

Venture



DECEMBER

1976

NUMBER TWENTY TWO

ISLAND VENTURE SPECIAL



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VENTURE 44. A sort of magazine,
by, for, and about,
the 44th Gloucester
Venture Scout Unit
(Sir Thomas Rich's)

ISLAND VENTURE SPECIAL

An episodic and fragmentary account of some events occurring between July 22nd and August 7th 1976, on and near the Island of Gometra in the Parish of Kilninnan and Kilmore, Strathclyde Region.

The following members of the Unit were present on the Venture

Leaders	Frank Henderson and Bill Spear	
Workers	Pete Bright	Ian Fletcher
	Phil Champion	Keith Franklin
	Dick Chappell	Ian Howells
	Stuart Douglass	Bren Noonan
	Paul Dyer	Chris Pashley
	Ben Emerson	Rob Pragnell
	Mark Evans	

"..he looked about him and saw he was on a soaring peak, eerie, and utterly desolate, and girt on all sides by so wide a sweep of sea that he could see no land but in the farthest distance. He realised then that he had been conveyed to an island, but which he could not tell; he would have liked to know, and yet it seemed he never would, for there was neither castle, fortress, refuge, nor house in sight where men might dwell. His solitude, however, was not entire, for round him roamed wild beasts."

"Queste del Saint Graal" Anon.

One Day in the Life of...

Alcatraz was closed in the 1960's and Devil's Island penal colonies off the coast of French Guiana have been abandoned, but still the budding 'Papillons' of the 44th persist in trying to do something 'completely different'. This year's variation meant packing the usual equipment - tents, stoves, Ryvita, and tins of beans - and STREB - and moving off for a fortnight to act as nursemaids to the county's little scouts. 250 scouts of various ages were to spend 2 weeks on Mull and every day a group would spend 24 hours on the almost deserted island of Gometra.

As is apparently usual, it was raining when the morning peace was shattered by the dulcet tones of Brendan Noonan enquiring "where's the **** tinopener?" Bren was preparing breakfast - one $\frac{1}{2}$ " slice of luncheon meat, one dollop of luke warm baked beans, two Ryvita (if you are lucky) and a portion of the traditional Scottish breakfast - porridge. Our "brew" showed a marked resemblance to polyfilla in appearance and in effect.

Having reluctantly scrambled out of a now cosy sleeping bag and rummaged around the tent for socks, trousers, etc. the meal was ready. Hopefully the rain would not make the Ryvi. too soggy. When all was washed up and put away in the kitchen unit constructed by Mark, Wally and co by courtesy of fishing fleets from Grimsby, Peterhead, Clydeside and Hull, it became time for the most momentous decision of the day, shall I wash? Of course all members of the Unit past and present know the answer to that particular hygienic problem.

A quick scratch settled the issue, and then it was time for the immigration officials to take the track down to the landing area to process the new influx of juvenile masochists. Who in their right mind would take part in an exercise like this? The boat was sighted, and eventually made it cautious way through the submerged reefs, and the tinies disembarked expecting to be greeted by woad covered savages. So those who had served their sentences hastily boarded the craft, and re-

turned to the "mainland", carrying tales of pygmies, diets of worms and seagulls, and living in holes in the ground - all strictly untrue - well nearly all!

After the immigration formalities, the group was split up and sent on an elementary orienteering test. Progress was observed by hidden watchers armed with binoculars on a rocky crag overlooking the route. By now the rain had eased, and the neighbouring island of Ulva was visible through the light mist. After an average of an hour's hike, all the scouts had reached our base, which was only about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from the landing point, and were given some ideas about the activities of the day.

Whilst they set off on an exploration of the island, we settled down to lunch of jam, Ryvita, cheese, chocolate, and discussed various things like food, food, the weather, and of course food. This was guaranteed to bring young Ian Howells out of his tent, making his first appearance since breakfast! He was bursting with enthusiasm for the afternoon's activity. Equipped with a wooden rifle and a red cape we would set up ambushes around the island, harass the scouts, who were now highland clansmen, armed to the teeth with claymores and shields, and full of excitement at the prospect of beating hell out of some defenceless and undernourished venture scouts.

