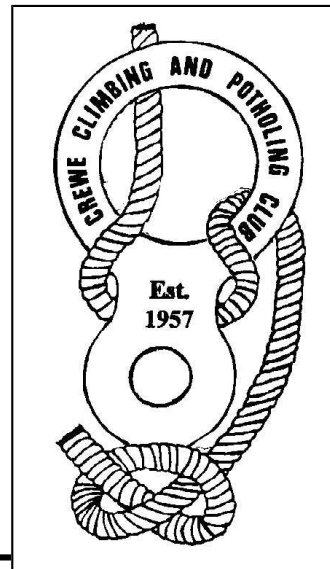


C.C.P.C.

Newsletter 94.

Autumn 2008

Log on to www.ccpc.org.uk



This issue is full of activities other than caving, there has been a tendency in recent years to cave for most of the year then, rather than run a caving trip abroad members have gone UP something rather than down. As a rule we don't publish reports on club trips unless something unusual happens or it's a trip we don't normally do. Just to prove we do go underground sometimes there follows a summary of what we've been up to during September – and bear in mind many of us were abroad for the first week or so!

Out and About: Recent CCPC Activities

Someone recently asked me if CCPC is an active club !!

Perhaps a brief note about what Members are up to would help to show the kind of things available for individuals to get involved in. Anyone can add to this, just by sending items to be included in this section in the next newsletter.

There is a lot happening out there !!

Monday, 1st September 2008: CCPC Meeting at 'The Bleeding Wolf', Scholar Green.

Saturday, 13th September 2008: DCRO Training Exercise at JH Mine, Derbyshire.

A number of CCPC Members were involved in a DCRO exercise based at Rowter Farm and the shaft entrance to JH Mine, involving dealing with an underground rescue scenario, communications, and big shaft hauling techniques. The multipod was set up, and used for hauling team members to the surface.

Sunday 14th September 2008 Work on Minera Mine, N Wales was completed.

Monday, 15th September 2008: Peak Cavern, Derbyshire.

a.m.: Two CCPC Members were involved in a short filming trip in the entrance series.

Monday, 15th September 2008: DCRO Call Out.

p.m.: Three CCPC Members were among the first to arrive at an incident involving a calf which had fallen down a mineshaft. Other CCPC Members arrived later. The shaft had been filled, and covered over, more than thirty years previously, and was unknown to the farmer. Recent subsidence had left a thin layer of turf over a deep void, and the calf had broken through this. The incident lasted for nine hours, and eventually the calf was humanely destroyed as it was severely injured and could not be recovered.

Saturday, 20th September 2008: Out Slets Beck Pot, Penyghent, Yorkshire.

Ten CCPC Members undertook a descent of this Grade III system in the Penyghent Gill area. The pitches were all descended, but the final stretch of passage could not be reached as the duck at the end of the canal was sumped.

Saturday, 27th September 2008: DCRO Fund Raising, at Bakewell.

a.m.: Several CCPC Members turned out to 'shake tins' at the public in support of DCRO.

Saturday, 27th September 2008: Speedwell Mine and Caverns, Castleton.

p.m.: Several CCPC Members assisted Speedwell Mine management, by carrying out an investigation of the failed pump at 'The Bung' in Far Canal.

Sunday, 28th September 2008: Cwmorthin, Oakley and Gloddfa Ganol Slate Mine Complex, near Ffestiniog, North Wales.

Ten CCPC Members explored 'the round trip' route, with many extras, through this vast complex of passages and huge voids. This place has to be experienced to be believed, and any attempt at a simple route description is doomed to failure. We were able to explore parts of Level H (there are well over twenty levels) which is usually more than twenty metres below the normal water level at the accessible 'bottom' limit of the mine, due to current pumping operations in a nearby complex. Some Members described it as 'like being on the Titanic at the bottom of the Atlantic', as every piece of metalwork was coated with rust which crumbled at a touch. Very strange. An excellent five hour trip.

Monday, 29th September 2008: Speedwell Mine and Caverns, Castleton.

Three CCPC Members assisted the management of Speedwell Mine by removing the failed pump from 'The Bung' in Far Canal. At the same time, another CCPC Member replaced one of the fixed ropes in Block Hall.

Needless to say Len & co. have been very busy in "you know where" twice a week and I'm told a breakthrough is "imminent"

Brian and Jim's dig on Stanley Moor Buxton continues and again the current situation there looks promising.

NCC shafts (Peak Cavern) will shortly be bolted- help will probably be required

The trip that (almost) never was!!

