

# Val di Mello 2015

## Expedition Trip Report

Submitted on behalf of  
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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1	Area Information . . . . .	3
1.2	Maps and Guidebooks . . . . .	4
1.3	Video and Photography . . . . .	4
<b>2</b>	<b>Expedition Team</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1	How We Met . . . . .	5
2.2	Dennis Bergmann . . . . .	5
2.3	Jo Robbins . . . . .	5
<b>3</b>	<b>Climbing Routes</b>	<b>6</b>
3.1	Short Multi-Pitch Routes . . . . .	6
3.2	Single Pitch Routes . . . . .	7
3.3	Il Risveglio Di Kundalini <i>6a+/R2/II</i>   <i>E1 5b</i> . . . . .	9
3.4	Luna Nascente <i>6b/R2/3/III</i>   <i>E2 5b</i> . . . . .	9
3.5	Oceano Irrazionale <i>6b/R2/III</i>   <i>E4 5c</i> . . . . .	10
3.6	Quote Rosa <i>6c/RS2/II</i> . . . . .	12
<b>4</b>	<b>Journal Summary</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>14</b>
5.1	Gear . . . . .	14
5.2	Food & Accommodation . . . . .	14
5.3	Budget Breakdown . . . . .	14
<b>6</b>	<b>Trip Comments</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Future Plans</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>18</b>

# 1 Introduction

The overall aim of this expedition was to climb some of the big-wall and multi-pitch climbs in the Val di Mello, Italy. More specifically, the aims and objectives were as follows:

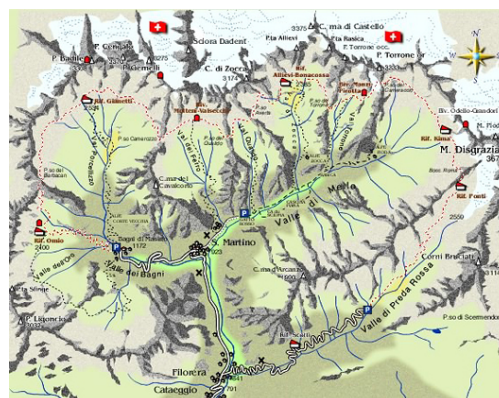
- To produce a video blog which provides insight for other climbers into the area, as well as summarising the climbing experiences whilst on the trip.
- To gain big-wall climbing experience, which can then be taught to younger members of the club on a future trip.
- To inspire other members of the Imperial College Mountaineering Club, in the hope that they will undertake expeditions in the future.

## 1.1 Area Information

The Val Masino is an Alpine region in the province of Sondrio, Lombardi, Northern Italy. it consists of three small valleys: Val di Mello, Valle di Preda Rosa, and Valle dei Bagni.



Province of Sondrio



Map of area

The Val di Mello is often referred to as ‘The Yosemite of Italy’, and looks strikingly similar with its granite walls that tower over the vally from both sides. There is a huge variety of climbing within the Val di Mello alone - with bouldering, single pitch, alpine, and multi-pitch big-walls up to 800m high.

## 1.2 Maps and Guidebooks

The guidebook that we used is the “Val di Mello Rock Climbing Guidebook” by Mario Sertori. This is quite a new guide which came out in July 2014 and, although written completely in Italian, it has clear and detailed diagrams of the topos. There is also a German version available, which my German partner Dennis bought whilst we were out there.

The itinerary was as follows:

29th June: Flight to Munich.

I met Dennis and his girlfriend Nicole at the airport, and we drove down to Italy arriving that evening. Dennis and Nicole’s friend Gottfried joined us the following day. I spent three weeks in the valley climbing predominantly with Dennis. Nicole and Gottfried stayed for two weeks but then had to leave due to work commitments.

19th July: Drive back to Munich

20th July: Flight back to England



Val Masino

## 1.3 Video and Photography

To document the trip, I tried to keep regular video diaries and recorded the climbing, the scenery, and any highs and lows of the trip. It proved quite difficult to achieve a variety of shots as I was usually the one filming. I also found that it was difficult getting good footage whilst also trying to push my limit in climbing.



