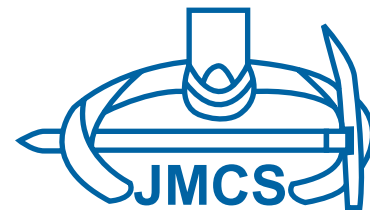


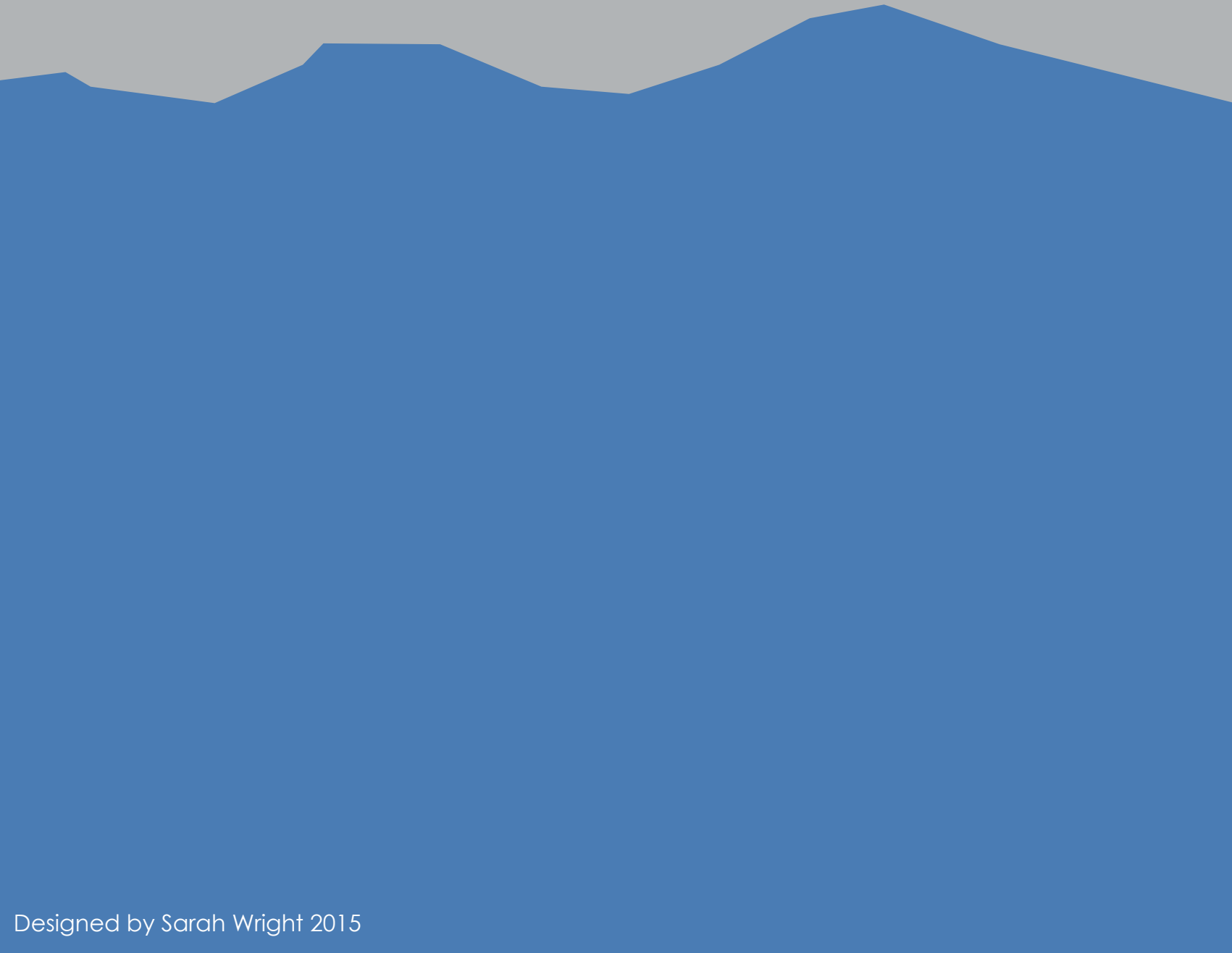
JMCS

Winter Newsletter **2015**



2015

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Secretary's Introduction



Welcome to the Edinburgh JMCS Annual Newsletter 2015.

We have a bumper crop of articles this year, so I will not detain you long. I just want to say thanks to all the authors and a special thank you to Sarah Wright, who once again has worked her editorial and presentational magic in the production process. Enjoy!

David Small, Secretary.

The Alps, August 2015

Bruce Macrosson

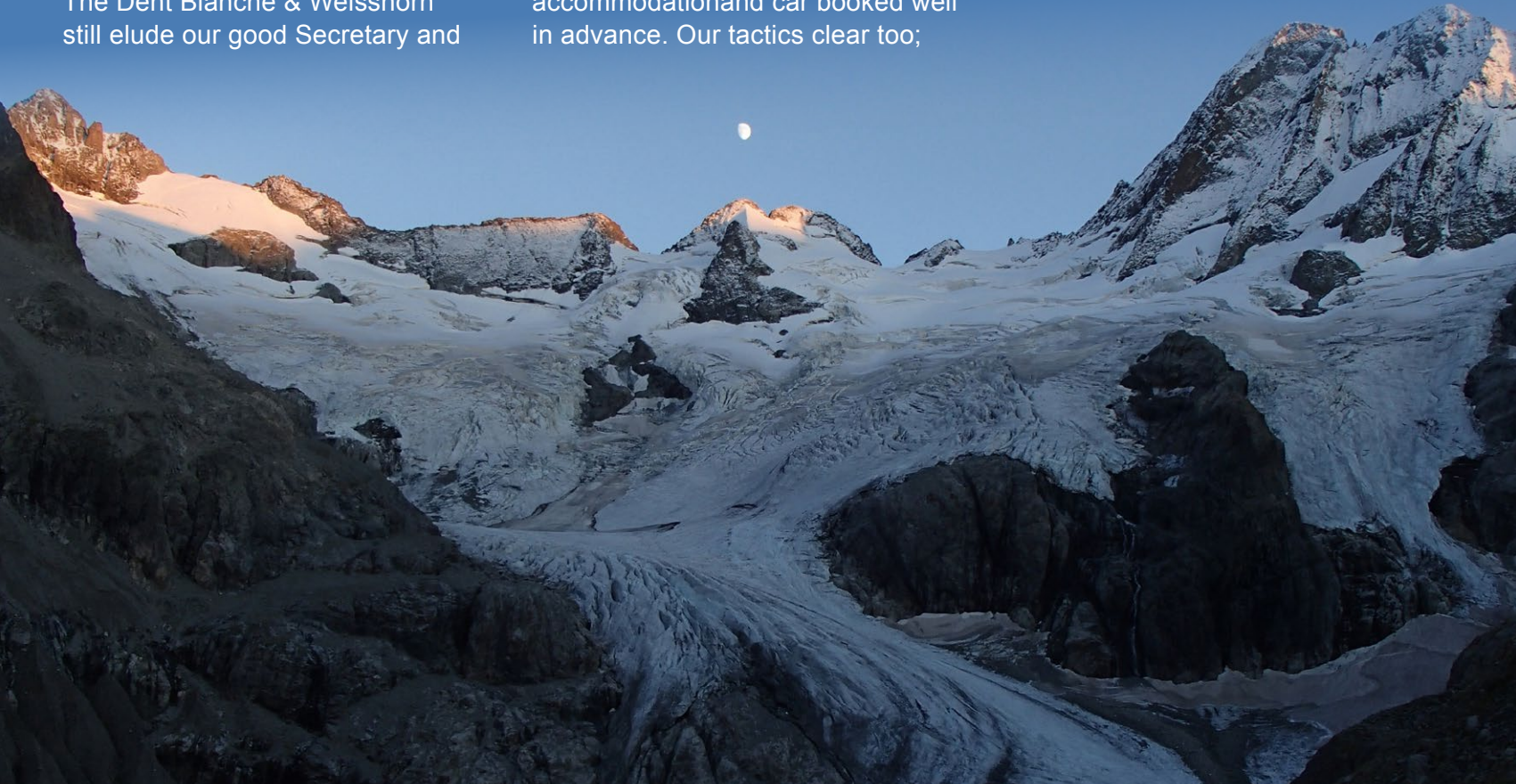
I had absorbed in awe Ueli Steck's mantra for the swift and clean dispatch of Swiss Giants at last year's Edinburgh Mountain Film Festival. His message seemed simple; Swiss efficiency, clarity of thought and brutal training.

The Dent Blanche & Weisshorn still elude our good Secretary and

myself, so being large, intimidating Swiss giants and in Herr Steck's very back garden who was I to ignore the advice of one who could sprint up the North face of the Eiger in 4 hrs .

We were efficient; our schedule carefully detailed and drafted, accommodation and car booked well in advance. Our tactics clear too;

up high fast, maximise time on AD alpine mixed ridges with a day of rest before the main event. Plenty of brutal bashing up and down of local Munros with some rock climbing mixed in as well. I'm sure the Swiss Machine would have approved.





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The deep fresh snow, continuing cold temperatures and unsettled weather, had scotched any realistic prospect of us getting up our dream peaks over the next few days.

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Our thinking was clear too. High peaks need acclimatisation and working lives don't leave much time so our intention was clear, get up high fast. Off plane, into Switzerland, up to mountain hut and up our first Alp on waking. It was all so neat and simple on paper. Indeed I was rather proud of our plan !

In a state of high excitement, day one saw team MacSmall hurtling down the Rhone Valley in our hire-car before trudging up to the Moiry

hut in a somewhat Scottish cold misty drizzle. We arrived at an almost empty hut wet and brewed tea outside in the by now gently falling snow. A friendly Scottish guide friend smiled sympathetically but knowingly at our plans. I lay awake that night as the reality of our situation sunk and pondered our next move. We woke to deep snow and dank Scottish murk.

The deep fresh snow, continuing cold temperatures and unsettled weather, had scotched any realistic prospect



of us getting up our dream peaks over the next few days. But fear not, we had another carefully scheduled plan in reserve. I unfolded Plan B and away we went.

We left our Swiss hut in thick mist and snow, slithered back down to our car before David put in a determined 5 hour bout of driving across Europe before we finally stopped in a hot and sunny Ecrins National Park. Crampons and axes were swapped for rock boots and cams, followed a sweaty 3 hour walk up to the Dibona hut. Wee Bruce felt distinctly smug that sunny evening as he munched his baguette underneath the looming spire of angular granite that is the Aiguille Dibona.

