

Special EGCC Discount



Peglers, tel 01903 883 375, website www.peglers.co.uk, give EGCC members a special discount of 20% on climbing gear and clothing on production of a current EGCC membership card. This discount does not apply to maps or books. As proof of membership is required this special discount cannot be given for on-line purchases.

BMC Discounts

As a BMC member you are entitled to a discount, usually 10%, on production of your membership card. A full list is given in the Member Handbook you will receive direct from the BMC. Some retail outlets of likely interest to EGCC members is given below.

<u>Store</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Website</u>
High Sports	Salfords	www.high-sports.co.uk
Costwold Outdoor Ltd	Nationwide	www.cotswoldoutdoor.com
Field & Trek	Nationwide	www.fieldandtrek.com
Joe Brown Climbing Shop	Capel Curig	www.joebrownsnowdonia.co.uk
Needle Sports	Keswick	www.needlesports.com
Outside (5%)	Hathersage	ww.outside.co.uk
Snow & Rock	Nationwide	www.snowandrock.co.uk
The Climbers Shop	Ambleside	www.theclimbersshop.co.uk
Ultimate Outdoors	Betwys y Coed) Keswick) www.ultimateoutdoors.com



*EGCC Magazine And
Newsletter
June 2007*

EGCC Newsletter and Magazine

Welcome to this month's Newsletter and Magazine. It's bigger than usual as I received three long articles so well written that I found I had no wish to edit them. I hope you enjoy them as much as I did.

The members list is on the last page. Please check your details and let me know if there are any errors, omissions or changes needed.

Blacks are not in the discount list at the back, however their shop in Horsham have been giving me a 10% discount on production of my membership card. Reg

Summary Of EGCC Committee Meeting 17 April 2007

1. Finance £519.56 has been spent so far this year on BMC subs, the EGCC magazine and web hosting (including an accrual from last year). The combined cost of the web for this year and last was £219.17. We have a credit balance of £517.64

2. Membership. The Treasurer confirmed that a sum of £260 had been paid to the BMC for 28 members, so our club's third party liability cover is in place. 29 members have paid. There is an additional small number expected to rejoin.

3. Social. Some members have independently been cleaning up Stone Farm. However the good Spring weather has brought out those who are careless so the crag will need our continued attention. Sarah undertook to contact the Southern Sandstone group and obtain technical guidance on how we might address erosion of rock and soil, noting that Stone Farm is an SSSI.

An evening BBQ mid-June was agreed. Sarah to book suitable weather. Lianne has offered to give a talk on her desert trip.

4. Meets. Now that Spring is here it was agreed that emphasis should shift from the indoor walls to Stone Farm on a Wednesday evening, with the opportunity for a swift pint in Dunnings Mill afterwards. Consequently, Stone Farm is now the default for pleasant evenings instead of a wall.

1st May Bank Holiday (5,6,7 May) - Pembroke - Jim to pass emails around.

2nd May Bank Holiday (26,27,28 May) - Lake District.

5. Newletter. A magazine will be out by end May for June.

6. Website. Trevor has updated the website. It needs some new photos. To update the Yahoo Group address from 2005 to 2007 is proving difficult.

7. Chairman. A Chairman is sorely needed.

8. AOB. Consideration was given to broadening the scope of club activities. For example, the cycle ride was much enjoyed by the wobbly climbers who participated. eg. Away Meets could include cycling.

News Items

Social Secretary 20th June - it's Offend the Veggie night at Stone Farm. I challenge you all to surround my vegetarian self with barbequeing burgers, sausages and other animal parts. We'll provide barbies (but no Kens), you provide meat and medicine. Come along, straight from work if you fancy, climb, eat, and climb some more. Or gossip. Your choice. We'll be there till it's outrageously dark and then we'll probably go to the pub. Toodlepip!! Sarah

Meets Secretary The weekend of the 2nd June our away meet is in Glorious North Devon. Miles and miles of fabulous awesome sea cliff climbing amongst dramatic scenery. What is more it is a much shorter drive than the Lakes/Pembroke and the campsite can usually be easily attained after a day in the office.

