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COVER PHOTOGRAPH: Andy Minshull during the Dalkey Quarry 40 marathon
Pic: Ian Lawler
Next month, the Irish Mountaineering Club will celebrate its 70th anniversary. It was founded by Joss Lynam and Bill Perrott in December 1948. Leafing through past journals, you are struck by the rich heritage of our club and its global reach. It set standards for mountain climbing in Ireland: and at a time when it long-distance travel was difficult, IMC members set off on far-flung expeditions to the Alps, the Himalayas, Africa South America and the Southern Alps.

Back in 1954, Peter Kenny said Spillikin Ridge would be a “route for supermen only”. Yet he and Frank Winder led the first ascent.

In the late 1950s Brighid Hardiman referred to a timeless challenge when climbing in Connemara: “Mweelrea was climbed by some of the group on a day when three of us did Carrot Ridge, its 900 feet of Diff standard raised to XS by the midges which accompanied us all the way."

“We had to climb in bright hot sunlight with sleeves rolled down and Anorak hoods up to try and ward off the nightmare swarm that beat against us like rain. We sat at the belay points with scarves over our faces, smoking incessantly and in my cases, nearly in tears of frustration and rage.”

The Journal has a great account by Paddy O’Leary of the exploits of the legendary Emmet Goulding during the 1960s. “ Appropriately his name is linked with the very first VS of the decade, Aiseirí at Lough Barra, which he climbed with O’Leary in June 1960.”
Dermot Somers has a riveting account from later in the 1970s of an epic 22-hour climb of the Matterhorn’s North Face, with climbing partner Dawson Stelfox. It was the only time he enjoyed the achievement while getting no pleasure from any of the hard climbing. You can see why. He describes the face in Irish. “Is meascán carraige is leac oighre é, tá se claonta i dtreo na drochaimsire. Ach thar aon ní eile, tá locht ar an gcarraig fhéin. Is aoilchloch lofa scaoilte an chuid is mo dí” (It’s a mixture of rock and ice and prone to bad weather. Above all, there’s a fault with the rock; most of it is rotten loose limestone).

Another moment from the past, involving a team that included member Dónal Ó Murchú (still active!), a prelude to the first successful Irish Everest expedition six years later. It was the Irish Zhangzi-Tibet Expedition 1987 which tried (unsuccessfully) to put a new route up the South West spur of Zhangzi (7553m), formerly known as North Peak. It is the mountain immediately north of Everest and connected to it by the North Col. Led by Joss Lynam, the team tried to summit using a different route with a team led by Frank Nugent. However, “appalling snow conditions" forced them to turn back about 250m short of the objective.”

Dónal, who wrote the report, also suffered a very bad bout of cerebral oedema early on but recovered. He recounts the difficult retreat from the mountain. "We struggled down to base camp under the heaviest loads that could be carried. On the way we came across the tragic scene of Doug Scott’s team digging in avalanche debris for the body of Nima Sherpa. An innocent track along the moraine… had become a deadly trap overnight."

And so to the 69th year of the IMC. It was another very active year with an influx of new members. There was an abundance of meets, both in Ireland and in Britain including visits to the Peak District, the Lake District and Snowdonia. There was also an extensive training programme. In a talk last winter O’Leary exhorted members to expand their horizons, as the IMC pioneers did, and plan to summit the world’s declining population of unclimbed peaks. A dream worth pursuing in the club’s 70th year?

Harry McGee, Publicity Officer

Dónal Ó Murchú’s picture of the retreat from Zhangzi
Andy Minshull took over the job of training officer in 2018. Here is his first-person account of the challenges involved in introducing a swathe of new members of the joys of rock climbing and mountaineering.

A flurry of WhatsApp messages checked on the train after work, a brace of emails and a gaggle of forum posts and the list was complete: My first Glendalough New Members’ meet as IMC Training Officer. When asked if I would step up to the dizzying standard set by Jon Smith, my predecessor, I was both honoured and concerned. I had seen how much Jon did and with a busy job and young family was unsure I could give as much time. So at the AGM when formally “voted” in (no-one else volunteered!) I responded “Yes but I will need help”
The previous year a few of us at the Mournes meet had agreed it needed to be a team running the Introduction to Trad climbing programme. I had no idea just how much help I would get, and was truly overwhelmed some Dalkey evenings when we had more mentors than participants! (At least for the first hour, while the commuters did battle with the M50) So a heartfelt thanks to all of you who mentored even if it was only one evening, it made a massive difference to the quality of experience.

Still, the pressure was on for the meets, and for Glendo there is an added challenge that there is less lower grade climbing. With a range of mentors from ancient (20+ years climbing) to very fresh and youthful (on last year’s programme) we had to do some stealthy Scilla Black manoeuvres to get the right people with the right mentors. How successful were we? Hard for me to know – I’ll do another survey.

The usual sun dances and prayers to various weather gods worked and the Friday and Saturday were almost too nice, a bit of sunburn on the Friday for some of us who had no idea we would need sun cream.

For those that managed to take Friday off work that was the best day for climbing – a small party, the crag to ourselves, well worked out partnerships.

Saturday was a great tapestry of IMC members on the crag, with multiple ascents of the classic Severe and Very Severe routes. We rigged an ab line on Forest ledge, which worked well, in hindsight some of us should have split over to Hobnail as there was some queuing for routes. I chose a hideous route (Ifreann Direct) to try and avoid the queue for Forest Rhapsody which my two faithful seconds did well to get up, I thought I was falling off the alleged 4b crux several times!

It was a great atmosphere on the ground and up on the belay ledges. Wade brought some biscuits up which he produced just at the right moment.

Despite getting organised on Friday and pre cooking the curry for Saturday’s meal, the rice took ages but everyone seemed to cope with a late feast. Sunday morning was drizzly so the mentors consensus was no climbing in Wicklow – Owen, Thomas and I had a great day in Dalkey on the way home along
The Mournes was again blessed with cracking weather and the Friday crew, encouraged by me, learned the virtues of carrying heavy climbing gear up a mountain. I sold this as being great Alpine training. We got up high onto the Binnian Tors and did some good routes, though the gear was a bit flared and unsettling. Owen slipped and unfortunately his top gear ripped, and the first piece was not enough to save him from fracturing an ankle badly. Mountain Rescue were thankfully speedy to arrive and winch the patient out to Newry to be assessed. Walking back downhill was more fun than waking in, all obviously concerned for Owen's well being.

Now the Mournes Cottage is great but small indoors and more and more people pouring in through the doors made it feel like Toners at Friday tea time pretty quickly. A good fire was lit outside and Simon and Darragh disappeared off to see Owen in Newry. The next days climbing was a mass IMC invasion of Lower Cove with a few FM parties on the big Bearneagh Slabs.

My highlight was doing Dots Delight which was ace but tricky to protect the second.

Another great atmosphere the following evening with guest chefs cooking up a storming curry for the masses – memo to us for next year, bring better kitchen utensils! Simon and I went up to see Owen again, who was alright but not hearing much from the doctors so seemed glad of the visit.

Another groovy campfire outside and it was nearly the longest day so the sunrise came round very fast.

I took it steady on the Sunday, Cillian and I both wanted to get home early so did some great routes on Pigeon. Came back to the hut and cleaned up – had a word with ourselves that next year we will make the rules clear regarding what is expected in a club hut.

Paid the farmer for the camping, he'd given us a much better field this year – he donates all the cash to the Motor Neurone disease charity, so that's got to be good karma all round – we are welcome back next year…

All in all I have enjoyed being training Officer this year, I had great support, and with a few subtle changes (and maybe a couple of radical disruptive ones) we will be back next year.
The Kuffner Arête of Mont Maudit

by Aidan Roe
The Kuffner Arête is one of the most aesthetic and airy routes in the Alps and is seen as the best route on Mont Maudit (4,465 metres). Also known as the Tour Ronde Ridge and the Frontier Ridge it was first climbed by a team lead by Moritz von Kuffner in 1887. It involves mixed climbing, including some steep ice and classic rock climbing. Apparently the views are incredible, especially of the Brenva Face and the South East of Mont Blanc.