Ambushes were usually mistimed, skirmishes were fiascos, and with typical redcoat inefficiency, we never got our man, Bonny Prince Charlie (alias Bill Spear) and his heathen jocks. The finale was the battle of the bothie, a deserted ruin where the Beau Gestes of the 44th fought for King, country and survival against the hordes of Gloucestershire scouts. Peace usually broke out after about 20 minutes, and the remnants of the force limped back to prepare the evening meal.

An essential element of all dehydrated food is water, and naturally Gometra was lacking the normal supply equipment. Before every meal, therefore, a trek was made to the burn where a piece of plastic piping (collected on a beach-combing expedition) had been incorporated into a small dam. The cold clear(?) water bubbled over the heather bordered rocks, with

a variety of insects providing an extra supply of protein to the normally starchy diet of spaghetti and stew.

The evening meal for the scouts was cooked on a driftwood fire, and taken round to their scattered camps along the next valley. These food runs were often a source of amusement, playing hunt the pineapple chunk amongst the braken after one of the waiters accidentally slipped on some rocks. Mercy missions with loo paper were also run for those in need.

By 8 o'clock G.E.T. (Gometra estimated time) it was time to relax beside a nice fire, and as it gradually darkened the solo whist players slipped away to "Casino Force Dix".

The familiar lumps and bumps of the ground beneath the tent had become extremely comfortable after a week.

Perhaps the sun would shine tomorrow...

Pete Bright.

-o-

Sir, I invite your highness and your train
 To my poor cell, where you shall take your rest
 For this one night; in part of which, I'll waste
 With such discourse as, I not doubt, shall make it
 Go quick away - the story of my life,
 And the particular accidents gone by
 Since I came to this isle.

The Tempest Act 5

Unlike Prospero, I shall spare you the story of my life but will discourse briefly on the circumstances that led to our arrival on the enchanted isle of Gometra.

Nearly two years ago the County Commissioner dropped some veiled hints about a project on a lonely Scottish isle. I mentioned to him a scheme I was considering in the Orkneys, and was promptly asked to shelve it, and invited to join a small, but eminent group of commissioners led by Fred Walker, and so Island Venture was born. After many meetings, visits, strokes of genius, and some disappointments, a plan was evolved which resulted in nearly 300 scouts and leaders travelling 500 plus miles to an exposed and isolated site on Mull. When the weather was good it was possible to see, across Loch Tuath, "our island".

(continued on page 7)

It was a quiet afternoon at base camp (a rare enough thing!) The last clansman had left for the mainland, when a dinghy put ashore in the southern harbour and a party from a newly arrived yacht came into the camp. They had come to investigate something that had caught their attention at sea. It was a strange device on a rocky crag, and they had argued as to whether it was a radar receiver, a satellite tracking unit, or a weather station. It was, in fact, STREB...

THE STORY OF STREB

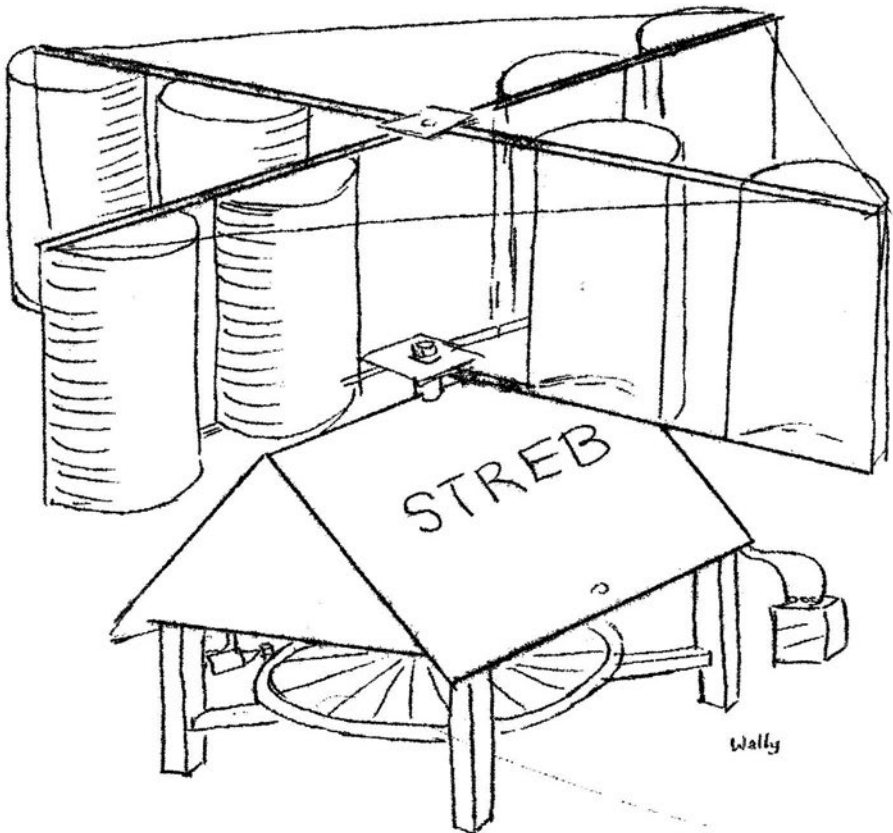
Credit for the idea of designing this wonderful piece of engineering technology must go to the V.S.L. Wally and I first heard of it at a meeting to discuss Island Venture. General idea was to build a device to generate electricity to power a portable T.V., and enable us to watch the Olympics. Eventually, however, it deteriorated into being a power unit to provide a lighting system for one tent!

