



JMCS 2016 Contents

Introduction David Small

Welcome to the Edinburgh JMCS Annual Newsletter 2016.

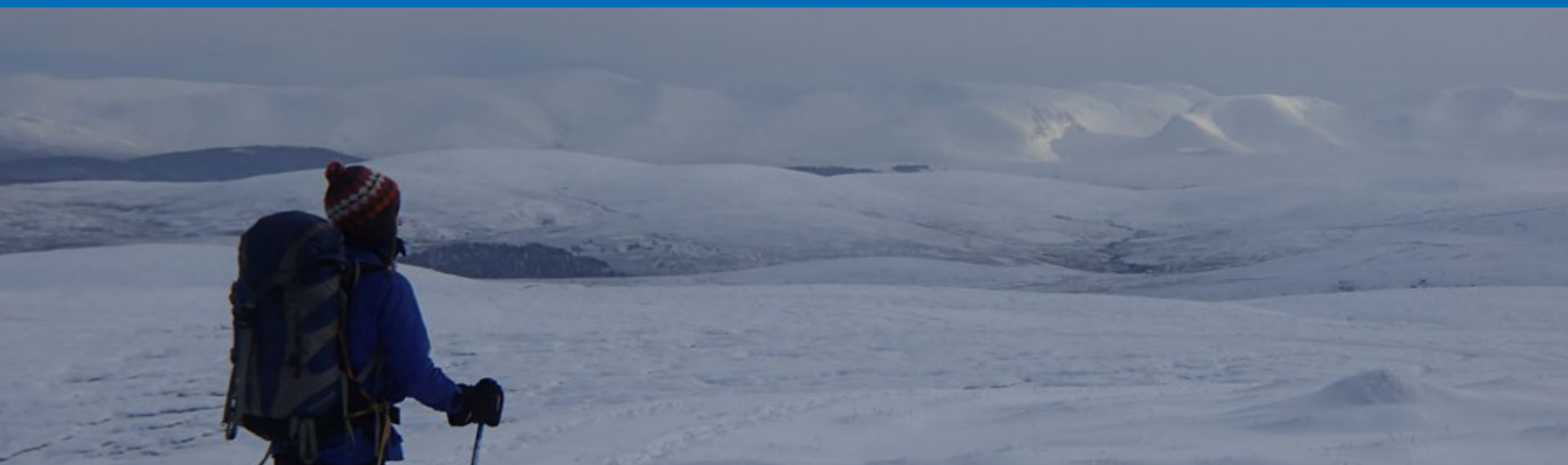
This year 50% of our content is domestic, ie it is about activities in the Scottish mountains rather than in destinations Alpine or further afield. Bruce Macrosson comments on the Scottish winter, where farce and tragedy are never too far apart, while Charles Stupart vividly evokes the magic of the Smiddy and An Teallach in winter and Bryan Rynne recalls 30+ years of hill walking and predicts, rightly I hope, that it will never be the case that the whole population of the world has Completed.

The other 50% reports what members have been up to on ski and on foot in the snows

of Iceland, the amazing scenery of America and the infinitely varied setting of the Alps. I take two messages from this. First, rocks and mountains both far from and near to home offer plenty of scope for fun and adventure. Secondly, members of the Edinburgh JMCS are as active as anybody in going in search thereof.

On behalf of the Club, I thank the contributing authors and especially Sarah Wright who, as so often before, has sprinkled her fairy dust to transform the lead of Word documents and jpg's into the gold of the Newsletter which is now up on your screen.

David Small
Secretary





The Forge Charles Stupart

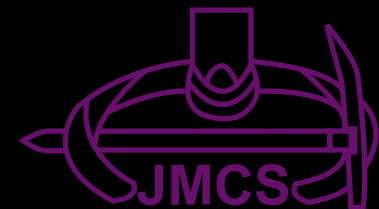
2016 is the 50th anniversary of the club obtaining the first lease at the Smiddy. Much work was done in the years between 1966 and the opening in 1972 by the members at the time, some of whom are still members of the club today.

As the plaque on the wall outside the hut says, the commissioning of the building as a hut was made possible by funds subscribed in memory of the Honorary Member Jim Clarkson. Since then the hut has undergone an occasional upgrade here and there but still retains

the simple layout, mixed with a blend of conservation of “original features” that must have been so key in the decision by the APRS (Association for Protection of Rural Scotland) a charity, which promotes the care of Scotland’s rural landscapes, to issue the award to the Smiddy in 1975.

March 2016, after a bit of a chat with one of the locals who knows the mountain really well, saw me once again back in the hut and another winter traverse of An Teallach – always a great day out!

The Smiddy



1966 - 2016

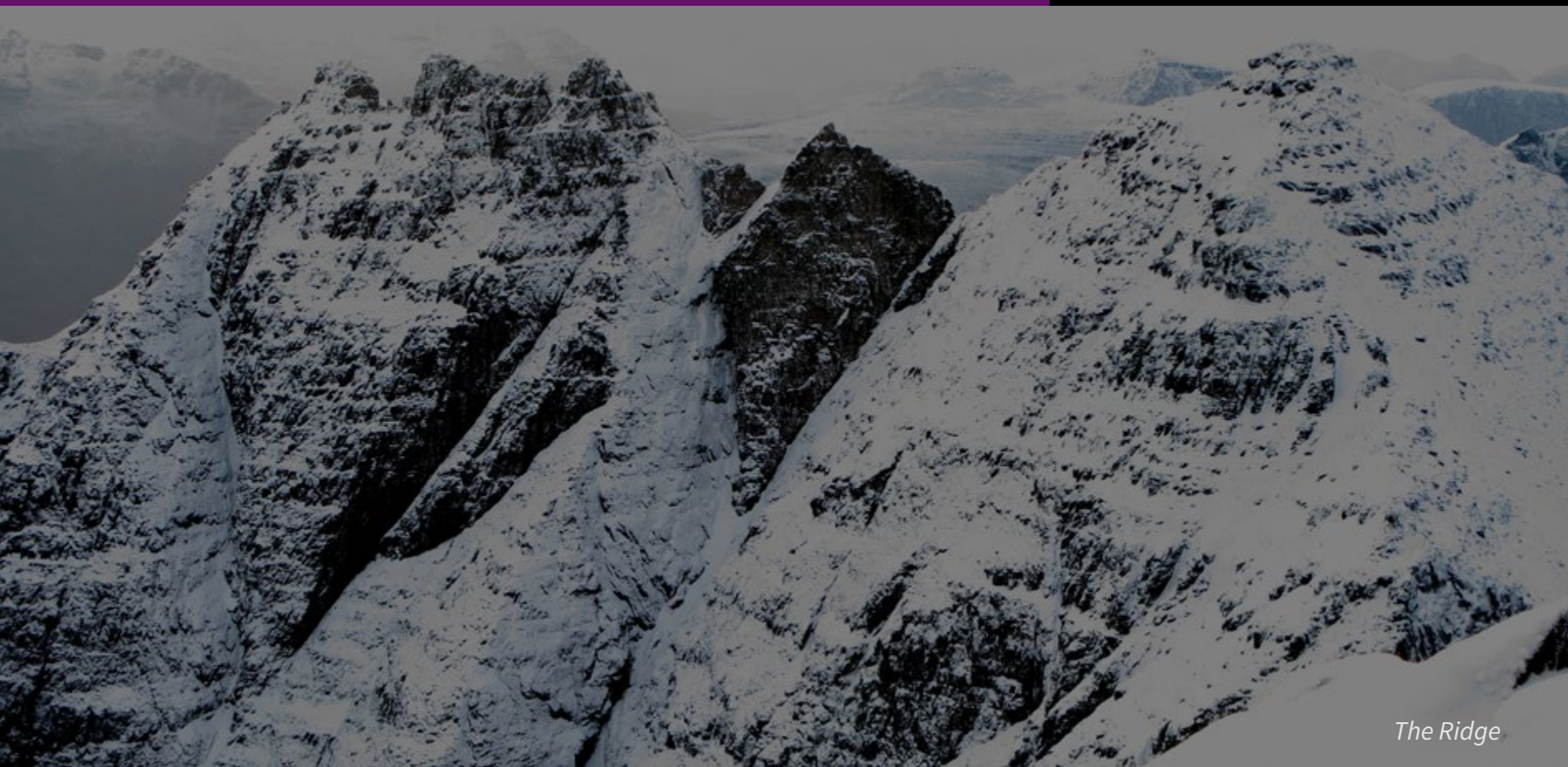
Without a doubt the An Teallach corries are monumental, deep and U shaped. Carved through the creek and fracture of ice, the forces of nature have forged one of the best mountains in Scotland right out the back of the hut.

