

The Pinnacle

Newsletter of Gwent Mountaineering Club

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Spring 2012

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

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Welcome to the 32nd Newsletter, which opens with an article by Kath Taylor recalling the presentation by Tori James to the club, including her ascent of Everest.

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gwentmountaineeringclub.org.uk

Tori James first Welsh woman to climb Everest



"I was honoured to take the Welsh flag to the roof of the world"

It was a coup for the club to secure the services of the top Welsh female mountaineer Tori James. At the tender age of 25, Tori became the first Welsh woman to climb Mount Everest and she agreed to give a presentation to members at our meeting on January 26 about her experiences and motivation. Tori, a farmer's daughter from Pembrokeshire has an adventurous



Tori at the North Pole

past. In 2000, she was a member of a 4-week expedition to the Vatnajökull glacier

in Iceland. She started work for the British Schools Exploring Society and in May 2005 her team, the Pink Lady Pole Cats, became the first all-female team to complete the Polar Challenge, a gruelling 360 mile race to the magnetic North Pole.



Tori on the Hillary Step

Tori then helped form a team of four from the London Business School who wanted to climb Mount Everest. As part of their training, they travelled to Tibet to climb Cho Oyu (8,201 m/26,906ft), the world's sixth highest mountain.

But more was to come. In 0730 local time on May 24th 2007 Tori reached the summit of Everest (8,850m/29,035ft). In doing so, she became the youngest British female and the first ever Welsh woman to climb Mount Everest.

"after reaching the summit I had smiled for about a month"

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Chairman's Remarks (Peter Salenieks)

It is a pleasure to see *The Pinnacle* make a welcome return. As a former Editor, I know only too well how much work goes on behind the scenes to bring each issue to members and am grateful that Terry and his contributors have given freely of their time.

Our programme is an enduring strength and recent events are featured, including one of our best attended Thursday evening talks, the Annual Dinner Weekend and the ever-popular Christmas Pudding Walk. The Club also provides a forum in which members can meet to organise joint ventures, as exemplified by the Norwegian ice climbing trips. A wide range of individual interests are represented by accounts that take us across Europe, from sea level to the summit of Jebel Toubkal in the High Atlas Mountains

I sincerely hope that you will enjoy reading this newsletter, be inspired by the stories and will choose to share your stories in future issues.

Fifty Not Out (Peter Salenieks)

The year of my fiftieth birthday was an opportunity for celebration and reflection. There were reunions with family, friends and fellow travellers during the course of the year, including some whom I'd not seen for a long time. The pace quickened as the big day approached, with an evening climb in the Wye Valley followed by my first ever balloon flight. This was made all the more special by being part of a dawn mass ascent during the Bristol International Balloon Fiesta. Marginal conditions delayed our flight until a weather window opened and we launched, drifting west across the city before landing almost an hour and a half later in the shadow of the Cotswold Way, followed by a champagne toast.

"finishing the last few slices of birthday cake at the *Castle Inn*"



Balloons over Bristol



In the Foothills of the Beacons

A longer walk was planned on Sunday, as we traversed the Black Mountains from Hay on Wye to Pengenfordd, finishing the last few slices of birthday cake at the *Castle Inn*, before people made their way home.

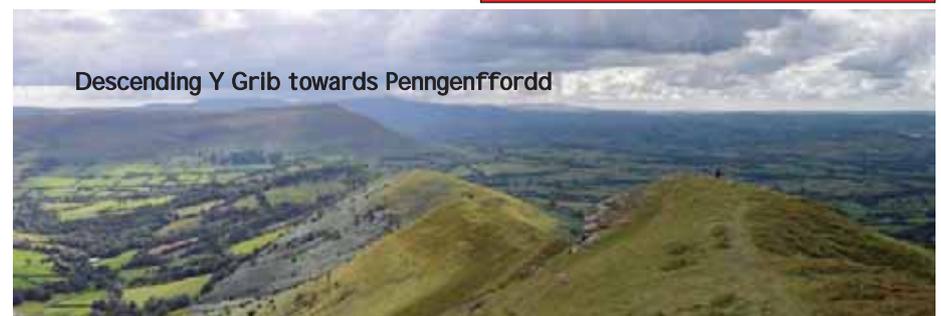
I was privileged to witness the last flight of the last Concorde as she returned to Filton in 2003. One of the speakers highlighted how air travel has made the world a smaller place. It has enabled me to visit mountains in North America, South America and

