

THE FORTNIGHTLY FAFF

The Periodical Journal of the Mercian Mountaineering Club

Aug 2015

NORMAN WRIGHT

1930 - 2015

**Founder member of the
Mercian Mountaineering Club**

FEATURING

Desperation Crack
Sailing in Greece
Now Then!
Outside Edge Route
Tremadog Meet
Weekend Warriors



A word from the editor

I'd like to start by thanking Geoff Taylor for writing his lovely piece about Norman, one of the Mercian's founder members who sadly passed away in June. Norman will be sadly missed by those that knew him. I didn't know Norman as well as I'd have liked to; I became active with the Mercians at about the same time that Norman's skiing injuries caused him to become less active. So I found it interesting to read about Norman's youthful exploits and enjoyed noting that many of things he used to get up aren't that different to what we all do today. I had no idea that he had summited the Zinal Rothorn, a peak that thwarted me in 2011. Times have changed, but perhaps not by as much as we think.

Looking to the future there are some great meets lined up over the next few months. We've got The Gower on August bank holiday which has always proved to be a popular meet, perhaps as much for the opportunities to have a BBQ on the beach and a swim in the sea as for the climbing. It's a shame I can't make that one but I'm pretty sure you'll all have a good time. Saturday the 19th of September see's the annual take place in Clapham, Yorkshire; we've already got about 30 people signed up for that one. And then in October, when the weather in the UK really starts to take a turn for the worse, a dozen (or so) of us are off to Kalymnos for a dose of sun drench sport climbing. If you're interesting in going it's not too late to book yourself a flight and an apartment, and don't forget to pack your driving license so you can rent a motor scooter when you get there.

Stew.



Photo courtesy of Simon Hodgson

Our friend Norman

by Geoff Taylor

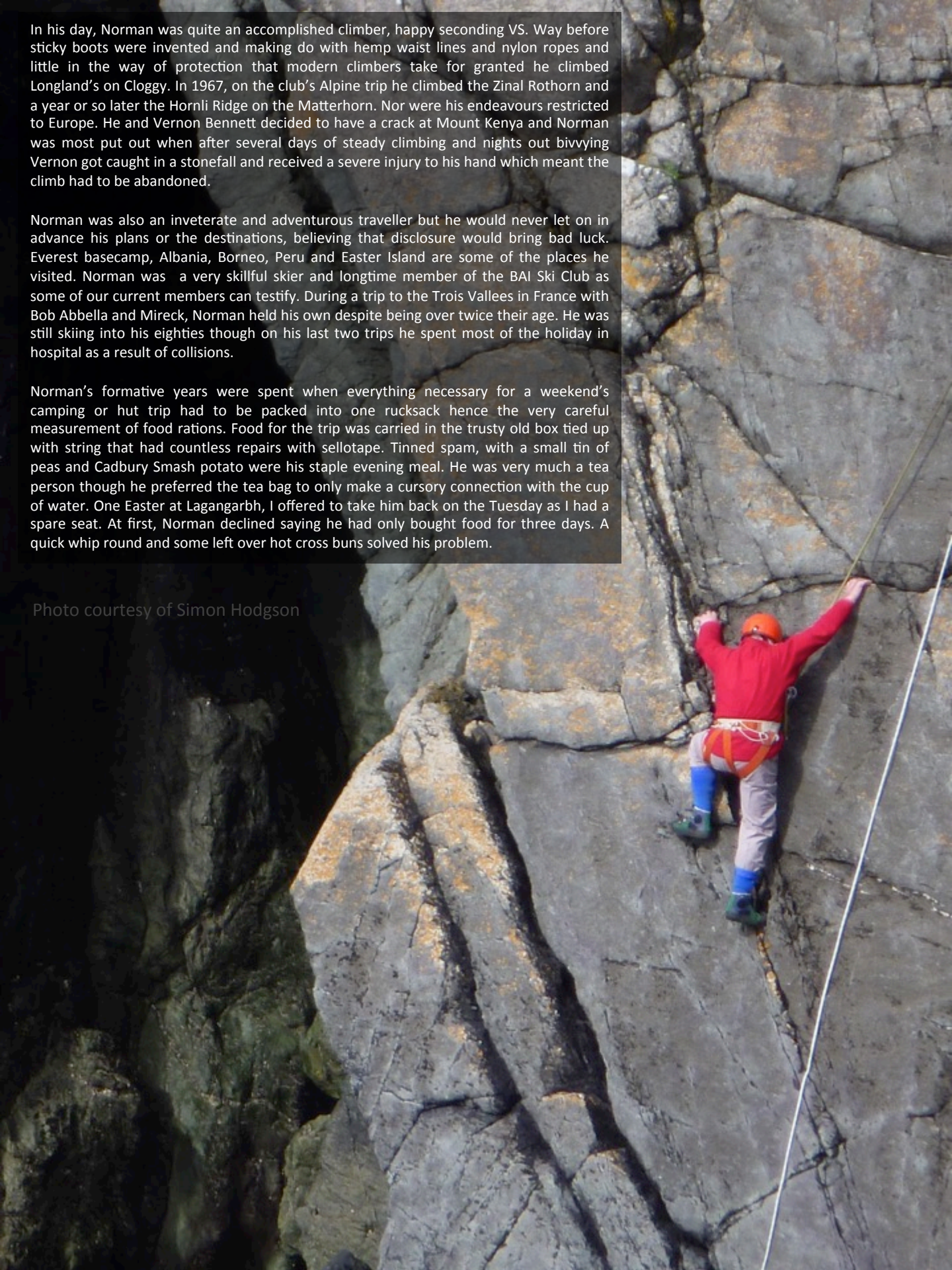
On June 13th, the Mercians lost one of their oldest and most loyal members who was held in great affection by all who knew him. After National Service in the RAF, then work as a draughtsman for Parkinson Cowan who made gas cookers, Norman joined the evening classes in mountaineering held at the BAI (Birmingham Athletic Institute) in John Bright Street for two hours on a Thursday evening. He, along with Jack Goff, and George Potter inter alia enjoyed their practice abseiling and prussiking back up the three storey stairwell with twice termly visits by coach to North Wales alternating between the youth hostels at Ogwen Cottage and Bryn Gwynant allowing them to put their mountaineering theory into practice. This was traditional abseiling, now called Classic for those brave enough to try it and prussiking with loops. No fancy descenders and no prussiking devices then and no Health and Safety brigade interfering either! After the two year course ended various students wished to continue their mountaineering activities and so in 1957 the BAI Mountaineering Club was formed with the Principals of the BAI Institute being ex officio vice Chairmen of the Club.

