

### Before the MBA - Cabining

Many members may believe that bothying started in Scotland and spread with the MBA to England and Wales. This is not quite correct. Whilst what we know as bothies were in 1965 to be found only in Scotland, this is a matter of terminology. The following article from MBA Journal 100, December 1991 shows that properties in wild and lonely places in the Peak District were being used by walkers and the like for overnight stop-overs in the way that bothies were being used in Scotland. These properties were not previously homes but shooting cabins, and hence the author Keith Deary entitles his article Cabining. Another article on the web site, about Wholehope Hostel, shows that others were seeking out accommodation in wild and lonely places, albeit that the simple hostel path was chosen in remote Northumberland. Quite possibly abandoned farmhouses throughout remote areas of England and Wales were being used, and also caves and dosses in slightly less remote areas, e.g. Dartmoor and Exmoor, for overnights. In the 1950s and 60s, car ownership was far less prevalent; whilst a trip to and a walk on Dartmoor all in a day is now quite possible, in the 50s and 60s, it would have been considerably more difficult, requiring self-propulsion on bikes, hitch-hiking and weekend trips making best use of scant rural bus services (as Keith's article describes) with the use of caves, dosses and abandoned farms to escape the inclement weather.

In recording a bit of our 'bothy heritage', our problem is that, as far as the MBA is aware, this sort of experience was not recorded and most of the participants are no longer with us. Tales of such adventures are probably now lost forever.

If you do have such a tale, a diary account left by your father, a story published by your aunt in a local magazine or newspaper, then the MBA will be happy to receive a copy and give it a second airing as part of the illustration of our 'bothy heritage'. Forward the account to the Journal Editor in the first place. Thank you.

Now to Keith Deary's article.

#### Cabining

Keith R J Deary

For me it all began back in 1950, on a youth club 'bus trip to the Yorkshire Dales. It so happened - lucky chance! - that I was sitting near Alan Bateman, a keen Rambler, and as we passed through the scenery he pointed out the best way up the fells, showing us where the streams might easily be forded, and warning us that those inviting-looking green areas were in fact deep bogs. Most importantly, every now and then, he would point out some little remote hut on the moors and say 'That's a shooting cabin. Some of them are not kept locked, and we brew up and even sleep in them'. Hence the title of this article 'Cabining'.

Noticing my interest in all this, Alan invited me to go out with him onto the Derbyshire Moors (we indiscriminately called all the Moors in the Peak District National Park by this name in those days, no matter in which county they actually lay), to experience the joys of rambling first hand. Back home in Doncaster I remembered this and decided to take him up on his offer.

'Join the YHA' was his advice, 'and get yourself some kit from the Army Stores. It shouldn't cost you much'. So along I went to the Army Stores. How many of you remember the ex-WD 'Australian Bush Boots'? Supple leather, sewn in tongue, high in the ankle and a bright chestnut colour! These were the boots I bought, along with a few single and treble hobs with which to nail them. I also got an ex-WD Bergens type rucksack, iron framed for 45/- (ever since school days, I've kept a diary in which I record such details – it makes interesting reading, and is one reason I am able to write this article).

My YHA membership card duly arrived and off I went with Alan on my introductory rambling weekend. We stopped at Ewden Youth Hostel (SK274961, and since closed) between the Broomhead and Moor Hall reservoirs - and in those post-war days the dams still had a pylon at each

end, from which were suspended cables to prevent the Luftwaffe from doing what 617 Squadron had done to some German dams.

Ewden Youth Hostel, as I now realise, was distinctly bothyish. It was a single-storeyed timber building with a central kitchen, dining/common room, and a dormitory at each end with integral wooden bunks. It was one of a group of such buildings put there originally to house the workmen who built the dams.

### A Sunday lunch on the hills

My first ramble went up the reservoir track onto the moors, and then followed Duke's drive, a bridle-way that took us over to Derwent. Half-way over, believe it or not, we stopped and cooked a Sunday lunch! It was Alan Bateman's firm belief that the inner man must be kept well-filled, and on his walks he always kept an eye open for some convenient lunch-time spot at which to 'drum up'. The convenient spot that Sunday was *Abbey Brook Cabins* (SK197924, and since then demolished). There were two cabins on the site, one a sentry box-like shed, windowless, tarred over, and kept locked; but the second was just as one imagined a shooting cabin should be – stone built, with stout door and window, wood-panelled inside and with a stove, table and benches.

