THE FORTNIGHTLY FAFF

The Periodical Journal of the Mercian Mountaineering Club

April 2015

LLANBERIS MEET

Winter climbing and scrambling in the, erm, Ogwen Valley!

HIGH HOUSE

"One of the three best meets ever!" (Morris, 2015)

THE B-TEAM

A member of the Mercian B-Team compares his day to the A-Team

SNAKE & LADDER

A semi-successful attempt at the Dinorwic slate mine obstacle course

www.mercianmc.org.uk

MERCIAN MOUNTAINEERING CLUB

A word from the editor

Greetings my fellow Mercians and welcome to the new issue of The Faff.

I hope you have enjoyed the winter season and got stuck into some scrambling, climbing, or whatever else lights your candle. For me it didn't work out too well, I missed both of the Lake District meets that Karl, as outgoing meets secretary, had astutely booked right by the best Cumbrian winter venues. I hear the Patterdale meet at the High House hut was exceptional - one of the best ever. You can read all about it; I had an unprecedented 3 articles written by Tom, Malcolm and Fabian. I really hope you enjoy Fabian's article, it's a great take on the shenanigans of meet and the amount of faffing that goes on. It certain made me chuckle out loud more than once.

Winter is not over yet though, and with Easter meet at Lagangarbh a few weeks away the corries and buttresses of Glen Coe (and dare I even suggest the north face of The Ben) beckon. With luck we might bag a few more snow gullies or ice routes before the arrival of the warmer weather. The Easter meet sold out within minutes of it officially being opened at the pub much to the delight of Vijay (the treasurer). As a club we invested a lot of money to make the Lagangarb booking and I'm delighted that it has proven to be so popular.

Special thanks to everyone who contributed this time round. Keep up the good work.

Stew.

Roland Clarke enjoying the winter conditions on the Patterdale Meet
Photo: **Malcolm Imhoff**

BMC AFFILIATED CLUB

LOTTERY FUNDED
SPORT ENGLAND
#thisgirlcan
MAMMUT
Proud to say I have crabs.
THIS GIRL CAN

LLANBERIS MEET

LLANBERIS /lænberɪs/ *noun*
From the welsh meaning
"needs a good pub"

by Tom Morris

Emma on the classic winter grade I/II scramble up Tryfan's north ridge on the Sunday. Snow fall and poor visibility provided the spice. Photo by **Stewart Moody**

Pen Ceunant Uchaf (Welsh, "Nice chairs, bit pokey") was to be our home for the weekend of 17-18 January and a gaggle of Mercians soon found themselves ensconced in the cosy lounge with the fire roaring and beers cracked open.

Given the number of people attending and the dimensions of the lounge, a number of re-shuffles were required leading to an unfortunate incident with a table moving with Laira's wine bottle still attached. Whilst we couldn't save the vino, Laira's warning cry of, "WINE! WINE!" did become something of a catchphrase for the weekend.

Several plans were discussed for the following day with the North ridge of Crib Goch (Welsh, "lost-in-trainers") a possibility. However, we soon agreed that Cneifon (Welsh, "Crest Is Best") Arête sounded more like our scene and at Stewart's suggestion, alarms were set for 6.30am. Both Vicki and I loaded up on layers, spare blankets and down jackets as the dorm was pretty bloody Baltic but we soon warmed up and I had a surprisingly agreeable nights kip.

6.30am arrived and everyone managed to lever themselves out of bed without too much furore and I whipped up the now traditional poached eggs on toast (Huw-the student has become the master). We convoyed off to Ogwen (Welsh, "place of cake") Cottage and our early start was justified when we bagged the free parking. A short hop to Llyn Idwal (a famous prince who led his people to freedom up introductory slab climbs) which was where the group split. Joe, Tom Mead, Emma, Pierce and Pete chose to walk directly up to Cneifon Arête and get cracking, whilst Stewart, Vicki, Karl, Joel, Laira and myself went for the grade 2 scramble up the corner of the slabs first. This was described in the book as being damp and tricky and they were certainly not wrong. It was soaking and slippy and I was nearly wrong-footed at the outset (WINE!). Helmets and harnesses were donned as a precaution.

