

irish mountain log

THE MAGAZINE FOR WALKERS AND CLIMBERS IN IRELAND

No 91 Autumn 2009

ISSN 0790 8008

€3.20 (£2.20)




**Mountaineering
Ireland**

www.mountaineering.ie

What did you do last winter?



Winter Mountaineering 21st - 27th February, 7th - 13th March, 2010
Advanced Winter Mountaineering 28th February - 6th March, 2010
Snow and Ice Climbing 21st - 27th February, 28th February - 6th March, 7th - 13th March, 2010

Contact us for further information, or visit www.tollymore.com for full course details

T: 028 4372 2158 (048 4372 2158 from Rol) Email: admin@tollymore.com
Tollymore Mountain Centre, Bryansford, Newcastle, Co Down, BT33 OPT

Gramang Bal, Himel Pradesh,
objective of IMC summer expedition 2009.
Photo: Sé O'Hanlon.



Onwards and upwards

Plans to recruit a new Chief Officer ongoing

"Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time."

As clubs and individuals start to make their way back onto the hills and crags after a summer possibly spent further afield, we on the Board have to take stock of where Mountaineering Ireland is as an organisation and, more importantly, of where it is going as we head into a new membership year for the National Governing Body for hillwalking, climbing and mountaineering in Ireland.

Mountaineering Ireland is fortunate to have a dynamic Board and enthusiastic and professional staff who are all deeply committed to working to ensure that the members get the most out of their

organisation. However, it continues to be a time of great change in Mountaineering Ireland and, by the time you receive this issue of the *Mountain Log*, we will be engaged in trying again to recruit a new Chief Officer for the organisation, a crucial post as we move forward. The Board would like to acknowledge the excellent work of the acting Chief Officer, Pat Dignam, and of all the staff members, north and south, who have shown professionalism and commitment beyond the call of duty in the past few months. We also welcome Joe Dowdall of Co Antrim to the organisation as the new Mountain Rescue Development Officer for Northern Ireland. The Board of Mountaineering Ireland gratefully acknowledges the funding support of Sports Northern Ireland for this important position.

As we start our new membership year, we are looking forward to the Autumn Gathering in Dingle, Co Kerry, when we hope that as many members as possible will be present to discuss the changes in the organisation and to enjoy the craic.

Ruairi Ó Conchúir
Chairperson
Mountaineering Ireland



WELCOME TO...

ISSUE 91

The Irish Mountain Log is the membership magazine of Mountaineering Ireland. The organisation promotes the interests of hillwalkers and climbers in Ireland.

Mountaineering Ireland

Sport HQ, 13 Joyce Way
Park West Business Park
Dublin 12, Ireland
Tel: (+353 1) 625 1115
Fax: (+353 1) 625 1116
info@mountaineering.ie
www.mountaineering.ie

Hot Rock Climbing Wall

Tollymore Mountain Centre
Bryansford, Newcastle
County Down BT33 0PT
Tel: (+44 28) 4372 5354
youth@mountaineering.ie

Editor: Patrick O'Sullivan

Tel: (+353 1) 837 8166 (pm, wknds)
iml-editor@mountaineering.ie

Features Editor: Peter O'Neill
iml-featureseditor@mountaineering.ie

Literary Editor: Joss Lynam

Tel: (+353 1) 288 4672 (pm)
iml-literaryeditor@mountaineering.ie

Advertising: Mountaineering Ireland
logads@mountaineering.ie

Production: Cóláin MacLochláinn
iml-production@mountaineering.ie

Printing: GPS Colour Graphics Ltd,
Alexander Road, Belfast BT6 9HP
Tel: +44 (0) 28 9070 2020

The Irish Mountain Log is published by Mountaineering Ireland four times a year – in March, June, September, December. The material published in the Log by the voluntary editorial team and contributors must not be taken as official Mountaineering Ireland policy unless specifically stated.

Copy deadline for the Winter 2009 issue of the Irish Mountain Log is Friday, October 23rd, 2009.

PARTICIPATION AND RISK

Readers of the Irish Mountain Log are reminded that hillwalking and climbing are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks, and be responsible for their own actions and involvement. Mountaineering Ireland publishes and promotes safety and good practice advice and through Bord Oiliúnt Sléibhe (BOS, The Irish Mountain Training Board) administers a range of training programmes for walkers and climbers.



Features

24 Slievenamon

Kevin Higgins on the myths and legends of a Tipperary mountain

26 Two and one half to the Brecon Beacons

Jenny Murphy reports on a family hillwalking trip to south Wales

29 Testament to the Insane

Iain Miller writes about a first ascent on St John's Head, Isle of Hoy, Orkneys

34 Expedition to Himachal Pradesh

Sé O'Hanlon reports on an expedition to an unclimbed Himalayan peak

38 Trekking with Messner

Tom Fox goes trekking in the Cordillera Huayhuash of Peru

42 Hiking in the Rockies

Peter van der Burgt goes hiking in Rocky Mountain National Park

46 A day on the Nordkante

Conor Warner tackles the North Ridge of the Piz Badile

50 Written in stone: what the mountains can tell us

Bernie Lafferty and Peter Wilson continue their series on geology.

Regulars

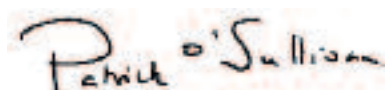
6 News 12 IMRA news 54 Training
news 56 Access & Conservation news
58 Books 62 The last word

Call the rangers

Welcome to the autumn issue of the *Irish Mountain Log*. As the trees take on an autumnal hue and the evenings draw rapidly in, we may have more time to reflect on the continuing need to protect the upland environment we cherish.

Whether it is related to the downturn in the economy or just to a general increase in the amount of free time people have, there is a continuing increase in the number of people accessing upland areas for recreation. While this increased interest in our sport is welcome and hopefully will be reflected by an increased support for Mountaineering Ireland, the national governing body for that sport, it does put increasing pressure on the upland environment, itself a limited resource in Ireland. We must all strive to be environmentally conscious in our activities and follow the principles of Leave No Trace.

This increased pressure from walkers and climbers is compounded by others who would also like to avail of upland areas for their sport. In general, we must come to a compromise so that these other groups are provided with areas where they can safely engage in their sports. However, we are all aware of the destruction that quad motorbikes can cause to the fragile upland environment. This environmentally damaging activity is illegal in protected upland areas and must be stopped, other than in the designated locations. One way of doing this is to ensure that if you witness quad bikes in protected upland areas, you report the activity to the duty rangers, who may then be able to catch the bikers. So do your bit for the upland environment and ensure that you have the local ranger's telephone number with you.



Patrick O'Sullivan
Editor, Irish Mountain Log



ON THE COVER: On Pitch 6, Testament to the Insane, St John's Head, Isle of Hoy, Orkneys, Scotland. See *Testament to the Insane* feature article, page 29. Photo: Iain Miller.

THIS PAGE: Glenveagh, Co Donegal, a classic glacial trough with overdeepened floor containing Lough Veagh. See *Written in stone: What the mountains can tell us*, page 50. Photo: Peter Wilson.

News

Get all the latest news at www.mountaineering.ie

Changes in office staff

Tim Orr and Aodhnait Carroll move on



TIM ORR, Mountaineering Ireland's first Training Officer, has decided to leave the organisation. Ensuring the development and provision of suitable mountaineering training is central to the work of Mountaineering Ireland so that our members can enjoy our sport as safely as possible. Under Tim's stewardship, we have made huge strides in ensuring that members all over the country can access training programmes. Tim will continue to work in mountain training as a service provider. The staff and Board wish him well in his new endeavours and thanks him for his contribution to the development of mountaineering training in Ireland.

The training office will continue to be serviced by the Training Administrator, Kate

Hebblethwaite, and the new post of Technical Training Officer is currently being advertised. Overseeing training provision standards will continue to be at the heart of Mountaineering Ireland as the working relationship between BOS and MLTNI develops and strengthens.

Aodhnait Carroll, Mountaineering Ireland's Access and Conservation Officer, has also decided to move on from the organisation to further her studies, and the staff and Board wish her all the very best with those studies and her further career. In her two years in this post Aodhnait has done excellent work for the mountaineering community to protect access and promote conservation in Ireland, issues which should underpin all of the work of Mountaineering Ireland. – (Ruairí Ó Conchúir)



GENERAL ENQUIRIES

info@mountaineering.ie

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President

Alan Tees

president@mountaineering.ie

Chairman

Ruairí Ó Conchúir

chairperson@mountaineering.ie

Honorary Treasurer

David Batt

treasurer@mountaineering.ie

BOARD MEMBERS

Tomás Alyward

tomas-board@mountaineering.ie

Pat Kenneally

pat-board@mountaineering.ie

Vincent McAlinden

vincent-board@mountaineering.ie

Deirdre McCarthy

deirdre-board@mountaineering.ie

Jerry O'Dwyer

jerry-board@mountaineering.ie

Patrick O'Sullivan

patrick-board@mountaineering.ie

Ross Millar

ross-board@mountaineering.ie

Dawson Stelfox

dawson-board@mountaineering.ie

STAFF AT SPORT HQ

Caretaker Chief Officer

Pat Dignam

pat@mountaineering.ie

Administrator

Una Feeney

una@mountaineering.ie

Accounts Administrator

Terry Canavan

terry@mountaineering.ie

Training Administrator

Kate Hebblethwaite

kate@mountaineering.ie

Access & Conservation Officer

Aodhnait Carroll

aodhnait@mountaineering.ie

STAFF AT TOLLYMORE

NI Youth Development Officer

Angela Carlin

angela@mountaineering.ie

NI Mountain Rescue Development Officer

Joe Dowdall

joe@mountaineering.ie



Membership news

By August 2009, there were 131 member clubs in Mountaineering Ireland. There were 8,284 club members and 1,329 individual members, giving a total current membership of 9,613. There were also two associate clubs – Ballyhass Lakes Activity Centre and Bóthar.

* * * * *

North West Mountaineering Club launched a new website in August, www.nwmc.ie.

Ordnance Survey maps: a correction

Ordnance Survey Ireland has asked us to correct the impression given in the last issue of the *Mountain Log* that a decision had been taken to publish a new series of 1:50,000 maps based on a new and different national grid. They state that following a consultation process they have decided not to proceed with this project at this time. We apologise for any confusion caused.

New Wicklow rock climbing guide

Out soon. Order your copy now

THE WICKLOW MOUNTAINS form the largest area of continuous upland in Ireland, with an average altitude of over 300m. The rounded, dome-like outlines of these granite hills dominate the skyline to the south of Dublin. The Wicklow Mountains are remarkable for their quiet natural beauty combined with the feeling of remoteness and detachment, unusual in a landscape so near to a major city.

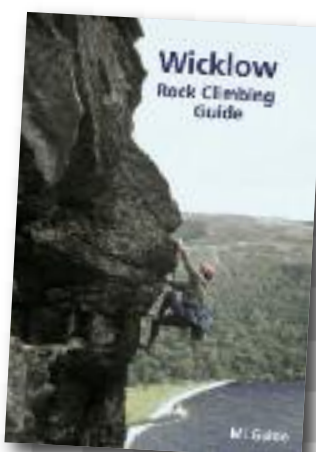
Edited by Joe Lyons, this new guide to rock-climbing in Wicklow, a long-overdue update to the 1993 edition, not only offers comprehensive route listing for all major climbs in the area, with handsome full-colour illustrations throughout, but also traces the development of climbing in Wicklow as well as giving an introduction to its geology and the local flora and fauna.

The areas covered include Glendalough, Luggala, Lough Dan, Carrigshouk, Mall Hill (Glenmacnass), Glenmalure, Hollywood, Bray Head, Lover's Leap (Enniskerry), Rocky Valley (Kilmacanogue), Dunran (The Bishop), Green Lizard

Crags, Barnbawn (The Rock of Garryduff), Carrick Mountain and Barrnacullia. Also listed are new routes and selected winter climbs.

The guidebook will be published at the end of September 2009, and will retail for €20 (members) or €22 (non-members).

To ensure you get your copy of the new Wicklow climbing guide, advance orders are currently being taken. To place your order, contact Mountaineering Ireland by telephone on (01) 625 1115 or e-mail info@mountaineering.ie. – (Kate Hebblethwaite)



Mountaineering records wanted

Building the Mountaineering Ireland database

Information has been pouring in for the new database set up by Mountaineering Ireland to record Irish mountaineering achievements. So far, this has mainly been from the 'hard hillwalking' fraternity. Examples are:

8,000m peaks

- Dawson Stelfox completed the first Irish ascent of Everest in 1993.
- Ger McDonnell made the first Irish ascent of K2 in 2008, being tragically killed on the descent.
- Wes Sterritt summited Cho Oyo in 1987.

Alps

- Charles Barrington made the first ascent of the Eiger in 1858.
- Paul Harrington and Martin Daly made the first Irish winter ascent of the Eiger North Wall in 1997.

Munros

- Jimmy Tees, though resident in Scotland, completed the Munros in 1983, the first Irish climber to do so.
- Uinseann Mac Eoin completed the Munros in 1987.
- Peter and Fran Wilson completed the Munros in 1990.
- Brian Ringland completed his last of the Munros, Corbetts and Grahams on the same day

in June 2005. Was he also the first Irish person to complete the Corbetts and Grahams?

Ireland

- Brian Ringland completed all of the 2,000-foot mountains in Ireland in 1992 and all the 500m tops in 2004.
- Dave Southall completed the Ulster Coast to Coast (Cushendall to Malinbeg) in 1995.

Past issues of the *Mountain Log* would be a huge source of information, and we hope someone will take on that task to help fill out the picture, but in the meantime, please send in anything you think might be notable, for yourself, or someone you know. We need a good spread of information before we can decide how best to present it.

If you have information about any other relevant achievements, please e-mail facts@mountaineering.ie. – (Alan Tees)

Everest success double On May 21, Noel Hanna and his wife Lynne climbed Mount Everest from the Nepal side. They are from Northern Ireland, and are the first Irish couple to summit.

Calendar of events

For more information about any of these events, please see the relevant section of this magazine or the events section of the website, www.mountaineering.ie.

Fri to Sun 9-11 October

Autumn Gathering, An Daingean (Dingle), Kerry

Fri to Sun 9-11 October

3-day 'Train the Trainers' workshop at Autumn Gathering, An Daingean (Dingle), Kerry

Sun 11 October

Environmental Officers training workshop at Autumn Gathering, An Daingean (Dingle), Kerry

Sat & Sun 17-18 October

Mountain Leader refresher workshop, Kerry

Sat to Mon 24-26 October

Mountain Leader assessment, Connemara

Sat to Mon 14-16 November

Mountain Leader assessment, Donegal

Workshop re-scheduled

Volunteer Training Officers workshop, initially intended to take place in September, will now take place later in the year or early next year. Ample notice will be given.

February 2010

Mountaineering Ireland AGM. Date and venue to be decided.

*MCI promotes the principles of
Leave No Trace*





Restricted parking

Glencree Centre facilitates walkers

THE GLENCREE Centre for Peace and Reconciliation would like to make it clear that the parking and toilet facilities at the Centre are for customer use only. The Centre depends on income from its restaurant to support its work. Recently, on one weekend in August, with the available parking spaces taken up by people hillwalking in the area, potential customers were unable to access the Centre's restaurant, significantly affecting the takings for the day.

However, the Centre does want to facilitate people wishing to walk in the area as much as possible, but they have to protect their income from the restaurant. To that end they have asked us to make Mountaineering Ireland members aware of the parking that they have graciously made available at their facility for use by walkers. They have designated 12-14 parking spaces at the lower end of their buildings for the purpose of accommodating people who would like to walk in the area. The Centre asks that any walkers who would like to avail of these parking spaces please contact them for permission prior to the planned date of their visit so as to avoid the disappointment of the spaces being already taken.

This is a very generous gesture from the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation to walkers and we would like to thank them for this. While in the area, don't forget to stop in to the visitor centre, the craft shop and the Armoury Café for a nice hot drink after your walk.

- To book one of the available parking spaces, please contact the Manager, Eileen Kennedy, at eileen.kennedy@glencree.ie, by telephone at (01) 282 9711 or by mobile at 087-832 9235.



Winter Skills in Scotland

Winter courses with Irish Adventures

Why do a Winter Skills course?

If you are already into winter walking or like the idea of it, then you should know how to look after yourself in the mountainous areas of Ireland and the UK in winter conditions. Snow can turn mountains into places of unparalleled beauty...but can you deal with the conditions? Do you have the proper equipment and, more importantly, do you have the knowledge and skills to use the equipment? We will teach you how to make crucial, safe decisions while winter walking.

Our four-day courses cover various key aspects of winter walking and are designed to give you the skills to cope in treacherous conditions. These skills include: how to walk up and down steep snow slopes safely; how to use crampons; how to use an ice-axe; how to dig a snow-hole, and how to judge avalanche risk.

Why Scotland?

Although mountains in Ireland can be dangerous at any time and can experience icy conditions in winter, in the Scottish Highlands you will likely face one of the toughest climates in Europe. With proper guidance, this makes it an ideal training ground. We train in world-famous mountaineering locations such as Ben Nevis, Glencoe and the Cairngorms. We provide technical equipment including helmets, harnesses, ice-axes and crampons. Of course, it's not all work and no play. Our accommodation is in luxury chalets where you can relax in the evenings and recharge the batteries.

Requirements for a Winter Skills course

- Previous hillwalking experience
- Hillwalking equipment
- Average to good fitness (5-6 hour hillwalks)

Cost: €575 (5% discount for Mountaineering Ireland members)

Course dates 2010

12-17 February, 17-22 February, 26 Feb-3 March, 4-9 March 2010

Winter Mountaineering Course

If you have already completed a Winter Skills course or have experience in winter skills and would like to progress, then this is the course for you. This course will give you both the skills and experience for technical winter mountaineering, beginning with climbs on some classic winter routes over the weekend. You will learn how to climb with two ice-axes, place gear, make belays and climb together. During the course you will have the opportunity to climb some of the classic routes in Scotland, such as Ledge Route on Ben Nevis, with experienced and qualified MIC instructors.

You can get more information on the courses at www.irishadventures.net or contact Noel on 087 419 0318 or email info@irishadventures.net.



irishadventures



WINTER SKILLS COURSE

Enjoy a long weekend course in the highlands of Scotland, learn the techniques of winter climbing and walking with ice axe and crampons in the great areas of Ben Nevis and Glencoe.

€575

Price includes: Luxury Chalets, Airport collection & drop off, Equipment, qualified & experienced instructors.

WINTER MOUNTAINEERING COURSE

Already have winter experience then this course is for you. Climb some of the classic winter routes, Ledge Route, Curved Ridge, Aonach Eagach Ridge. Learn to climb, place gear, Belays. All under the instruction of experienced MIC instructors.

€650



MOUNTAIN SKILLS COURSE

Learn to Navigate and be confident in the Irish Mountains on an official Mountaineering (MI) Ireland mountain skills course

Mountain skills 1, 2

€145

MS assessment

€180

Locations: Kerry, Cork, Galway & Wicklow.

WWW.IRISHADVENTURES.NET

See website for List dates & prices of all courses and activities

087-4190318 info@irishadventures.net

Irish Adventures, Ballinaboula, Dingle, Kerry.



WINTER SKILLS SCOTLAND GIFT VOUCHERS AVAILABLE MOUNTAIN SKILLS TRAINING

Death of Alpine legend

Riccardo Cassin (1909-2009)

RICCARDO CASSIN, one of the leading mountaineers of the 20th century, died on August 6 at the age of 100, near Lecco, in his native Italy. Cassin's mountaineering career spanned more than six decades during which he made roughly 2,500 climbs, including more than 100 first ascents, many of which are considered classic routes.

Cassin developed a reputation as an accomplished alpinist in the 1930s when he started climbing with a group later known as Ragni di Lecco (the Spiders of Lecco). The group used relatively crude equipment by today's standards to make their ascents.

Lecco is a town by Lake Como in the Lombardy region of Italy. Cassin moved there when he was a teenager looking for better work and he immediately became impressed by the steep rock faces looming above the town. An ascent of Punta Cermenati with his friends was, for

new routes up old mountains and designing new "ironmongery" for protection.

In 1937, Cassin made his first climb on the granite of the Western Alps. Over the course of three days, he and four companions made the first ascent of the northeast face of the **Piz Badille** in Switzerland's Val Bregaglia, a route now known as the **Cassin Route**. Two of the climbers with him died of exhaustion and exposure on the descent.

Perhaps his most celebrated first ascent was of the **Walker Spur** on the north face of the **Grandes Jorasses** in the Mont Blanc massif in 1938, at the time universally acknowledged as the finest alpine challenge.

Cassin began designing and producing mountaineering equipment in Lecco in 1947. That year, he produced his first rock

pitons, going on to produce his own hammers, ice axes, karabiners, harnesses and down jackets in the following years. The company he established now supplies an international market.

Cassin was supposed to have been on the Italian expedition that

made the first ascent of K2 in the Karakorum in 1954, having participated in the reconnaissance expedition the year before. However, he was disappointed when he was left out of the subsequent successful expedition in the end by the leader, Ardito Desio, supposedly on health grounds.

Following that experience, Cassin went on to organise and lead his own expeditions, including one which resulted in the first ascent of **Gasherbrum IV** in the Karakoram by Walter Bonatti and Carlo Mauri in 1958, and an expedition that

climbed Jirishanka in the Andes in 1960.

In 1961, Cassin was both leader and a successful summiter on the expedition that made the first ascent of the **Cassin Ridge** on **Mount McKinley** in Alaska, at that date the most technical route on the mountain and previously thought to be unclimbable. In 1975, Cassin led an expedition to the unclimbed south face of Lhotse in the Himalayas, but this was unsuccessful due to an avalanche and deteriorating weather.

Despite the concerns about his health when he was not included in the K2 expedition, Cassin remained active and was still climbing in his mid-eighties. In 1987, he repeated his climb on the Piz Badille for the 50th anniversary and then repeated it a week later for the press.

In his lifetime, Riccardo Cassin received several of Italy's highest honours. During a career spanning more than sixty years, many of his most challenging routes became benchmarks by which climbers still measure their ability. – (Patrick O'Sullivan)



Riccardo Cassin.

NE face of Piz Badille. The Cassin Route ascends the right-hand side of the face.



him, a defining moment, after which he devoted all his spare time to developing his skill as a climber. Boxing was a sport he also enjoyed, but he abandoned it when he discovered that climbing rocks slowed down his reflexes in the ring.

His greatest success in the Dolomites came in 1935 on the Cima Ovest di Lavaredo, a formidable north face climb, which Cassin made with his climbing partner, Vittorio Ratti. Although he had natural talent as a mountaineer, Cassin never became a professional mountain guide but devoted his talent to discovering



Riccardo Cassin repeating the Cassin Route, Piz Badille, Switzerland, in 1987, aged 78.

Eco-mountaineering on Everest

Apa Sherpa, leader of Eco Everest Expedition 2009.



THE UIAA Mountain Protection Commission has praised the efforts of the members of the Eco Everest Expedition 2009 for highlighting environmentally friendly practices in mountaineering.

For the second year in a row, the expedition – led by Dawa Steven Sherpa – displayed eco-sensitive,

cost-effective ways of climbing the mountain. The team's aim was also to raise awareness of the threat global warming poses to the Himalayas.

The expedition members succeeded in carrying over 6,000kg of rubbish from the ice-fields of Everest back to base camp. They also recovered part of a crashed helicopter, which went down at Camp 1 in 1973. This effort is part of an initiative to rid the slopes of Everest of waste – including empty oxygen tanks – left behind by other climbers.

Apa Sherpa, the climbing leader of the Eco Everest Expedition 2009, set a world record by reaching the summit for the 19th time. He carried a World Wildlife Fund banner, with the slogan "Stop Climate Change – Let the Himalayas Live" to the summit.

Following the success of the first expedition last year, the UIAA nominated Dawa Steven Sherpa for the Environmental Award of the International Olympic Committee. The prize recognises and encourages the implementation of good environmental practices in the field of sport.

UIAA's health advice for climbers

THE UIAA Medical Commission has published a new page of 'Frequently Asked Questions' for climbers, which focuses on questions relating to nutrition, prevention and treatment of injuries, and healthy training principles for climbing at sea level.

UIAA doctors provide answers to questions such as "What are the early signs of over-use injuries and how can they be prevented?," "How do I know whether I tore a finger tendon?" and "Should I buy climbing shoes one to two sizes smaller than my ordinary shoes?"

