

Chelmsford Mountaineering Club



2014 Newsletter

Hello everyone,

Welcome to the Chelmsford Mountaineering Club 2014 Newsletter. First of all, my sincerest thanks and appreciation for all those who sat down and wrote something for this year's newsletter, for without you guys we wouldn't convey ourselves as the 'fun, friendly, and highly active mountaineering club' we claim to be!

Secondly, I would like to say thanks to all those who I have climbed with this year, whether it be newbies who I have shown the ropes (and how to use them), veterans met while on my travels, and last, but not least, new club members.

Your Newsletter Editor,

Martin Bagshaw



Brian Clary on top of Ben Nevis, Scotland, March 2014

Contents

Regular Features

6 CMC Annual Awards Summary by Ian Pegg

8 Calendar Competition Winners

Trip Reports and Articles

12 My Most Memorable routes of 2014
Martin Bagshaw

42 Alpine Dreams
Rafal Malczyk

18 Everest Base Camp - Cho la Pass - Gokyo ri trek
Danny Crump

48 Mingulay and Pabbay, June 2014
Martin Bagshaw

34 Rock Climbing in Morocco's Anti Atlas - Tafraout
Catherine Smith

CMC Annual Awards

Nominees and Winners of our Club Awards in 2014

In 2014, the award winners were as follows:

- Danny Crump** - Epic Award for numerous tales re- counted at the Christmas do
- Fiona Dean** - Most Improved Climber
- Bryan Clary** - Club Member for being very proactive in taking others outdoors

In 2014, voting took place on the North Wales Meet. Award nominees and winners are as follows:

The EPIC Award

A.k.a. the Danny Crump/ Harold Award.

- Richard Aphorp** - Yorkshire trip - Demonstrating what not to do on wet limestone with a cam placement - ended in A&E visit & several weeks of wearing mountaineering boots rather than rock boots.
- Martin Bagshaw** - Yorkshire trip - Demonstrating how to look after your second, rock dropped on 2nd's head - ended in A&E visit along with Richard.
- Efe Tunc** - Cairngorms trip - Winter climbing at his limit - decided to test how strong ice axe leashes are? - As he was dangling in space, he was not quite sure of why his groin area had become warm!
- Efe & Rafal** - French Alps - not quite sure why ice route was much harder than the grade, as the route planned had a piton at the bottom, so must be the correct route, managed to retreat without major incident.

And the winners were - **Efe & Rafal!** Rafal & Efe picked the incorrect route in the Alps to climb, getting quite far up before realising they were wrong, and being forced to retreat when faced with harder, rockier terrain. Fortunately, they ended without major a incident, and no major incidents/ epics were had by any members of the club this year.

You can watch Efe and Raf's video here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcA0XNIN0c8&>

The MOST IMPROVED Award

- Katie O' Connor** - Starting to lead and overcoming concerns of gear working.
- Claire Mathews** - Leading this year and seconding Martin!
- Catherine Smith** - Starting to lead and climbing the Sloth!
- Martin Bagshaw** - Really pushing his grades and starting to lead E2's with confidence.
- Neil Pasmore** - Seconding Martin and leading well outdoors.
- Fiona Dean** - Has made excellent progress at the wall, and transferred that outstanding progress outdoors.

And the winner was - **Fiona Dean**.

The CLUB MEMBER'S Award

- Simon Clark** - For supporting the Club Committee for booking huts, The Christmas meal, etc. Running induction sessions and supporting climbers on outdoor trips.
- Katie O' Connor** - New to the club, but supporting the Committee and welcoming new members at the wall.
- Danny Crump** - Helping to organise the Yorkshire trip, always happy to give advice and support on trips.

And the winner was - **Katie O' Connor** for Her support of new members at the wall meets and active supporting in the running the club this year.



**Ian Pegg,
Club Chairman**

Calendar Competition Winners

The following photographs won the online vote for a place in the 2015 Chelmsford Mountaineering Club Calendar.



Walking in to Sneathda, the Cairngorms



A Rescue Helicopter flying by the Grand Capucin, French Alps



Efe Tunc sumitting L' Index,
Aiguille Rouge, the French Alps



Andrew Porter on top of Ancient Art,
Fisher Towers, Utah



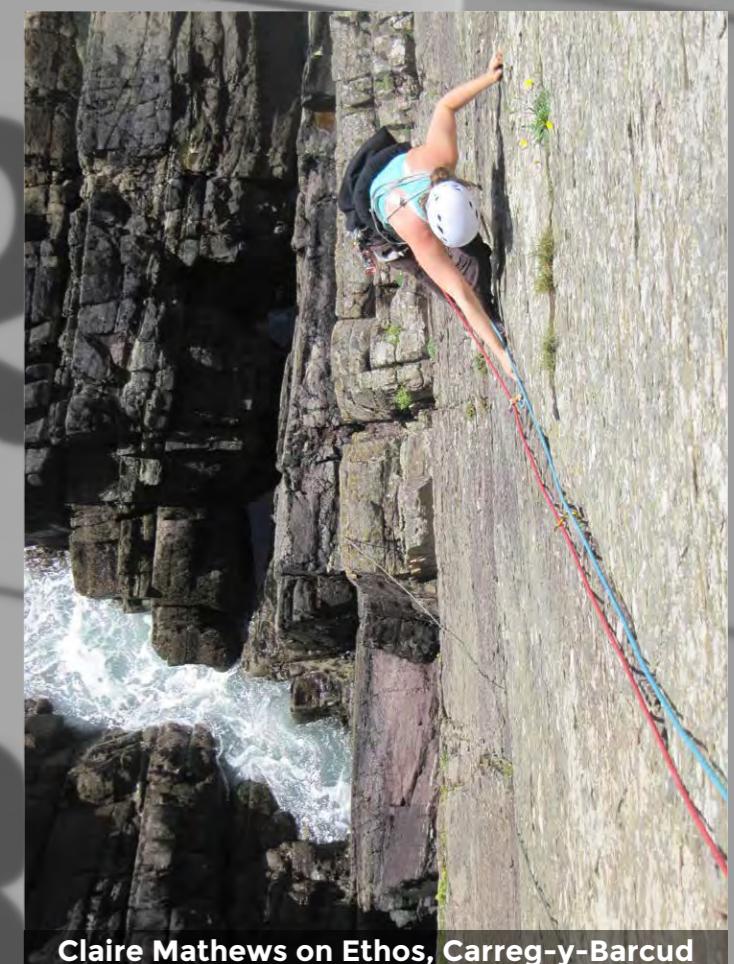
The CMC walking in to Eagle Crag, Grisedale, the Lake District



