

Leeds Mountaineering Club



Nov 2007

Hi All

Well its been wet and windy for most of the year... Bummer! But from what I've been hearing and seeing folks have been getting out and about. So heres the summer review in glorious Mountaineer Vision...

Notices From Da Management

Given that we've just had a committee meeting we thought it might be a good idea to draw your attention to the following

- New folk and BMC Liability Cover - Just a reminder that folk need to be a prospective member (i.e. have filed in a application form and paid the prospective members fee) before they attend any official club meets (this includes climbing meets down the wall or at a crag on wednesdays) or you're not covered by the BMC 3rd party liability.
- 2008 Meet Leaders - These are the people who make it happen so, if you've been with the club a while, why not start thinking about leading a meet? Responsibilities include: committing to a weekend, being at the Palace the two tuesdays before, linking up folks who can share lifts, welcoming folk & caring for the social side of things, key logistics and organising a meet report. Interested? If so, contact Ken on..... or just catch him at the AGM when he'll be keenly signing people up (bring your diaries!!). I'd like to see a big mix of folk from right across the club so get keen!
- Meet Leaders - Just a reminder that any cheques needs to be made out to the club, either Leeds Mountaineering Club or LMC. If you are handed a cheque that has been made payable to yourself, then please bank it and re-pay the club from your account. Also can you ensure that all cheques are no older than 6 months when handing to the committee.
- 2008 Membership Fees - Officially due from the 1st Jan but you can pay anytime between now and the AGM. **Can everyone who's keen to be a member for 2008 please make sure you're paid up before or at the AGM please** so we can get the list and payment straight off to the BMC (so we can all get our one free copy of Summit! ;) Membership is staying at £14 if you're a full member, £10 if you're a provisional (get yourself on some meets!! ;). Drop me a line if you're not sure which you are.
NB: If you joined in the last 3 months of 2007 then that

covers you for 2008.

Aussie James (Membership sec):

j.heywood@bigpond.com or 0113 274 0456

- Hut Fees - We've had a few folks trying to pay less for their hut nights, they're £15 not £14 as clearly stated on the front of the meets card.

Announcements

Calling all new members!

Did you know we run weekend meets at various huts in the Lakes, North Wales and Scotland? No!!? Well just have to say you're missing out on one of the best features of the club (*no Ken its not your animal magnetism! Ed.*). Take a look on the back of your meets card and you'll find a whole raft of places to go. Fancy some rustic charm? Well head on down to Cae Amos, the clubs hut. Fancy something more up market? Not a problem head to one of the FRCC huts. Heres some challenges for the winter meets; Walk a horse-shoe route without getting lost or climb that VDiff in big boots!

Annual General Meeting

The AGM is on for the 29th Jan. at the Victoria on Great George Street. Come along and have your say on where the club should be going.

Meet Leaders

We have created a Meet Leaders Checklist to help with the organising of a meet. Now its as simple as filling in a tax return ;-). We'll be putting a copy on the website, and hopefully putting one in your grubby mitt if you're a meet leader.

Annual Dinner

Come along to the Annual Dinner on the 23rd Feb., for a weekend of food, beer, partying, slideshows, awards and just possibly some mountaineering. Categories for the awards are:

- Mountaineer of the Year
- Most Improved
- Fall of the Year

If you think someone deserves a special mention drop a member of the committee a line and we'll have a vote on it.

Patterdale Meet Report

[This should have been in the last newsletter, think is disappeared in my bottomless inbox. Ed.]

**12/13th January George Starkey Stadium. Patterdale
Brazilian Wax v Coffee Beans All Stars
Kick off: 15:00**

Teams

- Findleca - Ken Findlay (Captain)
- Latimaldo - Pete Latimer
- Paildo - Paul Spinks
- Pulfosa - John Pulford
- Houfinho - Lesley Houfe
- Lildo - Les Holbert
- Clito - Dave Clark
- Forrestisco - John Forrester
- De Mellson - Norbert DeMello
- Helisco - Helen Dickens
- Guilfoylson - Simon Guilfoyle
- Vallanca - Simon Vallance
- Gilildo - Giles Smith
- Parsaldo - Will Parsons
- Eveca - Alun Evans
- Shaca - Genvieve Shaw
- Debbicos - Debbie Hargraves
- Vernellardo - Rachel Vernelle
- Fieldinho - Suzanne Fielding
- Beecraldo - Mike Beecroft
- Davildo - Dave Hughes
- Cinho - Rob Cundy
- Sao Santos - Sally Fleming
- Hudsiano - Paul Hudson