This resource is particularly useful for young climbers and their instructors, who want to ensure that children and teenagers develop good climbing habits and don't over-strain or damage their bodies while they are still growing. However, most of the questions and answers are relevant to climbers of all ages and abilities.

There is also advice on issues such as use of vitamin and mineral supplements, how to relieve joint pain, and how to deal with various common climbing injuries.

To read the page, see the web link, http://www.theuiaa.org/news_139_Medical-Commission-gives-advice-to-sport-climbers-

Advice on contraception at altitude

A DOCUMENT produced by the UIAA Medical Commission will be a valuable source of information about the use of contraceptives for women going on mountaineering trips and expeditions, especially to altitude. It provides the most up-to-date information on the topic.

A lot of women using contraceptives on expeditions or at altitude are doing so in order to control their menstrual cycle and not just for contraceptive purposes. This document has been produced with both angles in mind.

The effects that travelling, altitude and other issues can have on both the menstrual cycle and contraceptives are highlighted in the article. Many forms of contraception are listed and details given in relation to their effectiveness in various situations, including for controlling the menstrual cycle.

Advice is given on the benefits and possible side-effects of each type of contraceptive that will help a woman to decide what would best suit her, based on her needs. The duration of the expedition, preparation time and the reason for taking it all need to be considered when choosing a form of contraception. Any health risks or factors that should be taken into account when deciding are also discussed in the document.

Other issues are also mentioned, such as waste disposal and protection against STDs, which may need to be considered. The document is a guide only and recommends that medical advice be sought from your own doctor before going on a trip or an expedition.

IMRA News

Get all the latest news at www.mountainrescue.ie



Reek Sunday 2009

PAUL WHITING

CROAGH PATRICK (Irish: Cruach Phádraig, St Patrick's Mountain), known locally as the Reek, is the site of an important pilgrimage on the last Sunday of July each year, when up to 25,000 pilgrims attempt the 764m (2,510 ft) ascent, many in bare feet.

This year, on July 26th, all twelve Irish Mountain Rescue Teams (MRTs) were in attendance for the **Reek Sunday Pilgrimage**. This pilgrimage has now become a national operation for the Irish Mountain Rescue Association, one of the few mountain rescue organisations that has a national operation.

This year, the MRTs were joined by members of the Irish Cave Rescue Organisation (ICRO) and five members of the Calder Valley Mountain Rescue Team who travelled over from the UK for the event. A total of 145 rescue personnel were present on the day.

The weather was wet and windy and the number of pilgrims seemed down compared to previous years, when the weather had been drier and more appealing. Despite the conditions, the Gardaí estimated that 20,000-25,000 pilgrims made the climb.

The teams dealt with 29 incidents, including asthma attacks, cardiac/chest pains, panic attacks, cramps, lower leg injuries, head injuries, minor cuts and bruises and hypothermia. They also dealt with a number of 'missing people' incidents, or pilgrims who had become separated from their companions. Despite the weather and number of incidents, some sounding quite serious, none of the casualties had to be evacuated from the mountain by stretcher.

IMRA would like to thank all of the other agencies that assisted on the day, including the Order of Malta, the Civil Defence and the Irish Air Corps. Special thanks to the Mayo Mountain Rescue Team, who hosted the visiting MRTs and once again did a great job of organising and co-ordinating everyone.

Technical rigging

Four members of IMRA went over to Fort William in early June to attend a trial version of a new **technical rigging programme** being developed by the Mountain Rescue Committee of Scotland. The programme consists of three courses, each building on the content of the previous one. The first course is a foundation course designed for those who have already gained rope and basic rigging experience within their own MRT. The second course looks at cable ways and hauling systems, developing knowledge of rescue equipment and more complex rigging systems. The third course is designed to train rescue rigging scene managers. In addition to the Irish delegation, Mike Sandoover from Kerry MRT attended as one of ten instructors on the course. With the assistance of two of the instructors from Scotland, the five who attended this course are now preparing to run a similar rigging course at the Achill Outdoor Centre, Co Mayo, over the weekend of October 2-4th, 2009. – (Paul Whiting, dev-officer@mountainrescue.ie)

IMRA news in brief

A **regional training exercise** was held over the weekend of August 15-16th in Co Fermanagh under the auspices of the IMRA Training and Development Group.

* * * * *

The **Medical Sub-Committee** met on August 22nd and is continuing to gather data on the casualties dealt with by all of the MRTs in 2006-'07 so that they can see what medical skills are necessary to deal effectively with casualties on the hillside. Work is progressing well on how the training necessary for mountain rescue personnel to provide the medical care required in possibly remote locations on the hillside can fit into the guidelines laid down by the Pre-Hospital and Emergency Care Council for other first responders (www.phecc.ie).

* * * * *

Four delegates attended the **International Commission of Alpine Rescue (ICAR) Annual Congress** in Zermatt on September 22-27th. IMRA is hoping to have representation in future on ICAR's Aviation and Medical Commissions.

* * * * *

Two IMRA members attended the **Inland SAR Planning Course** at the National Search and Rescue School in the US Coast Guard Training Centre in Trenton, New Jersey, from September 21-25th to bring back information about the latest techniques from the USA.

Upcoming events

● November 6-8th 2009: Training and Development Group, Party Leader Course, Larch Hill, Co Dublin.

● Return visit to the Österreichischer Bergrettungsdienst (Austrian Mountain Rescue Service) in mid- to late November 2009 as part of the "EU Exchange of Experts" programme.

Rescue Me!

Help required to sell
advertising in **Call Out**

The Magazine for the Irish Mountain Rescue Association

Remuneration on a percentage basis. A pleasant telephone manner and a knowledge of the mountaineering/hill-walking scene required.

E-mail contact details to Paul Whiting, "Call Out" Editor:
dev-officer@mountainrescue.ie



SHOW **YOUR** SUPPORT FOR OUR VOLUNTEER RESCUE TEAMS....

OPTION
1

Wear our
t-shirt



€20
PLUS P&P

OPTION
2

Put our sticker
on your car



€5

PLUS P&P

OPTION
3

Purchase a
subscription



€30

OPTION
4

Join our
supporters club

A year's subscription
to Call Out, a t-shirt
and 2 car stickers

€50

All for...

Get four copies of Call Out mailed directly
to your door for a year. Your subscription
goes to supporting our teams.

ORDER FORM

Please pay by bank cheque or postal order made payable to
"Irish Mountain Rescue Association (IMRA)" and send to the following address

**'Call Out' Magazine, Irish Mountain Rescue Association, SportHQ,
15 Joyce Way, Park West Business Park, Dublin 12, IRELAND**

If you are ordering option 1 please include €5 for postage and packaging

Please tick your required choice

Option 1 ☐ Option 2 ☐ Option 3 ☐ Option 4 ☐

If purchasing a t-shirt please specify your size by ticking the box below

S ☐ M ☐ L ☐ XL ☐ XXL ☐

Name:

Address 1:

Address 2:

Town: County/State:

Postcode: Country:

Email:

Phone Number:

☐ Postage & Packaging

☐ Sub-total (cost of chosen option)

Promotional Code: **mtolg200903**

☐ Suggested donation (€25)

Date:

☐ Total

Signature:

Leave No Trace

Principle 3 and Principle 4

BEVERLEY PIERSON

THE FIRST TWO principles of Leave No Trace, planning ahead and being considerate of others, were covered in the last issue of the *Mountain Log*. We consider the next two principles, respecting farm animals and wildlife, and travelling and camping on durable ground, here.

Respect farm animals and wildlife

"The stark truth is, if we want wild animals, we have to make sacrifices." – **Colin Tudge, Wildlife Conservation**

The third principle of Leave No Trace is based around the value of respect. This principle is paramount in the outdoors. Encounters with wildlife inspire tall tales and long moments of wonder. A chance encounter with a deer on a forest road, a sighting of an otter on a riverbank, or the spectacle of dolphins surfing alongside in the sea, can be awe-inspiring. Unfortunately, wildlife around the world faces threats from loss and fragmentation of habitat, invasive species, pollution, over-exploitation, poaching and disease. Protected lands offer a last refuge from some, but not all, of these problems. Consequently, wild animals and marine life need people participating in recreation who will promote their survival rather than add to the difficulties they already face.

Most people are more likely to encounter farm animals like sheep and cattle than golden eagles or otters when in the outdoors, but the same principles apply to both farm animals and wildlife. In general, it is best to observe animals from a distance and not to approach them. If an animal moves in response to your presence, then you are too close. Remember, animals are vulnerable at particular times of the year – birthing, guarding young, etc. Avoid their habitats at these times. Feeding wildlife can damage their health and leave them more susceptible to predators. Food and rubbish attract small mammals, so make sure to store food and rubbish securely. All dogs should be kept under effective control – either responding to voice command or on a lead to reduce the likelihood of them startling wildlife and farm animals.



Robin.
John Griffin.

Travel and camp on durable ground

"We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." – **T.S. Eliot**

This principle looks at the direct and visible impacts of recreation when travelling in the outdoors, e.g. soil erosion, vegetation damage, etc. What effect does a footstep have? The answer is, it depends. A footstep means different things to a



"The notion that outdoor recreation has no environmental impact is no longer tenable"

Hill cattle in the Burren, Co Clare.
Photo: Brendan Dunford.

young tree and meadow grass, to blanket bog and fragile soil, to a gravelly river bank and forest moss. Unfortunately, trampling causes vegetation damage and soil erosion in virtually every environment. Recovery that takes a year in some environments might take 25 years in others. Other impacts are also possible. Most soils contain animals that live or feed on decaying plants. Trampling destroys the habitat for insects, earthworms and molluscs as well as the fungi that fertilise the soil and help make re-growth possible. Vegetation protects underlying soils. Once plant growth is destroyed, erosion can continue with or without further use.

People visit natural areas for many reasons, among them to explore nature's mysteries and surprises. When we leave rocks, shells, plants, feathers, fossils, artifacts and other objects of interest as we find them, we pass the gift of discovery on to those who follow. *It is the missing elements of our favourite places that disturb us the most.*

This is not only an issue of aesthetics but also of resource management, habitat and species loss and the reduction in the sense of wildness in our environment.

Try to recognise durable surfaces such as rock outcrops, sand, gravel, etc. It is best to concentrate your use in popular areas to avoid creating new tracks and trails. Therefore, always stay on designated trails. If there aren't any designated trails, you should disperse your use to avoid creating trails and tracks.

With regards to camping, the best method to use when selecting a campsite is to select the most durable camping location possible – it is better to use an already impacted campsite rather than creating new traces of your impact for other people to add to. When leaving your campsite, leave it as you found it.

"The notion that [outdoor] recreation has no environmental impacts is no longer tenable." – **Curtis H. Flather & H. Ken Cordell**

For more information on Leave No Trace, please visit www.leavenotraceireland.org. Look out for the following principles – 'Leave What You Find' and 'Dispose of Waste Properly' – in the next edition of the *Mountain Log*. – (Beverley Pierson, Development Officer, Leave No Trace)



National Trails Day

Sunday October 4th, 2009

NATIONAL TRAILS DAY is a celebration of the wonderful variety of trails in Ireland and a chance for everyone to enjoy some of our most beautiful countryside, forests, mountains and lakes.

National Trails Day 2008 was very successful, with more than 6,000 people getting out to enjoy trails in a variety of ways in the 67 plus events which were held across the country. There were bat walks, mountain-bike cycles, family orienteering events, Leave No Trace hikes, trail conservation work parties, heritage walks and just plain ordinary walks!

This year, National Trails Day will be an all-island event, and the Northern Ireland Forest Service and Northern Ireland Tourist Board are joining in as sponsors of the event along with the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Coillte, the Irish Sports Council's National Trails Office and Fáilte Ireland.

National Trails Day will be held on Sunday 4th October with the objectives of:

- Promoting an awareness of the recreation trails (walking and biking) and allied outdoor recreation facilities that are currently available in Ireland
- Promoting an understanding of the need to manage and resource our trails and other facilities
- Promoting an awareness of the work of all key agencies in delivering trails and other facilities.

The aim is to have over 100 events organised and promoted for 2009 Trails Day. The event's websites, www.nationaltrailsday.ie and www.nationaltrailsday.co.uk, have been set up to give information about the events that are happening, including location, description, time and duration, who the event is aimed at, and so on.



Dromore Wood, Co Clare.

- For any queries about organising events, etc, please e-mail info@nationaltrailsday.ie or alternatively contact Dáithí de Forge on 086-205 8873 or Carol Ryan on (01) 201 1132.



Progress made on Dublin Mountains Way

Cruagh to Tibbradden section opened

THE FIRST SECTION of the Dublin Mountains Way (DMW) has now been opened. It runs from Cruagh Wood to Tibbradden car park and then up over Tibbradden Mountain to join the Wicklow Way.

The section from the Tibbradden car park to the Wicklow Way junction has been extensively improved. The old path has been resurfaced with chips (the only imported material) and logs have been put across it at short intervals to divert water. Where the path crosses the forest road, large granite boulders that have been put in place will (hopefully) deter quad bikes from using the path. For the rest of the way from the forest road, the method used has been to dig out the bog and a certain depth of the solid material below and replace it upside down with the solid material, clay, gravel and stones on top to form the path. A detour has been made round the burial site at the summit.

Walkers consulted have generally considered it a considerable improvement. If you are considering walking this section, take note that the Tibbradden car park is only open from 10:00 to 16:00 at weekends, although there is some space on the roadside.

Newly refurbished Wicklow Way near Glencullen.



At present, Mountain Meitheal is working on the section between Cruagh and the Massey Estate. This will be a raised treadway, with materials funded by Coillte and the Irish Ramblers' Club. This short connection will open up a long length through the Massey Estate and over the Hellfire Club. – (Joss Lynam)



Who ya gonna call?

Call a ranger if you see a quad bike in a protected area

MAIREAD KENNEDY

WHILE OUT WALKING on Lugnaquilla recently, my partner and I had an encounter with some quad bikes. This made me realise the important role hillwalkers can play in stopping this environmentally damaging activity in upland areas.

There were lots of people on the hills that day, in both small and large groups. It was one of this summer's rare clear days, so we could see them all. As we were coming off Lugnaquilla, we heard the sound of motorbikes in the distance and spotted four quads and a scrambler coming down into the saddle between Slievemaan and Lugnaquilla. They drove past us at high speed, heading for the summit of Lugnaquilla.

We called the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) duty ranger, who was in Brittas Bay at the time but immediately drove to the area. Afterwards the ranger phoned to say he had gone to Glenmalur to look for them but, as he didn't know which direction they had gone from the top, he couldn't find them.

Despite all of the people who were on Lugnaquilla that day, the ranger didn't get

any other phone calls about the quads. Had he received just one other call to say which way they went from the summit, he could have been waiting for them at the bottom and they would have been caught. Because the area they were in is a Special Area of Conservation, it is illegal to drive a quad or scrambler there without a permit.

The NPWS are doing their utmost to put an end to this activity and the damage it causes to the hills. They have put up signs at the points of access used by the bikes. This has dissuaded some, and since the signs were erected, activity at these points has dropped off. However, they are very keen to catch people engaging in this illegal activity so that they can progress some prosecutions, generate publicity and hopefully dissuade others. They are also interested in getting photographs identifying the offenders, registration numbers for cars used to transport off-road vehicles, and any other information you have regarding this illegal activity. If they know where the bikes are active and how they are accessing the hills, they will be more likely to catch the bikers in action when they are doing targeted patrols.

Call this number

Please save the Duty Ranger number, 087-980 3899, into your mobile phone now, and if you encounter quads or scramblers on the Wicklow Mountains ring the number immediately to report them. You can also pass the number on to anyone else you know who is active in the Wicklow Mountains and encourage them to do likewise. The NPWS, like all other agencies, are currently short-staffed, so they only have one ranger on duty at the weekends. Therefore they may not always be in a position to respond to the information they receive, but as on this occasion, they just might be and your phone call could make all the difference.



Quad bike ruts in Wicklow Mountains.
Photo: Helen Lawless.

Ulster Way unveiled

New 1,000-kilometre walk

THE NEW Ulster Way route was officially launched on September 16th. The revised route will provide a 1,000-kilometre circular walking tour around the best landscape and scenery that Northern Ireland has to offer. This will certainly become one of the classic walking routes in Ireland. Few other walking routes in the world incorporate such a vast array of woodland, mountains, coastline, moorland, built and natural heritage and biodiversity.

Walkers can experience coastal walking along both the Causeway Coast and Lecale Coast, enjoy upland walking in the Mourne Mountains and Antrim Hills, discover the lakelands of Fermanagh and explore the volcanic landscape of the Ring of Gullion. The Ulster Way will also allow

walkers to explore other less well known parts of Northern Ireland.

Along the route, walkers will encounter myths and legends, such as of Cú Chulainn, and be able to follow in the footsteps of saints and scholars such as St Patrick.

"We estimate it will take on average three weeks to walk the whole route, but you don't necessarily have to do it all in one go. You could walk the route in a series of short stages, ticking off each section as you go along. Because each section is so unique, it means every trip will be different," explains Chris Scott, Marketing Officer of the Countryside Access and Activities Network (CAAN).

Many will be familiar with the green-and-yellow Ulster Way signs dotted around the Northern Irish countryside. However, these are now being replaced by striking new blue-and-yellow signs indicating the



Quality Sections of the new route.

Planning your trip along the revised Ulster Way has been made easy with a new official website, **www.walkni.com/ulsterway**. The website includes interactive maps, printable maps, route directions and links to accommodation and attractions. This website has been created by CAAN with funding from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

The new route has been coordinated and funded by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency with input from the Ulster Way Advisory Committee and many others. – (CAAN)

Everest gives back

DVD launched by Irish Nepalese trust

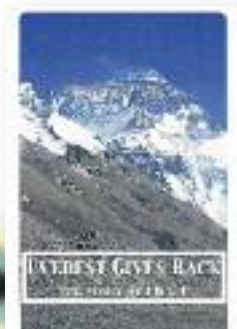
THE IRISH Nepalese Educational Trust, INET, an Irish-registered trust that was founded with the remaining funds from the 1993 Irish Everest expedition, has enlarged and flourished since then. Its objective was to build new schools and community houses in Phuleli and in the neighbouring villages in the Solu District of Nepal, in the foothills of Mount Everest.

Dhana Khaling Rai, who was on the Irish Everest Expedition, is

INET's chief organiser and promoter in Nepal and, like everyone working for INET, is a volunteer. Dawson Stelfox MBE, a member of the 1993 expedition and the first Irishman to climb Everest, designed a simple school building and this has now been used to build schools in the Solu District. The main new school, Shree Saraswati Bal Vatika, was opened in Phuleli last year, and another new school was opened recently in Nuntala village.

As a fundraiser, and to spread the word to non-readers, Chris Avison has produced for INET a very attractive and informative DVD, *Everest Gives Back*, about the work that the Trust has done. This DVD is now available "at, say, €15 each, or whatever contribution folks would like to make," says Chris.

Proceeds from its sale will be used to directly fund INET projects in Nepal. To obtain a copy (or simply make a donation!), consult the website www.inetireland.ie. – (Joss Lynam)



Situations Vacant

Chief Officer (1) & Technical Training Officer (1)

Mountaineering Ireland is the National Governing Body for the sport in all its forms and is recognised as such and substantially funded by both the Irish Sports Council and Sport Northern Ireland. The organisation has almost 10,000 subscribing members and covers a diverse range of activities from hillwalking through to sport climbing. We currently wish to recruit for two key posts.

Chief Officer

3yr contract, Sport HQ, Dublin (re-advertisement)

The Chief Officer must be a highly motivated individual and an effective manager of staff and funding, with the leadership skills and knowledge to motivate, support and inspire staff and all those with whom he/she interacts. Excellent communication and budgeting skills are absolutely critical. The salary scale will be commensurate with experience in the range €55k-€65k. In addition to an excellent working environment, the position comes with employer pension and VHI contributions.

Technical Training Officer

3yr contract, full or part-time with flexible hours, Sport HQ, Dublin

We wish to appoint a suitably qualified, self-motivated and self-managed person to fill the challenging post of Technical Training Officer. The post holder will work alongside Mountaineering Ireland's full-time training administrator to ensure the continued roll-out of mountain training at club and individual level and the moderation of a range of awards and training schemes to promote safety in hillwalking and climbing. The salary scale will be commensurate with experience but in the range €40-45k (full-time).

Full job descriptions, person specifications and application forms are available at www.mountaineering.ie. Applications must be lodged with Mountaineering Ireland, Sport HQ, 13 Joyce Way, Park West Business Park, Dublin 12 by 5pm on 5th October 2009. Envelopes should be sealed and clearly marked 'Chief Officer Application' or 'Technical Training Officer Application.' Email applications (complete applications only) will also be accepted at jobs@mountaineering.ie. Late or incomplete applications will not be considered.

*Mountaineering Ireland is an
equal opportunities employer*



YOUTH on ROCK

HANGING ROCKERS

THE HANGING ROCKERS Climbing Club is based in Florencecourt, Co Fermanagh. The Club was formed in 2005 with the intention of making use of the impressive climbing wall at Gortatole Outdoor Education Centre. The Club now has around 120 members, who meet up to three times per week, and it regularly organises outdoor meets. In 2007, a youth initiative was started by members of the club in an attempt to attract young climbers aged 10-17 years and to encourage them to continue climbing as they got older. In January of this year, the Hanging Rockers youth initiative was brought to a whole new level with the support of Gortatole OEC and Mountaineering Ireland. The club provided a course of climbing sessions over an eight-week period, plus a day of cragging at Malinbeg, Co Donegal, for young climbers. Weekly climbing-wall sessions were held at Gortatole under the supervision of Paul Kellagher (MIA) along with another five volunteers, who are all working towards the climbing wall supervisor award. At the same time, the Sligo-based project Girls Outside was holding wall sessions at Gortatole, introducing teenage girls from the Sligo area to climbing. In August, the Hanging Rockers volunteers, in conjunction with Mountaineering Ireland, organised a day's outdoor climbing at Malinbeg. It was the first time any of them had climbed outside on real rock. On the approach to the crag there were several nervous faces, but by the end of the day apprehension had turned into pure exhilaration as the participants topped out on routes up to VS! Hanging Rockers plans to resume its youth initiative this autumn, and is hoping to expand the programme to provide more in-depth training and greater scope for outdoor climbing. It is hoped that an ongoing link will be established with the Girls Outside project. Keep an eye on www.mountaineering.ie for details.

James Brown

PEAK DISTRICT *June '09*

AMONG THE PASSENGERS on the first flight of the day to Manchester were nine Irish climbers aged 9-14, two instructors (Eddie Cooper and myself) and a volunteer, Joe-Anne Calvert, mum to one of the group... and mum to the whole group for the next week! While the other passengers checked in with just a lap-top or a briefcase, we were busy sorting out ropes, weighing bundles of climbing gear and stuffing rucksacks inside bouldering mats in the check-in queue.

Just a few hours later, we were standing at the base of Stanage Edge, a gritstone outcrop outside the village of Hathersage, our base for the next week. Stanage is a special place for many climbers. Almost every climber in the UK could tell you something about this crag, a route they've done, a route they aspire to do, or at the very least, a route they saw in the film *Hard Grit!*

We spent the afternoon on a section called 'Manchester Buttress.' Everyone climbed six or seven routes, most of them three-star. Some of the group led while others concentrated on top-roping harder lines. They all found something to challenge them. Everyone climbed until the combination of rumbling stomachs and tired arms got too much! We'd spent the whole afternoon on a section of rock approximately 100m long. Looking right along the crag edge, it continued as far as I could see – three miles of perfect gritstone with thousands of routes. So much to do, so little time!

The next day, we started by climbing routes at Lawrencefield Quarry, followed by bouldering at Curbar. By the end of the day everyone's fingers, unaccustomed to the rough gritstone and the intensity of climbing all day, were showing signs of wear. It didn't really hold us back, but there's only so much of this your skin will put up with, especially with the hot, humid weather which was forecast again for the next day. That evening, Eddie and I searched the limestone guidebook for somewhere a bit more skin-friendly.

