

## High Atlas

Mike Wainman

## Queensland Stubai Valley

Andy Hughes

## The White Mountain

Simon Gladstone

## The Italian Job

Chris Comrie



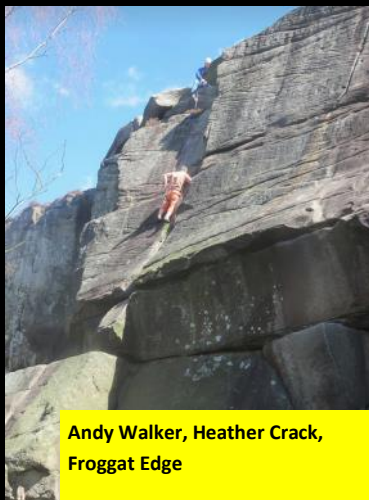
# Editors Note...

Hi all, once again, we have an action packed edition of the newsletter showing what our members have been up to. We have been an international bunch, spanning the globe from local meets in the UK, to the Alps, Dolomites, High Atlas, and on the other side of the world in Australia.

Although we have lots to tell about our activities near and far, there is a more worrying matter closer to home I would like to discuss, as it dawns on me you might not actually be aware of it. No, its not the retreat of the glaciers, which I admit is greatly concerning for our siblings, nor is it the uproar caused by the BMC wishing to change its name, prior to the abrupt u turn normally associated with our government. The subject is attendance of meets. Now I have only been relatively active in the club for the last 4 years, and have only really recently starting regularly attending meets, but it is very apparent to me that we need to do something about this.

Since the last newsletter, we had a promising start to the year, in Elphin we had a full house, In actual fact, the first few meets of the year were well attended. Langdale had double figures! Fallcliffe Cottage in the Peak, saw quite a few, we had 7 in total. Next was May Bank Holiday where we had 6 or 7, and then it seemed to crash for the Summer. Arrochar Alps saw 3 attendees. Then the Wye Valley meet saw 3. August Bank Holiday, we had 5. Pembrokeshire had 3, and I hope this weekend for the works meet will see more than you can count on one hand. Is there anything we can do about this? Surely there must be a way to get more bodies to the meets, or maybe we simply need more members. Answers on a postcard!

On a more positive note, I am delighted with the content we have in this edition. Read on for stories from afar.



Andy Walker, Heather Crack, Froggat Edge



Ted Wilkins, North Wales



Dan Bennett on Quick Step, VS4b Pembroke

I was lucky enough to fulfil a dream this year by successfully summiting Mont Blanc, in a thoroughly enjoyable first trip to the Alps, with Mr Dan Bennett. Mike Wainman has been off to the High Atlas Mountains, Andy Hughes & family show us what its like down under, and Chris Comrie proves all this can be enjoyed going solo!

Finally I would like to congratulate Andy Hughes, for being nominated President for next year. Andy has been an active member since 1971, so is deserving of the post.



Other news worthy of mentioning, is the re-painting of the hut. See photos—be warned you may need sunglasses. Thanks to John Fiirmin, Ted Wilkins and Mike Wainman.

Thanks goes out to Chris Comrie, Mike Wainman and Andy Hughes for your contributions to this edition.

Before I end, I would like to warn of an unpleasant consequence of a fall I took when climbing at the August Bank Holiday meet. As I fell I inadvertently grabbed the rope, resulting in quite a nasty burn on my fingers and hand.

This happened on Saturday morning, and my hand became swollen throughout the weekend. I had put this down to some quite vicious hand jamming on Central Park at Gogarth. By Monday afternoon I had a couple of red lines appearing from my finger, up my forearm. I thought this would go away, but by the evening the lines had reached my arm pit, and after some google-assisted self diagnosis, I decided to call 111 for advice. They told me to get to a GP asap, and booked me in for 9pm that evening.

On seeing the GP, he referred me instantly to the trauma department, where I was admitted with Cellulitis, and spent 2 days on intravenous antibiotics!