Late 2007 around a dozen of us decided to visit Ecuador to climb amongst other things a volcano that goes by the name of Chimborazo which, at 6310m (about 20,800' in old money!) is the highest point on the earth's surface if measured from the centre of the earth due to the equatorial bulge.

Our plans were well under way when we received bad news- Tungurahua a nearby volcano had erupted showering Chimborazo with ash causing the snow to melt and refreeze as ice resulting in all trips being banned by the authorities.

Fortunately Matt Ryan one of our members, who most of you will remember, lives in China now runs a trekking company that goes by the name of Dragon Expeditions. A quick e mail and we were back in action with the promise of an unclimbed peak being our target. Cost of flights appeared to increase on a daily basis so flights were booked and preparations began in earnest. This turned out not to be one of my better decisions.

A couple of weeks later world-wide demonstrations against the Chinese presence in Tibet began and these were particularly violent in the region close to “our” proposed mountain. Fortunately things settled down but were rapidly followed by the earthquake in Sichuan Province (Matt lives in Chengdu).

Despite assurances from Matt that all was well the Foreign Office advised against travel which meant that our insurers would not provide cover (nor a refund OR compensation- but that’s another story!).

With weeks to go we postponed our China trip and decided to head for Ailefroide in the Ecrin (French Alps). Training began

My son Mark and I decided to drive down arriving on Sun 24 August, we found Sharon and Mark L’s tent on the camp site- they were on a high-level walk down the valley. Following an evening over a bottle (actually a 5l carton) of best French red wine we had an early night.

Up bright and early we set off for a high level walk (2500m+) to Lac Puy Alliard.. Early evening saw the arrival of Keith J and the entire Brentnall clan (minus Scruff the dog). Plans for the following day were finalized over a few beers and the remains of the 5l carton!

Tues am began with a short drive up the valley to Refuge Cezanne via a stretch of road that only a month previously had been buried by several metres of rock-avalanche debris. Our target was the Glacier Noir at around 2800 although this was abandoned at around 2500 due to poor conditions. Mark and I turned back early (age and infirmity!) and I had my first taste of hitch-hiking for many years in order to retrieve our car to collect Mark and our gear. That evening Darren and Paul arrived.

Wed we climbed to Colet du Rascrouset at 2799 with the majority finishing off with a quickie to the summit of Pointe de Rascrouset 3082. It was a long hard day with over 1500m of ascent and descent, particularly for D&P who had only arrived the previous evening and had not had chance to acclimatise.

Thursday was a “rest-day” but we did manage to fit in some climbing and a via ferrata.

Friday saw all but Paul, who had a knee problem, heading up to the refuge at the foot of the Glacier Blanc, a pleasant trip despite the heat and climb of about 600m.

Saturday saw Alan, Alison and Martin unsuccessfully attempt Montagne des Agneaux (stone fall and time being the reason), Darren, Keith, Sharon and the two Marks summited Roche Faurio (3730m) while I staggered back to Ailefroide with an ankle injury caused while climbing the previous day and aggravated by my winter boots. That night Alan Alison and Martin arrived back in camp.

Sunday was a leisurely day spent watching the finish of a series of races on “skis with wheels” (bit like elongated roller skates), taking in the sun, sinking a beer or two and awaiting the return of those still on the mountain.

Monday, climbing and via ferrata again.

Tuesday saw Keith returning to the UK as his mother had suffered a fall. The rest of us decamped to La Grave as the weather was forecast to deteriorate but many of climbed or VF on route.

Wednesday saw Mark and I cross the Glacier de la Girose to climb the Dome de la Lauze (3568) while Alan led the others on an attempt to reach Breche de la Meije. That night the heavens opened. Sharon

and Mark L held the record with about 2" of water in their tent. Paul and Darren slept in their tent (it hadn't flooded) Mark J in the back of his estate and the rest of us in a sports-barn, with one wall- but it did have a roof.

Thursday was no better so Mark and I set off north while the others visited the Coranche show cave (a stunning place if you get the opportunity). The weather failed to improve, the Brentnalls moved on to Chamonix with the remainder gradually drifted back to the UK by various means. Not quite Ecuador but considerably better than sitting in the UK watching daytime tele!
Ralph J.

Six Easy Days in the Alps : August 2008

With everyone else (or so it seemed at one time) planning to head for South America, Paul Nixon and I decided to have a slightly cheaper, and shorter, break in the French Alps. As things turned out, volcanic eruptions turned the South America trip into a Chinese adventure, and then a massive earthquake wrecked the Chinese plans so other CCPC Members also ended up in the Alps, although we never saw them.

