

JMCS 2018 Contents



Alpine Trip Simon Opit

Like a lot of climbers, my summer months inevitably get planned around either one or two visits to the Western Alps. The annual dose of: soaring snow-covered mountains, alpine meadow naps, glacial puzzle solving, brutal hut walks and 'tower of babel' linguistic diversity, becomes a major focal point of every year. For me, this has been the case for more than 25 years.

As soon as the days start getting longer and the winter season begins to show signs of dripping to a stand still (and the urge for warm, functioning fingers becomes a medical necessity), my thoughts become embroiled in the next 'how, when and where?'. This year was no exception but as it so happens, this year was also my sixtieth birthday. I was determined that this auspicious occasion (well, for me at

least) would be distinguished by a trip full of fun and success – not always traits traditionally associated with endeavours so dependent on long spells of good weather.

And this brings me to the crux of the matter. No sooner had the winter-long angst of weather watching become redundant, than I begin to scour the ECMWF long-range charts and other

esoteric and occult sources, for signs of the holy grail; namely, Anticyclonic nirvana. So while I admit I have a bit of problem, it hurts no one and the torment is largely private!

Of course, this obsessive behaviour is largely irrelevant, not because of the notorious inaccuracies of long range computer modelling but because as a father of two and a reluctant full time worker, in reality, all choice is illusory. In addition, my similarly hindered climbing partner, Kenny, determined we only had 10 days to play with, so we bought our air tickets to Geneva (which would at least preserve some flexibility) and set our departure date for July 14th.

For preparation, Kenny and I managed a number of training days out - with one particularly memorable weekend coinciding with a glorious spell of summer weather. Such opportunities are to be grasped with both hands and that Saturday we drove to Skye and scrambled along the Clach Glas – Blaven ridge followed by a cooling swim in a burn before driving to the top of the Bealach na Bà for a wild camp. Next day, we dropped down to the bottom of Sgurr a`Chaochain and climbed

the four-star classic Cioch Nose route before traversing back to the car. It was a glorious few days and actually took a little pressure off knowing we had had some of the best Scotland can offer in summer. However the obsessive behaviour continued and finally, the decision made that while the general weather picture across the alps was to be somewhat changeable and far from perfect, the Italian Monta Rosa range seemed to promise the best option with an apparent pattern of stable mornings followed by afternoon murk. We settled on a plan for ticking the so-called Italian Haute Route with as many 4000ers as we could collect in the days at our disposal.

At this point I will simply say that time passed and before we knew it we were waking up inside what felt like a concrete cell but was, in fact, a motel on the outskirts of Geneva airport. However, a small, but potentially significant fly was about to land in our alpine ointment. On waking and packing, I could not find the keys to the padlock securing the large North Face duffle bag containing most our most important kit such our tent, stove, ropes and rack etc. Frantic searching



“As soon as we pitched the tent and a brew was brewed and consumed, I sought out the local forecast and Lo! - the weather Gods had good news.”



and re-searching was followed by much self-loathing, followed again by ever more frantic searching but the inevitable conclusion had to be accepted. It would seem that I had left the padlock keys in my wife's car (when she dropped as off at the airport) and that was that. As is usual, Kenny was the epitome of reason and positive karma (one of the reasons I climb with him!) and so we set off regardless all the while mentally exploring the various options that we had. After a wonderful drive over the Col du Grand-Saint-

Bernard and along the Val 'Aosta we headed for the beautiful Gressoney-Saint-Jean. On arriving at the campsite we mentioned our predicament and after we managed to convince them that the bag was actually ours, the owner silently slipped away and returned with a giant pair of bolt clippers and Hey Presto! we were back in business.

As soon as we pitched the tent and a brew was brewed and consumed, I sought out the local forecast and

Lo! - the weather Gods had good news. It would seem that, while not wall to wall sunshine, the weather was very usable and we hatched a plan to spend a night in the Quintino Sella hut (3585m) and then next morning climb Castor (4223m). It turned out to be a straightforward ascent notable for two things; one, the sheer beauty of the snow arêtes on the way to the summit, and two, the presence of the entire Italian army (or so it seemed). Thankfully, even in our non-acclimatised state, we were able to out run them



Liskamm summit

and get to the summit first where we were able to enjoy the very small top in peace and safety. We enjoyed the spectacular descent to the top lift station and eventually returned to the campsite to pitch the tent, go shopping, cook dinner (- a feast of fresh Gnocchi in tasty sauce washed down with finest local red wine). That night we went to sleep feeling great that we managed to tick our first 4000'er only a day after arriving in Gressoney.

As is often the case, other more mundane things provided satisfaction too. Our cooking capacity was somewhat limited by the fact, that just prior to leaving Edinburgh, we were forced to rationalise our gear (for obvious reasons) and the second stove was one of the victims of the cull. However, as it happens, another distinguishing characteristic of Kenny's, is his talent for creative culinary solutions. So he and the single 1L MSR Windburner stove consistently delivered and our morale and wallets were eternally grateful.

With one nights sleep back down in the valley, it took just a quick peek at the local forecast and numerous diverse confirmations (how did we ever manage

before Wi-Fi?) for us to decide to 'make hay while the sun shone' and head back up high again the next day. And by high, I mean to almost as high as the Western Alps can get.

Our plan was to get up early and take the various lifts from Staffal to the Lis Glacier and make the long approach to the Margherita Hut (4554m). As usual the day started eventfully. Our otherwise very nice and reliable hire car decided at this crucial juncture to refuse to start. This immediately threw our plan into jeopardy; as we needed to catch the early 'climbers special' in order to be able to approach the hut while the glacier was still frozen. By some miracle (or was it the guardian angel that I was beginning to suspect had taken us under its wing?), Kenny convinced an early-rising - but thankfully convivial - Slovenian to allow us use of his jump-leads to get our car on the road again. We were up and running in a few minutes and managed to catch the lift. Once in the tele-cabin, all we had to do was relax and take in the stunning scenery that the southern aspect of the Monte Rosa presents. After some strenuous via-ferrata type fun, we put our crampons on and roped up for the glacial slog. At

Somewhere on the East Ridge during Liskamm descent



some point we stopped on the glacier to cook a breakfast of Chilli Con Carne and Chocolate pudding, which fuelled us enough to blast up to the hut.

The Margherita hut is perched on the summit of the 4th highest mountain in the Alps (Signalkuppe, 4554m) and our arrival signalled our simultaneous unravelling. I immediately lost my glacier glasses down the vertical face, dropping 1000m into Switzerland, and our heads would not stop thumping. The loss of my glasses immediately set off alarm bells, as I knew there was no way we could either climb or even descend the next day without eye protection. However, another miracle ensued, when the hut guardian managed to find a pair of rather fetching glacier glasses left behind by a previous occupant. One problem had been solved but the effects of altitude continued to have a vice-like grip on my brain, even throughout the staggeringly impressive dinner. It was a strangely familiar feeling – but not from climbing (where I've always acclimatised very quickly) - but from memories of hangovers from days gone by. Throughout the long (but short!) night,

the time passed in waves of panic and episodes of impending doom.

Thankfully, the following morning we managed to stuff some food down our mouths (and even more in our pockets) and we gratefully set off down the steep slopes under the hut and traversed across to the first summit of the day – the Zumsteinspitze (4563m). Once we descended from that top the glacier was immediately enveloped in a very familiar Scottish white out! Martin Moran's warning that the "featureless glacier terrain becomes very confusing in mist" proved to be the case but we dug deep into our winter toolbox and deployed our non-alpine skill set (by utilising a map and compass) and eventually we were heading back up and along another delightfully narrow snow arête to the summit of the Parrotspitze (4432m).

Increasingly, not only did the weather improve but our strategy of starting high and ticking the summits off as we descended, ensured our altitude muffled heads cleared too. By the time we reached the Corno Nero (4321m) we both felt so good, that

we abandoned the rope and sacks and soloed up the perfect neve and little rocky top to finish our traverse. We had completed all five of the 4000m peaks and could now enjoy glorious sunshine and the stunning views south, across to the sweeping Milanese plains and the Po Basin.

Our return to the valley neatly coincided with the only storm we encountered during our trip, so we welcomed the two-day hiatus and made plans for our grand finale. The object of our desires was a 'given' really, as whenever we were back in the valley, our eyes were unavoidably drawn to the hulking mass of Liskamm (4527m).

We settled on climbing the Cresta Sella up to the East summit (the highest) with a descent down the worryingly narrow East Ridge. After a night at the lowly (in more ways than one!) Gnifetti hut, we ascended the now familiar Lis Glacier but once we branched off west, we were alone and the big mountain atmosphere of the SE face of Liskamm weighed on our minds, as the more serious nature of what we were now attempting was unmistakable.

