



Autumn Newsletter

Well folks here is what will probably be the last newsletter of the year. Only three this year, but quality not quantity as they always say. Jules and Nigel have sent me a great couple of articles, so we're good to go. I've also got a lot of photos from this years trips, mainly to Pembroke and Skye.

Firstly the AGM is on the 13th of November at Deri Inn in Rhiwbina, CF14 6UH. Starting at 7pm. You'll get a free drink after it. Not that we're bribing you to turn up. Honest.

The annual dinner is on the 22nd of November and is at the Pumphouse in Swansea.

Tickets are £20 for a three course menu (there is a £3 supplement for steak). The full menu is on the BB. Please contact Chris Wyatt for tickets on

christopher.wyatt@majotech.com or 07890828031 or 01792 539904. Nik Goile is doing his talk about climbing the Nose on El Cap and there will be some games as well.

On the 3rd of December, Up and Under are hosting another slideshow evening. Nigel and Steve are showing pics from their recent exploits in the Alps and Nepal. Thanks to Mary for organising and Up and Under for hosting.

Also we now have a new website address if you want to use it (the old one still works):

www.swmc.org.uk

Finally on the BB a number of people are organising trips up to Scotland for some winter mixed climbing, trips to Italy for some Ice Climbing, trip to Font for bouldering and trips to Spain for some hot rock. So if you're interested in any of them, get on the BB and get involved.

I'd also love to see some more photos from your exploits over the year. So please send them in to my email address which is:

comms@southwalesmountaineering.org.uk

2013 in photos



Becky (climbing) and Tim (belaying) at Saddle Head in Pembroke



Mark walking along to the base of Saddle Head.



Felix and Andrew on Valkyrie at the Roaches



Gareth under a table. Not sure what else to say here.



Nigel being sensible as always



Matt Dix bouldering at the Roaches



Abi Coe on the Prow at the Roaches



Jules on Torpantau Falls, March 2013

Mark scrambling down to Saddle Head



Mary on Kellys Shelf (HS) the Roaches

SWMC trips to Skye by Jules Vine



The club has been running a trip to Skye since the day I first joined the club. I asked if the club ran a Skye trip and the reply was " we do now" For the first couple of years we stayed in a bunkhouse but although we enjoyed the free drinks and abuse from the local landlord the quality of the accommodation was not up to scratch and I did some hunting around and discovered the Sligachan cottages and bunkhouse. A much higher standard of accommodation, unfortunately the local bar staff are polite and professional but you cant have everything.

We first went in May but although the Cullin looked stunning in white slushy fresh spring snow hampered our activities and we moved to June. Less risk of snow but still not too midgy. Last year we had wall to wall sunshine, this year the weather was more changeable on the Black Cullin although the weather was often fine elsewhere on the island.

Multi pitch climbing, scrambling and mountaineering are the main activities. The Inaccessible Pinnacle is an easy climb but the most amazing mountain summit in the U.K., delightfully exposed, and most of us have been up it at least once. Standing on the Cioch and having a sword fight is a must for others. Pinnacle Ridge , Am Basteir and the Tooth can be climbed from the cottages with out driving.

The secret of a good trip to Skye is flexibility. By all means have your "to do" list but don't pine over your HVS if the conditions are not fit, go climb a damp V.diff instead. If its really not fit to go up the mountains then go for a bike ride or a stunning coast walk/run. Don't always be put off by mist on the Black Cullin, It often clears as the day goes on.

Last year the cottages were full of bikes, mountain bikes, road bikes and various in-between bikes. Sarah insisted they all had to have names. The roads are quiet and the trails are empty. A boat trip can get you to the other side of the Cullin where the mountains are even quieter or off to see wildlife on a rest day. The Red Cullin offer some scrambling, hill walking or fell running.

Skye offers something for everyone.

Nigel and Steve's Alpine trip 2013

Fri 9th August 2013

We'd picked up a very nice hire car and had just pulled into the services, a three hour drive from the airport. It was as we switched off the car and tried to lock it that we realised it was the wrong bloody vehicle! Not only was it the wrong car, but it was the wrong hire company. We had the key to a Europcar vehicle, but had just switched off the engine of a Hertz rental vehicle. Was this a taste of how the trip was going to go?