Thursday, 21 August:

After the usual 4.00 am. start, morning ferry, and endless drive through France, we were camped at Le Verney site, below the Bossons Glacier on the outskirts of Chamonix by 8.15 pm.. Still daylight !

Friday, 22 August:

Just an easy day, we decided, so sorted out gear for playing on the ice, and headed for the Bossons Glacier. We should have known better ! A British couple camping nearby had already told us that the local guides were not using the Bossons with clients this year, as it was dangerously unstable, and there was no easy access.

We took the lazy way up, riding the little 'Telesiege' (chair-lift), to the Chalet du Glacier, where we sat drinking coffee on the terrace, and noted the complete absence of anyone on, or near, the glacier. In previous years there have been dozens of little figures dotted about, being taught axe and crampon technique, or dangling in modest crevasses. Anyway, having made the effort (sort of) to reach the Chalet, we wandered up to the viewing point at the end of the tourist path, climbed over the fence and discovered that the climbers' path to the glacier was gone. A considerable landslip had taken a whole chunk out of the hillside. Ever resourceful, we smugly scrambled up through vertical vegetation, over the top of the break, and back to the remains of the old path beyond, much to the horror of watching tourists. Unfortunately, only ten metres round the corner (but luckily out of site of the tourists), the next massive section of the cliff had gone, so we sat in the sun, ate our lunch, and wondered when the bit we were sitting on would join the other debris, far below. Eventually (the original tourists having gone) we retreated, climbing confidently back onto the pathway as if we had just conquered Mont Blanc.

Back past the Chalet, we followed the brink of the massive glacial trench down through the forest, until we were able to slither down the rubble slope to the outflow stream, far below the snout of the glacier. A long plod back uphill, over unstable moraine slopes covering dirty ice, eventually brought us to the lowest extremity of the exposed glacier. Our plans to go romping about had been scrapped some time before, with the first close-up rumblings and visible collapses of rotten seracs (ice towers). There was plenty of mobile rubble around too, which made the whole place just a little intimidating.

After a few pictures we headed off, up the rock slopes to the left, to where young trees were beginning to get established on the scree, and there we picked up a faint path back across to the forest edge where we dropped to a viewing point at the end of a tourist path. A brief stop for more coffee, sitting outside the Chalet de Cerro, in pouring rain (almost directly opposite the Chalet we had used in the morning), and we were on our way down through the forest and back to Les Bossons. We had only climbed

(unaided) about 400 metres altogether, but descended about 800 metres ! - and still time for shopping in Chamonix.

Saturday, 23 August:

Heavy rain all night, and loud rumblings from the glacier above the site.

With low cloud and drizzle in the valley, we decided on an easy day, walking at high level on the Aiguilles Rouges.

We took the Telepherique de la Flegere (cable-car) to 1877 metres, then the Telesiege de l'Index (chairlift) up to 2385 metres, then wandered across the steep slopes, with small, isolated, snow-fields, below the Aiguille de la Flora. Visibility was poor at first, but improved as the cloud base gradually lifted, and we even saw five Chamois, close enough to photograph. Eventually, at the east side of the Combe des Aiguilles Crochues, we dropped to the tourist path to Lac Blanc, and followed it to the rocky spur beside the Lac Blanc Chalet, where we had our lunch overlooking the whole of the Mont Blanc range and the associated glaciers. Alpine Choughs took cheese and crackers from our fingers – amazing. We followed the direct trail down to Flegere cable-car station, and crushed in with everyone else for a rapid descent back to Chamonix. Only about 250 metres climbed, according to the map, but it seemed more !

Sunday, 24 August:

After a much better night, we awoke to a beautiful day. Our sacs were already packed and ready for a day on the Petite Aiguille Verte, and we had a quick breakfast and set off up the valley to the Telepherique de Lognan et des Grands Montets, near Argentiere.

There was considerable helicopter activity in the valley, and we later discovered that this was due to a huge serac collapse, in the early hours of the morning, which had wiped out the main path high on Mont Blanc du Tacul, injuring seven climbers, and totally burying eight others. The bodies of the buried climbers would not be recovered for a considerable time (perhaps years), until revealed by melting ice.

Paul and I rode the cabin lifts up to the summit station on the Aiguille des Grands Montets, at 3295 metres, then dumped our sacs and plodded up the flights of stairs to the very top terrace, feeling just a little wobbly for a while. Photos taken, we dropped down to the snowy saddle below the station and kitted up, leaving one sac with food and foul weather gear in the rocks.

This must be the shortest, easiest, and most accessible little alpine ascent in the valley, but even so it is good fun.