Asia that were largely inaccessible even a few decades ago. Travel broadens the mind. In her book *The Kindness of Strangers*, Kate Adie writes about how help often comes unbidden when most welcome. So it has proved during my travels. Many would do well to accept this advice amidst the bustle of their daily lives, which offer a stark contrast to time spent in the mountains where the choices are sharper as one feels more alive and can

simply be.

Reflecting on my first fifty years, I believe that the journey is as important as the destination. One secret of happiness is to take pleasure in what you can do. This changes with the turning of the years, sometimes unexpectedly. Journeys are best made in the company of friends, many of whom I've made during over twenty years as a member of Gwent Mountaineering Club.

"the journey is as important as the destination"



Descending Y Grib towards Penngengffordd

The GR54 (Tour of the Oisans) (Kay Beechey)

The GR54 is a gem of a walk, full of variety and with spectacular views as a constant backdrop. One minute you're strolling easily through sun-dappled woodland, following milky-blue rivers and wandering through sleepy, old, stone villages, the next you're toiling up zig-zag paths (oh, those zig-zags!) over scree, slate or boulders to narrow, exposed cols, or following knee-blasting stony paths down (and down and down) to velvety Alpine pastures with grass hoppers leaping from the shadow of your boots and clouds of sheep, their bells clanging, drifting across the hillside.

It's not an easy walk; its reputation

"wilfully ignoring the imposing statistics of the walk (12,830m/42,063ft of ascent!!)"

as one of Europe's most challenging is well deserved, and filled me with trepidation as we set off from Bourg D'Oisans on the first day. The town is at the bottom of one of the Tour de France's most infamous climbs and the cafes and bars are full of cyclists of all ages, come



Col de la Muzelle from col de cote Belle

experience "Alpe D'Huez" for themselves.

We'd left it too late to book huts from the UK, so Dave pounced on my suggestion of taking some emergency camping stuff, seeing the opportunity to

turn the trip into a full blown back-packing expedition. Thinking of the romance of the idea I'd agreed, wilfully ignoring the imposing statistics of the walk (12,830m/42,063ft of ascent over 10 days, crossing 14 passes...) and the weight of the rucksack I'd have to carry. Even with Dave taking the tent, I had to be helped when lifting my rucksack onto my back. Add to this a pair of boots that had started to seriously disintegrate just three weeks before we were due to leave for France and a foot that had been injured by trying to break in a new pair of boots too quickly, and the prospects of an enjoyable completion of the GR54 seemed remote. However, with my old boots gaffer taped and my heels covered in Compeed plasters, I managed the first few days with enough energy left to be able to look



for- **Col de l'Aup Martin** ward to the next section.

The first few days of the walk are popular with day walkers and the scenery is at its prettiest. Spectacular views of La Meige (3982m) dominate the skyline as the route makes its way through the Ecrin National Park. The second half of the route is much more remote. Leaving the day walkers behind, you head into wilder territory where the prettiness of the first sec-

tion gives way to imposing and forbidding terrain. At home, the "Caution!" warnings in the guide book had made me uneasy; now, faced with the steep, exposed scree and narrow cols I was overwhelmed by the rugged beauty of the place. The dangers were real, but, approached with the sort of care you instinctively take when walking in some parts of Scotland, for example, the route is enjoyably challenging and not dangerously so.

