Contents

Moonlight Challenge
Áine O’REILLY
The IMC take on the moonlight challenge . . .

Scotland Winter 2014
Aidan ROE
A wet 4.30 am start marked the beginning of our trip to Scotland in Feb. . .

Costa Blanca
Colm PEPPARD
IMC Hot rock climbing in Spain . . .

Irish Rock Climbing Select Guide
Dave FLANAGAN
A new select guide to Irish rock climbing. . .

Scandinavian Slab Clinic
Dave MADDEN
Four days climbing in the Setesdal Valley, Norway. . .

Great Gola
Crystal SHIMABUKURO
IMC meet on Gola island, Donegal . . .

My Favourite Climb
Jon SMITH
Has Dalkey got a problem? Bouldering routes in Dalkey . . .

AGM NOTICE
Page  3

IMC BLOGS
Page  9

CARABINER ANATOMY
Page 19
The Ideal Belay
Rob DAVIES
First in a regular feature on technical topics . . .

St. Kevin's Traverse
Ceabhrall DALY
The traverse of the OTHER SIDE of Glendalough upper lake . . .

The Meets Team on Tour
Sinead RICKERBY
The meets team take on some UK classics . . .

Beginners Article
Louise CURTIS
A beginners perspective . . .

Bearnagh Slabs
Sinead PATTEN
The 2014 meet in the Bearnagh slab. . .

Paklenica National Park
Maria MCCARTHY
The Paklenica National Park in Croatia . . .

Wales Meet
Paul NOLAN
Allow me to begin with a short preamble. I’m a new member who joined the IMC in May . . .

Remembering Emmett Goulding
Page 31
A big thanks to all those who contributed to this newsletter
- Ian Christie (Editor)
The Annual General Meeting of the Irish Mountaineering Club will be held in The Teacher’s Club, Parnell Square, on Thursday November 20th at 8pm.

At this meeting all aspects of the running of the club will be open for discussion. It will be an open meeting at which any member of the club may express their views. If you would like an item placed on the agenda please forward it to the Secretary at least three weeks before the AGM.

Any TWO FULL Member’s of the club may have a motion placed on the agenda. Notice of the motion must be submitted signed by the Proposer and Seconder to the Secretary three weeks in advance of the AGM.

Only Full Member’s are entitled to a vote on such motions.

The committee for the coming year will be elected at the AGM. There are several forthcoming vacancies, please consider giving of your time for the benefit of the club.

The Secretary
How it all began
It was the Thursday after Joe’s accident when all talk in the Mc Donough’s pub was about what had happened. It had been a beautiful evening’s climbing in Dalkey Quarry and more people than usual had gone for a drink afterwards. The previous Saturday’s rescue had made the RTE news so everybody wanted to know more. The mountain rescue teams were one of the heroes of the story. Ian, who went to Joe’s assistance and helped with the rescue, spoke of how they had gotten him down from the mountain so professionally and carefully, with almost military skill. He described the human chain that they made passing Joe’s stretcher between them, and once it had passed each rescuer, he or she ran ahead to the front of the chain to receive the stretcher again and so he was passed from person to person safely down the mountain. Joe, although visibly gravely injured was thanking them and joking with them. Ian mentioned that one of the mountain rescue teams involved, The Glen of Immun Mountain Rescue Team, was organising a fund raiser to raise money, a night walk in November, The Moonlight Challenge. As well as our gratitude for what the team had done, the challenge sounded like something that we’d want to do anyway, a good excuse to hit the hills. Of course we were in.

The shock of the next day’s news that Joe had died completely wiped away the warmth and relief of the previous night’s drinks. Where, the previous night, it seemed incredible that he had survived (only somebody as large as life as Joe could survive such a massive fall), now it felt unbelievable that he had died. Five days on from the fall he was surely out of danger, and wasn’t he chatting away to the hoards of visitors that had descended on St Vincent’s. All our jokes and banter seemed out of place. It felt like we had been robbed.

And so the training began (in kind of earnest). I hadn’t done any serious hiking in years so I definitely needed to get up to speed. Ian was directing training and coordinating the group via email. After being almost blown away and on our first outing to Sorrel Hill it turned out to be a beautiful autumn. On various weekends we criss crossed Scarr, Brocadh, Camderry and Lugduff. After the fine summer the colours were almost unbelievably vivid. It was brilliant to be out on the mountains, a great
autumn to rediscover Wicklow; heart shaped Lough Owler, the colour of the layers of the blanket bog, the herds of deer keeping an eye on us. We even saw Wales and could count many mountains over there on the horizon. The views were stunning.

I joined the IMC to learn to climb so I hadn't properly appreciated that there are so many excellent hikers/mountaineers in the club, people with knowledge, efficiency and competence in the mountains. It was really eye-opening for me walk with them. Using phone apps and the specialised GPS trackers was also new to me. They track how long you've been walking, how far you've gone, tally the heights of the hills you've climbed and descended and even tell you how many calories they think you've burned. Quite entertainingly, these different systems never quite agreed with each other. This inspired much discussion as to which one was right and how come they differed. I chose to believe the one that indicated that we'd walked the longest, climbed the highest and burned the most calories.

Simpler methods were not without their problems either. When Ian asked me to lead a practice route I decided to draw it out on a laminated map to make things as simple as possible. It rained. It hadn’t occurred to me that rain and water soluble marker don’t really make a great combination, so we had the experience of more and more of the map washing away every time it was opened. Peter (who actually did know where he was going) suggested that it probably wasn’t the best idea to draw the route using make-up. It wasn’t make-up, but come to think of it, most good eyeliners are waterproof.

The runners’ training appeared to be going well too, and great tales of thundering across the mountains in the dark appeared the IMC online forum. They did emphasise that they were not treating the Moonlight Challenge as a competitive event; however their description of bounding from rock to rock and of running much further than they planned gave an impression of a completely different league of fitness. From their online discussions it appeared that head torches were a huge concern, particularly the strength of torch, measured in lumens, necessary to undertake a fell run (there was differences of opinion on the optimal number of lumens).

I’m not sure whether it’s possible to have Freudian slips while typing. As the event came nearer Ian's typos when emailing about the event made one unsure whether they were mere typos or whether they reflected a deeper malaise. He renamed the event the “moan light challenge” and called our collective team the “moon liters” in the title bar of various emails. Surely it was only a slip of the keyboard! He also repeatedly emphasised that it wasn’t him that was picking the teams, but that some nice, neutral, autonomous person from Glen of Immal Mountain Rescue was going to randomly assign people to teams.

When the original post had gone up on the club’s website looking for volunteers for the challenge, it very quickly became apparent that there was enough interest for more than one team. There were the usual, joking (I think!), requests not to be on such and such’s team. Also, there was a flurry of suggestions of names for the teams.
Being the harmonious lot that we are, these included “The Influential People”, “The Committee”, “The Real Irish Mountaineering Team” and “The Unofficial Irish Mountaineering Club”, and The Irish Mountaineering Popular Revolutionary Front (IMPRF) (a suggestion was made to add ‘Club’ to the last name so that they could be the IMPRFCs). There was huge competition on the money raising front with rival ‘my charity’ accounts vying for attention on the forum.

The teams were announced just before the big event. There were four walking teams from the IMC; the Irish Mountaineering Club, The Irish Mountaineering Popular Revolutionary Front (IMPERF), The Irish Mountaineering Liberation Alliance (IMLA), and the Irish Mountaineering and Non Mountaineers and Allied Activities Trade Union (The IMNMAATU). These names made me imagine us stomping across the route with placards and wearing dodgy 1980s anoraks, maybe even singing rebel songs. Times must be tough. The kit list included the usual, rain gear, head torch, whistle, first aid, water and food, but didn’t mention anoraks or placards or include any song sheets. Another typo I thought was that I was listed as captain of a team. Particularly when that team included Gerda Pauler, a Norwegian based German mountaineer who had traversed Nepal and had not only climbed the highest peaks in the seven countries containing the Alps as her summer holiday last year, but had cycled from peak to peak (to top this off when weather conditions had stopped her summitting Mont Blanc she cycled all the way back when she had completed her final peak in Italy to properly finish the job and successfully summited. This was surely some mistake.

The Big Day
When we arrived at Glenmalure Lodge we were struck by the great atmosphere. There was an air of friendliness, and expectation. It was a much bigger event than I had imagined with more than 400 participants. Everybody appeared to be in good form and feeling good about participating. The organisers had gone all out and there was a climbing wall and face painting – perfect for our revolutionaries! The runners already had been dispatched to their starting point. Their 20 km trail running route went east to west from the Immal bar in the Glen of Imaal via Table Track to Glenmalure.

At the check in, I was interrogated to ensure we were properly prepared. The officials seemed happy with my answers and we were issued with a map and a set of tickets to be submitted when the entire team presented to each checkpoint. We were bussed from Glenmalure to Glendassan, instructions originally given by email were reiterated en route by a steward. We were on the last bus and straining at the bridle to go.

The Route
The route brought us through the three glens from Glendassan to Glendalough and Glenmalure taking in sections of both St. Kevin’s Way and the Wicklow Way. It led from the old Lead Mines in the Glendassan Valley, via St. Kevin’s Way through the monastic settlement in Glendalough to glacial valleys and mountainous terrain along the miners’ path and the zigzags skimming Lugduff, then down through forest to the beautiful valley of Glenmalure. There were 3 check-in points on the route, Glendalough, Ballynafunshoge and at the Shay Elliot Memorial.
Glendassan to Glendalough
After a team check in at the start we were off, at a gallop along St Kevin’s way. The route was very well flagged. There was moon light; a full moon did make a brief appearance. The grave yard in Glendalough was transformed using dry ice and spooky lighting (there were fire jugglers on the route as well but they had gone home by the time we got there). It quickly became apparent that there were two different approaches to the challenge on our team. While the star gazers in the team took in the views, the speedier finish line gazers went stepping it out together finishing each leg first. The good atmosphere at the start carried through to the checkpoints. The craic was great. Copious amounts of enormous chocolate muffins were being dispensed so we’d probably gain weight on the walk.

Glendalough, to Ballynafunshogue
From the first check point a trail of light created by other people’s head torches stretched out ahead of us along the lakes and up the zigzags and then disappeared into the mist that covered the tops of the mountains. As we gained height near Lugduff the mist made visibility very poor and made our head torches pretty useless. They were better held in our hands than on our heads. The mist also made encountering other people quite a strange experience, especially because we couldn’t see them till the last minute. When we came upon somebody sitting alone in the middle of nowhere, I thought it was a walker who had enough and decided to give up - on further questioning it turned that they were one of mountain rescue team who was keeping an eye on us to make sure we didn't take a wrong turn. We also had the strange experience of various disembodied voices greeting us, and all that could be seen was a head torch bobbing around. We eventually sussed who they were - most of the time. A very slippery stone step down through the forest brought us to checkpoint two where Martin and Gerda, our finish line gazers, awaited us. It was a mild night, almost warm. I needed no extra layers and needed no extra food (those chocolate muffins!) I didn’t need the backpack.

In the forest, between checkpoint 2 and 3, we had another strange encounter. A few kilometres along the forest track beyond the check point the organisers had set up some mountain rescue mannequins to look as if they were climbing one of the trees. On first glance (in the dark, lit by head torch) it looked as if they were hanging and we couldn’t see that they weren't real people. Everybody stopped in their tracks as it caught their eye. The hairs on the back of my head stood up. On closer inspection it was obvious that they were climbing and that they were mannequins, but the initial impression took our breath away. Team conversation turned to the film, ‘the Blair Witch Project’.

When nature called, it seemed safe enough on an isolated path through the forest to barley step off into the trees whilst my team mates walked ahead. If any other teams were approaching, I’d see their head torches. As frequently seems to happen me, things didn’t go quite to plan. Just as I was nicely settled and offloading some of the many litres of water I had imbibed, the mountain rescue four by four with its high calibre headlights came around the corner.
Above the sound of the engine I heard my ‘teammates’ laughing hysterically as I jumped up and fumbled to get my clothes pulled up. My initial reaction to act as if that had just happened was scuppered when the jeep pulled alongside me and the driver rolled down his window and apologised profusely. He was laughing so much he didn’t have the breath control to finish the sentence. He did manage to blame my ‘team mates’ for pointing me out. I rejoined the gang. When they recovered from their hysterics they came up with ‘original’ jokes about being caught with my pants down and queries as to whether I had gotten my knickers in a twist!

The Finish Line
We made a half hearted attempt to jog to the finish line. Despite it being around midnight we were clapped into the finish line by very enthusiastic members of the mountain rescue team, who by then must have had very sore hands. At the final check in our time was noted, we were given a cert, a very fancy neck gaiter and team photo and some lovely stew.
The Après Challenge party in the Glenmalure Lodge was fantastic. There was music and dancing. There was a great buzz. Everybody seemed to be energised by their long walk rather than tired out by it. The driver of the jeep came over to apologise yet again about catching me in the headlights (and there I was reassuring myself that he probably wouldn’t recognise me again).

Sé O’ Hanlon was wondering if anybody else had seen the sight impaired runners and further explained that he had seen one runner with a guide runner tied closely to him. Somebody said it was Vincent and Ambrose but no one knew why they were attached to each other. We speculated that they never found a strong enough head torch, or maybe one had managed to blind the other with too powerful a torch, or perhaps they were taking their mountaineering relationship to a new level. An explanation came via Facebook and on the online forum, where according to Ambrose it was all Vincent’s fault. They weren’t tied together but were linked by Alpine Coils and they had done it just as a joke. (Ambrose did confess that he really enjoyed the spectacle of the ‘hardcore’ runners being passed by two idiots roped together!).

