



Newbury Mountain Club Trip Reports, 2003

Fort William, New Year 2002-3

I was hoping to have a big report on Scotland, but time has not been permitting. In short, we stayed in four holiday bungalows a few miles outside of Fort William in Glen Nevis. Even though we all travelled by what can only be described as convoluted routes, we did meet at exactly the same time in Safeways. The bungalows were ideally situated for walks up the Glen, into the Mamores, the West Highland Way and up Ben Nevis. Some really good walking was had by all, with a few near epics and dark descents. New Years Eve was celebrated with the usual NMC vigour; dinner, drink and dancing. Most people eventually found their way back to the bungalows for a continued late night session. On New Years Day a few jaded individuals set off for the Hidden Valley in Glen Coe, enjoying the first minor epic-ette of 2003 ("Aah, that happened last time I came up here" Martin B stated as we negotiated 500ft of snow covered rock field). All in all an excellent trip with weather conditions you could die for; not enough snow for some, but virtually no rain.



Pokey

AGM 2003

As usual the club AGM took place in early January, 11th to be precise, at the Dolphin.

After the initial warm-up drink and re-acquainting with the less active members, we proceeded to the meeting room for the main shindig. Previous minutes were read and accepted, not that many could remember the last AGM, let alone agreeing that the club should finance Alan's new car! We had the treasurers report, I can't remember what the figures were but it all looked OK and the accounts were accepted.

As outgoing president, Harry presented a summary of the previous year's events and trips; including the Brecons, Dartmoor, North Devon, the Lakes, Yorkshire, N. Wales and Sardinia amongst others. He then went on to present the year's

awards and prizes, for Altitude (Alan), Best New Climber (Paula), Golden Underpants (Dave W) and a few others.

Then on to the elections: Bruce was elected as El Presidente, Angela as Treasurer, Alan as Secretary, Meets Officer (Rhoda), Webmaster (Andrew C), Newsletter Editor (Pokey) and the Committee (Bob, Dave W, Martin B, Katharine, Richard and Mick). Bruce then took over the mantle from Harry and thanked outgoing committee members for their commitment over the years, especially Harry and Caroline in their roles as President and Treasurer (respectively) over the past 3 years.

The committee has met on two occasions since the AGM, firstly to set a diary for this year and secondly to fix some dates for the start of 2004. The latter should enable us to book some more prestigious locations well in advance.

Pokey

Llanberis 28 Feb – 2 March

Flying along the A5 as the car lurched around corners in a desperate bid to make last orders had an all too familiar feeling to it: only this time we didn't make it. We were also headed for Llanberis, not Nant Peris. It had been over a year since I had last been to North Wales. I was hoping to be able to call in at the Vaynol Arms in Nant Peris rather than a Llanberis pub in order to catch up with old friends, though Rhoda (who I was giving a lift to) did not know this, but it was already past closing as we passed. Instead, we arrived in Llanberis just as Dave, Sarah and Gabrielle were leaving the Dolbadarn Hotel after failing to secure an extra drink after hours. We stopped and gave them a lift to the youth hostel – our accommodation for the weekend – where we joined the rest of the group: fourteen of us in total.

Next morning we set off on a walk from the hostel for the summit of Snowdon, via the Rhyd Ddu path, and if you know where that starts you will be aware that it is on the opposite side of the mountain from Llanberis. I planned it the night before when it appeared that as organiser of the weekend people were expecting me to set the walks too. The forecast was not good for the horseshoe, there was no snow for winter mountaineering and it was too cold for rock climbing, I felt that this would be an ideal walk making use of our location. I had done it some sixteen years ago when trying to work up a thirst for an "Over the Hill Mob" bash with St Helens Mountaineering Club. No one objected then, maybe it was the wine that Bruce had brought along.

Then as now, the route took us through a low pass called Bwlch Maesgwn between Foel Goch and the northwest flank of Snowdon to Nant y Betws, then following what is shown on the map as a dismantled railway to Rhyd Ddu. Except all those years ago, I remember crossing an old dilapidated bridge (which I was hoping to cross again this weekend), whereas now the railway had been rebuilt as part of the Welsh Highland Railway.

