

GIBRALTAR ROCKS 1979

Monday 20th August

After a potentially disastrous start when we nearly forgot 3-year-old Daniel's comfort object, a much-used thin floppy cot pillow (with a clean pillowcase, I hasten to add) we left Saltash at about 13:15 in a Ford Transit minibus that had been converted to a caravanette. By the time we reached Plymouth centre, Daniel was asleep and stayed that way until just before Exeter.

We were finally on our way to Gibraltar, known colloquially as the Rock, feeling very fortunate to have free accommodation with Alan's parents, as Alan's father was there on a 3-year posting from HM Dockyard, Plymouth. Alan's sister Joanne was also living with them and working in Gibraltar Dockyard.

After stopping for a quick picnic tea in the back of the caravanette at 17:00 and then stopping again at 19:00 for Alan to take off part of the exhaust that had apparently broken, we arrived at Gatwick at around 21:00. The car park Alan had phoned earlier in the morning to book a space said there was no record of his phone call, so we were forced to use a more expensive car park costing £1.25 a day, as opposed to a mere 95p.

We left the caravanette behind for three weeks and were driven to the airport reception in a minibus, where our cases were checked in and we sat for an hour or so waiting for flight DA 2624 to be called. Daniel, who had been falling asleep as we arrived at Gatwick, was wide awake and chattering excitedly. When we went to have a drink, he was pleased to be doing so "in the middle of the night." However, he was very tired and when we were queuing to board the plane, he kept saying, "Can we go now?" over and over again.

Tuesday 21st August

We took off about 15 minutes late, whereupon he immediately fell asleep. I wished I could have done the same, as although I tried very hard to detach myself from all thoughts of flying and plane crashes, it failed to have much effect. It didn't especially help when we were served a hot meal at about 01:30, either. I managed a few carrots, some forkfuls of shepherd's pie and a small bread roll, but generally speaking, I felt quite anxious.

The flight lasted for 2 hours and 20 minutes, but there was wind and inevitable resultant bumpiness as we approached Gibraltar, situated at the southernmost tip of the Iberian Peninsula and the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea. Alan's father had frightened me with stories of the short landing strip that stretched out into the water, so I was glad it was dark and kept my gaze firmly inside the plane as we descended, looking at Daniel for comfort. The plane had to make a very steep descent and a tight turn to avoid entering Spanish air space.

I was therefore highly relieved when we landed safely at 02:35 and stepped out into the balmy night air. Alan's parents had come to meet us and after we'd collected our cases, Alan's father (Derek) drove us to their flat, where we all fell into bed as soon as was decently possible. Unfortunately, Daniel refused to fall into his own little bed on the floor alongside our double bed, so he slept with me in the double bed and Alan slept on the floor.

I heard Derek and Joanne going to work, mainly because the two flushes in the flat sound like jets taking off and I'd had enough of planes! Alan and I arose to face the day again at 08:00, but Daniel slept until gone 09:00, when we all had breakfast with Alan's mum (Betty). The rest of the morning was spent unpacking and then Derek and Joanne came home for lunch.

Afterwards, the three of us took our first walk in the heat of the day, although there was one of the famous Levanter clouds hanging over the top of the Rock. The Levanter (Viento de Levante) is a warm, moisture-filled breeze that hits the eastern side of Gibraltar and condenses in the sky above, forming a large cloud that results in high humidity. To be honest, it seemed more of a strong wind than a breeze, but we set out regardless.

Following directions from Betty, we headed to the lighthouse at Europa Point, which dates back to 1841 and stands at 160 feet/48.8 metres above sea level with a range of 17 miles. The *Sunflower* shop there, known as the last shop in Europe, was unfortunately closed and we were nearly blown away – but only in the meteorological sense. We therefore returned to the flat at Phillimore House, with Alan carrying a very tired Daniel all the way and hence discovering the need to enquire about a pushchair for the rest of our stay here.



Europa Point lighthouse

After tea, Derek drove us to Main Street for a quick stroll and then Joanne wanted Alan to help her with the yacht she used at the Boat Club, so we all went along. Daniel was quite happy throwing stones into the water, but it became late, so Derek drove Betty, Daniel and me home and went back to the Boat Club to collect Alan and Joanne later. Alan and I then went to bed after looking at a few of Betty's slides. It had seemed an incredibly long day.

Wednesday 22nd August

We all slept very well, but a Levanter cloud was hanging over the Rock again. Joanne had taken the day off work and after breakfast we all caught the bus to Eastern Beach, the largest beach on Gibraltar and unsurprisingly on the eastern side of the isthmus joining the Rock to Andalusia, Spain. The bus was a privately run 20/25-seater and the journey was quite an experience, filled with local people who seemed to be speaking Spanish to each other very loudly.

Unfortunately, the waves at sandy Eastern Beach were rolling in like great breakers and the beach was almost deserted. Daniel wasn't keen, so we just sat on the wall for a while and then caught another bus to the Queensway Club, where there was a swimming pool. Even that was quite cold and Daniel dangled his feet in the water for a mere two minutes. However, we stayed there for an hour, eating biscuits, drinking squash and walking around with Daniel.

In the afternoon, Joanne purloined the car from Derek and took us for a drive around the Rock. The Levanter had finally lifted, so we stopped at Catalan Bay, where Daniel was bought a bucket and spade and we all had an ice cream. It was hot, but the sea was still rough, so we didn't go onto the beach.

Joanne drove us next to Both Worlds Bay, which is a small bay on the eastern Mediterranean coast of Gibraltar and on the opposite side of the Rock from the main city, where we saw the famous water catchment area. We were then driven through some substantial tunnels in the Rock itself, around Europa Point and back to the flat in perfect time for tea.

To be precise, Alan and Joanne didn't stop for tea, because they were going sailing. After the rest of us had eaten, Derek drove Betty, Daniel and me to see the yachts racing and we finally made out Joanne's boat, bringing up the rear. Back at the Boat Club, we waited patiently for the boats to return and I can't deny that Daniel and I were more than a little bored.

At last Joanne's boat appeared, for which I was personally grateful, as it was becoming late and Daniel was tired and crabby. Then disaster struck! The yacht turned over on its side and then completely upside down – and the rescue boat had already left the water, which it apparently shouldn't have done.

We watched helplessly as both Alan and Joanne managed to scramble up onto the upturned yacht, relieved to see that another yacht and the rescue boat were on their way. However, Alan then walked up the keel and the boat righted itself, after which they were both baling out buckets of water.

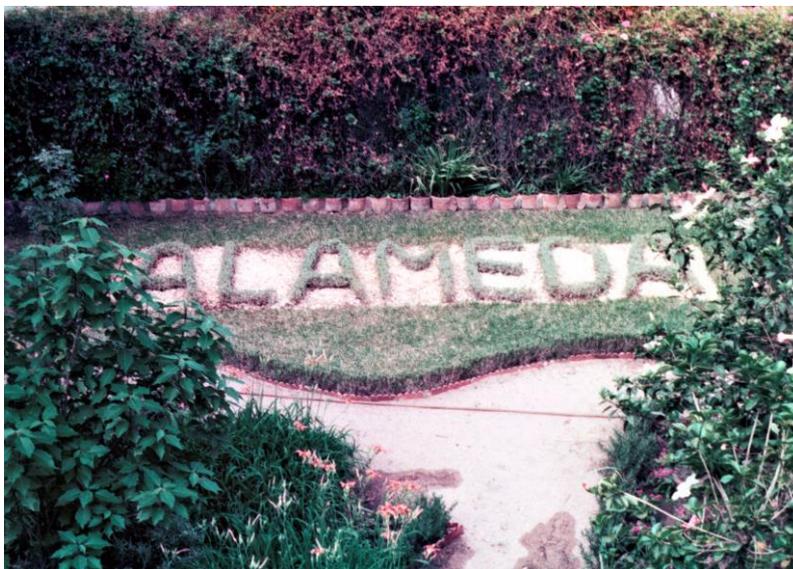
Joanne had unfortunately grazed and bruised her back, but apart from that, they were both all right – it could have been a lot worse. Alan said that he thought Joanne had hit her head on the boom when the boat had capsized, so he'd dived in the water after her. Up to that point he'd somehow managed to keep dry.

