

# The Sandalwood Box

(Part 2)

## DREAMING SPIRED

by

Peter Gibbs

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## Keble College

A chilly breeze blew through the Porter's Lodge of Keble College. The notices behind the glass-covered boards listing names and activities seemed intimidating as did the faceless figures floating by in duffle coats, or worse, the superior faces of academic accomplishment swooping past in gowns with a clutch of books in the folds of one arm. I was helped up to my rooms first right second storey by Tom the Butler, who reminded me that he had done the same for Dad and brothers Den and JM. Through the bars of the study / sitting room very basically furnished I looked across South Parks Road at autumn leaves falling, to the gothic building of the Pitt Rivers museum half right and a more modern School of Chemistry opposite, through individual trees of Elm and Oak. The bars seemed solid enough and the gaps too small to get through to the drain pipe. I felt strongly like regaining the freedom of open space and somewhat daunted by the institution I had entered. 'Gates close at 11.00 pm' said Tom. I would need to recce the brick wall topped by steel spikes to get in from late outings. It helped to hear Tom tell me how Dad had discovered that he could bend the fire-poker into a U shape and demonstrated this from room to room. This precedent of physical accomplishment helped lift my initial gloom and I was soon enrolled into the athletics and rugger teams which in later days helped to cure the 'blues'. The little bedroom off the sitting room also had its barred window. Going to sleep at night couples walking by below on the gravel pavement could be heard talking in muffled public school accents. I was in another world and felt somewhat alienated and daunted.

There were a few days in London before coming up to Keble and these were spent in a blurred whirl of activity with Dave who had a room in London House and was signed up to study medicine. We explored London together, discussed future plans like the Cunene and Blue Nile, wrote papers on the Orange trip. He made a large framed photo of the Aughrabies as a present. Rachel's parents kindly offered hospitality at their flat in Grays Inn Road. We went to a musical. It was a world apart in complete contrast to that we had left but we made the most of it and enjoyed it thoroughly. He came up to Oxford a couple of times for walks, talks over cherry-wood pipes, and if we could afford it, a sherry and muffins over the fire. We would plan something really good where no-one had been before, but for starters we planned a walking trip to the Lakes so far known only from Wordsworth's poetry. We caught a bus to Keswick and did a walking tour for a few days pitching the silk tent at night in pleasant spots on the edge of lakes.

But no freshman from the colonies could have had my singular advantage of family relations all of whom treated me with lavish hospitality and welcome. There was Uncle Victor and Aunt Joan at The Old Vic, Bicester, just 12 miles from Oxford and an easy one-hour bike ride. Their Lucia and Christopher were about four and two years old respectively and normally had an au-pair minding them, but also welcomed their explorer cousin from the wilds of Africa giving them a story or playing their records like 'The Owl and the Pussycat'. Their place was a second home where there was always an amazing genuine welcome, fondest kisses from Aunt Joan always impatient for the latest news over a glass of sherry by the fire in the drawing room while Uncle Victor scuttled around adjusting the central heating and checking on the dishes in the Aga, competing for my attention to share his ideas for the next project outside or show off his last one. It is no wonder I spent a great deal of time there which I tried to repay a little in projects helping Uncle Victor. Indeed in the third year, after they moved to Clifton Hamden, my first surveying project with a borrowed theodolite from the School of Geodesy, Brigadier

Bomford himself, was to set out and level pegs for the grass tennis court. He loved to treat family to an evening out, a dinner and play or musical. "I've bought tickets for My Fair Lady next Friday, Pete. Keep it free". There were many of these occasions, usually including Julia his daughter, and sometimes the Roborough Gibbs or any of us as he could include in the party. He knew how far I could make a pound go and drove past me down Banbury road once in Aunt Joan's Triumph waving and letting one fly from his hand.

There was Aunt Ella at Quakers Corner just 12 miles in the other direction through Cowley to Benson also within easy cycling distance, but care had to be taken from the Morris Minor cars being road tested on this otherwise quiet lane. Her dog 'Pooh' welcomed a walk and her gypsy caravan in the orchard offered a quiet peaceful retreat for book work, the intention being more frequent than the fact. She had a real character gardener called Belcher whose observations on the weather and the state of things in the soil was rich in information. She always had the latest travel books and was herself a great traveller going off most summers to Europe or as far as Cairo, often in company with 'The Goup' who was also a polio cripple. I walked Pooh one day and made the mistake of playing "Hide and Seek". This frightened her and she ran back home with tail 'tween legs much to Aunt Ella's amusement.

Further afield at Roborough near Plymouth was Uncle Den and Aunt Laire and their four girls Jill, Margy, Rozzie and Penelope, and Tamil the spaniel. They were up at Oxford to see about a course for Jill, staying at The Old Vic in my first term and asked me to spend the Xmas vacation with them, which I shall in part relate later. Again, this was home from home but on an even higher note of hilarity. The jokes and gales of laughter that constantly accompanied these girls and their wonderful parents could not be equalled. Of course their small-holding was attractive to other undergraduate friends like James Duncan and Ottie Bock from South Africa on the basis that keep was given in exchange for work in the small holding. Ottie was a very tall Afrikaaner reading medicine. It was a hot summer and he had been thinning out the overgrown thicket by the raspberry canes. Dear Mrs Sentence came in three days a week to help her Lady Hilaria with the cleaning and kitchen, but she had not yet met Ottie. She was at the sink with her back to the door. In came Ottie stripped to his underpants and bare feet with his axe over his shoulder dripping sweat and thirsty. She turned around screamed and fainted as he said in a soft Afrikaaner accent "May I have a glass of water please, ma'am?". This and other stories are told down the years and still keep Aunt Laire young at 92. Their stories are often told against themselves like the one when Uncle Den was stuck up a ladder cutting the hedge. In later years he could only get up and down this with the aid of a stick but unfortunately while cutting the hedge overlooking the public road the stick dropped out of reach and he was out of earshot from the house. So standing overlooking the hedge he resorted to shouting to passers by "Ahoy there, Ahoy there!" trying to get someone to come near enough to explain his predicament. Word spread that The Colonel had gone soft in the head but after a long half hour he was rescued and able to recount the incident with amusement and punctuated "What, What?" and guffaws of laughter. Poetry and humour kept these two young at heart. I have always been grateful to Uncle Den for giving me copy of 'Other Men's Flowers' by A.P. Wavell. Perhaps he knew him from the war but it is a good anthology, all of it learnt by heart (by Wavell!). Aunt Laire herself is a great poet and has written ballads about her family history the Mount Edgecumbe Estate and Cothele. Even at 90 she wrote a long one for her birthday party gathering. The first two verses:

Ninety years and now I am the last one of the Edgcumbe Clan.  
Quickly I jumped out of bed, the phone is ringing, Rozzie said:  
"Rob and I have had a hunch, we'll take you out for birthday lunch".  
I said, "How lovely, It's a deal". She said "We'll meet you at Cothele,  
We'll find you somewhere good to eat, so mind you're looking nice and neat".  
(My face is passed its sell-by date) "Now ten to one, please don't be late".  
I wonder where we'll go for lunch, and what gave them this sudden hunch?  
I called out "Hurry up" to Zan, for we must do the best we can.

Aunt Jean and Uncle John, Penny and Andy now lived near Reading, a bit too far for a quick visit by push bike. But Penny then about 16 was at school in Oxford and certainly added moments of fun like this one from my diary for Sunday 31 January 1954.

*Lovely cold day again. Was woken up by Penny Whitehead throwing snowballs against my window on the way to church. (The crocodile of girls had left her behind as she gathered up the snow for the next ball and my tousled face stuck through the bars elicited some laughter). Went to chapel. Morning writing letters, James (Duncan) and I watched the skating on Port Meadow - lovely, then had a game of squash. Worked after supper to 10:00 then again to Port Meadow to watch a few people skating by car light. Temp 20F. The Cherwell and Isis are frozen but not yet to walk on. I think this weather is lovely and hope it continues.*

This cold weather froze the puddles at the entrance to the Chemistry school across the road so that every few minutes there would sound a crash of bicycle and a curse as the riders took the bend at their normal speed. Of course bicycles were often regarded as common property in Oxford but having got one that suited it was worth keeping in good condition and locking.

Clearly by this time there was much going for my interest and enjoyment and the big problem was whether with all these family and other distractions I could cram in enough to pass the Prelim exams at the end of the second term. The school of Geography was relatively new to Oxford (founded by Mackinder about 25 years before after some years of pressure from the RGS) and thought to be an easy option for those who came up for sport like Colin Cowdrey. But prelims had to be passed and tutorial essays completed and approved even although great great Uncle William had given 50,000 pounds for the chapel and his sons a similar amount for the great hall and library, even though my grandfather, father, and brothers had been up before me, it was a necessary hurdle or I could go and do lumber jacking in arctic Canada as I threatened to do, if I failed. My tutor, C.G. Smith who had got a first in geography, was not helpful about my wish to be a land surveyor (my chief interest was to make maps of unexplored country). In the first place he said you don't have any useful maths and in the second place none of us can teach it to you unless you are postgraduate and do research in geodesy. I had quite soon discovered by making the acquaintance of Professor Debenham, then the professor of Geography at Cambridge and who had been the geologist on Scott's last expedition, and since founded the Scott Polar Research Institute, that the Cambridge school was much more practical and field-work oriented in its course. However, for a start I was jolly lucky to be where I was and perfectly sympathetic to its founding philosophy which was to provide places for the sons of clergy 'for gentlemen wishing to live economically'. I could agree with that situation whether I had any option or not, but the other statement of policy from the 1865 Sub-Committee for the design of the new college was that the college was NOT intended for 'persons of inferior social position, less cultivated manners, or of attainments and intellect below ordinary level of the University'. These were standards that the bush life

of the Orange and company of Namaqualand Basters had not equipped me for although their manners were far better than many from snob public schools. But I was keen to take up the challenge of 'intellect not below the ordinary level' by somehow finding the time against all the other social and sporting attractions.

My tutor in Ethnology was dear Mr Bradford, just across the road into the Pitt Rivers museum, under the massive chest of the Brontosaurus to the far corner, up a winding staircase and into a small book-lined office with a small gothic slit window. Pieces of totem pole or decorated skin from a Navaho Indian's codpiece and other bits of memorabilia from his collections were hung or perched around his office. He sat behind a jumbled desk with his mind half in Tierra del Fuego wondering how on earth those Indians could survive without clothes, and when he noticed your presence through his pipe smoke would come to attention and ask to be reminded of the subject you were now to read an authoritative essay on since the previous week. If I was lucky, Malcolm Marsden (from Marlborough and waving an elegant cigarette holder) would read his and play for time. It was however a subject I liked, and the more disappointing that I failed the first prelim in it, but was given a second chance (so trapping in northern Canada was put on hold!).

Geology lectures were taken by a lecturer whose mouth movements and lisp imbued helpful onomatopoeia to the stratigraphic or mineralogical terms. Words like 'Argillaceous schists' you felt were wet and sweet as he mouthed them 'Argillashush shishts' and those in the front row would needs take out their hankies. When he described the vast magmatic outflows of the Jurassic period you could easily imagine from his mouth and belched hot breath the wide fissures pouring out the molten rock, I wished I had had his several lectures a year earlier as he brought the landscape of the British Isles to life from the earliest pre-Cambrian days. From his reading list or maybe it was Marjorie Sweeting's I got the book South African Scenery by L.C. King and would spend nostalgic hours over the illustrated photographs of its familiar landforms strongly pulling me back.

I of course enjoyed the History of Exploration as a subject and some of the lectures by C.G. Smith. The rivalry of discovery of the sources of the Nile and the Niger, Cook's amazing discoveries and charting in the Pacific, the evolving map of the world and its imaginative geography where it had not yet been visited like Terra Australis, was all grist to the mill, which I enjoyed, but for the fact that the reading list was long and time was short. I found Blackwell's second-hand shelves most useful and kept on getting books that were not strictly on the list like Waterfalls of the World with its excellent chapter on the Aghrabies among others. Most of us, I think, became Fellow members of the RGS and I joined the Exploration Society. It was attending some talk of a climb in the Himalaya at the Exploration Society at the start of my second year I found myself next to a shortish chap in a tweed jacket with darning in the elbows and old lotus veldschoen shoes who had just returned from Mount Roraima. We identified a common interest in climbing and unusual trips over tea afterwards, and thus began some memorable trips and lifelong friendship with David Wilson<sup>1</sup>. But of these escapades in vacations more later if only for my selfish interest in their recollection.

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<sup>1</sup> Now Lord Wilson of Titlyorn one time Governor of Hong Kong, Vice Chancellor Aberdeen University and Chairman of North of Scotland Hydro Board but at heart a true explorer and mountaineer.

It was useful to have to tackle French and read up some books in French on the geography of France. A routine seemed to develop to work in the morning, or attend lectures or libraries, train or compete in athletics or rugby in the afternoon, attend a tutorial between 5.00 and 6.00, dinner in hall or one of the simpler eating houses like the Stowaway, back in rooms to read or write letters until midnight or so, unless socialising elsewhere. On days when there was no formal training at Iffley or a match, I would run along the Cherwell across the Parks. When it froze I would break the ice at one point for the horses to drink. Athletics training was at the Iffley ground the other side of Magdalen bridge and some 15 minutes bike ride. I practised high jump, javelin, discus and was sometimes roped in to do shotput and polevault. At the university finals I came second in HJ but there was one other chap, Jeffries, who was away at the time so missed a blue against Cambridge but was often in the university team when one or other was absent, and there was usually at least one college match a week in the winter.

*On 23rd Jan 1954. Long day today by coach to Cambridge in Keble athletic team against Pembroke college. Very cold day. Won HJ and discus but Keble lost. Linked up with James Duncan, Mike Russel, Francois Marais, John Arenhold, Mike Hudson (ODs) had drinks and supper. Coach back 12.15 had to climb in.*

Squash was a very good game for exercise which I played frequently with James Duncan and James Kidd myself having to do more of the running as they were both more skilful. In the university athletics cuppers Keble came fourth and I managed to win in the HJ and well in javelin.

It was on the 6th March that I took a coach to Cambridge and met Professor Frank Debenham tho' my diary does not say whether I had any introduction but I feel that Penelope Cook who had a flat in St James, London may have had something to do with it. He was most interesting to talk to and showed me around the Scott Polar Research Institute. We lunched and talked about Scott's last expedition. Had supper at his place and was made welcome by his wife. He was himself first a geologist and second a geographer and was very encouraging about geography as a career and saw no reason why I should not pick up the elements of surveying as he had done. He spoke also on Gino Watkins, Rymill, Chapman and others who had been at Cambridge and learnt arctic travel methods and kayaking from the Eskimos in Greenland. I saw his studio workroom and the things he had on hand and later managed to get some of his books, *The Way to Lhala* (on Livingstone), *Kalahari Sands*, *Antarctica* and *In the Antarctic*. This last brings out the light-hearted side of the expedition better than any other. It is interesting that then 41 years had elapsed since Scott reached the south pole and as I write now 43 years have elapsed since I returned from the Antarctic with FIDS yet the memory of that time is much clearer than many later years as it evidently was with him also.

A week of cramming for prelims followed, much interrupted by Malcolm Marsden who came in late most evenings inebriated and had worked out, so he told me, that Our Lord was not God, two interesting talks on Eskimos and Indian tribes in Brazil and an afternoon biking to see John Mike at Cuddesdon College. I left the bike at Garsington for a puncture repair and walked from there. He had at this time a new BSA motorbike and gave me a lift back to Garsington. I had two days of exams and biked out to the Old Vic for some relaxing gardening in Aunt Joan's herbaceous border.