When some of the group noticed that we had to descend to the road, there were murmurings of dissent (mainly from Maggie), which nearly turned to outright rebellion when we cut across the Snowdon Ranger path. Many wanted to take this instead, but in true democratic style (reminiscent of the US in the UN), the uprising was quelled and we continued to Rhyd Ddu.

Rising from 190 metres, the Rhyd Ddu path involves 895 metres of ascent before reaching the summit of Snowdon. At first, it was a steady plod, but in next to no time the rain swept in on a cold icy wind. As we climbed higher onto the Llechog ridge, the rain turned to sleet and eventually snow. The group by this point was becoming a little stretched out, so it was decided to split up to avoid those at the front from getting cold waiting. A final arête called Bwlch Main led to the junction of the Watkin Path and onto the summit. This route is not as popular as those on the Llanberis Pass side, but in my view is second only to the "horseshoe" and well worth another ascent in good weather for the views.

All safely back down at the hostel, most of us tried the "Heights" after my recommendations for the pub the night before hadn't gone down too well. It was St David's day, and to celebrate the hotel had put on a couple of bands. The main attraction I thought was good, even if Maggie felt they were too noisy.

Sunday saw a few people with stiff legs and sore knees, consequently we had fewer takers for the walk up Elidir Fawr (924m). Nonetheless, we still managed eight of us, to whom I had promised a 3 to 4 hour walk. After a slight detour to find the start, we took a direct and steep line for the summit. However, we were rewarded with views all the way across Ynys Môn (Anglesey), the Carneddau and the Glyderau – in somewhat different conditions from the day before.

Martin Butler

Dorset, 2-5 May

The official Newbury Mountain Club trip list seemed to indicate that a trip to the Lakes was planned for the early May Bank Holiday. Indeed, the committee discussed this trip with enthusiasm when they met in January. Slightly nearer the time that we would actually sit down in the car for a six hour journey, attitudes began to change. The root cause of our discontent was that this trip was sandwiched neatly between a trip to Yorkshire and a trip to an area of Northumberland that is further North than a sizable portion of Scotland.

Normally undeterred by journeys that would worry long distance lorry drivers, we (I) decided on a change. Dorset was selected from the multitude of possible destinations on this little island. Close to Newbury and by the seaside were major factors in its selection.

Trips really should be written up nearer the time, so the following is what I remember... and might be what actually happened or what was planned to happen, or what happened the last time we were there...

Saturday was a sunny day, ideal weather for a walk along a ridge – Alan was in charge and took us off on a surprisingly long walk from our comfortable campsite. Across fields of thistles and meadows of flowing grass we were led, overlooking the steam trains that charged on towards Corfe Castle. When we reached this little village (named after the castle) we scoured it for a pie shop that was rumoured to make tasty fresh pies. Eventually this was found and the walk could continue. With enough food for a few days we headed up on to what some described as a refreshingly windy ridge. Our route led along the ridge towards Swanage, where the consumption of ice cream and coffee was compulsory. From Swanage I headed back overland - with the idea of stoking up the barbecue-picking my way through static caravan parks and cow fields. The rest of the group

headed off round the South West Coast Path through the Durlston Country Park for a slightly more scenic finish.

Sunday saw us off to the South West coastal Path again. The route was simple: walk to the sea (at Dancing Ledge), turn right and walk a few miles to the beach. Alan diving into the sea after an errant Frisbee was the catalyst for some very cold swimming by the braver people there.

The luxury of a Monday Bank holiday not far from home is not to be underestimated. After packing up the camping gear we headed off on another fine walk. This walk included a stop at a pub in Kingston with one of the finest beer garden views in England (Corfe Castle defending the gap in the ridge that separates the Isle of Purbeck from the rest of England). Disappointingly the pub was closed for refurbishment, but we still sat down at the empty tables to take in the view (unhindered by the crowds that would usually fill the garden on a Bank Holiday weekend). After a few more miles we completed our trip to the seaside with fish and chips in Swanage.

Bruce Wilson

Northumberland, Late May Bank Holiday

For the last bank holiday in May, nine of us made the long journey to Wooler in far flung Northumberland: camping in the old market town nestled at the foot of the Cheviot Hills, where we had a mixed (and relaxed) weekend of walking, climbing, nature and culture.

