

THE FORTNIGHTLY FAFF

The Periodical Journal of the Mercian Mountaineering Club

May 2014

Newlands Valley

Snow gullies,
rock climbing,
road bikes and a particularly
cold river crossing

Norway

Cross country skiing

Weekend Warriors

Epic photos from ad hoc meets

Julie Taylor does the

SNOWDON HORSESHOE

BMC Nav Course





A word from the editor

Hello again, and welcome to the May issue of the Faff.

It looks like winter has come to an unexpected end. Like me, you might have been waiting for the big annual dump of snow that clogs up the roads of Birmingham, and is followed by stable and prolonged winter conditions in the mountains. And, like me you may be a little disappointed that it didn't happen. Central Trinity, a classic grade I/II snow gully up Snowdon was top of my tick list this winter and, it seems, will remain there for another year.

Shed no tears though, for it feels like summer has arrived early. I happened to be climbing a sport route at Tintern Quarry in the Wye Valley a few months ago, and by mid-afternoon the temperature on the thermometer read 25 degrees – that was in March! (gasp). The other weekend many of us gathered at Castle Naze in the Western Peak, and were blessed with a balmy day when t-shirts and sun cream were the order of the day. Speak to Vicki (the Mercian's human thermometer) next time you see her and she'll tell you that according to her UKC log book 2014 is already one of her most prolific climbing years, despite in still being only April - if she's out climbing it must be warm.

So whether you are hankering after sport or trad, the climbing season has arrived with a bang. Check out the Weekend Warrior pictures and see the variety of places that people have been climbing over the past few months. Do note that these photos have all been taken on ad hoc meets when groups of Mercians have got together, jumped into cars (often Graham's) and shot off up the motorway (often very quickly) for a day or two of climbing.

We've got stacks of meets lined up for the next few months, so if you are attending any of them, and would like to see your words in print, please let me know. And keep them photos coming too, especially those taken on ad hoc meets.

I hope you enjoy reading the journal. Please join me in expressing thanks to those who have contributed articles – Paul Rigby (twice!), Tom Morris and Julie Taylor.

Stew.

SNOWDON HORSESHOE

words and photos
by Julie Taylor

Cefn Garw meet - Betws Y Coed

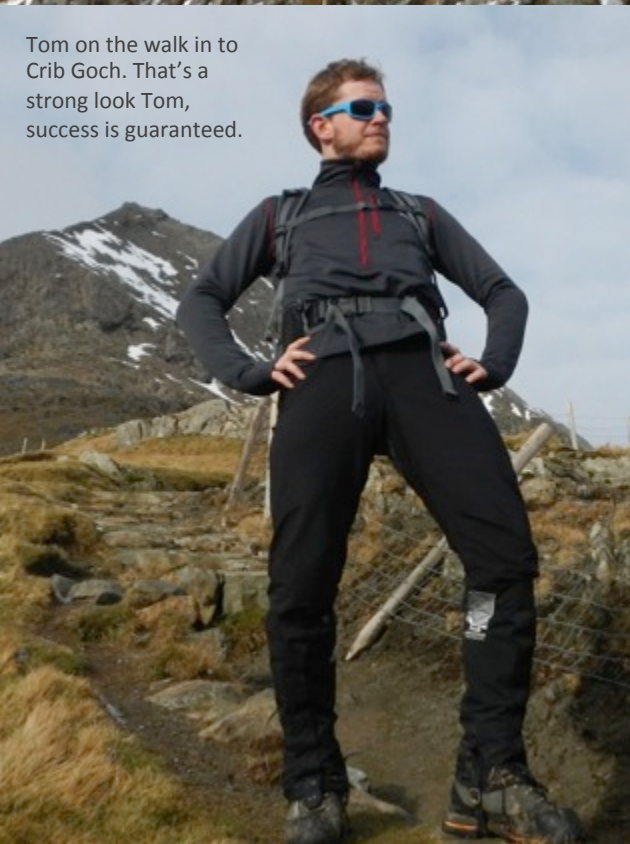
Saturday saw good weather in the morning - the first clear frosty morning I have seen on a meet for a long time, it lasted until lunch before the clag set in so that was a bonus. Simon, Beth, Tom and myself did the Snowdon Horseshoe - from Pen y Pass car park up Crib Goch, Snowdon Summit (in the white), then down Y Lliwedd. It was a long day as it was slow going over Crib Goch with snow on the top but had some cracking views. And Beth got her second use out of her crampons. I hope you like the photos.



