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What was your favourite climb and why so?
What made it memorable?
The scenery, the difficulty, or the people you climbed with.
Or was it something completely different?
On page 4 Conor O'Connor give us an interesting insight into what made the earth move for him, and on page 5 Tony Barry tells us about what makes Carrot Ridge special for him.
Who says Mountaineering is not funny? With Gerry Moss around (page 14) it can be hilarious and with our book reviewer Tina Ennis reviewing the latest mountaineering bestseller, “The Shite Spider,” we can all take a good laugh at ourselves on page 13.
Meets! We have meet reports from Connemara on page 27 and on page 8 The meets team, Vanessa and Sinead meet the Alps. There can only be one winner there!
Meanwhile on page 19 one of the top contributors to the literary genius of the IMC, Ambrose Flynn, gives us his surreal take on a very special winter climb in Kerry.
Dave Madden gives us a great trip report from ice climbing in Norway on page 20.
Do you feel like deserve an award?
Why not go out and get one?
Rob Davies gives us all the info on mountain training awards on page 24.
Give him enough rope! On page 29 Willie Whelan explains all the things we weren’t really sure about ropes but were afraid to ask.
A big thanks to our regular contributor Angela Carlin from Gravity Climbing Centre who distills the combined climbing wisdom of the Gravity team in her ten top climbing tips (page 7).
Remember these, each one a nugget.
Our very own Cliona McCarty tells us about her adventurous ascent of Elbrus (5642m) in the western Caucasus mountain range last year(page 34).
Lastly I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the mountain rescue personnel who helped out with Joe in Wicklow last year, and also and in County Mayo last November when Geoff Rowden had his accident. Geoff’s two friends Tony and Dave remember him on page 31.
NOTE: This newsletter gives us just a small sample of the many activities that have been going on in the IMC over the last few months.
There have been more, including ice climbing, Scottish trips, sun rock trips, winter hikes, yoga/pilates, moonlight challenges, snow climbs in Wicklow and Kerry, indoor meets, indoor walls etc.
The testament to the fact that the IMC is a very active club is that I can’t keep up with it all!
Please help out by sending any info or articles on what you’ve been up to into me at: publicity@irishmountaineeringclub.org.
And don’t be shy!

Ian Christie
Now there’s a question or is it a statement? An interesting thought, what is “My favourite Climb”, should it extol the complexities of movement, technique and strength, a route that required training, focus and total concentration? I have climbed many memorable routes, most made equally memorable by the company kept and the achievement of success on the difficulties presented. That sense of having moved beyond your previous perceived capabilities, realising it was always possible, doubt merely being the guide to better preparation.

Each route as one progresses in climbing has its own unique memory, did I slip regaining composure in a controlled way to succeed positively to the finish? Did I fall several times before I came back and climbed from the bottom to the final hold with a gasp of “thanks be to God”?

Did it all come together in a blinding “Flash” of success and skill having waited that little bit for it to dry out?

In fact, like most of us, I have many favourite climbs; some I use to challenge myself, some for the fun and company of climbing with friends, many for pushing myself that little bit extra. One that is colourfully embedded in my mind is Mahjongg. A long time ago........... indulge me....... I was soloing around the quarry, a beautiful day, so the attraction to the west quarry and the retained heat of the rock brought many climbers to these routes. Mahjongg was free, levitation had a female climber, a club member, about a third of the way up, so I began the route intermittently chatting to her. Progressing over the overlap towards the borehole, free of the shackles of rope and accessories, movement was swift so proximity to a climber on Levitation is rapid. We continued to converse. As I moved out right to the stance we were neck and neck on our respective routes, I remained on the V stance. Glancing to my right I noticed, unavoidably I might add, that she was wearing quite a revealing top that resulted in what can only be described as a perfect view, of her bare breasts. Mesmerised by this visual delight, the gigabyte image embedded, I turned around to be met with the gravitational awareness of falling, I had of course completely forgotten where I was!

It is fascinating the way time appears to slow down to a frame by frame sensation in a fall. A pause initially when the first downward movement begins, acceleration, yet time for awareness of options and all the while the wonderful image flashing before my eyes, repeating it’s self. Sliding, facing out (remember, I did casually turn around) now moving rapidly I reached out to grab the gorse bush that used to reside near the start of the route with my right arm. Fortunately this last “straw” grasp sufficiently slowed my decent, flopping on the ground my only pain was the pins cushioned on the inside of my arm of gorse needles. Rapidly attended too by the climber (I averted my gaze – lesson learned.....!) I brushed myself off and placed the route into a special “favourite category” revisited both physically and mentally from time to time!

Conor O’Connor
My Favourite Climb is Carrot Ridge. I had to debate this with myself. I have loads of favourites. I usually decide this question by sitting on the fence and answering: Which ever climb or mountain I’m on at that particular time. For instance, if I was on Jug City that would be my favourite climb at that moment - Jug City would be a real contender, definitely the most dramatic VS I have been on.

Why Carrot Ridge? Firstly it means I am in Connemara in the Twelve Bens, one of my favourite places on the planet. I met my wife Mary on her first hill walk, the Glencoghan Horseshoe, which I happened to be leading, of course that’s a different story. Climbing Carrot Ridge means I am having a day out with great friends. I have climbed the Carrot with Frank Power, Debbie, Solvic, Ken Doyle, Benoit, amongst others; and a couple of weeks back with Jason Ahearne, Krzysztof Kozlowski and Frank Power again. The climb itself is not a huge undertaking but still demands respect, you can climb it in boots or rock shoes in the dry or a little damp. In the wet just wait for another day although it still is enjoyable, we just topped out a couple of weeks ago before getting an absolute deluge on hitting the scree descent.

Carrot Ridge is a sociable climb it gives time and space to get to know someone on the walk in, chat at belays, move together & to share tales with others afterward. It is an ideal route for honing mountaineering skills without being under great pressure.

As you climb the views get more stunning. Looking down, Glen Inagh is picturesque whatever the weather. As you top out you have one of the best views in this country or any other country for that matter, you are slap bang in the middle of the Bens, Maam Turks, Mweelrea, Maumtrasna and the Sheefreys to the north and the Atlantic to the west. It’s the view that automatically has you making plans for the next day, month or year ahead.

To make the best of a day out on Carrot Ridge it can only be improved by walking out over Bencollaghduff and over Ben Baun if you really want to max the day. & then back to Letterfrack for a bowl of chowder and a pint.

Tony Barry
Recent snowy weather provided the opportunity for a mixed group of apprentice and experienced backpackers to practice their winter skills.

On 18 January eight hikers set out from the IMC hut bound for camp on Mullaghcleevaun. There were some girls in the hut getting ready for a night out in the bright lights of Laragh but most of us passed up their offer of a pre-hike makeover.

We headed up the road to Wicklow Gap and then plodded up through the snow to Tonelagee. Tony tried to get us to practice our navigation skills from Tonelagee onwards, but his efforts were somewhat sabotaged as I had written the bearings on my map from a previous hike & called them out before anyone had taken out their compass.

By the light of a full moon we continued around the peat hags of Barnacullen where two lights spotted on the hillside proved to be two stray hikers, Vanessa and Declan, who had left the hut a bit later and caught up with us. More lights were then spotted but what appeared to be 30 hikers standing still on a hillside turned out to be a village. Below Barnacullen Oisin showed us how to navigate using sastrugi. The theory is that ripples in the snow will all be aligned in one direction according to the prevailing wind so if you take a compass bearing & check your orientation relative to the ridges you can then proceed without a compass & just stay at the same angle relative to the ripples.

We camped a little below Mullaghcleevaun in about six inches of snow. We then noted that if you have a tent which you haven’t put up before then Mullaghcleevaun on a winter night is perhaps not the best place to learn. On checking our equipment we saw that we had eight tents for ten people, one of them being a 4-6 person leisure centre carried by Oisin. One of the tents had a pole which was broken before the hike to save time, but our training officer then demonstrated how to break a tent pole by falling on it. Oisin sprang into action with some duct tape to patch up the pole. Tent pegs were easily lost in the snow but a walking pole buried horizontally provided a good replacement.

After tea a few of us headed to Oisin’s bar and conference centre. I had carried in a half litre of rum with mixers which was gulped down in a few minutes by four thirsty hikers. It was only about -5C at night but with a good breeze it felt a bit colder. Morning was bright and clear and we woke to a glorious sunrise with the tents wrapped in a blanket of snow as another couple of inches had fallen during the night. We hiked out directly over Barnacullen, an area normally best avoided but now the bog was frozen hard. Back at the hut it was evident that the girls had a rougher night than us, with sore heads all round.

Thanks to Tony for organising the hike and to Tony and Oisin for drinking the bar dry, thereby lightening my load for the walkout.
Gravity Climbing Tips - ANGELA CARLIN

For this issue we have put together 10 top tips from the Gravity team to help you improve your climbing.

1. “Broaden your horizons! Climb somewhere new and try climbs you haven’t done before” - Vicki

2. “Work your weaknesses- try to become a good all-rounder” - Claire

3. “Remember to keep your hips in to the wall- keeping your centre of gravity close will allow you to transfer a lot of weight onto your feet, saving energy in your arms!” - Juan

4. “Have a plan for every session you do; having something to focus on will really help you to make the most of your time at the wall. Also, having a plan for what you will work on will allow you to warm up appropriately for your session.” - Claire

5. “Look at your feet! Keep your eyes on your feet until they are properly placed on the footholds, many people look away too soon and as a result don’t get their feet onto the best part of the foothold” - Claire

6. “Use your warm up as a chance to really focus on technique and assess how you are climbing. Try to climb perfectly- with smooth, flowing movements and good footwork. If you practice climbing like this it becomes an ingrained habit and you will climb well, even when you are close to your limit. If you practice poor technique that will also become ingrained!” - Angela

7. “Balance, Balance, Balance!” - Terry

8. “Practise climbing with silent feet, placing your feet gently and accurately on the holds every time. Precise footwork is so important” - Liam

9. “Climbing with people who have a positive attitude is a huge help. Find a partner who encourages you and gives you confidence. Try to second someone who climbs a grade or two harder than you- pay attention to how they place gear and where they find rests- this can be a big help in progressing to the next grade” - Vicki

10. “Be open to trying things that are hard and don’t rule out the possibility that you might be able to do them. If you get on and have a go you may surprise yourself but if you never try, you’ll never know! Apply this logic to everything- harder grades, dynamic moves, different types of climbing, (but apply it carefully to run-out trad routes!)” - Angela
With the objective of summiting Mt Blanc, Vanessa and I booked the ‘Mt Blanc ascent – 6 day course’ through ‘Mountain Spirit’. Dougal Tavener, an IFMGA Mountain Guide, originally from North Wales, and a hugely talented guy was our Mountain Guide. Little did he know what he was letting himself in for.... 6 days with us two!!!! ‘Proper Cat 5’; a term mountaineers use to describe an extremely difficult climb, and a phrase adapted to describe a ‘difficult’ woman, was our first signature

1. ‘John Wayne walk’
So our first day involved testing out our new crampons and ice axes. We took the Grand Montets cable car to the glacier, strapped on our shining spikes, and roped up before practicing our ‘John Wayne walk’. We practiced handling our ice axes while trekking up to the base of our first challenge.....Petite Aiguille Verte. Rock climbing in crampons was very new to us. This ascent was not one of elegance and grace but a really enjoyable and achievable climb. Resting in the sunshine with large smiles on our faces, we enjoyed our lunch on the summit (3512m) while admiring a 360° view of the surrounding mountains and glaciers, including Les Drus, the Grands Montets Ridge and the impressive Aiguille Verte to the South.

2. Pte Lachenal
On day 2 we took the Aiguille du Midi cable car, geared up in the narrow tunnel before stepping out onto a small busy ledge to see our destination. Vanessa led the trek that commenced with an extremely narrow ridge with steep drop-offs at both sides. No disco legs just heightened senses.
We moved carefully and veered right onto the Valley Blanche which allowed us spectacular views, including the Cosmique Hut, where we would be staying that night. While trekking down we were greeted by mountaineers, literally slogging it at a snails pace, making their way back up to the cable car after what must have been an exhausting adventure by the looks on their faces. Dougal directed us to step off the trail to allow these poor bodies to pass....one of the many unwritten rules of the mountains. After an enjoyable trek across the flat glacier to the base of the Pointe Lachenal Traverse, and after a slightly more graceful climb in our crampons we took in the impressive views of Dent de Geant (giant tooth) and the Grande Jorrasses. After more scrambling and abseiling down, we then trekked across the glacier to the foot of the mountain supporting the Cosmique hut and climbed/scrambled to the back entrance. There we relaxed in the sun while admiring a close view of Mt Blanc from the decking; our aim later that week! After a very tasty three course meal, Vanessa taught us all how to play ‘Spit’ and even negotiated the language barriers with two Italians.

