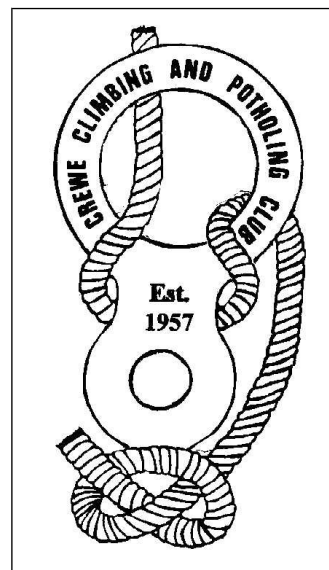


C.C.P.C. Newsletter 97. Summer 2009

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China April 2009. ("Big Snowy Mountain".)

We couldn't believe our bad luck in 2008 when a volcanic eruption prevented us visiting Chimborazo in Ecuador and then an earthquake near Chengdu prevented us visiting Matt in China! With only 48 hours before departure this year I had an e mail off Matt saying that due to possible problems in Western Sichuan (it was Tibetan New Year) the Chinese government had withdrawn permission for foreigners to visit the region! However Matt came up with a suggested itinerary which involved travelling to the north where the population was ethnically Mongolian not Tibetan- our trip was on.

Monday: After around 13 hours of travel we arrived in Chengdu to be met by Matt and Apple. We were driven to our hotel and following a shower and short rest Matt arrived to organise transport to a rather upmarket restaurant where he had secured a private room for a Chinese banquet. It was an excellent meal with countless dishes- our antics with chop sticks amusing the staff somewhat. Sadly Apple told us that she was no longer able to join us on our trip as she had secured some TV work that would last several weeks.

The meal finished and countless beer bottles emptied we were delivered with some confusion to our hotel for a night's kip.

Tuesday: Just about every meal in Sichuan is accompanied by steamed dumplings and breakfast was no exception. Noodles, rice and "angel cake" were also on the menu. Matt arrived with the transport to get us to the airport for flights north. Unfortunately the roads to the air port were grid-locked but we just managed to arrive on time by driving on the wrong side of the road (which was exciting to say the least) avoiding oncoming traffic by using the cycle lane (in the wrong direction) and when this was blocked the pavement although this did involve stopping to move a variety of obstructions blocking the way. At one point I recall passing a traffic cop on the wrong side! Incidentally the Chinese are very aggressive drivers with nerves of steel, no quarter is expected or given. Matt has developed his driving techniques and mastery of Chinese roads to a fine art although his vehicle has suffered somewhat in the process.

We just made it so we flew over the Taklamakan Desert to Urumqi (about 3.5 hours 2100km) then back in the direction we had come for an hour or so to Dunhuang in the Gobi Desert. (1h 20 min 700km) our base for the night. Here we met our guide, a Tibetan called Yuan erge (which we failed to pronounce so nicknamed Jordi) and our cook Lingdang. These two had

travelled by rail for around 48 hours in order for our gear to be available. A coach took us to an excellent hotel.

That evening we walked through immaculate streets to a restaurant for yet another banquet. Unfortunately we ended up at the end of the evening in a pool hall so we had the first of MANY late nights.

Wednesday. Again dumplings for breakfast accompanied by chilli and noodles, boiled or fried egg. About an hour drive took us to a series of grottos excavated and decorated over several centuries (beginning around 600 AD) by Buddhist monks. (Mogao Grottos) They contain the second tallest statue of Buddha in the world at around 30m. It **was** the third highest but the Taliban destroyed the second tallest that was situated in Afghanistan.

After lunch we drove to the spectacular Ming Sha sand dunes (this was after all the southern end of the Gobi desert). We resisted the touristy bits like riding camels and 4x4s and went for a walk up a couple of dunes in order to stretch our legs.

Back to the hotel then out for a meal (One of the more interesting dishes was “camel hoof”!) with copious amounts of beer which fortunately is not too strong. NB. Beer drinking nearly always includes a BBQ and tonight was no exception. Teaching the locals and our guides “on Ilkley Moor bar T’hat” proved extremely difficult as did explaining the significance of “Ten green bottles”. Ling Dang pointed out the bottles can’t HANG on a wall!

Thursday. A small coach was crammed with us, our gear, four live chickens and after about a 4 hour drive a large cylinder of coal gas (which leaked so had to be replaced) and some petrol, for the stoves. The smell when combined with chicken shit was “unpleasant” and there was precious little space to stretch out. A further 2 hour drive took us within about 30 mins of our first camp but en route we had to draw the curtains on the coach as we were listed as “Chinese climbers” (to avoid problems with permits) and we looked anything but Chinese. However we did have the “director of tourism” on board who seemed quite happy with the arrangement!

