

red rope bulletin 24 *spring 2013*



...the joy of treks special: various european routes to whet your appetite, plus great news from beddgelert!

The Alps of Southern Europe are our most popular destination but we should not forget Norway. An amazing variety of experiences to be had there but my experience is limited to the short summer season when lightweight trekking without any special equipment is possible. There is an extensive network of huts with well marked trails between them, mostly along the valleys and posing no problems to a minimally competent fell-walker. The major mountains too tend to have marked routes to the summit but there is also great opportunity to explore less popular mountains where tracks are less obvious and you can feel like an explorer!

The huts run by the the Norwegian Trekking Association (DNT), usually found in the valley rather than half way up the mountain, are comfortable and very varied. Some will serve meals but many will be self service. You will need a sheet sleeping bag and on the trail the sort of emergency equipment you would normally take for an English Lake District summer - no more.

There are not many corner shops or supermarkets to be found hereabouts (actually none) but all the self service huts, apart from some in the far North

are well supplied with non perishable food, so there is no need to carry much food with you unless you have special needs. Cost of an over-night stay in 2012 is £21 or £6 if you camp with your own tent. There appears to be an excellent deal at some of the manned, meal providing huts of three nights accommodation with full board for about £70. (These prices are for members of the DNS and I have no personal experience of this 3 night deal) Membership of the DNS is worthwhile both for the discounts and the latest information about huts they will provide. They will also give you a standard key usable at all their huts in case there is no one there and they are locked. Not likely to happen at the popular Southern and Central huts but essential if you are travelling in the far north.

One feature of these huts which appeals to me is that you just don't have to book. Located in the valleys they have more chance of expanding and room will always be found for you, usually with no problem. Paying is also very straight-forward at the self service huts whether or not there is a warden present. Just itemize the number of nights you stay and any food you have taken from the store and fill in a credit or debit card form.



This is normal but you can also leave cash in Norwegian Kroner. The system depends entirely on trust and works reasonably well.

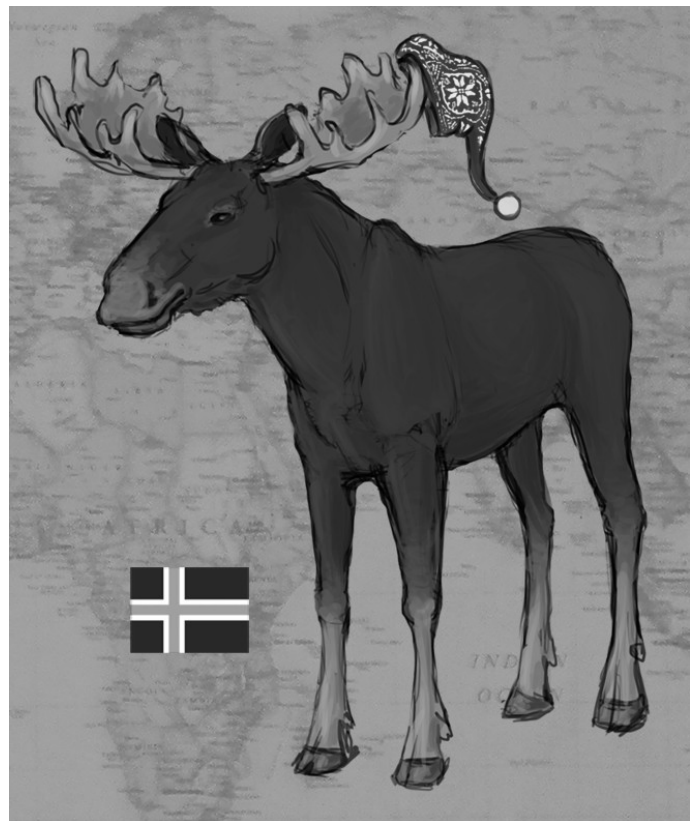
The highest mountain in Norway weighs in at 2469m so there should be little snow and no need of special equipment in the relatively short summer season, but certainly in late June snow could be a major problem and you are talking of some serious mountaineering in winter. It is sometimes a long walk in to the huts but usually no great height gain as Norwegian mountains in summer should be easily climbed from the valley in one day.

We used a variety of accommodation in between mountain treks - youth hostels and camping sites. Many of the campsites have small well equipped wooden chalets (highly desirable accommodation in the bitter winter months) but off season i.e. in summer, were reasonably enough priced for us to hire a normal 4 bed unit for 2 - would be a pretty good deal for 4.

Norway, of course, is an affluent country with a high standard of living which makes it expensive for anyone on an English salary. If you are economically minded it would be quite a good idea to give up drinking alcohol and eating out at restaurants for your stay there but using the excellent facilities provided by the DNS you can have a quite reasonably priced holiday.

The Norwegian experience, if one can call it that, is much more relaxed than the Alpine experience. There are of course two very different Alpine experiences for Red Ropers. One involves the chaos of breakfast and preparation in a busy Alpine hut. Stumbling about in the dark on rocky paths and late in the afternoon descending rapidly before the snow turns to mush. There are so many compensations, of course, but I have heard it said that the best part of the day is when you get all the kit off after leaving the glacier in the afternoon. The urgency and tension of an Alpine day is perhaps what really appeals to serious mountaineers but for me the only downside of Alpinism is that everyone is in such a tremendous rush. Nothing like this in a Norwegian summer.

