

August '06

It's always brilliant to start the newsletter with such happy news. Ruth and Kev have tied the knot so best wishes to you both. Big Congratulations too as Emilie and Neil celebrate the arrival of daughter Holly Louise. Martin and wife Helen visited from their home in New Zealand and confessed to reading the club's website to see what you're all up to. Martin even found time during their gruelling schedule to get along to the Plas Y Brenin Meet. Great to see them again. Maybe we could get a NZ Meet for 2007?

Apart from the usual monthly weekend meets that keep the club going there have been superb trips skiing, the week in Skye and then a fortnight in Cham. Each month there has been an excellently attended club meet, but sadly lack of reviews from Rhydd Ddu, Nant Gwnant, Dent and Plas Y Brenin, means you'll have to wait to see if any tales emerge at the President's Meet. Thanks to those who have sent items for the newsletter but without the info from you guys (we're not quite as free to get to the meets ourselves just now) then the newsletter's nearly impossible to produce. All items, no matter how brief will be, I can personally assure you, gratefully received. Thankfully we do have a variety of items to let you know what folks are up to.

Finally, as The President's Meet 2006 will soon be upon us, do make sure you get your menu choices (see back page) and money to Ian ASAP. The Club is arranging the catering for the meal ourselves so we will need time to do the shopping as well as the cooking..... Hope to see you there! Alison

President's Meet '06 – Chamois Mountain Centre

With only a matter of weeks to decide what you fancy for your meal, you'll find your form on the back of this newsletter. We're returning to the Chamois Hut, situated adjacent to the Beacon Climbing Centre and about ten minutes from Llanberis where a merry band of HMC cooks will be catering for 48 of us in what is hoped to be a "back to basics weekend" together with some light entertainment to boot! Cost will be £30 for the weekend payable in advance and by 29 September '06 to Ian with your menu choice. Cost includes two nights' accommodation, 3-course dinner plus wine on Saturday evening. It also covers music and comedy from "DECCA". We also plan to have 2 or 3 barrels of Real Ale available be on tap at just £1 a pint. It's set to be the event of the year which you can't afford to miss. Plus as always, Dave eagerly awaits your furtive TAT award nominations! Don't delay – book today!

Burbage Common Open Day

Yet again this year the club was represented at this event in May. The stand was quite busy with interest particularly as Ted had videos running on the laptop proving some insight into the club's activities. A list of prospective members has been gathered and a session at Leicester Leys wall will follow at a mutually convenient date. Thanks to Ed, Sue, Ali, Ted for turning out and representing the club. Mark H

Adrenaline Tubing at Tamworth Snowdome

Andrea's had some initial interest for this relatively new feature at the Snowdome. Essentially no skill is required (nor any particular prior knowledge of anything snowy) you just hang on to a large inflatable then launch yourself off down the slope. Apparently it's a great laugh and guaranteed to get the adrenaline going. No date set just trying to get a group together for a fun night/weekend trip and the cost is apparently under a tenner. Fancy it? Speak to Andrea (soon).

Bring your Mum to a meet on Skye

Whitsun week heralded a trip to Skye for HMC. Ed, Andy A, and Ben all did exactly what the title says. This time Ed surpassed himself and booked the Lodge of Sligachan hotel. This excellent venue gives very good access to the North Side of the Cuillin Ridge and the Red Cuillin. Mountain bikes were in evidence and were used by Andy A and Annette to explore bits of the Island. Trips were made to Quirang and The Storr by various parties to look at both the geology and the wildlife. Talisker Beach was popular, as was Glen Brittle and the Sligachan Pub, with Ed and Andy T having a