Our route took us up some steep ground up and eventually over the Ill Nasso, to then immediately make a steep descent to an incredibly exposed col North of that summit. This was now the beginning of the South ridge. After so many days climbing snow, it felt great to be pulling on rock and negotiating tight mixed chimneys. Eventually the ridge became a steep narrow fluting of neve. A wild exposed pitch led up to the precipitous East ridge, giving incredible views back down into Switzerland, far, far below.

A quick scamper along the ridge took us to the summit, but mindful of the deteriorating snow conditions, we compressed our congratulatory satisfaction and started the long nervy descent down the East Ridge. For much of the way down Kenny and I more or less moved side by side with each other - one of us on the Italian side and the other on the Swiss side of the ridge. As soon as it was practical, we dropped off the south side of the ridge. We made our way back down the Lis Glacier, towards the Gnifetti Hut and eventually the lifts down to the valley.

“After so many days climbing snow, it felt great to be pulling on rock and negotiating tight mixed chimneys”

It was a superb end to our trip and overall could not have been bettered for the amount of time we managed to spend high in this amazing environment. I felt my weather obsessing paid off and the trip's agenda of maximising the number of summits with the maximum amount of fun was completely achieved. However, our Guardian Angel seemed to desert us on our trip home but suffice to say, by this point we'd had so much success in the glorious Monte Rosa that we were able to cope with the nightmarish logistics that began to unfold.

(Editor's note, by way of explanation – they missed their flight home from Geneva!)

Glenshee from Broad Cairn. Glas Maol is on the top left, cliffs of Creag An Dubh Loch on the right.



Broad Cairn on Skis Stuart Buchanan

Back in the mists of time of the last millennium, David and Alasdair Buchanan Nordic skied from Glenshee over to Broad Cairn and back, a classic tour of some 17 miles across the entire width of the plateau. Through rose-tinted spectacles they described langlaufing on perfect spring snow, taking advantage of cover that lasted well into the longer days of March and April.

Having missed out on this excellent adventure the first time around, I was keen to do it myself. January brought an alignment of suitable weather, snow-cover and childcare. What was

lacking was daylight and someone to share it with.

I slipped on my old leather boots, clipped on similarly antiquated "misery sticks" as Charlie calls them, picked up my leather basket Swix poles and skinned up from the Glenshee ski centre just as the morning light was brushing the hills with gold. The plan was to ascend Glas Maol and then take advantage of the height to make a long descending traverse round the flanks of Cairn of Claise and Tolmount to arrive at a neck between Glen Clova and Glen Callater. From there, a short

"I zig-zagged up an eroded skinning track to the side of the ski runs, warming up with the exercise while my lungs got used to the cold air."

descent would be followed by steep skinning to the summit of Broad Cairn.

I zig-zagged up an eroded skinning track to the side of the ski runs, warming up with the exercise while my lungs got used to the cold air. Soon I passed the last ski lift and the summit of Glas Maol lay ahead, an upturned pudding bowl. The steep icy slopes overcame the adhesion of my skins, so it was time to kick steps until the angle eased and I could skin once again. An odd sense of dislocation assailed me – the unbroken curve of the summit forming the horizon, and the blue sky above providing no reference for scale, felt like the curvature of a tiny planet. When I finally spotted the summit cairn it was far off to my left. I stopped for a hot drink and some extra layers – the wind had picked up from the west and was bitter. Off came the skins and the first descent of the day began.

A combination of very variable snow – from windslab to icy and back again – skinny skis and rather floppy boots meant few marks were awarded for

grace, even after the first few fearful turns. However, with skis rattling over the sastrugi I managed a rapid pace cutting a line and maintaining momentum over the humps and bumps towards Cairn of Claise, then on down towards Tolmount. After an exhilarating 10 minutes at speed, the angle eased and the terrain became rough, my isolation enlivened by white mountain hares scattering left and right for company.

Broad Cairn's ramparts rose from the edge of the plateau. They looked steep. I descended to the base of the slopes, put my skins back on and started up. Fortunately, the slopes weren't as sheer as they appeared, and I climbed steadily up to a cleft and then to the rocky summit itself. For the first time I turned around and saw the entirety of the plateau, extending not just back West to Glenshee, but South to Mayar in Glen Clova.

After a quick lunch it was time to head back. Rather than descend the steep slopes I'd climbed, I headed North to Cairn Bannoch and down the whaleback ridge of Fafernie

to Tolmount. The wind that had previously given me a help of my way was now in my face, and was biting cold. I plodded up the slopes towards Carn an Tuirc. After the exhilaration of covering ground rapidly on light feet on the way out this was slow and hard work, now in my down jacket to keep warm. Finally, I reached the shoulder of Cairn an Tuirc from where there is one of my favourite descents – a broad gully line that curves around and down onto a wide easy angled slope, eventually reaching a river a mile or so from the road. This is a lovely descent that curves round from the north following a broad stream line.

Unfortunately this time the cover was a bit limited, and the line narrow. My legs were too tired to properly enjoy it or ski it in style, and a couple of impromptu snow profiles resulted. I reached the river and then, later, the road feeling knackered, and somewhat bruised and blistered. However, that part of the journey will fade just as the bruises, leaving golden memories of the joy of covering ground fast on Nordic skis. It was just as fine a tour as Alasdair and David had.



Canadian Rock Ruairidh Finlayson

So after getting thoroughly spanked in Yosemite last year, but very much enjoying the process all the same, heading off on another North American trip so soon may have seemed a little rash. However, after talking to Alan Carne in Verdon about Squamish in particular, “it’s like sport climbing with gear (and) it’s probably the best granite climbing venue in the world”, I felt somewhat reassured.

The plan was to fly into Vancouver in late August and head straight to a lesser known sport climbing area called Skaha for a warm up, before heading to the granite capital of Canada, Squamish. There were originally four of us on the trip but unfortunately Phil had to pull out as his dad fell ill. Locals would kindly join to make up the numbers on the harder routes...

Skaha:

Skaha is known for its vast number of largely single pitch gneiss sport climbs on a collection of bluffs outside the town of Penticton, about 4.5 hours east of Vancouver, near the US border. It’s famous for its lakes, fruit and excellent wine. Rainfall is low here and it’s technically a desert - yes a desert in Canada - which is weird but seems to work just fine, particularly for the



climbing and the vines.

Overall, we found the climbing here quite hard. Steep and crimpy was the order of the day, which we normally can cope with, but we found that French grades don't translate that well (or perhaps Kalymnos is just super soft!) I only got up 5.11d on-sight here which apparently translates to about 7a on most tables, despite on-sighting 7b in Kalymnos earlier in the year without too much trouble.

On our favourite climbs (e.g. Brilliant Pebbles 5.10c/6a+) we found ourselves moving slowly up technical, near vertical rock, between crimps using little rails for feet. This was against a stunning setting - rolling tree-lined hills in a sub-alpine environment. Further up the grades, perhaps crossing over at around 5.11b/6c, it becomes steeper and changes style to overhangs and thuggishness.

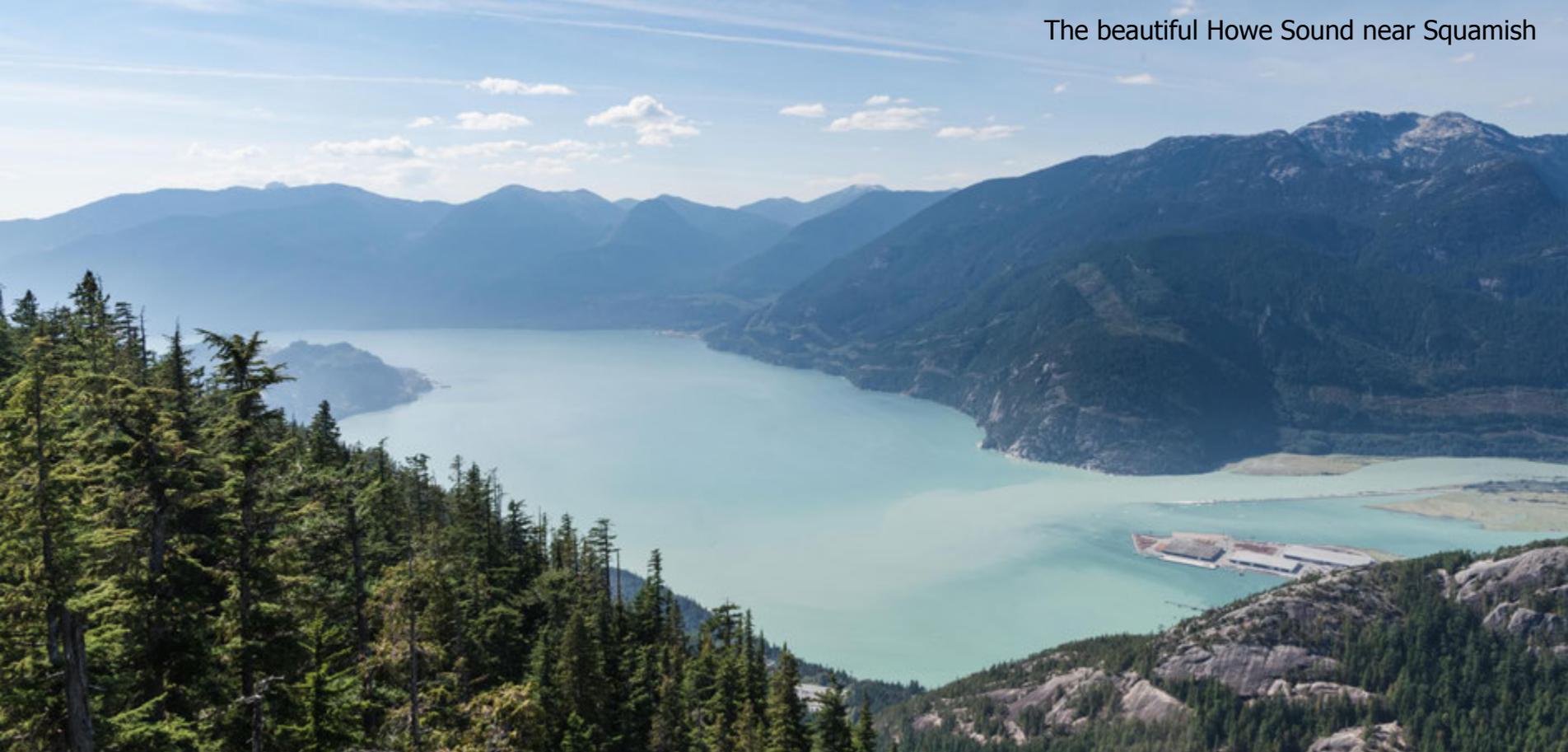
The climbing is wonderful and the atmosphere chilled, so it's well worth ignoring the grades and enjoying the routes. There is some trad here but frankly there's so much high quality sport that you probably wouldn't bother, unless you were staying for well over