More comparable perhaps to the more relaxed trekking from hut to hut that many in Red Rope prefer but Norway is a big country with a small population. You will find far fewer people around and any number of interesting mountains climbable without special equipment whereas in the Alps you usually can't go very far up without hitting serious problems.



You won't pass any mountain inns on the way, which some will see as a serious disadvantage but others will be glad of this. You can easily spend the whole day seeing no one and the long Northern day in the summer will usually give you time for a leisurely return to the hut which for me is a very pleasant part of the day.

You will probably be self catering, using supplies at the hut, so no deadline here and no need to book ahead for the next day if you are moving on. There is also a difference in the local fauna, herds of reindeer and the curious musk ox in the Dovrefjell National Park are things you won't see much of elsewhere.

It is not quite true that everyone in Norway speaks English but at the hut you will usually find that most people do speak good conversational English and some will no doubt speak better and more correct English than I do at any rate.

All this suits me very well and I concur with what my companion on this trip, who had been to Norway several times before, said, 'Norway is a mountaineer's paradise'. **A H**

Photo left shows the Rondvaspu Hut in the Rondane National Park. We did the Veselsmeden (2015m) and the Storsmeden (2016m) using the hut as a base.

Painting, with thanks, by 'the tourist 93'. It's one of a series intended to represent countries through animals and associated imagery. The artist is Norwegian.

the dolomites

pam case

Walking from hut to hut (with your knapsack on your back) in the mountains of Europe is great. Clothes for heat, cold, wet and exposure will fit into a smallish sack as long as they are lightweight and quick dry. The huts, some in almost impossibly remote places, are comfy, with good food and wine, often with pillows and duvets so that all you need is a sheet sleeping bag. We booked ahead and were often in small rooms for 4 with just the 3 of us.

And if you like soaring craggy peaks, limestone scenery, alpine flowers, sun, via ferrata and the odd ski lift, then head for the Dolomites. ('Via Ferrata' refers to metal ropes, ladders and rungs which help on the more difficult bits, which means you can do possibly scary/thrilling things quite safely).

Last summer Barbara, David and I walked the first half of the Alta Via 2 in the Italian Dolomites. Using the Cicerone Guide 'Trekking in the Dolomites', we planned to follow the first half of the trail, walking for up to 6 hours a day at most. This means that some days we would walk 8 miles in 4 hours and others 6 miles in 6 hours; it depends on the steepness of course, so the distance is not as relevant as the timings. Some days we did the route in book time, other days we took longer.

We flew to Verona and then took a train to Bressanone for the start of the route, staying in the rather swish but cheap youth hostel, a beautifully converted old mansion.

Our first day was steep and hot and the ski lift in the middle welcome. Rifugio Citta di Bressanone was fairly empty but served very good goulash. The scenery was stunning - a lengthy rock wall opposite and peaks around. The morning mist had rainbow circles. From there to Refugio Genova, via a very nice cafe; then a steep zigzag climb to reach the hut. The following day started with the only rain of the whole trip, although there were strong winds and heavy rain overnight when we reached Refugio Boe after a rest day at Passo Gardena.

Rifugio Boe is in the middle of a stone desert with fragile, yellow mountain poppies and small white clusters of flowers sheltering underneath the rocks. There is also a refuge at Piz Boe, the highest point in the area at 3,151m. We made a short trip up there, without packs, and had coffee watched by choughs which were as cheeky as city sparrows. The shifting panoramic views were fab.

The route from there to the ski lift was packed with day trippers, children and dogs, all coming up to the high mountains by lift for lunch. Nice that they can see it all - and great for us to go down by the same way, watching climbers on a perilous peak and saving our knees.

Another day the route from Rifugio Puez crossed a wide, flattish area full of alpine flowers, with a lovely, swimmable lake. At the first col, more choughs gathered, waiting for snacks as people paused to take in the view on either side. Next a scree balcony path with imposing rock wall opposite. After the next col, a fantastic landscape of spiky red rock pinnacles with a narrow path threading through the middle, quite awesome. And sunshine all day.

Over 12 days, we stayed in a variety of rifugios and hotels (for rest days), eating incredibly well, getting fatter in spite of the exercise. I swam in 2 high lakes, battling for space with tadpoles and newts! Dave and I took the cable car right to the top of the highest mountain, the Marmolada, which is used by skiers in the winter and was used, in a more primitive form, by troops in the 1st World War. The tunnels they lived in at the top of the mountain didn't provide enough protection and many died from exposure. Although I don't ski, I would like to go back in the winter to see the area in the snow - and to stay at the Hotel Tyrolia again, for its excellent food.

Our trip ended at St Martino Castrozza, a ski resort surrounded by magnificent peaks. Humphrey and Heather joined us from their trip to the Triglav area in Slovenia. The next half of the Alta Via 2 involves Via Ferrata routes which require proper safety harnesses, so we chose not to do it this trip.

It was an amazing holiday and I would really recommend it. (And thanks to Elizabeth from Manchester for recommending it to us.) **P C**

Photos anti-clockwise from below—which is their chronological order, honest!

Leaving the first refuge.

A steep gully, with via ferrata, from Passo Gardena to Rifugio Boe.