A late start on Saturday saw one group off climbing on the local sandstone and another walking over Wooler Common and the edge of the Cheviots. The weather was mixed for both parties; dodging showers the order of the day, nevertheless we managed to barbecue in the evening.

Sunday morning brought better weather and an earlier start for some of us to go off to the Farne Islands on a boat trip with Bob. This was a trip well worth the money as we saw puffins galore (some 35,000 pairs living on the islands), amongst many other species of sea birds and seals.

Afterwards we went off climbing, where we met up with Paul and Bruce. Only a few routes were managed before the rain came in, so off we set for Holy Island. Another barbecue was in order that night, though Bob and Paul were only just in time before the coals died down because they decided to go cragging in the evening sunshine that had returned.

Most people left for home on Monday, either going climbing or sightseeing on the way, with the exception of myself and Maggie who persuaded me to stay another night, and Pokey and Annie, who were staying for the week. The four of us went for a walk in the Cheviots taking in the summit of Hedgehope Hill.

On Tuesday morning we left Pokey and Annie and proceeded home, stopping off at Alnwick Castle to visit the water gardens at the home of the Duke and Duchess of Northumberland.

Editor's Note: For those who don't know about this part of the country, it is beautiful and very quiet compared to the nearby, overcrowded, Lake District. The

extra hour's drive is well worth it, on one day's walk I saw another eight people (four of which I would have missed if hadn't stopped to enjoy the view for quite so long). Without sounding too much like the Northumbria Tourist Board, if you haven't been, GO. If you have then you know what I mean.

Martin Butler

Wye Valley, 11-13 July

Although slightly earlier than usual, this is always a popular trip. Geoff and I arrived first and proceeded to make our camp on the edge of the forest, a slightly different pitch to usual. People steadily arrived over the next few hours, Becky and Becky being the last to arrive on Friday. We had a pleasant evening sat around our "it's a barbecue not a fire, honest warden" fire.

On Saturday the weather was fine and the majority of people opted to climb at Symonds Yat. There is a wide range for all capabilities here. As the weather was pretty hot there was plenty of coverage from trees to cool off. A number of people climbed the Pinnacle, which I've yet to do, along with a mixed armed forces Stag Day. Maggie certainly needed a cold shower after seeing them. That evening it was the usual barbecue, the numbers had doubled since the morning, so the whole event took on the impression of an Indian powwow.

Sunday saw a relatively speedy start by the cyclists, a bit slower by some of the climbers, walkers and bird-watchers. I think the cyclists had a good time, we had a great climb, and a bit of a stroll along the river, culminating in a cool cider at the Saracen's Head.

Pokey

Summer Alpine Trip, Mont Blanc-Chamonix 15-20 July

Four went out... but did four return? Read on to find out.



Dave Wilson



Dave Hall



Richard Spraggett



Martin Butler

Organising the Trip

I inherited this trip; originally it being someone else's idea – but he didn't renew their membership – and having been to the Alps a few times, and recently back with the Club (after an absence of a couple of years) it was suggested that I take on the organisation; which was not something I particularly relished (at first), having never run a week long trip.

At first, the enthusiasm was low – just Richard and myself - but, if you are competing with Bob's trips, then it's probably understandable. It also appears that people were put off by thinking the Alps are for Alpinists only: if you were one of those then, hopefully by the time you have read this you will think differently. Nonetheless, during the Yorkshire Dales trip Richard managed to convince Dave Hall to come along (provided that there was no 'serious Alpine mountaineering involved'), and later Dave Wilson decided to join us.

Chamonix-Mont-Blanc

Leaving the UK on Friday evening, we arrived in Chamonix-Mont-Blanc at about 9 o'clock Saturday morning after a car drive through the night, and headed straight for the apartment that I found on the internet. Richard was convinced that it was a derelict hotel on the corner – having heard of the infamous Snowdon bunkhouse; though I think Andrew Cook has now assumed the mantle of finding basic accommodation following the West Bay campsite in Dorset – but just down the lane was our apartment with a splendid view of Aiguille du Gouter.

