There was a great turn-out from the members once again this year for the annual photo competition. Members could forward two entries for each of the five categories; the winners for each category are selected by those present on the night.

The process for selecting the winners is as follows, each person is given a list of the entries for each category and they put an X beside their favourite image, the one with the most X’s is the winner.

**Categories & Number of Entries**

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<tr>
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The prizes for each category were a €40 Voucher, a spot prize (Head Torch) was given for the best image/title; the total value of the prizes was €245. On behalf of the club I would like to thank the Great Outdoors for their sponsorship to the value of €85. Next time you are looking to purchase gear I would ask members to show their appreciation by shopping at the **GREAT OUTDOORS**.

**Category Winners**

<table>
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<th>Category</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>Climbing</td>
<td>Terry at Krokan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Climbing Funny</td>
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<tr>
<td>Camping</td>
<td>No way out</td>
<td>Allister Gerrard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill walking</td>
<td>Mount. &amp; Mount. to go before we sleep</td>
<td>Barry Denton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape</td>
<td>Narnia</td>
<td>Alan McDonagh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spot Prize</td>
<td>The Odd Couple</td>
<td>Alan McDonagh</td>
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The overall winner selected from the five categories and the perpetual trophy winner for 2010 was Barry Denton with Mountains and Mountains to go before we sleep.

**Congratulations to all who participated!**

*Kieran Kelly - Club President*
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**AGM Notice**

The Annual General Meeting of the IMC will take place on Thursday 18th November 2010 at 7:45pm in The Teacher’s Club, 36 Parnell Square West, Dublin 2.
Ships that pass in the night

Gerry Moss

In the beginning it was envisaged that the IMC would eventually spread its tentacles (or its testicles, as Bertie Ahern would have it) countrywide, with sections in each of the four provinces.

In the heel of the hunt we had to settle for just the two: one here in Dublin and one in Belfast. That we held on to the two sections for as long as we did was quite an achievement. As Brendan Behan once put it: the first item on the agenda of any Irish committee meeting is usually a split. The Belfast section lasted until sometime in the nineties, when it just faded away.

Up until the eighties it was the practise to exchange visits on a regular basis - we would go up there, stay in The Bloat (the Belfast Section’s hut in the Mournes) and do some climbing or walking, and they would come down here and stay in the Glendasan hut for more of the same.

On one of their weekend visits we held a joint meet on the Sunday to the sea cliffs at the foot of Bray Head. There was about a half-a-dozen of them, and a handful of us. After all these years I can’t recall which of the lads came down from the north, but I do remember there was one female.

She was a phantom of delight,
When first she gleam’d upon my sight;
   A lovely apparition, sent
To be a moment’s ornament;
   Her eyes as stars of twilight fair;
   Like twilight’s, too, her dusky hair;
   But all things else about her drawn
   From May-time and the cheerful dawn;
   A dancing shape, an image gay,
   To haunt, to startle and waylay.

W.W.

complexion, eyes of the brightest blue, and her finely-chiselled features were framed by a mass of golden curls. With a sweet, shy smile and a complete lack of affectation, there was an air of innocence about her. A lovely person, totally charming, and a newcomer to the climbing scene.

Naturally enough, as the meet organiser and local expert on all aspects of climbing on the Bray sea cliffs, I felt it incumbent upon me to take her under my wing. A responsibility I shouldered with my usual quiet fortitude. To be fair to the lads, I did have several offers from them to take her off of my hands, but I felt it would be unfair to burden them thus.

We got on like a house on fire. She was a natural on rock, supple, strong and with a keen sense of balance. We rattled off most of the routes on Cable Rock, abbing back down each time to the water’s edge. Towards mid-afternoon, we were standing on a narrow ledge, just out of reach of the waves, having abbed down from doing Spinnaker, a VS climb that is a mixture of the delicate and the strenuous, and one on which I had used almost all of my meagre selection of gear.

With commendable efficiency, as she followed me up each route she had removed the gear and racked it neatly on one of my slings. But this time, as she leaned over to pass the sling back to me, it slipped from her fingers and we both watched in horror as the lot went tinkling down the rock, entered the sea with a plop, and disappeared from view. On that dull, raw October day there was a full spring tide, with about five meters of cold, choppy water below us, so it looked like goodbye to my precious gear.

“Not to worry, Gerry,” she said quietly, and before I could protest, she had kicked off her shoes, slipped out of her harness, pants and top, and stood poised on the lip of the ledge, clad in the briefest, filmiest of underwear. A sudden hush fell over the crag as everyone stopped climbing, keen to witness this turn of events.

Then, with a shy, bashful smile and a sidelong glance in my direction, she dived gracefully into the cold water. By the time she surfaced all the lads were lining the bank, waiting to catch a closer look at this gorgeous spectacle. She came up empty-handed, but I was probably the only one to notice that, as she lay on her back, treading water, her golden hair streaming out behind her, her smile as sweet as ever, blissfully unaware of the effect she was having.

For it was immediately apparent that, in the few moments she had been immersed, her underwear had shrunk dramatically. Indeed, it was transparently clear that those lacy garments had never been designed for
use as swimwear, and were now about as useful as a couple of strands of loose barbed wire - offering a modicum of protection to the property, but in no way impeding the view.

Her announcement that she was going to try again was followed by a flurry of frantic activity, as the lads discarded clothing left, right and centre, and plunged in to join her. She rolled over on to her tummy and executed a perfect surface dive: hands, head and torso going down first, the pert little bottom rising slightly, the long shapely legs the last to disappear. With much kicking and splashing the boys followed, hot on her heels.

They were down for an extraordinary length of time, giving me a chance to reflect on what a thoroughly decent bunch of chaps they were. To brave the cold water on such a raw day in an attempt to recover my gear was, indeed, an act of unselfish kindness. Though not normally one to show emotion, I am not too proud to admit that I felt a lump in my throat, and the merest hint of a tear in my eye.

Although they popped-up empty-handed, they remained undaunted, breathing deeply, smiling broadly, and slapping the surface of the water with gusto. With the demure mermaid leading the way, down they went again, remaining under for an even longer spell this time.

Again they surfaced empty-handed but, surprisingly, more cheerful than ever, and mad keen to submerge again. As they disappeared, however, I felt a slight uneasiness, a small twinge of doubt. For by now they had drifted quite a distance away from the spot where my gear had gone down, and there was no chance whatever of them finding it where they were diving.

Then the penny dropped. This shower of depraved lousers didn’t give a fiddler’s fart about me or my gear. Nothing but a gang of rampant perverts and debauched louts, whatever they were groping for down there, it certainly wasn’t my gear. And, worst of all, they were being lured on by this sly siren, this shameless strumpet, this...this near-naked, brazen bitch from Belfast, while I was left bereft, nutless and forgotten about on the bank. Bloody women. Typical. That’s the thanks you get. I knew the minute I clapped eyes on her she was nothing but trouble.

There was nothing for it - I was going to have to take the plunge myself. Although a strong swimmer, I am normally reluctant to expose my skinny, milk-white frame to cold winds or the public gaze, particularly when I am wearing my saggy, baggy underpants, but on this occasion the focus of attention was entirely elsewhere. Indeed, at this stage I’m almost sure I could see clouds of steam hovering above the frolicking sex-fiends out to sea. I eased into the water and dived down, down, until I was grasping the fronds of seaweed flourishing on the rocky seabed.

In those days we had to fashion our own slings, purchasing the tape by the yard, and you had a choice of two colours: white or orange. Luckily I had opted for the orange and so it was I spotted my sling nestling in a particularly lush batch of seaweed. I surfaced with a yell of triumph, brandishing my gear for all to see. My success was greeted with stony silence and sullen stares, - I was the party pooper - but what did I care?

Back on shore they clustered around Lady Godiva, each one earnestly offering to dab her down with the tail of his shirt. With dusk fast approaching, we called it a day, packed up and headed back along the cliff path to Bray.

I never saw her again as, shortly after, she abandoned the climbing scene for fresh fields and pastures new. It has always been thus. Every year I see a fresh batch of eager faces as young men and women come to sample what climbing is all about. Some may have a natural talent and ability, others struggle on even the easiest of climbs. But most have one thing in common - within a few weeks they will sink without trace. The trouble is, it is almost impossible to identify the ones who will become hooked.

Sometimes it is the strugglers, the slow learners, who persevere and eventually become competent and keen climbers. Which is why, not being a great one for instructing, I like to keep my input during the course to the minimum required, waiting until it is all over, to see which of them will bother to turn up on the Thursday nights in the quarry? They are the ones deserving of our time, attention and encouragement - and it often pays off - on both sides.

Down through the years, I have been fortunate enough to spend some wonderful climbing days and weekends, on mountain crags and sea cliffs the length and breadth of these islands, partnered by keen and enthusiastic tyros - the best of cheerful company.

And I look forward, with confidence, to more years of the same - for the climbers may come and go - but the rocks remain.
In Praise of Luggula
Gerry Moss

As the new Wicklow guide has been published and Luggula has been receiving increased attention in from IMC members this year I thought it would be a good idea to reprint this article from IMC Newsletter no 4 1993.

Luggala a lovely, if somewhat enigmatic name, for a lovely, though somewhat mysterious crag. At least it’s always been a mystery to me, why this, one of Ireland’s finest crags, should be neglected by climbers. Propose an outing to Luggala and alas the response is often one of shuffling feet, averted eyes and mutterings of ‘pressing domestic commitments’ ( and this, as like as not, from blokes who think Fairy Liquid is some class of poncy poteen from Kerry ) Press a little harder and you will be earnestly assured that all climbs at Luggala are undergraded, unprotected, usually damp, and often devoid of hand holds. Nothing, in short within the capabilities of the common man. All of which is baloney!

In refuting these allegations, I do so from a position of some strength, being not merely common, but positively vulgar. I suffer palpitations of the heart on 5a and palpitations of everything else on 5 anything else. I’ve never pumped anything heavier than a bicycle wheel and as for battle, well, the last time I was considered bold was by Sister Conceptia at infant's school and that had more to do with the abhorrence of small boys and dead budgies than any real appreciation of raw courage. Yet I have climbed and enjoyed some great routes at Luggala.

For starters, Luggala has more climbs within the 4b to 5b range than Glendalough has. True, there are some poorly protected routes, but these are in the minority and are clearly indicated in the guidebook. Okay, so gear placements are not always obvious, but we can all profit from a sharpening of technique in this life saving art.

