



Newsletter

www.chelmsfordmountainclub.co.uk

March 2006

Chairman's Ramblings

Well March is nearly over and the winter seems to be waning, so its time to put away all those guide books you have been drooling over during the dark months, get the tick lists out and go for it.

Having said that the CMC is a club that is very active all year and there have already been a lot of club trips.

The last few days of 2005 saw Piers and I venture down to Swanage to sneak a day in before Christmas, we were amazed to have bright sunshine blue sky's and dry rock.

Sea cliff climbing is always esoteric and the conditions made the day one to remember, with some classic routes ticked off.

We ran our Winter skills course again this year with a group going up to The Cairngorms, with a couple of guides to improve their snow, ice and winter survival skills.

The reports back indicated a week enjoyed by all and many thanks to Dee for taking on much of the logistical and cooking responsibilities up there, and for Wyn for organising the trip.

Marion has already organised a winter walking weekend up to North Wales and the Peaks, as she is off on a trek to the Himalayas later in the year and this is the start of her fitness programme, I think a wild camping trip is also planned.

Piers and Paul are off with the LMC to the Ben, staying in the CIC hut for an epic week, (not too epic I hope), but I'm sure the tales will be entertaining!!!(“Its all about the climbing” man.)

We have had one committee meeting already to set the meets up for the year, and get the various plans for the club underway.

One of my main aims is to get the website updated, as this is our window to the world and we need to utilise the technology to have a site where we can all interact and that reflects what we are and our club activities.

Member's photos and reports on club trips etc can also be posted there, but we will need to have your views on what shape you want the web site to take as there are several possibilities.

Chris and Graham are the technology guru's so if you have any thoughts on how the site should look please let them know.

I have discussed the possibility of having a club bursary, where by we can utilise some money to get people trained within the club, so we can confidently train new members with minimal risk. We are likely to sponsor SPA courses, some first aid training, and navigation training, but the possibilities are flexible, more details on this later.

Meets.

The clubs Cornwall trip is looming, I have secured the bunkhouse after much searching of the web, so now it matters not how inclement the weather is, as we will have a dry place to retreat into. There is some fantastic climbing in this part of the UK and its worth a visit just to experience the atmosphere.

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There are plenty of routes of all grades, and we are located in close proximity to the main climbing cliffs. (Of course there is also a pub nearby) so come along as there are still a few places available.

Other meets on the cards for this coming year are the friends and family meet up in the peaks at the end of July.

The aim of this trip is for the club to give us all a chance to meet up on a more social basis where our other halves, girlfriends boyfriends, our kids et al, can all turn up and meet each other and share The "Oh he's gone climbing again" stories.

Hopefully we can all get to know each other a bit more and do a bit of climbing. (And I totally deny this is just a way I can blagg an extra weekend's climbing by dragging my wife and Kids along on the pretence that it's a club social.)

We have also got the Whillans hut booked at the Roaches for later in the year, this is rather an achievement as it has to be booked some 18 months in advance!!.

But what a location, best get your name down early as the hut spaces are limited.

I think a mass ascent of Valkyrie is surely on the cards.

The CMC Christmas meet is one that is always well attended and full of some kind of drama, tall stories, and other escapades, so...watch this space ... this year a decent hut that will actually accommodate twenty of us with more room to spare is being organised...just 5 mins from the pub ... what more could you ask for?.

These are the organised club trips but as you all know there are many other trips that are on an impromptu basis, so watch the e mails.....

Verity and Martin are off to Font again for Easter so if you have the time it's a great place to spend a few days. In an idyllic forest location with many different circuits to suit all different styles from high ball problems to crimps, power moves and slapping for the top.

Of course I had to get the dictionary out to put that sentence together as I'm not one of the bouldering types (Oh no just burnt the bacon sarnie, I knew I shouldn't have started writing about bouldering).

Other club members are off on various trips, Wyn's off to Alaska soon to do Denali,

The two Paul's are off to Spain for some sun'n'fun and big routes over Easter,

and a few of us are going to the French Alps again this summer, Frendo spur here we come.