The rest of the day was spent settling in and wandering about the town doing the inevitable gear shopping. That evening we were treated to Dave Hall's cuisine on the patio – pizza and salad – but, after the long drive it was welcome.

Later we were horrified to discover the price of a beer: 5Eur for a half-litre, which brought about the quote of the week, "it's a good job we're not big drinkers".

The town of Chamonix-Mont-Blanc lies at the bottom of a steeply sided valley underneath snow capped mountains such as Mont Blanc (the highest in Western Europe at 4,808m), Aiguille du Midi with its restaurant atop, the Aiguille du Grepon and Les Drus. It is a haven for mountaineers, skiers and tourists alike, thus always busy, and packed with bars, restaurants and shops.

The valley itself – or the Vale of Chamouni, as Shelley refers to it – boasts many activities for all people, from Alpine mountaineering, sports climbing, high mountain walks to valley walks, mountain biking, canoeing, white water rafting and paragliding.

Mont Blanc

First conquered by Jacques Balmat and Michel-Gabriel Paccard on 8 August 1786, the mountain still draws many a mountaineer today. Balmat was a simple crystal hunter with an eye on the reward offered by Monsieur de Saussure of Geneva; Paccard a respected doctor with a "passion for the sciences". They teamed up to reach the summit, but mainly to give some credibility to Balmat's ascent.



The Mer de Glace (Day 1)



The next morning we got up early and took the first train on the Mer de Glace funicular railway, which climbs steeply up the hill side up to Montenvers, where we disembarked and descended a series of iron ladders for about 200m to the glacier. Once on the ice, crampons and harness donned, we set off up the glacier traversing crevasses.

The idea was to spend some time getting used to moving on a glacier and have a go at some ice climbing: to have generally an easy day after the long journey the day before, but we just seemed to keep going and going, up around the corner and onto the Glacier du Tacul. We finally came to a halt before the Seracs du Geant (towers of ice on an ice fall, which have a habit of collapsing in the afternoon sun) and the Refuge du Requin. This was part of the original route up the Aiguille du Midi.

From this point (to which I had never ventured before) you can see Mont Blanc du Tacul and the cable car into Italy. After turning back we reached the Montenvers station with just enough time for a beer before one of the last trains descended for Chamonix. Dinner was had on the patio again – my turn to cook this time, whilst Richard and Dave Hall discovered a bar with a happy hour for “cheap drinks”. Later, we were treated to a light show as lightning moved in.

Aiguilles Rouges (Day 2)

Monday morning brought thunderstorms and heavy rain. After waiting these out, we set off for a traverse of the Aiguilles Rouges. This chain of peaks lies on the opposite side of the valley from the Mont Blanc Massif, and as a little lower in altitude they are predominantly rock. Utilising the free Chamonix bus, we went up the road to the Col des Montets, from where ascended steeply; in what was now back to the hot sunshine, to the flatter area just below the line of summits – known as the alp. At this point the rain returned as we set off across the range heading back towards Chamonix keeping below the summit ridges.

Nothing is quite what it seems in the Alps – what was planned as an easy day was rapidly turning into a big walk – such is the scale of the mountains out here. We stopped at the cable car station at le Flegere for a welcome break and refreshments, then as the better weather returned started our diagonal descent into Chamonix; which still took some considerable time.

We must have arrived back in town before 7 o'clock because it was a little too early for Happy Hour, so we had to pay the more exorbitant rates for a beer. That evening we were treated to Dave Wilson's cooking; and just to dispel the reputation gained in Scotland – he can cook.

Le Brevant (Day 3)

Next day we again turned our attention to the Aiguilles Rouges, but somewhere new to us. Le Brevant, hard to not recognise with its large rock face – to the top of which a cable car runs – dominates the vista over Chamonix on this side of the valley.

I didn't get very far: having suffered a recurrence of Achilles Tendonitis, I decided to return to the valley, whereupon I found a good butcher for some steaks for dinner.

The others carried on to the top – later I discovered that they had done a “pub crawl” at 2,500 metres.

