

# THE GWYDYR MOUNTAIN CLUB NEWSLETTER – EXTRA!

**September 2026: Editor Dave Gray**



## Introduction

Welcome to the September Newsletter!

This is an Extra! edition with an article on an incident-packed climb in the Stubai Alps from Steve Swygart. Thanks to Steve, and to Brenda, Gill Eccles, Helen Grant, Mark Barley, and Mike Doyle for their help with this edition. Please let me have material for the next edition, the final deadline for that is **September 25th**.

## Looking Ahead

**Here are the upcoming meets venues for September and October, 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....**

|                     |                                                                                 |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1 September</b>  | <b>Tuesday Evening at Gallaghers – ‘Trekking in China’ talk by Mike Gilbert</b> |
| 1-11 September      | Austria Trip – Stubai Alps                                                      |
| 18-20 September     | Hut Weekend                                                                     |
| <b>26 September</b> | <b>Saturday Walk – Eccles Pike and Whalley Bridge from Combs Resr.</b>          |
| 9-11 October        | Hut Weekend (Work Weekend)                                                      |

## Focus on Venues

The **Stubai Alps** trip is a hut to hut one, and Austria is a German speaking country, so that takes us straight to the ‘F-word’.

No not that F word but F as in Fuss. No, not dithering around but the things that typical Germans or Austrians or Swiss Germans have at the bottom of their legs! Fuss as in foot.

I’m hoping that it’s now a thing of the past but the coarse grey blankets provided in German-speaking huts in my Alpine days had ‘F’ written at one end. The F was to tell you that generations of Teutonic feet had rested at that end of the blanket, and if you used the blanket the wrong way round you might get a whiff of something that was more Russian Front than Yves St Laurent.

Alpine huts in my experience vary enormously, often depending on the character of those running them. So a few memories and some other hut venues...

The *best all round hut* I stayed in the Breche de Rolande hut in the French Pyrenees. It was my first and the setting was magnificent, below the rocky crest of the range. The next day’s trek to

the Breche col was easy, over a 'glacier' which even back in the '80s was just a big permanent snow patch, and we had a great day in Spain walking up to the rounded summit of the Taillon.

Much more hazardous was the hut toilet. In classic style this was a hole in piece of wood over an enormous drop into space – at least it was well ventilated but the problem was that they didn't bother to light it at night, a battery light was a technological step too far. So you couldn't aim – or given the then prevalent level of hygiene sit - with any confidence.

That said the people running the place were cheerful and friendly and boy could they cook. Our evening meal was garbure, which is a lentil and bean stew with a piece of bacon at the bottom. It tasted superb and I still regularly cook my own version at home today.

The hut has been/is being modernised since our day with a fine looking extension, I hope the food has stayed/will stay as good! This is the hut as I remember it with the Breche above to the right of the skyline. The photo is from the website <https://www.topopyrenees.com> which belongs to a French guidebook writer. It's in French but even if you don't read the language it has loads of fascinating, and varied, photos of the Pyrenees.



The most *disappointing* hut experience was also food related. Like the Breche hut, the Elizabetta Hut in Italy has a magnificent setting, looking across the Val Veni to the Brenva face of Mont Blanc. My walk to it, part of the Tour du Mont Blanc, was superb. I could see the famous Peuterey ridge and also Central Pillar of Freney looking stark and golden in the sun.

And after three days on dehydrated food wild camping I could almost taste the red wine and spag bol waiting for me at the hut. Whadda-mistaka-ta-make. This was not the Italy of Captain Bertorelli, Bella Pasta or Bella very much. Instead, one subsisted on polenta, a yukky, tasteless, yellow porridge. In which floated two sausages, alright in themselves but not looking great in that context. Hunger enabled me to eat the sausages but I couldn't cope with the polenta.

There was a fashion amongst the UK chattering classes a while back for 'plonk and polenta' parties – now over thank God as I still can't stand the thought of the stuff!

This is the Brenva face of Mont Blanc, rather closer up than I saw it! (photo credit Tony Simkins on [www.summitpost.org](http://www.summitpost.org))



My *luckiest* hut was again on the Pyrenees venture, the Barroude hut which is under a huge, dramatic cliff, the Barroude Wall, on the French side. We hadn't booked the accommodation ahead on the trip, and there was no room at the inn. Me and a couple of others weren't ready to trust to luck and had sleeping bags, so were allowed to stay in an overflow marquee at the back. The bulk of the party ended up in someone's garage way down in the valley.

The hut has changed a bit – this picture (credit <https://www.ubm-magazin.com> ) shows the new ultra modern eco friendly hut that now stands on the site of our humble tent, with the great wall behind.

And finally my *funniest hut experience* was in the dormitory hut at the back of a hotel in the Bernese Oberland. To spare everyone's blushes let's call the village Ubergurglstein.

