



SWMC Newsletter

Autumn '06

www.southwalesmountaineering.org.uk

There are just so many choices in the climbing world, so many subtleties and variations.

In just one week in North Wales, five of us scrambled wet ridges, lead multi-pitch monsters, top-roped slate and even hiked tourist trails.

And each of us had a different list of favourites. I've never seen anyone so excited over some shiny rock as Des Devlin in the industrial wastes of the slate quarries. Admittedly there are some lovely lines and a certain eerie charm to the abandoned landscape, but in that land of mountains it just didn't quite rock my boat.

Yet I had one of my most memorable mountain experiences without even touching rock, sitting watching Clogwyn D'ur Arddu slowly, dramatically emerge from its cloak of mist after a wet day bumble to visit the shrine to Welsh climbing.

And now, despite the darkening evenings taking us back to the wall, autumn gales keeping us off the sea cliffs and the sandstone threatening its long winter of seepage, there's a whole new range of games to keep us happy.

Some are working the campus board, planning a winter of training to push a grade next season. Some (who mostly seem to live in the Abertawe area) will steadfastly ignore the approaching winter, and grab any window in the weather to feel real rock. Some even sit at home and write poetry. (That Chris Wyatt - doesn't he ever just watch some telly?)

And I sit in our back room surrounded by boots and gaiters and goretex, obsessively scraping my thumb across the pick of a shiny new ice axe.

Viva la difference. Bring it on.

Simon Williams, Newsletter editor

Annual General Meeting

All club members are invited to the Annual General Meeting at the Rhyddings Hotel, Brynmill Avenue, Brynmill, Swansea on Tuesday 14th November, starting at 7pm.

The meeting will be in the upstairs function room, there's a bar and the first drink is free, so come along and have a say in the running of your club.

Items for the agenda should be emailed to club secretary Alan Rosier [alan.rosier@capita.co.uk] by 17th October. The full agenda will be published by 24th October.

Your Club Needs You!

The Annual General Meeting is your chance to stand for any club committee position you fancy. Nigel Lewis (chair) and Llio Elgar (treasurer) have already announced their intention to stand down, so these positions will need to be filled. If you fancy any other role, the incumbent more than likely will not put up much fight. To be considered, you'll need to have a club member nominate you, and another member to second the nomination, all of which can take place at the AGM.

All committee members will be expected to try to attend every committee meeting, and will have an equal vote when present. The committee aims to meet a minimum of four times a year, usually hosted by a member at their home, and meetings tend to alternate between the east and west of the club area.

The following is a list of committee positions and the main responsibilities of each role.

Chair

To chair committee meetings and the AGM, provide a short report at the AGM and a speech (or introduce a guest speaker) at the annual dinner. Will usually be a signatory to the club's bank account and may receive official communications sent to the club. To be the public face of the club at any open event.

Secretary

To take meeting minutes and publish the AGM agenda and minutes, receive and respond as appropriate to official communications, and update the BMC as to membership status. Will usually be a signatory to the club's account.

Newsletter editor

Responsible for producing and editing the quarterly newsletter.

Treasurer

Will hold the club cheque books and be responsible for the annual accounts. Is a signatory on the club account.

Barn Warden

Responsible for overseeing the maintenance and smooth running of the club's barn, Llety Llwyd, near Llanberis.

Membership Secretary East / Membership Secretary West

Two posts. Will take applications for new membership and renewals of membership, issue membership cards and be a point of contact for enquiries from prospective members. Must periodically update the secretary with details of members.

Ordinary Member East / Ordinary Member West

Two posts. Responsible for organizing the venue for the AGM or the annual dinner.

Club dinner

The venue, menu and entertainment are now all confirmed for the club annual dinner on Friday 17th November. If you attended the dinner two years ago you'll remember a great night (some may not remember very much at all), so this year it's the same venue, same band and quite possibly the same food (hopefully freshly cooked).

So that's the Discovery Inn on Celyn Avenue, Lakeside, Cardiff from 7pm, with food served at 7.45. The Clingons will be playing from 10 o'clock, and chuck out is midnight.

Menu:

Homemade minestrone soup
Pate, salad and toast
Prawn cocktail

Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding
Stuffed fillet of lemon sole
Breast of chicken wrapped in bacon
Vegetable pasta dish

Chocolate cheesecake
Black Forest gateau

It's all for the bargain price of £18.00. Contact Paul Rogers [fathorsepig@yahoo.ie] for food orders, and send cheques payable to 'SWMC' to Llio Elgar, 144A Craddock St, Cardiff CF11 6EY. Orders and payment must be received by October 25th.