Dennis and Nicole



Climbing in Val di mello gives stunning views

## 2 Expedition Team

### 2.1 How We Met

Dennis and I met whilst climbing The Nose, El Cap (Yosemite). Due to ill partners and a lack of water, we ended up switching partners, combining supplies, and finishing the route together. We kept in contact and met up to climb the following summer in the Peak District.

### 2.2 Dennis Bergmann



Dennis enjoying topping out on the first day of climbing

Dennis has been climbing for about nine years, and started at the age of 21. He lives in Frankenjura, Germany. This year he started his own business in physiotherapy and personal training, where he supports local climbers in questions about training, how to stay healthy when training, how to get strong after injury, and how to push their limits. Over the last couple of years he has put up trad first ascents on Frankenjura limestone. He sport climbs at up to grade 7b. For the past few years he has travelled to the Alps annually for long multi-pitch routes, mostly involving repeating old classics. His favourite style of climbing is multi-day Alpine or big wall traditional climbing.

The future: Dennis would like to climb more big walls around the world, put up some more first ascents, continue with the training workshops and develop a holistic concept in training. Coming back from Italy he is psyched to do more Alpine-style routes with long walk-ins. But most importantly, he would like to live out his passions and be psyched at what he does.

### 2.3 Jo Robbings

I have been climbing for the last six years and started at the age of 15. I live in Surrey and have just finished an undergraduate physics degree at Imperial College London. I previously took part in the Exploration Board funded the Yosemite 2013 expedition, where I climbed various multi-pitch routes and two big wall climbs (The Nose, El Cap, and South Face of Washington Column). I have been actively involved in the Imperial College Mountaineering Club since joining university, including being treasurer of the club in my second year, and took part in various tours and trips, such as three years of Scottish winter climbing and multi-pitch climbing in the Verdon Gorge (South France).

The future: I also would love to complete more big wall climbs around the world, to explore some of the incredible climbing areas and push my limits. Although I now have graduated, I hope to pass on some of the skills that I have built up whilst in ICMC to less experienced members by continuing to take part in club events and trips.



Enjoying the epic views in Val di Mello



## 3 Climbing Routes

### 3.1 Short Multi-Pitch Routes

#### **Cunicolo Acuto 5b/R2/I**

Based at Il Sarcofago, this was the first route we climbed in the valley, consisting of three pitches graded 5a, b and c. It was a fun and gentle introduction to the climbing style, involving an epic chimney squeeze in the second pitch.

#### **L'alba Del Nirvana 5c/R2+/I**

Also at Il Sarcofago, this was quite an easy 5-pitch route that I climbed with Dennis, with Nicole and Gottfried a couple pitches below. Unfortunately I jarred my shoulder by slipping on the the first pitch (a runout slab that I did not want to slide back down), so I mostly seconded the rest of the route and had to have a couple rest days to recover. All in all a great route with some fun crack climbing.



Dennis enjoying the squeeze chimney on Cunicolo Acuto



Climbing with Gottfried in Brontosauro. His near-perfect slab climbing skills speak of many years of experience



Gottfried and Nicole climbing on Nirvana below us

#### **Un Pipistrello Al Sole Do-Re-Mi-Fa 6b/6b+/S1+/II**

This was a fantastic four-pitch bolted slab climb in Brontosauro that I climbed with Gottfried. The first pitch had the option of a very run-out 5+ or a well bolted 6b/6b+, so I opted for the well bolted one. Really cool, quite hard with lots of trusting the feet. Next was a 6a, 3a and

6a+. All amazing, a really fun climb! The rock was unbearably hot by the time we finished, so we abseiled off and returned to camp via a quick dip in the lake.

## 3.2 Single Pitch Routes

### Scappellin Scappelletta 6c+/S1+/I

Having confused routes and not checked the guidebook properly, I got on this route thinking that it was a 6b. After reaching the crux at about 2/3 the way up I concluded that I was either really weak or it was graded wrong; it involved lots of sharp crimps and powerful moves. We checked the guide book later, turns out it was 6c+ so I felt a little less weak about falling off. Went back to try it again a couple days later - felt much stronger on it and dialled the crux moves, but it was so sharp that after one attempt my skin was knackered. The sun soon began to overheat the rock so we head to the lake for a swim, and then back to camp for an afternoon siesta. I did not have another chance to try this route, but I would like to get back on it when I can next go back!