And yes, there probably only is one Severe worth doing, but Pine Tree Buttress is one of the finest climbs of its grade in the country and should be part of every climbers repertoire. Though all of five pitches, this climb will only leave you half way up the crag, on Conifer Terrace. You could scramble off from here if you wished, but there are many exciting possibilities on the face above.

For the first timer I would recommend Curved Air, a pleasant VS which gives a good introduction to the type of balance climbing for which the crag is noted.

It is on climbs such as this that it becomes clear how stories of a dearth of hand holds at Luggala gained credence: the fact
Roll on the Winter

Sé O’Hanlon

I don’t say “roll on the winter” just because I am fed up with the summer or losing it at last. It’s just because I have bought a few maps of Wicklow that are going to add new interest to my walking in Wicklow, which is a winter pastime.

If you, like me, have an interest in more than just tramping along eroded tracks these maps will interest you. You will see names on streams you never knew had names, corrected names on many mountains, locations of historical events, climbing locations, accurately mapped forest roads and lots more.

They really are a mine of useful and interesting information. There is a generous overlap from map to map so it will usually be enough to bring only one of them with you.

The maps are published by East West

Mapping who have produced 3 maps so far:
Dublin Mountains from Saggart to Cleevaun and Enniskerry to Blessington; West Wicklow from Kippure to Mullacor and Ballymore Eustace to Roundwood; Lugnaquilla & Glendalough from Tonlegee to Ballinaclash and Rathdrum to Donard.
Still to come is east Wicklow from Enniskerry to Wicklow Town and Sally Gap to the coast.

The maps are on a scale of 1:30,000 and printed on water resistant paper. I bought mine in McCoys of Laragh but you can also buy them online from www.eastwestmapping.ie and elsewhere. Forget Harveys and the Ordnance Survey, the ultimate maps have arrived.

It is also well worth going to the Eastwest website and reading the section about place names. Lots of surprising information there.

Irish Mountaineering Club - Newsletter Autumn 2010
Why’s dis climb called dat?

Steve Young

Hey Mister Young, if you’re out there in Canada send us more photos and stories from the temple - Luggala.

Your last dispatch was great, seeing you and the other hard chaws from the ’70’s, hearing the routes you put up and how they got their names. And hey, I’d appeal to any of your cronies to do the same. We know you’re out there. And not just stuff on Luggala. Glendo - The Quarry - Donegal - Fair Head - anywhere. Come on, this is great history, we love to see and hear it. I know others feel the same.

After calls from John Duignan and Barry Watts to put something down on paper for the IMC Newsletter how could one say no to such a “forum call” from Gerry Galligan on April 13, 2010.

New Routing…

Somehow the thrill of seeking out new places and lines to climb has a far greater appeal to me than doing the existing routes or climbing harder and hard problems. Perhaps it was some latent explorer gene that was bursting to get out. Having previously climbed on the extensively developed granite of S.W. England, the opportunities there for new discoveries and lines were extremely limited, hopefully Ireland would be different. The excitement of the new route challenge is there; one must climb within your capability, both up and down. You never know what is ahead but hopefully you can remember how to reverse the moves if the impossible is reached.

The Gear…”

My initial rack in Ireland consisted of a Troll belt, through which you threaded the rope and secured it around your waste with a bowline and keeper knot. Protection consisted of a number of tape and rope slings for spikes and flakes, 3 Peck crackers (1/4”, 7”, 1”), 1 wired 3/16” Peck cracker, 3 Clog hexes and a 1/8” brass Clog on impossibly stiff wire, a small versatile Troll wedge and the one and only saviour, the MOAC wedge on tape. A ton of steely crabs and one Pierre Allain alloy crab completed the equipment. This crab had the dubious distinction of going “flurry” after a day on the sea cliffs!

Depending on location, a wide selection of chrome-moly pegs and hammer were carried and even a bolt, hanger and drill!

After the arrival (1973) of our own walking climbing shop in the form of Bob Richardson I expanded the protection to a set of 10 Chou Hexcentrics and a wallet full of alloy crabs. The steely’s were gratefully accepted by others. The faithful blue Compton lid topped me off and a pair of Terray Saugeois big wall boots or a pair of EB Super Gratton’s had me shod. How could I forget the infamous 8 that produced copious amounts of brass filings when abseiling on a gritty cleaning rope!

In the Beginning…

On my arrival at Rosslare early one misty Wednesday morning in Autumn 1971, the climbing potential was soon realised. A stop by a grotto outside Wexford town, a run across the dewy grass and I was up a nice cracked slab. My old A40 Somerset had made it this far, I travelled light, my cloths, tools to fix the car, climbing gear, my mineral processing notes from University and a photo copy of pages from “Where to Climb in the British Isles” by Edward Pyatt that related to Eire. There was no mention of these rocks!

Thursday evening after work at Avoca Mines, I explored Bell Rock for its climbing potential, again no mention in Pyatt. I believe modern activity has developed this interesting rock! The next evening I was up on Motte Stone Hill, a bouldering without a beanie and even following Irelands early via ferrata.

Now, it was the weekend, with no GPS, mobile phone or Climbing. Ie forum route data base I set out to find the brief but intriguingly described Glendalough, Luggala and Dalkey climbing potential. The magic mist of an early Irish morning. (I had not found Guinness yet), accompanied me across the wonderful road from Rathdrum to Laragh and onto the all but deserted car park by the lake at Glendalough.

By the time I had eaten my “sarnies” and cheese, washed down with Tizer, explored the old mining buildings, examined the roll crusher, I headed up the scree towards the musical “clank” of gear. High on the dark granite to the right of the main buttress, two climbers battled with gravity. A call up to them was almost unintelligibly answered by “F.O.” Boy! the natives weren’t friendly. I headed off back down the scree past huge wild looking goats. (I was later to learn it was Christy Rice and Doug Milnes on the first ascent of Rock Island Line). The initial reaction was, lots of nice looking routes, obviously cleaned lines, little scope for my exploratory side, keep away from the natives.

Next it was on through Annamoe, past the church high on the hill at Derraloessery, where President Erskine Childers was to be buried a few years later, past Roundwood and up the Sally Gap road to the gates above Loch Tay. Wow! That’s a crag. Little did I realize what a hell of a walk back I was to have as I skipped down the sheep shit strewn road to the lower gate and off down to the river, its stepping stones and access to the huge boulder field below Luggala. The crag offered a somewhat appealing sight but somehow there was something not right, were they slabs, what with all the vegetation, were there cracks, why did it look so “unvisited.”

Lots to be done but I was soon to lean from “pub tales” that it was an ominous place and best to stay away from its licentious garb! Didn’t meet any unfriendly natives!

Steve Young on the Motee Stone - 1973
It was Sunday, again I woke early and headed north in search of Dalkey, a quarry that appeared to be in the middle of a residential area. I parked at the top car park, walked across to the tower and view the scene below and over Dublin and the bay. Climbers punctuated the broken walls and gory ledges. I rolled down the steps and around to an area known as the East Valley. Here, three swearing climbers fought over who was to first tackle the white lift of granite, it was Diphthong. This trio was my greatest find to date, Jimmy Leonard, Joe Mulhall and Paddy Lyons. The end of the rope was handed to me, their argument was over, my trial began! Next it was Triptych, arrangement were made for Thursday night at the Teachers Club and my introduction to Guinness by Paddy. There was obvious potential within the quarry, blank unclimbed areas of rock, ivy covered walls, vegetated cracks and friendly climbers! I acquired my “Climber’s Guide to Dalkey Quarry” (the 1964 O’Flynn edition) at this first IMC meeting.

And now for the names:

Cathy Crackers:
This route started my quarry gardening. I was soon to become “the mad English gardener”, a name that I soon re-acquired over here in the Canadian Shield. A long strip of thick grass ran the height of the cliff, with a little prodding, it released from the line of the route to end up like a roll of carpet at the bottom. People lined up at the bottom to get in on a first ascent. As the name, she inspired many routes!

Distrust:
Without an up to date guidebook, information and names were usually passed along at McDonagh’s pub over a toast and a pint. I thought Thrust was actually Trust, it was either due to the noise in the pub, the slurred Guinness speech or my problem with the Irish brogue – was it “did I want thick socks” or “six socks” or were these to be “3 pairs” or “12 socks”? The route needed extreme cleaning to remove ivy, loose rock and other vegetation (and from the look of the 2005 guide picture it never became a popular route). Tools of the trade included an entrenching tool and yard broom.

Fuelled on Sardines and Tizer,
The route became reality. After we learned the true name of the adjacent route, Distrust seemed an apt name for the route that tackled the first loose rock in the quarry. Paul McHugh on the second ascent with Leslie Wooton confirmed its difficulty and character. It led to an invitation a few weeks later from Se Billane to join the Spillikan Club. Donal O’Murchu saw to it that I never achieved the entry requirements!

Tipp Toed:
Came from having a girl friend from Tipp. The peg was placed to prevent a potentially ugly ending on the steps. Remember she married me for my looks!

Yellow Line Rider:
Bob Richardson’s breach of the Central Buttress, the first new route on the rock for 24 years, the name was derived from the Richardson brother’s hazardous biking antics, they were the original Dublin bike couriers. Another 10 years and improvements in gear and training would pass before other features were named.

Brown Sugar:
The rock had the consistency of BS.

Time Burner:
Exposed after a fire-cleared sections of rock at either end of White Wall. A burnt out watch lay on a ledge at mid height.

Black Hand Gang:
This route possibly lit the fuse on Gerry Moss, after the climb we both had “black hands” and were fired to explore.
Ultima Thule:
Our first venture out onto the “blank stuff”, “beyond the borders of the known world”; Sean Darby’s lead of the second pitch was impressive.

Visions of the Emerald Beyond:
Horizontal exploration heading for a patch of emerald grass over beyond Helios. A lot of new ground was covered.

Creeping Paralysis:
What I believe was my hardest “aid free” new route. Paralysed with fear, EB’s, no chalk and a long fall in the offering, the name seemed obvious.

Siesta:
That afternoon I teamed up with Mick O’Shea, the banter was voluminous, After the climb, I went to see Ester, but I could not spell her name in my message to Donal.

Mahjongg:
Spelling again, is it “g” or “gg”? Extensive cleaning never seemed to get down to “solidity”. The Chinese game that involves a lot of little bricks seemed apt; each hold was a loose little brick! It was nearly called “7 Up” but we could not find two additional people to meet the loose challenge. Jim Butler wore his sandals (so the story goes) and Bob Richardson was mad that I didn’t let him lead it. I put in the hard graft to make the route so I should get the first crack at it!

