

THE GWYDYR MOUNTAIN CLUB NEWSLETTER – EXTRA!

October 2024: Editor Dave Gray



Introduction

Welcome to the October Newsletter! This is an Extra edition, with an article on rock climbing in the Dauphine from Steve Swygart. This brought back great memories of a Club meet way back in 1993! A big thank you to Steve, and to Christy, Gail Smith, Helens B and G, Mark Barley, Ray, Richard Smith, and as ever David LJ for help with this edition. Please let me have material for the next edition, the final deadline for that is 25th October.

Looking Ahead

Here are the upcoming meets venues for October and November, details are on the Club Website. The meets list is constantly being updated, please **check it out regularly** on the Website. Meets added to the programme since the last edition are in bold as a reminder **in case you've missed them...**

1 October	Patagonia Talk by Helen G, and EGM at Gallaghers
4/6 October	Sorbie Tower, Galloway
11/12 October	Hut Working Weekend
18/20 October	Hut Weekend
26 October	Saturday Walk – Bodfari, Moel y Parc, and Pen y Cloddiau
30 Oct/17 Nov	Ecuador - 'Triple Crown'
1/3 November	Hut Weekend: Bonfire Party
22/24 November	Hut Weekend
27 November	Royal Court Panto evening

Venues in Focus

The **Sorbie Tower meet** in South West Galloway takes us to another area that I've missed



out on in my Scottish travels. What caught my eye about it is that it not only gives access to the fine Galloway Hills, but also to a coastline of which I was unaware.

This is the rugged South Machars coast, and from looking on the map there

are paths on which it can be walked. Here's two photos to whet your appetite – these cliffs are north of Burrow Head...



...and this shot is taken south of Monreith. (photos: flickr.com).

As for Sorbie Tower itself, it was built in the 16th century for Alexander Hannay of Sorbie, adjacent to a 12th century motte (the earth base of an earlier type of castle), on a raised site protected by surrounding marshland.

It is a Tower House, what would usually be called in England a Peel Tower. It has an L-shape, which is designed to allow the defenders to subject the double solid grille and door entrance to a hail of sideways arrows or gunfire; cutting down the attackers – who might be English or from rival clans.

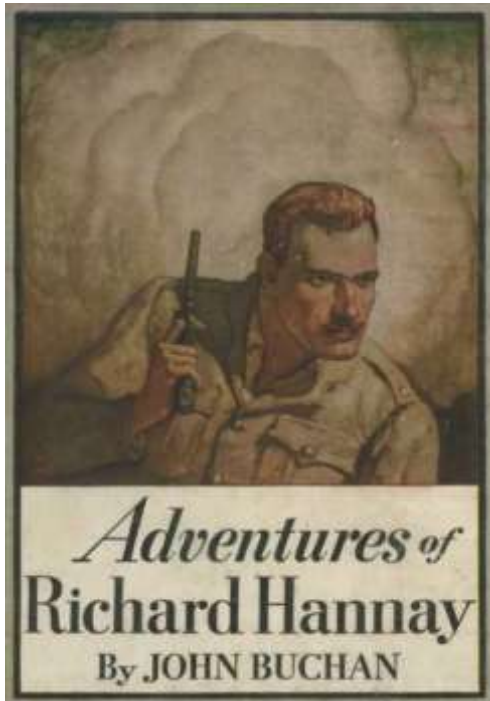
As the headquarters of Clan Hannay, this was a chief's house and it could withstand any attack short of a full scale siege. Sieges could usually only be mounted by other chiefs, or the state itself in the form of the Scots or English March Wardens. So a hard target and small time raiders would go for something easier – like the chief's tenants! To take a Tower House required artillery, or innovative tactics like getting on the roof and tearing through it to attack, or trying to start a fire on the lower level to smoke the defenders out. George McDonald Fraser's old book *'The Steel Bonnets'* gives a racy account of life on the early modern border including material on these fortresses.



Another good read is the Clan Hannay website <https://clanhannay.org/our-story/> (credit for Sorbie Tower photo) which shows that people with the name Hanna, Hannah, or Hanney

may also be descended from the clan, of which the first written records are from the 12th century.

The most famous Hannay is probably a fictional person, Richard Hannay, the empire building espionage hero of several of John Buchan's novels, most notably 'The 39 Steps.'



Hannay (seen left) is in a way the literary grandfather of James Bond. His adventures were set in the time around WW1, but we never get to find out what happens to him in the the end.

Old Africa Hands once told me 'He fetched up in Zanzibar back in '46, and had a late-life love child there'.

