

WEDDING OF THE YEAR

"Do you take this Member to be your lawful climbing partner, to have and to hold, to belay and to climb, for rocks and for walks, from this day forth, until rock boots wear out?"



On 15 September Anne Noon (ex committee member, builder/developer, walker, mountaineer, knicker elastic user) married Steve, her childhood sweetheart of 3 months. The marriage at Bush Hall Hotel in Hatfield was attended by many HMC members, which took place in a shed (sorry Gazebo) in the garden. A nice touch. Even more dashed home from the Mid Wales meet, taking place that weekend, for the excellent nosh, bouncy castle and barn dance.

We at the HMC wish them all the happiness in the future.

PS. The wedding was discussed by the Committee and was such a good event that we are hoping to make a wedding a regular feature, especially the free food and gratuitous use of a bouncy castle. Volunteers please.

Here is Anne and Steve cutting the cake. Some may be surprised that Anne is talking at the same time. However, many will not.



Here is the group with the happy couple

Members New Routes see page 6

TOP TEN TIPS FOR THE MOUNTAINEERING NOVICE

IT was William Blake who once uttered "great things happen when men and mountains meet", a leitmotiv that proved to be well-founded when the stalwart HMC met for a waterlogged Bangers & Mash in November.

Frankly, I had my doubts. In fact, a few days before the 'I Must Be Starkers' weekend (as I fondly began to call my first meet) the doubts had reached feverish proportions. Night sweats, loss of appetite and constant mumblings of "karabiner, cam, crampon". I considered seeing a specialist.

The task ahead seemed as insurmountable as Everest (or is that Qomolangma?). I'd only climbed once before (something resembling a four-rung ladder at an adventure park), I preferred three-inch heels to three-inches-of-mud encrusted boots, and I was a wee 5'2" (an issue accentuated by the fact the club was predominated by Vertically Unchallenged Amazonians). Plus, THERE ARE NO PUBS ON THE TOP OF MOUNTAINS.

Nevertheless, after a bit of coaching from my Sensei I hit upon a plan to survive the rigours of the outdoors and give strength to other mountaineering neophytes.

1. Befriend a HMC member who has a duplicate set of trousers, waterproof jacket, gloves, thermal top, harness, rucksack... But, try to ignore the assorted selection of 30-year-old foodstuffs encrusted to the inside pocket, and never probe the owner about just where 'that stain' came from.
2. Make a list of Things To Take. This should include everything you own (including the kitchen sink, draining board and plumbing) and should be closely followed up by a list of Things That I Really Didn't Need To Take. Discarded items should include soap or shampoo (strong bodily odours are de rigeur on the mountaintop), food, warm clothes, emergency medical kit and virtually anything that will bring you a modicum of comfort.

3. Both of the above lists are normally superseded by the list of Things That I Really Did Need After All. Basically, if you don't pack and repack at least eight times before you reach your destination then you are already a qualified mountaineering expert.

4. Immerse your entire body in cold water at least three times a day in the weeks running up to the meet. This will allow you to feel at home in the semi-aquatic conditions of Wales. You will soon learn that a HMC weekend brings home the real meaning of what it is to be DAMP.

5. Swot up on mountaineering lingo. Bangers & Mash = Bangers and Mash and Mash and more Mash. Once you've overcome the dizzy heights of Snowdon you will be expected to scale the breathtaking Mash Mountain too. Karabiner = not an exotic cocktail, but an oversized safety pin that keeps you from falling 800ft to your death. Short walk/easy climb/bit of a scramble = this one is a particular favourite of German mountaineers and actually translates as 'seven-hour, limb-jangling, joint-searing race, up and down a towering precipice'. Boffy = don't be misled by this one. It may sound like a warm and cuddly mountain-top retreat, complete with fireside bar and optional slippers; in fact, it is a gloomy hut not dissimilar to a cattle shed. Gear fondling = sadly not as sexy as it sounds (and mostly reserved for the men).

6. Embrace the Mountaineering Diet (truckloads of cereal bars, Cadbury's Fruit and Nut and high-energy glucose drinks). This will help keep your energy levels up for the strenuous amounts of Boasting About What I Plan To Climb, Saturday-night SHOUTING games and the five-hour tinkling session on the Bontempi (sadly not a Yamaha) organ.