Outside Rif. Boe, with Piz Boe cabin on horizon.





People have been walking the Camino Santiago since the 12th century when the discovery of the bones of St James was announced in far north-western Spain. Those walking it nowadays are a different breed to the cloaked early pilgrims with their staffs, wide-brimmed hats with scallop shell and bundles of spare clothing, but the Way still has a strong spiritual feel to it and many of the hostels (albergues) along it are run by religious foundations.

The average distance between them now is 7km and there is no shortage of accommodation. They charge 5 euros a night, maybe 10 if they are privately owned. You do need to be able to tolerate sleeping in dormitories in bunk beds, and must have your own sleeping bag. Most have kitchens so if the village has a shop, you can self cater. Otherwise there are always bars and restaurants which offer a Pilgrim Menu: a modest 3-course meal with wine and bread for 10 euros. No need to book in advance, in fact most do not accept pre-booking; it's first come, first served, and if they seem full they will often put extra mattresses down for you. The hostels vary a lot, many are in historic buildings and part of the fun is that you never know what you are going to get. But there's always a warm welcome.

You need a Credencial: this is a booklet which will be stamped everywhere you stay. On arrival in Santiago take it to the Pilgrims' Office behind the cathedral and they will give you your Compostela: a document in Latin to say you have completed the pilgrimage. You can get a Credencial at the start of your walk, from a hostel, or send for one in advance from the **Confraternity of St James**.

The signage is excellent- just follow the yellow arrows and the blue conch signs. They are placed for walking west *to* Santiago. There are various guides which give maps, facilities available, distances, historical and cultural information etc. Many people had the **John Brierley** guide, I used an excellent German one from the **Rother Bergverlag**, which is available in English.

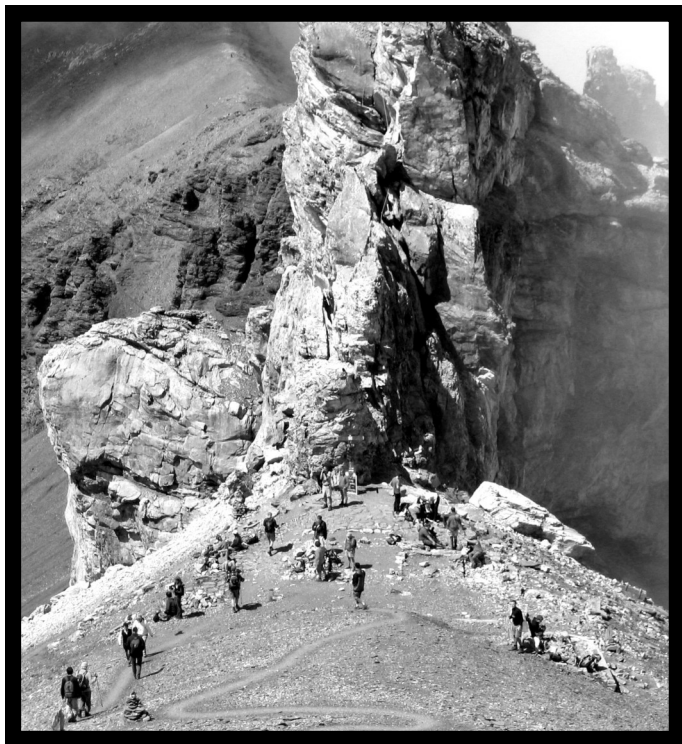
The main Camino starts at St Jean Pied de Port south-west of Biarritz and your first day is up and over the Pyrenees to Roncesvalles. It's a tough first day but after that the walking is not hard. You are on farm tracks, footpaths, sometimes Roman roads, also alongside or on actual roads, although the Camino avoids them where possible. April to October is probably best, avoiding the heat of August. **L N**

See lower front cover photos, 'stork' and 'lane'.



alpine pass route

barbara segal



The Alpine Pass Route crosses Switzerland east to west, from Leichtenstein to the shores of Lake Geneva. In the summer of 2008 three of us walked the central - and most spectacular - section from Brustli (near Altdorf) to Lauenen, taking 10 or 11 days including a rest day. Our biggest day involved nearly 1600m. of ascent, though one of our party took an alternative route involving a mountain omnibus! Most of the tour is within easy reach of roads and the area is well-served with public transport, so you could tailor your route to the time you have available.

The route is a mixture of meandering paths over pastoral alps and rugged mountain tracks, at a height of between 550 and 2,800 metres. It goes close to the famous mountain trio of the Eiger, Jungfrau and Monch - even traversing the north face of the Eiger at a height of around 2000m. The views are spectacular throughout and most of the terrain is straightforward. However, there's a fair bit of up and down - at least one pass a day as the name suggests. Three of the passes: the Sefinenfurgge, Hohturli and Bundeschrinde, are more demanding than the rest of the route, with some steep scree and a bit of easy scrambling, assisted by fixed cables. It would be possible to work out ways of bypassing one or more these, but you'd be missing out on some of the best bits of the trek. None of them is particularly difficult and there's no serious exposure.

There are very few Swiss Alpine Club refuges at this height in Switzerland, so we mainly stayed in a mix of private refuges and small mountain hotels, most of which have dormitory accommodation. These tend to be more expensive than alpine club huts, and costs in Switzerland are generally higher than in the other Alpine countries of Europe. But the variety of accommodation is one of the best things about Alpine treks, and this one was no exception.

