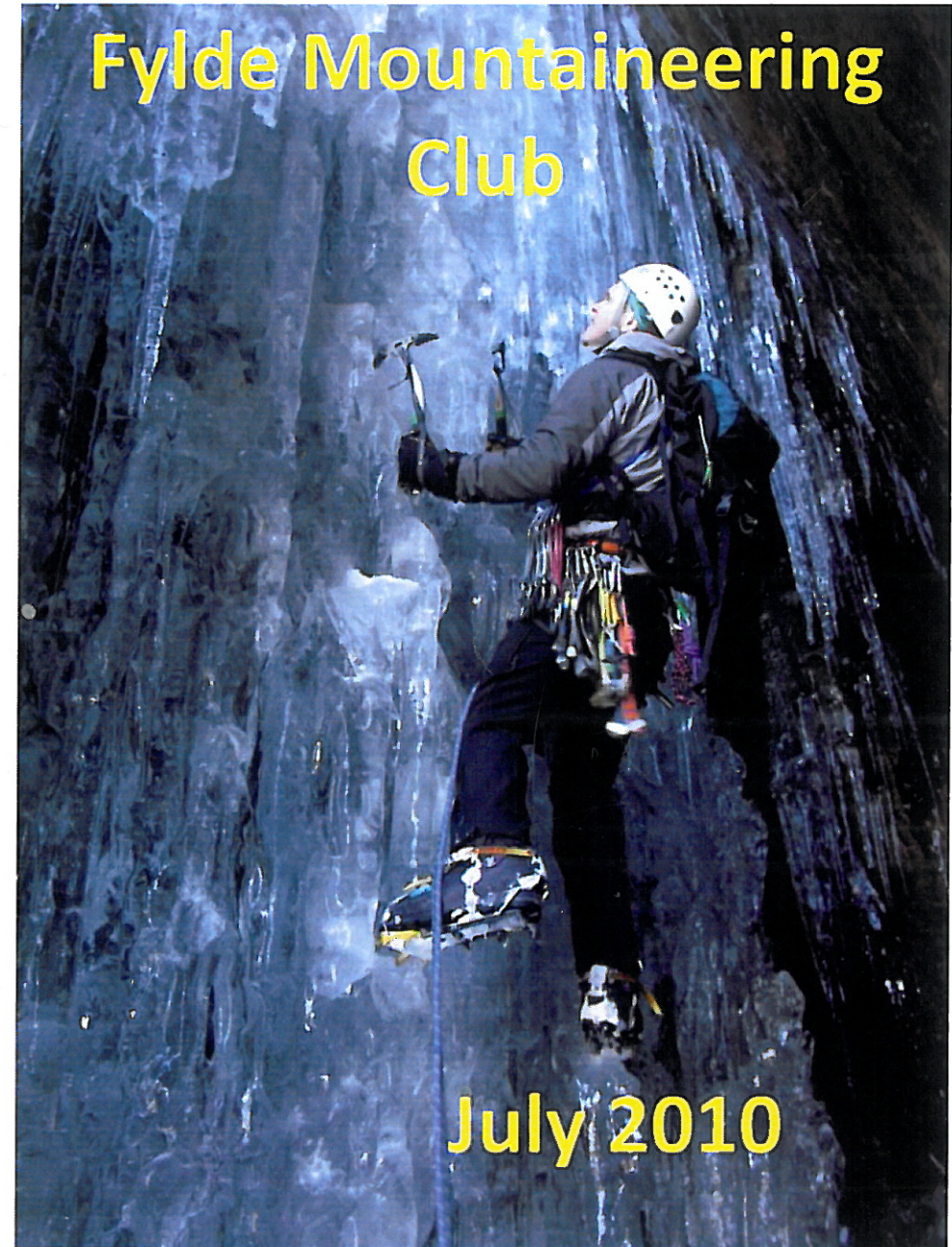


Jul 2010

Fylde Mountaineering Club



July 2010

Cover photo: Steve Wrigley on Dove Crag Gully, Grasmoor by Martin Bennett



FMC Photo Comp 1st Place Action by Steve Wrigley



FMC Photo Comp 1st Place Landscape by Steve Wrigley

Contents

Contents	3
Editorial	4
Recommended Reading	4
Rock Climbing in the Moroccan Anti-Atlas Mountains, March 2009	5
La Grave 2010 climbing and skiing report	9
2010 Ice-fall Climbing Meet	11
Northumberland Meet May 2010	14
Ripping Yarns:- The Curse of the Egyptian Figurine.....	17
Some Pubs In Devon and Cornwall	21
Ladies Meet March 2010, Stair	26
The Sicilian Job - Exodus	26
Ladies Meet June 2010	28
Morocco 2010 – The Return	29
Pembroke 2010: part 1	33
Working Weekend Stair 22–23 May '10	36
High Craggs Meet.....	37
Clive's Bangers and Mash Meet Pics:	39
Pentire Obsession	40
Pembroke 2010 – part 2	43
Accrington Moor Evening Walk Pictures	46
...and finally... Johnny Walkers Tales.....	47

Editorial

It seems like only yesterday that I was sitting in front of my computer producing the January edition of the newsletter and yet so much has happened.

We had the best winter season for decades, volcanic eruptions caused air travel chaos, a new Government has been 'voted' in, England have embarrassed themselves at football...again (but at least not as much as the French), and Nick Harrison has learned that he can't fly (glad that you recovered quickly Nick).

The Mug of the Year award could be hotly contested this year with Stuart Gascoyne putting in a superb effort to try to seal the win in the opening weeks of the year, but we all thought Nick Hepburn had sealed 'victory' last year only for him to escape due to poor refereeing decisions (that is the last time I'll mention the World Cup, promise). The team who hired a car without aircon and drove around in sweltering weather for 10 days only to find the aircon switch on the way back to the airport would give him a run for his money, but it wasn't a club trip so is ineligible.

This edition nearly became purely a collection of volcano stories but Martin Bennett, Angela Lovett and company have come to my rescue with a great collection of articles and pictures. I have even recovered the articles lost from the last edition and so this edition begins with an article on last year's Moroccan trip – this is the place to come for the most up to date news reports ☺.

Sadly this edition consists almost entirely of reports from climbing trips which just doesn't reflect all of the activities that the club is involved with – come on walkers, canoeists, cavers, bikers, where are your reports on your fantastic trips.

Caroline

Recommended Reading

For Chris Thistlethwaite and Geoff Brindle:-

'Essential Weisswurst Etiquette Guide' by Dr Werner Siegert details the "noble art" of correctly preparing and eating German bangers.

For Nick Harrison:-

'Bombs Away: A Guide to Skydiving and BASE Jumping' by Paul McMenamin

For the editor:-

'How to Win Friends and Influence People' by Dale Carnegie

Rock Climbing in the Moroccan Anti-Atlas Mountains, March 2009

It's some time now since Les Brown went public on the discovery he made whilst on what was to have been a walking trip with his wife in Morocco, namely acres and acres of climbable but until then unclimbed rock. Some nobs went to have a look as soon as the guide book was out and I was upset to have missed the trip due to other commitments. Unfortunately for them they had very untypical weather for their stay and came back without much enthusiasm for the place. My interest wasn't diminished by this, and subsequent reading and talking about it, particularly to Steve Wrigley in 2008, made me determined to arrange a trip as soon as it was practical. That turned out to be in March/April this year (*Ed: ...well...2009 anyway*). I recruited my fellow retiree Alan for a fortnight and Steve and Robin for a week and the gig was on.

Alan and I made up the advance party and arrived in Tafraoute, the small town which is the base for climbing on the many crags in the Ameln Valley, at a decent time of day so we had the luxury of daylight to trawl around a number of hotels seeking the best value for money. This proved to be, not at the Hotel Les Amandiers recommended in all reports to date but at the excellent Hotel Saint Anthoine. For about £12.50 each per night we got a luxurious twin room with private shower, toilet etc including breakfast. Excellent. And it's one of only two places in town where you can get a beer. Add the fact that breakfast was served on the sunny terrace overlooking the pool and you start to see we weren't going to suffer for our art!

Right. Free advertising for hotel over. Our first day started slowly as we got our bearings, looked around the town, bought some bits for lunch and sought the crag with the shortest approach. This turned out to be "Crag E" – yes, it seems there are no local names for the crags so the guide book, rather prosaically, lists them by identifying letters. (I don't think there's a Crag X though; if there is they're not saying where it is . . . hee hee hee . . .!). It's approached from a village not far from "home" in about 40 minutes and provides a number of routes around 150 metres long all graded 4B to 5B. One doesn't get the luxury of an adjectival grade or even a description – just the numerical grade of the hardest move (no clue as to where this might be) and a line on a photo. The rest is up to you. Adventure with a capital A. The way it ought to be.

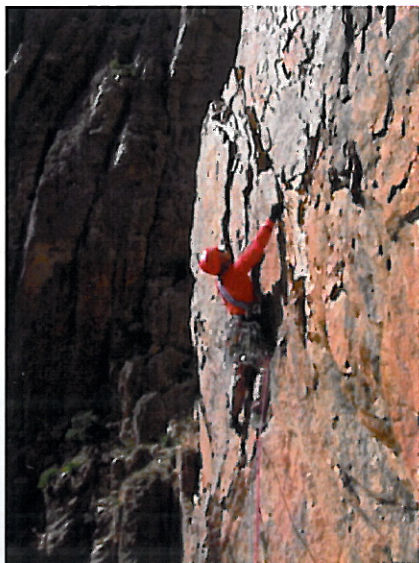
This first climb, though enjoyable, was not a classic – some slightly un-nerving loose rock and moves rather harder than "4B" might suggest as well as route finding doubts served to pose the question in our minds – "If this is the easiest route on the smallest most accessible crag, what have we got ourselves into?" Incidentally there was another party on this crag at the time – the only time this happened. In the whole time we were there were only two other parties in the area, and these had gone after our fourth day or so.

Subsequent days proved that our first impression was erroneous – for the most part the rock is good quality quartzite, the crags are relatively easily approached – most walks are 30 to 90 minutes, not much for crags usually ranging from 200 to 400 metres, and the prickly plants that abound are easily made up for at this time of year by the vast carpets of beautiful highly coloured wildflowers. The climbing we did, up to what they call a 5A, is for the most part technical rather than strenuous, the route finding and cursory descriptions add to the experience, the descents are sometimes delightful

walks in themselves and the absolute absence of any fixed gear (there's not a peg or a bolt to be seen, and we spotted only a very few abandoned abseil slings here and there) is very refreshing when you consider the ever increasing thickness of the bolt "wedge" being driven into British climbing.