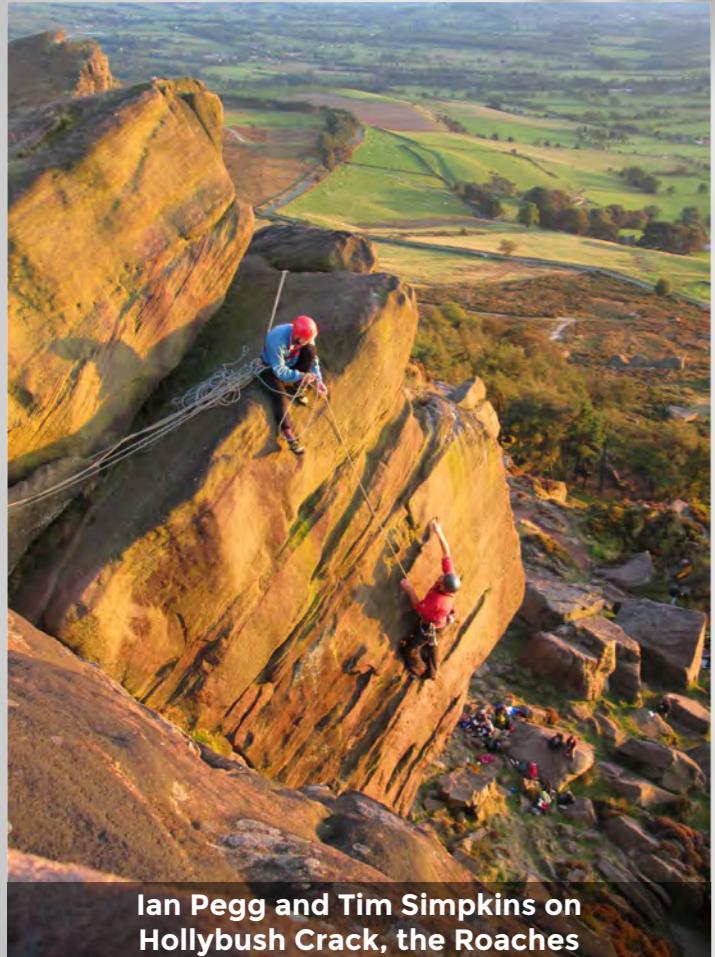
Morning on Mingulay, the Outer Hebrides



Michael Porter on Scarface, Indian Creek



Claire Mathews on Ethos, Carreg-y-Barcud



Ian Pegg and Tim Simpkins on Hollybush Crack, the Roaches



Claire Mathews on the Great Valerio, Carreg-y-Barcud



Chris Sabel at Bamford Crag, the Peak District



Prayer flags on Gokyo Ri, The Himalayas

My most memorable routes of 2014 - by Martin Bagshaw

The following is a list of some of the more memorable routes I have climbed this year. A variety of factors made the following stand out in my memory; though if absolutely anything could be said to (nearly) unite them, it is that they tended to be a bit adventurous.

Tower Ridge - March

Why? - This was my first winter route, and probably my longest day out climbing yet. The conditions on Ben Nevis were stellar, a stark contrast to the only other time I had visited the mountain (and the country) on the eve of my tenth birthday with my Dad.

With little snow on our original objective, the Buachaille, the decision was made to just go head to Ben Nevis. Despite having had less than two hours sleep in Bryan's van after hacking up to Scotland from Essex the previous night, we were both feeling alright, so the decision was made to just go for it!

About halfway up the ridge, it emerged that I had mistaken one of Bryan's old hexes (it really does look quite old) for tat. Naturally, Bryan just runs back down 100-200m of the climb to retrieve the tat, and back up again, all in the space of about five minutes. Descending a long, steep snow slope at the end of the day, climbing down by facing in to it, and with calves burning, I was feeling a little insecure. I took Bryan's advice of 'kick it like you mean it,' (without the caveat of 'not so hard the tip of your toe will still be numb over six months later!')

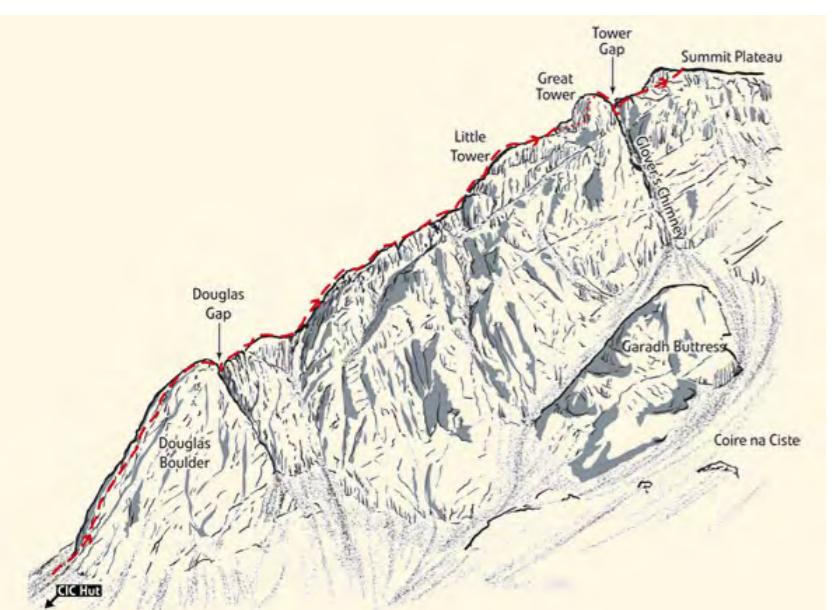
Although I realise I just pointed out the two blunders of the day, it really was a brilliant outing. So brilliant, in fact, that perhaps I should take early retirement from Scottish winter, and set my sights on the Alps? Hearing of such thistle conditions there, and having stole such a brilliant couple of days out, it would be tempting to end on a high note, though I doubt the club elders would be amused!



A picture of Tower Bridge, not Tower Ridge



Bryan about to cross Tower Gap, the end of the route



A picture of Tower Ridge, not Tower Bridge

U-ei - June

Why? - Although everything on Mingulay and Pabbay was highly memorable and of great quality, I include this route mainly for route finding reasons, not aided by the fact that the topo started halfway up this 100m climb. The 90m free hanging abseil to get to the base of the Grey Wall Recess was pretty awesome too; the walls were out of reach as soon as you started descending the rope!



At the bottom, my climbing parter, Tom, and I stared upward, pointing at features, looking at the book, and repeating for about 45 minutes, unable to move more than 20m back from the base of the cliff to get a better view, for we would have been in the sea. Finally, with a vague idea of where the first belay was, Tom set off on the first pitch. The climbing was very pleasant, and I felt more relaxed and focused than I normally would do on second. As we got higher, the line gradually got more obvious, and more probable than it had been from the ground. The hanging hand traverse the guidebook picture suggested turned out to be a pleasant layback sequence on solid, gritty rock. Though the climbing on 'Prophecy of Drowning' may have been finer and more sustained at the grade, passing this improbable looking terrain was quite satisfying, in a similar way that successfully navigating a vague/ overgrown/ Moroccan footpath is.



The abseil in to the Grey Wall Recess, Tom setting off on the first pitch, and a guy called Robin following us up U- ei.



The Craik - June

Why? - My friend Dan suggested that for our last day on Pabbay, we should 'climb until we fall off,' and that I did. I had to yoyo the route, taking a fall while scoping out the wrong ripley holds on the bouldery start, then got back on immediately after. As a result, I got really, really pumped towards the top, when I made it there. As my first and only British 6a lead to date, it was a great way to round off a perfect week away, in which I certainly had a 'Craic' with my fellow climbers.



Myself probably about to take a swing on 'The Craik' because I am not following my own priceless advice of 'just go up.'

The Yellow Slab - July

Why? - This route was pretty cool, taking you on a rising traverse through some quite steep ground. Going around blind corners, you could never quite see the full extend of what you were up against next. The climb felt quite hard for the grade as many on Scafell Crag do, especially the steep hand crack (5a, not 4c), and the bold horizontal traverse to finish on. Not one for the beginner HVS leader, but a must-do adventure.

Although suggesting otherwise, the guidebook photo (far right) shows by far the easiest part of the climb, the 'yellow slab.'



Silly and sensible headgear being worn on The Yellow Slab, but not in that order.

Sling's Shot, Talking Smack, The Reptile Smile - July & August

Why? - Ever wanted to climb in the Mediterranean, but lack the time/money/enthusiasm/don't want to be sentenced to clipping bolts for a whole week? Welcome to Blacknor North Crag, Portland. This crag has perfect offerings across the grades on some of the most weird, wonderful, alien flowstone rock you are likely to encounter in the British Isles. I include three route names as they are very close together, and the style of climbing is very similar.

Orangey- cream coloured tufa, a type of limestone similar to the stalactites you would usually find in a cave, cover the upper 15 to 20 metres of this section of cliff, with the first few metres looking like a pile of rocks glued together with smooth concrete. The place is awash with huge juggy undercuts and hand-sized cylindrical pinches, some with edges reminiscent of scales on a serpent, hence the route name, 'The Reptile Smile.' Given how great the climbing is, I'm amazed that it's not as polished as The Cuttings crag. Oh, wait no, that was all a lie, its actually crap, don't go there...

