

That's Me!

THAT'S ME – THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE LOUGHTON MOUNTAINEERING CLUB

SPRING 2005

Counting Crows & Virgin Snow

The last notes of the Counting Crows CD faded as the car rolled to a halt. It looked cold outside, very cold, much colder than the -10°C on the car thermometer, a slight breeze was blowing spindrift across the road ensuring that the wind chill would be significant.

There was nothing for it but to dive out of the car, put on some extra clothes, unload the ski's from the roof box and fight to put the ski boots on with increasingly numb hands.

Well chilled by the time everyone was ready to set off I was keen to get moving. The first couple of miles out of the village were on a piste de fond track, easy skinning on the flat. 'It's not a race!' Exclaimed Ralph as I overtook him, 'I know but I'm bloody cold and need to warm up!' was my reply.

After half an hour we were sheltered from the wind by the trees and started to warm up and could appreciate our surroundings, it was a sunny blue sky day in a quiet valley above the town of Briançon with a rocky crest directly above us. Our intended route was to the right of the crest up to the Col Perdu and then onto Pic L'Arpelin a modest summit of about 2500m, an ascent of 800m from the village of Le Laus where we had left the cars.

The piste de fond ended and the track became a narrow trench through the knee deep snow in the trees. As the way steepened up we were glad that someone had already beaten a trail.

Soon the trees gave way to an open snow bowl and we could see a few people ahead of us. We zigzagged up the track relishing the thought of the descent to come in knee deep fresh snow. One party was already on the way down making graceful S's in virgin

snow, would we be able to emulate them with our less than perfect off piste technique?

The snow had been blown away on the top of the col exposing rocks and it became apparent that no one had been above the col onto Pic L'Arpelin. With exposed rocks on the ridge and possible slabby snow on the face we elected to take the ski's off and do the last 200m of ascent on foot, with or without crampons according to taste. I'd carried my light weight crampons with me so thought I might as well put them on and set off breaking trail up the ridge. I'd kept my sack on so that I could have some lunch at the top but on arriving at the summit the wind soon changed my mind so I carried my lunch back down to the col where it was slightly less exposed. The cold clear air on the summit gave good views across to a col Dave and I had skinned up to on a previous year. But the modest height meant we did not get distant views to the major alpine summits.

After a quick bite to eat it was time to take the skins off the ski's, remember to set the



boots into downhill mode and set off down. The first few turns were taken cautiously as the surface had formed a frozen crust, in places there was the notorious 'breakable crust' sometimes strong enough to support the weight of a skier but unpredictably giving way trapping the ski's beneath the crust, often at the crucial point part way through a turn. Further down we were able to find some nice powder and started to 'go for it' attempting to find our rhythm and bounce gracefully from one turn into the next, well that was the theory! Looking back up the slope to admire ones handiwork was usually disappointing with the S's very uneven. Unlike the neat,

tight tracks of the continental skiers!

All too soon we were back into the woods, fighting to make turns round the trees and not get caught off balance by changes in the depth of snow as we crossed other tracks. All good fun! Then we were back on the piste de fond track, initially cruising down and then poling on the flatter bits. Back at the village some dived straight into the small, warm, welcoming bar while the more impecunious of us headed back to the car and tea and cake back at the apartment.

A good day out, a fairly short unambitious route, but ideally suited to the lack of daylight hours in early January and the bitterly cold day. *Jeff*

COTSWOLD outdoor | action | travel

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15% Discount for LMC Members
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LMC heads for the slippery slope



Giordy takes a powder

Once again there were no broken bones this year although many of us tried our hardest! The unseasonably cold weather may have put a few off, but for us powder hounds, it meant the first day's skiing especially was beyond our wildest dreams (remember, there are no friends on powder days!).