Simon Hodgson
scrambling on Crib Goch.



Tom on the walk in to Crib Goch. That's a strong look Tom, success is guaranteed.



Summit photo on Snowdon.
L - R : Tom, Beth, Simon.



A full-page photograph of a rock climber, Joe Norris, ascending a large, layered rock face. The climber is wearing a blue helmet, a black long-sleeved shirt, and grey trousers. They are equipped with a climbing harness and a red rope. The rock face is composed of large, horizontal layers of sandstone. The sky is clear and blue. The climber is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the frame, reaching up with their right arm. The rope extends from the climber down towards the bottom right corner of the image.

Weekend Warriors

Joe Norris crusing Chequers Buttress (HVS 5a), Froggatt Edge, The Peak District.

Photo : **Vicki Cox**

Weekend Warriors

Karl Stewart leading Terms of Endearment (III),
Corie an t'Sneachda, Cairngorm National Park.

Photo : Stewart Moody





Weekend Warriors

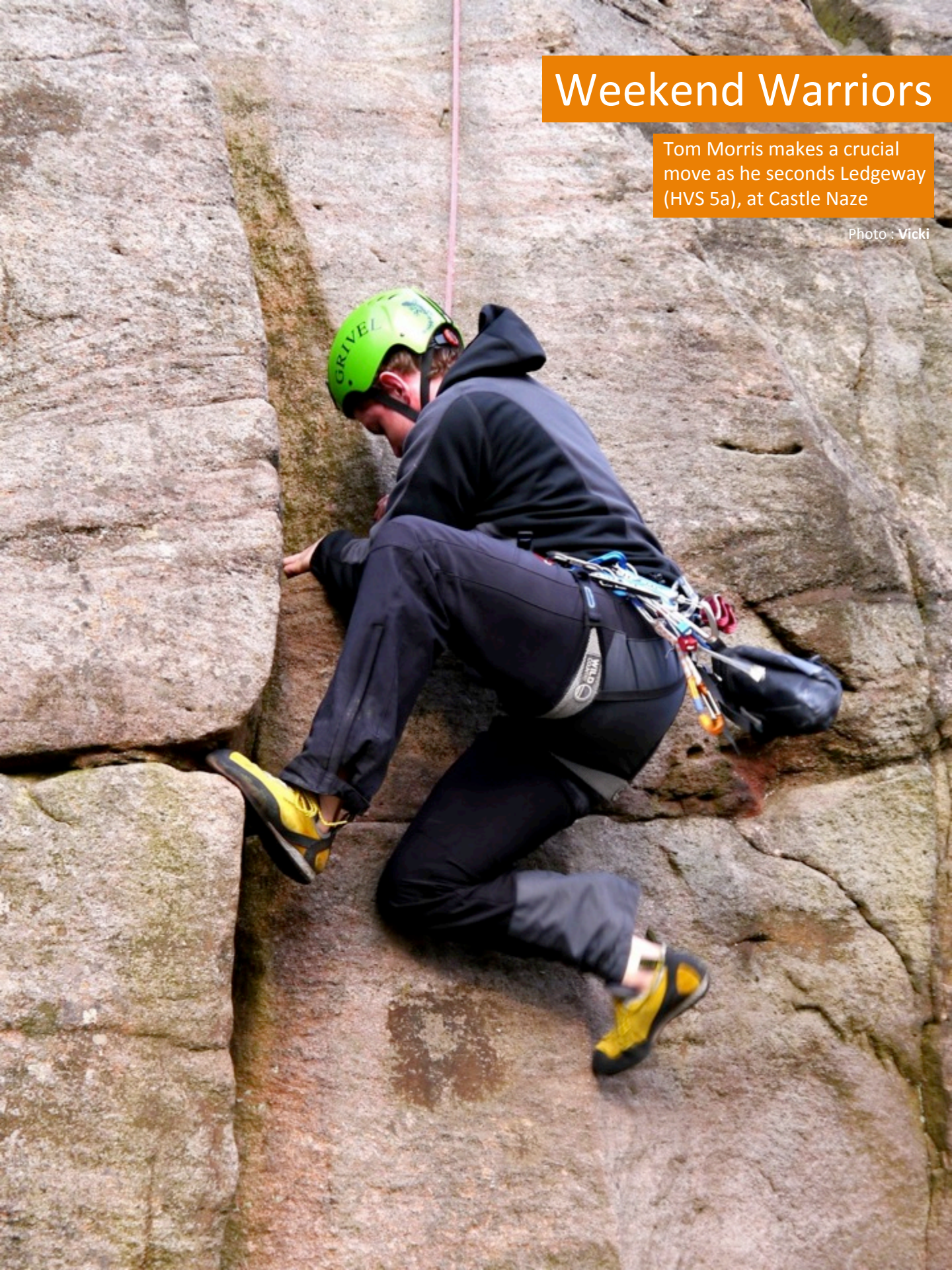
Pete Nielsen, Jane and Graham Perry return the bottom of Wyndcliffe left hand crag after an ascent on Monsoon (S 4a).