personal tour of the brewery. Ed, Alastair and Nigel made an ascent of Blaven in exciting weather. Pinnacle Ridge was the scene of a mass ascent by eight members. The scrambling up the first two pinnacles is good but never desperate. The descent of the third pinnacle provides the crux of the route, and after careful consideration of about a nano-second it was decided that an abseil was needed. The wind was blowing snow about as we headed for the Knight's Peak, and the damp rocks gave cause for pause in a few places, but nevertheless, the route finding was quite straightforward with mostly big holds and good Gabbro to climb on. Following the obligatory summit visit a descent was made by the west ridge into Coire a' Bhasteir. An excellent day. There were two parties out on the Red Cuillin making good circuits of these rounded hills from the hut. An attempt was made to find and climb on The Cioch, but the misty isle held this secret for another day. The mums earned their keep for the week by preparing sumptuous food for the hungry walkers and by trialling this year's president's meet menu. The return was part of a cunning plan Baldrick, to visit a beer festival in Keswick, but like all of Black Adder's plans went slightly awry. The festival was sold out, and the bunk house shared with lucky festival goers and did not make for a harmonious time. Some walking was done (not sure what) but I gather more lazing about and sunbathing was the order of the day.

Skittles

WE WON! Don't know how, but we did! Thanks to Andrea for organising the event back at Croft and for those who threw their cheeses well!

Mountain Bikes & TrailQuest at Cannock

Someone, probably Andy A suggested a trip to visit Cannock Chase to "Follow the Dog" on a Sunday in February. So a multitude of members gathered in the damp forestry commission car park at Birches Valley. The Whyte family were due to arrive, but went back to bed when they saw the weather! Following some heckling from the Bowline club, (who also happened to be there), we set off on a wide variety of machines as diverse as their owners and in a multitude of colours. The route started with a fairly wide track, but quickly narrowed down to good single track. The first section claimed some casualties with the slippery conditions getting the better of them, but the majority ploughed on. I cannot recall the minutiae of the route, but it swept through the different environments that Cannock has to offer throwing mud over us and at times providing some quite challenging riding. By the end of the ride our bikes were a uniform brown, as were our clothes and faces. A good morning out that led to me wanting more.

Ali went skiing which gave me some time to do some research into bikes. Following the Cannock episode and the last two trips to Dolgellau I had decided that a replacement for my '91 Dawes hardtail was needed. I just needed an event to justify a new purchase and settled on a trailquest series held on Cannock Chase over 4 Tuesday evenings in May, June and July. These events are basically Mountain bike orienteering and are usually either 2 or 5 hours long. These were 2 hour events. I was consistently in the lower rankings for the event series, but that didn't matter as I was out mountain biking with a purpose. I even managed to convince Ian B to join me for one event which turned into 3 and became quite expensive for Ian as the latter 2 events saw him damage the drive train on his bike on both occasions. If anyone would like details of these events email me and I'll get you the info.

Mark

Ski Trips

Ewan took up the invite to have a long weekend skiing in Andorra with former Stantonite Mark W. His verdict "EXCELLENT – can't wait to go again". Whilst Emilie and Neil organised another great trip to the Serre Chevalier area early in 2006, which several club members attended.

Despite the gamble to ski rather late in the season, Ed's excellent trip to Mottaret once again dropped lucky, finding snow across the Three Valleys resorts. There was just one enforced early return to the bar for the Après Ski due to pretty poor visibility when clag and rain stopped play, and most of the higher lifts. Still this was a welcome excuse to rest weary legs. Elvyn persisted with his tales of off piste temptations and by the end of the week had spurred on several accomplices for rather more than their insurance probably covered! The bad news is that Ed's got other plans for 2007 so the Club's looking for a volunteer to do the organising next year. Any takers?