### Minchia Biglia El Re De Picche 6c / S1 / I

This was a short overhanging sport route that we tried on the first day when getting used to the rock. It was quite pumpy and cruxy - I fell off pulling over the roof. We did not go back to do it again, though I would have liked to try the second pitch of runout slab!

### Trapezio D'argento

I spent a day at this crag with a chap from the Glasgow student group called Jon. All the routes here are fantastic quality sparsly bolted slab climbs.

- Scimmiagallina 6a/b/S2/I
- Via Sconosciuta 6a/b/S2/I
- Idea Del Cavolo 6a+/S2+/I

This was supposed to be two pitches of about 6a climbing. We did not, however, read the part in the guidebook about requiring some small cams. On the second pitch the bolt line veers very suddenly off to the right, which I followed until they suddenly run out. Unable to easily back off, I continued up what seemed like the easiest route up hoping another bolt would appear. No other bolts did appear, so after slinging a very loose small tree I climbed higher, traversed very carefully across some scary moss, and eventually managed to escape to a ledge. This was probably one of the scariest climbs I have done in a while, simply because of the unpredictability of the mossy unclimbed rock and the huge fall factor and pendulum I would have encountered had I slipped off!



Enjoying slabs at Trapezio D'argento

## Sasso Remenno

This was a fantastic sports crag just down the road from the valley. It has a great range of grades, from 4s all the way up to ungraded projects that have the quickdraw left in.

- Fantagenitori *6a 20m*
- Via Delle Dire Gobbe *6a/6b+*  
This was actually two pitches of 25m and 15m, but we combined them to make one long sport route of 40m.
- Senza Nome *6a*
- Senza Nome *6a+*
- Drugster *7a 30m*  
On what was supposed to be a rest day after climbing Oceana, I ended up going with some of the Glasgow students to try this route. It was described as being crimpy and technical, which sounded amazing, so I went along to give it a go. Ewan (from the Glasgow group) went up first using a clipstick to put up the rope. I then gave it a go on top rope and found some funky beta to get past the crux. I decided to next give it a go on lead and surprised myself by pulling through both cruxes and sending the route; my first 7a outdoors! Spent the rest of the day buzzing and feeling psyched for the next climb.
- Psychokiller *7b*  
I tried this route on one of the last days of the trip, so I was feeling pretty wrecked. It was amazing and very hard. There were lots of big moves between good holds, but I had to crimp a lot of intermediates. Used up a lot of my skin! The line followed a big imposing 30m arête, and there was one run out move on the arête that I fell off several times. I slammed into the corner pretty hard and was quite shaken up, managed to slice both of my legs. Tried it again but didn't have the mental strength after the previous fall, so came down and sent Ewan up it. He managed to stick the runout move and got to the top, so I tried again on top rope and managed to pull through the crux section I had previously fallen off. The thunderstorm started moving in so we retreated to the bus and then went for pizza - this is a route I will have to get back on whenever I next am in the valley!



