



CRUX

The Magazine of the Hertfordshire Mountaineering Club

SPRING 2013 ISSUE

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CLIMBING

WALKING

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BIKING



Hi Guys,

Welcome to the latest edition of Crux. Thank you for supporting the club during 2012.

The year started with a January trip to the Lakes which saw superb winter weather and some new members experiencing the winter mountains for the first time.

The annual dinner was held in the Peak District and the MOTTY mug (member of the year) was awarded to Barry McRobb for his commitment to climbing, getting away most weekends of the year in all weather conditions and coordinating the outdoor meets programme.

Dave, Barry and a number of other club members have been encouraging new members to take their first steps on rock and we organised an induction at the Hatfield Wall for new members and hope to do so again this year.

We had a well-attended trip to the Alps this year introducing a number of new members to the high mountains for the first time, despite bad weather a good time was had by all.

The club applied for BMC grants and we were awarded £200 towards the club website and £200 for training. Kevin was given £50 toward his ML assessment, congratulations on passing. £50 was given to Spencer and Nicola which was put towards a navigation course which Nicola kindly organised for the club. £50 is still up for grabs anyone?

There is a Mountain skills boot camp coming up this Easter, learn all the essential skills for looking after yourself in the Mountains over this exciting four day weekend. Get booking on this year's events, they fill fast!

Looking forward to a good 2013.

CHAIRMAN



On behalf of the Committee

I would like to thank once again this year the St. Albans branch of Cotswold Outdoors for hosting our Annual Slideshow and our AGM.

I should also like to thank Nicola for putting together this edition of Crux, and the contributors for taking time to write the articles. Phil also deserves a special mention for maintaining our superb website, and of course our heartfelt thanks go to all those club members who have worked hard in some way to make this the great club it is.

Cover Photo:

Al Cartwright and Nicola Williams during their successful ascent of the Jungfrau by the SE ridge last July. Photo © Paul Hearn.



Phil's Gear Guide

Rab Generator Vest, £80 Cotswold Outdoors

On the Yorkshire Dales meet, Paul Hearn asked me to write an article for Crux on "My favourite bit of kit". Other than a brief to keep it short, that was it, no other stipulations. I agreed, of course, how hard could it be? Well as it turns out, harder than you think. You see I have so many bits of kit, but in the end I did settle on a single item. My favourite bit of kit is the spare layer I throw in the rucksack before setting out, the Rab Generator Vest. It's a vest filled with the synthetic insulation Primaloft. I take it with me year round and use it as an extra layer for my outdoor activities from walking, scrambling, climbing, mountain biking, to Scottish winter and alpine. It is light, keeps my core warm, and leaves my arms unencumbered.

When not in use, it compresses well. For walking and scrambling; it is a great layer to throw on when you stop for a lunch. For climbing, it's a great layer to throw on when belaying. For Scottish winter or alpine it is a great layer to throw on for those pre-dawn starts, or if you are unexpectedly caught out by the weather. For mountain biking it's a great winter mid layer, or for when you stop to fix a puncture or mechanical. It's also great if someone has an accident, and you need to keep them warm, to combat the shock. You can wear it, in the evening camp, as the night cools. Because it is Primaloft it retains its warmth when wet. So sometimes I just put it on as the outside layer rather than an inner layer, even when raining.

That's why I bought it XL, so I could also throw it on, over the outside, without too much faffing. So if you don't carry a spare layer, I recommend you do, especially in winter. I'd also say you wouldn't go too far wrong with the Rab Generator vest. You can even wash it in the washing machine!





Gary demonstrating 'This is why you ski tour !'

Ski Touring

Why ski tour? Having skied about once a year for 10 years, I had now gotten a bit bored of the time spent in lift queues, crowds, churned up snow, the fear of being taken out by a complete stranger and of course that horrible scraping sound of snow boarders behind you. On joining the club, Gary did mention that he had just done a ski tour trip, and having missed out on the opportunity to heli-ski (where a chopper takes you to the middle of nowhere, you jump out and ski in deep powder) in Canada as I had twisted my knee the day before I was booked, this seemed right up my street.

What is ski touring?

Instead of getting a chair lift to ski on marked pistes or even off-piste, you go uphill on your skis to wherever you choose, fixing special skins to your skis, enabling them to glide uphill without slipping back. The original ones were made of seal skins, but now similar to thick felt. You also wear ski touring boots which are a cross between ski and hiking boots and are more comfortable and lighter than normal ski boots enabling you to walk in them if you need to. Ski touring skis have different binding to normal ski boots as your heel has to be able to come out and in of the binding to go uphill. You might still need the odd chairlift or cable car to get to where you need to be, but after that you are off. You would zigzag your way up, making kick turns to change direction, uphill is of course more tiring and takes longer than coming downhill, but on the way you take in the amazing views and scenery which are devoid of the crowds you would get on the slopes. If there is any ice, steep or really deep snow, or rock, it may be necessary to take off your skis, carry them in your rucksack and walk that section in your boots. Once you have reached the top, its time to take off the skins, secure your boots back into the ski bindings and ski downhill – virgin, untracked snow, beautiful to ski in, but murderous on the thighs.

What kit?

Usual winter stuff crampons, ice axe etc plus avalanche gear – probe, shovel, transceiver, ice screws, rope possibly. Skis, boots, poles, skins and ski crampons can be hired. Plus I now always wear a helmet on the downhill.

The Trip Kevin and myself booked ourselves onto a 3 day introductory backcountry ski course with the British Alpine Ski School (BASS) in Chamonix. We both wanted to make sure our off-piste skiing was up to scratch, and the course would show us ski touring skills such as fixing the skins (not as easy as you would think especially if its windy and your hands are freezing) and avalanche safety skills. We would then to join fellow HMC members, Gary, Robin and Charles, who skied toured the previous year, for the rest of the week. We arrived a couple of days before the others and we were all staying in a great little hotel, Les Randonneurs, cheap and cheerful, in Argentiere in Chamonix. Chamonix is a mecca for extreme sports enthusiasts and for skiing is geared more towards intermediate and advanced.