Photo : Stewart Moody

Weekend Warriors

Tom Morris makes a crucial move as he seconds Ledgeway (HVS 5a), at Castle Naze

Photo : Vicki





Weekend Warriors

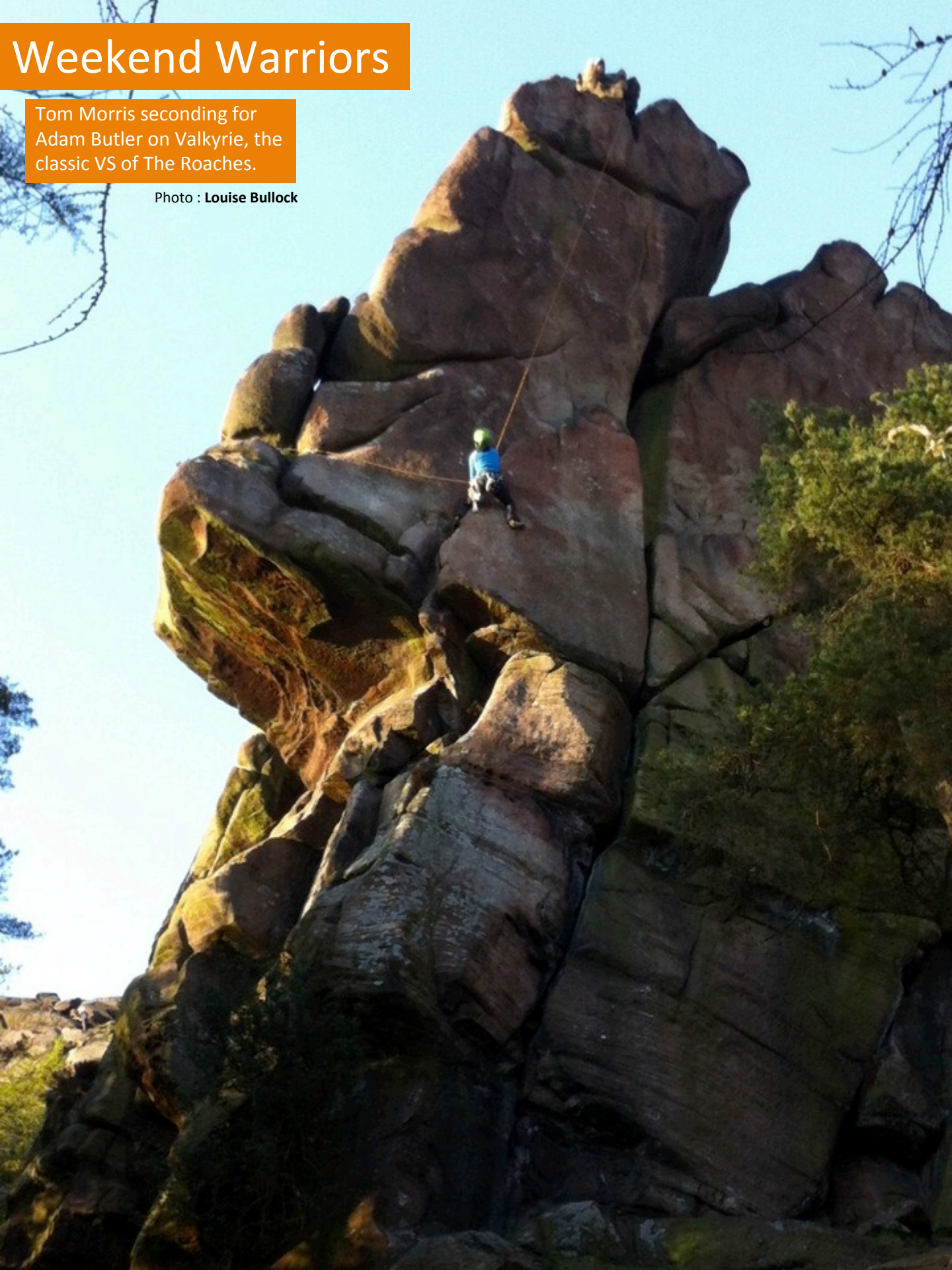
Vicki on one of the many bouldering problems at Stanage Plantation