So began a memorable Easter vacation at Roborough and Mount Edgecumbe joined in part by Uncle Victor, Aunt Joan, Lucia and Christopher. I caught the Riveira Express down sleeping off a late night in London with James seeing the musical 'Guys and Dolls'. Uncle Den was quick to show me the outside tasks he had in mind which was wise planning as five days later, on Rozzies birthday (April fools), Jill, Margy and Rozzie arrived home from which time on it was all games, walks, laughter, canoe rides and dances. I did in fact complete some fencing then there was a reel party at Mount E on Passion Sunday; the little Ford broke down at Torpoint ferry and I had to walk back and collect the Walsey so we did not get back until 1.00 am. Next day Jill, Margy and I took a walk across the Tavi river and were cut off by the tide necessitating borrowing a dory dingy to get back, spent ages looking for the car key eventually found with shouts of glee by Jill in her skirt hem and so missed a party at 6.00 with John Dougan in Plymouth. So the pace and fun continued through Easter. Four days back in Oxford, when I meant to do some work to retake the one paper, was much taken up with canoe trips up the river, a play and the film 'Doctor in the House' with Uncle V Aunt Joan and Julia.

Reading again my diary for the summer term of that first year it was largely play and little work in the small hours, much time on the river, a great deal of athletics, matches for the Centipedes and the college besides squash and tennis for fun. The highlight of the term was the Keble summer ball on Friday 28th May at which Jill was my partner and we had been having hilarious fun together since her arrival on the Monday, canoeing up the Cherwell, spending a day in London trying to get a Canadian visa for me and laughing like mad at a Danny Kaye show. There was no time for much sleep over that weekend.

*Friday! Today merged into tomorrow with no sleep. Jill came with Aunt Joan to Keble at 3.30. It was raining steadily so we didn't watch the Eights as planned but had tea with JM and James at Ellistons. Visited James' rooms where I borrowed a bow tie and left Jill at the Hamiltons to get ready for the dance meeting again at the Regency restaurant at 8.30 with Den and Rachel. Had a lovely meal and, still raining, went across to the dance at Keble. It was all wonderful with drinks in my rooms and good dance tunes. Time flew and soon it was 3.00 am when Den and Rachel left for 141. It had now cleared up so Jill and I walked to Magdalen but could not get a punt so climbed into the parks and watched the dawn breaking and heard the dawn chorus. At 7.00 am I took her back to Holywell (Uncle V's rooms) and I climbed back into Keble. I was woken by Bolla (Jill) at 11.00. Lunched sleepy-eyed. I had athletics against London Univ. Jill returned to Old Vic and slept 4.00pm to 10.00 am Sunday. I went to the 08.00 at St Giles and biked out to the Old Vic by 10.30. We found the energy for a country walk before lunch. Helped uncle V cart manure in the afternoon. Had supper in the kitchen and a lazy 2 hours in front of fire in the drawing room. Left on the bike at 11.00 back to Keble and bed by 01.00.*

Perhaps not surprisingly my preparation for an essay on the Mediterranean that morning was hard going. I quite forgot a lunch appointment with Father Le Mesurier who dropped in for a sherry at 6.00. At 7.00 I had a college athletic match against Oxford City and perhaps boosted by alcohol won all three field events.

Oxford athletics had been given a boost earlier this term when Roger Bannister beat the 4 minute mile record on Thursday 6th May. It was the OUAC vs the AAA. Derek Johnson (who

had the UK 440 record) paced him for the quarter mile, Donald Gorrie<sup>2</sup> (an Edinburgh Councillor I would later meet from time to time) for the half mile and Chris Chattaway (who later helped found the John Muir Trust) for the 3rd lap. The crowd were anticipating a world record and went wild in support over the last lap.

Another significant event was on the 16th June, a Wednesday and full moon when JM and Margaret came and had tea in my rooms. I guessed that they had become engaged. We paged through the Atlas as to where to go and celebrated with supper at The Town and Gown.

James Duncan and I were planning a trip to Canada this summer vacation. It was thanks to Den who knew one Dr John Evans, a Canadian at Univ, that we were able to get someone to vouch for us to get a visa. Indeed as it turned out the Evans family gave us great hospitality in Toronto.

Luckily I had a couple of relaxing days at the end of term at Quakers, where Mrs Hubbard looked after me for meals as Aunt Ella had gone to Egypt. I was able to do some reading for the failed Ethnology paper which I wrote again on midsummers day. It was time after this first year of dreaming spires and luxurious hospitality to have a taste of the labouring world (and make some dreams come true). So it was that James and I caught a charter flight to Toronto to work our passage around Canada and the States.

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<sup>2</sup> He also had a good voice and sang on coach journeys to away matches accompanied by O'Sullivan's guitar, "Passengers will please refrain from urinating while the train is waiting in the station, yes we pray. Workmen working underneath will catch it in the eyes and teeth and they don't like it any more than we"



## A Canadian Vacation

On the 27th June 1954 James Duncan and I were aboard a DC-4 on a charter flight to New York organised through the National Union of Students office. It was to be a working vacation to pay for the flight and a trip to the west coast tho' we still had to find a job. We were in high spirits making jokes and laughing at everyone and ourselves particularly my crewcut which made me look American. This was for me and perhaps for James the first flight we had done which made it a particular venture. Our route took us over the western isles of Scotland to Iceland in 6 hours. Although night it was light there as we came in low with views of a rugged coastline and desolate interior. There was time for a leg stretch in the nippy air which reminded me of the air in Basutoland - cool and bracing. We came down again at Goose bay in Labrador for a meal and asked the waiter for moose steak on the tender side. We arrived at Idlewild airport at midday next day and took the coach into New York. The YMCA put us up at 1.25 \$ each for the night but first, having left our rucsacs, we had to explore Times Square and get into a typical dive where a negro jazz band were giving a loud New Orleans show. James was spell bound by the trumpeting (which he had tried to master in his college rooms under his bedclothes with a mute stuck into the throat). Outside the city was a roar and blaze of lights too.

Next morning we started on our travels with a coach to get out of the city limits and then started hitching towards Toronto in Canada. We got four lifts, a business man, a clergyman a farmer, and an old retired yankee engineer who kindly took us out of his way to La Fayette where we camped on the edge of a wheat field made a fire and had hot chocolate.

Next morning, waking in the dewy grass we packed and were on the road by 07.15, a nice clear morning although I felt frowsty. Again we had interesting lifts - to Buffalo where we crossed the border walking a mile over the Peace Bridge and getting through the customs with some reluctance on their part. A pleasant Californian took us to see Niagara. It was a grand spectacle of a curtain fall but had lost its wilderness with railings and restaurant viewpoints. Then one good lift took us right through to Toronto where we found the YMCA this time at 2\$ a night. Toronto gave the impression of a huge new town of 1 million people all buildings of modern glass and concrete and the underground recently opened. It was a day full of interesting impressions not recorded. After a canteen meal which broke a fast since yesterday's breakfast we had a good long sleep.

We had the address of Watson Evans in Rosedale, a suburb, so leaving our rucsacs we caught a tube to this residential district and found their luxurious house. He and his wife Jean were charming and welcoming. They had three girls of 7 and 5 named Elizabeth and Jean and a recent arrival of 3 weeks. In spite of the new born their attic was offered as a base and Watson said he would talk to a contact about a labouring job. Today was Dominion day (1st July) a public holiday. We sunbathed in the garden and watched TV. Watson gave us lunch next day in the modern skyscraper building in which was his office. We visited the Employment Office to see about vacancies and in the evening when Watson got home he said that the company Innis Van Austen would employ us on construction at \$1.25 an hour for a 9-10 hour day. It seemed too good to be true. We looked at an alternative on a farm outside Toronto offering \$100 a month which would have been nice as it was an attractive place with a river running through it, which we swam in, but we chose the more lucrative road labouring job to start on the Monday.

It was Sunday the 4th July. We took Watson's recommendation and went to the 11.00 at St Paul's church on Bloor street which with sermon went on to 12.45. We got to know the Rector better later as on one Sunday he preached about his early years in the Yukon saying what a tough life it was and how for his own safety he had to put quite a different meaning to the 6th and 7th commandments because sitting in the front row was an Indian Chief who was known to have murdered a colleague for his wife who now sat beside him.

The alarm was set for 05.00 and we ran down to get the tube train and report for work. The foreman, a hunchback Italian and bronzed as an olive, nodded our presence and gave us each a signal flag to direct traffic. The first day went by slowly without much effort standing in the middle of the road coordinating the traffic flow and desperately trying to keep attention on this dull job. On the way back we experienced our first modern supermarket for supplies and had a meal. Not used to these new hours we slept through the alarm next day and rushed on empty stomachs to get to work. We were now getting broken in and put on the burner, shovelling in intense heat the molten tar off the surface behind the infernal machine and barrow after barrow onto a heap beside the road. This day got us pretty dead beat, but I expected we would soon toughen up which we did, as getting to bed earlier and having boiled eggs and cocoa next morning we worked more easily on the burners conserving energy. On the look-out to conserve funds we found a cheaper restaurant giving a meal at \$0.60. The evenings were long and light and we put in time watering and digging the garden. Watson had made the attic room beautifully tidy with books galore and wireless. They were going on holiday to leave us looking after the house.

As the days passed it grew hotter (up to 95F) and shovelling road material in the gang of Italians we both grew fitter and also more observant, keeping an eye on the foreman to see if you dared lean on your shovel for a restful moment. The pay was a new experience. We earned about \$60 a week and kept our expenses down to essentials. Labourers in Canada were driving to work in nearly new cars. It was a land of opportunity alright. There were many opportunities for hard-working labourers of various nationalities. We had some language problem with our fellow workers but got to know them. One of them called Mark brought photos to work to show us his family and village in the Italian mountains. He was doing well and saving and would soon bring them out. He was fluent in French and rusty in English so between lorry loads we would try to improve his English and our French besides learn the odd Italian word. All the gang were individual characters. we got on well with and they with us. Not everyone came out alright. We met a chap called Cordingley at the Ranch House restaurant one evening. He had been up at Magdalen during the war and taken up bee-keeping. Several times we shared meals. My diary does not record how he hit hard times but on our last meal on the 11th August he was very depressed about the prospects of returning to England with no house, job or money with his wife and 3 children. We had registered at the local library and our mail came in good supply to the Poste Restante with frequent letters from Liza, Jill, Margy, Dave and Mum and Dad. My parents and Bid set sail from Cape Town to take up a new home in Chester as Dad, after what must have been a difficult year of decision-making, had accepted to be the Dean of Chester. I missed JM and Margaret's wedding at Chesterton also.

The USA required a formal visa application and an interview for our planned month of travels. This was accomplished at the cost of some work time as was an answer to an advert in the paper offering our services to help drive a car across Canada. We went to see Mr and Mrs

Blanchard on the last day of August. They were an old couple she from Folkestone driving out to Banff the next week. We made an agreement cutting their suggested contribution of \$25 each down to \$15 on the basis we would do the majority of the driving. We neglected to tell them that we had no experience of left hand driving and were anxiously aware of the enormous width of these American cars compared to James' Austin 7! Before we left we heard that the return charter flight to UK was cancelled. James booked a passage from NY on the QE2 on the 29th September for \$165 but I left my ship booking open hoping to get back earlier to have a few days at home before term. I worked on to the day before leaving Toronto while James took the last week off to do some reading. We had a sad farewell to Mark and Frank the old hunchback knowing we would not see them again. With Mark we had a beer and saw an Italian film as a gesture. We also took Watson out to our 'Ranch House Club' and scorning the normal chips budget meal ordered rare steaks. We bought him La Traviata as a farewell gift. Jean and the children were away this last week. We sat up late talking and when we went to bed I could not sleep until 05.00 when we crept out getting some breakfast at a cafe on the way to the Blanchard's place.

We left with the Blanchards at 06.45. It was a strange day getting used to the car and driving. We both took turns and familiarised with the LH drive. It was a 1951 Chev all working except the self starter. We did 420 miles towards Sous St Maris stopping at overnight cabins beside a pleasant lake where I had a good walk. Blanchard didn't say a word through supper. We started off next morning in good time but on the wrong road and various other things held us up. But we had the starter repaired at the Mackinac ferry which crosses the straits of the same name - 8 miles of water separating lake Michigan from lake Huron. Here we changed the wheel with a puncture and had it repaired also which took an hour as the patch would not take first time. We passed through pretty wooded Michigan country dotted with lakes to overnight cabins at Iron Mountain with a small hill nearby for a walk and a view. On the 5th next day we progressed 610 miles through attractive Michigan Wisconsin country flattening out to the prairies at Devils Lake. It was interesting crossing the Mississippi as a young river near its source and seeing great wheat, corn, sunflower and sugarbeat fields. It was country like the OFS of South Africa but more productive and richer soils. Another long day of 560 miles took us into Montana only about 150 miles from the Canadian border the country changing from flat grass lands to rolling cattle country still with numerous lakelets and much small wildlife. We crossed the Missouri river where it had 4000 miles to run to its mouth and was bigger than its Mississippi twin of yesterday.

Wednesday 8th September.

*I am sitting having a small lunch beside a delightful mountain stream with at least four snow-capped peaks all around. Yesterday evening we arrived to see the Rockies for the first time but today, on my own in the cold air and with climbing and walking I am really sensing them for the first time. I thought I might be able to get to the top of Cascade (10,000') which dominates Banff but it became too tricky with loose rock and a doubtful way up so I returned to the valley where I am having a late lunch. It is all so pretty and so beautiful I am hoping that my photos will come out. We arrived last evening in the rain and parted with the Blanchards. J and I camping in the nice camp where we will spend tonight as well. I have not made any plans for the next 2 weeks but as the days pass by something will work out<sup>3</sup>. This river I am sitting by flows rapidly and rushes over a small shoot. It is melt water and cold. I would love Dave to be*

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<sup>3</sup> I had to get a ship from NY by the 25th.

here now to see it and appreciate it better than I can. Banff is a large village much like I imagine a Swiss village. It is 4500' up and fairly chilly sleeping out at night. The evening - The day turned out a great success after all. I walked from the river for three miles up to the chair lift that runs up to a view point half way up a mountain called Norquay (8250'). I had no intention of climbing it but thought I would walk up to the view point at around 6500'. I was pretty tired but thinking I would just climb a bit higher to get away from the trippers with cameras I found myself within reach of the summit. I had to abandon my pack as I was now on moderate rock and was also very fagged. In another half hour I was at the top and rewarded with a magnificent view of all four valleys one at each corner of the compass and snow peaks dominating everything. I took a delayed action photo and started back to find my pack and return. Climbing alone is not a good thing and perhaps not wise but there is no doubt about it that every little thing is appreciated much more. It is an indescribable feeling of satisfaction to stand on top of a peak all alone. Now, after an excellent supper I am feeling grand and surprised that I'm not more 'gone in' and stiff as I haven't climbed for ages and the last few days have been sitting in the car. Banff is a minute area of the Rockies and I'm sure huge stretches are virtually untouched with many virgin peaks. James spent the afternoon swimming in the hot sulphur springs and is feeling 'terrific' too. I think we will stay here tomorrow and perhaps I will climb Rundell (9500') which is just asking to be climbed as it crouches across the campsite.