Match Report

It had been raining all Friday and the forecast said more rain on the way. A near capacity crowd came to watch this game between the two most colourful sides in the division. The Coffee Bean All Stars pressed early on with Gilildo, Vallanca, Cinho and Parsaldo making runs down the flanks. Disaster struck in the 30th minute when Vallanca suffered a broken collarbone in a crunching tackle at the Ullswater Bank end by Houfinho (yellow card). The pace picked up and both sides could have gone ahead. Both Findleca and De Mellson had shots blocked as they raced over Beda Fell. Clito, Lildo, Forrestisco, Helisco and Paildo all played well in defence and got the better of Gowbarrow Fell. The Brazilian Wax team dominated the latter part of the first half with Eveca, Shaca, Pulfosa, Debbicos, Latimaldo, Vernellardo, Fieldinho, Beecraldo and Davildo put together some

great passing through the legs of Bowdale Haws, and exploiting the gaps behind Angle Tarn and Brock Crag. Latimaldo had a thunderous shot turned over the bar by Place Fell.

The second half started off slowly with both side finding it difficult to control the ball on the wet surface. Vallanca was substituted and Sao Santos came on for her first match of the season but was not match fit. The conditions worsened as both sides went for the victory that would take either side to the top of the Nescafe league.

Lildo, Helisco and Clito combined to turn Sheffield Pike and then Raise the ball over Hellvellyn, but just went wide. Hudsi-ano, Houfinho and Latimaldo began to spread the ball about and went into Deepdale but the ball spun off St Sunday Crag. Again the Coffee Bean all Stars were finding it difficult to control the ball in these windy conditions and Findleca, De Mellson and Parsaldo could not penetrate the defence around Place Fell.

Arnison Crag was given a torrid time, and misplaced tackles saw Debbicos, Davildo, Eveca, Pulfosa, Vernellardo, Shaca, Beecraldo and Fieldinho all going close.

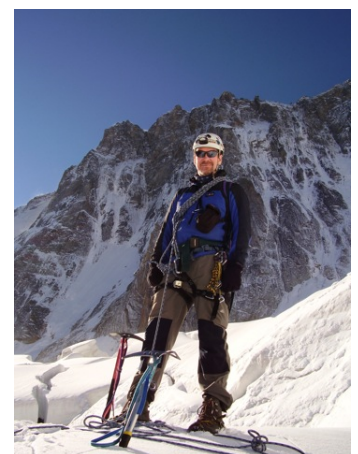
Deep into injury time (Sorry Simon), both Gilildo and Forrestisco both came close to getting the winner only for the Goalkeeper Grisedale to palm it round the right hand post. All in all a tight game and a draw was a fair result, but the conditions did make it hard for both sides to express themselves.

The only injury worry for the Coffee Bean all Stars is that Vallanca will be out for at least 8 weeks with a fractured collarbone and will miss the next couple of games against K Shoes Copa Boys Club and the Little Langdale Gringos. But hopefully Sao Santos will be match fit for both of those important league games.

Reporter
Reginald Boozy Get

Chamonix Meet

I think I'm getting a bit blasé with all this jetting off on climbing trips; this time we only just made the check-in at Liverpool and we were rushed through to the front of the queues. It got us straight onto the plane without waiting, but it didn't make us popular with our fellow travellers... Still, we made it from Leeds to Chamonix in 7 hours straight, not much longer than the drive to Fort William.



