

## FRESHERS' SEASON

### PRESIDENT WELCOME:

What's up? Ballachulish crag is under a bridge so it theoretically should have been dry on the fresher's meet, yet somehow horizontally angled rain made dry tooling anything but dry. Thankfully for others, the roof of a certain facility in Kinlochleven held watertight, or waterproofs and a stern attitude were donned on the surrounding munros. Thankfully, Torridon and the Lakes seemed a little bit drier. Now it's just a matter of waiting for things to get cold and snowy so the ice axe wielding season can begin.

### GUMC ACTIVITIES:

#### FRESHER'S MEET – Ebba Orava

Upon arrival to the Ballachulish village hall there was a slight struggle to find the best sleeping spot to claim as yours and after everyone had got settled in, the bigger and more important struggle to succeed in all the different games that were being played began and kept us up till the wee hours of the night.



The forecast for the weekend promised a wet ordeal, and so for Saturday some of us took shelter at an indoor climbing gym whilst others braved the weather for various outdoor activities. The evening of Saturday night peaked with taking a dip in the nearby Loch Leven which induced feelings similar to those of taking an exam – nervous anticipation laced with dread beforehand, followed by the utter shock of "what the h\*ck I did not study for any of this/this water is so darn cold all my nerve endings curled right back into my spinal cord" and upon leaving, being replaced by the wish of drinking vast amounts of hard liquor.

On Sunday, a group of us headed up two munros, staying surprisingly dry for the ascend but inevitably getting soaked and hailed on during the descent, as if the mountains were crying, mourning our departure. I miss you too mountains (sob).

All in all, a superb weekend, a lot of friends were made, lotsa peanut butter was eaten, and more rainbows than I can count with my fingers and toes were viewed with appropriate excitement (DOUBLE RAINBOW!!).

## TORRIDON MEET – Ted Collins

When Anna kindly asked me to write up an account of my trip to Torridon the first thing that came to mind was a quote by Andy Kirkpatrick, *“climbing is like masturbation: it feels good when you're doing it, but no one wants to hear about it”*. This is because I spent my time at Torridon bouldering and I feel that bouldering is at the epitome of this concept. We may tape up our hands to make them look more knarled; constantly climb topless and take all our photos in a sepia tone to create an atmosphere of hardship. But truly when your arse is only a foot off the ground it becomes quite hard to write a riveting story about it all. I'll try my best though, but for any readers who would rather not hear about the rambling of a deluded boulderer, then maybe tune out, no bother.



I awoke on the Saturday morning due to Iggy throwing the hall keys onto my chest whilst instructing me to lock up the hall when leaving. It was expected from the no good boulderers to be the last out, and sure enough, when I adjusted my eyes, the hall appeared to be almost empty. Checking the clock it was late morning. No need for an early start when the day's plan is to walk five minutes down the road to climb a couple metres of rock.

Vic, Alex, Alicia, Jovin and Adam were also keen for heading over to the boulders dubbed the Celtic Jumble so there was a good crew of us. It was a crisp morning with a cold breeze: perfect for climbing. As we walked along the road, something was nagging at my mind but I shook it from thought as we neared the Celtic Jumble (what some have called the best bouldering in Scotland and maybe even in the UK). A vast number of walls and boulders made of wonderful grippy sandstone set in a beautiful backdrop. It is a disgrace I hadn't been here myself since I live near Inverness. Ah well, here now.

Got to say though, the sandstone here lives up to its name, solid with tonnes of friction, just ace. We warmed up around the celtic boulder on some fine arêtes and slabs. A large celtic symbol carved into the boulder was marvelled at; wondering how long it had been there. Turns out it was carved in the 90s, which kind of killed the magic, but it's still pretty impressive nonetheless. Highlights from that area were East Face Arete 4+ and Slot Crack 6A+. I eyed up this magnificent highball arête Vapour Trail 6B+, but quickly made some excuses and whimped out.

We managed to bump into the Torridon bouldering guidebook author Richie Betts; responsible for developing many of the bouldering classic test pieces around Inverness. Alicia

commented on how lucky we were to chance upon him and Victor then joked how he's actually probably here every day.

