deserves little comment, being very easy. We crossed several peaks and finally descended a stream bed to the Rabassa road and reached the Keenlyside's Xalet at Aubinia, by a series of short cuts through the woods, at 19.15. Francis kindly gave us a lift down to St Julia and we returned to my Xalet by bus at 21.15.

Conclusion I had clearly underestimated the difficulties and forgotten that I was no longer a young man. The ridge is more like the Cuillin ridge than Crib Goch, but at least 6 times as long. We used the rope on 13 occasions. We were fortunate with the weather which only delayed us by about one day. I must pay tribute to my young companions who carried far more than I did. My sack weighed little more than 10kg, but my companions sacks must have averaged 17kg. I felt rather like a Victorian mountaineer with my guides and porters.

It is most important to carry passports. In May, Donald Ross and I were stopped by Spanish Frontier Guards between Fontenada and Aos. Two of them covered us with submachine guns whilst the third examined our passports. Eventually we were allowed to continue and were dismissed as Romanticos! In retrospect I would have preferred to do the climb the other way round as nearly all the difficulties were on the descent. It is an expedition well worth doing and I can strongly recommend it.

Great Gable to Wookey Hole

Graham Balcombe

Down the road of memory I can picture myself as a young lad browsing through my father's bookcase and becoming fascinated by a rather poor story of skull-duggery among divers raising a ship's treasure. It was not the book itself which appealed but the realization that the story could be acted out under water; water, the stuff that drowns, yet the underwater world could be made accessible. The other picture is of the discovery in the local library of O. G. Jones's *Climbing in the English Lake District*, an introduction to another forbidden world, for this too could be entered, given the know-how. These 2 simple events had a significant effect in determining the course of my after-life, although in the reverse order.

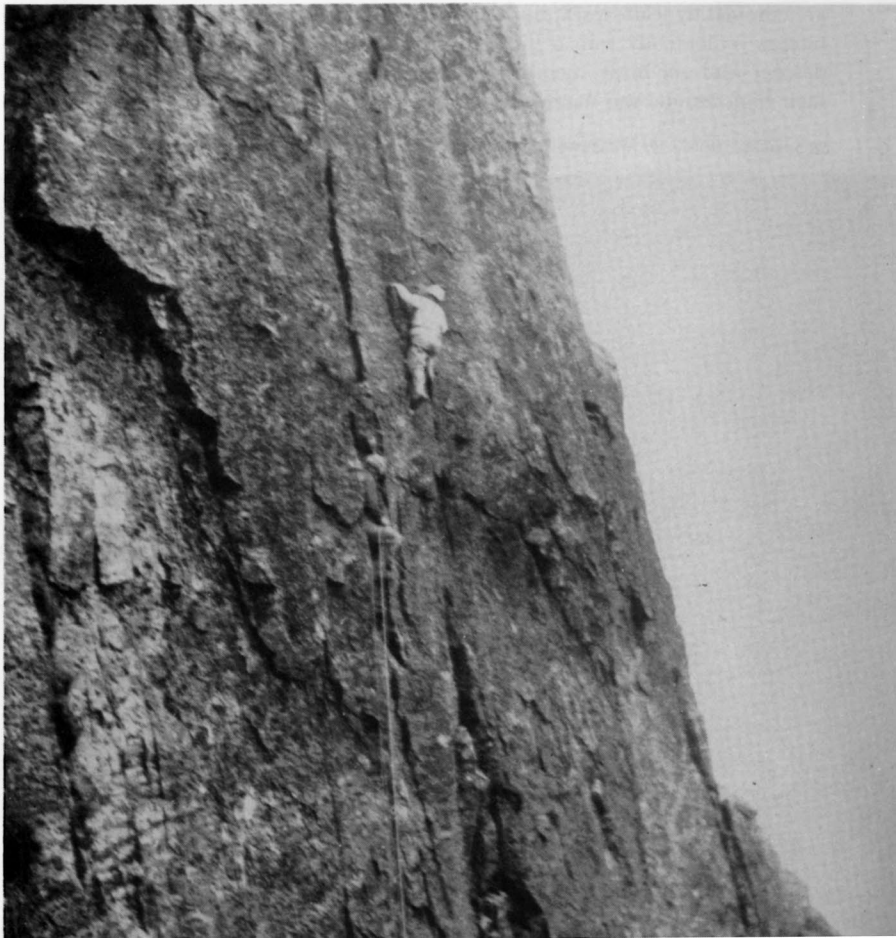
I was living at Southport at the time and already had been orientated in considerable measure towards the outdoors, so it did not take a great deal of effort to peep at the rocks where Jones had pioneered. From the accident of picking up Jones's classic—for, indeed, I read singularly little beyond *Tarzan of the Apes*, and even that was read under the classroom desk during English History lessons! —there arose a growing interest sufficient to overcome the obstacles to a more serious approach to rock-climbing than solo scrambling on the easies.

