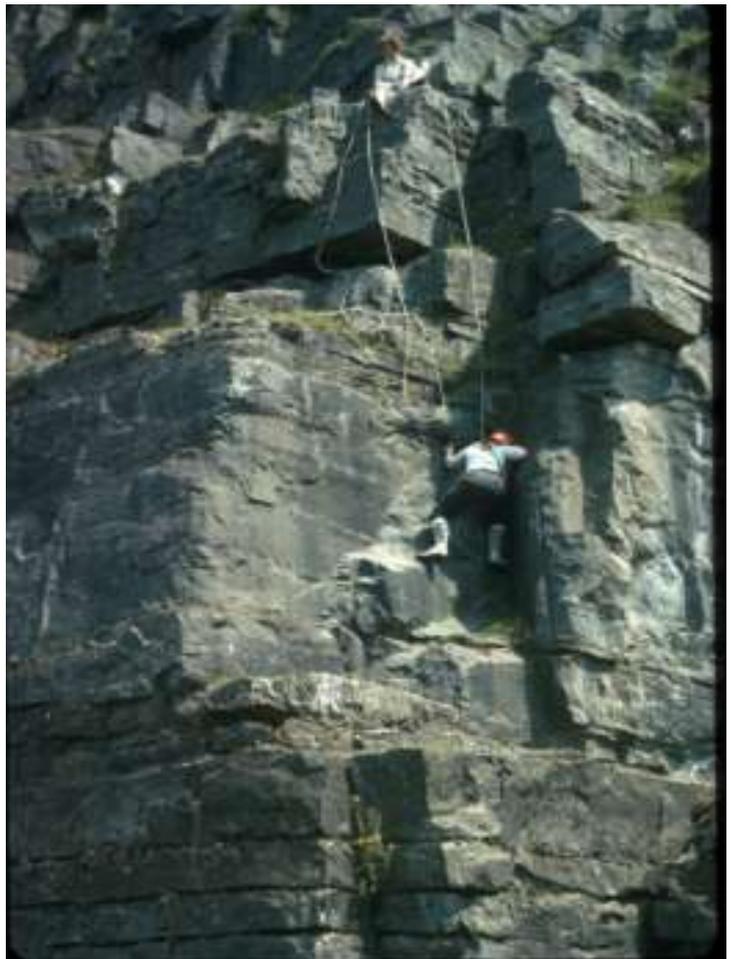
to Pontesford in Shropshire where there were several climbs on Volcanic rock. Meanwhile midweek evenings were spent on Cleeve Hill.

The best climber in the section at this time was Peter Gardiner. With his athletic build and long reach he was in great demand as a leader.

Initially the climbing equipment was provided by the people taking part, particularly the last named. Gradually though, the section acquired some kit. In 1971 the group started to be known as the Climbing and Mountaineering section and weekends of winter mountaineering were organised in Snowdonia.

Liz Hudson & Mike Gargery on the Taff Fechan

The scope of rock climbing was broadened by odd visits to Avon Gorge, Churchill Rocks, Cheddar Gorge and even Brean Down. Later it was widened still further to include Swanage, Hen Cloud (Derbyshire) and Taf Fechan in Wales, while the evening climbers were invited to Wycliffe College climbing wall and explored rocks at Randwick and on Haresfield Beacon.



In 1972 a climbing committee was formed and Ginette Woolley became the first secretary. Gradually though, the personnel began to change. Some of the original members dropped out, new members taking their places. Climbing standards rose and in the late seventies the section was as strong as at any time. Leading names included Pauline Lister, Peter Sheldrick and Chris Mitchell. Diane Mitchell became section secretary in 1979 and ran things successfully for two or three years, but towards the end

of 1982 interest waned. Mike Gargery, who already had had a spell as secretary, resumed the post but the rot had set in. When Mike left the district in June 1986 it spelled the end of the climbing section.

When the Gentian Club split away in 1982 mountaineering had become regarded as a separate group with its own secretary, firstly George Watkins and then Eddie Skinner. This state of affairs went on till 1988 during which year there were no meets arranged.

Nowadays, mountain walks and the occasional foray into Snowdonia or the Lakes are organised through the general programme committee. The demise of the climbing section was disappointing but the reasons for it are not hard to figure out. A local mountaineering

club with its own hut in Snowdonia had become better known. To an enthusiast whose main interest was in climbing there could only be one choice.

THE HORSEBACK RAMBLERS

This was the second of the sections to be formed, Ponytrekking appearing on the club programme as a weekend based on Tyn-y-Cae Youth Hostel near Brecon, on the 27/28th September 1969. The following year weekends were staged at Capel-y-Ffin Youth Hostel in the Black Mountains, and Tyn-y-Cae again. After that meets were held in a variety of localities including Exmoor, the Shropshire Highlands and the Forest of Dean.

When an organising committee was formed Ray Bethell became secretary to be succeeded by Ann Comely in 1974. There was considerable interest in this activity in the seventies and evening rides based on the Hyde Stables were introduced. At this venue some tuition was available and this proved popular. Felicity Crooks was an energetic secretary but attendances started to drop off in the eighties. Cheryl Browning took over in 1983 but by 1985 the writing was on the wall. Only one meet was arranged in 1986 and that had no real support.



**Caroline White prepares to lead her 'Posse' out of the ring
Brecon Multi-activity weekend 2002**

Stemming from a multi activity weekend during 2002, there are moves a foot to revive the horseback ramblers. Marjorie Mills has agreed to be section secretary & already meets have appeared in the programme.

THE SUBTERRANIAN RAMBLERS

On the 26th November 1972 an item on the club programme attracted a surprisingly large turnout. It was a visit to the ancient iron mines of "Old Bow" and "New Dunne" in the Clearwell area of the Forest of Dean. This had been campaigned for by club member Les Sherratt who had done some caving and was keen to number the sport among the Club's activities. It was Les, too, who introduced us to Tony Day, our leader for the day, who knew these mines like the back of his hand. The meet was a great success and there were several present for whom that trip underground was the first of many.



In New Dunn Mine Forest of dean 26/11/72

An early item on the caving agenda was a weekend spent at the South Wales Caving Club hut at Penwyllt in the Swansea Valley. This is strategically placed near the most extensive cave system so far discovered in the UK, Ogof Flynnon Ddu (O.F.D. for short).

For a while the caving section was seen as an extension of the climbers. But soon an organising committee was formed and Les Sherratt became the first secretary. The section quickly gained popularity and several leaders emerged but Tony Day remained one of the leaders in demand. The name of Bruce Hendrie was soon to the fore. Bruce quickly became section secretary and held the position for six years.

Evening visits were arranged to the stone mines at Box and other local sites, and in 1976 the section was given the job of gating the entrances. Meanwhile, members were visiting caverns up and down the country. Agen Allwedd and Eglwys Faen near Llangattock were popular, while the Mendips often got on the programme.