7. Wear your best undies. You never know when the mountaineers' favourite game of Put the Rope Through Your Trousers might crop up.

8. Don't drink too much on the first night (need I say more...). If you do, make sure a friendly mountaineer puts you in the recovery position for the rest of the following day, as well as positioning a waste-paper bin near your head.

9. Learn to love Deep Heat.

10. Lastly, and most importantly, warn all your friends and family that you won't stop talking about 'My First Meet' for months afterwards!

Alice Whitehead

CHAIRMAN'S T(W)ALK

Hello

Have you ever had one of those moments when you are pre-occupied, when, for instance: you are busy at work, or you dropped a thousand pounds down the grid by accident, or you are getting married to a Russian princess tomorrow whom you met yesterday, or that HUS you agreed to second with Steve who made it look easy and now you are stuck and your fingers can hardly hold on and the WHOLE club is looking up at you chanting "Bill's gonna fall". Well, I have one of those moments and I am supposed to write something amusing and enteraining for the Crux. So I won't.

Have a happy winter mountaineering and Christmas from all at the HMC.



Whose bum is it anyway? or 'Does my bum look...no, please!'



Ed's little column

Apologies for the long gap between issues but here we are with a bumper issue full of brilliant articles. Normal service has been resumed and I am already working on the next issue.

I don't think this is what Geoff had in mind when he asked Pete for a light at the Phaesels BBQ.

Bill



Berg Heil!

by Adrian Jones



Recently, I have been conducting a scientific study of mountaineering experiences. I've noticed that all walks and climbs can be broken into three basic stages which I shall call: *'This is going to be brilliant'*, *'This is absolutely fantastic'* and *'Wow, that was brilliant'*. Some mountaineers only seem to experience these three phases, but more experienced HMC members may recognise the fairly common *'This is horrible'* sensation which can enhance the *'that was brilliant'* stage. This article documents a recent field trip I conducted in the Alps to investigate this effect.

In July this year I set out with my research assistants, Peter Durkin and Richard Franklin, to our chosen test site, the Zinal Rothorn. This mountain was chosen because of its extreme coefficient of pointyness, large potential epic factor and our low intelligence quotients.

The walk up to the Rothorn hut is pretty and the hut has good food and impressive views of the Matterhorn North face. I ask the warden about the route; apparently it is fine and only two people had fallen off today. We get up at some ridiculous hour and, using our traditional route finding technique of following everyone else, plod up the glacier. The weather is very clear and the Matterhorn is looking striking with the moon above.

Above the glacier, the route steepens and gains a snow slope above a big cliff. 'Mmm, slanty', I think. We're making good time and there are only one or two parties in front of us when we reach the real climbing. This slows us down considerably and we overtaken by a party of Italians. The situation is unlike any Alps I've climbed before, more reminiscent of an easy Scottish gully climb with a towering face above. We're all at the 'absolutely fantastic' stage.

At the top of the gully (The Gabel), we have to queue behind the Italians. We are joined by some Germans we met in the hut and eventually most European nationalities are on the mountain. Pete follows the Italians across the exposed 'Biner slabs'. The remaining route to the summit consists of several not-insignificant gendarmes and some steep snow of dubious quality. By the time we reach the summit, we have been overtaken by all European countries except the Germans.

The Rothorn's summit is topped with a beautiful iron cross with an ornate figure of Christ. Pete immediately belays to Jesus' leg and Rich ties himself to the arms. Soon the Germans arrive. In contrast to our desecration of the Summit, they shake our hands and say,

'Berg Heil' (Hail to the mountain). They quickly run away and the English are last again.

The descent back to the Gabel seems very slow and we take ages to get down the steep snow which has turned very nasty. Pitching three people back across the Biner slabs is painful, and I'm reaching the *'This is horrible'* stage. I'm really worried about the snow lower down and my impatience must be obvious to Pete and Rich.

We decide to abseil the gully below the Gabel. Two abseils later we've got ourselves in a real mess. We're tenuously belayed to a boulder in the middle of a steep snow slope with infinity below and a cliff of melting icicles above. Rich is going to sleep with exhaustion and I'm having a sense of humour failure. Our German friends have stopped on the snow ridge below, either concerned for our safety or eager to watch the show. Pete traverses to find somewhere to abseil from. While he's looking, several avalanches of ice pour down from above. Now I'm really frightened and have reached the 'Oh my god we're going to die' stage. We make a final (diagonal) abseil across the face to reach ground where we can move together away from the cliff.

