

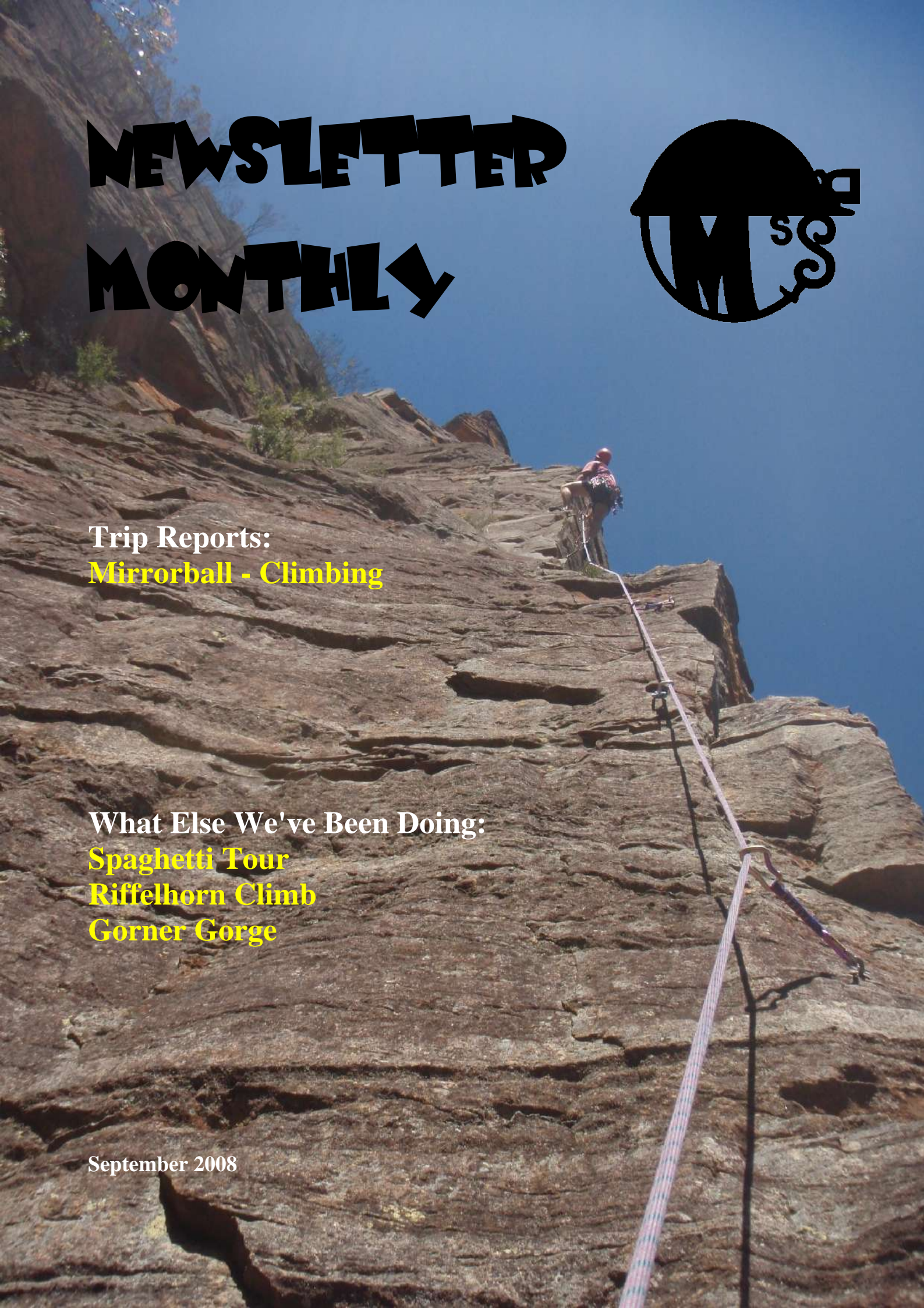
NEWSLETTER MONTHLY



Trip Reports:
Mirrorball - Climbing

What Else We've Been Doing:
Spaghetti Tour
Riffelhorn Climb
Gorner Gorge

September 2008



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Cover Shot:
Graham on the first pitch of Mirraball.
Photo by Rod Smith

Last Meeting

Last meeting saw the return of Dave with some great photos of his and Johan's recent European jaunt. He also filled us in on some of the adventures the pair of them had. We also had trip reports from Tiger Snake and Penrose Gully, Jenolan, and Tuglow.