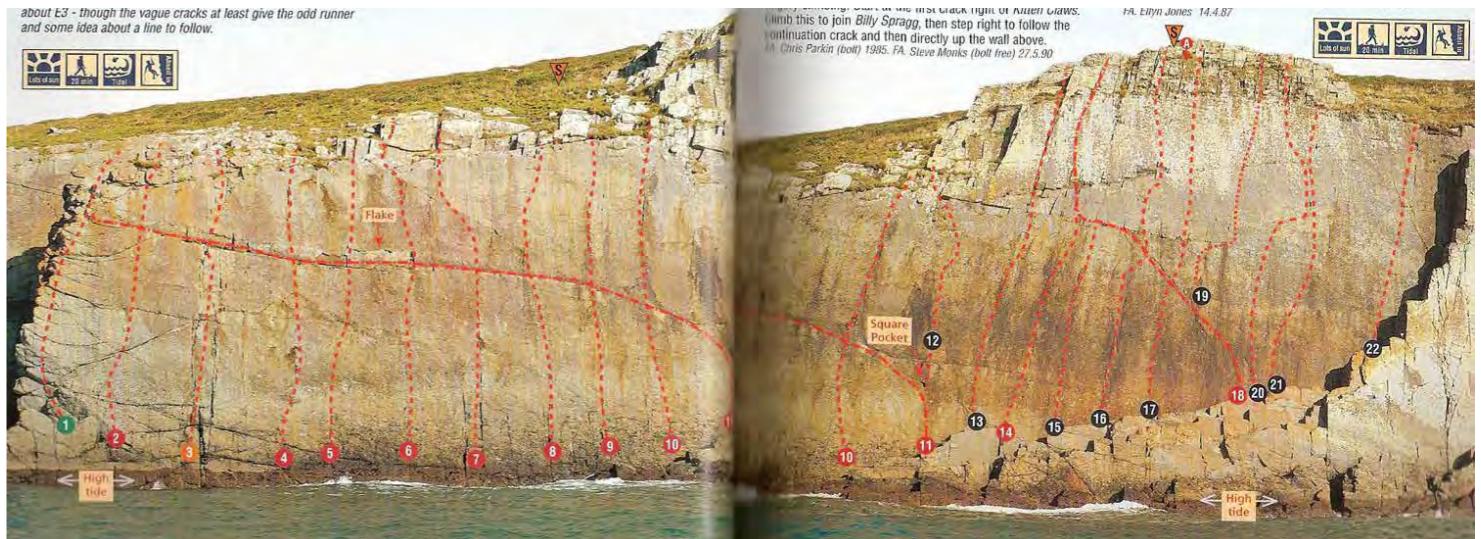


Blacknor North basking in all of its tufa-full glory, and a bit of the evening sunshine.



The Great Valerio - August

Why? - Not your typical line, with a 40m near horizontal leftwards crackline traverse on a massive sheet of hard, crimping sandstone. The name of the climb is taken from an eerie-sounding old folk song about a tightrope walker, though it is advisable to climb at least some of it with your hands in the break, what with this being how you place gear and all. Aside from having such a potentially antisocial line, bisecting about 10 routes as it crosses about half of the crag, Carreg-y-Barcud was a brilliant discovery. The rock was a bit like slate to climb, but with far more options (i.e. crimps), and similar to slate, lots of hints of colours were to be seen, with tints of purple, green, and orangey-salmon in places.



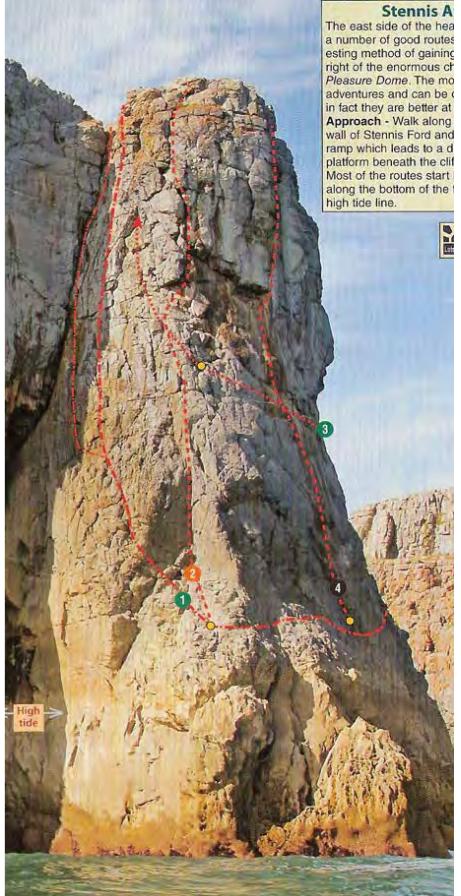
The massive traverse line of The Great Valerio could see you accidentally on purpose get in a lot of peoples way.

Stennis Arete - August

Why? - What is a list of memorable climbs without one that was scary? That is why this one is here. On a very blustery day where we should have just gone to Huntsman's Leap, Claire and I opted to climb 'Stennis Arete', a traverse around Stennis Head, followed by a vertical pitch up the Arete. With constant winds of around 20mph, and gusts of perhaps 40 to 50 mph, a warm, calm, sunny day would have definitely been the ticket.

The traverse around the headland wasn't bad (with the bonus swag of a number 4 nut at the start), though around 5-10 metres before the base of the arete, I noticed I was about that distance above the intended route's belay! If I had followed the correct route, I would have been climbing through waves though...

I dispatched the next pitch with increasing concern. As I got higher, westwardly gusts threatened to blow me off right, especially if I veered right to follow the crackline that the Rockfax book suggested I do (which looked more like HVS 5a). Using my better judgement (i.e. bearing in mind that Rockfax did this sort of thing to me before on my visit to Pembroke one year previous, and also paying heed to the route name), I opted to follow the arete, on the other more sheltered side to the top, and tentatively brought up my now emotionally fried second.



Stennis Arete on a much better day



The Red 7c at Basildon - September

Why? - This was a little project of mine that I was pretty chuffed to complete. Although I only climbed it clean on a top rope once, I include it really is a great route on the limit of my ability, that I managed to climb pretty much perfectly; not an ounce of energy wasted, or false move made. The crux had quite tenuous moves, pushing apart of two opposing slopers where the wall steepens, while delicately working your feet upwards and right, in order to get your body high enough to move past the slopers.

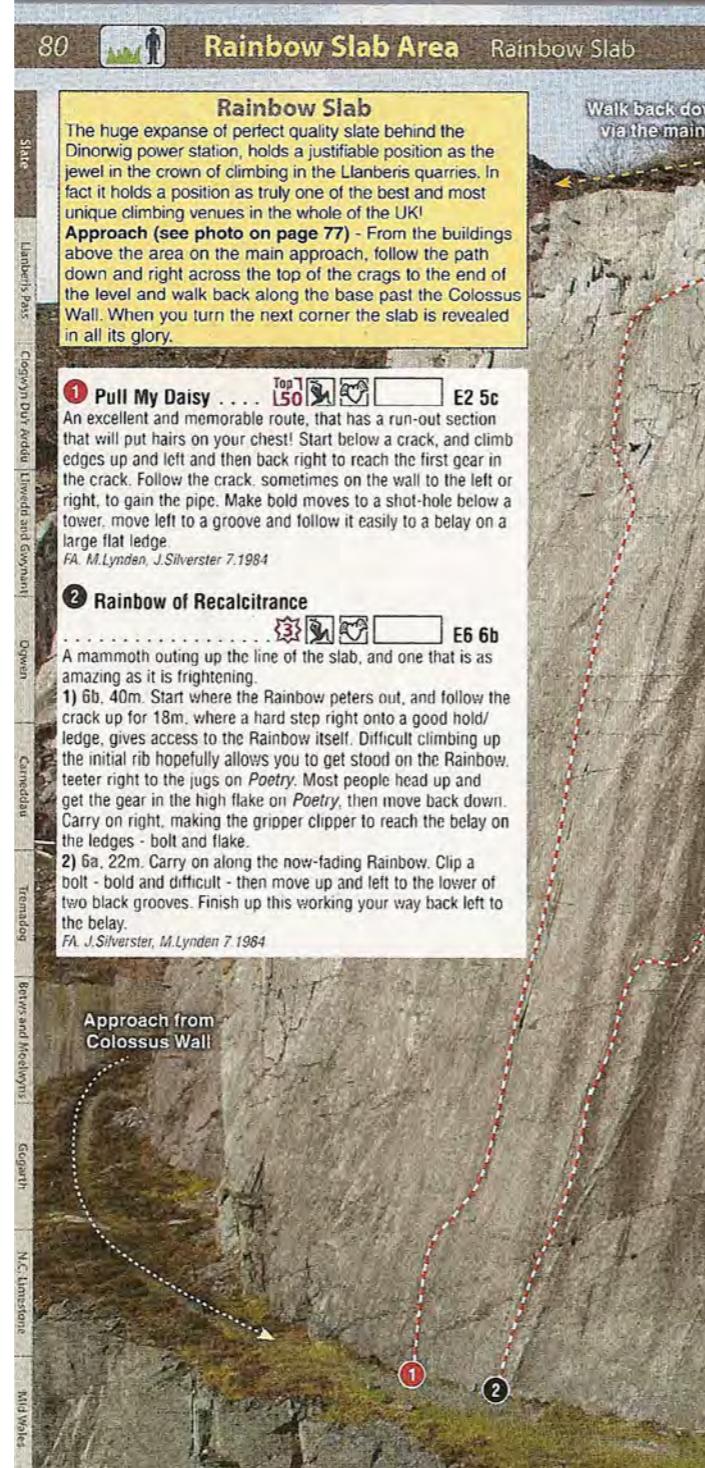
Though some might not understand how an indoor route can be more memorable than an outdoor one, the reality for most of us settled in Essex is that most things we will climb will be indoor. Even if limited to Harlow and Basildon, something will stand out as being special if you climb for long enough.

