THE GWYDYR MOUNTAIN CLUB NEWSLETTER – EXTRA!

December 2026: Editor Dave Gray



Introduction

Welcome to the December Newsletter! A Merry Christmas to all our readers!

This is an Extra! edition with an article from Steve Swygart on climbing adventures around Manikia in Greece – so some sunny photos for gloomy UK December days! Thanks to Steve, and to Helen Grant, Nicky, Mike Dagley, Ray, Tom Humphreys, and as ever to Brenda for their help with this edition. Please let me have material for the next edition, the final deadline for that is **December 23rd.**

Looking Ahead

Here are the upcoming meets venues for December and January, details are on the Club Website. The meets list is constantly being updated, please **check it out regularly** on the Website. Meets added to the programme since the last edition are in bold as a reminder **in case you've missed them…**.

1 December	Tuesday Evening at Gallaghers – 'Exotica' talk by Steve Swygart
15 December	**Tuesday Evening at Gallaghers – Christmas Pizza Evening**
17 December	Annual Climbing Competition at the Boardroom
18 December	**Sunday Walk – Christmas Wirral Strollette: 'Tour du Neston'**
24 December – 3 Jan.	Hut Weekend (Xmas and New Year)
15-17 January	Hut Weekend
22-24 January	Hut Weekend – Burns Night

Focus on Venues



Starting off the month is Steve Swygart's **'Exotica' talk and slideshow at Gallaghers**. Here's one of Steve's photos – a well-fed sun-bathed Thai sea stack, not one of your skinny freezing UK jobbies!

Steve's talk is in two halves with a beer break and takes us over a span of contrasting climbing locations. Part one is hot and humid climbing on limestone in Thailand; Part two takes us North across Scandinavia, dropping in at the Troll Wall, and finishing on the stunning Lofoten Islands above the Arctic circle.

Lofoten takes me back to my student days when slideshows were one-up from magic lanterns, beer was 20p a pint, and at age 18 I'd never left the British Isles. Some of my college friends had been to the Lofotens and their pictures inspired me to think about one day going abroad to explore bigger hills.

Also on **Tuesday at Gallaghers** is the **Christmas Pizza Evening** – watch out for Maragaret taking your orders!

Turning now the (pre) **Christmas Sunday Strollette, the Tour du Neston**. This give us an opportunity to break away from Christmas preparations and shopping and get out into the open air.



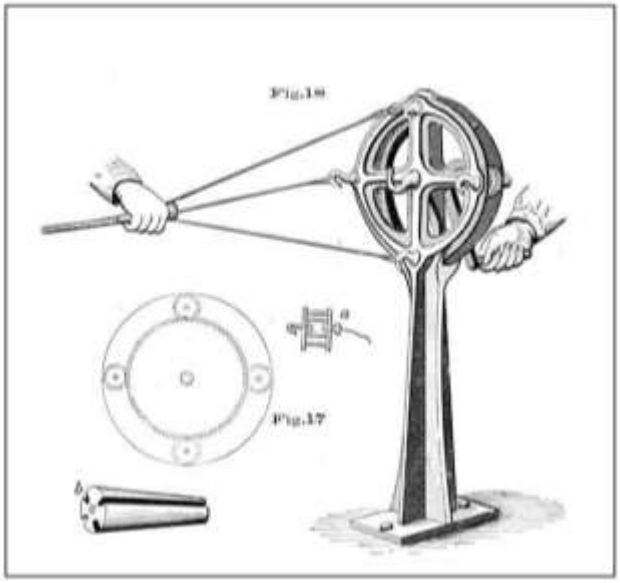
Just over the main road from the car park is a minor road called The Ropewalk. What is or was a ropewalk?

Put simply it's a facility for making rope – here's a picture of one in action in Edam in Holland around the turn of the 20th century (*artist Max Liebermann, credit Wikipedia*). A canalside path forms the walk.

As you can see the walk is long and narrow, some were in the open air, others were covered.

In principle and to this day rope making involves the twisting together of fibres. Before modern fibres were available, these would be short natural fibres, typically hemp, that were laid side by side in a long lines along the length of the walk, the individual sections of fibre strands having a 'staggered start', relative to each other.

