

# **INTER COMM**

**CLUB INTERNACIONAL D'ANDORRA**

**MAGAZINE / REVISTA**



**VOL. 6 - Núm. 3 - SPRING / PRIMAVERA 1997**

# CLUB INTERNACIONAL D'ANDORRA

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# INTERCOMM

## Club Internacional d'Andorra

Quarterly Magazine  
March 1997

### CONTENTS

News from the Board <i>Tony Hooper</i>	
Editorial <i>Margaret Shaida</i>	2
News from the Groups	4
The Scrap Book	4
Car Boot Sale	4
Activities Group	4
Naturalist Group	4
Helpline	4
Investors Group	5
International Singers	5
Scottish Dancers	6
Computer Group	6
Letters to the Editor	7
Egyptian Evening <i>Karin Ostergaard</i>	8
Here and There	10
A Look to the Future	11
Restaurant Review	12
Largest Solar Furnace <i>Peter Dunkley</i>	13
Karakoram Highway <i>Jeanne Lodge</i>	17
My Favourite Place <i>Sheila Hooper</i>	18
Answers to the Christmas Quiz	18
A First Visit <i>Alan Howard</i>	19
In Uganda (contd.) <i>Jacque Crozier</i>	20

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### NEWS FROM THE BOARD

#### *Tony Hooper*

Although a little late I would like to pass on congratulations to the International Singers for their magnificent series of concerts in December. Any concert means a lot of work, but to perform four times in six days, in four different parishes, indicates the level of commitment that this group has. All the concerts were very well received, and invitations to perform elsewhere were quickly forthcoming. Specific thanks should go to **Clare Allcard** for her organisation, **Binnie Segal**, the gifted accompanist, and **Sheila Hooper**, the conductor. Also to be praised are those who so generously contributed (during the concerts) to a number of charities. Once again, these events had very good coverage in the press and on television.

On 14/15/16<sup>th</sup> March we shall be holding our "Hobbies Exhibition" at the Sala de Joventut in Ordino. On show will be individual work by members, illustrating not only the diversity of interests but also the high standards achieved. There will be an opening reception on Friday, 14<sup>th</sup> March so do come along and give your support. It promises to be an interesting evening.

**Advance notice of the 1997 Annual General Meeting of the Club:** this will be held on Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> May at the Hotel Paris-Londres commencing at 2000hours. In accordance with the Statutes of the Club, none of the current members of the Board are due for re-election this year. This



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group of people has worked very hard during the past year, and as Chairman of the Executive Committee, I should like to thank them for the manner in which they have carried out their tasks. Each member is ready at any time to support any other member. The proof is in the way in which the Club continues to progress - Social Activities, Helpline, and the Groups; the Coffee Mornings are now usually well supported.

Mention of Helpline reminds me that congratulations must be extended to those who put together the Recipe Book which has been such a big success. Copies are still available - and remember all proceeds go to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

#### EDITORIAL

*Margaret Shaida*

**W**e know that Spring is almost here, not just because the days are getting longer, but because it is St. David's Day on 1<sup>st</sup> March. To mark this special day, Sheila Hooper has written us a small feature (page 18) on her favourite place in Wales.

Talking of St. David reminds me of the novelist who had finally written her masterpiece which was accepted by a publisher. Then, she was advised, for reasons reluctantly acceptable to her, that she should change her hero's name from 'David' to 'Richard'. Fortunately, with the aid of her computer, the change was fairly rapidly completed. It was just bad luck that David (now Richard) and his wife, Melanie, spent their honeymoon in Florence where they visited the Uffizi Gallery in order to view the famous statue of - Richard!

But back to this issue: we are lucky to have another splendid article from Peter

Dunkley who tells us (on Page 13) about the world's largest solar furnace, which is situated in the Cerdagne, not too far from Andorra.

We also have the story of an exciting and dangerous twenty-four hours on the Silk Route from Jeanne Lodge (Page 17). It makes our visits to the markets of Seu d'Urgell and Organya seem very pleasurable and trouble-free.

The Pyrenees may not be as dramatically high and remote as the Himalayas, but a first-time visitor to Andorra was so impressed by the peaks and walks here, that he sent us his impressions after he had walked up one of the many glorious valleys last autumn (Page 19).

Karin Ostergaard looks back at the talk that Dan Parsons gave us last November. His fascinating tales of Egypt when he was working there in the earlier part of this century kept everyone enthralled (Page 13).

And of course we have our usual reports from the Groups, news of events to come, and the answer to our Christmas Quiz. We also have a list of all the ingredients (Page 9) that went into the magnificent cake that Stella Madden made for the reception after the Christmas Carol Festival in Ordino. I suspect that two strong arms and hours of time were also important ingredients!

Even the most conservative among us will be aware of the increasing importance of computers in the modern world. Given their importance, it's astonishing that people are only now just beginning to think about the Millennium - and the problems that its arrival may well bring to anyone owning a computer. For more information, turn to page 10.

You will all have seen copies of the

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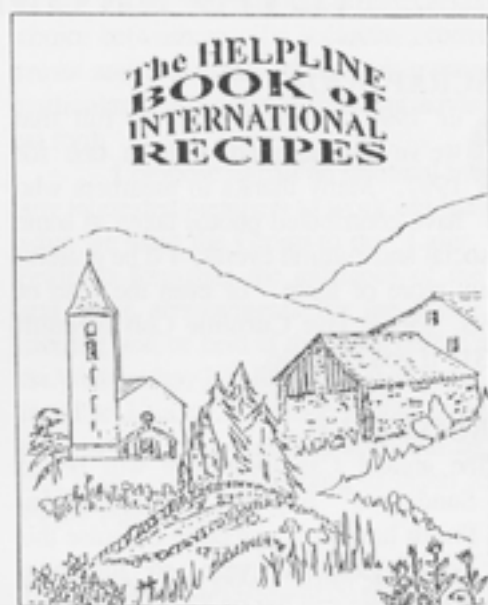
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*Helpline Recipe Book.* Like *Intercomm*, this cookery book was the result of the work of many people, and included recipes from all over the world - the C.I.A. is truly an international group! Special thanks must go to Liliass Grassie who spent many hours collecting, organising, collating, printing and publishing, and, finally, marketing and distributing this book. In all this work she was helped by many people, not least by Stella Madden who did the typesetting, and Barbara Melville who did the sketches. Incidentally, I must apologise to Barbara for omitting her sketch from the magazine last month.

Lastly, we have just received a letter enclosing the copy of an envelope which was sent from England to Andorra via Osaka. This must be quite rare, though I recall that my mother sent a hand-knitted outfit to my newly-born elder son - which arrived in time for my newly-born second son three years later!



## WRITER/BIOGRAPHER

1. Would like to hear from individuals who consider their lives up until now have been interesting enough for people to buy the book! Women's biographies are particularly popular with publishers at present! (Not sure about Andorra's sexist laws here). If you have read any of Hugh (Telegraph) Massingbred's books *Obits*, you will also undoubtedly feel the terrible loss when some lives are simply unrecorded. Write me a clear (preferably typed) brief synopsis for an opinion! I live just across the border (Ariege).

2. Writer, House-trained Englishman, just finished book, needs quiet billet in Andorra for final edit before publishing. Guardianage perfect but will consider all reasonable propositions.

B.J.F. @ BP79, Pamiers, 09102, Cedex



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## NEWS FROM THE GROUPS

### THE SCRAP BOOK

**O**ur 1996 Scrap Book is so full that we've had to start a fresh one for 1997. Many thanks to members who have contributed photos taken at some of our social and cultural events. I'd be grateful for many more of these - or even the loan of negatives. Please give **Caroline Colvin-Smith** on 837315 if you can help.

### CAR BOOT SALE

**T**he annual Car Boot Sale will be on Sunday, 6<sup>th</sup> July. **Caroline Colvin-Smith** has nobly agreed to organise this event again this year, so for more information, please call her on 837315.