The next day, we headed for Horseshoe Quarry. It's big and scary for most people, but to our team of tiny climbers it appeared to be no trouble at all. Eoin led a 6a+, which I did afterwards and wondered how he managed the moves that I found 'reachy.' Vicky pulled off so many holds that the route she was on probably needed to be upgraded, but she didn't appear to be remotely fazed by the experience. Evan top-roped a 6b+, which went the full height of the lower tier, sparking a bout of fierce competition which only ended when someone mentioned dinner. Time to eat, make a plan for tomorrow and sleep!

The plan was to go to Staden Quarry. It is another limestone quarry, less well known than Horseshoe, but the routes there were perfect for what we wanted. There were a couple of easier routes with plenty of protection, which everyone led on pre-placed runners, as well as some top-quality E1s and E2s to have a go at on a top-rope. The locals asked whether all Irish kids can climb like that?

On our last full day there was no point in preserving the skin any longer, so back to the grit we went. We spent the day at Millstone Quarry and the evening bouldering at Froggatt. Everyone had at least one bleeding finger by the end of the evening. Some were bleeding from all ten fingers and were still reluctant to leave.

The last day. There was time for a quick trip to the climbing works to ensure that everyone returned home in a proper state of exhaustion. Then off we went to the airport. For me, it was just the halfway point in the trip as the next day I was due back out to work with the 14+ age group. For everyone else, it was time for a well-earned rest!

Angela Carlin

Kryan bouldering at Curbar, Peak District, with Eddie Cooper.
Photo: Angela Carlin.

Saul on Covent Garden, VS 4b, Peak District.
Photo: Angela Carlin.

YOUTH CHAT

with Angela Carlin

Vicky seconding at Staden,
Peak District.
Photo: Joe-Anne Calvert.

HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE

ON JUNE 20th, a squad of nine young climbers, selected from their placings in the Northern Ireland Region's Youth Climbing Series competitions, attended the UK final at the Westway Wall in London. It was a big event, with almost 200 competitors from England, Scotland and Wales.

Just a week later, nine young climbers were in the Peak District for a five-day trip, to hone their technique on the famous Peak gritstone. And then there were the British Lead Climbing Championships, and the British Bouldering championships, to attend....

ELLIE is 10 and lives in Clare. This year she competed in the NI Youth Climbing Series and went on to represent Northern Ireland in the British Finals, where she came 5th in her category. She also took part in the Mountaineering Ireland youth trip to the Peak District in June. Ellie, how long have you been climbing?

I've been climbing since I was four.

Did you enjoy the competitions?

Yes, I enjoyed the competitions because they were fun and friendly as well as being quite hard in places. It was also nice to visit different climbing walls I hadn't been to before.

What was it like going to compete in London?

It was exciting. I was nervous before it and my hands were shaking. It was reassuring being part of a team, because we all cheered each other on.

What was your best climbing experience this year?

I enjoyed the Peak District the most. It was brilliant climbing outside as I haven't done much outdoor climbing, and it was fun to be with the rest of the group and make up mini-competitions, just for the laugh, like walking up a slab with no hands.

EON is 12 and has been climbing for two years, mainly at the Ozone Wall. Eoin, what was your best climbing experience this year?

I really enjoyed going to the Peak District because it was such a fun trip. It also felt great winning one of the competitions this year.

What did you enjoy about the Peak District trip?

I loved climbing in the outdoors on real rock. Leading was also a real thrill and it was just great to spend all day climbing. The bouldering almost ripped my fingers apart, but I loved it.

KRYAN (see photo, opposite) is 14 and has been climbing for 2½ years, mainly at the Hotrock climbing wall in Co Down. This summer was his first real opportunity to climb outdoors, with the Peak District trip. Kryan, did you enjoy the competitions?

Yes, because you got talking to other climbers and could compare yourself to other climbers and learn from each other. They also helped me improve my confidence.

What was your best climbing experience this year?

The best experience was climbing outside in the Peak District – especially the cracks! I enjoyed the Peaks trip so much because it was something new and different that I hadn't done before.

JAKE HADDOCK is aged 17, with under two years' climbing experience. He has already achieved some impressive ticks, including bouldering at Font 7a+. Jake, you've entered some competitions this year. What is it that you like about competition climbing?

I competed in the Seniors at the British Lead Climbing Championships and came 14th. I loved the comp. It just gets you really psyched to train your fingers off seeing the talent overseas, and it also gives you a chance to really push yourself and come back stronger and stronger year after year!

What's the best route or problem you've climbed this year?

The best problem I climbed has to be 'La Baliene' (7a+) in Fontainebleau. On my first trip to Font with the team, me and my mate Tim were looking through the guide and saw this amazing prow. We got on it, thinking it would be a stroll. We didn't come close that time, but we came back this year and got it second go!

The Peak District this summer was amazing, too; really good getting on the Grit and doing some of the classics from the climbing magazines like 'Not to be Taken Away' and 'Crescent Arête.' It was also great seeing the friendly climbing scene around Sheffield and Yorkshire, meeting top climbers and getting some beta!

DARAGH O'CONNOR is aged 12 and lives in Co Dublin. He's been climbing with his Dad, Terry, for three years. Daragh was invited to join the Mountaineering Ireland Youth trip to the Peak District after coming third in the Belfast round of the YCS competitions. Daragh, where do you normally climb?

At the UCD climbing wall, with the Winders Club, or in Dalkey Quarry.

Did you enjoy the competitions, and why?

Yes, because everyone helps you out even though you are competing.

How was the trip to the Peak District?

It was *amazing*, because we got to do so many new things! The best thing was a route that we did in a Staden quarry in the Peak District – 'Swan Song' (E1 5b).

(In interviews with Angela Carlin)

Back to basics

The Irish Bushcraft Club joins Mountaineering Ireland

DONAL CARROLL

WHEN PEOPLE HEAR the word 'bushcraft' it doesn't exactly conjure up any immediate response besides "What's that?" but if the term 'wilderness survival' is mentioned, people immediately recall TV-generated preconceptions of eating grubs in the jungle or of squeezing water from camel dung. Personally, I have done neither...yet!

In fact, bushcraft and wilderness survival are pretty much one and the same thing; it just depends on how you look at it. Bushcraft is the study of ancient peoples' ways of life before the trappings of modern living. To place bushcraft in a time period in human history would be wrong as these skills are still practiced around the world. Bushcraft has been popularised in recent times by the likes of Ray Mears in Britain and Tom Brown Jr in the US – to name but two of a whole host of bushcraft or wilderness survival practitioners and instructors. In Ireland, bushcraft seems to be quickly gaining in popularity, but in truth, people have been

doing these things for years. From the scouts to your average wild camper, a huge amount of people have enjoyed heading out into the wilderness to live and learn about nature; we just never had a name for it before.

So what is bushcraft? Well, without putting too fine a point on it, bushcraft is the study of living in the wilderness. From the skills of building primitive shelters to lighting fires, and to identifying and eating wild food, bushcraft is learning how our ancestors lived off the land. The Irish Bushcraft Club is Ireland's first official bushcraft club and is a member club of Mountaineering Ireland. I founded the club in May of last year after people expressed an interest in getting something official established. From then on, the club has grown and it practices in different areas of the country. The club meets once a month for a weekend of wilderness living where knowledge, experience, stories and laughter are shared. Our permanent practice area is in Co Cavan, but we have been to Kerry, Wicklow, Galway and Antrim, practicing.

The club has been welcomed by different bushcraft schools around the country and helps complement bushcraft courses by offering a place for people to practice their skills in a learning environment.

Your next question might be 'Well what kind of person joins this kind of club?' – which is an obvious one. Our members range from barristers, mechanics and carpenters to my own profession in IT, and more. We are a mixed bunch but are all just regular folk who enjoy learning bushcraft skills. No experience is required





Well frankly, I'm bushed!

to join the club, but a sense of humour is recommended. There is no skill we wouldn't give a go (although I might refrain from drinking the camel dung!).

Bushcraft is an excellent way to have a greater appreciation of the outdoors and nature. I used to walk through forests blissfully unaware of what was around me. I'm not just talking about the names of trees, plants or other wildlife but also their uses, life cycles and relationships to other wildlife. It doesn't take a whole lot of knowledge to start appreciating the average Coillte forest in a whole new light. Now I only need to walk very short distances to find things of great interest. We often travel only ten metres into a forest before something cool jumps out at us, whether it be a particularly useful tree, an edible plant or a bird you recently learned to identify. This information will be great for when I go for my Mountain Leader award, too.

As a club, we camp for two to three days in a forest. We generally have a number of projects on the go. Recently we have been busy constructing our single-person debris huts, we cooked a chicken and some lamb in a ground oven, weaved willow baskets, made natural water purifiers, tracked rabbits and undertook a whole host of individual and group projects. We normally arrive on the Friday evening to set up. The aim is always to try to light our fires using as primitive a method as possible, which can often be difficult if you arrive late to a dark, damp forest; it is great practice,

though. The weekends are quite relaxed but we always get a good deal done. We are hoping to get out during the evenings to meet up during the winter, as well as for going camping.

We have been looking for different areas around the country to practice in and to get more people from a variety of areas involved. Getting land permission is difficult and it seems to become an issue when people realise that you wish to light a fire, and understandably so. In your average forest you don't have to walk very far before you see charred ground, circles of rocks and empty cans or containers. However, I really enjoy looking back when leaving the forest after our gatherings because it's very difficult to identify where we were. The fire has disappeared and the rubbish isn't there; the only signs remaining are the wood shavings from carving and the footprints we leave. It's kinda spooky. We have a limit set on the amount of people that can use an area on any given weekend, to limit the impact, and we always comb the area for anything we have potentially dropped. Why the effort? Well it's simple, really – it's so we can arrive back to our spot and it looks completely untouched. So if you know of an accommodating forest owner, please get in touch!

If you love the outdoors, have an interest in nature and wish to learn some interesting skills, then bushcraft is a great way to broaden your knowledge. Look us up at www.irishbushcraftclub.org or email us on thebushcraftclub@gmail.com.



Making fire



Basket-making



Camp fire



Putting out the fire

The President's Diary

ALAN TEES

THIS PAST YEAR has been a difficult one for me personally, with two close family bereavements, and I am left feeling that I should have been able to contribute more to a job for which I feel very privileged to have been chosen. Coming on the heels of Declan O'Keeffe's high profile presidency, I am aware that little of what I have done has been in the *Log* and I feel the need to write about the various things I have been involved in over the past year.

In July 2008, my wife Margaret and I arrived back from the MCI Alpine Meet in Vicosoprano, reinforced in our belief that we are privileged to be part of an organisation with such potential to make new friends!

Off to the Highlands

September began with a board meeting in Dublin. Being resident in Culdaff, Co Donegal, has many advantages, but convenience to Dublin is not one of them and I am greatly indebted to Dawson Stelfox, who is a board member and who usually does the driving from Lisburn. Nevertheless, I don't normally get home until about 2:00am.

The following weekend, we were in Glenmore Lodge in the Cairngorms for the Mountaineering Council of Scotland Gathering, which included their AGM. In addition to having my hire car damaged by a trailer-load of kayaks, the highlight of the weekend was participating in a debate with the manager of the Alladale estate about his plans to fence off part of Scotland as a commercial wildlife park, which were rejected by the meeting.

The month of September finished with a poorly attended regional strategy meeting in Sligo. Still, we did manage a couple of

routes on the excellent Happy Valli crag the next day.

Consultations

October was busier. We received an invitation to attend a sports dinner in the Crowne Plaza in Dublin on the 8th to honour Bertie Ahern's contribution to Irish sport. Representatives from the worlds of tennis, hockey and triathlon provided good company at the table and made up for a somewhat tedious speech by the ex-Taoiseach!

Two days later, we were in Macroom, Co Cork, for the October Meet, hosted warmly and ably by the Cork Mountaineering Club, and the following weekend, Co Down, for the Ulster Federation of Rambling Clubs AGM.

Funding has been applied for for a badly needed new indoor wall in Derry. I have been trying not to get too involved as there are others more qualified and with more time to give, but no one else was available on Tuesday October 24th, so I went to a meeting with the funding body and Derry City Council. I came home quite



Alan and Margaret Tees meet Andy "The Bull" McSharry (second left) and Michael Mulligan (Sligo MC) in Ballintrillick, Co Sligo.



The President and his wife Margaret with members of the Ulster Federation of Rambling Clubs (UFRC), Walkers' Association Ireland (WAI) and the Ramblers. Back row from left: Ronnie Carser (UFRC), Alan Tees, Reg Magowan (UFRC), Simon Stewart (WAI). Front row: Margaret O'Sullivan (Ramblers), Margaret Tees (North West Mountaineering Club). Photo: Margaret Tees Collection.

discouraged, as it all seemed a long way off (2011) with lots of hoops to jump through and boxes to tick in between.

One of the desired results identified in our five-year Strategic Plan consultation process was more regionalisation within MCI. There didn't seem to be much thought given as to how this would come about, what regions there would be or how a regional structure would work, but I felt that, rather than more poorly attended meetings, if we could get some MCI club members together for a weekend away, something might develop from that! We tried such a weekend in Connemara for the North West area at the end of October, but although the craic was great and contacts were made, I don't recall any serious MCI business being discussed!

In November, I did a slide show for a local scout troop on our recent Panpatia expedition, had another wall meeting with Derry CC and went out with the new Donegal MC (taking a few North West MC and Colmcilliers with me) and a great day was had by all on Kings Mountain, Sligo.

In December, I had another board meeting in Dublin and, with family illness, I would not have been able to do any more.

Meets and greets

The New Year began with a teleconference board meeting, the first I had done (not ideal, but better than 8-9 hours in a car), and then Margaret and I took advantage of a kind offer from Simon Stewart and Margaret O'Sullivan? to come to Wicklow for a weekend. A windy day on Djouce was followed by a convivial evening meeting with familiar, and some not so familiar, faces from the Dublin outdoor scene.



The President with Mountaineering Ireland members at the Autumn Meet in Gougane Barra, Co Cork, in October 2008. Photo: Margaret Tees.

On January 23rd I did a slide show in Omagh for West Tyrone Rambling Club and the following day went out with the Sperrin Hillwalking Club in the snowy Sperrins...where else? I was royally received, but the day was somewhat marred by the breaking news that two Irish hillwalkers had died in Glencoe. On 28th I helped to judge a junior climbing competition at St Columb's Leisure Centre (very rewarding) and the month finished with the second focus group weekend in the Maamturks and a fruitful meeting on Ben Whiskin with "The Bull" McSharry, hosted by Michael Mulligan of Sligo MC.

I missed the AGM in Wicklow due to a bereavement, and the organisation's name was duly changed to Mountaineering Ireland. Personally, I like and fully approve of the new name, but I would like to have seen more member consultation.

In March, I was in Torridon with a group comprising members of North West MC, Colmcilliers and others, and on 23rd I did the Panpatia slide show with Strabane Hillwalking Club at the local library.

At the end of April, we found ourselves with a broken-down car in Co Down at 4:30 on a Thursday afternoon, trying to get from a CAAN event (good talk by Hanna Shields) to Wales for the BMC AGM and a Mountaineering Co-ordination Group meeting I was due to chair on the Friday. I had never before been to one and was somewhat apprehensive. We got there, it went well, and the BMC voting procedure was considerably more interesting than the

talk and slide show presented by an up-and-coming young tiger with a taste for "funky" E5s in "funky" quarries at various "funky" locations. I crept out.

The Climbfest was in Glencolmcille this year. Mountainous seas restricted activities initially, but the weather stayed dry and the smaller than usual crowd of about sixty got plenty of climbing done. We produced a topo guide, but my attempts to get a tee-shirt sponsor came to nought, although we did produce fleeces for €20 and rugby shirts for €30 each. If you didn't get one and you want one, send me the money and I'll arrange it.

Carrick-a-Rede crag

Thanks to the efforts of Ross Millar and Aodhnait Carroll, I managed to meet Barry Crawford from the National Trust at Carrick-a-Rede, to look at a crag there (currently out of bounds) with a view to assessing it as a possible climbing venue. The matter had been raised by a couple of Mountaineering Ireland members who, on visiting the famous bridge, spotted it and thought it had potential. The National Trust are sympathetic but, as there will have to be substantial cleaning carried out, they will have to discuss it with their environmental people. They are also considering permission to climb at Dunseverick and were unaware of the substantial number of routes already there.

The opportunity for a photoshoot with Miss Tyrone for the launch of the Sperrin Hillwalking Festival was not to be missed!

In the event, I turned up in Gortin on the 9th of June to be greeted by Mr Frog and Miss Squirrel. The resultant photos, I suspect, will come back to haunt me!

At the end of June, the Hugh Sharkey memorial weekend joint meet with IMC on Owey was a bit of a disappointment. Not only did the promised good weather not materialise, but I broke my hand on the way back! Worse, Margaret was in Germany, so I had to fend for myself, one-handed, for a week. Even worse, I was in the throes of purchasing a camper van which I planned to drive to the Alpine Meet in Switzerland, and could not do so in plaster. I got the plaster cut off, a small brace put on instead, and got there, but it did curtail activities somewhat. Look out for my new book, *The Alps Single-handed*, with a foreword by Joe Simpson.

Thanks to all

As I near the end of my two-year period as President, I am amazed at how fast the time has flown by. I would like to have got around to more clubs and perhaps attended less meetings. Indeed, if you have a club event and wish me to attend, I will make a major effort to get there, wherever it is in the country. Finally, can I just finish by paying tribute to our current Mountaineering Ireland Board. I have sat in on most of their meetings this year and we are privileged to have a most formidable group of individuals, in terms of their experience, commitment and skill, acting on our behalf.

Slievenamon

Kevin Higgins writes about a mountain of myth and legend

Slievenamon, Co Tipperary at sunset, viewed from the east. Photo: Kevin Higgins.

When a search for Sliabh Dile on a list of Irish summits proves fruitless, its height of 721m narrows the search to two possibilities. Sure enough, this was an earlier name for Slievenamon, in County Tipperary, and like many of Ireland's hills and mountains, it has generated many myths and legends¹ over the centuries.

Being something of a lonely summit, isolated from other ranges such as the Comeraghs and Galtys, means that it may be a bit neglected by serious hillwalkers, other than those 'ticking' lists. Taking about two hours from the car park, the standard route on the wide track to the summit is a popular Sunday afternoon hike.

Many people who climb the hill are aware of the origin of the modern name. Slievenamon (Sliabh na mBan, the Mountain of Women) was named following its use by the legendary Fionn Mac Cumhail in the process of selecting a mate. Not wishing to make many enemies by choosing just one of his numerous admirers, he decided that the selection would be made on the basis of athletic prowess. The candidates for his hand would compete in a race to the top of the mountain.

Slievenamon viewed from Knockroe. Photo: Kevin Higgins.

Fionn did, however, have a favourite and was not averse to a bit of skulduggery. Gráinne, daughter of the king of Ireland, was the one he fancied. Secretly, he advised her to take it easy at the start, as any hillwalker might, in order to save energy for later. The others raced off, leaving Gráinne behind, but they soon became exhausted and lay down on the heather, and she overtook them to claim the prize.

Another version holds that Gráinne was smuggled to the summit on the night before the race so that when the others arrived she was found to be there ahead of them and declared the winner! According to proverb, 'Beauty and virtue are not always found together' and as we know, it was not long before Gráinne eloped with Fionn's best friend, Diarmuid Ó

Duibhne, and thus began another myth cycle.

This, however, is only half the story. The full name of the hill is 'Sliabh na mBan Fionn.' This could be understood either as 'The Mountain of Fionn's Women' or 'The Mountain of Fair Women.' Since Slievenamon stands on the edge of 'Magh Femhen,' the plain stretching roughly between Cashel and Clonmel, and 'Femhen' can be translated as meaning 'fertility' or 'feminine,' the last word in 'Sliabh na mBan Fionn' can be read as a corruption of 'Femhen.'

With this in mind, one may recall that Slievenamon is one of the topographical features in the country that appear to have human form. When viewed from some distance to the east and with some imagination, the whole mountain's outline can be



seen to resemble a reclining pregnant woman. It is probably coincidental that the phenomenon is most striking when observed from the vicinity of Knockroe, on the Kilkenny/Tipperary border. This is the location of a Bronze Age chambered burial site² which, though on a much smaller scale than Newgrange, exhibits a similar phenomenon in relation to both sunrise and sunset at the winter solstice, when the life-giving sunlight enters the burial chambers, the realm of the dead. The sun lights the passages of orthostats and finally shines on the engraved rearmost stone of the western one before sinking below the horizon.

Such mounds, tumuli or hillocks of ancient origin traditionally held the remains of a mortal king or ruler. They were designated 'sidhe' and provided an escape route for the defeated Tuatha Dé Danann, and on occasion were a means of access to the 'otherworld.' A number of hills in



Carving on summit boulder painted with chalk.
Photo: Kevin Higgins.

Ireland are called Seefin and this can be understood as 'Suidhe Finn' (Fionn's Seat, where he rested while hunting) or 'Sidh Fionn.' The summit of Slievenamon is sometimes called Seefin, and just to its north is an outlying summit called Sheegouna. It was in this region that Fionn and his warriors reputedly entered a 'sidh' to assist Donn Mac Midir in battle against the Tuatha Dé Danann.

Such stories are recorded in the 15th century *Book of Lismore*, which, among other things, records many of the sagas of much earlier times, even if they are often confusing and convoluted. A most interesting tale is the alternative version of Fionn Mac Cumhail's 'thumb of knowledge':

'When hunting near Slievenamon, he met a strange woman near a spring well. She filled a silver tankard and was followed surreptitiously by Fionn to a secret door on the mountain. She entered so quickly that Fionn only got his hand on the doorpost, with his thumb inside. On pulling his bruised thumb out, he placed it in his mouth to ease the pain and found that he had the gift of prophesy – only available when he chewed his thumb.'

One modern myth, rural rather than urban, from the Slievenamon region is the story of 'the burning of the last witch in Ireland – in 1895', recalled in the children's rhyme:

*Are you a witch or are you a fairy,
Or are you the wife of Michael Cleary.*

The full story is recounted by Angela Bourke in *The Burning of Bridget Cleary – A True Story*,³ and its mythical aspect lies in proclaiming the victim a witch; the husband was tried in court and served a jail sentence as a result.

Nowadays, a substantial track gives easy access to the summit and this small sample of the lore concerning Slievenamon might, on occasion, provide subject for discussion and help shorten the trudge to the top. When there, make sure to examine carefully its summit and nearby cairns. Who knows what might be found? Maybe a prize could be offered for interpreting the enigmatic engraving on one of the summit boulders. As well as being an item to 'tick off' on a list of summits, Sliaabh na mBan provides a mountain of myth and legend to anyone interested. ■

Kevin Higgins is a member of the Tyndall Mountain Club, based in Kilkenny. He says he has been hiking and climbing in Ireland and abroad for too many years to think about. He has developed an interest in the history and folklore of Irish mountains and mountaineers.

Outlying summit of Slievenamon in winter.
Photo: Kevin Higgins.

Footnotes

1. *Slievenamon* (1955), edited by James Maher, is a comprehensive account of the legends and history relating to the mountain and its surroundings.
2. *Knockroe*: Prof Muiris O'Sullivan of UCD has been in charge of most of the archaeological work on this site. An outline of the work is available at <http://www.ucd.ie/archaeology/research/knockroe/>.
3. *The Burning of Bridget Cleary: A True Story* by Angela Bourke, Pimlico, London (1999).

Knockroe Bronze Age burial chamber near Slievenamon showing interior of west passage at winter solstice.
Photo: Kevin Higgins.



Two and one half to the Brecon

Jenny Murphy reports on a family hillwalking trip to south Wales

The Craig Cwn
Llwh ridge.
Photo:
Jenny Murphy.

Before the birth of our son, Kevin, my husband, Dave Walsh, and I spent most of our holidays enjoying the great outdoors. After Kevin's birth, we were keen to continue doing this, at least until he stopped being happy to go wherever we went! So this summer we bundled up our now eight-month-old and headed for the Brecon Beacons in south Wales.