Next Meeting

Date: 20th October, 2008
Time: 7.30 pm
Venue: Baden Powell Scout Camp
Pomona Street, Pennant Hills

Quote of the Month

"It's a 19, which is 1 short of a 20" - Graham explains the intricacies of the climbing grading system.

Announcements

Brett has bet Dave that he will quit smoking. There is a bottle of Mead and lamb shanks in it. If Brett doesn't touch another smoke before the November Jenolan trip, Dave will be buying the Mead and lamb shanks. Otherwise Brett will supply them.

Trip Reports

Climbing - Mirrorball - 27th September, 2008

Participants: Graham Boyles (TL), Roderick Smith, Denise Thomas.

Trip

West face of Mirrorball

Area : The Blue Mountains : Northern crags (Bells Line), Pierces Pass : Mirrorball Area
Grade : 19 (consensus)
Length : 120m
Style : Sport
Description : Four pitch, bolted, slightly runout climb with epic views across the valley.
Pitch 1 : 25m 19, up arete to ledge, with DBB.
Pitch 2 : 30m 18, up arete and face to chossy cave and high DBB on far lip of cave.
Pitch 3 : 20m 17, up face to big ledge
Pitch 4 : 45m 18, up face, to Lunch Ledge, moving right. Pretty exposed.

Rod, Denise and I arrived within 5 minutes of each other on Saturday morning at the car park to the Walls Lookout at Pierces Pass. The weather was stunning, the sky was blue, the trees and Rod were green (someone really should tell Rod to slow down, at least when he's seriously ill with the flu). We sorted out gear, screw gates, quick draws, bolt plates, helmets, slings and ropes and then headed off towards our destination. The walk in is easy, even easier if you stick to the walking track

We arrived at the rap in point to the Mirrorball after no more than 45 minutes walk. The walk in ledge is situated in a superb position overlooking the Grose Valley and some of its most spectacular features. Having forgotten my climbing guide (give me a break, I hadn't climbed for 18 months and was a bit rusty on the preparation) we had no idea how long the first rap in was so I doubled over the 60m climbing rope and went for it. Unfortunately it reached not much more than half way down the first pitch so I stopped on the first ledge and Rod hastily redeemed the situation by joining in the other 60m static rope to the set up.

The first 50m pitch takes you to the top of the Mirrorball, a rather massive gendarme. From this there are two ring bolts for the final abseil pitch of about 60m. This second abseil pitch is rather spectacular and takes you down the narrow chimney made between the Mirrorball and the main face. We left that static rope in place in case we needed a retreat for later. Rod and I both made the bottom by about 1:00pm. It wasn't difficult to find the start of the climb even without a climbing guide. There was something quite intuitive about the name "The West Face of Mirrorball" and going to West side and bingo, there was the line. I am beginning to think my navigation skills are starting to rival John Gray's.

Even from the bottom you clearly get the sense of a spectacular line of climbing. The first pitch takes the NW arête of the gendarme providing really beautiful views out into the Grose. The back drop to the entire climb is “The Overhang” which the club did as an earlier trip. I was a bit nervous admittedly because the only thing I knew about the climb was the grade and that was it. Fortunately the first 10m provided a nice false sense of security so it required no motivation to launch off the ground. The first half was easy but then the climb starts to take on a much more vertical character, very vertical in fact, on small holds. Here we’d found the crux according to the grade but it didn’t provide me with any problems only because a fall from this part of the climb was safe so I didn’t mind suspending myself on fingertips and smearing feet to make the clip. The exposure even here is amazing as one clings to the arête like a fly on the wall with nothing much more than finger tips. Rod quickly followed with no problems and I was beginning to think, hmmm, we might actually do this.