In the end all was fine, but had I left it things could have been a lot more serious, and I very nearly did. The moral to this story to me is 1) take the bloody first aid kit on the route, and use it, 2) don't just leave it thinking it will be ok, and 3) don't bloody fall off!

## The Italian Job

Chris Comrie



An invitation to a wedding in Tuscany turned into a month long tour of Italy over September. For once, no hard routes on soaring challenging faces were planned, a gentle trip visiting new places, exploring, taking it easy, a holiday. Our nomadic wanderings took us north for a planned week in Cortina, situated at the very heart of the Dolomites.

We were unprepared for the shock of the wild difference in climate, from 35 degrees on the streets of Verona to just above freezing and snowing at 2752m on the summit of Lagazuoi Piccolo high above one of the most strategically situated road passes in the Dolomites, the Passo Falzarego. We explored the First World War trenches and passages blasted into the mountain top, every ten metres or so a slit cut through the rock onto the open face to allow machine guns and rifle's to discharge their lethal fire on the poor devils below. We then became entombed for one and a half hours whilst descending the Lagazuoi Tunnels, cut by the Italians from the bottom up at an angle of forty five degrees in parts, to allow an ambush of the enemy from behind. The huts built into side chambers to house the men are perfectly preserved and eerily silent. Thousands of men died here and you can feel their presence.

Because I was undertaking my mountaineering alone, I opted for using one of the many Via Ferrata in the area, the highlight was undoubtedly my complete traverse of the Sorapiss Group, a horse-shoe of steep rock walls accessed from the north via the beautiful Lago di Sorapiss, a striking lake of an amazing turquoise colour, a reflection of the sunlight on the minerals leached out from the glacier. The excursion took me two days which included an overnight bivouac in the tiny shelter of Bivacco Slataper, the highest point on the route. After leaving the lake I never saw a soul, complete silence and solitude. However venturing outside at dusk for a pee before finally settling down for the night, I was confronted by two very large Ibex, I don't know who was the more surprised they or I? I attempted to move them on by approaching but they had no intention of moving and began snorting and pawing at the rock with their front foot, I considered it prudent to back off, a charge and potential serious injury seemed a distinct possibility which, would have proved a bit awkward for a sole traveller! This was a truly magnificent excursion.

Photos:

Cover: Mont Blanc Summit from Dome du Gouter

Top Left: Ski Club 18 - Monte Faloria

Right from the top: Outside Bivacco Slataper, Lago di Sorapiss, Bivacco Slataper, St Bernard Pass.





# HIGH ATLAS

**Mike Wainman**



*Yours truly on a cold Jebel*

## OH WHAT TO DO ?

I was getting itchy feet (no not athlete's foot), not having been off trekking for the last few years. Some problems with my back and knees had improved with a lot of hard work and I knew I needed to be off again before old age and decrepitude set in even further. My wife Christine had even given me a pass out ! But where to ?

My long standing ambition, above all others, has been to do the full Karakorum Traverse, but for years no reputable agency has run this. I did the first half in 2006, from Hushe over the Gondogoro La to Concordia and K2 then down the Baltoro Glacier, and this was by far my best ever trip. This left the second half, up the Biafo Glacier to Snow Lake and the Hispar La towards the Ogre, as top of my wish list. In theory a couple of agencies were offering the trek this summer and I had put my name down, despite dire Foreign Office warnings, but they failed to get enough clients, indeed any clients, mad enough to go to Pakistan in the current climate, so that was that.

An alternative did however present itself. Jagged Globe had an interesting trip to the north side of K2, flying to Kyrgyzstan, then jeep across the far western tip of China before trekking into K2 in what looked like extremely remote and rugged terrain, plus camels to carry the gear and port you over some big rivers. Great, let's go for it I thought, until Jagged Globe also pulled the trip for lack of support.

So, what to do ? Four previous trips to Nepal had been very enjoyable, but I felt like a change and needed a trip that would actually run, when I remembered a trek that had been at the back of my mind for a while – a three week crossing of the High Atlas in Morocco. A number of club members had been to the Atlas and enjoyed it and Mark Anderson had bent my ear several times recommending this particular trip which he did some years ago. So off to Morocco it was at the very end of May. It was only after I had booked that Ted Wilkins reminded me of what Mark had said about a large chunk of his group having bailed out part way, finding it too tough. However, I thought, if Mark can do it .....!