We travelled to Wales by taking the fast ferry from Rosslare to Fishguard, which only takes one hour. The Brecons are approximately a two-and-a-half-hour drive away from Fishguard. The main gateway towns for the mountains are Brecon to the north, Crickhowell to the east and Abergavenny to the southeast. All of these towns have a variety of accommodation, eateries and the

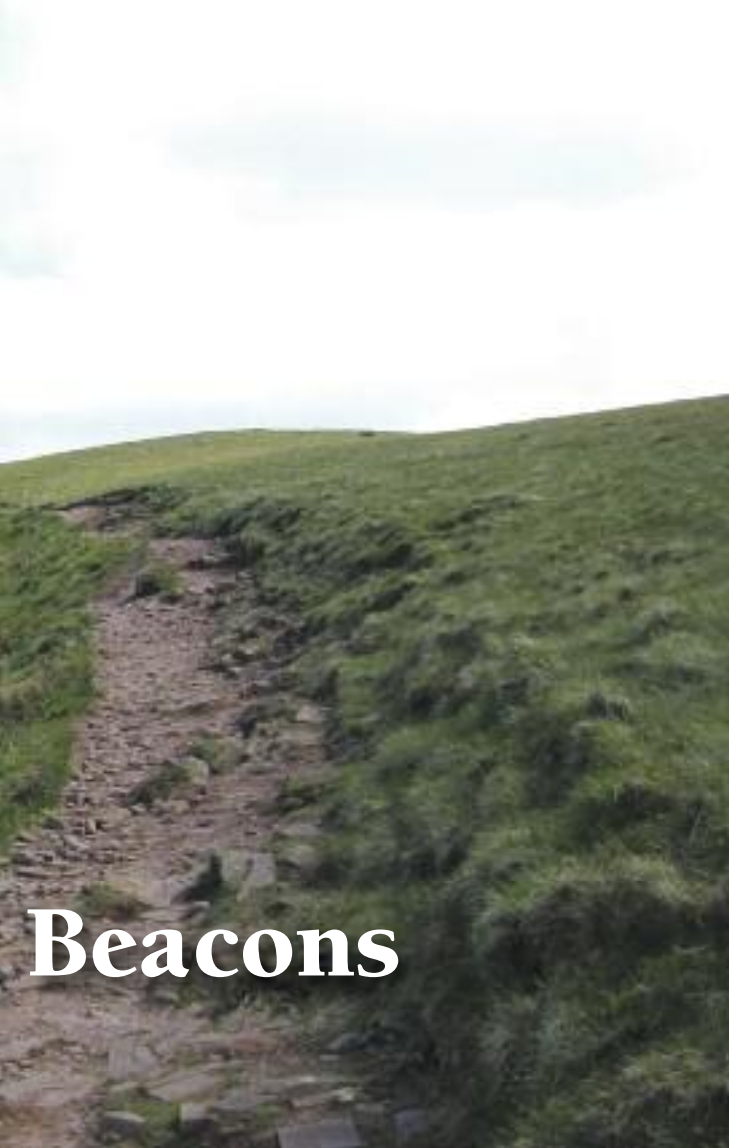
usual selection of outdoor shops. Outside of these towns there are numerous small villages dotted around the area. For our week's holiday, we stayed in self-catering accommodation on an organic hill farm outside the tiny village of Crai, which is off the A4067, south of the village of Sennybridge.

The Brecon Beacons are part of a national park and there is a visitor centre at Libanus, southwest of Brecon town on the A470, which is a great place to get a lot of information on the history and geography of the area and about activities in the park. Added to that, there is a cosy tea room in the centre, which provides a good back-up plan for a rainy afternoon, which wouldn't be unusual in south Wales!

The highest point in the Brecon Beacons is Pen-y-Fan at 886m. There are numerous ways to reach the summit of Pen-y-Fan, but we decided to take the most direct route and keep the outing to an afternoon one rather than making a full day trip of it. The start of the walk is at Pont Ar Daf and is very easy to find as it is on the

A470, which is one of the very scenic roadways in the Brecon Beacons. At weekends, the road is very busy with motorcyclists and motorists. The place to park your car and to actually start walking is in a lay-by on the A470 just south of the Storey Arms Centre. This lay-by has an information board, toilets and an ice-cream van! The Welsh word 'pont' means bridge and, sure enough, the road does cross a river after the lay-by, the river flowing into the nearby Beacons Reservoir.

Leaving the car parking area, we followed a very visible track through the conifer trees. We emerged from the conifers after a few minutes and continued down a cobbled stone track to cross a river via a very convenient bridge. The walk proper starts after this with a more or less direct ascent of Corn Du (873m), which is the second highest mountain in the Brecon Beacons. The track was very busy with runners and walkers, two-legged and four-legged, so we were busy with civilities on this first leg of the walk. After about three-quarters of an hour the track forked, the left fork



Beacons

“We bundled up our eight month old son Kevin and headed for the Brecon Beacons.”

leading on to the summit of Corn Du. Corn Du means ‘Black Horn’ and gets its name from the distinctive crop of rock that defines the summit. The north face of Corn Du is sheer and exposed.

From Corn Du, we continued to Pen-y-Fan, which is only thirteen metres higher than Corn Du. It was accessible along a ridge to the northeast of Corn Du and we reached it after approximately fifteen minutes.

Pen-y-Fan means ‘Top of the Peaks’ and, having a perfectly clear day, we had magnificent views from the

summit. Leaving Pen-y-Fan, we retraced our steps back along the ridge to Corn Du. The wind was starting to become a bit too breath-taking for Kevin in his elevated position in the back carrier, so we quickly descended from Corn Du onto the Craig Cwm Llwh ridge.

From the ridge there were fantastic views down into the Cwm Llwh, which houses Llyn Cwm Llwh, the ‘bottomless lake.’ I haven’t found a definite meaning for Cwm Llwh, but one translation could be ‘Powder Valley’, which might be linked to a longstanding

hillwalking ◀

The family on the summit of Corn Du.
Photo: Jenny Murphy.



Dave and Kevin (in backpack) on the way up to Corn Du.
Photo: Jenny Murphy.



On the Craig Cwm Llwh ridge.
Photo: Jenny Murphy.



Llyn Cwn Llŵch.
Photo:
Jenny Murphy.



tradition of military training activities there. From the ridge there was a track which led directly down to the Storey Arms Centre, but we continued on to find the obelisk further along the ridge.

The inscribed obelisk was erected in memory of Tommy Jones, aged five. The boy had been on his way with his father to visit his grandfather at Cwm Llŵch farm on August 4th 1900. The pair stopped off at a place called the Login, where soldiers were encamped for training at the rifle range up the valley. At the Login they by chance met Tommy's grandfather and cousin. The two young boys took off ahead of the two older men, but eventually the two boys became separated, with Tommy trying to retrace his steps back to meet his father but instead getting lost in the mountains. *The Daily Mail* newspaper at the time had put up a reward of twenty pounds to anyone who could

find the body, resulting in an anxious search lasting twenty-nine days. His body was found at the spot now marked by the obelisk. It was and still remains a puzzle as to how a five-year-old, already tired after a long day and a long walk from Brecon, could have reached such an elevated position, over rough ground and more than likely in the dark. The erection of the obelisk was funded by voluntary donations including from the person who had been awarded the twenty pounds reward money.

With these sobering thoughts in mind, we continued on along the ridge, eventually following a faint track down off the ridge, leading to a fence, with again a convenient stile. After crossing the stile, the descent became steeper but eventually the Storey Arms Centre came into view behind a conifer plantation and we made directly for it.

The Storey Arms Centre is an outdoor education centre. The centre takes its name from a drovers' inn, which was situated a few hundred metres away from where the centre is situated. The inn was constructed about 1840 and demolished by Cardiff Corporation Waterworks in 1924. The present Storey Arms was constructed in 1936 as a youth hostel and café, "in order that the amenities of the catchment area may be enjoyed with less likelihood of contamination to the streams flowing into the impounding reservoirs" (taken from *The Centenary of the Cardiff Corporation Waterworks*, 1950). From here, it was a short walk along the road back to Pont ar Daf.

On other days of our holiday we walked in the wonderful waterfall region further south in the range. This included the Sgwd yr Eira waterfall, it being the most famous because you can actually walk behind the waterfall. There is plenty more scope for hill-walking with a variety of scenery in the Brecon Beacons, and a number of the more challenging peaks could be combined to make a longer day expedition. We went home happy that a theme-park holiday was a few years away yet! ■

Jenny Murphy grew up in Co Carlow with views of Lugnaquilla and the Wicklow Mountains in one direction and Mount Leinster and the Blackstairs in another. She lives in Co Limerick with her husband David Walsh and son Kevin. Both Jenny and Dave are members of Limerick Climbing Club.

Dave and Kevin
on way back
to Storey
Arms Centre.
Photo:
Jenny Murphy.



Map

British Ordnance Survey
Explorer Map OL12 (Brecon
Beacons Western Area).

Accommodation

We rented a cottage on
Aberhyddnant Farm
(www.abercottages.co.uk) which
is set in a really nice rural
location but it does require you
having your own transport.

Guidebook

Walk the Brecon Beacons by Bob
Greaves (Discovery Walking
Guides).

Pitch 8, Testament to
the Insane, Isle of Hoy,
Orkneys, Scotland.
Photo: Iain Miller.

rockclimbing ◀

Testament to the Insane

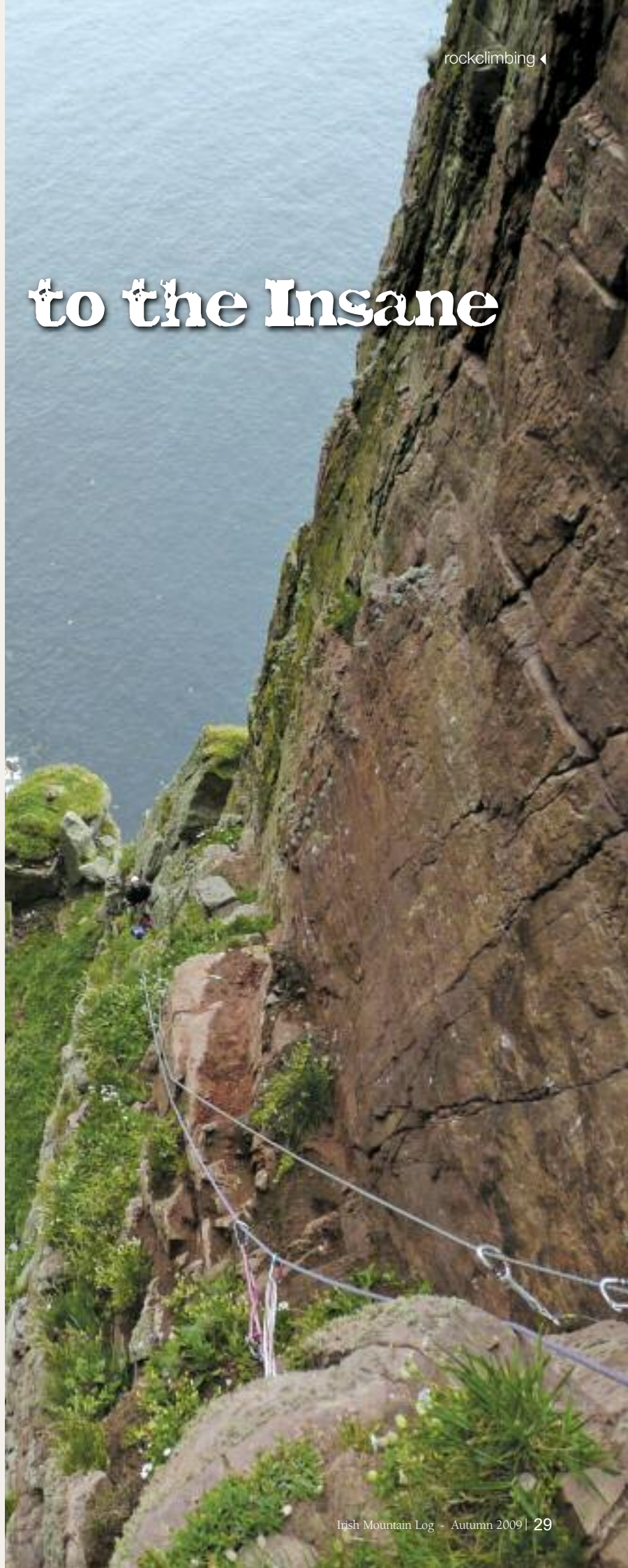
Iain Miller

It all started with a knock at the door early one evening in July 2003. A stranger called Les Gorham wanted to climb St John's Head, the UK and Ireland's highest vertical sea cliff. What followed over the next five years was a near-fanatical quest to free-climb a new route there.

St John's Head sits approximately three kilometres northeast of the infamous Old Man of Hoy. The island of Hoy is the second largest of the sixty-four Orkney Islands and its western coastline is an almost continuous 25km stretch of the highest, most inaccessible, foreboding and atmospheric sandstone sea cliffs that it is possible to imagine. The highest part of this coastline is St John's Head and, at 350 vertical metres from sea level to its summit, it is indeed a monster!

Due to its isolated location, accessing the base of the cliff at St John's Head is a major exercise in logistics and planning. The cliff summit is a two-hour walk from Rackwick Bay (the nearest road-head) following the cliff-top path past the Old Man of Hoy. This takes you to the summit of St John's Head, and from here things begin to get silly! The descent "path" to the base of the cliff is a 600-metre, near-vertical bullrush solo, scrambling down through primary jungle with a 40-metre abseil through a waterfall to arrive at the bottom soaking wet and exhausted, all the time carrying a Yosemite-sized rack! This descent from the summit to sea level can take anything from three hours to an agonising full day to complete.

The Head was first climbed in 1969 via the 400 metres long Original Route at E3. This route was climbed in a continuous three-day adventure that saw the team of five sleeping in hammocks on ledges high above the sea. The second route on the Head was climbed in 1970: the Longhope Route was climbed in a seven-day odyssey and, at E7 and 500 metres long, is considered to be the daddy of adventure climbs in the UK. A third route was climbed in 1988. At E5 and 435 metres long, Big John was also a major undertaking. All three of these routes were originally climbed with varying amounts of aid and were later free-climbed, with two of the routes waiting 27 years



"We climbed the awesome fault-line up the centre of the 90-metre upper headwall in four superb pitches..."



Top of pitch 7, Testament to the Insane. Photo: Iain Miller.

for second free ascents! The first ascents' list reads a bit like a who's who of the British climbing scene, with Dave Turnbull, John Arran, Mick Fowler and Edward Ward-Drummond all having played their part in creating or free-climbing these routes.

It was with this rather worrying information in mind that our quest began....

In July 2004, Derren Fox, Ross Jones, Les Gorham and myself jumped off an inflatable at 4am at the base of the unclimbed south face of St John's Head. It is difficult to describe the atmosphere of our location. The "beach" was made up of thousands of house-sized boulders, and in between the boulders were thousands of ground-nesting birds. Above us stood over a quarter of a vertical mile of unclimbed, overhanging and seriously decaying ancient red sandstone. We had entered the Realm of the Senses. We racked up in silence as Derren led off up the first pitch of vertical grot. The first three pitches consisted of

friable wet rock and near-vertical grass. Derren, Ross and myself were alternating leads, whilst Les carried a specially modified TV camera. Camped on the cliff-top was Howard Clarke, who was operating a second camera. Thus our activities would be immortalised on film!

The third pitch brought us up to the bottom of the south face at about 90 metres above the sea. Pitch four was a 55-metre horror-show up a bulging green chimney, followed by a spot of faith-climbing up vertical stacked rubble. This took us to a superb ledge, and at this juncture the sun came out. Hurray! The next two pitches took us up another 80 metres of mixed ground consisting of a mixture of good rock and primary jungle. We were now standing at the bottom of pitch seven and the next 45 metres of rock above us would turn out to be the crux of the route.

Off crept Mr Fox up the steep and frighteningly loose rock. He was following a natural flake line and for

the next hour stealthily made his way upward, picking off loose rock and dropping them 600 feet onto the beach below. The tension was all too apparent as he reached for a distant hold...and off he popped, taking a 25-foot whipper, plummeting downward as gear ripped and rocks fell before he slammed alarmingly into the rock face far below his high point. An outstanding performance for one so young, and all captured on video by Les! There was a look of grim resignation on his face as he casually remarked whilst hanging from the ropes, "Would anyone care to lead through this pitch?" The silence was deafening as the three of us looked at our feet and waited for Derren to continue the pitch. The bruised but still functioning Mr Fox returned to the fray and led us to the sanctuary of a terrifyingly insecure ledge on the very edge of the abyss.

It was now 10pm and we were 290 metres into our route on irreversible ground. Emotions were running high

as the endorphins flowed. The sun was setting fast and so we pressed on upward into the darkness. The next 45 metres climbed a superb groove with some athletic moves through a wee roof. Alas, as Ross led this pitch we were being rained on, below him on our exposed ledge, by brick-sized rocks as he climbed the vertical stacked rubble above the roof. A character-building half hour was had in the semi-darkness as the continual thump of falling rock around and between us continued.

Thankfully, "Climb when ready" was called, and one by one we climbed by the light of our head torches through the darkness to Ross. It was now midnight, and Ross was sitting in a cave below a monstrous boulder. This was our home for the next four hours of darkness. It was cold – it was very, very, very cold – as we each lay in silence. Our "lightweight" bivy gear consisted of bin bags, and so we lay there wrapped in bin bags, in a cave, 340 metres up our route above irreversible ground as the clouds drew in and the drizzle started... a truly surreal experience.

With a distant hint of daylight on the horizon at 4am, we began to

organise ourselves for the push to the summit. The monstrous racks were rearranged, the ropes were sorted and the flapjacks were finished. The first pitch of the day was a 50-metre wade through soaking-wet, waist-high reeds to the base of the upper headwall. I was last to leave the bivy cave, and as I waded through the saturated reeds I felt safe in the knowledge that it had been forgotten that it was my lead next. It was 5am when I joined the other three at the belay below the upper head wall. The early morning rain stopped and around us in the middle distance rain continued to lash the countryside.

"Your lead!" beamed Ross.

For the next four hours we climbed the awesome fault-line up the centre of the 90-metre upper headwall in four superb pitches. Each of the four pitches up the headwall was entirely different; a roof, a chimney, a hand crack, an off-width and the odd cheeky crimp made for excellent climbing on excellent rock. Standing on the belay stances between pitches on this headwall, our location and situation on this huge face was absolutely awesome. Stretching for kilometres either side of us were the

ominous, monster cliffs towering over the Pentland Firth, and 300 metres below us the Atlantic Ocean battered our previous day's landing "beach."

One by one, we ascended the headwall to arrive on the windblown summit, and so "Testament to the Insane," at 477 metres long and graded XS 5B, was born. The rain in the form of horizontal rods arrived five minutes later and lashed down for the next six hours as we descended to Rackwick Bothy carrying all the toys!

Here we go again!

I kind of thought that this was the end of my relationship with St John's Head. But then, out the blue, in February 2007 I received a very short e-mail from Brother Jones. It simply said "The Head?" and so the Quest continued....

June 2007 and we were back in Orkney. This time a much more lightweight approach was the order of the day. Just Ross, myself and a humungous Yosemite-size rack between us. On the cliff-tops our ever-present watchers in the sky, Howard Clarke and Mick Tighe, were in attendance to activate a rescue if

Pitch 10, Testament to the Insane.
Photo: Iain Miller.





Pitch 8c,
Testament to the
Insane.
Photo:
Iain Miller.

things went pear-shaped. The object of this year's exercise was a new route up much more intimidating ground, slightly to the north of the Testament to the Insane arête. We camped on the summit and, at an unsociably early hour, descended the "goat track" to the base of St John's. As explained above, this descent "path" is actually a 2,000ft near-vertical bullrush solo followed by a 40-metre abseil through a waterfall. This ensured that, when we arrived at the base of the north face of the Head at 6am, we were absolutely exhausted and soaking wet.

During the next hour, we travelled 500 metres south over the massive boulders and the ground-nesters to arrive at a final impasse. The final 100-metre section of coast was non-tidal. So we stripped off and swam and boulder-hopped to the base of the south face. And lo, standing in this special place again, the heavens opened, our proposed new route became a waterfall and we decided to bail. For the next six hours we re-

swam the non-tidal section and re-ascended the bullrush slopes. "*Never, ever again!*" was the mantra as we retreated.

It is safe to say the ascent of the "goat track" is on the very edge of sanity. As you solo up the 400-metre cliff through the waist-high vegetation, your only protection from a fatal fall is the handfuls of vegetation you grab as you ascend.

To summarise our 48-hour adventure at St John's Head on that occasion, we had descended and ascended 4,000 feet of near-vertical bullrushes, swam 200 metres in a truly outrageous location, and abseiled down a waterfall. We hadn't actually done any pitched climbing but had had a superb and full-on adventure!

Upon leaving Orkney and returning to Donegal I solemnly vowed *never to return to St John's Head*. Yep, I would *never, ever return to St John's Head!*

Never, ever again, but...

In July 2008, we were back in

Orkney, again in a lightweight approach, with just Ross, myself and a big wall rack. We enlisted the help of Kevin Heath and his 125hp inflatable, and a 4am start once again saw us at the base of the south face of St John's. Alas, due to the generally poor summer weather, our chosen new route was damp (resembling a waterfall) and very green-looking. By default, we decided to re-climb the Testament to the Insane arête. For the next 12 hours we climbed the original 16 pitches in a more sensible 13, made the route more direct by straightening the first and last pitches, and free-climbed pitch 8 by removing the original aid point. Climbing the route this time was a much more relaxed affair and I, for one, felt that I was now finally at peace with the mighty St John's Head.

Written in memory of Les Gorham, who died in an abseiling accident at the base of an Orkney sea stack two days after ascending St John's Head in 2004. ■

Testament to the Insane route guide

THE HEADLAND of St John's (pictured above, on island of Hoy, Orkneys) terminates in a huge steep-stepped arête at its southern end. This feature is the largest and most obvious one on the headland and is easily seen from the Orkney-to-Scrabster ferry. Access to the route is gained by a scramble from the descent gully along the beach below the main face. A short section below the main face is only accessible at low tide. Alternatively, it can be accessed by boat in calm seas.

Testament to the Insane 470m XS 5b

FA Derren Fox, Ross I. Jones, Iain Miller, (Alt. Leads), Les Gorham, 23-24 July 2004

FFA Ross I. Jones, Iain Miller, 9 July 2008

The route was first climbed in a single 26-hour push with a short bivy during darkness. An 8m leader fall was taken on pitch 7 and one point of aid was used on lead. The pitch was then free-climbed at 5b by the second.

In July 2008, the route was repeated in 12 hours. More direct first and last pitches were taken and the aid removed from pitch 7.

Rock quality is in general poor but the location and the atmosphere is truly outstanding – an adventurous and serious route.

Pitch 1, 30m To the left of the boulder beach, directly below the arête, climb the short seaward wall of excellent rock and scramble to the only boulder and prominent scar.

Pitch 2, 35m Scramble easily up the grass to the rock band; belay in cracks at its right-hand end.

Pitch 3, 40m Continue up the steepening grass to the base of the towering arête; belay at the bottom of the big chimney/groove.

Pitch 4, 55m 5a Climb the chimney/groove; pull out left at its top to a sloping grassy stance. Climb up steep ledges to another groove and pull out through the roof at its top and follow the short corner/wall to a small stance. Continue up a grassy arête on the right to a superb ledge at the bottom of a right-facing corner.

Pitch 5, 40m 4a From the right-hand end of the ledge, climb the slabby right-facing corner to easier ground, ascend this swiftly to a second right-facing corner, and climb this to a good stance. Belay in the cracks on good rock.

Pitch 6, 40m 4b Climb up trending left gently to the base of a steep red wall below a huge precarious capping boulder. Traverse right-hand and ascend the steep ramp on better rock to a steep and extremely loose vegetated slope. Climb this delicately to landward side of another massive perched boulder. Belay in the twin cracks on the wall below it.

Pitch 7, 45m 5b Traverse along the grassy ledge to the bottom of the prominent arête which bounds the right-hand end of the huge slabby upper wall. Pull around the arête on good holds in an exposed position to gain the base of a left-facing corner. Climb the corner steeply to an exposed ledge (several pegs) and belay at the back below a wide groove.

Pitch 8, 12m 4a Climb up the wide groove and up grass to a good stance. In situ peg and gear belay.

