



Junior Mountaineering Club of Scotland / Edinburgh Section

25 Plewlands Gardens,
Edinburgh
EH10 5JS
13 November 2003

Edinburgh JMCS members,

NEWSLETTER – OCTOBER 2003

Welcome to the October newsletter. Please find attached:

- An invitation to the AGM & Annual Dinner from President Helen Forde
- An agenda for the AGM
- The minutes of last year's AGM
- An annual subscription form for 2003-2004
- The current membership list

As you will know Paul Brian from the SMC has kindly agreed to be guest speaker at this year's Annual Dinner so it promises to be an interesting evening. I look forward to seeing a good number of you there.

There's a lot happening at this time of the year with discount nights, lectures, and the annual dinner. Don't forget the climbing wall evenings at Heriot-Watt and the monthly pub meets. The winter meets kick off in Glen Etive just before Christmas, so let's hope for some early snow.

Details of these activities are to be found overleaf. I look forward to seeing you over the next few months.

Neil Cuthbert
Secretary Edinburgh JMCS

Winter Meets Programme 2003-2004

Meets Secretary Patrick Winter has put together the following meets for the winter months:

Date	Location	Contact	Notes
19/20 December 2003	Inbhirfhaolin, Glen Etive	Patrick Winter	6 Places£4 ppn
9/10 January 2004	Muir of Inverey Eastern Cairngorms	Neil Cuthbert	8 Places£6 ppn
30/31 January 2004	Ling Hut Torridon	Patrick Winter	8 Places£5 ppn
20/21 February 2004	Blackrock Cottage Glencoe	Stewart Bauchop	10 Places£4 ppn
28/29 March 2004	CIC Hut	Neil Cuthbert	8 Places£5 ppn

Further details of the huts are available on the club web site (www.endinburghjmcs.org.uk)

If you wish to attend a weekend meet please telephone the contact no earlier than the Monday preceding the weekend. Bookings are taken on a first come, first served basis.

Jock Spot's and the Smiddy

Listed below are the weekends when our club huts at Jock Spot's and the Smiddy are available for the (exclusive) use of members. On other weekends two places at Jock's are kept free for the use of club members. It's worthwhile noting that both huts are often available for use mid-week, so those lucky enough to have days free when the hills are quietest can take advantage of this facility then. Anyone intending using either hut should contact Ali Borthwick (t. 01383 732232) for Jocks or Alec Dunn for the Smiddy (t. 0131 336 1251).

DATE	HUT AVAILABLE
22/23 November (poss. work meet)	The Smiddy
29/30 November (poss. work meet)	The Smiddy
13/14 December	The Smiddy
20/21 December	The Smiddy
24 December – 1 January 2004	Jock Spot's
27 December – 1 January 2004	The Smiddy
10/11 January	Jock Spot's
24/25 January	Jock Spot's
7/8 February	Jock Spot's
21/22 February	Jock Spot's
21/22 February	The Smiddy
6/7 March	Jock Spot's
6/7 March	The Smiddy
13/14 March	The Smiddy
20/21 March	Jock Spot's
20/21 March	The Smiddy
27/28 March	The Smiddy
3/4 April	Jock Spot's
3/4 April	The Smiddy
10/11 April	The Smiddy
17/18 April	The Smiddy
17/18 April	Jock Spot's

Club Discount nights at Tiso's and Nevisport

Please note that the next club discount evening at **Tiso's** Rose Street is on Wednesday 29 October from 18:30 until 20:30.

There is 15% off all products, 25% off selected boots, rucksacks, harnesses, boots and ropes and some tents. There is 10% discount on books, maps, canoes and GPS systems. Some special sale items have 50% off.

The usual arrangements for entry to the discount night will apply.

The **Nevisport**, Shandwick Place Discount Day is on Thursday 30th October

The store is offering the following discounts to members throughout the day. Doors will close at 6.45pm with the last sale by 7.15pm:

- 15% discount on climbing hardware on price shown
- 20% Discount on all other full price items (there will be no discount on GPS, publications or batteries)
- Sale items - price show or discount shown above - which ever is the cheapest

SMC Eastern District/ JMCS Slide Nights

The programme of lectures for the 2003/2004 season is detailed below. Please note that the first lecture in the series is being held at the Café Royal Bistro Bar in West Register Street (i.e. NOT Pollock Halls of Residence).