After the boat had been dragged out of the water, we could at last go back to the flat to put Daniel to bed. He had happily gone to sleep in his own little makeshift bed last night and was fine with that arrangement this evening also. Alan and I followed him at 22:30, after watching a repeat of *The Love Boat* on television. It should have been *The Capsized Boat*!

Thursday 23rd August

Daniel slept well again and got up to play at the very decent hour of 07:30. Alan and I rather fancied looking around Main Street by ourselves this morning, so at 09:20 we left Daniel with Grandma (who didn't mind at all) and walked into the centre. It was very warm and we enjoyed the walk, looking at the sea, passing by the Alameda Gardens and reading the few historical notices we saw.

The Alameda Botanical Gardens had been created in 1816 under the instruction of the Governor of Gibraltar, as a peaceful area of recreation for the garrison then stationed on the Rock. We could see many interesting shrubs and flowers and the heat combined with the unusual planting created a pleasant, evocative smell. I particularly liked a pepper bush that was right at the edge of the garden, hanging over the wall close by the pavement.



Just in case we forgot the name

Some of the shops were still shut, but we walked up one side of the street and then down the other side. The shops were small, but cluttered with all kinds of souvenirs, electrical goods, leatherware and colourful clothes. We were looking for a lightweight Baby Buggy, but the only pushchairs we found were between £25-£27, so we decided we'd have to ask Betty for advice.

We bought a few items, including a kaftan top for my mother, but as it was approaching midday and we were hot and tired, we started the long trek up the hill to Phillimore House. Fortuitously, Derek and Joanne drove by on their way back to the flat for lunch and gave us a lift. Daniel was playing happily with Grandma, who said he'd been very good.

After a sausage lunch, Betty went to see the woman next door, who had a pushchair she no longer used and she very kindly let us borrow it – problem solved. We immediately took Daniel for a ride to the Alameda Gardens, where it had become very hot. There was a miniature golf course there, an open-air theatre and lots of lovely flowers and bushes, as well as palm trees. We took photos, sat down, perspired, watched cable cars going up and down the Rock and then perspired a whole lot more as we walked back up the hill to the flat.

Daniel was in an upbeat mood as we ate an evening meal of chicken, rice and mushroom sauce, but he was so tired that we put him to bed as early as possible. The rest of us then watched *The Saint*, which was a repeat of course, as programmes in Gibraltar are very much behind English ones. We went to bed at 23:00 and noticed Daniel was tossing and turning a lot. I wondered if he was being bothered by a mosquito, as we'd been warned about them.

Friday 24th August

We awoke at 07:30, mercifully with no mosquito bites, to another warm morning in Gibraltar. I stayed with Daniel while Alan accompanied Betty to the NAAFI for some food shopping, but by the time they returned a Levanter had appeared.

After lunch, Joanne (who had taken the afternoon off work) came with Alan, Daniel and me for a walk up to the Moorish castle and an observation point half way up the Rock. I have to confess it seemed much more like three-quarters up the Rock! It was a long, hot slog and we were all sweating and exhausted by the time we reached the castle, which is now used as a prison. The history of the castle over the centuries, though, seemed to seep from every stone.



The Moorish Castle's Tower of Homage

It had been built during the first Moorish occupation from 711 to 1309, but while it's believed that building started in the 8th century, there are no records of either this or of its completion. It was undeniably an important fortification, with walls stretching down from the upper part of the Rock to the sea. During 1309 to 1333, the Spanish took and reoccupied Gibraltar, destroying most of the castle. However, it was then rebuilt during a further Moorish occupation from 1350 to 1462, after which Gibraltar was once again recaptured by Spain.

During the War of the Spanish Succession in 1704, an Anglo-Dutch force captured Gibraltar and under the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, Gibraltar was ceded to Britain in perpetuity. Spain attempted unsuccessfully to regain control in the Great Siege of Gibraltar that lasted from 1779 to 1783, but Gibraltar remained a strategic base for the British Royal Navy.

During World War II, civilians were evacuated and Gibraltar was strengthened as a fortress. General Franco, the Spanish dictator, refused to allow the German army on to Spanish soil, frustrating a German plan to capture Gibraltar (known as Operation Felix). In the 1950s, Franco renewed Spain's claim to sovereignty over Gibraltar and restricted movement between Spain and Gibraltar.

In a 1967 referendum, however, Gibraltarians cast an overwhelming vote in favour of remaining under British sovereignty, which ultimately led to Spain completely closing the border and severing all communication links. Oh dear!

The dominant features of the castle we could see were the Tower of Homage at the top with various terraces and battlements below, as well as the huge gatehouse. The view was very worthwhile from where we were, as we saw a plane landing on the airstrip (whereupon I wished I had my movie camera with me) and the sea, boats, streets and cars way beneath us.

We managed to drag ourselves further up to the observation point, which was nearly as far as the Upper Galleries and drank some orange squash with a great deal of pleasure. Daniel had a fine time walking around and jumping off steps where we sat. It was peculiar looking upwards from where we were, because although we were sitting in sunshine, the radar scanners above us were completely obliterated by the Levanter cloud.

After staying there for over an hour, we made our much easier way back down, through narrow streets filled with parked cars, a couple of them abandoned. On reaching Main Street, we stopped for an ice cream and met Derek, who drove us back to the flat. All the exertion had given us an appetite, so we really enjoyed the steak, chips, carrots, peas and marrow that Betty had cooked for us. The meat is very good here, as it apparently comes from Poland.

We put Daniel to bed and Betty babysat while the rest of us went to see a film at the Queensway Club. From what I can ascertain, it's a popular meeting place among the Brits. It's very pleasantly laid out, but while the film was running, it was very hot and stuffy. The film was *Silver Bears* starring Michael Caine, which I found mediocre. We returned to the flat at 22:50 and hence to bed.

Saturday 25th August

Daniel woke at 07:00 this morning and woke the rest of us, the little darling! After breakfast and chores, we drove to Main Street at 10:00. Daniel insisted we would be going to the beach and took his bucket and spade to persuade us...

Meanwhile, Alan bought a camera lens with birthday money and was pleased because the man gave him £1.60 off and it was about half the price it would have been back in the UK anyway. I bought a batik skirt and a shawl with my forthcoming birthday money and Joanne bought me a top for my birthday 😊

At midday, we went to the Queensway Club for lunch, which was sausage, mashed potato and beans, followed by Black Forest gateau. Derek then drove us to Catalan Bay, where the sun was shining brightly just a little way away from a rather large, dense Levanter cloud. The cloud was swirling around the top of the Rock, looking as if the Rock was being drawn in towards it.

When we took off our shoes to step on the sand, we almost hopped from one foot to another, as it was burning hot. Daniel was nervous of the sea again, although the waves were a lot smaller than last time. We sat on the sand, where Alan made sandcastles before we all took turns to paddle our feet in the sea to cool down. Daniel didn't like it at first and kept going back to the sand, but he soon took Joanne's hand, then mine and took us down to the water for a while.



Hold my hand!

Later on he took Alan's hand and it was then that he suddenly lost all his fear, splashing around so much that we took off all his clothes except his underpants. He was squealing with delight every time a wave splashed his knees and then his middle. He even knelt down and let go our hands – result! Next time we really must take our swimsuits. At around mid-afternoon we had an ice cream, then went back to the flat. Alan and I noticed that we'd caught the sun, but Daniel appeared to be fine, thank heavens.