Solid State:
The micro electronics age was just starting, the rock was far from Solid State, climbed in a gale while carrying an empty ruc-sac. The additional lift got me up; my accomplices, Donal and Jim B were unable to follow.

The Gnasher:
First ascent 12.8.72 and not as recorded in the 2005 guide. Shame about the aid but it did lead to its future free ascent. The “nash” was of the Cathy fame.

Dillon’s Dawn:
An aid extravaganza climbed the day Nash became Dillon. Again in the 2005 guide the ivy fights back. Free climbed 20 years after the first ascent, should I have left it unclimbed?

Superette:
The aid or super etrier was used as the route was battling up through Ivy.

Ocrist Goblin-Cleaver:
Ivy Wall area was thick with ivy. The initial explorations involved chimneying between the rock and the creepers and utilizing a 17” long First World War bayonet as a machete to rid the wall of the infernal growth. Pre-environmental awareness! Tolkien inspired the name.

Damocles:
Another famous sword, I would not have wanted to fall carrying that weapon.

Tenashity:
Word play, shitty hanging on.

The Shield:
The once obvious iron disc, now sadly removed

Eleven’s a Crowd:
The Eliminates were crowded, I wanted to climb unhindered.

Up Slide Run:
Progress seemed to be up, slide, run.

Re-Entry: The reason for the name escapes me, the 2005 guide description makes me believe the route lacks ascents and it is wet. At the time of the first ascent, it was quality clean rock, spoiled only by the peg. Second ascent by Donal Windrim confirmed its quality at the time.

Lumberjack:
Christy Rice and others employed the first major quarry clear cutting of the ‘70’s.

Oggie:
The name for a Cornish pasty, to match the Yorkshire pudding theme for British regional food!

Stereo Tentacles:
Popular stereo music was just beginning; reaching out during the final bridging sequence was like music coming from different directions compared to the earlier thin moves. Donal screamed in stereo as he stretched to bridge!

Shatt:
Described in the guide as dubious rock, to me it was “shattered” and so were we. Pre-cleaned on abseil from “stacked hexcentrics”, newly arrived from the USA with Bob Richardson.

Subpoena:
Nixon, Watergate and all that.

Distrust First Ascent
1972
Peter Cooper

The Poisoned Glen

This is the second part of an article focussing on the development of Donegal’s Poisoned Glen.

The previous article looked at the early developments from 1950 up until 1970. As with the previous article, I need to add that this is not the definitive history as the story is still developing; a concise version of the two articles will be published in the next Donegal guide.

To briefly recap:

The Poisoned Glen and its place in Irish-rock-climbing’s history really started with Gibson and Mc Murray’s ascent of Green Grass Gully in 1950. The major-players in its early development were the IMC’s climbers and a few, significant, visiting British climbers; they were all truly pioneering and at very respectable grades too. The IMC produced The Glen’s first guide in 1962. By the end of the 60’s Irishmen McDermott and Goulding had lead the great and off-tried line of Obituary Corner1. British climbers, the famed, Estcourt and Bonington had bagged its sought after sister-route: Obituary Column (VS)2.

Frank Winder was concentrating on his biochemistry career, having made a very significant impact on Irish climbing; he left a tally of 9 routes in The Glen – often climbing with Betty Healy3. Healy climbed on half a dozen new routes in The Glen and was an editor of the first Donegal guide with Sean Rothery4. Yorkshireman Harold Drasdo had climbed his last new route in The Glen, The Direct (HVS) on Bearna’s Buttress. Between himself and his brother, Neville, they ‘bowed-out’ with a tally of 20 new routes in The Glen. Andrew ‘Max’ Maxfield and R. Wilde, appear from records, got the last route of the 60’s with Un-Named Route in the September of 1969, bringing the tally of climbs in The Glen to 45 routes; and that marked the end of the first two decades of climbing in Donegal’s Poisoned Glen.

Many of the routes remain classic lines worthy of your attention, some are among the finest climbing experiences to be had in Ireland and other routes are over-due for reappraisal.

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1 This was the sought-after line that many of The Glen’s regulars had lusted after.

2 The line having repelled many Glen regulars, including Harold Drasdo who with his brother Neville had climbed The Glen’s first two HVS back in 1956. A line not to be taken lightly, perhaps?

3 Healy was a keen new-router on crags throughout Ireland and was a climber of some repute, she climbed better than many of the male climbers in Ireland at that time. Now in her late eighties she still recalls her climbing times, in the 50’s and 60’s, with much fondness.

4 Sean Rothery served as IMC President 1970-72. He also pioneered notable new routes on several of the Derryveagh crags.

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1970 onwards:

When the 1960s’ ended a new era didn’t begin: 5 years had to pass before another 2 new routes were recorded. Pat Redmond and Dave Walsh5 climbed Kongen (grade) in the August of 1974. Walsh recalls his eldest brother, also a climber, introduced him to The Glen and that they had climbed lots of routes there. Eventually he spied the line of Kongen. Having been rained-out of Norway that summer Redmond and Walsh returned to climb in Donegal, the line was climbed and it received the Norwegian word for king as its name. Though the line wasn’t climbed entirely in the style Walsh would have liked:

“I couldn’t make a move about a third the way up without protection. Pat had a go and made the move and got protection in. Then he couldn’t make the next (crux) move where the wall bulges a little. To my horror he pulled on a nut and finished the route. We have “discussed” the matter many times since. Pat was my best friend over 25 years but we never saw eye to eye on that. To our amazement we couldn’t get up the last easier angled bit. The corner straight above didn’t go and the shelves to the side were rounded off and we couldn’t manage. We tried for hours and hours and eventually ran out of time. It was pitons or abseil, and we chose pitons.”

The tale for Walsh did eventually get a happy ending:

“I always knew it would go and I eventually got back in the early 90s. I strolled up the main pitch and though the last pitch slowed us, Finbarr Crowley got a wee wire in and protection wasn’t an issue. Then it was straightforward delicate HVS slabbing, and he was up to it.

Really it’s a magnificent route”.

(Dave Walsh 2010)

On the Last Small Buttress Anaconda Corner was the 2nd new route climbed in the October of 1974, by the team of Findlay, Moore and Hawkins. Its name continued a tradition of snake-themed climb names started in 1959 by Frank Winder.

There were no more new routes for four years. June 1978 saw legends of the Irish climbing scene Calvin Torrans and Clare Sheridan6 add 3 routes, the 140m+ Rah on the West Buttress was the first E2 in the Glen; it rates 5c and gets 3 stars. It was to remain the hardest route in The Glen for fifteen years. Calvin and Clare also added the Glen’s first E1, Bad Blood on Creag na mBreach, but not until 1993. It can happen that a harder grade is climbed first but this was a fairly astonishing time scale.

In my previous article I noted that it seemed almost incredible to believe that E1 had not come to The Glen prior to this date (37 years after the 1st HVS), especially as some of its 1950s’ pioneers had climbed extremes elsewhere by the mid-1950s. There’s still no answers, suggestions or objections come forth on this subject.

5 Dave Walsh IMC President 1986-88 and pioneer of many routes at Malinbeg.

6 I cannot start to say how many routes they have climbed in Ireland, from the late 1960s onwards, but let’s just say it’s a hell of a lot! And always at a good standard too.
Calvin and Sé O’Hanlon\(^5\) were to do the First Free Ascent (FFA) of Gouling and McDermott’s 1968 route Saoirese (HVS). Calvin let me know he climbed Nightshade (HVS) ‘free’ about 30 years ago, but also confirmed he wasn’t the first to do it; alas he does not know who did the FFA. Does anyone out there have the answer for me?

In 2010, Dave Walsh still clearly recalled his ascent of Nightshade and rated it as “the best route I ever climbed in Ireland, never mind Donegal.” Calvin also got the FFA of pitch 3 of Geoff Sutton and Harold Drasdo’s 1957 route Hammer and Sickle (HVS) in 1981; Calvin still has ambitions in The Glen!

1978 also saw the IMC’s 1962 Donegal guide reprinted, containing 30 climbs in The Glen and with no updates whatsoever. There must have been a perceived need for it but I doubt it would have caused a stampede. I wonder how many copies were sold? So until the publication of 1979’s Malinbeg guide, to those not ‘in-the-know’, it would have seemed that no other climbing had been done and no other crags developed in Donegal. Now we have the internet and a tally of 1500+ climbs in Donegal on the CCC’s web-site.

1979 saw the ascent of Mamba (VS) on the Last Small buttress by a team consisting of Tom Hand and Emmet Gouling. There is a possibility that this was the same line as College Route, done in the late 60’s by Maxfield and Rittman. Either way, 30+ years on, this was the last new route recorded on this buttress; perhaps there’s some lines that were overlooked? It was a nice to see a return by Gouling to new-routing in The Glen, having been active throughout the Derryveagh crags from 1980 onwards. He lives less than an hour away from these crags, so we should be encouraging him to get out more.

1985 saw Dawson Stelfox’s\(^6\) 1985 Donegal guidebook published, the first whole-of-Donegal guide since 1962. The Poisoned Glen did not feature in Stelfox and Torrana’s Rock Climbing in Ireland guide of 1984. This did not go un-noticed at the time and I wonder if this would still be the case, if the guide were to be compiled now? Frank Winder’s routes elsewhere in Ireland (and Donegal) did feature in the guide but none of his Glen contributions made it into the final draft. Perhaps this would not be the case if a new selection were made? Especially as some of Malinbeg’s routes have fallen into the sea.

On Creag na mBreac Alan Tees\(^5\) added Dubious Maiden (HS) in 1985, putting that year’s guidebook further out of date. Also he put his own guidebook out of date, on the Ballaghgeeha Buttress Stelfox and Andy McFarlane climbed Anachronism (E2) in 1988. Dawson returned in 1991 with Mrs Stelfox; Margaret, adding Jaundiced Eyes (HVS).

Niall Grimes\(^4\) 1993 Donegal Supplement showed that development had slowed down further, as attentions had gone away from the mountain crags to the outcrops; nonetheless 4 new routes were recorded. Oddly, Grimer did not add any routes here; which is curious as he was active over on the nearby Lough Barra crags with Al Millar.

1993 saw Derrymen Paul Dunlop\(^5\) and Kieren Gallagher Chasing the Dragon, this line was The Glen’s first E3; and remains its hardest line to the present day (now there’s a challenge!).