Adrian, our guide, got the quote of the week early on the first morning "When skiing in powder, don't ski in my tracks!". The subtleties of powder skiing had to be explained to our less experienced members (suffice to say "after you" isn't in the powder skiers dictionary, and looking back at your perfectly executed tracks is the essential finale!). I've attached a photo of the tracks of some of us!

As ever, there were many examples of people trying to ski uphill. This peculiar habit particularly afflicts less experienced skiers and, even more perversely, the desire to ski uphill becomes ever stronger the steeper the hill, even though it is of course

harder the steeper the hill. This of course always has only one outcome - gravity pulls the person's arse to the ground!

The prize for the longest involuntary slide down a slope this year went to Leigh. For some unknown reason, she decided to jetison her skis half way down a black and slide the rest of the way down it on her derriere at high speed! Of course she claimed her skis came off!

The final guided day was possible the best, skiing a range of reds and blacks with near perfect snow on them. Thank god I managed to shut Adrian up before he explained what we were going to be skiing, otherwise my earlier explanation that it was going to be an "easy" day would have got me lynched.

Thanks again to Leigh for organising the whole thing. However, the en suite rooms did confuse me - I didn't go to the loo or wash for a day as I couldn't find the communal bathroom!

Giordy



Jeff climbs down...

Jeff has said he will step down from his position as Secretary at the end of the coming year.

This column would like to be the first to thank him for all his good work and dedication to our enjoyment of not just the meets, but of the our club, his efforts will be missed.

the next step...

With Jeff's decision comes the need for a new Secretary, interested parties or any one else, please give it some thought!

Hints & Tips

Platapus tubes...

Stop them going furry, keep it in the freezer on return from a trip...really works!

Walking poles...

If they are not locking, clean the screws and bits with fresh lemon juice...de oxidises the metal and they work lovely afterwards!

Phoebe & Peter get a taste of the Alps

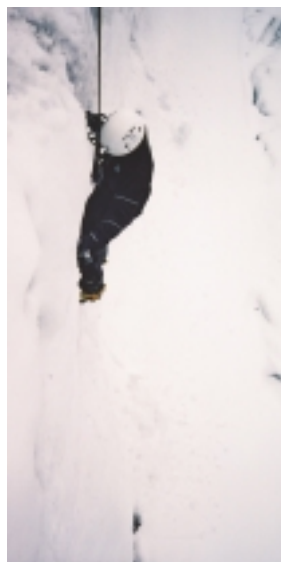
*Location: Grund, Innertkirchen,
SE of Meringen in the Bernese Oberland*

The Bernese Oberland apparently has a reputation for poor weather and it's reputation certainly lived up to it last Summer; we erected the tent in rain, pitched it in rain and one of the undying memories of the camp site was waking up to the sound of rain lashing down on the tent. Alas, this almost relentless onslaught of rain did put the dampers on our high-mountain aspirations, such that over the two weeks we only managed to attempt two snowy peaks - as opposed to the four I achieved on each of the previous two trips - and a storm prevented us reaching the top of one of those!

The two snowy routes, which we did attempt were the Wetterhorn (3692m.) via the East Flank (graded PD) and the Lauterahorn (4042m) via the SE couloir & SE ridge (graded AD+):-

Wetterhorn

This mountain was summited from the Dossen Hut (2663m), the approach to which was a 5hr route; this hut walk was actually very enjoyable and undertaken in lovely weather, beginning in a very attractive forested valley, taking us onto the bottom of the Rosenlaugletscher glacier and finishing with an



enjoyable scramble up a snowy rock ridge upon which the hut stood. We had to delay this hut walk by one day upon advice from the hut warden, owing to the presence of too much snow on the rock scramble.

The hut was quite a delight when we got there, probably because the warden looked after it as though it was her home, complete with flower baskets, ornaments and even a resident cat; apart from the numerous pictures of it posted around the hut, this cat was actually only spotted by people who needed to find their way to the loo in the middle of the night; quite what the cat's nocturnal habits were, heaven only knows as the hut was completely surrounded by rock, snow & unfriendly precipices!

