

## September '05

The first part of the year seemed a hard act to follow, but the Club members have continued to enjoy an excellent range of meets. The sun shone superbly for the long weekend to Cornwall, and there was discussion about reverting to the Club's original name of "Outdoor" Club as there was as much interest in body boarding (hopefully whizzing to shore aboard a wave whilst lying on a short board in a wetsuit for the uninitiated) as the cragging and walking! Both trips to Chamonix were hugely successful, although the later trip was possibly more conservative for adventure. Gear, more precisely stoves have been an issue recently (read on for more details), but gear shop wise rumour is that Canyon did re-open. This year's President's Meet menu is at the back so once you've made the tough decision of what to have, let Dave know ASAP. As it's our Anniversary Year, please feel free to spill the beans on any historic TAT award nominations that might have got away in the past..... or were so good they made need a second outing .....

From the 6<sup>th</sup> October, and subsequent 1<sup>st</sup> Thursdays of the month, there will be a regular indoor climbing "meet" at the Tower. It's informal – just turn up (pay!) and join in. Experience not essential!

Earlier in the year we caught up with former members Mark and Alison Ho and their *three* children. Belated congrats to them, and no wonder they've been a bit out of circulation. Congrats too to Louise and "Leapy" Lee on the recent birth of their son, William Henry.

As always, thanks for the articles and please let me know what you've been up to. I don't get out much.

## Lowe Alpine MM 2005

There are times when the obvious seems a bit too obvious. The clue on the LAMM Website that Mulled wine would be served at the event centre didn't register until my man on the spot told me that this year's event was on Mull. I must be losing it! I don't normally miss a trick like that. The secret location was less of a surprise this year.

Anyway to business. I entered this year with the intention of Ali and myself running around the wilds of the Scottish Highlands for a couple of days whilst Ben got a break from us! But unfortunately these plans unravelled at the last minute. So, I roped Pete in. The lure was a weekend on Mull, all travelling expenses paid by me. Good job he lives in Oban – the port that the Mull ferry sails from.

After a lift with Mark W and his partner (I ran with Mark in 2002 and came 9<sup>th</sup>) we all caught the ferry to arrive on Mull at about 11.30pm. A short spectral train ride later we arrived at Torosay Castle for the campsite and registration. It took until about 1.30am to get registered, get a brew, get the tent up and brave the toilets.

Following a mere 4 hours sleep we were awoken by the obligatory bagpipes. Our start time was at 07:40 so we had a leisurely breakfast from the excellent Wilf's Café, eaten in the queue for the loo. Nice.

The Lowe Alpine normally has some quirky shenanigans with transport and this year was no different. After we collected our maps we boarded a coach for destination unknown. There was much speculation as to our drop off point. We turned South along the A849, eventually being let out of the coach in Glen More at GR 596290: the middle of no-where. The event uses E-punching, so it's a case of collect the control descriptions (the points you have to visit), mark up your map and go, punching the controls in the correct order until you reach the finish. It was at the point of "go", that Pete remembered to tell me that he couldn't run anywhere as his knee was still playing him up. "Ok, so we walk as quick as we can" was my reply, but I really wanted to try running if the conditions proved possible.

The course on day 1 took us in a big loop to the South around Loch Uisg, a feature that the planners had called the Donut, to arrive about 3 miles up the road from our start point at the North end of Loch Sguabain. The terrain was particularly rough and we didn't run anywhere, but most teams were in the same boat because the mist was down. The route took us to eleven check points over 25.2 km and up 1030m of ascent. We achieved this in 8:39 to put us in 67<sup>th</sup> place out of 172 starters.

Pete was knackered and had 40 winks whilst I sorted out the meal. Later we went for a stroll to loosen up. It was a very clear evening after all the clag. Apparently it thundered in the night, but neither Pete nor I stirred from our slumber until the bagpiper regaled us again with his own brand of dawn chorus.

Day 2 was a mass start for us and we were in the first batch of starters. Pete's knee was playing up so we knew that we were unlikely to move very fast. The clag was low again and as we ground our way up Sgulan Beag many elite runners streamed past us. This can be somewhat dispiriting!