We expected our camp to be around 3200m but it was in fact nearer to 3800- most of us felt light-headed in the thin air. Water was a real problem – there wasn’t any, and the only “clean” snow involved a round trip of about 2 km. Fortunately “Jordi” did most of the carrying which was VERY exhausting! Some of us took a short walk gaining about 200m before returning to camp. “Climb high, sleep low”. It was rather a cold night.

Friday. We took a walk across some loose (dangerous?) scree to a high col at around 4005 then the majority of the group went up to a point at around 4200. The journey back to camp involved a short ascent and most of us found this VERY hard work. Jordi and Matt were left to carry water with a little help from Keith. Tonight wasn’t too cold – or were we adapting?

Saturday. Matt had arranged for most of our gear to be transported to base camp in a 4X4 belonging to some scientists working on the mountain so we set off for the 10k/400m climb to the camp. The route followed a well made “dirt” track – the area as destined to be developed as a tourist resort. A potential car park had been flattened from terminal moraine and a “long drop” toilet block had been constructed. It was moderately full and even fuller by the time we left. It was advisable to wait until the wind was in the right direction and not too strong before bearing all to the elements as the aroma could be somewhat overpowering! It was sunny but cold and a few of us took a walk up the lateral moraine before returning to the mess tent for a meal and cards. It should be mentioned that Ling Dang was an amazing cook producing a different dish each meal from fresh vegetables and meat. (Our first chicken met a sticky end! Jordi ate the feet which most of us didn’t fancy anyway.)

Sunday. Cold overnight – minus 11 deg C INSIDE the tent- this was to continue throughout our stay making us reluctant to get out of bed before sunrise. We spent the day on the glacier (which was spectacular) practicing roping up, crevasse rescue and in some cases ice climbing. In the evening it was moderately warm (around freezing) particularly in the mess tent.

Monday Only minus 10 in the tent and once the sun came up it was quite warm. The majority of the group attempted a “carry” up to our top camp at around 4600 (or above) while the sick and lame remained in camp. Sadly our porters had gone AWOL (they never did show) so it was a real slog. Nobody actually made the proposed high camp but the gear made it to about 4500 (mainly thanks to Jordi) where it was secured to the ice with an ice-screw with group members trickling back in ones and twos. We found a tent pitched on the glacier at a point where the route is quite difficult. Assuming a previous group must have lost their way we gingerly opened the door expecting to find the worst- it containing several Thermarests and a few pots and pans.

Tuesday. Mark L and Jenny were suffering from AMS so decided to stay at base camp, Paul elected to stay with them. Heavily laden the rest set off for high camp which they reached in about three hours. It was glorious when we arrived but went VERY cold as the sun went down. Most of our time, after pitching tents, was spent melting snow.

Wednesday. It was cold overnight and it seemed even colder in the morning. There was considerable reluctance to get up. It took ages to melt enough snow for breakfast and drinks but by about 0930 everyone was ready for off. Despite the cold the surface of the snow was soft with everyone suffering as they plunged thigh deep with monotonous regularity. I was first to turn back spending the next couple of hours melting snow and drying equipment in the sun. Darren was next to turn back arriving in camp at around 11 am. He hung around for a while before deciding to descend rather than spending another night at high camp. Ages past and it was around 6pm before I spotted the first of the summit party on the skyline and it was a further 30 minutes before Matt, Jordy and Mark arrived in camp with news that they had turned back with about 150m to go!. The stragglers arrived back and Matt and Jordy decided to head down, the rest would follow after a night's sleep.

Thursday. Very cold with low cloud. Boots were frozen and it was a real struggle to get ready. At 0900 I radioed base camp to see we were on the way and that a hot meal and maybe a hand with packs would be welcome. I was asked to decide which we wanted- in the event we got both which was more than welcome! We couldn't believe it – chips n egg! The rest of the day was spent chatting and packing for our retreat the following day. Mark L and Jenny still felt under the weather. Incidentally our “invalids” had made a remarkable job of clearing the site of litter left by previous groups.

Friday. Most of us set off walking to keep warm if nothing else. The coach arrived with the director of tourism, was loaded, and we left the mountain with the usual “closed curtains” at the appropriate spot. On our descent we saw loads of camels apparently wandering freely and a lone wolf quite close to civilisation.

Matt had booked hotel rooms for a few hours so we could shower and relax before catching the train at about 11m Sat.