Our favourites were the self-catering Alpenhof in Stechelberg (Lauterbrunnen Valley) run by a Welsh/Australian couple who are super hospitable and very knowledgeable about all things Swiss; the Naturfreunde haus Gornerat at Griesalp, where we prepared for the Hohturli (*photo left, taken by BS from Blumlisalp Hutte*) and watched a fantastic sunset followed by a firework display on the other side of the valley, marking the Swiss national holiday on the first of August.

By way of a contrast the tiny Berghaus Bonderalp (*photo below*) was a particularly rural spot where we were treated to a special alpine meal of potatoes and melted cheese and slept in the attic above the cowshed!

Getting there: We flew to Zurich and then travelled to Brustli by train & cable-car, but you can reach the area reasonably cheaply by train if you book ahead.

Guidebook: Kev Reynolds, *The Alpine Pass Route*, Cicerone Press. There is also lots of info. on the web, with some great photos: steverabone.com/apr/intro_.htm has excellent shots of the passes.

Costs: Accommodation at 2012 prices averaged around CHF 30 - 40 for an overnight stay, with half board at around CHF 70 - 80. On most days there are one or more places en route where you can buy drinks and snacks, and it's possible to stock up on food for lunches every few days. However, Switzerland is not a cheap option!

Alternative route: *Tour of the Jungfrau*. This is a circular route that includes parts of the APR but avoids the more difficult sections, and is a great introduction to Alpine trekking. There is a Cicerone guide to this, also by Kev Reynolds. **BS**

See front cover photos top right and main.



**Enter please neither with dry nor wet
ski or moving shoes the showering and
toilets.**

"Andorra! Surely that's just ski resorts and wall-to-wall shopping!" "Well, yes and no"

It's certainly true that one of Andorra's main industries is selling duty-free goods to its French and Spanish neighbours (legacy of its former industry – smuggling!), and another is skiing – there are more miles of ski pistes here than in the rest of the Pyrenees combined. But there is another, quite different, altogether wilder, side to Andorra and that's the miles and miles of unspoilt upper valleys and over 30 mountains over 2800 metres high (more than 9000 ft), with three different rock types – granite, gneiss and shale/slate. Most of these summits are accessible with little or no scrambling by reasonably fit and experienced mountain walkers. Anyone familiar with UK mountain walks will have few problems here.

Lac del Pessons—our route back

As for the valleys, many are truly exquisite, wild and remote. One of them, the Madriu, even has World Heritage status and the traverse of Pic de l'Estanyo to or from the Vall del Riu is said to be the finest walk in the Pyrenees! Have I convinced you yet? If not, then there is the accessibility. The very developments that mar much of the lower valleys justify frequent bus services through the day. Not something you find in the rest of the Pyrenees! Then there are the 26 clean and well maintained mountain huts scattered throughout the country. Two of them, in the far NE and far NW of Andorra, are manned during the main season and at odd weekends, and are large modern buildings offering meals and all mod cons. The rest are unmanned and fairly basic, but totally free and offer a very cheap way of staying in Andorra. "OK, I'm persuaded. How do I get there and how much will it cost?"

The downside to Andorra is that it is so mountainous that there is no room for an airport nor for a direct railway. The nearest airports are at Barcelona, Toulouse and Girona,

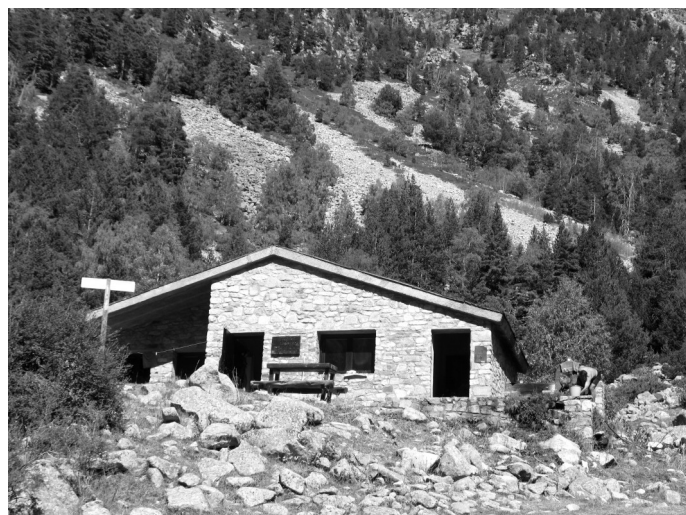


all with bus connections to Andorra, albeit not always at convenient times and not always every day. Flights go to Barcelona from most UK airports. Fares start at £83 return (as at Dec 2012 for June 2013 price) from London, £120 from Birmingham, and £140 from Manchester. Bus connection is €54 return. More convenient is the overnight train from Paris to L'Hospitalitet every night except Saturday, with a good bus connection to Andorra La Vella. You can leave London by Eurostar at 1730, Paris at 2150 and arrive in Andorra about 8:30 am. The sleeper costs only £35 each way for a reclining seat, £55 for a couchette. Early booking on Eurostar should enable you to buy a return with decent connections in Paris for £89. Bus fare to Andorra is 12 euro each way. So that makes a very reasonable £180 - £220 return from London. More expensive than the cheapest airfares but less than high season rates and no protracted queuing for security or hanging about for baggage collection.

