



David Bodecott's Desert Island Climbs

Young Prior's fantastic list in June dispirited me: would I ever achieve a similar list of hard routes in my lifetime? Twenty-five years of travelling, almost thirty London trips and three overseas each year, plus all the usual family commitments has resulted in no serious Alpine Climbing, few Scottish trips and only two Sun Rock trips ever. Maybe the second thirty years of climbing will be more productive than the first thirty. So if you have free time and Scotland has a good forecast - try me, I might just be free that day!

1. Route 1, Ben Nevis (V, 5)

A thrutchy, strenuous, straight line. So strenuous, I volunteered like a fool to put Sir Chris's sac inside my own to ease his passage. Al Rouse and Brian Hall climbed the slabby gangways just adjacent. Same weekend, after their memorial ascent of Geddes Gully in the Northwest, we all sat in The Kingshouse bar for syrupy Eighty Shillings. Good crack, poignant memories. Geddes had gone with cancer. No more Rouse (K2).

2. Ferrous Buttress, Mad VS, Middle Iron Crag.

A truly surreal experience on one of the biggest buttresses in the North Lakes. Included because it is the antithesis of climbing starred routes, and a true adventure. Three pitches, crux led bravely by Martin A. in fading light after I tried to persuade him to give up and reverse back to the start - I was convinced he didn't have time. Pray there are no earthquakes along the Glenderaterra/Thirlmere fault during your ascent, and don't get stuck, as there are no solid holds abseil points. Very clean rock, in fact this is the only self-cleaning route in the Lakes, you'll see what this means!

3. Summertime Blues (IV, 6) Gable Crag.

One of the new breed of steep mixed Winter lines, i.e. no water ice - hooray! The day my axe broke - fortunately after the crux. Dave Absalom and I thought we had done the first ascent Christmas Eve 1995, but it had been climbed, claimed, even written up and photographed in Climber & Rambler. Drat! Zut alors!

4. Minus 2 Gully, Ben Nevis (V, 4)

First route on the Ben with Sir. Painful work in leather boots on such a long route with one Terror and one Salewa hammer. I immediately went out on returning and bought new gear. 'Never had cold feet since!' Brilliant route, not steep, but very long and committing. An open face route really. I don't remember it being desperate at the top, but the crux is common to NE Buttress apparently (The Mantrap - I'm not sure if we knew which bit this actually was). I know we found quite a bit of gear, all of which I conceded to Sir. I wouldn't do that now!

5. Point Five Gully (Ben Nevis, V, 5)

A protective, womb-like environment if the spindrift isn't too bad as on our ascent. Three steep pitches including some freebie protection in frozen-in tat, then a snow plod up to that nightmarish maelstrom they call the summit: how anyone finds their way off still amazes me. The third pitch was a bold overhanging umbrella: it was after this that I decided mixed climbing was my metier. Meanwhile, Neil Dowie, my partner on the FRCC meet took a real fancy to soloing every piece of water ice he could find. Water ice - you can keep it, not for me thanks. Well, maybe when the Honister icefalls form again!

6. Grand Dierdre, VS, Thearlaich-Dubh cliffs, Coir a' Ghrunnda, Skye.

10 days of drought and a heatwave after finals in '73. Hot enough to skinny dip in Coire Lagan. Hands shredded by the Gabbro and frazzled by the sun. Best corner in Britain? Some location anyway!

7. South-south-east Arete, HVS, Aiguille Pierre André, 2812m, Maljasset, St. Paul, Ubaye, France.

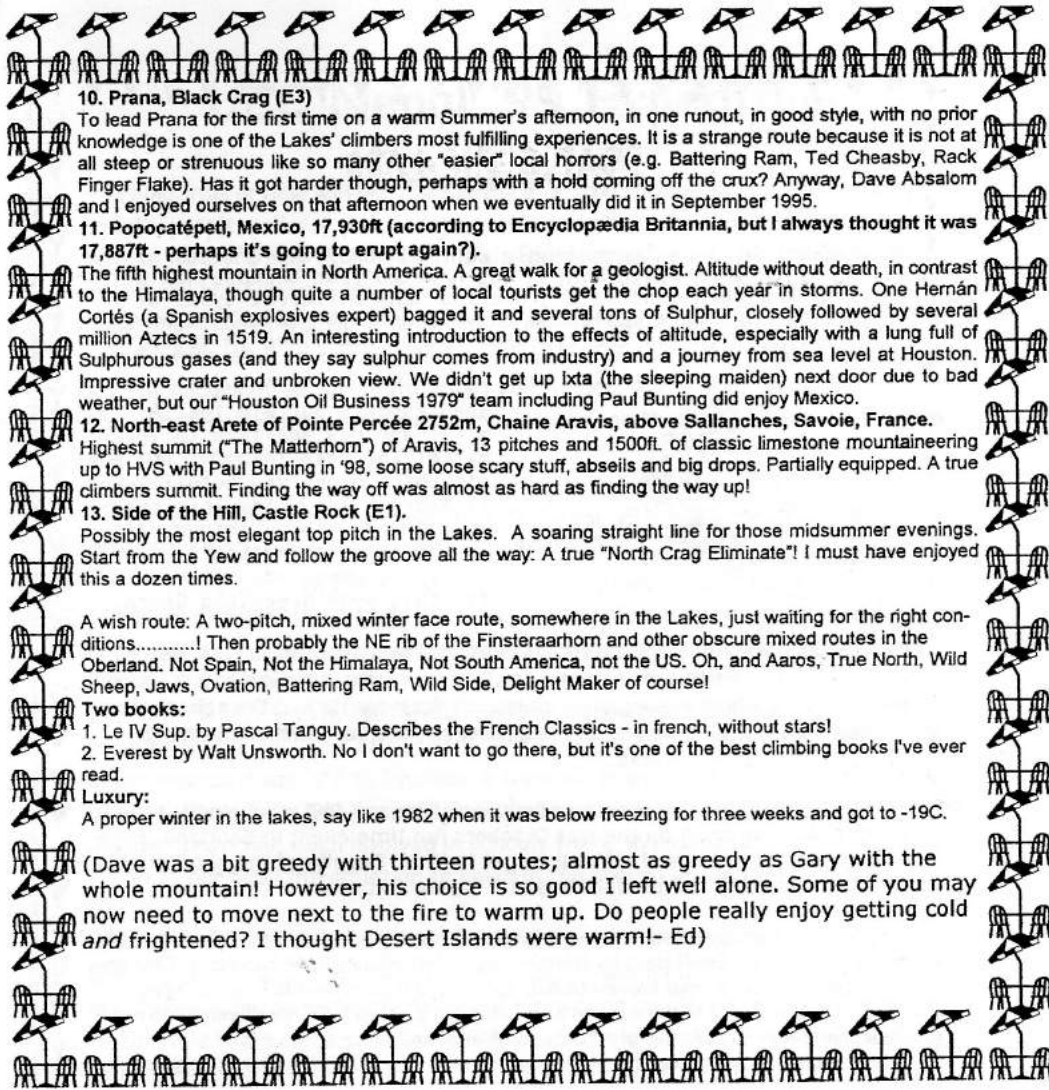
The '98 alpine trip (my first) with Paul Bunting suffered poor weather so it became a rock-climbing trip. This 800 foot spire of pink, purely architected quartzite with walls, dierdres, slabs and cracks is strictly for Francophiles. Seven pitches up to HVS. Partially equipped, but only the French could bolt a route that could be aided on natural gear.

