

On the last week of the Summer holiday 7 pupils and 3 staff from Charleston Academy Climbing Club headed off for the 2015 Climbing Club Summer trip. After a fantastic trip to Mull in 2014 the bar was well and truly raised. What follows is a short summary of 6 brilliant days climbing, camping and walking in Ardnamurchan, Canna and Rum.

As has become standard practice for the climbing club we met at School early in the morning on Monday 10th August before loading up the minibus and travelling to (almost) the most westerly point of mainland Scotland. Ardnamurchan is a beautiful, remote part of the country offering superb views to many of Scotland's western isles. After finding a campsite and pitching tents in torrential rain we went to Sanna Bay to do some bouldering and practice some rope work and gear placement techniques that would be required for the rest of the week. The weather was bad but the situation, views and mood of the group was tremendous. Everyone was in high spirits that evening while making tea and hiding indoors from the persistent rain, teaching each other some very interesting card games. With trench foot slowly setting in fingers and damp toes were firmly crossed for good weather on Tuesday.

Optimism paid off! On Tuesday we travelled the short distance to the tiny village of Achnaha, followed by a walk over the boggy ground of the Ardnamurchan Caldera to a crag called Achnaha Buttress. We spent a bit of time building and checking anchors before getting on with some nice climbing. By lunchtime the sun had made an appearance and everyone was enjoying being in such a beautiful place whilst climbing great lines on excellent rock. Plocaig rock HS 4b, Coal mining VS 5a and, Nicht Thocts VS 4c. Unfortunately the day had to come to an end and everyone needed to get some food and pack up for a ridiculously early start on Wednesday.

5:30am, light rain and sleepy heads. Camp was broken, breakfast eaten and away from the campsite at 6:30, aiming to get the boat from Mallaig to Canna at 10:15. Retracing the route back through Ardnamurchan we admired the beauty and remoteness of this part of the mainland not really realising what was ahead of us. At Mallaig we loaded up our rucksacks with tents, climbing equipment and enough food to last the next four days out on the small isles. Feeling like Himalayan sherpas we boarded the Cal Mac boat to Canna. At this point 2 pupils headed home which left a small group to continue on the adventure. Crossing the water to Canna, the pupils and staff started to get an appreciation of the wild, remote nature of these small stunning islands. On arrival at Canna we met the local National Trust for Scotland ranger who provided us with all the information about the best places to camp, the location of the toilet and shower (about a ten minute walk from the campsite) and gave us some advice on the best areas of the island to climb. With camp established we went in search of an evening climb. With the first attempt on Bunkhouse crag proving unsuccessful due to poor rock and a heavy shower we headed further east to Lower House Crag. We established to set of anchors and every one had a shot at Drunken opposition HVS 5a and Long campaign VS 5a. Both of which were nice routes. The rain eventually caught us again so we retreated and planned for Thursday's climbs.

Climbing appetites wet from the foray on Lower House Crag and batteries recharged after a much needed and well deserved long lie, we headed to Wave Crag. A remarkable crag with a very obvious curved rock pillar feature at its west end. From the information in the guide book, this was the best crag on the island and covered in interesting, challenging climbing. It did not disappoint. After the pupils setting up the anchors and ropes almost completely independently we set about climbing.

The first routes of the day were on the south-east facing side of the rock with stunning views across to Rum. With a huge number of routes to choose from in very close proximity we spent about 4 hours trying various climbs on this face. With the sun now splitting the skies and a strong breeze coming off the Atlantic, this was the perfect place to be climbing. After a quick change of anchors we attempted a series of easier routes on the west (wave) face of the crag now basking in the late afternoon sun. The final challenge and the hardest route to be attempted by the group was left until the end of the day. Everybody was ambitious to climb Big Sur E1 5c*** (3 stars denote a route of superb quality and one of the best in the country). Everybody watched, supported and cheered each other on as we attempted this astounding route. With each person showing some excellent climbing technique, astonishing moves and high levels of stoicism, success and delight were inevitable. Feeling elated we headed back to camp for some tea and a restful evening.

Friday was our rest day. Fortunately we had plenty of time to get breakfast, showered and pack up camp. With the shower being a short walk from the camp and there being the only shower on the island for all the visitors, sailors, climbers and other tourists, it took about 4 hours to achieve these seemingly simple tasks. Thankfully time in the western isles is plentiful. Loaded up we wandered back to the village and enjoyed a coffee and cake in Café Canna before taking a short walking tour of Canna's old prison (built on a rock stack) and Canna house and gardens. After a short wait for the boat due to a delay, we were bound for Rum. What a treat we got when we arrived, a beautiful bay with a lovely flat campsite beside the water. What felt like every midge on the west coast of Scotland had gathered for our arrival so we hastily set up camp, cooked dinner and went for a walk (to avoid the midges) before an early escape to the sanctuary of our tents.

Saturday, the last day of the trip, the sun was out (so were the midges). Today we took a walk up Hallival (762m) and Askival (812m), two of the peaks on the Rum Cullin. This was an excellent walk with a good mixture of well-established path, some gentle scrambling and, at points, grassy narrow ridge. The summits were coming in and out of cloud for most of the morning and as we ascended we got some spectacular views of the western isles, Ardnamurchan and at points as far as Ben Nevis in the breaks between the clouds. We took a slightly different route on the descent to find some abseiling and to see a different side of the mountain. This resulted in an exciting half an hour of boulder hopping and finding a small hut high up on the hill. Time was marching on as we descended back to camp and we had a boat to catch back to the mainland. Fish and Chips, the first cooked meal we'd had for 6 days. It was needed, deserved and gratefully received. As we arrived back to Mallaig and walked the short distance back to the bus the sun was setting on our adventure, and what an adventure it was. 6 days of camping, climbing, walking, great company, challenges and enjoyment. With the words 'this was better than last year, where are we going next summer' lingering in our ears, we wait with baited breath for the summer trip 2016!

The group of pupils on this term were superb. It was a pleasure to take them on the trip and to see them develop their climbing skills in such a gorgeous location. For the whole trip everyone was engaged, polite, respectful and focused on whatever task was facing them. They took to every challenge exceptionally well and worked well as part of a team and individually. They demonstrated safe and reliable rope work abilities whilst showing an enthusiasm to learn new skills and techniques. The trip was fantastic fun for staff and pupils and we look forward to running similar trips in the future.

Some photos are shown here, more more photos of the trip please visit our facebook page.
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Charleston-Academy-Climbing-Club/693230604086331>

Pupils on the trip: Patrick Morris S3, Rebekah Morris S6, Rory Barker S3, Harry Barker S6, Calum Finlayson S6, Ronan Hennessy S5 and Jenna Bisset S6

Staff: Mr Nairn, Miss Massey and Mr Richards

Charleston Academy Climbing Club aims to give pupils a wide and varied experience of climbing by organising events that will challenge and develop climbing skills and promote enjoyment. For more information about the climbing club, see Mr Richards.