Dinner is organised for the speaker before all the lectures by Des Rubens (SMC Eastern District Convenor) at the New Bell Inn Restaurant, 233 Causewayside. Dinner is good value at £10 for two courses and the food is excellent. Anyone wanting to come along to the dinner should let Des know beforehand (tel. 0131 667 5468).

28 October –George McEwan “Myths & Realities of Glenmore Lodge”

Following last year's highly successful talk by Rab Anderson, the JMCS and SMC are combining once again to hold another – this time by former JMCS & current SMC member George McEwan.

George works as a senior instructor at Glenmore Lodge, and his talk will feature slides of historical as well as current interest. George will outline what the present day lodge offers Scottish mountaineers such as JMCS and SMC members. This will be a high-class lecture by a well kent and skilled presenter.

This lecture will take place in the upstairs rooms of the Café Royal Bistro Bar, West Register Street, Edinburgh on Tuesday 28 October at 8.00pm.

The rest of the lectures will be held on the second Tuesday of each month commencing at 7.45pm at:

University of Edinburgh
Pollock Halls of Residence
Holland House
18 Holyrood Park Road
EDINBURGH
EH16 5AU

11 November –Robin Campbell “Early 19th Century Mountain Drawings”

Robin is a nationally and internationally known figure and his lectures are unmissable!

9 December – Malcolm Slessor “The Scottish Pamirs Expedition of 1962”

This was a famous expedition, the first post-war expedition to the Soviet Union by a group of western mountaineers. It was of course on this trip that Robin Smith was lost. 'Red Peak' should be on your reading list prior to this talk –Malcolm's account is still reckoned as a classic of mountain literature. There will be an opportunity for signings after the lecture!

13 January 2004 – SMC/JMCS member's slide night

10 February 2004 – Mike Dales of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland “Current access and conservation issues”

9th March –Dave McLeod

Mainly winter, but also some on summer. Dave is probably Scotland's star young climber at the moment and has been pushing the boundaries in bouldering, in cragging and in winter climbing.

More details of the 2004 lectures will follow.

JMCS Members slide night

Pat & Dave Buchanan have kindly agreed to host this year's slide night on Thursday 4 December from 19:30 to 20:00 onwards. Please bring a selection of slides (no more than ten) plus food & drink. The address is:

5 Mortonhall Road
EDINBURGH
EH9 2HS

t. 0131 667 7497

Digital projection should also be available. Members should send their images by e-mail or on CD to Dave (d_buchanan@uk.ibm.com), preferably about a week beforehand.

2003 Meets Reports

Jock Spot's New Members meet 21/22 March – Stewart Bauchop, Davy Virdee, Neil Cuthbert and Kevin Long (guest)

Great weather on Saturday meant a day on Ben Nevis. Stewart teamed up with Dave Amos for an ascent of Point Five Gully (V,5), whilst Davy and Neil opted for Indicator Wall (V,4). Dave headed home for Edinburgh while the others headed back to Jocks and were joined by Kevin Long.

Sunday was milder so Dunkeld was the venue for some early season rock climbing. Climbs included Consolation Corner (V. Diff), Hogg's Hindquarters (V. Diff), Kestrel Crack (Severe) and Cuticle Crack (Severe).

CIC Hut meet 28-29 March – Thomas Beutenmuller, Eddie Gillespie, Dave Amos, Patrick Winter, Stewart Bauchop, Neil Cuthbert

Conditions on the Ben were not as good as the previous year, but there were still a number of classic climbs in excellent nick.

Dave and Patrick climbed Tower Scoop (III) & Good Friday Climb (III) on the Saturday, followed by Number Three Gully Buttress (III) on Sunday. Stewart and Neil spent Saturday on Tower Ridge and made an early return home on Sunday.

Eddie and Thomas climbed Comb Gully (IV,4) on Saturday and Good Friday Climb (III) on Sunday. On Sunday night they stayed in Glen Nevis YH and went to Polldubh on Monday, climbing Pine Wall (HS) in the morning and Autobahnausfahrt (Mild VS) in the afternoon.