8. Route Major, Carn Etchachan, Cairngorms (IV).

A moonlit walk under the Northern Lights from the car park into the A'an basin with intrepid adventurer, one S. Reid. The couple under the Shelterstone were mightily surprised by our entry at 3am. A reasonably windless day dawned. Sugary conditions to start, then improving ice in the upper grooves which were really superb. Was it nine pitches? Classic climbing, not hard. A bearded local jock retrieving lost gear greeted us at the top. Descending around the side of the Shelterstone Crag at 5pm. reminded us of how innocuous Scotland's Arctic wilderness could be, in between the killer storms.

9. The Curtain, Ben Nevis (IV, 5)

The first time I did the Curtain, the second pitch was a steep, scary, sludgy morass of wet spindrift and soft ice. The second time, the top pitch was so fragile, that being lighter than Martin Armitage, I had to lead it. As he came up, the crust collapsed under his weight. A great route to train your nerve in poor conditions. Martin normally solos things like this, much to my disapproval.



10. Prana, Black Crag (E3)

To lead Prana for the first time on a warm Summer's afternoon, in one runout, in good style, with no prior knowledge is one of the Lakes' climbers most fulfilling experiences. It is a strange route because it is not at all steep or strenuous like so many other "easier" local horrors (e.g. Battering Ram, Ted Cheasby, Rack Finger Flake). Has it got harder though, perhaps with a hold coming off the crux? Anyway, Dave Absalom and I enjoyed ourselves on that afternoon when we eventually did it in September 1995.

11. Popocatepetl, Mexico, 17,930ft (according to Encyclopædia Britannia, but I always thought it was 17,887ft - perhaps it's going to erupt again?).

The fifth highest mountain in North America. A great walk for a geologist. Altitude without death, in contrast to the Himalaya, though quite a number of local tourists get the chop each year in storms. One Hernán Cortés (a Spanish explosives expert) bagged it and several tons of Sulphur, closely followed by several million Aztecs in 1519. An interesting introduction to the effects of altitude, especially with a lung full of Sulphurous gases (and they say sulphur comes from industry) and a journey from sea level at Houston. Impressive crater and unbroken view. We didn't get up Ixta (the sleeping maiden) next door due to bad weather, but our "Houston Oil Business 1979" team including Paul Bunting did enjoy Mexico.

12. North-east Arete of Pointe Percée 2752m, Chaîne Aravis, above Sallanches, Savoie, France.

Highest summit ("The Matterhorn") of Aravis, 13 pitches and 1500ft. of classic limestone mountaineering up to HVS with Paul Bunting in '98, some loose scary stuff, abseils and big drops. Partially equipped. A true climbers summit. Finding the way off was almost as hard as finding the way up!

13. Side of the Hill, Castle Rock (E1).

Possibly the most elegant top pitch in the Lakes. A soaring straight line for those midsummer evenings. Start from the Yew and follow the groove all the way: A true "North Crag Eliminate"! I must have enjoyed this a dozen times.

A wish route: A two-pitch, mixed winter face route, somewhere in the Lakes, just waiting for the right conditions.....! Then probably the NE rib of the Finsteraarhorn and other obscure mixed routes in the Oberland. Not Spain, Not the Himalaya, Not South America, not the US. Oh, and Aaros, True North, Wild Sheep, Jaws, Ovation, Battering Ram, Wild Side, Delight Maker of course!

Two books:

1. Le IV Sup. by Pascal Tanguy. Describes the French Classics - in french, without stars!
2. Everest by Walt Unsworth. No I don't want to go there, but it's one of the best climbing books I've ever read.

Luxury:

A proper winter in the lakes, say like 1982 when it was below freezing for three weeks and got to -19C.

(Dave was a bit greedy with thirteen routes; almost as greedy as Gary with the whole mountain! However, his choice is so good I left well alone. Some of you may now need to move next to the fire to warm up. Do people really enjoy getting cold and frightened? I thought Desert Islands were warm!- Ed)