However, we made good progress even up the most memorable climb of the event- the East ridge of Dun da Ghaoithe which rises steeply for 500m from the stream that runs into the River Forsa. The only navigational error we made occurred when the clag melted away at about 4km from the finish line. I got a bit blasé about being able to see and stopped navigating properly. This resulted in traversing the top of a waterfall and missing our fourth checkpoint. That little error cost us about half an hour, and who knows how many places?

The advantage of going on the hill with either of my two brothers who are likely to do so, is that you know you are going to be in for treat with flora and fauna. This weekend was no exception with Pete forgetting about aching joints to point out rare plants with unlikely sounding names in Latin and telling me about the rare insects that we were likely to encounter. It is at times like these that I realise how little I know, or maybe just display how gullible I can be. They all look like moths to me.

Day 2 took us 7:11 (a total of 15:50 for the whole race). The course was 19km long with 1110m of ascent and we finished 65<sup>th</sup> on the day. Our overall position was 62<sup>nd</sup>. Not bad as we didn't run a step.

Mark

### *Ted's lack of fire power*

It was supposed to be a leisurely backpacking trip, up to the Lakes on a sunny Sunday, pub lunch and a pint in Keswick before heading down Borrowdale to Seathwaite. Leaving the car we headed up the path by Taylor Gill Force towards Sty Head. Carol who hadn't backpacked for a few years felt the strain as we negotiated the "scrambly" bit by the force, but soon Sty Head was reached and then the steep ascent to Sprinkling Tarn where we camped.

As night fell it was time for a brew, out came the trusty petrol stove, a match was applied, but not a flicker, not a spark, not a flame, nothing, pumped it up even more, no use, like a damp squib on bonfire night it was totally defunct. (And before you ask...yes, it was full of fuel and had been tested the day before). Nothing for it but back to basics, decanted a tin of tuna fish in to a plastic bag, stuffed a hankie into the tin as a wick, petrol from the stove and a match...whoosh, the flame lit up nearby Great End, Great Gable and Glaramara and was probably seen from the Isle of Man. But the kettle, now balanced precariously on four tent pegs soon provided hot water for soup.

The pattern was repeated for breakfast, reheated Swiss "Rosti" and coffee and very blackened cooking pans. Fortunately dear reader my name isn't Potts so it is not a case of Potts calling the saucepans black.

Spent the day on the climber's traverse of Great Gable, joining the throngs at the top (Bank Holiday Monday) and continued to Kirkfell. We descended into Wasdale hoping to find an answer to the cooking problem in the shop. I bought a solid fuel cooker for a fiver (like the army issue Hex Cooker). Excellent dinner at the pub (rack of lamb) and an smashing pint or two before heading back up to Sty Head, using the old pony track route, not the direct ascent across the shoulder of Great Gable.

Supper drinks made using the new solid fuel cooker, OK but used quite a lot of fuel. Breakfast cooked using the remainder of the petrol and the new cooker, packed up the tent and kit and headed over to Esk Pike, Bowfell and returned over Glaramara and a steep descent back to the café and car at Seathwaite. A fine couple of days with good weather.

PS A trip to Jackson's of Old Arley and parting of £13 provided a new burner tube and the stove works again.

## Andy and Ackie's "What If?" Adventure

Ackie, myself (Andy C) and Mark (Hi) set off in the early hours of Saturday morning (18th June) for Luton airport, kindly driven by Mark's wife. This was my first trip to the Alps and so I was excited but quietly nervous at what lay ahead. At the Airport we met Thane, (Mark's mate from London) Ian and Amanda M from the Wall in Leicester and Amanda's friend whose name escapes me. Eight of us in all.

We arrived in Chamonix at around 12.15pm. Ackie and I were dropped off at the Train Station. The plan was to buy some gas for our stove and catch the funicular at 1pm to the Mer de Glace. This is where **What If (No.1)** was encountered....What if the shops are closed when we get there, was not a scenario we had thought about. We had to hang around till 2.30 pm for the shops to re-open after a rather long lunch break before we could buy gas and before we could catch the train at 3pm, 2 hours behind schedule.

