



Newbury Mountain Club Trip Reports, 2000

Summary, from October 2000 Newsletter

There's been so much happening over the last couple of months that I figured it was about the right time for another round up of what we've done and what's coming up.

It's been quite a busy summer - July saw us in Ireland, September gave us the Picos in Spain and then we had a trip to Paris. We have a trip report on the Ireland extravaganza from Pokey - well worth a read (prizes for anyone who can identify the book he stole the opening line from!). We also have a report for Spain penned by yours truly. In a future newsletter we might get a report from the intrepid foursome of Bruce, Alan, Mick and Celeste who braved tropical storms, semi-wild pigs and Alan's underpants (see the Eire report) to complete the GR20 (a massive 100+ mile trek across the mountains of Corsica).

On top of these trips we have also done a great deal of climbing in locations such as Stannage, Froggatt, Swanage, Avon Gorge, Wye Valley and probably some places I've forgotten. Pokey even developed a new religion in the Peak District: something about getting stuck on a climb and praying to anyone who may be listening at the time - Optimism.

I'm sure our venerable President would have liked to say a few choice words but as he's sunning it up on a secret island in the Med we'll have to stick with "Pass me another beer will you Katie".

Martin Higgins

Midges, Pants and Guinness – Ireland, July 2000

I am writing this three months after the event, so those that were there may not remember the events quite as I write them; put this down to your fading memories and read on.

July the first dawned, not unexpectedly, a little before my alarm woke me. The quiet pre-holiday drink the night before still rested far too heavily on my brow. The dawn had also left a black bin liner on my doorstep. Was this Sarah's gear or a massive stash of illegal substances? What the heck, in the boot with all my stuff and off to Kate and Harry's place. Harry wasn't coming as he had forgotten he had an exam on the Tuesday, numpty! Having been given rights of control and punishment over Katie, oh, and the Key, we set off. Katie had offered to drive the first stint. Across southern England in to Wales, along its chin, past its mouth and on to the snout (those that see Wales as a pig's head will understand) to Fishguard, the jewel of Pembroke. On the ferry I realised why Katie had offered to drive the first bit; she had popped a seasickness tablet, with her eyes pointing in far too many directions I guided her to a seat to sleep the rest of the crossing. Into Ireland, Sarah's stash smoothly smuggled through the attentive though sunbathing Customs officers. The journey was to prove a bit of an epic. Lunch in Waterford and on to Cork. Katie's navigating proved second to none, Alan would

have been jealous. We managed to check out most of the streets of Ireland's second city, some a couple of times for good measure, finally we ended up on the ring road which admittedly wasn't marked in my 1911 AA Book of European Roads. We finally arrived in Killarney just before seven. Helen had cooked a mammoth lasagne which we tried to finish off, only leaving just enough to feed the entire house for the next three days. Then down to the pub for the inevitable pint or two of Guinness.

On the next day we set off for the peak of Tore Mountain, a hill just crying out to be climbed. Unfortunately we had to leave it crying, because there was no apparent way up its rhododendron covered flanks. The Corsica practice team had trouble at times through the often tight confines of the footpath. With the troublesome bushes behind us we entered battle with the small but very annoying midges. A cup of tea and cream cakes beside Muckross Lake proved our downfall (Midges 1, NMC 0). Our goal was then in sight, Molly Darcy's pub and a pint of refreshing Guinness or two.

John Edge and Liz arrived early that evening; smoking a Cuban cigar, a can of beer in hand. John was smoking a cigarillo and sipping delicately on a brandy and Babycham. After a refreshing shower it was back to Molly's for dinner, oh and a pint of Guinness or two.

On Monday, it was the big one, our ascent of Carrauntoohil (or Corran Tuathail) with the group looking like an excursion from a measles clinic (Midges 2 NMC 0). The Devil's Domestic Appliance was a test to sort the men from the boys. Most came into view at the top huffing like the proverbial steam train, Sarah even making a spirited effort to usurp my title of Mr Tomato Head. Unfortunately the clouds closed in while we were traversing Maggillycuddy's Reeks. This gave Alan a chance to really demonstrate his navigating skills; luckily we all made it down. While on the subject of Alan, it was during this day that it became apparent to all that he had only packed one pair of underpants for the week. Well he hadn't packed them, he was still wearing them like he had for the previous three years. Pants were to become a theme of the holiday, read on!

