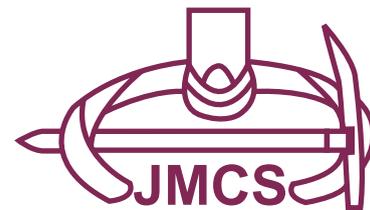


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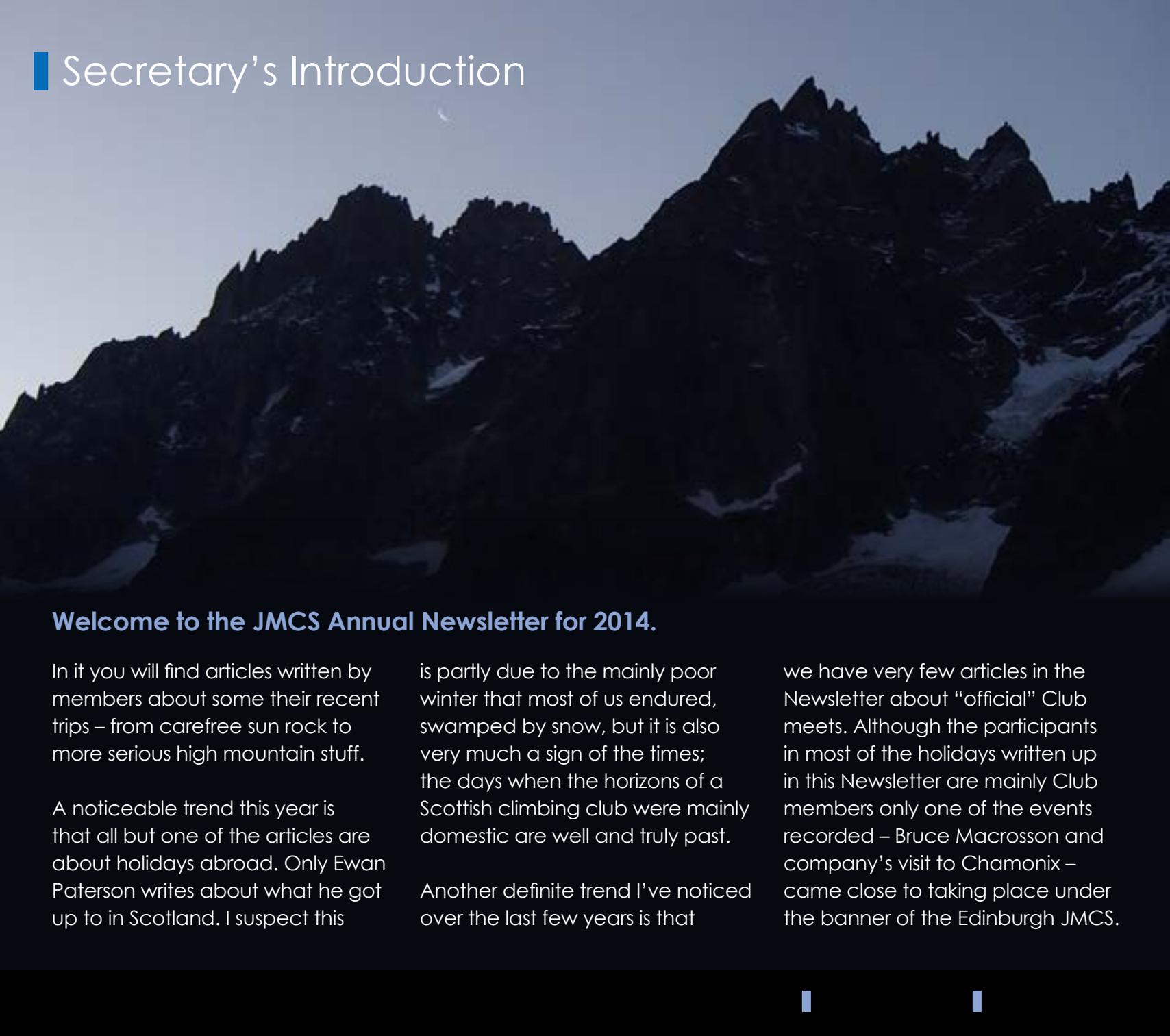
Winter Newsletter 2014



2014

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

Secretary's Introduction



Welcome to the JMCS Annual Newsletter for 2014.

In it you will find articles written by members about some their recent trips – from carefree sun rock to more serious high mountain stuff.

A noticeable trend this year is that all but one of the articles are about holidays abroad. Only Ewan Paterson writes about what he got up to in Scotland. I suspect this

is partly due to the mainly poor winter that most of us endured, swamped by snow, but it is also very much a sign of the times; the days when the horizons of a Scottish climbing club were mainly domestic are well and truly past.

Another definite trend I've noticed over the last few years is that

we have very few articles in the Newsletter about "official" Club meets. Although the participants in most of the holidays written up in this Newsletter are mainly Club members only one of the events recorded – Bruce Macrosson and company's visit to Chamonix – came close to taking place under the banner of the Edinburgh JMCS.

You may feel that we need more about actual Club meets. Since we now have a Facebook page, it may also be possible to get some sort of record of such meets, and also members' activities outside the meets, into the public domain on a frequent and regular basis, soon after they happen, rather than taking a mellow retrospective view

in the Autumn of the year. I would very much like to hear from you with feedback on the Newsletter and your thoughts on possible alternatives or supplements to it; david.small@advocates.org.uk

My thanks go to the authors and photographers who have contributed to the Newsletter. We

also owe a huge debt of gratitude to Sarah Wright; once every year I send her an untidy mess of assorted Word documents and jpegs, which she then somehow turns into the attractive, user-friendly publication that you are now reading.

David Small
Secretary, Edinburgh JMCS.

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The JMCS Abroad, Chamonix - July 2014

Bruce Macrosson

Team List: Bruce Macrosson, Gwylim Satchell, Peter Wilson (SMC guest), Alan Smith, Bryan Rynne & James Dalgarno.

Having spent many happy weeks out in the Mont Blanc range over the past 23 years and mindful of the sheer variety of climbing available there it has long been a dream of mine to get a JMCS contingent over to Chamonix, especially with some members who had never climbed there before. I also hoped this would generate

some Club summer alpine momentum and an annual JMCS alpine trip might become an established fixture.

The team arrived in a cool, damp and dark Chamonix outside our Spartan hostel just before midnight. Talk on the way over had been of an almost freak cold and wet early summer (turned out to be one of the coldest & wettest summers for over 50 years by the end). Big dumps of snow above 3000m and an unsettled forecast was not quite the start I had

hoped for. Thankfully as the trip unfolded all my companions turned out to be the embodiment of patience and stoicism. This became obvious when, having decided to go for a hill walk on the first day, rain having vetoed any notion of climbing, we ground up a steep 1000m track through dripping pines, rain and swirling mist. Much the same for the next day but at least a wee break in the afternoon allowed a few valley sports routes to be squeezed in. It was Bryan and James' first trip to climb in Chamonix



Bruce en route to L'Évêque



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*Those incut holds bit
back however and
Monsieur Wilson
brought home a
couple of stitches on
his finger*

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and by now I was starting to feel a bit guilty having lured them out with glossy guidebooks & tales of acres of sunkissed granite and sparkling neves.