3. Early Ascent
Due to forecasted weather deterioration, our planned date to challenge Mt Blanc was going be too dangerous so Dougal advised an earlier attempt. We set off at 5am the next morning and made the journey back down to the campsite with the aim to rest. For those who enjoy their simple pleasures in life, there is this lovely hotel with a spa/pool in short walking distance from the campsite called the Aiglon, which we thought was a very nice way to prepare.

We made our way back to the Cosmique hut early that evening and heads hit pillows by 8pm after a tasty meal and a few games of ‘spit’. Apart from the mountaineering experience we gained, another aspect of this holiday that charmed us, was some of the people we got to meet. Captured attentions as they told some of their stories and dents in memories made. One such person was a 56 year old German lady named Gerda Pauler, who we met this night. Not only was she about to challenge Mt Blanc, this summit was to be the 7th and final summit she would climb on this particular expedition. Along with successfully summiting the other six largest mountains in the countries of the Alps to raise awareness and money for autism, Gerda also cycled from one country to the next. Impressively!
4. Summiting
We quickly learned that ear plugs are a necessity when sharing a room with another 15 other bodies. We rose at 12.45am after what I would describe as a brief siesta. We were first to leave the Cosmique hut by 1.30am. Dougal was well impressed with us girls and reported it was a first for him. It took us 5.5 hours to reach the summit. Being night time we did not get to fully appreciate our journey but this didn’t dampen our excitement and motivation. We crossed crevasses and by seracs. On the top of Mt Maudit, we completed a two-pitch ice climb of approximately 60° following Dougal, who climbed ahead to safely secure us from above. This was a super thrilling experience. Apart from being our first time experience ice climbing, it was dark and we felt like we were on the biggest adventure of our lives. Vanessa and I just laughed the whole time, due to a concoction of nerves and excitement. After a long last haul we reached the summit for a stunning sunrise at 7am. Poor Vanessa felt nauseous for the last while but pushed on. I was lucky in that the altitude didn’t inflict that on me.... I was the only one who didn’t lose my appetite, so as usual I was always looking forward to my next snack. On top we were greeted by dramatic and spectacular views of sun kissed mountain tops peeking out above clouds, images cameras cannot capture or do justice....It felt surreal at this stage, but if we thought we were going to sit back, enjoy a snack while letting this moment sink in, we were wrong. Dougal was eager to get us off this mountain as quickly as possible, as safety was his goal.

A 5 hour return journey, this time in daylight, allowed us the opportunity to visually recognize that we achieved our goal. Pushing forward we got to examine our route more carefully, including the crevasses and seracs. Arriving at the top of Mt Maudit, with the wind strengthening, we skipped a small cue who were not yet organised to descend. Dougal swiftly assembled and lowered us one closely after the other, before quickly climbing down solo himself. In an instance we were at the bottom of a route that we recalled took a lot of energy to climb. Placing full trust in someone you barely know at times like these warrants acknowledgement. Dougal’s enthusiasm and passion for the mountain’s made it all such fun, whilst his depth of knowledge made it highly educational, but it was his competence, and high levels of training and sensible approach to risk-taking, that allowed us to experience these excitements and thrills safely.

XXXL Burgers
Remember those exhausted looking mountaineers we mentioned before? Well it was our turn. That last haul back up the ridge to the Aiguille du Midi cable car was horribly demanding.....Jelly legs and a narrow ridge up ahead; ‘a proper cat 5’. We passed all the enthusiastic adventurers coming down and this time they politely stepped off the trail and found words of encouragement for us. The effort of trying to return a smile and a ‘Merci’ was even wearing at this stage. So
when we reached base Dougal brought us directly to a bar called ‘Elevation’ and we all over-indulged in the XXXL Burger; gluttony at its best and we finished every crumb along with numerous glasses of celebratory red wine. Delicious and definitely worth the visit!! Actually we took quite a liking to these burgers and became regulars.

Rest day
As a rest day we went sport climbing in Servoz with Dougal. Servoz is a lovely multi-pitch sport climbing Craig a short drive outside of Chamonix. It was raining and this Craig provided shelter and an escape from the valley’s rain. We got to experiment with our climbing, attempt an E grade, learn some new techniques and all in the comfort of top ropes and a bolted wall. We also spent time learning how to rope up for glacier walking, tie knots and a crevasse rescue. As tomorrow was our last day with Dougal, we got to pick what tomorrow’s activity. After a taste of ice climbing on Mt Maudit it was easy to decide what to do.

Ice-climbing
We enjoyed a train journey up to Mer de Glace, which is the longest glacier in France. We climbed down approximately 200m of steep ladders before stepping onto the glacier. After a short picturesque trek, we stepped up near the edge of an enormous deep crevasse. After setting up anchor and demonstrating using the gear he supplied, Dougal lowered us about 20-25m from where we got to test out our new techniques climbing out of the crevasse. ‘Proper cat 5’ was replaced with "chicks with picks". Ice climbing was such a thrilling experience, a definite prioritised ‘to do’ on our long ‘bucket list’ of planned adventures. Once lowered, all we could see were vertical drops of sequenced ice with the noise of an aggressive flowing glacier river beneath. This really added to the excitement, being so deep in a crevasse with no one in sight or hearing distance, just a ledge up above to get over. I must admit a few moments of disco legs, a wild imagination and a few words with me, myself and I, to get real and start climbing. It was such a feeling mastering the technique and reaching the top, only to be lowered again and again!! Ice climbing kicked Mt Blanc’s ass for thrills and excitement. On climbing out of the crevasse for the last time, Vanessa announced her plan to buy ice axes and climb in her freezer if she had to. Celebratory XXXL Burgers again that evening.
Replacing Dougal
That wasn’t the end of our adventures. Chamonix has such a wealth of adventures that people from all levels of abilities can indulge in. One day we got the bus to De la Flégère (2335m), took the lift to 2550m, trekked to, climbed/scrambled up and traversed across the ridge of Aiguille Crochues, approx 2800m. Steve Bowker, a really experienced climber who we befriended in the Les Arolles’ campsite led us on this outing. Camping in Chamonix is a great place for meeting people with similar interests and there always seemed to be an abundance of people willing to share their experiences and knowledge.

A freezing bath
One day we took the bus to Argentière (1252m) and took a very beautiful scenic ascending hike to Lac Blanc (2352m). There we swam in the glacier lake (seriously freeeeeeezzzzzzing:-)). Needless to say we were the only two idiots who braved the icy cold waters. I think I lasted a total of two 45 second dips, while Vanessa, as Vanessa does, decided to swim to the other side of the lake so she could touch the snow beach, and was awarded with applause from the onlookers. We then treated ourselves with a large slice of the famous blueberry tart at the restaurant, before napping on a rock by the lake under the sun for a few hours.

Going solo
We spent another few days sport climbing in the Les Gaillands areas, which offered a large range of single and multi pitched climbs for all levels. Les Gaillands was only a 20 minute walk from our campsite and less of a walk into Chamonix. Here we really got to experiment and strengthen our climbing techniques, along with building our confidence. Debbie Murray, an IMC member also holidaying in Chamonix with us, was generous with her time, advising us on what equipment to buy, teaching us new climbing techniques and sharing her equipment which allowed us to set our eyes on a bigger independent target. She also helped us indulge in many XXXL burgers and jugs of wine over the time we all spent in Chamonix.

We took two lifts to Le Brevent (2525m) and headed out to do our very first Multi-pitch climb of 7 sections just as a pair. It went really well; apart from a few cut fingers we completed our task with Vanessa leading. XXXL burger again that evening

Another day we took the Aiguille Du Midi lift, roped up and went on our first independent trek across the glacier. As a reward we took the lift from Aiguille Du Midi across to Hel Bronner which allowed a stunning view of the surrounding mountains and glaciers. You get to sit back and really take in the scenery, while truly appreciating the size of the seracs and crevasses from above. Vanessa decided to finish her holiday with a paraglide, another nerve thrilling way of seeing what Chamonix and has to offer.

Chamonix left both of us with urges to return again with greater and bigger targets. Vanessa came home highly motivated to continue enhancing her leading skills, while I felt ready to tackle Yorkshire Pudding as my first lead, and we both have achieved so much more since.
A classic account of the $hi*e Spider’s East Coast ascent to Full IMC Membership
This is the long overdue sequel to his terrifyingly tedious debut novel, “Seven Years in Dalkey”.

Having survived such drawn-out episodes as “A pitch too long on Diphthong” and “Phantom FM”
the $hi*e Spider has again put pen to paper trading near adventure for yet another book deal.

The chapter “Escape from Kevin’s Bed” is a no holds barred, graphic account of the Winter Meet Traverse. Learn how the team were tempted to leave the $hi*e Spider dangling, unprotected and exposed to the unknown delights which awaited in Kevin’s bed. Read how, through Exit Crack, the journey took a rope-grabbing turn and a close encounter with a native and rarely seen reigning-deer.

Death Bivouac relates the legendary tale of a narrow escape through an even narrower window before the $hi*e Spider embarked on an epic night crossing of the Ice Field to rendezvous at advanced-navigation-team base camp.

Names have been changed to avoid further embarrassment. Events have been greatly exaggerated and have gained urban myth status and therefore their details may no longer be considered historically accurate.

Praise for The $hi*e Spider:

“A gripping account of one of Ireland’s greatest mountaineers and his awe-inspiring escapades. He’s a psycho.” Randy Croagh-Patrick

“A hauntingly great tall tale.” Joe Simpleton
Down on the sea cliffs at Ardmore Head it was a normal kind of Ardmore day: blue skies, bright sunshine, warm rock and the sea gently lapping at the base of the cliffs, while other parts of the country contended with a cold and blustery northwest wind and frequent showers. Perfect conditions for climbing, but I wasn’t there to climb - a temporary shortage of climbing partners had seen to that. Nor was I on a sightseeing trip either. There was work to be done.

A few weeks earlier I had climbed a long, steep corner that had been beckoning to me since the first day I came across the sea cliffs at Ardmore.

Situated at the back of a narrow inlet, the route, Sliabh Geal Ghua, was nicely sustained and it had kept me on my toes (literally as well as figuratively) all the way, until a little below the top. Here I encountered some loose and unstable blocks - this route, as with all the others at Ardmore, was being done on sight, ground up - so there was always the possibility of a bit of unexpected excitement. There was no possibility of dislodging the blocks as they were directly above the rope and, come to think of it, directly above my second, too. So I sneaked off to the left and set up a belay to one side. Then we scrambled up steep vegetated slopes to safety.

My mission today was to ab down and remove the offending blocks so that a direct finish could be made. I had brought two metal stakes for anchors, but had difficulty in finding satisfactory placements directly above the route and had to settle for a spot well back from the top of the cliff. This meant that the run-out from the anchors to the base of the climb was nearly 45 meters, too long to allow using the rope doubled so, after tying one end off at the anchors, I abbed on a single line, carrying two thirds of the rope in shoulder coils, plus a bag containing an old ice axe, peg hammer, brush and scraper.

The blocks came away easily enough, confirming my decision not to trust them but, as expected, they left a lot of dust and dirt in their wake, so I set about giving that section of the route a good brushing. Finding the coils of rope around my shoulders hindered me, I undid them and lowered the end down until it rested on a large flat boulder at the foot of the climb.

As I worked away, I heard a voice ask, in piping tones, "What’s that man doing, Jamie?" and realised I had some company. Two red-headed youngsters, obviously brothers, had found their way down onto the platform that overlooks the climb from the side, which we use as Basecamp and, having located a comfortable ledge, were sitting watching my movements with close interest. It was unusual to see any of the locals down at the cliffs and I must admit it was rather flattering to be the object of such undivided attention.

"What’s he doing, Jamie?" the youngest one asked again, with all the innate curiosity and innocent inquisitiveness that is the endearing hallmark of small children everywhere. "I dunno" was the grunted response. Obviously, Jamie, like elder brothers everywhere, had perfected the art of fobbing off his younger brother.
I was so engrossed in my work that I failed to notice that the tide was coming in. Having satisfied myself that the offending detritus had been removed, I loosened my prussik in order to descend, but found I was unable to slide down the rope - it was as taut as a piano wire. I checked below me and found, to my annoyance, that a rogue wave had sucked the end of the rope off the boulder upon which it was resting and carried into a cavity underneath.

