

ROCK CLIMBING IN MOROCCO'S ANTI-ATLAS – TAFRAOUT

Sitting in the pillow covered lounge, listening to the sound of the rain pouring down outside the Hotel Argana. Thought this would be a good time to write the review I promised Martin. Chris has just arrived back from the local bakery looking like a drowned rat, with a big smile on his face, carrying cakes.

Meant to be leaving tomorrow to make the journey back to the UK. Raf has been checking out his insurance policy to see whether he is covered, if we are unable to drive to the airports through, what currently looks to be rivers not roads.

Anyhow back to the start of the trip; how I prepared for a rock climbing trip to Tafraout. Negotiated good prices for Genesis half ropes from Go Outdoors by utilising their beat any online prices by 10%. Bought a set of Hexes; which came in super useful, 3 x 25cm quickdraws also proved handy and 20 metres of abseil tat; which could be considered over-kill. Bought the 3 pocket guides to Tafraout as everywhere had sold out of the full guides to the area, although we later found that the nearby Tafraout carpet shop had all these guides to sell.

THE MEMBERS OF THE GROUP:

Justyn – Not yet a club member, sport climber/boulderer. First Trad experience, the Sept Roaches trip, where he led his first lead, E1 5b Kelly's Direct.

Me (Catherine) – Joined the club in April 2014 after a break from climbing of about 10 years. Done my first HVS leads on the Roaches trip in September.

Raf – Wannabe serious Alpine climber. All around nice guy, with incredibly infectious laughter. Leads HVS.



STUFF YOU NEED TO CLIMB THINGS

DAY 1 – SAT 22ND NOVEMBER 2014

Justyn and I drove up to Manchester to catch our Monarch flight to Agadir. My hold luggage was pretty much all climbing equipment, OCD packed into separate plastic bags. Nearly at the limit for hold luggage at 23kg. 4 hour flight later and we arrived in Agadir. But it was a 2 hour wait before we finally managed to leave the airport with our hire car, which we had hired for £75 for the week.

Now came the epic journey in the dark to Tafraout, 2.5 hours up twisty mountain roads. We soon discovered that a pile of rocks at the side of the road meant up-coming hole or pile of rubble. Since Justyn drove to Manchester airport, it was my turn to take to the wheel. The rain had been so heavy that the water was now running across the roads. Never driven through mini rivers before. At one point the car started swaying sideward, which was an interesting experience. Arrived at the Hotel not too far behind Raf and Chris, who had driven from Marrakech.

DAY 2 – SUN 23RD NOVEMBER 2014

Rained overnight so the ground was still damp. We decided to have a little hike up the mount next to the Hotel. Surprisingly the rocks seem to dry out quite quickly. Group decision to reckkie the locations we wanted to climb once the weather brighten. Palm Tree Gorge and Cheshire Cheese, both a 15 mins drive from Tafraout and with walk ins that were less than 25 mins. Palm Tree Gorge might have been interesting in the sun but since the weather was fairly wet, didn't appeal. Cheshire Cheese was more exposed, therefore would hopefully dry faster. The approach as described in the guides as 'walk up the dry river bed,' unfortunately in our case it wasn't dry. Therefore a lot of scrambling later and great deliberation amongst the group regarding which part of the crag was which. We went back to the hotel that day none the wiser on this point.

Checked out a local restaurant that evening, which seemed to have the exact same menu as the hotel just 'slightly' more expensive at 95 Dirhams for 3 courses, just under £7.

MEALTIME AT THE HOTEL ARGANA**DAY 3 – MON 24TH NOVEMBER 2014**

Another wet day, so another reckkie of Cheshire Cheese, to finally agree on which crag was which. We found the path this time, which did make it a 25 mins walk in instead of the hour we did before.

In the afternoon the rain finally subsided so we headed out to the nearby granite to try and climb something...anything! Again our over enthusiastic group navigation skills

kicked in, so instead of the 15mins walk the guide stated, we decided it was obviously the one in the distance. Then after an hour of walking, through sheer desperation to climb, I decided that the crag we thought was Black Wall, which after looking at it from every angle was nothing like Black Wall, was going to be climbed regardless. We pioneered two new climbs; I managed to slice into my hand with my new Petzl climbing knife trying to prune away plants and Raf lost Chris's Cam in a crack. But we managed to climb that day so it was a success. Then back to the hotel to start an evening of drinking mint tea and playing Rummy.