LAMM 2006

"Let's just get the record straight. I am not doing a Mountain Marathon this year!. I am having a year off." I almost believed this would happen as well, especially when Lowe Alpine announced that their Mountain Marathon this year was to be in the VERY far North. The weekend before the event I had a small pang of regret but too late now. Tuesday night felt like I should be packing, but no need I wasn't going anyway. Wednesday night Mark W (past LAMM partner) called, "Ron's had to back out, How are you fixed?. We are flying to Inverness, then hiring a car, we'll just change the details, no problem, you'll need Friday off work". The last sentence should have been a stumbling block, but my boss said "You can book it down to sporting excellence, I can let you have a day off for that". The airline wanted £140 to change a name on a ticket that cost £40, so we drove.....to Assynt, just North of Ullapool. 10 hours to get there and I still can't quite believe it. I've not trained, I should be going to the Pub with Pete tonight who is in the south for work, but I'm here and we start at 8.10 in the morning. A damp night does nothing to lessen the surreal experience of 5:45 am bagpipes, roll over and sleep for another hour is the team decision, a slick breakfast and we are collecting our maps and off. The first day's route leads us over terrain to the south of Conival, and then over Conival before leading us through very rough terrain to camp at the head of Loch Glencoul. We are 41st overnight out of over 150 teams, so quite pleased we retire early following a Raven meal, the first I've had for 20 years! Sunday the plan is to get up with the piper and start as soon as possible. So at 6.45 we are off heading for a day of trackless orienteering over 20km and 1100m of ascent. We finish at 1:30, thinking we haven't done very well, but in the final analysis we improved 9 places to 31st. Not our best position, but nevertheless pleasing. This year's LAMM was the over the toughest ground I have ever encountered for this type of event. I still can't quite believe we were back home for midnight!

Mark

Day Walks

The "Saga Lout" section (regular members John T, Stuart and Dave P) have been covertly out and about exploring in the National Forest South of Burton on Trent. Branston Water Park, Needwood Forest, Tatenhill and Rolleston Forestry Centre are regular bases for their varied forays. They leave before dawn and generally arrive back after dark with tales of missing paths, product testing electrified fences and detection of woodland where none exists on the maps. This may be due to the occasional lunchtime pint but "never gain" from the pub at Hoar Cross where there was only small change for three pints from a tenner!

Cragging

Nigel M, Tracy, Richard, Beastly, Teeth and Ann S have all confessed to being out climbing, (and I'm sure there are others of you out there who haven't confessed yet!). Venues have ranged from the traditional Stanage, to the not so popular Lawrencefield, where Captain Crag and Teeth managed to rescue a damsel's boots from the pool. How they (the boots) got there is not clear! Teeth flushed with a purchase of some shiny new gear persuaded Ann to accompany him to Harborough Rocks, where amongst others, the crag classics on Trident Buttress were ascended. Tracy, Rich and Beastly paid a visit to the Roaches and entertained themselves on the Lower Tier for a day.

Where there's a Wall there's a way

Whilst a number of members continue to meet up at the Leicester Leys Wall, the club hopes to restart the "1st Thursday in the month" wall meet from October '06. New, experienced or rusty climbers always welcome. The club kit (harnesses, helmets and some rock boots) can be available if you call to arrange with Mark in advance.

Coast to Coast Bike Ride

What a great time we had on our recent C2C bike ride! It was such good fun that we are going to plan another long distance route similar time next year. If anybody is interested let me know so I have an idea of numbers. My sister was horrified at the standard of accommodation we booked and said she was going to vet it first. The first night she said was like a white washed cow shed, the 2nd night was like something out of St.Trinians and the 3rd night was like Colditz. Apart from that she really enjoyed it, and that was from someone who didn't even own a bike till 4 months ago. The route itself was

challenging but very scenic from the beautiful lakes to the peaceful Edale valley, the bleak moors of the Pennines to the industrial suburbs of Sunderland. We also raised about £600 for Cancer Research UK. Tracy W

Chamonix

Yet another excellently planned and executed trip organised by Ed this year. A total of 18½ members enjoyed the delights of the Haute Savoie in Chamonix in a very settled period of hot weather. Highlights of the fortnight were attempts on Aiguille du Tour by Mark and Brian K, from a bivouac getting to within a few metres of the summit; Nigel becoming Harry's apprentice for the fortnight with ascents of Petit Aiguille Verte, The Cosmiques Arête, the left hand route on the Tacul Pyramid; plus splendid general walking, mountain biking and cragging the valley had to offer. No doubt more details will appear in future issues