We had a meal in the now familiar surroundings of a private room- on our return to the hotel there was an argument in progress between Jordy and the hotel management about being overcharged. Matt joined in and things were finally settled after much shouting and pushing, apparently normal negotiation techniques in China.

Saturday. We had a couple of sleeper cars and slept, surrounded by our gear till dawn. We awoke to find ourselves still travelling through desert but gradually more and more greenery began to appear making the journey more interesting. Night fell and again we slept until dawn, by now we were in a much more hospitable landscape and by lunch time Sunday were back in Chengdu

Sunday. Matt arrived at our hotel early evening, we walked across the city to collect his dog then went out for a BBQ. On our way back to our hotel we stopped for a “last drink” which involved yet another BBQ and several “last drinks”. A Chinese group joined us which prolonged the night even further- they then insisted on picking up the bill!

Monday. This was spent in what must be one of the worlds biggest electronic super markets in China. Five floors of gadgets most of which I've seen. Apparently there are several of these. We went to purchase some pirate DVDs and were led from the rather posh mall to the dingiest block of flats I have ever been in. One of the "apartments" (a single room) housed a well dressed young lady selling DVDs at around 40 pence. Another young lady arrived and led us to yet another similar apartment in another block to a room again packed with DVDs. The evening was again spent sampling the delights of local cuisine pigs brain and stomach, various types of offal plus other local delicacies.)

Tuesday. Matt, Ling Dang, Mark and I spent the day climbing on dolomitic limestone while the others went sight seeing. We passed through the area devastated by the earthquake in 2008, the very site where Matt was heavily involved in the "rescue". We were late arriving back in Chengdu so had to forgo our shower and go straight out for a meal. This meal roughly translated was "hot pot". HOT was the word. The food was thrown into a boiling pot of oil with chillies and pepper, fished out, then rinsed in a dish of sesame oil before being eaten. Brain, and other inedible animal parts were on the menu – I was glad to be vegetarian and to have declined the "hot pot" option!. Our Chinese friends from the previous evening rang inviting us out for another "session" so we tramped across town but (fortunately) they failed to appear!

Wednesday. Matt persuaded some of the students at the university to lend us mountain bikes so we set off on an exciting(ie frightening) ride through the city to a tea-house where Matt selected a live cat-fish and chicken for our meal. I think it was this meal that also contained frogs.

We had a mad hour or so getting back into Chengdu in time for the opera. This began with yet another visit to a tea-house within the opera complex where we were offered a massage and the opportunity to have our ear-wax removed by a guy with a Petzl head-torch and a fistful of evil looking instruments. We all declined both!

The show was quite good and included some frenetic drumming, a girl who juggled various objects with her feet- including a large table, plus various other interesting acts. The climax was fire- eating and mask changing which was amazing! We couldn't work out how it was done even when one of them came into the audience!

After the show yet another meal the highlight this time being rabbits heads- whole. The contents could be extracted by biting into the skull. Snails were also in the dish. Needless to say there was a copious and never ending quantity of beer (yet again courtesy of Matt as were all the meals and booze on this trip). The last two to arrive back at the hotel were Darren and Paul, apparently there were 68 empty bottles on the table by the time they left at around 4 am! Jordy had to be sent home in a taxi, I bet Matt can't remember how he got home.

Thursday. A visit to the panda reserve. We were amazed at just how many pandas there were and how active they were with the young ones climbing and play fighting throughout our visit.

We arrived at the airport, boarded our plane the spent the next 5 hours waiting while they tried to fix a problem with the jet engines which were stuck in reverse. Apparently flying backwards is not recommended. Needless to say we missed our connection in Schiphol so spent the night in a luxury hotel where an excellent meal (and breakfast) was provided by KLM.

We were back in the UK by 0830 Friday- all except Sharon and Mark who extended their trip with a couple of days in Beijing. All in all a good trip especially as it was all arranged by Matt (Dragon Expeditions) at VERY short notice.

Ralph J.

PS There may be some confusion regarding some of the evening activities – especially the ingredients. Blame Matt who insisted on trying to get us legless every night.

PPS. The glacier we climbed/camped on was the Touming Mekge Glacier (Mongolian for high and vast), the mountain being Daxue Mountain (Mandarin for Big Snowy Mountain which is not very original and apparently there are numerous others with the same name!). The glacier is 10.1 km long and covers an area of almost 22 sq km. surprisingly despite global warming it has only receded by 0.94 m over a period of 7 years.

Incidentally, there is an excellent caving area about 4 hours train-ride from Chengdu. If any of you guys are tempted a trip can easily be arranged at minimal cost.

Stream Passage.

Well Gaping Gill, there is a funny story, goes a little like this.