"Ahh, for fucks sake", I proclaim loudly interrupting the bouldering session. "Forgot to lock the hall!". The nagging sensation finally came to light. The keys were still under my sleeping bag. I dismissed walking five minutes back to lock up since I'm lazy, but thoughts of Torridonian thieves ransacking the hall annoyingly stayed in my mind.

The boulder I was really keen for checking out was the iconic "ship" boulder with its classic Malc's arête 7B and the more doable left arête Squelch 6C. I'd first seen this boulder in a video featuring a local climber Steve "Stevo" Bate slapping his way up Squelch. The film was made as an arts project to capture what the essence of bouldering is about and was nicely done using a moving crane for the camera. Only Steve's eyes mysteriously looked glassy in the video which I later found out was due to the fact he got totally stoned before the shoot with an accomplice. Later in his life he ended up developing tunnel vision; but he didn't let this get in his way as he went on to rope solo El Cap and had just won two golds and a bronze in the passing Paralympic games in tandem cycling. Interesting how things work out.

Anyway, due to this I was super keen to try Squelch. Not expecting much, I leaped up to the starting holds, half a minute later, after pulling dreamy moves between slopers and a sketchy top out, I was standing on top. Utterly fantastic! Young Adam then flashed the problem after in great fashion and Victor and Jovin came really close with Victor falling from the last move. Better luck next time Vic!

Afterwards we had an unexpected visit from my dad, Shane, and my dog, who were just climbing up at Seana Mhealan; it was good to have a catch-up. But soon the sun was setting and skin was wearing thin. It was time to head back to the hall. We slowly mooched back feeling knackered yet chuffed with the eventful day. Plus the hall hadn't been robbed which is always a bonus.



## LAKES MEET – David Southgate

For the third meet of the gum club year we were headed across the border to the land of the lakes (More commonly known as the Lake District). The home of quite a few lakes and the few decent mountains that England has to offer. After a Sax House filled trip down we arrived at the lovely Mungrisdale village hall shortly before the minibuses. There was some talk of some shooting stars but at that point it was too early to see them properly.

As we needed something to do we set out trying to find the best place to set up a slackline in the darkness outside the hall. After an idea of putting it across the river had been dismissed we persuaded Liam to shift his car so we could put it in a more sensible place.

After failing at slacklining many times, we remembered about the shooting stars so headed away from the unnatural light to see them. After long amounts of time looking in completely the wrong direction (turns out to see Orionids you need to look at Orion) we all managed to see one each so we headed back to the hall so we could attempt to sleep.

On the Saturday two other climbers (who asked to remain nameless (Although you may recognise them in the supplied photos. Oh well, they are good photos.)) and I climbed the famous Little Chamonix. This was my first lead on a multi pitch route. After some forgotten climbing shoes, awkward bum shuffles and the misidentification of a saddle belay we finished it. Although the route was super polished and despite the involvement of mega fuff I really enjoyed the climb and I can see why it is a classic.

The Sunday involved catching up with all the sleep that I had missed out on the previous night. After a late start we headed back to Shepherds crag for a much less fuffy two pitch HS. Due to the late start, we did not manage to fit in another climb.

Overall, this was a great meet and was certainly a lot less wet than the lakes meet last year. After even more Sax House and a KFC, we were back in Glasgow and then I remembered that I needed to do some maths by 3am which killed the mood.



## **SKI TOURING, OFF-PISTE SKIING, SKI MOUNTAINEERING – President Katie Bowen**

### **For the Attention of Mr J. Tindale: A reflection on experiential learning and getting into ski touring**

Ski touring, off-piste skiing, and ski mountaineering is currently growing pretty fast in the UK, and on a sunny day with recent snowfall it's common to be overtaken in certain popular areas by hordes of brightly coloured, swooshing skiers, who are somehow able to defy sinking knee deep into the powder on the uphill and swoop down the descents.

Unfortunately, ski mountaineering is quite gear intensive, however, if you already have the clothes for mountaineering in Scottish winter, you can probably ski in them too. A normal ice axe and crampons out of the club kit (legend says there is a super duper lightweight ski touring axe in there somewhere) will also suffice for those situations where you don't want to be on skis – but please please please check the crampons fit your ski boots first.

