

Newport Outdoor Group (YHA)



Editors

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Web Site

<http://walk.to/nogs>

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***Get
The
Outdoor
Habit!***

Salcombe: Sun, Sea and Specs

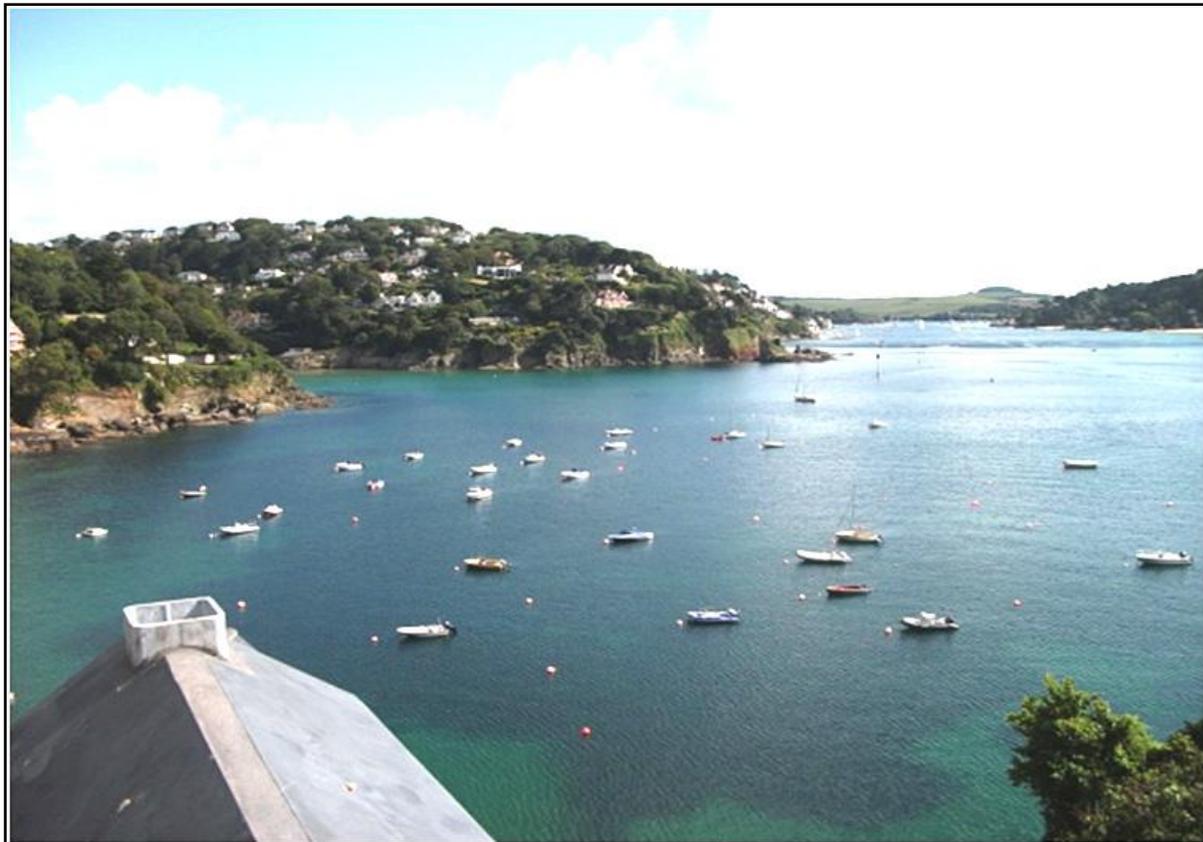
by Chris Nevines

"Last night I dreamt I went to Manderlay again..." or was it Salcombe hostel?

Salcombe Hostel could easily be the setting for a Daphne du Maurier novel: A tall, gaunt residence perched high above the creek overlooking Salcombe, that can be reached only via a narrow, tortuous road (I am so glad that I wasn't driving!) In July, the view from the front terrace can only be described as spectacular, and the lushness of Overmannow gardens (now owned by National Trust), with its exotic trees and blue African lilies, all add to the sense of bygone splendour.

As I sipped my coffee on the terrace area, glancing up at the swallow's nests under the eaves, I could not shake off the expectation of seeing a sinister face peering out from behind twitching curtains on the top floor.....What a great setting for a Murder Mystery Weekend! I wonder what it is like in the height of winter, with a storm lashing below and the palm trees swaying in the wind?