Thankfully by day three, Le Grand Beau temps had started to arrive and it was time to climb. A low snow line and still fresh temperatures left the Aiguilles Rouges as the obvious choice. Bryan and James headed up to the Brevent to perform in front of cable cars full of admiring tourists on the classic Frisson Roche.

Alan and James decided to focus in on

the Aiguilles Rouges and over the course of the trip savoured the delightful gneiss of the Voie Brunat Perroux on the Aiguille de L'Index (along with half of Chamonix that day), Voie Gaspard Premier on l'Aig Gaspard and Robin Wood on Aiguilles Floria. Those incut holds bit back however and Monsieur Wilson brought home a couple of stitches on his finger courtesy of the A&E department as a momento of his trip, not unsurprisingly a couple of days walking on Les Balcons rather than climbing ensued.

Gwylim's plans for the Charmoz Grepon



traverse dissolved as soon as the clouds clearing to show a dramatic, but alarmingly white gendarmed summit ridge. Deeply loaded slopes and by now strong sunshine made immediate ideas of high altitude snow/ice seem none to wise either.

We then played Chamonix's trump cards; variety and speedy cable car access which allowed us to make the most of weather windows. This we did and five solid days of quality rock routes on lower altitude peaks ensued. I enjoyed them all but my favourite days were on l'Aiguille du Peigne and its Les Lepidopteres and Papillons ridge with the NE ridge of L'Aig de l'M a close second. Took a toll on my hands though, still had the scabs of my granite rash visible a fortnight later.

Bryan and James joined us up at the

Plan de l'Aiguille hut to sample some Chamonix granite. A new selective guidebook had been spotted in town by Bryan promising some well bolted, technical and quality climbing on the erstwhile unknown Les Dames Fontaines, unfortunately someone had removed the hangers from said bolts, yet none of the technical difficulties which I believe up the overall commitment somewhat! Our ravings about the delights of Les Lepidopteres in the hut that evening soon had them heading of in that direction, in retrospect perhaps by omitting the rock hard neve on approach, Bryan's fell shoes and the exposed crumbling approach hadn't quite painted the full picture.... but I do believe they enjoyed it nonetheless. A long lie and up to the Aiguille du Midi for a change the next day with an airy snow arete & thinner air

above the Valley Blanche.

Le grand beau temps had by now started to depart and it was back to a cold, wet and a rapidly falling snow line for our last full day. The Chamonix gear shop integrale and an evening of chat, pizza & beers provided a fine and contrasting finale to the trip.

Looking back from a personal point of view I really enjoyed the trip both on a climbing and a personal level. I hope the others did too. I can't thank them enough for their patience; what with rain, unseasonable fresh snows, a gite full of American teenagers & somewhat basic accommodation and never a moan at the purported organiser. It's myself who should have been giving them a rope bag to say thanks!!

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not exactly “death bivouac” but all the more pleasant for it



Orgon, France - September 2014

Kirsten Besemer



Enormous amphitheatre of Orgon crags

Shortly before our eagerly anticipated trip to Orgon, in the French Provence region, we got some alarming news about what was supposed to be the worst Air France strike in history. (Yes, even for the French!) Thankfully we were able to get as far as Paris, and the unplanned 8 hour ride to the Gite gave us lots of time to start planning the climbs.

The gite, chosen by Bryan, turned out to be lovely and comfortable, with a good sized sitting room for spreading out gear and relaxing in the evenings. It

was near a charming village, Menerbes, which was a nice uphill walk away, and looked quaintly and charmingly French. I would go back just to sit in the pretty little central square, sipping a glass of house wine...

The only place that was open after our long drive advertised itself as a "snack bar" but actually offered lovely home-made pizza and delicious salads. As we were to discover later, the village had several more excellent restaurants which offered delicious good value menus with

truly delicious dishes. Two local bakeries and a corner shop meant we were never short of baguettes, and a nearby large out of town supermarket supplied everything else. We were undoubtedly lucky with the weather. It was mostly sunny but not too hot, at about 24 degrees, which made for ideal climbing conditions. There was only one rainy day.

The climbing near Orgon is ideal in that it offers a huge variety of climbs and a good choice of really good easier sport climbing routes. In la vallee heureuse,



where most of the climbs are located, there are large sectors of 4 and 5's which meant that I could quickly progress from what was my first ever outdoor lead to be become increasingly confident. Bolts were usually quite close together, and I was quite pleased at how easily I began to feel much more confident about leading. However, there was also a good choice of more difficult routes, so all of us were able to climb at our own level. Most sections were single pitch.

Some routes were a little slippery. When the guidebook proudly claimed the route was first climbed in the 1940's, it was easy to see the gradual smoothening of

rock against generations of hands and feet. Although I quite liked imagining those climbers who came before me with their tweeds and nylon ropes, it meant some routes had become quite a lot harder than they were graded. However, on the whole the climbing was very good, and nice views across the valley at the end of each climb were a real reward. Not to mention the ever-present smell of provencal herbs growing all around the crags. They tasted fabulous in the meals Nils and James cooked on some very nice evenings in the Gite.

Although the climbing near Orgon was excellent, we decided to drive over to

the Calanques one day to do a multi-pitch climb. Bryan and I went up 'Le Marchand de Sable' a three star 6a climb. The 90m climb had amazing views right out to the sea, and it was truly stunning. Nils and James climbed up Le Grand Diedre Jaune, another 3 stars climb, undoubtedly partly because of the same amazing views down into the valley.

I had a really lovely holiday, and would very much recommend both the region and the Gite near Menerbes to anyone looking for a good choice and variety of single pitch sport climbs, as well as great food in beautiful surroundings.

An Apprenticeship on Ice

Ewan Paterson



How do you teach someone how to climb on rock or ice, to read the mountain environment and be safe moving through it?

You can't.

You can give pointers, advice, tips. Stories about what you've learned or the situations you've escaped from but at the end of the day the student must learn to make their self safe and must rely on their own wits for rescue. The mountains are a serious place and require serious treatment. They require the right kind of mentality. What's needed is an attitude of complete self reliance and the ability to think outside of the box – to draw on all your combined knowledge, in an instant, and know the safest action to take. It may not be the safest possible, if you had an hour to throw around ideas with your mates then you might come to a different conclusion, but you have absolute confidence in your action at this moment and it's that confidence that will get you up and off that hill before it even starts to get dark.

The great thing about this club is that you don't just have very knowledgeable mountain goats who'll give you all the advice left sticking in their beards after breakfast but you've also got these grizzled hard-men who have this exact temperament so necessary for any sort of heroics – mountain related or not, and



Bruce: “come hither, lad”

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I learned you could not only spend the whole of a winters day sun-blessed but also tan-necked

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you can learn this attitude from them.

So this winter was my first winter climbing experience and it blew my mind.

Winter climbing only started to appeal to me after I saw the Alps and realised I would have to learn it to reach those tremendous peaks, and even then only as a means to an end.