The weather was perfect for climbing. The worst we experienced in the first week was a day of high wind which simply meant it was better to climb on lower crags rather than the ones near the col at the head of the valley. There proved to be only one day out of fourteen that was to be the exception that proved the rule, and this turned out to be the day after the "second wave" of Rob and Steve arrived. And what an exception it was! Heavy rain, high winds and low temperatures meant we were restricted to driving around on a recce of some of the more recently developed areas around to the North. As we stopped and opened the car doors to get a clearer view at one particular pass we'd to hastily close them again to keep the sleet out of the car!

Happily the storm was short lived. As it tailed off the next morning we went to explore one of the granite climbing areas nearby. These, in contrast to the "mountain" crags sport bolts and some very hard climbing, the work of "The Gaaiirrmans" we were led to believe. We found a couple of slab routes that proved to be too easy but OK for a still damp morning. Incidentally for the boulderers amongst us the granite areas look as if there's enough for an army to go at for years! By 11.00 am the sun was out so it was off back to one of the smaller (only 150m) crags - Crag S in Tizgut Gorge, really a big gully wall a bit like White Ghyll except here there's another crag opposite (Crag T), for Steve and Rob's first day proper. One of the routes both ropes did that day, Tizgut Arete, proved to be very good, sustained and exposed in 3 pitches.



Alan Blackburn leading Tizgut Arete, pitch 3

Tizgut Gorge is a terrific venue for a short day having routes of 2 or 3 pitches and a relatively short and easy approach. But beware not only the spiky flora but also the fauna – this was the only place we caught sight of a snake and I'm pretty sure that, although they're rare, what we saw was an Egyptian or Black Cobra – said to be the most deadly of all cobras, also known as the Asp, of Cleopatra fame, and up to 8 feet long, though we saw only the rear 4 feet of ours as it lazily slithered under some boulders beside the descent route.

Other recommendations if you're perusing the guide book with a view to a visit are Crag A (whether your climbing there or not you should take the road to the village of Anergui – I guarantee it's the "best" road you've ever experienced – just hope you don't meet anything!) which is vast, 10 minutes from the parking and has routes up to 350 metres of all grades, Crag U where a 3 star route is a Hard

VS called The White Tower, and The Lion's Face (Crag J) which Steve and I climbed on the last day – another word of caution – the guide book says it's 300 metres but we climbed at least 400 metres.



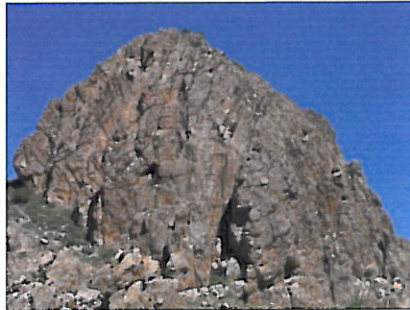
The picture shows the 400m "Lion's Face" together with the 400m approach. Our route started at the base of the diamond shaped face and climbs more or less direct to the apex, passing the big overhang ("eyebrow") to the right.

Another crag that looks good but which none of us visited this time is Crag W – see picture below:



Crags like these, up to 400 metres high, abound in the Ameln Valley. Further afield, but still within an hour's drive, are yet bigger faces as well as dozens of smaller "British" style crags of 1 to 5 pitches.

The pictures below show Dwawj Slabs (up to 6 pitch routes) and Ksar Rock (1 and 2 pitch routes) - two crags we actually got to grips with as opposed to simply staring at in awe.



Oh yes – the facts – we flew to Agadir with Thomsonfly – about £250. We pre-booked car hire with Hertz – about £25 per day – local car hire can be cheaper but you'd lose half a day at least getting into town to arrange it. Hertz worked out OK though the guy at the desk claimed he'd not been told to expect us, then did us a fab price (for cash of course!) on an upgrade to aircon and a cd player. Driving in Morocco is fine if not quick. The roads are very quiet but also narrow and winding. Tafraoute is a very busy small town at the heart of a thriving agricultural community. General impressions: dusty, busy, sometimes a bit smelly but all in all delightful with friendly and helpful people – even the carpet sellers trying to get you to visit their shops to see their wares "just like Mr John Brown did!" are polite and helpful. The ladies seem to be out of town manually gathering (at this time of year) grass to feed the cattle which are kept indoors; the men, unless occupied in some trade workshop making clay pots or metal bashing, seem to spend much time sitting at pavement cafes drinking tea! Everything except car hire and petrol seems very cheap, even with the then very depressed £.

Incidentally the Hotel Saint Anthoine is just the right distance, about quarter of a mile, away from the bustling dusty heart of town and its smelly bits. At the end of the day you can get a beer here then wander into town to one of a number of small restaurants with even smaller menus! The cuisine is limited but wholesome and hot – all the cafes have the same things on offer – tagine of chicken or meatballs or vegetables or the same things on a plate with couscous, sometimes a salad Nicoise if you're lucky. We liked the Star of Agadir but the food in the Cafe Marrakesh is just as good and a good bit cheaper. Besides which the proprietor is a really nice guy and the stair balustrade has to be seen to be believed!

In two weeks we only scratched the surface and are planning our return in March 2010. As things unfold at the moment it seems there may be a very much cheaper air fares with Easyjet. This time we might try to fit in a few days at Todra Gorge as well; and a look at Marrakesh.

We'd be delighted to hear from anyone who's interested, and let's face it if you've waded through all my ramblings to get this far you must be !

Martin Bennett

Ed: Apologies yet again that this article failed to appear in the January edition due to Gremlin's playing with my computer – I work in IT so what would I know about backing up data.

From the very hot to the very cold.....

La Grave 2010 climbing and skiing report

Written by Adrian Clifford, Extracted from the FMC Website

As usual an exciting week was had by the team, magnificently organised by that well known chef, Martin Bennett. Thrilling times were guaranteed by the presence of Alan "stormbringer, harbinger of doom" Blackburn. Nick Hepburn arrived safely without any detours involving transcontinental train detours but Frank got to within 30 miles but then had a three hour detour due to a blocked high pass which he had been taken too via the sat nav.

A respectable, cultured and civilised air was given to the proceedings by the presence of Becky who bravely battled with steep ice led by Phil and she fitted in some skiing too. Numerous ice routes were climbed by all (except me), and no days were lost due to bad weather. Ali took quite a hit on his helmet and left arm from an ice block while leading but managed to hang on despite tinnitus caused by this and a soon to be very bruised arm. Martin was very pleased that his hands no longer felt like blocks of ice during his ice climbs due to some smart pills and electrically heated gloves. Alan was suffering while climbing though as he had bruised his ribs while soloing some ice the week before the trip. Happily though he was skiing up to his usual high standard after a bit of a disappointing skiing last year.

On day one everyone set out to climb ice and found plenty. I had been reading up on the off piste potential at La Grave which was said to be world famous. As route finding on the two big runs down was said to be tricky I joined a very friendly French group of four group lead by a mountain guide for my first day. When he handed out climbing harnesses and avalanche transceivers we wondered what we might be getting into! Twenty five or so skiers have been killed here in the last 13 years or so and though we were not going into the steep couloirs avalanches, serac and glacier falls were recognised potential hazards. The first route was the classic route of the Vallons de La Meije sector, 1800m down to the town. The temperature at the top station was minus 23 however with added wind chill but as there had been heavy snow 24 hrs previously there was terrific powder snow with not many tracks in it and the route looked fantastic. The north face of the Meije loomed over us as did the serac fields though these were only a hazard for the descent lines further to the right. Easy couloirs, open powder slopes, narrow tree lined sections and some tricky moguls lead down to the valley and a short walk to the nearest restaurant overlooking the mountain and lunch.

The last time I ate with a French group mid way through a day out I made the mistake of matching their wine and cheese intake and ended up having to land my paraglider early and vomit into the bushes - so only one glass of beer this time! In the afternoon the plan was to go down the Col du Lac via the Rognon de la Girose then join the Vallons de Chancel 1800metres. Our guide told us we were going over a glacier section and had to follow him very precisely in that area. On the way up we met an American group with a guide who was going to do one of the steep couloirs on this side of the mountain. They said you couldn't afford to fall in it and that someone who did died on it last year. Apparently icy sections can form overnight and if so it would be like skiing down an easier ice climb. Inspection thus would be needed apparently. Something for next year perhaps as this was our group's first venture onto proper off piste.

We had been very lucky in that 36 hrs earlier it had snowed very heavily and we were in a world of powder and making the first tracks a lot of the time. We started off by catching a rope trailing behind a snowplough to be towed up to the top pomma. I thought the French locals were messing about when they first grabbed the rope but soon realised that this was the fun way up. The last section up the pomma to near the summit and the glacier was quite exciting as we were not sure what we were facing. Terrific powder and some tricky route finding led to a huge powder slope leading down to a frozen Lake and a glacier. Our guide Manus insisted that we follow exactly in his ski tracks during this section, the only problem being that he bombed off at speed. A French guy ploughed into some small boulders and lost a ski, this resulting in a bollocking from Manus as he should have gone off the track into some deep snow where I had had to go. We finished up skiing across the ground above the ice climbs in the La Pylone area then skied to La Grave.

Overall we had skied down 3800 metres and had the best days skiing in 30 years by quite a margin. Having an idea of where to go I was very keen to venture out again the following day without a guide rather than go ice climbing as I planned to do this during a six night stay at the cic hut on the Ben in February. When the day dawned Stuart Gascoyne mentioned that he liked the idea of some off piste so he hires some powder skis and we set off under a blue sky. Having been down the Vallons de La Meije already this seemed to be a safe option though the avalanche risk was still at 3. Stuart decided not to rent an avalanche transceiver though I did as well as a shovel and probes as our guide of yesterday said we should and it did seem to be the done thing. It was a few degrees less cold on the top and the wind had dropped. Stuart had forgotten his goggles and as it was sunny his corneas may have had some problems though fortunately I had my sunglasses with me so could give him my goggles. The skiing was terrific again though with more tracks than previously. Stuart fell quite a lot

but didn't hurt himself. I had a few tumbles myself of no consequence and we finished off with a great descent all the way back down to La Grave.

The following day a big team wanted to ski as we had spread the word as to how good it was - a dramatic tale follows - watch this space !!!! ([Ed: or just read the next article](#))

2010 Ice-fall Climbing Meet

MARTIN BENNETT (All photographs by Steve Wrigley)

The tenth annual FMC ice-fall climbing meet took place in early February as usual. This year the venue was La Grave in the region of La Meije in the Southern French Alps. We'd been once before but hadn't on that occasion enjoyed the best conditions, the ice formation being limited necessitating driving to find ice to climb, so it was with some concern that we converged on La Grave from a variety of embarkation points - Liverpool, Birmingham, Italy and Ireland. We need not have worried - it was evident from the drive up the valley in glorious winter sunshine and daytime temperatures below minus 10 degrees that this year's build up of ice was abundant. We could hardly wait till next day to get at it.

