

## JOE BROWN BIOGRAPHY

Full version

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*Note:*

*Gradings given here are current ones. At the time of some of the first ascents V.S. (very severe) was the highest grading used. Routes were rarely inspected or cleaned beforehand, but pegs were placed more readily than today both for protection and aid. Joe developed a self-imposed limit of 2 pegs on a pitch preferring to leave harder routes for later generations.*

Joe Brown, the youngest of seven children, was born on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1930, the son of Joseph and Mary Brown (nee Atwell). Life began in Ardwick, a working class area of Manchester.

His father was a jobbing builder but with work scare during the depression of the early thirties, he made ends meet with periods spent at sea. When Joe was only 8 months old his father suffered a shipboard accident sustaining an injury which became gangrenous and led to his death. With a large family and only his eldest brother bringing home a wage the family's financial position was dire. At first his mother took in washing, then once he was old enough to be left in the care of elder brothers and sisters, she went out to work as a cleaner.

By the start of the Second World War the family had moved from their two-up, two-down terrace to a larger house in Chorlton-cum-Medlock an area that suffered badly in the Blitz of 1940. Not only was their house severely damaged, but first one then another of the schools Joe attended was destroyed. Against this background and with many younger teachers conscripted into the forces his schooling was much disrupted. Although Joe never excelled academically he was equally never near the bottom of the class. It was just school did not seem that important to him. His great joy was exploration, initially in his local area then, by the age of 12 on camping expeditions made with the most rudimentary of equipment. This was the period of Arthur Ransomes "Swallows and Amazons", when it was not considered totally irresponsible to let children of this age off to explore by themselves. Indeed, at the age of 14 most people from Joe's world would have left education and be in full time work. Exploits from this period included the discovery of the Alderley Edge mines and of Eldon Hole, where his

group descended the huge 180 ft. (60m.) shaft hand over hand on various lengths of rope knotted together - an escapade that rates as amongst the most dangerous of his career!

When Joe left school at 14 he became apprenticed to a plumber and general builder called Archie. Archie paid Joe ten shillings (50p.) a week, most of which he passed to his mother. Nevertheless he was able to save towards his first pair of boots - helped by Archie who hearing this gave him the £3 10s. 0d. he desperately needed, an act of kindness never forgotten.

Joe and his friends were now scrambling and climbing in the local gritstone quarries. This soon led to expeditions further afield, and, when Joe was about 16, to the discovery of Kinder Downfall — a cut through the gritstone plateau where water runs off the Kinder Scout. Joe led the way to the top solo before throwing down the end of a brewer's rope for his companions to follow. The ropes the group had were rudimentary - a piece of rope found beside roadworks, and most famously his mother's washing line - it had actually started life as a length of sash cord before serving as a washing line, but had been discarded as she thought it too old to be reliable! After this episode Joe became determined to climb more, and by good fortune soon met a slightly older group of lads, led by "Slim" Sorrell, who at 18 had a wider experience of the Peak.

His first trip away from his home area was to the Lake District in 1946, when encumbered by over heavy sacks they struggled to Pillar Rock. Pillar Rock is always impressive. and was on a scale far larger than anything Joe or his companions had previously encountered. They were intimidated by the longer climbs and the much greater exposure than on the gritstone edges so started with routes on the lower side of the rock. Here they felt more at home, and soon realized that the climbing itself was no harder than they were used to, indeed many of the holds were more positive than on grit. Quite soon they progressed to climbing a VS route here (in 1946 VS was well above the standard most experienced climbers were operating) and with rapidly growing confidence, by then end of the holiday tackled New West route, a technically easy route on the main face.

In 1947 Joe began to climb his first new routes, the most memorable being Saul's Crack (HVS, 5a) at the Roaches. At Christmas Joe made his first trip to Snowdonia. Wearing gym shoes and climbing as it snowed they ascended the Idwal Slabs (Ogwen Valley) before being repulsed by the steeper Holly Tree Wall above. A return trip was made the following spring, and in glorious weather Joe and Slim Sorrell climbed most of the routes on Holly Tree Wall

and the Gribin Facet. Having cut their teeth on these traditional and popular routes on their next visit they moved to Tryfan and Glyder Fawr, to do Munich Climb (V.S.) and Lot's Groove (V.S.) both routes with a considerable reputation for difficulty and seriousness. In barely two years Joe had progressed from untutored scrambling to ascents of highly regarded Welsh routes.

Up to 1948 Joe and his friends had operated largely in isolation - indeed they continued to operate outside the mainstream of the climbing world for several more years. They had not served the usual long apprenticeship with older more experienced climbers which was the norm at the time, but were self-taught, through adventure and mis-adventure, and approached the cliffs without any of the inhibitions and traditional values that might otherwise have held them back. They had little idea of grades and grading but judged climbs solely according to their own opinions, assuming that if they could get up it, it could not be regarded as hard by other more experienced climbers.

Joining the Valkyrie Club in 1948 brought Joe into regular contact with other climbers, and together they explored the Peak District's gritstone edges, with Joe now making a number of first ascents such as Freddie's Finale (E1, 5b), The Trident (HVS, 5a) and Blue Lights Crack (HVS, 5a) all at Wimberry. Brown's Eliminate on Froggat is also a climb of this period. Graded E2, 5b today, on the first ascent it was a far harder prospect than now (contra the comment in Peak Rock). He climbed in nailed boots relying on flakes only a fraction of an inch in thickness. Many of these flakes have now broken off leaving larger holds. Also at Frogatt he climbed Three Pebble Slab (E1,5a) and Valkyrie (HVS, 5a), while on Stanage Right Unconquerable (HVS, 5a) fell to him the following year.

1948 also saw Joe's first serious foray into winter climbing with a camping trip to Ben Nevis which culminated with a forced evacuation from a high campsite in the face of a blizzard which literally destroyed the tent. The Glen Nevis bridge had been washed away, the river crossing proved epic, and Joe's companion, Ludder, was found to have a broken leg, from an injury sustained descending the Red Burn five days previously!

At the end of 1948 the club met at Ogwen for Christmas. Joe and his group were now climbing at every opportunity, with Joe making what was probably the first winter ascent of Hanging Garden Gully (IV) on Christmas Day. They also took the opportunity to top rope Suicide Wall which had been put up by Preston only 3 years earlier and had the fearsome reputation of being the hardest route in Wales. Given that they had just made a winter ascent it must also

have been very cold indeed, and shows remarkable bravado even to think of attempting it! Joe was to come back some years later to make the true second ascent but this was after he had completed his period of National Service.

The next day Joe borrowed five pegs from Ernie Phillips and with Wilf White went round to the Llanberis Pass to make an attempt on what was to become Cenotaph Corner. Given the fact it was winter, and Joe and his peers had only been climbing for 2 or 3 years, it was show of amazingly audacity even to try a major new route that had already been eyed up by the leading climbers of the day. But they were no respecters of tradition, and climbing solely for their own pleasure were in no way overawed by such thoughts, but instead had the confidence of the young in their own abilities – indeed their ability had already been amply demonstrated in the exploits of the previous few days. They also were not afraid of failing now only to return later. It is easy to imagine that being on a high, having top roped what was regarded as the hardest route around, nothing would seem impossible.

