

The Pinnacle

Newsletter of Gwent Mountaineering Club

GMC Newsletter 31

Spring 2009

Fostering
mountaineering
In South East Wales
for over 30 years

Chris Barber MBE

Inside this issue:

Welcome to the 31st Newsletter. Regrettably, it is a little late, due to work and technical problems

Chris Barber MBE	1
GMC Sardinia 2007 by Dave Simcock	2
Mystical Encounter on Twmbarlwm by Caron Tan	3
Annual Quiz 2007 by Roger Millett	3
Annual Dinner and Walk 2008 by Dave Simcock	3
Stan Beese (1916-2007) by Trefor Beese	4
Marjorie Vivien Coles (1943 – 2007) by Dawn Brown	5
Highland Highs by Tony Massey	5

Have you seen this and want details of the club?

If so Phone 02920 882502 or visit our website:

gwentmountaineering-club.org.uk

Copyright © 2009 by Gwent Mountaineering Club and the contributors. All rights reserved.

Gwent Mountaineering Club founder member, past chairman for many years, and lifetime member Chris Barber was made an MBE in December 2007

Dave Simcock's notifications to members:

Dear Member

It is a great pleasure to inform you that Chris Barber has recently been awarded an MBE for "services to the community and to the tourist industry in South Wales".

I am sure everybody in the Club will join me in congratulating Chris on this well-deserved recognition of his many achievements.

Chris's tireless enthusiasm for the hills and valleys of South Wales, and the Blacks and Beacons in particular, are evident in his founding and subsequent Chairmanship of the GMC for many years, without which none of us would be here, so to speak!

Once again, congratulations Chris. The Club looks forward to many more years of beneficial association with you.

Dave Simcock,
Chair, Gwent Mountaineering Club

BBC News Website

On Sunday 30th December 2007, the BBC website listed people in the honours list:

Author Chris Barber, 66, from Llanfoist, near Abergavenny, Monmouthshire, said he was "shocked and delighted" by his MBE for services to the community and tourist industry in south Wales.

South Wales Argus Report:

AN AUTHOR and historian from Llanfoist near Abergavenny made the New Years honours list for his lifelong devotion to the great outdoors.

Chris Barber, 66, has been awarded the MBE for services to the community and to the tourist industry in South Wales.

He said: "It was a complete surprise, I'm grateful to whoever nominated me, I've no idea who that is.

"I feel it is a great honour, I'm very privileged."

The former Newport High School pupil was born and bred in the city but has lived in Llanfoist for the last 27 years.

For 20 years he was the chief countryside officer for Gwent, and established the Gwent countryside service in 1974 which created walkways and picnic sites.

In the 1960s he was a mountain rescue team leader for the Black Mountains, and has helped established a number of youth hostels in the area.

Mr Barber said: "My interest in the countryside rubbed off from my father, I've always loved exploring and we'd always go to places of historic interest."

In 1985 Mr Barber set up his own publishing company, Bloreng Books, mainly for his own work, but he has published other peoples as well.

His 25 titles include Mysterious Wales, and the most recent is "In the Footsteps of Alexander Cordell".

Mr Barber has been a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, and a founder member of the Brecon Beacons Park Society.

GMC Sardinia 2007



The first week in May of 2007 saw what was probably the largest GMC foreign trip of recent years to Sardinia, for some rock, sun and sea. Initiated by Alison Rothwell and Terry Delbridge, the group grew and grew until it reached 16, and even included a refugee from the South Wales MC.

We flew from Gatwick to Olbia in the north of the island, and by various hire cars arrived in Cala Gonone on the east coast late on Saturday night. It wasn't until we woke on Sunday that we saw what a lovely spot it was; a more or less unspoilt little seaside town ringed by 900 metre mountains. Access until fairly recently was only by boat, a tunnel through the mountain now making it possible to get there by road. This being modern times, the town is now well adapted to tourists mostly from mainland Italy, but there weren't many of them at this time of the year, and the place was charmingly quiet with a real atmosphere. (Think Fellini's 'Amarcord', 1973, for film buffs of a certain age...) We had rented various holiday flats at very reasonable rates and so were dotted about the town, which occasionally proved to be a bit of a problem for keeping in contact, but 'que sera, sera' as the song has it.