The first day or two went off very well in the by now usual way of various teams heading out for their choice of the multitude of icefalls on offer, or in the case of Adrian, availing himself of a local guide to sample the dramatic skiing on offer at this, one of the best regarded extreme skiing locations in the World - no pisted runs here. The knowledge he thus gained he generously offered to share with those of us who fancied that sort of day. Accordingly a team of 6 set out on our third day to follow "guide" Adrian as he showed us the reasonable ways down from the 3550 metre high point, avoiding the pitfalls of the worst of the glacier's crevasses, serac threatened slopes and the many steep couloirs (some ending in the icefalls we were there to climb!) which are the domain of the super skiers.

We began to whittle down the number in the group quite soon. Part way down our first descent Michiel found that he'd chosen his rented ski boots badly - they were so tight his feet were numb - he made it to the half way station and took the telecabine down. And then there were 5. We went up again to the top station of the telecabine and then beyond - the next ascent is made by being pulled on skis behind a snow tractor. At this point Stuart, in front, went a little too low and, not wanting to step up the hill, took the decision to descend the glacier without us. Now we were 4. After the tractor pull there is a final draglift to attain a ridge. It was from this point Adrian was to lead us down the glacier via a route he'd done with his guide. The route begins with an easy slope alongside the drag lift. Here we met a local skier who proposed to show us another route, new to all of us. We decided to go with him (as Robin later pointed out - "mistake number 1"!) This meant going back up the drag lift. At the top we waited, Glenn, Alan, myself and our French chum, for Adrian to appear. And we waited. And waited. We went back up and looked down the line of the drag lift - Adrian was not on it. Mobile communications let us down. We made the assumption Adrian had thought better of it and decided to descend the route he knew. (Mistake No 2). Down to 3! We skied off following our new guide and had another long and beautiful descent, this time across

the glacier, followed by a long long traverse to the telecabine mid station and a final long downhill to La Grave.

But, you are asking, what of Adrian, which guide we fickle, ungrateful ones had churlishly exchanged for another at the drop of a hat? It turned out that the fall he'd had earlier, into soft snow, which we'd all seen and which seemed innocuous, had eventually proved to have caused an injury to his upper arm which now became too uncomfortable for him to continue skiing. Having done his best to contact us to tell us of his intentions (without success) he went down in the telecabine and that was the end of his activities that week, a bone in the arm proving to have been cracked. The rest of his week was spent visiting the clinic, taking pain killers, phoning the car hire company to add a new driver, and reading my copy of Huckleberry Finn – finished it yet Adrian? Only the best book in the World eh?

But, saving the best till last, I can now tell what I know of the way Stuart spent the afternoon. The first we knew was when Glenn, by now in the bar, got a text from Stuart which had been sent an hour or two earlier, informing us that he had found some difficulty, was having to re-ascend on foot and "may be some time". We later discovered he'd followed ski tracks across the glacier and beyond till he found himself at the top of some steep terrain where he found a guide with a group with snowboards on their backs abseiling down the gully which was the only means of descent at this point. Understandably when you think about it, the guide found himself unable to comply with Stuart's request to ab down his rope. Instead he advised Stuart the only way home was to ascend on foot some hundreds of metres to cross a ridge before finding skiable terrain; and this in deep snow,

carrying skis. An hour or so later, still daylight but not for long, he was still climbing, and realising that some or all of the ensuing ski down would be undertaken in the dark. Just then a helicopter appeared, coming so close Stuart had to crouch in the snow hiding his face from the whirling maelstrom of snow created by the rotors. When it had gone he looked up to see a figure (Angel of Mercy?) above him looming through the still suspended snow and beckoning to him. He made his way to the man, who signalled the helicopter which came back in, hovered with a skid on the slope allowing Stuart and his saviour to hop in, and whisked him down to La Grave toute de suite. So far was his journey eased that the helicopter landing pad was in the car park of our lodging, leaving him 50 yards to walk! I expect he enjoyed his brew when he got in. Served in a very big MUG no doubt! Mind you, talking of MUGS – perhaps



Ali contemplating yet another crux section

there's another contender – a certain Irish member, having missed the connecting bus from his flight into Grenoble took a taxi – the cost? Roughly £180.00, wasn't it Dennis? Still, well worthwhile to enjoy the company of the nobs.

But amid all this talk of skiing, you may ask, what about the primary purpose of the meet, that of climbing ice? Whilst the day above was undoubtedly the most eventful, plenty more enjoyment was had throughout the week with various teams involved in climbing up and down the main valley with this year no need to go long distances to find good ice. For example all, or just the early pitches, of the following climbs were ascended by at least one FMC team: Caturgeas(4), Les Moulins(4), Orgasme(4), Goulotte du Muretouse(3+), Colere du Ciel(3+), Le Pylone(4), La Croupe de la Poufiasse(4+), Adrenaline Rush(4), Phantasme(5), L'Alleau(4). In addition many members enjoyed an afternoon or so of gentler skiing at the very sunny, and even better, deserted, ski area of Le Chazelet; a mile or two uphill from La Grave, this was also the favoured location for a post route, pre dinner pint since it keeps the sun till late in the afternoon.

The accommodation was once again at the Gite du Rocher which at £16 per night in small rooms for 4, albeit with private facilities, no longer seems as good a bargain as it once was, but then what in Euroland does these days? Comfortable enough though, and at least this year Chef du Cuisine Van Gulik had room to move in his kitchen, even if he had fewer pots and pans to wield than were strictly required. Yet again a vote of thanks is required from the whole meet for Michiel's skill and willingness in providing wholesome dinners night after night. Thanks to these economies it was even possible to enjoy the odd hour down the pub – mind you, at the usual Euroland £5.00 per (not quite a) pint it was only the odd hour.



"Beef Cobbler anyone?" Chef de Cuisine extraordinaire Michiel



You've seen the "Chief Cook"; now meet the "bottle washers"!
(FMC Photo Comp 3rd Place Humour)

Ideas for next year's ice trip are invited. It'll be three years since we were last at Cogne; anyone fancy a return? A joint meet there with the usual suspects from the Rucksack Club has been mooted, via Easyjet to Geneva – any takers for this notion? Let me know if you favour this or any other suggestion – it seems a long way off but an early decision may mean cheaper flights. Meanwhile, as I speak, in mid April, there's still ice to be had in Scotland, so not yet time to stow the axes and crampons – I'm off there now so that's all from me in my guise of Il Chef du Cascatisti, for this year.

Attending the meet were: Bennett, Wrigley, Brookes, Welsh, Holmes(g) Blackburn, Cundy, Gascoyne, Andrews, Clifford, Lee, Ellis(g), Van Gulik(g) Hepburn, McGuinness(g), Bowling(g), Carrigan.

Northumberland Meet May 2010



This is the first Spring meet we have had up here in the North East & it was well attended & good fun, if a little cold. The venue was new as well as we stayed on the National Trust's Cragside Estate at Rothbury. This fantastic estate was created by Lord Armstrong who founded the Armstrong Vickers engineering company in the 19th century. The house was the first in the world to have hydro electric power. The house is excellent & the

extensive grounds offer lots of opportunities for walks.

The retired folk arrived first as usual on Friday afternoon – Kevan & Glynis Ebrell, John & June Wiseman & Clive Bell. This was the serious walking team. Later in the evening Chris T & Geoff Brindle arrived shortly after Caroline & I. Dave Wood & Hal made it after closing time. We stayed in the Base Camp which they mainly use for volunteer holidays but rent it out as a Bunk House when not used. The facilities are generally excellent although the mattresses could be more comfortable.

On Saturday morning the walkers were up & out early to walk up Windy Gyle which apparently lived up to its name. This moorland hill is part of the Cheviots & forms the border with Scotland. They did manage to find some shelter for lunch after which Clive fell asleep & snored in his usual fashion but on this occasion even woke himself up.

The rest of us decided to head off to what is perhaps an obscure crag called Linshiels One on the Otterburn firing ranges which fortunately were not in use that day. We had the crag to ourselves & were joined in the afternoon by Martin D & Alex. It is south facing catching the sun & whilst climbing we were sheltered from the northerly wind so it was a good choice. The signs are interesting as they ask you not to touch anything as it may blow up & kill you!

The grades do tend offer value for money up here so we kicked off with a Severe – Private & Pashion which was ok. We then did a rather challenging VS called Offensive followed by a good MVS – Flanking Arete – which had a very steep start (overhanging). Martin lead an E3 – The Mirage which was ok for the grade.

We decided to move on late afternoon to a second crag The Drake Stone. The short journey was punctuated by a pint in the pub at Alwinton where I'm told the beer was good. The Drake Stone is situated on the top of a hill on the edge of the firing ranges & catches the wind. That day was no exception but we managed to do four routes between us ranging from Severe to HVS. All were excellent as the rock here is superb. The best were Hoe (Severe) & The Golden Hind (VS).



Clive Bell relaxing after a long squawk and Martin tops out and Clive is there camera at the ready
(photos by John Wiseman)

In the evening some stayed in to drink wine & others went to the pub in Rothbury & the reports were reasonable. That night it did rain but by mid morning this had cleared & although there was

still a strong northerly wind the day looked ok. The walking team split up with Kevan & Glynis going to Alnwick Castle Gardens & the others for long walk over the Simonside Hills.

The climbers decided to have a look around the grounds of the estate to let the crags warm up a bit. This made for a very enjoyable morning rounded off by tea & cakes in the Trust cafe. We then headed off up to the more popular crags on the summit of Simonside. Although a bit cold it was quite climbable and a good selection of routes were done.

Chris, Caroline & I moved on after a couple of hours to Ravensheugh further along the moors. This is a generally harder crag but surprisingly was reasonably sheltered that day. We bumped into the walkers on the way who had had a great day as well. We did a couple of VSs (Pendulum & Crescent Wall) that were excellent (*Ed: for 'excellent' read 'desperately hard'*). Hal & Dave joined us for the second one as they had decided to visit the house at Cragside. We were blessed with some warm & enjoyable evening sun which made for a good finish to the weekend & even spotted a couple of Roe Deer on the way down.



Hal on Crescent Wall

Overall everyone had a great weekend. The next trip up here is in late September when we will stay on the coast between Seahouses & Beadnell near Holy Island.

Andy Dunhill



Could this be the mega brew pot we've always been looking for??

Ripping Yarns:- The Curse of the Egyptian Figurine.



“ψε ωηο ρεμοωεσ τηε Βρονζε Φιγυρινε φρομ ιτσο ρεσπι νγ πλαχε σηαλλ, τογετηερ ωιτη τηειρ αχχομπλιχεσ, συ φφερ τηε ωρατη οφ τηε Γοδσ.”

Translated by the eminent scholar Christ Histlethwaite this inscription was found to read:

“ye who removes the Bronze Figurine from its resting place shall, together with their accomplices, suffer the wrath of the Gods.”

