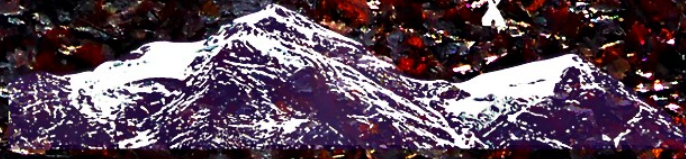




# Red Rope



*the socialist walking and climbing club*

**bulletin 32 spring 2017**



# Knoydart: Scotland's last wilderness?

2016 proved to be another busy year for Red Rope Scotland with trips to Glen Coe, Glen Nevis, Skye, Cairngorms, Lake District and Knoydart. The long weekend in Knoydart in September 2016 was, without doubt, our most popular trip, with twenty-five notes of interest! The final thirteen who signed up included nine members from all across Scotland, two from London and two from Liverpool.

With people travelling from all over it proved a logistical challenge for Maia Forrester, the trip organiser! Finally everyone was booked into the Knoydart Foundation Bunkhouse, the community enterprise accommodation close to the village of Inverie, and onto various ferries from Mallaig.

Three members of the party, stalwarts from Scotland, managed to travel up a day early on the Thursday and were lucky to have fair weather for a 13 mile walk that included 'bagging' the Corbett Beinn Bhuidhe, (not that some of us are counting). On their return to the bunkhouse, exhausted from an unexpected final vertical descent through rocks and bracken, the others had all arrived, having lugged their rucksacks and boxes of food and wine along the shoreline from the pier.

After an impressive demonstration of collective vegetable chopping we had an excellent meal together before settling ourselves into the lounge for an affable chat and to discuss our walking plans for the rest of the trip. On the Saturday, Helen Todd and I decided to bag two Munros, Meall Buidhe and Luinne Bheinn. We had a great day out with panoramic views over the peninsula and beyond, while many of the others opted for the Corbett, Sgurr Coire Choinnichean, up behind the bunkhouse.

The Sunday, unfortunately, was a very damp day but, undeterred, most people decided on a long walk over to the far side of the peninsula to sample the local coffee and cakes at the lovely, and very aptly named, 'Road's End Café' at Airor. Those determined to get in another hill walk, in spite of the weather, chose to climb Sgurr Coire Choinnichean, but had to battle through wind and rain for only very limited views from the summit.

The weather cleared by the end of the day, and the walkers enjoyed a pleasant evening drying off, and indulging in a small libation or two in 'The Forge' pub, back down in Inverie.

Monday was the Day of the Big Hill, with ten of the group walking a 14 mile round trip to take in the legendary Knoydart Munro, Ladhar Bheinn (3346ft). This was a challenging day indeed. In addition to the distance and height involved, there were occasional scrambles thrown in here and there, which proved a real test for a few members of the group. With helping hands from their fellow walkers, and occasional 'wind assistance', everyone managed to clamber to the summit. *Main photos*

As this very long day drew to a close, we were rewarded with a golden sunset and a wonderful evening sitting by the water's edge back at 'The Forge' for yet another well-earned drink. We were all greatly impressed at the hardiness of the Liverpool contingent, Andrea and Mario, who rushed off before their drink to don their swimsuits and lurch far out into the freezing cold sea for a good 20 minutes!