Mark

Ian in The Galapagos Islands

After a convoluted 22 hour plane journey to get to Ecuador I spent a couple of days in Otavalo experiencing the rather large open market, viewing volcanoes and visiting indigenous crafters. I'll never look at a weaver mat the same again it takes the weaver about 4 hours to make a mat sitting on a hard floor in a very dark room which also contains a screened off kitchen and bedroom and there are guinea pigs running around the floor which apparently are a great delicacy. For all this effort he will make \$2. After Otavalo I moved to Quito the capital city staying in a fantastic Hotel in the old town. This is a city that loves its spiritual guidance; within 4 blocks there are 14 of the most fantastic churches that can rival any in Europe. After a day and a half I was well and truly churched out (there still remained 200 plus left to visit) and headed off to the Galapagos (Isla Balba), were arriving is an experience, the airport consists of a few sheds (OK nice sheds but still sheds). Here I met up with the other 13 divers (mainly Americans, a Swiss, a Canadian & 2 other Brits) who were going to be on the dive boat. We were then transferred to Pto. Ayora. The volcanic terrain on the main island appears at first is quite barren with trees that look dead (they apparently instantly bloom when the rains arrive) but as you go over the summit of the island suddenly everything is green and lush. Arriving at the port we were transferred to our boat and home for the next 11 days the Lammer Law which is the 2nd largest trimaran in the world. The web site managed to over sell the boat, this is not to say it was a bad boat just not as quite as good as I was expecting.

The Galapagos is the dive site for seeing large marine life and the seas are teeming with fish I now realise how depleted the other dive sites I've done are. The highlight has to be seeing Whale sharks (13) at Darwin Island, I knew they were big but you just can't prepare yourself for something the size of a bendy bus just appearing out of the blue. Your jaw just drops, which is not a good thing as your regulator falls out. When we went off to the dive sites in the pangas (zodiacs), dolphins would play in the bow waves and quite often we would surface and find them doing acrobatics, though I only ever saw one underwater and it wasn't hanging around. The Sea Lions not to be out done would play with us during our safety stops, they would come right up to you and look in your mask. Other highlights included seeing a big Marble Ray 1.8m (6ft), going for a swim with Pilot whales. Oh almost forgot, the sharks, seen so many (Hammer Heads, Galapagos & Silkies). At Darwin it took a leap of faith just to swim into the blue to surface when there could be a 50+ sharks swimming around and a couple of times they were circling us and one occasion even the guide was apprehensive. Apparently Hammers don't like the bubbles divers produce and so they maintain a safe distance, I'm not so sure about this as I looked one in the eye. As well as the diving we also did about 5 land visits and each island is completely different. On our first land trip we came across Sea Lions, Blue footed boobies, marine & land iguanas and Frigate Birds.

On another island we saw Albatross nesting, Flamingos and on a snorkel I saw sharks, turtles and a penguin even though it was for about a nanosecond. The other panga arrived when the penguins were feeding and got some great video of them catching fish. We visited the Darwin Centre on Santa Cruz to see the Giant Tortoises including Lonesome George who is the last of his species.

Our last island visit was to a post box, which was installed over 100 years ago by whalers. This post box is slightly different because you don't require a stamp and whoever goes to the box should collect any mail that is near to where they are going next and hand deliver it. I sent a postcard to my mother, so it will be interesting to see how long it takes or if it ever turns up.

One down side to this type of trip is that as you are in the middle of the Pacific Ocean the sea is not exactly calm even if the crew thought it was. Mostly the boat travelled at night so sleep was not the

easiest activity as you were bounced out of bed and draws, crockery and glasses were crashing onto the deck. Returning back to Quito we spent a couple of nights in the new town again in another fantastic Hotel before heading off to Bella Vista in the cloud forest which lived up to its name being cloudy and cold for most of the time. We stayed in a geodome bamboo house. The cloud forest is renowned for its bird life with 16% of all the world species being found in Ecuador, however despite the excellent walks we hardly saw any, although due to the bird feeders around Bella Vista we did see the most wonderful displays by humming birds.