*It was Good Friday when the “Illusive Eleven”, -1, (Chris P was to arrive the following day) materialized from a R**n A*r conveyance at Trapani airport to embark on the 2010 Hot Rock extravaganza to Sicily. They collected 3 of Fiat's finest chariots and made their way to Villa Walter on the outskirts of Balestrate, a spacious palace with garden, which was to be their home for the following 8 nights. Arriving at 11 o'clock at night they were greeted with a magnificent feast provided by the Villa's owners.*

And Hot Rock it proved to be, so hot in fact that as early as the 3rd day the team chose a cold and breezy crag to climb on so to escape the sun's rays.

The action took place in just 2 main areas, mainly the sea cliffs below San Vito lo Capo on the NW tip of the island and the various crags on Monte Pellegrino which edge on to Palermo to the E of Balestrate. Most folk were operating in the 5s and 6s, although Martin did touch the 7th grade.

Palermo is an extremely busy city which exhibits an extreme variation to Sicily's unique driving style, thus making our forays there a tad exciting. Over the Easter weekend the land below the crags there was taken over by numerous 'pink knickers'

barbecuing and the like, making the cragging less pleasant than it would normally be.

San Vito, on the other hand, is an idyllic venue with many sectors but featuring rather sharp rock. Geoff and Tom, the two walking wounded from previous action, along with Clare, chose to survey much of the coast and it thus became Geoff's second home, along with the bar at the campsite there.

We all enjoyed communal meals and banter in the evenings and the usual extended decision making process in the morning, not helped by the sunny garden where we all congregated for breakfast.

However, as the script would have it, Fate took a turn for the worse and Thursday 8th April will be a date forever burnt into our memories.

'I' was I who first spotted the idol, sat partially hidden in the grass by the rocky beach at San Vito. I pointed it out to Chris P but something inside told me to give it a wide birth and I thought no more of it.

However, later that day, things started to happen. Whilst following the track to the crag by the beach Martin's car shredded a tyre. No big deal as they quickly sorted it and lost little time climbing. Caroline was hit on the head by a stone dislodged by the rope whilst lowering myself off a route, despite my warning her and telling her to stand to one side. Luckily she managed to hold me and Woody came immediately to the rescue. Later in the afternoon we had our first storm of the trip. We could see it approaching so we sought shelter in a bar in San Vito. This was a very localized storm indeed, thunder and lightning crashing directly above us, so close in fact that it caused Alex to let out an almighty scream that would have cleared the bar had it not been for the absolutely torrential deluge! Eventually it eased off to a steady downpour and we were able to take a ferry to the other side of the road to collect our vehicles and return to our Villa.

It was then that I realized that things would never be the same again when, to my horror, Caroline proudly placed the figurine on the dining table. We were doomed.

Friday saw a change to the team. Clare went home, Dave and Hal moved to more luxurious accommodation and we were joined by Andy, Chris C and Neil. Saturday saw the departure of Chris P and we all upped sticks and moved into an apartment in the middle of Balestrate itself. It was a fairly large, 2 floor apartment but fairly soon things started to go wrong. Whilst cooking our meal we ran out of Gas, the Electricity kept tripping and the hot water was intermittent.

We continued to visit the local crags, climbing everyday as a large jolly team, and, with a slight let up in the Gods' retribution. Sunday was not a good day for Caroline as she started the climbing session throwing up. Martin caught his arm in a Karabiner whilst being lowered off, letting the whole crag know about it (Ed: from the high pitched scream we thought that he had caught something else!!), and Alex joined the screaming when she was attacked by a lizard whilst she was sunbathing (Ed: she probably prefers the description 'Godzilla').

On the Tuesday Dave, Hal, Martin, Alex and Nick departed, leaving just 7 of us to face the consequences of Caroline's dire action - the curse was far from lifted.

Tuesday morning saw Chris C waiting to change his hire car after a nearly successful bid to oust current candidate Stuart Gascoyne from being the next 'Mug of the Year' (you'll have to wait 'til the dinner to get the full story).

On the Thursday Andy, Chris C and Neil did the only multi pitch route of the trip and as my arms and finger ends were trashed I, along with Geoff, Tom, and Caroline took a well earned rest day to explore the remains of the ancient cities of Segesta and Selinunte. We all had a really excellent day not knowing what the Gods had in store for us.

That very day the curse finally kicked in with its full force. The Gods, so incensed by Caroline's desecration, caused a mighty eruption, but not being very bright they missed and it happened in Iceland, not Sicily. Realising their mistake they pushed a dense cloud towards us thus causing mayhem with the European Aviation and prohibiting us from leaving this cursed island. Michael O'Leary, a God (Ed: Is that rhyming slang?) in waiting, had further vengeance to bestow us.

.....

And so it was early ish, for the FMC, Friday morning, the day of our hoped for departure, that we 7 descended on Trapani Airport. There were no crowds or queues and the officials in the ticket office confirmed that our flight was not cancelled so we obviously went climbing. But early that afternoon I received a text from R**nA*r telling me that our flight to Liverpool was cancelled.

We packed up and returned to the Airport to queue for hours at the booking office in order to rebook our flights. We were lucky, we thought. Caroline phoned her father who booked the last 3 places for Geoff, myself and her onto the following Tuesday flight. Andy, Chris C, Neil and Tom would have to wait until the following Friday for a Liverpool flight which was not an option. They booked an early Saturday morning flight to Milano and after extending our car hire we then went back to the house in Balestrate, which we had luckily managed to secure for 3 more nights.

Andy's team got up early for their flight the following morning but returned to the house at about 7:00 am having had to re book their flight again, this time to Rome at about midday. After a brief sleep they once again returned to the airport only to be informed that this flight was also cancelled. On their return to Balestrate they visited a travel agent and booked a ferry from Palermo to Genova. By this time Tom had had enough and decided to sit it out with us. So again Chris C had to go back to Trapani to return the hire car and then with Andy and Neil drive

to Palermo, courtesy of resident chauffeur Caroline, who by now had become native as far as driving in Sicily was concerned.

Then there were 4. Sunday saw torrential rain again so we took Tom to the airport to practice his queuing and sort a flight back to Liverpool the following Friday, whilst we stormed the castle at Erice. This was easy as it was completely enveloped in cloud and no one was about. We then picked up Tom, visited the nature reserve at Scopello, a beautiful place indeed, and returned to the house to be greeted with the news that all R**nA*r flights were cancelled until the following Wednesday.

Thus we had a decision to make.

Exodus.....to be continued on page 24

Some Pubs In Devon and Cornwall

(Assessed by Martin Bennett, with, surprisingly you might say, Alan Blackburn and, wholly expectedly, Ali Welsh.)

Ali, Alan and I, needing more sunshine after a fortnight in Morocco, decided on a few days touring pubs in SW England. The weather forecast being exceptionally favourable for mid April, and picturing ourselves in the beer gardens of the South West Riviera, it wasn't a big decision to extend the few days to a week. A caravan ("with a picture window with an Atlantic view to Lundy and beyond") in Westward Ho! was hastily booked to provide accommodation in an area the Good Beer Guide (in the absence of our very own beer guide, one M D'Ale, we had to make do with the written version) assured us would provide rich pickings. Here's what we found.



Tea time on the first day found us enjoying pints of Proper Job and Tribute (Tribbers) in the garden of the excellent Bush Inn at Morwenstow (www.bushinn-morwenstow.co.uk). Highly recommended. Incidentally we had passed the time prior to the sun ascending beyond the yardarm by amusing ourselves at one of the crags of the region, Cornakey Cliff. The routes chosen to justify the imbibing to come were a good little HVS called Stormy Weather and a nice big easy VS known as Wrecker's Slab.

Our guide book suggested a visit to Braunton to try out The Black Horse. We seemed to get there very early and, though today was the one sunless day in the whole week, decided to once again amuse ourselves in anticipation of the main event at a local cliff. Accordingly we found a spot known as Baggly Point and after the inevitable pause for morning coffee felt obliged to venture on to the rock with ascents of some lovely slabs variously known as Ben, Marion and Kinkyboots. On the last we found a No 2 camming device. By the power of modern communications we were later able to re-unite it with its owner via UK Climbing Forums. Very gratifying – the owner said getting it back was like being re-united with an old friend! And so to the main business of the day – but what's this? The Black Horse was shut! The fools! What now? A little persistence found adequate recompense in The Agricultural, locally known as "The Aggie", (<http://www.welovelocal.com/en/sw/north-devon/braunton/pubs/agricultural-inn-ex332ea.html>) where, though the surroundings were not exactly to our tastes, the beer (Otter) was fine. Better though, was the Betty Stoggs we enjoyed a few minutes later at the Beaver Inn (www.beaverinn.co.uk/) at Appledore. A bit of a detour but worth it.



Day three - two pubs today we thought; a bit further West maybe. This meant the time until we felt we could cross the threshold of the first was spent at Marsland Point where we found a beach and a

crag. Since we were there we found time to make ascents of routes known as Magic Staircase, Walking On The Moon, Oiseaux, and Rock Pool Crack. All provided good slab climbing on good rock with one or two "run out" moments among them. Very close to the crag is The Old Smithy Inn at Welcombe (www.theoldsmithyinn.co.uk/). Strongly favoured for more than just the Sharps Six Hop IPA . (Modern discrimination acts and political correctness forbid me from entering into a description of the other



attraction!). Only our intention to try 2 pubs that day convinced us to leave after one pint. On the way back to base we detoured to Parkham to sample the wares of The Bell Inn (www.thebellinnparkham.co.uk) where we once again went for the Betty Stoggs. Another great pub.



A repeat visit to the manifold attractions of the Bush Inn was called for and achieved after a short sojourn at Lower Sharpnose where we did what I think was the best route of the trip – Lunakhod, and another HVS called Dulcima. The only time we climbed out of the sun, since they're on the shady side of the fins. You couldn't call it a disappointment but, since the "Tribbers" was no longer on, we had to "make do" with Betty Stoggs. Again. And it proved to be as good as ever.

Saturday was a peculiar day in that we did no climbs and HAD NO BEER! Being FMC nobs I know you'll not be surprised by the lack of climbing but share shock and dismay at our failure to procure a

pint. Here's how it came about: we (misguidedly) went to Blackchurch Rocks. Since it was fully thirty years since I'd last frightened myself trying The Verger it was in my mind to "have another look" as the saying goes. Happily, this being a North facing crag with a cold wind blowing directly onto it, we decided against it. Just as well – we later learned it's now considered to be, not a scary HVS/E1 but a scary E3! The tide only just having left the lower 10 feet of the Sacre Couer pinnacle, and left it exceedingly slippery, our attempts on it were short lived. We retreated to what we expected would be a pleasant alternative, the sunny Brownspear Point. But it's fallen down! Most of it anyway, taking all the climbs we fancied with it. Nice beach though.



It being still early when we got back again to the car, and lunch having been a meagre affair, we sought out the Docton Mill Tearooms (www.doctonmill.co.uk/) and enjoyed the best, biggest and best value cream tea I've ever had. We lingered so long enjoying it in the afternoon sun that beer time crept up on us and, so stuffed were we that for once large quantities of fluid were not such a great attraction (he said apologetically).

