

CEUNANT NEWSLETTER

January 2013

Thrills & Spills on Monte Bianco – Tony Mynette

In Easter 1992 Joe Brennan, Denis Jordan, Oliver Rooke and Tony Mynette headed to the Alps for a skiing trip.

Easter Monday dawned to confirm our worst fears. Peering out of the window in the Amburger Hütte revealed horizontally driven snow and nil visibility. So after a week of on/off activity in the Silvretta and Stubai we elected to give up on Austria. But where to next? We had a week left of our scheduled ski tour and with reasonable levels of fitness and acclimatization were keen for more action. A phone call to the tourist office in Chamonix came up trumps: it was warm, sunny, settled and forecast to remain so for the rest of Easter week.

24 hours later we were skiing the Valley Blanche in blissful conditions, delaying our descent to savour the breath-taking mountainscape. For Joe and I this was our second VB excursion in two months but familiarity didn't lessen the thrill of being in this premier alpine location. It was on one such picnic stop while lazing in the sunshine that the possibility of skiing Mont Blanc first occurred to us. (With a few tours to our credit including the classic Haute Route we were thus emboldened.) The most frequented but reputedly dangerous MB ski route, the Classic Route, was via the Grands Mulets hut and Bossons glacier, leaving skis at the Vallot bivouac hut at the foot of the Bosse ridge. We spoke of it no more but the seed was sown.

Wednesday was fine though with a stiff breeze blowing. We opted for another high altitude day and took the Grand Montet ski lift to the top station. The plan was to ski down to, then skin up the Argentiere glacier and the Glacier Tour Noir to the Col du Argentiere. We duly arrived at the col at 3pm, somewhat late due to a delayed start. After a brief lunch break we began the ski descent, on good snow to begin with but lower down the Tour Noir we met breakable crust and flat light which slowed our progress. Emerging with relief on to the easier slopes of the Argentiere glacier we schussed gently for 2 miles or so down to the snout. After negotiating the ice fall we joined the Point de vue piste run and via this to the Grand Montet (Lognan) half way lift station, where we pitched up at 5.45pm having just missed the last passenger lift down! All was not lost - we were generously invited aboard the workers lift and were back in the valley for 6.30pm, having being saved a tiring descent on foot. My diary records 'an excellent day'.

One of the team
faces a serac barrier
en-route to Grands
Mulets hut



AGM
16/03/13

We updated the forecast, it was clear the good weather would remain 'til Friday at least. We therefore resolved to end the holiday with an attempt on 'the big one' so on Thursday morning boarded the Midi 'frique for the second time that week, this time bound for the Grands Mulets hut.

We left the half way station Plan d'Aiguille and made our way across a snowy basin to a shoulder under the N. face of the Midi and the Frendo Spur. There followed a precarious traverse about a kilometer in length on a steep and exposed slope which we negotiated nervously using harschiesen (ski crampons), axe and ski pole. We emerged with relief on to the Bossons glacier but were immediately surrounded by towering seracs and yawning crevasses reminiscent of the Khumbu Icefall. The weather by now was overcast and had not cleared as promised. This, together with the terrain, especially following the recent nervous traverse, combined to produce an atmosphere of foreboding which we all admitted to. As if on cue Denis pointed with concern to my binding which he thought might be moving sideways on the ski especially when under maximum stress during 'kick' turns. An inspection showed the binding was indeed slightly loose at its screw fixing. After discussing the problem we elected to continue to the hut where we would attempt a repair using our emergency tools and perhaps more comprehensive kit available there. The foreboding increased as we progressed gingerly towards the hut.

The Grands Mulets at 3051m. is in a magnificent position astride a rock boss surrounded by a crevasse-strewn glacier. Skis (except mine) were left in the snow and we climbed 30m of rock by fixed rope to gain entry. There followed a 2 hour engineering session where, with rawlplugs provided by the warden and under supervision of a Bavarian engineer, we effected a repair. There followed a 'should we stay or should we go' debate and after much deliberation we decided to go for it. Maybe the decision was unduly influenced by the fact that Friday was our last day and the weather was set fine.

Friday dawned, or rather didn't yet as the 'Mont Blanc breakfast' is served by order nearer to midnight than dawn. We left at 3.30am, a little late but wanting to restrict the time skinning in darkness. The going was steep and heavily crevassed. We were thankful that our head torches picked out the tracks of earlier guided parties. The boom of falling seracs in the darkness, the ever-present crevasse danger, and now the suspect gear, all helped to prolong our earlier nervousness and unease. Cheery banter was there none.