Seconded by Wilf White Joe reached the niche at 100ft, the exit from which is the crux of the whole climb. While trying to place a peg he let the peg hammer slip from his mouth, and it fell directly down the corner hitting his hapless second a glancing blow on the head. He descended to find Wilf dazed but conscious, and within a few minutes he had been encouraged to get back on the rock. Joe re-ascended to the niche, but he had used all five of the pegs they had with them, and had to retreat again. There was some subsequent criticism of the number of pegs Joe had used (Harding wrote in his 1950 Pass guide "with sufficient ironmongery and few scruples this corner could be ascended"). Such criticism was hardly justified, in part because the corner was choked with grass, and was cleaned only in the course of Joe's ascent (it was then a very different and harder proposition than doing it today), but also because of Harding's own ethics, and indeed the prevailing ethics of the day. When Harding made the first ascent of Ivy Sepulche in 1947 it was pre-cleaned from an abseil rope yet still required 2 points of aid on the first ascent. Nearby, the first ascent of Kaisergebirge Wall in 1948 used 7 points of aid: "Nothing was barred, pegs, knotted bootlaces..." even (later) the famous bicycle crank added for aid and protection. So such implicit criticism seems to have been born more out of envy than a sense of genuine indignation.

Joe was called up for 18 months National Service in late January 1949. Finding that there was no mountaineering corps, and that joining the Marines meant signing-on for a longer period, he served

in the Ordnance Corps, with postings to Portsmouth, Leamington Spa and later Singapore. This kept him off the crags for a large part of 1949/50. But as far as possible his leave was spent with friends climbing either in the Peak District or Scotland.

During a period of leave at Easter 1949 that he made his first visit to Clogwyn d'ur Arddu - the Black Cliff. Joe easily jammed his way up the first pitch of Curving Crack, a pitch that was then usually then laybacked. Impressed with the cliff he returned with Slim Sorrell later in the year when they proceeded to climb all 13 major routes that existed on the cliff. This was an target few of the leading climbers of the day had achieved, yet alone by a pair of youngsters during their first year at the crag. Having done the existing routes they turned his attention to the unclimbed lines. Starting up the 'drainpipe crack' (which had already climbed by Birtwistle) he attempted to take the cracks above on the right. The weather was poor, damp and cold (not that such thoughts ever deterred Joe and his companions from trying even the hardest routes), and Joe was climbing in socks. High on the second pitch, with his fingers over the top, but numb, he was unable to pull up any more and fell, cutting through two of the three strands of their much valued hemp hawser laid rope. He survived and the route remained for another day.

During National service Joe suffered one of several accidents to befall him when not climbing - breaking a leg in three places in a scrum for the tea urn. But three months later he was back, stealing a new route at Froggatt under the nose of Wilf White who had inadvisably told Joe he was thinking of giving it a go in a letter that Joe had received while still in hospital! No doubt Wilf had imagined he had rather more breathing space before Joe hit the crags again, but arrived to find Joe already at the top.

Once demobbed Joe resumed his attack on standards in the Peak District with a vengeance, over the next 12 months establishing Elder Crack (E2, 5b) and Right Eliminate (E3, 5c) on Curbar, and, in contrast to the crack climbs which had become his hallmark, Great Slab (E3,5b) on Froggatt. On Birchens Edge he climbed Orpheus Wall (E1, 5c); while at the Roaches he put up The Mincer (HVS, 5b), Dorothy's Dilemma (HVS 5a) and Matinee (HVS, 5a,5b). At Stanage, Tower Crack (HVS 5a) and Namenlos (E1,5a) both date from this period. More routes followed at Stanage the following year - The Unprintable (E1, 5b), Terraza Crack (HVS 5b) and Baw's Crawl (HVS 5a). Although he and his companions also returned to Cloggy (Clogwyn D'ur Arddu) many times in 1951-2, but it was in

the Llanberis Pass that Joe established the first of his many new Welsh routes, Hangover (E1 5a,5b) in May 1951.

In April 1951 Don Whillans first entered the scene. Joe and his friends were climbing at the Roaches in Staffordshire and Joe had just established a direct start (HVS, 5a) to Valkyrie, a 1946 Peter Harding VS of some reputation. Slim Sorrell was unable to follow. Don said he would give it a try, was tied on and within a few minutes had joined Joe at the top. Within a few months the one of the most influential climbing partnership in history had been formed.

In June 1951 Joe returned to Cloggy, this time with Whillans to establish Diglyph (HVS, 4a,5b,4c), in October they were back again, this time adding Vember (E1, 5a,5b,4b) the scene of a previous failure. Finally, Joe led The Boulder (E1, 4c,5a,5a). The upper pitches of this were done as a single run-out of 270 feet (80m.) on two ropes knotted together, after Ron Moseley (who was climbing well having made the first unaided ascent of Kaisergebirge Wall the previous weekend) and his companion declined to follow - doubtless a wise decision in view of the absence of protection on the difficult traverse, and the uninviting pendulum that awaited the unwary. When almost at the top Joe caught his anorak hood during a difficult sequence of moves and almost took what would have been a very spectacular and serious flyer, but with a last great struggle he freed himself to complete the route in a state of total exhaustion.

Climbing was not restricted to Cloggy, Joe and Don also made the first ascent of Cemetery Gates (E1 5b,4c) on Dinas Cromlech in the Llanberis Pass - the name spotted on the destination board of a bus in Chester as they returned home which fitted well with the tone of the adjacent routes Cenotaph Corner and Ivy Sepulchre.

1951 saw the disbandment of the Valkyrie Club as its members moved away. Meanwhile, Joe and a small group of elite climbers had started meeting at the Y.M.C.A. in Manchester on Wednesday nights and from this sprang the 'Rock and Ice', which was officially founded on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1951. This was a club never that owned a hut, nor had much in the way of a constitution or rules, but was nevertheless became one of the most influential clubs in the history of British climbing. Indeed, in no other club before or since has there been such a mixture of drive and talent, so that it stood head and shoulders above everything else - its members regarded with awe wherever they went. Although much has sometimes been made of rivalries within the club these were generally in the form of competition between its members keen to get one up on their companions, and were not as bitter as has been portrayed. This

club too eventually died, primarily because it no longer served its original function. It was resurrected as the Rock and Ice Climbing Club some years later but by that time the burning energy had gone, and most of its members operated independently.

1952 saw Joe establish a further six routes on Cloggy, including Pinnacle Flake (E1, 5b,4c), the Black Cleft (E2, -,5c,5c, 5a,-) Llithrig (HVS, 4a,5a,4c,4c), Octo (HVS 4b,5b) and the Corner (HVS, 4a, 5a); but his greatest prize of the year was the first ascent of Cenotaph Corner (E1, 5c). This immaculate route, probably the best known climb in Wales, follows a vertical 120ft. (35m) corner between two wide perpendicular walls. The line was obvious, and had already been named by Menlove Edwards. After news of his attempt at the end of 1947 circulated a number of other leading climbers had tried their luck but none were able to pass the first difficult section at 20 feet. When Joe returned in August 1952 he knew that he had previously placed more pegs than were necessary and this time completed the route with the use of only two - indeed, thereafter he adopted the rule of limiting himself to no more than two pegs on a pitch. It is interesting to note that even on this obviously difficult route Joe did not wait for ideal conditions, climbing it in socks because of the dampness. This was typical of his group who would never let poor weather interfere with their plans.