The prominence between the Loch and the summit of Sgurr Fiona is massive

No winter climbing clobber meant a nice light rucksack. A late start meant lunch in the corrie then easy progress up a gully and onto the ridge.

Never in the shade, Torridonian ripples in the sun – the Bad Step is fun the pinnacles never hard, always straightforward but fantastically atmospheric.

*“ Never in the shade,
Torridonian ripples in
the sun ”*



The Ridge

THE JUNIOR MOUNTAINEERING CLUB
OF SCOTLAND (EDINBURGH SECTION)

THE SMIDDY

THE CONVERSION OF THIS BUILDING FOR USE AS A
CLIMBERS HUT WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY FUNDS SUBSCRIBED
IN MEMORY OF JIM CLARKSON
HONORARY MEMBER WHO DIED ON CÀRN MÒR DEARG LOCHABER
17 MARCH 1968

*Home Sweet Home
(for the night!)*

Sgurr Fiona and rock hard neve on the descent as the temperature starts to drop.

Ascended Bidean a' Ghlas Thuill in March, with the sun setting over the Atlantic, gave undoubtedly the highlight of this traverse.

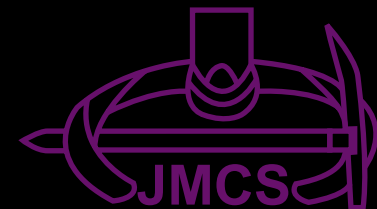
Then time to start the descent down the North Ridge of Bidean a' Ghlas Thuill and back to the Smiddy, home sweet home

for another night.

So another fun day up on An Teallach in winter, and the whole mountain to ourselves - sometimes you just get lucky.

So whether you see the hut as a “cosy Scottish Climbing hut”, “Alpine Style comfy bivouac refuge”, “the holiday hut”, “one of the club’s cherished huts” or simply just the Smiddy, the Smiddy is just such a great place.

The Smiddy



1966 - 2016

Yosemite and Tuolumne

Lyonell Boulton and Bryan Rynne

After talking about it for a long time, we finally managed to go on a climbing trip to Yosemite this year.

Bryan: To be honest, the fact that I went at all was due to Lyonell proposing concrete plans for the trip early in the year. Given that he had been there before and we have similar climbing abilities, when he proposed the trip I thought 'if I don't say yes to this I will never do it!'. So, to some extent, a 'no-brainer'. On the other hand, I did feel a certain amount of trepidation, and I was worried that this might be way out of my league. In particular, I did insist that we would not be doing any 1000m routes dragging portaledge and the ancillary stuff with us.

Lyonell: Early this year I decided to tease Bryan to finally make a space in his busy agenda for a climbing trip to Yosemite. For me it was an opportunity to go back to The Valley which I first visited almost 20 years ago and perhaps find my way back to adventure climbing. Big walls or desperate climbs were never part of the agenda.

*Initial view of Yosemite Valley while driving down from the west.
El Cap is the obvious wall on the left, and Half-Dome is just visible at the back.*



Tuolumne Meadows. Lake Tenaya is just visible, with Stately Pleasure Dome (containing the climb Great White Book) on its left.



Everyone reading this will know about Yosemite and some will have been there. Most people will even have seen ‘Valley Uprising’ the film by Peter Mortimer and Nick Rosen which was part of the Reel Rock Tour in 2014. Unfortunately, our trip bore little resemblance to that: no drink, no drugs, no 1000m routes up blank walls. The former was bit of a shame and the latter was bit of a relief, but we are middle-aged mathematician nowadays. Given this, it initially seemed difficult to know quite what to write about it that hasn’t been written before. Online the ‘Yosemite for the middle aged mathematician’ demographic had not yet been tapped into, so that seemed to be a gap in the market that we could fill.

Except that Krakauer already exploited the notion of a middle aged climber who was also a mathematician with his portrait of John Gill in Eiger Dreams. Given that, we decided to just give a brief account of our trip and include some beta to people who might want to go there in the near future.

We flew to San Francisco (there are other possible routes), which is about 170 miles and 5 hours drive from Yosemite National Park. We then hired a car and drove there. The journey was quite easy, but due to the flight times we stayed in a motel in Manteca, about one and a half hour from San Francisco, both on the way out and on the way back.

“Yosemite for the middle aged mathematician’ demographic had not yet been tapped into, so that seemed to be a gap in the market that we could fill.”



*Looking up at El Cap from the Merced river in the middle of the valley.
An idyllic spot for a swim, if you don't mind swimming in ice-cold glacier meltwater.
Lyonell went in, but I chose to read my book for a while.*

Lyonell: Manteca is Spanish for 'Lard' and it has some excellent Tex-Mex food. Best Breakfast Burritos ever.

Accommodation seems to be the biggest logistical problem with a trip to Yosemite. The park currently receives about 4 million visitors a year and about 25 thousand of them are climbers. Luxury villa type accommodation (which is what Bryan tends to prefer) is very limited and normally booked at least six months in advance. There is also a lot of other accommodation in the valley, but it also appears to get booked up long in advance, is expensive and, to be honest, looked a bit grotty. Most of the camp-sites have to be booked, and often fill completely a long time in advance. There are a small number of other camp-sites in the valley that you just turn up at. Camp 4, where the hippies of the 1960-80s stayed, is one of them. However these seem very overcrowded and noisy, as well as hard to get into. We found that the catering provided by the Park Services and Curry Company is roughly comparable to Michelin restaurants, but only in terms of their prices...

For all these reasons we did not actually stay in Yosemite Valley but instead opted to get away from the masses and pitch our tents in a quiet camp-site called Tamarack Flats, a short distance up the Tioga road heading towards Tuolumne Meadows. This

is a 'wilderness' camp-site, with toilets, but no running water, and each pitch had a bear-proof container, a barbeque and picnic table. Despite Bryan's usual distaste for camping, this was OK for him, and was fairly quiet and easy to get into. It works on a first come first served basis, so you have to be there fairly early to guarantee a spot, but there is quite a rapid turnover of people. We stayed there 12 nights (this may have been illegal) but most parties only stayed 1-2 nights, so if you hang around in the morning you will get a pitch. It also had the advantage of making it relatively easy to drive to either Yosemite Valley or Tuolumne Meadows (about 40 minutes). In fact, this turned out to be an ideal basecamp and we alternated climbing days at each sites.