In his day, Norman was quite an accomplished climber, happy seconding VS. Way before sticky boots were invented and making do with hemp waist lines and nylon ropes and little in the way of protection that modern climbers take for granted he climbed Longland's on Cloggy. In 1967, on the club's Alpine trip he climbed the Zinal Rothorn and a year or so later the Hornli Ridge on the Matterhorn. Nor were his endeavours restricted to Europe. He and Vernon Bennett decided to have a crack at Mount Kenya and Norman was most put out when after several days of steady climbing and nights out bivvying Vernon got caught in a stonefall and received a severe injury to his hand which meant the climb had to be abandoned.

Norman was also an inveterate and adventurous traveller but he would never let on in advance his plans or the destinations, believing that disclosure would bring bad luck. Everest basecamp, Albania, Borneo, Peru and Easter Island are some of the places he visited. Norman was a very skillful skier and longtime member of the BAI Ski Club as some of our current members can testify. During a trip to the Trois Vallees in France with Bob Abbella and Mireck, Norman held his own despite being over twice their age. He was still skiing into his eighties though on his last two trips he spent most of the holiday in hospital as a result of collisions.

Norman's formative years were spent when everything necessary for a weekend's camping or hut trip had to be packed into one rucksack hence the very careful measurement of food rations. Food for the trip was carried in the trusty old box tied up with string that had countless repairs with sellotape. Tinned spam, with a small tin of peas and Cadbury Smash potato were his staple evening meal. He was very much a tea person though he preferred the tea bag to only make a cursory connection with the cup of water. One Easter at Lagangarbh, I offered to take him back on the Tuesday as I had a spare seat. At first, Norman declined saying he had only bought food for three days. A quick whip round and some left over hot cross buns solved his problem.

Photo courtesy of Simon Hodgson



Norman had served as Chairman on the Committee and for many years did sterling work as Librarian disappearing for what seemed like an age with his head torch into the bowels of the Waggon & Horses outbuildings. It was typical of the man and his sense of duty and devotion to the Club that his last appearance at a Club event should have been at last year's AGM. He was also instrumental amongst others in setting up the Greg's Hut Association in memory of another founder member who was killed in the Alps at Easter 1968. This hut and Norman's painting of John Gregory were featured recently on the BBC's Pennine Way program (Episode 3, 25.17-28.11 with Mercian Mountaineering Club featured on a commemorative plaque at 26:17).

Norman was a man of many attributes. He will be particularly remembered as the one who would greet and engage with potential members when they first came down to the Club. He could also be quite determined, Alan Hardie records an incident when he lost his wallet which had fallen out of his jacket when climbing Bramble Buttress at Tremadog with Norman. After abseiling down three pitches searching every nook and cranny without success, Norman said that they might as well have lunch. Alan in no uncertain terms told Norman he'd better belay him whilst Alan repeated the climb. Perseverance had its reward and Alan retrieved his wallet in the long grass at the top of the climb. Conversely, only a few years ago, when I was climbing Needle Ridge on Great Gable, Norman's disintegrating 1950's edition of the guidebook, stuffed into an equally old cagoule spilt its pages down the side of the ridge. Norman insisted on roping down with me waist belaying him to collect the errant papers.

At his birthday party to celebrate his 75th (don't hold your breath folks) there were many representatives from the Club, The Ski Club, Church and Scouts demonstrating the wide interests and circle of friends that Norman had.

However, the attribute, nay speciality, that most members will associate with Norman on a meet was his uncanny ability to wander, that is to wander-OFF! Don Teanby recalls the occasion when stopping in Ennerdale, they were descending from Pillar when Don pauses for a minor comfort stop only to find that Norman had disappeared. He spent 20 minutes shouting and looking for him only to find back at the hut with a cup of tea.

