

# Cambridge Mountaineering 2011

*Journal of the Cambridge University  
Mountaineering Club*

Edited by Rachel Berkowitz and Steven Andrews

The editors would like to thank all those who have contributed to this year's journal. Herein are a fantastic set of articles and pictures.

Cover photo: Mountaineering in Washington—Panorama from Black Peak. Photo taken by Richard Shaw.

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*Abducting freshers since 1905: CUMC freshers' meet 2010, Whillans' hut, The Roaches. Photo by Steven Andrews*

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*Sunset over the Peak District from the Burbage Valley.  
Photo by Steven Andrews*



*Panorama from Mt Daniel summit, North Cascades,  
Washington state. Photo by Rich Shaw*

*Rachel Berkowitz*  
**Editor's note**

Mad dashes to the nearest crag in the Peak District, overnight drives to the Alps, rainy weekends drinking in the Lakes, indulgent bank holidays in Fontainebleu, and elaborate plans to tackle projects in mountain ranges around the globe comprise many of my fondest memories of living in Cambridge. The CUMC has had a full year, with people cutting their teeth on ice climbing, introductory courses in the Alps, weekly trips to gritstone or limestone, an annual meet in Pembroke, traveling south for bolt-clipping, and epic nights out in Cambridge that few who attended will remember. These folk prove that a top notch mountaineering club can thrive in the flattest part of Britain, and I'm grateful to be a part of such an inspiring group.

As with any university organisation the current faces of the CUMC change quickly, and a lot of people that I still think of as permanent fixtures in the club are now scattered around the world. While I wish we could climb together more often, it's a privilege to have a multi-continent network of like-minded people with whom to meet up when the opportunity arises.

This journal is a collection of the reflections, thoughts, and musings from just a few adventures had among these friends.

Keep on climbing and writing!



*Hanging on - Via Ferrata de Yves Pollet-Villard (French Alps). Photo by Phil Ewels*

*Richard Lines*

## **Garibaldi: more than just a biscuit**

Having just moved to the Canadian province of British Columbia, it seemed fitting to sample some of the alpine offerings that lay close at hand. Several opportunities immediately present themselves. Perhaps the most wild and appealing is the Tantalus range, conveniently situated an hour up the road from Vancouver, just northwest of the climbers' mecca, Squamish. The peaks in the majestic Tantalus range are all highly prized objectives, yet all receive little attention due to the un-bridged Squamish River which blocks the way. Assuming the plucky mountaineer can swim or canoe across the river, he still faces a 14 hour minimum approach to most routes. The majority of climbers and skiers opt for the \$300 return trip by helicopter. But, for the 'funemployed' alpinists keen to cut their teeth on the west coast, the Garibaldi range holds significant promise.

Visible from the trans-Canada highway and Squamish Mainstreet, Mt Garibaldi (2678m) and its neighbour Atwell (2655m) strike an impressive pose as they loom high above the valley. However, much like the perennial British favourite Ben Nevis, the interesting facets lie hidden behind the smooth bulbous face most commonly in view. As seen from the north, Mt Garibaldi is an impressive jumble of hanging glaciers, high crags, tottering seracs and sharp rock spires. On the northeast face, the 'voie normal' outflanks the mountain's natural

*Richard Lines*

defences by means of a relatively smooth system of snow and ice ramps at the amenable grade of AD-. This route was my target for the July public holiday weekend.

The requisite group of enthusiastic alpinists were recruited from the University of British Columbia's 'Varsity Outdoor Club' (VOC). Around 20 members of the VOC were planning to cross the Garibaldi Neve, the large glacier that engulfs vast parts of the Garibaldi provincial park. The summer crossing can be made on foot, snowshoes, or skis. This July, it was expected to require around three days on foot due to the snow level at around 1500m. A small group planned to attempt to summit Garibaldi while the remainder of the party traversed the glacier below.



*The summit ascent team*



*Garibaldi: more than just a biscuit*



*A cold night on the glacier*

Starting early Friday morning at the trail head as far as the old logging roads and a rugged 4x4 would allow, we gingerly started the 12-hour march through the forests and into the subalpine and eventually the alpine. En route we stopped in the Red Heather ‘warming hut’ and sat around a roaring wood fire in the stove, then hiked to the Elfin Lake hut just after lunch. The hut had only just become fully accessible after being buried under 6 meters of snow over the winter. From here we descended steep slopes, crossed rivers and started the final slog up to establish ourselves on the glacier at the foot of Garibaldi

in readiness for the next day's summit attempt.

We pitched camp on the glacier at 1900m and went about the usual business of melting water and preparing ourselves for the next morning. Since we were on a glacier, the water supply was frozen, but especially interesting was the abundance of little black glacier worms. These worms live on the apparently barren glacier by eating bacteria, and cannot survive much above freezing. They also added a welcome dose of protein since fishing them out of our drinking water was a never ending task.

For our breakaway summit group of five, the accommodation was split into one two-man and one three-man tent. Ideal, one would assume. Yet the three man palace was stripped for alpinism and featured no inner tent. One of the three occupants became unconvinced of the home comforts that sleeping on the snow would yield and opted instead to squeeze into my compact mountain two-man. The night passed with fitful bouts of sleep and 0300hrs arrived far too soon.

The morning dawned as glorious as any alpine start. Five groggy mountaineers fumbled to light stoves and pack tents under a brilliant canopy of satellites, planets and suns. A golden dawn struck as we made our way to the base of the climb.

The climb itself was a straightforward snow slope which steepened to a crescendo at the bergschrund, which we passed to start traversing a steep and phenomenally exposed snow slope to gain a lower angled

*Garibaldi: more than just a biscuit*

ridge of snow. The traverse was an airy affair and leading out on the virgin snow, I couldn't help but peer down to the rocky teeth and bottomless gullet of the bergschrund below. When the safety of the moderate snow ridge was obtained, steep rimed and icicled crags loomed and we climbed higher to gain the rocky summit slopes. The team moved efficiently through the obstacles and were soon basking in the glory of the summit.



*A golden sunrise*

*Richard Lines*

Imagine the view afforded there: the deep waters of Howe Sound just in the valley below and the Pacific Ocean beyond. Imagine the majesty of Mt Baker far away in Washington State, USA, and the nearby peaks all cloaked in a pink alpenglow. Well, imagine we did as in our brief ten minutes on the summit, the clouds rolled in and the temperature plummeted as we shivered in between summit hugs. Soon we were descending the same route, and just over the horizon we could make out the ropes of the rest of the Vancouver team heading our way after a somewhat more leisurely start to the day.



*Mt Garibaldi*

For nearly two hours we waited for the other group as we basked in the sun and watched a lone bear forage on the far fringes of the glacier. When they caught up with us, we took lunch and exchanged stories of weak snow bridges, cold nights and bad food. The remainder of the day was spent walking up to the meadows below the apparently unclimbable Table Mountain. On this blue-skied afternoon, I was lured into imagining a lush valley complete with wild flowers, butterflies, and a stream of clear drinking water. The reality was yet another snow-covered plateau, and now the clouds were rolling in and the rain starting to fall. The rain fell heavily the whole night and didn't cease for morning when we were met with thick mist and more rain. After two nights and two hard days out, the group wearily trudged through the trees and up a lava chute to the saddle between two dormant volcanoes. The rocks there were sculpted and ornate. The weather worsened to a sleet and hail mix, driven by the cold wind. The descent and return to civilisation was via Garibaldi Lake, complete with meter thick ice, but what a beautiful place it is.

The weather improved until we were treated to blue skies again. From the lake, a well-maintained trail winds down 1200 vertical meters in just over 9km. The journey starts in the frozen subalpine of Garibaldi lake and carves into the steep sided valley via switchback after switchback. On the descent trail, the trees become denser and larger as the air warms and the snow gives way to green shoots and eventually temperate woodland complete with the fragrant pine and cedar smells that

*Richard Lines*

accompany the lush life of the valley floor.

As an introduction to alpinism in British Columbia I am struck by the sheer amount of time required to complete the main objective. Because of this physical effort and the extra element of adventure afforded by the comparative remoteness, the popular routes are generally more straight forward than in, say, Chamonix. For the climber brave enough to apply the European mindset of hard technical mountaineering to the remote peaks in B.C., a significant reward of first ascents could be found. The 'multi modal' approach to climbing, where the climber may make use of 4x4 vehicle, a mountain bike, skis or even a canoe certainly adds to the adventure and ensures that whatever the weather, there is always mountaineering approach training to be had.

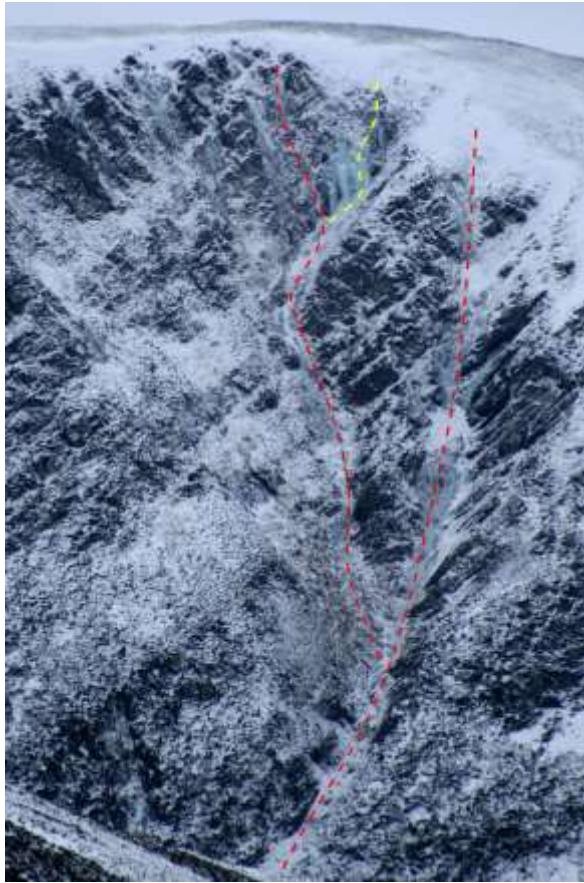
As this story reaches its conclusion, may I take the chance to encourage one and all to find a copy of 'Alpine Select' by Kevin Mc Lane and visit Vancouver. It's all here waiting!