To my mind the words “Scottish winter” had always been buddies of wet, dripping, cold, shivering, misery and freezing jagged death. Why would you ever crawl out of your warm bed in the middle of the night, closing your front door on the smell of Christmas pine needles, and drive yourself up north to spend the

day freezing cold and tongue-stuck to some ice with a howling wind icing your eyelashes? It never made sense to me. Winter had always been a time where my exercise lapsed and I stayed in my cave, fattening and slothening – waiting for Spring and the decurtaining of the day.

Imagine my surprise then, when my eyes were unfastened and I learned you could not only spend the whole of a winters day sun-blessed but also tan-necked. Instead of being snuffed up inside with a nose full of festive cheer you could be fresh-aired with a crystal snow flaked view of the beautiful snow capped mountains.

I have been very lucky to have been mentored by Bruce Macrosson this

season in the art of winter climbing. Without his help I would have done far less and be a far lesser mountaineer. It was really good luck to find we had a good connection – suitable for a little life-trusting.

First Route

My first winter route was grade 1 great gully on Beinn an Dothaidh where Bruce could get a good gauge of what sort of winter climber I would be (and so could I). So we drove up on that early November day in the darkness of the early morning with fat heavy snow flakes giving a treacherous and very wintry feel. I had my brand new shockingly expensive (250 quid Scarpa Jorasses) B3 boots and a whole load of equipment borrowed from kind Bruce and I was ready for this wee walk.



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this seemed pretty and in no way dangerous to my new eyes. I looked down and it all seemed a lot more steep than it had on the way up

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Bruce enjoying the sun at The Cobbler

It was just a snow plod but it was good to get the right basic movement techniques concreted in:

1. Feet – kick in hard first then use it as a step or you’ll be going nowhere.
2. Arms – swing the axe and pull, or if you’re in the softer sort just dagger in and push him down.

That might seem simple but lots of people find it takes quite a while to get used to it (and you see many, many people on the hills doing it wrong).

Anyway Bruce seemed happy enough with my technique and he suggested

trying something with teeth rather than gums. It was just off to the left and was maybe a grade 2 or something. So off Bruce goes like a shot up it, leaving me struggling and falling a little at the start – wondering if I was going to fall at the first hurdle and toying with the notion that I actually hate all this cold wet white stuff. My shame over powered me and I managed the starting step and met Bruce again a little further up.

He had stopped to think on the way ahead – which was a large cornice-y top, this seemed pretty and in no way dangerous to my new eyes. I looked

down and it all seemed a lot more steep than it had on the way up (– WOW real climbing!!). As Bruce hummed and hawed I just went off ahead up the natural line I spied – traversing across to lessen the volume of snow dislodging above and below me and reached the top: my first winter route complete and a success.

Northern Corries

I really got to grips with this winter game when Bruce and I ventured up to Coire an t-Sneachda (pronounced as corrie an-trect so Bruce tells me). We had soles had gone up in the Christmas holidays to climb!

Here we roped up for some real climbing. I was still very new to all this so we started off quite easy with Hidden Chimney and then did the Haston Line. Although the mega snow conditions made everything quite easy I managed to find a hard bit of climbing on the last pitch of the Haston Line – it was a corner of complete ice and quite vertical for a short while, quickly getting quite far above your protection, it involved a little bit of bridging with the feet and it felt so exhilarating to use climbing techniques in boots and crampons. The move felt neat and I was quickly up into the secure névé where I could plant the axes and crampons in

with such security. I moved up to the top-out – a cut in the consolidated snow, stood up planting my axes in beside me and took in the beautiful view: a blue sky and the mountains and cliffs all around lit up in the sun in a brilliant white. There were other parties to the left and right topping out on their routes giving a feeling of camaraderie. I had the feeling of bliss after the good climb the whole while that I belayed Bruce up. When he appeared and congratulated me I was so happy and it was such a great day of exercise and achievement (and great weather) – I knew there was no going back: I was now a Scottish Winter Mountaineer.

Buachaille Etive Mor

The high point of the winter for me was climbing the North Buttress route with Bruce. This is a grade 4 or so and it really tested me. Again the conditions and weather were fantastic. The climbing here was markedly harder than it had been in the Norries. The climb was quite an undertaking as well being 5 pitches or so. Bruce took the first hard pitch and the one after the crux. My memory is not exact but one of them involved going up on the right and sketchily crossing over to the left, it was a good lead and hard to follow, especially with freezing hands and a generally chilly temperament – caused

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Bruce belaying at Stob Coire nan Lochan

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I tried the axes beyond the edge but their picks found nothing, so I paused and searched my mind for what to do – I did not want to fall. I put the axes in as best I could just near the edge, balanced on it.

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by successive pauses due to a party we'd met at the start (unlucky) slowing us down.

I took the crux pitch and I took the harder variation as the other party were on the easier way. I got in a couple of bits of protection as I looked up and saw an edge, above the flared wide crack, with the unknown beyond it and no footholds below. I tried the axes beyond the edge but their picks found nothing, so I paused and searched my mind for what to do – I did not want to fall. I put the axes in as best I could just near the edge, balanced on it. My feet skittered below searching for anything to give support – nothing was found. Panic. Determination – I was not going to fall. I put my bodyweight through my shoulders and arms atop the balanced axe heads, and managed to swing my leg up aside, then a quick rock-over and I was out of the danger. The adrenaline made me feel sick to my stomach – my spirit felt broken and I just wanted someone to take me out of this misery (helicopter?). It was just the adrenaline mixed with shock from going a little out of my depth and it was temporary – I was enjoying the climbing again after Bruce's next pitch.

We reached the top with nightfall – the sky was completely clear and the starry heaven was so beautiful, the moon

was out and bathed all the surrounding mountains in a wonderful calm light. There was a tremendous tranquillity to counter the fraught experience on the cliff below.

Concluding Comments

I am tremendously indebted to Bruce for mentoring me and giving me this great gift – the ability to move confidently in the frozen mountains. Thank you so much Bruce, I hope I can do the same for others in the future.

Another great climb this winter was climbing Taxus on Beinn an Dothaidh with Mark Swinhoe – this was an eye-opener for both of us and was a really great adventure.

Learning these skills let me accomplish what I wanted – to climb the snow-peaks in the Alps. I managed Mont Blanc which had been my goal for a whole year. The weather was great and the views from the top are truly awesome.

If I had to choose between rock climbing and winter climbing I would definitely now choose the latter. The wildness of the terrain and feeling of adventure is a magnitude higher and the mountains are so much more beautiful when clothed in white.

I hope we all get a good winter this year!

Alicante in February 2104

Tim Chamberlain



What an awesome week! Based again at The Orange House, inland from Benidorm, Alicante, the mighty Puig Campana and the fine Bernia Ridge were our main targets. Lucky with weather this time we had fantastic days on both. Long days too. We got to start of Espolon Central (HS, 13 pitches; about 50 minutes steep hike to the base of the route), geared up and were on the route when the sun rose at 7.30am. The early start was to give us novices that chance to opt in for the, as it turned out great fun and value for money, excellent Mark Edwards Finish (in OLD guidebook only) to give about 17 pitches with easy scrambling in between. Took us till 3pm to do EC, and till 5pm to summit and then an hour down the big scree run and back to the car. We climbed it all on single 60m and all the climbing was on gorgeous rock.