All efforts to release the rope proved ineffective and, as it was brand new, having been used only once before, I was anxious to get down quickly to rescue it before the tide came in any further. But, despite undoing my prussik completely, I was stuck fast. By a process of trial and error I found that I could make some progress by stretching down as far as I could, grabbing the rope at my feet and hauling on it. The elasticity in the rope allowed some slack to be gained and I was thus able to slide down a little at a time. It was hard, back-breaking work, eliciting much grunting on my part and a baffled "What's he doing NOW Jamie?" from the inquisitive little rascal over the way.

It got worse. As I made slow, but steady, progress down the rope the amount of give became smaller and smaller, necessitating more and more effort. In order to get the maximum amount of slack I had to bend double, bringing my head right down as far as the belay plate, while reaching as low down along the rope as possible. That's when it happened. With the side of my head resting on the belay plate, I took a firm grip on the rope below and hauled. As I slid down a few centimetres a tuft of hair from behind my ear was drawn into the plate and I was trapped. Now, what's the odds on that occurring to a bald old coot like me? Unbelievable.

The route was slightly overhanging at this point, so now I found myself dangling in space, several feet out from the rock, gyrating slowly, while doubled in two, with my head twisted to one side, held fast by a lock of hair. At this stage, though the pain in my back was excruciating, it was as nothing compared to the sharp crick in my neck. To make matters worse, as I slowly wheeled around, I could see, out of the corner of one eye, the two eager-beavers taking everything in, and
I could hear, with one ear, the oft-repeated query from the mystified little urchin - “What’s he doing NOW, Jamie?” And the grunted response, ”I dunno, I think he’s listening for something”.

I tried snapping my head backwards, but there was absolutely no give. So I locked my two feet around the rope, closed my eyes, gritted my teeth and strained my head upwards as hard as I could. At first there was no result but then there was a slow, tearing sound, accompanied by a slow, searing pain and a quick, sharp yelp, and I was free again. All of this drama brought the by-now standard response from the ever-curious little cub on the side-lines and even as I brushed the tears from my eyes I could hear him imploring "What’s he doing NOW, Jamie?"

So, under the watchful and critical eyes of the two onlookers, I slowly made my way down the rope until, by sitting on the boulder, which was now completely awash, I managed to unclip from the belay plate. Looking down, I could see where the tail end of the rope had disappeared into a small cave beneath the boulder. Some tugging, from a kneeling position, proved fruitless and convinced me that I would have to go down and squirm my way into the cave if I was to have any hope of releasing it.

I dropped down off the boulder into the chest-deep water, took a deep breath, submerged and cautiously inserted my head into the narrow, dark opening. Next moment a strong incoming wave hit me in the butt and I was propelled rapidly forward, whacking my helmeted head off the back wall of the cave. It was pretty dark in there, and the water was teeming with grains of sand, bits of seashells and strands of seaweed, but I could dimly discern where the rope had wrapped itself several times around a small boulder. I tugged and pulled at the coils without effect and then had to hang onto them for dear life as the retreating wave tried its best to suck me out and carry me away. I emerged with lungs gasping for air, coughing, spluttering and wheezing, head buzzing and chest heaving, hanging grimly to the rope. And through all of this there came, clear as a bell, the petulant query of the little brat up above: “What’s he doing NOW, Jamie?” At this stage his incessant questioning was beginning to get under my skin, so it was enough to send me back, post haste, into the black hole of Calcutta. Again without success.

By this stage I was convinced that there was only one thing for it. I would have to cut the rope, using my old ice-axe. The axe was a MacInnes Terrordactyl, the cutting edge of ice-climbing technology back in the early seventies, at which time it had served me well but, with a sharply drooped adze and blunt after many years of use as a gardening tool, it was highly unsuitable for chopping recalcitrant ropes.
Kneeling on the boulder, I timed my attack to coincide with the brief periods when the waves were retreating, raining a flurry of blows at the point where the rope lay against the rock. It was hard, frustrating work. The rope was soft and immersed at all times in water, my aim was not always what it should be and, to cap it all, through all the hustle and bustle I could hear the sharp keening voice of the little cur up above still beseeching his brother to tell him what I was doing now. Unbelievable.

By now his unrelenting repetition of the same question was driving me nuts: it bored into my head, echoing around and around in my brain, to the extent that I found myself snarling it over and over through gritted teeth in time with the swinging of the axe, like so: WHAT'S-HE-DO-ING-NOW-JAM-IE and I wished, albeit briefly, that I had the snotty-nosed little fecker's head on the block in front of me where he would bloody soon find out what I was at.

For a while it was touch and go as to whether me or the rope would be first to give up the ghost, but it yielded at last. Holding the frayed, ragged end of my new rope I reflected sadly on the unfairness of it all and wondered how it had come to this.

With a heavy heart I jumped off the boulder and staggered unsteadily across the inlet towards the slab on the opposite side, being pushed and pulled by the alternate advance and retreat of the waves. The slab, though at a gentle angle, was covered in seaweed for the first couple of meters, but there were holds of sorts, so I pulled up gingerly and was just out of danger when my fingers slipped and I did a spectacular backward flip and disappeared beneath the waves.

I regained my feet in a blind rage, cursing Ardmore, Waterford, the whole of Munster and everyone therein. And did my sudden submergence elicit the familiar response from the little wretch up above? Can a duck swim? Is water wet? Are all small, nosey brats the pits?

I took hold of my axe and, in a wet form of dry tooling, smashed the pick into a crack as high up as I could stretch, pulled up on the shaft and reached up to dry rock and safety.

Out of danger now, I suddenly realised how exhausted I was, as I scrambled slowly up the slab, and even more slowly up the steep boulders to reach basecamp. Avoiding any eye contact with the two upstarts, I squelched across to the nearest ledge and plonked myself down. Completely knackered. Totally, utterly banjaxed. I sat there, elbows on my knees, head in my hands, coughing, wheezing, gagging, hawking up dollops of seawater, while water seeped out from beneath my helmet, from my eyes, ears and nose, as well as from every stitch of clothing. And if I was feeling pretty sorry for myself it was because I sensed that I wasn’t out of the woods yet.

Without raising my head, I cautiously half-opened one eye and confirmed the worst. Two pair of feet shuffling impatiently in front of me, waiting for the inquisition to begin.
Unbelievable. What did I do to deserve this, and where did these kids get off, with this blatant harassment of their elders and betters? What’s the world coming to? I blame the parents.

I eventually raised my head and fixed them with a watery gaze. But there was nothing watery about the way the eldest lad was looking at me: he eyed me up and down with open contempt. He spoke first and his contribution, though mercifully short, was brutally frank.

"When the 'Sampson” was shipwrecked at the bottom of the cliffs over there, my Dad climbed down to it, and he didn’t use no ropes or nothin”, he scoffed with disdain.

Nice one, just the sort of thing I needed to hear and me bent double under an assortment of paraphernalia. As if I gave a tinker’s curse about him, his poxy Da’s heroics, or some crummy old rust bucket of a shipwreck. Feeling pretty wrecked myself I tried to come up with a suitable response but, before I could do so, he was elbowed out of the way and the little lad planted himself four-square in front of me, legs wide apart, hands on the hips, big, blue eyes jumping out of his head with eager anticipation. No prizes for guessing what was top of this guy’s agenda. The arrogant little swine. Where does Ardmore get them from?

"Mister” he demanded, as he jabbed his finger in the direction of the route, "what were you doing down there?"

Try as I might, I couldn’t supress a groan. Then, leaning forward, I beckoned him closer and placed a limp, wet hand on his shoulder.

"Your guess is as good as mine, son", I whispered hoarsely, “because, to tell the truth, I haven’t a bloody clue”.

That stopped him in his tracks!

**Postscript.**

I returned a couple of weeks later, timing my visit to coincide with a period of low tides, climbed the route in its entirety and, what’s more, retrieved the tail end of my rope. I brought it home, washed it thoroughly and hung it up in the shed, where it remained for years. I took it along on the Joe Reville meet to Ireland’s Eye last September and used it to back up the in-situ tat on the abseil anchor above the North Col. It did its job admirably and is still up there, surrounded on all sides by the sea, yet safely out of reach of the restless waves. Which is rather fitting, don’t you think?
On a Wednesday eve tales of ‘fat’ ice and good snow conditions leaked from Facebook like gold seeping from a faint rainbow. Electronic whispers of fact, painted by Piaras Kelly, using broad strokes of white, orange, brown and black seeped out into a selective consciousness. But alas winter conditions are fickle in Ireland and the West continued to be pounded by low pressure systems of the mild variety. On Friday night I sent an SOS to Piaras expecting nothing in return, but a message ping’d backed immediately, ‘Yeah, we’re heading out in the morning.’ Arriving at the Kelly household shortly after 9am the Reeks Ridges encouraged optimism. Mick Donnelly arrived and the pilgrimage began. The walk in through the Hag’s Glen was flanked with snow-capped ridges, towering cumulonimbus clouds casting dramatic shadows and Corran Tuathail wearing a white formal gown ready for the ball.

We moved past the almost bare Howling and Primroses then onto the second level passing The Lick, an uber classic ice climb taking an impressive line. But Jack was nowhere to be seen as water ran down the face. Moving on through the Gap and into the entrance to Curve Gully our winter pilgrimage began. The snow, ice and turf were not perfect but provided good axe placements and the opportunity to create lots of fun. We donned our crampons, left the rope in the bag and started up the gully, each axe finding good purchase. A little under half way up we decided to spice things up by moving onto the steeper left hand wall, picking out pockets of small buttresses and ice above ample exposure. Axes hooking and torqued in cracks, front points balancing on smears as weight is momentarily transferred to the axes, everything narrows and time slows.

The movement without ropes, harness, gear and partner in good conditions is absolutely wonderful, like a fluid life affirming dance on a bizarre windless and silent North face. Occasionally stopping to take in the spectacle and see each other beaming with delight. These days are special and rare.

Moving higher all becomes monotone, the silence deepens and the cloud contains an almost tangible sense of peace and fulfilment. Reaching the Cross the Sun is a burning, fierce pin hole trying to break through. There is only one thing to do - to do it again. We move down toward Beenkeragh Ridge and descend via Central Gully, a mixture of down climbing and glissading. On reaching the bottom there is less talking this time, just sheer enjoyment and silent fluid movement. Tomorrow the rain will come.

Winter climbing in Ireland is a fickle tale of nearly but not quite or being too late. But sometimes, just sometimes it all comes together with the best of people in amazing places to create a memory that becomes distinct.
Successful Ice climbing trip to a beautiful part of central Norway.

In February a number of members of the IMC made the journey to central Norway in search of some quality ice climbing away from the crowds. Earlier plans to travel to Setesdal in southern Norway were quickly abandoned due to the unseasonably high temperatures in the early part of the winter. Plan B was hatched sometime after Xmas. Hemsedal, an area I had researched a number of years ago looked like it would probably provide more reliable ice conditions being a good bit further north and at a much higher elevation than the Setesdal valley. At five and a half hours drive from Oslo Torp Hemsedal valley is also reachable in a day’s travel from Dublin.

Hemsedal is a popular ski destination with local Norwegians and has two ski-centres, one in Hemsedal village and one in Solheisen about twenty minutes’ drive further up the Grondal valley. Perhaps less well known is the fact that it is one of the first areas in Norway were ice climbing started and contains a full spread of venues from roadside single pitch crags through to serious multi-pitch routes. There are also long mountain routes and mixed climbs with grades from M4 all the way up to M9. Hemsedal hosted the 2006 ice climbing World Cup and has received visits from the usual ice climbing glitteratzi including Will Gaad, Ines Papert etc. Information is fairly sparse on the Internet and I was forced to shelve out a pricey €40 for the Ice climbing guide to the area. “Pricey” is unfortunately a recurring word where most everything in Norway is concerned.
On awaking the morning after a very late arrival we found that our cabin was ideally situated for ice climbing – half way up the ski piste! The fact that the ski lift was 15 yards from our door and the hire shop 10 yards was to be a magnet that was too strong to be ignored all week. The setting was absolutely idyllic with pristine snow conditions, empty lifts and seemingly no-one around. After sorting ourselves out we headed out to a cragging venue Rjukandefoss – not to be confused with the more well-known ice climbing town. A five minute walk from the road saw us pop into a mini-gorge somewhat reminiscent of Krokan in Rjukan. Steep ice pillars and one or two nice mixed climbs had my eyes out on stalks. The belays were all bolted and top ropes could also be rigged by simply scrambling around the top of the crag. What followed was a frantic blast of several hours of top-roping and leading from a team who were conscious of making up for 2 years lost time; and in the case of Dave Keogh – starting completely from scratch. We led WI4 and M5 routes but left some of the steeper pillars to the top ropes. My technique was certainly a bit rusty and I was grateful for this excellent “warm-up” venue.

