

# MEETS REPORT - OVERSEAS MEETS

## SIERRA NEVADA, CALIFORNIA

July 22 - Aug 12

Having had such a good time in 2004, we felt compelled to go again, not least because we'd seen the Evolution Traverse but had failed to get to grips with it and wanted to do so.



This year, as well as Iain Gilmour, Tim Josephy and myself, we were joined by Alan Kay and Andy Wells, (who had been a YRC member some years ago). Iain and Alan chose to walk the 70+ miles of the High Sierra Trail, west to east across the mountains, so we dropped them off at the start at Crescent Meadow, the day after we arrived, having visited General Sherman en route.

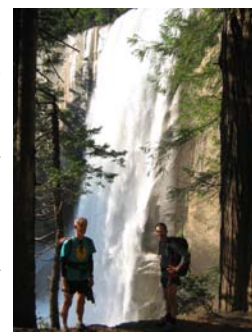


The rest of us travelled west then north to Yosemite; we travelled via Fresno, about which the only remarkable thing was 46 deg C temperature whilst we stopped for some shopping at Trader Jo's. Thank goodness for a car with aircon!

Rounding the bend and descending into Yosemite valley in the early evening, the first sight of the main cliffs is fantastic; El Capitan nearest, dominates, with Half Dome still sunlit and further away - jaw dropping stuff. We camped the first two nights at Crane Flat. On Monday 24<sup>th</sup> July, we set out from Yosemite valley (4000') and climbed Snake Dyke route (5.5) on Half Dome (8836').

This ascends the curved face diametrically opposite the wired 'tourist' route. It was pretty hard going just getting to the bottom of the route, jet lag and un-accustomed altitude left us all lacking in energy and quite breathless. The rock climbing wasn't hard, but the protection was sparse except at the stances, most of which were quite uncomfortable for three people. We felt like ants climbing up the outside of a large ball - not too steep, but still very exposed. When we got to the top of the route, we were still some 800' vertically below the summit. Trudging up the slabs to meet the marmot and its many human admirers at the summit was really tiring.

It was soon apparent that not only was there more snow around than in 2004, but also that the streams were much fuller; making the waterfalls far more dramatic. Vernal (pictured) and Nevada Falls, alongside our route down from Half Dome were spectacular - much photographed, and the spray gave us a good wetting - appreciated after the heat of the day.



The next day, we drove into Tuolumne Meadows, stopping at Olmstead Point on the way. Views SW along Tenaya Creek to Yosemite Valley and Half Dome were spectacular. Later we climbed a route called "Great White Book", 5.6, 3\* on the Stately Pleasure Dome. It featured very sparse gear on long pitches curving away out of sight. On Andy's pitch, he climbed the full length of the rope - we had to assume he was belayed, but arrived to find he'd had to jam his knee hard into the corner crack to get secure, some way below the next stance. We did not possess 6" friends! The skin scraped off his knee in that selfless action didn't heal over until the last couple of days of the holiday.

On 26<sup>th</sup> July, we walked to Matthes Crest and traversed the full (half a mile) length.



This is a Peter Croft Grade IV Traverse 5.7, 3\* route. It was a grand day of up and down horizontal movement, pinnacles, scrambling, abseiling, rock steps, very narrow crest moves, with serious exposure both sides and even a horizontal corniced pitch, which felt really odd! It became a 15-hour day and dark by the time we reached the road. We endured just Cherrios and warm water for our evening meal. We'd camped at the Tuolumne Meadows campsite and thought we'd treat ourselves to a breakfast next morning at the Tuolumne Meadows Grill; we did - it was really grim, be warned!

Thursday 27<sup>th</sup>, was a sort of provisioning/rest day; we did set off to climb on the `roadside` Drug Dome, there was a splendid looking route called The Hobbit, but after taking 70 minutes to get within sight of the bottom, we'd left it too late - so went for a swim in Tenaya lake instead.

28<sup>th</sup> July: Drove to Big Pine via Tioga Pass and walked up delightful trails to the bottom of Temple Crag. En route, we encountered Beth Kennedy, camping by the path with two llamas, two dogs and a crow. More of this, later. The way crossed a fast flowing outlet from a lake on some tree trunks that had jammed across the narrows; a slip would have meant more than a wetting. After crossing some elephant talus, we found a splendid bivi site, close to the bottom of the crag. That evening as we pottered about, a rock as big as a car suddenly appeared bounding down the snow above us and well to our right interesting! Next morning, we walked up scree and across a large snow slope to the bottom of our route "Moon Goddess Arete" 5.8. This had two towers on it, hence some abseiling as well, on the way up. Climbing was easy to begin with, but it soon reared up. There might have been 18 pitches, I can't really remember. Where it was tricky, there was a lot of loose rock and with serious rope drag in places made for some tense moments. We also got a friend stuck (thankfully, it wasn't mine!), but did find some gear too.