We set off the next day up to the Mer de Glace. Nick had to acclimatise, so we were headed for a 3,500m peak called Aiguille l'Emourent. This is reached from the Leschaux Hut, above the eponymous glacier, with a fine view of the Hironnelles and Grand Jorasse. The descent to the glacier, and climb to the hut, involved far too many ladders for my liking (I hate ladders, they're just not natural.) The hut however, was

lovely. As was its *gardienne*, Delphine, described as “the Uma Thurman of the French Alpine Club”. There was definitely a feminine touch in evidence, with dried flowers, pink duvets and even a teddy bear on my bunk.

But Delphine is more than a pretty face, when we mentioned our plans she warned us off, as the couloir we needed to follow was incomplete. So we set off early the next day up the Mallet Glacier, to the Periadès instead. The weather wasn't too promising at first, but as the sun came up the mist lifted and the Grand Jorasse loomed impressively over us. A helicopter buzzed in as the cloud lifted, and as we watched, hovered over the Walker Spur and rescued some poor soul from a ledge halfway up. I hope they were able to enjoy the view as they swung beneath the copter heading back down the glacier.

We walked all the way back to the Monteverd Station, caught the train back to Cham, and then immediately went up to the Aiguille du Midi and over to the Cosmiques Hut. The guardian there had warned us off, as high winds were forecast, but we thought a night up there wouldn't be wasted anyway.

As it turned out, Nick suffered from the altitude and a heavy cold during the night, so we didn't set off early the next day. Just as well, as the winds were reaching 80 Km/hr at 4000 metres! Several of the earlier parties had already returned, frozen and battered. So we set off for a gentle walk across the Valle Blanche, to the Torino Hut in Italy. We had superb views and some great photos all the way, so despite the icy wind and biting spindrift we had a very pleasant morning.



News from other climbers at the hut wasn't good; two had attempted the Dent du Geant but were turned back by the cold after the first pitch. Everyone else was staying low and looking for sheltered routes.

We woke early the next day hoping that things had improved, but if anything the wind was even worse. We waited until daylight but it was still blowing a hoolie, so we went for another walk, back across the Vallee to the Midi. After a good deal of thought, we decided to abandon any plans for higher routes and go back down to Cham for a cooked breakfast.

We decided to head off to the Aiguille Rouge for some rock climbing, so we walked up to the Lac Blanc Hut that afternoon, and found time for a bit of bouldering and scrambling before dinner. The hut was a cut above the usual – it even

had a shower, which we definitely needed by that stage. And the food wasn't your usual hut slop – wild boar casserole



followed by pears in a bitter chocolate sauce, anyone?

In the morning we headed for the most obvious feature, the ridge above Lac Blanc leading up to a peak called The Belvedere. This gave us a cracking morning of scrambling and easy climbing, with stunning views across to the Mont Blanc range. Remarkably, we had the mountain to ourselves the whole day. Another fine meal at the hut rounded off an excellent day.

An early start the next morning made sure we reached L'Index before the first chairlift started up. We were delayed slightly by two marmots, which were grazing, foraging or whatever they do, blithely ignoring us as we watched from the track; so we made it to the bottom of the route just as the first climbers were hopping off the chairlift. However the first pitch held us up, it's not technically difficult but it is horrendously polished. The route improves after that, and we enjoyed 4 more pitches before topping out for an early lunch. Abbing off with two 60m ropes saved a lot of faffing about, and we were back down in Cham for a shower, beers and some gear shopping.

We treated ourselves to a posh meal that evening, at a French/Japanese fusion restaurant called ... “Le Munchie”. Never mind the name, this place is superb – quality French ingredients with an unusual Eastern twist (no “Thai fishcakes” here); cooked and presented perfectly. I recommend it for anyone tired of the tartiflette-and-pizza offerings of the usual Chamonix eateries.

Another excellent week, despite being limited by the weather, confirming Chamonix as the best place for a “short and sweet” Alpine trip!

Capt. Keef

Californian Road Trip

After what seemed like a lifetime of anticipation and planning, which included crack climbing practice wherever possible, loading up on finger tape and the begging, borrowing and stealing (but only off my dad!) of numerous cams, we were finally off to America. Six of us; Dave, Mike, Andy, Matt, Corky and me set off from Manchester to LA to go to climbing in Yosemite National Park for three weeks – something we did, but which developed into a full-blown Californian Road Trip.