Bar room gossip I always thought, till I saw this photo of Freddie Mercury...



Seriously, Hannay was thought to be modelled on [Edmund Ironside](#), who was a young spy after the Second Boer War. And commanded the WW2 Home Guard in later life.

Richard Hannay's WW1 was exceptionally bloody in absolute terms, but *relative* to the population of the British Isles the casualties in the Civil Wars of 1639 to 1653 were much worse, by a factor of roughly 100%. So for the generation which experienced them, the worst warfare in our history. And a Hannay, Dr James Hannay or Hanna (c1595 – 1661), was there right at the start of the violence.

Dr Hannay was the Dean of St Giles's Cathedral in Edinburgh. In 1637 King Charles I ill-advisedly attempted to introduce a new English style prayer book in the Scots Church. It was seen as being too close to Roman Catholicism for the beliefs of most Scots, and aroused intense opposition.

In the July, Dean Hannay attempted to use the book in the Cathedral, and legend has it that a lady called Jenny Geddes threw her stool at his head.



This initiated a major riot in the church. Hannay and the other clerics were lucky to escape alive. There were copycat riots elsewhere in Scotland (see picture above, *photo - Wikipedia*) and by 1639 events had deteriorated to an armed standoff between England and Scotland, called the First Bishops' War, which itself set in train the events that were to lead to the outbreak of warfare across the British Isles.

Further afield is the **Ecuador Triple Crown** meet. This will be a demanding expedition, aiming to acclimatise and then climb three high volcanic peaks, two of which have a traditional French Alpine grade PD. From some quick reading online each of these has its own distinctive background and claims to fame...

First up is Cayambe (5,790m, 18,996') first climbed in 1880 by the famous UK mountaineer Edward Whymper and his two Italian guides Louis and Jean Antoine Carrel, and boasting the only glaciers to straddle the actual equator. Here it is looking snowy, wild, and remote, from 'somewhere in that nowhere'...



It's the point on Earth furthest from the planet's axis of rotation, which means that standing on its top you are rotating faster through space than anyone else. (*photo – Wikipedia*)

Next up is 'naughty boy' Cotopaxi (5,897m, 19347'). Unlike the other two, it's an active volcano, the highest one in the world, with 87 known eruptions to its credit. First climbed in 1872 by Colombian Angel Escobar and German academic and explorer Wilhelm Reiss, having repelled Wilhelm's renowned countryman Alexander von Humboldt in 1802. Here's Cotopaxi misbehaving in 1862 (*painting by Edwin Church, photo flickr.com*)



The third summit is the highest in Ecuador, Chimborazo, weighing in at 6,310m or 20,701 feet. Because of its height and its position close to the equator, where the ellipsoid planet 'bulges out', it is the point on Earth furthest removed from the centre of the planet. It was first climbed by Whymper and the Carrels, again in 1880. This was the first known occasion that Europeans had gained a summit above 20,000 feet.

Chimborazo from the air (photo by Morgen Mills, <https://commons.wikimedia.org>):



Occasional Section – Members' Personal News

It's great to be able to share news of the arrival of baby **Benjamin**, who is the grandson of **Helen Bartlam**. He was born on August 24th.

His proud parents are Helen's middle child Danny, and his partner Iolanda, who live and work in the Algarve. Benjamin is also the nephew of Helen's elder son Davide, who was a member of the Club when he lived in the UK.





There is also good news of our former member **David Barley**, son of **Mark and Laura**, who now lives and works in London.

David completed the West Highland Way in late August. A big achievement in a fast time and in challenging weather conditions! He walked solo, camped out a couple of times, and was aided by sending his camping ahead gear on using a luggage service.

Here is David seated with the 'Man with Sore Feet' statue in Fort William.

This Edition is a chance to hail the TV debut of **Christy Miles**, who appeared on Border TV, part of the ITV network, a few months back. Control/Click on the link below to see the clip, this takes you to an I - player, then if you want you can scroll over the first piece on rowing once it starts, to get to Christy's section at 10 minutes or so into the clip. NB this will work as long as ITV keep the episode online:

<https://www.itv.com/.../news/catch-up-on-border-life/wspf8z2>

Christy's piece covers her work as an outdoor instructor with an emphasis on hill walking and navigation. It's a lovely peaceful watch with fine scenery.

I don't think we ever celebrated screens large or small before in newsletters etc. – I know Laura has been on the TV (and radio) news when she worked in the business community, and there are YouTube posts of films featuring Alan Rouse's climbs. If there are any others stars past or present to mention, please let me know!