Email me if you are interested in coming - I need to have a rough idea of how many are coming to book the campsite.

Wednesday evening meets will normally be at Stone Farm with Harrison's Rocks and/or a wall depending on circumstances. Check your emails as Wednesdays approach. Jim

Web Editor The Yahoo Group list has been updated. Please let me know if you are not receiving group emails - there are usually several each Wednesday. Trevor

April Fools Weekend - by Graham Siggers



Early Training Session For Future Partner

I was excited - a weekend of classic rock in North Wales. JL was off his survey vessel and circumstances had conspired to for a weekend climbing.

I don't know how many hours of toilet-guidebook time I had racked up since the last trip in December, but it was probably in excess of fifty. Great Gully, Amphitheatre Buttress, East face of Tryfan, and routes on Lliwedd all beckoned. Friday arrived, to work in my climbing clothes and slinking off at 4pm to jump in the car up the M40. The journey went well and I arrived shortly after 8:15pm. There was one minor event involving an empty plastic bottle, a certain biological need, and a pair of waterproof trousers, but I can't relate the details in such an esteemed family publication as this. Suffice it to say I seem to be currently in a phase of discovery concerning the less standard uses of waterproof trousers. Having cycled to work another one of these limitations was made apparent to me when I attempted to use the trousers as a towel after showering. The absorbency (none) meant the process was completed to a similar timescale as if I'd stood outside and used simple evaporation.

Anyway, the climbing! JL arrived at the B&B in Capel Curig late and understandably humourless after an 8.5 hour journey from Plymouth. We exchanged a few objectives for Saturday, and settled eventually for his, realising that my toilet guidebook training was probably not the optimum preparation for a 1,000ft route at the beginning of April. The Gambit, a three star 320ft Vdiff route high on Clogwyn y Person (Crib y Ddysgl). Park low down in Llanberis pass, walk all the way up to Cwm Glas and then climb the route, north facing, to a ridge. We requested an early breakfast and went to sleep. *"How will we get back down, the guidebook didn't say it was possible to find a descent route if we were late up, could we get to the top of the mountain after the climb? Also no information provided. Would we be able to climb 320ft in time? Should be possible as just a VDiff. Will we find the start of the route?"* Eventually I fell asleep, that combination of unknowns and tiredness working well together in a worrier's mind like mine.

Dawn broke and it was a stunning day (in Snowdonia of all places!). Breakfast smartly down, water bottles filled, and by 9am walking up the mountain to Cwm Glas with heavy sacks fit for an ascent of the Eiger.

We arrived at the Cwm and left the sunshine now hidden by the walls forming the northern part of the Snowdon horseshoe. The ascent had been a good kick up the backside to my lazy office residing body, and the repetitive gagging induced by the overly mineral-rich water from the B&B had added to the challenge. Five pitches, alternate leads, I was doing the first. There was minor dissent from JL but then he hadn't neatly racked up his harness with all the gear the night before so no argument.

The first pitch was gorgeous. A strenuous move lifted me onto an outward sloping slab, tentatively padding down and up the edge of the slab, then good crack climbing before another short awkward crack led to a large belay stance. The perfect combination of thugginess and interest. JL came swiftly up and pressed on with the next pitch. Less defined in terms of routefinding with the unknowns from last night coming back. Are we in the right place? It looked indeed as if a "difficult traverse" rightwards started the third pitch and so off I headed. The pitch was superb, twice as long as the guidebook said, and probably around the 4a/4b grade. The traverse crossed the middle of a quite blank looking wall, and took small pieces of protection in a horizontal seam which was quite flaky. Just as I was about to leave JL's sight, all gear and holds disappeared. I found something, reached a short "chimney" (aka grotty loose groove) and set up belay before being too far away. JL followed, having a total 'mare at the blank spot, which was odd considering this

was a Vdiff b) he climbs a couple of grades harder than me. We were however now obviously off-route. The persistent reference to chimneys in the guidebook being met by none. The unknowns were back in full. If we continue up, might we end up in a dead-end, unable to climb further? If we back off, how long would it take us to abseil off the now vertical ground beneath us, the cliff dropping to about twice the distance as at the start?