Hopefully these trips will inspire some articles for our summer news letter.

I know some of our members are keen to progress onto alpine climbing, so have a look at the current summit magazine (page 7) as it gives details of the alpine skills courses that are available.

The BMC are running an alpine meet based in Arolla from the 5 – 19th August with a range of courses available.

The Jonathan Conville trust have places available that are heavily subsidised, based in Cham using British guides with dates from June to August. These will cover crampon/ ice axe technique rope work, avalanche assessment, moving together and other alpine skills. These have to be applied for and the closing date is 18th April, forms are available on the BMC website. They are aimed at young people and are an excellent start to an alpine climbing career.

If you're a girl its your lucky day as the Conville trust have teamed up with Sprayway to offer some FREE places on an alpine training course this summer. It is to support and encourage female mountaineers. These are based in Argentiere in July. So go on girlies give it a go, it's a fantastic place to take a break and we will be over in Cham at the same time so we could all meet up for a CMC get together. Again application forms are on the BMC website.

Finally I would like to say a couple of big thanks , firstly to Tony for all this contributions chairing the club over the last three years, a period of time that has seen many developments and a strong growth within the CMC, as the club has attracted many new members and begun a new lease of life.

Also to David who stepped in to undertake the treasurers role at very short notice when Derek emigrated. Both your efforts have been greatly appreciated.

Hopefully this newsletter will be arriving with you all very shortly; again as always the CMC is your club so any ideas, comments or contributions are always welcome.

Simon.

Chair CMC.

Chairs Report for 2005

Tony Walentowicz

Apologies: my apologies for not being at this AGM this time but the white stuff calls and I must go.

Preface: After three years as Chair and with Simon stepping down from Secretary – this role being taken by Verity, Simon will now take the Chair. I've enjoyed my three years and will continue to be an active club and committee member.

Summary of 2005

The club continued to grow throughout 2005, in no small part due to the availability of the Writtle climbing wall. New faces are always welcome but encouraging is the way some new folks are getting involved not just with climbing but organising people and trips. The club now appears to be the central focus of mountaineering activity in Chelmsford.

Meetings and members activity

Obviously a lot going on with people doing their own thing as well as on club meets. Unless you are involved in every outing (unlikely) you won't be aware of where people are going and what they are doing so it would be nice to see more stuff being written up.

Some of the things I know about are outlined here but I'll leave more of the details to the Secretary and meets organisers.

There was a winter-guided trip to Scotland organised via Wyn and the Writtle Club. There was an enjoyable visit to the Roaches in April with a good turnout seeing many routes done.

There was another good turnout for North Wales in May. Three of us climbed Amphitheatre Buttress and visited Angelsey for some Holyhead mountain routes with others climbing in the Ogwen valley. Weather was fair but on the windy side from memory.

A small party went to Chamonix and climbed a number of projects, including sport routes (in the valley), multipitch (Aiguille Rouge) and Alpine ascents (Gran Paradiso (Italy) and Cosmique Arete. A memorable outing that had to cope with two storms and some unpredictable snow.

July saw the clubs first barbecue down at Harrisons – apologies to members who couldn't make it.

Four members made a repeat club trip to **Lundy** and had a good time in this fabulous place, could this become a regular event?

There was another **Peaks** visit in October before we were back in **North Wales** in November for the Annual Dinner. As usual in November the weather threatened but the weekend saw climbing at Tremadog and a great day of club activity at the Moelwyns. Also as is becoming a little too normal, two members got off Tryfan very late, causing some concern for a while. The evening dinner proved a lot of fun with a rather warmer room than the previous year.

This is just a brief resume of some of the year's events and I hope to see more in 2006 newsletters.

The Wall

Has proved to be a great success, perhaps more than we envisaged. Before we were aware, we were getting inundated with new 'members' who really were just looking for the convenience of a local wall to climb on. We had to turn people away at times and put others off, not a situation we have ever been in before. Things seem to have settled down now but we need to keep a careful watch on numbers. Again we would urge members not to introduce friends unless they are interested in becoming active club members. The wall is full if twenty people turn up which is less than half our membership.

