

Autumn 2000

As we head towards winter get your new diaries out and start planning your HMC social life for 2001. Nick's already secured a tantalising array of meets for the New Year, see meets page for details. A few (well four actually) dedicated members battled the fuel (and a key) crisis to get to the fated Cwm Eigiau meet (more later)....

More limited contingent from HMC completed the Great North run again this year. Appallingly, with less training than last year we all managed to *improve* on last year's times. Maybe this training thing's over-rated.... Unfortunately, flushed with success, very stiff legs, and a trip to the Rhinogs with Ed under our belts Mark and I decided to go up a class in the KIMM the weekend after the Great North. What a mistake... after a day of thrashing around in thigh deep puddles of mush we "ran" into camp after ten hours of competition. By this time all the sheltered and/or dry pitches had been suitably camped on. We found a dryish, "convenient" spot near the rows of portaloos (up-market compared to the LAMM). As the wind continued to hammer the tent, we did seriously consider adjourning to the relative stability of the loos!! We decided to bail out on day two, but the walk out was probably ten miles on tracks and roads. Still on the way back we bumped into Phil Robbo and family. We even had a personal introduction to Tom, their new edition to the Cumbrian Family Robinson. Congratulations on your new arrival.

Also, "Congratulations" too go out to the Lee family following the safe arrival of Katie Lee to proud parents Debbie and Pete!!

Presidents Meet – Oct 2000

Thanks to Dave for another great weekend. Sadly, poor weather reinforced the members feelings that its time for a change of venue! Despite the weather, many bargain hunters ably traversed the gear shops of Keswick and Ambleside. After the evening meal, President Gillett and former President Don Ward performed a memorable rendition of "*Lager and Lime*". Then the annual presentation of the TAT awards ensued. There were nominations for inability to find an orienteering event; appalling attempts to "speaka-da-lingo" abroad; and secretly stashed walkie-talkies that would definitely have aided communication on a classic Scottish rock route. As quoted in the Hinckley Times, members did a variety of activities including "indoor-climbing" before awards were presented to HMC's for "special tasks"!!

Even the chairman was "honoured" for his efforts to have a completely useless sleeping bag at a hut meet. A hurriedly purchased replacement for a forgotten bag proudly proclaimed to be a one-season bag. On closer examination it was difficult to determine *which* season this would be...

Also after the meal, Kev Turner gave a slide show covering his trips to the Pamirs which was certainly inspiring. Cheers Kev! However, we're probably off to another venue next year... time for a change.

Excitement in the Dolomites

Following a very enjoyable walking holiday in the Dolomites last year I thought I would opt for a bit more excitement and try some Via Ferrata. Little did I know that the excitement would start before I had even left the UK.

The plane was accelerating down the runway at Birmingham airport at, or very near, take-off speed when the pilot suddenly aborted the take off, killed the power to the engines and applied the brakes. A warning light had come on in the cockpit. After looking under the bonnet and getting the workshop manual out the engineers could find nothing wrong. We were sent back to the terminal building for about an hour while the pilot tried some dummy runs down the runway and declared it to be a false alarm. We got back on the plane and flew to Munich without any further incident.

I was staying with a party from Waymark Holidays in Dobbiaco about 4 miles south of the Austrian border. This area of Italy, the South Tirol, was until 1918 part of Austria, and German is still the first language. Many of the Via Ferrata routes (although fortunately not the cables and ladders) dated from

the 1st World War when the area was the front line between Austria and Italy. It was quite strange to see World War 1 trenches and gun emplacements besides the routes and at the top of mountains.

The first couple of days were spent doing relatively short Via Ferratae to get us used to the equipment and to practice clipping on to the cables and ladders.

On the Wednesday we climbed the Via Ferrata de Luca – Innerkofler up the Paternkofel. This Via Ferrata was interesting in that it started with a 600m long WW1 tunnel which had been driven along the length of a narrow ridge. This was also our introduction to down climbing Via Ferrata cables. On the descent we stopped at the Zsigmondy-Comici hut for a drink. The weather up until this point had been good but just as we were leaving the hut it started to rain with the occasional rumble of thunder rolling round the hills.

The following day we climbed the Via Ferrata Strobel overlooking Cortina. The walk to the start of the route was very reminiscent of the Cobbler, i.e. straight up from the road for 1000ft. Up until this point the Via Ferrata had consisted mainly of cables with the odd short ladder. The Via Ferrata we climbed on the Friday up the North East Cadin Spitze was the exact opposite, 300m of ladders with the odd piece of short cable in between.

