



RED ROPE BULLETIN 50 AUTUMN 2025

National Trips 2025 > 2026

2025

Drumbuie, Haltwhistle, 7th-14th Nov

<https://www.sykescottages.co.uk/cottage/Lake-District-Cumbria-The-Lake-District-Haltwhistle/Dumbuie-954820.html>

2026

Two of the 2026 national trips are almost full but the following have spaces so click on the links to find out more and see details of all trips in MIS.

March: Corrydon Lodge, Glenshee 6th-13th March

<https://www.cottages-and-castles.co.uk/cottage/75997-corrydonlodge>

May: Don Whillans Hut, Peak District

14th-17th May

<https://rockhall.thebmc.co.uk/>

August: High Moss, near Coniston

Sunday 16th – 23rd August

<https://rucksackclub.org/huts/>

National Trips Update

The Trips Group met on Zoom in September and though we didn't cover everything on the agenda some decisions were made. We voted not to book further trips for 2026 to give regional groups space in the calendar. National trips have been booking cottages with mostly single beds over the last 5 years so do get in touch for ideas of suitable cottages if needed. We also chose October as the best month for next year's Gathering so look out for this weekend in the MIS.

Another item on the agenda was how to adapt our practice to suit a wider range of fitness levels, particularly when we book holiday cottages with fewer places. When we went on our first trips to Scotland 20 years ago it was rare to have someone on the trip who didn't want to go up hills most days but things are different now! We will ask trip organisers to be as specific as possible when they list trips in the MIS but language can be misleading. For example, a trip to Longthwaite in Borrowdale has walks for all levels of fitness close by but the 'low level walk' to Keswick is rough in places, includes some ascent and is 14km long, so wouldn't be suitable for anyone looking for a leisurely day. A location can also have a wider than expected appeal. Aviemore is great for mountains but also has forest tracks for low level walking or cycling and is well established as a centre for tourism, so it can be hard to predict trip

activity. The weather and group size will also affect plans. Larger groups work well as more people + more cars = more options. Staying in a cottage for 8 will mean fewer options.

With all this in mind we decided to add a checklist to the trip booking form asking which activities are you interested in - Pottering/ Low level walks/ Walks with ascent/ Climbing/ Cycling etc.

This will help the trip organiser to identify a potential mismatch within the group, especially when the group is small. If only one person has ticked 'pottering' or 'strenuous walks' the organiser will contact that person to check whether it will be OK for them. There may be space for them to invite a friend along or they may choose to cancel. We hope this will help but if you are thinking about joining a trip and need more detailed information please contact us or the trip organiser.

Becky and Sarah

trips@redrope.org.uk





This bulletin is catching up with trip reports. There are four more on the next three pages. The next is the Aviemore report, which this photo is taken from. DS

London Easter Trip to Exmoor

I was lucky enough to join London region's trip this Easter, along with 13 others including 4 from the East Midlands, Merseyside and Bristol & the South West.

It was at the Exmoor Bunkhouse in Countisbury, near Lynmouth, which is in an excellent location and can house 18. The drying room wasn't really adequate for that number, however, and we were pleased it only rained on our first day!

There were several great walks directly from the bunkhouse, situated near the coastal path. Transport by car was necessary to reach most of the moor. The walks were very varied, including coastal walking, through woods, along rivers and

valleys, across streams and over the moors, with many wonderful views.

Due to the steep valleys and coastline, at times the walking was tough. Although we met several other walking groups, it was not as busy as some of us had expected. We saw wild ponies and pheasants in addition to goats, horses and cows. The funicular in Lynmouth/Lynton was a unique and fun experience and we all enjoyed visiting the pub next door to the bunkhouse.

All in all it was a very enjoyable and successful trip with great food and company. Many thanks to the organisers. I hope there will be room for me to join the London group next year!

Jane Miller, Stroud (Bristol & SW Region)



Aviemore 15-22 March 2025

This was my first ever trip to Scotland in winter, apart from the previous week at the Red Rope trip in Killin, and I did not know what to expect. In the run-up to both trips, there had been talk of winter skills training, ice climbing, and lists of extra gear we would need to head into the mountains in winter conditions.