JL pushed on up the groove and reached easier ground. It was a short pitch, but given my uncomfortable near-hanging belay in the grotty bit, I needed to come up. I joined him and he pushed on picking a line we thought would reduce the risk of nasty surprises further up. I took the next pitch, a combination of easy rock climbing and scrambling, with some technical grass. I kept going. Above me looked to be scree boulders overhanging a break in slope. Heaving my whale-like climbing frame over one of these boulders, I found myself lying on top of the ridge on a footpath. I let out a muted, self-controlled well-known climber's call to inform the belayer of my arrival at our intended destination. It was late in the afternoon by now, so we changed into our walking boots and headed off up to Crib y Ddisgl before descending down its north ridge to the pass. In the pub by 9pm. Grab the last roast lamb, text from my sister to inform of the safe birth of my nephew. Awesome day, awesome weather, awesome dinner. Awesome news. All in all, awesome.

Sunday we were up at the same time (well OK, half an hour later). My body was wrecked but it was another stunning day and we had agreed to do Reade's route, a more famous and less starred route than the Gambit, which ascends an obvious nose to join the Horseshoe Ridge at Crib Goch.

We parked at the same spot, having picked up bottled water to minimise the rapidly increasing side-effects of the sediment-laden B&B water (gagging had by this morning extended to other orifices, resulting in my performing a good rendition of a "lazy susan" in the B&B's lavatory).

A long slog up to Llyn Glas, then across to Cwm Uchaf, underneath the north walls of Crib Goch. We could see the route, obvious in line and looking massive with patches of ice still resting on the shaded north facing rock. I had no concept of scale until some scramblers on the ridge started to pass. They looked far too big and suddenly the scale became reduced from Himalayan proportions to the 120ft climb the route actually was!

We roped up at the shaded base of Crazy Pinnacle Gully, with JL taking pitches 1 and 3, and me settling for the crux pitch 2 with a famous leap required from a pinnacle onto a wall. Off he went smoothly and easily, swiftly arriving at the belay stance. Some time elapsed, then more time, until finally a conversation was required:

"All right mate?" I shouted enquiringly.

Pause. "Er, I've got a bit of an ...er.. issue"

"What sort of an issue?" I asked.

Longer pause. "I'll, er, tell you when you're up here"

This was not a reassuring answer.

"Have you lost your belay plate?"

Much longer pause."Er... yes mate, threw it down the hill. Am trying to remind myself how to do an Italian Hitch, but can't quite make it. Hang on, try this. Could you put your weight on the rope to test?" I attempted to appear nonchalant, to nobody in sight, and

leapt in the air and with all my might tried to simulate the impulse from an F2 fall to test him out. It held. The ground looked easy, I was coming up. "Climbing" I shouted and trotted off to join him. Coming over the brow to join him, his belay arrangement was hard to ignore. It was not an Italian hitch, rather two neat turns of the rope around a carabiner. "Mate, what the **** is that?", I asked politely. It was his homemade arrangement and probably would have held given the easy ground, but before I lead the next "crux" pitch, I wanted to see a real Italian Hitch. Together we cracked it, two loops for a clove hitch and then turn one around or something.... anyway it was the real thing, and reassured I set off.