Late May to July is the high climbing season, with the expectation of dry, sunny weather and relatively cool temperatures. We were there for the first two weeks of June. This is slightly on the late side for Yosemite Valley - in fact, most days the temperature in there was in the mid 90s (Fahrenheit!). Despite being Venezuelan, Lyonell found this quite hot so he had to take regular baths in the Merced river. However, due to years of intensive training in S France and Spain, Bryan quite liked it. Once you get off the valley floor you get a bit of a breeze and it was usually almost comfortable. On the multi-pitch

Looking along Tenaya Creek valley, towards Tuolumne, from the track up to Glacier Point on the south rim of the valley. Half Dome is on the right, and North Dome is the small dome on the left. Our biggest route was the South Face of North Dome (5.7), up the shaded face in the photo. We walked in from a long way behind it, and bushwhacked down through all the vegetation to get to the foot of the clean rock - a long day!



routes we carried water and wind-shirts, but not much else. On the other hand, it is almost too early for Tuolumne, which is at an altitude of 2600m. In fact the Tioga road had only opened a few days before we arrived, when the snow had melted, and we had to walk across snow fields to get to some of the routes. Here, we didn't carry so much water, but a fair amount of thermals. Being at 1800m, the camp-site was cold overnight, so we were both glad we brought quilted jackets and fairly heavy duty sleeping bags.

Once we arrived (after buying provisions in Manteca) we got our tents up and put all our food into one of the bear-proof steel boxes that are everywhere. It seems that if you don't put your food, and everything else that smells edible like

toothpaste or suntan cream into these, then you will either get killed by a bear or shot by a park ranger. If the bear kills you, then the bear has to be shot by a park ranger too, so it is best to avoid any strong smelling body lotions or shampoos. We then headed off down to Yosemite Valley to do some warm-up climbs.

At some point on the road down into the valley, you get your first proper view of the big walls, with El Cap on the left and Half-dome at the back and on the right. OK, it was still a long way away, and we had seen the photos (and Lyonell had seen it before), but Bryan just had to stop and look at it and take a photo - utterly spectacular! Of course, it got even more spectacular as we got closer,

until we arrived on the valley floor with 1000m walls soaring up all around you. The downside is that at that moment you also find yourself in a long traffic jam, surrounded by a heaving mass of humanity. Being America the obesity capital of the world, this seems a fairly apt description.

On that first day we headed for Swan Slabs, a small single-pitch crag with some easy routes that we could warm up on. We started with Bryan leading Flake Route - this was a nice, easy route (maybe HS) to get some feel for the rock. Unfortunately, when he got to the ledge at the top he found that the belay/abseil bolts were missing! Lyonell came up, and after some discussion we then had to downclimb it

(solo). Given that we were already into it, we then soloed a few other routes (about VS/HVS), including Swan Slabs Gulley (5.6). This boosted our confidence (well, it shredded Bryan's nerves).

Bryan: Apart from the soloing bit, this was fun, on good rock with lots of friction for the feet and was a good introduction to the rock.

After that we had dinner in Yosemite Lodge. This is a sort of apartment complex in the valley with a large 'canteen'. The food was OK, so we ate there most nights when we had climbed in The Valley.

The next day, with somewhat over-inflated egos, we opted to go to the Polly Dome area in Tuolumne Meadows. We bushwhacked for about one and a half hours to the base of Phobos, a 5.9 classic testpiece of the locality. Naturally, neither of us could get beyond the initial, steeply overhanging crack - at 3m off the ground! After a few attempts, by both of us, which included pulling on gear and falling off (to our defence, it was wet), we gave up and decided to head to the lower area of Bunny Slopes. There we 'enjoyed' a few quasi-bolted testpieces on the classic, glass-smooth, polished, 'low-

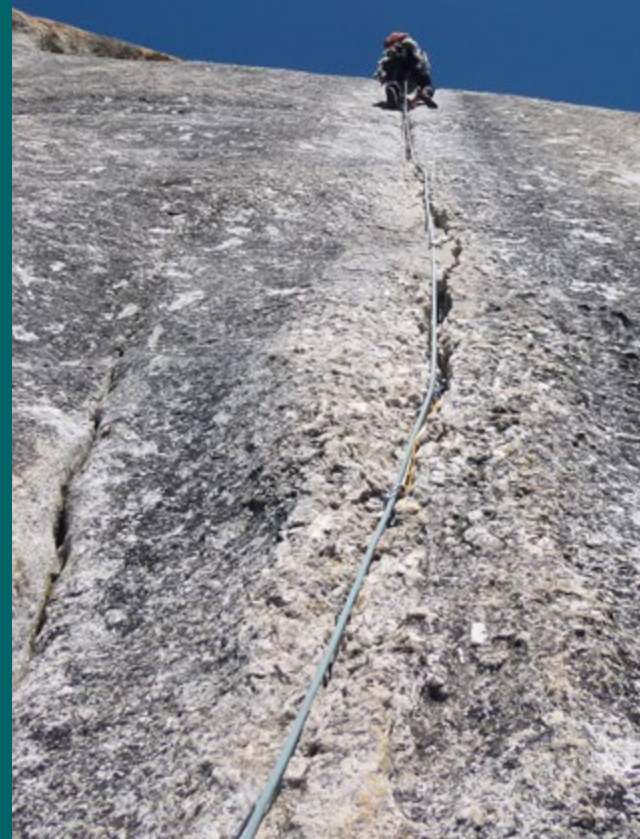
angled' granite slabs for which Tuolumne is world renowned.

That evening, over a barbecue (a lot of sausages and a few bread rolls) at the camp-site, this debacle caused us to reassess our ambitions for the rest of the trip. We decided that 5.9 (supposedly HVS!) may be out of our reach in Yosemite.

On day two we went to one of the Valley's famous beginners' crags, Knob Hill. There we linked Turkey Pie with the appropriately named Anti Ego Crack and regained some confidence in our abilities. The feature of the day though was our first encounter with the local wildlife, in the form of a Coral (or a King) snake that Bryan found at the base of the routes after our abseil. Regardless of the species: Coral is deadly - King is innocuous, we reminded ourselves to visually check the insides of our rucksacks and shoes, before inserting our limbs into them. To celebrate the success of the day we dined on a couple of pizzas at Curry Village (now called Half Dome Village).

The third day we began exploring longer, slightly more exposed routes. We headed to the appropriately named

Bryan inching his way up the (very) long crack on West Crack, Daff Dome (5.9), wishing he was better at finger and hand jams.



Stately Pleasure Dome, right in front of the beautiful Tenaya Lake in Tuolumne Meadows. There, after a complicated approach which involved a grade 4 solo and a rescue rope thrown at Bryan who became stuck on a ledge, we did the Great White Book (5.6R). This became one of the features of the trip for Lyonell. The R besides the grade meant that the route was poorly protected. In this case the crux pitch (led by Lyonell) was a 30m, unprotected, 10in off width corner. Needless to say, many 'real' Yosemite climbers solo this route (we saw one of them), and people have been reported as literally walking down the pitch in tennis shoes.