Useful web-sites: air-fares - <http://flightchecker.moneysavingexpert.com/>
Train times – German rail - www.bahn.com
French night trains - <http://intercites.voyages-sncf.com/nuir/voyage-de-nuit>

If you are a strong walker and can carry all your needs for several days, including sleeping bag, mattress, cooker and food, and don't mind being rather smelly on the way home (!), then you can avoid accommodation charges altogether using the free refuges scattered throughout Andorra. See <http://www.hola-andorra.com/arinsal/english/refugisGB.html>

along the Madriu valley/ top: refuge in same valley



If that's a step or two too far then using the manned refuges for a couple of nights for food and showers would add about 40 euro per night (for dinner, bed & breakfast). For softies (like us) an apartment in one of the valley centres would cost £60-80 per person per week. You only get a bed each and an en suite bathroom and a bit of storage space but it seems pretty good value.

Most walks, including mountain summits can be done in long day trips with no more than 1300m of ascent/descent. However I do recommend at least one night in one of the huts. There is nothing like sunrise at 2000+ metres!

S W

P.S. Try 'Aparthotels' for self-catering accommodation.



Continuing the European theme, this is poet and linguist Edwin Morgan's 'Siesta of a Hungarian Snake':

S SZ SZ SZ SZ SZ Zs zs Zs zs



2 members of London Red Rope, Mark Alexander and myself, plus Heather Morris from the Leicester group, spent eight days in August in Slovenia, mostly walking in the Julian Alps. Mark and I flew to Ljubljana while Heather came by train via Paris and Munich, so the trip began when we met up at the youth hostel by Lake Bled on Saturday 4th.

Bled is near the Julian Alps, not in them, and is a really big tourist attraction. Our first walk was a circuit of the lake, followed by a ceremonial eating of a Bled cream cake. We then took a bus twenty miles west to Lake Bohinj, no higher but surrounded by the mountains. We used the youth hostel there as our base for the rest of the trip but making two separate treks up to stay in mountain huts. Both Slovenian hostels were comfortable and we had our own room each night, although the evening meals were a bit uninteresting.

The first trek was for just one night. We began by going up 3,000 feet by cable car and ended with a long descent back to the lake, not always well way-marked. The second trek took us to three

huts and two summits, the climax of the trip being an ascent of Triglav on the Friday. Triglav is not just Slovenia's highest mountain but a national symbol, appearing on Slovenia's flag, but luckily as non-Slovenians we were not required to flagellate one another on the summit ...

Having been often to Austria and once to Bulgaria, Slovenia was much more like Austria: the huts were mostly pretty comfortable but similar in price to Austria. Although our Cicerone guidebook did not make this clear, our Austrian Alpine Club cards got us a substantial discount on accommodation in the huts, as well as covering mountain rescue insurance. One advantage over Austria is that there you really need to speak a little German, but nobody expects you to know Slovenian.



We had been worried whether we would get up Triglav, given the amount of "fixed rope" and our lack of harnesses and other climbing equipment. However, it was all very easy scrambling and the "ropes" (metal cables bolted onto the rocks) were arranged mainly as hand rails: the few people who were religiously clipping themselves on (and off and on again at every stanchion) were very slow. In practice, the places that felt most precarious were where there was no rope in place, and therefore nothing for the people with harnesses to clip on to.

On Sunday 12th Mark had to head home for work, while Heather and I went two hundred miles west by train to the Italian Dolomites, meeting up with Pam, Barbara and Dave — but the Julian Alps can be recommended as a trekking area offering a good combination of affordability, comfortable accommodation, nearness to the UK and great scenery.

H S



Where? Many great routes have been described in this bulletin but there are masses of well-documented routes, particularly in Austria, France (The Tour of Mont Blanc) Italy and Switzerland, with a few in Slovenia, the Pyrenees and the Picos in Spain. Routes in less well known areas are beginning to feature in the guidebooks.

How difficult? Routes range from straightforward – comparable to hill-walking in Snowdonia or the Lakes – to those involving glacier crossings and requiring crampons and ice-axes for sections. Most involve a fair bit of height gain and loss – 600m+ per day. Route-finding is generally easier than in the UK, with sign-posts at path junctions and way-marking throughout, though this can be a bit patchy. Paths are well-maintained and generally less rough than in the UK.

When? Most of the routes are possible from June to September, but you're likely to encounter snow earlier in the season. The first two weeks of August tends to be the busiest time.

Guidebooks: Cicerone Press produce the best known trekking guides in English: www.cicerone.co.uk. These are generally excellent – accurate and with all the information you need, and there's a 20% discount for Red Ropers. Guidebooks are also produced by Rother (English translations from the German publisher Berverlag Rother) and you can find various one-off guides and descriptions of the routes on the Internet, many of them very good.

Maps: See guidebooks for what you need. Those produced by the national equivalents of the Ordnance Survey are not necessarily the easiest to follow and there are sometimes good, cheaper alternatives available, eg from Kompass and Tabacco. Stanfords (London & Bristol) carry a large selection of overseas maps and there are also a number of online suppliers, which can be cheaper – but it's obviously best to look at the maps before buying, if possible.