The initial slope was smooth snow, still in shadow, and consequently quite firm and crisp, but at a fairly steep angle, and with a dramatic run out of well over a thousand feet on either side, if you got into an uncontrolled slide, and didn't manage to stop on the narrow col ! We were moving roped together, but that probably meant that if one slipped, then we both would ! After a few zig-zags, we angled across right to reach the first of the rocky pinnacles on the ridge. There were several pairs just ahead of us, and a few more up on the further towers above, with at least three groups plodding up below. This was going to be interesting ! Despite the crowds, we made reasonable progress, passing some obstacles on the right, and scrambling over and around others, until we were held up at the end of a very short snowy ridge between two outcrops. A very unhappy British girl was belayed at the end with her rope disappearing up around the corner of the rocks beyond, while a French guide bulldozed his way down past her, dragging his two white-faced clients behind. As we waited for the jam to clear, another French guide with two clients pushed past us, and practically climbed over the British girl and out of site. Some loud shouting followed as her partner tried to disentangle his rope and get down to her. I traversed out far enough to see what was going on, and above the Brit I could see yet another guide lowering his three clients down a rock step (only a couple of metres). It was bedlam !

Paul and I decided that under the circumstances five metres below the top was near enough for us (we've done it before), and we started down, supporting the two Brits as required, as the girl was more than just a little unhappy.

Back on the Col we retrieved our gear and had lunch in the sun, enjoying the spectacular view. Above us the tangle of ropes on the ridge seemed worse than ever, with only a couple of teams plodding down.

After lunch, we roped up and descended the steep slope to the east of the Col, dropping onto the glacier des Rognons. We had seen several parties descending that way earlier in the day, and there was a clear track in the snow. Last time I went that way, almost ten years ago, I descended directly to the Glacier D'Argentiere, about 750 metres below, passing south of a huge rock spur over half way down, but this time the trail curved away to the north side of the spur. The direct descent route was pristine and unmarked, with an area of possible crevasses visible below, so we followed everyone else's tracks, which quickly led out onto the top of a convex slope of hard, uneven ice. Although we were just a little uneasy, plenty of Crampon scratches led onwards, across and down. After dropping a few hundred metres, two figures became visible on the ice-sheet below, looking up at us. At first I thought the lead guy was waving his arm to show us which way we should go, but then he waved the other arm, then both together, and it was clear he was asking us which way he should go !! The tracks had vanished by this time, so we just keep going down, following the other pair, until we joined them at the edge of a rock band, still a very long way above the main glacier.

Paul completed his descent with a very fine double somersault with twist, on the very last couple of metres of the ice. Just showing off really.

There was a lot of awkward route finding, over the rocky slabs, all well smoothed by glacial action, and then top-dressed with masses of unstable scree and boulders, but we eventually reached a small prominence with a cairn, and then picked up a faint path down. Our path joined the main tourist path coming up from La Croix de Lognan Telepherique station to the glacier viewpoint, and we followed it down to catch the penultimate cabin of the day, back to the valley. Another easy day over; only 275 metres climbed, but 1550 metres descended.

Monday, 25 August:

After so little effort in the previous days we thought we needed a rest day, so we decided to take a gentle stroll up to Refuge de Bel Lachat, the site of a tiny light, just visible at night on the crest of the ridge, directly north of our camp site.

We parked just below the entrance to Merlet animal park, opposite the village of Les Houches, and set off up the steep link path to the GR5 – E2 (Tour du Mont Blanc) path. The forest was beautiful, but seemed to be more vertical than we had anticipated (I didn't realise those were jammed together contour lines on the map, I thought it had just been nicely coloured in !!). We went up for a long time, meeting a few French parties coming down at speed, and being passed by two English girls, going up, also at speed. They promised to see us later at the Refuge for tea, but must have got tired of waiting. We did eventually get there (2136 metres), having conquered the final endless zig-zags, and we sat on the terrace, drank coffee, and looked down at our campsite 1100 metres below.

We lunched on the slopes above, then sauntered up to the summit of Tete de Bel Lachat (2276 metres), and went on along the GR5 path towards Le Brevent. We got some good close-up photographs of mountain goats (sheep ?) on the rocks above the Refuge, and heard plenty of Marmottes calling, but didn't spot any. I left Paul watching the wildlife, and went on to Le Brevent summit at 2525 metres, which looked closer than it turned out to be. The Telepherique station there is closed for 2008 as they are reconstructing the half-way station at Planpraz, and everything looked very grey and miserable, as a band of rain swept across from the west. I rejoined Paul and we headed back to the Refuge, for more coffee before our long descent.