Day two had multi-pitch written all over it. There was a serious amount of snow in the valley so a lot of the remote routes were going to be avalanche prone and time consuming to get into. After consulting the guidebook we opted for the WI4 multi-pitch classic of the valley, “Haugfossen”. Finding the parking spot was straightforward enough, despite the attempts of Dave Trunk’s Garmin Satnav lady who was making her best efforts to get us stranded. Snowshoes were donned, apart from Dave Keogh whose cunning plan of hanging around at the back was to pay off dividends. The walk-in had fantastic views down the valley and over the village. The route itself was a peach, wide enough to accommodate two or three teams and providing steep WI4 climbing on good ice. Dave Trunk and I choose a line on the left while Cearbhall Daly and Dave Keogh opted to stay on the right side, well away from me which was a good idea, considering some of the dinner-plates I was unleashing. The route was completed in two pitches which was just as well considering we had managed to leave half our ice screws back in the cabin.

The next day we decided to head to Golsjuvet about 25km back down the valley. This is Hemsedal’s top ice cragging location with a host of stiff ice and hard mixed single pitch routes. After arriving
and viewing the gorge I was certainly pretty glad we hadn’t come here on the first day! We met up with Barbara, Chris and Flo who had also come out from Dublin for the week. We led some more WI4 and then followed Chris Re up a nice sustained pitch of WI5. Dave and I crossed the river and headed further down the gorge where we lead another two short pitches, one of them weaving its way left around a tricky overhang. We also met Leslie Ayres, an English guide who has been living in Norway for 30 years and is one of the earliest pioneers of ice climbing in Hemsedal.

For the third day’s entertainment Leslie pointed us in the direction of Torsetfossen - another multi pitch climb with a reasonable approach. Or so we thought. The description of the “short” approach lulled us into a false sense of security and we left the car without our snowshoes and the map, both of which we were to regret leaving behind. We could see the climb and got to within 50 metres after wading through snow up to chest high in places but our path was eventually barred by a nasty gully on one side and impenetrable woodland on the other. We had clearly missed the correct approach! We arrived back at the car wrecked but still with a few hours daylight left. So on the way home we dropped back into Rjukandefoss for another few laps on the pillars.
With heavy snowfall overnight and more expected the next day we decided we would give the skiing a run. Not content with learning ice climbing on one trip Dave Keogh was soon also receiving his first day’s skiing tuition from the rest of the team. What else could we throw at him? Our ski pass covered both ski areas so we spent the morning in Solheisen and the afternoon in Hemsedal. Possible the toughest assignment of the week was enduring the local Norwegian country and western singer at the après-ski bar. We didn't hang around long- and we certainly didn't buy any drinks. Always remember to buy your drink duty-free when you arrive in Oslo!!The final day presented an interesting choice. Should we delve into the depths of the Norwegian countryside in the search for a route that may or may not be in? In the end we opted to return to Haugfossen where Trunk and I tackled a new line, “Indre Haugfoss” WI4+, a cracker of a route that was the highlight of my week. Dave Keogh was on a roll and under the careful tutelage of Cearbhall he led a line up the right side of Haugfossen at WI4, an impressive achievement after four days ice climbing.

In summary this was a great trip. Hemsedal doesn't have the depth and variety of ice routes on offer at Rjukan but it more than makes up for it in terms of scenery and the quality of the climbing. I found the grades to be a bit stiffer than Rjukan but some of that may have been due to the overall lean ice conditions. If less snow is around or during early season (from October some years) the scope for long mountain routes and mixed climbs is huge. In general 2014 has been a poor year for ice in Norway – many of the multi-pitch routes in Hemsedal were not in condition but there was still plenty to do. The area receives more than the average snowfall for Norway so certainly snowshoes are a must-have in my opinion. If we had longer the next valley Laerdal, 1 ½ hours’ drive away, reportedly has some classic long multi-pitch routes although being slightly closer to the Fjords it’s probably less reliable. One for next year perhaps . . .

Dave Madden

Guidebook: Hemsedal Ice – Bjorn Kruse and Jurgen Amot

Web: http://np.netpublicator.com/netpublication/n61274165
     http://np.netpublicator.com/netpublication/n53614229
     http://home.online.no/~pest/HTLferrer.htm
Thanks to Rob Davies for a round up of the various mountain training awards available in Ireland.

All NGB Mountain Training awards follow a flow of first gaining some experience in the discipline and then once you have some basic experience you can attend a training course. After completion of this course there is a consolidation period where you practice what you have learnt and work with peers and others more experienced to gain further knowledge and cement the skills acquired at training. You can then attend an assessment course where there are 3 possible outcomes.

Pass: where satisfactory knowledge and application of the syllabus and the necessary experience and attributes were demonstrated

Defer: where the performance was generally up to standard but complete proficiency was not attained in some aspects of the syllabus. Some form of reassessment will be required.

Fail: where the performance has been generally weak, or the necessary experience and attributes have not been shown. Further training may be recommended before another complete assessment is taken.

The following is a diagrammatic flow for the SPA scheme:
LIST OF NGB COURSES AND THEIR REMITS

Mountain Skills (MS1, MS2, MSA)
The mountain skills scheme is a personal proficiency award that gives training to individuals who wish to be self-sufficient in the mountains. MS1 covers basic navigation and associated skills. MS2 cover more advanced navigation and movement on steep terrain. MSA is an optional assessment, which includes night navigation. MSA is a pre requisite for attending ML training.

Climbing Wall Award (CWA)
This award qualification trains and assesses candidates in the skills required to supervise climbers on purpose built artificial climbing walls and boulders. The Climbing Wall Award does not include the skills and techniques required to teach lead climbing.

Climbing Wall Leading Award (CWLA)
This award trains and assesses candidates in the skills required to teach lead climbing skills on indoor or outdoor artificial climbing walls and structures with fixed protection. It builds on the skills acquired in either the Climbing Wall Award or Single Pitch Award, one of which candidates must hold to access the Climbing Wall Leading Award scheme.

Single Pitch Award (SPA)
This award trains and assesses candidates in the skills required to supervise climbers on single pitch crags and climbing walls. Common activities undertaken by a Single Pitch Award holder will be roped climbing and bouldering. The Single Pitch Award does not include the skills and techniques required to teach lead climbing.

Multi Pitch Award (RCL4 or MPA)
This award trains and assesses candidates in the skills required to supervise climbers on multi pitch crags. Common activities undertaken by a Multi Pitch Award holder will be roped climbing on non-serious multi pitch venues where other skills such as mountain navigation or short roping access are not required. The Multi Pitch Award does not include the skills and techniques required to teach lead climbing.

Lowland Leader Award (LLA)
The LLA is for those taking their first steps into the world of leading groups on day walks, along clearly defined tracks and trails, in forests, coast and countryside during summer conditions.

Mountain Leader Summer (MLS)
This award trains and assesses candidates in the skills required to lead hillwalking groups in summer conditions on mountainous routes not requiring the planned use of a rope. Established in 1964, this was the first award created.
Winter Mountain Leader (MLW)
The Winter Mountain Leader is validated to lead and provide basic skills instruction to parties on hill walks within the UK under winter conditions.

International Mountain Leader (IML)
This award trains and assesses candidates in the skills required to lead parties in mountainous areas, including snow-covered Nordic type terrain of the “middle” mountains but excluding via ferrata, glaciers and terrain requiring alpine techniques. The International Mountain Leader builds on the Mountain Leader Award, which candidates must hold.

The Mountaineering Instructor Award (MIA)
The Mountaineering Instructor Award trains and assesses candidates in the skills required for instructing mountaineering, including all aspects of summer rock climbing, including the coaching of lead climbing, and scrambling. It builds on the skills acquired in the Mountain Leader Award, which candidates must hold.

The Mountaineering Instructor Certificate (MIC)
This award trains and assesses candidates in the skills required for instruction of mountaineering, both summer and winter, including snow, ice and rock climbing. It builds on the skills acquired in both the Mountaineering Instructor Award and Winter Mountain Leader awards; both of which candidates must hold to access the Mountaineering Instructor Certificate scheme.

British Mountain Guide (BMG, IFMGA)
This international award trains and assesses candidates in the skills required to guide climbing (including the coaching of lead climbing) skiing and mountaineering on rock, snow & ice, and in alpine terrain. IFMGA is the International Federation Mountain Guides Associations, which BMG is a full member.

Further to the above awards there is a range of new proficiency awards coming on line. Ireland for some time has had the Mountain Skills syllabus which give instruction to those wishing to be self sufficient in the mountains but without the desire to lead or teach others. There will soon be Rock Climbing Skills that will fill the gap between the novice climber and the aspiring leader or instructor.

Further information on the above can be found by visiting the Mountaineering Ireland Website or talking to an award holder of which there are many in the club.

Rob Davies
6.45am Saturday morning running out to the car at my house in Galway I was not happy. In the throes of the West of Ireland’s permanent monsoon season the rain was beating down so heavily our cat Beamish didn’t even make her usual dash around my legs and into the warmth of the house after her nightly bivvy. On the drive out to Letterfrack I remembered my Galway roots and cursed the feckin’ weather, the feckin’ sheep on the road, and the meet organiser John feckin’ Duignan for declaring 8.00am as the ‘ideal’ time to be at the hostel – very feckin’ ideal I thought as I ploughed my way through was it surface water or a lake…I couldn’t be entirely sure.

But…lo and behold the weather cleared nicely and by the time I arrived at the hostel all was right with the world again and we were off on an adventure. Some of the group of thirteen IMC members had done the legendary Carrot Ridge the day before and strangely enough weren’t keen to do it two days running (some people can be so selfish) so for me that climb would have to wait until another day.

My bag was already packed and ready for a good walk in the hills so I spent the next while reacquainting myself with the must see Old Monastery Hostel. As someone said over the weekend about Stephen (the man behind the madness) “that man had a vision”. And this is so true. Simply to stay in that hostel and not even put your nose out the door to smell the mountains would be an interesting Connemara experience. It is quirky personified. Personally I’m all for it, from the blue lights and open fire in the bathroom to the confession box filled with women’s undergarments in one of the bedrooms. The food is amazing but I recommend taking short breaks from horsing it down to let your eyes roam around the dining room. The décor is…there’s that word again…interesting.

Six others plus me then spent the day doing a really enjoyable walk that took in Muckanaght, Benfree, and Galway’s highest peak Benbaun. Here’s a map of the route courtesy of route planner extraordinaire Niall Ennis. To start the route there’s parking at 800575 at the end of a (very) minor road off the R344. The ascent up a ramp between two small crags onto Muckanaght was one of my favourite parts of the walk. It is very steep with sometimes the best (and arguably most enjoyable) strategy being to use hands as well as feet and go up spider like. Another lovely thing about this walk is the diversity over a small distance. You have your river crossing that as we learned can, in full flow, defy all latest developments in Gore-Tex technology, very boggy ground down in the valley, the steep grassy ascent onto Muckanaght, and the barren rocky landscape on Benbaun. Along the way I enjoyed the company, the easy banter that tends to come with days in the hills, the views, and the fresh air and exercise. Although John admitted an uncanny ability for getting lost this one did not turn into an epic in any way, shape, or form and we got Michael back in time for the rugby.

That night we all enjoyed one of Stephen’s delicious meals, and sampled my dad’s homemade elderflower wine with me polishing off the rejected samples. Even my convincing argument that it’s an acquired taste didn’t wash with some. Perhaps it’s like Marmite, which I have never tasted but I hear is a member of that ‘love it’ or ‘hate it’ food group.
Afterwards some people went to the pub (in typical Irish fashion that tiny town of Letterfrack has no fewer than three pubs; Veldons, Molly’s, and the Bard’s Den). Others lounged around the hostel listening to John play the uilleann pipes, Barney and Kris play the famous Old Monastery blue guitar, and Sinead Dunphy sing beautifully. Except for the songs probably best left to Sinead we all joined in a bit of a singsong, and were even treated to a song in French from Bénédicte on her return from the pub. A great night.