When we reach the snow ridge, the Germans have gone. We treat ourselves to a seated glissade (bum slide) down the upper snow slopes, which I have trouble enjoying after the gully experience. The snow slope above the cliffs is, as I feared, in terrible condition. It's now around 2pm and the slope is slush. Every bit of snow we dislodge builds up into a ball then starts a slide below us, taking rocks with it over the cliff. Eventually we can see the steep path down to the glacier. I end up on some scree that slides like water, which freaks me out. Rich puts in a belay and I calm down. As a final challenge, we have to cross a snow bridge which I don't remember being there on the way up.

Towards the bottom of the glacier, we initiate another bum slide. By now I've decided that everything is dangerous and I'm dragged down shouting 'slow down, it's too fast'. Back at the hut, the 'that was brilliant' stage kicks in almost immediately. Plans of climbing any more mountains from the hut are abandoned and we run away to Zermatt, muttering 'fantastic', 'awesome', 'amazing route'.

To conclude, for a successful mountain adventure, never belay from Jesus and always say 'Berg Heil' on the summit. For a proper epic, however, tie on to his legs and say 'ooh, there's the Matterhorn'.

More Fletsch?

by Richard Franklin

Early in the second week of the Alps trip Rod and myself found ourselves stuck in the valley with nothing to do, so we sat down to find a nice straight forward climb. We decided on the Fletschhorn with a choice of two PD routes to the summit, the West Flank/NW Ridge (a snow plod) and the SW Ridge (a rock route). We spent the day sunbathing until about 3.30 when we casually made our way up to the hut via the cable car. On the short walk up to the hut from the cable car station we bumped into, amongst others, Johnny and Gary who had just done the Fletschhorn by the SW ridge after failing to find the Lagginhorn! Now, our fears should have been alerted here as when we told Gary we were going to climb the SW ridge he was grinning like the Cheshire cat! However we thought little of it. After receiving the route from the hut we made two ill-informed assumptions. Firstly, as the only part of the route given any significance in the guidebook was a steep section of snow leading up to the foot of the ridge, we assumed this would be the hardest part. And second, the guide book described the ridge route as an alternative to the normal route and simply said follow the ridge to the summit turning any gendarmes on the left, so we assumed this would be straightforward with no surprises.

In the morning our recce and navigation became obsolete as we followed torch lights all the way to the glacier. At first it seemed we were walking across the glacial debris at the front of

the glacier but the appearance of large crevasses made it clear we were in fact walking across the lower dry section of the glacier so we promptly moved onto the moraine. From here we walked to the foot of the snow section described in the guidebook as steep and intimidating. Meanwhile a Dutch climber called Wilco joined us as he thought it might be too dangerous to solo. In retrospect he may find this quite ironic! The "Steep and Intimidating" snow climb turned out to be a lot easier than its appearance or the guide book made out which only made lull us further into our false sense of security!

After the snow hill there was an easy walk up to the foot of the ridge then the snow got very steep and hard. Rod already had

his crampons on but Wilco and I put ours on and roped up. The snow climb up to the start of the rock part of the ridge was, in contrast to the previous bit of snow, a lot steeper than it looked and wasn't even mentioned in the guidebook! However we were of the belief that once we were at the top it would be an easy scramble up the ridge. When we eventually got to the top, this belief was proved to be unfounded. The ridge went up a great deal further than we expected, but before we could climb it we had to descend a near vertical (OK probably only 60°!) couloir, but after a display of classic alpine belaying we finally got onto the ridge.

The ridge was much more technical than its grade would

suggest. After doing PDs on the Nadelhorn and Ulrischhorn we were expecting a little more than low level scrambling, however what we got was a climb! We moved together well for the length of the rock section turning the gendarmes as suggested and even traversing a couple. Then at the end of the rock section I almost made Wilco wish he had soloed!

We were right at the end of the rock section of the ridge. From here we could see how the route turned into a gradual snow plod to the summit, which was a relief at this point. I was side stepping across a ledge when a rock came away in my hand. I spun around and fell forward off the ledge. I was looking 400m down the face and starting to fall. All that went through my head was whether Rod and Wilco would put theory into practice and arrest my fall!

