
DENNIS GRAY
The Villain

Memories of Don Whillans



Pajama people. Don Whillans ready for bed in the Everest icefall in 1972. (Doug Scott)

Better be a piece of broken jade than unbroken tile.

Chinese proverb

A filmmaker contacted me recently with news that a production company were planning to make a film about the life of Don Whillans. What did I think about this? I told him I thought that if it was to be honest and truthful, it would probably need to be what we used to call X-rated. His soubriquet 'The Villain' was not inaccurate. On occasion his aggression was frightening to behold. There were happenings that from my understanding of psychology



A young Don Whillans with Harry Smith. (Dennis Gray)

would have labelled him a sociopath. But let us be clear. He was without doubt one of the outstanding mountaineers and rock climbers of any era. When the editor of a continental magazine got in touch, asking me who I thought were the three most memorable British climbers in the history of our sport, I had to admit that Whillans was one of them. It is, with hindsight, a surprising fact that Don and Joe Brown began climbing within a few years of one another and were active together.

I first met him in 1951 when I was 15 years old and he was 17. I was going slowly down the Llanberis track, having just made my first climb on Clogwyn Du'r Arddu with Jack Bloor. I was carrying all our equipment and spare clothes because Jack had gone off on a training spin. He was an outstanding runner, having won the Festival of Britain road race, and a few years later the Three Peaks challenge in Yorkshire, which he established with Arthur Dolphin¹.

As I drew level with Whillans he spat out an 'Ah doo'. He was only as big as I was then, 5ft 3in, but he was twice as broad in the shoulders and he had the angular face and quiff that became his hallmark in early press photographs. I hadn't understood his greeting so he spat out another 'Ah doo'. He looked so aggressive that I stammered 'Hullo' and scuttled off down the track, chased by a shout of 'Bloody stuck up!' from Whillans.

I next met him the following Easter on a Rock and Ice bus trip to Glencoe. I found myself sitting next to him and he didn't let me forget how I had reacted on our first meeting; I was subjected to a flow of acerbic comment the like of which I had not then experienced. Don had a language that was all his own, finessed over the years. If you were easily put off you were 'a drink of water', if you confessed to finding a route hard you were 'a ta-ta',

1. After Bloor's death in 1984, a memorial fund and races were established in his honour in support of young Yorkshire outdoor athletes. See: jackbloor.co.uk



The Rock and Ice in Chamonix, 1954. Sitting: Joe Brown, Fred Ashton, Nat Allen, Ron Moseley. Back row: Unknown, Ray Greenall, Don Whillans.

if you advised him a climb was not in good condition you were ‘a ninnie’, but the biggest put down was if you were ‘a little hill man’, applied to an individual or generally meant for all and sundry in the climbing world he might be annoyed at.

The climbing partnership he enjoyed with Brown famously began in the spring of 1951. Don was paying his first visit to the Roaches in Staffordshire and wandered by chance into a first ascent on the Lower Tier. Joe had led a crack that was repelling his second. Whillans volunteered to try. He tied on and without too much difficulty reached the ledge where the leader was belayed. He then expressed a wish to try the next pitch and Joe agreed. With a struggle Don managed it. The route was called *Matinee* because a crowd gathered to watch the action.

Brown was impressed that this youngster who had only been climbing a matter of months could lead what was near the top standard of that period, a pitch that was then badly protected. It was in those days generally believed that one had to work up through the grades, build one’s experience before attempting extreme climbs. Whillans, like Brown, was a contradiction to that belief. They both climbed difficult routes soon after starting.

Matinee was the beginning of a partnership that lasted for several years, one of the strongest in the history of British climbing. The media loved



Whillans in Chamonix in 1959 with Les Brown, Robin Smith, Gunn Clark and John Streetly. Smith and Clark had just beaten the others and photographer Hamish MacInnes to the first British ascent of the Walker Spur. (*Hamish MacInnes*)

these two working-class heroes; they fitted the belief that society was changing and becoming more egalitarian. Brown became known as the Human Fly while a Stockport newspaper wrote how ‘Whillans moved up hold-less slabs balancing like a fairy.’ He let it be known that if the journalist referred to him as such again ‘he would deal with him.’ In later years he was more content to be referred to as the Andy Capp of the climbing world.

