

Alan Mills  
Memories  
of  
The Mountain Club

## Alan Mills: Memories of The Mountain Club

I joined The Mountain Club in the summer of 1955 at the age of 22 shortly after I'd re-joined English Electric after university and for a year I spent almost every weekend either on a Mountain Club meet or climbing with Mountain Club friends. I also went caving in the Peak District on one occasion with Laurie Galpin. It was an easy cave by all accounts but it led me to decide that once was enough for me.

The attached 24 Photograph Pages are derived from colour slides and some black and white photographs. I've identified most of them by when and where they were taken and identified the people as best I can remember and with the invaluable help of Nick Smyth and, through him, his wife, Margaret, Ian and Marney Smith and Tony and John Vereker.

They start with Tyn-y-Tyll, the Club's first hut in the Cowarch Valley, and finish with Bryn Hafod in its early days. In between are photographs from four locations, Buttermere, the Roaches and Cornwall in 1956 and Glencoe in 1958, followed by photographs of a few more of the people I knew so well in those days. Cornwall in 1956 was an official Club Meet and was well attended but the others were probably unofficial.

Digging out and selecting the slides and photographs and writing these few words rekindled many happy memories of The Mountain Club and also reminded me of the many members of the club in 1955 and 1956 who are no longer with us.

I started to put these pages together some time ago but it was the flurry of other people's memories earlier in the year generated by the correspondence about the wording of the plaque to be placed on the seat at Bryn Hafod to commemorate Johnny Downes that pushed me to finish them.

I apologise for any mistakes and for not remembering someone whom I should have remembered; I can only plead that 1956 was some time ago.

Alan Mills, Brisbane, Australia. 27 September 2013

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01: 1956 Cowarch, Buster, the London Taxi

Buster, the elderly London taxi, was given to The Mountain Club by Geoff Nodin when he returned to Australia after his time with English Electric, Stafford presumably as a Graduate Apprentice.

The photograph shows John Vereker on the roof of Buster looking down at Chris Pennack on the right with two other people, whom I can't identify, with Tyn-y-Twill in the distance on the left.

Nick Smyth tells me that the fellow on the left is Eric Morrison who owned the Ford Consul parked beyond Buster.

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02: 1956 Cowarch, Outside Tyn-y-Tyll

Left to Right:

Shirley ?????, identified by Nick Smyth,  
an unidentified woman,  
Fred Williams leaning against the wall,  
Chris Pennack, sitting on the ground nearest the camera, who joined English Electric  
Stafford as a Student Apprentice on the same day as I did in 1949 after he'd completed  
his National Service in the RAF,  
Tony Vereker, seated in the back row behind Chris Pennack,  
Jean Turner, identified by Nick Smyth,  
another unidentified woman who's hardly visible,  
Sheila Williams, leaning forward, seated beyond the unidentified woman,  
me, in the swimming trunks (why I was in swimming trunks, I can't imagine),  
another unidentified woman,  
Don Gilbert, standing, and three unidentified men seated on the verge on the right.