It most certainly had been a day of contrasts (and hard work!).

The next day was a delight. Alpine rock climbing at its best. Seven pitches of perfect bolted 5'ish granite up onto the Clochetons Gunneng Aiguille followed by straightforward but still most enjoyable climbing up onto the Aiguille Dibona.

For all those that love long alpine granite rock routes free of glacial hassles I could not recommend the place highly enough.

More rock climbed above the hut the next morning before walking down to the car and off to La Berarde with Les Bans and its glacier standing

shining alluringly in the sun.

La meteo unfortunately appeared to have ignored our carefully drafted schedule. Perhaps we should have written it in French? Sunshine and showers, rain, storm and a drop in temperature were promised. But this could not be ! We were in Les Ecrins, the Sunshine Alps, the place one runs to when things turn bad up North.

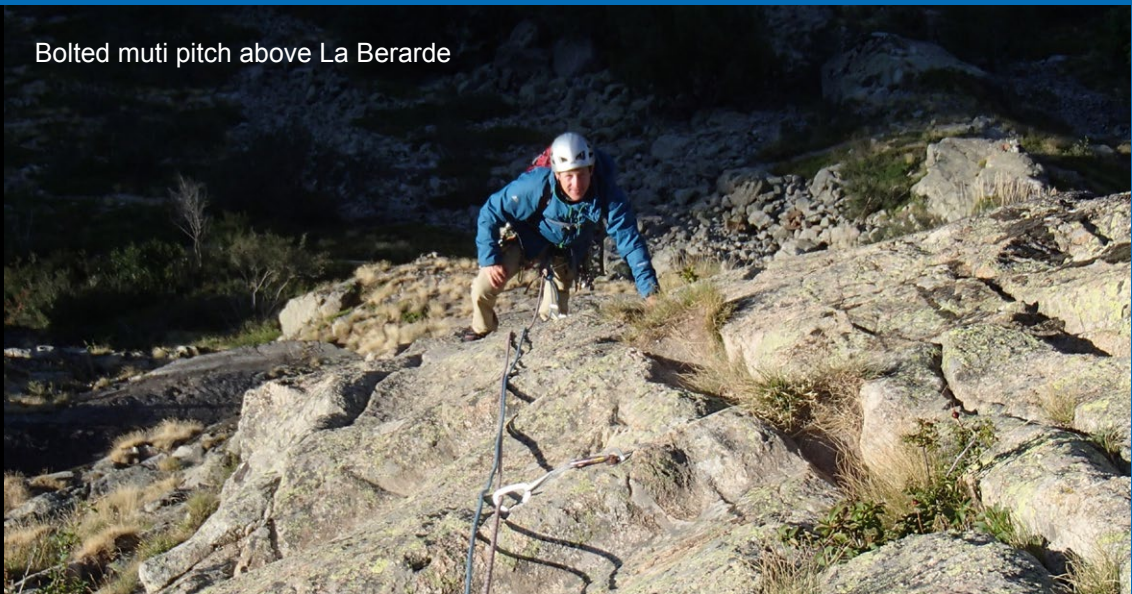
A distinct feeling of "it's no fair" was starting to settle. Things were salvaged to an extent when a superb 13 pitch granite route was done on La Tete de La Maye above our Gite the next day. Things really started to unravel however as we coiled our

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For all those that love long alpine granite rock routes free of glacial hassles I could not recommend the place highly enough

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Bolted muti pitch above La Berarde





Bad weather at the Moiry hut

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I learned you could not only spend the whole of a winters day sun-blessed but also tan-necked

”

ropes on top and David revealed that he had managed to pick up a virus in the Dibona hut and was now feeling decidedly grim. His suffering and frustrations were compounded that evening when, with the rain by now drumming off the Gite's roof, he revealed that his toothache was an abscess and he was going to have to find a dentist.

Time for a pen, a fresh piece of paper and a plan C

In hindsight Plan C probably wasn't the wisest but we were by now getting desperate for some success.

The plan; I embark on the 4 hr walk

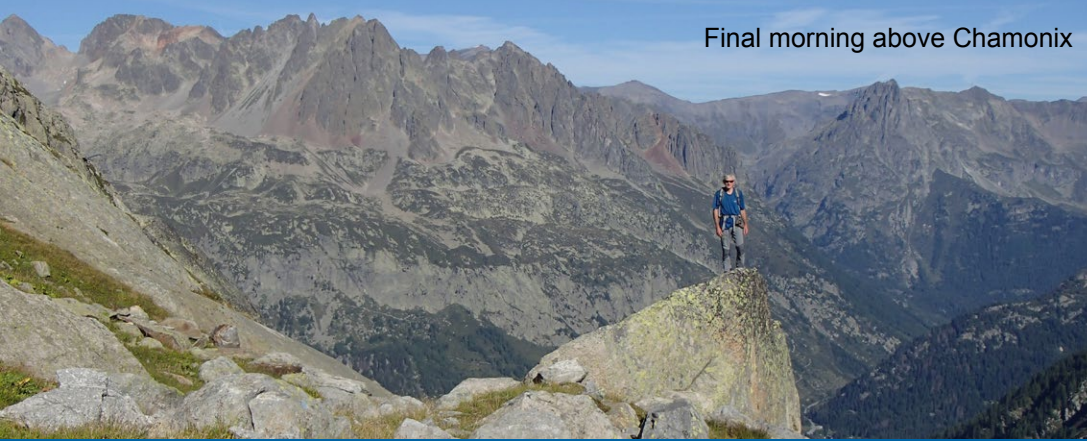
up a wild and lonely Ecantons Valley in mist, heavy rain and thunder to the Pilates hut whilst David headed down and find a dentist. The next day I was to solo the straightforward Mont Giobernay whilst David, with his tooth now fixed and virus defeated would sprint up to the hut in the by now scorching sunshine. We'd then dine together contentedly that evening before exorcising our frustrations with a successful assault of Les Bans the next day.

Reality. I stagger into a dark and deserted Pilates hut at 2600m wet, cold and glad to get shelter from the lashing rain and thunder. Now safe and neither zapped by lightning

nor drowned in glacial flood water I began to appreciate the privilege of having experienced the awesome power and drama of the Alpine, brown glacial torrents crashing down through deep gorges as ghostly jagged shapes loomed out of gaps in the mist high above.

I was starting to wonder if the hut had been deserted in the storm when thankfully a young lady guardian emerged from the shadows and kindly helped me dry my clothes and filled my bottle with water.

Very nervous and uncertain as I headed out into a very dark morning. The way up through the moraine



onto the glacier was far from obvious in the blackness and I felt distinctly alone and weak but the glacier was straightforward and nerves evaporated as the sun rose and my climb ended on a high as I scrambled up the summit ridge above a sea of cloud with the peaks of Les Ecrins etched against a blue sky.

Could our luck have changed?
Nope.

Yes, David had found a dentist and indeed he did manage to get up to the hut too despite a bridge having been washed away in the night. After a very lonely 36 hours it was great to see him again. It was however not great to see the rock ridges of Les Bans now gleaming white with fresh snow and its glacier, which the guardian had assured me was bon, looked more like a very crumpled moth eaten piece of paper to me.

Wearied from the efforts of the past few days I voiced my concerns to David. A new man had arrived though..... his drugs were obviously powerful. His positive determination was palpable, a route had soon been traced through a maze of seracs and with a disparaging "it'll be nothing compared to a snowy Tower Ridge" he was off, scorching down through the cliffs onto the glacier in preparation for the morrow.

David deserved success. He coaxed a nervous wee pal up through a steep maze of black hard glacier ice whilst I tried but failed to ignore the fact crampon points were barely scratching the ice, the chances of holding a fall nil and those black holes beneath us did look awfy deep and hungry but the man did good. We got through, over the crumbling bergschrund and onto the rock ridge above. Unfortunately we were

by now well over an hour behind schedule, the rock above plastered in snow and the guided party behind us had turned back long ago. So down it was, seven wearisome hours of glacial icy maze trouble, moraine hacking and downwards trudging back to the valley.

Our reward for our efforts. More bloody rain and more promised. So back onto the autoroute again, this time back to Chamonix. Where we actually got lucky and had 2 days of cracking granite climbing in the sun on the Chamonix Aiguilles.

On one hand it had been frustrating as we were cheated of a chance to get onto our dream peaks. On the other it had been a most marvellous adventure, much good rock had been climbed and I've got a couple of alpine memories that I'll cherish. I'll just ignore the fact that Ueli managed to scamper over 82 Alpine 4000m peaks in 82 consecutive days this summer rather than our zero 4000m peaks in ten.

So where did we go wrong ? The answer is clear methinks. Mr Steck obviously uses a Swiss made spreadsheet on power-point rather than our humble paper when detailing his plans. Success should be assured for 2016 now.



Steve belayed at the top of the second pitch of Scarab

In France, a publicly accessible climbing area without bolted lines is viewed like a publicly accessible swimming pool with sharks in it.

(David Kastrup quoted in Arapiles Selected Climbs)

Australian Rock David Buchanan

Two of our Lancashire friends, David and Kate, decided to get married in Australia (since Kate is Australian), and thought it would be a good idea to have a Lancashire Mountaineering Club meet to the Arapiles as a pre-celebration of their wedding. (I have been a member of the JMCS for about 40 years, and of the LMC for about 25.) Consequently, Pat and I decided to join the meet and extended it to a three month trip with one month in Australia and two in New Zealand.

So at the beginning of November 2014, Pat and I flew to Melbourne. After recovering from jet lag in the pleasant town of Geelong not far from Melbourne airport, we spent a few days travelling along the spectacular Ocean Road before heading north to the market town of Horsham, where we camped and met up with our friend Steve from Lancashire. From this base we could get to the Arapiles easily and also explore the Grampian Mountains, a bit further away.

Steve and I were keen to get our first

route done so after a 45 minute drive to the Arapiles and a short walk, we climbed Arachnus a three star 105m classic at about HVD. Descent was by two 45m abseils from new bolts. Great climbing!

Since we were going to spend more time at Arapiles later on in the trip, most of our time at Horsham was spent climbing and walking in the Grampians. The rock is a hard sandstone similar to Northumberland, but the cliffs are much bigger. Steve and I did two routes, both about mild VS, and both at Bundaleer crag.

Scarab climbs a crack in two pitches to below a huge roof. Then a spectacular, but easy, traverse across a wall leads to a large ledge. The final wall behind the horns of the Scarab proved to be harder than it looks. The descent consisted of some scrambling followed by a 50m abseil from good bolts.