I kept in touch with the Rock and Ice after that bus trip to Glencoe, particularly Ron Moseley. He sent me details of routes Whillans had pioneered on limestone at Stoney Middleton and Pickering Tors in Dovedale, both in the Peak District. In the spring of 1953, John Ramsden and I travelled by train, bus and foot to Stoney, where I led *Frisco Bay* and repeated some other routes Don had put up but we had no other names and even pioneered a route of our own, *Little Capucin*. How we then travelled to Dovedale I don’t know but despite many attempts both Ram and I failed on the route across the roof of the cave at Pickering Tors.²

When I was posted to Manchester for national service in February 1954, I climbed mainly with Joe, Ron Moseley, Ray Greenall, Joe Smith and other members of the Rock and Ice but Whillans not so often. He worked Saturday mornings and so much of his activity was confined to outcrops he could reach after his work finished that day. He was a plumber and proud of that fact. I remember how he reacted when Joe was also referred to as a plumber

2. Pickering’s Overhang (E1 5b) appears in many guidebooks as a Joe Brown route. The author recalls it as one of Don’s.



Chris Bonington and Don Whillans Eiger-bound in 1962. Bonington's ascent with Ian Clough later that year caused tension between them.

in a media profile. 'Nat Allen and I are plumbers,' he spat. 'Joe is a bleedin' property repairer.' It was obvious that he thought this inferior.

I did visit Cratcliffe and Froggatt with Don. After a route on Froggatt Pinnacle he simply jumped off the top, across the gap and onto the hillside opposite. Until a motorcycle accident in 1961, when he badly injured a kneecap, he was impressive at this sort of leaping. I was once at Curbar with him leading Eric Beard up Joe's route *Short Slab*, quite a bold HVS, and he soloed up behind wearing boots. Beardie found the route hard and was telling Don so as they arrived together.

'You can easily jump down this route,' Don replied and without hesitating he turned round and ran back down the slab.

On another day's climbing I asked him why he hadn't done national service. 'Because I failed the medical,' was all he would say. At the time I found that unbelievable. At that time I thought him physically an outstanding figure and at the time I was mixing with some of the best athletes in the country. One of our Manchester athletics team had just managed a four-minute mile. It might surprise some that in these early years Don neither smoked nor drank much alcohol, preferring to stay in the barn or his tent and listen to a small radio whilst other members of the club visited the pub. So I assumed his answer was a joke. But I found out eventually that Whillans suffered from a rare kind of vertigo that had hospitalised him previously and that was why he had failed his medical.

Don was fortunate there were climbers in the Rock and Ice who had Alpine experience. In 1952 he visited Chamonix with Don Cowan and Nat Allen. Under their tuition he learnt the basics of alpinism. On a visit limited in time by work commitments they managed three classic routes on the Aiguilles, including the Mer de Glace face of the Grépon, and from these beginnings his motivation grew. When the Alpine Climbing Group (ACG) was formed in the spring of 1953 Whillans, Cowan and Allen were invited to be founding members. At a later date I was its secretary and Don was one of its keenest supporters but when it formed Joe had not even visited the Alps.

This changed in the summer of 1953, when Cowan, Allen, Don and Joe visited the Alps together. They had an epic on the Crocodile. The climb went well but on descent a sequence of accidents led to a cut rope and Joe falling in his crampons onto Whillans. Don suffered a punctured backside



Cigarettes, alcohol and motorcycles all took their toll on Whillans. Here he is enjoying all three on the summit of Ben Nevis, a publicity stunt for Triumph.

while Don Cowan burnt his hands holding the fall. They retreated back to the Biolay campsite to lick their wounds.

Flicking through the guidebook, Joe discovered that the *Fissure Fix* on the west face of the Blatière was the hardest pitch in the range. But then they met up with Geoff Sutton and Bob Downes from the Cambridge University Mountaineering Club. At that date Sutton probably had the best knowledge of the Aiguilles of any British climber. He told them that a huge rock fall had erased the route on the Blatière, which was ripe as a new route. They set off at the first opportunity, Brown climbing with Cowan and Whillans with Sutton. It was on this first attempt that Joe led the Fissure Brown, a crack that came to be acknowledged as the hardest pitch in the Western Alps. Joe reported it as being no harder than some of the gritstone cracks he had already climbed but I am not so certain of that.