Newsletter/communications

We managed about two newsletters, many did probably not see the first and the second was a good solid edition. Ideally we need more but more stuff needs to get written. We should aim for two good editions in 2006. With these going on our website it is a window on our world for other people and may be how we are seen to outsiders.

The yahoo group is working quite well, some bits work better than others. We need to use this more and keep giving feedback to Graham.

And finally: thanks to all who have helped make the club work this past year, a lot of effort is put in by a few individuals and its much appreciated by me. 2005 was a good year, lets just build on that.

CMC AGM Secretary's report for 2005 Simon Clark

Reflecting back on last years AGM, I had anticipated the club would increase in numbers, but the increase has been more than surprising.

The CMC has grown significantly over the last year; in 2004 we had 29 members, rising during 2005 to 63.

This significant rise has in some part been due to the clubs regular use of the Writtle climbing wall.

There are many enquires from the BMC website, via the internet, and referrals from Field and Trek.

I think the increase is club membership say's a lot about the club, when new members come along they are made to feel welcome and part of the club right

from the start.

This is a great attribute, as so often in clubs it can be difficult to get accepted.

I would just like to say a big thanks to all of you who make that extra effort and give up your time so new members feel welcome in the club and can learn from your climbing experience. As I know this often involves you giving up your climbing time to facilitate this.

The club has evolved significantly over the last 3 years from a relatively small club to a level now where the club is very active and member's expectations have grown.

The club will continue to evolve and it's down to the members to be an active part of this evolution and shape the future of the CMC.

For that to take place we do need input from members, so do let us know what you want from the club and how you think it should run.

This is a very exciting time for the CMC as we now have an income from the wall money which we can utilise within the club, a position we have never been in before.

This gives us scope to make improvements that haven't been possible until now.

There are lots of ideas regarding the form these improvements should take so watch this space. I would also appreciate your views on this.

Writtle wall.

We continue to run the wall sessions every week, I think this is very worthwhile, it gives a reason for people to meet up and get together as well as maintaining fitness and improving technique.

The wall is a facility to maintain and improve for the mountain environment and is not just an entity in its own right.

I think this message has been communicated as the numbers seem to have settled down to a manageable level, so overcrowding and safety are not compromised.

We are planning to do some route setting, soon and your help with this is needed.

Club activity.

2005 was again another active year for the club.

The planned club meets through out the year, where huts are booked in advance is working well.

This years meets included a Scottish winter skills week, trips to the Roaches, The lakes, Peaks, Lundy, The Alps and the annual club Christmas dinner to N.Wales.

The Christmas dinner saw the most club members attend than on any previous trip the CMC has run.

It was quite a logistical exercise getting every one there and fed, but the weekend was an excellent one, with the club subsidising the cost for members from club funds.

The CMC are still being put on the world map as Wyn continues to knock off the Himalayan 8000m peaks, summiting Spantik in early September this year. Good one Wyn.

Also this year for the first time we had a club barbeque at Harrison's rocks, an enjoyable and quite enlightening evenings entertainment was enjoyed by those present. It was open to members and families/partners/girlfriends, with the club supplying drink and food.

The numbers were a little lower than we had expected, but we will be doing a similar meet again this year so put it in your diaries now.

Club communications.

As the club grows communicating is an ever important task.

Graham set up the yahoo user group earlier this year which seems to be working well.

The website is next on the agenda for an overhaul something I think is long overdue.

The clubs activity should enable it to produce a superb web page, and this is important as it portrays the clubs image for all to see.

Sadly again the club has struggled with newsletters this year only managing two editions, hopefully with all the activity we can improve on this during 2006.

The aim is to simplify the newsletters and aim to produce 3 per year, covering The winter/spring activity, summer trips, and the final autumn escapades, anything and everything is welcome, so please contribute.

During 2006.

This year looks to be another active one, with club meets already taking place and more in the diary.

There will be some restructuring in the club this year to enable us to ensure the increasing club administration runs smoothly, and to implement, the ideas for club improvements.

But this is your club and although the committee form an active part of it, we need your ideas and views to make the club what you want it to be, so please do let us know.