DAY 4 – TUES 25TH NOVEMBER 2014

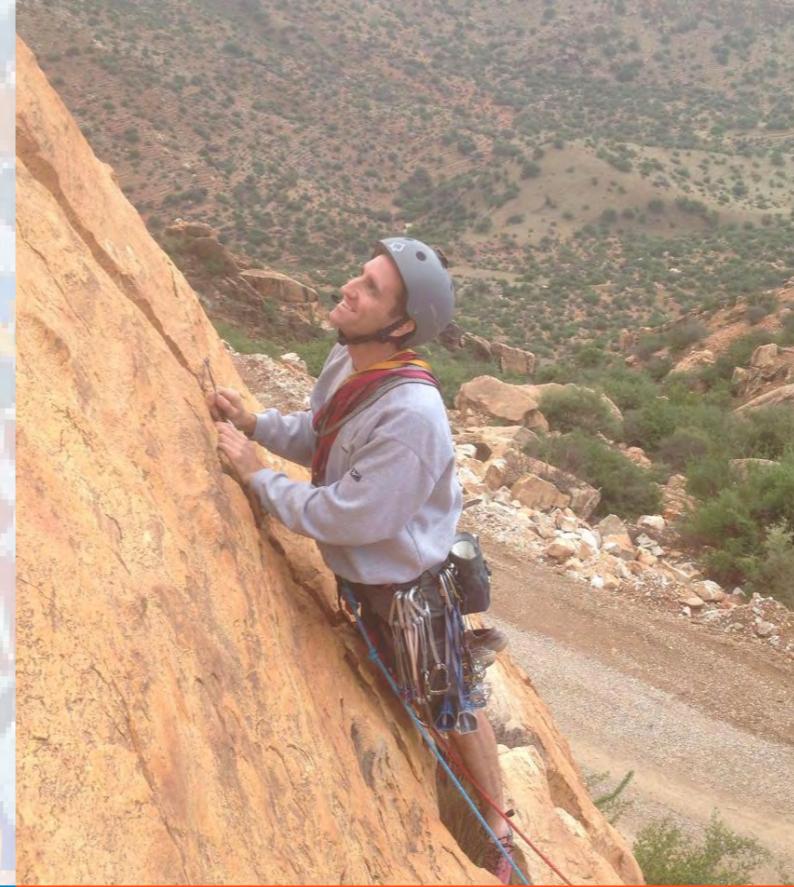
Finally some decent weather, the sun was shining and we headed off to Cheshire Cheese for the 3rd time to get some routes done. Chris and I started leading routes next to each other; Where's Jim (S) and Dream of White Sheep (VS 4c). The language got worse as we both discovered the lack of gear placements and loose rock. Justyn and Raf followed up with Mousetrap (HVS 5a) and Wonderwall (VS 4c). I finished up leading My Hovercraft Is Full Of Eels (HVS 5a) to which I discovered the translation of 'beneath an overhang, climb boldly through the roof' to mean whilst having no decent gear placement, climb an overhang on loose rock. Chris and Raf ended the day on A Break From The Afternoon Sun (HS 4b - Alternate). We all learnt that day to always have two solid points of contact to the rock, as one is very likely to break off and as a belayer, helmets are advisable.