Pitch 9, 45m 5a Climb the steep right-trending corner through a wee

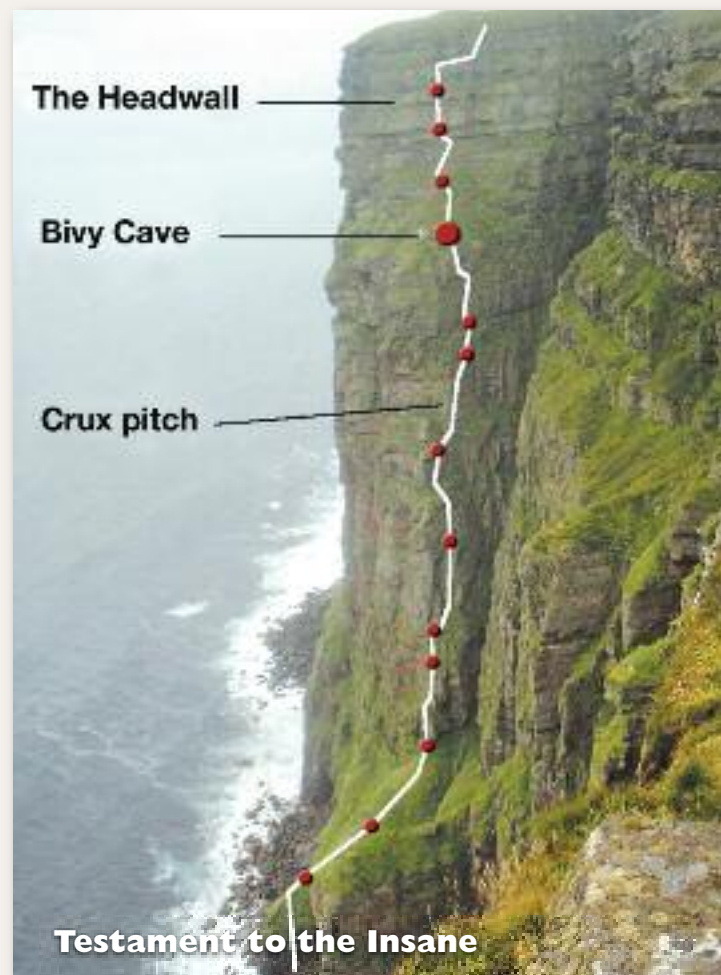
roof to steep vegetation. Climb this to a recess on the left. Climb the centre of the recess to a huge boulder and belay. Bivy on the first ascent.

Pitch 10, 48m Scramble through deep vegetation to the bottom of the headwall. Belay on the high point of vegetation directly below the huge central fault line.

Pitch 11, 25m 4b Climb the left-facing corner on the left and up to and into a cave with a huge block on the floor. Climb through the niche in the roof of the cave to the bottom of a big left-facing corner. Good flake belay at bottom of the corner.

Pitch 12, 20m 5a Climb the hand crack 3 metres to the left of the vegetated open book corner to a good triangular niche. At the back of the niche climb the steep hand-cracks to a good stance on the left. Belay in sight and sound of others.

Pitch 13, 35m 5a Continue up direct in classic chimney fashion to the summit.




Expedition to Himachal Pradesh

Sé O'Hanlon reports on an expedition to an unclimbed Himalayan peak

In August 2008, five members of the Irish Mountaineering Club – Eric Corkery, Moira Creedon, Niamh McGreen, Sé O'Hanlon and Naomi Sturdy – set out from Dublin to attempt to climb Gramang Bal (6,248m) in the Kinnaur District of Himachal Pradesh.

View toward North
Face of Gramang
Bal (6,248m),
Himachal
Pradesh, India.
Photo:
Niamh McGreen.

ur objective was selected following advice from our colleague Paddy O'Leary, who had been close to the mountain in 1993 and again in the early 2000s. We based our plans on Paddy's information, 1:50,000 maps and Google Earth.

We travelled from Delhi to Shimla, where we bought most of our supplies, with our Liaison Officer, Mala Malhonet, cook Ram Singh and his helper, Amer (who usually works as a mountain guide but was taking a rest from that responsibility). Mala is an experienced mountaineer who takes her job seriously and helped us in every way possible. Ram and Amer carried out their kitchen duties excellently but were also resourceful and very willing, and able to help us with many other issues which arose during our journey. Each of them was a source of great strength in his or her own way.

After two days shopping, we continued along the NH22, more

romantically known as the Hindustan–Tibet Highway, to our road-head at Morang. From here we intended to climb by Timchhe Thach, cross the Timchhe ridge and contour slightly downwards to the banks of the Rovang Khad where we planned to set up our base camp on the bank of the river. We hoped to lose the minimum possible height when descending from the ridge to the base camp site so as to reduce what we would have to regain on the other side. From this camp we hoped to get onto the west ridge and follow this ridge to the summit. Little did we know that we would be doing more exploration than climbing.

As planned, we spent two days acclimatising at Morang while waiting for our porters to arrive for the carry to base camp. We used these days to reconnoitre the route to base camp and were surprised that what we found on the ground did not match our expectations. Instead of ascending via Timchhe Thach as planned, we took the advice of the herdsmen and

shepherds and followed the Khokpa Nala to the Timchhe ridge. However, there was no water source for a camp on the ridge and we would be cut off from the east ridge by a precipitous descent to the Rovang Khad, which would be completely impossible for laden porters. We needed to re-think our plan.

We returned to the ridge the next day with our cook Ram Singh and met herdsmen who brought us further up the ridge to point 4,560m, where there was an excellent site for our camp. This would have been impossible for us to do without Ram's language skills. Water was available there from the pipeline that runs to Morang from a pool at the foot of the glacier, from which the Rovang Khad flows. We had no time to reconnoitre the descent to the river where we had originally planned to site base camp and decided to stay at point 4,560m. The only apparent disadvantage of this site was that it influenced us toward the northern, glacier side of the mountain

and away from our planned route up the west ridge.

The following days were spent investigating the approach to the mountain via the glacier at the head of the Rovang Khad. The approach to the glacier was a straightforward slog and there were no special difficulties on the glacier itself, apart from a section where a buttress looming above generously distributed stones on the ground below and on any passers-by. This was definitely not a place to linger. When we reached the head of the lower section of the glacier, we were not encouraged by what we found.

There were two ways to reach the upper glacier. The first was to ascend under the hanging seracs described as ice walls on the map. The other was an ascent of the icefield to the left of the glacier with a difficult exit through the headwall. A steep icefield led from the upper glacier to the cornices on the summit ridge.

In total, these sections would have involved 1,300m of technical climbing. The objective dangers of the ascent under the seracs were unacceptable to us. We decided that the ascent up the slopes to the left of the icefall while carrying loads for a higher camp would require fixed ropes, but we were not carrying that

“From this camp we hoped to get onto the west ridge and follow the ridge to the summit...”

sort of equipment. It became clear that we would have to focus our attention on our originally planned line of ascent.

Before we could rethink our plan, an even bigger problem arose when our water supply dried up. For a day or two the whole team made the 5km round trip to draw a supply from the pool which fed the pipeline, but eventually even that dried out. The only other source of water was the Rovang Khad which required a three-hour round trip with a 450m descent and ascent over difficult terrain.

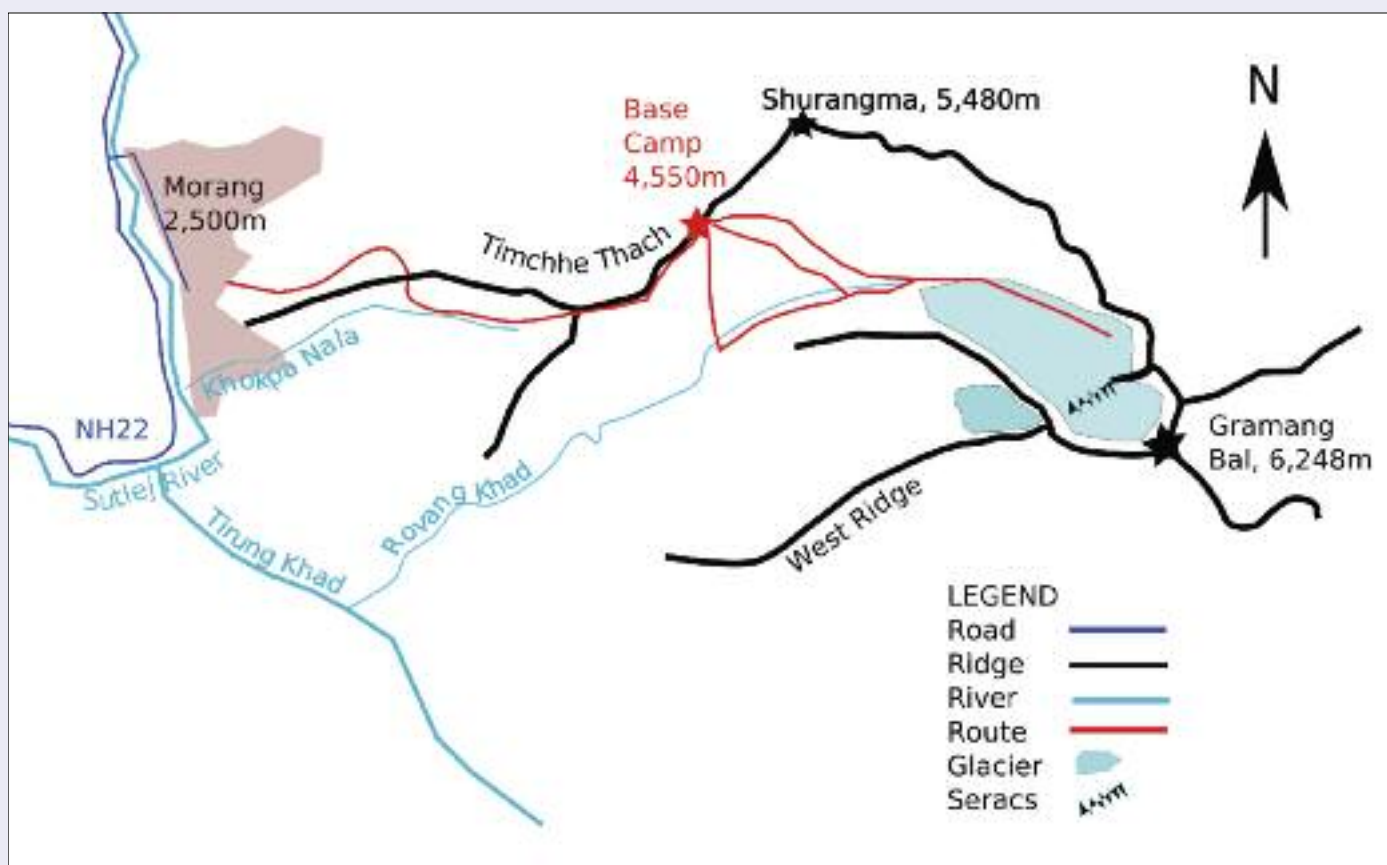
There was no point in us spending our time drawing water to maintain a base camp with no time left to explore and climb, so after a long discussion we reluctantly decided to call a halt to our venture. It was ironic that we could not survive in this location without a basic requirement, water, but yet were able to walk a few metres across the ridge to where we could see Morang 2,000 metres below, and use

mobile phones to summon the porters for an early carry-out and send text messages home. It was very disappointing that, on the day the porters arrived, the water started to flow again, but by then it was too late; three of us had already descended to Morang to reduce the demand for water at base camp.

While water-carrying, we explored the vicinity. Our planned site for a base camp on the banks of the Rovang Khad was not practical; the route between there and Timchhe was very steep scree and would have made an extremely difficult day for porters. The ground beside the river was uninviting and full of boulders, which would have made setting up a base camp there an exercise in earth-moving rather than just one of cutting tent platforms.

On another day we descended more than 450m straight down to the river where we found a possible site for base camp on the other side of the

Area visited by the expedition, with route to Gramang Bal shown in red. Map: Sé O'Hanlon and Joss Lynam.





View of
Gramang Bal
in sunlight.
Photo:
Sé O'Hanlon.

river, even though it was much lower than we would have liked. This site would permit an approach to the east ridge while still leaving the option of the north face ascent. The main question was how to get to it.

It did not seem like a great idea to follow our route and climb to 4,560m before descending to 4,100m to set up a base camp but there may have been an option of ascending the Rovang Khad from the Tirung Khad. When Paddy O'Leary tried to follow this route he was stopped by a rock wall and it seemed that there was no useful way through. Near the potential base camp site there was a well beaten track, a couple of hundred metres long, to the river bank, which did not continue on our base camp side of the

river. The fact that this clear track exists and is on only one side of the river seems to indicate that there is a way up to there which must be known to local herdsmen or shepherds. Enquiries locally could clear up this question and might open up the best way to the northern and eastern approach to the mountain.

Our expedition was, in one way, a disappointment because we did not get to the summit of Gramang Bal, the mountain we had approached so confidently, yet we went home happy. We got great pleasure from being some of the few non-locals who have been into this beautiful and remote area. At the same time, we became aware that what was to us a new frontier is a familiar back garden for the herdsmen

and shepherds of the district. The key to the mountain could be found by tapping their knowledge.

It was a privilege for us to come into contact with the people of Kinnaur and their culture. It was an education to see how they have taken advantage of technological and mechanical progress while still maintaining their culture and adapting progress to the needs of their society rather than the other way round, as so often happens.

Acknowledgements

We got generous support from the MCI (as it then was), the Irish Mountaineering Club and The Great Outdoors. We are pleased to take this opportunity to thank them in public. ■

“The fact that a clear track exists seems to indicate that there is a way up, known to local herdsmen or shepherds...”

Sé O'Hanlon is a member of the Irish Mountaineering Club and a past secretary of the then MCI. He has been hillwalking and climbing in Ireland and overseas for many years and was a member of the successful IMC expedition to Kangro Tarbo in Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, India in 2000.



NATIONAL LEAD CLIMBING COMPETITION

PLAY AT HEIGHT
DINGLE CO. KERRY



SATURDAY 10TH OCTOBER 09

ENTER AT
WWW.PLAYATHEIGHT.COM/COMPETITION

LIMITED ENTRIES

SENIOR MALE - 7A - 8A

SENIOR FEMALE - 6B - 7B+

JUNIORS - 6A+ - 7C

Trekking with Messner

Tom Fox goes trekking in the Cordillera Huayhuash of Peru

Itrekked with Messner in the Cordillera Huayhuash...Messner Callupe, that is. He was in charge of the three horses taken on our 110-mile trek to cover emergencies and evacuations and for people to use when ill or having a bad day. Little did I know that his father Rossilini, our head muleteer, had named him after Reinhold Messner, with whom he had worked on his climbing trips.

We overnighted in Lima, the capital of Peru, after a long-haul flight from Heathrow via Amsterdam, and then drove for nine hours to Huaraz. We travelled along the coastal desert on the Pan-American Highway before turning inland. From sea level we ascended to the Conococha Pass (4,100m) in a distance of 80km. From there, we descended to Huaraz (3,028m) where we spent two nights acclimatising.

Huaraz is a bustling town of about 100,000 people, a base for trekking and climbing in the Cordillera Blanca and Huayhuash. The town was completely rebuilt following a catastrophic earthquake in 1970 which flattened all but one street of buildings and killed half of the city's population.

We trekked up to Lake Churup (4,500m) the following day. After a wander through the never-ending street market where you could buy anything you needed, we headed for the small town of Chiquian (3,500m), which used to be the starting point for the trek. From there, the drive to Quertelhuain, our starting point, was an exciting six-hour drive on a dirt road. The construction of mining roads means that most groups now

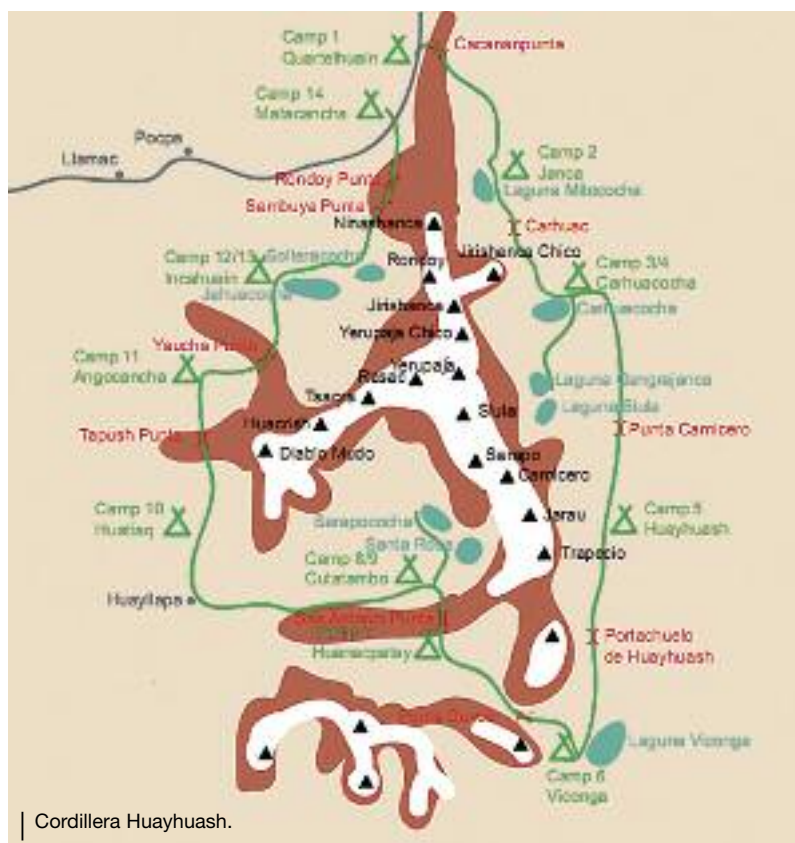
avoid walking along the dirt track due to the frequency of mining trucks. We called into the village of Pocpa to meet our muleteers and camp staff. Five men from the village were to work with us for the next fourteen days.

Quartelhuain was directly under our first pass – the Cacampunta (4,690m). Two hours' walking took us to this pass, which is the great continental divide. This is a geographically important place as the water on one side flows to the Pacific Ocean and on the other to the Amazon basin and hence to the Atlantic. Ninashanca, Rondoy, Jirishanca and Yerupaja dominated the skyline. Later, at our camp at Janca (4,250m) we were told that an earthquake (7.5) had hit Peru that night. It was under-sea, 47km deep, and 136km south of Lima (we were to the north), but tremors were felt by camp staff and trekkers lying in their tents. I felt nothing, sitting in the mess tent.

From Janca we traversed the Carhuac Pass (4,600m) to our camp at Lake Carhuacocha (4,100m) with hanging valleys, glaciers and towering, snow-covered peaks. On the following day, we trekked up the



Tom heads for the Punta Cuyoc on his horse, Sol del Oro.
Photo: Tom Fox.



Cordillera Huayhuash.



Jose "Pepe" Manga
on the Yaucha Pass
(4,847m) looking towards
Yerupaja (6,617m).
Photo: Tom Fox.

valley behind the lake to explore the area. Half way along I knew I was not right, so I sat and waited while the others completed their exploration of the area.

Back at the camp, my temperature was recorded at 39.4°C, two degrees above normal. I had a rough, sleepless night and was not up to the mark on the following morning. With seven hours' trekking in front of us, I considered my options. I was convinced by Jose "Pepe" Manga, our Peruvian guide, to use a horse for the day. It was my first experience on a horse and I spent a nervous day crossing the Punta Carnicero (4,575m). It was a cold, dreary day and I was not dressed for horse riding. I arrived at the pass feeling so cold that I could not eat my lunch.

The journey from the pass to the camp was warmer but I was wrecked when I arrived at the tiny settlement of Huayhuash (one house) at 4,345m. A course of antibiotics soon got my temperature under control but by the following morning it was obvious, with what I was coughing up, that I had a throat infection. Messner and my horse Sol del Oro (The Golden Sun) were to become good friends. My rucksack stayed on the horse for the rest of the trek and I used the horse for part of the trek over each of the next four days.

This meant that I got to all the viewpoints with my cameras (which weighed a bit) and got all the photographs I wanted. Rossilini looked after me the next day as Messner and Pepe had to evacuate a fellow trekker on a horse. It turned out that she had developed bronchitis. On the horse you actually saw more as you were not watching where you were walking. Rossilini, who led the horse, went out of his way to lead me up to viewpoints and to make sure I got all my photographs. He led me up to the Portachuelo de Huayhuash (4,750m) and on to our camp west of Laguna Viconga (4,500m). Next was the

“On the horse you actually saw more, as you were not watching where you were walking.”

Jirishanca (6,094m) dominates as we trek towards Lake Carhuacocha (4,100m).
Photo: Tom Fox.



Punta Cuyoc (4,950m), a highlight of the trek, with tremendous views of Carnicero (The Butcher), Sarapo, Siula Grande and Yerupaja. We celebrated at the pass.

It was the turning point on the trek – we were re-crossing the continental divide and were on the road home. We camped in a valley below the pass at 4,500m and it was one of the coldest nights on the trek.

Day seven of the trek used to be a slog down one valley and a slog back up an adjacent valley just to get around the long ridge of Cerro San Antonio. In recent years, a more

direct route has been developed which takes you over a high pass.

The highlight of the San Antonio Pass was the tremendous view of Sarapococha valley. A long, steep descent on scree brought us to the lunch stop above Laguna Jurau with the summits of Carnicero and Jurau rearing up behind us. The cooks, who trekked with us carrying our lunch, had picked another great lunch stop. Our twenty mules and the camp staff had gone the old route as the terrain on the pass was not suitable for them.

We camped at the pampa at Cutatambo (4,350m). I had trekked

the entire day on foot and, when I arrived at the camp, I had no energy to join the camp staff, who were playing soccer! Our day off here was spent visiting the Sarapococha valley, which is famous for its association with Joe Simpson and Simon Yates of *Touching the Void* fame. We stopped at the site of their base camp (4,000m) and trekked further along to view the terrain of that epic story. That was a lunch stop with lots to talk about!

We followed the Rio Calinca down to the village of Huayllapa (3,500m), the only time we dropped below 4,000m on the trek. A steep and dusty ascent in the mid-day sun took us to a camp at Huatiahq (4,253m). As we crossed the Tapush Pass (4,750m), we saw the trekking peak, Diablo Mudo (Dumb Devil), and a memorial to a Peruvian woman and her American husband who were killed and robbed of their possessions while trekking, on their own, a few years ago. They resisted the theft and it cost them their lives. Their assailants were eventually brought to justice.

We camped in the valley of Ancocancha (4,450m) near a forest of Quenao trees. As we camped high it was only a short, steep ascent through a rock face and up some scree to the Yaucha Pass (4,847m). We scrambled up to Cerro Jammy (5,000m), the highest point on the trek, and savoured the moment on an atmospheric morning. Another steep descent brought us to a hanging

The descent (red line) from San Antonio Pass as seen from Sarapococha valley. Messner and Raul in foreground.
Photo: Tom Fox.



valley above Incahuain – the highlight of the trek. From there, we looked down on lakes Jahuacocha and Solteracococha with an impressive backdrop of mountains – Ninashanca, Rondoy, Jirishanca, Chico and Yerupaja.

We spent two nights there at 4,100m. We took a well-earned rest day, while the cooks and camp staff prepared a typical Andean feast in the outdoors. It was cooked in a depression created in the ground. An igloo, about 750mm high and wide, was constructed from stones. Into it they put brushwood and heated the stones for several hours. They prepared lamb (freshly killed the evening before), fresh fish from the lakes, chicken, sweet corn, green beans and several types of potatoes.

View of Sarapococha valley from San Antonio Pass.
Photo: Tom Fox.



“We spent a day in the Sarapococha Valley of *Touching The Void* fame.”

They then dismantled the igloo and created a bed of hot stones on which they placed four varieties of potatoes. The meat, chicken and fish were prewrapped by them in tin foil and placed among the hot stones. They covered the lot with the remaining stones before applying a thick layer of reeds from the lake side. The green beans were placed among the reeds to avoid over-cooking them near the stones. The reeds were then covered with a thick layer of earth to seal the mound. A cross made from twigs was put on top by Wili Rocha, our mountain guide from Huaraz, and it was left to cook for about an hour.

The ceremony of cooking Pacha Manca (Earth Oven) is very important in Andean tradition as it is the food from Mother Earth, cooked in earth. The mound was dismantled and all the food removed. In the cook tent they laid it out in containers and presented it to us with a salad and wine they had brought from Huaraz. It was a scrumptious meal. In fact, the food on the trek was the best I have come across and the credit must go to Raul, the cook, and his assistant, Valintin.

