

## ***Brief Exposure, dialogue with Gordon Stainforth for *The Great Outdoors*, January 2001***

### **Which area of the world would you most/least like to visit?**

I really cannot form strong opinions about places I haven't been to. The world is a very large place and my experience of it is rather small.

### **Which figure from history would you like to go on a walking holiday with?**

Well, I'm not sure about a 'walking holiday', but I'm sure it would have been most stimulating to have gone walking and scrambling with Coleridge. I would also have loved to have gone climbing in the Peak with those brilliantly inspired Edwardian rockclimbers, Siegfried Herford and Stanley Jeffcoat.

### **What item of gear for the walker/backpacker would you like to see invented?**

Some kind of inflatable boots for crossing bogs!

### **What piece of music do you associate with the outdoors?**

I don't. This really is a naff question. As much as I like all kinds of music, and I have worked in the film industry as a music editor for the likes of both Stanley Kubrick and James Horner, I particularly dislike the practice of taking modern music - which is, after all, a product of the highly civilized indoors - into the great outdoors. I don't think even Beethoven, despite his Pastoral Symphony, would have liked it. There is just so much to listen to in nature, as most of the great composers have said time and time again. And remember, Mozart insisted on the importance of silence as well as sound. I'm sure he would have hated our overindulgence in music as background 'wallpaper', as well as portable walkman-type stereos and outdoor 'music' festivals. I myself cannot stand hearing radios or recorded music in a campsite. Very simple music like a guitar or church bells or cow bells (or yak bells!) though, I can find very attractive when it is totally in keeping with its surroundings.

### **Which book has most inspired you?**

I assume you mean 'outdoor book' - otherwise I would be mentioning books of philosophy which few people ever bother to read, and a whole lot more besides. The outdoor book that most inspired me when I started climbing was Whympers' Scrambles amongst the Alps - a total classic - closely followed by Chris Bonington's immensely enthusiastic I Choose to Climb. They both made me really want to go out and climb. My brother and I, being then based in Hertfordshire, just went out and climbed anything we could - drainpipes, horrible bits of chalk quarries, but above all trees, especially some superb hornbeams in Knebworth Park. Very soon after that, the ever delightful Harrison's Rocks. Then in 1968, a whole month in Snowdonia without a single drop of rain, starting on Milestone Buttress and finishing with Kaisergebirge Wall and Spectre. Total magic.

### **What item of gear would you never leave at home?**

Well, apart from obvious things like waterproof clothing on wet days, and a headtorch in the winter, I always like to have a pen and paper with me for making notes, or if I'm suddenly feeling inspired. I often have ideas for things I want to say in my books when I'm out walking. Contrary to what many people might think, there are many days when I quite deliberately leave my medium format camera gear at home, because a photography day for me is really rather different from a walking or climbing day. I quite often have a smaller camera with me, though.

**What is the most important benefit the outdoor experience has given you?**

A grand question deserves a grand answer! Something like: a greater appreciation of nature in the company of others with similar values ... thereby learning what really matters in life, and keeping everyday problems in perspective. Hope that doesn't sound too grand, but I think it's true.

**In which outdoor skill are you most lacking?**

I wish I could do dynos like Leo Houlding! (I wish I could do dynos.)

**If you could spend an hour with the Prime Minister what subject would you like to discuss with him?**

Culture, not to dumb it down; adventure sports, not to make them 'safer'; the value of outdoor activities (particularly for young people), as opposed to conventional competitive spectator sports.

**What outdoor experience has redefined the rest of your life?**

My first day's climbing at Harrison's Rocks in November 1967 - and then a total epic on Store Trolltind in Norway in 1969, which was a truly intense near-death experience.

**Which mountain in the world would you most like to climb?**

I would still quite like to climb the Matterhorn, perhaps by the Zmutt Ridge. At a more fantastical level, the Nose of El Cap (left unfinished last year after soloing the first 10 feet in trainers!)

**Is walking sexy?**

No.

**If you had to sacrifice one area of Britain for New Town development where would it be?**

The valleys of south-east Wales; and most golf courses - actually I'd rather they reverted to nature, and were made open to all who appreciate the outdoors and dislike exclusivity.

**Are you optimistic about the future of the natural world?**

In the short term, no; but once we have made ourselves extinct, nature will bounce back, I'm sure, and hopefully in a few million years a wiser species will appear on Earth.

**Should wilderness be for all or just for those who appreciate it?**

Only for the latter - but then, in an ideal world, everyone would be taught to appreciate wilderness areas better i.e. for what they are, and not what they might be 'developed' for.

**Can you define your relationship with the natural world?**

I'll try! ... an inescapable relationship with an omnipotent intelligence - the nearest thing there is to a 'god' - a god of creation and creativity, and intelligent life: life-providing, life-enriching - often harsh, sometimes cruel - but without which, nothing.

**If you were told you could take one last walk before you died, where would it take you?**

If I were unable to get to the Grand Canyon (an unutterably beautiful place), I would take a walk nearer home, from the Robin Hood Inn northwards along the top of Baslow, Curbar and Froggatt Edges to the Grouse Inn.

**What would you like your epitaph to be?**

He tried to see a little more deeply.

**SHORT BIOGRAPHY**

After leaving the film industry in the mid-Eighties, Gordon Stainforth started a new career as a photographer and writer, producing several highly acclaimed and award-winning books, including *Eyes to the Hills*, *The Cuillin*, and *The Peak: Past and Present*. He has been an enthusiastic rock climber and hill walker since the mid-Sixties.

© **Gordon Stainforth**  
**Jan 2001**