Got up Saturday, bright & early, off to a flying start, so far so good.

Arrived in Clapham 8.30, found a parking space, all 3 of us raring to go.

Opened the boot, put our socks & wellies on, went to put our (BRIGHT YELLOW) oversuits on, oops who forgot to load the suits in the car.

Dilemma time what to do next. do we

A/ carry on just in our undersuits

B/ rush home, pick up suits & get back without getting a speeding fine

C/ give up & cry

We opted to try for A as it is the first letter of the alphabet, so off we went just the 3 of us, fully laden (minus the suits of course). 90 mins later arrived at the entrance, still in good spirits. tackled the squeeze & navigated the 1st pitch, handled the high level traverse (Yes Ralph even Gill managed it) look down the pitch, saw water & decided maybe not such a good idea to get wet at the start only wearing under suits.

Only realistic option left was C (Seeing Des cry like a baby was worth its weight in gold) So yes we did go to Gaping Gill & had a good starter trip.

Des, Gill & Martin

What could possibly go wrong? (A cautionary tale!)

The title of this piece dates back to an earlier trip to Mallorca when a bunch of KCC cavers set about doing a descent of that magnificent canyon below Gorg Blau known as Sa Fosca (literally translated as The Darkness), this being a trip which we thought would have taken some eight hours, but which, it turned out, took almost twenty four ... but that's an entirely different story.

John Lennon Airport, or Speke, as it used to be known to the many Liverpool Music Hall comedians, was eerily quiet when we arrived at 04:30. The long, mitochondrial queue barriers were the only clue to how busy the place might get once the sun rose above the nearby Jaguar factory. There were eight of us, Darren, Neil, Gareth, Izzy, Will, Bez, Alison and me, meeting for an early morning flight to Palma – the gateway to some spectacular caves and canyons, or so we all hoped.

After a breakfast of bananas, coffee, buns, butties and Guinness, the queue for security had suddenly manifested itself. This Gareth pointed out, from bitter experience, was an EasyJet-created artificial queue designed to make you think you are going to miss your plane so that, hopefully, you will shell out an extra £3 to join a faster queue. Unfortunately for the three quid

fast trackers, there had been a “medical emergency” in the security section which effectively held up both queues – but, as far as EasyJet was concerned, it was still a financial success.

Security is a euphemism. If you want to take water on board the plane, only the really expensive stuff from what is laughingly referred to as “Duty Free” is allowed, although, on this particular day, The Independent was giving away a free bottle of Buxton Spa with every issue! So, armed with eight issues of the Indy, we all marched up to the departure gate.

“Izz Tharra Cast????” asked the eagle-eyed girl from EasyJet, looking at the plaster which supported Alison’s fractured wrist. “Orfly sorry luv, yer can’t gerron!” she added, punching the air, and carving another notch in her clipboard. And that was that. Despite contacting both the insurance company and the family doctor and receiving assurances that it would be OK to fly with the injury, Alison’s caving trip ended abruptly, prematurely and extremely rudely. Problems? – EasyJet couldn’t care less!!

A quick discussion on tactics, and we decided that there wasn’t any point wasting two airline tickets, and so Alison headed alone back to New Mills with her 20kg of personal and communal kit - no way was EasyJet going to let us take any of that with us. The flight waited until all the baggage had been removed and Alison’s holdall was found and returned to her. As the pilot said over the intercom, “Apologies for the slight delay, ladies and gentlemen, but some passengers have decided not to fly with us today.”

After landing at Palma and waiting a couple of hours for Izzy’n’Will’s car to materialise, we headed to Alcudia, where our lodgings awaited. And while we waited (and waited) for ours to be made ready, we plotted our first trip. The decision was to go for a canyon ... maybe not Sa Fosca ... how about the next one down the scale ... Diners? What could go possibly wrong?

The following morning, we headed along past Port de Pollensa and out on the Lluc (pronounced “Yuck!!”) road to Escorca. And we would have probably got there if last winter’s storms hadn’t caused a huge landslide to come down and block the road just before the junction we needed for Sa Colobra. The only other way to get to our objective would have been to drive right around the island, via Soller – and that would have wasted too much of the day.

So Plan B involved going back to Alcudia, picking up caving gear and wetsuits and heading South through Arta to Manacor and thence to a cove where we could swim to a cave called Cova des Coloms. It was a long swim, but with wetsuits to buoy us and various other buoyancy aids, we made it, in some 15-20 minutes, around a slight headland and into a narrowing cleft where the waves pummelled at a lowish stretch. Through the easy duck led us to a flowstone “hearth” which opened out into a beautiful series of huge grottos, lined with immense formations, all kept pristine by the watery passage which guarded entrance to this cave. If you only ever do one Mallorcan cave – do this one.