One of the Warratahs that are starting to flower
Photo: Rod Smith

The second pitch was basically easy but “palm sweatingly” run out in places so not sure where the grade 18 comes from. It did claim one of my bolt plates which became stuck fast to a poorly placed bolt. There was an awkward move I suppose that required you to get your feet to basically where your elbows are in order to step off an undercut ledge. Again Rod quickly followed but a decided darker shade of green. I kept losing him in amongst the backdrop of gum trees. This pitch finished in a large cave where we had a quick drink before launching up the 3rd pitch.

The 3rd pitch continued to increase the stunning exposure and views and followed another obvious line of bolts up a face. This pitch also seemed easy but the quid pro quo was the distance between some of the bolts. “Run out” doesn’t add to the grade so again I’m not sure where the grade 17 kicked in. This pitch finished on top of the Mirrorball itself and you really couldn’t have a nicer belay stance. A Coo-eee from Denise was a welcome surprise as she had waited for us on the walk in ledge. From this point you are looking directly up at “The Overhang” and it was very easy to imagine base jumpers filing off like lemmings. Rod really wasn’t feeling very well when he emerged on top of this pitch, did I already say “someone really should tell that guy to slow down, at least when he’s seriously ill with the flu”.



Graham on the 3rd pitch
Photo: Rod Smith

The last pitch was the longest and by far the most serious, in keeping with the confusing nature of Blue Mountain climbing grades. The first half was easy, no more than grade 10 but the second half steepened to vertical with very tricky and even dangerous ring bolt placements. I think I spent more time on the last 20m of this pitch than the second and third pitches combined. The problem occurs about 6m above the point the climb goes from slabby to vertical. The first clip on the vertical is easy to reach but the second was difficult on tenuous holds and scarce feet and a fall would result in broken ankles or legs. If you fell trying to make the clip no amount of force would help you clear the obstacle below, a very large cliff well off the vertical and made of nasty hard rock. I mucked around and made half a dozen attempts trying to stretch out to the bolt plate but could not make it safely. In the end I aided off the last quick draw using a series of slightly shorter slings. It took me 3 attempts at this before I could safely make the clip. At that point I got Rod to lower me back down to the ledge so I could at least make the moves.

After that minor epic the next ring bolt was reasonable on a fully loaded stance with another move leading to a rest. I reckon this was when the climb started to really make you earn the views. The next obvious move was to a memorable triangular pedestal about 3 ft above head height. The move consisted of a tricky mantle, to knees, feeling pulled off balance out into the chasm. The pedestal was just big enough to stand on and perched one directly over the entire climb below. This really is an epic climbing stance, airy and magnificent. The reverie is rudely interrupted by the fact that the last gear is now at waist level and there is still 4-5m of climbing to go on the most exposed part of the entire route. I stood here for some time moving up and back down, right and back left, left and back right thinking I aint getting any closer to the top. I tightened my undies and finally moved out left and up to another stance in a small nook. Now well above the last gear the moment of truth. Swinging back out onto the face on good hands and average feet but flagging strength, 115m above the trees below, arms starting to cramp, heart pumping, palms sweating I really and truly don't want to fall now reach hand, foot to previous hand hold, reach hand again, foot to previous hand hold again, easier, higher, finally there. Phew, I'm glad that's over.

Rod follows, so fast I can't believe it, what's going on, wasn't that the hardest pitch? Damn seconds, make it look so easy.

40 minutes, back to the car, 5:15pm, exhausted but what a classic day in the Blue Mountains.

Graham.

What Else We've Been Doing

Spaghetti Tour, Switzerland – August, 2008

I watched as our guide Milan, lifted his left boot high against the wall - one single crampon tooth finding minimal purchase in a tiny depression on an otherwise smooth rock wall – and made the necessary move to a higher stance in the steep gully. The 4000m altitude and the fact that he had just ascended the icy shoulder of Mt Pollux from the valley, seemed to make no difference to the ease in which he just demonstrated the climbing move “It is easy, I will save you with the rope” he said to David and myself.