The booking was with KE Adventure, but in reality it was run by French agency Alibert and I was the sole Brit, with eight French, one German, one French-Canadian and two Yanks, ranging in age from a young French woman in her twenties to one guy even older than me, but fit. The French guys were good fun, with one seeming to have an endless supply of pastis in his kit bag for us to enjoy pre-dinner aperitifs. At one point I managed to get the French looking for big noisy frogs down by a stream – they never even suspected ! I A Berber guide, cook and several muleteers and their mules to carry the kit made up the crew, and we mainly camped apart from three nights in basic gites.

Three weeks of excellent weather ensued, with clear skies and mostly warm weather, with several hot days, hard but not too excessive. The timing turned out to be just right, not too hot, but with the winter snows having almost gone and some spectacular carpets of flowers. The trek comprised a tortuous route across the High Atlas, reaching four of the main summits, Toubkal, the highest at 4167m, M'Goun at 4071m, Anghamar 3608m and Ouanoukrim 4088m, with substantial daily ascent and descent over passes, high plateaus, valleys and through gorges. As there were no rest days, it was sustained, but mainly technically easy walking with no more than a bit of scrambling, though some quite exposed and loose eroded tracks in parts. There was a close call on one narrow rotten cliff path, which had slid away, requiring a delicate detour over extremely loose rock – this caused one of the mules, which were normally very sure-footed, to panic and it nearly fell down the cliff with two of the muleteers hanging onto it. How they all did not go over I will never know – strong and brave men. A couple of boring days were unavoidable to link up stages of the route, but overall it was spectacular.

There was a good dose of culture, visiting several Berber villages, Kasbahs and our guide's family home for tea and the crew entertaining us with Berber songs.



...continued

The normal daily routine was an early start, with a long morning trek followed by a two hour lunch break in the heat of the day, with a shorter afternoon walk, apart from summit days, which could entail a pre-dawn start and a packed lunch.

The food on trek was mainly very good, with superb fresh salads at lunchtime and evening tajines - that is apart from the cous cous - I hate bloody cous cous. Unfortunately for the Muslim crew, Ramadam started a week into the trip and was strictly observed by them during daylight hours, which was extremely hard in the heat. Despite this they never had a problem with maintaining the service for we non-believers. This was the first time our guide had led such a sustained trek during Ramadam and he swore never again.

The highlight of the trek was undoubtedly the ascent of M'goun, with a delightful ridge walk and superb views, and a cold breeze making the ascent a little easier. In contrast Anghamar has nothing to recommend it - a big pile of loose rubble, infuriating on both ascent and descent, comprising rock for which David Hughes kindly provided the technical name - shitite. Ouanoukrim was reported to be good, a big day with 2000m of ascent, of which I only made the first half, being stricken with a dose of the 'Montezumas' and forced to make too many 'excursions' from the track. At one point I was surprised by a group of Japanese, complete with cameras, who will no doubt now be showing their friends photos of a 'full moon' in



Morocco. However, I recovered for the climb up Toubkal, which also had a lot of loose rock, and we were rewarded by a wonderful panorama extending to the Middle and Anti-Atlas and almost to the Sahara, unfortunately obscured by haze.

Thank you Mark.

Mike Wainman

Photos:  
Top: Mule team in one of the gorges  
Middle: Berber village  
Bottom: Lunch



**A long flight,** Manchester - Abu Dhabi - Brisbane, then two nights in the vibrant city, to get over the jetlag. To show us around Brisbane we met up with Bob Fick (who accompanied us on the Annapurna Circuit and Chulu Far East expedition in 2007).

We had a month to explore, walk and scramble around the Great Dividing Range based in a hired motorhome adept at avoiding Roo's but think milk crate for sound quality.

