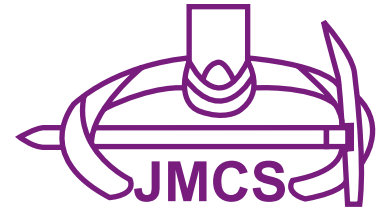


# JMCS

## Winter Newsletter 2010



*Click on the articles below to view or use the buttons on the navigation bar at the bottom of the page*

- Secretary's Introduction
- Climbing on Smith Rock, by Susan Jensen
- Ice Climbing in Norway, by Roy Harrison
- Spring in New Zealand, by Dave Coustick
- A Short Walk in the Khumbu, by Ruairidh Finlayson
- A visit to Verdon, by Bryan Rynne
- The Inaccessible Pinnacle of France, by Stuart Murdoch
- Mont Blanc, by Ruth Love
- Climbing on Mingulay, by Patrick Winter

# Secretary's Introduction



In the past, written accounts by Edinburgh JMCS members of their own recent activities (as distinct from reports of formal Meets) have been printed off and sent round with the invitations to attend the AGM and dinner. This year I received too many articles to make printing an economic proposition, especially if the photos accompanying the articles were to appear in colour. So this year we have decided to 'publish' the articles on the Club website rather than in print. This will save money, preserve the rain forest and show off the photos to proper effect.

When I invited contributions, I expected that much of what came back would relate to the Scottish mega-winter of 2009/10. But in fact, during the whole of that remarkable season, no-one in the Club seems to have done anything that they felt was worth writing about.

It would also seem that it is leaving the UK, in particular, that unlocks the well-springs of literary inspiration for JMCS Members, for all but one of the contributions which I received proved to be about climbing or walking abroad.

In any event, a good article is a good article wherever the action is set. I hope you find much to enjoy.

Many thanks to all the authors, and to Sarah Wright for her excellent creative design work in producing the finished product. Also, to Roy Harrison and Bryan Rynne for their logistical help.

David Small



# Climbing on Smith Rock

Susan Jensen

I'd visited Smith Rock State Park when I was about 14, apparently; I've seen the photographs that prove it. I don't remember that trip at all and was only reminded when Iain and I started planning a trip to the States, ostensibly for family visits, but also to spend some time at the "birthplace of American sport climbing". As it turned out, Smith got much more time than the Jensens, but it was always thus.

In spite of the fact that we have had the comprehensive guidebook since 2006, we ended up learning a few things during the

trip and it occurred to me that others might benefit, should you be considering a trip out that way.

First – there is a new comprehensive guidebook by Alan Watts published in 2010. If you have the old Alan Watts guide (1992), don't even bring it. Get the 2010. Don't bother with the little Smith Select guide either (dated 2009) – it is too limited in cover if you want to do any trad (of which there are many quality routes), or if you end up chasing the shade or the sun, depending on the time of year you go.

Time of year to go – apparently October is the month favoured by locals, as the weather is generally settled and cool. February through early April are also of a desirable temperature, and the days may be a bit longer; I can imagine October to be a bit short on daylight, especially if you are camping in the Park. We were there in early September and in spite of the fact that the locals were exclaiming over the unseasonably cool weather, to us it was very, very, very warm in the sun. We followed shade around and still suffered from the heat. Smith is a desert within a desert, with a microclimate that

repels rain and cloud – it can be raining in Terrebone (the village near Smith Rock) but dry in the Park. And if it does shower, it dries incredibly quickly.

Smith Rock, being a State Park, is very well developed for recreation. It isn't wilderness climbing: solitude would happen only in the middle of winter or during an outbreak of plague. Actually, in the middle of winter, there would still be walkers. It has great footpaths, amazing views and scenery and composting toilets near one of the more popular crags; it is well used by both locals and visitors. Which also means you can meet lots of locals for chat about climbing and the area, or to borrow their clip stick (more of that later).

Terrebone, the small town a few minutes' drive out of the park, has all the required facilities including supermarkets, diners, colourful characters and espresso shacks, plus a well-equipped climbing shop. Bend, a bigger town and 30 miles away, has more to do for non-climbing astimes. We didn't go to Bend, but I get the feeling it is a sort of Outdoor/Adventure Sports capital type thing – one of the major ski areas is there, there is kayaking, equestrian things, lots of trail running – you know, the sorts of things that flourish in predictably good weather.

The climbing - there are very good trad routes mixed in with the bolted routes; the multipitch routes tend to be trad, and even trad routes tend to have bolt belays. The style of bolting on the older sports routes was very different to that

in Europe as there was a local ethic of hand-drilling on the lead; consequently the first bolt can be unnervingly high (sometimes past the crux, due to the nature of the rock), and bolts can be more spaced than on modern sports routes. There has been some retro-bolting to change this, and more modern routes have also been done in a more friendly style. The current ethic is to walk softly and carry a very long clip stick, so either bring a clip stick, or be prepared to ask the very sympathetic locals for the use of theirs. Everyone is apologetic about that position of the first bolt, but no-one has taken the initiative to add a lower one. I was halfway up to the first bolt on one route (no clip stick) and got into a position where I was not happy either moving up or down. Fortunately I was in a reasonable position at the time, so I asked the nice fellow on the next route over, who was about to head up on a toprope, if he would mind taking a quickdraw and my rope up to my first clip. The locals are very accommodating.

Be prepared to care for your fingers. The rock is welded volcanic tuff and even the midgrade routes are balancy and fingery compared to the juggier limestone in Spain and France. Fingertips shred (come with ClimbOn or pick up one of the many local varieties in the climbing shops out there) but heal after a couple of days to leathery toughness (also bring sandpaper) and finger tendons are given a real workout. For the homesick or finger-weary, there is ample columnar basalt to jam up. We didn't touch that, can't vouch for it.

“ You could easily do an entire week on bolts, but a trad rack does take you to some really amazing places, such as the tourist route up Monkey Face, for example, or up some corner crack lines.

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Sport vs trad – As mentioned, most of the routes are bolted. You could easily do an entire week on bolts, but a trad rack does take you to some really amazing places, such as the tourist route up Monkey Face, for example, or up some corner crack lines.