The next morning, while some headed off for home after breakfast, others, fuelled by the porridge and boiled eggs made a plan of action for the day. I decided to combine getting back to Wicklow reasonably early with some exercise and did a quick solo spin around Diamond Hill. The weather was beautiful as were the views from the top, and apart from the sheep and the four Cork men who I burned on the way up as they stood chatting, I had the whole mountain to myself…bliss.

The Connemara Meet happens annually and is a really special one. Stunning scenery, imposing wild mountains with the power to make you feel small but on top of the world at the same time, and accommodation that defies social norms combine with great craic with friends to make for a perfect weekend.
Are you a beginner wondering what’s the first rope you should buy or an experienced climber thinking about upgrading your old rope?

Do you understand the difference between full or half ropes?

Do doubles seem like more trouble than they are worth?

**Rope classification**
Firstly is handy to know that half ropes are sometimes called doubles and full ropes are referred to as singles.

In the past climbers used to talk about 9mm and 11mm ropes (this described the diameter of half and single ropes respectively), but now the diameter of single ropes available has been reduced to 9mm in some cases (e.g. beal joker, millet absolut pro) so it’s important to check the ropes classification as well as its diameter. This is easily done as ropes are marked at the end to allow easy recognition. Half ropes are marked with a ½ symbol while full ropes are marked with a 1.

New 9mm light full ropes capable of being used as either full or half are marked with both ½ and 1.

**Which rope for what route?**
Generally climbers start off with a single rope. These are ideal for the climbing wall, bolted routes and straightforward single pitch climbs. When we start moving onto more complex or meandering single pitch routes, multi pitch climbs or areas where a long abseil is required it’s probably time to move on to using 2 half ropes.

The basic idea of double rope techniques is to have different coloured left and right hand ropes that work for you independently and which you clip according to the position of the runner. If the route is direct and all the gear central, such as on a continuous crack pitch, ropes can be clipped alternately. This way you’re nicely protected by the previous runner, that’s on the other rope, as you pull up an armful of slack to clip.

If the pitch runs diagonally or meanders around clip left or right accordingly and try to keep an idea of what line your ropes are taking and which one is on the right and which one is left. This is best done by taking the time to stop, and look back down the pitch from time to time. Sometimes your belayer will have a better overall view of the line of the pitch and can shout out which rope to clip.
**Single (full) ropes advantages**

One single rope is lighter than two halves.

Handling is slightly simpler and belaying is easier.

A fat rope is a bit easier to grip than a thin one when holding a fall.

A full rope can take more falls before having to be retired.

**Double (half) ropes advantages**

Easier to arrange protection on complicated routes avoiding rope drag.

When clipping gear you can be held tightly on one rope while taking a handful of slack from the other one to clip a piece of protection.

Half ropes stretch more thus reducing the impact force on gear and climber. With 2 half ropes, double the length of abseil is possible.

Sometimes two marginal pieces of gear can be clipped before moving up in situations where if you had a single you could only take advantage of one.

Less extenders need to be carried for extending gear 2 ropes are less likely to be fatally damaged as 1

**Finally**

The idea of using half ropes can seem simple but in practice it can be difficult to get it right at first. If you’re new to double ropes try them out on some routes well within your leading grade first, or even a route you’ve climbed before so there are no nasty surprises.

Equally as important is to be sure your belayer is comfortable with the added complexity of paying out two ropes – it takes some practice so start off gently

Willie Whelan
I first met Geoff on a busy night in the teachers club in early 2012. It was a brief “Hi, how’s it going?”, but that was enough for us to catch each others attention on our initial introductory day at Dalkey Quarry. We shook hands and that was the beginning of a trusting partnership on the rock and in the hills.

As time went on we would dare each other into our first lead, after 3 times top roping Paradise Lost, Geoff was the brave one to first lead it followed by myself. He was always the more enthusiastic one, and if he knew there was good protection, he wanted to go up first, otherwise he might give me a nudge to give it a go!

Within our first year we endured a few “right of passage” climbing days out, and pretty much every single one was in the rain, these included the epic day on Howling Ridge, another wet day on Carrot Ridge in Connemara, another wet day on the Bernagh Slabs in the Mournes and of course, many wet days in Dalkey. I learnt a lot about Geoff on these days and I was always impressed by his content while we were climbing in the rain. We would chat about his wife, Ann Marie and his daughter Chloe. How he would pop Chloe into his backpack and take her off into the hills. This was one of his passions, combining family life and his love of the hills. Something else that Geoff explained on our approaches was his professional goal. What he wanted to do is use his role in the HSE - where he looked after kids that have had it pretty rough - and complete his ML assessment so he could then get paid to take the kids into the hills. I thought this was a really amazing way to combine and great job with one of his biggest passions. Finally, one of his only concerns in life was the downfall of Liverpool FC, I am sure he would be happy with their performances this year!

Throughout that first winter when we joined the club we had our first initiation to properly roughing in on the winter bivvy. So Geoff took it on himself to organise the winter camp on Lug, which was a great day/night with great company. We were joined by Tony (who constantly pushed us throughout our first year, and still does), Vanessa and Frank. We had high hopes to have a drop or two of Whiskey at the summit in one of the tents, however, with the conditions they way they were, we just shouted at each from tent to tent in between the lulls in the blizzard winds! What fun though!

As the weather started to improve I think everyone will remember the summer we had last year. Towards the end of this July 2013 I got a call from Geoff, he had a free pass for the weekend and luckily enough so did I. We had a think about a number of routes so we decided on a repeat of Howling Ridge, this time without 12 other climbers.

He picked me up at 4pm after work on a Friday evening and we made our way South, stopping off for a cheeky pint along the way. We arrived in Cronins yard at 9pm, still with sunlight but we had our head torches just in case. We decided on leaving the tents behind and just took our sleeping bags and mats, rack and ropes, one stove and a couple of meals. We met a group of lads that had just returned from the Devils Ladder and they asked Geoff what we were doing arriving at that time. Geoff explained our plan to head in and sleep somewhere on the hill and I think they thought we were a little mad, which I probably agree with.
So we popped on the backpacks and jaunted in with a beautiful twilight sky! As I recently had a son, I probed Geoff with questions on fatherhood. He gave me all the low down on his first two years with Chloe. All of which was sound advice, although he promised me the poops would slow down which I am yet to see! We also spoke his recent trip to the hills, he had been down this way only recently with all his mates. He would desperately try to get them into hill walking so he would ensure there was a fire wherever they camped and a few cans of beer. They walked up a few hills and I think he really enjoyed his time out there with his closest mates, even if he wasn’t climbing, just to be out there was enough for him.

We arrived at the Heavenly Gates and set up camp, which meant rolling out our sleeping bags. We put the stove on and Geoff then produced a bit of Whiskey to help us sleep, always keeping me entertained in the hills as usual! So by 11pm we were tucked up as the fog set in. We set our alarms for 7.30am and drifted off to sleep.

The next morning was foggy but warm. It felt like we were waking up on a mountain in Spain. Up the ridge was cloud and below us the valley spanned out below. We were happy. Geoff set up his rack and harness and I followed suit. Geoff, as eager and enthusiastic went off first, as far as I remember he was so happy he was singing to himself and jabbering away to me below.

We switched leads on each pitch and boy did this feel like a different climb to the first time we climbed it. I think we climbed to the top of the ridge in around 2 hours, and that was while we were taking our time and ensuring our rope work was correct. We had plans to take on the Alps together, so we want to get as much Alpine practice as possible. We coiled the ropes and moved together to the top. We also stopped for photos along the way. Unfortunately technology was not Geoffs forte and he ended up taking close up shots of his own face and not many of me!

Sitting on the top having a Sandwich we started to get eaten alive by midges so a quick photo shoot and off we headed down. We didn’t fancy heading down the Devils Ladder (bad memories there), so we took the trail back to the Heavenly Gates and took our time in the heat of the day.

This time on Howling Ridge we could see the way leading the Cronins Yard which made life much easier than our previous trip. We joyously got back to the car and threw our gear into the car and made our way back to Dublin, again, stopping for a quick pint.

We made it home just in time for dinner to share the story of our day with with our respective families, lucky ladies eh?!

This was unfortunately the last time I saw Geoff. I try not to think about those few days on Mweelrea and prefer to think of the great fun we had together. All those days in the rain and those couple of days in the sun! He was not only a great friend who was always on offer to give me advice, but he was also very trustworthy person to have on the other of my rope. It was truly a privilege to have been his climbing partner and he will be missed by everyone that met him in the club, along with his family, friends and colleagues.

David Mc Neill
Geoff Rowden 1975 – 2013

I have had the pleasure of knowing Geoff from April 2012 when he joined the Irish Mountaineering Club. Firstly as a participant on our introductory to Rock Climbing which he tackled with zeal. He basically realised we were all mad and this was the place for him! He geared up and was on the sharp end of the rope pretty quickly with his new side kick Dave McNeill.

Since joining Geoff had consistently participated in many club activities and meets. He was in the process of completing his log prior to going for ML assessment. We had a couple of great days and nights out, some planned and some improvised. He got his full IMC initiation on Howling ridge in August 2012. I had travelled with Geoff that morning from Dublin to Cronins yard and then had a further 12 hours on the hill with him, a good way to get to know someone, his enthusiasm, dry wit and sense of place in the world was very apparent. He loved life, his life, which revolved around his wife Annemarie and Daughter Chloe as many of you will have heard at his service. You will also have heard about his love of the mountains and this was apparent when in his company. After a winter Bivi in November 2012 I gave him the slightest nudge to organise / lead our winter Lug Camp which he did January last year even organising buckets of snow. What a great night we had, spin drift chaffing our faces until we reached our summit camp and all we did was laugh and have the craic. At last year’s introductory Geoff was present regularly to help and learn. You could see he was quietly proud that he had moved to the next stage. Later in the summer during the heat wave Geoff and Dave snook back down to Howling to see what it really should be like. To that faithful day in October, a slip with Tragic consequences, the desperate search. As Geoff’s family has done and on behalf of the club I would like to thank all those members who participated in the search, Mayo Mountain Rescue who coordinated all services who travelled from near and far. The local people and business’s who accommodated us.

From his service: The Joy of Living [Extract] – Ewan MacColl

Take me to some place of heather, rock and ling,
Scatter my dust and ashes, feed me to the wind,
So that I will be part of all you see, the air you are breathing,
I’ll be part of the curlew’s cry and soaring hark,
The blue milkwort and the sundew hung with diamonds;
I’ll be riding the gentle wind that blows through your hair,
Reminding you how we shared the joy of living.

Tony Barry,
President, Irish Mountaineering Club
The Top of Europe

Earlier this year I had the opportunity to join a group of 14 Irish Adventurers, all hoping to reach the summit of Mt Elbrus in Russia, the highest mountain in Europe and one of the world’s 7 Summits. The group was led by Pat Falvey who has completed the 7 Summits twice, including Everest from both the North and South Side, and 2 experienced Russian guides Sasha and Dmitry, so in very capable hands we headed for the Caucasus Mountains.

My trip started in Dubai as this was the main base for my holiday. My son was doing work experience in Ras Al Kamiah for 6 months and as he was away for his 21st, this gave me a good excuse to visit. After spending the w/e in Dubai, I flew on Sunday to Mineralnye Vody at the base of the Russian Caucasus range and met up with the Irish team who had just arrived from Dublin. We then had a 3.5 hour bus trip to Terskol and finally arrived at our hotel in Cheget. I could compare Cheget to an Alpine ski resort but that would be much too glamorous. We were in the heart of the Russian mountains and many aspects of the area were almost decades behind the rest of Europe. Often when you were looking for something, food or services, you were met with a cryptic answer or wrong information and everyone just says ‘this is Russia after all’. Having said that, the place is full of character and it is a very beautiful valley.

Once established in our Cheget hotel, we met our base camp Manager Anna who helped us with translations, logistics and everything down to extra flasks and gaiters. We were almost lulled into a false sense of holiday rather than the hardship of a trekking expedition as the hotel was fab, it even had a sauna and pool tables and of course a bar. Speaking of bars we tested most of the Russian beer on the 1st night and some people were a little sluggish to say the least on Monday morning, but we managed the hike all the same. On our 3rd night we helped our Russian guide celebrate his son’s 1st birthday which involved more beer and Dmitry’s large bottle of gin which was shared around. We knew all about it the next morning, or not as the case may be!!! So that was the end of the holiday…. as the serious stuff was about to start.