We eventually arrived back in Bourg D'Oisans on a blisteringly hot day and celebrated with over-priced Oranginas in a pavement café. It seemed a world away from our experiences of the previous ten days when we'd watched golden eagles circling above our bivouac site, and sat sharing French bread and fresh goat's cheese on the top of narrow cols, surrounded by the snow-capped peaks of the Massif des Ecrins. My boots, aided by the gaffer tape, had held out and my injured foot had only twinged once or twice throughout the entire trip. Even my huge rucksack didn't feel heavy anymore. The weather had been kind and we'd both had a wonderful time. The



La Meige

GR54 is, indeed, a gem of a walk.

"The GR54 is indeed a gem of a walk"

Rjukan Ice Climbing February 2011 (John Jones)

You learn some strange things ice climbing in Norway. -17 degrees is not a good temperature to douse hot water on the car windscreen to clear ice! It simply freezes! Double trouble!!

Eight brave souls made the trip last February and it turned into a very successful week Rjukan lies roughly midway between Oslo and Bergen and is situated in a steep sided valley idea for waterfalls.

It's preeminent claim to fame as the 'heavy water' capital during WW2 has thankfully been replaced by it's reputation as one of the best locations in Europe for ice climbing. It offers all grades, single or multi pitch and all within a convenient ten minute drive from the town centre.

A personal goal for the trip was to lead a grade 5 climb. This involves ice of 80 to 85 degrees or a pitch of 20 to 30 meters of vertical climbing. There will be a high possibility of difficult, complex ice features.

Gareth and me went to Vemork early on our last day to tackle the three star classic Vemorkbruckfoss Vest. It all went well the only moment of worry coming as I was finishing the first pitch to ice that was constantly dinner plating (shattering). Ice is always steeper than it looks as Gareth found leading the second pitch!! We had the grade 5 and already planning the assault for 2012



Keith Gareth and John Crossan ready for a full day's outing on Fabrikfossen which is in the background.



This is Keith on the second pitch of Vemorkbrufoss Ost.

The first pitch ends just by an ice cave which was very cold indeed. Preferable to belay outside for comfort and practicality. It is graded WI 4. The ice was pretty steep and on a few sections of the upper pitch very dense. It was Bob's lead with Keith and John C seconding

"To Leash or not to Leash?"

Goals were achieved, expensive kit was lost then miraculously found in four feet of powder and we all survived! Supermarkets do not open on Sunday and I will be more wary of skirting a partly frozen river in the future.

"As for the leashes.....Some do and some don't!!"



This is a view of Rjukan from high on Fabrikfossen

A grand day out!!



Gareth looking very happy on Vemork Bridge with the second pitch of Vemorkbrufoss Vest behind.

Winter in the West Highlands (Adrian Fawcett)

There are few places which match the Scottish Highlands in winter for the splendid sense of wilderness and isolation the mountains provide. And I can think of no better way to immerse oneself in that landscape than to get off a West Highland Line train at Corrour, prepared for a few days and



Adrian on Stob Ban

steady plod up Beinn na Lap, knowing I would need my headtorch to reach the valley at the far side of the mountain. There was snow lying above about 500 metres, and good winter conditions along the summit ridge, and reached my destination by 6:30 p.m.

I was the only person getting off the train, and a few moments later the

"I was the only person getting off the train"

train was disappearing into the distance, and suddenly there was just me, a heavy rucksack, the railway line, and an open, icy landscape. There's not even a proper road at Corrour – I think if it was not for walkers the station might not exist. With a little under 2 hours before dark, I set off on a

steady plod up Beinn na Lap, knowing I would need my headtorch to reach the valley at the far side of the mountain. There was snow lying above about 500 metres, and good winter conditions along the summit ridge, and reached my destination by 6:30 p.m.