Winter slideshows

Ever fancied having a rapt audience hanging on your every word, gasping at your deeds of daring and nodding appreciation at your stunning images? Well here's your chance. If you can be halfway informative about any climbing and mountaineering related topic, and have some images to support it, then put your name down for doing a slideshow this winter. Venues and dates to be confirmed, expressions of interest to Nigel Lewis [nrllal@btinternet.com].

Club communications going digital

From November 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.

If you're still not registered go to www.southwalesmountaineering.org.uk/bb/ and click the 'register' link.

Next issue...

The next newsletter will be Winter 06-07, due out in January. If you have anything to contribute, email Simon Williams [williamssj6@cf.ac.uk]

The Committee

Chair

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Preposterous Tales

Slime sprayed walls in ghostly grey
A lonely skylight signals distant day
Ocean waves, irrepressible
Rush into this dismal hole
A millennium crowd of stallions
Cheering for Wales

I cross the chasm, friction's edge
And spy an even darker passage
dripping all my nightmare fears.
With every move, my task to bridle melting mind
Trust the un-trustable! Doubt the un-doubtable!
Inch by inch, step by step
Testing, resting, testing, moving
An hour? An age? I cannot say
I find relief in belay's warmest welcome
With pounding heart and sweating brow, I call
My patient friend below to climb when ready

You cross the self-same chasm, teeter, slip
Arachnoid suspended, a fragile thread
Silhouetted,
The whirling maelstrom, stallion no longer,
but viper striking at your heel
Up the thread, your prussiks take! Go!
Inch by inch, step by step
To waiting friend, relief at night's dawn

Subsiding tension, pint at hand
Now just another epic to be told
Just another gripping story for the road
Hopefully the last!
But somehow, doubted.

by Chris Wyatt

Learning to lead

Nik Goile, chief 'first lead' guide and instructor, reports on a wet but successful North Wales weekend

A poor forecast didn't stop a good turnout for this summer's "First Lead Weekend" in North Wales. Nic Keepin, Martina Luetschg, Pete Stringfellow and Dan Cook were all keen to progress their leading skills under the watchful eyes of myself and helpers Tucker and Rob from Swansea and Sylvia, Des and Gemma from Cardiff.

Despite the appalling weather arriving as promised, all ventured out on Saturday morning to the old favourite - Tryfan Bach in the Ogwen Valley. All the first leaders had actually lead before, so it was more a "First Lead in the Pouring Rain", and all four notched a couple of routes before the weather proved too much.

The Swansea folk weren't too perturbed by the rain and made a quick ascent of the North Ridge of Tryfan, while the Cardiff contingent headed for the nearest climbing wall! (*ed. To be fair to the Cardiff lot, they'd already had a week of North Wales rain, and their own wet day of Tryfan scrambling had included a full Bristly Ridge adventure.*)

Sunday brought much better weather, and all completed their first multi-pitch leads on Idwal Slabs. Pete and Martina made a good ascent of "Hope", the biggest obstacle being the bank holiday crowds. Dan climbed "Tennis Shoe" with Sylvia while Nic and I swung leads on the quality "Ordinary Route".

At the top we were joined by Des, Gemma, Tucker and Rob, and the

afternoon quiet was split by pleasant banter between the different SWMC teams spread across the Slabs. The celebratory pint afterwards at the Bryn Twrch was well earned.

Bank holiday Monday started out promising. Sylvia, Des and Gemma were heading back home, but everyone left headed out to Glyder Fach. Nic and I opted for some roadside cragging on Milestone Buttress, while up at Glyder Fach the teams paired up. Rob managed to get 15 feet off the ground on Direct Route before the heavens opened and everyone was treated to a dose of freezing mid-summer hail.

Erring on the side of caution, all retreated and instead made a mass ascent to the summit of Glyder Fach via some grade 1-2 freestyle scrambling led by the enthusiastic route finding of Tucker.

Meanwhile on Milestone, Nic and I were topping out on the "Pulpit Route" when the hail hit. Unfortunately this turned the descent gully into a raging waterfall and I proceeded to show Nic how NOT to set up an abseil. We got down safely but I ended up having to climb the rope three (!!!) times before I managed to pull it through. Anyone who has ever abseiled down that gully in the past (including me) is probably wondering how I managed to screw that up...

The teams all converged at the Ogwen Cottage for a cup of tea within minutes of each other.



Martina Luetschg topping out on Hope, Idwal Slabs. Pete Stringfellow belays

It was a successful weekend despite the bad weather. I was very impressed with the first leaders' willingness to get out on the rock despite the poor conditions. Their positive attitude and enthusiasm definitely made the weekend worthwhile.

Let's hope we get a bit of sun next year!



Rob and Dan setting off up a wet Tryfan Bach



Nigel Lewis and partner Lisa explore the Cordillera Real range of Bolivia. While Lisa will be happy to reach the Condoriri base camp, Nigel is keen to summit a 6,000m peak...