“The climbing is wonderful and the atmosphere chilled, so it's well worth ignoring the grades and enjoying the routes.”

a week, which you probably wouldn't because Squamish is there and draws you with some force to the west.

Squamish:

Feeling thoroughly destroyed, though mostly in the fingers, we headed to Squamish, which consists of some of the finest cracks, slabs and bridging (or 'stemming') anywhere in the world, usually with straight forward gear and bolted anchors (hence "sport climbing with gear"). Ease of access is another bonus, with the local town only minutes away from the beautiful crags and big walls alike.



This set up is not lost on the North Americans, nor foreigners, and it would be hard to describe the place as quiet - but it doesn't feel rammed either. There's a lot of high quality climbing packed into a relatively small area; but there's also enough trees and secluded spots that you can climb 'top 100 classics' all day without seeing many people, at least when we were

there (early September).

It looked as though we would have 5 days of glorious sunshine before it crapped out, as it often does on the West Coast of Canada, so we pushed it hard to max-out the climbing while we could. We started on Smoke Bluffs near Squamish itself, on classics such as Laughing Crack (5.7), Quarryman

(5.8), Wonderland (5.9) and Popeye and the Raven (5.10d) - VS to E2/E3 and all ***.

We continued on a similar theme the next day at Murrin Park: e.g. The World's Toughest Milkman (5.9), Mr O'clock (5.10d) and Horrors of Ivan (5.11c) - all ***. Unlike the sport routes, the trad grades seem to

translate pretty well - Horrors of Ivan felt solid E4 6a/+ which it apparently translates to. Pretty much destroyed my left bicep on that - not totally ideal with several days' hard climbing to go...

The next day was a slab-tastic multipitch on The Chief called Deirdre (5.8). The Chief is the main show in town, visible from everywhere, a bit like a small Half Dome but with substantially more high quality free climbing. This is the classic that every man and his dog wants to do - and you can see why - nice line, great views, reasonable grade. Reminded me of a big version of Spartan Slabs/ Hammer.

We had been scared into getting up at the crack of dawn for this one to avoid the crowds, and because we were climbing as a three. As it turned out we were the only ones on the route for several hours, which was rather nice and took all the pressure off. This also meant we would be off the route fairly early, could have a second breakfast in town and chill out for the rest of the day.





Next was a full day's climbing on the Chief with Alanna, a super-cool Vancouver lass we knew through a mate of a mate. We started on a four pitch classic called Bullethead East (5.10c) followed by one and two pitch classics Exasperator (5.10c) and Rutabaga (5.11a or E3/E4). My 'large finger locks' technique definitely took a step up that day - Regents Street at Millstone has felt much easier since.

The Grand Wall:

The next day was the big one, The Grand Wall (9 pitches, 5.11a or E3/E4), oft quoted as THE route in Squamish. All the exposure, epic pitches and all achievable in a day. This was also THE route for Ru, as I'd been eyeing this up and 'training' for it all year by throwing myself at E4s with varying degrees of success (formerly not much, latterly lots) to make sure I

was utterly solid at the grade.

This was to be attempted with another lass called Ro (short for Roberta) who I thought was another mate of a mate but turned out was a random I'd met on the Squamish facebook group. Thankfully she was very nice indeed and utterly competent. She had been out of it with a nasty injury for a while so didn't want to lead many of the

Me on Exasperator (5.10c) with The Grand Wall above



itches and certainly not the harder ones. This suited fine.

Anyway, Ru and Ro (couldn't make it up!) started pretty damn early to make sure we were first on the route. Of course we weren't. A frankly rude Italian-French couple led another route to get to the true start, as we scrambled up the easy way, and led right through us as we stood there pretty much all geared up, all without saying a word other than lightly cursing in one of their respective Latin languages.

Of course it turned out they were super competent, cruising ahead of us after a few pitches, and really nice, offering to send a photo they took of me on the super-classic Split Pillar pitch. Chances are I'll probably never see them again...or that epic photo... damn. Interestingly they also said that the conversion from French grades is a total nonsense - agreed!

I actually found the Split Pillar pitch the hardest on the route but is supposedly only 5.10b (E1/E2). Presumably the first ascensionists had hands the size of Thor and could jam the whole way - I had to jam,

layback, jam. The next pitch, The Sword (5.11a), is said to be the crux. Big dynamic moves on a thin layback. Actually felt cruisy(ish) compared to Rutabaga the day before.

Then comes a second pumpy bolt ladder and rope to wrangle with (A0) both of which detract slightly from the free climbing classiness of the route - but not overly so given how quickly they can be despatched with and the quality of the rest. Then comes the other crux for many, Perry's Layback (5.11a), which is a thankfully fully bolted, feet-on-slab, mega-pumpy overhanging layback traverse. Superb. More classic and often sustained 5.10 climbing gets you to the well-named Bellygood Ledge, before the safety of the forest track down to the base. I think we were up and down in less than 6 hours so decent time made.

The rain came as expected the next day but we were able to squeeze in another half day's climbing at Cheakamus Canyon and I got my 5.12a on-sight sport tick (7a+ apparently).

Conclusion:

The old man often says 'you make

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your own luck’ - however, anybody who’s read anything decent on the subject of luck, will happily tell you this is a complete nonsense. You can’t ‘make your own luck’ as that’s against its very definition. However, I do believe in enhancing the possibility of things working out quite well - and I suspect this is what he really means.

After some severely bad luck with Phil pulling out, we were blessed

by obscenely good luck on so many levels. We missed the smoke from nearby forest fires by a few days, we had superb weather when it mattered and we met some excellent partners. Part of this was down to some damn good planning, if I may say so myself, and some was genuine blind luck, all of which made for a wonderful holiday.

FAQs: Would I do it again? In a heartbeat. Easier climbing than Yosemite? Not necessarily, just more accessible and more across the grades. Best granite climbing venue in the world? Yes. Was the trip an anti-climax after all that prep? Na it was great - was good to crush something after five days of hard climbing that was beyond me 12 months ago, and the UK trad prep was awesome fun.

Tips: early September is the perfect time to go, make sure to train on cracks and slabs in the UK (Peaks, Llanberis, Etive), join the Squamish facebook group, single 60m rope is fine for the majority of routes, take several sets of cams (2+) or meet partners with more there, take lots of slingdraws but less quickdraws if you have cams with slings. Enjoy!



Looking straight down The Grand Wall (5.11a)



Ski Touring in the Lyngen Alps

Stuart Buchanan

At short notice, Davy More invited me onto a ski touring trip with David Wilson (who some of you may have met) to the Lyngen Alps in the very far North of Norway (69.5 degrees North), after Mary-Lucy was unable to make the trip due to injury.

It was quite incongruous to leave Edinburgh at a reasonable time of day and after two relatively short flights arrive in Tromso, well north of the Arctic circle. The irony that skiing there is becoming more and more popular as global warming affects ski touring further south was not lost on me.