The first problem we had to overcome was that of deciding on what generator could be used for the ingenious device. A D.C. generator (Scout Headquarters would like one of these) was thought of first and after a day's work an old dynamo was unearthed and disconnected from an engine generously supplied by a well known car dealer, and welding expert.

One factor of the machine which caused many problems was the material and design of the sails. After considering several ideas, the V.S.L. suggested that we might try using some large 'tin cans' which we might be able to acquire from the Slumberland Mattress works. Wally and I rode down to Tredworth, where we were allowed to pick up three cans, and later Mr Champion drove down to pick up some more. The idea was to cut the cans vertically in half, and attach them to a wooden framework forming the sails. After a number of mock-ups, the design was finalised. The design seemed to be the most efficient possible with the materials available, but the problem was that the sails did not rotate fast enough to generate any current from our car dynamo, even with an eight to one gear ratio. After consultation with Mr Chappell, Mr Drake, and

the school physics department, we decided to use two A.C. generating dynamos. This created more problems because we wanted to charge a battery, so both currents from the dynamos had to be rectified and then combined together. Gradually a complex of condensers, rectifiers transistors and so on, was assembled, and on a trial run, Keith Franklin was able to record a good voltage reading on his multimeter.

All this technology and hours of pain and sweat (and smell!) resulted in a remarkable device which was built on a cut down coffee table, and painted blue, proudly bearing the legend S.T.R.E.B. (Sir Thomas Rich's Electricity Board.)



The day of departure dawned, and just as we were about to get on to the M5, it was realised that we had left the main sail frame behind! Eventually, after two days travel, we got to Gometra, only to find that the box of electronics had been left on the beach at Kilninian! Frantic messages went back next day and at last STREB was installed on a rocky crag, and as the westerly winds started the sails turning, electricity was produced (for the duration of our stay apart from one hour when a nut on the main shaft came loose, and the sails fell off! No damage was done to the sails or the electrics, but the bicycle wheel was buckled. Production of power after that was limited, but the sails continued to rotate to impress any visitors.

Our first attempt at alternative technology was a limited success, but was it worth bringing STREB home? Hard faced executives gave the thumbs down. Mercifully, the end was swift and painless. The V.S.L. crept up behind STREB in a moment of calm, when the lethal arms were motionless, and heaved it off the cliff. SOB! HISS!! BOO!!! A small black box of electronic pieces now takes its place on the Unit's trophy shelf, and on dark winter nights, the ghostly creak of supernatural sails can be heard echoing across Gometra.