"The next 2 days I saw nobody just footprints in the snow"

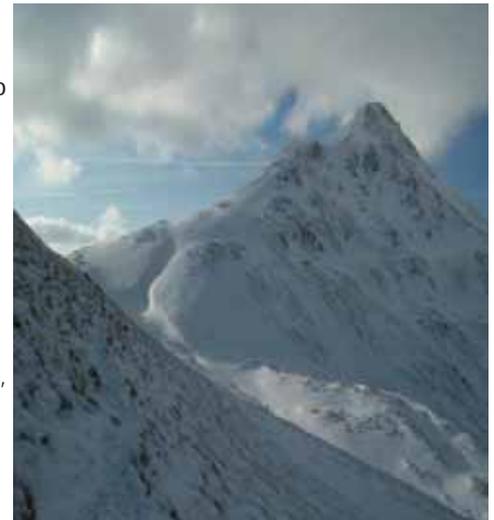
Next day I headed over Chno Dearg and Stob Coire Sgriodain to Fersit, then up Coire Laire. Weighed down with the necessities for winter mountaineering, there was no way I had time to make it up the two mountains to the west of Loch Treig that day. Shortly after I had descended Stob Coire Sgriodain, a rescue helicopter arrived. Although it too far away to see clearly, they apparently rescued somebody from a location just a few hundred metres from my descent route.

The next two days I saw nobody. Just footprints in the snow, although these could have been a few days old. I abandoned my attempt to climb Stob a' Choire Mheadhoin due to the conditions: the snowy rim at the top of the steep corrie looked like a potential avalanche hazard – not something I should probably tackle on my own – and the rate at which the clouds were sailing over the summit it looked pretty windy too. So I headed back down, and opted for Stob Ban instead. This turned out to be the highlight of my trip – conditions were excellent, and I dumped my rucksack at the point where it started to get steep. Stob Ban is a prominent little peak and from it you get great panoramic views of the Grey Corries and Mamores. Next day I summited Sgurr Eilde Mor, again with near perfect snow and weather conditions. However, this was followed by a slightly dodgy traverse around the mountain. According to the

map it's a footpath, but it gradually fades to nothing. A long steep slope of heather and scree covered in snow and ice is not much fun!

Camping in temperatures well below zero brings with it the pleasures of breaking ice over streams to get water, having to warm up the gas canister before you can boil the kettle, and thawing out your fingers several times while scraping ice off the flysheet and packing away the tent in the morning. But it's definitely better than waking up to driving rain and low cloud

"The pleasures of breaking ice over streams to get water"



A snowy Stob Ban (Grey Corries)

Ascent of Jebel Toubkal 4167m (Roger Millett)

So, I travelled with the Adventure Company departing from London Heathrow on 29 May 2009 with my brother in law to arrive in Morocco at Marrakech. We assaulted the Mountain, which stands at 4,167 m.(13,543ft) in the Atlas Mts of N Africa, on our 6th day of 8 in Morocco.

The mountain was approached in 3 stages starting with a mini bus to the Berber village of Aremd for two days. Then a 6 hour walk up the demanding Mizane Valley to our two day base camp at the Neltner Refuge. Outside of the months of June to September the area is snowbound and only very serious attempts can otherwise be made. Luggage was transported up to the base camp by mules. The Refuge stands at 3,207m (10,522ft) so a net height of 4,650 feet was gained from Aremd to get to the Refuge. The 3rd stage climb up to Mt Toubkal summit required a 6.30 am start and it took us 4 hours up a strenuous route with snow still on the ground in parts.

Lunch was taken on the summit with plenty of time to take in the extensive views and photos before a descent back to base camp and an overnight stay before returning back the same route to Aremd village. Only one member of the group failed to make the summit, owing to altitude sickness.



Roger and Brother in Law on Toubkal



Summit of Jebel Toubkal 4,167m

“Only one member of the group failed to make the summit, owing to altitude sickness.”