Having fun trying Psychokiller



Atmospheric scenery by Psychokiller



### 3.3 Il Risveglio Di Kundalini *6a+/R2/II | E1 5b*



Series of amazing crack climbs up Kundalini

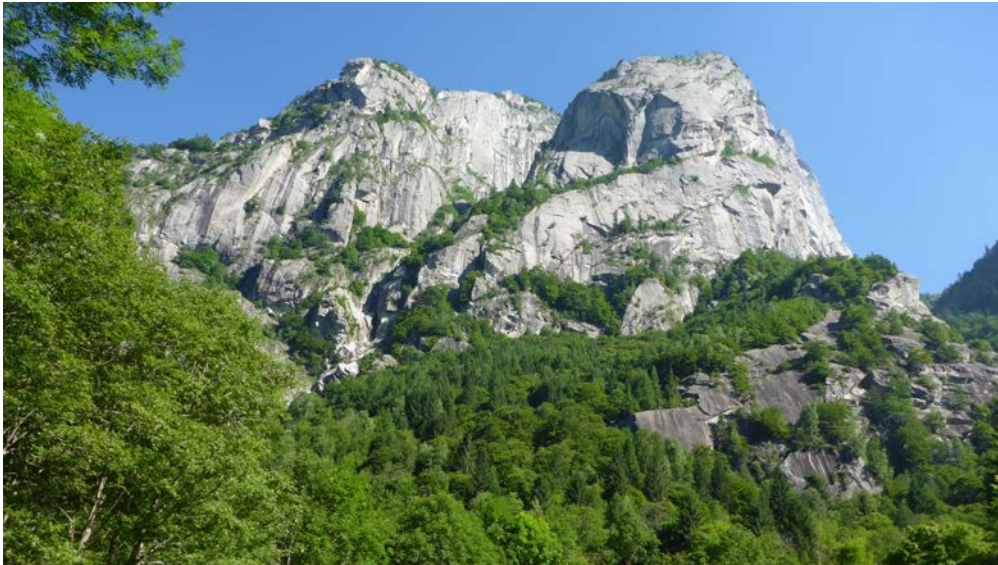
After a reasonably early start we were walking to the crag by 6am. The base of the route was easy to find and we were on the wall 45 minutes later. Kundalini is supposed to be 10 pitches, but because of rope drag we did it in 12. One of the best routes that I've climbed! It was in full sunlight though, so very hot! My feet were burning by about halfway up, especially on the slab pitches. But the route has some fantastic varied pitches, including epic crack climbs, a chimney, and a funky slab. We both got back down feeling knackered after being on the wall till about 4pm and not eating much. We went straight to the lake and enjoyed an evening swim, and then head to the nearby bar for dinner.

### 3.4 Luna Nascente *6b/R2/3/III | E2 5b*

Got up at 3.45. The walk in was a pretty gruelling uphill slog with some unobvious paths. We got to the base at about 6am. Dennis lead the bouldery first pitch and then I lead up the thin fingercrack second pitch, which was actually pretty pumpy with polished feet - it spat me off a couple of times before I pulled through. The rest of the route was a fantastic series of crack climbs. I led the runout slab traverse and final runout slab, both amazing fun and very runout. On the traverse I managed to go too far by misjudging how much rope I had used, which resulted in downclimbing a sketchy rock-over on 30m runout slab. But we both pulled over the top feeling tired but pretty good. The walk down, however, was grim. I had destroyed my knees by the time I reached camp. All in all a fantastic route with amazing crack climbing.



### 3.5 Oceano Irrazionale *6b/R2/III* | *E4 5c*



View of Oceana from the campsite

Oceana Irrazionale is one of those iconic routes of the valley that just begs to be climb. Visible from the campsite, the route follows a series of crack climbs that lead up to the crux roof pitch, and then onto the slabs above to finish. The approach in itself is not completely trivial, taking a windy steep trail that, after heavy rainfall, becomes a torrential waterfall. There are several fixed ropes of dubious condition to help on the steeper sections. The trail eventually leads up to a slanted ledge that marks the start of all of the routes. Along this ledge is a cave that seems almost too well designed for bivvying in, with several flat platforms to sleep on and a rope strung up to clip gear/bags to.



Bivvy cave by Oceana

To avoid doing the approach in the dark, we walked up during the evening light and stayed in the bivvy cave located directly at the base of the routes. The walk in proved to be a fun adventure, and about two hours later we safely arrived at the cave feeling psyched for the next day. We sat and admired the amazing view from a slabby outcrop and then head to bed. The cave was fantastic (so long as you don't mind waking up to spiders walking across your face!).

We woke up at 4.30, slapped on some suncream and walked five minutes across to the base of the route. We had agreed that Dennis could lead the crux pitch, which meant me starting assuming we alternated leads. The first pitch was this amazing 5a chimney. Because of the windy nature of the pitch I ran it out to the belay - great fun and easy climbing. Pitch two was a fantastic technical slab that took us across to the start of the crack climbs. I lead a couple of spicy cracks that were quite wide and difficult to protect. Because of rope drag we ended up not following the guidebook suggestions, so Dennis lead half the 6a+ pitch and I continued and combined with the crux 6b roof. The 6a+ was a super pumpy slopery crack traverse with not much gear, so I



climbed it by jamming one knee inside to prevent falling. The 6b was amazing! Not great gear so I made a conscious effort to not fall. Step out of the offwidth and up, bridge whilst pulling over the roof with lots of exposure and some positive crimps. This pulls out onto a great belay ledge with a big tree.