*Garibaldi biscuit: more than just a mountain?*



*Rich Lines prepares to move to beautiful British Columbia with a climb on Valkyrie, The Roaches, Peak District. Photo by Steven Andrews*



**AN SOCACH, Locahn Pollaig Crag: Radius Gully,  
Index Finish – Broken Finger Variation 35m IV, 4.  
Steven Andrews, Dave Allen. 7 Jan 2011.**

*Follow Radius Gully, Index Finish until the upper icy, rightward  
slanting, ramp is reached. Continue to the furthest prominent  
icefall. Climb this directly until a steep turfy break is reached.  
Traverse rightward to continued ice. Follow to the top.*



*Steven Andrews*

## **Ice in Alladale**

Once again my suggestions of new year in Scotland for some adventurous climbing in remote corries with the possibility of new routes had fallen on deaf ears, with a large contingent of the CUMC heading to Kand....Kanrst...Kandersomething to climb on perfect ice in the sunny Alps. Okay, so I couldn't pronounce and much less spell their destination, but I was sure that they would do no better with the places to which I was heading. First, though, my lack of a climbing partner was going to have to be overcome.

With no partner forthcoming, it was to be skiing for which I had to settle in the lead up to Christmas. 'To settle' does not, however, do it justice. Despite my body giving me telltale signs of something more than fatigue from the ten hour drive north, no feeling of lethargy could stop the crystal clear light and sparkling blue skies from drawing me out in to the winter landscape. The air, which had produced a jumble of sparkling hoar frost, bit at my lungs and numbed my fingers. Such air makes the world feel new and pristine with every breath feeling like your first. It was into this pure and untarnished winter landscape that I was re-born each morning during the first few days of my trip before returning to doze by the open fire in an attempt to recuperate for the next day's activity.

Unfortunately in the back of my mind I could not help but wonder what climbing conditions might be like with the continuing cold snap likely to end shortly after Christmas. A walk up Alladale to have a look at the local attractions showed me what was available and would give me a chance at quite an adventure. Forays further north to climb Ben Hee and ski on the flanks Beinn Klibreck as the thaw continued led to further taunting. A remote waterfall I had spotted a few years back confirmed my thought that, given a prolonged freeze, it would make a stunning climb.



*Unclimbed ice*

I had by now managed to organise a climbing partner for Hogmanay and another pair of friends for a couple of days in the Cairngorms shortly after. It was with surprise, however, that another day of climbing would present itself. I received an email from a local climber, Dave Allen, who had spotted some pictures I had posted on an internet site of the routes I had been

*Ice in Alladale*

prospecting in Alladale. He happened to be the first ascentist of many of the routes and asked if I fancied meeting up for a climb. I was somewhat concerned by his list of routes and their intimidating grades, but I accepted the offer and we planned to meet up in Alladale once I got back from the Cairngorms. Fuselage Gully on Beinn Eighe and a ramble up Baosbheinn in Torridon followed by Aladdin's Mirror Direct and Hidden Chimney in Coire an t'Sneachda high in the Cairngorms provided a good warm-up for what lay ahead. Unfortunately, a misjudged corner on the drive back from the Cairngorms and an inexorable slide in to a wall were not so welcomed. Luckily I managed to organise a kindly lift down to the road end to meet up with Dave for our climb the next day.



*The remote and wild Alladale*

*Steven Andrews*

It was to be a long walk in across some pretty rough ground and we had decided to take Dave's rack and rope and would divide up the weight before we set off. I packed light but thought it might be worth carrying a couple of extra ice screws, for which I was going to be thankful the next day. Winter climbing is a strange branch of climbing, particularly Scottish winter climbing; so dependent on weather, always precarious, and very much in line with the older principals of climbing in which the premier mantra is that the leader doesn't fall. Because of this, winter climbing partners have to be individuals that you have grown to trust and understand, so it was with quite some trepidation that I had accepted this invite. But I was to be rewarded.



*The three ice pillars at the top of Radius Gully, the third of which would provide the start to our new route*

Things did not start well. As we drove up the narrowing road from Strath Carron and wound our way up Alladale the snow was deepening, and suddenly it became apparent that we were going to struggle to make further progress by vehicle. Any progress we were likely to make also ran the risk of landing us in the rushing dark and icy waters of the Alladale River. After some consternation on our part, the head keeper of the Alladale estate arrived on his way up to the lodge, and was not pleased to find us blocking the estate road. After some frantic phone calls and profuse apologies we were freed and made it up to a useful layby.

The delay had allowed light into the sky and plans to investigate possible lines on the far off Alladale Slabs were abandoned in favour of what had looked like a number of possible new lines out of Radius Gully on An Socach. I was relieved that I had taken along some extra kit when I peered into the boot of Dave's car to see a rack comprising a scant assortment of nuts, 7 pegs, a warthog, a bulldog, two drive-ins and two slightly worse for wear ice screws. Later I would find that my apprehension, on the basis of the kit we had, was somewhat unwarranted. This minimalist rack kept the bags light and we were soon making good time past the lodge and into Alladale, which despite the recent fence building and 're-wilding' still retains its long-lived rough and wild character.

Alladale is a deep glacial trough with protruding spurs of steeply inclined schist that have been truncated and ground down by the passage of ice over thousands of years, leaving the dramatic sweep of the Alladale Slabs

on the south side of the glen. Steep slopes rise northwest to the extensive bulk of Carn Bhan and Seana Bhragh beyond, with their arctic plateaux rivalling the Cairngorms in their desolate beauty. In the depths of the valley, Alladale Water meanders through the lumps and bumps of moraine left by the retreating glaciers, and ancient Scots pine woods huddle from the cold. A blue sky with wisps of pure white icy cloud framed the wild scene for our walk, and a pastel glow on the surrounding peaks was cast northwards on the trails of spindrift.

Unfortunately there was not enough snow for skiing so we were reduced to bashing through the reeds and heather of the valley floor, happy for the thick ice on Alladale Water, before taking on the glacially steepened valley sides. We continued up to the lip of the hanging corrie in which lay our climb. A frozen lochan filled the base of the heathery corrie around which the remnants of a once higher shoreline could be made out. The deep gully cutting the corrie lip told of its draining and also provided a further obstacle to reaching the base of our climb.

A few bedraggled-looking silver birch tenuously clung to a vegetated cliff to the right of the gully mouth. The gully then narrowed and we climbed up initially over treacherously snow covered boulders, and then onto firm older snow draped with worrying slews of fresh powder that told of recent avalanches. Making the mistake I have made too often, we found ourselves on steep ground wishing for the security of crampons and axes. The now too well-practised moves of struggling into harnesses and

delicately threading crampon straps ensued whilst we precariously balanced on a cramped and steep ledge. From there, the gully twisted up through several ice and rock steps with steep vegetated sides hemming in the now persistent spindrift. After soloing up to where the gully branched (to the right, Thumb Finish; to the left, Index Finish), we decided to set up a belay and take the left branch which led towards the three pillars of jewel-like turquoise that I had spotted in my previous reconnaissance.

Now the unusual collection of gear that comprised our rack started to make sense. Having set up a belay with one ice screw and a warthog driven into something that approximated concrete, I started up the steeper ground. The 60m half rope now appeared very skinny, trailing unhindered back to Dave at the belay. Two enjoyable and steep icy steps were passed using attractive corners on their right. Each step offered technicality alongside the security of a reasonable ice screw placement. In the right-trending upper portion of the gully the three ice pillars were now in view and took on an even more spectacular appearance. The preceding day's thaw had created hollow arching sheets of deep blue ice and umbrellas rimmed with icicles which had formed in the ensuing freeze.

Three metres short of the first pillar, and what was to be a spectacular thread belay, the rope came tight: my 60 metres were finished and I had to retreat to a promising rock outcrop 10 metres lower. Scouring the rock, not a crack could be found, nor even a suggestion of a peg

placement, so it was the surrounding ice-filled turf that had to provide the protection here. Dave followed me up and would lead on to the base of the third, and thickest, ice pillar up which I would take on a new line (Broken Finger Variation – IV 4). The ice reared up steeply but the recent thaw had softened the pitted texture allowing well-aimed axes to slide in without effort. However, dinner plates were still on the menu if the wrong target was chosen. Aladdin's Mirror Direct in Coire an t'Snechda had provided good preparation with similarly steep climbing but this time the ice provided an assuredness which made the situation admirable. Icicles draped and rimmed mushrooms of ice which had grown on ground so steep that its vegetated nature seemed almost impossible.

The realisation hit me that I had finished the section of the route that could be observed from below and was now entering entirely unknown territory. I now had to make decisions and the spaced protection was not going to allow easy escape from a mistake. Up ahead steep mixed ground looked unpromising but a vague ice line led rightwards. It would need some delicate and precarious moves with feet on ice and axes delving in to the steep snow-covered jungle. Having used my two good ice screws, I was down to two rather blunt alternatives which I decided to save for later and settle for a warthog. The Alladale turf did its job once more and after some considerable hammering I felt safe enough to traverse out right, happily reaching some icy steps and a hard won ice screw (those remaining were



*Ice in Alladale*

now exceedingly blunt). A lovely line of ice then led up towards the lip of the plateaux. Continued steep moves led me to curse the blunt screws but the route out was now assured, the best line chosen and victory in sight.

Over the lip and wading across deep powder with a sense of elation the view appeared even more spectacular in the low sun...ah, no, it's windslab and that fracture doesn't look so promising...but quickly heading toward a number of small boulders on the wind-scoured brow of the hill I continued my reverie.