I packed some extra warm layers of clothes and thought I might be spending days walking in the valleys and reading in the cottage. But in the end the weather was warm, the extra clothes remained in the bottom of my backpack in the case of emergency, and I went walking every day. It snowed before we arrived but while we were there the sun came out and apart from the last day there was not much wind.

The Cairngorms were stunning, covered in a foot of snow above 800m. We did some lowland walks in several incredibly beautiful remnants of the ancient Caledonian forest, with majestic old Scots pines, large areas of younger pines, and patches of birch glinting with purple new growth. My fellow trippers also went on some cycle rides along the valleys and in the forests, taking advantage of the many kilometres of fantastic off-road cycle track in the area.

These forests were impressive, but my abiding memories will be of the two summit ascents I did, Ben MacDui (1309m) and Braeriach (1296m). This was, at the age of 62, and having walked a lot in different environments, my first ever serious winter walking in the snow!

The sky was blue as we trekked up through pristine white snow and it was glorious. I only had mini crampons but given the conditions this was sufficient to get to both summits safely. I felt so grateful to be in the company of friendly

experienced Red Rope members, as I would not have attempted this on my own. Aviemore itself is not very attractive, but it did have all the shops we needed, and Glen Casnip cottage was very comfortable.

Claire Marris

a radio that's not quite tuned
a message from the man in the moon
cryptic comments in dashes and dots
scrawled on roofs and chimney pots
a shimmering static which flickers then falls
on bus-stops and bye-laws
fences and walls
which clusters
around street lights
and blankets backyards
as sleeping streets become
christmas cards
refrigerated pixelated -
avant-garde!

David Symonds

Early Demise of Snow in Scotland

David Stein sent a message to the RR members list with a link to a Facebook page by Iain Cameron from 6 August, noting that:

'It is my solemn duty to report that all snow in Scotland has now gone! A visit today by Campbell and Colin Hutt (and Joe Glennie, who turned up as well!) to Garbh Choire Mòr revealed the tiniest of patches remaining at Pinnacles, with Sphinx having melted in the last couple of days.

So small was the patch that it was possible to pick it up briefly for a photo opportunity before putting it back down to watch its inevitable demise."





Cairndow, 3-10 May 2025

You know how it goes: 8 people (Sarah, Steve, Pete, John, Janey, Jane, Damien and Yvonne) spent a week in a great location climbing mountains, eating excellent food and drinking Fyne beer. The details? The Cobbler, Beinn Bhuidhe, Ben Cruachan, Beinn Chorrnach, Beinn an Lochan, Ben Donich, Beinn Ime, Beinn Narnain. Plus Crarae gardens, Loch Long from Carrick Castle, Glen Fyne, Glen Kinglas and Inveraray Castle for tired legs days.

We loved the space at Inverfyne Cottage and location near to the brewery and café/deli/information centre/bus stop. Having 2 bikes helped access to some hills and pootling up Glen Fyne. Any complaints? The water in the taps was too hot, "It's too warm for custard", empty shelves in Inveraray Co-op, a few ticks to remove and we didn't get to Loch Eck so I couldn't go round saying "By 'eck!!!" Highlights were: the weather, few midges to disturb our post-walk tea in the garden and morning salutes to the sun, clear views from all the peaks and a harmonious, well organised trip. 10 out of 10 I'd say...

Yvonne Hosker

Knoydart

Knoydart is a peninsula in Lochaber, on the west coast of Scotland. It is accessible by ferry from Mallaig to Inverie, the ferry port with shop, cafe and pub. We ordered most of our food from the shop, to support the local community, and ate very well indeed.

Ten of us had a good time with mountains, coast walks, swimming and good company. We tailored our plans to the weather and had hours of sunshine and clear views from the tops.

It was a short distance to the bunkhouse, a comfortable place with helpful staff, a roaring fire in a large lounge and enough space to work around other groups. Some of these, unlike ourselves, were up at 5 a.m. to bag 3 Munros, regardless of the conditions!