We stayed at the fantastic FabLab, near Lyngseidet in the centre of the peninsula. FabLab is an outreach program from MIT run by Haakon, a huge Viking with lots of interesting stories to tell about the history of the region. The hub of FabLab consists of a traditional Viking longhouse where we ate like Jarls, surround by comfortable chalets sleeping 5-6. We were sharing accommodation with Steve Jones and his aspirant guide Max Cole, who were

guiding another group. The original plan was that we'd be completely independent from them, but as there wasn't enough space in the other group's hire car for Max, we ended up skiing with Max each day and so getting guided for free.

The food was superb, with smoked salmon and porridge in the morning and big stews of elk, lamb, or reindeer in the evening. One thing to avoid is Rutten salmon, which looked like smoked salmon but tasted as the name suggests! I'm sure it's an acquired taste, one which I don't intend to acquire.

The logistics of the skiing was/were very relaxed. There was no need to get up early, the snow was down to the road (at sea-level) and most of the touring was within 30 minutes' drive of the FabLab. So we typically set out about 9am and returned by 4pm for showers and pre-dinner beers. Very civilized indeed compared with crack of dawn starts in crowded huts further south.

We were there in mid-April and the weather and snow conditions were unusually poor with cloud and rising temperatures. On seeing the photographs afterwards, Mary-Lucy described it as looking rather Scottish! The snow was not freezing overnight at sea level, which made for some very soft descents at the end of the day. However, there was generally very good cover and the snow higher up was good.

Most of the peaks were 1200-1400m in altitude, typically starting from sea-level, and non-glaciated, so made for very reasonable day-tours. It was possible to go deeper into the peninsula and climb more serious glaciated peaks, but we didn't.

The geography is very Scandinavian, with steep silver birch forests up to a tree-line at around 400m, where the angle typically eased off before steepening again to the summit. Descents were generally broad and not too steep.

A very short summary of the peaks we climbed gives a flavour:

- 20th April – Runtinden (800m). Short half day tour after it stopped raining.

- 21st April – Rundfjallet (1483m). Very flattering easy slopes on the descent that just ran for miles.
- 22nd April – Fastalstinden (1275m). Spent most of the day in cloud. Told it was spectacular when clear!
- 23rd April – Daltinden, (1533m). Classic of the area with a great north face with 30 degree section. Very fine descent.
- 24th April – Storgarton (1250m). A peak right at the northernmost end of the peninsula, and the furthest we drove all week. Views would have been fantastic had the cloud lifted.
- 25th April – Rornestinden (1040m). A cirque of peaks around a very nice hut for lunch. With a little more enthusiasm earlier in the week one could easily ski an extra peak after lunch.

We had a fantastic week and I'd highly recommend the area for the quality of touring, FabLab for food and accommodation, and Max as a guide. I wonder if I can go next year...

Here is a fuller diary of the trip -

Thursday 19th April
Arrived Tromsø 1910 via Oslo. David Wilson met us with a hire car and we

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drove to a hotel just at the edge of the peninsula where I enjoyed a reindeer stroganoff.

Friday 20th April - Rundtinden
Woke up to rain. Had breakfast, bought provisions and then drove to Lyngseidet to meet Steve and Max at the “FabLab”. By the time we got there the rain had stopped and the cloud was lifting so we decided to go up Rundtinden, an 800m peak just to the north of the village. As you'd expect, the snow was a bit soggy but we were able to ski from the car up tracks

FabLab, with one of the chalets on the right.



through the steep birch forest. Above the tree line the slope relented slightly at a lovely circular hut with a fireplace in the middle. We joined Steve and his party in the hut for some lunch then headed on and up into the clouds. An hour or so of skinning mellow slopes brought us to the summit, with views into the fjords on either side of the peninsula on the way up.

The descent started with a very flattering layer of fresh snow on a firm base but by the time we reached the

tree line the snow was heavy and soft and deep if you made the mistake of leaving the snowmobile tracks that formed an impromptu piste. However we all descended safely if not elegantly back to the car by 3:30pm in time for tea and cake.

Our accommodation was one of five chalets surrounding a Viking longhouse, each with characteristic peaks carved as horses. In the evening we repaired to the longhouse for an enjoyable meal of lamb and elk seated around a

long table in high backed chairs each inscribed with the name and height of a local peak with the top cut to represent their profile. With dogs at our feet and drink in our hands we told sagas of adventures like true Viking Jarls!

Saturday 21st April - Rundfjallet
Thanks to a combination of a hot chalet, sunrise around 4am and the lingering effects of dehydration I was up early. The weather was a bit cloudy but showed signs of clearing. Over a breakfast of porridge, smoked salmon

and Norwegian fudgy cheese Max proposed we “stretch our legs” and ski up Rundfjallet, a 1483m peak 5 minutes up the road. Like skiing up Ben Nevis, we thought.

After a leisurely start we left the car just before 9am, following a track by the side of a ravine. Big clawed footprints has us guessing if there might be wolves about, though we later decided it was probably just a big dog being taken for walkies!

The track ended at a picturesque hut, from where we descended to the stream bed and up the other side. This low, the snow was soft and deep with plenty of air pockets to collapse and bury our skies in a foot or more of sugary mush. Max broke trail through the silver birch forest while we toiled behind him. His route finding was excellent and before too long we reached a firebreak that had seen some traffic and where the snow was more packed down. Up this we zigzagged steeply before breaking out above the tree line to the sunlit open slopes, less steep and with more consolidated snow.

We had a break, admiring the fjord

and the surrounding peaks, some partially obscured by a veil of cloud before heading onwards and upwards. Our peak was similarly hidden, but as we ascended the cloud shifted and we beheld the rocky East face of Rundfjallet, riven with the debris of many avalanches that had thundered down the imposing crags.

We traversed below the face and climbed through the cloud to a bealach and a partial inversion. Where before the had been a cold breeze the air was now still, and the sun gently fried us as we ascended the final slopes to the summit, the snow balling up on our skins. The summit was busy with several other parties and a drone incongruously zipping around like an angry wasp spoiling the otherwise tranquil peace. To the south and west similarly size peaks thrust through the cloud, all oddly truncated and flat topped from a glacial ice sheet. We removed our saturated skins, had a bite to eat and tightened our boots for the nearly 1500m of descent back to the dark blue waters of the Lyngen Fjord. Max led off down the shallow summit slopes and we followed, adding our flowing lines to the bright white paper.

The descent down from the bealach was steeper, on snow baked soft by the low sun. Our lines became less elegant but still continuous. Below, the cloud enveloped us in its cool embrace but the snow improved, protected by the cloud and NE aspect. Soon enough we left the cloud and once more beheld the wide gentle slopes leading us down to the steep birch forests, the ravine and the sea.

The snow flattered our skill as we carved broad turns down untracked slopes, savouring each one as we got ever closer to the trees we knew flagged bottomless sugary snow bog.

Max hit it first, his skis sinking out of sight but kept his footing. We traversed to the firebreak, hoping for better conditions from the passing of others. We found steep, soft snow, liable at any point to collapse under the skier, leaving them with their skis a foot or more below the unreliable surface and often their pole sunk up to the grip.

Where once we carved great parabolas in the snow, now the aim became to descend without injury by whatever means necessary. Side slips, kick turns

“Where once we carved great parabolas in the snow, now the aim became to descend without injury by whatever means necessary..”



Max skiing from the summit of Rundfjallet. Daltinden, showing the face we skied a couple of days later is in the background.

and snow plows part of the repertoire as we struggled downwards then traversed out to take us out of the ravine and back to the car.

We eventually received respite in the form of ski-do tracks which we gratefully followed to the ice covered river, a wide highway providing easy flat skinning back to the car. This we reached just before 5pm, having had a longer day than expected though with 1100m of superb skiing.

Our thoughts turned to rehydration, tea and showers but on returning to the

chalet we discovered that there was a water cut affecting the whole village! As compensation, when we turned up to dinner salt-encrusted and thirsty, our hosts had provided free wine and soft drinks. These failed to offset what was an excessively salty meal of whale carpaccio (somewhat reminiscent of liver) salt cod and salty sausages. Fortunately the water came back on in time for showers before bed.

Sunday 22nd April - Fastalstinden
Steve's group were a little grumpy at breakfast. Having left the taps on when the water went off they returned

from dinner to discover all the hot water had run out. Terry from the ISM arrived and surprisingly recognised me given he'd last seen me ten years ago. Cloud was obscuring the tops but Steve and Max were confident it would clear in the afternoon. Therefore we headed past the village to the foot of Fastalstinden, a 1275m glaciated peak with 30 degree slopes and the significant advantage of starting at 130m altitude and a well graded track through the birch forest. As a result we quickly reached a picnic bench at the edge of a lake above the tree line for our first break. We caught glimpses of

the upper slopes between the cloud. Steve's group caught up with us just before we set off around and across the frozen lake to the steeper upper slopes. We reached the cloud base and continued higher, conditions feeling very like a claggy day on Cairngorm.