Despite the fact I was not going to do any mountain climbing on this trip the pull was too great and I decided to organise a trip up Cotapaxi. I returned to Quito but the day was one of those Ian holiday days, I realised at checkout that I had at least \$100 stolen from my wallet, bus back broke down (leaking hose) which was fortunately somewhere as against the nowhere that we had been for most of the journey and they managed to replace the part and we moving again after half an hour. Arrived back in Quito to find no details regarding Cotapaxi. Frantic telephone calls followed with the organiser informing me someone will be in contact shortly, nobody ever did. Having to re-arrange my time I tackled the Volcano Pichina (4675M) which dominates over Quito, fortunately there's a cable car that take you quite a fair way up and then it's a 4 – 5 mile (6 – 8 Km) walk to the summit which finishes with a 20m (60 ft) moderate rock climb but at this attitude it felt a lot harder. My reward for this endeavour was a total white out so no view of the crater and I nearly lost the path off. The following day I went Mountain biking on Cotapaxi it was relatively easy but it's not often you get to do 1300m (4,500 ft) of decent in one hit. It also starts just below the glacier so it was good to see what I missed and despite that the fact it was the dry season it was snowing and as the group descended it turned into torrential rain, I was so cold and absolutely soaked to the skin at the end but still a good day. If you're inspired to dive in the Galapagos and I hope you appreciate the diving is quite serious because of the strong currents. You'll need at least 50 dives before they'll consider letting you dive there and you also need some big bucks. I will also wish you better luck than the French chap who joined us late on the first day on a last minute deal who unfortunately burst his eardrum on his first dive!

Ian B

Adventures in New Zealand

Continuous travel for 36 hours is gruelling to say the least but this is the most fantastic flight path ever - the descent sweeps across mountain ridges and tries to graze the hill sides before cork-screwing down to lose height, then tries to clip a few more bits of mountain before putting down to terra firma. We arrived safely in Queenstown, NZ's very own Chamonix, mountains, skiing in winter, and bungee jumping & other sports. Maybe try the Mad Dog White Water surf? You're on a surf board as you go through the rapids - hold on tight - until you get to a set of eddies that suck you under until you pop up somewhere later - they've only lost two people so far!

Queenstown is also home to several Lord of the Rings film sites (especially the mountain bits). The town is dominated by a range called "The Remarkables" (Dimrill Dale & Misty Mountains), but not far away is the river Anduin. Daughter Loz and I had a warm-up walk via that gondola into the back hills. We're staying in a cheep 'n' cheerful "backpackers" (hostel) - a bit of an institution here in NZ, before moving on for our first multi day walk - The Kepler Trail one of New Zealand's "Great Walks". This is intended for fit walkers (or if as unfit as I, then at least determined); it takes people onto a high level mountain traverse but there is no technical challenge - you can't get lost, there is a prepared track all the way.

Trail Day 1: Took a water taxi across the lake & get deposited on a beach beside a dense forest through which our path leads ever upwards at a relentless slope up for 3000 ft. The forest is the most lush/overgrown/exotic I've ever seen (apparently primeval rain forest). After 4/5 hours we exit onto moor land and vicious wind/rain – there's a rainbow below us. **Trail Day 2:** Dawns clear, snow on the ground. We traverse the mountain range, good crunchy snow underfoot for most of the day. After about 5 hours we begin to descend to the next hut at about 1500ft. **Trail Day 3:** Another fine weather day as we descend through another forest - ALL DAY! While sitting on a stone beach in a river having a stop, Loz walks over to the water, looks down & picks up a rock - there appears to be gold flecks in it and this is an old gold mining area. It goes into my pack for further investigation, but turns out to be Iron Pyrites, "Fool's Gold". Our overnight hut is beside a different lake - with a sandy beach. **Trail Day 4:** Weather is going to deteriorate. More forest to walk through then on for ham, eggs, & chips!

Our next objective is Milford Sound. Quite an amazing place that would be "amazing" if less tourists! Loz got a last place on a Sea Kayak trip, I hitched a lift - meant we got there pretty early in the

morning. With such excellent weather I book myself a Fiord cruise plus a ticket for the underwater observatory chamber. This is rather curious local phenomenon as a huge amount of water falls annually in Milford (7 metres/year) which forms a layer over the sea water. The land water picks up tannin from the vegetation so is a very dark layer of water lying on top of the salt water. Result is at a relatively shallow depth you get relatively dark conditions normally associated with a much greater depth.