One end of the set of fibres would be bunched together and firmly secured together but left free to move as a body. Each strand to be twisted was threaded through a conical plug tool or 'donkey', which was moved, or moved under its own momentum as the twist developed. See the diagram right, from 'Textbook of Seamanship' (New York, 1891). The donkey guided the twisting process.



At the other end was a metal or wooden wheel to which the individual fibre ends could be tied and this was turned to twist the

strands together and build up the rope. As the strand were twisted the rope shortened and moved towards the fixed twisting machine.

One you'd made a small diameter rope, it could be twisted together with others to build a bigger rope and so on! As you can see from the Edam painting, once this buildup started you needed to rest the constituent ropes above the ground to take the weight, for example using trestles. In Chatham Dockyard in 1836, before steam power was used to do the twisting, it took 200 men to form a massive rope that was 20 inches in circumference.

HMS Victory needed 31 miles of rope and in overall terms across Europe naval ropes were broadly around the 1,000 feet/300m length, and the length of the walks for such ropes would be longer as the ropes shortened as they were twisted. The Parkgate one is around half a kilometre long, producing finished ropes of about 350m in length. It operated from some time prior to 1729 to some time after 1814. (Source https://nestonpast.uk/learning-the-ropes-parkgate-rope-making-and-the-ropewalk/ *article credit Anthony Annakin-Smith*).



Chatham Dockyard ropeworks pictured left (*credit Wikipedia*) still operates commercially today making traditional ropes and ones from modern fibres..

Naturally given the massive demand for rope, ropewalks could be found in many port cities. Liverpool has Cable Street, and the Ropewalks quarter.

In Hamburg, the famous Reeperbahn ('ropetrack') is on the old ropewalks. A long way from sedate Parkgate!

Finally, at the **Hut** Tom Humphreys has been working hard with the plumbers to make a number of improvements. To summarise:

- Gas supply is now coming from the bulk storage tank, so no more orange bottles.
- The Ladies and Gents Loos are now swapped back to the original design with two w/cs each – turn left for the ladies, and right for the gents. All the taps are now modern ceramic ¼ turn models.
- In the kitchen the tap heads have been changed to stop dripping (please do not overtighten), and work is in progress on the sink units.

Editor's Note

You will see that I have now put a 'hard page break' between this section and the next; I will continue to do so in future editions. Doing so makes the timely editing and layout of the material much easier. **So please do scroll down to the next page for highlights of recent meets!**

Grand Days Out (and In) – Recent Meets Highlights

Starting with an iconic meet, Nicky writes ‘Big thanks to Kev and Vanda for organising the **Bonfire Weekend** - fabulous walks, weather, bonfires, fireworks, swimming, food and fun!’

Here are some of Nicky’s photos of the walks…this is the team going across the northern part of the Glyders range on an ascent of Elidir Fawr…



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..and one of Craig Cwrwgl and Elidir Fawr across Marchlyn Mawr





A day closer to the Hut, above in the hills north of the Llugwy, gave these views over to Moel Siabod…

…and west towards Gallt yr Ogof



Finally here are a couple of shots from Helen Grant of the bonfire itself:





A meet back in October which was just too late to make the last edition was Bill's **Saturday walk** along the Shropshire Union Canal from **Ellesmere Port to Chester**. We had fine weather for this pleasant and varied walk, if a bit windy. And had some good laughs, even at Merseyrail's troubles in getting us back to the starting point! Here a couple of my photos of the day – the Boat Museum at Ellesmere Port and a tranquil canal scene.





The 'ad hoc mountain days' feature in the GMC WhatsApp group has been very successful in turning the base metal of solo days out into the gold of good trips with Club friends.

First up is Mike Dagley's ad hoc trip over Pen y Cloddiau and Moel Arthur by the western balcony path and the ridge. Mike writes 'Thanks everyone, great to have good company on a lovely outing in nifty conditions, and surprisingly mild. No need for a duvet! Mike's photos overleaf show the group tackling hillfort ramparts and the vivid colours of the larch plantation below Pen y Cloddiau.