The following year there were another five new routes on Cloggy - including the fine Girdle of the East Buttress (HVS, 4a,5a,4c,4c,4b,5a,4b,5a). On Cynr Las he made the first ascent of The Grooves (E1, 5b,5b,5b), a fine natural line destined to become a classic route on the crag. In the Lakes with Whillans in the lead they put up Dovedale Groove (E1,5b) and Triermain Eliminate (E1,5b), while Joe led Moseley and Tom Waghorn up Laugh Not (HVS, 5b) on White Ghyll.

1953 saw Joe make his first trip to the Alps - on the pillion of Don Cowan's motorbike. On the East Ridge of the Crocodile Joe broke his wooden shafted ice axe and they had to cut their 250ft. rope into pieces after it jammed, disasters to the impecunious pair. They then made an abortive attempt to re-climb the Allain-Fix route on the Blaitiere after a major rockfall. This was a highly regarded route, the only one in the guidebook to have a VIb graded rock pitch. Indeed this was why they chose it, reckoning that they were up to any rock they encountered. Although they only got a third of the way up the difficulties Joe mastered the difficult crack, which would later be named in his honour 'Fissure Brown'. Needless to

say by the time these two novices left the valley they had made a considerable impression!

Easter 1954 saw another winter climbing trip to Ben Nevis. Whillans and Nat Allen had spent a couple of days trying to force a route through the overhangs on the Carn Dearg buttress before Joe joined them. Following a crack that cut the main roof he reached a chockstone on the lip and got a sling around it, but then retreated, removing his runners, ready for the following day. They decided that, because it was so strenuous, one would climb to the lip placing slings, then retreat and allow the other to climb through. In view of Joe's effort the previous day Don offered to place the gear, and let him finish the pitch. However, once on the lip Don was still climbing strongly, and with Joe's encouragement to keep going pulled round the roof into a far from easy crack above. At this there was a shout of "English Bastards!" from the CIC hut from where their progress had been closely observed. A classic Scottish line had fallen to English visitors! The name Sassenach (E1 with 2pts. aid, 4c,5a,5a,5a,-,4b,-) seemed appropriate.

Back in the Peak Joe and Don tossed a coin for the lead on The Sloth (HVS, 5b) at the Roaches — Don won, and so another now classic route was created.

By diligent saving through the winter of 1953-4 Joe and his companions had accumulated enough money to be able to spend a prolonged season in the Alps - sufficient they hoped to be able to wait out bad weather and achieve some really worthwhile climbing. Unfortunately 1954 turned out to be one of the poorest seasons that Chamonix had known, and little was accomplished. Their first success was to complete the route that they had retreated from on the Blaitiere the previous summer. They then turned their attention to the West face of the Dru, successfully making only the third ascent, and that in a record time. This impressive feat for still relative novices to alpine climbing gained them recognition not only in Chamonix but also among the established British alpine fraternity. This was to have major implications for Joe's future life, as he would now start to get invitations to join expeditions rather than just climbing with his Manchester based friends.

So it was that Joe's life became centered around climbing (he says it was from his very first day on Kinder Downfall), with everything else taking a subordinate role. To go to the Alps he and his companions had given up their jobs and they returned to England broke and unemployed. For the next six or seven years Joe continued to work as a self-employed jobbing builder as this was a way he could take off time when he wanted, to go climbing. Initially

he under-priced his quotes, which meant that although he was never short of work he made little money, and had to work fast and hard just to break even at the end of the week. Tradition has it that Joe was a plumber by trade. This is not true, Joe and Archie were always general builders. However, Joe did have two brothers who were plumbers, so he would get advice on plumbing jobs from them, becoming a proficient plumber in his own right.

But work was just a means to fund the next climbing trip. Throughout the following years a pattern was established with regular winter trips to Scotland, weekends spent in Wales, or less frequently in the Lakes District, and an extended trip during the summer to the Alps or further afield. Winter weekends were sometimes spent pegging artificial routes on limestone — a social activity as much as serious climbing, with the group brewing up in a cave or under an overhang while one member climbed — with days spent in places such as Dovedale, the Manifold Valley and at Goredale Scar. Routes such as Brown's Overhang (A3) at Stoney Middleton; Venery (A1) and Southern Rib (A2) in Dovedale and the classic White Edge (A2) on Ilam Rock date from this era. In warmer weather they went to the gritstone edges where in 1954, on Stanage, Joe climbed the Dangler (E2, 5c) and freed Quietus (E3,5c). Although there was no training in the modern sense, by climbing every weekend all year and doing manual work during the week he and his group maintained an exceptional level of fitness.

On his return from the Alps in 1954 Joe had a telegram awaiting him from Charles (later Sir Charles) Evans, who was to lead the 1955 Kanchenjunga expedition. Kanchenjunga was the third highest summit in the world (28,156ft.), and then the highest one to remain unclimbed. The expedition was intended primarily as a reconnaissance, but Charles Evans nevertheless wanted a strong climbing team to be able to make a sound judgment about a return expedition. All expenses were to be paid - Joe need bring only £20 for pocket money - Joe didn't like to say that he didn't have £20! This was a expedition in the wake of, and very much in the mould of the successful 1953 Everest expedition. A long journey by boat to Bombay, then by train to Darjeeling where six tons of gear was divided into sherpa loads. Although the ice fall proved difficult the expedition established camp 4 on the ridge above. Joe acclimatised well, and with George Band was selected for the first summit attempt. The summit was reached by them on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1955, although not without some difficulty as Joe had had to climb an overhanging crack in the final wall (the following day Norman Hardie and Tony Streater found an easy way around the obstacle and also reached the summit). At that time Kanchenjunga was the highest summit ever reached by a Briton - Everest having of course

been climbed by a New Zealander and a sherpa. It was also probably the hardest climbing done at this sort of altitude until the Everest South West Face expedition some 20 years later

It was a weekend in April 1956 when Joe and Whillans returned home after making the first ascent of the Cromlech Girdle that Joe arrived back to find Ian McNaught Davies sitting in the front room waiting for him. Ian announced that he was off the unclimbed Mustagh Tower in the Himalaya in a fortnight - would Joe like to come? The Mustagh Tower (23,860ft.) had been described as "Nature's last stronghold - probably the most inaccessible of all the great peaks, its immense precipices show no weakness in its defence" (R.L.G. Irving). So described it presented an immediate and compulsive challenge. This expedition was the antithesis of the Kanchenjunga one — much smaller and privately financed by its wealthier participants, although still shipping three tons of equipment. Joe of course could not have afforded to pay, but his credentials from the Alps and Kanchenjunga made him the first choice for lead climber for any cutting edge expedition.