The final day involved two passes close together – Sambuya Punta (4,750m) and Rondoy Punta (4,735m). The long trek to the first pass took over three hours but the ever-changing views of Jirishanca and Yerupaja made it worthwhile. On our descent to Matacancha (4,100m) we

could see the valley where the village of Pocpa is located, which was on our way home.

On the way back to Huaraz we stopped in Chiquain where they were completing preparations for the feast day of Santa Rosa de Lima (30th August). It is the most important festival in the country and the streets were decked with bunting and decorations. We watched the local brass band having its final practice in a local restaurant. Road works delayed our journey to Huaraz. It seems that there will be a metalled road all the way to Chiquian in the near future.

After the long road journey from Huaraz to Lima, on which we overnighted in a hotel in Miraflores, we toured the old town of Lima while waiting for our evening flight. Services were going on in all the churches as part of the feast day. We watched the police parade outside a church where the President of Peru was attending a service and visited the church that housed relics of Santa Rosa de Lima. She is the patron saint of the police force. A statue of her was paraded through the streets. Sections of the streets were covered in floral arrangements that had been created for the day and that were destroyed as the parade walked over them. Traditional dancers performed in front of the parade as it went along. Our guide Pepe made sure we were kept entertained in the old town

and gave us a flavour of Lima we might easily have missed.

The fourteen-day, one hundred and ten mile trek had everything – spectacular mountains, nine high passes, good food, great Peruvian guides and very friendly staff. A very quiet route and great weather added to the enjoyment and made it one of the great treks of the world, in my opinion. Go, before it gets too busy! ■

Tom Fox is from Dingle and is an individual member of the MCI. He undertook the Cordillera Huayhuash trek in August 2007.

Santa Rosa de Lima festival dancers.
Photo: Tom Fox.



Looking down on Emerald Lake
from Flattop Mountain Trail.
Photo: Peter van der Burgt.

Hiking in the Rockies

Peter van der Burgt goes hiking in Rocky Mountain National Park



The Rocky Mountain National Park is situated in the US State of Colorado and

is part of the great Rocky Mountain chain, the Rockies, which forms the backbone of North America, stretching for over 4,500km from Mexico to Alaska.

The Rocky Mountain National Park has seventy-two named peaks with heights over 12,000 feet (3,658m), rising to Longs Peak with an elevation of 4,346m. The park has pine-covered valleys and slopes, alpine meadows, lakes and rivers, snow-clad peaks and wildlife in abundance.

The park also has 500km of hiking trails ranging from flat lakeside strolls to steep mountain peak climbs. For motorised traffic, the main road through the park is Trail Ridge Road (part of US Highway 34), which is the highest continuous highway in the United States. This road links the town of Estes Park in the east to the town of Grand Lake in the west, crosses the Continental Divide at Milner Pass (3279m) and reaches a maximum elevation of 3713m. Trail Ridge Road is closed from October to June.

This summer, I had to be in the United States for a conference and decided to spend some vacation time afterwards travelling through the western United States. Having travelled by direct flight from Dublin to Chicago, I decided to travel onwards to Denver. Denver International Airport is a very big but pleasant airport located in the prairies just east of the Rockies, and it provides a convenient starting point

for exploring the western US. My first stop was going to be Rocky Mountain National Park and I had reserved four nights' accommodation in Estes Park in advance on the web. Estes Park is located just outside the eastern edge of the park and provides a wide range of hotels, restaurants, cafés and shops. It is a 1½-hour drive from Denver. Estes Park is not a place to be away from the crowds, but there is the option to rent cabins in quieter areas on the outskirts of the town. Rocky Mountain National Park is one of the most popular parks in the US and attracts over three million visitors annually. Its close vicinity to Denver also attracts many weekend visitors.

The US National Park Service operates several visitor centres which provide excellent information about all aspects of the park. Two excellent hiking maps (Maps 200 and 301) are published by *National Geographic* as part of their *Trails Illustrated Maps* series. These maps are printed double-sided on waterproof paper. Map 200 covers the entire park and has a scale of 1:50,000 and a contour interval of 50 feet. It shows the hiking trails with trail mileage and also a variety of other relevant information, such as campgrounds and shelters. Map 301 covers the area around Longs Peak and Bear Lake in the eastern section of

“The park has 500km of hiking trails ranging from flat strolls to steep mountain peak climbs.”

the park on a 1:25,000 scale. Hiking guidebooks are available describing the hikes shown on these maps.

The Rocky Mountain National Park has a number of trail heads reachable by car, from which hikes of various lengths and grades of difficulty can be made. A popular trail head is Bear Lake. In summer, the parking lot at Bear Lake fills up quickly during the morning but there is overflow parking elsewhere and the park operates a free shuttle bus to Bear Lake. There are several other free shuttle services during the summer months. Many hiking trails are so long that one has to backpack, which requires a backcountry permit. Longs Peak can be reached by the Keyhole Route, but this is the only non-technical ascent and is open for hiking for only a short time most summers. This trail is

View north from Ute Trail.
Photo: Peter van der Burgt.





View of Ute Trail scenery towards the southeast. The trail runs from the slope in the left of the photo along the ridge towards the centre of the photo.

Inset: Wild stonecrop flowers on the trail.
Photos: Peter van der Burgt.

12.5km one-way and has an elevation gain of nearly 1500m. I did not bring backpacking gear and was therefore restricted to day hikes. To get used to the high altitude of the terrain I decided to do easier hikes during the first two days, and hike to the top of one of the higher peaks on the third day.

Emerald Lake and Lake Haiyaha

Both of these lakes can be reached from the parking lot at Bear Lake. The trail to Emerald Lake is very well developed and attracts many casual hikers. It is 2.4km in length, starts at Bear Lake at an elevation of 2,888m and reaches an elevation of 3,072m at

Emerald Lake. On the way you pass Nymph Lake and Dream Lake. From Emerald Lake you have to return 1km to Dream Lake to follow the trail to Lake Haiyaha (about another 2.5km), which is at an elevation of 3,115m. It is then possible to continue a loop of about 3.5km to Glacier Gorge parking lot where you take the shuttle bus or hike 0.5km uphill to get back to Bear Lake. The trail to Glacier Gorge is less well developed but is also much quieter. I very much enjoyed hiking these trails, which provide beautiful mountain vistas.

The Ute Trail

This trail can be reached by taking Trail Ridge Road. Parking is in one of

two lay-bys, one signposted at the start of the trail and another 200m further west. The trail is at an elevation of 3,500m. After an initial climb of about 60m, the trail runs more or less level for about 3km, before it starts to descend towards Upper Beaver Meadows trailhead, a further 6.5km away. The trail is one of several trails established by the Ute and Arapaho Indians as they crossed the mountains between their summer and winter hunting grounds. The 3km section offers very wide views, mostly towards the south, and is a great way to get some fresh air when you are driving the Trail Ridge Road. When I was hiking this trail, several elk were grazing in the distance and the alpine

View north from Hallett peak.
Photo: Peter van der Burgt.





tundra provided a very nice display of wild flowers.

Flattop Mountain and Hallett Peak

The Flattop Mountain Trail starts at Bear Lake and reaches Flattop Mountain (3,756m) after a distance of 7.2km and an ascent of 870m. Hallett Peak (3,875m) is reached after a further 1km and 120m ascent, which follows the Continental Divide. This trail is popular because it provides a relatively easy access route to one of the high mountains in the park, and links with trails in the western side of the park. Hallett Peak provides a wonderful 360° view of the Rockies. Flattop Mountain Trail is a well-maintained trail and the ascent is fairly gradual, so it is intermediate by Irish hiking standards. The trail to Hallett Peak is only slightly more demanding. However, the high altitude means that you get out of breath very quickly, so you have to adjust your pace. Nevertheless, I was able to do this hike in less than seven hours, which included a half-hour break on the top of Hallett Peak.

Some practical information

The official website of Rocky Mountain National Park is www.nps.gov/romo. Information about the *Trails Illustrated Maps* (200 and

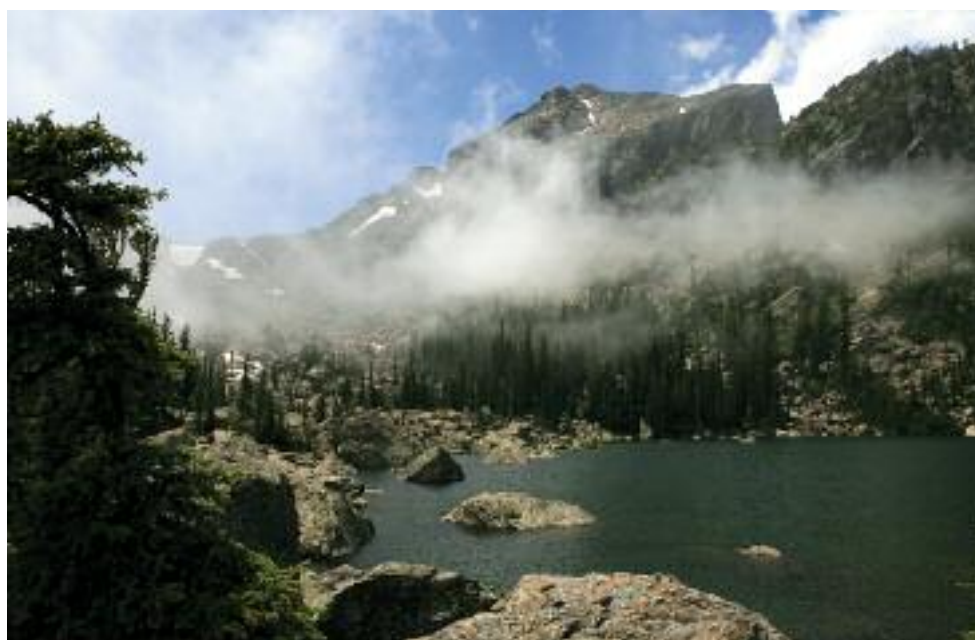
301) can be found at www.trailsillustrated.com. A good overview of hikes in the park is provided at www.thespiritoftherockies.net. Overnight accommodation in Rocky Mountain National Park is available at campgrounds, and motel and hotel accommodation in close vicinity of the park can be found in Estes Park (www.estesparkevb.com) and in Grand Lake (www.grandlakechamber.com). Because of the large number of visitors during the summer, advance reservation is recommended. The eastern entrances to the park are about

a 90-minute drive from Denver International Airport. ■

Peter van der Burgt is a member of the Irish Christian Mountaineering Club (www.irishchristianwalking.com) and of Mountaineering Ireland. He frequently hikes in the Wicklow Mountains and in other areas in Ireland, Wales, Scotland and further afield.

View towards the south from Hallett Peak (3875m). The high mountain in the distance is Longs Peak (4346m). Photo: Peter van der Burgt.

Haiyaha Lake (3115m) with Hallett Peak (3875m) in the background. Photo: Peter van der Burgt.



A day on the Nordkante

Conor Warner tackles the North Ridge of the Piz Badile

North Ridge of
Piz Badile
(3,305m)
viewed from
the Sasc
Faru hut.
Photo: Conor
Warner.

It was Monday, July 7th 2008, and it was lashing. We just had to get out of the campsite and away from the Vicosoprano valley. On Saturday we had climbed the south ridge of Piz Balzet (IV), but since Sunday morning, when we were rained off the central spur of the Spazzacaldeira, it had been raining more or less continuously.

Barry Watts and I had set our sights on completing two other routes in the Swiss Bregaglia Alps before the trip was over, namely the Meuli Route on the Punta da l'Albigna and the North Ridge of the Piz Badile. The weather forecast, however, looked ominous. Tuesday looked like being the best day,

with the weather set to deteriorate on Wednesday and the remainder of the week lapsing into thunderstorms with downpours. So, having discussed our plans with the mountain guides at the MCI Alpine Meet, and having contacted the guardian of the Sasc Faru hut, we decided to pull out all the stops and head straight for an attempt on the North Ridge of the Piz Badile.

Our mate James Xxxx?? dropped us off at Laret (1,252m), which is reached by a private, steep, winding toll road above Bondo. From there, we trudged our way up through larch forest and dense undergrowth on a winding path, crossing several rivers en route, in what was literally a continuous downpour all the way up to the Sasc Faru hut (1,904m).

The guardian, Heidi, was very welcoming and was amused when she saw the state of us, soaked to the bone like drowned rats. She advised us that the weather forecast had changed. The weather was set to improve from Tuesday morning onwards and both Wednesday and Thursday looked like being settled, warm and sunny.

Basically she suggested that we should hold off going for the route until the Wednesday, when a number of other teams were also going to give it go. The joy of local wisdom! That evening, we discussed the route at length with Heidi (she had climbed the north ridge twice), read the various guidebooks that were available in the hut (in German), paying particular attention to the descent route, had a few beers and hit the sack.

The Piz Badile was first climbed in July 1867 by William Coolidge with guides F and H Dévouassoud by the south face. The north ridge, known locally as the Nordkante, wasn't climbed until August 4th 1923 by Alfred Zürcher with the guide Walter Risch. When we were at 2,400m, we could vaguely view on the east face the line of one of the most famous routes in the Alps, the Cassin Route, which was infamously climbed by Riccardo Cassin, V Ratti, G Esposito, Mario Molteni and Giuseppe Valsecchi in July 1937. Heidi had informed us that Cassin still lived locally.

On Tuesday morning, we dried out our gear and walked up to 2,400m,

just below the route proper, to give it a good recce and to stash our gear. Between 2,300m and 2,400m there are plenty of good bivy sites and running water from springs. The recce proved invaluable, helping us to visualise and plan the route; the initial snow field and slabs up to the col at 2,589m, the start of the ridge, the Risch slab and its overhang, the daunting ridge above, the crux section, another steep-looking ridge section and another large slab (which we nicknamed the Shimmering Slab); above that, the route seemed to continue endlessly to an ever-narrowing ridge. The rock looked dull-grey, smooth and compact and the ridge as a whole looked somewhat like the prow of an upturned US navy aircraft carrier.

We left the hut the next morning at 4:10am in darkness and, with the aid of head torches, arrived in good time at the point where we had stashed our gear, just below the final snow fields. We donned our harnesses, arranged our gear and, using our ice axes, made our way to the col (2,589m) at the start of the route on the north ridge. There we put on our climbing shoes and roped up, putting away our axes and moving off together. By 6:20am, under clear blue morning skies, the five groups who were attempting the route that day were established on the ridge. These groups comprised two Austrians, two Italians, three Swiss, two Czechs and ourselves, two Irish.

I led up the first section, where we moved together over relatively straightforward terrain on perfect granite (III/IV-). We started on the left side of the ridge before moving up onto the crest and on from there, with some exposure, to the base of the Risch slab, about 170m up from the col, where the Austrians were just preparing to pitch-climb the slab. Barry took over the lead and started up on the left side, continuing to under the overhang at the top and working out right to exit the slab (IV+).

During the next four or five superb pitches of slab and dièdre climbing on the ridge proper (IV/IV+), there was considerable traffic and delay with the position of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th groups on the ridge continually changing between us, the Swiss and the Italians, while the Austrians stormed ahead. The interaction between the groups was in general good-humoured. During these

pitches, which were amazingly exposed and weaved from one side of the crest to the other, from bright sunshine to shade, the temperature plummeted as a wind gusted from the east. These proved to be the toughest pitches of the route due to a combination of sustained climbing, the cold and the jostling for position.

We arrived at a stance that appeared to have two options: to traverse left below the ridge or go right across the ridge, passing through a tight dièdre (which the guidebook advised was the correct way). I got jammed in the dièdre with my big West of Ireland shoulders but eventually managed to barge my way up to the next belay point, with Barry waiting, grinning and pointing to the crux pitch. The crux pitch (V-) took the form of a short, steep wall involving some easy bouldering moves, with lots of in-situ bolts and, unlike the section of ridge before, not in an overly exposed position.

With the crux completed, the ridge eased for two pitches (III-/IV), with some short dièdres with some loose

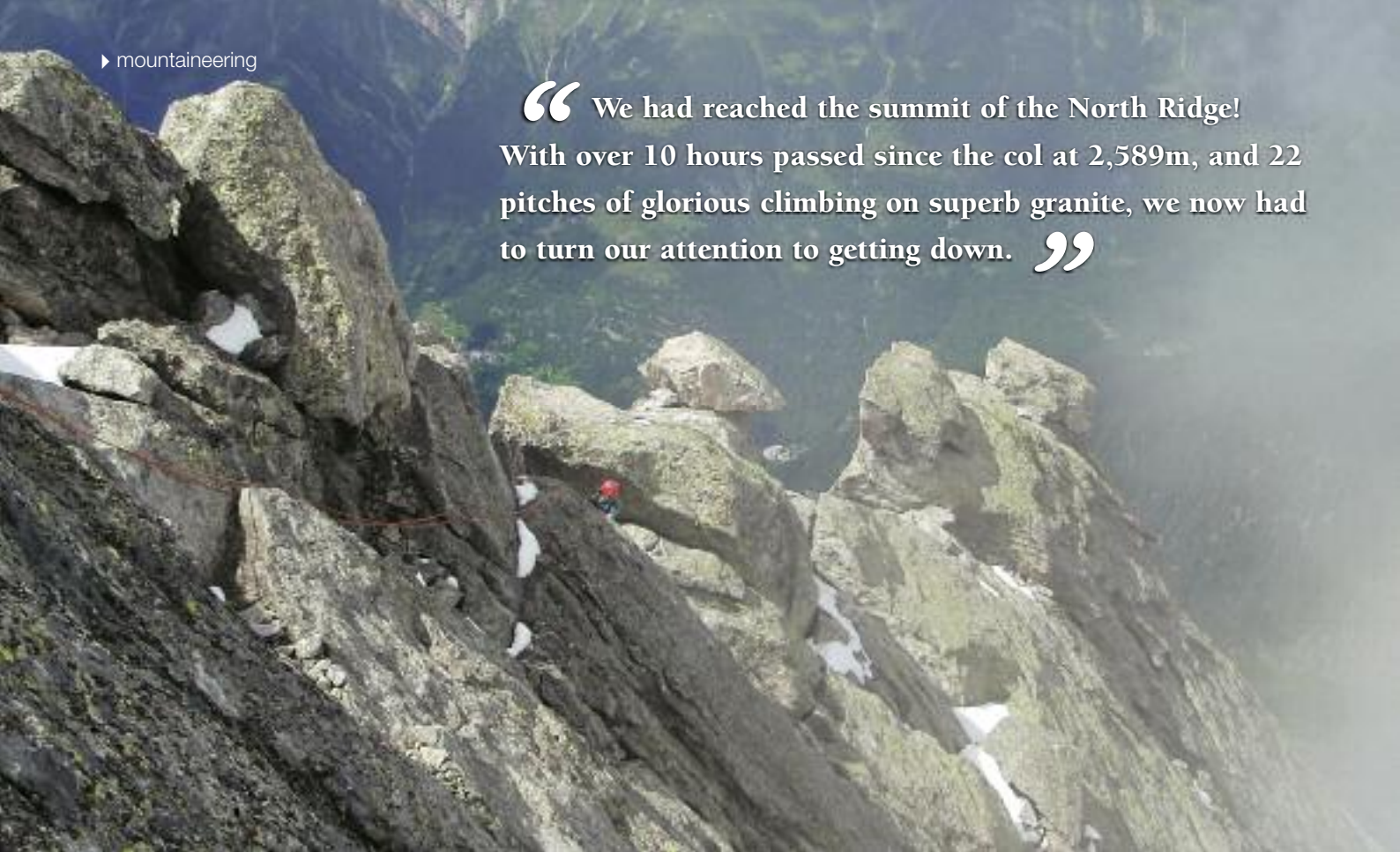
stone, that led to the base of the Shimmering Slab. This slab (IV) was climbed via numerous cracks, reminiscent of Skull Slab at Aill na Crónáin in the Burren. From the top of this slab the route continued to another dièdre that traversed up across to the right side of the ridge and disappeared around a corner. The next belay stance was in an outrageously exposed position, a small sentry post situated on an overhanging ledge covered in snow, with the full extent of the vertical northwest face visible directly below. Barry led from there (IV-) on around to the right, singing a wee tune, leaving me with my thoughts. Each belay turnover took only moments, with very little said.

The climbing grade eased after the next pitch (IV-) and I took over the lead at this point, giving Barry a very well earned break. The next few pitches rose up over easy slabs (III) from one side of the ridge to the other, then mostly on the right-hand side, avoiding small gendarmes with the occasional short back-climb, until a



Climbing on the Nordkandt.
Photo: Dawson Stelfox.

“ We had reached the summit of the North Ridge! With over 10 hours passed since the col at 2,589m, and 22 pitches of glorious climbing on superb granite, we now had to turn our attention to getting down. ”



The Nordkandt in profile. Photo: Dawson Stelfox.

small col was reached just before a poised block. We could see the top. From this col, the route followed down to the left along a small, narrow snow-covered gangway, avoiding the last prominent gendarme before reaching a short tunnel between huge boulders that otherwise blocked the ridge. From the tunnel, and after some easy terrain, we had gained the summit of the Piz Badille at 3,305m. The North Ridge was climbed!

With over 10 hours having passed since the col at 2,589m, and 22 plus pitches of continuously glorious climbing on superb granite, we had now to turn our attention to getting down the south face to the Gianetti hut.

The Italian pair had just started descending from the peak when we arrived. We could hear the Swiss team further down, while the Czech team had turned back several hours before, opting to abseil back down the North Ridge. The Austrians, we imagined, were sipping coffee in the hut at this stage. We changed into our big boots, had a quick snack, gathered ourselves and started the descent. From immediately below the summit trig point, we went via a short chimney, into Italy, to the top of the descent route that is defined on the east side by a steep couloir and on the west side by the south ridge.

The guide book suggested that we should descend the top section of the couloir. However, on closer inspection of the snow and rubble-filled couloir, we decided to set up an abseil and descend the slabs to the right of the couloir. We could see the Italians immediately below us in some confusion, slipping in the couloir and trying to untangle their ropes. I backed up an existing abseil point with some 8mm tat that I'd brought along and we arranged our two 50m ropes for the descent. We then abseiled down to another ledge and, lo and behold, there was another abseil point and some streaks of

orange paint to indicate the descent route. Sorted!

On the ledge at the end of our second 50m abseil, we noticed that the Italians were preparing to abseil down the right-hand side of the ridge via a new-looking bolt-and-chain abseil point. Like a haunting memory, we remembered Heidi, back at the hut, warning us not to abseil down via this chain, saying "you must stay on the left side of the ridge until the cross!" and that there was another abseil point further along the ledge. There was, and we convinced the Italians to follow us, away from their presumed deaths.

We resumed our descent of the south face. Four 50m abseils down from the top of the couloir (from just below the summit trig) brought us to a ledge and narrow track that led down parallel to the ridge to another abseil point. This abseil led down to another ledge at the bottom of the couloir where another abseil point awaited us. The Italians kept slowing us up and despite our best efforts we couldn't get past them. We then convinced them to abseil down our ropes to speed things up as their ropes kept getting tangled and they seemed to be all up in a heap. This abseil ended at the pathway to the cross which Heidi, like the oracle, had warned us was difficult to find. The path went down a bit, right a



bit, up a bit (not down, which is where some apparently go wrong), across a bit, left a bit and steeply down a bit to a ledge at the top of a sheer gully which was marked by a metal cross erected by the Italian Climbing Federation. This cross doubled as the abseil point, or so all the tat suggested.

Another nearly 50m-long, free-hanging abseil, this time down the right-hand side of the ridge, led to the final abseil point. The final abseil in darkness led down onto a snow field (c2,900m) with a trail of footprints leading to the moraine. We packed away our ropes, donned our head torches and set off down to the hut in the dark. The Nordkante was climbed and the south face descended. Job done! Myself and Wattsie roared out an ol' Clare shout, shocking the Italians a bit, and fumbled our way down guided by the outside hut light that the guardian had put on when he spotted our head torches.

We got to the hut (2,534m) sometime around 10:30pm, very much relieved. The guardian brought

us a full dinner and beer, which were both very welcome. Soon after, we hit the sack.

We could have planned to return to the Sasc Faru hut via Passo Porcellizzo and Passo della Trubinasca, but 'Team Italia' offered us a lift back to Chiavenna. So, after 2-3 hours of downhill walking through the absolutely beautiful sun-baked Valle Porcellizzo, with waterfalls, springs and a cheese-making factory, and past enormous boulders and lizards, surrounded by magnificent peaks, we reached Bagni del Masino (1,172m). We paid a quick visit to the village's famous thermal springs before being whizzed away back to Chiavenna in a Fiat Punto.