### ACTIVITIES GROUP

**E**veryone should have received a copy of the most recent programme of events. A full programme for March includes a one-day visit to Montserrat on March 11<sup>th</sup> at a cost of 6,500 pts per person, and, a week later, a visit to various Andorran Commercial Enterprises. This latter excursion is open to members only and will cost 3,500 pts including transport and lunch.

Early next month (April), a two-day visit has been arranged to the botanical gardens near Blanes and to the flower farm that supplies the wholesale market in Barcelona.

In May there will be a two-day visit to Villafranca de Penedes. This will include a

guided tour of the Torres vineyards, a wine tasting, a visit to the wine museum and to the colourful Monday morning street market on the first day, and an opportunity to visit some of the Roman archaeological sites in Tarragona.

Some time towards the end of the ski season, the Activities and Helpline Groups are planning a joint trip in a Telecabin at Soldeu up to the ski slopes for lunch at a restaurant. This event is for those members who don't normally go skiing, and would like to see a ski station in action. The Telecabin is like a small train carriage, closed-in, and with plenty of time to get in and out. Members only!

And don't forget the two big Activities for 1997: the five-day visit to Avignon on 25<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> June. Closing date for this excursion was 27<sup>th</sup> February. The second major "CIA Customised Holiday" is a two-week visit to Egypt in October. A copy of the detailed itinerary is available on request from **Ann Price** 836653.

### THE NATURALIST GROUP

**M**embers of the Club are invited to join the Naturalist Group on their trip to Gibraltar in August. You don't have to be a bird-watcher or naturalist to go along and enjoy it! Call **Brian Dore** on 835931.

### HELPLINE

**B**y the time you read this, you may have heard firm details about the proposed second First Aid Course. The cost will be 10,000 pts, and each session will last two and a half hours. There is still time to let **Lilias Grassie** 838349 or **Ann**

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**Britt Nielsen**



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Price 836653 know if you are interested in joining the course.

When Tony Hooper stood up to announce the winners of the Helpline Christmas Competition at the coffee morning last February, there was an air of interested expectation. As Tony said, the C.I.A. likes to hold such draws in public, so that we can all see that everything is fair and above board. He went on to introduce the organiser of the Helpline Competition, Liliass Grassie, who, with barely suppressed laughter, announced that as there had been no entries, there were no winners! Well, you can't get fairer than that, can you!

### INVESTORS' GROUP

In May 1996, at a meeting of Group representatives and the Executive Committee, I floated the idea of an Investors' Discussion Group. There was sufficient positive responses for this to be followed by publication in *Intercomm* of a provisional proposal of such a group. At the time, it was envisaged as being limited in membership to those who derived a significant part of their income from investment in stock exchange securities and who play a substantial role in the management of those investments.

Discussions with several interested people since then have led to the conclusion that this was an unduly narrow concept of potential membership. To be useful and successful, I now believe that the Group ought to be open to any Club member with an interest in investment. I am still firmly of the opinion that the group ought not to give advice on the selection of particular securities or on the timing of sales and purchases; these issues are the proper concern of professional advisers. But it does seem appropriate that the Group should be in

what could be called procedural advice, such as where to get information on investments, the choice between specific securities, conventional trusts and unit trusts, collective approaches to particular professional investment advisers, and so forth.

I propose to call an informal meeting of any interested members to work out between us what we want the Group to do. Later, we can begin to formalise the existence of the Group and make arrangements for the future. This meeting will be held at the usual coffee morning on Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> March at the Paris-Londres Hotel at 11 a.m. Presence at this meeting will not commit to anything in advance, so I hope that many people will come to listen and talk.

Peter Parkinson

### INTERNATIONAL SINGERS

First, congratulations to all who came to our Christmas concerts. Your generosity raised over 128,000 pts for local people in need. The concerts also resulted in our choir being invited to sing at Pas de la Casa and Organya; proposals which we hope to take up in the spring. A second bonus was the attraction of new members, always a pleasure for us. Right now we are anxiously awaiting the return of our accompanist, Binnie Segal. Till then we are learning new music as best we can; ranging from Brahms's 'In Stille Nacht' to Simon and Garfunkel's 'Scarborough Fair' and Gershwin's 'Summer Time'.

We are hoping to present some of our songs either at 'Una Nit de Musica i Dansa' on the 24<sup>th</sup> May or possibly at an after dinner recital at the beginning of June. As always we very much welcome any women who enjoy singing harmony. (Any men interested in joining a choir, do contact us too. We can note your names and, as soon as we have enough



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male voices to form a balanced choir, we'll contact you.) **Clare Allcard** 836269 **Binnie Segal** 836296 or **Pop Goldsteen** 835621

### SCOTTISH DANCERS

**O**ur numbers were sadly down this season but, with the turn of the year and the return of **Michael and Judith Scott**, new life has been breathed into the group and we now muster at least ten for most Sunday afternoons. So anyone who is interested, old hand or rank beginner, do come along to the Biblioteca (middle door) of the La Massana Church Hall at 4.30pm for two hours of fun and exercise. For any further information call **Brenda Ross** 836886 or **Clare Allcard** 836269

### THE COMPUTER GROUP

We still see our chief use as a forum for exchanging computer information between members by phone. Interest in the club continues. The membership list has grown considerably, due to the efforts of **John Hunt** on his telephone.

We now have forty-five persons who use computers and whom we think might get help from the Group. At the last count, there are fifteen members on the Net.

We are trying to organise a regular meeting of the club on the second and fourth Thursday of every month. The time will be subject to change. For the present, we shall phone any person interested. next meeting.

The first meeting was due to be held in mid-February to discuss membership of the Internet in Andorra.

The Internet has information on the latest treatments for different diseases, conditions, illnesses, and information on sports, stamps, religion, bridge, computers,

automobiles, travel and tax problems.

Although it may be impossible for you to join the Net, you may have a friend where who is on, and can send a message to a user, who will pass on the message to your friend who lives nearby.

Once more, the best to you all, and special hanks to officers whose efforts keep all the various activities going. You can contact me by E MAIL: [sjoyjones@mypic.ad](mailto:sjoyjones@mypic.ad) or by Tel: 836972. **Stanley Jones**

### IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

In our next issue we shall be visiting  
El Moli de la Placa,  
an Italian restaurant run  
by a young Englishman in Arinsal.

\*\*\*\*\*

And we shall be going to Ecuador with three members of the Naturalists Group.

\*\*\*\*\*

We also hope to have reports from the Activities Group.

\*\*\*\*\*

We are always looking for features that may be of interest to our members.

Please drop the Editor a line.

And if you feel an article is too long, then why not write a letter?

The deadline for the June issue is 7<sup>th</sup> May 1997.

We look forward to hearing from you.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### Editorial and Production Team

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I was appalled to hear today (5<sup>th</sup> February) that some members of the CIA had complained about our collecting some money for the young Portuguese family that lost the breadwinner, husband and father in the road accident a few weeks ago.

What kind of people are they who have no charity in their hearts? What would their reaction be if it happened to a member of their own family? Come on, C.I.A. members, where is your charity, your compassion?

However, we should like to give our heart-felt thanks to all those members who so generously contributed to the fund.

Sheila Hooper

Just a quick note to say how very proud I was to hear that our club had once again come to the aid of a family in distress. Just a year ago we had the Arinsal avalanche, with Dinah Baxter, Ann Price and Britt Nielsen, in particular, giving invaluable time, comfort and practical help to its victims. Now, with the tragic death of Sr Gonçalves, a 37 year old Portuguese resident, we have once again been able to give a helping hand, this time to a young widow and her two small children just when such assistance is most needed.

It is also cheering proof of how our foreign resident community no longer remains aloof, on the periphery of society in Andorra, but instead is becoming more and more involved in the real life of the community.

Clare Allcard



All members of C.I.A. owe so much to Margaret Shaida, the Editor of the *InterComm* magazine with its masterpiece of a Cover Picture. Surely our magazine is by far the Best Publication in Andorra, and, indeed, amongst the Very Best in England and our neighbours North and South of our Borders.