The windows overlooked a narrow yard and the drying room wasn't the best but the building's eaves were full of martins (or were they swifts?) which liked to sing! The location gave easy access to walks, the river and the beach.

Ladhar Bhienn was not possible due to low cloud and strong winds but Meall Buidhe, Aonach Scoilte to Sgurr Coire Choinnichean and Sgurr Coire Gobhar were rewarding alternatives. Access to the ridges was sometimes difficult with no visible path or tall bracken. However, the ridges themselves were magnificent and the panoramic views to the islands were stunning. The flora and birds were also delightful.

Some of us walked to Sandaig, through non-stop rain, to be rewarded by hot drinks and hospitality in a chandeliered pop-up cafe. Several of us threw their bodies in cold rivers and claimed it was wonderful. Others of us were unconvinced.

The group had a mix of Scots and sassenachs, frequent Red Rope trippers and one person on their first. Bonding sessions were carried out each evening in the women's bathroom to hunt for, and remove, ticks of which there were many. We became experts with the plastic tick twisters and experienced in tick identification.

Knoydart sounds very remote, but in fact is well connected with frequent ferries. However the wild spaces and small number of walkers outside Inverie made it a very special trip.

Mary Wilkins

Black Patch, Presteigne in the Welsh Borders. October 2025

Six Red Ropers made their way to Black Patch, a large and comfortable house in a remote corner of Radnorshire near Presteigne in The Welsh Borders. Two more members joined us as the week went on. The area proved excellent for country walks, with plenty of hills rising to 300m or more (highest point of the week was the Hergest Ridge at 417m). We enjoyed good weather apart from Storm Amy on the first day, but even that didn't deter us from venturing out. There were so many good routes nearby that we spent the whole week in an area about 15 miles by 5, walking direct from Black Patch or taking a short bus ride to a start point when possible. Not much time spent in the car getting around. Several walks included sections of Offa's Dyke which runs through the area. We saw plenty of red kites and a few buzzards amongst other birds, and one thing that struck me was the absence of background man-made noise.

As the week went by, apples started to feature more and more until they formed a core part of the trip and it was difficult to peel away from them. We'd taken quite a few with us from our gardens and allotments, but everywhere we went there were apples – a community orchard at Knucklas, a charity shop in Presteigne giving them away, the orchard at the Hergest Croft gardens offering them. Many unfamiliar varieties for us to try including varieties with intriguing names like Red Falstaff, Greensleeves and Barnack Orange.

It seemed like "another day, another apple". We ended up having three apple and cheese tasting sessions after our evening meals. Very simple to organise but a great showcase for local produce. We even had an unknown variety that we simply called "Londis Car Park" as that's where it was picked from!

Anthony Haywood



Just like Red Ropers, Tory members of the House of Lords like Eric Pickles, seen left, love to get away from it all over the summer, in his case to Bognor Regis, where he likes nothing more than to swim in his unique, hand crafted wet-suit before knocking out one of his remarkably accurate scale models of a variety of Scottish Baronial castles using only manual dexterity, sand and a bucket and spade. (Antoni Gaudi, eat your heart out! La Sagrada Familia indeed!)

It is thought that Bognor is a paella free zone.

Summer solstice sunset, picnic and walks

A few years before Covid I decided to start leading a summer solstice sunset picnic walk for Merseyside Red Rope.

Initially I suggested we catch the train from Liverpool north to Hillside station, 2 stops south of Southport, and walk through the dunes to the Sefton coast and then go south along the beach to the Fisherman's Path where we could walk through the dunes and woods to Freshfield station to return to Liverpool.

The first year there were only 3 of us and we had our picnic sitting on the dunes watching the sun sink into the sea, which left us 45 minutes of daylight to walk the mile and a half to the station.

