

Strathaven Climbing Club

Newsletter 174, December 2015 (a bit late)



Society Wedding Column (well, SCC wedding anyway)

It was the event of the year and they had to go 5000 miles away to avoid the Caledonian Shouting Choir singing at it. Well, not really – but not many folk will have wedding pics as good as these!

Yes, it was Kenny & Rona's wedding, just after sunrise on 22nd September last.

From Rona:

"A big thank-you to everyone who contributed to our wedding gift- it was most unexpected and such a lovely surprise - it even stumped Kenny for words - for a few seconds anyway!! We've bought an original print by James Hawkins who has a studio just outside Ullapool - Rhue Art, as we've always loved his paintings - the print is currently being framed, and the picture will hang pride of place in our dining room."

News from beyond the Blog (Rob)

You may have noticed that the Blog had been performing flawlessly over the past 3/4 months. Flawlessly, until I reported this fact at the last committee meeting; a rash move with hindsight, as it was then down for 4 days straight. Touch wood and all that...

However until further notice the Blog is still:
<http://strathavenclimbingclub.blog.com/>
(except when it's taking a rest)



Stoney Middleton August 7th-8th (Roy)

The President and I cruised down the M74, M6, M61, M60, ... , A6, etc on Friday night to Stoney M with the intention of a weekend of sports climbing and drew into the commodious car park of Carlswark Cottage. Use of the not-very-secret code let into this excellent accommodation. Members may well recall my aversion to huts that do not have proper tables – but no problems here: in fact one could hardly move for tables. Getting round was rather like those little puzzles with 16 spaces and 15 lettered squares one had to slide around to get them all in order.

In a short space of time we were 100 yards up the road in the Moon Inn where they had really stopped serving food but kindly provided us with scampi and chips. Back in the hut we engaged in a darts tournament with the FJBs, who had arrived in the interim, narrowly losing 2-1.



Figure 1: Roy on a Lunar crux.

An early start on Saturday got us to the extensive Horseshoe Quarry – only a mile away - and we followed the track round and up to the Top Quarry where there were a few routes I felt we could have a decent shot at. In fact we did 4 routes in the 4-4+ range and they were steep and non-trivial. In fact I fell off once due to a lackadaisical approach to finger jamming. Then we descended to the main quarry area and Chocolate Blancmange Wall which has climbs with a similar range of grades rising from a steep earthy ramp which matches them in difficulty. The rock here lay back at a more friendly angle but was like flint and brittle – not to my taste, but suited my younger companion. (I was accused of nearly killing someone but I denied it.)

Later, back in the Moon Inn we waited in vain for the FJBs. Eventually we succumbed to sampling the much touted steak pie to have with our accumulated ale and had just finished when the aforementioned FJBs arrived. They ordered the same fare having been subjected to the same heavy touting thereof. It took, I recall, about an hour and a half for their food to arrive and we speculated on why it took so long. Had the cook run out of steak and had to nip round to the butcher's? Or had the cook to be sobered up with endless cups of coffee? And what was that mysterious yelp? Later, in the cottage there was another darts challenge match; this time we narrowly lost 2-0.

Perseverance Pays Off
- Mont Blanc and Le
Meije July 2015

I first set eyes on Le Meije in 2001- my first visit to the Ecrins -

passing through La Grave, and the sight of the north side of the mountain with its vast glaciers shimmering in the sunshine was incredible – like nothing I had seen before. Unfortunately, even in my short time of visiting the Alps, the glaciers here have diminished greatly and very noticeably – a great shame. The Alpine Club Guide describes the traverse of Le Meije as “ One of the great expeditions of the Alps “

In 2005 Mike, Billy & I returned to the Ecrin - La Berard this time, with ideas of the traverse in mind. As a start we planned an acclimatisation climb – the ascent of Pic Nord du Cavals by the W ridge (D+). I was assigned the crux pitch – “ climb the overhang on friable rock“– certainly not with a rucksack on my back full of big boots, crampons and an ice axe for the glacier descent. We turned tail, tried to climb the peak by our intended descent route but found the glacier was bare ice, studded with stones & grit and thus hard as concrete. We did not succeed and suitably chastened (and scared shitless) we decided that le Meije was beyond us.

There was a bit of a hiatus in alpine climbing trips – I was going with Rona for more general mountaineering, including a trip to the Ecrin in 2007 when we camped in La Grave and woke up in the morning to Le Meije towering above us. By 2009 and the resumption of climbing trips, my focus had somehow turned to Mont Blanc and this became the aim for the next few years. Then in 2013 I returned to La Berard with the purpose of the trip being Le Meije. However, my partner that time turned out not to have the desire to attempt it despite excellent weather. An ascent of Les Bans was the second prize. I returned again in 2014, this time with Martin Fitzimmons & his Norwegian pal - Ole. A much more determined team and success on Pic Nord du Cavals by the S ridge, normally a D rock climb. Huge amounts of fresh snow had however left the mountains in winter condition. This snow had Freddie, the guardian at the Promontoire hut saying non! non! non! to our suggested Meije attempt.

2015 - again with Martin & Ole. As usual I had crammed in a full programme, straight from the airport to Refuge Tre - la -Tete, then something every day hence. But always the weather will bring a few enforced rest days (not this time!). Our objective the next day was Mont Tondou 3196m. A 5am start in the dark had us horsing up a good trail on the west side of the Tre - la - Tete glacier – obviously heading for the Conscrits refuge, but we thought a way would lead down to the glacier further up past the seracs of the lower section. I was ahead a bit when I rounded a bend and there was the Conscrits. Damn it - we had missed the correct trail. A descent of about 200m on the most unstable and frightening moraine debris landed us on the glacier. This was crossed easily and snow slopes lead to the NW ridge which was climbed on rock until we joined the voie normal just below the Pain du Sucre. Many people are happy to call it quits here but we thought we would scoot along the short ridge to the true summit. That's the problem with the Alps – short ridges which look like they can be scooted along, can't. The ridge involved easy climbing but with considerable exposure and some rotten rock for good measure. Took us over an hour to get out & back and that was unroped ! The descent was by the voie normal down the Mont Tondou glacier then back across the Tre – la – Tete glacier over more moraines then back up 300m to the Conscrits. For an easy first day