Somewhat like on Clyde Minaret two years before, we arrived at the top just after the sun had set. First view of the summit had a crescent moon just over it, so the route name was perfect. The descent was to the south, down talus to an abseil into Connect Pass (11,800'). Surprisingly, we found it quite easily, then just had to descend snow slopes and scree back to the bivi, arriving after

11pm. Andy had bought a new LED headlight - it gave a wonderfully powerful beam and helped us down much more quickly than another party who had retreated off a neighbouring route and were also descending in the dark.

The next day, we walked out and drove to Lone Pine/Whitney Portal and met up with Iain and Alan, who had successfully traversed the High Sierras in good time (see their account of the trip). We'd had none of the storms they had, but had heard some thunder on occasions. That night we stayed in the Dow Villa Hotel - relative luxury - surrounded by cowboy film star memorabilia. Food that was not rehydrated and a trip to the launderette made us all feel rather better

The area between Lone Pine and Mt Whitney had been used as the location for shooting John Wayne and others' cowboy films. Indeed, one track passing through a desert scrub area with huge piles of granite boulders was called Movie Road. It wasn't hard to visualise goodies chasing baddies through it. That evening, we dined with Beth Kennedy at her house on the outskirts of Bishop. She was good company and made us very welcome; the conversation ranged through politics, capitalism and conspiracy theories to druids! She had `rescued` all the animals in her care and regularly went into the hills with them, having retired to do so.

On Tuesday Aug 1st, we all walked from South Lake (9800'), above Bishop, to Bishop Pass (11,900').



This was up another delightful flower filled valley. Andy, Tim and I then ascended Mt. Agazziz (13,893'), via an easy scramble, just to the south. The views from this peak were stunning.

Next morning, we set off from North Lake (9,350') for Lamarck Coll and the Evolution Valley with bivi and climbing gear and food for several days. Alan and Iain chose to go via Piute Pass (11,423') and take a longer route around, via the

JMT and meet us on the Darwin Bench, where we'd found a perfect bivi site two years ago. Lamarck Coll is quite high (12950') and on the approach one sees many horizons which could be the pass, but turn out not to be. Head down and trudge on! As noted earlier, there was a lot more snow around and we had to cross several snowfields that were not there last time.



Mt Darwin

The Darwin Canyon was every bit as grand as we'd remembered, five brilliant blue lakes in a line stretching away to the right below us, flanked by steep and jagged mountain ridges, and opposite us, the Evolution Ridge (a Grade VI, 5.9 \*\*\* ridge, eight miles long). Even from where we were, it was difficult to judge the scale of the thing; 'small' features on it turned out to be rather large when we got there later. At some point on our descent we came to the conclusion that to seek to attempt the traverse carrying all the gear we had, with expected climbing at up to HVS was going to be too difficult/slow, so decided to look at it in daily stages.

Evolution Ridge



On arrival at the agreed bivi site, we found it still partly covered with snow, and what wasn't, was still very wet. Also, to suit the new plan, being at the north end of the traverse was less useful, so we continued round and down into the Evolution Valley where we found a good bivi site on a promontory into the main lake. It was sufficiently exposed to catch the breeze and blow away more of the midges, which were a lot more evident this year.

Tim discovered that the soles of his shoes were coming adrift and wouldn't survive rock ridge stuff the granite is exceptionally tough on gear (and skin), so he decided to walk back out the way we had come, change his shoes for some others at the car and return to meet up with us either before or at, the main rendezvous on Darwin Bench. He left the next morning, as Andy and I set off for the ridge, directly above our bivi site. This was 2,500' of ascent, walking to begin, but soon into scrambling as the way got steeper. Judging by the quantities of loose/unstable rock, it didn't look as if many people had been that way. We reached the ridge and could immediately look down onto a glacier and into the Darwin Canyon on the other side. Turning right/south we ascended to the summit of Mt Mendel (13710'). It wasn't very far, (400m?) but took us nearly five hours of roped rock climbing up and down to get there. This part of the ridge seemed to be comprised of jumbled poised blocks, dubiously held in place by gravity. For the most part, they were considerably heavier than us, but we moved very carefully, often with heart-in-mouth! It certainly wouldn't have been the place to seek to move with heavy packs. Beyond Mt Mendel, the going was easier for a while, but then the ridge looked more jagged, like we had been on. We didn't think we could get to Mt Darwin and down within daylight, so at a low point in the ridge, descended a gully back to our bivi site in the Evolution valley.