Naismith Hut meet 2-4 May – Patrick Winter, Bryan Rynne, Dave Coustick and two Guests (friends of Dave's)

"A poor weather forecast deterred anyone else from attending this meet in the far flung North West but the weather did not turn out that bad in the end, as pictures in the annual club slideshow may confirm. It was too dodgy for climbing however, so a weekend of hill walking was enjoyed instead.

On Saturday Dave, Patrick and Bryan made ascents of Canisp and Suilven in fine conditions apart from one short-lived downpour.

On Sunday Dave and his friends from Stirling went up Ben Arkle while Bryan and Patrick bagged Cul Mor and Cul Beag.

On Monday before the long drive home Bryan insisted on bagging another Corbett so up Ben More Coigach we tramped. In short, a weekend of fine hill walking in a nice cosy hut which has great views of Suilven from the lounge."

(Patrick Winter)

Whole Club meet Arran 24-26 May – cancelled due to lack of interest.

The Smiddy, Dundonnell 21/22 June - Patrick and Francis Winter, Ruth and Simon Love (Guest)

“The first visit to the Smiddy for all concerned and deemed to be a great hut by all, even if getting into it proved fraught and troublesome on the Friday night that we travelled up.

Thanks to Fraser Fotheringham who intervened (deus ex machina) to lend us a key which actually fitted the lock and saved us all from spending a night at the Dundonnell Inn. (probably would not have been too bad!)

Francis and Patrick were hell bent on exploring Carnmore but the weather was quite disagreeable, so in the end we had to settle for Jetty Crag, which afforded some enjoyable starred pitches. Charlie’s Corner (Hard Severe), Right Charlie (E1 5B*), Climbs: Anthrax Flake (VS**), HVS 5a*, Gruinard Corner HVS 5a*. The weather would have permitted more climbing but the midges positively did not!

Meanwhile, Ruth and Simon went fishing but did not produce any fish for supper, just as well perhaps as Francis and I are vegetarian!

Next day the weather was worse – Francis and Patrick drove home stopping briefly at Dunkeld for a quickie, while Ruth and Simon climbed Ben Wyvis.”

(Patrick Winter)

Inbhirfhaolain, Glen Etive 12/13 July – cancelled due to lack of interest.

The Shelterstone, Loch Avon 9/10 August – Helen Forde, John Fowler, Edie Gillespie, Euan Scott, Stewart Bauchop, Simon Fox, Patrick & Francis Winter

“At last a summer meet with a difference, good weather (at least on the Saturday) and numbers attending almost approaching double figures!

Game plan for half the party - Patrick, Francis, Stewart and Simon (who thought that no one else was going) was Friday night at Jocks and an early start the next day for the walk in and sport. Francis and Patrick got up first to the famous howff, noting that a party of two and evidently a mixed couple were already in residence.

Francis and Patrick went up to the Shelterstone Crag and climbed (The Steeple E2 ***).

Our elation at completing this famous route was increased by the discovery upon our return to the howff that the two mysterious occupants were non other than John and Helen, now fresh from Coire Sputan Dearg after successful ascents of Grey Slab (Hard Severe**) and Amethyst Pillar (HVS). Plastic mugs of red wine all round!

Sometime later our other two friends, Simon & Stewart appeared on the horizon, but who were the other two figures who caught up with them?. Eddie and Euan of course who had also decided to come!

Well 4 may be a company, but 8 warrants a soiree and later that evening the ShelterStone resounded with much laughter and merriment as many tall tales were told and liberal quantities

of beer and whisky consumed. The howff was illuminated by candles and headtorches and delicately scented by John and Helen's anti midge joss sticks (can't remember the actual name for them but very effective).

But what of the climbing exploits of the others? Stewart and Simon climbed Crystal Ridge (Diff) at Coire Sputan Dearg and then went up Ben Macdui, while Eddie and Euan did a combination of Dijibangi and Dagger (VS 4c).

Next day was wet so everyone walked out. Half the group were later to be found salvaging something of the day at Dunkeld, but altogether it was a great meet and thoroughly enjoyed by every one present."

(Patrick Winter)

Caer Fran Hut, Llanberis, North Wales 13-15 September – Helen Forde, John Fowler, Sue Marvell, Brian Finlayson, Patrick and Francis Winter.