*Next up: Kenny's tale of warming up on Mont Blanc for the ascent of Le Meije – one of the last major Alpine summits to be scaled after the so-called Golden Age, it only took Kenny
11 years!*

it had involved 1700 m of ascent, but it had been the most perfect of alpine days weather wise. Next morning a 3am departure for a traverse of the Domes du Miage. Martin & Ole aren't big fans of roping up when not required, so we chose a safe looking line up the Tre – la - Tete glacier and by 6.30 were at the Col des Domes. It seemed churlish not to include point 3673 - the highest Dome on such a nice morning (not always done, as it is in the other direction from the traverse), so we left rucksacks at the col and nipped up to the summit in about 40 minutes. At the summit we met 2 guys who had come up from the Durier bivi. Now that would be a trip. Or perhaps Mt Blanc by the Aiguille de Bionnassay. (*Absolument. Count me in for that– Ed.*) From here it was time to turn to the west and the snow arête, the pictures of which makes the Domes traverse so appealing.



..On the Tre - la - Tete glacier. Mt Tondu behind.



The arete to the central Dome du Miage

It was easy walking along the narrow snow crest until a steep descent to the Col de La Berangere and then the final peak the Aig La Berangere. The climb to this was on rotten rock and snow – I hate climbing rock in crampons but Ole said it was what he liked best. No accounting for tastes. The view to the east towards Mt Blanc was stunning, and to the south, beyond the Vanoise we could make out the shape of Le Meije and the other peaks of the Ecrin. From here it was a quick and easy descent back to the Conscrits and an afternoon of lying about in the sun and a few beers and another night at altitude.



On the Domes ridge -
Aig de Bionnassay, Dome
de Gouter & Mt Blanc in
background

Next on the programme - Mt Blanc – good acclimatisation for Le Meije. 3 nights booked in Cosmiques, and for once, perfect weather. Still, a 5am start from the Conscrits, as it is a long way down, then the drive round to Chamonix, re-supply and then up to Cosmiques. I was pleased that I had carried a rope for 2 days and 3000m of ascent without getting it out my sack – but you never know !. Martin was developing a cold, so he decided on a night in a hotel in Cham. Ole & I decided for the next day on a rock route on Point Lachanel – Marlene a 250m V+ A more Christian start this time - 7am. Still 6pm when we got back to the hut where Martin was installed but a bit under the weather. Nonetheless at 01.00 hours the 3 of us were up & set out just before 02.00. Like

perseverance on Le Meije this was my 4th stay at the Cosmiques with Mt Blanc in mind. The 1st year with Mike, Billy & Martin a storm blew in the night before our attempt and the big achievement that day was to get back to the Midi station safely. 2nd attempt Mike & I. We were well acclimatised and were in front of everyone else. When we reached the slopes leading up to col Maudit I found myself wading through waist deep windslab. We agreed without hesitation to turn back despite the guided parties continuing. Next year the 3rd attempt with Mike, Martin & Veronica and I cancelled the booking for the Cosmiques the day before we were due to go because of the weather. Next day 12 people including guides were killed in an avalanche on the Maudit slopes where Mike & I had turned back. No such worries this year, perfect conditions and weather. Unroped we were moving faster than most people – a lot of whom seemed in the hut last night to have plenty money for a guide but little alpine knowledge. At one of the first steepenings on the slopes of Mont Blanc du Tacul, a guide was trying to explain to a client how to hold an ice axe !!! We made good speed along and up the flank of Mt Maudit where the first light of this perfect day took over from the moon. The climb up to the col Maudit was straightforward but the far side warranted a rope. Here things were decidedly



Looking down from just below Mt Blanc summit to Mt Maudit



Mt Blanc summit

icy. Also, a brisk wind was making the low temperature at this early hour keenly felt. We had been too hot on previous days, so in Cham I had bought a thinner softshell rather than wear my trusty Buffalo and I was regretting it at this point. Martin was struggling – loaded with the cold but battling on gamely. It was simply putting one foot in front of the other and eventually we were on the summit for 6am. .We didn't hang around it was so cold and the views from the summit are a bit disappointing – everything is far below you ! We were back at the Cosmiques for 11am sunshine, beers and another night at altitude.

Next morning Ole was keen to return to Midi via the Cosmiques arête – a route I always vowed never to do – too busy & crampons on rock. However an early start and I was not going to wear crampons. We had a wonderful outing. Martin who was still struggling, kindly carried the ropes and gear back to the Midi. ,Soloing and light packs meant we could pass the people who were also already on the route from the Cosmiques. Down to Chamonix and on to la Grave. The view of Le Meije as we drove over the Col Galibier was fantastic.

One to really get my heart going with anticipation. This was going to be a success.



North face of Le Meije from col Galibier



Promontoire ridge & South face of Le Meije

Some logistics to sort in La Grave - and everything fell into place, We found accommodation at the gite Le Rocher a sprawling bunkhouse run by the loveliest hippie woman and her spaced out husband, decorated with psychedelic 60`s posters advertising bands and full of the wackiest stuff The spread they put on for our evening meal was outrageous and breakfast the next day even better. We were told to help ourselves at the bar and let them know the tab. We then discovered that the Aigle hut had just reopened after 2 years of rebuilding – this would save a 4 hour descent then an hour back along the road at the end of the day.