We arrived in LA after a problem-ridden journey featuring delayed flights, missed connections and lost bags. This set us back slightly, so we arrived in Yosemite after dark, which meant we missed the stunning views on the approach, but also meant that when we woke up next morning we had the full impact of said stunning views all around us, and they were breath-taking. We camped for five nights in Yosemite Valley, where we encountered the notorious bear boxes. In Yosemite National Park everything with a scent, such as food, stoves and toiletries, has to be stored in a secure box rather than the tent or car – more hassle than it sounds. I personally didn't see any bears around the camp, but we heard a few in the night...maybe we should have put Matt's climbing boots in the bear box too...?

The climbing then! There was so much to choose from, the entire valley is full of



alluring granite faces and crack lines. Our first day though consisted of single-pitch cragging at Swan Slabs to help us get used to the rock and the American grading system. We then split into pairs for the remainder of the time and mainly did shortish multi-pitch routes like The Grack (5.6) and After Six (5.7). Dave and I did a route on El Capitan called Little John Right (5.8) which felt quite odd – El Cap is a truly awe-inspiring piece of rock that I'd imagined was impossible for all but aid climbers and the extremely hardcore – I almost felt like I should tiptoe up in case I got found out! In actual fact it felt very hard and I did end up using an enormous Camalot 6 as a point of aid. Mike and Andy decided to have an epic adventure and climb a route on Half Dome that required an evening walk-in and bivvy to enable an early enough start. Snake Dike (5.7R) “follows a phenomenal natural passage on a grand monolith” in 8 often run-out pitches plus endless 3rd class

scrambling to the summit. A rest day beckoned...

We then decided to move on to another part of the national park, Tuolumne Meadows (pronounced Twa-lo-may, we think!) for another five nights to experience the land of granite domes and featureless slabs. Again, we used the first day to acclimatise, as Tuolumne lies at approximately 9,000 feet, and get used to the style of climbing, which differed from that in the Valley. We set up top ropes on Pothole and Western Front domes and practiced our friction-climbing ready for the ensuing days of multi-pitching and the intended 'Big Day'.

Our Big Day started at 5:30am and for me and Dave, entailed an aesthetic 12-pitch 5.9 on Fairview Dome called Regular Route, a route that, according to 50 Best Rock Climbs in North America, all ambitious climbers dream of doing. It took 8 hours from the bottom to the dome's summit, where we were rewarded with fantastic views over the meadows and beyond. For Andy and Mike, another big walk-in led to Cathedral Peak (5.6), a classic of the region with stunning positions, which unfortunately are usually shared with several other parties. Matt and Corky took on Zee Tree (5.7) on Pywiack Dome, a 7-pitch face climb with unusually good bolted protection at the crux.





Unfortunately, this was Corky's last climb, as he only had two weeks holiday, so drove back to LA the next morning.

So then there were five. We decided to move again to a place we didn't know much about but had heard was home to some pretty good climbing – Mammoth Lakes. We set up camp, bought a guide and cheap bouldering mat and we were set. We went sports climbing in Clark Canyon and did some superb routes, my personal favourites being Driller Instinct (5.10d) and – only partly for the excellent name – Ugly, Fat and Mean, Come To Mammoth, Be A Queen (5.7). We all got personal bests bolt-clipping at Horseshoe Piles a few days later, with DDD (5.11a), a devious off-balance corner.

Interspersed with the climbing, we had semi-rest days at the Deadman and Catacomb boulders. There was no giant killing, but we had lots of fun and there was mucho gurning! We continued the road-trip on a bouldering theme and stayed a day in

Bishop, where it was, to coin Andy's phrase, 'H-O-T!' Consequently we waited till evening and then paid a visit to the infamous Buttermilks, home to many ridiculously hard problems. Unfortunately we have no photographic evidence, as all hands were needed for spotting, but trust us, we flashed them all. Honest...

Despite all this climbing, we got to see a lot of incredible sights and do some tourist-y things on the days we moved camps. Dave and I watched a beautiful sunset in Yosemite Valley from Glacier Point and we all saw the Giant Sequoia trees in Mariposa Grove, one of which even has a tunnel through its trunk! We visited Mono Lake with its unique protruding salt tufas and the Devil's Postpile in Mammoth, a row of perfectly hexagonal basalt columns, rather like a giant church organ.