Geant icefall safely negotiated
(background: Tour Ronde)



Warden 'pipes us aboard' the
Saarbrucknerhutte

It happened about an hour after starting out. On a steep traverse while executing a kick turn the binding parted company from my left ski at the heel section. Only the leash kept me attached to the ski which otherwise would have careered like a missile back down the glacier. I detached the other ski and nervously kicked steps in the ice until reaching a level platform. My day was over. I elected to stay put until daybreak then return to the hut on foot. I exhorted the others to continue. However, Joe wisely and very unselfishly offered to return with me to safeguard the descent, thus giving Denis and Olly a chance of going for the summit.



**About to start the Valley Blanche (background:
Aig. du Geant & Grandes Jorasses)**

These two crunched on upwards while Joe swished down ahead of me, waiting every hundred metres or so. I plodded on behind strenuously and miserably, weighed down by packed skis. We arrived back at Grands Mulets at 7.30am. I was tired and dejected. Joe was uncomplaining.

Friday had indeed dawned perfectly and after a brief recuperation Joe and I retraced our steps to the Midi halfway station. Now resigned rather than dejected (Mont Blanc would always be there - the trick was to ensure we were around for another attempt). Our consolation prize was al-fresco lunch in the warm spring sunshine at Bistro du Sport where balm for our hurt took form as 1 doz. Fin de Claire oysters complemented by the *de rigueur* bottle of Chablis.

Meanwhile, as we basked in valley sunshine Denis and Olly were having their own epic high on the mountain quite unbeknown to us (it being pre-mobile era). Having reached the Vallot hut they had stashed skis and were making their way up the Bosse ridge when 300m below the summit Denis collapsed in the snow holding his knee. It transpired that a monster head plant in Austria 10 days previously (broken ski pole, glasses, etc) had caused a hairline fracture of a knee joint and the constant stress on it since then had resulted in a catastrophic collapse.

The good news for Denis - Olly was a medic, the bad news - his speciality was psychiatry! Olly dug out a platform on the ridge, no easy task given the steepness and exposure then anchored Dennis securely.

A descending party alerted Chamonix Mountain Rescue from the emergency phone in the Vallot and twenty minutes later Denis was plucked expertly if unceremoniously from the ridge screaming with alarm at being swung on the cable from one side of the ridge to the other, exposure never being his strong suit. Ten minutes after that thanks to a routinely super-efficient rescue by the Chamonix team Denis was ensconced in A&E being plastered up.

We reunited later that evening and celebrated in the time-honoured manner a safe outcome to another, yet on this occasion, not uneventful ski tour.

Postscript

Joe, Denis and Tony returned the following year with Graham Sutton to ski Mont Blanc by the same route, on that occasion without incident.



Above:

One of the team faces a serac barrier en-route to Grands Mulets hut

**Below:
Skinning tentatively!**



Outdoor Meets in 2013

Month	Date	Venue	Camp or Hut
January	26 th - 27 th	Scotland - Lochnagar – Braemar Lodge Bunkhouse	Hut
February	8 th -10 th	Scotland – Ben Nevis – CIC Hut	Hut
March	16 th -17 th	AGM - Tyn-Lon	Hut
March	Easter 29 th -1 st April	Cornwall or Scotland – Snow conditions dependent	Camp
April	13 th -14 th	The Peak District – Hope Valley	Camp
May	Bank Holiday 4 th -6 th	Scotland - Torridon	Camp
May	Bank Holiday 25 th -27 th	The Lake District – Duddon Valley	Hut / Camp
June	8 th -9 th	Wye Valley	Camp
June	29 th -30 th	Mid Wales – Dinas Mawddwy	Hut
July	13 th -14 th	Wild Camping – Cwm Silyn	Camp
August	Bank Holiday 24 th -26 th	Yorkshire Dales – to be confirmed	Camp
September	7 th -8 th	Swanage – Square & Compass	Camp
October	12 th -13 th	The Peak District – Carlswark Cottage	Hut
November	2 nd -3 rd	Workmeet – Tyn-Lon, with fireworks	Hut
December	7 th -8 th	Family Meet – Tyn-Lon	Hut
December	New Year 27 th -1 st Jan	Scotland – Glen Coe, Lagangarbh Hut	Hut

And don't forget that much loved cornerstone of the Ceunant meets program, the third weekend of each month at Tyn Lon. See you there.