An exciting flight got them to Skardu (the Dakota had an altitude ceiling of 13,000 much the same as some of the passes it needed to cross) which was followed by a walk up the Baltoro glacier. Much of the tower proved to be very friable, with sections of Alpine grade V climbing. At 23,000ft. a diversion onto the North face was required to turn a steep rock band. Above a short ice pitch they found themselves climbing unbelayed in deep unconsolidated snow for two pitches before finding a rock belay. Several false summits led to the true double summit. This came as a surprise as they hadn't realised that it was not a single distinct peak. Not sure which was the higher they attempted to cross between the two. Joe fell through the cornice at this point and was left with legs dangling 7,000ft above the glacier below. In the face of such dangerous snow conditions and incredibly tired they abandoned their attempt to reach the other summit and retreated, bivouacing 200ft. below the summit. On the way down the following day they passed Tom Patey and John Hartzog making their summit bid - which, given better snow conditions, they achieved, reaching both summits, just six days before a French expedition reached the top via the South ridge of the mountain.

Over the next few years Joe continued to put up grit test-pieces such as The Rasp (E2,5b) on Higgarr Tor, and the Hanging Crack (now E2,5b, but some aid originally used) on Dovestones Edge; then there were the usual round of trips to Wales, The Lakes,

Scotland and the Alps. On Cloggy he continued to produce hard, quality routes with Taurus (E4,5c) climbed with Whillans in 1956, and one of the earliest routes of this grade; The Mostest (E2, 4a,5a,5c,3a) and November (now E3, 5a,5c,5a, but originally aided with chockstones) in 1957, Shrike (E1 5c,5b) in 1958 and Woubits Left Hand (E3, 5b,5b,6a) in 1959. But the Rock and Ice seemed to have lost some of their drive as members married or moved away. Indeed, Joe himself was married on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1957 to Valerie Melville Gray a primary school teacher, and inevitably also a member of the climbing fraternity, for nobody else could have understood or accepted the way of life that Joe and his contemporaries had established for themselves.

In 1959 Joe was approached to take part in a safety film titled 'Hazard' which was intended to get its message across through the medium of climbing. This was too good an opportunity to miss, offering five expenses paid weeks in the Dolomites. While there, Joe and Don Roscoe attempted the major Cassin Route on the Cima Grande, but ill-equipped and without a guidebook they failed to realise its seriousness. A major electric storm accompanied by hail hit them when part way up and they were forced to bivouac in sodden clothing. Retreat was the only option, but because of the overhanging nature of the climb they had to down climb pitches, since abseils would have risked them becoming marooned in mid-air on the end of the rope. Eventually, on vertical rock they started to rappel, passing another party on the way up. This retreat in itself caused a stir as it was not generally considered possible. Only one other party had ever attempted retreat from so high on the face, and they had suffered a fatality in the process.

1960 saw the birth of his first daughter, Helen. This year also marked a change in direction. For the past seven or eight years Joe's aspiration in Wales had centred on Cloggy. Like Cox before him he had grown to know the cliff intimately, but had worked it out at the standards of the day. Some variety was needed. Although not matching Clogwyn D'ur Arddu in scale or ambience Tremadog nevertheless has some advantages. It is a user friendly crag, being situated immediately beside the road, offering rock with good friction, a variety of climbing, and a far drier climate (it also doesn't take drainage so dries quickly) than is found in the mountains, although only 20 miles from Snowdon. And, above all, at this stage it still offered plenty of scope for exploration. Joe's first visit was in March 1960 Joe, lured there by climbing partner Claude Davies. Immediately Joe established two crack climbs that were destined to become classics of the crag, Leg Slip (E1, 5a,5b) and First Slip (E1, 5c,4c). Vector (E2, — another classic that weaves an unlikely way through overhangs - was accomplished next, over two visits, the

first with Trevor Jones, the second with Trevor and Claude Davies. Both fell off at the first overhang - Claude was able to regain the rock because of a runner above him. Trevor, coming last, was not so lucky since Claude had removed it, and he was left hanging in space. Much to his frustration he had to be lowered to the ground; so missing out on the first ascent of what was to become the best known route on Craig Bwlch-y-Moch. Exploration was in the air and the North Wales was scoured for new crags. One offering was Carreg Hyll-drem, a small and viciously overhanging roadside crag where Joe established classic routes of Primus (E2, 4c,5c,4c), Hardd (E2, 5c,4b) and the Girdle (HVS, 4c,4b,4b,4c); another was Castell Cidwm where he climbed Dwm (A1,HVS, A1,5a,5a,A1) Vertigo (HVS, 5a,4c) and The Curver (VS, 4c,4c), returning in 1962 with Chris Bonnington to establish Trango (E4, 6a free but originally aided) a photo of which was later used as the Joe Brown shop logo. 1961 saw a return to Tremadog with The Neb (E2, 5b,5c,5c), Nimbus (E2, 4b,5c,4b,5a), The Grasper (E2, 5c,5c) and The Fang (HVS, 5a,5c) all being climbed.

In 1961 Tom Stobart was making a film about the Valley of the Assassins in Persia (now Iran) for the B.B.C. and invited Joe to accompany him to gain access to caves high on the cliffs. Disappointingly, although the film was a success, little of interest was found in the caves.

Upon his return from Iran in September Joe commenced work as an instructor at White Hall, Derbyshire's Outdoor Pursuits Centre at Buxton. Although not a teacher it was held that this was more than compensated for by his abilities. Although this gave Joe the opportunity to spend his working time in the outdoors it also had its drawbacks. One was that now Joe was no longer his own boss and could not accept any invitation he chose for climbing trips. Inevitably within a couple of weeks of starting at White Hall he had asked for 2 weeks leave the following spring to go on a trip to Petra in Jordan where Tom Stobart was working on a further archaeological film. But another invitation to go to Patagonia had to be turned down. Indeed, had he been able Joe could have spent most of the ensuing two years on expeditions! Nevertheless he enjoyed his time at White Hall, and for a time even lost his enthusiasm for climbing. In its place he took up canoeing, enjoying the challenge and thrill of paddling white water. By nature Joe has never been overtly competitive, and had no wish to get involved in slalom competition. However, he was once persuaded by Colin Mortlock to go to slalom with him. Paddling in Division 4 Joe immediately gained promotion to Division 3, beating Colin into the bargain! If the will had been there he would doubtless have progressed further, but Joe never bothered to paddle competitively

again - perhaps to Colin's relief. One party piece he developed was the ability to canoe upside down, always guaranteed to make an impression with his students.