We had completed 3 trekking days from our base in Cheget around the Baksan Valley, getting to over 3000m each day, one day we used a chairlift to get us up a bit quicker so that we could spend more time up high. The weather was good and we had some nice sunshine but we knew that our summit day would depend on the mountain weather. Once again we had to pack bags and leave behind anything that was not essential for our high altitude base for the next 4-5 days, also knowing that there would be no opportunity for washing bodies or changing clothes. Our repacked bags meant our day pack including summit gear, i.e. crampons, ice-axe, full gorex, down jackets, multiple types of gloves, sunglasses, goggles, merino wool socks, plastic boots and the reliable crocs for ‘leisure wear’! A few extra items like -20 sleeping bags and mats would go in shared bags and off we headed by mini-bus to the gondola where we met our cook for the next few days with our supplies. Very quickly we formed
a chain gang – operation Elbrus as we loaded bags and boxes onto the gondola and then baled in ourselves. 2 gondolas (cable cars) took us from 2000m up to 3500m, not quite Alpine style, i.e. lots of wary looks at the equipment but it worked. The last section was by rattrap (snow cat) which we had heard lots about as a means of getting up and down the mountain. It’s like a big caterpillar with blades churning up the snow as it creeps up steep slopes. One rattrap took our gear and the other took us.

Our 1st night was spent in Camp Islam, a private hut above the Barrels at 3850m and our next 4 nights were spent higher up at 4200m in the Muzofar Base just above the old burnt out Priut 11. Anyone who is familiar with mountain huts will know what these places can be like; in Russia the hut was made from a container and had a selection of bunk beds or else mattresses in a row on a big long communal bed, in one place this accommodated 8 of us. There was great excitement, not, checking out the toilets which could be smelt from the distance. I’ll attach a picture rather than describe…….. Anyway our new home in the mountains very quickly became familiar and cosy, we had great food and plenty of it, water came from boiled snow which was cooking 24/7 for our thirsty team. During the day we did training with our guides, glacier travel, ice axe arrest, crampons and rope work. On our 2nd mountain day/night, we felt the need to celebrate our lead guide Dmitry’s birthday so this involved a sing song with a little cognac in the afternoon, thanks to Ian on guitar with an endless song repertoire, and then to our surprise a mad idea to order up some beer to the hut, turned into a reality when a rattrap arrived to the camp with a slab of Russian beers. This was the funniest thing ever as even though they were ordered and calls to base were made, no one could say that it would happen, as we so often heard during the week, ‘well this is Russia’!!!!

Plans were made the next day (Saturday) for a summit bid early Sunday morn. As you can imagine all kinds of worries and anxieties were setting in but Pat had gone through everything with the group and logistics were very well in place with extra guides etc. The weather forecast was reasonable but there seemed to be a change from the previous few calm clear days so it seemed the best opportunity to go rather than wait in case there was further deterioration. We did a short acclimatisation hike that day, and then the advice was to rest and eat, and of course pack and re-pack once again. There would be very little in the ruck sacks as all gear would be on us at 2am, and ideally all handy food would be in our pockets ready for refuelling at 45min intervals. 2 litres of hot water for everyone and no point bringing a platypus as this would freeze.

So for our 1st attempt, we headed up the mountain on the rattrap at 3am, started walking about 3.30 and battled with deep soft snow in the dark, -18C with an increasing wind-chill bringing the temps down to -28C and white out in an unpredicted blizzard. While the stops were necessary to get water and rest for 5-10 min, we were getting colder as we stood in line and sipped small amounts of water. After about 2hrs my fingers felt cold, and very quickly became numb so I had to get help to put hand warmers into my double gloved hands. Luckily this worked but other team mates were also struggling with cold feet and faces despite the many layers of gortex, down, fleece etc. The first 4hrs was a slow steady uphill until a slight levelling off on the traverse to the coll where the wind really picked up and was cutting into us from behind. At 8am Pat made the tough but essential call to turn, the sense of disappointment and frustration was palpable, but no one was questioning this decision as to continue would not be safe. We were 300m from the top, however Sasha said afterwards that they were the worst conditions she had seen on the mountain and the team would have been putting themselves at
risk to continue so agreeably but very disappointedly, we turned and began the return to our camp. Half of the group were roped for safety at this point as there was very limited visibility and some people had used up most of their energy on the way up. Now, although going down, we were facing into the strong winds and trying to keep together so this was no easy trot down the mountain!

We all made it back and the situation was reviewed, I honestly thought that this was it for Elbrus, although well prepared, the mountain is still in charge so looked like I would never see the view from the top. In the background Pat and the guides were working out the feasibility of a 2nd summit bid and as the day went on, these plans progressed. The weather forecast was updated and at dinner we had a team brief to digest the events of the last 24hrs and access team possibilities for a Monday night/Tuesday morning summit.

This was a tense and exciting few hours as there were many different opinions, some were on for going back to the mountain whatever the conditions, others felt they had had a good shot at it and were happy to go back to Cheget and have the last 2 nights in the hotel. The majority were definitely on for a 2nd chance, but could have been dissuaded if the weather forecast did not give a reasonable window of opportunity. So the dinner chat wavered from ‘yea we should go again’ to ‘sure there’s no point hanging around here any longer if the weather is looking dodgy. And in the meantime we bought a few bottles of beer from the hut keeper (they were stashed under his bed which was at the end of our dinner table………..) and plotted and planned, and of course sang!

The final team decision was that 10 or maybe 11 of the team were feeling strong and were on for 2nd chance so everything was once again put in place for a return attack on Elbrus, and this time an hour earlier on Tuesday morning, i.e. leave our high camp at 2am. The first attempt had varying effects on some team members due to frost nip, severe sun burn and a knee problem and in the best interest of safety and team success, 3 unselfishly gave up a 2nd summit attempt, realising that going again could have affected the team as a whole. Pat returned to Cheget with the guys as we were now at the wire with regard to time left to get up and down the mountain, collect our gear at the high (hut) camp and make the last gondolas etc, and of course have our last session together, so there was a lot of paper work and bills to be sorted.

Once again we prepared, rested, ate and boarded the rattrap at the earlier time of 2am. Bearing in mind the strategic planning of loo visits to ensure there would be no loo stops in the minus temperatures for the next 10hrs….stress or what? We started walking at 2.22am and began our long slow ascent, in a line, concentrating on our breathing, and focused on our goal. Even from the start of the climb it felt easier and more enjoyable, of course due to better weather as the stars and bright moon were visible, but the extra time had benefited us so much with acclimatisation and this made a significant difference. Despite the better conditions, my fingers and this time toes still got cold, I had hand warmers in my pocket ready to go so popped them in and Sasha showed me some ‘high altitude’ aerobics to get the circulation back to my toes and this did work. Everyone has their own issues when doing this type of climb and sometimes small problems seem like they might become huge so it was interesting to find out afterwards that although I started well and felt strong, on reaching the traverse I started to feel like my legs would hardly work anymore having gone from steep uphill to almost on the level, also energy seemed to suddenly dip and this didn't really make sense, but turned out lots of the team experienced similar feelings at this same stage.
We then had a short rest for about 20min at the coll where we replenished fluids and got some energy foods, tablets, gels etc, had a chat and prepared for the last 1.5hr push to the summit. We were roped up for the next section which was steep and slow and then we saw the top. It was fantastic to see the top and move towards it and then it was a reality, we were all there. We reached the summit at 9am after 6.5hrs climbing. Wahooo! Success!! and it was such an amazing feeling I could even take my gloves off and the sun was shining, the view was just stunning. Everyone was just so chuffed and excited, some more wrecked than others, but all in high spirits and tons of pics were taken. One of the team even had a pint of Guinness and a glass to pour it into! We had about 25min on the top taking it all in. Personally I could have stayed there much longer but the snow clouds were building up and we did have a turnaround time which we needed to adhere to. At 9.15am we headed down, the 6.5hrs up took 3hrs to get back to the Pastuhova rocks where we had booked a rattrap to take us the last 400m to our high camp.

The team of 11, our very own Mission Impossible! had done it. We quickly gathered our last few items in the hut, had a snack and took a chairlift and 2 gondolas back to the hotel. Needless to say we had a great celebration in the hotel, first with dinner and certificates, and later in the Cheget local bar with our guides and the rest of the team. As the team would say, it was ‘Class’…. We had a great crew, and despite all the hard work and primitive conditions we also had great craic and fantastic teamwork, made possible by our Leader and Guides who believed in our ambition and ability, and tirelessly supported us in this challenge.

We left for Mineralnye Vody the next morning at 7.30 and took a flight to Moscow where we once again had some celebrations. Of course this Irish Team weren’t too long finding an Irish Bar, despite the considerable lack of directions or signage in English. The metro was a nightmare due to the Russian writing so it was Russian roulette hoping to get the right train from the right platform, and then try and spot a station name to know where to get off! Unfortunately the 1st gang going home were fleeced in a taxi, doors were locked and the taxi man wouldn’t let them out without paying €150 for an 8k run to our hotel. Forewarned is forearmed and we paid about €21 some hours later. I travelled to the airport with the team early next morning and waved them off back to Dublin, left my bags at the airport so I could go into Moscow for the day. Mind you as soon as I got into town and realised the challenge ahead finding my way around I nearly went back to the airport but it was a fab sunny day and I persevered so am pleased to say that I saw Red Square and the Kremlin and lots of impressive Russian buildings.

And then back to Dubai which is like a 2nd home for me, staying with my sister and her family chilling and getting some sun. Catch-up time also with Shane who had become well localised and qualified to direct me around those crazy mad motorways with 8 lanes in some places and the most complicated interchanges I have seen anywhere. Last but not least, a 2nd summit for me, got to visit the Burj Khalifa, the tallest building in the world at 828m with 7 height records, pretty amazing but not as amazing as the summit of Elbrus.

From the Top of Europe and until the next adventure……yeeeeeessssssssss!
1 APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF 2012 AGM
Proposed by Sé o Hanlon and seconded by Gerry Galligan

2 PRESIDENT’S ADDRESS
To begin, can I thank you for attending the AGM, it’s an important event in the clubs activities which should feature in the diary with just as much significance as any other climbing or hiking meet. The committee and I are delighted to see such a good turn out and we hope this has more to do with a renewed enthusiasm for club matters rather than a desire for a raffle prize.

This has been a very sad and difficult year for the club, having lost Joe and Geoff to accidents in the mountains. We have all been affected by their loss, especially those who were particularly close friends of both. I’m reminded of a sad truth spoken by the famous Mount Rainer guide Lou Whittaker who told all his aspirant guides to always bear in mind that “just because you love the mountains don’t mean that the mountains love you” I’m sure that in time we’ll come to terms with our loss and carry on as the guys I’m sure would have wanted. I’d also like to mention the recent passing of Nuala Rothery, wife of Sean, long time members of the IMC and of course Sean himself was president from 1970-1972.

At this time can we stand and take a moment to remember not only Joe and Geoff but all our members who are no longer with us.

On behalf of the membership I would like to thank the committee for its work during the year. Several matters have been progressed. In particular, our membership records database has after a considerable amount of work by Declan and Cillian been brought up to date. A major redevelopment of the website will shortly commence and we owe thanks to Peter and Cillian for their work in bringing this project to this stage. The library as you know has been transferred to Mountaineering Ireland and was moved to their new HQ in Blanchardstown. Benedictu has put in a lot of work cataloguing our collection and ensuring its continuing availability to our membership. Tony as training officer has continued to develop and extend our in-house training to become not only a rock climbing but a more rounded mountaineering programme. Tony is stepping down as training officer this year and leaves a fine template for his successor to follow. Se continued his sterling work as Hut Warden and I’d also like to thank his team of handy persons, Nick, Jason and all the rest who turn up at the hut every time he asks for help, whether to drive a nail, paint a door or make the tea. The newsletter has become an interesting “must read” with lan as editor in chief; I just hope he doesn’t take to phone hacking for his next stories. I’d also like to thank our Secretary Eoin, for keeping us on the straight and narrow after meetings by reminding us of what we actually said rather than what we thought we said and of course our chairman James for keeping the committee on course and calm.

Meets, are at the core of the club. I’m sure by now everybody will be aware of the extensive and interesting series of meets lined up in the Teachers Club over the winter months, our thanks go to Vanessa and Sinead who came on board the committee lately and hit the ground running. I am sure that with them at the helm we can look forward to a full and exciting outdoor meets season in the coming year. This year saw folk from the club on meets both at home, Mournes, Kerry, Connemara, Ballykeefe, Ireland’s Eye and of course Glendalough and Barnbawn, and abroad in Scotland, the Alps, Spain, France, Wales, and the Lake District. Meets are the lifeblood of the club, they are where friendships are forged, skills improved, adventure had, but mostly they are just great craic. If for whatever reason
you have been missing out, and with an exciting calendar already starting to fill up I encourage you to make a special effort to sign on in the coming year. So, on behalf of all who attended meets I wish to thank those who have put in the work to organise meets, especially those which have become regular fixtures on the calendar, John Duigman for Connemara, Tony Barry for Kerry, Peter Woods and the Burren and of course Gerry for Wales and the Lakes. So folks there are plenty of free weekends during the year and if you have a favourite crag or a favourite mountain area to walk in please think about sharing it with your club mates and maybe adding something new to next year’s calendar.