Pull My Daisy - October

Why? - I have wanted to climb on the Rainbow Slab in the Dinorwig slate quarries for quite some time now. Maybe it was a picture or two of people tip-toeing along Poetry Pink, Johnny Dawes with his back to the wall, catching extra runners while halfway up, or just wanting to see in person this weird, metamorphised-looking arching feature that gives the crag its name.

With the originally intended E1 and F6a lines on the nearby Bella Lugosi Slab hosting a large puddle and gushing pipe at the bottom and nothing else within my current grade in sight, it looked like 'Pull My Daisy' just had to be on. Even better, I would get to climb it in what seems to be becoming my signature style: as it is getting dark!

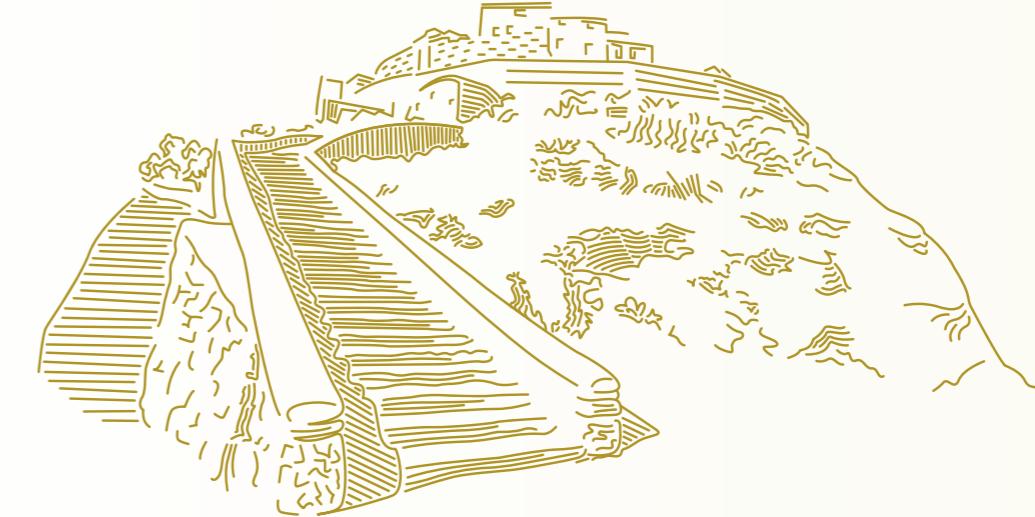
The other thing that made this a memorable route was a pretty damn big runout, which constituted a good upper third of its 40 metres. Fortunately, this came after the 5c crux section, and had good gear to protect it, with nice and steady 5b climbing which eased off after a few metres. Then again, the left piece of the last gear was a sling around a pipe which protruded the best part of a foot from the wall, definitely not something to hit on the way down. Anyway, I reached the top in one piece, and Ian didn't even have to turn on his headtorch (until the walk out!).



The topo for Pull My Daisy. It should be called 'Sling my Pipe'.

Rock the Kasbah - November

Why? - This one is here for a several reasons. Firstly, what a name! A good song to have stuck in the 'internal jukebox,' also with the 'Kasbah' being the name of one of two places I stayed in Morocco; a fortified village- turned into a hotel, quite the novelty. Secondly, this was a nice big, wide crack, the sort of climb where you have no option other than to squirm, face climbing or laybacking was no option. I hadn't climbed this sort of thing since Yosemite, two years previous. Lastly, I got to put the ridiculously big no. 6 cam a family member returning from America brought me back to good, practical use (at last), along with a borrowed one the size down. Unfortunately, I only have the below photo of me inevitably belaying in the dark to show as evidence, but who needs photos when you've got memories?...



The best way to finish a day's climbing - in the dark

everest base camp - cho la pass - gokyo ri trek

- 6th to 25th nov 14

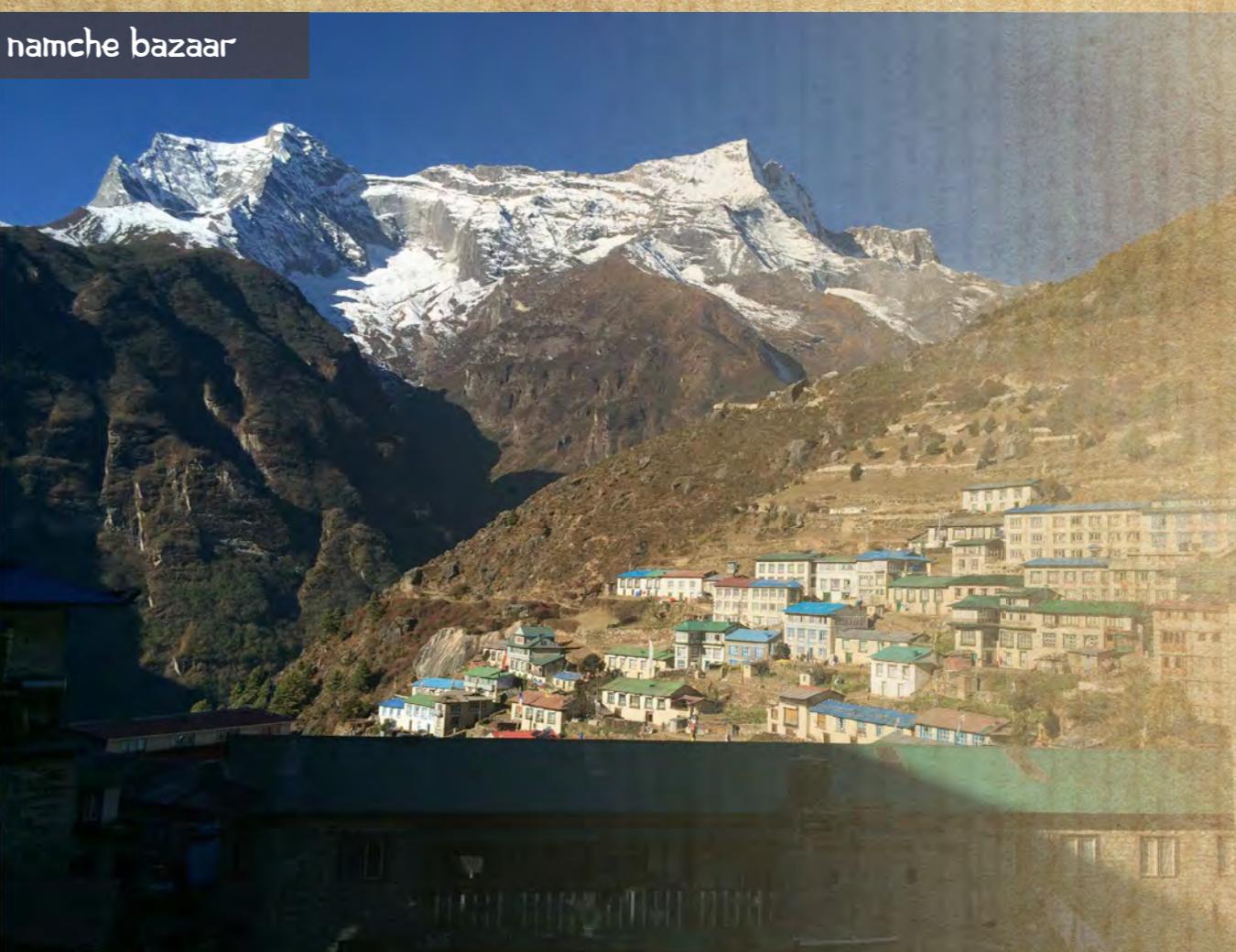
I don't usually get nervous when flying but as I climbed into the tiny 8 seater plane my stomach began to tighten. The pilot stuck his satnav on the window and the twin propellers roared into action. The scariest part of the whole trip was only 30 minutes away. We would be landing at Lukla airfield, a runway only 1.5kms long perched on the mountainside. With such a small margin of error, inevitably a few planes miss! Reassuringly, the pilot checked the brakes several times as we taxied and wiped the steamy cockpit windows with a rag. Soon we were in the air, rising above the Kathmandu smog into deep blue skies. My hunch to sit on the left-hand side was immediately rewarded with spectacular views of enormous snowy peaks glistening in the morning sun. People pay good money for this sightseeing aerial tour alone but we were about to begin a twenty day adventure among the highest mountains in the world climbing to around the height our rickety little plane was currently flying at.