We took a set-and-a-bit of wires and a set of cams, and hardly used the cams at all – the cracks are the wiggly kind, not completely parallel, so perfect for very solid wire placements and the kind that make cam removal a real hassle. We brought a 70m single and a 60m half rope, with the intention of trad climbing and for routes with long abseils, and used them both. Even if you just take a single, a 70m would help with the abseils, although it appears that most routes are equipped for belays and abseils for 60m ropes.



A comment on the grading – we photocopied one of the international grade comparison tables from a Rockfax guide (also available on Wikipedia or lots of other places). The comparison of French to American grades below about 5.11 is pretty much rubbish – 5.10a is most definitely not like 5+. At Smith rock, it was a fair E1 5b, and easily more like French 6a or 6a+. The table comparisons to British grades are useful and seemed fair, but the comparison to French grades is just annoyingly misleading. I don't know if that is just a Smith Rock effect, but it was certainly noticeable by others we spoke with. A bolted 5.10d lead did feel like very steady British 5c climbing, without the hanging about to place gear.

The current baggage restrictions on transatlantic flights do mean that sport is more desirable – 23kg in hold, plus 10kg or so for hand luggage. Saying that, we fitted the two ropes, rack and climbing gear plus other stuff into the weight limit, but borrowed camping gear from family once we were over there (including the shiniest pots and pans in the campsite). If you bring your own camping gear, do the paid-in-advance extra bag thing. Fly into Portland or Seattle (Portland is a smaller, more friendly airport) hire a car and drive either 2.5hrs or about 5 hrs, respectively. Smith Rock could be included in a trip to City of Rocks, Idaho, and it is within an easy day's drive to Leavenworth, Washington, land of multipitch granite in an alpine setting.

The campsite at Smith Rock, called the

Bivouac site for historical reasons, has hot showers, and they are the cleanest shower and toilet facilities I'd ever seen in a heavily-used campsite, cleaned daily by park volunteers. Cost is \$5 per person per day, and that includes day use of the Park (otherwise \$5 per day per car). There are long term residents (the American term is “dirtbag climber” rather than “dosser climber”) at the campsite: one young man had gone into permanent sabbatical (he didn't look old enough to have been in a job that long), was effectively living in the camp site and took it upon himself to feed everyone in the campsite on big, American, fluffy pancakes every Saturday morning. I learned this as I was consuming half of a big, American, fluffy pancake that had absorbed considerable amounts of faux maple syrup. The first few routes that day were done on pancake power. FYI – in Yank-speak, pancake=hotcake=flapjack. They are all the big, American, fluffy things.

Wildlife we spotted – turkey vultures, red tail hawks, crows, other miscellaneous birds, coyotes, cougar (only heard about this, actually), chipmunks, fish jumping in the river, western skinks, mule deer, swifts, bats, rabbits, Yanks, Germans. No midges or mosquitoes in evidence.

Apres-climbing, and a reason on its own to go there – locally made huckleberry ice cream at Juniper Junction, the wild-westee-stylee climbing/tourist shop on the road into the Park., open until at least sunset. Double scoops recommended.

Climbing in the shade and thinking of ice cream...





Krokan (before the invasion of the trainee guides)

# Ice Climbing in Norway

## Roy Harrison

Karaoke, Flumes & BBC News 24:  
Edited highlights of a visit to Rjukan, 20-  
24 January 2010 by Roy Harrison, Terry  
Lansdown, Ruth McArthur and David Small.

### Wednesday

We had an early start, made considerably less early by having stayed in Troon with a friend of Terry's, whose generosity was matched by his geographical convenience. After battling our way past the grim Ryanair staff littering Prestwick Airport, our flight arrived in Oslo Torp; as close to Oslo as Prestwick is to Glasgow. A solid drive by David on the snowy roads saw us safely into Rjukan, where pretty, brightly painted wooden buildings sit rebelliously beside imposing, grey stone power stations.

Having arrived in the early afternoon and keen to make the most of the day we headed to the Ozzimosis area, a five minute walk from the car, where we enjoyed a couple of short routes in the rapidly closing darkness. We then retired to our accommodation at the Rjukan Hytteby; lovely warm little self catering cottages with a heated bathroom floor perfect for warming frozen ropes and extremities.

### Thursday

Spurred on by the taster of climbing the previous day Terry and Roy headed off to



attempt the multipitch Fabrikkfossen (WI3). It was tough breaking trail to the route, and then even tougher leading through chest deep snow. Moments after deciding to escape to a nearby tree and back off, a small powder avalanche whistled past. However, snow-related challenges paled into insignificance when compared with the difficulty of trying to scream calls loudly enough for a partially deaf Terry to hear. Ruth and David also had difficulties with the snow, and found themselves wandering up and down the river in the Lower Gorge amid mega-

meringues of snow, looking in vain for a bit of ice clear enough of snow to make it worth climbing.

Back in the Hytteby, we took the short walk to the swimming pool and spa, where we spent the evening as we would spend most: lazing about in saunas and jacuzzis. Any pretence of being serious climbers was lost during lengthy periods racing each other down the flume, which features an automatic LED timer showing how fast you have slid from top to bottom - possibly one of mankind's greatest creations. Our

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*It was tough breaking trail to the route, and then even tougher leading through chest deep snow. Moments after deciding to escape to a nearby tree and back off, a small powder avalanche whistled past.*

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climbing kudos was further diminished by our childish leaps into the water from the top of the in-pool climbing wall.

### Friday

In light of the immense quantities of snow it was decided to attempt shorter steep routes, and we returned to Ozzimosis. Sadly, shortly into the day Ruth hurt her leg stepping backwards at the base of a route. Or, to use climbing parlance, Ruth seriously injured her calf muscle completing a technical move on a WI4 route. Either way, it was unfortunate as for the rest of the trip Ruth couldn't climb. Or walk. Or move at all, without emitting yelps of pain. In the true mountaineering spirit of sacrifice, the majority of us agreed that we should abandon Ruth and continue climbing as a three; leading the easier routes where possible, but generally bottom roping harder things.

