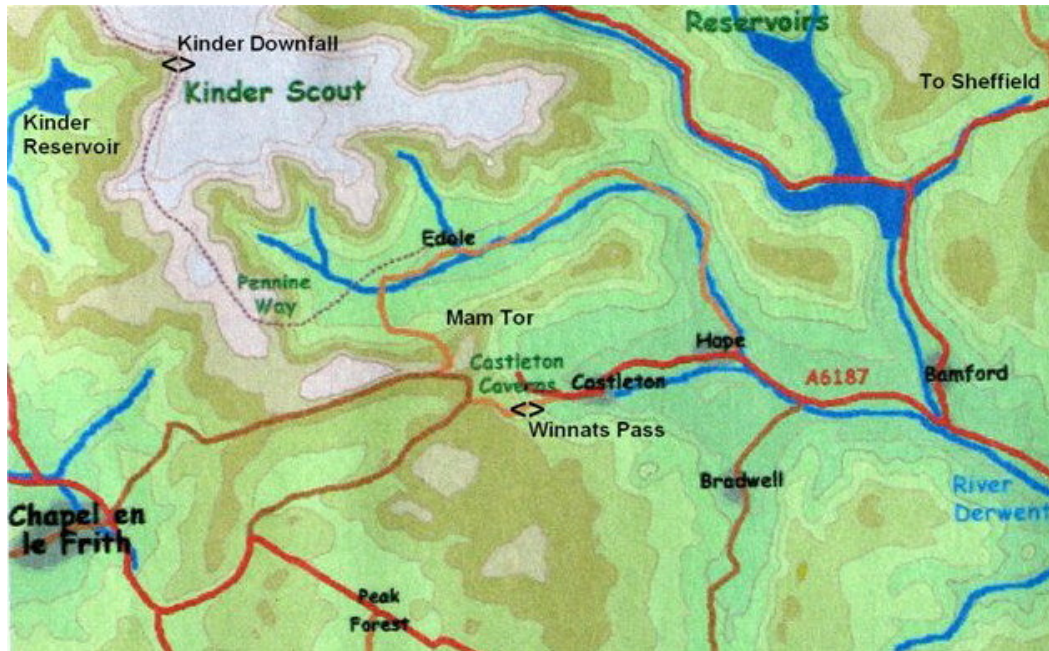


PRELUDE

Travel to the English Peak district of Derbyshire and you will find Kinder Scout (Kinder), a windswept gritstone plateau most of which stands about 600 metres above sea level. At just under 2000 ft, Crowden Head is Kinder's highest point with another prominent, rock faced feature known as Mam Tor rising nearby. Edged with oddly shaped boulders, strewn with gritstone and laced with peat eroded watercourses (grouches), the plateau is for the most part featureless but because of its topography, it presents ideal views of the surrounding terrain from its ragged circumference. Forming part of one of England's most popular cross country hikes, "The Pennine Way," the plateau is the source of many brooks and streams with one of them being the Kinder River that drops over Kinder's western escarpment at a point referred to as Kinder Downfall.

We first learned of Kinder Scout from a hiker by the name of Michael Nield whom we encountered camped out on the Isle of Skye, Scotland. We visited him later in Sheffield, not far from Kinder, where he showed us pictures of the Downfall which at times appears to flow uphill due to the windy conditions often found there. Michael gave us a good map of the plateau and recommended we visit the area but warned us of the crowds that frequent the trails there in the warmer months.



Prior to the events depicted in Derbyshire Dilemmas, Wendy and I had done a great deal of hiking in all weathers, in many parts of the world, and at altitudes up to 21,000ft. With that kind of experience behind us, we gave very little thought as to what serious issues, if any, that could arise on what seemed to us at the time, a 'piece of cake' jaunt hardly worth the effort. Other trails we had done in Britain in the summer months soon convinced us to stay away from popular treks in vacation time. Like the Continent, there are just too many people in that part of the world to have any kind of a 'have the place to yourself' experience. For example, an August trek to the top of Ben Nevis, Britain's highest mountain, was most memorable for having to negotiate long lines of humanity enroute including women pushing prams with infants inside. Kinder Scout in mid December seemed a much better option, for at that time of year, there was a far better chance of having the trek to ourselves including the opportunity to stay the night in deserted car parks.

Having now mentioned car parks, it's worth noting here that approaching the area of Kinder Scout just before dusk as we did, may seem like a poor idea to some but this was common practice for us throughout Europe. If you are hoping to 'overnight it' in a village or car park or wherever, so that you are already on the spot for an early start to your day, it's much better to move in late, after dark and so attract as little attention as possible. Move in too early and you have a much greater chance of being hunted off by some vigilant, obnoxious, 'stick to the rules' type character and in England, there's plenty of them to be had. In writing Derbyshire Dilemmas, I will base many of the details of that experience on our travel diaries. Apologies to those 'in the know' for any discrepancies I may have made regarding Kinder Scout but it's a good few years ago now that we were there and memories do fade in time but for us, the experience we had there never will.

DERBYSHIRE DILEMMAS

DILEMMA ONE

Iridescent before our headlamps and driven horizontally before the wind, snowflakes streaked meteor like out of the gloom in front of us, bombarding our windshield to the point where our wipers could scarcely clear them quickly enough. It had been a gradual climb since leaving Castleton and the weather had transposed itself from threatening cloud to light rain, then pelting sleet and finally snow.

Wendy wound down her window a little, only to quickly close it again to suppress a flurry of flakes. "Gosh it's freezing," she said. "Whose idea was it to come to the Peak District in December?"

Low cloud obscured most of the high country from view and I thought then of Michael Nield, our trail hiking friend; would that he was with us now to tell us where Kinder Scout was located.

"Look there! That looks like a National Park building on our left," motioned Wendy, "and that must be the car park as well." I braked hard so as not to miss the turn, noting with unease some sideward drift of our VW camper's (RR) rear end on the sleety road. With collars upturned against the biting wind and wool hats pulled down below ear level, we got out to survey the scene.

"Oh heck that can't be it," I scolded Wendy. "We have to find Edale first and there's certainly no town around here anywhere."

"Good grief, is this really Derbyshire?" groaned Wendy, who just in that little time had already taken on a snowman-like appearance; "more like the French Alps I reckon," she continued.

I nodded. "As if we haven't seen enough of this sort of thing on the Continent." Look that could be Mam Tor." I pointed to a momentary break in the cloud, beyond which the face of a mountainside showed itself in the twilight.

"Looks like the picture Michael showed us" assured Wendy, and we both made a dash for the warmth of RR.

It was just the clue we'd been looking for and we knew then that the correct way to 'Kinder' lay still ahead of us.

"Right my lady," said I, "according to Michael, it's up the road a few miles and then right at some picnic tables and we should be able to see Kinder Scout."

"Are you kidding? You'll be lucky to see the road ahead of us if this weather keeps up, let alone Kinder Scout."

I inwardly cursed Wendy's realism and spun off up the road. Who'd be out in these conditions anyway, other than a couple of nutcase Australians? As we climbed, the road became much steeper and the terrain closed in around us. I changed to a lower gear, something I never liked doing on an icy roadway with our well laden VW camper. "Let's hope I don't have to use first gear on this darn slope," I warned.

Scarcely had I said so when Wendy exclaimed, "Oh no! Do you see what I see?"

I followed her gaze up the road and noted a red traffic light indicating a one way system for a short distance. There was little time to decide on what best to do; I knew that if I stopped on that steep, icy roadway, we likely wouldn't get moving again, not without chains anyway, and it was one hell of a time and place to be fitting them. Through the red light we went! With visibility restricted due to whirling snow and a narrow one way lane as well, the next few moments passed somewhat tensely for us both. At last, the other end, and nobody encountered en route.....thank heaven!

"Don't do that again," growled Wendy.

"We made it, didn't we?" I grinned. But my assurance was short lived, for out of the gloom ahead, appeared yet another red light. This time I slowed down for the controlled area appeared to be somewhat longer than the first one and with that hesitation, our engine r.p.m. dropped considerably.

"Damn," I cursed and quickly changed to second gear, at the same time gunning RR past the oncoming red light. The increased torque on our driving wheels was too much for the icy conditions however and we slewed sideways at some 45 degrees to the roadway ahead. Wendy grabbed her door grip for support as our rear end whipped and clipped a large, orange traffic divider into a ditch. I corrected the skid but then yellow headlamps suddenly appeared as if from nowhere in front of us.

"He'll wait at the green light; it's only just ahead of us," I comforted Wendy.

"Like heck, he's coming through and traveling downhill, he'll never be able to pull up in time; back up, back up," Wendy yelled.

I didn't need her urging for I was already trying to engage reverse gear even before our "Two Ton Tessie" had slithered to a stop. We'd passed the red light by some 150 ft only, yet to reverse even that distance downhill, along a steep gradient, with head out window and rapidly fogging glasses, was not at all funny. I'd gambled against the oncoming traffic once and triumphed but perhaps this time I'd bitten off more than I could chew.

"See if you can find our wheel 'chocks' Duff. We're going to have a problem any moment from now," I cautioned.