The road in and out of Milford is pretty amazing too. Various glacier gorged valleys can be seen (including "The Divide" where the now gone glacier split into 3 channels) and there's a mile long tunnel under a part of the "Southern Alps" range of mountains. Apparently the highlight of the year is the "Nude Run"; this is a race through the tunnel - the only kit you are allowed is a pair of trainers OR a head-torch!

We transferred back to Queens (Party) Town for St Patrick's Day festivities and wandered into town, somehow not getting back until way after midnight (early by local standards).

Then we hired a car for the 900 km drive through some fantastic scenery to Picton (North End of South Island). Our journey went via Christchurch to take the Tranz-Alpine train into the mountains, apparently one of the top ten train journeys in the world.

Our next achievement was our luxury 5 day wilderness tramp following the Queen Charlotte Sound from the open sea to the inland head. There's a hotel/pub at the end of every day, plus our heavy gear being shipped round by water taxi - way to go... shame about the weather. The walk's a combination of coastline/ridge walk - sounds fantastic until you realise that this is rain forest land, which is essentially all you can see!

Next it was over the Cook Straights to the North Island, Wellington calling... sailing into the harbour was spectacular. Some would say the NZ national food dish is "fush und chups" - we had an excellent example, really fresh monkfish cooked in front of our eyes. Normal NZ portion size - luckily we were sharing.

Next we headed off for Volcano land, and the "must do" Tongariro Crossing, near Turangi (better known to Lord of the Rings fans as Mount Doom). This is possibly the best one day mountain walk available to normal people, and as such it gets busy (over 2000 people per day in the height of the summer). Thankfully this was low season so 200 or so! The Tongariro Crossing, is 2 hours up, 3 hours across craters (used by NASA for simulated moon landings) between two technically active volcanoes, and 2 hours down.

Ahead and below are the Emerald Lakes (and they really are that colour), where steam vapour is rising up from all sorts of places including just seeping through the ground. En route I even got get a scree run

After Tongariro we went on to Rotarua where there are Geothermal Springs everywhere. Smelly tho'. At Orakei Korako (The Hidden Valley) we stopped to view the geysers, bubbling mud pools and pools of goethermically warmed water.

Rotarua is a Maori Cultural centre and the word "Maori" apparently translates as: "Natural". The only natural thing we saw on their "cultural Maori tour" was their sacred spring! This was a serene place, I could have stayed for hours...

Everywhere in NZ, it's "World Famous" this and "World Famous" that, which brings me to The (Sheep) Shearing Capital of the World. The previous 2 days have been the National shearing competition. At our backpackers we meet up with a couple of sheep-shearers and a group of Maori women who employ the shearers. This town is also the home of the Pamplona-like Bull Run done Kiwi style, with sheep, and today is the big day.

In town to watch the sheep run, things have warmed up a bit. Sheep are going to run from one end of town to the other. There's even a competition with a good prize to guess how many there are. I declined the chance to enter this competition. Approx 2000 - 3000 sheep were involved, with 2000+ last year. My guess was they'd try to fox everyone by putting in less than 2000. I'd guess my birth year, 1950 - the actual number of sheep turned out to be 1951! The sheep run was highly entertaining - did they run where intended? I leave it to your imagination.

Then there was the sheep shearing competition... unreal. Our new friends got us into the competition hall for the semi finals. The atmosphere was intense as we viewed 6 shearers in action together, the slowest taking less than a minute per sheep

The Maori ladies enthusiastically encouraged us to go back for the competition's grand final- "it will be awesome!" Loz declined but off I set to sample the "awesome" excitement of the Kiwi National

Shearing finals - once again entering as a competitor. The merriest of the ladies pushed me right to front of stage where the excitement of the grand final was even more "awesome" (this was a word I'd hear shouted into my ear countless times during the evening). The PA commentary was getting even more intense - "peeled that one just like a banana!" Strangely, this competition will be the highlight of my Kiwi tour. Steve O