Accommodation: Most regions have a good network of refuges/huts run by the national Alpine Clubs. These are particularly widespread in Austria, and there are lots in France and Italy. They provide communal sleeping with bunk-beds or sleeping platforms and excellent food. Most have hot water and showers. They are varied in style but generally comfortable and often memorable, with good communal areas, including a bar. Many are in spectacular locations. Where there is no Alpine Club hut, there are privately-run refuges or

small mountain guesthouses, some of which have dormitory accommodation. Overnight costs for an 'average' alpine club hut start at around €20, with an additional €20 or so for evening meal and breakfast. Some refuges do an all-in price for half board, whereas others offer an a la carte menu. The overnight fee is halved for members of Alpine Clubs (see below) and Austrian refuges guarantee to provide one evening main course at a special rate for club members.

Austrian Alpine Club: This has a British section: (<http://aacuk.org.uk/>) , so is the obvious club to join in order to get reciprocal rights across the European Alpine clubs. Membership includes annual insurance to cover mountain rescue and related medical and repatriation expenses etc., as well as third party liability. It covers you for most outdoor activities and is a very good deal. Furthermore, people over 60 get a reduction!

What to take: You will generally need to carry all your stuff for the duration of your trek (though some commercially organised treks transport luggage. It's usually possible to walk in 'summer' clothing, but evenings are cold at altitude and you can encounter very bad weather – heavy rain and even snow. In addition to clothing you'll need at least a litre of water per day, possibly a few days' food for lunches, sun cream, personal stuff and all your usual mountain essentials. However, it's recommended that you keep the weight of your pack down to around 10 kilos. Some trekkers manage with a 35 litre rucksack, but 40 – 50 litres is probably more realistic.

B S

the bulletin

It would be great to get accounts in September from RRers who have tried these, or similar routes. I have found trekking, after some faltering first attempts, challenging, enriching and fun. Many thanks to all contributors!

The NC have asked for the next edition to have an emphasis on climbing. It is well known that climbers are a shy and retiring bunch (not!) but perhaps on this occasion they could abandon the habits of a life-time and tell us what they have been up to - 300 plus words, with some photos, before the end of June would do the trick. Other material will be gratefully received!

Happy trials, David Symonds

email: bulletin@redrope.org.uk



High on the hills approaching Hathersage Moor we looked down towards Scrapperlow - a great old house - as remote now as it has ever been. With the sky bathed in a grey misty haze, the house looked eerie and mysterious, and you could only wonder what secrets it holds.

However, despite Bronte sister connections – Charlotte Bronte was a governess in these parts - this was no Wuthering Heights fable and the ghosts of Cathy and Heathcliffe were not about to rise from the Moors. We had come to Hathersage in Derbyshire's renowned Peak District for the 2012 Red Rope AGM.

Held on 29/30 September in Thorpe Farm with its ample bunk houses the business meeting was only one part of the weekend's activities. I had turned up on Friday afternoon, and being my first AGM, did not know what to expect. But Hathersage village was great to wonder around – the little streets, the church and the reputed grave of Robin Hood's lieutenant Little John - in those days the forest stretched from here to Nottingham. Locals will, of course, assure you that it is Little John's grave for sure, and warn you not to wonder alone on the dark moors at night - as dreadful things are said to happen...

So it was on the Saturday - in the daytime - that many of us walked around the hills and moors above the village to practice our orienteering skills - getting completely lost was part of the fun. The day proved good for walking; it was neither too

warm or cold, and slightly misty and damp. Plenty of other walkers were about and you can see why the Peak District is so popular.

In the evening, we had a lovely meal courtesy of Lynne Newark and the sock swap auction courtesy of legendary Red Rope mountaineer Kos. Then there was Arthur's great quiz. For the 20 odd of us present the crack and warm conviviality was really good.

My concern at this point – being notoriously tight at buying rounds - was to grab those 5 point something bottles of Hobgoblin before Dave and John got to them. Fortunately I succeeded!

The AGM itself took place on the Sunday morning in the same communal hall where we ate Lynne's dinner the previous night. Our esteemed officers sat on the top table grim faced and serious. Meanwhile Dave and John kept eying me suspiciously - no doubt wondering where those damn Hobgoblins had gone.

The AGM was business-like and I was impressed by how hard the officers, and committee members, work given that it is all voluntary activity. The officers' reports included a treasurer's statement that would put many accountant to shame.

Much of the discussion focused on how to make better use of IT and how regional groups could coordinate activities better. The core of the discussion though was how to attract new recruits and particularly younger members.

Crucially, Red Rope is not just any old walking and climbing club, but a socialist one. So we heartily applauded when Don told us how Red Rope, which is affiliated to the Ramblers, were instrumental in passing a motion at the Ramblers own AGM condemning their link-up to get cut price details from notorious private health profiteers, BUPA.

I felt the AGM weekend worthwhile and even quite relaxing. I recommend you should consider attending next year.

But going up alone on those Moors by Scrapperlow Hall in the middle of a dark night with the wind howling? If only Cameron Clegg and Osborne would do that...