Photo : **Stewart Moody**

Weekend Warriors

Tom Morris seconding for Adam Butler on Valkyrie, the classic VS of The Roaches.

Photo : Louise Bullock





Jodie, Simon and Riggers
take to the very serious
business of a seven day
cross country skiing trek through

NORWAY

words by Paul Rigby



In February Jodie, myself and Simon travelled to Norway to take part in a cross country ski trip organised by the Norwegian Trekking Association. The trip was to start in Roros, a small mining town near the Swedish border and ski through Femundsmarka National Park.

It was the first time myself and Jodie had been on a cross country ski trip but with the experienced and well-travelled Simon Hodgson on our team we were confident of coming through any challenge that faced us. We were geared up with waterproofs, thermals, hats and arctic mittens and keen to traverse the wilds of Norway. We had the mind-set to stave off -35 temperatures and wrestle wolverines if the need arose, however, we had no idea it would be much more mundane problems that would nearly scupper our whole trip.

Because of Michael Gove and his reign of tyranny currently waged against teachers across the land the three of us could not travel together. We flew out to Oslo on the Friday leaving Jodie behind to escape the clutches of the Evil Lord Gove and fly over the next day. It was almost immediately upon landing that things started to go wrong. We got off the flight to collect our bags only to find that the bag containing Simon and Jodie's skis had not come on the airplane with us.

After complaining at the airport we were informed that the bag may still turn up, and that we should go to our hotel and wait. We were getting the train from Oslo at 2.30pm the next day, which didn't leave British Airways much time to get the skis to us. Ski-less and a little worried myself and Simon headed into Oslo to check into our hotel and experience Norway's capital. With Jodie still in the UK it meant it was just me and Simon heading out for dinner on that Friday which just happened to be Valentines Day.

It was a happy coincidence for both of us as neither of us could think of a better person to spend the most romantic day of the year with. Hand in hand we strolled down the high street of Oslo and settled on a pizza place in which to dine. After chomping down on some pizza and gazing longingly into each other's eyes we decided to head back to the hotel. When we got the bill the second problem of the trip reared its ugly head.

We were delivered a bill for an impossibly high amount. We then remember that Oslo was one of the most expensive cities in the world with beer prices that would put a Scotsman off drink. Reeling after our huge food bill we retired to the hotel.

The next day started well with our hotel informing us that BA had been in touch and would deliver the missing bag of skis there before midday giving us plenty of time before our 2.30pm train. There was just the little job of heading 45 minutes north of Oslo to pick up the skis I had rented. With a skip in our step we headed to the metro station as snow gently started to fall. We arrived at the fiendishly difficult to pronounce metro station of Voksenkollen after picking up the skis from the hire centre things took a turn for the worse and a long held belief about Norway started to melt away. Much to Network Rail (and Huw Davies) relief the trains do stop in Norway when it snows.