Thursday 9th September

I left after breakfast rather stiff from yesterday, crossed the Bow river at the village bridge and saw the Bow Falls about 25' high but pretty on the way to the mountain. A track zig-zagged up for a part of the slogging stretch to about 7000'. It then petered out in scree slopes below a sheer cliff of about 300'. There were I later discovered four gullies altogether that ran up into the cliff face. I tried the first three in turn and at last got up the third. The proper route lay up the fourth as I discovered on the way down. When I had got out of the gully a long steep semi scree slope led towards the summit. I became exhausted half way and stopped for some food. What I thought was the top proved to be a false summit and the highest point was linked up with this beacon by an impossible traverse, a razor edge ridge of treacherous broken rock. I took many photos all around. It must be the best view I have ever seen. It is the second highest peak in this area so I could see peak after peak stretching away. The Banff side of the mountain falls sheer for 3000' before reaching the pine slopes. I wasted a good hour trying to find a way down on the extreme West of the upper scree slope. I had to retrace steps to the gullies and found an easier way down the precipice in the fourth gully that I hadn't tried coming up. Relieved to have got down that part I dawdled and sun-bathed for quite a while in the lovely warm catchment of sun provided by the arena of rock above. I enjoyed the slog down through the pine forest and saw a lot of small wildlife, a beaver and foxes tail. Just to finish off a lovely day I came across a mother and daughter in a dejected state beside the path. The mother had sprained her ankle badly and for the past six hours they had been struggling to get down and were both gone in. I can't imagine why the girl had not walked down and fetched a horse for the woman. However, I piggy-backed her down to the road which luckily wasn't too far and we then walked to Banff for a taxi. It has been a very long day physically but was beautiful. James went down to the village for supper but I wasn't budging so finished off some soup in which I mixed some oddments of bread and milk and tasted jolly good. I think the Rockies must be practically unequalled for beauty.

*Friday 10th September*

*It is quite chilly in the mornings so we were up as soon as it was light. Dawdled over breakfast then packed and walked through Banff to the main road. We got a lift with a zoology teacher from Chicago through to Lake Louise. The camp site is about a mile from the lake where the 'Chateau'? a huge hotel overlooks the entire length of it. The water is an unbelievable emerald blue from the glacier melt that feeds it. Mount Victoria at the head of the lake rises to 11000' and facing North three glaciers stretch down to 7000'. We walked up the lake and onto the foot of the ice in the company of an English lecturer who read 'Greats' at Oxford. I was very interested seeing the glaciological processes of erosion and the silting up of the lake etc. There were large moraines running up the path of the retreating glacier. On the way back we saw a she bear and two cubs crossing the road so we cut through the bush and intercepted them. I think I got a good photo as they approached and walked past within a few feet. In the evening we ate in the cafeteria not far from the site. James bought a colour photograph of lake Louise and I bought and sent Dave a minute birch-bark canoe as a late birthday present. We wisely decided to sleep under cover of the kitchen roof as it rained. We slept on the tables and must have looked a sight when a young couple walked in to make breakfast in the morning. We watched them eat hungrily as we had run out of groceries. Later we bought some at a small store had a late breakfast and then set out to walk to the Moraine Lake and the valley of ten peaks 8 miles away. On the way I decided to follow up a creek a little way which turned out most beautiful opening into a clearing with a grand view of Mount Temple - 11000'. I came back the same way and struck the path to Moraine Lake. It was a good walk with delightful view of the Ten Peaks all of them over 10000' and all snow covered. Several glaciers and their streams ran into this delightful emerald blue lake which itself is dammed up by a moraine left thousands of years ago I imagine. I started to walk back along the road but was picked up by a nice young Canadian couple from Calgary. There is a chance that they will be going on to Radium tomorrow. This is on my route to Spokane. Time is now short so I must leave tomorrow hitching on my way back to New York. (James had more time and planned to hitch down the west coast and through Colorado). I could spend ages here but even this short time has been worth months of uninspired living.*

*Today I noticed particularly lots of species of beautiful flowers but have not a clue what their names are. I saw three deer also and was disturbed by a large black bear crossing the road.*

*Sunday 12th September*

*The nice Canadian couple offered to take me as far as Radium Springs so I parted company with James to see him again in Oxford and left the Rockies. I lunched with them overlooking Lake Windermere, about 80 miles from lake Louise. There they left me. I had three short rides with two German couples and a Canadian and was then picked up a charming Dutch/English family who spoke French in the family as well. She was Irish and he Dutch and their three children under seven. They had me to supper and to stay the night, really good of them. He is a geologist on the mine at Kimberley. Their children are trilingual and delightfully happy and good natured.*

*Mnr Sevensma showed me around the mine in the morning and then put me on the road. I had an interesting lift with an English girl doing physiotherapy in Vancouver who took me to Cransbrook. A Vancouver student in forestry took me onto the border at Eastgate. The Canadian official addressed me in Afrikaans and we got on well. He had lived in Cape Town for four years and gave me a couple of introductions to flying officers at Abingdon near Oxford where he was stationed. The US officials let me through without any trouble and I then waited*

*a while for a lift. A local took me to the Koutenaai River bridge and then I was picked up by a nice American who worked at a fish hatchery 80 miles on the road. He immediately suggested I stay the night and meet his English wife. I have never been so spoiled and fed and looked after. His name was Bud and hers Dennise Batchelder. He had been in the US navy and met her in the war at Southampton. He is quiet good natured but I have seldom met such an excitable and talkative person as she. She talked until midnight non stop. It was a very pretty valley where they lived. I was interested in the fish hatchery from which they stock the rivers with various species of trout. She was obviously homesick for England and had been brought up in a sheltered home. After a huge breakfast next morning she took me to the edge of Clark Fork four miles from Thompson's Falls.*

*I waited about four hours until a lumberman picked me up as far as Missoula. He reminded me of Scott having a problem with drink and doing various odd jobs like cowboy and lumber work which never lasted long but 'hail-fellow' and hearty. I could get no further lift so put up in a cheap tourist house for \$1.50. Another lumberman took me on some 50 miles to Drummond telling me about his stock-car racing hobby. After a longish wait a very nice fellow from Seattle drew up and said he was going right through to Minnesota 1200 miles. He was good company and informative on the country we were going through. I was tempted to make more distance with him but wanted to see Yellowstone Park so got off at Livingstone and after a long wait walked five miles to the edge of the Yellowstone river and camped on its bank in a beautiful spot watching trout or salmon jumping in the shale rapid a few yards from where I slept.*

*Yellowstone is only 50 miles but I could not get a lift next day then on Friday 17th a Texaco lorry driver took me to Gardiner at the entrance to the park where he changed vehicles and in the course of his rounds took me on an informative tour. From my diary - *The road to the Park goes through Yankee Jim's Canyon where the Yellowstone rushed through rocky gorges. We proceeded upstream to Canyon where the headwaters plunge over high falls into this canyon of sandstone, clay and sulphur rock. I behaved like a typical tourist. The country is incredibly beautiful although contrasting with the beauty of the Rockies. Everywhere one sees strange phenomena, geysers and hot springs, mountains of geyserite and weird rock formations. The colours too are so beautiful in the rocks and trees turning to autumn and the lakes and vleis a dark blue. We saw several bears, antelope, elk and wildfowl. Texaco, as I called him, knew every little thing of interest so was a wonderful guide<sup>4</sup>. I had intended staying on a couple of days and leaving from the East exit. but I had trouble with my knee - some infection and could hardly walk so I decided to return with him to Livingstone. We drove over a pass 8500' high on the way back to Gardiner where again we changed vehicles back to the tanker.**

*At Livingstone I got a room for the night at \$1.50 and phoned a doctor who suggested I call in the morning. I hobbled to him and for \$3.00 he lanced it cleaned it up and gave me a penicillin injection. Feeling less painful I walked out of town two miles. An insurance traveller James*

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<sup>4</sup> This National Park and others owe their existence and protection to John Muir born in Dunbar in 1838. I later became a member of the John Muir Trust and read his "Wilderness Journeys" published by Canongate Classics. His fervent description of the Yellowstone cannot be bettered: July 15 1869... Never before had I seen so glorious a landscape, so boundless an influence of sublime mountain beauty. The most extravagant description I might give of this view to anyone who has not seen similar landscapes with his own eyes would not so much as hint its grandeur and the spiritual glow that covered it I shouted and gesticulated in a wild burst of ecstasy...

*Calveri took me 150 miles to Billings, a very pleasant man who gave me his card. He was from Butte, Montana. Again I had good luck with a Jack of-all-trades picking me up to Miles City another 150 miles where I camped on the edge of town with permission from a rather gruff farmer. I was disturbed by two horses and a thunderstorm some 20 miles off giving a good display of lightning. Up early on the road but no lifts were forthcoming so I walked back into town which was celebrating an annual fancy dress convention. I was preparing to catch a bus to St Paul leaving at 5.00 pm and tried once again for a lift after a haircut. A lone driver pulled up and shouted "Where you going Bud?" to which I shouted "New York" and he said 'Hop in you can help me drive to Pipestones, Minnesota". We drove all night non-stop except to change at the wheel and got there at 04.00 in the morning. He had been driving since the night before so I did the major turn at the wheel. I slept on in the car, a spacious Oldsmobile, and then joined his family for breakfast all seven children under 22 years old and all like their father heavyweights on a diet of starch bread and doughnuts. He was a scraper driver 1100 miles away in Shelby and returned home to his 4-roomed house and family when he could. So I was on the road again by mid morning of Sunday 19th and had lunch with a Methodist minister and his wife, one of several short lifts across Minnesota with its corn and bean fields. I hoped to avoid being dragged into Chicago city.*

*On the Monday I did about 200 miles reaching a small place east of Prairie du Chien where I walked two miles over the bridges crossing the Mississippi. Looking down I watched turtles swimming around a sandbank. I slept that night in a luxurious hotel with water, fan and heater all laid on. On the Tuesday I reached Southbend quite a large city beyond Chicago which we skirted to the south side and here put up at the YMCA. This had a library and I found some good stories about Bull-terriers I could relate to. A Greek student going to Cleveland gave me a lift for 250 miles. Then a local photographer from Cleveland towards the Pennsylvania turnpike road. He introduced me to a friend of his called James Reese of 1018 South Second street, Elwood City, PA., who as a result of a terrible electrocution accident in 1919 had 'lost' his face; that is to say he had a major skin graft over the features but still had the use of mouth, holes for nose and eyes. You read his expression from the tone of his voice. His attitude to life still sounded positive.*

*A trucker, ignoring the rules, gave me a lift in his 40-tonner travelling on the turnpike to Boston through the night. After a shave and brush up at a rest house I was lucky to get a man from Miami Florida going through to New York via Philadelphia and the New Jersey turnpike. I had never seen such super highways before (The M1 in UK had yet to be opened but even then it was half the size of these 6-lane highways). You paid 1 cent/mile toll. There was a slow speed limit! Approaching Manhattan from the south which drove through the Lincoln tunnel under the Hudson river and straight up to the Empire State building where I thanked this my last lift provider.*

It had taken 12 days to cross the country from the Rockies and I felt that I was getting to know the makeup of the variety of energetic and mostly hospitable people of the northern States.

I had \$12 left from the \$65 Toronto earnings and put up at the YMCA for \$2.40 a room. I cleaned up and 'phoned Mrs Nebolsina. She asked me around to supper and then I took her daughter Kathleen to see 'The Malta Story' which was much appreciated. Next day an invitation to lunch followed and with some contact from Christ Church Oxford we toured the Central Park Museum, Rockefeller Centre and the Empire State. From the top the antlike mass of people in the streets below hardly existed. Had supper in the YMCA with a doctor from

Kenya up at Oxford and who knew Den, but whose name I did not record. Luckily I had a ticket on board the Isle de France sailing the next morning because I was now quite out of funds except for 2 cents.

My diary ends with that information but the voyage was from recollection fun and relaxing lasting just four days. It was a maiden voyage of this ship so all guest were treated with special courtesy and the French cuisine left nothing to be desired. We docked in Liverpool only 20 miles or so from Chester where Dad was now installed as the new Dean and Mum was doing her bravest best with the huge terraced Deanery premises in Abbey Street to make it a family home. There was much to catch up with, Bid was there and I think Mary. I had just a few days helping decorate rooms before going up in a fresh attempt to study at Keble. In fact I had now moved out of college to rooms in North Oxford so there was less feeling of incarceration and one could enjoy more the dinners in Hall which were compulsory on one or two evenings a week.



## Some Small Adventures from Oxford

The next two years at Oxford were much taken up with planning what we called 'trips' and exploring Scotland and parts of Europe. During that Michaelmas term back in Oxford James Duncan and I had both acquired independent motorised transport; he an old Austin 7 with a canvas hood top and I had used up much of my buttery account to get an old Ariel 500cc single cylinder from a motorbike shop near Oxford station. I was not thinking of giving up bicycling but more the scope that this machine gave to visits to London or home to Chester. It cost something like 20 pounds and I often think the salesman saw me for a gullible buyer because the clutch frequently needed stripping to clean oil off the plates.

I had this bike before James bought his Austin 7 as I remember a Saturday afternoon trip up to London to see a show with him as pillion passenger. But it was a freezing foggy evening in November with visibility down to a few yards and the road was so icy that you had to slide shoes along the surface to keep the bike upright. We made slow progress and had to put up in a pub about half way. It was the first of many cold rides wearing a sheepskin lined leather jacket, windproof trousers and a balaclava helmet. After a couple of hours on the bike in winter, circulation had to be restored by vigorous arm swings or getting into a steamy transport cafe. At the end of term I proudly showed Mum and Dad this machine on the first of many journeys up to Chester via the A5 and the A49, had four days at home before returning to Oxford on the 9th December to find James for the trip we planned to France in his A7. The roads were frozen in Shropshire but quite empty and I reached Oxford at 1.30 pm. He was not in college so I went out to the Old Vic for the night.

### Paris and the Alps in a reluctant Austin 7

Next day we met up, took Elizabeth, a friend of James' to coffee, spent time trying to sort the car lighting problem and ignition (wires had to be twisted together while cranking the handle) and reached Dover at 10.00 pm. There was a late ferry at 11.30 to Dunkirk for 8 pounds return. We drove off at 05.00 in the morning into deserted Normandy countryside. We had neglected to fill the tank before leaving Dover so when it showed empty we took the precaution of stopping at a pump somewhere a bit industrial and watching for two hours the French labourers cycling off to work with their lunch tins, until the pump attendant showed up chewing garlic with a bunch of keys. Late that day after dark the car faltering we entered Paris and sought directions from the Gendarmes for James' colleague Peter De Roos (who was also up at Univ and son of the Dutch Cultural Ambassador). No one was at home when we did find the address but it was journey's end as far as the A7 was concerned. What with French cobbles and the other side of the road enough was enough. Smoke poured out of the engine it 'gave up the ghost'. She had never heard this language before either. We abandoned her for a brief snack at a restaurant and then the De Roos had returned and welcomed us with champagne as if such British inventions reaching Paris from Oxford deserved some special celebration. They recommended a local 'pension' for us where we checked in and then caught a metro into the city centre returning pretty dazed from lack of sleep at 2.00 next morning. Peter De Roos invited us to an excellent and cultural lunch with his people which fortified us to unravel the car wiring problem, but we failed in that and spent the late afternoon walking

around the main sites, the Eiffel Tower and the Notre Dame. We pushed the car into the De Roos garden next morning and caught the 11.30 train to Geneva in search of some skiing.

A bus ride brought us to Menere 60 kms from Geneva and well up in the snows on the side of Mont Blanc. The morning appreciation of the scene was worth every franc so far paid. It was a lovely atmosphere of virgin slopes, snowclad forest and alpine ridges above everything. Our finances were well depleted with the hire of skis so to budget a few days here we cut our food expenses down to 4 francs a day between us, enough for a bottle of wine, a long baguette of bread and a half kilo of cheese.