The next year there was a bigger group, who wanted to eat their picnic in the sand dunes before we got to the beach. As a result the light was starting to fade before we got to the turning off the beach to the Fisherman's Path. So one of the group (he knows who he is!) decided to charge off in the sand dunes, leaving the rest of the group trying to catch up with him. Luckily we all got safely back to the station! So the following year I decided to move the walk to the Hilbre islands, a string of 3 tidal islands situated off the north west corner of the Wirral peninsula, in the mouth

of the Dee estuary about 1 mile from the shore. It is a great place to watch the sun sink into the sea from the cliffs at the end of the furthest and largest island, Hilbre. The walks have to be planned around the high tide times, so some years we have had our picnic at Red Rocks, on the corner of the peninsula mainland, while waiting for the tide to recede sufficiently for us to walk over to the islands.

And other years the tide times have allowed us to have our picnic on the cliffs at the furthest end of the furthest island while waiting to watch the sun sink into the sea. Sometimes we have had organic homegrown strawberries and homemade elderflower champagne (alcohol free!) while we wait.

Roger, now a former Red Rope member, who lives in Snowdonia, came over several times with his dogs, pre and post Covid, as a walk to Hilbre island is one of his favourite walks.

We had a break in the first summer of Covid but have carried on since then. This summer we had our picnic on Little Eye, the first and smallest island, while waiting for the tide to let us walk over to the two other islands. It was during one of the heatwaves so it was really warm all evening until after we got back to the mainland.

Text and photo by **Madeleine Broderick**

Roger Greenhalgh, who Madeleine mentions, has been a brilliant hut warden for many years at the LMC hut in Beddgelert which RR is involved with. DS



A Review of the Banding System

Background: The National Committee is in the process of reviewing the banding arrangements, which have been in place for 10 years. A "banding sub-group" looked into what members on benefits or state pensions might receive, to give an idea about how to draw up categories based on income. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) says that the median income this year is £30,000 - our Band 4 category starts at £31,980. The club has a bank balance of about £18,000 so we don't have a financial crisis, and we will continue to uphold the progressive approach to charges which makes Red Rope socialist but we do need to get our proverbial ducks in order!

When the club started virtually all members were either working or unemployed. Therefore income, along with housing costs and having dependents, were the salient factors. Now, given that many members are retired, incomes have probably decreased but we may have state and vocational pensions and savings. We may also find that we need to spend less because many of us will have bought our accommodation, children will no longer need support and we may have local and national travel passes. Members may live as part of a couple or other form of shared household, which again saves money by sharing energy costs, for example, as opposed to living alone. Another issue is that whilst there has been a

'hardship' band for those who have slipped through the social security net it has not been widely known about, which is partly why the plan is to have 6, not 5 bands.

How would a new system work? We have been considering three options: 1. Modifying the current income-based system to include some of the factors mentioned above. 2. Describing people's circumstances to assess bands. 3. Create a "points" system. This would involve using a check list of about 8 criteria, saying which do or do not apply to you and counting up a total which reveals your band. The draft document below sets out some ideas about how bands could be described, as in 2. above, with the idea that we invite members to consider their financial position and how it relates to the club's principles.

Clubs pay the BMC £29.33 per member per year, about a quarter of which covers third party insurance. BMC charges will rise by 4.8% in 2026. Another expense is in running RR, which includes financial support for the Gathering, the cost of printing and posting the bulletin and paying for NC members to travel to one 'live' meeting per year. There will be trials of new ways of calculating bands, which will inform relevant motions.

David Symonds for the NC

Send comments to: red_rope_national@lists.riseup.net

A set of draft descriptions of the new bands for members of Red Rope

The intention is to be descriptive rather than prescriptive, and to remind members of the club's principle of the more well-off subsidising the less well-off, in the spirit of a socialist organisation.

Band A is for members with little or no income, not receiving benefits or being supported by anyone else, e.g. asylum seekers.

Band B is for members who receive benefits e.g. universal credit, job seeker's allowance

Band C is for members who are in receipt of wages or pensions but need to take care in order to pay their monthly bills. They may be living alone and paying high rents on a low income. They would be net recipients of subsidies from other members' fees, to a limited extent.