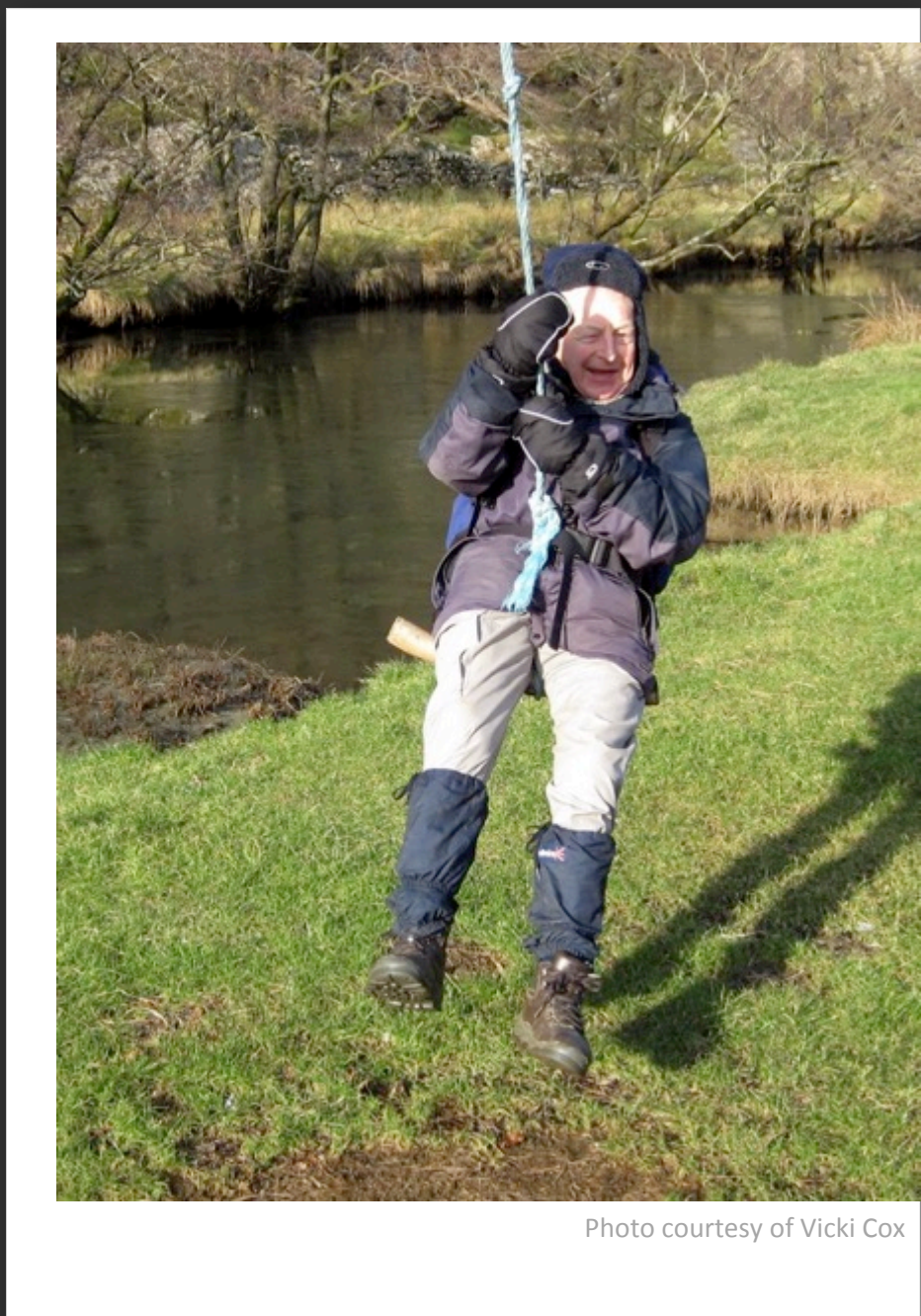


Photo courtesy of Vicki Cox

Many will recall when stopping at Annette's, the concern when Steve Newton "lost" Norman. North Wales Police and the Mountain Rescue were alerted and members were about to leave to look for him in the Moelwyns area when a call came through, he was safe. Gordon McGregor, joined 1963, life member and Munro completer recalls that in his very early days, Norman taught him to never wholly rely on other people in the hills. Descending from Scafell Pike in the snow as it was getting dark, they ended up in Borrowdale when Langdale was the intended destination and spent the night in a chicken hut. Still that might have been marginally more comfortable than another anecdote

concerning Norman. The story goes that he and other members were having a go at Holly Tree Wall. They either ran into difficulties or had left it too late and decided to retreat and abseil back down. After several abs, and remember, ropes were much shorter than 100ft/30m, it went completely dark. They decided it was too risky to descend any further, by now being on the Idwal slabs, so spent a very uncomfortable night right there. The morning light revealed the footpath just 6' below them!

This picture is of the rose bush kindly given to Lynn and myself on the occasion of our 40th wedding anniversary taken on the weekend that Norman died. It was a typical gesture of a kind and considerate man.

- Geoff Taylor



DESPERATION CRACK

BRIMHAM'S NOTORIOUS

HVS 5b SANDBAG

words by
STEWART MOODY

photos by
VICKI COX

There are a few places in this world that are frequented by rock climbers as much as they are by regular folk. I hope they won't mind me calling them regular folk, what other phrase is there? Pedestrians? Maybe non-climbers would have been a better turn of phrase – too late, "regular folk" is out there now.

The first such place that comes to my mind is the summit of the Aiguile du Midi in the Chamonix valley. At 3,800m high and serviced by a cable car every 10 minutes the viewing platform near the summit is appropriately packed with regular folk. Several routes top out right on the viewing platform too. Having climbed up from the glacier far below you vault over the handrail not only to the safety of civilisation, but also to the click-click, click-click as dozens of cameras immortalise your top out. "You climbed up that!" someone asks. "Oooh, that must be very dangerous" says another. "It's nothing", you reply, "we have all the equipment and we were very careful" but deep down you enjoy a brief moment of stardom. With a swagger in your stride (just enough to make your ice screws and cams jangle) you stroll off to the summit café for a cup of tea before jumping on the cable car for the easy ride back down to Chamonix.