BMC Expedition Planning Seminar

Ceunant Mountaineering Members attend the BMC Expedition Planning Seminar

On the 12th of January CMC committee members Bob Ellis and Stew Moody attended the BMC seminar on expedition planning, which was held at Plas Y Brenin. Workshops included:

- Using Google Earth for visualising mountain routes.
- Staying healthy on expeditions.
- Dealing with altitude and AMS.
- Deciding where to go and when to go.
- Finding sources of grants and sponsorship.

A series of presentation were then given by the likes of Nick Bullock and Mick Fowler on their recent expeditions to mountain regions in Pakistan, Alaska, and Greenland to name but a few.

Bob and Stew are now busy making plans for their own expedition which they expect will take place in the summer of 2014.



Bob Ellis



Stew Moody



Newsletter Archive

Kevin Devine



I've recently begun a project to create an archive of club newsletters and magazines dating back to the earliest days of the Ceunant. And to make them available on the club website for all to see. With the help of a few of our longer standing members (particularly **Tony Mynette** and **John Pettet**) our record of the 1960's is filling up nicely, and we are expanding into the heady days of the 70's and 80's. There are even rumours of a few missing newsletters from the dark ages of the 1950's, but they will not hold out long.

Looking through them it's surprising how often the subjects discussed are the same today as they were 50 years ago. So I thought it might be fun to use the forum of today's newsletter for an occasional look back in the archive.

Let's start with 1960. In February 1960 a deliberately provocative editorial tackled the perennial subject of the purpose of a climbing club. It seems the social side of the club was not universally popular:

"To have a club social evening and dance is, on its own, an idea worthy of serious consideration, but it has nothing whatsoever to do with a clubs annual function, and can only undermine the clubs purpose"

By the September 1960 edition it's clear the social side was fighting back:

"If a climber does not feel like exercising himself on the crags during a weekend by all means let him fester in the hut listening to Elvis and playing chase the lady or three card brag"

But there was no shortage of humour with a climbing glossary including the following:

"Your rope - Ancient, frayed, shock-strained specimen of loose fibres, suitable only for a clothes line. My rope - Practically new, undamaged, carefully treated piece of equipment"

They were clearly a pretty hardy bunch in those days. Evidenced by an annual "Welsh 3000 meet", which posted times for the classic mountain traverse of 12 hours 28 minutes.

I'd also urge you to take a look at the Christmas 1960 edition which contains an emotional description of the old hotel at Pen-y-Pass, which is now a youth hostel of course. Including the author being nursed through a bout of Asian flu "with all the medicinal contents of the bar liberally applied".

I hope you enjoy dipping into this archive as much as I have. Our club and sport have a long and colourful history. You'll find much of that history here – great adventures, memorable parties, new routes which are now familiar favourites and more than a few signs of the times (membership fees of 1 guinea and hut fees of 2 shillings). You can find the archive at www.ceunant.org/newsletters, and if you think you can help fill in any gaps, let me know.

One Week in Kalymnos – Karina Bogucka

Kalymnos. We went, and we conquered. And it was great. We ate a lot, drank a lot, we rode scooters, and I think it's worth saying that we were climbing every day, and that all of us pushed our leading grades. I was there, of course, so was Stew Moody, Luke and Graham Perry, and Tony and Anne Millichope.