**KAT AND CHRIS AT CHESHIRE CHEESE**

DAY 5 – WED 26TH NOVEMBER 2014

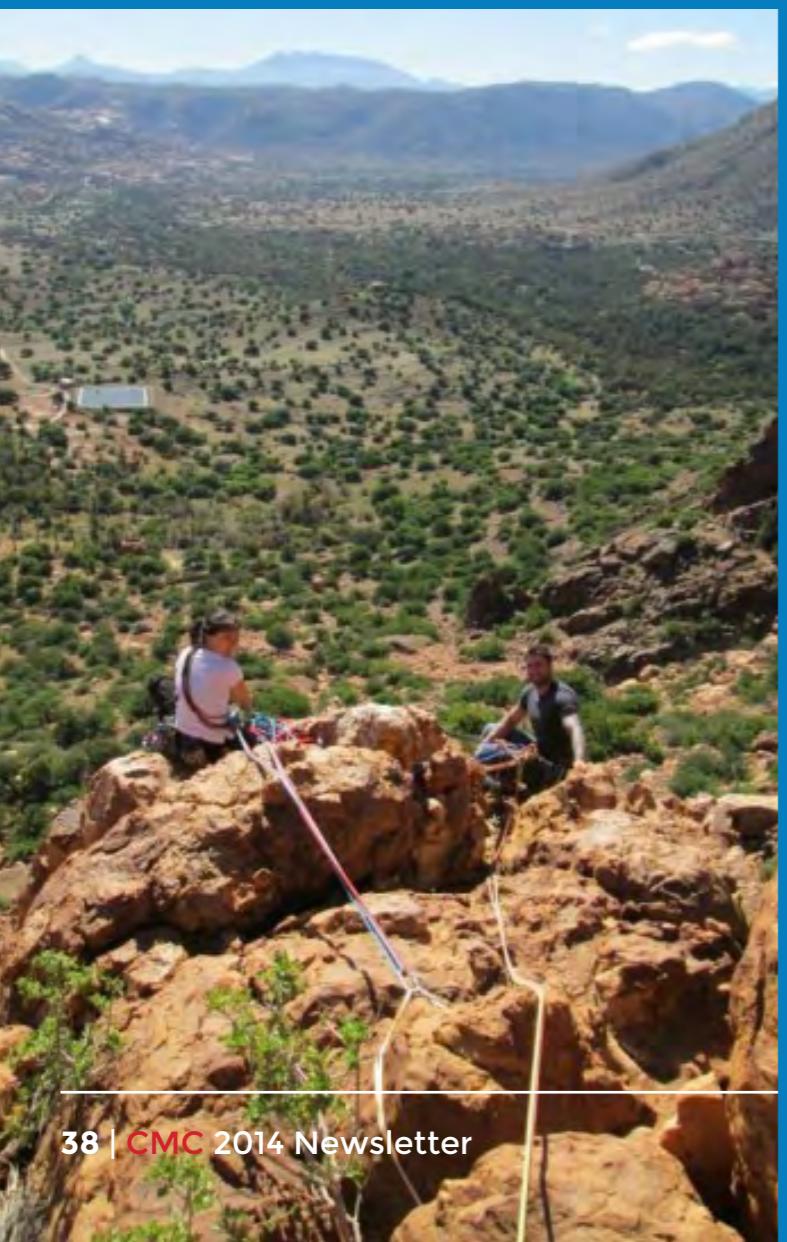
It was another lovely day so we got an early start straight after breakfast, heading off to Robin Hood Rocks. The journey was scenic and colourful, along a dirt road with some steep turns. Raf put himself forwards to drive the 40mins to the crag; hadn't properly driven in 8 years. Chris and I were in the back seat and were wondering at points whether we would need to vacate the moving car to save ourselves. By far the scariest part of the trip.

Robin Hood Rocks was practically on top of the road, where we had our best day of climbing yet. Starting on Roadside Buttress with Chris leading The Good, The Bad & The Ugly (VS 4c) and I led Jam Boys (HS 4b). There was a lot of huffing and puffing as the lower climbs were tiered, so the rope drag made it feel like we were pulling up baby elephants.



CLIMBING AT ROBIN HOOD'S ROCKS

MORE CLIMBING AT CHESHIRE CHEESE



Raf carried on higher up the crag leading Little John (HVS 4c) and Justyn giving a first attempt at Above & Beyond (E2 5c) a pleasantly technical climb with good gear. Justyn collected his gear so I could also lead Above & Beyond, which proved to be a popular choice as after Chris led half of Sheriff's Wall (S) and Raf carried on up Robin Hood Chimney (VS 4b). Raf also led the E2 with Chris as his second.