Obviously Brimham isn't quite Chamonix! It's a National Trust property for a start. There are no towering aiguilles nor are there any glaciers but it's jumbled mix of unusually shaped rock and some impossibly balanced pedestals make it a real magnet for regular folk on the weekend. And a particular God-awful off-width makes it popular with climbers.

It was mid-afternoon on Sunday the 21st of June, Father's Day, and we had ourselves an audience. A few families had seen us amble over with our racks and

ropes and were waiting patiently for the show to begin. Dave Simmonite was climbing with Naomi, I was with Vic. Pierce was with us too. I'm not sure what the regular folk expected but clearly some of them weren't prepared for the amount of pre-climb faff that takes place – I guess it's like going to the cinema and expecting the film to start right away. Oh no foolish people, first you have to sit through all the crap that comes first. "Are they going to climb up there dad" asked one little boy as Vic flaked out the ropes, "Yes son". "What's he doing now dad" he asked as Dave read his route description, "reading a book son". "I'm bored dad" he said as I laced up my rock boots, "shut up son".

After waiting over 20 minutes some folk had wandered off, only to be replaced by others. Some of the originals remained to see what would happen next. Personally, I think they were hoping to see someone take a really big whipper.

We both set off up our routes at the same time. Quite soon Dave was up to his armpit in the last few meters of Desperation Crack (HVS 5b). "I just can't squeeze in, I just won't fit" came the incredulous shouts to my left. I pressed on up my route (Jabberwok Variation, VS 4c) which I think I carried off with just the right amount of drama. I tried to keep the swearing to a minimum for the sake of the few remaining children. There was some grunting on the strenuous lower section, most of which were genuine. Next there was an exaggerated bit of flagging that

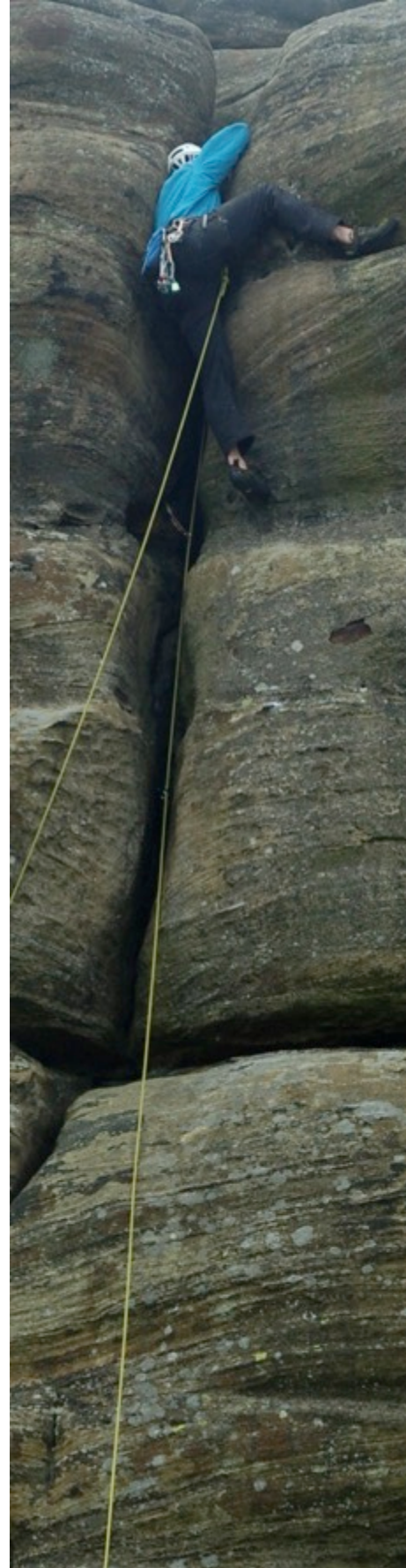
was more for their benefit than for mine. Then came a few calls of "watch me here Vic" as I teetered rightwards below an overhang. I then launched myself bodily into the jaws of the yawning chimney and swam towards the light to top out. I built my belay and felt pretty pleased with myself, but all eyes were elsewhere.

A few meters away on Desperation Crack things weren't progressing quite so well for Dave. I presume that the regular folk guessed that if someone was going to take a fall it was going to be Dave who was clearly on the much harder route. And with a name like Desperation Crack, coupled with the notorious HVS grade you know it's going to be a total bastard. Vic and I arrived back at the base of the crag to see Dave at a bit of an impasse. He was a few meters from topping out; right in the jaws of the crux, a horrendous off-width crack.

The best way to describe his facial expression and body position would be to have you cast your mind back to that TV documentary about vets working on a farm and one unfortunate soul had to reach deep up the back passage of a cow to remove a blockage. The grimace! The arm that had vanished up to the shoulder! The panting and puffing of cheeks! The look of a person asking God to intervene on their behalf! Even the security of a bomber cam the size of a dinner plate to his side couldn't help Dave out – truth be told he was just too barrel chested to progress any further. After a pretty heroic effort he threw in the towel.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph!