The Minch is quite near the previous route and the second easiest route in our guide. It consists of a long chimney which narrows towards the

The fine chimney of The Minch



top. The first pitch is climbed in classic manner and is good fun. The second, and final, pitch contains the crux, which, to my embarrassment, I fell off leading. Fortunately, it is very well protected. Steve cruised up it by lay backing a rounded edge, and I came up on a tight rope.

Our main objective in travelling to Australia was to climb at Arapiles. This is one of the best rock climbing locations in the world: the rock is impeccable quartzite which takes nuts and cams well; there are nearly 1200 routes in the selected guide; and quality routes are available at all grades from the easiest to well into the highest E grades. Oh! and the area is semi-desert so the weather is quite good too.

After our week at Horsham, we moved to the Pines campsite at Arapiles to join the LMC meet. The Pines is very basic and cheap. Only climbers stay there – it is not on the tourist trail. Almost all climbs are reached from the campsite by 10-60 minutes walking. The ambience is a bit like Camp 4 in Yosemite (as I remember it from 40 years ago). There is also great wild life around the campsite - wallabies and kangaroos, Echidnas, various lizards



On the first pitch of Tiptoe Ridge

and birds, including Kookaburra.

Because of the great selection of easy routes, Pat and I climbed together most days. On the day we moved from Horsham we climbed three single pitch routes at Declaration Crag.

Our next climb was Tiptoe Ridge *** D 140 m. Four great pitches with a short abseil from the pinnacle at the top of the second pitch. The following day we climbed the similar and parallel Introductory Route **D 135m. Rain now intervened, and we retreated to Horsham for a rest day.

Next day we visited Mitre Rock which lies about a kilometre away from the main Arapiles ridge. We climbed three excellent single pitch routes: Cloaca, Exodus and Deviant; and finished the day with Guiding Light Variant which, in two pitches, took us to the summit.

High temperatures were forecast, so early the next morning we set off for the very nearby Organ Pipes and climbed Diapason ** VD. Three excellent pitches, but, unexpectedly, rain threatened so we climbed quickly, finished the climb by 9:45 and were back in the campsite by 11:00. After lunch, the weather

improved so we walked up to Charity Buttress and climbed three single pitch routes: Charity, Hope and Serenity.

I wanted to photograph our prospective Bride and Groom on the photogenic Kachoong E2. So we arranged to meet at Bush Ranger Bluff where Pat and I climbed Little Revolver Crack * VD. Then we drove to the top of Arapiles and descended: David and Kate to the start of Kachoong; and Pat and I to the base of the cliff from which we would ascend to the “photographer’s ledge”. Unfortunately, I took the wrong line, and after some anxious moments, we arrived back at the top of the cliff! Pat had had enough, but some kind locals directed me to the abseil descent to the ledge so I was able to get my photo. In the evening I climbed the two pitch Conifer Crack with two of our LMC friends, Richard and Nancy.

Next day it rained again. Not that much, but it put us off climbing, so we had a shopping trip to Horsham followed by a visit to the “Little Desert” National Park. One drawback to Arapiles is that there is not a lot to do nearby if the weather is iffy. If the weather is good, the Grampians are about a 2 hour drive

Because of the great selection of easy routes, Pat and I climbed together most days.



“ Although expensive to get there (UK to Melbourne return £800-£1000.) we found it cheap to live around Horsham and the Arapiles. ”

away. Pat and I spent next day climbing single pitch routes at Bush Ranger Bluff.

My last big route of the trip was Hurricane Lamp Cracks HS, which I climbed with other friends David and Cathy. This gave four excellent pitches to the top of The Pharos. Descent was by semi-free abseil.

Next day Pat and I climbed again at Mitre Rock before departing to Horsham for showers.

The rest of our time in Australia was spent exploring Melbourne and taking photos at Kate and David's wedding. Then it was off to Auckland for the

next part of our holiday.

Information

Although expensive to get there (UK to Melbourne return £800-£1000) we found it cheap to live around Horsham and the Arapiles. Melbourne prices were similar to Edinburgh. We used Airbnb for accommodation in Melbourne, hostels on the Great Ocean Road (the one at Port Fairy was especially good) and camping elsewhere. Car hire was also fairly cheap.

The Grampians

Steve had a book that he got in the UK that described selected climbs in the Grampians and the Arapiles, but

a more definitive source is Mentz and Tempest's "Grampians Selected Climbs" which we saw in book shops in Australia. Rock and Run have a more modern guide, but I haven't seen its contents.

A good website is www.chockstone.org/grampians/grampians.htm

Although we based ourselves at Horsham, Hall's Gap might be a better base for the Grampians.

Arapiles

Arapiles Selected Climbs, Simon Mentz, Glenn Tempest, 2008 is very good and available in the UK. I think I bought my copy from Rock and Run (although I don't think I paid the price I've just seen on their website).

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I was very glad to hear that the staff, and all Alaskans it seems, have an excellent sense of humour.

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Denali

Roo Finlayson

Six months planning, preparation and training for one photo - a picture on top of North America's highest mountain, preferably with Mr Foo, my hairy little brother. I invited my mate Mr Phil along, who has a similar amount of high altitude experience and likes a bit of equipment geekery.

I was to be the stand-in leader of this merry band of Scots. As I wrote my chosen name for the expedition, *The Scottish Badger Appreciation Society*,

on The Department of Homeland's form, I thought the chaps would see the funny side...they didn't. However, after some initial hesitation on phone to the National Park Service, I was very glad to hear that the staff, and all Alaskans it seems, have an excellent sense of humour.

Dysfunctional efficiency:
A phrase uttered by Phil at one point summed us up rather well: *"we are probably the most dysfunctional*

group on the mountain but we are pretty damn efficient". He was of course referring to the abuse we hurled at each other from ten metres away over ropes, sleds and almost certainly crevasses. It was disgusting - seriously, you have never heard language like it nor at such volumes - all very embarrassing in retrospect. On the efficiency side, we made excellent progress up the hill and seemed to at least keep up with groups of a similar age and ability, such as the Norwegian



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There were a number of antagonising factors behind the discord but I would point primarily to the sleds, which we hauled up and down the mountain behind us with 30kg loads on top

”

and American pairs.

One thing I stupidly hadn't considered when setting up the expedition, was my position as the common denominator (Mr Foo = brother and Mr Phil = my mate). This meant I took a larger proportion of the abuse, in the first week at least. Mathematically, and conservatively, if brother kindly donates 2/3rds of his abuse to me and 1/3rd to mate and mate dishes out 2/3rds of abuse to me and 1/3rd to brother this gives me approximately 1.33 units of abuse (or 44%) and they each deal with 0.83 units (or 28%).

Proclaiming myself as leader on the NPS form (there has to be one)

probably didn't help. However, by the end of the two weeks the two of them were dishing out larger amounts of abuse to each other and therefore balance, if not harmony, was restored to the expedition. There were a number of antagonising factors behind the discord but I would point primarily to the sleds, which we hauled up and down the mountain behind us with 30kg loads on top (in addition to 20kgs on our backs). These plastic torture devices, which resemble children's sleds, are truly evil and I propose that they be banned internationally.

To Basin Camp:
Weather had delayed our departure

from Talkeetna by a day already so we landed on the glacier, buried a limited cache of fuel and food and got moving. One day to Camp 1 (2,400m) which was a 9km slog, a cache at Camp 2 (Motorcycle Hill) the next day then a move up to Camp 2 (3,400m) the day after (6.5km). This was followed by a rest day, a cache up at Basin Camp (4,300m) the next, then a move up to Basin Camp the day after that (4.6km).

We shunned intermediate camps and caching between camps. This cut down on the camp building and avoided back-carrying (going back down the hill on a 'rest day' to pick up a cache) which we identified as

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At High Camp we got on with building our snow fortress. By this stage we were pretty efficient at making camp (digging a pit big enough for two tents and igloo-type walls

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high quality time-wasting (although admittedly a fair strategy in certain circumstances).

After a rest day at Basin Camp, we saw a potential window to make a cache at High Camp (5,200m). We ascended the Head Wall but were beaten back on the ridge at Washburn's Thumb by 50+mph winds. We therefore had to cache our five days' worth of fuel and food at 5,000m - against our original strategy but a 700m gain with around 10kgs of stuff is better than nothing. A forced weather rest day followed and so we waited for a summit window. We left the next day for High Camp with about 20kgs of tent, sleeping bags,

down gear, food etc and added the cache from 5,000m on the way up (30kgs in total) - hard work along the ridge at that height!

At High Camp we got on with building our snow fortress. By this stage we were pretty efficient at making camp (digging a pit big enough for two tents and igloo-type walls as high as the tents to protect from the wind). When the Norwegian team arrived, they were more than happy to set up camp next door (saves both parties building so many walls). It was looking so good that a Mongolian party asked if they could set up next to us too. The guide asked us about our summit plans, probably because we looked like we knew what we were doing. In retrospect, we were one of the best prepared and strongest teams on the mountain, much to our surprise!

Summit day:

It was bitterly cold on the first night in High Camp, with some of the coldest temperatures any of us had experienced (below -25C with some high winds so effectively below -40C which feels even colder due to the altitude). We took a rest day based on our Norwegian comrades' forecast which had been sat-phoned in from home. It was spot on, with summit day

as predicted - a perfect and nigh-on windless day. We started out behind a few groups at about 9.00am to ensure we weren't breaking trail, at least at the start of the day. We headed up to Denali Pass (5,500m) at a good pace, then round the weather station and up beside Archdeacons Tower.

Before long we caught the leading group, so I thanked the leader for breaking the trail to that point. He said ominously: *“let's see who gets to Pig Hill first”*. Another group overtook as we rested before the Football Field (5,950m) but they stopped at the bottom of Pig Hill. I looked around and thought, 'fine, if no one else is keen, I'll do it' and started up the face. I now know why it's called Pig Hill - 1ft of the fluffy stuff at 45 degrees above 6,000m - not particularly easy going.

I chose a path that largely avoided a serac on the right and a large cornice on the left. On the summit ridge itself, there were a few choices to make with regard to the safest route but all very manageable despite the exposure. The views were getting better every minute but none more spectacular than at the summit itself. We arrived at 3.00pm on 27th May. We were the 3rd, 4th and 5th to the summit that year out of what will probably be around 500 summits. The



36% success rate in 2014 probably puts this number into perspective.