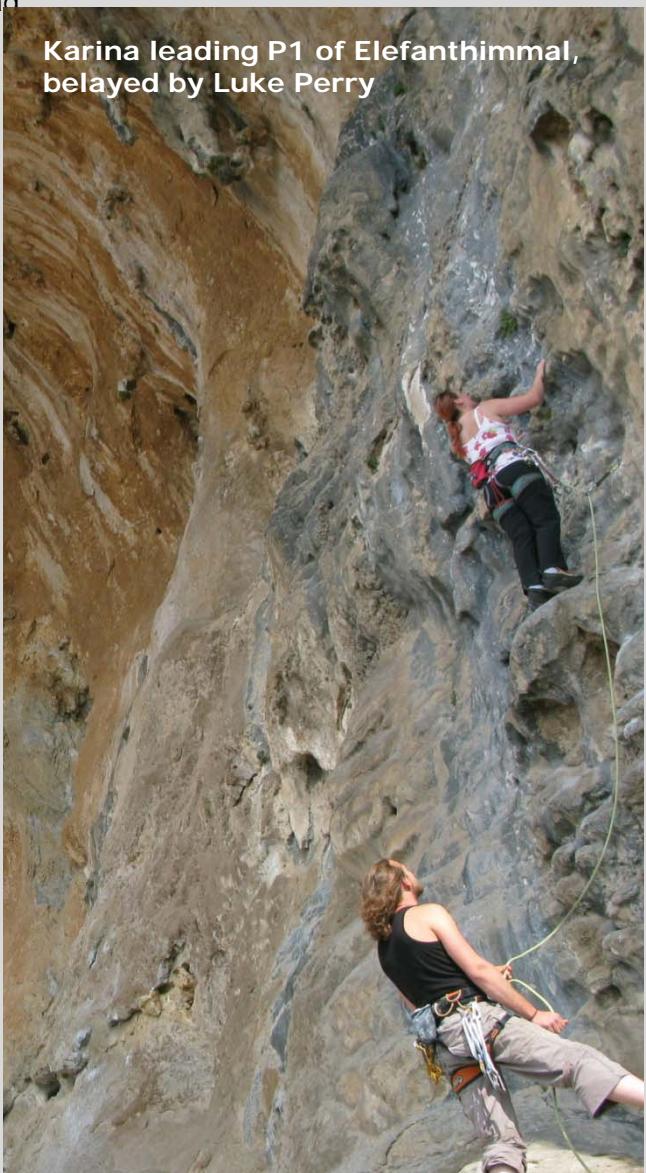
On the first day we went to Dolphin Bay where I was smacked in the face by a neighbouring climbing party's rope, that was a nice welcome. Stew led a 5b as his first warm up, and I seconded. I thought it was a great T-shirt temperature for climbing, others were wearing down jackets.

On the third day the group split, we all went to Telendos, but Stew, Luke and Graham did a multi-pitch, whilst I went with Tony and Anne to another part of the island. One of the leads was really difficult for the grade, it might have been 5a, but it had some tricky moves, and even Tony said they were tricky. I pushed my grade here too. I'm seriously proud; every day I pushed my grade. We wanted to walk back to the marina, but we were too shattered, so we caught the boat from just below the crag instead

The day before the Grande Grotto we decided to take it easy! Yeah, right. We still pushed. The day we went to Grande Grotto Luke lead a 7a+. We then moved onto a route who's crux move on the second pitch was 7a+, and I took it upon myself to lead the first pitch. We met Spider-woman that day, a Russian girl with her Swiss husband, and everyone pointed to her to show how you rest on a sport route, none handed with a knee bar. Then there was a group of kids from Glasgow climbing 8a, I'm pretty sure they were the national team, their t-shirts certainly.

The food was really good, cheap, and we got free deserts, and on occasions free shots. One night, in a restaurant we'd been to before, we decided we were going to guess the number of doughnut balls in the large bowl we were served for dessert. Stew and Luke bet they could guess the nearest number, the looser would wear a beer label stuck to his forehead later that night in the pub. Would you believe it, they were both equally close, so they both looked like idiots in the pub that night. Scooters were fun, first of all it was fun watching Stew and Graham try them out, and then trying to get us all balanced in pairs with all our climbing gear too. Stew found turning right quite hard, but he was ok with turning left. It was lovely, you don't need a car there.

Karina leading P1 of Elefanthimmal, belayed by Luke Perry





L-R : Karina, Stew, Tony, Graham, Anne



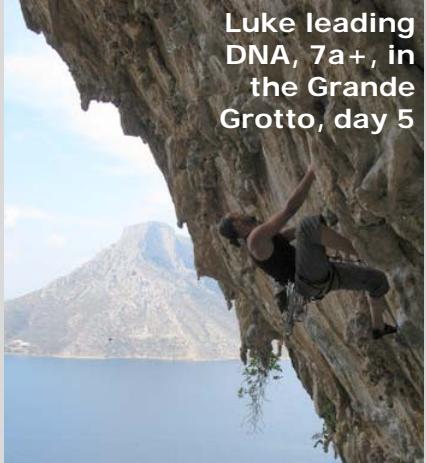
Spiderwoman chalks up

And I have to mention the donkey, it was on our second to last day, when we met a great Canadian couple. Whenever someone told a joke, it seemed that the donkey would bray. You probably had to be there, but it was funny, we laughed all day.

My favourite route was the very last route I lead, on the very last day. It was 5b, I don't remember the name of the route though. It was just a perfect, words can't describe it. It was challenging yet all the holds were there, everything just fell into place for me. It was at a crag called Summertime, and we all flew home that night.