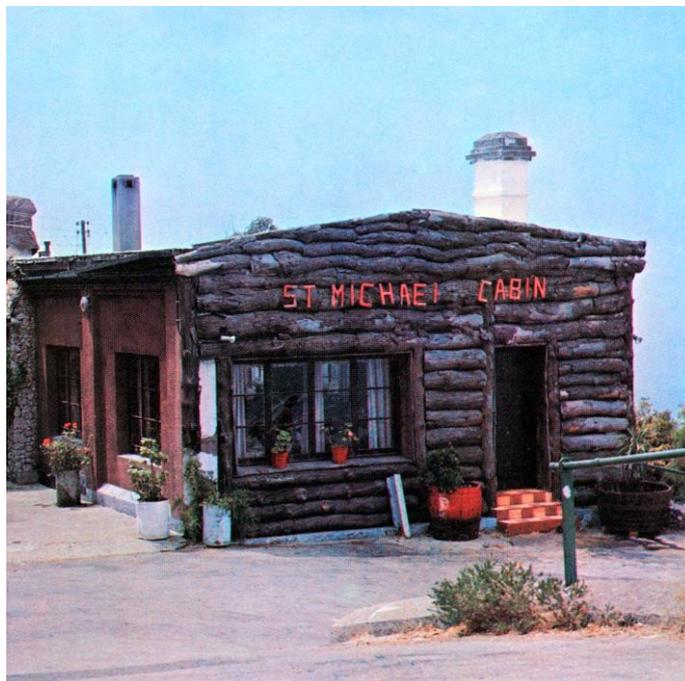
After a snack at teatime, Joanne looked after Daniel while Derek drove Alan, Betty and me to an open-air eating place at Camp Bay, not far from their flat. It was very popular, as we had to wait a little while for an empty table, but soon we were sitting down looking out at the sea and eating calamari (fried squid) and pinchitos (small cubes of barbecued meat on kebab sticks).

It felt so good simply to be alive on such a beautiful evening, in such a carefree atmosphere and lovely surroundings that I was reluctant to leave – but we went back to the flat at 21:30 and watched television for an hour. Daniel had been no trouble, as I think his beach exertions had worn him out. Goodnight!

Sunday 26th August

There was actually no Levanter cloud this morning, which was a bonus. Daniel did his usual early morning rounds to wake everyone up (I'm sure they love this) and we then had breakfast. Alan, Derek and Daniel went for a Sunday morning walk up to another observation point near Europa Point, while Betty and I stayed behind to do odd jobs and Joanne stayed in bed. Daniel came back saying something about a hole in the wall. I think the *Hole in T' Wall* is a pub originally frequented by the Royal Navy, but there my knowledge ends.

At around 14:00, after a salad lunch that was perfect for the weather, we all drove up the Rock in glaring heat and stopped at a couple of observation points, before going on to St Michael's Cave. This multi-chamber network of limestone caves is over 9,843 feet/3000 metres above sea level and because of its easy access, is the most visited of over 100 caves located inside the Rock.



Entrance to St Michael's Cave

The entrance fee was 35p each, but Daniel was free. It was blessedly cool inside the cave and the strange structures of stalagmites and stalactites, together with some atmospheric recorded music and coloured lights, created an other-worldly sensation that despite being essentially 'false', was nevertheless effective.

The caves had been created by rainwater slowly seeping through the limestone and turning into weak carbonic acid that very slowly dissolved the rock. In this way, tiny cracks in the rock grew into caverns and galleries. The stalagmites (growing from the floor) and stalactites (growing from the ceiling) are formed by an accumulation of mineral-laden drops of water from above.

I learned that in 1867 an excavation led to numerous prehistoric finds, including arrow heads, stone axes, bone needles, shell jewellery and pottery. It was also exciting to learn that just five years ago, a Neolithic bowl had been found. On the other hand, the Victorians used St Michael's Cave for picnics, concerts, weddings and duels, which seems sacrilege.

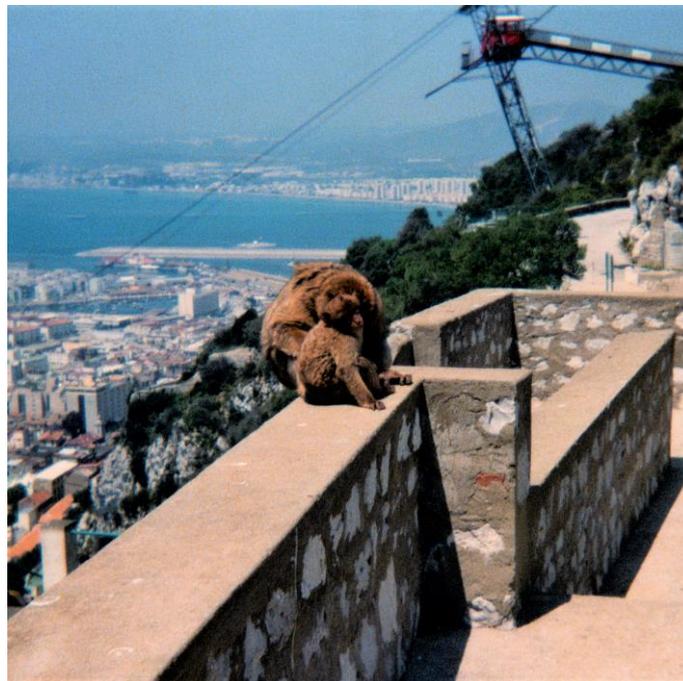
Even worse, though, was that today in the main cave (the Cathedral Cave) we saw a stage with seats and several men preparing for the forthcoming Miss Gibraltar Contest. No comment. This cave is used as an auditorium for concerts because of its sound-enhancing acoustic properties, but I was so unhappy to see litter scattered around and worse than that, initials scratched in the rock. I must have voiced my disgust, because Joanne said that the St Michael lower caves are unspoiled, so perhaps we can see them later. Apparently they're not open to the general public, but can be viewed with a special guide.

The lower caves had been discovered in 1942, during World War II when St Michael's Cave was being prepared as an emergency military hospital, (although it was never used). It was decided that air circulation needed to be improved, as well as another exit found in case of air strikes and while rock blasting was taking place, the deeper system of caves was discovered.

Back to the present day, we emerged into the bright sunlight and headed for the refreshment area, imaginatively called *St Michael Cabin*. While there, Daniel knocked over his Fanta orange drink all over the table. Joanne told the man, who brought a cloth and after he'd wiped it all up, he brought us a fresh drink and said, "Don't worry." What a nice man! Of course, I was scared that the second drink would be knocked over and watched poor Daniel like a hawk.

Derek then drove us to the Apes' Den, where we walked around to see what was happening in ape world. Although referred to as Barbary Apes (or Rock Apes) they are Barbary Macaques, namely tailless monkeys. Their presence is assumed to date from the early days of the British Garrison, when they may have been imported as pets or game and consequently thrived on the limestone cliffs.

A few of them were sleeping, but we saw some with babies and these followed us up some steps. There was a notice saying the apes were likely to grab bags and cameras and run away with them, so we held on to ours tightly. Alan took photos, but I hastily retreated when one started to follow me. There were lots of visitors there, the most we'd seen in one place, despite the sun beating down mercilessly. I saw some dragonflies, the first I'd ever seen, like mini-helicopters.



Apes on the wall

Our next stop was at Ince's Galleries, or the Upper Galleries, or Windsor Gallery, to give three choices. Actually, Windsor Gallery was the first tunnel that had been undertaken by Sergeant Major Ince in 1782-3, during the Great Siege of Gibraltar that lasted from July 1779 to February 1783, when France and Spain attempted to recapture Gibraltar from the British.

During the siege, the Governor of Gibraltar offered a reward to anyone who could suggest how to place guns on a projection from the precipitous north face of Gibraltar. Sergeant Major Ince came up with the idea of tunnelling through the rock, resulting in a most ingenious defence system.

We walked through the tunnels (or galleries) with guns mounted by holes in the wall and looked out through these holes at Gibraltar and part of Spain. They naturally came to an abrupt end, at which point we retraced our steps to the car and drove home feeling quite worn out, as it was surprisingly past 17:00.