Walkers and runners included, twenty three people completed the challenge on behalf of the IMC. For the record, of the IMC teams the IMNAATU completed the challenge in the quickest time, The IMPERFs were second, the IMLA were third and last by a long shot were my team the IMC. Gary the victorious IMNAATU team captain later produced loaded all of the times onto a spread sheet so we could analyse our performance. The runners all completed the distance in double quick time with the (self named) ‘two idiots roped together’ heading up the IMC posse of six.

It was a fantastic night, the atmosphere was electric and everybody seemed to have great fun. The Moonlight Challenge was very well organised, both by Glen of Immal Mountain Rescue Team and by Ian Christie on behalf of the club. The enthusiasm, goodwill and spirit of all involved made it a great experience. It was a great cause and everybody was a winner. After costs they raised €35,000 from the event. They are going to buy and kit out a new van with the money that they raised (no need to improve the spec of those headlamps!).

*I think Joe would have approved.*

**IMC BLOGS**

The new IMC website has many new features. One of the best of these gives you the option to easily post of blogs of your latest adventures, with photos, straight from your pc.

To post a blog, go to the blog page on the website and click on "link to back end"
A wet 4.30 am start marked the beginning of our trip to Scotland in Feb. This is always my favourite trip of the year. From the first year I went out, the place captivated me. The wildness of the landscape and weather thrill me. The unpredictability of every trip keeps me motivated throughout autumn and winter. When I’m out running through the rain and mud in Wicklow, when the spirit flags, casting my mind north keeps me moving. What will the weather be like? What climbs will be “in”. If a particular climb is “in”, what will condition be like? Will I get some more of my tick list done? Weather-watching and perusing the local blogs fill a lot of spare time. I knew this year would be tough going. Scotland had been on the receiving end, like us, of storm after storm since December. Unlike here though it was dumping huge amounts of snow and I knew this would curtail our activities to some extent.

Niall, Karl, Ken and I made the long trip north towards Fort William. I had climbed with Niall last year in Scotland and we had some cracking days out. We have similar goals and seem to generally have the same aims when we’re out there. Karl had done an introductory course to Winter Mountaineering last year and had really enjoyed himself. He had signed up to do an advanced course this year and seemed really keen. Ken had never done any winter climbing but we had convinced him it was something he needed to do. We were to meet my friend from Newcastle, Alastair who I meet the first year out there and we had met up each year since. He’s the quietest Geordie you’ll ever meet but very solid when it counts and finally, sharing digs with us up there, club adventurer, Ambrose.

Disembarking from ferry it was obvious there was plenty of snow on the hills. Looking north the mountains on Arran were blanketed. I love the drive. Once past Glasgow you soon hit Loch Lomond and from there on its one stunning vista after another. We crossed Rannoch Moor. The amount of snow was truly staggering for Scotland. Few of the usual features could be picked out.

On many slopes we could see the trace of avalanches. When we got to the top of Glencoe we stopped to take a look at Buachaille Etive Mor.
I have passed it many times and never seen it in such condition. Two of the plumb gully lines on it were full, Crowberry and Ravens but with unconsolidated snow. No use to anyone. A picture of someone climbing in Crowberry is what started me winter climbing. I only now feel ready to tackle it but it’s rarely in the right condition. Ravens is a pipe dream! There is always next year. We continued on to Fort William and got set up in our digs for the week.

My usual itinerary up here is to hire a guide for a couple of days and then get out myself for the remainder of the trip. Not having anyone to teach me the requisite skills I have found this to be an ideal way to learn the basics of winter climbing. It’s a good system. You’ll second routes that will be initially way outside your ability to safely lead but at the same time give you the self confidence to tackle climbs at an easier grade. I think it’s a good idea to work your way up through the grade so you won’t end up getting sand-bagged on mid grade climbs. More so than rock, during the winter the golden rule of winter climbing is, don’t fall.

We like to get a tune up day in before meeting our guides, so Niall, Ken, Alastair and myself and set our sights on Stob Coire na Lochan. The forecast was reasonable and we felt the avalanche hazard, although Considerable (see link below) was manageable. The walk into the coire is short by Scottish standards but brutal to the uninitiated. Ken moaned about his knee a lot.

The snow level started at about 400m which actually made it a bit easier at the start but the last 100m into coire was tough going.
Niall had been keen to do Twisting Gully (III,4) a Cold Climbs classic (required reading for any would be winter climbing) as he had led the crux on SC Gully (III) the year before and I think it was just an itch that needed scratching. We knew that gullies would be out on this trip, in Lochaber anyway, so I had set my eye on Raeburn’s Ordinary Route (IV,4) as a backup plan. I love doing climbs that have been put up by some of the greats and Harold Raeburn is right up there. This would be my first IV lead and the game face was on. Ali and I swam up to the base of route. There were prodigious amounts of snow it took ages to get to the base. Eventually we got a descent nut in after 10 minutes digging, not ideal for a belay but I had spotted some rope tat 5m away and knew I could clip that and expected to get more gear in as I moved up the initial chimney. This was my first mistake.

The first pitch is close to 60m and over the length of it I got 3 pieces of gear in. The route was buried in fresh powder so axe placements weren’t as secure as you’d like and by the time I had worked my way up to the second belay my head was well and truly fried. It physically wasn’t very hard but it was mentally the hardest bit of climbing I’ve ever done. I arrived at the second belay sitting au cheval on ridge, knowing I was just out of rope and starting to freak. I couldn’t see a thing to set up a belay with. Just as I was about to start trying to bury my axe I looked out to left and saw a newish peg in a crack. I dug the snow out of crack further down and place a descent nut. I had my belay. The sense of relief was unbelievable. I brought Alastair up. And he followed through. Niall arrived up quickly behind him. He had led the first pitch well, finding more gear than me. The second pitch bypasses a big tower. You traverse around it and then up a shallow gully behind it. After that you make a bold step out to the left over the cliff face on soft snow. The wire Alastair used to protect this is still there. He bet it in. I don’t blame him. Niall appreciated the courtesy. The last belay was solid. I led the first pitch and although it was easier it was quiet precarious. I was also getting into the swing of things and found plenty of protection using a bit of cop on, sadly in short supply on first pitch. Alistair and I topped out. It was dry but the wind was biting. I wasn’t sure how Ken was doing. It was his first winter route so Niall would have to lead it all. After an extended wait, Niall topped out and shortly afterwards Ken. The steward’s enquiry commenced. How long was I on first pitch? I don’t know but it was a while. How long were we on top waiting? A while. What we do know is Ken had an attack of the vapours. What caused them? No one knows but I suspect it’s because he’s a great big fanny. It was a great day out. I was buzzing. I had the piss ripped out of me on the way down to car. I didn’t care. A great start to the week.

Karl had a good first day. He had the good luck to get paired off with a guide on a 1 to 1 basis, its normally 2 to 1 so on his first day he managed to get The Curtain (IV,5) on Carn Dearg and Left Hand Chimney (IV,4) on the Douglas Boulder done, with his guide Matt Stygall. Ambrose was off on the North Buttress (IV,4) on Buachaille Etive Mor with Alan Hughes finishing up a course. We went straight to the pub to have a drink and see who could bullshit the most. I won. I’ve lots of practice.
The second and third day out were to be guided days. The forecast on the first of these wasn’t brilliant, we decided to head up the Allt a Mhuilleann to the CIC hut under the North face of Ben Nevis, and take a look at our options when we got up there. There wasn’t a huge amount on. No one had been high on the mountains for weeks. Most of the big classics were out.

It’s a stunning walk in, even in foul weather. I remember how intimidated I felt the first time I walked in under Carn Dearg and up towards the CIC hut. Now it just gives me a rush. So many great climbers have climbed here, set new routes here and still today the boundaries are being pushed. Mike Pescod and Guy Stevens our guides for next few days pointed out bits and pieces. Because of the unusual weather over the last 6 weeks climbs were in that hadn’t been done in years. The Shroud (VI,6), an icefall in Castle Corrie had touched down for the first time in years. No one could get near it though because of the avalanche hazard on the hill above. We took turns out in front to try breaking the wind for the others behind. Eventually we got to CIC Hut and geared up. The Curtain was in good condition and there was another climb beside it the Curtain Rail (IV,4) beside it that would allow us climb together and then switch. Although given a harder technical grade I found The Curtain the easier of the two climbs. The ice on The Curtain gave first time placements all the way up while the crux move on the Curtain Rail had slightly cruddy ice. It made for a nice thoughtful sequence. I believe Ken suffered a brain fart here but I only have second hand information so it’ll stay on the hill. For the moment. My descent down No. 5 Gully would have won me a prize at the Winter Olympics. It certainly gave the lads a laugh.

The following day Alastair and I climbed Observatory Ridge (V,4) with Mike. This was the last of the 4 great ridges on Ben Nevis for us. The Ridge was covered in snow and mist. It made the digging
out of belays really difficult, and in some cases, further up the ridge impossible. We had to move together over steep but easy ground with massive exposure on either side. Every axe and foot step had to be 100%. It felt really out there at times. As we were doing this the mist lifted for a while and we could see all around. It is really massive. We could see climbers across on Tower Ridge and we could hear Ken (really loud) and Niall across on the NE Buttress. Unfortunately the clag closed back in but not before we got a chance to check out the cornices. They were massive. We were able to skirt these by moving out left, but even now 3 weeks later I don’t believe any of the classic gullies have been done. We topped out to find Niall and Ken were already on their way down. After a most enjoyable bum-slide down the Red Burn, losing about 400m in 10 minutes we met up with lads at the car park. Karl had also done the NE Buttress with Matt. He had an exciting day. Starting up to the First Platform by a rarely in condition, Newbiggins 80 Minute Route Right Hand Variation (V,6) and then, while doing one of the crux moves on NE Buttress, the Mantrap, he was left holding just the handle of his axe as it had become detached from shaft. Exciting stuff! While we were all on Ben Nevis Ambrose was out on a blind date on Stob Ban in the Mamores. He had done the east ridge of the North Buttress (II/III) and had a cracking day.

The following day we were back out by ourselves again. Niall and Ken were keen to do Tower Ridge while Alastair and I opted for a road trip. I have for a few years been looking to go to the NW of Scotland. Conditions are fickle here because of its proximity to the sea. This year though the best conditions seemed to be up there. The avalanche forecast was good so Alistair and I set off at 6.30 for Liathach up in Torridon. It was a fantastic day out. Once north of Invergarry it really does become wild and remote. It took us nearly 3 hours to get up there but it passed quickly. We had set our eye on a climb called George. It’s graded as a III,4 but with some recent rockfall local climbers have upped it to III,5. We arrived at the car park on a lovely clear morning. All the walk-ins are meaty up there and the guidebook had it down as a 2.5 hours in to coire. We made good time and got to the foot of climb. I took the first easy pitch and ran the rope out to its full length. To the start of the more technical sections. Alastair set off and came to the first step which he surmounted with the minimum of fuss. He disappeared out of sight. I was left there occasionally paying out the rope taking in the views which were magnificent. Eventually the rope came tight and I got moving. Over the first step the rope continued on for 15m and then disappeared into a hole/cave(?). I followed the rope. Ali, had set up belay in the cave. It was really tight. He looked uncomfortable. ‘Are you sure this is the right way?’ ‘Yes 100%’. I could see light behind him.

The guidebook describes it as fun and that it shouldn’t be bypassed. There was no way I could follow him in and swing leads, he’d have to continue on himself. With hindsight this was a real stroke of luck. To continue Ali had to dig away the snow and move towards the light. The cave is formed by an enormous chockstone. To lead on you have to climb up into a letterbox above it turn through 180 degrees and reverse out over a sheer drop. There is very little clearance so turning around is a struggle. Reversing out over sheer droop is a bigger struggle and trying to get your arm/axe out and into something solid is ....? The belay was a massive thread so 100% but Ali did ask to be kept on a tight rope. A few times. When I eventually followed thru I couldn’t believe it. It was a really ballsy lead. I led through to the top and out on the ridge near the summit of Spidean a’Choire Leith.
At this stage it was later than I had expected and the weather was crapping out on us. I had planned to traverse Liathach over the Am Fasarinen Pinnacles, get two routes done but there was no point. We needed to get to the top of Spidean to find our way off the mountain.

It’s a fabulous top (only 275 Munros to go now) but we were only getting fleeting glimpses in the worsening weather. We descended to a col lower down the mountain and found our way off the mountain by using the tried and tested method of following the footprints. We eventually picked up the track lower down the mountain and reached the van for 7.30. It was a proper Scottish day out and the pair of us were buzzing, even faced with the long drive back to Fort William. We already have plans to get back up there for a few days next year. It was a brilliant day out. We arrived back at Fort William just in time for beer and kebabs. A perfect end to my birthday.

While we were off fannying around on Liathach, Niall and Ken were doing the famous Tower Ridge (IV,3) Ken takes up the story . . .

It was Wednesday, my fourth day out and my third morning in a row to be walking into the CIC hut. We had arrived on the Saturday. I had an ‘easy introduction’ day on Sunday; a quick spin into Stob Coire na Lochain; a restful belay and a record breaking ascent, with Aidan, Alastair and Niall leading the way. Monday and Tuesday we climbed with guides. The pace was a bit easier this morning than that set on the earlier mornings. We were up earlier than the other days and were making good progress. The sky was blue and the air still.

Our walk-in was going to be 40 minutes longer this morning, as we hadn’t access to the higher car park, used exclusively by the guides. As we approached the hut we could see some parties setting out and behind us we could see a string of climbers approaching.

Happy that we had set off early enough we passed the hut and headed up and left of the Douglas boulder. On the steeper ground we put on our crampons and got the axes out.

This was my first trip to Scotland, my fourth day in crampons and I was comfortable uphill, downhill though I was still being cautious.

We were heading for Tower Ridge. It was Niall’s route really, I was along for the experience and happy to second. If other days were anything to go by we were expecting lots of snow on the route. Protection might be hard to find and perhaps some critical features might be buried. We were both looking forward to testing ourselves in the conditions.