F for Fuss was in operation and the facilities and showers provided were basic to match.

Not so though for Bill Sutherland, a mild mannered but very tough walker, mountaineer and runner, who sadly died young in 2004. He came into the dorm and enthused about his shower – ‘I went up the outside stairs to the *proper* shower room, and it was lovely and clean and hot. They’d even laid out big fluffy towels and shower gel and aftershave and ladies’ perfume’.

In disbelief we followed Bill outside...to find the stairs he’d innocently climbed were the outside back stairs of the private house next door, where he’d showered in the bathroom and emerged, undetected... We managed to get back to the safety of the dorm before the hysterics started!

I can thoroughly recommend Mark Barley’s upcoming meet on and around **Eccles Pike**, having done it with him on a couple of times on two different routes.

The walk on the programme has a lot of historical interest in it. And because it is set in the centre of a valley the Pike itself commands big views across the western Peak District and south west Pennines, stretching as far west as Winter Hill. Hence the massive viewfinder on the summit, captured with me by Mark on one of our walks.



## Grand Days Out (and In) – Recent Meets Highlights

Opening up with the climbing world and the **Marian Bach** meet Mike Doyle posted with this photo 'Steve tackles the best route on the crag: *All the Roadrunning*'.

Steve Swygart added 'Brilliant climbing at the grade and looks unlikely from below. Definitely 3 stars of anyone's money'.

Also on Facebook Gill Eccles writes 'We had a busy and successful **work weekend** last week, clearing the grounds around the **Hut**, cottage and lower bin area. Thanks to Sue, Kev, Margaret, Reg, Hew, Nicky, plus Helen and Glenn for a pre weekend grass cut, Kev and Vanda for pre weekend cottage garden tidy and Tom for his ongoing help. The bench and picnic table look great thanks to Reg and Hew.

The grounds are looking well maintained!'



I loved this picture of the Zen Area, with the Grand Master's towel having successfully de-levitated from the 4<sup>th</sup> astral plane to drape casually on to the picnic bench.

We enjoyed a fine day out on my own **Cyrn y Brain circuit** day trip, sunny and warm but with a breeze cool enough to need a fleece and even a jacket from time to time. As ever I got lost at the start of the section down to Faraway, but by the time this shot was taken we were on the right track again!

All the heat and drought gave quite an autumnal feel to the landscape. It was very clear and we got good views of the nearby Eglwyseg Craggs, and of hills from the Welsh 3000s down to Brown Clee Hill in south Shropshire.



The day finished with a nice pint and a good few laughs in the beer garden of the Crown Hotel in Llandegla.



This was the ultimate GMC low level walk – Sue's **Crossing of Morecambe Bay**, under the guidance of the King's Guide, Michael Wilson.

This is the crossing of the River Kent channel on the meet. Not just us in Mark Barley's photo!



The website <https://guideoversands.co.uk> told me a couple of things I didn't know.

First off the role of the Guide has been going since 1548. Secondly, that there is a great deal of work involved in the programme of crossings:

'Michael and his partner Joanne really are a dynamic duo when it comes to the walks, Joanne works hard behind the scenes planning, organising and liaising with many charities to fulfil all of the walk dates.



Joanne also assists Michael on the test days where Michael and Joanne go out on their tractors and test the sands, plan the route and mark the way by the traditional laurel branches commonly known as brobs'.

There is a lot behind the scenes work that goes into every walk, a lot think it is just a walk across the bay but each walk really does take an immense amount of planning and organisation' (see photo from website left).

The fact that the route is planned out and marked each time was a revelation, and it emphasises just how hazardous the Bay is.

Getting back to the heights, and to the August **Hut meet**, Helen Grant posted - 'Thanks Sue for an enjoyable walk from the hut on Saturday over Moel Siabod to the Pen y Gwyrd then up the miners track and back over Foel Goch along the ridge to the hut with a second pub stop at the Tyn y Coed - miles and 4,444ft of ascent. Great day out.'

Here's two of Helen's photos, both views from the Glyders, one of Moel Siabod and the other of the Snowdon Horseshoe:



Looking at the same meet Brenda posted: 'Fabulous weekend at the Chapel. Thank you to Sue and helpers for the Alpine meal on Saturday.

Thank you to Reg for suggesting a walk on Saturday, Penmachno to Betws-y-Coed (Stage 11 of the slate trail) . After a mix up with the standard bus, we were told about the Fflecsi bus service which we phoned to take us to the start and tracked it's arrival the app, fabulous service and really cheap.

On Sunday we had a lovely walk round a rather low level looking Llyn Elsi avoiding the steep incline. Great company and thank you all for making my cousin Jackie feel so welcome'

Here are a couple of Brenda's photos – the scenery on the Slate Trail, and the dedication stone at Llyn Elsi to commemorate it becoming a reservoir just before WW1.





