Welcome to the Summer 2016 IMC Newsletter

It's been another great year for the New Member's Programme. Club membership took a significant dip in the new year but since then we have had over 80 new members sign up. Within these pages you can find perspectives from both sides of the programme, from both newcomer & mentor, as well as impressions of the Lake District from two of our new members who attended the June meet there, together with a selection of photos from the well attended Glendalough Weekend. Again, kudos to Training Officer Jon for organising such a great programme.

Members have been busy on a number of climbing trips away to various destinations including Spain, Norway and the Alps reported within, as well as as Sinead, Cian & Vanessa heading off with Andy for some big wall adventures in Yosemite (featured in the next newsletter).

Nearer to home, members have managed to tease another 2 new routes out of Dalkey Quarry. Kevin Byrne, Sean Barrett, Colin Keogh and Antoinette Gough putting up "GR20" in the East Valley and Jon McCarty, Niamh McCarty, Keith O'Brien squeezing in "Circumcision" in the West.

Mention must also be made of Dave Keogh who, not content with seemingly flying up to Scotland every other weekend over the winter (see his blog article on the IMC website), is now completing impressive ticks in the Alps including the Walker Spur. We hope to have more details on that later in the year.

Finally, please keep the articles and trips reports coming in, we are always looking for content for both the newsletter and the blog. And don't forget the "Memorable Climbs" series, if you have a climb that you hold a certain affection (or, indeed, disaffection) for that you would like to share with others, whether the climb be well known to all or a wild obscurity, please consider writing up a piece on it. If you have any questions on any contribution, just get in touch.

Gary Smith, IMC Publicity Officer
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Credits

Front Cover: The Glencoaghan Horseshoe [Photo: Vincent Astier]
Back Cover: Dave Trunk on the Big Blue [Photo: Dave Madden]
Inside Front Cover: A sneak peak of what’s to come in the Winter edition’s Yosemite article [Photo: Andy Kirkpatrick]
Inside Back Cover: Alpine Summits [Photos: Liam & Marie McCarthy]

This Newsletter would be nothing without you, the writers & photographers, as well as the organisers of all the IMC trips & events, so many thanks to everyone for their contributions.

Newsletter complied & edited by Gary Smith.
I was beginning to question my judgement. We had left the back of the hostel on the N59 just twenty minutes before and we were already more than half may up Benlettery (577m). My knees would complain about the pace later in the day, but right now my neck was hurting looking up at Barney as he beat a quick pace to the summit. Vincent was here too. He was out of sight, every time I thought I had passed him he would emerge from behind an outcrop of rock ahead, loping along with an easy gait. I was sweating. I stopped to admire the views, three times.

The views were good out over Ballynahinch Lake with its isolated castle sitting wrapped in scaffold, probably in the process of being restored. Further to the south west lay hundreds of lakes due to be inundated as sea levels rise. I wondered aloud if I should invest in the area and be first in on new seafront property.

I had been on the IMC Connemara meet three times and this was without doubt the best weather I had experienced. The more altitude we gained the better the views became.
At the summit of Benlettery we had a little breather. We had done well. I told myself that we had covered the hardest part of the Glencoaghan horseshoe. Benlettery (577m) was done, only Bengower (664m), Benbreen (691m), point 680m, point 674m, Bencollaghduff (696m), Bencorr (711m), Derryclare (677m) and the slog up the road to go. Looking about at the clear skies and each summit capped with a generous covering of snow down their slopes I realised the disadvantage of such great views.

I busied myself taking photos using the selfie camera on my phone, the other camera was broken, so unfortunately I appear in most of the landscapes but even I found it difficult to ruin the photos. The views seaward were clear and bright. Barney squinted North wondering aloud if we were looking at Mweelrea sweeping down to Killary Harbour. Vincent pondered the irony of leaving his sunglasses at home, having spent five years living in Ireland and never requiring them before now. Ever the optimist, I was prepared, I had my cat3 sunglasses and was glad of them as we navigated the upper slopes of the next summit.

The first time I ever tried the Glencoaghan Horseshoe I did it with Bill Nolan. Bill managed to get us lost that day. Luckily I corrected the navigational error despite the shifting mist. In the process I met Aidan Roe completing the route in the opposite
direction. I smiled to myself as we came close to the top of Bengower, we had followed an earlier hikers footprints and I know that Aidan appreciates these navigational niceties. The summit of Bengower is slightly past the route back down to the adjoining col, requiring an about turn if you wish to descent to the col by the easiest route.

The second time I was ever on the Glencoaghan Horseshoe was two years previous with Frank Creedon. We overshot the top of Bengower by doing just that, visiting the exact summit and missing the descent route. We corrected the navigational error with a little bit of scrambling.

Today though there was no fear of doing that. The sun was shining and the breeze was light, something to be enjoyed. Although from time to time I did hanker aloud for some harder navigational legs. Vincent proposed that I blindfold myself and he would tell me if I was going off route. Barney was quiet, probably thinking that he was less than half way around and perhaps I should gag myself instead.

Barney lead off quickly again. The route was clear, the subtleties were made more obvious by the previous hiker. He was familiar with the route we thought, as he seemed to find the easier path around each obstacle. We left the footprints behind from time to
time to reach each summit peak. We would inevitably meet the footsteps again on the downslope only for them to disappear on the rocky cols and re-emerge faintly on the sloppy upslope. Each determined step became deeper and deeper with altitude defining a clear route. Comforting as the path was, it was unnecessary on such a fine day. There was no threat from the weather as we reached point 674m. The down hill route from here takes a little dog leg and crosses loose boulders and scree with a few sharp steps, softened by the snow. The lower part of the col was sunny and dry. Vincent and I both commented as we peered across the back of the horseshoe, "Back up now".