Sensing the urgency in my voice, Wendy immediately began to grope behind her seat for two wooden, pre-cut, wheel stops that we always kept there. I hardly noticed her efforts because I was too busy trying to keep RR in a straight line as it weaved backwards down the hill. I reached the light and as I swung on to my correct side of the road, the oncoming car swept by with its horn blaring and lights flashing, hinting at the driver's disapproval of my actions. I ignored his shaking fist out the window for I was too intent on easing RR to a final stop....but stop it would not!

Take my word for it, it's one of the most frightening of all winter hazards, when your vehicle starts to skate on an iced over roadway, particularly when narrow shoulders give way to embankments leading into gullies below. Gentle braking only locked the wheels which in turn increased our drifting speed; hand brake application worsened our plight even further. Desperately I tried to engage low gear against our backward slide for RR's rear end was slewing sideways off the safety of the tarmac. Suddenly with a grinding clunk, I found low gear and immediately accelerated, releasing the clutch violently in an effort to try and jump us back onto the hardtop.

Our rear wheels, by then on a road shoulder of drifted snow, spun viciously, heating ice to pungent steam. In this fashion we traveled sideways for two yards towards the then green light, but because of road camber, lost further ground towards the embankment. Then the engine stalled leaving RR at a precarious angle indeed and still slowly drifting backwards. Frantically I tried to ease RR forward by cranking the starter while still in low gear but it was asking too much of it to get us out of that situation, the pitch was too steep. The engine roared to life again!

"I can't hold it Duff," I yelled above the noise of spinning wheels and motor. "See if you can get something under the front wheels at least they're still on the roadway."

Having already found the wheel chocks, Wendy leapt from the drifting van, in her haste leaving the door open. By the time she got herself into position, RR was slowly increasing its pitch down the embankment and all four wheels were then off the roadway. Snowflakes whirled around the cab and road maps took off into the darkness as I looked for some sign from Wendy groping behind the front wheels. She raised an arm and I cut the engine, then anxious moments followed as I waited for RR to settle.

With the hand brake on and the engine in gear, RR juddered to a slow halt. There followed an ominous creaking groan from the rear as the wheel chocks slipped and then took hold again under the tires. Success was short lived however; silently the chocks sunk deeper under the snow then with a sudden bump we overrode them.

"We're still sliding," cried Wendy, her voice showing real alarm for the first time.

"Jesus!" I blurted in the tension of the moment and leapt from RR to appraise the situation. It wasn't till then that I realized how bad things were. RR's considerable weight was carrying it slowly over an embankment to an uncertain fate.

"Chocks, more chocks and fast!" I yelled, as I dashed feverishly about in the light of our headlights, looking for rocks or indeed anything to serve the purpose, but winter's mantle covered all, and rocks

were difficult to see. As Wendy struggled to reposition her chocks, I raced wildly up the road past the second light that had started all this trouble. I fell into rather than scramble down the ditch where I had clipped a large traffic divider earlier and with relief, my grasping hands found its welcome cone shape in the snow.

Within moments I returned to Wendy and RR, hardly noticing my hand which was bleeding from a cut sustained in my fall. As Wendy struggled to reposition her chocks under the front wheels for a third time, I jammed the rubber divider, cone first, behind a rear wheel. With baited breaths we watched RR slip back a little, then judder once more to a halt. As the divider cone slowly buckled under the weight of RR, the large square base was forced downwards through the snow into the ground where it held long enough for us wedge our wheel chocks once again under the front wheels. But it wasn't until we had at last located a suitable rock under the snow, then wedged it under the other rear wheel, that we really felt our beloved home had been saved. Not often had RR caused us such anxious moments as those we endured together, while trying to avoid the destruction of the tiny home that we had grown so attached to over our traveling years.

With RR apparently settled, we then became fully aware of our half frozen hands, wet feet, ice clogged sweaters and pounding hearts.

"Good grief!" said Wendy, trying unsuccessfully to hide the quaver in her voice. "I thought it was never going to stop sliding and your hand is bleeding too"

Stiffening myself against the cold, I said nothing, for I was still alarmed at the angle at which RR had settled and also, the force of the wind that somehow seemed intent on toppling it into even further difficulties. I lost no time as Wendy aided me to fit the very snow chains I had been so reluctant to fit earlier. Thank heaven for our cleverly designed snow chains; each chain was made up of two halves already linked together save for one small area. After placing one half over the back of a wheel and the other half over the front, all that remained to do, was to place RR in gear, then crank it forward just enough to allow me to join up the connecting links. Chains fitted, albeit loosely, we pulled steadily away from the embankment and onto the safety of the tarmac and then proceeded to clank and rattle our way, like some ponderous tank, to the top of the pass.....yes, the light *was* green at the time!

Was it foolish to have placed us in such peril in the first place? Yes, I admit it was, but making snap decisions had become a way of life for Wendy and me throughout the many years of overland travel already behind us; some had been life saving, others not so. To me, the odds were in our favour at the time; we were in a sparsely populated area, it was late, just on dusk and with very little likelihood of traffic, especially in the current weather conditions. Had it not been for the even more foolish actions of the other driver, we would indeed have made that second one way section without a problem. I say even more foolish because to enter a single lane, one way, light controlled roadway with a vehicle approaching you, seems downright crazy to me, regardless of the fact that you had a green light. That, I would never have done!

"Can't get over that guy not letting us come through," I reminisced with Wendy. "He could've waited just a little longer.....not like the cautious English really."

"Didn't you notice?" replied Wendy.

"Notice what?"

"The car had French plates."

Suddenly it all came back to me; the yellow headlamps, the small grey Citroen, the blaring horn and the fist shaking out the window.

"Bloody Frenchman!" I retorted, in my realization of the fact. "That explains a lot, they have no time for the English!"

It was a wintry scene that greeted us atop the pass; in fact, quite unlike anything we'd seen in Britain during our previous visits. Heavy wet snow had transformed the area; shrubbery appeared in our headlights as white blobs; nearby fence posts were white helmeted and tussocks were no longer visible. With its engine weight over the rear wheels, RR had for the most part good traction in snowy conditions and our loose chains had been taking a hammering on the tarmac and so on level ground, we paused to remove them and oh the woe of it! Only those who have experienced it, can fully appreciate the misery involved when faced with a task that requires using bare hands in wintry conditions, especially when having to handle metal; with fingers chilled to the bone, even minor manoeuvres can entail considerable hardship. Sapped of their mobility and strength by the cold, one's hands respond poorly to such tasks as the tensioning of a clip or the hooking of an eye. As well, make a slip, knock those fingers if only slightly and the mind cries out with the pain of it.

It was dark by the time our road turned towards Edale and by then, snow flurries had waned to sleet. Soon after, lights appeared in the distance.

"That must be Edale," said Wendy. "Let's stop for a coffee, I'm a wreck!"

"Same here," I replied, peering ahead of our headlights in search of a place to park. A lay-by appeared but the approach was steeply downwards. Gently I applied the brakes to ease our way in but RR slithered onwards regardless under ice power.

"Shoot," exclaimed Wendy, let's forget the coffee for the moment, I've had enough ice skating for one evening thanks."

I ignored the car park adjoining the main road near Edale; no doubt it carried the usual sign posted scourge to all "campervanners", "NO OVERNIGHT PARKING."

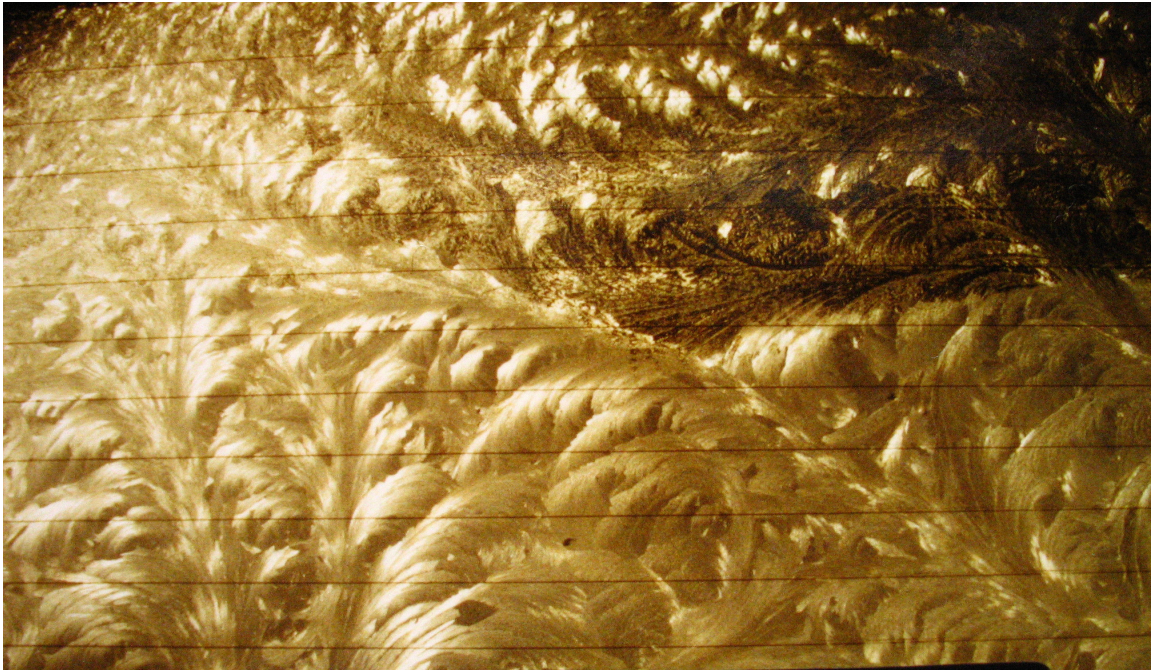
As we headed instead towards the town, my eyes caught a glimpse of the terrain up to the left before the railway underpass. A sixth sense developed over years of wild camping, drew me instinctively in that direction, following a narrow lane to its very end where we found a quiet level area for parking; near the railway line perhaps but nevertheless, we'd done much worse at times.

