

Newsletter - Spring 2016

Welcome once again to the latest edition of the Newsletter. It is that time of year again, and it doesn't even seem a few months since I was writing this column for the first one. As they say, time fly's when you're having fun!

As I type this, Winter is still around in some areas, yet Spring is upon us and has already brought a great weekend of sun in the Lake District a few weeks ago. An excellent weekend with more people than you could shake a stick at, we even had a day out with 7 climbers!

In contrast weather-wise to a few weeks before in Elphin, which brought rain, snow sleet and a small amount of sun. It didn't stop us getting out, with a few Munros bagged, as well as a visit to one of the remotest parts of Scotland I have ever been to called Sandwood Bay, an amazing looking beach that is only accessible via a 6.5km path.

Myself & Mr Bennett attempted the An Teallach Winter traverse, somewhat defeated by the weather and suspiciously looking avalanche prone slopes. We did not want to be another headline at the end of a sad run of events already in Scotland. Read on for Dan's account of events.

Winter was also around for the presidents meet, a few of us took to the hills and got to don our axes and crampons in Snowdonia, with ascents of Crib Goch, Tryfan & Bristly Ridge, Y Garn, Pen Y Ole Wen and more.

I am pleased to include Chris & Marcus's account of their adventure on the Penon de Ifach in Cost Blanca, it didn't quite make it into the Autumn newsletter but was worth waiting for.

I am hoping for a good Summer this year, we have lots of meets lined up so hopefully lots of climbing (and whatever else you fancy doing)! I am looking forward to reporting on a trip to the Alps in July, attempting the Trois Monts traverse of Mont Blanc. Watch this space!

Special Thanks to Chris Comerie, Marcus Harvey, Jamie Ward & Dan Bennett for their contributions!

Featured in this Edition...

- ▲ **Wayfarer's Meet in The lakes**
- ▲ **An Teallach**
- ▲ **Penon Adventure**

Next Meet...

27th - 30th May—Arrochar Alps

Beinglas Campsite, Inveranon, Loch Lomand

The Glasgow Section confirm this is the best commercial campsite for small tents in the area. Also, they say the on site bar is very good; there is a restaurant there. In other words it's pretty much self contained. The cost is £8 per night per adult. There is no need to book ahead. The link provides details:



<http://www.beinglascampsite.co.uk/camping.php>

Look forward to seeing as many as possible on this meet.

John Firmin

Upcoming Meets...

Glanafon

17th—19th June 2016

If the recent weather I have experienced in Snowdonia the last few weeks has been anything to go by there should be some sun in the sky for this one! Then again it is Wales and one can only hope!



Symonds Yat

15th—17th July 2016

There's lots of stuff to do in the Forest of Dean, including rock climbing in Symonds Yat, as well as the nearby Wintours Leap and Wynd Cliff. Also paddling on the Wye, caving, biking



A note from Mr David Hughes:

Glacier Books, Pitlochry, Scotland, PH16 5AT www.glacierbooks.com Tel - 01796 470056

I have bought from these people the odd volume over the past years and on my way back from this year's meet at Elphin sold them some of our redundant SMC Journals (donated) for the benefit of club funds. I have a copy of their latest (March 2016) catalogue which I shall leave at Glanafon next week. Clearly there is no rush but they are a super outfit and deserve our support. If anyone has a few spare pounds and wants a good book for the shelf this is as good a place to go as any that I know.

An extract from

facebook

GREATLANGDALE By Jamie Ward



An extract from Jamie's write-up on our Facebook page ...

“ Just returned from a great meet up in the Lake District, good to meet up with old and new club members and the weather for once was on our side, sunny but chilly conditions we took to the crags.



Day 1 Friday - Jamie, Simon, Dan, Chris - Walked from the hut to Lower Scout Crag, then to Upper Sout Crag then traversed around to White Gyll Crag - Jamie and Chris did - Cubs Arete - Route 1 - The Slabs Route 1 - Dan and Simon Climbed - The Slab - Route 2 - The Slabs Route 2 - A great mountaineering day topped off with a few pints at Stickle Barn Tavern.