James must have had a previous ski holiday because I noted that he gave me an initial lesson. The art was by no means mastered but it was a start to a skill and sport which gave me enormous pleasure in the Antarctic or in winter weather in Scotland,

When the diary just ends inconclusively it is indicative that life was being lived to the brim. The burnt out wires in the car must have been connected alright or she knew it was the start of the return journey. I can only remember the sight of it lifted off the boat at Dover by a hoist with its wheels, relieved of any weight, hanging out sideways and a clonking sound of bottles of wine on the back seat jostling one another, which we hoped the customs would not hear. Travelling back towards its home town the engine purred beautifully. This car was a very good example of a machine acquiring a mind of its own and not just the sum of its parts. In other words if it did not fire when you cranked the handle first time but kicked it as well, nothing would make it cooperate. But if you polished the radiator cap and spoke kindly, then cranked the handle, you probably got full cooperation on all four cylinders.

## Architectural Challenges

Following that meeting with David Wilson at an Exploration Club talk we soon put our common interest in challenging steep facades to the test. There was not much near Oxford (although he had the greater interest for short sharp crags and went up to the Gritstone Crags on some occasions) but we sometimes turned our attention to some of the local building fabric. Some ascents were quite spontaneous and commenced with a speculative enquiry like "I wonder whether that drain-pipe junction would lead to a straddle across to that window ledge and then a direct up to that gargoyle?" "Could be, I could belay you from there and with your reach you might put a top rope over the gargoyle". No sooner suggested than with furtive looks around and a spit on the hands and we were putting theory to the test. One such ascent with a gargoyle handhold onto the roof parapet of the west facade of Liddon Quod caused more adrenalin than intended, as when I reached for the gargoyle and started to raise myself beside it there was a lurch as it teetered forward. I had most of my weight on my other hand and was able to steady the carved masonry with the grasping hand while uttering some cautionary sound to David to alert him to the piece of grinning ghoulish fabric so nearly dislodged above him. I fear that I had little thought for my ancestors' benefaction and the undue damage we were doing to prove our climbing skills, but we were aware that repair was very necessary and managed to reinstate the gargoyle with cement before its absence from the roof skyline was noticed. Martyr's memorial was a common ascent by others with a wealth of ornate holds. The Radcliffe Camera offers chimneys between pillars up to a stone parapet overhang before a terrace and the copper dome. One unfortunate whom I did not

know, and many would say foolhardy undergraduate, came off on the overhang attempting a solo and lost his life on the flagstones below.

## Cairngorms

David's love of hills was borne in his native Scotland and outings from school at Glenalmond. An Easter trip to the Cairngorms was soon planned as he reeled off gaelic names like Garre Corrie and Corrie Sphutan Jerrig, whose phonetic spellings bore little resemblance to their gaelic spellings scribbled down on a sheet of paper. We would meet at the Corrou Bothy. I could collect a key to the Derry Lodge gate at Inverdrue and so get the bike to the hunting lodge. "The keeper is Bob Scott who uses a pony and sledge in the winter and should remember me. Corrou is about an hour and a half up the Lairrig". It sounded good stuff and what about an ice axe? His old housemaster would lend one "if you could go via Glenalmond". So the plan was made. At this time David had no motorbike and planned to walk from Braemar where a bus would drop him. I travelled via home and relished the journey north beyond The Lakes into country I was seeing for the first time. The bike must have gone well and the roads were delightfully open as I crossed the old bridge at Stirling, found my way to Glenalmond College and collected an ice axe and a rope, reached the market town of Perth for a meal after dark then crossed the Tay and took the lovely tree lined road past Meiklour hedge through Kirriemuir and up Glenshee above the tree line. David had told me about 'The Devil's Elbow' and its hairpins. I reached it about midnight already cold from hours of sitting and it was below freezing up here but the night was fine so spread the bag out on some heather and zipped the outer cover tight, soon getting warm enough to sleep.

The key, the gate, the track, Bob Scott and the lodge were all as described only the broad scots accent was new and welcoming. "Aye, weel ye ken the snaw is still lying but ye'll see the rawd t' Corrou bothy roond the ben and will be there the noon". In answer to my question "Nae, I sicht naebody up the Lairrig today ken". With his beard, blue eyes and weather-worn face and hands, wearing an old kilt and brogues he was a part of the Highland hills and you could visualise the hours of time he spent stalking deer, cutting up peat and Scots pine windfalls and maintaining the lodge for his laird. Highland ponies were grazing and some deer down by the burn, it was crisp and lovely as I followed the path here and there marked by a cairn around the slopes of Cairgorm and into the Lairig Gru where the view opened to show Devil's Peak, Cairn Toul and Briareach on the west side all covered in snow and sombre screes on the east side disappearing under snow and into mist up the higher slopes of Ben McDui. It was new kind of country and all the more interesting for its open upland appearance, the rocks, heather, chattering burns and scots pines as far as Inverlui; but beyond that no tree larger than a blaeberry bush. The bothy tho' well camouflaged with its moss- stained walls and rusty tin roof was evident close by the main burn and below the gully that ran up to the col between Devils Point and Cairn Toul. There was nothing but a fireplace and heather on the floor; but it was shelter and drew you in like a magnet. You took your chance on who you would find already occupying the room but this time it was empty. I lost little time waiting around and walked up Devil's Point which commanded a good view of the approach path. A lone figure strode over the bridge as I came slithering down the talus slope. It was David wearing an old anorak much soaked in linseed oil, tweed breeks and thick wool stockings, looking much at home and dead keen to show me his favourite haunts. But first, what about

a good fire. The roots of the old Caledonian forest lie half hidden by peat hags since they were cut down for the charcoal burning and smelting industry of the last century and before. We used the ice axes and gathered bundles of root wood as much as we could carry. That evening by fire and candle light we planned routes up ridges and corries.

So we shared an energetic few days of glorious spring weather on this sub arctic landscape. The snow on the plateau was hard and shaped into sastrugi by the winds; cornices hung over the corrie edges and the gullies were packed with ice and hard snow. We climbed the main four summits based on Corrou and also explored some rock routes up the headwall of Braeriach corrie. No detailed guide had yet been written as it had for Snowdonia and The Lakes. Steep exposed buttresses were only to be found in a few of the corries. Its main attraction was for walking and ice climbing in this remnant of arctic landscape. When up on the plateau no guiding features were visible and it was exposed at 4000' with mist prevalent, so care was needed to traverse it on a compass bearing. We dropped over to the Shelter Stone by Loch Arne for certainly one less comfortable night than Corrou. It was a natural shelter with some stone wall blocking a side gap. David and I were well matched for ability over rough ground although he had the edge on the upslopes I could usually keep up running down the hills. I never knew him dawdle even when the prospect ahead was asking for time to admire, if it was downslope he got into top gear and leant rocks and scree like a chase in The Thirtynine Steps exalting in the splendour of the hills. Some years later he was to be a famous uncaught Hare in the Trevelyan Hunt<sup>5</sup>. We found a common chord in appreciation of the hills and this semi wilderness. At the time I had lyrics out of Iolanthe on the brain from a record recently bought at Oxford and would sing these to myself. No wonder he ran so fast to get out of earshot! But there were many more walks and climbs down the years and a good trip to Lapland later in this chapter. Indicative of our friendship and attachment to this area was that twenty years later we met again at Corrou but this time I was accompanied by our youngest son, James, then aged seven (and David's godson) and he and Natasha his wife had Peter (my godson) and Andrew his younger brother. James and I had come down Glen Guisichan from Speyside and they had come up from Deeside. We had a memorable walk through to Rothiemurcus where at that time Aunt Jean and Uncle John Whitehead lived. Our dogs Angus and Raasay accompanied us with their own little back packs. Many other trips followed in later years taking skis as Mary, Bid and I did once, or walking through with son James again, after which he made me a plaster model of the area and I made a photo board mounted on the 1" OS Map. This small area of upland wilderness on the climatic edge of permanent snow cover became one of many fond tracts of country accurately fixed in memory and affording enjoyable replay in imagination.

## Snowdonia

Back at Chester it was not long before I set off on a short walking tour of Snowdonia on my own leaving the bike at Capel Curig. This area was all within an hour and a bit from Chester and became a common destination. I walked out on the Bethesda road for two miles and up a small valley to pitch tent in misty and windy weather but snug in a new sleeping bag and a

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<sup>5</sup> In 'The Trevelyan Hunt (The First Hundred Years 1898-1998) by G.W. Trevelyan he has been described as 'a legendary Hare'.

groundsheet on the floor. Soon after waking up I was whistled out of the tent by a farmer doing his rounds, irate that I had not asked permission to camp. Still windy and misty I followed the Afon Llugwy to its tarn Ffynnon Llugwy and climbed up to the col between it and Afon Llafar that runs down to Bethesda. Now it was very windy but the clouds had blown off at 3000' and the temperature above freezing at 37F. I left the pack and climbed up Carnedd Llyweln (3485') and marvelled at the clear view to Conway and Llandudno and around to Anglesey. Back at the pack I sheltered for a snack and then followed the Llafar towards Bethesda passing an old plane wreck. The ground was soaked and spongy except on scree slopes of moraines. Snow beds were melting fast. It rained continuously through the dreary slate workings of Bethesda and some miles beyond in the direction of Mynedd Perfedd looking for a dry spot to pitch the tent. But I found one, a perfect site by a stream on a well drained bit of turf and a view over Llyn-y-Mynedd reservoir to Bangor. The moon came up through the mists, the tent was weatherproof and the primus dried things out. I had walked 17 miles and not encountered another hostile landowner.

Next morning I climbed Carnedd Perfedd with a strong wind and mist on the top, traversed along the Llanberis side of the hill in pouring rain, took a stupid short cut which wasted time and set out at 1.30pm to climb Snowdon. The wet had soaked through the leather lumberjacket and the anorak trousers and the wind increased to a gale. I must have pushed myself a bit hard as with general fatigue the walk became 'an agony' (quoting from my diary which showed how I still lacked tolerance of some minor discomfort). I reached the top at 4.00. I had intended to go on down to Nant Gwynant but perhaps wisely returned down the pig path and made for the dry Youth Hostel

It remained misty and wet for two more days. I walked over the country between Llanberis and Rydd du to Beddgelert and along the valley with its lovely lakes back to Capel Curig. The return to Chester on the bike was drenching but it was a good ending at home to my first few typically wet days in Wales.

The weekend before the start of the Trinity term was recorded in my notebook as noteworthy. Den and Rachel's eldest, Nicholas, was christened at St. Mary-Le-Strand on Saturday 22nd April, presumably by Dad, as it was a family gathering, and we forgathered after in Den's flat. Aunt Ella and Jean and John and Rachel's family were all there. On the Sunday I motorbiked to the Old Vic. The garden was looking lovely in Spring flowers. Uncle V was in good form in spite of major dentistry and let Julia and I enjoy the sunny weather with a good country walk getting an appetite for Aunt Joan's high tea. I had to get back for a college athletics committee meeting at which I was introduced to Treasury duties. Apart from that it was 'one of the loveliest days this year in every way'.

## Scandinavia

There is such beauty in bread  
Beauty of sun and soil  
Beauty of work and toil  
Wind and rain have caressed it  
Christ often blessed it  
There is such beauty in bread

I may have misquoted Freda Elton Young. About this time I gave this verse to my mother. It was illustrated with reapers and corn stooks and a loaf of bread. It was the sort of sentiment she appreciated and it hung over the kitchen stove in the Deanery. We inherited it back again when she died. Never before had I appreciated the truth of this so much as on this trip when hunger brought images of nutritious whole-meal loaves.

I had intended that summer vacation to get north of the arctic circle by ship and bicycle, ship to Bergen train to Oslo and bike north from there. In fact once the ship and train had been paid for and a meal in Oslo for myself and a passenger on the train, I only had 4 pounds left and it became a hungry but healthy pedal back overland to Ostend. I left Chester on July 6th and slept on the moor beyond Penrith. The boat sailed at 4.00 next day. It was up and down dale for the 50 miles over the Pennines to get the boat train at 2.10 with just time to post some things back home to relieve weight.

Friday 8th July.

*Writing on the night train to Oslo. Beautiful scenery arriving at Bergen cruising up the fjord in the early morning again in perfect weather. The train journey was a little tedious as overcrowded but it never really got dark and there were lovely glimpses of mountains lakes and snowfields. Met a nice Norwegian girl returning home to Oslo after 5 weeks in England and also a cultured chap who had just spent over a year in England. (Later on 9th) Cycled out of Oslo in the pm and did 65 miles and sleeping next to a beautiful lake near Hamar. Realise the shortage of cash and so will not be able to bike right north. Hope to reach Trondheim, cross to Sweden, a week in Sweden, a week to Ostend. Have only 4 pounds to last till then which will scarcely buy food. A very hot day today and the mosquitoes are a nuisance at night. I didn't wear a shirt and had too much sun as result. Lovely sunset and long twilight now 11.00 pm*

In fact the mosquitoes prevented sleep as it was too hot to zip the bag closed. In the end I stripped off and lay in shallow water in the lake with just my nose out.

*Partly due to a disturbed night and the great heat I only managed 60 miles to reach Rena next day. Although I drank gallons of water my mouth was always dry, a sure sign of dehydration from lack of salt and I also had diarrhoea. It was a gravel road with short hills and pleasant along the Gloma river which I will follow to its source and then cut across to Sweden. I chose to sleep in the YHA in spite of short funds.*

*I felt much better for that. In the morning sent David (Needham) a line for his 21st birthday, spent 7 kroner on jam, milk, bread, salt and sugar and followed the Gloma river for 30 miles flowing strongly at about 10,000 cusecs and having lovely changing colours. At Stai I crossed over a pass into a parallel valley containing a fine lake for a swim and tea after 12 miles. The gravel road followed the river to its source, a long slow pull with two heavy showers which wetted and cooled and brought out the smell of pine. I freewheeled the other side back to the Gloma river now much smaller and at 10,00 pm reached Tynset having covered 100 miles. The speedo reading now 375.*

*I wondered whether to leave the bike here and hitch to Trondheim to enquire about trawlers going up the coast or to a Scottish port but thought the chances not too good and committed myself to Sweden and an overland return. It was 40 miles to Roros and then a steady ascent to the border up the Gloma valley through forested country. It was downhill for 20 miles the*

*other side to a delightful spot on the edge of a lake. I made a large fire and had a long swim getting away from mosquitoes. It was past midnight and I could still see the snow-capped mountains on the border. 85 miles speedo 460.*

Wednesday 13th July.

*The road I took has followed the Ljusnan river down towards the Baltic. My first night in Sweden was almost a nightmare as mosquitoes drove me out of the tent and I hardly slept at all. Have now bought a bottle of excellent mosquito oil. There was a nice Swedish couple and their small boy camping near. The little chap could speak a few words and we swapped addresses. I only left the lake at 11.00. The road was rough with short steep hills and incessant pine forest but I had a delightful lunch stop and swim. Thunderclouds developed in the heat and I was caught in a fantastic downpour with thunder and lightning accompaniment. It remained wet off and on so I found the Swedish YHA equivalent at Sveg costing 4.5 kronas - expensive but I needed the sleep. 85 miles.*

Thursday.

*I covered a good distance - 108 miles. Had an early start and a good ride before lunching and swimming in the Ljusnan. It is wide here. I biked virtually non-stop to Yarusso where I had a glass of milk, most strengthening, and went on to 8.00 pm a few miles before Bollnas. The river is a logging one and in the eddies they are tightly packed together. It has rained for a couple of hours harder than this tent has had before so it is coming through. It should clear later and dawn a fine morning again with luck. I will get to Stockholm Sat night. Have little money left.*

Friday 15th.

