

Sun Rock for Team Scotland

Neil McGeachy reports on the highly successful youth team meet to Spain in 2011

Over the last 5 years or so Catalunya in the north of Spain has rapidly become Europe's top destination for limestone sport climbing. The sheer quantity of accessible world class crags on offer in this region is mind blowing, from the steep pocketed bulging conglomerate of Margalef to the endurance sapping tuffas of Terradets and the crazy upside down world of the Santa Linya cave. The choice is endless.

The quality of climbing on offer is highlighted by the fact that many of the world's top climbing athletes have taken up residence in the region. Climbers like Tom Bolger and Chris Sharma both reside here and can regularly be seen in action on the huge Santa Linya cave pushing the standards of the sport to levels most mere mortals could only dream of.

The varied climbing coupled with the accessibility, not to mention the consistently dry and sunny weather, all made this region the perfect choice for the 2011 Mountaineering Council of Scotland - Scottish Junior Team's REALRock Sport Climbing Trip.

The hardest part of planning the trip was choosing a base. After discussions and many hours spent drooling over pictures on the web, the decision was made. It had to be Siurana. There are endless reasons why this is an ideal choice for Scottish Team Trips or personal sun rock trips in general.

Ryan Air fly direct from Prestwick and Edinburgh to Reus (Barcelona), which is only 40 minutes' drive from Siurana valley; 'Camping Siurana' is situated in the heart of the climbing and is one of the most pleasant climbers camp sites I have ever visited. There is a choice of accommodation ranging from basic camping, camper plots with electricity, to bunk house and log cabin apartments and a warm and friendly climbers bar and restaurant on site. There is also a local super market less than 10 km away in Cornudella Del Monstant. More importantly though there are over 600 routes, spread over 40 different crags (grades ranging from F3+ to F9a+) and displaying a wide range of climbing styles from powerful cave routes, to wicked drain pipe tuffas and endless amounts of huge crimpy and technical face climbs. All of which are within short walking distance from the camp site.



Gabriella on a testing route

The Scottish Junior Climbing Team is made up of climbers from 8yrs to 16yrs, who compete in the annual MCofS Youth Climbing Series and have achieved a top 3 finish in their regional rounds. MCofS deliver a range of coaching events for the squad throughout the year aimed at educating these youngsters on appropriate and effective training, competition tactics and about life beyond the climbing wall. The aim of this trip was to expose these youngsters and their parents to life on a foreign sport climbing trip.

Over the course of the nine days in Siurana, six MCofS national coaches offered support and advice and ran workshops at the crag on topics such as safe crag conduct, footwork outdoors, reading rock, the skills of red-pointing and on-sight attempts.

There was also a special end of trip treat for the climbers when Spanish based cutting edge sport climbers Tom Bolger (9a+ red-point/8b+ on-sight) and Lynne Malcolm (first Scottish female to climb 8a) joined the trip to run a one-off coaching workshop on one of their local crags!

The trip was also a great opportunity for coach development and two aspiring MCofS Coaches (Calum Forsyth and Ross Kirkland) were invited along to shadow the coaching and learn a bit more about the organisational side of delivering these events - covering aspects such as writing risk assessments, crag selection, writing session plans and managing groups at the crags and in the camp site.



The meet gave the opportunity to gain advice about how to interpret guidebook descriptions and help with route reading and tactics

How the kids and big kids (Parents) got on:

The '3 Amigos'

Malcolm Bradley, Scott Kier and Scott Donaldson are all 14-16years of age and members of the hugely successful Granite City Rock Stars climbing club. These 3 Amigos spent the week working with ReAch and MCofS Coach, Mark McGowan. As these guys were a little older and had a good base of outdoor experience already, Mark was keen to encourage them to take control of their trip.

Mark climbed with them as their partner for the week, stepping in when necessary to offer support and tips on technique and approach at the crag, as well as running evening workshops on reviewing tactics and game plans for each day!

The guys started off focusing on on-sighting and consolidating their grade, then as the week progressed moved on to the process of red-pointing. Providing them all with the opportunity to come to terms with the stress of project climbing!

All three climbers had very definite goals for the trip, wanting to get lots of mileage under their belt and to climb their first F7a or 7A+. These goals were well and truly dispatched as they made short of numerous hard climbs throughout the valley!

Team Bosi

It is quite exceptional that kids from the same family have developed into two of the country's most talented and successful young climbers. William is a current member of the British Junior Climbing Team and has spent the last two years pushing for podiums in National Lead Climbing Comps and holding his own against the world's top young climbers in international competition.

Alexander is one of Scotland's strongest and most exciting young boulderers, regularly dispatching V5's and V6's and pushing the country's top boulderers in the Youth Climbing Series, Scottish Youth Bouldering Championships and South of Scotland Open Bouldering Comps.

The Bosi's spent most of the week working with their personal climbing coach back in Edinburgh, Ross Kirkland. As both already had previous outdoor experience they did not waste any time getting stuck in to ticking many of the challenges Siurana has to offer. Many routes of 6c/7a+ were quickly dispatched it wasn't long before they were getting their teeth stuck in to more testing challenges, both making good progress on routes up to 7b+. Impressive viewing!



William Bosi and his personal coach Ross Kirkland screaming up routes in the sun

Team GB

Rachel Carr, Eleanor Hopkins and Buster Martin are all members of the British Junior Climbing Team and regularly compete in International competitions. They are also transferring these skills to real rock and starting to turn a few heads with their success outdoors!