As Dave lowered off I stepped slightly back and pretended to thumb through the guide book for an adjacent route. "Christ" I thought whilst turning the other way "I'm not going to try and finish it off, it looks horrendous". Luckily I wasn't the only scrawny 6 foot something climber that day – Pierce stepped up to the plate having harboured a secret desire to lead the route all weekend. We pulled the ropes down, Pierce tied in, and cruised up it to the monster cam that marked Dave's high point. He clipped the cam and composed himself. He was facing to the left and trying to squirm upwards with no success. Naomi, now getting quite cold walked off to the café. She was gone for about 10 minutes and on her return found that Pierce hadn't move a single vertical inch. It was clear that Pierce needed to be facing right. "I can't move – I just can't turn around" he said almost laughing at how ridiculous it was. But clearly this was not an exaggeration as it took him a further 7 or 8 minutes to perform this delicate 180° turn. Next came an attempt at an incredible ear-high rock over – nope. Then a bit of back and footing without truly committing to the crack – nope. I think we all knew what was needed and deep down Pierce did too. He squeezed the whole left side of his body into the crack, jammed in a chicken wing, did half an Egyptian with his feet. Inch by very slow inch he squeezed his way up. He topped out to our rapturous applause and bloodied ankles. Sadly by this point most of the regular folk had got bored and left for the car park but never mind Pierce, you were a hero to us that day.



NOW THEN!

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SPECIAL**

**UNCLE GEOFF!
TAYLOR SHOCKED AND
GRUMPY AS HE'S SEEN
HOLDING PF3 FOR THE
FIRST TIME!**

**PF3 EXCLUSIVE!
SON CAUGHT YAWNING
WITH BOREDOM AS DAD
TRIUMPHS ON HVS 5b
SANDBAG**

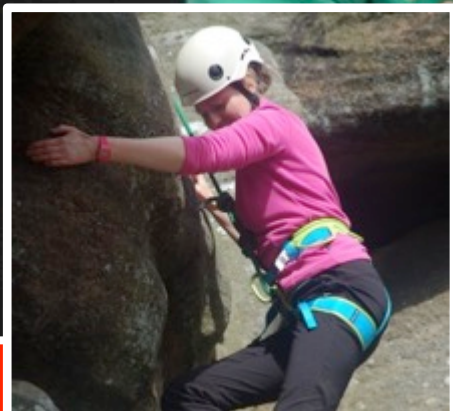
**TWICE BEFORE
BREAKFAST!**

**SHOCK AS STEWART
ENJOYS CLASSIC VS SO
MUCH HE LEADS IT
AND SECONDS IT ON
THE SAME MORNING**

**TOM'S PUB
GAMMON
DELIGHT**

**EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS
WHEN SERVED WITH
SAUSAGE, BLACK
PUDDING & EGG**

**"NEEDLESS TO SAY I
WAS DELIGHTED WHEN
IT ARRIVED AT THE
TABLE"**



**LOUISE IS RIGHT ON TREND AS
SHE SHIMMIES UP A ROUTE IN A
STRIKING NEW TURQOISE
HARNES. THIS SUMMER'S
MUST HAVE COLOURS AND
STYLE**

**WITH ONLY A FEW MONTHS TILL
THEIR WEDDING DAY NAOMI &
DAVE SNAPPED SHARING A
LOVELY PDA WHILST WATCHING
THE CLIMBING**



OUTSIDE EDGE ROUTE

photos by **Khyati Patel**

Though it was called the Tremadog meet there is more to that area than Pant Y Fan and Bwlch Y Moch. Having read about the 6 pitch Outside Edge Route (VDiff) in Cwm Silyn, Khyati and co. headed over there to see if it was worth it's Rockfax Top 50 status. Here are some of the photos she took .

Pete Nielsen
enjoying being
incognito whilst
belaying



Joel Taylor with his
characteristic smile



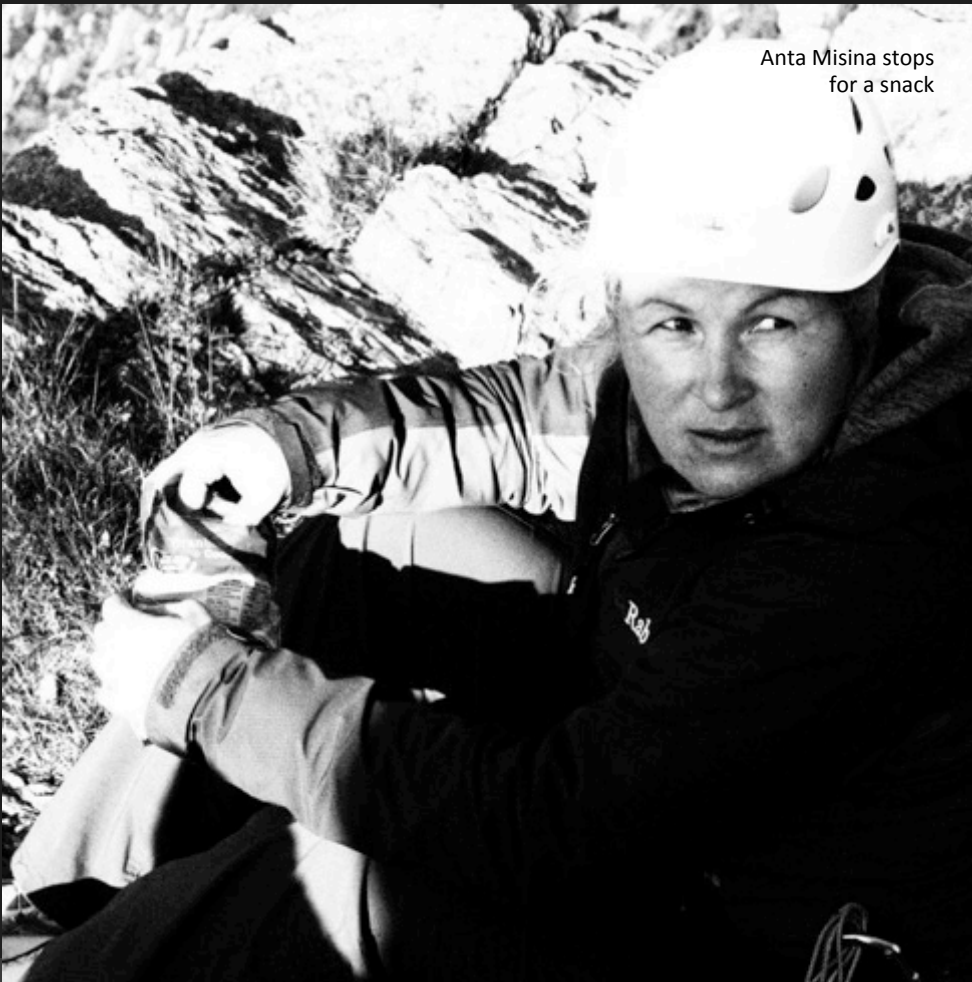
Summit shot of (L-R) Jane Gilmore, Andy
Armstrong, Pete Nielsen, Anta Misina, Joel Taylor