“We basically knew that this buttress was the cleanest in the glen and that it is close to the road if you walk from the Lough Barra side. So myself and Kieran Gallagher went down for a weekend to see if there would be new routes......the line of ‘Chasing the Dragon’ really stood out quite prominently and was just waiting to be climbed. It didn’t require much cleaning and so I decided to just do it.”

“I wasn’t aware that ‘Chasing the Dragon’ was the hardest route in the glen......I’m quite pleased about that!” (Paul Dunlop, Summer 2010).

I recently contacted Paul regarding a tale I’d had relayed concerning his efforts at trying to free Nightshade. The route he’d actually been trying to be free was not Allan Austin’s Nightshade but Calvin and Clare’s Rah (E2), with Al Millar.

“The route was Rah E2 5c which has a point of aid at the crux pitch that myself and Al Millar set out to free. It started out ok but the higher up we went the wetter the crag was, one pitch before the crux pitch was like crossing a slab with a sheet of water flowing down it, it was very bad. Alan got to the crux pitch and it was impassable because of the wet. At this stage we were too high up to start retreatting so we just forced a new route to finish, but by this time it was pitch dark (it was October) and we had no head torches so we had 2 long pitches of new climbing in complete darkness, then a nightmare 3 hour descent where you couldn’t even see your feet on the ground or Alan standing right next to you......very scary considering the massive drops all around. So we had so sit down and crawl for hours down in the dark, falling over small buttresses not knowing when you were going to stop. I got hypothermia, broke most of my finger nails halfway to the quick and felt nothing......it was a bad day out!”

In August 2010, I was reading some copies of Irish magazine Rock Climber and in the back of it I found 2 new routes dating from 1994 Summer of My Dreams (VS 4c) and Emigrants Eyes (HVS 5a) both climbed in the June by G. Murray and M. McNaught. This was going to possibly scupper the later new routes on the buttress.

1 Sé is a legend of Irish cycling, winning The Ras several times in the 1960s. He served as IMC President 2003-4.
2 Editor of Donegal Rock Climbs 1985, Leader of first Irish team to climb Everest and became a President of the Mountaineering Council of Ireland (now MI). He’s also an Architect, in his spare time.
3 Climbing since the 1970’s, a long-term member of the North West Mountaineering Club, later he became a founding member and the first President of the Colmcille Climbers Club, edited the 2002 Rock Climbs in Donegal; eventually he became President of Mountaineering Ireland.
4 Derry lad, ‘Grimer’ was a keen activist in Donegal from the mid-1980s to mid-1990s. He is now resident in Sheffield and employed as guidebooks editor at the BMC; his definitive Stanage guide won that year’s BANFF guidebook award.
5 Paul and brother Raymond are well known for being talented climbers and have many hard routes in Donegal. Paul also gained a reputation for significant hard ascents in the Burren, often solo. Paul has been at the forefront of the campaign for a new climbing wall for Derry which should help see not only a rise in climbing standards but also a long-overdue rise in numbers climbing in the North West.
Fortunately, Kevin McGee has provided an accurate photo-topo showing where the routes overlap – but it also shows enough independence for all the lines to be listed. I was dreading telling the new-routers that there lines had already been done, as I’ve been there myself and it can be disappointing - to say the least. Ironically the magazines were lent to me by previous Donegal guidebook editor Alan Tees. Here’s to serendipity.

Alan Tees’ 2002 Donegal guidebook reflected the continued focus on developing Donegal’s outcrops and isles.

Development since the guide hasn’t ceased though. Alan Tees, Marty McGuigan and Marty’s son Mark added a new line to The Glen in 2003; Return Of The Eagles (HVS 5a). Which finds its way up 2-pitches and 50M of fine Donegal granite on the West Buttress, with the added bonus of an off-width followed by overhanging flakes with hidden holds.

2005 saw the Millar Brothers, Al and Dave, cleaning half-way-up the Castle Gully, adding Spectrum (E2) and Chemical Brothers (E1). Al returned with, fellow CCC member, Donna Ryan and they climbed Claymore in the Gully (E1) and Lianwrst or Bust (HVS). What set this period of development apart was its intensity, four new routes done in one year is something where the Glen is concerned but four in maybe just a month and certainly under two months; also there were not on the Ballagheega Buttress – this was some new territory.

In 2007 recently immigrated Orcadian-Scotsman, Iain Miller (CCC) took time out from sea-stack-conquering and explored the Castle, producing a ‘grit-grinding’ (ask him, I don’t know either) of To Be Continued (HVS 4c). The route goes up to the base of the very fine looking feature Portcullis Wall, which Iain describes as “ahem, a bit harder”.

The July of 2008 saw Donegal natives Kevin McGee and Patrick Tinny (CCC) climb Patagonian Summer (HVS) on the smooth walls of Ballagheega Buttress. However, a short-lived bit of confusion over whether this was a new route was settled by Alan Tees. Alan was there the day a peg was placed, prior to a bail-out by Paula Turley and partner, on the original attempt of this line. McGee and Tinny took time-off from developing Crocanafainn in the June 2009 and climbed The Mistress (HVS), the Glen’s 17th HVS line. Kevin and Patrician display the Donegal climbing spirit amply, with only a couple of years climbing experience they were new-routing in the birthplace of climbing in Donegal.

What next?

Lately it would seem that climbing in the Glen is seeing a minor revival. The Potential is still out there for the hardy gardener, with a very long rope and lots of time. The lines are out there for the keen, but it’s a touch of boldness that’s going to help most – on the cleaner faces. Acceptances of long walk-ins, possible ramp routes and horrendous midges on calm summer days do seem to be necessary to get the most out of your day.

When I first drafted this article the next line was: ‘And, more winter potential could be out there for those with a penchant for starting out before it gets light.’ Well, the Christmas of 2009 proved to an absolute bumper year for winter-climbing throughout the Donegal highlands, including The Glen.

Fine efforts were made by many members of the CCC. It saw new winter routes climbed, which further adds to your reasons to find your way to there. Iain Miller had a Christmas Day to make many of us envious. Rather than stuff himself with turkey and trimmings Iain was new-routing on the Donegal ice! See the reports on the CCC website’s logbook and on-line guide.

Developments since last article (1950-1970)

Whilst browsing the internet I came across an article featuring Trinity College’s Reverend Caesar Otway, which referred to him abselling in The Poisoned Glen in 1853. He published Sketches of Ireland. I’ve been unable to find the article again and research his mountain adventures further. I’d be very interested to read an article about him, if somebody else knows about him: he could prove to be an historically-important early figure in Irish climbing. Though, abselling’s one thing, climbing is another.

It is entirely probable that the Reverend Otway and Henry Chichester Hart would have known of each other, if not met, being of the Irish gentry class and Trinity graduates.

H.C. Hart is known to have been scrambling/climbing in The Glen in the 1880’s and alphabetically named its gullies. In 1895 Hart wrote the Irish edition of Climbing in the British Isles for editor Walter Parry Haskett Smith. Having skim-read H.C. Hart’s Donegal plant books I know that he not only listed the plants he found but also said where they occurred in the Donegal highlands - via altitude. He had extensive knowledge of not only The Poisoned Glen and Mount Errigal, but was also familiar with Lough Bealshe too; there’s every chance he would have scrambled the easy gully behind the main face.

Hart’s intimacy with the Donegal landscape at its time was incredible and probably equalled by very few since. Additionally, Hart was also a Justice of Peace and wrote many critiques of Renaissance plays, particularly Shakespeare’s. They were a posh lot, the early Irish climbers. But should you go to the Fanad peninsular his house still stands and the garden is open to the public, at Carrablahagh north of Port salon; importantly there is good climbing at Crocanaffain and bouldering, developed by Glen-pioneers The Millars’, near Fanad Head.

Harold Drasco sent a very informative letter, which arrived after previous article had been submitted for publication. It will be of use in the next guide’s production. Al Millar met with Harold in the early 2000s’ and interviewed him, he is also in possession of Harold’s own annotated 1982 Donegal guide, which corrects some of the lines. Neville Draso also contacted me and recalled his times in Ireland climbing with IMC members Winder, Rothery and Kenny; and the impressive climbs they did.

Sons of Donegal, the Millars’ are also part of the Derry scene that gave us Niall Grimes, the Dunlop Brothers and a significant jump in climbing standards. Al was a member of the CCC from its inception and a long serving secretary. Dave Millar continues the family’s new routing tradition at a good standard, is a member of the CCC and a keen contributor to the Donegal guidebook.

New routes over a 7 year period were more than double the 4 climbed in the 8 years between the Stefox guide and Grimer’s supplement.
Following climbing in Wicklow, they were guests at a party given by Bill Perrot. The Drasdo’s even got entertained by a warm fire in the library of the large house across the lake at Dunlewy, reputedly owned by members of the Guinness clan at that time.

I have managed to contact Allan Austin regarding his time in The Glen and had a positive response but, alas, nothing has come through before this deadline.

It was a nice surprise to receive an e-mail reply from Chris Bonington, confirming he’d enjoyed visiting The Glen in 68 but other than remembering it as being one of the wettest places he’d ever climbed he couldn’t recollect the actual climbing. He did however share his memory of that night, when he’d given his Eiger talk to IMC and Queens’ climbers in Belfast. It’s the only time he’s given a talk under the protection of armed British soldiers, who all enjoyed his talk; later he was taken to the Officers’ Mess and entertained till very late into the night. It possibly beats camping at Dunlewy.

I was in touch with Belfast-based artist Dan Shipsides, he had an exhibition ‘Pioneers’ which was inspired by the early members of the IMC. As a result the audio interviews he conducted with Winder, Healy and Rothery are now available as free downloads: just search under his name – it’s not common.

Well that’s the story so far, it continues to develop and I hope you’ve enjoyed what I’ve shared with you. Thanks to all those who have assisted in helping with these articles. I hope you’re all feeling inspired to go to Donegal, will you get your new line in time for the next Donegal guide?

I am still appealing to all of you for your memories, any gap-filling information and historical pictures; relating to Donegal’s pioneers and significant ascents on any of the Donegal crags. If you know any retired climbers, prod them for info and any pics they may have up in the attic; they may have valuable ‘stuff’ relating to Irish climbing history!

Should you want to check details of routes, add comments or submit a new route then go to the Colmcille Climbers Club website: www.pete-smith.co.uk home of the on-line Donegal climbing guide. I can be contacted via the CCC’s on-line guide page.

Peter Cooper was President of the CCC (2008-10) and is Editor of the Donegal guide.