On that November Sunday I at once realised, as so many other people have, that rambling is the acme of leisure. Leisure? I must be joking! Nevertheless, many were the cabins in which I subsequently 'brewed-up', because of that day.

But not all the 'cabins' in which we sheltered qualified, strictly speaking, for such a grandiloquent title. One in this category was *Four Jacks* (SK104880) at the top of Grindsbrook (in those times pronounced 'Grinsbrook', as my diary confirms). This was almost ruined and to get into it, you had to stoop and, once in, remain seated. But it served us well enough, though today no trace of it remains.



My first night cabining was also at Alan's instigation. He wanted to go on the Bleaklow Moors, and in those days that was considered to be a 'hard day' if done from the nearest hostel at Rowland Cote (or Edale as it is now mistakenly called). Perhaps that needs some explanation. One reason was, of course, Alan's habit of cooking a meal at lunchtime lessened the time available for walking! I have some other reasons

Little Crowden Brook Cabin, November 1952 Photographer unknown

beside me as I write, however. They are: one ex-WD 'Commando' rucksack, weight 7lbs; one Radius half pint paraffin stove, weight (empty) 1.5lbs; and a pair of ex-WD leather boots nailed with No. 6 and No. 8 Tricounis, Centre Muggers and Heel Clinkers, weight 6.5lbs. So the basic weight that I (and most others at that time) set off with, before we put anything in the rucksack was 15lbs. And in my

case 6.5lbs of that was on my feet. We are told today that ‘a pound on the foot is four pounds on the back’, so no wonder I once thought twenty miles to be a long walk!

But back to my first experience of cabining. *Bullstones Cabin* (SK179961) was the place we chose, just below the gritstone outcrop of that name, near to the where the Cut Gate drops down into the Derwent Valley (and now disappeared without trace – even the spring is clogged up and hard to locate). We got the ‘bus to the Flouch Inn and went over the Cut Gate to the cabin. I recall that my sleeping bag was a kapok-filled ex-WD job which three-quarters filled my rucksack and was not the lightest I have ever owned. It was, however, very warm and comfortable, and I was grateful for it that night - I had been sickening for a cold all week, and it chose that night to turn quite nasty. So the next day, instead of discovering the joys of Bleaklow, I wearily trudged the eight miles of the reservoir road down to the Ladybower Inn and caught the ‘bus home. Funnily enough, though, that disastrous start was not among the reasons why it was another three years before I got the chance to go cabining again.

### Stamp Collection

One reason was that in those days there were plenty of good hostels in the Peak District. In fact, in a more recent YHA Journal it was stated that in the late 1940s and early 1950s there were more hostels than at any other time in the Association’s history. When I look back over my YHA cards, I see the stamp of Rowland Cote and Ewden, Peakley Hill and Bretton, Castleton and Leam, Holmfirth and Ravenstor, Fulshaw and Buxton, Windgather, Oakenclough and Matlock. And they were all real Youth Hostels, unlike some of today’s establishments with fitted carpets and in which you hear complaints to the warden if the ‘wrong wine is served with dinner’! On that list, Fulshaw was the most ‘bothyish’ (SE211017, now closed): it was a converted barn with a central stove, very comfortable and homely.

The other reason for the delay was the suggestion by King George VI that I serve two years in the Royal Air Force. While doing that I was, as a member of the RAF Mountaineering Association, allowed to use to use climbing huts. I remember Lagangarbh, the SMC Hut on Buchaille Etive Mor, with great pleasure.

My second cabining weekend was therefore not until the early winter of 1954, and was organised by our present Northern England Area Organiser, Donald Rich. There were three of us: Don, myself, and Pete Dewhirst, one of our Barnsley friends then just starting his mountaineering. He is still keen



Bullstones Cabin, Winter 1954 (photo by Donald Rich)

and a good friend of mine. Our venue was *Bank Top Farm*<sup>1</sup> (SK155931), and today, you guessed!, demolished, in the Westend Valley of Derwent. The reason for its present dereliction may be that it stands not only on the bank of the Howden reservoir but also on Forestry Commission land. At that



time though, it had not been empty all that long and was in very good condition. There was still a 'Yorkie' range in the kitchen, and a few felled deciduous trees in the farmyard, so Don produced a chain saw from his rucksack and we soon had a roaring fire.