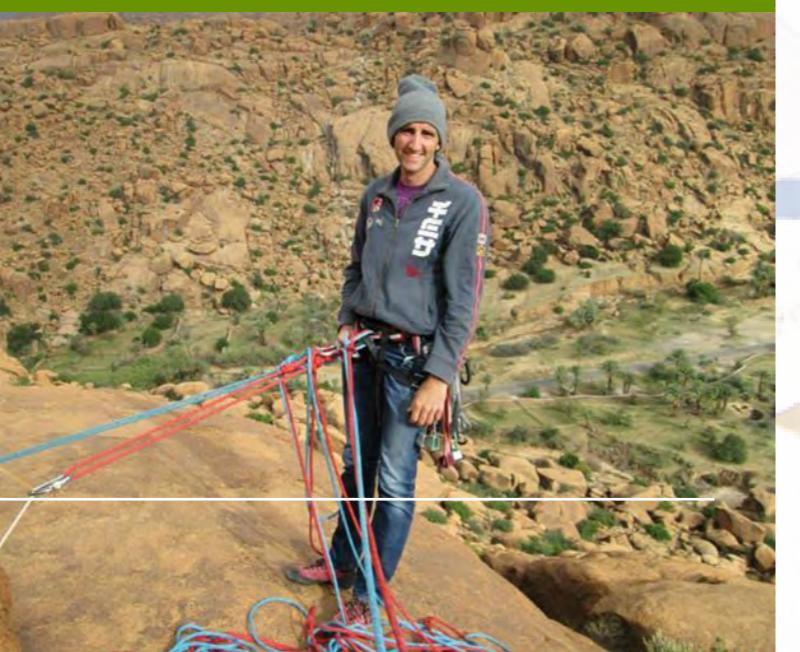
Chris as usual providing the humour for the day by over balancing backwards and sitting on a clump of cacti. If only I had had a camera to hand. Justyn finished the last route on that Buttress, with Down & Out and enjoyable E1 5a.

We then moved over couple of metres to the right to Bishop's Buttress, where Chris set off a mini rock slide attempting to get to the base of the buttress. Unfortunately a pretty large rock came down with him, taking him out from doing any more climbing. Working as a three, Justyn lead Take It Easy (HS 4b) with myself stupidly attempting Into You Like A Train (E2 5c) as the last climb of the day. To cut a long story short, eventually I took an easier end to the route over the overhang and we learnt why you should always have your head torches on you.

**GRANITE TORS NEAR 'FLAKE QUAKE'****DAY 6 - THURS 27TH NOVEMBER 2014**

Another wet day after it had been raining all night, so we decided to utilise our time wisely by trekking back with some German tourists; Louisa & Till, to attempt to save the cam. I'm sure you will share our joy that it was indeed a successful mission.

Then as the sun had appeared again, I persuaded Justyn to undertake Flake Quake (HVS), a 4 pitch route; although we did finish it in the rain. Raf and Chris opted out and went back for coffee and cakes instead.

CAM RESCUE (HAMMER SUPPLIED BY HOTEL)**DAY 7 – FRI 28TH NOVEMBER 2014**

Worst rain Morocco has seen in 6 years, 32 people died in the South and we are now holed up in the lounge of Hotel Argana. Mustapha, our attentive host has been supplying us with mint tea and cakes. Although logically it must be purely coincidental, I secretly believe Raf picked this time of year just to get a jump on the Epic award for next year.

Other useful pieces of information for anyone else planning to visit Tafraout; I changed a £100 to Dirhams before I came to Morocco, which was a mistake as the exchange rates are much better even at Agadir airport than in the UK. Food is stupidly cheap and super tasty; dinners at Hotel Argana for 3 courses were 75 Dirhams (£5). The people are really friendly, and the women although they tend to hide their faces, will give you the most openly friendly smiles if you smile and say hello.