And, so to Le Meije. The approach to the Promontoire hut via the Brech Le Meije is dismissed as that – a hut approach – yeah, but it takes all day. The Enchefores ridge is a huge buttress with careful route finding required and the glacier below the Breche de la Meije quite tortured. We had come over here from the hut last year to climb Le Rateau by the E ridge and plowed across the glacier in deep snow – very different this time and horrible loose ground to the Breche. From here a series of abseils onto the Etancons glacier and then an easy walk to the Promontoire hut. Ole and I had climbed the lower part of the Promontoire ridge last year so the start in the darkness presented no problems. Ole had led the brèche du Crapaud (Toad`s Step) last year, I was selected for the pleasure this time. Not a problem, even in the dark, the rope then stowed and fast progress made until the ridge steepens. We had left the hut just before 2 French guys who had climbed the route before and obviously knew their onions and we were managing to keep in front of them so felt we were going well, However at the first steepening I managed to lead off onto what felt a lot harder than the overall grade. I was retreating back down when our French friends whizzed past to the left – the last we saw of them except as tiny figures ahead on the ridge traverse. On a couple of occasions we managed to lose the route, but had learned that if it felt too hard we should retreat a bit and scout round. Near the top of the ridge a fixed rope lead up rightwards towards the lip of the hanging Carre glacier. We followed this along a ledge system and the a bit further - then it became obvious that this was not the way.



Figure 2: Looking back down the pitch with the lower section of the Promontoire ridge below



Figure 3: Ole leads off on to unknown ground towards the glacier

Finally - on the Carre glacier. I felt so elated just to set foot on this snow that hangs there, so high up on the great south face of the mountain. The occasion was not lost on Ole either who remarked " I guess not many people cross this glacier " The climb to the Grand Pic seemed to go on forever and the Cheval Rouge slab then the climb round onto the arête and up to the summit were fantastically exposed. The view of the onward route along the ridge to Pic Central the final peak of our traverse – the Doigt de Dieu - looks daunting and starts with 3 x 40 m abseils into the Breche Zigmondy then a traverse round the Dent Zigmondy, now equipped with a cable but this early in the season still mostly buried in the snow. The climb to regain the crest of the ridge at the 2nd tooth beyond the Dent was tricky - up a very icy gully. From the 2nd tooth it was pure pleasure moving together along mostly good rock (although in some places a bit rotten) with descents down snowy edges over the 3rd and 4th tooth to Pic Central . It did however seem to go on forever - enjoyable as it was.

At last it was time to descend to the Aigle hut. Some long (60m) abseils into the unknown - the last by Ole towards the large bergshrund at the foot of the face which the ropes only just crossed kept the excitement up. 14 hours after leaving the Promontoire we arrived at the Aigle hut. Glad we didn't have to keep going to La Grave !



Top left - Martin above the Cheval Rouge on the ridge to the summit
 Top right - Me in the icy gully leading to col beyond 2nd tooth
 Left – View along ridge to Doigt du dDieu

We were greeted like heroes when we arrived at the Aigle hut. It was past the serving of the meal, but the two girls who ran the hut cooked a separate serving just for us. Our 2 French chums were delighted to see us but laughed uproariously when we recounted our “new route”. They did console us by saying that many people go off track during the ascent. Ole did a fair bit of digging around after we came back and reckons our line onto the Carre glacier was a new variation. I was keen to climb the Meije Oriental the next morning but was voted down – oh well.

A fantastic trip – the best ever. How to top that next year ?

Note :- a week after we returned, the following was posted on the official Chamonix Mountain website.

“The Three Monts route is in difficult condition but still possible for experienced alpinists, The section on Mont Maudit leading towards the Col du Brenva, has bare ice and part of the traverse is very exposed.

The traverse of the Dômes de Miage has become much more difficult; the Tré la Tête glacier is very crevassed, the ridge has much more pointed and a crevasse has opened near the 2nd dome. It is best to forget the other routes in the area, with the exception of the Aig de la Bérangère.

Pointes Lachenal traverse not recommended. The bergschrunds on the approach to the rock routes in this sector are opening,”

Too much good weather -How lucky were we ?

MIDWEEK WALKING

In the dark days of winter, a couple of us started thinking it might be nice to get out for a day during the week. Basic rule was not more than 90 minutes approx. driving; and moderate day length. We've had varying success, with some folk showing a tiresome attachment to work commitments, house painting and golf but we shall persevere. 2015's haul included these:

- New Lanark & the falls of Clyde (George, Ian, Eric, Dave, Colin). Set off in a half hearted blizzard which cleared shortly to give us a very picturesque and atmospheric round of the riverbank from Kirkfieldbank to the Falls of Clyde. Tea and buns in the visitor centre at New Lanark drew uneasy jokes about pensioners' walking groups....
- Lowther hills: another wintry day out, this time in cold, sunny conditions. Ian, Else, Ken Ch, Stewart, and Colin. It does feel odd to walk along a two lane tarmac road between the two main summits, courtesy of the Air Traffic Control system installed on the top. Compensation is given by the wide views across some of the emptiest bits of Scotland's map.



Figure 4: Frozen balls on Lowther summit

- Ben Narnain & A'Chrois (Charlie, Stewart & Colin, 9th June) After the unseasonal early summer winds and rain we were blessed with a bright, warm day with fluffy clouds and gentle wind. Narnain, like many sugar loaf hills, rises in sudden upstarts and it's a tough full-frontal haul onto the summit. A leisurely lunch a few metres from the summit was followed by a stroll across to A'Chrois (more enjoyable in winter though). This summit was strangely busy thanks to a large group of old guys (compared to us youngsters). The way down was intermittently steep and boggy until someone suggested we go down the fire break through the forest rather than walking back along the 300m contour to the path. Only it wasn't a fire break, it was a cliff. An hour later, and three outcrops circumnavigated, we emerged on the higher of the two forestry roads, 400m below the tree line, scratched and covered in bits of tree....next time just say no. Or take a rope. And an axe.