Planning a long weekend in a far-flung place like Wales will always be a bit of a gamble. By all rights you would expect to travel a few hundred miles and get bad or indifferent weather, do little or no climbing and travel back feeling a bit miserable and poorer after whiling your time in the flesh pots of the local village.

Well how wrong can you be! The weather was glorious, almost Mediterranean in character and held for five whole days (some of us were fortunate enough to be able to extend the visit). Much climbing was done and all enjoyed the hut, a new venue for the club. It is situated just outside Llanberis and perched on the hillside enjoys good views of the surrounding countryside. A cornucopia of routes done, many of which are Welsh Classics.

John and Helen – Tennis Shoe (Idwal Slabs) Severe ***, Lazarus (Idwal Slabs) Severe **, The Arête (Idwal Slabs) V Diff. * Grey Slab (Idwal Slabs) Very Severe ***, Shadow Wall (Carreg Wastad) Very Severe ***, Wrinkle (Carreg Wastad) Very Difficult ***, The Cracks (Dinas Mot) Hard Severe **

Brian & Sue – Tennis Shoe as well, Main Wall (Cyrn Las) Hard Severe ***, Crackstone Rib (Carreg Wastad) Severe ***, Wrinkle as well

Francis and Patrick – Main Wall (Cyrn Las) Hard Severe***, The Grooves (Cyrn Las) E1 ***, Brant (Clogwyn y Grochan), Very Severe ***, Spectre, HVS **, Brant (Direct), HVS***, Hangover E1** (all same venue) Diagonal (Dinas Mot) HVS ***

Brian and Patrick (after every one else had gone home) The Direct Route (Dinas Mot) ***, Dream of White Horses (Wen Zawn - Craig Gogarth) HVS ***, Ribstone Crack (Carreg Wastad) Very Severe *, Shadow Wall Very Severe **, Lion Very Severe ** (all same venue)

(Patrick Winter)

Salving House, Borrowdale 4/5 October –Sally Dipple, Ruth McArthur, Susan Jensen, Bryan Rynne, Francis and Patrick Winter

Last of the summer meets... but certainly not the wine!. The weather was a mixed blessing for this meet, sunny to begin with but then degenerating into squally showers and more organised rain.

Nonetheless a little climbing was done.

On Saturday Bryan and Susan went to Shepherd's Crag and climbed Little Chamonix (Very Difficult)*** and surely the classic of the crag. Later they climbed Donkey's Ears (Severe) ** before rain stopped play.

Meanwhile Sally and Ruth went walking in Langdale while Francis and Patrick went to Black Crag for Troutdale Pinnacle Super Direct (Hard Very Severe) ***. Inclement weather ruled out any more climbing, so off to Keswick for coffee and retail therapy.

Back at the hut for tea, wine and scrabble before dinner.

We had the hut to ourselves apart from another couple, one an FRCC member and his friend a feisty member of the Pinnacle Club. The latter showed her mettle later that evening when fuelled by a large amount of red wine she joined us at the local pub to shower us with a veritable deluge of jokes, all of which are too risqué to repeat on these pages, but don't worry, I shall be briefing our after dinner speaker at the AGM!

Next day the flesh was willing despite wine induced hangovers, but the weather went into a decline again.

Sally and Ruth managed a walk in Ennerdale, Bryan and Susan tackled Blencathra via Sharp Edge. Francis and Patrick went for a stroll and after finally accepting defeat as far as outdoor climbing was concerned spent some time at the Keswick Climbing Wall (we don't recommend it as a wet weather alternative). Next time we shall visit the Pencil Museum instead!

(Patrick Winter)

Articles

Cassin Route – Stuart Buchanan

3:30am and I'm wide-awake. The dormitory of the Sasc Fura hut is full of Germanic snoring of Wagnerian proportions. We're supposed to get up at 4am, but the combination of adrenalin, noise and expectation mean I'm not going to get back to sleep. I give Alasdair a nudge, and as he's awake suggest we just get started. We don't put too much effort into keeping quiet, or keeping our headtorches covered, as we fold our blankets and leave the dorm. Serves them right - it's a bit unfair that they should be able to sleep soundly while keeping me awake.

