



SWMC Newsletter

Summer '06

www.southwalesmountaineering.org.uk

You bunch. You're a funny old lot. Sitting in the pub after a day out, there's no shutting you up. It's hard crux this, dodgy bit of gear that, best route ever the other. Hour long debates on the relative merits of friends and hexes, blow by blow accounts of the latest epic debacle.

But asked for a few hundred words and a couple of pics, there's just unnatural silence. Embarrassed mutterings and the shuffling of feet.

It's only thanks to the ever-productive Paul Rogers, Gwyn Evans and Chris Wyatt that this season's newsletter (and most other issues) isn't entirely empty. Of course, a PhD student, a council worker and a hospital habitue have more time on their hands than most. And I know it's high summer, and you'd rather be out enjoying than sitting in writing.

But all of you have good stories to tell, and there might even be a few interested to hear them. It doesn't have to be an exotic overseas adventure or the first ascent of a modern classic, although they definitely have to be written up. Just a good day out, or a route you've always wanted to do. The excitement of your first lead. A bit of advice, how you moved up a grade. With or without pictures. A great (or even just ok) pic can even be enough with no more than a decent caption.

And don't worry about it being the greatest piece of literature ever. It doesn't need to be, and I've got qualifications in knocking this sort of stuff into shape (yes, I know you'd never be able to tell). You should see the state of the coffee-stained scribbles Rogers sends in before they're given the treatment. Such a disappointment for an educated boy.

To give you an idea, this issue I've even included a piece of my own ('Bowfell in Boots' if you want to read it). There's no epic, and it's a grade that just about everyone could do. I forgot the camera that day or I'd show you the views, but it was a top day out I'd recommend to anyone.

And that's what the newsletter should be all about. Think of it as the pub, without the beer. Though you're welcome to crack one open when you read it.

Simon Williams
Newsletter editor

Joining the club

Join the SWMC and you'll meet friendly and helpful climbers and mountaineers of all abilities and interests. There's regular weekday evening and weekend climbing meets, a lively online forum, British Mountaineering Council affiliation and insurance, discount at retailers and reduced rates at the North Wales club hut.

Anyone interested in joining should go to the website www.southwalesmountaineering.org.uk, or email John Custance [membership.east@tiscali.co.uk] for Cardiff area membership, Tim Huddy [tim.huddy@ntlworld.com] for Swansea, or Linda Jensen [Linda.Jensen@ntlworld.com] for the youth section (see page 2 for more youth section details).

First Lead Weekend - for wannabe leaders

The annual SWMC First Lead Weekend in North Wales will be taking place on the bank holiday weekend of the 26th August. It's a great chance to have a go on the sharp end of the rope under the watchful eye of seasoned club members. Or just a great excuse to climb in North Wales if you haven't managed to get there this year.

The aim is to climb in the Ogwen Valley and Llanberis Pass (weather permitting as always).

How many people will be able to come depends on the budding-leader-to-experienced-member ratio so get in quick. If you want to come, either as a new leader or as an experienced helper, contact Nik Goile [nikgoile@gmail.com] for more info.

Equipment stolen

Fixed equipment at sports climbing venue The Gap has been removed by persons unknown. In recent months Paul Bowen et al have done an excellent job of rebolting many routes at this popular sandstone quarry. Club secretary Alan Rosier further added four chains to the lower-off's on the left hand wall of the lower quarry. All have put in a great deal of time, effort and money.

Sadly, the people responsible for removing the equipment must be climbers, and it seems a particularly pointless act as the value of the equipment stolen probably wouldn't cover the fuel cost for a return trip from Cardiff.

Sign up to the bulletin board for all club communications

From September this year, all club communication with members will take place by email. To receive any communication (including this newsletter), all members MUST be registered on the bulletin board, although there is no requirement to be an active user of the forums.