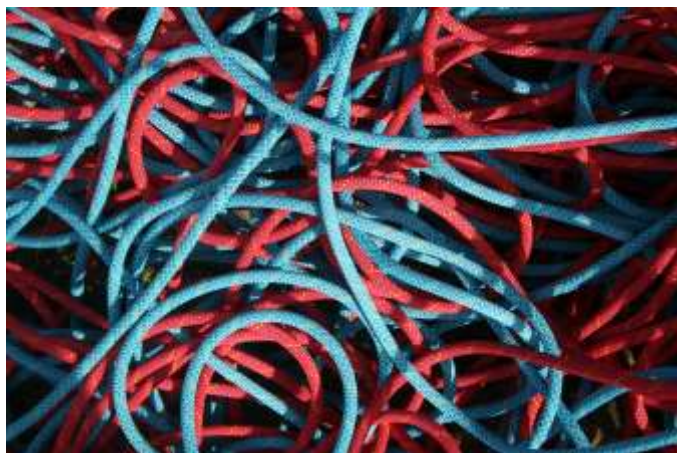
I was somewhat disappointed once more to arrive short



*Dave walking out with the sun casting its last light on the northern hills*

of my desired belay. Attempted lassos into the wind were hopeless, merely whipping back into my face along with the biting, ice-filled wind. A shallow patch of neve nearer the cliff edge provided some security for my heels and I turned to the An Socach turf one more time. The turf was shallow with rocks just below the surface. Eventually I managed to force a drive-in to be a drive half-in and angled a bulldog so it gained some purchase. Luckily Dave obliged my wish for him not to test the belay and the fractured windslab also courteously stayed in place.

The frustration from our morning delay was now repaid with a wintry sunset, lighting the sinuous bulk of Ben Wyvis against the incoming tide of darkness. The waves of snow covered hills rolled on northwards with the occasional peak breaking through the surf. Morven in Caithness and its tail of the Scaraben ridge reached down in to the Moray Firth, catching the last of the sun. Walking through the spindrift, alight with the last ebb of light, we started to descend back in to the glen and to the long walk back out from our remote adventure.



*Roping up. Photo by Steven Andrews*



*Chalking up. Photo by Phil Ewels*

*Lucas Laursen*



*The objective (the mountain, not the beer)*



*Eyes on the Alpendurst route*

*Lucas Laursen*

## **Jägihorn incident report**

Messieurs Goldman and Davenport, in Switzerland for the McCombie nuptials, invited Ms Crockett and Mr Laursen to an attempt on the Jägihorn, above Saas Grund in the Swiss Valais region. Goldman and Davenport charmed the hut mistress into providing extra victuals. With full bellies and a 4am start, Laursen led the team on a circular tour of a neighbouring moraine in a suspected effort to escape the climb.

When the fog cleared and the sun rose, however, the team identified the start of the Alpendurst route and commenced climbing activities culminating in a successful summit. From here the evidence grows patchier. The two rope teams lost sight of one another. Subsequent reports from CUMC Zurich stationmaster Kavanaugh place Goldman and Davenport on a dance floor at a castle outside Basel ca. 3am. Davenport failed to report to the post-climb debriefing in Dietikon while Goldman reported to Dietlikon instead. Kavanaugh relieved all parties of their duties in disgust.



*Looking down from the summit of Mt Blanc at 4808m above sea level. Photo by Rachel Berkowitz*

*Rachel Berkowitz*

**Thin air and massive views: Mt Blanc  
2010**

Little did I know how it feels to try and breathe at nearly five thousand meters above sea level. Little did I know how it feels to look down from the highest point in the European Alps. Human beings were not designed to survive up there, yet I have joined the faithful following that makes the pilgrimage each summer to the high mountains.

I had been eagerly anticipating our trip to the Alps for so long that I could barely endure the interminable pause for the traffic light to change so I could dash across Euston Road to Belgrove Street where my climbing partner Drew and his trusty Toyota Yaris were waiting. Drew's collection of 1980s dance music provided the soundtrack for our drive from London to Chamonix, and proved a necessity for the 3:00am driving shift.

I have made this journey with enough regularity that I no longer see arriving in Dunkirk and traveling through the French countryside as foreign and exciting, but have come to regard the prevailing use of the French language as a somewhat bothersome inconvenience that must be endured en route to the Alps. Eventually we arrived at the climbers' car park in Chamonix, village of mountaineering legends, and cooked our dinner by a

*Rachel Berkowitz*

country villa where the lady tending her garden smiled broadly and wished us “Bon Apetit!”



*The Cosmiques arete, with Mt Blanc in the background*



The next morning we made preparations for transition to the climbers' world. Looking the part, as British climbers, we were heavily laden with too much gear and clad in dark colours. We clanked our way to the Telepherique Aiguilles du Midi amongst sleek, shiny Europeans in bright colours with tiny form-fitting rucksacks. Tourists made up the rest of the queue to ride to the top of the lift whereupon they flooded the restaurant and viewing decks to have a look into the mountains, and we scrambled over a metal fence to go climb those mountains.

Meeting our friends, Igor and Helen from Cambridge, provided us with an alternative to our plan of living as bivvy bag-dwelling paupers in the tent-village that had sprung up in the Vallee Blanch, as they had laid claim to a 10m x 10m wood hut perched on a snowy ridge. Wooden shelves formed two sets of twin bunk beds and allowed four pairs of two to cuddle up out of the wind. Luxury to the student budget.

The views and the altitude took our breath away, and we deemed the acclimatization trip a success as we completed the Cosmiques Arete and Ordinary Route on the Mt Blanc du Tacul over the next two days. Climbing over other climbers on the icy rocks of the Tacul summit yielded views of alpine peaks swirled in moving clouds. At the edge of our line of sight, Mt Blanc built up a lenticular cloud and suggested that a descent to the valley might be wise.

*Rachel Berkowitz*

After two days of waiting out a storm in the valley, the volume of gear and food crammed into the Yaris on our way to the lift station indicated the magnitude of our upcoming Mt Blanc climb. Trekking across the wind-blown glacier to the bivvy hut brought us to a cozy party of three Russian men and three university students from Southampton, all of whom were waiting to pounce on the weather window, and invoked the “Always Room For One More!” rule. The lack of any space for movement about the hut and the 1:00am rise-time brought chaos as all ten of us bustled through breakfast and rucksack-packing rituals to join the strings of lights making their way toward the highest summit in Europe.

After climbing the fixed ladder over the Tacul



*Men in black at the bivvy hut*

bergschrund, we plodded higher into the night and up to the shoulder of Mt Maudit, where the 45-degree snow and ice slopes of the col du Maudit provide a significant challenge due to its situation at 4300 meters. I shivered up the pitch whilst climbers kicked down from above, and turned into a whimpering, coughing, nauseated wreck. Near the top Drew suggested we might want to turn back, as the altitude was clearly just going to get worse. I hurt so much that I very nearly agreed, but upon topping out and seeing the summit slopes in the distance, I told him “there is no way we're turning back now.”

On we marched into thinner air. My friend Alex's words rang in the back of my mind: “you can go on a climbing trip, climb some routes in nice weather, and have a good time. But that's not where all the good stories come from.” Indeed, the requisite “I'm never climbing again” moment had been satisfied.

As the sun rose, Mt Blanc turned into Mt Rosé and the cameras came out. The track weaved around snow domes and seracs and the gradual uphill battle became more difficult as I gasped out “I'm trying...I'm really trying...sorry Drew.” I couldn't think; all I wanted was to collapse and sleep for a bit. Nausea set in and I wanted to throw up but there was nothing to lose from my empty stomach so every few minutes I would cough violently from trying to expel nothing. A few steps uphill, then keel over with head between knees, barely able to muster the strength to move forward. I tried to enhance my energy by eating some food but the few bites of cereal bar merely egged on the nausea and were abandoned. I

*Rachel Berkowitz*

told myself to count twenty steps before the next desperate pause, but five seemed the best I could manage.

Just two more sections of slope...just five more switchbacks to catch up with that green-clad team...then aim for the orange figure moving in the distance. Each target was met miserably behind schedule, but we finally held the summit in our view. A German climber saw me struggling and offered me a trekking pole: "Just leave it in the Cosmiques hut when you're down, and label it 'for Jakob'."



*Mt Blanc turns into Mt Rosé in the early morning sunlight*

And then it was over, as Drew and I finally stepped onto the top of the world with Igor and Helen close behind. The narrow summit ridge fell away to Italy, France, and the rest of Europe! Mountains that looked imposing from the valley base were mere topographical indicators from up here; clouds gently cushioned the space between knolls and bumps; heavily crevassed treacherous glaciers showed only an innocent white blanket carpeting the bases of tiny mounds of granite.

Mt Blanc was no longer some mythical mountaineering legend for us. The snowy dome on the Chamonix postcards was ours, and here on the summit we delighted in it. Now we could bask in the experience, from a long-ago Tuesday pub meet where we'd tossed around a summer trip idea, through the logistics that transformed the idea into something that we were really going to do, and into the moments on the climb where a glimpse of the deep blue alpine sky above or an icy blue labyrinth of crevasse below took our breath away just as much as the altitude did.

The descent was easier but I was still moving slowly. Whilst setting up our ropes to descend the col du Maudit, a Canadian guide criticised our boot-axe belay technique and said to me “sweetheart, you're going to get frostbite if you don't cover up your nose.” A stressful descent of that pitch, lowering on top of climbers and mistaking climbing ropes for fixed ropes, made me wistful for American mountains where company is not the norm.

*Rachel Berkowitz*



*Rachel and Drew on the rooftop of Europe*

Still weak and coughing, we arrived at the bivvy hut and collapsed in our sleeping bags for thirty-six hours as a whiteout raged outside.

I awoke to a burning face, and toes screaming, as I realised that I had succumbed to frost nip. I welcomed the storm outside as an excuse not to have to move. When it finally cleared, nothing was climbable due to the dangerous instability of nearly two feet of fresh snow, so prepared for our descent to the valley.

The transition from the high country to the well-trodden world below was marked by tourists oooh-ing and aaah-ing at the massive rucksack I was carrying into the cable car. To them, this was the ultimate form of adventure and independence. But I reflected on whether the cable car lifts, huts, and daily weather forecasts infringe on the purity of mountaineering in Chamonix.

We had “climbed the mountains and got their good tidings” (to quote Scottish alpinist John Muir), and this knowledge must suffice to tide me over through a long winter of city-dwelling until the next journey above treeline. Now that the sunburn has healed and the frost nipped toes are a less alarming shade of blue, weekends of rock climbing and hill running will keep me focused on preparing for a return.