It is one of the disadvantages of fine weather that you can see the slog in front of you, but at least you get the rewards when you get there. The three of us paused for five minutes to eat at the summit of Bencollaghduff (696m). It’s at the back of the horseshoe and peers into the Gleninagh Valley. Vincent supplied strong cheddar cheese and squinted off into the distance wishing he had his sunglasses. We discussed hikes, climbs, rambles, getting lost and getting found, accidents
and near misses, routes and gear, plans failed, successful and future. We pondered which summit was which, how much altitude we gained, what that cloud was doing.

We wandered on.

We came within sight of Carrot Ridge. Some IMC'ers had been planning to climb it today. We peered carefully along the route, not a climber in sight. “Maybe they are finished?”, it was 12.30pm. We cheerily quickstepped along in the sunshine, from time to time looking in the direction of the Ridge which was deep in shadow. “You’d be freezing standing around on belay there today”.

I was sweating again, Vincent was wishing he had brought his sunglasses. We crossed the col to the base of Bencorr and quickly started up the various rubbly paths with its scree, twists and turns, following an obvious terrace we had seen from a distance, we then broke right, bringing us to the top at 711m. My left knee was feeling the effects of the hike and was getting increasingly tight each time I stopped. Some clouds seemed to me moored to the summit of the Maumturks to the west. Another party of IMC'ers were somewhere over there. It looked pretty flat from our vantage point as we momentarily worried for their well being.
Our route now took us back along the opposite leg of the horseshoe. The cols weren’t as deep between the peaks so the route was covered in snow all the way to the top of Derryclare where it petered out to slush. The view from Derryclare was clear but a little less inspiring than our previous views, it was all downhill, but across open boggy ground to an outcrop of farm buildings nestled in some trees. Vincent longingly looked at the road below. I said I thought it would take an hour to get down as my knee whimpered, Barney searched in his backpack for motivation.

We were at the edge of the road in 20 minutes and past the farm house in 5 minutes more. It had been a slippery descent. I was glad to be on level ground and was happy that the last stretch along the road turned into a pleasant stroll listening to Barney tell us of his past exploits and Vincent's insightful French observations on Irish weather and Irish bread.

We arrived back at the hostel in time for the Ireland vs England rugby match. The team from the Maumturks had arrived back early having found the ground to be even more level than expected. I was looking forward to a long hot shower…..❖
On Saturday, Derek Hendrick and I decided to try to climb Carrot Ridge. We had discussed it with various more experienced climbers, such as Ken Doyle and Vincent, and they had given us plenty of advice and tips. Ken even loaned us his guidebook, which we really appreciated.

We left the Old Monastery Hostel in Letterfrack, about 9.30am, and drove to the start point in the Inagh Valley, reaching it about 10am. We met a local lady on the way in, and got permission to park in front of her house. Amazingly she had never heard of Carrot ridge, but knew all about the Twelve Bens.

We shouldered our packs and began the walk-in along a rough track, before cutting across the bog and crossing the river at the bend. It was a beautiful morning, the sun was shining and the sky was a deep clear blue. We had a great view of several of the Twelve bens, with snow on their tops, against the blue sky, it was like being in the Alps. We managed to avoid the worst of the bog, by following a trail of stones, from an old stone wall.

Once across the river, we began the ascent up the ever steeper slopes to the start of the climb. We moved out of the morning sunlight and into the shade, and the temperature dropped very quickly. Once we reached the start of the climb at the Pink Slab, we stopped for a breather, and a snack, and had a close up look at the challenge ahead. Carrot ridge looked immense, but there seemed to be plenty of possible climbing options.
We geared up and sorted out the rope. Due to the amount of water around, everywhere was wet or damp, so we decided to climb in our hiking boots, and carry the rock shoes in a pack, just in case. The Pink Slab was very damp, with water running down it in places, so we decided not to try it, and scrambled around it to the left, and looked for a place to climb back onto the route. The rock was cold and wet, and my hands were quickly getting very cold as I climbed. Derek reported the same. After a bit of scrambling about, Derek spotted a line, and led it for about 20m, with a couple of nice moves, getting us nicely back onto the route. I followed him up, and we scrambled on to the next step part where I led a 30m section.

About then, we noticed Sean and Jay climbing up behind us. We later found out they were climbing in rock shoes, and couldn’t believe we climbed it in hiking boots. We couldn’t believe they climbed it in rock shoes, as it was so wet.

The climbing was easy, and we were both getting the hang of it now, keeping warmer by moving steadily. We moved on up and over the First Step. I led another short section, and we scrambled on over another flatter area, before coming to a steep pitch, which we reckoned was the Second Step. There had been a little bit of rain, while we scrambled, and the rock immediately became greasy. The sky had darkened a little bit and things were looking a bit ominous, for while, as some big clouds passed over.

We took a quick break and had a snack, and luckily the clouds passed over and the sun
came back out, and we decided to continue.

One more long lead, and we were up and over the second step, and we were home and dry, scrambling around a bit, and on up to a grassy ledge, which led to the end of the Ridge. We descended off to the left of the ridge onto the scree slope, which had a lot of shallow snow on it, and this helped make it easy enough to descend back to the bottom of the ridge.