It is so complete and enlightening, covering so very many aspects of the very wide range of subjects, such as the Advance Notices, Activities which Ann Price is Master of, News from the Groups as well as special reports from members on their individual achievements like "A Naturalist in Uganda".

Then there are the Special Features like meeting with the British Honorary Consul in Andorra for our individual benefit.

Dan Parsons

*What a wonderful letter to receive! It is much appreciated. However, I couldn't possibly produce the magazine without the help of many people: Tony Hooper, who always organises the cover (and picture); the leaders of the Groups who supply me with the programmes and news of their Groups; and Jacquie Crozier, Peter Dunkley, Clare Allcard, Ursula Ure and all the many other members who regularly contribute features for the benefit of us all. So, thank you, everyone! - Editor*

I thought the enclosed copy of an envelope (see left) would amuse you and other members of the C.I.A. My husband and I could hardly believe our eyes when we had a jolly good look at it. It looks as if the Post Office workers in Japan can read better than the English post officer workers. We were wondering if any other members of the C.I.A. have received mail that has gone half way around the world and back again.

Octavia & Ronnie Jones

The Editor welcomes Letters to the Editor.  
The deadline for the next issue  
is 7<sup>th</sup> May 1997

## AN EGYPTIAN EVENING

*"The Nile is Egypt and Egypt is the Nile". So said Dan Parsons in his interesting talk to the C.I.A. last November. Here, Karin Ostergaard recalls the evening for us.*

After several unsuccessful attempts to find the right restaurant, this time preferably in La Vella, Ann Price and Caroline Colvin Smith finally settled for Hotel Poblado in Arinsal. Fabienne, the owner, had generously promised to be on standby, being able to seat and feed our group of over forty people.

The very efficient Caroline brought her own recipe to Fabienne and together they composed a wonderful menu. The dinner was an absolute success. The service was excellent and Fabienne and her staff were always present and at the ready when needed.

Ann introduced Dan Parsons in a brief speech of welcome. Members had already been provided with back-ground information sheets giving some facts and features of Egypt and the Nile. In addition, Dan and his wife, Pauline had put up a small exhibit of maps and pictures in the hotel lobby to give us additional and more illustrative information (to be studied while

sipping cocktails before dinner).

When Dan Parsons took the stand, he greeted us in Arabic, and then went on to explain that there is a difference between Egypt 'then' and 'now'. 'Then', he explained, was 1928, when, as a 21-year-old youngster, he was employed by Ransome & Rapier on the installation of sluice gates in the Aswan Dam along with three barrages to control the Nile and extend the irrigation of farmlands.

Dan described the primitive living conditions in those days: the bedroom also served as an office, but with no air conditioning. It was cooler to sleep outside, especially during the month of May, when the bed was "as hot as a frying pan". Food was kept cold in ice boxes, not in refrigerators.

Work on the dam was often hard under a scorching sun, especially for the Italian workers who were assigned to work down in the quarry. The sluice gates had to be lifted by hand which was no easy task. Dan told us



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about Yusef, one of the strongest men on the job. Yusef was always dependable, but one morning, after a big evening, he didn't show up for work. The other workers laughed, saying that he had landed up in jail, which entailed a trip to the police station to retrieve him. The police finally let him out, but insisted on bringing him to work every morning at 6 am when work started and taking him back again at six in the evening when the day's work was over. This episode clearly showed how important the dam was to the local people.

There were many such stories. One day, Dan recalled that he had gone shopping in Cairo where he came up against two rather aggressive salesmen. During their conversation, Dan happened to mention that he was working on the Aswan Dam. It was like a code word, he said. Suddenly, the two men became very friendly, serving Dan coffee and cakes. When he purchased two items from them, they gave him a present.

Dan told us about 'Jimmy', the dog that was Dan's constant companion. During the heat of summer, the crane driver would sometimes lower Dan, with Jimmy on his lap, down into the reservoir in a bos'n's (boatswain's) chair which the workers had rigged up. When the water reached Dan's waist, Jimmy would swim out to cool off.

Dan recalled a story about Egypt in the time of the Pharaohs: apparently each summer, when the Nile was low, the most beautiful maiden in Egypt would be chosen for sacrifice. At a special ceremony she would be thrown into the Nile to assure a good flood. One year, the pharaoh's daughter was chosen, but she suddenly disappeared; so another beautiful maiden was selected and sacrificed in her place. That year, Egypt had a very low flood and famine followed. The following year, the pharaoh's daughter voluntarily sacrificed herself, and Egypt had the highest flood ever.

Another tale was about some featherless hens and a man called Hassan. Dan said he had noticed at several markets that all the hens were scraggly-feathered and bare below the wings which meant that they were unable to hatch their eggs. Then one day, he met an Arab called Hassan.

It seems that Hassan came from a family who for generations had had a special talent for hatching eggs. He would go to a

certain area and visit the local market where he would offer his services to hatch eggs for the owners of poor-laying hens. With the eggs he collected he would walk out to the delta at the edge of the desert. There he had built a hut three metres by three metres from mud bricks and in the walls he had placed many small sticks, like shelves, upon which he could arrange the eggs. Altogether, he could house some eight thousand eggs. In the centre of the room he would build a small fire and every day he carefully turned all the eggs. When they were hatched, Hassan took the chicks back to the market. He always knew exactly to whom the chicks belonged, and how many. He had nothing written down - it was all in his head.

The above are just a few excerpts from some of the many tales with which Dan regaled us. Everyone appeared to listen with great interest, because the whole talk was interesting and presented to us in both an educational and humorous way.

A sincere thank you to this extraordinary man (who is approaching his ninetieth birthday), for his great effort and hard work, which had gone to make the evening so very special.

And last but not least, many thanks to Ann and Caroline for their time-consuming work in organising our many wonderful get-togethers. This evening was another one of their many great successes. □



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## HERE AND THERE

When **Stella Madden** cooked the magnificent 13.25 sq. ft of cake for the International Club's refreshments after the Ordino Christmas Concert, she used a staggering quantity of ingredients. We thought you might like to know what went into it!

2 kg            Mixed dried fruit  
500g Demerara sugar  
500g            Dark brown sugar  
1 jam jar sultanas (soaked in brandy for one month)  
2.5 kg Plain flour (type 55)  
18 Eggs (size 70-75)  
2 tins Golden Syrup (454g each)  
4 tins Black Treacle (454g each)  
1 litre Milk  
750g            Butter  
350g            Margarine  
• Pot of bicarbonate of soda  
Spices: 1 jar each Cinnamon, Ground Cloves, Ginger, Nutmeg + • ground, Coriander Seeds  
1 cup Peach Snaps, Bols or whatever  
5 Lemons  
2 Oranges  
3 Mandarins

When we heard that **Christopher Balfour** had written a book called "Roads to Oblivion" we wondered where he had gone! We needn't have worried. He was writing about the Triumphs and Tragedies of British Car Makers in the ten-year period between 1946 and 1956. As he says, the decade following World War II, presented unrivalled opportunities, but were

*Overheard at the coffee morning:*

"It was one of those restaurants where you could keep shooting all round with a shot gun, and yet never hit a waiter."

\*\*\*\*\*

*We have been sent the following poem about Palm Sunday:*

Joyful, in a long procession  
Through ancient church, their palms held high  
Plaited, looped with gay bright ribbons  
Every colour you could tie;  
Babes had rosarys made of sugar,  
Pink and white sweet beads they fly;  
Little boys wave tinsel banners  
Grannies dressed in black pass by.

Down the church steps go the families  
Fiesta dressed in little groups,  
Braving out the freezing weather  
Taking photos for the books.  
Some carry branches of the laurel  
Girls hold scented blossoms white  
Symbols of the re-awakening  
Of the Springtime Spirit's might.  
**Jenny Bogarde © 1983**

also the prelude to the departure of most of the big names from the scene.