Arriving at our destination after six months of planning and preparation was pretty emotional. As I screamed out whatever I happened to scream out on the summit, I was happy to see someone back along the ridge saluting back in appreciation of what had been achieved. We had plenty of time for photos on the summit, not least because the weather was absolutely perfect. You could have worn a T-shirt - an almost impossibility at that height (6,190m) and latitude

(63 degrees north) any other day of the year.

We crashed at High Camp that night and awoke to very high winds. We knew that they were to get worse that afternoon, so got on with camp deconstruction and nipped past the big guided group before they got to the ridge. This was to prove a shrewd move. Any delay in those kind of winds can be dangerous, as proven by the travails of an American group we met back at the bar in Talkeetna post trip. One of the party had sustained nasty frostbite on the

way down that day, as evidenced by his bandaged fingers (black and swollen but apparently saveable). The same group kindly bought us a pitcher for our trail breaking efforts on summit day.

Despite all the people disturbing the relative peace of the park, Denali truly is one the most beautiful mountains on the planet. The scale of the place is terrifying, with an entire day's walking hardly putting a dent in the incredible landscape. The plane back from the glacier to civilisation opened up a little more of its grandeur and is by far the best flight I've ever taken. However, there is so much more to see and I would like to think that I will return one day to climb another peak (or many).

We were very lucky with the weather when it mattered but also took every chance we had. As a result, we were up and down the mountain in 12 days rather than the 3 weeks that it could have taken (or not made it at all as is often the case). Back at the National Park Service office, the ranger who had checked us in to the park, also checked us out. He signed us off with a line that I will always remember: *"God bless the badger"*.



Ecrins September 2015

Bryan Rynne

In the course of last year's trip to Chamonix (see last year's newsletter) we decided that another trip to the French Alps was warranted. However, instead of going back to Chamonix, a subgroup of us, together with Simon, decided to go to the Ecrins in autumn.

We stayed in a chalet in la Casse, on the edge of Vallouise in the Ailefroide valley. The location was partly based on a Climber article about the area by Jerry Gore (who runs a guiding/accommodation outfit based out there, and from whom we rented the

chalet). Sue and Bryan et al went there in May, although they stayed in a smaller village called Les Vigneaux a couple of miles down the valley. Vallouise is a very nice little village, with an excellent hotel and restaurant called the Vallois, which did very good food and drink. Both the beer and the red wine (by the litre pitcher) were excellent after a hard day's climbing. The chalet was only 10 minutes walk away from the Vallois, across the fields, and 3 minutes walk from a very nice boulangerie, where I set up a daily standing order for baguettes, croissants and pains au

chocolat (some doctors feel that a combination of beer, red wine (by the pitcher) and croissants and pains au chocolat provides a well-balanced diet containing all the vitamins, minerals and anti-oxidants that anyone could require).

We flew to Geneva and then drove to Vallouise - the drive took about 4 hours. On the way there we followed the satnav and drove through the Frejus tunnel into Italy and back out again, which was not very scenic and very expensive. On the return journey we drove over the col du Galibier,



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When we arrived there were several parties abseiling off, which was handy as it showed up the descent route, and in particular the final abseil anchor which was not marked on the topo and would not have been obvious on the way down.

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which was extremely scenic, and free! It may even have been quicker....

The weather was good almost all the week, although gradually becoming a bit greyer and gloomier, until it started pouring down on the final evening. However, it dried up again for the drive back to Geneva, and over the col du Galibier. It was cold first thing in the mornings (Vallouise is at about 1200m), but had usually warmed up by the time we started climbing (there was little incentive to get out at the crack of dawn). Judging by the others' experience, this may be a better time to go there than May.

The climbing was also very good, with a very fat guide book full of single and multi pitch climbing, all relatively nearby, and on a variety of rock types. There are also many high, 'Alpine' routes, from the Ecrins and Glacier Blanche huts above Ailefroide. We all did a mixture of these options.

On day one we all went to the crag Rocher Baron, a nice crag, high up a long rocky road, above the main Durance valley, for a day of single pitch routes in the sunshine, to warm up. The next day Alan and Simon decamped up to the Ecrins hut to do one of the high, 'Alpine' routes alluded

to above, while James and I stuck to single pitch stuff. After that, we (James and I) decided to do a couple of the long slabby granite sports routes (i.e., no big boots or crampons!) above Ailefroide.

The first of these was Ecrins Total, 5c, 6 pitches, which is an easy and pleasant 20 minutes walk up the valley from Ailefroide, and was very easy to spot due to the prominent triangular slab of whitish granite at the start, which was visible from a long way off. When we arrived there were several parties abseiling off, which was handy as it showed up the descent route, and in particular the final abseil anchor which was not marked on the topo and would not have been obvious on the way down.

Setting off up it with some trepidation (after some sandbags in the morning), we found that it was actually quite easy most of the way, on very rough granite, with plenty of holds most of the time, and very well bolted. So, a very enjoyable route which took about 3 hours up and 1 hour down.

Next day, after the success on Ecrins Total we decided to do the second easiest route in the multi-pitch section: La Cocarde, 5c, 6 pitches. This turned



out to be a much tougher proposition - right from the start! The first pitch had a desperate move off a ledge, near the ground, from the 2nd to the 3rd bolt - this was one of the hardest bits of the climb and the bolts were about 4 metres apart! If you fell just before the 3rd bolt you would almost certainly injure yourself on the little ledge just below the 2nd bolt, and then topple over the edge into space, where you would then meet your belayer coming up due to the high fall factor.... I spent a long time trying to get round this impasse - so called 'ethical' considerations would not have held me back if I could have cheated past it. Unfortunately, it

became clear that it had to be climbed cleanly or not at all, and my fear of being thought of as a wimp overcame my fear of being helicoptered out to the local hospital. Fortunately, I managed it, and things got slightly better after that! The climbing remained hard, and the bolting never became good, but it wasn't as bad as that anywhere else. By the end I felt like I was starting to get the hang of walking up steep blank slabs with no holds. A route that became very good - in retrospect! (In particular, in the bar with that beer).

Alan and Simon returned that evening, and the next day Alan,

James and I went single pitch cragging while Simon rested in order to go back up again the following day with me.

On Thursday Simon and I walked up to the Ecrins hut to do the Barre des Ecrins on the Friday. We got woken up by the hut warden at 3.15am, and set off at about 4.10 - in the dark obviously, down onto the glacier and roped up. Unfortunately, due to the lack of a path across the glacier (apparently there is usually one in the snow, but there wasn't any snow!), and the extensive crevasses, we took too long crossing the glacier and by the time dawn came up it was clear that we were short of time, and the weather wasn't great anyway (it looked unlikely that we would do the Barre anyway), so we gave up at that point and walked back down to the valley.

While we were doing all that, Alan and James were doing more of the low level multi pitch stuff. This more or less finished things, apart from a final day of single pitch stuff.

So, overall, a very good trip with many different types of climbing done, and an immense amount more to do. I will be going back.



Drive-by orange picking, apparently fine!

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The purchase of the RockFax guide (Spain: Costa Blanca) – the one with the photo acknowledgement for Bryan Rynne, a surprising discovery – reinforced the recommendation.

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First Impressions of Climbing in Spain

Sandy Sharp

Despite climbing for 30+ years I had never tried the “sun rock” experience. A chance conversation at the climbing wall raised the possibility of me and my usual wall mates (Alex Taylor and Alf Chamings) heading to Spain. Further conversations with other wall habitués narrowed the destination to the Gandia region. The purchase of the RockFax guide (Spain: Costa Blanca) – the one with the photo acknowledgement for Bryan Rynne,

a surprising discovery – reinforced the recommendation. The area had several crags with an extensive selection of routes within our grade. The guide suggested an average temperature for March which was very acceptable to someone from the UK (20oC max 9oC min) with 7 hours average sunshine/day and 7 days/month with some rainfall.

Flights with EasyJet, direct from

Edinburgh to Alicante, were easily arranged and a local flat rented from a retired English couple, about 10 minutes from one of the main crags (the eponymous Gandia crag). Assessing the far too numerous options for car hire kept us busy for a day or two but eventually even that was sorted. Just a few weeks remained to get some training – even more trips to the wall. The evening before the early morning flight was

Alf on Fisura tal (6a+) at Gandia;
blue sky as usual



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At midday it was almost too hot to climb – the locals seemed to stop for a siesta in a cave at noon.

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the final Alien Rock bouldering competition of the winter season which showed the training had progressed well and thankfully didn't result in any last minute injuries.

The flight went smoothly, the climbing kit (essentially just a rope and quick draws) still left us all comfortably under EasyJet's baggage limits. Collecting the hire car went equally smoothly and we were at the flat by early afternoon. With one of the crags being so close we went on a quick reconnaissance and ended up doing 3 routes in glorious sunshine before lack of daylight stopped proceedings.

For the next week we climbed every day, the weather at worst cloudy but always warm, most days we had sun. At midday it was almost too hot to climb – the locals seemed to stop for a siesta in a cave at noon. Most days we climbed at Gandia but we also ventured further afield for days at Salem (probably wouldn't go back) and Bellus (Cueva Pechina and Sector L'Altet – Estui Place which were excellent) Despite climbing at Gandia crag for 4 days there was still a sector of the crag (the one furthest from the car park) that we didn't visit. My chosen project for the week was Pepistroika 6b, a route that was in the RockFax Top 50. Unfortunately

I timed my redpoint attempt badly (mad dogs and Englishmen etc) and didn't get the ascent, but Alf managed a redpoint. We did much harder climbs on our visit but somehow the line and sequences of Pepistroika made it memorable and, for me, raised it above the surrounding routes. Alex got numerous onsights of much harder routes and a redpoint of a route so overhanging it was hard to decide which way round the photos belong.

Gandia had various sectors, each with a different character. There were overhanging sectors with big holds, vertical sectors and even some routes with steep slabs.

The locals all seemed to use the RockFax guide and were very welcoming. They passed on useful information such as routes not included in the guide and also directed us to crags that weren't even in the guide but which had online topos). The crags were never busy but there was usually another team within hailing distance.

Would I go back?
Definitely.

As an early option to kick start the UK summer season it is highly recommended.



Lundy Summer

Patrick Winter

In early spring this year I received an unexpected email from Brian Finlayson inviting me to partner up with him for a FRCC trip to Lundy planned for early August.

Lundy was a climbing destination I had often fancied – I had read articles about it and thumbed through the guide books - but the logistics of arranging a visit there always seemed either too complicated or inconvenient. For a start climbing on about 80% of the crags is forbidden between the 1st April and 31st July because of the bird nesting season.