Underwater Underground!

However, as with other sections the cavers struck a bad patch. After Mike Rogers' stewardship no one wanted to be secretary so George Watkins acted as a stand in. But he did keep things ticking over.

Nothing very much happened in 1990 partly due to George's illness, then the following year John Sutton, who had already done sterling work took on the duties of secretary. It is largely due to him, Humphrey Sherwood and latterly Alan Henshaw that the caving flag has kept flying.

At the time of going to press, however, there is an urgent need for new members.



Julian Brown by column

THE WATER RAMBLERS

The first water rambling date was 23rd September 1973 when a number of members met at Oxford to go punting on the river Cherwell. The following year canoeing began in earnest and the section was launched (no pun intended). Tony Smith was elected secretary and soon a programme of events was in full swing. Tony knew of some cheap-to-hire canoes and this helped a great deal. But the section was keen to acquire some craft of its own and soon had a "fleet" of three. It goes without saying that several members owned their own canoes.

Canoeing was carried out on the rivers Wye and Severn (between Bridgenorth and Bewdley) and closer to home on the Stroudwater Canal and river Frome. They even tried their hand at sea canoeing off the south coast. Training sessions were held at South Cerney. David Redmond was section secretary for six years during the mid eighties and during this time the water ramblers were generally quite successful in organising a well attended programme. But interest was dwindling and in 1989 only two meets were organised.

The following year it was believed that the section was finished but Peter Landless was determined to give it one more try, organising three trial meets. It was then the section received its killer blow. The club's three canoes had been stored in a farm barn at Climperwell, and it was with some dismay that the club learned of the fire in which the canoes had been completely destroyed. There was no insurance cover so the loss was a complete one.



The three trial meets were carried out using borrowed canoes, but it seemed that the chance of resuscitating the water ramblers had gone. But not quite. Water craft has been featured on a multi-activity weekend and another event has found its way on the latest programme. Perhaps all is not lost..

Water Ramblers & Canoes

THE CYCLE RAMBLERS

There was a short cycle ride, led by Alan Brackenborough on May 1st 1976 but it was not well supported and not particularly memorable. One or two other events designed to stimulate interest were subsequently staged with similar results.

The cycling section really got going at a two hostel weekend involving Badby and Greens Norton Youth Hostels, both in Northamptonshire, at the end of April 1977. Actually it was a two activity weekend as well, for walking was catered for. But the cyclists were well represented. During the weekend the party visited the British Waterways Museum at Stoke Bruern (before it moved to Gloucester) and the former battlefield at Edgehill.

Thereafter an organising committee with Alan Brackenborough as secretary arranged a programme with at least one meet per month. Availability of machines was one problem. Although the enthusiasts had their own of course, the club wanted to give as many people as possible the chance to try out the delights of cycle touring.



“Where do we go from here?”

SRC cyclists in Central Wales

L to R Peter Sheldrick, Eddie Skinner, Maurice Teal & Ron Manning

To this end the section eventually acquired three bicycles which were available for hire and looked after by Alan. They were by no means the latest models but sufficient to give a would be cyclist a taste of the pastime.

Weekends always proved popular. Sometimes they were based on a Youth Hostel but camping weekends began to creep into the programme. January 1983 saw the first of the rides-to-lunch, a series that has been carried on and fulfilled in most years since.



Track to Parsons Bridge (near Devils Bridge) L to R Eddie Skinner, Peter Sheldrick & Marion Teal

In recent times the venue has been "Waterend Farm" near Longney where the fare is roast beef and trimmings; and what trimmings! . Cheryl Browning and her assistant Margaret Skinner have annually provided lunches that are truly memorable.



Winter Riding Llangurig Mid Wales May 1979



Rough Stuff ! west of Nant-y-Moch (Central Wales)

In the eighties the secretaryship changed regularly, few wanting the post for longer than a year. In 1987, however, Eddie Skinner, who had already done one stint, took over and has held the job ever since.

Attendances on the rides have been steady but disappointingly low over most of the years. There are signs, though, that this is now on an upward curve.

The cycling section received a shot in the arm when Philip Andrew became Club chairman.

Among other things Phillip was a cyclist, the first club chairman to be so inclined. Among the events that he instigated were rides followed by barbecues at the Andrew residence and an off road weekend across Central Wales.

The section increased its prominence during the Foot and Mouth crisis when the walking side of things became limited.

THE SOCIAL SIDE

Nothing much happened socially during the early years of the SRC, the committee concentrating on arranging a programme of rambles. In 1959 though, a Christmas party was held. 1960 was a quiet year, then the following April, the Club staged a Barn Dance in aid of the local R.A. May 1961 saw the very first skittles match on the "Fleece" (Lightpill) alley, the away team being the Cotswold Rambling Club. The year was rounded off with another Christmas party held at Robinson Hall at Brockworth.

At the end of 1962 the Christmas party was replaced by a New Years party held at the home of Norman and Enid Roberts. This format was repeated at the end of the following three years. For the next in the series something different was planned. The party was staged at Duntisbourne Abbots Youth Hostel, some members walking out from Stroud and returning the next day. This event happened after the New Year so it was actually part of the 1967 programme. Also in this year the Club enjoyed its first slide evening and on another occasion a "bangers & mash" tea.

In 1968 one outstanding event was a "Tyrolean Evening" in which typical food of the region was enjoyed and Tyrolean music played. At the end of the year, just before Christmas was the first "Carol Party", an event that was destined to run for twenty years.

1970 saw the first club dinner. It was held at Slimbridge Youth Hostel and as in the Duntisbourne weekend a large party of members walked there and back. The arrangements were similar in the two following years, 1971 being at Slimbridge again and the 1972 venue at Duntisbourne Abbots.



Club dinner at Slimbridge YH 10/1/70 Norman King & Maurice Williams in foreground

After this it was decided that annual dinners should be more formal affairs but that the principle of walking to a hostel and back should be kept alive as a "walk for your supper" event. Thus the dinner for 1973 was held at Moor Court Hotel on Minchinhampton Common.

The plans for the 1974 dinner were ambitious indeed; a hotel where the diners could stay overnight if they wished. The hotel chosen was Littledean House Hotel in the Forest of Dean, and the occasion was successful enough for the idea to be tried again. In 1975 How Caple Grange near Ross was the choice and sixty attended. But the following year the "overnight" idea was dropped and the event moved to the "Royal George" at Birdlip.

Two dinners followed in ensuing years, at the Hill, Stroud, including the Silver Jubilee Dinner, then the organisers moved the event to Burleigh Court Hotel near Brimscombe. This proved to be the final annual dinner, there being insufficient support to carry on the series. Since then the SRC has staged a couple of formal dinners but these were special occasions and are referred to in other pages.