We decided not to wait for Sean and Jay, as we knew Sean to be a more experienced climber than us, and we headed back to the car. The walk back through the boggy valley seemed to take forever, but was about an hour and a half from the top of the ridge.

We had a great day and were very pleased with our climb. The climbing wasn’t difficult, but the wet rock made it a bit more of a challenge than we had anticipated.

We had been told that we could scramble the whole route, and it would take a few hours. It took us 4 hours on the route, and we pitched a lot of it and wouldn’t have scrambled much more even if it was dry. The exposure was interesting, in places, and there were some long run-outs with no gear, but plenty of big holds, to balance it. On damp rock it was an interesting day.

The walk in and out was tiring, and I’d advise anyone to pack gear carefully and travel light. We used a range of nuts and micro-nuts and slings. We possibly could have used some very small cams, but didn’t see any placements for larger cams, and didn’t need them anyway.
Seven Days in El Chorro

Words & Pictures by Ambrose Flynn

An IMC rabble consisting of myself, Eoin, Austin and Jason arrived in Malaga on a Saturday night with the intention of picking up our donkey and hightailing it into the El Chorro hills. We eventually navigated bovine bureaucracy and found our way to The Old Granary Cottage comfortably nestling in the hillside. Our goal for the trip was simple, to climb as much as possible and say "Hi" to the sun.

Sunday afforded us the opportunity to meet our amazing hosts as we were treated to the first of many outstanding breakfasts, mostly consisting of produce from the area.

On day one our first port of call was Frontales, the spectacular swathe of imposing limestone dominating the El Chorro valley. We decided upon the Arab Steps area of Frontales as it was a 10 minute drive from the cottage and consisted of a wide spread of grades.

Eoin and Austin teamed up as did myself and Jason, as we got stuck into some well bolted and fun slabby routes, 25-30m from 5a to 6b+. The climbing was all pockets and edges on excellent limestone.

One of the more enjoyable aspects of El Chorro is that each crag has a different style of climbing, in the Arab Steps the grades range from 5a to 8b+, from slabby to severely overhanging and all easily accessible. After our initial routes we spun around the corner and enjoyed the pleasures of Poema de Roca’s rather large cave!

The jewel in the crown of this sector was the *** Poema de Roca, consisting of a pumpy romp up steep tufas and cracks. What a line!! But not for us this time around. Eoin, the strongest climber in the group, enjoyed Garcia Aguas, a ** route surrounded by improbably difficult lines.

Our evenings for this trip were spent in the Olive Branch Hostel, just up the road from
where we were staying. Although we were not staying at the Olive Branch, we could rock up each morning and book dinner for 8pm. Most of the nights the meals were really enjoyable, with beers and snacks purchased via an ‘honest book.’ Take what you want, write it in the book and pay up at the end of the trip. It was also nice to meet other climbers as the place was packed each night.

On **day two** we enjoyed a short 30 minute trip to Desplomilandia. Yet again, another sector with multiple crags all with their own character. Rain was forecast so we made a visit to the Buena Sombra crag that contained many ***routes of 30m. Both parties started up 3 star routes beside each other. We thought we'd picked a ‘Top 50’ 6b but instead happened upon a rather tricky 6c. It had been raining and everything was a little spicy. Eoin was battling hard beside me as I was perplexed at the slabby (wet) crux, unable to go any higher. Abandon ship was the order of the day.

The routes in this sector alone are worth a trip to El Chorro, top class sport climbing.

We moved 100m into a small cave and did a few easy routes while Eoin went to war on Liron Careto, a hard 7a. He fought bravely but no cigar this time. It is possibly worth putting this crag in context - it’s atop a hill with stunning views in all directions. It’s hard to be disappointed when it rains as the views are breathtaking.

**Day three** brought us back to Desplomilandia and Sector La Vida Misma. Not far from our exploits the previous day, the climbing was similar in quality and style. Once again the forecast was for rain so we worked through a few routes with an eye on the impending deluge. We continued on in the same vain mainly climbing 6a/b with Eoin trying another 7a. I must admit that this was my 3rd day of being quite ill therefore I don’t have many found memories from day 3, except the ever constant abuse from Jason, Eoin and occasionally Austin.
Day four was set for nice weather and we headed back to the Arab Steps to sample more of the amazing routes in that sector. This sector is possibly the best area for the first time visitor to go as there are grades for everyone, stunning views, easy access and most climbers we spoke to were super friendly. We continued as before working through really nice 6a/b routes, before heading back to the cave to try something a little meatier.

Eoin jumped on what he thought was a 7a and successfully started moving up thoughtfully through the first few clips until the difficulties kicked in. He worked it for a while and lowered to take a rest. His encouragement prompted me to have a go. I started up and made several positive attempts to strong-hand it through the crux but to no avail. Only afterwards did we find out it was 7b!! Regardless, we both felt that with
more time at the venue and on limestone we could climb these grades. Only a lack of imagination makes any grade impossible.

Usually at this point in such a trip a rest day would have been undertaken but with the mixture of being rained off and our appetite to do as much as possible we consigned this idea to the bin. **Day five** brought us to my favorite area of Turon, a slab paradise in an amazing situation located about an hour’s drive from El Chorro. There were only two parties at the entire crag, ourselves and Kevin Kilroy and Claire Hardy from N.I. Total randomness at its best.