The Bernia Ridge was a great success. Especially as this year we didn't go through the tunnel and actually made it onto the ridge! Cracking day out, it was like a mini Cullin traverse, with lots of ridge, short abseils and lots of options to make it more interesting. All easy stuff though we did rope up in several places as I was a tad nervous about some of the fine drops. The technical section was too short and too easy so I wouldn't bother with rock boots next time.

On the summit of Puig Campana



Other days, we climbed at Toix in the evening sun, went watching vultures in the mountains inland, and had fun on Via Pany on Penon de Ifach (7 pitch) that has an almost subteranean first pitch and a great herd of sandwich-hunting cats at the top!

As for our wee adventure on the Magical Mystery Tour – it is well worth a go – though I advise choosing a considerably less windy day! The wind freaked me out a bit and with the raging sea crashing under us and some seriously strong gusts I generously let Mike lead it all! Turns out we should have done the abseil in with two 60m ropes and left them in situ...oh well, the 2-stage abseil was kinda fun, the route fine so we didn't have to risk an attempt on those freakin' scary looking ladders.

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Puig Campana from our hostel



the village of 11 Camp, the hamlet at 11,000ft



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A lifetime of another 14 years later I found climbing, and a lifetime again, in 2014, was my first return to Alaska.

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Days on Denali

Susan Jensen

In 1986 I left Anchorage, as soon as I could under my own steam. Or my mum's anyway, in a Volkswagen microbus kitted out to take both of us and my life to Oregon, where I would make my escape and start university. A lifetime of another 14 years later I found climbing, and a lifetime again, in 2014, was my first return to Alaska. Climbing presented the only compelling reason to return, as there was no longer family there and I kept in touch with only one person who himself managed to get out of Alaska frequently.

Growing up I knew little of the mountains around Anchorage; the Chugach range within walking distance of the house was a place to do drugs and escape the mess of the parental units. There may have been people climbing and mountaineering while I was in high school, but I was oblivious. It was only in about 2001, living in Surrey and spending weekends underwater, that I tried climbing as an alternative to a day's SCUBA diving, and the compulsion for the occasional taste turned into a need for mainlining within a few years.

In 2012, a crevasse incident in Zanskar precipitated the decision that a mid-

life crisis was in order. The spring of 2013 began a year's career break from NHS Scotland's statistics division, and part-time break from part-time work for the Scottish Mountaineering Club's publication team. India for a few months, impulsive trad trip to Morocco with a group of friends, an uncharacteristically long trip to family in Oregon much to the delight of my 90-year-young grandmother, back to Scotland for a coveted winter of flexibility to chase the conditions. Some time in the Alps in the previous autumn and following spring, then – just to give everyone in Scotland a chance at good weather, which seems to happen when I'm not there – to Denali in June. The year



off was turning into about a year and a half.

I had gatecrashed a team that already had Denali in their sights; Victor and Rick were thinking of the Cassin Route, weather gods permitting. If you don't ask, you don't get – and after some debate and consultation with the wider community about whether bivvy sites could take a three-person tent, I was allowed. I promised to carry heavy loads, maybe even make tea every morning, and not take up too much space.

Late May 2014 I arrived in Anchorage, the only friend from high school that I kept in touch with met me at the airport. He looked pretty much the same, the brash and sarky smile greying a bit at the corners. I had a couple of days in

Anchorage, staying at the house of a near-cousin and her housemate, doing some stealth nostalgia tours where I was ambushed by memories, and shopping for supplies. The rest of the team arrived, gear and food and the growing mountain of bags piled into a van that deposited us at the steps of the wooden chalet from which springs the grounded part of Talkeetna Air Taxi. The Costco components of our food stores – sirloin and salmon burgers, 4 lbs of pre-cooked bacon, 10 lbs of Vidalia onions – put us right at our weight limit for the flight. The sledges from Kahiltna Base Camp to 14000ft Camp were heavy, but the contents made it possible to bear the unpredictable weather and worse forecasts during the weeks of sitting in our icy cube of snow blocks, Mega Mid flapping, taking turns scooping snow out

of the rubbish bag into the MSR pot for yet another round of tea.

Backing up slightly... It was a relief to get to parts of Alaska that I didn't know, didn't have to watch for ghosts. We were dropped off on the glacier at Kahiltna Base Station at about 8pm on 2 June, 2014. It took us a couple of hours to decide what to cache there, to repack the bags so that they fit on our three sleds and to start off to the Ski Hill Camp. Leaving at 10:30pm we had some sunset colours reflecting off the hills and glaciers around us at about midnight, then more muted sunrise colours an hour or two later, with little change in light between. At 63°N at the beginning of June, even a close cirque of peaks couldn't keep the sun away for long. Quietly shuffling along the path beaten into the snow, tied

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On the ascent, the main difference between day and night was not the light but the number of other people also moving up the path.

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into the middle of the rope, I could feel that my eyes probably couldn't get much wider – similar to that midnight, full-moon traverse of the Sakang Lungpa glacier to get the hell out over the Sakang col the year before.

The weather stayed clear for a few days as we increased height from camp to camp, looking forward to the day when the snow-block walls we built and the pits we dug would be used for more than the night's rest. On the ascent, the main difference between day and night was not the light but the number of other people also moving up the path. Some 1200 people registered for the mountain this season; most of them had already gone through by the time we were arrived. There had been a few days of good weather and the path was as well-trodden as the pony track up Ben Nevis in winter,



Inside the pit of the kitchen tent, dug out and walls built, covered with a pyramid tent

but a step just off-path had you up to your oxters in powder. Or a crevasse. The wands every 10 metres keep people on track, as do the pee-holes – when the cold wind scoured away the soft snow next to the path, the short, yellow pillars became waymarkers, too.

The steady progress up included one carry to just below 14 Camp (the affectionate name for the camp at 14000ft), then a back-carry a couple of days later to pick it up, once we

were established in 14 Camp itself. On arrival to any of these village camps, the first order of business is to see if an appropriate-sized shelter was available for occupation, or whether we had to extend the suburbs ourselves. 14 Camp produced the goods; we found a snow wall around an area that would take two small tents and a kitchen pyramid, with some work to flatten and dig pits. Over the weeks we were there, the structure of our encampment developed as befits a team with a former architect and the





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There was a brief time after arrival during which we feared food might need to be rationed;

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son of a builder, in spite of the latter's being a GP. We had walls of tightly-laid snow-blocks, overlapping for strength and higher than the tents; an offset entrance to keep the wind out, flying buttresses to support the external walls that were slowly melting in the sun; a graceful corridor to the space next door that we commandeered when a Polish team departed; gear storage spaces, and trenches around the tents to make the clearing of the heavy snowfalls easier. The layout of the encampment centred around the loo, which perhaps isn't what one would have at home, but it did mean that the loo was private to our team – both functionally and visually. Later, at 17 Camp (yes, that's at 17000ft), I had the US Army mountaineers politely looking away every time I went behind the small walls of that pee-hole.

We had a good few days to work on this encampment because the day after we arrived at 14 Camp on 6 June, the weather turned unsettled, and this lasted for several days. The camp area is incredibly sheltered from prevailing winds, but the cloud and spindrift movement on the ridges above – when we could see them - confirmed some of the days' forecasts. Much of the time it was soaked in, claggy. Even then it was light through the night, though, just variations in the white clouds. Stormy days were spent in the kitchen tent making endless cups of tea, or thinking of more snow-block construction and maintenance projects.