The evening was spent relaxing at the flat, although Daniel finally went to sleep rather late, despite being extremely tired. It had been an interesting afternoon, though, because I do like to learn a bit of history about wherever I am.

Monday 27th August

Bank Holiday Monday, but there was yet another Levanter cloud, as this is apparently a bad time of year for them. We'd never have guessed! However, it was still sunny in places and therefore still hot. We spent the morning indoors doing necessary odd jobs again and then had an appetising lunch prepared by Mr D Santillo Snr, consisting mainly of herring salad and Chianti wine.

At around 14:00, we returned to Catalan Bay complete with swimsuits, but the sun wasn't shining and it put me off swimming. Daniel went in the sea for a splash, though, along with Betty and eventually me, while Alan and Joanne later went in for a full-scale swim complete with snorkelling gear.



Splash!

We stayed there for about two hours until the tide nearly came up to where we were, which was almost against the wall. Daniel was beginning to shiver, so we dressed him amid much protest and made our way back to the flat, where we all had baths or showers to remove any lingering sand, before having tea.

At about 20:00, Alan and I took advantage of our current live-in babysitters and went out for an evening stroll in the fading sunlight. We walked down lots of steps, past a large group of Gibraltarians in the back streets, through a tunnel in the Rock and on to Camp Bay. We splashed out and bought a packet of crisps and a drink each from the place we'd been to on Saturday evening and took them down near the beach. It was wonderful to sit on a low wall sipping our drinks and looking out over the water at the lights of Spain twinkling in the distance. I think we both felt unusually carefree and happy.

However, it was back to reality for the sweaty walk back uphill as usual. We passed by a car that had obviously been in an accident and to be honest, I'm surprised we haven't seen a lot more accidents considering the mad way they seem to drive here. We reached Phillimore House at 21:30, when Alan, Betty, Joanne and I decided to indulge in a game of Scrabble before going to bed.

Tuesday 28th August

Derek and Joanne were back to work today, poor Daniel wondered where they were when he did his morning rounds. It was cloudy again, but we walked into Main Street with Betty, who took us through a very pretty part of Alameda Gardens that we hadn't seen before. We did some shopping, bought some books about Gibraltar and caught the bus back for the standard fare of 13p.



Daniel with Grandma in Alameda Gardens

At about 14:00, after a cheese lunch, we walked down to Rosia Road and along it, as Alan wanted to find an old Moorish vent, the only one left of its kind. He eventually found it and took some photos, getting his newly clean white shirt dirty in the process. We then carried on to a museum and happily spent an informative hour or so there. Although the museum was small, it was fascinating and I saw an Egyptian mummy for the first time.

As we started to walk back, Derek and Joanne came along in the car and gave us a lift, for which I was very grateful, as my feet were hot and aching by then. I also seem to be having a spot of bother with a sore wisdom tooth, so I hope nothing awful happens before we go home. Come to think of it, I hope nothing awful happens after we go home, too.

In the early evening, Derek took Alan out to places unknown. Actually, it was the Dockyard, but although when Alan left he said he would be gone for around 10 to 15 minutes, it was more like two hours. I can't say I was surprised!

Wednesday 29th August

Daniel happened to wake up while Derek and Joanne were getting ready for work this morning, which was a bit annoying, as I could have slept on and on.

Another Levanter cloud was hanging above the Rock when Alan, Daniel and I later left the flat, for which I was personally glad, as it was much cooler when we walked down the road, through Alameda Gardens and into Main Street. Alan was personally not glad, though, because he'd wanted to take some photos and the lighting wasn't bright enough for what he wanted.

We decided we might as well do some shopping while we were there, so we bought a picture of Gibraltar as a thank you present to Betty and Derek. We also bought a piece of rock from the Rock for ourselves and Daniel bought a furry ape (monkey) with his holiday money. Once again, Derek and Joanne espied us on their way home for lunch and gave us a lift, which was pretty good timing on our part, especially since this is always by coincidence and not design.

After lunch, Betty was preparing for what she called a party to be held in the evening – I say party, but I think only two couples were invited. Alan and I were tired of walking, so we stayed in for the afternoon and did odd things, including reading on the balcony and letter writing. Daniel was intent on playing with Grandma, who was intent on making party food.

After tea (when Daniel asked for baked beans and then didn't eat any) Betty and Derek stepped up their preparations for the evening. Of course, astute Daniel realised something unusual was happening and naturally wouldn't settle down to sleep at all. He therefore ended up at the so-called party sitting with us, eating crisps, drinking water and looking exceptionally pleased with himself.

I was glad he was there to keep me company, to be honest, as Alan was talking more or less all evening to his parents' friends Mandy, Ron, Pearl and David. Joanne's friend Vince failed to turn up at all. Daniel finally gave in and fell asleep in my arms at about 22:00, but by the time we went to bed at midnight, Alan said his throat was sore. All the talking couldn't have helped...

Thursday 30th August

On waking, Alan said his throat was extremely sore, he was feeling sick and he was hot and aching all over. When we got up at 07:45, Betty rang the doctor's surgery and made him an appointment for 11:30.

After breakfast and the usual chores, we all left the flat at 10:30 and walked slowly through the Alameda Gardens to the surgery, which was right beside the Queensway Club. Alan was seen at 11:50, diagnosed with pharyngitis and prescribed penicillin and aspirin. His voice was extremely low and interesting.

We attempted to meet Derek at the Dockyard gates for a lift home, but missed him and had to catch the bus back. When it arrived, it was full up, but we were still allowed on and ended up like sardines in a tin, nearly out of the door. I had to hold Daniel on my hip with one hand and the rail with my other hand, it was the most uncomfortable journey of my life so far.

After lunch, poor Alan retired to the bedroom, so Daniel and I stayed in with Betty. The weather wasn't wonderful anyway, with heavy clouds, sudden sharp breezes and a very hot, humid atmosphere. Fortunately, we still have half of our holiday left, so I hope Alan is well for our long day trip to Tangier on Saturday.

A normal evening ensued. We played a TV game for a while, then Alan, Betty, Joanne and I played Scrabble, which I won! My wisdom tooth isn't sore any more, I'm very relieved it wisely stopped doing whatever it was trying to do.

Friday 31st August

Lingering heavy clouds made it quite dark this morning, rather like a rainy day in England without any actual rain. Alan said he was feeling much better, but I'd annoyingly woken in the night with a sore throat and earache. However, I felt reasonably OK, not nearly as ill as Alan had felt yesterday.

After a relaxing breakfast, the three of us took it easy strolling into Main Street, through Alameda Gardens at Daniel's insistence, since he seems to like sitting on the cannons there. To be fair, he fits on them very well:



Just the right size

We managed to buy a few more souvenirs and drew out £50 for our trip to Tangier tomorrow. After lunch, Alan went into the Dockyard with Derek, Daniel played with Grandma and I rested in between writing a few postcards.

After we'd eaten at around 17:00, the Levanter cleared and Alan asked Derek if he could drive him to a few places where he wanted to take photos. Derek agreed, so Daniel and I went too. Alan took his photos of a gun, a gate and part of the Moorish wall and we returned happily to the flat. Africa tomorrow!

Saturday 1st September

Our wake-up call came from Derek at 06:30, whereupon Daniel woke up while we were dressing and we all had breakfast at 07:00. Daniel was very good when Alan, Derek, Joanne and I left him with Betty, watching with her from the balcony while we waited for transport to take us to the ferry – except that it didn't come. It was so fortunate that someone Derek knew drove along on his way to work and gave us a lift at about 08:00. It was also fortunate that both Alan and I felt well after our brush with the rogue virus/infection.

We had to wait on the dock for the *Bland* travel agent, who had taken our passports when Derek had booked the trip. There was a query about Alan's passport because it still stated his profession as Radio Officer, but it was soon sorted out and we finally boarded the MV Mons Calpe – so named because the Rock of Gibraltar was one of the legendary Pillars of Hercules, known to the Romans as Mons Calpe. Where the other 'pillar' was sited has long been disputed, but may possibly have been in Morocco.