Joel Taylor having a rest on the route



Anta Misina stops
for a snack



P H O T O F A F F

[PhoneFaff] "Hello dear. Yes, uh-hu, yes, but I can only talk for a minute as the crux of the climb I'm on is coming up". For the second issue on the trot Pierce features in PhotoFaff. This time stopping on his VS(4c) to answer his phone on the Brimham Rocks meet. And he's smiling for the camera!

photofaff by VICKI COX



TREMADOG MEET G

by Tom Morris

Armageddon. That's what was predicted for the weekend of 3 & 4 July in Tremadog. Torrential rain Friday night into Saturday morning, an afternoon's respite to cruelly raise hopes and then a Sunday of biblical proportions. We went anyway.

Minor last-minute navigational snags aside, Beth and I made good time to the western edge of Snowdonia and immediately upon arriving joined the throng already clustered within the Ferrishütte. Tents were thrown up in the merciful dry with fearful glances being thrown towards the sky. Just as we pushed in the last peg and cracked open the first beer, the heavens opened and a full on Thor-derived thunderstorm erupted. The lightning strikes were about 30 seconds apart and getting nearer when I noticed that I'd put my tent up directly under a tree. Whoops.

"Where are Adam and Stew?", "They went out for a climb..."

Immediately giving them up for dead, I started wondering where I would store Adam's Monster Cam on my rack and whether I could squeeze Stewart's twin ropes in the boot. (Un)Fortunately, they survived relatively unscathed and soon arrived back dampened but un-electrified. We huddled together cooing at the storm and the lunatics a few fields over who were letting fireworks off before retiring with no plans for an early start.

Fabian apparently didn't get the memo and was up and about at a completely unreasonable hour. I cracked an eyelid, muttered some foul oath and tried to get back to sleep. Unfortunately, tents aren't too conducive to lie ins with the lack of blackout blinds a particular drawback. Trousers on, I wandered out into the dim void of 'outside'. The grey was uniform and the drizzle unremitting. It didn't take much arm twisting for an en masse assault on Eric's café to begin. Munching a (sub-par frankly) cooked breakfast and staring glumly out of the window brought morale to a low point. We

slunk back to the campsite with several members opting for going back to bed.

You'd be forgiven at this point for thinking this sounds like the crappiest meet ever consisting mainly of lying down. Up until this point you would be right. However...

Around 11am Stewart, Vic and I decided enough was enough and by God we were leaving the campsite even if it was to slosh up a Diff. I proclaimed this to the others and managed to rouse some more interest. Clearly sensing our steely determination, it was at this point that the weather actually took a turn for the better with the rain stopping and the sun finally pulling its finger out. Before long, Pierce and I were at the foot of Christmas Curry (Micah Eliminate) HS 4b with glorious sunshine awaiting us above the treeline.

This is a route of excellent quality with a particularly enthralling final pitch and definitely worth its place in the Top 50 for the area. The first and second pitches are pleasant enough without being too memorable but the third and fourth are true classics with added distinction of being very different in character. I led pitch three which involved a bold and burly layback start then a wonderful ascent of a groove to a large perched boulder, over which one had to manfully heave. Pierce took the final pitch up a final face which was far more delicate with much smaller, though still positive, holds with a nervy rock-over as the crux. As is his wont, Pierce eschewed more conventional protection for an assortment of ballnuts and tri-cams, assuring me they were safe as houses. I'd still not prefer to be belaying if he came off above some ropey 1.5 tri-cam to be honest...

We kept pace with Adam, Beth and Karl who were beside us on the regular version of Christmas Curry and had only good things to report. Re-convening at the top there was much rejoicing and we immediately decided to hop straight onto another route with the other Top 50 classic, One Step Into The Clouds as our aim. Just needed to drop a jacket off at the campsite first...