Another ad hoc walk further afield was described by Helen Grant - ‘Thanks Gill for organising an enjoyable hike today led by Dom onto the Glyders via Bristly screes and descent down the Devils Kitchen. An atmospheric start but eventually the sun came out’. Dom is Gill’s son, and Leigh’s husband, who is doing his ML training.

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Helen captures the atmospheric start above, and Ray took these vivid photos of Y Garn and Llyn Ogwen, and of Cwm Idwal in sunshine





After only some 298 million years the limestone crag of **Coed y Garreg** has coyly stepped into the GMC limelight…



Steve Swygart posted ‘New crags are always of interest, even if they are small. Apparently, recent logging had revealed one near the very unlikely place of **Trelogan** of all places, which someone had bolted up during the hot spell in August this year, and Paul Ross had a copy of the new topo for it. En route through a field of turnips on Halloween, one could be forgiven for thinking that this was some kind of hoax, but persistence paid off and the forecast little sun trap was located.’



He goes on to stress that extra caution and reserves of strength are needed on the three hardest-graded routes, however ‘…the other five we did were probably at the right grade. I suppose it’s a reasonable enough winter venue for a sunny day, should you be so inclined. Thanks to those that turned out for a chance to do some extremely recently put up new routes’.

Members interested in the crag should read Steve’s full post thread on our Facebook page before tackling it.

The name of the crag is as given on the topo Steve posted. Apparently Mike Doyle intends to include this crag in a possible new edition of his book ‘A55 Sports Climbs’. The routes pictured are Centurion (6a) on the left, and The Arete (6a) on the right,

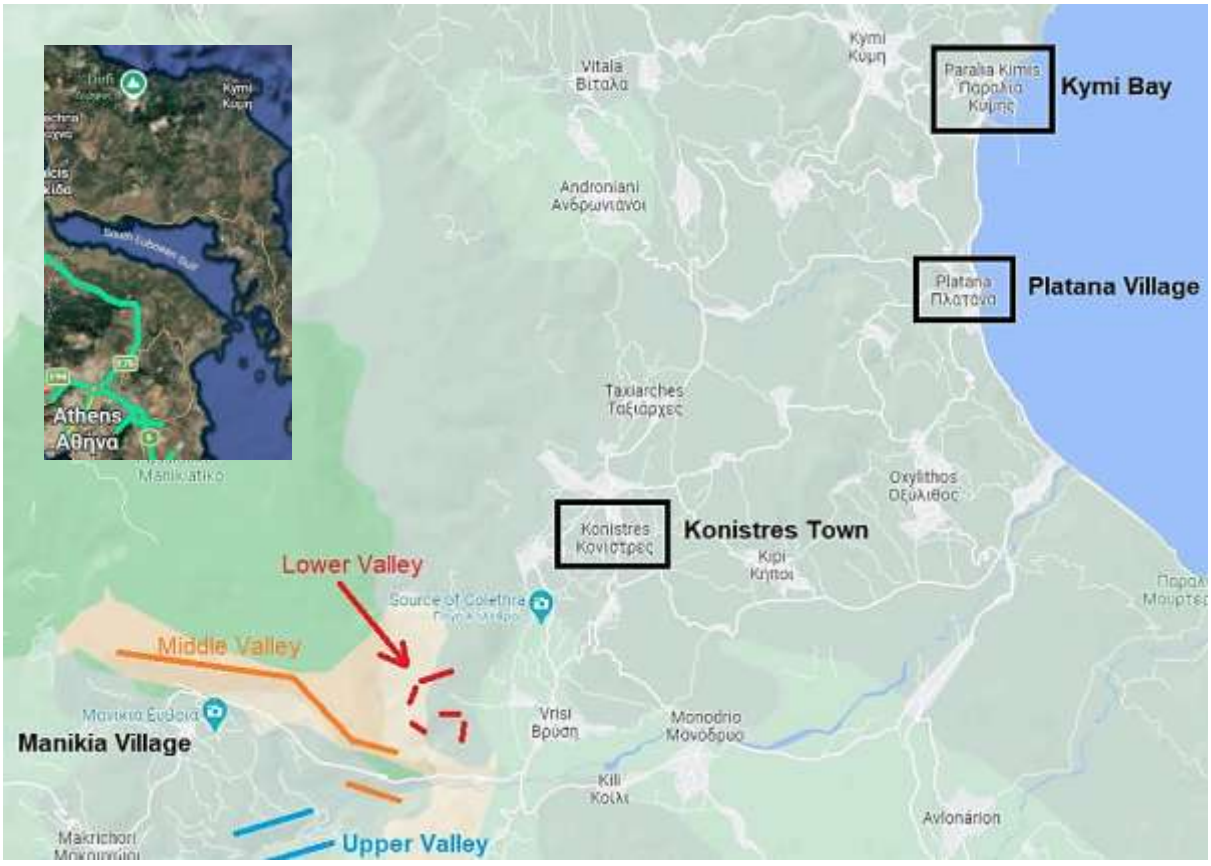
EXTRA!