Next day, Andy and I walked south on the JMT and forded the stream just before Sapphire Lake, then ascended Mt Spencer, the spur to its east and up onto the ridge between Darwin and Haeckel. This approach gave excellent views of the whole ridge and demonstrated to us just what an effort it would be to traverse the lot. We cut through a notch in the ridge to find climbing on the other side was far less formidable than it appeared on the side we'd come from; I'd hoped to get at least to the summit of Mt Darwin, but we just couldn't seem to make quick enough progress and by 2pm, clouds were beginning to build up in a somewhat ominous fashion. We elected to descend - yet another loose gully, to the valley. Rain began when we were still some way from the bivi, but held off from what was to come until just as we got there. The rain turned to hail like small marbles and was rather fierce; we cowered in our bivis, seeking to keep sleeping bags dry and breath through small openings, whilst avoiding the puddles that formed in any dips. Lightening flashed very close as the

storm moved passed us; after two hours it had gone and we were able to emerge to a watery landscape.

At this point a rather wet and bedraggled Tim arrived. On leaving us the previous morning, he'd gone back over Lamarck Coll to the car at North Lake, changed shoes, then walked up over Piute Pass (11,423') and bivied, then, the next day walked all the way round to Darwin Bench, met Iain and Alan, then came on to us. This is a distance of some 28 km on the map, but probably more than twice that on the ground. A tremendous effort, considering the roughness of much of the path and the height lost and regained.

He'd been caught in the storm too, managing to shelter for part of it in his bivi bag, but arriving wet with a lot of wet gear. We had not taken waterproofs - for weight saving and because in 2004, there had been no inkling of any rain. They might have helped! The night was quite miserable and in the morning, all our sleeping bags had plenty of ice on them, inside our bivi bags. There wasn't much enthusiasm for going up to the ridge again, so we set off and rejoined Alan and Iain on Darwin Bench - for a second breakfast - before exiting back over Lamarck Coll to the car at North lake. Just 10 mins before reaching the car, we ran into swarms of large, insistent mossies that made escape from that area a necessity. Whether this was as a consequence of the thunderstorm making the ground and vegetation so damp or due to proximity of the horses at Bishop Pack station wasn't at all clear, but was very unpleasant. A mile down the road when there were fewer outside than in, we had to stop and open all the doors to get them out of the car!

Next day, we went to the Gallery of Mountain Light in Bishop and looked again at many of the photos taken by Galen Rowell. These are superb, so good as to be unreal in some cases. Driving north, we visited Mono Lake, and were entertained by Ranger Cedric Williams, describing the history and some of the flora, fauna and geology of the area. He was quite a showman. We also went to Panum Crater, a volcanic spot near the lake that had erupted only 600 years ago, creating lightweight grey pumice and dense black obsidian. That night we camped at Ellery Lake campground, just east of Tioga Pass.

On Monday 7<sup>th</sup>, we walked from Saddlebag Lake dam (10,100') to the western end; Iain and Alan

continued to further lakes then returned via the north side of the lake (to a cafe for soup and cakes). The rest of us ascended to the North Ridge of Mt Conness (Grade II, 5.6 \*\*) and climbed it to the summit. (12950'). The approach valley was again delightful, small lakes, streams, waterfalls, trees and flowers, giving way to more desert like landscape with snowfield/glaciers descending into ponds amongst barren dirt and rocks. The ridge offered quite easy climbing, in often very exposed positions and a couple of abseils from towers en route. We'd caught up with a couple of Americans, one of whom was glad of our rope on one pitch - they'd omitted/forgotten (?) to bring one. On the way down, we gazed at the South Face, above which the West Ridge (which we'd ascended in 2004) rose to the summit. This is huge and must have lots of routes to be discovered as well as those that have been climbed. Camped again at Ellery Lake campground. This was a chilly place when the sun wasn't directly on us - ice on sleeping bags each night.

On Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup>, Alan, Iain and Tim decided to walk to Clouds Rest; this is a peak first seen to the north of and slightly higher than Half Dome. We dropped them at the end of Lake Tenaya, from where they walked the seven miles to the top to be rewarded with superb views of Yosemite Valley and its walls. Andy and I returned to the Stately Pleasure Dome, where we climbed South Crack, 5.8, a 3\* route.