Simon Clark (Secretary)

CMC AGM 1st February 2006

Minutes of Meeting

AGM held at The Rose, Writtle Green, Writtle at 9pm.

Members present

Simon Clark, David Stynes, Verity Ford, Aaron John Bowley, Michael Hyde, Martin Hill, Adam Maclean, Mike Campbell, Elved Roberts, Victoria Ames, Rob Anstee, Clare Dobson, Ben Stickley, Wyn Morgan, Marion Leister, Piers Harley, Daryl Flint, Graham Hewing-Powell, Michael Porter, Matthew Porter, Ahad Ramezanpour, Paul McTear, John Meehan, Denzil Mackrory.

Apologies received from Tony Walentowicz, Andrew Porter.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed as being an accurate record. There were no matters arising from the minutes, these were duly signed off by Simon Clark.

Treasurers report: David Stynes

David reported that the clubs expenditure was £2522.49 with club income at £3768.67.

This gave us a surplus for the year of £1246.18, when added to the clubs existing funds the total reserve now stands at £1790.11.

The revenue from Writtle climbing wall was £1329.23 which in part has helped to fund the club dinner with a cost of £274.

Club subscriptions

With the club's income from the wall money it was suggested that more club meets could be subsidised – for example another BBQ. Another suggestion was paying for members to become SPA qualified, or to subsidise members to go away on trips on an annual basis. Route setting training at The Castle was also another suggestion.

Daryl suggested The Calvert Trust which provides adventurous outdoor activity courses for people with disabilities. Their website address is <http://www.calvert-trust.org.uk>

Election of club officers

Club Chairman: Simon Clark (Proposed: David Stynes, Seconded: Aaron Bowley)

Club Treasurer: Wyn Morgan (Proposed: Simon Clark, Seconded: Elved Roberts)

Club Secretary: Verity Ford (Proposed: Graham

Hewing-Powell, Seconded: Martin Hill)

Non committee posts

Meets Organiser: Martin Hill (Proposed: Piers Harley Seconded: Michael Hyde)

Meets Assistants: Marion Leister (Proposed: Wyn Morgan, Seconded: Ben Stickley), Clare Dobson (Proposed: Victoria Ames, Seconded: Marion Leister)

Website coordinators: Chris Grimble (Proposed: Ben Stickley, Seconded: Ahad Ramezanpour), Graham Hewing-Powell (Proposed: Martin Hill, Seconded: Piers Harley) Paul McTear is also happy to help out with the website if needed.

Meets list 2006

Four trips are already in the process of being planned for 2006 – Fontainebleau over Easter, Cornwall at the end of May, a friends and family weekend in the Peak District which has been postponed one week to the 22/23 July, and the Peak District again in October where the Whillians Hut has been booked. There will also be the annual club Christmas dinner weekend in North Wales – date to be confirmed.

AOB

Concerns were raised by Simon on behalf of Andrew Porter in his absence, over the lack of policy or structure in place to cover club safety when on club meets. It was suggested that we should leave route details with a member of the club and advise them if it changes, especially as there is often no mobile reception when we are climbing. We should also have a list of the members on the club meet with their mobile numbers and next of kin details. Some members thought this should only be necessary on formal trips, i.e. when it is open to all members. Wyn suggested leaving route details on overhead projector slides as these could be easy to place over a map and then draw the route directly onto the slide.

Martin was concerned about the contact list as he believes there is too much personal information listed. He had previously mentioned this to Simon and Simon confirmed that now only e-mail addresses are listed and distributed. All of the information is still required but will only be supplied to the BMC for their admin purposes and will not be given to any third parties.

Martin also suggested an informal AGM halfway through the year so that we could keep track of club meets and any other issues that were raised at the beginning of the year.

Members requested that the date and agenda of committee meetings is e-mailed to everyone before the meeting so that they can have an input into what may be discussed.

Marion requested more club meets being held on bank holiday weekends to take advantage of the extra day off work, and Piers requested more club meets to places where the climbing is considered to be harder.