Niall lead off up a wide snowy gully, finding gear on the left wall, he disappeared around an elbow and I was quickly called up to the belay; a piece of in situ cord on a spike. The next pitch was the first bit of real climbing, rock snow and ice, a short chimney lead to a broad snowy ridge where Niall set up a stomper belay. As I completed the pitch, a guide and his client appeared to our left, ascending a snow slope. Niall hit the green for go button. The race was on to keep ahead and not have people getting in our way, especially a guide and his client.
As I pondered the view, Niall was off. Niall and Aidan had done a number of trips together and this was my first trip with them. They climbed with guides on a couple of days each trip and they obviously had absorbed a lot of knowhow and had made it their business to learn the skills and the environment. I wasn't out of my depth, but certainly I had no winter climbing experience and deferred to the two lads when it came to planning the day's climb. Part of the plan was obviously not to stop! The previous few days I had become accustomed to eating and drinking on the hoof, being fed hot drink while I belayed. My efficiency had to improve, with the guides it is possible to switch off; today there was no switching off. It was going to be a long day and we were not on for having anyone make our day longer.

We completed a couple of pitches along a shallow ridge; following instructions I moved out ahead and belayed Niall along a pitch, he arrived and corrected my stomper belay technique.

The Guide and client arrived, Niall was gone. He was along the ridge digging out a belay at the base of the smaller tower. When I arrived we were belayed on a couple of nuts and a piton. It was a wide part of the ridge, plenty of room for everyone. Niall traversed right along the base of the tower and dug out a spike about ten meters out, another ten meters he disappeared around a corner and I could tell by the rope he was now moving up. The Guide and client arrived. There seemed to me to be an alternative route straight up the tower, but on the left, but most route descriptions warns against this route. Niall called me across, the guide following. My first winter lead was offered; I was up the gully like the proverbial rat. I know from other climbing experience that I climb differently as a second; I seem to get less absorbed in the climbing and tend to follow the rope. It's a habit I’m trying to break. I exited the gully onto a long snow slope, I ran it out the length of the rope, but couldn't get to the obvious end of the slope. Now to build a belay; a stomper or dig one out at the base of a small boulder to my right? Well my last stomper did not meet approval so perhaps I should stick with what I know. I dug, and dug and dug some more. Finally I had a route dug out for a long sling, which of course was not on my harness but below on Niall's harness. I dug some more and found two nut placements.

The guide appeared to my left. I watched as he did a little stomper dance, drove his axe in and within seconds was calling his client up. I eventually called Niall up. He was now second; I reasoned that he was at least safe and alive; he was still second! I’ll have to work on that efficiency!!

Another pitch or two and somehow Niall was ahead again and digging out good belays for the guide and client. Finding good belay spots is a bit of a black art I think and it comes with experience I hope. The competition was beginning to dull as the two leaders got chatting; they switched leads for a couple more pitches, one belaying slightly above the other on each pitch. It is good to cooperate with other climbers, but it was obvious we were all trying to stay ahead of the posse behind us. The blue sky had disappeared and there were no views from the ridge. The wind was rising. I arrived at the foot of The Great Tower. The guide was ahead on the eastern traverse, his client belaying. I looked up at the near vertical face of The Great Tower and wondered if I could climb it. The guide was on what seemed to me to be a snowy path, well beaten out by previous
climbers over the last few days. The narrow path seamlessly blended into the surrounding mist that rolled down the steep slope below. Niall moved quickly along the traverse, it swung left then right with a step over a small ridge and over a buried block then the route turned sharply up to an open slope. As I turned the corner and climbed the slope Niall called, he was way out to my left, almost below me, standing in Tower Gap. I crossed the slope to the top of The Gap. The snow and ice were soft and mushy and not at all as good as what we had previously climbed. As I approached, on my right was the sense of yawning space. I couldn’t see it but felt it was there, Down to my left in The Gap Niall was belaying and gave some instructions about the climb down. The ice wasn’t solid. It was undercut and below where you would like a good right foot there was only scratchy rock. It was the first time in the week I felt I had to reset myself and consider that I might have to be prepared to take a swing, right down the narrow walls of Golvers Chimney. I kicked some of the slush away, got a good left foot and traversed across, not very stylishly, but it was winter in Scotland!!

The Gap was definitely the most technical part of the climb, the most exposed and the least secure. There were a few delicate moves to follow to get out and onto the ridge above. I had the comfort of the rope; I was quickly getting to like this seconding. Niall had no such comfort and did well to step delicately up the fragile snow and ice.

Another run out, a climb right over a short wall and bulges and we were up. Niall was barely visible in the blowing snow. The weather had got a lot worse. We gathered the gear and prepared for the descent. We had prepared a couple of bearings and distances to guide us from the top back to the well trodden descent path. The plateau of Ben Nevis is not the place to be lost in a white out. If there was evidence of other climbers about it was quickly blown away by the high wind. There were no footprints to follow. I walked on our bearing, Niall close to my shoulder making sure I didn’t stumble over an edge in error. A sharp turn right after 150 meters brought us onto the correct bearing to descend towards the Red Burn.

As we descended we were sure we were on the right path, the texture of the snow was solid underfoot compared to left and right of our route although visibility was nil. I had never experienced a complete white out before where there seemed to be no up or down and it was good practice to navigate through it.

We gradually emerged and quickly descended; helped by an exhilarating 500 meter bum slide. It was almost dark by the time we got to the car park. A day out in the mountains would not be complete without some injury and my right leg obliged. I hobbled down the last bit of path, Niall didn’t seem in such a hurry now, happy with his successful lead he waited at each bend to make sure I was still mobile. We both reached the jeep, sat stiffly into the comfortable seats and relaxed. A full on, great Scottish winter day out. Now back to Aidan . . .

The following day’s weather was horrendous so we all had a rest day to recharge the batteries and even though the day after that’s forecast was poor we had made up our minds to go out anyway.
We thought we'd head up and take a look at Stob Ban and see if we'd get the route Ambrose had done earlier in the week done. We battled our way up the track on the way in for an hour or so in the strengthening wind and deepening snow and finally decided unanimously to turn around. The avalanche hazard was rising all the time, still it filled part of the day and after going back to Fort William we went out for the afternoon and spent the day climbing indoors.

With high winds and a sketchy avalanche forecast we decide to head over to Glencoe to try North Buttress (IV,4) on Buachaill Etive Mor. The weather was to deteriorate during the day so we left early. I was climbing with Ken and Niall because Alastair had injured his hand at the climbing wall the day before. Ambrose and Karl were joining us. We got in to the base of the buttress and started to ascend towards the foot of the climb. The snow wasn't frozen so even getting to the bottom of climb was hard work. When I went to put my crampons on one of them decided to come apart in my hand. It took me 15 minutes to fix it and by the time I got moving again my hands were frozen and I was in foul humour. I caught up with the two lads who were waiting for me and flaking out the rope. Niall was ready to run the rope out, up to the first belay just to get things moving as there were two lads in front of us. Niall brought me and Ken up to belay, not before Ken tried to remove one of my fingers with his new axes. By the time we got up to it, the rope was in a right mess. Niall was going to lead the first proper pitch so it needed to be pulled back thru. While I was doing this Ken had spotted a helicopter. Instead of paying attention he was staring vacantly at the helicopter (RAF practicing I'd guess). I believe he has some previous here so I should of let it pass but I lost it and told Ken to ignore the big helicopter. I was quite frank. Meanwhile we waited for the two lads in front to finish. They were painfully slow, but I'll cast no stones after my performance earlier in the week. Niall led off up first pitch. It wasn’t in the best condition, freezing level was above the mountain top and it was covered in unconsolidated snow. Sub-optimal I believe is the expression. By the time Niall reached the second belay he had caught the two boys up. The next pitch was the crux. The lads were down to a crawl. I was cold and flowery. The toys came out of the pram. I told Ken I’d had enough. I untied and down-climbed to the base of route. I stopped to see how the lads were getting on. Even after getting to the base of the hill and looking up, the team in front were still on the second pitch. I crouched down behind a boulder to watch. The eventually finished and Ken set off. It was his first winter lead and he nailed it. He was up it in no time. I’d seen enough. They had caught the two lads again. I went back to the carpark and met Ambrose and Karl who’d bailed earlier, and got a lift back with them. Niall and Ken arrived later on. They had abbed off after the second pitch because the team in front were so slow. We’d had a good day out despite the poor weather. One important thing I took from the day was the forecast. Although very high winds (70-80mph) had been forecast, they didn’t materialise until much later. Nine times out of ten the forecast is on the money and should never be ignored, but in Scotland to a degree you should always head out and stick your nose in. Otherwise you’d get nothing done.

That was the end to our unofficial IMC meet in Scotland. There was the usual bout of drinking and bullshitting and the long drive home but I think everyone enjoyed it. The rat had been sated for the time being.
I’m already looking at ideas for next year. I definitely want to get up and do some more routes in the NW. Niall still has his eye on Point Five. Ken is going to get his knee fixed so he can join us again next year without having to do all his weird stretching, and I think the bug has well and truly bitten Karl. He just needs a pair of axes that don’t come apart on him. Ambrose seemed to have a good two weeks and picked up lots of new skills as he works toward his Winter ML.

**Useful Links**
http://www.mwis.org.uk/ (Mountain Weather)
http://www.sais.gov.uk/ (Avalanche Forecast)
http://www.fortwilliamholiday.co.uk/ (Accommodation)
http://www.abacusmountaineering.com/ (Courses, Private Guiding)
http://www.ukclimbing.com/logbook/winter.html (what’s been climbed in past 5 days)
http://www.smc.org.uk/publications/?ID=59 (A good selection covering the whole of Scotland.)
19 of us met up bleary eyed for the 7am flight from Dublin to Alicante on Sat 8 March. Half the flight was made up of Spanish teenagers, who were probably going home after a school trip to Ireland. There was a big cheer out of them when we touched down in Alicante and looking out at the bright sunshine and 20 degrees we could see why.

It was a handy 1 hour transfer up to our accommodation at Finepark mountain lodge, a couple of km outside Finestrat and about 10km away from Benidorm. This was a great find by Ian Christie because the lodge was big enough to accommodate all of us, which made for great social evenings, with all the group together each night. 4 who flew in later had to put up with the hardship of staying in a house by the pool a 100m away. The pattern from day 1 was drinks after dinner in the big common room until the wee hours (well 1am most nights) and muchos cerveza and rioja was had at bargain prices. Thankfully there was no dancing on tables but ear plugs were recommended for early nighters.

On the first afternoon, 10 of us trekked up to have a look at the start of ‘Espolon Central’, the 13 pitch monster climb up Puig Campana (at 1400m the 2nd highest mountain on the Costa Blanca). This climb ranged from 3 (VD) to 4+ (VS) but with the serious exposure applying and route finding being critical I decided it was one to aim for next year. However, Kevin Coakley, Ian Christie, Peter Woods and Barry Watts went off satisfied and ready for their assault a few days later. James Aitken cooked a great meal for us all that first night and by 10pm we had our full complement of 23 (as those coming by the later Ryanair flight were then in).
The first day we all went to Sierra de Toix (well all bar John Duignan and Hugh Reynolds who being the cute ones with a priority car booking had made a dash for Toix straight from the airport the day before and so went elsewhere). Toix is an impressive sea cliff face about 10km north of Benidorm and with a choice of 222 sport routes (ranging from 3 to 8a+) you could spend your week just here alone! There are great views of the coast and the mountains inland from here. Just a short walk from the car park is Toix far Oest, a nice short rock face (single pitch climbing) which had some 3s, and plenty of 4 and 4+s for us to get used to rock again (after a winter indoors). Most of us amused ourselves on this face for the day, as there were 27 routes to choose from. I was climbing with Brian Lawless, as well as Aine O’Reilly and James Aitken, who shared our car.

The second day we went to the crag beside the picturesque village of Guadalest, which is perched on top of an impressive limestone pinnacle and has an imposing castle watch tower and church. We went to the Penya Alcalà area which had a number of 4 and 4+s for us to warm up on. Peter and Barry were climbing beside us and told us that Ian, Kevin, Niall and Tina Ennis had gone off to do an impressive Trad route called Esther's Chimney (which climbs up through a vertical tunnel hollowed out in the mountain by erosion). After lunch we moved over to that crag called ‘Penya Maura’ and we met Ian who was just back down and so able to give us details of the climb which was 3 pitches long and took about 3½ hours to do. We decided to give it a go (the first pitch at least) and because it was now mid afternoon Aine lead off up the left side (with James), following Ian's earlier route, and in order to save time, I lead off up the right side (with Brian) at the same time. Ian had warned us that he had had difficulty getting good protection in and had found this pitch the most committing. This was certainly the case, there was some ‘psychological’ gear put in (that you didn’t really want to fall on), but we both made it up without incident. It was part HS, part VS, but climbing it ‘on-sight’, unsure of protection and unsure what was coming next definitely made it feel VS all the way. The limestone was very sharp compared to the bolted routes and really made us appreciate what the people who developed this area had to deal with in the early days (I imagine an even stronger aversion against falling than usual and a fair investment in rock shoes). By stark contrast the 2nd pitch through the chimney inside the mountain was completely smooth and quite straightforward, but because it was so unusual it made the climb particularly memorable. The final pitch was surprisingly short and not too difficult, but exiting out of a small window in the rock onto an exposed face by an airy delicate move this proved equally memorable. On top of the climb a fantastic view of Guadalest on one side and a turquoise coloured reservoir on the other greeted us.