There was a short crack which was probably off route, but enticing. I went up this before crossing onto the face of the pinnacle and reaching the top. Awesome, the sun was peaking onto me, and the wind was noticeable as I stood up on the top and looked over to the opposite wall for holds. It was more of a lean onto the wall and a lunge up for good holds, but still the exposure and atmosphere, the sun and being high up in Snowdonia with stunning views down the pass, made it brilliant. Up to the top of the next pinnacle and set up a belay stance, nicely wedged behind a block facing west into the sun. "What an idiot I thought, all he has to do is look after his belay plate. Oh well, I mustn't drop mine", I thought seriously, and promptly dropped it. It landed just below my feet, some two inches further and it would probably have joined its colleague in the rocks far below. I retrieved it and viewed JL's failings with more humility (and resolved to do something about mine).

Someone had told me that the pinnacle move was harder if you were less than my lanky height and this certainly seemed true looking down at JL. Plus the wind had picked up, increasing the exposure. Still, he crossed with no incident, joined me, swapped gear and proceeded up the last, steep, pitch to the top. Big Whoop, finally I moved off to join him, by this time rather frozen. The sheltered boulder I had so smugly identified for a belay stance had by now turned out to really be the perfect design for a stone-age refrigerator, funnelling all the wind up through a couple of holes and freezing its occupant.

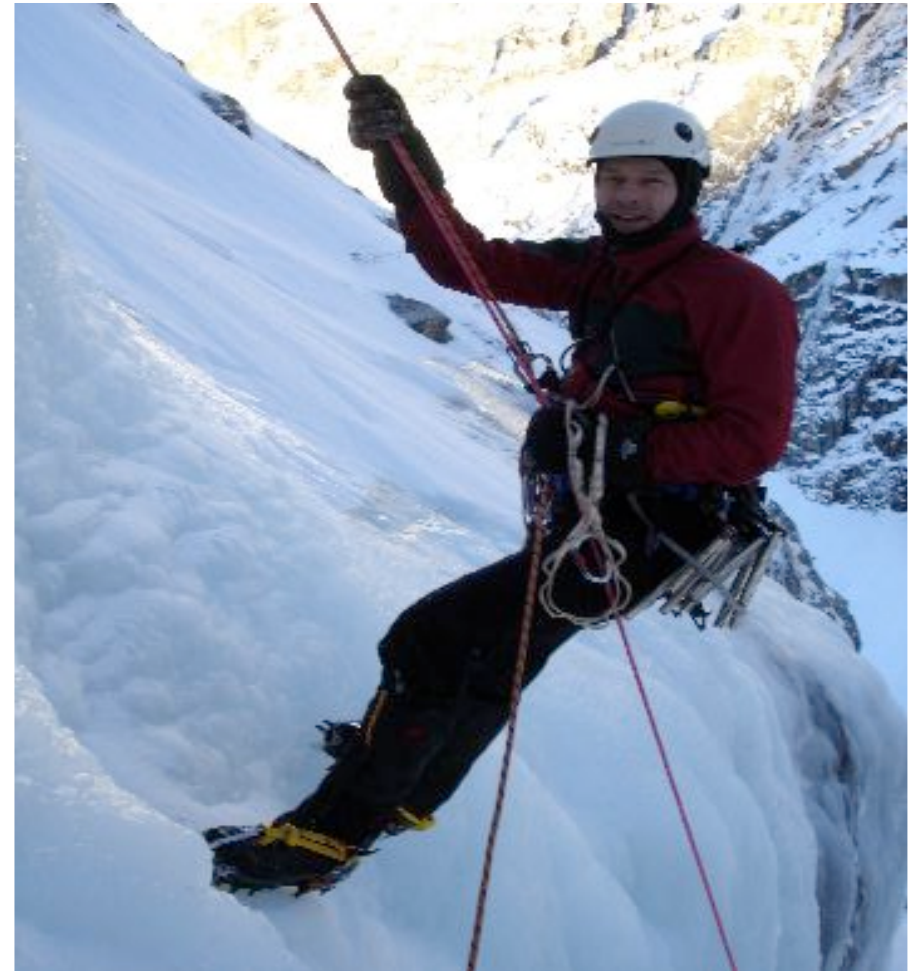
The top arrived after some typical exclamations that occur when combining the inability to move fingers and limbs with the need to climb. Glorious sunshine, views all around and a decent sandwich and thermos of coffee. On with the boots, a scramble eastwards over Crib Goch before turning north to descend the scree slope back down to Llyn Glas and down to the pass.