Aiguille du Midi (day 4)

Wednesday; and we did really have an easy day, catching the teleferique to the top of the Aiguille du Midi. A spectacular feat of engineering has positioned a number of buildings, including cafes and a restaurant on top of a series of pinnacles at 3,700 – 3,800m, and accessible by cable car.

From the top you can take another cable car over to Italy. But, we didn't make this journey; instead we took in the views of Mont Blanc, when I think some seeds of interest were sown for a return trip to the region. Also from the top you can look down upon Chamonix, some 2,500m below.



Following a descent to the half-way station at le Plan du Midi, where we had lunch we elected to walk the rest of the way down – this took a further 3 hours.

It was decided to eat out that evening, but I didn't realise that we (Dave W and I) would end up cooking again. The two of us chose to share one of the specialities of the Haute Savoyard – a plate full of raw chicken, beef and veal that you had to cook for yourself on a hot plate.

Le Buet (Day 5 – Thursday)

First climbed in 1770 by the Du Luc brothers le Buet is an easy and good introduction to the summits of the Alps. The views looking across the Mont Blanc massif from the summit are supposed to be amongst the finest in the area.

An early start (a 05:00 alarm call) saw us set off, to what was for us our major peak for the trip. Standing slightly adrift of the main range near to the Swiss border, at 3100m le Buet is the highest peak in the Aiguilles Rouges.



The guide books recommended taking ice axes and ropes, but due to the lack of snow I was persuaded (by Dave Wilson) to leave the latter behind; and given what we found we could have left the axes out too.

Both guidebooks that I had advised taking two days over the ascent, stopping at a hut on the way, but I was informed by Geoff (who had spent some time living in Chamonix), that it could be done in one day.

The walk in was fairly trouble free and easy, we even managed to spot a marmot basking in the early morning sunshine. We stopped at the hut for a drink before making the journey upwards. This itself proving uneventful, nevertheless it took Marc-Theodore Bourrit – one of the 18th Century pioneers – two years just to locate the mountain.

This year was an exceptional year; low snow fall in winter, coupled with high spring and summer temperatures had led to very lean snow conditions, making a lot of the traditional routes inaccessible to be all but the most experienced alpinists. Due to the lack of snow the route became little more than a hard walk and we reached the summit just after noon. But, the views were not to be had; low cloud having arrived. The weather forecast was for rain in the afternoon, and true to it; the rain arrived just after we took our summit photographs.

A quick descent saw us back at the hut for a well deserved cup of tea and a break in the rain. From where we carried on down to the car, stopping off at a bar for a quick beer before heading off home.

The Last Day (Friday)

Friday was our last day. The two Daves decided to take another trip into the Aiguilles Rouge and race each other to the top, whilst Richard and I went back onto the Mer de Glace to have a “play” ice climbing on the ice walls of the crevasses.

What next (year); Mont Blanc?

Martin Butler

Peak District, 25-27 July

We arrived at the campsite Friday night and had trouble finding the rest of the group. Eventually we found them in the Families Only area, miles from the facilities but with a great view of the countryside. We all piled into Bob’s car (7 of us, making it Bob’s Bus!) and headed for the local pub at Over Hadden, where Mick and Ange met up with us to sample the local brew. Back at the campsite we discovered it was on the flight path to Manchester Airport, so flashing lights as well as shooting stars were seen by the night-sky-gazers.



Saturday saw the arrival of Mike and Gavin very early, as well as Will and Alex with their mammoth tent (it was big enough for Will to stand up in). The group split into three, the walkers leaving for a circular walk in the nearby valleys and the climbers going to various crags over the day. Mick, Ange and myself opted for a day at Stanage, followed by tea and a spot of gear shopping in Hathersage. Bob, Emma, Mike and Gavin climbed elsewhere, with a plan to swim in the afternoon not happening because of too much climbing and not enough time for slacking. Bob led an E1 and Emma an HVS for the first time. It was a hot day and the walkers found themselves at the next pub up the road at Monyash, before meeting back at the campsite

for the traditional barbecue feast and drinking. This was slightly hampered by the rain, but good use was made of Will and Alex's new tent.