While Wendy brewed up the 'cuppa,' the snow turned to heavy rain and I felt compelled to don an extra pair of socks for it seemed much colder than it had been. As I held the welcome warmth of my extra large coffee cup in both hands, I noticed that they were shaking. I drank silently for a while and then said quietly, "We had a close shave that time Duff."

Wendy placed a knowing hand on my lap, "you don't have to tell me; I'm thinking about it too; we nearly lost our home."

By the time we bedded down, the rain had eased and my mind revelled in the stillness of the night about us. "Was there really a village nearby?" I wondered. Having been around the busy city of Sheffield for some weeks, I'd lost track of what absolute silence was. It was heaven and stirred within me the thrill of being on the road again, away from the "rat-race" and the ugliness of it. Through the skylight directly above me, I could see the odd star peeking out beyond thinning cloud; perhaps we would see the sun in the morning I thought, as I snuggled into the best little bedmate in the world.

DILEMMA TWO



"Looking upwards, I saw frost, delicately formed in picturesque fern shaped patterns."

Around six that next morning I stirred and switched on a light to check the time. It seemed unusually cold and little wonder, for a glance at the thermometer revealed it had dropped to just on zero within the van. Looking upwards, I saw not snow on our skylight but frost, delicately formed in picturesque fern shaped patterns, so bewilderingly interwoven, that to copy them would test even the most skilled artist's brush. Gold cast by our interior lighting, it was a beautiful sight but frost also meant a clear start to the morning and as such, was the password for early activity within the McGrath emporium..... "Kinder Scout Downfall" was our target for the day!

A grey pink sky announced the first hint of dawn across the high ridges about Edale as we emerged from our ice encrusted home, parked by a thankfully silent railway station. Not even a rooster stirred as we made our way briskly down lane, under bridge and along roadway, our passage heralded only by the clump of our trail boots beating in rhythmic succession on the tarmac. Wendy paused to read the menu on the door of the "Nags Head," a local pub popular with hikers.



"Wendy paused to read the menu on the door of the 'Nags Head.'"

"This place must be lousy with tourists in the summer," Wendy half whispered. I grinned as her voice nevertheless echoed around the empty cobbled square.....this was definitely the time of year to climb Kinder Scout! But where was Kinder Scout? The Information Centre was well and truly closed up so there was no help forthcoming there. With binoculars I scanned the high ridges beyond the town. Strangely formed rocks lay there, many askew, others atop one another with some precariously balanced as if ready to fall. How ghostly they looked in the early light of dawn, their sinister silhouettes appearing like some alien army gathering upon ridge top to repel any would-be invaders that dared enter their lofty domain.

"Hey muggins," a voice from the stillness disturbed my thoughts. "This is no time to be standing round; I'm frozen; let's move it man."

Wendy was right, it was a "bonnie morning" albeit a cold one. We passed an old Landrover with more holes in its windshield than it had glass, then beyond it was a sign, "The Pennine Way." Running water broke the stillness of the waking day as we scaled fence and crossed bridge; then dogs barked as Wendy negotiated an anything but quiet sheep gate.

"Blast !" I heard her muttering. "Now I've woken up the whole village."

As we traversed an open field etched in frosty white, our heavy boots met no resilience beneath the frozen turf and as we chatted, our conversation vaporized in the frigid air. A second sheep gate, and the way to Kinder lay open before us; a gulley, wide at first and bedded with stream, then narrowing and becoming steeper with rock face at top. The trail, easy at first, became more difficult, not because we had reached the snowline but rather, the hazards of frozen mud and water flow. There was no or little grip to be had on the iced over slippery track; below, a stream, its embankments embellished with icicles, awaited the unwary.

Time and time again we broke marked trail and took to the tussocks for foothold, thus lengthening our rate of climb but even then all was not easy. Holes a thousand fold made by climbers in softer boggy times, lay frozen and hard, pitfalls for the potential twisted ankle!

"Should have brought some darn crampons for this lot," half joked Wendy, as she cracked her way through an ice skimmed puddle.

Soon we were picking our way slowly from rock to rock. The stream, which beforehand had reverberated its activity from the rising walls of a narrowing ravine, gradually eased to a trickle, its life blood mostly frozen in step like cascades that clung picturesquely to the steep rock face ahead. The last two to three hundred feet was exasperating to say the least; every rock lay ice covered, every prospective foothold a pool of water, not thinly frozen but solid all the way through. The greatest care was needed, especially nearing the top. This was no Everest of course but none the less a slip meant a fall and on solid rock, that is not pleasant under any circumstances.

"What's happened to the sun?" queried Wendy, as she slithered her way between two frosted over boulders.

I looked towards the horizon. As with many a British morning, "Old Sol" had been swallowed up by clouds.

When only a hundred feet from the top of the rock face, a loud curse from Wendy, climbing below attracted my attention. "Of all the rotten luck, just look above us!"



"A loud curse from Wendy, climbing below attracted my attention."

Startled, I looked upwards. Thick grey mist had appeared atop the plateau and like an advancing tidal wave, it spilled over and downwards, enveloping me with such speed, I would scarcely have thought it possible had I not been there to witness it. At the same instant, sunshine returned penetrating my mist spun cocoon and for one euphoric moment, ice crystals about me were aglitter and aglow with the splendour of it. I looked downhill. Wendy, negotiating a frozen cascade some 50 ft below, appeared as if silhouetted against a staircase of liquid gold. It was a beautiful sight; camera in hand, I turned quickly, anxious to capture the effect on film before it vanished. But I was too anxious; my foothold, firm enough till that moment, gave way on a frosty rock and I lost balance. Falling, I had but one instinctive thought in mind.....the camera! I tumbled but 20 ft. before I came to rest; that is, in three stages anyway. Falling backwards with arms held outward to protect the camera, my small daypack took the brunt of the first impact and a crunch of metal followed by a miniature explosion, heralded the dying throes of our packed thermos flask full of hot chocolate. Unable to stay gravity, I rolled over sideways, legs and arms in the air, to then drop over a 6ft. high ledge, landing on my buttocks with such force that both my hat and glasses went flying. Finally letting go of my camera with one hand, I still couldn't control my momentum enough with the free arm to prevent myself from falling forward over yet another ledge, after which I came to rest face downwards over a large rock with a force that took my breath away.

Wendy was at my side before I could regain my feet.

"My God," she exclaimed with concern. "Are you all right? Have you broken anything?"

"Only my pride and our thermos flask," I replied ruefully.

"Lucky, lucky," was all Wendy could think to say.

By that time all semblance of our 'bonnie' morning had gone.....lost behind swirling mists that had suddenly reduced visibility to some 50 ft.

"What a shame," Wendy moaned, "we never even got to see the top."

I nodded grimly; it was a bitter pill to swallow after such a fine start to the day. How sombre was the scene about us then; fog dulls not only your surroundings to the point where all seems grey, cold and uninviting but also effectively dampens your enthusiasm for carrying on.

Our depression was disturbed by what sounded like voices from below us. Startled, we noted two figures emerging from obscurity below us.

"Hello there! Enjoying your climb?" came the cheerful greeting.

"We were," Wendy and I chorused together, "that is until the fog rolled in," I added.

"Come on now 50ft. isn't bad. We've seen it down to 3 ft. on Kinder. Going over to the Downfall then? Make sure you start back before 2 o'clock if you do. Get's mighty tricky down this face once it's dark you know. See you at the top then.".....they were gone past before we thought to answer them.

"Crazy 'Poms'," I muttered to Wendy once they were out of earshot; "they'd reckon we're having a heat wave in a snowstorm."

"Got the right spirit though, haven't they?" she replied. "Let's give it a go as well; it may brighten again; you know what mountain weather is like."

Optimistic as always, Wendy was probably right. It could brighten, besides, we couldn't let it be said that only the British flag was hoisted over Kinder that day.

I retrieved my hat and glasses; the hat had become wet during its fall and then frozen with icicles attached; also, my glasses were completely frosted over. I donned both, then with a grin, I turned in view of Wendy and began groping the air wildly in front of me as I did so.