However they did not have to because I fell less than a foot and landed on another small ledge. I expected to bounce straight off down the mountain but I just stopped. I could not believe my luck. All I can say is one of us at least was not meant to fall off the mountain that day! In any case I'm sure they would have stopped me- 'right Rod!'

Just when we thought the climb was as good as over there was another ridiculously steep bit of snow to descend, this time a good 60-70°. Safely this time and without incident we descended the snow. After this part it was, as we had hoped, a short walk up the snow to the top. We had perfect weather that day and the views were

Rod, Wilco and myself on the summit



magnificent. We were the last to summit but the only ones to do so by the SW Ridge, however we still managed to avoid turning into pumpkins by being off the mountain well before 12 midday!

After the obligatory summit photos I had to do one more thing. I needed to make a phone call from the top of a mountain! It took some fiddling to get a signal but I did manage it and I called a mate at work to wish him Happy Birthday. The fact that it was not his birthday until the following Saturday took nothing from the novelty value of making a call from almost 4000m!

This was the last mountain I climbed in the Saastal and a good one to go out on. I'd recommend this route to anyone but your better off talking to the hut warden's dog than reading the guidebook!



The Fletschhorn as seen from the Weissmies Hut

An advertisement for 'Complete Outdoors' is shown, placed on a map. The ad text reads: 'For the best in Outdoor Clothing, Tents & Camping Accessories. We can point you in the right direction. THE COMPLETE OUTDOORS. London Road, Bourne End, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire HP1 2RS (Just 10 minutes from junction 20 of the M25) Plenty of parking spaces. Tel: 01442 873133. OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK. Shop on line: www.complete-outdoors.co.uk'. The ad also features logos for Visa, Mastercard, and American Express. Surrounding the ad are various outdoor items: a wooden-handled knife with 'LEKI' on the handle, a silver compass, and a light-colored hat.

NEW ROUTES AT SHAPELY GLEN CRAG

This is a delightful crag featuring 2 classic climbs, each with their own set of unique problems.

The best approach is from the South. Parking can be found at the foot of a wooded valley, which extends for half a mile. Follow the well-marked track up the middle of the valley until you reach a short bushy section, which must be negotiated with care, as there may be hidden rocks in the undergrowth. After this section the crag will rise in front of you.

Both climbs are graded Very Severe 4c with climbers tending to pick one or the other. Climbs are described from left to right.

Whatever Floats Your Boat – VS 4c



A wide crack at Shapely Glen

Multi-pitch climbing at its best, delicate handling skills are required for this one.

1) At the base of the cave (this is often moist) take either the left or right wall and using delicate fingering techniques gain the top of the cave. The precarious bulge just below the roof of the cave must be treated with great care and attention. Pull out of the cave with several bold moves until a sloping ledge is gained. This leads to a short section, which may be a bit overgrown. From there follow a

straight line up the sloping slab, stopping at a central hole for a hanging belay.

2) Careful investigation will reveal which side to progress further up on. Follow a line either left or right of the belay to a largely bulging overhang. The overhang does decrease in the middle but its more fun to work your way over one of the ledges. The section from the first belay to the overhang is not difficult but balance is required. At the overhang there is one large jug on either side to be gained in order for you to get your leg over. Proceed up the rounded slope to the top.

It's Fun Astride – VS 4c

A single pitch route with the 4c moves at the start.

A column of rock must be negotiated with great care at the start of this route. The side of the column can be very smooth with a slight overhang near the top but don't worry there are ridges to aid upward movement and the top can be gained by an easy mantle shelf. Once at the top sit astride (as the title suggests) and enjoy the view, before negotiating the descent to bridge across to the main crag. Again the main crag may be a bit overgrown at its base but this may aid the pull across from the very technical beginning. From here on it becomes easier, with good handholds on a delightful slab. There is an overhang to negotiate near the top of the climb, but whether you choose to go up the left or right hand side of the slab, there should be a nice handhold that can be gained to allow an easy pull up. This area may again be slightly overgrown, but it shouldn't be too much of a problem. Once over the overhang follow the easiest line to the top. © Marion Ford & Claire Phipps

Winetasting in Cormot, Burgundy by John Parrott

Snugly tucked into the corner, I look sideways. A line flat of holds stretch left. Below them and perhaps two moves away is a small triangular foothold. A slither of polished limestone is all that breaks the smoothness of the wall in between. It will have to do. I reach out brush it with my left toe, then retreat back into the corner again. My right hand buries itself deep back into a crack. I feel safe and secure here. Distant from the world, and yet folded almost into the rock, I am as close to it as the lizards I was watching earlier scuttling from crevice to crevice, or the ivy that binds itself to the rock in the secret places where the climbers don't go.