Rachel and Buster had very clear aims for the trip (Buster F8a / Rachel F7c) and set about achieving these straight away. MCofS / British Team coach Robbie Philips and MCofS and ReAch Coach Gary Vincent were on hand to support them through the process.

Both climbers had set targets that would push their mental and physical ability to the limit and providing them with a roller coaster journey of emotions throughout the week, as they coped with the frustrations and pressures of projecting.

This led to an exciting last day with both Buster and Rachel dispatching their project climbs in the rapidly fading light. Nice one guys!

Sadly Eleanor was in the middle of a very slow rehabilitation from a shoulder injury and had to drastically change her aims for the trip. Eleanor had a very successful 2010 outdoors, becoming the youngest Scottish female to red-point *Hamish Teds* (F7b+) and had aspirations of pushing herself on harder challenges in Spain.

This was not going to be possible and the focus of her trip had to change to gaining quality mileage and experience without aggravating her shoulder! Eleanor was obviously disappointed, however, it is testament to her love of the sport and being on rock that she approached the change to climbing easier routes with just as much enthusiasm and commitment as she does harder projects. I'm sure it won't be long until she is pushing standards at the crag again!

Team Trouble

Megan Saunders, Rory Cargill, Eilidh Vass Payne, Gabriella Stewart, Kirsten Grey, Jodie Brown, Rory Whyte and Rhiannon Friereich are the new wave of talented and exciting young climbers coming through in Scotland at the moment, ranging from 8yrs to 13yrs of age. It was inspirational watching them approach the trip with such excitement and maturity!

It rapidly became apparent to the coaches that the initial plan of encouraging lots of low grade mileage to build experience was not going to cut it, with all of them making short work of on-sighting their way through endless F4 – F6b's over the first two days. We quickly changed focus and started concentrating on selecting projects and getting to grips with red-pointing.

As the days progressed the youngsters rapidly got to grips with the challenges and frustrations of working out the intricacies of climbing a route very close to their physical limit! Almost every one of the team successfully managed to complete a F7a project and I am sure those that didn't, would have if they had been able to stay for the full trip rather than having to head home early for school!

I can't quite believe that climbers this young were capable of achieving this on their first outdoor Real Rock trip! A special note here has to go to Rhiannon, who at 9 years old must be the youngest Scottish female ever to have red-pointed 7a outdoors.

Team Zimmers

The Mums and Dads did their kids proud in Spain, with everyone getting in to the spirit of things at the crag and the camp site! Many of the parents spent the week trying to keep up with the kids on the rock, special mention here has to go to Sam for red-pointing his first 7a, hot on the heels of his daughter Rhiannon and Grant for giving the kids a lesson in 'Never say die' commitment as he continually gave 100% on on-sight attempts and red-point projects throughout the week.

Those who were not comfortable with getting on the rock, played their part with endless belay shifts at the crag. Hopefully every family will have left the trip feeling like they are more than capable of returning on their own on future family climbing holidays!



Eilidh Vass Payne high on her first lead at Siurana



Megan focusing on the redpoint on Els ni Agrada F7a+

This trip was one of the most enjoyable and successful MCoFS Trips I have been involved in. Coaches, climbers and parents learned loads and went home desperate to get back out on the rock! These trips are such an important part of MCoFS Youth Development, as we aim to educate young climbers on the many ways you can challenge yourself beyond the world of indoor climbing walls, hopefully making young climbers more likely to sustain life long involvement in the sport.

Massive thanks must go to: Tony Arbones and Camping Siurana for their warm and friendly hospitality.

- ReAch coaches, Robbie Phillips Coaching and EICA: Ratho Coaches for the numerous days worked on a voluntary capacity, thus allowing the trip to happen.
- Pamela Miller at EICA: Ratho for running a pre-trip training workshop in equipping and stripping sport routes.
- MCoFS for helping to fund, organize and deliver the 2011 trip and their continued support of young Scottish climbers and coaching.



ABOVE: Rory Whyte about to embark on a steep and pumpy crux

BELOW: Neil McGeachy



What the Parents Thought:

“As a parent I was enormously impressed by Neil's organisation of the whole coaching experience. He managed to match the needs and wishes of a variety of young people and their parents, several of whom appeared for various parts of the week, with the skills and personalities of a number of experienced coaches.”

“The coaching was well organised and presented to the participants in an informative and enjoyable manner, with everybody able to join it at a level that suited their ability.”

“Above all, the children involved had fun and felt that they had learned something. The friendly, group based approach meant everyone was involved in some aspect of the training at any given time and this created a very positive atmosphere amongst the youngsters.”

“Given the situation, that is perched on a cliff face in the Catalonian Mountains, I was impressed by the groups discipline and good practice while climbing and resting. The youngsters were a credit to their sport and country.”

What the Kids Thought:

“When I clipped the chain I felt fantastic! My first 7a outside, which I had worked hard to red-point.”

What the Coaches Thought:

“It was such a beneficial experience. Being able to pass on some of my own experience and also learn from working with older more experienced coaches”

“The Spain trip was a beneficial experience for me because it gave me the chans to to coach kids outdoor which was and experins I had never had before. It broaden my horizons and highlighted the fact that there was much I still needed to learn if I wanted to be a professional coach. I also learned about scoping out crags to make shoor that they are safe and sootabl for using for the group you plan on taking to the crag as well as choosing roots sootabl for the individuals climbers. ovarall I think that it was a great chans to get vital epearyans in out door coaching and I am grateful to halve been aloud on it.”