

DMC Alpine Meet - Ecrins July 2011

The 2011 Alpine meet took place in the Ailefroide valley in the heart of the Ecrins National Park - part of the French Alps situated between Grenoble and Gap. The meet was well attended with a range of abilities and experience represented within the group.



Members began arriving late Saturday evening (2nd July) at our chalet accommodation in Pelvoux Le Poet. The arrival at the chalet was very welcome after a long day travelling and the stresses of luggage allowances, supermarkets etc. The accommodation proved very comfortable and overall cheaper than camping at Ailefroide.

Dimanche 03/07/11

After a good nights sleep, and eagerness to set out, Ed, Steve, Jon S and Tony made the short drive up the valley to Ailefroide to climb the multi-pitch sport route Snoopy Direct. At F6a+ with a pitch of 6b, the climbing (280m and nine pitches) was quite sustained but a fantastic route on immaculate granite -

consisting steep laybacks, slabs and traverses. The descent (on foot) around the top of an exposed ravine also proved quite interesting!



Mike D and Jon H climbed Remonte-Pente Direct, also consisting nine pitches starting at 3a, steadily increasing in difficulty to 5+. The route provided a nice mix of slabs, corners and flakes - an excellent introduction to the granite valley climbs. Kris and Jamie climbed single pitches on the 'Petit Dalles' followed by a walk up towards the Bosse de Clapouse.

Lundi 04/07/11

Next day Ed, Steve, Jon S and Tony took the three hour drive to La Berarde on the north-eastern side of the Ecrins over the Col du Lautaret, via La Grave. The airy drive on precipitous single tracked roads was followed by a three hour walk to the Soreiller hut situated at 2,719m directly beneath the Aiguille Dibona where we'd stay the night - fortunately the rain had stopped allowing us to walk in the dry. The hut was very comfortable, with excellent service and good food.



Mike and Kris opted to visit two crags in the main valley south of Briancon. The first 'Rocher Baron' was quartzite with single pitches of various grades up to 20m in length. The second was 'Vignette' an unusual rough and razor sharp limestone crag. A visit to the bookshop in Vallouise that evening provided ideas for summiting the following day.

Mardi 05/07/11

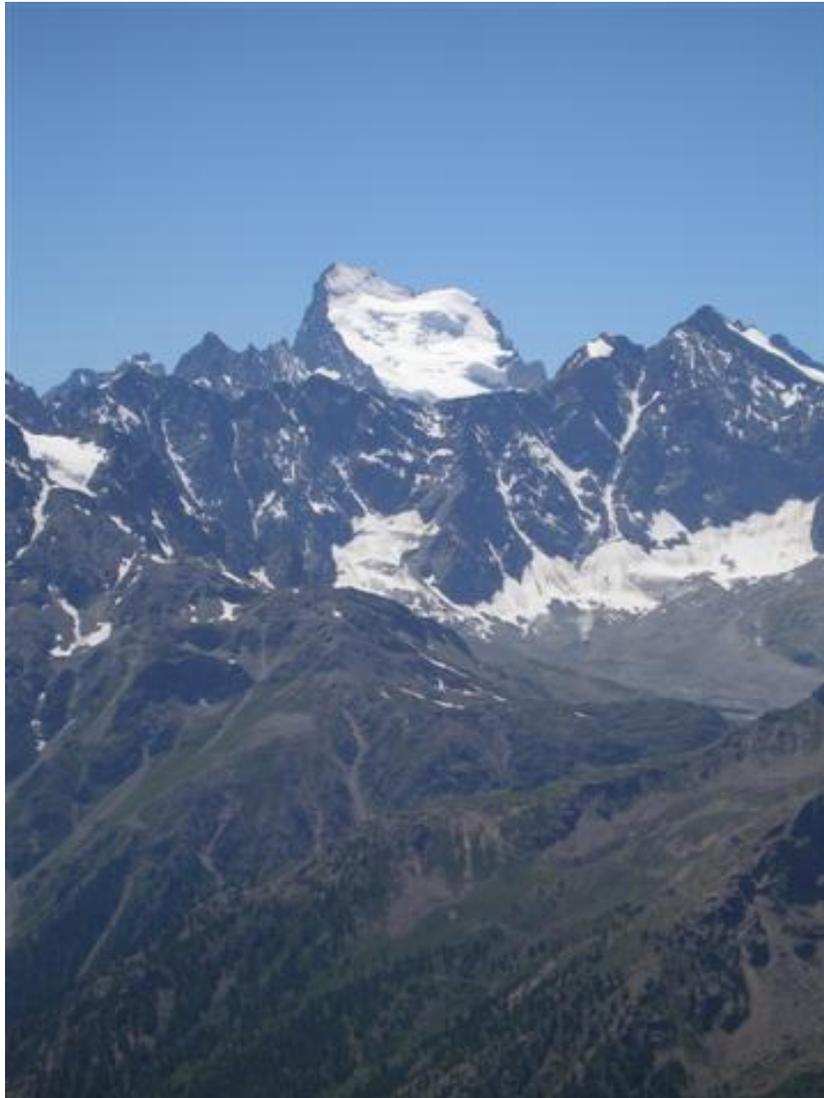
Not long after the sun had begun to warm the base of the climb Ed, Steve, Jon S and Tony set out from the hut to climb the Aiguille Dibona via the Visit Obligtoire. A magnificent route consisting 12 pitches (6a) on granite, although bolted, we also took a small rack of trad gear to protect sections where the bolts were less well spaced. The route had everything from technical slabs, pulling through roofs, chimneys through to topping out right on the summit (3,131m) proving to be one of the best climbs any of us had ever done. The descent (two abseils and a scramble) via the normal route also proved interesting, before returning to the hut, then the valley before the long drive back to Ailefroide.