This first attempt was stopped by bad weather after a bivouac on ledges higher up but they were back in Chamonix the following year, and after an abortive attempt on the east face of the Capucin, held up by the weather and a slow party ahead of them, Brown and Whillans wrote their name large in the history of alpinism with a repeat of the west face of the Petit Dru, the third ascent in the fastest time, and by completing their first ascent of the west face of the Blatière. Higher on the route, Whillans led a crack which became the second crux, overcome by a fierce layback.

Whillans saw these successes as the way forward for him becoming a fulltime climbing bum. There was no doubt that with longer periods in the Alps many routes would be within his compass and over the following decade the number of ascents he made mark him out as the leading British alpinist. He was still pioneering in Britain and though at times he was difficult to be with socially, once on a climb or an outcrop one could not wish for a more concerned companion.

I climbed a lot with him in the latter years of the 1950s. I was with him when he made the first ascent of *Cave Wall* on Froggatt Edge and I made the second ascent of *Goliath*, his infamous crack climb on Burbage. He wanted me to tell him if I thought it was hard and worth recording. Currently graded E4, it was obviously one of the hardest routes of that era and among the first of that grade in the world. Don coached me up *Left Eliminate* on Curbar, when I had a blank on the route, although I had already led *Peapod* and the harder *Right Eliminate*, although I had to be rescued on the former when my right boot became immovably stuck in the narrowing crack. He soloed it to show me how it was done and talked me up it after him.

I also climbed with him in the Mont Blanc range and the Dolomites. The hardest route we did together was the east face of the Grand Capucin and although we had no difficulty on the ascent, during the descent a forced bivouac in a storm tested us utterly.

After that summer's Alpine season, we had a Rock and Ice meet at my parents' home in Woodhouse, Leeds. We climbed at Ilkley, Crookrise and Almscliff. My father and Whillans began a surprising friendship that lasted until my father's death. He was in the entertainment industry almost all his life and Don accompanied him on some of his club and theatre dates around the north of the country. It was noticeable, from this time on, that Don became more polished with the one-liners for which he became famous in the climbing world.

In 1957 Don made his first visit to the Himalaya as a member of the Masherbrum expedition led by Joe Walmsley. In retrospect this had a real effect on his future physical wellbeing: travelling to Pakistan by sea took several weeks and during the voyage he started drinking and smoking. Beer was a shilling a pint and he won a raffle prize of a thousand cigarettes and by the time he had smoked them he was hooked. I know from personal experience how hedonistic such sailings to the subcontinent could be, having done so two occasions. There is little to do on such journeys except eat, drink and make merry.

The attempt on Masherbrum was tragically derailed when Bob Downes was taken ill with altitude sickness and died. This had a great affect on Don. He had become close friends with Bob: together they had pioneered the route *Centurion* on Ben Nevis. After Downes' death, Don made a last attempt with Joe Walmsley backing him up, but he had to admit defeat despite being close to the summit.

From then on the Himalaya held him in thrall. Don took part in the Trivor expedition of 1960 and drove back to Lancashire on his motorbike at



Don in the Karakoram in 1983, an éminence grise on Doug Scott's freewheeling team that included, from left to right, Steve Sustad, Alan Rouse, Greg Child and Beth Acres.

its conclusion. Then there was the Gauri Sankar attempt in 1964, which I organised. This expedition was full of incident as we drove from Leeds to Kathmandu. We almost succeeded but I have already written about this elsewhere.³ I think Whillans' outstanding ascents in the 1960s were his two climbs in Patagonia: the Aiguille de Poincenot in 1961 on an Irish expedition and in 1963 the Central Tower of Paine with Chris Bonington.

Don and Joe were as different as chalk and cheese. Brown is best described as calm and sanguine; Whillans in a temper was frightening. He never threatened me but I saw enough of him when riled and out of control to know not to get involved. On one occasion Morty Smith challenged Joe Brown to a wrestle-cum-fight but included me in his plans. Initially I refused but Joe agreed believing he could handle us both, having grown up on the mean streets of Manchester where he was used to dealing with heavies. Morty and I had a plan: he would take the Baron head-on whilst I crept up behind him and put a stranglehold on his neck. This worked a treat and we nearly killed him and I was so sorry to have taken part, but when he recovered Joe was full of admiration.

'You clever little bleeders,' he observed. Then I realised Whillans was making ready to join in and he came at us! I turned round and started to run but he was after me. Fortunately I was still in training and he couldn't catch me but as I went off up the road towards the Llanberis Pass he shouted after me: 'You're a bloody slippery Jim!' And that's what he called me from thereon.