During the summer an Irish Mountaineering Club team took on the Kuffner Arête, starting the expedition from the Auguille de Midi. Our party was comprised of two, Niall Hedderman and me. Our attempt on Kuffner started the day before with a traverse of the Vallée Blanche. A mid morning start had us crossing during the hottest part of the day. We were heading for the Torino Hut. We had decided to start from there. We’d been advised that the start from the Fourche Bivouac Hut on the lower ridge wasn’t in great condition. I was a bit disappointed. I have seen many photos of the hut and loved the idea of spending the night on the ridge. The plus side was we didn’t have to carry bivvi equipment and there was an outside chance I might actually get some sleep in the Torino Hut.

It was a beautiful walk through some impressive scenery. Despite the heat the snow was still in good condition and it was firm underfoot. As we reached low point of traverse I could look up into the Cirque Maudit and see the Kuffner (or Frontier) Ridge. Standing on the border between Italy and France it sweeps up from Cirque Maudit at 3580m and reaches the NE shoulder of Mount Maudit at 4335m. It is given Alpine grade of D,III (1200m from Torino.7-9hrs). It’s a manageable grade but serious enough undertaking. You need settled conditions and good snow cover. It looked like everything had fallen into place.

We arrived at the Torino early in the afternoon. Its situated on the south side of Munt Blanc. The views onto the Puerty Ridge and down across Val d’Aosta are breathtaking. It’s a much wilder side of massif. We sat on the terrace for a while and hydrated knowing we had a big day the following day. After we’d had our fill of water we retired to the bar for one or two beers. It’s made with water too so why not? We went to bed at about 7.00pm after an enormous dinner. We’d a breakfast sitting at 2.00am so the alarms were set for 1.30am. Odd that this is described as fun and that anyone would spend their spare time doing it.

I tried to settle and sleep but it was a long time coming. The one niggle at back of my mind was our preparation. We had only been high once really since we arrived 4 days earlier. I know myself that I can blag it to an extent. I’ve often traveled over for long weekends and gone high with nothing more than a headache. This trip though I’d added worry. I’d just finished some treatment two weeks previously and wasn’t sure whether or not it would effect me. I think it was in Niall’s mind too but it was never mentioned until after all had been done. With numerous toilet calls (not sure what the point in hydrating is), it was probably 10.30/11.00pm before I dozed off.
The numerous alarms woke me at 1.30.
It’s a daft hour of morning to get up. We geared up and got outside. We roped up and started off into the mist. We had allowed for two hours to the foot of the couloir that led up onto ridge. You descend back the way we had come the day before and at low point turn into Cirque Maudit. Easier said then done with the mist down. We’d spotted a small cluster of tents the day before beneath the Grand Capuchin.

After an hour of steady going I was starting to wonder would we ever find the tents. Out of the mist they appeared. We were heading in right general direction. After 15 mins or so we saw some head-torches coming out of the mist. It was a guide and client on their way to do Diables and they put us back on track. Now the mist was easing and we could see lights on the approach couloir and up onto the ridge. We made directly for the bergschrund. We’d made good time. It was still only 4.00am.

The bergschrund was massive. We’d shortened the rope to about 10m. Niall disappeared over the lip with the rope following and a shout of ‘watch me here’. The rope came tight with no sign of him exiting so I started to move. I followed him in. After a few minutes of very nervous post-holing we found a track out into the couloir that previous parties had made and started ascending. For the next half hour or so we continued up on steep easy ground. It was well stepped and the nevé was perfect but there was nowhere for protection. It was just a case of keep moving and don’t do anything daft. I could feel the exposure growing behind us but could not quiet see it. Around us the sky was starting to brighten and you could catch the outline of ridge and stars above us. The couloir narrowed at top and the snow disappeared. There was a sketchy 15m of mixed climbing to get ourselves onto the ridge properly. It was really not a place to slip. Every placement needed to be perfect. It was now nearly dawn and the mountains opened up. Back down along the lower ridge we could see other groups behind. Views across to the Peutery Ridge were jaw-dropping.

I couldn’t believe I was finally on the Kuffner Arête. For the first time I was feeling the altitude. Route finding wasn’t too hard. We were nearly always in sight of another group. It being a ridge it wasn’t overly difficult staying on track. We got to the snow slopes below Point l’Androsace. There was a huge gendarme on upper ridge. This is turned on left in three to four pitches of 25m. You approach by crossing a snow arête, or Demi Lune as its know, with huge exposure down to the left. The snow was perfect and it wasn’t long before we reached the technical crux. Niall dispatched it with ease. I nearly blew a gasket. Luckily previous parties had left some rope to yard on. Being completely devoid of technique or ethics I hauled up the thing. My lungs were bursting. I stood there for second gasping like a freshly landed mackerel.
We pitched our way through a col behind the Point and came back into the sunshine. I got a much needed rest. I also got a chance to take in the view. To my right the Arête du Diable, which Niall had done with Dave Keogh the year before. To the left is the Peutery Ridge, a route that fired the imagination.

We shortened the rope again and started moving together with bits of gear between us. We were feeling the altitude. I was in bits with the thirst and struggled to get food in, even jellies, my mainstay on the mountains. The climbing though was great. Through rocks. Across snow. I could see the team ahead of us pulling out onto what I thought was the top a couple of 100m above. When we finally reached it I was disappointed to see there was another step to go. At 4,250m I was running on fumes.

We were out on the Chamonix side of the ridge now. An exposed snow traverse brought us to a final gully. Climbing up through this we were finally out on the broad expanse of Mt Maudits north flank. We had done the Kuffner Ridge.

We traversed across another snow-shoulder at 4335m and dropped down to a small col. Here we’d a decision to make. We could ascend the final 100 metres or take a track across North flank and skip it. What do you think we did? It’s a secret!

Some time later we found ourselves on the the descent track off Maudit through the spectacular seracs. I’d seen pictures but up close and personal it was incredible. Massive ice cliffs that break away once in a while with sometimes devastating results. I wanted to stop and take pictures but Niall was having none of it. I have form in this department. I’d stopped on a snowbridge crossing the Vallée Blanche the day before to drop a layer and have drink. I hadn’t noticed it at all.

We kept moving down steep slopes until the ground finally levelled off on a large col between the Tacul and Maudit. Out of range from anything that might have come off side of the mountain. I think it’s first time we both stopped to relax. We had done the route in decent time but were feeling it now. We hadn’t stopped to eat anything and had taken very little in the way of liquid. Now neither of us could get much in at all. It wasn’t time to be hanging around.

We started up again. Our descent down north face of Mont Blanc de Tacul was a fractious affair. We eventually got to the bergshrund where the local guides have put in a ladder to aid people crossing it. We dropped down this and made out way out from under the seracs on the Tacul. It was 2.00pm We’d been on the go constantly more or less for 12 hours. We stopped to drop gear and layers.

It was instantaneous. I felt what was left of my energy drain out of me. Like a clown car when all the wheels fall outwards, I realized I was completely f**ked.

It was 30 degrees plus Celsius on the glacier. The heat was appalling. Our water was long gone. We’d to make our way back to the lift station up the Midi arête. It was purgatory. I could barely put one foot in front of the other. I lost count of the number of times I stopped. It felt like everyone was skipping past me. I thought I was going to get sick. I was completely exhausted. Finally we got to the station. It had taken close to an hour. My brain wasn’t working right. (loads of material there for some). I could hardly pack away my gear but at the back of it all the fireworks were going off. We’d done the Kuffner. I was thrilled. Both of us were. All was right with the world.
The annual meet to the Lakes has long been one of the highlights of the club’s calendar of meets, especially since the date was moved to the June weekend. I think every year since, we have been rewarded with actual sunshine. In 2017 we all stayed at the MAM hut in Coniston. I say ‘hut’ but it is closer to 5-star accommodation with hot running water, central heating and a drying room in case your gansey gets damp.