After a few red faces (mostly mine, but I expect the guy who left the car running was relieved!) we made our way a little late but smiling into the centre of Zermatt.

Saturday to Monday We had set ourselves the goal of a few lower peaks to warm up on and get a bit of altitude. Our first objective was "Skyline" an AD+ up The Riffelhorn a 2,927 metre peak. We took the train up to Rotenboden station, had a pleasant sunny ascent and a long three hour descent back down to our hotel. We passed over alpine meadows, down into the forest and eventually through the town where we had a well-earned beer.

Day two saw us ascending on the same train but going to the top station. We left Zermatt under a bank of cloud that we broke through just above The Riffelhorn and we were rewarded with beautiful views above the inversion in every direction. The next few hours could form the basis of a surreal episode of Twin Peaks as we passed half the population of Japan, a huge St Bernard dog, a bikini clad glamour model and a mountain top troll who loved sausage but hated the German Police. (You had to be there!)

A three hour scramble along The Gornergrat West Ridge brought us to the snowfields at the summit peak of The Stockhorn, 3,532 metres. We had fantastic views of our main plan for the days ahead and we were easily able to pick out most of the peaks we hoped to attain. The down side was that we had a walk of nearly five hours to get back down to the hotel.

We reversed the ridge so far and then dropped into a side valley that took us to a freezing cold glacial lake. We finished our lunch with our hot feet soaking in the freezing water. Of course with such sunny weather, it wasn't long until one of us took a very cold, very quick but very exhilarating skinny dip. We rejoined the path we had taken the day before and continued the foot thumping knee knacker descent to town.

Monday was a rest day but we didn't want to waste it. We knocked off the Via Ferrata that sits above Zermatt. It was a hot walk up to the start and took us five hours to complete, but as we didn't need to wear our big boots and only had one little pack between us, it gave us the rest we needed. The situation was fantastic. Steep ladders and big traverses across huge exposed faces, with fantastic views across the valley. We only saw four other people from start to finish and only two of them were actually on the route. A great day out!

Tuesday 13th August

After an early breakfast we set off for the cable car. The gates opened at 0630 and it took us until 0800hrs to arrive at the top station. The wind took away most of the heat generated by the morning sun as we strapped our crampons on and roped up.

We traversed across to the Breithorn and began our ascent of our first 4,000+ metre peak. Every other person bar us headed down the valley toward the Val D'Ayas Hut or went direct to the Breithorn main summit. Steve and I struck out for the Central summit making quick progress up a well-trodden path.

We moved over the summit and traversed the shoulder toward the first section of bare rock. Most other people make the traverse in the other direction and go back down on the cable car. Of course that wouldn't fit with our overall plan and we just accepted that we would have to make some tricky descent moves.

Climbing rock in big boots is a different experience to rock shoes, but there is a mahoosive difference when you move on rock wearing crampons. Even so, we made the transition well enough and made good progress moving together on the rope. Just before we reached our first down climb, we met the first of the guided parties coming the other way. Generally, the clients were pleasant enough but the guides were grumpy, presumably because we were going “the wrong way” and not paying them anything.



We made reasonable progress moving together as we traversed, but found ourselves having to take a lot longer on the down sections, which we pitched. We had hoped to find belay stations but as the locals all went the other way, there were none in place. Toward the end of the ridge, we realised that we wouldn't have enough time to include the furthest subsidiary peaks and decided we would descend to the hut when we reached the next section of glacier.

Steve led onto a pillar and waited there for me as we searched for the way down. I spotted what appeared to be a bolt on an adjoining subsidiary pillar and began to make my way across to it. A short section of tricky down climbing brought me to the gap between the pillar we were on and the pillar with the bolt.

The step across wasn't as difficult as I thought but the exposure was immense. I was able to see down both faces of the ridge hundreds of metres to the glaciers below on the north and a mere 40 or 50 metres to a ledge with smashed rocks that sat above the snow slopes on the south face. I stepped across and transferred myself onto the other pillar. What a great situation! The top was warm to the touch and quite flat, with a subsidiary ledge for the feet, like a little bench to sit on. It measured about three metres by one metre and was a great place to sit and look at the view. I clipped the bolt and brought Steve across.