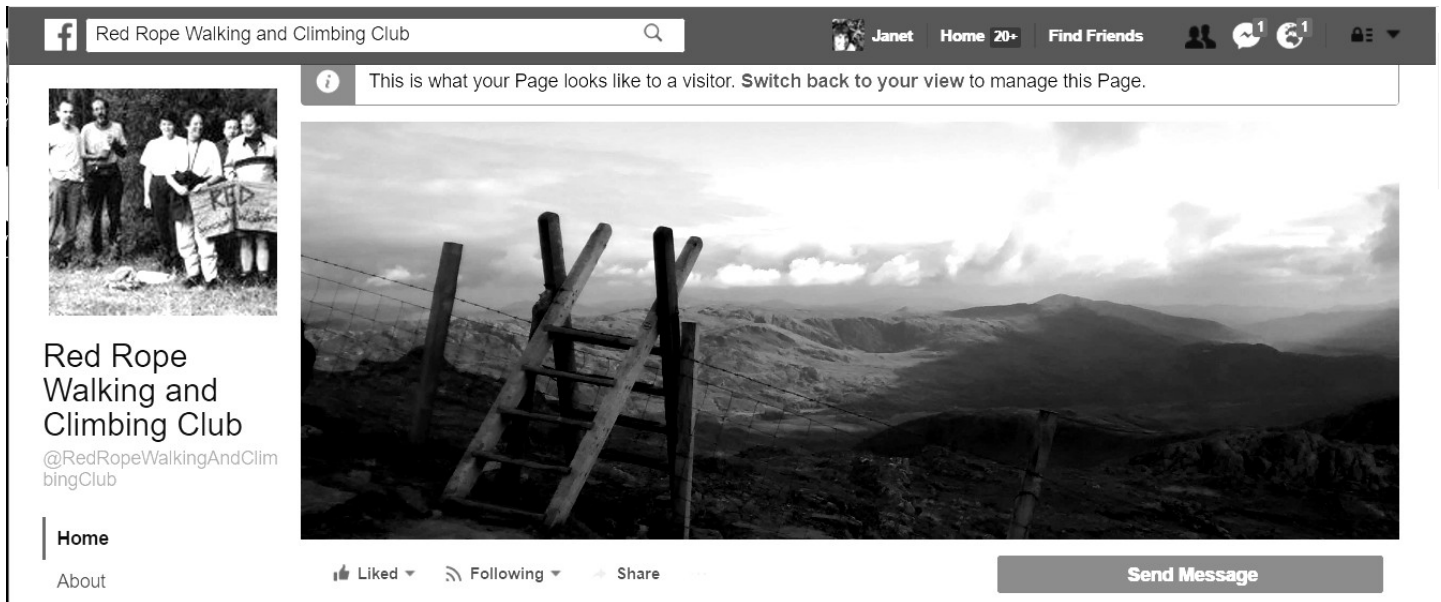
Sadly, all good things must come to an end and on the Tuesday we had to pack up and head for our ferries home. I am sure we all took away some wonderful memories of the beauty of Knoydart, an appreciation of Maia's hard work organising the trip and, perhaps most of all, the great spirit of camaraderie and the opportunity to meet some lovely Red Ropers from south of the border: Sherry and Dermot from London, and Andrea and Mario from Liverpool. We hope to see you all soon!

We are looking forward to another busy year in 2017, with trips planned to the Cairngorms, Glen Nevis with its iconic wire bridge over to Steall Hut, Laggan/Monadh Liah, Crianlarich and North Wales. Fingers crossed for good weather and a low midgie count all year!

**Mickey McDiarmid**

*Photos by Mario Gonzalez. Title of article taken from an Alistair Sawday book of the same name.*

# Have you seen the Red Rope Facebook site?



Our Facebook site *Red Rope Walking and Climbing Club* has been online for a couple of years. It is set up as a community site and anyone who joins the site can post to it. So far this is working well. It's a good place to put up pictures from walks and trips, news articles and events that other Red Ropers might be interested in.

The great thing about Facebook is that people get notified by email when a new post appears and so it's a quick way to send news around. We don't have exact statistics but around 150 people are now using the site. If people 'like' or share the post it goes to their network as well, so it can go further.

For example, an article re-posted from the Guardian, 'Walking to Health and Happiness' reached 216 people, Merseyside RR's photos from Jan. 2017 reached 215 people, and a post put out by Coventry RR reached 263! I used it to publicise the Red Rope T shirts before Christmas, and London RR regularly advertise their upcoming walks on the site. Obviously Facebook is not going to replace the MIS or the Bulletin. We will still use the RR website for all official club information and so on. Facebook however, is a quick and lively way to share photos, and publicise whatever!

We also have A5 colour flyers that can be used as mini-posters, given to friends, or left in cafes or on noticeboards. They have all the regional contact details on the back, as have our 'business cards'. Contact me soon at **publicity@redrope.org.uk** for any of the above. The key person in recruitment is really YOU, the member, so tell your friends, ask them out on a walk and get the word out. **Janet Saunders**

*Another great way to publicise the club is to hold a disco in your flat and wear your RR T shirts. If only Pete and Uta had remembered to invite some guests! More T shirts will be available in May.*



BMC 'Rescue Emergency Care' Training. A weekend course near Capel Curig, Snowdonia.