Day 2 Saturday - The hut was bussling with activity first thing, climbers and walkers checked routes and maps and went there seperate ways, the decision to make a mass ascent of Gimmer Crag perched high on the flanks of the Langdale Valley saw a party of 7 start the gruelling uphill slog. We split into 3 teams and climbed various classics, Marcus and Chris climbed Bracket and Slab Direct whilst Jamie and Gordon opted to do the easier original Bracket and Slab. Dan and Simon gave the young Hugh his first mountain crag experience and climbed the 'Gimmer Chimney'.

We persevered with cold hands and fingers in the morning and were rewarded with clear blue skies and warm rock in the afternoon, we all did a route on Main Wall to top the day off.



Day 3 Sunday - A visit to the nearby Raven Crag at Walthwaite for a half days climbing was in order. Many of us had long distances to travel home so this crag was ideal as it was near the hut and had a short walk in from the road. It turned out to be a gem of a crag, usually a crag so easily accessible would be over used, the routes were all great quality on good rock. We climbed - Route 1 - S- Enterprize -VS Hardup Wall -VS Route 2 HS Tritus HVS and Proportional Representation HVS all climbed in t-shirts in the sun!”



Day 4 Monday - With all the JMCS departed I went in search of some ice and snow, from the Old Dungeon Ghyll car park I began the long slog on the 'Cumbrian Way' up to Angle Tarn, I left the security of the well trodden footpath and made my way over to the base of 'Great End'. At first sight it wasn't looking promising, most of the snow had gone on the faces and it looked like the search for some 'Ice Axe' action would pass me by for another season. I made my way around to 'Central Gully' which was poor in the lower section but looked good higher up although I didn't fancy soloing a grade II/III. With a new found optimism I made my way round to 'Cust's Gully' which is almost hidden from below, the lower section was poor but once the top corner was turned and the jammed boulder was in view my persistence was rewarded, solid neve all the way to the top. One Pitch Gully was also in good condition but I opted for the easy 350ft snow plod, although very easy I was made up, a proper mini adventure, I continued on to Broad Crag - Scafell Pike - Esk Pike - Bowfell and down the Band - Superb day out!

Day 5 Tuesday - Parked the van at the top of Kirkstone Pass looking down towards Patterdale and Ullswater - Looong drive home.

Thanks to all the members of the JMCS for making this a memorable meet and also for ordering the good weather!



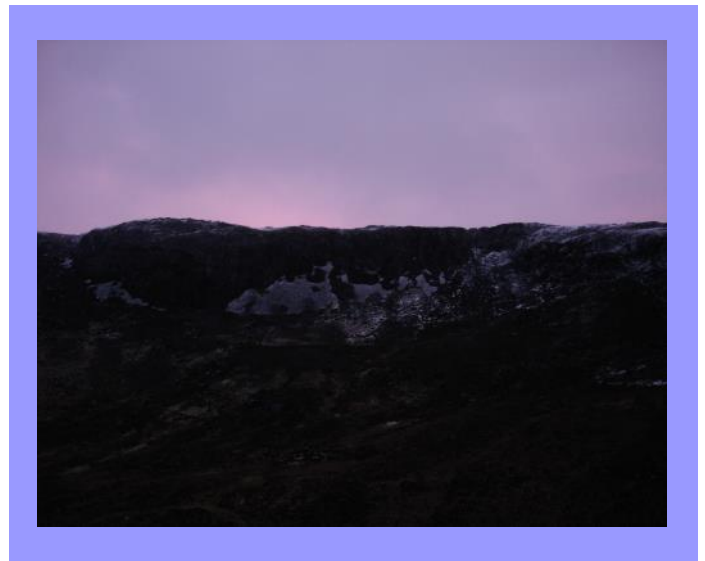
An Teallach

Written by Dan Bennett

An Teallach 1 – Dan & Simon 0

After having arrived at 2100 on the Thursday weary from the road after a reasonably easy (and actually quite short in comparison with the London contingent) 9.5 hour drive we were welcomed by a fine selection of superb curries and table wine, provided by the good Mr, Hughes. A few glasses of wine later and we both turned in as it was a 0500 leave the following morning. We weren't blessed with the best weather by any stretch this year at Elphin, but if there was a day to attempt an epic it was the Friday. Lunch was prepped, bags were packed and we retired. What felt like half an hour later the alarm went off and we were up, we did the 50 minute drive to the layby near Corrie Halle and jumped out the car both full of vigour and bravado!