Eric's Cairngorm Cantrip; 18th – 20th July

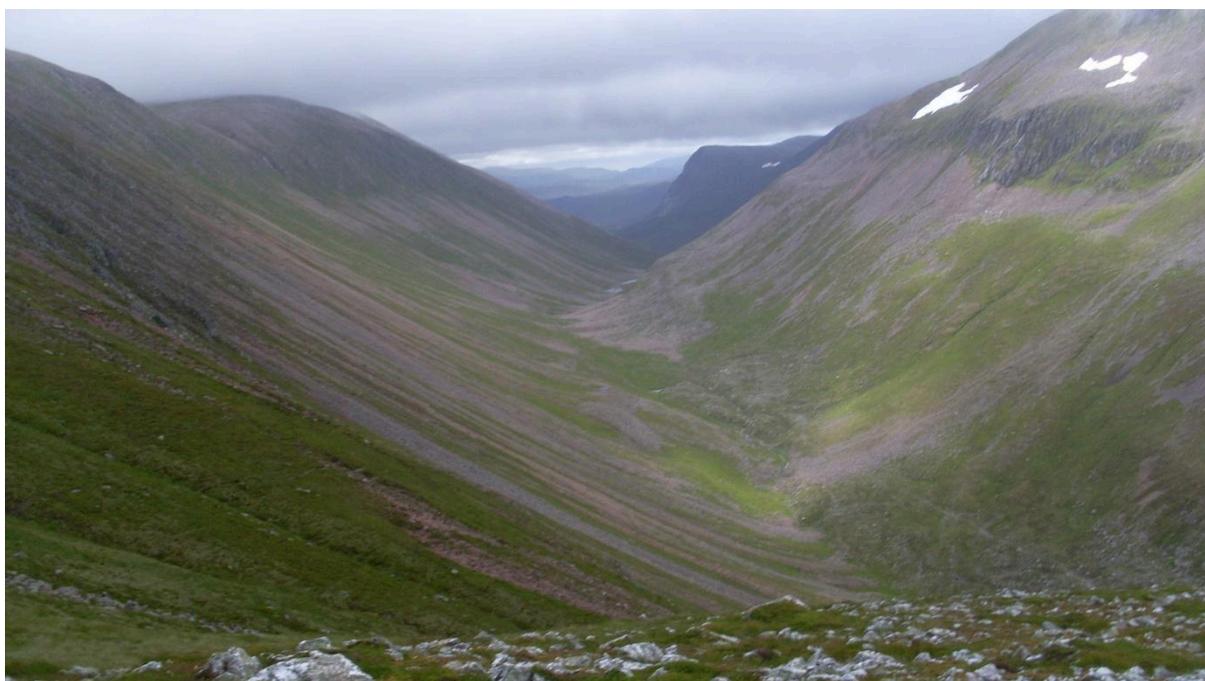
Fifteen years ago I walked from Knoydart to Arbroath through the high passes – Corrieyairack, Lairig Ghru and Jock's Road. In view of my impending seventieth birthday I thought I would try another epic - on a smaller scale of course. I settled on a three-day tour in the Cairngorms. The plan was to revisit the Lairig Ghru and stay at Corrour Bothy, if habitable; then down to Derry Lodge, up Glen Derry, climb to Loch Etchachan and down to the Shelter Stone at the head of Loch Avon; last day, up to the plateau to finish on the summit of Cairngorm.

Remembering the delicious feeling of freedom on walking alone across Scotland, I wanted no company again. But my wife put a stop to that! I don't know why – my life insurance is good.

In the event I was joined by my older son, Garrey, and his pals, David Carr and Graham Taylor, all experienced hill walkers.

We crashed out in Mill Cottage, Feshiebridge on the Friday night after the obligatory visit to the bar at Loch Insh Watersports. Next morning, in spite of a poor forecast (which did not materialise) we drove to the skiing car park where I dropped my route description off at the Ranger's Station. We set off for Lurchers Crag, getting used to three-day sacks, including two tents. Then, suddenly, behold! the Lairig - the huge but elegant trench, over the summit past the Pools of Dee to Devil's Point and beyond.

Earlier this year, Charlie Beaton and I climbed out of the Lairig on a hard, vertical line only to top out at a diagonal path which looked easier. I found it and we tried it downwards. It wasn't bad but half way down it disappeared so we had to stumble to the floor of the Lairig, Graham trying some scree running.



Arriving at Corrour Bothy, we were surprised to find it empty. Traditionally known to be a cess pit, it is now hospitable – reroofed, repanelled inside and with a composting toilet. Thanks MBA! There are three abandoned carrymats and a fire, if you can find anything to burn apart from the wall panelling.



Sunday started with low cloud and drizzle, but by eleven the tops were clearing and we set off for Derry Lodge. Lunch was taken beside the replacement footbridge, looking across to Bob Scott's cottage which has been turned into a superior bothy in his memory. A fine afternoon saw us up Glen Derry and, before the step up to the Lairig an Laoigh, a stiff climb to the left passing the Hutchison Memorial Hut. It is no bigger than the Corroul and also in good nick, but with a spade instead of a toilet.

High Loch Etchachan looked wonderful under its rugged cliffs.



Then down through mist to Loch Avon, and there, under its crag, among its huge mates, wearing a cairn, was the Shelter Stone. Like Corroul it was empty. Luckily the floor was covered by a large tarpaulin, and litter was minimal. That night, after a dinner of lightweight Supernoodles, I discovered that my lightweight sleeping bag was useless. I woke every two hours shivering - I could shine my torch through it!



On the last day, I was flagging. It was a steep haul up to the plateau, arriving at the lip of Coire an t-Sneachda (pron: *Corrie un trechgu* – don't ask why – *snow corry*.) By the way, there are still plenty of snow patches lying; they won't melt this year. A final climb to the summit of Cairngorm (1245 metres – only topped by Beinn MacDuibh, Ben Nevis and Everest.) (*and just possibly one or two Alps – Ed.*)

Ringling the bell at the back door of the Ptarmigan Restaurant, the top terminus of the Funnypeculiar, we were allowed in for a welcome pint and a bowl of Cullen skink, both reasonably priced. On the viewing platform, the thermometer read 0.75C!

We finished the round at the skiing car park and, still failing to change our underpants, (*too much information, Eric – Ed.*) drove home. Nae bad for a septuagenarian.