*It did dawn bright and clear but was hot even at 07.00 am. It was a hot tiring day against strong wind and monotonous. Passed through Gavre, a town of some size and bought a litre of milk which I drank straight off. For the last 20 miles I passed no stream where I could camp and finally at 9.00 pm went up to a farm house. I have not been introduced but can hear I am a source of amusement. The only person I have met so far, other than on the boat or train who can speak English was the Norwegian customs officer. I should reach Stockholm tomorrow night as am now on the main N/S tarred road. Know someone to look up there. 105 miles.*

*Saturday 16th July. Dave's birthday 21st. I hope he had a happier day than I did. Reached Stockholm mid pm but could not contact Fred Berghand met in Oxford last year. I spent a couple of hours in the city and then biked out to camp 15 miles beyond. I had hoped to spend a night but can't afford the lodging. Am now making for Halsingbord 3 days ride then through Denmark, Holland etc. 92 miles total 847.*

Diary entry for the 17th is a tired scrawl reflecting a strong headwind all day, a lot of insects in the camp only 70 miles covered and I could not get a stamp for a pc home.

Monday 18th.

*Did a good day making up a bit for yesterday. The country is pretty farming mostly under wheat barley and oats with some market gardening too especially strawberries. Wind against most of the day. Bought supplies and had a big breakfast at 11.30. That used up my last Swedish money. Have 2 pounds for other countries still. Had supper at 7.00pm then did two hours fast going alongside the (next) largest lake in Sweden (Lake Vattern). The weather being*

*perfect and myself feeling well after a meal it was all beautiful. Have found a lovely spot next to the lake. Halsinbord must be 140 from here. Today 114 total 1030.*

Tuesday 19th.

*Though somewhat feeling the lack of food since reduced to porridge and tea yet I managed a good day and am camping on a delightful river, the Lagan, sixty miles short of Helsingbord. Had a good swim dodging logs. The wind was in my face all day but as the road was forested it was often sheltered. Clear sky, a river, a fire, and in spite of porridge a satisfied tummy. 102 total 1132.*

Wednesday 20th

*A very interesting day. I am camping on a farm in Denmark about 10 miles beyond Copenhagen. It took until 4.00 pm to reach Helsingbord. For lunch I had an oat fry-up which was very rich. On the ferry I cashed my travellers cheque and paid the fare of 3 kroner. That left me with 30 kr. Bought food for 8 and a map for 2 leaving 20 kr I ate half the food on the beach between Habinger and Copenhagen. The coast is delightful. I longed to swim but being anxious pushed on and didn't see much in Copenhagen but cycled straight through as it was getting dark. Tomorrow I will have another ferry, longer this time, about 25 kms, which I believe costs some 8 kr not leaving much to play with. So hope I can do bigger mileages through Germany and Holland. 100m total 1232.*

Friday 22nd.

*Am sleeping 50 miles inside Germany in a well-protecting forest. Yesterday was interesting going through Denmark and crossing on the ferry to Myborg which all took a few hours. I had a puncture and the wind was mostly adverse and in consequence only did 85 miles. Today I covered a lot of ground - crossed over a bridge at Middle ? in western Denmark and then went due south to the border which I reached at 5.30pm. There is great contrast between these countries as one plunged straight into Flamburg with all its grimy industry, none of which exists in Scandinavia. I met a very nice German on his farm. I wanted water and he gave me milk. Am now anxious about the mileages as it is 400 kms to Holland and another 200 miles to Ostend and I only have 6 marks or about 10/-. Might have to cut out my margarine and syrup. Still have plenty of porridge and tea but don't want the trip to turn into a desperate dash.*

Sat. 23rd.

*Have been going on country roads most of the day in order to bypass Hamburg and its autobahn on which bikes are not allowed. As a result it meant rattling along cobbled roads worse than corrugations. The side of the road is cleared for bikes as a rule but this is often so sandy that my narrow wheels can't manage the surface. I crossed the Elbe estuary (4 kms) on a ferry which was a long delay. Being assured beforehand that it was free I found it cost me 1.3 marks or a quarter of my money. I bought a loaf of bread for 1 mark. I estimate four days to Ostend but there is a strong west wind blowing which will delay me if it continues. Am sleeping in a wood 40 kms from Bremen and should reach Holland tomorrow night. 92 miles total 1504.*

Sunday 24th.

*Had a very successful day. Got off the country roads by 11.30 and made good progress after an early lunch along the main road through to Holland. The wind has dropped which is a blessing. Reached the border as it was getting dark. On the Dutch side I found myself in a small*



*town celebrating something and it took ages to get through it. Found a wood to sleep in in spite of a sign VERBODE'. Am hoping I will not be discovered. Must be three more days to Ostend from here. 124m 1626 total.*

*Monday 25th.*

*Crossed Holland and am sleeping in the barn of a friendly dutchman. I was fortunate with the wind and the roads in Holland are very good and the country as flat as can be imagined. Got involved on an autobahn between Arnhem and Nimwegen, two large places which took some time to get through having to find my way on by-roads. The Rhine and the ? were interesting rivers luckily involving no ferries. I managed another long day of 120 miles and the comfort of this hay loft is excellent. Was able to hold quite good conversation in Afrikaans with this Dutch farmer. I hope to reach Ostend in one long leg from here. Recollected but unrecorded was that on one of these last hungry days I surreptitiously lifted a few potatoes from the edge of a field and quickly converted them to calories. 1746 total.*

*Tuesday 26th.*

*Through Belgium with cobbled villages again which are exasperating to bike over. After getting through Antwerp felt tired and had a big meal of a tin of pears from Denmark and finished the bread and potatoes. It seemed ages to Ostend which was reached at 8.30 pm. Discovered a boat sailing at 01.00 am and bought a ticket with English money which was able to change to Belgium francs. Failed to get a bath which I needed badly but bought a slab of chocolate. I sat through 'Calamity Jane' in the local cinema enjoying the 'Buggy with the fringe on to' sung by ? Doris Day relaxing with the few francs in my pocket. On board met a SA hitch hiker and got a berth by tipping the steward my last francs. 119m 1865 total.*

*Wed 27th.*

*After a 4-hour sleep we docked at 05.00 and went through customs on an empty stomach. It was a wonderful feeling to know that I had reached England. I had thought of putting the bike on a train but with only 8/- left decided to ride up to London slowly and see JM. I had very little energy but at Folkestone had a large snack of ham rolls and coffee. Even so I was played out near Maidstone so slept in the shade of a haystack until 2.00 pm. With my remaining 2/6p bought a loaf of bread, 1/4 pound margarine, tin of syrup and an orange and had an excellent meal. Reached London at 7.00pm and after some dreary cycling through to the West End reached Kew. Now have had a meal I shall always remember.*

*Pitched tent in the garden with a camp bed (loaned) v comfortable I feel I have lost weight and am v fit. It's been a most enjoyable trip. Must now sell bike. 90m total 1950m.*

I was obviously still wrapped up with my own concerns at having ended a marathon ride on tight finances to say nothing of the welcome from JM and Margaret who then had a flat overlooking Kew Gardens. I think Michael was a few months old. Obviously this trip would have been much more educational had I been able to take another week and see more of places like Copenhagen; but I confess that I derived some kind of competitive satisfaction in journeying against the clock and managing on short commons. It was I suppose good training for later. Apart from the few showers in Sweden this had been an exceptionally hot and sunny summer with many days in the 80s or low 90s F.

I did not sell the bike immediately. Hearing that Dad had taken a locum at Glengariff in Bantry Bay for a family holiday and he, Mum and Bid were already there with plans by JM and

Margaret to follow, I used the bike to get there via the ferry Fishguard to Cork, another two long days. It was a family holiday we will all remember for the Irish characters in the village, the quite beautiful sea lochs and mountains of Slieve Miskish, the tropical gardens on an island in Bantry Bay, climbing Hungry Hill which the old biddy called 'oongry ill' and warned the devil was up there; but above all for the walk to Barley lake when JM disappeared into a poor peasant's cottage and caught us up carrying on one hand a puppy of the local sheep dog breed. It was one of those fait-accomplis which brook no dissuasion tho' Mum had been having a hard time settling into Chester she was also a great lover of animals. So Barley became a dear member of the family and one of the handsomest dogs we ever had, living for another fifteen or so years and taking part in all activities, particularly rounding up any straggling members on walks.

## The Scillies in a sloop

One of the adventurous young men in the Plymouth area courting cousin Jill and who later married her, was Martin Minter-Kemp. He was a keen sailor and had already done a single-handed crossing of the Atlantic in a catamaran. On one of my visits to Roborough in the summer of '54 or '55, I cannot remember which year and have not found a diary, he suggested the idea that I might join him in a week of sailing as a good friend, a Roman Catholic priest in Plymouth, had offered his 5-ton sloop. His friend Henry Cadogan could join us for two days along the coast but we could make the Scillies an objective. His experience was comforting as I was new to sailing. "Have you got any charts of the Scillies?" I asked. "I'm afraid not" he said and putting on his mischievous optimistic look through his bifocal glasses, added "We will use the OS 1" map, there's one in the car". The Scillies were shown as an insert not more than a couple of inches across on the Penzance sheet. This was the first improvisation and more were to follow. The ship floated prettily in Plymouth harbour but with a definite air of neglect as if its owner trusted much to the unseen hand of the Almighty to keep sails from rotting and batteries from discharging etc. "The great thing about sailing is that however much you prepare for a voyage the unexpected often takes over" said Martin, which I took to mean that there was little point in checking things out before hand.

Aunt Laire said that we must have tea with the owner of Tresco Island, some distant relation. We unhitched and caught the tide right sailing out of Plymouth Sound with views to starboard of the Mount Edgecumbe estate and Cawsand. It was a novel and peaceful means of transport with mild summer breezes and progress slowly but definitely plotted by means of compass resections from coastal landmarks as we tacked westwards to Falmouth for our first nights anchorage. Henry left us next morning and under Martin's command we tacked west again past the Lizard and Wolf Rock until past sunset. We were navigating for the narrow entrance to St. Mary's Bay now tacking into an increasing wind. There was an approach channel marked by a green and red light and a revolving searchlight which lit up jagged rocks on either hand. Martin had me leaning over the front with a sounding line shouting out the depths and each time it decreased down to a couple of fathoms and black rocks were being lit up ahead he would shout "Ready About!" and put the tiller hard over while I ran back to cleat the jib onto the other tack. This way we cleared the narrows and got into the bay but deemed the wind too fresh to sail with it about Southeast into the harbour in the dark so tacked on upwind

until the lead showed we were closing the shore and threw out the anchor, It held and we celebrated a more lively but successful day two of sailing.

Inside the islands narrow and shallow channels linked the main island with others with many superb white sandy beached and the sea clear like a tropical island. We got the boat around to Tresco alright and spent two days enjoying ourselves and having a tea with the lady owner whose ancestors had planted the exotic tropical garden of cycads and palms and red-hot poker and other warmer-climate plants. Who should be staying in the hotel we treated ourselves to lunch at but Virginia McKenna and her husband Bill Travers, she looking as demure as in *The Ring of Bright Nu Water* or the film on Elsa the Lioness. I could have introduced myself as Mary's brother as they had been at school together) but no doubt reserve prevailed. With Bill Travers gazing into eyes even off screen how could I interrupt their soliloquy?

So far so good but then our time was up and we made an abortive attempt to leave. Once we cleared the island into the Atlantic no breath of wind and a huge sea swell rose and fell. We tried to bring the engine into service and it would not fire. We sucked out the petrol and drained it through a handkerchief which with the swell made us both sea-sick. Slowly we coaxed her back into the shelter of small islands, anchored and Martin went off to get a weather report. "Fine" he said "In the morning will be a 15 knot west wind and just what we need for a day sail back to Plymouth." Our luck was further in and a fisherman gave us four huge crabs which Martin thought we could cook for supper somewhere off the Lizard but with no container large enough to hold them they were left to crawl loose around the boat. We set off early and true to forecast after a few hours of light breeze it blew about 15 knots but for about an hour then increased to 30 and then about 40 as darkness fell and the following seas were having their tops sprayed off. "Great sailing" said Martin as the mainsail split and we took in a couple of reefs. The battery charge had run down as we cleared Wolf Rock lighthouse and with considerable difficulty lit a paraffin lamp. There were large ships thundering past in the dark. "Just hold the lantern up" said Martin. "You take the helm and keep her on this bearing while I get some shut-eye". I remember being exhilarated and somewhat nervous running before what seemed like enormous seas and leaning back hard against the tiller to keep her on course. She had what they call 'weather helm' probably because the gybe was pulling too much and not balancing the main. Suddenly the tiller came away in my hand and I thought I had scuppered the boat as she came upwind violently and Martin bleary eyed emerged from the cabin with rattled enquiring language. I felt as if I had nearly pushed myself overboard like a tug-o-war when the other team leaves go of the rope. The crabs added to the confusion until we could sort out things. The tiller had come out of its socket on the rudder and fortunately was still in my hand like a pick-axe handle. Sails flapping and spanking and loose sheets were whipping and waves now splashing over the cockpit as we tossed broadside to the wind but some order was restored thanks to Martin's help as we knocked the tiller back into place, grabbed for loose crabs and tossed them overboard and filled the sails again on the old course. Some lighthouse sent us a signal in Morse to show lights to which we could only shout replies. We said lots of things about the Met forecast and many prayers that passing ships would see us clearly on their radar. It was a night of pretty violent sailing which bore out the unexpected happening.

But dawn broke calmer and lovely. We were off the Sound near Rame Head when our way was blocked by a fleet of naval ships in line ahead. We can't get through those what are the

rules of the sea? "Steam gives way to sail" said Martin "let's see if it holds" as he kept a steady collision course. To our amazement the line suddenly swung from nose to tail to line abreast and between ships 3 and 4 was a gap right on our course. We waved vigorously to the bridges on either side. When we had cleared them they reverted to a southerly course. We wondered thankfully how much that diversion of six destroyers had cost the Royal Navy.

So thanks to the Owner praying hard and Martin's skill his ship found her berth again and I left feeling a little less of a novice and not at all surprised that Outward Bound had a sea school at Aberdovy for adventure training. It was a skill to get more accomplished in.

## Across lapland by canoe

I was back in Scandinavia a year later in July 1956 this time as part of a 4 man official Oxford University Expedition. David and I had spent much time in the previous year (my last and his second at Oxford) researching possible good journeys, and in particular a scheme to navigate the Blue Nile. My cryptic diary shows that we contacted Douglas Busk, Ambassador to Abyssinia, and read all that Cheeseman had to say about the gorges and tribes of the Blue Nile. But whatever the reason, perhaps finance or practicality, or the pull of the arctic which was strong in both David and myself, coupled with the fact that two colleagues of David's, Tom Shaw and Peter Simpkin had access to marine commando fold-away canoes through their Territorial Army training, Lapland became our destination. The maps were studied and a fitting objective seemed to be to cross from the Norwegian coast to the Gulf of Bothnia through Lapland via the main Stora Lule water system on the Swedish side of the watershed. The mountains of Sarrekjacko added further attraction. We must have made up some scientific justification for backing purposes although I cannot recall what they were, other than writing an account of what we found, but it was officially recognised by the University and I think granted some funds. The RGS, of which I was then a Fellow, loaned some small instruments, an aneroid and compass. I acquired some sketch maps. It was not unexplored country by any means but whether this actual journey had been done as an objective was not recorded. Unfortunately I was already committed to a date to join FIDS (Falkland Island Dependencies Survey) to start rudimentary training as a land surveyor at the Directorate of Overseas Surveys, so I could only accompany just over half the journey and missed the most exciting part. But still, it was memorable and I heard some of the incidents I missed from David afterwards.