The first day's climbing was at Budinnetto, a striking armchair shaped crag high on the hills above the town and the blue, blue sea. The weather was glorious, as it was most of the time we



were there, and the climbing brilliant. All routes were bolted, and of clean high-friction limestone, which is so good you can climb routes a grade harder than is possible here in damp old Wales. Many routes were climbed, picnics eaten, bodies warmed by the sunshine, more routes were done, and 16 happy climbers gathered in the Blues Bar that evening to celebrate their good fortune.

I think we climbed on different crags every day, pretty much. Not everybody did the same thing every day, but mostly we climbed together, and met up for a drink and a meal in the evening. Some walked in the lovely countryside some days, and others rested up and did their own thing on others. For your reporter two particular days were the highlights, for differ-



ent reasons.

A group of six of us hired a motor boat one day to cruise along the coast a few miles to a lovely little beach with several promising-looking crags. At the end of a perfect day on the rock (and even in the sea for a dip), we found the boat had broken free of its moorings. The engine seemed to have suffered and wouldn't start. Energetic and voluble Italian tourists sprang to the rescue and started it, so off we set, but hadn't got more than 200 yards when it abruptly died. At this point the sea suddenly seemed surprisingly choppy! We paddled furiously back to the jetty to avoid an imminent ducking. After a repeat performance from the tourists the engine started, and off we went again. We got quite a bit further this time before it packed up again; but this time we were too far out to paddle back. The waves were definitely bigger now! We started the engine ourselves this time, and somebody discovered that if you pressed a vital engine part it worked quite well for at least five minutes. After several stop/go five min-

utes, the boat operators came to our rescue in another boat and fixed it, but went back to Cala Gonone straight away and of course, it packed up again immediately they had gone. (Just like that irritating fault on the car does as soon as the mechanic drives away). We did eventually make it, of course, but teetered on the edge between hilarity and hysteria for some time, and your reporter was very glad when we reached dry land again. And to add insult to injury we had to pay an excess charge for damage to the propeller!

On another day eleven of us went inland to climb in Surtana Gorge, about an hours drive away. The 45 minute walk-in was stunning, wild flowers everywhere, following a river, then through forest as we ascended into the Gorge. The climb was a longish 140 metre route called 'The Sound of Silence'. Rightly named, we were the only ones there, not a sound to be heard except birdsong - Simon and Garfunkel would have been proud. What a beautiful place and what a superb route; five pitches of perfect rock, with three long abseils back down again. Two other members of the party could be seen as small dots climbing on the other side of the gorge. They went on to visit a prehistoric village on the mountain called Tiscali; an obscure name chosen some years ago by a certain Sardinian entrepreneur for his new internet company.

All in all, a thoroughly good time was had by everybody. We climbed on seven or eight different crags, and at a guess, must have done at least a hundred routes between us, and only scratched the surface of what was available, both climbing *and* walking. And we returned fit and enthusiastic for a summer of pushing the grades in Wales, or at least that's what we said at the time!

Dave Simcock



Mystical Encounter on Twmbarlwm

Many moons ago, a quick saunter on Twmbarlwm Mound one late May evening turned out to be quite an eerie, mystical encounter.

Sitting on the top of the Mound admiring the pending sunset, I clearly heard music; the sound of bagpipes to be precise. My immediate thought was one of sympathy; it was probably one of the few places the person could practise without receiving complaints I thought!

Visibility was excellent. I looked all around, numerous times; but no other person was in sight, anywhere. I was clearly on my own. Previous to hearing the music and before ascending the ancient mound, I had thought to myself that the atmosphere felt spooky. I shrugged off my feelings. I had been on the ancient mound many times and never experienced anything eerie, but it still felt strange. Was it all in my imagi-

nation? Not one to be beaten, I waited to see the sunset and then walked home.

A couple of weeks later, during a conversation on a Club walk with Chris (Barber), I mentioned the incident. Smiling, Chris asked if I had been reading his book, *Mysterious Wales*, in which a history of people hearing organ music on the Mound was described. I gave a negative reply. I have read many of Chris' books, but not *Mysterious Wales*. I described the music as that of bagpipes, but organ music is a wind instrument and could conceivably sound similar. At this point, alarm bells started to ring.