Arriving at Montnvers train station at around 3.45 pm I caught my first sight of the Glacier we were about to traverse. Having never set foot on a glacier before or, come to think of it, having never even used crampons before I was a little nervous. Still, we had learned a lot from Mark who had spent a considerable amount of time teaching us roping up techniques and crevasse rescue so we were as equipped as we were ever going to be.

The next challenge to face us was to descend the ladders on to the glacier. As I explained to Ackie, I don't do ladders. Thinking about the implications of our second **What If**...What if I didn't go down the ladders, the weekend would be over already so I took a deep breath and started to climb down. These ladders weren't so bad after all.

Walking along the glacier was fantastic. The size of it cannot be described. After about 2 and half hours of trudging across the glacier and the moraines we decided to find a nice big rock to camp behind for the night. As we were bivvying, within ten minutes of choosing a location we had a camp. Up with the Poncho and out with the bivi bags and hey presto, we have a camp. Supper was next so out came the stove and ...nothing. Don't know why it wouldn't light. **What If (No.3)**, what if Ackie hadn't brought a *spare* stove - we would have been very hungry.

Lying there in awe of the mountains was quite amazing. In the silence every now and then there would be a large boom as a rock fell somewhere.

Next morning after a brew and breakfast the plan was to head for our original target of a cave near to the Couvercle Hut. We started packing away and Ackie realised his Thermarest had been punctured. **What If (No.4)** he had taken a roll mat instead? Crossing the moraines, Ackie said that that there were some more ladders round the corner. Ok I thought. Can't be worse than yesterday. Oh yes they can. I counted the rungs on the first and it was at least 60ft high. After watching several American women descend I took a deep breath and started up. Ackie said all he could hear was step, step, step clink clink as I unclipped and clipped every few steps. By the time we got to the top of the ladders it was 11.30am and about 30 degrees. We decided we were not in a rush and pitched the Poncho for a couple of hours to take in the views.

Reaching the Couvercle hut later that afternoon we had another **What If (No.5)**. What If someone was in our cave? Damn, they were. Nowhere to sleep! Eventually we found another great Bivi site and set up camp. Ackie was not looking forward to a night with a flat Thermarest when he had a moment of inspiration. **What If (No.6)** someone has left a roll mat under that rock. I couldn't believe it, there under a rock were 3 roll mats and an old set of crampons. Laying them all down on the floor was like lying on a mattress.

Next day we decided to check out a high mountain path which we were told followed the path of the glacier but at high level, ending up opposite to the train station at Montnvers. It was a long hot day, again in the thirties. What a fantastic path. Up and down ladders, crossing beneath ice falls and through waterfalls. It got to about 4 pm and we decided to find a bivi site. We sat for a minute and there was silence. No running water. We hadn't bargained on a **What If (No.7)** there was no water. The decision was made for us. We had to continue to the train. We were not sure what time the last train was but we knew it would be close. Zipping down ladders like there was no tomorrow, we were

now exhausted. On with the Crampons, and across the glacier quite quickly. We got to the bottom of the final set of ladders off the glacier to be overtaken by a Frenchman who was running.

**What If (No.8)** we miss the train I thought. We were totally exhausted and these ladders were the final straw. We almost crawled up with lungs bursting by now and as we walked up the path the final train was just leaving. It was a relief to just unload the packs for a few minutes while we decided what to do. Ackie found a half full discarded water bottle and downed what was left.

**What If (No.9)** there was no water anywhere? We would have a very unpleasant 3 – 4 hour walk into Chamonix or a very unpleasant night in the open. Neither choice seemed appealing. Just then we turned a corner near to a shop at the train station and there was a tap. After drinking what seemed like gallons of water and filling up every container that we had, we started down the track through the woods. The first flat section we came across became our bed for the night. Ackie lit a fire to keep the endless flies away and we ate a hearty meal washed down with plenty of tea.