Johan on the summit of Pollux.
Photo: Dave Stuckey

Normally, the act of climbing up a rocky gully is fairly straight forward – just lift your leg high onto a boulder via a suitable foot hold, crank hard and stand up, whilst gripping a reasonable hand hold. We've all done it a million times in canyons and on climbs in the Blue Mountains – but not with crampons on smooth rock at 4000m!!!

The ascent we were making on this particular day was part of our 'Spaghetti-tour', named because of a night in one of the Italian alpine huts: Val d'Ayas hut (3400 m) – being a nice change from our constant diet of Swiss alpine huts! Included in the 'Spaghetti tour' was an ascent of Mt Castor 4228m, Mt Pollux 4092m and a long traverse of the Italian Mezzalama glacier.

The twin mountains of Castor and Pollux - named after the Gemini twins of Roman mythology – offer excellent ice climbing up long rising approaches culminating in narrow ice ridges with of course, fantastic views.



The Pollux descent
Photo: Dave Stuckey

Back in the ascent gully on Pollux, I managed that difficult 'single-crampon-point' move ok, whilst watching David's sharp crampons metres above my head. Different to climbing in Australia, we were tethered as we climbed, just 3 metres apart, our Guide Milan, belaying us with a single rope as we climbed together. Not too comfortable with this, it was likely that either of us would pull the other off the rock, if either of us fell! I was expecting David's crampons to come sliding down the rock any minute onto my hand, but thankfully he managed the difficult and steep rock section ok. Returning to the ice, after the rock pitch, was a relief or what! All we had to do was ascend the steep slope to the summit ridge – just a doddle.

The summit of Pollux was spacious – at least two metres wide - and presented a fantastic view of the Pennine Alps on the border between Valais, Switzerland and the Aosta Valley in Italy. It was all simply superb and the excellent weather allowed us a little extra time on the summit than what would normally be permitted.

The descent and return to Klein Matterhorn (our starting point) was long and arduous – walking along the softening glacier in the late afternoon, roped to our Guide Milan, boots sinking into deep snow, without any rest stops, was the stuff of legends. Well, David & I were not going to ask for a rest-stop and Milan wasn't going to say anything, so we just kept going and going and going.....

A top Spaghetti-tour.

Johan



Dave (left) and Shane Hoffman (centre) in front of the
Trift Hotel
Photo: Johan Verhagen

Riffelhorn Climb, Switzerland – August, 2008

Our climbing Guide introduced himself as 'Konstanz', but as the day progressed, it became obvious that 'Arnold', like in Terminator, was a more accurate name.

As we rode the Gornergrat train toward the Riffelhorn peak, Konstanz asked us about our climbing experience – trying to determine whether the Zermatt Alpine Centre had allocated him for the day, two hard rock men or, two soft bumbles?

The Riffelhorn peak sits high above the giant Gorner Glacier and looking across the glacier are the immense northern faces of the Breithorn, Pollux and Castor – three peaks which David & I would eventually summit. To the left of the same view is Monte Rosa and to the right is the Matterhorn. I can't imagine a rockclimbing area having a better view!

Now roped up, Konstanz led us around to the Gorner Glacier side of the Riffelhorn and we commenced a long traverse to the start of our climb named 'Egg', graded as European 4 (Aussie 14-15?). As is normal practice in traversing, Konstanz regularly fed the climbing rope behind long fixed bolts, so as to protect David & myself should we fall – no bolt plates or runners, just loop the rope behind the long bolts! The exposure at this point was more than adequate!



Dave shaking hands with the Terminator
Photo: Johan Verhagen

The Riffelhorn rock was excellent, offering good friction and positive holds but because we were wearing our mountaineering boots, instead of friction boots, the climbing was at times, verging from challenging to desperate!

Konstanz led the first pitch placing minimal runners, constructed a belay with a Munter Hitch and ordered us to start climbing – together! Yes, David & I were tethered about 2m apart on the same rope. The likelihood of either one of us falling would have direct consequences to the other person ie with myself climbing 2m below David at all times, if I was to fall, I would have simply pulled David off the rock, the both of us to be held by that little Munter Hitch above!