An hour later after sandwiches, cake, tea and a nice sit down, we eventually levered ourselves back out and approached the base of the route, joined by Karl. I took the first pitch which started amicably enough before reaching a stiff hand-jamming section with poor feet which brought a bead of sweat to my brow above a dodgy cam I can tell you. Fortunately, this was short lived and I soon reached the enormous spike which made up the first belay. Pierce and Karl joined me and with a minimum of rope faff, Pierce set off up the classic second pitch. There was some initial route finding difficulty on the face which Karl and I could do nothing to help with from round the corner. Pierce soon found his way however and before long, we were following him up a fabulous, delicate, crimpy, cruxy pitch worth every one of its stars. The wind had picked up significantly by this point which added to the drama with Karl being particularly unimpressed with the risk of being blown off (chortle). When we rejoined at the top we were all feeling pretty pleased with ourselves and without further ado, Karl set off up the final pitch which involved an interesting enough traverse but provided no special difficulty.

So far, we'd ticked two top 50 routes of excellent quality and were determined to ride this wave onwards and upwards. We headed back to the roadside and set off in search of The Fang, a much-vaunted HVS. Unfortunately, it was busy at the time so Karl offered to lead us up Striptease VS 5a which he said he'd done before. This is a steep, thuggy, 3D climb which requires trust in the feet and heft in the arm; a very good lead from Karl. The book advised that most people ignore the second pitch and so we ended the day with tree abseil after a slightly more traditional level of rope faff.

After a traditionally convivial evening with much halloumi and beer, we awoke on Sunday morning with high hopes. These were soon dashed by the continuous, soul-sapping downpour. Welcome to Wales. Given that we were going to get wet anyway, some hardy soul, with only our best interests in mind (naming no names... *cough* Beth! It was Beth Heeney *cough*) suggested a dip in the sea.

Braving the driving rain, off we toddled towards the seaside. The nice man at the gate eyed us dubiously as we turned up at the empty parking area in the driving rain, "£5 per car". £5! You can whistle for that mate. He eyed us even more dubiously than before as we all parked on the street a few hundred metres back whilst Huw shuttled everyone back to the beach. Once we had all stripped off (4 people in the back of the Volvo was no joke) we started eyeing each other dubiously. "Looks pretty cold out there", "And wet", "Who's idea was this?", "Yours!". In a surprising twist, it was Fabian who opened up the first can of MTFU and was out of the car sprinting towards the ocean before anyone could shout, "NO! Let's have tea instead".

In for a penny in for a pound so everyone (with the notable exceptions of Adam and Pierce who are of course, absolute girlymen) scrambled out of the car and charged into the Great Green. In an unusual twist of fate, we didn't actually all immediately die of being absolutely bloody fritzing. In fact I would suggest it wasn't really that bad, I've been in colder tarns in the sunshine. Jolly good.

We spent the best part of an hour slashing about, shoulder charging waves and generally giggling like a load of idiots whilst the kite surfers on the shore eyed us dubiously. Feeling sufficient moistened we charged back out of the sea before doing an atrocious job of drying off and piling back into the car. Khyati at this stage had adopted the 'full-body vibrate' method of trying to generate some body heat and had become more of a Khyati shaped blur.

With some surreptitious, suburban nudity we were soon back in our civvies, car heaters on and ready for the off. Grand plans were hatched for roast club at Huw's but with some traffic chaos and general knackeredness it was a stop on the way and an early night. An eventful and very successful meet, yet again. Bon Oui!

Weekend Warriors

Naomi Walker and the eponymous feature of Pinnacle Route (S 4a) in Ogwen. 21 metres of traditional thrutting and heart pounding excitement as you stand up on it.

Photo : **Stewart Moody**





a recipe for a Greek sailing holiday

by Capt. Huw Davies

- 1** Teach the crew the sailing basics, such as how to tie a bowline, and how to survive dingy sailing in Edgbaston reservoir, capsizing and gybing abruptly, to the sound of Pierce shouting "It's sinking! JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH IT'S SINKING! ARGGGGGHHH!"
- 2** Check the crew have the necessary qualifications as the first mate is approaching Birmingham from Bristol, on the night before the 5:00am departure. SMS Text to Gape: "It's probably a bit late to be useful, but have you got your Competent Crew certificate with you?" Immediate phone call back from Gape "Alright mate, I don't have it, do we definitely need it?" "I'm wondering if you're winding me up, but I don't think you are." "No, I definitely don't have it mate."
- 3** On arrival in Zea we navigate the extensive list of briefings, equipment checks, replacement of missing equipment etc etc etc etc, for several hours, while the pool and beer call. I attempt to convince the technical briefer of our competence, and try to strike up a rapport in preparation for the difficult discussions on our return.
- 4** We head to a nearby restaurant for an obscene and health threatening amount of food which includes melons in giant teacups.
- 5** Start the first day with a short comfortable outing to warm the crew to the task? Or instead, set off on the longest leg of the holiday, in Force 5-6, with the uninitiated clinging to the boat like cats clinging to fragile driftwood in a storm? Gape steers a steady course.
- 6** Arrive at Kea ("How does that bowline go again Huw?"), and find a beautiful little beach for an evening swim in the bay.
- 7** When morning breaks, set sail for Kythnos and a gorgeous bay, separated from another bay by a narrow sandy strip of a beach. After the obligatory anchor debate we anchor in a nice spot, next to a large expensive boat that quickly departs. Swim to the beach to drink cans of lager. Life is very good.
- 8** Have a slightly sobering crack at practising the rescue of an unconscious casualty (Anna – not really unconscious), and discover Gape has a very accepting approach to fates hand, which may explain his driving. We send a willing guinea pig (Emma) up the mast for a token link to climbing – we're a mountaineering club after all.
- 9** Sail briskly for Serifos, and another beautiful little bay. Obligatory anchor discussion (stern anchor this time), and much appreciated concessions to a cautious Captain with nightmares of waking to the sound of tortured fibreglass meeting rock. We walk up a very rough, challenging, and very hot path to the town, for swimming and beers next to the beach. Is that a marsh? Is that a mozzie? Later that night we walk back to the boat down a precipitous path in flip-flops in the pitch dark.
- 10** Wake up to a horrendously aggressive rolling of the boat, the clanging of rigging, and the buzzing of bastard itchy f**king mosquitos. It's four in the morning. We planned to leave at 5:00am for the long leg to the busy port of Idhra so it makes sense to just set off now. But I'm not ready yet. F**k me this rolling is irritating. Why did we anchor side on to the entrance? And that marsh was always going to be infested with these bastard mosquitos. 4:30am, give in and raise anchor. It's a big relief to not be buzzing and rolling on anchor (to the sound of Mr Gape pointing out the folly of the stern anchor yet again). Head out to the watery abyss.