Being Friday night, Terry and Roy decided to sample the delights of the local nightlife. And what good fortune: Karaoke Night at the Ammonia Cafe! After suffering the remarkable beer prices and the even more remarkable karaoke, a morbidly obese drunkard crashed to the floor in front of us, knocking over our table and drinks as he fell. The crowning joy of the evening was when Roy received some unwanted attention from a local 'hottie'; a crooning man-woman whose beauty was reminiscent of the imposing grey power stations looming

over the town.

### Saturday

Again in search of short steep routes, and climbing as a three once more, we headed down to Krokan. A short walk from the car led us to an amazing fairytale land of huge snow mushrooms, and beautiful green, orange and blue icicles dangling from the rocky gorge walls. We had some fun leading a variety of nice single pitch ice routes. Terry decided undertake a DIY hearing enhancement operation and found a smoker willing to lend him a cigarette butt, which he used to burn ear holes in his balaclava. At least they would have been ear holes if they hadn't been so close to his eyes. The screamed climbing calls continued unabated.

An invasion of trainee guides limited the availability of routes and so we retreated to Vemork Bridge, where we climbed Vemorkbrufoss (WI5); more than 50m of steep ice climbing, usually completed in two pitches that we top roped as a single pitch. Suitably exhausted after this exertion and with the light fading fast we returned to our accommodation, where we nobly recounted to Ruth all of the excitement she had missed. In response she regaled us with wondrous tales of her adventures watching BBC News 24 on an endless loop. The rest of the evening was spent in the typical manner: beer, sauna, wine, food and whisky.

### Sunday

Our last day and we had time to do some climbing before our flight home. Hoping that the huge party of top roping wannabe guides would be somewhere else we returned to Krokan, where we enjoyed a selection of short routes. Ruth made it down to the crag, slowly, to have a look about, though sadly she was still in too much pain to climb. On the way back through town we stopped at Vemork Bridge for the view. We met a guy who told us about his monster fall a few years ago, leading the 50m route we had done the day previously. As he neared the top of the route he found that below an outer casing of ice water was running strongly, gushing out every time he tried to place a pick. Tired, wet and cold and without decent placements, he fell off; a dodgy ice screw blew and in the end he was left dangling a mere three metres off the ground and fortunately with all joints intact. The tale was made all the more poignant by the tiny baby he was holding in his arms.

Relieved that none of us had taken a 50m fall, the slow drive along the snowy roads led us back to the tiny airport (not) in Oslo, where we took over the majority of the available floor space to sort out our gear. The return flight ended what we all agreed was an entertaining trip (well, three of us did) to a beautiful place, with friendly ice climbing in a relaxed and amenable setting (though with some literally groundbreaking karaoke singers).



## Spring in New Zealand

### Dave Coustick

Although it is now some time ago, I was halfway through my round-the-world tour when I wrote this; here are a few of the highlights of some of the New Zealand section of my travels. No serious mountaineering on this trip but the walking has provided some great days, though much of my time has been spent on touristy things. There's a bit about some of this on my blog at [www.davecoustick.blogspot.com](http://www.davecoustick.blogspot.com)

I included New Zealand for a three week visit, mainly to visit friends, having had several previous trips there, some as long

as five months. However there were still a couple of classic walking areas I had not managed in the past, primarily on account of the weather.

The first of these was the Tongariro Crossing, in the North Island. Tongariro is a volcano and probably officially considered active, adjacent to the ski area on Ruapehu and the crossing is a popular one day traverse of the peak. Before leaving home, I had made enquiries by email about transport to and from the start as it is an A to B walk. No problem, I was informed. When I came to book by phone

from Auckland, it was a different matter. I was told that because it was winter, I could only book as part of a guided trip for 125 dollars. Consulting with my friends in Auckland, an alternative route was devised.

With the weather looking perfect I decided to try and catch sunrise from the summit. I made the short drive to the road end carpark and set out shortly after 4.0am. The path is good and was snow free until reaching a saddle after two hours walking. It was getting light now and I managed (just) to get started on the south ridge of

Tongariro for the sunrise. Crampons were donned near the start of the ridge, which provided an easy scramble and much more interesting than the normal route. I then traversed the summit and back to near the saddle where I had been just before sunrise. This is the normal route (out and back) of the "Crossing".

From here I cramponed up perfect névé on the evenly graded adjacent volcano, Ngurahoe – seen below from Tongariro. This slope seemed to go on for ever as being a volcanic cone there was not even a small flatter spot to rest. It was eerie being on the snowy summit but with a vent issuing steam nearby.

These two peaks made for an excellent full day's walk, so the lack of shuttle transport turned into a bonus.

The second walk was a couple of weeks later in the Nelson Lakes region of the South Island. This time I was with two friends, Richard and John, from Auckland. The plan was a three night trip taking in the Angelus and Sabine huts, with a peak or two en route.

With hindsight we should have realised our day 1 plan was going to be quite long and either amended it or started earlier. The three of us had only rendezvoused at Nelson airport at six the previous evening and then had to buy provisions, eat dinner and drive 100km to the small village of St Arnaud so an early start did not come to mind.

We left the car at 9.45 and commenced with a lakeside walk of about three hours.

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*The two of us continued up the snowfield for about an hour by which time we were close to the hut but could see no sign of it and had lost the markers. It was about fifteen minutes before dark and it was not the weather I would have chosen for a bivvy or snowhole.*  
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After a short break we saw the possibility of saving a kilometre by taking an alternative path which forded rather than bridged the river. The map showed the main part of the river at the start of the flat valley where it was only a couple of inches deep so no problem, But river courses change, and after another half k we got to the main river. This was deeper; not a problem to cross but it did mean wet boots and feet, which would turn out not be ideal later on.

We continued up the main valley to a sign indicating 4 to 5 hours to the Angelus hut and it was now nearly two o'clock. It would be dark just after six but we thought that we would be ok and would make final decision a bit further on. At three-ish

we agreed to go on and Richard set out ahead; being younger and fitter than us he said he'd go on and then come back to give John a hand with his pack.

A bit later we came out into a large open area and realised that the weather was not that great. John and I felt it would be better to return to a hut lower down rather than ascend the long steep snow slope into the mist. However Richard was now too far ahead so we had to continue. Half an hour later John said he was going back anyway. I failed to jwas happening. I took John's stove as Richard had all the gas (John hoped he could get the fire going in his hut below the tree-line) and I carried on up and back into the forested area. I did not have a map but the route seemed well marked and after another half hour I was out of the trees and spotted Richard a long way above me.