Then there is the consideration that all visits and accommodation have to be well planned in advance by application to The Landmark Trust, a very worthy conservationist body who oversee all activities on the island, which is incidentally owned by the National Trust. And then of course there is the business of actually getting there. Lundy for any who may be unaware, lies about 19 miles west of Morte Point in the Bristol Channel.

Most visitors sail from Clovelli or Ilfracombe in Devon. Because of the sailing times of the ferries most people travelling from somewhere as far away

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With strong winds and a high sea most passengers were more than a little queasy on the crossing.

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as Scotland will require an overnight stop on the outward and return stages of their journey. So a climbing trip to Lundy is not normally a straightforward matter. However the FRCC had already done most of the groundwork regarding dates, ferries and accommodation and Brian was prepared to do everything else at our end. For me it was all quite painless – I simply had to say ‘yes’ and pack my climbing gear when the allotted time (the 1st August) came.

So with all arrangements in place or potentially so there was really no need for any deliberation and I gratefully agreed to come along.

The journey down to Ilfracombe was uneventful but seemed interminable due to traffic congestion which seems almost inevitable these days if you want to travel anywhere further south than around the Manchester or

Liverpool junctions on the M6.

Our landlady at the very respectable seaside bed and breakfast that Brian had booked had a gentle Scottish lilt (she being an ‘expat’ from Alloa) which made us feel very much at home. Next day we rendezvoused with the rest of the FRCC party (another 12 folk) mostly from the North of England and boarded the Island’s supply ship (MS Oldenburg) which despite the shortish distance between the mainland and the island took over 2 hours. With strong winds and a high sea most passengers were more than a little queasy on the crossing. As well as being very

popular with climbers the island is also a haven for naturalists who come to appreciate its diverse flora and fauna as well as those who simply fancy a peaceful break in an island famous for its unique atmosphere and rugged coastline.

On disembarkation we were duly conducted to our hostel style accommodation for the week -The Barn – a large converted threshing house on two floors, most of the beds situated on the upper floor which presumably was a hay loft at one time. Situated in the cobbled courtyard of the old village and a stones throw from a surprisingly well

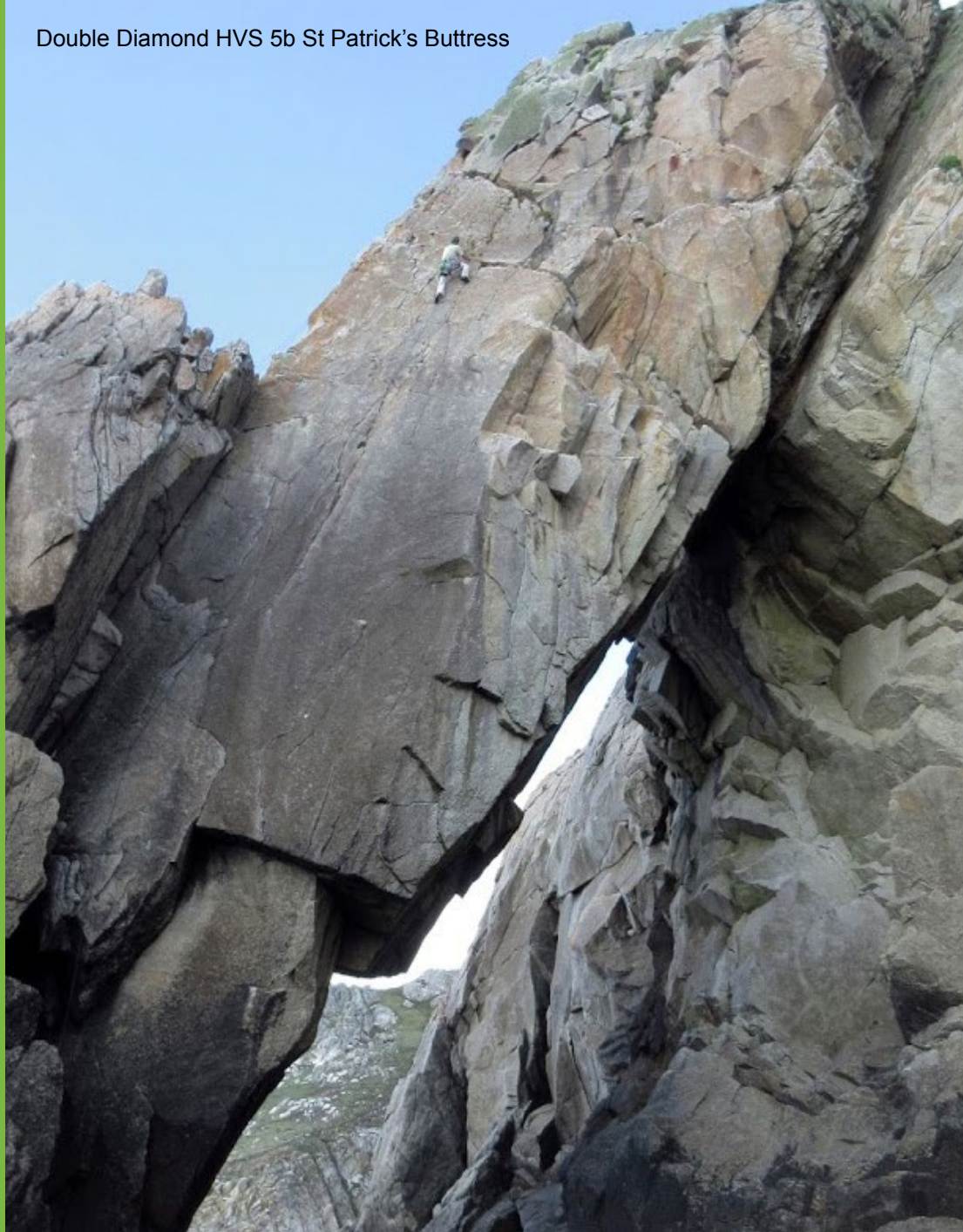
stocked shop and a lovely Ye Oldie type Inn (the Marisco Tavern) offering a good range of ales and food, we had everything we could wish for.

Lundy is only about 3 miles long and only about half a mile wide at its widest point, the main topography of the island being a long plateau about 130 metres above sea level. There are no roads to speak of but instead a network of rough paths or tracks and also several stone dykes running across the island which are useful reference points for locating crags. The island can be circumnavigated by foot in about three hours (or so we were told as we never got round to doing ourselves).

During the week we climbed at a range of sea cliffs on the island. The rock is granite and the climbing crags situated predominantly on the eastern Side of the Island. The crags range from remote atmospheric zawns to sunny open slabs with everything in between and there is an excellent spread of grades. Access to the start of climbs is frequently by abseil and often at low to mid tide only.

The most well known crag and route on Lundy is undoubtedly The Devil's Slide (HS) which is an obligatory climb for the first time visitor to the

Double Diamond HVS 5b St Patrick's Buttress





Island. We climbed this on the first climbing day of the trip which dawned fine and sunny with azure blue skies. The Devil's Slide is a remarkable 100 metre high granite slab offering a range of routes from Hard Severe to E5.

Another route which is de rigueur on this crag is the infamous Satan's Slip, a pretty run out E1 with poor gear and belays but candidly I was unable to muster enough nerve to rise to this challenge, particularly on the first day of the trip. A more suitable alternative was Albion, a better protected corner / slab climb and also a classic VS.

Other memorable routes we climbed during the visit included Shamrock (VS) , a classic crack climb with three

quite meaty pitches for the grade, Centaur HVS 5B which offered fine varied climbing in quite an intimidating setting, Diamond Solitaire VS and the very photogenic classic Double Diamond HVS 5B – which climbs a steep wall initially and then a delicate slab. It looks improbable at the grade from above but that proved to be deceptive, as there were in fact lots of good holds and resting places.

I think all members of our group ticked the latter route and were enthused with equal measure by its quality and situations.

Brian and I were pleased enough with what we climbed but as always when you visit a new climbing area you always have that inescapable

feeling that you have only scratched the surface so another visit would be very appealing.

Our group in the Barn bonded very well and after a day or two there was a good humoured sense of camaraderie and community which made for a comfortable and relaxing stay.

The weather on the trip was generally fine and dry with only one day being a virtual wash out.

All in all this was a memorable climbing trip and although a visit to Lundy does require some planning and commitment I would thoroughly recommend it. My thanks to Brian for inviting me along and for doing virtually all the arranging and organising.



Mountains of Cheese

Roy Harrison and Terry Lansdown

When two novice JMCS alpinists were unleashed for the first time on the mountains around Chamonix, neither of them could have known what a life changing and arduous trip it would be: “I’m beaten, I can’t go on, keep going without me.” (Don’t worry, it’s not what we said about the climbing, but about the Raclette). Never before have two people eaten as much cheese in a week - read on if you think you’re hard enough...

We’ve been climbing together now

for quite a few years, mostly as we share a similar love of the mountains, especially in winter. The fact that we also share a slightly strange sense of humour and have other similar interests, such as a love of good food and drink, helps add to the enjoyment we get out of the hills. Largely self-taught in winter and on multi-pitch mountain routes, it took a few years for our confidence to build, but we eventually succumbed to the temptation of a visit to the higher mountains of the Alps.

Perhaps not the most straightforward beginner destination, the lure of Chamonix proved irresistible, and we booked our SleazyJet flights to Geneva, to arrive the last weekend of August to stay for nine days. Our aim was to miss the Summer crowds but still catch some good conditions. Confident that the remaining elements (digs and transport) would be easy to arrange, we relaxed a little in our preparation. Unfortunately we realised a little late that the weekend we arrived was the culmination of

the week of the Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc (UTMB) and consequently everything was exceptionally busy. Eventually we managed to find an AirBnB flat near the Aiguille du Midi station (a great location) and to book a transfer company (Mountain Drop-offs) to deliver us from Geneva airport to our digs, although both took some effort and we were a little apprehensive, especially regarding the accommodation.

As it happened, we need not have worried. After a short wait for some other passengers our transfer company efficiently dropped us off at the door, and our friendly Frenchman welcomed us into the pleasant (if dodgily sub-let) flat, with wooden everything, a ship's wheel for a light, and a cute little balcony overlooking a busy street, a launderette and 'Le Tof' (a gay-friendly, but neighbour-eardrum-unfriendly nightclub).