Dennis pulling over the crux roof pitch

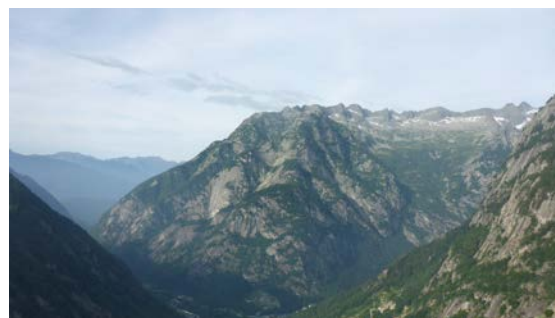


Enjoying the scrambly approach to Oceana



Some of the fantastic crack pitches

The rest of the route was supposed to be really easy runout slabs. Most were fairly easy with 50-55m runouts, except I went off-route without the right gear and ended up on a slightly scary very runout offwidth, which I climbed by jamming one knee inside to avoid falling. I thankfully made it to the top without any falls feeling happy to be in one piece. After much pulling through grass and spikey plants we eventually reached the top. A short celebration of fruit buns and water, then we began the 16 abseils to get back down. We had a few sketchy abseil anchors consisting of one bolt, but eventually reached the valley floor. Another 30-40 minutes of walking and we were back at camp feeling exhausted but happy with the onsight achievement. I had got super sunburnt so wandered about in pain until a kind Glasgow student took pity and lent me some Aloe Vera gel.



View from the the climb

### 3.6 Quote Rosa 6c/RS2/II



The surroundings were beautifully peaceful at the base of Quote Rosa

Quote Rosa, a fairly recent route established in 2012, is at the far end of the Monte Qualido peak. Nearly all of the routes up Qualido are round 500-900m in length, with a combination of hard trad/sport and aid climbing. The routes are generally quite committing and parts of the wall have, over the past 15 years, considerably changed due rock fall. Quote Rosa is the easiest and least committing routes up the Qualido face, described as the only ‘via plaisir’ (i.e. fun and non-committing) on the wall.

Unperturbed by the images of rock fall in the guide book we set off for Quote Rosa. Our plan had been to rest in the day and walk up during the evening, but I had got sidetracked with Drugster (the 7a sport route) and not really rested at all. I felt absolutely destroyed from Oceana and the sport climbing send, but having agreed to climb Monte Qualido I had arrived back at camp, had a rushed dinner of bread and chocolate spread and was soon walking up to the route with Dennis. The approach was steep and long; we lost the path a fair few times. The plan was to bivvy in a massive climbers’ cave known as Hotel Qualido, but we couldn’t find it! After some searching with headtorches Dennis found another cave with some cool walls built up by the entrance, so we slept there.

We woke up at 4.50. After a slow start, we were walking by about 6 AM. The walk up to Quote Rosa wasn’t trivial by any means. There was no path so we followed the Rocky River for some of the way, then lumpy unpredictable grass and some wet slabs. About one hour later we arrived at the base of the route. The line was very indistinct, and followed several ledges of vegetation. Although the guidebook stated that every belay was bolted, we didn’t see a single bolt. The rock also looked super chossy. After some consideration we agreed that neither of us was psyched to climb it. Run out chos? No thanks. Both exhausted, we fell asleep at the base of the route for about two hours in the sun. We then stumble across to some other slabs that looked fun but they were very sparsely bolted and I was completely knackered and not psyched for hard runouts. We agreed to walk back down. It was slow and painful, but two hours later we were back by the lake.