Christopher devoted years of research in the preparation of this sad but illuminating story of the British motor industry. When not researching the archives in Britain, Christopher lives in Andorra, refurbishing his cars and walking the peaks. This was his first book.

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## A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

*This feature is based on an article written by Ian Paton and first appeared in Themescene, the Journal of the British Thematic Association.*

You may have heard about the problems that could face the business world at the turn of the millennium. It may be of interest to some of our members to reproduce excerpts from an article entitled "Millennium Misery" which appeared in the March 1997 issue of the Journal of the British Thematic Association. The problems all relate to the date change in the computers at the turn of the millennium.

Ian explains: "Computer software keeps track of the date, and because it knows the number of days in each month it changes correctly to the new month at the right time; the battery in the PC ensures that the time and date continue to clock up even when it is turned off. After 31<sup>st</sup> December it changes to the new year, and there lies the problem."

But, Ian goes on to ask, "What will happen when the date changes from 31/12/1999 to 01/01/2000? Well, there won't be a problem if a 4-digit year is used, that is,  $1999 + 1 = 2000$ . But if a 2-digit year is used:  $99 + 1 = 00$  and carry '1'. What do you think will happen to the 'carry 1'?"

But Ian stresses you should *not* rush and use the Date/Time Icon to set your PC at 11.58 p.m. on 31/12/99, to see what happens at midnight. Your computer *might* just crash.

And don't think that because you are not connected up to the Internet that it won't affect you. If your software is a few years old, "it will affect everything on your PC: spreadsheets, word processing, database, desktop publishing, etc., as well as Windows. Windows '95 is probably Millennium proof, but Version 3.1. may not be. Anything earlier than 3.1 may well have problems. And don't ignore MSDOS if you use it.

"Large organisations (e.g. British Telecom) with thousands of computers may have to spend millions of pounds to prevent a disaster at the start of the millennium. On a very small scale we all have the same problem.

"Reports have it that one test with a PC set to 31/12/99 which changed to 31/10/0 (only one 0) crashed immediately. If your software is not using a 4-digit year it might just collapse the first time you tried to do anything in the new

century because of a 'blank' at the end of the date where it was expecting a digit. The use of the 2-digit year is a ghost from the past when memory and disk space was much more expensive and saving two digits in each of hundreds of thousands of records seemed cost effective.

"Every time a file (= letter, database, etc.) is written away to disk, the software automatically provides a 'label' which contains time and date. A dud date like the one above could prove disastrous, and even if your date has changed to 01/01/00 without a problem, the question arises as to whether the software is able to recognise that 01/01/00 comes after 31/12/99 and not in front of it? 2000 is higher than 1999, but 00 must also be higher than 99.

"The Date which is automatically printed on letters and reports by a word processing packages using the PC stored date. Just setting the stored date to 01/01/00 on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2000 might deal with this, but if the date stored in the PC has automatically been changed to something like 31/10.0, then it is quite possible that the 'Set Date' routine may not work."

Ian concludes: "I've heard of people who've booked their restaurant to celebrate the Millennium. I hope they have the same foresight concerning the survival of their PC software." ☒



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## RESTAURANT REVIEW

*It is always interesting to learn of new restaurants. Here, Peter Dunkley introduces us to his latest find in La Massana*

Els Fogons de la Padrina (in the valley at La Massana) is back in business again. It re-opened just before Christmas under Louis and Christiane Verrycken, a Belgian couple, who had a well-respected restaurant in Llorts a few years ago. Louis is chef while Christiane looks after the front of the house. Their objective is to offer distinctive dishes but at everyday prices. As Louis says, "What's the point in doing the same as everyone else?"

The menu lives up to the claim. It's particularly strong on seafood, much of which can be ordered either as a 'starter' or a main course; home-smoked salmon or trout, for example, stuffed clams and an assortment of fish and shellfish pâtés. Also available are salmon slices with champagne sauce, sole meunière, warm oysters in champagne sauce and a couple of unusual trout dishes; one steamed with leeks, the other, flambéed with Ricard.

For conventional starters, the house salad has fresh, crisp vegetables, attractively presented. The pâté assortment is unusually good; it includes a portion of foie gras.

Carnivores are well provided for, with venison filet, leg of lamb (two people), pork 'filet mignon', and sirloin with a choice of numerous sauces and side dishes. The desserts are an invitation to gluttony. Christiane's tarte tatin is silky-smooth and her chocolate mousse highly commended, although I could have done with a slight extra tang of armagnac in it.

During the week, Els Fogons offer a three-course, 'menu de dia'. Recently, the main courses have been 'blanquette de veau' or 'coq au vin'. We've had both and will beat the drum for them. At 1,450 pesetas (glass of wine included) this is exceptional value. The (hot) bread rolls, by the way, are the best we have had for a long time.

The à la carte menu is well-priced with main courses 1,000-1,900 pesetas (most of them towards the lower end), starters at 680-950 and desserts, 500-750. The house wine is a good Rioja at 650 pesetas.

Louis also handles special orders, given a few days' notice. We tested him with a request for roast suckling pig for six. When we arrived, 'piggy' was revolving on a spit over the open fire at the end of the room. The meat was moist, tender, tasty.

We've been to Els Fogons seven times since Christmas and chosen a variety of dishes. Discounting some minor blemishes, we've found the food to be of high quality, with generous portions. We also like the ambiance. At one end of the room, there is a bar area where one can await guests or have pre-table drinks. Christiane is friendly and hospitable; Louis materialises from the kitchen to check reactions.

Els Fogons is closed on Sunday nights and Mondays.



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# MORE POWERFUL THAN 10,000 SUNS

## The World's Largest Solar Furnace

*In this intriguing article, Peter M. Dunkley visits the solar furnace in the French Institute of Materials and Processes near Andorra*

It was always a favourite childhood prank. With a magnifying glass, you concentrated the sun's rays onto the leg or hand of a companion who was looking somewhere else at the time and - in a few moments - bingo! For a truly spectacular, high-tech version of the same trick, though, it's difficult to beat a solar furnace. The French Institute of Materials and Processes has the world's largest. Located just outside the little village of Odeillo in the country's south-east, it can generate, in just over three seconds, a temperature more than half that of the surface of the sun itself.

From a distance, it had seemed surreal; an ethereal, iridescent structure floating above the floor of the valley below. Closer up, I realised that what I had been looking at was a vast, shimmering, mirror, built into the side of a fourteen-storey building. With its parabolic shape producing reflections of cloud and sky in the lower half and the hillside terrain in the top, it was an extraordinary sight made even stranger by the constantly-shifting pattern of images as I drove down the hill towards the complex.

Facing the structure, a hundred metres away, was an equally curious spectacle; dozens of huge, flat, mirrors arranged in ascending terraces up the hillside, each with its surface tilted to the sun like some bizarre, robotic helianthus. Less obvious at first was the white-tiled, slim rectangular tower, half the height of the huge, parabolic mirror and located a few metres in front of it. It later proved to be the focal point - literally - of the entire project.

The Cerdagne, home of the Institute, is one of France's more pastoral areas. The

office and laboratory windows on the south side look out onto a green, open plain circled by the distant mountains of two countries; France's own Carlit, Puigmal and Puymorens and the Spanish Sierra del Cadi. Picturesque villages dot the plateau and, in summer, cattle wander through the flowers and shrubs, grazing the meadows. Remote from urban or industrial centres, the atmosphere is clear and unpolluted.

The two principal French routes to the Cerdagne traverse countryside as impressive in its own way as the plain itself. One meanders through the castled town of Foix and the Ariege

Valley to L'Hospitalet and Latour-de-Carol. Signs erected by the local government along the road - "La Terre Courage" - sum up the austere beauty of the region.