By the 1970-71 season virtually a full social programme was in being plus one or two summer events. In the early seventies a social committee was formed with a social secretary. A huge variation of items were dreamed up including such things as a cheese and wine social, wines of the world, a tour of the HTV studios and visits to Lacock Abbey and the Clearwell Show Caves. Theatre visits and navigation evenings became more frequent.

Things haven't changed much in the intervening years. The social programme is in the capable hands of Margery Van Zyl who has been social secretary since 1991. Theatre visits are quite common and a Barn Dance is almost an annual event. One item, in January of every programme attracting a large audience is the Holiday session in which members show slides of their own and club holidays. This started life as "Holidays Out of Doors" back in 1974 and has been running ever since.



Social & Dance at Box Village Hall

**L to R Malcolm Cain, Maurice Teal,
Gerald Cox, George Watkins, Stan Dunn,
& Alie Watkins**

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Throughout its existence the SRC has endeavoured to keep its name in the public eye if only to gain new members. In doing so the club has sometimes performed duties best described as in the public interest. In 1968 for example the club took part in the registration of local commons and in case some of you think there are only two it must be pointed out that there are a lot more than this.

In the late sixties/early seventies the SRC assisted in marking rights of way on master maps. John Clayton was a leading light in this activity. It was John too who campaigned for and led footpath clearances in the seventies.

In 1975 Stroud Rambling Club broke new ground by entering a float in the Stroud Show Carnival. A great deal of work and enthusiasm went into this venture and quite a few people were involved; but the individual who drew all the threads together was Malcolm Cain. How did we do? We achieved a creditable third place.

The Club always likes to get descriptions of the latest rambles in the local press. In July 1980 it burst into print on its own account, publishing a book of local walks. There were lots of local sales outlets and 2000 copies were printed. A few years later the Club was instrumental in the publication of the "George Watkins Walk" leaflet as described elsewhere.

Apart from anything else the SRC has been affiliated for many years to several organisations. The National Trust, the Ramblers Association, the Cyclists Touring Club, the Council for the Preservation of Rural England and the Gloucestershire Trust for Nature Conservation have all benefited financially from this connection.

At the time of going to press the club is affiliated to:- the Cyclists' Touring Club, the Ramblers' Association, the South Cotswold RA, the National Trust, the Youth Hostels Association, the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Sustrans and Cambrian Caving.

RUNNING THE CLUB

We've already seen how in the Clubs early years the jobs of Secretary and Treasurer were combined. At that time the SRC was run by seven people; chairman, secretary/treasurer and five committee members (a position of rambles secretary, started in 1955 was discontinued after two years).

As mentioned before in 1967 separate secretary and treasurer were appointed and the post of Vice Chairman inaugurated so that the total committee was increased to nine for several years.

In 1972 an extra committee member was added and two years later the post of membership secretary was created. By this time the section secretaries were sitting in on meetings so that by the late seventies a committee attendance had shot up to fifteen.

The early AGMs were held at a variety of cafes, hotels and schools, then in 1963 began a spell of AGM's held at members homes. With a rising membership this practice was bound to be short lived so from 1969 the AGM was held at the Laurels Hotel (once) Teachers Centre (three times) Box Village Hall (once) Leisure Centre (nine times) Paganhill Village Hall (once) and Teachers Centre again (four times). In 1991 the AGM was staged at Rodborough Pavilion where it has been ever since.

Committee meetings were held at member's homes for many years but from 1977 to late 2002 they took place at Stratford Park Leisure Centre. The latest place where the committee has been welcomed is Kings Stanley's fine village hall. Today the general committee is constituted of; the chairman, vice chairman, secretary, treasurer, membership, bookings, social and programme secretaries plus five others..

The names of past chairmen plus that of the present chairman appear elsewhere. The post of vice chairman has been held by Maurice Teal, Stan Dunn, Alan Hall, Malcolm Cain, Eddie Skinner, Ian Anderson, Geoff Hudson, Bill Birch & Margery van Zyl, the present vice chairman being Adrian Roberts.

Sadly, Malcolm Cain died in September 1980 while in office, having completed almost three years in the post. The SRC had installed a garden seat in the grounds of Slimbridge Youth Hostel as a memorial to an energetic member of the Club who was instrumental in trying out new ideas.

CLUB HOLIDAYS

One couldn't comment on more than a smattering of the hundreds of rambles, climbs, weekends etc. that have been arranged. But it's appropriate to mention the Club holidays, although these have become more numerous, averaging two a year through the latter half of the nineties.

The 1970 holiday in Zermatt has already been mentioned. It was over five years before another trip was arranged, then in October 1975 a party of members travelled to Jersey, largest of the Channel Islands. They stayed in St. Hellier and did some coastal walking.

A year later over 30 members spent a week on the Isle of Man. In spite of adverse conditions the summit of Snaefell was attained among other objectives.

The next holiday to be arranged was to Holland in 1979, an Easter visit. This was more a sight-seeing tour than a walking holiday, one of the highlights being a visit to the bulb fields. There were two holidays in 1979, the second staged in the Yorkshire Dales. The participants stayed in the Yorkshire Dales National Park Centre at Whernside Manor and did some hard routes during their week.

In early summer 1981 the venue was the Isle of Aran. Thirty members took part but not all did the hardest routes which took in the summit of Goatfell and other notable peaks.

1982 saw a return to Jersey. This time the club members stayed in the north of the island.

George Watkins, who had led the Jersey trip had long been keen to lead a holiday in the Belgian Ardennes and the autumn of 1983 saw the fulfilment of this wish. Walking was through forests, over high moors and through steep river gorges.

1988 saw the first of a series of holidays abroad organised by Bill Birch. This one was to Majorca, the party staying at Puerto de Alcudia. The party had hire cars to get them to the start of the walks, some of which were through quite wild country. On two occasions the holiday makers disported themselves in the Mediterranean, surprisingly balmy at the end of October.



Boquer valley Majorca 28/10/88

The second of Bill Birch's promotions was in May 1990. Two weeks on the Isle of Madeira and thus being the longest Club holiday to date. The sixteen strong party had three nights at the four star Eden Mar Hotel in Funchal then transferred to the Residencia Orca at Porto Moniz on the north western tip of the island for another three nights. The rest of the time was back at the Eden Mar. Most of the walking was along levadas (irrigation channels) but there were coastal walks and one along the mountain spine of the island.



Levada do Norte W Of. Carviera de Lobos Madeira



Towards Puig Major Majorca 30/10/92

In 1992 it was back to Majorca, the group staying at Puerto de Soller. It was wild walking as before, the summits of L'Ofre and Teix being attained plus an entertaining walk, partly coastal, to La Calobra. Actually half the party did this walk the other way round, cars being placed at either end of the route and keys exchanged at halfway.

