



Newbury Mountain Club Trip Reports, 2001

Summary, from July 2001 Newsletter

Well, I suppose it's about time I got around to writing up a newsletter really. It's been a good while since the last one and quite a bit has happened. I think probably six months has gone by since I last put anything together like this. I do have a good excuse for it taking a bit longer than it should. I'm going to put some of the blame squarely on the shoulders of the Foot in Mouth crisis (you know, the well-documented political disease). There we were having a rather good weekend walking in the Lake District and all of a sudden we had to turn away from the Coniston Old Man and go for a walk in the Grizedale Forest instead, much to Mick's chagrin as he's spent a lot of time in the Lakes and never done that particular mountain. We'll get it next time. As it turned out we shouldn't have been directed into the forest as we met a farmer putting up the closed signs as we left. Anyway, that weekend in February marked the end of any real activity for several months. There were a variety of trips planned which were unable to happen as there was really nothing to do when we got to the various places.

Over the next few months we still managed a few trips although they were mostly limited to overseas visits. Some of us flew to Alicante and did some climbing and walking around the area. Four of us went off to Nepal for three weeks and we recently went on a week long holiday to the Pyrenees. In this exciting episode we have a report from Pokey on Alicante and a trimmed down recap of our Nepal visit. I've also written something for the Pyrenees trip.

One event that managed to go ahead despite major concerns that it would be cancelled was the Crafty Craft Race in Newbury on the May Bank Holiday. This event is normally held along the canal from Hungerford Common to the middle of Newbury. This year the course had to change a little as Foot and Mouth prevented access to the canal path. Instead the course followed a short loop in the middle of town and the idea was to do as many laps as possible in 45 minutes. We managed to come in pretty well despite having rebuilt the boat to go fast in a straight line without turning. The fancy dress we had won us a prize and the Wilde man went for the cup (later used for champagne during the post race BBQ). Well done to all involved.

Martin Higgins

Nepal, March-April 2001

During April, Mike, Alan, Mark and myself went on an expedition to Nepal. Not really a club trip, but the slides have sent a good number of people to sleep so I thought a repeat would be good. We left at the end of March and had a good number of delays due to overbooking, redirection and general incompetence. Finally we arrived and got to the hotel which was reasonably pleasant, given the poverty stricken state of the rest of Kathmandu. We spent a day doing the touristy things like watching dead people get burned and trying to convince street kids that we weren't going to give them any money.



A long bus ride took us to Pokhara where we stayed for the night and got our first good views of the mountains. Macchapuchhre was to stay in view for the majority of the next two and a half weeks. The trek started with a couple of miles

in thirty degree-plus temperatures (which were to remain for most of the trip). If all the days had been that easy we could have kept walking to the top of Everest.

The tea houses we stayed in were a major surprise to me. We had rooms with ceilings and walls and beds with mattresses. There was a variety of good food (mostly fried unfortunately - the Nepalese seem to have the idea that westerners only eat fried food) and plenty of drinkable water. This sort of luxury took me completely by surprise. The following days took us slowly up the trail to Annapurna Base Camp at just over 4000 metres. The walking was reasonably straightforward with few major challenges other than the heat and on the penultimate day of the uphill trek we went from bright sun to several inches of snow in about twenty minutes. Interesting weather. Just after the bulk of the snow Alan was in the lead guiding us up the path. "Are you OK up there, Alan?" asked Dave. "Yes, fine. Err, which way is it?" replied Alan. Luckily we had a vision in yellow named Pemba with a flask of hot tea. He'd run on ahead of us to Machhapuchhre Base Camp and come back when the weather closed in. He pointed us to the path which was only a few yards away at this point.



As we got up to Annapurna Base Camp I managed to get some altitude sickness. The pressure (or lack thereof) started to screw around with my head a bit, giving me a splitting headache whenever I moved so I lay down in the tent that was waiting for me and stared at Tharpu Chuli (the mountain we intended to climb). So long as I didn't move I felt fine, but Dave in his capacity as the one in charge decided that the best cure for me was to not eat that night. How that cures a headache is totally beyond me (it was good for Craig who had some pretty bad stomach pains). I didn't care too much and just stared at the mountain although when I heard the cries of delight when Ram brought out a cake he'd made I was a little annoyed especially as I heard them clearly say that they'd save a piece each for me and Craig and all I ever saw was a photo of it.