Gear was good for the first two, steeper pitches and the way clear. Above that, it began to get a little worrying! Protection was minimal in full 50m run outs on the micro rough but macro smooth surface of the dome. A pair of Americans, who demonstrated a 'rock padding' technique that we'd not worked out for ourselves, overtook us. It seemed to consist of: - lean forward, palms and outstretched fingers flat on the rock, feet pointing uphill (not sideways) and ascend quickly, moving only one of the four rock contacts at any one time, so that three remained with sufficient friction to maintain contact / stop a slide. It obviously worked for them - but takes some commitment to put it into practice. Not really sure we wanted to spend the practice time! Despite being a lot slower than them, we did finish the route without mishap and met up with the others for a second swim in Lake Tenaya. The day ended with an excellent meal at the Tuolumne Restaurant; a very satisfying day for us all.

Our final day in the Tuolumne Meadows area was also a good one. Alan walked via Rafferty Creek and Tuolumne Pass to snow clad Vogelsang Peak and back, a fine shapely mountain to the east of the meadows. Iain went to Cathedral Lakes along the JMT route. Tim, Andy and I went to climb a 5.9 route up the north face/end of Eichorn - the steep spire attached to Cathedral Peak. Half way up the third pitch, we gave up - it was too hard - and abseiled down, leaving a Rock 8 and good krab for the next party to claim. (That was more painful than the dented pride!) We scrambled up to the saddle between the summits of Cathedral and Eichorn and took turns at photographing the other two on the Eichorn summit, after a straightforward, but exposed climb.



Adrian  
on  
top

After getting down, we scurried away quickly as a less than competent party seemed to be setting about the same route. We descended through the open woodland on the east side of the mountain and back to the Tuolumne Meadows campsite for our final night.

On returning through San Francisco, Andy and Alan visited Alcatraz, Tim got a professional shave, Iain visited an art gallery and we all met up at Ian Bridge's flat before going to a motel near the airport and a flight home the next morning. We were within 24hrs of the plot to blow up 10 transatlantic planes being discovered in Britain, so security was much tightened, but were only about an hour late at Manchester after it all.

Once again, a splendid meet with good company -

and still, so much more to return to do. Our thanks to Tim for most of the organisation: he couldn't say "Its not my fault...." There was no fault!

Adrian Bridge

### The High Sierra Trail ( by Iain Gilmour)

The club trip to the Californian High Sierra was split into two parts, climbers and backpackers. Alan Kay and I could not resist the temptation to visit this superb mountain range again, and chose to hike the High Sierra Trail to enjoy the superb scenery. This trail is a 70 mile West to East equivalent of the John Muir Trail, and merges with the JMT for the last two days. Any suggestion that this is an easy option was quickly forgotten as we carried 7 days food, full camping equipment, and bear canister through very remote terrain, finishing at 14,495 feet on Mount Whitney, the highest part of the USA outside Alaska.

The party of five flew to San Francisco on Saturday 22 July, hired a car, and drove to a motel, all in one day. The next day we drove to Crescent Meadow, near the General Sherman Sequoia tree, said to be the largest living thing on earth, and then to the trail head. The climbers waved goodbye, and agreed to meet us a week later at the other side of the Sierra, for them a 700 mile trip. After a day and a morning of travelling, Alan and I set out at 2 PM carrying 35 pounds plus water in a temperature of 85 F. at 7,000 feet. The cumulative effect of jet lag, travel fatigue, temperature, and altitude, soon took its toll, so we camped after eight miles of trail. Collapsed in my tent with a heavy thunderstorm booming overhead, my mind went through the possible reasons for feeling so exhausted. What if I should crack up part way through the trail? Anyway, a large bowl of porridge the next morning soon boosted morale, and the following days brought renewed confidence.

The Sierra had received more snowfall than usual, so the creeks (full blown rivers in Yorkshire terms) were fuller than usual, and several had to be crossed by edging across fallen tree trunks. We were surprised by the weather which produced a thunderstorm every afternoon. The trail follows the side of a deep valley, sometimes crossing steep rock faces and avalanche gullies, before rising to Kawea Gap at 10,700 feet. We threaded our way along the deep Kern Canyon with enormous trees, frequently crossing creeks, and camped near Kern

Hot Springs. A thermal spring gives a trickle of nicely hot water near the edge of the river, so we enjoyed a good wash, not caring if chipmunks or bears should be watching.

The trail soon joined the John Muir Trail, and then climbed to more arid terrain near Mount Whitney. We camped at Guitar Lake after a short day, to leave us plenty of energy on the last day for the 3,000 feet climb and 6,000 feet descent to Whitney Portal. After a good meal, we hitched down to Lone Pine and awaited the climbers.