Finally, we tripped back to LA via Death Valley, which was a surreal experience – the land is extremely barren and hostile, and it brings a whole new meaning to H-O-T! The temperature reached



54°C, so I thought I was hallucinating when we saw a couple running, yes running, along the road! We visited the small museum and restaurant before heading back to LA, where we had a day chilling on the beach and a night on the town.

After packing and one final night out, all that remained was to fly back, hope our luggage made it too and get over the jetlag and the fact that we'd left the sun a long, long way behind us!

Overall, a jam-packed Californian road-trip – thoroughly enjoyed and even more thoroughly recommended!



Holly

A little bit of Mountain Biking.

(The 2007 Grand-Raid Crystalp)

A few years back, some drugged up yanks thought it would be a great idea to throw themselves headlong down large hills sat astride an old bicycle, and so was born "mountain biking". Well, the world is now full of mountain bikes, and they're good for riding over curbs, or down to the shops on. Some people even ride them away from tarmac, and might get a bit muddy in the process.

Once in a while, they get ridden in mountains....

I'd heard about the "Grand-Raid Crystalp" a number of years ago through magazine articles. It sounded like a true adventure. The Grand-raid is a one day mountain bike race, but rather than being round a wet field in Surrey for a couple of hours, it takes place in most of the southern Rhone valley in the Valaise Alps in Switzerland. It starts in the ski village of Verbier, and weaves its way down, around, but mostly up the various alpine valleys to the east until it hits the finish line in Grimentz - 121KM (about 80 miles) down the trail. The route starts and finishes at about 1500M above sea level, but in between there are four serious mountain passes, the highest "Pas de Lona" clocking in at 2787M above sea level. This is about 5000M of climbing along the course.



Back in the winter of 2004 some friends and I were planning what mountain bike events we'd like to do during 2005. The Polaris challenge was booked in, a couple of team 24 hour races and longer "marathon" rides were discussed, then I threw out the casual quip "anybody up for doing the GRC?". Before I had too much chance to think about, Dave had booked his place, and I my hand was forced. I was going to Switzerland!

We went, we saw, we rode... half of the event. The weather had closed in, and there was low-cloud on the Pas de Lona, so no rescue choppers could get up there if anything went wrong. Rightly, the organisers decided that they shouldn't let even more tired, lycra-clad cyclists up on to a snowy mountain pass in those conditions. All that training, all those miles on the racing bike to get fit enough - all in vain. No finishers medal for either of us!

Cut to 2007. Will, astride his pride & joy, 6:30 AM on Verbier high street. It's cloudy, so not too cold. The starters hooter sounds, and the thousands of cyclists start to creep their way up the opening climb to Croix de coeur. To open the course with a 700 meter climb is an interesting warm up, but given the nature of the event, you better get used to it. Even though "what goes up must come down", on the GRC the going down usually takes a fraction of the time that going up does. As I topped out the first pass, the cloud was breaking up, and the sun was starting to fall on the hills across the valley to the North - this was starting to feel like being in the mountains!

I was packed as is my way, cautiously for a big day out in the mountains. Gore-tex, leggings, hat & gloves crammed in with the bike tools, and two spare inner tubes. Some people were riding with little more than a pertex shoved into a back pocket, which would work, but I don't like getting wet, so err on the heavy side.

At regular intervals along the route there are feed stations - staffed by volunteers, and stocked up with fruit (banana, Oranges, Kiwi, grapes), energy bars & flap jack, bread, cheese, water, energy drinks, or vegetable stock to drink (this is a great way to replenish some of the salt you've been sweating out). The volunteers manning the feed stations are only part of the story. The whole community is hanging out of windows and over front gates, cheering the racers on tirelessly through the day. It's a real morale booster to have someone cheering you by name, having taken the trouble to read it from your race number plate on the bike.