Getting to Chamonix was easy, Luton to Geneva, then an hour transfer. We took an early morning flight and arrived with time to spare and sort out our stuff. The next day, we spent getting our ski legs back, it was sunny and surprisingly hot, so was a great day skiing. Then onto our course the next day, 5 of us in total, 2 Americans and a young doctor from London (reassuring to have a medic amongst us!). The first thing we did was to ensure our transceivers were on and we were all 'reading' each other. We spent the day on and off-piste with skills and drills – skiing holding your poles across your body, skiing pole-less etc. The second day, we played with our transceivers again, doing checks, burying things in the snow and finding them and digging them out which was fun, but seriously one of those things, you need to know but hope never to have to use.

We also had our first go attaching the skins to our skis and 'skin-ning' along and doing kick turns, which was quite exhausting and then skiing back down. Our third and final day, was spent honing all our skills, getting quicker putting the skins on, and lots of challenging skiing off piste. The course had pretty much done as it was supposed to do, so we were looking forward to venturing out.

We then joined the guys on our tour day, to the Col d'Argentière using the cable car to get us high, descending onto the glacier and then starting the long skin up. There were plenty of other groups doing the same, so little danger of getting lost, but it was sunny, hot and tiring, and unfortunately we had to turn back as we behind schedule. Skiing back through vast and open terrain, with crevasses and seracs with blue skies was amazing if a little scary, and I was relieved to reach civilisation again – a black pisted slope which seemed easy compared to what we had been on. I had already concluded by then, that ski touring was the way forward, not a ski lift queue in sight, and so peaceful and quiet. Unfortunately the next day, the weather took a turn for the worse, cloudy, snow and cold. Gary, Kevin and myself still decided to go out but we stuck to piste and nearby off-piste, we also had fun with some mogul fields. Conditions grew worse and visibility to about 10m – so we took it easy and slowly and headed back. The forecast the next day was good, so we took the bus to another hamlet, Flegere, and took the cable car up and left the crowds once we got up high. We made our way to the Aiguilles Rouges, having to take our skis off for a short steep bit, and we found a great spot to have our lunch on a frozen lake. The rest of the day was spent pleasantly skiing back, however when we were in for a surprise as we needed to get a chair lift down at the end of the day, which was closed, so we and the rest of the people making their way home, had to hot foot it to another chair lift, the timing was very close but we made it. The next day, we all went our separate ways, Gary was off a week's hut to hut ski tour, Charles and Robin were going home, whilst Kevin and I still had two days left. We had decided to ski the

Vallee Blanche which is an off-piste glacier route of 20km with a vertical descent of 2700m which is the usual finale to ski school weekly courses. Its a very popular route and involved taking the Aiguille du Midi cable car up to 3842m, which allows gives amazing views of Mont Blanc, then traversing along a treacherous and very exposed ridge with only a rope separating us a from very long drop, also as we were going without a guide, we decided to stick with the classic route. Were we scared? Of course, but the actual skiing was pleasant, navigating our way through the exposed landscape and seracs. Our piece de resistance was pushing our way to the front of the queue to be lowered down a small drop of about 2 meters – probably because it looked scary and we already had our harnesses on. Strangely enough the worst of the skiing was getting back down to the valley at the end of the Vallee Blanche, the route was through trees, almost single track, icy, bare in some places and very busy. We had now skied for 8 days continuously so decided to have a tourist day for our last day in Chamonix, we went up on the cable car again to see the views of the Mont Blanc massif unencumbered with layers of clothing and gear, we ate our first tartiflette and we had crepes with lashings of cream and toffee sauce, and of course looked at the expensive gear shops.

All in all, a great week, combining the two pleasures of skiing and the mountains. I am definitely going to do it again and already thinking of booking a hut to hut tour. Chamonix is a great town and we were so inspired by the views of Mont Blanc to go back and attempt to climb it in the summer, but that's another story.



Samantha Yen Yau



Finding Our Way

A Weekend Navigation Course in the Peak District

Ending up at the end of a dark, dead end track trying to find our hostel was perhaps not a promising start to our weekend navigation course.

Our course started the next morning (we did find our hostel shortly after) when the five of us met Jon from Will 4 Adventure in a car park for part one of our course. Jon started with a brief chat on kit, some useful websites (see below) and then some map reading skills such as taking grid references. Jon quickly got us off walking so that we could learn navigation skills by 'doing' – the best way to learn.

Jon started by showing us how to match up the landscape features on the map with what we could see as we walked so that we could follow our route on the map. We were then shown how to use a compass to take a bearing from the map on where we were heading and then walking on that bearing to get to our destination. Each of us took it in turns to lead the group to a location that Jon asked us (in secret) to aim for while the rest of us followed and tracked where we were on the map by matching what we could see around us to features on the map (which may just be the contours to show the shape of the landscape). This was great a great learning experience as Jon left each of us to lead our section and then just helped out if we had any questions or explained where we went slightly off track if we did.

We practised this for the rest of the day and along the way Jon explained various tools to help us navigate, such as selecting a 'catching' feature slightly beyond where you are aiming for – an obvious landmark (e.g. a stream or path) that you know if you reach it, you've gone passed your destination and need to turn around. We also took bearings on landmarks we could see to check our location on the map. Jon also explained how we could estimate how long it should take us to get to our destination,

allowing for any up and down hill sections, to help us plan a walk. The second day we met in a different location for more practise like on day one. This day was a bit more challenging as the boggy landscape was quite featureless (to an amateur navigator at least!).

I thought the course was an excellent introduction to navigation and it has given me the initial skills and confidence to get out there and plan walks for myself. (Even experienced walker Paul picked up the odd tip.) I'm looking forward to the next stage course that will involve some night navigation and wild camping, once I've had a bit more practice using what I've learnt so far in tamer situations first!

