

Simon and Jillian's Christmas Newsletter

2002 has been another busy and active year for both of us. In January we joined a local mountaineering club and have been away on a number of climbing trips to the Wye Valley, Stanage Edge, and Snowdonia.

For Jillian's birthday in February, we took ourselves off to Méribel in the French Alps for a week of skiing. Having been spoilt with perfect powder conditions in previous years it was a bit of a shock to find the snow conditions less than ideal. Many of the pistes were very icy, with little snow cover and exposed rocks doing nothing for our newly edged skis. However, we had an enjoyable week staying in a very comfortable hotel, eating gourmet food, and enjoying the fantastic weather.

At the beginning of June we were off to France again, this time to the Vercors National Park. We hired a rural gîte for the week and managed to speak lots of French with the locals who speak virtually no English in this part of France. During the week we went mountain biking and horse riding across the high alpine meadows and through the nearby pine forests. We also managed to ascend a number of the local 7,000ft summits.

On the descent from one high mountain pass, we had our first encounter with a religious cult – a group of blind folded individuals all roped together alpine style, shuffling along and chanting. They were all dressed in jeans and trainers and, apart from the rope, had no mountaineering equipment or provisions. With the weather rapidly closing in and daylight beginning to fade, their ascent was not so much a question of faith but one of sanity!

Later in the summer we traveled to Verona for the annual opera festival held in the Arena di Verona, a two thousand year old Roman Arena, where we watched superb productions of Puccini's Tosca and Bizet's Carmen.

For Simon's birthday in September we spent a long weekend in Barcelona taking in the Gaudí architecture, sampling the tapas bars and making the most of the hot weather by spending an afternoon on the beach!

When not pursuing outdoor activities, Jillian has been participating in a local public speaking group she joined earlier this year. We have also started Bridge lessons which, despite being the youngest members of the class, are proving to be very fun and challenging.

We look forward to catching up with many of our friends over the festive period and wish everyone a very Happy Christmas and New Year.

Simon and Jillian

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