

# The Pinnacle

## Newsletter of Gwent Mountaineering Club

Number 29

Spring 2007

**Fostering  
mountaineering  
In South East Wales  
for 30 years**

### Inside this issue:

Welcome to the 29th Newsletter, which opens with an account of a weekend meet in the Lake District then adds a selection of Welsh mountaineering stories & news in brief, before culminating in an ascent of Stok Kangri in the Himalayas.

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## Koniston Kapers

The entertainment had been sorted, the weather ordered and the multitude assembled for the autumn meet of 2006. I had arranged to meet Alex Hardisty early on Friday morning to reduce his outstanding Nuttall's above Kirkby Stephen, and as I journeyed across the northern Dales, I was looking forward to a pleasant weekend.

List suitably ticked in improving weather, we drove towards the Lakes with stunning vistas and angry clouds broken by shafts of evening sunlight. Arriving at Coniston Coppermines youth hostel, we found the advance party having a brew amid tales of car parks on the M6. Thoughts turned to sustenance, and we walked down the track to The Black Bull



Coniston Coppermines Youth Hostel  
(Photos Peter Salenieks)

for solid and liquid refreshment. A steady trickle of members arrived during the evening, with more dire tales, but eager anticipation of the weekend ahead. The stroll back up to the hostel passed with less pain than might have been expected. With less than a full complement, we retired to see who would surface in the morning.

A morning roll call found Jeff Hunt absent without chit, and a couple of phone calls only resulted in an engaged tone. Still, with low cloud and a stiff breeze, the intrepid team ventured out to do battle with the Coniston fells. Gradual ascent up the ridge brought us to the summit of Wether-



Braving The Elements On Wetherlam

lam, with intermittent showers and a strengthening wind to keep us entertained. Following a brew, the summit of Swirl How was attained, and by now, various plans had evolved. Tref and the serious tickers marched purposefully into the teeth of the breeze to do Grey Friar, while the remainder headed for Coniston Old Man along the ridge above Levers Water. It was around this time that we saw our first sign of human life since leaving the hostel. The weather became more clement as we ap-



Direct Descent From The Old Man To The Hostel

proached the Old Man, and the throngs had begun to reach the summit more directly from Coniston. After a stop for lunch, the party split still further, with the intrepid

(Continued from page 1)

opting to go round to Dow Crag, with an option of White Maiden and a return down the Walna Scar Road and a traverse back to the hostel. Tref's group were already planning that route, so a rounding up of stragglers was a possibility. The remainder opted for a direct descent to the hostel for afternoon tea and buns, and use of the shower before the rush. As we descended, the weather improved, and the throngs staggered up through the quarries towards the summit for a fleeting glimpse of the surrounding fells in autumnal colours.

As the parties returned from their various routes, time was spent catching up on life, the universe and everything, with eager anticipation of a hearty meal and rehydration. Our host did not disappoint. Further discussion led to teams being assembled for a quiz led by Jan to ease the brain cells from their addled state. Prizes were awarded to the winners, the Cunning Linguists being piped at the post in both rounds.

Sunday morning dawned early, wet and windy, dampening people's enthusiasm for another epic. Tref headed home with talk of Harter Fell on his list, and others discussing retail therapy. Terry



Crossing The River Brathay At Slater Bridge

& Jane headed off for Langdale for more furtive Nuttalling, while the indecisive made a decision to have a walk around Tilberthwaite. With the weather improving, we set off towards Little Langdale through disused slate quarries, gently easing the body into gear and taking in the gentler side of Lakeland scenery. The swollen River

Brathay at Slater Bridge gave a scenic point for elevenses before an ascent of the flank of Birk Fell saw us back towards Tilberthwaite Gill, just as a final shower dampened the day as we said farewell.

Many thanks to all who braved the delights of the M6 and made it a memorable weekend. Let's do it again soon, and order some different weather.

Jeff was working in Copenhagen and was due to return to Glasgow on Friday until BA cancelled his return flight. He got home on Saturday lunchtime and found the phone had not been replaced correctly - hence the engaged tone.