If you're already registered on the bulletin board you need do nothing. If you are not registered and wish to continue to receive club communications after September, go to www.southwalesmountaineering.org.uk/bb/ and click the 'register' link at the top right of the screen.

Llety Llwyd, the club hut

Much work has been done recently on improvements and maintenance at the club's hut in north Wales, and hut warden Bryan Smith still has many more plans.

Recent visitors may have noticed the all new thermostatic radiator valves. Each radiator now has one large and one small valve. Please do NOT adjust the smaller valves - the larger valves are thermostatic and can be adjusted. Please do not adjust the kitchen radiator at all, and set the furthest radiator in the drying room to at least '3', to keep the system ticking over. The radiators in the bunk rooms will soon be plumbed in, and will also be fitted with thermostats.

Bryan will soon complete the process of replacing all the light bulbs with energy efficient ones, and to replace the wheezy toilet extractor fan.

The men's shower has been demolished, and plans are coming together for a replacement unit or units. The bathroom radiator is to be replaced with a fan assisted radiator to heat the bathroom quickly, and a heated towel rail will be fitted. The ventilation will also be improved to reduce the damp smell that can permeate at present (this has already been improved by the removal of the rotting carcass of the timber-built old shower).

Shane Daniels has been helping Bryan with some exploratory drain work (!) to see if drainage from the proposed new shower set-up will work. For this reason there is a hole in the bathroom floor below the boiler. It is not large but please take care unless equipped for caving.

The track is now driveable, although this could be only for the very adventurous or four wheel drive equipped. Many thanks to the Lincolnshire hut folk for the boulder lugging and concreting at the top gate. They have also undertaken to replace the terminally rusty gate into the hut 'garden'.

As usual, Bryan asks for any feedback, and any suggestions as to how the hut can be improved are much appreciated. He also asks for anyone willing to get up to the hut for a bit of work (walling, painting etc.) to let him know.

Climbing for young people

SWMC members Linda Jensen and Gary Lewis run a club for young climbers on Saturdays at the Welsh International Climbing Centre (WICC). Linda, also BMC Area Youth Coordinator for South Wales and Gary, BMC Climbing Wall Rep, hold the climbing and coaching session between 10.30 and 1 pm for youngsters who've learnt the basic climbing skills and are keen to improve their wall climbing..

If a youngster wants to go along on Saturdays, they need to first do an introductory course at a local climbing wall, learning how to put on a harness, tie onto the rope and maybe how to belay. If afterwards they're still keen, they should call Gary or Linda (see below for contact details). Kit can be hired to get started, and Gary and Linda can advise on buying new or help find second hand gear.

If you would like to join the SWMC Youth Section but can't attend the Saturday morning club, it may still be possible - call to make special arrangements.

Gary Lewis: 029 20214677; gary.lewis2@ntlworld.com
Linda Jensen: 029 20652992; Linda.Jensen@ntlworld.com

Next issue...

The next newsletter will be Autumn 06, due out in October. If you have anything to contribute - trip reports, news items, letters, photos, rants etc - email Simon Williams [williamssj6@cf.ac.uk]

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Old Man on Hoy

Gwyn Evans reports on a visit to the most famous sea stack in Britain

As usual it starts with a telephone call.

"Fancy a trip to Hoy?" asks Dick. "Steven and Mick are looking at some routes on St John's Head, and we can swap partners as we wish."

"Sorry Dick, all I know about St John's Head is it's very big and there are only three routes on it, the last one I heard of was E4. The only thing I'd be interested in would be the Old Man."

"You haven't done the Old Man? Neither have I, would you be interested?"

"Well yes, but who are Steven and Mick?"

"Steven Sustad and Mick Fowler" SHHHH*****TTTT...

Six weeks later on the pier at Scrabster, we're all meeting over a bacon butty in the Seamen's Mission. Soon we're on the boat and admiring the Old Man from the sea. We arrive at the superb little port of Stromness, houses dropping down the hillside into Scapa Flow.