After our return swim, we visited two more caves which were nearby – close enough, in fact, for us to walk to them from the cove. These were Cova des Pont and Cova des Pirata, both are ex-show-caves, both are big, easy and very, very pretty. All in all, we covered quite a bit of cave passage on our Plan B.

But (and there is always a “but” isn’t there) when we got back to the hire car, it was sporting a newly smashed near-side rear window. It had been broken into, and various goodies (not Neil’s shell suit, though) had been stolen by the thieves. As we drove to nearby Arta to report

matters to the Police we were at an all-time low. I mean really, what else could go possibly wrong?

Because of the car break-in, the first part of the next day was earmarked for returning the car, which was now full of glass, to the airport in Palma. Luckily we had windscreen insurance so there was no extra cost, although the provision of a replacement car meant that we were subjected to a second dollop of the Mallorcan Car Hire Fuel Fiddle!!

Anyway, as we were over on the other side of the island, we elected to descend a cave in that locality and opted for Avenc d'en Corbera, a huge hole near Valdemossa with a nice airy entrance pitch and, new to me, an exciting climb up into a side gallery with some very interesting formations. Neil has posted some really good shots of this and some of our other caves and canyons on Picasa web.

The next day, feeling our luck was slowly improving, we elected to have another bash at the Diners canyon, even if it meant driving right around the island – which it did. When we finally arrived at the col above Escorca, most of us stayed at the col while Will and Gareth (our two drivers) positioned a car at the bottom of the gorge. Unfortunately (what could go wrong!!!) the winter landslide season had struck again, and the lower car had to be repositioned slightly higher up the road!

The canyon itself was great – a long prairie section rapidly evolved into big sweeping rock scenery. The abseiling was mostly straight-forward, and none of the rigging was too taxing. It may be the second hardest on the island, but it's nowhere near as tough as Sa Fosca – although we only had one wet bit. Well Gareth and I got wet - setting up a tyrolean death-slide for the others! A good day's abseiling climaxed with a jungle bashing session when some bright spark suggested that it might be a good idea to cut the corner to get directly to the car. And me without my machete too!

On the Thursday, having had a good day's canyoning, most folk fancied a bit more and headed back to Escorca for a bash at the Esmoler canyon. Neil's photos also include this. As I think that the caves on Mallorca are definitely the main attraction, I decided to have a solo trip out onto the Alcudia Peninsular and take a look into Cova Tancades de Cap de Menorca. This is another ex-show-cave which is very big, with spectacular formations, but I did manage to find the second crawl / entrance this time. Both entrances are in the cliff face overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, and I suspect that, when it was a show cave, the punters were probably taken there by boat.

On the last day of the trip, the majority elected to go shopping, museuming and baring in Palma – which I admit is a very interesting and old city ... but Gareth and I decided to squeeze in one more cave. Heading out onto the spectacular Formentor Peninsula, we sought out and found El Forat 502 – no mean feat as this biggish entrance shaft has a fairly small top entrance, and it is fairly well hidden under a bush in the middle of an arete covered in prairie shrubs.

But find it we did. This was the scene of Brian's "mishap" last October, and, anxious not to repeat the experience, we were very careful as we scrambled over the huge boulders which abound in the lower chambers. What could possibly go wrong? – Well, the answer to that is that, having derigged and jugged back up the entrance shaft, I suddenly realised that my rucsac was no longer on my back ... and, slowly, I turned around and began re-rigging. Well, if a cave's worth doing at all, it must be worth doing twice.

Many thanks to Neil for doing the organising for this trip. The accommodation was spot on, and the cost of the trip was probably the lowest price I've ever paid for a continental caving holiday. Just a pity about the ... er ... problems.

Alan Brentnall.

The Tongariro Crossing, North Island, New Zealand 5th March 2009

While travelling through Australia and New Zealand, Annie and I managed to fit in a number of superb day-walks, but this was an exception, as I enjoyed a solo mountain day.

North Island has a belt of volcanic activity running in an arc, SW to NE, from the solitary volcano of Mount Taranaki (Mount Egmont) on the west coast, through the Tongariro National Park in the centre and Rotorua in the north east, and out to the isolated volcanic peak of White Island, 50 Km out in the Bay of Plenty.

Tongariro National Park is the Oldest National Park in New Zealand, and is one of the few sites worldwide to have dual World Heritage status. It is recognised for its important Maori cultural associations as well as for its outstanding volcanic landscape. There is a cluster of three volcanoes forming a line north to south: Mount Tongariro – 1967 metres, Mount Ngauruhoe – 2291 metres, and Mount Ruapehu – 2796 metres, which were given to the people of New Zealand in 1887 by the local Maori chief, and which form the nucleus of the park.