Definitely an easy day, with 826 metres climbed to the Tete de Bel Lachat, then another 300 metres climbed on the way up to Le Brevent, making 1126 metres altogether (Snowdon is 1085 metres – from sea level !!).

Tuesday, 26 August:

Another light day planned. We used the two lifts up from Le Tour, at the head of the valley, to reach the high ground close to Col de Balme at 2190 metres, then followed the easy contouring path southwards. Height was gradually gained, and the path turned east around a spur of rock to give the

first views of the Glacier du Tour, with the Albert Premier hut (our destination) visible at the top of a steep moraine slope, some distance ahead. Our route crossed a slope of scree and small boulders to join the moraine at 2484 metres, and then it was just a steady plod up to the hut at 2702 metres. Plenty of others had made the same journey, and the terrace was crowded, but we enjoyed coffees there before moving on up the rock slopes behind the hut to find a quiet spot for lunch. Our view was fantastic, taking in the whole of the upper Tour Glacier, and the surrounding peaks. The weather was perfect, and we watched a number of groups descending from the Aiguille Du Tour, and from the high Cols leading over to the Plateau du Trient. Having wandered up as far as the end of the rock band, we reluctantly turned back to the hut for a last coffee before descending. An easy walk back brought us to the cable lifts with thirty minutes to spare before they closed, despite being delayed chatting to the two English girls from the previous day.

Wednesday, 27 August:

Our last day, so nothing too taxing. With kit packed the night before, and an early breakfast, we were the first two customers in the queue for the first train of the day from Chamonix to Montanvers. At the terminus we let the other climbers set off first, then followed their route down onto the Mer De Glace glacier. The path was easy for a short distance, then ended abruptly at the top of a series of enormous slabs fitted with steel ladders and traverses, which led down to the ice. We were soon kitted up, and as the weather was fantastic we dumped one sac in the rocks, with our extra foul weather gear, and just took the essentials as we wandered off up the glacier. Although we carried a rope, we didn't even rope-up, as the glacier was completely bare of snow, and the hazards were obvious. Several groups nearby were being instructed in crevasse rescue techniques. We had some fun route-finding, in and out of the shallow crevasses, and enjoyed using axes and crampons on short ice walls, then, once clear of the fractured zone, we set off up the glacier to the junction where the Mer De Glace is formed by the combination of the Glacier du Tacul and the Glacier de Leschaux. Eventually, having gained height steadily, we stopped for lunch, on the rocks below the Refuge d'Envers des Aiguilles, and just sat in the sun enjoying the spectacular location. We could pick out a few tiny figures, far off, heading for the Refuge du Couvercle, but that was all. It was amazing.

An hour and a half later, we were back at the foot of the ladders, then we left peace behind and climbed up into the madness of Montanvers in the afternoon !! The place was heaving with tourists, and we had to force our way through the crush to get near the front on the platform in order to stand any chance of getting on the next train. Big sacs and ice axes did the trick, and we rattled gently down to Chamonix and the camp site.

A quick shower, camp packed up, and by 3.15 pm. we were on the way home. I actually crawled into bed in Alsager at 6.00 am. Thursday morning, ready for another easy day.

Colin S. Knox. 4th September 2008

Chamonix and Zermatt – August 2008.

Yet another exploit in The Alps!

After several months of talking about possible routes, climbs and mountains we wanted to 'bag', August finally came and Derek (Nottingham), Angela (Dundee) and myself (Kendal - CCPC), set off to the Alps in Derek's campervan. We had a rough plan of what we wanted to do and where we needed to be, but as always the weather and the availability of the refuges had an impact on our plans. We were joined by Ade Pedley (Manchester - CCPC) and Paul Tucker (Blwch - South Wales) during the second week. Below is my diary from our trip, enjoy:

Friday 15th: Arrival in Chamonix at Des Barrets Campsite.

Saturday 16th: Lift to the Aiguille Du Midi Station and 5k Glacier walk on the La Vallee Blanche and Glacier Du Geant to the Torino refuge, crossing over into Italy. The Torino refuge is of a good standard with stunning views of the Courmayeur valley below.

(Grade – F)

Sunday 17th: Dent Du Geant – Summit Height 4013m.

3am start from the Torino refuge crossing the Col du Geant and Col du Rochefort. Turned back at La Salle a Manger, due to bad weather 200m from the summit (4013m) The Rochefort was heavily corniced from snow fall, two days prior. (Grade – AD-)

Monday 18th: La Tour Ronde – Summit Height 3792m.