Author with a problem

I look down. Below Adrian and Steve are talking and laughing. Their voices float up through air. "Just step left." I know that. Know that once I commit myself, and move away from the corner it will be alright. The holds will flow, they usually do. Its one of the laws of nature, that the world will conspire to help those who commit themselves, who believe in themselves however mad or foolish they may seem. Perhaps it is one of

the reasons that we climb, to reassure ourselves that fundamentally this life is about reaching out beyond the constraints of our everyday existence, and that when we do, and truly believe in ourselves, the world will help us achieve what we reach for.

I wait a moment longer, watch a leaf spiral slowly down from the trees above the crag. Look out across the valley at the road winding down to the village, and the autumn vineyards rising up into the hills. Then scuttle nervously left.



Adrian at Cormot

Later we sat in a bar in Nolay, warmed by wine, and food from a good though ruinously expensive restaurant. The bar was old, heavily timber framed like all the buildings in this part of the town. Comfortable though. Not as oppressively ancient as the other buildings around the square. Outside the rain fell, fine and mist like in the light of the lamps. Climbing tomorrow seemed unlikely and we talked of wine tasting. The bar was not busy, mostly men sat alone, looking sullenly into

their drinks. This I suppose is the reality of rural France, or more probably the reality of midweek in provincial bars across Europe. The landlady, blonde, somewhere in her 40's, had a faded beauty and disillusionment about her that was curiously attractive. I wondered at her story, and what it would take to bring the light back into her eyes.

Later we stumbled out into the night and back via another bar to the tents. We'd only been away for a few days, but it had been a good trip. There had been a great day spent bouldering at Fontainebleau. I'm always a little wary of bouldering, being naturally wimpy and only too aware of leg or ankle breaking landings. Fontainebleau is though superb, there's so much to do. If you don't like a problem it's easy to move on to another. The forest landscape and sculpture like boulders are wonderful. Lots of friendly people and an atmosphere that's a cross between a Sunday picnic and a party. Then on to Burgundy, steep limestone, forested plateau, chateaus, vineyards, and of course some of the finest wine in this part of the galaxy.



ALTITUDE

A new thriller in paperback, by Bill Burt, BSc, CHMC.

"Grant, darling" Prucilla gasped, "it. is....hard to catch ones breath"

"Is it your deep passionate love for me, making your heart beat a thousand times faster, my darling Pru?" breathed Grant, his puny muscles rippling like a sack of worms as he spoke.

"Or is it that that we are on top of a mountain in the Alps and you are suffering Altitude sickness." Grant beamed at his lover. "Because at the top of Mont Blanc for instance the air pressure is only 560 mBar, so you are almost having to breath twice as hard to do the same exercise at sea level! At the top of Everest the pressure is only 350 mBar, so you have to breath 3 times as hard".

"Is that right Grantie, darling" she breathed, breathlessly.

"Yes" he carried on, "The pressure of the air gets lower as you get higher, which creates a lower temperature.

Temperature is a measure of the activity (kinetic energy) of the air molecules and obviously less molecules means lower temperature. The formula is the temperature drop = $(Palt/Psl) 0.19$. The drop in temperature is about 6C per 1000m climbed."

"Oh" she pouted, suddenly noticing his rather sad limp hair.

"Indeed, Pru, my sweetums". He said, his eye's lighting up like a smokey bonfire on a long-off hill, "It's called the Adiabatic lapse rate, and can be as much as 10°C per 1000m for dry air." He carried on getting visibly excited; "But, if it's wet or cloudy, then as the air rises it cools and water condenses, which gives out heat, due to the latent heat of vaporisation, so if it's cloudy the lapse rate is lower."

Pru's eye's glazed over and with a look that could turn water to ice (an effect that Grant found little to do with Boyles law) said: "I'm off, you boring tosser". Then she turned and walked off down the valley.