Sunday was a parting of the ways, the climbers went off to Froggatt and the walkers set off on a circular walk starting at Winster. This soon became familiar as we ended up in Birchover, where we had stayed on Dave's trip last November. The all familiar standing stones were climbed by Maggie and Dan; it was only when we passed the bunkhouse that Alan remembered we had been here before. Still, with nice sunny weather the views looked different and we didn't see aliens running around the rhododendrons this time (huh? Ed.).

Not too far to travel and the long sunny days made this an enjoyable trip for all. It was nice that Emma came down the road from Leeds to see us.

Paula Bamber

Dorset, the Other End, 8-10 August

During the weekend of 8th-10th August some parts of Britain experienced the hottest temperatures on record. A time to stay indoors, go sit by a fan or just sit in a cold bathtub all day... but for the diehards from NMC it is a perfect time to go and get sweaty in the great outdoors!

A small band of sun-seekers from NMC spent the weekend trolling along a chunk of the South West Coast path from near Charmouth to West Rissington... another band spent their time clinging to the rocks off Portland, palms getting sweatier by the second!

Of course, the great southern ocean (Lyme Bay) provided frequent relief from the flaming sun god... er, the sun. Bodies were also cooled with the consumption of plenty of cider (Mike) beer (Martin) Guinness (Andrew) and lager (everyone else!) Overall a wicked weekend both sweaty and refreshing... and one that I think wasn't too badly hindered by the campsite... which I shall make a final apology for (DONE) and then it is confined to the mists of time as "OUR SECRET!"

Webmaster – why do they make me lead trips?

North Cornwall, 12-14 Sept

Unusually fine September weather added to the enjoyment of the North Cornwall trip, with many members choosing the beach and surfing option over hill walking and climbing.

Rhoda, Sarah, Martin and Karin spent Saturday morning pony trekking, and the afternoon body boarding/ sunbathing at Widemouth Bay. Dave and I (accompanied by Bruce for the first mile after a much appreciated, presidential lift to the start) walked 16 miles along the coastal path, from Bude to Hartland Quay. Finishing after 8 long hours, at 6.30pm, we were met by the others who had kindly left the beach and driven up to Hartland to bring us back. A 'few' beers and some seafood followed at the Wreckers Inn, before we headed back to Bude.

On Sunday, the whole group (boosted by the presence of Kath and Paula who arrived late Saturday night) walked from Crackington Haven to Widemouth

Bay. This 8 mile walk, left just enough time late in the afternoon, for some more body boarding and swimming before we set off home.

(Finally, the Cornish Coasts campsite charged only £3 per night, which should make this the cheapest trip of the year!)

Richard Spraggett

Alicante, 1-9 Nov

Present: Bob (organiser), Rhoda, Gaby, Mike, James, Paul, Will, Alex.

Setting off at three in the morning was never going to be an easy thing, but everybody managed to get to Luton in time to have an early-morning wake-up pint in the bar (well, Paul did, anyway). Still, at least there was some sleep to be had on the plane, resulting in stiff necks and general sleepiness on disembarking at Madrid. Sleepiness on the part of the non-drivers was in fact a definite bonus, as the drivers of EasyCar's finest were jolted rudely awake by some of the A-class's less desirable features, for example its cornering ability of a mouse with an ironing board strapped to its back. However the whole box of CDs left in one of the cars came in very useful! (Don't worry, we returned them to their rightful owners afterwards.)

Our first destination was Montanejos; en route we took a quick stop, to provide first blood for our keen climbers, and the sighting of some eagle-like birds for Rhoda. We reached Montanejos in the dark, after a rather jolly 20 km drive through some marvellous switchbacks which were crying out for a fast, manouverable and responsive car - not the A-class then. The mountain refuge that we stayed at provided plentiful food and drinks that night.

The first night Gaby performed a rather spectacular drop off the top bunk onto the floor (just in case some people were wondering what went thump that night, don't look if you don't like blood). Next day, climbing got serious, as we set off for the Montanejos limestone in warm sunshine, just a stone's throw from the hostel. Unfortunately, Mike started having trouble with his left arm, as he had given blood the day before going on holiday, and was now developing a nasty bruise (excuses, excuses). After a long but very enjoyable day on the rocks and in pools of water, we retired back to refuge for a best effort of drinking the bar dry. We didn't quite achieve this but the pizza was delicious (every 6th of it!). We were upgraded in our accommodation that night (I think it was an upgrade?) to a precariously perched alpine hut for 6! The little hut was perched on top of a steep rock, and of course, no night would be complete without Gaby taking a tumble off the top bunk, this time skinning half her arm...