Another 3am Start from the Torino refuge. Gained access to the ridge at Col d Entreves. Returned back to the Torino refuge and Helbronner Station to collect gear. Cable Car from Helbronner Station to Aiguille Du Midi Station in France. Returned to the campsite in Chamonix. (Grade – PD +)

Tuesday 19th: Mont Blanc Du Tacul, NW Face – Summit Height 4248m.

First lift from Chamonix to the Aiguille Du Midi Station (3842m). On the route we discussed the potential for the Seracs and Avalanches to pose a serious threat to this route. It was on this route that eight climbers (four Germans, three Swiss and an Austrian) were killed days later, by a falling serac!.

(Grade – PD +)

Wednesday 20th: Day of rest in Chamonix - replacing lost fluids!!

Our original plan was to climb Mont Blanc later on that week via the Three Monts route, (Mont Blanc Du Tacul, Mont Maudit & Mont Blanc). After speaking to several people on their failed attempts of the Three Monts route and viewing the heavily corniced ridge on Mont Maudit for ourselves we decided this was out of the question and booked into the Gouter refuge for a possible ascent of Mont Blanc via the Les Bosses Ridge.

Thursday 21st: Day of rest in Chamonix and Les Houches - again, replacing lost fluids!!

(Ade Pedley and Paul Tucker fly out to meet us in Chamonix)

Friday 22nd: Derek, Angela and myself leave Chamonix at 6am for our ascent of Blanc Mont - Summit Height 4810m.

Using a combination of the Bellevue cable car in Les Houches and the Mont Blanc tramway to gain height to the terminal station at Le Nid D Aigle (2372m) we began our ascent to the Gouter refuge (3817m).

The route involves a sufficiently steep scramble which includes the crossing of the infamous Grand Couloir. In crossing the base Grand Couloir there is a serious danger of rockfall from the thaw of lying snow or rocks dislodged from parties climbing some 2,000ft above. We began the 100m walk / run across the base of the Grand Couloir keeping one eye on the slopes and crags above for any rockfall. It was at this point we heard shouting from above and to our horror watched several large rocks (football size) and a body fall / roll / bounce 1,500ft down the Couloir. We quickly retreated back to the safety of the side walls of the Couloir and took shelter behind a buttress. The rocks passed first, continuing down the Couloir to the Glacier de Bionnassay 1,000ft below and the body landed five meters from the three of us. Our immediate reaction was to run out to help the body but common sense quickly took hold, when we realised that rocks were continuing to fall. We waited with the body for 30mins until the rescue services / helicopter arrived, where the winch-man clipped into the harness of the body and very quickly removed him from the Couloir in an undignified yet professional manner. The body was in an horrific state from the 1,500ft fall, Derek guessed his age to be in his twenties, I thought more like late forties, but due to his injuries we couldn't tell for sure. The body was wearing a harness (but

not roped up) and there was no evidence of a helmet or use of crampons, however these could have been removed / ripped off on his fall. Witnessing this had a deep impact on all of us for the rest of our time in the Alps, even Angela who works in the intensive care department in Dundee Hospital. We continued the climb to the Gouter refuge some 2,000ft above, crossing the Grand Couloir and continuing, very slowly and nervously, on the remainder of the climb and fixed lines in high wind and poor conditions, looking for signs and evidence as to where the man had fallen from, some time earlier.

Due to the bad conditions forecast, we arrived at the Gouter refuge (3817m) to find it almost empty with only 25 people using the facilities (normal numbers are 140 +). The forecast for the Saturday was not good and because of this we booked into the refuge on the Saturday night as well for a possible ascent on the Sunday instead.

Saturday 23rd: Mont Blanc – Summit Height 4810m Via Les Bosses ridge.

We woke to find perfect conditions and made the decision to make the most of this. After an up-to-date weather report from Ade Pedley in the valley we made a slightly later than planned start for Mont Blanc. With daylight on our side the navigation was not the serious proposition it could be in the dark and we quickly found ourselves at the Cold du Dome (4250m) and viewing Mont Blanc and the Bosses ridge in its full magnificence. The final climb up the shapely Bosses Ridge has wonderful and exposed views on either side. The greatest achievement for me was that we hadn't been put off by the weather reports and because of this we had the whole mountain to ourselves, apart from a French group of four, some 500 meters ahead on the ridge. Later on we saw the French group turn back on the ridge, some 350 meters from the summit, this was a concern as at the time we didn't know why, it was only on their descent that we found out that three of the group were not acclimatised and were suffering from the effects of altitude. One of the French group asked if he could join the three of us for the final ascent to the summit, so the three of us became four and after tying him on to our rope we continued for the summit. The summit came with solitude, great enjoyment and great views of the rest of the Alps and the cloud in the valleys below. Wind speed was approximately 25-30 MPH. (Grade – PD +).