We pulled the tags off our new walking poles and treated it like a dress rehearsal for a long Alps day with planning, kit we took and food we ate, the poles became a bit of running joke across the weekend as they were cheap and kept breaking, (which is the most frustrating thing when you have the pleasantries of a wet Scottish winter coming at you at 90mph, but I digress) For the walk in on the path however the poles were a revelation. We slogged up the Shenavall track and broke off a bit early to the right once we caught glimpse of the south east side of Sail Laith's ridge. Approaching from the east we cut across boggy heather covered terrain and sighed relive when we finally got on the base of the Munro at about 400m. Taking an abrupt turn north the going did not get any easier as it's a really horrible bolder field and given the awful conditions there was not enough good snow to pick a line and keep to it. The wind was awesome in its power. We had experienced a bit of it crossing the heather bog to the base of the ridge but once on the ridge it was something else. Having to keep to the windward side on the west due to what was obviously very loaded slope on the east we were in the brunt of it all the way up (the ends of Simons poles had already started to come off by this point and I thought it was just a faulty pair as mine were fine, it was not until Sunday on Col Bearg when I would realise this smugness was misplaced



and mine were just as bad!). When we got to the top (954m) we were still on time to complete the ridge so after some sustenance and tea we soldiered on. Having donned crampons about 50m before hitting Sail Laith summit we were now faced with an awkward walk over partially covered boulders and bad snow conditions. We dropped 40 or so meters and then back up to the second summit at 960m. On the way up this slope the wind really hammered us with big gusts flinging spindrift and sleet into the air which shot blast the cheeks and exposed flesh, it was just awesome. We couldn't really see much at the top of the next summit but as we were obviously on the highest point, seconded by reference of the altimeter, we took a fresh bearing and headed off again in the direction of Corrag Bhuide and the crux of the expedition. The clouds parted for a second and we saw a col below us and a shallow snowy gully up the next peak so took a bearing as we half expected not to see it again until we were on it! We dropped down into a really nice low lying col that had

some of the best snow we saw over the whole weekend, the wind chill down here had kept the snow hard and a rocky ledge on the east side of the col just before it dropped off meant some of it was gathering, but not dangerously so, as it was quite flat and wide..

The time was now around 1130 and we said if we got to the top of Corrag Bhuidé by mid day that'd give us enough time to tackle the crux/pinnacle section and complete the task in hand. We got to the base of the shallow gully we'd spotted from the adjacent peak and started trudging up it. I had got a second axe out to dagger with but didn't use it as the gradient was deceptively shallow and walked up most of it. I got to the top second, here I met Simon who had already taken the next bearing..

..Now I'd like to think we're not the only two that have fallen victim to the next misfortune; *interpreting the guide book!* "Follow the crest 30m to a terrace (a small path in the summer)" Great, A small path in the summer, indicating its smaller than a normal sized path, thus probably difficult to spot on a summers day!?! What help is that on a winters day, with very limited visibility, and spindrift hitting you in the face at 90mph! It had taken us another hour to get to this point, we'd traversed around the top of a gully and it was obvious the less than average snow conditions were starting to deteriorate further. Due to the objective risks at this point this is where we decided to rope up and set a belay. Simon continued on, dropping down a small section (that might have once been a small path in the summer?!) and up another section (could also have been a small path in the summer!) to try and obtain the ridge proper, which was to our right.