Band D is for members who manage their expenditure fairly easily. They may, for example, have a few thousand pounds in savings, own their own home and have paid off their mortgages, and/or be living with a partner or others who are in receipt of wages or pensions and share living expenses. They would pay a certain amount more than the full costs of their Red Rope membership each year.

Band E is for members who have above average income from work or pensions, have no financial difficulties, and are in a comfortable position regarding housing costs. They may have substantial savings. Their membership fees would go some way towards subsidising less well-off members.

Band F is for members who have a high income and can easily meet their outgoings. They are likely to be in a well-paid job, and have substantial savings. Their membership fees include a significant contribution to the subsidies given to less well-off members.

Notes: This is a *draft* document. Comments are welcome. By the time motions need to be submitted in the new year we will have a clearer picture of costs per band. Minutes of the NC meeting where this topic was last discussed can be found at: <https://www.redrope.org.uk/governance/committee-and-agm-minutes/>

Palestine Action

The morning of Saturday 6th September wasn't that different to any morning setting out on a walk. One of us (Sue) had done this trip before, so had worked out the route. Not much actual walking would be involved, just a brisk hike through London parks. We were on our way to Parliament Square to take part in a Defend Our Juries (DoJ) Lift the Ban protest. As retired, financially secure people, we're in the privileged position of being able to risk arrest. However, the intention was not arrest, but to sit in reflective silence holding a cardboard sign with the words: I OPPOSE GENOCIDE - I SUPPORT PALESTINE ACTION.

These protests have gained momentum since the initial action on 6th July. Sue first took part on 19th July. She was one of 55 arrested sitting in the rain at the feet of Gandhi's statue in Parliament Square. She has since been charged for her first sit and is soon to appear at Westminster Magistrates Court for a plea hearing.

Over a 1,000 took part on 9th August but in September, when we both took part, there were approximately 1,500 others. At 1pm we wrote our signs and sat down. Mary was finally arrested at 10.30pm and Sue at 11pm, among the last to be arrested. We were carried to police vans and then driven round the corner to join a slow queue to be processed. The police tried to encourage us to give our details and accept street bail, but we held out. Several hours later we reached desks where we were asked again to provide our details. As a repeat offender, Sue couldn't avoid being identified. Given "street bail" at about 3am, DoJ volunteers whisked her off to a church for tea and a chat with fellow protesters.

Mary was able to remain incognito and was eventually taken to a police station for a few hours. On release on police bail she was also met by DoJ volunteers, with snacks and help to start her journey home. It is a sad fact that around 2000 people have been arrested in Britain on terrorism charges for simply sitting in silence holding a cardboard sign.

Mary Bailey and Sue Edwards , Notts RR



Giving Blood

I was reclining in an adjustable chair minding my own business recently when I heard a cheerful voice shout out "That's a colourful splash!" I was at the blood donor's unit of St Georges Hospital, Tooting, South West London, and had just finished giving my 60th donation, at my advanced age too! The problem was that when the donation equipment finished taking my blood, the blood flow did not stop, thankfully a rare occurrence.



The team immediately went into action and soon stopped the bleeding. I felt fine, better in fact than at my previous 59 donations, which incidentally all went smoothly. For my 60th, I had deliberately stoked up on iron levels beforehand by eating lots of liver, which I never normally do and red meat, which I usually avoid, but it worked. My blood is Neonate blood, and necessary for babies in their first few weeks who have problems after being born prematurely. So I continue to give whenever possible.

The highly diverse staff at the unit were fantastic. The majority were women, and largely non-white, although bucking the trend, there was a smiling young white male assistant sporting a lovely set of tattoos. Nevertheless, my donor session experience emphasised to me that if a Farage/Jenrick regime ever does come to power, efficient blood donation procedures would simply go out through the window. So why not check now to see if you are eligible to give blood at: **www.blood.co.uk Tel 0300 123 23**

Nigel Green

RED ROPE | THE SOCIALIST WALKING AND CLIMBING CLUB

bulletin@redrope.org.uk

Many thanks, as usual, to everybody who has submitted material, with the slight quibble that some of it was sent after the deadline! The spring deadline will be 1 April 2026. It will include news of the AGM, scheduled for 18 March, with the deadline for resolutions a couple of weeks earlier, so if you're planning to submit a motion don't leave it too late! I will edit the next edition, which will be my last. I hope to see others come forward in the role and would be happy to advise them, if required. I designed the front cover using photos from a variety of RRs, so many thanks are also due to them to them.