The four of us sat out on deck enjoying the fresh air for the whole journey, which lasted for almost two and a half hours. When we'd left, Gibraltar had been partially obscured by a dense black Levanter cloud and everywhere was very misty, but by the time we reached Tangier, the sun was shining brightly. We saw some dolphins just outside Gibraltar as the ship gently rolled, which reminded me of our three and a half months aboard the MV Glasgow Clipper. Having said that, I'm glad this was just a day trip on a ferry.

I was quite excited when we finally set foot on African soil at midday. Tangier is a city in northern Morocco on the North African coast, at the western entrance to the Strait of Gibraltar where the Mediterranean meets the Atlantic. Due to the influence of many civilisations and cultures, it has a very rich history that dates back to the 5th century BC, when it was a Berber and Phoenician town founded by Carthaginian colonists. Its name may be derived from the Berber goddess Tinjis and it remains an important city for Berbers (indigenous people of North Africa west of the Nile Valley).

Our unmissable guide Charlie met us – the famous Charlie we'd heard of from both our fathers, who had visited Tangier before. He was an amiable character of ample proportions, dressed in a white kaftan with a scarlet fez and he spoke with a very pleasing accent, although it was sometimes difficult to understand every word he said. When his tour group of the day had all gathered around, he took us through Customs and into a waiting coach to drive us to the Kasbah. I must confess I was fascinated en route to see lots of Muslim women dressed in burqas with only their eyes and noses showing.

I had a shock when I saw a body lying on the pavement with his head against the bottom of a tree trunk and his feet nearly in the road. I thought he was dead for one chilling moment, but then I noticed other bodies sprawled around on steps and on the ground. Were they like tramps in our country, or was it the done thing for men here to spread themselves around wherever they fancied?

The coach stopped at the bottom of a hill and we walked upwards, stopping at some gardens that were very pretty, but we were whisked around and didn't have chance to appreciate them properly. Charlie had previously put us on our guard about bag snatchers and warned us about men and boys who would try to sell us things, although we managed to buy some postcards for 10p each safely.

Our next stop was to see a snake charmer and his assistants, who amusingly started their 'enchanting' music as soon as they saw us coming. A few brave people went to have their photos taken with a snake around their neck, Joanne included. I was thinking about doing it myself, but it was time to move on.



Enchanting ... perhaps

We were led through the tumultuous Kasbah, past lots of small shops and streets filled with people and strange smells, until we reached the leather factory. Here we were instructed to bargain for anything we wanted to buy. I could no more have done that than have swum back to Gibraltar doing butterfly stroke, but fortunately Alan wasn't afflicted in the same way at all and bargained for a handbag. It was actually for me, although it suited him very well! He also bought a belt for himself for 50p (that turned out to be too long) and Joanne managed to bargain for a leather jacket from £70 down to a mere £36.

Upon leaving the factory, we were besieged by men and boys attempting to sell us camels (souvenir leather ones), bags, wallets, kaftans and heaven knows what else. To be honest, I'm really not sure, as I was too embarrassed to look closely for long. There were also a few boys begging, which I found particularly difficult to witness, especially as we were on our way to a restaurant for lunch.

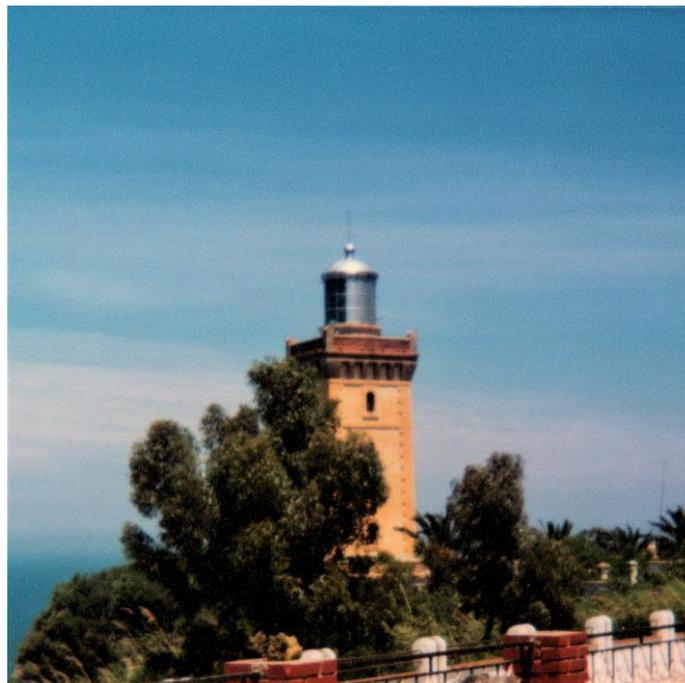
I must confess that I entered the restaurant with a few misgivings, as I have a reprehensible habit of being strangely suspicious of foreign food, but I'm pleased to say that I came out feeling much better. As we all filed in, some musicians were playing Moroccan music and continued to do this throughout the meal, creating a tasteful and subtly exotic atmosphere.

First of all, we were served with salad, kebabs and brown bread, which I thought was the main course, but then we were offered chicken with either chips or couscous. I chose chips, but tried some of Alan's couscous and found it tasted pleasantly of cinnamon and other spices. We were then given a choice of water melon or honey cakes with mint tea. We both chose the latter, which was lovely, as the mint tea was surprisingly refreshing and reviving. We were amazed to discover it was 15:00 by the time everyone had finished.

On leaving the restaurant, another group of men and boys bore down on us with trays of leather goods and souvenirs. They were very persistent and were still trying when everyone was sitting in the coach again. I was getting used to this sort of onslaught, but still didn't like it in the slightest.

We were then driven out of the city to Cap Spartel, where a rather attractive square lighthouse stood 1000 ft above sea level. This lighthouse had been built in 1864 by Sultan Mohammed III. Interestingly, Britain, France, Italy and Spain paid to maintain it until Moroccan independence in 1956.

Thankfully there was a convenient bar reasonably close to the lighthouse, where we were able to enjoy a most refreshing cold drink that helped to combat the heat a little. As we left, another bargaining session took place and Alan decided to buy another belt. However, he was given a different one to the one he'd chosen and it turned out to be much too long, but by the time he realised it was far too late. Curses ... but not really.



The attractive square lighthouse
(but a very poor photo)

Our next visit was to the camels. There were three of them and almost as soon as we stopped, people hurried off the coach to have a ride at 25p a time. It was an opportunity too good to miss, so I persuaded Alan to come out with me ostensibly to look at them, but then realised I'd left my purse in the coach with Derek, so had to run back to collect it, as Alan was already busy taking photos.

A slight kerfuffle with the cameras followed when Alan gave his to Joanne (who'd got out of the coach) and we gave my movie camera to Charlie to hold. He asked if we wanted him to take pictures, so we said yes and then proceeded to climb up onto the same camel with me in front of Alan, clutching onto the rope.

When the camel stood up, I felt as though I was falling and grabbed hold of Alan's arm as if my life depended on it. It may have done! The camel walked around in a circle first and then trotted for a short while. It was fun – but it was even funnier when the camel sat down again, first on its front legs and then with a bump onto its back legs. It was a very unusual experience...



Trying not to fall off, as Charlie (left) uses my movie camera

We were then driven to the Cave of Hercules above Atlantic Beach, where we were shown around by a Moroccan carrying a lamp. It was dark and eerie and if I'd understood what was being said, I know I would have found it fascinating.

Apparently, the caves had been used as dwelling places since Neolithic times, as archaeological excavations had revealed flints and human bones. For a long time, locals quarried stone from the caves and in the first half of the 20th century the caves were used as brothels (presumably until it was discovered that tourism was even more lucrative).

