

Clwb Dringo De Cymru

SOUTH WALES MOUNTAINEERING CLUB

Winter 2010



by Andy White, SWMC Editor

New SWMC Committee & Changes to the Club

As we engage in a dangerous sport and all members sign the BMC participation statement, we are basically covered against anyone making a claim for a climbing accident. However, perversely this does not apply if someone were to trip over a step in the hut (without a 'mind the step sign'), or indeed if someone were to get brain damaged by choking on an almond at the annual dinner (without 'warning: danger of choking!' written in an icing sugar stencil over the pudding)

It could be argued that the risks of an accident like these happening are quite low and that the chance of a good and upright climber suing the club is also pretty low. But if you ask yourself 'what would I do if I suffered a permanent injury?' you might reconsider.

The way the club is currently set up, every member of the club is jointly and severally liable for any debts incurred in such an action. This means that if we were to suffer a multi million pound lawsuit you could all be paying for the rest of your lives!

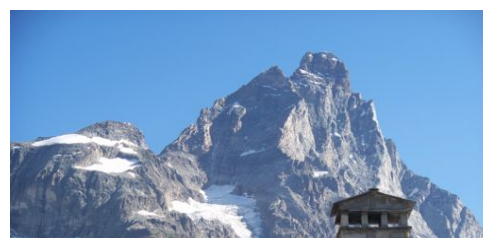
Continued on page 3



Dolomites

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Dan Cook treats us to the delights of climbing in the Dolomites, following last years SWMC Expedition.



Italian Ridge

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Nigel Lewis recounts his and Steve Kedwards Alpine adventures of last year.



News

Congratulations to the Goudges!!!

Congratulations to Ian and Sara who were wed on 26th February in a beautiful ceremony on the Gower.

They must both be commended for incorporating their passion of climbing and mountaineering into their day.

From a moving speech comparing marriage with the trust and companionship of climbing partners, to karabiner napkin holders and wonderful mountaineering inspired table centre pieces.

Their day was as much about their love for one another, as the passion that they have shared together for many years within the club

We wish them both, continuing happiness in their new life together.

Events & Meets Calendar 2010

With the evenings growing longer, its time to start hitting the rock...so here's what we have in store for the forthcoming season:

16th – 18th April

24th April

1st to 3rd May

8th May

10th – 16th May

29th – 31st May

12th – 13th June

24th – 25th July

11th – 12th September

25th – 26th September

27th December

BMC AGM (Gower)

Chris Wyatt

Beginners Day (East)

Andy White & Rhys Jones

Peak District

Steve Hill

Beginners Day (West)

Dan Cook

Skye

Jules Stephens

Lake District

Steve Hill

First Lead Weekend (North Wales)

Andy White

Pembrokeshire

Ian Goudge

Portland

Dafydd Jones

50th Celebration North Wales Meet

Sara Davies

50th Anniversary Annual Dinner

Nigel Lewis

Still to be confirmed are the following:

- **Love the Hut Weekend**
- **Rope Safety**
- **Sking Trip 2011**

Please note that it may be necessary to change the date of some of these meets, any changes will be published on the bulletin board. If you are interested in attending any of the meets please contact the organizer.

Changes to the Club by Chris Wyatt continued from Page 1

I do not want to be alarmist as this has not yet happened to any club in the UK but I personally would feel much more relaxed being a member of the club if I did not have this even as a remote possibility.

With this in mind and following legal advice, at the AGM the committee put to the vote the decision as to whether or not we should change the set-up of the club in law, and the members agreed.

We would like the club to become a not for profit limited company. The key word here is 'limited'. This means that a claim against the club can only go against the assets of the club - not the assets of its members.

What does this mean in practice?

Not much in terms of the day-to-day activities of the club - but we do need to re-write the constitution of the club.

Currently our constitution governs how the finances are managed, membership, committee structure etc.

Our committee runs the club on behalf of the membership while our trustees are the names, which legally own the club's assets.

In the proposed new company these things will be subject to 2 documents, the articles of association and the executive committee rules. The club will be legally run by three directors but with the support of an executive committee. The directors will be taken from the executive committee and the role of trustee will become redundant.

It is envisaged that the articles will be a legal document, 'written in stone'. They govern finances, membership and conduct of the directors of the company vis-à-vis the membership. The rules, however, will be much easier to change and will govern the makeup and job descriptions of members of the committee, events and so on.

Our aim in writing the legal articles is to ensure that:

- Nobody can 'carpet bag' the club and its assets
- The directors and committee are genuinely accountable to the membership
- That as much flexibility as possible is given to the directors and committee regarding committee structure, events etc.
- That the directors will not personally profit in their role as directors of the club



Pack your climbing gear, walking boots and surf board! The BMC is heading to Rhossili on the Gower Peninsula on Friday 16 April. Join us for a weekend of climbing, walking, socialising, eating and drinking!

In conjunction with SWMC, the BMC are running an outdoor festival to coincide with the BMC AGM. The weekend will be a relaxed and informal affair, based at the Worm's Head Hotel, Rhossili. On Friday evening Chris Wyatt of the SWMC, will be letting us know the best climbing and walking venues in the local area. There will also be an inspiring talk and slide show from Simon Rawlinson on how a group of kids from a village in south Wales are pushing themselves to achieve great things in the world of climbing.