Manikia – the New Mecca of Sport Climbing…by Steve Swygart

So In terms of Greek sport climbing (not including Kalymnos), we've spent many months over the last eight years at many different locations in the Peloponnese. Most of the crags we've visited we've loved, but there have been a few that we haven't got on with; that's just part and parcel of exploration – see my previous article on this topic. Having seemingly exhausted the Bumper Book of Greek Fun's suggestions for the region (Aris' Greek sport guide, now out of print and you'd pay upwards of £90 to get a copy on e-Bay, we were told), it was now time to explore other areas.

Our Austrian friend Hans made a visit to Manikia last October (2025), sent us some pictures and videos, and after doing a bit of research we made this our target for the late season sun rock slot for 2026. This idea was put on the back burner as the club's proposed Costa Blanca trip seemed to be gathering pace and although we'd been there upwards of 12 times since the late 80's, it seemed to be ideal for us with 3 weeks planned and some new crags for us to visit, having got the new guidebook as a Christmas present a few years back. But for whatever reason, there was not the requisite drive and interest and so Plan A was reverted to.

Manikia



A 2.5-hour drive north of Athens on the north-east of the island of Evia (aka Euboea) revealed a landscape of limestone cliffs towering over olive groves, dotted with small sleepy villages. One settlement in particular, the "rustic" village of Manikia, might just have established itself as a new international sport climbing destination. Greeks have climbed a bit of trad here since the

early 90's, with sport routes starting to get established in the mid 2000's. Since 2019, the local authorities have been following the Kalymnos/Leonidio model of climbing tourism by getting some foreign know-how and muscle in to develop the valley, although given the actual amount of rock available, this looks like a task that will never get completed!