On our last day at the coast we killed time with a visit to Vicarage Cliff for some more very pleasant slab climbing

on In Memorium, Joie de Vivre, Sol, Little Dribbler, Wellington Street and Tombstone, all but the first deserving one more star than they get we thought. In the early evening The Bush Inn required a last visit and then The Bell Inn at Parkham. We enjoyed more Betty Stoggs at each, as well as some excellent value nosh and good conversation with the landlady and locals at the latter.

On Monday we were heading for home via some yet to be chosen hostelry when we found ourselves in Bristol of course. What shall it be we thought, see if Dave Cundy's in to make us a brew or do a route at Avon Gorge? Sorry we missed you Dave – but you'd have been at work anyway. None of us had ever climbed on Suspension Bridge Buttress so we selected the 3 star HVS Hell Gates. After seconding Ali on the so called 4c first pitch we approached the theoretical crux with much trepidation. It proved to be fine at the grade however, and the route finishes with a superb exposed traverse pitch and a single abseil straight back to the start. The drive home was of course interrupted by seeking out another beer guide recommendation, The Cricketers Arms (www.beerinthevening.com/pubs/s/28/28842/Cricketers_Arms/Sandbach) in Sandbach where to prepare for our homecoming we felt it appropriate to choose a pint of Burnley's finest - Moorhous Blond Witch - and found of course that it stands up well in comparison to the fare down South.

So that was that, some excellent beers in mostly very convivial surroundings and a bit of exercise by way of rock climbing to go with it. Who could ask for more?

Martin Bennett

April 2010



FMC Photo Comp 2nd Place Action by Martin Dale

FMC Photo Comp 3rd Place Action
by Phil Kendrick



FMC Photo Comp 2nd Place Humour
by Clive Bell



FMC Photo Comp 2nd Place Landscape by Martin Dale



FMC Photo Comp 3rd Place Landscape

Ladies Meet March 2010, Stair

A CRACKING WEEKEND.

Blue skies, sunshine, cold but clear views. Saturday was approximately a 10 mile walk from Howtown which included the twin buttresses of Authurs Pike and Bonscale Pike with fairly gentle ascents but the rewards of the panoramic views over Ullswater and beyond, enticed a person to linger and enjoy the contrasting scenery.

We included the Cockpit Stone Circle which is extensive with a chain of stones – possibly a Bronze Age Burial Site - but a suitable picnic spot with seating for all.

Sunday we did another mass ascent. Rowling End and Causey Pike and some more energetic members walked as far as Sail before descending down the Miners Track.

Yet another successful Ladies Meet and although the golden Daffodils were sadly lacking, the huge abundant swathes of Snowdrops were compensation

Jennie Tolley



The Sicilian Job - Exodus

Some say that he is really Jean Luc Picard and that his phasers are always on stun. All we know is that he's called The Crag. Some say that he breaks wind a bit and that he can belch the theme tune to The Good Life, all we know is that he is called The Wasp.

At the start of the Hot Rock Race the Crag, along with the Witchfinder and the Cursefinder, decided to sit it out for a few days and wait for the flight out of Trapani on Tuesday whilst the Wasp opted for a ferry to Genova with his trusty cohorts The Registry. Captain Mellow decided to takes things slow.

By Monday morning the Wasp team had reached the mainland and were on a bus to Paris. The Crag team were in deep discussion since their Tuesday flight had also now been cancelled. Captain Mellow just mellowed.

Giving up on flights, Crag and co started chasing the Wasp. Captain Mellow followed.

Tuesday evening and news reached the Crag that the Wasp had landed in Newcastle - the race was lost and he hadn't even finished the second lap, read on for all of the gory details.....

THE 1st GREAT ESCAPE

Not knowing how they were to get back to the UK it was on Saturday 17th April Chris C, Andy and Neil boarded the 10 pm ferry at Palermo to arrive 20 hours later in Genova at 6 O'clock Sunday night, having had 3 R**n A*r flights cancelled. From there they managed to catch a train to Nice but it only went as far as Vermiglia, so after sleeping in the railway station there they caught the first train to Nice the following morning. They took a taxi to the airport which was open but not for flights. Whilst they were pondering their next course of action, they were approached by 2 French ladies who, by a stroke of good fortune, asked them if they wished to travel to Paris and if so, a big yellow bus would be departing there in 10 minutes. Apparently, a group of French people had found themselves stuck in Rome and took it upon themselves to organise a coach to take them home. The coach thus gained 3 extra passengers and the team arrived in Paris 13 hours later. They made their way to Andy's Sister in Law's house on the outskirts and got a bed for the night. Andy spoke to Christine on the 'phone and got several contact numbers. On Tuesday morning he finally got through to Eurolines and booked coach tickets to London Victoria via Calais. They then caught a train on the East coast line from Kings Cross, arriving back in the NE at 8 O'clock at night. On Wednesday Chris C went with Neil to collect his car from Liverpool airport.

Palermo to Newcastle - 70 hours.

THE 2nd GREAT ESCAPE

Like the first team we (Caroline, Geoff, Tom and I) did not know how we were going to get back to the UK but we again took the 10pm Monday night ferry from Palermo to Genova. Unlike Andy's team however we had an initial logistical problem of returning the hire car to Trapani airport and then getting to Palermo docks. This was solved with the help of the Travel Agent in Balestrate who organised a mini bus to collect us from Trapani, and 2 Belgian folk in the same situation as ourselves, and take us to the ferry, thus splitting the overall cost. Many suggestions were made whilst on the ferry including buying a vehicle, hiring a large car to take us to Zeebrugge to hiring a coach between a load of passengers but all these fell through. We did see actor Damian Lewis on the boat, the first of 2 celeb ticks of our journey (*Ed: his wife, of Harry Potter fame, was on board as well which made 3 celeb ticks*).

We also arrived at Genova at 6 pm and after a short debate made our way to the railway station where we caught the 20:19 train to Milano arriving there at 10pm Tuesday night. We then caught a Taxi to Paul and Cristina's where we stayed for 2 nights. Caroline and I spent all Wednesday morning on the internet and at Milano's Stazione Centrale in vain attempt to get a train as near to the UK as possible whilst Tom and Geoff went walk about to buy supplies etc. We eventually found that flights were now available from Bergamo, between £300 - £400 for the next few days but only £110 for the Saturday, so we plumbed for that. We were just about to confirm that internet booking when Tom

phoned me with a telephone number for the British Consul. Whilst wandering around the railway station he and Geoff had met up with some Brits catching a coach from Milano to London organized by the British consul, a real stroke of luck.

I booked us on and shortly after 1pm Thursday afternoon we were on our way. We arrived at London Victoria via the Chunnel at 11am Friday morning, caught the tube to Euston and arrived in Liverpool about 3pm. Our 2nd celeb tick, Martin Bell, was in the adjacent carriage. We then caught a taxi to the airport to collect Caroline's car and I was home for 5pm that evening.

Palermo to Kelbrook - 91 hours.

Editor Postscript: My wish for a hot bath when I got home was foiled by a faulty boiler. Never mind, I thought, I'll just go to my parent's house for a hot bath. That was also foiled when I got there to find that they had had a power cut and so there wasn't any at their house either - I did finally succeed a few hours later after restoring the power to the hot water tank. Next time I'm definitely not picking up any strange Egyptian idols.

Ladies Meet June 2010



The June Ladies Meet started afloat on Windermere. Blue skies, gentle breezes strengthening later after G & Ts, followed by a rip-roaring sail, with fabulous views of, among others, the Langdale Pikes, Fairfield Horseshoe, Loughrigg.

A very early start on Saturday allowed us to take full advantage of another perfect day. We walked many of the hills we had admired from the lake, over Sergeant Man, and high Raise, traversing the Pikes and down from the top of Stake Pass via Mickleden, for afternoon tea at the ODG. Ground astonishingly dry, sky astonishingly blue, 360 degree views across all the Lakeland peaks and beyond.

Magic self-filling wine glasses appeared that evening to accompany a delicious communal meal. Birds sang, sheep baaed, women talked.

Our next outing is September 4th and 5th, Stair. All women members and friends most welcome.

Morocco 2010 – The Return

Last year's trip, about which you may read elsewhere in this edition since it escaped the previous one, was enjoyed so much that part two was planned almost immediately upon our return. It would be me Alan and Robin of course but Steve felt by the time it came around he may find work getting in the way, and so it proved. In the end the fortnight team was Alan, Ali and me, joined for week two by Robin and Woody. The cost of the trip was greatly reduced by the entry of the no frills airlines into the N. Africa market. We opted for Easyjet to Marrakesh. This meant we could have a night in Marrakesh en route; it also meant a longer drive, the consequence of which was not one but two speeding tickets in the course of a couple of hours! Be warned if you pass this way. When I picked up the first on-the-spot fine it was decided the cash should come from our newly gathered kitty. When Ali got the second one you couldn't have blamed Alan, the non driver, had he jibbed at topping up the kitty again before we'd had more than one meal out of it! To his eternal credit he said nothing about it.

This year we had discovered a place to stay in what's come to be known as "The North Side" of the Anti Atlas rock climbing scene. And what a place – The Tizourgane Kasbah is an ancient fortified village which seems to be being single-handedly restored by one family, who live there and offer "pension" type accommodation in the small part of it that's so far liveable in. Quaint is not the word for it. Unique fits better.



Kasbah Tizourgane. Photo by Martin Bennett

Using this as a base for the first few days we picked off some of the plums on this side, notably a 1000 foot VS called "Aseldrar Welcome" that spelled adventure with a capital A. It goes up the left wall then into the huge bay of the crag in the picture then back left to the arête leading to the highest point. For my money it was as good as anything we did on the trip. The only disappointment was the wild boar we were warned about were not in residence at the base of the wall.

We also had great fun on an established route on a face known rather "Britishly" as Lower Eagle Crag. The route, Pink Lady, is a mere 700 feet or so and also goes at about VS and provides very enjoyable climbing without too many route finding problems. Both crags are approached in 10 or 15 minutes and offer easy walking descents.