Grand Days Out (and In) – Recent Meets Highlights

It's been a busy start to the autumn, here's a roundup of what we've been up to...

Starting on rock, Gail Smith writes – 'Yesterday, Les, DL-J and I took a very slow drive along the A55 to climb at **Penmaenbach Quarry**. Advantage of there being 3 of us was that I was able to take a few photos when not belaying.

This is one of David slab climbing. A very nice day out. Thanks folks!'

And moving off that scary rock and swiftly indoors, the slide show at **Gallaghers** presented by John and Carol, covering their **West Highland Way** success earlier in the year, got good reviews from the audience members who've been with me on recent day trip meets.

Right at the start of the month, Helen G writes: 'Good **hut weekend!** We made the most of the weather yesterday with some of us doing the Snowdon big dipper (14 miles, 4920 ft ascent) and others walking on the Carneddau. Today we walked 9.5 miles over to Dolwyddelan to visit the Gwydyr pub and on the return tried out Dave G's suggested route from the hut mentioned in the latest newsletter.'

Here's a photo of the Snowdon walk, some of the team descending Moel y Cynghorion with Clogwyn Du'r Arddu on the left, and the south summit of Snowdon in the background.



We defied 2024's warm and murky tendency on Mark Barley's **Hague Bar to New Mills** circuit. We stayed dry and even got some views over to Lantern Pike and Cown Edge, and the hills above Lyme Park. Mike Dagley, a former member living in Manchester, joined us for the day, it was great to have him along. Highlights were the attractive heathland at the top of Mellor Moor – this is a few of us at the trig point there...



...and the spectacular sandstone gorge of the Torrs at New Mills, where the rivers Sett and Goyt meet to continue their journey on to form the Mersey.



At the actual confluence is the Torrs Hydro Scheme, whose reverse Archimedes screw turbine (known as 'Archie') started generating in the summer of 2008. Archie has produced over 1,962 MWh of clean, green electricity that is sent directly to the nearby Co-op supermarket! Any surplus is fed into the National Grid.

It was super to meet friends old and new on the **Graig Fawr and Moel Hirradug** walk. Here's some of the team checking out the big view from the first of the tops, captured by Ray. When I saw this photo I thought for a second 'who's that old bloke in the middle pointing?' – and then realised it was me! Oh dear...



We enjoyed good weather on the walk, sunny but breezy, and covered 9.5 miles in the North Clwyds, taking in chunks of the Offa's Dyke path. What really surprised me was that per Chris's GPS we had nearly 2,100' of ascent on what I've always seen as a mid level day.

The Prestatyn area often enjoys better weather than average, in the rain shadow of the higher Welsh hills. This is Moel Hirradug seen from Graig Fawr. A stiff little climb.

We rounded the day off with a good pint sitting in the sun outside the Crown Inn in Trelawynd.

Trelawynd is an interesting village in an interesting area.

Above the village is Gop Hill, the site of the second largest neolithic (about 4,000 to 2000 BC) mound in the UK, and the largest ancient monument in Wales.



Trelawynd church has a 14th century cross with a surviving carving of the crucifixion, and about 5 minutes drive away is the magnificent 10th century viking style cross of Maen Achwyfan, see below (*photo pinterest.co.uk*)

The photo above (*photo - Trelawynd and Gwaenysgor Community Council*) is of Trelawynd Memorial Hall. This unusual building is on the A5151 and dates from 1909. It's a listed building due to its 'Arts and Crafts' style design.

It was built for the village by Mr M.A. Ralli (1845-1917), as noted on the plaque on the Tower, in memory of his wife. Not a Welsh name. Michael Antonio Ralli was Greek consul in Liverpool and was one of the family who owned Ralli Brothers, which was a massive Greek international trading concern, with interests across the world in the 19th and 20th centuries, and some of whose successor companies still operate today. At its height it employed around 40,000 people. The Rallis were philanthropists, but sadly also dealt in the Chinese opium market at one stage. They were 'Lords of the Manor' in Trelawynd, living at Mia Hall.



EXTRA!

ROCK CLIMBING AROUND BRIANCON AND NORTHERN HAUTE-ALES – by Steve Swygart

In essence, this is a great place for summer cragging, as many of the areas are at high altitude, but it can also be used as an “out of season” venue, for when all the tourists have gone home and stopped clogging the roads up (i.e. end of August into September), as Briancon used to boast that it enjoyed 300 days of sunshine on the town sign! We have previously made two other trips to this area (1994 & 2008 with the kids) and enjoyed the weather, the variety of climbing and other activities (rafting etc) that are on offer.

