



INTRODUCTION

I have always been adventurous. As a child I was outside at every opportunity, ‘raking about’ as they say in Yorkshire, exploring the becks, woods and fields near where I lived in Northallerton. On family drives into the Yorkshire Dales or the North York Moors I felt attracted to the wild, rugged hilly landscape. In my teens, when the chance came to take up climbing on trips with Northallerton Grammar School, the seed was well and truly sown and it very quickly germinated into a passion, eventually becoming a way of life. I knew from the first time that I went out on the moors and fells that it was where I wanted to be. It was a kind of ‘calling’.

Going out into the hills of Northern England was an exciting adventure, especially in bad weather. It often seemed to be wet and windy and I quickly learned to cope with and enjoy inclement conditions. In real terms it was more committing than today if only because, in those days before GPS and mobile phones, you had to be more self-reliant. I relished the physical exertion as well as learning the skills of survival and navigation using an Ordnance Survey map and compass. Geography was my favourite subject and to this day I find maps interesting; you could say that I enjoy a good map read. I had a natural talent and quickly became competent at finding my way in the hills, even in poor visibility. I delighted in the challenge of navigating in bad weather and would often go out on the North York Moors in thick hill fog and rain just for fun, to practise map, compass and navigation skills. The vagaries of dense cloud, rain and wind out on the hills and fells did not put me off. I enjoyed the battle against the elements.

Sometimes, just for fun, I would go out onto the moors for a survival experience and spend a night in a ‘bivvy bag’ – a heavy-duty plastic bag, about the size of a sleeping bag. I learned about exhaustion, exposure and hypothermia, and developed an innate resilience that has served me well.

K2: Setting off from the Shoulder at 8000m in the early morning.

Looking up towards the Bottleneck – a narrowing couloir topped by a band of huge threatening seracs.

These massive ice cliffs look like the White Cliffs of Dover but are rather less friendly. The route, up and left beneath them, is very dangerous as huge sections can – and do – collapse, wiping out anyone below.