Friday 27th July 1956.

*I am writing this aboard the Polarlys in Bergen harbour shortly before sailing north towards Bodo. Yesterday morning, Peter Simkin, Tom Shaw and I left Liverpool on the Newcastle train together with six bags of canoes (180 lbs) a huge kitbag of food (65 lbs) and our respective packs, all surprisingly heavy. Mine is 70 lbs. At Newcastle where we changed to the boat train, David Wilson joined us, looking bronzed after his Spanish trip. An amusing situation occurred just as the train was steaming out of the station. David sighted his pack still sitting on the platform and with a cry like an animal escaping from capture alighted from the train to join his pack and miss the train. However, he caught the boat alright. A number of the fair passengers come up to expectation. During the course of the evening, Tom, having broken the ice by seeking instruction in Norwegian pronunciation, things livened up and we danced*

Norwegian folk dances interspersed with Scottish reels which David taught them. A heavy swell however, imparting some entertainment on its own sent some of us below - poor Peter was below all the time - and the last dance 'Stripping the Willow' looked after the rest of us.

Coming up the fjord this morning was again delightful and it didn't seem a year since I came to Bergen before. The visibility was astonishingly clear and the sights approaching harbour beautiful. Again I was struck by the neatness and cleanliness of the houses perched on naked rocky outcrops and also, as if forgotten, by the imposing formidable coastline, the low limit of tree growth, lack of cultivation, and the way rows of houses were built almost above each other in an attempt to defeat the steep slopes.

It was lovely to walk through Bergen, through the fish market where the cruel custom is held of serving up the fish live, and across the main central square where the folk sunbathed, and flower beds, rather splendid. We visited a cafe and drank milk as cheap as 6d a quart. Feeling the need of exercise we scrambled up the hill directly overlooking the city. It was a good walk. Peter had a swim in a reservoir and cut his foot how badly I don't know but spoke of it being a little swollen this evening. We sail at 10.00 pm.

*Saturday 24th July.*

All day we steamed through fjords with delightful scenery on either hand. Seldom does the route leave the shelter of the fjords which are never more than a couple of miles wide. The glaciated sides of the mountains fall precipitously into the sea. They are rugged and with their peaks frequently capped in cloud the aspect can be inhospitable. Settlements crowd into the glaciated valley floors where hay has been cultivated but never higher than 200 ft tho' the reason often seems as much the abrupt change of slope as the factor of altitude. At three ports of call. Alesund, Maldo and Kristiansund we had a chance to stretch our legs. The ports are much the same.

*Sunday 29th July.*

As I write it is past midnight yet only the Evening star is to be seen hovering low over the purple grey shapes of the mountains, here rising steeply from the level expanse of the fjord and dominated by a single dome-like mountain eerily lit by the glow of the sun not far below the horizon in the West, and the light of a half moon in the East. It is a perfect scene. Far across the fjord a stretch of moon reflection dances in a straight line across the waters and loses itself in the black shadow of this mountain. While patches of snow would witness a changing season, in this scene there is little conception of the passage of time. Here is a clear picture of unmarred beauty. I can see just a handful of houses distributed over a small expanse of level ground.

The sun has been bright and warm today so we sunbathed with our backs against the funnel. We explored Trondheim in the morning and had a brief walk at Rondvick in the early evening. A rather extraordinary thing happened, for a sweet little girl insisted on exchanging addresses with the four of us on an embarrassingly short introduction. We had to run to catch the boat and when safely up on deck she found that she had forgotten to give us her address written on a scrap of paper. She insisted on getting it to us and the scene caused some little merriment on the quayside.

*It is a shame to go to sleep. We are reaching a delightful settlement of some 60 houses and passing through a narrow channel between two islands on the south side of the harbour. The place is called Solstad. Tomorrow we reach Bodo in the afternoon.*

*Monday 30th July.*

*12.30 pm. David and I sleeping on the top deck awoke late just as the boat steamed into Ornes. Apparently we had crossed the arctic circle at 8.00 pm - difficult to believe as it is extremely warm and altogether a perfect hot sunny day. Ashore we walked a mile up the village main road with shirts off and sitting on the deck now the sun is quite Mediterranean. Some few miles east of Ornes an ice cap crowned a peak about 5000' high. Altogether the mountains along this stretch are higher, more angular and more snow is lying. The little Norwegian fishing craft look very picturesque on the unrippled surface of the fjord and against the everchanging mountainous background are the colours that are so splendid. Vegetation has changed to a shorter stunted birch scrub which in parts is thick petering out about 500' up.*

*Bodo was reached on time and we split up to find some transport that would take us on to Tys fjord. I found the PO and was disappointed that my return Trondheim to Newcastle ticket had not arrived. I left a surplus parcel there which relieved my pack a little. We tried several garages and finally decided to take a tiny little boat that sailed at 6.00pm and took a most circuitous route north calling at several little ports and islands en route. By skilful negotiation Peter managed to barter several slabs of surplus chocolate for an evening meal for the four of us. (On a previous evening he had done the same with masses of surplus jars of a meat extract that some firm, whose name I forget, had kindly donated). It was an excellent meal of delicacies such as goat milk cheese and sardines with lashings of milk. We had a five-minute leg stretch up a precipitous hill that rose nearly sheer from the jetty. Again it is a perfect evening and the lights are magnificent.*

*Tuesday 31st July.*

*The little craft left us at Innhavet at 7.30 am this morning and from the wooden jetty we waved goodbye to Turin Nesge, a lovely girl who was travelling with her parents and her brother from Bodo to Syalvaar in the Lofotens.*

*After writing up the diary last night a rather amusing scene occurred at a tiny little port we called at. Tom, David and I had all perched ourselves for the night on the canvas cover of a lifeboat and David had fallen fast asleep to wake up confronted a few feet away by a jetty full of teenage Norwegians, youths and lasses, an event which in itself was an amusing sight. Before long we had them singing folk songs with the conducting help of a drunk man on board eager to get the village talent to impress us tourists. It was our due to render something in return so with me on the mouthorgan and David and Tom doing their best at 'She'll be coming around the mountain when she comes' we raised a cheer from the bystanders.*

*It was decidedly hot when we reached Innhavet. Having assembled all the kit under the shade of some firs we swam in the cool water of the fjord. After a good late breakfast of chicken soup and tinned beef we managed to get a lift on a local lorry going to Drag, a little place on the shore of Tys fjord. It took a couple of hours to assemble the two canoes and a further half to pack the kit in. By 3.00 pm we were ready to set off up the fjord David and Peter in one and Tom and I in the other. We canoed steadily for an hour and a half and reached a small settlement where an extraordinarily good-hearted woman gave us milk, bread and berry juice, refusing payment. Another hour and a bit brought us to Mushan where the fjord turns sharply east through a narrow channel. We were deceived for some time approaching this point along*

*a five-mile stretch of water into thinking that we were approaching Hellenboton (the head of the fjord). Seeing the fjord continuing around the corner was rather a disappointment. Studying the map this evening it is clear that we have nine miles to do tomorrow to get there.*

*We are sleeping in a delightful spot where a steep stream leaping down from melting snow beds on the mountain beyond enters the fjord. A good fire is again a joy and we ate well. It is midnight and visibility excellent. Sea trout appear to be jumping and Peter is about to have a go at spinning. David and I went up to the little farm where a charming couple live in a humble homely house. He is a dwarf of a man with a wrinkled bearded face, surely with Lapp blood in him. Fishing seems the chief occupation. They have also a couple of cows, a small patch of potatoes and lucerne. I was interested in their method of harvesting the scythe-cut lucerne by dragging branches across the cut grass they contrive to roll it into big round balls about five foot in diameter.*

*A word about the fjord here. It is a very impressive sight with the mountains on either hand rising often smooth and sheer to 3,000'. Distances across the water are deceptive - a mile can look just a couple of hundred yards. The rock is mostly granite and smoothly glaciated tho' in parts jointed and cracked. Great slabs rise steeply for 1500' on the north side. The south is surprisingly forested some of the trees large birch and fir. The moon is in its last quarter and is at this moment rising above Louknesfjellet opposite (967 metres). Weather: clear sky excellent vis temp 62F. Fjrd temp 52F. Distance canoed 12 miles.*

*Wed. 1st August. 11.30pm.*

*Sleeping out one mile above Hellenboton at 200' above sea level on the first part of the portage across to Sweden. Today has been our first of good exercise - a longish and valuable day. We breakfasted on freshly caught salmon, delicious but expensive as we paid 5kr for it. We only left Muskat about 10.45 am but canoed steadily with only one break to Hellenboton. We reached there at 3.40pm, rather slow canoeing for 9 miles but it was into a fresh breeze and slightly choppy water. In our canoe (Tom and I) we trailed a spinner and to our great surprise pulled in a 1lb fish, Tom's first, which we partly lunched on at Hellenboton. Over lunch the portage plan was discussed. Decision was to pack our packs to the lake a mile and quarter away and 200' up; to return, dismantle canoes in bags and pack them some distance along the path to the Stora Lule headwaters. The canoes in bags are rather heavy (c 100 lbs each) and bulky but we brought them without much trouble to this camping spot and three of us took all but one large bag another 1.5 miles and 700' up, leaving Peter to prepare supper for our return. It was a good slog up a steep zig-zag and in my case accelerated the process of getting fit speedily. We reached a wide undulating stretch of glaciated granite slabs where grew a number of grotesquely shaped pine trees rather like the Cedarberg country, and leaving the canoes in an obvious spot we returned now able to appreciate the magnificent scenery. For the lights across the fjord and catching the mountain summits were splendid and several waterfalls cascaded down towards Hellenboton. On the way down we picked delicious red berries (?Blaeberries). Supper was excellent and filling thanks to Peter and, I think my vet-cookie was appreciated; but the cigarette afterwards was worth the whole thing. Weather: overcast stratus at 3500' (Thermometer left in lunch spot will retrieve tomorrow). Canoed: 9 miles total 21. Walked 6 miles.*

*Thursday 2nd August. 11.45pm*

*Sleeping by the side of Kwatnetjaure (540m) having spent all day relaying packs and canoes from Hellenboton lake - some 3.5 miles and 1500' below. It has been a long and tiring day. I*

personally feel much better for it. The lake was reached with packs at 2.30pm where we lunched on chocolate and tea and then returned for the canoes reaching the lake again at 7.00pm. Assembling the canoes took an hour and a half. We are sleeping right beside the water's edge next to a disused Lapp tent.

The country over which we walked was broken by huge granite blocks. By far most impressive sight was the canyon, about 600' sheer into which the headwaters of the Hellenboton river plunges.

David is the fittest of us. Tom was very tired but managed to keep trekking splendidly. Peter has unfortunately some sort of temporary stomach trouble, was sick this morning and must have felt the day's exercise more than any of us. He is eating little. Tomorrow we should be able to make our way along this three-mile stretch of lakes to the Marjikjokk river where I expect we may have to portage - it falls steeply for 3 miles. Mossies are bad again and pay no attention to ointment.

Weather: Little cumulus but set fair. Temp 47F. Lake temp 49F.

Distance walked: 3.5 miles direct 11.5 relaying.

None of us slept much last night due to mossies and too hot to close bags.

Saturday 4th August. 00.35.

The canoe journey started yesterday when we left the western end of Kuvatret lake and made our way by lunch time to the Marjikjokk river source. We lunched at a portage and for the first time an hour's fishing was successful. Peter, Tom and I landed seven trout. David even caught one but remained a sceptical fisherman. From that point David and I packed two packs 2 miles down the river. Thunder clouds were brewing it was hot and enjoyable tho' mosquitoes ubiquitous. Our object was partly to recce while Tom and Peter took the canoes as far as possible downstream. For the first 2 miles of its course it meandered through an alluvial flat but then entered a rocky steep course which continued to the junction of a left bank tributary some 3.5 miles from its source. On our return David and I were caught in a thundershower, Met the canoeists and gave them a discouraging report of the river downstream, then all started to pack the remaining kit to the river junction. It rained hard and was cold work without coats. Last night we fished until late and landed another 6 trout not getting to bed until after 01.00.

This morning we overslept. Trout for breakfast awfully good. Leaving camp we retraced tracks to fetch the canoes deciding to walk them downriver unladen. It was wet work raining on and off as well. With little water in the river they had frequently to be carried, pushed and generally man-handled. It didn't do them much good. We lunched late back at the camping place of last night and loaded packs.

From here the river changes name to the Skeddejokk. We did three hours of canoeing and walking in shallow rapids until 9.00 pm when we came to a mile stretch of bad river initiated by two pretty little chutes where the stream enters a small gorge. Being late we packed kit a mile downstream and camped. Already both canoes have been shaken a lot and one is leaking. This relaying business is slow. As the crow flies we have covered no more than 3.5 miles!

Had a splendid supper of pemmican, spaghetti and vet-cookie with coffee. Peter in an hour's fishing caught 6 trout for breakfast tomorrow. The country here is thickly forested with birch scrub. We had a thundershower again at midday and intermittent rain. Again the night is clear and cool and as light as the hour before a winter Rhodesian dawn. Lovely fire. There is a veil



*of river mist and inversion of temperature up to about 50 feet above the river valley floor. The smoke of the fire mingles with it and travels downstream at a slow pace.*

*Air temp 1.00pm 43F. Water temp 52F. Dist travelled 3.5 miles*

*Sunday 5th August.*

*Tonight we reached Ratjajaure the first of the system of lakes that continues for 90 miles to Porjus. It was a relief for the Skaddyokk had been an unnavigable stream for the most part although this afternoon a stretch of 6 miles of beautiful meandering river relieved the discomfort of walking canoes through shallow rapids.*

*We are camping on an island in the lake - a lovely night.*

*This evening after supper I went over maps. I must try to reach Porjus by the 14th August to return. It is 95 miles direct and we want to combine a couple of days climbing.*

*Lovely fire. Food running perhaps a little short but enough for 3 days. (No real concern as we can eat fish). Altitude 429 m. Temp 48F. Dist canoed 8 miles.*

*Monday 6th August. 11.20PM.*

*The day started late as we left our little island of last night at 11.45. But canoeing with a fair breeze behind us we made good time and stopped for a break on the south shore of Luoktajaure after 12 miles. Lunch consisted of the minimum - tea, small chocolate and small handful raisins. The afternoon canoeing was tiring without a break. But the wind was still favourable although stirring up choppy water and bringing in wet weather. We reached a point where a little stream comes down from a mountain called Nepal and camped at 8.00 pm - tired all of us. This spot is a disused Lapp settlement with the framework of a tent and a little turf shelter where I shall sleep tonight. Any amount of firewood - driftwood - is a joy and a vg supper and huge fire brought spirits back quickly enough. Truly this fire is a joy. As food is now running short we are making for Sinorva some 10 miles on to restock before spending a couple of days climbing to the South in the Sarek Tjakko mountains. There were some lovely glimpses of the mountains and glaciers of Alika and S. Tjakko but cloud was low and it rained most of the afternoon. Again it is the colours that are so striking. An interesting thing today was that we found no narrow channels connecting the three lakes we have passed through as shown on the maps, I imagine the reason being that the water has been dammed up at Store Sjoffallet since the survey. We met two Lapps fishing from a motor boat and conversed as well as we could - nice men. This is a beautiful little cove where we are camping. On the lake shore is a heap of driftwood. There is a grassy verge to camp on and this is backed by big boulders lit up by the fire. One looks across an arm of the lake. The wind has calmed and the water is still. A dark ridge of mountains backs the water and above it the Evening star is shining. It is the only star visible tho' it is darker tonight than usual. Distance: 24 miles canoeing.*