This year several of the committee have served their maximum terms so vacancies arise. Each year it seems to be a struggle to get a committee together. Many don’t attend this AGM so they can avoid being asked, and this year the committee have had to resort to some gentle arm twisting i.e. the raffle. Over the last several years many newer club members have put themselves forward to serve on the committee, and this has worked very well with fresh thinking and energy. I hope that this will continue this evening. This evening my term of office as your president comes to a close. I would like to thank not only the committee for allowing me to attend many of your meetings and for your tolerance when I often exceeded by “observer” status. I would also like to thank those members who were always there with sound advice over the last couple of years and listened to the odd rant out on the hill or crag.

It has been a great pleasure and honour for me to serve as President of the Irish Mountaineering Club and I wish the club and my successor well. Go raimh mile mhaith agaibh.

Declan Craig

3 RECEIPT AND APPROVAL OF OFFICER’S REPORTS

3.1 Chairperson
The Chairman, James Flanagan, thanked Declan for his helpful contribution to the committee. The Committee met every six weeks throughout the year. The Chairperson thanked the Secretary for keeping the minutes well organised, the previous webmaster, Tony Groves for his contribution in building the current club website and Peter Wood for planning the upgrade of website. He hoped to see the fruits of his efforts soon. He also thanked the Training Officer, Tony Barry, in training up new members and making a great impression of the club on new members. The Chairman also thanked the Hut Warden, Sé o Hanlon for his service as one of the longest serving members of the Committee. He thank the Librarian, Bénédicte Reau, for her work making the Club library more accessible. The Chairman also thanked Vanessa Sumner for taking on the role of Meets Officer and hitting the ground running. Lastly he thanked the other committee members and appreciated their efforts.

The Chairman related his efforts lobbying for indemnity for uplands landowners. He is also working on obtaining a location in the city centre to host the club Library closer to its members.

Adoption of the report was proposed by Sé o Hanlon and seconded by Gerry Galligan.

3.2 Treasurer
The Treasurer, Declan Finnegan, on taking on the role late reported he had a steep learning curve. He has struggled with the workload and is only getting to grips with the role now. The Treasurer is currently working with auditors to finalise accounts which need another few days to review. Auditor Paul Donnelly confirmed there no big issues and just a presentation issue.
The Treasurer requested that his apologies be accepted.
Adoption of the report was proposed by Séan Barrett and seconded by Dave Madden.

**3.3 Publicity Officer**
Declan noted newsletter has gone from strength to strength.

Since taking over the job of publicity officer this time last year it has been a very busy time.

Three newsletters have been produced and I would like to thank all of the people who contributed to the newsletters.

I have been trying to produce a newsletter that reflects the wide range of the types of activities that the club members are involved in.

The big problem with editing the newsletter is that it is easier to get content from people that I know personally and it is hard for me to reach out to the people that I do not know personally. This could make it a bit cliquey, something at all costs I want to avoid.

So I suppose the real job in editing the newsletter is trying to find out what is going on, what people are doing, and encouraging them to write about it.

Peter woods and myself have also put a lot of work into the planned improvements and modernizing of our club website and this work will be coming to fruition very soon.

I would like to thank my fellow committee members for the work and commitment put in and generally doing the best job we could do, sometimes under difficult circumstances.

Ian Christie

Adoption of the report was proposed by Kevin coakley and seconded by Christy Rice.

**3.4 Membership Officer**
Cillian Russell gave his report. There currently are 228 Full members including 59 new members. Six members have been promoted to full membership. The Membership Officer receives a steady number of inquiries from the public. In the Spring there was a twice weekly climbing meet in Dalkey Quarry. Thanked members for their support in mentoring novice climbers. These meets attracted between six and twelve climbers on average. Efforts have been made to update members contact details. The contact list is largely up-to-date. A Gmail account has been setup with these contact details to replace the mailing list until technical issues are resolved.

Six associate members applied for promotion to full membership.

The role of the Membership Officer is unclear as it overlaps with training officer and publicity, and the question can be posed as to whether this office is necessary. The primary responsibility is to look after new members.

Adoption of the report was proposed by David Jacobs and seconded by Tony Barry.
3.5 Training Officer

Since last year we have had a pretty active year in the club and a great response to most events from Participants and those willing to give their time mentoring others in the club.

Last Autumn and Winter we ran a program introducing members to the syllabus of Mountain Skills and Mountain Leadership. This included a skills day in Glendalough in November, A Winter Bivi in December and a Winter Camp in January.

In the late spring we ran our regular introduction to Climbing which consisted of 6 nights in Dalkey, leading up to the intro weekend in Glendalough. A total of 43 signed up for participation. At this point I would like to thank many members of the club for their assistance in making this a great success. I would like to thank all the committee for their support and most for their participation. A number of individuals for special mention and who form a core team around training are – Declan Craig, Rob Madden, Noel Caffrey, Rob Davies and Se o Hanlon. Thanks for their regular support during events and for their assistance in publishing notes and their guidance. Also Peter Wood, Ken Doyle, Cillian Russell, Declan Finnegan, Vanessa Sumner, Benedicte, Ian Christie, Kevin Coakley, Conor O Connor, Jon Smith for being their every evening and encouraging others.

Dates for IMC Introductory Programme

Thursday 11th April 8.00pm - Teachers Club, Introductory presentation for new members Thursday 18th April 6.30pm – Awesome Walls Sunday 21st April 10.00am - Introductory Day, Dalkey Quarry Thursday 25th April 5.00pm onward - Introductory Evening, Dalkey Quarry Thursday 2nd May 5.00pm onward - Introductory Evening, Dalkey Quarry Thursday 9th May 5.00pm onward - Introductory Evening, Dalkey Quarry Thursday 16th May 5.00pm onward - Introductory Evening, Dalkey Quarry

Saturday 15th June - Sunday 16th June - Glendalough Weekend – IMC Hut Glendasan

Great Outdoors issued us with a one off 20% discount for use before May 31st. 15% discount applies for other purchases before end of May. Thanks to John Guy and his colleagues for there assistance and advise.

Pre-Alpine Training – 3 nights booked 18 attended with Calvin Torrans, I wish anyone heading to the Alps would do this no matter what the experience.

First Thursday of each month as designated open night. Members were / are encouraged to mentor new comers to the club – all need to get on board, committee needs to support / promote. I think this should be promoted continuously as it broadens the contact in the club. It worked pretty well and made the club more inclusive.

To all who organise meets, Thanks first as a participant and as Training Officer this is really the grounding for the clubs mentoring, where learning is put into practice. It is the foundation of experience. The refresher nights went down pretty well with positive feedback before and after meets from participants and organisers. Again the training programme needs to be sustained longer than the spring 5 week programme.
A couple of things that I would like to see considered: Glendalough, I feel it is a big step up from Dalkey and that we should put it back for a couple of months perhaps to August. There are softer meets we could have in advance e.g. Ballykeefe, Lower Cove, [Fair Head – Joke]

Standards, we have a duty of care towards ourselves and others. There is a saying that doing right or wrong, wrong is generally due to not knowing the difference between right and wrong and there lies the issue. Of all issues taking on the role of Training Officer I have found this the most challenging. Whilst I and other training officers have had an informal team around them, if I was to continue I would put more effort into formalising a more dedicated team without being exclusive.

To Joe and Geoff I would like to offer my thoughts and thanks. Joe for adding energy around training events in Dalkey and the club in general and Geoff for allowing me to become a friend in a short space of time and organising last years Winter Camp and enthusiasm for learning more. Unfortunately, I learned more in a couple of days in Mayo than I had ever in one sequence of events. Thanks to all the rescue teams’ efforts, we are privileged to have a few in our membership.

I wish next next Training Officer every success and trust I will be there to support the team. Climb safe

Tony Barry IMC Training Officer, 2012 - 2013

Adoption of the report was proposed by Tony Groves and seconded by Peter Wood.

3.6 Meets Officer
Sinead Rickerby and I started organising indoor meets for the IMC in September of this year and shortly after this we were both co-opted onto the committee. I’d like to thank Tony Barry for asking me if I’d be interested in the job and for giving me the option of doing it as a joint role (with Sinead). I’d also like to thank the committee members for welcoming us into the fold, and other IMC members, particularly past meets officers, who helped us in the initial stages by suggesting speakers to approach for example.

Indoor Meets To Date: Thanks to the following speakers who have given talks for the IMC to date:

- Gerry Galligan – Climbing Ramabang
- Bénédicte Reau – GR20 – Corsica
- Tim Fogg – Caving
- Cian O’Brolcháin – Everest
- Naomi Sturdi – Yoga and Pilates
- Gerda Pauler – The Great Himalaya Trail and Seven Summits Of The Alps

Please support Gerry Galligan with his Book Launch by attending his free event in the Lansdowne Hotel on December 4th during which he will be reading extracts from his book; Climbing Ramabang and sharing his experiences of the first ascent of Ramabang (a 6000m peak in the Indian Himalaya) in 2008 and his incredible overland journey home. (Details on the IMC website)

Upcoming Indoor Meets:
The calendar has been filled for this year right up until the end of March with regards to indoor meets and we urge all members to keep logging onto the IMC website and checking the ‘Upcoming Events’ section, the front page and the forum where details of events can be found. Also I will send out an email to all current members who wish to be contacted by email on the Sunday or Monday before every talk.
Ongoing Events:

- Naomi Sturdi will be running a four week yoga and pilates course in Awesome Walls beginning on January 7th. Classes will be held on a Tuesday from 9-10pm. This course is filled but due to the huge demand we hope to discuss things further with Naomi and there is a high possibility she will run another course for IMC members at some stage in the future.

- Noel Caffrey has been walking in the mountains of Wicklow for the last two months in preparation for climbing Aconcagua in January. He has kindly made these walks open to all IMC members. Dates for his December Walks are now on the website so by all means join Noel on any of these you wish.

- The unofficial climbing club night has been changed from Thursday nights in Awesome Walls to Tuesday nights to avoid a clash with the Thursday night talks in the Teacher’s Club so please continue to come along to Awesome Walls every Tuesday evening.

Outdoor Meets:

Thanks to everyone who has organized and gone on the outdoor meets so far this year. There are many more to come so I urge everyone to keep checking website and emails and sign on for as many as you can because they are great fun.

The next one that comes to mind is the hike and bivi on Saturday November 30th organized by Tony Barry. This will contain some informal MS training. (Details on website).

Vanessa Sumner

Adoption of the report was proposed by Tony Barry and seconded by James Flanagan.

3.7 Librarian

Archives: Archives are stored in the IMC Hut, all have been sorted by year. Indexation is done up to 1954. All IMC Photos which are part of the archives are scanned and saved on a CD. IMC Films shoted in 50's are also saved on a DVD (done by IFI) and stored in the hut.

Catherine Coleman, daughter of Jack Coleman, contacted the IMC to donate all her father’s letters, notes and mountains photos from 1959. As soon as I received them they will be added to the archives.

Projector Howell & Bell was checked and clean up, it’s in order to use if anyone can get old 35mm films. (The IMC ones are conserved in the IFI and cannot be borrowed for conservation purposed.)

Books: All IMC books are in Mountaineering Ireland Office. In April MI mived from City West to Blancharstown and therefore the books were not accessible, all packed in boxes. Since June 2013, I've been entering all books (IMC + MI) in an online database which soon will be available for all members. I still need to add quotations to the books in order to MI staff to find the books in the shelves. 640 books are part of the IMC, most of them are in average conditions, some are in very bad condition and couldn’t be borrowed but only read in the MI Office.
Aleck Crichton (one of the first member of the IMC) contacted the library to donate all his books. He lives in the West coast (Sligo) so on a next trip to the West I will collect the books or Paddy O’Leary might be able to collect them too.
Bénédict Reau

Adoption of the report was proposed by Peter Wood and seconded by Sean Barrett.

3.8 Hut Warden
This year saw the continuation of improvements in the Hut as part of a process started and continued by a series of wardens in the past.