Having trekked in Nepal previously I was confident with our plan not to get a guide or porter, carrying all our own gear. Eli had never been high altitude trekking before and I looked forward to only being responsible for one other person, not the usual 20 or so school kids I'd become used to! With the aim to start offering the EBC trek, this would be an opportunity to check out my itinerary, the result of collating about 30 other companies programs into one that suited our time frame. I also hoped to meet some guides along the way who could become potential partners, leading future treks for me. Within one day in Kathmandu, I'd already met the Chairman of the Mountaineering Association of Nepal, who tried to sell us a guide, and Bishnu, a very helpful travel agent who'd sorted our flights (and also tried to sell us a guide). We'd obtained our own TIMS cards and Sagarmatha NP permits from the tourist office and were ready to escape the chaotic city.

Suddenly the mountain view from my window was replaced with an evergreen forest at eye level as we flew through the gap in a ridge rising steeply above us on both sides. I looked through the cockpit and saw it, Lukla runway, a tiny strip of tarmac directly ahead. **As the plane swayed from side to side I prayed that the pilot hadn't been on the piss the night before.** We slowed right down. It felt as if we were floating in mid-air, then a thud and loud screech. The engines went into over drive, the brakes hard on and to great relief we cruised into Lukla, phew! Within minutes the deafening plane was unloaded, reloaded and disappeared off down the hill like a bus with wings. Peace and calm returned to the foothills, our journey had commenced.

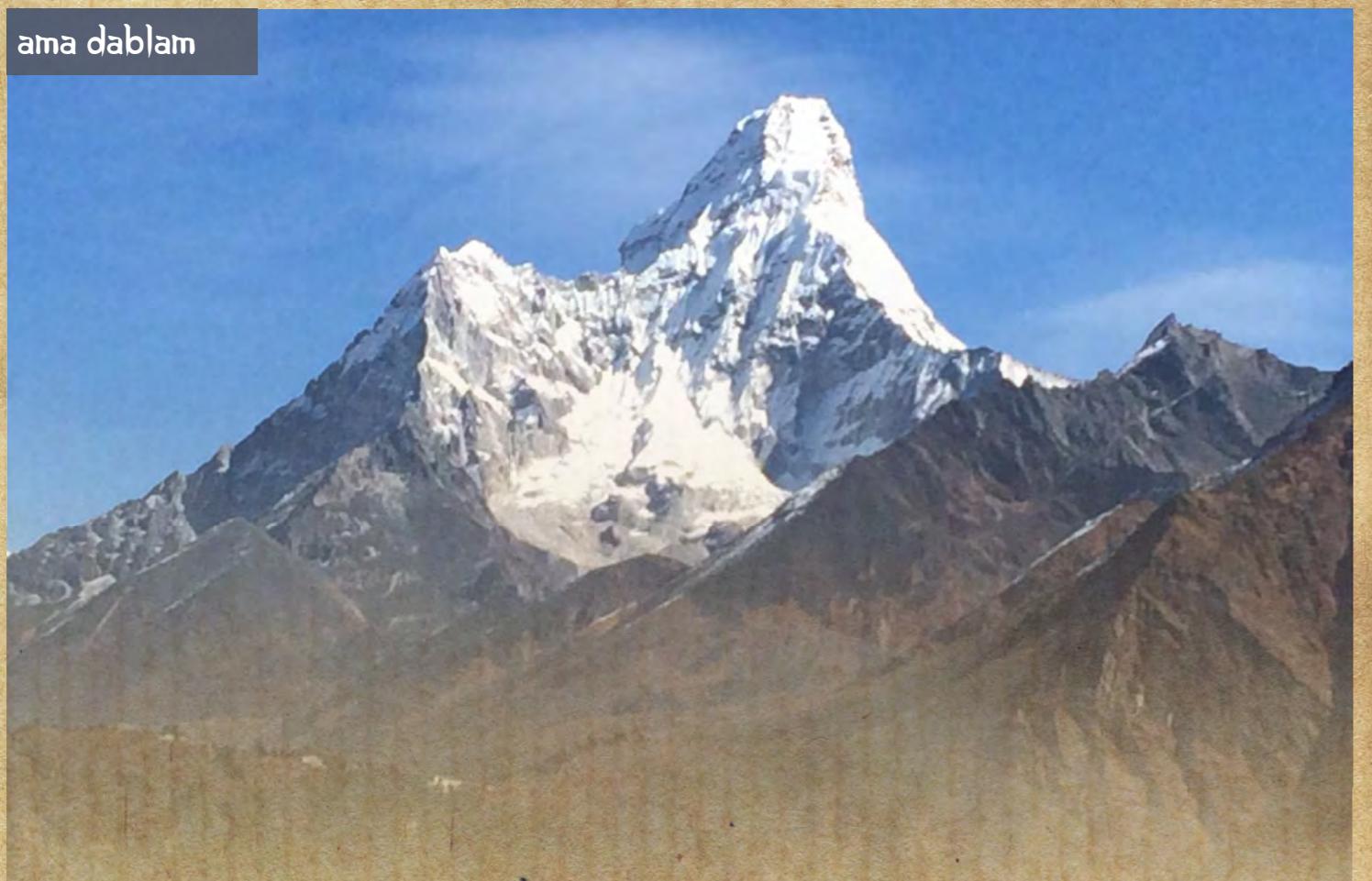
The first few days were relatively straight forward, after an initial descent of a few hundred metres we steadily followed the valley upwards crossing the river several times on suspension bridges. Occasionally a side valley provided a glimpse of higher mountains covered in snow and ice. After a night at Phakding we entered the national park proper, showed our TIMS and permits, crossed the highest and scariest bridge so far across a gorge and began a steep, dusty ascent towards Namche Bazaar. A view point half way up provided our first brief view of Everest in the distance, the summit poking up behind Nuptse.

At nearly 3500m, **Namche is the first settlement where the altitude really kicks in and is the obvious place for an acclimatisation day.** Consequently, it is a large and bustling town full of lodges and gear shops arranged like a horseshoe in a bowl on the hillside. Across the valley, the 6000m peaks plastered in ice gave a good idea of what was in store for the coming weeks. Our day was spent drinking coffee, using the wifi and shedding some unnecessary gear, duplicate items like toothpaste, suncream and a clean set of clothes to return to. In the afternoon we climbed the hillside to gain 300 metres of altitude before descending again, a common way to get your body used to the thinner air.