"I'm on my way," I said.

"Crazy man'" she giggled. "You look like Scott of the Antarctic"

As we climbed higher, the fog closed in even further. It was eerie the last 80 feet or so; the rock face about us appeared only intermittently, like a phantom image playing hide and seek in the mist. After a while, I began to have doubts that we were still climbing vertically or had we digressed left or right? The murky grey matter seemed to swirl all over me, offering no comfort of mind or feeling of dimension; it was like climbing in a cloud on an icy staircase that led from nowhere and headed into obscurity. Below in the stillness, only the occasional scuffle of boot on rock told me that Wendy was not far behind.

At last the top and level ground but little else for compensation.....only more mist and a chilling breeze!

"What's next?" asked Wendy.

"Don't ask me," I replied.

Almost immediately, we were drawn towards voices in the near distance and almost fell upon the two climbers we had spoken with earlier. Huddled together in the bottom of a 6ft deep, narrow gulley to escape a chilling breeze, the two "Brits" were boiling up a brew on a tiny cooker attached to a Camping "Gaz" cartridge.

"Now I've seen everything," whispered Wendy. We're staggering around in the mist wondering what best to do next and these two choose to sit up here at 2000ft, in sub-arctic conditions, and make a cup of tea."

"Maybe they've got the right idea," I quipped, thinking of the mixed glass and cocoa I was still carrying on my back.

"You live locally?" asked one fellow, a lean wiry type whose weather beaten countenance suggested a love of the great outdoors.

"No, not really," replied Wendy. "We just flew over from Australia to climb Kinder Scout."

"How long really is it since you left Australia then," the Brit enquired again, not in the least impressed with Wendy's wry sense of humour.

"Four years," I chipped in with a grin for I knew he wouldn't believe that either, even though it was in fact true.

"Damn Australians! Never give a straight answer to anything, grumbled the other fellow, a short stocky chap whose ruddy nose and pale face was the antithesis of his suntanned companion.

"Up for a cup of tea then," queried the other?

Before I could dream up an excuse to decline, his gas ran out and the kettle immediately went off the boil.

"Looks like no tea today for anyone," I commented.

"Not to worry, we have another cartridge; won't be a moment then," the Brit assured us.

"Don't worry about it, we've got hot chocolate in a thermos when we need it," I responded, failing to mention the condition it was in.....we were much more interested in moving on than pausing for tea!

We passed them by heading off to examine a mushroom shaped rock that had suddenly appeared out of the mist nearby.

"Got yourself a compass I hope, "they called after us. Wouldn't head off across the plateau without one you know."

"No problem," I answered back, "We Aussies are taught at a very early age to track kangaroos through dust storms." My comment did prompt a response but we were too far away by then to hear it which was probably just as well.

We had brought a compass however and as I made that farewell remark, my hand instinctively wandered to the bulge in my shirt pocket...yes, it was still there.

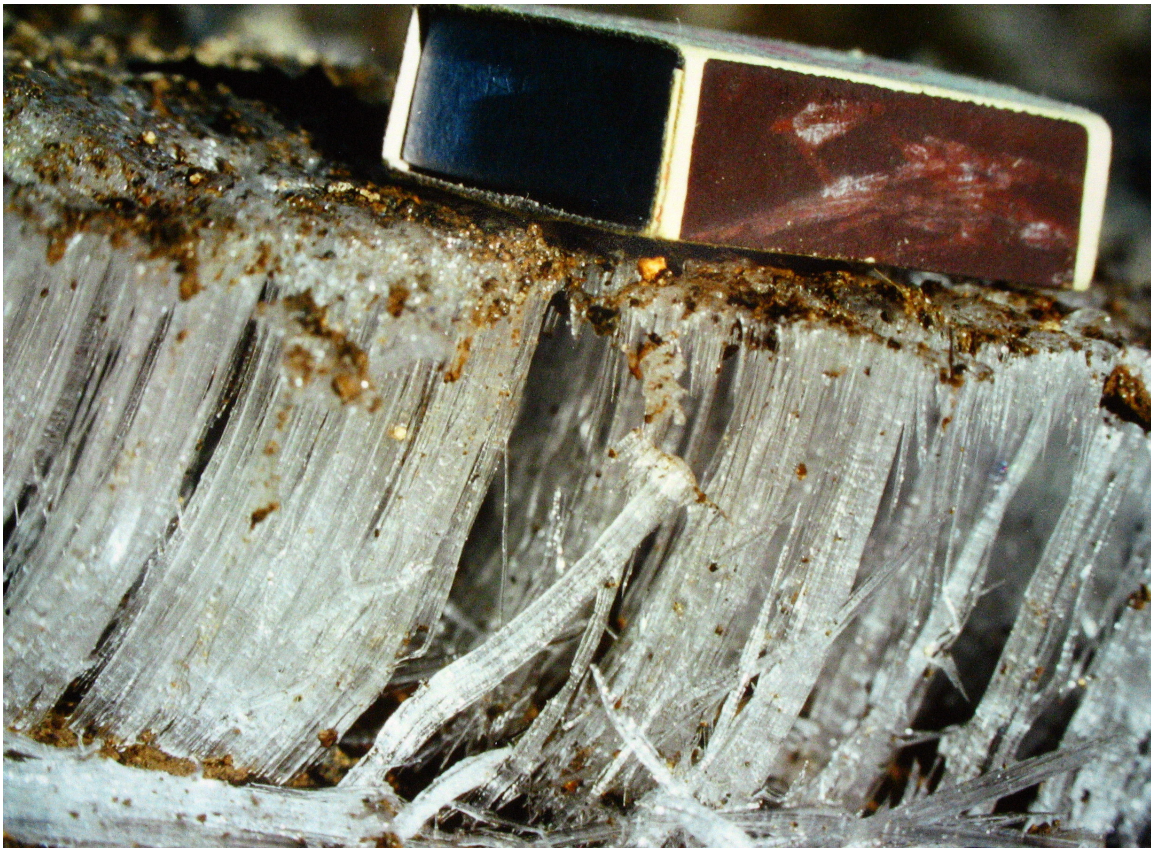
Reaching the mushroom rock, we paused to contemplate our situation. It seemed pointless to go on for visibility was very poor indeed. We'd see very little under such circumstances and possibly for a whole lot of effort as well.

"We'll wait a while, it may clear," suggested Wendy.

It seemed the only thing to do so we walked around in circles to keep warm. It was a strangely silent world up there on the plateau; the light breeze was in effect soundless for there was no bush to ruffle or trees to stir; only the movement of the swirling mist betrayed its chilling presence. The terrain appeared level enough when viewed from a distance but in fact was not at all easy to negotiate. Centuries of erosion had attacked the soft peat like soils of the plateau, creating many water cut gullies (grouches), some quite shallow, others so deep and narrow, one could scarcely climb out of them easily. Thank heaven for winter and the fact that these trench like barriers lay frozen; as a result,

their icy walls crumbled beneath our feet as we scrambled into and out of them, a far cry indeed from the foot sucking nightmarish bog that they must be in summer time.

An hour went by during which time we had not ventured any further at all because of the fog but we did discover and examine in wonder, a strange phenomenon we termed "ice forests." Formed from ice, one third as thick as a match stick, yet often twice as long, strange, straw like formations had risen forth from the ground in their thousands, pushing the topsoil above them as they did so. Viewed from side on, these fascinating oddities did in fact resemble densely packed clusters of branchless trees with the brown topsoil above them forming a sort of crowning foliage. What impressed us most was their extreme fragility yet they had obviously been strong enough to lift over two inches of soil above them in the first place. If we blew upon them ever so slightly, they would topple one against the other, creating a chain reaction of destruction. As we have so often been reminded throughout our travels, it is Mother Nature who never fails to fascinate those who take the time to discover her creations.



The strange phenomenon we termed "ice forests."

It was while I was felling my third ice forest that a call from Wendy sent me scrambling out of the depression in which I'd been crouching.

"The mist is thinning," and even as she spoke, more and more of the plateau lay revealed before us. The sunshine which hitherto had been naught but the merest hint of a diffused glow above our heads, slowly broke through our frigid captivity and cast its welcome warmth across the plateau and our upturned faces. Oh the joy of sunshine and what it can do for the human spirit when both mind and body have suffered from the lack of it.

To our left lay a somewhat snow covered but nevertheless recognizable track which closely followed a contour edge that dropped steeply towards a valley and then Edale. Beyond that, the plateau narrowed to a projection which looked like it could be crossed via an easy walk to its north western ridge; the way to the 'Downfall' we surmised but the route still lay well and truly hidden by the mist. It was almost as if some unseen hand had partly rolled back the fog providing a 'one choice only' pathway for us to follow.

"I 'dunno'," said Wendy dubiously; this could change in five minutes and we'd be back in the thick of it again."

"Never fear my dear," I assured her. "With a bit of luck, the weather might hold long enough for us to follow the ridge around to the 'Downfall.' According to Michael, it's only about an hour's walk back across the plateau to our descent point."