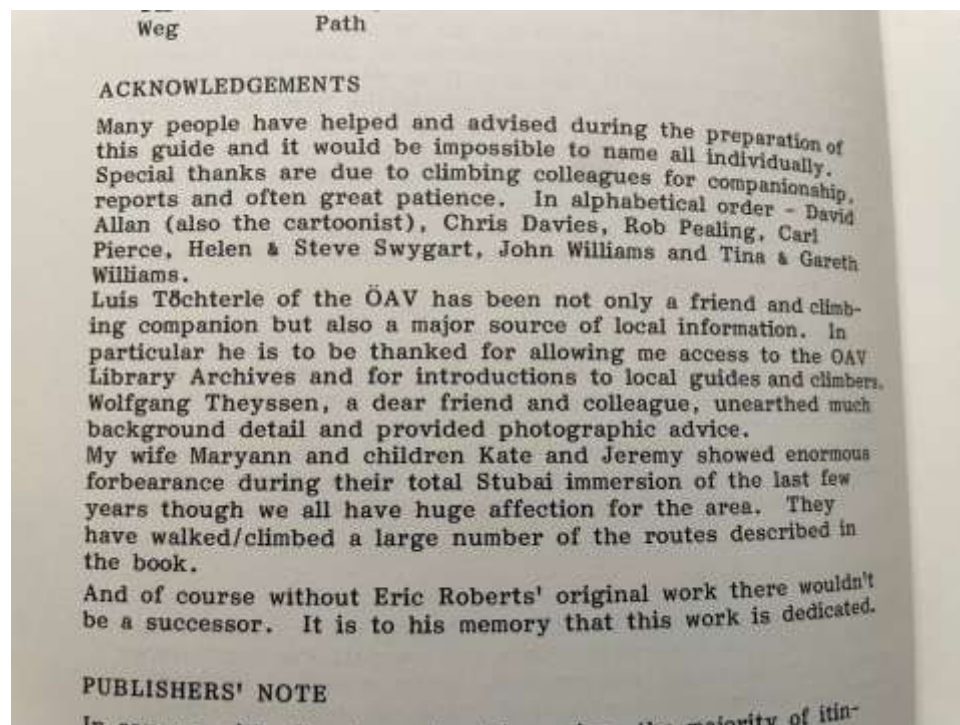
## EXTRA!

### Stubai Antics...by Steve Swygart

The current club trip to the Stubai area prompted me to take a look at the old West Col Stubai Alps and South Tirol climbing guide, written by our old friend Jeff Williams in the late 1980's, which was published in 1991. It was a bit of an old-school, understated effort by today's standards, and I thought I would share with you some of the content, which still makes me chuckle even today, and write of some reminiscences of a route that we did in the area.

Jeff was an acquaintance of Helen's father via NHS connections, as he was a Senior Paediatrician at Ysbyty Glan Clwyd at the time we knew him. He wrote alpine mountaineering guidebooks by way of a relaxing hobby and was fluent in German. He'd also been in the SAS, so that in itself tells its own story, I guess. After retirement, he focused on writing walking guidebooks and he currently teaches safari guiding (otherwise known as how to approach dangerous game on foot!) in South Africa. In other words, a bit of a character!

For one of his guidebook writing trips to the Stubai in 1989, he needed some climbers to come and check out some rock routes that he needed to verify from the previous effort by Eric Roberts, and also from the local German language information that he'd obtained. We were asked to volunteer our services for a week's hut-to-hut trip across the north of the area, taking in agreed routes on a daily basis.



Jeff organised the logistics impeccably. I can recall a flight from Manchester to Zurich, then on to Innsbruck via one of those tiny Austrian Airlines turboprops that served champagne whilst you were flying down alpine valleys. Two trains (which I recall running for with a full pack), a bus and a ski-lift later saw us ensconced in a hut just in time for dinner. Fab stuff.



One such daily outing lined up for us was to do the Northeast Ridge of the Acherkogel ('a splendid rock pyramid', 3008m, AD-; Route 162 in the guide), which he'd not got much intel on. Jeff and his brother John were going to do the North Flank Route on this, which is F+. We split off and arrived at the base of the ridge where it allegedly met the snowfield in order to start the route, but we couldn't see an obvious way as the intel had alluded.

*The Acherkogel from the north west (credit Wikipedia)*

After about 20 minutes of wandering about, looking for an easy way up, we slowly realised that there wasn't, because the snowfield/glacier had dropped by about 50ft, so standing back, we could see that this was now way above our heads! Global warming was just starting to gain traction as a theory at the time, and here we were, seeing a very early example of it.

This meant that a new pitch had to be climbed to access it – Jeff, with typical understatement wrote of our struggle....., 'Getting onto the ridge is not easy, c IV.'