David was already in Queensland with the RAF for three months so some ideas were forthcoming. Firstly, a walk up to the summit of Mount Mitchell through rain forest, to emerge from its depths to fine views west of the range. Further south in New South Wales we embarked on a peak called Mount Warning, aptly named. The final 150

metres involved steep scrambling on slippery rock with a stout chain for moral support. Apparently Captain Cook saw this peak as he sailed up the Gold Coast and it coincided with some treacherous reefs, hence the warning. And so the trip progressed, delightful hill days in glorious weather.

We were soon to reach what must be the highlight of the trip, the Carnarvon Gorge National Park after a rattling long, long drive (two days). The scale of things in Australia is over whelming. The Gorge is spectacular, massive cliffs, rain forest, Aboriginal wall art and miles of trekking along its meandering river.

On returning east we spent some time exploring the Glass Mountains north of Brisbane before the long flight home.



Carnarvon Gorge, Queensland



The team, David, Beth & Andy





## Stubai Valley Austria

June / July 2016

Andy Hughes

After the Australia trip I took the tent to Austria for a month to walk in and around the Stubai valley, usually visiting huts, lakes and ascending peaks.

The valley boasts an excellent variety of outdoor activities

in sublime surroundings. There are many peaks around the 3000metre mark making access from the valley feasible for a long day out. Huts are plentiful and there are many stern challenges for all abilities.

I found the following peaks etc. provide great day's out:

Brennerspitz - Rotspitz Pass - Knotenspitz - Mairspitz  
Mutterberger See - Gramaalen waterfall - Salzaualm Hutte  
Blaue Lacke - Rene Rensburger Hutte – Falbesoner Zee  
Freigar See



The weather was good as was the whole experience of a camping trip in such a picturesque part of Austria.

*Photos:*

*Top: Mutterberger See*

*Left: View from the Rene Rensburger Hutte*

*Right: Freigar See*







# the white mountain

It all started in December 2015, when contemplating my first Alpine expedition. It dawned on me that it was not actually out of the question to be able to climb Mont Blanc, something I'd wanted to do from a very young age. Having spent hours studying photographs of Europe's tallest peak, I decided it was time to have a go.

New Year's Eve, 2015, Dan was coming round for dinner. I had a proposition for him. So, after a few bottles of fine wine I came out with it. Fancy climbing Mont Blanc? It seemed he had already been thinking the same thing. How hard can it be? I had my heart set on the Trois Monts route – something a bit more challenging than just a path, and away from the crowds of the Voie Normal. I studied the route for weeks, working out where the cruxes were, where the avalanche risk was, and which hut we'd stay in.

**“Fancy climbing Mont Blanc? “** We settled on a date. July seemed the best month, and booked the ferry. All that was left to do now was plan our warm-up and acclimatisation routes, and sort the hut out. Our original plan, was to climb Le Petite Aiguille Verte, (3512m), and then stay in the Chamonix valley. A day on the Mer de Glace to practice hauling each other out of crevasses, and on a different day we would catch the Midi up to traverse the Cosmiques Arête. We would then stay in the Cosmiques hut for an Alpine start of the Trois Monts, covering Mont Blanc du Tacul, Mont Maudit and Mont Blanc, and descending via the Gouter route back to Les Houches.

After much scanning of the UKC forums and seeking advice from the more experienced, I decided we needed to get higher for the acclimatisation, and spent another night reasonably high too. This led to plan B. We would catch the Grand Montet lift up to Glacier Rognon, put the hours

of You Tube videos to practice in the form of actual crevasse rescue, and then spend the night on the Glacier d'Argentiere. We would then have an early start up the Aiguille d'Argentiere, and then back to the valley. This would take us to near 4000m. Cosmiques Arête and the Trois Monts would remain part of the plan.

Hut booked, days to go and then we start checking the Weather forecast. Not good. After weeks of high pressure and blue-sky days, an unstable series of depressions were on their way from the west. Serious discussions were had



about cancelling, but due to the losses we would suffer in the form of the ferry, travel insurance, breakdown cover etc. it did not seem worth cancelling. Instead we crossed our fingers. It seemed there was a chance of a window in the weather, so we went for it.