- 11** Beautiful, beautiful picturesque sunrise behind us. Serifos becomes distant. Idhra is far beyond the horizon. I hope the compass is accurate and the GPS isn't going to choose today to expire. Tom Mead steps up and plots some reassuring lines on the chart, bisecting the distant island. Enjoy the first of the calm days. It's sunbathing whilst motoring on autopilot weather.
- 12** Approach the lovely Idhra Island. Before entry into the main port we stop for a nice swim in the bay next door. Arrive at the beautifully preserved 17th century former pirate town of Idhra. The sea of boats moored 5 deep to the harbour wall is really cosy and friendly, very hippy like; you cross each others boats to get to shore. This is how harbours should be. We speak to some of our neighbours about good places to go the next day and at what time the layers of yachts are likely to start peeling off in the morning. Idhra is really peaceful, in contrast to its past, with shops along the seafront selling hand made trinkets.
- 13** It's really hot but for some reason we embark on a death march up to the highest point in the town overlooking the bay. The view is good though. We head on an epic roundabout mission back down to a particular pub, which is actually only a restaurant, and is closed. Instead we find a lovely pub with outdoor seating on the harbour front and start satiating the now considerable thirst. We stay for a 'couple' more before returning to the boat. It's still very early.
- 14** Despite the early hour there's a palpable atmosphere of drunken energy in the air. Tom cracks out a rendition of 'I'm on a mother f**king boat', which is awesome. The hard edged singer is clearly pretty excited about being on a boat, as are we all.



L-R: Tom Gape, Tom Morris, Beth Heeney

The once pirate town of Idhra



- 15** Drinks are drunk, the stereo is turned up, it's still early afternoon and I notice from the galley that Tom is limbering up for another song. I guess I need to accept that everyone on the harbour is quickly and permanently going to want to drown us. I need to get some more beer in me so I don't worry.
- 16** We set off for town again, drunkenly clambering across the boats we've already enraged with our singing. "YOU NEED TO TAKE YOUR SHOES OFF TO WALK ON THE BOAT". "They're deck shoes, they were specifically designed for the purpose, they don't mark". "YOU NEED TO TAKE OFF YOUR SHOES". "Alright then, I'll go another way".
- 17** Still scrambling across boats to the harbour wall, Tom Wright completes one of the funniest manoeuvres I can remember, and manages to fall into the gap between two boats with a resounding SPLOOSH. He is resigned to heading back to the boat and giving up, stating with fairly inarguable logic that if he can't get across to the shore now, he's not going to manage the return journey when he's even more pissed. This is something of a quandary. I need and must get into town to get pissed, but we can't leave a man behind. The solution comes to me - the dinghy! We take the small dinghy and therefore remove the grumpy and unreasonable yacht obstacle course from the equation. This provision of alternative transport probably saves us all from stumbling loudly back across boats at 4:00am and getting keel hauled by the occupants.



Beach life (Photo by Beth Heeney)

- 18** Jaegerbombs, sharking by Sunsail crew, male bonding with Sunsail crew (Gape), but no stairway to heaven later, and we set off on the return dinghy journey across the harbour with much merry shouting, laughing and calamity. Some confusion (or competition!) between the rowers causes the dinghy to weave a very circuitous and indirect route back (I blame this on Tom Mead), causing maximum exposure for the merry shouting and laughing to benefit the harbour. Pirate town Idhra has had a sniff of its past revived, without the horrific murder and rape.
- 19** Woken by the arrival of our turn to leave the mooring, we depart via the bay next door and go for a restorative swim. Some holding tank crimes by other crews cause the swimmers to retreat to the deep water, with Gape on safety boat duty. Our last island, Poros, provides awesome rubber ring towing, some persistent but fruitless touting, yet more food, and a lovely view.
- 20** On our last day on the water Beth navigates us through a tight flotilla of approaching yachts as we approach the harbour where we started. Intact. After another meal we fight the exhaustion, and fuelled by Jaeger and Coke annoy the pretentious sailor types by dancing to the bad DJ until the early hours.
- 21** Token sweaty sightsee of the Acropolis (sic) before the comatose return flight, and damp, grey Blighty. A grade-A holiday.

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