Take home messages - the three Ps:

**Preserve life**  
**Promote recovery**  
**Prevent complications**

An inauspicious start to my birthday weekend and safety; arriving at **Helyg** after dark in driving rain which rapidly progressed into a full torrential storm. However, fuel for the belly is an essential for a weekend in the elements and the 4 of us from Merseyside consumed our way through spicy curry, fruit from Sarah's allotment and delicious Dafna's gluten-free chocolate birthday cake, keeping our spirits up as we waded through the flood coming through the hut wall.

After a full breakfast and with the skies clearing we were ready for Steve Howe and his cheery account of every accident that could possibly befall us on the hills. By the end of the course we understood the essentials for an outdoor first aid kit, remembering the tick remover for those pesky critters. Above all keep plenty of gaffer tape!

Steve guided us through an excellent course on the principles of First Aid through practice in the outdoors, with a good dose of play-acting thrown in – my favourite was throwing up as Jennifer rolled me over - her face was a picture. But seriously, we thoroughly learnt the basics of Outdoor First Aid and the importance of decision making when in the hills and at a distance from summoning help.

We gained a good appreciation of the need to keep the casualty warm and also for others in the group to stay warm, preventing further casualties with the use of a group shelter or a bivvy bag. A Merseyside Red Rope outing is never complete these days without some wild swimming and the opportunity provided by nearby Llyn Idwal with Tryfan, Glyder Fawr and Glyder Fach looking on could not be missed. Sarah and Andy took an exhilarating dip, whilst Jennifer and I observed, bivvy bag and first-aid skills at the ready!

We encourage other Red Rope groups to do this training and learn the PPPs of being safe in the great outdoors - with a bit of fun thrown in. Remember:

**Preserve life**  
**Promote recovery**  
**Prevent complications**

Safety is everyone's responsibility.

**Pat Nicholl** *photos by Sarah Thwaites*





Helen and Dan from the Yorkshire Ramblers joined us in the mayhem. Some people thought they might not last till midnight so Helen found midnight chimes on the internet which she played at 11 pm! We decided this was totally authentic as we are still in the EU so can celebrate 'French New Year,' cracked open the Prosecco and all sang Auld Langsyne, crossing arms and drinking in the New Year. However, at midnight GMT most people were still up, so we did it all over again, with yet more Prosecco!

Conversation was very interesting and covered many topics, but there was an inordinate amount of time spent deciding on walks! This led to tongue in cheek murmurings of 'Let's have a meeting!' Questions swirled in a circulating fashion 'What's the weather?' 'How many forecasts should we read?' 'Which should we believe?' The Norwegian forecasts seemed the most popular because of their optimism but the end result was 'wait 'til morning'. Who wants a longer walk? (9 miles) shorter walk? (5 miles) high walk? End result...wait 'til morning!

However, at least it gave me some ideas. Next time it might be worth everyone knowing at least one walk they would like to do. Altogether it was a fabulous way to spend five days and bring in the New Year. Everyone was so welcoming that I never felt marginalised despite joining a group of longstanding friends - a great start to 2017! Particular thanks go to Pam Case who organised the trip.

**Jessie Normaschild**



*Photos: The Boggard, Pen y Ghent from Ingleborough and Thornton Force, below, which is part of a 4.5 mile privately owned trail, starting in Ingleton, which The Guardian of Feb 4 said was 'worth the whopping £6 entry fee. A lovely circuit, it takes you round nine falls - including Thornton Force, one of England's finest - on two rivers, the Twiss and the Doe.'*



# Via ferrata, vie ferrate, klettersteig – whatever!

(‘Kletterstieg’ is German for the Italian ‘via ferrata’ which translates literally as ‘iron way’. ‘Vie ferrate’ is the plural.) The following course was offered by the Austrian Alpine Club, which has thousands of members in ‘Sektion Britannia’. You qualified for a big discount if you had were in your second consecutive year of membership. Members also get discounts in huts run by other national clubs and highly rated accident insurance.

## **Aug 14 – 20, 2016 AV-A Basic Klettersteige Training, Gasthof Rechenhof, Innsbruck.**

*Many categories of via ferrata are located close to Innsbruck, making it possible to have a varied and informative course. Learn more about equipment, technique and tactics. Stay in comfort near the town, with venues easy to reach with AV-A’s minibus. 5-6 per guide.*

I was interested in this course but unsure whether I would be fit enough. I emailed Gabi Pfeifer in the Innsbruck office in January, 2016 for clarification, mentioning that I was 64, enjoyed trekking in the Alps and was fairly active at this advanced age!