As we sat there marvelling at what we could see, it occurred to us that we would need to abseil down a sheer face using just that one single bolt. It was in good condition, actually seemed quite new and the rock was solid, but there was absolutely no back up. We decided to go for it anyway. As Steve weighs less than a whippet, I agreed to “test” the strength of the bolt. He completely unclipped from the system so that if it failed he would be left stranded on the pillar but at least would be able to make a phone call. Me? Well I doubt whether I would be worrying about anything if it all went wrong!

With my weight stretching it, the rope took me exactly to a little boot width flake crack that traversed across the steep slab to easy ground. I unclipped and waited for Steve to come down. The rope was difficult to recover at first but mercifully started to run with a bit of faffing. We traversed across ledges covered in broken rock and eventually found ourselves back on the snow field at the col.



An obvious descent path took us toward our hut. However, as we crested a ridge, we realised we had a tricky section to cover as we descended the next bit. A very steep crevassed slope looked out of the question, and we elected to move through a rocky buttressed area which would take us past the Rossi e Volante Bivi hut. We reasoned that there would be an obvious path linking the two places. Unfortunately, it was a pile of choss! We clipped a bolt and abbed down to the bivi hut. From there we could see a drop straight to the main glacier floor. As we looked for somewhere to rig up the next abseil, we realised the rope wouldn't reach anywhere near the bottom. We found a shitty ab station that we were never going to use and after a bit of searching, found a set of pegs near the lightning conducting wire. I dropped down and found myself hanging over a boulder choked gap between the main buttress and a ledge

leading to the descent path. I needed to move right but as I started to swing across I could feel the rope rubbing over edges and sending bits of rock spinning down around me. I wasn't happy! My crampons were skittering and squeaking on the rock as I tried to push myself into a safer place. If my feet came off I would swing back the way I had come and run the rope over the edges again. No way! I kept my right hand controlling the rope and reached across my body with my left hand to grab a rock spike and haul myself across. Good manoeuvre, but my arm pushed open my camera case and I squirmed as I watched my camera slowly slide out, fall onto the ledge just below me and then slide into the boulder choke.

With my feet firmly back on solid rock, I shouted up to Steve who reset the ropes and abbed straight down to me. A long but relatively uneventful plod took us down the glacier to the Val D'Ayas Guides Hut, some nine and a half hours after we'd left the hotel.

Wednesday 14th August We had shared a room with 4 German guys, three of whom thought it was okay to get a bit pissed and have a loud chat after lights out. They got up just before us so we didn't even have the revenge of waking them early. By 0500hrs we were back on the glacier and could see them about half a kilometre ahead of us.

Somewhere deep in Italy, lightening shot through the sky and although we could clearly see the flashes, we heard no thunder as it was so far away. However, we could hear huge seracs falling from the upper glacier and smashing to

pieces below. Way too far away to cause us any problems but close enough to remind you of the power of nature.

As we reached the lower slopes of Castor, we caught up with the four Germans who allowed us to pass them. About 15 minutes later we looked back and saw that they had turned around and were descending. Hopefully they had bad hangovers or just not enough sleep and perhaps we had the last laugh after all!

As we neared the top of the slope we traversed across to the final ascent ridge crossing a deep bergschrund on the way. We gained the ridge and stepped into warm sunshine. A knife edge took us up to the summit where we joined a party of Polish who had come up from the other side. Our first four thousander of the day.





We traversed across the mountain and dropped down to the Feliksloch Glacier. It wasn't even eight am but already the sun was hot. We began the climb up onto the south west ridge of Lyskamm, knowing we had a full five kilometres to traverse until we dropped off the far side of the mountain. It was a long haul up toward the west summit, with the final slope before the ridge proper adding some interest. The slope was around 55 degrees and icy as it was in the shadow of the main mountain. There was a big line of deep bucket steps wandering up the face and twice we had to step out onto the icy slope to allow people coming the other way to pass.

The main ridge seemed to go for miles! In places it was as wide as a few metres, but in some places it was as wide as your average garden wall, with steep slopes each side dropping hundreds of metres into oblivion. Awesome! Occasionally the route threaded through rocky towers, but most of it was on snow. Sometimes there were holes in the cornice where you could look down for a very long way indeed.

We pulled over the east summit and began the descent down the east ridge. At first this was almost like a mirror of the ascent with bucket steps descending the steep slope. It then turned into another 50cm wide ridge that was several hundreds of metres long before giving us a last line of bucket steps down the side of the precipice and on to the glacier floor. I can't explain how impressed I was with the ridge traverse. Absobloody lutely brilliant!