*Tuesday 7th Aug. 0100.*

*Camping in bivouac on way towards Sarrek Tjakko range. At the moment rather wet and cold and have all squeezed into a single bivouac tent. We reached Suarve by canoe at 4.00 pm and found to our delight a food store where we replenished stocks. There was a barrage there around which we portaged canoes on a truck. Trekged from 8.00 to 11.30 and camped. Rough country. Temp: 45F Distance canoed 10m. Walked 4m.*

*Wednesday 8th Aug. 10.00pm.*

*It has been a good day of walking and climbing - a great change to canoeing. The change has been abrupt and we are generally tired. Our bivouac last night was really quite comfortable. We all fitted in under the tent. The change of vegetation from thick scrub to open tundra was abrupt and occurred along a belt a few yards wide. Once in the open marshy tundra at about 2000' the going was faster and easier except for belts of bog which had to be slushed through. At 1.00pm we reached a little Lapp shepherd's hut and found two Swedish hikers. Lunched with them and decided to stay here - a lovely little turf hut and within walking distance of Sarek Tjakko and other good climbing ground. The hut is of Lapp construction of timber overlaid with birch bark and covered finally in peat, oval in shape and a fireplace in centre. After lunch we had a good walk up some small hill about 4000' up. It was windy and the temp of 39F rather chilly while sleeting. There were some fine spells and shadows and colours splendid. Glimpses of Sarek Tjakko glacier were lovely.*

*This is a beautiful area but travel in it is very slow and tiring. One scrambles over loose moraine, sashes through boggy ground and picks ones way through silver birch thickets. But it is all rewarded. We are sleeping early in preparation for a long day on Sarek Tjakko tomorrow. Hope the weather clears. Temp: 38F at 10.00pm water in stream 44F. Wind force 7.*

*Saturday 11th August.*

*I have missed writing this diary for two nights, the first one through sheer tiredness and last night through over eating and being quite incapacitated. Tonight after a long day of canoeing against a slight head wind we are sleeping 25 miles from Store Sjøffalet and 30 from Porjus. I will start on the events of Thursday.*

*We planned to climb Sarek Tjakko and made an early start leaving the Lapp hut at 08.45. It was a raw cold day blowing hard and a temperature of 38F. The long approach to the mountain took five hours and included wading through a glacier stream - cold work on feet. By midday we were slogging up the middle of the three east-facing glaciers. It was a steady easy climb and near the top of it we lunched - some mint-cake and a cheese sandwich. Drift was blowing and being chilly we were soon on the move again to the top of the ridge. This revealed what we thought to be the summit a long way off involving another 4 hours or so. It being already 3.00 pm we turned our attention on a lovely little pyramidal peak and started to climb that. It was on the way up this that looking back and the clouds clearing we could easily make out the summit hidden by the opposite ridge of the glacier we had ascended. David and I thought it worth while attempting so splitting up we descended again to the glacier and started up the opposite ridge leaving Peter and Tom to climb the little peak and return to the hut.*

*We climbed for an hour and a half and over two false summits. On the second of these we stood only a few feet lower but separated by a spectacular arete which descended 200-300 ft lower. The weather was now foul, blowing a gale and sleeting, rather cold. We called it off and started down, glissaded into the glacier and returned to ford the stream in the valley below.*

*David, while crossing the stream (with his boots around his neck) slipped. His boots fell into the current and were swept away. Being seven miles from the hut still and cold weather this*

was a little serious. We started back at a jog trot David in his stockinged feet<sup>6</sup>. His feet must have cost him agony going through bogs and along rough tracks. Apart from bruises tho' they seem well enough now. Needless to say we were very tired on Thursday night.

Yesterday, Friday, we packed up and trekked back to Suarva. After the exertion of the day before we all felt a little 'gone in! Tom's foot was causing him trouble. David, wearing my 'tackies' seemed ok. I found I had cut my heel crossing the river the day before but it is nothing. We saw some lovely groups of reindeer on the walk back. It was a relief to reach Suarva in the mid afternoon, not having lunched, we sat down in the tourist hut to coffee and two loaves of bread. Fortified, we organised kit and put the canoes in the water only to find that they both leaked. We didn't get away until about 7.00 pm and canoed in good time to the portage at Stora Sjöffalet - 6 miles. At Suarva Peter bought a reindeer skin and 2lbs of reindeer meat. The skin cost 24 kr and the meat 6 kr. At all of these drops between lakes there are little push railway tracks. We loaded both canoes on one of these and pushed the kilometre to below the fall where we camped.

What with the reindeer meat and three vet cookies the meal went on until 00.20 am and we all went to bed bloated. It was perhaps the first time I had felt really full while on this trip.

Our gorge the night before was just as well because we awoke this morning to find the meat, margarine and some prepared vet-cookies vanished. (An otter had enjoyed the food!). We had a late start getting away at 10.30 canoeing up to the falls and leaving there at 11.00, The falls were very attractive but not really impressive as waterfalls go. Apparently about 2,700 cusecs are going over.

We have decided on organised canoeing for these long lake stretches. The form is half hour stretches with 5-minute breaks. Four of these against a slight headwind brought us to Saltoluhta, a rather smart rustic hotel where a luscious lunch was being served for 6kr each. Instead, we took our biscuits and cheese out into the sun and ordered coffee which came in a silver pot.

We did two long periods this afternoon and evening from 3.00 to 9.30 divided for a small meal of porridge at 7.00pm. By doing so we covered some 17 miles and reached a portage where a drop of 5 metres separates the Store Lule from the upper lake system. We camped late.

It has been a perfect day - a remarkable change in the weather with warm sun when out of the wind but a slight head breeze to canoe against. We are leaving the mountains behind and the country is opening out. Settlements are few but every few miles one finds a solitary house, a small jetty, fishing nets and often the skeletons of Lapp tents. The lights and mountain silhouettes this evening while canoeing late after the wind had calmed were really perfect. One was a little weary to appreciate much of it. It is cramping to sit in these tiny canoes for 3-hour stretches. Tom took a colour photo of a lovely evening scene looking back. We are attempting in three days to reach Porjus by Tuesday midday so that I can reach Trondheim on the 17th. I am sorry this rush is necessary. It would not be if less time were spent packing etc. The morning start is always slow.

Sunday 12th (lunch).

This morning we entered the broad stretch of the Stora Lule Trask. We are lunching at a delightful spot. The sun is hot, the weather ideal when sheltered from a chilly wind. We did four stretches (8 miles) this morning. A kind fisherman presented us with 8 small fish to be

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<sup>6</sup> I remember offering him one of my pairs of stockings but he would have none of it and treated the matter lightly.

demolished tonight. Such is the scale of distance across these large lakes that one appears to be hardly progressing. The country is now thickly forested on either side with pines, scots fir and birch. We are finding heather now too and there seem to be more flowers about.

(Evening 0100 am) Canoeed on until 9.00pm and camped in perfect setting looking across at the setting sun and right on the water edge. This long distance canoeing is rather depressing Tom who very sanely asks himself whether he could be doing something else more profitably. I hope very much that the river below Porjus proves easy going. We are 10 miles from the end of the lake. I stayed up this evening after everyone had gone to bed and made up the fire into a lovely blaze. Tonight over supper the discussion was on the purpose and enjoyment of the trip. I fear that Tom feels he has had enough of semi-arduous travel. His feet were blistered climbing and the monotony of lake canoeing seems to overshadow the rewards of the camp and company. I hope all will be well. I have myself enjoyed every bit of this little trip. The night is still and lovely. We have been awfully lucky with this weather.

Distance canoeed Sat: 25m. Today 19m.

Tuesday 14th August.

Written in Narvik. Yesterday morning we reached the end of the Stora Lule Trask after six hours of canoeing in rather rough water and entered the river. This we found to be dammed up and the six odd miles downstream to Porjus was rather tedious. But it was good to reach Porjus and in such good time. A good place for the canoes was found before we explored the main street of the town in shorts wearing an odd assortment of footwear (David's only shoes were his gym shoes through which half his feet protruded and Tom's were in similar state) and 3-week's growth of beard. We looked a sight. A b-line was made for a grocer shop to restock with food half of which we immediately consumed huddled behind a bank to catch the last rays of the afternoon sun.

I discovered that a train was leaving for Narvik at 10.20pm and thought it worth my while to try to catch it as it would get me there early the following morning and give an extra day to reach Trondheim by Friday.

When it came to finding a campsite site with the others we found the official site to be a marsh with little wood and no fresh water - an abandoned place. David and I left the others to prepare supper along the river side and went in search of the local policeman to see about my passport. (None of us had as yet officially left Norway or entered Sweden). When we did he could not speak a word of English so explanation was made through an interpreter in Tokkmokk by telephone. An excellent supper was ready when we returned. I handed over the art of vet-cookie making to David and he produced some absolutely delicious cakes. My train rather broke the supper party up and as I jumped aboard they each thrust a couple of buttered biscuits into my hand for the journey.

I was very sorry to leave them in this way only half way through the trip. I had a few words with David before I left. Peter and Tom have both felt the strain of the last week's exercise - the mountain trip and the canoeing rush to Porjus. For the next 25 miles the river drops very much and unless they can manage a portage some way below the Harsprangett falls, the rapid walking and shooting will be a lot to put up with. The river below that should be excellent for canoeing though. I hope very much that the next two weeks goes without a hitch. I lent David my watch and left with them the map case, fishing things, billies, tent pegs while I took with me one of the tents.

*The very efficient electric train that I boarded shot through the country at a great speed. At Gallivnar I had to change and wait two hours on the station. It was chilly so I climbed into my bag and went to sleep on a bench to awake half an hour after my connection was due. Fortunately it was an hour late. I found an unoccupied coupe and managed to get a little sleep.*

*In the early morning the scenery along the Tournetrack was very lovely as the line passed through some fine mountains. Approaching Narvick the line was cut and tunnelled high up on the precipitous side of the Narvick fjord 1000' feet below. The train reached Narvick at 9.30 am. I had a good snack and then explored the harbour on the chance of working a passage to Bodo where I hoped my Trondheim to Newcastle ticket would be waiting Poste Restante. I tried about six ships. The language barrier was great. One ship was sailing tomorrow to Bodo and I would have worked a passage on that but could not afford the time so I bought a ticket for 28kr on the midnight sailing. To pass the time I took some lunch with me walked to the outskirts of town and went to sleep. There are some lovely mountains in the neighbourhood. The recent weather seems to have brought the snowline down to about 4000'so the scenery is very alpine.*

*Wednesday 15th August.*

*I was a long wait on the quayside. The boat sailed at 00.30 and I fell asleep almost immediately on a lifeboat awning sleeping right through almost to Bodo which we reached at noon today. It was a relief to hear that my ticket from Trondheim was being kept at Trondheim. I discovered that the cheapest way to Trondheim next to getting a lift on some boat would be freight- passenger boat for 52kr sailing at 9.00pm. I hung around the quayside all afternoon but as no southbound boat called I caught this very dirty little freight ship. I have yet to buy a ticket but no one has accosted me. Have been very greedy over food consuming quantities of bread, cheese and milk and having a 4kr lunch. Altogether I must have spent 20kr on food today.*

*Saturday 18th August. Aboard the Erling Jarl boarded at Trondheim yesterday evening. It is a large magnificent vessel compared with the craft I have been voyaging in lately. I have no cabin but the clean lifeboat awnings are quite the comfiest beds going. Slept superbly last night. From Bodo on Wednesday I caught the Ronin, a very dirty little boat to be cramped up in for two nights. It was a relief to arrive at Trondheim early yesterday. I immediately collected my ticket and boarded the Erling Jarl tho' the boat was not due to sail until 8.00 pm. It was a quite magnificent day so I took lunch and a bathing costume and walked out of town to a splendid spot on the coast. I made vetcookies for lunch and spent the pm sunbathing and swimming. The sun was a treat.*

*I spent the evening in company with a few Norwegians doing their national service equivalent who were being free with a cheap 'Finspirit'. They were pleasant chaps. Only one could speak English fluently. He lived in the extreme north of Norway and told me about 1944 when he was 12 and escaped evacuation by hiding in the mountains. I had a meal with him for 5kr. The Norwegian meal starts with a single course of something good, a stew or a plate of fish and vegetables washed down with tea, and then continues in a help yourself manner to a variety of delicacies to be mounted on unlimited slices of bread and butter. There are plates of spam, bacon, fishcakes, sardines, goatcheese slices, jams etc. I had hoped to be able to spare my last travellers cheque but cashed it perforce last night. The cost of living is certainly higher than in*

*England tho' not true of all things - clothes, camping things comparable - but food is more expensive.*

My diary ends there. I had one or perhaps two nights at home in Chester and then reported at the Directorate of Overseas Surveys in Tolworth on the 22nd, the beginning of a 3-year association with exploration survey in the Antarctic with FIDS - the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey.

I heard their story later at a lunch at the Oxford Union on my degree day. They had an adventurous time getting through to Lulea on the Baltic. Tom and Peter manned the one boat and David alone in the other. There must have been some exciting white water stuff which they came through without mishap. But the river ran through a military security zone and they were arrested as spies. How had they entered Sweden? There was no entry point stamp in the passports! While they were held, the films in Tom's camera were processed for evidence. Happily their story was at last believed and the voyage continued. If I remember rightly Peter and Tom had the means to take a paid passage back to UK with the kitbags of canoes. But David had to explore routes of initiative and rowed out to a ship at anchor offering to paint the funnel for a passage to UK.

Tom was doing medicine and Peter was to join the Colonial Service. Our ways parted and I never met these two again but am sure that they remembered the best parts fondly and forgot about the pain of trying to keep up with David, always ahead. It was thanks to them and their canoes that it was planned that way. A good trip. I have always said that Lapland should be visited in the Spring on skis and a reindeer acquired to pull a polka sledge. I returned to Norway to ski several times but have yet to get back north of the circle. It is the Gulf Stream that keeps it relatively mild for its latitude with ice caps perched above 4000'. Where I was going the topography was similar as was the latitude but ice caps overflowed from the plateau down glaciers to sea level such is the influence of the sea and its currents.

## Kind Fate

Through that last year at Oxford, excluding the trip to Lapland, there are just a few cryptic jottings in the university pocket diary to jog memory.

There was a talk at the Exploration Club by George Lowe in October '55. He spoke on the Everest Reconnaissance expedition and the final climb by Hillary and Tensing. I was to see more of him in October when he and four of us potential surveyors attended a course on astro navigation by Steve' Stephenson. He was a member of the Trans Antarctic expedition under 'Bunny' Fuchs and chosen as the deputy navigator to Ken Blaiklock.