Max navigated by GPS to the summit where we had lunch and shivered hoping for the cloud to lift. Steve's group joined us and eventually our patience ran out and we headed down as a single group of 9, Max leading following the GPS breadcrumbs lacking any visual references. Sadly we were in the cloud almost all the way to the lake, short-swinging close to each other on snow that started nice but became poor chopped up hard snow intermixed with soft deep slab.

The bottom slopes were better with spring snow but by this time I was tired and did a couple of snow profiles by face planting up to my elbows. We were back to the car by 4pm.

Not having had enough exercise, Max took David Wilson and I to the end of the peninsula where I found bits of coral on the beach, evidence of the reefs that apparently exist in the fjords.

Caption

Max Cole, David Wilson, Davy More and Stuart Buchanan on the summit of Rornestinden.



“We zigzagged up, following earlier tracks that cut into the top layer of soft snow like a scalpel..”

Monday 23rd April - Daltinden

The day dawned cold with blue skies. Max and Steve decided we'd all go up Daltinden, a 1533m classic with a great north face with 30 degree sections we'd seen from the summit of Rundfjallet. We were keen to make the most of the good weather and by going high hoped to have good snow as well.

After another fine breakfast we piled into the car and drove south for 15 minutes through a huge 3.5km tunnel and a car park at the start of a deep valley leading into the interior of the Lyngen peninsula.

We skinned up the flat valley for 4km. Ahead the snout of a low glacier and

a couple of huge cirques with ridges rising for 1000m.

We could see most of the foreshortened face frowning above us with the dots of another party zigzagging their way up. We turned off the valley and worked our way through the steep birch forest and soft snow. Above the snow firmed, the views opened up and the gradient reduced before steepening onto the face proper. We stopped for a break on a little patch of ground hugging heather and rocks clear of snow. Amazingly given the snow was only just melting, some of the heather only a centimetre proud of the ground had already produced berries, and as we walked back on to the snow our footprints left little red spots on the ground from walking in the berries as if our feet were bleeding.

The slopes became steeper and the others put on their couteau. Ahead, an earlier party of hardcore skiers from Chamonix had found themselves on particularly steep slopes and resorted to kicking steps up the slope. We zigzagged up, following earlier tracks that cut into the top layer of soft snow like a scalpel.

After some 700m we reached the West shoulder of the slope and continued into the cloud that had developed over the morning and now capped most of the peaks. The wind at this altitude was biting and here and there stones poked out of the snow, creating a very Cairngorms feel that was only enhanced by Max having to use his GPS to locate the cairn on the summit plateau.

Once there we shook hands formally, a habit that David Wilson had introduced some years previously and a symptom of his naturalisation as a Swiss. We then dived into our duvet jackets and stripped frozen skins from skis as we awaited Steve's party who were a few minutes behind us.

The summit achieved it was time to descend. As the day before, Max led off and I went behind on the basis that it would allow me the opportunity to stop and rest half way down the section without holding up the group.

Fortunately the snow conditions were good. In keeping with the Cairngorms theme there was soft windslab on a hard base on the first steep section. After this, despite Max's best efforts the going became somewhat icy,

On the descent from Rornestinden with the village of Lyngseidet and the Lyngenfjord below.



“After a break in the sun and shelter from the wind on a heather island we continued down, the spring snow lower down providing very easy skiing.”

particularly on the steep 30 degrees slope and gully. It was still OK to ski but not as easy as we might have hoped.

After a break in the sun and shelter from the wind on a heather island we continued down, the spring snow lower down providing very easy skiing. Ever present on our minds was when this would turn soft and our skis drip through the crust and into the soupy snow below.

Amazingly, due to careful consideration of slope aspect, we were only 100

vertical metres from the valley floor before we started sinking, and a traverse line without any turns brought us to a track that led down the valley which took us with kick-and-glide, herringbone, double poling and taking-skis-off-and-walking back to the car. A very fine 8 hour day.

Back at FabLab our culinary odyssey continued with Rutten salmon, which looked like smoked salmon but tasted rotten. The reindeer liver and heart casserole was palatable in comparison and I was informed that the elk

casserole was quite nice.

Tuesday 24th April - Storgarton
We woke to the forecast low cloud but uncertainty in how the day might develop. The weather looked better looking up the fjord so we decided to head north and ski Storgarton, a 1250m peak almost at the tip of the peninsula.

We spent an hour driving sedately on sometimes bumpy roads to which the passengers in the back complained. The road and houses hugged the side of the fjord.



Finally we parked at the mouth of a small river that rose in a steep coire high above us. It had been cloudy overnight so the snow had not frozen and was distressingly soft. As we started to skin upwards I was already concerned about the final descent, which had been problematic on earlier days.

The river curved right and the coire opened out in front of us, the last scattered birch trees just poking through the deep snow. We stopped for a quick drink after the regulation one hour of skinning and then continued up the steepening face, zigzagging before breaking left to reach a shoulder. Max was slightly concerned with my kick-turn technique which was limited both by my telemark equipment and my own flexibility and stood below me on the steeper turns to arrest me

if I slid at the critical moment with skis pointed different directions.

On the shoulder we caught up with a group of French tourers with a guide who were staying on a boat and traversing the mountain. Despite the low cloud visibility was good we could look out on a host of islands and jagged peninsulas all around us.

From the shoulder the ascent was once more reminiscent of the Cairngorms - cloud, sastrugi, windslab and rocks.

We reached the summit an hour later, the cloud base at the same time. It was surprisingly still and warm in comparison with the day before and quite pleasant. The French party were somewhat disappointed I didn't have any whisky to share on the summit,

before one Toulosain dryly noted he hadn't packed cassoulet either.

Skins removed, helmets on and we started our descent back down the shoulder. Despite the warm temperatures the snow quality was quite good, soft slab with some sastrugi. I still managed to fall flat on my face, failing to spot a small drop-off in poor contrast light. After this we traversed onto the face and found superb consistent spring snow for 600m to the bottom of the coire. This we thoroughly enjoyed, with Max and the two David's beautifully carving their turns. Sadly I couldn't quite get my skis to carve and compounded my failure by falling just as David Wilson was videoing me.

While the snow now became sticky it

“We had a fantastic week and I’d highly recommend the area for the quality of touring, FabLab for food and accommodation, and Max as a guide.”

didn’t collapse in the way that it had on previous days, and we were able to ski to the car without resorting to “survival mode”.

We returned to a dinner of poached salmon followed by lamb but fortunately no Rutten fish.

Wednesday 25th April - Rornestinden
Our final day of touring dawned to low cloud and a little drizzle. Undeterred we drove into Lyngenseidet and

parked beside a firing range at the foot of Rornestibden, a 1040m peak. We hummed-and-hahhed about whether we might be better off catching the ferry as the other side of the fjord looked brighter but David More provided some moral backbone and we set off into the cloud through the ubiquitous birches. Above the tree line we worked our way on the bank of a river that flowed from a large cirque ringed with peaks of various steepness.

As one of the many forecasts predicted, the cloud lifted as we ascended, though it didn’t dissipate. We reached a very nice hut at the edge of the cirque and had an early lunch, joined inside by a guided party from France.

An hour and a bit of steep skinning up the face and then a final rocky ridge and we reached the summit. We got glimpses through the clouds of the sea, surrounding peaks and our first peak of a week ago just across the valley.

On the summit we were joined by the French party, sang happy birthday to

one of their members and exchanged photo taking. We waited for a gap in the clouds to start our descent and enjoyed 500m of good quality snow, from a small amount of powder on a firmer base up high, to easy spring snow lower down.

We returned to the hut to find it occupied by a large party so had a second lunch on the balcony, enjoying the view of the opposite peak which had a north facing couloir Max suggested for our next visit.

The interior occupants emerged and turned out to be a group from Switzerland, one of whom was a friend of David Wilson. A small world indeed.

After our second lunch we headed down, following the right bank of the river and keeping to north aspect slopes where the snow was firmer.

Despite careful route finding the snow inevitably softened and even Max fell, having found a particularly deep patch. From then on it was survival skiing to reach the car, which we all did without any drama. A fine tour to end a fine weeks skiing.



My friend Humphrey or a Rum Cuillin Traverse

Thomas Beutenmuller

On a rather overcast day in late summer of 2003 I was commuting to my work in Balerno. I sat upstairs in a No 44 bus, probably reading a book or looking out of the window, daydreaming. At Haymarket a chap in a brown suit entered the bus and also came upstairs. For some reason I paid this person more attention than the other people on the bus, because something caught my attention: Was it that the suit did not fit his wiry frame, or did I think I knew this guy from somewhere? I thought he looked like a Hoover sales rep, and I wondered where he would get off? Maybe at the Corn Exchange? Or at Juniper Green?