I followed on to have a look and that particular route was not achievable given the conditions so we tracked back down the 'small summer path' and set the belay again. After about an hour of looking and trying to get up to the ridge via several routes we did decide to back track

because even if we had reached the ridge at this point we were concerned that we'd run out of daylight to finish the rest of the ridge. This was backed up by the deteriorating snow condition. Even in the time we'd been at the base of the pinnacle area the



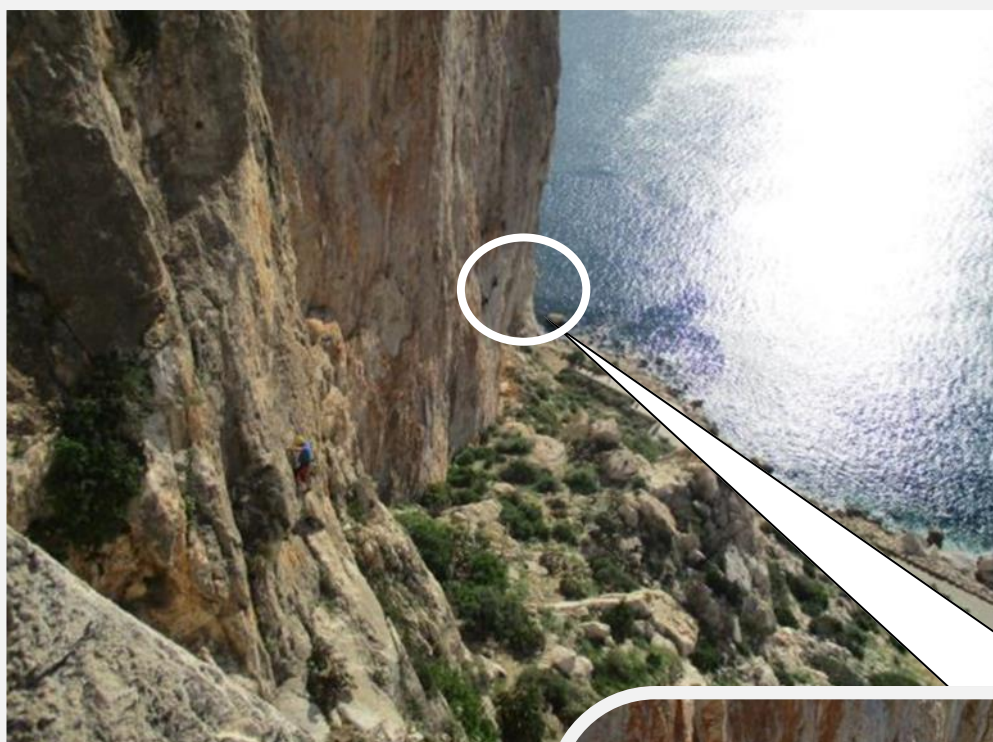
return traverse was getting worse, which was apparent when crossing, snow was now very loose and had retreated quite a way. This was even more obvious by the time we reached the long shallow gully and the wide flat col. The hard snowpack here was now almost gone, exposing the rocks beneath. Slogging our way back up to the 960m peak we did investigate skirting around the west side to save going up and down again. Upon further inspection to the west was a collection of avalanche prone gullies so we pushed on up to 960m then over to Sail Liath. We were now confident we weren't going to get caught out by the deteriorating snow any more as it was just the boulder field on the descent of the Sail Liath ridge ahead. We sat down at 954m donned the primaloft and had some lunch. After a brief bite to eat we set off again, Now easily nearing 1500hrs. On the last patch of snow before the descent we saw the tracks of an arctic hare, its tell tail signs of both front paws being side by side and the two rears almost on top of each other. It was snowing, and spindrift was being blown everywhere so they must have been fresh tracks to not yet be covered. Didn't get to see it though, unfortunately. The descent and walk to the car was tiresome, the visibility had improved though so we had some great views on the way down Sail Liath's. When we got back to the car we were wet, exhausted and probably dehydrated but both had beaming smiles on our faces. We stretched out, wrapped up, drank, ate then drove back to the hut, where the right honourably Mr. Hughes had another sumptuous feast waiting for us. We still had an excellent day on the mountain regardless of not achieving the entirety of what we'd set out to do. We also learned a lot; how quickly conditions underfoot can change, the value of making a plan and sticking to it, and most importantly knowing when to turn back! We will return An Teallch!

Via Gomez-Cano or Can't-o?