" 'Aaaand' if the weather hasn't cleared by the time we reach the 'Downfall'," came the reply.

"So we use our map and compass to guide us back to our descent point and as long as we get back before dark, we can still make it down to Edale," I assured Wendy again. As I spoke, I was etching the outline of a large heart by slowly pouring the still steaming contents of our thermos flask onto a frozen pond. Wendy, who had been checking out the cliff edge trail ahead of me, backtracked to see what I was doing. As I was admiring my handiwork, Wendy picked up a rock and lobbed it smack in the middle of it, opening up cracks on its surface.

"Come on dreamer," jogged Wendy; "if it was left to you, we wouldn't reach the 'Downfall' until tomorrow."

" 'Bumma,' you've ruined my graffiti," I chastised her as the heart shape gave way, dropped down and floated beneath the surrounding ice. "Check it out, there's actually water still flowing under this pond," I added.

Unconcerned, Wendy hurried off to rejoin the cliff edge trail whilst I knelt and repacked our glass filled thermos, now minus the chocolate, into my day pack. When I looked up again, both Wendy and the trail had vanished from view, lost in mist that had miraculously appeared from nowhere. In seconds I too had suffered the same fate; obviously the mist had not left the area by any means. "Where are you Duff? I yelled concernedly.

"Over this way," came the reply, "but for God's sake watch where you walk; I'm right above a cliff face here."

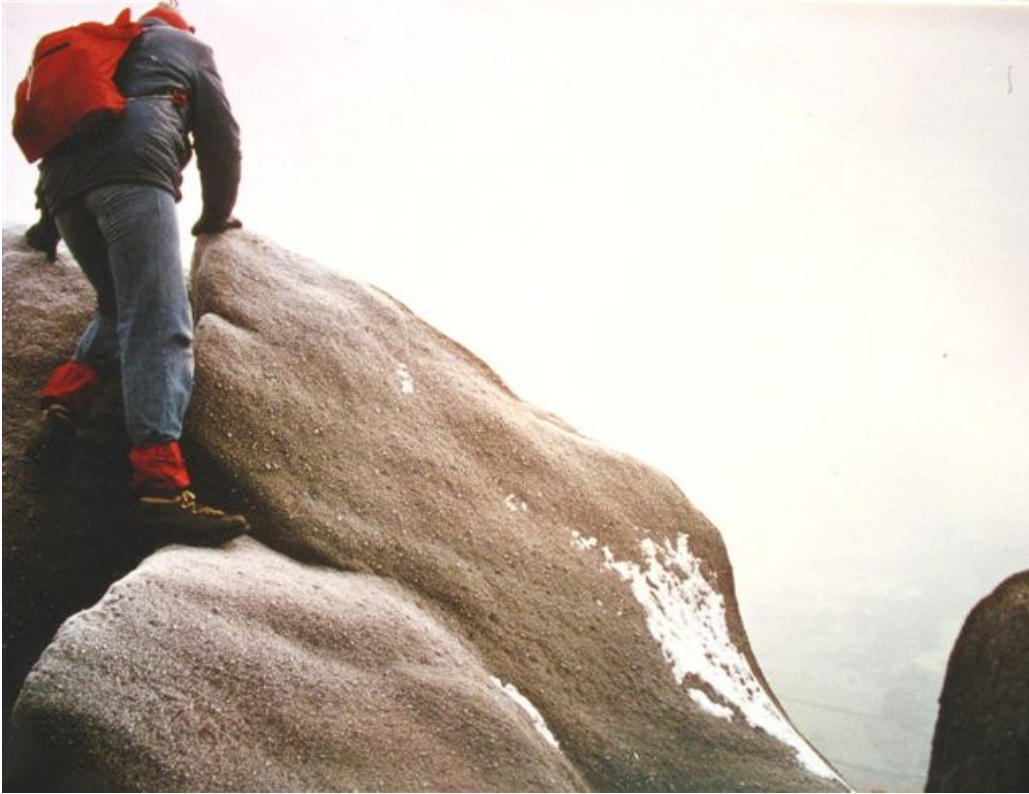
I didn't need Wendy's advice to remind me of my predicament. How quickly the scene had changed. In the clear atmosphere the danger of a sudden drop beneath your feet is easily seen and thus avoided but when you are suddenly enveloped in mist on such a trail, you can rapidly become paralytic indeed. What puzzled me was the absolute pea soup density of the mist; it was far worse than anything I had experienced. Wendy sang a school song to indicate her presence while I shuffled slowly forward, feeling ahead one foot at a time. It was an unnerving experience to say the least, for visibility was almost zero.

"Where are you? Came a voice from the void.

"I'm coming along the trail slowly," I answered, bracing myself for the predictable reply.

"You crazy goof," ranted Wendy, if you take another step I'll....."

Her voice trailed off in mid sentence because in the space of those few words we were suddenly revealed to each other again.....the mist had vanished! We looked downwards to a fog filled valley below and as we stood there, fast rising air currents brought with them more pockets of mist that swirled menacingly upwards, then around us, only to vanish as mysteriously and quickly as they had come.



"We looked downwards to a fog filled valley below"

The situation of course was not critical but I recall a time when Wendy and I were brought to a halt by mist while hiking in Canyonlands, U.S.A. For three hours we were reluctant to move and when the weather did clear, we found ourselves sitting but 100 ft. from a precipitous cliff edge, that dropped at least a half mile down to a river valley floor below. Experiences like that are not easily forgotten so understandably, we were much more at ease leaving our cliff edge trail and moving inland across a peninsula to its western ridge. Once on the western side, vistas of a sparsely settled, pasture clad valley bisected by a single tarred roadway opened up below us. Beyond that, green hills and more level topped mountains rolled away into the low cloud and haze.

Before long, we were no longer engrossed with the whims of mist but found ourselves occupied instead, with what looked like an old battlefield where rock had warred with rock. Everywhere they lay upturned, on their sides and askew at all angles, silent, weather scarred and frost etched. As we picked our way through this graveyard of granite, the mist again returned, rolling between, over and around our company of ancient sentinels, creating what surely would have been a classic background for some Hollywood 'Dracula' movie. The trail henceforth was interesting enough, although at times

difficult to follow because of light snow cover. For nigh on two hours we wandered at will, traversing groughs, plateau, ridge top and hillside. We descended to and climbed up again from yet another frozen cascade and paused often to examine rocks, which on the one hand projected forth over the valley below and on the other, stood as monumental clumps, stark and alone on the plateau.



"For nigh on two hours we wandered at will, traversing groughs, plateau, ridge top and hillside."

The vagaries of the weather continually plagued us; periods of sunshine and blue sky alternated with clinging mist, creating an environment that varied between welcome warmth and unwelcome cold. As well, low cloud persistently refused to reveal the plateau in full and so we walked onwards, following

the contour of the ridge, where at least visibility was at its best. It became apparent to us however, after a further half hour, that there was far too much descent involved in our trail; also, we should have at least been looking down on the Kinder Reservoir by that time. We had been till then quite confident that the track we were following would eventually lead us to the 'Downfall' and so, we had not questioned its meanderings, yet we had to bear in mind the shortness of a winter's day.

"I see a stone marker up high on our right, a good way ahead," said Wendy. "Let's make for that."

We were on the leeward side of a hill at that time and found progress somewhat slow as we hiked upwards through snow towards the marker. Thank heaven for our good trail boots and heavy waterproof gaiters, both of which helped to keep our feet warm and dry despite the depth of snow. Following an old stone wall for a while, we soon began to reach higher ground and unfortunately, strengthening wind as well.

We paused by a lone frozen tarn on which Wendy immediately began to take running slithers from one side to the other; "bet I can slide further than you," she challenged. I watched light heartedly but couldn't become enthused because just for a moment, I recognized a familiar clump of rocks materializing out of the mist nearby. I grimaced; some time earlier, we'd already been on the section of trail that we were currently following. I said nothing to Wendy, no point in dampening her spirits I reasoned. If we couldn't see the "Downfall' from the stone marker still ahead of us, then it would be time enough to start getting serious about the issue of heading home. As we approached the marker, things began to feel right; it was high ground all right, probably the highest around for miles and so the wind picked up accordingly. We fell silent as we walked to keep the chill of it from our throats. Stronger and stronger the wind blew but the unfolding panorama before us drew us onwards into the full force of it. There below us at last, appeared the welcome sight of the Kinder reservoir; our first recognizable landmark since we left the far side of the plateau nearly three hours ago. To our right we knew would be the 'Downfall' yet that area still remained maddeningly obscured by low cloud. "Let's have lunch," said Wendy. "I think it's slowly clearing. Maybe in another half hour or so we'll be able to see what's



over there."

"We ate in a semi-crouched position, huddled together for warmth, while the wind shrieked its ferocity amongst the boulders about us."