Conor Warner has been an MCI member for 10 years and has climbed in the Alps on numerous occasions. Based in Clare, he climbs regularly in the Burren, Kerry and Connemara.



Technical Summary

Gear (shared between two)

10 medium-sized nuts
6 medium-sized rock-centrics
2 friends (size 2 and 3)
2 50m ropes
7 slings
12 crabs
11 extenders
2 belay bugs and abseilers
Tat and Prussik loops
Head torches, helmets, harnesses
Ice axes and crampons (for the return trip back over the passes to Sasc Faru)
Plus the usual stuff, but not too much, as had to keep the weight down!

Route description

Bondo (823m) via toll road to Laret (1,252m) to Sasc Faru Hut (1,904m) to summit of Piz Badile (3,305m) and down to Gianetti Hut (2,534) and finally down to Bagni del Masino (1,172m).

652m ascent of a walk-in from Laret to Sasc Faru hut, less than 2 hours (or 1,081m from Bondo, 3.5 hours).

1,401m of an ascent with 716m on the North Ridge (2 hours to 2,589m).
Guidebook time for the ridge is 5 to 7 hours, but easy to be delayed with traffic to 10 hours.

771m of a descent with 405m on the South Face. Guide book time of 2 to 2.5 hours, but easy to be delayed with traffic (of the Italian type) to 4.5 hours.

1,362m descent on walk-out to Bagni del Masino, less than 3 hours.

Grade summary

North Ridge circa 22 pitches of (III/IV) with one pitch of (V-) with an overall grade of (D-) with fixed belay points for much of the middle section and some bolts and pegs.

South Face (in ascent) is PD (II/III) with fixed rings for the majority of the abseil points.



Competition

Win a ski trip

THERE ARE FOUR ski trips to be won in a Great Outdoors Dublin and Ski France International competition to be launched in October.

The fantastic 'Win a Stay in the French Alps' ski trip competition will be run monthly for four months. The competition gives you the chance to win accommodation and ski passes for two people in some of the best resorts that the French Alps have to offer.

Entering is easy. Simply go to **www.greatoutdoors.ie** and check out the Ski France Competiton page which gives you all the info on the featured resorts, live webcam links so you can check the snow conditions, exclusive deals for ski holidays at the resorts, and the all-important question and email address to enter. It couldn't be easier.

THE STORE TO EXPLORE



**GREAT
OUTDOORS**

www.greatoutdoors.ie

Written in stone

What the mountains can tell us

Bernie Lafferty and Peter Wilson continue their series about the evolution of the Irish mountain landscape.

Harsher times in the Irish uplands: glacial erosion

Climate change is very much the 'hot' topic of our time, but rather than being an abnormal circumstance it is one that has prevailed throughout Earth's history. Approximately 21 thousand years ago (a mere blink in geological terms), the mid- to high latitudes in both hemispheres were in the grip of a prolonged and extremely cold phase.

Valley glacier in the Austrian Alps. Note the heavily crevassed zone where the ice spills over a rock step marking the transition from the upper to the lower valley.
Photo: Peter Wilson.

The last glacial episode, often referred to as the Last Glacial Maximum (LGM), marked the final phase of the cold cycle that started around 115 thousand years (ka) ago. With the exception of several mountain summits, Ireland was completely covered by ice and today shows the

This aerial view of Baffin Island, Canada, gives an idea of what the Irish mountains looked like about 20,000 years ago as the last ice sheet began to decay.
Photo: Peter Wilson.

very clear impacts of that glaciation.

Ice sheets began developing in Antarctica 30-40 million years (ma) ago and in Arctic latitudes the first glaciers probably formed around 10-15 ma ago. Since then, ice masses have waxed and waned as global climate fluctuated in response to variations in the Earth's orbit and the complexities of the ocean-atmosphere circulation

system. Even though glacier ice endures still, for the last 10 ka the planet has been in a warmer (interglacial) mode. In general, glacial periods have lasted much longer than the intervening warm phases.

Ice Age Ireland

The concept of an Ice Age in Ireland was first proposed in the mid-1800s

when surveying techniques, unlike the sophisticated technologies in use today, confined academic curiosity to surface features and landforms. By the late 1860s the introduction of Irish terms, including *droimnin* (drumlin) and *eiscir* (esker), into the scientific literature indicate a growing relevance of the Irish glacial story to the wider international debate on cold climate events and processes. That role is no less significant today. Because of its location on the northeast fringe of the Atlantic Ocean, the Irish glacial record continues to provide valuable insights into the long-term dynamics of the ocean-atmosphere circulation system – the main driver of global climate change.

Over the last 1-2 ma there have been many periods when ice masses grew and decayed in Ireland. The successive glaciations significantly influenced the character of the land surface over which they prevailed and ultimately gave rise to the diverse and dramatic landscapes and resources enjoyed and exploited today. During climatic ameliorations, glaciers retreated or stagnated and downwasted in situ, exposing mosaics of associated landforms which, when the ice readvanced, were either obliterated or reworked and modified. It is because of this repeated overprinting that landscapes are often referred to as palimpsests within which valuable information of past events are concealed.



geology ◀

Ireland's glacial heritage is evident throughout the island. The lowlands tend to be associated with depositional landforms such as drumlins and eskers whereas the dramatic scenery of the uplands is largely due to glacial erosion. Cirques, *arêtes*, loughans, U-shaped valleys, cols and *roches moutonnées* are the most easily recognised and appreciated features of ice action in the mountains. Moraines and erratic boulders also indicate the presence of former glaciers and occur in both lowland and upland settings.

It is by exploring the rich and complex legacy of glacial landforms that the configuration and dynamics of the long since disappeared Irish ice sheet can be reconstructed and the

extreme environment that prevailed more fully appreciated.

Climate records tell us that on many occasions cold temperatures endured for considerable periods, allowing thick and extensive snowpacks to develop. Over time, the pressure exerted by the thickening snow compressed the lower layers, transforming them to denser ice. Glacier flow was ultimately induced by the pressure of continued accumulations of snow deforming the underlying ice and initiating sliding in the direction of least resistance.

Once set in motion, the glaciers eroded the land surface by means of plucking (aka quarrying), abrasion and meltwater erosion. These erosive processes have been observed below

A rather overgrown *roche moutonnée* but still showing the characteristic morphology of smooth (abraded) up-ice side to the left and craggy (plucked) down-ice side to the right.
Photo: Peter Wilson.



Ireland's finest *arête* between Carrauntoohil and Beenkeragh in the Reeks, Co Kerry.
Photo: Lee Campbell.



Coomlumminy,
Co Kerry. A
cirque below the
summit of Beann
in the Reeks.
Photo: Peter
Wilson.

and at the edges of modern glaciers. Because some Irish landforms resemble those emerging from beneath retreating glaciers in the Alps and Antarctica it is inferred that similar processes produced them. Such modern analogues are invaluable aids in the reconstruction of past environmental conditions.

Plucking refers to the fracturing or crushing of rock in contact with the ice. The dislodged material is then incorporated into the glacier and carried away. Abrasion is the 'sandpapering' effect that entrained rocks have on underlying surfaces. The resulting polished and striated bedrock is a reliable indicator of past ice flow patterns. Meltwater, flowing alongside or beneath and away from the ice, is also a very effective erosive agent, both mechanically and chemically.

Glacial erosion varies depending on the character of the bedrock and the temperature at the base of the ice. Their thermal regime is an important characteristic and glaciers are usually classified accordingly as either warm-

or cold-based. The presence of meltwater beneath warm-based glaciers facilitates sliding and erosion along the substrate. Cold-based glaciers tend to stick to the ground beneath and are unable to slide. As with most natural systems the thermal properties of an ice mass vary over time and space, so erosion rates also change. Generally, warm-based glaciers achieve more erosion than cold-based ones, but it is impossible to say how long it has taken for any of the big erosional features to form – but they are usually attributed to several glacial periods.

Glaciated valleys

Glaciated valleys are probably the most obvious of the big landforms and are frequently referred to as U-shaped valleys. Because very few are truly U-shaped, it is more appropriate to call them glacial troughs. They are linear features eroded deeply into the landscape and display much variation in their cross-sectional form as a result

of differences in bedrock properties such as strength and joint spacing. Glendalough, Glenmalure, Glenveagh, Barnesmore, the Silent Valley and the Gap of Dunloe are among some of the best known examples of classic glacial troughs in Ireland.

It is generally accepted that most glacial troughs are aligned along pre-glacial river valleys, which in many cases followed geological faults and fracture zones. Over successive glacial periods the river valleys gradually evolved, by a combination of plucking, abrasion and meltwater erosion, into the troughs we see today.

Many troughs exhibit areas of localised overdeepening, where the floor of the valley has been eroded more deeply into the rock than in adjacent areas. These basin features can be accounted for by geological factors and/or changes in the thickness or velocity of the ice. The larger/deeper basins tend to be occupied by lakes. Some of the smaller and shallower basins have been infilled by peat growth and may now be difficult to recognise.

Truncated spurs and hanging valleys are the main upland features that are generally associated with glacial troughs. Truncated spurs are steep buttresses that project boldly from valley sides, having been planed back by glacial erosion. Hanging valleys are tributary valleys perched on the flanks of troughs. They have been left hanging at a higher level because the troughs were excavated to a much

“ Glendalough, Glenmalure, Glenveagh, Barnesmore, the Silent Valley and the Gap of Dunloe are among the best examples of glacial troughs in Ireland. ”

greater depth by the ice. Streams from hanging valleys drop in steep cascades or spectacular near-vertical waterfalls. Well-known examples are the valleys whose streams unite to create Pollanass Falls on the south side of Glendalough.

Cirques are classically described as armchair-shaped mountainside hollows with steep headwalls and sidewalls, usually with cliffs, and more gently sloping floors that may contain small lakes or peat bogs. When seen from above, a cirque headwall is arcuate and is continued by the sidewalls, to give a roughly semi-circular plan form. In Ireland, cirques are known as coums or cooms; in Scotland they are corries.

Because cirques are perched high on the sides of mountains they are, in effect, a type of hanging valley with a cascading stream or impressive waterfall. Cirques are thought to have developed from pre-existing mountainside hollows created, perhaps, by stream erosion or landsliding. These depressions provided some degree of shelter for the accumulation of snow and ice in cold episodes; as a result small glaciers developed. Over time, glacial plucking and abrasion enlarged the hollows to the dimensions we see today.

Prevailing weather conditions were very influential in cirque development. Leeward (north to east) slopes were favoured for cirques because it was in such sheltered locations that wind-driven snow built up. The prevalence of cirques on north to east facing slopes in Ireland suggests that, similar

to today, the glacial winds were also largely from the south and west. These aspects were also advantaged by the fact that they received less solar radiation, so the cirque glaciers were afforded a greater degree of protection from melting.

Arêtes are usually associated with cirques and are basically narrow precipitous rocky ridges. Side-by-side or back-to-back cirques are normally divided by arêtes – those in the Reeks are the finest in Ireland. Elsewhere, arêtes are generally easier to traverse with less scrambling involved – another period of intensive glacial erosion is needed to sharpen them up.

Both troughs and cirques are likely to have roches moutonnées – bedrock hillocks or knolls with a relatively smooth side facing the direction from which the ice came and a broken or craggy side facing the direction the ice was going. The smooth side is due to abrasion, the rough side due to plucking.

It is believed that they assume this characteristic profile because of pressure differences that arise as the ice passes over the knoll. Greater pressure on the up side favours abrasion; as the ice passes over the top pressure falls and a cavity opens between the ice and the rock. Freezing and thawing of meltwater in the cavity causes blocks to be prised off and carried away.

As to the French name – wavy wigs were fashionable in the 18th century and were known as moutonnées because mutton fat was used to keep them in shape. The name was adopted

for knolls that had a likeness to the wigs – hence, roches (rock) moutonnées.

Meltwater is also a potent agent of erosion and is nearly always present; it's particularly abundant as glaciers waste away. It flows on top of, within, alongside and underneath the ice, and its path may be diverted suddenly due to the opening of a crevasse or cavity. Ultimately it flows away from the glacier margin, taking eroded material that it eventually deposits.

As with present-day rivers, meltwater streams carve channels in bedrock or thick sediment sequences. We can recognise them as meltwater channels because they are often to be found cutting across ridges and no longer contain flowing water. Given the large size of many meltwater channels the present-day stream may seem rather insignificant, an indication that greater, more powerful flows were responsible for the erosion. Deep and narrow rock-cut gorges are also likely to have been produced by meltwater.

The glacial history of the Irish uplands is one that is dominated by landforms created by erosion. In the next article in this series we will explain the nature and character of features created when debris carried by the ice is finally deposited. ■

Bernie Lafferty is an independent environmental systems specialist working in the northwest region.

Peter Wilson is a lecturer in Environmental Science at the University of Ulster, Coleraine, and an MCI member.



The Corranabinnia arête in the Nephin Bogs, Co Mayo – somewhat easier to traverse than some of those in Kerry.
Photo: Peter Wilson.

The latest information from Kate Hebblethwaite, Training Administrator

Autumn gathering

Dingle, October 9-11, 2009



Kate Hebblethwaite,
Training Administrator

MOUNTAINEERING IRELAND is gearing up for the annual Autumn Gathering. This year, Dingle Hillwalking Club is very kindly hosting the event on October 9-11th, so we will be decamping down to Kerry for a weekend of long walks, great craic and hopefully some good weather.

Training events will loom large at the meet. Noel O'Leary's company, **Irish Adventures**, will be running a **free Mountain Skills workshop** for anyone interesting in learning more about hill

skills (www.irishadventures.net).

Play At Height, the largest climbing wall in Ireland, has also thrown open its doors to us and will be offering a free climbing workshop for anyone who would like to try out their fantastic facilities (www.playatheight.com).

Play At Height will also be the venue for the National Lead Climbing Competition, taking place on October 10th. Many thanks to both companies for supporting the Autumn Gathering and for kindly offering their time to help make this a weekend to remember.

Also taking place on the weekend will be a three-day **Train the Trainers** workshop. This is an opportunity for those aspiring to a career in the outdoor industry to work toward becoming fully fledged BOS-approved training course providers. Even before this workshop had been advertised, reservations were flooding in. The course is now fully booked, a fantastic indication of the



Dingle, Co Kerry.
Photo: Kate Hebblethwaite.

level of enthusiasm out there among people looking to develop a career in the Irish outdoors.

The weekend course will take participants through the process of working as a mountaineering training provider. It will also help develop their skills as teachers and will further their understanding of the broad scope of Irish mountain training. Their next step will be to observe some different providers in a number of separate locations in order to garner broader practical experience. This observation role will be an actively progressive involvement with the training provider and the trainees.

The Training Office wishes all aspirant providers the very best of luck in preparing for their new careers and is always very happy to hear about their progress through the system.

Summer Alpine Meet

Over a hundred took part this year

THE AUTUMN Gathering follows in the wake of the hugely successful Summer Alpine Meet, which this year was held in Innerktirchen, Switzerland, in early July. From the photographs and YouTube links that have been sent in to the office, everyone had a fantastic time – despite the less-than-fantastic weather.

Over a hundred people took part in the meet and a full range of training courses were offered, from advanced Alpine mountaineering to rock-climbing introduction sessions.

All feedback from the event is greatly appreciated, as it will help us to ensure that the 2010 Alpine Meet is as successful and enjoyable as this year's meet. If you haven't given your feedback yet, you can download a feedback form from the website or just send us an e-mail at training@mountaineering.ie.



Conor Pass,
Co Kerry.
Photo: Kate
Hebblethwaite.

Winter Meet

Scotland 2010

WITH THE summer and autumn meets put to bed, the Training Office's thoughts are slowly turning to the 2010 Winter Meet, which will be held in either February or March of next year. We have already had quite a few enquiries about this meet and are very pleased that people are already looking forward to joining us for some more snowy adventures.

We have yet to make a final decision about the location but hope to be able to announce finalised plans very soon. As with the 2009 Winter Meet, we will be running a number of winter mountaineering courses, but also hope to add snowshoeing and snow-holing courses to the programme.

Further information about all of the various meets and the activities taking place at them can be found on the Mountaineering Ireland website, www.mountaineering.ie.



Conor Pass, Co Kerry.
Photo: Kate Hebblethwaite.

Training events

October-November 2009

THERE ARE still a few spaces available on the second **Mountain Leader Assessment** course, which is planned for this autumn. It will be held from November 14-16th in Donegal, and the cost will be €350.

Places are also still available for the two-day **Mountain Leader Refresher Workshop**, which will take place in Co Kerry on October 17th and 18th. This workshop is open to all current members of Mountaineering Ireland who have either completed their ML training and would like to refresh certain areas of the syllabus, or who are qualified ML holders who would like to undertake some Continuing Professional Development. The course will cover navigation on the first day and steep ground on the second. The cost for each day is €30.

In light of Tim Orr's departure and absence from the many and varied projects he was organising for the coming months, there have been a few rearrangements made to the planned schedule for BOS events. The **Volunteer Training Officer workshop**, initially intended to take place in September, will be re-scheduled for later in the year. Further information will be circulated to all clubs as soon as a finalised date has been set.

If you would like further information about any of these events, or would like to book a place, please contact Kate Hebblethwaite in the Training Office by telephone at (01) 625 1115 or by e-mail at kate@mountaineering.ie.

Successful SPA candidates

The Bord Oiliúint Sléibhe (BOS) providers have continued to maintain the high standards of formally recognised training over the summer months, with many new climbers successfully gaining the BOS Single Pitch Award (SPA). BOS would like to extend their congratulations to the following newly-awarded SPA holders:

Single Pitch Award

Danielle Rosenberg Polak
Nicky Garrett
Deirdre Harman
Aodhán Hudson
Gerald Kirby
Anthony Corcoran
Don Courtney
Darren McGrane
Bryan Doyle
David Martin

Mike Jordan
Askea O'Dowd
Seán Nee
Sylvian Delage
Edwina Horgan
Gerard O'Sullivan
Seán McNamara
Branimir Kesic
Miriam McSharry
Cathy O'Neill



The latest news compiled by Aodhnait Carroll, Access & Conservation Officer

Signposting in the uplands



Aodhnait Carroll,
Access & Conservation
Officer

MOUNTAINEERING IRELAND is opposed to the marking or signing of upland and mountain areas. We define the uplands as land above 300m and associated 'wilderness' or semi-wild landscapes, crags, quarries and other climbing areas.

Only five per cent of our island exceeds 300m in elevation and can thus be defined as uplands. Some one-tenth of these uplands are above 500m – these are the mountain areas.

In recent years we have seen the popularity of hillwalking with locals and visitors grow in leaps and bounds. The tourist industry has taken note of this trend and is engaging in a number of campaigns to promote hillwalking. Mountaineering Ireland is working to ensure that any hillwalking product that is promoted in Ireland is to the very highest standard with regards to environmental protection, safety and enjoyment.

Mountaineering Ireland feels that the usage of signs reduces the need for self-reliance in the mountains, tends to encourage point-to-point walking, with associated erosion, and in general reduces the wildness of the mountain environment. Often the appearance of markers leads the walker to believe that they are entering into an area where the risk has been managed for them. Often people interpret signage as depicting a "safe" route and so are more likely to attempt it without proper navigation skills or suitable equipment. In low-lying areas the result of this assumption can be more easily managed as there is road access to much of the lowlands and a greater chance of getting help, should it be needed. In the uplands, however, this assumption can lead to serious injuries, costly rescues and, in extreme cases, even death.

An example of inappropriate usage of markers was brought to our attention by a number of members who raised strong concerns over the Slieve Foy walking route near Carlingford, Co Louth. Concerns were raised in regards to both environmental damage and safety.

The environmental concerns raised were:

● **Route selection** It was noted that in certain areas walkers are directed onto land composed of delicate bog. Often in these areas there is the option to move either left or right and continue travel on a more durable surface such as rock and grass.

● **Marker choice** The markers that were used to guide the walker were way-marking signposts in the grassy areas and, as the walker gets up into the mountainous region, they are replaced with fluorescent placards. The way-marking posts were put in place by drilling holes into the rock, fitting the sign down

Way-marked route signpost,
Slieve Foy, Carlingford, Co Louth.
Photo: Ross Millar.



into the hole and securing it with cement. The placards were secured by drilling screws through the four corners of the signs and into the large rocks at the top of the climb. The safety concerns raised were:

● **Weather** Due to its location, the weather in Carlingford is well known to change quite quickly. Slieve Foy has the ability to look quite clear from below but, on reaching higher ground, it is not uncommon for it to be in fog and cloud, which may reduce the visibility to almost zero. It is very easy to become disoriented on this mountain and it has some very dangerous ground that can quickly make that a serious mistake.

● **Signage orientation** The signage at the top of the mountain is mounted on one side of some very large rocks. This means

that if a walker does not possess the skills to navigate in fog and they become disoriented, they may be unable to follow the signs back down to safety.

After communication with both Fáilte Ireland and Louth County Council, it was agreed that the signage would be removed from the top of the mountain as soon as possible. This is a very positive outcome for this particular issue and we are happy that, through partnership and communication, we were able to reach an acceptable solution to this problem.

Although the Slieve Foy issue has been addressed, the underlying concerns over when it is appropriate to provide signage and when it is not still seems to be an ongoing issue. Mountaineering Ireland has recently been contacted regarding the signage on Brandon Hill, the highest point in Co Kilkenny, which has recently been signposted. Walkers there are already beginning to see the erosion caused by point-to-point walking where it did not occur in the past. Mountaineering Ireland will continue to encourage the responsible and appropriate use of signposting so that Ireland's wild areas remain wild and unmarred wherever possible.



Signpost secured in concrete base.
Slieve Foy, Carlingford, Co Louth.
Photo: Ross Millar.

Access issue resolved in Galway

Comhairle na Tuaithe agrees a solution

IN JULY, the Environmental Officer of a Mountaineering Ireland club forwarded information about an access issue in County Galway to the office with a request for assistance:

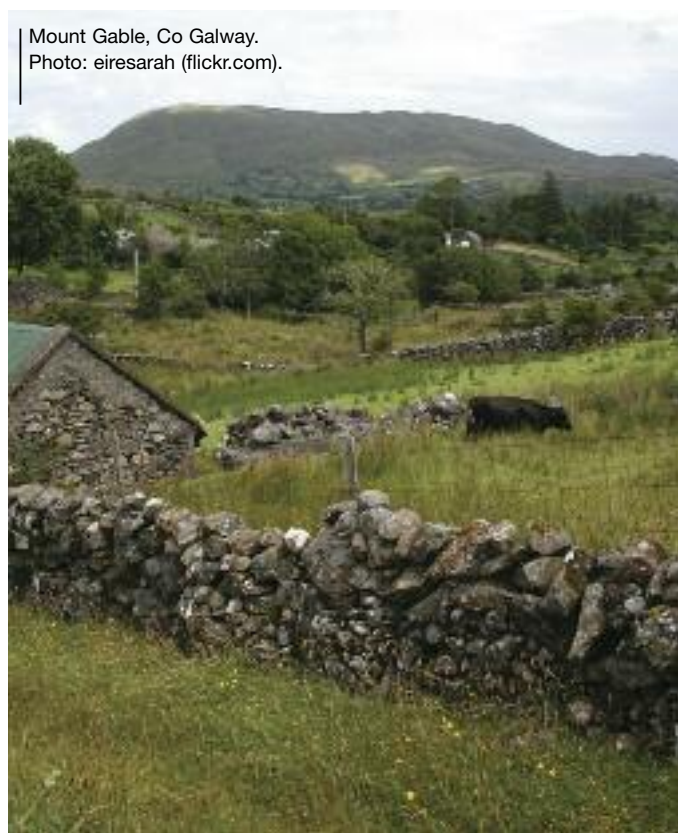
"One of the club's members visited Mount Gable (Slieve Levy) two weeks ago from the north side via Petersburg, through the village of Kilbeg. The last house in Kilbeg village is privately-owned. At this point there is a gate leading onto an old track that brings you to Coolin Lough and then onto Mount Gable.

There has always been a gate leading up from the house onto the track to Coolin Lough. Of late, the gate has become damaged. This is in a large part due to the number of walkers going through and using it. The landowner had approached Galway County Council about the damage to his property and requested that the gate be repaired, but the Council had refused.