The third day we went to Vall de Guadar (Echo Valley) which per the Rockfax guide “is one of the more impressive mountainous limestone regions in the Costa Blanca. Compared to many of the other crags in the Costa Blanca it is relatively unspoilt and quiet which makes it a great venue for those who are after a bit of solitude far from the madding crowds.” There are 8 climbing areas and we climbed in the Echo 1.5 area (which offered a number of humane grades as well as harder stuff). We warmed up on a number of short single pitch 4s and 4+s, though accidentally did a 5 to start with, and then moved to longer 25m climbs on the upper face. The first of these ‘Romero’s birthday’, graded 4, I found more committing and difficult than the short 5 I did earlier (so certainly one that I would swap the grades around on). Meanwhile Aine and James found an extended
climb all the way from the lower crag up onto the upper crag and up to the top on an oddly named route calle 'Sesamoid'. The imposing face of ‘Aran de Batistot’ and fine views back to the coast made Echo Valley another very scenic place to climb. Meanwhile, today being the last of the very good weather days Kevin, Ian, Peter and Barry had gotten up at 6.30am and gone to Puig Campana to tackle the epic 13 pitch classic ‘Espolon Central’ climb up the east face of it. I’ll let Barry take over.

That evening we discovered that Eric, Geraldine, Przemek and Karolina, had done the very airy and imposing grade 5 (HVS) Magical Mystery Tour route on Sierra de Toix. I’ll let Eric take over.

Three solid days climbing done at this stage we were keen to give the fingers a break from pure climbing and so we hatched plans to have a climbing ‘rest day’ and instead go for the Castellets ridge walk. Per the Rockfax guide “sandwiched between the rock climbing meccas of the Sella valley and the majestic Puig Campana is a serrated ridge of marathon proportions - Castellets. The ridge is composed of a multitude of summits linked by dizzying, and at times difficult knife-edge aretes. There is the magnificent traverse of the first section of the ridge, the El Realet Ridge”. Unfortunately, after escaping for 4 days someone in Met Eireann discovered where we were and sent some Irish weather over our way and so the forecast for Wednesday was suddenly for high winds and rain showers. Knife edge arets not being the best place to be in high winds and rain we quickly changed plans on Wed morning. As the wind and rain was sweeping in from the north east, we scoured the guide for SW facing crags and found that a low down crag across the road from Echo Valley was just right and so back we went to Echo Valley on day 4. In the end the showers didn’t amount to much and being Spain the rock dried out immediately after so we got a number of good climbs in. Needing a break from climbing all the time we took the opportunity to set up a top rope from an overhang in order to practice self ascending a rope using harness and foot prussiks (and this was meant to be a rest day!)

Ian and a few others were climbing up at the main face of Echo Valley. We had hatched a plan earlier that if the weather held we might walk from Echo Valley back over the mountains, around Puig Campana to Finestrat (a walk of about 10km which Ian had done last year and highly recommended). Luckily the weather held and so Ian, Aine, James and myself, set off from the top of Echo Valley over the mountains to complete this walk late in the afternoon. So much for a ‘rest day’, but I have to say, the views were fantastic (far exceeding my expectations) and ‘Ballymun by the Sea’ (Benidorm) actually looked pretty good from up there (like some futuristic space city). The inland countryside and mountain views are stunning. The view of the knife edged Castellets ridge in the twilight, with mountain ranges behind it continuing to the horizon was particularly good. We even had a full moon rise up over Puig Campana to make it a magical walk back in the last of the daylight.

On the fifth day, the forecast was for more serious rain, so we decided to use high tech methods to decide where to go i.e. we stuck our heads out the lodge door to see which way the wind was blowing and which way looked least grey.
We gambled on a dash back to the coast and Sierra de Toix (as it jutted out of the coast and might escape some of the rain). This turned out to be a good gamble because we spent a full day climbing on dry rock in very pleasant conditions while looking at heavy grey cloud blanketing all the inland crags. John and Hugh had the same idea and they spent the day in the impressive Mascarat gorge just before Toix (again on dry rock with the place to themselves). This time we climbed a ‘top 50’ 2 star two pitch climb called Espolón Gris, 32m and 30m. It was graded 4+ (VS) but as a user on the Rockfax website rightly says “there are many ways to climb this and whilst the easiest line might be 4+ it is very easy to get onto harder terrain.” We also climbed the 1 star 2 pitch climb Viejos tiempos which being: “the old trad route up the blocky grooves”, also allowed me to put in extra protection when I fancied it.
On our final day, we travelled to Olta (which sits just inland from the massive 300m tower of the Peñon d’Ifach which looms over Calpe). We picked Olta because there were lots of routes to choose from at our grade and because we got to finish off in style with stunning views of the Penon d’Ifach (probably the most famous landmark on the coast). We got in several climbs and finished on a brilliant climb up onto a pinnacle, which gave fine views of the Penon and the coast.

That night our hosts at Finepark mountain lodge laid on a huge bbq and we all feasted, told tales, and drank under the stars. Out came the guitar, and Karl, the new voice of Finestrat, gave it socks and led the way in belting out the songs.

We climbed for 6 days in a row and had barely scratched the surface of what the Costa Blanca has to offer. We climbed in 4 different locations and in 1 / 2 areas in each. However, to put it in context, the Rockfax guide lists 50 different locations, many with over a dozen different areas in each, a total of 3,500 sport routes, and 21 featured Trad routes (there are many Trad routes, like Esther’s Chimney, which aren’t in the guide, as it focuses on sports routes). We didn’t even make it to the most extensive climbing location in the Costa Blanca, Sella which has 317 routes, albeit, mostly in the higher grades. All the places we climbed were within a 40 minute drive from our accommodation (Echo Valley was only 20 minutes away). Within a 1 to 1½ hour radius from Finestrat dozens of locations are in range and many only have a short walk in to them. The choice of climbing areas and climbs are huge. I reckon you could go to the Costa Blanca every year for over a dozen years and keep climbing new areas every year. Thanks to Ian for a great trip. I can’t wait to get back . . .

Holiday info: Fly to Alicante (c.€150) Aer Lingus or Ryanair

Car Hire: (c€50), if you add full ‘crash and bash’ insurance and petrol (c.€200 for the week)

Finepark lodge was €17 pp per night (€119 for the week) - http://www.finepark.com/en

We used the Rockfax Costa Blanca climbing guide.

Also, lots of info online on http://www.rockfax.com/databases  [Spain, Costa Blanca]

Also see - http://costablancaclimbing.com/theclimbing.html
As some of you may be aware I’m currently working on a select guide to Irish Rock Climbing. Following in the footsteps of Calvin and Dawson’s 1984 select guide “Rock Climbing in Ireland” is a daunting task. Their guidebook, published by Constable, is now a collector’s item and still serves as a very useful guide to some of the best climbs in the country.

Select guides, free to focus on the best – what ever that means – climbs, have a little more space to breathe, with more room for route descriptions and clearer, less cluttered topos. But nothing has more potential to create discussion and debate, quality is highly subjective, it’s impossible to get it ‘right’. Never has the phrase “You can please some of the people some of the time, all of the people some of the time, some of the people all of the time, but you can never please all of the people all of the time” been more apt.

Whatever my final selection, no matter how many people I talk to, some people will disagree. Everyone has different preferences and biases. The final list won’t, and shouldn’t, be my personal picks it should represent the sum of all the input I receive. Maybe the goal isn’t to please as many people as possible but to displease as few as possible. I recently read a review in an old IMC newsletter by David Walsh of the 1984 guide and I was heartened to read his criticism of some of the choices made by the editors.

To showcase the best climbing our country has to offer and do it justice is a big responsibility and choosing the right routes is important but I suspect (hope!) there is an large element of the 80:20 rule i.e. the vast majority of climbers would make similar choices most of the time.

The primary goal of the guide is to document the best of Irish rock climbing but it isn’t just a matter of compiling a list of the best routes, I must take into account how the book will be used and help climbers to choose the most suitable destination for their abilities and preferences. Is there any point documenting the only easy route on a remote crag packed with brilliant hard routes? Is there enough routes at a certain grade to ensure that people can have a good day’s climbing?

I would consider the following as the most important factors.

**Quality**

Quality has to be number one really. If a route is good then it’s a contender, maybe it’s remote, maybe there isn’t much other good climbing on the crag, maybe it’s not that popular, it’s still a contender. Guides uses stars to indicate quality and different guidebook writers seem to have different approaches to stars, some seem more generous than others. I have noticed a tendency for hard routes to get 2 or 3 stars almost by default. It’s understandable that a first ascentist is proud of their route and thinks it’s great and there is probably some selection bias going on (they wouldn’t put the work into climbing a new route unless they thought it was going to be good) but they aren’t really the best people to objectively assess the quality.
There isn’t an really scientific way to measure quality, it’s entirely subjective. If a route get climbed often and is considered good then it probably is, ditto if it’s considered rubbish but the difficulty lies in accessing less popular routes. The logbook system on UKClimbing is excellent, everyone who logs a climb can vote on its grade and star rating. The Irish crags have a reasonable amount of data entered but again on only the more popular routes.

**Popularity**

This is a tricky one. If you accept that good routes are popular for a reason and vice versa then no problem. But I don’t think it’s as simple as that. What about hard routes that are rarely climbed? Have a quick look at the UKClimbing logbook entry for almost any crag and you can see that the most popular routes are the easier ones. It makes sense that the routes that most people can climb are climbed the most often (I think this is a cumulative distribution function).

The herd mentality is also a factor, ironically I think most climbers aren’t that adventurous preferring to stick with the established classics rather than taking a risk on a route that hasn't got three stars or that doesn't have a good rep.

However there is an opportunity in this. By highlighting (maybe with a great photo) and clearly describing some routes it’s possible to attract people to them, turning a once neglected route into a neo-classic. This has to be done very selectively, too much hyperbole and the guide loses it’s credibility.

The goal for the select guide is two fold, to satisfy climbers (by documenting the kind of routes they want to climb) and to try and broaden the horizons a little. I think that there are a lot of great routes in this country that have never been properly documented and have never got the attention they deserve. With routes that required cleaning before the first ascent the window of opportunity for them to become become popular enough to stay vegetation free is short. Take Luggala, a large mountain crag less than an hour's drive from Dublin and outside of a half dozen popular routes it receives very little attention.

In many ways a select guide contributes to this the honeypotting problem by encouraging climbers to polish a small numbers of routes while other nearby routes, that are maybe only slightly less good, sprout vegetation. My philosophy with the bouldering guide was to document even very minor problems if they lay within an area that had potential. The thinking being that by attracting climbers to the area (seeing a problem, even a minor one, documented in a guide seems to add a certain credibility to it) they will, after having checked out the documented climbing, turn an eye to their surroundings and start exploring for themselves.

For a crag like Luggala this means clearly and attractively describing some of the best routes in order to encourage climbers to visit the crag where they will then see the potential for themselves.
Convenience
I think climbers are ambivalent about convenience. When one is pressed for time a roadside crag is ideal but there are other times when one just wants to get away from it all and visit a remote area. Compare Dalkey Quarry and Cnoc na Mara, one is within the boundaries of the capital city and the other is as remote as you can get on this island (or just off it). Obviously one isn’t better than the other. The quarry is perfect for doing a few routes after work in the evenings and the Cnoc na Mara is one of the best adventures to be had in this country. Sometimes one tolerates remoteness or difficult access because the climbing is so good while in other cases the journey is as much part of the experience as the climbing. It’s just not as simple as roadside = good, remote = bad or vice versa.

Other Climbing Nearby
The Rockfax select guides document virtually every route at their chosen crags and while I don’t this this is a suitable approach for my guide there must be some consideration given to the crags as a whole as well as to the individual routes. There is no point documenting one short Diff route when the rest of the routes on the crag are E7+. The flip side of this is that it’s possible in a select guide to document isolated routes that won’t ever make it into a definitive regional guide. Take the example of Carrot Ridge, one of Ireland’s best easy multi-pitch routes, which has never been documented in a print guide (not one produced in the last 30+ years anyway) as it lies in something of a climbing wasteland. (I know there are a reasonable numbers of routes in the Twelve Bens and Maums but they have never got much attention). For routes like Carrot Ridge which are a day out in themselves there doesn’t need to be any other climbing nearby.

Conditions
Routes that require a drought to dry sufficiently to be climbable probably shouldn’t be included. On sea cliffs where a big sea will mean some routes are unclimbable it might be worthwhile including some routes that are more sheltered. A good example of this is Gola where the best routes lie on the Main Wall which is open to the sea, here there is a strong case for documenting the routes on the inland crags, especially as it’s an island and you might be there for a few days. However inclusion of the routes on the inland crags shouldn’t be interpreted as claiming that they are among the best routes in the country.

Grades
The goal would be to concentrate on routes that are within the climbing ability of the majority. I’m not sure what the average grade climbed is but I assume it’s somewhere around VS. I also assume that the spread of abilities follows some kind of normal distribution i.e. plenty in the middle and less as one moves towards either end of the spectrum. And it probably makes sense that the selection of routes follows a similar distribution. That’s not to say that every crag should have the an identical distribution of grades. Crags like Fair Head don’t have much in the way of easier routes so you would expect the focus to be harder there.

So please get your thinking caps on and don’t hesitate to get in touch. I would love to hear as many different opinions as possible.

Dave Flanagan
flanagandavid@hotmail.com
1 Carrot Ridge VDIFF 360m

The first pitch is the crux of the route, with delicate climbing on small holds and minimal protection. While the climbing on the first pitch is enjoyable it's quite out of character with the rest of the route, it can be avoided by traversing to the top of the first pitch from the left, this would bring the grade down to Diff.

As every party will climb the route slightly differently, the following description is just a rough guideline.

P1 50m Start on pale pink slab high up to the left of the main cliff. Climb the slab near its left edge to a stance just below the final steepening (optional belay). After a final steepening the angle eases, belay here. To do this in pitch in a oneer with a 50m rope the belayer needs stands a bit higher than the foot of the slab. A bold lead on small holds that will feel much harder in big boots.