The summit route from the hut has a guidebook time of 5hrs and consists for the most part of a snow plod up the Rosenlaugletscher glacier. However, to get back to the glacier from the hut we first had to ascend to the top of the ridge upon which the hut sits, entailing a zig-zag walk up a fairly steep snow slope and a descent down the other side onto the glacier.

The glacier plod was a bit of a trudge, but we eventually reached the col between the Wetterhorn and the Mittelhorn and were immediately surprised to see just how steep the final summit slope was and which began with a knife-edged snow arête up which we had to climb; the arête required care, but the 10m wide band of rock, which we then had to cross was particularly tricky, with all its holds seeming to be downward facing and unhelpful. Once crossed, we then zig-zagged up the soft deep snow slope, before delicately breaching the summit cornice through a natural break, but which required care and a



Phoebe leads the way.

precautionary ice axe belay. We arrived on the summit about an hour over the guide book time, probably as a result of the depth of fresh snow and the lack of tracks - the Wetterhorn hadn't been summited for quite some time before today. We couldn't actually stand on the very highest point of the summit, as this would have necessitated standing on the end of a long cornice, which overhang the slope we had just ascended. The summit views were excellent, particularly of the row of mountains to the West, which included the Schreckhorn, Eiger, Monch & Jungfrau and also to the North where the mountain drops off seemingly vertically down to Grindewald in the valley bottom.

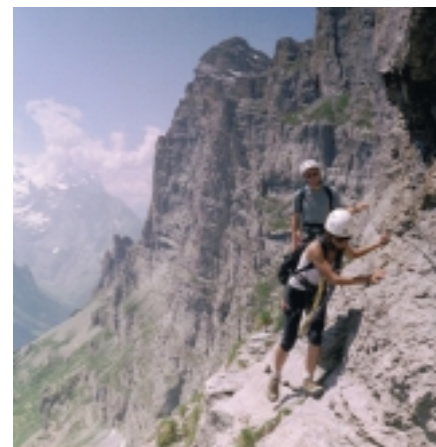
Descending the summit was actually very enjoyable, more so than the ascent (the reverse of the norm for me), apart from the fact that the sun was beating down on us and I was in need of de-layering, but had to wait until we were back at the col. The plod back down the glacier seemed long and tiring and was made that much harder by the then very soft snow. By the time we arrived at the hut we were thankful to be able to flake out in the sun and prepare ourselves for another route the next day. However, although we stayed another night in the hut, it was then decided to simply return to the camp site, owing to tired legs and much sun burn.

Over the next few days, the weather was not conducive to the higher snow covered mountain trips, so our focus changed to other activities; these included a number of walks

up lower mountains, including the Axelhorn & Mannlichen, a thoroughly enjoyable via ferrata route, some valley rock climbing at Handeg, a visit to an impressive local gorge, a trip to the local climbing wall and even a trips to Brienze & Interlaken. The Axelhorn trip in particular, provided some wonderful scenery of lush valleys, green-blue lakes and a huge array of tiny but beautiful Alpine flowers, quite a contrast to the rock & snow of the higher peaks. These lower routes also lay witness to a range of animal wildlife, which included an ibex, a mountain fox, a salamanda and several ???

Lauterahorn

At the end of the second week, a reasonable weather window was forecast, so myself and three others headed off for a summit attempt. As this route was both more strenuous and more technical than our route up the Wetterhorn, Phoebe decided to sit this one out and do some rock climbing in the valley instead. The hut climb was a long and rather tedious affair, being 19KM long and mostly along the Unteraargletscher, Finsteraargletscher & strahlegletscher glaciers - this was made all the more awkward by the amount of loose moraine covering the Unteraargletsche glacier, which made for slow progress. We arrived at the Aar Bivouac Hut (2731m) at around tea time, after a hard 7hr walk; alas by this time, one of the group decided that he wasn't on top form and didn't fancy attempting the summit, particularly as he had the prospect of having to drive all the way back to England as soon as we would have descended



the mountain the following day, so now we were down to 3.