Wyn advised all members that it is up to them if they are happy to take novices to places such as the Alps, but reminded them that the risks are greater and that skills in the UK are not the same skills as needed when in the Alps.

Martin requested that the month is put on the membership cards as well as the year, so that we can still use our cards in the days leading up to next years AGM where it might normally be refused due to being out of date. Simon said that the BMC club number will also now be on the cards.

Marion thanked all club members who had helped guide and train novices on club meets.

Safety at the wall was another issue brought up; Wyn is concerned by the bad belaying by some members and it was suggested that beginners are sent on a course first. The hire of a guide was also suggested, or to appoint safety officers but with no legal responsibilities. General mistakes could be listed on the newsletters or via yahoo. However it was explained that we can't test beginners because we would be rubber stamping them that they are safe, but perhaps we could explain safety to novices and have an induction. Notes for new members and conditions of use listed on the website were suggested, and that perhaps people who have completed courses could have their first trip subsidised.

End of meeting

Winter Skills Scotland February 2006 and other lessons Graham Hewing-Powell

It was with great disappointment that I found myself unable to take part in the winter mountaineering skills course in early 2005, from all of the stories that returned, the event went extremely well and hence I found myself all the more keen to take part in 2006.

The winter skills course for those that are not aware is a joint course run with and organised by Writtle College Mountaineering Club. The event has been running for a number of years and opening its doors to the CMC has only increased its appeal.

The aim is simple, a bunch of novices on the hill with a top quality guide and the opportunity to learn as much

as time allows about best practise in Scotland.

The trip started with everyone meeting up at the chalet at Feshiebridge just south of Aviemore. There were 4 from Writtle college (Steve, Geoff, Zoe, Laura), 4 from the CMC (Clare, Victoria, Rob and myself) and the 2 guides, (Robin and Kevin).



After an eventful journey up (the plane got stuck at Luton!!) there was the first of many delightful surprises, Clare and crew had kindly cooked dinner for all, the start of a week of hearty food that was very much appreciated by all. The first evening was spent checking gear, chatting to the guides and trying to understand everyone's respective abilities and aspirations.

Day 1 Started with Porridge (thankyou Vicky) and then followed by a day at Coire an Lochain. For those of us not familiar with Scotland this was the first real experience of the long walk in required before commencing any hill side activity. The porridge paid dividends here as we trudged our southern wimpish legs supporting what we felt were not overfull rucksacks up hill. Here was the first lesson, we all learnt when looking at the guides, 'don't carry the rope unless you can find some over mug to do so', i.e. the client! Thankyou Rob for being the resident sherpa. Once in the gully we practised ice axe arrests, not a moment too soon for Clare who decided to attempt stopping by diving head first towards the rocks! After lunch the group moved on to crampon work on one of the few remaining pieces of ice. This was huge fun not least because of the beautiful clear ice, it was just a pity there was so little.

Day 2

More porridge and then straight up to Coire Cas. The aim of the day was to do snow assessments and dig snow holes. The walk in was still a shock to the system and unfortunately took a toll on some of those in hired or borrowed boots, necessitating their early retirement. On route we met up with the local avalanche assessor. This proved invaluable as we managed to spend the

morning with him understanding the process of snow pack assessment and how the avalanche risk reports are created. After lunch we moved to the other side of the corrie and tried to make snow holes. This was more of an exercise in igloo manufacture given the limited snow and I am sure that any passing Inuits would have welcomed the entertainment. The group then trudged over Cairgorm and back down following the funicular railway. The day finished in Cairngorm Mountain Sports, where I successfully sorted out my boots and then we tucked into hot chocolates and cakes.



Day 3

Yet more porridge, a real necessity today as the conditions had turned cold, windy and the weather was generally closing in. The group split into 2 with some deciding to go rock climbing on the sandstone cliffs west of Inverness. The rest of us convinced of the merits of Fiacaiall Buttress in Coire an t-Snechda, set off in search of bad weather.



The usual walk in was followed by an early lunch at the foot of the buttress, where crampons harnesses and helmets were donned. Robin then led the way over snow and ice covered boulders. I suppose the route would have been no harder than a rock climbing v-diff, but the effect of where it was coupled with the worsening conditions, ice axes, crampons and moving together as one made the experience quite memorable for all.