After much shouting he realised something was wrong and came down to join me. I explained the situation but by now it was too late to return to the lower hut which was much further. We were at least reassured as John had a personal locator beacon (EPIRB) if anything were to happen to him. The two of us continued up the snowfield for about an hour by which time we were close to the hut but could see no sign of it and had lost the markers. It was about fifteen minutes before dark and it was not the weather I would have chosen for a bivvy or snowhole. Check the map more carefully and found we needed to be more to our right. Ten minutes later we were very pleased to see a sign poking out of the snow – "Angelus Hut 5 minutes".



We were soon there and got the wood burning stove going to dry out ourselves and our kit. We had not realised quite how penetrating the light drizzle had been. At least there was plenty of wood; a few weeks earlier some people arriving had recorded in the hut book that there was no wood left. Fortunately a short time before we arrived a heli-drop of wood had been made.

The weather was getting wetter and windier but we awoke in the morning to clear skies and nice hard névé for the short ascent of Mount Angelus and superb views. We took a slower route back to the hut as there was no hurry and we were back by midday. We were expecting John to be on his way up and Richard descended the snowfield to the forest edge about one o'clock to help John with

his pack. I lazed around the hut, chatting to a solo new arrival. After a couple of hours I walked the ten minutes to the top of the snowfield to see Richard just appearing, but no sign of John. Richard then carried on to a ridge above the hut to get a mobile signal. No message from John at either the DOC (Dept of Conservation) base, where we had registered our intentions, or at the hostel where we had started.

We debated what to do now and decided that if there was no contact we would have to descend by our ascent route the following day. Then, at about five o'clock we saw someone appear; it turned out not to be John but he did have a message that all was OK and John was making for the "Bushline Hut", relatively near the road. Richard and I were therefore able

to have a relaxing evening in the now popular hut; about a dozen people had arrived in the last hour of daylight on this Saturday evening.

Sunday morning we had a great walk along a snowy ridge on another glorious day and got to the Bushline Hut by lunchtime. We left a note for John and descended a bit more meeting him a little later. Having a few hours spare we went back to the village to move the car to the road end for the next day as well as purchasing some liquid refreshment. So the three of us had a pleasant evening back in the hut and heard each other's stories.

Overall we did a few things wrong but everything worked out fine in the end!





Base Camp and the Khumbu Ice Fall

## A Short Walk in the Khumbu

Ruairidh Finlayson

As you probably know, my brother and I summited Everest on 17th May this year. The following is a report on the summit bid from Base Camp up. If you are interested in the particulars of the entire 2 month expedition, from the Base Camp Trek, to the many acclimatisation climbs through the superb terrain of Everest, please get in touch and I'll fire you a copy of the full report.

To give some background, we had flown from Kathmandu to Lukla and trekked in to base camp (5,364m) in around 10 days. We then spent the following 34 days at base camp and above, climbing up through the Khumbu Ice Fall, into the Western Cwm and onto the Lhotse Face on numerous occasions, spending as many nights on the mountain as needed to acclimatise to a reasonable level.

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### The Plan of Summit Attempt thereafter:

Day 1: Head straight up the Khumbu Ice Fall and Western Cwm to Camp 2  
 Day 2: Perhaps rest at Camp 2  
 Day 3: Head up the Lhotse Face to Camp 3  
 Day 4: On oxygen, head over the Yellow Rock Band, over the Geneva Spur to Camp 4 at the South Col, rest and that night leave for the summit  
 Day 5: Summit and head back down to sleep at Camp 4  
 Day 6: Back to Camp 2  
 Day 7: Back to BC

The timing of the above was utterly crucial weather wise. This was to be determined via a combination of our Swiss weather reports, other teams' reports and the Tibetan weather calendar which was written by a high Lama. The Tibetan one worked on Cho Oyu last year and I now had little confidence in our Swiss reports after the unpredicted storm we were caught in during acclimatisation. At the time our super Swiss was saying the 15th and 16th May (low precipitation but as cold as -30) and the sherpas were saying the 16th and 17th.

### BC to Camp 2 (6,350m):

We left on 13th May after 3am. The Ice Fall had changed dramatically, particularly lower down, so much so that we had trouble finding the way. We didn't get lost but it did add time to the journey. Angus and I stopped off in our solitary tent at Camp 1 (6,040m) for a rest, and then plodded up the rest of the way to Camp 2. Rob, Bunter and Ginger all seemed to have picked up a stomach bug, most likely

the same one as Foo had.

We sat at Camp 2 on the 14th and watched all the people go up to Camp 3 like ants. Ginger, Bunter, Tim and Rob (our leader) were to go down the next day due to their illnesses and Angus, Foo, Tore (assistant leader) and me to go up. It was a big decision to split the group but they were just too ill to go on. The weather forecast update mentioned dangerous winds, and the window consisting of the 15th and 16th, not the 17th. I was worried that we had missed it but Robert said we were still on. We just needed to move it on the 18th from the South Col before the weather closed in.

### Camp 2 to Camp 3 (7,100m):

We set off around 7am with relatively heavy packs. We didn't hit any queues as most people had gone up the day before. However, we found it harder than last time, particularly the last 200m. I munched some Pringles at Camp 3 (high calorie:weight food believe it or not) but they screwed up my stomach. I didn't eat until lunchtime the next day. We went on oxygen that night (only 1/4 litre per minute). The masks definitely have condensation problems and your face is permanently wet as a result.  
 Camp 3 to Camp 4 at the South Col (7,950m):

Got changed into full down gear and left at around 7am. Sherpas turned our oxygen to 1.5 litres/minute. Didn't realise it was that low until later, although this should have been obvious considering our slow pace.





Straight out of Camp 3 there's one of the steepest sections of the Lhotse Face (basically steep ice climbing on fixed ropes). Last thing we wanted to start on! I wished our Camp 3 wasn't as low in comparison to the real Camp 3 as it took us a couple of hours just to reach it.

Once there, we were greeted with a body wrapped to the ropes like a mummy; probably the Russian who died on Lhotse a few weeks before. His face and body were covered up completely with his down gear. It was impossible not to look as I clipped the ropes next to him. He died of a heart attack apparently.