Next day, we were made our way to the coast in a leisurely way, stopping off at Jerica for more limestone fixes, and a close-up of James's split-crotch pants (thanks to Rhoda's camerawork). We were amazed to receive the guide at a local Café where we had been told to ask for it by the Hostel owner, it didn't look feasible that a guide would be found in such an odd place? But sure enough after some searching scruffy set of A4 plastic wallets was produced from behind the bar. A small miracle! The routes were fantastic and we were all sorry to leave, but leave we must.

Off to sunny Calpe on the coast and a luxury villa thoughtfully provisioned with victuals and litre-bottles of beer by Will and Alex. The NMC members did

themselves proud, making considerable inroads into the supplies before retiring. Then up again at 10ish for a leisurely breakfast on the sunny terrace, and a plan was born to brave the famous 'Barranco del Infierno', or the Gorge of Hell (inviting!). Clouds were to be seen over the hills, so there was some hesitation whether the gorge would be passable at all (prone as it is to flash-flooding). In the end, we decided to leave all camera equipment at home, including camera phones, and just chance it. Getting to the gorge, it was still cloudy but we decided we might as well do it now we were here. All tooled up with abseil devices and helmets, we set off to the bottom of the gorge, which on closer inspection was actually bone dry apart from a few pools. The gorge is spectacular, narrowing at points so much that you are completely enclosed by rock walls without a view of the sky. We were surrounded by stunning images and had no camera to capture them! Not even a little Sharp phone! So we scrambled, climbed, abseiled and swung out way through the fantastic rock formations having brilliant fun all day.

Being righteously shattered after yesterday's very long walk back up out of the gorge to the cars, it was some time before anybody stirred the next morning. Despite a late (11ish) start, Bob, Rhoda and Paul decided to conquer the Penon d'Ifach yet again, Bob and Rhoda having already done it a few years before. As Mike was by now sporting a purple bruise over the best part of his arm, Mike, Gaby and James decided on the more leisurely option of a walk up the TV hill which gave a great view of 1000 holiday villas in the November sun. We scoured the Penon with our binoculars but could see no sign of the intrepid climbers. So, out of the goodness of our hearts, we decided to load up with provisions and meet the undoubtedly famished conquerors as they came off the mountain. Weighed down with beer and cakes, we set off up the steep path to the summit as darkness was rapidly descending. We had made it all the way through the tunnel by the time we received a call from Bob back at the villa informing us that everybody was going for dinner in 1 hour... Needless to say, our intrepid explorers had started up the Penon but had then seen the light (from a nearby bar) where they met up with Will and Alex. A fabulous meal at a nearby harbour restaurant later that night finished off the evening in style.

After the previous day's complete failure to rise early, we managed to set off to Sella at a reasonable time in the morning. The drive was well worth it - Sella is a wonderful climbing spot in the mountains above Alicante catering for all abilities. From basic climbers like Gaby (who proudly led a number of heavily bolted 3cs) to Spiderman-like James (rather entertaining to watch whilst snacking on shortbread, brie, magdalenas and bananas). Mike's camcorder produced some very entertaining footage of a pink stripey-trousered Paul, and magnificent views of the surrounding mountain range. On the last twilight climb of the day, as Mike was getting ready to abseil down, he was unnerved by the unwavering stare of a huge Eagle Owl only feet away sitting on his abseil tree. This little incident prompted a quick exit from the belay tree, and an early-morning dash to Sella the next day to recover his abandoned camcorder from the top of the climb. Apart from a bit of owl poo, the camera was none the worse for a night in the open.