On Day 4, with our packs a more manageable weight, we followed the trail out of Namche, traversing the hillside northwest. Now the scenery became truly spectacular. To our right rose numerous high peaks including Kangtega at 6783m, to the left Tabouche Peak (6495m) and ahead, now in full view, the trio of Everest, Nuptse and Lhotse dominated the far skyline. Then, **my favourite mountain of them all came into view, Ama Dablam. Like a tigers tooth its a serious looking peak soaring up behind the Hinku Himal to 6814m.** After some 'Nepali flat', we dropped to cross the river before a steep climb brought us to Tengboche, our stop for the night and home to the monastery where the mandatory pre-Everest ceremonies take place each spring.

ama dablam



Settling into trekking life, the next day continued as before, Nepali flat, lunch stop, begrudgingly losing some height and a final steep ascent to Dingbouche, Ama Dablam looming ever closer on our right. **Our mantra for the trek was 'slow and steady' and we stuck to it religiously.** With time on our side and achievable goals we could afford to rest a day in Dingbouche at 4400m. Many groups we met (most with guides and porters) would plod an extra day to Lobouche at 4900m before the next rest, a rise of 1400m from Namche. This contradicted all literature we had read about altitude sickness and its prevention so we let the 'day packers', as we had branded them, march on whilst we held back and acclimatised properly. The persistent roar

of choppers up and down the valley were an ever present reminder of the consequences of ascending too quickly. One lodge owner told us that as many as ten percent of trekkers end up taking this route out, a premature (and expensive) end to their Himalayan experience. Insurance for such events here should be considered mandatory!

I'm sure most of you are all familiar with **AMS**, **HACE** and **HAPE** so I won't bore you with the details but these were the few simple rules we stuck to:

1. Never climb more than 600m in a day.
2. Rest a day for every 1000m ascent.
3. On rest days, climb higher but descend to same altitude to sleep.
4. If feeling rough, STOP and rest. If it persists, get down.
5. Finally, we vowed to be upfront and honest with each other about how we felt, highlighting any problems early on (don't try to be a hero).

In addition, confidence in our prior research and rules meant that we chose not to take any medication. Diamox is the common drug of choice to aid acclimatisation but we both wished to see how our bodies adjusted naturally. The only exception was taking the odd Ibuprofen for headaches, something I discussed at length with a doctor in Dingbouche, part of a team carrying out a long term study on its effectiveness, the verdict seemed conclusively positive.

Dingbouche sits on a plateau where the valley splits. Half a days walk east lies Chhukhung. From here you can climb Chhukhung Ri (5550m) a 700m ascent before returning to Dingbouche. We contemplated this side trip but it would use up both our contingency days so sticking to our mantra we decided not to. This is also the way to the famous 6189m trekking summit, Island Peak and further round, Makalu, one of the 14 8000ers. Our path turned northwest towards the mighty Khumbu glacier and Lobouche. Over 2 hours we leisurely climbed 200m stopping at Dughla for a disgusting lunch. We then climbed the giant moraine of the Khumbu and a splitting headache really took hold. At the top of the climb there are many memorials to those who have perished over the years on Everest. I recognised some famous names from books I've read, victims of the 1996 disaster and so on but I was keen to just keep moving before my throbbing head stopped me completely. A miserable afternoon and some Ibuprofens later, we reached a jam packed Lobouche full of sick trekkers. The day packers we had watched leave the day before festered all around. The town echoed to the sound of the 'Khumbu cough' a result of breathing the parched air. Things were getting real. After eventually finding one of the last available (and grossly overpriced) rooms, we agreed to implement our 4th rule the following day. I popped some more pills and passed out.

So after only 4 days of actual trekking we were about to take our third day off. It seemed excessive as we watched the day packers less than enthusiastically continue up towards EBC but then as the third helicopter of the morning came in I reminded myself of rule 5, don't try to be a hero, Crump. As it turned out, a good nights sleep and a pot of lemon and honey for the Khumbu cough was just what we needed. After second breakfast I had eyed up a rocky ridge rising behind the town towards the summit of Lobouche East, another popular but more technical trekking peak of 6090m. After convincing Eli that it would be a good idea and promising not to get carried away, we set off with some water and a packet of Pringles. **What followed was a totally unplanned but thoroughly enjoyable afternoon out, something we would've completely missed out on if we'd been on a typical scheduled 'package' trip.** We scrambled for as far as I deemed safe without a rope, halted eventually by a steep slab with serious consequences if hashed. The friction was amazing though and with just a walking rope and some slings to protect Eli, I'd have happily continued on. Although only several hundred metres above the lodges, we now had a totally new perspective on the mountains we'd been walking amongst. Now the view stretched all the way back to where we'd ascended from towards Ama Dablam and Kangtega. Plus, for the first time, we saw the full scale of the Khumbu glacier stretching up towards EBC and beyond.



the khumbu valley

...As I sit here in Guangzhou airport in deepest China, I am getting conscious that this article requested of me by Martin is fast becoming a small novel but sod it, I'm here for 14 hours so I'm gonna proceed. I wouldn't even know how to condense it anyway...

The hunt for Toblerone! So, on day one at lunch we met a Swiss couple. They had just completed the Renjo and Cho La passes before being met by a porter with their technical gear at Lobouche East base camp. They then climbed this followed by Kongma pass, Chhukhung Ri and Island Peak and were now on there way home, epic! They let us in on a secret that at Lobouche BC, 5 bars of Toblerone had been left in the shade of a rock. The description seemed simple, at the rear of the lake, there was a perfect place to camp and the 'treasures' lay nearby. From our vantage point on the ridge, the lake could easily be seen, a beautiful turquoise colour that only high

glacial lakes possess. **So after a 'Jamaican cigarette' we decided to take up the challenge and descended the ridge by an alternative route, which was quite eventful (but not worthy of receiving Harold I'm sorry to say).** On arriving at the lake we soon realised that you could've camped almost anywhere along its shores in a situation to rival any other wildcamp on earth. Oh and yeah, there were quite a few rocks!!! So in short after an hours treasure hunt, we resigned to the fact that these chocolate beauties that we craved very much having eaten our Pringles were not destined to be found. Despite our failure, we returned to Lobouche buzzing with a huge sense of achievement, having left the beaten track and enjoyed what can only be described as the biggest playground I've ever had the privilege of messing about in.



ridge and toblerone lake

Anyway, having had yet another day off, our strategy began to pay off. We set off for Gorak Shep to complete our first official goals feeling very much acclimatised. Having shed all but the most essential items at Labouche, sleeping bag, down jacket and other warm stuff, we were now cruising and soon began overtaking the swarms of day packers. Reached in about 3 hours, Gorak is a grim place. A few cold and dirty lodges in a dusty windswept depression surrounded by moraine without a tree or bush in sight. Look up though and you soon realise you have nearly reached the top of the world. Pumori 7160m to the north is a very impressive peak, dramatically framing the comparatively tiny dimple of Kalapattar. To the East the lower slopes of Nuptse alone are colossal and they completely obscure any view of Everest behind. Giant ice walls barely cling on and glaciers ooze down like icing sugar into the main Khumbu glacier. The Khumbu itself takes a while to comprehend. Not your average pristine white Alpine glacier but an immense body of rocks, some the size of houses, laid upon a mostly unseen river of

ancient ice. In places though its thrusted up to create mini ice mountains or descends down to form frozen lagoons surrounded by overhanging cliffs. The noises are subtle but ever present. Rocks cascade into the icy pools and the occasional groans give the impression its alive, a very alien landscape indeed.