Saturday is the opportunity to get out and about to explore. Locals from the SWMC will be heading out to Fall Bay and Trial Wall, so why not join us? We've also got National Trust Head Warden for Gower, Sian Musgrave, to guide you over to the famous landmark that is the Worm's Head, accessible only at low tide. With great climbing and walks, fabulous beaches and stunning scenery, it would be a shame not to join us. Why not organise a club weekend trip to coincide with the festival? Bring the family and make the most of this area of outstanding natural beauty.



South Wales Mountaineering Club 2010 Committee



Chairman – Ian Goudge

How long have you been climbing for? Roughly ten years, of which the last four have been with the SWMC.

What have been your best climbing experiences? Climbing 'Dream of White Horses' in Gogarth; weekends spent in the mountains of North Wales and memorable social times at the club hut; and finally my favorite club trip must be Lundy in 2008, minus the 'lurgy' next time though!

What have been your funniest/most embarrassing experiences? Ha, nearly falling off a route after a close encounter with a nest of squawking young Jackdaws! As for embarrassing moments, they don't come any more embarrassing than mountain boarding in a pink tutu!

How has your climbing developed since joining the club, and what are you aspiring for? Since joining the SWMC, I've learnt a huge amount, and developed far faster than I would have outside of the club; looking ahead I can't think of anything better than simply getting out as much as possible on the rock, and for everyone in the club to continue to enjoy their climbing!

What are your favorite climbing areas and routes to date?

Ah, there are far too many to list! Whilst I love the wonderful scenery and climbing of South Pembrokeshire, my favourite South Wales route has got to be 'East Ridge' on Great Tor, fun multi-pitch climbing on the beach!

What's been your scariest climbing experience? Going off route on a Grade 2 scramble into HS/VS territory climbing, in big mountain boots with no protection.

What are your opinions of the club and how do you wish to leave your mark? The club represents many different types of climbing and its essential that we continue to cater for, and support each of these areas.



Secretary – Eefu Thong

How long have you been climbing for? 10 years on and off, serious for the last 3, 3 in SWMC

What have been your best climbing experiences? Portland 2009 – fantastic climbing, BBQ, swimming, Pregnant Pause (F6a+)

What have been your funniest/most embarrassing experiences? Pole Dancing – St Mary Street to Costa Blanca
How has your climbing developed since joining the club, and what are you aspiring for? To continue to develop through climbing with more experienced climbers in the club, aiming for 7a in the near future. E2/E3

What are your favorite climbing areas and routes to date? Costa Blanca – Marion, Sella

What's been your scariest climbing experience? Fell off Holy, Holy, Holy (E2) in Dalis Hole, mistook it for HVS, resting on gear 3m from the top when the gear popped and I fell, of 8 bits of gear I was left with just 4 by the time I came to rest, 2 top and 2 bottom!

Also Climbing at the Wen Zawn in Gogarth, long abseil into serious waves and dramatic scenery, it felt seriously committing.

What are your opinions of the club? Vibrant - folks from all walks of life, with varying abilities and interests but we all share in our enjoyment of the mountains and having fun together.



Ordinary Member (East) – Dafydd Jones

How long have you been climbing for? I started climbing when I went to University in 1997. Although I managed to climb the odd E2/E3 and travelled widely, by around 2002 I'd drifted away from climbing. It wasn't until Summer 2007 that I once again put on a harness and started to go along with the SWMC to outdoor crags on a Wednesday evenings.

What have been your best climbing experiences? Onighting the Split Pillar, a 30m crack pitch on the Grand Wall, Squamish. Being one of the few people to climb the Expansionist at Llanbradach. Onighting my first and only E4, Jetrunner at Bamford. My hard redpoints like Berlin F7a+, Pleasant Valleys Sunday F7b, Encore! Magnifique F7b+. The long routes like Diedro UBSA on the Penon d'Ifach, Costa Blanca and the trad adventures like Exposure Explosion HVS at Ogmere and American Beauty on Lundy

How has your climbing developed since joining the club, and what are you aspiring for? My main reason for joining the club was to meet people in Cardiff after being away from the area for about 10 years. I was also curious about what some of the crags that I'd read about were actually like. Having climbed mainly in the Peak District, I had the impression that there was no good climbing in South Wales! I was soon proved wrong and the quantity and variety of local climbing has definitely inspired me to progress. I've gone from climbing F6b to F7b+ in the two years since joining the club and intend to keep going to see where I can get. There are plenty of quality routes in the area to use as goals and milestones.

What are your opinions of the club and how do you wish to leave your mark? The club is heavily involved in promoting and maintaining the local climbing environment. We should aim to keep it that way.

Membership Secretary (West) – John Custance



Membership Secretary (West) – Steve Hill



Ordinary Member (West) – Dan Cook



Hut Warden – Alys Rook



Treasurer – Gareth Tucker

How long have you been climbing for? On and off for almost ten years, and a member of SWMC for maybe five of them.

What have been your best climbing experiences? Best single moment was probably turning the lip of the big roof on pitch 8 of the Pilastro Route, Torre di Rozes, Dolomites.