As we emerged, we were enthusiastically approached by a number of men and boys trying to sell us their wares, but it was time to leave for the ferry back to Gibraltar. I noticed several mosques on the way back to the dock – Charlie had told us the three main religions in Morocco are Islam, Judaism and European (presumably Roman Catholic). On arrival back at the dock there were even more men thrusting wallets, kaftans and what have you at us, but we expertly escaped them and boarded the waiting Mons Calpe at around 17:00.

The ferry was already quite full and we couldn't find a seat, so stood on deck to watch as we left. When the ship moved, it became windy, so we tried to find a seat in the dining room or bar, but to no avail. We finally found a place to perch looking out over the stern at other ships, the coastline and the setting sun.

We arrived in Gibraltar at 20:00, although by the time we returned to the flat, it was 22:00, due to a traffic jam in Main Street. We found Daniel asleep on the settee, as he hadn't let Grandma put on his night nappy or his nightclothes! She said he'd been very good apart from that and they had been out for a long walk. After a most welcome cup of tea, we were more than ready for bed after a very long, exciting day. I have now been to Africa and have ridden a camel 😊

Sunday 2nd September

It was clear this morning, but we were all too tired to go to the Mediterranean Steps as planned for a clear weekend day. Instead, Alan and I took Daniel for a short walk in an upwards direction to a reasonably scenic spot where we took photos, had a drink and then strolled back to the flat for a salad lunch.

In the afternoon, Joanne drove us to Eastern Beach, but it was quite windy and the sea was rough there, so we drove on to Catalan Bay, which has now been named "our beach" by Daniel. It was rough there too, but we made the best of it and enjoyed paddling our feet in the sea. Alan was told off by a policeman for going out too far. He was kneeling down at the time, but didn't like to tell the policeman, who was warning lots of people about the strong undercurrents.

After an ice cream, we drove back to the flat, where a fortifying roast beef meal awaited us. A relaxing evening followed, reading, writing and watching GBC TV.

Monday 3rd September

Another Levanter was hovering threateningly over the Rock. Daniel woke at 07:10 and I woke feeling tired and grumpy, but we left with Betty for Main Street at about 09:15 to watch the guards changing and the band on parade.



The Main Street parade

It started at 10:20 and we managed to find a good vantage point for taking photos. Daniel liked the band, but I found it very hot and claustrophobic standing still for so long in a crowd. It was a spectacle, but not my kind of thing.

We did some shopping, then met Derek on his way home for lunch. He had a letter for us from my parents, which cheered me up somewhat. Alan and I decided to take Daniel for a walk to Europa Point in the afternoon, where it was very windy but hot in the sun. We sat overlooking the sea to have a drink, before Alan thought it would be a good idea to take us to see the Hole In The Wall that he'd visited with Derek the previous Sunday.

Unfortunately, when we arrived at the place where we needed to ascend a hill to get there, I happened to notice a notice (as you do) saying unauthorised people were prohibited. Clearly Alan hadn't noticed the notice, as he and Daniel were already halfway up the hill. As I wondered whether to follow them or to call up to them, a policeman in a little office at the bottom of the hill nearby called them back. He wouldn't let us go up, which was peculiar as Alan and Derek had been there before. Alan is having a little trouble with the policemen here!

This slight contretemps meant we had to walk back the way we'd come instead of carrying on, so we were tired, hot and quite disgruntled when we eventually got back to the flat – only to find that Betty had gone out, so there was nothing to do but sit on the step and wait for her (only about ten minutes, thankfully).

At around 17:30 a curry was enjoyed by all, especially Daniel, who ate lots. Alan went to the library with Derek, while Betty and I did the dishes. Another usual evening in Gibraltar passed, except Alan fell asleep when he put Daniel to bed.

Tuesday 4th September

Our third and final week is underway, time seems to have flown. It didn't exactly fly last night, though, as I was kept awake with a persistently itchy toe, but at least we haven't been troubled too much by mosquitoes. It was a sunny morning even though a cloud was over the Rock. Betty, Alan and Daniel went for a morning foray to the butcher's, while I stayed in and did odd jobs.



Political graffiti

After lunch, Alan, Daniel and I walked to the Alameda Gardens for a game of miniature golf. Daniel definitely enjoyed himself, but the layout of some of the holes was a bit peculiar. From there, we walked up to the Moorish wall and around the back streets. The housing looked pretty grim to me and I wouldn't like to live in Gibraltar, although the graffiti was interesting (photo above).

We ended up in Main Street, where I bought my last few postcards and Alan finally found a belt that fitted him. I was feeling tired again and therefore was secretly relieved to meet Derek for a lift back to the flat, where we consumed some tasty sweet and sour pork for tea. Betty, Derek and Joanne then went out to see a film, *The 39 Steps*. I'd personally had enough of steps recently, so after Daniel had gone to bed, Alan and I went mad and relaxed by playing TV games – which was actually great fun!

Wednesday 5th September

We'd been hoping for a clear day to go to the top of the Rock, but a Levanter cloud was once again present – they do love Gibraltar at this time of year. Joanne had taken the day off work and Derek had lent us the car, so we were blissfully free to explore wherever we wanted without walking miles up and down in dusty heat. This was good news indeed.

Not such good news was first of all when Joanne drove us out to the Mole that was basically a stone wall stretching out into the sea like a kind of breakwater. I fully admit that it scared the living daylights out of me as she reversed to turn around with nothing to stop us careering over the edge.

The reason for this insanity was for Alan to take a photo of the Rock from a distance, but it was quite cloudy and I would have happily settled for a postcard instead. After my adrenaline had managed to subside, we did enjoy a pleasant and interesting drive around Gibraltar, seeing the different beaches and water catchments, as well as driving through the tunnels.

We went back to the flat for lunch. I was most impressed because Derek had walked to work in the morning, walked back for lunch and then walked back to work. The cloud looked as if it was clearing in the early afternoon, so Betty, Joanne and the three of us decided to go for the long-awaited cable car ride to the top of the Rock. The cost was £1.70 per adult and 85p for Daniel, but Betty was steadfast in her refusal to let us pay.

We rode straight to the top without stopping at the midway station, which was the Apes' Den. It was a gentle ride, but I was ever so slightly nervous and therefore glad when we reached the summit. We walked around, looking at the magnificent views and taking photos of both sides, before sitting down in the open air (or warm cloud) to drink 7-Up. Joanne kindly bought us a certificate each to say we'd been to the top of the Rock of Gibraltar.

Daniel became rather fidgety, so we caught the cable car down to the midway station, thinking he'd like to see the apes. He seemed rather underwhelmed and everyone became very hot and sweaty walking up the hill, so ten minutes later we were quite glad to catch the cable car down to the bottom once again. On arrival back at the flat, several of us washed our feet!



A gentle ride, but quite high up...

Daniel went to bed early, so Betty, Joanne, Alan and I left him with babysitter Derek and escaped to The Dolphin Bar at Camp Bay, where we had a drink, calamari and pinchitos. It was so pleasant sitting and looking out over the sea at fishing boats and the distant lights of Spain. We walked along the shore for a while and the evening air was the coolest I'd yet experienced – simply lovely.

Thursday 6th September

It was a clear morning, so a good day for a picnic. Therefore, after breakfast and preparing food, we set out at 10:00 and walked up the Rock via the military road. The heat was intense and we stopped several times for a rest and a drink.

On leaving the military area, we walked along a straight road directly above the Apes' Den, where there were rusty rings that soldiers used during sieges to haul their cannons up the Rock. Alan was fascinated by them, while Daniel has been fascinated with cannons all the time we've been here:



Another cannon!

At midday we stopped in the only shady place we could find, which happened to be on top of a water hole cover. It was lovely sitting in the open air to eat sandwiches, hearing the sounds of the town far below and the cicadas in the foliage nearby. Some large ants came along and started to clear up our crumbs, so we left them to it and carried on along the road.

We quite soon arrived at Princess Caroline's Battery and looked out once again over the landing strip. It seemed even hotter than before and was very hazy – which may have contributed to my failed attempt at taking a movie of the plane that came in to land, as I didn't spot it until it was almost down. Foiled again!