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Alan Tees Donegal MCI 2002
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Conversations, correspondences and e-mails (so far) were with:
Harold and Neville Drasdo, John Duignan, Paul Dunlop, Betty Healy, Kevin McGee, Al and Dave Millar, Iain Miller, Alan Tees, Patrick Tinney, Calvin Torrans and Dave Walsh.
The Cassin Route
Dermot Shields

Like many climbing plans the idea for this one was spawned at the climbing wall one rainy evening. Neil Wilson and I had discussed different alpine routes in the past and had our own wish lists but we shared a craving to climb the Cassin route.

I could only get away for a few days and Neil was moving to Haiti to work for a few months at the end of the summer. So we started the preparations...

The Cassin Route takes a more or less straight line up the centre of The North East face of the Piz Badile. It is one of the walls that Gaston Rébuffat dubbed one of the six great north faces of the Alps back in the 1930’s. The epic ascent by Cassin and co., and the subsequent horror story decent when two of his companions died lays testament to the seriousness of the route at that time.

The route has equipped belays now and some fixed gear where it matters so the technical difficulty is now reduced. The use of modern gear, energy gels and up to date weather forecasts also make a dramatic difference today. However the Cassin’s reputation remains and it makes you sit up and take the undertaking seriously when you are considering having a go or when you are standing at the base of it looking up!

To prepare ourselves we read numerous climbing reports from other climbers. We studied the gear they used, the clothes they wore, the food they ate and the topo’s they used. We found 3 independent topo’s of the route with subtle differences and studied them in depth before we left for the climb. We decided to travel as light as we could so as to climb faster. But we expected there was a fair chance we would be forced to bivi on the route or on the decent down the North Ridge. Due to our time constraints there would be no warm up route, just the Cassin, so we had to be organised.

We flew to Milan on the red eye flight from Dublin and drove our rental car north along the shores of Lake Como to get to the Swiss village of Bondo. This is at the foot of the Piz Badile in the Bregaglia Mountains. Luckily you can drive from Bondo to an upper car park reducing the walk-in time to the Sasc Fura hut to under 2 hours up a nice shaded forest track.

As we stepped out of the car to shoulder our bags we caught our first glimpse of the North Ridge and the twin North faces of the Badile. Simply put, we were awe struck. It is a striking mountain and the gravity of what faced us landed in the pit of our stomachs. How are we going to climb that?

The climb is a rock route in summer months with 3 of the 25 pitches at about 5c+. Climbers traditionally carry their own gear alpine style with a small bag each. Therefore we gambled on using approach shoes and left our heavy...
mountain boots and ice climbing gear behind to save weight.

We were climbing the route early in the season and consequently there were no footprints to follow on the initial snow field. This must be traversed to get established in the middle of the North East Face. We spent a lot of time creeping across this snow field in our approach shoes kicking steps and balancing with a homemade walking stick I found at the foot of the North Ridge.

There was a 50m run out from belay to belay on the snow field so we had no regrets taking our time, as it would be a bad idea to rush across without crampons and axes.

We had read of an unfortunate accident at this spot in recent years which played on our minds. And to top it off the German warden in the hut told us the night before that it was impossible without ice gear and not to do it under any circumstance. This resulted in a sleepless night wrestling with our inner demons and making the tension more intense at that crucial part of the route. But we committed and found a way across, the tension eased away and the fun began.

The face is the biggest either of us had climbed so far, 800m of vertical climbing once you are established beyond the snow fields.

We thoroughly enjoyed the climbing and the weather was great until we were about two thirds of the way up. Just as Neil reached the hanging belay under the second crux the thunder clouds rolled in and the sky’s opened up. I scurried up after him and we set about getting our bivi bags out.

Neil was hanging on 3 or 4 pitons and I was on 2 camels. The rain was pouring down the face in a waterfall...
off the overhang above us making things a bit more interesting. We juggled our gear about, clipping everything onto the belay and bumped into each other as we pulled up the bivi bags to escape the deluge.

The rain lasted about 2 hours I think, but after that a few rays of sun made it through a gap in the clouds and lifted our spirits. We quickly packed up and I aided up the crux corner as it was dripping wet. Then Neil led through up a long difficult slab pitch to get us into the exit chimneys.

Completely dehydrated he helped himself to a pool of rainwater conveniently located at his head level, no hands, he just dropped his face in and sucked it up (standards were dropping!). I climbed through into the exit chimneys where we found a good ledge to call home for the night and we settled in.

The following morning brought clear skies and a welcome sun. We set off early up the last two pitches of the chimney, which had a little ice in places. Then we made our way across to the slabs that bring you to the summit ridge baked in the morning sunshine. We relaxed for a short while in a notch in the ridge peering into the other valleys and back down the face, two specks on the top of the Black Dwarf. Mindful of the long decent that awaited us we couldn’t hang around for long.

The clouds built up again at times but luckily there was no more rain. So the 20 abseils down the magnificent North Ridge went without any trouble. We made it down to the hut with big appetites and a warm welcome back from the wardens, even a wink from the Fräulein! The quality of the climbing, the exposure, the feeling of remoteness, the company, the history, the hut…..it was brilliant.

Gear we used:
light rain jackets, two pairs of gloves each, hats, balaclavas, dryflow tops, 1 light fleece each, light weight bivi bags, down jackets, head torches, 6 energy gels each, 3 litres of water each, a couple of bars of chocolate, 1 set of wires, 5 or 6 friends, 10 lightweight extenders, slings and locking crabs. We left behind rainproof leggings, sleeping bags and ice climbing gear to cut down on weight.
No Way Out by Allister Gerrard. Winner - Camping Category. Photography Competition

Terry at Krokan by Michael Stoker. Winner - Climbing Category. Photography Competition
Matterhorn Trip
Anthony Feeney

The Matterhorn trip came about as it was always an ambition of Sandra’s…

…but the wheels were really set in motion during the October 2007 MCI meet. “What next?” we were asking after a big Scottish year. “Time to move up a gear and go Alpine” was the general suggestion.

Pete, PJ, George, Sandra and I have done loads of stuff together but we needed a 6th person so that we could climb in 3 pairs. 2 weeks before we were due to set off I still hadn’t found that person but Martin Bonar got me in touch with a Cork man named Dave Cummins who, every summer, gives up the job and spends a few months travelling round Europe climbing.

The rest of us got into Zermatt on Friday 18th but George and Dave were arriving on the 19th, so we spent the hot Saturday hiking up to Schwarzsee Paradise (2583m) for a close look at the Matterhorn. Since Zermatt is at 1620m we reckoned we climbed a Munro in about 2.5 hours. Not bad. Sweating profusely but pleased with how the old legs were standing up to the steep climb we stopped for a pint at the Schwarzsee Hotel to be duly awestruck by the immense snow covered mountain before us. The old guy at the campsite had told us it would be out of condition for a few days. Incidentally he claimed to have climbed the Matterhorn 500 times!

The Alpine Centre also told us that guides were taking some clients up but they were getting the crampons on at maybe half height.

With the party all together on Sunday we headed for the Klein Matterhorn cable car and the Breithorn summit. The guidebook suggested 2 routes - one a straightforward hike up the SSW face to the main summit, another traversing West across the main ridge after crossing the glacier below. We took the slightly harder (PD-) ridge route roping up in pairs, Alpine-style, with 10m spacing. The quick ascent by cable car to 3820m meant we were all puffing and blowing at the altitude, especially on the way back.

Despite this we gained the narrow ridge and main peak (4164m) in under 2 hours, then re-crossed 3198m by Shank’s mare. The first section to the Edelweiss restaurant is very steep but you are rewarded by views of the thundering river and a walk through shady flowered woods. The second section to the Hotel Trift is more open but again, great views, spoiled only by the gay couple and their yappy dog “Spencer” who seemed to be a permanent 3 feet behind me. “Is he checking out my bum?” We also spotted a Mickey Rooney lookalike and a serenely gliding 70ish nun who seemed to be trying to breathe through the humid day.

The scenery becomes more and more barren as you approach the hut and Dave and I were in no hurry to get there and be bored rigid hanging round. After 3 hours we gained the hut, got our beds assigned and then froze slowly as we waited for dinner. The hut is quite small and was relatively crowded so they had to serve dinner in 2 sessions. After nearly 2 hours the other climbers were still unwilling to give up their seats in the warm dining room and we had gone through our repertoire of lame jokes, were now using bench-dips and chin-ups to keep warm and were ready to kill the damnedly loud Americans.

Eventually Dave took charge and we elbowed our way in. It all turned out very well because we stuck to our table for the rest of the evening while the loud ones chilled elsewhere. A few after dinner beers kept the fun going as we played “Jack Changes” on a luckily discovered 52 card deck, with much head banging of the low-hanging lanterns. I think we were louder than the Americans by the end and PJ’s yells and our general laughter ensured heads turned our way more than once.

A 9.30pm bedtime was followed very shortly by a 3.30am call for breakfast. The day before no-one had made the peak due to the
heavy snow conditions, hence the crowded hut and the mass of climbers for this day. With a bellyful of Red Bull and Nutella smeared bread though, I was ready to charge up to the peak. A longish steep snow pold gained us the initial chimney, followed by more plodding, a brief climb then a final pold along a corniced ridge to a narrow airy rock section. The cloud had occasionally come in and we were battered a few times by the wind whipping up stinging ice particles on the ridges, freezing the bladder pack mouthpieces and denying us any fluid intake. A traverse led us to the bottom of a snow filled chimney and by this time the other 4 were well ahead.

The Red Bull had worn off, the altitude and cold were getting to me and Dave and I were too polite to the slow ascenders and those already descending. We tried going round them on a section of HVS rock (in crampons!) but that just slowed us further. At the top of the chimney, in Gabel’s Notch, we discussed turning back, but despite being well outside the guide time I wanted to push on. The sun was out, the water packs had defrosted and a quick snack had replenished my flagging energy. At the Biner Slab however we met the others descending and their description of a very windy summit and multiple ascents and descents of rock pillars put us off going further. We descended delicately using various tied ropes to abseil the vertical sections and even bun-slid the final snow slope to the hut. TIP: Using your partner’s well grooved bum track makes for a faster descent, though do remember that you still may be tied together to avoid unnecessary anchorage and sudden tumbling stops! At the hut we stopped for a quick drink then hammered on down to the valley, Dave racing ahead of George and me despite being a 20–a-day smoker!

Next day was a rest day and we discussed whether we were even ready for the Matterhorn, given that we were all badly outside the guide times for the Zinal (the summiters were 2 hours out). Despite badly aching legs I thought of all the work I’d put in to get in shape for the trip and determined that, even if I didn’t make the summit again, I’d prefer to at least have a go. The vote carried and we booked the Hornihutte for Thursday evening.