We made good progress up the scramble although we definitely went a bit off piste. There isn't an obvious line once you've reached the top of the slabs and we meandered about the buttress looking for the path of least resistance. There were a couple of tricky steps and all in all it was a lot more 'interesting' that I was expecting for an introductory scramble. This was all before we had got to the main event!

However, we found our way to the wide bowl in which Cneifon Arête sits and wandered to the start of the route. The others in our group had just reached the top of the first pitch having had some navigational conundrums to surfeit before they could depart. Unfortunately for us, there were two other parties already waiting at the bottom and queuing in the cold was at the top of no-one's agenda for the day. Given that the first pitch, whilst very good, was only the entrance to the ridge itself we decided to scramble around and come up onto the arête from the side. If you head left around Cneifon Arête there are several lines which can be scrambled without protection and are certainly worthwhile in their own right. Soon enough, we had caught up with our comrades and charged ahead. Cneifon Arête is a stunning crest of rock with fantastic holds and awesome exposure, as grade 3 scrambles go you won't find much better. Even with Joel stopping every 15 seconds to take another selfie we made good time on the ridge and soon topped out onto a snowy plateau. Feeling pretty chuffed with our days work we strolled back towards the road down y Gribin (Welsh, "The Gribbler") and were back at the car by 2pm. At Ogwen cottage we met a contingent of the runners up in the annual "Sexiest Mountaineering Club in Birmingham" competition...the Ceunant MC who had just been for a stroll round the lake and had a brief conflab. Our early start meant that we were down with plenty of time for some gear shopping and pub visiting. We parked up in Llanberis and met up with Dave and Naomi who had been grounded for the weekend by Naomi's ankle knack. The group wandered through Joe Browns and V12 where I picked up a monster sling and some new gloves to replace my trusty Marmot XTs which had finally died a death. Stewart dropped a wedge of cash on some Petzl Lynx crampons whilst I jumped up and down and turned positively verdant with envy. Following our bout of retail therapy we converged on The Heights where the men all enjoyed a pint (although Tom Mead's was a suspicious shade of pink) and the women all supped a decadent hot chocolate. Oh, and Joel. Joel also had hot chocolate, completely ruining the pleasing level of symmetry our table had adopted.

Pierce rigs a quick belay at the summit of Cneifion Arete. Photo by **Stewart Moody**

Joe reads some burns before the haggis is served. Photo by **Emma Mead**

Upon arrival back at the hut we found Karl and Harriet hard at work on our Burns' night supper of haggis, neeps and tatties and resumed our spots in front of the fire with some high value beers. Soon enough, the call to arms was sounded and we took our places around the dinner table wondering which of our two resident Scotsmen were going to step up to toast the haggis. It was Joe who eventually MTFU and busted out a booming version of the famous Burns poem in his best Glaswegian accent (apparently the trick is to sound really, really angry) which ended to rapturous applause and a wee dram (Scottish, "breakfast") courtesy of Geoff. A few more beers and convivial chatter were had, along with a game of 'crossed or uncrossed'. Apparently, the object of the game is to figure out the rules which I was a bit too fatigued by that point to put too much effort into. One by one, people slunk off to bed perhaps a little earlier than they were anticipating having packed plenty into the day.

It had been agreed by all that a lie-in was the order of the day on Sunday with a round of Tryfan (Welsh, "Triffic!") via the North ridge. It was a three-tea morning by the time rucksacks were donned and we were in the car by around 10.20am. The weather was initially kind and we made good upwards progress towards the ridge proper.