“Out of season” was basically the purpose of this particular trip, which was the first European one undertaken in our new motorhome, which we took delivery of back in January after a two year wait. After a three day leisurely drive through the Tunnel just after August Bank Holiday, with a stop off near Langres to visit an old corporate work colleague, we finally arrived at the much less busy campsite of Iscle de Prelles ([Camping*** in Briançon, in the heart of Serre Chevalier and the Pays des Ecrins \(camping-iscledeprelles.com\)](http://camping-iscledeprelles.com)). This is located just south of Briancon and boasts a lovely, heated swimming pool with mountain views for that post-climb afternoon dip (and no kids, as they are all back in school), and has an excellent boulangerie and boucherie within a 10-minute walk, together with an excellent Carrefour Market just 5 minutes’ drive away. Even though we have retired, gone are the days of roughing it in a tent and buying hot water to put on your dried grub in mountain huts!

But what of the climbing, I hear you ask. Well, there are 10 different valley areas to have a go at, ranging from high altitude crags situated off of mountain passes, to sunny lowland cliffs, with numerous rock types just to add another dimension to the mix. There’s quartzite (Gogarth without the grip!), the usual suspect of limestone (my particular favourite, but with some different types) as well as granite and conglomerate. There’s also a bit of gneiss somewhere high up I think, but we didn’t manage to fit that in.

Having a motorhome as the sole means of transport sometimes proved challenging on the crag access and parking front, even though it is relatively small (6m long), so even after perusing both the guidebook (the old one was better for finding ways to the crags!) and Google Maps/Earth, sometimes objectives just weren’t possible to reach due to low bridges and very narrow approach roads, which was a shame, as we probably missed out on some fabulous crags, judging from the pictures in the new guidebook ([Briancon Climbs 2022 Edition \(cordee.co.uk\)](http://cordee.co.uk)). This new guide is great for inspiring you to go there as it now has pictures rather than crappy line diagrams, but nearly all modern guidebooks have co-ordinates or QR codes for parking, which this doesn’t. In a very retrograde move, the sketch maps of the crag locations are somehow worse than they were in the previous guide, which made life tricky, as difficult as it now was with a motorhome to park up!

Anyway, onto the climbing!

Pantalon (1600m; Vallee de la Guisane)

This well-bolted, friendly quartzite warm-up crag is north-west of Briancon, towards the Col du Lautaret and is just 10 minutes’ walk from the car park. There’s 43 routes from 4a to 6b, situated opposite the many ski runs of Serre Chevalier. The best bits are Dalle Blanche with routes up to 35m (some great lines and quality climbing), and Les Rochers Orange, a somewhat scruffy-looking buttress over on the right that doesn’t look like much, but all of the

routes on it are steep and give long pitch unlikely but very good value for money sustained climbing.



Steve on a 6a+, Dalle Blanche



Crag shot of Les Rochers Orange

La Falaise de Gero (1100m; La Roche de Rame)

Roche de Rame is a great place if you can lead 8b, as there's shedloads of them, but lesser mortals will settle for Les Indiens at Gero, which is principally a set of limestone slabs set to the left of a fantastic gorge with a natural spring situated at its base. Most of the routes seem to have very easy starts, but then battle soon commences, usually with some technical and beautiful moves on routes that are typically 35m long. This crag can get quite warm, as this is south facing and quite low down, but the view down the valley is fab. All of the routes are named after Native American tribes, with Comanches (5c/6a) being particularly worthy of a Kalymnos-style musical note, although the guidebook operates no star system.



Comanches – takes the steep slabby corner system above and right

Rocher Baron (1360m La Sieste au Soleil)

This is a great area for climbers of all abilities, as there is a brilliantly positioned quartzite crag on a col overlooking the main valley with some fabulous lower grade routes on, plus a new 200m 13 pitch route that links 3 levels of rock, with the hardest pitch being 5a. There are several opportunities to escape the route too, so ideal for relative novices, with an easy descent.



Walk up to La Sieste au Soleil with main valley view / standing under the Vive La Vie area; a top route with a 6a extension that meant I had to downclimb from the first bolt after being lowered off (untying and clipping in) on our 80m rope. Helen led it also, but fortunately there was an intermediate belay at half height that could be used to remove any stress!