Tuesday saw some of us attempt the rest of the ridge of Maggillycuddy's Reeks. Setting off in glorious sunshine we happily embarked on a mammoth ascent, 800m in about 1 mile. Yet again the weather conspired against us, cloud and thunderstorms closed in. Being at the highest part of a country is not the wisest thing in thunder. I had to use all my powers of persuasion to convince everyone that we really shouldn't be there (it's never nice to see a grown man on his knees pleading). So we headed off for safety, me with my trekking poles thrusting into the black sky, inadvertently challenging Thor to a match (thank you Martin for making me aware of this fact). After witnessing one of the best electrical storms I've seen (I would have preferred being indoors to do this), we stopped off at Kate Keamey's cottage for a Guinness or two. Unfortunately our heroic deeds were trumped by Sarah, Sue and Gordon, who had gone for a walk along the old Kenmare Road. After the storm, they had to traverse a torrent on a submerged bridge; well that was their excuse for the wetness of their undergarments.

Wednesday was a day of rest for some and a day of disappointment for one. Harry and Mick were due to arrive at Cork that evening, so Kate, Sarah and I set off for an afternoon in Cork. Martin and Helen went diving off the south coast, while Alan and Bruce went for a coastal walk around an island. I'm not sure what the others did, but I'm sure they had fun. Cork was a doddle, our knowledge of the road system gleaned from Saturday led us straight to a multi-storey carpark. Sarah and Kate set off on their mission to find some pants for Alan (one technical pair, one pulling pair). My mission was to find some music, preferably live. I failed on my mission but did manage to fall in love with the most gorgeous barmaid I had set eyes on for days. Kate failed on her mission, it appeared technical underpants weren't in season. Sarah returned proudly waving a pair of Colin

Klines. Helen also failed on her mission: having shown all on the boat her most intimate bits, she then sadly couldn't find the largest shipwreck off the coast of Europe (only 1000m long!). With Mick and Harry on board (Mick carrying his Corsica pack, marginally smaller than a modest house, and Harry carrying his Tesco bag of gear) we set off for home.

On Thursday it was time for another good walk. This time it was an alternative route up Carrauntoohil. Unfortunately the cloud had descended, so the group split, some to the top and the rest of us for a drier low level walk. We still managed to lose Alan in the clouds; while we were frantically searching (Kate blowing theme tunes on my safety whistle, I just wish she had detached it from my rucksack), Alan was in a small hut phoning Caroline. Once we regrouped and descended from the clouds, Bruce brewed up a warming cup of tea (practice for Corsica). We were on a tight schedule, as that evening we were having the big group meal. With my usual band of lackeys and hangers-on, we started the preparations. The menu that evening was to be local barbecued salmon, followed by roast bacon, cabbage and potatoes (Sarah's creamed potato dish going down very well). The crumble for dessert narrowly avoided disaster when Sue stepped in with the correct quantities of ingredients (I'm not so hot on the desserts). Both houses sat in for the meal, all was washed down with a copious amount of wine. Two other events happened during the meal; firstly there was a private showing of Alan's new underpants (girls only, luckily for the rest of us). Secondly, John and Liz announced their engagement (congratulations), John had finally decided that he could put up with Liz's cigars.

Friday dawned a bit fuzzily for some of us; after a slow start people set off for the last day's events. Some walked from Kenmare back to Killarney, some set off home, and for Harry, Kate, Sarah and myself it turned out to be the most strenuous day so far. We set off for the Sheep's Head peninsula, just south of Bantry Bay. Buying a map in Bantry, we ended up in the only pub on the headland for lunch in the sun (Guinness and sandwiches). Kate and Sarah had a sudden urge for cake and tea, leaving Harry and me to do the only decent thing: another Guinness. This had the potential for continuing all afternoon, luckily we were saved from ourselves by the timely return of the girls. We then drove out to the end of the peninsula, walking the last mile to the end. After such a strenuous walk a long rest was required; Sarah read, I watched the local fishermen plying their trade in the bay, Harry and Kate disappeared only to return with a cheesy grin (not sure what they had been doing). Our walk back to the car took in a little lough: the others decided to swim in it (more underpant antics I'm afraid), and I decided that the offbrown and green colour of the water was less than healthy (before or after the swim? - Ed). More tea and cake was bought from a shed in the carpark (the lady told us about the cows swimming in the lough) and then we returned to base. By the time we got to Kenmare it was getting late so we stopped for dinner in a rather out of place nouveau cuisine restaurant (little did the stuffy waitress know that three of our number were pantless). Some of the others spent the evening sampling the local music in Killamey; Mick even made some new Republican friends.