The other route is through the Tet valley. Starting from Villefranche-de-Conflent, the road and the narrow-gauge railway line which parallels it, snake their

way through the mountains to Montlouis - at fifteen hundred metres, the highest military garrison town in France. Before the line was completed in 1911, the upper valley, at the edge of the Cerdagne, was often cut off for months during the winter. Now, the 'Little Yellow Train,' well-known to thousands of tourists, travels the route, year round, from Villefranche to Latour-de-Carol. Odeillo is one of its stops.

With an annual three thousand hours of sun, the area was a natural site for solar energy research. In 1953, Professor Felix Trombe set up the first solar furnace at Montlouis. It's still in operation today on the ramparts of the fort and the heat it generates is



used to bake the ceramics in a nearby pottery oven.

Two more ambitious developments grew out of the original Montlouis installation; the Institute's own solar furnace at Odeillo, started in 1962 and an experimental solar power station, at nearby Targassonne, known as 'The Themis Project,' in 1975. The one hundred-metre high, Themis receiver tower on the hill above Odeillo is still a landmark in the area. The solar part of the project has been discontinued, though, and some of the equipment adapted to gamma particle research.

The Institute, part of France's National Centre for Scientific Research, employs about a hundred people. Its Director, Gilles Flamant, has been in charge for the last five years. "I first came here as a student, twenty years ago," he told me, "then after a year in industry, returned as a researcher." A multi-talented man, Flamant runs marathons for recreation as well as finding time for his writing. Young and with gallic good looks, he seems to wear easily his responsibilities as the chief of this unique establishment.

Almost everyone at Odeillo is involved directly in high temperature work,

either through the creation of new materials and processes or studying the reactions of substances to extreme conditions. "For example, we did some of the tests here for the U.S. Space Program," said Flamant. "Their scientists wanted to find out how heat created by re-entry into the earth's atmosphere would affect spaceship materials."

According to the Institute's own calculations, the amount of light energy concentrated in the focal tower by their parabolic mirror is over 10,000 times the quantity beamed by the sun on an equivalent area of the earth. The Public Relations people used this data to develop the memorable slogan, 'Plus Fort Que 10,000 Soleils' - 'More Powerful Than 10,000 Suns' - as the Institute's signature. As well as being the theme of the displays and A-V presentations seen by some 80,000 visitors annually, the words also form the Institute's logo, printed on its letterheads and other literature.

Even for a non-scientist, it's easy to grasp how Odeillo's solar furnace works. The flat mirrors - known as heliostats - always face the sun. Mounted at different levels up the hillside, each of them reflects its light to the

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central parabolic mirror in a plane parallel to its axis. The mirror then reflects the light from all the heliostats to the focal point in the tower where the actual experiments are performed. No problem with the principles; it was the scale of the project that left me shaking my head.

The parabolic mirror itself is forty metres high, fifty-four metres wide and because of its size, had to be constructed from individual sheets of specially-toughened glass. There are over nine-thousand of them, each forty-five centimetres square. Ten people worked for two years to install and bring them to functioning pitch.

On the hill opposite the mirror, the sixty-three heliostats are adjustable, sideways or up and down. Each is composed of a hundred and eighty individual mirrors set in a frame six metres high by seven and a half metres wide. Aline Olalde who took me around the Institute, explained how they track the sun.

"Everything is controlled by the computer. It calculates precisely how each heliostat must be positioned in order to reflect the most light to the parabolic mirror. Then it sends a signal to the heliostat's mechanism. When the solar furnace is in use, the heliostats are moving, all the time."

Walking on the hillside was a curious experience. Bathed suddenly in warmth from the reflected sunlight as I passed in front of each heliostat, I continually caught sight of myself in mirrors more than three times my height. It was as though I had been suddenly transported to some exotic, outlandish set of a sci-fi movie.

In front of each heliostat, mounted on a frame and pointed at its centre, was what looked like a small telescope. "It holds four photo-electric cells," Aline explained. "Before we developed the computer program, they controlled the heliostats. When the sunlight no longer fell directly on the heliostat - because of the earth's movement - the cells sent a signal to the heliostat's hydraulic system. Unfortunately,

they didn't work while the sun was behind the clouds, so there was a lot of time wasted in catching-up when the sun came out again. The computer controls are more efficient, but we keep the other system as a back-up."

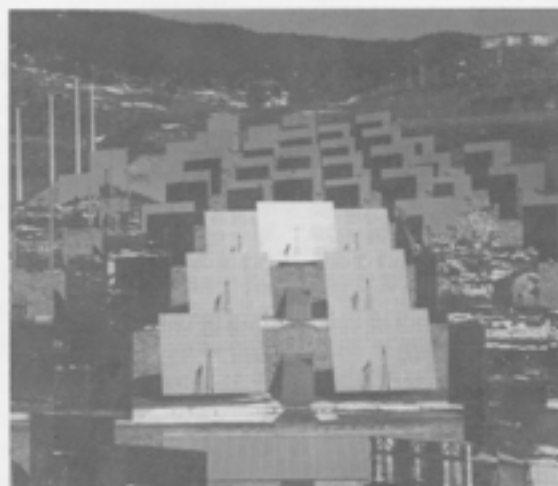
Since the furnace was not being used at the time, I was able to visit the focal tower. Experimental work areas are not usually photogenic; hardware takes priority. This was no exception. At the end of the room, looking out onto the parabolic mirror, huge metal shutters - now closed - occupied most of the wall. In the middle of the room, rails had been installed to allow the test materials to be slid forward in their water-cooled holders. At the end of the track was that precise position in space at which, with shutters opened, the giant mirror focused the light from the sixty-three heliostats. Mundane as it was, I felt a frisson of excitement, of awe, knowing that only a few

hours before, the place where I was standing had been suffused with the radiance of ten thousand suns and seared with a temperature of three and a half thousand degrees.

Although the parabolic mirror is the show-stealer at Odeillo, it's not the only piece of equipment at the Institute which uses the

sun to produce high temperatures. We took the elevator to the sixth floor on the opposite - south - side of the main building to a long, narrow laboratory cantilevered out from the side of the structure.

Aline pointed out eight hemispherical mirrors - concentrators - two metres in diameter, suspended from the ceiling. Then, at the touch of a switch, a portion of the laboratory floor rolled back, exposing a heliostat on the terrace, far below. When in use, it reflects sunlight up to one of the concentrators which then re-focuses the light to a point halfway between floor and ceiling where the test material is placed. Like their big brother, these small concentrators can also raise the temperature at the focal point to 3,500 degrees,



but the area of the focal point is much smaller. As a result, they're able to handle materials only a square centimetre or so in size compared with the forty to eighty centimetres possible in the focal tower.

"There's a story behind the mirrors," Aline said. "Originally, they were reflectors for a battery of searchlights, brought here by the Germans during the Occupation. When the Germans retreated, they left them behind. Our scientists adapted them when the project was being put together in 1962."

Although most of Odeillo's experiments involve the solar furnace, the Institute's equipment also includes plasma generators and lasers. "What we do here is not fundamental research, not plasma physics as such," says Flamant. "We use plasma for processes, particularly in connection with environmental control work. By creating temperatures of up to fifteen thousand degrees, we're able to experiment with different ways of transforming or recycling otherwise dangerous waste materials."

While the Institute operates at the leading edge of high temperature research, most of its work is now geared to eventual commercial or industrial application. It holds some patents of its own - in ceramic synthesis, for example - but increasingly, the Odeillo experiments are planned in conjunction with institutions and corporations, both in France and abroad, who pay for the work and then register their own patents. There are close connections with the Societe Europeenne de Propulsion, and other companies in the field of space and aeronautics. There's also an ongoing relationship with the U.S. in various space-program related experiments.

Top of the Institute's current priorities is the production, in experimental quantities, of Carbon 60. Researchers in Texas found this new molecule by accident only eleven years ago when they vaporised graphite in a helium atmosphere with heat generated by an electric arc. The discovery opened up a completely new field of carbon chemistry.