<sup>1</sup> The farm may have gone but the name lives on, the Forestry Commission naming its woodland here as Bank Top Plantation

We had a very comfortable night, but there was quite a heavy snowfall, and the walk the next day along the top of Bleaklow to Wain Stones was not the easiest of trips. But we did it, and went down Wildboar Clough to the Woodhead Road intending to get the Manchester - Barnsley 'bus at the George & Dragon (SK092998 and - all together now! - since demolished). But the road was a sheet of ice with the usual snow drifts that still hold up the traffic every winter, so no 'bus. We set off along the icy imitation of the arctic that was masquerading as the A628 Woodhead Pass, intending to catch the Barnsley 'bus (the Yorkshire 'Flouch circular') at the Flouch Inn some six miles up the road - if it was still running.

Now you remember those lovely nailed boots I just mentioned? They would have been ideal for such a trip, but by this time I'd changed them for a pair of Timpson veldschoen with Itshide Commando soles. Slither, slither, slither! I can't recall if Don was still in nails, but anyway he soon outstripped us, and by the time we got to the Dog & Partridge, a pub half way along the Flouch, he was waiting with a couple of drinks. Then we raced along the last bit, and caught the 'bus.

Although I've got a record of all the hostels in the Peak District at that time, it is difficult to decide just how many cabins there were. Some that appear on maps - even supposedly up-to-date OS maps - have left no signs of their existence. Some OS maps show a couple of cabins in Grindsbrook, but no one that I know recalls anything about them, or remembers ever seeing any ruins. Two of these disappeared cabins are on the northern slopes of Kinder Scout: one in *Ashop Clough* at SK091906; and the other under Seal Edge at SK117893. Many of the others remain only as level bases: *Abbey Brook* I've already mentioned; another that was visited regularly because of its excellent spring is in the Derwent Valley at SK172693, marked on the OS as *Lord Edward Howard's* - I certainly remember a good cabin there, but I never slept in it.

### Collision of Lancashire and Yorkshire

Black Hill was once well provided with cabins, but today only the bases remain. One was on the Pennine Way at *Near Grain Spring* (SE075049); *Wrigley's Cabin* (SE085052) was another; and there was one in *Holme Clough* (SE075049), not marked on any OS map. Just how much remains of the

Cabin in *Little Crowden Brook* I cannot say, because it is so long since I visited it, but even then it was in ruins. There are other sites at which, even when I started rambling 40 years ago, there was only a pile of stones to recall the existence of a cabin. *Upper North Grain* (SK103934) on Bleaklow was one such. Like the crashed Lancaster Bomber below Higher Shelf Stones (SK095948), it and others like it are lost except to those with good memories. It would be an interesting exercise - one which I have often considered doing - to revert to my old 1947 revision One Inch OS Maps 102 & 110, and with my ex-WD Mark III prismatic compass (bought at a local opticians for £13 16s\* in 1958) to try to find traces of all the marked cabins - the springs at least should still be there. [\(About £305 in 2017\)](#)

When I came to write this final paragraph, it astonished me, so grip the arms of your chairs and prepare to be similarly amazed: I find that I have never stopped in a Scottish bothy! There are quite a few reasons for this, which I won't go into here, but I must certainly put this to rights. You shall get an account of the success or otherwise of my attempts to do so in an article I will write for the Journal celebrating the MBA's fiftieth Year, I promise!

[Keith did not meet his promise to contribute an article to our MBA 50<sup>th</sup> year anniversary publications. The MBA's membership records (as looked after by our membership team in Cupar) do not include membership for Keith. Public records last show Keith on the electoral roll in 2002. Born in 1933, Keith would have been 69

in 2002 and 82 by the time the MBA reached its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, it is quite possible that Keith passed away between 2002 and 2015, and therefore did not meet his promise for good reason.]

This article (February 2018) is now 26 years old. Any updates and corrections on detail given due to the passage of time will be welcome. Please send them to the MBA's Journal Editor.

### **Digging around the internet, aka 'armchair bothying'**

Back in the 1950s, Keith Deary could not have anticipated, in fact none of us could have anticipated, the impact that computing and the internet would have on our lives in years to come. The appeal for second hand memories and accounts of pre-MBA bothying adventures that precedes Keith's article is one way of adding to the store of information about our bothying heritage but the internet itself provides another opportunity.