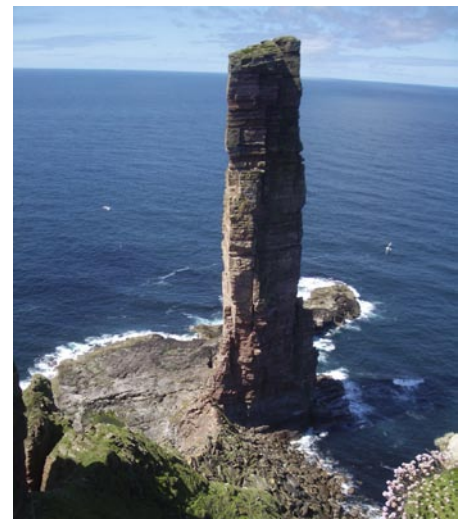
Mick is bouncing up and down, full of enthusiasm and ideas. "Let's go to Yesnaby." Yesnaby is a sea stack off the coast of Mainland (Orkney's biggest island). There we're treated to the sight of Mick hiding his underpants in his helmet before diving in for the nude swim to the stack. The first ascent of Dirty Wife is a foregone conclusion,

although the return to the cliff top by a very long diagonal prussik is not so easy.

After a long night in Flattie's Bar in Stromness we drive to Houghton to bivvy and wait for the first ferry of the morning. As we're gearing up in the Rackwick car park a couple of determined guys set off up the hill with big rucksacks. Over an hour later we're at the bottom of the cliff watching two other parties on the route, both on the first stance. Obviously no rush, so Mick regales us with tales of his various ascents: the helmet jammed in the top of the chimney epic; the rope drag problem; the one straightforward ascent. Eventually we agree that Dick and I will go first with Mick, Steven and Tess forming the fourth party of the day.

Fully geared up with a couple of Friend 4s and a "must have" Friend 5 (courtesy of my children for Father's Day), we set off. Pitch 1 is a straight forward 4b in the sun. Pitch 2 is the big boy, a long traverse out of the sun to the foot of a wide crack and the first overhang, surmounted without too much problem. This is followed by an overhang capped chimney. The chimney isn't too bad, the Friend 5 goes in very well cammed. "I sure hope Mick gets that out cos the kids ain't seen their present yet".

Fortunately the old wooden wedges are still in place and provide overhead pro for the move into the crack above. Friends 4 and old wedges provide the pro up to the stance. Dick doesn't smile much but there is a definite grin as he tops the corner. Unfortunately, on his pitch a fulmar gets him with its projectile vomit. It's ok for him as he's lost his sense of smell, the rest of us aren't so lucky, we're going to have to live with him for the next few (unshowered) days! As I set off on my pitch the first party is abbing down, using balanced abseils and wandering around the ledge unroped. Dick's not amused by these antics and tells them so in no uncertain



The Old Man himself

terms. I'm concerned I might sweep them off if I fall, Dick's worried that if one of them stumbles and grabs my rope, with no runners on it, I'll be hanging in space. Whatever, we're glad to see the back of them.

This brings me to the foot of the last pitch - a fine looking corner. This VS 4c could hold its own on any crag and Dick has it; but I'd had the crux below so shouldn't complain. On the way up you can look right through the cliff to the sea beyond,

fantastic. Sitting on the top waiting for the others we admire the puffins with their stubby little wings, flying around the summit with their beaks full of sand eels.

When we're all regrouped it's time to test the theory that with 60m ropes you don't need a safety rope across pitch 2, but we've left one in "just in case". First off the stance at the top of the main pitch I clip into the safety rope and slide down until I can confirm the ropes

reach the ground. I carry on to the stance and untie the end of the rope. But I'm not brave enough just to fly off into space, so there are some shenanigans while I lower myself before untying and abbing to the ground.