View From Birk Fell To Wrynose Fell

## Candles, Carols, Mulled Wine & Minced Pies

*The Christmas pudding walk is a popular and much loved tradition amongst members. Little did they know that there was a surprise in store, as Liz Atkinson explains...*

This years Christmas pudding walk did not disappoint. There may not have been any puddings but all the other ingredients were there: great views of the



Great Views & Good Company

Blacks, good company and Santa's little surprise! The walk started at Llangattock on a lovely winters day. There weren't quite as many antlers and Father Christmas look-alikes in evidence

this year but the colour and cut of our leaders beard led me to think that Santa was there to guide us (sorry Chris)! Chris led us over to the hill to Llanelly and on to Clydach gorge, where, after a brief stop for lunch we set off through the tunnel. As we splashed through the rather wet tunnel the sound of carols was heard and we began to see an array of lights. 'Low and behold' there were Santa's little



Heading Back To Llangattock



Clydach Gorge

helpers in the form of Carole, Richard and Ted with some very welcome minced pies and mulled wine.

Alas, we could no longer in the tunnel forever; fortified by our refreshments and a rousing speech from Lesley we set off again up the hill and along the road to Llangattock. Naturally, as it was Christmas a drink at the locally hostelry was required to round off the proceedings.

Many thanks to Chris Barber for leading the walk and to Carole Fereday, Richard Smith and Ted Bumford for decorating the tunnel and providing the refreshments, music etc. An enjoyable time was had by all.

## News In Brief

*Much has happened since the 30th anniversary dinner last October. Club Chairman Dave Simcock presents a roundup and then Roy Silverthorne adds a tribute to Bill Morris, who passed away earlier this year.*

**Anniversary Dinner.** The Anniversary Dinner in October celebrated the Club's 30<sup>th</sup> year since its founding in 1976. Held at Pen y Darren Outdoor Centre near Crickhowell by courtesy of its Director (and Club BMC Representative) Martin Skinner, members enjoyed an excellent meal and a very entertaining talk by Norman Croucher, mountaineer extraordinaire! Over 60 members attended, including some founders from the early days. Celebrations continued into the night, helped by the overnight facilities at Pen y Darren. Thanks are due to Martin Skinner and his staff for all their hard work in making the event such a success.

**Anniversary Ceilidh.** Another anniversary event, a Ceilidh, was held at Goytre Village Hall in December, with the Rarebit Band ensuring maximum participation by the more than 80 members and friends there. An excellent buffet was laid on and with the bar seeing much use as well, a great time was had by all. Someone was heard to remark that it was more energetic than most Club Meets! Thanks to Richard Dowle for single-handedly organising the event. To be repeated at the Village Hall on 8th December 2007.

**Everest and Kilimanjaro.** Well-known mountain guide David Hamilton gave an illustrated talk in October on the ups and downs of guiding on Everest. He contrasted the normal Western Cwm route on the Nepalese side with the Northern route from Tibet, and fascinating it was too. This was followed by an informal discussion about the Club trip to Kilimanjaro and Mount Kenya in the summer. Members interested should contact Keith Anderson, who is coordinating the trip. Members interested in Everest should contact David Hamilton!

**AGM.** Significant changes took place at the AGM held on 9<sup>th</sup> November at Goytre: Lesley Mooney is now Vice Chair, Sara Dickinson is Treasurer, Gareth Roberts is Publicity Officer, Trevor Wil-

liams is Programme Secretary – a vote of thanks was given to outgoing committee members Robbie Crocker, Ian Tucker, Dave Bingham, and Terry Delbridge. Chris Barber was voted an Honorary Life Member. The AGM will in future be held in October not November. The Committee's authorised expenditure limit was increased from £150 to £450. But no change in subs, which stay the same.

**Digital Projector.** A digital image projector has at last been purchased, along with an accompanying laptop. Please contact Roger Millett if you need to use it for a Club talk.

**Cotswold Outdoor.** An account has been set up for club members at Cotswold outdoor shops, which offers about 15% discount. You will need to quote the account number (G2229) and show your club membership card before the items are put through the till.

**Donation to The John Inns Memorial Fund.** John Inns was an active member for a number of years in the Club's early days. With Jeff Thomas, another early member, he founded Crickhowell Adventure Gear, and opened shops in Crickhowell, Brecon and, until relatively recently, Abergavenny. John based himself in the Crickhowell shop and could always be relied on to give good advice to members, along with a generous discount. Although he had suffered from ill health for some time, John was active in the hills to the last. He was walking in the Beacons on 15th September 2006 when he was suddenly taken ill and died. A collection was made at the Anniversary Dinner, supplemented from Club Funds, and a contribution of £75 made to the John Inns Memorial Fund which will finance conservation projects in the Beacons. Plans are currently under way to rebuild Carn Pica, an ancient and conspicuous landmark above Talybont, which is in dire need of restoration.