Have you noticed it aye rains when the club ventures in to the Lakes?And it was so wet no-one got any pictures. Ian tells all -

23rd/24th October COPPERMINES CONISTON

Until Robert and Alan Sinclair (newbie) arrived later on Friday in the last car, there were only pensioners on this meet. Charlie had an attack of the giddies, so he and Jackie were a late withdrawal and Mike obviously looked at the weather forecast. So Doc drove Eric and John McGilivaray('nother newbie) down whilst Else and I took Tifter and Donal. We late lunched in Cranstons in Penrith which we'll not hurry to again as it was dear and very busy(queueing).A misty crossing of Kirkstone Pass was followed by a circumnavigation of Tarn Hows that made the best of a grey late afternoon, rescued however by the autumn colours. Food and beer at the Black Bull, was followed by a reasonably early night.

Eric John and I were off on the Saturday by 8.20 in steady rain. We took the wrong way at the fork in the path behind the miners cottages and by the time we realised we had, we (well in truth the other two outvoted me) chose to head up Wetherlam instead of the lower route to Tilberthwaite. Fortunately at this stage the steady downpour was at our backs and as we made our way higher up and recrossed the stream we could see Robert and Alan not more than 10 mins behind us - but that was the last we saw of them until the pub in Coniston. We made our way up Wetherlam and over and down into Little Langdale and along to the Three Shires pub over the scenic little bridge that adorns so many postcards of the Lakes. We came across an outside cludgie at one of the Halgarths about 10 minutes from the pub, with a sign saying Eric on it; If only he could have waited. Else came and picked us up at 1.30 and took us back to The Crown in Coniston. This was far too early of course, but we eventually watched New Zealand somewhat ponderously overcome Argentina.

Of the others, only Robert and Alistair had ventured higher up also doing Wetherlam and returning to the hut by the ridge that comes from Black Sails. It was Alan's first top and he thoroughly enjoyed it despite the weather. The others walked along the Lake's edge and back to Coniston and the Crown before Else had even gone to fetch us from Little Langdale.

A fairly heated drunken exchange of views finished off the night in the hut, but it had the beneficial effect of keeping Eric completely comotose for the night, thus curtailing his midnight perambulations.

For those of you who may not have taken the opportunity to browse the remaining meets for this year and pencil some dates into your diary, these are they:

22/23 April: Muir of Inverey - Linn of Dee

13/14 or 21/22 May: Jura - Camping

10/11 June: Naismith Hut - Elphin

2/3 September: CIC Hut - Ben Nevis

7/8 October: Mill Cottage - Feshiebridge

11/12 November

Inbhirfhaolain - Glen Etive

Robert and Alan did some climbing on the Bell next day, another first for Alan. Some car related and electrical problems in the hut delayed their retiral from the hut, but they certainly made the best of the week-end. Else, Donal, Tifter and I went to Hawkshead and had a short walk around some local country lanes before heading homewards. Doc Eric and John meanwhile took in Tarn Hows before heading North.

It should be noted that the route from Wetherlam towards the Three Shires pub in Little Langdale was an absolute nightmare in the wet conditions - the slippery rock being outdone by the even slippier vegetation and all three of us did impressive imitations of Tom Daley on more than one occasion. It is not to be recommended on rainy days.

CAUTION: MAY CONTAIN NUTS (or Risk Assessment for the Mountaineer)

The MC of S has been busy with mountain safety issues and has a wealth of useful information online at this link:

<http://www.mcofs.org.uk/safety-liability-clubs.asp>

In particular your attention is drawn to the risk assessment forms available and to the discussion on “duty of care” and how it applies to club members. This pretty much reflects how things are in this establishment but I’m sure I am not alone in recalling a few occasions of uncertainty, wondering if that very-late team has actually just got waylaid in the pub or if they might be in bother on the hill.

CIVIL LIABILITY INSURANCE AND REPORTING OF ACCIDENTS AND INCIDENTS

As members of the MC of S the Strathaven Climbing Club and its individual members have Civil Liability Insurance. This covers their liability to pay damages in civil law and includes:

- Public Liability: Accidental bodily injury to third parties and/or damage to third party property arising out of declared mountaineering activities.
- Product Liability: Accidental bodily injury to third parties and/or damage to third party property arising out of any goods sold or supplied.
- Professional Indemnity: Claims out of Errors or Omissions, and is provided for circumstances involving bad advice or failure to act (but not for members who should have separate cover due to being a guide or instructor).
- Libel and Slander: Includes defamation.
- Officers' Liability: In respect of mismanagement.
- Abuse: But only if a Club has fulfilled the criteria of the MCof S Child Protection Policy.

Cover includes member to member liability. Members should note that activities such as mountain biking, canoeing etc are only included when they form a part of a core activity.

Further details are available by accessing the MCof S website.

However it has come to our attention that part of the insurers protocol is that the club is responsible for promptly reporting all accidents/incidents to the MCof S. Failure to do so could lead to any subsequent claim being excluded. We have not being doing this.

At the Committee meeting on the 7th of July it was decided that the Secretary shall record and report all future accidents and incidents to the MCof S on their forms and following their guidance.

Members are encouraged to let the Secretary know of any accident or incident as soon as possible so that we can arrange the completion of the report form, which are held by the Secretary for that purpose. Please note that all accidents or incidents should be reported as there is no downside to this - ie; premiums are NOT effected and there is no assumption that a claim will follow - but there are downsides to not reporting ie if there were a subsequent claim, it could be excluded (claimant is denied his rights, defendant may have to defend action without legal cost coverage, office bearers similarly). Please remember insurance is at its most useful not when the expected happens, but the unforeseen.

We have ascertained that failure to promptly report accidents/incidents in the past will not lead to any possibility that the policy can be declared void but that any claim from such a past accident could be excluded.

So – if you have an incident while out in the hills, let the Secretary know. Even if you’re sure you won’t want to make a claim.

Ivan the Terrible (Billy)

A climber of a certain age should have an apprentice...for all sorts of reasons...not least to ease the progress into decrepitude by having someone to carry all that heavy protective gear that becomes so comforting as you become more aware of your own mortality. I was not actively looking for an acolyte but when I bumped into Ivan at the climbing wall, a twenty year old French student with a shock of curly brown hair and an equally shocking Allo Allo comedy accent ,it seemed to be like fate.....especially when he expressed a burning desire to sample the delights of Scottish winter climbing. I managed to cobble together enough kit to get him started and arranged to pick him up outside his student hovel at 7am that Saturday.

