



**OVER THE BRINK  
AND BACK**

**PETER ROWLANDS**

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and Back*

## *Over the Brink and Back*

An inspiring tale of a remarkable recovery from a hugely challenging, life-threatening accident.

By Peter Rowlands

With contributions by:

Val Rowlands (Mum)

Anna (sister)

Andy (friend's father)

Rachel (physiotherapist)

## *Dedication*

I hope this piece serves as a reminder to all that we are stronger, more courageous and resilient when we are part of a family. I dedicate these words to my family.

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## *Introduction*

Many of us who participate in adventure sports have wondered: *“What if the worst really happened? What if everything I have held so dear were to be taken away in the blink of an eye: my way of living, my job, my social life ... everything?!”*

## *Photographic Acknowledgements*

Cover – Morning clouds, Switzerland	Peter Rowlands
Rock climbing – Arapiles, Australia	Martin Doyle
Sea cliff climbing Llithfaen, North Wales	David Noddings
Climbing at the depot, Manchester	Paul Knowles
Skiing on my day off a week before the accident, Austria	Henry Methold
The Chardonnet Couloir, Haute Route	David Hollinger
On the Tournier Spur, Les Droites	James Thacker
A spectacular ride to safety	James Thacker
My turn	James Thacker
Deposited on the roof of the Argentière hut	James Thacker
Teaching snow science	Dave Evans
My van, the Brazilian – Saas Grund	John Jones
A typical day at work – the summit ridge of Weissmies	Peter Rowlands
A huge avalanche in the Tyrol – Scotty's tracks are just above where the slab failed	Peter Rowlands
Last of the daylight on the Brittle Ledges – Eiger, 1938 route	Stu MacDonald
A brutal white out – The Hardangervidda, Norway	Peter Rowlands
The Hinterstoisser Traverse – Eiger, 1938 route	Stu MacDonald
Ice climbing in Rjukan, Norway	Mark Skeleton
The first bivouac on the Peuterey Integral	Guy Buckingham
April 2013, in intensive care	Bernard Rowlands
Nine years later, cycling through Switzerland	Dominic Tinner
Nine years after the accident, cycling in the Écrins, France	Andy Turner

## *About the Author*

Peter Rowlands lived a life packed full of adventure. As a climber, mountaineer, skier, surfer and kayaker he constantly drove himself to the limit and lived life to the full. Pete combined his passion for mountaineering with his career, and in 2010 qualified as a professional (IFMGA) Mountain Guide.

In 2013 he was caught in an avalanche which swept him over a cliff. Despite falling 140 metres and suffering serious brain injuries he survived. His prognosis was that in time he might be able to communicate by blinking.

Nine years later he has made a remarkable recovery and though sheer determination recovered his fitness levels. Pete does have speech problems and an odd gait but he has gone on to find new challenges. He has recently cycled the equivalent distance to once around the equator and continues to live life to the full.

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## April 2013 Austria

Kühtai – I always love being in Kühtai. Between December and April, it became my home from home. Sitting high above the Inn Valley and the city of Innsbruck, Kühtai nestles in a col overlooking the Tyrol region of the European Alps. It was my own little corner of paradise. In the village centre, bars, clubs and restaurants spill out, contributing to the alpine ambience. The tranquillity of the high Alps prevails, yet metres away, bright neon meets the jagged horizon.

According to friends and colleagues (it is highly unlikely that I'll ever recall this) I was, as per usual, heading to the Dortmunder Hütte, a roadside refuge owned by the Austrian Alpine Club. Its accommodation is basic but its proximity to great ski mountaineering more than compensates. I absolutely loved it there. We trenched a meal, washed it down with a full-bodied red and retired for an early night.

The next day saw us making our way up the Niedertal Valley to the Martin Bush Hut. In the clear, alpine morning, the group made good progress. Suddenly, above us, we heard a sharp report, like the crack of an explod-

ing artillery shell. A huge wall of heavy, wet snow, approximately one hundred metres across, weighing over a thousand tonnes and capable of demolishing a large house, accelerated down the slope towards us. I had just enough time to shout a warning to my companions before the avalanche engulfed me and carried me over the edge of a cliff ...



Rock climbing – Arapiles, Australia

Sea cliff climbing Llithfaen, North Wales



Climbing at the depot, Manchester





Skiing on my day off a week before the accident, Austria  
The Chardonnet Couloir, Haute Route



On the Tournier Spur, Les Droites  
My turn



A spectacular ride to safety  
Deposited on the roof of the Argentière hut





Teaching snow science  
My van, the Brazilian – Saas Grund



A typical day at work – the summit ridge of Weissmies  
A huge avalanche in the Tyrol – Scotty's tracks are just above where the slab failed





Last of the daylight on the Brittle Ledges – Eiger, 1938 route  
A brutal white out – The Hardangervidda, Norway



The Hinterstoisser Traverse – Eiger, 1938 route  
Ice climbing in Rjukan, Norway

The first bivouac on the Peuterey Integral





April 2013, in intensive care



Nine years later, cycling through Switzerland



Nine years after the accident, cycling in the Écrins, France

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