

Imperial College Union Outdoor Club Easter Tour Report 8th -15th April 2009

Day 1 - 8th April 2009

The dozen Outdoor Club members finally met up at Stansted Airport at 5pm to catch the plane to Zadar in Croatia, local arrival time was 2035. From the airport a shuttle provided by the Croatian Airline took us to the centre of Zadar. This first interaction made us regret not being able to speak Croatian and not having thought to pack a phrasebook, therefore we battled through with the 50 words in the back of the travel guide we had brought with us. After a long wait in Zadar bus station we caught the late night coach from Zadar to Rjeka and alighted at midnight in Starigrad-Paklenica. A short walk led us to the Paklenica National Park campsite and bed for the night.

Day 2 - 9th April 2009

Our first proper day in Croatia started late as we all slept in: tired after the flight and travelling of the day before. However we had soon located the nearest supermarket and sorted out provisions for the day. It was hoped that we would be able to buy gas in Starigrad to use with the stoves we had brought out with us, however after a quick check in the likely locations no gas was to be found. Deciding that we would cross that cooking bridge when we came to it, we started the short (1hr) walk to the entrance of the park, where we each bought a five day climbing pass and headed in to the crags.

The main aim of our tour was to introduce our members to sport climbing and so we headed to the Klanci area of crags (the nearest to the park entrance as it was getting a bit late now). Here we spent a few hours introducing novices to the basics of converting what they had learnt indoors to the outdoor environment. Soon everyone was having a go at leading routes, and enjoying the glorious sunshine. After this taster of what the local limestone had to offer we started the walk out in search of dinner. On our first night we went to the local pizzeria which was very good and a place to which we were to return again.



Picture 1 The National Park entrance and coaching on the first day.

Day 3 - 10th April 2009

By now a routine had developed and so we got up early, bought food for the day, made sandwiches then walked in to the crag to climb until sunset. This went well and the number of routes we managed to climb increased as our confidence and knowledge of the rock grew. As it got dark we headed out of the valley and tried a spaghetteria for dinner (being so close to Italy the cuisine in the area had a very Italian

influence), where Phil got to try a delightful inkfish risotto, which was a plate of black risotto. Despite not looking appealing it was quite tasty.

Day 4 - 11th April 2009

Having ticked quite a number of single pitch routes it was decided that we would try some longer multipitch routes to see how we fared. An imposing looking corner was selected, the first pitch of which looked very long. As the guidebook recommended the use of 60m ropes as standard, a team with 60m ropes lead it first. Having seen that they had made it with what looked like a lot of rope to spare the second team set off on what they thought was a pair of 50m ropes, only to discover 1m from the top of the pitch that one of the ropes was only 46m long! With a bit of rope stretch the belay was reached and the first pitch was conquered. The rest of the route (4 pitches in total) was easy in comparison and only the awful descent path added further spice to the outing.



Picture 2 Climber halfway up the multipitch on the left single pitch on the right.

In the afternoon we walked up the valley further to look for other crages to visit and were duly rewarded when we spotted Anika Kuk. An imposing cliff reaching 400m high we spent a long time picking out climbers on the routes on the face and trying to work out what lines each of them was on.

Day 5 - 12th April 2009 - Easter Day

Easter Day in Croatia meant that all the shops were shut, so we had bought provisions the day before to cover this. Spurred on by our previous successes on multi pitch routes a group of us got up early (5am) to walk in to Anika Kuk to climb a 9 pitch route we had seen the previous day. We had been advised that it would take 7hours and so climbing as a three we had allowed plenty of time to get to the top. We started climbing at 7am and reached the crux pitch (pitch 7) in 3 hours. For two of the group it was their first time on a route this big and the efficiency displayed by them was commendable. Only a minor error in route finding (leading off onto an extremely difficult route and having to retreat), coupled with another group overtaking us held us up. We surmounted the crux pitch, and led the final two pitches to the top to be rewarded with stunning views from the summit. We completed the route in 4 and a half hours and were on the summit for lunchtime. Descending back down to Klanci

we met up with the others who had been climbing more single pitch routes in the valley and we continued to do so for most of the afternoon.

Another group had headed off in the afternoon to go and lead a multipitch route in the traditional style (rather than bolted sport). At 5pm our team of three decided to do their route as well. We rapidly caught up with them, as they had been held up by a slow moving team in front, and overtook them, before getting back to the valley at 9pm when the last of the light had just faded. The long descent over scree was not pleasant in such poor visibility, unfortunately the team behind us now were not so lucky and had to abseil and descend in the dark, finally getting back to the tents at 3 in the morning.



Picture 3 The face of Anika Kuk (with some climbers highlighted), and climber on the start of the crux pitch on Anika Kuk

Day 6 - 13th April 2009

Our very early start and late finish of some of the group the day before took its toll on us and so we did not get up very early. Fortunately a rest day was forced upon us as this was the only day on which it rained while we were there. In addition the shops were still not open and so we had to make do with what we could buy at the local petrol station! To make the most of the rainy day, some people caught up with some sleep, others explored the local town of Starigrad. The day was restful and we headed to a restaurant we had not yet tried in the town, which turned out to be one of the best, mixed grills all round!

Day 7 - 14th April 2009

In order to use up our five day passes we headed back to the Klanci area and tried to climb some of the harder routes of the area. It was on this day we finally took advantage of the fact that there was a shop built into the crag which sold beer! So after the last and hardest routes of the day we sat down to enjoy a beer and enjoy where we were.



Picture 4 Outdoor Club climbing in Klanci

Day 8 - 15th April 2009

This day was spent reversing the journey from Starigrad to Zadar, and then from Zadar to the airport. All went well and we spent a lot of time waiting at Zadar Bus Station and at the airport. We arrived late at night in the UK and headed our separate ways.

Tour Summary

Overall the tour was a great success with everyone getting to experience sport climbing with most people trying it in various forms, from single pitch to multipitch. In addition some of the local traditional style climbs were attempted and enjoyed. Financially the tour broke even, as this is how Outdoor Club Tours are run. The proportional share of the total cost of the tour is paid by each member upon return from the Tour. All twelve members on the tour were full members of the Outdoor Club and IC, no non members were present. The tour fulfilled the aims and objectives as per the application despite being to a different region, everyone was able to enjoy either an introduction to sport climbing or gained further experience of it, in addition all members had fun and returned safely (except for some extremely worn fingertips). The feedback I have received about the tour has been extremely positive with many participants wishing to go back to the area in the future.

One of the major problems of the tour was the unavailability of gas for cooking in Starigrad as mentioned above. Future OC tours to the area will benefit from information that we obtained whilst out there on other alternative options, and about the availability of gas in Zadar. The inability to cook increased the cost of the tour, which was not a major issue; however it could be improved on in the future.