She replied: ‘Dear David, many thanks for showing interest in our Courses for English Speakers. First of all I would like to mention that you are never too old to learn! The pre requested skill you should bring: free from giddiness, surefooted in rough terrain, some power in your arms and flexibility to enjoy the “Klettersteig” - I am sure you fulfil.’

As a result, after a degree of shilly-shallying (gasp) I signed up, partly in the knowledge that Dermot and Humphrey from Red Rope were also going. I say ‘partly’ because one of them had told me I wouldn’t be up to it!

How did the sport start? To quote from The Severe Climber’s blog, ‘Vie ferrate have their origins in World War One. As the Italians and Austrians fought a war of attrition in the passes, summits and ridges of the Dolomites in north-east Italy they built vie ferrate to help the movement of troops and supplies. In the 1930s the Italian Alpine Club began to restore the routes and to build new ones as a way to attract tourists. These routes are now used for sport, with climbers clipping on to metal cables and ladders for safety as they scramble over rock - an exhilarating way to explore the mountains!’ (See ‘The White War’ by Mark Thompson for an excellent account and analysis of the fighting.) There are now VF routes in other parts of the Alps, particularly around Innsbruck in the

Austrian Tyrol, where I met up with Ian, Dermot, Humphrey and Iolo (pronounced ‘Yolo’) at Gasthof Rechenhof, on a hillside a few miles from the city centre. It’s a pleasant, quiet hotel with helpful staff and good food. Robert Thaler, our instructor, was a local man with good English, the International Mountain Guide qualification and a wealth of experience.

We soon felt we were in good hands, at times literally, which I discovered on the first day’s ascent of the Stuibenfall in the Ötztal. ‘One of the country’s most spectacular natural sights, this is the Tyrol’s tallest waterfall...the rushing waters cascade 159 metres over cliffs, weather-scarred rocks and moss-covered et ceteras’, to slightly misquote the Tyrol’s publicity... anyway, the five of us were going up a vertical ladder fixed to a rock face. I was in the middle of the group and found it very hard work, sweating buckets and feeling feeble. Robert effortlessly dropped down, attached a rope to my central karabiner and elevated me to a spot where I could manage on my own.

The route had been constructed to give great views of the waterfall. It took about 3 hours to get to a conveniently placed cafe/bar at the top, where we refuelled before walking down, mainly on a remarkable metal staircase, which gave more excellent views of the waterfall, made all the better by bright sunshine. Robert had driven us to the climb in a smart AAC minibus. The only downside to this was that the journey took over an hour each way. This was the case on most of the five days, which was a bit frustrating.

I found the second day fairly difficult but it wasn’t the shock to the system of the opening day. I was feeling more comfortable by the third day, helped by Robert’s personal and group advice. The fourth day was the lull before the storm! Robert had deliberately selected an easier route near his home village of Zirl. The path led into a steep wooded valley where cables often enabled us to ‘clip on’ for safety. We had a spectacular view of a train weaving through tunnels in the mountains.

However, as you may have experienced, accidents can happen when you are least expecting it. On this occasion Humphrey was walking on a dirt path along the edge of the mountainside when the path gave way, which could have resulted in a nasty fall, particularly as we were not clipped on at that point. Robert reacted instantly, secured Humphrey and all was well.

On the fifth day we drove a short distance to the cable car to take us to the start of the route along the 'Nord Kette', the north ridge, which overlooks Innsbruck. It can be seen from the city centre and looks suitably awe inspiring! Robert had assured us that we would be up to the challenge.

He also told us that the start of the route, via a series of steep ladders, would be the hardest part of the day – it wasn't! We had not had a lot of practice on descents and as the ridge was spiky they seemed to present themselves with great frequency! Another big difference was the degree of exposure.