**New Programme Secretary.** The Programme is one of the Club's great strengths, and new-comers often comment on its variety and number of events we organise. Trevor has been finding it difficult recently to devote enough time to the demanding role of

Programme Secretary. Due to changes in his work situation etc., he has reluctantly decided that it is in the Club's best interests for him to tender his resignation. The Club is grateful to him for the work he has nevertheless been able to do since being elected at the last AGM. Terry Delbridge, the former Programme Secretary, has stepped smartly into the breach to help out with preparing the Winter Weekend Programme. Please contact him if you can volunteer to lead one of the meets.

**Memories of Bill Morris.** Bill was a stalwart member of the GMC for about 12 years and walked regularly on the Thursday and Sunday events. He often said that he wished he had taken up walking earlier in his life as he enjoyed it so much. He was a big man, well over six feet tall with a straight engaging personality, together with a very generous nature.

Bill was born and lived most of his life in Newport. He was very much a family man and expressed his love for his wife and children.

Unfortunately, Bill was diagnosed with cancer some three years ago, and at that time was given about eighteen months to live. However, with the strength of character he had, he fought it to the end.

Bill leaves his wife Pat, children Salli and Stephen and his new grandchild Tomos, who certainly proved a joy to him in his last months. We will miss him.



# A Successful Winter Ascent Of The Blorenge By The Popular Southern Route

*Amidst all the possible snow events on the Club programme, Richard Dowle describes how fresh snow helped to make this Thursday evening night walk just that little bit special.*

There's usually a 'Night Walk' planned for one evening each month during the winter programme. Nothing too long or demanding - just some fresh air and a taste of what it's like to come off the hills later than expected. That's the theory but occasionally the hills can show us that it pays not to treat them with too much complacency.

The Blorenge from Keepers Pond. What could be more straightforward? Compass? GPS? You must be joking. Read on.

**"What could be more straightforward? Compass? GPS? You must be joking."**

Thursday 8 February was the only day it snowed this winter (except for the next day, contrary to the forecast, and it took me 3 hours to get back from Cwmbran to Goytre!). I did wonder if a lower level walk would be in order but the road was driveable up to the pond and seven souls duly congregated. We cut across to the Llanover road, floundering in the snow filled gullies; there's a bit of a path and we soon lost it, but we knew when we hit the road, as the snow was flatter there. Should have heeded that experience.

There's a well-worn track to the trig point from Foxhunter and, with plenty of footprints, just carry on. Well, soon the footpath was obliterated with the snow, the footprints vanished and the mist brought visibility down to



Putting On Brave Faces At The Trig Point  
(Photos Peter Salenieks)

about 10 yards. Which way now? A compass ain't much good if you don't know your position. The trig point must be upwards, but that's difficult to tell in the mist. Could easily overshoot the cairn and I needed to take a bearing from there. That's when Gareth produced the GPS and, with position established, we headed in the right direction to the trig point, although we practically walked into it before we saw it. There's Carol, Jenny and Kath putting on brave faces!

There's something about thick mist or snow, or both, which transforms the ordinary and you could just as well be in the middle of Dartmoor or Cairngorm plateau; it gives you that feeling of remoteness and heightens the challenge to ensure a successful outcome.

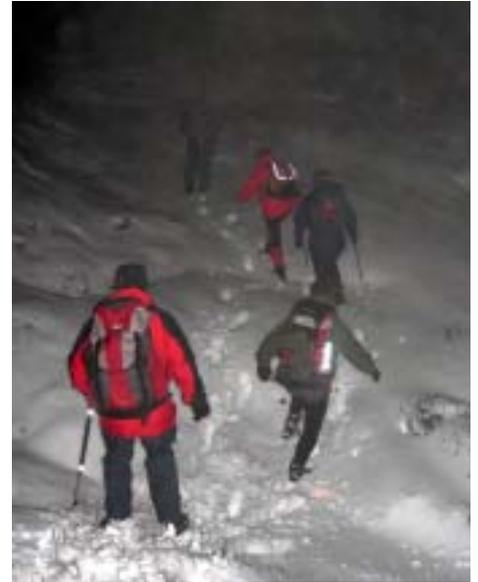
Walking on a bearing, we duly arrived at the north face. The trick here was to realise when you were there and not drop straight over the edge; the normal street lit panorama of Abergavenny was totally obscured with the fog. Gareth seemed determined to practice his ice-axe skills on the north



Gareth Practicing His Ice Climbing Skills

face, which we tried to talk him out of. Not entirely successful as the picture shows. Goodness knows where Pete was to take it!