The effects of the headache were quite cool. For the second time in my life I hallucinated like crazy although I hadn't had any drugs and I remembered what I saw this time in a sort of detached manner. Basically, I saw faces in the side of the mountain and the shadows like you do if you stare at the clouds on a summer evening. Most excellent.

As I was still a little dodgy next day I went back down to MBC to recover while the others headed up the mountain. A few days later I'd chatted to a whole bunch of interesting folks and I came back up to ABC and the following morning the group came off the mountain (it was a day earlier than I expected). There was one success by Ben with Nate getting the next highest at the top of the flutings. Mick and Dave P made it to the base of the flutings but had to stop there as the snow was really too deep to sensibly continue. A good effort to this point though - a kilometre higher than I got to. The way down was absolutely fantastic. As we were going down the oxygen content increased so we were flying along.



There were a few with injuries so they had to go slow but Mick and I started accelerating down the trail like a yeti was chasing us. When we got to the end of the trail Pauline was there to meet Dave which was a huge surprise for him and she'd brought beer for all the party. The bus ride back to Pokhara was a pleasant one. We spent a day looking around Pokhara and then headed back to Kathmandu. We spent a day there getting totally tempted out and then found that the airline had screwed up big time and we had an extra two days in the capital while it was sorted out. They put us up in a five star hotel though. Alan had been the only one apart from me who hadn't got a stomach upset on the trip until now when the hotel got him. I managed to remain unaffected by the food and maintain my 100% record of eating and drinking anything I like without worrying about getting ill. Perhaps getting sick from dodgy food is a psychosomatic effect...

Martin Higgins

Plummeting for Beginners - Spain, May 2001

No surprise when I arrived at Alan's, he was ready and waiting; a bit more surprising was that Celeste was there and ready too. Then, miracle of miracles, when we got to Rhoda's she was ready. Fearing that my watch was so obviously wrong, I sped at warp factor 8 towards Luton or were we flying from Stansted (never really knew). The others (Martin, Bob, Dave, Ange and Bruce) finally arrived, all present and correct, time to leave for Spain. During the flight, Celeste used her I'm-in-the-business card to get her and Rhoda onto the flight deck, Celeste to suss out if the Captain earned enough, Rhoda to put his hat on. Cars were duly hired and we set off for Calpe, a traditional southern Spanish tourist building site with a rather impressive rock sticking up beside it. The accommodation was the only remaining building from a bygone era, a bit of character amongst heaps of contemporary concrete. Bruce was chosen as the

"safe option" (if only they knew!) to share with the girls. Once Martin and I were installed in the cupboard that was to be home for next few days, it was off to the bar. Later we had a nice walk to look at the rock and then on to a Chinese meal. Will and Alex arrived just as we were ordering.

Next morning, the planned 7 o'clock start became the more traditional, just before lunchtime. We set off to climb the rock (Penon de Ifach), aiming to be on the beach by 3 in the afternoon (ha! If only we'd known). Three groups started the climb: Bob, Mick and Rhoda, Dave and Martin, and Bruce, Celeste and me.

Dave and Martin were doing a more difficult route, while the rest were doing the less difficult one. While our group followed the route as directed, Bob's group zigzagged wildly up the rock, only touching the specified route at right-angles to it. This was to cause a major hold-up at one difficult bit, which meant we were sat on a ledge for 2 hours waiting for them to get out of the way. By that time Dave and Martin had caught up with us, the other route being a tad too hard for them (Dave's fingernail scratches could be clearly seen down the face of the rock from 100 feet away). Bob's next zig (or was it a zag, lost count by then) took them into a blind corner, well out of our way. The next two pitches were up a wonderful slab with excellent holds and very aromatic thyme bushes. The view from the top was breathtaking, just a 2 foot wide ridge and a drop down the other side to the town. The final "easy scramble" to the top was marginally more difficult than expected. Especially as time was getting on and lunch had not been brought.