1962 saw Joe invited to join an expedition to the Pamirs, partly funded by a Texan businessman to encourage détente between East and West. John Hunt had already led an expedition to the Caucasus in 1958, and a Russian group had been hosted in Britain in 1960. In the event an S.M.C. expedition led by Malcolm Slesser amalgamated with the Alpine Club one to form a British expedition. The regimented structure of Russian mountaineering, the 'sports plan' mentality of Russian mountaineers, and indeed the way the British party was treated like a trade delegation, was anathema to the climbers who deliberately tried to flout the system at every opportunity. The expedition was marred both by the incompatibility of the British and their Russian hosts - the former considering the latter reckless in their determination, while the latter considered the former undisciplined and indolent - and by the deaths of Robin Smith and Wilfred Noyce in a fall during descent. After this half the expedition left for home, others including Joe remained. The difference in attitude and the gulf between the groups became obvious on the ascent of Pic Communism (24,590ft.) when Anatoli Ovchinnikov, the Russian leader, announced that "In the Soviet Union all peoples go to the summit. Peoples who not reach the summit make the climb a failure...The strong will go in front, the weak behind. The strongest of the weak will go at the very back and force the weakest to keep up". At the summit a short speech was made and medals presented, and the British and Soviet flags flown from ice axes. Fortunately all the British climbers made it to the top, thus making expedition an unqualified success in Russian eyes. The return trip gave Joe a brief entree in to the world of espionage. While waiting in the airport at Moscow the group was approached by a man who claimed he was a reporter. While their soviet 'minder' was diverted he asked Joe to take a small but bright yellow package back to England. Fearing that this could be a trap, and not wishing the whole expedition to end up in the Lubyanka Joe declined, but found the packet thrust into the anorak he was carrying over his arm. Not wanting to expose the man, or indeed daring to say anything Joe boarded the plane with his heart in his mouth, expecting to be challenged at any moment. However, the flight went smoothly, and the plane landed safely. But no sooner were they on the tarmac than a man in a trench coat approached the group saying "I believe that one of you has something for me". The package was handed over with Joe still having no idea what it contained, who sent it, or who collected it.

The 1963 trip to the Alps, arranged with Tom Patey, accomplished a new direct variation on the Greloz-Roch route on the West face of the Aiguille du Plan, a successful ascent of the South-West Pillar of the Dru and another first ascent on the North West face of the Pic sans Nom. Their ascent went smoothly, although the weather deteriorated rapidly on the descent, to such a degree that they were forced to get out the bivi sack and sit out a storm while the hiss of small avalanches passed to either side of them. A pair of Italians attempting the Dru, with whom they had bivouaced the night before, became trapped high on the face. It was five days later before one managed to get down, the other had died in the attempt.

The following year the same pair returned and on the second attempt succeeded in establishing a new routes on the North Face of the Migot, and the remote West Face of the Petites Jorasses – for a change this turned out to be much easier than they had anticipated and they only to need to use the rope for a couple of pitches.

Just to show the old touch hadn't deserted him he also once he returned to Britain he returned to Ramshaw Rocks to put up Ramshaw Crack (Now E4, 6a, but originally with some aid).

A new departure for T.V. was the live televised climb. Joe was first invited to take part in a Eurovision broadcast from the South Face of the Midi. It was an interesting experience, with the broadcast commencing in a snowstorm. Because of the tightly worked schedule and the live transmission the climbers had to be in particular places at set times. To do this climbing normally would be difficult if not impossible, given the variability of weather conditions. So the whole thing was a cheat, with the climbers traversing on and off the face between slots, and using the cable car to get higher for later transmissions. Even so, the climbing that was shown was genuinely difficult in the prevailing weather. Back home the BBC approached Joe about a similar broadcast for the following year. He suggested Cloggy, with cameras on Llithrig, Piggot's and Pinnacle Flake. Unfortunately, the weather was poor, with thick mist, and technical problems dogged some of the best positioned cameras. However, the broadcast was deemed a success, and the BBC began looking for a follow-up to be broadcast at Easter 1966. South Stack on Holy Island off Anglesey was chosen because of the accessibility of the awesome and unclimbed Red Wall. Many climbers had looked at this, but none had touched it. Although the route climbed for the programme was almost entirely artificial (Television Route, A1) it gave Joe a view of the face which seemed to have a continuous crack line. This was good enough to tempt him and Pete Crew to

make an attempt later in the year which resulted in the first ascent of Red Wall (E2 4b,5c,4b), followed 4 days later by the ascent of the line he had seen initially, which gave Wendigo (E3 4c,5a,5b,4b). Joe found out about the much better rock and the possibilities which existed slightly further along the cliffs towards North Stack. After a period when climbing had become less important in his life this provided the impetus he needed to encourage him to further exploration, and he returned frequently climbing a number of now classic routes. The outside T.V broadcast became a feature of the period, with two others in Glencoe and on the sea stack known as the Old Man of Hoy in the Orkneys. Joe, Chris Bonninton and Tom Patey had made the first ascent in 1966, and Joe proposed it as a suitable, indeed stunning location for an outside broadcast climb. o it was, albeit a logistical nightmare for the programme makers because of its remoteness! However, the programme gave what is probably the best remembered T.V. spectacular, with an all star cast of Joe, Ian McNaught Davies, Pete Crew, Dougal Haston and Tom Patey on the climbing team and Hamish McInnes, John Cleare, Rusty Baille and Ian Clough on filming. The climb repeated for TV some 15 years later with Joe then teaming up with his daughter Zoe. She was an instant hit with the viewers through her outspoken but cheery manner and immediately was snapped up as a presenter for the children's magazine programme Tiswas.

1966 was also a year of change at home. Val had never been entirely happy living at White Hall, and they had considered opening a climbing shop for some time. Joe had already started making fibreglass climbing helmets, which he thought he could expand into more of a full time business. A suitable property was found in Llanberis High Street (the same one as is the shop today), and helped with a loan from Chris Briggs of the Pen-y-Gwryd Hotel, they moved in to a building in need of major repair and complete refurbishment, done by Joe and climbing acquaintances. They opened for business at Easter while Joe was climbing on South Stack for the BBC live outside broadcast. So things came full circle with the scene of many of Joe's happiest climbing days now on his doorstep.

Joe's second daughter, Zoe, was also born this year, so with money tight he offered private guiding, made helmets in the back room of the shop and (with extensive help from Pete Crew and Robin Collomb) to publish his autobiography, "The Hard Years" (now available in paperback) which appeared in August 1967.

The helmets were an immediate success. At that time few designs were available. Most were imported and designed to protect from stonefall in the alps rather than giving the wearer protection if they

fell off and swung into the rock. The one British helmet, the Compton, which did give protection in the event of a fall, was heavy and cumbersome, and few chose to wear it. Remarkably, although Joe later sold the business, and it has gone through several hands since, but the helmets have continued to be made until 2005!

Although Joe wanted to contribute to business he did not enjoy the adulation that was inevitable if he worked in the shop itself. He therefore remained in the background, doing refurbishment and making the helmets, and later climbing "software" harnesses, tape slings and the like.

As the helmet business grew he took on Mo Anthoine to help him. The story goes that testing was done by one of them wearing the helmet while the other hit them over the head! As it expanded so new premises were needed and an old stable across the road was bought and converted. Still it grew. At this point it was becoming a fully fledged commercial undertaking, needing constant supervision to ensure the quality standards were maintained. Although Joe was happy working for himself he never wanted the problems of running such a business, and he decided to give it to Mo.

Shortage of funds, a young family, and the demands that setting up the business made on him and Val meant that for the next few years Joe did not go on any expeditions.