I venture to think there were two underlying causes for the pursuit: one the actual pleasure of overcoming difficulties, which in some measure could be assessed in advance, and the other to attain some counterbalance for the one-downmanship of not taking part in school games, but whatever the primary urges might have been, the wild and lonely places, the racing clouds and the tumbling becks formed their own bonds and took over.

At first I was on my own; I found no one anxious to tag along, so cautiously crept up easy scrambles and had my first real scare in a Coniston quarry where solid rock led at the top to a treacherous scree-like slope that did its best to pitch me back down again.

My job then took me to the S of England, but that had its compensations; the greater distance to the Lake District was in some measure offset by the acquisition of better transport and a solution to the team problem came in the formation of the YHA Mountaineering Club. I cannot recollect how I started there, but well do I remember how on the first trip with them, to The Lakes, my exuberance took me on a bit of solo stuff, dead easy no doubt but against the rules and I was duly disciplined and put off climbing for, I think, 3 whole days. It had a beneficial effect! In due course I met and enthused an office co-worker into joining me, and he too fell under the spell; together we experienced the thrills and delights of airy traverses on thin holds, of entertaining struggles up places like Smuggler's Chimney, or the extreme contrasts between ascent and descent in Intermediate Gully on Dow Crag. We were working through the F&RCC guide-books to the more popular crags and were not really ready for pioneering, but occasionally the chance came along. Engineers' Slabs, for example, where a rock-fall put the leader,

65 The first ascent of Engineers' Slabs, Great Gable (Photo: K. Smith collection)



Astley-Cooper, out of the running and I took over. We only managed to do the bottom pitch that day, but returned on the morrow armed with a slater's hammer which did duty in excavating the holds, for every ledge was thick with vegetation and for some 6 hours my second was bombarded with earth and lumps of turf. Despite this he was still ready to occupy the 'good ledge' (I think one can just get both feet on it, the toes anyhow) while I made the ascent up and out of the final chimney. That was our first new route of real significance, and the elation was such that our feet hardly touched down on Moses' Trod on the way back to Wasdale Head, or so it seemed.

By contrast, Buttonhook was little more than a boulder problem that appeared to need doing in the course of crossing off the routes already recorded in the guide-book, so we did it. It was a bit ticklish, but that did nothing to alter the impression that Kern Knotts is little more than a boulder, albeit an exceedingly nice one.

Whether or not the fires of enthusiasm had passed their brightest—which I think was not the case—a chance meeting one Christmas with a party of pot-holers, taking a brief camping sabbatical at Seatoller, altered the course of our lives: we were introduced to pot-holing in Swinsto. This, according to the then existing situation in pot-hole exploration, was quite a formidable baptism and both of us were greatly impressed by the fundamental difference in approach. Of course crags are climbed by team-work, but ours were not; we were 2 individuals climbing the pitches individually with a bit of rope as security between stances: the Swinsto descent (and our hosts, members of the Northern Cavern and Fell Club, deserved their high repute) was team-work of a kind we had not met before. The technical

66 Swildon's Hole—the first Sump 1 diving party (This and next two photos Graham Balcombe collection)

difficulties were not great, but the trip had to be done to a timetable; weak (a purely relative term) and strong, all had to pass by. The rock scenery too was particularly impressive, like a deep chimney taken to extremes so as to surpass anything we had before experienced, and throughout the cave each scene was presented to our dim headlights out of the complete blackness of previous nescience, an experience which, as we were to find later on, is so highly accentuated when exploring some new cave or passage.