So, if you've never learnt how to read a map and are feeling inspired, why not borrow an OS map from your library, borrow a compass and practice following your route on the map when you're next out for a walk. You could even still do that when walking in a familiar area (which is probably safer if you're on your own!). Or I'm sure your fellow club members who can navigate would be happy to help when you're next out walking on a club meet. Or better still, go on a course!

Useful websites: www.will4adventure.com ran the course (we covered Hills Skills 1 and 2 on the weekend) and they provide various courses and holidays. www.walkingbritain.co.uk has a lot of information to plan walks in all the popular areas in the UK. www.mwis.org.uk provides mountain weather forecasts for the main UK mountain areas.



Spencer Brookes



Joe Towe – 1944 To 2012

One of our longest standing members

Gerald (Joe) Towe, walker, climber and canoe instructor sadly passed away in June 2012 of bone cancer. He was already suffering with Parkinson's disease.

Joe joined the Hertfordshire Mountaineering Club in the 1970's, after leaving the Solihull YHA club. Joe attended many HMC meets in the 70's, 80's & 90's, where his rumbustious nature fitted in well. In 1990 He was awarded the prestigious HMC Member of the Year by the chairman Dave Nicholson.

Joe was a keen walker and spent some time climbing in the Alps, where he had a few adventures, including being helicoptered off after an accident whilst climbing in Switzerland in 1971. Joe was seen skiing a few times, but broke an ankle at the end of one HMC ski trip, falling on an icy footpath. Later in life Joe moved to canoeing, obtaining a grade 4 instructors qualification. Joe joined the Ackers Canoe Club in Small Heath, Birmingham, where he was one of their instructors. Joe also had a few canoeing adventures / incidents. Some HMC members remember Joe organising canoeing meets at Llangorse Lake in the Brecons in the 90's, giving canoeing instruction on the Wye at Symonds Yat, and canoeing on the River Wye to Monmouth.

In his early career Joe was a Fireman, and then moved to British Gas in Solihull, where in his Time & Motion role, he said he tried to do as little as possible. During his retirement Joe undertook several university courses including Geology and Astronomy (he had a large telescope in the living room). Joe took a course in Archaeology, and went on a field trip to the Oman, Wadi bashing for 2 weeks in an old Land rover. He was quite pleased this year to receive a Distinction in his recent correspondence course. Richard Vernon, an ex-member of the HMC, remembers first meeting Joe in the Knowle scouts, where he taught Richard to climb. To Quote Rich, 'Joe enjoyed his archaeology and fields trips and loved the outdoors, an all-round good mate. He liked a good laugh, a pint, and a good discussion, or two (or 3.)' Joe was a great character, intelligent, with a wicked sense of humour, and



will be missed by those who knew him. I first met Joe Towe in the Solihull YHA in the early 70's, but after a small incident, Joe thought it better to leave the SYHA, and move to the HMC, where he felt more at home. He behaved himself, apart from biting Duncan Wilson's ear. Joe mellowed in his later years, and was the official carer of his friend Yvonne, who died of cancer several years ago.

Over the years Joe was fond of coming out with a few Towe'isms including –

Got a sheet of bread, fella? (or even a full breakfast, which he was known to have purloined on more than one occasion..!)

* How to make a Towe Omelette - First you borrow two eggs.

* That persons got a Bottom like two ferrets fighting in a sack

* In a minute, my arm will go mad..

* Let me massage your head



Albert Silwood

Carry on Cooking **Muesli Bars** by the Camp Cook

I wanted to make some calorific and protein laden bars for the Hill and know what was going into them. So much shop stuff still has much too much fat and sugar. These are low GI and will provide slow release carbs and protein, and are also a good source of fibre.

The Bars

Ingredients;

350g muesli/Rolled Oats/Macadamia
nuts and dried cranberries
50g chopped linseed, almonds, pumpkin and sunflower seeds
1 teaspoon vanilla
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
60 ml olive oil
80 ml honey

What to do;

Preheat oven to 160 C. fan forced.
Combine the ingredients in one large bowl until mixed through.
Spoon into a baking tin lined with baking paper.
Bake for 25 – 30 minutes until golden.
Cool and then carefully cut into bars

Chocolate topping option:

This has proved very popular when out on a cold day!

Additional Ingredients;

Good White and Dark Chocolate
Malt Whisky (optional)
To add the chocolate covering:
Boil a Saucepan of water 1/4 full and suspend a Pyrex Bowl above it (use something like a colander)

This will be an indirect 'baine marie'. Chocolate is delicate so care is needed to avoid steam touching the melting chocolate as it will re-solidify going gritty and rendering it useless. Break up the chocolate to small pieces. Allow the Pyrex Bowl to warm and add the dark chocolate and melt slowly. It is important not to rush this, or stir too much as the chocolate will go granular and lose its texture. When melted enough pour as a topping over the bars and put back in to the Freezer.

Repeat the process for the white chocolate after thoroughly cleaning the bowl, adding if desired a good tablespoon of malt whisky. The alcohol will evaporate but add flavour to the chocolate. When thoroughly melted pour as a top layer over the bars. Freeze for a few days and wrap in Foil.



Falkenstein Schusterweg

In the Summer of 2011, Steve Moore accompanied Andre Knirsch and his friend, Rainer, to Saxony in Germany. Close to the Czech border, the area is characterised by large sandstone towers rising impressively out of the surrounding woodland. The towers reach heights of over 200ft with often the only route up and down being to climb up and then abseil off.

Their main target was a route called the Falkenstein Schusterweg. Though a Saxon grade III, which equates to only a Diff or V Diff in UK technical terms, protection is lacking with some pitches having literally no protection at all. The climbing ethics of the area mean there is little to no bolting of the routes except for the occasional anchor or abseil point and perhaps more unusually the use of climber placed metal protection, such as nuts or cams, is not allowed. This means that the only protection generally takes the form of slings or knots wedged into cracks, giving the routes an all together more serious aspect! Chalk is not permitted.

An oddity of the area is the idea of a Baustelle, where the rules of the area allow climbing on your companions to assist progress up difficult sections of a route! As far as I'm aware, our team didn't take part in this activity, though admittedly there were times when it could have helped. Another local sport is to jump between the pinnacles, which are often close together, and this even has its own grading system. The idea of doing this was left to another day however.