Sure, why would you go climbing at all if you can stay in that kind of luxury? Síle and myself, of course, forswore such comforts and slept in the back of our van. Mind you we cooked, ate and washed in the hut, just to be sociable though!

Before all that mind, we had set off on the Friday morning via the Dublin to Holyhead ferry. This is my favourite way to get to British crags as it drops you in Anglesea, only a stones throw from one of my favourite places to climb, Gogarth. After leaving the ferry we nipped up toward South Stack and the easily accessible crag of Castle Helen. This crag is situated directly below the tea shop at south stack and is very reliable if the weather is not looking great. We abseiled in and ticked off the Atlantis/True moments/Freebird combination before driving on up to the Lakes.

People arrived at the hut at all hours through Friday night and we were all a bit slow getting moving on the Saturday morning, a sure sign Gerry hadn’t made this trip. However, once movement was finally achieved the resulting momentum carried most of us to Borrowdale. This is one of the more famous Lakes venues, with many roadside crags. People scattered out along Shepard’s crag, ticking off the local classics. Little Chamonix and Donkey’s Ears proved popular and attracted several parties. It being Saturday, it seemed like every climber in Britain had had the same idea, but that’s the problem with roadside venues! The routes are a bit polished. As I sit writing this I’m contemplating the idea that this makes you focus (more) on technique, but in truth when climbing I’d prefer a bit more friction. Still a good day was had by all.
On the Sunday most people headed to Langdale. In typical IMC fashion everyone had their own idea about where to climb and once again we all spread ourselves across the many crags in the valley.

Some went for single-pitch crags down in the valley, conveniently placed near the pub (thought I’m sure that was just a coincidence). Some headed for Whyte Gill, another great venue if the weather’s looking a bit dodgy with some excellent short multipitch climbs at reasonable grades.

Síle, Doug and I went up to Pavey Ark to do some longer routes. Doug and I set up shop at the start of our route while Síle went for a dip in Stickle Tarn. We had a great day climbing Crescent Slabs (S), then scrambling down Jacks Rake and then climbing Stoat’s crack (VS). This makes a good long route of pleasant climbing at a very amenable grade. We even had the crag to ourselves, probably due to the longer walk in.

The Monday was a washout and Síle and I had to get back for the ferry in Holyhead, so we decided to drive back down towards Anglesea. We parked up at South Stack and waited for the rain to clear. The next morning a heavy mist still hung over Holyhead mountain and the main cliff at Gogarth so we headed down the road to Roscolyn. This area is a fantastic sun trap, with good steep climbing and a great alternative when the crags at Gogarth are not in condition.

I started off with a nice little E1 called little queenie, then Síle upped the ante and climbed The Sun (E3) topping off an excellent weekend.

The time between the meet and writing this has let a lot of the details escape me, so I don’t have specifics of who climbed what and where. However, it was a brilliant few days with a good-humoured group of messers, meandering through the Lakes. If it sounds like fun to you, this year’s meet is just around the corner.
The Peak District has some breathtaking countryside as well as some of the best climbing in Europe. Among its legendary climbing venues are Stanage Edge, near Sheffield and the Roaches, in Staffordshire. A respectably-sized group of IMC members visited this amazing climbing Mecca during the May Bank Holiday weekend. The weather conditions were perfect to experience its extraordinary gritstone (and some limestone). The club based itself at the southern end of the Peak District in the village of Two Dales just north of Matlock. It was a perfect place to introduce the club to Peak District quality gritstone climbing.

So what constitutes a good, nay the best, meet ever?
Sunshine, good company, quality cooking, excellent affordable accommodation, proper beer, pub less than 50 meters from the house, best rock type in the world, quality three-star routes from legends like Joe Brown and some Period romantic fiction. We had all of these at the IMC Peak District meet 2018… But don’t take my word for it. This is how those who were there recalled the experience.

The peak district what an incredible trip it’s hard to pick a highlight as it was all so entertaining. The weather, company, food (well done to the chefs), the cute hut in the picturesque village of the two dales but above all else the spectacular climbing at Stanage. At a push the Sunday wins the prize as the climbing at inverted V/Black slab area was full of 3star climbs and the craic was mighty as everyone feasted on all it had to offer.
Jaanika
First climbing trip to the UK and I was amazed by the quality and quantity of climbing. Spent a day in Black Rocks and a day in Stanage and only managed to dip my toe. I could easily have spent a week in these locations and cannot wait to go back. Climbing on gritstone pushed my limits of technique and stamina. 
Top memory would be the seeing the start of Stanage, but not being able to see the end. I could not believe how much climbing is on this mile-long crag. But I must admit that on our way to Stanage, passing Chatsworth House, nobody in the car could hold their excitement of seeing Mr Darcy’s (from Pride and Prejudice) house. As always travelling with IMC is great fun: cooking together, chatting and recalling experiences.

James
Fantastic week-end, made all the better by the incredible weather and superb company. I’d forgotten just how hard grit is when you are not used to it; thank God for the two Fionas Sunday. Also, thanks to Con for leading that impossibly difficult HS 4b on Black rocks, for which I needed serious aid to get up, and Jon didn’t find trivial.

The Two Fionas
The Fiona’s highlight of the holiday was one après-climb clinic. We learned one could go up a grade with new shoes. The first available pairs were bought: we are back at VDiff.

Sara
The Peak District was such a great weekend! I thought it was brilliant to be climbing with different people in such a picturesque landscape and summery weather. The crags were impressive – particularly Stanage – and at the same time the approach was very convenient – perfect combination! Different style of climbing to what I’m used to, interesting stuff. Few of us also went for a nice cycle along the High Peak Trail on the last day, because I thought it was worth to explore the area a bit more and it was really worth it. Final revelation: I discovered the chef in me! Lol.
There are obvious attractions – and obvious drawbacks – to a Kerry meet. There are Ireland’s most majestic mountains, some extraordinary climbing, and spectacular views. The drawbacks are fewer: mainly the perils of an Atlantic weather system and getting there!
So the Kerry meet of October 2016 saw the weather gods smiling on us. However, the tortuous drive down was a different story. We finally found the hostel after the use of multiple sat-navs. We rested our bones and met up with some of the others who’d already made it. Tony Barry and Peter Wood had arrived early and enjoyed a very wet hike over the tops near Cloghane.

So the Mount Brandon hostel had welcoming owners and an excellent kitchen, good sized dining area and a small lounge. Arriving in the dark I did not appreciate the magic of the location. The next morning the true face of West Kerry showed itself.

So we left the hostel around 10am and followed the convoy to Dún Séanna Head outside Dingle for sea cliff climbing. I was really looking forward to climbing at the coast especially as it looked like it was not going to rain any time soon… Tony was leading the meet and by the time we got over the 30min walk-in he and Peter were in the midst of rigging the ab rope. As Petra Tolarova, Vincent Astier and I were last in the queue and would be waiting a while for the ab we tried the scramble round to the east end of the crag, mentioned in Dave Flanagan’s Rock Climbing in Ireland. Weirdly, for October, it was sunny, and a few people started wondering if we would need sun cream. A good problem to have. The scramble was fun and we got to the base of the routes around the time of the first abbers. We picked a nice easy warm up route to get used to the rock type – sandstone – Peter Pan VDiff and Vincent came up after Petra as a third.

I had my eye on the Giraffe and Mr Allister and as we coiled ropes at the top two seasoned locals appeared. I went and looked at the long slabby angled routes with one of these guys, with a fantastic view out on the Atlantic towards the Skelligs.