The weather was glorious and Mont Blanc loomed over us looking oddly achievable. However, our main priority was to find somewhere for a beer, and some lunch. We wandered about for a while enjoying the bustling UTMB (seriously, a 170km, 10,000m of up and down run!) atmosphere. We settled on Elevation 1904 (mainly as we'd heard the name mentioned).

The location outside in the sun with views of Mont Blanc was lovely, but the service and the food (a Salade Nicoise and a tuna melt) were a bit uninspiring. However, sunshine, beer, and time away from work, helped us through those difficult times. Having lubricated our decision-making machinery, we got our bearings, some cash, and some provisions. Setting our minds to tomorrow's goal in the Bruce Macrossan patented 'Beginner's Trip to Chamonix'. On that, thanks again to Bruce for all the help and advice, it was invaluable! And not forgetting all the other information and tips from Charles Stupart, Bryan Rynne and Sue Marvell too!

Next day, Stage 1 - the Aiguille du Tour via the Albert Premiere hut. Got the bus up the valley - the buses are easy, cheap, and pretty regular - then took the cable car up from Le Tour. If you're renting digs you should get a free pass, but we didn't due to aforementioned dodgy sub-let. With the weather still lovely and following the recommendation of the guidebook, we arranged ourselves a picnic for a break during the walk-in to the hut. The guidebook suggested a lovely lake as the perfect spot to stop, although the unusually hot and dry summer had taken its toll on the

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lake, which had been reduced to an area of damp grass. We continued on, to find a shaded spot by the path where we laid out our modest spread - olives, bread, crisps, fine cheeses, bread, cornichons, grapes and salad vegetables. It seemed a shame that we hadn't brought any wine, but we struggled through. It was perhaps a little too large a lunch as (we didn't realise) there was still a large portion of the walk remaining, but our arrival at the lovely, friendly, well-appointed hut was greeted by a cold beer, which once again helped to ease our difficulties. Dinner at the hut was a friendly and tasty affair (if not particularly well catered for us as vegetarians) with soup, cheese, meat



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After watching a spectacular sunset across the Aiguille Rouge and the glacier below the hut, we retired to a fitful night's sleep

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stew and a sponge pudding. After watching a spectacular sunset across the Aiguille Rouge and the glacier below the hut, we retired to a fitful night's sleep (the temperature and altitude were conspiring) and awoke rather later than most others, due to a combination of technological failings and user incompetence (two alarms, both on UK time, one hour late). Breakfast was functional, comprising dry bread, jams and coffee, and not particularly easy to stomach as we both adjusted to the altitude. Our first alpine day was spectacular, if hard work - the weather was good and,

except for our late start, everything went without a hitch. Easy scrambling, stunning setting, first practical experience of crossing the glacier. We grabbed our stuff, walked back down to the cable car, and took the bus back to our digs.

Stage 2 - Aiguille du Midi & the Cosmiques Arête. An early start for the first cable up the Aiguille du Midi, just a simply stunning location. In twenty minutes, you're lifted just under 3km up, from the benign security of the Valley to the eagle's nest. To get to the climbing you need

to cross the 'forcefield of disclosed limited liability' - or hop the gate into an ice cave - to gear up before the descent down the Arête de l'Aiguille du Midi. This descent comes on you like a cold sweat after the muggy fart-fest of the cable car (presumably brought on by atmospheric pressure changes). Apparently, this year has been hot and dry so the arête was even more exposed than usual. We may be soft, but it's a pretty sobering experience looking (straight) down 3k on your left to Chamonix. We debated whether to rope or not, and did; under the mistaken illusion that the top climber could heroically jump to the other side if the lower climber were to slip. Still unsure of the sense

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Aspirations for the big peaks were rather quickly pulled into check as the weather turned for the worse

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in that! Frankly amazed to survive the short sharp descent to the glacier, we headed back round behind the cable car station in (once again) literally breath-taking scenery of the Mont Blanc Massif and the surrounding peaks and glaciers.

The Cosmiques Arête takes a cunning but mostly obvious path back up to the Aiguille du Midi Station. It's straightforward scrambling with some interesting moves, and nothing too taxing. The one sting in the tail is a short protectable HS/VS- move near the end. Two tips, don't go to the summit of the first peak, and you might not consider the first of the two bolted abseils to require an abseil (we

down-climbed and then hunted for some time for the next abseil, which we'd already done). A fun feature of the route is that it ends with a ladder back on to the public viewing platform. Not a hard day, but a glorious one, we both agreed it was probably our best in the mountains, ever. In the evening we went to Les Moraines, a nice restaurant with a little bar and a covered terrace, where we had moules and monkfish with some nice house wine and good service from a friendly career waiter.

Stage 3 - Merde il Pleut! Aspirations for the big peaks were rather quickly pulled into check as the weather turned for the worse. It rained for

most of the day and we ended up going to the climbing wall down the valley at Les Houches, on a hot and humid day. A bit of confusion over the grades, but not a bad way to kick around on a wet day. We had begun to part ways with Bruce's idealised plan. Dinner in the evening was a quiet affair in the flat with a selection of cheeses, wine and snacks.

With the weather still a bit shaky, on our next day we gambled on some multi-pitch rock on the Aiguille Rouge. As we caught the damp cable car up to l'Index it seemed to get wetter and wetter on the way up, and didn't clear. We hung around underneath the crag in the drizzle with the distinct



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impression that it wasn't going to get any better. Instead we decided what would be really nice would be to do some 'training' by taking our rock gear for a walk back to Chamonix via the Gares de Planpraz cable car. The weather began to clear a bit, and in the end we had a pleasant if slightly damp day's walking along part of the Tour de Mont Blanc. That night we ventured into Chamonix again for dinner and ended up in the touristy heart of the town. Once again moules featured on the menu along with another local traditional food, the tartiflette, which comprised a mixture of potatoes, onions, bacon and of course, cheese (there seems to be a

theme to the meals here, or maybe it was just us).

Next day, we took the Grands Montets cable car up from Argentiere on a colder feeling day to the Petite Aiguille Verte. The route is right in front of the telepherique, and looks like it shouldn't take more than two to three hours. We thought we were pretty early, but it turned out (rather true to form) we were 'last at the crag'. The Petite Aiguille Verte is a nice mixed day out. We headed up the icy initial part heading broadly from left to right up the peak. In the background one can see the frankly sobering Aiguille Verte (proper). This looked like a

long way 'out of our league' at this point! A little way on the route has a short sharp ice pitch leading onto the rocky arête, somewhat similar to the Cosmiques arête in character. On the arête we encountered our first significant challenge, 'guidus groupus obstructus'. This particular species was certainly not endangered where we were. We lost count of the number of groups and suffered the overtaking-waiting-overtaking game. We summited a little while later, but had certainly been slowed down by the crowds, who'd have thought (well, anyone with even a little knowledge of the easy peaks in non-optimal weather, although unfortunately not us). For

dinner this evening we descended into a sort-of pizzeria-Hades guarded by a languid cerberus (le Caveau), where we enjoyed some surprisingly pleasant pizza and wine in an old wine cellar.

At this point in our trip we were running out of 'beginner (alpine) peaks'. However, we were trying to enjoy the high mountains, rather than the crags. Our assumption was there are better locations for 'bolt clipping', so if we had the option it was best to stick to the high ground. A bit of digging in the books and online and we focussed in on the Aiguille Marbrées, a small peak on the border with Italy. It was a fun little peak and cool day out. To get there, we took the cable car up the Aiguille du Midi, then across on the Panoramique, exiting the Helbronner Station on the Italian side. The cable car across the glacier field is a fantastic trip on it's own, and highly recommended.

Italian style was in evidence at the Helbronner station. The hut was being renovated, but the Visitor Centre was very fancy, with big glass panels and Italian marble. To get out onto the glacier, you take the lift down to the ground floor and walk out of a tunnel. We geared up and crossed the glacier to walk behind the

Aiguille Marbrées with the imposing Dent du Geant further in front. A nice straightforward scramble back round and up to the summit. On our way back to the Station we stopped at some pretty serious looking tents pitched on the glacier and explored a rather neat igloo. We also noticed some 'crazy ladies' on the glacier in 'street clothes'; an entertaining Italian guide was suggesting they'd fall into a crevasse 400m deep, and in a thousand years all they'd find would be a pair of Jimmy Choo's! We packed up our gear and went back into the station for a pint of Birra Moretti and an espresso, which were really good and very reasonably priced. Two euros for a double espresso, shame on you France! The weather and scenery were stunning, in all it was a glorious little day.

The following day brought questionable weather so went for a walk from L'Index down to Montroc-le-Planet. It was a nice, interesting and fun walk, and the Lac Blanc was pretty (at least the bits we could see through the mist were), although we had a memorably crap, expensive and weird coffee at the hut (a very strange place) by the Lac. Whilst we had a generally enjoyable descent down the metal ladders and steep paths, save dodging the odd boulder falling from

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above, most of the other walkers were going up and seemed to be suffering a fairly unrelenting ascent. We went back to Chamonix for very weird food in a touristy but fun restaurant, full of all manner of weird and wonderful objects (including stuffed animals, terrifying dolls and a giant animated polar bear). Having decided that we hadn't had enough cheese on the trip we chose the Raclette. We fought bravely with the three kilos of cheese that faced us, but ultimately we were soundly beaten. In a bit of a cheese-daze we wandering around killing time having a few drinks, and stumbled across an Oom-Pah band on our way to Barberousse l'Escale des Pirates,



a lively little pirate-themed bar where everyone seemed to be drinking the same strange homemade orange drink served in large bottles.

Our final morning had arrived and so we returned to our favourite breakfast spot of the holiday, the Bighorn Bistro. We'd tried it a few days previously, and they were just round the corner from our apartment. So we had a delicious breakfast of poached eggs

with smoked salmon, with plentiful coffee and some delicious homemade donuts. We tidied up the flat and then waited for our transport to the airport and had an uneventful flight home. So after all, no Mont Blanc for us this time (who'd have thought Mont Blanc would be a substantial undertaking), but maybe on another trip. Hope that this has been helpful to any other people who like (mostly) French food and might also have aspirations to

climb in the Alps. We've both been bitten by the bug and are very much thinking of getting back into the big peaks. Wonder what the food is like in the Italian Alps...

Overall, the costs per person were about £200 for flights & transfers, £250 for our digs, the cable car passes were pretty steep at £200, around £250 on food, and not forgetting about £100 on cheese.



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The plans grew more ambitious with every forecast we watched and in the end we decided to attempt the Great Ridge of Garbh Bheinn in Ardgour.