P2 30m Move up and then right heading for the large ledge below the vertical wall. Belay on a large boulder.

P3 45m The First Step. A steep start off the ledge on big holds leads to a slab, climb this either directly or moving right then left to belay below the steep corner/chimney (optional belay). Climb the chimney (see photo on page ??) and belay at the top.

P4 90m Scramble along easy, level ground to the foot of the Second Step.

P5 45m The Second Step. Tackle the short steep wall on its left and then move to the foot of the groove that runs up the ridge just right of centre. Follow this on lovely big holds to easy ground.

P6 100m The Third Step. Easy scrambling leads to the top of the ridge.

Alberry and Crofton, (CUMC) 1933

The quickest descent is down the steep scree slope east of the ridge. Alternatively if you aren't in a hurry you could continue onto the top of Ben Corr before descending via the Maunina Pass and following the good path back down Glen inagh.
Conditions

An easy climb but often cold, windy, and in early autumn often wet, and drizzly. Varying conditions on the ridge can make it difficult to judge likely weather on the ridge.

Remote, with no marked access, and few rescue options. The approach is via the Col de la Croix de Fer, which can be a long, cold walk in early spring.

Climbing with a partner is recommended, and rescues are usually by ice axe or rope.
Directions

From Cronin’s Yard or Lislebane carpark take the wide flat track up the Hag’s Glen. After 2km, just before the track fords the Gaddagh River, branch right following a vague path alongside the stream that drains the lough. The path makes a rising traverse up the rocky slopes above the lough with a few easy scrambling steps. Enter the lowest tier of the hanging valley. The path for Brother O’Shea’s Gully continues straight on. Branch left and climb the spur known as Eagle’s Nest. The Kerry Mountain Rescue Hut is on the level ground at the top of the spur. Follow the loose path along the foot of the cliff to the notch on the left skyline, this is Heavenly Gatos (GR V 807 844).

THIS PAGE David Flanagan passing the easy pinnacles above The Bridge. Photo by Peter McMahon.
Emmett Goulding first came to climbing when he began V Diffs in Glendalough in 1959 and by 1962 he had climbed the west face of the Dru.

Emmett put up many new routes in Ireland, including Sarcophagus in Glendalough, with his climbing partner Tony Ingram.

This route still stands today as a test piece for aspiring climbers.

Remarkably Emmett first climbed this demanding route in big boots and not the ultra grip shoes we use today.

Sadly, Emmett Goulding died, on 21 August 2014.
Welcome to Setesdal. A beautiful valley in Southern Norway flanked on all sides by huge granite domes and peppered with picturesque lakes, rivers and forests. Those granite domes mean one thing….slab climbing!

So it was with a little nervous anticipation that I arrived in the Setesdal valley eager to polish up my somewhat sketchy slab climbing technique. It was probably just as well that we arrived at 2am, sparing me an initial sight of our main target for the trip, the 850m “Monsterwand”, visible close to the road in Valle. I probably wouldn’t have slept too well.

Dave had picked out the campsite we were staying in and the location was top notch, right beside the river with great views and it also had a handy kitchen for whipping up our gourmet camping food. To save time, and money, we brought all our food with us in our luggage, something I would recommend for anyone contemplating this type of short trip to Norway. Rural Norway has a stripped back appeal, no frothy cappuccinos, no wifi, no pubs and certainly no data roaming if you are wise. But for me this is one of the most appealing aspects of climbing here – it’s a wild and remote climbing experience in a first world country. Having said that you can make this type of trip as adventurous or as relaxed as you want. And Setesdal itself has all the bases covered – from roadside crags through to remote, adventurous mountain routes.
Sport or trad – take your pick. Or your picks even, if you come back in winter. And yes it does have bolts so you may laugh at my “wild” and “remote” comments!

Tired and a bit jaded from the previous evening’s long drive, Dave and I were fairly slow out of the traps on day one. We headed for Loefjell, about 15 minutes drive back down the valley. This is the jewel in the crown (according to the guidebook anyway) of Setesdal climbing. And we were blown away! A seemingly unending sweep of rock greeted us as we stepped out of the car. You would have travelled far and wide for this – I suppose we had! Was it a mountain or a crag? The 1.5km wall was divided into a number of sectors – we headed for the “Plaisir –Picnic” sector which judging by the name anyway we hoped would ease us into the climbing. The climbing was indeed friendly – superb rock and friction although the bolts were pretty spaced. I guess if you were bolting 150+ routes you would be pretty sparing with your bolts as well!! At the top of one of routes I spotted a superb layback crack running 30m up the crag. No bolts on it and no route in the guide. With a harness full of quickdraws and no trad gear it was a bit frustrating to say the least!!
Having settled in to the trip we headed on day two for the aforementioned “Monsterwand“. The view from the road was jaw-dropping. A massive slab rising up 850m from the lakeshore. I tried to console myself with the fact that in Setesdal it barely got dark before midnight – although I hoped we wouldn’t be that long! The approach was via the quaint hamlet of “Bo“ which could have easily figured on the Norwegian tourist board’s latest campaign.

Our chosen route up the Monsterwand was “Jotun“, a three star 5+ route. At 840m long it is the longest on the wall. However after two pitches it became clear that seepage on the route was going to be a problem. So on Pitch 3 we moved onto “Trolldans“, another three star route graded 6- .

The climbing was incredible, never particularly hard but massively run out. Some of the easier pitches offered up only 2 bolts for 60m. Usually you got a bolt at the crux but generally a fall would have been a cheese-gratingly bad idea. The odd trad placement was possible, usually a small cam but these were few and far between as the slab was mostly featureless rising up in seemingly never ending waves. Due to the dome shape you could never see the top which only added to the overall atmosphere. My footwork was getting a lot of practice at this point as the route was yielding about one handhold every pitch.
On pitch 12 Dave ran into a slight problem. He was forty metres out from the belay when he called back to indicate that the next bolted belay was under water! Unfortunately the huge amount of snow Norway experienced in 2014 was resulting in excessive seepage on the slab from melting snow above. We considered the options including a traverse or pendulum onto another route but it didn’t seem on. We had done the best climbing but with only two pitches to the top it was a bit disappointing not to finish.

The next day we opted for another long multi-pitch route, again in Bo, this time on the “Neverland” slab. The curiously named “Captain Hook” was a slightly shorter and supposedly easier route at 5, 575m. It was a peach alright although we both felt it was harder and more sustained than the previous day’s outing. Mind you this time we got about two handholds per pitch. Small mercies.

The guidebook had said to watch out for the “Black Mamba” on the seventh pitch. I wasn't quite sure what to make of that – no more explanation was given. It seemed an unlikely location for an african snake or a lady of ill repute.
And so it was that I found myself on lead on the seventh pitch. The moves away from the belay immediately felt trickier than anything else the week had produced so far. It got steeper and the rock had a very suspect polished look, closer inspection confirming that it offered next to no friction. I was concentrating very hard at this point not to come off!! Then just to my right I saw it – a four inch wide snake of dark rock twisting its way out of sight up the pitch. The Black Mamba! Don’t ask me what the geology was but the sandpaper like surface soon had me tip toeing steeply upwards through the polished wilderness.

We topped out on Captain Hook and took a good break to take in the views before the long ab down.

We awoke on the final day pretty dog tired but a four day pass is a four day pass and that sun was still shining- who knows when we might see that again?? So back we went to Loefjell – a different sector this time “Brokkestoylen”. This is another top location – a really well bolted beginners and intermediates crag with thirty or so routes from 3+ through to 7. At this point our feet were really starting to complain so we took it fairly quietly, climbed a few routes and enjoyed the great views.
We didn’t even scratch the surface on this trip.

The guidebook has over 500 routes in there and if you have more time there is clearly lots of potential for new, adventurous trad climbing. Everywhere you look there are walls and most of them are unclimbed.

If you are planning a trip to Norway the best bet is to stay flexible and book at the last minute based on a good weather forecast. Ryanair flights actually go down in price nearer the time – we booked one week in advance. The drive from Oslo Rygge to Setesdal is about 5 hours.

So if you feel your footwork needs a bit of a tune-up we can highly recommend Setesdal – the Scandinavian Slab clinic.

I’m still a ropey slab climber but I got a helluva lot of practice!!

**Guidebook:** Setesdal - Henniger and Brunner – Panico Alpinverlag

**Gear:** 2x 60m half ropes, 12 extendable draws, some small to medium size cams, half set of nuts, comfortable rock shoes!, small climbing pack

**Recommended camping:** Flateland camping, Valle
This past weekend I unexpectedly had the most amazing climbing experience. I was secluded with 10 crazy people on a tiny island off the West coast of Ireland. (Where there were five times more sheep than humans that typically inhabited it.)

Before voyaging to Ireland I asked people, what should I do in this country? Many suggested to learn how to pour Guinness, see a fancy and historic book called “Kells”, look at cliffs, or tour the Game of Thrones sites. But I thought, I wanted a different Irish experience. One of adventure, real beauty, and jubilant sheep.

With some online research and social networking in the Irish climbing community, I was blown away by how incredibly friendly and generous Irish climbers are. I had several invitations to climb around the country within a day of posting.

Some meetings didn’t work out logistically, but one did. This meeting was described on a Facebook message to me as . . . outstanding rock climbing in a wild, remote and truly beautiful setting, “no facilities except water” and “look for a short bald dude.” Sure, why not? Would this be a three-day, three-night nightmare where I’d be stuck on a remote, uninhabited island with strangers?
A friend suggested that as soon as I got there, I should ask the fishermen if I could use them as a potential emergency escape. It could have been a “Stranger Danger” disaster of a group of reckless or creepy people. But no, the team of mountaineers embraced me and encouraged me to grow. It was a once in a lifetime experience that I will never forget. This is the story of an American (me) wild camping and climbing with Irish mountaineers.

**Day 0: Meeting Gola**
After a 4 hour drive from Dublin, we hopped onto a local fisherman’s dinghy boat. This was the start of our wild Gola Island Adventure.

As soon as we stepped onto the island we saw the only water source on the island (exclusive of the generous sky), and several abandoned homes and farming walls. At that point, I knew that we were in for a wild undertaking.

With every person carrying gear and food the weight of 2 middle school kids, we all thought “Did I bring too much beer/wine?” We trekked over the Heather, wet bogs and half-fallen rock walls. We set up camp next to the lake, trying to avoid the prevalent sheep poop, when possible. We ate by the beach fire pit and slept early. Tomorrow was the day we were going to crush it.

**Day 1: Getting Acquainted to Gola’s Climbs**
We started the first full day on a place called “Gripple Wall”. We were to abseil (or rappel as Americans would call it) down the sea cliff, to a ledge where the high tide crashed close to our feet.

I was told to clip my ATC in and wrap a cord around what they called an “abseil rope”. Then, James warned, “Do not freak out and squeeze the brake hand too hard or else you’ll fly down the 60 foot cliff.” Ok…noted. “Lean back and go!” I hope that there is more in this life for me. Here it goes… Creeping along inch by inch I peeked between my shaky legs into the crashing ocean waves below. There aren’t many things better than between-the-legs-ocean views and realizing that at that second, because of the kindness of others, you have become a better, more able person.

So if you had not already gathered, I quickly realized that I was not as ready as I should have been. What I was to encounter on Gola Island was quite different from my experiences in America.
Luckily, my new friends were amazing to help me tackle the challenges and get me up to speed on how to be an Irish Mountaineer. I’m going to say it again: the folks I met at IMC (and probably the entire Irish climbing community) is amazing.

OK, I had just learned that Ireland is a trad climbing country. Trad climbing is when a person places little metal pieces between cracks in rocks in hopes that it will hold you 5, 20, 70+ feet in the air as you get your body up a cliff. The goal is to place these instruments in the right cracks at the right angle with the right width so that it does not come out and can be later ejected from the crevice by another climber. This is so the rock stays pristine. It is a scary as feck concept. I guess for me this was as good of a day as any . . .

The rock was a grippy granite with large sugar-like granules. Our feet had a great time and could stand on anything. Our hands on the other hand were tentative and well worn and torn after use. Most routes had medium to large slopey crevices that you could jam a soon-to-be-bloody hand or finger in.

We all climbed several lovely routes on Griple Wall. They included “Pride of Gola” (a fun journey around a corner with pretty ocean views to our left and right), “Jean A Cheval” (a narrow chimney with shimmying required) and “Gripple Wall” (an energizing climb up a straight rock face).

From the work out, we were hungry so we took a quick walk back to camp for lunch. Unluckily for us, the grey clouds rolled in and started dumping rain on us. And with that the climbing day was over. At night we looked at four forecasts and were hopeful that the next day would bring sunshine and climbs.

**Day 2: The True Irish Experience**

Boy were we wrong. The Irish rain kept coming throughout the day. Four unsuccessful expeditions
later, we gave up trying to climb. The rainy day luckily wasn’t only of us laying in sleeping bags, looking at raindrops, talking to caterpillars, and contemplating life (though it did include quite a lot of that). It also included cooking feasts over a small flame, yoga on the beach, laughs, wine, treks with “National Geographic views” and swimming. Although we were antsy for more climbing, it was a pleasant time.

**Day 3: This is Irish Climbing**

We were grinning when we saw the morning sun. We knew that this was the day we all came out for. Out we ran (after eating a nice breakfast, of course) to find a dry rock, known as “Inland Crag”. After everyone crushed “Weathered Window” (a tricky bugger that required lots of high steps and trust in yourself), we wanted more ocean views.

At “Main Walls” we ascended several excellent routes while trying to avoid the waves crashing by our feet. I think our collective favorite route was “Run of the Arrow” (a steady climb within a well-protected grove). Our climbs were so enthralling that we asked the fisherman to pick us up later (so we’d get back home at midnight). Worth it!