Being a Swiss event, the timing system was impeccable. Each rider was wearing an electronic chip on their front forks. My phone was switched off during the event, but when I turned it on at the end, I was greeted by a stack of text messages, giving the exact times that I'd passed through each of the timing stations. How cool is that?!

The Pas de Lona is the last climb of the day, an ascent of 1,400 meters from the town of Evolene. I had pictured the final time cut off point as being nearly at the start of this climb, and thought I was in good time to make the 4PM cut off to get past this point. It was with some shock then, that I heard a time marshal at the preceding checkpoint saying to competitors "Well, you can go on if you like, but it's 11KM up the track, and 750 meters of climbing". It was ten past three, I'd been in the saddle for nearly 9 hours, and I had 50 minutes to get to the next checkpoint - if I didn't make that, then it would be another futile visit, and I'd be condemned to attempt to reach the finish line another year.

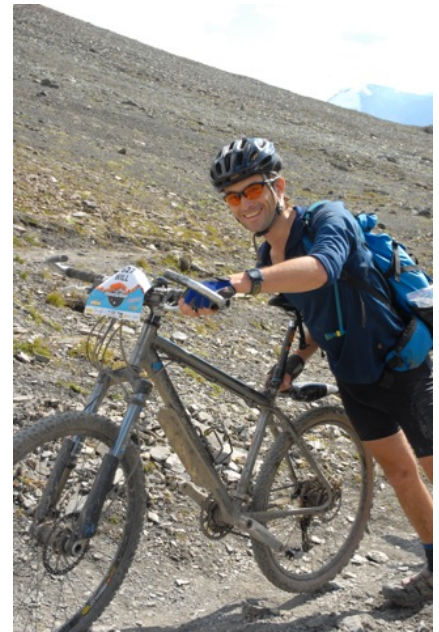
That was the hardest climb I think I've ever done - a killer climb one might say. I made it at exactly 4 o'clock. I found out after the race that one competitor didn't fair so well on that climb. A 32 year old man had a heart attack on the course and died soon af-

terwards. he was captain of the local hockey club in Grimontz and had ridden the GRC before, so we can only presume he was unlucky. Sobering stuff.

Beyond the final time checkpoint lay the trail leading up to the Pas de Lona. This is the notorious section of the race, as it's un-ridably steep, loose and rocky. Pro-racers and everyone else just have to drag and carry their bikes up the track for the best part of an hour. The huge sense of relief on arriving at the top of the climb was soon replaced by near despair as someone pointed UP to the next feed station!! At least it was rideable, and arriving at this feed station we knew it really was down hill all the way to the finish, 15 kilometers down the trail.

By this point I was pretty much spent. All I'd got to do was hang on, and not crash on the way down the hill, and I would have made it through. The track started as a wide, land-rover worthy trail - just about right for tired arms and bleary eyes. The course setter had, however, saved the best for last. The final 3 Km down to the finish line was a feast of technical, rocky singletrack. A friend of mine who rode the short course and finished hours earlier maintains that this was the most fun part of the course. 12 hours in to the ride I wasn't able to muster quite such enthusiasm for jagged rocks and steep drops. I could see the helicopters buzzing around, and knew that the finish must be close. The finish line was quiet by the time I got there (anyone who used to think Will rides quickly, look away now) : 12 hours, 21 minutes and 27 seconds after leaving Verbier. Only nine more of the 350 finishers from my category crossed the line after I arrived, and another 50 did not finish.

So, 2 years after setting out, I'd finally made it to the finish line, tired, but very happy. If you're hankering after a really big day out with lots of mountain biking, then the Grand-Raid comes highly recommended. Let me know if you're planning a trip... you might gain some company! <http://grand-raid.ch>



Will Parsons, October 2007

Alpine Meet 2007

Keith Waddell, Steve Mead, Damian Wilkinson

Steve & Cath Morley

Ken, Norbert & Penny

Steve & I left Leeds on a very rainy Friday evening, with the last-minute realisation that the ferry wasn't at 2:00am as we thought, but 11:45pm. So some speedy driving was called for. Fortunately the rain stopped around Cambridgeshire and we made it to the ferry on time.