This climb became a turning point for the rest of the trip and over the following nine days we alternated between Yosemite Valley and Tuolumne Meadows, apart from one rest day when we went for a 'wilderness walk' in Tuolumne to Elizabeth Lake with views of Echo Peak. On the Tuolumne days we cooked at the camp-site as there was nowhere to eat along the Tioga road at that time of year.

To a large extent the Yosemite Valley routes were long, steep finger and hand jamming crack lines, or long laybacks. Although the guide books talk about the Yosemite granite as being ground smooth by

glaciers, we thought it had a lot of friction compared to some rock we have climbed on. Even without being great at jamming, these routes seemed OK up to about 5.8 or 5.9, and reassuringly well protected.

Bryan: I could get a bombproof nut in every 3-4 metres, while Lyonell would put in a wobbly friend.

Lyonell: I could get a bombproof friend in every 3-4 metres, while Bryan would put in a wobbly nut.

On the other hand, the Tuolumne Meadows climbs contain a lot of horribly runout 'low-angle slabs'. This can literally entail 20 or 30 metre runouts with no holds and no protection - just walking up slabs on your hands and feet, hoping that you don't slip. When you are seconding directly upwards this does not seem too bad, although the angle is not that low, and you do have to look carefully for the slight changes in angle that give you something better to stand on. When you are leading or seconding a traverse, and are 30 metres out from a runner, these slabs don't seem at all low-angled! Bryan still vividly remembers the terrifying experience of a slight steepening in angle just before the belay ledge when about 20m above the only cam on the pitch, especially given that

"Coral is deadly - King is innocuous, we reminded ourselves to visually check the insides of our rucksacks and shoes, before inserting our limbs into them."

Lyonell was taking a lot of pictures below, belayed on 3 micro-cams (the sort that are not really rated to take long falls!).

Alternatively, if you are not on low-angle slabs, you might find yourself in an unprotectable corner or chimney. Regardless of the grade, a route rated as R might involve leading a hideous, off-width, angled corner with nothing but friction to keep you on, and no protection for 30m - if you slip you would fall past the belay station, touching absolutely nothing in between.

A few other highlights:
Nutcracker 5.9 start variation. Arguably the most popular Valley climb ever, it was

Bryan and Lyonell on the top of Daff Dome, with Fairview Dome behind on the right.



one of the first in Yosemite done solely with nuts. Lyonell almost fell off the crux mantel move onto a ledge at the top of the last pitch. Fortunately the move was protected by an 'in situ' nut, probably dating back to the 1970. According to the guide, an unwritten rule was that no piton should ever be driven into this route. Bryan on the other hand found the crux quite easy, to the extent that he thought it was a good idea to recover the historical piece of gear as a souvenir. Following Lyonell's recommendation, he left the nut on the ledge at the top of the climb.

West Crack (5.9). Located in the beautiful setting of Daff Dome, we both felt that the climb was among the best of the trip with fantastic views of the appropriately named Fairview Dome. Bryan lead a

massive runout crux pitch on that day, but the real feature was the belay at the top. Your only protection there was an erratic boulder about a metre and a half in diameter which was solely prevented from rolling down the summit by a suspicious looking fist size rock. Needless to say, we carefully threaded the slings under the boulder without touching the rock.

South face of North Dome (5.8). Long (4h) approach with heavy bushwhacking but absolutely worth it. The route is above the Royal Arches, so the best approach is from above, starting near Tamarack flats. A total 14h epic, but magnificent route with views of Half Dome across the valley. Possibly the best of the trip, plus we also had our second encounter with the local wildlife. Returning along

the trail, in the dark and miles from anywhere, we spotted a pair of 'predator' looking eyes staring at us from the bushes about 10 yards away. We don't know what it was, but we didn't hang around to find out.

Talking to a ranger a few days later we were reassured to be told that no one had been killed by a bear in the park for decades. We were slightly less reassured when he then observed that a few people had had their arms ripped off...

Super Slide (5.9) in the Royal Arches area was the most technically demanding climb we did in the whole trip, but possibly the most technically humiliating was Munginella (5.6) on Five Open Books on the last day. We were all in full rack and



The famous waterfall at the Hetch-Hetchy reservoir that everyone walks to to get wet - and no further!

ready to begin climbing at the base of the route, when a local young lady in tennis shoes asked for permission to pass ahead of us and solo the same route. Bryan was definitely impressed by the feat.

Some final beta. June seems to be the best time to go. Avoid Camp 4. If you want to stay in luxury villa accommodation, plan way in advance (and good luck). Consider a two weeks plus trip, it takes time to get used to the climbing style.

Also, get a good topo/guide. We used the supertopo guides, which take a bit of getting used to, but when you read them carefully they tell you exactly what size friends you will need for fixed and running belays when the possibilities are limited.

Lyonell: Bring lots of friends and some nuts.

Bryan: Swap friends with nuts as appropriate.

Read this carefully! If you use up your size 4 cam (for example) in the wrong place you might find you have run your entire rope out and then have, literally, absolutely nothing to belay on.

On West Crack we found ourselves both hanging from two friends, with nothing to stand on, 200 metres up. On the South Face of North Dome Bryan had to untie and climb a (hard) crux move of a pitch while Lyonell was still leading across some blank, runout slab - good job we didn't fall off...

Bryan (finally): I am certainly glad I went, but this is a serious place, especially Tuolumne. Ignore the grade conversion

tables - they are meaningless until you have climbed there a lot (a lot more than me) and have a real feel for all the features of the rock there. If you want to lead, I think you probably have to be comfortable leading at least HVS/E1 to get much out of it, although I have only had one short trip there so I might be wrong about that. We climbed up to 5.9, and if you ignore the danger element then I would give that about E1 5b (slightly more than the grade conversion tables suggest), but I used up a lot of adrenalin on those routes, and I don't usually generate much adrenalin on E1 5b.

Lyonell (finally): Yosemite is still a magical place despite the crowds and increasing restrictions by the Park Services. It is definitely an eye opener and worth visiting at least once during your climbing career.

Chasing the Ephemeral Bruce Macrosson

(with apologies to Simon Richardson for nicking his title)

Here follows a wee tale of JMCSers and pals at play in their native land.

I, like most Scottish winter obsessives have spent years searching for some pattern or long term clue so as to give some certainty of decent conditions before sinking precious holiday time, brownie points and money into dates.

I've still not found it but I have isolated one almost mathematical certainty

as the money, time and hassle invested in a particular winter climbing trip increases then the chance of serious meteorological nastiness dominating the trip increases proportionally. Add some expensive plane tickets into the equation and then the equation becomes almost a certainty.

This rule was again demonstrated this winter.

Ex-pat JMCSer Gwyllim Satchell flew up from Henley for an early season long weekend and Rob Noone was joined by 3 Irish chums around the same time. With four plane tickets purchased the storm

clouds soon gathered.

Whilst we must swing axes in rough weather if we're to get much done in this country, Rob has yet to accept that when a storm has been officially named by the Met Office we should just give up. Rob therefore played the dutiful host undaunted whilst storm Gertrude piled in off the Atlantic and indulged his guests in the delights of a Scottish winter at its most "Scottish". They spent one day crawling off the Cairngorm plateau into 110 mph winds as an entree before ending the trip on a high with midnight spent huddled on the Ben Nevis plateau in turbo driven sleet wondering when (if) his friends would ever emerge from a slush buried tower ridge.