Back at my car by 8:30pm, I left JL and headed back down south. My body was glowing with physical tiredness, my mind satisfied with the achievement of our modest objectives. My mood refreshed by the pure and constant Snowdonia sunshine. I mustn't leave this as long next time....

The Day of the Ice Tombstone - by Tony Boud

Back in January 2003 in the Oisans region of the Alps, as I belayed Ag, on top of 30 metres of steep solid ice and 5 metres of steep lemon sorbet, my eyes came to rest on a really beautiful looking ice climbing line. It was on the other side of the Vallon du Diable and I could see the full height of it. Rising above the approach slope a slender strip of ice went up in a parabolic curve, sharpening to a point to squeeze through a tiny gap and then appearing to twist like a spiral through wide iced amphitheatres and more hour glass slots heading for the mountain summit. I could see a team going up it, climbing the third

pitch, their progress was steady and the satisfaction they were experiencing was palpable. It was beautiful and impressive, had no sun on it (unlike the horror that we were climbing) and.. it didn't look too desperately hard (unlike most routes in these parts)! I photographed it and set about investigating later that night in the comfort of the chalet. "Les Hemos a Godo" was the name, grade II 4 220m ***, five pitches, "...classique..", this sounded perfect. Unfortunately it was our last day and I had to store away for future reference any further thoughts of the route.



My next 'Icefest' was January 2006, Ag was pregnant and having some rest days. Adrian was a free agent. We teamed up, and, sharing the journey with Eddie and Olga, we set off down the road through Bourg-d'Oisans, turning off through the Vallée du Vénéon as the first hints of dawn appeared in the night sky, heading for .. the Vallon du Diable!

Now, regular readers will know that Adrian has a lot of good stories to tell. Climbers who have shared a rope with Adrian will know why, he demands a lot from a day's climbing, and is an addict for adventure. I am a bit more laid back than that. This was the first time I had actually partnered Adrian, and the day was not going to disappoint.

It is a long walk down the valley and we had plenty of time to discuss routes. Eddie had in mind a thing called "Autisme" (I get a bit put off by a name at times), Adrian and I were vague and would find something else. I thought Les Hemos a Godo might be a bit too straight-forward for Adrian, but it was just the next gully on from Autisme, I didn't push it, but that was what I wanted to do!

We eventually reached the point below Autisme. The route was barely discernible up through the grooves and bulges of the buttress above and it might have taken an hour to slog up that horrendous approach slope just to take a closer look. We pushed on.

Les Hemos a Godo was in perfect condition. The approach slope was shorter than for Autisme, and it all looked great apart from one thing, we had been beaten to it. Two Frenchmen were gearing up at the top of the slope. But you just can't turn your nose up at routes that are so tempting. I didn't have to say anything, we decided to head on up, we could follow them. By the time we reached the foot of the route the other team were completing the first pitch. We then had a decision to make, who would go up first. Eddie was gracious and insisted that we go. Then the decision; who was to lead first? I was a little anxious, I wasn't sure how I was going to go, and a little pressure was building, five pitches, Eddie and Olga wanted to complete it as well, I couldn't afford to mince about and get the jitters and let Adrian down. Still, somehow I volunteered, and without realising, also put myself in line for the crux third pitch - through the second narrowing at 85 degree steepness. Another factor, that we were all eminently aware of but not mentioning, was that the first pitch had turned into bomb alley and chunks of ice were raining down it as though someone was emptying a truck above. It was the French leader smashing his way up the second pitch!