*They're better climbers than you are. Photos by Rich Shaw*





*Ed Feldman*

## **High up on Ben Nevis, Northeast Buttress**

*I took a few deep breaths, and turned to Drew.*

*“I’m feeling a bit worse for wear; it’ll probably be a short pitch.”*

Sprinting up Tower Ridge the previous day, combined with 2 bad nights' sleep and a growing cold had left me drained. But up we'd got up at 6 anyway to face our objective: the long mountaineering classic, the Northeast Buttress. By the time we'd climbed the first few hundred metres, my strength was fading.

Having had a bit of an epic seconding the previous pitch (a mini spindrift avalanche had forced me to stall halfway through the crux) I was relieved to finally reach Drew at the belay. All that was left between us and easier ground to the summit was an ice pitch followed by a steep mixed corner.

“I’ll just get us up to the corner and let you handle the rest.” I tried to sound offhand and failed. I just sounded worried.

Drew nonchalantly agreed and I took a few deep breaths to prepare, beginning to feel some strength returning.

*Ed Feldman*



*Ben Nevis northeast buttress under tantalising blue skies*

“You’re on belay,” he said. He wanted me to get moving.

### The fun begins

I started moving and almost immediately the exhaustion kicked back in. I had to rest only a few feet above the belay, completely out of breath. I forced myself upwards and progress slowly became defined by a

rhythmic mantra:

Axe...axe...foot...foot...breathe...breathe... I wasn't even looking where I was going – my entire world focused on each kick, each swing.

A blast of air laced with spindrift swiftly ended this trance, telling me I was back up onto the ridge proper. I made my way easily along for a few feet until a wall of rock reared up ahead. A steep ice slope dropped down the right side of the ridge, and further along there was an icy groove leading to the base of the 40 foot corner - it looked a long way away.

I thought about making a belay but another slap in the face from the wind quickly changed my mind. I started climbing down the slope on the right. The thin red lifeline of the rope arced beside me in a perfect bow, unhindered by gear, for 60



*The sky is no longer blue above the Ben*

*Ed Feldman*

feet until it disappeared over the ridge. I had no way of communicating with Drew and I couldn't see anywhere ahead to put a runner in, let alone make a belay.

It was only then that I fully appreciated the situation: fully committed, high up on the buttress, in foul conditions on the highest mountain in the UK, absolutely exhausted, with not much prospect for a belay and the hardest pitch yet to come. And I just stood still on my front points unable to move.

After what felt like hours the pragmatic part of my brain finally kicked in. A thousand feet to the corrie floor was too much to think about and slowly I managed to squeeze the focus back down to the six feet around me. I carried on, thinking only about each step, each axe, and soon found myself at the base of the groove still with no protection.

I looked up to see a vertical ice step about 20 feet above. I carried on up the groove, forcing any thoughts that weren't about the next placement away from my mind, humming some 1980's crime-against-music that Drew had subjected us to on the long drive.

And then the ice step was immediately above. It was only about six feet, but vertical, and after the already traumatizing pitch it seemed hugely intimidating. I reached down for a screw on my harness, relieved that I could finally get some gear in.

It wasn't there. I'd left it at the belay.

I looked back, now to see even more rope drooping

*High up on Ben Nevis, Northeast Buttress*

pathetically into the whiteness. Calves cramping, forearms and shoulders aching, I felt very alone. I somehow managed to muster a bit of composure and climbed efficiently through the next few feet and up to the base of the striking corner feature.



*Ed enjoys some solitude on the ben*

I looked around for some sort of belay, relieved to have finally finished the ordeal, but saw nothing. I wondered if I had enough rope left to just climb the corner above and be done with it. But after trying a couple of moves I knew I was in no condition to climb it. Another search for gear yielded a hairline crack that, after a bit of persuasion, just about took half a knifeblade. It was

facing directly downwards. I felt sick – it was the worst belay I'd ever made. I tried to cut a stance and at least get some weight off my frontpoints and relieve my tiring calves.

“The belay’s not great,” I said, once Drew had joined me, and gestured at the feeble bits of metal that were our solitary attachment to this huge bulk of rock and ice. Drew seemed unperturbed, but the final pitch looked vicious. Forty feet of featureless granite, thinly iced with a dusting of powder hiding everything. I handed the gear over and told Drew to get some in soon.

### Two lives in one pair of hands

Drew set off confidently, climbing the corner directly above the stance, crampons a few feet above my face, kicking snow and ice down onto me. On the next move, his crampon slipped a bit and instinctively I shouted up to be careful. Now 15 feet above, he started scraping away snow from the left wall of the corner, looking for any gear placement. But there was nothing. I saw him give up and switch focus to the rock and ice in front of his face. I could tell he was psyching himself up for the next difficult move.

And then he was making the move. Crampons scraping both walls of the corner. Elbows, hands, knees all being employed to mantle this small ledge. I felt an intense uneasiness at how reliant I had just become on someone else’s ability. Taking control of my own life has always been the most exciting and satisfying part of climbing for

*High up on Ben Nevis, Northeast Buttress*

me, but I got scared the moment it was out of my control. I suddenly wished it was me on the sharp end. But just as I was working out what to do if he came off, he was on his feet again – he'd done it.

I prayed that this was the hard climbing over, but he didn't look comfortable and still had to contend with the last few feet of the corner. Locked off on one axe on the thinnest of hooks in the back of the corner, he spanned his full arm length sideways trying to get a placement over the top of the corner. After several unsuccessful swings, I saw him hook the axe over his shoulder and



*The summit's in sight, but still a long way away!*

reach down to his harness. Next thing I knew, the axe was off his rudimentary homemade leash – he must have needed more reach.

‘I really hope you know what you’re doing, Drew.’ I was scared; Drew was obviously struggling. A dropped axe here would be the end. There was no way he would be able to climb up or down with just one tool. He took another swing with his extended reach and I heard the clunk as it bounced off rock. He still couldn’t find a placement and each swing looked less and less energetic. He gave it another swing and it seemed to stick. Moving some weight onto it, he shuffled slightly along the ledge. I could see him preparing to bounce test the placement. Going straight armed on the axe, he jerked downwards on it – once, twice...

The axe ripped.

Suddenly everything was in slow motion and I saw his weight come away from the wall. I slammed my body into the corner and I waited. Waited for the impending impact, I could see the fall in my head: Drew dropping down the corner catching me with the full force of his crampons, the weight coming onto the gear which didn’t even slow our fall as we slid down the short slope below and over the looming precipice. But I was detached, unemotional. Not scared, merely foreseeing the inevitable. I squeezed further into the corner expecting Drew to come crashing down at any second. This fall seemed to be taking an eternity...

...and then came a single, sharp thud of metal against



*High up on Ben Nevis, Northeast Buttress*

rock. It didn't sound like a fall... I looked up in confusion. Drew was still there and taking another swing over the lip of the corner. He must have somehow held on. In a daze I saw him get a good placement and clamber up over the last of the difficulties. He looked down with a manic grin:

“That was exciting...”

I grinned back at him, still not quite realizing what had happened and laughed nervously.

An hour later we were on the summit of Ben Nevis, and we were buzzing. Already laughing about what shortly before had been one of the scariest bits of climbing I'd done, I leaned back on the summit cairn munching a chocolate bar. All the tension of the previous few hours was suddenly released and it left an incredible feeling of elation in its wake.



*End of the second pitch of Alehouse Indirect. Inset: View across to the crux pitch. Photos by Sarah Rothwell*

*Sarah Rothwell*

## **First ascent of Alehouse Indirect**

*(As reported by the leader of the first ascent, Sarah Rothwell, Sept 2010 )*

Alehouse Indirect is a daring new multipitch route, recently put up locally by members of the Cambridge University Mountaineering Club. The climbing is bold and sparsely protected and those brave mountaineers who attempted the route last Tuesday night risked ground falls and traffic accidents to complete their aim.

The first ascent began at the Mitre, where the climbers assembled themselves and prepared for their arduous task with strengthening draughts of medicinal ale. Various approaches were discussed, yet the route finders (far exceeding their standard duties as social secretaries of the club) seemed hazy on the exact path, beyond the need to make headway towards the great buttress of the Maypole at some point in the evening.

When the climbers felt strong enough, the first pitch began. This was an easy 15 metre stretch to The Baron of Beef and was easily completed by the fresh-faced group. However, things became hairy during the second pitch. From here the terrain was largely featureless underhangs lacking in positive holds. Rope management became a major problem, and several ropes of climbers displayed

shockingly bad climbing etiquette by crossing their routes with those of other teams, thereby leading to tangles and several near-misses, although luckily solidly-placed lamp post belays prevented any serious injuries.

Unforeseen hazards manifested themselves in the form of roads, and in these areas cyclists and cars moved at great speed across the rock face, bewildering our unfortunate first ascensionists. Each team's reaction to clear the route as quickly as possible merely resulted in one climber on either end of a rope stranded on opposite sides of the road, neither willing to move in front of the mighty beasts which were rapidly becoming frustrated at the length of taut rope in their path. Eventually the seconds braved the dangers and joined the lead climbers for the last of the pitch leading to the Pickerel Rib, stoically enduring a barrage of tuts on the way.

Fortified by yet another dose of medicinal ale, the mountaineers decided to brave the long crux pitch that culminated in the Maypole Buttress. Whilst further road issues were largely avoided, this was far from easy. Rope management was once more an issue, this time due to leaders creating enormous rope drag around various street features. More than one suffering second was so affected by this poor management that they effectively became tied to a post by a tangle of different ropes. Several leaders also cracked under the strain and were forced to take to the less overhanging terrain offered by lamp posts and street signs in order to gain some respite from their arduous climbing in Portugal Place Chimney.

*First Ascent of Alehouse Indirect*

Despite these difficulties the climbers remained determined and the safe ground of Maypole buttress was eventually gained. Here, several climbers felt the need to further prove their worth by taking the bold step of soloing to the toilets, although thankfully some retained their sanity and belayed each other safely the whole way.

From here, one poor climber needed to be airlifted between alehouses, due to injury sustained in the Pickerel, however even this didn't dampen the hardy climbers' spirits, bolstered as they were by medicinal ale. I regret that I know no more of the route from this point except that there was talk of a bold lead to the Bun Shop. It is my belief that some brave souls even did an E8 variation of this pitch, taking in some exposed climbing near the cash machine on Sidney Street.