The runway into the sea

We left there and started to walk down to the town through the narrow streets in search of an ice cream. A car came careering down the road behind us, so we naturally stepped into the roadside gutter, but it was very sandy and I slipped and fell onto my left leg, grazing it in two places.

I didn't feel anything much at the time and we carried on walking, but then it started to sting and when we stopped to look in a shop window, I felt faint. It was fortunate there was a step for me to sit on! I sipped some water that we had with us, but couldn't stand up for a long time. Daniel kept saying, "I want an ice cream NOW!" The people in the shop opposite were looking at me out of the shop window, I found it quite distressing and embarrassing.

Alan was about to call for a taxi when my head fortunately cleared and I started to feel much better, so I gingerly stood up and set off, glad to get away from the people in the shop window. Everything seemed dazzlingly bright, it was a very odd sensation. I had to sit down once more for a couple of minutes, but then Alan found some ice cream for Daniel at last. I borrowed Alan's sunglasses and we set off up the hill once again. I soon felt normal and we thankfully reached the sanctuary of Phillimore House, where I gratefully had a shower and Alan doctored my leg – ouch!

We stayed in for the rest of the day, deciding against going out to see the evening lights as planned because it was cloudy. A slightly peculiar day.

Friday 7th September

It was sunny this morning, so Alan and I set off with high hopes to take our elusive movie of a plane landing, as Derek had said there was one due between 11:30 and 12:15. We left Daniel with Betty, who took him into Main Street and bought him a fire engine (a toy one, that is – and very smart too).

Meanwhile, Alan and I arrived at the perfect place for a spot of filming, outside the Upper Galleries where we could see the whole runway. All we had to do then was wait for the plane – so we waited – and waited – and waited. By 13:30 the plane still hadn't arrived, large clouds had rolled in and the wind had sprung up. To say we were a little cold, tired and dispirited was an understatement. There seemed nothing for it but to return to the flat and by the time we arrived there, we were sweltering again. Gibraltar has some peculiar weather...

We stayed in for the rest of the day, partly because my foot was hurting where I'd fallen on it. Betty, Derek and Joanne went to see a film at the Queensway Club in the evening, but Alan and I gave it a miss because it had been so stuffy there last time. Good night!

PS: The plane we never saw landing was delayed because of fog in the UK and didn't arrive until 15:30. It would have been a long wait...

Saturday 8th September

Daniel woke at 07:10 this morning, when it felt decidedly muggy on what was my final day of being 26. Derek had to go into the Dockyard at 08:00, but he returned at just gone 10:00 and kindly drove us all into Main Street, where we split up to pursue our individual shopping activities.



Two tourists by a Victorian (VR) postbox

We returned to the flat for lunch, after which Alan, Joanne and I prepared for the lower caves expedition that Derek had booked for us, by donning plimsolls and oldish clothes. Joanne lent me a pair of long (very long) socks to wear with my shorts. It was an unusual sight and as the appointed time of 14:30 came closer, I began to wonder just what I'd let myself in for.

On arrival at St Michael's Cave, Derek introduced us to the guide who would be taking eight of us down and we had to sign a waiver form in case of accident. This was a little alarming, but I managed to keep my cool, even when we were taken through the emergency drill, such as where to stand outside to let the ambulance in, etc. If the guide himself was injured and/or unconscious, we had to follow the orange leads of the lights until we came out.

This tended to drain my already waning confidence somewhat, but we left Derek (who had previously been down to the lower caves) waiting safely outside while we walked gamely down the path to the cave entrance. Joanne and I were the only females in the group and it was clear to see that two of the men had been drinking. Alan kept asking me if I was OK as if I might not be. I wasn't at all sure, to be honest, but I so didn't want to let the side down.

The guide said that if anyone felt they couldn't go on while we were down in the caves, he would have to bring us all back, as he wasn't allowed to leave anyone alone. No pressure there, then. He phoned the top cave man (though not in the troglodyte sense) to let him know we were on our way down, so that if we weren't back in so many hours, the alarm would be raised. At this point, my heart had started to beat a little wildly.

The air was cold as we entered and some men changed into overalls. The guide explained that the lower caves were in their original state (though fully lit) and the tour would take about three hours, with some scrambling and minor climbing with ropes. We started to descend and the minor climbing with ropes began right away. "Keep your feet apart and lean right back, or else you'll slip," said the guide, as we prepared mentally for our individual descent. Joanne went first, followed by me, then Alan and the rest of the group, with a few slips and slides.

There were beautiful rock formations all around that must have taken thousands upon thousands of years to form. We had to crawl through one part before reaching one of the worst obstacles, a drop of 30 feet in the shape of a boxing ring that we had to cross by hanging on to ropes. "The first First Aid box is here," said the guide, as we prepared to meet our doom.

He somehow managed to stand behind us on the other ledge (although I can't quite remember how, through the haze of dread I was feeling) as we all proceeded around the ring of horror. When it was my turn, I managed to go ahead and do it without engaging my fearful mind. It was hard on the wrists and arms, but I had a sudden flashback to when I was 11 in the school gym and good enough at rope climbing for the teacher to ask me to demonstrate to the rest of the class. Who would have thought I'd ever need that strange skill again!

After we'd all navigated it safely, the guide confided that he was always glad when he'd got the group through the boxing ring, as people who were going to panic would have panicked there. I'm so glad I managed not to panic...

We carried gaily on, up and down, through different caves, along ledges, up and down ropes, with the guide pointing out various structures and telling us anecdotes about certain discoveries and previous tour groups. At some places it was easiest to slide down on our bottoms. Eventually we came to the first lake, surrounded by rimstone, which is formed by a type of scum on the surface of the water. "You'll be walking on rimstone later on," said our trusty guide, smiling a little enigmatically. "It's very hard."

I didn't have time to ponder long on whether he was referring to strength or difficulty, as he began showing us straw stalactites that are very thin, straight, fragile and hollow, formed by drips of water with a hole in the middle. Most stalactites start off as straw stalactites, but sometimes the straw stalactites break off and fall. The guide said we could take any pieces we saw on the floor, although they would be hard to find – but Alan managed to find a couple!

The guide continued to ply us with interesting information, which I have to say added to the whole experience. The caves had been completely sterile when discovered, but there are now some algae type growths from bacteria left behind by visitors over the years. There are ten different types of formations in the lower caves and the only other caves with as many are in Russia. The next contender is France, with only five formations. However, we couldn't see all ten formations, as they were in places too difficult for us to reach.

We came to another lake and stood admiring it, until the guide informed us that we had to walk around the edge of it on rimstone. "But the rimstone's under water!" blurted out someone incredulously. "Only an inch or two," replied the guide, as we prepared ourselves by taking off our shoes and socks. The lake was about four feet deep in some places and fifty feet at its deepest.

My heart had sunk (to at least fifty feet) but I tried not to think about anything, as there was no turning back. I simply followed the person in front, leaning in towards the rock wall and catching hold of it as much as possible. The rimstone in places was only the width of my foot, if that. We also had to walk across two planks of wood in the middle of the water. I did not enjoy the lake experience!

We soon came to the end of the cave system, which meant one thing, that we'd have to go back again the same way. The last cave was so small that the guide could only show it to us in twos and threes. It basically contained a small pool and some rocks in the perfect shape of a cross, which seemed quite bizarre.

Although this small cave was undeniably special in its own way, one of the older men (from the pair who had unwisely been drinking beforehand) had been very taken with the beauty of one of the bigger caves, saying it reminded him of a cathedral and that humans could never recreate the beauty of nature. It may have been the drink talking, but it was an excellent point.

However, his friend was definitely a bit of a twit and prone to slipping as we slowly began our return. He kept making the rest of us laugh with his bumps, slips and expletives, but whether it was from humour or hysteria, I'm not quite sure. Maybe cave mentality was beginning to take over, because the rest of us were sniggering behind his back, poor man. Regardless, it was time to start the return journey, which was uneventful in that we had done it all before.