Finally we all arrived at the top for a team photo, gear faff and descent down the footpath to the hostel. It was nearly 9pm when we arrived back. Time for a quick shower and out for some food and what was to prove a few too many drinks.

It was Alan's birthday the next day, so celebrations started early and carried on until it was very early. Body Slammers (ask Celeste for the rules), beer, wine, port) - you name it, we mixed it. This all ended in the inevitable skinny dip at 3 am. Some people returned eventually to the Hostel, others, well I'll leave that to the imagination and blushes.

The day's activities started after breakfast: some of us went to Sella for a climb or walk depending on the level of hangover. Rhoda had to go via the hospital to get her foot looked at, during her late night swim she had trodden on something spiky (missed a chance for a gratuitous "prick" joke here). After a lecture on

swimming without shoes on (lucky she hadn't sat on the sea bed!) she was discharged with little treatment and no sympathy.

The single pitch bolted climbing gave me a perfect chance to demonstrate my recently honed plummeting skills (5.8, 5.9, 6.0, 5.7, 5.8, 4.0, the Russian judge wasn't impressed). I'm not sure what happened on the walk, but people staggered back in dribs and drabs; some even claiming to have walked an astonishing 2 miles in 5 hours. On the road to the bar for a pint, Alan decided to do a little off-roading in the 306. Luckily Angela was with us, single-handedly lifting the car, removing the wheel-nuts with her teeth and replacing the rather bent wheel with the spare (tough these Northern Girls!!). All this while Al and I looked on worrying over broken fingernails.

As it was Alan's birthday, he had chosen a night out in Benidorm, so we booked into some surprisingly reasonable accommodation near the centre. Will and Alex took one look at 'Dorm and left for somewhere else, never to be seen again. The meal was excellent, the Rough Guide coming up trumps again. The evening was somewhat subdued compared to the previous, some hangovers still being visible. Dave, Martin and I finished fairly early as we were off to climb Puig Campana the following day. This was one of the original targets for the trip; most declined the chance, feigning split-ends and other minor ailments.

We were at the base of the mountain before 9.30 (not bad for one of these trips!). The target was 40 minutes per pitch, a total of 12 pitches and off the mountain by 8pm. Martin and I were sharing the leading, with Dave dragging along in the middle. The first few pitches were going to schedule, the climbing not unduly difficult, although I was feeling a bit nervy after yesterday's fall. Pitch 5 brought us to the base of an arete. Pitch 6 was to prove to be the critical one. My turn to lead up this very exposed arete, big drops to the left and right and absolutely nothing behind me. All things considered, it was rather surprising that I lost the route, but I did. This raised the level of climb from just plain hard and scary to something much harder and scarier; I even went quiet. For those who have never climbed with me, that means I had been through all the other stages of talking to myself (well beyond the shitshitshitshit stage). I finally made it to the top with the help of some found gear, missing the belay loop (not surprising as that was on the route).

With Dave and Martin up, the pitch had taken over an hour, knocking our averages. The second critical aspect then occurred, two Spanish climbers overtook us, delaying us by a further 20 minutes. Then the final criticality: it started to rain. By the time I had made it up pitch 7 the rock was getting very slippery. By now it was 4 o'clock, we still had 5 pitches left and the rock was slippery. At this point, the survival gene kicked in (except Martin, who has an additional eating gene instead) and we decided a pint would be preferable to climbing in the rain. The descent proved to be an epic. Abseiling from the first pitch, the rope jammed around the tree we were using. Martin had to re-climb pitch 7 to free it and use the conveniently placed wire loop. The next abseil was off the side of the arete, unfortunately when we pulled the rope through it managed to tie a perfect Italian Hitch around a tree halfway down. Dave climbed up to free it, creating a new route "Dave's Rope Trick", he had to leave some gear to get back down. It would appear that leaving gear on this mountain was the norm, as we found nearly as much as we left. We were beginning to get hungry by now, it had taken three hours to get down these two abseils, so we shared out what was left of our meagre rations (only the Kendal Mintcake left, not that desperate!). We were also wondering if we would ever get off this mountain or if we should send out for a pizza. Two more uneventful abseils and a scramble got us back to the base of the mountain, very relieved. We were back at the car at 8 o'clock, finally meeting the others at a small bar in Finistrat for a beer or two and some tapas, glad to be alive. Several lessons were learnt that day, the most

important one being don't buy cheese sandwiches from 24hr shops in Benidorm, they are tasteless.