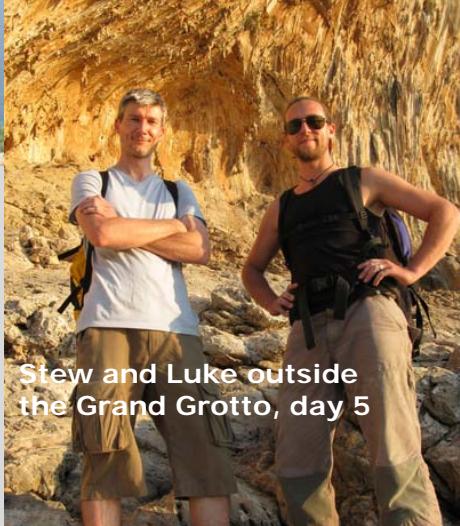
L-R : Karina, Luke and Graham sizing up the routes at Arhi, day 4



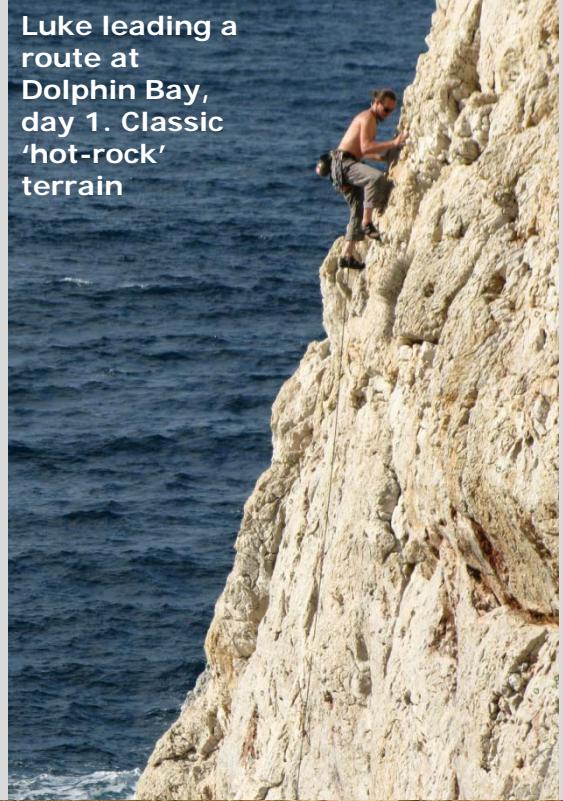
Luke leading DNA, 7a+, in the Grande Grotto, day 5



Group photo in the pub, with the owner



Stew and Luke outside the Grand Grotto, day 5



Luke leading a route at Dolphin Bay, day 1. Classic 'hot-rock' terrain



Beers and forfeits in the pub, day 6



Tony and Anne soaking up the afternoon sun, day 4



Karina hydrating at Dolphin Bay, day 1

ATTENTION ALL CLUB MEMBERS...

Annual General Meeting

4pm, Saturday 16th March, Vaynol Arms

Your Ceunant AGM will be taking place in at 4pm at the Vaynol Arms, Nant Peris. This is your chance to discuss the club and vote for the new committee. If you would like to raise an issue or want to join the new committee then please contact Fiona Devine, the Club Secretary:

Email secretary@ceunant.org



**Ian
Smith**
Chairman

THE NEXT OUTDOOR MEET IS...

The CIC Hut, Ben Nevis, 8th – 10th February.



Left - John Beddard and Bob Ellis stood outside the CIC Hut. Right – Dan Ashfield on P1 of Green Gully, on the North Face of Ben Nevis.

Please keep an eye out on Facebook for updates and invitations to meets.



Banff Film Festival,
19:30, Saturday 9th
February, Crescent
Theatre, Birmingham
www.banff-uk.com

Exclusive Booking at Tyn Lon

Please be advised, that the committee have once again granted Jackie and Leo and their group of children exclusive use of Tyn Lon for the period of Monday 20th May through to Friday 24th May. Please do not stay at Tyn Lon over this period. They will have vacated Tyn Lon by mid afternoon on the Friday so the hut will be free for the weekend.

Posting a cheque to the treasurer?

As Maggie McAndrew is due to step down as CMC Treasurer at the next AGM, Naomi Walker is currently acting as deputy treasurer until a new treasurer is voted in at the upcoming AGM on the 16th March 2013.