*Editor's note:* The party did indeed undertake a penultimate pitch to the Bun Shop; but due to adverse conditions had to re-route to the Champion of the Thames. At this point there was debate as to what constitutes the actual summit of the Alehouse route. Many members concluded that they had reached the summit, congratulated each other, and descended an easy gully to their respective base camps. The hardest of the crew, however, decided to remove their ropes and make a bold free climb toward the beacon of Cambar Pinnacle. Whispers suggest that they climbed through the night and into the dawn, braving surfaces inhospitable to climbers, but the Cambar Pinnacle is reputed to haze the memory of all who venture near, so the exact trip recount will never be known. -RB



*Winter climbing near Bowfell Buttress, Lake District, UK. Photo by Rachel Berkowitz*



*The Stauning Alper, across Kong Oscar Fjord, East Greenland. Photo by Steven Andrews*

*Ursula Moore*

## **Falling through Africa**

Over the summer of 2010 I joined one of the clichéd African overland trucks that takes tourists on a sightseeing trip through the grasslands. But this one was a bit different. Made up entirely of climbers, the “Hot Rock” truck was travelling from Jordan to Cape Town over the course of a year, stopping to camp and climb wherever there was rock along the way. I met the “Hot Rock” climbers in Nairobi and travelled with them through Kenya, Tanzania and part of Malawi.

The climbing in Kenya is relatively well developed with several guidebooks and dubious grading. I got my first taste with two weeks camping in Lukenya, just south of Nairobi. We spent our days climbing and our nights drinking and listening to the hyenas. Lukenya is a fantastic spot with hundreds of singlepitch and several multipitch routes which we investigated fully. On the last day in Lukenya, I began my bid for the dubious honour of the “psycho girl” title with a 6-metre fall onto a number 1 nut, cracking my helmet in the process.

All this hard training was great preparation for our first big challenge: Mt Kenya. At 5199 metres, Mt Kenya is the second highest mountain in Africa and both of its main peaks require at least v.diff-grade climbing for over 20 pitches.

All but one route requires a summit bivouac. We were all wonderfully under prepared but I felt like I had at least bagged a very experienced partner – a Kiwi climber called Simon. We walked in to the base of the climbing (at 4200m) in two days, spending an extra day acclimatising and checking out the first few pitches. Unfortunately, Simon got pretty ill with the altitude so we soon came down to the Sirimon hut (4200m) in the hope that things would improve overnight.

We awoke at four o'clock the next morning to reach the base of the climb at dawn. Simon had had a rough night and wasn't going to be able to climb, so I joined a pair of sport climbers from the UK – thankfully gear placement was fairly straightforward! Watching sunrise from the base of the climb was magical but soon we were off, moving together up the first easy pitches. Things were going well until about nine in the morning when we started up the wrong gully. Two hours of faffing and abseiling later brought us back on route but seriously behind schedule.

By early afternoon it was clear that we would not reach the summit in daylight and we decided to abseil down. By that time Steve, one of the Brits with whom I was climbing, found that he had reacquired the stomach bug he had been battling for the last week. He did well to stay laughing, but abseiling just beneath someone who keeps urgently stopping to de-trouser is a little nerve wracking. Abseiling 13 awkward pitches resulted in the inevitable stuck rope scenarios and I was always sent to retrieve. We finally got down about an hour after nightfall and





*Mt Kenya*

remained good friends for the rest of the trip.

After Mt Kenya, a short visit to the crag at ‘Frog’ brought me to my second big fall. Whilst climbing a lovely crack, I placed a cam very poorly and then tried to jam my little hands into a very big hole. It didn’t work. I fell onto my cam (which popped) and then onto the sling below it. Fortunately my sling held and I fell 10 metres, ending upside down staring at my belayer’s knees.

This called for a break from climbing, so I went with my Mt Kenya partners to Mombassa and the surrounding

*Ursula Moore*

beach for a week's relaxation. We spent the time catching up on much needed protein, beers and ice cream before rejoining the truck in Tanzania.

If climbing in Kenya is developed, then climbing in Tanzania is not. With little idea of locations we stumbled across several very high boulders. Although the height of the boulders rendered the bouldering mats mostly useless, it was really sociable climbing. Hundreds of local kids came every day to see what we were doing and showed us that you could easily get to the top of the boulders just by walking up the other side.

After the obligatory sight-seeing stop in Zanzibar we drove south into Malawi. This drive involved eighteen hours of dirt track and two flat tyres in our converted coca-cola transport truck. Arriving dust caked and exhausted in Malawi, we weren't too upset to find minimal climbing available and instead enjoyed a day of drinking (and falling off fences) on the beach near Lake Malawi.

We never claimed to be a particularly clean group, but I didn't realise how bad it had got until leaving from Lilongwe. At the airport, security refused to search me as I was so covered in dirt, and after that I felt a bit sorry for those sitting next to me on the plane. I was sad to leave my travel companions as they carried on to Cape Town, but the call of English rain-soaked gritstone was just too much. Fortunately I came back with plenty of contacts, pictures and scars to remind me of a great trip.

*Sian Hughes*

## **Intro to ice climbing, CUMC style**

My original plans for the winter holidays this year had involved going somewhere warm and sunny for some relaxed bolt-clipping. But, after finding out that a group from the CUMC were planning an ice-climbing trip to Switzerland, I decided I'd follow the crowd and give it a try. According to a certain Scottish club member I was, after all, not a 'proper' climber if I'd never climbed ice.

After investing my Christmas money in boots and crampons, I finally set off to Switzerland. A rather unpleasant journey involved waiting alone for the night bus at 1am at a rainy London bus stop, a cold hour trying not to fall asleep in Victoria station, and a really long wait at Gatwick Airport, but I finally made it to Kandersteg.

After some brief single pitch ice climbing the afternoon we arrived, I was excited for my first full day of climbing in the Oeschinensee valley. I'd made plans with Hauke to second him up a 5-pitch Grade 4 icefall called Namenlos.

Things went smoothly until the last pitch when Hauke disappeared from sight. As more rope was getting pulled up I started to get a bit concerned that he'd run out of rope, but assumed that he'd eventually managed to reach the belay. By this point I needed to put on my headlamp. I'd long ago resigned myself to the fact that we'd be

*Sian Hughes*

descending in the dark. After I dismantled my belay, Hauke pulled some more rope up and I figured I was safe to climb. I moved to the right but then waited awhile longer, but the ropes were still hanging slack above me. I retreated back to the belay and reattached myself to wait. And wait I did.

I felt out of my comfort zone, 150m off the ground, in the dark and starting to get cold, with no way of getting down, just waiting for Hauke to sort out the problem. To make things worse I'd left my phone in my pack, had no food or water, and hadn't eaten in 10 hours. My only consolation was the fact I had a headlamp, but it had a dying battery!

After standing around for about half an hour, Hauke finally appeared from above. We decided that the ropes must have frozen to the ice and Hauke couldn't take in slack beyond the frozen point. We made it safely down, and got back to the hostel just in time for dinner, and to celebrate New Year's Eve! I'd had a pretty eventful first day, but was hoping that it would be my last epic of the trip.

A few days later, I went with Kane to climb a five-pitch Grade V called Glucksritter. We made an early start, and after about an hour's walk arrived at our icefall, thankful that we were the first ones there. After my concerns over my headlamp battery the previous couple of days, Fiona had kindly lent me hers. I checked whether Kane had brought his. He replied that we were starting so early there was no way we would need headlamps.

*Intro to ice climbing, CUMC style*



*CUMC welcome in the new year at the Kandersteg Scout Centre*

Kane set off up the first pitch, weaving back and forth to avoid the overhanging ice-chandeliers and umbrellas, trying to find the bolts in the rock to the right of the ice. He reached the anchor and I set off to follow him. The climbing went well but about half-way up, the ice became really wet. I was thankful that I was wearing waterproofs, but my mittens were woollen Dachsteins and got soaked! Nevertheless, I reached the belay easily.

Kane's line up the next pitch weaved even more than the first. Eventually he reached the belay, and my first

challenge was to go over the top of a bulge and climb down the other side, with the next ice screw a good 3m to the left. Running water poured down on me. I needed to climb the section with some slack in the ropes, as any tension would pull me off the icefall. But just as I started to climb down the icy bulge, the ropes stopped pulling through completely, and I was left with several metres of slack hanging in a loop below my feet.

Now I was scared. I faced the potential for a big fall, I was soaked, and I couldn't communicate to Kane that there was so much slack in the system. Terrified, I moved gingerly down and eventually made it to a ledge below. After a while, one of the ropes pulled through, and I could see that the other was hooked around some icicles.

Obligated to continue upwards, I tried to unhook the stuck rope as I went. As I got closer I realised this would be impossible, so I shouted at Kane to give me slack and decided I'd have to sort it out when I gained the ledge above. Following the free rope, I traversed right. But just as I reached the next ice screw, the stuck rope pulled tight, frozen below the bulging ice umbrella, and I couldn't break it free.

Now I was stuck. After realising that panicking wasn't going to get me anywhere, I concluded that my only option was to untie from the jammed rope and just climb on the other. I retreated back to a better ledge and managed to untie, then climbed back up, removed the screw, and started the traverse again. When I got to the

*Intro to ice climbing, CUMC style*



*Sian stays warm in Kandersteg*

*Sian Hughes*

next screw on the traverse, I could see the rope going down and right before disappearing around a pillar. Kane was now within earshot so I could tell him not to pull me off while I traversed. Nevertheless, I was terrified: I couldn't see where to go next and was again faced with a section of downclimbing. If I fell, I would pendulum into a rock wall.

Thankfully I didn't fall, and uneventfully climbed the final gully to the belay. We decided that if we were unable to pull the stuck rope free it would be a good excuse to retreat from the climb. But some significant effort by Kane pulled the rope free and, given that we'd already completed the two hardest pitches, we couldn't give up now.

Apart from minor trouble unclipping from the anchors that were high above my head and getting such bad hot aches on the third pitch that I thought I was going to vomit, the rest of the climb went smoothly and we reached the top as the sun was setting. I felt pretty smug that I'd brought my headlamp!