Mike and Kris drove around towards Lauteret and Pont des Alpes to walk up the Aiguille de Lauzet at 2,717m. This proved to be very good acclimatisation for a walk later in the week. Hitting the col Chardonnet we were side tracked to the summit of Crete du Chardonnet at 2,785m which was just as well as two male Ibex displaying unfriendly body language and sharp horns blocked our access via a roped slab to the summit of the Aiguille.

Mercredi 06/07/11

After an early breakfast and even earlier wake up call (2:45am) when the hut warden balled “TROIS HEURES” in the bunk room, Jon H and Jamie reached the summit of the Dome de Neige, a 4,015m snow dome on the top of Glacier Blanc. A one-hour glacial walk in the dark led to the foot of steep crevassed terrain as first light broke followed by the approach up the remainder of the glacier and snow climb which went pretty smoothly. The route meandered up and left avoiding huge ice cliffs, before making a long and airy traverse back right hundreds of metres above the glacier, crossing one wide crevasse on the way to the summit. A swift decent was then made before the sun had chance to start melting the overhanging ice cliffs, followed by a long walk back down the glacier.



Ed and Kris headed for the Tete de la Draye from Ailefroide with Ed continuing onto the summit of Cime du Paillon (2,790m). The route involved an excellent low grade ridge walk with some scrambling and route finding on the upper sections. Excellent views from the summit and towards the higher Aiguilles and across the Ailefroide valley. The remainder of the group, taking advantage of a 'rest day' did some more single pitch climbing in the valley at Secteur Amigo. Some of the grades were at bit stiff and far from friendly!

Jeudi 07/07/11

Initially setting out from the car park (Pre de Madame Carle) for the Ecrins hut and Pointe Louise, a rain shower and a dubious forecast for the following day meant Ed, Steve, Jon S and Tony opted to stay at the Glacier Blanc hut to climb the Cineastes Ridge the following day. The revised plan secured a lie in (relative to the usual 4am alpine start) and shortened the three hour walk in by at least an hour. Our early arrival also provided the opportunity to assess our chosen route and sample the hut omelettes!



Mike Kris and Jamie decided on cragging in the main valley again. First at 'Laus de Cervieres' a delightful slabby crag 20m high with plenty of low grade routes. The views from the crag were splendid up to the col d'Izoard. We got rained off but as can often be the case in this area we drove further down the valley to 'Casse de Prelles' and sunshine. The climbing here was on quartzite again but steeper and harder and was excellent with plenty more to go at. Mike L, Jenny and Jon H enjoyed a day sports climbing on the Grande Falaise, a huge limestone cliff above Freissinieres. The rock is very rough, compact and solid, and a world apart from the limestone climbing in the Peak District. Many routes were done around the Grotte de Vaudois, which, due to the large capping roofs allowed routes from grades 5 - 6c to be climbed in the rain.