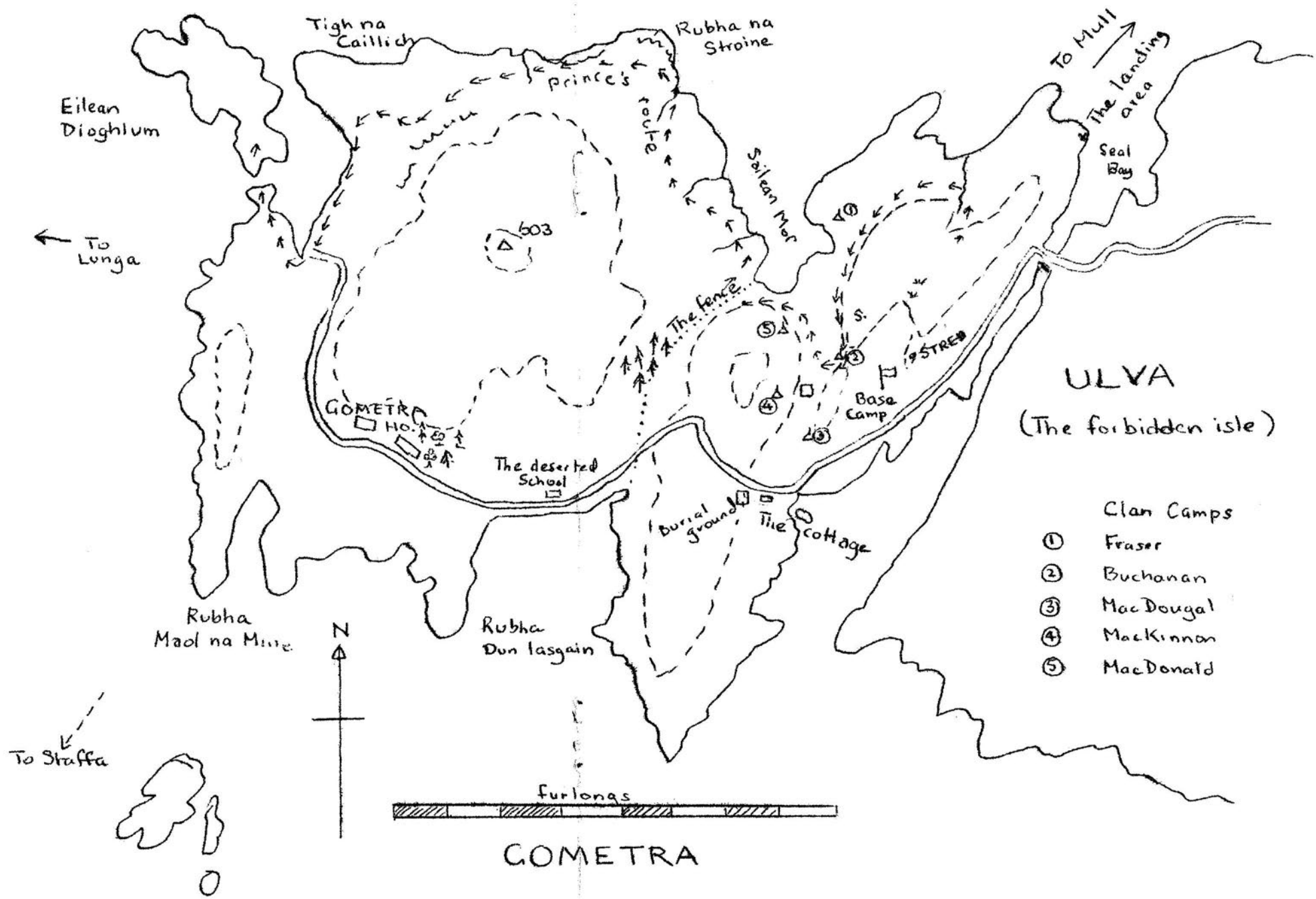
Dick Chappell.

Continued from page 4

Our island because by the devious machinations of their leader, the Unit found itself in the role of general staff for the activities thereupon. They had been promised long hours of hard labour, drudgery, boredom, and privation, and they got it! They were nursemaids, cooks, mechanics, life guards, outdoor pursuit instructors, actors and refuse collectors. But they accepted the challenge - careful, I must not sound as if I am being complimentary - that would never do!

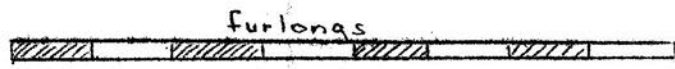
But we were not alone in our efforts, as we were joined by some very willing hands from the Wycliffe Unit, and of course both Barry Sutton and Alan Warren were towers of strength and it was largely by their efforts that the whole adventurous scheme on Gometra was held together.