At the top elated, relieved and covered in icicles, we unroped and quickly headed across the tops of the corrie to find a decent gully. The first we came to Robin pointed out was unstable and likely to avalanche, given the cracks forming across the top. By now the conditions had deteriorated further and visibility was down to 25 feet. The next gully along (the goat track) was clear and headed down while being sand blasted by ice particles. At the bottom, all was quiet and we were joined by a flock of snow buntings, obviously dependent on scraps from climbers.



Day 4

Further a-field today to Creag Meagaidh, an awesome amphitheatre of rock and ice set in what seems to be the middle of nowhere. It required also the longest walk in which the guides decided would be best done in trainers first, only putting on boots once the ground became icy, the rest of us plodded on in big boots, there is obviously another lesson there that you can work out for yourself.

The cliff was stunning in its appearance and would obviously provide a number of spectacular rock lines in the summer. We chose a gully in the middle that was supposed to be around grade I.

With all the gear on at the base of the gully we started to climb as a single group. Despite the snow being reasonably deep, the presence of running water under the ice to our right did not bode well and before long Robin the guide called a halt. We had reached a point where the snow had become too unstable and there was significant risk of the whole lot coming down with us attached. So we turned around and headed back having seen first hand the risks associated with unstable conditions. Of course this then meant a very long walk back to the car.



Day 5

Back to Corrie an t-Snechda for the last day with beautiful conditions. The snow that had fallen on Wednesday (day 3) had finally had time to go through enough freeze-thaw to compact down into a stable surface. Hence everyone and his friend was out on the hill, including heaps of skiers. We finished the week practising ice axe belays and placement of ice screws. I had finally discarded the deadman (not a description of any of our party thankfully) on the basis that it was useless on the hill given the conditions. Guides went as far as to say they never carry them. There was my last unofficial lesson, 'if you don't need it, don't take it' a mantra for the guides and hence why we were carrying all the weight.

Kevin (the other guide) then showed how truly brave(or stupid, you choose) he was by testing my ice axe belay, by walking up the hill and sliding down again at great speed. I'm relieved to say for both of us it worked.



With the sun pouring down on us, Rob, Clare and I

decided to complete the week with Robin by climbing to the top of the gully and walking off the top of Cairngorm. The experience of reaching the top all be it of an easy gully, with clear blue sky and perfect snow conditions is one I will cherish for a very long time.

I'd like to thank everyone who came, particularly Robin and Kevin without whom we would be lost, Clare for carting all my heavy gear in her car and lastly Wyn for organising such an excellent trip, especially as he was then unable to attend personally.

Graham Hewing-Powell



Fontainebleu August 2004 Martin Hill

Due to the fantastic bouldering experience in Fontainebleau last May (2005), Verity and I are returning to the continent once again this Easter (13th to the 18th April) to say bonjour to the bouldering mecca of the world, where any trad climber (new or old to the sport) can seriously push forward the limits of their grade.

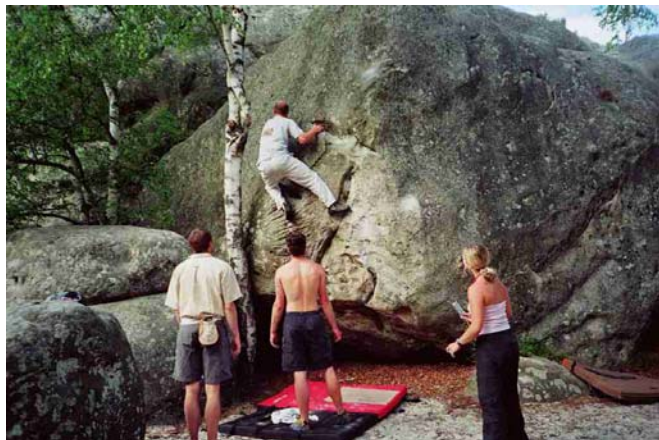
Having read some background information on such an infamous area I felt both excited and anxious as to whether one) I would enjoy it and, two) I'd be able to finish any problems (routes for you trad guys!)