Steve Wright, for the National Committee

The NC has been concerned for a while that there wasn't enough discrimination between being a member of Red Rope and not being a member. Non-members were receiving many of the same benefits as members for the same money or only a little more. Some non-members walk, climb and even come on trips several times without bothering to join the club. Whilst we want to encourage as many people as possible to come on our events, we would like them to join the club after "trying us out". To add to this concern, the BMC has drawn attention to its associate clubs, like ours, that the liability insurance cover it provides clubs assumes that event participants are members of the club, or are likely to become members.

So at the last AGM in Oct, 2012, the club agreed a set of rules to apply to national events and recommendations to regions that should make being a member more advantageous and also minimise insurance risks. These are detailed on the Red Rope web-site but the following is a summary:

Multi-day trips, both national and regional, will give priority to members. Non-members will still be able to apply to join a trip but they will be placed on a waiting list. For national trips they will only be accepted six weeks before the start of the trip if there are spare places. Regions will be able to specify their own deadline for non-members, preferably when advertising the trip. However, trips that are specifically training events will only be open to current members.

National trips will charge non-members at the E-band rate applicable to the trip, taking account of any multiplier (as now), but also adding a 50% surcharge, instead of the current 20%. Non-members will only be allowed to go on two national trips before they must join Red Rope to go on any more. We expect regions to apply the same rule.

For regional day walks and climbs, regions may continue to apply their own rules. However the club is recommending that non-members participate free of charge for no more than two events. After that they should be encouraged to become members. As part of this, they should be required to pay for each subsequent event until they join. Each region can decide how much this should be but we recommend between £3 and £5 per event.

Regions are especially asked to note that their club liability insurance cover may be affected if a non-member continues to participate after their first couple of events and may need to make their own arrangements for liability insurance.

Finally all event leaders and organisers, regional and national, must be current members.

These rules and recommendations come into effect on April 1st 2013 but the change to trip fees for non-members will only be applied to trips that have not yet received applications from non-members. **SW**

non-members, new rules

Don Kinniburgh, RR Ramblers rep

Perhaps the biggest current threat to our freedom to walk in the countryside is the Government's plan for the future care of the National Trails. (These are the more important and most visited long-distance paths e.g. the Pennine Way - there are thirteen in all.)

Such paths require a good deal of maintenance. At the moment this is the responsibility of Natural England (NE), the quango in charge of conservation and countryside recreation, which comes under DEFRA. As a result, National Trails today enjoy a high and consistent standard which walkers can rely on.

The advantage of this set-up is that each path is looked after as a whole. Offa's Dyke, for example, has its own National Trail Officer funded by NE, who is responsible for liaising with the local councils along its route, engaging contractors, organising volunteer work parties and so on. Natural England oversees and co-ordinates this work across the country, as well as providing funding and publicising the National Trails.

The Government wants to slim down NE (in the name of 'smaller government') by taking away their responsibility for the National Trails. It is to be given instead to a plethora of 'Local Trail Partnerships' of council reps and voluntary groups, with no one responsible for co-ordination for the whole path - let alone for the country!

The big problem is that no one will be in charge. The local councils in the new Local Trail Partnerships are all strapped for cash. Some will take their responsibilities seriously, others will not. Parts of, say, the South Downs Way will be well maintained and enjoyable to walk though, other parts might become simply impassable. Walkers usually want to walk the whole path. If word gets around that such-and-such a section is a mess they won't even start. The Trails could become neglected and fall into disuse - no doubt to the delight of landowners whose lobbying was probably behind these proposals in the first place!

The Ramblers are campaigning for a new National Trails Trust to be set up to take over the promotion, management and co-ordinating role of Natural England - on the lines of the Canal and River Boat Trust which has replaced the Inland Waterways Board as manager of our canals. So far their campaigning has fallen on deaf ears, though this proposal is one which should be in everybody's interests - not least the hoteliers, B&B owners and other local businesses which get most of their custom from people, many from abroad, walking the paths. (The South West Coastal Path is estimated to be worth £300 million a year to the regional economy.) The government carried out a 'consultation' on its new proposals for just eight weeks before Christmas.

The final decision is expected around Easter. Hopefully it will receive the same storm of protest which led to the reversal of the forestry proposals. If ever there was a campaign in which walkers need to make their voices heard, this is it!

DK

national trails



I had not organised a trip for 15 years, mainly because I have been very few trips in that time, so, when the CIC trip was practically booked out before the summer and we had a waiting list in late autumn I was feeling full of confidence. I had even started sorting out the logistics of getting eight climbers and all our gear to the CIC for five nights.

But then our imploding capitalist society stuttered momentarily and Joe got a new job. Meanwhile Colin, who like me had judged the waiting list rock solid, decided to use his membership of another club to book places separately – a very socialist principle this, sharing your skills and enthusiasm between clubs. Still, we had Andrew who had been training diligently on the off-chance to fill the place.

For the uninitiated, a little training is necessary if you are to enjoy the comforts of the CIC, unless that is like Kate you have friends in high places who can give you access to the upper car park – she kept this a secret until a few days beforehand. By then, Andrew had been advised by a doctor to rest, while Karin had been injured while training in north Wales.

Undaunted, various last minute efforts were made to fill the vacant places with Malcolm, whose preservation instinct is strong, inviting a mountain guide while I tried various political folk who might have added some spice to the discussion in the hut. However, the settled cold weather, which had created a mini-capitalist panic down south but had been perfect for climbing, was now forecast to change dramatically and the only person foolish enough to consider a place was Alvin – a very keen climber. Unfortunately not keen enough to persuade Ian in the car on the way up to Glasgow that it was worth continuing in the face a predicted series of lows, and winds in excess of 100mph. So, after an evening enjoying each other's company, five stalwarts were left.