Day 1

We've spent a week trekking around Peru, but now we've moved on to Lake Titicaca and into Bolivia. A few more days in the rarefied air of La Paz and we're ready to move onto our main aim. We start from La Paz at 0800 hours. Two hours in a four wheel drive and we're approaching the mountains. It should be quicker, but we get caught in one of the famous road blocks that characterize Bolivian protest. This one is to oust the Mayor of El Alto, who the locals think has over-promised and under-delivered!

We drive over the Altiplano, sometimes on a road, sometimes not, chatting to Pedro and Rogelio, who'll be hiking with us. Both work for Bolivian Mountains, a guiding company I'd gladly use again and recommend to anyone who cares to listen.

We finally stop near the head of a valley, close to the little community of Ajuani, and meet up with Rosemary, a 'Cholita' who will act as our muleteer. The fact that she's Rogelio's wife makes for easier

sleeping arrangements!

Pedro, Lisa and I leave them to pack the four mules while we set off along a nearby ridge. We climb from around 4,000 metres up to a high point named Wawa Anaky. It's little more than a scruffy outlying high point compared to the fantastic peaks around us, but as this is Lisa's first trip to South America, we duly photograph and 'tick off' her first peak. At 4,500 metres, it's not her highest, but certainly the highest for a good few years.

('Wawa Anaky', in the local Aymara language means 'a mythical man who keeps all children safe'.)

We move on to the nearby Ganchallany pass at 4,800m before dropping 800 metres down steep scree to a gorgeous little lake called 'Gystana'.

('Ganchallany' translation: 'A place to catch mules'. 'Gystana': 'Question'.)

We open our more than adequate lunch packs sitting alongside the lake, surrounded by llamas and 'suerta maria', which are considered a lucky bird. We're soon joined by Rogelio and Rosemary who lay out a huge picnic to supplement our

food. After a lazy half hour we set off again for the next pass while the mules take the long way around. Another 800 metres over steep thorny scrubland, which gives way to barren scree. The erosion has caused a strange weathering effect so that some slopes look like a Japanese raked garden, with symmetrical lines of alternating coloured gravel running down the slopes.

At the ridge we traverse across 40 degree scree with the occasional patch of snow, until we plunge another 800 metres back down 45 - 50 degree scree to reach Juri Khota, the "Wet Lake". By 4.30 we've pitched the tents and are into our first hot brew of the evening.

Day 2

A cold wake up some time around six, and I set the camera to catch the sun as it peeps over the shoulder of Austria Peak. Another glorious day as the sun warms us. A few hours later and we're off along the west side of the Laguna and up onto the scree, a rising traverse with occasional thick sticky patches of glacial

mud. Patches of snow are already softening in the morning sun. We're traversing across 50 degree scree with only the slightest indentation of a path. A large patch of slush and snow blankets part of our way and Pedro short ropes Lisa for a while. Then up over firmer ground, scree and rock steps, over the lip into the upper bowl of 'Lago Glacial.' A short stop for food at 4,600m, but no meeting the mules today! We cross onto the northern slopes of Austria Peak, looking down at the glacier snout below us. A short scramble on steep but easy ground with a 20 metre drop off to our left, more steep and easy ground and then a long rising plod through the boulder field to Austria Pass at 5,000 metres.

We consider dropping the sacks to make a quick detour to bag Austria Peak some 200 metres above us in vertical height. It's now very cold, clouds starting to come in and cover the sun. Pedro estimates an extra one and a half hours to the peak. Lisa doesn't fancy adding the extra time to our day, so we go on down to that evening's camp.

At first the descent goes directly down towards our destination at Laguna Chiar Khota, 500 metres below. As the ground gets steeper, the path takes a long traverse zigging and zagging down the side of the valley. Now we can see Aguja Negra, an unclimbed tower of choss the other side of the valley. To its left are Pico Illusion, Pyramide Blanca and Tarija with the 5,370 metres Pequeno Alpamayo partially visible behind it.

We reach camp in the glacial boulder field around 2.30pm. As we got there, a wave of fatigue sweeps over me and I'm very glad we hadn't gone up to summit Austria Peak. A splitting headache follows and all I want is to lie down. My fifth trip over 5,000 metres, but my first time to have anything more than mild discomfort from the altitude. Not a happy bunny! After an hour lazing with coca tea I'm feeling a little better, but still it's a very cold night, with a pounding headache and little

sleep. At 5.30am, I hear the clanking of a large team going to recover the body of an Austrian who'd fallen from Cabeza de Condor some days earlier.