Tuesday morning we set off, and drove all the way in one go: Dover to Calais, arriving in Chamonix at around midnight. In search of a comfortable place to sleep, we settled for the roadside bivy in Col des Montets, just outside Argentiere.

On Wednesday morning, the original day that we would head up to the Glacier d'Argentiere, the weather was fine. We headed into Chamonix to visit the Maison D'Montagne. After a chat with one of the staff, and a translation of the forecast into thundery showers, we decided a bivy on the Glacier was not a good idea. Instead we headed up the Grand Montets as planned, and were on the summit of le Petite Aiguille Verte in no time. Dan had started to feel the effects of the altitude a little, and after a pleasant afternoon we headed back down to the valley to find somewhere to base ourselves. After trying the Mer de Glace campsite which was full, we checked out the Camping Argentiere. This was a gem of a campsite, it had great washing/shower/toilet facilities, and a bar with cold beer. With a view of the head of the glacier d'Argentiere, this was base camp.

Thursday was a reasonable forecast for the morning, not so good for the afternoon. We walked up the footpath some 1200 vertical metres to the Glacier Argentiere. Its scale was staggering. Sheer faces of granite towered above the run-off from the ice. A short walk onto the glacier itself revealed a playground of crevasses of all sizes, some too deep to consider throwing ourselves into, others just right. It was time to put the hours of theory into practise, and after roping up and deciding who was going first, I 'fell' into a crevasse. It was a couple of minutes before I had started to wish I had put my hard-shell on – these crevasses were wet! Oh well, Dan will have me out in no time! Sometime later, I emerged over the lip of the crevasse, faced with the look on Dan's face of 'that's not as easy as it looks in the video!' We swapped roles, and some more time later I donned the same look.

There were a few oversights, old ice screws are not that easy to drive in to the ice! But it worked. We found a bigger crevasse, and did it again. This took up most of the day, so we headed back. With some slightly sore feet, the prospect of cable car sadly dwindled away as we realised we would miss the last one. A quick patching up of blisters, we walked back down to the valley to be refreshed with some cold beer at the campsite.



*Photos: Top Left: Aiguille du Midi, Mont Blanc, Dome du Gouter Left: 5 star living! Top Right: Petite Aiguille Verte. Above: Les Drus from Petite Aiguille Verte. Bottom Left: Glacier Argentiere. Bottom Right: approaching the lip of a crevasse.*







Above and Inset: Le Cosmiques Arête

On Friday, we were quite tired from yesterday's ordeal, so after another visit to the Maison Montagne decided some rock climbing was in order. Advised by the office to try out Les Guillets, some 5 minutes up the road, we spent the day there, on some lovely sports routes. We climbed around 8 routes, and then headed back after a last minute decision to pack and go

bivy on the glacier Argentire, even if it was forecast rain. Half-way through packing our sacks, the heavens opened, and we quickly changed our minds.

By Saturday the possible window in the weather was disappearing, as were the hopes of making the summit we had come for. We decided to make a break for the Cosmiques Arête, in reasonably poor weather. At least we would get some altitude we thought. At the top of the Midi station, it was snowing, and visibility wasn't great. A short while after roping up and sorting gear, it was time to head for the little gate. Tourists stood in anticipation as we wondered through. I led the way, briskly at first, but when out on the arête I was soon slowed down by the reality of the situation, particularly the 1000m drop on my left, and several hundred metres on my right. Nevertheless, this is what we had prepared for so on I went.



After crossing a small crevasse we arrived on the Col du Midi. The visibility was improving, so decided to head over to Mont Blanc du Tacul to assess the conditions. The tracks were covered, and there seemed to be a lot of snow. Just then the rumble of an avalanche nearby confirmed the route was probably too risky. After the recce we headed over to the Cosmiques hut, and began the Cosmiques Arête. This was a very enjoyable route, mixed climbing, a couple of back to back abseils, snow ridges and a nice pitch of around VDiff in crampons. After a couple of hours, you arrive at a ladder, which once climbed you are greeted by hordes of Japanese tourists eager to have their picture taken with you. We felt famous, at least in Japan! What do they do with all of those photographs?! We hung around for a while until the last lift, to stay at 3800m for as long as possible. At the mid station, we were suddenly stopped from boarding the cable car as a huge flash of lighting struck the station. There was a zap and a smell

that reminds me of the dodgems, followed quickly by some panic and a rush of lift staff to get everyone off the car. After waiting a while for the storms to pass, we were allowed back on.