Still undaunted, we came up with what I thought was a cunning plan of doing a low down route before everything melted, but when we got out the car at Bridge of Orchy we were too late. Kate, who was staying in Glencoe, then announced she would call it a day. We feared the worst so Malcolm cleverly sorted her food bag so it contained essential ingredients for every evening meal - except the one we were having that night - and we then told her we were dependant on her arrival the next day!

Later that day, four of us reached the CIC to find Colin, that Alpine Club stalwart, had twisted his ankle, although his companions, Andy and Adria, arrived in what appeared fine fettle after a 3am start from the other kingdom. I then enjoyed a pleasant stroll up Coire Leis, the high point of the trip as it turned out, before dark and the winds started. We were in the process of congratulating ourselves on being the only groups with the motivation to get to the hut with such a poor forecast when others began to arrive, including a film crew, until the only spare mattresses on the sleeping platforms were Red Rope's.

With south westerly gale force winds and lots of snow predicted my second cunning plan was to climb on the west side of Tower Ridge, in the face of the storm but, so my theorising went, safe from avalanches before descending from the Douglas Gap somehow. This appeared to convince the others, who probably should have known better by now, and we set out as two pairs after dawn - Andy and Adrian being in slightly less good fettle than I had thought. I had forgotten that high winds can behave treacherously on the Ben and we found the gale coming from the north east rather than the south west and dumping snow on the final approach slopes. So, after a fair bit of faffing, the result of rusting skills and judgement, Malcolm and Jerzy tried a rampline to reach our intended route. By then, each time the spindrift blew we stopped – I am sure we were not always like this. Even Chris, who normally looks totally at peace in a hooley, was expressing signs of discontent so we retreated, without much regret it must be said, to the warmth of the hut. Here we found Kate, who had not found the walk up too bad – with the help of a lift to the upper car park – and even praised her heavy pack on the basis it had prevented her from being blown away. Her lightness provided the perfect excuse not to go back to the car park where she had left her gloves and, after seeing her trying on various pairs of spare mitts five sizes too large for her hands – it's amazing the amount of spare gear people bring to huts and the camaraderie of sharing is heartening – I set off into the blizzard for her gloves.

I had forgotten how poor conditions feel: feet sinking deep, back buffeted, head and eyes forced down to avoid the spindrift, mind wondering whether it could ever find the way back. But it was all too brief. The freezing level was only 100m below and rising and by the time I returned a couple of hours later the snow was mostly gone.

The CIC is now a much softer place than it was, not just because of the indoor toilets but because mobiles now connect you to the outside world. The availability of forecasts helped the decision to bail out the next day. In the old days people would have just sat and waited. Nowadays people can return to work and save their holidays for better times. Many thanks to everyone who booked, who dropped out and the Red Ropers who came in whatever guise for your good humour, co-operation and company.



Malcolm Donne in action on January's Ben Nevis trip, based at the CIC hut. Advertised as a great opportunity for winter mountaineering, with the position of the hut saving a 4 hour walk in, what could possibly go wrong?! Nick's account, whilst having an undertone of farce, makes it clear how much organisers sometimes have to deal with and how important it is for the group to work together, as they obviously did on this fraught and freezing occasion!*

Photos: Chris Drinkwater

beddgelert breakthrough! richard toon

Richard Toon LMC, 28 Dec. 2012

All the planned work on Cae Ysgubor for 2012 is now completed. The building is watertight. We start again in the spring and have budgeted to complete the downstairs and upper floors; to install the internal staircase; to fit the internal walls and to start on the electrical. But we will then have drawn our funds down to the minimum to keep the Club solvent. So we are dependent on being successful with our grant application to the Welsh Assembly - we should be hearing about this now! We have a contingency plan to submit for Lottery funding in the spring.

The LMC intends to hold a meet in the new Welsh hut over the summer (June 28th - 30th) and in autumn (Nov 1st - 3rd). Facilities will be very basic - only floors to sleep on; no toilets or electricity; camping stoves for cooking; a water supply from the stream. If Red Rope feels that these conditions can be tolerated, then you may also wish to hold a meet there. Discuss it and let me know! We are also having a weekend working meet in Wales (April 19th - 21st) for people who cannot get down during the week - RR members would be most welcome. See Kos for details.

Richard Toon LMC, 10 Feb. 2013

Hi folks,

I'm sure you'll be as pleased as us to learn that we have been awarded, in principle, a grant of £47,955 by the Welsh Assembly to complete the Welsh hut. We have to sort out detail and get quotes for all the jobs. The major items are connection to the grid for electricity; internal works (electricity and plumbing etc); the sewage disposal system; water supply; and the stone cladding.

The grant has to be spent in the next 12 months and becomes available from April 1st. We are now extremely confident that we will have a fully operational hut by the autumn of 2013!

Tomorrow a small group are starting working on the hut again, doing the internal floor - the radioactive gas membrane, insulation, screeding and slate floor surface.

Regards, Richard/ email: r.toon@talk21.com

Congratulations to all involved! Photo from October.