It didn't take us long to get down and walk back to the car, where we were greeted by Nikolaus, Nick, and Rich. They'd had a much shorter day than us, and had spent the last three hours in the pub! Rich had just one pressing question, which was 'Sian, did you cry?'. I quite smugly answered no!

On the final day of the trip four of us planned to climb the classic Almenalpfall, which at 240m was the biggest icefall in the valley. I was seconding Igor, and Hauke and



*Intro to ice climbing, CUMC style*

Rich were climbing together. Despite my unease about the hanging ice screw belays and the prospect of abseiling from abolokovs in the dark, as well as the constant ice falling on us from Rich and Hauke above, the climbing went smoothly.

After an uneventful (with the exception of frozen prussik loops) descent, I was relieved to be safely on the ground. But as I was sorting the ropes, I noticed a tear in the sheath of one. Upon closer inspection, it turned out that the entire sheath was torn, and half of the core severed!

I definitely felt lucky to be safely on the ground. I was also relieved it was the final day of the trip. I'm not sure my head could have handled any more after an epic-filled week!

Of course, now that I'm back in the UK, I'm looking forward to my next trip. Perhaps I'd be better sticking to sunny bolt-clipping next year? That remains to be seen...



*Ice ice baby!*

*Rachel Berkowitz*

**Kandersteg: An epic poem**

A trip of the CUMC  
to the Swiss Alps to ice climb and ski  
Yielded banter and jokes  
amongst many good folk  
But no climbs that were less than grade three.

In Kandersteg on a III, 4  
Minus 10, clear blue skies, views galore  
The climbing was beautiful  
and the ice, thick and dutiful  
And at dusk, climb was done, there's no more.

At the top of five pitches of ice  
the descent should have been plain and nice.  
But a team in the gully  
helped inspire our folly  
though tried not an epic to entice.

The ice pitch from tree down to bolts  
couldn't handle two teams on two ropes.  
As I was on second  
the thought to us beckoned  
to lower me off in the hope

*Rachel Berkowitz*

that the rock face down which I would go  
would connect with the gully below.  
    ‘‘It’ll save us some time  
    whilst the other team climbs,’’  
so we thought. But we should’ve thought ‘‘No!’’

Awhile later my feet reached an edge  
Some thirty meters down, I’d allege.  
    But I had a look round,  
    and was shocked when I found  
the bolts far out of sight from the ledge.

Several meters of rope piled around.  
Igor must think I’m now on the ground!  
    Forty meters below  
    was safe trod-upon snow;  
the gully, a long blank traverse round.

Perhaps anchored to nothing or less  
I gathered my wits to assess.  
    Igor heard not my shouting  
    which furthered my doubting  
that alone we’d get out of this mess.

My best hope, it seemed, at the time  
was to wait for the others who’d climbed  
and might soon be descending,  
thus could help me in wending  
my way to the gully o’er rime.

*Kandersteg: An epic poem*



*Igor leads the crux pitch of Namenlos icefall in Kandersteg*

*Rachel Berkowitz*

Occasionally I shouted to Igor,  
or the climber I hoped would soon be here  
for what seemed like forever.  
I swore that I'd never  
climb again; to this promise, I'd adhere.

Clanking gear finally told me the lad  
was descending! He stopped and we had  
a thoughtful discussion of  
possible repercussions of  
our options, which could be quite bad.

While he hung there just meters away,  
it helped I could finally relay  
through his straight gully line  
within earshot just fine  
up to Igor, what caused the delay.

The lad bounced on his rope to my bivouack  
over insecure snow like a maniac.  
With a prussik I fixed  
to his rope and then ditched  
my own for Igor to take back.

Now there's two of us hung on the ice pitch  
on a half-rope the security of which  
I wasn't quite sold on:  
one prussik?! Can't last long!  
Then he ab'd to his mate at the tree hitch.

*Kandersteg: An epic poem*

Next I started down, fine, nearly stable!  
But I suddenly found I'm unable  
to move, as my hair  
had begun an affair  
with the screwgate, stuck tight as a cable.

Chopping hair with my axe was no good  
though I tried for a while, thought it should!  
I asked Climbers below  
“Got a knife you could throw?”  
and their buddy climbed to where I stood.

I thought that their buddy was merely a friend  
out for a night solo, and wanted to lend  
a hand when he'd seen  
his pals overly keen  
and still climbing, where he would ascend.

But our earlier shouts had attracted attention  
and later I learned through a casual mention  
that this soloing dude  
had been earlier cued  
from Mountain Rescue to come relieve tension.

From safe stance I saw Igor abseiling  
Whilst the others were fixing a railing  
of tat and fixed ropes  
for traversing the slopes.  
But we decided we then would be bailing.

*Rachel Berkowitz*

To the others we bid an adieu  
and carefully pulled our ropes through.  
Abseiled down three more pitches  
without any glitches  
but the darkness obscured alpine views.

The folk at the hostel were betting  
on what time we would finally be getting  
back home with pub stories  
of failures and glories,  
and how long on the hill we'd been sweating.

We said “sorry we got back so late  
but we've had a long day tempting fate.  
We've had nothing to eat,  
have cold hands and cold feet  
might a hot bath and food us await?”



*The little town of Kandersteg*



*Andrew Morris*

## **Down in the sunny south: sport climbing tour de France**

*This article gives a whistle-stop roughly east-west tour of some of the places I've visited in the sunny south of France over the past few years. I've ignored some of the famous venues such as Ceuse and the Verdon which are more suited to slightly warmer times of year in favour of places to go when it starts to chill down; that is, the kind of place that might be appealing in February, March or October. Some of them aren't the household name that is Verdon, but the climbing is still top-notch. The places I've chosen are venues at which one can visit a wide range of crags from a central base without trekking about too much.*

### Buis les Barronies

Buis lies northeast of Avignon and is a small town literally surrounded by crags. One of the best things about this area is the variety of crags and grades. Whilst mixed-ability groups may not always find their choice of routes on the same crag, they will certainly find enough excellent quality climbing to last for awhile. At the hardest end of the spectrum is St Leger, which is a world-class winter crag tucked into a sheltered valley: imagine

*Andrew Morris*

long sustained routes, lots of sun, tufas galore, pumped forearms, and loads of amazing-looking 7s and 8s (plus a few 6s). If you can climb these grades then don't ask questions, just visit!

For a slightly broader range of grades, Baume Rouse is well worth a look with excellent slabby routes such as Coin Coin (5+), and a central amphitheatre containing great routes like Aband Fils de Crapaud (7a) and the mega steep Rahan Fils de Crao (7b+). Malaucene is another crag offering a good mix of routes on white pocketed rock, sporting delights like Un Nouveau Monde Right (7b+), Pipougne (soft 7a) and Papillon (6b). On a friendlier note, Combe Obscure offers many quality Fr5 and Fr6 technical slab climbs on immaculate rock, and the multipitch routes at St Julien come highly recommended: my friends raved about La Grotte, a 3-pitch Fr6a which involves climbing through a hole on its first pitch!

## Orgon

Orgon is a small town not far south of Avignon, and forms the second stop on our tour of the sunny south. One of the best things about Orgon is that the climbers' campsite sits in the middle of a cirque of crags, all an easy walk away, and boasts plenty of slabby technical routes in the 5s and 6s range. I enjoyed Jeux sans Frontiers (6b) and many others. There's also a steep semi-rainproof crag at Orgon Canal, the archetypal "outdoor sports gym" with its perma-draws and sika. Trust me, it's

better than it sounds!

Other excellent areas abound. Mouries is an excellent fin of rock with nice albeit super thin and technical steep slab and wall routes. Mont Gaussier is another excellent venue nearby, with a good mix of options. Of course, it's only about 40 minutes to Buoux if you fancy some pockets - this is a truly amazing venue, although I imagine most people would devote an entire trip to it rather than popping in for a day.

### Ales

A base around Ales, west of Avignon, provides access to three excellent crags (along with several others to which I've not been). Claret, Seynes and Russan are sheltered and sunny, so are probably some of the best cold weather crags of the group. But beware of seepage on any tufa routes since in the winter it will take longer to dry.

Claret is a crag for the strong of bicep, with steeply undercut starts and strenuous overhangs. The few low 6s I tried there were either hard or outrageous sandbags, but the high 6s and above provide a large volume of routes to try and the quality improves dramatically. Russan is a south-facing horseshoe above a river, with ace routes in a lovely setting. There are steep tufa-draped overhangs for the hard man, and excellent long sustained wall climbs like *Musique Celeste* (6a+) and *Les Racines de Ceil* (6b) for the mortals amongst us.

*Andrew Morris*



*Looking across at the tufa-drenched main wall at Seynes, with a climber on Dinosaur (8a+)*

*Down in the sunny south: sport climbing tour de France*



*Andy Morris in the evening light on Un Nouveau  
Monde Right (7b+) at Malaucene*

*Andrew Morris*

Seynes has a reputation for being a proper oven of a crag. I've heard one climber refer to it as having its own internal heater. The main wall at Seynes is dripping with tufas and hard routes. On either side of the main wall are the wings, where the difficulty drops slightly. There are lots of high quality routes on the wings, mainly thin slab climbs or wall climbs on compact grey limestone. My favourites were Aphrodisiaque (6a+/6b), L'essential (6a), and Izquierda (6b+). Tube Neural (6c+) looks like a sport route for the seasoned trad climber: begin by climbing up a tufa, then back-and-foot up between two tufas, then knee-and-wriggle up to where the tufas join before hauling out over their tops.



*Pete Eccott taking to the air from Rahan Fils de Crao (7b+) at Baume Rousse*

## Le Rozier

Staying at Le Rozier offers access to three fantastic venues: Gorges du Tarn, Gorges du Jonte and Le Boffi, with Cantobre a bit further away. Those who climb at the grade will probably have heard of the Tarn - home to untold numbers of long endurance routes. I've not yet climbed here, but the area impressed me so much that I'm already booked for an October rematch. Cantobre is another tough crag, which also looks out across a crazily perched village - very sheltered and sunny, with a side wall offering a few good 6s and a main wall covered in steep 7s and 8s.