This time we took the cable car to Schwarzelee and took it easy for the 2 hour walk to the hut at 3260m. Just as we arrived we noticed the little red rescue helicopter hovering around the peak in swirling cloud. Within minutes it had swooped down and picked up 2 mountain rescue men, who dangled from a rope underneath and were carried off to what looked like the Zmutt Ridge. PJ excitedly described them as 6’ 6” Adonis-like hunks to a smiling Sandra who’d returned with George from scouting the start of the route. A few trips back and forth brought 6 people down safely. None seemed to be injured and we heard tales of climbers pushing to the summit despite sheer exhaustion and being then unable to descend.

The helicopter was a stern reminder of the dangers this mountain could present but at the same time it was a comfort to know that if things went wrong you had professional backup. Watching the pilot consistently drop people off inch perfect on the landing spot was inspiring to watch.

Up close now to the peak you could start to make out climbable features and this reduced the fear factor somewhat. From Zermatt the whole Hornli Ridge (grade AD) looked like a knife edge with huge drops either side. We talked to one climber who’d only made to the Solvay Hut the previous year who described it as “a big mountain scramble”. 3 laughing Austrians joined us at our dinner table at 7pm, having just descended, and also described it as easy but they were well used to this sort of thing it seemed. By 8.30pm we were all in bed after a delicious 3-course dinner. We’d had to pay a fortune (about 74) for 1.5 litre bottles of water due to a chronic shortage. The washrooms were closed and the toilets had the shortest flush ever so they (and we) ponged a bit!

At 3.30am we were woken again and the hut was soon bustling and dazzling with head torched yawning climbers. At the Rothorn hut we’d noticed others pay for a purplish concoction called “marsh tea” which seemed to be some kind of invigorating drink so Pete and PJ sorted themselves out with some while the rest of us relied on the usual dilution of Powerade. On the Zinalrothorn we’d all been so concentrated on getting to the top that we’d barely touched the food and water we’d brought along so this time I carried 2 litres inside the pack (to avoid freezing) and various nuts and cereal bars to graze on.

We set off after the main parties had left, tied in our usual pairs (Pete / PJ, George / Sandra, Dave and myself), hurling along at a breathless pace in head torches. An initial fixed rope section leads to a confusing series of switchbacks through loose rock and the occasional cairn. Another fixed rope section along a narrow ridge, some snow traverses and we were on to the long scramble on the rocky sections up to the Solvay Hut. The sun had risen on this beautifully clear day and this time Dave and I were almost rude in pushing ahead where we could. We even passed one or two frustrated guides dragging their hapless clients on short ropes. We played it very safe though, always keeping at least one runner between us on the scramble sections and 2 or more where it got vertical. There was so much tat and fixed rings all over the place that it was just a matter of clipping in and moving on and we made the Solvay Hut in 3 hours, scant minutes behind the other 4. The friends and nuts we took along were never used and slings and runners were all that were necessary.
We’d climbed about 700m by this stage but looking up you could tell there was a long, long way to go. I assessed the huge breathless exertion it had taken to just get this far but after a few minutes rest and a snack I knew I could go a lot further. 3 hours was an excellent time as far as I was concerned and I was in high spirits. Dave’s relentless (I wouldn’t call it encouragement exactly!) shouts of “Drive On!” and “Let’s Drive This Bus Home!” kept me in a perpetual almost trance-like motion where the only thing that mattered was the 3 or 4 feet of rock in front of me and it was thus that I climbed the beast one bit at a time. I tried not to consider how far we’d come, how far we had to go, how long we were taking, or the massive drops and just concentrated on looking out for icy rock and good holds. I’d had one scare on the way up, slipping on some water ice and falling about 3 or 4 feet, heart racing like mad till Dave held me. I didn’t want to repeat the feat at a much greater height.

The Moseley Slabs are about the hardest and most vertical sections before and after the Solvay Hut. We still hadn’t got the crampons on, the previous 4 days of sunshine having melted the snow line to quite a height. Shortly after the slabs though it was time to stick them on and here I got my second fright as a guide, who’d lowered his female client down next to me, decided to skid his way on crampons down the slab towards me, stopped just short and laughingly patted my shoulder before scooting on. For a second I’d thought he was going to bowl the 3 of us over the edge and I had to take a while to compose myself, muttering a few choice words at the guy’s arrogant bravery.

We gained The Shoulder after crossing a narrow ridge where the vertigo-inducing drops either side could freeze you in place if you stopped to think about them. The helicopter seemed to be a constant presence at this height sweeping in to check that everyone was doing OK. We were still just behind the others and tarzaned our way up the huge thick ropes. There are some pure vertical sections where I thought my tired arms would never get me up and there was a bit of “traffic management” as ascenders and descenders shouted and jostled their way up and down.

Above this is what I called “The Roof” which is a long 60° snow slope that requires much care and plenty of ice axe work, whilst buffeted by strong winds. 20 minutes of hacking and stepping later we were passing the statue of St Bernard and had gained the Swiss peak at 4478m. Hurray! I could see the others on the Italian peak but the narrow cornice (barely two footsteps wide) in between made me very nervous, being that you could see all the way down to Cervinia on the left side. Dave, however, was already marching over there and shouted back “Trust the crampons, they’re your best friend!” and “You paid good money to get here, make the most of it!” so we picked our way over and took some photos at the crucifix. Total time taken was 6.5 hours. Not too bad given the guide book said 6 hours. Well one book said 5 hours but we’ll ignore that uber-athlete!

Because of all the fixed rings etc. descending turned out to be a relatively straightforward series of abseils. Our 60m rope seemed to be perfect for the job, dabbed through the rings we went down in 30m steps and always seemed to land beside the next ring in the series, then just pulled the rope down. Our rope work wasn’t great though because we could never find the mid-point and usually had to feed the entire rope through sorting out knots etc. By the time we neared the Solvay Hut Dave was totally frustrated with this method and encouraged me to down-cimb with us roped together. I hate down-climbing however and thought it was just as slow but less safe than abseiling. When we reached the easier lower slopes Dave decided to climb on down and I continued to slowly abseil by myself, a little frustrated at the rope but thoroughly enjoying the solitude and the views of the huge peaks around me. My only interruption was a phone call from work asking me, “Is this a good time to talk?” “Uh.... Not really, I’m descending the Matterhorn, bugger off!”

It was rare that I couldn’t find some tat or ring to hang off and I mostly made my way down to the left of the main path. I found the 2nd series of fixed ropes but lost my way shortly afterward when I abseiled down to avoid the switchbacks of the loose path below. I went too far down however and then floundered around for ages trying to find the path, as darkness started to descend. Dave called and I assured him I was fine and only minutes away from the hut but an hour later (around 9pm) I was still lost and was putting the head torch on. Just when I was about to call for help I spotted 2 carins that I recognized; we’d hurtled past them around 5am that morning.

I was back at the hut by 9.30pm and very glad to pay for a bottle of water. My 2 litres had turned out to be barely enough and had run out by about 2pm during the descent. A few mouthfuls of Dave’s were the last I’d had and I’d resorted to sucking snow while I searched for the path. George, Sandra, Pete and PJ had all decided to descend to Zermatt, a decision they regretted when the heavens opened on them and when they also realised the length of the trek. Dave booked into the Schwarzzsee Hotel but there was only one choice for me: another night in the hut. I stumbled up to my room only to find my allocated bed covered in someone’s gear. I tiredly clambered up, shoved it to one side and woke up the Frenchman next to me who sat up and loudly exclaimed “Sorry, I farted!” I’d have laughed if I wasn’t so tired and fell asleep to the sounds of the rain on the roof, 2 whiffing snorers and the indeed farting Frenchman. Huts eh?
We’d all booked return tickets on the cable car, hoping to make the summit in 6 hours and the descent in 7 and to be back at Schwarzsee for the 16:40 last car. Nobody made it of course but, where the others trekked down in the dark, Dave and I separately made our way down at leisure the next morning. We all met at Potters Bar for an English breakfast and took the rest of the day off to shop. That night we celebrated wildly in the Post Hotel downing several Talisker whiskys and talking utter rubbish mostly. There was a club underneath the hotel and George, Pete, PJ and myself danced away in the smoky atmosphere (seems Switzerland hasn’t outlawed that yet), I staggered back later than the others having spent the evening pursuing a girl who spoke no English and no German. Think her name was Christiana but who knows? Next morning Sandra regaled me with stories of Pete and George throwing up mightily in and around their tents / cooking pots / anything that came to hand really.

Despite major hangovers Pete and I left the others and hired “Dirt Scooters” with an all day Schwarzsee cable car pass. Take the cable car up, ride down, let gravity do the work. Simple. Except we took a wrong turn first time round and ended up careening along a narrow rocky path with 50 foot drops to our right and nothing but bicycle helmets and judicious use of the brakes to prevent disaster. We had a few spills, Pete coming off spectacularly and losing some thumb, but mostly survived until the lower roads where the roar of the huge tires told the crowds ahead “Get out of the blimming way!” The second time round we sussed out a better road and had a lot more fun but twice was enough risk and we went back for dinner and more card games. Dave had packed up by this stage and was off to Chamonix for more technical stuff, having achieved what he’d come to Zermatt for. Still can’t thank him enough for helping me out.

On the Monday PJ wasn’t feeling well and despite getting on the Gornergrat train with Pete, George and I to go rock climbing on the Riffelhorn, she soon had to return with Pete and go see a doctor who put her on an antibiotic drip. Sandra had chosen to pack up and book into a hotel for the final night, so that left George and I to enjoy the multi-pitch bolted fun of the Riffelhorn Sudwand. Getting off at Rotenboden station (snigger, gotta love these Germanic names) there’s a short hike round the back of the peak and you eventually spot little blue signposts and blue painted dots marking the bottom of routes.

The sense of exposure was wonderful though, with the glacier below and peaks behind us and the constant gentle roar of melt water echoing along the valley. After a quick snack we tried a second route called Egg, 150m, 6 pitches, 4 | 3 | 4- | 3+ | 4 | 4 and a scramble to finish. This time we had to traverse the whole south face and even abseil at one dangerous point. It was like getting around at the bottom of Fairhead, annoying in the building heat of the day. When we got there we discovered a guided party just starting the route but they did a good job of staying just ahead of us. The guide led on 2 ropes then reeled the other 2 in as they climbed just behind one another. This route was slightly harder, maybe low end VS in one or two areas, and again wonderfully exposed, especially on the final slab. Even though the routes were bolted the spacing (10m?) between the bolts was just enough to make you nervous of the run-out. We even placed a friend at one point rather than risk the largish fall. A very enjoyable day marred only (for me) by the down-climbing from the top of the routes.