What have been your funniest/most embarrassing experiences? Someone once mistook me for a homeless person at a train station and offered me a sandwich. To be honest I wasn't really embarrassed more chuffed about the free sandwich!

What are your favorite climbing areas and routes to date?

There are too many cool places to list that I've not visited yet but want to go to. Of the places I've been, I really like the Alps although I seem to have spent far more time in tents in the rain than actually climbing when there. Favourite route is probably the Comic Route on the Cima Grande, classic climbing on an inspiring face.

What's been your scariest climbing experience? An altercation with a serac during the decent from the Chere Couloir, Mt Blanc du Tacul.

What are your opinions of the club and how do you wish to leave your mark? I'd like the club to contribute to all aspects of the S Wales scene and look out for the interests of all climbers in the area.



Newsletter Editor – Andy White

How long have you been climbing for? Nearly four years, of which the last three and a half have been with SWMC.

What have been your best climbing experiences? Topping out on Sab Gubia, Mallorca, leading all eight pitches of Grooved Arete on Tryfan, Ice-climbing on Idwal Stream in North Wales and the various climbing trips to Spain.

What have been your funniest/most embarrassing experiences? Hmmm, there are far too many to list, besides I save them for drunken nights at the hut, but of course at the top of my list would have to be the "Nipple Tassle, Thong Wearing Climb" that I carried out in Mallorca.

How has your climbing developed since joining the club, and what are you aspiring for? Since joining the SWMC, I've learnt a huge amount, from sea cliff climbing, to ice and Scottish winter climbing; this has all been thanks to the experience of other members within the club.

What are your favorite climbing areas and routes to date?

Ah, there are far too many to list! Whilst I love the wonderful scenery and climbing of South Pembrokeshire, my favourite South Wales route has got to be 'East Ridge' on Great Tor, fun multi-pitch climbing on the beach!

What's been your scariest climbing experience? Nearly drowning at Lundy after slipping on wet rocks whilst retreating from Arch Zawn and a very long retreat from the Aonach Eagach Ridge in winter conditions.

What are your opinions of the club and how do you wish to leave your mark? I'd like to see the social side of the club continuing to develop, as well as encouraging more new members to take up climbing in the South Wales area.



Chris Wyatt, Daniel Cook, Nik Goile on the Summit of Don Quixote

SWMC Dolomites Expedition 2009

by Dan Cook

When first asked by Chris if I was interested in a trip to the Dolomites my first reaction was that I didn't think I was ready to plunge straight into big long multi pitch TRAD routes. I thought maybe I should ease myself into it, maybe a holiday to Croatia, or the Verdon Gorge where there are nice multi pitch sport routes so that I could get a taste for it, then maybe next time go to the Dolomites. As the trip got closer and closer I took the plunge and threw myself in the deep end, it was to be a baptism of fire. I literally booked a last minute flight and before I knew it me, Chris and Nik where heading to Torre Venezia in the Cervetia region so Chris could finish off what he started 3 years ago when he fell off and broke his ankle.

We arrived in Italy at around 10p.m, it was a quick 2hour car journey to the Cervetia region and then another 2hour

hike to the Vazilier Hut, and this put us in a poised position to hit the mountain at day break. So after 4 hours sleep and no breakfast we were feeling great and ready to claim are first route and Chris's nemesis the Torre Venezia South face (Tissi). After another hour walk to put us at the base of the route I took first lead of the holiday and set us off. After 5 pitches and a rapid turn over it was Nik's turn to take lead of the holiday and set us off. After 5 pitches and a rapid turn over it was Nik's turn to take over, after he dispatched the famous traverse in style and led one more pitch we were at the same ominous point where Chris had taken his unfortunate fall. After a few wise words of where not to go Nik managed that pitch without having a epic. After another quick change over it was Chris's turn to lead us to the top, and after a lot of grunting and pulling through a brutal crack at the top we had made and 6 hours over guide book time. Maybe those change over weren't as fast as I thought.



So with a long day one out of the way consisting of 4 hours sleep 12 hours of climbing a 3 hour decent we managed to get back to the Vaziler Hut in one piece to spend the night. Like true mountaineers there was no rest the next day, as we needed the practice.

So after an early night and another early start we headed for the mountain. After an hour walk we made it to the base of the route, but something didn't feel right about the start so we decided that the route was further up the scree and around the small mountain which was next to it. After reaching this point something still didn't feel right and we felt the first start must have been right, but Chris being the hero that he is, stepped in and saved us the hassle of walking back down the scree and lead us up an unclimbed face of rock to a ledge where we could traverse across and get back on route. Once at the ledge we traversed and traversed and then traversed some more with no obvious sign to where the next pitch started. Chris being reluctant to quick as every scrambled up another 3 pitches until he found a proper belay stance. Excellent we thought, someone has been here before so this must be the route. I took over lead for the next pitch the climbing on this pitch was actually quite nice, it was plumb vertical and the first bit of solid rock we had climbed on the whole route. This all changed after about 40m as it turned into probably the loosest rock we had climbed on all route. But luckily I found a belay stance where I decided to lower off back to the belay stance and to reconsider the guide book. Chris's enthusiasm to bag this route was still high but sadly at this point mine and Nik's had diminished and we didn't want to miss another meal at the hut so we managed to convince him to retreat. Unfortunately this wasn't as easy as we all hoped, it was tricky abseils and scrambles the whole way and right at the end as usual the worst was saved till last. We had to abseil down a greasy face until you were level with a 3m gap between the rock and a huge lump of ice, but what didn't help was what can only be described as a sculpture of an ice monster that made bridging the gap very tricky.