Saturday dawned very early for some: Sarah had a flight from Cork to catch, the others a ferry. When I got back from Cork, Kate and Harry were the only ones left. We had a ferry the next day from Rosslare so we had a bit of time left. The sad business of cleaning up and packing completed we set off for the east coast on the scenic route. Trying to find somewhere to have a picnic near the Rock of Cashel was difficult but we eventually settled for bird-poo laden table overlooking the fortified abbey in the rain. When we arrived near Rosslare we were found some accommodation by the lovely girl in the Tourist Office (I think Kate cramped my style a bit, that and Harry acting as though he is related to himself). Mrs O'Leary was a very friendly landlady whose daughter was an expert violinist (age 12) and Mrs O'Leary was very proud of her sister who was an award winning

artist based in Cobh and the storm: out at sea during the autumn were great to watch from her lounge and were the tea and scones OK what time did we want breakfast in the morning (all without a single breath).

We managed to get away for some dinner in Wexford (eventually! There wasn't any room at the seafood festival). With nothing left to do we headed off on the early ferry next morning. I realised that the holiday was over as I forlornly walked onto the platform at Newport, Kate and Harry disappearing off towards home, me on my way to York.

So that brings it all to a close, the end of a great holiday in a beautiful part of the world populated by a generous and friendly people who also happen to brew Guinness.

Pokey

Climbing oranges and other tall tales – Picos, Sept 2000

Spain again. That's twice this year now. (There's a few plans for the country for next year as well.) This time the target was the Picos. An uneventful flight led to a longish drive in the heat of the day from Bilbao down to a little village in the Picos (via a pint of course). We had two cars between the seven of us (Bill, Bob, Bruce, Cliff, me, Mick, Pokey) and we managed to meet up with Will and Alex at the village. We headed straight up a twisty dirt track as far as the cars could take us, then slung rucksacks on our backs to do the remaining trek up to a hut up in the mountains. The views were already stupendous and they just kept getting better (at the same time as I got more knackered). We had a deadline to achieve as well so the pace was sustained at a reasonable walking rate without too much in the way of a rest (did I mention I was knackered?). The hut had to be reached by 1900 so we could put in our request for dinner for eight. They were expecting us to arrive but I don't think they wanted to cook unless they knew for certain the food was going to be eaten - everything was imported to the hut by mule. We made it with time to spare. There's something to be said about drinking wine and eating a huge meal after a long hike up to 2000m above sea level - it shouldn't be done - but why should that stop us. We would have ordered some beer before the wine but Bob saw that a couple of Irish guys had signed in before we got there and we reckon they probably caused the shortage of beers. After the meal our party drifted off slowly to bed while Bob gave an astronomy lesson to those who were still awake. The sky was completely clear and we could see stuff with the naked eye that normally would be tricky to pick out with a telescope. There were also a couple of guys on the side of the mountain peak we were due to climb in the morning. They had a portaledge and had decided to camp a little higher than anyone else.