We get back to the car about 10:15 and drive to the Hoy Inn. The bar has two pumps, one for beer one for lager, but the landlady provides bacon butties. Would you get that after a late night in the Wye Valley?

Bowfell in Boots

Simon Williams finds out if he's too big for his boots on a Lakeland classic

Some days it's great to park up by the crag, pull off a couple of hard sport routes and be back in the pub before the first pump has worn off. Then other days, nothing other than a full mountain adventure is going to satisfy.

The Lake District is the home of mountain adventure, and I'm here with my partner Llio to tick some classics. And Bowfell Buttress is a classic in every sense. Seven pitches on a high, isolated mountain, it was first climbed in 1902, and many thousands of climbers have been up it since. Supposedly a v diff, one hundred years of polish and a couple of stiff cruxes really tips it into the severe, and only tradition has prevented a re-grade. But if the oldies could do it with hobnails and hemp...

The Broad Stand walk-in is a long pull up a rambler's motorway, and in the already baking heat of the hottest day of the year a scramble up the cool and shaded gully of Crinkle Gill seems a much better option. Soon among the babbling stream, mossy boulders and dappled light, we're expecting trolls, goblins or the little people around every corner.

But it must be a day off for fairy folk, as none appear, and within an hour we're scrambling out the top.

Then a long moorland traverse and we're finally picking our way up the scree slopes of Bowfell, the 900m peak looming above. The E-peppered buttress we're heading

for looks steep and impenetrable, but we soon spot the v diff route, an elegant line of least resistance linking up obvious flakes, chimneys and terraces.

To travel light, we're carrying one 8mm rope to use doubled over (more than enough for the 20 metre pitches), a stripped down rack of nuts and hexes, a couple of slings and half a dozen quick draws. And a big pair of winter boots each. Our alpine aspirations, and a nod to the Tigers who first climbed these Lakeland classics and invented rock climbing in the process, has prompted us to leave the miracle of modern rock boots at home and do it the old way.

We think we're travelling light. But we're not quite as light as the fell runner (the first person we've seen all day) who pants up the slopes below. He nods a quick hello, pulls on a pair of rock boots and side steps around us on the first pitch to start his long solo. I watch him gracefully smear and bridge the second pitch chimney, then clunk and heave up after him, already wondering if the big boots are really such a grand idea.

But it all goes well, and we make good progress. The boots allow little delicacy anyway, so the polish doesn't affect the climbing too much, but it does make route finding a breeze, often the hardest challenge on a broken mountain

line. At a steady pace this is close to a three hour climb, and we take the time to enjoy every minute.

Our guide book suggests an alternative line for a more interesting finish. If more interesting means following a vegetated, gear-spurning crack up a steep, lichen-infested slab, then it's spot on. My advice would be keep to the route – a hundred years of tradition can't be wrong.

But it's pitch five with it's infamous crack crux that has to be the highlight, distilling all the variety and interest the route has to offer. The crack itself is just a couple of fingery pulls and some clever footwork, although it could come as a bit of a surprise to those expecting a v diff to offer jugs all the way.

But it's the glorious groove and chimney above it, with a thoughtful side-stepping sequence to gain the step across to the exposed but comfortable stance, that puts just the biggest, cheesiest grin on my face.

We take a breather here, revelling in the airy high mountain feel and the glorious views. When we can finally tear our eyes away from the vertebrate sweep of the Langdale Pikes, we spot the web of scratches covering the rock where we sit. They could only have been made by the scraping of crampons. Doing this in full winter conditions – now that would be an adventure.

I'm already wondering if the big boots are really such a grand idea.

A Day on the Beach

Chris Wyatt discovers a few problems with his family at Caswell Bay.

A beautiful July morning fills my window and it's a Saturday. The kids decide to use me as a punch bag for their morning exercise and I'm soon up to escape the mayhem. Saturday morning ritual usually includes making pancakes for the family which I duly do. Let's discuss the day!