Sunday 24th: Descend from the Gouter refuge (3817m) to Le Nid D Aigle (2372m)

We cautiously descended the Grand Couloir retracing our steps from the Friday to the Le Nid D Aigle station (2372m). Using the Mont Blanc tramway and the Bellevue cable car, we arrived back in Les Houches for a celebratory drink.

Monday 25th: Day of rest in Chamonix - replacing lost fluids and celebrating!!

Tuesday 26th: Angela fights home to Edinburgh from Geneva.

Leave Chamonix - Derek and myself take Angela to Geneva airport and continue our journey to Tasch in Switzerland (Zermatt's carpark!). Ade Pedley and Paul Tucker arrive later after driving direct from Chamonix.

Wednesday 27th: From Tasch to the Hornli Refuge (3260m) – Lower slopes of the Matterhorn.

After an early start from the Tasch campsite Paul, Derek, Ade and myself caught the train to Zermatt. We walked through the town centre to the far end to take the Schwarsee cable car where we began the 780 metre ascent to the Hornli Hut (3260m). After checking-in at the refuge and leaving our gear, the four of us climbed (soloed) the first 250 metres of the Matterhorn as a prior reconnoitre in daylight to help with navigation in the dark. (Grade – AD- III).

Thursday 28th: Matterhorn - Summit Height 4478m. Via the Hornli Ridge.

At 3am the next morning the four of us spoke over breakfast (mars bar and bottle of water) and Paul and Derek decided not to attempt the climb, after having a bad night's sleep and problems with Paul's lungs / breathing. Leaving the Hornli refuge (3260m) Ade and myself began our ascent one hour ahead of the guides and their clients, who were due to set off at 4am. We successfully retraced our steps in the dark from our previous reconnoitre but as soon as we passed the point we had reached the day before we found ourselves 'off piste' and on poor quality rock. Eventually the main bunch of guides and clients passed us and we followed their line trying to keep up! The Hornli Ridge is a climb on enormous dimensions. The lower half of the climb lacks technical interest but is tilted at an exposed angle and follows an intricate line, making several loops out on to the East Face. We reached the exposed summit slopes several hours later with perfect weather conditions and very little wind. First we reached the Swiss summit and then we traversed the extremely exposed and delicate summit ridge to the Italian summit and cross. After a few photos we began the descent which is mentally and physically more taxing than the ascent and by the time we reached the Hornli refuge we were both mentally and physically knackered!. Paul and Derek descended from the Hornli refuge (3260m) to Zermatt at 4am that morning only to remember that Ade had Paul's car keys!.

(Grade – AD- III)

Friday 28th: Hornli Refuge (3260m) to Zermatt and Tasch.

After a leisurely 9am start and breakfast, Ade and myself descended from the Hornli refuge (3260m) to Zermatt, entering the first café we came across for a drink and food. The rest of the day Ade and myself sunbathed and drank beer at the campsite, while Derek and Paul climbed a few routes on a local crag in Tasch.

Saturday 29th: Tasch - UK

After a heavy night out in Zermatt we set off back to the UK at 11:00am, extremely hung-over. We arrived back in the UK (Dover) at 2am on the Sunday.

All in all my most enjoyable and successful trip to the Alps, achieving summits that have been on my 'to do' list for a number of years and look forward to returning sometime with the possibility of conquering Monte Rosa (2nd highest in the Alps), after our failed attempts a few years ago.

August 2008

Gareth Williams

Report From Natalie on her Op Raleigh trip.

On 6th February I went to Sabah Borneo for a month with Raleigh International to work on their environmental projects in the rainforest. My main reason for choosing that location was the opportunity to climb Mt Kinabalu – however when we got there we were greeted with the news that they no longer offer that trek – gutted! We drove past it, but that was as close as we got.

After a week of team building and health and safety etc we were allocated project sites – Danum Valley Conservation Area for me and the rest of Alpha 4 (15 of us) – what a stunning place! How lucky am I getting to spend 4 weeks in the tallest, most pristine primary rainforest in the world?! The work we did in Danum revolved around helping with the rehabilitation of logged forest in the area. Our main project was the construction of an Orchid trail. Working alongside rangers from the Danum Valley Field Centre (DVFC) we also re-built rotten bridges and maintained trails to make access easier for scientists.

Danum life was simple – I loved it!

You get up at the crack of dawn; eat porridge making it as tasty as possible with the aid of sugar, powdered milk, honey and raisins – it didn't take long to get it just right; purify some water; then head down to DVFC armed with gloves, a shovel and a hammer, to meet Rudi the ranger for the days jobs.