While the needle of The Razor’s Edge and Jumbo routes looked very adventurous and enticing I really wanted to build confidence on the VS Giraffe, billed (by one of the locals) as one of, if not the best, in Ireland. It was a fantastic looking route in an amazing position. With the tide and swell the way it was we needed to get on it, so move we did, this time down the ab rope.
With the tide and swell the way it was we needed to get on it, so move we did, this time down the ab rope. Other parties – Tony, Sile, Harry and Áine, Karen and Emma, and Paulina and Peter were doing a plethora of routes further round, and David and Cearbhall were on the needle, sheltering from a brief shower (at one point) doing the E1 Jumbo The sun came out and quickly the rock was dry again. Getting to the start of Giraffe was exciting. The two locals skipped past us to Mr Allister which looked amazing. I checked Petra was happy on her belay ledge way right of the start, which was being buffeted with big swell and picking a moment between waves got onto the start.

Fantastic protection, lovely long route that felt vertical but was a slabby angle, quality VS climbing in an amazing position, the sea crashing below, and a “yes” fall zone all the way.

Petra flew up the second with relative ease. We abbed in for Mr Allister HVS, before it got cut off by the sea. A more exciting traverse to the belay, with the swell coming up much higher now. Again a fantastic climb, more technical, with the crux near the top – a slightly sparse section in terms of protection and some thinking to work out the moves.

On Sunday we drove for over an hour to the Gap of Dunloe – my first time there – I felt like I was looking at Llanberis Pass in a way, the place I first discovered my love of climbing. Though the ponies and single track road were a surprise I did notice it was a bit windy. We’d been advised the day before, to get to the Gap early as it acts as a wind tunnel later in the day. Instead of looking at which routes would be sheltered I was blinkered and looked at the routes I wanted to climb, either Bimbo Limbo VS or Jamaica Plains HVS multi pitches on the High Buttress. By its very name it sounds more exposed to the wind but the guide book description of long quality routes, and the look of the high mountain crag from the car park, were too appealing. As we hiked up we noticed it was now fairly windy.

We went to look at Jamaica Plains HVS. I don’t usually warm up on HVS but the first pitch looked ok so we went for it. I thought I had had a good look at the route on the walk in, and had the key landmarks on the route in my mind and the route description fairly well memorised. There’s an off width in the middle pitch, which I was both nervous of and excited about – carried my camalot 5 in readiness. Anyway, I went left instead of right at the top of pitch 2, realised the error but we decided not to correct – it was powerfully, saucily windy by now.

So pitch 3 was a gardening pitch, to join the last bit of L’Orange with the start of the fourth pitch of Jamaica Plains, unfortunately above the odd-width!

Slightly gutted I set off on the 4b pitch expecting to make light work of it. It was amazing. The wind factor had increased to feisty by now, and communication with Petra was becoming tricky. We had discussed the three tugs on the rope method but it’s never reliable when there’s rope drag. For some reason when I reached the belay, and there were no anchor points, I assumed I was too far left and headed right – half-knowingly embarking on a cool traverse link-up to another route The Bird VS – I think I was enjoying it so much I didn’t want it to finish.

Still, the traverse on the link-up was ace and I highly recommend it – there’s a 5a move on it. It sort of made up for missing the off width. By the point of starting the fourth pitch we were high up on High Buttress and the wind was massive and furious.

I can’t wait to get back to Kerry to sample more with the great company and fantastic climbing.
Barry O’Flynn, who passed away in February 2017, was a past-President of the IMC and served at various times as club Secretary and Treasurer. His five-year tenure as Hut Warden at Glendasan, in the late-60s and early 70s is remembered by many.

Barry spent his early years in the low lands of counties Kildare, Laois and Carlow. On coming to Dublin in 1957 he joined the Club and the following year was asked would he take on the office of Treasurer. Very flattered he agreed although later he realised no one else would take it. When he took over as Warden, the Hut was in a very run down state. The Club was unable to finance professionals to restore it so with the help of a few members he undertook the renovation of the premises on a do-it-yourself basis: in the process he developed DIY skills as plumber, carpenter and block layer. The Cow House, which was a mere windowless and doorless shell, was transformed into additional sleeping and living quarters and yielded much needed revenue.

He led several beginners’ meets to the Austrian and Swiss Alps and organised a high level walking tour in the Pyrenees. As an Alpinist he cheerfully acknowledged he was no Bonnington or Bonatti but he was a competent climber on rock, snow and ice and had successful seasons in Zermatt, Chamonix, the Oberland and the Dolomites. Amongst his better climbs he numbered many of the Chamonix Aiguilles, the Old Brenva route on Mont Blanc, the north face of the Aiguille du Bionnassy, a traverse of the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau and a traverse of the Matterhorn. He was a member of the 1964 IMC Expedition to Rakaposhi while, at home he edited the Donegal and Dalkey Guides and had many new routes to his name.

Paradoxically, while he objected strenuously to the publication of Mountain Log as he felt (correctly) that it would eventually supplant IMC Journal, Barry was the person who suggested the name!

In his retirement Barry sought out battered and worn copies of the first climbers’ guides to the Irish mountains and rock faces which existed only in manuscript or duplicated form and republished them as printed booklets under his own imprint – Cló Ceo Draoidheachta [Magic Mist Press]. These he distributed free to interested parties and deposited copies in club and the Copyright Libraries. Barry became known to a new generation of IMC members through his writings on the club website and a collection of his entertaining essays on an eclectic range of mountaineering topics can be found at http://www.irishmountaineeringclub.org/author/Magicmist/
Breaking Back

Lessons from a painful fall

By Harry McGee
I k now where I should start this story but it’s so hard to start it from there. It is not during my transfer by ambulance from St Vincent’s Hospital to the Mater Hospital in the dead of night, trying to guess what part of the city we are passing from the lights coming in through the roof window.

It’s not when I am being moved a day earlier from a bed to a stretcher for a scan and the medics are doing a ‘log roll’ to protect my back. I try to accommodate by playing a horizontal statue. As they roll my supine body to the left and then to the right, it I’m saying (to myself): “I hope I’m not going to end up in a wheelchair.” As they are doing it all the talk is of Love Island. In real life the profound and banal coexist side by side.

Where I should start the story is earlier, a few days earlier. From the moment I realised I’d had a bad fall and really hurt myself, I adopted a really positive attitude, refused to felt sorry about it. Ok, I knew I had broken bones but I was lucky and had no one to blame but myself. That mindset involved only one artifice and that was not thinking about the accident, and the run-up to it. It wasn’t denial. I knew from the first day that it would be excruciatingly painful to recall and even more torturous to write about it. Because with every sentence describing every move I cringe and grimace at the stupid mistakes I made. In truth, in the four and a half months since I have consciously avoided considering that fateful moment. Until now. So here is how it started... Early on a Thursday morning in late June, I went climbing with another IMC member in the quarry. It was a day from heaven, blue skies, a view of Dublin Bay that was borrowed from the Mediterranean, placid seas, boats and ships gliding tranquilly. I tackled Tramp, a VS. It was my second ‘lead’ climb of the day, having done a climb called Jameson 10 a little earlier. I had done my first climb easily, a little too easily, and my confidence was just a little too high.

And so to the many mistakes. The first was I knew little about the climb other than seeing another club member climb it a year before. The second was I started it without doing a proper recce (figuring out the moves from the ground). The third was that I put in only one piece of protective gear before reaching the crux, which was a corner crack. It turned out to be useless when the fall happened. Although I managed to get the No 5 camming device into the crack, I just could not get the rope up into the carabiner. It was so warm the rock was sweating and I could feel my fingers slipping.
My next mistake was that I panicked. I remember a series Irish Times colleague Peter Murtagh wrote about the Irish army rangers training ahead of a mission to Mali. They did the same exercises over and over again, so when such an emergency occurred in real life, they would be able to use their muscle memory to respond.

I should not have got into that situation in the first place, but when I did I should have been able to focus, to remain cool and not panic. It was a fail on all three counts. There were things I could have done including holding onto the piece of gear or trying to retreat but I did none of those things. I could feel myself slipping. And then I was gone.