It was uber warm and possibly not ideal for slabs but we styled our way up a selection of really nice routes at 6b. But to be honest only one of the routes had a tricky 6b move with the rest being massively overgraded. The highlight of the trip for me was when we spun around the corner to a more vertical section of the crag and all four of us jumped on the outstanding *** 6c, Quasimodo. This route had everything, a lovely safe intro, building towards the difficult crux involving some definitive technical nuance, high feet and strength, pulling into a shallow cave. Then moving out and onto improbable coral like features on a delicate traverse towards the chains. Jason came the closest to flashing the route first go, with the rest of us taking a few attempts at the crux. The standout route for me.

**Day six** was an interesting day as Eoin and Austin took to the multipitch classic of Amptrax at 6a over 5 pitches. Myself and Jason were starting to feel the strain and stayed in the area for some lovely challenging 6a’s. It was all horizontal breaks and
good friction. We occasionally walked up the hill to see how the guys were progressing and it was clear to see they were making short work out of Amptrax. It is possibly worth mentioning the guys had a late start due to our unforeseen trip to the police station as a result of me ding the back of the car the previous night. But that’s a story in itself!

On **day seven**, out day of departure, we headed back to the Arab Steps for a final blast. I went back to a fantastic 6b two pitch route but the cracks were starting to show and we lowered off the first belay. Eoin and Austin climbed the excellent Blade Runner. For the final route of the trip Eoin gave an all-out effort on Arabesque, a difficult 7a. It was a big, big effort but unfortunately again no cigar this time. Smashed, we packed up and headed back to Malaga.

El Chorro is a must visit destination for all climbers operating at all grades. The accessibility, proximity, cost, convenience and the quality of routes located in mind-blowing situations makes this a place you should visit. And it’s only a few hours away from Dublin!! I strongly recommend The Old Granary hostel as the hospitality as shown by our hosts is without doubt the best I’ve ever experienced. It made the trip - a big thank you to Catherine and Martin.

I will organize an IMC meet to El Chorro in early 2017 and look forward to seeing you there. ♦
The Glendalough Weekend

by The New Members

Friday Night Preparations
[Photo: Sara Marilungo]

The sun bathed Glendalough sees lots of climbing action on Saturday [Photo: Dermot O'Dwyer]
Happy trainer & trainees
[Photo: Ben Crawford]

Fanfare Stretch
[Photo: Dermot O’Dwyer]

Glendo Ab [Photo: Sara Marilungo]

A busy main face [Photo: Dermot O’Dwyer]
Top Left: Quartz Queuing
[Photo: Sara Marilungo]

Bottom Left: Up & Down
[Photo: Dermot O'Dwyer]

Top Left: The Long Ab
[Photo: Sara Marilungo]
Expectancy Action
[Photo: Sara Marilungo]

Ifreaan Direct
[Photo: Ben Crawford]

GerryK enjoying the day
[Photo: Ben Crawford]
Future Event: Highs & Lows
A Talk by Dermot Somers

8pm on Thursday 10th November 2016 at the Teachers Club, Dublin

A quizzical look back at 40 years among mountains and plains - dancing (now and then) on the walls.

Crags, peaks, routes, walks, nomadic journeys, north faces, documentary travels. From Tibet, to the Eiger, to the Sahara, Sceilg Mhichíl, the Himalayas, El Cap and more.

Dermot will give an audio-visual presentation with a bi-lingual (Gaeilge/English) dimension based on, but not limited to, his 2002 book Rince ar na Ballái (or Dance on the Walls). Dermot's career and book cover a particularly dynamic period in the development of standards and achievements of Irish mountaineering (the great Alpine North Faces and a first Irish ascent of Everest among the highlights).

Although published in 2002 Dermot's mountaineering memoir has probably not been read by many Irish climbers as it is to date only available as Gaeilge.

The talk will be inclusive in the widest sense - nobody whatever their fluency or lack of it in Irish will feel disadvantaged. He will encourage audience feedback in Irish or English - and possibly also in another language he can understand!

This event is co-sponsored with Mountaineering Ireland and tickets can be booked through their website:

http://goo.gl/4QpWpY
Mixed Memories of Arctic Senja

Words & Pictures by Dave Madden

It was day two of our trip to the island of Senja in Arctic Norway. The previous day we had climbed one of the Island’s classic ice routes “Big Blue” in Ersfjord [see back cover], a fantastic climb situated in a beautiful fjord lined with big walls. We had originally planned to climb the south face of Heston today but after checking the route out with binoculars and speaking with the local Ice Guru it was clear that it was a non-runner. Conditions overall on the Island were “thin” this year with some of the established ice routes not in condition.

So our plan now was mixed climbing on Kyle, just outside Mefjordvaer. The planned early start was somewhat mitigated by the five minute drive from our accommodation. In fact it seemed a bit lazy to take the car at all! On parking we met several local Norwegian climbers who were also planning to walk in – this was something new for me as last year we hadn’t bumped into anyone on any of the crags. We all made casual conversation as we waited for each other to leave the roadside. Young they may have been but they were already cute enough to let us break trail. After ten minutes I took a strategic “wrong turn” and let them ahead.