By 2pm, fed and watered, our plan was to go to base camp but on hearing a guide tell a Japanese pair it was too late to do, we decided to summit Kalapattar instead. Evidently, the success of a self led trek can sometimes depend greatly on receiving the odd snippet of info just at the right moment. Something that would happen repeatedly for us luckily. Some aspects however are left completely to chance, like picking the right lodge or having the misfortune of eating a meal that has been prepared by shitty hands, it can be a lottery. A guide wouldn't help here either, they seem to just go where their friends are staying at or own, regardless of quality or cleanliness!

views from kalapattar

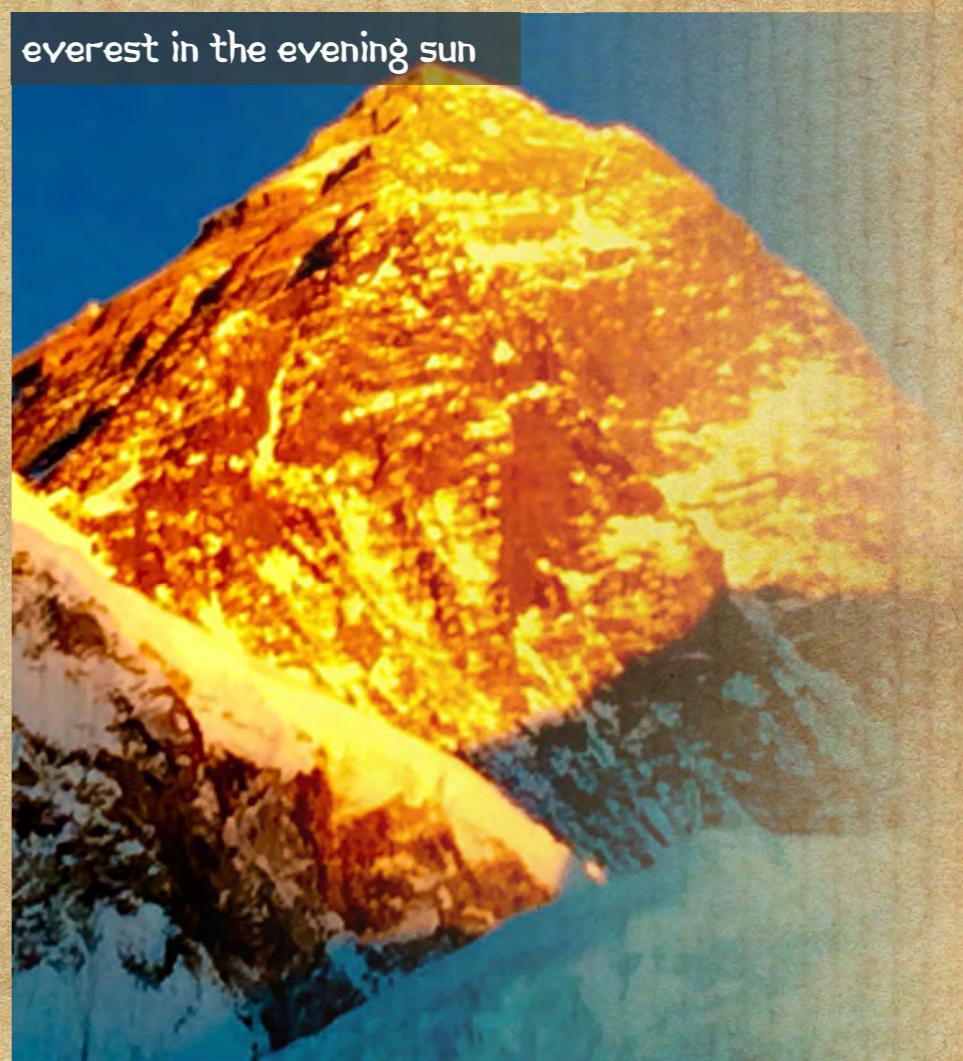


There are two paths clearly visible towards Kalapattar's mini summit. The main well beaten tourist track on the right and a steeper left hand variant. According to the map they both reach the summit, being me I chose the left hand 'Scottish Munro' style approach. It was much harder to begin with but became less steep as we gained height. Then after a few hours we reached some rock and began negotiating a way, sometimes letting Eli lead with her new found confidence from our Lobouche excursion. It was hard work, constantly reminded of the thinning air by moments of absolute breathlessness.

At about 5pm we topped out to what I expected to be a tourist filled summit. To my dismay we were met by a long 'Crib Goch' like bouldery ridge, totally devoid of people. On closer inspection, the 'party peak' could be seen (and heard) little under a km away inundated with noisy whooping crowds. By now Everest's summit was in full view behind us but had alarmingly already turned a rich orange colour, we had about 20 minutes of daylight left, oops. But the human body is a remarkable thing! Suddenly adrenaline kicked in and with a sense of urgency, we blasted over the ridge to a point of weakness I could see on the right

which would take us safely to the main path down. Not once did we have to stop and take breath, our bodies just responded and not only that, it actually felt bloody good. Patience earlier on was now definitely paying off. Again not quite a Harold award moment but certainly a spot of good fortune not to have been negotiating it in the dark with torches. So we didn't summit Kalapattar, however we had a wonderful ridge completely to ourselves at 5500m illuminated by an Everest sunset. Success? You decide. One hours descent and we'd had our latest night so far. Usually in bed by half 6, we finally turned in crazy late at 8pm.

everest in the evening sun



Early mornings are not pleasant at this altitude / time of year. The temperature is below freezing and lodges are only heated in the evenings by one stove in the communal area, fuelled by dried Yak shit. Also at this height, people seem to lose control of bodily functions, some lose the food lottery but others seem to just lose the ability to aim. Consequently, we began referring to a nighttime trip to the toilet as piss skating, urine literally freezing on the floor. Seriously hazardous and if not careful, you could easily end up in the bowl or worse, long drop. So it's better not to go, but as your body changes blood acid levels at altitude and your kidneys go into overdrive, you inevitably have to, and a lot, averaging 4-5 times a night!! It's not pleasant but 10 days into the trek its unfortunately a way of life. You can also imagine the state of the showers, so at \$4 a go, washing was often a privilege not worth pursuing. Dirty but warm and dry remained my second mantra. Hand sanitiser and baby wipes here are just as essential as a down jacket and insurance.

Following our mini adventure and reluctance to get out of sleeping bags, the following day was a late start. We set off at 10 for Everest Base Camp. A long, dusty, undulating slog over endless moraine gets you there in just under 3 hours. We'd heard mixed reviews from other trekkers about whether to bother or not and on first impressions its nothing more than a pile of rocks. At this time of year it's desolate, no tents, no climbers or summit dreams, just rocks, prayer flags and banners from other groups that bothered to hike up there. If you left it there I can see why you'd be disappointed. But walk as I did for 2 more minutes and you'll find yourself face to face with the Khumbu glacier in all its majesty. I've already tried to put it into words but sitting there on top of it is hard to describe, you just have to experience it for yourself. Then a thunderous roar echoed all around me as an avalanche crashed down a slope to the left of the icefall and my mind wandered completely. What must it be like living here for months, the glacier creaking beneath you relentlessly, slowly carrying your tent down the valley day on day. Then the anticipation of running the gauntlet up and down the icefall to higher camps, huge blocks of ice poised to come crashing down at any moment. Everest's summit is only just visible above the steep slopes immediately ahead. What's it like up there, would I be able to get to the top?

The tents don't actually need to be there if you have an imagination. Then I thought about the longer timescale, how all the surrounding peaks have slowly been ground down by this sea of abrasive rock and ice, the inconceivable length of time it has taken to wear these mountains away and spit the remnants out at the other end, not too mention the immense power required to do so. Plus at the same time, the mountains themselves are still being thrusted upwards, how small and insignificant that made me feel. It's a truly wonderful place to be, base camp or not.



In running form we managed to have the place to ourselves again, passing the morning shift on the way there and the evening procession on the way back, perfect. But on the down side I forgot my sunhat and cream and as a consequence received a severely burnt nose and face. The sun at this altitude is lethal. plus it reflects off the snow doubly cooking you like a kitchen grill, burnt from above and below, major school boy error. Also we left EBC late so decide to chance another night at Gorak Shep that evening and head down the following day.

The route back to Lobouche only took around two and a half hours. We collected our gear from the overpriced lodge, scoffed some food and continued to descend putting ourselves right back on schedule. After an hour the trail splits, left to the memorials and back down the terminal moraine to Periche, and right towards Dzongla and the Cho La pass, our route. As we began to climb the right hand side of the valley, the trains of people could be seen heading back down the moraine. I looked at our path which traverse the hillside, no one! We'd met a handful of people who had come the opposite way from Gokyo and they all said the same thing, it is much quieter and cleaner over there. After the unsanitary conditions, piss skating and crowded over-priced lodges, we both longed for some tranquility.