Another fortnights extravaganza was staged in 1994, a huge party of over forty flying to Prague in the Czech Republic. After this travel was by coach, eastward, first to Blansko, then Poprad in Slovakia. Here, some of the walking was in the Tatra Mountains, the party also indulging in canyoning. Finally everyone returned to Prague on the all night train.

During the summers of 1994, 1995 and 1996 Trevor Wood organised a traverse of Wainwrights Coast to Coast walk in three week long stints. The route starts at St. Bee's on the west coast and on July 25th 1996 the Club party marched into Robin Hood's Bay on the North Sea coast. The route broke new ground by being a hostel to hostel linear walk although the luggage was transported by road.

1995 also saw a holiday in the Isles of Scilly stage-managed by Margery van Zyl and in 1996 Bill Birch, although now domiciled in Southern Scotland, once more entered the arena. He arranged and led a week long programme of walks in the Borders region.

There were two Club holidays in 1997, one in Southern Ireland and one in the Lake District. The Irish trip was led by Trevor Wood and featured the mountains of the south west. Walking was of high grade and during the week Ireland's highest summit "Carrantouhill" was reached. The Lake District holiday was led by Frank Heathcote and Trevor Wood. It was in the autumn and based on the Youth Hostels of Coniston Coppermines and Keswick.

In March 1998 the Club went to Spain's Costa Blanca. A record forty four made the trip and were accommodated in an apartment block in Calpe. The walking was typical of the region, rough, and above all dry. One of the highlights was the Bernia Traverse which included a short cave section and a visit to an old fort. The organiser was Margery van Zyl, there being several leaders, for on some days two different walks were arranged.

Top of Serella Castle Costa Blanca



The main event in 1999 was the visit to Germany's Schwabian Alps at the invitation of the German Alpine Club (Reutlingen Section). Eighteen SRC members took part in a holiday of infinite variety. The hospitality of the German hosts was outstanding.

The Big Wheel I.O.M Traverse



In the year 2000 Club holidays were confined to the UK but there were three in total; one to the Isle of Man led by George Lodge, one to the Lakes, and one to the Bowland area of Yorkshire. The Bowland/Dales holiday was another linear walk with luggage transported by road. Hostels used were Slaidburn, Stainforth, Malham, Kettlewell, Aysgarth and Grinton.

The leaders were Rhona Lindup and Lorna Lane with help & guidance from our 'Northern Members' Mike & Elsa Bridges

Malham Cove Bowland Dales Traverse



2001 saw a return, after three years, to the Costa Blanca. The party, not so numerous as the last time, were booked into the Hotel Mendoza in the town of Alfaz del Pi. Once again a fleet of cars was hired and this proved crucial since the walks were widely dispersed over the surrounding area. Three beautiful days were enjoyed after which the weather deteriorated but the walking programme was not too badly affected. This week was organised jointly by Adrian and Jane Roberts.



Paella at Alfaz del Pi Costa Blanca



Cabeza del Oro summit Costa Blanca

Toward the end of 2001 a sizeable party of club members holidayed for a week on Lanzarote in the Canary Islands. As it happened, this was the last event led by Phillip Andrew as club chairman.

Costa Teguisse Lanzarote



In October 2001 a slightly different style of holiday was tried; a mid-week four night break based in a comfortable hotel with half board accommodation & using coach transport both from & to Stroud, and for the start and finish journey of each day. This allowed a three day linear walk to be completed along the Sandstone Trail in Cheshire. As we were based within the city walls of Chester, there was the opportunity to explore this ancient city.



View from Rawhead Sandstone Trail

In 2002 George Lodge led a very successful holiday in Guernsey with its offshore islands, also hotel based but using the excellent island bus service to access the walks. George Lodge & Mavis Rollins made a flying visit to Alderney, whilst two other members escaped to Jersey for the day to cycle part of the island.



Guernsey S.R.C leader George Lodge (on guard duty?)

MEMORIES OF STROUD RAMBLING CLUB

When George and I joined the Club in the early 60's, it was on its last legs. (No Pun intended!). If we had six people on a ramble, it was considered a good turn out. Several of the walks at that time were combined ones with the Cotswold, Cheltenham and Bath Clubs.

Public transport was good in those days and often we caught a train or bus to the starting point of the ramble. Also, there were still plenty of cafe's and tea shops where we could have afternoon tea at the end of the walk.

However, numbers remained low. At the A.G.M. in October 1963, just about a year after George and I became members, it was proposed to wind up S.R.C. and become part of one of the other clubs. George was very much against this. Eventually it was agreed to keep the club going, provided George would take on the post of chairman. This he did, and in fact he remained as chairman until his death in February 1991.

Those of you who knew George, will remember his enthusiasm for anything he set out to achieve. Over the years the club began to grow and started to flourish. I was elected as general secretary in 1968. I think we worked well as a team, even if we didn't always agree on every issue!

In the early days there were only two rambles a month, a full day and a half day. By the early 70's numbers on walks had become so large, that it was decided to put on a walk each weekend, alternating between full days and half days. The earliest weekend meets were held in the Black Mountains, staying at the Marling School hut. In March 1966 we started using Youth Hostels for our weekend meets. These then became a regular feature.

Last year's Foot and Mouth crisis was not the first one that affected the Club's activities. I quote from a letter sent by the secretary on 13th December 1967.

"Regrettably the Foot and Mouth disease epidemic is continuing and we cannot at present see an end to it. As a result we must cancel all rambles indefinitely".

S.R.C. had become an important part of our lives. Apart from the regular walks, many other events stand out in my memories. There were the "Walk for your Supper" weekends at hostels within walking distance from Stroud. Usually there would be a social evening to follow. Eventually these were replaced by an annual dinner at a hotel locally.

I clearly remember the first local social evening we organised, in January 1966. This was a party at the home of the then secretary, Dorothy Hartley (now sadly deceased). We felt the evening needed a theme and I now quote from the programme, "Festivities and food with an Eastern flavour". Bring your own fez. Book tickets with sec. 2/6 (now 12 1/2 pence)".

The social scene began to develop after that. Between 1967 and 1970 there were intermittent social meets on a Tuesday evening. From November 1970 onwards they became a regular monthly feature. I especially remember the evening featuring a specific country, with slides, music and national dishes prepared by various club members. We also had several enjoyable evenings playing skittles with other rambling clubs.

For many years, summer was hailed in, on a Saturday evening near Midsummer's day, with a barbecue in the woods around Stroud. The smell and taste of food cooked in the open air, a huge bonfire and vast quantities of Weston's cider, created a wonderful atmosphere.

Two other events became for us the highlights of the social scene in winter. One was the "Annual Advent Walk and Carol Party". A Sunday afternoon walk was followed by a scrumptious afternoon tea, provided by club members, after which there would be carols and readings by candlelight. Just the think to put one in the Christmas spirit, especially when the evening ended with sherry and mince pies.

The other event was the "Social Evening and Dance" in February. It was an evening of fun with dancing, games, raffles and a buffet supper. All this was done by candlelight in a decorated hall.