Being famished, I didn't argue so we clambered down through rocks in front of us, seeking out a cleft that would offer us protection from the wind. We dined well on ham and cheese sandwiches but sorely missed the warming comfort that our hot cocoa would have provided. We ate in a semi-crouched position, huddled together for warmth, while the wind shrieked its ferocity amongst the boulders about us, carrying with it wind blown snow that stung our faces on contact. In the misery of it I found myself thinking, what in blazes were we doing there anyway? Surely not just for some insignificant waterfall? The idea was even crazier where we were concerned, for Wendy and I had shared together the experience of viewing most of the great waterfalls of the world. We must have indeed had a screw loose for ever having listened to Michael Nield's story about a waterfall that for the most part flows uphill in the wind. Discussing the issue, we laughed again and again for that's how it is with Wendy and me; always willing to have a bash at anything, given half a chance, and sometimes getting into trouble because of it. C'est la vie!

Our mirth finally subsided for the numbness of our bodies began to remind us that this was no Sunday afternoon picnic but in fact a venture far more serious than that.

"I'm going for a look-see," said Wendy.

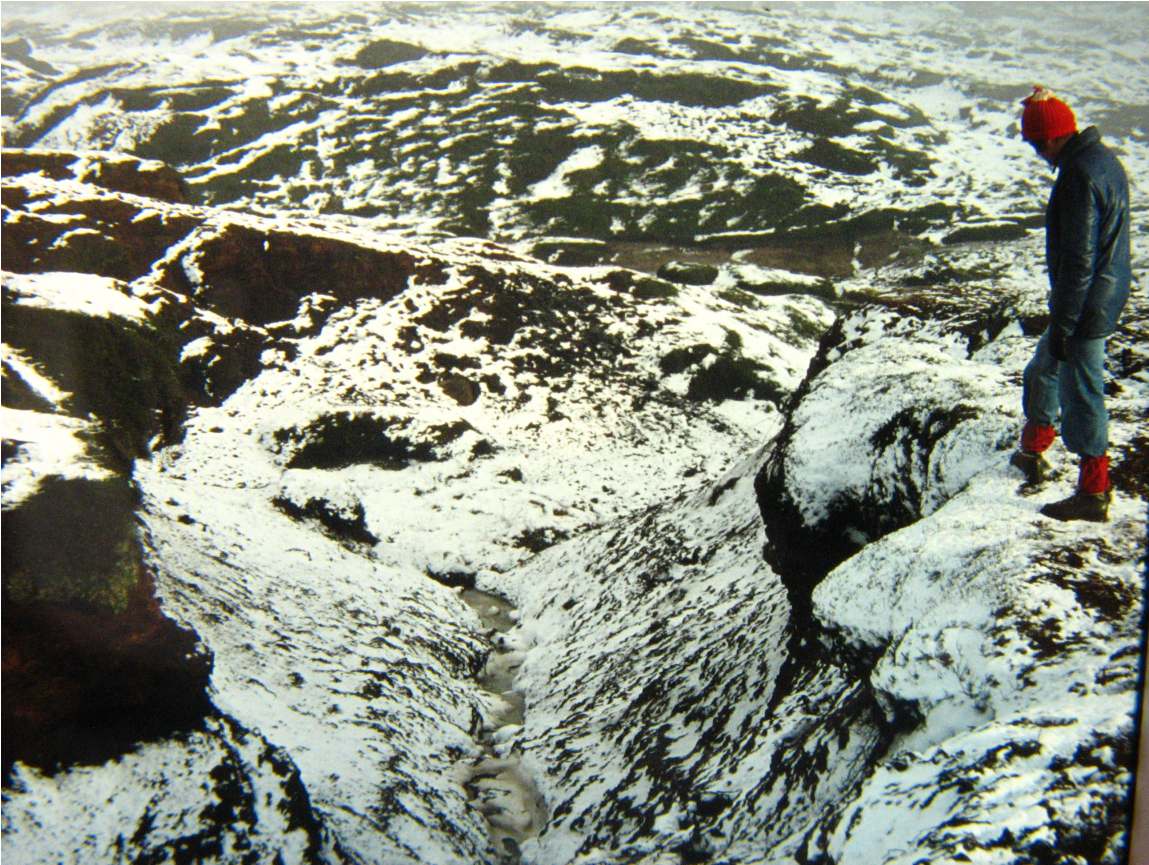
I didn't argue, better her than me in that wind. Her shout of glee soon brought me out of my 'cubby hole' however.

The plateau had cleared off completely and so for the first time we were able to bring our binoculars to good use. Away to our right, along the edge of the plateau, the contour of the landfall indicated the "Downfall" was a good 15 to 20 minutes walk away. Anticipating that the entire Downfall face would present a fascinating array of stalagmites, stalagmites and the like, we were immediately fired up with new enthusiasm to have a closer look.

Before setting out, we scanned the snow covered hills and plateaus that seemed to stretch on about us ad infinitum. It was an impressive sight and one which made us realize just how much untouched land was still available to those in Britain wanting to escape the 'rat race' and take to a trail, for a day or even a week. I walked a short distance so as to look back upon the land whence we had come. With binoculars, I followed our original pathway onward to a point where it branched several ways at a signpost. We reasoned then that because of poor visibility, we had been unable to gauge accurately the contour of the plateau and so had probably wandered south along the Pennine Way for a short time. Just for a moment on that same route, I thought I saw two figures moving on the horizon. Were they our two earlier acquaintances? But they were gone before I could view them further. The sight of them brought to my mind the words, "Make sure you start back across the plateau before 2 o'clock, get's mighty tricky down this rock face once it gets dark you know."

I glanced at my watch, noting it was 1:30 pm. We set out immediately to reach the 'Downfall' attacking the terrain with renewed zeal. At first we followed a trail similar to all we had seen on the plateau to date. Lightly snow covered, it was obvious that many had trodden the once boggy ground before us, leaving it in such a pock marked state, that we easily recognized the path ahead as being different to the lesser trodden areas about it. The 'Downfall' however, was not as easy to 'bag' as we had thought for we underestimated the rigours of the terrain. Wave after wave of water worn groughs

cut into the plateau directly across our path, forming stamina testing barriers that delayed us no end. Laboriously we slithered down snowy embankments, then scrambled our way up again only to find more of the same still waiting ahead.



"Wave after wave of water worn groughs cut into the plateau directly across our path, forming stamina testing barriers that delayed us no end."

"My God," I groaned to Wendy, "this lot is not going to be any 20 minute walk....more like an hour maybe! Adding to our misery was the fact that these same gullies were capturing and funnelling the wind, picking up snow with it which constantly clogged our dark glasses and found its way beneath our parka hoods.

Still we pushed onwards, determined to get closer to the 'Downfall' and its ice parade. After 30 minutes of downright, dogged determination, we were at last within striking distance of the 'Downfall,' yet despite our physical labours and first rate parkas, we were shivering from the exposure.

"Only a little way now," I encouraged Wendy. As I spoke I noticed my shadow wane to half its strength then vanish completely in the flat light of the snow. I paused to look behind us; we had been so intent on making our way to the 'Downfall,' I had not noticed dark, low clouds gathering on the horizon. Wendy paused also, noting my concern.

"Don't like the look of the weather much," she grumbled, "if I had to guess, I'd say it was going to snow before the day's out."

I scanned the darkening sky anxiously; the wind was strengthening and growing colder and it seemed that to push on to the 'Downfall,' would be foolish indeed even though we were then so close.

Reluctantly I said quietly to Wendy, we'd better head back 'Duff,' almost hoping she wouldn't hear me.

"I guess that's best," she finally said, but then posed the question, "which way do we go?"

I looked at my watch; it was 2:15PM. My eyes roamed uneasily across the desolate landscape in the direction of our descent point to Edale which I guessed to be at least an hour's walk away. The plateau was clear, yet without the sun, its bleak, featureless terrain had a grim foreboding gloom about it which somehow seemed prepared to swallow up anyone who dared challenge it.

"Across the plateau," I eventually answered. We had little choice really for to retrace our steps the way we had come would take far too long.

In disappointed silence, we turned our backs on 'Kinder Downfall' and made haste across the plateau, that is, to the limit the terrain allowed us to do so. The route at first was obvious with the 'Downfall' behind us and to our left, and a familiar clump of rocks still visible in the far distance on our right. Besides that, trails, despite a light covering of snow, still indicated the way. We had only made 15 minutes across the plateau when the first of the bad weather reached us; it had approached with surprising speed. Rain peppered our parkas from behind and quickly saturated them, adding just another touch of discomfort to the whole situation. The rain was not that much of a problem, but the advancing wall of low cloud coming up behind it, promised far greater complications. Thoughts of further photography were soon abandoned as wet snow, pushed along by gusting wind, began to fly around us, decreasing visibility to around 20 yards and it wasn't too long before we were no longer certain of the way. We stopped to take a compass bearing and consult our map and it was at that time, alone together in the increasingly sub-arctic conditions of Kinder Scout, that our already low morale was dealt a severe blow.

As I withdrew the compass from my front shirt pocket, I felt instantly that something was wrong with its shape. Closer examination revealed that the Plexiglas face and moving arm of the compass were shattered beyond repair. Dumbfounded I stared with disbelief at our misfortune, trying desperately to recall what could have caused such a disaster. Then I remembered my morning fall with the camera and also my final coming to rest.....face downwards over a boulder that rammed the wind out of me and so too it seemed, the useful life out of our compass. How even more unfortunate that I had not discovered the damage sooner, but up until that time, neither of us had felt the need to use it.