Please send any cheque for annual subscription and hut fees to Naomi at 8 Broad Road, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 7XE

A MOUNTAIN COWARD'S FIRST MULTI-PITCH – CAROL OLIVER

I decided a while back that I really needed to try at least one outdoor climb in preparation for my Skye Cuillin trip. My friend Mark Eddy kindly offered to take me. Various crags were discussed and Oxford Crag in Patterdale, which is more or less a scramble, was the favoured choice. It was just what I wanted... single pitch, only around 30 or 40 feet and very, very easy.

Mark rang me to sort out a date – however, he said he now had plans to take me on a different climb – one which he thought would be better practice for the Cuillin. He said he was going to throw me in at the deep end a bit... ooo-errr! I wasn't to know, at this stage, that the 'deep end' was a multi-pitch climb on Middlefell Buttress, of around 250 feet going at 'diff' standard!

We arranged to meet on the Wednesday evening at the Old Dungeon Gill pub in Langdale at around 1630 - I rolled up in the car park around 1600 feeling very nervous indeed. I looked up at the valley wall and could see tiny people far above climbing up some huge, vertical and savage-looking buttresses – I hoped I wasn't due to join them on those crags! I looked around the valley walls in all directions and couldn't see any other crags which looked like they would be climbing crags though – all the others looked too bitty.

I sat with a drink outside the pub in the blazing sun - everyone else in the beer garden was happy and smiling having come back from a wonderful day's walking on the fells. Mine was the only glum face – purely nerves. I was really wondering what I'd let myself in for and whether I was even capable of outdoor climbing on a proper crag. 1630 arrived and so did Mark - I went to meet him. He was all smiles and asked how I was - I just said 'nervous'. We sorted out kit and he passed me the very heavy climbing rope and showed me how to strap it onto my back – I was amazed how heavy it was to carry. We then set off up the valley side towards the crags I'd been eyeing fearfully... The sun felt hotter and the rope felt heavier and I was puffing away already and feeling quite sick with heat, stress and exertion. In 15 minutes we were there... right at the foot of the crags I'd been dreading!

We had a little rest and Mark passed me a few implements to clip onto my harness – one was a carabiner and sling, another was a 'nut removal device' (sounds nasty) and then the belay device and carabiner. I put my harness and rock boots on and hid my walking boots in a little crevice at the bottom of the descent gully. I then reluctantly put the helmet onto my very hot head and Mark proceeded to go through all the things I needed to know for the climb.

The first thing was the 'climbing calls' – there were four of these... When we started to climb, the true meaning of these was revealed. The first one was "Safe" (I'm up that section now – in a moment we'll see what you can make of it). Then, "On Belay" (wait till you get up here and see what complicated system I managed to contrive to strap you to which you'll have to figure out how to dismantle later) and "Climb when ready" (gulp/great, I can get off this tiny belay ledge now - which way did he go up that again?). The only call I had to shout was "That's me" which unfortunately didn't mean, "Right, that's me off for my tea – see you later when you come back down" – it's more "All right! you can stop pulling up the rope now – my feet are leaving the ground!"



Carol on the first pitch,
too pre-occupied with
the climbing to notice
Mark was snapping
away with his camera



Mark Eddy at the top of the route



By now, I'd figured out that this climb wasn't the nice little single-pitch I'd been hoping for. In addition to that, I'd also been warned that I couldn't just walk/run away at the top – I had to abseil (or be lowered) back down for about 100 feet. Mark showed me how to use the nut key to knock nuts out of cracks to retrieve his gear for when I was following him up the crag. We then tied in and Mark set off to tackle the first pitch.

The first pitch was really only a scramble and very easy and even I could have gone up it without the rope. However, when I reached the nice grassy area atop it, I had a look down and was perturbed at the amount of height we'd already gained. After that, I made sure I didn't look down again for the whole climb. I noticed the second pitch was much more vertical, although very short. I started to look for a route up it while Mark sorted out the rope.

Shortly, he set off up the second pitch – of course, he made it look easy. This pitch was probably only around 15-20 feet and he was up it in very quick time. Soon it was my turn again... I found the start pretty hard. There was a 'V' which I had to work my way up and I found it very slippery indeed and couldn't get my feet to keep still anywhere. Luckily there was a superb ledge handhold above which I managed, after a minute or so, to get high enough above to get my elbow and forearm onto so that I could try to lever my way up the slippery V section. I huffed and puffed a bit and eventually managed to smear my feet up the V and onto better holds above it. From there the climb became quite a bit easier and I joined Mark on the second belay ledge. This was again grassy – a lot smaller but still comfortable.