Walking with the sun on your back (Barry Hankey)

The Greek Islands are a great place to go walking if you like the sun on your back. If you don't like the heat then May or September are your best bet. Me, I like it hot. My wife and I have been going to the Dodecanese, the Easternmost group of Greek islands every year since 2000, usually twice sometimes 3 times. I spent 5 months there in the summer of 2010 and 2 months in 2011 walking in the mountains and researching a walking guide (which is yet to be compiled) The mountains of the Dodecanese are generally rugged, the same kind of scale as the Brecon Beacons, Snowdonia or the Lake District and at least as dramatic as anywhere in the UK. In some ways the challenges they present are similar to UK mountains but in other ways they are very different. Perhaps surprisingly, one of the main differences is the problem of route-finding.



Amorgos: footpath to high-level monastery; over 1000 foot drop into the sea on the right

Maps are either non-existent or, at best, poor and unreliable unlike British OS or French IGN maps so it's a matter of finding and being able to interpret old pathways: how to tell the difference between a little used path and a goat track, many of which are quite ancient, is a useful skill. It's also important to know when not to push your

luck. Traditionally the Greeks do not seem to have shared the same 'because it's there' challenge to climb mountains which developed in other parts of Europe from the 19th Century and so in many cases there are no paths or established routes to the tops of peaks. Where there are paths to the top it is because in times past monasteries were built there in search of solitude. In some



Nisyros: Looking down into the still active crater from the path around the caldera rim

stone paved because they are still used for pilgrimage on the appropriate saint's day.

Two important things to remember are that instead of wet weather gear you carry water and if you can't hack walking in the midday sun you find a shade tree (most mountain monasteries, of which there are scores on every island, have them) and doze away a couple of hours.

Many Brit rambling groups go in September and start walking early morning (08.00) and finish by 14.00. But if you acclimatise properly and are sensible you can walk through the heat of the day.

One of the really great things to do on most islands is to walk across the ridge to the other side of the island where the beaches are seldom visited, so you don't even need to pack a cosie or a towel. Swimming in the Aegean is something everyone should do before they die. It's amazing, particularly when coupled with a good walk. On Tilos you can walk across the island have a good swim from a

After a good walk settle down in a tavern and put the sun in a bottle.



deserted beach, walk back and have another good swim from the 2 mile long Town beach before settling down with a beer or an ouzo in one of

the many tavernas.

It's great to escape Grey Britain and walk in the sun, then sit in a taverna planning the next day's walk in the knowledge that it will be just as sunny tomorrow. There is no need for wet weather contingencies or wet weather gear. Not that I'm trying to sell the idea of walking in Greece. If you're of



Amorgos: tiny chapel dedicated to the prophet Elijah on top of the island's highest mountain

the mindset that Greece is too hot, or you don't fancy the idea of not even be able to read the alphabet let alone speak the language, and you can't be doing with all that foreign food, then great, stay in the UK. One of the great things about walking in the Greek islands is the solitude. It's rare



Nisyros, the island with the hole in the middle: looking along the length of the caldera



Nisyros: sulphur deposits from gas emissions in the side of a gorge in a secondary crater.

to see anyone else out walking unless you go on one of the few milk-runs.

If you do fancy the idea of walking with the sun on your back and want to know more, or fancy meeting up over there (yes, I'm planning on going back this summer again) let me know.



Nisyros: ancient settlement built into the volcanic rocks in Minoan times in highlevel hidden 'valley' with Mount Diavatis towering above

"Swimming in the Aegean is something everyone should do before they die."

Unnamed Peak Spanish Pyrenees (Jan Wagenaar)

The French side of the 3Km Bielsa Tunnel was cold, wet and shrouded in mist, In contrast the Spanish side was hot and sunny. It was early morning so we stopped for Breakfast alongside a fast flowing river, the peaks of the High Pyrenees soared above us. Breakfast Done I pondered over climbing this "hill" to take a few photos. I thought it would take a little over an hour. I was quite fit at the time still running 70 mile / week or so. I was able to "jog" easily up the initial slope but the ground soon became extremely rough and I had to walk, but I was still able to make good progress. It was quickly