There was a brief time after arrival during which we feared food might need to be rationed; one of the neighbouring guides said that most years he would be happy to tell people to come up to 14 Camp with only five days' food, since so many private and guided groups would either summit or give up and still have 10 days' food and/or fuel left that would then be hawked around the camp. This year's unusually cold, snowy and windy weather did mean that people were waiting longer for that break, so less food was left to unload on the climbers still resident. We were on a later wave of pretendants, though, and soon other teams started heading down. A departing group from Dubai gave us some 5 kg of nuts, energy bars, jerky and 'fruit'y sweets. My carbohydrate requirements were now sorted. Then soups, pasta, pizza sauce!, salami, cheese, more nuts and fruit arrived before we had to stave off charity lest we put on too much weight.

Have I mentioned the cold yet? It was cold, apparently much colder than the previous year, and colder than the reports we had seen from April climbers. My pricey altimeter watch, the one that is too polite to wake me with its alarm, also doesn't show temperatures below -10°C. There were very few mornings I could wake to admire the exact temperatures that I had survived through in another night with a forecast of -20°F, as the measurement precision had disappeared. So the cold was judged by the length and





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the cold was judged by the length and extent of ice crystals that dangled from the ceiling of the Fitzroy's fabric. One morning I found one that had to be nearly 2 inches long.”

extent of ice crystals that dangled from the ceiling of the Fitzroy's fabric. One morning I found one that had to be nearly 2 inches long. That was a cold night. Near the end of the trip it warmed to a forecast -10°F at night with 0°F by day, and baking in the sun – but independent confirmation wasn't possible to any precision. We had philosophical discussions about whether it was fair to tell tales of degrees of frost when working in Fahrenheit – this would have been nearly 50! – than would be calculated in Celsius.

For the first few days at 14 Camp we were new kids on the block, keeping to ourselves and building the walls. Some days were not windy but visibility was down to very little, with snow falling. We started to realise that the NOAA forecast, which was available on the

satellite phone then repeated on the 7pm Ranger forecast via the FRS radio, and on the Ranger's whiteboard each day, hadn't the faintest idea what it was talking about. A forecast for snow and high winds as often as not would produce a decent summit day. Equally, a forecast for low winds and clear skies would have us waking up to evil lenticular clouds over Foraker and Denali, and plans for ascent that day would be submerged under snow. Unfortunately, we didn't know how to adjust for that, and so joined the rest of the camp in frustration, especially as none of the weather windows seemed to last more than 24 hours at the most.

But as an independent group (as opposed to one of the many, many commercial groups on the mountain), we could

choose our own level of risk and so on an okay forecast we did an acclimatisation walk/small food carry up to the ridge below 17 Camp, near the base of Washburn's Thumb. It was claggy that day so couldn't appreciate the view, but a couple of days later when we moved up to 17 Camp (on a reasonable forecast that turned into a wild day) we did have fantastic views and so could appreciate the narrow rocky ridge leading up to 17 Camp as well as the queue of guided groups moving up the ridge ahead of us. We weren't as fast as Kilian Jornet, who had done an 11 hr 45 min summit from Kahiltna base camp a couple of days previously, but we were quite a lot faster than most of these folk who were being long-roped and were pitching up easy ground. Patience, patience; all part of being on a mountain with a brand name.



hot sun at 7800 camp on
the way out



Arriving at 17 Camp in the afternoon of 13 June, it was windy and snowing and we moved into a partially-built and abandoned shelter next to a group of US Army boys. They had been there for a day and a half and were keen for at least some activity, so helped us cut blocks to build up the walls around the tent and the loo.

Another day and night at 17 Camp, then we woke to something that resembled the decent forecast, and so set off at 11:30am to follow the trench across the Autobahn. Going up from Denali Pass we overtook a bear-sized fellow who was climbing alone, and was later taken off the mountain by helicopter with frostbite to face, hands and feet. Further still we overtook other groups and another lone climber, who was also rescued the next day, but only

with frostbite on his face and hands. At the summit, the clouds moved in and views were all cotton wool, but very windy cotton wool. We knew the other teams that were up there – the camp-villages become small neighbourhoods after only a couple of days – and so after a photo session and a bit of chat, noticing that the wind was picking up, we headed down.

There was a careful bit on the summit ridge where a Polish climber later fell and slid a couple hundred metres, but was picked up by his team on the Football Field pretty much unharmed, luckily. After that it was following the path, which was already starting to fill with spindrift, and taking waypoints for the hoped-for descent from the Cassin. Take a left at Denali Pass, spot the wands and appreciate that it will be only a bit longer back to camp, food, water, sleeping bags. There was no-one else on the Autobahn, I think only one other team was ahead of us on the way down; it was strange having a quiet spell. We met one team who were on the way up – I remember it was 7pm because we listened to the Ranger's forecast on their radio with them, and none of us believed the forecast. We told them of the worsening weather we had seen, and were relieved to find the next day that they had turned around at Denali Pass.

After the sleep of the just, we joined the queue back down to 14 Camp the next morning and tucked into our stores

of bacon and burgers, anticipating a couple of rest days then off to the West Rib Cutoff to descend to the base of the Cassin, and hey-presto, that will be us on the route. Possibly the best weather day was our first rest day. After that we descended back into the prevailing weather chaos. More snow, sunny spells, wind and forecasts that were being derived from the weather system of a parallel but inverted universe. There were a couple of large avalanches just above camp in the middle of a couple of nights; the noise woke me with a violent start. But then most loud, rumbly noises do that these days.

On the waiting days we started touring the camp to check out the vernacular architecture and to see if there was anyone we knew – and of course, there was. We got a few cups of tea at other camps, and gave a few back to visitors to our tent. I provided Scottish shortbread to Polish, French, American and Bulgarian climbers; we were given coffee and hot chocolate, including the dried version to keep us going after they had descended. Every day we checked the weather board, talked to people with independent forecasts, watched the skies, modified plans and imagined a climbable mountain. There were a few other teams waiting for the Cassin. Some got to the same place we did – the West Rib Cutoff, ready to descend – and also turned around, unhappy with snow conditions. Many headed back to civilization, and



after seven days including one false start made in all seriousness, we saw a forecast for HEAVY SNOW (upper case, really) to happen in a couple of days. That afternoon, on 22 June, we packed up and headed down with still-heavy sledges intent on practicing eskimo rolls, on a poor track and with freezing winds. That was miserable and, going down Squirrel Hill, positively frightening. The sledge could twitch and take both it and me sliding over an edge that I didn't particularly want to see. But we made it, slowly but surely and with a lot of swearing and on-the-road modifications to pulling and braking systems, requiring stops undesirable in those temperatures.