People ask you what goes through your mind when you are falling. The answer is nothing. Truth is it happens so quickly that your next conscious moment is picking yourself up from the ground.

My fall was between three and four metres and luckily onto grass, hardened by a long dry spell. I’m not sure what happened to my first piece of gear, a nut. It had become dislodged either while I was climbing up, or else wasn’t as secure as I had thought. Or else the slack rope in my hand was so long that the first piece of protection had become redundant. When I decked, I immediately felt the pain in my wrist and the general all-over pain of being winded and bruised.

And there followed another major mistake. I moved. I should have stayed put but instinct and adrenaline kicked in. I knew I had broken my left wrist as that was very painful. But I had also broken my back, though I did not realise it at the time. The wrist at the time seemed the problem... but it was only part of the problem.
So I got up and walked to a car. Even as I walked to the car, I could feel how sore my lower back was. It was when I was in the car that I realised that my back could also be an issue. The nearest hospital was Loughlinstown. By the time I got there, I was not able to sit down and stood in the waiting room in some pain. They told me they could treat my wrist but not my back so it was back into the car and onto St Vincent’s Hospital.

I can’t remember how long I was waiting in St Vincent’s but it seemed forever. I stood in the waiting room and, once through into the department, I stood outside the treatment room, trying to lean against a wall.

It was only when the consultant looked at me that I was placed immediately on a trolley, and also treated for shock (my blood pressure had fallen sharply).

So all of that movement was a mega mistake. With a broken back, especially if there was a danger of spinal cord damage, that could have been very grave. The cardinal rule for somebody who has fallen is don’t move.

Once on the trolley, I lay on my back for four days, not allowed to move. My only view of the world was an upward one, mainly of ceilings and lights spinning by as I was being wheeled from one place to another for an interminable series of checks. Although not wearing a brace, I was still a spinal risk. I encountered more log rolls over that time than a Canadian lumberjack in felling season.

Once over the A&E bottleneck, my experience of Irish healthcare could not have been more positive. A battery of X-Rays and Scans, including an MRI, confirmed a really bad break in the wrist as well as an unstable fracture in my lower back (lumbar) region.

From early on, I knew I needed surgery on the wrist. The top of the radius had been smashed so I needed a plate inserted. The only question now remained was about my back. The scans were sent to the National Spinal Unit in the Mater Hospital. Very late on Friday night, I was told I was being transferred there as surgery would be required. When they called Fiona at home she was very upset (as was our daughter, Sadhbh), fearing the worst.

I had been sanguine up until now. I had no pins and needles on my limbs. I had suffered no head injury. I could wiggle all my fingers and toes. Still, doubts crept in.

When you have been fit and healthy all your life, it is a very unreal experience being in a hospital setting. You become helpless, like a discarded toy, completely dependent on others, unable to go to the toilet, unable to do anything for yourself.

The most unreal part was the journey and arrival at the Mater. The ambulance arrived after 2am. It was a Friday night and they had to deal with ambulance rush hour. I was log-rolled onto the gurney and then braced and wrapped as tightly as an Egyptian mummy. As we sped through the city, the paramedic said he’d already taken a number of people from Dalkey Quarry that summer. A few days later, a nurse in the Spinal Unit said the same thing. And when I thought about, I could think of four or five climbers who had sustained bad breakages in the past year, it was as sober reminder of the dangers of the sport - that you should never become blasé or take anything for granted.

The National Spinal Unit in the Mater is small and modern, with about a dozen beds, and amazingly dedicated and caring staff, who witness the heart-breaking consequences of catastrophic life-changing injuries on a regular basis. It was during my stay there I realised how lucky I had been.
I landed there at 4am on Saturday. The room I went into was plain. It looked like an operating theatre, an impression buttressed by the serious looking equipment surrounding the bed, including a TV screen attached to a pivoting arm.

A medic did the pin and brush test which was unnerving. They pricked the skin with a pin, and then brushed the skin gently, to ascertain my sense of feeling. Thankfully, it was okay. Early the next morning the registrar came in to tell me the results of the scan. I would probably need an operation on the back, and definitely on the wrist. The good news was there was no damage to the spinal cord. For the first time since the accident I cried, tears of relief.

Things moved quickly. That evening I was wheeled into theatre at about 7pm. The consultant orthopaedic surgeon, was Michael Dodds, originally from Sheffield. He’s a very likeable guy, low-key and positive. He did the back surgery (a fusion involving a pin) and then flipped me over to operate on the wrist - it needed a plate and loads of screws. He had to put bits of bone back to rebuild the top of the radius: it looked like the inside of a Crunchie Bar, he said. All in all it took until 2am, six or seven hours in the depth of a weekend night.

I woke following day, feeling groggy after the operation and the painkillers. All I could do really was look at the drawn game between Galway and Kilkenny on television. I braced myself for a long stay. It wasn’t to be. The next morning the plaster specialists came up to put my left arm in a cast and to fit me with a brace around my lower waist. It essentially looks like a plastic piece of armour - if you are thinking superhero, it is definitely Turtleman. Within minutes a physiotherapist had arrived and I was walking up and down the ward with this strange shell around my waist. They didn’t hang around. I spent Monday walking up and down the ward. I was tested on a stairs on Tuesday and discharged Wednesday morning. I stopped using all painkillers the following Sunday.

It made for an alternative summer. As a naturally highly-strung and intense person, I had to learn the virtues of patience. With an arm in plaster and wearing a brace, everything was done at snail’s pace. But I settled into the pace. I got out for a walk most days, learned how to cook with a hand in plaster, and got to appreciate the joys of daytime TV.

Originally, I was to wear the brace night and day for 12 weeks but after a few weeks, I was allowed to take it off at night (which made a huge difference). I had never seen a brace before that but every-time I visited the outpatients I met plenty of members of my new brace-wearing species - one guy had broken his back when diving in Sandycove, another had slipped awkwardly on kitchen tiles.

And so to recovery which has progressed well. As Michael Dodds said to me: "You have got off Scot free." Now in late November, I’m cycling, swimming and taking long walks with short run intervals. I’m only about six weeks away from going back running continuously. Both wrist and back are recovering well (though there’s still a bit to go), thanks to an exacting regime set out by physiotherapist Doireann Murtagh.

I have learned plenty of personal lessons. But there are general ones too. Given the relative frequency of such accidents, there might be a case for an information sheet for every new (and seasoned!) member to remind them of the correct protocols when such accidents occur. There might also be an arguable case for some kind of volunteer rescue service aimed at Dalkey and other crags not near mountains, even though I can foresee huge logistical difficulties in even trying to arrange them. That said, it is becoming more popular and the frequency of falls will also increase.

At least I know where my story will end.

The other recurring question I’m asked is always cast in the negative: “You’re surely not going back rock climbing again, are you?”

Sadly, the answer to that one is predictable and reflects the tragicomedy that is my life!
We were high up on the north face of Lliwedd, half-a-dozen pitches of climbing below us and as many more to come. Normally a dull, gloomy spot, on this particular day it was the place to be. Refreshingly cool as the rest of Snowdonia sweltered in an unusually hot September. A genuine Indian summer.

Comfortably seated on a throne belay, my back resting against the cool rock, paying out the rope to Liam, who was out of sight above and climbing steadily upwards, I was in a relaxed and placid mood as I surveyed the scene spread out before me. On the left, the huge bulk of Snowdon brooded over the dark, shaded waters of Glaslyn, which bore hardly a ripple in the still autumn air; across from us the narrow, jagged rim of the Crib Goch was bathed in bright sunshine, with a steady trickle of walkers picking their way carefully along its exposed crest of copper-coloured rock; off to the right, the placid waters of Llyn Llydaw stretched away in the direction of Pen-y-pass, with the Glyder summits beyond.

