

Deep Water Soloing – Malta

By Avril Gall Photographs Sandy Carr

Challenge – a last minute family holiday, less than 4 hours flying from Edinburgh with guaranteed sunshine and excellent climbing.

Solution– Malta – a great range of sport and trad routes and amazing Deep Water Soloing all within 30 minutes drive of our hotel.

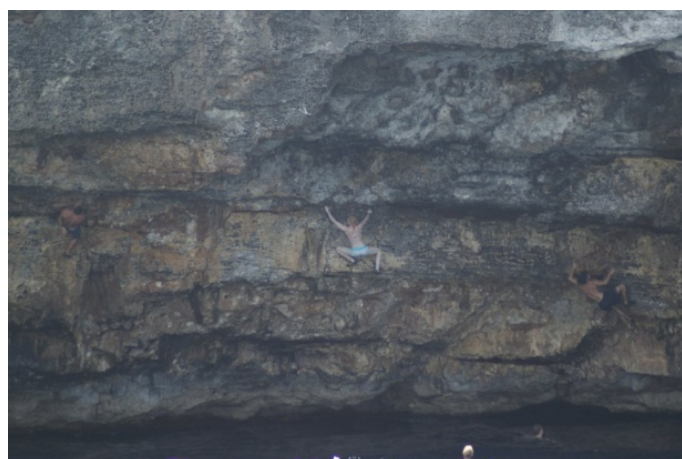
After a hard summer training for the July Youth Competition Rachel wanted to have some fun. I made contact with Simon Alden (President of Malta Climbing Club - MCC) and he invited us to join in the club's inaugural Deep Water Soloing trip to Comino.

We met up first at the Sliema Scout Hall which hosts Malta's only indoor wall. Currently just a bouldering wall they are going to extend it over the roof to allow lead climbing practice later this year and hope that plans to include a larger facility in a new sports complex to be built in Qawra come to be. In the meantime the club make the most of the space with some challenging problems. A couple of the members had been creating new boulder routes all day just around the corner from the polo pitch and Simon was keen to get topos to add to his Google map of climbing locations around Malta (<http://www.maltaclimbingclub.com/where-to-climb>).

He mentioned there are a number of 'secret' locations where the climbers are breaking new ground and setting up some amazing new routes. A key issue just now is to reach agreement on the appropriate balance between bolted and trad routes. A discussion that persists wherever a group of climbers get together.

Sunday we headed up to the top of the Island and were amazed to find a 75 foot yacht waiting to take us the short trip to Comino. After a 'once round' the island it was into the dinghy and across to the walls. Malta's limestone cliffs drop straight into the clear blue sea so the idea is you get on the wall and climb up or traverse along until it spits you off. Rachel and the better climbers in the club made this look easy, but there were soon lots of us floating around in the crystal clear waters and trying to haul ourselves back on the walls – not an easy task when you've kept your shorts on.

After the traverse several of the climbers went up to the top of the cliff before launching themselves into the blue. I went up to take a look but didn't jump choosing a significantly lower platform to get back into the water.



A quick lunch then it was round to the next cove with another traverse after which Rachel headed over to a large stalactite with some of the 'dudes'. You had to use a wire ladder to get onto the base of the formation then it was straight up. When Rachel came off (after realising just how high up she was and choosing to down climb a bit) it was to a round of applause from the whole cove. It was a great day and one the club hopes to repeat in September when Johnny Dawes is visiting.



On Tuesday evening we joined the club at Wied Babu, a location with a great range of sport and trad routes. It is right next to a main road and you have to know exactly where the ladder over the railings is to get down into the valley. Simon's Google Map was used a lot during our holiday.

MCC use it as a taster evening so there were lots of beginners there. The range of nationalities was amazing with many of the participants visiting the island to learn English. I'm not too sure what they made of our Scottish accents but everybody seemed to have a good time.

On Wednesday it was down to Red Wall, next to the famous Blue Grotto cove, with MCC's Simon Alden and Fabien Chavanneau. Sandy, Rachel and the guys started with a long abseil to reach the base of the wall while I watched from the safety of a rocky outcrop on the other side of the cove. Then it was onto the "Gladiator" – described by Simon as *"an excellent DWS traverse starting at the bottom of Earthquake Corner going left through a tunnel that penetrates the buttress and emerges opposite the Blue Grotto arch. A horizontal ledge is followed all the way back at the base of Blue Wall to the starting point, usually on good handholds, with the crux being a step down past an overhanging section which was quite technical with not-so-obvious holds"*. As well as the challenge of the climb the group also had to face the constant flotilla of tourist boats visiting the cove.



Wied Babu

The wall at the top is the main road – no long walk-ins

Thursday and Friday saw Rachel and Fabien head to Ghar Lapsi for some routes within the amazing caves, then Ghar Hasan for a shot on the left side DWS routes. I finally got an opportunity to visit some of Malta's amazing churches and megalithic temples. Rachel wouldn't have been able to resist testing these ancient rocks out for grip if she'd accompanied us.



'Gladiator'



On our final day's climbing we headed down to the base of Wied Babu for some DWS on the other side of the Blue Grotto. Even I got back on the wall and was pleased not to fall off when one of the tourist boats was in sight.

Malta was a great destination. There are plans underway with the Malta Tourist Authority to organise a climbing festival in 2012 as a way of showcasing its amazing locations to the wider climbing population. This would be beneficial as on most occasions we were the only climbers there, despite a good range of grades, and amazing rock. Short travel time in the car and good bus services around the island mean the main walls are all easily accessible, even for those on a budget, and there is an array of accommodation types. For families there is the usual holiday stuff for non-climbers to enjoy, but you may well be tempted to pop on your 'stickies' (rock shoes) and give DWS a go yourself. Just remember not to wave to the cameras as the boats go past.