More rope sorting then Mark was off again after pointing out a couple of routes up the next section. One was some obviously polished steps up – but the steps looked quite large and far apart to me. He went up a different route to these with a big step up to start but, as I studied the almost vertical section of crag in front of me, I was pretty sure I could see an even easier way to the right of those and resolved to try that one myself.

Soon the calls came to let me know it was time for me to attempt to dismantle this belay – two nuts and slings in a crack on which I had to use the nut key. I knocked them out no problem but found I then had a couple of slings to fit around my shoulder. I didn't realise how large slings were until I started looping them diagonally across my shoulder – I think one sling went around 3 times before there were no awkward and dangerous dangly bits. I clipped the carabiners onto my gear loops and set off.

My route choice got me up the first part much more easily than the other two routes but from there on I struggled for a while. After a bit more huffing and puffing – and worrying about falling off on some of the much smaller holds, I started to make progress up the pitch. This third pitch was quite a lot longer and more complicated than the other two had been.

I reached the area where Mark had told me I needed to turn to the right but was puzzled. Had he meant into the small crack behind a large rock flake? I thought I could just about fit my foot into that but worried a bit about getting stuck in it – I thought that would take a lot of sorting out and I would get very stressed if I got stuck. I was already feeling the height by now (even though I hadn't looked down) and was starting to get slightly shaky legs and my stress levels were going up a bit. I wasn't panicking though so that was good.

Anyway, I tried my foot in the crack for size and my leg fit in okay. I decided I needed to get my other foot up on top of the rock flake to push my way on up the crag but had my legs the wrong way round. I managed to push on my hands and swap my legs over and then managed to step up onto the top of the flake and push on upwards. There were good steps up from there. Luckily, so far on the climb, all my handholds had been pretty good – I still rely on good handholds rather than good footholds for confidence (I know that's the wrong way round really).

I soon joined Mark, who was giving lots of encouragement from above, on the... belay ledge... if you could call it that. It was a long ledge but, to my mind, was absolutely tiny! It was probably only about 3 inches wide and my feet only half fit on it – I felt my heels hanging over hundreds of feet of space! I found two very good handholds and clung on, leaning into the rock and feeling very tense and insecure, despite the fact I was firmly attached to a sling around a small pinnacle just above me.

Just at this point, Mark fished out his camera and aimed it at me. I realised I was looking very stressed so thought I should really try to smile if he was going to take a photo of me so I forced a smile – I was later surprised to see that on the photo it actually looks like I'm really happy to be there! However, it was around this point, I think, that I told Mark I probably wasn't going to take this up as a hobby as I was finding it a bit stressful! He just smiled and told me I was doing very well.

The next section was very long and towered way above me – it was slightly less steep though and I could see it was much easier, having large steps all the way up it. Mark said it was just really a scramble and I had to agree - it wouldn't be a scramble I would be happy to do at that height without a rope though! He could see I wasn't really keen on releasing my two firm handholds on the rock in front of me and asked whether I wanted to belay him up the next bit or not. I said I probably should but he said he was happy enough if I didn't want to. I was really worried about him falling off and said so but, in the end, he set off up unbelayed and I selfishly clung onto my two rocky handholds – I was feeling very guilty.

After quite a bit longer this time, the rope eventually started to snake off up the pitch after him and eventually the calls floated down for me to start off up the fourth pitch. I first had to clamber behind the pinnacle to retrieve the sling from around it. I wasn't so keen doing this as I had to face out and was worried I'd catch a glimpse of 'down'! Anyway, by concentrating hard on the task in hand, I managed not to notice what, by now, must have been a humungous drop below me. Soon I was looping the sling round me and clipping the carabiners on to my gear loops and following up what turned out to be a very easy, but quite sustained, climb up the rocky steps to the final grassy ledge.

The end of our climb was here – a pleasant grassy ridge after a climb of around 250 feet. There was at least another pitch or two to get to the top of the crag but here was where we were to abseil back down into the scree gully. When I arrived on this grassy area, it was comfortably long and large and I initially felt very relaxed. I believed all my troubles were over now... All I had to do was abseil back down into the gully which looked very near to hand – I'd abseiled before at the climbing wall so I'd be fine, I thought...