I saw Don in several confrontations over the years but none as frightening as the night he picked a fight with some members of Sheffield Hell's Angels.

3. D Gray, *Rope Boy*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1970. See also I Clough, 'Gauri Sankar, 1964', *Alpine Journal* 1965, pp96-105.



Whillans in puckyish form on Everest in 1971. (John Cleare)

This was one winter's night in the Little John pub in Hathersage; they were annoying him as he was sat near the door and every time one of them came through having been to the bar he felt a cold draft. Even so, I was amazed when Whillans stood up and hit one of them with the swinging door as he came through carrying a tray of drinks. The angel went down. Whillans swung round and grabbed a bar stool before fending off the rest of them while his wife Audrey, Morty and I ran outside to my van. I revved the engine and as we pulled away Don came running out and dived in the back.

Unlike Brown, Whillans was a sports player; at school he took part in gymnastics, boxing and rugby, and he was keen to participate in the games sessions of the Rock and Ice. When we played barn rugby he played no holds barred. There was a particularly bloody session in the Wasdale barn in 1960, when the young Doug Scott and Dez Had-

lum, both playing for rugby clubs back in Nottingham, also took part. I used to make sure I was on Don's team, even though he was not the strongest physically amongst club members. Morty could do one-arm pull-ups on either hand.

Whillans' other big interest was darts but despite cheating (he used to fiddle his score) he could never beat Eric Beard, who was once in a competition for the best players in the country. A youth spent in the back-to-backs of Leeds 6 had its compensations. When I lived in Derby, Nat Allen, his wife Tinsel and I visited Audrey and Don at their cottage in Crawshaw Booth, Lancashire. Whillans had been sent there during the war as an evacuee and had happy memories of the area. Though the accommodation was Spartan, Audrey was almost saint-like. How she put up with Don and his tempestuous character I never understood but her welcome could not have been warmer. She had married him in 1958 after a long courtship, so she must have well known what their life together would be like.

Crawshaw Booth is near Bridestones, the grit outcrop known to locals as the Kebs; Whillans had pioneered many problems there. I managed *Duck*, which made me quack, and the *Whillans' Jam*, but I failed hopelessly on *The Villain*. Don was offering to buy anyone who could repeat it a pint,

which was impressive because he was a notorious tightwad but it was a few years before he had to pay up.

My keenest memory of this visit to Crawshaw Booth was waking up with the Whillans cat licking my face as I lay in my sleeping bag on the floor of the cottage. He was trying to make a living around this time as a freelance lecturer and later as an equipment designer. I suppose in both cases he was eventually successful, for his lectures were hard-core and humorous, and appealed to the climbing fraternity. Some of his designs, including a rucksack, the world's first sit harness and his 'Whillans Box' to replace a tent on expeditions were successes. Others, such as the 'Whammer', were not.

We had one of the first designs of the Whillans Box on Gauri Sankar in 1964. It weighed over 70lb. Carrying it up the 'Little Eiger' and traversing across the north face to put it into an ice cave we had dug completely banjaxed me. Later, Don was to act as consultant to a specialist clothing firm who were trying to develop a range of outdoor clothing. This was aimed at a general market, particularly the golfing and motoring community. For a while Whillans was to be found at the Open or Silverstone but I'm afraid the jackets, while looking attractive, enjoyed limited success.

When I arrived back in Liverpool by sea in January 1965, Whillans and Terry Burnell were onshore to greet me; they had come for their personal gear from the Gauri Sankar expedition.

'You picked a good one there,' Don told me. 'What's next?'

'The south face of Annapurna I,' I laughed and showed him a picture of the face Jimmy Roberts had given me before I left Kathmandu. I discussed the objective with Nepal's foreign minister and he promised they would give us permission to attempt it. We started to plan for the face but the film *Raid into Tibet* was released, causing Nepal to be closed to expeditions for the next few years.

In early 1969 Chris Bonington contacted me as Nepal had opened again and Nick Estcourt, Martin Boysen and he were keen to try Menlungste. Did I think they would get permission for this? I thought not at the time but that the south face of Annapurna I was a possibility. I sent him the photograph of the face Jimmy had given me. I had just married and there was no way I could participate, especially with the organisation. I was more than pleased when Don and Dougal Haston were successful in 1970 but so sad at the death of Ian Clough, one of our Gauri Sankar party and one of my oldest friends.