Having been given the initial push towards the underground, I found my job again took a hand; I was stationed near Bristol for a while, so inevitably the caves of Mendip took the limelight. They were on the doorstep, The Lakes were far away; trips to Wasdale or Snowdonia became the holiday specials, but Mendip was for every ordinary week-end—and many a week-day, too.

Inevitably, the rubber-necking introductory period led to engagement in specific objectives of exploration and such projects gripped and fascinated to the exclusion of what then seemed rather like play-boy activities on the crags. Such an objective was the deeper exploration of Swildon's Hole at Priddy, where previous downward progress had been halted in 1921 at a sump, that is where roof and water meet to say there is positively no way on. The then surveys had this sump as 460ft below the entrance, and the then guesswork, however inspired, had it that the stream came out eventually at Cheddar, some 4 miles away and another 100ft down. Evidently the job had scarcely been started!

We were foiled in our early diving and in our attempts to make progress by ordinary means. Maybe we feared that our 'ordinary means' (which, unfettered by the restrictive code of the cragsmen, was gelignite in ten-pound lumps) were unduly upsetting the little village almost directly above us, and so we sought alternatives, for the story of the divers became ever more cogent until at last Jack Sheppard, my second on Engineers' Slabs, won through that first water barrier, thus pointing up the way to a new means of cave exploration which has since transformed the pot-holing scene. Nevertheless, the exciting few hundred feet of cavern discovered did little to get us nearer the goal—as the subsequent years of exploration have shown as sump after sump has fallen to divers, yet with still an awfully long way to go (and in a very different direction to boot!).

The very first dive in Sump 1 was not a pleasant experience; it was something that had to be done, since we had previously ordained that it should be done and, the party having been duly organized, the gang was then assembled expectantly round the sump. The so-called respirator was crude in the extreme and doomed to fail, and there was no diving-dress to keep out the cold. I should have known better, but listened to stories of how this and that acquaintance's acquaintance had done great feats with a mere hosepipe, and I did not even try the thing out other than in the domestic bath, which merely showed that the valve system worked. At the sump, there was no going back (at least until we had put up a good showing!) but the ill-formed fears on the bank disappeared as I submerged in the chilly water and thick mud, to be replaced by the real ones of finding the way on; whether this or that particular piece of the invisible roof felt firm and relatively safe to crawl under. In the event it was a poor start, but in the weeks that followed it quickened rather than killed the determination to get through. Caving is like that. After a particularly tough session, you creep out cold, tired and hungry, and swear you'll never go down a hole again. Then, after a bath, a meal and a rest, you dream it all over again and add—well, not till next week-end, anyway!

67 Divers at Wookey Hole, 1935

By contrast, the work which has become one of the big ones, Wookey Hole, was started more or less by accident. We wanted small, compact, lightweight diving equipment for Swildon's Hole; our enquiries drew a blank but we were offered the loan of the big heavy stuff with the hard hat. Utterly impossible for Swildon's, but we thought that Wookey Hole might fit round it. The main problem was not so much our ignorance of diving technique, but our benefactors' ignorance of caving conditions, resulting in their Instructor's attempt to introduce the naval diving regime into the Third Chamber, where diving was to begin. By a pretty desperate effort we got the gear in, but there really was no room for the Navy as well. It was splendid fun, however, and although success was very limited, the way was opened up for the better stuff that came more than a decade later when we had made ourselves some suitable breathing equipment and acquired some surplus frog-suits. Above all, it was at Wookey Hole that we entered a new world of adventure, for with luck and when going upstream, the diver could see where he was going, and what he saw was extraordinarily good.