Incredibly, the first climb up the Falkenstein was undertaken way back in 1864 by a team of gymnasts from Bad Schandau. The Schusterweg itself was first climbed by Dr Oscar Schuster in 1893 and is now the most popular means of ascending the rock. The route is over 300 feet long and at least 5 pitches.

The 1st pitch finishes at a large ledge along which you then walk 10m to the right to the start of pitch 2. From here, the going gets harder as the route heads up a corner and chimney before heading right, under a cave roof. At the top section our team had to crawl/wriggle into a crack and onto a slab, with no protection until exiting to the only bolt of the route at the beginning of pitch 3

The bolt was probably put there as the 3rd pitch has no protection at all. This pitch delicately climbs up the right hand side of the slab above. Steve and Andre were told to ignore an

abseil ring up above them, presumably because of how far off route it was, but with hindsight it would probably have been a good idea to use it! It would have been possible to head up to it and clip it with some long extendable quick draws before heading across the slab to the right, adding an extra element of safety.

The 4th pitch traverses 10m past a plaque commemorating Dr Schuster, where it is customary to touch his nose for good luck, before heading down 4 meters to a beautiful "thread" belay.

The 5th pitch then headed up a chimney, off right up a long crack before a jump over a gap! The finish not far off, they then had a long step into an identical 'twin' crack going left and they were there.

Altogether an amazing experience and a possible venue for a future club trip perhaps? ...Only if you've 'really' got your climbing head on and a large collection of knotted slings!



Scottish Winter Mountaineering

Scottish winter mountaineering could be one of the toughest, most uncomfortable pastimes known to man and woman. It usually involves getting up early in the dark, walking for miles with a heavy pack, being blasted by arctic airstreams and ending up looking like a Polar Bear. Only then do you start climbing, topping out in a white out if you are lucky, but more often than not in the dark. Then reverse the process to get back to the Hut, get the kit in the drying room and prepare for the next adventure the following day. I think it is partly because of this hardship that Scottish winter mountaineering is such a satisfying activity. Arguably if you can be a successful mountaineer in full Scottish winter conditions then you can be successful anywhere.



Photos:

Background: Typical day in Coire na Ciste!

Top this page: Navigating off from the summit of Ben Nevis.

*Middle this page: Approaching Compression Crack V,5**.*

Bottom this page: Back in the CIC Hut after a bit of an epic!

Top right hand page: Mark, Jon and Steve traverse No.2 Gulley.

Lower right hand page: Dan Robinson MIC shows how it's done.

So here are some tips to make you first foray into this dark art a little easier:

Preparation is the key, the old adage that failure to prepare is to prepare to fail does in this case does not hold truer.

So boil it down:

Group aspirations/fitness/experience
Route/planning
Weather forecast/Avalanche reports/Blog sites
Kit
Timing
Flexibility- be prepared to amend plans and think what if?

Practical tips:

You need to travel light but keep the basics per party:
Group Shelter
First Aid
GPS
Foil Bag
Spare Map and Compass
Spare hi calorific food
Headtorches and spare batteries

Specifics:

First day get out on a good slope with a safe run out and practice safe movement on snow and ice: kicking steps, cutting steps and ice axe arrest.

Although cold you can still get dehydrated- in dry cold you are losing fluid through your lungs - take a Nalgene or Sigg bottle of water and a flask of hot juice or coffee/soup.

You are not going to be stopping for lunch or having a picnic. Anytime the party stops to put on extra clothing, gear up, or rest at a belay stance, then have a bite to eat or drink when you have done what you need do.

Removing the wrappers of chocolate/energy/muesli bars etc. and putting straight into your outer pockets reduces the faff factor, and saves the wrappers disappearing into the distance as the wind blows them away, littering up the mountain.

Take many pairs of gloves because over time they will all get soaked and there is one fatal flaw of gloves, there is a hole where the water can get in - where your hand goes!

If you have had to take off your gloves to complete a delicate task and your hands get so cold (say touching the bare metal of karabiners or fitting crampons) then get them up under the hood of your shell and up against your neck. The jugulars are a good source of heat as the arteries supply blood to the head.

Much of the time you will be navigating in poor visibility rain/dark/whiteout, so make sure you are confident of your pacing and can estimate roughly 100 metres over all kinds of terrain. (practice this at home) If you have a good idea of your footfall then navigating off the top of the Ben in a white out will be much safer and not turn into an epic.

Each time you stop on a navigational leg to take the next bearing plunge your ice axe shaft into the snow and point the pick in the direction you have just come from. When stopping and getting the map out it is so easy to become disorientated and get in a muddle.

When climbing it is often best to use quite thin gloves (when ice or mixed climbing on two axes) for a good grip, often this means that your hands will get reeeeeeeaaaally cold, so once on the belay use a big pair of mittens, 'cos the person you are climbing with is just as cold -and they have only just started the pitch.

80% of all mountain accidents occur in descent, maintain your concentration after summiting.

If this sounds all a bit daunting then there are some terrific courses are on offer:

Jagged Globe: <http://www.jagged-globe.co.uk/>

Plas y Brenin: <http://www.pyb.co.uk/>

Glenmore Lodge: <http://www.glenmorelodge.org.uk/>



Paul Hearn





First Ascent

Year after year I've managed to find an excuse to not partake in the HMC Alps Trip. 'Ah sorry Gary, it clashes with Glastonbury', or 'No sorry, I have bad shoulder'. But this year my luck had run out - Glastonbury was on a rest year and my shoulder would now 'technically' be fixed. This year I would be joining the HMC to the Bernese Oberland in Switzerland for my first Alpine excursion whether I liked it or not!

So my name is on the list, but what next? Well any other year and I'd have got some serious hill walking miles in to aid my fitness and found myself an Alpine Skills course to learn some, well, skills. But alas my post shoulder op rehab wouldn't actually render me fit for anything until at least the Spring (I wasn't even strong enough to tie my walking boots up in March). Time wasn't on my side!