However, the weather was on our side, as it had been all week, and whilst we were in cloud at one point it wasn't too much of a problem. By this time Dermot and Iolo were in their element, Ian was doing well but Robert was still keeping an eye on me and Humphrey, which suited me! We stopped for lunch at the highest point on the route which gave us remarkable views of Innsbruck and the Inn valley, as shown in Iolo's fab photo on the next page, with an alpine chough (?) in the foreground. *(All 3 photos on the next page are from Day 5. The ones below are from Day 1).*

This was followed by clambering up and down more unlikely looking rock faces until, after about seven hours, we could take off our helmets and harnesses and walk down to the still busy cable car station to be whisked much further down to the valley and the minibus. I was slightly delirious with relief at this point.

In conclusion I would say that we enjoyed the week although I felt as if I might have left it 30 years too late! We were all between about 50 and 65 so the others may have felt the same. It was an exciting experience which gave me an insight into climbing which, as a plodding hill walker, I had never had before, despite seeing the usual films and reading several accounts of altitudinous derring-do. At 488 euros it was great value in that we had half-board at the hotel *and* Robert's services for the week, plus harnesses and helmets - tough gloves are also useful.

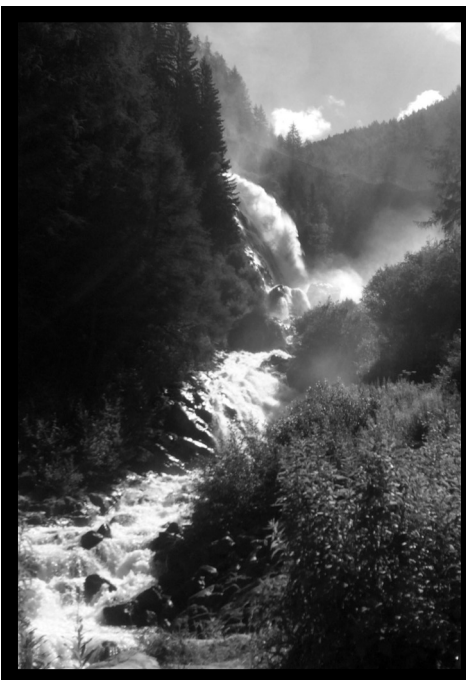
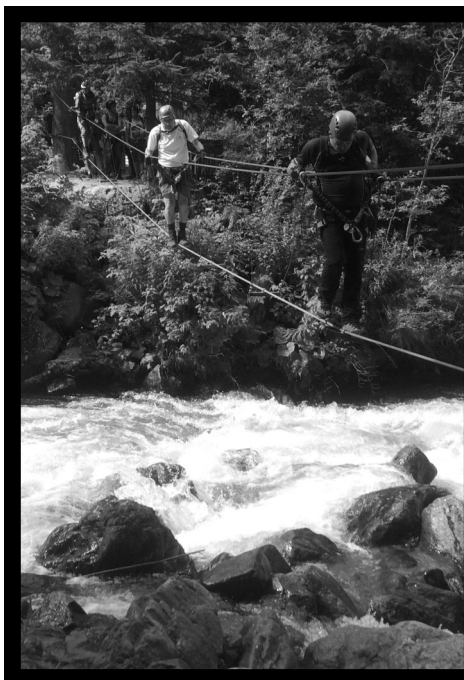
The course was subsidised by the AAC on the basis that each of us did something to benefit the club, for instance, I volunteered to write this publicity article, which will appear in the AAC newsletter, and Dermot will be leading a walk in the south of England. The same course this year will unfortunately be about 20% dearer due to the fall in the pound.

I had been concerned about the application process but it turned out to be fairly straightforward. Gabi in the Innsbruck office was very encouraging and answered queries by email very quickly. The staff in the Sektion Britannia office were also very helpful. So, if you are thinking of going on this year's course, my advice would be go to the AAC website and sign up soon!

**David Symonds** *trip photos by Iolo Roberts and Dermot McKibbin*



*All the gear above is by Petzl except the Black Diamond gloves - other brands are available!*



## VF2: The Brentas



After our week on the AAC Klettersteig course, Dermot and I wanted to practice our new skills, so for our second week we took the train south over the Brenner Pass into Italy. We had both been to the Dolomites before, especially around Corvara, but this time we headed for the semi-separate Brenta range, further south and the other side of the main Adige river valley. From Trento we took a bus up to Madonna di Campiglio, which turned out to be a typical out-of-season ski resort. Our walk up to the cable car station was in heavy rain, and the cable car ride and our final short descent to the Graffer hut were in fog, so we ended our journey from Innsbruck soaked and with no sense of the area at all.