C60's characteristic, symmetrical shape led it to being christened in France as 'le footballene.' Elsewhere, C60 and its offshoots such as C70, are known as 'fullerenes' after the shape of the geodesic dome structures created by Buckminster Fuller. Dozens of laboratories

throughout the world are now investigating the unique properties of the new molecules and finding applications for them in areas as diverse as biology, pharmacology, optics, micro-electronics; even, possibly, the treatment of AIDS.

There's another, even more exotic venture in which the Institute is involved, though. European, U.S. and Russian scientists are now working on a project for the year 2,000. Its name - aptly - is 'FIRE'; its objective, to study the sun's environment from distances as close as two diameters. The Institute's assignment is to duplicate the conditions the FIRE probe will encounter during its mission - not just the enormous heat, but its bombardment by elementary particles. Says Flamant, "In the vacuum chamber where we create the high temperatures, we will also be using an array of equipment, including electron and ion guns, to reproduce these extreme conditions. I don't think anyone is better equipped than we are to undertake such experiments."

From its foundation, over thirty years ago, the Institute has depended for its experiments on the energy of the sun. Later, as I stood on the hill again, staring down at the glistening face of the huge mirror below, it occurred to me how appropriate it was that the Institute should now be called upon to help investigate the very nature and source of that energy. □

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## THE KARAKORAM HIGHWAY

*Despite living in the midst of the Pyrenees, Jeanne Lodge's journey along part of the Silk Route in the Himalayas last year was an impressive experience.*

The highlight of 1996 was a trip along the Silk Route in June between Islamabad and China. We were a group of thirteen plus our guide Justin. Our tour (with "Explore") took us by mini bus along the Karakoram highway over the Himalayas. The drive along the Indus is quite spectacular as the road precariously winds its way ever upwards high above the river bed - and there are no barriers along the outer edge! Unfortunately, it was wet as the pre-monsoon rains had already arrived. To acclimatise, we spent two days in Hunza, an oasis among the steep snow-covered mountain peaks. Dried apricots come from this region.

Due to the rains, landslides were reported along the road, so we left our bus and proceeded on our way in a convoy of five jeeps. We had to avoid fallen stones and boulders strewn across the road, until we came to a torrent that had completely blocked the way with metre-high mud and rock. There was nothing for it but to back-track to our hotel and wait for the bulldozer to clear the road in the afternoon. On the second attempt we got a bit further, our drivers racing past the worst areas, fearful of falling debris - but again we had to turn back due to dangerous conditions.

Next morning we set out again following the bulldozer past the worst, until we reached a rock-fall that would take days to blast a way through. But there on the other side was an abandoned bus. Justin walked to the next village to find the driver and we were on our way again.

The next big hurdle was a one hundred

metre wide landslide. So we booked into an hotel for the night in Sust where we dined by kerosene lamps. Up at 5 am to reach the landslide before the snows above started melting and the stones rolling. Some of the party were reluctant to cross, as below, only a vertical wall separated us from the foaming waters of the Karakoram. With a little help from the locals, who also carried our luggage, most of us made it under our own steam, though two girls had to be carried and the Greek who brought up the rear had to retreat behind a convenient rock as a great boulder rolled down towards him. We then had a short distance to walk after waiting for the road team to blow up another boulder lying across our path. The noise was deafening as it reverberated along the narrow gorge.

Round the corner were two abandoned buses. It took a lot of persuasion and a large bribe to convince the Chinese bus driver to take us to our own bus which had not only run out of fuel but had also developed a puncture. Both the fuel and spare tyre were part of our luggage. We were advised to drink as much water as possible to avoid the discomfort of altitude, which meant frequent stops, also a good excuse for photography as we left the narrow gorge and climbed toward the Khunjerab Pass, 15,500 feet above sea level, and the highest road pass in the World, inhabited only by golden Himalayan marmots sunning themselves atop their burrows. Unfortunately most of the descent to Kasgar was at night, where we arrived at two in the morning after a twenty-hour day, but just in time for the famous Sunday market we'd come so far to see.

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## MY FAVOURITE PLACE

*On the occasion of the St David's Day, Sheila Hooper looks back to her childhood in Aberystwyth, Wales*

**A**s this magazine is due out on 1<sup>st</sup> March, (which is St. David's Day - as if you didn't know!), I thought it might be a good idea to have a little article about Wales.

I'm sure you all have a favourite place. In Wales, mine is Aberystwyth. Why? Well, this little place has been involved in my life since I was a small child.

Aberystwyth is a sea-side resort in mid-Wales on Cardigan Bay, not the usual kind of resort, rather quiet for many people but very popular just the same. It has a pier, a very long promenade, a band stand that used to show Pierrot shows, a harbour, and a life boat. Standing at one end of the promenade is Constitution Hill. The beach? Well, if you like a pebbly beach, great!! If you want sand, you have to go round the headland to Clarach.

Aberystwyth is a University town, which is housed in a beautiful Victorian building; by now, I should imagine that there are numerous high-rise blocks to house the students. It has the National Library of Wales, which is also housed in a very spectacular building on the outskirts of town. And there is also the College of Agriculture, a striking

Concert Hall, the King's Hall, and, of course, the old castle ruins.

As you can see, Aberystwyth has everything.

From my earliest memory, I spent all my summer holidays there. I was there in 1939 when the Second World War broke out, remembering the evacuees from the Midlands of England, and also when V.J. Day was declared in August 1945. I went on board H.M.S. Vanguard when she was there for a few days on a goodwill visit.

Later, Tony and I became engaged in Aberystwyth, and a year later (forty years ago this year) we spent our honeymoon there - couldn't afford to go anywhere else!

Mind you, Tony didn't feel the same way as me. He fell down some steps and chipped his elbow, and had to go home to mother to be looked after whilst I went to work.

The chances are that I wouldn't recognise the place now, as I haven't been back there for twenty-five years at least. I expect technology will have transformed the hitherto quiet retreat into what people now expect - a town of non-stop entertainment. □

---

## ANSWERS TO THE CHRISTMAS QUIZ

How did you get on with the Christmas Quiz? I hope it gave you a minute or two of challenging contemplation and pleasure over the Christmas holidays! The answers are as follows:

3 BM

A the W in 80 D

34 B B in a P

4 W and a F

7 W of the W

J 4 is I D

26 L in the A

S W and the & 7 D

70 = 3 S Y and T

The 12 D of C

Three Blind Mice

Around the World in Eighty Days

Twenty-four Black Birds in a Pie

Four Weddings and a Funeral

Seven Wonders of the World

July Fourth is Independence Day

Twenty-Six Letters in the Alphabet

Snow White and the Seven Dwarves

Seventy = Three Score Years and Ten

The Twelve Days of Christmas



## A FIRST VISIT

*Alan and Irene Howard visited the Principality for the first time last October, staying with friends in Andorra la Vella. Here, Alan describes their first mountain walk in the Pyrenees. They have two children - but do not live in Surrey!*

A shot rang out, rudely shattering the peace. Noise echoed round and round the mountains, then all was silent again except for the stream gleefully heading for the sun. We continued up the valley and passed a hunter wearing breeches, ancient wax jacket, gun slung over his shoulder, game bag, and a radio earpiece. An incongruously high-tech touch in an otherwise timeless garb.

We emerged into a high plateau and gradually entered a massive cwm, high ridges all around and the far end blocked by a 9,000 ft mountain with a fine dusting of late autumn snow. What a sight! We sat down beside an old shepherd's hut and ate an orange. Then on and upwards. The air was noticeably thinner and the relentless upward progress became a bit of a slog.

Conversation gave way to deep breathing but the slowly changing view inspired us on. The mountains were so sharp in the cloudless sky you felt you could reach out and touch them. Now the stream was far below, the valley floor flattening out and our path becoming indistinct and occasionally covered in snow.

We heard a noise and saw four figures bounding down the trail.

"Buenos dies!" I said in my best Spanish accent.

"Good morning!" they replied. So much for my linguistic ability.