Having recently read a similar book on *Mysterious Wales*, by Alvin Nicholas, in which a BBC Researcher recently experienced a similar encounter

to mine, has really made me think "What did I actually hear that evening on the ancient burial mound of Twmbarlwm that boasts so many mysteries?"

By the way Programme Secretary, do you want me to lead an evening walk up Twmbarlwm on the new Programme?

Caron Tan



Annual Quiz 2007

The annual club quiz proved a hit for those attending and once again proved a departure from mountaineering knowledge with not too many of us possessing too many answers in previous quizzes to some testing technical questions which only the likes of Chris Barber possess!!

The quizmasters comprised the Mr and Mrs duo of Trevor and Anne-Marie, who followed up last year's successful quiz in charge, once again, accompanied by the redoubtable Richard Smith.

There were three teams, two made up of five participants and one of four. The quiz was in an unusual three parts as Anne-Marie put questions to a chosen

member from each team with a 'brain teaser' where questions were a play on words and much careful listening (and thinking) had to be raised to provide a correct answer, e.g. if a man walks a dog into a wood, how far into the wood does he travel? or, a bungalow is built with four sides with one window on each side facing south. A bear passes one of the windows. What colour is the bear? [answers on a postcard to Anne-Marie for those not there on the night!].

The remaining two halves of the quiz contained themes such as 'arts and culture'; 'geography'; and 'science'.

The winning team made up of Roger, Adrian, Lynne and Stuart, won by a huuuge margin..... to pick up their well won prize of a box of chocolates. The runners up also gained a prize, another box of chocolates. These were both opened, mixed and piled up to be valiantly shared amongst all participants including our stalwart bar tender, George. A good night was had by all and much thanks goes to our joint quiz masters for there work in preparing the questions with special thanks to Trevor's Grandmother, who devised some of the questions!

Roger Millett

Annual Dinner and Walk 2008

The Annual Dinner was held on January 26th at Pendarren House, Llangenny. Nearly 40 members attended, noticeably less than last year, although maybe that was to be expected as it was not an anniversary like last year.

We were treated to a splendid four course dinner by Martin Skinner's hard-working staff, and were generally made to feel pampered by the excellent service and pleasant surroundings.

Afterwards, former member Mike Prosser, hot from guiding in the Alps, gave a very entertaining illustrated talk about his experiences at Everest base camp with a team of doctors research-

ing altitude sickness. The expedition had been the subject of a TV documentary some months before, so it was interesting to get an insider's angle on it, and find out more about the results of the research. One fascinating fact that emerged was that Viagra is now the drug of choice for altitude sickness! Apparently it enables more blood to flow and so more oxygen to be absorbed.....so the story goes.

Many thanks to Martin Skinner and his staff and Mike Prosser for another great evening.

Some members stayed overnight, either in the accommodation at the

house or in vans or tents even, and next day Jen Price led them and others who returned, on a very pleasant walk from there up Sugar Loaf. Over 20 of us gathered on the top and we were blessed by sunshine and a good view, even if the wind was a little keen. Back in Llangenny, the Dragon welcomed and the weekend was rounded off by a pleasant drink in the sunny garden. Thanks to Jen for leading a walk which had been omitted from the Programme!

Dave Simcock

Stan Beese (1916—2007)

My father Stan Beese was a GMC member from May 1979 until November 2007

He took me walking from an early age. In the 1950s and early 1960s Stan took me up all the major peaks in South and North Wales. When I left home, he continued walking with work colleagues, mainly in South Wales.

In 1976, for his 60th birthday treat, I took him to the Lake District. We did a 12 hours plus circuit of the Scafells, Esk Pike and Bowfell from the bottom of Hardknott pass. For his retirement trip in June 1978, we did Ben Nevis, his first Munro. He was blessed with near perfect conditions.

Stan joined Gwent Mountaineering club in 1979. He was a walker, not a climber. On club day walks he sometimes took his young grandson on short cuts and diversions, enabling me to do the full route. For years he came on club evening walks, but as the years went by the pace of the walks became more difficult for someone in their late 70's.