The weather forecast for Saturday was poor so we decided to do another old wartime route, the Alpinveg. This was a ledge about 3 – 4 foot wide running across a cliff face. We made a repeat visit to the Zsigmondy-Comici hut and true to form just as we were leaving the hut it started to rain..... (Remind me to avoid the Zsigmondy-Comici hut in future).

On the Sunday we dropped down a grade and did the Ivan Dibona route, graded C in the guidebook. This was more of a protected path than a Via Ferrata. This route did however include the highest point of the holiday at just over 3000m and the longest suspension bridge in the Dolomites, which fortunately had been rebuilt since being blown up in the film Cliffhanger.

The next day we climbed the Toblinger Knoten under the shadow of the Trei Cime de Laverado (also known as the Drei Zinnen). From a distance it was hard to imagine there would be a feasible route up this 200m high stack. The route consisted mainly of ladders including one 10ft ladder which was slightly overhanging. The view from the top was superb, it was easy to see why this had been a wartime observation post.

Apart from the Ivan Dibona all the routes we had done up to this point had been graded D in the guidebook although routes we had done towards the end of the holiday had been a lot longer, steeper and more exposed than those towards the beginning. As a finale we decided to climb a grade E route on the Col Rosa (Italian for peak is Col). This was definitely a step up from the routes we had been doing and in parts was more like a climb than the scrambles we had been used to.

That was the end of the Via Ferrata climbing but not quite the end of the excitement. Just for good measure the coach taking us back to the airport had a blow out on one of it's rear tyres, we caught our flight with only minutes to spare. Alastair Paterson.

Cwm Eigiau

The meet was doomed from the start. First off it clashed with Nick and the soon to be Mrs Helen's wedding – Many Congratulations to you both! Secondly, some farmers and truckers had decided a bit of terrorism was needed on behalf of all the motorists in the U.K., leaving petrol supplies a little on the scarce side. On Thursday night at HMC HQ numbers were down from eight to four, with two more cancelling, until two saviours said "We've both got full tanks of fuel". Things were looking up! So after careful planning (almost 30 seconds) a high security start was deemed necessary.

The four of us BALLY, BERRY, Mick and Elvyn left a warm and sunny Hinckley at 18:30, the boot full to the brim. We arrived at a cold and very wet Wales (no change there then) at 21:00, and drove from Tal-y-bont up the track to find the hut. By 21:30 we realised that we'd taken the wrong (left) fork in the road, and we'd also managed to get the car stuck! Dilemmas abound, we decided that with some careful manoeuvring, and our tails between our legs, we'd retreat to the pub in Tal-y-bont to lick our wounds and formulate another plan of attack.

Five pints, a few games of pool and the weirdest game of darts later, we set off again, on the right track this time. With a lot of stopping and starting (it's a gated road) we found ourselves at the Dam, almost of us unscathed. Flip-flops and deep muddy puddles don't mix!

We all geared up and prepared ourselves for the mile long walk from the car to the hut, more dramas were to follow! "Wheel-Bally-barrow", showing more of his evenings sound ability (not), decided that as his feet were already dripping wet, he might as well save getting his boots wet by making the trek in his flip-flops. Oh dear!! Ian on the other hand, was arguing with Mick and Elvyn, about the direction of the hut. His G.P.S. (what's one of those, Ed?) pointing one way whilst Mick and Elvyn were pointing at the track which went the other way.

All three were happy though, as thirty minutes later, one with an electronic gizmo that had redeemed itself, one with a map and one with prior knowledge arrived at the hut. No BALLY??? Another thirty minutes later the door flew open and Lee collapsed in through the door. Having carried his own body weight in gear and beer (he's already had 1 TAT award for not travelling light – will the boy ever learn), came to the conclusion (with the aid of bruised and bloody knees), that flip-flops had not been the best choice of footwear after all. After first aid, and locating a radio station that played "Bangin' choons", much feasting and merriment paved the way to a well deserved night's rest!

Saturday morning, thick heads aplenty and groggy weather led the group to decided on a walk to Craig Yr Ysfa, to recce some routes. A wet gully scramble out of the amphitheatre (which some chose to rope up for), led to an impressive ridge walk to Pen-yr-helig-du. The four split into two groups for different descents back to the hut, group one beating the other back by a clear thirty minutes. But why is it, that the later group always has the keys?