With Keith's article typed up, the photographs scanned and the cold, unfriendly winds of winter whistling around my house, I casually typed 'Bullstones Cabin' into the Google search engine and to my joy, a little research trail followed which reveals a bit more about the Shooting Cabins of the Peak District and about their use and their fate.

**Gone** Most of the cabins have gone and we are not far away from a time when it will not be possible to say that they were usable within living memory. Keith Deary's article includes Donald Rich's photograph of the Bullstones cabin. Sadly Donald, and I think Keith, are no longer with us but my internet research led to an e-mail correspondence with a Roger Chapman who confessed to being more of a Munro bagger than a peat bog basher. However, in 1964, Roger did write to his parents about a rare excursion into the Peak District, describing an overnight spent at the Bullstones Cabin a decade later than Keith and Donald:

"We were quite lucky with the hut we stayed in. Two huge holes in the walls where the windows should have been, a door (which actually closed), a leaky roof (luckily it didn't rain), and a huge fireplace. Luckily there was some wood scattered around so we got a roaring fire going and sat around it cooking and singing folk songs until about midnight".



The two Bullstones Cabins, photographed in 1960 by Jack Ashcroft

Writing in a club newsletter 30 years later, Roger said “The overnight hut was one of the cabins below Bullstones commonly referred to as the Bullstones Cabin. Shortly after this meet it was razed to the ground and all that can be found there now is the remains of the floor. Incidentally the ‘leaky roof’ referred to in the letter was actually mostly missing but it does not do much good unnecessarily alarming ones folks. :-)”. Roger, like so many of that 1960s generation, now finds that his mind is willing but the legs are too weak.

Adding to Keith’s description of the hill walking gear of the time, Roger tells his readers : “I was carrying 2 sleeping bags because firstly I didn’t have a camping mat, secondly my own sleeping bag was one of those ‘no season’ Kapok horrors that children used to get saddled with and thirdly the borrowed sleeping bag was an ex RAF exposure suit with a sleeping bag base but arms and a hood above.”

A walking colleague of Roger’s in his club, Jack Ashcroft, also has some recollections, and I thank Jack for providing the above photograph of the two Bullstones Cabins. Keith Deary refers only to the Bullstone Cabin, perhaps because only the lower cabin was left unlocked in the early 1950s. It does seem in the photograph that the roof of the lower cabin is in poorer condition, no doubt leading to the near absence in later 1960s years described by Roger.

Jack writes: “.....a small number of largely WW2 veterans who would meet at lunch hour in the mid '50s at the tiny Ladybower Inn as it was then, followed by a late afternoon December walk along Derwent Edge to Back Tor, Margery Hill and so to Bullstones Rocks and the Cabin. On the Sunday morning it was a walk down the reservoirs back to the Ladybower Inn for very adequate beef sandwiches - a speciality of the then landlord, Edgar. These few Saturday afternoon walks and bivvies at Bullstones Cabin formed the basis of the more ambitious Kinder - Bleaklow weekend starting on Friday night at the Nag's Head, Edale.

In this photo [i.e. the photograph above] of the Bullstones Cabin, taken around 1960, the centre of interest is Professor Falkner demonstrating a solution to “Brass Monkey weather” with a gaz stove. We assume his laboratory lectures on smelting for brass were better presented with a bunsen burner!

Into the 1960s and '70s the Bullstones meet moved deeper into Bleaklow, using Lower Small Clough Cabin; the comparative comfort of Bullstones Rocks Cabin having been vandalised by some idiots.”

Jack also contrasts the all British, male-dominated Bullstones meets of the 1950s and '60s with the multi-national, mixed-sex nature of his club’s meets reported in his club’s recent newsletters. As Jack points out, it’s not just the equipment that has moved on.

Thank you Roger and Jack for these recollections.

**Razed to the ground** Being “razed to the ground, all that can be found there now is the remains of the floor” has been the common fate of most of the Peak District’s Shooting Cabins. There seems to be two causes of this.