Reminiscing like this, I am reminded of various little incidents on walks. I will not forget the first time we met Maurice and Marion Teal, when we literally "bumped" into each other. (Maurice and Marion gave me permission to mention this). At the beginning of a walk, George had just parked his Maicoletta scooter, apparently out of sight. For when Maurice tried to park his car in the same spot, car and scooter had an unfortunate encounter! I should add that this did not stop us from becoming good friends.

Another time there was an encounter of a different kind. A few members had brought their dogs on a walk. Two of them decided to have a fight. When one of the owners tried to separate them, he was bitten by his own dog and had to be taken to hospital.

On Rushup Edge



In the early days, we would sometimes have afternoon tea at someone's home after the ramble. On one such occasion we ended up weeding the garden. We certainly earned our tea that day.

Then there was the time when we were well on our way after the pub lunch stop, when it was suddenly realised one of the ladies was missing. We did not see her again until the end of the day!

Apparently she had been in the toilet and was left behind. (Wot, no head count after lunch!)

Fields of cows have never worried me, but bulls are a different matter. I was reminded of this on a walk when I had not noticed one of the herd was a bull. When I did become aware of this he was right behind me. For the first time in my life I managed a high jump, over the hedge, in a split second.

There is also a special memory associated with the first carol party. Everything had been prepared, except that we had no idea how we were going to get the nine candles to stand up. We had one or two impractical ideas, before deciding the ring "The man who always had a solution for everything", our vice chairman Malcolm Cain (sadly now deceased). Sure enough, "leave it to me", said Malcolm. The next day he turned up with a log of wood with nine, evenly spaced, holes for the candles. With some greenery draped around it, it was perfect. That log was subsequently used at every carol party. I still have it, covered in candle grease.

These are only just a few memories that come to mind. To end, I will mention the Easter meet that nearly wasn't. We were going to spend the Easter weekend at a Youth Hostel. The bookings had all come in and been dealt with. A few weeks before the meet a few more members asked if they could still come. I telephoned the hostel to ask if there were any spare places. A very kind warden told me there were plenty of spaces, but he didn't have a booking from SRC! Oops, I'd dealt with everything, except booking the hostel. The meet did go ahead, for luckily the hostel could accommodate all of us, even at that late stage.

So many happy memories. As I am writing this I feel quite nostalgic. And the 28 years when George and I shared this part of our lives, will always be very special to me.

Alie Watkins

A MID WALES CYCLING DAY

We gazed out of the small windows of Nant y Dernol Youth Hostel and watched the snow come down. Great white feathery flakes descended as thickly as one would expect at any time during the winter, and it was now May 5th! It had been snowing for an hour and showed little inclination to go off, giving us the feeling that if we were to do anything at all, we'd have to move, snow or no snow. So eight cycle ramblers sallied forth, enveloped in waterproofs of many colours, into the wintry weather.

Descending the Dernol valley, we turned north along a lane on the west bank of the river Wye. After a mile or two the snow abated, blue sky appeared, and as we descended to the

edge of the river itself, the sun made an appearance. The landscape it shone on was most unspring like.

The fortress like tower of Llangurig church showed ahead and shortly afterwards we turned left along the A44, but not for long. After about a mile a narrow lane had us heading south of west with the hills looming intimidatingly ahead. A few steep bends had us walking but thereafter the road slanted across the hillside at a friendlier angle.

At a convenient stopping place we paused to enjoy and take stock of the situation. Lower down the snow had melted quickly and we were now surrounded by smooth contoured mountains, white crested on a green base. The sun was now riding high in a blue sky with fluffy white cloud galleons drifting past, enhancing the landscape.

We resumed across the open mountainside towards the dark green mass of forestry, encountering the odd patch of snow. On entering the trees, we found level snow over the complete width of the road. It was three or four inches deep and gave the leaders the pleasure of breaking a virgin surface. Indeed everyone ploughed their own furrow as they climbed steadily and silently through the trees.

Emerging from the forest we found ourselves seemingly on top of the world. A sea of snowy summits surrounded us, the further ones glowing dimly through the haze that was beginning to form. Here indeed we really felt part of the great outdoors.



The surface beneath the snow was still a tarmac one, and this we found surprising. The map suggested a forestry type track, but we were not complaining. In front of us was the deep rift of the Diluw valley into which our road now descended. Care had to be exercised but as we lost height the amount of snow decreased.

Llangurig Area

Just short of the Afon Diluw, the strip of tarmac came to an end and the continuation of the original surface proceeded towards the stream and the inevitable ford. We were happy to see, however, a footbridge just wide enough to accommodate a bike, spanning the chilly waters.

We quickly regained the track which now climbed for a distance to reach a low pass. Below us the rough mountain track plunged into the head of another valley. It gave us a headlong dash that proved quite exhilarating if somewhat hair raising on the looser sections. With a mountain torrent to its right the track maintained its steepness to Blaen-y-Cwm where the metalled road and river Ystwyth showed a few yards ahead. But a gnarled, many branched tree trunk claimed our attention as a convenient lunch spot.

The sun was now beaming down quite warmly and demolishing the snow on the upper slopes. While we sat at lunch a white summit gradually changed colour and when we set off again along the metalled road, a few flecks of snow remained.

The gradient soon had us thumbing into our lower gears, but it levelled out and we rode pleasantly with the river below to our left in the bottom of its valley. We were nearing the valley head and were soon climbing steadily. Presently, instead of the Ystwyth to our left, flowing westwards, we had the Elan to our right, flowing eastward. With the slope now in our favour, the shallow gradient produced exhilarating going as the party flew along, wheels humming, through the vast landscape.

As we turned south onto the road past the Elan reservoirs our attention was drawn to the weather. Black clouds were rolling in from the west and the entire valley head was blotted out by part of their contents. Even as we watched the storm swept down the valley at astonishing speed and we had scarce time to struggle into waterproofs before the first stinging particles were lashing us. Crossing the Elan we battled our way up the opposite slope in near white out conditions. The wind had risen and there was more hail than snow blowing before it. We rode down the side of Graig Goch reservoir still enveloped in white fallout. But when you are clad in suitable clothing there is something satisfying in challenging the elements.

By the time we had reached Graig Goch dam the storm had passed leaving a trace of whiteness once more on the hills. Crossing the dam's crest we assembled on the other side to consider the next move. A gate promised access to a track on the west side of the valley and, glory be - it was unlocked. The promise was fulfilled, the track proving quite delightful and much to be preferred than the road on the opposite flank of the valley. Much of it lay along the shore of Pen-y-Garreg lake and it finally emerged onto the road a short distance along Garreg Ddu reservoir.

We now made for Rhayader along the road traversed by a multitude of tourists in high season. However, we did find a private house that supplied teas and that fortified us for the final leg of the days ride. This took us along the lanes on the south west bank of the river Wye, a superb route in itself.