The biggest job was improving the fire safety of the Hut, an activity prompted by a prod from Carol Ryan. All interior doors were replaced with firedoors. Walls and ceilings and the underside of stairs had layers of fire-resistant plasterboard added. The hinges on the window in the main dormitory were repositioned so that it could be used as an escape route from upstairs. Notices showing escape routes were fixed to bedroom doors. The goal was to provide a one hour barrier between upstairs and downstairs in both the main part of the building and the Cowhouse. The two smaller bedrooms upstairs in the main hut are now separated from each other and from the landing by a 30 minute barrier. This work has also had cosmetic value.

Thanks for the heavy lifting is due to Jason Ahearne (who was worth all the rest added together), Tony Groves, Ed Hick, Nick Keegan, Ultan Lacey, Conor O Connor, Christy Rice, Eugene Shields, Dave Trunk,

New stairs for the Cowhouse were designed by Kieron Kelly and installed by Jason Ahearne. This was a bit like an E2 traditional route being equipped with bolts to reduce the danger element. Lar Mathews made new benches for the kitchen to replace the life-threatening wobblers which may have been there since the IMC first fitted out the building.

The toilet block was efficiently repainted by Ultan Lacey and Conor O Connor. And Ultan also kept the grass under control.

A new stove was installed in the kitchen.

Help with some emergency jobs was provided by Ian Christie, Kieron Kelly and our next-door neighbour, Shay Conway. Tony Barry sourced a work top for the Cowhouse.

We shared the Hut with MI, University clubs, youth climbing groups, young people anxious to get into the outdoors, people on training courses. The most impressive group were the group of disabled Polish hikers who completed a trek from Marley Park to the summit of Lugnaquilla over 10 days. They are an inspiring example to us all.

The Hut was lightly used by IMC members during the year but there is no doubt that it was an important way in which we carried out our principal Club objective - “to encourage and organise mountaineering (including rock-climbing, hill-walking, ice-climbing, and bouldering) and kindred activities in Ireland and abroad”. The Hut has shown a modest profit over the years which is held in reserve in case of emergency and it has never been a drain on Club finances.
A new Hut Warden will take over this year, now that I have completed my very enjoyable three years. The job is ideally suited to a retired or unemployed person but a person gainfully employed could recruit an assistant or two and between them the burden would be quite light. A new mind could do the job less labour intensively than the way I did it, which was designed to provide me with an excuse for chilling out in Wicklow.

Sé o Hanlon

Adoption of the report was proposed by Donal Ó Murchú and seconded by Peter O’Neill.

3.9 Access and Conservation Officer
Since my report last year, I have kept up attendance at various committee meetings - Mountaineering Ireland, Wicklow Uplands Council, Irish Uplands Forum, and one at the Forest Stewardship Council of Ireland - which I may become a member of, once they are no longer suspended by the International FSC for lack of reports, accounts etc sent in to FSC Europe HQ. I will have more of a grouse about committees later on.

From my wanderings about this last year I am encouraged by improvements up in the hills. There are more sheep and less deer. For example, on an overnight bivvy at Lough Ouler, while trekking northwards up the Lugnaquilla Route (only a masochist would do this), I saw 21 sheep. In 2009 there were 7 in the same area. I saw no deer - there were 46 in 2009. Mullaghcleevaun has more sheep than I used to see, and other places as well.

I met a stalker above Glenmalure and he confirmed my impression the deer are still far too numerous. But on the back of Djouce, between the Coffin Stone and the Wicklow Way, the deer are better controlled. As you walk, the Stags notice you, and that you aren’t carrying a rifle. They send their Hinds up about 200 metres away from you (no rifleman will fire at that range - well not me anyway) and they then stand about 50 metres from you and keep you under observation - Hiker Watching. I’ve seen a group of 5 stags hiker-watch me on Camaderry.

The paths were a lot better in the dry weather this year. Nonetheless a novice companion of mine who was not used to bogs managed to go in almost to the waist a foot to the left of where I had walked without me sinking in at all.

I notice the army have at last put up proper notices round the Glen of Imaal range, I met two soldiers out checking the perimeter, which is good. Trained soldiers are usually good country-men and tidy with their camping.

The quad damage seems to be decreasing, but the litter is not. Some of the worst I saw was most of a household of junk tipped by the forest roadside on Slieveboy in Wexford. The local people clear it themselves instead of phoning the litter number. We may be putting up gates, the locals said. Glenmalure is pretty bad as well. The new “Pure” campaign has yet to reach the mountains, as far as I can see.

People are beginning to get the idea of not taking dogs on the hills - it makes no difference to sheep whether they dog is on a lead or not, because the lead is too thin to see. There are still ‘almost untrodden’ places. I was at the source of the Liffey in October - hardly any tracks.

The committee work has had its ups and downs. The Irish Uplands Forum is looking to reinvent itself.
The Wicklow Uplands Council, with its Heather Management working group, has had two setbacks this year - its research adviser has had a burnout, and it has not been allocated EC funds for its programme, despite a very good assessment and working plan published this year. An alternative with a lower budget is being worked on. The best thing this year was a meeting in Glendalough to which came Simon Coveney, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and Andrew Doyle, who heads the Oireachtas Joint Committee on same. About 50 of us were there and we were very encouraged to feel both Simon and Andrew understood our concerns and were on our side. I said afterwards to the Minister “two officials like yourselves coming to meet 50 locals like our lot would never have happened in England.”

That being said, here's my peeve. I find myself comparing the situation in England with ours here. In the Lake District for example, which I have considerably tramped, there is a one-stop authority namely the Lake District Special Planning Board, expertly staffed and well funded. If it’s a planning matter, or repairing a footpath, or concerns the farming or wildlife, they are the people to go to. In Staffordshire, the County Council have purchased and maintain the open country area called Cannock Chase. They have bought farms which they let to new entrants to agriculture, support them and advise them and offer them preferment to a larger holding later on if they are making it. Compare this to the network of committees and organisations in Ireland and no wonder we have so much difficulty getting things done.

I’m going on for another year anyway. In a few days I’m 75 and It’s time I looked for a successor. I did put up a scheme to do weekends with any interested members or associate members, but it Left No Trace. So our esteemed IMC has got it - right.

Thanks for listening. I have all my papers with me if anyone should need more info., please ask, but also I have to get back to Wicklow town before the Rising Sun catches me and I turn to stone.

Thank you.
Peter Norton

As the role of Access and Conservation Officer is not recognised in the Constitution, it was not necessary to have a proposer and seconder for his report.

3.10 Secretary
Eoin O’Neill reported on correspondance received during the year including the agreement of Kindred Club Status with the Midland Association of Mountaineers in the UK, which gives access to their club huts.

Eoin also thanked Vanessa and Sinéad for taking on the Meets Officer role.

4 ELECTION OF OFFICERS FOR 2013-2014 COMMITTEE

4.1 President
The President proposed someone who has performed a variety of roles and did a good job in all of the them. He has hiked, climbed and been assessed and is competent in mountains and on rock, Summer and Winter: Tony Barry was proposed as the next IMC President and was unanimously elected to acclaim.

Incoming IMC President Tony Barry said he has made a great number of friends through the club and enjoyed every bit of it and would be delighted to be given the honour of being President of the IMC.

4.2 Election of Officers and Committee Members
4.3 Non-Committee Roles
Peter Norton agreed to stay on as Conservation and Access Officer. Cearbhall Daly agreed to take over as Webmaster.

4.4 Auditors
5 MOTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elected</th>
<th>Proposers</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moira Creedon</td>
<td>Sean Barrett and Gerry Galligan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noel Caffrey</td>
<td>Cillian Russell and Peter O'Neill</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Elected</th>
<th>Proposers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chairperson</td>
<td>Sé o Hanlon</td>
<td>Tony Barry and Terry O'Neill</td>
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<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Dave Madden</td>
<td>Sé o Hanlon and Sean Barrett</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Declan Finnegan</td>
<td>James Flanagan and Dónal Ó'Murchú</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity Officer</td>
<td>Ian Christie</td>
<td>Noel Caffrey and Vanessa Sumner</td>
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<td>Membership Officer</td>
<td>Cillian Russell</td>
<td>Sinéad Rickerby and David Jacobs</td>
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<td>Training Officer</td>
<td>Kevin Coakley</td>
<td>Tony Barry and Peter Woods</td>
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<td>Meets Officer</td>
<td>Vanessa Sumner and Sinéad Rickerby</td>
<td>Tony Groves and Christy Rice</td>
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<td>Hut Warden</td>
<td>Christy Rice</td>
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<td>Librarian</td>
<td>Bénédicte Reau</td>
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<td>Ordinary Committee Member</td>
<td>Paul Neary</td>
<td>Sé o Hanlon and Dónal Ó'Murchú</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ordinary Committee Member</td>
<td>James Flanagan</td>
<td>Tony Barry and Sean Barrett</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Paddy O'Leary explained the background of the Expedition Grant Policy and Application Forms. The Application Forms are designed as a guide to help applicants decide if they have the expected competency.

Regarding the second motion, Paddy proposed that the second sentence be removed as he felt the method of appointing the Expedition Grant Panel should not be added to the constitution in order to allow a future committee make changes easily, if required. Sé o Hanlon noted that making the Panel as formal posts to the constitution was to ensure that the panel would not be neglected by a future committee.

5.1 Motion 1

"That the Expedition Grant Policy and Application Form be ratified."

Proposed by the committee and was approved unanimously.

5.2 Motion 2

"The committee will appoint a panel of six experienced members to consider the merits of Grant Applications for Expeditions to the Great Ranges and to make recommendations to the Committee."

Proposed by the committee and was approved unanimously.

5.3 Motion 3

Motion was withdrawn by the Committee.

6 Any Other Business

The president adjourned for refreshments. When the AGM reconvened after a short break there were no items put forward for discussion. The President then brought the 2013 IMC AGM to a conclusion.

Date: 2013-12-29T20:17+0000

Author: Eoin O'Neill
## Club Income and Expenditure to 30th September 2013

### Income 2013 2012 Expenses 2013 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership Fees</th>
<th>9,809</th>
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## Hut Income and Expenditure to 30th September 2013

### Income 2013 2012 Expenses 2013 2012

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<tr>
<td>Opening balance at 1st Oct 12</td>
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<td>Membership Fees to be lodged</td>
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<td><strong>Opening balance at 1st Oct 12</strong></td>
<td><strong>Opening balance at 1st Oct 12</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Transfer from club ac (Club savings)</td>
<td>Transfer from club ac (Club savings)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transfer from club ac (Club surplus cash)</td>
<td>Transfer from club ac (Club surplus cash)</td>
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<td>Transfer from club ac was originally Hut savings</td>
<td>Transfer from club ac was originally Hut savings</td>
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<td>Interest (373-101)</td>
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<td>40 year / life</td>
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**Treasurer's Report for Year ended 30th September 2013**

**CLUB**
Income from fees was €9029
Adjusted surplus for year was **€668**

**HUT**
Hut income - fees was €10819.83
Adjusted Deficit for the year was **€2,008**

**GENERAL**
UPCOMING EVENTS

April- Beginners Intro Program (organised by Kevin Coakley)
Thursday 10th April introductory talk Teachers Club 8pm.
Thursday 17th April learn to belay Awesome walls 7pm.
Sunday 27th April all day climbing session Dalkey Quarry
Thursday 1-8-15-22nd May Dalkey from 5pm
Weekend May 24th multi-pitch weekend Bearnagh Slabs Mournes, staying in Meelmore lodge.

Lake District Meet (organised by Gerry Moss)
Friday, Saturday, Sunday, May 30th, 31st and June 1st, leaving on the morning of Bank Holiday Monday, June 2nd.
This year we will be staying in a hut, new to the IMC, in the beautiful Duddon Valley.

Kerry meet (organised by Tony Barry)
12th - 14th September, Clohane, Dingle Penninsula Kerry
Staying at the foot of Mt.Brandon, half an hour away from Dunsheen Head.
Climb in the gap on the way back Sunday.
Details to be confirmed

Joe Reville Ireland Eye Meet
Saturday 6th September (to be confirmed)

October Bank Holiday Snowdonia (organised by Gerry Moss)
Fri, Sat, Sun, Oct. 24th, 25th and 26th, leaving on Monday 27th.
A long-standing, and popular, IMC tradition.

**There will be more meets organised throughout the spring/summer.

Just keep your eye on the website for details.
www.irishmountaineeringclub.org
or the imc on Facebook page.

I hope that all our members can keep these dates as we need everyone to participate to make this a success for the new members.