Soon the plan is laid. We are going to Caswell Bay, Gower for a beach day. Mrs W sorts out clothes and beach stuff while I find the BBQ. I sneakily slip in a pair of rock boots to go with the bucket and spade, rugby ball and boogie board.

We park the car, walk across the car park and down to the golden sand. The tide is high but on the way out. Families and teenage tribes converge on the sand. We grab a base camp under the low limestone cliffs on the east of the bay.

A quick throw around, a couple of sandcastles, an ice-cream or two and I go for the jugular:

"Anyone fancy bouldering?"

"Na..." retorts my 10 year old boy as he buries himself in a book. The girl has found a friend. Mrs W takes a well earned sunbathe.

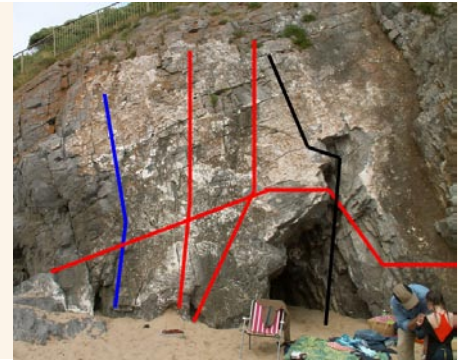
"Well does anyone mind if I go bouldering?"

I presume no answer equals yes so off I go.

Route Key

■ Easy ■ Moderate ■ Hard

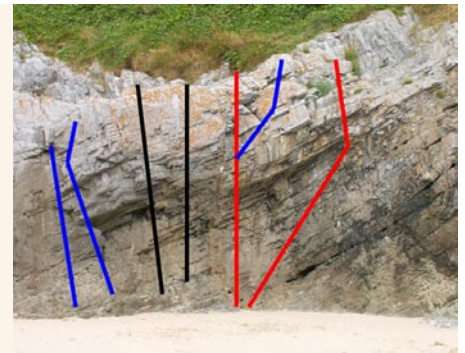
I start at the top of the beach at the white slab. Five routes here. The black is interesting – stretchy at first, technical and crimpy at the top of the cave.



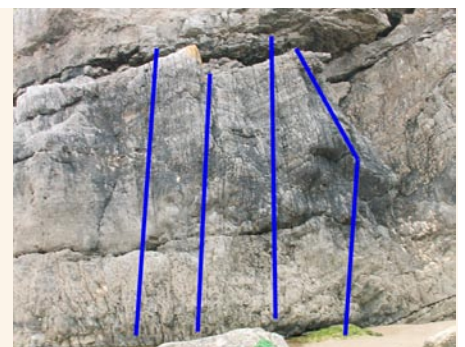
My daughter arrives fresh from sand architecture. I find a good adventure for her. Into the right hand cave, a bit of squirming and out through the left hand cave.



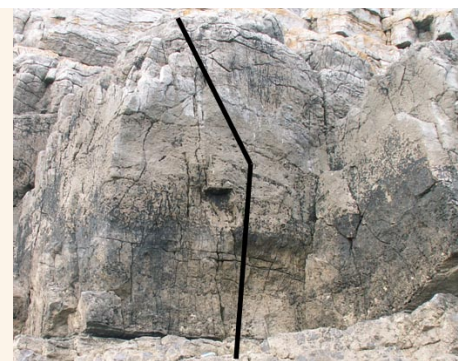
I carry on to the wave area just down the beach. I'm still working on the left hand black route – straight up through the overhang and headwall – but some of my mates have done it.



My son approaches, bored of his book. I take him to the slabs just down the beach. There's enough here to keep any beginner happy for hours. However you may want to rope up as it's quite highball.



It's nearly time for the BBQ but I'm not yet finished. A favourite problem can be found on the upper tier just round the headland. A fierce, crimpy one move wonder.



The whole family enjoyed themselves and I manage a reasonable session. Thanks Caswell Bay.