We had the place all to ourselves: cocooned in an atmosphere of deep silence, with not even a breath of wind stirring across the face. This is the life, I thought to myself, as I stretched my legs out on the commodious ledge.

Then, suddenly, there was an explosion of sound, rousing me from my reverie with all the abruptness of a slap in the face, scattering my thoughts like dry leaves before a winter wind. It was the sound every climber dreads when high on a rock face - the sound of falling rock. Instinctively, I cowered in against the face, tightening my grip on the rope as I did so, waiting for the clatter of rocks about my head and shoulders. Then I realised, to my relief, that the rock fall was not directly above, but off to one side. Looking across, I could see the cause, and effect, of the incident.

A hapless sheep had lost its footing on some loose ground and was now plummeting down, accompanied by a shower of boulders. As the sheep fell through space it cartwheeled slowly, almost gracefully, through the air, before crashing into the rock face and rebounding out to continue its fall, repeating this process a couple of times before landing, with a sickening thud, in a hollow a short distance below me. It twitched convulsively for a few moments, then all was still.

But not for long. Within less than a minute a small flock of ravens, those dark denizens of the upland airways, came swooping down to settle on the rocks circling the hollow. After a brief pause two of them hopped down and moved in for a closer inspection. There must have been some movement, some sign of life, still present in the animal, for they turned, took off again and went their way.

All, with the exception of one. The largest, probably the oldest and canniest of the flock, moved in closer, chose a rock just above the sheep's head, closed its wings and settled down to wait. The reward...
for its patience would probably be the sheep's eyes, a favourite snack of ravens everywhere. A call from above informed me that Liam was ready to take in (he had been so absorbed in the climbing that the whole incident had passed un-noticed) and I was soon on my way. As I gained height a little shoulder of rock cut off the scene of the tragedy from view. But something else caught my eye as I climbed. A pair of buzzards had arrived and were circling above the spot on outstretched wings, drawn unerringly to the upcoming feast by who knows what form of bush telegraph.

For Nature shows no sentimentality in these matters and the recycling process would proceed with ruthless efficiency. There was enough food here to support, for a while at least, some of the creatures inhabiting these inhospitable mountains, fortifying them for the rigours of the upcoming winter. Within a few months there would be nothing more than a pile of bleaching bones to mark the spot of the sheep's demise. But even then its contribution to sustaining life would continue for, the following spring, in raven's nests all over the area, many a newly hatched chick would benefit from the insulation provided by tufts of fleece plucked from the carcase of the long-forgotten sheep.

Mahatma Gandhi, that wise old owl, summed this cycle up nicely: "while everything around is ever changing, there is, underlying all that change, a living power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves, and re-creates. In the midst of death, life persists".

We were on the cramped stance below the final pitch of Sarcophagus, sorting out ropes and gear, on a fine spring morning, when we spotted them. Two peregrine falcons, most likely the pair which nest on the upper cliffs, circling leisurely overhead. Suddenly, as if on a given signal, they flew towards each other, locked talons, folded their wings and began plummeting earthwards, in what looked for all the world like a suicide pact. As they fell, they tumbled over and over, faster and faster and faster. From where we were standing, and as we watched in horror, we could hear the wind tearing through their plumage as they shot past. They approached the boulders at breakneck speed but, just when it seemed there was no avoiding smashing into them, they parted, spread their wings, and skimmed above the rocks, with little more than inches to spare. How they could judge the critical moment to part, while tumbling at such a dizzying rate, is a tribute to their renowned eyesight and aerial skills. They repeated the process twice more, starting at a higher altitude each time and falling at a faster rate towards what looked like certain death. Then, having established their trust in each other, they soared off into the distance.
There is, in a narrow, secluded, tree-lined glen, a small but steep crag, known only to a few, that I like to visit every now and then. This crag lies on private land, where, it would seem, walkers are tolerated, but the situation regarding climbing is, as yet, untested. For although permission to climb here has never been refused, this is simply because permission to climb has never been sought. In these matters I follow the policy of "don't ask, don't tell" popularised by the U.S. military for dealing with a different matter entirely.

None of the few routes recorded thus far came easily, or yielded without a struggle, but these days, for me, struggling is the order of the day. High up on the face of this crag there is a small pedestal, neatly situated beneath a roof which protects it from the elements. In other words, a perfect spot for a raven's nest. So it was no surprise to discover, when first climbing there one winter, that it did, indeed, bear a nest.

We avoided the crag the following spring and summer, leaving the birds to rear their young in peace. But when I paid a return visit in autumn, to check things out, I discovered that a minor tragedy had occurred. In common with many nests of large birds, this one incorporated lengths of the binder twine that some farmers are prone to leave lying around. The foot of one of the fledglings had become entangled in the twine and, when it launched off on its maiden flight, it had been brought to an abrupt stop. It had fallen down below the ledge and dangled there in space, upside down, unable to right itself. It must have suffered a slow, lingering death, with the parent birds powerless to intervene.

There was a strong wind blowing through the trees on the day of my visit, and every so often a sudden gust would set the dead bird gyrating wildly at the end of the cord, spreading its wings and ruffling its feathers, so that it seemed as if the bird was still alive and trying to free itself. I found this danse macabre unsettling, so I set up an anchor, abbed down and cut the cord. The nest itself was a mass of binder twine, still posing a danger for any subsequent users, so I swept it off the ledge in the hope that, should the birds return the following spring, they would start afresh.

So far they haven't returned. Not surprising, for having had to watch the young bird's death throes would probably have been enough to scare them off for good.

However, such an ideal nesting site is too good to be left idle and, sometime soon, I expect it will be discovered by the next generation of ravens scouting out the glen.

I regularly go for a morning’s ramble along the ridge running north from Windgates, on the Greystones road, to the cross on Bray Head and back again. It’s a pleasant walk, and one I enjoy. On one side, a steep slope, studded with rocky outcrops, drops down to the cliff path and the ever changing sea, while on the other there is a fine view out beyond the Earl of Meath's estate and the Little Sugarloaf to the Dublin and Wicklow mountains. On a clear day, looking out to sea, the mountains of Snowdonia can be seen on the distant horizon, while the Mournes beckon from beyond the Hill of Howth.

Once Saint Brigid’s Day has come and gone I am always on the watch for the first signs of Spring on the Head and these come in many forms: the carpet of bluebells beneath the trees on the northern slopes; the hoarse croak of the ravens nest-building on one of the buttresses; the short, staccato bursts of song from the wrens as they flit in and out through the furze; the tell-tale call of the kittiwakes as they wheel about the cliffs below and, best of all, the first glorious outpouring of song as the larks, singing non-stop, wing their way upwards in the sky above their nests.

One fine spring morning I was rambling along, thinking I had the ridge all to myself, when I spotted two twitchers, just below me. These were serious birdwatchers, equipped with tripods, elaborate cameras and powerful binoculars. I was about to drop down and ask them what the story was, when the object of their interest came zipping into view.

Four alpine swifts, flying in close formation, rocketed along just a few feet above the crest of the ridge. Magnificent flying machines, with short bodies and powerful wings, their speed was breath-taking as they flew out over the town, turned and came whizzing back again.
Watching them, I couldn't help but smile as I contemplated the result of their navigational error. To paraphrase Wilde's Lady Bracknell - to stray one hundred miles off course may be regarded as a misfortune, to stray a couple of hundred looks like carelessness.

Not that I would be pointing the finger for, during a lifetime spent tramping the hills of these islands, I, too, have often navigated by the seat of my pants, sometimes with unexpected results. Needless to say, my gaffes pale into insignificance when compared to that of the swifts but the fact that our islands are covered by networks of roads does limit the scope for making spectacular blunders.