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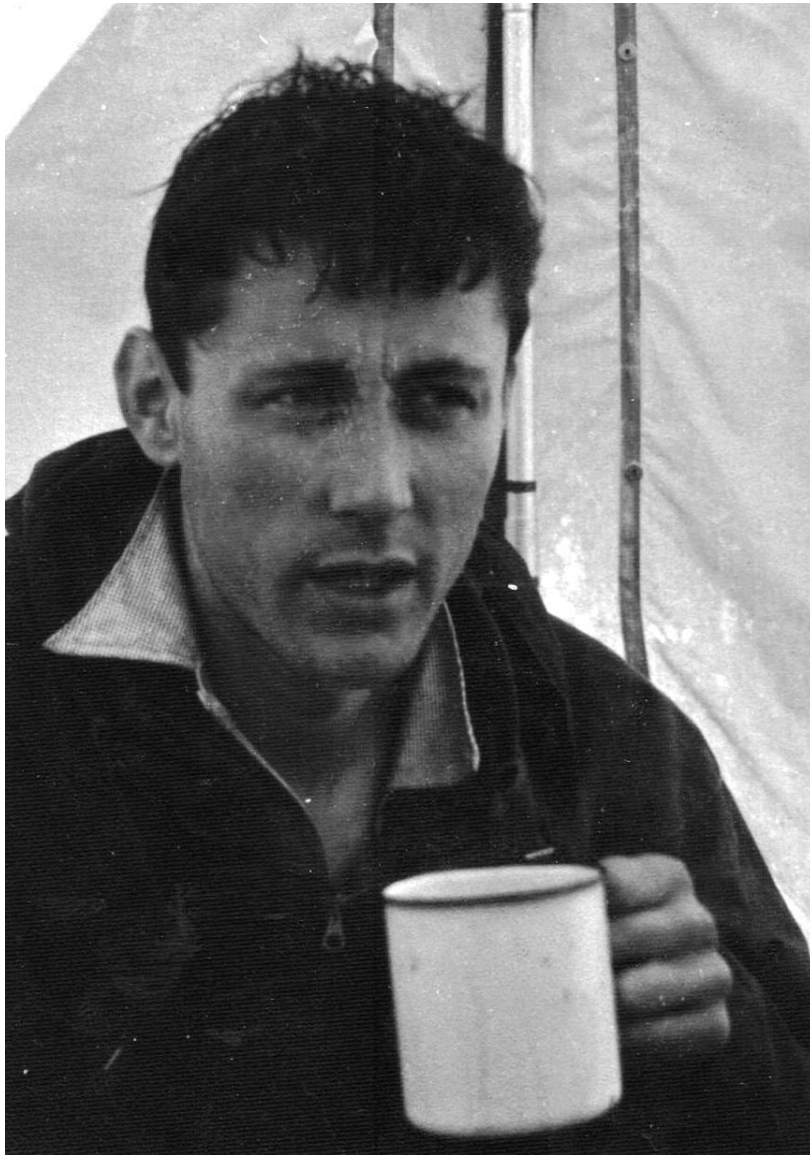
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03: 1956 Buttermere, Sheila Williams and John Vereker

Sheila Williams and John Vereker in a better tent than I had, sitting out the wet weather above Buttermere in the Lake District.

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04: 1956 Buttermere, Fred Williams

Fred Williams in the same tent in the same place. It really was a wet weekend.

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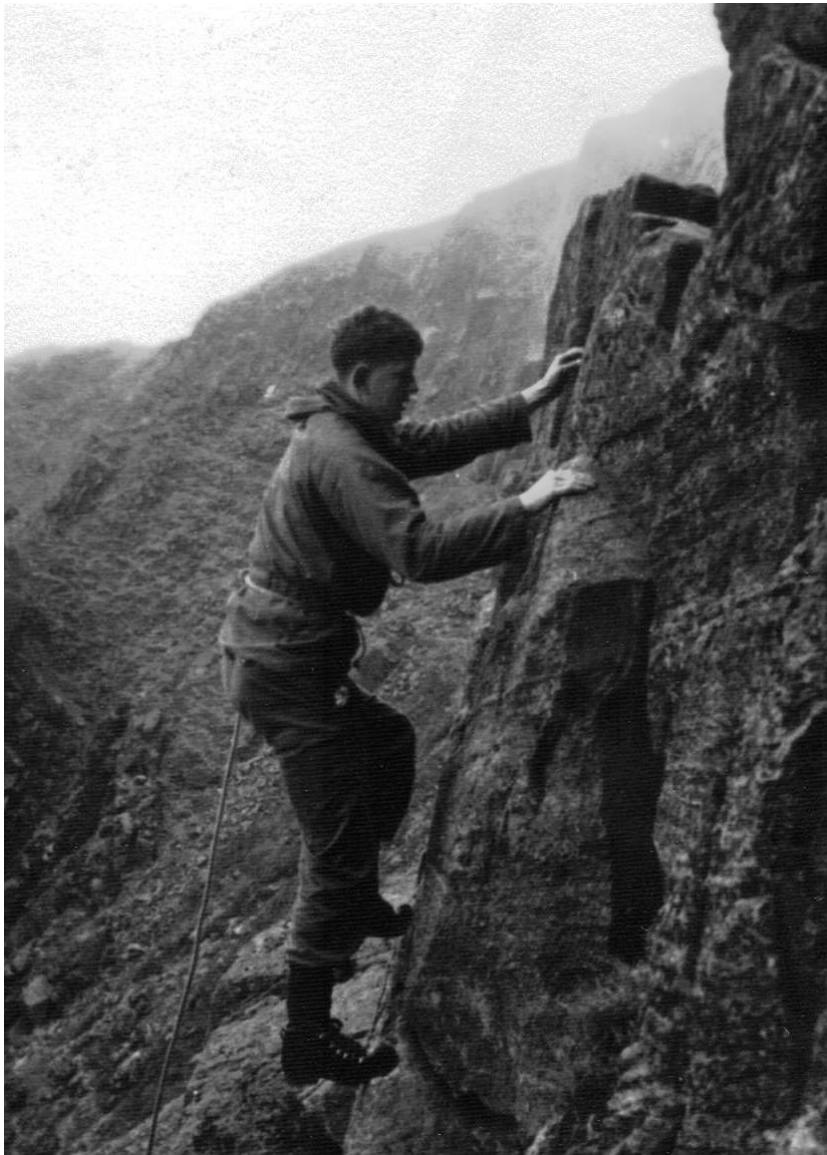
05: 1956 Buttermere, Me

I must have been running at a higher temperature than the others.