Names however do scare Gwyllim and I so it was back to work for me and socialising for Gwyllim with a snow bound slither up the A9 into the Norries to finish off the trip. That last day could have been a success if I hadn't fallen through a snow bridge into a stream up to my waist on the walk in. The icy water oozing over the top of my boots did take the edge off Patey's Route for me that day.

Rob waiting on the top of Tower Ridge



“ Winter addicts refuse to learn. So two months later more Irish and English plane tickets had been bought... ”

No trench foot though so a definite result.

Winter addicts refuse to learn. So two months later more Irish and English plane tickets had been bought and Gwylim, Rob and the Irish and I were all bound for the Ben for a long weekend at the CIC hut. Now late March on Nevis really should be a reasonable bet, in hindsight though the outcome was predictable.

Gwylim and I raced and beat the inevitable wind and snow on the Friday with a speedy drive and walk up and delighted in fat ice and blue skies on “The Gutter”. As soon as the Irish Vibram hit

the North Face path later that afternoon the inevitable began. Rob and chums opened the hut door early that evening with the gales and snow pounding in behind them. The temperature then preceded to craftily rise early the next morning too. At daybreak we all emerged from the hut into the gloomy clag, each party ploughing it's own separate furrow through knee deep damp snow. Rob and Sean up into Observatory gully, which I must confess did seem a bit of a spicy option in light of what had come down the night before and Gwylim & I up into Coire na Ciste. I didn't like what I saw on departing the hut and wasn't the most psyched partner that day. Gwylim

and I spent a wet and knackered ninety minutes swimming up to the foot of our route where we bottled it in the face of surprisingly steep ice, sloughs of snow coming down from on high and a way too high misery factor.

Mr Noone & Co. however have an alarming affinity for the “full” Scottish experience so ploughed on regardless up Observatory Gully focused on Indicator Wall. No surrender either as Observatory Gully avalanched below them cutting off any retreat. Real commitment in marginal conditions, perfect, just what they had come up for. Unfortunately their day was about to be rudely interrupted.....

Discovering a pair of English climbers stuck under Good Friday climb unable to get either up or down they felt obliged to help. Despite Rob's pleas for them to come up Indicator wall with them where the ice was steep enough to be out of the dodgy snow, they were having none of that. So they all roped together and Good Friday Climb it was to be. I wonder if any of Rob's new found skiing skills were of use as he rode an avalanche down onto a wisely placed runner half way up it ?

They all got up however and had only just begun to feel their way down through wind and snow off the Plateau when the day's randomness cranked up yet another notch. They now came upon a young maiden with only her smile and hot-pants to keep

her warm. Our Irish friends lingered a moment to stop and talk this single young lady (as they are wont to do), no chance for flirting however as her smile promptly vanished as she collapsed with hypothermia at their feet. The rescued English said farewell, and I hope thank you, leaving our Irish friends to nurse Mademoiselle Hotpants down to the Halfway Lochain on the strength of jelly babies, craic and some warm clothes scrounged from others on the way down.

I was mightily relieved when two head-torches were spotted just before midnight bobbing up towards the hut as the wind and snow started to crank themselves up into their next frenzy.

We all ran for it the next day.

Gwylim and I finished our trip with a swim up into Stob Coire nam Lochain to incur the wrath of the UKC conditions police as we burrowed through powder into soggy turf and rock on Raeburns Original Route but the skies were blue, the climbing absorbing and it was a fun end to the trip. No damsels in distress rescued, avalanches dodged or late night finish so I felt a bit of a fraud when we got back home in time for a family tea.

As already said, winter addicts refuse to learn. So the tickets up North have already been bought and days off booked but maybe, just please maybe it will be winter 2017 will be when my theory is proved definitively wrong “



Will tops out of Tower Ridge at last (2nd Scottish route)

Iceland Ski Tour

David Buchanan

Question: What do you do if you are lost in an Icelandic forest? Answer: Stand up! (Old Icelandic joke.)

Two friends of mine Richard and Roger were travelling through Iceland on their way to Greenland in the spring of 2015, and noticed that there was rather a lot of snow about and thought it might offer ski touring possibilities. So, in early April 2016, six of us arrived at the excellent youth hostel at Akureyri, planning to ski day tours on the Troll Peninsula (see maps). We had limited information: an Eagle Ski Club tour report; we knew that the Telemark Ski Company run a trip there; and a blog by some scary couloir skiers from Chamonix. We also obtained maps. 1:100,000 scale maps are available in the UK from The Map Shop and Stanfords and are useful for planning. 1:50,000 can be bought in Iceland, although finding a shop that sells them can be challenging.

Our first tour was to a peak called Salur to the south of Akureyri. (Map 2 shows the locations of our tours.) The skin up felt quite long and was quite steep and then rocky at the top. We

Richard skiing down Kistufjall





had an excellent ski down, on slightly icy but softening névé, all the way to our cars. Very much like the best Scottish spring skiing.

The next day we drove to the opposite side of Eyjafjörður to ski Kaldbakur. This area is popular with snowmobile riders and we parked at their car park a few metres above the fjord. We followed the snowmobile trail along the south side of a prominent gully that separated us from Kaldbakur. The gully broadened into big bowl which we followed onto the east ridge of our mountain. Although this started gently, it became steep. I turned back when the névé turned to ice (none of us were

carrying ice axe or crampons), but my more intrepid friends continued to the summit. The descent turned out to be a really great ski run down the bowl and then the gully on névé which became good spring snow.

We now moved to the very welcoming and quirky hostel at Dalvik, and because the weather was rather poor, we took a side trip to the Goðafoss waterfall.

The weather improved overnight so we did a short tour round and above the local ski area in varying visibility and snow.

The forecast for the following day was poor and although there was little precipitation,

low cloud resulted in poor visibility. So we explored the Svarfaðardalur valley south west of Dalvik, and did a short tour to the small lake of Skieosvatn.

Wednesday 20th April dawned cold and bright. We drove north to Ólafsfjörður to ski one of the subsidiary peaks of Kistufjall. Great views and a wonderful ski down over hard névé, soft slab and spring snow. Some of us drove to Siglufjörður for a celebratory beer.

Good weather continued and we drove beyond Siglufjörður to the north of the Troll Peninsula and the Ulfsdalir valley. We skied up one of the peaks of

“ The experience of skiing directly above the sea was quite different from touring in the Alps and not unlike skiing in Norway’s Lyngen Alps ”



Dalabaejarfjall. Very windy and coolish. The ski down was enjoyable, but not as good as the previous descents as it was spoilt by some breakable crust. Because this gave us a rather short day we thought we might drive the back road to Ólafsfjörður and so circumnavigate this part of the peninsula. Unfortunately, approximately halfway to Ólafsfjörður, the road was blocked by snow so we had to retrace our tracks, occasioning another beer in Siglufjörður.

Our last ski tour from our base at Dalvík

was to the peak of Sólarfjöll, the most easterly of the two peaks that dominated our view to the south. We parked at the highest point of the road below the peak and skinned towards its north ridge. This proved to be too steep, and led by David Medcalf we traversed across the west flank until we arrived at a wide easy angled gully, which provided access to a col and the most northerly summit of Sólarfjöll. This gave excellent views across Eyjafjörður. After enjoying the summit in good weather we skied pleasantly back to the cars, and a drove south to Akureyri.