Now to swing around the narrow terrace at the head of Cwm Craf and find the upper tram road. As we



Heading Off Into The Gloom

headed off into the gloom, I thought it'd be tricky navigating through 180 degrees with no landmarks. Sure enough we seemed to go on and on, over rougher and rougher ground and, more worryingly, losing a lot of height. You get this mindset that, a bit further, and it'll come right! GPS time again and, sure enough, we would have come out near the Cordell Country Inn! Getting onto the link up from Hill's tram road brought us back onto the upper route and eventually to Keepers Pond. If I'd have looked at the map more closely, I would have seen that following a contour line would have been more sensible. The 500-metre line goes right around the western side and practically drops you in the pond. The mist was thinning on this side, and lights from some of the remote homesteads were twinkling through the frosty air and seemed to emphasise our isolation.

Soon though, all back safely after a challenging but enjoyable walk. Although Steve favoured the Lamb, we looked at the snow-covered road and thought we'd head down to the Queen Victoria. Little knowing a bigger challenge awaited - getting the cars onto a sloping ice covered car park!

**Lights from remote homesteads twinkled through the frosty air.**

# A Hitch-Hikers Guide To Hill-Walking

*Those who visit the mountains must learn to treat them with respect. Tony Massey recounts the story of an encounter in adverse conditions.*

Out of the mist they came, like beings transported from another era by time machine. Only this time, the bungling operator had entered the wrong co-ordinates into the infernal contraption. Four shell-suited figures strode purposely toward us, perms glistening in the light drizzle and white trainers muddied from the rivulets of soil and water coursing the path above Milestone Buttress. We noticed the plastic supermarket carrier bag protecting the younger ones hair and her cries of protestation as the older brother playfully whacked her over the head with his lunch in another carrier bag. He got short shrift from his father. We stopped practising our belays and looked at each other, jaws wide open. It looked like a misplaced scene from a 1980s Harry Enfield sketch. As they drew closer, we heard their call...

"Ere mate, is this the way to the top?"

"Um, yes, but we really advise that you turn back because the summit weather is already quite bad and getting worse according to the mountain forecast..."

"Look mate, if we wanted your advice we would...*colourful metaphor... expletive... cuss... mutter, mutter...*"

...and off they strode, up and into their personal unknown, brandishing carrier bags and sharp tongues, but would they return to shop again?



Tryfan

A whistle blew fiercely, shouts and clouds of moisture filled the air and tired walkers rushed to the source. I turned off the gas before the kettle spilled its boiling contents! Half a dozen cups of hot tea later we were sat around the kitchen table in Jesse James' Bunkhouse discussing the day's

achievements on Tryfan. The proprietor was listening. I asked him if, during his time working on the Mountain Rescue Team, he had been called out to many serious rescues of the "untrained" general public on the Snowdonia mountain range. "Not really" came the reply. Many of the rescues he had attended were of experienced climbers and walkers pushing themselves to the limit and beyond, often in unfavourable conditions. We nodded, pondering again. Our destination the following day was the Snowdon summit but we were not expecting very good weather. We wondered also if the "Kappa time-travellers" had made it safely back from Adam and Eve.



Snowdon Summit Clouds

The heavens had opened, the gods roared across the roof of Wales, their mouths raining spittle on the earth. Thus, our route up the exposed Crib Goch was swapped for the Pyg Track that morning and we reached the summit in good time, leaning into stiff southerly winds on the last leg to the peak marker. The restaurant was closed but, incredibly, one train journey had earlier been made and a handful of passengers had disembarked for a walk off the mountain top. Now, with the locomotive gone, a prospective train of human misery was ready to begin its wet, cold and confused 1000 metre descent to safety. We found shelter to eat our lunch and, in disbelief, watch waterlogged jeans-clad tourists descend in all directions, with only one or two carrier bags in sight.

The Llechog path was a precarious place to be as the wind, determined to send us tumbling northwards into Cwm Clogwyn, wrenched at our expedition packs. It was indeed as if the gods had taken leave of their senses, raining torrential anger upon us for not advising the rail passengers to

board the train for its return to Llanberis thus avoiding their collective celestial wrath. But what ears would our advice have fallen on? Deaf? Abusive? Tryfan taught us restraint. We are all tourists in these parts after all.

Bunkering down below a stone wall that crossed the Rhyd-Ddu path we noticed the wind had lulled. Drizzle filled the air and a whirling mistiness covered then uncovered the slope. We looked up from our cups of tea and spotted a family of four (not the Tryfan travellers again, surely!?) descending the path above us. The parents were arguing, the children crying and all of them soaked to the skin...

"Are you all okay?" We asked tentatively.

"We are cold" the mother said "and want to know if this is the way back to Llanberis? This is the Llanberis path, isn't it?"