Le Boffi is perched high above one of the valleys leading into Millau, with views of the famous viaduct from some of the routes. Whilst the crag has one of the longest walk-ins at almost half an hour, it's well worth the effort. Sector Damned is one of the highlights of the cliff and offers excellent easier routes. But the sector really shines at 6c, with several packed close together including the fantastic Les Regles de l'Art which is one of the best single pitch sport climbs I've ever done.

The final venue on our tour is the Gorge du Jonte. It is not very well known, but certainly should be, especially for the mid-grade trad climber. Set in a beautiful valley, complete with vulture sanctuary, it offers single pitch and multi pitch sport and trad out to about 150m or so. I've only done one route here, the lovely Le Bitard (5+), but I plan to return.

Guidebooks etc.

Local topos for all of the crags can often be found in local Decathlons, Tourist Information offices, or Tabacs, but is quite hard to buy a decent comprehensive guidebook from the UK. Of the areas I've covered, Buis (and Buoux) is covered by the Haute Provence Rockfax, whilst the other three will be in the Languedoc-Rousillion Rockfax which is due out later in 2011.

The situation with French guidebooks and bolt funding is a bit complex. Essentially all local guidebooks provide funding for the local area bolt fund, which maintains the equipment on routes and develops new sectors and crags. The Rockfax guides, however, don't make any direct donations partly because they don't want to, but also because the French haven't shown a willingness to accept them. At some crags, the local authorities fund some of the bolting in order to promote the area. It's difficult to find out where this happens, since no-one seems to want to give a straight answer, so it's quite hard to tell whether climbers are supporting the local equippers by simply being there.

The karma-friendly option is to buy a guidebook, though it can be difficult to find an all-encompassing option for any one area as some cover very tiny areas or even single crags. Some French guidebooks (the Ceuse guide I used in 2007, for example) are unadulterated rubbish that I really wouldn't want to pay for, but there are some good ones too. The guides for Thaurac and for Chateauvert have decent photo-topos, and the St Leger



*Down in the sunny south: sport climbing tour de France*

guide is of a similar style. Of course, the locals will have more personal knowledge than the Rockfax guidebook so might offer a more informed view on the type of climbing on a route.

I hope this provides some ideas to help British climbers spread their nets a bit wider than the Spanish coasts when looking for the next winter bolt-clipping trip. It is easy to get to nearby airports like Nimes or Montpellier. For gear, take plenty of draws and the longest sport rope available: 50m is limiting, 60m is a good all-rounder, 70m covers most things, and 80m covers just about everything. The venues I've listed are only a selection, and I've thoroughly enjoyed sampling other venues such as Thaurac (with the neighbouring multipitch at Hortus for the full trad experience) and the sheltered delights of Chateauvert as well. Get out there and have fun, and let me know any gems you find!



*The main wall at Seynes*



*Descending Crib Goch, Snowdonia, North Wales. Photo by Phil Ewels*



*Rich Shaw on Veliki Cuk in Paklenica National Park, Croatia. Photo: Rachel Berkowitz*

*Bill Onorato*

## **Enduring my Patagonia**

Our trip in early March (Patagonian autumn) was to comprise two distinct treks: the Estancia Maipu to El Chalten crossing, and the circuit of Cerro Huemul massif. We had assumed that the first would be a reasonable warm-up for the second. Wow, were we wrong! Of course Greg Crouch, the author of the book *Enduring Patagonia* and his climbing partner, Jim Donini, thought it to be just ‘a walk in the park’, but both, having just climbed Cerro Torre from the west in winter, are in another league entirely!

### El Chalten crossing

Following a day at the rustic Estancia El Condor on the shores of Lago San Martin, we began a three day, 30+ mile cross-country trek from Estancia Maipu to El Chalten. The first day was supposed to be a gentle ascent through lenga (beech) forests to the foot of the Del Gordo (“Fat Man”) pass. Immediately the terrain turned sharply uphill on an ill-defined track. It looked like only horses and wild guanacos had ever used these trails. Later we found out that only 40 people had ever completed the crossing and 19 of them were our current party!

The weather was bad to start and got worse. Never

before have I experienced sun, rain, snow, sleet, fog and punishing wind all in one day! The ground was sodden wet from the previous week's rain, and the mud balled up and clung to my boots with each step. Soon I was dragging a few pounds of mud along with my tired ass!

Four hours into the crossing we stopped for lunch and discovered that one of our party was missing. While the guides frantically backtracked looking for him, I took off my boots to discover two nasty blisters on my heels. I had never gotten blisters before and this was a hell of a place to start! My blister was taped and our missing person was found and we continued on, relentlessly uphill. It wasn't until over four hours later that we arrived at Camp 1, just beneath the crest of the Del Gordo pass and prepared in advance of our arrival by the gauchos on horseback, high above the banks of the Rio de Los Portones.

Day two of the crossing commenced with an hour's steep ascent over the Del Gordo pass. Then we began to descend into the steep valley of the Rio de Los Portones. As a new 'delight,' we had to ford the river several times. The day ground on, relentlessly up and down, through bogs with tufts of button grass, rocks, boulders and scree, calafate bushes to scrape at one's gaiters and the ever-present wind. The weather changed constantly but settled, for the most part, into light snow/sleet. This was actually quite welcome over the alternative of driving rain. We slogged on until we reached Camp 2 in failing evening light. Exhausted and wondering what the last day would be like, we fell asleep in anticipation of 'the

longest and perhaps the hardest day!’

I was sure that I could hike on, but my heels were certainly bothering me. Eventually I agreed to an alternative plan: instead of hiking the last 10+ miles, I would ride



*The Fitz Roy Group in Patagonia*

them on a pack-horse along with the gauchos. So, the group left on foot and, after watching the gauchos break camp, I mounted my steed, ‘Muracho,’ and headed off across country with three trains of four horses and another rider. We crossed some quite difficult terrain, but Muracho, my horse, was very sure-footed. At one point

*Bill Onorato*

we had to dismount to allow the horses to cross over the river in a very narrow and steep-walled canyon. One of the horses almost lost it going up the dizzying far side bank. However, after four hours' riding, we caught up to the group on foot ascending a very steep slope leading to a mirador (viewpoint).

I rode to the top to find a commanding view of the Fitz Roy and Cerro Torre massifs. The weather was clear but the wind was howling. We lunched in the saddle and



*View of Mt Fitz Roy across Lago Viedama*

headed off down steep and relentless slopes towards El Chalten. All that I had learned about horsemanship years before in Palos Verdes, CA, came back to me. We even had some flat meadow stretches where I opened Muracho

up to a full gallop! But the best – and worst – was yet to come. Approaching El Chalten after a very steep descent, we had to ford the swift-flowing Rio De Las Vueltas. It was at least 50 meters across and who knew how deep? I urged Muracho on into the river and gripped him tightly with my calves and thighs. The swift current seemed to push us further downstream than we were making progress across. I lost my stirrups two-thirds of the way across and hugged Muracho by the neck, urging him on. He swam mightily and we reached the far bank, half soaked. It was wonderful to ride the last few hundred meters to our delightful rustic inn, the Hosteleria El Puma, where I promptly enjoyed an ice-cold bottle of Argentine Quilmes beer!



*The incomparable Cerro Torre*

Cerro Huemul circuit

I spent the next two days at the El Puma nursing my heels and tending the big roaring fire of lenga wood in the fireplace in the main sitting room. The rest of the group headed out in pouring rain and a stiff wind to begin the Huemul Circuit trek. This is a circumambulation of Cerro Huemul, which lies just south of the Fitz Roy-Cerro Torre massif, bordering west on the great Southern Icecap and southeast on the Viedma Glacier and Lago Viedma. I felt sorry for my colleagues due to the weather conditions which they would have to endure. Then my guide from my last Patagonia trip, Cristian, came by and we agreed to do some hiking around El Chalten the moment the weather improved.

The third day dawned crystal clear. Winds from Chile had blown away the clouds and rain and the granite giants of El Chalten were out for all to see. I had rarely seen such a perfect day in Patagonia! Cristian and I set out on a 28 km trek to Lago Torre at the base of Cerro Torre, Torre Egger and Cerro Stanhardt. Approaching the first mirador, we could see the Torre massif outlined sharply against a pure blue sky. The towers were coated on the west side with snow and rime but the eastern faces towards which we walked were clear, cold, sharp, gray granite. An amazing 200 meter snow mushroom had built up on the summit of Cerro Standhart.

We continued on over the second mirador and, eventually, through Agostini Camp to the scree and glacial moraine slope leading up to Lago Torre.



Surmounting this, we arrived at the small lake formed by runoff from the Torre Glacier at the far north end. Some fresh icebergs had calved into the lake and floated around in odd shapes and various hues of white to deep blue. Most impressively, Cerro Torre penetrated the cloudless sky like a knife blade, unclimbed until the late 1950s and seldom since then. Cristian and I put on crampons, roped up and headed for a careful walk across the crevassed snout of the Torre Glacier, to the base of the Compressor Route up Cerro Torre. Looking up the sheer granite wall was both sobering and exhilarating. Not one I'd ever venture up! But the walk back to El Chalten was invigorated by a sense of accomplishment and deep satisfaction.

I learned that meanwhile on the Huemul Circuit, the group would be returning a day early, having not completed the circuit. The first day had been all rain and wind and the second day even worse. They had made it to their first camp at Laguna Torro, but waited out the storm for the entire second day. When the third day dawned clear and calm, they were to move up to cross the snout of the El Tunel Glacier, ascend 5,000 foot Windy Pass, have a spectacular view of the Southern Patagonian Ice Cap, and then descend to a camp beside a small lake and a refugio hut that had been placed by the Argentine Department of Glaciology for Ice Cap field studies. They made it up Windy Pass to a mind-blowing viewpoint. But the camp further on had been flooded by the earlier torrential rains, so they backtracked to their Laguna Torro camp and returned to the El Chalten the next day.