At midday we strolled back onto the metro and realised everything had stopped. The power was out. The metro wasn't moving and the train taking us to the start point of our trip was leaving from Oslo in 2½ hours. After hanging around like polite and well trained English men we finally broke and ordered a taxi. Arriving at our hotel in mild panic we discovered the ski bag had been delivered, much to our relief. After grabbing our bags we arrived with 15 minutes to spare and finally in beautiful synchronicity our bum cheeks unclenched.

Top left:
L - R : Paul, Simon
and Jody strike a
strange ski pose!

Top right:
the author

Five hours later we arrived in Roros, our starting point. We had met Jodie on the train as she had flown in on the Saturday morning. After spending a night in a rather splendid hotel we packed our bags and headed out. As myself and Jodie strapped on our skis on for the first time ever we realised that the other people in our group had 20 years plus experience of this kind of skiing. However, with youth, bull-headedness and extreme physical fitness we set out on the first day to travel 16km.

Right:
Simon passes the time
in the hut oblivious
to his surroundings

Below:
Jodie takes has obviously
learned the first lesson,
always ski in someone
else's tracks - it's easier
that way

The temperature was relatively high on the first day 0°C meaning the snow was wet and constantly stuck to the bottom of the skis. This meant lots of stopping and scrapping the snow off, the first few hours were very hard work. As it got colder and our technique got better we soon stopped lagging behind the group of 50 plus year olds that were sailing across the snow ahead of us.

I learned some harsh lessons that I would be re-taught constantly. Firstly skiing in the tracks of others is far easier than trying to make your own path and it is very difficult to steer when going downhill. On the first day we all took a tumble on gentle gradients but luckily the snow was deep which softened the blows to our bodies but not our pride.



"The fire went on and like a lazy cat Jodie positioned herself as close as possible. We were served with a delicious dinner of cauliflower soup and what we can only describe as 'mystery balls'".



The first night was spent in a self-service hut. These are un-manned huts where food is provided but you have to cook it yourself...or at least leave the Norwegians have to cook it for you. The fire went on and like a lazy cat Jodie positioned herself as close as possible. We were served with a delicious dinner of cauliflower soup and what we can only describe as 'mystery balls'. These were meatballs from a can that tasted of just ambiguous. After skiing for 7 hours we ate it despite our misgivings.

The next day was by far the hardest and longest of the trip and nearly broke myself and Jodie for different reasons. After travelling for 6 hours we turned onto a track which had incredibly deep snow and gentle but significant uphill and downhill sections which slowed us down. We got to the hut just before dark with me in desperate need of food and Jodie suffering from her first class blisters she had gently been incubating in her boots. Thankfully this was a manned hut and we were served with an amazing three course meal which included beautiful locally caught fish. Jodie's feet had taken a battering from her boots and exposed sore skin on her heels. Thanks to compulsory national service in Norway two women knew how to deal with bad blisters and tried, as best they could, to help.



With clear blue skies above us we
skied across Lake Femunden. It is
a beautiful flat expanse of ice which
gave us views of mountains ahead.

The third day was the shortest but probably the most spectacular day. With clear blue skies above us we skied across Lake Femunden. It was a beautiful flat expanse of ice which gave us views of mountains ahead. Our pace was quick on the lake as it was flat and covered in a thin layer of snow but our inexperience caught up with us again when we tried to ski across exposed ice which was incredibly slippery on our skis. It was daunting moving across the ice where cracks were clearly visible but we could also see that the ice was around 9 or 10 inches thick and apparently you only need 4 inches for a person and 8 for a car so we were safe with some ice to spare..

At the end of this day I decided I would join in with some of the activities that some of the Norwegians were doing. Although it is traditionally a Finnish custom two of the women on the trip were keen to strip down and go snow bathing just outside the hut.