Placing mountaineering boots on small holds after years of friction boot experience was quite strange and the burden of having to coincide our climbing moves over difficult rock made for a very challenging climb. Behind us was the most fantastic view of glaciers, peaks, rock and ice but all that was on our minds was trying to follow Konstanz's lead.

The following five pitches just blurred into a world of amazing airy stances, horizontal and vertical flakes & cracks, long slabs, large and small holds, fantastic moves, desperate moves and simply 'look where we are' astonishment.



Johan on the summit of the Riffelhorn
Photo: Dave Stuckey

David's running commentary of describing the climbing route was most entertaining: 'good holds here', 'the angle is relenting now', 'this bit looks hard', 'I can't do the next move until you come up underneath' and the classic, 'there is nowhere to go'!

Meanwhile, Konstanz was doing his best impression of Arnold Swarzenegger in Terminator, correct in accent and volume "Use your boots", "C'mon it is easy", "Stand up".

We eventually reached the summit of the Riffelhorn – myself taking a welcome drink, David getting a kite into the air and Konstanz talking on his mobile about two hard Aussie climbers.

Johan

Gorner Gorge, Switzerland – August, 2008

It's not often that you commence a canyon tour by climbing aboard a chairlift. Johan & I had decided to do a commercial tour through the Gorner Gorge. This canyon has a massive catchment and carries the combined waters of the Furgg & Gorner Glaciers. 'Should be a cracker' we thought as we gathered at the Zermatt guides office to await the rest of our party.

We were accompanied by 3 others: a French speaking Swiss couple, Livia & Marc, plus Milan who had been our guide on our recent 2 day climbing trip to Castor & Pollux. We'd had a brilliant time with him and built up quite a rapport. His ever-present smile widened expansively when he spotted Johan & I. He'd been telling us about the canyon tour, in his broken English, whilst we were in the "Rifuggio d'Ayas" climbers hut in Italy. Little did he know that Johan & I had specifically requested to have him as our leader when we booked the canyon tour.



Johan & Milan with the pulley
Photo: Dave Stuckey

We got down to business. Equipment was sorted and distributed. Milan was struggling with a large pulley arrangement, the size of which would have made Robert Clyne cry. He got it into his pack and we were off up the valley. Our ride on the cable car was brilliant and being fairly early in the morning, many animals were still visible, grazing on the lush Swiss mountain herbs and grass. Our Swiss companion, Livia, was cooing something in French to Marc, about the deer below. I pointed out that Johan & I had enjoyed just such a beast on our dinner plate last night at the excellent Stockhorn Grill. This was accompanied by excellent Gratin Dauphinois and a light bottle of Dole. Livia was horrified! Milan couldn't contain himself and went on to add that in Slovakia, from where he hails, there is one day of the year where the dog is taken as a delicacy. He was almost weeping with laughter when telling us that pet owners had to lock up their animals on that day, lest they get barbequed. "A real hot dog!" he burst out laughing. Livia wasn't too sure about our conversation topic, so I added the translation... chien (woof-woof!) Her eyes widened, hands rushed over her gaping mouth. "Chien!?!?" she gasped. Previous horror turned to mortification! How could she possibly go canyoning with such a mendacious bunch of carnivores who have absolutely no appreciation of cute animals? "This is going to be a top day" observed Johan.



Johan negotiates the swaying bridge, log descent in the
background
Photo: Dave Stuckey

We alighted at the alpine village of Furi and descended the secret track to the edge of the canyon. Here we paused to don our helmets, harnesses, cowstails, gloves etc. Milan sorted the group and we clipped onto the steel traverse cable. The canyon is set up as a via Ferrata route throughout. There is no point where it is acceptable to be unclipped from the safety.