The 1000 foot Aseldrar Crag Photo by Martin Bennett

Even closer to the road is a crag with a very British feel if not name – Ksar Rock, where we'd been last year. This provides routes from one to four pitches and up to about 300 feet long. This year we climbed established routes from Severe to HVS and had a bit of a prolonged adventure doing a new route by



accident. Having started late after climbing Pink Lady, across the valley, we set off up the wrong groove and climbed it for 2 pitches, one lead each for Ali and Alan, before becoming convinced it wasn't what we thought it was as I tried to make sense of a pitch 3 description of a route we weren't on! Then it went dark. No torches! We hastily rigged an ab and got to the ground just as the light failed altogether. Then we had a fight with the ropes. Good job our hosts at the Kasbah were open minded when it came to dinner time! Having left gear, and being parsimonious, we went back next day to get it. I abbed in, collected the nuts, crab and maillons we'd left and found it a simple matter to climb out via a relatively easy chimney gully thus completing a 3 pitch route of about VS. A tentative name for it is "Two Day Event" VS 5a,4c,4a

Alan and Ali on new route at Ksar Rock Photo by Martin Bennett

On our way to our new billet at Tafraoute, the spiritual home of Anti Atlas climbing and mountain walking, we stopped off at Sidi M Zal for an attempt at "The Great Corner". Alas, it was only after the harrowing ascent of the first 100 feet or so where, not having No 5 or 6 cams, the protection was limited, that Alan came to realise the mistake in the guide book meant he was on the harder proposition, Bowline. This is the huge curving corner on the picture. Great Corner is the huge straight corner to it's left. A retreat was affected and we got some compensation on a 500 foot

Sidi M Zal - Crag ND. Photo by Martin Bennett Severe before heading off to Tafraoute for the first beer since Marrakesh. Yes, you've just learned the one negative thing about staying at the Kasbah!

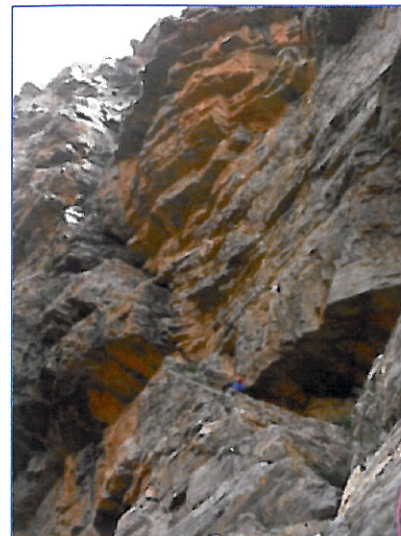


Having first checked out the best price we could get at the much favoured Hotel Amandiers we again got the best deal at Hotel Saint Antoine and moved in. It was nice to find some of the same staff, who remembered us from last year (*Ed: And yet they still let you stay!!*). We also booked a room for Woody and Rob who were expected late the next day, which we spent on an abortive attempt at Original Route on the prosaically titled Crag W. This was my fault for

taking a blinkered approach. We were later advised by Les Brown, the first ascensionist, that in this

region "whenever it gets hard, have a look round the corner". To add insult to the injury of failure I later realised I'd left my pocket knife at the base of the route. A return match was clearly called for.

Next day was Rob and Dave's first so we took them on the hairiest drive we've so far found, to the village of Anergui with it's huge crag with a 10 minute approach. They enjoyed a big VS whilst Alan Ali and myself did the excellent HVS "Naseby", Alan getting the lead on the plum pitch where he can JUST be made out in the first picture contemplating the soaring corner that is the meat of the route.



Two views of Alan leading the main pitch of "Naseby" at Anergui. Photos by Martin Bennett

Neither Ali nor Woody had done one of THE climbs of the district, The HVS "White Tower", so they went off there next day whilst we had semi rest day on an easily approached smaller crag (Crag L) in the main valley on a route called Outer Edge which is graded 5a. Rest day? It provided me with my hardest lead of the trip, and Alan's pitch was also decidedly worrying.

It was time for the return match with Crag W's Original Route. Ali and me took the direct approach to the cliff this time, finding it much quicker, and also finding my knife exactly where I'd left it after peeling my orange. One - Nil to the nobs. We used a different approach pitch, easier and more pleasant, and arranged it so I got the pitch I'd failed on. This time, armed with the "look round the corner" advice, it went smoothly and I belayed below what proved to be the best pitch of the route which Ali led with glee. A last 200 foot easier pitch and we were up it. Two - Nil, and time for a beer.

We'd got into the habit of having our post route beers on the terrace at the Hotel Les Amandiers where they're more used to this kind of thing (the Hotel St Antoine, whilst it will serve a beer, insists that it is enjoyed discreetly). In this way we got to meet many of the original pioneers of rock climbing in The Anti Atlas, who still go there every year and this time happened to coincide with us, hence our acquisition of much excellent advice. A few days passed in a similar vein, including a

return bout, successful this time, with "Great Corner" on Crag ND, climbing as a rope of 4, which we've done before and can be made to work better than you might think.

Our last climbing day was spent with Les Brown and his friend Noreen at a new crag they've been looking at, provisionally known as Sidi M Zal River Gorge. A little exploration led to 3 new routes – Ali and Alan didn't think their route was worth recording and followed Woody and I up one which certainly is – now known as "Sez Les" it's a 350 foot VS up a big corner on the N. Face of the crag.



MartinB and Woody on 1st ascent of "Sez Les" at Sidi M Zal River Gorge. Photo by Rob Andrews

And that was that. There's no beer to be had in the hamlet of Sidi M Zal so a coke had to suffice. Our last night was spent back at The Kasbah (no beer again) so it wasn't until next day, after a long dusty drive over the Atlas Mountains (taking the scenic route not least because speed traps are less likely on the mountain roads), when we returned to the Hotel Ali in Marrakesh, that we were able to celebrate the end of another excellent trip in the time honoured fashion.

Members present on the "meet" were Andrews, Bennett, Blackburn, Welsh, Wood. There'll be another next March – let me know if you're interested – there's great walking as well as rock climbing, and all in perfect weather.

Martin Bennett

Pembroke 2010: part 1

It was with some trepidation that I packed for the 2010 FMC Pembroke. The score so far was: Pembroke 2 - Me 0. Let me explain - in 2006 I had to return home after one day due the illness of my lift's good lady. In 2007 I broke my leg in a bizarre motorcycle accident just outside Builth Wells on the way down. End of summer climbing for me. Hence the anxiety. The poor weather forecast for the May Day weekend didn't lift my spirits.

Nonetheless, it was a fine sunny day when Captain Tim picked Tony and myself up in the Good Ship Mazda on Friday lunchtime. Having taken precautions against spontaneous combustion, leprosy and impetigo I sat in the back surrounded by roll bars, wearing a padded flame-proof suit, a crash helmet, whilst clutching a St. Christopher, a rabbit's foot and with Russell Grant on speed dial (*Ed: Tim's driving can't be THAT bad!*). Good progress was made by Tim through the Mid-Wales rain to emerge at a breezy, cloudy, but dry St. Govan's car park. Woody, Hal and Steve had arrived earlier and subjected Steve, a new member, to a Pembroke baptism of fire by taking him up Rear Wind (HVS 5a). We joined them at Stennis Head and managed to get a couple of routes in before dark, namely Highland Fling HS 4b & Quickstep VS 4b. After which we repaired to the sanctuary of the St Govan's Inn to experience the serendipity of an all-you-can-eat curry night. Luckily we had put some toilet roll in the fridge. This was washed down with several pints of real ale, one of which was named CWRW – try pronouncing that if you are brave.

Then on to our residence for the weekend – Greenala. A splendid 1940s mansion in Manorbier. This was a great find by Woody. The décor was original and was like something out a Noel Coward light comedy. Dinner jackets were de rigeur and cigarette holders were optional. The most impressive feature was the terrace which had a sublime view of Manorbier beach (see photo below). Once settled we toddled off to The Castle pub to quaff draught Bass and await the arrival of that great luminary of the FMC, His Nobjesty Lord Martin of Dale. His eminence duly arrived at about midnight accompanied by the lovely Alex and the not-quite-so-lovely Pete. So a customary late night was had by the team.

Because we had several fairly inexperienced climbers at the meet, it was decided to go to Saddle Head to start with since this provided a good selection of lower grade climbs. The forecast bad weather didn't arrive and it was sunny but very windy at the top of the crag. A good day was had by all. Tony, Steve and I got to know each other a lot better squashed together on some small stances on the superb Blue Sky (VS 4a4b), after Tony led Pink Un (VS 5a) and followed by Sea Mist (HS 4b). Tim and Pete, encouraged by Woody and Hal, were learning to lead on some of the VDs and Severes. What a marvellous place to learn your craft! Comestibles and ale were again taken at the St. Govan's Inn again. Later we had to endure the Saturday night entertainment in The Castle – namely a Karaoke. Painful.



The View from Greenala's Terrace

The same sort of weather prevailed on the Sunday windy but sunny. At St. Govan's you needed every item of clothing on at the top but at the foot of the cliff people were taking tops off – men I might add. A good selection of routes were climbed by the team here. Tony and I climbed Sandbagged (VS 4b), Stacked Against (VS 4b). Woody tackled Up Against the Wall (HVS 5a) but misread the guidebook which said "harder-than-it-looks". He soon found out why. Pete ably led Centurion (Sev 4a) and then also led Sandbagged. A good effort. Woody then eulogised about a route at Trevallen called The Hole (HVS 5b) – so off Tony and I trotted. He was right. What a unique route! After a thin traverse and strenuous crack, the route gains the top of the cliff via a tunnel at about 25m – like caving in reverse. Superb. Martin treated Alex to an ascent directly after us. Meanwhile Woody and Hal climbed the first pitch of Dinkum Wall (E3 5c). You are probably ahead of me by now dear reader – yes it was the St. Govans Inn again followed by The Castle.

In the midst of our incredible climbing exploits I should mention that Nick and Kate attended and joined Martin and Alex at their cottage, and us in the pub, but mainly enjoyed the wonderful coastal walking available. Sorry - I haven't any details of what they did.

Similar weather for the May Day Bank Holiday - windy but a cold northerly wind. Tony, Tim and I decided to climb in the St David's area, mainly due to it being (sort of) on our way home, this being our last day. But also because the new Rockfax guide promised some splendid routes. The rest decided to follow.



Martin Dale on Uncertain Smile E2 5b

So it was that we landed at Craig Caerfai amid the beautiful surroundings of Caerfai Bay. Our group tackled most of the mid-grade routes on the Main Slab, including, Caerfai Crack (HS), Nameless (VS), The Byrn (VS) and White Wall (HS). There were several ascents of the classic slab climb Armorican (VS), and Monsieur Dale led Uncertain Smile (E2 5b) with aplomb. Tony had a go but his "a" didn't have enough "plomb". By this time it was for us to depart and for Captain Tim to pull off a creditable sub 5-hour run back to the Fylde (*Ed: amateurs!!*).

Being lucky enough to stay on, Martin and Alex walked over to Carreg Y Barcud and did Ethos (HVS). On the Tuesday they went to Mother Careys and Martin started up Crymthion (VS) but higher up it got dirty and loose, so he switched to a crack to the right, which turned out to be Sunsmoke, (E2). Wanting to climb in the sun they followed this with another VS called Eighth Gauge, but this was too easy for Top Nob so he switched to Tempest E2 – awesome! Woody, Hal, Pete and Steve, meanwhile, climbed Rock Idol (E1), as a rope of four - reputed to be one of the finest E1's in the country. Hope I get the chance to find out one day. I think I'm correct in saying that the latter group's journey home wasn't without difficulty. Rumours of a diesel car being filled with petrol have emerged. If true, this is the second FMC member to do it this year. Maybe the curse of Pembroke has been passed to another.

