

Eulogy for Charles Knowles

We're here to remember and say goodbye to a very special man and good friend, Charles Knowles. Fellow Castle members have been sharing their memories of him, so my apologies that it's not been possible to include them all.

Charles was already an active member of both the Hallamshire and Eagle Ski Clubs before he joined the Castle Mountaineering Club in 1975. [I'm forever grateful to him, that he introduced me to the Castle when I first arrived in Sheffield in 1980, and he was organising an Eagle Ski Club event which I attended – thank you, Charles!].

He was an experienced and accomplished mountaineer, with two particularly notable expeditions needing to be mentioned, both with his friend Hamish Brown – the first to the Nanda Devi Sanctuary in the Himalayas in 1977, and much later, in 1995, a complete traverse of the Atlas mountains of Morocco [900 miles over 3 months, all 10 of the 4000 metre peaks having already been climbed] being joined by some Castle members I can see in front of me now.

He'd persuaded his boss to bend the rules just this once, to allow him to carry over several weeks holiday to the following year, to allow him to go away on an extended 'one-off, trip of a lifetime'. A few years later with a new boss, he managed to have the rules bent yet again 'just this once'. Charles had recounted this to me with a slightly naughty grin on his face.

There were many other Castle trips abroad; a 30th anniversary trip to Ecuador [climbing Chimborazo], cycling in Cuba, and in Europe, to the Dolomites, Pyrenees and Alps [with an epic on the Eiger].

He was a competent and steady skier, joining me on two of our hut-to-hut XC skiing trips in Arctic Norway, and there were numerous Castle ski holidays, which in later years he easily managed even with his two hip replacements, rarely falling over, and taking great satisfaction reporting back afterwards to his orthopaedic surgeon. To be prepared for almost any eventuality, he always had a rather over-large rucksack [not ideal on chair-lifts] but it was full of occasionally useful equipment [one member's broken ski-boot was mended on a black run].

Back in the UK he was equally active, a true stalwart of the club, joining in enthusiastically with Castle evening, weekend and many away meets.

Two special memories are climbing the Devil's Slide on Lundy with him, and as a four, climbing Napes Needle in the Lake District, but him declining to do the traditional headstand on the top of it [his excuse was that he was wearing a helmet not his flat cap!]

He obviously liked to set himself different challenges. In Scotland, he completed the Munros, Corbetts and Marilyn's, and then started ticking off trig points, before starting on different canal tow paths. He once tried to see how far he could drive his car without using the brakes – it might have been 20 miles!

He was a kind man, taking and collecting people from hospital, and also very generous, always offering to buy you a drink – it was almost impossible get in first and buy one for him.

Charles certainly liked talking and was never lost for words, and it was sometimes very difficult to escape without appearing rude. I believe it was Hamish who said "Charles is a talker, he needs to be shared". And who hasn't heard the story [probably several times!] of him breaking leg whilst out skiing alone in the Dales [before the advent of mobile phones] and managing to drive quite a number of miles [not in an automatic car] to a hospital, with apparently no-one around, so that he needed to drive on further to a second hospital to get the required medical assistance, and even then had to lean repeatedly on his horn to raise staff to get attention.

He never married, so his Castle friends became his Sheffield family, and he was happy to take part in the numerous social events on offer; parties, ceilidhs, visits to the theatre and cinema, slide shows in our clubroom and birthday celebrations. He celebrated his own 70th on the campsite on Skye below the Cuillin Ridge, with Caroline and Ali quietly and secretly decorating his tent while he slept in it, much to his obvious delight when he emerged later. His 80th involved a group cycle ride with a party afterwards. And the following day, Paul and I took him on probably his very last rock climb [on Burbage] when he WAS wearing his traditional flat cap. His 90th was marked in the Grouse Inn, where Castle members met his nieces Gill and Sally, and his longtime friend Hamish came down from Scotland.

Hamish plans to be on a Scottish hill-top today, and like us, will also be remembering Charles. I hope that others unable to be here in person, like Hugh

Dowling, Chris Huxham and Vee Anderson, will be able to be with us in spirit via the zoom link.

Gill and Sally, I'm sure Charles was very appreciative of your caring and practical support in recent years, helping to sell his flat, and later his house, to enable him to spend a final year, sharing time living with his brother Bob in his Keighley care home.

It is surely the end of an era.

Charles, you had a remarkable life, truly a life well lived, and knowing you and sharing some of it with you, certainly enriched all of ours.

We will miss you.