On reaching the base of the mountain two skiers appeared from left-field heading upwards towards our chosen route “Gully of the Sods”. By the time we got up there the leader was already on the first pitch. It looked like an excellent route but as it was a narrow gully it wasn’t really an option to climb below them. We only had details of two other routes on the face and the young Norwegians were preparing to gear up for one of them. “The Trolls, The Trolls” was another excellent looking line with reputedly a hard crux section that had already repelled one party this week. I had a chat with the leader. He was weighed down by what looked like a big wall rack including five ice hooks for the turf. The Norwegian turf must be good stuff I thought.

It was all a bit unexpected, had we come all this way up North to start queuing for routes? We could have gone to Scotland for that. We only knew of one other route on
the face called "Kyle's Keyhole" but it was only two pitches long and we were looking for something a bit more substantial. In the end we settled for a narrow gully line on the right end of the face. We had no idea of the grade or even if it had been climbed before.

As Dave T was still struggling with his chest infection I settled into all day duty on point. The first pitch was a straightforward wade through chest-high powder to a wimpy tree belay. The next pitch was up into a snow bay and finished at another poor tree belay. The third pitch was the meat of the route and I worked my way up a narrow steep chimney and groove. The climbing was awkward and hard for me with very few positive footholds, plenty of vergased rock and some pretty rubbish snow ice. It had been a while since I had done any mixed climbing of consequence and I couldn't help feeling I was bringing myself back up to speed a little too quickly. The rock on Senja is very compact Gneiss and I had been warned about the gear, or, well, the lack of it. As I edged further up I discovered that this route was no exception. Not a crack to be seen and yes the Norwegian turf is as crap as the Scottish stuff. But what was the same as Scotland was the spindrift which was constantly pummelling me from above.

I reached a point forty metres up the pitch where I could see a very steep hard section and what looked like easier climbing above. The exit looked very tricky though. My last bomber piece of gear was twenty metres below and the previous piece, a 10cm screw that was about 7cm in, offered amusement value only. A fall from here was out of the question and I took a long time considering my options. Down climbing would have been hard but possible. I went with my gut feel and continued. Several poor placements later I pulled over the bulge and sucked in rather a lot of Norwegian air. Where's Dave Keogh when you need him?!

The next two pitches were easy enough climbing and a boulder on the ridge line at the top even presented the first bomber belay of the day...better late than never! Dave T's lengthy sojourn on belay duty didn't seem to be doing a whole helluva lot for his chest
infection but he never complained...well maybe once. On the final few moves of the top pitch the profanities started to fly. He then performed the most athletic move of the trip as he clipped a sling from his harness to his crampon just in time to stop his boot disappearing down the mountain. Looking back it was funny but not I’m quite sure the top of a Norwegian mountain in winter as it is getting dark would have been an ideal time to lose a boot.

The walk off was pure class. We had just enough light to enjoy it. First along the narrow corniced ridge and then down the shoulder through the trees to the road with great views over the fjords and peaks on both sides. Finally back at our car we spotted the torchlights of our Norwegian friends backing off their route. The crux pitch had repelled another party it seemed. And so we finished a day that will remain long in the memory...needless to say, we climbed ice routes for the rest of the week!
At the end of April, when I came from Germany to Ireland, I brought my harness, karabiner, climbing shoes and an ATC and hoped to find someone with whom I can sometimes climb in a hall.

Eight weeks later I was a member of the IMC and got the opportunity to climb outside on splendid rocks in Dalkey and Rocky Valley and to make my first multi-pitch climb on the Cracks On The Garden of Eden in Glendalough accompanied by a great bunch of different members of the IMC.

The climbing weekend in Glendalough at the IMC hut was the first opportunity for me to meet and to get to know other IMC members. The atmosphere was very relaxed and even though I just joined the club, people made it really easy for me to feel welcomed. At this weekend Jon patiently taught me how to climb and repel and went through the theoretical aspects of how to use all the gear and how to set anchors. He answered every question I had and in the end he showed me how to do multi-pitch climbing. It was really a fantastic day and for the first time I used fist and foot jams which is not mind blowing for a skilled rock climber but for me it was a pretty cool experience. To climb with Jon as a teacher was great fun and when we finished the route I knew that rock climbing is something for me that I want to keep on doing in the future.

After the weekend in Glendalough I went for the first time to Dalkey, hoping to convince someone to climb with a bonehead like me. At the quarry, it maybe took 10 minutes and I was attached to a rope starting to climb with Ambrose. Later, Anni joined us and the three of us climbed various routes and after the session I didn´t know if my forearms or my tummy hurt more due to “strenuous” laughing. Since then, Ambrose kept me informed about their climbing activities during the week and I joined them to go again to
Glendalough, Dalkey, the Wall and Awesome Walls. For me as a beginner, rock climbing is fascinating because it combines many great things; most important it is outside, its routes are very diverse and challenging and it enables the mind to only focus on how to make the next move or for beginners like me also how to not fall.

There are still plenty of things I have to learn but during the last 3 weeks I met great people with whom I had a fun time at the quarries and I am really happy that I joined the club.

**Andy Minshull - Change Is The Only Constant**

I have been climbing since 2000 and this year was my first involvement with the IMC New Member’s Programme. I joined the club in 2005/6 but since then have only dipped into club activity occasionally. Since last year I have made a conscious effort to get to the quarry on a Thursday evening to meet people and reignite my passion for trad.

Earlier this year a friend asked if I would be helping with the New Members. At the time all I could think of was how long the trad layoff between November and March is and how I just wanted to climb, not spend my precious climbing hours mentoring. I said, "Not formally, but if anyone needs a partner I'm happy to take new members climbing."