I set off at what I thought was a great pace, appropriately as the onslaught raining down forced a kind of urgency that meant no time for dithering. Some of the small debris coming down took numerous small bounces and never gained much energy, the big pieces were another matter. It was important to see them emerging from the narrow slot above and calculate their trajectory in order to evade them. Thirty five meters, a few good dodges and several near misses later and I was approaching the necking point and a solid chain belay beyond, with just three ice screws placed below. Pushing on through encouraged by the security just ahead, on the steepest ice so far, I was pleased with myself, and settled down on the belay, safe now from the barrage.

It wasn't long before Adrian was cruising up through the gap, keen to get to his turn on the sharp end. It was a shame then that the second pitch was crap. He also discovered why my lead had been so lively. The second pitch was shallow and the relatively thin ice was sitting on a bed of snow and was breaking up under the pressure of an ice axe. So no placements then, not one, he was round the corner and above me but I could still hear, fairly explicitly, how unimpressed he was. As I followed through the third pitch reared up ahead. It was a wide stretch of delicious super-thick ice and the line of the climb was

clear, heading for a narrow concave half tube in the vertical terrain at the top - much harder than the first pitch.

I set off trepidated but also buoyed by a bit of new confidence, only to be met by ropes squirming down onto me, shortly followed by the crampon points of the French climbers as they abseiled off, having ticked the crux. This was also the time at which Eddie and Olga turned round below us, Eddie had dropped something important and in retrieving it there was no way there would be time for them to re-climb and complete the route. All of a sudden we were on our own. Curiously this was also about the point at which we realised that we didn't have a guide book.

Eventually I reached the crux stretch. The climbing suddenly became strenuous. My decision to place a screw at the very hardest point was not one of my best. However, I was able to accommodate my numb tourniqueted left hand for the last couple of moves before I mantled onto a comfortable belay. It was pretty clear as Adrian arrived that he felt the distribution of quality lead pitches was not fair and needed redressing.



We now found ourselves in rather dramatic surroundings, below a huge sweep of ice, a fifty meter high amphitheatre on our left as we faced in, which met an effectively vertical ice wall at the back. On the right side a vertical rock wall.

The question was where did the route go (we had grown accustomed to good fixed belays and more importantly, equipped descent lines)? We had no guide book, no one around any more, no tell tale scars on the ice and nothing visible around the rim. I say nothing, except for one thing, at the foot of the vertical wall, at the back of the gully, we could see a single Abalakov anchor thread in the ice. Had someone abseiled from it, or was it the minimalist belay for a steep wall variation? I was trying to ignore it but Adrian was already weighing this up as his launch pad to an outrageous pitch. High up on the right of the (apparent) line, below the rim, we could see a small cave and we convinced ourselves it must contain some sort of belay. So it was agreed, Adrian's prize for the day. It was a twenty metre slog up the moderate snow gully, below the rock wall, to reach the anchor, we moved together on this and then I set up to belay using the Abalakov.

A little traverse left and then Adrian headed up. This was a whole different ball game, very steep and sustained, only the slightest horizontal rib at about half height to give any relief. Adrian battled away and the ice screws went in steadily. After about twenty minutes he got onto the rib. He placed another screw and, taking advantage of the slightly more relaxed position, he informed me, with a certain emphasis, that he was getting knackered. On he went again. As he eventually edged towards the cave I counted the ice screws. He had one left and then he found there were no belays in the cave! The only chance was to carry on to the rim and rely on there being something up there. There had better be because there wasn't much rope left either! He placed the last screw before cresting the rim and going out of sight. Immediately an ice debris barrage began again. Only these pieces were not bouncing, they were falling parallel to the wall. Fortunately, it was just to my left. Then the radio that was slung around my chest came to life (the radios had been Adrian's insistence, "we're taking these", for real sticky situations only!):

"Tony, watch out, I have a really big bit balanced on my boots, are you ready?"