"Lac Bleu?" they enquired. This was indeed our objective. We had started from the picnic area at Puntal above El Serrat and made our way via the Rialp hut towards the Port de Sigeur. We could see the pillar on the crest of the col and the map said the lake was just beyond that, twenty minutes into France.

"How far?" I asked, and they replied "Two hundred metres."

"We're nearly there," I cried, but my wife Irene pointed out that they probably meant another two hundred metres in height. She was right, as usual.

Now we were high enough to see over the ridge of the cwm, the white glistening summit of Pic de Font Blanca. A final slog to the col and we were rewarded by a magnificent view over France to the north and the blue lake towards the north-east. Time was pressing so we took a photo of the lake instead of dipping a toe in, then headed down. On the way back we noticed that a huge area of the mountain was covered with small azalea bushes.

"We'll just have to come back here in the spring," Irene said.

We made rendezvous with our friend who had kindly come to collect us and took photos of the silver birches just turning a spectacular golden yellow against the dark green hillsides. Pleased with ourselves, we drove down those interminable bends and stopped for a beer in a café overlooking a deep valley. Andorra is indeed a vertical country.

To 'unwind', or maybe to inspire us for a future expedition, our friend took us over the Ordino-Prats road to the Col d'Ordino and a fine view of Ordino and the Pic Casamanya. From here you begin to run out of superlatives as the entire eastern flank of Andorra is laid out before you. I resolved to climb Pic de Coma Pedrosa as it is the highest in the Principality, planned ski trips, ski tours, and summer camping. Reality returned with more hair-raising vertical driving back to Andorra la Vella.

Sipping coffee on the balcony after dinner, and watching the sun setting over the city, we wondered why we had to return to England. ☐

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## A NATURALIST IN UGANDA

*Continuing our travels in Uganda, we give extracts from **Jacque Crozier's** diary, which capture the flavour and some of the highlights of her Ugandan holiday.*

### DAY 1 - July 30th.

**A**fter a remarkably comfortable flight we landed in pouring rain to a lushly wet, green Addis Ababa...At midday we flew on to Entebbe...In the gardens of the Lake Victoria Hotel we watched a variety of birds ranging in size from tiny Tawny-flanked Prinias to Hooded Vultures. Later we strolled around the nearby Botanical Gardens, a still-beautiful relic of the colonial era, down to the shore of Lake Victoria, enjoying views of fifty or more noisy Black-and-white-casqued Hornbills, equally noisy Black-and White Colobus monkeys, the ubiquitous Grey Plantain-eaters, Green Pigeons, Woodland Kingfishers, Hadada Ibises and Palm-nut Vultures - a good introduction to some of the more common Ugandan birds. Our first day in Uganda ended with a pianist playing soft music in the restaurant, where we were introduced to the country's most popular dish, fried "tilapia" and chips.

### DAY 2 - July 31<sup>st</sup>

Early the next morning, while our luggage and crates of water were being loaded into the two Land Rovers which would be our travelling homes for the next sixteen days, we birdwatched in the garden... The drive north took us first through the outskirts of Kampala, very seedy and shantytown after the long years of civil unrest but even here there was plenty of birding interest. The countryside grew increasingly wilder and less cultivated as we approached Masindi, though even deep in the bush we were never far from a thatched hut and a tiny plot with a few banana plants. The rains continued until July this year, so bush and woodland are lush and green. Cassia trees were in brilliant yellow flower and the vermilion blooms of the Nandi Flame trees broke the emerald monotony with vivid splashes of colour. After a coffee break in Masindi, we left the tarmac road for dirt tracks and drove towards Murchison National Park through gently swelling, thickly-wooded hills.

We arrived at the very new Sambiya River Lodge. As dusk approached, we sat on the bluff overlooking the river hoping for nightjars. Nothing prepared us for the spectacle we were to see; it was still light when the first Pennant-winged Nightjar made a spectacular sweep just above us, looking less like a bird than a Japanese kite or flying Manta ray! We watched totally enthralled as more and more males in full breeding plumage swooped overhead. There must have been at least forty, their enormously elongated inner primary feathers of "pennants" waving behind them. We watched enraptured until it was too dark to see.

### DAY 3 - August 1<sup>st</sup>

**T**oday was Shoebill Stork day; this was not only the name of the boat that took us up and down river but also the "Bird of the Day". We made an early start to drive the fifteen kilometres from the Lodge to the Victoria Nile. Murchison Falls National Park is unique in being bisected by the Nile flowing from east to west for 115 kilometres.

Our morning boat took us upriver towards the Falls; Saddlebill and Openbill Storks fed in the shallows, Lapwings and Thick-knees flew up in alarm, and Fish Eagles sat sentinel on the tree tops. Then on a small island was the Shoebill. Preposterous, almost grotesque yet strangely dignified and impressive, it stood immobile while we watched and photographed.



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We continued up river to the foot of the Falls, a spectacular surge of water as the fifty metre wide river is forced through a seven metre cleft in the escarpment, falling forty metres with a thundering roar. We clambered onto a small rock midstream to photograph before returning to the boat and heading back downstream to Paraa where we picnicked beside the river.

The ferry, the only way to reach the north side of the Park, has been out of action for several days so there was a long queue of lorries waiting to cross. Realising we would never get there and back in the afternoon, we changed our plans and commandeered the "Shoebill" again to take us down river to Lake Albert (all the lakes and parks had their names changed to African ones during Amin's dictatorship; Albert became Lake Idi Amin - now they are back to the good old colonial ones!). In addition to the birds, there were at least a thousand hippos wallowing in the shallows, huge crocodiles, waterbuck, bushbuck, buffalo and two elephants along the river banks - all part of the Nile trip.

We drove back to the Lodge in the gathering dusk with Pennant-winged Nightjars flying around.

#### DAY 5 - August 3<sup>rd</sup>

**I**t was a long drive from Sambiya River Lodge to Fort Portal, on dirt tracks all the way. The attractive exterior and gardens of the romantically named "Mountains of the Mount Hotel" belied the rather basic interior, lack of hot water and extremely slow and surly service.

#### DAY 6 - August 4<sup>th</sup>

Our planned very early start to Kibale Forest had to be re-adjusted. In fact, it was a surprise to get breakfast and our picnic sandwiches at

all, given the disinclination of the staff to do anything before 7 a.m. It is about fifty kilometres from Fort Portal to Kibale on a poor dirt road. At the Park Headquarters we divided into two groups as the wardens allow no more than six people in a group to visit the chimpanzees.

The calls of forest birds were heard all around as we followed our guide along the narrow trails and brilliant butterflies (there are over 140 species in Kibale Forest) flitted in the sunlit clearing. The first primates we saw were Red Colobus, Red-tailed Monkeys and Grey-cheeked Mangabey, then our guide found a family of chimps. We watched Matthias, aged five, his twelve year old sister and their mother for an hour before they settled down to sleep high in the canopy.

Our planned stop at the beautiful Crater Lake nearby was cut short by rain, which as we took shelter in the little cafe there, turned into a violent thunder storm. The rain had made the forest road muddy and slippery so we drove slowly the 120 kilometres to our overnight hotel, the Margarita in Kasese.

#### DAY 7 - August 5<sup>th</sup>

**T**he Margarita is situated beside the golf-course on the western edge of Kasese, where the first foothills of the Rwenzori mountains rise up from the plain. If you are very lucky, the clouds that habitually shroud the mountain tops lift and you can see snow-capped range after range stretching into Zaire. Today was normal, so only a few misty peaks could be seen.

We drove south, with a brief stop at the Equator, through dry Euphorbia candelabra savannah where hundreds of Uganda Kob were grazing. We stopped at two crater lakes; Lesser Flamingos were feeding in the second, saline one, while a small herd of Buffalo lazed around the edge.