Chris Comerie & Marcus Harvey

[Marcus] I'd climbed on the Penon de Ifach once before and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. In preparation for this trip I found myself scouring the guide book again for amenable routes on the more committing eastern end of the South face. The Via Gomez-Cano had always been there but in the past I'd always allowed myself to be put off by the aid pitch, graded F7b+ free or A0/5+ for mere mortals prepared to pull on fixed gear. A few weeks before the trip I emailed Chris to see how he felt about giving it a go, taking the opportunity to suggest he bring his etriers. An item of kit not normally considered essential for bolt clipping trips in the sun! When Chris replied in the affirmative I felt that familiar jolt of excitement as a fanciful idea made one step closer to being a plan.

[Chris] November 5th 10:13, an email from Marcus; "I've been looking at the Costa Blanca guide book and there's a route on the South face of the Penon de Ifach that I'd like to have a go at, it's called Via Gomez- Cano". I immediately reached for the said tome, nestling amongst many guide books a-top one of my creaking office book shelves, thumbing through the pages I spotted the object of his desire, it was graded at 6b (E3) with an aid pitch of A0 or free at 7b+!! My reply read; "It sounds like a bit of an adventure, let's have a look and give it a go".



Two weeks later on 24th November, on the eve of our second day of climbing in the area, we're stood at the base of the intimidating towering 1000ft South face of the Penon de Ifach, craning our necks trying to piece together exactly where the route goes. By many accounts this is a massive mountaineering classic which weaves its way through some incredible rock features. It follows a long sweeping diagonal line through a series of huge caves situated around mid-height of the wall, a lot of the ground is very steep or over-

hanging and for us we felt, the outcome was uncertain. My mental approach was that we could climb it but, we might also fail! There was the added burden of the short winter day, we had to be on the summit by 6pm (nightfall) or risk the possibility of spending the night out. Hanging in a harness inappropriately dressed shivering the night away, was not a particularly inviting prospect which, somewhat added a little spice and urgency to the proceedings.

There are officially nine pitches. It therefore fell to me to begin proceedings by climbing the first pitch, this being in the right chronological order to allow me to be in a position to lead the aid pitch.



This was a dubiously bestowed honour, in part due to my past caving experience of aid climbing, hanging and swinging around like a demented Gibbon on steep holdless rock walls. Before leaving the ground, I studied the topo that Marcus had down-loaded from the internet, there appeared to be an anomaly between this and the RockFax guide?



[Marcus] With 9 hours of daylight at our disposal, we'd budgeted ourselves 8 hours of climbing time from 9am to 5pm on a 9 pitch route with a guidebook time of 7.5 hours. It was going to be tight but, barring mistakes or mishaps, we thought we had a good chance of getting to the top in daylight. As I watched Chris set off up the first pitch at 10am, I admit I was anxious; we'd already eroded our safety margin. Then things got worse. The two topos I was carrying contradicted each other regarding the line of the first pitch.

[Chris] On arrival at the [anomaly] I wrongly chose to follow the topo and forced out right, soon finding myself amongst hard steep ground too difficult for me to continue. After a short retreat back diagonally for several metres, I arrived at the safety of a huge thread belay from where I brought up Marcus for a fresh look.

[Marcus] Understandably, Chris had found my shouted directions confusing, so he elected to take an early belay and bring me up. From below it had been hard to understand the confusion but when I reached Chris it was all too obvious. Fixed gear was evident in various directions but none of it seemed to correspond to the lines expected from the topos. Leading through, I decided to follow the most amenable line up a flake crack that looked like it fitted the Rockfax topo. The juggy crack became a strenuous polished corner but with it came the bolted protection that gave me the confidence that we were on route. With rope to spare, I continued up an awkward naturally protected crack-line finishing with a strenuous pull onto a spacious belay ledge. At last, I felt we were making progress but I didn't dare look at my watch to confirm the time we'd lost.