He was still climbing, only on shallower ground and had run into another area of thickly glassed snow that was nearly strong enough to climb on, but not quite. The slab had fractured from below his axe and dropped onto his feet, trapping them. It was a tombstone sized chunk. He let it go and as it appeared over the crest it rotated slowly against the sky and accelerated towards me. I cowered to the right as far as I could and prayed it would fall straight. It did and it shattered into the wall two meters below and to my left and then thumped into the snow slope below.

"Still alive Adrian! And by-the-way you've got about four meters left." I radioed up.

As the rope slowly paid out once again, I realised that he had not found an easy anchor. Eventually there was no rope left and Adrian was pulling against my belay. The call came in:
"Tony, I think I can arrange something here! I need another three meters, can you move off the belay?"

That was great! Straight into the fall line! "Don't let any more big ones go Adrian!"

As I started moving my arms and legs I realised I had pretty much frozen to the wall; I had been there well over an hour. I edged across the traverse, kicked some big foot holds and

planted the axes in the ice one above the other above my head and then tried to get my whole body underneath them. The excavations then began far above me and a constant stream of debris kept me entertained.

Finally he finished and invited me to climb. 'Okay, never climbed anything this hard before and my belayer is ten meters above his last screw, anchored to two axes in the snow and an ice sculpture!' I thought for a moment, and reasoned with myself that my Mummy couldn't help me now and I would just have to get on with it, and if it got desperate I would just clip into an ice screw.

In fact the climbing was fantastic. The sustained nature was demanding and exciting! I was able use some of Adrian's pick placements, when I found them, to save energy. I was steaming inside my jacket as I took out the last screw and faced the bit that, to me, felt totally unprotected. Using my last ounces of strength I got through this and when I arrived at the belay I found Adrian sitting proudly beside his creation, a strange icy mound that he had fashioned into a bollard with a loop around it. Still, it wasn't so good that he would turn down the offer of an additional ice screw, as it was now available, to back up!

Our difficulties were not over. We were off route without question, and had to find the abseil line. It was getting late and would be dark soon. I was soon off on a belayed exploratory traverse pitch over a delicate ice crust to check out the other side of the ice-fall, trying to spot the fixed anchors in the fading light. Sure enough, in the rock on the other side was a scruffy little cluster of tat! We had been about 15 meters to the right of the ascent line.

Adrian abseiled from the tat first and within a minute was off the rope. I followed down and to my surprise found him nestled into a cave that was hidden by a curtain of icicles about 7 meters down the face. Inside was a big fat shiny chain. Surely it was plain sailing now. No need to think, Adrian headed off again aiming for the belay that was at the top of the third pitch that we could now see again. Only to find, to his astonishment as he approached the end of the ropes, that he could not reach it. He was half way down the 'moving together' snow pitch. The temptation to solo down to the belay and save twenty minutes of messing-about was great. He looked at it and weighed it up against the trudge back up to the Abalakov anchor. He opted for the safe option.

That was it now, we knew where we were. As we abseiled our way down the route darkness fell. On arriving back at the gear we realised how knackered, dehydrated and hungry we were. Adrian came to the rescue again with his flask of thick milky coffee.

As we headed back down the Vallon du Diable, under the stars, we were greeted out of the gloom with a "where the bloody hell have you been!" It was Eddie, with Olga, marching back up the valley (in trainers(?)). They had been clearly concerned about us, but were not so delighted now they found us alive and well; it had been a long wait!

Studying the guide book later that night, whilst enjoying the legendary Peglers hospitality, I tried to pin point where we should have gone. I found the route did indeed describe an alternative steep sustained option on the back wall. It was my guess though, that this took a leftward slant to reach the anchors in the hidden (abseil) cave, which would have been quite a bit easier. Our route, however, was surely the best!

Scotland - March 2007 - by Adrian Botting



The trouble with cut-price flights is that any cut-price weather included in the deal can only be exchanged for better weather a week later at great expense. Tall Stuart and I were greeted by weather in Fort William that would have made an otter laugh out loud. Nevertheless, we loaded up our rucsacs and trudged up the Ben to see how bad it could be.