We started with some steep walking which gave way to the first of the pitches. A 20 metre cliff yawned below us and Milan rigged a figure 8 descender to lower us one by one from a bolt. The Swiss went first, then it was my turn. "David...moment!" called Milan...he was fiddling around with the descender. "There!", he added "just for you!". I looked to see that he'd replaced the figure 8 with a Munter hitch. Ah, what a noble man. My descent seemed somewhat faster than that of the others...a pattern which repeated itself throughout the day. In fact, the pace of my 'controlled' descents appeared to increase with each successive drop. On reflection, a possible solution presents itself and I strongly suspect one Johan Verhagen of egging on Milan to "let it rip" once I was over the edge. This theory has yet to be confirmed.



David tiptoes across the suspended log.
Photo: Johan Verhagen

The route through the canyon was at times quite hair raising. Lengthy sections comprised of nothing more than steel pins and hoops, drilled into the rock for feet and hands. They were invariably slippery and usually at some exposed point above the raging torrent below. The volume of water was nothing short of astounding and a fall at any stage would have been certain death if you became detached from the safety line. Thankfully, we were clipped on at all times, so the result of a slip, whilst guaranteed to be terrifying, wouldn't be fatal!

The way on, clung to the smooth rock and presently started descending to a dark and narrow section, which bristled with bolts and cables. Milan retrieved the large pulley arrangement from his pack and commenced attaching it to one of the horizontal cables. I could hear the Swiss...clearly excited. Livia was repeating "oh la la!, oh la la!", which could be roughly translated as something like "we're not going down there are we???". We were at the first of 3 flying foxes. On surviving this, the next challenge presented itself. Two pine logs leaning against the rock and angled at approximately 50 degrees took us to the next section. There were lateral slats of wood, nailed across the logs every 20 centimetres or so. This provided something to stand on whilst descending the logs, however, did nothing to reduce the rather alarming bounce. This was rapidly becoming the stuff of an "Indiana Jones" type epic and it didn't stop here...the next obstacle was a suspended bridge, which not only bounced but swayed too. White knuckle stuff now with the foot pad barely a plank wide. Walking carefully, the bridge finished near the far wall of the canyon where a single pine log was suspended over the next section.

Upon teetering along the log and rounding the corner, I witnessed Livia swinging through the air at the end of a long piece of rope which was suspended from a bolt somewhere above our heads. She eventually hauled herself onto the opposite side of the canyon, where a small platform was located. I was confronted by a smiling Milan with the business end of a large rope swing in his hand. "David, you must swing in this direction" he advised as he clipped into my harness. I launched and enjoyed a massive swing down the canyon. The walls were mere centimetres from me at the end of each swing. I grabbed the tail of the rope, which was attached to the other side and hauled myself across. Johan was next, the canyon echoing with his yells of delight. Then it was Milan's turn. He clipped onto the rope and slipped off the rock like it was just another day in the office. Johan decided to assist and started hauling him in from the landing platform. Milan's swinging motion died down and he was just about to step onto one of the foot rungs on our side, when Johan stopped pulling the rope. Milan started to haul himself in, unfortunately at this precise moment, Johan decided to start letting the rope out again. Milan remained suspended in space, unable to get his feet onto the foothold. He pulled in more rope, just as Johan let out more rope. And again. He was like a rat running in a cage and getting nowhere! By now, I was weeping with laughter and Milan equally so. He could do nothing except continue the process until Johan ran out of slack. Of course this was precisely the tactic adopted by Johan too. Reunited on the opposite ledge, Milan congratulated Johan on an excellent practical joke. Our Swiss companions were disbelieving of the apparent disrespect being demonstrated towards our guide, until they saw Milan's arms on our shoulders and his infectious smile!

Another flying fox was reached after first climbing through a classic canyon swirl hole. Then we started ascending above the canyon. I thought it was a bit early to be leaving the depths. We stopped at a large tree with a tightly stretched cable angled back across the canyon. This was the big one...more than 80 metres long and over 50 metres above the canyon floor. My rate of acceleration eclipsed all previous descents. I'm certain that I arrived at the other end of the flying fox some seconds before my stomach! Another couple of abseils saw us all crammed onto a very dodgy wooden platform, suspended over the roaring waters once more. The canyon here was barely 2 metres wide and a narrow ribbon of wooden planks snaked off into the distance. This was by far the most dilapidated bit of walkway yet and we were relieved to have the safety cable by our side. The last 2 metres of the walkway looked to have been destroyed by a rockfall and we were required to balance across on the remaining steel support before leaping onto the grassy slope behind. A short scramble up the slope saw us back onto the tourist track once more with an easy walk down to the alpine village of Blatten.