[Chris] This small mistake had eaten into our valuable time, therefore spurning the pangs of urgency that were gnawing away at us. From the belay the line of the aid pitch was pretty obvious, albeit slightly depressing!! A soaring rightward trending arc, clearly traced by a line of rusty bolts culminating in a fierce looking overhanging groove, reminiscent of a child's dot-to-dot picture. Initially it went free until one is forced to resort to etriers. I found the distance between the bolts increasingly challenging, particularly in the upper groove where I had to employ just about every trick I could muster, by fair means or foul to reach the next clip. This is a pitch for the tall in stature, not for the vertically-challenged!

[Marcus] The topo made it look like most of it was free and aid would only be required on the last few feet where an exit was made into a cave via an overhanging crack. To my dismay, I saw Chris employ the etriers on the steep slab before the crack in the headwall. Time was ticking away and I knew this pitch had the potential to bring the ascent to a crashing halt. I watched with my heart in my mouth as, bolt by bolt, Chris clipped in a set of etriers, gained as much height as he could, I pulled in the rope and he strained to clip the second set of etriers into the next bolt. Just as he was disappearing out of view, to what I thought must be the safety of the belay cave, I heard the discouraging shout "It keeps getting worse!"

[Chris] The final aid move on a Camelot required a ridiculously high step, achieved by a one armed hang whilst leaning right back bringing my left knee right up to my chin, thus enabling me to tentatively thread my toe with my free hand into the top loop of the etrier. A big step in conjunction with an extended stretch enabled my fingers to curl over a decent hold which, I hoped would be the penultimate final move.

Having to maintain momentum in an attempt to avoid running out of steam, I urgently pressed on with further bridging and (thank god) good holds which led me to the sanctuary of the belay. When Marcus joined me I think we both felt that the despatching of this pitch was the key to the climb, opening up the remainder of the route. However there was still a long way to go and the outcome was by no means certain.

[Marcus] When it came to my turn, I quickly realised that without Chris' herculean efforts on this pitch, we would certainly have been forced to descend for any early bath with barely 150ft of climbing to show for ourselves. When I arrived at the belay I took a moment to gaze up in awe at the roof of the enormous cave we had entered and then, finally, I checked my watch. It was 1pm; we'd taken an average of an hour per pitch. At that rate we'd be reaching the summit at 7pm, over an hour after sunset.

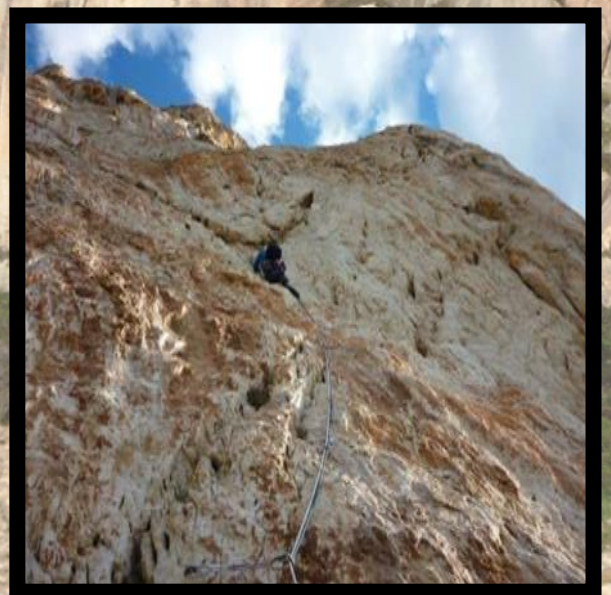


[Chris] The following three or four pitches of easier leftward trending climbing, passed around the periphery of some impressive cavernous honey-combed caves. Continuing to swing the leading between us, I eventually arrived at a belay to the left of a deep chimney. I was somewhat uncertain of our exact position; our meandering journey to this point had passed over various banks of loose stone and grit, bearing no sign of any previous passage. Marcus joined me and a discussion ensued about exactly where we might be on the wall?

[Marcus] I knew the next three pitches were technically straight-forward, so this was our opportunity to make up time by climbing quickly but being careful not to stray off line. Pitch 4 took us to the top left corner of the huge cave and, via an exposed move around a rib, into an adjacent cave. Pitches 5 and 6 continued the leftwards line to bring us out from beneath the cave roofs onto a wall beneath a steep crack and, higher up, a gaping black chimney.