France was dry; the roads were long and so boring that we made a diversion into Germany. Still we didn't lose much time and were pulling into Saas Grund by mid-afternoon. We met Damian at the site, set up camp and flaked out, before going for beers & pizza in the evening. It was raining pretty hard, but the forecast was better for Sunday.

We woke to a cloudy morning, but by the time we'd taken the cable car up to Plattjen it was lifting and we set off up the Mittaghorn. We walked to the summit then set off across the ridge to the Egginer in cloud which cleared as we went. We had an enjoyable scramble (graded AD) as far as the Egginerjoch, where we wisely decided not to overdo it and so headed down from there back to Saas Fee.

The next day's forecast was for a fine early morning, but with a front closing in by lunchtime. So we got up early, and caught the first cable car up to the Mittelallalin ski-centre. From there it was a quick snow-plod (PD) up to the Allalinhorn summit at 4026 m; cheating I know but we used it to acclimatise and we were back in the restaurant enjoying apple cake by 11:00am.



Once the weather cleared again we headed up high, this time to the Hosaas Hut to attempt the Lagginhorn and Fletschorn. We spent a good night in the new hut, although it is a bit of an eyesore, being a modern green box. In the morning we walked easily up to the Lagginjoch, and were treated to a fantastic sunrise on the way. We started the South

Ridge in a cold wind, but soon warmed up as we climbed. This route is graded AD, but with a note that fresh snow on it would add another grade to the difficulty. And so it proved!

We made guidebook time over the first section of rocky ridge, mostly scrambling with short sections of easy climbing, until we got above the snowline. There we were drastically slowed down by the soft, unconsolidated snow underfoot. With tricky climbing and a couple of dodgy abseils to manage, it seemed we'd never get off that ridge. We were joined by another British pair, who were finding it equally hard going, and then finally we were on the summit rocks; exhausted, hungry and relieved.



It was a slow but easy descent down soft snow to the Weissmeiss Hutte, which we reached just in time for dinner. A huge bowl of minestrone was placed before us, which we soon polished off; followed by chicken curry (with tinned peaches. Hmm.)

We called off the plan for tackling the Fletschhorn the next day, and Steve headed straight back down the valley. Damian and I went over to the Jegihorn, to follow the via ferrata there. This proved to be quite a hard one, especially the wire bridge over to the main summit, which I unashamedly bottled out of. Damian did it with static slings & normal krabs, which proved a bit nerve-wracking, although the climb on the other side was even worse – artificial holds bolted to a sheer rock face, anyone?! He made it though and we met back up at the summit.



Back down in the valley, we met up with Steve & Cath, who it turned out were on the same campsite but hadn't been told we were there too! The weather was still good, so Damian & I headed over to the Tasch Hutte to traverse Alphubel. This was the earliest start of the trip, with breakfast at the hut served at 3:00am; which seemed a bit unnecessary until we got up onto the glacier and had a superb 360 degree panorama for the sunrise. We were treated to stunning views of

all the Valais Alps and beyond, as the first rays of the sun lit up each peak. Moments like that make it worth all the effort!

It was a straightforward (PD) snow plod to the summit, and we were there by 7:45am. Remarkably there was no wind, and we were able to just sit, have breakfast and admire the views. We headed back down to the Langflue cable station, with the snow already turning soft in the sun and an entertaining crevasse jump near the end.

We had a relaxing weekend back in Saas, with the weather still good, and headed up to the Almageller Hut on Sunday afternoon. This is a very pleasant walk, with the chance to have bratwurst halfway up (which pleased Steve no end.) This hut was our favourite of the trip by a long chalk. Was it the location, the views, the Dri Hornili ridge just 15 minutes away, the apple cake that made us book for a second night? Or perhaps the trio of blonde female *guardiennes*? Who can say? Anyway, we thoroughly recommend a visit to this fine establishment.



High winds in the night kept everybody off the high summits, but we made a traverse of the Dri Hornili (AD) in sunny but blustery conditions, very Scottish I thought. We then tackled a 4-pitch route on the sheltered side, which went at F5c and certainly tested my nerves on the lead. We had a little trouble on the descent, as we couldn't find the abseil points and ended up fixing our own. After that excitement, we went back to the hut for coffee and apple cake.