Mweya Lodge, in Queen Elizabeth National Park, is situated at the tip of a long peninsula jutting out into Lake Edward, overlooking the Kazinga Channel (which links Lakes Edward and George) to its south. The sunsets over the lake looking west towards Zaire are spectacular. In the late afternoon we took the vehicles for a game drive along the Channel circuit until dark. Bushbuck, Buffalo,



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Hippo, dozens of Warthog and Banded Mongoose were seen.

#### DAY 8 - August 6<sup>th</sup>

We spent almost an hour before breakfast watching the sun rise over the Kazinga Channel while skeins of geese and pelicans flew overhead. At nine o'clock we took a boat trip down the Channel; Yellow-billed Storks, White and Pink-backed Pelican lines the banks, Squacco Herons peered from the reeds, hundreds of Pied and Malachite Kingfishers fished and flew over the water. Near the fishing village on the lakeshore, African Skimmers dozed among the gulls and the vast number of Hamerkops on the shore while White-winged Black terns hawked over the water where hundreds of hippos wallowed.

After lunch we left for a game drive to the Kikorondo Crater area to the north of the Lodge. This is perhaps the most picturesque part of the Park, a zone of old volcanic craters whose wooded slopes hide deep blue or green lakes in their depths. A pair of Lappet-faced Vultures were perched on a dead tree on one crater rim and there were even more flamingos in the saline lakes.

Every night a Hyena prowls around the Lodge; tonight he came right up to the campfire after dinner, sending some of the guests screaming back into the dining room. Hippos grazing on the grass outside the cabins are commonplace, sometimes leading to *very close encounters when you return to your room after dark.*

#### DAY 10 - August 8<sup>th</sup>

There was time to watch the sun rise over the Kazinga Channel for the last time, then luggage and people had to be packed into the jeeps for the day's drive south to Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. The highlight of the day occurred very soon after we left the Lodge - a Leopard was sitting in the road...We all watched as it unhurriedly loped into the bushes beside us.

We continued south to Ishasha through the southern part of Queen Elizabeth Park...There were few mammals but we did spot Topi which, in Uganda, are only found here. The scarlet flowers on the bare Red-hot Poker or Erythrina trees lit up the wayside. Soon the park gave way to an undulating, cultivated landscape with high hills rearing up in front. We passed through typical African villages and finally reached the Gorilla Camp at Buhoma right on the edge of the Impenetrable Forest.

#### DAY 11 - August 9<sup>th</sup>

Two groups of gorillas have been habituated to humans in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. We had six permits (the total number allocated) to visit the largest, nearest Mubare or "M" group so those voted the fittest, which included Brian, had to go to the Katendegere or "K" group, which were considerably farther away.

We had to be at the Park Office by 8 a.m. and after collecting long sticks, porters to carry rucksacks, lunches and cameras, a warden and two trackers, we were briefed and set off along the main trail. Very soon we turned off and the forest and its noises closed

around us. We were on a narrow track where the undergrowth had been broken down, whether by gorillas or yesterday's trackers was not clear. Mountain gorillas are so called because they love going up and down mountains! Fortunately, for most of our route, we traversed the slopes rather than going straight up. By 10.30, the trackers were hacking a path through the giant nettles and impatiens so that nine people and an equal number of heavily laden porters could follow the path taken by twelve gorillas this morning. We reached "M" group just before noon and spent the next hour watching them feeding. The twelve gorillas in "M" group are made up of the Silverback, five females and six juveniles.





This Silverback gave us the best views, putting on a chest-beating display as we arrived, later feeding peacefully and taking very little notice of us visitors. Several juveniles swung briefly from branches, appeared and disappeared in the thick vegetation and when our hour was nearly up, the youngest of the group (aged 1 year, 1 month and 3 days, the warden told us proudly) performed acrobatics from a branch very near us. We arrived back in camp at 2.45.

Those going to "K" group had to start their trek by crossing the fast-flowing Munyaga river on stepping stones and getting wet feet in the process; one porter slipped in! They were accompanied by a camera crew from Channel 4, making a film in the "Lonely Planet" series and ten porters, some very heavily laden with cameras and sound equipment. After the river they had a long, hard climb to almost 2000 metres - just into the Giant Lobelia zone.

When they reached the gorillas the "six only" rule was strictly enforced and only the cameraman and one assistant were allowed to go close to the animals. "K" group is much smaller (the death of the old Silverback caused the group to split up - gorilla rivalry again) but very good, close views were had of a young Silverback, a female and a juvenile. The descent was really rough and steep, through virgin forest until finally they had to re-cross the river. Brian decided to wade. Wet and tired, they reached the camp an hour later than the other group, having gone much further, much faster.

Bwindi is only just south of the Equator, so we all found it unexpected to have to huddle around a camp fire, wearing our

thickest jerseys, to keep ourselves warm in the evenings.

#### DAY 12 - August 10<sup>th</sup>

Today was spent on a long, gentle trek back into the forest along the Waterfall Trail which follows the Munyaga river upstream as it tumbles down the steep slopes. Thanks to Alfred, our local guide, we saw a lot of good forest birds, including that loveliest of all forest Bee-eaters, the Black. We picnicked near the stream and then climbed to the second highest waterfall but few were brave enough to take a dip in the icy pool below it!

#### DAY 14 - August 12<sup>th</sup>

Today we walked along the Rushuura Trail, up the hill behind the camp site. This walk, if you get high enough, looks across to Zaire's Virungas volcanoes and on clear days one can see as far as Lake Edward and the Rwenzori Mountains. Even the short distance we walked, the views overlooking the forest-covered hills were superb; it was good to look down on the treetops instead of constantly craning one's neck to peer up into the canopy. We completed a full hand of diurnal primates with L'Hoest's monkey, the only one of the seven species to be found in the Park that we had not seen.

The butterflies in Bwindi are outstanding, with more than 200 species identified so far; Forest Mother-of-Pearl, iridescent Green Swallowtails and shimmering indigo Charaxes were some of the larger and more colourful ones we identified. There were also large number of that peculiarly African family, the yellow and orange Acraeas.

Our final evening in camp was enlivened by a dancing display by the local women's group before we tucked in to a sumptuous barbecue.

Unlike last year, and Brian's predictions, it did not rain once in the Forest during our visit. Although it can deluge at any time in the rainforest, the full rainy season at Bwindi normally starts towards the end of August.

#### DAY 16 - August 14<sup>th</sup>

On the way back to Entebbe, we stopped off at Mburo National Park. This lies in a rain shadow area between Lake



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**How to get there:** Ethiopian Airlines flies daily from Heathrow, Frankfurt or Rome to Addis Ababa. Twice-daily connecting flights to Entebbe. Alliance Airlines flies direct Heathrow-Entebbe weekly. There are frequent flights from Nairobi, Rwanda and many other African countries.

**Accommodation:** see text. All recommended hotels have small gift shops and sell postcards.

**Tour Operators:** Abercrombie & Kent Ltd. P.O. Box 7799 Kampala, Uganda. Tel: 266700/3 Fax: 266701 organise trips to Game Parks, Gorillas and Chimps in four-wheel drive vehicles with drivers.

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**Currency:** Take US dollars in larger denominations and traveller cheques to change at airport. Hotels don't always have exchange facilities, though Mweya Lodge may help but you won't be near a bank! Small dollar bills are useful to tip gorilla trackers and porters, etc. and most hotel bars will accept them. The ones recommended will also take most credit cards.

**Stamps:** buy them at the airport. You won't get them anywhere else.

Victoria and the Rift mountains and is mainly composed of dry, Acacia savannah, which reminded many of us of parts of Kenya. Lake Mburo and several smaller lakes surrounded by Papyrus swamp form a wetland system in the centre of the park. Zebra and Impala are the most common herbivores, ones we had seen nowhere else in Uganda. During the whole day we saw no other visitors or vehicles; just the birds and the animals and a few fishermen on the lake!

The distant, threatening rain turned into a spectacular storm late in the evening. Mbarara was without water and electricity; at least the hotel had a generator! ☐

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