The day had begun threatened by the weather. Yet that very weather provided the magic that will cause it to be remembered when many other good days have sunk into obscurity.

Maurice Teal

CASTLE COMBE JUNE 2000

On Thursday 8th June a small group of Club members set off on a delightful sunny morning for a walk in the Castle Combe area. Little did we know what a bizarre ending the walk was to have.

The walk itself was beautiful, through a lovely wooded valley, and on our return to the village we explored its delights before having lunch in one of its hostelrys. After lunch we drifted back to our cars, which were parked in the car park at the top of the village. Three of us, Margery van Zyl, Brenda Blick and myself, had almost reached the car park when we were aware of two cows rushing past us. This seemed strange so I stepped out into the middle of the road and looked back down the way we had just walked up and could not believe my eyes. There were two cows lying right across the road surrounded by bits of branches and other debris. We had passed that spot just seconds before and had seen and heard nothing!

Margery van Zyl had her dog with her so decided it would only frighten the cows more if she took the dog near them, so she decided to stay near the top of the lane to warn traffic that the road was blocked. Brenda and I ran back down the hill to see what had happened and found two young heifers in the road. One was having trouble breathing and making awful rasping sounds and neither of them could get up. They both looked very frightened.

To try and get help we ran down to the first cottage in the village where luckily a man at home knew the owner of the cows and phoned him at once. Brenda and I then ran back to the cattle and stopped cars coming up the lane until the farmer arrived. When he saw the state they were in he decided to fetch his trailer and to phone the Vet. In the meantime he asked us to stay with them and continue to control traffic.

While he was gone the heifer with breathing problems recovered enough to get to her feet but fortunately could not run far, as by this time a crowd of people and cars were blocking the lower end of the lane. She went up into a small quarry at the side of the lane from where the farmer was able to load her into his trailer, but the other one still could not get up. Meanwhile some farm workers were trying to catch the other two, uninjured but on the loose.

By this time we had discovered that the heifers had only just been let out into the field and had run right across it, through the hedge and four of them had fallen down the high embankment onto the road beneath.

When the Vet arrived he said that the heifer on the ground had broken its back. We saw him fetch his pistol from his car, so not wishing to see him shoot the poor frightened animal, Brenda and I walked quickly away back up the hill, but heard the shot ring out. It made us feel quite emotional.

The three of us felt quite shaken when we thought that if we had walked up that lane just a few seconds later those four heifers would probably have flattened us!
We had heard of it raining cats and dogs but never cows!!!

Marjorie Mills

A WEEKEND IN MERIONETH

The party had gathered at Dinas Mawddwy Youth Hostel (now closed) on the Friday evening, most having driven up by car from the Stroud area. But Les White, who lived in Warwick had made his own way. Seeing that he didn't have his own transport, to this day I don't know how he got there.

Saturday dawned fine and sunny so the party prepared to drive up to Bwlch Oerddrws. The plan was to leave a car at the hostel so that the morning drivers could be driven up to the pass to retrieve their vehicles at the end of the day. Nine walkers were involved so two cars sufficed for the outward journey. Fortunately three were available.

I should explain that the A470 goes past the hostel then heads west over the Bwlch Oerddrws on the way to Dolgellau. Conveniently, there is a small car park on the pass and the party was soon booting up for the days proceedings.

A barely discernible path led us up the steep slopes on the southern side of the Bwlch. After some nine hundred feet of ascent the gradient relented and as the day was getting warmer by the minute a halt was called for coffee. It was getting quite hazy but we could just make out the bulk of Cader Idris to the west.

We had arrived at the northern extremity of a sizeable flat area. In a wet season it could be quite boggy here but on the present occasion it was practically dry so we made steady progress in a south easterly direction. Presently we began to lose height only to climb again to a fence that marks the limit of Forestry Commission land. Turning left we followed the fence with crags below and to our left.

After little more than half a mile the fence turned abruptly to the right but we kept on in line. It was about here that someone came upon a skylark's nest. It was superbly hidden in the long grass. It contained one fledgling, almost fully grown, which made no attempt to get away. We passed quickly on, not wishing to upset things.

The going was up again as we climbed towards the summit of Maesglasau, another broad topped hill. At a shade over 2200 feet it was the highest point of the day and an appropriate spot for lunch. The July sun was by now really beating down and by common consent the lunch break got a little extended. When we did resume we descended in a southerly direction. It came as no surprise when we arrived at another Forestry Commission fence which we followed, heading east. We continued to lose height, then climbed again to a minor summit at 1568 feet.

It had got progressively more humid as the afternoon had worn on so when we spied a small sheet of water about half a mile away and some two hundred feet below our present position it gave us ideas.

The lakelet, Llyn Foel Dinan proved ideal, deep enough to swim in but not deep enough to get out of ones depth. The water was pleasantly warm and soon every member of the party was merrily splashing around. But a distant rumble of thunder had everyone scrambling for the bank.

Two or three decided there and then to make for the hostel which was little more than half a mile away in horizontal distance but almost a thousand feet lower. The rest of us got back into the water, but it became obvious that a change in the weather was in the offing. We seemed to be surrounded by mountainous piles of vapour. More rumbles had us out of the lake and making for the forestry that clothed the hillside between the hilltop and Dinas Mawddwy.

We had just begun our descent through the trees when a blinding flash of lightning and a simultaneous crack of thunder signalled a cloudburst. Sheets of drenching rain with occasional hail accompanied our descent of a Forestry road which gave on to the valley road not far from the Youth Hostel. It was still pouring heavily when we reached that haven. We arrived like drowned rats to find all power was off in the building.

Signs of the ferocity of the storm were in evidence the following day when we walked on the Arans. Sites of lightning strikes on rocky outcrops were seen as were tell tale tracks where storm torrents had swept down the mountainside.

The party was well up towards the summit of Aran Fawddwy when a loud rumble of thunder stopped us in our tracks. Fearing a repeat of the storm the previous day we elected to retreat.

But not so in the case of Les White. He stated his intention of completing the traverse of the Arans, descending to Bala lake and making his own way back home. He would not be dissuaded and carried on northwards.

In the event the thunderstorm failed to materialise, but if it had, the high Aran ridge would have been extremely exposed and not a place to be.

The rest of the party descended to Bryn Hafod climber's hut where we had parked the cars that morning.

Maurice Teal.

BRING TEA !!!

It all started about 20 years ago when it was decided to have a day on the Carmarthen Fan in mid-summer, and to make it a long walk (18 miles) as it was 100 miles to the start. The programme said "Bring Tea"; you certainly needed to take something to eat after lunch as it was 9pm for the return to Stroud. During the tea stop discussion revolved around brewing up tea and mobile tea-shops or ice cream vans.