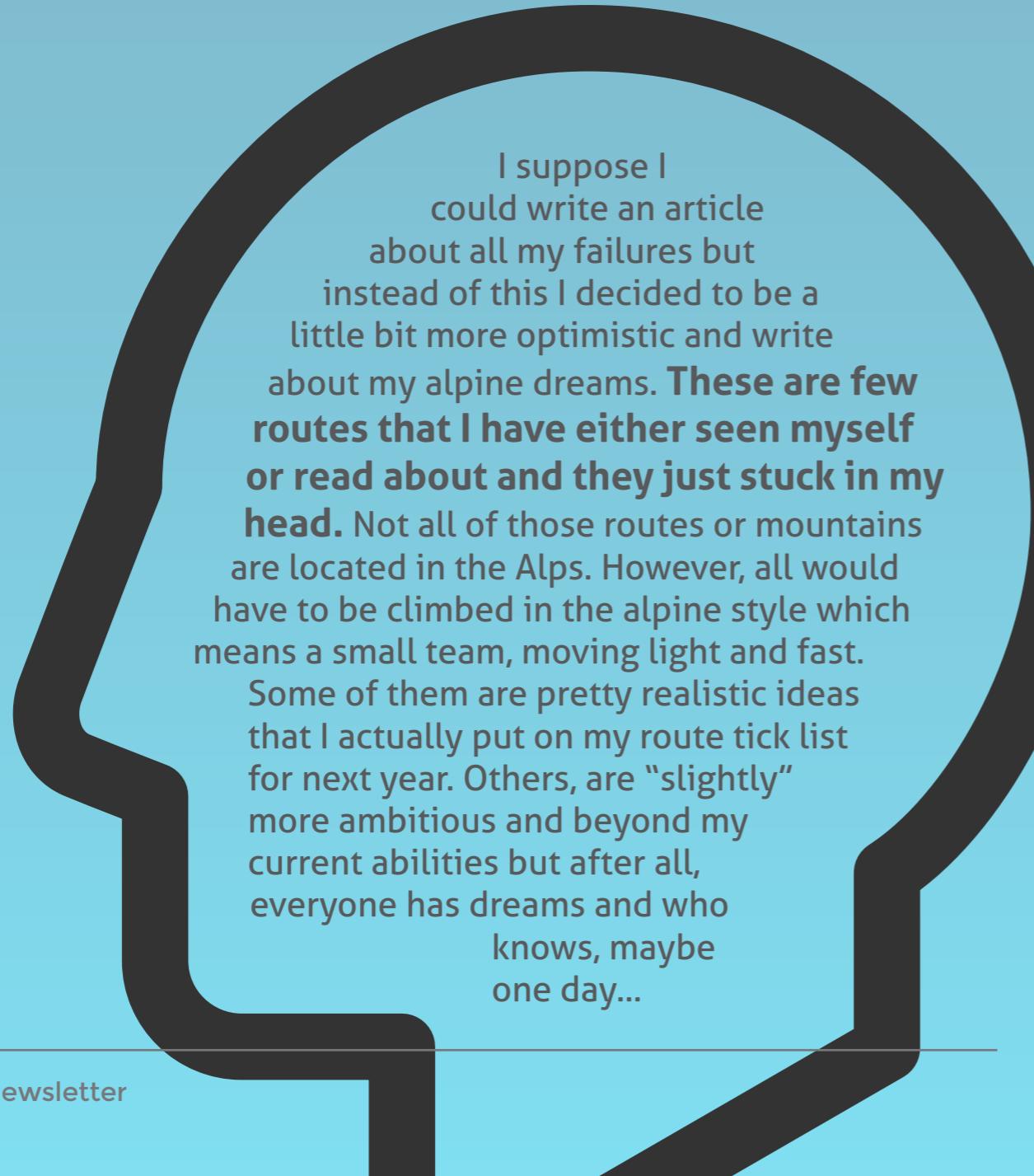
Currently we are planning to leave Tafraout tomorrow morning with Mustapha in tow as he is planning to go on his holidays. We have no idea if we will be able to make it back on the roads we arrived on, as some have been closed for days.

Final thought - even though it hasn't been the most successful climbing holiday ever, I don't think I could have spent my time in Tafraout with better company.

CATHERINE SMITH**RAFAL AND CHRIS GETTING INTIMATE****BREAKFAST AT THE HOTEL ARGANA****CMC 2014 Newsletter | 41**

Alpine Dreams...

First of All, I have to admit that 2014 was not a good year for me. Due to various reasons, such as shortage of money, bad weather or navigation errors, I managed to fail on all my major climbing projects. I will never forget how slowly I was walking back from the Triangle du Tacul after our epic retreat from the Chere couloir (or more precisely Perroux gully). I was dragging my feet at the pace of a turtle, not because I was tired – just so disappointed...