Once the full impact of our misfortune had been realized, we couldn't hide from each other the look of concern on our faces. So rarely in our trail walking lives had we ever felt the need to use a compass although we always carried one, and now just when we wanted it most, it was lying useless in my hands. Hopefully I scanned the visible area about us for some hint of a landmark, but I knew after our morning experience, Kinder Scout was going to offer absolutely nothing in that regard.

"What are we going to do?" anxiously enquired Wendy, searching my face for some sign of reassurance. "If we don't get off the plateau before nightfall, we're likely to freeze to death."

I wished she hadn't put it so bluntly but nevertheless I felt Wendy was correct; the wind was dropping the temperature considerably and even then, we were anything but warm. We had little choice but to push on, hoping that we could follow the foot trails which were then becoming harder to see in the heavy overcast and falling snow. It was the snow that cast the greatest danger upon our predicament, for not only was it slowly covering any semblance of a trail in front of us but it was also obliterating our tracks behind us.

After an hour, it wasn't too long before we weren't sure which way we were heading and were also becoming very tired from scrambling hastily in and out of the peat bog gullies that stretched like a never ending maze across the plateau before us. It was the infernal gullies that helped to make our plight even greater; it didn't seem to matter which way we climbed out of them, we still had blowing snow in our faces; had the terrain only been more level, we could have more easily kept the wind behind us, thus pointing us in the direction we should travel.

"How far across the plateau do you think we are?" panted Wendy, near out of breath from exertion. In the fading light, I glanced wearily ahead of us but that quickly proved a waste of time. "Duff," I finally said, "I wish to God I knew."

Wendy said no more. I took her by the hand and we descended to the bottom of yet another gulley where we both slumped despondently to rest; a little more out of the wind perhaps but none the less exhausted.

"Things don't look too good 'husb,' " said Wendy eventually.

"Are you scared?" I asked, trying to ascertain her true state of mind.

"Not as long as we're together," was her endearing reply.

My old mate still had some kick left in her yet it seemed.

We ruffled through the meagre contents of our day packs; flashlight, spare bulb, matches, toilet paper, lip salve, two pieces of cake and two oranges. We'd long since donned the extra clothes we'd brought and thank heavens for them.

"Can't make much of a fire with one roll of toilet paper," said Wendy ruefully. "Maybe we can dig a hole in the snow using our thermos flask shell as a shovel; then we could crawl into it and weather the night out."

Despite my low spirits, I couldn't help but smile at the naivety of Wendy's statement.

"For one thing there isn't enough snow to dig a hole that deep," I replied, "and besides that, the thin metal of our thermos flask wouldn't last through the first half inch of frozen bog."

"Guess you're right," Wendy murmured and once more fell into silence. We ate our cake and reluctantly removed our gloves to peel our oranges. My hands were shaking so much, I could barely accomplish the task.

"Are you all right?" asked Wendy concernedly.

"Just cold that's all" I answered, but I knew it was much more than that. I was truly worried for our safety and felt that Wendy sensed that too.

The snow started falling heavier than it had been. I shone our thankfully powerful flashlight into the darkening sky above us and watched the flakes streak by almost horizontally over our heads.

Had the wind changed direction I wondered, or did the way home still lie before the force of it? I was sure I didn't know anymore! My wandering flashlight beam caught the sight of Wendy finishing off her frigid orange. Perhaps it was just the light and the way it showed her up in the semi darkness but I thought then and there that I had seldom seen my dear mate so worse for wear. Her skin seemed ever so pale and ice debris clung to her chin, under her nose, around her eye brows and also to the corners of her eyes. Like mine, her parka having first been soaked and then frozen had not repelled the snow as it should have done; instead the frigid material had allowed ice to adhere in close knit fashion over its entire surface. Icicles clinging to the perimeter of her rain hood, where it outlined her face, completed the grim picture, a picture which illustrated only too well the seriousness of our situation.

The numbness of my idle body told me that we should move again, if only for the warmth of our physical labours and I beckoned for Wendy to follow.

"I think it's this way Duff," I said. For one moment I thought she wouldn't get up, but she did, rising very slowly to her feet and joining in behind like the true, faithful companion that she was. I knew how she felt! It was just about dark by then and so we staggered and stumbled in the light of our flashlight alone. Despite my foam lined leather bound gloves, the cold had numbed my hands to the point where I had trouble hanging onto the flashlight without dropping it.

My feet were still dry but continually walking in snow had taken its toll on them too; I had little feeling in them. As well, snow by that time had found its way behind my parka hood to the point where it was melting in an uncomfortable icy trickle down the small of my back. Cursing my own discomfort, I found myself wondering what it must be like for a mountain climber when caught in a storm at 28,000 ft. It would surely make our own plight look somewhat trifling by comparison, I reasoned. This rationalization of matters seemed to help my state of mind, although I wondered how Wendy was faring physically; after all, she was strong but not as strong as me. My biggest challenge at the time was a psychological one; time and time again waves of doubt plagued me. Were we doing the right thing? Should we continue on or stop, save our energy and weather it out? Were we going round in circles or were we near our goal? Would we ever get off Kinder Scout or was it going to be our tombstone? Why oh why didn't I think to check the compass after my fall? I had no answers to any of it which frustrated me all the more. It was indeed a bad situation for us both!

Some time after we had been obliged to use the flashlight to see our way ahead, fate took a hand in our situation. The bright beam roamed momentarily over a distant, dark patch in the snow; I walked towards it curiously because in the current white-out weather conditions, it shouldn't have been there at all. Getting closer, it took but a moment to realize what it was! There before me, was a hole in the ice, somewhat ragged but nonetheless recognizable as a rough heart-shape. It was obvious what had happened; located over a weakly flowing stream, my handiwork had enlarged itself somewhat, helped along perhaps by what sunshine we had experienced throughout the day. Likely, the stream flow had also increased in the same conditions. Whatever the reason, the logic of what had kept this hole open was far from my thoughts at the time. I knew that it was located not too far from the cliff face that led

on down to Edale but as Wendy was quick to point out, finding the hole is one thing but in our then almost zero visibility conditions, in what direction do you strike out from there; ahead, left, right or beyond? It was an agonizing situation to be in.....so near and yet so far!

"Think man," said Wendy, shaking from both excitement and the cold. "Where was I when you were drawing the heart?"

I thought for a moment and then replied, "In front of me on the cliff edge trail."

"OK then," said Wendy quickly, "one usually draws a heart with the apex of it pointing towards their feet, so that if we strike out in a straight line forward from that apex, we should reach the cliff edge trail where I was standing; if we're careful, we can go left from there and it will lead us to our descent point."

Wendy had a point and my tired brain tried to reason out any discrepancy relating to her logic; no doubt there were some but I was too fatigued to argue and we had nothing to lose anyway.

Checking the heart again for what at least appeared something like an apex, I remarked, "Notice the water underneath?"

"What about it?" came the reply.

"It's flowing the way we want to go."

Wendy slapped her hands together for warmth. "That's a good sign," she said. Let's get going."

I sensed her renewed enthusiasm. Like me, she obviously felt that we now had some chance of surviving our predicament. With a renewed fervour that neither of us realized we had left in us, we strode out across the plateau in the direction we had calculated. Pushing our feet before us like shovels, we left as much of a trail behind us as we could, so as to help point the way back to the heart should we need it again. After all, at that time, it was our only link to survival.

But we were not destined to defeat 'Ole Man Winter' that easily! After shuffling some time in the fog, it became apparent we had been walking too long already and that any hope we may have had of following a predetermined direction was futile; and when we began to encounter more wretched gullies, that disoriented us altogether. How can I hope to tell in mere words, the sheer frustration and nightmarish difficulties that assailed us on Kinder Scout that wintry night? Visibility was down to 20 ft; one could say that this was reasonable but it might as well have been 3 ft. There was but one colour, white, white and more white, which in itself effectively disguised every change in contour of the land which lay beneath our feet. As a result, we staggered into unseen dips, tripped over hidden rises and sometimes tumbled into small ditches that fell away from under us before we realized we were upon them. As for our flashlight, we would have perished without its support, but at the same time, its brilliance created a dazzling halo about us that made visibility even more difficult much of the time. But it was the cold that was the worst of all; our limbs ached continually whilst our eyes had been reduced to weeping, stinging slits against the blowing snow.

Finally I had to say, "it's no use, if we go on any further we might never find our way back to the heart again;" although in truth, I couldn't see in my mind what earthly use that would be either.

Wendy slumped to the ground in the protection of yet another gulley. "Oh God!" she cried in anguish, "I'm so tired and we could be so close to the area where we climbed up."

"I know, I know, but we could be walking away from it too." I hated saying that to Wendy for she looked about done in but I knew that already our tracks were becoming indistinguishable in the snow behind us, thus blocking our way back to the heart. I said nothing about it at the time, but I had noticed Wendy's speech was becoming a little slurred which was cause for more concern.