[Chris] He eventually considered that the route into the depths of the chimney was correct and quickly disappeared within the bowels of the cliff, swollen whole by the gapping vertical gash. I did not see him again for some time, then I felt the familiar subtle twitching and pulling of the rope, synonymous with the reaching of a belay, he had made safe.

Chris took the lead for pitch 7, as he toiled away, I acknowledged the waves from fellow climbers belayed in a shady, secure looking, cave across a steep wall to my left. This pitch was more awkward than it looked, with a nasty move out of an open groove into a steep crack, requiring a high step with the right foot onto a polished foothold with very few handholds for security. After a few grunts I reached Chris and, looking up, my heart sank.





[Marcus] The guidebook description for pitch 8 couldn't have been clearer, "squirm up the chimney... until you are forced right". I could see a line of shiny bolts beckoning me to slabby ground on the left, but no sign of fixed gear in the direction we were supposed to go. The overhanging chimney itself looked off-width and we certainly hadn't brought cams large enough to bridge that gap, it also hadn't escaped my notice that this was supposed to be one of the crux pitches. Chris probably detected my ebbing confidence and suggested the attractive bolt line could be an option, but who knew where this would eventually lead? I decided to follow the topo and head for the chimney. After a few careful moves I peered into the deep cleft. Yes! I spotted a loop of tat, evidence of previ-

ous passage. I squeezed myself into the chimney's jaws and, reaching up to clip the tat, my heart sank again; it was attached to a decades old wooden wedge! However, as my eyes began to adjust to the light starved innards of the chimney, I saw that it was filled with subsidiary cracks that would accept all manner of natural protection. A couple of placements later, I was motoring up as fast as my wedged rucksack would let me. The escape out to the right required some athletic moves but I was rewarded with a spacious belay on a slab beneath the final pitch.

[Chris] Within the confines of the gloomy gash there was only just sufficient room to make any upward progress, to enter however, was very tight, subsequently my rucksack became jammed and I could no longer progress upwards or otherwise. It transpired that my approach shoes in the bottom of my sack had become jammed across the narrow opening, requiring a considerable squirming effort to affect a release. The climbing progressively became harder as one climbed higher, culminating in a series of hard moves to access an outward sloping belay ledge. I felt exhausted by the shenanigans of the route thus far, the aiding of pitch 3 had particularly sapped the strength from my ageing frame, Marcus therefore magnanimously agreed to relieve me of my lead and began what we hoped would be the final pitch to the summit. Following yet more hard and in part strenuous climbing, this did indeed prove the case.

[Marcus] We didn't need to check our watches now, the south facing rock was aglow with an eerie orange light; no time to loose! Chris quickly arrived at the belay and we agreed that I should lead on. After a brief false start, I followed a groove that led to a polished corner and a bulge near the top that appeared to block further progress. At the bulge I noticed some underclings leading away from the corner to the right, these enabled enough height to be gained to make a long reach to average holds and a peg above the bulge. As my strength sapped away I had a stark choice, do I clip the peg and risk running out of strength as I make the move or make the move straightaway and deal with the protection after the fact? I clipped the peg and felt my fingers uncurl from the holds above. "Tight rope!" I shouted and relaxed to let my arms recover. As I surveyed the scene I noticed a bridging foothold out on the left wall of the corner, I think this was the moment when I finally believed we would make the top. With fresh arms and some bridging moves, I overcame the bulge to find myself in another steep corner. After consulting the topo I realised that it was now possible to make a devious escape left to the final belay. I clipped in and shouted that I was safe as I felt a heady rush of satisfaction sweep over me. Now I could enjoy the stunning view of the sea below and the mountains inland, this was the feeling that made it worthwhile.

Within minutes the sun was setting and Chris had joined me, we jabbered excitedly whilst we coiled the ropes and prepared for the walk off. Now, under the cover of darkness, I could unpack the footwear that I'd specially chosen to keep my rucksack weight to a minimum; a pair of my girlfriend's sandals.

[Chris] On approaching him during my final weary moves he exclaimed through an unfeasibly large smile, "I think we're going to live"