Glad to be alive (or not dead), we proceeded to have a nice evening trawling tapas bars around 'Dorm for food, green cocktails and a boogie. The next and last day was a slower start, after a breakfast or two some went climbing, others for a gentle stroll around Toix. The afternoon was finished with a nice meal in the yacht club, washed down with sufficient sangria. Then off to the airport for our return home. With one last bit of culture, a quick swing round the University at Alicante. Who said turn right and what does that picture of an aeroplane mean on road signs?

Well that about brings us to the end of yet another gem of a long weekend. Cheers to Bob for organising it. If anyone who hasn't sampled one of these weekend is enthused by this near factual account, the next one is in October going to Genoa.

Pokey

Pyrenees, July 2001

Eight of us made this one. There were a variety of excuses from some of the usual suspects like training courses, lack of holiday and impending parenthood but we'll let them off this time (so long as it doesn't happen again). This trip was a mixture of walking, cycling, climbing, eating and sweating. The first day for myself, Sarah and Angela was a drive from Newbury to the gite in the mountains. Not a bad run down although road closures and lousy signposting gave rise to a couple of delays and detours. We got there eventually and met the others in a bar (where else). The next day was a bit iffy on the weather but those of us who drove wanted to walk anyway so off we went. The walk we intended was around the side of Lac de Cap de Long and then up 800 metres to a nearby peak. We only made it up half of that height before the time indicated that we should turn back. We'd done a good scramble up a small waterfall and a bit of a climb up some rocks. The walking had been great so we returned home happy in the sunshine. The next day was a bit of cycling for Sarah and I while the rest went for a big walk out of the area. It sounded pretty good even though they didn't cover as much ground as they'd hoped for. We had another good walk to Lac D'Oo although we would have gone for a longer walk but the cloud was very low that day.

We got a brief glimpse of the lake when we arrived but it didn't last long. I don't think Pokey put enough money in the view meter. After this walk we went into a hot baths place where the idea was to sit around in some caves under the building for a while then go and soak in a warm swimming pool followed by another period in the caves. This was all supposed to be a nice relaxing experience or something. I think I may have missed the point somewhere along the line but it wasn't unpleasant. I'll have to try harder next



time - I've been told I have to learn how to relax.

Another session on the bikes for Sarah and I while Pokey and Angela did a big walk round the lakes ended with us two riding all the way back to St Lary and the others meeting us there. It was downhill for about 25 kilometres and would have been rude not to. The final day was a good walk up a part of the GR10. Fantastic day with great views except for the last part where we almost lost Sarah in the mist when visibility dropped below 5 yards. The cows and goats had the right idea as we drove up and back through a tunnel - they collected in the tunnel and completely filled it making driving forward a little tricky. I guess these locals do things a bit differently.



The last evening was worth sticking about for. The remaining six of us had a meal in the Hotel d'Angleterre where Pokey, Bob and Rhoda were staying for the last night as our gite accommodation finished the night before. Sarah and Rob had already headed off for Barcelona to finish their holiday there.

The food was pretty good as was most of the stuff we ate over the week. Afterwards we went down into the market square of Arreau to celebrate Bastille Day and Pokey's birthday with fireworks and dancing all in the rain. Apparently it was always an ambition of his to celebrate his birthday and Bastille Day in France. Eventually the three of us who were driving left for somewhere further north around midnight and got to Disneyland a little after 1 the next day, having slept on route for a couple of hours in the car. Disneyland was good fun especially when we plucked up the courage to have a ride on the teacups. Back to Newbury within a few minutes of the others, almost exactly on schedule.

Martin Higgins