Chris our hero went first, making a very elegant maneuver to bridge across, I was to follow but not so elegantly and then Nik came after. With all three of us safe and sound we headed back after our day of mountaineering/Canyoning and it wasn't until then that we turned around and discovered that we had actually climbed the wrong mountain never mind just going off route.

After feeling slightly ashamed of the previous day Chris and I decided to Head back to Torre Di Barbele and bag the route while Nik chilled out and generally took it easy. We found the route easy this time and it all made perfect sense surprisingly. The climbing was fantastic, it was sustained E1 climbing most of the way on the best quality rock we had seen, except for one pitch which was thankfully was on Chris's leads. After reaching the summit in 4 Hrs plus of guide book time we then had to navigate the descent. This is probably the worst and most scared for my life I have ever felt. The descent was basically 4 abseils down a greasy shoulder with gully which comprised of very loose rock. It wasn't very appealing to say the least. But thankfully with Chris's experience and bravery we made it off safe and sound with out a scratch but mentally scared.

It was after this day Chris and I thought it best to have a rest day and we all agreed that this was supposed to be a holiday and not a mission to kill ourselves and so left the beautiful isolated Cheivta region and headed to a more touristy part of the Dolomites called the Sella region.

After a day of rest we, were back on it again and had decided on The Big Micheluzzi as our route of choice. Being a popular route we made an extra early start so we could be the first, which paid off quite nicely as later in the day it got busy. Chris started us off to a flying start leading the first 5 pitches, handing over to me to climb the 90m traverse pitch with some exceptional exposure. Next up was Nik to get us to the top and it was at this point that we realized why people choose to do this later on in the day. Basically at the end of the traverse pitch there is a stream of water jetting down the face of the route which dries later in the day. How were we supposed to not do that? Luckily the route didn't continue straight up the middle of the stream but just skirted past it. Nik got us to the top where we didn't have to make any scary abseils down but just walk off which made this climb perfect to chill out and enjoy.

With the end of the Holiday dawning closer we still wanted to bag one last big route on the Mamarlarda so we decided for a day of sport climbing next which would leave us feeling fit and fresh the next day to climb Don Quixote on the last day of climbing.

The sport climbing felt a bit stiff in hind sight, whether it was the fact we were completely shattered from the long days and loads of climbing that we had been doing or the simple fact that my index fingers started to bleed on the 6b I jumped on first, I couldn't tell. From here we headed to the failer hut on the Mamarlarda.

After another extra early start we arrived at the base of the mountain to find that we had been beaten to it. B****rd went through my mind at that point but nether the less we still seemed to make pretty good pace over the first few pitches. That was until the real climbing started, at that point the party in front slowed dramatically, maybe it was the hammers or huge packs they carried that slowed them, I couldn't tell but it looked heavy, at which point I thought they may have planned to bivvy, and as we went for the light approach we couldn't afford such a luxury. Luckily after another 12 Hr climb to the top I was I was pretty tired but ecstatic to finally get there, this moment of self achievement and celebration was short lived after Chris shouted from below "Dan just sort the F**king belay out". I guess at this point we were all pretty tired, cold and just wanted to get up and back down the mountain, but as the Italians had they're luxury of a big fluffy duvet they were in no rush to abseil down and true to they're form they seemed to take an age to clear the ropes.

We eventually made it down just in time to get a warm meal and a beer to reflect over the achievements of the holiday. After only seeing a small snippet of the dolomites I'm keen to return next year and see what else it has to offer as there is plenty there to go at, so save your money I recommend it to every one it was a great experience!





Warming up on the Breithorn, with our real goal behind us!

A *LONG* day out on Italian Ridge by Nigel Lewis

Steve Kedward and I had booked 9 days in the Alps and had been steadily acclimatising on the Valais East peaks around The Breithorn area. The weather had been changeable at the start of the week and we had not been able to see The Matterhorn because of cloud on a few days.

Our aim was to climb to The Carel Hut, stay overnight and summit via The Italian Ridge the next day. If the hut was quiet, we might stay a night on descent or just push on down to the valley.

Finally, we got the forecast we wanted and we were off!

Approach to The Carel Hut – 13th August 2009

At 0800hrs we left the cable car at Plan Maison, to begin the trek around to the Carel Hut. Already the sun was coming through and there were other hikers going in several directions. We had checked with the guides office and been warned to carry a lot of water as reports were being received of very little to be found on the hill. As a result of this, our packs were heavier than we had planned.

The approach route takes a rising traverse north and then west until it reaches The Duke d'Abruzzi Hut. The sun was pleasantly warm, bordering on hot as we crossed bare ski piste roads and then began the climb up through old moraines. A few times we crossed fast flowing clear streams and took the opportunity to drink plenty.