The morning came a little sooner than some of us had hoped and after a short breakfast we headed off around the base of Naranjo des Bulnes to the other side which had our intended route on it. When we were at the base of the route Will and Alex decided to go for a walk with Cliff instead of doing the climb which was probably a wise decision in retrospect. As there were still seven of us climbing the logistics had to be planned out in some detail - a task which had been completed in the war-room the night before. Bob and Mick were to share the lead with the rest of us following up in order. Bob started up to the first belay ledge a short distance up followed by Mick, Bruce, Bill and Pokey. I brought up the rear. As those at the end of the line were climbing Mick was sent on up ahead. He disappeared out of sight quite quickly (I assume he was placing gear this time) and soon had the next belay in place. A group of Spaniards started climbing just behind us in two pairs and soon overtook us. It was a little crowded while we were on the same belays but they were a smaller group and got out of the way soon enough. I didn't really see much of Mick and Bob till we got to the top of the

climb four pitches higher up. Most of my time was spent chatting to Pokey and Bill on the belay ledges. The warmth of the sun and the views made for a very pleasant day on the rock. When I finally got to the top of the climb there was still a couple of hundred metres to go to the top of the mountain - the rest was a scramble across the rock without ropes. The last part of the climb itself caused a little amusement. The rock was fairly blank except for a series of deep grooves called cannelithos (sp?) which became something ruder when Pokey got hold of it. This part of the climb became the tongue jam section. Anyway, the scramble was quite interesting. It was quite easy but there were a lot of loose stones around (we had to leave the ropes behind so as not to knock any off on people who may have been below - a couple of small stones had dropped past while we climbed and over that distance could have caused some nasty injuries or knocked us off the rock). I started to feel reasonably agitated by the feeling of exposure and the idea that a slip would end in two bounces on the slope we were on followed by about 15 seconds of life flashing between the amphitheatre and the ground rushing up. I knew exactly what it was and I knew there was little chance of it being my friend. I found out later that altitude can sometimes cause a little paranoia which remains my excuse for losing my bottle.

We almost lost Pokey on this top section. His self preservation gene had quietly gone off on holiday somewhere safer and he was heading off straight up the slope. He hadn't seen Mick and Bruce go up and left so he had to downclimb a section after Bob yelled at him. We made the top together, Mick and Bruce having waited for us to catch up and got a few group photos to prove we didn't make all this up over a few pints. We were at around 2500 metres altitude and had rock climbed a mountain - a first for all of us I think. The descent was good fun as well. We used a couple of ropes to abseil down the amphitheatre to the point where the tongue jams had happened. From here we proceeded to abseil all the way down to the ground about 300 metres away. The methodology for this was simple. We set an abseil up and Bruce was lowered down it usually by me. He'd take a rope with him and make sure that the abseil ropes were OK. Once he was down I'd jump off and join him to set up the next set of ropes. While we were doing this the rest would make their way down with Bob bringing the ropes down at the end and passing them forwards for lower stages. Having made the bottom all that remained was to get packed up and leave. Bill and I were slower than the rest (neither of us particularly like walking down loose stones) so they went on ahead and we followed at our own pace. We made the cars about half an hour after they did but got further delayed when we got a flat on the dirt track. When we eventually made it to the town we were staying in, all the others had eaten already. Bob said something to the waiter and he came back with four plates, two of which were put in front of me and Bill and the other two sent back - things were looking up, the amount of food Bob just ordered for us was supposed to be for four people. The waiter brought out some food after we'd already dealt with the leftovers from the other guys. Then he brought some more food. Then some more. Each plate of food turned up, got split down the middle and consumed in a precise and efficient manner. By the end of it we'd worn the poor waiter out. Then all that remained was a couple of puddings each, a few beers, some brandy and some coffee and come the early hours some well deserved sleep.

The remaining days are best left to visuals so Mick will have to host another slide show if anyone wants to know the details. We walked up the Cares Gorge the next day. The first part of the trip had been amazing as we spent the entire expedition above the clouds. The gorge was nothing less than awesome. The walk took us along varying levels of the gorge which towered hundreds of metres of often vertical rock from the river in the bottom to the tops of the mountains. The next day was spent in driving up to Comillos on the coast where we spent the night after a relaxing evening eating and drinking and wandering around the town. A waitress in the restaurant thought that Helen was Pokey's wife which was

quite amusing as he was going gooey eyed over her (or blurry eyed depending on how you view events). Bob and Bruce had a late night swim in the sea and then we got a look at the local sights in the small hours of the morning. Will and Alex had to head for the airport early so we didn't see them the next day. We drove along the coast part way to Bilbao for some food and a bit of bouldering on the sea cliffs, and then completed the journey all the way back to England.

Martin Higgins