Next morning we broke camp quite early and descended into Chamonix. Ackie said **What If (No.10)** we could get a shower. 4 days in the same clothes and we were probably beginning to pong a little. We went to a gite that Ackie knew from a previous visit called The Vagabond. The nice chap there let us have a shower and store our kit for the princely sum of 3 Euros each, which we thought was a bargain.

We later met with Mark and the others who had had a bit of an adventure.....but that's another story. A cracking weekend that I can recommend to anyone. Andy

## *July in Chamonix*

With a view from the back garden of the huge ground floor apartment looking straight up the Bossons glacier, the Aiguille du Midi to the left and Mont Blanc to the right, we had an ideal base for the two weeks. We had an almost ever changing group of club members, plus another couple camping near the town centre. Logistically, we made good use of local footpaths, buses, trains, cable cars, whilst some braved bikes and occasionally we even moved our own vehicles. Exploration wise, the terrace paths on both sides of the valley, particularly those with ladder sections, proved very popular outings. There were trips to the scenic glaciers and lakes, viewpoints and refuges, supermarkets and bars. Harry P and Ed had the bit between their (own!) teeth. If it hadn't been for the family Ed's sudden and unexpected return home ..... Ed too has his own Cham **What If.**

## *The Wolves of Gevaudan*

A story of adventure in the Ardeche. The news that the Dolomites trip was off as a bitter blow. A lack of cheap air fares to Italy was the reason. Four club members got their heads together on Thursday night and several ideas were mooted. How about somewhere in France? Brittany or the Ardeche? Paul was nominated to search the web for a suitable venue and flights. The outcome was a cheap return to Lyon.

**Sunday May 29th** Brian G, Paul J, Dave P and John T boarded the Easyjet flight from Stanstead to Lyon-Saint-Exupery, and one and a half hours later collected the hire car. The VW Passat 2.5 Diesel soon gobbled up the miles as Paul motored down the Autoroute, ably assisted by John navigating. Brian chipped in his advice about sorting out the aircon as the temperature was 30 C outside. A brief stop for provisions was made at Le Puy en Velay, and soon after we arrived at our destination. In St.Etienne-de-Lugdunum we were soon enjoying the hospitality of our well equipped gite, with dishwasher. A quick recce revealed one hotel, (where a much needed cold lager was consumed), but no food available. So we retired to the gite for a scratch supper of baguette and cheese.

**Monday May 30th** It was raining when we got up, but by the time we'd driven to Langogne, it had all but stopped. A look around the town included a visit to the tourist information office for a weekly weather report. No more rain! A serious shopping trip to La Supermarche ensued, followed by a return to the gite for ham and cheese filled baguettes. The afternoon was spent quietly ambling in the Le Pins hills south of the village, where swathes of yellow broom were in abundance. The walk along the ridge gave us good views of wooded hills and to the south the Mountains of Le Tanarge, our objective for Tuesday. We returned to the gite via the hamlet of Gazelle and a road walk. In view of

the sparse meal on Sunday evening we decided to try our luck with the restaurants of Langogne. They were all shut! So, we ended up in the Grand Hotel, where we pushed the boat out with a five course meal, several bottles of wine, coffee and a brandy to finish.

**Tuesday May 31st** Following breakfast we piled into the car and headed East along the D19 towards the Col de la Croix de Bouzon where we parked at the ski station of the same name. We set off up the track through the trees until they gave way to scrub and boulders. At the highest point of Le Tanarge (1511m), we met a party of children and their instructor, who took an interest in us Brits. Descent was made to the South side of the summit towards a track on the tree line. Following the track we found suitable boulders for our lunch stop and another consultation of the map. The route took us back to the ski centre through the very welcome shade of the forest. We decided to take the Tanarge scenic route back to Aubenus. Brian enjoyed this spectacular rally driver's dream of climbing hairpin bends and exciting winding tarmac through gorges. The rest of us held onto lunch and enjoyed the stunning views. We struggled to park in Aubenus so we didn't linger. Following a stop for provisions we returned along the same route getting the stunning views in descent this time.