F.H.



ULVA
(The forbidden isle)

- Clan Camps
- ① Fraser
 - ② Buchanan
 - ③ MacDougal
 - ④ Mackinnon
 - ⑤ MacDonald



GOMETRA

Memoirs of a fugitive Prince an extract.

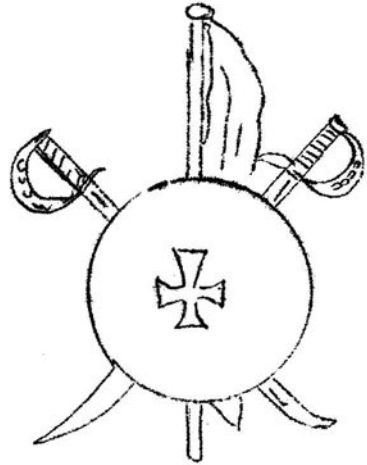
There's many a man who'd drink the health
 Of our rightful ruler,
 Smashing his wineglass to the hearth,
 Cursing the usurper,
 But honour now his more in deeds
 Than drinking toasts unnumbered,
 A gill of blood shed on the moor
 Excells nine drunk in gallons.

Thus wrote Alexander MacDonalld, bard of Clanranald in the spring of 1745, and the last two lines were, of course, to come true all too frequently during the long hot summer days following the debacle of Drumossie Muir the following year.

Recreating the atmosphere of the chase over two centuries later for a generation living in an age of tactical nuclear weapons, devastating air strikes, intercontinental ballistic missiles and all the panoply of late 20th Century warfare, had its moments nevertheless. The feel of a broadsword (albeit wooden) in the hand, the brave fluttering of a clan standard, muttered passwords, grave faced deference to nobility all helped arouse great feelings of vicarious nostalgia in those of sentimental outlook. Even the more earthbound couldn't but become galvanised into action by the bloodthirsty cries of the redcoats and renegade Campbells. The clans of Frazer, Mac-kintosh, Buchanan, MacDougal and MacDonalld may not be recalled as readily by Charles Edward Louis Philippe Casimir Stuart as by his erstwhile emmulator on Gometra, and yet their deeds were not without excitement.

The Buchanans and MacDougals seemed fated to miss the action. It is ironic that they have given their names to, respectively, a major Glasgow rail terminus and a household kitchen product, for their Gometran reputation is one of non-arrival, non-connection and a failure to rise to the occasion in the central basin of the island. (So much for the flower of the nation!)

It is said that defence is the best form of attack. It might be said that defence was the best for an attack! A realistic decoy movement by James Stewart of Appin followed by an undignified scramble by the Prince and party resulted in a highly authentic confusion, and in the mêlée the Prince, to his own amazement, as well as that of the redcoat squad, found himself hoofing it along a rocky shore, seemingly totally alone.



The true delights of real cross-country running, in hiking boots, under a warm sun, pursued inexorably if at times invisibly, are not to be missed. It is perhaps not to be recommended, but... On one occasion the Prince taking the initiative after having been surprised by the pursuers, dived for the cover of a deep stream bed. Fortunately dry, and bedecked with bracken, it afforded first class cover, even against the keen eyes of very close redcoats.

On another occasion the Prince, wishing to slow down the rapid and successful forward movement of his escort, so as to permit a planned Campbell pincer move to materialise, decided to stumble. Having stumbled in true coarse acting style he rolled artistically down the slope towards the cliff top. Concentrating on a controlled stop a yard from the cliff top he foolishly forgot to check his path over hidden rocks in the heather - as they might say in the Navy Lark, he almost did himself an ooh-nasty! His ego was further deflated by the acid comments of his escort, who briefly reverted to type!

Eventually the mountain track was gained, with or without escort, at which point the Prince seemed to undergo a metamorphosis. Eschewing his favourite Gadarene swine he seemed to become Rob Roy, the clans regrouped and set off marauding, stalking the renegades and redcoats to do final battle at the bothie. Here the staff that had guided the Prince now

served Rob Roy as a cudgel cum pike cum musket. Oddly enough this did not go down well amongst certain of the company. However, it is not the winning or the losing - the game was the thing. Thus, as the flags went down and the sun set slowly in the west, yarns were swapped and blow by blow replays enjoyed.