From Abruzzi Hut the route starts to wend it's way steeper over rocks and scree fields until it reaches a steep gully that needs to be scrambled. It skirts a snow field on the flanks of Testa del Leone, until you arrive underneath the headwall. It then follows a line across the shattered and sometimes loose scree until you drop into the col between this mountain and The Matterhorn.



Fixed ropes below hut (picture taken whilst descending)



The guides said there wouldn't be water!

Until this point, we had been able to find plenty of water and were a little disappointed in the advice to carry so much of it. My advice would be to carry empty containers as far as the snow field and fill them up there from the millions of gallons that are running off the hill!

We had a quick conversation with 3 English guys who had turned around at Pic Tyndal. Their 'water' advice was to collect snow below the Carel Hut as there wasn't too much above it and the melt water was in scarce supply. Some easy scrambling over slabs and scree brought us to the first of the fixed ropes. Climbing this free, in rock boots with no rucksack would be quite pleasant. However, with big mountain boots and a pack, it was a little harder and the fixed ropes were put to good use!

The small snow field below the hut seemed to contain a fair bit of toilet paper and nasty looking brown smudges so we decided that the 'collect snow from here' advice was best not followed! We limbo danced our way off the slabs under the hut balcony and then into the hut.

The guidebook time from Abruzzi was 4 to 5 hours, and we had managed to do it from Plan Maison in 6, so we were fairly happy with our rate of progress. There were quite a few climbers there, and a few coming off the mountain who had obviously been to the summit.

Carel Hut

The hut consists of a kitchen area with benches and tables, with a set of gas burners for cooking and melting snow. There is a guides only room that leads off the kitchen. The main sleeping area leads off the other side of the kitchen and at first appears to consist of two tier bunk beds that run down each side of the hut. Closer inspection shows that what seems to be an attic hatch is actually the way to a third level of bunk beds. There are pillows, mattresses and blankets; a smell of cabbagey farts and damp. Outside, there is a door that leads to the gas storage area and the evil long drop toilet, that is actually a 'short' drop toilet due to the pile of human waste that has built up. It actually falls on the snow field that is below the hut, so we were delighted with our decision not to take the snow from there.

A poor sleep was occasionally interrupted by earlier climbers leaving their beds, and although most of them tried to be quiet, in the close confines of the hut, it was difficult not to disturb others. Our alarm went off at 0400hrs and it wasn't difficult to get up as we were keen to go.

The kitchen area was a nightmare with extra guests who hadn't found a bed, lying under tables, between benches and generally in most available flat space. We ate a bit of breakfast and squeezed into our boots and coats. By 0450 we had tied into our rope and were off onto the slabs above the hut.

The Italian Ridge – Friday 14th August 2009

Almost straight away, there is a line of fixed gear to follow. Route finding was easy, what with the ropes and chains, and the 10 or so other people that all left round about the same time!

A rope leads up to a fixed chain that heads a steep wall and then hangs out and around a small roof. The chain was cold and icy, difficult to grip in gloves, but at least you knew you were going in the right direction.

Some steps up and over slabs lead to a ledge called the Mauvais Pas. We moved together, clipping bolts as we went. We then reached a fixed wire that is best treated like a safety line on a Via Ferrata. We had thinned out from the other people but as we neared the end of the line, a bit of a jam was building up. 2 French speaking men behind us decided to leave the fixed line and scramble alongside it into the little col above. No problem, that's their choice, but the rope between them now cut across everyone else waiting to move on. Ahead of us, two parties were vying to get ahead of each other and getting themselves into a right mess!

We got into the bowl above the Linceul ice field. Here the route description reads 'scramble up to a fixed chain' but doesn't really help with which direction to go in. We took a while trying to find the right line, sometimes getting ahead of the crowd, sometimes having to get back behind them. It was obvious that everyone wanted to get ahead and we probably all looked like ants when the nest gets kicked! We got to the fixed chains about the same time as 2 other French guys, and they seemed to be faster than us so we let them through. The other 2 pushy French guys were behind us and just behind them was a Spanish speaking pair who seemed to be father and son.

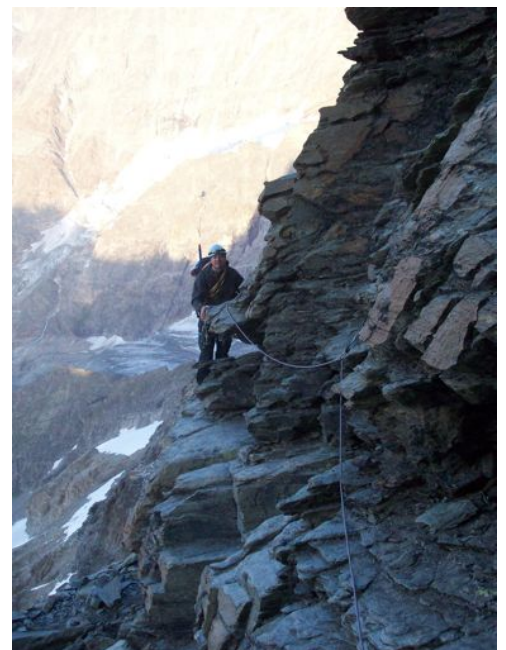
I climbed up alongside the Corde Tyndall chain for 30metres, whilst Steve belayed me. I found it easier to use the rock more than the chain itself. The good thing about it was that quickdraws fitted into the links so that you could place gear absolutely whenever you wanted to, simply pick a place on the chain and clip it.