The following year I started the walk from Llanddeusant. I asked the assembled party if they wanted to brew up tea in the afternoon. The obvious response was yes they would. The reply to that was "right- you can carry it!" I have a very heavy paraffin stove which Andy Robinson volunteered to carry. The other things such as:- meths-stove, kettles, cups, tea-bags, powdered milk, sugar, spoons, paraffin, meths and matches were divided amongst the rest of the party. I remember I carried the plastic cups. All we needed was water.

A stream was found and tea duly made. Next year was the same so a tradition was started. Over the years various streams have been found, some large, others small with little water due to hot weather. Once we found a stream with a cave which was different. The favourite spot seems to be by the side of Llyn y Fan Fawr. Here there is plenty of space to sit and set up the stoves and also a guaranteed supply of water from the lake. The view is also the best with the cliffs of the mountains of the left; Llyn y Fan Fawr in front and the Brecon Beacons in the distance on the right.



The tea making tradition well established we had more stoves. Peter Sheldrick brought along his lightweight gas fuelled one so I did not have to bring my heavy one. I acquired some solid fuel stoves from the army and then Norman King took a great interest and brought his stove. For a few years this resulted in a race to see who could boil the water first. Regulars on these trips are used to procedures of setting up stoves, cups and tea bags organised and fetching water. The latter can be entertaining as the stream can be down a steep bank; over very rough ground, very shallow or contain bits which we do

not want in our tea. One of the best was Roger Bevan paddling in Llyn y Fan Fawr in order to get to deep enough water to fill the kettles.

Most years we have had sunny weather but on rare occasions the weather has been poor so no brewing up stop. The best year was when we stopped for lunch twice, brewed up at the tea stop at Llyn y Fan Fawr, found a telephone box near the car park and telephoned El Greco cafe in Abergavenny so they stayed open for us and we stopped for tea and tea cakes on the way home. Philip and Heather had a meal each as well.

We have all become older over the years so the walking distance is not quite so long and we are not quite so late returning home these days. If you are out on a ramble and you hear about brewing up and tea stops in the mountains you now know what it is all about.

Eddie Skinner

HEREFRESHIRE HOP AND APPLE COUNTRY AROUND MUCH MARCLE

If I ever wanted to live anywhere else, I think I would like to live in rural Herefordshire. I love the peace and tranquillity of the countryside, the timber framed buildings, the ancient churches, the hop fields and apple orchards. England has the perfect climate for growing apples, which can be ripened on the tree before picking, to produce sweet, juicy, crisp apples - so different to many of the imported apples.

I used to walk in Herefordshire as an antidote to way marking and sign posting. I quite often started my walks around Much Marcle and became aware of the Apple Festivals held annually during two weekends in October as a prelude to Apple Day. Then in 1999 I suggested a walk to the Club focusing on the hop fields and apple orchards around Much Marcle to coincide with the Apple Festival. It certainly attracted a lot of support from our day walkers.

On the outskirts of the village, the Weston family own an attractively designed garage. There used to be a number of 1930's black and white photos of various members of the family with their Gypsy Moths and AVRO aircraft which they flew from the Cotswold Flying Club at Staverton.

Just behind the garage is the "airfield" belonging to the Herefordshire Model Aircraft Club which is the venue for one of the "Big Five" flying displays. Try to imagine a 1/3 scale Catalina flying boat or a Vulcan bomber against a backdrop of the Marcle Hills.

Our walk takes us to the hop fields of Hall Court Farm near Kynaston. Although the harvest was completed a month earlier, we see the arrangement of poles and wires which support the vines and examine a few stragglers. As we approach Hall Court we are able to see the louvered roof of the oast house where the "Goldings" and "Fugles" varieties are dried before transfer to the brewers in Burton-on-Trent.

We travel through the pretty hamlet of Kynaston and arrive at the entrance to the Hatfield National Fuschia Collection where they have approximately 1500 varieties in stock.

Our path leads through a field where mushrooms can normally be found and then suddenly there they are - - row after row of the most wonderful looking desert apples. The harvest is in full swing. Huge wooden crates piled high with apples await transfer to the store. This is the culmination of the year's work.

We arrive at the lovely old church at Putley and go inside to admire the interior and then off again, passing Lower Court Farm where the Michelin and Dabinett cider apple harvest is in progress. These apples are transported by road, either to Bulmers in Hereford or down to Taunton. It's worth stopping to watch the mechanical harvester - - it can pick up an egg without breaking the shell.

A brisk lane walk takes us to Fosbury where we can buy a bag of apples if we have room in our rucksacks, and then down the lane to Woolhope to the Butcher's Arms for a roast lunch and a pint.

Our afternoon route leads up along the Marcle Hill ridge with good views in both directions and then down to Weston's Cider Factory, our arrival perfectly timed for a free tour of the works which always ends at the shop with a tasting session and a purchase or two.

We walk back briskly to Much Marcle Village Hall where they have a display of hundreds of varieties of apple but the main attraction is the home-made fruitcake and tea. The perfect end to a walk.

Geoff Hudson

'A DAY UNDER' A trip down Swildon's Hole with John Sutton and Stroud Subterranean Ramblers

The great outdoors, which I left just two minutes ago, had sunshine, green grass and birdsong, and a blue sky with a few fleecy clouds for contrast. Down here in Swildon's Hole, the most popular sporting cave in the Mendips, it is dark, wet and very cool. My headlamp lights my way, it's bulky ex National Coal Board battery heavy on my belt. Ahead there is fitful illumination from Mike's lamp, interspersed with darkness as he goes round a corner or his body blocks the passageway. Behind come the familiar sounds of metallic clinking and scraping against rock as Liz carries the rolled up caving ladder through with her.

Forward progress for the next twenty minutes or so is largely through narrow, awkwardly twisting passages, often with so little headroom that progress is only possible on all fours. To say that the rocky floor underfoot (or more often under-knee) is uneven would be approaching the ultimate in understatement. The way down involves frequent negotiations

of steps varying from a few feet, vertical, to twenty feet, very steep. Most of these my fellow caving freaks and I must share with greater or lesser cascades of water; there is no such thing as successfully keeping out of the way of all of them.

Once more I think to myself, Why do I do it? Next I think, How I hate caves that don't let you acclimatise gently at first! After all, there are those that do, and you can start by walking along some spacious, gently sloping passage before serious caving business gets under way. And once more I think of country walking, coffee and the Sunday newspapers, and pub lunches, none of which are now an option for today.

Julian Brown in Watershed Swallet (Mendips)



Another five minutes and I am wet to the skin, because it has rained a lot in the last couple of weeks and Swildon's watercourse is in spate. Another thirty minutes and I am getting wetter still, if possible, as I descend the mercifully short ladder needed to negotiate the Twenty Foot Pot

It is a vertical drop between the floor of the cave nearer the entrance and its continuation below. The ladder shares its space with a torrent of water, which is also on its way down and is a great deal speedier about it than I am.