We were out of the wind by 11 Camp and 11pm, and carried on down to 7800 Camp (I suppose calling that 78 Camp, or 7.8 Camp would have been too complicated),

where we knew someone that was in residence. Waking the next morning to warmth and blue skies, we knew it would be a good summit day for someone – in the latest 24 hour weather window – and for us it would be a basking day. We had some visitors from Brazil, India, Japan (with ukulele), and Poland and drank more tea, deciding that an early start to Kahiltna and the airstrip would be “fine, I'm sure” – any backlog should be cleared and we'll certainly make it there before the weather changes and planes won't be able to move. And that is what happened – the next day, after a slightly late start, we caught a taxi that arrived 10 minutes after we sledged into Kahiltna Base Camp; that was at about 2:15pm. By 3:30pm the last plane of the day had flown out – the promised weather system had moved in (at least they could spot the big ones) and people on the mountain were stormbound

for four days. We toasted them from the pint-pots of Talkeetna.

I spent a few days around Anchorage before my moved-forward flight home to Scotland. Day hikes, rock climbing; went up the only hill in the Chugach that I had knowingly ascended before leaving in 1986, on a distant Sunday with the local Sierra Club. Driving around, random-caught glimpses would pull out another memory and velcro it into reality, sometimes reshaping a background I had distorted. Spoke with my brother who was now living in Tennessee and with whom I don't often speak, and the nostalgia, or some other sentiment, had me talking with him about doing some sort of mountain thing, like Everest Base Camp Trek with him. But it wouldn't be until 2016 so we can fade back into our separate ways before then.

Montanjos, Spain - October 2014

Bryan Rynne

Most years Patrick Winter and I head off somewhere for some multi-pitch climbing (either sports or using modern, high-tech protection). This year we decided to go to Montanejos, a small village about 60 miles north-west of Valencia. Montanejos was once a major climbing venue, but it languished for a long time with a poor guide and a need for many of the routes to be re-equipped, and seems to be very quiet nowadays. However, local climber Ernesto Lopez, who runs a refugio just on the edge of town, has now re-equipped

many routes, and published a new, very good, climbing guide in 2007 (we bought the guide from him). We had been there for a look, and had a very good day's climbing, a couple of years ago, at the recommendation of Jane and Stuart Murdoch, and wanted to return to have a full week there.

Most of the climbing is on the walls of a long, narrow, steep-sided gorge, with routes of 100-200 metres, or in a subsidiary gorge. The walls of the gorge

look very steep and high, partly due to how narrow it is, but also because they are very steep. It would be a climbing paradise here if you could climb hard grade 7's - you could easily climb here for 6 months without running out of things to do. Unfortunately, Patrick and I don't climb hard grade 7's. In fact, although we have often done 6b's and some 6c's in Costa Blanca, we found that 6a was pretty tough here, and 6a+ was about our limit. Once we had recalibrated our expectations we had a very good week here, cherry picking



View of Pericondrío Tragal and Trilitate

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The sun shone the whole week, and even though it was the second week of October some days were almost 30 degrees.

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a selection of the local classics, roughly 100-150m, 4-6 pitch routes, mostly containing 6a+ pitches, together with plenty of single pitch stuff.

The rock is mostly steep, pocketed technical limestone, although a couple of the long routes featured some exciting diedres and aretes. One of the best routes of the week was Diedro Del Negre, 165m 6b(6a+ Oblig.) featuring about 60m of sustained, strenuous laybacking up the diedre - fortunately it was well-bolted! In fact, almost all the routes we did here were well bolted, although there is also 'trad' available if you want it. We also did the first three pitches of another local classic: La Luna, max 6b/6b+? which offered very steep but superb climbing on good holds. At the top of the third pitch of this much sought after route there is a spacious ledge, complete with a small wooden bench to allow climbers to have

lunch and admire the wonderful view before continuing, or in our case abbing off. Extremely civilized - if the belayer had a belay device featuring a guide mode it would be possible to sit with your feet up admiring the view, occasionally pulling the rope in when a cry of 'take in - PLEASE!!' wafts up from below.

Another excellent route, which we did on our previous visit, is Pericondrío Tragal, 6b, 150m, containing a stunning, very exposed, rising traverse. This is in the Pericondrío sector, in a subsidiary gorge above a stream, and opposite the road, which is tunneled through the rock about 50 metres above the stream. The routes here are accessed by walking across a dam. Rather than doing the same route again, we went to the same starting point and did Trilitate, 6a+, 100m, 4 pitches. This was not as good as Pericondrío Tragal, but very good nevertheless.

We finished the week with Cornelius Moliarte, 6a+, 160m, 5 pitches (the first pitch to get to the start, which wasn't strictly part of the route, would have been a tough 6b+ in Costa Blanca). A very good climb with continued interest and varied climbing, which drifted up and rightwards across a steep wall - presumably looking for the easiest line, since everything else around here was harder.

The sun shone the whole week, and even though it was the second week of October some days were almost 30 degrees. Fortunately, the mornings were cool, and due to the very meandering nature of the gorge, with its high walls, it was often possible to pick climbs and times of day when it wasn't too hot - we got this wrong on day two by going to Placa del Sol in the middle of the day (the name should have told us something), but we didn't make that mistake again.



Getting to the climbs is very easy. The gorge starts on the edge of town, literally 5 minutes walk from our apartment, and the first climbs at Sector Inicacion are another 5 minutes walk from the road. The furthest we walked was 30 minutes, and this was along an almost horizontal track through the gorge, so not a hard approach! Descent is usually by abseil, although some routes do finish at the top of the gorge, and it is possible to walk back to the town from there (not back to the start of the climbs though, unless you walk back up the gorge again).

Montanejos itself is a small spa town with a scenic, gently meandering river flowing along the edge of the town, with water apparently at 25 degrees. It has a modestly thriving tourist industry centred around pensioners coming to swim, or wallow, in the hot spring water. Patrick and I decided to forgo the pleasures of all this. However, this means that there is quite a bit of accommodation here. We stayed in a good, well-equipped apartment, less than two minutes from the town square (well, most of the town is less than two minutes from the town square), which contained a very pleasant bar serving good food. There, of course, also the refugio. This has accommodation and does very good pizzas, when it is open, which does not seem to be often.

Overall, I would say this an excellent place to go, although some of my finger joints are still aching. We had a very good week there.





What We Did On Our Holidays

David Small

Bruce and I had wanted a return match in 2014 with the Grand Cornier, Dent Blanche and Weisshorn, none of which we had got up in 2013, but this year's cold, wet Alpine summer ruled them out. In a ten day trip you don't have much time for sitting about waiting for the sun to come out and clear the ridges of snow, and we reckoned the best chance of good conditions lay in the Ecrins. So, to start with, Bruce booked us in for a couple of nights to a fine gite in the tiny village of Les Hieres above La Grave.

Les Hieres looks directly on to the north face of La Meije. It was after 6pm when we got to the gite and the chill evening air, coupled with the amount of snow that we could see on the ridge, made us think carefully about our options for the morrow – but probably not carefully enough.