This was a great trip. The experience of skiing directly above the sea was quite different from touring in the Alps and not unlike skiing in Norway’s Lyngen Alps. Generally we had the mountains to ourselves, though our summit on Kistufjall was shared with a snowmobile party, and there is some heliskiing. We met German and Italian parties, but no other British ski tourers. However, tourism is booming in Iceland and back country skiing is also growing rapidly. Worth going back soon before it all gets tracked out.



Dunploddin’ Bryan Rynne

In mid-October, on Arran, I finally came to the end of a 26 year odyssey - my final Graham, having already done the Munros+tops, the Furths (‘Munros’ in the British Isles outwith Scotland), Corbetts and Donalds. I also did the deleted Munros, on the grounds that ‘if they were good enough for Munro they are good enough for me’.

This took considerably longer than the original Homeric odyssey, but fortunately was not accompanied by the myriad epic-disasters of that one [nor did it feature any of the bizarre fantasies in Cream’s ‘Tales

of Brave Ulysses’ but maybe that was just as well...]

So, to help fill the newsletter, here is a random selection of thoughts about all this.

The start of it all

Apart from a youthful indiscretion in about 1982, when I ascended Ben Nevis as a PhD student, clad in a leather jacket and completely unencumbered by items such as a map or a compass, but carrying two tins of beer in case of an emergency, I started Munro bagging in 1990. Not that

I realised that at the time - I was simply accompanying someone who was bagging Munros, I had no intention of doing so myself. Unfortunately, at some point I realised that I had done about 50-60 of them, and I felt that I should start writing them down. This of course is the start of a slippery slope which involves colouring them in on a map, starting to spot the gaps, then driving off to remote parts of Scotland on Friday evenings in order to sleep in my car (which was a Capri in those days, so I had a stylish vehicle available which happened to be ideally shaped to

sleep in, being long and sleek) solely for the purpose of walking over a selection of dots on the map, whose names I often didn't even know.

Of course, once I had finished the Munros (+ tops and Furths), in 1997, the obvious thing to do was to vow not to do any more. Unfortunately, for some reason I then bought the Corbetts book, with a view to getting some ideas for pleasant, local walks, with no intention of doing the lot of them. However, my anti-perambulation vow lasted about as long as various other vows over the years, and once again I found myself driving off to remote areas of Scotland to sleep in my car...

A roughly similar thing happened with the Grahams, although by then I had given up sleeping in the car and was using B&Bs (the Donalds are fairly easy to do, and were knocked off over two winter seasons, mostly on single days out).

Why do it?

Obviously, they are there. Other than that, it is hard to know why this activity is so addictive. I did, and still do, enjoy the feeling of being fit enough to power up long steep hills and do 25-30 mile walks in fell-running shoes.

(OK, change that to 15 mile walks nowadays, and the power is missing). On a good day (summer or winter), the Scottish landscape can be glorious and it feels so good to be alive and out in it (OK, on a bad day it can be pretty grim, but even that sometimes gives a morbid sense of achievement, at the end of the day, when you have reached a pub, anyway).

I also quite like walking on my own - you can mull over big questions like 'life, the universe and everything', or more mundane things like what to do at work next week. In fact, I used to prove maths theorems in my head, and sometimes got so engrossed in that that I would suddenly realise that I hadn't really looked at anything for the last couple of hours (OK, I don't do that nowadays either...).

You could keep on going up nearby hills, but that really is a bit boring, so the major advantage of doing the various tick lists is that it forces you off to remote areas of the country that you would not bother with without that motivation - which possibly sounds a bit pathetic!

Why did it take so long?

At one stage I was doing 50 or 60 Munros per year, but then I discovered climbing,

*“walking on my own
- you can mull over
big questions like
'life, the universe and
everything,' ”*

which came to displace walking when the weather is nice. Also, as I have got older, sitting at home feeling warm and dry has displaced walking when the weather is ghastly. Combining these means that things have slowed down a lot in recent years.

How many are there?

On the current lists (these lists have changed slightly over the last 26 years)

Munros: 282 Tops: 227

Furths: 34

Corbetts: 221

Donalds: 89

Grahams: 221

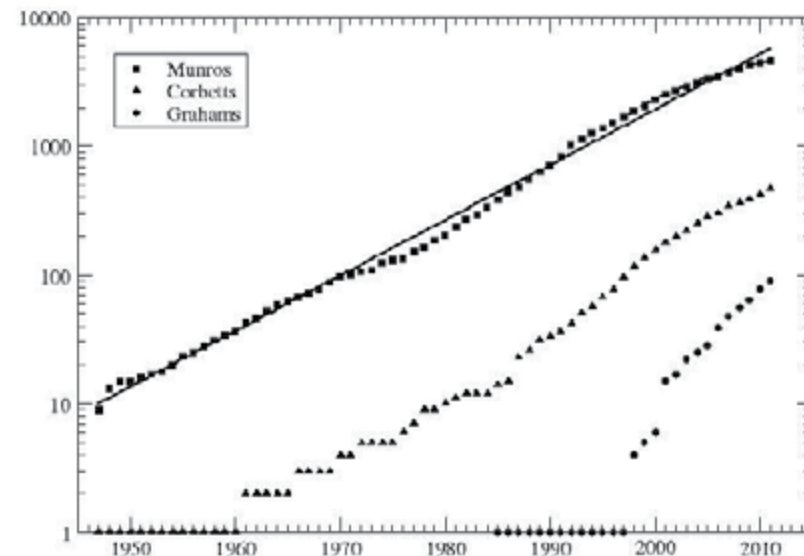
giving a grand total of 1,074. So, I averaged about 40 per year.

How many people bother?

All of the following is based on the



The summit of Ben Nevis, 1981



numbers of people who have admitted to doing these lists (either to the SMC nowadays, or to the Angry Corrie crowd in the past). It is hard to know how accurate that is. Anyway, here goes. The current number of completions seems to be (on 16/10/16), from the SMC website:

Munros: 6026

Corbetts: 623

Grahams: 110 (not on the SMC site, so just an extrapolation from the graph below)

It does not seem to be easy to find other numbers, at least, on the basis of about 2 minutes research on google (which I would guess is about the level of research that goes into, say, the typical newspaper article).

Above is a graph of the log of the number of Munro, Corbett and Graham completions, up to 2012 (admission: I plagiarized this graph from the web-site <http://tinyurl.com/h8brfzr>).

This has a few interesting features (well, I found them interesting):

(a) the growth of Munro and Corbett completion numbers was very close to exponential (straight line on a log graph) for a long time. I have no idea why this should be so. Exponential growth is a standard growth rate for lots of systems, in fact, for anything modelled by the simplest, first-order, linear differential equation you can imagine (this used to

be in O-level maths, but I suspect that it isn't in the modern equivalent). For example, the number of bacteria on a petri dish, or rabbits in a field, when there is a plentiful food supply (hence the phrase 'breed like rabbits'). But why should Munro and Corbett baggers do this (increase exponentially, not breed like rabbits)?

(b) The growth rate for both Munro and Corbett completion numbers looks like it is tailing off slightly on the graph, and the above numbers for 2016 show that that trend has continued to date. The numbers are still increasing, but not exponentially. Of course, they have to tail off at some point, or in a few years time everyone in the world would have done the Munros. In

fact, anecdotally, there seem to me to be fewer people around when I venture onto a Munro nowadays than there used to be, and when I pass well-known Munro-access car-parks there seem to be fewer cars. I did Aonach Mor and Beag a couple of months ago, on a nice day, and passed 2 people. This was way fewer than I expected for such well-known and accessible hills. The number of completionists is obviously a lagging indicator of the number of people out there - people who have spent the last 20 years doing the first 200 Munros are probably not going to stop now, just because fewer people are starting out. But my guess is that there are fewer people starting out.