(Incidentally, the area was used as Mordor in the Lord of the Rings films, with Mt. Ngauruhoe being 'Mt. Doom' !)

There are several notable walks in the area, but the Tongariro Alpine Crossing is often described as the finest one day walk in the country, which is why I chose it.

I started my walk from the Mangatepopo Road end on the west side of the mountains: Turning off the deserted State Highway 47, we bounced our way up 7 km of dusty dirt-road which wound its way across a desolate moor-land, not unlike much of the northern Pennines, to a tiny car-park and turning circle. There were already about twenty cars there when we arrived at 8.30 am., but our hotel was over 50 Km away, which doesn't make for an early start.

As I put my boots on a lone figure emerged from one of the cars and I was surprised to find myself interviewed about my fitness, equipment, previous experience, route and escape plans. I know I'm getting on a bit, but I didn't realise I looked that bad ! The gentleman was a Ranger, and he proceeded to tell me of all the accidents and rescues they have had to deal with – all very encouraging. Even so, I waved goodbye to Annie, and she set off to explore the nearest town before meeting me at the end of the day, 18.5 km. away on the other side of the peaks.

After she drove away I remembered that my map was still on the back seat of the car ! The initial path leads onwards over the moor, gradually gaining height as it follows the Mangatepopo stream, until, after about twenty minutes a side path turns off to the nearby Mangatepopo Hut, where I could see a group of about twenty walkers getting ready to set out. They must have been heading down, as I didn't see them again. Just beyond the hut the terrain becomes more rugged as the path skirts the lower edge of several enormous lava fields which spill down from the increasing bulk of Mt. Ngauruhoe, towering above on the right. There is little vegetation, barely more than lichens and mosses in pockets amongst the jagged cinders which make up the more recent eruption debris. The path continues, in places as a board-walk, into more desolate terrain at the head of the valley between Mt. Tongariro

on the left (north), and Mt. Ngauruhoe. A flat area with an isolated 'portaloo' marks Soda Springs, the end of the easy walking, although the actual springs, surrounded by buttercups are some distance away on the left (15 mins. return walk).

There is no drinking water anywhere in the mountain area, except the limited supply of collected rain water at the huts, as all springs and pools have a high mineral content. Walkers have to be self sufficient, and carry in their own supply.

From the Springs the path climbs steeply to the Mangatepopo Saddle between the two peaks. The path has recently been 'improved', and despite the rough surroundings, it was a straightforward plod to the top, with increasingly good views. At this point, the very steep scree climb to the top of Ngauruhoe heads off to the south, but with limited time and steadily strengthening winds I stayed on the main route, following the marker poles down and across South Crater. This is a huge flat-bottomed basin, with an explosion pit formed around 14,000 years ago. The lava flows running down from the slopes of Ngauruhoe are from the 1870 eruption, and are a reminder of how volcanically active this whole area is. At the far side of South Crater a steady climb leads up to the narrow crest overlooking Red Crater beyond, with the highest point of the walk, at 1886 metres, a short distance further on.

The views into Red Crater, and over the surrounding landscape, are spectacular. Immediately below the rim is the open top of a huge hollow pipe, or 'dike', formed when molten material being forced up to the surface created a vertical channel in the crater wall. The outer layers solidified while the middle remained molten, and it was then left hollow when the lava ceased to flow and drained back into the magma chamber below. Sulphurous fumes drifted up from the base of the crater, and in some places the crater walls 'smoked'. The whole area was unstable.

I moved a few hundred metres out along the ridge leading to Mt. Tongariro and left my rucksack in a patch of boulders, before continuing towards the summit. The wind had increased considerably, and in exposed places it was difficult to stand up, with grit and dust blasting across the ground surface like smoke. Ahead, another lone figure moved, crab-like, from one patch of shelter to the next, making slow progress along the rise and fall of the ridge. I caught up with him about fifty metres below the summit, where he was resting in a group of boulders, having decided it was too rough to continue. After a brief discussion I went on, being so close to the top, and found him following close behind. The summit (1967 metres) was uninspiring, being the highest point of a broad, rock strewn dome, but the surrounding views were fantastic, taking in the whole of the Tongariro National Park, except where the mass of Mt. Ngauruhoe towered in the foreground, blocking out much of the southern prospect. We retreated, eventually reaching my stashed rucksack, where we went our separate ways.