Outside the dorm, we stuff our sleeping sheets in the basket provided; grab our sacks and head out the door into the cool air. No point trying to eat. While Alasdair can eat huge quantities of food at any hour of day or night, I'm feeling quite sick enough already. As we start up the path behind the hut, we can see more lights in the dorm. It looks like we started a stampede of people not wanting to queue on the route. They shouldn't rush. While most of the dorm will be doing the Nordkante (aka the North Ridge) of the Piz Badile, we have greater ambitions. The weather is perfect and quite warm, and Alasdair and I are climbing efficiently and quickly after two weeks in the Bregalia. Everything has come together for an attempt on the Cassin Route.

The first half an hour of the path is fairly well marked, as we walk quickly to keep warm following our headtorches. Then we reach the boulder field where things become a bit trickier. Waymarks disappear and are replaced by cairns, which merge into the rocks. We can see the occasional flash from headtorches in the distance - presumably someone has bivvied. We wind our way over the boulders and, having youth and fitness on our side, soon overtake the party ahead, who are bumbling around slowly looking slightly lost. We reach the bottom of some glacier polished slabs just as the glow in the East has become strong enough to switch off our torches. Another party is at the top of a small snow patch beneath a wall, with crampons and ice-axes but we know that we should be able to get to the route without touching snow, so we scramble up to the right to reach a chossy gully and the bottom of the North ridge.

From here we get the first view of the massive NE face of the Badile as the dawn light hits it. It is amazingly smooth for such a huge area of rock, with a small rognon at the bottom (where the route starts), a couple of chimney lines on the far side and some ledges and grooves near the top being the only real features. It's big, real big. We know it's supposed to be 22 pitches to the end of the route, then some 200m to the summit, but it looks huge. Time to drink some water, have some food, gear up and "gird our loins" for the challenge ahead.

As I rack up for the first block of pitches, Alasdair takes the sack and one of the ropes and starts descending to a ledge system that will take us to the rognon, with glacier below and 800m of rock above. By the time I start after him, he is a small dot in the distance, dwarfed by the rock above him. After traversing below the face, some chimney work takes us up to the top of the rognon and to the steep pegged crack that is the first pitch. Ropes flaked (60m as we hope to run some pitches together) I tie in and start the route proper. The first pitch starts with a couple of nice jams, but soon the crack disappears and the only way upwards is a small edge for my foot far to the right. It's quite high, and there's not much for the hands. A peg in front of me suggests a quick "french free" move, but also promises protection, so I clip it and reach my foot over, wishing I'd tightened my boots for performance, rather than comfort. A quick worrying "am I going forwards or backwards" wobble onto it and I can jam again, over an overlap and

onto a slabby crack, job done. I belay after 60m, having tried to run the first couple of pitches together. Alasdair joins me and we start getting into the swing of climbing fast - long run outs, only clipping pegs unless things are getting hard, seconding on a tight rope, and making sure the belays are as efficient as possible by equalizing with a sling and tying in only once. When Alasdair reaches the belay he clips in with a screwgate and immediately starts flaking the rope, while I grab any gear on his harness and have a glance at the photocopied topo. There's no time to do anything else and after a couple of pitches of flakes and slabs in the dry air, I'm parched. We stop for an extra couple of minutes, down some fluid, take off some layers, put on sun cream and don sunglasses. The sun is now on us properly and the day is beginning to warm up.

After some more pitches up slabs, flakes and cracks, none of them hard, we reach what should be the snowfield in the middle of the face. Due to global warming this is no longer present, instead there is a bit of choss on a series of ledges, and various rubbish, including the sole of a boot. On the one hand the lack of snow has made our lives easier - no need to carry crampons, but it has also reduced the seriousness of the route - it's now a rock-romp instead of a true mixed alpine face like it would have been 20 years ago. We're overtaken by some climbers moving together who turn out to be a guide and an aspirant, so we let them climb the next hard pitch - up a steep corner - while we have a rest, eat some power-gel and swap over gear. We're now around halfway, and it's only 9am. We're making good time as we started at 6am, and guidebook time is 6-10 hours.

Alasdair now leads and I'm left with the rucksack as he gets to grips with the next F5c+ pitch. After being in the lead so far, and because Alasdair has been seconding at very high speed, time passes more slowly for me. I soak up the rays and admire the view. Directly opposite us is the N face of the Cengalo, a complex face of steep buttresses and ridges that Alasdair would like to climb but just looks like a frightening death trap to me, with an immensely crevassed glacier below. A massive rock-fall from the couloirs between the Badile and the Cengalo and a smaller one down the N face of the Cengalo provides some distraction before Alasdair shouts safe and I start climbing. The corner isn't too bad, but a bit of a pain with the rucksack. I begin to wonder if it's easier to lead.