becoming obvious that the view from the valley floor was extremely for shortened and numerous false summits were experienced. As I climbed higher I was conscious that the "hill" was becoming much narrower and airy and in some places some easy scrambles were necessary. A little over 2 hours later and a final scramble I reached the top and an interrupted 360 deg panorama, lay before me. This hill was in fact a mountain in its own right; the top was flat about the size of a snooker table and covered in alpine

flowers. The sides adjacent to the side I came up fell vertically away for many 100's feet and the other side overhung with a drop down to a ridge that rose steadily to a solitary high peak a mile or so away. Photos taken I made my way down and a little over 2 hours later I emerged to our parked car covered in sweat and a few 100 flies buzzing around my head.

"I was quite fit at the time still running 70 mile / week or so"



Christmas "Pudding" Walk Pics (Jen Price)



Who is this Father Christmas ?



Where is this snowy mountain top?

Club Dinner at Tremadog (Roger Millett)

From a perfect blue sky to a continuous downpour made for a contrasting winter weekend for the 29 GMC members who made the trip to north Wales for the Annual Club Dinner. The village of Tremadog was the base chosen. A private hostel, the actual birthplace of T E Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia), proved a convenient location for a variety of walks and climbs in the varied but beautiful

“From a perfect blue sky to a continuous downpour”

landscape of Snowdonia.

Members of the Club converged on Tremadog from various directions and timescales with quite a number taking the opportunity to stop



Rhaedr Mawddach

off on route to do a walk. Three car loads from Gwent met up at Garnllwyd, just a couple of miles north of Dolgellau, to be ably led by Colin Price on a 4/5 mile route up the Afon Gain river valley following the former gold trail to reach the abandoned Gwynfynydd gold mine. The route was taken from Kevin Walker's book (Kevin gave a talk to GMC members and also led a

Sunday archaeology walk). The walk followed the old miner's tracks to and from their workplace where mining took place almost continually from 1844 to 1999; a beautifully wooded walk above the river pounding over a rocky bed and passing the half frozen Rhaedr Mawddach waterfall. On reaching the derelict mine and associated buildings, the ten walkers returned via the opposite bank of the river. Although temperatures never got above freezing point the clear blue sky, accompanying sunshine, good company and beautiful scenery were adequate compensation. Plans for Saturday's walks were



disrupted by a stark contrast of weather as heavy rain prevailed. One party which had planned to summit Moel Hebog wisely joined Trefor Williams and Dawn's party on a lower lever walk starting from the hostel and heading northwards in the direction of Llyn Cwmystradilyn Reservoir. With discretion, a decision was made to shorten the planned route as freezing conditions, slippery ground and constant rain dampened our enthusiasm. The prospect of watching the Six Nations rugby in front of a live fire back at the hostel may have had something to influence this decision, but I cannot be sure of this!

A more hardy and better equipped group, armed with crampons and ice axes, set off for a route to scale Moel Hebog ascending from Beddgelert. The ascent was successfully



achieved without encountering fresh snowfalls expected. The rather inadequate drying room (wet room?) ended up packed with soggy kit and clothing.

Showered and more appropriately dressed, members enjoyed the Club's planned dinner at "The Golden Fleece" where a very good three course meal was enjoyed. In fact many were defeated by the quantity served up, failing to clear their dishes but, as always, some always manage to do otherwise!! Our after dinner guest speaker ?? provided a very interesting presentation on the theme of Snowdonia's fauna, flora and geology illustrating the unique characteristics to be found in one of Britain's leading National Parks. A good evening was had by all.

Sunday's weather offered better prospects for those able to find some dry clothing! Others departed for home earlier than planned but ten members in all met up at Barmouth to do the "Panorama Walk", which runs above the Mawddach Estuary; a walk which appeared in a TV

“Three car loads from Gwent met up at Garnllwyd”

A Walk in the Snow (Ken McBride)



T'was it a fortuitous conjunction? Snow, high pressure and annual leave. Scrying with long look glasses left a muddy image. Stability butted up against turbulence.