Sunday morning and another poor night's sleep! Mick decided that a bumble around base camp was enough for him. The other three had plans on "Amphitheatre Buttress", the Classic 900 ft *** V Diff. On reaching the start of the route, Elvyn decided the conditions were not to his liking, checked the map and set about following a track to Carnedd Llewellyn, and back round to the hut. BALLY and BERRY, still with three stars in their eyes Matthew, set off up the route. A couple of hundred feet later and the weather took a turn for the much worse. Both climbers decided that fleeing was the order of the day. After a few abseils they were at the bottom, complementing each other on a safe retreat, and noting how wise Elvyn had been! Still, there's another route to keep on the wish list for a little longer...

Amazingly, everyone back at the hut almost at the same time. After a quick pack, it was back to the car and head for home still chatting over the thoroughly fantastic weekend.

Not bad for a weekend that almost didn't happen!!!

Lee Leatherbarrow.

Tour of Mont Blanc

Noony and Barbara L completed a Tour of the Mont Blanc massif during the last two weeks of July, managing to catch the only spell of good weather experienced by this area during that month. Phil and Barbara were not "purists" when it came to the route, being happy to miss out the odd less interesting sections, preferring to take in some of the "high col" variants and some off-route ridges.

Setting off a day late due to bad weather, the pair were lucky to have 6 days of glorious sunshine. The first four days saw them travel from St Gervais-les-Bains in France to Courmayer in Italy, mostly by the conventional route apart from a snow covered crossing of the Col des Fours (8661 ft).

The "lost" day at the beginning was won back by taking a bus up the valley of Courmayer and then walking over to Switzerland. An interesting ridge caught their eye, which they opted for prior to descending their first Swiss valley, via a small alpine farm – serving beer and selling cheese made on the premises. This charming place also offered overnight accommodation sleeping on beds of hay, and a toilet positioned at the top of a ladder!!

At the end of the first week they had crossed the high Col of Fenetre d'Arpette (7338 ft) at 10am after a 7 am start to the day. Feeling enthusiastic, they decided to take a detour on the way down to the

foot of the glacier. Unfortunately the forecasted thunderstorms arrived right on cue and gave them a good soaking. The next day dawned grey and very wet, but after a review of the options (over the col, or a longer lower route on the bus) they selected the up-and-over option over the col into France. They were even rewarded by sunshine breaking through at the top of the climb. After a change into dry clothes, a nearby ridge offered a scenic afternoon, before staying the night in a village not far from Argentiere.

The next day's walk to Lac Blanc and the refuge Flegere proved more interesting than expected, as the route included some "Via Ferrata".

Now in the Chamonix valley, Phil and Barbara had a couple of easy days (riding up to Aiguille du Midi and a valley walk to Les Houches). However, they finished their trip in style with a 5,500 ft ascent to 9,000 ft achieved in 4 hrs 40 mins (including a coffee stop) and carrying full packs too. This took them to a deserted refuge at Baraue Forstiere des Rognes on the main route to Mont Blanc summit. On their descent they were blessed with a close encounter with five chamois, prior to riding down to St Gervais on the tramway.

Inspired by the altitude training, Phil and Barbara (supported by Pete Marston) had design on the "little" Welsh 300's ...

Do you believe in Angels?

On the 5th August, we (Phil and Barbara) tackled and completed the Welsh 3000's. With good weather for most of the day, we ascended Pen yr Ole Wen with blue skies. Unfortunately, a dramatic change occurred resulting in thick clag and horizontal rain. The traverse of the Carneddau then became a lonely survival exercise requiring very careful navigation when we already tired, and with daylight running out on us.

After an anxious time and looking like drowned rats, we were delighted to reach the shelter of the stone wall by Foel Fras, and the sure knowledge of exactly where we were. We were startled to find two chaps in sleeping bags propped up beside the wall, one reading a newspaper and the other eating a pot noodle. One chap, looking surprised at how wet we were, said "Is it raining where you've come from?", to which I replied "Is it raining? It's heaving down on the other side of this wall!"

Having spent the last few hours worrying about finding our way safely off the Carneddau before nightfall, it was a somewhat surreal encounter to meet two chaps who looked like they were out on a Sunday afternoon picnic!! Meeting those two characters certainly lifted our spirits and spurred us on for the last part of our journey to Aber (where Pete was to meet us). We arrived at Aber shortly after nightfall.

Afterwards, I thought if they didn't know it was raining, either they'd been there for hours ... or .. arrived by some means other walking ... Do you believe in angels?

And Finally

Thanks to everyone who's contributed to the newsletter throughout the year. Hope to see you all on the 14th December for the nibbles and quiz night. If not,

HAPPY CHRISTMAS & MERRY NEW YEAR