The afternoons trekking was the easiest and most pleasant so far, we didn't lose any height, just maintained a steady traverse as the Khumbu valley dropped to our left. Ama Dablam came into view again and we had excellent views back up to where we'd just been. We rounded the bend and new mountain vistas came into view, a new valley full of summits we hadn't seen before. 90 minutes later we arrived in Dzongla. As promised, the place was very peaceful and the lodge owners so friendly, we decided to stay a day, using up one of our contingencies to wash clothes, recover from the previous days successes and prepare for the **most demanding section of all, Cho La pass**.



dzongla view

I'd tried to research the pass as much as possible but as with most glacier crossings, it was largely down to the conditions on the day. The weather had been stable throughout the trek. Occasionally cloud would roll up the valley mid-afternoon but the nights and mornings were clear. There had been no snow since the storms and avalanches which killed all those trekkers in the Annapurna region in October, over a month ago. Ultimately, we'd just give it a go and if dodgy, turn back. I also didn't want to carry crampons around South-east Asia for 2 months only to be used for one day. I asked those who'd come the other way, some had them, some didn't but all made it, that suggested it was game on.

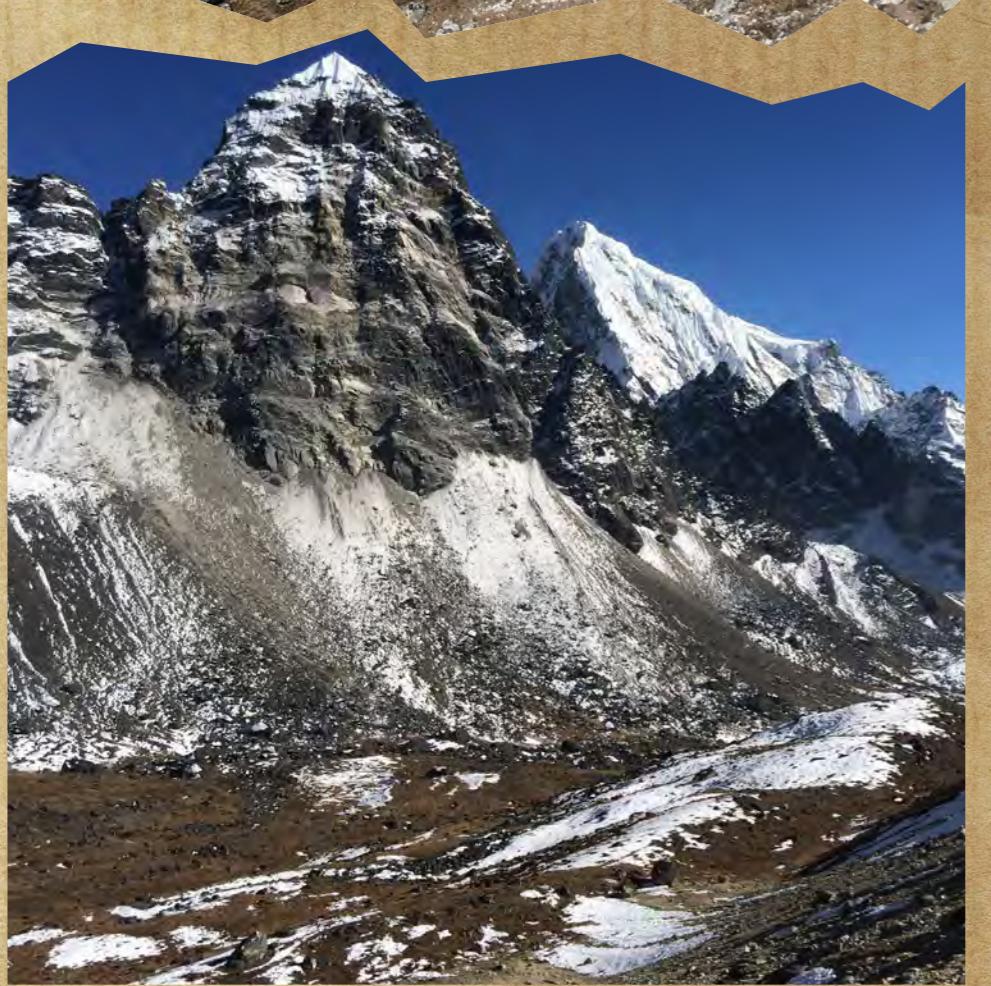
We tried for an alpine start but struggled to get out as per usual in the cold. Then, beating the owners up, breakfast was half hour late. Eventually we set off at 6 just as the first rays of sun appeared over Ama Dablam. An hours easy walking led us to some lofty crags. At first I couldn't spot the way but soon, several Sherpas could be seeing on a rightward ramp weaving up between the walls of rock. It was fun scrambling although the packs slowed us a little. After an hour of up we'd reached the glacier. The snow was pretty compact and had been well trodden, but with care not to fall off the steep slope, we followed icy steps until we were on the glacier itself. Then it was just a case of steadily following the path up to the col avoiding crevasses on the right. One final surprise came in the form of a frozen lake formed as the glacier slid away from the rear wall leading up to the pass. We traversed behind taking care not to dislodge pretty hefty sized boulders balanced precariously on the far bank. One final short climb and we'd made it, simples. After many photos back to where we'd been, and of yet more new views ahead of us, a steep scree path led us to a boulder field. Following polished rocks, the path was easy to find. In true Himalayan fashion, it wasn't a straight forward down but we had to pass over 3 more hills before finally descending to Thangna.





gokyo

The following day would have us crossing another glacier, this one however was on an entirely different scale. Walking alongside Ngozumba glacier for almost an hour, it then took a further hour to cross the thing via a faint path which weaved amongst icy mountains and deep pool similar to those on the Khumbu. Grinding southwards from Cho Oyu, another 8000er on the Tibetan border, this glacier seemed even more alive and vigorous. **Set off by the morning sun, rock avalanches could be heard in all directions** as we tentatively crossed on a path, completely different to the one shown 2kms further south on our map and obviously nonexistent now. Eventually after a steep moraine climb we reached Gokyo, a beautiful little settlement on the shores of a large, typically turquoise lake named Dubh Pokhari. Behind The town rose Gokyo Ri, our final objective at 5357m. Soon after reaching Gokyo however the clouds belled up from further down the valley so we put off the summit until the following day.



gokyo

That evening, having won for so long, Eli's numbers were finally up in the food lottery! A night of vomiting followed and by morning it seemed as if we may have fallen at the last hurdle. **Gokyo Ri had the appearance of a Wainwright but the 600m climb would certainly be a struggle with food poisoning. Despite this, and the altitude, Eli soldiered on and after a 3 1/2 hour ascent, summited the final goal.** Our efforts rewarded with the most spectacular views of Everest and surrounding mountains so far. Cloud in the valleys added to the atmosphere that we were on top of the world, not literally of course but it certainly felt like it!



gokyo ri



We now had 4 days to descend, 2 back to Namche, 1 to Lukla and a contingency to use up when wanted to. It would have been possible in this time to complete the Renjo pass also but not wishing to push our luck, we decided against it. The journey down took us to Dhole for a night, then a final 500m slog up before descending to join the main EBC trail to Namche that we had left behind 2 weeks previously.

Our last lucky break came when we arrived in Namche. Firstly, the lodge we'd left some gear at was full, so we were forced to find another. By sheer fortune, we met a lodge owner who had worked 15 years for Exodus, a well known trekking company. On discussing our flights out, he swiftly informed us that a South-east Asia conference was taking place in Kathmandu from the 26th, our flight day. Consequently there would be no domestic flights to or from Kathmandu for 3 days! A few phone calls later and our flights were brought forward to the 25th and we were checked

in (something else we were unaware we needed to do 24hrs in advance of arriving in Lukla). Basically he saved our bacon. We therefore had one remaining day to complete our trek back to Lukla. On paper this would be longest day but descending the majority of the way, and into comparatively thick air, we arrived back at 4:30pm on the 24th.

Our luckily break became more apparent when we arrived back in Lukla and overheard the turmoil and dramas facing other trekkers who returned and desperately struggled for plane seats. Some had failed to check in (2 of those seats became ours) and others just hoped to grab a ticket on returning to the town.

The next morning we checked the bags in with relative ease for such a chaotic place. Our plane arrived at 10am loaded with goods not tourist, a sign that the season was quieting down I guess. Airport staff unloaded (threw) rice, beer and millions of biscuits onto the runway and very shortly after, we were hurtling down the hill like a roller coaster before lifting off into yet another clear Himalayan sky. 30 minutes later we'd landed in Kathmandu and our epic journey was over.

Thanks for reading.
Danny Crump