That night, we drove up to Bellevue to check out the lifts, in case the Gouter route was an option. After absorbing the info on lifts and parking, we headed back to base to drink beer and contemplate.

Sunday morning was judgement day. Monday had a good forecast, as did Sunday night. Sunday afternoon was forecast storms however. There was also fresh snow. Trois Monts was out of the question, what about Gouter? We would achieve our objective? But we didn't have a hut booking on this route! Could we bivy at the Tetes Rousse? What time would we cross the Grand Couloir? Lots of questions, and debating to be had. We checked the website for the Gouter hut – it was full. So on the off-chance I called them up. They had space! the summit bid was on!

We quickly made our way to the Bellevue Telepherique, and were soon on the Tram up to Nig Aidle. The weather was fine at this point, becoming swelteringly hot. A couple of hours later we arrived at the Tete Rousse Glacier. We would be crossing the Grand Couloir at the worst time of day! There are some pretty horrific videos on You Tube to prove the point. After a quick enquiry with a warden we were relieved to be told it was calm.

After what seemed eternity, and lots of energy used up, we finally arrived at the Gouter hut, just as the weather started to come in. A quick study of the route, a sachet of dehydrated food and we were in bed for 8pm. It was not long before the alarms sounded (not that we were asleep). It was 1:30am, time to get up.

Monday morning, we had breakfast, geared up and left the comfort of the hut. By now it was 2:45am. It was pitch black, with the exception of a



half moon, and the glow of the lights in the valley below, as if Chamonix was still awake. It was a beautiful setting. I started walking the ridge up to Dome Gouter, with only two parties in front. Their head torches highlighted the way. After an hour and a half we were on the Dome Gouter. The shadow of the giant mountain beyond rose out of the darkness. Soon after we were at the Vallot hut, and then on to the Bosses ridge. As the exposure increased, so did the faint glow of light on the horizon in the east. We plodded on up the ridge, stopping to rest

more and more frequently as the realisation we were over 4000m kicked in. Mont Blanc is one of those mountains that you think you can see the summit, only to arrive and see another. The gradual sunrise and breath taking views to keep you going, and before long we were having the obligatory hand-shake, only this time at 4810m. We had done it! Although we were only half way! We hung around on the summit for 10 minutes or so, and then started our descent.

*Photos: Top : Mont Blanc Summit at sunrise. Bottom: Looking to the Matterhorn.*





The descent seemed to take forever. Trying to convince ourselves that the uphill parts of the descent were not there on the way up. By now the effects of the altitude were kicking in. We both had headaches, so tried to get lower down as soon as we could. We finally arrived at the Gouter hut and put our gear away. Those who had stayed the night at the Tete Rousse hut were just making their way passed the Gouter. The thought of doing the Gouter scramble and then Mont Blanc was not appealing. It was around 9:00am now, and we started the rocky (which was now a snowy) descent toward the Grand Couloir. There seemed to be a small amount of rock fall, triggered by walkers above. Ironically our experience of the Grand Couloir was rock fall in the morning and not the afternoon!



After what seemed like an extremely long day, it was actually only lunch time. We had arrived at the tram, made our way down the lifts and were in a café bar at 12:30pm. The beer never tasted so good! That night we packed our base up, went for a fondue and set off early the next morning. Another day of driving, we arrived back home for around 10:30pm. All in all, a fantastic experience, with some extreme amount of luck thrown in to enable me to achieve my dream, even if it wasn't by the Trois Monts.

**Simon Gladstone**

*Photos: Top: Crossing a crevasse on the descent. Above: The view of a lifetime! Mont Maudit, Grand Jorasses, Matterhorn and more...*