Paul Leach, Verity and I caught the 6.30am ferry and by mid afternoon we were relaxing outside our tent in a picturesque French campsite soaking up the sunshine.

Then the time came to have my first taste of Fontainebleau. We took a short 10 minute drive to the nearest crag, called Trois Pignons. The array of boulders was set in a serene silver birch forest with

sand you would normally associate with a Mediterranean beach. The amount of problems of varying difficulty was immense. Once we synchronised the guide book to the area it was time to put our stickies to the rock.

The climbing is on sandstone, generally with friction problems, very tiny edges, and lots of overhanging moves. The boulders are organized in "circuits", with a consistent level of difficulty. There are several hundred circuits, from the easiest, to the most extremes, featuring a total of tens of thousands problems. On each circuit, you follow the markings arrows, which are of a specific colour.



My initial anxiety was soon dispelled after having romped up two or three problems, but I soon found a few more to work at. The beauty of Font and the problems available is that you have to step back and look at the problem, and think about a solution in regards to what sequences your hands and feet need to follow in order to bag it.

I arose the next morning feeling a bit stiff (no not like that!) after yesterday afternoon's bouldering. We had decided to go to an area called Franchard Isatis which is one of the great spots to visit in Fontainebleau. It is where superb blocks of sandstone up to 3 or 4 metres high stand proud giving you wonderful circuits. Whilst there Verity and I did a problem called Dalles D'Argent (Slabs of Money) – a classic crimp that's been made even more problematic due to the high level of traffic polishing the holds.

Another fantastic day in the French sunshine following the orange route was had by all. It was polished off by a relaxing dip in the campsite swimming pool basked in evening sun.

In the evening we relaxed outside the tents whilst cooking our dinner. Paul had a duel fuel double burner compared to our feeble excuse of a stove. Needless to say he had eaten his dinner and was doing the washing up before our water had even boiled!

We then chilled out with a French beer. After I had experienced the seductive continental climbing atmosphere over the past few days I was seduced to push my limits further and decided that Cul de Chien was the place to take my ambition.

The Cul de Chien is at the centre of the Trois Pignons forest, a desert with boulders that gleam from intense popularity. It's a sumptuous area with golden sand. Here the climbing was intense with numerous challenges; some that I bagged and some that just spat me off!



That evening I was talking about doing some high ball problems after the incredible day which left me on a huge high. I wanted to go to Dame Jouanne which is renowned for its high risk high ball action with slap happy top outs. I was eventually talked into going to Éléphant – not quite so high risk but still high ball, offering happy sandy landings.

The area is one of the best known boulders to climbers all over the world, partly due to the enigmatic and melancholic mood of its lovely shape. The circuits here offer an array of intimidation, fear and demanding technical climbing. It is not a place where you can afford to make a mistake on many of the problems without dire consequences. The blue circuit is a tremendous challenge of both climbing skill and mental control – so we did the orange one. No, only joking! ☺



By this time Jeremy Ceh and his friend Jonathan had joined us and the five of us cracked on with the blue circuit. The area lived up to our expectations and far more. It was our longest day climbing and we only headed back once the sun started to set. We drove into the picturesque town of Fontainebleau itself for dinner where we reminisced about the bouldering we'd done and how our climbing ability had improved over such a short period of time.

On our day of departure we slipped in a short half day session in an area called Bas Cuvier. This is set slightly off the main road to Paris making it ideal for our last day. It is synonymous with super hard test piece climbs that bring most first time visitors back to earth immediately with a resounding thud onto the crash pad. The area has a high density of problems with good landings and has featured in just about every bouldering video ever made.

On this day I was starting to feel the pace of the trip. The area of Bas Cuvier is definitely a place I would like to revisit with a fresh pair of arms this coming April.

Verity and I would love to see some of you guys joining us this April to experience the Font magic, like I experienced last year.

So you trad guys dispel your bouldering animosity and give a new facet of the sport a try, who knows, you may even enjoy it!

For more information please see me at the wall or e-mail me.