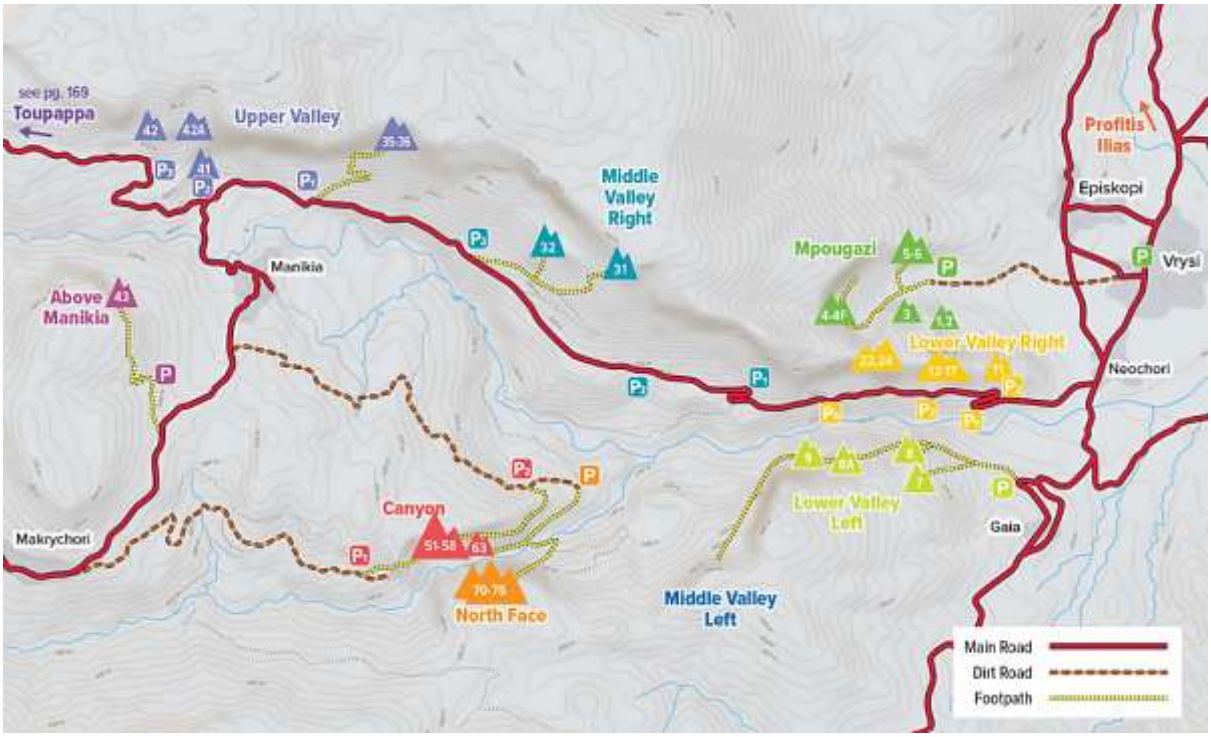
Planning

Couldn't have been simpler. There is a website that they've put together [Manikia Project – Climbing-Trekking-Cycling](), which details accommodation, things to do (still to be populated, however) and gives general advice. As usual, the climbing guidebook and Google Maps are your friends, as is Booking.com etc, which is our tried and tested modus operandi. We chose to stay just outside Monodrio, a pleasant village which was just seven minutes' drive from the Lower and Middle Valley crags, where most of the easier climbing was situated. There's absolutely stacks of climbing further up the valley in the 7's and 8's that just wasn't relevant, like a lot of newly developed areas these days.

The guidebook is split into colour coded sections by valley area as shown below, with QR codes for parking areas that actually worked. There's an overall photo map of each area of crags, and each crag has a number in the book, which is replicated on wooden signage on the ground when arriving at each crag, so all quite thoughtfully done.

We had the first edition of the guidebook and most other climbers we came across (mainly French and German) had the latest one. There were only a couple of additional bits that had been developed in the easier grades when we saw people on "undeveloped sections".

The Climbing



There are some major crags here that have had quite a lot of multi-pitch routes developed. There are two major problems with these routes, however…

1. You'll need 2x50m ropes to abseil off, as the vast majority (i.e. 99% of them) don't have ways down on foot. Most modern sport climbers are bringing 80m ropes to do the longer single pitch routes that have been developed all over Europe and won't have space in their bags for two shorter singles to ab off with. With a bit more thought and cash (for extra bolts), if they'd have been equipped with 40m abseils, the routes would clearly get far more traffic.

2. They are all quite hard and even for the easiest route you'd have to climb 6b. So, both of these factors (especially the first) pretty much rules this option out.

For mere mortals climbing in the 5a-6c grade range, crags at Mpougazi, Lower Valley Left and Right, Above Manikia (not particularly inspiring), and Canyon crag #63 (the curiously named Durex……), are all you can sensibly go at (see plan above). If you are only climbing in the 5's, there's not too much and you might get a week out of it if you don't go too mad. You'll probably need to be leading at least 6a (if not 6a+) to get the most from a visit.

The guidebook (like they all seem to do these days) doesn't give star ratings for routes, but you can get a reasonable idea of quality from checking out The Crag. The problem here was that quite a lot of routes hadn't had many ascents (if at all) from users of this resource.

As you might expect from a relatively remote area in Greece these days, bolting quality is pretty much on point. However, there was the odd dodgily placed one with dinner plating behind it on occasion. Clip it and climb on if you dare!