In April 1987 aged 70 he continued his Munro ascents on a Scottish trip with son and grandson Gareth.



Stan, Trefor and Keith on Glas Tulaichean, March 1997

away, during a snowstorm on Beinn Sgulaird. A defeat then was avenged in 1995.

Aged 78 he spent a glorious summer week in Braemar, ascending 10 Munros in 6 days.

In July 1996 aged 80 he ascended a Munro with good stalker's path near Tomdoun in not much over guidebook

The photo shows club chairman Chris Barber performing the honours. Stan was so proud.



Life Membership 1996

His final club walk was the Xmas pudding walk of December 1998. He had planned merely to walk up the track to the bothy for lunch. It was such a clear sunny day that he did part of the route, reaching the summit of Pen-y-Gader Fawr, then cutting down to the bothy. A good day for an 82 year old.

After this Stan continued to walk on flatter terrain; the canal bank, and later round Croesyceiliog where he lived. Eventually, advancing dementia ended his attendance at indoor evening meetings.

Many of us in the club are in the second half of our mountaineering careers. Stan's exploits in later life shows that we should all be able to enjoy mountains for some years to come.

Trefor Beese



Stan and Gareth on Ben Vorlich, his second Munro

In the next ten years on club and family trips to Scotland, he pushed his Munro total up to 36. These were in Summer, Spring and Winter. I have many happy memories of our adventures.

In March 1989 we spent at least 10 minutes trapped on the ground, hanging on to rocks to prevent being blown

time.

His last two Munros were climbed in the next spring, two months before his 81st birthday.

At the time of his 80th birthday, Stan was made a life member of Gwent Mountaineering Club. The ceremony took place after a Thursday evening walk up Tor-y-Foel (not a short walk).

MARJORIE VIVIEN COLES (1943 – 2007)

Marge was born in Ayr, Scotland in 1943. She was educated at Ayr Academy and then studied sciences. At the age of 21 she took the “£10 Ticket” to Australia, which in those days involved a 5 to 6 weeks boat trip and an obligation to stay for 3 years or pay for one’s own return ticket, a brave move for a young woman at that time. Marge stayed the 3 years and then returned to England where she shared a flat in Chelsea with two friends.

In 1973 she married David, an engineer, in Knightsbridge and they spent their early married life abroad. They had two children, Gareth who was born in Nairobi, and Robyn who was born in Dubai. The family returned to the U.K. in 1985 to educate their children, and settled in Wales.

I first met Marge about 25 years ago at Cwmbran Leisure Centre where, amongst other activities, we played Squash and Badminton. A group of friends used to walk together and started doing Challenge Walks. Marge took part in The Caerphilly Summits, South Wales Three Peaks, Talybont Trial, Twmbarlwm Trek, and others on a regular basis.

Marge joined G.M.C. about 13 years ago, and Kath Brown and I joined later as a result of her talking about it’s activities. Her navigation skills were excellent, but she only used them when called upon to assist when we hit problems. She actually always seemed to know exactly where we were.

Her General Knowledge was amazing, and she loved to join in any quiz

that was going on. She was great fun and game for anything, as she proved on an adventure weekend when she crawled through a muddy tunnel on an Obstacle Course when the rest of us “chickened out”.

Unfortunately, the last few years had proved a struggle for Marge as her health deteriorated, but she carried on working and looking after David in between chemotherapy and surgery, and managed to attend the Annual Dinner last year. Her illness prevented her from walking on Thursdays, which saddened her greatly. The last Thursday walk she managed was Llangynidr in June 2006.

Dawn Brown.

Highland Highs by Tony Massey

Celestial bodies lit up patches of the night sky as we sped north toward the Highlands of Scotland. The Eagles sang out ‘Desperado’ as the four of us desperately pierced the windscreen to see the snow-capped Cairngorms.

“...Don’t your feet get cold in the winter time?”

The sky won’t snow and the sun don’t shine,

...and it’s hard to tell the night time from the day...”

We knew they were there, towering above the conifers enveloped by cloudy shadows cast across a shifting horizon. It was late, we were tired, and the windscreen wipers beat sleet, spray and fleeting flurries of snow from our view. Still some miles short of Ardenbeg Bunkhouse in Grantown-on-Spey, we drove on through the night.