With Jodie and Simon looking on I decided to try it and promptly de-clothed and rolled around in the snow before coming to my senses and running back inside. It is very refreshing experience and nowhere near as cold as you might expect. I would highly recommend it as long as you have somewhere warm to run to afterwards.



By this stage the 3 of us had seemed to master the cross country skiing technique on the flat but we all struggled on the downhill with some epic face-planting going on. Every fall was marked by a huge Mercian shaped hole marking the spot of our failure. You know you are struggling when 50, 60 and 70 year olds are whizzing past you on skis and you are desperately trying to get back to your feet from the bottom of a self-made, 2 foot deep, snow hole. Sadly every trip must come to an end and on the last day we had to ski for a few hours to get to the spot to be picked up by the bus. Jodie's blisters, however, were still causing her grief and she took the optional dog sled to the pick-up point, something which I was jealous of.

We took in the sights of Oslo including two huge polar explorer ships and the Norwegian Royal Families Palace, which has less security than most supermarkets and took the glum flight home. It was a great trip and I would highly recommend cross country skiing if you get the chance.



Paul takes his snow bath. When in Rome...



Epilogue

After returning to the UK Jodie Munks founded Blister Research UK. A group aimed at raising awareness of blisters and the terrible effects they have. One in three people will be effected by blisters at some point in our lives. Join the fight. Help us stop blisters today.

Anyone fancy a bacon sandwich?

// BASE 100 Tee

DESCRIPTION

- Thermal layering item to keep you warm
- Regulite fabric
- Super lightweight and breathable with a premium quality wicking treatment
- Quick drying
- Cut and sew constructions with flat lock seams
- Fibre content: 93% Polyamide, 7% Elastane




// SPRING 2014
COLLECTION



Tom Morris walking up Newlands Valley with typical enthusiasm.
Photo by Vicki

It's two thumbs up for the **NEWLANDS MEET**

Words by Tom Morris

A group of hikers are walking up a dirt path in a mountainous area. In the foreground, a man in a blue jacket and black beanie is giving a thumbs up with a wide, enthusiastic smile. Behind him, two other hikers are visible, one in a red jacket and another in a blue jacket. The background shows steep, rocky mountains with patches of snow and sparse vegetation.

**No electricity.
No showers.
One outdoor toilet.**

We could be forgiven for having reservations about yet another hut which could optimistically be described as 'rustic'. However, our misgivings turned out to be misplaced and the Newlands Valley hut turned out to be a hospitable, cosy and toasty warm base for our weekend adventure...



Julie and Vicki pose for a photo whilst Beth makes steady progress up the snow gully. Photo by **Stewart Moody**

One definite similarity to the last hut we stayed in was the rough 'n' ready track from the road. Crawling up a mile and a half of unsurfaced, uneven, rocky terrain in the pitch dark with what we could only assume was a 100ft drop to our deaths at the side didn't put Beth, Anna or myself in the best of moods. Arriving at the hut to find we had to tetris our way in between several other cars on a slippery, grassy bank didn't do much to alleviate matters.

However, once we were inside with the sleeping bags laid out, the beers opened and the wonderful pot-bellied stove glowing countenances were much improved. Plans were idly discussed but the hammering rain didn't allow us to set much in stone without seeing what the morning brought.

What absolutely no-one foresaw was Huw being the first up and providing tea in bed. This unexpected bonanza clearly shook everyone and we spent a good mornings faffing getting over it. After a leisurely breakfast it was decided that myself, Huw, Julie, Vic, Stewart, Beth, Anna, Sandy, Bracken (the dog), Chloe, Louise and Piers would set off straight from the hut up the nearby Dale Head. Stewart professed knowledge of a decent grade 2 scramble near the summit which would provide our interest for the day.

We set off with the weather alternating between sunshine, showers and hailstorms and made good time up the path through the heather. Before we'd set off for the weekend we'd debated whether axes and crampons would be necessary with the majority opting not to bring them. Stewart's friend working as a guide in Ambleside suggested that we wouldn't even need winter boots. This all goes to show just how quickly things can change in the mountains.