The walk into Sneachda was enlivened by my attempts to teach him the necessary vocabulary and before long the corrie was ringing to cries of “bugger off” and “bag of shite” ...all delivered in that delightful accent. We soloed up the initial pitches of the Runnel to beneath the final chimney where I lashed him to the belay and told him to just watch and learn from my style. Unfortunately half way up my right crampon fell off and I had to hang from a jammed pick to attempt to reattach it for what seemed like a lifetime. I assured him that this was all par for the course but I could swear I heard him muttering something that sounded suspiciously like “bag of shite” under his breath! We topped out safely to a postcard view and I was even persuaded to go to the top of Cairngorm to kick off his bagging career.

***Remember it's easy to
book a hut –***

- 1. Email Rob on
strathaven.climbin
g.club@gmail.com***
- 2. Pay Janice***
- 3. Buy beer***
- 4. Turn up!***



Figure 5: no idea how to caption this one...

The next weekend saw us slogging back into the corrie again but this time in decidedly iffy weather. I had promised him some ice and had heard that Mirror Direct was in nick so that's where we headed

, though someone had recently fallen from it and broken a leg. All went well until near the top of the ice pitch when I became aware that my right pick was hanging limply like a stale stick of celery. I had recently removed a head weight and had obviously not tightened the bolt enough! Some creative use of an ice screw saw me over the bulge and to the in situ belay where I relaxed and again explained to Ivan that these things happen and are in fact character building. He shrugged a typically Gallic shrug and muttered under his breath... that phrase...again. I had created a monster. I got my revenge by continuing directly up the rocks above the couloir at a rather technical grade involving some hooking and torquing. I hadn't really explained these techniques to Ivan and he showed his displeasure by making a gesture at me which I believe was first used by English archers at the battle of Agincourt to antagonise the French!

And so to last Saturday forecast, accurately as it turned out, to be wild and windy. This time the ski road was shut but we joined the hoards slogging up the path and made it to the foot of the Mess of Pottage in reasonable shape. I decreed that Hidden Chimney would be sheltered from the howling gusts and so it was. Unfortunately it was also harbouring a merry band of student climbers from Sheffield who were treating the whole thing as a social networking opportunity. I explained to Ivan that they were English and so it was ok to overtake them. Unfortunately when he came to climb he got snarled up in their ropes and the whole thing descended into slow motion farce...so much so that when he finally crawled over the cornice my arse had literally frozen to the ground. It was my turn to use the immortal words....which I did with gusto. We packed up and headed off for the top of the Cas in a proper Scottish hooly. I had very kindly agreed to let Ivan carry the rope and all the gear to provide some ballast but even so he was regularly picked up and carried towards Loch A'an....screaming loudly...you guessed it...."bag of shiitte".

When we finally made it into the shelter of the ski area and paused to take stock Ivan grasped me by the shoulders and looked at me intensely. "Billee" he said "zat vos ze most amaazing experience of my life....how can I ever zank u?" I swear there was a tear in my eye. And now we have arranged to spend next weekend on the flanks of the mighty Ben Nevis. I have explained to Ivan that we might need two ropes and many ice screws. But he agrees with me that this is a good thing as it will make him more stable in the winds we can surely expect to experience .

*Alps 2016:
Despite this
newsletter being
labelled
December, it's
actually April
and any Alpine
action will need
to be getting
planned soon. Is
there a
groundswell for
a Club Collective
this year after
last year's hardy
individualism?
Let Ian, Charlie
or Colin know*

The Strudel Tour. (Ian & Colin)

Staffal is the last village at the head of the Gressoney valley, almost an afterthought to Gressoney la Trinite, and is the starting point for the lifts that take you off towards the Gnifetti and Quintino Sella huts. Despite (or because of) Ian's experimental approach to driving on the right (which included going the *wrong* way into a toll lane, and almost getting intimate with the Granite outcrops on the right hand side of the car) we reached the village in the softening light at the end of the day and eventually found our lodgings; the Villa Regina was the grand pink building beside the lifts but it was also the only

hotel without a big sign on the outside. A splendid Gothic shooting lodge built by a German arms

dealer in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian action of 1870 (I think), it had fabulous wood panelled public rooms and dark, secretive corridors. An Art House remake of “The Shining” could definitely have been on the cards except that our host was a gentle, genial Italian grandfather (although he was from Sicily). Besides, we couldn’t find a big enough axe. In any event we were well pleased for £next to nothing per night. And there was something home made available every breakfast time.

Day one dawned with us raring to go Via Ferrata-ing on the Via Ferrata Emilio Detomasi alla Cimalegna. This involved getting the cable car to the Passo del Salati then asking the two lift guys what to do next. Neither spoke English but eventually figured out that we were asking about the Via Ferrata then they could not do enough for us. Marco finished his Espresso first, but then took us down in our personal lift, part way down the Alagna side to Bocchetta delle Pisse 2450m. A short walk uphill brought us to the start of the VF ready to muscle our way up the vertical start. Or at least Ian was; Colin was struggling with a dodgy shoulder and decided a 20m overhang was not going to help it to recover.

Via Ferrata Emilio Detomasi alla Cimalegna (Alagna Valsesia - VC)

Photo by Paolo Paglino



So at the helpful sign at the start, Colin set off rightwards to take the milder option, which promptly turned in to a rubbly path; after 200m or so lost patience and set off straight upwards towards the ridgeline to meet the “harder” variant. We avoided the Himalayan bridge, in Colin’s case because of the 20m overhang and in Ian’s because he missed it – but both enjoyed the steppel –aided scramble up the slabby ridge line after that. A cairn at 2780m marks the end of the route and we wandered on up to the Passo del Salati, then down the track to our hut for the night, the Oresteshuette, nestling on top of a moraine at 2600m. Unfortunately to reach it involved going down a long way, then back

up into the enormous coire it sat in .A strenuous 1000 meter day giving good acclimatisation but neither of us had much energy to cope with the(dull tasteless) veggie option.