I started climbing in England with the Lincoln Mountaineering Club, where there was a strong ethos of teaching and learning while doing. My first ever route
was a 4 pitch Severe in the Lake District, this also being the first time I had belayed and taken gear out. I remember very clearly being told "keep one hand on this bit of the rope, this is what stops me hitting the ground if I fall off" and then my new partner disappeared up the crag. I remember focussing so completely on the belay plate, feeding enough rope through, paying out on one half rope, keeping the other locked off. Concentration on the task was complete and all consuming. Within a couple of years I was introducing new climbers to the sport.

Turning up at Dalkey Quarry on a Thursday in May this year I was immediately impressed by the turnout both of mentors and new climbers. A range of top roping and leading practice going on and a warm welcoming atmosphere. I had decided in advance I would not climb anything too hard with a beginner belaying.

With any group climbing session there is always some standing around, so I found the nearest unoccupied new member at Paradise Lost and said "Do you want to climb something?" and off we went up C Route. Something within my comfort zone so I could keep a close eye his belaying. Dave had good climbing skills already and was keen for a lead so we went for Dectissima S, in retrospect not an ideal first lead but he did it very well. I really enjoyed coaching him up it, it's a great moment to be part of with any new climber.

Next week I found John Persell ("Basecamp John") watching and waiting for a turn on a top rope in the Ivy Chimney area, very new to climbing and keen to learn. He led Eliminate A, again his first lead and the process of assisting with gear decisions was truly rewarding, great to have helped John to achieve his first lead. Then I decided to do Up Slide Run. I realised I would not push my own climbing at all if I did not trust my belayer, and by this stage all new members had practiced belaying for a few weeks. So I set off on the onsight and after a couple of checks that John knew what he was doing I settled into enjoying the climbing. He enjoyed seconding it too.

The following session with John he seconded my onsight of Helios, a route I had expected to have a more forgiving first section being a VS! Gear was a bit of a challenge early on. Still I felt very secure with John's focussed belaying, another cracking route and a good achievement for both of us.

Hector de la Cruz and I met through the beginners Whatsapp group and had a great early morning start one weekend doing Hyperion and In Absentia, both on sights again. Hector has climbed sport for a while in Mexico and was keen to learn trad while in Ireland. The moves round and onto the nose on In Absentia felt precarious, though well protected, and at no point did I doubt Hector's belaying.

A few weeks later I met up with Ben Crawford, another new member who had only been doing trad since Easter, again we met through the Whatsapp group. Ben agreed to second me for my on sight of Gargoyle Groove Direct, only my third E1 lead so definitely not in my comfort zone. Ben helped me to place the early gear, a couple of brass offset micros, and belayed while I tested them by jumping off.
Further up I slipped off the moves getting out of the groove and the gear held me (thanks to Ben's belaying!) I was totally buzzing after completing it and though Ben found it tough to second we both thought it a fantastic route - a great joint achievement.

A few weeks later still and Ben was leading Giants Staircase, not his first lead but still good to be coaching. As we swapped leads for the second pitch we reviewed the belay and discussed the pitch ahead.

A while later that evening and Ben caught me as I fell off Graham Crackers twice, on the move getting out of the horizontal crack above the nose.

Last week I was climbing with another new climber, Juro, who led Delectissima smoothly and then seconded my onsights of Dirty Dick and E-route Staircase Finish.

So from this I have learned that using someone's belaying experience as a reason not to push my grade, or theirs, would have been easier and more comfortable. To push my climbing though, I don't want to stay comfortable!

There is something special about the attentiveness we all apply to belaying when we have only just learnt the skill. A raw fear-filled concentration, expecting a fall to come and focussing on hands in the right position to brake a fall, enough slack out to not stress the anchors, and so that the leader can climb freely and unhindered. Leading while someone pays that 100% attention is a reassuring experience.

So far it has been a great season of climbing with new members at Dalkey and I am looking forward keenly to the rest of the year.
Gina, Derek, Gar, Teresa and Michela set off in the early hours of Friday 3rd June for the June Bank Holiday Weekend trip to the Lake District. We arrived at Dublin Port in plenty of time in spite of the newbie (Teresa) trying to take over the whole boot with her gear. Some of us wondered if we were at the right level of climbing to participate in this trip especially when listening to the more senior members discussing the various crags but we were reassured that there was something for everyone in the Lake District. The 2 hours sailing was smooth and coffee and food was enjoyed by all.

The drive to Coniston was long and tedious, like the M50 car park but 10 times worse. The only saving grace was numerous stops at various service stations along the way. After exiting the motorway four times we were sure we would be at the right service station to meet the rest of the group, having found what it looked like the described foot bridge. We breathed a sight of relief and called the others to say we had landed but little did we realise there was more than one foot bridge along the way, and the service station we were at was still not the right one, it did however provided us the much needed fuel to continue the journey.

We arrived at the hut six and half hours later, tired, weary and hungry. While the others were already half way up a crag, we decided to go for a walk and sun downers in the town.

The hut was cosy, comfortable and with plenty of space and right in the middle of the very picturesque village.

When the others arrived after their climbing, we were informed of the early morning start, to make the most of the weekend,
so we all fell into bed happy but exhausted.

We assembled in the kitchen in plenty of time, and discussed the climbing options and our aims for the weekend. Cillian and the senior members suggested that we’d team up with Mags who was more than willing to guide and share her expertise.