So fitness would have to wait until nearer the time, and the snow skills even longer, leaving me nothing more to do other than re-search (and panic)! Countless websites, books and films later my head was soon full of theory, and what I could practice at home I did. After successful crevasse rescues of a bag of hand weights up my stairs I felt confident. I could certainly 'rescue' my dog too if needs be (he seemed less keen), and maybe possibly even a real person from an actual crevasse if push came to shove! My staircase was less appropriate for ice-axe arrest or taking my first ever steps in crampons though.

July soon rolled around, in the weeks leading up the big trip my shoulder was doing well and I managed to frantically up my fitness levels with gym trips and cycles to work. Apparently my enjoyment of the experience would be directly proportional to my fitness more than anything else.

After a long and successful stop at a French supermarket, we rolled into the beautiful valley of Lauterbrunnen with a car full fine cheeses and wine. This was going to be a good holiday! But almost instantly the storms rolled in too and somewhat scuppered our plans. If we thought the weather 'down low' was bad, 'up high' wasn't proving to be an appealing prospect either. A group led by Phil had braved it without regret (although did

have a minor 'Jamie in crevasse' incident), but lead by Gary and Paul, we held out for the clear blue skies we wanted. I have to say I was relieved. I was indeed there to climb the stunning mountains that loomed over us in the valley, but I was also nervous. Not only that, but I really appreciated the lower level hill walks that we were forced to devise to fill our time meanwhile. The Bernese Oberland is amazing regardless of altitude.

Eventually the weather cleared and our time came to 'go up'. The mountain train that carved its way through the infamous Eiger up to the Jungfrauoch seemed like an easy way to gain altitude, but the sheer expense of it made even that a challenge when it came to parting with that amount of cash! Arguably worth every penny though, it really is quite something. From the top we had a straightforward walk across to my first high altitude hut experience. Gary having to explain the dietary requirements of our group to the Guardian was always an adventure in itself though. 'Someone who eats no pork or no cheese...what does he eat?' It was a fair point, I'd been in Switzerland nearly a week by now and couldn't remember life beyond such foodstuffs.

The hut was a strangely relaxing place. An early night was necessary for an even earlier start, so I snuggled into a giant bed with five men. Not something I'd normally do, (not even on holiday) but had to accept I was high in the mountains now, and things were different up here. Morning came around pretty damn quick and all of a sudden the relaxing tranquility of it all was shattered.

It's 4 am and time to get going. I'm still trying to wriggle my way out of my sleeping bag liner when the boys are dressed, woolly hats and all, and off to breakfast. I knew I had to be efficient up

here but this was something else! What should I wear? What looks best? All were questions the boys didn't have time for. We forced down the jam and bread and within another blink of an eye they were kitted up with boots and crampons and ready to go. They were like machines at this time of the morning...I still needed to run around aimlessly for another 10 minutes before I would be ready! Happy I'd done the best I could with my dress sense given the circumstances, we set off and the hard work really began.

'Let's take the slightly harder route to the top of the Monch' came Al's bright idea. 'It's easy, just an AD'. I'm still yet to wear my crampons (ever!) but I dutifully followed in their false sense of security. It was tough for even long legged Al to break trail but at last we made the ridge. From here it really was easy...it was time to turn back! Ice on the rocky ridge forced us into an 'exciting' abseil back down to safety. Once more I'm relieved. There had been brief talk of 'It's a bit desperate, but worth a try in crampons'.

5 hours later and we're back to where we started. Take two. This time we took the easier route. It wasn't easy for me. I donned my crampons for the first time and finally experienced the real sense of exposure that a mountain ridge can offer. It was terrifying, but the team were great. Most of us turned back close to the summit as the cold crisp snow from early morning start was becoming dangerously soft in the mid-day sun. But that was it. The day out I'd been fearing yet so keen to take on at the same time. My first Alpine route. Not a smooth day out I think everyone would agree, but at last it wasn't unknown anymore.

The weather got 'iffy' once more so down to the valley we went and filled our time with Via Ferrata's on the north face of the Eiger and such - again, not a compromise at all but in fact fantastic way to spend our time.

For our second peak, the weather clearly wasn't going to be kind enough for us to disappear into the depths on the Bernese Oberland as we had hoped, so another £120 later and we had a return ticket for the mountain train again. The Jungfrau, or Virgin

Mountain as it translates to, was our target this time. The highest of the Eiger, Monch and Jungfrau trilogy. This time to ease my nerves I studied the guidebooks closely. They really didn't help.

This was wholly a different experience though. For starters I only ran around aimlessly for 5 minutes in the morning rush this time. I suddenly felt more confident now. Of course I had at least now worn crampons before...much more experienced! It was tougher though, 2 weeks of hiking and climbing had taken its toll and we were all pretty exhausted. 'The Alps trip is a wearing down process' explains Paul. I can concur.

With Paul and Al on each end of my rope we reached the summit by lunchtime. What an achievement it was, certainly to me at least. It took me weeks to get over the view. We stood upon a tiny patch of snow with the Eiger and Monch behind and below us - incredible. I've been privileged to see and do many amazing places/things, but this would take some beating.

Of course we had to hot-foot it down again before the sun once more made the return journey too perilous. With our feet back safely on the 'ground' we shared a few words; 'I gonna have a beer when we get back to the hut' Agreed Al and Paul. 'I'm going to have a little cry' I replied.

Space is short in this publication, so I can't say much more than that. Just that there was never a bad day, even when the weather had other ideas. Obviously that's mostly thanks to the organiser and fellow 'holiday makers'. So cheers to Gary and Paul in particular, you did a fantastic job as I'm sure you always do. And thanks to everyone else too for your support and company on what was easily the most stressful, emotional, exhausting and terrifying trip of my life.

See you next year!



Nicola Williams



Building your first rack

by Cragfast



So you've migrated from the Indoor Wall, been comfortably seconding on some multi-pitch routes and fancy getting some more gear so you can try some leading. But what's needed? Kit doesn't come cheap, and you don't want to be too weighed down, but you don't want to be topping out without enough gear to build a belay!