I suppose I could write an article about all my failures but instead of this I decided to be a little bit more optimistic and write about my alpine dreams. **These are few routes that I have either seen myself or read about and they just stuck in my head.** Not all of those routes or mountains are located in the Alps. However, all would have to be climbed in the alpine style which means a small team, moving light and fast. Some of them are pretty realistic ideas that I actually put on my route tick list for next year. Others, are "slightly" more ambitious and beyond my current abilities but after all, everyone has dreams and who knows, maybe one day...



1. AIGUILLE DU CHARDONNET, FORBES ARETE (AD+)

I remember my first visit to Albert Premiere Hut near Argentiere, France. I was waiting with Efe for a dinner in front of the dining room, killing the time reading stuff displayed on the information board. My attention was attracted by a little piece of paper with a hand written note "**If you attempt Aig. Du Chardonnet, you must tell us when you come back. Failure to do so will result in a rescue action start immediately**".

That little note made me scared of this mountain before I even saw it. On the following day, we were climbing some easier routes around the hut. About 9 am as the clouds went up, I eventually could see it. My first thought was that this is a truly beautiful mountain – a lonely piece of rock, surrounded by glaciers from all sides, clearly separated from other summits. I took a couple of shots and after return to the hut started studying routes to the summit. Forbes Arete is one of the classic climbs of the area – not too hard, only AD+ but sustained in its difficulty, with a tricky descent. Since then, this route has always been on my wish list. It's definitely within my abilities, I only need to be in the right place at the right time and in a good weather...

2. MONT BLANC, INNOMINATA RIDGE (D-)

According to Gaston Rébuffat - the French alpinist who wrote several guidebooks to the Mont Blanc range, this is the finest route to the summit of the highest peak in the Alps. It is a long route on Italian side of the mountain. Requires three days of good weather. One night stay in Monzino hut and another night in Eccles bivouac hut. Technically should not be too bad but high altitude and loneliness mean that this is a serious climb from which it is not easy to retreat. In addition, there are considerable objective hazards (rock falls).

I had a little ambition to attempt this route with Efe last summer but unfortunately, weather and snow conditions were far from what would allow us to climb. Another project for the future...

3. GRANDES JORASSES (NORTH FACE), COLTON - MACINTYRE (ED1, VI 6)

The North Face of the Grandes Jorasses looks amazing – it is big and scary. It is a very difficult and dangerous wall. No surprise that it is considered to be one of the six hardest north faces in the Alps. I looked at it many times from the valley or from Aiguilles Rouges and it always made me think how much I would like to be one of those guys capable of climbing stuff like this. I have no doubts I still have to learn a lot. There are several great routes on that wall but having just finished reading “One day as a tiger” by J. Porter I am inspired to add Alex Macintyre’s route to my list.

4. ALPAMAYO, FERRARI ROUTE (AD+)

Alpamayo is a 5947m peak in Cordillera Blanca, Peru. In 1966, during a photographic exposition in Munich, it was called “the most beautiful mountain in the world.” Of course it is very subjective opinion but at least on the photos it looks really good. As a consequence, the Ferrari route on the south-west face became the most popular climb in the range. In terms of difficulty, it is not particularly hard – only AD+ but due to location, altitude and remoteness I think this route is a very interesting target. Perhaps, a perfect choice to progress to high altitude mountaineering. I’ve been trying to convince Efe to this idea but, at least so far, without success. Hopefully soon though...