Very happily, that was the last rain and just about the last cloud we saw. People we met told us we had chosen an exceptional week, and the only "weather problem" was that the huts and routes became increasingly crowded as people took advantage of the sunshine and clear skies.



On our previous Dolomites trip most days were straightforward hut-to-hut treks along the alta via, with a few separate days where there was a via ferrata close enough to our route and within our capabilities. We now know the Brenta is the one area of the Dolomites where the vie ferrate ARE the hut-to-hut routes. Over the next four days we got from the Graffer hut via the Tuckett, Alimonta and Pedrotti huts, to the Agostini hut – about 6 miles as the crow flies. Not being crows, our route was much more convoluted, mostly following vie ferrate along exposed ledges.

Those were actually the easy bits, so long as you were clipped on to the almost constant metal cable. The hard parts were the rare exposed sections where there wasn't a cable; the down-climbs, especially when another party was coming up, and the short stretches of glacier. There was no real crevasse risk as any snow covering had long since melted, but they were often steep. We were very grateful that Robert, our instructor in Innsbruck, had made us buy basic "spiky" crampons, but if I was going again I would also take a lightweight ice-axe.



Each of those four days was quite short, setting out around 7.30 or 8 and getting to the next hut between 1 and 2, followed by a lazy afternoon, but we probably weren't quite experienced enough, or fit enough, to combine two of those days into one. We did do a longer day on our fifth, stopping for lunch at the Apostoli hut then on to the Brentei hut for the night — we covered a fair distance in the afternoon but with little via ferrata. Our final day in the Brenta was a long winding descent through the woods, ending at a hotel in San Antonio di Mavignola, before a bus back to Trento, a train to Verona and a flight to London.

The Brenta Dolomites are strongly recommended to anyone wanting to do a lot of vie ferrate. We toured the dense network of fairly comfortable but crowded huts in the central Brenta, but harder souls can escape the crowds in the northern Brenta, which look to be equally impressive but have only unstaffed bivouac huts. It would be quieter in early July or September.

**Humphrey Southall** *who also took the photos on the opposite page.*  
*The lower photo shows Dermot on the Via delle Bocchette Centrali, between the Alimonta and Pedrotti huts.*

Many thanks to everyone who sent in material. The excellent front cover photo was taken by Fiona Coyne of Merseyside RR on one of our recent walks. I took the photos on page 7. N.B. Next deadline: July 17.

**David Symonds**

**National New Year Trip to Swarthbeck House**

For some years London region have organised a trip for New Year but they have noticed that many people from other regions join them, so asked if it would be better to organise it as a national trip. We agreed and following some consultation on possible accommodation we have booked 5 nights at this spacious and extremely comfortable house on the eastern side of Ullswater. It's great for all levels of walking with options for leisurely days too. If you haven't been before it comes highly recommended, a perfect place for a party with ping-pong and pizzazz! Details in MIS. **Becky Bates**

**Stop press** The 2017 Red Rope annual gathering will be held over the week-end of Friday 29 September to Sunday 1 Oct at Mankinholes YHA. This is the same venue as in 2016. The venue can be reached by train to Todmorden and bus or a walk to the hostel. The NC is in the process of organising free outdoor training for all club members who attend. Please put this date in your diary now. Details to follow. **Dermot McKibbin**



late November 2016. After a 6 hour drive from London me and a friend arrived in Snowdonia at 2 am to be greeted by a minor blizzard and a hour's walk to Cwm Eigiau. We wild camped near the old slate workings - well worth it as it was a fantastic morning with blue sky and white ground scrunching underfoot, resulting in a feeling of great exuberance and freedom. We went to climb Amphitheatre Buttress - alas, it wasn't in condition (very powdery snow). There were beautiful alpine type views all over the Carneddau, perfect for walking. The following day we went round to scramble over Crib Goch via the East Ridge; ice axes and crampons were helpful. Another glorious day completed by descending the Pyg track in the dark. A spectacular weekend. **John Aldous** Thanks to John for the above, his photo and the RR masthead design. Jane Hammett spotted the 'Boots' Graveyard' near Hebden Bridge. Flower photo from an idea by G. O'Keeffe - it's spring!

# RED ROPE

## THE SOCIALIST

### WALKING & CLIMBING CLUB