PS There's more to be had further round the point and on the other side of the bay. See www.southwalesbouldering.co.uk

Costa Blanca report

How to get there, where to stay and what to climb.
Paul Rogers reports on a quick trip to the Costa Blanca

For most people the Costa Blanca is a winter destination. If you make a summer trip, like us (we went in May), you'll most likely have the place to yourself.

Obviously if you are going in winter you won't have to worry about avoiding the sun, though I've been told that it can be proper brassic at the high altitude crags, such as Ferradier. For all the details, Rockfax do an excellent guide to the area.

EasyJet fly to Alicante from Bristol. A top tip if you're going to drive to the airport is to leave your car at Wraxhall Manor. They secure your car in a safe lock-up, offer you a cup of tea then transport you and your luggage to the airport by minibus. It's cheaper than leaving your car at the airport and you don't have to worry about parking. They pick you up on your return, good service, highly recommended.

We hired a car at Alicante airport, then drove 45 minutes to the Orange House in Finestrat, just outside Benidorm. The Orange House is cheap with good self catering facilities, though by no means the only place to stay - those who are a bit more adventurous / can speak a little Spanish could probably find more for less.

We visited a different crag each day, the furthest away being just over an hour drive and the nearest about 15 minutes. As we went in May we were keen to avoid direct sun and easily managed to find crags with midday shade. Some venues, like the local one of Sella, had crags on either side of the valley - when the sun hit we were able to scurry across to the other side.

The following is a brief summary of the crags we visited

All photos by Niall Cambell
(including the one of himself? ed.)

Sella

Mostly vertical and slabby. Routes of all grades, mainly technical face climbing. Most of the routes are long, 14 bolts or so. Some gems here, will put your footwork through its paces. There are also some multi-pitch routes, but you're out here for some sport action don't mince about and crack on! Some of the easier routes near the carpark are a little polished. If you are after multi-pitch action then you're better off going to the Penon D'Ifach or the Puig Campagna, which have proper all day multi-pitch routes.

Gandia

Most excellent. A mix of vertical and overhanging routes. The routes tend to be shorter in length, though longer than your S Wales sport routes. Lots of pocket and tufa pulling. There's an amusing 5+ on the lefthand side of the crag that's similar to Undermilkwood at Three Cliffs (but without the slime). This crag is south facing so it gets the sun all day - great in the winter, not so good in the summer.

Forada

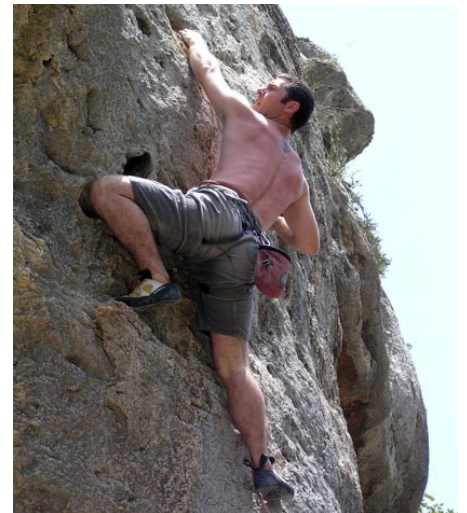
Absolutely awesome. Steep pocket-pulling pleasure. I've never pulled on holds so big before or since. Gets the shade all day and is at altitude so can be cool. I froze my tits off in shorts and t-shirt. Fantastic if you've got arms. If you don't then the other side of the outcrop has more amenable climbs. Don't even think of wimping off round the back though as the steepness is where it's at. Get yourself a pull up bar and get out there. Good place to bag your first 7a (Spiderman).

Salem

On first appearances we thought this place was a shower but after a few routes it turned out to be great. A really good variety of climbs, technical and steep without being too overhanging. Gets all day shade. Not that much below 6a.



Paul at Gandia



Niall on a short stiff route at Gandia



Dean on a 7a+ at Salem



A more amenable route at Salem