5. NANGA PARBAT, RUPAL FACE

This is my craziest idea. Nanga Parbat in Pakistan is the ninth highest mountain on Earth (8126m) and its Rupal Face is the highest mountain face in the world (4600m from the base to the summit). I have never been anywhere near to Nanga Parbat and have only seen it on pictures. A while ago I read Reinhold Messner's story of his first ascent of the Rupal face in "The Naked Mountain". Then about Steve House's obsession in "Beyond the Mountain". Finally, a little bit of research on internet. **Apparently, Nanga is one of the last two 8000-meters (along with K2) that have never been climbed in the winter** so there is still a little scope for exploration. This is a real challenge – to climb Nanga Parbat via Rupal Face in the winter. This must sound mad even to most experienced Himalayan climbers. Despite numerous attempts, no one managed to do this so far. **They say that it is a polish speciality though to climb 8000-metres in the winter.**



The list of my alpine ideas is obviously much longer and includes alpine classics like the Swiss route on Les Courtes, Italian ridge on Matterhorn, Frendo Spur on Aiguille du Midi and many more. I could talk about it for a long time (or write about it so much that probably nobody would bother to read my article). Anyway, I hope that 2015 will be more lucky for me so that I can tick at least some routes off the list.

Rafal Malczyk

...and Alpine Reality (so far)



1. Efe and me enjoying afternoon coffee in Argentiere hut (2013)
2. Efe and myself at the summit of Aiguille d'Argentiere (after climbing couloirs en Y, 2013)
3. Myself at the summit of Aiguille d'Argentiere (2013)
4. Myself climbing "Cosmiques Arete" on Aiguille du Midi (2011, photo: Andy Teasdale)
5. Efe at the summit on La Tour Ronde (2013)
6. Aiguille du Midi seen from Triangle du Tacul (2014)

Mingulay and Pabbay, June 2014

- BY MARTIN BAGSHAW

Though I have been fortunate enough to check out quite a few new places in 2014, none have been quite as wild or as interesting, with climbing as good as on Pabbay and Mingulay. It was akin to being marooned on a desert island for a week, albeit with a few supplies and a lot of climbing options.

In mid June, I joined Dan Moore and Paul Schweizer, a couple of Edinburgh-based guys I met in Yosemite in 2012, along with around thirty or so others on a week long trip to these two beautiful islands on the far south-west tip of the Hebridean archipelago. Mingulay and Pabbay are inhabited only by a huge population of seabirds for most of the year with a short window in the summer months when climbers, walkers, and paddlers come to explore.

Rather than provide a daily account of events (as I will waffle on for ages, and have left writing this story for far too long), I thought I would provide snippets to go with a few photographs.



Screen grabs taken from yarrmaps.com. Just in case you ever need a source for pirate themed Google Maps!

1. LEAVING OBAN

- Embarking upon the six hour long and heavily subsidised £30 journey to Castlebay, the main town in the Barra Isles. The boat seemed to consist only of retirees and fellow climbers.



2. CASTLEBAY TO MINGULAY BOAT RIDE

- This was probably about a half hour journey, and the most expensive leg of the trip! We each paid £100 to get taken over to Mingulay, picked up midweek to go to Pabbay, then back to Castlebay. I met Dan's friend, Tom (on the right), who lives in Oban before Dan and Paul arrived. We got along so well I ended up on a trip to Morocco with him and some of his friends later in the year.



3. DONALD THE BOATMAN

- This guy has found a nice little earner taking climbers out to the islands. He normally takes people on sightseeing tours to look for dolphins, seals, and sea birds found around the Barra Isles. This photo was taken at 10.30pm; I found the light didn't completely fade at night at this time of year, twilight just seemed to hang there all night.



4. OUR CAMPSITE IN THE MORNING

- Only a small area on the southern side of Mingulay is camped on, to limit human impact. We dug latrines to use, and got water from a nearby spring. Most mornings, and for large portions of many days, a thick mist rolled slowly over the islands, further adding to the isolated desert island feeling.



5. LOST IN THE MIST - Paul and I got lost in the mist on day two. And day three as well. It was sooooooo thick. Our tiny map of the island (and our lack of compass) didn't really help, nor did the lack of landmarks and gentle terrain. This photo was taken as some of the mist was clearing on day two, and we were heading to a different crag to the one we originally intended to head to. With the sun beating down hard through the mist, it felt more like being in a desert sand storm than on a misty island.



6. PUFFINS - A happy by product to losing our way in the mist on the third day is that we got to see a lot of Puffins. The west side of Mingulay is inhabited by huge, mean birds called Skewers, commonly known as Bonxies, who swoop to attack you. Many walked with walking poles poking out the top of their sacks for protection, and a Scottish Mountaineering Club member who we spoke to mentioned his friend got knocked out by one once. On the other hand, the north east side of the island is home to more friendly puffins. Shame there wasn't more climbing there.