Ailefroide (1500m)

A huge summer climbing area offering a large range of routes on nice granite at all lengths and difficulties; there's even some trad! It is also an extremely beautiful alpine valley where many mountain walks such as Tete de la Draye would start. We had planned to do one of the longer routes here (A Tire d'Ailes Froides, D, 230m 5c max on Fissure d'Ailefroide) but it had rained hard a few days prior and was still not dry on its top half when we spied it from the car park. This meant that some dry single pitches were in order on Sector Amigos, so we settled for several routes from 5c – 6b+ on top quality rock. A look at the old guidebook reminded me that we'd taken the kids (then 12 & 10) up Chaud Biz at Secteur Two Hot Men (D, 180m 5c max) which had a couple of slightly overhanging corners lurking in the undergrowth. Helen used to stick her hands in cracks for the kids to stand on when they were really small when seconding!

In all seriousness, it is a truly beautiful area and although the glacier at the head of the valley has massively receded, it is well worth a visit from anyone who wants a fix of alpine scenery without the usual associated footslog.



Torrent de St Pierre from the bridge in the middle of the village (L)



*Someone having a go at Amigo (6a^{***}) – top stuff! (R)*



Looking north up the valley from Secteur Amigos towards Pre de Madame Carle; glacier only just visible in this light; a bit more prominent early doors.



Looking southwest from the village towards Pelvoux – Sele

Casse de Prelles (1360m – 1550m; Briancon Area)

Or in our case, the local crag, with very good parking just 15 minutes from the campsite. Another quartzite crag with numerous sectors offering medium levels of difficulty. Mainly facing south and east with the sun going off of it around 4pm, which was the ideal time to get in the camp pool, which was maintained at a toasty 30C. Some interesting routes, mainly 5c to 6a+ in a fab location on the other side of the valley from Rocher Baron.



J'ai deja donne – 6a



View from the top butress – fab



Then when the sun goes off the crag, it's still shining on the pool for another 2 hours until it goes behind that mountain on the right. The pool has a great cover, so you can still swim even if it is windy. A great spot!

Mont Dauphin Fort (1000m; Guillestre / Eygliers)

Now for something completely different – conglomerate.

Situated at the confluence of Durance and Guil rivers, overlooking the impressive canyon of the latter flowing down from the Queyras valleys, Mont-Dauphin is one of the many places fortified by Vauban (the military architect of Louis XIV) in the second half of the 17th century.

In 2008, the *place forte* of Mont-Dauphin, was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as are the others of Vauban's design. The fortifications are on top of a massive plug of conglomerate, on which the climbing, and very steep it is too, takes place. Think pudding stone, and the holds are holes where rocks or pebbles have come out of the matrix, or they are stones or pebbles protruding from the same. It's probably what some route setters on climbing walls aspire to when they place small volumes and flatties, together with other squarer holds at jutting angles. The trouble with it is that it is very steep, and the trick appears to be remaining composed enough to find the biggest and the most non-flat holds (i.e. ones you can at least get a finger-tip behind) before you get pumped and fall off!

On a visit to some smaller sectors to try it out, we were managing to on-site 6a+ quite comfortably, but the more impressive area of Rez de Chaussee was a slightly different ball game. 6a's felt more like 6b as this was a little steeper and it was taking longer to find the bigger holds! We did a couple of 30m routes, Flipper Mont Dauphin (6a) and Papy on Night before retiring pumped after several days of climbing! Unfortunately, the local Gendarmerie were using this route, but they kindly allowed me to use their quickdraws to lead it. It was just as well, as the bolts were a bit spaced getting into the steep scoop at half height and I was glad to clip the slightly longer quickdraws they had at a couple of points!



Helen at Secteur Solo Boys / Total Kheyops Papy on Night (6b); Gendarmerie out to play!



Ultime Foil (7a+) on Twin Towers – an exceptional piece of rock if you have the ability!



The spectacular waterfall opposite Rez de Chaussee; a truly inspiring place to climb!

So there you have it; we've only just scratched the surface of what is possible in this particular area, but it has lured us back a few times now to sample its particular charms. There's cragging of every different type across all the grades, together with general mountaineering opportunities and mountain walking for all abilities. The weather is pretty reliable given that it is an alpine area, so what's not to like?

Food is of particular importance to us, and we can say that we were more than adequately catered for by the local shops as mentioned earlier and my somewhat flagging faith in French restaurants was more than restored with a trip to La Marotte at Villeneuve [LA MAROTTE, La Salle les Alpes - Updated 2024 Restaurant Reviews, Photos & Phone Number - Tripadvisor](#). We luckily managed to reserve a table (there's only 16 covers downstairs) for their last night of the summer season before they re-open in December for the ski season.

Highly recommended for mixed ability groups, so if anyone wants to peruse the guidebook for inspiration, just give me a shout and I'll bring it to The Boardroom!