David Symonds

Wendy Pettifer - She Made a Difference

Wendy, a member of Red Rope since 1982, died in July. Her death is a profound loss to her family, friends, colleagues and the many people she touched through her activism, legal work, poetry and kindness. Forthright and determined, Wendy never let obstacles get in her way.

Wendy lived and worked in Hackney in the east end of London for most of her life, becoming very attached to the area. This is where her daughter, Rosa was born and later she spent time there with Rosa and Olly's son Nye.

After working at Hackney Centerprise for nine years, Wendy qualified as a lawyer. From 2009 she worked as a housing lawyer at Hackney Community Law Centre. Much of her work focused on refugees and migrants and she gained an MA in Refugee Studies from the University of East London.

In 2006 Wendy was a founding member of the Hackney Migrant Centre (HMC) where she gave pro bono housing advice and ensured that the centre gave wider welfare advice and support. The HMC and its clients continue to gain greatly from Wendy's contributions.

Her activism extended beyond her legal work. She was deeply involved in political and social causes, both in the UK and internationally. She worked in Cairo for a refugee organisation and in Tunisia as a witness to human rights abuses. She had a longstanding involvement with the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers, Labour Housing Group and many others. She was active in the Palestinian Solidarity Movement and left the Labour Party in protest over its stance on Palestine.

Even after her "retirement", Wendy's commitment to justice remained unwavering. For months she lived firstly in a refugee camp in Greece, and then in the "Jungle" in Calais (she was fluent in French). She worked with other volunteer lawyers to win asylum for about a hundred refugee children, enabling them to join family in the UK.

A creative as well as a fighter, Wendy wrote her first poem when she was 13. She published two books of her poems, *Love Lines* (2020) and *The Witching Hour* (2021) at lovelines.net. The proceeds went to charities she was involved with.

For the past six years, Wendy lived with cancer. During these years she interspersed her treatment with travel abroad with her husband Nick, as well as attending pickets and demonstrations. She spoke very highly of the NHS.

At her funeral, Wendy's sister, Diana, spoke warmly of their support for each other. Her best friend, Pam, spoke of Wendy as a party girl and her friend Alan read one of her poems. Wendy's daughter Rosa shared heartfelt memories of the joy, fun, and love that she, her husband Olly and their son Nye enjoyed in their family life with Wendy, together with Nick.

Over 150 people attended the funeral to commemorate and celebrate Wendy's life - a testament to the breadth and depth of her impact. Wendy kept up her spirits to the end and left behind a message: keep up the good fight.

Dot Lewis and Debbie Singer



Wendy and Nick, photo: Hackney Migrant Centre

Wendy at a recent London Red Rope social, photo: Debbie Singer



MY SELF

Is it really my self, now ageing?
Or does it belong to my mother, my sister
Or the women before us?

A wife sewing for sailors on their ships
A water diviner, rod dipping to sweetness in the soil
A pub landlady, three husbands down
Each one richer than before.
A dressmaker wearied from lifting irons,
A cook peeling spuds by the dozen,
At night knitting socks for soldiers,
A lady of leisure at Horkstow Grange
Manseford is our family name.

Are these really my hands, now wrinkled
Or do they belong to my granny, my aunties'
Long fingers, bending arthritic joints
To thread a needle, grasp a ball, heft the washing
Close a clasp, raise a glass.

Why was it when younger,
My body belonged only to me
To strengthen or weaken as I pleased?
But now they all gather to mould my lines,
My manners, my ways.

from 'The Witching Hour' (2021) by Wendy Pettifer



Statement by Wendy on her book 'The Witching Hour', available from lovelines.net for £8.