Across the piece, grading was fairly accurate and I only recall coming across one massive discrepancy that would put you off.

This was our first climbing trip after the back fracture that Helen sustained in Kalymnos in May, and apart from a few tentative trips to the wall, she hadn't climbed at all since that time. This was always going to be a bit experimental and so we were prepared maybe not to climb, or not climb so much, or perhaps find that Helen would be OK just belaying. In the end it all went very well, but to maximise chances of continued success we decided against venues with a relatively long walk-in (>20 minutes).

Crags and Recommended Routes…

Mpougazi



This is an enormous side valley to the right of the gorge leading up to Manikia village and is extremely impressive (see below). Development has only touched the lower crags nearest to the car park field and the bowl at the back only contains three easier 200m multipitch routes currently; clearly scope for many more. Of the offerings here, we visited Oi Portes tou Kastrou (The Gates of the Castle) and Bain de Boue, both of which had been recently developed by French climbers (*naturellement*). These get the sun early doors (if you'll pardon the pun) and it goes off after lunch. The other crags had either shorter routes (if it's much less than 20m, I'm never that bothered) or ones that were too hard (i.e. starts mainly in the 7's).

Oi Portes tou Kastrou

Vrisi 6a+*** Episkopi 6a+** Agios Vlasis 5b* Konistres 5c***

Most routes here have lovely waterworn gouttes d'eau starts, leading to super sharp stuff to finish. Some newer routes had been added to the area of rock on the right, and some easier, longer routes had been added to the slabbier area of rock that you come to after steeply ascending the approach path. All very aesthetic and right up our street.



Episkopi 6a+** - about to get on some super-sharp holds through the bulge

Bain de Boue

(Left) Marzo 6a+** Avdelou 6a+** Melting Bolt 6b*** C'est Le Moyen Age 5c+***

Greek Contact 6a*** Rockway 6a+**

(Right) Barba 5c* Tsapa 5c* (both very "British"!!)

A fabulous little crag with routes up to 6c+. The left side is a bit like climbing in Provence or the Ardeche (or even High Tor!), with pockets/jugs that only come to light at close quarters, so you have to be fairly committed to moving up and having faith that there will be a hold at the grade. C'est Le Moyen Age has to be one of the finest routes anywhere. Classic hidden water pockets and jugs lead to a small roof with a continuation of the same. Some older Austrian climbers were asking for good 5c's/6a's to do, so I pointed them at this. Big smiles all round!



C'est Le Moyen Age 5c+*** - beautiful climbing in a great situation

Main Valley - Lower Valley Left Side

Trexe Grigora – a very nice session can be had here in the morning sun facing east, then when it gets a bit too hot at lunchtime, the sun moves around and it's fully shaded to complete your crag ticking session. Five routes here of very good quality (all ** & 20m+) in a lovely position overlooking the Provence-like patchwork of olive groves from 5b+ to 6a.

Further along the path up the gorge and similarly east-facing, there's Megalo Schtroumpf. Nine routes from 4a to 6a+, mainly in the 5's but a few of them were quite short. We didn't visit, but The Crag informs me that quite a few of them are worth **.

Lower Valley Right Side

All The Universe

Now we are talking!! A big 40m high angle slab festooned with jugs, pockets and flakes. Developed by Claude Idoux (he of Kalymnos Fame), this is easily the best lower-mid grade crag in the area. Typically, the lower half of the crag is easier angled on very good holds, leading to having more difficulty in the upper half (on the right side), and progressively gets harder over the whole 40m the more leftwards you travel. Routes here are from 5a to 6b+ typically and everything has at least 2 stars with several 3-star jobs. The extreme right-hand side has several shorter lines (22m) which were all pretty good too. 29 routes in total.

Stand out climbs here were Mars 6b+**, Venus 6b***, Neptune 6b***, Saturne 6a+*** & Soleil 6a+***. Many 40m 2* routes from 5a-5c, mainly all well bolted, encouraging pushy climbing.



Neptune 6b*** - 40m of sustained brilliance. Absolutely fabulous!