We set off with the weather alternating between sunshine, showers and hailstorms and made good time up the path through the heather. Before long we were wading through deep powder which had all obviously fallen in the last 48 hours. We located the rowan tree which marked the beginning of our scramble but unfortunately the wet grass + wet snow combo on the traverse proved too sketchy so we abandoned the idea.

Fortunately, Huw had managed to locate a likely looking gully behind the scramble which we set off up instead. This wasn't exactly a picnic either and before long we were sharing out three axes between eight people (Piers, Louise and Chloe had wisely decided to stick with the path).

I did have a brief gulp when going last past a particularly bold move using a piece of loose moss for a foothold after Stewart had rather dastardly overtaken me. Nevertheless we soon reached the ridge and met up with the other three members of our party. Striding purposefully along we soon reached the summit despite the howling winds and sideways hail.



Bracken's spirits dampened somewhat in the tough conditions and on a couple of occasions we all huddled around her to form a cordon against the wind and to allow Sandy to wipe the snow off her face!

Soon however we began our descent, whereupon began a series of guerrilla snowball fights lasting almost back to the hut. Beth and Anna proved devious and surprisingly accurate opponents (they are girls...) and we also learned that Anna is surrounded by some kind of impenetrable force field. That or Huw's aim is God-awful. With the hut in sight the next obstacle was the stream with no likely looking crossing points in sight. Myself, Sandy and Julie chose to griz it in boots whilst many of the others actually took their boots and socks off to wade the buggar.

We of the dry feet smugly strolled into the hut and left the moistened members of our merry menagerie to hang their trousers and socks up on the drying rack above the stove in the living room (I was amazed by this and consider it a miracle of British engineering).

We descended on the Dog and Gun for a few convivial jars before heading back to the hut for some of Julie's delicious chilli. A few hearty portions later the damson gin was cracked out.



Clothes changed and teas made we loitered in the hut for an hour before deciding to head into Keswick for a mooch in the shops and perhaps a livener before dinner. I procured a new compass ready for the Navigation course on the 5-6 April whilst Stewart was quite taken with a shiny new bright orange helmet for which he duly handed over a wedge of cash. Anna came away with some fetching new softshell trousers whilst for once Vicki managed to keep her hand out of her pocket!

We descended on the Dog and Gun for a few convivial jars before heading back to the hut for some of Julie's delicious chilli. A few hearty portions later the damson gin was cracked out and Huw suggested a game of Werewolf (essentially blink murder with some added complications). Despite being a lowly villager in both games I was cruelly murdered twice by the treasonous bastards I had previously considered my friends. We retired to bed (some slight more wobbly than others) having thoroughly enjoyed our day out.





The next morning the weather looked much brighter and Little Chamonix on Shepherd's Crag was initially considered. However, after much discussion, chuntering and faff we decided it was too cold and instead, my self, Vicki and Stewart headed to Jackdaw Ridge, a grade 2 scramble or Diff climb depending on which book you trust! Rich, Bob, Beth and Anna set off for a stroll up Lord's Seat whilst Chloe, Piers, and Louise strode off towards parts currently unknown whilst Huw and Julie took the road bikes for a spin over the Honister pass.

Whilst only a grade 2 scramble (at least in one book) we'd brought the ropes and rack so we were bloody well going to use them, although the big boots were left on. Stewart led both pitches ably, despite some initial route finding struggles whilst I adopted the 'one arm for climbing, one arm for sandwich' technique for much of the first pitch. I regret nothing.

A short debate was had on the ethics of tree use during climbs and scrambles with the outcome being that with heavy rucksacks and big boots they're definitely fair game.

A short debate was had on the ethics of tree use during climbs and scrambles with the outcome being that with heavy rucksacks and big boots they're definitely fair game.

We soon reached Jackdaw terrace where we stopped for lunch and some photos. Stewart was testing some new approach shoes and a soft shell for Climber magazine so Vicki was keen to get some artful shots although it probably it the first time I've seen someone actively attempting to get a close up of a foot on a climb. The views from the top were gorgeous and despite a short hailstorm early on we had amazing weather for the whole day. A fine introduction to the climbing season for myself and I look forward to many more days on the crag this year.