As for getting hold of kit, the increase in popularity in the sport is bringing prices down a little (although BREXIT) and there is an increasing second-hand market. Here is a list of places which are good for obtaining kit:

- UKC Buy and Sell
- Facebook Outdoor Gear Exchange
- Facebook British Backcountry For Sale megapost (with 1.3k comments since 2013)
- Facebook Chamonix Buy and Sell but the sellers aren't always up for posting
- Gumtree
- German ebay ([www.ebay.de](http://www.ebay.de)), also will show offers from Austria
- Glenmore Lodge jettison shedloads of gear for cheap at student seminars etc
- Snowheads Forum is good for more heavy duty offpiste stuff
- [www.ekosport.com](http://www.ekosport.com) if you can afford to buy new
- The recycling bins in Argentiere

Ski boots can make your life a misery if they are the wrong size or shape. For short tours, or skinning from the summit tow at Nevis Range to access beyond the back carries, you'll manage fine in downhill boots, though they are tricky to walk in if you have to take your skis off. A good walk mode with some flex will make uphill and bootpacking easier but you'll want them to be also pretty stiff for downhill.

Ahhhh bindings chat. “Tech”, “pin” or “Dynafit” bindings are probably the best for touring as they are light and getting better all the time if you're an enthusiast of jumping off of cliffs. Examples are the Fritschi Vipec, Dynafit Radical/Vertical, and the Kingpin. They do require that your boots have special thingies (inserts) and can ice up a bit. Other popular binding types are Marker Tour, F10, F12 (beefy and pretty solid), and Fritschi Diamir or Eagle (lighter but can give the impression you are ice skating, not skiing). Beware older models may have an “insta-tele” mode. These you can ski in pretty much any boot.

Also telemarking is a thing, but I like my knee ligaments just as they are, thank you.

Skis. A lot of the cheaper set-ups of German eBay origin are based around skinny, sharp edged, heavy piste skis (which actually might be quite good for an icy March Sunday at

Glencoe), but a bit unpleasant to tour on when it's powder-on-heather in January. Older type skis might also be very straight and harder to turn on or have worn out cores. So, what you want for Scotland is probably something about your height, 80-90mm underfoot? But I'd actually just ask someone who knows what they're talking about.

Poles are poles really, collapsing ones have a habit to get broken though, and if you're going to have two 170cm planks with you, then solid ones are a bit more indestructible, but this is not guaranteed.

Skins for the uphill. Mohair glide nicer than Nylon but don't last as long. Second-hand ones might need re-glueing. Heel clips are good in Scotland as the skins will frequently crud up and leave you sliding backwards down the slope. If you're them buying separately, remember that skins that are too narrow might make you slide backwards.

Ski crampons, as distinct from boot crampons, will make life easier when negotiating icy slopes, especially if your friends have them too.

Talking of friends, avalanche gear is something you should think about, as your chances of getting out alive essentially rely on your mates finding you in the first 15 minutes, and skiing is more likely to get you into areas which could be dodgy. So ideally everyone in the party will have a transceiver (with batteries), shovel and probe. Transceiver hide and seek is fun but no substitute for practising looking for rucksacks in the snow or at a transceiver park.

So now you're fully kitted up, how's your skiing? Some other Gumclubbers taught me to snowplough turn one drizzly day at Glencoe, which gave me a whole season of fun, including a couple of short tours on rolling terrain. The following autumn I got some lessons at a dry slope, where the instructor slowly beat my bad habits out of me, and being able to parallel turn with a reasonable degree of competence really helped on a wider variety of terrain. That being said in some conditions relapsing back into the snowplough and having some tactics up your sleeve like slide slipping and kick turning can be really useful.

If you want to get lessons in Glasgow, Bellahouston dry slope offers lessons. The ones through the uni ski club are cheaper but a. involve joining the ski club and b. are a bit crowded with people learning so they can look cool and pull on the ski trip. You can also get lessons at Braehead (a bit more expensive, but real snow) and at most Scottish ski resorts.

Can you walk uphill? If yes, you can probably ski uphill.