I continued over the top of Red Crater, then very steeply down loose ground to the brilliant green coloured Emerald Lakes at the start of the crossing of Central Crater. The descent route skirted several areas of 'smoking ground', and there were patches of rock there which were too hot to rest your hand on. Lower cloud was quickly moving in, reducing visibility, but not causing any route-finding difficulties on the well marked trail. Central Crater is another enormous flat-bottomed feature, but is a drainage basin rather than a true volcanic crater. After a late lunch-break in the lee of a group of boulders at the far side of the crater, I climbed steadily, up through cloud, to the rim where I could look down onto Blue Lake (Te Wai-whakaata-o-te-Rangihiroa - !!!) in its crater on the other side. Swirling cloud filled the basin, only adding to the strangeness of the scene. This lake is 'tapu' (sacred), and visitors are forbidden to swim in it, or even to eat food near it (a good job I'd already had lunch). The trail flanks the east edge of North Crater, with its cooled lava lake and secondary crater, on its east side, then begins the long descent to the Ketetahi Hut (1450 metres altitude). Initially the path is on the side of a valley, but eventually it begins a series of endless zig-zags down a broad tussock covered spur towards the hut, which is clearly visible far below. By this

time I was below the cloud level, and could see far out to the north, over the lower forest, towards the track end and the State Highway 47, still a couple of hours away. Some distance below the hut, the path crosses the edge of Ketetahi Springs, another highly active area where hot acid water bubbles from the smoking ground and has left a mass of mineral crystals in the multi-coloured rocks. Water temperatures there have been measured as between 74 and 91 degrees Celsius, with steam venting at 138 degrees. Bright yellow Sulphur can be scraped from the rocks around the vents. Finally the path reaches the cool podocarp-hardwood forest for the last weary stretch to the road end. At two places the track passes over the tongue of a lava flow from the Blue Lake Crater, far above, then follows the Manga-a-te-tipua stream which is 'naturally' polluted with minerals from the Ketetahi Springs. Having passed only a few small groups during the day, it was a shock to reach the car-park and find at least thirty people sprawled about waiting for pre-arranged transport out. No problem for me, as Annie was waiting with cold drinks – the best end of all. Brilliant day. Colin Knox. 10 May 2009

Mount Huntington Alaska Harvard Route 1200m Scottish Grade 6

The Harvard route is located in the Denali National park, and although Mount Huntington is not very high 12240ft, the Harvard is a very steep and technical route up to 70 degree ice and mixed ground, with very limited bivvi spots on the route which normally takes from 2 to 5 days to complete, there was originally four of us going to attempt the route but one guy had to drop out at short notice due to heart problems, leaving just three of us not usually a good number but it worked ok, except for the three of us spooning in a small two man bivvi tent perched on various ledges hacked out of the snow, so sleep isn't exactly a restful experience!!.

Considering the reputation that Alaska has for bad weather and especially on the Tokositna Glacier where we had our base camp located, we hit it really lucky for April, we had mostly clear skies and no wind, but night time temperatures were as low as -25C at base camp, and didn't raise much above that all day but it didn't feel too bad once you got the sun on your back!!.

We broke trail to the start of the route the day after arriving, with only 10 days to get the route done we didn't want to waste any time, the approach is fairly simple but some big Crevasses to avoid and a lot of collapsing seracs on the easy approach which we decided to avoid by taking the longer and steeper approach. The third day was spectacular weather so we decided to go for it, the low temperatures meant that we didn't get going till late about 12 pm, but we had light till 10, the first 5 pitches involve mostly ice up to 70 degrees, then you arrive at the top of a ridge, from here a mixed pitch that leads through an awkward chimney (made worse with a 30lb pack on your back), to an easy angled broad snow slope to our bivvy spot, from here we had to dig out a ledge for our tent, but at least it was easy soft snow, so we finally got settled in at about 10pm and got some food on, we were all in good spirits and managed to get some sleep, it was an amazing night there was not a breath of wind and the sky was clear looking out of the tent you could see an astounding collection of stars in the sky and just make out the 3000 ft near vertical drop to the lower glacier right outside the tent door.