The bus emptied as it was travelling along Lanark Road, but the suit remained on the bus and only exited at the last stop in Mansfield Road, which was where I also got off. To my surprise the guy walked into Harmer School. I remember finding it odd that a Hoover sales rep who wanted to sell equipment to the domestics at my work travelled there by bus and did not show up in a fancy car with a boot full of the latest models of suction devices, but these are strange times we are living in

As I found out a few weeks later, this guy was Humphrey Twomey from

Ireland, who had come to Edinburgh for an interview for the post of a Child Care Worker. I quickly found out a few key facts about Humphrey: 1. His Irish brogue was at times very hard to understand (he hails from County Cork). 2. He said he was a keen hillwalker. At least that is what I thought he said, as I was sure I could hear words like 'Cairngorms', 'Isle of Skye' and 'Bidean nam Bian' in his sermon. 3. Humphrey also is one of the fittest people I have ever met: He used to run from the city centre to Balerno in the morning, and back in the afternoon. He finished the 2004 London Marathon in the time of 2



“Getting up at three or four in the morning and driving miles for one good shot of a spectacular sunrise is something Humphrey calls a red letter day.”

hours 45 minutes, which made him 300th out of 30 000 participants! 4. Humphrey is a keen photographer. Not the 'point and shoot' person like most people I know, more like, Colin Prior-keen: Getting up at three or four in the morning and driving miles for one good shot of a spectacular sunrise is something Humphrey calls a red letter day. 5. And one more thing: Humphrey usually never wears a suit, and he also likes to leave the task of hoovering to others...

And that was it, the beginning of a successful Iro/German hillwalking partnership over the next seven years, with a string of great mountain days across the Scottish hills, from

Northumberland to the Northwest Highlands.

It was with some sadness when I saw Humphrey move back to Ireland in 2010 due to starting his family circumstances. We have stayed in touch and he continues to visit Scotland regularly, so we have been able to intermittently continue to explore the Scottish Highlands together.

Since we first met we always have talked about going for a trip to the Isle of Rum together, and this summer there must have been an equinox of time and opportunity, as a real chance occurred that we actually could go

for it, so we firmed up plans for the beginning of July. As I had started my hillwalking holiday already and was in the Arrochar Alps, I picked up Humphrey in one of those modern coffee places in Dumbarton. After a rather large Cappuccino we drove to Mallaig where we had booked ourselves into a bunkhouse.

The ferry was leaving for Rum at 10:15 the next morning. I had a bit of an unorganised hour prior to leaving: I could not find the battery for my camera, the car park at the harbour was full so I had to park at the far end and found myself running to the pier with boots dangling off my hastily packed rucksack and my jackets pockets full of

bit and pieces I had randomly grabbed together out of the boot of my car. Whilst repacking the bag in the queue on the pier my karimat rolled towards the water and all sorts of embarrassing scenarios occurred before we safely boarded the vessel.

The weather was very overcast and chilly on our way to Rum. The sea was steel blue and the clouds were hanging low in the sky. However, after the hot and sunny weather we had had in recent weeks I was confident that this was only a short break in the heatwave, and the forecast assured us that the outlook would improve again the following day. Due to this I had changed the booking in the Rum bunkhouse: Instead of heading up in the hills straight from the boat we now had a day to acclimatise and would start the Rum traverse the following morning and planned to stay in Dibidil Bothy at the southern end of the island.

After a two hour crossing we landed on Rum. It appeared that most of the community had gathered at the pier to see who had come on the ferry, pick up goods or direct the few workmen who had brought their vans over. Although I love going to remote

islands, I always need a little time to overcome my fear of being cut off from the rest of the world, or may even have a similar experience as Sergeant Neil Howie in the cult movie *The Wickerman*...

The new hostel is only a ten minute walk from the pier. This is a brand-new building that replaces the hostel in Kinloch Castle, which has fallen in disuse due to decay of that tract of the castle. The warden, a guy in his twenties called Jed, was very welcoming and conveyed an aura of relaxed friendliness. He showed us our room and the facilities and encouraged us to get on with whatever we wanted to do. I did not want to overly stretch his hospitality and/or nerves but could not stop myself from using one of the guitars that were hanging on the wall and blast out a few songs whilst Humphrey made us a cup of tea and sandwiches.

In the afternoon we went for a guided tour of Kinloch Castle. This was a very interesting building with a lot of history attached to it. I mean, if you have the cash, go ahead and build yourself a huge castle in the middle of nowhere in the Northern Atlantic, and

“The sea was steel blue and the clouds were hanging low in the sky.”

Dibidil



“It was also nice to learn that the locals see tourism as a means of sustaining the community on the island, and we felt everybody made us very welcome.”

why not, ship in the building materials from as far away as Ayrshire.... Have wild parties and force anybody who dares to land ashore at gunpoint to turn around to never return. In the end of the tour, especially after I heard the Orchestrion blare out a tune from a well-known British comedy show I came to the conclusion that the Isle of Rum during the reign of the landowner Mr John Bullough would not have been like The Wickerman, but may have had more elements of Monty Python's Flying Circus....

Another fact I learned on this tour was that everybody I asked where they came from were keen to state that they are from Rum, although quite a few of them sounded distinctively Glaswegian. I understood this as follows: In the not so distant past, when the island was run like a feudal fiefdom, people were employed to work there, and given accommodation by the estate. Once they left their employment they also had to give up their home and return to the mainland.

This meant that nobody really was developing roots on the island. But since the foundation of the Rum Community Trust it appears easier to raise a family and treat Rum as your permanent home if you choose to do so, and it was good to see the odd kid cycling past us, or seeing a baby strapped to her hippie mother in the Community Centre. It was also nice to learn that the locals see tourism as a means of sustaining the community on the island, and we felt everybody made us very welcome. Still, with a population of 22 souls it has not exactly re-reached the high levels of inhabitants it had in the 18th century when there were over 300 people living on the island.

After learning so many facts in the

space of one afternoon I was ready for another cup of tea and singsong in the Hostel, but the next thing I knew was that Humphrey had hired a bike and was pedalling towards the beach of Kilmory, in the north of the island. He only came back at ten o'clock and ate his dinner I had kept for him without any complaints....

Now to the main event, the traverse of the Rum Cuillin: We left the bunkhouse late morning, and Jed the warden had let us leave our excess baggage in a store room. We saw two other walkers with whom we had spoken the night before. They said that they too planned to do the traverse, but without a bothy stay. As they had not brought enough food they were in the process of sourcing an evening meal from somewhere before setting off.

We walked up Coire Dubh past a dam that provides the hydropower for the castle and turned east towards the first peak of the ridge, Hallival. There was some scrambling involved, both on the way up and down. The hills were still clad in mist, but there was no wind and we still believed the forecast that promised an improvement in the afternoon. From the bealach between Hallival and Askival we got a great view of the Isle of Eigg. We felt quite



isolated so far away from any other fellow humans, but this was what we had come for. We also felt all the birds had abandoned us, including the fabled Manx Shearwaters, whose burrows we had passed quite frequently, but we assumed they also would have gone down to the sea foraging.

We played it safe with the ascent of Askival: Instead of looking for the pinnacle in the mist we just stuck to the faint footpath and arrived safely at the trig point. The next reference point was Bealach an Oir. We could have also climbed Trollval, a Graham, but decided to walk around it, towards the second Corbett of the day, Ainshval,

Just below the summit we saw two familiar looking walkers descending towards us. It was the same guys we had spoken to in the morning. In fact, it was the only humans we had seen since we left Kinloch! They had done the traverse in reverse and still had to climb Askival. They explained that the lady in the shop had offered to cook them some venison for their dinner and if they were back late they should just knock on her living room window.....Since I am a Vegetarian and by now was closer to Dibidil than they were to Kinloch I much preferred to carry on and cook my own pasta at the bothy...I have to admit, I felt a little fatigued by now and was relieved

when we finally got to the summit of Ainshval.

By now the improvement in the weather promised by the MET Office had happened and we had fantastic views all across Rum, and over to Eigg, Skye, Muck, and even could see islands that I could not find on the map!

The continuation to Sgurr nan Gillean was a much gentler undertaking, although I felt tired by now. We encountered the first wildlife, which was a small herd of feral goats. The descent to Dibidil took longer than expected: We had to veer left and had to do some scrambling through broken



The Bunkhouse

rock before we reached a gap in the hills before we could see Dibidil as a small dot in the distance. Humphrey was a good bit ahead of me. However, I was quite a bit surprised when he walked past the bothy and the Dibidil river: Instead of getting water and put on the stove for the pasta he went for a swim in the sea.....what can I say? It would be his turn to do the dishes again....

Dibidil is a great bothy, situated in a lovely corner of Rum, with fantastic views over to Eigg and Muck. The evening sun was shining and there were no midges, so we were even able to sit outside. The bothy book mentioned that previous visitors had seen a rather large rat, the size of a

cat, but it did not show up that night.