Back in Zermatt, a nice dinner and a pint or two rounded off the final evening. PJ had recovered, but it was a relatively early night since we were all catching early trains for flights from Geneva to Dublin and (myself) Zurich to Birmingham with plenty of time to contemplate the week during the 4 hour ride. We’d looked at the Matterhorn many times since that Friday’s success and were constantly voicing “I can’t believe I was up there!” I still can hardly believe it and I won’t forget this trip in a hurry. We were very lucky with timing and the weather too, given that people couldn’t even summit the Zinalrothorn the day before we tried, there was thunder and lightning on our rest days, and the day after our Matterhorn summit was one of the worst days of the whole week. “Jammie beggars” do I hear you jealously cry? :)

Getting to the start of our routes involved some delicate picking across narrow ledges ever wary of the long drop to the glacier below. Excellent view of the Dufourspitze and the other Monte Rosa peaks though.

Our first route was called Via Charly, 100m, 7 pitches, 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3+ | 4. There are 4 different routes leading from the same start and they’re all named on a little metallic plaque with their grades. I’m not too sure about grade comparison but I led the first and found it relatively easy (maybe HS?) and the middle pitches were certainly no harder than Severe.

Irish Mountaineering Club - Newsletter Autumn 2010
Iain Miller

The Realms of Chaos

It was 6am and I was nearly 30km from the nearest main road...

...5km from the car, at the base of a 250m sea cliff and I was totally and utterly alone, no-one knew where I was or what I was doing, I had no means of contacting the world in the event of the proceedings resembling a pear and 300m out to sea was the object of my desires. The south westerly winds were causing the distant sea to smoke, Neptune and his legions of the damned were “in the building.”

I was standing on a small outcrop 6 metres above UBER white water violence, a Lidl dingy mattresed in front of me, a dry bag full of toys clove hitched to my left wrist and the beast on my right, a 60m half and a 60m single alpine sacked on my back and all that was left to do was commit to a super scary big leap into the rage and thus enter The Realm’s of Chaos.

Two summers ago whilst on a cliff top stroll along the An Port highway, I stumbled upon a huge collection of Leviathans of such gothic architecture and nautical nastiness that a quest was immediately began, alas it is fuelled by the overpowering rush of an inner tide and thus two years on nearly 50 virgin Donegal sea stacks have been spanked with no end in sight.

HURRAH! The main residence of the leviathans is An Port, a little known road end at the entrance to Shambala, in South West Donegal, where a cliff top walk will leave you speechless.

The islands of Aran, Owey and Tory also play host to a further collection of these nautical bad boys.

Standing head and shoulders above the masses is “Cnoc na Mara,” a 100m sharks tooth stack, which sits 120m from a storm beach in a truly magical and outrageous location. Its landward arete rises for 150m out of the Atlantic Ocean and provides a VS like no other. Its last pitch a 60m summit ridge is unforgettable. Next door to “Cnoc na Mara” is “An Bhuidéal” a twin headed 50m beast whose north summit is a super skinny and UBER scary place to be, again climbed at VS.

Both of these stacks are outstanding adventures but do require a tad of nautical wisdom! For a big leapfrog in atmosphere a visit to “Dare 2 Be,” the Matterhorn style stack to the North of Skelpoona, accessed by a KM paddle along the base of 200m high inescapable looseness is a tad “full on,” and on the island of Aran lives the Giant’s Reek stack a 120m monster in an absolutely committing location.

The daddy of Donegal’s more adventurous stacks is Satan, a 70m stack on the seaward side of Gull Island. It is protected by conflicting tides and has a very high death potential as the only landing place on the beast is in the very centre of Hades. The stack is so named, as make a mess of the dingy work and the beast will take your soul.

And so our stories begin.............

FA Satan X55a 70m

And Sho, with our souls still intact from our previous visit to the lair of Mephistopheles, Noble Brother Martin Boner and I descended once more unto the realms of darkness.

The object of our desires was an ascent of the Dark Lord himself, this 70m stack sits to the West of Gull Island and simply put, it is in the most remote and inaccessible location off the mainland of Ireland.

HURRAH! Welcome to the Abyss!

Each carrying our 20kg beasts of burden, an early morning 4km trot across the hinterlands of Slievetooy followed by a 100m steep scramble and we arrived at our wave washed base camp.

It was now a 500m sea passage to reach the base of Satan and as neither of us had spoken for the last hour we paddled out in continued silence. Paddling out into this amphitheatre of outrageous natural beauty, fear and intimidation, it was near impossible to suppress the sensory overload, as I felt we had now reached and breached the bounds of the same and in the distance the coronach played on.

Twenty minutes of easy atmospheric paddling later we arrived at the Gothic labyrinth separating the two stacks we alighted onto the easiest island, Satan looked very, very difficult to land on, Neptune was in the building! Oh, Happy Days!

“This is Fackin Awesome!” Quipped Brother Bonner, I agreed, and we once more descended into silence.
The only way to access our goal was a small recess in the channel between the two stacks, I don’t wish to labour the point BUT this channel was truly surreal!

“DEAD, your God is dead. FOOLS, your God is dead. USELESS prayers of lies. BEHOLD Satan’s rise!” Roared our hosts as we made the journey across the Styx to arrive at the sanctitude of the 6th inner circle.

And whilst in celebration of Rage the heavens grew strong, the key to the 7th gate of Hell lay momentarily unguarded.

Changed clothes, sorted the toys and climbed a 25m pitch of immaculate Basalt to arrive at a col to the south of Satan and between an offshoot lump. A further 30m pitch took us up steep Basalt blockiness to the bottom of twin summit towers, The Horn of Satan, if you will! :-) A third 35m pitch climbed the steep corner crack between the horns to arrive on the summit ridge, a thought provoking ridge scramble and we sat aloft the Prince of Darkness.

“Let’s get the Fack out of here!” Suggested Brother Bonner, and I couldn’t have agreed more.

We abseiled and down climbed the route to our mighty vessel.

Toys sorted and we set sail, 10 minutes later whilst paddling up the final channel and awaiting the final big lump to spit us free of the labyrinth and out into open sea. I turned to ask Martin if he was having fun yet, head bowed he was in silent prayer as we were lifted 6 feet and carried out into open sea on the crest of a monster roller. Arms raised as we both roared at the sky, we had been reborn into the world having left behind the gothic architecture of Satan’s abyss.

A superb paddle back to the beach was had as the all tension and vertical concerns were now behind us!

This was a truly awesome adventure, I would just like to thank our hosts Satan and Neptune for their hospitality, and although we were never actually asked to part with our souls I do feel we aged 10 years in one particular memorable paddle stroke!

**FA Tormore Island VS 200m**

It was in the midst of a monsoon 7am on a Sunday morning that the troops gathered on the pier at Burtonport. Noble Brothers Alan Tees and Peter’s Cooper and McConnell sat in the gloom as the vertical rods from the black sky rained down. There was hope, the forecast was good. Cha Cha.. :-)

The object of our desires was the summit of the 150 metre unclimbed sea stack, Tormore Island, approx 20 NM south of our rain lashed pier. Two of the party had made several attempts at taming this beast previously, so by default the approach of choice today was to be by RIB. Our noble stead was being Captained by Paul Bathgate, a veteran of nautical misadventures along the Donegal coastline. Our noble stead it’s self was a 76 mph monster of a RIB and we were on our way.

Now I’m not sure if my fellow cohorts knew what to expect when I mentioned using this type of vessel for an attempt, but upon setting sail and Captain Bathgate opening the throttle a tad, the white knuckles and blank expressions from the troops spoke volumes. Exshellent Mish Moneypenny! We were having mucho fun and we were only 30 seconds into the adventure.

Ten minutes later we rounded the North end of Arran Island into quite atmospheric seas and for the next 40 minutes we got a nautical kicking! Words can’t describe the journey suffice to say it was emotional! :-)

As we arrived at Tormore it was under siege by legions of white horses, Neptune was furious! Our fearless/insane Captain navigated the channel separating the stack from the land, sensory overload had already been reached and breached as we entered the cauldron of angry white sea. Some pretty amazing boat handling skills left four wide eyed fools on a non-tidal ledge at the bottom of the landward face of Tormore Island. With a “See you at four” our boat and Captain screamed out of the channel and into the maelstrom!

And Lo, as ordered the rain stopped and the Sun came out. Happy Days :-) Let’s cane the beast we cried in unison.

The first 45 metre pitch was a V. Diff affair on superb quartz and growing atmosphere to an excellent block belay.

We were climbing caterpillar style, meaning as three met the next pitch is led while the fourth is ascending the last? Ehmm, kind of makes sense to me?

Anyways, as Brother Cooper came up, Brother Tees led off up the second pitch of slabby mixed ground to a lofty perch below the monstrous roofs.

Pitch three bypassed the roofs on the left and had a modicum of exposure as further mixed ground took us to a huge ledge and superb Peg Belay. Thankfully the discovery of this belay meant we could now deo get off this stack, a minor point of concern, which I had been pondering all morning! :-)

Two of the party had made several attempts at taming this beast previously…
McConnell powered up pitch 4, a vertical celebration of grass and mud. Oh and 2 rubbish runners in the first 30 metres, a rude awakening to stack world. The summit ridge was reached and a solitary block belay in an ocean of green was had. One by One we scrambled the last 20 metre grass ridge to a spectacular summit. No one said very much as savoured where we were. Simply Awesome!

Photos were taken and evidence of previous visitors sought, none found. Happy Days Indeed!! :-)

We made an abseil descent of our route, four forty-five metre abseils using the now in-situ peg belays, took us to the non tidal ledge to await our lift home.

Being last to ab, I arrived at the ledge to an ominous silence. The seas were now crashing green either side off the channel and every fourth wave threw thousands of tons of green on to the stack opposite us. This was absolutely awesome to watch, alas not so good for our travel arrangements, we had no sleeping bags!

“What do you think?” Asked Alan.

“Aw, it’ll be fine.” came my confident reply. Internally I considered us to be fucked, if you pardon my French.

For the next half hour we sat in quiet contemplation, and WHOOSH into the channel came our boat at 50 degrees to Port and riding a monster Greeny, full astern and Captain Bathgate and Crewman Mike Crowe got thrashed about in an astounding display of seamanship, our mighty vessel was getting an almighty kicking. Several passes of our ledge and the luggage was safely stowed. Then for the next 10 minutes the boat stayed in the centre of the cauldron riding the chaotic seas.