Figure 6: Ian trying out the overhang at the start. I think he decided it was too easy

Day 2 – an easy day with a cable car ascent to the top station at Punta Indren, and a walk/ scramble up to the Gnifetti Hut at 3600 metres. The forecast was concerning us, with mild temperatures, high winds and heavy snow forecast for Days 3, 4 and 5.



Figure 7: Gnifetti Hut - best in the Alps?

So instead of a couple of days festering at 3600 – 4000 metres next morning Ian’s bold plan was to head straight up and out for the Margherita Hut, at 4550m the highest building in Europe on the

summit of the 5th highest mountain, the Signalkuppe, or much more elegantly in Italian, Punta Gnifetti.



Figure 8: Lyskamm

As the dawn broke it was a beautiful day and the glacier plod was benign and simple. For a moment I thought Ian had broken into song until I realised he was throwing up....Ian's acclimatisation was not going so well. This became a theme for the day. The terrain was easy, very little crevassing and a well established trail.

The scenery around us was awe inspiring with Pyramide Vincent, Corno Nero and the Corno Nero on our right, and the reigning tryptich of Punta Gnifetti, Dufourspitze and Nordend in front and dominating everything by sheer dramatic tension, Lyskamm to our left. After the Col de Lys Ian was ill again but determined and six hours or so later we were in the Margherita.

Ian was struggling even to drink, and over the evening meal (four courses, again – they take these things seriously in Italian huts) was unable to eat anything. We shared a table with a pleasant German nephrologist, who on learning how Ian was feeling began to look at him as though he was a lab specimen...anyway, next morning dawned through the clouds and the beginnings of the day's snow and rain, and Ian wasn't yet in a jar. The weather spared us the dilemma of finding the road across the Zumsteinspitze to the SE ridge of Dufourspitze as neither of us fancied routefinding down the glacier in the clag with the path buried, so down we went. By 3600m, Ian had recovered enough to enjoy the Gnifetti's apple strudel, which by popular acclaim was the best strudel ever. By this time it was depressingly warm and the rain was West Highland in character. We mislaid the path to the cable car in the clag and some old fashioned navigation tactics were deployed – spot the Italian and follow him down! In mitigation it must be said that Colin had it figured with map and compass before we saw him...



Figure 9: Lyskamm E Ridge. Spot the climbers..



Figure 10: Zumsteinspitze, Dufourspitze and Nordend from the lavvy window!

Our Sicilian host at Villa Regina welcomed us back, and Ian was expecting to spend the rest of the week festering in Staffal ; a wee walk down the valley the next day was livened by the Kamikaze crickets and richness of flora and fauna to be seen. However it became plain that another weather window was opening, so another plan was hatched. Next day we took the cable car on the other side of the valley and walked up to the Quintino Sella Hut, which was quiet, and about to close for the winter. The higher reaches of the hut walk takes to a spiky ridge with cables, steppelen and at one point a wee bridge, all of which adds greatly to the enjoyment.



Figure 11: Fun on the "hut walk" to the Sella

Overnight it snowed, but only a little, and it was much colder as we set off in the dark next morning for Castore; a snow plod which we took slowly. The Lyskamm again dominated proceedings, this time to the east of us.



Figure 12: Lyskamm from Castore

Colin had summited Castore a dozen years previously from the west, from the Val d'Ayas hut; as we got higher the plod emerged on to a beautifully chiselled, corniced ridge. The wind also strengthened from the west.



Figure 13: Castore E ridge

On we plodded, meeting two Norwegians on their way down, having turned at the first false summit. One of them told us in that doleful Norse way that many people had died on this ridge. (Don't really believe him)



Figure 14: Homeward bound. Pt 4175 behind Ian; Castore summit is on the far right of the picture.

At the first point, the ridge swerved rightwards and got slightly narrower; at the next, we could see that the summit was still a good 20 – 30 minutes away which would mean probably another 90 minutes on a narrow ridge, in a strengthening wind. We declared that our false summit, at 4175m just 50 metres short of the actual summit, would do us nicely, and off we went. A wee break at the hut, then back down to the valley, the burden of objectives shed nicely leaving us relaxed and serene.

1st/2nd October THE CABIN LAGGAN

Janice couldn't make it for the Friday night, so she invited me to take Gill as my guest and a friend of hers whom she had invited. Does that all make sense? Now I've forgotten Gill's pal's name, let's just call her Babs. Gill and Babs did Ben Vrackie on the way up on the Friday and arrived just as it was getting dark. I waited for them in the wee lay-by that takes 4 or 5 cars at the base of the knoll behind which the Cabin is situated. I had carried my gear up earlier and had noticed a sign off to the left about 20 yards before you go through the gate to the Cabin's environs. The sign pointed left and read 'East Highland Way' - I was unaware of such an animal.

Whilst Gill and Babs did the Geal Charn up from Spey Dam on the Saturday, I had arranged to meet Janice at the west end of Loch Laggan. After a false start, we biked into Lochan na h'Earba then up

the path that takes you through to Loch Pattack. Before the col we struck off southwards to pick up the obvious shoulder that takes you to the main ridge of Beinn a' Chlachair. Proceeding to the top and then back to the col and up Geal Charn we met, overtook, were overtaken and finally joined by a German lady sporting a cycling cap but with no bike, and a Scot and Englishman from Argyllshire. Having satisfied myself as to their suitability I left Janice in their company to do Creag Pitridh, whilst I rushed back to my bike and to see the 2nd half of South Africa v Scotland in the Glen Hotel in Newtonmore with Gill and Babs.



Figure 15: no-one took any photos at Laggan so here's a photo of the hut.

Back in the Cabin, drink and food were consumed in conservative quantities and I had a thoroughly enjoyable evening in such pleasant company.

On the Sunday, Janice rushed off to do the Spey dam Geal Charn, (*shouldn't that be another damn Geal Charn? – Ed.*) leaving her packed lunch behind her. But she did it so fast she wouldn't have worked up enough of an appetite anyway.