At the tender age of 10 years, while on my first camping weekend with the scouts in Larch Hill, I persuaded two of my pals to sneak out of the tent with me at first light and, while everyone else was asleep, we climbed Tibradden Mountain. It was a first for the three of us and I can still remember the delight of standing on the summit and discovering the range of hills stretching away to the south. We vowed we would explore them and, during the years that followed, we did just that. Using the bus routes to Enniskerry, Bohernabreena and Blessington, we roamed far and wide, in summer and winter, day and night, learning to cope with the hills in all conditions, while coming to know, love and respect our mountains. Using the half-inch Wicklow map and one of those little round compasses with the nervous needle, our self-taught navigational technique was never as precise as the level achievable nowadays but, if we sometimes found ourselves wandering into terra incognito, we were always capable of extricating ourselves and, in the process, discovering that straying off route was not the end of the world. Indeed, just as the swifts seemed to be enjoying their unexpected surroundings on Bray Head, we sometimes found ourselves doing likewise in seldom visited glens and corries.

A few days after first seeing the swifts I was back up on the ridge again. There was no sign of them. The birds had flown. Let’s hope they made the journey home safely.

Happily, we always did.
It was only thirty minutes short of midnight, and we were only thirty minutes away from the cairn on Lug, at the tail end of the Lug Walk. While Mick and I made our way up the broad crest of Cannow, on a showery night in October, sometime in the late 1950’s, the full moon played cat and mouse with us, as dark clouds, driven by a fresh south-westerly, moved rapidly across the sky. There would be short bursts of soft light, revealing the hills all around, when the moon peeped through gaps in the cloud, to be followed by periods of darkness as the clouds intervened again. Every now and then we would be soaked by a heavy burst of rain but, just as quickly, the wind would dry us out again as we plodded steadily along.

We had no set plan as to what to do when we arrived at the summit: we were travelling light and easily pleased. If the showers passed off we might hunker down for a few hours in the shelter of the cairn, or we could head on down to Seskin and a deserted cottage I knew of. Another option was to head down the Ow valley and chance slipping in to the Aghavannagh hostel. We opted for the latter and, to add a bit of spice to proceedings, decided to descend via the main gully in the South Prison.

The moon had retreated behind a thick bank of cloud and it was quite dark in the gully so Mick, whose eyesight was not the best, opted for carrying a torch, which left only the one hand free for scrambling, slowing him down considerably. I always preferred not to use a torch unless absolutely necessary, so I forged ahead and when the ground levelled out, sat down on a boulder to await his arrival. Looking back up the hill, I could mark Mick’s progress by the movement of his torch down the gully.

But when I turned to gaze out across the upper reaches of the Ow valley, I was startled to see another light, making its way along the slopes of Lybagh. The light was pale, feeble and flickering, weaving a little from side to side as it progressed along, for all the world like someone riding a bicycle with a lamp on its last legs. Some old farmer heading home after a night of playing cards at a neighbour's house, was my first thought but no, that was nonsense - there were no roads and certainly no habitation that high up the mountain.

Even as I watched, the light changed direction and came straight towards me and I realised it was moving across open space. Then it dawned upon me what it was I was witnessing. It was a barn owl, foraging for food. I had listened to debates on the radio on this very subject and, while there was general agreement that it did occur, there were conflicting views as to the how and the why. I sat, transfixed, as the light approached nearer and nearer, all the while weaving from side to side as the owl listened for any sign of prey. I don’t know if it sensed my presence or heard Mick’s approach but, just before it reached me, it switched direction and I caught a blur of movement before it vanished into the darkness.

When Mick reached me we pressed on down and were pleased to discover the head of a newly constructed forest road, in an area as yet unplanted. Shortly after, just as a heavy burst of rain began, we came upon a forester’s hut. Grateful for the opportunity to shelter, we stepped inside. It was the usual basic forest workers cabin - four walls and a roof, with a low bench running around three of the walls. We kicked off our boots, doffed our bicycle capes, stretched out on the benches and, lulled by the steady drumming of rain on the roof, were asleep within minutes.

Towards dawn the skies cleared, the temperatures plummeted and the cold brought us to our feet. We headed on down to Aghavannagh and, as we neared the hostel, spotted a woman collecting eggs from the henhouse in her garden. Mick, ever the silver-tongued, chatted her up and persuaded her to sell us half-a-dozen eggs for a few pence. The decent woman threw in half a loaf of her homemade soda bread as well. There was no-one up or about at the hostel. The front door was locked, but the kitchen window wasn’t.

We borrowed a drop of milk and a spoonful of tealeaves and feasted on toast and scrambled eggs, washed down by mugs of hot tea. Fortified by our breakfast we hit the road for Enniskerry and the bus home - taking Djouce in on the way. Wish I could do that now.
Paul Donnelly, who died suddenly last November, was an active IMC member from 1969 until his death from a heart attack at his home in Portobello. Paul grew up in Whitechurch near the Dublin Mountains and it is perhaps here that his lifelong love of the hills was nurtured. Secondary school was Westland Row, followed by an economics degree at UCD. His initial employment was with Roadstone, but he moved into the Public Service and spent the rest of his working life with Enterprise Ireland. Paul took early retirement and was able to devote his time between his many and varied interests. It is this wide range of interests that best characterises Paul. He had a lifelong association with the Labour Party and often trudged the streets at election time for the candidates of his local branch. Paul worked behind the scenes and produced policy papers on various economic and social issues to be included as Labour Party policy. I think he also enjoyed the social activities and enjoyed the parties hosted by his friend Mary Frehill. Paul’s interest in the last few years was climate change and he was well read and informed on the issues. As usual he became an activist and sought to change and influence public opinion. He was a member of Friends of the Earth and made a submission to the recent people’s forum on the issue. Paul was well-read and loved nothing better than a lively discussion with his many friends on current topics. On hill walks in Wicklow and elsewhere he was likely to stop in mid stride to make his point. One learnt to keep walking otherwise little forward progress would be made. In latter years he took to year-round swimming usually in Sandycove or around in the Forty Foot. I would occasionally join him on hot Summer’s day and was always amazed at how long he stayed in the water, his distinctive red bathing cap bobbing in the distance. He wasn’t a daily swimmer by any means but in Winter seemed to be able to cope with intervals of two weeks at a time. As with all his activities the day was not complete without a coffee or two or a meal and a pint. Paul ran in Dublin City Marathons, participated in early orienteering events and won a Mountain Marathon orienteering event organised by the club in November 1984.
It is as a member of the IMC that we will best remember Paul. He served on committees, was meets secretary in 1981 and was treasurer in 2004. His name crops up as a volunteer Hut warden on numerous occasions. He was also a diligent club Auditor for many years. Paul was always ready to help even if it meant that he was put to some bother. It was typical that Paul came to the rescue of Des Doyle on a Saint Patrick’s week-end in the Lake District when he towed Des’s car to a garage for repair.

Scrambling was Paul’s forte and showed his calmness and steadiness to best advantage. In the Club Journal of ’83 Ingrid Masterson describes how Paul and herself retreated from the ridge of the Casnile in a thunderstorm with the ridge glowing and ice axes singing. Ingrid rightly worried but Paul took it in his stride. Dave Walsh has recounted the dramatic descent from the Piz Bernina after a storm enforced bivouac, Paul was unfazed and Dave did all the worrying. Not all ascents were as traumatic.

The traverse of the Piz Badile with Ingrid Masterson, along with Joss Lynam and Liam Convery in 1982 was fondly remembered by Paul as one of the highlights of his climbing career. They climbed the North Ridge, descended the South ridge to the Gianetti Hut in Italy and the following day walked back to their base in Val Bregaglia. Paul wrote an account of this in the club Journal 1983.

Paul loved walking and climbing in the Pyrenees and had many trips there on his own or in the company of John Patton, Brian Searson and John Burke. More recently he continued to climb in Dalkey, often with Con O’Shea and finishing with a swim in the Forty Foot.

I think I first met Paul on a meet to Skye in the 70’s but it was much later that we teamed up on numerous ski holidays and walking and climbing trips in Ireland, Scotland, Majorca and Greece. Some highlights for me include our Scottish trip in June 2006 when we climbed The Cobbler, Curved Ridge on Buachaille Etive Mor, had a wonderful day traversing An Teallach, and later also the traverse of Suilven.