The next day was again fine and clear but so cold that we had to wait till late morning for the sun to come round to start the most technical pitch on the route, this proved to be very tricky and required aiding even without a pack on for the leader, it took us nearly three hours to get

us all up the pitch and haul all the gear, the route then involved another hard pitch and some easy but exposed traverse pitches to get to the next hard mixed pitch, during the process of hauling the sacks we lost all the snow stakes, although they are not crucial it could be a set back!!, the time was now 9pm, and we still had a hard mixed pitch to get up then approximately 500ft of 50 to 60degree ice to get to the only other bivvi spot, we had no other choice but to press on, after a lot of trouble that involved me having to abseil back down in the dark to rescue Neil after we got some gear jammed we arrived at the top of the last hard pitch at midnight, it was now -30 deg, but fortunately not windy, the remaining pitches went ok, but involved a lot of insecure and deep dodgy snow on ice, it was time consuming but we got to the bivvi spot below a feature called the Nose at 6am after 18hrs of continuous climbing we were all desperately dehydrated and Simon was near vomiting for some strange reason, Neil was nursing his fingers so I set to work digging out the bivvi ledge which was not so easy this time as there was ice which needed to be hacked out, we finally got the tent set up at 8am, and made some food, it was then that Neil found out that he had serious frostbite on two of his fingers but we were all too knackered to care so fell asleep till 1pm.

When we awoke, the weather was looking grim in the valley, further investigation of Neil's fingers confirmed our fears we would have to go down, we reckoned on about 7-8 hours for an abseil descent but decided to compromise and retreat back to our first bivvi spot which would take about 4 hours, we reckoned that we were all too tired to make it all the way down, we got moving without breakfast at 1pm, Simon went first to set up the belays required for the abseils, I would look after Neil and get him on the ropes as he couldn't use his fingers to set up his abseil, all this went well but I reckon I drew the short straw as I had the job of pulling the 60m ropes through and this went on for 18 abseils!!, we got to the first bivvi spot but found to our dismay that some other guys had nabbed it, with no room left to dig out another ledge we would have to go all the way down. We got to the bottom of the route at about 10pm, making the last couple of abseils using Bolokovs, these are made using two intersecting ice screws through the ice to form a thread for a bit of cord which you then abseil off, the ice was so hard that these were absolute bombers!!.

We started the trudge back to the camp in semi darkness, there was one steep section to descend with a crevasse to jump over about half way down, this felt really dodgy in the dark, tired and with the biggest set of Snow shoes on you have ever seen!!, me and Simon stood at the bottom of the slope waiting for Neil who was still descending from about half way down the slope which was about 200 ft high, next thing there was a wumpfff sound and he was at the bottom luckily sat on top of the avalanche debris!!

We spent the next day chilling in the tent, and managed to get the Ski plane to come and pick us up the next day to get Neil to the medical centre in Talkeetna, whilst we were there nobody else managed to summit, the three other teams that were attempting the route were all made up of guides, we were the first on the route so did a great job of breaking trail and digging out the bivvi ledges for them to use, ah well good luck to them!!

Meanwhile, after seeing a frostbite specialist in Anchorage he said that Neil's fingers should make a full recovery, when he got back here in the UK, they wanted to cut em off!!, he still has them no thanks to the NHS

Ade Pedley.

All in a days' work!

Right at the start of the May meeting Ralph (DCRO duty controller) got a "shout" from Derbyshire police about an incident "in Wensley". Unfortunately details were rather scanty

and the name of the system uncertain. Alan (also a controller) and Alison (a call- girl!- *don't ask!) had a brief discussion, formulated a plan and left, followed shortly by Steve (DCRO core team) and Paul Nixon (who was car-sharing).

The casualty was some distance down Old Mill Close Mine with a dislocated shoulder and had been alone since 1730. By now it was gone 2130. Several other CCPC members arrived (Ann Austin, Ron & Patsy and Darren (early Tues morning). It was a protracted affair that didn't finish until late Tuesday morning with the last team members surfacing around noon.

Washing the gear was a nightmare- even worse than the Odin Practice a few weeks previously.

Update: Apparently the casualty suffered a broken arm in addition to the dislocation.

Meets.

23 May Whitescar

7 June DCRO Collection Castleton

14 June Meregill (Wet n deep- there will be an alternative.

27 (&28?) June Nenthead (especially for mine enthusiasts

4 July DCRO training and BBQ

12 July Birks Fell

25 July Rumbling Hole

9 August Little Neath (S Wales)

22 August Marble Steps

5 September DCRO Collection Buxton

6 September GG- Flood Entrance

19 September Eldon Hole (also DCRO Ex., mtg., and pie n pea)

26 September DCRO Collection Bakewell

4 October Lancaster – Cow Pot- Pool Sink

25 October Peak Cavern

8 November West Mine Alderley Edge (Where it all started)

29 November JH Mine (plus something a little less taxing

12 December Cwmorthin (N Wales Slate Mine)

19 December DCRO Pub collection. (Will Gill be a fairy this year?)

Don't forget this is a list of "official" trips, lots of other "unofficial" trips take place mid week and at weekends. You only have to use the Yahoo site to find out.