Ireland in 1830, and the senior Ordnance Survey man in the field was having a hard time of it. Top O'Graphical had problems with his men, equipment and the weather, which was so wet, tipping down without stop. At intervals he thought that the men were up to something and plotting against him. He had caught some of them hachuring a plot to steal equipment from the store, casing the joint, and ready to half-inch anything they could get their hands on. But to his great relief, they could not fathom out how to break in, steal the surveying equipment and sell it.

One day, all was to change. Topo, as he was known, returned to base having heard a local story about a rare map drawn by William Shakespeare being hidden in a cave beyond the botanic garden of the castle, way up the mountain above the col, by the summit. The only problem being that Mount Joy was protected by a beastly and ferocious Phoenix. Topo wanted the map and began to assemble a team of men to help him get it.

He saw sapper Kell from Killarney working in the yard. ‘What, man, still at it?’ Kell was bored of ordnance moving. Constantly humping shells here and there, he had recently been doing it on a scale not seen before. He would be useful for his strength. Then the regimental cook, who being a mountainmaster could spot heights which were unsafe, and could traverse the area better than anyone. As a pathfinder he was a legend. ‘Hoy, you over there’, shouted Topo to a man who was well wrapped in both a jersey and guernsey, but had nothing on his head and was atlas. ‘Hachure, hachure’, said the man Hammond. ‘Bless you, bless you’ replied Topo who did not catch the cold. ‘Come with me, there is work to be done.’

Stan Ford, the final recruit, was very popular, one-in-a-million they said. He did everything on a large scale, due perhaps to his county origin, rather than a restricted townland upbringing. At home, he had roamed extensively, frequently travelling the London Road to Southampton and Portsmouth town, plans of which he carried in his head, yet wanted to see more. During the Battle of the Scales, he had visited Burns’ country to see burnt Sienna after the great fire. So, once the party was assembled, Topo and Stan Ford, along with Cook, Hammond and Kell, started preparations for a hike to undertake a provisional reconnoitre of the cave. On such a dangerous mountain there was no latitude for error. Could a hiker cover the distance easily, a group of hikers even? Yes, if meticulous route planning commenced at once, with possible routes plotted and re-plotted, drawn as a neat line, sometimes with revision, nay continuous revision was needed to get round any projection obstructing the path. A final route was agreed and Stan Ford’s résumé of the route was written up in a descriptive manual for the group, a book of reference, in case of difficulties.

The castle had been built between 1254 and 1260, with the completion date 10.5.60 above the door. It was owned by Sir Veyor, who had personally drawn the plans for the adjoining botanic gardens. These had been ignored by Will, the wizened head gardner of unknown ancestry, who was thought to be an ancient
Britain from Neolithic Wessex, born long ago, some say in the dark ages, but more probably from southern Britain in the iron age, a Britain before the Norman conquest in fact.

Will had by-passed plans drawn by Sir Veyor, preferring his own tried and trusted methods and processes to achieve good results. His gardening management style was a direct, or general laissez faire approach. To start with, the whole area had needed a good overhaul, and we find that after an initial levelling with a bright yellow earth-moving JCT, Will is satisfied that the ex-moor is laid out to the great design, with no lines of initial levelling showing. However, his assistant, who never ate, as levelling staves off hunger, was almost illiterate, poor at scribing and could not copy right; thus he always got the same things wrong, but the old gardener invariably spotted the systematic error, which he corrected. On such hilly ground, the gardens were wonderful, except that dead olm disease had struck the trees along the western front, with a second series along the east also in decline. However, the major design involved a colourful compass rose in the centre, with a decorative floral border, composed of clumps of flowers, punctuated alternately by large trees, of which, a five foot May bush and a deciduous ten foot Bilby tower above the rest. ‘Perfect as they are and as they ought to be’ thought all who saw them. Heading east towards Lands End would mean sea level, and a walk along the shore, de la beche, after a pleasant meander down through Crab wood, a relatively new forest, always in full sunlight, with no hill shading the vegetation; a lovely withy combe, created by the agents of erosion, being the main attraction.