The chossy vegetated route

## 4 Journal Summary

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	Summary
Day 1	Flight to Munich, followed by drive down to Val di Mello
Day 2	Climbed at Sarcofago to get used to the rock. Did multipitch route Cunicolo Acuto and the first pitch of a bolted route Minchia Biglia El Re De Picche.
Day 3	Climbed multipitch route Il Risveglio di Kundalini
Day 4	Rest day
Day 5	Climbed Un Pipistrelle Al Sole Do-Re-Mi-Fa. Thunderstorm later in the day prevented any more climbing.
Day 6	Single pitch sport climbing at Sarcofago on the very sharp Scappellin Scappelletta. Lost a lot of skin!
Day 7	Very sore skin - forced rest day. A group of students from Glasgow University Mountaineering arrived in the evening, so I spent some time chatting with them.
Day 8	Worked Scappellin Scappelletta at Sarcofago and dialled the crux moves, but the heat stopped further attempts. Climbed Nirvana later in the afternoon. Jarred shoulder and spent evening trying to rest and swim.
Day 9	Rest day for tweaky shoulder.
Day 10	Second rest day for shoulder, as it was still quite painful.
Day 11	Climbed Luna Nanscente.
Day 12	Slab climbing at Trapezio D'argento in the morning, sport climbing at Sasse Remenno in the evening .
Day 13	Sport climbing at Sasso Remeno
Day 14	Rest day. Walked up to the base of Oceana Irrazionale to bivvy in the cave.
Day 15	Climbed Oceana.
Day 16	Sport climbing at Sasso Remeno - redpointed 7a Drugster. Walked up to Monte Qualido in the evening
Day 17	Checked out Qualido, uninspired so walked back to camp. Day spent swimming and slacklining.
Day 18	Rest day.
Day 19	Worked 7a+/7b at Sasso Remenno until a thunderstorm stopped us climbing. Bailed and went to get pizza with the Glasgow group before they head back to Scotland.
Day 20	Felt tired and nauseous, so rested most of the day. Evening at sassa remeno
Day 21	Packed up tent, had some lunch in San Martino, and began drive to Munich. Stopped in Germany and bivvied in a quite spot off of the main road
Day 22	Arrived at airport, bid fairwell to Dennis. Day spent chatting to people in the airport cafe before flying home.



## 5 Budget

### 5.1 Gear

As we both already had our own gear, there was minimal equipment expenditure for the trip. Some of the gear used was kindly lent to us by the the Mountaineering Club and club member James Lawson - specifically the portaledge, some big sized cams, and the aid climbing hooks.

### 5.2 Food & Accommodation

We stayed in campsite "Camping Ground Jack", which is at the heart of the Val di Mello valley and within walking distance of all of the climbing areas. The cost per night was quoted to be £240, but as we stayed there for the full three weeks the total cost of camping was kindly significantly discounted to £150 (and they gave us a free bottle of wine!).

### 5.3 Budget Breakdown

Total cost per person were as follows:

Flights & bag wrapping: £128.11

Fuel & Vignette: £134

Camping: £150

Food: £200

Insurance: £99.52

This totals £711.62.



Arrived back safely in the UK

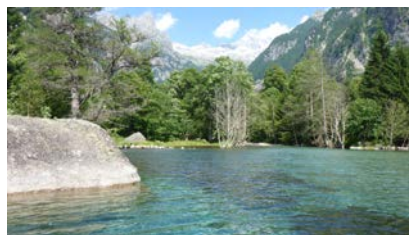
## 6 Trip Comments

During the flight home I compiled a list of suggestions for how the trip could have run smoother.

- More definite wish list to avoid miscommunication with partner. Due to a bit of misunderstanding on what we were both psyched for, we ended up making a few compromises on some of the routes we would have liked to climb. Dennis was keen to do some of the longer Alpine style routes, but as I have a history of knee issues I could not manage the long walk ins. I was quite keen to try some of the hard aid climbs that were in the valley, but this was not something Dennis was so keen for. We were both eager to do the classic long multi pitches so mostly focussed on those.
- Drive, don't fly. This would not put a limit on the amount of gear required, and would also be quite affordable if split with several others.
- Three weeks was a good length for building a respectable tick list. I think four or five weeks would be quite an awkward length, as after three weeks we both felt in need of a rest for body and mind. A longer trip would ideally be six to eight weeks to allow for rest time between chunks of climbing.
- More training in antagonistic muscles to avoid injury, particularly for the walk ins. Although I felt fairly prepared for the climbing, I had not done much preparation for the long walk ins and subsequently struggled more with those than I perhaps should have.



Communal area at camp



Crystal clear lake

Additionally to the general trip comments, I came up with some area-specific comments:

- For big walling, you need to go at a different time of year. Perhaps Autumn or Spring would be good, but definitely not summer. Due to regular thunderstorms and extreme heat, the conditions were non-ideal for long committing routes. Other locations are definitely much better for multi-day routes.
- The big wall climbing that was saw was not actually particularly inspiring. All of the long multi pitch routes that I wanted to climb we did within a day. The longer routes are mostly based on the Monte Qualido face, which is very choosy and in direct sunlight.
- The best climbs were all day multi pitches. The valley is particularly great for slab and crack climbing.
- Unless you really like runouts, ignore the guidebook gear suggestions and take two sets of cams!