Work until 10am, go for a half hour tea break (2 biscuits and black tea), return to work for 2½ hours, have an hour lunch break (this consisted of crackers with tuna, sardines, peanut butter, chocolate spread, jam, marmalade, sandwich spread and we occasionally treated ourselves to thin soup with greasy dregs (don't ask!). We became very inventive. Food often dominated the conversation). Then work until 4ish. Work stops for rain!

Return to camp, do a bit of washing, swing in the hammock, either cook or wait with anticipation for dinner to be cooked – a mysterious meal you had to design from rice, pasta, tinned peas, sweetcorn, mushrooms, beef curry, a bit of cheese, tuna, frankfurts and spam. Eat this long awaited dish, change into your “longs”, then pass the evening with fancy dress, a quiz, twister, writing in your diary, cracker eating competition, watch the sunset from the observation tower, go for a night walk with the rangers. We also managed to organise some talks with scientists carrying out research in Danum – the most interesting being from 2 graduates from the UK who are researching the Clouded Leopard, an animal whom we know nothing about as yet.

After this, return to your comfy little hammock and fall asleep to the jungle noises I can't even begin to describe.

The views from the observation towers were breathtaking, as was the wildlife we encountered. An Orang-utan swinging in the trees above our camp, and the Bearded Pig and piglets raiding our camp every night to find scraps of food are some of the most memorable experiences along with going for a run with the girls and “bumping” into a herd of elephants with young – something I would only dream of seeing.

Awe inspiring stuff, hence, since then I have travelled across Canada and down the west coast of the USA with one of the many great friends I made on Raleigh. I've also done my gold D of E expedition along the Caledonian Canal – Fort William to Inverness. It's been one very busy year, no excuse not to show my face down the odd cave or two though.

Nataler Forester.

Natalie disappears to uni this October- we wish her all the best and hope to see her above (and below) ground in the years to come.

Morocco.

Here is some notes for other cavers if they wish to trek in Morocco.

Do you fancy trekking somewhere but not in Europe? Climb 4000m peaks? Ski touring in winter? Only have a weeks holiday? Budget of around £500 including flights? Then I can recommended Morocco.

Flights costs: good flights with Ryan air, Easy jet, Thomas cook fly out of Manchester but may not fly during winter months. If organized in advance you could pick up flights for £100 return.

To hire a mule (to carry kit) guide and accommodation in a Gite or camping with food is around £50.00 a day for two people. If going to just do Mt Toubkal 4160m you can just walk into the hut and out again. Could be done in a three day trip. We traveled with KE adventure, good value for money at £470each for 11 days plus flights. Could be done cheaper independent traveling but nice and organized .My top tip would go to KE adventure website, down load the detailed itenary and use that as your planning guide. A good guide to hire is Mohamed Idblaid walksmohamed@yahoo.fr

The square and Souks or markets in Marrakesh are a sight to behold. It is the maddest, busiest place we have seen on all of our travels. By night there is the biggest BBQ/outdoor cooking area, about 20 stalls all squeezing orange juice, snake charmers, acrobats, henna tattoo ladies, music - very cool .WE haggled well and got the prices we wanted to pay but its so hard and shopping in uk is a doddle by comparison! Leather, wood, textiles and spices are popular here. Hotels in Marrakesh for a nice Riad

is around £35.00 per a room but small rooms, usually shared bathrooms. More western style hotels, 15 mins walk from town have larger pool and bigger rooms (£35.00). A evening meal can cost £3.00 upwards and drinks around 70p. No beer due to Islam country though can be found in tourist hotels.

If anyone wants more information contact Richard Hathway 01782 791790 for more details.

In addition to this lot we've had members caving/climbing/canyoning/via ferrata in Tenerife, Majorca, Italy, Slovenia and if we include Kev and Matt New Zealand and China!

Forthcoming attractions.

3rd October Speedwell Cavern

5th October Peak Cavern

6th October Meeting Bleeding Wolf

7th October DCRO training, Buxton

12th October Providence Pot- Dow Cave

25th October Lancaster Easegill Caverns

9th November Nettle Pot

11th November DCRO Training Buxton.

16th DCRO Whitehall Induction Day

29th November Long Kin East/Rift Pot plus DCRO bag-pack

3rd December DCRO training Buxton

7th December Holme Bank Chert Mine

20th December Bull Pot plus DCRO pub collection

NOW is the time to send in your suggestions for 2009/2010. All requests to Darren if you don't ask and it's not on the programme you've only yourself to blame!!