Once upon a time, I am sure that my waterproof would have coped well. However, it had seen better days and this was turning out to be one of the worst of days to be out and about. 90mph winds and heavy rain transformed my jacket into a filter. Once the rain had passed through every piece of my clothing and began to fill up my boots, my 'get up and go' got up and went. Stuart and I had a discussion: the CIC hut was visible through breaks in the rain further up the valley. The Ben was being beaten to death by the wind higher up. We were slowly drowning - a better day was surely to be had elsewhere. We fled, dried out a bit and went to the Ice Factor in Kinlochleven. Good fun and dry too.

Saturday dawned dry-ish but with an even worse forecast - 100 mph winds and rain. Ever opportunists, we bagged a quick two-pitch rock route in big boots in Glen Nevis before the rain started again and we went for a walk to look at Steall waterfall, which was immense. No surprise there. By this stage it was only marginally drier outside the waterfall than inside it, and I decided that an investment in a new waterproof jacket was required.

That night, the weather turned colder and it began to snow. Stuart and I packed our bags and set off for Stob Corrie nan Lochan in Glen Coe, on the basis that the routes did not need ice to be in condition, and that there were some that were likely to be relatively safe from avalanche. Several others had the same idea. Dorsal Arête was a popular choice and

so we opted for Dorsal Chimney, a Grade IV,5 two pitch variation start to the standard route.

It began with a very accommodating belay and an easy groove led up to a chimney that got progressively narrower. An onlooker would have detected signs of distress as it became more difficult to stay in the chimney where there was a marked lack of adequate gear. I placed a poor peg, edged up a bit further and found a worse peg in situ. The weather girded its loins and hurled snow down the hill with such force that looking up was not possible. I confess to a severe bout of self-pity, garnished with a desire to flee. The weather calmed a bit and, as fleeing looked to be more hazardous than continuing, I edged up a bit further. In the back of the crack I uncovered what used to be known as a full weight runner - a big fat hex placed sideways and secured with a few smart blows from 'the persuader'. 'Bring it on!' I thought and began to enjoy myself.

The next moves can only be described as Scottish: a mono-point delicately placed on an edge outside the chimney to the left, and the entire right side of my body engaged in a full body jam in the chimney. Very secure for staying still, but incompatible with upward progress. I was pleased that my new waterproof jacket was packed away safely (the observant will notice the correlation between purchase of jacket and the rain stopping). Huge effort enabled the friction to be overcome until I could lodge first one axe and then the other in something unidentified above to arrive on a sloping ledge. I duly disinterred a belay of sorts - one of those scary ones that periodically have to be replaced when they fall out. I have found the trick to be not to alert one's partner to these minor shortcomings.



The crack now continued above, about 6 inches wide and in a sort of groove. Stuart headed up and waved very sharp spikes above my head in a disconcerting way. He found a

good wire and my fears over the belay and his crampons subsided. Turning this way and that he inched his way up the groove and out onto easier ground. One pitch of easy ground brought us into line with crowds and the fine final pitch of Dorsal Arête.

The walk down finally saw off Stuart's feet which had been suffering from new boots. The snow continued overnight and we were in a quandary over what to do. In the end we set off for the Cobbler, but the weather couldn't decide between blizzards and white out or blinding sunshine. What was not in doubt was that the snow was deep, damp and heavy and so we ran away and went for a Tourist Trundle around the West Coast - Loch Fyne, Inverary, castles and the like. Pleasant - yes; cutting edge of modern alpinism - no.

Of course, as we left the temperature plummeted, the snow replenished everything stripped by the rain, and by Thursday the Orion Face was plastered in névé from top to bottom and there wasn't a cloud in the sky, and it stayed like that for two weeks. @!%*&! £\$%*&@ as Asterix would say.



The Mountain Bikers and Jason - January 2007