However, in 1970 Mo asked Joe if he would like to join a small group going to El Toro (5710m) in the Peruvian Andes. The expedition, which was sponsored by United Newspapers, had dual objectives, to make the ascent and to try and find a plane supposedly carrying gold that was thought to have crashed on the glacier below. Shortly before the expedition left there was a major earthquake in Peru; debris littered the roads en route to the mountain and the expedition suffered repeated aftershocks. The objective was a splendid peak with an impressive vertical granite face. To one side of this an ice couloir led to the summit ridge. From basecamp they followed a glacier to a camp below this feature. Because the mountain was near to the equator the heat of the midday sun melted the ice, making climbing impossible. The regular routine was therefore to rise early, climb until mid-morning and then descend. By this time water would be gushing down the couloir, and their ice screws would be melting out, making this procedure somewhat risky. By the following morning the ropes left in-situ would be frozen and encased in ice and the ice screws secure once more. At one point a deep crevasse cut across the couloir, and disappeared downwards to the underlying rock 40 feet below. The

thought that the entire route below this might suddenly disappear in one of the aftershocks was not one anybody cared to dwell upon! The climbing went smoothly and they gained height steadily, in due course emerging from the onto the summit ridge. The snow here was of a type not uncommon in South America, a plating of brittle ice over unconsolidated powder. The climbers moved cautiously up the ridge, overcoming minor difficulties until about 100 feet below the summit. At this point they could clearly see the summit, but although no further technical difficulties remained the state of the snow was such that no one was prepared to risk their life just to stand on the true summit, so the actual summit remained inviolate for another generation.

The Dinorwic Slate Quarry had closed in 1969. In 1971 Joe, Claude Davies and Morty Smith established the first routes there, Opening Gambit (HVS, 4c, but altered by rockfall and described in the guide as "a typically bold venture on the biggest slate cliff") started things and was followed by Hamadryad (E3, 5a,5c,5a,4b, but originally with 2 points of aid) so pre-empting the slate climbing explosion by over 10 years.

In 1972 Joe was asked by Tony Streater, who had been with him on Kanchenjunga, to help with an expedition to Ethiopia. This was not a mountaineering expedition, but was to reward young helpers for their charity work in the U.K. and foster links with their peers in Ethiopia. In Addis Ababa they were joined by an equal number of Ethiopians, and then proceeded to the highlands in the north of the country. This area consisted of a dissected plateau, with deep valleys within which stood a number of rock towers which were the objective of the climbing part of the expedition. Camp was established on the plateau, so reaching the objective required descent rather than ascent! Unfortunately shortly after arriving Joe again wrenched his back and immediately became immobile. He knew from past experience that he would remain incapacitated for days if not weeks, and would have to be stretchered out. At first this seemed hopeless over such rough ground, with the stretcher party making very slow progress. However, the arrival of a party of local tribesmen completely altered the situation. Five, under the command of a leader carried the stretcher shoulder high and at a jog, covering the ground so fast that the rest of the expedition could not keep up — a quite remarkable feat. On his return to the U.K. Joe at last found a surgeon who was able to diagnose his back problem, and following an operation to remove the offending disc climbing suddenly became easier again, although he did lose some of the flexibility that had been a hallmark of many of his earlier exploits.

1973 saw a return to South America with the Roriamas Expedition (9094ft.). Although not very high this prow of rock jutted from the rain forest at the junction of Guyana, Venezuela and Brazil, and had been the inspiration for Conan Doyle's story of prehistoric survivals in 'The Lost World'. In fact it could be approached easily from the south, coming up a gradual slope, but because of its political significance Guyana were keen to support an expedition that approached from the north. Don Whillans and Adrian were joint leaders with Don, Joe, Mo Anthoine, Hamish McInnes and Mike Thompson being the main climbers. Also attached were a camera team, a radio operator, a doctor and a several officials. People either love or hate the jungle. Joe loved it; despite the wet, the scorpions, spiders, snakes and myriad other nasties that inhabited it he found things of interest everywhere. The climbing started only beyond camp 6 after a nine day walk-in. The prow itself was 1500ft. of vertical or overhanging sandstone. Much of the climbing was artificial, and almost without respite, although one camp was established in hammocks halfway up the face. Mo, who loved pegging, led the largest part of the route, and the four of them finally emerged on the top to find it a flat, but dissected area of bare rock.

In 1975 Joe led an expedition to Trango Tower (20,500ft.), a rock spire beside the Trango Glacier, a tributary of the Baltoro Glacier in the Karakorum. Mo Anthoine had made most of the arrangements, and the other lead climber was to be Martin Boysen, one of the leading rock-climbers of his generation. The team was inexperienced at organising Himalayan trips, but soon discovered the frustrations and bureaucracy that besets all Himalayan trips. They suffered unanticipated delays, then a shortage of porters, then porter strikes and go-slows, which together resulted in the team reaching the mountain with less than three weeks of the trip left. The final straw came when Martin trapped his knee in a crack about half way up the tower. Eventually he released it, but it suffered considerable damage. With him ruled out of the climbing team the expedition ground to a halt.

The objective was a good one so the following year a return trip was arranged, with Jim Curran and Tony Riley coming along this time to film the ascent. With the experience of the previous year things ran more smoothly. Base camp was established on the glacier then advanced base at the foot of the tower itself. Old fixed ropes were replaced and the first camp established at a snow patch one third of the way up the face. Martin did battle with the infamous crack from the year previous and this time won. Above were two more days of

hard climbing giving out eventually on to the snowy shoulder of the tower. Fittingly Mo and Martin made up the first summit party, with Joe and Malcolm Howells ascending the fixed ropes to the top in increasingly unsettled weather the following day. At the time, and indeed for a decade after this route rated as some of the hardest rock climbing ever achieved at such an altitude. Indeed, the Tower did not see another successful ascent for 11 years.

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Nepal was the destination of Joe's next trip, in 1977, although this time he was involved in supporting a BBC television expedition mounted to hunt for the Yeti. Despite weeks spent travelling the area no incontrovertible evidence was turned up.

In 1978 Joe, partnered by Davy Jones was beaten (by Mick Pointon and Phil Kershaw) by a matter of hours to the first ascent of what is perhaps Wales finest ice route (at least it would be its finest, if it formed fully!) — the Devil's Appendix in Cwm Idwal.

In 1979 Joe was involved in two trips. The first was with Hamish McInnes and Yvon Chouinard to South America. Hamish had come across a well documented tale of native gold hidden at the time of the Spanish conquistadors, a story that was backed up with a map purporting to show its location. Although they knew that the chance of finding the treasure was remote this was combined with a plan to climb Cotipaxi (19,347ft.). At first the details of the map could be followed, and features related to the topography. Like all the best quests they crossed a plateau of the quaking bog before reaching an area of dense arrow grass. This grew so closely that the only means of progress was for one of them to stand with arms outstretched and palms together while the next man pushed them forward through the grass. But it quickly became evident that they were not sufficiently equipped or supported to make much further progress here. By climbing onto the ridge tops travel became much easier — indeed other animals had created paths there — and they spent some days exploring their surroundings. Among discoveries was an old mine by a black pool. Years later a large and extravagantly equipped American expedition on a similar quest discovered and dived this pool and recovered some Mayan gold objects, although not the large treasure for which they were searching. For Joe's group the second objective was Cotopaxi. Local information was that, given familiarity with the area some people had managed to climb it in a weekend trip from Lima. They hired a jeep for two days and drove as high as they could and then walked up to an unoccupied mountain hut. After a few hours sleep they again set off for the summit, making fast progress. This was reached without problem, they descended, and amazingly returned the jeep within 24 hours of having hired it!