You already have a Harness, helmet, belay plate, large 'HMS' screwgate karabiner and a nut key so let's add to that another couple of HMS karabiners for tying into belays and couple of D shape krabs as a bare minimum. If you are Cragging and weight is not such an issue then Clog do a good inexpensive range. If you are looking to use your gear further afield on Mountaineering Routes or the Alps, then lightweight gear is available from DMM, Mammut and Camp.

Slings not only are cheap but possibly the most useful items on easier climbs, get 2 or 3 short 60mm each with snap link karabiners attached either end, 2 long 120mm, each with screwgate karabiners attached either end. Quickdraws can be bought in sets, saving a few bob and DMM do a 'Trad set' consisting of 2x12 cm, 2 x 18cm, and one 25cm.

There is quite a bewildering selection of Wires, Hexes and Cams from many manufacturers, but again sets are available. A good start is a set of Wallnuts 1 -11 and a set of Hexes or Torque Nuts sizes 1-4. If budget allows for 2 or 3 cams and a set OHB Offsets 7-11 so much the better. Further Cams and further passive

protection can be bought as and when afforded.

Finally a set of Prussics, (2 or 3 6/7 mm cords about 1.5 metres long and tied in a loop with a double Fisherman's knot)

Useful extras could include a knife and a length of 8mm cordalette to set up abseils. A most useful item is a 15 cm quickdraw but with a lightweight screwgate at each end rather than a snaplink.

This is great for abseiling as you can attach your belay device at one end and attach the other to your belay loop, so that the plate is positioned conveniently in front and slightly above your waist.

You can add a protective back up by attaching a Prussic to the descent ropes below the belay device and attach the Prussic to the harness belay loop with a screwgate. Some UK shops do deals for Wires, Quickdraws etc, some useful ones to check out; Needlesports, Joe Brown and V12.



The 2012 Silly Olympics

Five teams of elite athletes had been in training and preparation all year for this prestigious event. Six countries sent a team to the HMC Bangers & Mash Silly Olympics, and five events would decide the medallists for 2012.

To start with was the hurdles. One member from each team was blindfolded and guided over a makeshift hurdle by another member of their team. It was a close run thing for gold, silver and bronze, with five of the teams managing to guide their competitor over with some success. Of special note however was Geoff guided by Caroline; after adjusting his position so many times, shuffling him forward a bit and back a bit, he ended up facing the wrong way and missed the obstacle altogether.

The 5000 metres was next, but as there wasn't really that much space, it was reduced to 5 metres. Each team submitted two competitors to race together, arms linked back to back. Although Kevin & Yen pushed through the finish line first, Eddie and Keith's style was much admired, as Keith propelled Eddie through the finish line with enough force to headbutt the blackboard, not only in the heat but also in the final.

Gymnastics came next, involving everyone standing on one leg with the other raised. The last person standing was the winner, and the gold went to Dave Nicholson's daughter Emma.

The long jump was done from a standing position. All six teams achieved a good result, and the competition was a close run thing. However, it must be noted that later, after midnight, and with only three or four people left awake, Matt revealed an amazing talent for the static long jump, bettering anyone else's record by over a foot. "It's not height that counts, it's bounciness" he revealed. A gold medallist in the making for 2016, I feel sure.

The last event was Team Dressage. One "horse" and one "rider" from each team were to complete an actual dressage test read out to them by other members of their team. "It's just prating about!" declared Paul Hearn, as Barry and Olivia proceeded in a working canter from A to C. Prating about it was indeed, at which Paul himself took the gold.

Whichever team topped the medal table was of little relevance however, as the prizes were all drunk and eaten by midnight anyway. We can only hope that the legacy of these games will continue to bring silliness to HMC events for many years to come.

12 Months with the HMC



Having spent a decade living in Canada followed by a year in Northern Italy, I thought coming back to my home town in Hertfordshire would be the end of the line in so far as messing about on mountains. I knew that not only would there not be any mountains near by, but I also didn't expect the locals to share my passion of them.

The first three years back here I was skint and in desperate need of outdoor activities. I cycled most of the bike trails, and spent time finding the best routes to avoid cars and other people. To my delight we also had two decent snow falls over two winters that enabled me to X country ski round Verulam Park (local celebrity for the day!), and even up to the door of my local pub for some apres ski (the only time I loved the lack of gritters).

Despite all these self created adventures, they were just solo pursuits and lacked altitude. But my luck changed the day I shared my woes with my neighbour & friend Alistair who told me about the HMC; why oh why had google missed this one? So I turned up to an HMC pub night at one Tuesday evening last January and introduced myself to a friendly bunch who seemed to enjoy their beer; my sort of people.

My first meet was in February at the Snowdonia Hut. I didn't have a clue what I was letting myself in for terrain or weather wise having (shamefully) never been to north Wales. I got a ride with Gary and Paul Hearn and was entertained with various stories of adventures past. When we arrived the hut was cosy and warm, not the shack that I was expecting, and very inviting on a cold rainy weekend in Winter.

On the Saturday I was lead on a walk in torrential rain and incredibly strong winds, but we carried on regardless. At the summit the temperature dropped & the wind picked up (more). I experienced horizontal hail like little shards of glass blasting at my skin. It was like extreme beauty therapy, who needs to pay for skin peels & botox?! I then experienced what I can only describe as an ice cream headache through my eyeballs. I started to wonder if we would make it out alive; I'd experienced wind chills of -48 C in Quebec, yet it seemed an inclement day in Wales was the one that was gonna kill me.

All in all a great day was had by all and I was extremely grateful for a piping hot shower back at the hut, followed by a meal and copious amounts of beer down the pub after. If that wasn't enough fun for one weekend, the next day I decided to join some others in tackling the Snowdon Horseshoe. This was proper. This was what I had been missing; walking, scrambling, snow on the

ridge, a proper day out in the winter mountains. Wales had impressed me. I now knew I'd be coming back again & again.