Don was a member of the 1971 international Everest expedition to the south-west face organised by Norman Dyhrenfurth and the 1972 European expedition led by Karl Herrligkoffer to the same objective. On both Whillans performed well and reached some of the highest altitudes then reached on this objective, but both attempts were rife with dissension and argument. Though replete with stars of the climbing world those stars did not gel. These three expeditions were the apogee of Whillans' Himalayan career and it led to his appearance on the prime-time show *This Is Your Life*. As is wont with these things, the fame was short-lived.

In 1973 I persuaded Whillans to join me at the Leeds University climbing wall, then the most famous such facility in the country. By today's standards it was basic but it was probably the first wall that illustrated what could be achieved with an improved level of fitness specific to rock climbing. Don was unimpressed, however, and couldn't be persuaded to try any of the problems I showed him so we retreated to the Fenton, a nearby pub.

'There is no bloody adventure on climbing walls,' he pronounced over a succession of pints. I wonder what he would say now that there are over 400 walls in the UK and that most newcomers coming into the sport begin their climbing lives in such centres.

When I was at the British Mountaineering Council, I involved Don several times in national events to which the BMC was invited. One was a reception at Manor House in London. The guest of honour was the Duke of Edinburgh. He worked the crowd with an entourage of hangers-on, weaving his way around and eventually arrived at Don and me. He knew vaguely who I was; I was a member of a committee he chaired occasionally. Don, not so much.

'May I introduce Don Whillans, sir, one of our council's most famed members.'

The Duke looked at Don but was a bit taken aback when Whillans, in full Andy Capp rig, came out with his usual 'Ah doo,' and then held out his hand. The Duke's entourage looked on in obvious disapproval but were surprised when their charge grasped the Villain's hand in return.

Even more memorable was our meeting with Margaret Thatcher, when she was leader of the opposition. She wished to meet representatives of national bodies of sport. I won't repeat what happened; it's well known and involves birds and nests. The American climber Jim Donini was puzzled to learn that Whillans, an icon of the working class, was a keen supporter of Mrs Thatcher. I observe from this that as soon as somebody like Don breaks the boundaries of their origin, they often behave thus. As Shakespeare noted, 'He then unto the ladder turns his back.'

Towards the end of 1974, with the approval of the executive of the BMC, I put the names of both Joe and Don to the honours committee for recognition, in view of the great contribution they had made to British mountaineering. This seemed to be proceeding well until Whillans was involved in an outrageous incident that made the national news. ('The day Tiger Whillans took on the law', was the headline in the *Daily Mail*.) In the early hours at the end of March 1975, after a drinking session in the Woolpack, the police stopped Don for speeding and driving erratically. This led to a physical confrontation and Don assaulted the policemen who promptly called for back up. Five police were eventually required to subdue and handcuff Whillans and push him into the back seat of a panda car. Even then Don didn't give up until two of the coppers sat on him.

When the case came to court in Rawtenstall, the only excuse the defence could offer for Don's behaviour was that Audrey had been ill at the time and was in hospital. He was fined a considerable sum and banned from driving

for two years. In retrospect he was lucky. If this happened today he might have received a period in custody. In the aftermath, a lady from the honours committee phoned.

'Is this Mr Whillans appearing in the press for his misbehaviour the person your council has put forward for an honour?'

'I'm sorry, yes he is.'

'Oh goodness, we can't have such a person receiving an honour.'

When the birthday list was announced later that year, Joe received the MBE but Don was omitted.

In 1976 Audrey and Don left Rossendale for Penmaenmawr in north Wales and opened a guesthouse. I visited them there and was surprised to find Whillans had become keen on tropical fish with a large tank in one of the rooms. Over the next few years he went on many trips: to Yosemite, to Tirich Mir in the Hindu Kush, on a Doug Scott expedition to Shivling, to Patagonia again, and the jungles of Venezuela with a face climb on Roraima, to Huandoy Sur in Peru with a Scottish party, and sailing down the Amazon with Dave Bathgate at the expedition's conclusion. He was on Broad Peak, again with Doug Scott, when tragedy struck and Pete Thexton died of pulmonary oedema, but his days as the lead climber on prestigious expeditions were clearly at an end. Not everyone was willing to include him, for not everyone was willing to put up with his self-serving attitude.

