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Foreword

Playing the wild card

Wilderness is a difficult concept to pin down. To some people, it may be a virgin landscape untouched by Man, like the higher Himalaya, the ice-bound Arctic or Antarctic wastes, or the arid deserts of Asia, Africa or America.

As someone who has been lucky enough to spend time in all these places, I can vouch for the ultimate wilderness experiences they provide. But I can honestly say that I've had equal, if not greater, wilderness experiences in the British Isles. To give just one example, not so long ago I found myself seriously lost among the peat hags and groughs of Kinder Scout, a mere 10 miles from the centres of Manchester and Sheffield.

My own local 'wilderness' is the open fells and secret valleys 'Back o'Skiddaw' near my home in the northern Lakes. This is where I go regularly to escape the stresses and strains of a hectic world, and here I find I can lose and recreate myself – mentally and physically – just as easily as in a remote, untrodden Himalayan valley.

The essays in this book – all written, edited and illustrated by fellow members of the Outdoor Writers' Guild to mark the Guild's 25th anniversary – clearly show that this essential wild country can still be found on our doorsteps in most areas of the British Isles.

Perhaps you have already found your own treasured wilderness. If not, I hope these personal essays, photographs and illustrations from members of the OWG will inspire you to go out and find it.

As Henry David Thoreau, a man who found his personal wilderness in a tiny log cabin in the woods of Walden Pond in Massachusetts, first said in his 1862 essay on Walking: '...in Wilderness is the preservation of the World'.

Chris Bonington