Much to my astonishment my first book of poems 'Lovelines' virtually sold out by autumn 2020. By then we had gone through our first lockdown, and poems were buzzing about in my head, and in lots of other people's.

I was delighted that my "team" of editor David, Illustrator Jeff and IT guru Cata, were all keen to help again with a second book, "The Witching Hour". It contains earlier poems, many of which were written in the 1980s and 1990s and as well as new ones written during lockdown.

The poems became the bedrock of my life during a difficult time, stories of myself, of other women and travellers that I clung to in the dark winter days of 2020/2021.

I write about family, about having been a single parent and the joy of becoming a grandmother. I muse on relationships lost and found, old and new and how little we ever really know about another.

Some of the poems reflect on the tragedy of being forcibly displaced and seeking asylum in a hostile environment, some cherish my own home in Hackney, and hold out the hope of building a new one to others.

Finally, I address my own fears, and those of others when dealing with both Covid and cancer. And I take inspiration from the many courageous staff and patients I have met in the NHS since 2019.

Thank you, all those about whom I have written, and all those who will laugh and cry over these poems.

Sale proceeds will go to Care4Calais. I am currently a volunteer lawyer working with them to help and support asylum seekers placed in horrible conditions in hotels around London and beyond. We need every penny we can get.

*"Personal, political and powerful.
The images will remain"*

Hilary Wainwright, Red Pepper

A Return to Trekking in the Dolomites, North East Italy

Five Red Ropers – Heather, Gwenneth and Ralph from Leicester, and Hugh and Humphrey from London – spent a week in early August walking the southern half of the Alta Via 1 trail through the awesome scenery of the Dolomites.

We travelled out by various routes and met up at the Rifugio Staulanza, which was really a small hotel on a pass, and on a bus route. Most of our days featured an intermediate refuge where we could stop for coffee and cake, so our first day's walk took us via the Rifugio Coldai to the Rifugio Tissi, perched on a minor summit looking across at the much higher Civetta. The next day was very hard work, ending at the Rifugio Carestiato.

After a two-night stay, we descended quickly to the Passo Duran and the only road we had to cross on our trek, then over two passes to the Rifugio Pampret. The next day took us over the Forcella de Zita Sud, our highest point at 2,395m (7,858ft), then down a long descent to the Rifugio Pian de Fontana for coffee and cake, and over another lower pass to our sixth night at the Rifugio Bianchet. From there it was two and a half hours downhill to La Pissa, and a bus to Belluno from where we went our separate ways.

Apart from a couple of showers the weather was brilliant, and the scenery was consistently great. We all had some past experience of alpine trekking, but not for some years, so were not used to the packs: the refuges provided us with all our

meals and bedding, but we were carrying extra changes of clothes to look good for our subsequent visits to Venice, Verona or Milan. If we did another of these treks, we would worry less about looking smart, but we would still need to carry plenty of water - there was never more than a brief shower, but when not in woods it was often very hot.

Steve Wright had done a brilliant job booking the refuges for us, despite having withdrawn from the trip, but the sequence of huts was not ideal: the two nights at Carestiato was not through choice, and had we been able to stay at Pian de Fontana our last two days would have been more balanced. The problem is that, unlike ten years ago, it is now possible to book the huts many months ahead, and on the very popular Alta Via 1 and 2 routes travel companies are making block bookings, mainly to offer "self-guided tours" - so you are paying them a premium just for the sequence of bookings and some instructions. One way to avoid this would be to explore the Alta Vias 3 to 10, but English guides are harder to find and some involve stretches of via ferrata, needing special equipment. You could save even more by avoiding the refuges, but camping gear would make your pack impossibly heavy. The refuges are more expensive than staying in British youth hostels, but not by much- we had all joined the UK branch of the Austrian Alpine Club to get the club discount, and were then paying 60 to 70 euros per night for dinner, bed and breakfast, including some wine with dinner but not those coffee and cake stops! **Humphrey Southall**