- The campsite Camping Jack has an brilliant location, within walking distance of all of the crags, and is run by a very friendly Italian coffee.
- I did not try any bouldering as it was the wrong time of year, but it looked absolutely amazing.
- The closest shops are in San Martino, a 25 minute walk from the campsite. There are some small food shops, a climbing shop (with super cheap shoes!) and a few cafes with free wifi.
- The campsite can charge phones at the reception if you give them your charger and an adapter
- The Gatto Rosa restaurant is a five minute walk from the campsite and is a great place to go after a long days' climb!
- The lake is a ten minute walk up the path from the campsite and provides a perfect swimspot. The water is crystal clear and perfectly drinkable. Though if you want peace and quite try avoid going at weekends.
- If going in the summer, get up super early to try avoid the midday heat. It soon becomes unbearably hot and your feet will be on fire!

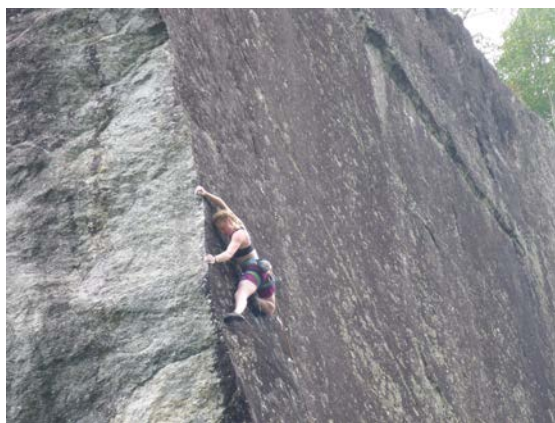


Seriously stunning views from the routes

## 7 Future Plans

Although I have now finished my degree at imperial, I have no intention of leaving the mountaineering club. The amount of experience and fun I have had over the last three years has been largely due to the efforts and support provided by both ICMC and the exploration board, and I would love to pass on this experience to younger members in the club.

I now live and work in Surrey, but regularly drive into London to climb at the Westway climbing centre, and so intend to stay an active member of ICMC as much as I can, including taking part in weekend trips and tours. I would also love to run one last expedition next summer, whereby I can pass on the big-walling skills I have gained over the last few years to other members of the club.



Fighting with the arête

This trip inspired me a lot to push myself more on long multi pitch trad routes. I feel that it significantly improved my mindset, and I left feeling more confident with runouts and pushing myself on trad climbs. I did not have a chance to do any more aid climbing, but that is something that I intend to do more of this year in the hope of being able to do some harder big-wall ascents in the future.

I would particularly like to continue encouraging the female community within ICMC, which has been steadily growing over the past couple of years. I am excited to see how the club develops over the next year with our first female president, Cat, who is already doing a fantastic job of running the club. Although it will be hard for me to be involved with the club during the Wednesday afternoon climbing sessions, I hope to help with running technique sessions and get involved with the social meet ups that run during evenings. Furthermore, if I am able to run a big wall expedition next year, I hope to take several other girls to encourage them to step out of their comfort zone and ultimately learn a fantastic range of skills that unlocks a great range of future climbing potential!



Doing some fun antagonistic training during a rest day



## 8 Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Imperial Exploration Board for making this trip possible. I would particularly like to thank Dr. Lorraine Craig and Dr. Phil Power for their ongoing support and advice.

I would also like to thank the Imperial College Mountaineering Club, and especially member James Lawson, for the kind lending of equipment that was crucial to the trip.

I would like to thank my main climbing partner, Dennis Bergmann, who provided constant high levels of psyche and was good fun to climb with.

I would also like to thank Stefano De Boni, who kindly helped translate portions of the Italian guidebook.

Finally I would like to thank the Glasgow University Mountaineering Club for being extremely welcoming and inclusive during the two weeks that they were also at the campsite. Not only did I meet a fantastic group of people, but also climbing partners that I hope to meet up with again when I can visit Scotland next!



Some of the Glasgow University Mountaineering Club