I decided to try the hostel meal on the Friday night - I ordered the fish with capons, strange round things with a distinctive, odd flavour. The evening was rounded off with a quiz, thoughtfully provided by Martyn, which quickly became fiercely competitive between the 2 main teams. Pam's team were by far the most intelligent and deserving, but were sadly beaten into second place.



Saturday dawned bright and - surprisingly for NOGs - we were all up early, ready to follow Martyn on a circular 8 mile meander (apart from Sheila, Charlie and Richard who went off to explore Salcombe, and Colin and Carol who disappeared off somewhere romantic together). We were joined by Paula and Alex and their babe, who seems well on the way to becoming a fully fledged Noglet, despite never having lived in Newport. This was going to be a leisurely day with sunbathing and a beach stop on the agenda; I even got to wear my new sunglasses for the first time this summer! Never having been to Salcombe before, I was entranced by the prettiness of the little coves and the pristinely clean beaches with their sparkling (and cold!) water. It was like a step back in time - no tacky seaside stalls, no loud music or litter, no mobile phones... just ordinary families enjoying an old fashioned day out by the sea, children building sandcastles with old-fashioned buckets and spades and dogs playing tag on the foreshore like they used to

do before they got banned from beaches. Bootiful! Martyn was kept amused by two scantily clad girls playing beach tennis and I fell in love with a gorgeous Andrex puppy. My only regret was that we didn't do a longer walk that day.



In the evening most of us opted for a meal at the Winking Prawn, sited at the cove below the hostel. It was an excellent meal and I am ashamed to say that on this occasion I was guilty of taking more than my fair share (inadvertently) and eating Bobs portion of salmon as well as my own – I can only put it down to Dai's bad influence, as I am always accusing him of gluttony! Dai (who must have drunk more than was good for him) then decided that the long walk back to the hostel was too much, and so set about trying to coerce Pam into giving him a lift in her car. When the dodgy knee failed to impress, he then shamelessly turned to sacrificing my reputation to Pam's love of scandal, and there was a disreputable debate on the finer points of how far one has to go in order to secure a back seat ride! (I refuse to comment on the outcome).

I did hope to have my revenge later, when I was roused in the middle of the night by voices on the terrace and banging on the hostel door. However it was not to be, as the visitors were not errant NOGs on an illicit liaison, but a group of strangers who had arrived late and wanted to be let in at 2 am in the morning! (Needless to say, in the absence of the Warden, this request was refused).

Sunday turned out a rather grey day, although not cold, and Dai offered to lead a walk over to Burgh Island. The plan was to start at Bigbury, not to be confused with Bigbury-On-Sea (which was the finishing point), but unfortunately some people did not listen to the directions, with the net result that half the group drove straight to the finishing point of the walk, and then refused to re-muster, having paid for parking!

As a good Christian, Dai did not commit murder that day, but there was much gnashing of teeth, so I think he was sorely tempted. (Pam was notably impressed by such a masterful display of pent-up emotion!).

Eventually those of us who had gone to the right place set off on a pleasant 3 mile saunter down to Bigbury-On-Sea and across the causeway. The customary teashop stop was a quaint little beach cafe on the island, which served a very tolerable cappuccino.

Despite the chaotic start, I think I can confidently say that a good time was had by all!



Wot a load of old winkers!

Reporter Of The Year 2010-11

Congratulations go to NOG treasurer Kevin Holmes on becoming the **NOGs News Reporter Of The Year** for 2010-11. Kevin wrote about the Borth weekend (see issue No. 116, March). For his efforts he was rewarded with the coveted certificate, and for the very first time this year, a Spacetech Diplomat Zero Gravity Pen! Why don't **you** consider writing up an article for NOGs News? If it's out of this world, it could be a winning entry!



Up, up and awayto Turkey Tump!

by Mike Alder-Woolf

At about 4.30 pm on a beautifully sunny afternoon on October 13th, yours truly celebrated a belated 50th birthday by going up, up and away.....in a balloon. No doubt some people may have liked me to have kept going up, up and away – but a precision landing near Turkey Tump, in Herefordshire, by my Virgin Balloon Experience pilot Mark Simmons (AKA "Nobby"), has allowed me to share my experience of this epic flight with you all. And what an experience it was!