We were switched up to 2 litres/minute at some point which made all the difference. It was a relief to get to the top of the Lhotse Face section and traverse to the Yellow Rock Band. We pulled up that and plodded up the curved, easy angled slog to the Geneva Spur. Foo was told that we were moving too slowly and may have to go down. We sped up and stopped under the Geneva Spur. Our oxygen levels were checked (reasonable) and we moved quickly up the Spur, over it and north along the flattish ground to Camp 4 and the South Col.

I fell into the tent straight away. Four of us would be squashed into it with all our gear (very cosy). I got to cooking up water from ice after a while and took over radio duties from Tore. I said to Rob in BC at 5pm, that if he gave the go-ahead we would leave at 9pm for the summit. It turned out that no one had summited that day, and so

everyone at the South Col was planning to leave that night. The idea of leaving at 9pm would be to avoid the crowds and the bad weather predicted for the following day. He said go for it. We went to 'sleep' at around 7.30pm, but shortly after sherpa Mingma popped in and said we might have to go down instead if the wind didn't die down by 8pm. It did die down, so we were awoken at about 8.30pm.

#### Summit attempt:

We were basically kitted up and ready for 9pm but the sherpas weren't. The South Col was packed with people getting ready and going. We left at 9.30pm but by this point we were well behind the masses. We started up together after meeting our sherpas, mine being Pema Tsering. The route is flattish, then steeper and steeper to the Balcony which felt like it took forever. Boring, monotonous slopes, behind tens of people in a line on the ropes, plodding then stopping, plodding then stopping. I fell asleep several times on the rope. After a few hours I begged my sherpa for a rest so I could drink and stop passing out. He said no. Eventually I disobeyed and sat down at the side and drank ice and juice from my bottle. Foo caught up and sat beside me. I gave him painkillers for his back which was bugged from earlier that day. By this time we were at the back of the traffic jam.

#### The Balcony (8,400m):

We eventually got there just before dawn and got our oxygen tanks changed. Without warning, Foo wandered over,



stuck his bum in my face and stated “Ruairidh, help me get my arse out!”. I sat there, slightly baffled, then proceeded to undo his down salopette back zip and attempted to ‘get his arse out’ while many a spectator watched on. He wasn’t impressed with my efforts, and repeated several times “get my arse out damn it”. He wandered off cursing and successfully pooped on the Balcony. Impressive at 8,400m.

I think I was boosted up to 3 litres/minute; what a difference! With no one in front I paced it up towards the South Summit as the sun came up on Tibet, Makalu (another 8,000m mountain) looking very impressive. However, before too long, we hit a queue. This one was long and slow. I fell asleep waiting a few more times but eventually got to the rocky section. This consists of steep, highly friable rock with thin fixed ropes attached to god knows what to pull up on. These days this section is far harder than the Hillary Step due to the lack of snow. Global warming, contrary to popular belief, is making Everest harder to climb every year.

#### South Summit (8,750m) to Summit (8,848m):

After the rocky section we followed the slope to the right and the South Summit. I begged for another rest and got one. Unfortunately my Nalgene was frozen solid despite being in my inside pocket, but the Thermos in my bag was surprisingly still slightly warm. Very nice.

We made our way along the Summit







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*On steeper sections, people were accidentally kicking down massive ice blocks. One hit me on the leg and a few on the back pack when I was sitting down. I waited for the big group to come down to avoid worse injury*

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Ridge which was very busy. The Summit Ridge is high on knife edge, Nepal on your left, Tibet to the right, and with all those people, potentially a death trap if the weather breaks. Two thirds of the way along the ridge is The Hillary Step. This is a block of rock, of which the North face must be climbed before ‘gracefully’ straddling the top and pulling over it. I assumed the top would be just round the corner from there; a bit further than that unfortunately with an additional plod. I got to the summit at around 10.50am and had a sit on the highest seat in the world. What a relief I can tell you!

The views back into Nepal were superb, but Tibet was where the clouds and snow were now coming from. Felt pretty rough after a few minutes without oxygen so clambered down and had some. I took

various photos and videos and ate and drank something. I said to the sherpa after a while that I had to wait for my brother and that was that. He totally understood because his brother was also up there guiding.

Foo got there around 11.20am. He was knackered, largely because he was ill on the way up and his back was stuffed. I think I may have been the youngest Scot to summit Everest until he turned up. We are most likely the first Scottish brothers to summit and the youngest British ones. We did photos together and radioed Gavin in BC with the news.

#### **Down from the Summit:**

We left sometime after 12 having been on the summit for well over an hour. There was no one else coming up and not many

behind us coming down; the turnaround cut-off time is normally midday. The Hillary Step was an easy abseil but I almost put my foot down into Tibet through a cornice. Foo was going very slowly so I waited. I donated my sherpa to Foo as his guy wasn’t around, and I knew I could probably get myself down safely. The way down from the South Summit was steep and hard work, with a mix of wrapping and abseiling.

On steeper sections, people were accidentally kicking down massive ice blocks. One hit me on the leg and a few on the back pack when I was sitting down. I waited for the big group to come down to avoid worse injury and Foo was amongst them. We got down to the Balcony, had a rest and Foo got his oxygen changed. We got down the rest



of the way to the South Col for 5.30pm, 16 hours after we left.

When I got in the tent I realised I hadn't put sun cream on all day. Realistically, the only time I could have put some on would have been on the summit and I was thinking of other things. My face resembled garlic bread with cheese, although not quite as tasty. Silly sod.

#### Camp 4 to BC:

The next day the weather hadn't closed in as expected. I was trashed after the Geneva Spur and the Lhotse Face was horrendous in the heat of the day. We stopped at Camp 3 to get changed and then headed to Camp 2 to sleep, eat for a change and drink plenty. We moved out fast from Camp 2 the next day, despite pretty much constant chest pains. I think I was pushing it a bit too hard and my body wasn't happy. I started hallucinating about half way to Camp 1 and couldn't see anything. I had to kneel down and breathe deep to see again. It happened 5 times in total but stopped when I crouched. Even after a few days in BC we were all more breathless than we were before we went up which was odd.