The next pitch is also F5c+, up and around a flaky roof to some rather thin layback moves. Alasdair dispatches it quickly, but I get an extra-tight rope for speed. We're now into the final third of the climb, and we both know it's "in the bag". We now have to climb up to a big chimney system that will take us up to the ridge. The chimney starts as a big V for a pitch. We've seen pictures of people nonchalantly bridging up this, but while it looks very stylish, it also means you can't place any gear. Instead Alasdair grovels in the bottom and squeezes up. I have to follow his example, led on by the rope and the runners. Great fun with a rucksack. Now the chimney widens, and becomes more box-like. The climbing is now via cracks in the back, sometimes using the features on the walls on either side. We let another party behind us through - they're climbing fast, while we've slowed down slightly, while we get some more water and powergel down. The next two pitches are much more British, quite steep face climbing in the back of the chimney, and very enjoyable. We're lucky to find the chimney dry. In most years it is damp and unpleasant. The angle eases off as the chimney opens out to more flaked cracks and we can hear voices from the North Ridge. Another pitch and I run out of rock on the crest of the ridge. The crest only a couple of feet wide, and cool air rises from the steep, shadowy west face. There are around a dozen people all over the place, and a convenient big ring to belay off. I belay Alasdair up and admire the view. We can see the rather crowded summit from here, which has a massive silver spike on the top. Luckily most of the people who do the North

Ridge descend to the Gianetti hut in Italy to the South, so the traffic is one way. Alasdair changes into approach shoes, no such luxury for me. We pitch along the ridge, partly because moving together will just cause a traffic jam trying to overtake other parties. The way wraps itself around either side of little granite aiguilles, with quite serious exposure. At one point Alasdair has to belay half way along a narrow ledge on the West face, which is much steeper and foreboding than the NE face, not being in the sun. Stepping around him is made even more fun because he's still wearing the rucksack. After a bit of fun climbing we reach the summit at the top of the ridge. There is a small gap between the ridge and the main mountain where the official summit lies with the absurd metal spike. We could go over there, but excluding the metal spike, it looks lower than where we are now. We relax for a moment, finish our water and eat the last of our powergel and some beef jerky. Now all we have to do is rappel the North ridge, which will take at least 4 hours, but we have plenty of time - it's 12pm and there's no sign of any bad weather approaching. After 5 and half hours of solid effort we've completed one of the classic routes in good time. It feels real good.

AMERICAN JOURNAL 2002 – Helen Forde

“Denver, Denver USA? Climbing in Boulder, Colorado?”

“Yup, that’s right, we leave next week.”

“But haven’t you seen the news showing pictures of raging forest fires and temperatures 20° above normal for July?”

“Well, the flight’s booked. Wind Rivers, Utah, and the rolling plains – here we come. At least the rock will be dry” smiles Forde brightly.

“Humph” says Fowler, packing a mosquito net.

30.06.02: Arrive in campsite at Estes National park in brilliant sunshine but we can see and smell smoke from distant hills. Without rain for three weeks all barbeques and fires in Colorado are banned. Nature moves in, making the barbie pits a safe haven for chipmunks and ground squirrels.

01.07.02: Over the next three glorious days we climb different crags in the Rocky National park. Start on ‘Lumpy Ridge’ – a long range of granite set in shaded pines ringing with the sound of woodpeckers. Climb ‘White Whale’ @ three pitches, and ‘Zingdado’. Both at 5.7. Next ‘Macgregor’s Slab’ – 300ft up; identification of climbs difficult but we do an eight pitch, probably ‘Direct Route’ [“Well, it was a bl**** long climb anyway.” says Fowler]. This was on wonderful rock with great friction and laybacks. Downward, to the rewards of watching humming birds sip nectar while we gulp cold beer. Finally climb at ‘Window Rock’ South Ridge Route 5.7. Lovely pitches, chimneys and slabs; very airy on the summit.