The chain finishes on some sloping slabs and I brought Steve up. By now, it was light and I was looking forward to getting some warmth from the sun. Boy, was I wrong! Just after leaving the chain, we popped out onto the ridge and were exposed to the winds coming over the north and northwest face of the mountain. The temperature plummeted and we went from cold rock to ice coated rock with patches of snow.

I hurriedly got out of my coat and stuck on an extra layer. The process left me chilled to the bone and I asked Steve if I could lead off again to get the blood flowing back. I followed a line of snowy bootprints into a gap between two rocks until it became obvious I had to turn up the ridge using a thin crack to surmount the rock at my right shoulder. I began what would have been an easy short climb at the beach, but soon found myself a little precarious and nervous, trying to get some gear into the crack. To make matters worse, just 7 or 8 metres back, the pushy Frenchmen popped into the snowy gully, and instead of coming as far as me, bridged up over the sides of the gully, onto the easier slab above and clipped a huge eye bolt that I hadn't seen!



Slabs below hut. The route took the top of the scree slope behind me



Mauvais Pas ledge



Looking back along the shoulder of Pic Tyndal



Italian summit, Nigel Lewis

Half a metre higher and I found an old but solid looking peg. Obviously I wasn't the first to think my line looked about right! I clipped the peg and to make the rope easier for us, I reached back to take the wire out of the crack. Stuck! Try as I might, it wasn't budging so I left it there. Anyone who knows me as a climber will know that I often get stuck gear out and in fact the wire I had placed was one I had found stuck in a route some years previously! Easy come, easy go!

By now the French were a ropes length ahead of us, and we were immediately behind the Spanish pair.

To our right was the steep south face of the mountain, and to our left was the less steep but loose and icy ground over the north-west face of the mountain. We moved together up the ridge and every now and again, we pitched a little section. Not far below the shoulder we reached a knife edge section that had a thick ribbon of snow and ice on it. The snow had melted back so that only the footpath remained, standing about 15cm prouder than the rest of the ridge. There was a line of bucket steps up it and the surface was fairly soft. Because of the ground falling away both sides, there was no gear.

Steve lead up it and chose not to stop to put his crampons on. Without any trouble, he got above that section and clipped a piece of tat that was buried into the ice at the foot of a small boulder. I followed along and we were soon just below the shoulder of Pic Tyndal.

We knew we were well behind the guidebook time and had a quick chat about it. I had sensed that we were both a little nervous on the ridge and the cold had sapped our energy. By now though, we realised that the summit was within reach. We reasoned that we had food, water, the right kit and we weren't lost! We had plenty left in us to get up and down, but would probably be descending the last part in the dark. We both agreed, if we got off the sw ridge and onto the fixed ropes, that wouldn't be a problem as we would just use them to guide us back in.

We moved easily across the crest of the shoulder and dropped down into the col below the final tower. A few climbers were going past in the other direction having reached the top. We mixed some moving together and climbing in pitches up to the fixed ropes.

We were now back on the sunny side and the rock was warm and pleasant to the touch. The ropes lead to the Jordan Ladder which although overhangs slightly in the middle, was easy to climb. Another fixed rope on a traverse lead us to an easement and the easier last few metres to the Italian Summit. Steve was leading, but gallantly stopped short and offered me the last bit of leading to the summit. I was really touched by his gesture and readily agreed to go on ahead.

I moved over the peak and dropped down slightly to the Summit Cross and waited for Steve. It was 1515hrs, and the views were fantastic! The pushy French were almost at the Swiss summit and the Spanish were just about to leave the Cross to follow them.

Steve joined me and we sat in the sun for a while enjoying the view over our late lunch. We debated continuing on and down the Hornli ridge, but decided against it as we had no route description with us. The plan had always been to descend via The Italian ridge and that was what we should do. We figured it would add an extra hour or two to reach the Swiss summit and get back here, so decided we had done what we set out to do and it was now time to race the sunset and get back.

Descent

From the Italian Summit, the first abseil took me direct to the foot of the Jordan Ladder. The 50 metre rope just reached the next abseil point and I clipped in allowing Steve to follow me. We pulled the ropes down and I went to take the belay device off my harness, where I had clipped it minutes before. Not there! With my gloves on, I must have mis-clipped it and it had tumbled off unheard down the abyss below me. I hadn't even used it on the way up, protecting Steve using Italian hitches instead. The sole reason I had brought it was to use it on the many abseils as I knew it would cause the ropes to twist far less than the hitch would.