*Bill Onorato*



*Bill at the awesome Perito Moreno glacier*

### A visit to Viedama

After recuperation, we all set out for the port on Lago Viedma where a boat took us on an hour's ride to the snout of the Viedma Glacier. Unlike the heavily tourist-populated Perito Moreno Glacier on Lago Argentina, we had the Viedma Glacier all to ourselves. We scrambled over well-worn, smoothly-polished and deeply-grooved rocks marking the area from which the glacier had retreated in the last ten years. Arriving at its snout, we all donned crampons and walked onto the glacier itself. It was made of large, sharp, granular compacted ice; a

circus of up and down dips, huge ice seracs, and occasional gaping, bottomless crevasses. We navigated our way carefully around it with cameras poised. Our excellent local guide, Luchy, lent me his ice axes and I had a go at front-pointing up an ice serac with my crampons while hammering in the ice hammers alternatively as I ascended. About 15m up was enough for me, but it made a great photo!

The rest of the trip had several highlights including a stay at Estancia Cristina, a working sheep estancia; a traditional asado meal; a visit to downtown El Calafate (one street full of tourist-oriented shops); a stay at the famous Los Notros Hostalaria directly facing the vast Perito Moreno Glacier, 7 kms away (spectacular view!); and a visit to watch the Perito Moreno Glacier calving great chunks of ice into Lago Argentino from its 10 story high facade. Also, the food and wines in Argentina were sensational and I didn't lose any weight on this trip! We continued our culinary and wine degustation in Buenos Aires after leaving Patagonia and developed a real taste for fine Argentine Malbecs, Cabernets and Sauvignons from the Mendoza valley. We toured Buenos Aires, enjoying the cafe life and dulce vida, especially in the old San Telmo district and around Puerte Madero. We walked all over the city and enjoyed the ambiance of its European/Latin flavor. Of course, we visited the quite bizarre and baroque La Recoleta Cemetary to see the tomb of Evita Peron. In all, we definitely endured, but greatly enjoyed, Patagonia.



*Ice climbing on Viedama Glacier*



*Lawrence Cowton demonstrating the technique needed to become a solid HVS leader, Tody's Wall, Froggatt. Photo by Steven Andrews*



*Shark fins from Liberty Bell Mountain, Washington state.  
Photo by Rachel Berkowitz*



*Now that's a volcano! Mt Baker, Washington, in  
all her glory. Photo by Rachel Berkowitz*

*Vidya Ravi*

## **CUMC Scottish winter skills course**

*The face of the precipice opened and bade us as birds  
pass through,*

*And the bark shot sheer to the sea through the strait of  
the sharp steep cleft,*

*The portal that opens with imminent rampires to right  
and to left,*

*Sublime as the sky they darken and strange as a spell-  
struck dream,*

*On the world unconfined of the mountains, the reign of  
the sea supreme*

*--Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'Loch Torridon'*

Standing by Loch Torridon and looking northeast toward the mountains that comprise the Scottish Highlands, the eye is drawn from the muted sea line to towering, snowy summits. The mountains are Liathach, Beinn Eighe, Sgorr Ruadh, Maol Chean-dearg, and Beinn Alligin. These 'imminent rampires' rise from the loch, nearly vertically in places, to more than 1,000 metres. They form, as Swinburne attests, a passageway that leads to a whittled land of glens and straiths, corries and cliffs.

This is the scene described by Swinburne as he, entering

the waters of the loch from the narrow straits formed by the Shieldig peninsula, sights the Torridon massif. The CUMC Winter Skills Course students arrived in Torridon not through this route, but from inland. It was a warm, blustery March night, and we were relieved to reach our destination after a gruelling twelve hours in the car. After the long day spent gazing listlessly at the bleak motorway fringe of road signs and discarded trash, we were happy to find ourselves in a land little marred by asphalt and steel.

Torridon is a small village in the northwest highlands. The name also applies to the surrounding valley and the hills that lie north of the glen. This area is a geologically and topographically unique and the rocks are amongst the oldest in the world, having been formed 2,500 million years ago. An aerial photograph of the land mass reveals an intensely patterned, perforated sheet, fraying at the edges where the mossy green and ochre yield to the rich teal of the sea.

### Basic skills and the lay of the land

Spring had arrived prematurely. The snow had been solidly packed until early April, but was now retreating and losing its density. Jim Sutherland, our course instructor, informed us that this would provide an excellent opportunity for us to evaluate snow structure, density and depth as a form of avalanche risk assessment. We split into two groups of six – one led by Jim, founding partner of the guiding company Nineonesix,



and the other by mountain guide Ian Stewart.

As we drove eastwards along the Torridon glen, Jim told us about the forestry and conservation issues targeted by the Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA). The SNH advises the government on the delivery of conservation designations and establishes nature reserves and national parks. That there are only two national parks in Scotland is perhaps testament to the convoluted and contested issue of national park designation. First, an area must be deemed of ‘outstanding national importance’ in order for it to be designated as a national park. The establishment of the Cairngorms National Park in 2003 was riddled with numerous disputes about where to draw the park’s boundaries, and about the construction of a funicular to facilitate visitor access into the area.

Beinn Eighe, on the other hand, is a national natural reserve and therefore is not protected under a comprehensive conservation policy. One of the first such areas in Britain, it was established in 1951. The reserve covers about 12,000 acres, and its lower slopes, a composite of woodland, moorland and bogs, houses many protected species. The wild cat, golden eagle, pine martens and a number of rare plants thrive in this mixed terrain. A long, variegated ridge makes up the massif’s bulk, and two munros, Ruadh-stac Mòr (Big Red Stack) and Spidean Coire nan Clach (Peak of the Corrie of Stones), form its summits.



*Cornices on Ben Alde, reason enough to go on a winter skills course!*

We trekked up to Coire an Laoigh, on the southern slopes of Beinn Eighe, and made our way to the snow line. As we traversed the corrie, our instructors had us practice self-belay and self-arrest. We continued up to the ridge and started the immensely exciting snow glissades, or ‘bum-slides’, back to our path. As expected, there were a series of intense competitions ending in unresolved disputes on whose is the fastest slide, whose the most powerful, and whose the most poised. Having slid our way down, we trekked back to the car and finished our day in a pub in Torridon.

## Marilyns and Munros

The word ‘Munro’ comes from Sir Hugh Munro, the cataloguer of Scotland’s hills that were over 3,000 feet, or around 915 metres, in height. This list, known as the *Munro Tables*, was published in 1891 in the *Scottish Mountaineering Journal*. Before Munro undertook the task, there had been numerous debates about classification of hills and mountains in Scotland including the measure of topographic prominence, or, how to make a distinction between different summits in the same mountain range. Some of these debates still continue, but according to the 2009 revision of tables, there are 283 Munros and 227 separate subsidiary tops.

‘Munro-bagging’ is the popular sporting practice of climbing every single Munro in the country. A lesser-known hobby is ‘Marilyn-bagging’. *The Relative Hills of Britain* by Alan Dawson, lists the 1554 hills of England, Wales, Isle of Man and Scotland that are over 150 metres high and have 150 metres of prominence,



*Ursula in a bucket belay on  
the northern slopes of  
Liathach*

called Marilyn's.

Our winter skills group had the opportunity to meet a Marilyn-bagger, Mat Webster, manager of Torridon Youth Hostel. Mat had started Marilyn-bagging in west Yorkshire and slowly made his way to Scotland. Having 'bagged' more than 760 Marilyn's, he is at the halfway mark. The most delightful ones that he has climbed, he says, are Sithean Bhealaich Chumhaig near Portree on Skye, which offers great views of the Cullin and Storr hills, and Torridon's own Seana Mheallan, a great 435-metre climb. He warned us that not all of these are in appropriately picturesque places: the Marilyn in the Yorkshire Wolds provides a view of the A166 replete with camper vans of holidaying families driving to the seaside.

### Routes and Trees

On Sunday morning we were joined by Nathan, who led one group up the Coire Dubh Mor. Nathan's team climbed 'Way Up' as two pairs, building their own belays and generally becoming more independent winter climbers. Once again glissades were in order with a swift descent off the south side of Liathach. Another group went with Jim and Ian. Wishing to find shelter from the forecast westerlies, this contingent headed up the Leathad Buidhe, Beinn Eighe, where we had a clear pleasant view of Slioch, a mountain that lies across the Loch Marree.

As we climbed above the snow line of the triangular face above Kinlochewe, we found some slopes that were

ideal for practicing snow belays and bollards. We took turns building bucket seats and buried axe belays, and belaying one another on open snow slopes. We then had the pleasure of abseiling back down from a snow bollard that we had constructed before making the trek back down to the Beinn Eighe's lower slopes.

The trek back down the Leathad Buidhe provided a chance to learn more of the construction and alteration of the densely forested ecosystem below. The Scottish Wildlife Trust and other charities' principle project has been the reintroduction of the indigenous Caledonian pine into the Highland's forests. Jim pointed out the landscape's telltale signs of extensive repopulation efforts: yellow bulldozers dotted the expanse, and we could hear them at work.

The Caledonian pine forests, a special ecosystem and home to some of the country's most unique wildlife, once covered the expanse of the highlands. Today, one percent of the original woodlands survive, and only in isolated patches. Climatic warming since the last glacial period and the extensive introduction of non-native conifers have prompted the Caledonian woodlands' steady retreat north. These habitats once contained a number of species, including the brown bear, the elk, the Eurasian lynx and the grey wolf, which are no longer found in Scotland.

Reintroduction efforts have not been easy; the future of the Caledonian pine in the Highlands is uncertain. This spring's unusually dry and windy conditions have made the land unusually susceptible to forest fires. In early

*Vidya Ravi*

May 2011, twenty-nine fires raged across the northwest Highlands, including one in the Torridon mountains that engulfed nine square miles of hillside. The fire, aided by strong winds and dry and warm conditions, spread unfettered through the region. The fire has been devastating for the forest regeneration project, and acres of mature trees have been destroyed. We can only hope that the region has not experienced too much irreversible damage.

### Back to Cambridge

Over the weekend, we acquired a solid foundation of some important winter skills. Not only did we learn technical procedures, but were also taught by our guides' years of experience about what to expect in the mountains in the winter. We also learned about Torridon's topography and terrain, wildlife and conservation management, and the extent of human investment in this place. We were very pleased with Jim, Ian and Nathan and thank them for all their help. And a big thank you to Steven Andrews for organising the trip.







*Vincent Lister climbs off into the sunset. Castle Naze, Peak District. Photo by Rachel Berkowitz*