"Bha bliadhna thearlaich air tighinn gu ceann" W.R.S.

Everywhere youth developed a passion for the Games, with their dialogues and progression of formulas. The Game was not mere practise and mere recreation; it became a form of concentrated self awareness for intellectuals. It was played with a virtuosity and strictness at once athletic and ascetic. It afforded them a pleasure which somewhat compensated for their renunciation of worldly pleasures and ambitions.

Das Glasperlenspiel. Herman Hesse

-o-

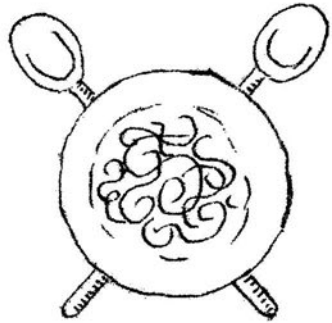
COOKERY CORNER

This week; SPAGHETTI GOMETRA

Ingredients; Spaghetti
Water, a large amount
Instant potato, etc.

Place packet of spaghetti into large amount of cold water. Warm slowly on primus for about 2 hours until spaghetti totally disintegrated. Panic! Add instant potato to thicken when this runs out add oats, Ryvita, cardboard, flour, or anything to thicken mixture. When quite sure that it will not thicken, add savoury mince and serve on cold tin plate. Retire discretely. Complaints may be heard initially, but as mixture sets in mouth, they will soon cease. Any of the mixture left over can be diluted with two parts water and used for paperhanging, or used neat it will seal holes in car radiators.

(based on an idea by B**n N**n*n.)



RANDOM THOUGHTS

It is difficult to put a value on or an order to so many of the events of Island Venture. Our concern so far has been entirely with Gometra, with no mention of the many other facets of the expedition as a whole, but this is understandable because to most of us Gometra was something totally new. It offered both hardship and peace, solitude and close companionship, and something undefinable which seems to permeate the very air of the Western Isles...

The island was a paradise for the ornithologist. So many birds, so indifferent to human observers. The young Cuckoo who spent nearly two hours on a rock beside the base camp, being fed by an overworked pipit. The shearwaters, puffins, and gannets that skimmed past us as we travelled to Staffa..

The indispensable Zodiac, and our trusty boatman, Nick who played such an important role in the Venture... Four of us will remember that run to the island when we had to wade out to the craft chest deep in the cold water, and then hang grimly onto the safety rope as wave after wave crashed over us.

Little things also remain in the memory. The stile we erected over the fence which became the focal point in it great game. The stretcher, built like so many things from drift wood, and used to carry at least two casualties to the shore. Scavenging on the beaches, Barry Sutton's speciality! The constant sounds of the sea, and the indescribable sunsets....

And the people too, the people of Gometra - Colonel and Mrs Howard, who welcomed us to their island retreat - we can not thank them enough for their hospitality and kindness. The lady who had lived alone in her little cottage for so long - we thank her for tolerating our noisy intrusion.

Eventually time came to leave, one party going early to ascend Ben More on Mull, and later joined by others, to climb Ben Nevis. The small remaining group packed up, and at the last moment we were offered a chance to visit Staffa, and the world famous Fingal's Cave. And did we go, gentle reader?

The journey there enhances the majesty of the cave. You can see the flat island from miles away, and watch it growing longer. Not only this, but the experience of having ridden in an inflatable craft on the open sea is one that cannot easily be described. Perhaps it is the thought of only having a thin sheet of plywood and a flimsy air bag between you and the sea!