29th/30th October INVERCROFT ACHNASHEEN (Ian)

I suppose I could go and dig out my munro book and give you the names of the munro's we did but that wouldn't reflect the kind of week-end it was. On the Friday George Hunter and I got up to Achnasheen in plenty of time to do that Munro that sits to the north of it, Fionn Bheinn (although I've always pictured it to the west). We set out intending to pick up a winding track by a burn but were dissuaded by something, either signage or fencing, away from the track which was looking less appealing anyway on closer inspection. We parted from the burn near the mini hydro scheme and struck up round a shoulder to our North and then across a shallow corrie and straight towards the top. Whilst never exhausting it was, as I remembered from doing it with Doc some dozen years ago, relentless. On the return we walked towards Toll Beag - ok I've reverted to type (note pun) and got the munro book out - but seeing Janice and Gill coming up the hill (to fetch a pail of water?) cut across to the head of the corrie. After a brief parlez we continued over Creagan nan Laogh and back to the wee dam and the hydro, where we picked up the previously discarded track. I have vague recollections of deteriorating weather and being aware Janice and Gill were having it less pleasant than we got, although I can't remember us getting views across to the Torridons even when we summited, which is a pity as it is the highlight of this particular munro (ok, Fionn Bheinn).



Figure 16: Moruisg from Sgurr nan Ceannaichean (library)

They've done a lot of work on the raised walkway into Invercroft which now takes you about 4/5ths of the way in and kept us completely free of any standing water. We press ganged a member of the Jacobites to carry in some of the firewood we had taken with us and ensconced ourselves for the night. In the morning, Margaret the non wood carrier of the two Jacobites, complained about their part of the hut being freezing so they were invited to sleep in the plebs rooms. They didn't do anything involving mountains that day, whilst George accompanied me in my normal routine of going to see Ray in Lochcarron. However as the afternoon appeared to be fulfilling the improvement forecasted, George and I carried out a full frontal assault on Moruisg - and to think I called Fionn Bheinn relentless. Janice and Gill meanwhile had spent the whole day out in fairly miserable conditions doing Sgurr Choinich and Sgurr a'Chaorachain - the first two you come to when you go in from Craig, or Gerry's, heading for Bhearnais. Chapeau, ladies - great effort. After visiting the Ledgowan again we retired to Invercroft where drink, and food, was taken in the company of the all conquering ladies and the retreating Jacobites. Whilst George and I scuttled home on Sunday Janice and Gill undoubtedly did something else.

Whit's Happenin? (Tam, Billy, Martin)

I was lucky enough to be invited away for a climbing weekend by the Cranhill Branch of the Strathaven Climbing Club, and what a weekend it turned out to be. The Friday evening saw Tam and myself meet up with Billy at the Lochaber Mountain Rescue Base, where we were to be billeted, before we wandered into Fort William for a quiet evening of contemplation – somehow there seemed to be a gap in space / time continuum though as we didn't arrive back to the Base until 02.00 on the Sat morning – something must have happened? Anyway, after a refreshing breakfast (full, served at 07.00) we left for a casual walk up the Ben track, the tranquillity only marred by the many failed attempts Billy had to try and clear his stomach – seemingly his fingers were just too big to get right down his throat.

It was a lovely day to be on the Ben, a fact proven by the nr of climbers on various routes, our first 3 objectives all had numerous parties either on them already or waiting to get on them so we settled on a quiet objective – BD Was Here, a very nice Grade III high up on Nr 2 Gully Buttress. Billy bagged the first pitch, a wise move as I heard a noise whilst attentively belaying him, turned to find Tam emptying the contents of his stomach at the belay stance, nice, real nice. Tam then swung into action, leaving me with a nice belay stance but he made short shrift of the pitch, then it was me, up to the belay stance and then lead through, I ran out of rope so made a safe belay at that point, much to Billy's amusement when he came up next as he managed to find a more secure belay stance on the other side of the rock I was hanging from. Oh well, all were safe. Up came Tam to the belay, a good bit of banter followed about me not having my shades with me (the weather really was that nice) then on pressed Billy to the top, then me with Tam coming up at the rear. When all at the top the Cranhill Boys proudly donned their matching Cranhill Blazers (or bodywarmers), then they proceeded to put on their shades .



One Eyed Jack, and his mate – The Cranhill Boys

After another quiet evening in Fort William (avoiding potential suicide jumpers spoiling our evening meal, and being joined by various ex pupils of Billy's in the bar) we arose in a somewhat fitter state and made our way to Aonach Mor – we had assured Tam it was only a 20 minute walk to the top! Upon finally reaching the summit we went down Easy Gully to find that the near perfect conditions the day before were not to be replicated, soft sugary snow on all routes under huge cornices so after a short traverse we finally found ourselves below Tunnel Vision, another Grade III. Billy again bagged the first pitch, a nice snow plod up the slope, avoiding the large holes appearing in the slabs to find a safe belay to which he brought us up. Tam felt like leading so off he went, zigzagging his way up the slope, getting a final screw in under the cornice before a long traverse right to a gap through it and then he was up. Unbeknown to Billy and myself Tam then set his belay up on a handy fence post which was back to the left of the cornice breach meaning that when he tightened the rope it merely dug itself into the cornice – we only found this once Billy had climbed 3-4m or so and started asking for Tam to pull the rope tight. After much consternation (and the passage of an hour or so) Tam then appeared at the lip of the cornice to shout down “Whit’s Happenin?”, this statement did not go down too well with Billy who by this time had started climbing / prussicking up the slack rope. We all eventually got to the top, had a “tutorial” on ropework / belay stance / forces before the wind got the better of us and we beat a hasty retreat down to the ski station bar – what a fitting end to two days climbing with the Cranhill Boys, sat in a bar drinking beer.

Martin

That’s all for now!

It’s your newsletter so any stories about exploits in the hills or forests will be received with thanks. Next newsletter Summer time for sure! – but we need photos and copy so keep sending it all in.

Colin (Acting- or acting-it - Editor)