Day 3

8am, and Pedro and I are shouldering our packs for a day on the glacier. It's a 40 minute walk to the ice or an hour if you're moving slowly. We take 50 minutes so I was reasonably happy with that (the guidebook suggests 1 1/2 hours). We

kit up but don't need the rope as the going is fairly easy. As ever, the snout is steeper and more broken than the rest, but soon eases up to no more than 30 to 35 degrees.

I'm enjoying the easy movement in bright sunshine, following the obvious tracks of climbers from earlier in the season. However, I'm soon moving more and more slowly, and feel myself breathing harder. Close to the top of the slope we began to traverse right, across the slope and toward steeper ground. We rope up and continue

"My fifth trip over 5,000 metres, but my first time to have anything more than mild discomfort from the altitude."

on, intending to summit Pyramide Blanca.

10.30, and there's clouds broiling over the horizon. I'm moving slower still and call out: "How long until the summit, Pedro?"

"One hour, maybe one and half."

I don't fancy racing the weather and after a quick parley, we change our plans and decide to head for the top of the glacier just to get a view over the other side at tomorrow's route. By 11am it's much colder and the wind has picked up. About 20 metres below the col we stop to put jackets on. As we're coming back this exact same way tomorrow, there's no point in slogging on up and so decide to go back down and save the energy for the real deal. A long slow plod down and another hour from the snout back to the tent. By this time I'm quite unwell, flop onto my sleeping bag and I'm asleep in minutes.

In the afternoon it snows, the clouds now blotting out our route. By tea time I'm feeling much better and manage a good meal. We make our plan for the morning. Pedro and I will get up around 2am and check the weather. If it's good to go we leave at 0300 hours.



At least the Dragon gets half way up the pole

Day 4

One o'clock in the morning. I've mostly slept, but I'm busting for a pee. I get up and find Pedro already awake and talking with some other guides. There's snow down as far as the camp, but we can see stars over the route. Pedro wants the other two parties to go before us and break the trail, so I go back to sleep until he calls at 2.30am. I force some breakfast down, but nothing of substance. I feel awful, but excited.

"Just keep going until the sun hits you," I think to myself. "It's always easier after the sun comes up."

Off we set, my head torch lighting up Pedro's heels and boot prints in the fresh snow. Now there's a clear moonlight sky and all the cloud is gone.

I'd been dosing myself on paracetamol to stave off the headaches in the hope of some sleep. It hadn't really worked and

now my head is buzzing. The cold air is bringing on a racking cough, and occasionally I clear a thick gob of phlegm from my throat. It makes my head feel like it's exploding, but does ease my wheezy breathing. I know I'm moving slower than yesterday, but worse still I can feel myself slowing with every step.

"Maybe this is my biggest mistake psychologically, as once I've changed the goal posts it's easy to do so again."

The only view is the small pools of ground light by the torches. Plenty of time to think. I decide to set my goal as this peak. If I can do that, I'll be happy. Save the bigger six thousander for

another time. It's been there millions of years, it'll be there for a while yet. Save it.

Maybe this is my biggest mistake psychologically, as once I've changed the goal posts it's easy to do so again.

If I can't make this peak, why don't I just aim for the summit of Tarija? Review things there.

Why don't I review things when I get to the glacier snout?

What will I say to Pedro when we get to Tarija? He's a guide and paid to be here, but he loves the mountains as much as I do and wants to go to the top. He'll be disappointed.

But I've realised I don't want to be doing this today. A huge steak in La Paz only costs about £2 in a good restaurant. The showers are hot and the air, oh the air! It's 3,600 metre air, but that feels thick enough to chew compared to here. But I've come a long way for this and know it will all be worth it when the glow of success is on me.

But it must be fate - a big, bench-shaped rock appears by the path.

"Pedro, I'm really slow," I call out to him. What I really mean is, "Let's sit here for a bit."

"How far are we from the glacier?"
"Half way."

That's the death blow. I feel shattered. Can I make the top? Possibly, but probably not.

Do I want to try? No. Definitely not. I've had enough.

We chat a bit longer, I'm apologising to Pedro. He's gracious and readily accepts we're going back down. Just half an hour and we're back at the tents, and I gladly slide out of my plastic boots and into my bag. I'm disheartened and down, but looking forward to getting back to town.

At second breakfast, Pedro tells me that one party had retreated after taking only 15 steps onto the glacier, and another had reached Tarija before turning back. The snow altered everyone's plans. By 10.15am we're leaving the campsite, now clear of snow, and by 11 we're at the pick-up point, where the car is already waiting.

A knife-edge drive takes us past the west face of Huayna Potosi, which looks staggering in the sun. We drop off the Altiplano into La Paz.

Day 5

3pm. Showered and stuffed full of steak, beer and Cuba Libre, we sink into our clean beds.

Disappointed? Yes. Satisfied? For now. Loved it? Absolutely!



Locals on the steps of Cusco Cathedral, Peru