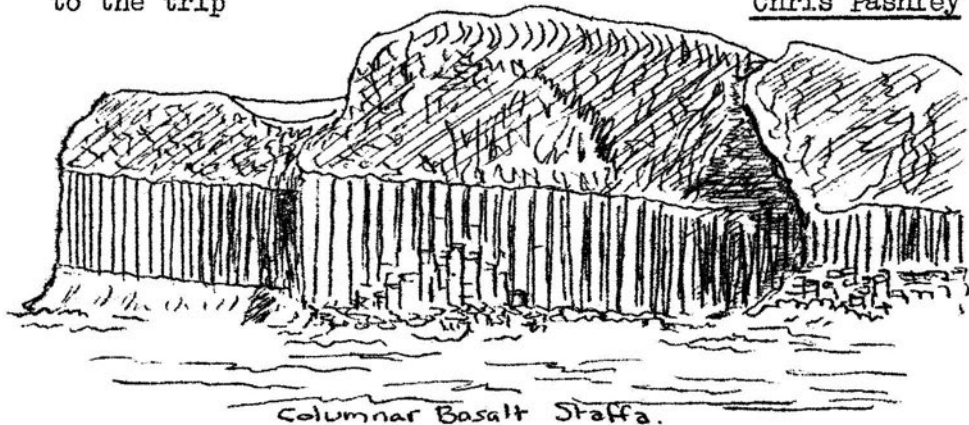
Nearing the island the boat was forced to slow to avoid numerous buoys and fishing nets. The approach to the landing stage was quite hazardous because of jagged rocks. This summer work has been done on fixing a landing stage to the rocks but high seas are challenging these efforts. More work is being done on building steps and walkways along the island.

The cave is cut into a rock called basalt, showing a peculiar structure which makes it look like a series of vertical hexagonal columns. It extends back about 300 ft, and is about 50ft high, half filled with water, and 30 ft wide.

When I thought about Fingal's Cave on Staffa I imagined just a very large sea cave. Many famous places are a bit of a let-down when you actually see them, because you have imagined something much grander. I felt something like this going to Stonehenge. Fingal's Cave was much better than I had imagined. Definitely worth an overture, Mr Mendelssohn.

For me the visit to Staffa was one of the highlights of the expedition to the Western Isles. It was the perfect end to the trip

Chris Pashley



Columnar Basalt Staffa.

The editor wishes it to be known that he can in no way be held responsible for what follows..

—O—

'Sir, what is poetry?'

'Why, Sir, it is much easier to say what it is not. We all know what light is; but it is not easy to tell what it is.'

Samuel Johnson

—O—

"Our Everest" or "The South West Tourist Route"

After working for nearly two weeks non-stop,
Ten of the party decided to climb the United Kingdom, to
the top.

Once selected, passed able, and almost fit,
The long hard dusty trail to Banavie at ten o'clock we hit

At Fort William we stopped, at almost six in the evening
And had to wait for three of the team, who were late,
before leaving,

But on to the campsite we pressed and cooked our meal
Of beefburgers, savoury rice, and 'mash' from a tin
(which we didn't have to peel.)

The following morning we awoke to thick mist and a
queue at the loo,
But we waited and it cleared a little, above the level of
the dew.

We packed our tents into the van and ate our porridge,
Got ready our spare socks, emergency rations, and picked
up our courage.

We parked in Glen Nevis, just below our day's climb
And set off in heavy warm trousers, waterproofs and walk-
ing boots in a neat tidy line.

We walked steadily up the well trod tourist route
 Passing people in yellow wellingtons, daps, jeans and
 even the odd suit.

At eight hundred feet we suffered a loss and learned
 That one of our party had weak knees, and so he returned
 To Fort William he went, and along the way (being in the
 School Choir) he sang,
 And there he met a friend with his geological hammer,
 having a bang.

On reaching the summit we celebrated with chocolate,
 raisins, and nuts.
 Some read the inscriptions, whilst others just sat be-
 side the tumbledown huts.
 But quickly we cooled in our sweat soaked clothes, so
 had to leave.
 We descended, but did not, at our very short stay there
 grieve.

Below the cloud level once again, we stopped for photo-
 graphs of the valley,
 And then decided, after a rest, into two groups to rally
 Those in the first were the fit, and those who wanted to
 rush on ahead,
 Whilst the rearguard of those who plodded down by Bill
 were led.

The attack on Ben Nevis complete, to Fort William we went
 There we stopped for souvenirs, and our money we spent
 On tea, biscuits, and cornflakes for the following
 morning.
 Which would signal the end of our stay in Scotland would
 soon be dawning.

Wally Champion

I wonder, however, that so many people have written, who might
 have left it alone.

Samuel Johnson.