He found solace in other activities. He and Audrey visited the Red Sea to try scuba diving, and he made a parachute jump, declaring he fell like a meat safe. He spent much of his time visiting old friends: John Streetly in the West Indies, Ronnie Wathen in Spain. But the nonstop heavy drinking and smoking was catching up with him. In girth he looked more like a Sumo wrestler than a mountaineer. One of his last climbs was with Joe Brown, an anniversary ascent for television of their outstanding route on Dinas Cromlech, *Cemetery Gates*. It was sad to see how unfit he was and how he struggled compared to Joe, who was still climbing well.

In 1984, Don was the guest of honour at the National Mountaineering Conference. These events dated from my early days at the BMC. Faced with financial constraints and the competing need to make the BMC more relevant to the mainstream climbing community, these gatherings, held at the Buxton Conference Centre, were a success from the start. The main event was the lecture on Saturday evening, given by someone universally acknowledged in the climbing world: Diemberger, Heckmair, Bonatti and so on.

Don certainly lived up to the occasion. His lecture got off to a good start when a stalker ran across the stage, allowing Don to make one of his most famous one-liners.

'Well I'll be buggered.' (Pause.) 'And so will he if I can catch him!' A full house roared its appreciation.

Earlier on the Saturday we organised a cabaret. That year half a dozen of us dressed up in drag to satirise the Miss World competition, with a jury of women climbers chaired by Rosie Smith of *Mountain* magazine. This was won by Donna Whillans, who, when asked, declared her ambition was 'to



Street fighting man. John Cleare's portrait of Don Whillans at Heptonstall.
(*John Cleare*)

become a fat, hairy climber!' All this done to raise funds for the purchase of the Alex MacIntyre hut at Onich.

In his last years Don was back working as an emergency plumber in the Manchester area. So when we had a water leak in our toilets at the BMC I phoned him. He arrived on his motorbike and I could see at once he had been in some kind of confrontation. His leather coat was torn and his face bloody. 'What on earth has happened to you?'

'I was knocked off my bike by a car.'

'Crikey, are you okay?'

'I got up off the road and chased after them, overtook the car and stopped in front of it. They had either to stop or run me down!'

'Bloody hell Don, it sounds like the Dukes of Hazard.'

'The driver got out of the car and I flattened him but none of the others. There were three of them in there but they wound the windows tight and I couldn't get at them. But I had my boots on, so I kicked hell out of their car. Then I drove off.' Don was over 50 and you would have thought past such escapades.

'Nothing has changed, has it Don?'

'You're bloody right Slippery Jim,' he replied.

That summer of 1985 he rode to the Dolomites on his motorbike. At Alleghe he ran into old friends Derek Walker and Roger Salisbury, but the latter noted how unfit and slow he was. Most of the time Dan sat around sunbathing and drinking. With nothing to do but talk about the old days, it wasn't a long trip. His drive home was plagued by heavy rain and he stopped off in Oxford, wet and dispirited, at the house of old friend Derek Bromhall. After a welcoming meal and a few beers he went to bed and simply didn't wake up, having suffered a major heart attack. He was 52. Don's funeral at Bangor crematorium drew hundreds of climbers from all over the country. I gave the oration and concluded that his was a unique character, difficult to assay but unforgettable.

His friends felt there should be some kind of memorial and the original proposal was a campsite in Chamonix. Derek Walker and I met with local officials there but the only offer was a site with avalanche warnings for winter and spring use. Talking with Audrey, we settled on a hut at one of the main climbing areas in Britain. Fundraising began, under the leadership of Derek. My contribution was to organise a Don Whillans memorial evening at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester. Doug Scott, Nat Allen, Joe Brown and Chris Bonington spoke of their climbs and memories of Don. Printer friends of mine wanted to help, producing leaflets for us, free of charge: 'Buy a Pint for Don!'

Derek and the other members of the committee raised a total of £50,000. Rock Hall Cottage at the Roaches came up for sale, and with extra funding from the Sports Council and other bodies, and a volunteer management scheme run by the BMC, the Don Whillans hut was secured. The Roaches seemed more than appropriate: the crag where he met Joe and where he did *The Sloth*, one of his finest new routes. The Roaches was also where Don met Audrey. She opened the hut at a ceremony in 1993.