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06: 1956 Buttermere, John Vereker

John Vereker above Buttermere.

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07: 1956 The Roaches, Tony Vereker leading

Tony Vereker leading on the final pitch with John Vereker looking on.

Taken a few minutes before the photograph on the next page.

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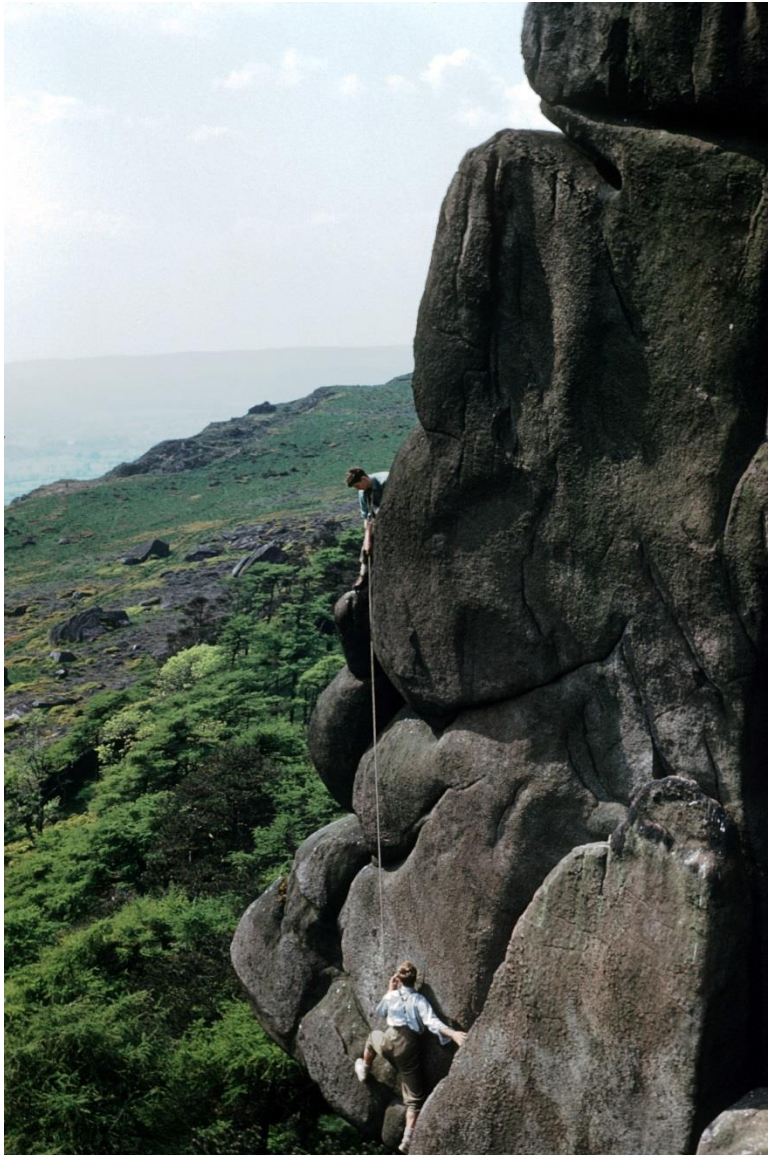


08: 1956 The Roaches, John and Tony Vereker

Taken a few minutes after the photograph on the preceding page.

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09: 1956 The Roaches, Stu Taylor following John Vereker

This and the photograph on the next page were taken on another visit to the Roaches.

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10: 1956 The Roaches, The Rock Public House

From Left to Right: John Vereker, Stu Taylor, Johnny Downes and what was left of my pint.

In 1956 the landlady dispensed your pint from an enamelled metal jug. When the jug was empty she disappeared from view down some steps at the back of the bar to refill the jug directly from a barrel.

Looking at Google Earth, The Rock Public House in 1956 is The Olde Rock Inn in 2013.