Vendredi 08/07/11

Steve, Ed, Jon S and Tony completed the traverse of the Cineastes Ridge - an impressive alpine route consisting of a series of nine aiguilles culminating at 3,203m. The route graded AD was climbed roped, with the harder sections pitched. An abseil was required as means of decent from each pinnacle. Views over the Glacier Blanc and across to Mont Pelvoux were stunning. The route finished via a 60m abseil onto the Glacier Tuckett, then scree before returning to the hut and then the valley for a well earned beer and BBQ.



After an early night and preparation for an early start from the chalet, Mike D, Kris and Jamie set off at 4am for La Grave, the morning sun was just starting to hit the tops of La Meije behind us as we departed from the car park around 6am. Our goal was Pic du Goleon at 3,427m via a steep walk up to a hanging valley, onto a moraine to reach the Glacier du Goleon. From here the route crossed the glacier rising 230m to the ridge. Staying roped up for the ridge walk on loose rock seemed sensible and after another 100m the summit was reached. Descent by the same route, but quicker meant that after a 13 hour day we were back in time for a delayed BBQ.



Jon H and Mike L climbed the classic Fissure D' Ailefroide, a 250m traditionally protected chimney line above the valley campsite. The route was climbed in eight pitches, belaying where necessary, and took around four hours. Overall, the route was excellent presenting a good variety of crack and chimney pitches with plenty of good holds and no major difficulties until the slightly harder finishing pitches. Certainly, the most memorable part of the climb was squeezing out of top of the very last chimney pitch; wedged deep in the back of the fissure, head locked one way and unable to move my shoulders, it was a real struggle to pull out above the final chock stone and onto the less than positive top out.

Samedi 09/07/11

From the shady forests of Vallouise la Casse, through alpine meadows then bare slopes and screes Ed and Jon H headed for the summit of Tete d'Amont (2,818m), one of the Montbrison summits. Initially intending to continue the traverse of the ridge to the north, we were defeated by loose rock, instead we decided to descend via the summit of the Tête d'Aval (2,689m) where we watched climbers topping out the mega limestone routes. Although the route was posted as five hours from the valley, Jon H and I topped out in a little over three, watching gliders catching thermals passing directly over us on the ascent. On the way down a storm was building to the north with lighting strikes on the high summits!



Meanwhile, Mike D, Steve and Jon S, having pretended it wasn't there all week opted to climb the Fissure. This nine pitch delight takes the most obvious line in the valley, looking as if the huge rock face had been cleaved by a giant axe. At about VS standard or Yorkshire Grit V. Diff., this has the occasional bolt, but requires a trad rack. Great fun was had by all, trying to squeeze through some pretty grim chimneys and like all good routes it saved the best till last. Not a route for the larger gentleman.

Dimanche 10/07/11

It was our last full day, Ed, Steve, Jon S and Jon H headed up the valley to Ailefroide to climb Cascade Blues (6a) - a delightful eight pitch sport route with two stream crossings! The stream and cascade, visible from the road were in full flow following the previous evening's storms so we were guaranteed wet feet! Again the route was very mixed in terms of climbing style with traverses, technical slabs, and overhangs; the route was also very well bolted. It proved to be a worthy adventure and very wet (for some). The decent involved three abseils to return to the bottom of the route and a short walk back to the road.



Mike and Kris chose to finish off with some more single pitch granite routes - you just can't leave it alone.

Lundi 11/07/11

Today we headed home via Lyon airport, although not without incident. Leaving in plenty of time we headed for Grenoble, however on the approach the Col du Lautaret it was apparent that the road was closed for a cycling event - the gendarme advising our only alternative would be a 200 mile drive circumventing the National Park via Gap. Fortunately, with the use of a sat nav, some fast driving, and delay tactics we made check-in with 10 minutes to spare. A fantastic week was had by all and look forward to next year's alpine trip.