04.07.02: Drive 400 miles to Pinedale, stopping to look in admiration at the preserved dusty wagon trails showing the route pioneers took through the mountain passes and across the prairies toward the distant Pacific. Camp in mosquito heaven, watch Independence day fireworks then use the next day to organise food and gear for the trek into Wind Rivers, camping in Cirque of the Towers.

06.07.02: 6am start. Drive over rough dusty tracks to Big Sandy, where Forde staggers about accustomising herself to the weight of her backpack, quoting books that specify the weight ratio that females can carry – and live! A hot, 8-mile upward trail through meadows of flowers, past lakes, over monumental boulders, until ‘Warbonnet’ hoves into view – a welcome sight for weary trekkers. Massive, yet elegant crenulations rearing upwards into the piercing blue sky,

snow mantling their bases . . . finally, the Cirque of the Towers. Set up camp surrounded by the usual clouds of mossies and crash out.

07.07.02: Early start, to climb 'Wolf's Head'. Far above the tent jagged peaks catch the morning sun. "Most climbers find the unique ridge ethereal, perhaps even surreal, and at the very least, clean, picturesque and surprising."

An amazing day follows, fourteen hours starting at Tiger Tower, then two abseils to reach the first pitch, most predominantly 5.6. A narrow ramp 2ft wide up a 30ft slab, the crux, which Forde is encouraged to lead, then upwards pitch-by-pitch, taking the climbers eventually on to the fairy-tale peaks and traverses. Extremely hot rock but continuously interesting especially when we have to relay shouted messages between two Americans who are completely off route and started hours before us.

Awe-inspiring to reach the delicate summit suitable in size for a very small chamoix with all four hooves together! An adventurous descent includes full rope abseils down dark mossy gullies with very steep banks of snow to land in, or behind. Slow descent over slabs and snow, down to the baking hot tent, where the mosquitoes are awaiting supper – us!

08.07.02: The now seasoned expedition of Fowler & Forde set off early toward 'Pingora', first climbed in 1940. Solid granite of 10,000ft but invisible to civilisation, it epitomises South Wind Rivers for climbers. Fowler leads South Buttress, 5.6, 3 pitches; a classic climb culminating on the generous summit, a sacred place for the Shoshone tribe of American Indians. Sitting on the summit looking down and across from Pingora to the ascent of yesterday, Wolf's Head impresses and astonishes one's perception of scale, A tiny red dot, a climber's helmet, looks like a 'sold' sticker on a gloriously huge mountain landscape.

By nightfall the air is cool, an endless expanse of indigo, star-pierced sky barely illuminates the now aloof, austere peaks. One feels privileged to be part of this secret, silent Cirque of the Towers.

10-15.07.02: 200 miles to Yellowstone, rewarded by sights of great buffalo herds. Exhilarating white water rafting expedition down the lovely Snake River, jumping in and drifting down stream peacefully until the mad scramble into the boat before the next rapids.

400 miles to Moab, Canyon Lands, and the Arches. Walking in temperatures of 112° amongst weather-carved red sandstone making a monumental contrast against the blazing blue sky. It gives the day a surreal, dreamlike quality, the colossal scale dwarfing the vulnerable humans with its unrelenting beauty.

16.07.02: Camping back at Estes National Park we rise at 5am, driving to the Rocky Mountain Trailhead at Glacier Gorge for the 6 mile trek to the foot of Spearhead Mountain. Pass Bear Lake and Black Lake in cool quietness then at 8am the sun breaks through, the terrain steepens and altitude problems force a slower more breathless ascent. Gear up on a small snowfield then move in slow motion to the foot of the climb. Mixed ascent with some good pitches including interesting slab traverses, we top out on the 12,578ft summit within the predicted schedule. Descent by boulders and scree then the trailhead seem interminable but finally, after a sixteen-hour day, we make it down to the car.

18.07.02: Left for Boulder to climb Wind Tower in Eldorado Canyon. 'Calypso', 5.7. A climb with an excellent and commanding position above the river but with the disadvantage of well-used slippery rock – well led by Fowler.

Finally, the forest fires: we watch 2nd World War planes targeting the hillside properties with water bombs, the sky full of swirling, dusky pink clouds obscuring the sun, very Turneresque. Sitting in camp on the last evening, soft flakes of ash fall on us and we can hear the coyotes howling.

Helen G S Forde.
July 2003.