Searching through the travelling library of guidebooks that we had brought with us, we both independently came up with Voie Davin as our most favoured option. This is a classic climb on the Aiguillette

du Lauzet, a prominent and readily accessible limestone peak of 2717m – the local equivalent of the Pap of Glencoe. We got going soon after breakfast, rather ignoring the fact that the route mainly follows a west facing chimney. Ok, the sun wouldn't reach us for a while, but that didn't matter, did it? It was August, after all, and we weren't going very high. Walking up to the start of the climbing kept us warm but, having seen nobody on the walk in, we found ourselves behind a Spanish couple at the first proper pitch,

and the wait in the shade chilled us as quickly and thoroughly as if we'd been on the Ben, queuing for Point Five in February. A combination of cold toes in cold rock shoes and cold limestone with sparse protection makes a mockery of the official grade of Voie Davin, which is not generous to begin with. As we got higher, the sun eventually began to warm us up, but the arrival of the sun coincided with our arrival at a band of loose rock. The Spanish couple knocked stones down on us, Bruce knocked them down on me and I was convinced I'd never, ever climbed with such a careless bunch of people. Then I got to the problem zone, where I could not avoid knocking some stones down myself, and my outlook became rather more charitable. We omitted the last few pitches of our route, taking to an easier scramble instead in order to get to the summit at a reasonable hour. As we descended in the late afternoon sunlight we resolved to take more account in future of aspect and temperature when choosing our "warm up" climbs.

The forecast for the next few days was good and we could hardly visit the Ecrins without climbing the Barre des Ecrins, the area's only 4000m peak. It is climbed from the Ecrins Hut at 3170m, but as the Ecrins Hut was full we stopped for a night at a hut lower down on the same glacier, the Glacier Blanc Hut (2542m). On my past visits I've found this hut to be rather more hospitable than its higher neighbour, but this time the guardian chose to put all the lights in the public area off at 9pm to enable the staff to retreat to a "snug" and celebrate someone's birthday. Well, at

least there was no pretence of customer service being at the heart of all they did. The next day, on our way up from the Glacier Blanc to the Ecrins Hut, we climbed the South Ridge of the Pic Du Glacier Blanc (3527m). This was a fine sunny route, mainly moving together on good rock, with the odd pitch and abseil thrown in for variety. The summit has superb views in all directions. I was feeling particularly untroubled by altitude that day, and rewarded myself when we got to the Ecrins Hut by having three helpings of the excellent main course at dinner.

The predictable followed; an uneasy night in a crowded, hot dormitory, my digestive system on strike and no appetite for breakfast at 3.30 a.m. However, as we plodded up the glacier I was just about well enough to enjoy the dawn when it came up above the Alpine peaks away to the east, a panorama including the Matterhorn and Mont Blanc. Later, there was sufficient interest in the scrambling on the summit ridge of the Barre des Ecrins to keep my mind off whatever my stomach might be up to. Added to the intrinsic interest of the knife edge ridge were the antics of a Polish couple in front of us. They were soloing; I don't know why, because one of them was clearly unable to cope with climbing on rock in crampons. Watching her struggle on relatively easy moves, with no margin of safety whatsoever, was nerve wracking; if she fell she was dead and so were we if she caught our rope as she went. If one were a saint I suppose one would have stopped to help them, but there was a keen wind blowing and, being who we are, we (like everyone else) just got past them

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as soon as we could and hastened on to the summit. There we met two of their friends and urged them to go and improve the situation.

By the time we had descended the full length of the summit ridge my innards were in a state of crisis and I was afraid that my gluttony on the previous evening was about to get its just rewards. But, for once, the crisis passed without any particular outcome and I was able to accompany Bruce on the short plod up to the Dome Des Ecrins 4015m. Although it is very near the Barre, the Dome somehow offers a much better view of the south side of La Meije and the peaks to the west of the Ecrins range so, if you are ever up there on a clear day and with time to spare, the Dome is well worth doing. Having enjoyed the panorama, we set off on the long descent in the heat of the day, back down the glacier to the Ecrins Hut, past the Glacier Blanc Hut and down the interminable zig zags of the path back to the car, which lay baking in the sun at Pre



de Madame Carle, some 2300 metres below the summit of the Barre.

We next stayed for a couple of nights in the village of Vallouise, in the splendid Gite d'Aigliere, which I would recommend to anyone looking for a base on that side of the Ecrins. From there we first had a day's rock climbing on the bolted valley crags above Ailefroide. The routes seemed to have got rather harder than when I last visited them, but Bruce was going well and so we had a good day climbing and discussing where to go next. Two objectives immediately appealed. One was the Aiguille Dibona, well known from guidebook photos everywhere, and the other was Les Bans, one of the peaks we'd seen from the summit of the Dome. To get to either of them we'd have to drive round to La Berarde, so after our second night in Vallouise we drove off in that direction.

As I drove, Bruce phoned the huts for the Dibona and Les Bans. The hut below the Dibona was full, but the Pilattes Hut below Les Bans could take us. During the conversation with the guardian Bruce was asked what peak and which route we intended to do, and I heard him reply "Les Bans, voie normale". Some hours later, after the long walk up from La Berarde up to the hut, we arrived to be told that the voie normale was out of condition with too much snow, that nobody was doing it and that it had in fact repulsed a party that very day. Neither Bruce nor I knows how to say in French "Why in Hell's name didn't you say that when we phoned earlier?", but those were the words (in English, and with several expletives deleted) that came to our lips. Our state of righteous indignation was not improved by what followed - the worst dinner either of us has ever eaten in an Alpine hut. Man, especially Alpine man,

cannot live by rice, a roasted tomato and mushy peas alone.

So early the next morning we walked away back down from the Pilattes hut, forsaking the high mountains for a multi-pitch bolted valley rock climb on the Tete Blanche, just down the road from La Berarde. We took a long time to find the start of our route, which was called "Camox" – the guidebook makes the way up from the road look easy and obvious, but it isn't. Camox is a three star route according to the guidebook, and I suppose it is if you ignore the long stretch of vegetation and loose rock between the two buttresses which the route follows. In fact you could make that two stretches of veg and loose rock, and three buttresses, if you want to do the route in full. But, looking down the valley, it was obvious that we were about to be rained on, so Bruce and I bailed out at the nearest abseil

point. A pair of Belgian climbers ahead of us pressed on, causing us to wonder if we were lacking in moral fibre, but the rain soon arrived, completely soaking us on our way down. Long before we got to our valley base for the night – the Belgian Alpine Club gite, as luck would have it – we were happy that we'd made the right decision.

In the BAC gite we were made very welcome but the residents were obviously concerned about the fate of the party ahead of us, who were also expected to stay there that night. When they hadn't got back by about 8pm, someone phoned the Mountain Rescue. About 9pm two gendarmes arrived to note the circumstances. About 9.30pm two very wet Belgian climbers traipsed inside, one of them sheepish at causing trouble, the other exulting in a long, trying day which had ended safely.

Meantime, Bruce and I were pondering what to do with the remaining two and a half days of our trip. The rain which had begun to fall while we were coming down the hill was hanging around and was not going to clear very quickly. If the Dibona hut had had places we would have gone there, but it didn't; so we decided to go to Chamonix instead, to climb the Aiguille du Peigne. This peak had defeated me once, and Bruce twice, so we both wanted to give it another go; and, in our optimism, we supposed that if we travelled there on Remaining Day One, and climbed it on Remaining Day Two, we would have time to climb something else on Remaining

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Day Two and a Half, before driving back to Geneva for the flight home.