Having had my first scheduled flight on 21st August cancelled due to 25 mph winds at 2000 ft, I was very thankful that this second chance flight was given the thumbs up - two people on my flight had been waiting almost three years, so be warned! Indeed, the scheduled flight from Bath that very morning had also been cancelled at the last moment, as the expected good weather failed to materialize. British weather, eh?

As Nobby proudly informed us, ballooning is a participatory sport. Basically, that means the passengers do all the hard work! So after helping to inflate the balloon to become a crimson cathedral of fabric using one of two petrol driven engine fans to blow pre-heated air from the burners into the envelope from a balloon basket turned on its side, I eventually clambered in to the now right-sided basket some 20 minutes later with 16 other crazy people. Due to the prevailing light SE winds on the day, the launch site was the Vauxhall Playing Fields at Monmouth. We were then asked to practice the "landing position" – which required one to sit on a small bench seat built into the basket and "Hold on tightly!" to some looped handles positioned in front of you. Then when Nobby said, "OK, that'll do", I stood back up – whoa! – only to find that I was already 200 ft. off the deck! I hadn't even felt a thing – absolutely no sensation of a take-off whatsoever. Indeed, that was the overwhelming sensation of the whole flight for me – absolutely nothing; No up, no down nor along. What a strange way to get about. Our pilot Nobby (his 109th flight of the year, who also qualifies as a 2nd Dan Black Belt in Ju Jitsu) could, of course, make the balloon dance in the sky by going up, down and also rotate it – and thus was able to offer his excited passengers remarkable and unrivalled aerial views - but it is otherwise at the mercy of the wind. And of course it is absolutely quiet floating along with the wind – I could even hear traffic noise, sheep bah's and cattle moo's at over 2000 ft. I was further thankful that I had remembered to bring my "Virgin Balloon Experience" baseball cap, as Nobby fired off occasional bursts from the powerful burners nearby in order to keep us afloat, and this proved to be a warming experience, though not totally unwelcome.

I celebrated with my fellow balloonists by sipping champagne at 4100 ft, while I marveled at the patchwork landscape of Herefordshire below me, and the magnificent white, fluffy clouds all around me.



I took my GPS device with me and occasionally checked it out for some details. For example, after 22 minutes of flying, we had covered only 3.6 miles "as the crow flies", at an average speed of 9.5 mph, with a maximum of up to 14.1 mph at some time. We had also ascended and descended at various times during the journey, but the most memorable was when our 2.5 ton of kit costing £100,000 broke through the cloud level at 2000 ft., and we were bathed in a beautiful warm sun (but it went very cold as we ascended through the clouds themselves).

Finally, I must mention the precision landing. After more than an hour of great fun, Nobby sadly informed us that we were descending to 800 ft. to start looking for a suitable and safe landing site. He had the latest navigational aids to assist him in this task on board, which importantly contained a national database of sites where NOT to land (for example, where irate farmers have previously objected). Near the landing site we overflew very low over the Vipassana Meditation Centre, where several new recruits seemed to be congregating in a field. Vipassana means to see things as they really are, and is one of India's most ancient techniques of meditation, so you can imagine their surprise when they looked up (and perhaps questioned) if they really had seen 400,000 cubic feet of balloon and 17 people creeping up on them! Nobby finally selected a field near a farm, and expertly guided us with some masterful touches of airmanship - firstly up and over some trees, then up and over a power line, and then finally up and over some hedges - to alight in a grass field with only the very slightest of bumps as we kissed *Terra Firma* again.

We had landed near Turkey Tump (which is near the village of Llanwarne in Herefordshire) after a total flying time of one and a quarter hours, during which time we had travelled 9.8 miles at an average and sedately speed of 7.9 mph. (You can see the landing site for yourselves if you run up Google Earth on a computer and then enter the following co-ordinates in the search box: 51.93898,-2.718966.)

There we awaited and chatted quietly amongst ourselves - still fully inflated and ready to lift off again if necessary - for the following ground crew to negotiate a safe passage back to Monmouth with the local farmer. Guess what? It turned out he was one of those irate ones who had objected in the past to unexpected balloon stops, but his field had not been entered onto the database! After a bottle of wine and a £50 bung was rejected, a sizeable £100 "release fee" was finally negotiated. (Is this some sort of Balloon Monopoly game, I wondered?) All that was left to do was to deflate the canopy, carefully roll up the fabric and lovingly squash it back into a large canvas bag - which in a field full of cow pats is not necessarily the very best way of remembering a truly fantastic experience!