We had a rest and I had a few gulps of Mark's water – I'd forgotten to bring mine. He had a quick snack and put a light jacket on. By now the sun was setting and a chilly breeze had set up. I shivered in my t-shirt and wished I'd tied my fleece jumper around my waist after all. I was still tied into the belay slings around a large boulder on the grassy ridge. From here I was to belay Mark while he went below the grassy ledge to set up the abseil. There was a medium sized tree sticking out from a nice, pointed-topped rock.

I hoped the rope was going round the nice pointy rock – I've always said I would never trust a tree for a belay. Soon though, I noticed the rope was being put around the tree – my heart sank... When he was safe, I went to peer over into the gully – the gully bed wasn't as comfortingly near as I'd thought. The bit I'd been looking at was probably nearly level with our grassy alp but we were going far, far below that. The drop looked absolutely enormous!

I started fretting and complaining and asked if I couldn't just attempt to climb down as I could see ledges setting off down that way and the start looked fairly easy to start with. Mark assured me that it would be a very difficult climb down and said it would take too long. I couldn't believe where he was 'standing' – his feet were on a very steep section of rock – he almost looked to be hanging in mid-air! I realised I had to get on with it and do something – at least set off.

Predictably, I started off trying to descend my comforting ledges. However, they took me away from the line of the abseil point so, as Mark pointed out, if I now fell off, I would be due a wild pendulum which wouldn't be nice. I reluctantly headed back to the much more vertical bit directly under the rope and tried to will myself to lean back and set off down. No matter how hard I tried to force myself to do it, I just couldn't trust the tree and just wouldn't lean out over the drop. In the end, I peered down to see if I could see some footholds – I was already clinging to handholds. I felt around and found footholds and continued to claw my way downwards, feeling and peering for footholds. I suppose I knew that, if I fell off, it didn't really matter and that I'd then just get lowered but, until I fell off I couldn't make myself do it.

By now I'd started to swear – I think for the first time on the climb. I kept whimpering that I "was terrified" as I clawed my way downwards. In not many minutes I reached the point where I had to turn right and head down another section to the gully floor. I looked below me and all I could see was two sheer gullies with a bit of a rock rib coming up between them – the drop looked even bigger down here!

I could see a foothold here and there but really didn't think I could find enough to continue descending, however, to my surprise I managed to clamber down this section too and eventually, to my great relief (and probably Mark's) I reached the loose scree of the gully floor and shouted up to Mark I was untying. Not long after, he happily abseiled down to where I was sat in the gully. Even though I really hate loose scree gullies, I was really happy to slither down this one back to my waiting walking boots. When we'd packed up and descended back down to the cars, I was surprised to see it was quarter to eight.

Mark's wife had come to meet us and was waiting in her car so we all trooped off to the pub and I treated them to a meal and a drink. Phew! My first outdoor rock climb was in the bag. I was actually quite surprised I'd managed it and quite proud of the fact that I'd got up the climb okay. I wasn't so proud of the fact that I'd completely refused to abseil back down though.



Panic-stricken mountain adventures!

If you want to read more of Carol's antics you can find her blog at:

www.mountaincowardadventures.wordpress.com

New Year Meet at Tyn Lon – Stew Moody



**Stew and Mike shelter
on Moel Siabod**



**Rich and Ellie in
the DJ zone**

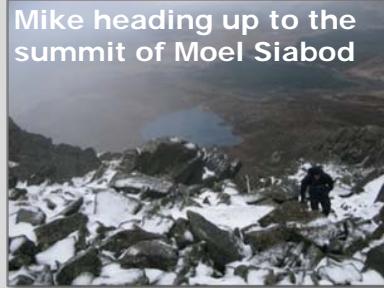


**Buffet O'clock
in tyn Lon**

Here's a selection of photos from the CMC New Year meet at Tyn Lon. I was there from the afternoon of the 28th of December till the 1st of January. I think they are representative of what actually happened; a lot of sitting around having fun and chatting in Tyn Lon over cups of tea, an awful lot of fine food and drink, several trips to the Vaynol, and, hmm, I'm forgetting something here, oh yes, a small dose of hill walking.



**Kev and Fi in
the Vaynol**



**Mike heading up to the
summit of Moel Siabod**



**Em makes
her starters**



Some of the buffet



**John and Mark in
the Vaynol**



**Luke and
Nats in the
Vaynol**



**Fi takes on the
boys at pool**



**Tommy and the
cheese board**



**Naomi and Dave in
the Vaynol**

...and don't forget folks, for this coming new year will be the [Lagangarbh hut](#) in Glen Coe.