**Wednesday June 1st** Today was to be a Robert Louis Stevenson commemorative walk in the Cevennes, with Mont Lozere the main objective. With Paul driving this time we headed South for Le Bleymard. Once again we travelled through exceptional scenery, passing by the Chateau de Champ. We parked at the nearby ski station and followed in Stevenson's footsteps to the summit via GR70 path. Stevenson travelled with his donkey, Modestine, we just had our lunch. We ate this at the cairn on Sommet de Finiels, then we descended to the car along the ridge of Sal des Laubies. On the return journey we stopped at Lake Villefort to admire the view.

**Thursday June 2nd** The Ardeche Gorge. This was one of the highlights of the week. The gorge is reputed to be one of the most spectacular in France. The journey was once more through spectacular scenery, (apologies for the repetition but you have to see it for yourself). We travelled over the Col de Meyrand (1370m) to Vallon Pont-d'arc, a small town at the top end of the gorge. We set off walking downstream and the gorge opened up with crags towering up to 350m adding to the splendour. At water level we met a team of British canoeists who were having the time of their lives. New vistas unfolded around every bend, the water having carved the caves, grottoes and pinnacles over aeons. Eventually we came to a point where the path crossed the torrent, and discretion being the better part of valour we returned the way we had come. This gave us time for paddling and for one member to go skinny dipping. We drove to the Pont d'Arc, a limestone arch spanning the river, and then onto the Belvedere du Serre de Tourre which stands proud over the Ardeche. Both of these offered excellent photo opportunities.

In the village of Joannas we found a Chateau of grand appearance to eat out that evening. On entering we were shown to a table in the Grand Hall, where the setting did justice to the excellent meal, the graceful high curved wooden beams overhead and delicious food continued the grand tone of our day. After the meal, mein host showed us around the parts of the castle that were in the final stages of restoration, very worth seeing. The journey back to our gite in the dusk was the perfect end to a perfect day.

**Friday June 3rd** The Tarn Gorge. On the western side of the Lozere another spectacle of grandeur was waiting to be explored. Another scenic drive was topped by the last few miles from Ste. Enimie along the Tarn Gorge to La Malene. It was gob smacking. To quote Paul it was "I've never had my gob smacked so much". I could not agree more! The drops from the road were tremendous, and all I could see from my side of the car was the huge drop. I remarked to Paul that he hadn't better get any closer to the edge! Parking in Malene we set off following the high track up the gorge. Even though the track was high, crags still towered above us which made for interesting photography. It was a very hot day and we balked at the prospect of an ascent of the gorge's side wall, choosing instead to retrace our steps. An ice-cream redressed the heat balance and we went for a drive up the "Difficile" road to the Caussee Mejan. We took a subterranean funicular railway to a cave with a cavern so large that it would easily fit Notre Dame Cathedral into it. The skilful lighting made the best of the 400 or so calcite deposits which ranged from stalagmites, to curtains and even cactus and a turkey shaped formation. At 200m deep it is an experience worth seeking if you're in the area.

**Saturday June 4th** Le Monastier-sur-Gazelle, where the village's stone memorial commemorates the start of RL Stevenson's epic walk through the Cevennes, accompanied by his donkey. We followed the start of his route, the Chemin de Stevenson or GR70, through scenic woodland, pastures and hamlets. After a few miles we turned to retrace our steps. I'd love to return to complete the full walk to

St-Jean-du-Gard. To round off the holiday on our last evening together, we cooked ourselves a slap up meal accompanied by a selection of local wines and cheeses. I would highly recommend this area of France if you're looking for something out of the ordinary. I'm sure you'll find the wild and untamed terrain quite captivating as we did.

As for the Wolves – historically the densely forested region of Gevaudan to the west of Margeride was home to many wild animals, including wolves. One particularly vicious wolf, the Beast of Gevaudan was eventually shot by a local Count. Sadly wolves became extinct in the area but they are currently being reintroduced.

John T