We had our lunch in the sun and then had several hours to slog down the glacier to the Gniffeti Hut. The sun was baking hot by this time, and the snow soft. But nothing was going to detract from the great day we'd had. Three summits over 4,000 metres and what must be the best Alpine ridge traverse ever.

Thursday 15th August

A rest day. Again this didn't mean a day off, just a lower tempo for the day. We had a lie in until 0600 and set off toward Pyramide Vincent an hour and a half later. The route was only facile, and we quickly reached our summit for the day. Again, the views were fantastic and we were able to pick out in detail tomorrow's journey. We were back in the hut after three hours with a whole day ahead to mooch about, fiddle with kit and recharge our batteries.

Friday 16th August

0515hrs and we were on our way. We plodded back up the glacier passing P. Vincent on the way. Our first peak of the day was Corno Nero. A line of steps traversed a 60 degree slope onto the fore-summit. We traversed easily across the summit rocks and sat there by the Madonna statue looking down onto Italy below us as we chatted to a solo climber, the mountain's only other occupant.

We reversed the route and dropped into the col toward our next peak, Ludwigshoe. An easy path traversed across the flank and lead us up onto the summit ridge which we enjoyed in solitude before plunging steeply down the other side toward Parrotspitze, our third four thousander of the day. A thin ridge took us to the summit where we met a pair of Italian climbers, the only others there.

Three great summits, three other climbers and fantastic weather. Sure, we could see other people in the distance, but they were so far away it felt like we had the whole place to ourselves. We were grinning like fools.

We dropped back onto the main path up the valley and rejoined civilisation. An easy path took us to the final slopes of Signalkuppe and the Margherita Hut, Europe's highest building perched on it's summit. For peak baggers, this was a top day. Four summits in just five hours, all in fantastic conditions.



Saturday 17th August

We had a 0500 breakfast and quickly slipped into a few extra layers to protect against the early morning cold. We were already at the summit of a mountain so actually started the day with a descent into the col toward Zumsteinspitze. We could only see one party ahead of us and we were slowly gaining on them.

As we reached the summit, we paused for a few photos as did the other pair. However, we were a bit faster than them and stepped onto the ridge dropping toward the next mountain. They looked a bit miffed that we were ahead of them, but hey, you snooze, you loose!

About a third of the way down the ridge, we tackled an awkward rocky step that switched our minds from "snow mode" to "rock climbing mode". It was only a few metres high but hard to protect and any fall would have you spinning down the main slope for a long way. Back on snow we quickly crossed to Dufourspitze, our final peak for this trip.

The ridge up was a sheer joy to climb. It mixed both snow and rock and presented challenge after challenge to keep us on our toes. Looking back, we could see the guys we had passed, still stuck at the tricky rock step and had we stayed behind them, we would have had to wait nearly an hour.

The upper part of the ridge is nearly all rock with patches of snow and we quickly moved together as we neared our goal.

At 0820 we topped out on the roof of our part of the world. In the far distance we could see Mont Blanc, the only peak in the Alps higher than where we stood. Following the obligatory summit shots we reversed our route for a hundred metres and then dropped down the north flank on a huge fixed rope. The Nordend was the other side of the col and looked tantalisingly close. It was a shame not to bag an extra four thousander, but we knew we still had a long way to go.

At 0900 we set off down the glacier through stunning and huge crevasse systems. Later we continued through the lower complex crevasse field, needing to back track a few times as the way ahead was impassable. Early, every now and again, we could hear the sound of distant Alpine Horns carried on the breeze. We crossed a huge boulder field and found the marked path that descends below the Monte Rosa hut. A long and weary walk down, across two more glaciated areas and the separating moraines, and we were finally on the marked path back home.

Six and a quarter hours of hard descent saw us back at Rotenboden railway station, where we had started our ascent of the Riffelhorn a week earlier. The train ride down to Zermatt was a real relief for our aching feet and avoided the extra three hours of bone crunching descent we had already endured twice so far. We were tired and dirty, but had grins like Cheshire Cats as we totalled up some statistics. 19 routes, 13 peaks, 1 wrong car, 1 mountain troll, a few blisters and tons of great memories. It was time to start planning another trip!

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