The appeal above and below ground has much in common save for the lack down there of summer warmth and richness of light and shade. To the dedicated, the urge is exploration, to go where no man has been before (or perhaps just a few), and doubtless for the kicks of getting places where but few of our fellow men could go even if they wanted to, an oblique ego-satisfying sort of oneupmanship. On the crags, the achievement is relative, the situations are a little artificial, for they could, in theory at least, be reached by other means, by roping down, by artificial aids (still almost entirely theoretical at that time, and certainly not approved as if tacitly

68 Early work with pitons on Bristol limestone, 1936

recognizing the possibility of by-passing the difficulties of the ascent). Down below, the achievement tends to be absolute, there is no other way short of sinking a shaft, and the satisfaction is correspondingly greater. It is the accidents of circumstances and personal history which will determine whether caving or climbing, if either, will exert the stronger pull; it was certainly so in my case and dedication then operated to the practical exclusion of the lost cause. Our caving colleagues knew little if anything of our background of cragsmanship; but occasionally we broke out to have a look at the local rocks: the quarries around had some interesting pitches, Cheddar Gorge as we saw it did not appeal, for what we looked at were the piles of loose stuff on the up-dip side. We had no eyes for the lofty towers across the

road—after all, climbing on limestone at that time was *not done* in this country, besides it was horribly public and it would be dangerous to traffic and passers-by. We looked at Churchill Rocks and bestrode them for a not very satisfying bit of fun, but we really enjoyed ourselves on the early routes of Avon Gorge, despite the crowds. The gorge was a good place for pitons, and where else might one drive a piton without evoking cries of disapproval? But for the crowds which drove us to climb very early in the morning and my own aversion to early-morning starts, we might have learnt much more about climbing with artificial aids and have gone places correspondingly. As it was, the pull of the caves and our rather guilty consciences about aided climbing on an artificial rockface bade otherwise.

Now in my old age I look back and wonder what might have been had we not met those people from the Cavern and Fell; there was an ambitious climbing programme ahead of us, for we had hardly begun the more serious stuff, but as I read the achievements of the present-day cave-divers, I have no regrets. I had a hand in triggering that off and I am content.

Schoolboys on Kolahoi

Richard Gilbert

We watched hypnotized as the massive rock, the size of a double decker bus, slowly toppled over, slid down a band of snow, accelerated and smashed to pieces before sweeping down the central couloir and finally coming to rest on the glacier 600m below. We were belayed on a rib of rock to the right of the couloir 70m away but the sulphurous fumes drifted up into our nostrils and we sighed with relief. I suppose at that point we should have turned back. After all we were only a school party and I had Charles, Simon and Patrick in my care, sixth formers aged only 17 and 18. But another 3 or 4 rope lengths would see us to the summit ridge and after 18 months planning and intensive training we could not admit defeat; besides I would have had a mutiny on my hands.

We were climbing the S face of Kolahoi, a beautiful pyramid of rock and the highest peak in the Kashmir valley area at 5456m. Our party of 13 was from Ampleforth College in Yorkshire and we had the distinction of being the first ever party from a British School to climb in the Himalaya. I had 2 assistant leaders, a doctor and 9 boys chosen from over 60 applicants from the school.

Base Camp was on the moraines below the N glacier snout of Kolahoi 2 days walk up the idyllic Lidder valley from Pahalgam. We had acclimatized for 6 days and had managed to find a route that avoided the main ice-fall by ascending the E glacier. Camp I was at 3800m on the lower slopes of the E glacier and Camp 2 was tucked under the long E ridge of Kolahoi at 4400m. The entire expedition had carried loads to establish and equip Camps 1 and 2 but my hopes of putting 2 small tents at the very bottom of the S face had had to be abandoned. The snow-field at the base of the cliffs was littered with avalanche debris and recently fallen stones. There was no safe place for a camp so I had decided to launch the assault from Camp 2.

From our reconnaissance the previous day I had underestimated the height of