Paula, Rachel, Duncan and I pitched our kit into ample locker spaces and climbed wearily into the bunks. A weekend of winter mountaineering training awaited us and several others returning merrily from the local pub that January night. The course, funded by the Jonathan Conville Memorial Trust and assisted by the BMC and Scottish Mountain Trust, was inaugurated by Jonathan’s family after his untimely death on the North Face of the Matterhorn in December 1979, aged 27. The Trust aims ‘to provide aspirant mountaineers with the skills to develop their ability and

love of the sport in the spirit of adventure embraced by Jonathan during his short life’.

“Beep, beep...beep, beep...,” bleary eyes peered out from under the hoods of sleeping bags. Reveille was early and Rebecca carried out kit issue with military precision. Individual and group kit comprised climbing helmets, ice axes, plastic boots, crampons, shovels, rope and other climbing tackle. Following a hearty breakfast of steaming porridge, toast and tea, the amiable Jonathan Preston and Mark ‘Sammy’ Samuels, our resident Mountain Instructors and experienced guides, briefed the group in

genial mood. We journeyed out past Loch Morlich to a breathless wintry mountain scene.

The slippery ice- and snow-covered footpath from the Ski Centre to Coire an t-Sneachda served as a winter navigation exercise. A stream meandered and toiled quietly below the surface crossing the path at 820 m; a trap for the unwary navigator in these parts. Jonathan led our half of the group to the flank of a moraine on the eastern slope of the corrie. We sipped hot tea and ate welcome snacks in the blinding sunlight and sporadic squalls. Armed with ice axes and wearing



Coire an t-Sneachda from moraine



Ice axe work

(Continued from page 5)

crampons, bearing keen minds and refuelled muscles we cut steps and walked in all directions across the snow bank bracing ourselves against erratic gusts. "Follow through with the adze!" roared Jonathan. Collective ice axes arced through cold air as we cut more steps in the crystalline snow. Then a 'swoosh' of bodies sliding down-slope and the 'thud' of axes arresting descents was followed by "bring the adze into your shoulders, raise those feet off the ground!" ...More tea and snacks. From lateral moraine to corrie head wall below 900 m and digging pits for avalanche assessment. No imminent danger here! The 'chip, chip, chip' of picks and the metallic 'ching' of crampon points on ice-covered boulder marked movement over frozen ground. In the distance climbers dotted impossible gullies below fingers of bare rock guarding Coire an t-Sneachda like proud sentinels. All too soon, darkness drew in as we descended the wall re-joining the barely discernible track from broken ground.



Ice axe breaking



Trying out the snow hole

Huskies strained at the leash, bright white eyes intent on racing to the finish and beyond. The Annual National Dog Sled Championships was in town and the spectacle proved an interesting diversion for fatigued minds and bodies in our minibus. That evening, following a three course culinary magnum opus prepared by the jocular Ronnie we ventured to the local pub for Sammy's slide presentation. Tales abound; "the decision to take a shovel on a high altitude expedition saved our lives as a vicious storm blew in and holed us up for three days" ...we listened intently, soaking up his knowledge and experience like human sponges. The Guinness flowed but the days efforts soon took their toll, we retired early.

The winds had dropped, the front occluded, and we stood below the ski tows at Coire na Ciste bathed in sunlight on the last day. Security on snow and ice, further avalanche assessment and snow holes was on the menu. Cutting seats for hip belays and platforms for standing axe belays was topped by passing skiers smiling as we pulled like demented tug-of-war teams on axe anchors and snow bollards testing our handiwork. On the banks of Allt na Ciste we came across a snow shelter large enough to house four weary travellers. We would now realise

the effort involved in creating such a shelter. On the eastern flank of Coire na Ciste we burrowed deep with shovels and axes and laboured long over cut blocks of firm snow. The end result was a shelter hewn from a bank of snow that housed the entire group of several mountaineers! Tea and sandwiches our reward, we glissaded down the slope and returned across the sodden footpath to meet our fellow course members. Back in the warmth of the bunkhouse we swapped tales over another excellent meal and thanked our instructors for a memorable weekend. We left the Highlands tired but on a high...

Tony Massey



Tony at snow shelter