David flies through the canyon.
Photo: Livia Bertschy

The only remaining task was to find a suitable spot for lunch and the Bergrestaurant Blatten looked to be just what we wanted. We spent the rest of the afternoon indulging in a classic long lunch and swapping laughs. Worth it? I'd do it again tomorrow!

David Stuckey

Future Trips

Welcome to the new look future trips section. Anyone with artistic abilities are welcome to submit their own icons for any of the categories here, and/or any other categories. If we use your icon then you'll have to be prepared to accept the praise and admiration from your fellow club members. Send your icons, or any other feedback, to roderick_smith@hotmail.com.

Legend:

Activity



Caving



Canyoning



Diving



Hiking



Abseiling



Cycling



Horse Riding



Kayaking



Climbing



Skiing

Grade



Easy



Easy/Medium



Medium



Medium/Hard



Hard



Extreme

Accommodation



Camping



Cottage















Extras






















Kites





Camp Ovens

Where	When	Activity	Grade	Trip Leader	Accommodation (if applicable)	Additional Costs	Let Trip Leader Know By:	No. of Spots Left
Pierces Pass and Dogface	11 th - 12 th Oct			Rod Smith 0438 444 262 roderick_smith@hotmail.com (that's 2 underscores)			7 th Oct	
Other Info: 200m abseils. Massive exposure!!								
Gooches Crater	25 th - 26 th Oct			Brett & Steph Pilcher Brett 0412 049 099 brettpilch@hotmail.com Steph 0423 526 288 skeeling@iinet.net.au	Camp Cave		21 st Oct	
Other Info:								
Jenolan	1 st - 2 nd Nov			Rob Clyne 0409 033 224 caver@people.net.au		\$5 Hut fee	29 th Oct	12
Other Info:								
Little Big Hole and Daylight Tunnel	15 th Nov	 		Rob Clyne 0409 033 224 caver@people.net.au			11 th Nov	
Other Info:								
Malaita Point	16 th Nov		Instructional	Johan Verhagen 4758 9811 johan.verhagen@sydneywater.com.au			11 th Nov	
Other Info:								

Where	When	Activity	Grade	Trip Leader	Accommodation (if applicable)	Additional Costs	Let Trip Leader Know By:	No. of Spots Left
Danae Brook	6 th Dec			Johan Verhagen 4758 9811 johan.verhagen@sydneywater.com.au			N/A*	Trip Full*

Where	When	Activity	Grade	Trip Leader	Accommodation (if applicable)	Additional Costs	Let Trip Leader Know By:	No. of Spots Left
Other Info: * If enough other people are interested, we will run a second trip on the same day								
Xmas Party	6 th Dec	Eat, drink and be merry		Johan Verhagen 4758 9811 johan.verhagen@sydneywater.com.au			2 nd Dec	
Other Info: 								
Wollangambe	26 th Dec			TBA			19 th Dec	
Other Info:								
Claustral	27 th Dec			TBA			19 th Dec	
Other Info:								
Dargans	28 th Dec			TBA			19 th Dec	
Other Info:								
New Zealand – Routeburn trail	Jan 2009			Johan Verhagen 4758 9811 johan.verhagen@sydneywater.com.au		Hut fees, flights	20th Jun	
Other Info: This needs to be booked and paid for, specifically the huts on the walk, thus the early notice required. Gourmet eating. 								

Where	When	Activity	Grade	Trip Leader	Accommodation (if applicable)	Additional Costs	Let Trip Leader Know By:	No. of Spots Left
Kites over Kosci	24 th - 26 th Jan			Johan Verhagen 4758 9811 johan.verhagen@sydneywater.com.au			20 th Jan	
Other Info: 								
Alcatraz	TBA			John Gray 0427 876 679 john.gray@sydneywater.com.au			TBA	
Other Info:								