We headed home in good spirits, already discussing what we would be doing with our next weekend as everyone seems to have caught the climbing bug with the sun having finally made an appearance. I think we can say with supreme certainty that the Mercian Mountaineering Club will ride again soon!



Top Right : Tom takes another bite of his sandwich on Jackdaw Ridge. Photo by **Vicki**
 Above : Huw cycling over Honister Pass. Photo by **Julie Taylor**
 Right : Vicki and Stew on the terrace above Jackdaw Ridge. Photo by **Tom Morris**

If you think Clapham is near Stanage it's probably time to search deep within yourself and quietly admit that it's worth going on a...



NAV COURSE

With our maps neatly folded, compasses in our pockets and fire in our stomachs three Mercians (myself, Tom and Huw) set out on the BMC organised navigation weekend near Clapham, Yorkshire.

words by **Paul Rigby**
photos by **Huw Davies**

After picking Tom up from home we set off, on a 3 hour journey, north in a car that was filled with mature, educated and considered remarks. We spoke about wine, ballet and the finer points of existentialism adding to the high level discourse that is often had among the intellectual elite of this country. Boobs were never ever mentioned... not even once.





With the knowledge that our navigation skills were significantly below what it should be the three of us had swallowed our pride and signed up. It was a heavily subsidised course and seemed very good value for money for a two day course that also included accommodation in the very nice Yorkshire Ramblers Club hut. At the meet there were people from all over the country including Newcastle, London and Liverpool. The three of us had already been named 'the Birmingham lot' after our numerous emails between ourselves and the BMC to make sure we were prepared.

Like the normal, well-behaved Mercians that we are we were up early, packed and ready to go on Saturday morning. There were 5 in our group including an Australian girl who did not know what a 'stile' was and had never encountered a 'bog' before. Buoyed by the fact we knew we were in right group we set out into the wilds of Yorkshire and started navigating. The course was set at a basic level and we were coached through the art of map reading, planning routes, taking compass bearings and techniques to find the places you are heading to. At times this was frustrating as we were asked what the thin blue lines on the maps indicated but we were humble enough to go on the course so we accepted our lesson of grandparental egg sucking.

We were each tasked with taking the group from one point to another at different stages of the day and the different techniques of navigating. The Saturday wasn't a long day and we were back in the hut, with no wrong turns, by 4.30. After some showering, faffing and eating the three of us kept up the Mercian tradition of heading to the pub.

We had been hoping for a slightly dark, atmospheric and traditional Yorkshire pub but we were deeply disappointed when we found the only drinking establishment, in the nearby town of Clapham, was a recently refurbished trendy wine bar which was far too posh for us to feel comfortable in.

WARNING Clapham in North Yorkshire does not have a decent pub. This should be inscribed on signs leading up to the town to stop tourists and visitors going through the same trauma and deep disappointment we suffered.

Despite our disappointing night of drinking and a large amount of snoring on the Saturday night we were up early again on Sunday morning to put our newly taught skills into action. By this point the Australian girl had been shown what a 'stile' was and unknowingly familiar with a 'bog' although in her part of the world they call them 'swamps'.

We were set points to get to on the map and as a group had to set a route and our rationale for taking it. By 'handrailing' features and ticking off bridges, streams and fences as we passed them and using the other skills we had learned we made it through without getting lost. With a light assessment at the end of the course, which the instructor politely added in, the three of us even managed to attain the NNAS (National Navigation Award Scheme) Bronze Level Certificate which was a bit of a Brucey bonus at the end of the course.

With new skills in our heads and now knowing that the red dial of the compass points north we left Yorkshire with a much better understanding of navigation and with much more confidence. I would highly recommend the BMC subsidised courses that are advertised on their website. They have first-aid, scrambling and even another navigation course in October at prices that you won't get anywhere else.

It was another fun meet despite there only being 3 Mercians and each of us only having the maturity level of a tangerine. It all ended in the usual way...by piling into the car with that dreaded Sunday feeling in our stomachs and a long drive back to Birmingham ahead of us. Boobs may have been mentioned on the drive back....



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