So we spent the next two nights in the Plan Hut above Chamonix. Before dinner on our first night in the hut we chatted to two English guys who were up there as clients of Martin Moran, the intention being that the three of them would get up at 2 a.m., climb the Frendo Spur on the Aiguille du Midi and descend to Chamonix by a late afternoon telepherique. Oh well, we thought, our ambitions are more modest and we were certainly not confident about getting off the hill before the time of the last 'phrique, but we are doing it for ourselves, sans bergfuhrer.

Route finding low down is key to climbing the Aiguille du Peigne. You scramble up a couloir and then have to exit left at the correct point. Two years ago Bruce and I had gone too high; this time we went

left too early. The results were the same – much faffing and loss of time. But, at length, we got on route and gained height to the little col at which we left our boots, wearing rock shoes for the last three hundred and fifty feet or so. This consisted of lovely sound rock, with pitches of about Severe, leading to the most absurdly crenelated, knife edge summit ridge I have ever been on.

Our delight in having climbed the Peigne at last was tempered by awareness that the afternoon was far advanced. We had to get moving. The guidebook suggested a descent involving a fair amount of down climbing, but it seemed better to us to abseil as far as possible, so we did. Not all the anchors were in situ, but relatively soon we were back at our boots and began moving together down the way we had come up. All went well until history repeated itself again. On our previous

attempt on the Peigne we lost the true route of descent and ended up abseiling down a horrible loose couloir. I had been determined not to do that again on our latest visit and was sure I would be able to find the correct way. In reality, we got lost again at exactly the same point and the couloir was our only way out.

Bruce is more enthusiastic about horrible abseils than I am so I was content to let him do more than his share of pulling the rope down and untangling the mess as it embedded itself in the stonefields which lay between the steep bits of the couloir. In truth, I was beginning to feel the effects of the long day. As the twilight deepened, we came to a pitch which Bruce was confident we could down climb whereas I was convinced we should abseil again. Only when Bruce went first and scrambled down with ease did I realise that my weary mind was playing games, inventing difficulties where there were none.

By the time we regained complete safety, on the snowfield at the foot of the couloir up which we'd originally started, it about 9.30pm and pitch dark. There was no moonlight, but the stars were bright. As we sorted ourselves out in preparation for the walk back to the hut we looked up and saw the lights of several headtorches high on the Frendo Spur. We did not suppose it could be Martin Moran and party, still going at this hour after a 2a.m. start – surely it had to be someone else, probably a party starting late on purpose to enjoy a night climb in good weather. Or so we thought; in fact, it was Martin Moran and co, having

a bit of an epic, as subsequently described on his blog <http://www.moran-mountain.co.uk/blog/#frendo>.

The next morning we were too tired to do anything other than stroll from Chamonix up to Montenvers and then take the train back down. On the platform at Montenvers we recognised Nick Bullock and Tim Neill, two of the UK's leading Alpinists, both looking shattered and obviously just down off some long, high, difficult route on a remote Nordwand. Both Bruce and I would have liked to find out what they just climbed, but neither of us had the nerve to introduce ourselves and ask what they had been doing on their holidays.

Barre des Ecrins



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Ice Climbing and Falling in Cogne

Roo Finlayson

I hadn't really done any pure ice climbing and was aware of this gap in my climbing experience. My mate Phil had done a course in the Alps and knew the score, so with some shiny new ice screws (Black Diamond Express) and ropes (Beal Ice Lines) we headed off to Cogne via Geneva from London one Friday night in early February.

The plan was to drive all the way to Italy

that night. Of course the usual delays in hiring a car and getting done for speeding in the Mont Blanc tunnel (2km/h over the 40km/h speed limit apparently warrants a €40 fine!) meant that we didn't get in until well after midnight.

A wee lie in on the Saturday proved auspicious, as not only were the masses ahead of us on the popular classic Cascade de Lillaz 3 250m *** but it meant

we could continue climbing after everyone had gone home. The bottom section of the Cascade gets light until late so we used the privacy to top rope some harder routes and practice screw placements.

The next day we ventured slightly further up the valley to the Valnontey – Rive Gauche sector and the no less popular Thoule 3+ ***. It was a stunning day with perfect conditions – not too cold but



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I was getting really pumped now but the top was almost there. I hammered both picks into the ice above the steep section with relief. I was almost out of gas but I had made it. Happy days.

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enough to keep the ice in place (or so we thought!) We took the steepest line up the first pitch to avoid the crowds then set up below the crux.

Phil fancied it so I belayed with two equalised placements about half a metre above me on the slope. He describes his experience as follows:

“I was a little daunted by the steepness of the next 12m of ice but this was what we had come to Italy to climb, so off I went. The ice was hard and I was getting pumped. There were only a few meters to go. The hardness of the ice had been

making placing the screws tricky so I was thankful that there was a perfect old hole a couple of meters from the top of the steep section. I had read in a US article that re-boring old holes was almost as strong as placing screws in fresh ice so I re-bored the hole with a longish screw. I was getting really pumped now but the top was almost there. I hammered both picks into the ice above the steep section with relief. I was almost out of gas but I had made it. Happy days.

I went to take a big step onto the shallow slope above. As I pulled up, the ice where the right hand pick was seemingly firmly

embedded disintegrated. The sudden backward jolt popped the left hand pick out of the ice. As I pinged backwards I let out the loudest “arghhhhhhhhhh” possible. The other climbers, who were out of sight on the lower part of the climb, must have thought I had been shot. As I arced rapidly out from the ice I had enough time to think: ‘this is probably going to hurt’ and decided it was best to close my eyes and wait for the impact. Luckily Ruairidh being a little lighter gave an excellent dynamic belay, so the expected impact didn’t materialize.

I came to rest upside down in a tangle

of ropes. I did a quick scan for injuries. Nothing hurt. I waited a couple of seconds to let the adrenalin wear off a little. Still no pain. I couldn't believe it. The biggest fall of the year if not ever and I was, other than a slight rope burn from getting my leg tangled, unscathed. Ruairidh lowered me back to the belay. I lay in the snow shaking for a few moments until it was suggested that I stopped pansying about and give him a belay, so we could finish the climb and drive back to Geneva without the need for more speeding in the tunnel.

Two valuable lessons learned luckily without injury: don't switch off mentally until you are actually safe; and when the angle of the ice changes suddenly, be aware that the quality of the ice may have changed for the worse".

From where I was standing: I saw him pop off, braced and locked the belay. Boom! I was pinged a metre up the slope and on to my side as the screws took the fall. Ouch! A metre and a half of slack and that would have been a pair of

broken legs but the ice screws and ropes did their job and the belay was solid.

When I went up, I could see where Phil had come off and indeed the ice conditions were odd. What felt like it would bite needed a good few extra swings to smash through the top layer and into the reasonably good stuff below. I scrambled up the remainder of the slope above the lip and stared at the view in awe, pumped to bits and utterly elated. I've only experienced this feeling a few times in climbing (Jelly Roll on Cloggy and The Strand at Gogarth in recent times) but it's half the reason I climb; working hard and an awesome view appear to be the essential ingredients.

Some relatively rapid (but speeding ticket free!) driving and pinpoint navigation got us back to the airport in time for our flight back. Monday mornings back at work are always painful after a weekend's climbing but worth it a million times over, particularly when you have photos and stories like these to show to your mates at work!

On his attempt Phil fell from the lip to a point below this photograph!