My next meet was the annual dinner, we stayed in The Peak District in Hathersage at the "Stinky Hut", it is on a dairy farm. We had a nice walk on the Saturday & then back to the hut to get glammed up for the dinner. The food was shite but that didn't really matter, we had a really good time. Presentations and speeches were made, people were toasted, more drinks were poured and we had a laugh. We all eventually staggered back up to the hut and just I was thinking the night was over, Barry appears with a bottle of vodka. I sat back down at the table & rolled up my sleeves...

Then came Easter. A very small group of us (because the weather promised to be bloody awful) headed to a campsite in Snowdonia. As soon as we arrived Saturday morning we were trudging up Tryfan in the snow. After a successful and enjoyable scramble up, I limped back (after twisting my knee on the way down) to camp to put up my tent in the cold rain. From there on in, we were forced to stay in the pub all evening as it chucked it down outside. We spent a lot of time in the pub that weekend. There were a few glimmers of sun however, and with those we manages a walk and my first climb for 5 years. I took back to it like a duck to water, it was a fantastic day.

Next was Langdale in the Lake District followed by the Northumberland "Jubilee" weekend. Both were riddled with antics interspersed with great walks and some amazing climbing. The worst part really was being stuck mid climbing route when the rain moved in, sliding about on bird poo whilst getting my eyelids bitten by midges! The rest was great though.

For the Alps trip I partnered up with Hannah and did some amazing walks, but we'll save those stories for another time, along with the stories from Phasels BBQ (Hemel Hempstead).

All in all my first year with the HMC has been fantastic, because as well as all the organised meets, I have been on many other outings and evenings with the friends I have made since joining. My weekends have been more or less full, and barely a week goes by without a tent, clothing or gear drying some where in the flat, not to mention the trophy grazes and bruises I often acquire. I bloody love it!



Rebecca Smith



Why bother with an ML?

I recently completed my ML and have been encouraged, mainly by way of a financial inducement covering a small part of the cost of the course, to write about the experience. This will hopefully give others in the club an idea of what's involved and maybe spark some interest in whether it is something you may want to do yourself.

I chose to do it for purely personal reasons. Having been a member of the club for more than 10 years and ventured out into the mountains in all weathers to do more and more adventurous activities I didn't feel that my basic skills had really gone along at the same pace. Basically, I didn't feel my navigation was as good as could be, in situations where the weather closed in for example and I was in an unknown area. I frankly didn't have a clue about first aid and as this was a requirement it meant I had to attend a course and get my knowledge up to speed. I had done a bit of climbing, but apart from tying into a harness and shimmying up a route on the indoor climbing wall, I wouldn't have had much of a clue how to safely belay someone down an area of rock too steep to safely walk down.

I also thought that I might like to help other young people to get some of the enjoyment out of the mountains that I have had, either through schools or scouts. So it was a formal requirement in some cases to do that, but at the least it was to re-assure myself that I had the skills necessary to do this safely.

I also deliberately chose to do the course in an area of the lakes I didn't know so well and wanted to explore more, so I booked myself into Wasdale Head YHA and onto a course with a company called Carolclimb.

The qualification is broken into sections which comprise of a week's course followed by about a year for consolidation and practice and then when you feel ready, a week's assessment. The assessment is purely that, it's a week to demonstrate that you know how to do all of the tasks shown during the training week, so no instruction or training takes place. This can be quite worrying when you are navigating on assessment and you are asked to show where you are on the map. As the response is typically an ok then or a grunt, but nothing to indicate whether you are right or miles out.

During the training you spend the first day on basic navigation followed by an evening to learn about knots for the security on steep ground practice the following day. Day two is spent kicking rocks to identify which ones are safe to belay from, tying yourself to these rocks, belay practice and some very simple abseiling. At all times you are encouraged to talk to your group and explain what you are doing, re-assure your pretend clients and hopefully keep them safe and not drop them over the edge. Then we went back for dinner and when it was dark enough, we headed out to do 3 hours night navigation.

Night navigation I should say can be hilarious, scary, bizarre, extremely confusing and sometimes even fun. When we did it the rain was coming down in torrents, so there we were wading waste deep through bracken, occasionally falling over, stepping into deep puddles trying to navigate to points on the map I could barely even see as my glasses filled up with water. However, when you see the thing you are supposed to be navigating to appear out of the dark the feelings of amazement and then satisfaction makes it really quite rewarding.

Day 3 was spent mostly in the classroom, doing weather theory, talking about river crossings and some first aid. We then went outside and pretended to have had a terrible accident in some remote part of the mountains and needed immediate assistance. So we got lots of strange looks from the other hostel guests as we made strange wailing noises and then wrapped each other up in survival bags and attempted to fashion stretchers from ropes and improvise various carrying techniques around the outskirts of the hostel.

Later on we had a talk on access and conservation and a review of kit and options for the overnight expedition on the following two days. The final two days are spent on expedition, with an overnight wild camp so you obviously need to take everything with you to survive for two days, including tent, stove, food, spare clothes etc.

The highlight of the overnight trip is obviously wild camp toilet skills for which you need to learn the technique of digging a hole and test your aiming skills. You also need to think about the weight of everything you are carrying and just how necessary it is to take everything in your bag as you need to carry the whole lot with you for two days. The weight of peoples bags varied enormously from one guy in the army whose bag weighed in at 23kg to one of the instructors who got it down to around 10. Most of us were around 14kg, but it does make you think about everything. I tried dried food for the time and it's actually fine and the most efficient way of getting a hot meal without carrying excessive weight.

On the expedition itself we didn't actually walk that far, but had to constantly navigate every step of the way. So this involved using different techniques from counting steps and walking on a bearing to being able to identify specific features on the map without using a compass.

At the end of the five days you then get some feedback on how well you have done and what you need to focus on before coming back for an assessment.

Some people do the course with no intention of ever doing an assessment, but just for the purpose of learning the skills and I would completely recommend doing this if that's all you are looking for. There is no need to do the assessment if you just want to go and learn.