“RIGHT, I’M COMING IN AGAIN, I CAN’T SAY IN HERE ANY LONGER, GET IN!” came our orders from Captain B.

And in he came, a single nano second later we were all in the boat.

“THANK F**K FOR THAT!” our nautical maestro roared as we crashed through green to exit the channel and out onto the high seas.

Now that, Ladies and Gentlemen was a high end emotional exit from a stack.

The journey back to Burton Port was bumpy, but in full daylight and sunshine it was excellent sport! Half an hour later saw us in Sheltered water between Arran Mor and Burtonport and Captain B gave the beast full throttle, 60 mph + and we arrived in Burtonport Harbour, a bit like flying on a very, very low flying Plane.

And so, having discovered the rabbit hole does indeed exist in Western Donegal, it was time to discover how deep it really goes and so a journey of solo adventures commenced.

The commitment required and the sense of primal fear that accompanies these journeys has to experienced to be believed. As always, tad of logistics and planning is the key to success and of course the adoption of perhaps less orthodox climbing equipment such as 600m of 6mm polypro, a lightweight Lidl Dingy, a single lightweight paddle, divers booties, a 20ft Cordette, a pair of Speedo’s, heavy duty dry bags, 20m of 12mm polyprop, an alpine hammer, a snow bar, a selection of pegs, a chest harness/inverted Gri-Gri combo and a big Grin!

Whilst playing on the surf some of the more memorable moments have been paddling with Dolphins, Bull Selkies and a massive Basking Shark, all within 15 foot of my tiny Lidl Dingy up to a kilometre from land. Alas a moment of mild concern was had whilst taking a 60 foot screamer, landing in the sea and realising there was an angel standing at the base of the stack.

Standing on micro summits many, many Kilometres from anywhere deep in the knowledge that you are truly alone is the true embodiment of being the owner of Dynamic rope!

I have refrained from writing anything regarding the safety aspect to adventure climbing suffice to say it is a very dangerous activity and every time I go out to play, the rope work, boat work and planning that accompany these activities is extremely thorough and anal so as to ensure a maximum margin of safety.

I have developed a unique method of nautical access using non climbing equipment and techniques which would take many pages to describe and explain, so after nearly 100 top end adventurous days out without serious incident either I am extremely skilled, very lucky or have sold my soul to Neptune the jury is still out.

But the tale continues….
Donegal Malinbeg Meet

John Duignan

It's Donegal, it's Summer, there are no midgies, the only thing chilled is the atmosphere and the beer; it was a marvellous choice of weekend for a meet. It's great to see so many beginners pushing out the boat. Ken, leading VS in his first year is up before us all, has had a run on the beach, got the porridge on and is leppin' up and down to get onto the rock. Donal ?g with lovely smiling wife Margaret is in great form and delighted to be back after all the years since he last climbed here. I'm climbing with Hugh Reynolds who is on fire, chasing one desperate lead after another.

Malinbeg gives a great intro to sea-cliff climbing with the short steep friendly routes on Neptune Wall at the North End, with little tidal threat. Bosun's Ladder (S) and Hydrophobia (VS) are three-star routes with great gear placements.

Salmon Pink further on the crag proves as devious as it looks - a chop route with delicate and strenuous bridging with risk of a ground fall. It feels under-rated at VS. Calvin's Corner, a three-star Hard Severe, gives magnificent bridging fun.

Main West Wall, with its abseil approach and tidal aspect feels more serious. We sample four routes - all great. Lord of the Flies, a Hard Severe with high mantleshelf and great laybacking is a must-do. Flying Enterprise (half-way through some of the moves I am reminded of where its name comes from ...) at VS and Fiddler's Green at HVS are three-star routes that alone would have made the trip worthwhile.

Sail Rock is next up, beside the very impressive Slieve League. The approach is busy with hikers and tourists but as we gradually move down the scree away from the sunny slopes above, we sense how isolated Sail Rock is. The photo in the Donegal guidebook of this quartzite slab with its famous Main Mast put up by Doug Scott right up its centre is iconic. All that comes to mind now is the stern guidebook warning about this being "a very serious crag where waves can extend half-way up the face". The crumbly dry grass and loose rock on the spur approach mean we abseil in. The basin below is awe-inspiring with massive walls circling in an amphitheatre and the booming sound of the sea below.

Up close the steep rock falls back and we fight like schoolboys for the first lead. Roaring Forties is a three-pitch VS along the outer edge of Sail Rock.

Tony - Chief of the Meet
Hugh Reynolds on Paradises In the Picture House Skelponagh Bay
Hydrophobia on the friendly Neptune Wall
The climbing is superb. The belays give stunning views out to sea as far as Benbulben across the bay.

Small fishing boats pass by and break the sense of isolation. The final pitch is Hugh’s and is definitely one of the most memorable pitches I have ever climbed. The wind has battered and carved the rock.

Although at times fragile, we are entranced by the magical wind carvings on the rock appear like Ogham writing on the vertical wafer-like layers. The rock offers great friction.

The route is as memorable a day out as Dream of White Horses or Seventh Heaven or a day in Luggala - my highest level of praise.

Skelpoonagh Bay beckons on a laid-back Sunday. The sandstone looks very brittle. We come here to look at a two-star route Paradise in the Picture-house, a rising traverse over a zawn with waves crashing into a sea cave below it. Beside it a three-star route The Fruit Palace gets the following guidebook write-up: “a wild trip giving the most mind-blowing position for a route of its grade in the country” and “belay here after changing your underpants”. The two routes share the same start. The position is as it says on the tin but sadly the rock is brittle. I chose a V.Diff line beside the climb to enjoy the ambience.

As Hugh follows a hold breaks off. Hugh then calmly goes back down, traverses out over the zawn and powers up the line of the VS. This man has cojones. Later talking to Gerry Moss - Ireland’s expert on cliff climbing - he recalls an IMC climber being helicoptered out of the Bay unconscious after a head injury after a hold broke off. I let myself off a hiding for being such a wimp on this delicate sandstone.

On then to view Muckross Head. It is clear why it is such a popular venue for strong climbers; the horizontally striated firm sandstone offers some amazing lines and rises above a sunwarmed platform - great for young things to sun themselves on between climbs. Morning Glory, a taster Hard Severe, offers great gear placements and a fun twisting line through the overhangs.

The beach just down from Muckross is a great way of relaxing and clearing off the grime. Amazingly the water is warm and the views of Sail Rock and Slieve League on one side and as far as Sligo in the sunset make it hard to pull away from the trip back to Dublin.

The venue was great. The company excellent. The journey to the crags through a rural landscape from a time where everyone moved at a gentle pace in the sunshine and has time to chat and share a story.

**Donegal, Pride of All, we love ya!**

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_Hugh Laybacks - Lord of the Flies_
Sebastien Constant, a mountain guide from the Ecrins area has done a fine job in producing a new guide to the region - of which this is Volume 1, fine job in producing a mountain guide from the Ecrins area has done a

Not afraid to challenge the established grades (especially where retreating glaciers have led to longer rock pitches and more difficult approaches), he observes with regret the crowded nature of grading at the lower level, resulting in a lack of differentiation. Refusing to include routes that have fallen out of use and for which there is no up to date information he cites one route, historically Facile, which has not been climbed since 1970 and which now sports a 50m overhanging wall to start. OK, a bit extreme but it makes the point.

Complete with a variety of short personal anecdotal essays from friends and those who have contributed to climbing in this wonderful region of France the result is a guide that will be thumbed through and savoured for many years.

There are some quirky aspects. The focus in on routes of alpine scale and hence for example the Fournel valley, a winter ice-climbing Mecca, has only one route! And as the name of the volume should make clear, there are only snow and mixed routes, no pure rock routes. For those seeking a single comprehensive guide for the region this is a pity. Also, conditions under foot are not always described for Summer conditions.

The use of skis may be both a novelty and a challenge for those used to visiting the Alps only in Summer, but clearly this is a growing phenomenon with most of the easier snow ascents now being done more frequently in Spring on skis than in Summer e.g. the Dome de Neige des Ecrins. Skis can also make the approach to winter ice routes faster and more enjoyable.

Those who have already dipped into the world of ski-mountaineering will appreciate the opportunity this guide will provide to widen their horizons, though it is worth noting that the focus is on individual day routes and not the kind of multi-day excursions for which the Cercets and Queryas are justifiably recognised.

How many club members are active in the world of ski-mountaineering? Perhaps it is time to give this aspect of our sport a bit more focus? Skiing in the Alps has long since moved off-piste and with modern equipment making it easier to master the groomed slopes, skins and free heels are more and more in evidence.

For a fresh approach, not to mention the 344 routes and 188 photos, I recommend this guide.

Snow and Mixed Climbs
Ecrins East, Cercets and Queryas, Volume 1
by Sebastien Constant, 2009
(English version 2010)
Editions Constant35
The Odd Couple by Alan McDonagh. Spot Prize - Best Title. Photography Competition
Confirmed meets for the next month or so are as follows:

Thu 11 Nov ‘10 - Lecture by Helen Lawless
Helen Lawless, Access and Conservation Officer with Mountaineering Ireland will talk about her work.

Thu 18 Nov ‘10 AGM

Thu 25 Nov ‘10 - Presentation by Iain Miller
Iain estimates he has climbed about 60 sea stacks. I think most if not all in Donegal.

Thu 02 Dec ‘10 - Slide Show by Rafal Stachowicz
Rafal will show slides of his trekking in the Himalayas.

Volunteers Needed

Volunteers to do slide shows or talks during the Indoor Meets are needed. If you think that you can tell a tale to entertain your clubmates please contact the Meets Officer as soon as possible.
IMC Committee 2009 - 2010

Kieran Kelly

Gerry Galligan - gerry.galligan@googlemail.org

Joe Reville - secretary@irishmountaineeringclub.org

Lloyd Moore - treasurer@irishmountaineeringclub.org

Dave Madden - training@irishmountaineeringclub.org

Peter Wood - meets@irishmountaineeringclub.org

Barry Watts - publicity@irishmountaineeringclub.org

Tony Groves - huts@irishmountaineeringclub.org

Edwige Ducher - membership@irishmountaineeringclub.org

Aoife Grant - library@irishmountaineeringclub.org

Tony Barry - tony.barry@O2.ie

Eoin O'Neill - imc@eoinoneill.com
Howls of Laughter