All in all, a great meet. Unexpectedly good weather, stunning climbing and coastal scenery, great pubs, an excellent residence, and most of all superb company. I think I speak for all attendees in thanking Woody for organizing such a successful event. Roll on next year.

Terry Robinson .

Working Weekend Stair 22-23 May '10

For a change there was not a great deal to do or at least that could be done in a weekend so we did what we could & went walking & climbing.

Jobs done included – a general clean around inside especially the WCs & kitchen areas. Some old junk was thrown out. Some people seem to leave things in the cottage that do not work at home so I have to throw them out (why they think these items will work at the cottage when they don't at home is a mystery to me!)

Chris T & Geoff did their usual gardening tasks outside including cutting down a few more inoffensive branches & moving the existing pile of garden waste to the east side of the land adjacent to the septic tank.- they are good at moving piles!

An area of floor screed in the new Porch had lifted so Geoff took it up & replaced it. This does now need to be re-painted.

I provided a veggie meal on Saturday evening for everyone. We had the usual argument about hot or cold pie & hot or cold custard. There was no choice however as this time I got ice cream again & mixed it with custard.

Thanks to those who helped: Chris Thistlethwaite, Caroline Webb, Geoff Brindle, Dave Earle, Mike & Carole Penn, Martin Dale & Alex & Dave Wood & Hal.

Overall it was a very successful weekend & I'm already taking bookings for the next one.

Jobs for the future include: Finish fitting out the Porch. Explore the possibility of getting Cavity Wall Insulation. Yet more garden landscaping, Cover the letter box in the gents fire door as someone has removed the nice metal one we had..New sinks & WCs installed as the existing ones are old & cracked .especially the ladies WC. The gents urinal does not flow away properly & needs a good clean or more.....The hot water heater is not working very well so needs replacing with local water heaters in the toilets & kitchen. The electrical appliances need a 5 yearly safety inspectionplus lots more I have not thought of yet!

Andy

June 2010

High Crags Meet

The dry start to the year had left the high crags of the Lakes in perfect condition. All we needed now was some perfect weather!

The forecast was good. Not much interest though from the membership of the FMC. So much so that we were able to accommodate members of Derwent MC left hutless due to a booking faux pas. In fact there were many more folks from another club in the Coledale than the usual FMC gaggle on the Friday night.

Saturday dawned glorious. Martin Bennett arrived ready for action, however harness problems for Andy Dunhill meant a trip into Keswick before any climbing got underway. Alex Ashworth and myself had already sorted our objective, the classic big crag trip up Eagle Front, Birkness Combe, Buttermere. Andy meanwhile had returned from Keswick and gathered his troops for an excursion into obscurity on Lining Crag, Borrowdale. Martin had been recruited along with Chris Thistlethwaite and Geoff Brindle. Andy Dunhill, for those unaware likes his obscure crags, but he has also volunteered to do some route checking for the new Borrowdale guidebook, and one of his crags is Lining Crag.

Slowly we made our way up the base of the Combe, Alex searching for elusive bilberries. Numerous teams were already ensconced on the route. We were sort of racing another team but they were moving faster than we were. We let them win and sat down in the sun for a butty. The crag was snuff dry. I started up the new alternative start, actually up rock instead of the grass to the left. The team in front of us moved quickly and didn't hold us up at all. There was a breeze but it was never cold. Absorbing climbing flows with just enough protection to the half way ledge. Alex led across the ledge and set up a belay, the first time we'd caught up with the other team. We followed them to a bit of a traffic jam below the final corner. Soon we were up, back in the sun again. We wandered across the top towards the summit of High Stile. All the western fells laid out before us in all their majesty. Pillar, opposite, winking at us. It was awesome! We reluctantly dropped down to the start of another classic, Oxford and Cambridge Direct. Alex's big lead! And lead it she did in very good style. Racing against the sun as it rose up the crag, whilst I shivered on the belay. All good things come to an end. Back at the car, a beer called so we stopped off at The Bridge for one. Then back to the hut for a rapid Sausage pasta dish and then up to the Swinny to say hello to a happy Martin B and an ecstatic Simon Fenna, who'd just purchased a new motor bike. John Hickman and Claire Addy had also arrived, having been on High Crag, Buttermere. They'd had a good afternoon doing Delilah and then one of those rarities, an FMC route, Foul Play. Martin, along with the Lining crag team had enjoyed themselves fouguing up unclean rock. Between them they'd checked four routes. More wine was consumed back at the hut by some than was sensible. They would regret it later!

The morning brought more cloud. Andy had retreated to his porch bed. Everyone apparently had been snoring! The Derwent MC members went about their breakfast routines oblivious to the trauma of Andy's sleep deprivation. The usual problem of where to go was discussed at length on the bench outside. "Slow" Nick Hepburn arrived earlier than usual. Andy had a climbing partner. Chris and Geoff had an idea, Martin and Simon's was Castle Rock but last night's excesses were taking their toll. Alex and me had our pushbikes with us, and it seemed appropriate to put them to some sort of use. Pillar was looking a bit adventurous so I suggested a look at the first crag up the Newlands Valley. The guide recommended cycling in, so why not? We set off against a strong wind. We saw no one until just before the Carlisle MC hut. Soon we were climbing the steep hillside towards Grey Crag; the hillside by the way was abundant in bilberries! After what seemed like an age we reached the base and collapsed, falling asleep. Maybe the wine excess had got to us too? It was very windy! Eventually we forced ourselves into action. Our chosen route, El Scorchio, started up a very steep loose looking groove. I set off in trepidation. Some loose rock was encountered and disposed of. It felt like this was an early ascent. I brought Alex up to a spacious ledge with poor belays then laid siege to the crux wall. The gear and the rock seemed suspect to me and my confidence was not helped when I lifted my foot off a foothold and half of it fell off! I committed to the cause, having to use a knee on the smooth wall, which was devoid of footholds. The pull into the niche was fierce and the position then attained was precarious. Gear was thankfully good now though and allowed upward progress to be accomplished less stressfully. The rest of the pitch went ok and I got a belay and brought up Alex. I couldn't hear her voice in the wind but she faltered at the smooth wall and shouted "have you got me?" before the ropes came in rapidly. She arrived smiling as usual. "Not so bad that, was able to find the smallest of footholds on the smooth wall, just enough!" We found the abseil sling, donated a screwgate and quit the crag. Job done. Time was getting on, no time for another route. I vowed to return to try the E4, and Phil Morris's finest hour, Space Rats in Grey, hard E3. We wandered back down the slope filling Alex's bag with juicy bilberries. The ride back to the hut only took us 15 minutes.

John and Claire went up Borrowdale but the cloudy conditions and the wind put them off and they ended up shopping in Keswick. Martin and Simon managed Gazebo on Castle but their hangovers got the better of them and that was all they achieved. Andy and Nick had a better day, ticking off another route on Lining Crag before going down to Eagle to do Squawk, a tough E2. Chris and Geoff had plans for Great Round How, but time was their enemy and they ran out, so went home. We ended up with a beer in Staveley then Chinese in Carnforth. A successful meet, I reckon. Shame not more members turned up to experience it.

Martin Dale

Clive's Bangers and Mash Meet Pics:



Coniston from Great Carrs - a shaft of sunshine pierces the low cloud

The team prepare to set off in the falling snow on the Sunday with bellies still full from the sumptuous food (and drink) the night before, but first the cars have to be rearranged...



Pentire Obsession

Ever since my first encounter with this brooding North Cornish giant way back in the mists of time, early 80's I think, I've had an unhealthy obsession with it's routes. It was that classic black and white photo on the front cover of Mountain 34, April 1974 that captured my imagination. Cornwall's secret crags it said. I had to go and have a look!

That first time I remember being totally mind blown by its atmosphere. We tentatively committed to the lay back on the first pitch of Eroica, reached the top of the flake, abbed off and ran away suitably impressed. I was back in 1987. Fresh from a successful few days in West Penwith, and with a good bunch of friends. Eroica wasn't going to win this time. We took the first pitch layback again, but this time went further. I snook past the peg, barely daring to breathe on it, and sailed up the groove above. I still remember the look on Fenna's face as he pulled over the top (and I have the photo!). What a route! I think Mick Van Gulik was also on the team. There were some other youths on the crag that day and the lines of Black Magic and Darkinbad were mapped out with their chalk. We stared in awe at these blank looking routes. They seemed a million miles too hard for us to even contemplate.

I was back in July of 1994, this time with Andy Dunhill. We were pirates, set to plunder Cornish treasure! (Well, at least we wore stripy things and bandannas, and Andy had his famous yellow football shirt). We were on one of Andy's regular July trips and I already had several routes of the required standard under my belt, so was quietly confident. We were going to emerge from the "dark n bad" walls triumphant. However, we had a big shock when we reached the bottom of the route. The enormity of the task bit hard with the realisation that a fall from the first 30 unprotected feet of 5c climbing would have very dire consequences. The deep trench filled with man-eating boulders waiting for the falling leader was horrendous. We very nearly ran away again. Andy was certainly not going near it. We rather pathetically padded out a couple of gaps with our rucksacks, then I set off armed with just a few wires and a couple of quickdraws. Several sweaty minutes later, I reached the sanctuary of a ledge and pulled up the rest of the massive rack. With at least three more cruxes to come I set off. I don't know how long I was on that pitch but I was a spent force when I finally reached the belay. Part way up Andy had shouted for me to look around. A swirling sea mist had blown in and the ropes immediately began to feel damp. Andy knew he would have to lead the top pitch, which contained a single move probably harder than anything below. He powered through it and we were up, sat on top of that grassy mound again. What a route!

Years passed. I had even bought a double set of RP's for my next objective (the guidebook recommended that you carry them!). Numerous attempts to tempt potential seconds down there had failed. Then, in June this year, I had a chance! A trip somewhere with a willing second was on the cards. The weather dictated that it would have to be the South West.

The scene was set. Another good thing perhaps was that my climbing partner had never even heard of Pentire, never mind clapped eyes on it, or even seen a picture of it! And I was going reasonably well.

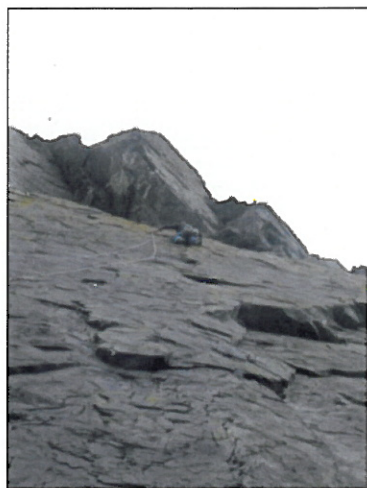
Alex Ashworth and I met up with Woody and Hal in a sunny Bude for a couple of days on the Culm. They then wanted to go down to Lands End. I could see my chance fading as we drove south past the turning for Polzeath. A nice weekend followed by a very wet Monday and a rather indifferent couple of days made the prospect even more doubtful. After a coastal walk in drizzle on the Wednesday we decided to drive north and stop off for a night in Polzeath, and depending on the weather, maybe have a look the next day.