We were a mixed group, Derek and Gar having led since the previous year, Gina and Michela, who had just started to lead, and Teresa, who had never led and had joined the club as part of this year’s New Members Programme in May.

Mags recommended **The Original Route**, in Langdale Raven’s Crag above the Old Dungeon Ghyll, a three pitch, three star Severe. We split into two teams - Gar, Derek and Gina, and Mags, Teresa and Michela - and we set off. Derek did exceptionally well on a difficult part of the route, requiring him to descend and ascend for a second time (which wasn’t in the plan), Gina and Gar followed him with more ease in that particular section. Mags led us in the right direction up a very enjoyable climb. Michela led two sections and was very proud of her anchors.

We were blessed with a rare day for the Lake District, with sunshine and blue skies so we spent the time preparing for the climb admiring the beautiful hills, enjoying the banter and spotting the gorilla in the mist.
The day was even more pleasantly rounded off by a feed of fish and chips from the famous local chipper and a glass or two of red wine. We all rolled into bed happy with our achievements that night.

A beautiful Sunday morning had us heading for Dow Crag, and we were delighted to find out that Mags was joining us again. The crag was busy so we headed over to C Buttress and settled on ‘C’ Ordinary Route, another three star climb in seven pitches. Teresa, new to the jargon, was soon to realise what 7 pitches meant.

We split up into the same teams, with Gar, Gina and Derek setting off before us, taking turns in leading. Teresa achieved her first lead, alternating with Michela, while Mags did the most difficult section. It was a long day, with a hot steamy walk into the crag, where we enjoyed sunbathing and cooling the feet by lake on the way in. Seven hours later we were at the top of the climb, but still unsure if there was more to climb until Mags confirmed we had reached our destination - much to her relief. After enjoying Gina’s jelly beans at the top (a vital piece of gear for any day) we started our descent. A rope was secured for the ledge walk, and Teresa led us down a steep gully, where everyone had to work as a team, guiding foot placement for each other.

We learnt a lot of lessons on that day: there is a lot that goes into a successful climbing outing - an early start, a good breakfast, plenty
of water and plenty of food in the back pack - make sure you are not hungry when setting off as 7 hours can be a long time without food! Suncream and midges spray, allow for a long walk in, carrying all your gear, so walking boots are essential as runners have a higher risk of slipping, it may be hot at the base but the wind chill and altitude mean you may get cold especially when belaying or waiting so an extra layer and water we found were essential, be aware of the length of your rope so that the valley doesn’t echo with “You’ve one metre left” and “Do I have any rope left?”, always have three anchor points and make sure they are good ones to avoid the embarrassment of Mags pulling them out, the importance of the support and guidance of senior members, and always finish your day with a good meal and a nice cold beer.

Being the last night, everyone gathered to have dinner together at the Black Bull in the village sharing their various achievements entwined with good banter, which continued back at the hut.

The following morning we discovered that the munchies got the better of some of the members and the ‘gingerbread man’ was caught. We had a midday sailing so we set off early and made great time, arriving at Holyhead in four hours. We enjoyed refreshments at the visitor’s centre overlooking the sea, a lovely spot recommended by Mags. The slower ferry allowed for plenty of winding down time and for one member to investigate suspicious bites. We all arrived home tired but happy and looking forward to our next climbing adventure. There was a palpable high throughout the weekend from those of us less experienced and it will be a cherished memory in the bank. Having completed an ‘original’ and an ‘ordinary’ route and sharing the weekend together made a strong bond between the 5 of us, under Mags’ generous, but watchful, eyes. We would certainly recommend this trip to anyone regardless of experience.
In August 2015, my husband Liam and I set off to do a few 4000m Alpine peaks and hoped that we might be able to do either Dufourspitze or Mont Blanc by the end of the holiday. We chose Saas Grund in Switzerland as our first base, being at the centre of the Saas Valley and surrounded by fourteen 4000m peaks. The Saas Valley provides a citizen’s pass to visitors which allows free bus transport between the towns along the valley and free use of nine cables cars including the Hohsaas cableway. This cableway provides ready access to two 4000m peaks, the Lagginhorn and Weissmies.

**Lagginhorn (4010m)**

To boost our acclimatisation, we spent our second night in the modern Hohsaas Hut. We both had headaches during the night due to the altitude but felt a bit better by morning and so we set off to tackle the Lagginhorn. In midsummer the Lagginhorn has little snow on its slopes which is rare for an Alpine four-thousander. For that reason we could afford a more leisurely approach in the morning and didn’t have to start too early. We left the hut at 7.30am. There are a few routes to the summit but we chose the West-South-West ridge which is predominantly a long rocky scramble. One short section, about half way up, required higher level scrambling (about UK Grade 3). The mountain steepens towards the summit and I found this more difficult than expected because of the altitude and its effect on my breathing. We were reasonably fit on our arrival in the Alps having completed the Mourne Sevens a week earlier and Howling Ridge in Kerry before that. A sudden change in the hiking altitude slows one down considerably though. After one final steep section we reached the summit, which was marked by an iron cross. The day was warm enough to spend plenty of time up there taking in the great views. The ascent took us 4.5 hrs and the descent about 3 hrs. We made the last cable car down to Saas Grund with plenty of time to spare.