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11: 1956 Cornwall, Camping near the Edge

Not a camp site for a sleep walker.

This is Bosigran with Commando Ridge not only as the incredible background but a very pleasant climb.

This was a well-attended meet over the Whitsuntide weekend holiday. I went down not only to climb but to see my wife-to-be, Beth, who lived in Newlyn, Nr Penzance with her parents.

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12: 1956 Cornwall, After the Swim

I can't find any climbing photos of this meet but I've several of us not climbing.

Left to Right: Roger Hancock; Cocky Young, identified by Nick Smyth; an unidentified male; Nick Smyth, seated with his back to the camera; Stu Taylor, gazing out to sea; John Vereker, stepping into his trousers, and an unidentified person on the extreme right.

I've spared readers a photo of Fred Williams running naked down the beach.

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13: 1956 Cornwall, The Boscastle Arms

This was taken after the swim.

There are ten persons in the photograph and regrettably I know the names of only six of them.

They are, moving from left to right, Fred Williams in the red sweater; Roger Hancock, smiling and looking at the camera; Stu Taylor, with spectacles, just to the right of Roger; Dick Kendal, with his back to us; Nick Smyth looking very suave with the sunglasses looking at the camera and, finally, on the extreme right, Cocky Young, identified by Nick Smyth.



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14: 1956 Cornwall, Penzance

Left to Right: Marney ?????, married Ian Smith; Beth Parker (who became Beth Mills on 11 August 1956); Don Gilbert in the wheelchair; Stu Taylor and a pretty nurse pushing Don from the West Cornwall Hospital into a car to take him back to Stafford.

The previous night, returning to the campsite in the dark, Don, who was by no means worse for wear, put his foot down a rabbit hole and broke his ankle. The wheelchair looks quite Dickensian rather than mid-twentieth century.

This was the meet at which Fred Williams fell off the first pitch of a climb and disappeared below the surface of the sea except for his hat that marked-the-spot.

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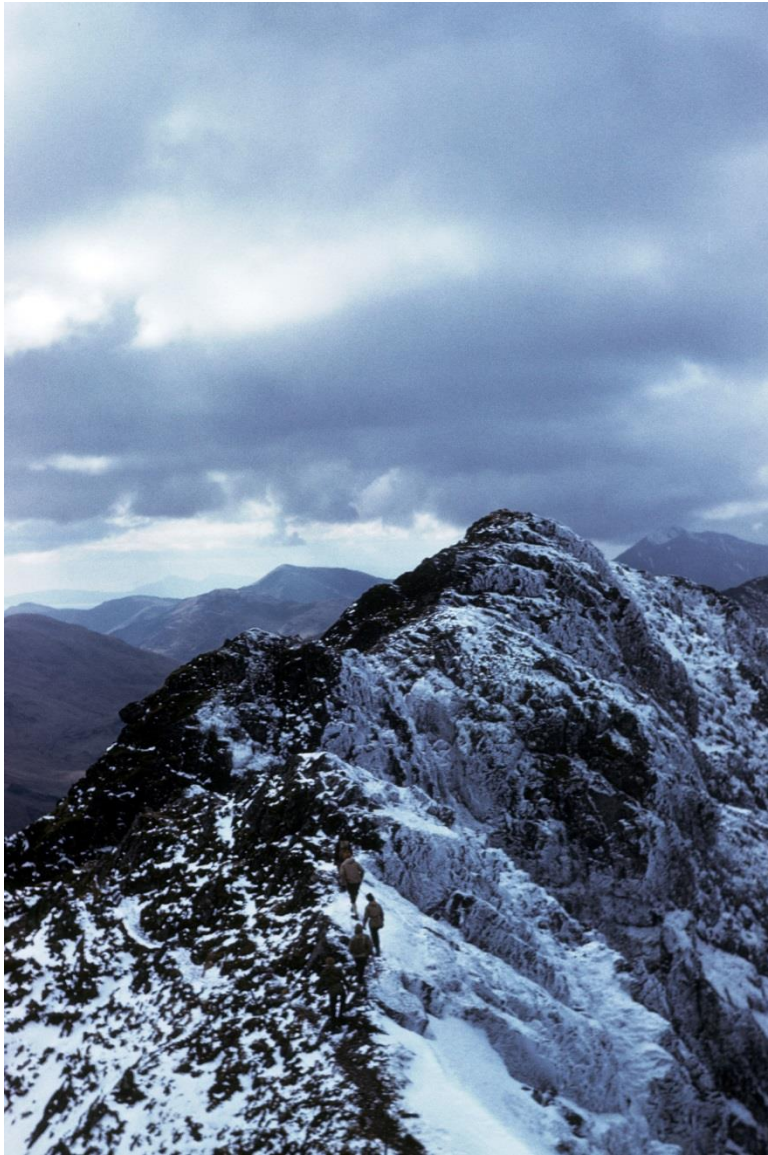


15: 1958 Glencoe, Looking at the Problem

We must have been mad.