A window, a porthole revealed prior to the stampede of the black boiling forces. A mad dash to avail ourselves. Cocooned in sleeping bags, inky velvet night slipping over the land; a breath of stillness as the freezer draws everything in. Steaming kettle, a freezing sauna, heat provided by infusions. Repleat, survival fare, noodles, tinned fish.

-2degc, -4degc,opening lines float through my head, ''.....Oh! Good morning Mr. Tyler, Going Down''.

-8degc within, the tents worth 5degc.

Dawn, liquid gold pouring over the world, life stirring after a night of loud cracks. The llyn freezing? The ice gods stirring in their niche? Heat in the tent a stifling -5degc. Breakfast, strike and off. Over the dormant grey glacial snake protecting the narrows approaching Pen Yr Ole Wen. Crust over powder. The dark forces ranked, advancing from South through to North West. Yr Wddfa lost in the glare of a low sun. Dark North faces; Tryfan, Glyder, Twll Du, Y Garn, icy shadows reaching northwards as if encircle us. A chill raw breeze; onward to Carnedd Daffydd.

The first wave, vanguard, sweeps over us, dulling spirits. Gone, shining whiteness. Ysgolion Duon, the Black Ladders true; dark foreboding, menacing in the crystal whiteness. Cat's-paws and zephyrs, gathered, piled up in Cwm Penllafar, bursting over the dam that is Carnedd Llewelyn.

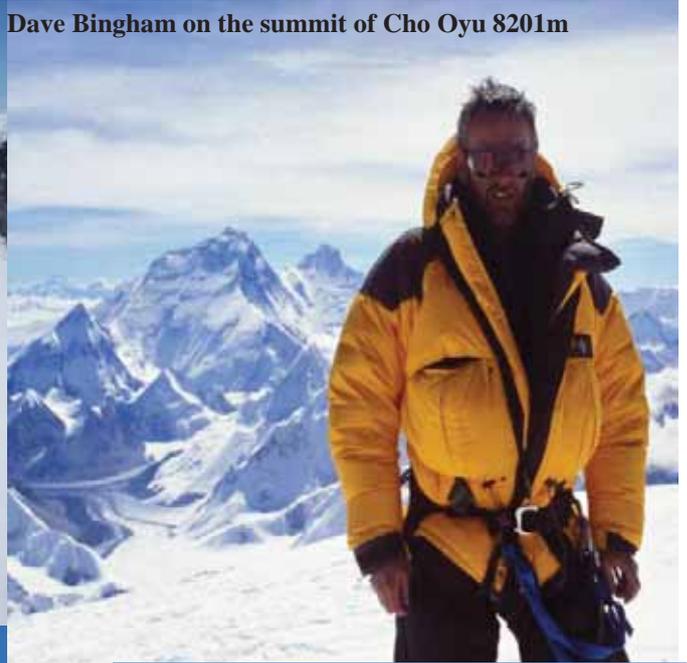
Down, down; farewell icy blast. Down through Bwlch Eryl Farchog, down passed Fynnon Llugwy. Down carriageway to the stage and welcome steaming brew.

A look, a nod, a smile. Another memory to share. Another milestone. Just down the road from the milestone beneath that Buttress.