Sir Veyor looked round from close to the edge of the cliff. He had been looking out across the dunes, where ‘sand be plentiful’, watching spring rice being planted in lagoons, just above the high tide water mark, by men who sang as they worked ‘Oh, we do like to be beside the deeside....’. Looking further along the coast, Sir Veyor might have seen jolly Fisher Unwin, the old jack tar, in his waterproofs, only recently returned to Port Lock after traversing the seven seas, with the seventh being the most remarkable in the series. When he returned and saw the vessels in the sound, ranging from dinghies to frigates, he was pleased to be home, and to celebrate took a swig of Old Sarum, a spirit level in strength with Azimuth or Pernod. To enter port in his yacht he had to look at the tide, gauge the depth of water and take all the physical features of the harbour into account.

Once ashore, he went to his favourite tavern where the bouncer, a nasty extrusion if ever there was one, looked as if he had been on a bender the previous evening. This door king had all the conventional signs and manoeuvres of a crook. His primary job was to control customers of all descriptions, large small and medium. In the Gordon and Loch Ness, there was a large bar, room enough for most gatherings and small compensation bars for those unable to get into the main room. At present, there was a bit of commotion as the French cartographer Theo de Lite, wanted someone to direct a General to tell him where Susi and the other girls, mostly Norfolk broads, were. These girls were very physical, with frequently sketched contours, and were always the litho the survey
party. Theo wanted to make the greatest impression, rather than let his friend Newlyn datum. The frenchman was very dapper, in later years he would have been a Mod, and had recently written a memoir, very small scale, about his experiences with fellow travellers in the Holy Land, where he undertook a survey of Jerusalem and Sinai. These memories were forever on his mind, as if engraved in stone; an advance edition of the memoir had already been distributed for reviews.

Within the castle, the guests included Sir Pell David, who had played county series cricket for Hampshire. All were relaxing before a fine fire in the airy, yet cosy drawing room in the tower. Roger was tinkling the piano keys, and playing anything from Elgar's magnetic variations to the new popular zincoplated dance tunes, keeping a neat base line. 'Hell, yer can get a good tune out of that thing' said Sir Pell. Just then, Henry the butler entered with a message for another guest, Sir William Roy, (yes, Will Roy was here), 'Can't you see Will playing draughts, man?' roared Sir Pell, dismissing Henry, tipping him a pound. Sat at a plane table, the game was played for money, with the bets dublin constantly, Will against the rest, and constantly trying to cheat em.

On approaching the castle grounds Topo's party crossed a fine green field, surveying all around them, noting especially the botanic gardens queue waiting to get in, and headed up the mountain to the col, rain pouring down, but better than yesterday when it had snowd on them. At the col, they found a near circular cave entrance, which from the sheep droppings, they decided was not a grotto or temple, more a rams den on several levels. They decided to undertake an interior survey, starting at the top, as in winter bottom levels could be flooded. The cave was dissected by a long wooden bench, marks on the floor, like parallel lines, showing where it had been dragged around. Carved on it were hundreds of personal and place names, some needing a Gaelic glossary to foyle any attempt at obfuscation. Just then, a tiny creature scuttled in, having been outside in the field, sketching celtic earthworks, long barrows and other archaeology in the field. Obviously the guardian of the cave, it was not a Phoenix, but a little six-inch minofag, who guessed the reason for the visit, and ordering the party to one side, had 'em bossed about in no time. 'To see the treasure, you must pay a registration toll worth £1' it said in a flash, spotting an opportunity. 'But I will not help you find it'. Having paid, a dim light was turned on, illuminating the place's old series of alcoves. Immediately, Topo's dog headed off. As an experienced explorer and sniffer dog, would Trig point to the correct alcove? He stopped at the fifth, which contained a brown paper and string packet with a parcel number on it. Unwrapping it, they found three large pieces of paper folded and cloth backed. Topo felt 'em and found them to be in poor condition, damp and soft like old Crawford crackers. Expectations were still high, and nothing could eclipse the excitement, but unfolding the third large sheet, confirmed that all were blank. The story was a hoax, another Shakespearian mudge ado about northing.