The IMC Gola Island Excursion was an unforgettable weekend of great company and adventure. The stars aligned and I got to spend three days and three nights amongst 10 batty Europeans roughing out what nature doled out for us. We rolled with its punches and trekked, snorkeled, yoga’d on the beach (and in a tent), and climbed some of the most amazing rocks we’ve all touched. Everyone was so kind and generous and rooted for everyone to do their best. Because of them I grew so much (and was able to be warm, dry, and safe). I learned how to abseil safely, trad climb, trad lead, and be a fecking awesome Irish mountaineer.
Sat in a sweltering office in Hyderabad little more than 2 days after enjoying the delight of a successful Lakes meet, I read Ian Christies email again. Could you write a piece on your favourite climb.

I had difficulty defining what my favourite was. In the end I decided the best criteria was to choose a piece of rock I have climbed far more than any other, even if it’s not a registered climb or even graded.

I came to live in Ireland 16 years ago. Working in Blackrock, Dalkey was handy for evening climbs. But having no climbing friends to share a rope with I was limited to soloing the easier climbs. I soon ran out of climbs (and became scared) and turned to “bouldering”. Like most climbers I have always enjoyed traversing. It’s the ease of progressive movement without the ground disappearing from view which allows you to relax into the climbing without any real fear.

The Low Boulder Wall is the small strip of rock as you enter the West Valley from Ardbrugh Road. I calculate it’s only about 8 metres long, but gently overhangs its whole length, which means it stays dry often when the rest of the crag is un-climbable.
There are variations on the traverse that miss out most of the larger holds, but to me, it’s not about absolute difficulty, it’s about the challenge of getting from left to right and back again in the most efficient manner, fighting the pump in the forearms.

The climbs starts at the furthest point left, where if it has been raining it’s possible to stand one legged and dry the soles of your boots. It’s difficult from the start and best to stay high with the hands. There is a well defined hand and foot ledge after this start where the pink granite is showing signs of polish, but don’t be fooled, the traverse requires technique with some essential small foot holds. Avoid climbing with bent arms as you ape across the middle section and you will get to a contrived rest point for one arm at a time. The final section for me is the crux, small foot holds and flat holds allow a long stretch (often with the use of a small intermediate) into the large crack/flakes. This for me is the furthest point before reversing the traverse to the start. It is possible to traverse around the bulging prow but its another grade again and I have made it only rarely and never after linking the first half of the traverse.

The solitary repetition of this climb, probably speaks volumes on my personality. As a child I played Table Tennis and the many hours of repeating the same strokes never seemed boring to me. Sometimes a fellow climber entering the Valley will stop and take up the challenge, but I don’t mind the escapism of being alone. Last week, after another wet Thursday Club night and every one had fled, I revisited the traverse after a long time away. The grass and brambles were higher, but the rock was dry. I had hoped that the rock would welcome me back like a long lost friend and go easy on me. But in reality it treated me with the due contempt an overweight climber deserves, and made me fight to the very end.
The Ideal Belay - Rob Davies

In the first of a regular feature on technical topics Rob Davies, a Mountaineering Instructor and long term club member takes us through how to build a good belay and discusses some do’s and don’t’s.

Belays are the boring bit of climbing right? You get to the top of the route and all you have to do is tie yourself to some old bit of bush and bring your mate up… The sooner he/she gets up the route, the sooner you can get on another route so speed and efficiency is your friend, right?

Well I agree in some parts with the above. I much prefer the movement of climbing to the process of belaying but I would also say there is something very nice, especially on Multi pitch routes when you have built a great belay for you and your partner and everything is organised and where it should be. A bit like that first few minutes after you’ve cleaned the kitchen… before you ruin it all by making dinner!

So Let’s start with the basics. I teach the acronym to my students of IDEAL. If a belay meets these 5 standards then it’s most likely safe or Ideal!

I: Independent. With a few exceptions you should build a belay with 2 anchors or more. These anchors should be independently attached to you so that a failure of 1 does not impact or shock load the other(s). There are a few techniques out there with balancing slings (American Death Belay… The name says it all!) that allow for you to equalise 2 anchors, without making them independent. Whilst this might be acceptable on Bolted routes its unlikely to be a good option on TRAD placed belays. See fig 1. I once saw a belayer who had multiple anchors attached to him fall several meters at the top of a Wicklow crag, when his second fell on a move gear ripped causing the entire belay to rebalance. The result was the belayer being pulled off the top of the crag and ending up 2 meters down the face. The second hit the ground!

![Fig 1. A Non-independent Sling Belay](image_url)
**Fig 2. A 3 point independent anchor**

**D:** Directional. The anchors should be in line with the direction of the loading forces (your second). A common example of a badly used anchor that is not directional is the stake at the top of Yorkshire pudding used to protect Honeypot. If your anchors are directional and are loaded with a fall the forces are transferred straight onto your anchors and not onto you and there is no lateral force where the anchors and the load try to align themselves. It also means that if your anchors are at ground level, then you should most likely be belaying sitting down. Otherwise your legs are causing a redirection of the belay and are a potential hazard in the event of a loading, where your legs with be buckled by the anchors taking a load!

**E:** Equalised. When using 2 anchors or more it’s important to spread the loading equally. This is especially important when building the points using TRAD gear. If we load one more than another this can have a detrimental impact on the second placement. Perhaps having it slack allows the cam or wire to dislodge or move or in the event of the more weighted anchor failing, we then shock load the second anchor.

**A:** Angles. The one that everyone is surprised with! I won’t bore you with the math but I have included a Diagrammatic below to show what happens to the forces at varying degrees of angle! Fig.3. Bottom line is that 60 Degrees or less is the optimum. Once we exceed this we start to increase the forces on each anchor more than the 50% split we would like. Try this for yourself by holding the middle of a length of 10 meters or rope and give each end to a friend. Start at 20 degrees and see if you can pull them off their feet. They will easily hold your pull. Move out to 60 and you will still have little effect. However ask them to move to 90 and 120 and you will see a huge difference and may even look like you’ve developed super powers!

**L:** Loaded: You Have checked that each anchor is capable of taking the load you are going to subject to it. You’ve given it a good pull in the direction of loading and you’re comfortable it’s fit for purpose, then great! In Trad this could be a really good tug on the wire or cam. If it’s a flake of rock then it could be a kick in each direction
So, the above gives a good grounding for a safe belay. So let’s ask a simple question… Why 2 anchors? Surely that sling attached to the metal spike is ok? I’ve been using it solo for years now and nothing bad has happened to me yet, right?

Well the sling you attached to the spike hopefully is! You purchased it new and not on EBAY. It’s been well cared for. Tested to UIAA standards and is tested to 22KN. Now... Does that metal spike have a CE / UIAA marking? Has it been well cared for? Surely its not been sitting in water for the last 40 years. Is it corroded just below the surface to the point of imminent failure? Simply; we don't know… which is why we spread our eggs between 2 baskets! Yes, it’s highly unlikely that your friend seconding Yorkshire is going to subject a massive force to the spike but when we practice good technique in Dalkey it sets us up for bigger things and shows the rest of the climbing and public community that we love adventure but also like stacking the odds in our favour!

The exception to this is the likes of the tree at the top of Thrust. You can think of others for sure. I wouldn't add a second anchor to my belay if I had attached myself to the Tree with the rope or with a sling. My feelings are if I am attached to the tree with a 22KN sling and the tree falls off the top of the crag under load I have bigger things to worry about! Likewise I can easily stand and belay here as I can arrange my anchors above and behind me therefore allowing for the forces to be direction onto the tree in a standing position.

Hopefully the above gives you some food for thought. Next issue we will look at Belaying both indoors and out.
"In Glendalough there lived an old saint, renowned for his learning and piety. His manners were curious and quaint and he looked upon girls with disparity."

17 souls gathered in the Glendalough Upper Car Park on Sunday March 15'th for a pilgrimage in the footsteps of one of the earliest locals, the infamous misogynist St Kevin. Led by our own Kevin (Coakley) who indeed must have the patience of a saint, he shepherded his flock on a circuit of the Upper Lake. As we left the tourist trail we noticed a lakeside bench well submerged in lake-water, perhaps a sign of what was ahead that we...maybe should have paid more heed to it. Our trail continued under the Spinc, conditions being rather soft underfoot. The first obstacle is traditionally negotiated 'Tarzan' style with a swing from the trees but on the day an abseil was the chosen method for most. We then came to Kevin's Bed itself, a section of rock with many old pegs in-situ. A rope handrail was put in place and one by one the lost sheep crossed, each stopping to peer into St Kevin's Bed, a small cave in the rock face. The cave is man-made and probably pre-dates St Kevin (c 500-600CE)

This refuge was also apparently used by others such as St. Laurence O'Toole and Michael Dwyer in their time. As we continued on another rock traverse was roped and that brought us to what should have been a walk along the shore except that for us it was a delicate rock and turf traverse, a sort of shallow water solo, the path below being under half a metre of water. Indeed some of our party just stepped into the cleansing waters of the lake hoping to wash away their sins if not the muck on their boots. We then reached the ruins of an old church which must be one of the most inaccessible historical sites in Ireland.

Continuing on what we now thought would be easy ground we came to another impasse as our path again disappeared in to the lake waters. After some debate in the now fading light, we decided to take the high road. Our advance party climbed a greasy chimney to reach a tree that could be used as an abseil anchor. Kevin then descended into the murky vegetated gloom and after some time we were relieved to hear a shout that he was now on safe ground. One by one the pilgrims then followed on, and then we could finally put away our ropes and gear. It was a beautiful mild spring evening and although sun had long ago set, a full moon now rose over the Spinc to light our way home. Crossing the river was our final hurdle but Niall, Tina & Barry went ahead and found it was easily forded at the Miner’s village.

With the moonlight shimmering on the lake, a short walk soon had us back at the car-park, just a little later than planned but all in good spirits. We retired to the hut to regroup where we found Christy had a roaring fire in place to welcome us. The finest selection of confectionery and cakes was then produced for what was a grand birthday feast (Vanessa's) for which we certainly now had an appetite to do it justice. Serenaded by Kris & Colm the party then continued long into the night.
Multi-pitching North Wales to Lake District

Following a taste of multi pitch climbing in the Lake District over the June Bank holiday weekend, Vanessa and I were super eager to get back to the UK. We had mustered up enough skills between the two of us to get ourselves up safely to the top of a small select number of VD and S multi pitch climbs. Rope work and route finding were our biggest cruxes. Fortunately, a smile and a few charming words to whoever was unfortunate enough to be in close proximity of us on the rock got us out of a few minor wrong doings.

With an excellent weather forecast expected, Vanessa and I joined Ian Christie’s meet in North Wales, with his troops Eric Corkery, Paul Nolan and James Aitken. We enjoyed three days of stunning sunshine and climbing. With an abundance of VD and S grade multi-pitch climbs there to chose from, and with a detailed ‘to do’ list from Gerry in the event of all weather conditions, we went straight to the Idwal Slab Crag from the Ferry. Ascenic 40 min walk in from the road where free parking was available took us by a lake to the base of our first climb Tennis Shoe (S, 6 pitch climb). Initially we found Tennis shoe a particularly easy climb and for a second contemplated increasing our grade to HS. Fortunately, James pointed out how we went wrong on the last 2 pitches and avoided the crux so we agreed polished S climbs were a more than sufficient challenge for us. However, to make up for this error, we had scrambled across to climb Lazarus (S, 2 pitch) with a quality top out view. Descending was most adventurous and included a lot of scrambling and some wrong turns, but we carefully descended and joined Ian, Eric, Paul and James for a few glasses of vino in Capel Curig.

The Glan Dena Mountaineering Hut is ideally situated just 40 minutes drive from Holyhead. It neighbours a beautiful lake and is walking distance to numerous climbing opportunities such as the Idwal Slab Crag, Tryfan, etc. Apart from being very comfortable and clean, it provides a well equipped kitchen/dining area, sitting room and lounge space for under £10 night. It is an ideal hut to visit if you don’t have a car and there are plenty of walks nearby for rainy days.

On Thursday we all headed to Llanberis pass as a group. Vanessa and I headed for Carreg Wasted Crag and climbed The Wrinkle (VD, 3 pitch), and then onto Crackstone Rib (S, 3 pitch). No wrong turns made that day but we did make use of the friendly locals for some advice. Carreg Wasted is a lovely crag with a short but steep walk in, free road side parking but get there early as parking is limited.
The valley itself offers a very scenic drive through and lots of opportunities for bouldering if that is what you prefer. Ian, Eric, Paul and James climbed The Cracks (4 pitch HS) and Flying Buttress (V Diff) On beautiful evenings like that, no better way to end a day than a dip in Ogwen Lake so pack your swim gear.

Friday was a quality day out. We all decided to climb Grooved Arête (HVD, 8 pitch) on the East face of Tryfan. Rushing off to make it there before the guys, Vanessa and I went off route and ended up taking the more strenuous and adventurous route to the base of the climb taking us up through thick heathers and a scramble up a tricky gully that we considered roping up for at times. Arriving later than planned, the boys were roped up and ready to climb. James joined us climbing Grooved Arête that day. Having already climbed it on numerous occasions, he generously allowed Vanessa and I to lead all pitches. He did lead the final and 8th pitch which he had never climbed before. We found this a really exciting climb, with an exciting taste of slab, vertical and mild overhanging climbing with exciting moments of exposure, just enough to get the heart pumping. A scenic scramble following the top out lead to the summit of Tryfan. There you are greeted by 'Adam & Eve', twin monoliths that test your nerves and balance when jumping from one to the other.

To take full advantage of the location and beautiful weather, Vanessa and I descended via Bristly Ridge which offered quality exploring and high quality scrambling, exposure and more spectacular views across the Nant Ffrancon and Cwm Idwal glaciated landscapes. The descending route is well marked that leads you back to the base of Grooved Arête to collect your bags. You can chose from a handful of other scenic routes if you wish, but this is the most exciting.