Writing in 1995, Kev Borman records: ‘On the north side of Kinder, what is now merely a tumbled ruin by a spring (Checkpoint 1 in one variant of Mike Hayes' Kinder Springs Event) used to be Black Ashop Cabin. Fred Heardman, once landlord of the 'Nag's Head' in Edale, described how a friend of his who should have known better was responsible for stone-rolling from The Edge, 250 ft above the hut. He wasn't happy until he'd scored a direct hit with a stone crashing through the cabin's roof.’ [Keith Deary refers to this cabin as Ashop Clough]. Vandalism and mis-use was clearly one reason for the disappearance of the cabins.

A John C Barrows (who departed this world in 2009) was another 1960s walker who explored far and wide over the moors of Derbyshire and South Yorkshire. Writing just 4 years before his passing, John recorded ‘Woe betide you if gamekeeper Joe Townsend ever caught you within these environments. He patrolled the Fairbrook and Ashop Cloughs with real vigilance’ and this gives a strong hint of the

second cause. After World War 2, the grouse shooting moors were opened up to walkers, in opposition to the desires of many of the gamekeepers. They could not stop the walkers, it was no longer trespass, but writing in 2008, John notes: 'Along with my friends, I trespassed along the ridges of Derwent Edge to the shooting cabins around Abbey Brook and the Bullstones cabins at Broadhead Clough. To save carrying tents on weekend trips we often slept in the cabins so it seems sad to me that over the years these shelters have been demolished, often by irate gamekeepers. Who can remember Four Jacks Cabin in Grindsbrook?' It seems that the gamekeepers could no longer prevent but they could still discourage.

**Four Jacks cabin** Of the Four Jacks cabin referred to by both Keith Deary and John Barrows, a Roger Redfern explains 'A good bit higher, though, was a building in this part of England, until 20 years ago. Never permanently occupied, the shooting cabin built beside the headwaters trickle of Grinds Brook by Mike Tym, gamekeeper to the Champions of Grindslow House, stood at 1,965 feet. It was stubby, with a low-angled roof that cringed against its heather bank to turn the howling westerlies. In snowy weather it soon disappeared under the cresting drifts so you had to dig to get at the doorway; but once inside it was quite snug and the snow blanket overhead deadened the roar of the gale. At some date or other it was rebuilt with the luxury of two rooms - one for the guns, the other for the beaters - by four local men who shared the name Jack, hence 'Four Jacks Cabin'. When most of Kinder Scout became open country, this cabin began to receive more than enough attention from the wrong elements. The Grindslow gamekeeper lost heart and Four Jacks quickly deteriorated, ruined by the very people who might one day be grateful for the shelter it offered. In the end it was removed by the landowner so that a stranger following the sinuous gravel bed of the Grinds Brook today would never suspect its former existence'.

Of the four Jacks, in 1964, Dave Mosely, an early generation fellrunner, wrote: 'I knew Jack Burdekin and Jack Belfitt well. They had been farm labourer and farm bailiff respectively at Grindslow House. They both lived into their 90's and died within the last five years in Edale. Jack Burdekin lived at the White Cottage next to the road near the church. He told me that the cottage had once been a pub called The Church and had also doubled as the doctor's surgery.

Jack Rowbotham was a local builder. He employed Jack Tym. There have been Tyms in Edale for many centuries and there were a lot of them at the beginning of the 1900s. There have been at least two Jack Tyms and this one was called Sailor Jack Tym because he had been in the navy until 1919. His daughter lives in Edale and is a wonderful source of local history'.

**Gone but not forgotten** is the title of a musical piece for which several renditions on the piano by Rick Wakeman can be found on the internet but *Gone but not forgotten* also aptly applies to the Peak District cabins. Why mention that Dave Mosely is/was a fellrunner - well fellrunners are the very breed of individual who keep going the memory of the shooting cabins. Their race reports are full of the names of cabins long since gone, but not forgotten by the Peak District's fell race organisers - few fell running events are run in the Peak without one or another of the sites (and frequently the base or remains) of a shooting cabin being used as one of the check points on the race. Hence the reference to 'Checkpoint 1' in Kev Borman's extract above.

The extracts above have come from articles published in the Journal of the Oread Mountaineering Club or the Dark Peak Fell Running Club or from the Totley Independent, a current affairs and local history newspaper published by Totley Residents Association (Totley is on the SSW extremity of Sheffield and SE of the Peak District). The availability on the internet of such articles, all of them more than 20 years old, demonstrates that the internet is a powerful tool in this modern IT orientated world.

Richard Genner, January 2019