It was then time to take the A-Classes (the not so 'Easy' cars) back on a death-defying dash to Madrid, we said our good-byes to Will and Alex who stayed on for a few days more. All went well until we hit the Madrid ring-road. Being caught in the middle lane, Gaby had no choice but to carry on watching Rhoda pull into a handy service station. However, the power of the mobile was much appreciated as Bob caught up by following a running commentary between Rhoda and Mike describing various landmarks we went past - leaning towers and giant Burger Kings much appreciated. Another small miracle. That evening after a much-

needed shower in a proper hotel, we had one of the best meals of the trip in Bob's favourite Lebanese restaurant. Much alcohol was consumed, and eventually Gaby's adrenaline-induced shaking calmed down...

Next day was La Pedriza day, Bob taking any willing victims to his favourite hangout complete with amazing formations of granite (featureless and completely lacking in handholds). Having had quite enough adrenaline for the time being, Gaby and Mike opted for a cultural day in Madrid, taking in the eclectic Thyssen-Bornemisza art collection, cathedral, palace and a few chocolate bars. However, no excuses were accepted the next day when the whole NMC contingent, shored up by Bob's friend, went out to La Pedriza to brave the granite yet again. After fighting our way through well-nigh-impenetrable thickets of bushy things and a few bottom-jams up a slippery crack, various people proceeded to measure their skill and strength against the cold and unforgiving stone. Much hilarity ensued on the part of Gaby and Mike who had yet again elected to watch people pant, curse and generally have a good time whilst making microscopic progress. However, the walk back through the open woodland following a babbling brook was quite stunning. Back to Madrid, cram in a few more drinks and tapas, then off to the airport and back to Britain...

Gaby Grubwinkler

Other trips from 2003...

... which never received a write-up! (There might be photos in the archive, though.)

16th – 19th Jan – Brecons

Organised by Rhoda, and met the “comfy sofa trip” criteria: a huge farmhouse with roaring fires and yes, comfy sofas. Notable, allegedly, for being the first time Dave Wilson said “which part of 9.30 don’t you understand?” as everybody fuffed about before a walk on the first day.

14th – 16th Feb – Lake District

Organised by Dave W. The joys of Ambleside YH. Good weather, if you look at the photos!

14th - 18th Mar - Ice Climbing, Glencoe

A Bob trip. Finally (after 4 years of trying) the group successfully managed the Aonach Eagach ridge to the north side of Glencoe. Apparently it had become an obsession for some...

28th - 30th Mar - Dartmoor

Organised by Pokey, and staying at the Forest Inn bunkhouse at Hexworthy. Great walking for all who went.

17th - 21st April - Easter in Yorkshire Dales (Ribblesdale)

Ange organised a trip to her homeland(!), which was notable for the celebrations of Mick’s 50th birthday and Alan clocking up 69 miles over the weekend by doing the Three Peaks twice. Oh yes, and then there was the Norbar Erratics...

7th - 15th Jun - Summer Trip - The Picos de Europa, Nth.Spain.

Another Bob trip – not much in the way of climbing, but instead trekking hut-to-hut in hot sunshine on clear paths. Also snow-filled gullies to play in! Highest point reached: 2598m on Torres de la Perdida.

27th - 29th Jun - Lake District

Kath's trip was notable for an excellent campsite, the two ridge walks in the Buttermere Circuit, and midges. Lots of midges...

22nd - 25th Aug - St David's, Pembrokeshire (Bank Hol.)

Quote of the weekend from Dave W, in his capacity as organiser: "Why plan for three months when you can panic for three days?". The last-minute search for a campsite worked out well in the end, and it was a great weekend of climbing and walking.

14th - 16th Nov - Cadir Idris

Walking and the rugby World Cup final – we all know the score! Hut trip, organised by Mick.

5th - 7th Dec - German Trip

Maika playing tour guide in her homeland. Plenty of shopping in the Christmas markets and much consumption of Gluhwein... also unsubstantiated rumours that some people actually went for a walk...?

21st Dec - Christmas Walk

To Hungerford along the canal, led by Alan. Plenty of mulled wine and mince pies...

27th Dec - 3rd Jan 2004 - Aviemore, Scotland

People hoped for snow... maybe a little too much, as it was hard going for the first few days before paths were established. Landing up to your waist in snow the first few times is quite amusing, not so much after the 15th time or so. Some good routes were attempted and some were even achieved, and there was also the opportunity to go skiing.