Tim is with us, a relative beginner whose only previous experience of using caving ladders had been in dry conditions. He seems unfazed by his first descent in a deluge, but I am sure he is glad enough of the morally comforting safety line.

On and down the passage goes, twisting and turning but now mostly quite lofty, so the usual mode of progression is walking, though care is needed where you place your feet. Happily, although all the rock is wet, none is slippery; an advantage over similar situations above ground where a covering of algae over wet rock is a byword for treacherousness.

Stalactite curtains are admired in passing, though Swildon's does not rank high for the number and beauty of its rock formations. In other caves there are some which still inspire me with awe after many repeat visits, and give me a sense of gratitude that I am there to see them, where relatively few people have ever been or are ever likely to go. But then, going where few others go is undoubtedly one of the great rewards of caving.

There are some large water filled potholes to be negotiated. A false move on the steep rock walls round the edges will usually see you enjoying a momentary submersion before regaining your feet in chest-deep water. Your fellow cavers always love to watch the performance- it outdoes dolphins at the zoo- but everyone in today's party except Tim has been there before. We all balance elegantly round the sides and Tim successfully copies our technique.

Today's trip is a short one, down to Sump One. Here the roof of the cave dips below water level, but only for about five feet, and the submerged passage is amply spacious for those who pass along. Because the sump is relatively accessible and very suitable for first essays in this particular technique, it is the one by far the most often dived in the entire country.

Four of us dive through, two before Tim and another after. For all the times I have been through, the adrenaline still surges as, crouched chest high in water and guide rope in hand, I take a couple of deep breaths before making my head go underwater. That's me: how is it for Tim, our one sumping first timer?

He joins in the laughter on the other side & then we dive back. The other two have meanwhile been taking their ease on the rocks round the pool leading to the sump and enjoy watching our re-emergence as we return. Tim, flushed with the gratifying excitement of his first sump, receives congratulations. We think he must be getting hooked.

Isn't all this very cold? I am often asked. Well, not so very noticeably, thanks to the revolution in clothing for cavers. Today I have opted for my neoprene wet suit, and let's face it, at my age I would have given up caving long ago without that innovation of the 1960's. Time was when very few cavers pursued their enthusiasm beyond the age of forty, but that aspect of hitting the big four O is now history.

Not only is the wet suit a marvellous conserver of bodily heat, but this overall skin-tight covering of resilient material, several millimetres thick, is also a wonderful cushioning layer against all this uneven rock on, over and through which I have to clamber and sometimes squeeze flat out. Hence the apparently strange sight of neoprene clad cavers having a break, seated or sprawled on uninvitingly lumpy terrain, wet through but showing every sign of enjoying comfortable repose after the ardour's of exercise.

Today as usual it takes less time to go out than to complete the inward trip. I often wonder why, with both gravity and loss of freshness both working against you! Again as usual, we all rejoice when we get the first glimpse of daylight through the entrance. This seems perverse for people who have actually chosen to spend the best part of the day underground, but perhaps it is just a sense of achievement again.

The walk back to the changing room, a barn on the edge of Priddy Green, takes about ten minutes. This is amply long enough to make us all very keenly aware how good it will be to get out of these clinging wet suits, wet by name and wet by nature, and into dry

+clothing. Furthermore, the fresh spring breeze strikes a little chill after the sheltered atmosphere of the cave. Just before, during and after changing, I drink copiously. It always seems surprising that you can sweat so much in such a watery environment.

Rehydration can be a prolonged and enjoyable experience, and includes the best-earned beer since the previous caving trip. As we quaff, we all muse aloud about our perversity, why ever do we cave? The discomfort, the wet, the mud, the awkwardness of the tight passages! Tim makes a gratifying audience for our reminiscences. And then we get to talking about our next trip, and have our suspicions confirmed that Tim really is getting hooked. How this takes me back, my first time down Swildon's Hole was in 1962, well before Tim had even been thought of. Lucky, lucky Tim - he has it all before him! The names are fictional, but the description is of the descent of a very well known and much visited cave.

John Sutton

Eric Seymour SRC's senior member



Eric Seymour demonstrating methods of 'tree support'!!!!!!



Eric Seymour (front right) leading a group of 74 walkers on his 90th birthday !!!! 15/3/03

The Future

In 2003 the club membership remains steady at just below 300 & as some leave the club, an increasing number join. It is encouraging to see new leaders offering walks & other activities. In May 2002 a multi-activity weekend was held near Brecon, offering a programme of hill & lower walking, canoeing, sailing, cycling and riding. It was noticeable that most interest was shown by members wishing to get astride a horse! As a result, in 2003 Marjorie Mills has offered to revive the riding section & this will be tried during the summer to assess the support. Plans are already in hand for holidays & events into 2005! - including a return visit to the German Alpine Club.

In July 2003 the club celebrates its 50th year with a Jubilee weekend. As well as meeting socially, the activities will include 'The George Watkins memorial walk' as a tribute to our former chairman who gave so much of his energy to establish the club in its formative years.

The future life & strength of the club rest entirely with its members, but it is to the many officers and members of the last 50 years we all owe a debt of gratitude and to whom this book is a lasting tribute.

Jim White Chairman SRC

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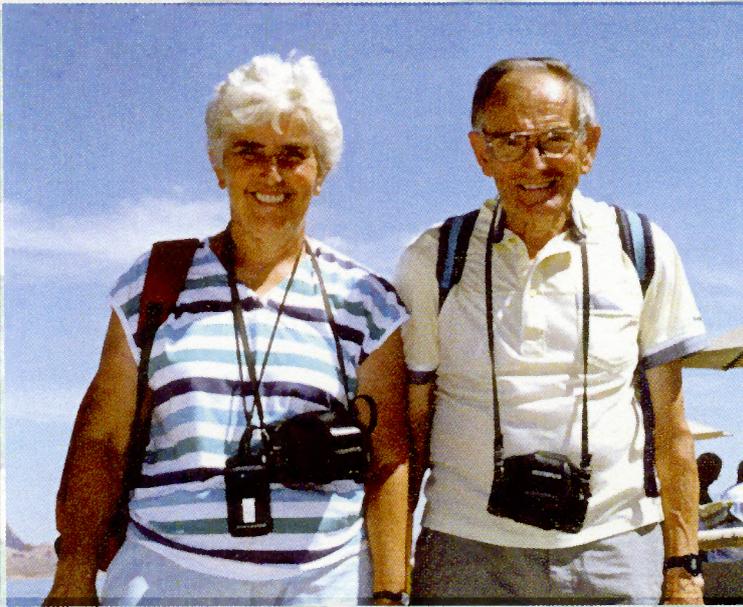
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And last but not least, all the past and present members we have had the pleasure of walking with over the last 40 years.

Maurice & Marion Teal



Authors Maurice & Marion Teal