"Wait, wait, don't you see", He wailed, "often conditions can cause temperature Inversion, where cold air drops down into the valley and the warm air rises, so sweetums might get cold" he called out, his face creased with a frown, and absent mindedly bit his nails.

"Can I show you my graph showing atmospheric pressure with increasing altitude?" he called after her, pitifully. But she walked on. "It's just not fair", he muttered, idly squeezing the spot on his nose.



A Bit of Rough in Wales

by Albert Sillwood

Camping, Walking, Climbing & Naturist Sunbathing were the items mentioned in the advert for the September 2002 weekend meet in Llanbedr, between Barmouth & Harlech, in mid / north Wales.

What was missing was a mention that this part of mid Wales was infrequently visited and that the paths through the deep heather were 'indistinct' in places. So the members walking over Rhinog Fawr, Rhinog Fach & Y Llethr on a sunny but cool Saturday, found themselves with a bit of rough going over the hills.

Pete Ambrose successfully navigated the main HMC party to the top of Rhinog Fawr via a winding & indistinct path, whilst Albert took the more direct route through deep heather. Pete's route, although longer, was definitely the better plan. The walk over to Rhinog Fach involved a steep descent over rough ground and down an interesting gully. Going up Rhinog Fach, Pete again made the right navigational decision, while Albert followed a goat track to the left, which petered out with 2 miles of heather to bash through. Oh hum.

Meanwhile Phil, Christine & Andre went south to Cader Idris and completed a few climbs, returning late, after eating in Dolgellau. Ian Gibbon & Marion went north for some climbing on Tremadoc, and Ian twisted his ankle.

On the Saturday evening a local hostelry _ mile from the campsite beckoned, with good food, beers and a kareoke. Ann Peden led the HMC Girlies singing, and Pete Durkin the HMC Lads. Tony Edwards supervised from a safe distance and then left for a bit of rough camping. The walk back to the campsite involved a lot of stargazing with clear skies & the lack of local lights.

On Sunday the main group drove to Cader Idris & did the horse-shoe, whilst Phil, Christine & Andre completed some more climbs on the back of Cader. Albert walked from Llanbedr to Shell Island to see if it was appropriate sunbathing weather. Although the sun came out intermittently, it was a cold wind, so after a quick paddle in the sea, it was back to the local Shell Island hostelry, for a relaxing pint in the sheltered sunny courtyard.

All in all, a good weekend in an infrequently visited part of mid Wales, with a bit of rough walking on Saturday.

The Back Page

The climbers guide to motorcycling

*** Honda firestorm, VTR (1000).

A fine twin pitch, separated by 90 degrees, a classic first climbed on in 1997. This route is best done solo, but is best seconded by a female, of slight stature to enhance the delight of this classic arrangement. Make sure you wear a helmet on all routes and protective clothing is preferred. Crash mats do not work.

First locate the start. A button type protuberance on the right, often marked with a symbol. The crux is the key. Insert it and start.

1. Select the correct gear by careful placement of the foot on the obvious rest. Grabbing a handful here will cause the rear to slip or the front to go flying. Smooth movement, with correct gear placements and a pull left, will swing you into a bend. Remember to overtake the slower people on your chosen route and to make as much noise as possible.
2. Once on the straight section, move up to the peak (revs), selecting more gear or gears to achieve (the) top as quickly as possible.
3. Ensure the grip is available at all times as a slip of the rear boots can result in some serious skid marks and, often, injury and embarrassment.
4. Beware of the Gendarms, carefully by-pass, avoid anything risky, and beware of any flash photography. Once negotiated, change gear and it's full throttle to the top.

Return to the start, avoiding any rocks or volvos on the route.

Next issue: Climbers guide to Sex. (helpful tips and demonstrations to the author please)

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PURCHASE DISCOUNTS

HMC has obtained discounts with the following outdoor clothing, climbing and camping equipment shops:

Cotswold

91 Victoria Street
St Albans
Tel: 01727 847888

Countryside

118 High Street
Stevenage
Tel: 01438 353086

The Complete Outdoors

Bourne End
Hemel Hempstead
Tel: 01442 873133

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STOP PRESS !

20% discount at **urban Rock** for all HMC members at the Castle and Westway climbing centres.

A current Membership Card must be shown.



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Photo: John Norris