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■ The Great Midge of Garbh Bheinn

Thomas Beutenmuller

I love climbing! However, it is a very target-orientated sport and when we read or hear about exploits of others it is often about what they have achieved, what grade they have managed to climb, how far they have walked, or how hard or even stressful it was, and I can't help thinking that this can remind me of the 'rat-race' I know only too well from work. In this little article I would like to describe a day in the hills when nothing worked out but I nonetheless felt it was a

great adventure, and I also was very tired at the end of the day.... When I told the guy I was with that day of my plans of spinning a yarn of the series of our misadventures he said that he does not want to be mentioned by name, so I will refer to him hitherto as my 'mystery companion'.....

It all started so well. The forecast for the weekend of the 16/17 September 2015 could not have been better. The plans grew more ambitious with

every forecast we watched and in the end we decided to attempt the Great Ridge of Garbh Bheinn in Ardgour. This is a bit further from my home in Fife than Glencoe or the Cairngorms and also involves a ferry crossing, but with visions of a clear sunny late summer day this only felt the right thing to do. We set out on the Friday evening and drove up to Glencoe. We spent the night in the barn behind Lagangarbh. When I had to get up to go to the toilet in the wee small hours



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there are more components to Scottish climbing than what you can see in the photographs of the glossy climbing magazines

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I was stunned by what a clear starlit night it was and I was looking forward to the adventure we were about to have.

We left Lagangarbh at 8 AM and drove down to Connel. On the way my ‘mystery companion’ spotted a figure he recognized. We stopped in a layby and the person turned out to be his friend Dan Bailey, and they had a quick chat. It is not often that one has the chance to ask a guidebook author about a route (see the book Scotland’s Mountain Ridges) an hour before setting out on it. However, what I noticed was that

Mr Bailey was tormented by a lot of midges swarming around his face and I started to remember that there are more components to Scottish climbing than what you can see in the photographs of the glossy climbing magazines.

We took the ferry from Connel to Ardgour and I felt shell-shocked after we had to pay £8 for the five-minute crossing. I also noticed that there suddenly were a lot of clouds around. I tried to convince myself that they would be burned up by the sun, but when we parked at the Abhainn Coire an Iubhair it

was still rather cloudy and all the mountaintops were concealed in the mist. Also, there was no wind whatsoever. We got ready and my ‘mystery companion’ repeatedly used choice language to let the little beasties know what he thought of their presence.... It appeared that they liked his blood group better than mine... I got my midgie net out and we started to walk along the river towards the cliffs of Garbh Bheinn. My ‘mystery companion’ reflected on the advantages of winter over summer climbing, as the days are crisp, the bog usually is frozen over and those damn wee creatures are but a distant

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It was pea soup weather up there: All the cliffs were concealed and it was impossible to make out any sections of the cliff

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memory...

We made good progress, had a quick break to fetch water out of the river and then headed up Garbh Coire Mor.

It was pea soup weather up there: All the cliffs were concealed and it was impossible to make out any sections of the cliff. We studied the guidebook and several printouts of photos we had brought along. But standing motionless for more than a few seconds led to being attacked by the little tormentors. They seemed fiercer than other members of the *Culicoides impunctatus* tribe I have encountered

elsewhere in the Highlands. To sum it up, the weather was not up to much, we were tormented by insects and we could not find the right lump of cliff we were looking for. After an hour we gave up the search and headed back down the valley.

Defeat tastes bittersweet, as they say. We got back to the car and drove off at high speed with the windows open to get rid of the Great Midge of Garbh Bheinn. It was early afternoon and we wanted to forget about the morning. The plan was to have a cosy bothy night up in Cona Glen at a place called Corlarrach which my ‘mystery companion’ has researched on the net, about five miles from the road. In order to get to our abode quickly we had brought our mountain bikes.

We parked the car near Cona House and carried out some basic arithmetic: Rucksack minus climbing gear, add sleeping bag, karrimat, stove and pasta, and some beer and whisky! We then set off up this wild glen on a track that got a bit rougher as we went along. At least this was proper mountain biking and not these graded trails like at Glentress. As you can see from the photos, we met some much more popular members

of the Scottish animal kingdom and made slow but steady progress. My ‘mystery companion’ is a bit of an expert on Scottish bothies and I am sure that he has a secret hand-drawn map of howffs and bothies in his potting shed, just as Tom Patey had a map of unexplored cliffs in his.... This was some great country out there and we had to stop at one point to check out a narrow bridge across a little gorge.

Teatime was approaching and the bothy came in sight. One more hill to cycle up and it should have been the end of the day and time for tea. What I noticed was that a patch of grass just outside of the bothy looked like somebody’s been camping on that spot. I kind of knew what that meant but refused to believe it until I gave the front door a good shake: Locked! We spent the next ten minutes looking for a key in the drain pipe, under stones and all the usual places but had to admit that this house was more of a remote Estate building than an open bothy and there was really only one option for us: Point the bikes towards the road again and start pedalling: It was an exhilarating cycle back to the car that made up for all the mishaps of the day so far.

The bikes went back in the boot and we had to weigh up our options. The

one thing we agreed on was that we would not pay another £8 for a 'Mini cruise' across Loch Linnhe. We decided to drive around Loch Eil and try to phone Ali Borthwick to see whether the Cabin was free. We could not get hold of him, but decided we would head in the direction of Balgowan anyway. The forecast looked decent for the Eastern Highlands on Sunday, and there was still hope we would do climbing in some shape or form.

The Cabin is our safe haven in the Highlands, the magnet we are drawn to. So we drove there and were delighted when we saw lights up on the hill. We did not know who was in residence but hoped that there would be space for us. We knocked on the door and introduced ourselves. A delegation of an Edinburgh Club linked to a rather well known if not somewhat controversial company that manufactures all sorts of equipment was in residence. We did not want to be called bed-thieving Scots in a hut that was fully booked, to quote Dougal Haston and used our best manners to explain our ordeal of the day. We were told that there was plenty of space and of course could we stay for the night. Hooray! It had been a long day, but all is well that ends well.

Corrlarach bothy



The next morning dawned clear and windstill again. I had a plan in mind, but my 'mystery companion' was concerned we may encounter the Great Midge again. I was able to convince him that we should give Kingussie Crag a go. I have been there a few years ago and it looked like a suitable venue for a short day. We set off after a good breakfast, parked near the golf course and walked through the woods up to the cliffs. My 'mystery companion' was won over by the place, as it offers great views towards the Cairngorms and the quality of the routes was

good as well. And as there was a nice breeze, it was a totally midge free zone. We had a good few hours of sport before we made out way back home.

When I look back at this weekend I can't help thinking that adventure is about exploring and the outcome being uncertain. Ticking things off a list is what we all are expected to do at work, and from that point of view I think me and my 'mystery companion' doing battle with The Great Midge of Garbh Bheinn was a great adventure!



The Ups and Downs of Winter

David Small

13 and 14 January 2015

The forecast was appalling and I knew I should cancel the trip. However, I had done no climbing in November or December 2014 and was keen to do something – anything – to get started. Also, Alasdair Buchanan was keen to get practice with “clients” before the Scottish Winter part of his guide’s assessment and I didn’t want to let him down. So I left Edinburgh in my car about

4.30am and, after Perth, encountered the worst conditions I have ever driven in. I could see about ten feet in front of me into never ending curtains of snowflakes being blown into and across my windscreen. The side of the road had to be sensed rather than seen. I desperately wanted to find a layby to stop in, but there was a lorry hard up against my tail lights and, in any case, it was impossible to tell verge from parking place, so I had to

keep going. At last, about Kingussie, things eased off a little and I pulled off the road to relax and drink some coffee from my flask.

Having met up with Alasdair in a very snowy Aviemore, we agreed that climbing was out and the best we could do would be to go skiing. The road up to Cairngorm was shut (the old Scottish story of “skiing cancelled due to snow”) but the road to the



The first pitch on
Deep Cut Chimney

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Lecht was open so we went there. I can't remember much about the drive there or the skiing itself, but the return journey from the Lecht to Aviemore is clearly etched in my memory. The road had not been ploughed or gritted and more snow was falling, but my four wheel drive Subaru seemed to be coping well enough. Or at least it was until I complacently approached a downhill bend too fast and realised, before anything had actually gone wrong, that the car was heading off the road. Sure enough we slid off, with a sense of violent inevitability, bumping heavily to a halt in a waste of snow covered tussocks.

As we climbed out, and scrabbled for warm clothing and boots among the tilting shambles in the back of the car, we noticed that another motorist had already come to grief nearby. He'd ended in a ditch on the other side of the road. It was cheering to know we weren't alone in our folly, but worrying to think that we stayed where we were we might be hit by other vehicles coming off the road just as we had done. There was no phone reception and we were steeling ourselves for the walk into Tomintoul to seek help when along came a Nissan pick-up driven by the chap who owns the café at Bridge

of Brown. He stopped to assess the situation and reckoned he could pull my car out. It seemed unlikely to me – my car looked beyond help and I feared that it would be there until Spring – but he gave me a length of webbing to fix to the front of it and, with a good deal of manoeuvring and wheel spinning, he pulled it back on to the road again. Any thanks I could express at the time were inadequate compared to the relief I was feeling. Although bits of the body work were crumpled, the moving parts of the car seemed to be working so Alasdair and I gingerly resumed our progress and at last made it back to Aviemore.

The next morning we walked from the snow gates at Glenmore half way into Sneachda before the snow drifts and clag drained our energy and morale and we disconsolately retreated. I could have stayed for another attempt the next day but my heart wasn't in it. The journey home was long and slow, with a big hold up in Drumochter while a spun car up ahead was put to rights. If, as I sat there waiting for something to happen, someone had offered me any sort of price for all my climbing gear I would have sold up on the spot – the whole winter game seemed to me nothing more than a self-indulgent waste of time and money.



3 and 4 February 2015

The sun shone, the frost glittered and the cliffs of Beinn Udlaidh were bulging with ice. Climbers were out in force and our preferred route, Green Eyes, was already occupied but on such a day that mattered not. Instead, Bruce and I went for a line of ice up the left side of Ramshead Buttress.

As usual, this felt steeper once I was on it than it had looked from below, but things were going smoothly enough until a good thwack with my axe brought about two unexpected consequences. Firstly, a large bit of ice came away and spent a second or two poised between me and the cliff, threatening to push me off backwards, before relenting and crashing away down between my legs. Secondly, a fountain of water shot out of the hole thereby created and instantly soaked the front of my jacket, my slings and the ice screws in my “pan pipes”.