The next morning started with more water sports: One member of the party had another swim in the sea, and one not quite so brave member, who explains his fear of open water by having been born in a rather landlocked part of Europe, was cooling down in a paddling pool in the river. The only pressure we had to leave this divine sun-kissed spot was that the ferry was leaving Rum at four o'clock, and we were booked on that ferry. The walk back along the coastal path was very scenic, fairly level and we were able to look up the steep hillside on the left and retrace our steps from yesterday. Only the odd cleg was

annoying us a bit, but I suppose that is the price you have to pay for a heatwave.

Back at the hostel in Kinloch we were allowed to have a shower and use the kitchen even though we had checked out the morning before and also had time to go for a cup of coffee in the community centre. It then was time to return to the hostel, say goodbye to Jed the custodian and jog to the pier with all our luggage. We met the two walkers again and had a nice chat with them during the crossing.

After three days on this lovely island Mallaig seemed a very busy place. We got ourselves a pizza, drove inland a bit and camped next to the road near Lochailort. The next morning we had a quick walk up Sgurr an Utha near Glenfinnan before I had to drop Humphrey off in Fort William as he was returning to Ireland the next day.

As with most places in the Scottish Highlands and Island I visit the following happens: My wife gives me a 'pass', to go there and 'get it out of my system', as she calls it, but I usually return with a longer list of places I would like to visit in the future than I set out with: What I am trying to say; I am sure I will return to Rum one day!

Leonidio - the new Kalymnos?

Bryan Rynne

Also present: James Dalgarno, Sue Marvell, Davy Swan

Having been climbing in Kalymnos on four previous occasions, I felt that it was now time to visit what regularly seems to be termed 'the new Kalymnos', viz., Leonidio. I had heard several rave reviews of Leonidio from like-minded sun-rock sports climbers, so it definitely seemed time to get out there. Adding to this feeling was the appearance in 2017 of a guide to sport climbing in Greece, produced by Aris Theodoropoulos, the chap who produces the Kalymnos guides, and which contains a large section on Leonidio. So, this article is a sort of travelogue/trip report describing some of my thoughts about it.

When to go

Judging by climate tables of the area, and the information in the guides, the best time to go seems to be about October-April. We went mid-October and it was mostly about 20-25 degrees and mostly very sunny (we had one day of rain in 11 days out there). Almost all the crags are roughly south

facing, so it felt fairly hot -- we coped with this, but any earlier in the year would have been too hot for us.

How to get there

Leonidio is situated on the east coast of the Peloponnese peninsula, south west of Athens. Getting there from Edinburgh is relatively easy, in principle: a direct flight to Athens from Edinburgh (Easyjet) and then roughly a 140 mile drive to Leonidio. About half of this is on motorway, starting almost on the edge of Athens airport, but the other half is along a windy, but good, coastal road down the east side of the Peloponnese. With luck this can be done in about a 3 hour drive, as we did on the way back, but could easily take longer if the traffic is bad. No ferries are required, as in getting to Kalymnos.

Slightly unfortunately, at present the Easyjet flights to Athens depart at 15.45 in the afternoon, and arrive at about 20.00 in the evening, necessitating a night in a hotel before driving to Leonidio the next morning. Since we were going for an 11 day trip, this was not really a big deal, and

Sue climbing at Skiadianiko





the corollary was that we had a fairly late flight back, which allowed us to climb on the final day.

On the drive you pass many well-known classical Greek sites (to say nothing of Athens itself). For example, our hotel was near to Marathon, and we drove past the Corinthian canal and Mycenae, while Sparta was not far away on the other side of the peninsula (apparently a minor industrial town nowadays, rather than a classical military superpower). We also drove through Argos, which may be known for other things than being the name of a mundane UK chain store. There were probably other

major sites from antiquity that my limited classical education failed to notice... Slightly to my shame, we did not visit any of these sites.

Leonidio town

Leonidio itself is a fairly small town in a valley just inland from the Myrtoan sea, with a large range of crags on the north side of the valley. It has a selection of somewhat nondescript looking bars and restaurants and a modest sized supermarket. Frankly, on the basis of a damp walk around it late one afternoon, it does not seem to have a lot going for it -- apart from those crags! We did not actually stay in Leonidio, and did not patronise any of the bars or restaurants,

although we used the supermarket regularly, so I can't really say any more about what it would have been like to stay in the town.

In fact, having investigated the accommodation available in Leonidio on the internet, I didn't fancy any of it much and decided not to stay there. Instead, I booked us into my preferred style of accommodation for a hard-core climbing holiday: a luxury villa! This was situated on the coast, about 5 miles from Leonidio, and turned out to be very good. As part of the desired accommodation specifications, it also had a nearby restaurant (10 minutes walk down to the beach) serving



Sue climbing at Mad Wall

“The general area is very attractive. A fairly wild coastline rising straight out of the sea to rough, rocky terrain and high hills (with a narrow, windy coastal road).”

excellent food and copious quantities of ice-cold Greek beer (by about day 3 they seemed to start serving this as we walked in the door). Of course, this may not quite fit the gnarly, hard-core climbing zeitgeist, but it suited me, and no-one complained.

The general area is very attractive. A fairly wild coastline rising straight out of the sea to rough, rocky terrain and high hills (with a narrow, windy coastal road). You can see why the ancient Greeks were into boats -- getting around on the land would have been very slow and tiresome. There are a lot

of narrow, stony beaches if you want to spend time sitting around by the sea (we didn't). There also seemed to be some walking tracks dotted around, although we did not investigate these.

What is the climbing like?

In addition to the Theodoropoulos guide mentioned above, there is also a local guide produced by the Panjica cooperative, based in Leonidio, who have a shop (and bolt fund) there.

This guide contains more local crags than in the Theodoropoulos guide, but the gradings are somewhat 'eccentric'. There is now a more recent edition of

this guide than the one we had, so the grades may have been recalibrated in this edition. Also, the chap in the shop said there were a lot more routes in there (old guide 900, new 1,400 guide routes) so there is more to do than we knew about. This new guide should soon be available online at: <http://tinyurl.com/yaoeynxj>. The Theodoropoulos guide is available from Amazon and elsewhere (google it).

Leonidio is surrounded by high, orange limestone walls, containing a large number of crags. We found that there were ample routes in our

grade range of about F5b-F6b for our 11 day trip, although we would have started to run out of ideas if we had been there much longer. The climbing is somewhat similar to Kalymnos: a lot of pockets, cracks and good holds, on relatively steep walls -- very little of the blank grey slab that is such a feature of France and Spain. Personally, I am not a fan of blank grey slab, and I thought the climbing here was excellent, as did the others. Although there are a few multi-pitch routes, the climbing is almost entirely on single pitch sports routes, mostly between about 25-35 metres, although with quite a few routes up to 40 metres (I got more use out of my 80 metre rope in a week there than in the previous 3 years of owning it). The bolting is mostly pretty generous, and I found that whenever I was struggling I wasn't far from a bolt. Walk ins were mostly between about 10 to 25 minutes, although some were longer.

One downside is that the area seems to be getting very busy, and there is a good chance of finding yourself queuing on crags having 10 minute walk ins, and being jostled out of the way by people who refuse to pull their ropes down even when not using them. I found myself muttering, repeatedly: 'though every prospect pleases, only man is vile', although

James climbing at Orama
(Davy and Sue belaying below)





I presume the hymn did not have crowded climbing crags in mind. Of course, if you can face a 25 minute walk-in, you will leave the madding crowds far behind. So, if you want to go there, go soon.

Is this the new Kalymnos?

We had an excellent trip, with very good climbing and weather (too hot some of the time). However, I don't think that this is 'the new Kalymnos', mainly because there is much less climbing in the near vicinity of Leonidio

than there is in Kalymnos.

The Theodoropoulos Greece guide is about the same size as his Kalymnos guide, but it supposedly covers the entire mainland Greece, although the Leonidio section seems to be the largest individual section in the book. Of course, it won't cover all of Greece, but certainly most of the locations in his guide are widely scattered, and would be far too far away to drive to from Leonidio (there are a couple of crags an hour or so away that we did

not investigate).

So, I would happily go back, but not as often as to Kalymnos. If we did return, we would probably end up repeating many of the routes that we did this time. That would still be fun, but you can spend a long time in Kalymnos without repeating routes. However, if you haven't been, and you like sport climbing in hot climates with good food and drink, go there! And do it soon, before it gets completely overrun!



In The Alps With No Boots On David Small

It was the first active day of our Alpine holiday in August 2018. We had left our gite in Chamonix early in the morning and, after a drive to the village of Champex, followed by a chairlift ride and an hour and a bit's walk, had arrived at the Orny Hut. I was standing in the boot room of the hut, feeling stupid and annoyed. I had contrived to leave my hill food, my spare contact lenses and my

spectacles back down in the car. There was nothing for it but to turn round, walk out, descend to the car, pick up what I'd forgotten to bring and then repeat the upward journey to the hut. Our plans for some bolted climbing on the crag above the hut that afternoon would have to be scrapped, or at least curtailed.