We did better the next day, polishing off an 8-pitch route (Schmetterling, F5a) and abseil descent in 4 hours and taking a leisurely lunch back at the hut (where we finished off their last apple cake). It was a pleasant walk back down (stopping again for Steve to scoff two bratwurst, this time...)

With an unsettled forecast until the weekend, we didn't make plans to go high again, but instead had a "Messing About" day in Saas Fee; riding toboggans and swinging about in trees in the adventure forest. The zip wire across the gorge was closed though, which was really disappointing and put me in a sulk until I found an ice cream stall.

The next day Damian & I went back up to the Egginer, and bumped into Steve, who was on his way to the Britannia Hut. He was taking both his & Cath's rucksacks, as she was running up instead of taking the cable car. Damina & I took a different route (with a bit of improvisation) on the Egginer to

the summit. The ridge back to the Egginerjoch was fairly challenging, and not at all the 'Facile' it was given in the guide!

Ken, Norbert and Penny arrived, along with a cold front (nothing to do with them, or so they claimed...) Steve and Cath came back down from a speedy and well-timed ascent of the Allalinhorn, via the Holoabgrat. They made it back just as the first clap of thunder sounded!

The forecast improved for later in the week so Steve & I made plans for a multi-day trip up Monte Rosa. Damian had to leave at the weekend, so couldn't join us. Ken & Norbert headed up Almageller way, to tackle the Portjengrat and Son-nighorn.

We set off on Friday from the Klein Matterhorn station across the Briethorn glacier to the bivvy hut below Roccia Nera. This was a cosy well-equipped little place, with packets of spare food kindly left by previous users. We shared it with a trio of friendly Dutch students, and later some Italians, and spent a pleasant evening melting snow and cooking. Unfortunately, the tomato and onion pasta someone had left turned out to be disgusting, and adding pilchards to it didn't help. The next morning, when we had to melt snow in the same pan, we were left with a revolting warmish liquid to which we added apple-flavour Isostar powder in a vain attempt to make it drinkable.



We climbed Pollux via the North-West flank (PD+), with another perfect sunrise on the way. It was windy & icy at the top, requiring some delicate footwork, and we topped out to meet our new Dutch friends, who had come up the West ridge. We all descended the rocky East ridge, which has an awkward slabby step to start with but is easy enough after that. Then we plodded on, up & over Castor (PD) to meet the crowds coming up from Italy.

Over the other side, we came to a problem. Our intended route was south of Lyskamm, over the glacier to Corno Nero. However, we would have to descend hundreds of metres to safely reach the glacier, and the snow was already getting slushy. And with the Quintino Sella hut close at hand, it didn't take much to decide to head there for the night and continue early the next day while things were still frozen.

Once there though, our plans went awry. I called the Margherita Hut to find that they were fully booked for the

next 2 weeks; so we abandoned the plan to go across to Monte Rosa. After much discussion with others there (including our Dutch friends and some English climbers) we decided to go back the way we came & do the Briethorn traverse. So the next morning, we climbed Castor a second time, and descended back to the bivvy we'd left the day before. From there it was an easy but tedious slog (PD) up to Roccia Nera, then we set off across the Briethorn Ridge. We made good progress in lovely conditions, getting over the West and East summits (AD) and descending to the central col by 12 noon. From there we considered our options – a long rock climb to the Central summit, followed by a long descent to an uncomfortable bivvy in the ski station. Or baling out there and having a beer in Zermatt.

The beer won. (Not very hardcore I know, but at least we had a shower to look forward to that night!)

We had a lazy sunny day in the valley, during which Steve read the new Harry Potter novel cover to cover. It rained again the next day, so we caught the cable car up to Kreuzboden and hired 'Mega Mountain Bikes' – heavy sturdy framed machines with quad bike tyres and disk brakes. Great fun bombing down mountain tracks in the mud & rain!

A final visit to the pizzeria that night finished off a fine holiday for me – no epics or big scary routes, just steady climbing in magnificent surroundings.

I recommend Saas to anyone, whether it's your first Alpine trip or your 20th.

Capt. Keef