#### Post Expedition:

I lost 6kgs and Foo lost 10kgs, mostly muscle mass unfortunately; at that altitude you don't lose fat first as at sea level, you lose muscle. We reached our CAIRN Trust fundraising target and I need to thank those who donated so thank you! Here follows David Small's poem about us and the mountain. Enjoy!

## Success on Everest

The Finlayson brothers know no fear,  
'Cos they learned to climb on their Dad's old gear;  
Harness by Whillans and nuts by Peck,  
They soon got used to risking their neck.

Summer or winter, rain or sun,  
They went on doing what they'd always done;  
Leading Pain Pillar in Super RD's  
Or the scoop on Hammer in ill-fitting EB's.

Then they turned their attention to the Greater Ranges  
Which caused some unexpected changes.  
The guides at Jagged Globe insist  
On strict compliance with their kit list.

A straight shafted axe which weighs a ton  
Is not what you want 'neath the Khumbu sun;  
Nor Craghopper breaches bought from Blacks,  
Nor Ultimate helmets, nor Joe Brown sacks.

Now the Finlaysons climb in big double boots,  
All kevlar (no leather), and posh down suits;  
With featherweight ropes that are quite the thing  
And krabs each lighter than an engagement ring.

In modern kit they conquered Everest's peak,  
(While sending us updates every week).  
And Brian won't notice, we hope and we pray,  
When most of his stuff appears on E-bay.

But there's one thing I'd like to stress  
About these chaps' Himalayan success;  
Forget all the gear they may have had,  
And financial assistance from their Dad;

No-one could've done what they've managed to do  
Without talent and drive so, Roo and Foo,  
We salute your achievement with a hearty cheer,  
And trust it won't be all downhill from here.







## A Visit to Verdon

### Bryan Rynne

After talking about going to Verdon for several years (and driving past it on the way to Orpierre on a couple of occasions) Patrick Winter and I finally got our act together and got out there this year. We flew to Nice, and stayed in the village of La Palud sur Verdon, about 10-15 minutes drive from the main climbing areas.

We stayed in the hotel Le Provence, which is right in the heart of the village, but there are several other hotels and gites close by. The village also has two bars and a couple of restaurants, a good (small) supermarket and a very small

climbing shop.

Verdon is, of course, renowned for the serious nature of the climbing - a 400m deep gorge which you abseil into for most of the climbs and then have to get back out again! In view of this, we had decided to aim at some of the less serious climbs and to hire a guide, Alan Carne, to get us up some of the tougher routes.

The first day started off fairly cool and grey so we decided to do a few easy short routes. Alan (by phone) told us how to find the abseil points for these routes -

this was very helpful as I think if we had been relying on the guide-book we would have spent a long time looking for them. Unfortunately, just as Patrick reached the top it started raining and by the time I was half-way up the final pitch it was pouring down. However, by some judicious pulling on the rope I got to the top. At this point Alan showed up expecting to have to rescue us - this was very good of him since we were not expecting to meet up with him until the next day. This set the pattern for much of the week - cool and grey mornings and wet afternoons.



We met Alan the following morning and, in view of the poor weather, we spent the morning looking around at the location of various climbs and abseil points, while hoping for better weather later on. This reconnaissance was well worth doing - he showed us a lot of obscure and difficult to find abseil points, and generally explained how things worked here. Fortunately, the weather slowly brightened up so that by the afternoon we could do a climb. However, first we had to get down to it, which involved being lowered 200m in mid-air on Alan's static rope - not much fun! Especially as the Italian hitch the rope was running through caused us to start spinning on the way down. However, we got down unscathed (without even any seasickness), and this was much quicker than doing 5-6 abseils. We then did Pour une Poignee de Gros Lards, F6a, 175m, 7 pitches. A very enjoyable route on good rock and in a great, exposed location.

The next day we were on our own! We got up at the crack of dawn (well, it seemed like it to me, but Patrick was of the opinion that dawn had been several hours earlier) and, since the morning seemed good, decided to have a go at La Demande, 6a, 380m, 12 pitches. This is one of the first routes climbed in the gorge, and starts from the gorge floor. It is given E1 5b in Birkett's guide 'French Rock'. Personally, it felt like sustained E2 5c to me, and I use the UK grading advisedly - the bolting is atrocious, so it is essentially a trad route (the bolts are very widely spaced, and almost always placed in easy ground, never where you actually need them). Since E2 5c is pretty much our upper

climbing limit progress was slow, and by mid-afternoon it became clear that we could not finish before dark, let alone before an approaching rain storm hit us. This led to a long retreat - made more difficult by the fact that the first half of the route is up a slanting crack system, so we had to haul our way back across the face all the way down. Fortunately, we got back to the foot of the gorge before it started raining - unfortunately, our car was at the top of the gorge! This meant that we were faced with a 7 mile walk, first along the sentier by the river at the foot of the gorge, then along the road, back to La Palud. To complete the rout, after about a mile of the walk it started lashing with rain, and we only had light wind-shirts with us. Luckily, about half-way back we managed to hitch a lift, and so got back to La Palud in time for several large beers (we were too late for any food, but by this point we didn't care, so long as we got some beer).

The rest of the week was a mix of walking, an afternoon of sports climbing near Aiguinnes, and some further relatively short climbs (100-150m). This included another day with Alan, on which we did Mangoustines Scatophage, 6c+, 150m, 5 pitches, and top roped various routes off the 'belvederes' (the view points built on the hairpin bends on the road above the gorge - the chunky railing provided very quick and reassuring belays).

Overall, a tremendous climbing location. Although we were unlucky with the weather we certainly got a feel for the place and did some very good routes, if not as many as we had hoped for.

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# The Inaccessible Pinacle of France

## Stuart Murdoch

During the summer, we had an unusual day out climbing the spectacular Dent de la Rancune in the Parc des Volcans. This is a “super In-Pin” feature that emerges from a wooded ridge in the Chaudfour Valley. The short side is 50m high and the bigger south face is 100 metres. The easiest way up is French 6A and ascends the cracks in the West face (see photo). We have wanted to climb the Dent for many years having been inspired by Bill Birkett’s use of it as the cover shot for his French Rock Climbs book. Birkett rates it as E1 5b with a point of aid to enter the crux crack on pitch 2 and HVS if all available aid is used on the crux pitch. It would be fair to say that we fell into the HVS style of ascent, not least because I carried my clipping stick for the very spaced bolts on the easier, but still technical section above the crux.