I was amazed to learn that from one end of the cave to the other in a straight line is only 250 yards, as it had seemed like miles. I found the worst part back to daylight and life as we knew it was climbing up the ropes I had managed to climb down fairly easily near the start. My wrists had become so weak from all the effort already expended that they felt as if they would give out. At one point, when I was scared of losing it, I was being pushed ignominiously up the behind by Alan, while the guide was waiting at the top with outstretched arms to haul me up. I'm glad I somehow made it, as it would have been disastrous to let go!

We finally emerged from the depths soon after 17:00, exhausted but very glad to have seen such inspiring sights – and to have survived as a bonus. When we'd arrived at Gibraltar for this holiday, I'd had no idea I would be having such a speleological experience by going on what was basically a caving expedition.

Derek was there to meet us and drove us back to the flat, where we had something to eat and then spent the evening recovering. When I was in bed, I kept thinking I was hanging from ropes above great cavernous drops...

Sunday 9th September

I awoke on my 27th birthday with aching limbs, which was no surprise. Daniel climbed into bed with us and after Alan reluctantly managed to wake up, I opened my presents with Daniel's somewhat insistent help! Breakfast was quite late at about 09:00, after which Derek asked if we would like to go up the Mediterranean Steps, as it would be less hot in the morning. It would be our last chance, so we girded our weary bodies in preparation of wearying them further.

Derek drove Alan and me to the place where the steps began and the three of us started climbing upwards. Some of it was really hard going, with huge steps or stony paths that weren't wide enough for comfort. I really wished my legs weren't already protesting from the day before and it was also uncomfortably hot already. We sat down on some (hot) steps and drank orange squash that deliciously eased the discomfort of our sweating brows and thumping hearts – well, mine was thumping, anyway.

We carried on, stopping at a few places to look at the view below and some gun emplacements used during the war. Eventually we reached the clouds and then the top of the Rock, which to my mind is no small feat. There were aeriels for the communication station there, although entry was naturally prohibited.

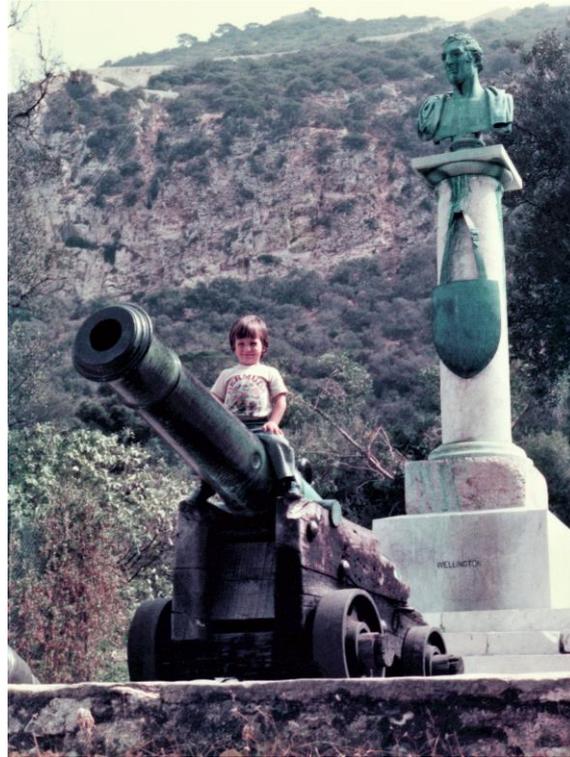
After gazing below and all around, we set off on what was supposed to be an easier route back, but it was still a strain to go down, as my leg muscles were aching quite horribly – but all in a good cause? Alan took a few photos along the way (all of which have deteriorated hopelessly) and we arrived back at the car by noon, with the day's exercise over as far as I was concerned.

After a blissful washing of some very hot, dusty feet (mine) and a light lunch, I was forced to set about packing the suitcases. Later in the afternoon, Derek's boss and his wife, Cyril and Valerie, arrived and stayed for the rest of the day. Daniel was showing off somewhat, but he enjoyed himself. After the guests left, we went to bed for our last full night's sleep here. I can hardly believe the end is nigh and have begun to dread the flight home.

Monday 10th September

Our last breakfast in Gibraltar, as tomorrow's will be in the plane. Our time here seems to have gone really quickly, despite being three weeks. Joanne had taken the day off work (Derek had very amenable walked into the Dockyard again) and drove us into Main Street, parking in the Alameda Gardens' car park.

We enjoyed a final little stroll around Alameda Gardens, which had played quite a large part in our total enjoyment of Gibraltar. I knew I would miss passing by the pepper bush and seeing all the Mediterranean planting. Daniel, of course, was duty bound to have a final sit astride a cannon:



A final fling with a rather large cannon

After that we walked around Main Street and finalised our last-minute shopping, which included a filter for Alan's camera and some Scholl sandals for me, before returning to Phillimore House for some lunch. Everything had a 'last' feel to it.

In the afternoon, Betty accompanied us to Camp Bay for a last session on the beach. It was a burning hot day and when Joanne bought us an ice lolly each, they melted away in front of our eyes. After an hour or so we'd frazzled enough and decided to have a goodbye tour around the Rock. Alan drove this time, although he said he wouldn't like to drive all the time in Gibraltar.

It was then time to return for tea and our last evening, which we spent watching some television. At 21:30 we went to bed, but I couldn't sleep...

Tuesday 11th September

Betty stayed up all night until 02:00, when she woke us (except I was already awake). Daniel was good, even quite chirpy as Derek drove us to the airport. It was stuffy and full of people inside the building, as the plane due to leave before us had been delayed until 05:30 due to fog at Gatwick. Gloom descended.

Alan checked in our cases and we went outside to wait in the cooler air. Daniel became restless and kept wanting to go for a walk to look at the aeroplanes, especially the one nicknamed *Yogi Bear*. A young girl sitting next to us went away twice to be sick, poor soul. At about 03:30, the Dan-Air 727 that we would be flying home in arrived from Gatwick and I watched the new arrivals with their jackets and macs, thinking how they wouldn't need to be wearing them for long!

After another hour or so of waiting and taking Daniel to look at the planes, including the one we would be flying in, the loudspeaker called our flight. It was 04:45 when we said goodbye to Betty and Derek, went through Customs and boarded the plane. I was wondering why we were flying before the plane that had been due to leave before us, but was waiting until 05:30 because of the fog? Alan said it was probably because our plane had more sophisticated equipment, but I couldn't help wondering.

We took off at 05:00 – goodbye Gibraltar! Daniel was very good and fell asleep soon after take-off. I wished I could do the same, although I think I felt slightly less nervous than the trip out. I still wasn't keen on eating, though, and kept looking at my watch every five minutes. We saw the dawn from the air, which was an inspiring sight, although I'd still rather see it from terra firma.

Daniel woke at about 07:00 as we slowly began our descent, drank his breakfast orange and tasted the roll that we'd kept for him. Then at 07:25 we touched down – safe at last! Stepping off the plane, the change in temperature from Gibraltar was very noticeable and decidedly chilly.

Everything went smoothly at the airport, although it felt quite strange as we were driven to the car park and reunited with the caravanette. It started fairly easily and then the long drive home began, with Daniel sleeping on and off all the time. Even though we stopped for coffee and lunch, the last part of the journey was so tedious – Alan was singing and whistling to keep himself awake.

Finally at 15:45, we drew up outside our home, which felt undeniably good. We'd enjoyed a wonderful time on an extraordinary rocky peninsula at the entrance to the Mediterranean that has historically been home to so many people – Neanderthal, Classical, Moorish, Spanish and British.

I hadn't really known what to expect from Gibraltar, but was delighted at the many different experiences it gave us, including the memorable foray into Northern Africa. Although I was glad to be home, I knew I'd remember this holiday as three happy weeks of my life.

NB: The photos from this holiday posed quite a problem and actually come from different sources/cameras, including some slides of Alan's that have deteriorated rather badly over the intervening 32 years.