Before we arrived, Ian and his troops had got up to all sorts including a memorable ascent of Chasm Route on Glyder Fach in summer hailstones.

To end our time in N Wales, we all met in The Stables Bar in Betws-y-Coed for food and drinks, a good catch up and a few games of pool. No need to mention who won. The Stables Bar serves food till late compared to other places. We all parted early on Saturday with Vanessa and I making a detour to Holyhead to pick up Sean Cryan on route to the Lake District.

As a trio, we climbed Troutdale Pinnacle (S, 6 pitch) on Black Crag Buttress in Borrowdale. Troutdale Pinnacle, a classic route, offered a variety of climbing on well protected and exposed settings. Sitting on the pinnacle gives the top out of Prelude Nightmare in Glendalough a run for its money.

The valley itself offers a very scenic drive through and lots of opportunities for bouldering if that is what you prefer. Ian, Eric, Paul and James climbed The Cracks (4 pitch HS) and Flying Buttress (V Diff) On beautiful evenings like that, no better way to end a day than a dip in Ogwen Lake so pack your swim gear.

Friday was a quality day out. We all decided to climb Grooved Arête (HVD, 8 pitch) on the East face of Tryfan. Rushing off to make it there before the guys, Vanessa and I went off route and ended up taking the more strenuous and adventurous route to the base of the climb taking us up through thick heathers and a scramble up a tricky gully that we considered roping up for at times. Arriving later than planned, the boys were roped up and ready to climb. James joined us climbing Grooved Arête that day. Having already climbed it on numerous occasions, he generously allowed Vanessa and I to lead all pitches. He did lead the final and 8th pitch which he had never climbed before. We found this a really exciting climb, with an exciting taste of slab, vertical and mild overhanging climbing with exciting moments of exposure, just enough to get the heart pumping. A scenic scramble following the top out lead to the summit of Tryfan. There you are greeted by 'Adam & Eve', twin monoliths that test your nerves and balance when jumping from one to the other.

To take full advantage of the location and beautiful weather, Vanessa and I descended via Bristly Ridge which offered quality exploring and high quality scrambling, exposure and more spectacular views across the Nant Ffrancon and Cwm Idwal glaciated landscapes. The descending route is well marked that leads you back to the base of Grooved Arête to collect your bags. You can chose from a handful of other scenic routes if you wish, but this is the most exciting.

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This climb has been added to our ‘favourite climbs of all time’ list, and after Sean went home we returned to do it again as a duo. Free off-road parking is available and a steep 20 minute walk in allows for a nice warm up. At Langdale, We also climbed Middlefell Buttress (a 75m Diff), Evening Wall(47m S+), Centipede (90m S) and The Original Route(61m S-). On our last day climbing there, Vanessa upped her game and finished the day with a HS lead called ‘Revelation’. A really superb climb that demanded mental boldness and a little brute force.

Shepards Crag is another lovely crag we visited near Borrowdale. Here we climbed Little Chamonix, (3-pitch V.Diff). A climb a local described as a ‘canny good climb’. Parking in a farm house coffee shop is allowed once you buy something. Free off road parking not far from here is another option. A short walk in takes you to the foot of the climb. As advised by Gerry, this crag is ideal for wet days as it is quick drying. On route home, a nice dip in Derwent Water Lake is an option for those who enjoy their swims.

A few things to know when you the Lake District....most importantly are Cornish Pasties in Pasty Presto in Bowness, dinner and wine in the Brown Horse. Get the lamb complimented with the fruity Merlot, it’s delicious! A car playlist composed by Sean, inclusive of Surfin USA, I Get Around, Mr Big Stuff, Good Vibrations and RESPECT...... gets you psyched, especially before a late dip in the lake. If you are not restrained by time when travelling to and/or from the Lake District, the sail and rail ticket from Windermere to Dublin Port is £41 so might help you save a few pennys. We are blessed in Ireland with unpolished climbing routes. The UK is polish haven but it makes for much more delicate climbing.
Having climbed weekly at Awesome Walls for several months last winter, the outdoors beckoned. While changing my shoes to go home, an IMC member who happened to sit beside me told me about the introduction programme that the IMC run for beginners. That evening I went home and emailed immediately to secure my place, I must have appeared quite eager considering it was the beginning of January and the programme was to begin in April. And so, with the introductory presentation in the Teacher’s Club, began the most interesting and challenging sport I have ever taken up.

I was initially surprised by the amount of people who had a new found desire to scale up rock faces and put their nerves to the test. Having eased us in with an evening at Awesome Walls it was now time to move on to bigger and less colour coded walls in Dalkey Quarry. Having never been to the quarry before, I was left astounded by the existence of this hidden gem of which I had no knowledge, and I a Dubliner. I was very excited to get started and the enthusiasm of all the members was very encouraging. We got started practising setting up anchors and tying various different knots and it was only when belaying a rope bag from the top of ‘Paradise Lost’, arms falling out of their sockets, that I thought to myself, ‘I must be mad!’ However, I graduated from belaying bags and got my first taste of climbing on granite. With slightly shaking hands and feet, I followed my patient partner up Yorkshire Pudding. I couldn’t believe how my hands and feet gripped to the rock, a slight Spiderman feeling but with more chance of falling. It was exhilarating.

Over the next few weeks in Dalkey my confidence, and the confidence of my fellow beginners, seemed to grow. Every Thursday I looked forward to my evenings in Dalkey and the new climbs and challenges I would face. Having seconded climbs from Paradise Lost to Binglestein, I was feeling very pleased with my decision to go on this introduction programme. One cold and blustery evening in May we met at Bullock harbour for a session on placing gear and practicing making anchors. What really continued to surprise me was the generosity of the IMC members with both their time and patience, not to mention their sharing of gear.

Our few weeks in Dalkey was to end with a weekend of climbing in the Mournes and so myself and climbing partner Tim Kay set off in sight of new rock to climb. The weekend to the Bearnagh slabs did not go quite everyone has envisioned it due to our unreliable Irish climate. After a wet few hours it was decided that the climbing would have to be called off and a hike would substitute.
Through the mist and drizzling rain we set off on our seven hour hike through the Mourne Mountains. Despite not being able to climb this trip was an enjoyable one, perhaps more so for those with proper hiking boots and waterproofs, but if nothing else we all got to know one another better and see the sights from the eminent ‘Game of Thrones’. With tired legs, and in one case and unknown fracture, we headed home the next morning after a hearty Northern Irish breakfast from the Meelmore Lodge.

As the programme was now finished it was up to ourselves what we did with our new climbing knowledge and insight into the world of challenging gravity. It was by now that I felt ready to start trying some leads myself, and with the encouragement of Cillian Russell as a partner one evening, I led my first climb on ‘Grave’, to my surprise and delight. It was from here that I went on to lead several others like Paradise Lost, Levitation, Eliminate A and Calypso, some of which required slightly more
encouragement than others! Our day at Barnbawn definitely helped to build on my confidence with leading. What a wonderful spot in Wicklow founded by Gerry Moss with many Diff and V Diff routes for the aspiring lead climber. This was without doubt one of my favourite climbing days of the past few months as I had the opportunity to lead climb all day and really work on gear placement.

Barnbawn

Overall, the past few months of trad climbing have been fantastic. From belaying ropes bags up Paradise Lost to my recent ‘baptism of fire’ attempting to lead Jameson 10, I’ve experienced fear, excitement, success and failure but most of all a new found delight in the challenges that climbing up rocks poses.
A sunny Sunday in mid-June saw our return to Bearnagh Slabs, a very different place when it is not shrouded in multiple layers of mist and drizzle, as was experienced on our first sojourn there in May, when a hike up Slieve Donard, led by Niall, was deemed our only real option. On this occasion we were dealt blue skies and sunshine, ideal weather for what was to be, for some of us, our inaugural experience of multi-pitch climbing.

On reaching Meelmore Lodge, with greater ease this time, thanks to Noel, whom I tailed, ensuring the route I took didn’t eventually wind up a very, very minor road with grass down the middle, we paired up with climbing partners. Yet again, in good IMC fashion, the experienced members of the club ensured all beginners were accommodated. Having witnessed this on many occasions since joining the IMC, it never fails to strike a chord with me and gives one an immediate ‘feel good factor’ about this club. The time and help experienced members invest in new members is unbelievable and goes a long way in creating a positive atmosphere. Both Eugene and David took me on board and we headed towards the slabs.

Following a short walk through amazing scenery we arrived at the slabs. Being relatively new to rock climbing, I was delighted to see the gentle sloping nature of the crag! I was even more delighted with the texture of the rock surface, which made the soles of your shoes seem Velcro-like!! This magical combination does wonders for your confidence as a beginner!

Within minutes of reaching the crag, Kevin was making his way up ‘Grand Central’ followed in toe by Ger and John. Ian, Gerry and Shane had disappeared off to climb a route called ‘Peter De Bruen’. To our right Áine and Tim were discussing ‘Hypothesis’, trying to decipher the exact route as described in the guidebook. I discovered that having a guide book of the routes in the area was only a fraction of the battle, actually matching the description of the route to the rock face was a real endeavour, leading at times, to many puzzled expressions! Following a short discussion as to what route was what, Eugene, David and myself decided to follow Áine and Tim up ‘Hypothesis’.

As I climbed up to Eugene at our first pitch, I marvelled at the ‘sticky’ nature of the rock and was beginning to believe I was getting the hang of ‘trusting my feet’! The fact that I even had time to consider this as I climbed, was a new experience, as my mind is normally consumed with thoughts of how the hell you get from here to there and what the hell can I hang onto next ??!! On reaching the first pitch, I had time to look around and admire the scenery while David made his way up, yet again a new experience as offered by multi-pitch climbing. It was here that I noticed the high spirited queue that had formed on ‘Grand Central’ as Vanessa, Sinéad and Brian joined Barry and Damian who were waiting on Noel to set up an anchor ahead. A scene from Ice Age 1 of a number of penguins sitting on a fast disappearing iceberg immediately popped into my head! Above to their left I could see Peter and Paul as they made their way up ‘Crooked Chimney’ - yes the initial gentle slopes had given way to more vertical faces! After two more pitches which involved a little more ‘trusting of feet’, but were quite manageable, we got to the top, where the views offered were amazing.

Bearnagh Slabs - Sinead Patten
Following a short scramble down, where you were thankful for your runners, we made our way back to the base. The sun was beginning to peep over the slab and multiple layers were being peeled off. Everybody had done somewhat of a swop on routes and were making their way up their second climb. Whether intently or not, a few new route variations were created along the way, accompanied with puzzled looks and guide books being turned this way and that. ‘Directisima’ caused a few debates and at times didn’t turn out too direct at all!

Having made our way up ‘Grand Central’, Eugene and myself decided to embark on it again, this time with a slight variation, in order to retrieve a nut which had fallen somewhere earlier! Luckily Clodagh and Antoinette, who were climbing the route with Cillian, spotted and rescued the missing target. As I made my way up the final pitch, Cillian, as usual, was helpful in advising where to place feet and how best to make use of the cracks in the rock. Then came the dreaded words: ‘You have to trust your feet on this!’ Following a discussion with Clodagh, we have come to realise that this phrase is really IMC code for ‘this is going to be hard and possibly terrifying!’ On reaching the top, we were greeted by Sinead, as ever ready with her camera from her perch on ‘Directisima’. We soon realised that as difficult as it is to locate a lost nut, a lost runner can be even more difficult! Yet again, in good auld IMC fashion someone, possibly Con, Paul or Dónal, who had managed to polish off ‘Crooked Chimney’ despite the late start, had spotted Eugene’s lost runner at the base of the slabs and left it dangling on it’s lonesome from a stake!

At eight o’clock, with weary legs, we made our way back to the lodge and were greeted by David who provided us all with Twixes from his stash! There is no doubt but time flies while you’re climbing, possibly as a result of the time consuming nature of setting up gear and the concentration required to ensure you stick to the rock face, but most undoubtedly, due to the ever good humoured company. Many thanks to Kevin for organising the day and to the experienced members for being ever generous with their time and advice.
During a recent family holiday in Croatia, Liam and I managed to grab a few days to ourselves to go rock-climbing and hiking in Paklenica National Park. We dropped our nearly-adult children off on the nearby party island of Pag (‘the new Ibiza’) where they had arranged to meet half the youth of south county Dublin who had planned to converge on Pag following various inter-railing holidays across Europe.

The national park is very accessible if you fly with Ryanair into Zadar. Zadar airport is 12 km from Zadar and Paklenica is a further 45km away. The small city of Zadar is a lovely place to spend a few days. It has a historic old town with a Roman forum situated right on the waterfront and some interesting modern architectural features built into the waterfront. Paklenica can be reached within an hour’s drive of landing in Zadar.

The Paklenica National Park lies 1 km inland from the little coastal town of Starigrad Paklenica, where it is possible to spend a day swimming and sunbathing on the coast if you want a break from climbing (although for us the climbing won out each time!). Note that there are two Starigrads along this coast, this being the more southerly. There is a good range of hotels, apartments, pubs and restaurants in Starigrad, all of which offer very good value for money. We stayed in the self-catering Argyruntum apartments, run by a very nice hostess, to be as close as possible to the park entrance. Paklenica lies within the Velebit mountain range which runs dramatically along the Adriatic coast for 150km. It is a national park of 96 km² centred around two large canyons (Velika and Mala). All of the rock climbing takes place along the sides of the Velika canyon. The steep vertical cliffs on either side of the canyon are limestone and the rock is very sharp in places! There are a wide range of routes, both sports and traditional.