Thursday dawned overcast and breezy. Not the best. Rain was also forecast. We decided to go for a look anyway. It was all looking very bleak as we wandered down the grass, still no path to speak of. A bunch of sheep needed moving before we hit the rocky steps that lead down to the boulders. Memories came flooding back as I studied the base of the crag for a way through the undercut base. That start of Darkinbad still looked horrific. The start of Black Magic was also not looking great. An overhanging scoop with poor holds, and no gear, straight off the boulders. However, Alex had found a better way just to the right. A couple of small edges with slight traces of chalk enabled a step onto the wall to be made from the top of a forgiving rounded boulder. I now had to make the



decision whether to commit. The odd spot of drizzly rain didn't help, however I figured that if I got going the gear higher up the wall was good so a retreat would be straightforward. I tied on. One tentative foray and I spotted a perfect skyhook hole. Alex went back to the sack for it. Just the thing to ease the nerves and a retreat option if things went wrong. I committed to the challenge. A few moves up and the gear started going in, good gear too! Steady moves but on small positive holds and good gear. I soon found myself below the twin cracks on Darkinbad. I remembered the moves leftwards past the now defunct pegs being the second crux but I now had to reverse them on Black Magic. Thankfully, the gear in the cracks was superb because on my first try I couldn't hold the poor flat holds and came swinging back around below the gear. One fall! Hopefully the last. I had a long sit then got it second go. The next objective, the crystal hole lay just above, then the crux above that. More great gear in perfect slashes in the wall spurred me on. The hole was disappointing holdwise but the moves up to the crux, whilst balancy were not irreversible. The guidebook had a telling photo of Kenny Palmer slipping in a perfect nut before doing the crux rockover. I was now there eyeing up the nut slot. I reversed back down and readied an RP 3. Second

time up and the nut slipped in at full stretch, another even smaller one went in just below it. It seemed easy to just suspend myself mid crux, so well protected. Reasonable holds, a slight lean to the right, left hand in the slash above the RP, bring the left foot up and rock up and it was done. All seemed to be in slow motion. Again, stood on positive holds and with more good gear, I was able to rest but was aware that my hands were getting very tired and were cramping badly. More tenuous moves followed to a point where I was staring at another perfect nut slot but had I the strength to hang on and place it. Swapping hands around on the hold I was able to coax a Rock 5 in. The way ahead was not obvious, I could have gone left or right? After trying both to no avail, I was getting very tired. Finally, I had to sit on the nut. So near yet so far. I could see the old gear on the belay up above in the corner. What seemed like an age later, I decided to try going straight up as a check of the guide didn't show any variation of line. Yes, that was the right way. I slowly edged up the green flecked now slabby rock to the belay. I was a spent force again, but I'd done it!



Two and a half hours I'd been on the wall. Alex, not surprisingly was a bit cold. However, with no rain yet to speak of, she shouted up to say she would have a go and see how far she got. The traverse being her initial objective. She'd have been happy with that. The nature of the route meant that there would have been no problem lowering her off from anywhere on it really. The ropes came in quickly to start with, then they went tight. She'd taken the easy route across the traverse and was now below the crystal hole. Ropes moved again. Then I saw her bouncing out from the wall smiling. She'd had to sit on them at the same point I had. She was enjoying it all and doing really well. She said she always wanted to see what an E5 felt like! Soon she was beside me

on the belay. Time was now getting on and we had a decision to make. I had originally expected to be abseiling off from here and stripping the gear but now we had a chance to complete the route. There were two options in the guide, either the very steep groove behind the belay at 5C, or a move down and round into an easier groove at 5A. My arms and hands were splashed. There was no way I could have lead the overhanging groove above the stance today. We decided to top out, so off down and right I went. Into the bottom of the right hand groove was ok, but progress up it was not 5A. Fortunately, the gear was good. The rock was loose however, and a large lump had to be disposed of before a swing could be made onto the very exposed right arête. Some grass holds and I was up. Alex followed without incident, then lead off up the tottery looking top section. We were up, lying in that grass again. What a route! It was 9pm!

Summary: - Ascents of three routes on Pentire Head, Cornwall. Eroica E2 (now thought to be E4 after the demise of the aid peg on the second pitch), Darkinbad the Brightdayler E5, and finally, Black Magic E5.

Martin Dale

Pembroke 2010 – part 2

NO MUDDY SUPERCAR CAMPING THIS TIME AROUND

If you have never climbed on Pembroke Sea Cliffs you might wonder why anyone might want to duel with it all:- the arm draining steepness, the committing and often inescapable lines and the soaring incoming tides. Yet every year that the Pembroke meet has run (and that probably numbers 15+), there has always been someone keen to do business with the elements.

As is now compulsory in our country, the BBC weatherman gave a promising week ahead with but with the May Day Bank Holiday Weekend looking 'increasingly unsettled'. Convinced that we would have a dry afternoon on Friday and then a bag of wombat's doo over the weekend, all parties, with the exception of Alex and Martin, set off Friday afternoon.

This meant that Steve Longworth, who had only been on a v.diff outdoors once before, found himself on the potentially aptly named, Rear Wind (HVS 5a *), at St Govan's East. This proved absolutely no problem for Steve whose progression through the grades should be an inspiration to all bus passes out there. Just arriving were Tony, Terry, Tim and Pete. They, like us, found themselves challenging some incoming wetness at Stennis Head with ascents of the popular VS's (Highland Fling and Quickstep).

Congratulating ourselves on getting some in before the wetting agent arrived, we settled down in the pub at Manobier to a serious lock-in with Nick Harrison and partner (who were on a walking holiday) and Martin and Alex on their way. At least the Reverend James would provide the comfort and tomorrow we would not be looking out onto a field of tents, and a new Maseratti Supercar getting an increasingly muddy paint job, as was the scene at last August Bank holiday.

As luck would have it both parties landed on their feet with the accommodation. The boys joined Hal and I in somewhat of a mansion in it's own grounds with views over Manobier Castle and beach. AND... as if too good to be true, the next day dawned bright and fresh, as did the next, and the next ...and (sorry you guys who believed the forecast) ..the next.



So... with 3 members of the team needing experience, a trip to Saddle Head was called for. A range of easier routes were dispensed with by Tim and Pete including Fel Gwyr (Diff) and Forgotten Corner (HVD). This was followed by an extremely rapid rope of four on Sea Mist (HS 4a** and on the front cover of the Rockfax) much to the amazement of the Manchester University students who had scared us for the last hour with their tactics. Tony and Terry quickly ascended Pink 'un (VS 5a **) then went on the steeper stuff where Steve found what it was like to endure a hanging stance over crashing waves on the classic of the crag, Blue Sky (VS 4c***).

Meanwhile Martin and Alex examined the blocks on the Trucker face of Blockhouse Buttress, culminating in Jolly Silly Billy Arete (HVS 5b *) which is apparently badly described in the book. Over on Stennis Head, Hal and I did Cool for Cats (E1 5b***) which, for the record, is just as pumpy as Manzoku. In celebration of an unexpected dry day, the party then subjected themselves to yet more tincture of golden throatwarmer. Surely it would rain tomorrow.....but it didn't.

The days developed with re-assuring predictability: morning tea on the terrace (with a guest appearance of Dave Cundy and Lorridan on a biking weekend) followed by some unhurried classic ticking and then some quality Larrup to steady the nerves.

A Pembroke weekend can hardly ever be complete without a trip down St Govan's West. On Sunday Tim and Pete opened their account on Centurion (Sev 4a*) so to be sociable Hal, Steve and I thought we'd do the route just to the left: Up Against The Wall (HVS 5a). Quickly glancing at someone else's guidebook, I somehow misread it as easier than it looked and not badly protected, instead of not as easy as it looks and poorly protected – which was the case. Could have been Mug stuff but it 'went' and not without some interest on the part of my seconds when it was their turn. Over on Trevalen Cliff, Tony and Terry were dispatching The Hole (HVS/E1 5b**) before finishing off on Sandbagged (VS 4c*). Meanwhile on Trevalen, Alex was with Martin who was a Youth On Fire (E3 5c *). Hal and I decamped onto Trevalen for the first pitch of Dinkum Wall (E1 5b**) and could just see Tim and Pete putting away Lemming Way (Sev*). More evening medicine was needed that night to cope with the impromptu karaoke of the locals but we were on a roll by then.



The Monday saw us arriving to more blue skies and a falling tide at St David's. All very picture postcard stuff. Craig Caerfai was the scene of the action and the party warmed up on some Severes and VS's. Pete elevated his leading grade to top out on Caerfai Crack HS (he's since done an E1!!) while over on the big slab Martin and Alex did Uncertain Smile (E2 5b**). We all did the classic Armorican (VS 4c ***) and just to finish off Tony had a look at Uncertain Smile, but must have strayed onto a direct version which gave him pause for thought.



Some of the party sadly departed leaving the diehards to live another day and delve into the depths of Mother Carey's Kitchen. This can be a hot intimidating place but the fan was on and we got down at the right side of the tide. Martin was already in action having started up what he thought was Crithmum which the guidebook describes as VS 5a* but has fallen down and in fact is now E2 5b. This didn't seem to bother him at all and he followed this by Sunsmoke E2 5b**.

Over to his left and at a point where the corner meets an impending wall, was the soaring corner of Rock Idol (E1 5a***) which the Rock Fax describes as 'probably the best E1 in Britain'. This was now to take the rope of four: Hal, Steve, Pete and myself. Mindful of the tides we decamped onto a commodious ledge some 25 foot or so above the sea. The ascent proved every bit as exciting as when I had first done it at 8.00! in the morning with Mark Harding in a heat wave in 1990. Hal, Pete and Steve all managed exceptionally well and arrived at the belay chuffed to bits. This was the closing of the account for the weekend and hardly a more memorable one could have been asked for.

Dave Wood Aug 2010

Accrington Moor Evening Walk Pictures



Britain's Next Top Model Winners 2010



...and finally...Johnny Walkers Tales

An old friend of mine was sat outside on the rear step of her house, sipping dry cider and reading in the sun.

She was disturbed by a sharp noise of something hitting the window directly above her. A fraction of a second later something landed on her head, fell to the ground and lay there in all it's feathered glory - a Great Spotted Woodpecker!

What cider was the lady imbibing at the time?

Yes, you've guessed it - cheap Coop Scrumpy.

Johnny Walker





FMC Photo Comp 1st Place Humour by Nick Hepburn