Mars was almost certainly my best lead for quite a few years now. I'd been working my way along this crag from right (easy) to left, getting progressively harder on each visit. Soleil (6a+***) had originally been given 6b, but there was just a lot of 6a+ in the last 20m to the chain and no real 6b move, hence the downgrade. Jupiter (6a+**) had one quite hard move for a two-finger pocket a little way from a bolt.

Saturne (6a+***) was an absolutely brilliant route, quite sustained in standard over the whole 40m, but obviously was getting to feel harder at the top due to the accumulated difficulties. I'd just completed it on a showery day and so I stripped it on the way down because it started to spit when I was at the chain. That was a wise decision as it then started to rain steadily. We put our gear in the large cave on the left of the crag and pulled the rope. It got stuck in a flake crack about five bolts up the route. We tried everything to free it, and just as I was about to leave it until it stopped raining, a very kind, cool French guy took some quickdraws from me and climbed up in the wet in his loose crag approach shoes to free it whilst I belayed him!

After an hour or so, the rain stopped and the wind dried the crag up enough to restart proceedings. Helen hadn't managed to climb this route, and seeing as it was so good, I climbed it again. After she'd climbed it, we pulled the rope down and the rope got stuck in exactly the same crack again! There was a little jammed spike sticking out of the crack over which the rope was continually draping itself. No matter which way you pulled the rope, the result seemed to be the same. Another French couple on another day did exactly the same thing, so if you ever do this route, watch out! Luckily, the wife of the guy who rescued our rope the first time was seconding an adjacent route and could easily flick it off of the spike for us.

Neptune (6b***) and Venus (6b***) both had tricky technical cruxes and were fabulous climbs. Again, both quite sustained overall.

On Neptune, the lower section was on immaculate rock and provided some great slabby wall climbing; probably mid-6a. From the halfway point, it then went full on through three scoops on pockets and side-pulls with lots of high feet. A rest at a large, slanted horizontal break led rightwards to another scoop and a last-minute decision not to take a blind alley rightwards was rewarded with good pockets but not much for your feet. By now, I was two bolts from the chain on even smaller pockets, which then narrowed down to looking at the chain from below with many choices of half-holds and a mini-pump was starting to brew. Fortunately, I managed to hold it together after 39m of continuous effort to work my feet out, select the right side-pull sequence for the last few moves and clip the chain. And what a route it was; easily the best of the trip and I must admit, executed in a very calm and smooth fashion that felt very satisfying.

With Mars 6b+**, we had intended to go up to Rainbow on our second last day, but I needed something in the tank to get this route done and not leave it to the last day having then climbed four days in a row to finish the trip.

All of the hard climbing starts from the second bolt and lasts until the eighth, so it's all in the first 20m and it's pretty sustained with a half rest at a horizontal flake break. Overcoming the bulge, you can rest easy on a big ledge, where some much easier climbing then turns nasty with poor feet in the upper mid-section, which finally leads to bigger holds and holding it together, the chain. I got quite pumped after all of the solid 6b+ moves and had a couple of rests higher up as my forearms turned to concrete on the slightly easier 6b sections, but I'll take it as a sign of good progress at my current limit. I just need to get a lot fitter!! Some older French ladies (probably in their early 70's) did it a few days prior and they made it look fairly easy! There's always room for improvement!!

You could quite easily spend a lot of time at All The Universe, and we managed to tick off 18 of the alleged 29 routes (we couldn't find #20, which had the length completely wrong anyway, so 28), missing out a couple of 7a's and some shorter 6a's over to the right. A combination of south-facing perfect limestone, amazing 40m routes with brilliant, technical climbing and being only five minutes' walk-in made it the go-to crag choice for injured pensioners!

Paradeisos

A much easier sector that in theory contained a very spectacular route – the soaring arete of Sonic Feast, 5c+*** 35m. This climbed the left side of an enormous groove that splits the entire cliff that faces the car park at All The Universe, so a pretty compelling feature. We decided to tackle that on our last day, as we'd used up all our gas climbing Mars (6b+**) the day prior. Mind you, that was our third day on the spin, trying to cram in as much as possible before we headed back.