In a lather of impatience and sweat

I dashed downhill to the top of the chairlift and then had to endure a downward and upward trip on what must be the slowest chairlift in Europe south of Glencoe. On my return walk to the hut I had two strokes of good luck. One was that it started to rain, meaning that we had lost hardly any climbing. The other was that I heard and then saw an ibex and a chamois headbutting each other. The sound

of their heads or horns clashing was loud – at first I thought it was rockfall. Only when it kept repeating did I think to look up and try to see where it was coming from. Stopping to watch them have a go at each other, despite the loud noise, it did not look a terribly serious fight; rather, it seemed to have a degree of ritual about it, as if, after having observed the formalities of combat, each party fully intended to continue about their business, irrespective of the outcome. I left them to it and walked on in the drizzle.

Next morning, in fine weather, we headed for the classic South Arete of the Aiguille d’Orny (D, 3150m). This is an ideal “first route of the trip” route; safe, not hard, not long, not high and with some fixed gear along the way. I went off route, too far right, on the penultimate pitch, but that proved to be a fortunate deviation, as it left Bruce with a cracking final bolted 5b pitch, part of a neighbouring route. An abseil from the summit and a careful descent down some steep and loose, but well-cairned, ground took us back to the foot of the route.

After a breather back at the hut we headed off in the other direction, across a wilderness of granite boulders, to the Gendarme d’Orny.

The Gendarme has a fine collection of four or five pitch, well bolted routes on lovely red granite, at amenable grades.

It is not mentioned on UKC, but the routes are in the “Swiss Pleasure” guidebook and on Camp to Camp. On our first afternoon we climbed Three Overhangs (5a). Then, the next day, before walking back down to the valley, we climbed Papa Paye and Papa Paye Encore (both 5b/5c, although with a harder final pitch which we avoided). A strong thermal air current was rising nearby, taking with it a mixed group of eagles and choughs, all wheeling around enjoying the delights of the sunny Alpine environment – just as we were, albeit with less rotational motion!

The forecast for the next couple of days was mixed, so we stayed close to Chamonix for more bolted climbing, going to the Chesery Slabs one day and into the Aiguilles Rouges the next. Then the weather settled down and, leaving Chamonix early, we went through the Mont Blanc tunnel and turned left up the Val Ferret.

This valley is one of the most beautiful in the Alps and is officially closed to motor vehicles during peak hours in summer time, but we were there early enough to drive legitimately up to

“at first I thought it was rockfall. Only when it kept repeating did I think to look up and try to see where it was coming from.”

the end of the valley and the start of the walk in to the Dalmazzi Hut. Our objective was an 18 pitch bolted climb called Les Chamois Volants (5b, D+), which finishes on one of the summits of the Monts Rouges de Triolet at about 3300 metres. The on-line UKC logbooks contain accounts of people taking all day and all night to get up and down this route, so after calling in at the hut we walked to the foot of the crag to make sure we knew where the route started and to familiarise ourselves with the first few pitches.

This certainly helped us to get away to an efficient start the next day. The



route is bolted, but in many places the bolts are hard to see from below and there is a fair amount of climbing in what you think is the right direction for ten metres or so, before coming across another bolt. Fortunately, after the first four pitches which are the technical meat of the climb, there is rarely anything harder than about V Diff and indeed in my opinion the route is probably best thought of as an interesting way of getting to a peak among the Monts Rouge, from where one can apparently have a superb view of the south eastern parts of the Mont Blanc range (a view denied to us by mist).

The descent is rather different. It is not impossible to abseil down the route of ascent, but it would be tedious, difficult and dangerous to go down that way, owing to the angle of the rock, the invisibility of the belay stances from above and the amount of loose rubbish lying around in certain places. The advised descent nowadays is down the south face, which is very steep and clean and contains quite a few bolted routes. The trick is to descend the summit ridge a little, find the top of one of these routes and abseil down it. After some faffing, we found the top of a route and I set off on abseil following the bolts down

mainly overhanging terrain, only to get close to the end of our 50m ropes with no belay in sight; the route must have been set up for 60m ropes. I had to attach myself to a single bolt, inconveniently placed half way up a bulge, and wait for Bruce to come down and join me. He then made a fairly short abseil to the next true belay, to which I in turn descended before launching off on another mission of hope. At least the rock had now eased off into the merely vertical.

By the time I reached the next stance I was relying on rope stretch to get there, and when I released the rope

ends they sprang five feet up the wall, well out of reach. When Bruce came into view sliding down from above, I warned him in no uncertain terms not to let go of the rope as I had done.

Fortunately he took the point, the rope pulled down alright, the remaining abseils were less exciting and then it only remained to try and find a way down the complex terrain below the South face of the mountain and back to our sacks at the foot of the climb. After a return to Chamonix, our next trip was again through the tunnel into Italy, this time turning right and driving up the Val Veni, heading for the Manzoni refuge. This hut is in a stunning location, hemmed in by ridges on the north side of Mont Blanc – the Peuterey, the Brouillard and the Innominata. The normal way up to the hut is interesting enough, involving a full on via ferrata, but there is also a ten pitch bolted slab route called Velociraptor (mainly 4c/5a but with the odd moves up to 6a), which is the way we went.

After a night in the hut we hoped to climb the classic Ottoz-Hurzeler route (TD-, 5c) on the Aiguille Croux (3256m). However, Meteo France was saying that there was a 100% chance of rain in the early afternoon,

and although Bruce and I strongly suspected that that this forecast was too pessimistic, neither of us could quite bring ourselves to insist that we take the risk; so we settled for the classic South Ridge instead (AD, 4+). We had intended to get up no earlier than 7a.m. for this, so we were rather surprised to hear that another party planned to have breakfast at 5a.m. (We were even more surprised to find out later that the first party ahead of us had got up at 3.30!) The hut custodian was not inclined to allow us our own breakfast time, so 5 a.m. it was.

After the usual hasty guzzle of bread and coffee we headed up the hill, seeing the lights of the 3.30 party ahead of us and those of the other 5a.m. party behind. Everyone joined together in a queue at the foot of the roped climbing. The pitches consisted of fine granite slab climbing, but inevitably there were delays between each pitch. At one point we tentatively sought to find our own way round to one side, but we were dissuaded by strongly disapproving looks from a nearby French guide, with comments about us knocking down stones on every one else. Staying in the queue was probably a good thing, as the best climbing was undoubtedly where the crowds were. So we relaxed and did

The Argentiere glacier (what's left of it) from the Chesery Slabs



The Aiguille Croux (in shadow, L of centre)
from the path to the hut



the pitches as and when we could, in the interim watching the morning light intensify and the haze in the valleys gradually disperse. At the top of the route the queue for climbing up became a queue for abseiling down.

Near the bottom we put our rope away too early, but the friendly guide just behind us (not he of the disapproving looks) let us use his rope for a couple of more abseils, including one down a hard snow patch where our choice of footwear (mountain trainers) would

otherwise have embarrassed us.

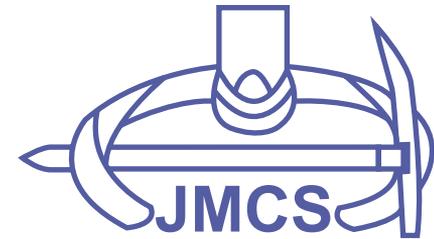
Needless to say, the weather stayed fair all morning and became positively warm and sunny in the afternoon; we could have tried the Ottoz-Hurzeler after all! But, despite the queues and the modest nature of the difficulties, we were quite satisfied to have done the South Ridge; the Aiguille Croux is in such a superb setting that virtually any route on it will seem worthwhile. If the forecast had been ok we might have stayed up at the hut for another

shot at the Ottoz-Hurzeler, but the meteo was very definitely, unarguably bad and we had no choice but to return to Chamonix where we spend the last few days of our trip on valley crags near Chamonix and in the climbing wall at Les Houches.

In all that we did, we never wore big boots, and never carried crampons – light mountain trainers were (with one possible exception – see above) all that was needed. We only carried an ice axe on one climb, and only stood,

or slithered (see above), on hard snow once. Our routes were all at modest height. Such lightweight frivolity is not how I used to think of appropriate Alpine activities, and how one should be clad for them. Maybe it is down to global warming, which undoubtedly restricts the choice of routes up high in late August; maybe it is down (on my part – not Bruce's) to advancing years.

Anyway, I still expect I will do things differently at other times, and so I will not be putting my La Sportiva Nepals up for sale on eBay quite yet; but this year we had a lot of fun in the Alps with no boots on.



2018