The 300 bolted routes start about a 5 minute walk from the upper car park (graded 3 to 8B+), allowing an accessible starting point. We found it remarkable that we could drive almost to the base of these climbs. The quality of the bolting was excellent. Paklenica is a great practice ground for beginners or those new to leading.
But don’t worry, there are also plenty of challenges for advanced climbers too – sports routes up to Grade 8B+ and a variety of multi-pitches, culminating in climbs of over 350m and 11 pitches on the massive Anita Kuk. The climbing season in Paklenica extends from April to October. It hosts the International Big Wall Speed Climbing meet from May 1st to 4th each year. One of the interesting things we noted was the possibility of renting climbing gear beside the car park, if you were happy to trust it.

There is also a great range of hiking available within the park. You can opt for leisurely 3-4 hr strolls along either canyon to the mountain hut and back. The highest peaks of Vaganski and Sveto Brado (both over 1750m) require a long days hike of about 12 hours or an overnight stay in the mountain hut. Unfortunately, unseasonal July weather with serious thunder and lightning storms made such long days in the mountains impossible during our short stay.

The cost of entry to the park is about €5 a day. Croatia has just gained entry to the EU about a year ago (mid 2013) and is still using its own currency, Croatian Kuna. A map of the national park (1:25 000) and a good climbing guide can be purchased at the entrance to the park.

Would we recommend it as venue? Definitely, particularly in the Spring or early Summer. We would love to go back to do more climbing routes and some long hikes that we didn’t get to in the short few days available to us.
Wales Meet – My introduction to multi-pitch climbing

Allow me to begin with a short preamble. I’m a new member who joined the IMC in May just in time to catch the tail end of the new members introduction programme having spent much of the winter making the trip up to Awesome Walls from home in deepest south Wicklow. As a reluctantly retired runner this had been my first experience of regular climbing. I mention running because after 20+ years of training for hill racing and orienteering I’ve strong legs and barely enough upper body strength to hold a knife and fork or cup of coffee. No problem I was assured, climbing is all in the legs. For people with good technique that may be true, for me, reach – cling – haul are instincts that need eradication. More about that shortly.

Just as the weather improved in springtime and the move to outdoor climbing loomed my semi-regular/occasional climbing partners scattered to the four winds. So after a month or two of sporadic trips to Dalkey and Barnbawn I took the plunge and signed up with the IMC. At that point I was happy to lead a route or two and open to trying pretty much anything. So when Ian Christie suggested I join him and another in turning right rather than left on entry to the quarry I was happy to tag along. The world of multi-pitch climbing was coming within grasp. I’d been up that side of the quarry once before with Alistair Yarrow who casually half way up Nelson’s End suggested I was in the best position to lead out to the top. So when Ian offered to let me lead the first pitch of Giants Staircase I was just about happy to give it a go.

Happy Ian my not have been when I ran out of courage, setting up a dodgy belay just short of the point used by every other climber since the 1940s. With great patience he climbed up setting up a new belay in the correct spot, disassembled my one while all the time chatting about the peregrines and some films. It was an amazingly calm clear night, the sense of separation while tied into the crag was quite something.

The following Thursday Ian mentioned he was planning a meet in Wales, and would I be interested? I was but was also a little worried that I’d hold back the ‘real’ climbers. Assured that there was no such issue I agreed and started packing.

Ours was a small party. Ian, Eric who I met on the ferry crossing, Aine who joined us in Holyhead and James who I’d encountered at the Meelmore multi-pitch hill walking weekend. Our short drive to the hut was enlivened no end by the electronic hand or more precisely finger brake of our brand new hire car. No end of press, hold, repress, don’t press combinations seemed to result in consistent forward movement retardation. A car brand has been blacklisted for life in the eyes of our driver. Our accommodation, the Glen Dena Hut would put many an Irish hostel or Alpine refuge to shame. The ordered minds that labelled every switch, tap, cupboard, knife, fork (I exaggerate, but barely) clearly have a view on how to reduce clutter time, allowing us maximum time and space to spread out our gear and debate Ad Nauseam which crag to climb today, tomorrow, yesterday. Yet on day 1 such planning was for nought as a road traffic accident closed access to our intended crag. So we diverted to Milestone Buttress in Ogwen.
I partnered up with Ian and James and watched with deepening unease as each struggled gingerly on the opening pitch of Direct Route, a supposed VD climb. All notions of proper climbing technique disappeared in a surge of upper body lactic acid and finger terror as I was introduced to the world of polish. Months of carefully placing feet to push upwards undone in two foot placements that gave neither support, confidence or grip. I may as well have been a paraplegic. Instinct returned and by the end of the first pitch my arms were feeling the heat if not quite the burn. Fortunately the later pitches proved less glassy, perhaps the terror of polish enough to dissuade many to go further.

The next day, after further debate we headed for Glyder Fach’s East Buttress. Assured by all that this route wasn’t anything like as travelled, I found myself clambering up a bit to inspect the descent gully. It looked horrendous, much worse than the climb route. Fortunately James expressed a deep desire to abseil rather than scramble down so my mind was put at ease somewhat. Chasm Route, another VD climb proved memorable not just for the climbing but for the hailstones that hit just as we topped out and the long slow descent of the gully by abseil, down climb and bum slide.

After somehow squeezing 36 hours worth of debate in overnight we headed towards Llanberis on day 3 to tackle The Winkle on Carwg Wasted. This was again fine climbing with chunks of exposure as I seconded (thirded?) after Ian and James.

Right from the start the name Grooved Arete had been bandied about with the ever changing weather forecasts dictating our best day for it being day 4. After I led us up a less than ideal route onto the Heather Terrace we arrived at its base on Tryfans East side setting up base. Mere months earlier I’d passed this way during a PyB training course and the GA marked on the rock was pointed out. Looking up at that time I thought ‘utter madness to go up there’. Now standing at the GA mark again my thoughts were broadly similar. We set off. Just in time for the rain that sweep in as I commenced onto the third pitch. I hate down climbing. The only thing worse is down climbing in the rain, but there was no choice. Amid a flurry of very calm packing and retrieving, two abseils were set up that got us but unfortunately not Ian’s ropes back down to the Heather Terrace and the long wet trudge back to the hut.

At this stage of the trip I thought I had a good grip on IMC member’s ability to debate what to do next day. But throw in the need to retrieve ropes and transport Aine to Holyhead and a whole new world of complication became apparent. It was from this point onwards that every time I turned around or went into a pub there stood or sat a follow participant of that PyB course. The outdoors is a small world…

With the days debate still ongoing Eric, Aine and James motored to Holyhead for a mornings climb before Aine departed by ferry while myself and Ian set out for a day’s scrambling on Tryfans North Ridge and then Glyderaw’s Bristly Ridge. With strong winds this was to prove an invigorating day and a highlight for me of the trip. The scrambling on Bristly Ridge is outstanding. Well pleased with our days work we began the long descent towards home. Perhaps it was the endorphins but when Ian suggested we divert to Grooved Arete to retrieve the ropes my response was ‘OK, but let’s go back over Glyderaw rather than down the path and then up around Tryfan.’
My orienteering brain arguing the longer circular route with less climbing then the shorter direct option. Perhaps it was fortunate we took this option as we later bumped into a large group of children led by adults who clearly were relying on their Faith rather than any sense, training or experience to stay on track. Something they had failed to do as they were completely clueless to their location under a now threatening looking sky. We relocated them and strongly urged they take the uninviting but feasible scree descent path below them. It was with some reluctance that we left them to their path. Personally I have no problem with any idiot going wherever they please on the hills, but when leading children, well that’s a very different matter. Our last sighting of this group’s progress was encouraging so we pressed on, quite tired I’ll admit to another short scramble and the safe retrieval of the two stranded ropes.

With the arrival of Vanessa and Sinead our favourite debating pastime was drastically curtailed and orders preferences to depart to Llanberis were issued suggested. At this stage I'd four days worth of lead climb opportunities declined and was feeling a bit cowardly. James has quite the vocabulary, so while I may not have understood all the words the sentiments were clear, today we were alternating the leads on Dinas Cromlech’s Flying Buttress. Before I had time to fully digest this fact I was in conversation with another PyB refugee. This route was the other highlight of the trip for me. I experienced my first true hanging belay, my first multi-pitch lead fall (more a slight slip, but a pulse raiser for us both), my first time dropping gear onto, then retrieving it from my big toe (James pulse only) and having the satisfaction of leading two pitches. So pleased was I that myself and Ian jumped out of the car on the way home and I led up one of the Diff routes on Little Tryfans sun baked slab. All I’ll say about my intermediate belay is Ian is well practiced at rebuilding my efforts.

Like a good sugar rush the high of the day passed. The next morning as we wearily trudged up once more towards Heather Terrace and Grooved Arete I felt the toll of the weeks climbing. My arms were blown, my brain was tired. I really didn’t want to face into another long climb. Fortunately Vanessa and Sinead inspired by my earlier wandering route to the Heather Terrace rolled up their sleeves and showed us boys how to properly wonder around a hillside. Having left before us they arrived, somewhat excited by their route choice just as I had delivered the news to James, Ian and Eric that I was bailing out of the climb. Gear and pairings were re-ordered and all five went on to finally master the Grooved Arete, completing the week.

Next morning the drive back to Holyhead provided enough finger brake entertainment to finally cause us to consult the operator’s manual, to find the car hire company had helpfully provided one for a different car.

Thanks to Ian for organising the trip and to Aine, Eric, James, Vanessa and Sinead for the informed debate, company and laughs.
The Irish Mountaineering Club library, which contains over 700 books, was integrated with the Mountaineering Ireland Library in 2013. It is now accessible to all IMC members. The whole library contains over 3,000 books, it is the most important library in Ireland dedicated to climbing and mountaineering.

A lot of time was spent to catalogue and classify the collection. Between entering all relevant information on an online database (title, authors, publication date, publisher, cover page, condition, specific notes...), classifying the books, moving them from one shelf to the other, more than eight months were needed to accomplish the full project.

The library is located in the Mountaineering Ireland Head Office in Blandcharstown. It contains various books such as biographies, travels stories, training books, expedition reports, geographical, historical and botanical studies, magazines, guidebooks and maps. It also contains fascinating books from the early ages of the mountaineering in the middle of 19th century. Their authors such as Whymper, Tyndall, Smythe, Conway, Shipton, Herzog, Hillary... were the pioneers of the Alps and the Himalayas. Many first editions are available and some are even signed by their authors. All these books are a very good source of information for historical researches and due to their old publications and sometimes bad conditions they will only be available at the Moutaineering Ireland Office.

The library contains a very wide range of guidebooks and maps. Most of the countries are represented and even if a lot of books are related to the Alps and the Himalayas, some books and maps of the Kilimandjaro, the Mount McKinley, the Aconcagua, the Mount Elbrus, the High Tatras... are also available.

Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England are very well documented with many walking and climbing guides to satisfy different types of outdoor enthusiasts. Ireland alone contains over 200 books, mainly walking guidebooks such as the Wicklow, Dingle, Western, Bangor or Foxford Ways and some climbing guidebooks of Donegal, Fair Head, Ballykeefe, Dalkey, Wicklow or the Mourne Mountains.

The training section contains many books from an early start of mountaineering with Geoffrey Winthrop Young and its « Mountain Craft » or Alan Blackshaw « Mountaineering, from hill walking to Alpine Climbing » to the more recent ones of Eric Langmuir « Mountaincraft and Leadership » or Steve Long « Hill Walking : the official handbook of the Mountain Leader and Walking Group Leader Scheme ». Other training books such as mountaineering (Cicerone) or winter climbing are also available for loan.
The periodicals cover most of the Himalayan, American, Indian and Alpine Journals. This last one starts from its first edition up to now.

To find your book, simply check the online database:
http://connect.collectorz.com/users/mountaineering/books

If you wish to borrow books, you can send your request to library@irishmountaineeringclub.org or info@mountaineering.ie. You can then either go to the MI Office to collect your books or request them to be sent to your home address (postage fee will be at your own charge).

Six books can be borrowed at the same time over a period of three weeks. If you wish to extend to three more weeks, simply email the library. Extension can be granted on request and peak seasons.

Do not hesitate to give your wish list. Many books, guidebooks, maps and periodicals are available however new acquisitions can be suggested to the library to improve this new facility.

Mountaineering Ireland Library
Irish Sport HQ, National Sports Campus,
Blanchardstown,
Dublin 15

Phone: 01 6251115

Email: library@mountaineering.ie or library@irishmountaineeringclub.org

Web URL: http://connect.collectorz.com/users/mountaineering/books

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Drive to the National Aquatic Centre in Blanchardstown, continue straight ahead to the security. They will open the barrier at the roundabout for you. Past the barrier, go right at a T-junction and the MI offices are in the single storey white building on your left (opposite to the FAI building). Visitor Car park is available.
# The Class of 2014

## MEETS FOR THE COMING MONTHS

- **November 6th to 11th**: Sport and trad climbing in Nice
- **March 2015**: Climbing trip to Costa Blanca is planned

## INDOOR MEETS

- **Tuesday November 4th**: Naomi Sturdi - Yoga Introductory Session - Awesome Walls
- **Thursday November 13th**: Dermot Shiels - Rock Routes
- **Thursday November 20th**: IMC AGM
- **Thursday November 27th**: Caver Tim Fogg – Rope Works
- **Thursday December 4th**: Kevin Coakley and Ian Christie winter sun climbing in France and Spain
- **Thursday December 11th**: Irish ultra marathon runner John O’ Regan
- **Thursday January 8th**: Frank Creedon
- **Thursday January 15th**: James Aitken
- **Thursday January 22nd**: Richard Creagh
- **Thursday January 29th**: Peter O’ Neill
- **Thursday February 5th**: Dave Ayton
- **Thursday February 12th**: Dave Madden – Ice Climbing
- **Thursday February 26th**: Dave Flanagan – climbing book