The rest of the route proceeded without incident and pretty much to time, but just as we started to top out at the summit, a horrendous snowstorm engulfed us from nowhere. Jeff had also just completed his route several minutes before and was shouting to us about getting to the easy way down (from which he was beating a hasty retreat), which we couldn't make out in the blizzard conditions. We got ourselves secured on the tiny summit, put our jackets on and hunkered down to wait out the storm.

Pretty soon, everything was plastered with snow and after 30 minutes of battering it down, the storm passed to leave everything beautifully serene and clear. Being a rock pyramid, it was very hard to discern a way off and there was clearly a magical way at F+ down a chimney/gully that we were missing. It occurred to us that the fastest way off was probably to reverse what we had just climbed; at least we knew roughly where it went! This meant downclimbing pitches of III+ (Hard VDiff) that were caked with snow and ice, turning the hard bits that the guidebook alludes to on the left (it had been right on the way up). I sent Helen's Dad (Carl Pierce; see photo of the guidebook above) down first on the rope with the gear, so he could place runners as he went. Helen went next on the other rope and as theoretically the strongest climber, I went last to take the gear out and avoid falling off. It was relatively slow progress, but at least we were managing to get off.

Hours went by reversing the route; scraping snow off the holds, placing gear, downclimbing. Eventually we reached to within around a rope's length of the glacier, and in view of the fading light, we decided to abseil off at a suitable spike, abandoning a sling and a bit of other gear to speed up progress down the new pitch of IV. Again, I was last down and on pulling the rope, it

got stuck in a crack (argghhh!) so I was forced to climb back up for a bit in an attempt to dislodge it. To lose a rope at this point in a week's hut-to-hut trip would have been a bit disastrous. Finally, we managed to dislodge it and pull it down, and just as we were getting ourselves together on the glacier to ready ourselves for the long walk back to the hut, the local rescue team arrived.

They had been observing us through a telescope from the hut, and their first question was 'why didn't you get into your sleeping bags and wait for the rescue team?' To which our reply was something along the lines of 'Why wait for a rescue that we don't know is coming', almost certainly followed by 'our sleeping bags are in the hut' and 'Well, we are British!'.

One of the rescue team had a metal flask, which contained Jaegertee, and offered it to us to drink. I can remember that moment like it was yesterday, as I'd never drank anything quite so wonderful before. It's something that you can get quite readily in the Sud Tirol and nowadays we always bring back a bottle in the van. We were clearly very glad of the company, which now negated the need for us to navigate back to the hut in the dark. We arrived at about midnight, where the hut guardian was waiting to serve us our Bergsteigeressen, and pretty good I remember it being too, having only had a little sandwich whilst waiting out the snowstorm some 12 hours prior!

Now, here to finish off are...

### **Stubai Alps Guidebook Snippets – some deadpan stuff**

On valley bases – 'the term 'accommodation' embraces a range of possibilities from grand hotels to the meanest bed and breakfast establishment. Special note should be made of public holidays to avoid disappointment, starvation and penury. The banks vary considerably in their opening times and almost always close for anything up to 3 hours at lunchtime'.

On the use of huts – 'if an early start is contemplated and there is space in the 'sac, a thermos (for teewasser collected the night before) or a stove (to use outside in the morning) would be useful. Because of the brevity of many routes, few parties start in the dark, and the practice is discouraged by hut wardens. The notable exceptions to this habit are the British, who are widely considered eccentric on the subject'.

'Many huts transport provisions etc by cable hoist – in the vernacular 'materialeseilbahn'. It is often possible to send your rucksack up for a moderate charge. Vistors are never allowed to ride on these contraptions'.

'Most DAV huts will also accept German Marks and the South Tirol (Ital.) huts always take Schillings as an acceptable alternative to Lire. Whether the rate of exchange is acceptable to the customer is another matter'.

On equipment – 'It is assumed that users of this guide will be well-versed in the basic and essential equipment required for alpine terrain. Rope, ice axe and crampons should be taken on most graded routes. On glacier routes, prussik loops and other gadgets for crevasse rescue are recommended. Except on steep ice or serious rock routes with infamous stone fall danger, the wearing of a helmet denotes a British climber'.

‘Fixed ropes are found on certain popular peaks and on some connecting paths. They have long been considered by many to be an eyesore and an insult – Frank Smythe wrote rudely about their installation even in 1935. Whatever your prejudices on the matter, beware the relatively common frayed wire and loose fixtures on some of these cables’.

On route timings – ‘All numbered routes and hut approaches/connections have time estimates included as a rough guide. They represent the time taken excluding stops for an average pack and gear, rather than that of a solitary fell runner in T-shirt and Y-fronts’.

On weather reports – ‘No weather information of any kind is presently available at local Tourist Offices – an important oversight which should be remedied by the authorities.’

**Steve Swygart**

**August 2026**