Of course, most people you see on Munros are not Munro baggers anyway. If you define a (mathematically idealised) Munro bagger to be someone who goes up each and every Munro exactly once, there is no reason why the distribution of numbers of them that you see on any given day should cluster around the honeypot Munros. Hence, you ought to get a better estimate of the number of baggers around by counting how many people you encounter on, say, Seana Bhraig or A'Mhaighdean, rather than those on Ben Lawers or Ben Lomond, where there will be lots of riff-raff. When I did both of those there was only

one person there - me! So, when you find yourself unable to get to the summit of Ben Lawers or Ben Lomond due to the crowds, don't berate Munro baggers - almost none of the people in your way are Munro baggers.

(c) Almost no-one had done the Grahams until about 2000 and since then the numbers have shot up (well, to the giddy heights of about 100). Why is that? I don't know, but the following item below describes one speculation.

This also bodes well for sales of the new SMC book entitled 'The Grahams and the Donalds', which describes routes up a list of Scottish mountains which is similar to, but not quite the same as, the correct list of Grahams. Bit of a shame for Andrew Dempster, whose 2003 guide to the Grahams led the way (and which I used), when hardly anyone was doing the Grahams....

(d) How many people have done all 6 lists? I asked Dave Broomhead (the SMC Keeper of the Lists) how many people had done all of them before me - the answer is 42! Comparing that with the graph would seem to indicate that something like a third of the Graham completionists have also done all the other lists. Given that before 1990 the number of Corbett completionists was barely in double

figures, that might suggest that hardly anyone bothered with Grahams until they had done Munros and Corbetts, but then in about 1990 they started on a Graham round. This is speculation...

What next?

No more tick lists anyway. There are a multitude of other mountain lists out there, which I am not even going to attempt to name. Many of these take the Corbett and Graham idea of a mountain with a given height and at least 150m drop all round, and then reduce the required drop to 'at least 30m' (and also tinker with the required height). But 30m is about the height of the climbs up the tower in Ratho climbing wall - you couldn't call that a distinct mountain. Going down 150m and then back up again feels like a bit of a slog, and you feel that you are on another mountain when you have done so - 30m is an undulation! Of course, you could also say that about many Munro tops and Donalds, but they are at least time-honoured.

So, I have made a vow not to do any of these - I would rather aspire to becoming a couch potato. Or maybe I will have to go on more rock-climbing holidays in warm, sunny countries - maybe with an Irish passport!



The Alps from Side to Side David Small

Last year (in August 2015) Bruce and I left Edinburgh heading for the Alps with our itinerary mentally determined down to the last detail. On the assumption that the plan would translate into reality, it seemed that all we had to do was to book places in the right hut for the right day then walk or climb upwards to the desired summit. There was no room for the unexpected and so, when the weather refused to come up to scratch

and I was ailing, things went off the rails. As it turned out, we very quickly cast the agenda aside and made the best of it (see the 2015 Newsletter), but for 2016 we had no plan except to pay close attention to the weather forecast and go wherever it dictated. I also took lots of vitamins and had another round of root canal treatment on my dodgy tooth before we left, in an effort to avoid last year's health problems.

We flew out to Geneva on a Monday, with Meteo France and all its confreres predicting beau temps across the Alps until Thursday, which would be showery, followed by a good day on Friday and then a really bad day on Saturday. Thank goodness for the internet and modern forecasting techniques, because the meteo people had it absolutely right.

Bruce knows all the gîtes in Chamonix and,

“ a delightfully level path along the upper slopes of a steep sided valley, with fine views across to the Grand Combin, continues the illusion that one is well up to this Alpine game. ”

after a night in one of the best, we left early the next morning, just as the colour of the sunlight on the high snowfields of Mont Blanc was beginning to turn from pink to yellow, to drive round into Switzerland. From the village of Champex an old style chairlift, like a faster version of the Ciste lift at Cairngorm (of blessed memory), gives the newly arrived Alpinist an easy first few hundred metres, provided he manages not to fall off at the start while wrestling with his rucksack. Then a delightfully level path along the upper slopes of a steep sided valley, with fine views across to the Grand

Combin, continues the illusion that one is well up to this Alpine game. At last reality sets in with a grind up to the Orny Hut at 2831m, which thankfully is neither longer nor steeper than it is.

From the hut, after a kit sort on the sunny balcony, we headed across the moraine towards the Aiguille de la Cabane (2999m), which we climbed via the Bon Accueil route (D). Nobody seemed to be around until we got to the foot of the climb, where we found a French Paw, Maw and teenage Son just starting out. It was clear that rock climbing was Paw's game. While Maw was out of practice but keen to do her best, teenage Son was intent on making the point, whenever he found difficulty, that he just did not want to be there. Anyway, they let us through and we gladly used the excuse of not holding them up to pull on the quick draws on the hard moves on the first pitch. After that, the standard was about Severe and we had a thoroughly enjoyable time all the way to the top, which had excellent views, particularly attractive to me because I was seeing familiar parts of the Mont Blanc range from a new perspective.

Over dinner in the hut, with an international company, we discussed the

vote for Brexit, which Bruce and I explained we personally disagreed with. Our French, Dutch and German co-diners felt the same way as we did. During that meal, and the ones that we had afterwards in other huts, the only different view we came across was expressed by some Swiss folk, who could not understand why any nation should agree to be governed by institutions outside their border and outside their control. Now is not the time, nor the place, to go further into all that, but I hope that the friendly spirit of the Alpine dinner table – based on the common instinct of all nations to climb mountains - will persist, no matter what.

Next morning we aimed to break the 3000m mark by climbing the Aiguille d'Orny (3150m) by the La Moquette route (5a). “Moquette” means carpet and there is a piece of carpet bolted to the rock at the base of the climb. I don't know whether the carpet is there because the climb is called what it is, or vice versa. We were still in the morning shade starting off and the first pitch felt insecure with cold fingers, but after that it was well protected golden granite all the way. The last pitch up to the summit is a particularly good example of steep but carefree (because well bolted and having lots of big incut holds)



climbing. One abseil and a cairned descent took us back to our sacks.

One could go on from the Orny Hut to the Trient Hut in order to climb higher, especially among the Aiguilles Dorées, but the forecast was still quite poor for the morrow (Thursday) so we walked/ chairlifted back to Champex and from there, by car, to the comforts of the Chamonix gîte. Next day we woke to dampness and cloud, as forecast, and were faced with a decision. We had ambitions among the Swiss 4000m peaks, but to achieve anything in that direction would

mean waiting for the snow shed by today's unsettled weather, with more due on Saturday, to burn off, even though good conditions were likely to prevail thereafter. So we decided to use the day to drive south to the Ecrins, where we reckoned the mountains would clear up more quickly than in the Valais.