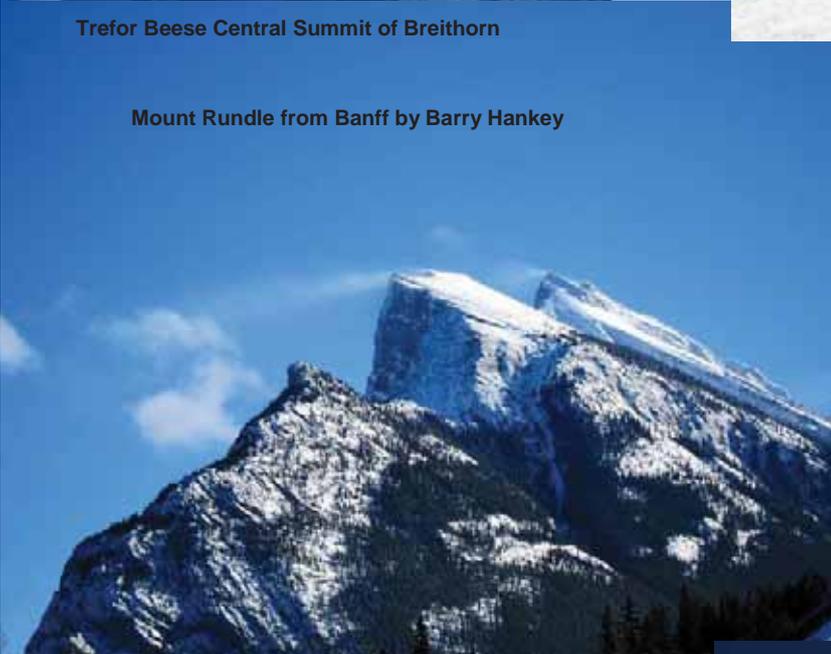
Members' Pics



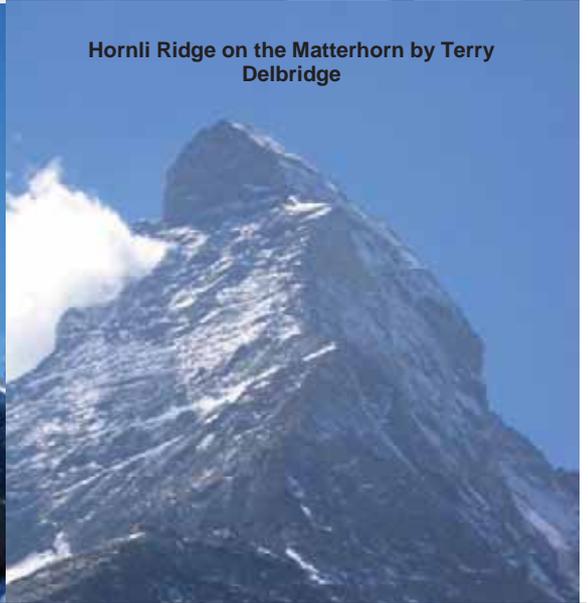
Trefor Beese Central Summit of Breithorn



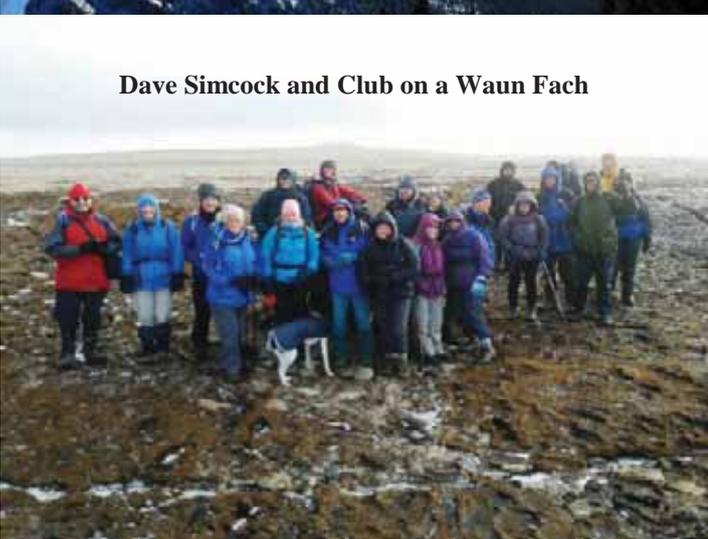
Dave Bingham on the summit of Cho Oyu 8201m



Mount Rundle from Banff by Barry Hankey



Hornli Ridge on the Matterhorn by Terry Delbridge



Dave Simcock and Club on a Waun Fach



Mera Peak from Mera La by Terry Delbridge