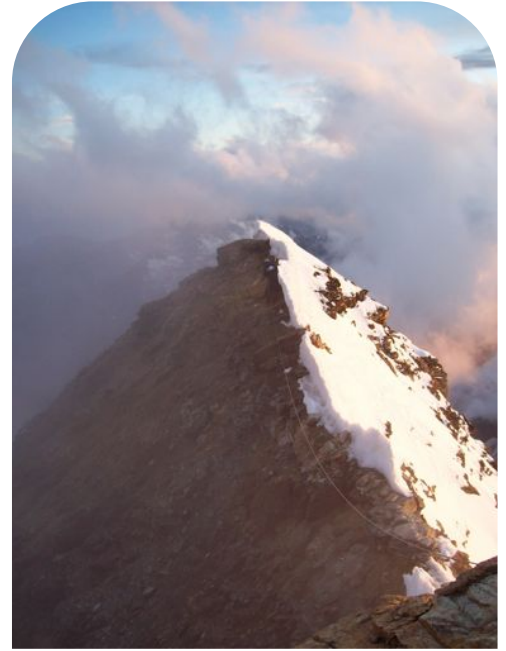
A mixture of down climbing and abseiling brought us to the enjambee below the shoulder. We had settled on a format of me leading every abseil and Steve following behind to untwist the ropes as he came down, hopefully preventing any rope jams.

From watching the mountain during the week, we knew that thick cloud built up over the south face every afternoon. (We reckoned that the Swiss had put 'fog pipes' into the mountain and manufactured the clouds so that the Italian view was less visible than the Swiss view of the mountain!). In reality, it was caused by the cold air coming over the frozen north side of the shoulder, mixing with the warmer air that rose over the south face. The sun was getting lower on our right shoulder and as we crossed Pic Tyndall, our shadows were thrown onto the clouds and surrounded by halos to make 'Brocken Spectres.' They looked great and the photos don't do them justice. Sometimes they had one halo, sometimes two and once even three!

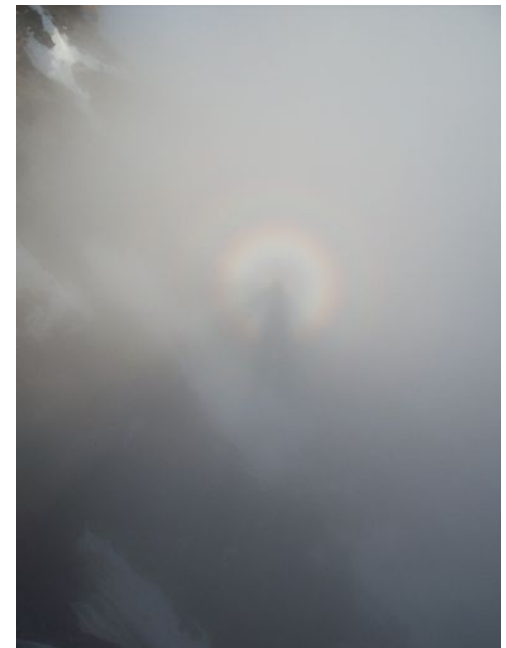
As we began descending the sw ridge, it got dark. The only difficulties we saw were being able to find the abseil rings in the dark and making sure we dropped off the ridge and onto the south face at the right point.

Things slowed right down because of the conditions. We simply took our time and kept plodding down, either abseiling or down climbing. When we reached the icy section with the ribbon of snow, it had frozen hard. If we had put our crampons on a little earlier, it would have made this section much easier. However, in the dark we had come lower than we thought, and by the time we should have put them on, we were already in the danger zone. We were attached to each other, but at this point, not the mountain! Getting it wrong here would be really getting it wrong! I found the frozen tat we had clipped on the way up and backed that up with an ice axe placement. Steve slowly down climbed facing in, using the frozen steps and his axe. When he reached safer ground, he was able to find a precarious sling placement and clipped into it.

Lots more abseils followed, sometimes it was easy to find the next ab station, sometimes it took 10 to 15 minutes. Although there were no big snow patches, the rock was occasionally verglassed and needed care. At one point, we simply couldn't find the ring bolts and set up a natural abseil on the rock. We dropped half way down the rope and found the right line again with a big bundle of tat to clip into. Of course, nothing is easy and as we tried to pull the rope down, it was jammed fast. We moved around a bit until we got to a spot where if we both pulled on the rope it slowly came through.



Nigel Lewis nearing the start of the descent along sw ridge



Brocken Spectre



Descending alongside the Jordan Ladder

We eventually reached the spot where we thought we should come off the ridge and find the Corde Tyndall Chain. We knew it was slightly below the crest but just couldn't find it. A few times whilst descending, we thought we had arrived at this point, but now we were here, we were convinced we were in the right place and annoyed with our inability to find 30 metres of thick chain!

I abseiled off to the south side and after dropping to a ledge some 20 metres below, realised it was not the right way. The ledge was covered in shattered rock and smelled strongly of cordite as if it hadn't long fallen there. I glumly climbed back up and we cast around again.

Suddenly, there it was! About two metres further than when I had last looked in that direction. From glum to glad in a few seconds. All we had to do now was follow the chain down, cross the bowl to its bottom right corner, and follow the fixed gear back to the hut. Home and dry! Or so you would have thought!

The chain is 30 metres long, but if you run the rope through a malleon just below the top, the rope stretch is enough to reach less steep ground. As was our fashion, I went first, followed by Steve. At the bottom we pulled the rope, but it simply would not budge. We moved as far across the ledge as we could to try a different angle, we tried flicking the ropes, we tried pulling together, we tried pulling the other end. Whatever! It wasn't going to come down.