In October 2008 we travelled first to Budapest and on to Thessaloniki in Greece. We had a glorious walk-in and climb of Mount Olympus just before the hut closed for the winter. We finished the holiday swimming and relaxing by the Aegean Sea. I particularly remember a fine August week in Kerry with Paddy O’Leary and Paul which finished with a climb of Howling Ridge on Carrauntoohil. Wicklow walking is what we did most often. Our last outing was on Scarr in late September and we finished with a meal and a pint in the Roundwood Inn. Paul had his favourite dish from their menu, chicken and chips with a side of coleslaw. He was to come with a group of older IMC members to Westport in October but pulled out of the trip at the last minute.

His sudden death shocked all his friends. We extend our sympathies to his sister Monica.
Brendan Walsh
1942 - 2018

Obituary by David Walsh

Photo: Gareth Jones
The Brendan Walsh I knew was always a devout Rock ‘n’ Roller and a mountaineer. My late father took Brendan and Rory, the eldest two of the five Walsh children, to Scotland in 1959, climbing Ben Nevis and in the Cùilins of Skye, awe-inspiring stuff to the ears of the rest of us. He almost got a chance to climb the Inaccessible Pinnacle, a moment that switched his lights on.

It never occurred to me that I would be anything other than a solicitor and a mountaineer, so great was my admiration.

At that time, it was a given that mountaineers routinely took dead bodies (and sometimes live ones too) down off mountains. He was a fine rock climber but mountain rescue was his main thing. He became the Irish Mountain Rescue director at age 22. The stories were frightening. It was a time of great expansion in hillwalking nationally, and the incidents came frequently. He never seemed to be offended by the nickname “Bring ‘Em Back Dead Walsh”. I followed him loyally into law and into the hills.

Knowledge of his early climbing exploits is a little sketchy but he was always very exact about having made the fifth on-sight lead of Spillikin.

Trafers Route in 1966 put up with “The Doc” on Ben Corr was a big thing.

There was talk of a major new route in Torridon that he didn’t write up and it is now a classic, but attributed to others. Calvin and he were apparently at something on the Delta Face in Lough Barra when one or other took a spectacular fall, at a time and in a place where most considered it essential that “the leader does not fall”.

Brendan was like a Swiss Army pen-knife, but one made by Stanley or Drapier rather than Victorinox, meaning that for sure he was multi-faceted, but yet he was fit for purpose in everything he applied himself to. He didn’t spread himself so thin as to give pass mark answers to things. When he climbed he got the Matterhorn, Mont Blanc and the Vajolet Towers in the Dolomites, but Scotland was his great love. He liked nothing better than to disappear into a wilderness area for a week and emerge a hundred miles away, a stone lighter, and a dozen or more Munros “bagged”.

In the law he was never afraid of great challenges: forcing civil legal aid on a reluctant public purse; or the sanctity of the secret ballot. He ended his legal career as Sheriff of the City of Dublin. In later years his cycling exploits took him all over Ireland, the neighbouring island, and the continent. He founded and ran for 30 years the Bum Bum Cycling Club, and it still goes strong. On the way he was twice published, writing guidebooks to the by-ways of Ireland and of Scotland. *Brendan Walsh was a member of the IMC from 1963 to 2018 (active until 1990)*
Books about climbing generally come in three forms.
1. Hefty “how to” tomes which are mostly used to weigh down coffee tables.
2. There is also a small amount of fiction out there, the only decent novel I can think of is “Climbers” by M. John Harrison. Also, our own Dermot Somers’ short stories are worth a read (and often have dark themes) and, of course, we are all waiting with baited breath for our newly-acquired Andy Kirkpatrick’s novel.
3) By far the most common form is the adventurous biographical type that we all know and love. I suppose you could consider accounts of accidents or significant ascents as a fourth kind but usually they are at least semi-biographical. Anyway, below is my opinion on a few of the third kind that I’ve read recently.

**Alone on the Wall - Alex Honnold and David Roberts.**
Alex Honnold is the biggest name in climbing after his free-solo ascent of El Cap’ and I’ll admit I’m a big fan. Unfortunately, this book was written before all that, but no doubt there will be a sequel. Alex pulled in David Roberts to co-author this which was probably a mistake. The parts written by the man himself are by far the best with his paradoxical easy going, yet incredibly psyched, nature coming through as he describes some nail biting solo moments. Most of the book however, reads more like someone put all the YouTube videos of his climbs in chronological order and then had to write a report on them for school. Unfortunately, I would have to recommend watching said videos instead of shelling out any money on this book.

**Revelations - Jerry Moffatt (with Niall Grimes).**
I had high hopes for this book as it was co-written by Niall Grimes. Niall wrote some great articles for climbing magazines back when they used to be made of paper. The book starts well with Moffatt’s early climbing career which was essentially dirt-bagging in North Wales and the Peak District. When I think of the dirtbag lifestyle I usually think of sunny locations like Spain or California. The realities of roughing it in the dank, dampness of the Peak are a bit grim but make some fun reading from the warmth of your armchair. However, after this, the book descends into what is essentially a tick list of routes he climbed and what he used to eat (or rather not eat!). I had lost all interest long before the end.
Rock Queen - Catherine Destivelle (translated by Marguerite Wright).

Now we’re talking. One of climbing’s biggest names in the 1980s and 1990s, this book does not disappoint. The original book was in French and the sometimes-imperfect English in this translation only seems to add to the book’s character. From her early exploits in Fontainbleau and sneaking out to go Alpine climbing at a very young age, through gambling addiction, to eventually becoming one of the first sponsored climbers you can only be impressed by this formidable climber.

Climbing biographies often start well with the climber’s early experiences but can lose momentum as they go on. Destivelle manages to keep your attention throughout, with some pretty impressive sounding ascents from all climbing disciplines (her account of opening a new route on the Aiguille du Dru is particularly gripping). A great read, and if you haven’t already read Lynn Hill’s book, you should do so next to really get in touch with your feminine/badass-climber side.

The Push - Tommy Caldwell.

Again, not going to win any literary prizes but, for my money, the best book here. Caldwell’s life has been incredibly adventurous with tales of being shot at, and taken prisoner, by rebels in Kyrgyzstan, cutting off part of his finger (though I think Ranulph Fiennes can beat this story!) and, of course, there is plenty of climbing. The story is told in a very honest fashion which doesn’t always paint the author in the best light when it comes to his personal life. However, the overwhelming motif is the author’s drive to climb which is very infectious. It might be best to save this one until Spring as you are guaranteed to want to run out and climb something as soon as you put it down.

All Reviews by David Craig
Waiting for the Sun to Shine

Christy Rice

I sit here looking out through my window on this dull and rainy day
The sky dark grey, a galeforce wind and not a bird will fly
And thinking back on other days the sun shone strong and warm
The sky was blue the air was clear and not a cloud seen I.
Then heading off on St Kevins Bus to quiet Glendalough
After a long weeks work to climb
Where the craic was good in the mountain hut
And the drink, it was devine.
There were stories told of epics bold
No exaggerating, its the truth I swear to you
But when the laughs broke out there came a shout
Spoofers, you haven’t a clue.
Someone then would sing up a rebel song
And in the chorus all would join
Then someone else would match that one
With another song, poem or rhyme.
This scene went on through out the night
Untill all of the drink was gone
Then in the morning you cleared your head
For on Camaderry Crag, you had to climb.
Some would head south to Baravore Glen
Some north to Luggala
While others would lie on in bed to nurse their head
There will be no, carousing around here today.
Still sitting here as the rain runs down the window pane
On this stormy November morn
Waiting for the sun to shine again
Oh, next March, or maybe May.

On the way to Tonlagee in early 1970s. Cars are Anglia and A40