If you do want to go on assessment however, you need to have done a minimum of 60 quality mountain days as well as being confident you can do the navigation, ropework and other theory, plus you need to attend a two day outdoor first aid course. There is a fairly detailed definition of the quality mountain day, but essentially it's at least 5 hours on the hills, generally including a summit and hopefully taking part in the leadership or organisation of the day out. You get a nicely bound log book to fill in the information about your days out under various conditions and in different mountain areas, plus there is a 30 question paper to answer before attending the assessment.

Then the five day assessment basically follows the same format as the training with the exception that the expedition is for 3 days rather than two and they ask you to give a 10 minute talk on some subject relating to the mountains or wildlife on the second evening. This was actually a lot more interesting than it sounds and many of the talks were really interesting and covered such topics as lakeland wild flowers, upland farming, mountain rescue, wildlife, conservation issues and upland tarns.

So my thoughts on the experience are that its very worthwhile and I learned a lot from the course. It's actually quite an intensive couple of weeks as during the training you are covering a lot of topics and there are some quite long days, especially on night navigation. Some of it may be new and some of it you may already feel you know, but there are always opportunities to learn new techniques as well.

I chose to do the assessment with the same organisation I did the training with, as I then knew what they expected and how they expected things to be done. Some people who had been on other courses had been taught in slightly different ways, some of which the assessors were happy with, but some that they weren't. Also the detail required for navigation can be a shock, as during the training I was asked to navigate to points on the map I could barely see. This did come as a shock to some on assessment who had maybe not been expecting to navigate to such a level of detail.

During the course and assessment it can sometimes feel that the instructors are being very pedantic and when you are cold, wet and tired this can be very irritating. So I think we all had days or periods when we wondered what the hell we were doing it for. You do also feel very pressured on the assessment to the extent that one guy who completely messed up his rope stuff on the second day, broke down in tears during the evening. However, they gave him another chance later in the week to show that he could do it and he eventually came away with a pass. So they

say up front that their aim is get people through and if you make a mistake that's perfectly normal and you will get other opportunities to correct things. But it does lead to some stressful moments.

On the positive side, I now feel much more confident that I would be able to cope under a much greater variety of circumstances than I could before. I have also learnt more about plants and wildlife from the instructors than I thought I would and I am now fairly confident of being able to navigate my way out of a wet paper bag by moonlight.

I met some really great people , learnt a whole bunch of stuff I didn't realise I didn't know and spent two weeks in the lake district exploring an area I previously wasn't so familiar with and came away with a qualification.



Kevin Blissett



Competition Corner

Win a Super Beal Rope Bag worth more than
“One Million dollars!”*

2nd Prize: A Rockfax guide to Pembroke.

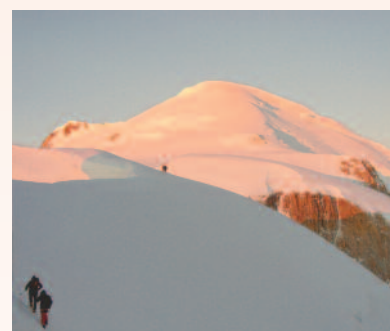
3rd Prize: One of Gary's dodgy old russian ice screws.

So here it is, a once in a lifetime chance to win Rope Bag ...far better than a Car or an all expenses paid trip to the Bahama's I think you'll agree!* Email your answers to paulhsecretaryhmc@gmail.com by Thursday 14th March 2013. Correct answers will be entered in to a Draw to be made by the Chairman at the Annual Dinner.

* *These are gross and fatuous lies.*



1. Who is this?



2. Mont Blanc, how high is it?



3. What knot is this?



4. Where is this?



5. When was our last meet here?



Why not come along and meet us?

- Come along and meet club members on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday evening of each month, from 8.30pm in the main bar at the Three Horseshoes, 612 Hatfield Road, Smallford, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL4 0HP. We recommend that you email the secretary before coming along so that we can look out for you. You'll normally find us to the left of the front door, or outside at the back when the weather is nice. There will be a sign on our table.
- Climb at Hatfield Wall (Every Tuesday (Some Thursdays too!) between 7.45pm-10pm. All grades of climber welcome. Can arrange partners if you're on your own.

EVENTS for 2013

- Snowdonia Hut Meet • Fri 15 Feb 2013 to Sun 17 Feb 2013 • Hertfordshire Snowdonia Centre
- Banff Mountain Film Festival • Fri 22 Feb 2013 • Union Chapel Compton Avenue London N1 2XD
- AGM 2013 and 20% off night • Tue 12 Mar 2013 • Cotswold Outdoors St Albans branch
- Annual Dinner • Fri 15 Mar 2013 to Sun 17 Mar 2013 • Castleton YHA
- Mountain Skills Course - "The Boot Camp" Thu 28 Mar 2013 to Sun 31 Mar 2013 • Nant Peris Snowdonia
- Gulabin Lodge, Spittal of Glenshee, Scotland • Thu 28 Mar 2013 to Mon 1 Apr 2013
- Pembrokeshire Camping Meet • Fri 19 Apr 2013 to Sun 21 Apr 2013
- Isle of Skye Camping Glen Brittle • Sat 4 May to Sat 11 May 2013
- Lakes Wasdale YHA Meet • Fri 24 May 2013 to Mon 27 May 2013
- Wales - Bala Camping Meet • Fri 21 Jun 2013 to Sun 23 Jun 2013
- Alps, Cervinia, Italy • Sat 29 Jun 2013 to Sun 14 Jul 2013
- Peak District Camping Meet • Fri 26 Jul 2013 to Sun 28 Jul 2013
- Snowdonia Camping Meet - Ogwen Valley • Fri 23 Aug 2013 to Mon 26 Aug 2013
- Lake District Hut Meet • Fri 20 Sep 2013 to Sun 22 Sep 2013
- Bangers and Mash - Snowdonia Hut Meet • Fri 8 Nov 2013 to Sun 10 Nov 2013

For further details see our website: www.hmc.co.uk