This was not just a matter of getting wet; the water froze as soon as it came into contact with me and my gear. Being somewhat precariously placed, I felt in need of a reassuring bit of protection, but I simply could not wrestle a screw out of its icy socket in the pan pipes. Fortunately the gear on my harness had escaped the worst of the deluge and eventually I managed

to place another runner. When he approached the source of the water, Bruce had a high old time dealing with a screw which I'd placed some way below it – the krabs on the quick draw were completely iced up and it took a prolonged period of violent action with Bruce's hammer before the quick draw could be freed from the screw and the screw itself extracted.

All this was exciting enough, but a sunny day on Beinn Udlaidh tends to calm the nerves and we had plenty of enthusiasm left for a second route. By the time we descended from that, most of the other climbers had left the coire and the western sun was lighting the icefalls a fine tinge of orange. I thought back to Drumochter in January and felt glad that I hadn't sold my kit.

We spent that night at Lagangarbh and set out in the morning for Coire nam Beith and Deep Cut Chimney. This was a day in complete contrast to the one we'd spent on Beinn Udlaidh; a long walk in through untracked powder, nobody else in sight, the tops clear but with a grey, cloudy sky lowering over the scene and a long climb up most of the varieties of snow and ice that Scotland can offer. The pitches of Deep Cut Chimney are short but

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quite steep and, trying to imagine what it must have been like climbing them step cutting with one axe, without pitons or screws for runners or belays, I felt great respect for the pioneers of the nineteen thirties and forties. When we emerged at the top of the climbing we realised, as no doubt everybody who does the route realises, that there was still a long way to go to the summit. After a never ending slope of strenuous neve we came upon a never ending slope of strenuous powder, then we took to scrambling up some mixed ground where it was possible to take rests in the name of assessing the next few moves. And at last we reached the



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summit – I remember the satisfaction of being there - isolated from the cares of the world by the steep slopes dropping away below us into the dusk of a February afternoon.

7 – 8 March 2015

It was an SMC weekend meet at the CIC hut, and on such occasions there is always a feeling of being obliged to fulfil one's booking, but the forecast was +3 degrees Centigrade on top of the Ben, with high winds from sea level and above. Bruce and I compromised between our sense of obligation and common sense to the extent of not driving up on Friday

night, but we were daft enough to leave Edinburgh, heading for the Ben, on Saturday morning. The burns up the side of the A9 were foaming white from Pitlochry northwards, a sure sign of intense thaw. At the west end of Loch Laggan the discharge pipes were spewing water out from the reservoir at great pressure. The scene might have appealed to our intuition of the grandeur of nature if we had not been faced with a walk up the Allt a'Mhuillin. Plodding up through the pine trees was not too bad, but once out of the trees the wind began to play with us as we aimed for the tantalising window light of the hut.

I was not expecting seriously to be bothered by the wind, given that I was laden with a rucksack containing ropes, food and winter climbing kit, but, when the gusts were at their worst, this time was different; I just had to lie down and wait for the wind to blow itself out. Then, near the hut, the question arose of how to cross the river. The choice was between wading across the torrent below the hut and trusting a snow bridge above it. Bruce and I went for the bridge rather than the wading and got across safely. I don't think that I have ever been so thankful to get out of the natural world into a man made structure.

By morning the wind had dropped but the thaw was still in progress, as forecast. The slabs just across the burn from the hut were mainly black with moss and running water and, where they retained a carapace of ice, it fractured as soon as it was stood upon. Beyond that, the snow in Coire na Ciste was damp and soft; any departure from the existing trail of footsteps meant a bootful of wet snow as one went in over ankle depth. Feeling obliged to go through the motions, Bruce and I headed up to Green Gully. The ice there was wet, but secure, and we had no competition to be first on the route. I have no real memory of the climb, or indeed the way down and the drive home, other than a sense of “why bother”?

18 – 19 March 2015

A midweek trip to the Ben, this time with a forecast of calm and chilly conditions. The CIC hut was deserted by the time we got there on the morning of our arrival, all inmates being up the hill among the figures we could see on the various classic ice routes which were clearly visible in the fine weather. Bruce hadn't done Hadrian's Wall, and it had nobody on it, so we went that way. I'd done Hadrian's once before, in completely different conditions, with Ruth Love.



On that occasion the cloud had been down, the ice had been cruddy and the spindrift at the bottom of the climb had been so intense that any bit of gear allowed to rest on the surface of the snow was irretrievably buried within seconds. This time there were no hindrances to keeping one's nerve and picking and kicking quite happily between the belays. We made the most of the ice, wherever it led us, and got to the top in the low sunlight of a fine March afternoon; the hills across Rannoch Moor and around Glen Coe, Glen Nevis, Strathspean, and stretching into the fabled country to the northwest, were flooded with a

beautiful whisky glow which shaded down to peaty darkness in the valleys. During the crisp, sunset walk down into Coire Leis, and over the starlit snowfields on the way back to the hut, I was intensely aware of our luck in experiencing such a day; I tried to resist any sense of having deserved it.

Two Step Corner, the next day, was a satisfying climb, but it is Hadrian's Wall which will stay with me as the route of the season – it all came together that day. It's the quest for that kind of experience which leads us on in our less successful, even doomed, ventures.



Climbing in Vilanova de Meia, Catalunya

Bryan Rynne

Patrick Winter and I have made a succession of trips to northern Spain to do multi-pitch, quasi-sports routes over the last few years, and this year was no exception. The main venue this year was Vilanova de Meia, together with trips to various nearby crags.

Vilanova de Meia is a small village near Lleida in Catalunya, about 100 miles from Barcelona, where we flew to. The area is situated a bit south of the Pyrenees, but these are visible most of the time, and provide

spectacular views along the northern horizon. There is an immense amount of limestone here, only a fraction of which is in the guide (no doubt much of it has been climbed at one time or other, without making it into the big, selected guide that we were using). There are many deep gorges (such as Vilanova, and Terradets which we visited a few years ago) and massive 'big walls' visible from 5-10 miles away. The selected guide to Lleida is a massive tome, apparently containing about 2800 routes, which

would keep most people going for a very long time.

We stayed in an upstairs apartment in a traditional Catalan house in the middle of a farm, in the middle of nowhere (the tarmac stopped about 3 miles before we got to it).

This was very nice, and the owners, Pete and Lou (who lived downstairs) were extremely friendly and helpful. This was situated about 3 miles from the main Vilanova crag so was



ideal for that. If anyone is interested in visiting this area we would recommend this as a place to stay (website: <http://tinyurl.com/pzjvjaf>). Due to the distance from any sort of restaurant, let alone the usual Michelin restaurant (and bar) that I normally regard as essential when choosing accommodation, we had to cook for ourselves all week. Well, to be more precise, Patrick cooked for us all week - I made tea, poured out beer and wine, and dispensed olives and crisps, but I steered well clear of the cooker.

We were there in early October, and the weather was mostly good. Quite cold mornings, so we didn't start particularly early, but it was mostly sunny, and didn't get too hot. In fact we often wore a fleece or helly to start with and were rarely too hot. In particular, we didn't bother carrying

water up the multi-pitch routes, so we could climb pretty lightly laden.

What about the climbing?

Vilanova village has a gorge above it, on one flank of which is a sort of 1.5 kilometre escarpment with a 200 metre vertical face looking down the gorge and over the surrounding countryside. This face has a huge mix of bolted and semi-bolted routes from about 6a upwards. There are also a couple of sectors on the other side of the gorge, containing single and multi-pitch routes. A lot of this was very good. The only down-side is that you have to cope with the usual northern Spain bizarre grading - usually extremely undergraded (although we did one pitch that was given 6a and was about 4), and often atrocious bolting, apart from at what the bolters regarded as the crux.

On the first day we did the 3 star 6a 'classic of the crag', Necronomicon, 140m, 4 pitches. The grading on this was about right, and was a very good route. The crux was pitch 3, a long vertical wall with (mostly) good horizontal crack holds that you could normally force one finger joint into, and get some good edging on your feet. In fact, somewhat reminiscent of the harder routes on the Heriot-Watt wall, for anyone who remembers that! Of course, it was a bit longer than the Heriot-Watt wall, so fingers were aching a bit at the top of it. Unfortunately, the route was rather spoilt by pitch 4 (and pitch 5, which is somewhat unusual on a 4 pitch route). This was loose and dangerous, and almost entirely free of bolts. I might not have minded my life depending on an occasional wobbly nut or friend if I had had some sort of confidence that I was going



the right way! However, with no route description, and a topo photo that had been taken from the other side of the gorge and showed almost no topographic features, I didn't really have a clue (OK, I am used to that). Just as I was getting a bit fed up with all this, I noticed a belay anchor for the adjacent route 5-6 metres away, and hastily traversed across to this. This had two advantages: (a) I wasn't about to fall to my death; (b) I could leave Patrick to find the way to the top. There were even two bolts some distance above the belay, so when he arrived I assured him that he could simply set a bearing on the line between these and keep going in that direction until he reached the top - well, that seemed to me to be as good an idea as anything else. This he

duly did (I don't think any more bolts materialised). We then walked off the back of the 'escarpment', and back down to the road. You could abseil off, but due to the amount of loose rock around it would be foolhardy to do so, both for yourself and for anyone else below.

Despite the final pitch, this was a good start to the trip - a steep and exciting route, in a great location with superb views across and down the gorge. Due to the slightly late start, and short daylight hours, we didn't have time to do a second long route so we headed off to the nearby single-pitch crags for the afternoon.

This pattern was repeated for the rest of the week. We realised fairly quickly

that although we have each climbed 6b regularly and the occasional 6c, in Vilanova our limit was going to be 6a, and even some 5's were quite taxing - I had to hang on the rope on the smooth, marble-like, overhanging crux on the grade 5 pitch on Amatista (6a). Of course, you don't usually encounter smooth, marble-like overhangs on grade 5 pitches...

We did several other 3 star, multi-pitch routes such as 'Sol Rogent' and 'A Donde Vas Vicente' in the same area as Necronomicon, and 'Amatista' on the other side of the gorge, as well as visiting various local, and not so local, single pitch crags, usually set in stunning scenery. Mostly the climbing was very good, apart from the occasional ludicrous grading or bolting. Unfortunately, to be honest, you probably have to be operating at 7a (French grading, not northern Spanish) or above to get the most out of the Vilanova area. However, the Lleida guide (Lleida Climbs, by Pete O'Donovan and Dani Andrada) is enormous and well worth looking at for ideas for other places to visit.