7. MIDGES (OR LACK OF) - After gearing up for some chemical warfare on this trip, I experienced all of about five minutes worth of midges the whole time I was there - while belaying Paul on this climb. The belay at the bottom of this one was interesting: semi-hanging on a small sloped ledge about a foot above the water, we somehow managed to keep the ropes completely dry!



8. MIST-BOW - Have you ever seen one of these before (other than that picture in this year's calendar)? I hadn't. Rainbow made from mist in front of the semi-inhabited national trust weather station on Mingulay one morning.



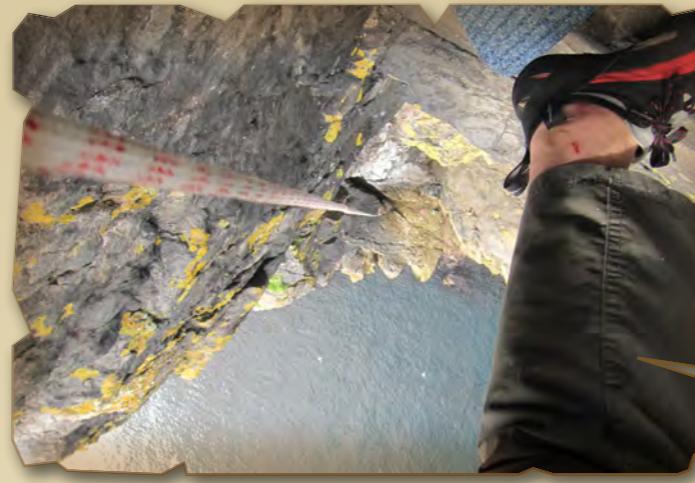
9. MASSIVE ABSEILS - Looking up at Paul descending after my first ever one hundred metre abseil. This one was into a section of *Dun Mingulay* cliff where the easiest way out was up an E2 called *Sula*. Like a lot of the big routes on the islands it looked intimidating from the bottom, but once you got going on it, the climbing turned out to be fine. Paul's pitch had one of the most juggy overhangs I'd ever climbed.



10. ARRIVING ON PABBAY - This picture is included to show some of the mass of bags and people swapping islands mid-week. Though there is presently more climbing developed on Pabbay, it is about half the size on Mingulay, and did not have quite as wild a feel to it. Then again, perhaps the weather had improved a bit by then.



11. MORE MASSIVE ABSEILS - Already included I know, but this one was ninety metres long, and free-hanging! So much fun, just don't touch your belay plate for a while when you get down. This one was into Grey Wall Recess in Pabbay, to climb *U-ei*, the route that confused the hell out of us with its topo starting halfway up. Damn you, Garry Latter!



12. THE GREAT ARCH - Easily the most famous rock feature of the two islands, Pabbay's Great Arch is home to the much raved about E2 5c, *Prophecy of Drowning*, which follows a series of grooves in the left side of the arch, then makes its way left and up, into the upper corner.



13. PROPHECY OF DROWNING? - The route name could be said to be a bit apt for some of us actually, for while I was out of sight of my belayer (Tom), in one of the deep grooves on the first pitch, Dan had abseiled down to climb the nearby *Full Fathom Five*. Only problem was that when he got down, he found out his rope was in the wrong place, free-hanging out from the cliff, with the end in the sea. He had also abseiled down without a prussik, and hung there, slowly creeping towards the drink, which was quite choppy. Fortunately, he managed to lasso a spike of rock, and pull himself in to the cliff in time for the prophecy not to become true! Photo taken by Tom.



14. PABBAY BEACH - Aside from Palm Trees, Rum, and quite a few degrees in temperature, this may as well have been the Caribbean! OK, you can probably tell I have never been... Evening activities for some people included fishing, with a fish fry occurring on at least one night. For other animals, fishing was popular too; I remember watching Arctic Terns dive-bombing the water to catch fish close to the surface. Photo taken by Dan. More of his far better photos can be found here, look for the Mingulay and Pabbay album: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/djclimbing/albums>