**Weissmies (4017m)**

Two days later we set off to do the Weissmies by the North-West Face using the first cable car of the morning at 7.30am so that we could do the mountain in a single day. This mountain was described in the guidebook as the easiest four-thousander in the Alps. However, due to global warming and the heat wave in the Alps this summer, we discovered that this route was now heavily crevassed. The first half of the route particularly had a very large number of crevasses which we had to zig-zag through. As the day was hot the condition of the snow became poor as the morning progressed. The route was clear and well marked by a deep track in the snow due to the popularity of this mountain. However, had we known about the poor condition of the route we would have used the south-east route instead and stayed in a hut for an earlier start. The ascent took about 4 hrs and the descent about 2 hrs.
Mont Blanc (4808m)

Now well acclimatised, we travelled over to France to attempt Mont Blanc. It looked quite tentative as the Gouter hut had been closed for much of July and August due to excessive rockfall in the Grand Couloir. We made a booking in the Gouter hut for August 19th. We based ourselves in St Gervais and kept busy with a day spent at the Aiguille du Midi and a couple of days doing some mid-level hiking to keep up the fitness and acclimatisation.

The ascent of Mont Blanc by the Gouter route is a two-day affair. The first day involves taking the Tramway du Mont Blanc to the Nid d’Aigle station, then hiking upwards for about 2 hours to the notorious Grand Couloir (sometimes referred to as the bowling alley because of the risk of rockfall from above) and finally a very steep 2-hour scramble up a wall of rock called the Aiguille du Gouter to reach the Gouter Hut. We did this on August 19th on a cold, snowy day with no visibility. Because of the fresh snow, we had to wear crampons throughout the rocky scrambling and this turned what would normally be a 5-hour outing into a tiring 8-hour one. The tiredness was in part due to the need to carry a much heavier rucksack than usual and this took its toll after a couple of hours of steep scrambling. The only blessing was that the cold conditions reduced the rockfall in the Grand Couloir so that there was no problem crossing it on the way up. I felt tired as we scrambled over the top of the Aiguille du Gouter. Not a great omen for the very long summit day ahead!

The new Gouter Hut - opened in 2013 - looked rather futuristic as we approached it. I felt really ill in the hut that evening with a severe headache and nausea due to the altitude at 3,800m. I couldn’t look at my dinner, never mind eat it. Liam reassured me that if I wasn’t feeling better by the morning we would just descend back to the valley and treat ourselves to some French cuisine. Things were not looking great for the next morning! Breakfast was at 2am and I was very relieved when I awoke at 1am to discover that the worst of the altitude effects appeared to have passed. Summit day was possible again!

We had our 2am breakfast, put on our gear and dropped down to the boot-room. There, we put on our crampons and roped up. There was an air of anxiety in the boot room as a number of teams prepared for the day ahead (or perhaps that was just me!). We both wore 4 upper layers and 3 layers on our legs with an additional down jacket in the rucksack to be donned later as we ascended to lower temperatures. The forecasted temperature for the mountain was minus 18. At about 3am we put on our head torches, grabbed our ice-axes and headed out into the darkness, walking roped together. We completed the long ascent up the Dome du Gouter in darkness. This was hard going and I had to stop regularly to allow my breathing to catch up with my exertion level. The next section was a little easier as we crossed the Col du Dome to the Vallot emergency shelter. Here we stopped for a short break and put on the additional down jacket and heavier Alpine gloves. The Vallot - which has all the cosiness of your average chest freezer - is a very useful pit-stop.
The Summit

Dawn had broken at this stage which gave me a lift. The orange sunrise over the white snow, with the lights of Chamonix visible in the valley below, was truly spectacular. We now headed towards the Bosses Ridge and suddenly the terrain became much more serious. The ridges were narrow with huge drops on both sides, Italy on one side and France on the other. Extreme caution was required. Liam shortened the rope at this stage. The next couple of hours were a real upward, steep struggle requiring full concentration at all times. After we passed the Rocheurs de la Tourette, the slopes became a little easier, the ridge widened and we finally reached the summit at 8.45 am. The magnificent summit ridge was surprisingly wide. We were alone on the summit and could relax and take in the amazing views in every direction. Here we were on the roof of Europe! A few parties ahead of us had already descended and we would meet many teams coming up on our way down. I was very cold however and so we couldn’t spend too long on the summit as we needed to get moving again to warm up. The old saying of the summit being the half-way point of a route now came to mind.

The Descent

We then started the long descent (2,500m) back to the valley. There was a bottleneck on the Bosses Ridge and we had to wait 30 minutes to allow 3 teams to come up before we went onto it. Although getting colder, we considered this delay worthwhile as we knew that passing groups presented a big risk on the ridges. The wind had picked up and spindrift now blew over the ridges. The condition of the snow had remained good and allowed confident use of our crampons. Once we had reached the Col du Dome we could relax and really start to enjoy the views again. Later on in the day the rockfall in the Grand Couloir was very heavy and it was a relief to have crossed it. In total, Day 2 took us almost 14 hours but thankfully we made the last train from Nid d’Aigle with an hour to spare. We were pleased to have made our ascent and descent safely.

Footnotes

Training: We had completed a week-long ‘Alpine Skills’ course when we visited the Alps in 2012. This year we hired a registered mountain guide for a day to revise and practice out on a slope the range of skills necessary for protection on snow slopes.

Weather: We were very fortunate to get good weather out there. Even moderately strong winds would, in our opinion, have rendered the high ridges impassable.
Liam & Marie on summit of the Lagginhorn with Weissmies in the background.

Marie on summit of Mont Blanc, Aug 20, 2015.