As it was necessary, the landowner proceeded with the repairs to his property and replaced the gate. In addition to the repairs, a padlock was put on the gate and a six-inch strand of wire was placed on top of it, denying access. When the walker spoke with the owner he was told that there was no issue with walkers being on the land. However, the owner would not be removing the lock and the wire until he had been reimbursed for the damage caused to his property."

It is situations like this that can often lead to a greater problem. A landowner's property is not respected, their request for help goes unheeded and bad blood develops between landowners in the area and recreational users.

Mountaineering Ireland contacted the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs on behalf of our members to make the Department aware of the access issue



Mount Gable, Co Galway.
Photo: eiresarah (flickr.com).

and the potential for it to become much worse. We are happy to say that this issue was looked into and a reasonable solution has been agreed. Rectifying this situation is an example of the good work being achieved by Comhairle na Tuaithe and we hope to see much more of it in the future.

Books

Literary Editor Joss Lynam presents reviews of some recent publications.

The consequences of putting climbing before everything

Dermot Somers



Evening Light

By Roger Hubank
The Ernest Press, 286pp
£12.00 ISBN 978-0-94815-93-8

Low evening light may mask familiar landscape in shadow, but it also lifts hidden shapes into relief, revealing patterns, boundaries, old burials. In his new novel, Roger Hubank applies this perspective to the life of George Hazard, an ageing mountaineer recovering from a stroke as he begins work on his autobiography. His estranged daughter is drawn back into his ambit out of a sense of duty towards the solitary invalid, her commitment tempered by a healthy streak of anger.

Since Coetzee's *Disgrace* won the Booker Prize in 1999, the morally bankrupt older man offset against an adult daughter has become a feature of serious literature. (See *The Truth Commissioner* by David Parks for an Irish counterpart). In the broadest sense the flawed Father reflects a patriarchal culture that fails both the female and the familial.

Hazard, a distinguished English climber in his mid-sixties, a national hero, has always failed the call of community, both as a climber and a man. '...he had never

enjoyed particularly close ties with other climbers...it was always the mountain he related to.' Early in his career he deserted his Welsh wife Rhiannon, a devout Catholic, and their daughter Calon in a passionate pursuit of summits that would make him the first Briton to ascend all fourteen eight-thousanders. He achieved a knighthood for his steely individualism (bestowed by Margaret Thatcher – who else?). The fact that he was driven by a passion to fulfil his manifest destiny at all costs was of course the reason for his singleminded success. Given his nature, he could hardly have done otherwise. But was that any kind of excuse? Was his life all of a piece – a series of desertions and betrayals on every scale? Convalescent, and drawn into his daughter's exemplary life, his past confronts him piece by piece. Frailty has exhausted his arrogance. Climbs and their consequences, in the Alps, the Himalayas, flicker in the flawed mirror of his memory as he struggles to edit his earlier writings into an autobiography that will do him justice and somehow ring true.

'Seems everyone around you gets the chop,' a climbing-partner (dead) had bitterly observed, adding in his diary, 'It's not that he's better than the rest of us. He's just bloody ruthless. For George, the mountain shuts out all other considerations...' And Hazard himself had written, of the Himalayas: 'Each one of us should trust only himself. If anyone got into trouble, he shouldn't look to the others for a rescue.' Are the bodies that were left behind him no more than casual victims of the elements, or must a man be morally responsible, always, for the manner in which he has engaged with those around him, whether in a blizzard or a bedroom?

This is Hubank's underlying purpose: a scrutiny of responsibility and consequence, not only in relation to the individual but to the family, the group, and to society itself. Hazard, the survivor, had looked after himself. His daughter Calon has grown up to become his opposite – a loving wife, the mother of small girls, a woman of religious faith, a believer in the community of hearts and souls. In spite of himself, the reclusive Hazard is drawn into her husband's family,

the Redferns, a close-knit prosperous family of English Catholics with a large home in Hampstead. Soon a kind of darkness falls across their lives, a moral blight, as a cruel drama unfolds before Hazard's helpless gaze.

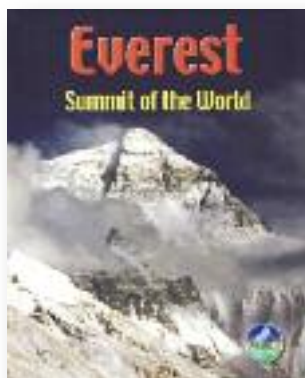
The plot switches focus to reveal a very different kind of pain to that experienced by heroes in extremis – the pain of women and children picked out for suffering by life's cruel lottery. Rituals of unflinching endurance are depicted, underscored by the overwhelming love that flies up against the dark. Through the women around him – Calon and her in-laws – the passionate heroics of Hazard's career are measured against the courage of ordinary human experience made transcendent by the redemptive power of the heart. 'So to the mystery of tragedy was added the mystery of love.'

Where the work, despite its austere strength, may not entirely convince is in its tendency in the second half to allow the author's sense of moral purpose, rather than character, to lead the plot. The women stretched on the rack of betrayal and deceit struggle at times to maintain identity against the draining force of moral gravity. But they pull through and, mercifully, there is no happy ending. In a novel of conscience and tradition, Hubank finds the justification for human suffering in its capacity to generate love. The pain of another person teaches the witness to love unconditionally. Now, it must be said, that while this Christian concept is profound, it is also highly dangerous. It may indeed spiritualise the individual but it also allows institutions – churches – to accept suffering and poverty as a necessary stimulus to morality in others.

Roger Hubank, a retired lecturer in English, has once again used mountain literature to explore serious themes, as he did in the acclaimed *Hazard's Way* (2001) and the very accomplished novel of exploration, *North* (2002). George Hazard, 'hero' of *Evening Light*, is the grandson of the main protagonist in *Hazard's Way*. It is not necessary to have read the earlier novel to appreciate this one.

Pocket guidebook to Everest's two most popular routes

Frank Nugent



Everest: Summit of the World

By Harry Kikstra
Rucksack Readers, 96pp
50 colour photos, diagrams
and maps
£9.99 ISBN 978-1-898481-54-6

This guidebook is one of a series from the publisher, which to date include *Aconcagua*, *Denali* and *Kilimanjaro*. The concise pocket guidebook contains selected nuggets of advice on planning and preparation, such as how to

prevent and manage altitude sickness, practical use of oxygen and yaks, and how to choose your route and expedition team, and it contains detailed descriptions of the Tibet (North-east Ridge) and Nepal (South Col) routes. The concise text is supported by mapping, diagrams and excellent colour photographs. The author is a full-time adventurer, photographer, expedition leader and organiser who has climbed the 'seven summits' and has authored two other guidebooks in this series, *Aconcagua* and *Denali*.

This guide will be a useful planning tool for those wishing to reach the summit by either of the two normal ascent routes used by commercial guided services. It gives no route information whatsoever

about any other route on the mountain, or any other mountain in either the Rongbuk or the Khumbu vicinity. For those with no experience, it breaks the great mountain into small chunks in a way which may over-simplify the difficulties and seriousness of climbing and surviving on the world's highest mountain. While the guide provides an assembly of useful information, it has the same problem as any concise tourist dictionary.

What has been left out? The guide favours the use of established guiding services and Sherpas, to make the chances of success greater, and contends that unsupported teams are only as strong as their weakest members, who will likely compromise the chances of a successful summit for all. In cost terms, the guide advises that commercial 'full service expeditions' range in price from \$20,000 to \$50,000 per person in Tibet and from \$30,000 to \$80,000 in Nepal plus tips and bonuses. The question is posed, what price is safety worth? It explains that cheaper prices are likely to mean a compromise on the amount of oxygen provided, or not having a personal Sherpa, guide or doctor, or determine the quality of food and supporting resources.

Who is this book for? It is clearly not for the 4% of mountaineers who independently climb different routes up Everest's many ridges and faces and who choose their own climbing style, resources and climbing companions. It does provide a handy pocket guide for those who chose to avail of the standard 'full guided service package' to tackle the great peak on their seven-summit quest. This guide, notwithstanding its useful information, appears to me to be another step in consolidating the two commercial routes as the ultimate in mountain tourism packaging.

Guide to all the main winter climbing areas in Scotland

Alaster Gerard



Scottish Winter Climbs: Climber's Guide (2nd edition)

By Andy Nisbet, Rab Anderson
& Simon Richardson
Scottish Mountaineering Club, 384pp
86pp colour photos; over 100 colour
route diagrams and maps
£24.00 ISBN 978-0-907521-98-3

This second edition from the Scottish Mountaineering Club (SMC) has an extra sixty pages and is slightly larger than the previous one. It is the only guide to cover all of the main winter climbing areas in Scotland. It is an excellent overall guide for climbs in Scotland (if you want to avoid buying individual guide books for each climbing area), with more than 900 climbs described throughout the Highlands. This new SMC guide covers a large range of climbs in each area, with emphasis on lower- and mid-grade classics. In the previous edition the route sketches were in black-and-white, with the route lines in black, which could be difficult to make out. However, in this new version, all the photo diagrams are in colour, with the route lines in

various bright colours, so the routes jump out of the page at you, making it much easier to pick out your preferred line.

SMC has kept the helpful details from the previous edition, such as length of the climb, the grading system (Scottish and technical) and the star system for recommended routes. In addition, some new climbs have been added, and route descriptions and grades have been revised. For example, Padraic and I (IMC) climbed Icicle Gully on Aonach Mor earlier this year. At the time, we were using the SMC first edition, which graded the route Scottish III. However, after the climb we felt it was more like a grade IV. Subsequently, since returning home I found in this latest edition the same climb is now graded Scottish IV, 4*.

The book has also been revised to take account of changes in climbing habits and in weather conditions in the Scottish mountains. If you are looking to buy your first Scottish winter climbing guidebook, or thinking of adding to your existing collection, I would recommend considering this one. You might not have to buy another for the foreseeable future!

Snowdonia and Three Peaks seen through a lens sharply

Linda Ó Loideoin

A Year in the Life of Snowdonia

By Andy Stansfield

A Year in the Life of Yorkshire's Three Peaks

By Bill Birkett

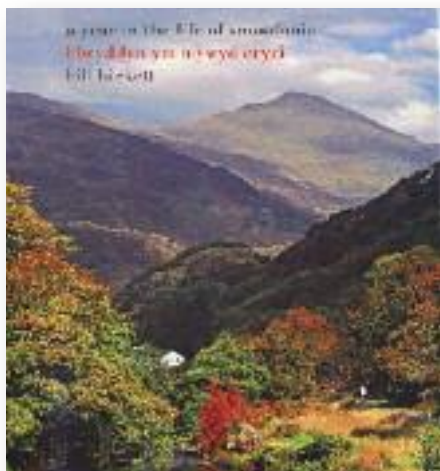
Frances Lincoln, each 112pp

117/97 colour photos, 1 map

£16.99 ISBN 978-0-7112-/2854-2/2991-4

These beautifully photographed books are another two in the *Year in the Life* series. The great joy of both of them is the fact that the photographers love the landscape that they are capturing, and it shows in the stunning photos. The text that accompanies the photographs is knowledgeable and interesting. The maps in both books are really to outline the area involved and can't be used as walking guides. These books are both what would be described as coffee-table books, which is a pity because I would love to have them along with me when walking in either area.

Snowdonia is an area that is well worth investigating and the photos in this book would certainly entice anyone to want to go there. I must admit to a soft spot for this



area as the first mountain I ever climbed was Cader Idris and at the same time first discovered the Snowdonia National Park. Bill Birkett has managed to capture the feel of the park from its coastline, its industry and its inland ways and mountains, along with an informative text. This book is not just about walking: there are photos of Portmeirion (for fans of *The Prisoner*), steam trains and of course the slate quarries that define this area. The text in this book is bilingual, English and Welsh.

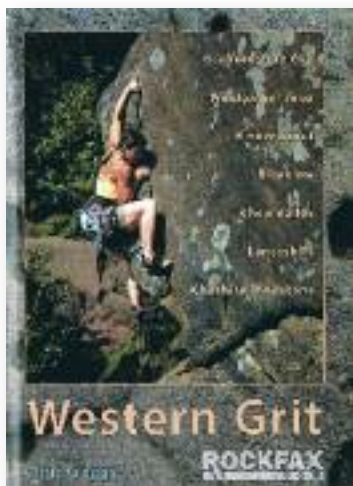
Yorkshire's Three Peaks district is an area sculpted by the ice ages; if you have never



been there, then think of the Burren and you can get some idea of the area. The Three Peaks are of course famous for the annual race run on them. This book explores the area that is encompassed by them. This is limestone shaped by time, and Andy Stansfield's photos of the area are an invitation and a delight. They show the rolling dales and the hills and the various scars that abound in this area. His explanations of the various paths made a lot of them finally make sense for me. If you've ever walked the Pennine Way or thought about doing it then you'll enjoy this book.

Guide to thirty-five crags in northwest England

Donough O'Keeffe



Western Grit

By Chris Craggs & Alan James

Rockfax Ltd, 384pp

Many colour photos

£21.95 ISBN 978-1-873341-22-3

I have not climbed at any of the locations covered by this guide. When climbing in the Peak District, I was very impressed by the sister publication and hence I approached this review with certain assumptions as to the likely quality of this newly revised edition of the 2003 original, and I was not disappointed.

Western Grit covers an expansive area including 35 crags within an approximate 60km radius of Manchester. Rockfax guides seem to improve with every edition, from early editions incorporating hand-drawn topos to the current excellent productions with incorporate quality colour maps to assist climbers in locating the crag of their choice, and with colour topo photographs depicting the line of the routes. The guidebook also incorporates more than sixty action photos that show some fine quality routes as well as scenic settings.

The guide is subdivided into seven areas – Staffordshire, Windgather Area, Kinder Scout, Bleaklow, Chew Valley, Lancashire and Cheshire Sandstone. Each section

includes a map showing the location of the crags contained in each area, and each crag is introduced with a more detailed map showing individual sectors.

All the usual Rockfax introductory information is included, such as the very useful crag summary section giving details for each area, including the number and quality of routes in each grade, walk-in times, crag aspect and whether routes are expected to be 'green' or not. Some see this as driving the hordes to a small number of quality crags while perhaps some old 'traditional' crags remain unvisited. While this may be true for the 'local' climber, the reality is that such information is invaluable for the overseas visitor with limited time to decide on the best locations to visit.

In summary, I found this Rockfax publication to be not only a great guidebook for use once you reach the area but also a great help to get one motivated. I may have to dust off the harness and book a budget flight!

All the Munros and Corbetts on one reference map

Robert Garrett

3000 Plus: The Original Munro Map (6th edition)

By Gordon D Henderson

Folded map, single-sided; many small illustrations of mountain range profiles

£5.95 ISBN 978-0-9527381-2-1

This is a map for the burgeoning Munro enthusiasts' market. It covers Scotland north of Glasgow, and all 284 Munro mountains and 227 tops are shown. Surprisingly, it also shows all Corbetts (2,500 to 2,999 feet high) within the map area.

It contains a wealth of information and is a useful tool

for planning Munro-bagging trips. Peaks are named and numbered in height sequence. Margin lists group them in ranges or geographical areas, giving heights in feet. Even declassified Munros are included. An inclusion since the 5th edition are 37 small illustrations of named mountain range profiles. These would be useful for those who stand on a summit wishing to know the names of some of the array of mountains stretching into the distance. Other information includes roads, railways, hostels, bothies and OS map coverage.

This is not a map to be taken onto the hills. Rather it is to be pored over at home, either secretly or openly, depending on the progression of the Munroitis virus within its unfortunate victim! Getting to grips with the lists can be a daunting task at first, but to the besotted Munro bagger this is all grist to the mill!



This Scottish hillwalking map is state of the art

Robert Garrett

Knoydart, Kintail and Glen Affric: British Mountain Map

By Harvey in conjunction with the BMC, MCoFS and BGS

Folded polyethylene map, double-sided, 1:40,000

£12.95 ISBN 978 185137414 4

Were it not stated that this map is polyethylene (polythene) one would assume it to be paper, such is the similarity. It should be durable and waterproof and it has the flexibility lacking in laminated maps. Can we have some like this in Ireland, please?

It covers three magnificent wild areas of western Scotland in great detail: Knoydart, Kintail and Glen Affric. The scale, 15m contour interval and subdued layering

make it an excellent map for mountain walkers. Peak baggers are catered for with Munros, Corbetts and Grahams distinguished, and climbing areas are also marked.

Glen Affric is shown on the reverse together with a "Kintail timeline" bedrock geology map and an illustration of the last ice cap that covered the area. Also on the reverse is information on the Knoydart area, mountain accidents, hypothermia, bothies, huts and more. I question the wisdom of including "Tips on the use of map and compass" and "How to take a compass bearing" as only those competent in navigation should venture into these remote areas.



Revised Cicerone guides to Jungfrau and Vanoise

Joss Lynam

Tour of the Jungfrau Region: A Two-Week Trek in the Bernese Oberland

By Kev Reynolds

Cicerone, 125pp

Numerous colour photos and maps

£12.95 ISBN 978-1-85284-596-4

Tour of the Vanoise: A Circuit of the Vanoise National Park

By Kev Reynolds

Cicerone, 157pp

Numerous colour photos and maps

£12.95 ISBN 978-1-85284-590-2

These are revised and updated editions to guides to popular tours. As usual, they have clear sketch maps, but obviously they need to be supplemented with 1:25,000 or 1:50,000 maps. There are very useful diagrams of walk altitude that also show where drink, accommodation and public transport are available. They have comprehensive introductions covering everything you want, both before and on the trek. The Vanoise includes a special warning to keep clear of sheep and, more importantly, of sheep dogs. Both guides are well illustrated and can be strongly

recommended to anyone considering making either of these tours, that are up to the standard of the Tour of Mont Blanc.



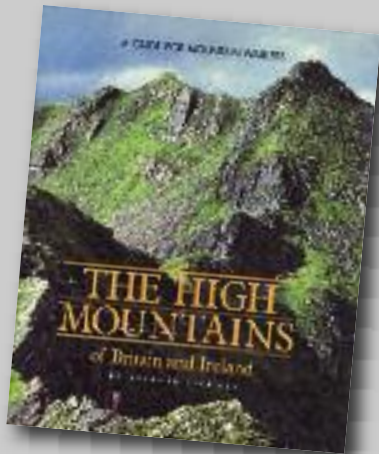
Irvine Butterfield

Acclaimed author and Munroist

MOUNTAINEER AND AUTHOR Irvine Butterfield died in Dundee, Scotland, in May of this year, aged 73.

Although he was born in Yorkshire, Butterfield moved to Perth at the age of 21, through his work with HM Customs and Excise. He subsequently adopted Scotland as his home. His passion for the Scottish mountains was evident throughout his life, and he completed his round of the Munros in 1971.

Butterfield was a founder member of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, Mountaineering Ireland's sister organisation, which was established in 1970. He worked tirelessly as a volunteer



for the Scottish mountains through his involvement with the MC of S and in the setting up of several other mountain-focused organisations, including the John Muir Trust.

Butterfield's name became synonymous with the Scottish mountains following the publication in 1986 of his authoritative book, *The High Mountains of*

Britain and Ireland. Among the several other books he wrote or contributed to were *The Magic of the Munros* and *The Call of the Corbetts*. Interestingly, for many years Butterfield's constant companion was a dog named Kerry, who appears to have adopted Irvine when he was in Kerry researching *The High Mountains of Britain and Ireland*.

In keeping with his passion for the Scottish mountains, and particularly his love for the Torridon area, Irvine Butterfield's ashes were scattered on Liathach near Loch Clair.

May he rest in peace.

Patrick O'Sullivan

Irvine Butterfield, born 1936, died 9th May 2009.



Liathach across Loch Clair, Scotland. Irvine Butterfield's favourite mountain view.

Recent bereavements

The Board of Mountaineering Ireland offer their sympathy to the family and friends of Ernie Lawrence, a founder of the Association for Adventure Sports (AFAS), who died recently. There will be an obituary in the next issue of the *Irish Mountain Log*.

The Board also offers its condolences to the family and friends of Rosaleen Rice, a member of the Irish Mountaineering Club, who has died.

The three magic little hidden Canaries

La Gomera La Palma El Hierro

7-DAY ESCORTED TRIPS - OCTOBER-MAY

Holiday includes:
Ferries Transport
Accommodation (apts) Daily Walks
Barbecues Swims €425

Walk For Fun - In The Sun!

Tel: 086 604 9836 (Summer)
Tel: 0034 922 719 261 (Winter)
Email: adwtenerife@eircom.net

Now from 2008:
Book your Tenerife flights online early with Ryanair or Aer Lingus and avail of lower than ever fares. Holiday includes all ferries, transfers and transport, accommodation and daily guided walks.
Price €425.

Order your books, guides and maps for winter and the festive season

Mountaineering Ireland continues to provide the book service previously operated by Joss Lynam. We can supply you with guidebooks and maps to almost any part of the world. For the walker, there is a large collection of Cicerone guides and books, or the wider selection of books and guides distributed by Cordee which also includes many climbing guides. Books reviewed in the Irish Mountain Log can usually be purchased through Joss Books with a members' discount. To place an order, ring the MI office on (01) 6251115 or email info@mountaineering.ie.

Joss Books



Mountain Ventures launches its first **Mountain Skills** programme since re-opening with an all new look. Check out our website to see our new facilities!

Course Dates

November 14-15th 2009	Mountain Skills 1 & 2	Fully Residential €190
December 5-6th 2009	Mountain Skills 1 & 2	Fully Residential €190
January 9-10th 2010	Mountain Skills 1 & 2	Fully Residential €190

Contact Aaron on 086-361 4151 or (045) 404 657
Email: info@mountainventures.ie Web: www.mountainventures.ie
Residential rate includes 1 night's accommodation, 1 breakfast, 1 evening meal and 2 lunches. (**Non-residential** €140)

A World of Adventure!



Mt Elbrus - Russia	£1390
Kilimanjaro - Tanzania	£1195
Mt Kenya - Kenya	£860
Africamp - Kenya	£1895
Kinabalu - Borneo	£1250
Aconcagua - Argentina	£2300
Everest Base Camp - Nepal	£1195
Mustagh Ata - China	£2200

Beat the credit crunch with our sterling prices, and beat the blues with our great trips and personal service! Call today to discuss dates.

Tel: 048 70 83 1258 (ROI) | 028 70 83 1258 (NI)
Email: office@adventurealternative.com

Ireland's Leading Adventure Company!
www.adventurealternative.com

ADVENTURE ALTERNATIVE
expeditions • treks • safaris

+ Volunteering Holidays in Kenya
+ Charity Expeditions
+ Youth Expeditions

irish mountain log

The magazine for walkers and climbers in Ireland

To advertise in the Irish Mountain Log
telephone: (+353 1) 625 1115
email: logads@mountaineering.ie


Mountaineering Ireland
www.mountaineering.ie

Cold:Play

autumn/winter 09/10

@ Great Outdoors Dublin



Grivel Air Tech Evolution Ice Axe €125

A beautifully constructed ice axe from the famous mountaineering company, perfectly balanced & with a head hot forged from a single piece of steel..well they been in the business for nearly 200 years!

Mountain Equipment Filteoy Mitts €95

A modular mitt with a liner, fleece pile inner and a primaloft outer mitt. Super warm & suitable for up to 6000 meters and polar regions. Our warmest standard stock item mitt.



Mountain Equipment Mens Changabang jacket €399

A state of the art mountaineering jacket constructed from 3 layer Gore-Tex Pro Shell for unrivalled performance & durability. Innovative features include the stealth hood- hands down the best fitting hood around. Also available for Women: Mountain Equipment Jannu Jacket €369



Petzl Ecrin Roc Helmet €79.95

The helmet that sets the standards for all mountaineering uses. Durable, tough & comfortable.

Grivel G12 New Matic Crampon €119.99

Simply outstanding, one of the best all round mountaineering crampons out there. Fully adjustable, one size fits all, strong & durable.

THE STORE TO EXPLORE



GREAT OUTDOORS

www.greatoutdoors.ie
chatham street : dublin 2 : 01 6794293

Don't Miss Our Amazing Ski Trip Competition!

Great Outdoors Dublin & Ski France
give you the chance to win one of
four trips to some of the best
ski resorts in France.
Go to www.greatoutdoors.ie
to find out more.

SKI FRANCE
ski-ride-france.com