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16: 1958 Glencoe, Aonach Eagach

I doubt that the persons in front of me on the ridge who can be seen on this photograph were anything to do with us.

What a splendid day on a beautiful ridge walk.

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17: 1958 Glencoe, Bidean nam Bian

The name of the mountain, Bidean nam Bian, is written on the slide mount and it's probably correctly identified.

This was our view of this splendid mountain from one of our climbs.

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18: 1956 Johnny Downes under Canvas

Because of a lack of direct contact with the club for many years, I didn't know that Johnny Downes had been such a leading light in the construction of Bryn Hafod. However, when I did learn of his role it didn't surprise me. He was always ready to lend a hand whatever the situation although he did a pretty poor job of putting this tent up.

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19: 1956 Fred Williams

I've forgotten where this photograph was taken..

However, Nick and Margaret Smyth believe that it's Bosigran somewhat confirmed in their minds by Margaret's identification of the plant in the bottom right hand corner of the photo as being Thrift. As Fred looks fairly wet perhaps this was taken after he'd fallen off the first pitch (Refer Photograph Page 14: 1956 Cornwall, Penzance).

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20: 1956 Dick Kendal

Dick was a fixture in The Mountain Club when I joined.

This unorthodox move was probably on The Roaches.

When I left for Calcutta in 1959, I gave Dick my partly disassembled 1928 Sunbeam motorcycle. Did he ever assemble it?

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21: 1956 Peter Pirie and Me

Left to Right: Peter Pirie and me.

Many of the Members of The Mountain Club in 1956 were employees of English Electric in Stafford but Peter was with Taylor Woodrow, a firm of civil contractors, who were busy extending what was then called the Main Works.

I remember being very fond of the bright sweater but can't for the life of me remember how I acquired it. I do remember however that in the photo I'm wearing a much patched, old pair of climbing trousers given to me by Fred Williams when he bought a new pair.

Where was the photograph taken? Cowarch? Langdale?

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22: 1956 Fred Williams, the Brittons and Chris Pennack

I've no idea where this not entirely satisfactory photograph was taken but I've included it because it includes Tony and Yvette Britton.

Tony was about my age and his long term girlfriend Yvette, whom he subsequently married, was a nurse at Stafford General. I don't remember why a French girl was nursing in Stafford.

Tony was an Overseas Technical Representative for English Electric and worked in Venezuela and other places before camping out with GEC Hong Kong in the early 80s while he looked after the Philippines and other markets in which GEC had distributors. After Tony's early death, Yvette returned to live in France where their son chose to live but quite recently I've lost touch with her.

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23: 1961 Cowarch, Hard Labour at Bryn Hafod

My wife and I with our young son and the younger of my sisters travelled down to see the 'new hut' from my parents' place in Yarnfield, Nr Stone, Staffs while we were home on leave from India.

We happened to choose the weekend of a Working Party and found a number of members hard at work except for the young woman in the wheelbarrow in the photograph on the next and last page.

The only person I can identify in the photograph is the person nearest the camera who's Dave Adcock.

However, Nick Smyth goes further by identifying Don (Chirpy) Chisholm facing the camera and going on to say that the next three persons in the trench could be Eric Morrison, Stu Taylor and Barry Knox with Johnny Downes wrestling with the Acrow Prop at the end of the trench. Even Nick can't identify the three people in the distance.

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24: 1961 Cowarch, Below Bryn Hafod

Left to Right: At the front our son Stephen, now 55 years of age, my wife Beth, who admits to being 49, and my sister Lesley, now a grandmother of four. In the wheelbarrow a sleepy but seemingly very comfortable unidentified young woman.

This visit to Bryn Hafod was almost my last physical contact with The Mountain Club although I subsequently kept in touch with what was going on with the help of Tony Britton, Mary and Laurie Galpin and Nick Smyth. I very much welcome today's information directly from the club.

Just a short time before this visit to Cowarch, Nick Smyth, then a Commissioning Engineer with English Electric's, Metal Industries Division, had stayed with us in Calcutta and had relieved me of my ex-WD (ex-War Department) ice axe for a holiday in the Himalayas.