We put some spare waterproofs on them, sat them down and broke the news after a few biscuit bars and hot tea. Stepping back, we waited for the family emotional eruption to resume but after a few tears they sheepishly asked us to guide them down to Rhyd-Ddu. It was not far anyway, but the cold, tired and wet family had an expensive taxi ride to Llanberis. We recovered with a pint by a warming fire in the Cwellyn Arms, relishing yet another masochistic sodden day in the hills to come.

'Old Jesse' may have had a point. It is surprising, but we don't hear of many tragedies involving the accidental hill walker, or read many articles about *'the British Family Robinson struggling for survival in the mountains after the weekly shop to Tesco's*. Even those seen walking around the Glyders in sandals have come to no apparent harm, and poorly prepared school parties lost on Dartmoor eventually find their way back to civilisation with only dented pride to bandage! We were even loathe to chastise when an older gentleman in cycle shorts and short-sleeved top asked for his photograph to be taken as we stood atop Ben Nevis fully protected from a raging autumn storm! He had "popped up" Britain's highest on the way up to John o' Groats from Lands End! Our jaws fell wide open once again, but that time in awe.

## Ladakh And Stok Kangri

Mike Rosser organised an expedition to Ladakh for Gwent Mountaineering Club in August 1994. It culminated in an ascent of Stok Kangri by Keith Anderson and Dennis Pickett, whilst a second rope reached the summit ridge. Conditions were rather different when Terry Delbridge faced the mountain in 2006, after eight days of snowfall.

I originally had three goals in mind when I booked this trip: a 6,000 metre peak, a trek in Ladakh seeing Leh, and to experience India for the first time. Delhi proved much better than expectations with gas powered rickshaws and 5 star hotels ... gut renching child poverty ... but some wonderful sights and sounds of a busy city.

We managed a couple of days in Leh at 3,500 metres and learned all the tricks of the trade with Pashmina and Thankas. The initial trek out of Leh started really well with hot weather, in



Local Smiles

fact too hot to stay in the tents later in the afternoon. We did a couple of really high passes – close to 5,000 metres to help acclimatisation, which definately worked although I have to say my new approach with loads of water and a steady pace worked really well...

As we readied for Stok Kangri at 6,121 metres the weather changed with rain in Leh and snow on high for eight days continuously. The approach to base camp was an ordeal with nine river crossings – I know all the techniques now from trees to ropes and the river conga, with everybody in a line behind the strong man. The weather was awful and the rivers in full flood. We managed base camp at approx. 5,000 metres, where the rain could be heard beating down on the tent roof, but



Prayer Flags And A Cairn Mark The Summit Of Stok Kangri

some great meals kept the spirits really high. Keith Floyd *et al.* eat your heart out at what these boys can do with a couple of burners ... and no problems with *Delhi belly* at this stage. We managed to make Advanced Base Camp (ABC) at 5,300 metres to see little of the mountain, but lots of snow. I spent the day eating chips in the cook tent.

Summit day came after rain and snow all night and to my surprise a lot of movement at 0200 suggested we were off...to test the water for an hour or so!!! Nobody believed this...we were off...up that slope, which looked likely to avalanche anytime. Fortunately, I wasn't breaking trail. The team behind us turned around before we reached the ridge...the summit ridge was full

**"the summit ridge was full on with drops down the side forever..."**

on with drops down the side forever... not so "climby" as Crib Goch, but it certainly had the exposure. Full crampons, ice axe and roped up now and just keep on going ... a great lead, breaking trail and finding the summit in awful Scottish style conditions. We could see nothing of the summit other than prayer flags and a cairn, but it was a great place to be at about 0830 or so ... we yomped back to ABC feeling great and got a standing ovation from

the teams waiting. That felt good, I have to say.

Getting out turned out to be an epic and the e-mail to my kids summed up the feeling back in Leh:

*"Back now safe and sound in Leh...it was the hardest thing I have ever done..loads of snow 8 days of rain/snow.set off at 0300 and battled against snow all morning...I was knackered..but saw the summit at about 0830 after a beautiful snow arete to the summit..nothing like the pic.. should have been easy but was bloody hard..we were the only ones to do it and got a standing ovation back at ABC... that felt good...the Japs were in awe cos they had turned back at the summit ridge....."*

*Then we tried to get out next day.. and all the melting snow had closed the valleys.took another 9hrs to find way out with loads rock climbs in the middle ..and some really hairy river crossings...but back now and getting rat arsed after 5 months of no beer... bloody hell it's a great day..."*