The hut was very well kitted out for a bivouac hut, with fully appointed bunks and even gas stoves; unfortunately, we never knew this and had brought our own gear, but such is life. We started the summit attempt at about 3am, which began with a decent to the glacier over scree; I'm glad that Steve had his bearings, as it was pitch black and there was no path, cairns or prominent features to guide us. Once we reached the glacier, we then had to walk up it to a prescribed spot height, before turning off the

glacier and climbing up the summit face. The bottom part of this face consisted of alternate bands of rock and ice/snow, which apart from making life slightly awkward also made route finding a bit of a challenge, as it appeared as a maze of rock & ice and we were still in darkness. Once beyond the last of the horizontal rock bands, it became apparent that the group of Germans ahead of us who were being led by a guide, were taking a route up the slope about 100yds right of where we were heading; after a bit of a discussion it was decided that they were probably on a better line and so we moved right and followed them.

However, after a while and as the light started to materialise we could see that they were heading up a couloir, which was blocked above by a steep rock band, possibly denying them further progress – they were on the wrong course after all and we had been right in the first place. Conveniently, we had only just started up this couloir and so were able to move left around the bottom of a rock spur and into the correct adjacent couloir. From here we were able to make steady progress up the face.

We still weren't completely on the right tracks though, a fact made all the more obvious by the rannel within which we were climbing! Despite this we continued up and made good progress, until when about 500ft from the summit ridge the skies above blackened and a heavy hail storm broke; we were immediately made aware of how the rannel was formed in the first place, as a river of hail about a foot deep came flowing down the rannel, immersing our axes and feet. This was then combined with lightning, which was extremely close by and a rapid decision to

descend was made. We couldn't see whether there was any good weather behind this storm, as it was coming from the other side of the mountain we were trying to climb. Alas when we got down to the glacier, the black clouds disappeared and blue skies arrived, but it was way too late to return back up; my summit bid would have to wait for another day. To every cloud there is a silver lining and in this case it was that we were able to return to the camp site a bit earlier, giving us more time to pitch the tent and drive back to Calais.

An Alps holiday wouldn't be complete for me without an exploration of the local culinary fare and in this region we had particular enjoyment cooking up meals with the local cheeses, cured sausages & meats, not to mention of course an array of good wines; camping we may have been, but our taste buds & stomachs were not forgotten.

All in all, an enjoyable holiday was had, just a shame that the weather wasn't so kind. Stroll on next year – in the MG?

July 10th – 25th

LMC Meets Programme for 2005

Date	Hut	Map Reference
January 21-22	3 Irish Row Yorkshire MC Coniston	GR 293985
February 25-26	Bryn Brethenau, North London MC Capel Curig	GR 737572
April 8-9	Annual Dinner, Castleton, The Old Vicarage YHA/ The Peaks Inn	
April 29/30-May 1	George Starkey, ABMSAC Patterdale	GR 3961601
May 20-21	Tremadog, Bromsgrove & Redditch MC Tremadog	GR 576405
June 24-25	Newlands, Carlise MC Newlands Valley	GR 229177
July 22-23	Bryn Hafod, The Mountain Club Dinas Mawddy	GR 843194
August 19-20	Lowstern, Yorkshire Ramblers Clapham, Nr Settle	GR 736691
August 26-27-28	Camping Meet, TBA	
September 23-24	Cefn Goch, Gloucestershire MC Deiniolen	GR 583625
October 21-22	Dunmail Raise, Achille Rattie MC Grasmere	GR 328119
November 18-19	Tan Yr Wyddfa, Oread MC Rhyd Ddu	GR 571535
December 16-17	High House, K Fellfarers Seathwaite, Borrowdale	GR 235119