The second trip that year was to Brammah 2 (21,079ft; 6425m) in the Kistwar. As has often happened Joe was invited to join an expedition which had already been planned. None of the expedition members had actually visited the area so the objective had been selected unseen, mainly because it was one of the highest summits of the region. The route chosen was an unclimbed line via the S.W. col. The walk in, which involved several days slog up the glacier, gave sight of numerous splendid towers which would have provided excellent alpine style objectives, while Brammah 2 itself proved a disappointment. Although higher than the towers it was a rounded dome which offered little in the way of technical challenge, but was guarded by complex crevassed snowfields. Under the prevailing conditions of heavy snow cover route-finding through these proved very difficult and frustrating, and the expedition ground to a halt without reaching the top.

The year after Joe, Hamish McInnes and Mo returned to the Llanghnates rain forest in South America, this time with a larger group which included local guides, and equipped for an extended expedition. Again peaks, quaking bogs and other features could be related to the treasure hunter's map. This brought them to the edge of the rain-forest. The transition was abrupt and total. Suddenly visibility was reduced to only a few feet, and progress slowed to a crawl. The natives had abandoned them so all their supplies now had to be carried in relay. Generally two members would cut a path through the forest, while the others ferried the stores. Progress was slow averaging only 2 miles a day, and the denseness of the vegetation meant that they could have passed within feet of the treasure without seeing it. After 42 miles and 21 days they emerged at a river on the far side of the forest. This provided an easier and faster means of travel and they following it, soon reached a native village. Although the expedition had been a failure in terms of its objective no one had really expected to find the gold, and Joe actually remembers it with great fondness, as one of his most enjoyable expeditions. Indeed, so much had they enjoyed it there they decided to return for a shorter trip the following year, but this time accompanied by Hamish's girlfriend and Mo's wife Jackie. But, as can happen, the magic of the previous occasion was not there and could not be recaptured. This time they started from the village where they had emerged from the forest the previous year. Following the river upstream from here they reached a track into the jungle that led to the remains of buildings discovered since their previous visit.

A characteristic of most of Joe's expeditions is that it is the company that matters, not the objective. Certainly charismatic

objectives and new routes add appeal, but despite his immediate success on Kanchenjunga, large expeditions to the highest peaks have never really held the attraction for Joe that they have for some mountaineers such as Sir Chris Bonington. The expedition to Thalay Sagar (22,650ft.; 6904m.) in 1982 was typical. Only four climbers were involved - they all knew each other, and were not relying on commercial sponsorship to pay for the trip. It was thus more like an extended holiday with a group of friends — on this occasion Mo Anthoine, Clive Rowlands, Malcolm Howells and Bill Barker. The mountain itself was unclimbed, and their selected route, on the north flank, looked as though it had a fair amount of technically difficult climbing in the upper sections. They approached via the glacier from which the Ganges emerges, which is, for that reason, a place of pilgrimage for Hindus. The roads were crowded and busy right to the glacier snout where a hermit held sway over the emerging river. The expedition established base camp higher up, and then climbed through an icefall to reach the back of the cwm. From advanced base camp here they ascended a long steep snow couloir that eventually brought them to a col on the ridge that links Thalay Sagar to Briguparth. Another camp was established at this col. Although ropes were fixed to this point above they climbed alpine style, without fixed ropes and camps. The ridge proved far from easy, with pitch after pitch of V.S. standard climbing, and little respite. Eventually a small snow patch provided just enough space for the final camp to be established. Joe until now had done nearly all the leading, and was feeling tired from the effort he had expended. It looked as if one more day would bring them to the summit. The following day Mo was feeling unwell and remained at the camp, but the other four set off up the snow ridge. Near the top they reached what they thought would be the final obstacle, a steep wall with an overhanging crack rising from its base. This looked hard. Joe had been seconding, but at this point the others all declined the lead. Joe put in a final big effort to overcome the crack and reached a ledge above. From here the obvious way ahead was a traverse along the ledge to an easy looking corner crack, but Joe felt he had done his share. He called down for back-up. But nobody came forward. Perhaps they were diffident because they thought that if Joe was now calling for assistance what lay ahead of him must be harder than the crack he had just surmounted with great difficulty! Without support Joe had no options left. He retreated and they returned to their last camp. Overnight the weather broke, and they all descended the following day. The weather continued bad for the next four days. The fixed ropes soon disappeared under snow and after sitting out storms on the glacier for several days more they retired from the mountain. Joe felt cheated - he knew that they had almost finished the route, and the summit was within their grasp - indeed, more help when it was needed or just one more fine

day would have made all the difference. He and Mo resolved to return.

The next year they returned alone, hoping to re-use their fixed ropes and quickly regain their high point. This time they brought a camera loaned by the BBC to record their progress. Things were very different this year. The couloir was much deeper in snow, and their ropes from the previous year had disappeared under maybe twenty or thirty feet of fresh powder. Excavating them was out of the question, so new rope was fixed as they made slow upward progress for about 500 feet. Here they left the camera and other equipment overnight and returned to their camp at the base of the couloir. Overnight the weather deteriorated, and a storm hit them. It snowed heavily and continuously. Eventually Joe concluded that the monsoon must have arrived unusually early, and that further climbing that season would be out of the question. They decided to abandon their attempt, but there was a small matter of a very expensive BBC film camera 500ft. up the couloir. They tossed a coin and Joe lost. Reluctantly he climbed the snow filled gully, throwing things down to Mo and eventually returning with the camera. They left, disappointed. Later that year the mountain was climbed for the first time.

In July 1984 Joe was involved in the second outside broadcast from the Old Man of Hoy in Orkney. By 1983 cameras had become much lighter and could be carried by the climbers rather than having to have a separate film team. This time Joe climbed with his daughter, Zoe, then a very bubbly 17 year old. She was an immediate hit with viewers, and from that sprang her career for the next few years as a children's programme presenter. In the course of this programme Joe became friendly with Mike Begg a producer for the BBC. From this friendship a number of other programmes were born, the best remembered probably a series of short films entitled "Fishing the Hard Way", which brought together Joe's two great loves, climbing and fishing. It involved Joe reaching some unlikely inaccessible fishing pools using climbing skills and techniques. A feature of the series was that he never seemed to catch a fish — at least not on camera, although he swears that he had more success when the cameras were off!

In 1983 Joe also took time out on an African holiday to climb Mt. Kenya.