Cousin Katy (Gibbs), the survivor of the legendary spinster sisters, Katy and Minnie (Minnie Ha-Ha of the Laughing Waters) who used to drive a Rolls, lived alone in a quite large country house at East Ilsley and was served by chauffeur and maidservant. She kindly hosted a couple of Sunday tea parties. These were formal affairs and you never knew quite what other neatly turned out young things you were likely to be joining. Sitting prominently on the carpet among the guests was her plywood cut-out of a large photograph of her last much-loved golden retriever. Tea was served in bone china and neatly cut small sandwich triangles served by the maid in a starched cap and apron. After tea and polite conversation about the latest trends in university thinking or politics, with some historical memoirs on the Gibbs family which sadly I never did take in, we were always despatched for a half-hour walk up onto the Downs where race horses were being exercised,

There were teas too at The Manor House, Clifton Hamden, a lovely house built (I think) by our great grandfather John Lomax Gibbs<sup>7</sup>, as a parsonage, when he was vicar there. It had the sort of proportions of a house that I like with a level lawn going to the bank of the Thames where croquet was played. Cousins Christopher and Helen were always formally welcoming but not in the same league of the closer relationship with Dad's or Mum's family. I got on more easily with Elizabeth the youngest and only daughter. I never saw much of the sons and had little wish to discuss the pleasures of shooting driven pheasant or grouse. I remember feeling miles apart in attitude some years later when cousin Hum's memorial service was held at St. Pauls and the talk before the service was on the size of the 'bag' the weekend before.

Rugby (16 matches) and athletics (12) seemed to continue to take up a sporting outlet in the Michaelmas and Hilary terms. There was a Bicester Hunt ball on February 10th '56 which Aunt Joan, Uncle Victor, Julia and I attended and there was a Keble Ball on 25th May just two weeks before the start of Schools'. It seemed to be a convention for tutors to have sherry evenings with their students in the last year which was very good of them but I do remember feeling awkward that I attended very few lectures in the second and last years feeling that I got more out of private reading on the subjects. During the last three weeks before 'Schools' week I did put in long hours at night cramming, keen that I should not lose my head like the reported examinee who having looked long and hard at the exam paper groaned and started convulsively rolling around on the floor.

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<sup>7</sup> John Lomax was a nephew of William Gibbs the benefactor of Keble Chapel and many other churches and restorations. He wrote a valuable memoir and sent his two sons to Keble. I have loaned this memoir for copying to Prof Averil Cameron, the present warden as it may help in a history of the college and certainly gives a picture of the social life of a parson at the time.

In the last summer term kind Fate brought my attention to an advert in The Telegraph headed Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey. The Crown Agents for Overseas Administration were seeking applications for posts in the Antarctic - medical officers, meteorologist observers, geologists, surveyors, general assistant handymen - something about only those fit and prepared to face isolation for two-year assignments need apply. I doubted whether I would make the grade of Surveyor but it seemed an ideal opportunity to try. Surprisingly I was called for interview and recall walking along the Embankment to the Crown Agents building somewhat trepidant about the interview, finding the waiting room and joining other aspirant types all putting on an air of nonchalance which belied their nervousness of a selection board. I was wearing a fairly newly tailored tweed suit with waistcoat which David said I should have buried in a Highland bog for a week to give it atmosphere. It was a panel of at least six, all of whom I was introduced to by Bill Sloman the chairman of the board. There was Denis Wiggins, a Director of the overseas mapping agency DOS, Dr Roberts of the Place Names. Committee of the F.O. and one time member of the BGLE (British Grahamland Expedition 1934-37), Sir Raymond Priestley, acting as Director FIDS and onetime Scotts last expedition. I had met him before at a lunch in London. Anne Todd was the secretary. I wish I had written a full account of the interview because somehow this team had to make crucial judgements on the character and ability of the applicants. I was asked why I wanted to go 'South' which I may have thought was a foolish question but tried to make my answer self evident. Dogs came into the questioning and had I had anything to do with them. Very much I said 'and a Bull terrier helped us down the Orange River'. Wiggins asked a few questions about the mapping we used and did we correct any errors in it. I answered truthfully No but we had observed some errors in the mapping of the lower Orange. (DOS had just finished the first mapping of Basutoland and Wiggins very kindly gave me a complete set to take South later - I was lucky I did not give the impression of mistakes in that mapping which we did not have on the walk). Asked about my survey competence I confessed to little practical experience on the Oxford Geography course but that I had tried to acquire theoretical reading knowledge. There were studied sideways looks until Wiggins hinted that he himself could take me out planetabling, if I was appointed, and make some provision for special training. I was dismissed and sent for a medical check. I felt grateful to Wiggins and Anne Todd gave an encouraging smile.

Getting an official letter of appointment was like an answer to prayer. Pay would be some 300 pounds a year and I would be expected to work up results at DOS in Tolworth after my return in two years time. I wasn't qualified but they wanted me and would see to some basic survey training at DOS prior to sailing in October or November. There was first the Lapland trip and much to do. It was a government expedition and all was found; but for me I needed to get some personal kit to get the most out of it and have my own stake in the outcome. I ordered up this and that feeling like the little boy in the song "I hopped I jumped so merrily over the water pump". There was a trader in Blackfriars who imported wolf skins from Hudson Bay. I bought one for five pounds thinking to make mitts or give the anorak hood some extra insulation. I visited Robert Lawrie near Marble Arch who personally equipped the British Everest expeditions since Mallory and Irvine's time. His brass door bell was well polished. He or his wife admitted you to his sanctuary of approved boots and climbing equipment with photos on the walls, mostly Everest or the Eiger North face and Matterhorn. He took measurements and discussed needs over a cup of tea. I went into overdraft as he supplied over the next weeks a tailor-made box-quilted down bag, big enough to reach to your feet while fully zipped up, with extra boxing in the feet and under the zip, a tailor made duvet down jacket with detachable hood having four pockets, the top two being for a head torch



and batteries for night astro observing, a Stubai ice axe and some alpine karabiners, a pair of Greenland leather boots of single leather and big enough for three pairs of stockings, a pair of climbing/ski boots made in Italy which he recommended and quantities of Kendal mint cake and a couple of pairs of silk finger gloves for instrument work. I ordered some sheepskin and from one of these Mum cut out and made a pair of slippers before I left and I turned the others into excellent gauntlets down South. She also machined up a new cover for the sleeping bag and many little draw-string bags tho' some survived from the Orange trip.

From the RGS I got Hinks' 'Hints to Travellers' both volumes. The survey volume is a pocket book of all the necessary theory and tables for expedition survey, astro observations, triangulation and calculating heights of mountains by angles or barometer pressure differences, a tremendous little 'bible' of survey which helped me then and still does to solve survey problems although in these days of calculators, the candlewax stained pages of logarithms are not used.

The FIDS office was a few small rooms upstairs in a building in Queen Anne's Gate. Friendly people, all very busy with plans and orders for supplies to equip two ships and supplies for six bases for two years needs, nevertheless had time to sit back and talk about the work going on down South. The office was also the planning centre for the Trans Antarctic expedition with 'Bunny Fuchs and Eleanor Honeywill planning details for Shackleton base in the Weddel Sea. The replacement new RRS John Biscoe was to make her maiden voyage in November a month after the sailing of the Shackleton. Besides these the Kista Dan was on charter for the TAE. Ann Todd looked after the personnel, their queries, their telegram correspondence and keeping in touch with parents, wives or next of kin. I sensed the dedication of people like her and Bill Sloman and it is no wonder that forty years later they were still running the office later named BAS (British Antarctic Survey) in a purpose-built office in Cambridge which then housed the separate sciences. Now it was just administrative, the geologists worked under Ray Adie in Birmingham, the Ionospheric studies in Edinburgh, the mapping under DOS in Tolworth, Human Physiology studies at the MRCP in Hamstead, Glaciology at the Scott Polar Institute in Cambridge. Recently FIDS had been allocated more money for survey so that after some 8 years since Stonington was evacuated, exploration survey of the hinterland to Marguerite Bay was to be recommenced. A major contract for mapping was that let to Huntings under Peter Mott. This was for mapping photography right down the west coast as far south as Marguerite Bay, the flying being done from Deception Island<sup>8</sup>. This was ongoing in its second year. It was political pressure that helped finance the further mapping and exploration of the Dependencies because Argentina and Chile had put in claims for sovereignty since 1943 which was the reason for Operation Tabarin in 1944 when the first two bases were established, but more recently Argentina had defiantly established bases and at Hope Bay had fired on some unarmed FIDS. It was time for the UK to be seen to be doing something about territory it claimed. And this Antarctic summer HRH The Duke of Edinburgh aboard the Britannia would be visiting some of the bases in the course of a Pacific tour. What a fortunate time to be a part of it all. A visit was laid on to see Brian Roberts at his 'Antarctic' desk in the Foreign Office. He outlined the diplomatic steps necessary to 'wave the Union Jack and formally protest Argentine presence (before accepting or giving hospitality!).

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<sup>8</sup> The book 'Wings Over Ice' by P.G. Mott printed by A. Wheaton & Co gives a graphic account with illustrations, written in 1986.

Later I was to become involved in indenting for supplies for a base, hundreds of pages of items from screws to primus prickers to sacks of coal and boxes of man and dog rations. Every single item would be ordered from a supplier, packed and consigned to the base in question on the appropriate ship and loaded into the holds in a planned reverse order of relieving the base. It seldom happened the way it was planned but I marvelled at the meticulous work they did behind the scenes.

Petra Leay showed me around the DOS offices in Tolworth where I was to join four other survey recruits for training. She was appointed as a graduate Geographer to look after the Antarctic mapping and allocate duties and courses to new recruits. Being young, shortish and pretty attractive with dimples in her cheeks, she had a problem to keep our attention on 'work' and none of us were inclined to keep office hours anyway. Lt. Angus Erskine was several years my senior and had just returned from the British North Greenland Expedition and had been a serving naval officer on the Protector in Antarctic waters. He was joining FIDS for a one year tour to be base leader at 'W' (Loubet Coast). Brian Holmes had worked as an Engineer for the past three years, an intrepid outdoor type who lived in the Brecon Beacons. John Rothera, a stolid Yorkshireman was like me a Geography graduate about the same age. Lee Rice was a jovial bald Irishman who had been teaching for some years. He had a jovial optimistic outlook on everything and the way his sentences went up at the end raised your own spirits in sympathy. We FIDS were housed at the furthest end of a 500 yard long corridor off which the mapping work sections branched, furthest from the Directors and Petra Leay. Our phone was taken away because Angus or one of us would always be calling girl friends. One day I walked down to see Petra about something like existing mapping, official anyway, and as she was not in her office I sat down. The phone rang which I answered to take a message. It was Rachel and we chatted away and while doing so in came Petra, she stood at her door assuming that I had taken the gross liberty of coming down to use her phone without permission and as colour crimsoned her cheeks I told Rachel I was in trouble and tried to smooth Petra's feathers. But we liked her and she did a great job. Besides all the existing survey reports and field books of previous surveyors' journeys in Marguerite Bay, she made available a lot of randomly flown oblique photography taken by Finn Ronne in 1947 for me to sort and plan routes. One of her objectives for me was a survey of the so-called Neny Trough and the country south of it which was marked 'Unsurveyed' on the maps showing coastlines. We noticed when she showed us photographs of the base Horseshoe (Y) on the island of that name that the name of the present Base Leader and surveyor, Derek Searle, cropped up frequently with a slight blush to her cheeks They were not engaged at the time, officially anyway. The story is told (by Petra) that when she went to the loo one day she overheard through the single brick wall to the Directors' loo two of them talking, "She is good but it will be a pity to lose her when she gets married". "Who to?" said the other. "To Derek Searle when he gets back from down South". This was news to her. But as it turned out that came to pass.

I was taught to use a theodolite by Clive Tomlinson who had just returned from a survey in Basutoland. The theodolites had to be specially cleaned of any grease and lubricated with a non-freezing graphite. These and other survey stores were packed by Chippy the carpenter. We did a course on Field Astronomy at Ascot and taken by Alfred 'Steve' Stephenson whose surveys on the BGLE in the '34-'37 period I had read about. Before that he was with Gino Watkins in Greenland. Over the four days and nights we were lucky to get some glimpses of stars and in a confused way calculated our observed positions by the Position Line method. He taught us to handle chronometers and aneroids with reverence. The chronometer watches

we would wear in a chamois leather pouch next to our tummies to keep them at a constant temperature. He showed us how to get time signals and rate the watches. Time error was longitude error. With latitudes of stars at transit the errors lay in the altitude observation and the estimate of refraction. The theory of the celestial triangle was confusing to us all but the identification of stars was fascinating and there was a glimmer of hope we might remember how to fix position for real when lost on an icy plateau four months later.

Brian Holmes, John Rothera and I shared a flat on the edge of Kingston Park with a balcony big enough to set up a theodolite. At night we practised observing and booking. Brian and I getting a bit impatient for some exercise suggested to Petra that we be sent on an official field training course to make a reconnaissance map of a sub-arctic area and what better place than the Cairngorms. Perhaps anxious to get us out of the office for a week this idea was approved so within days at government expense we caught the night sleeper to Aviemore, stayed at the Physical Recreation Centre at Glenmore Lodge and had a great time climbing all the tops producing sketches and compass bearings from the summits. At Glenmore our conversation recruited the instructor, George McLeod, as a mountaineer/handyman. He went down on a number of tours over the next thirteen years, a short tough little Highland Scot who made a great contribution in first ascents and sledge journeys.

A few days before the end of our 'course' at DOS and some days before the sailing date I left the motorbike at Kings Cross and took the train to Cambridge to see Prof and Mrs Debenham. Next morning when I started to regain consciousness I found myself in University College Hospital having come off the bike in Gower Street. From a diary or other source the hospital had phoned the flat and I was pleased to have a visit from Brian and John later in the day. News also reached brother Den who kindly visited me too. I was too impatient to stay in under observation as requested and had to sign a self-discharge form thanking the nurses for all they had done. I had a couple of days at 'home' in Chester packing my personal gear. Dad blessed my journey and saw me off at the station. There was an autumn ball at Keble on the 24th November to which James Duncan's sister, Ann, came up and Aunt Ella kindly provided accommodation at Quakers for us. After a leisurely breakfast with Aunt Ella and farewells there we mo/biked to the Old Vic for lunch. David (Wilson) joined us for lunch as did JM and Margaret with Micky and Caroline and Julia was at home with Uncle Victor and Aunt Joan. "We had a huge lunch and for my last day at The Old Vic it was a very happy one".

*Monday 26th November 1956.*

*Uncle Victor and Julia took me to Oxford station to see me off on the 08.00 and I reached the boat station Southampton at 1.00pm. While we were all standing on deck David breezed up on my old mo/bike having come straight down from Oxford. It was most kind of him coming down and we promised a trip together when we meet again. He plans to go to Arabia in the summer with John Newbould. Most of my difficult goodbyes had already been said so I was able to look objectively on the little quayside group as we sailed away. Brian has been put in charge of personnel and allots daily duties. Out in the channel the little John Biscoe is making rather heavy going so most of us are feeling a little queasy. There were a number of telegrams and letters on board for me. It's a long passage to Montevideo but no doubt we will quickly settle down to this confined existence.*

So ended a summer well filled with activity and comradeship and the little pain of parting from family and close friends as I headed for the beginning of the southern summer and over two years in the Antarctic. Liza and Dave (Needham) who were both at Cape Town at the

university sent fond farewells. From Dave was a leather-bound volume of Fifteen Poets with a neat inscription 'For Pete, on his departure for Horseshoe Island from England in the autumn of 1956'. I had the feeling that both Davids felt a bit left behind. They were idealists wanting a journey out of the ordinary. I would keep this in mind regarding the next two years as a recce for the real thing. But even so it was experience beyond my best expectation and some life-long friendships were again forged.

A book of verses underneath the Bough  
A jug of wine, a loaf of bread - and Though  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness –  
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!

Whether the rivers are liquid or frozen ice or the mountains unclimbed. seeing them, travelling them or climbing them for the first time in company that equally shares the rarity of the experience is good fortune that I was so privileged to have.

## End of Part Two