As a final back pack, Alan and I set out from Bishop North Lake over Piute Pass, to Goddard Canyon, and McClure Meadow to Darwin Bench, just above Evolution Valley. This is the most superb piece of wild country, jagged ridges of granite on both sides of the valley which has a series of beautiful blue lakes.

We met the climbers at Darwin Bench, where late one afternoon in a torrential thunderstorm, a wild apparition appeared outside my tent, it was a dripping wet Tim Josephy, who had trekked some 27 miles in a day and a half. Tim headed on to meet Adrian and Andy Wells, lower down at Evolution Valley. We wondered how they would survive the heavy storm in bivvy bags.

The route back was over Lamark Col at 13,000 feet and down to Bishop North Lake again. We used the excellent Tom Harrison maps, which show all the recognised trails. A glance at the map shows some of the splendidly named lakes, Hungry Packer Lake, Moonlight Lake, Fishgut Lake, and Donkey Lake, a welcome contrast to the high minded peaks: Darwin, Mendel, and Goethe.

If you are a backpacker, the Sierra is one of the best places in the world, with scenery, weather, and unspoilt remoteness second to none.

High Sierra Trail Miles

| Night Stop    | Waypoint                | Stage miles | Cumul. miles | Height feet | Day      | Day Miles   | Climb ft.    |
|---------------|-------------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|----------|-------------|--------------|
|               | Crescent Meadow         | 0           | 0            | 6,680       |          |             |              |
|               | Junct 7 Mile Trail      | 5.8         | 5.8          | 7,690       |          |             |              |
| <b>23-Jul</b> | Part way to Bearpaw     | 2           | 7.8          | 7,700       | <b>1</b> | <b>7.8</b>  | <b>1,020</b> |
|               | Bearpaw Meadow          | 5.5         | 13.3         | 7,820       |          |             |              |
|               | Junct Lone Pine Creek   | 1.6         | 14.9         | 7,400       |          |             |              |
| <b>24-Jul</b> | Hamilton Lake Outfall   | 1.5         | 16.4         | 8,350       | <b>2</b> | <b>8.6</b>  | <b>650</b>   |
|               | Precipice Lake          | 3.9         | 20.3         | 10,300      |          |             |              |
|               | Kawea Gap               | 0.6         | 20.9         | 10,700      |          |             |              |
| <b>25-Jul</b> | Big Arroyo Junction     | 3.4         | 24.3         | 9,560       | <b>3</b> | <b>7.9</b>  | <b>2,350</b> |
|               | Split to Moraine Lake   | 4.6         | 28.9         | 10,225      |          |             |              |
|               | Rejoin via Moraine      | 3.5         | 32.4         | 9,160       |          |             |              |
|               | Upper Funston Meadow    | 3.8         | 36.2         | 6,730       |          |             |              |
| <b>26-Jul</b> | Kern Hot Spring         | 1.5         | 37.7         | 7,100       | <b>4</b> | <b>13.4</b> | <b>1,035</b> |
|               | Junction Meadow         | 7.8         | 45.5         | 8,080       |          |             |              |
|               | Kern River Junct        | 1.2         | 46.7         | 8,830       |          |             |              |
| <b>27-Jul</b> | John Muir Trail Junct   | 3.1         | 49.8         | 10,405      | <b>5</b> | <b>12.1</b> | <b>3,305</b> |
|               | Junct Trail heads East  | 3.4         | 53.2         | 10,875      |          |             |              |
|               | Crabtree Ranger Station | 0.8         | 54           | 10,640      |          |             |              |
| <b>28-Jul</b> | Guitar Lake             | 2.6         | 56.6         | 11,500      | <b>6</b> | <b>6.8</b>  | <b>1,095</b> |
|               | Trail Crest             | 3           | 59.6         | 13,650      |          |             |              |
|               | Mt Whitney Summit       | 1.9         | 61.5         | 14,495      |          |             |              |
|               | Trail Crest             | 1.9         | 63.4         | 13,650      |          |             |              |
|               | Trail Camp              |             |              | 12,000      |          |             |              |
|               | Outpost Camp            |             |              | 11,200      |          |             |              |
| <b>29-Jul</b> | Whitney Portal          | 8.5         | 71.9         | 8,340       | <b>7</b> | <b>15.3</b> | <b>2,995</b> |



Budd Lake



Temple Crag



Moraine Lake



Darwin Canyon

Iain crossing Wallace Creek and then descending from Mount Whitney



ALPINE MEET - VALNONTEY AOSTA, ITALY 15 - 22 July 2006



Time to relax



Derek Bush on Gran Paradiso