Our ascent was made memorable by coinciding with a guide leading a journalist up the route. Their climb was recorded by a photographer and we all featured in the next day’s local daily newspaper on page 3 - no less! Despite being at (or maybe beyond?) our technical limit these days, it was a fantastic experience – perfect weather, stunning scenery, immaculate rock. The instant exposure as you step off the col to start the Voie Normal and immediately have a 50m drop to your right down the south face makes it a route to remember!

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## Mont Blanc

### Ruth Love

“Hey my sister has just climbed MONT BLONK!” “You ROST BIF eet’s MONG BLONG not MONT BLONCK but felicitations to your seester, that ees very good”. I had just texted the good news to my diving instructor brother John who lives in Egypt. He was with a French colleague when he got my text. John and I regularly swap adventure stories and these filter through to my two other brothers (golfers) and hopefully the scariest stories do not reach the ears of our parents.

David Small and I were back at L’Aiguille du Midi waiting our turn to descend

to Chamonix on the telepherique. We were holding numbered tickets as if in a queue for a deli at the supermarket. We were tired and parched, but elated after the success of the day, Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in Western Europe at 4810 metres. This was the highest that David or I had ever climbed. At the start, Simon (my husband) had accompanied us up to L’Aiguille du Midi station which still holds the record for being the highest vertical ascent cable car in the world. He took photographs of us as we descended the knife edge, steep ridge onto the glacier below from where one then ascends 80m

to the Cosmiques hut (3613m). Exhausted mountaineers were ascending the ridge at the same time which made it all the more exciting. On the right side you would fall to the Col du Midi (3532m), on the left side you would fall down over 1000m towards Chamonix. Many of you will know that this is where the famous Vallee Blanche ski run begins and in winter a guiding rope/ wire is placed along the ridge. Indeed a good few JMCS members will have climbed Mont Blanc.

We had prepared as well as we could given weather and time constraints.

Simon and I had arrived in France several days before David so I had gained a bit of a head start on fitness and mid altitude training. We completed a delightful 4 day hut to hut walk – Tour de Glaciers de la Vanoise. This took a course entirely above 2000m with a high point col at 2900m and sleeping three nights at close on 2500m. On this walk, that we would highly recommend, we were treated to our first ever sight of the rare Lammergeyer bird. Yes a text was duly sent to Eddie Gillespie (JMCS bird expert)!

David flew in to Geneva and we all met up hurriedly at the car park of the apartment near Chamonix that David was to be based at. I had already packed my rucksack in readiness for a trip up to the Torino hut booked by David the night before from Edinburgh. He quickly caught up on packing and soon we were being transported up to the hut at 3800m by telepherique. We were hoping to acclimatise and refresh our alpine technique. I had missed two Alpine seasons and wondered if I might be a bit rusty. But I found it to be like riding a bike and David is very fit so we soon settled into a good rhythm and felt at home. We only managed one route before bad weather visited. The South East Ridge of La Tour Ronde (PD 3792m) provided some training but the route is rather chossy in places and lacks quality. The final section is clean and pleasant and of course it was good to be sitting just under Mont Blanc the ultimate objective. Unfortunately we were not able to climb the Dent du Geant the next day as

hoped but were forced down by a storm. However we had benefited from two nights sleeping high and that certainly helped with acclimatisation.

So then a day off was spent in Chamonix, partly in the fantastic outdoor/indoor swimming pool but largely in Snell Sports, its biggest outdoor shop. I bought new boots and a North Face sports bra! Well I did not want to waste time fiddling with straps and clasps at 1.00 in the morning. Sack packed again and up up and away to L'Aiguille du Midi next day. We knew that a friend of David and Linda's, "Ozzie Andrew" would be up at the Cosmiques hut with a partner intending to climb Mont Blanc on Monday 19th July. Andrew had been out in The Ecrins for a couple of weeks and was already acclimatised. We were tempted by the kind invitation to join them but we declined feeling that we could do with another day of climbing and acclimatisation. The weather window was forecast to last two more days. We are glad we did wait as everything worked out perfectly and neither of us suffered from sickness or headaches as we steadily plodded up the mountain.

We climbed the Arête des Cosmiques (AD 4c), described as safe but exhilarating, on that Monday 19th. David had climbed it the previous autumn with Cairns Dickson and suggested that it would be a good and convenient thing to do. It's a short walk from the Cosmiques hut to begin the route and it actually finishes at L'Aiguille Du Midi station. It is a surreal experience to complete the route on a ladder which

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*I had missed two Alpine seasons and wondered if I might be a bit rusty. But I found it to be like riding a bike and David is very fit so we soon settled into a good rhythm and felt at home.*

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leads on to the viewing deck of the station. Tourists take photographs of you and ask lots of questions. One feels like some sort of celebrity of the five minute variety! This relatively short route gives time for a rest back at the Cosmiques hut and with a breakfast time of 1.00am for Mont Blanckers, this was very welcome.

We had planned to make a round trip rather than return to L'Aiguille du Midi but by good fortune and my tendency to talk to all I meet in the hills (Irish blood); we obtained some valuable beta from a British Guide one Johnny Baird that changed our minds. Most helpful and friendly, Johnny told us that some of his guide friends had warned him off descending by the Dome de Gouter Route which was “extremely dangerous”.



We later heard that several people had died from rock fall a few days before our ascent and others injured. David and I climbed Mont Blanc from the Cosmiques hut traversing below Mont Blanc du Tacul and Mont Maudit (separate summits over 4000m). We were meant to return by the Gouter route and be collected by Simon on the other side.

Those who have climbed Mont Blanc before will be familiar with how it all works. There were probably over 200 people attempting Mont Blanc that day including those camping on the glacier below the hut. David observed that their tents looked like hermit crabs in those snowy depressions! The hut accommodates 120 people maximum and only has two proper toilets! There are two supper sittings allocated according to intended route the following day. I ate a supplementary boiled egg whilst queuing for breakfast which is very continental and not substantial enough for me! This had been cooked for me by a friend of Simon's staying on the same campsite back at base in Chamonix. I reckon this made all the difference though David managed perfectly well without one and hates eggs anyway!