Taking her by the hand, I helped her once more to her feet but she seemed reluctant to go on; all the enthusiasm she had shown back at the hole in the ice, seemed to have left her completely.

"Come on 'Duff', you can make it," I pleaded as I proceeded to climb up and out of what seemed to be our ten thousandth gulley for the day. A sharp cry from behind cause me to spin around in time to see Wendy falling towards the gulley floor where she landed face down and didn't move. I leapt back down to aid her, fearing the worst.

"Are you all right?" I grabbed her and rolled her over. "What happened?" I kept on at her, clearing the snow from her face.

"Finally she answered. "Someshing rolled under my foot and I losht balance. I think I've hurt my ankle as well."

"Can you still walk? I croaked despairingly trying not to think what would happen if she said no.

"I shink so."

Beyond Wendy in the light of our flashlight, I caught sight of something blue. I knew that colour blue; it was as familiar to me as my own hand. Leaving Wendy for the moment, I got up, walked over and picked up the object. It was a Camping Gaz cartridge, used of course but in as new condition and with no sign of rust. My heart began to pound as I took stock of this very important discovery but I said nothing to Wendy.

"What is it? She queried.

"Nothing much," I replied, just an old can. I threw it into the mist, regretting that almost immediately; it may have been of some use later.

As best I could, I thought long and hard for several moments, reconstructing certain events within my mind. Finally I said, "Duff, I'm just going to go on a little further; I'll be back in a jiff."

"Oh no you're not," Wendy predictably replied. "If we split up then we're really fe...ished."

I tried to ignore her slurred speech. "Climb to the top of the gulley then," I told her. "I won't go any further than the range of my flashlight beam. "If I get too far away, then yell."

Wendy struggled to her feet, took two paces, then dropped to her knees; she was shivering quite noticeably and appeared somewhat disoriented. It was obvious that her condition was definitely

deteriorating; somehow, somehow, I had to get her off the plateau, out of the wind and down to warmer conditions.

I left her slumped in the snow and climbed out of the gulley. Wendy didn't follow as I had asked; shining my flashlight back on her I noted she had not moved and it was with great reluctance that I turned my back on her and began walking outwards in radiating circles, dragging my feet to leave a trail and shining my flashlight about in the mist. Suddenly, out of the gloom, what I had been desperately trying to find, appeared in my flashlight beam only a short distance away. It was a mushroom shaped rock; the rock in fact that I knew lay but a stone's throw from our descent point to Edale. A few circles more and I encountered terrain where the land began dropping away, down an ice flow blown bare of snow by the wind; it certainly looked like our ascent point from Edale but in the limited range of my flashlight, with snow flakes whirling about and the mist casting a confusing halo of light in front of me, I couldn't be sure. But what if it wasn't? The doubt of it sent shivers of fear flooding over me and I began to tremble uncontrollably. I felt that I couldn't get any colder than I already was and knew that we would certainly perish on Kinder Scout that dark, freezing, wintry night if that be so. And what of Wendy?

It was the thought of her somewhere back behind me that forced me to pull myself together. What in heavens name must she be thinking, left alone in total darkness and shivering in the misery of that dreadful night. Still unable to stop shaking, I made haste back to where I had left her by shortcutting across my own circular tracks in the snow. I finally found her, still down in the gulley where she had fallen. She was in a sitting position, with her arms wrapped tightly around her knees which were drawn up to her chin. Obviously, she hadn't climbed to the top of the gulley as I had asked but I was unable to scold her; I didn't have the heart or energy to do so. She looked such a pathetic figure; I guess we both did, half frozen and covered in blowing snow.

"Dish you find anything?" Wendy barely whispered. Although I was relieved to hear her speak, it only made me even more aware that she was definitely suffering from hypothermia.

"We're less than 30 yards from the descent that leads down to Edale," I said quietly

"Really?" was all she mustered in reply.

"Come on Duff," I urged. "Let's get to hell off this accursed plateau."

Wendy rose very, very slowly to her feet. Either she didn't believe me, I surmised, or else she was in a worse state than I thought.

As we began to descend the ice flow, Wendy's demeanour picked up somewhat; increased adrenalin perhaps because it now looked like we might make it but also, as she had shown more than once in other dilemmas that we had faced in the past, she possessed great fortitude.

As we picked our way down the ice flow, I couldn't help but think of the 'Brits,' earlier in the day, warning us to avoid the rock face in the dark. Ironically, we found it easier to handle than the rigours of the plateau above. For one thing, the wind eased considerably after we began our descent and so the snow drifted down on us rather than assail us. Visibility also improved as we lost altitude, so that by the time we reached a point where we could hear running water again, the snow fell only as an

occasional flurry and the mist lay above us. The fact that some lights had become visible below us in the far distance, also gave a great boost to our morals.

Thankfully, Wendy's ankle held up well; somewhat swollen yes but at least manageable. I pioneered the way, then ushered her down the same route after me. Progress was painfully slow however in the waning glow of our flashlight and we are grateful to this day, that it functioned long enough to guide us to safety; without it, we would have been 'dead meat.' By the time we reached the bottom of the ice fall, our fingers were frost bitten from dusting snow off icy ledges in search of hand holds, and although weary to the point of collapse, our spirits were high enough to drag ourselves back along the river bank, across the field, through the town and up the lane towards what we called home.

How can one say in any text what we felt when the familiar sight of our RR hove into view? Wendy burst into tears, one of the few times I have ever known her to do so. I wanted to join her but couldn't; I had my own way of suffering. As hungry as we were, neither of us had the energy to prepare a meal so as Wendy made up the bed, I brewed up the strongest and biggest cups of hot chocolate that I could possibly make.

We lay in bed till 3 PM the following day, during which time we cuddled and shivered, not so much from cold but more likely from shock. That evening we dined on thick, home made lentil soup, spaghetti bolognaise and fresh baked custard tart; the cook was back in action once again! As we ate, we discussed the drama on Kinder Scout over and over again. It seemed that Wendy remembered very little of events after her fall in the snow, indicating that she was probably very low in spirit and awareness of what was going on. I explained how it was that I finally found our way off the plateau. The blue container on which Wendy had stumbled, was to the best of my knowledge, the same one which had been used by our two earlier acquaintances to cook their breakfast. Fortunately for us, that cartridge had expired during the process and so rather than carry it with them, they had discarded it on the spot; not a nice thing to do in a National Park I admit, but an idle action which I am convinced to this day, played the key role in saving our lives that night on Kinder Scout. It was from that gulley that I recalled very well the lay of the land towards the mushroom rock and also, hearing for the first time, voices just ahead of us when we first crested the ridge above our ascent point.

So it was that we drove away from Edale the next grey, rainy morning with mixed feelings. We never ever did get to see the 'Downfall' close up with all its icy adornments. We did however, acquire a new found respect for winter in Britain and the rigours it can impose on those who venture into the high country at that time of year. And not forgetting RR2's close call as well, we certainly learned **not to** become complacent about driving in that country in wintry conditions, especially at night in unfamiliar territory.

At Castleton that morning, Wendy, who had been studying a map, slyly remarked, "You know, Michael said there were some very good trails in Snowdonia National Park in Wales. Maybe we should go and have a look-see; might be a bit cool at this time of year though!"

I maintained a long, hard, sceptical look at Wendy who was unable to keep a straight face and eventually broke into a broad grin. With a smile, I dropped RR into gear and turned the wheel in the direction of Wales; it was good to see "me ole mate" was back in true form again!

EPILOGUE

In our many years of traveling overseas, Wendy and I have come close to death at times but not so much from human peril as was so often imagined by those who have questioned us regarding our travels. Yes we did have our problems with armed bandits, backstreet muggers, guerrilla activity, army, corrupt police, arrogant immigration authorities, con-men, thieves, vehicle break-in attempts, irresponsible border patrols, poachers, wild animals, hippies, 'rip-off merchants,' frustrating Embassies and of course, general 'ner-do wells' but, when it came to actual life threatening situations, it was most often the unpredictable whims of 'mother nature' that threatened our lives as was the case on Kinder Scout. In fact, on at least five other occasions, natural predicaments also created life and death situations for Wendy and me and had not the other been there to help, at least one of us would not be alive today.

This may all seem very mysterious but not really for within the examples that follow, there are stories still waiting to be told. Avalanche; gale force wind; cave collapse; volcano; rogue lion; crevasse; freak wave; thin ice; flash flood; falling trees, landslide, dust storm and others.



The beauty found under glacial ice can be breathtaking but one must never forget that danger lurks there as Wendy, taking this picture, was soon to find out.....but that's another story!

True, the above examples all have contributed to our travel experiences and memories but perhaps it is because we live in Canada now, and get the chance to see and experience blizzard and cold on a yearly basis, that our experience on Kinder Scout remains all too real in our minds. Sometimes, when I am snug and warm in bed listening to the wind voice its winter misery outside, I still think of that plateau and having to leave Wendy alone on that dark and stormy night in Derbyshire. It was an experience that I would not care to relive again!