The much-vaunted route turned out to be more of a "British" experience shall we say…….slightly questionable and indeed friable rock in several places, quite unsatisfying climbing and lots of udging up a chimney crack near the top led to the lower off. More like HVS 5a if you ask me. The main problem was that the guidebook had this as 35m, when in fact our 80m rope had been fully deployed! You have been warned!

We tried two other 40m 5b's to the right that were really good routes; technical pocket work on lovely slabs filled with cyclamen and yellow crocus (hence the crag name, presumably), and were in fact 35m long.

Rainbow

The three different faces on here looked to give some good outings in our grade band. First off, I tried Woody (6a+**, 32m) on the left side. From below, it looked the easier of the three 6a+'s here to warm up on, so off we went. It will need a lot of traffic to clean up the initial section, as it had some quite dirty and vegetated pockets. An easier section led to some interesting moves, weaving through striated angled bands. There was a dodgy bolt at this point, but fortunately a bit higher, there was a thread and I always carry a thin sling for this exact purpose. Having bridged up through all of this, I was now faced with some very hard moves off of a poor right finger jam for a sloping angled break above with nothing for your feet. More like 6b+ and very ugly. Had several short falls which put my back out even more (I'd done it in picking my rucksack up out of the boot at Bain de Boue several days before!) and by the time I'd finished, I was walking like an old man of 90! I was therefore not in the best humour to evaluate the other routes here, which all looked pretty good at around 5a-6b+.

Other easier crags that you could visit here were a newly developed left hand side of Archaia kai Monterna (but these are only 10m long if that), Ilona School (nine routes from 4b to 5c, max 20m) and Above Manikia (6/12 routes are from 4c to 6a, 20m). The curiously named Durex in the Canyon area looked very good (from 5c+ to 6c+, all 30m) but with a 40-minute walk-in and Helen only just recovering from a back injury, we thought better of it.

Climbing Tourism & Economics

I've probably previously discussed in previous articles (and also alluded to it in this one) the economic effect that climbing tourism has had on both Kalymnos and Leonidio. We've been going to Kalymnos for around 20 years now and the change in terms of the island's economy has been striking. The main source of income previously was sponge diving, but when a virus started killing off that resource, climbing stepped in to provide a much-extended tourist season,

as it now starts in mainly April and finishes in October. Scooter hire used to be massive and still is, but now many of those people are hiring cars instead, which has led to even more gridlock than usual. I hear the locals are quite sick of it now, so be careful what you wish for! Similarly, there were no climbing shops, and now La Sportiva have a flagship store in Massouri. Restauranteurs and hoteliers must love it, though. Many of these live well outside the climbing area and retreat back home on other parts of the island for winter. Kalymnos is far too popular now and although we love it, so does the rest of the world and you just don't go in October now if you value your sanity.

Similarly, we've been going to Leonidio for 8 years and the change in the town is also obvious. It's far more spread out than Massouri, which is a small strip along the coast, so the tourist impact is far less. But shops and buildings generally have been done up, new restaurants and shops have appeared and even the road through the town looks very smart with its paved surface as opposed to the scruffy, pot-holed tarmac that once lined the street. They are probably enjoying it a lot more than the Kalymnians, although it is much beloved by Germans!

The same hope exists for Manikia, hence the investment in bolting these crags, but having visited the village, it is very hard to see how any such change can be effected. For a start, it's a victim of geography, being several miles up a mountain valley, albeit on a decent road. It's a small mountain village, with very little easily buildable land for development and what buildings they have are jerry-built and in very poor condition. If you have been to Leonidio, think of a small, semi-derelict village at the top of that valley; is anyone going to make that a major centre to develop? Not while you have lovely scenery and little towns like Konistres at the bottom of the valley, set in rolling green fields with nice tavernas and decent shops. I'm not sure how the village of Manikia is going to benefit in quite the same way; maybe someone with an awful lot of money and a compellingly inspiring vision has the answers?



2700-year-old olive tree near Konistres, as verified by Athens University; local legend has it that St Paul rested here in its shade

Steve Swygart, October 2026



Looking up the valley towards Manikia from Lower Right