It is a solid four and a half hour drive to get to the Ecrins from Chamonix, but the time was not wasted; while I drove Bruce was reading out route descriptions and planning where we would stay in order to achieve the most that we could. The

Meteo was still according with reality and the Ecrins were mainly free of cloud by the time we got there, although it still looked like we had only one good day (Friday) before Saturday would be really bad. After one or two false starts we booked into the Gîte'Aiglierie in Vallouise and decided to traverse the Aiguilles de la Bruyere (2611m, AD) the next day.

The Bruyere is a limestone ridge reached from Pont de l'Alpe in the Guisane valley which runs north west from Briancon.

Getting to the foot of the ridge is easy

unless, like us, you rely on the Alpine Club guide book to take you there. We got straight to the end of the ridge alright, but it was the wrong end. So we wasted a good thousand feet of ascent and had to go down and round to the right end. If you ever go to climb the Bruyere, just stay on the path and it will be completely obvious where you come off it to start the climb, which begins only a few hundred yards away from the path. You will find the rock on the first pitch even more polished than Traprain Law, but after that the friction is ok. The route isn't always obvious and the fixed gear is not abundant, but there is usually a bolt near any hardish move. Keep an eye out for bits of loose rock and all will be well. The sun shone all the time we were on the ridge and the frustration of our false start was soon forgotten.

True to the longstanding forecast, Saturday was a write off, but the rain ended before nightfall and the stars were out before we turned in. On Sunday morning we climbed Ecrins Total (D), a bolted multipitch on the Poire buttress just up the valley from Ailefroide, which we knew would not have suffered drainage problems after the previous night's rain. There are three 5c pitches but the difficulties are not sustained and we were up and down in time to return to Vallouise, sort the kit and drive up the valley to Entre les Aygues where you leave the car for the





short walk in to the Bans Hut. This is a very popular destination for active tourists to walk to for lunch, but by late afternoon they have all gone away and the only people there for dinner were three generations of the guardian's family and a handful of climbers. The guardian keeps trout, rabbits and chickens; he also has a vegetable plot, so you are guaranteed a good meal no matter what you prefer not to eat.

The next morning was fine and we walked up to the base of classic route (AD) on the

Dents de Coste-Cournier (3025m). This was one of the highlights of the trip for both of us; the weather was perfect, the climbing positive, the rock sound, the views stupendous, the route finding easy and the whole place deserted. The hut guardian told us that it is a relatively neglected route these days, but I would thoroughly recommend it if you are looking for a mid-height Alpine rock ridge accessible in trainers (at least in August). If you are keen, you can do the round trip in a day from Vallouise, although your knees should keep something in reserve for the descent back

to the hut, which is steep and feels much longer than it should.

On the theme of knees and long descents, the next thing we did was to traverse Mont Pelvoux (3943m), starting at the Pelvoux Hut (2704m) and finishing back down in Ailefroide (about 1500m). The traverse is only graded PD and does not get above 4000m, but it had a lasting effect on our constitutions, and indeed almost permanently brought those constitutions to an end. From the Hut there are two alternative routes of ascent, either by the

Rochers Rouge or the Coolidge Couloir. In late season the Couloir has a band of unstable rocks above it, so it is de rigueur to go the other way. Well, we tried, but we could not find the right way up the Rochers Rouge and so ended up in the Couloir.

We were a long way up, front pointing on August ice, when I heard a big rock clattering down from somewhere above us. We were both completely exposed and there was nothing to do but hope. As things turned out the rock missed me entirely, and Bruce got grazed by a fairly minor fragment, but other possible outcomes were only too obvious. There was nothing for it but to keep going and hope, and thankfully that was the only rock that came down while we were in the Couloir.

The view from the summit of Pelvoux is famous and, having seen it, I can say that it is one of the best Alpine panoramas you will ever find. We were fortunate; there literally was not a single cloud in the sky. The ridges of mountains big and small stretched away in every direction as far as the eye could see, stacked on top of each other, into the sunny distance, with Mont Blanc dominating like a giant wedding cake. With reluctance we began the long descent; this starts with gentle

glacier walking but soon steepens up into sustained sections of scrambling, with several abseils thrown in. We were overtaken by a couple of guided parties, partly because our 50m rope left us awkwardly and time consumingly short of easy ground on one of the abseils, so gladly followed them down to avoid having to think about finding the way. At last, it seemed clear that the difficulties were behind us and we gratefully coiled the rope, took off our harnesses and had a break for lunch. Needless to say, a couple of hundred feet down the hill there was one final abseil and the whole caboodle had to be dug out of our sacks and redeployed.

All that had gone before was, however, a mere prelude to the last 700m or so back to the valley, down unrelentingly steep grass slopes in the heat of the day, with never a stream in sight. Some way down we were pleased to enter a zone of scrub trees; although the branches tugged awkwardly at our ice axes as we fought a way through, at least we were in some kind of shade. However, the chamois have formed a variety of tracks here and we lost the true path on some very steep ground, being rescued from our predicament by one of the friendly guides hailing us from above. Lower down still the grass gives out and

“ We were a long way up, front pointing on August ice, when I heard a big rock clattering down from somewhere above us. We were both completely exposed and there was nothing to do but hope. ”

the scrambling resumes. Our tongues were hanging out, our feet were swollen and hot, our knees were protesting in every way they knew how, our brains demanded on behalf of all other parts of our bodies - why are we doing this to ourselves?

Back in Vallouise, feet up and being a couple of cold drinks and a hot shower to the good, we would not, in retrospect,

have changed a thing about the day's outing. But we did realise that the traverse of Pelvoux had taken a good deal out of us and that the next couple of days needed to be relatively mellow. In the light of (or perhaps I should say despite) that realisation, on the following morning we started by climbing the classic trad multipitch route at Ailefroide, La Fissure (D). This took us longer than expected, mainly because, as Bruce succinctly and accurately put it "David, when you are tired you climb like a drain". Then we drove all the way back to Chamonix, arriving to find the Ultra Trail de Mont Blanc in full swing and all gîtes full to the gunwhales. We got the very last two top bunks in the huge CAF gîte in Le Tour, causing – without meaning to – some Gallic consternation among our fellow occupants by coming in after lights out.

Next day – the penultimate full day of our holiday – we acted fairly sensibly for once, getting the telepherique up to the Plan and repeating the slab climb Les Lepidopteres (5b) which we had also climbed last year. Knowing the way up and down really helps to minimise psychological stress, and staying in the Plan hut means one can have a day of Alpine activity without too many demands on the body.

Our last day was as sunny as any. We trauchled across the moraine, keeping more or less to the path (where one exists) by being constantly on the look out for cairns, to the Aiguille de l'M (2621m) and climbed the North-North East ridge (D, 5b). This has beautiful rock and pleasant climbing apart from a fairly thuggy crux pitch, with which Bruce is thoroughly familiar, so I left it to him. The true summit of the l'M is a perched block above a lot of nothing, so we both left it to itself. On the descent (which includes several long vertical ladders) and on the walk back to the Plan I felt sad that the holiday was almost at an end, full of sun and activity as it had been, but pleased with our success rate – we'd failed on nothing we'd set out to do.

I should not, of course, have been so smug. Next day, trying to fit in a quick departure-day "scamper", as Bruce put it, up a route in the Aiguilles Rouges, we got lost three times, leaving three krabs behind to mark our high points, never finished our route and descended with our tails between our legs and our egos reduced more or less to about the right size.

On the plane home I listened, on my i-Pod, to Jessye Norman singing Richard Strauss's

haunting Four Last Songs. A perfect example of nothing really being over until the fat lady sings.