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In 1985 Joe (along with Hamish McInnes and Mo Anthoine) was engaged as safety officer for the filming of "The Mission"; a film about conflict between a Jesuit priest and a 17<sup>th</sup> century slave trader set against a South American background. The work involved safeguarding the actors, occasionally doubling for them (Joe doubled for Robert de Niro) and preparing rock for stunts. Although much of the action apparently takes place in the middle of the jungle, in fact the waterfall used was situated just below a luxury hotel, which was the base for the film crew. At one time a concrete walkway had crossed the wide river above the falls from the hotel. This had been washed or fallen away over the years, but the stunt crew together with the safety officers decided it would be fun to try and make a crossing back to the hotel from the far side. It was necessary to wade up to chest depth to get from island to island. All was going fine until on one sandbank, Joe, who was leading, came face to face with a large cayman - the South American crocodile. Fortunately the beast decided that it was no match for Joe, and slipped away into the water. However, the group were now marooned on an island a quarter of a mile from either bank, now knowing that the rivers was cayman infested! They decided to press on, only to be halted a hundred yards from the hotel lawns by the deepest and fastest flowing part of the river. There was no alternative but to retrace their steps the whole way to reach the bank from which they had started.

Joe enjoyed the summer, both for the company, and the games they played, and got paid for it too! As result he has worked on several further films - the James Bond film "A view to a Kill" (when he was involved for several weeks in arranging a single spectacular stunt where "James Bond" skies down an alpine slope and jumps down into a 80 foot crevasse), "Rambo", filmed in Israel in 1987 and Fred Zinnerman's "Five Days one Summer" again in the Alps.

In 1985 Joe received an invitation to join an Everest expedition that was to attempt the N.E. Ridge from the Chinese side. Any expedition attempting this route was going to be pretty big. Although Joe had of recent years only been on small informal expeditions, the chance to see for himself the scenes described in all the Everest books he had devoured so eagerly as a boy outweighed his reservations about large expeditions, and he accepted readily. The expedition was led by Brummie Stokes, who, although he served in the S.A.S. came to mountaineering without the usual military outlook. As a precursor he had managed to get some free flights to Alaska for the team to train. Thus 1985 saw Joe, Mo, and Brummie on Mt. McKinley (20,340ft.). Their initial route was the voie normal - a route which follows the glacier to 14,000ft before traversing 1000ft. diagonally up a large icefield to

reach the shoulder of the mountain at 17,000ft. Although the traverse is exposed the route is not of great technical difficulty. This ascent went without incident, and gave Joe and Mo an opportunity to cache some food for a planned later ascent. Clive Rowlands, John Fresh and Davy Jones arrived shortly after Brummie left and the new team set off, this time for the Cassin Ridge, a five day route of considerably more technical interest. The summit was reached successfully although their cache of food had unfortunately disappeared, and they had to beg food from another expedition, who were well supplied.

The 1986 Everest expedition approached from the northern side, following in the footsteps of the pre-war British expeditions, and visiting such places as the famed Rongbuk monastery. Once on the mountain itself life became much more intense, with a long hard climb between advanced base and camp one, which had to be done over and over again. Joe, as had always been the case, acclimatized easily, and paired with Mo spent a lot of time load carrying at around 24,000ft. As time went by the weather deteriorated, the winds increased and the jet stream gradually extended down the mountain. Indeed, Joe spent one night alone in a tent wondering if it (and he) would still be there in the morning or if all would be whisked away by the wind and end up flying over the Kangshung Face! Unfortunately once again the weather had beaten them. On popular Himalayan peaks there is always a great problem. Their popularity means that many expeditions have to accept less than ideal time slots, but simply by doing this they hugely reduce their chances of success as the likelihood of adverse weather is so much higher.

The following year, 1987, Joe was on expedition to Latok 2 (also known as Latok West, 23,319ft.; 7,108m.). The approach was as usual, up a glacier to establish a camp near its head. From there was a rising traverse to a camp established on the ridge. From here the route followed the ridge turning the pinnacles to the foot of the summit pyramid. A camp was established here. Joe led what proved to be the crux pitch of the ascent which started with an almost vertical chimney excavated in deep and poorly consolidated snow. At the top he was able to get a sound rock belay, and they placed a fixed rope on the pitch. Above the climbing proved somewhat easier, following ledges and chimneys to a high camp. Once this was established the party were in a position to make a summit attempt. Again Joe took the lead, making steady progress and fixing ropes on difficult sections for later. As the day wore on the weather deteriorated yet again, and they finally decided to return to the high

camp. It continued to snow for 36 hours, at the end of which they decided that there was no alternative but to retreat to a lower camp. Even this was not easy, as visibility was now very poor, and finding the end of the fixed ropes took some time. Once down the technical section of the route they made faster progress and reached the glacier by nightfall, again beaten by the weather.

1998 saw a return to Everest. The team was similar to the 1986 one, with Russell Brice and Harry Taylor as lead climbers. But as in 1986 they suffered another failure in the face of poor weather.

In 1990 Joe joined an expedition to Cho Oyu, (25,905ft. 8,201m) the sixth highest mountain in the world, and accepted as the easiest of the 8,000m. peaks if it is climbed by the standard route. One of the aims of the expedition was to allow two paragliders to fly off the summit, and thus establish a tandem paragliding height record. There was little technical difficulty involved in the ascent, which climbs steadily to a ridge below the summit plateau. A camp was established here from which Russell Brice, Harry Taylor and one of the paragliders made a summit bid. In fact only Russell reached the summit, which involved a straightforward but very tiring walk across the summit plateau at over 8000m. In fact the visibility was so poor he was not even able to say categorically that he had stood on top of the highest point, but only that he had gone the appropriate distance in the right direction and stood on the highest lump he could see. He rejoined the others to discuss their next move. If two were to make a tandem descent then one of the three was going to have to walk down alone. The solution was simple - a three-man descent — so establishing not just a tandem, but a triple paragliding height record! They went for it and remarkably reached base camp without incident. It was at 7,000m. on this expedition Joe came to a decision. High altitude mountaineering was now too much hard work. He was used to going better than his companions at these heights, but now, at 60, age was catching up with him and he was no longer the fittest. This was to be his last major expedition.

Since 1990 he has by no means stopped climbing. He still climbs, although not so regularly since he passed 70, and still has a thirst for cliff exploration and new routing. For the past decade he has visited Spain (mainly the Benidorm area) and Morocco frequently. But the popular sports climbing routes hold little in the way of excitement as the line is pre-determined. His love is to follow a natural line on a large cliff, and almost all his climbing has been on new multi-pitch routes up to 1000ft. in length, often at around 5a standard, although he can still climb the odd 5b pitches if no easier option presents itself. These routes, done with friends of long

standing, such as Claude Davies, Les Brown, Pete Turnbull, and Derek Walker, are often not written up (Although Claude Davies has recently published a guide to Morocco), and have left with no visible trace of their passage so others can rediscover them in the future. Locally his most recent first ascent was when he seconded Davy Jones on The Last of the Summer Wine (E4, 5b5a,5b,5b/c) on Red Wall at Gogarth, in the autumn of 1999.

In Britain he has over the years also had fun skateboarding and at one point got into white water rafting. Fishing, particularly fly-fishing has long been a major hobby; a collapsible fishing rod has accompanied him on most expeditions. Until 1995 he also personally made some of the Joe Brown harnesses and climbing tapes sold in the Joe Brown shops! The one thing he has always shunned is any form of self-publicity, giving lectures or after dinner speeches.