

## Arthur

My first involvement with Arthur was probably in late 66 or early 67! John Leigh and I were students at Chorley College and one afternoon a week helped a local teacher - John Bennison - with a group of young reprobates doing outdoor pursuits. John took us along to meet Arthur and Walt one weekend in Borrowdale and we all met in the Scafell Bar. This was still the days of Bill and Iris behind the bar – and woe betides if you said a word against Carlisle United.

We stayed in the hut that I believe nominally belonged to the Youth Club that Arthur had a big hand in – Briarcroft in Atherton. In fact it was a converted construction site hut that had basic facilities and slept no more than six!

Arthur was no stranger to Borrowdale. Whilst still at Leigh Grammar he had done forestry work in Great Wood – underneath Walla Crag and later as a relatively new primary teacher started the still fondly remembered summer camps near Troutdale Pinnacles.

John B, Arthur, Jim Foster and Walt Unsworth had all come together at the annual Coniston Summer School run by Lancashire Education. From this came the idea of a mountaineering club for Lancashire Teachers and the inaugural meeting was in September 1967 at County Hall – and as they say the rest is history.

In the early days the club was always strapped for cash but ambitious in what it wanted to do. The move of the hut from Rosthwaite to Portinscale was precipitated by Mrs Weir catching some of “Arthur’s lads” (none under 20!) getting to the hens eggs before she did. Towing it through Keswick on a Saturday afternoon raised a few eyebrows as we trundled past the Moot Hall!

Once at Portinscale it expanded with the addition of another site hut from a building site in Ormskirk.

This didn’t last long as it mysteriously burned to the ground one weekend. The occupants were in the pub in Portinscale when the event happened and their attention was drawn by the locals to the wonderful sunset illuminating the evening sky. This turned out to be the glow from the burning hut.

Arthur was at Tower Wood - the newly acquired Lancashire Outdoor Pursuits Centre on Windermere and received the news with his normal stoicism! It was also here, but not the same weekend, that the infamous handcuffs incident occurred. I never found how Stu explained the two half pairs to his parade sergeant next day!

Arthur now moved into top gear – deciding it was time the club got its own home and soon Blea Tarn came on the scene – at that time it didn’t belong to the N.T. and the tenant farmer Keith Rowan was keen to have us there. Now the club had a site for a hut and the Solitary was bought. Fund raising was an urgent requirement and for quite some time club members filled several courses at Tower Wood – with other club members as instructors! Fees from the latter helped to pay bills for the extension to the Solitary – though it is worth noting that from then on many materials for the Solitary and then for the Loft seemed to be liberated from building sites far and wide.

One club member recounts that Arthur always had a wicked sense of humour – one of his party tricks was to get into serious conversation with some gullible guy who had

just bought a pint. Halfway through the conversation Arthur would swiftly remove his denture and dunk them in the poor chap's beer with the immortal phrase "now that'll put hairs on your chest!!"

Arthur had just moved in to The Poplars in Leigh – a new estate and I am reminded of one moonless night Arthur, John Leigh and I donned balaclavas to go and recce the builder's compound. The effect was slightly spoiled by us all having the giggles. The window frame in the Solitary kitchen came from one such sortie.

Some of you might have wondered about the obvious alteration to the beam in the Loft. This came about after Arthur had clouted his head repeatedly on the old beam. "That's coming out" – and so it did. Part of the old beam still forms the base of the bedroom. The replacement beams look suspiciously like house floor joists.

Arthur was always one for moving on and Beddgelert followed – owned then by a canny Yorkshire man – Mr Haskin. We rented it to start with but when the opportunity to buy it came along Arthur was the man to come up with Beddgelert Bonds. No worry that we didn't have planning permission – the porch (based on the Ugly Cottage near Betws-y-Coed?) followed. A right royal battle with the planning authorities followed and the club eventually won!

By now Arthur and his expanding family of now 4 girls had moved to Bleaze Hall near Kendal where he spent a very happy 35 years. This gave him even more time to walk and climb in his beloved Lake District. Two guide books to the North West Lakes bear his name – although a route on Blake Rigg which he called "Life begins at---" appears never to have been submitted for the Langdale Guide.

Arthur had some serious seasons in the Major Alps – even persuading Stu Thomas to spend his honeymoon climbing with him in Chamonix. In later years he and Barbara bought a property in the Maritime Alps which he thoroughly enjoyed "renovating" over a period of many years.

He always enjoyed trips to Scotland – Easter 1967 was my first ever venture to Scottish Hills - in his red Commer van – if I remember we almost lost a wheel near Gretna and nearly got benighted on the Aonach Eagach ridge with Walt. Arthur was well ahead, down in the pub before nightfall – that is where the well known club motto originated!!

With the change of name to Lancashire Mountaineering Club in 1985 it was especially pleasing when Arthur accepted the invitation to be the Club's President – a post that he continued to be very proud of right up to his death. He was a regular attendee at AGM's and at Club Dinners – always wanting to know what was new in the club.

Over the last couple of years he frequently joined the "Wednesday Wanderers" delighting in taking Derek into Yorkshire to the likes of Kingsdale and several walks in the Lake District around what he called one of his favourite valleys – Kentmere. One thing I remember when he joined this merry throng was he never had a rucksack – everything for the day was in his pocket!

In December 08 he joined us for the last leg of the Rossendale Way and we stopped for lunch at a ruined farmhouse. Arthur promptly disappeared down a hole to explore what had probably been part of the cellar. If you read his Borrowdale climbing guide he enthuses over routes that have cave sections where you disappear in one hole and reappear out of another!

The last time I met up with Arthur was on a Wednesday walk in March this year when we walked over Walla Crag from Castlerigg down to Watendlath and then over to Rosthwaite for a couple of pints in the Scafell. Not quite the same welcoming place it had been 40 or so years ago but the company was still as good!! Full circle!

He was out with the Wednesday group up until early this summer, went over to his French house with Barbara later in the summer where he became seriously ill and had to come back home.

After some time in hospital it was his wish to return home where he died on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November. He would have been 82 just after Christmas.

C.W (November 2009)