Because the full rope length was out, we would have to free climb up the chain, prussik the rope or protect it somehow. Neither of us was that keen to do it and I picked up a little bit of tat from the floor, bunched it into my fist and put my hands behind my back. "If you pick it, you decide who goes." I said to Steve. He looked at me and promptly snaked his hand out, tapping the fist with the marker in it. Me to go then!

I dropped off my sack, borrowed Steve's belay device and set off back up the chain. I had set a prussik on one strand and got Steve to tie into the other so it couldn't suddenly release. I also had a sling to my harness and a quick draw so I could clip the chain. Actually, as I got going, I found the climbing easy enough and soon got to the top. The problem was that the malleon trapped the rope between itself and the rock face, so that when you pulled on it, it acted like an Alpine Clutch. I moved the rope to another ring bolt and it moved freely. A quick abseil back down again and we were off again.

Remember the ascent, when we were all like scurrying ants? Well we were now in the same place, but it was about 0230 in the morning. Try as we might, we were having real difficulty finding the way out of the shallow bowl we were in. We knew roughly whereabouts we should go, but were worried about descending too far and then not being able to get back up to where we should be. Steve was convinced the route was higher and we had already come down too far, whilst I was convinced it was lower and we had not descended far enough.

We eventually found a pile of tat to tie into. We were cold and tired, but still well in control of the situation. We pored over the route description, trying to reverse it in our minds. We had a couple of choices; abseil down a ropes length and see if things seemed different from that view, wait until it got lighter or wait until we saw the next days climbers ascending and spot the route from their movements.



Lovely spot for moonbathing!

We knew that we could see head torches at any moment, particularly as on the previous day we had been woken at midnight in the hut by people preparing to leave. It was really frustrating being so close to the route, so close to the hut, able to continue but being unsure as to the way to go. We sat there for a while debating the issues and decided to wait it out for a bit. The views were still impressive as we could see the lights of Cervinia a few hours below us. There wasn't a cloud in the sky and the stars looked so close. Twice we saw shooting stars.

After about 40 minutes we were getting colder by the minute and really fed up, so we decided to abseil and see if we could make some progress lower down. As we were getting ourselves back into order, we saw the torches coming up toward us. They were off to our right and below us. But would they traverse below us or climb up to our right and pop out above us.

We watched them for another 45 minutes or so, and made our minds up. The route was below us. We rigged the rope to abseil off our tat and lo and behold, abseiled 25 metres directly onto the end of the fixed wire! Of course we were glad to be back on track, but again, so frustrated as to have been so close all the time. Had we chosen the descend option earlier, we would have saved ourselves around 2 hours of moonbathing!

We waited for a few people to exit the fixed wire and then set off along it. People coming towards us were obviously more important than us as they made it plain we should be waiting off to one side for them to take precedence. I'm not sure I agreed, and either way, we kept going. As we were on the Mauvais pas, it started to get really quite light and as we descended toward the fixed ropes, a few people asked whether we had given up and were returning or were just super fast and already on the way down. It raised a few wry smiles when I explained we had not turned back, but neither could we claim a particularly speedy trip! At 0800hrs, Saturday 15th August, 27 hours after starting, we had our picture taken on the Carel Hut balcony. The hut was almost empty and we had a quick four hours of poor sleep. I have to admit, my feet were bloody freezing and I couldn't get them warm again!

Back to the land of beer! – Saturday 15th August 2009

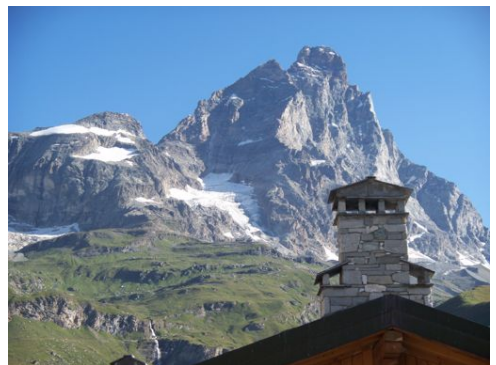
Just after midday, we began our descent, but this time straight in to Cervinia not to the cable car. At 1600hrs we dumped our sacks in the hire car and went straight off for a well earned and somewhat smelly beer! Was it hard? Yes, undoubtedly. That's the longest I've ever pushed through without sleep.

Do I wish we had turned around earlier? Absolutely not! It was frustrating being so close to the route, simply unable to find it in the dark, but I wouldn't have swapped that summit for a few more hours in bed, no way!

This was the culmination of a great week with a great mate, I would definitely do it again, except that there are so many other mountains to climb!



Descending alongside the fixed gear above the Carel Hut



Do you have a story that you think other members would be interested to read about?

Then contact Andy via email:
andrewwhite1303@hotmail.com

Next Issue – June 2010

- **Welsh Winter Climbing 2009/2010**
- **SWMC El Chorro Trip Report**
- **Climbing Sculptures**
- **Guide to using the Bulletin Board**



*Jim Slater leading Idwal Stream (II/III 4 ***),
North Wales, January 2010*

Safe Climbing!

Please feel free to provide feedback to the editor, Andy White via email:

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