We were not the first to depart from the hut (before 2.00am) but not the last either. We were pretty puffed whilst overtaking many parties en route but once we had slotted back into position, were fine again. I even felt I had a bit in reserve. A good part of the route was played out in the dark and a zig zag train of headtorches could be seen snaking its way up the

mountain. When dawn broke the views were stunning. Rosy hues and what have come to be called by Simon and I as "Pokenthroughs" came with a cloud inversion.

Mont Blanc is often referred to as a snow plod and it certainly is straightforward but the ground covered is consequential and full on mountaineering skills are required. Seracs above are an ever present threat. We encountered a couple of bottlenecks along the way dictating longer rests than we would have wished. We did choose to stop twice for revitalisation/comfort but otherwise kept going. Climbing an ice gully on fixed ropes with one basic lightweight axe (mine borrowed from Stewart's Melville College) was interesting and I did receive a blow to the temple from a lump of ice whilst we waited our turn. There was also a rickety ladder over a crevasse to negotiate early on. All this to look forward to on descent.

The higher reaches were unknown territory to me. I had no idea how I would fare up above 4000 metres despite the preparation. "Si loin si bien" till about 4500m but it could all go wrong if the physiology did not work after that. It became harder work and breathing was more difficult but I still seemed to be ok and comfortably keeping up with David who was first on the rope and going well. I thought of my Irish grandmother who lived to be 92 years old and gently disapproved of all this "Trotting about the mountains in this weather". When her husband died she said to me "Ruth if you don't keep going

you'll just stop". I decided to apply that advice to the present situation and kept repeating it to myself. An Italian man then passed me on his descent and muttered to me "duo minuti". Thinking of my grandmother of whom I was very fond and the joy/relief of reaching the top brought some tears. I wiped them off my face hoping that David would not notice but of course he did! A very happy moment.

We made pretty good time and arrived on the summit just after Johnny Baird and his two clients. He kindly took photos of us and also tipped us off about lift passes. He said it was worth a try to ask to convert our single lift pass into a return ticket for little or no extra cost. What a guy! My French speaking, our politeness and David's quick mathematical thinking got us a result at only 4E extra!

With the summit crowd sporting different brands of mountain clothing, against the bright blue sky, it was quite colourful up there. All very good natured though and the panorama was "epatante" (breathtaking as they say in French). We had to be careful not to get caught up in the strings of a paraglider. Someone was attempting to paraglide off the summit and was becoming entangled and blown about. We shuffled out of the way and watched anxiously but eventually he took off and disappeared out of sight probably touching down in Chamonix 20 minutes later. Our descent was going to take longer than that!



## ■ Climbing on Mingulay

### Patrick Winter

Despite their remoteness and consequent difficulties in access the outer Hebridean Islands of Mingulay and Pabbay have been attracting a steady stream of enthusiastic British climbers for a number of years. Many fantastic crags have been developed and while many of the most celebrated climbs are in the upper end of the grades spectrum (well E3 or more!) there is still much to interest those who climb at a more modest level. With this

in mind, a small group of JMCS (Dave Amos, Bryan Rynne, Francis and myself) along with a couple of mountaineering associates from Manchester (Michael Pettiphur and Martin Hampur) planned a visit to these islands this summer.

The first two weeks in July are often wet and windy in Scotland – that is of course because it coincides with the Edinburgh and Glasgow trades holidays – but

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*the outer Hebridean Islands of Mingulay and Pabbay have been attracting a steady stream of enthusiastic British climbers for a number of years*

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unfortunately this was the only time that was convenient for all of us to make this trip. The weather did not disappoint! – it was indeed wild wet and windy and our Calmac ferry to Barra from Oban from which an onward journey to these islands is usually made was delayed by about three hours. We arrived at 12.30 am tired and slightly sea sick and scratched around in wind and rain looking for somewhere to camp the night.

The next day our privately chartered ferry that was to take us to Mingulay was cancelled due to further inclement weather. Eventually we set sail the following day. Our charming ferry man, Donald McLeod of Barra Fishing Charters said that given the conditions and forecast for the week ahead we had better choose between Mingulay and Pabbay. Originally we had hoped to visit both islands. All things considered we plumped for Mingulay which is the larger of the two islands. I was disappointed knowing that this ruled out climbing the iconic 'Prophecy of Drowning' E2 on Pabbay which was perhaps the single most reason for making the trip in the first place.

After a fairly rough passage we disembarked on Mingulay and had to haul about half a ton of gear etc up steep slippery rocks and then a further 150 yards of boggy ground to our camping spot. Some climbing trips are such fun!!

As well as our own individual tents, we had a large mess tent for cooking, dining

and general communing, acquired at half price from Halford's spring sale. During the next week this tent was subjected to some very strong winds but a few boulders the size of large pumpkins kept it from being blown away.

Our camping spot was next to some old ruins (Mingulay has been uninhabited for nearly a century), overlooking a lovely sandy bay on which scores of seals had settled for the summer.

I had been dreading midges at the camping spot and had come prepared with all manner of candle and josh stick insect repellents but the upside of windy weather meant that they did not bother us one bit/e!

We spent the week exploring the island and climbing when the weather and swell of the sea permitted. We had hoped to climb on Dun Mingulay, the most significant cliff on the island and host to many highly esteemed routes but unfortunately conditions were always too stormy when we went there.

Out of only a handful of climbs we managed, the best was undoubtedly The Arch Deacon HVS, a very airy four star classic, first climbed by Mick Tighe (former guest speaker at a JMCS Dinner – remember him?). To get to the base of the climb necessitated a long and quite scary rappel on our new 100 metre static abseil rope. Despite coiling the lower end at least 10 metres out of the sea on

our initial belay stance, some extra large waves lashed across the stance (after we had departed) and swept it into the sea, whereupon it proceeded to get hopelessly snagged around rocks. An expedition to free it the next day failed and we had to cut it free, thus losing about 20 metres of it to the sea!

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*The weather did not disappoint! – it was indeed wild wet and windy and our Calmac ferry to Barra from Oban from which an onward journey to these islands is usually made was delayed by about three hours*

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