Above - Joel astride the Canon Stone on Tryfan's north ridge. Below - Mercians (L-R) Joe, Karl, Tom Mo, Pete, Joel, Tom Me, Emma, Laira, Ben, Vicki, Harriet) and Wales's most intrepid seagull by Adam and Eve. Photos by **Stewart Moody**

Tom Morris reveals his true super hero identity on Tryfan - “Mountain Ninja”. Photo by **Joel Taylor**

Top - It was fun but thankfully we're back down. Tea anyone? (L-R Tom Me, Vicki, Stew, Laira, Tom Mo, Harriet, Karl, Joe, Pete, Ben). Photo by **Emma Mead**
Bottom - Jeff Taylor experiencing particularly icy conditions. Photo by **Harriet Stewart.**

However, as we began to put hands on rock, the weather took a turn for the worse and for much of the rest of the journey we were battling sideways snow and hail. A couple of folks decided to don crampons at approximately the halfway mark although I managed without and we pushed on. Highlights of the route were finally locating the cannon stone, which Joel obligingly bestrode and the fun gully on the eastern side of the ridge leading to the small cave. Despite the weather, it's very difficult not to enjoy a day on Tryfan and we were all in good spirits as we reached the summit. A special mention must go to Tom and Emma Mead who hadn't done any winter mountaineering before this weekend but had no problems even in the challenging conditions and fabric boots!

We took the south ridge then the motorway down to Australia lake before splitting right cross country back towards Milestone Buttress where we'd parked the cars. We joined up with Pierce and Fran in Pinnacle Cafe in Capel Curig for a restorative brew and a perv over his new Rockfax Dolomites guide before heading home.

Another excellent, well attended meet and a great way to start the year.

ADD CHARACTER TO YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY BY ATTENDING

JOEL TAYLOR'S SELFIE WORKSHOP

WITH JOEL'S EXPERT TUITION YOU WILL LEARN THE SKILLS OF:

- COMPOSITION
- FOCUS
- ANGLE
- LIGHTING
- EXPRESSION
- BACKGROUND
- PROCESSING

TO BOOK YOUR SPACE PLEASE CONTACT THE UNIVERSITY ENROLLMENT DESK BETWEEN 9:00AM AND 5:00PM ON (01234) 567890

SELFIE@UNIVERSITYOFLIFE.EDU

"Joel taught me to take a hundred selfies a day, that way you're guaranteed that at least one of them might turn out half decent"
- Terrance, Tadcaster

"Chopping the top of your head off or getting your finger in the way of the shutter adds excitement to the photo - thanks for that awesome tip Joel"
- Kevin, Crawley

THE UNIVERSITY OF LIFE

WWW.UNIVERSITYOFLIFE.EDU

Weekend Warriors

Matt Lewis on the slopes of La Plagne. Is he actually moving in this shot?

Photo : **Huw Davies**

Weekend Warriors

Huw leading the Vertigo Traverse at Redpoint Climbing Centre during their 7th birthday bash. “Clip Huw! Clip!”

Photo : **Adam Butler**

Weekend Warriors

Stewart, Tom and Beth flying the Mercian colours in Llanberis Pass after kicked off the 2015 trad season in February with an ascent of Flying Buttress (Vdiff).

Photo : **Stewart Moody**

Weekend Warriors

Stewart feeling the pump on P3 of E Tutto Relativo (WI4+), Cogne Itlay

Photo : **Peter Reid**

Weekend Warriors

Beth summits Mount Annette in New Zealand's Southern Alps. Note the enviable crampons/sleeveless top combo. Aoraki/Mt Cook is in the distance.

Photo : **Dan Ashfield**

Weekend Warriors

Vicki seconding Rocking Groove (HVS 5a) at Lawrencefield on an unseasonably summery Saturday afternoon.

Photo : **Stewart Moody**

A Memorable Mountain Day

A classic lakeland winter walk

words and photographs
by **Malcolm Imhoff**

I had looked forward to this meet for a long time, and kept looking at the mountain weather forecasts. As we approached the hut at Seathwaite we could see there was still a lot of snow so our expectations rose. Saturday dawned with a clear sky and the sun touching the tops of the fells. We got out early as it was going to be a long day. We took the path up Grains Gill and it wasn't long before we felt the need for crampons. There had been a lot of freeze-thaw and the paths were very icy. We looked for the other Mercians who were climbing on Great End but I guess they were having fun being hit on the head by falling ice in a cold, wet, icy gully.

At the top of Ruddy Gill there was a classic view of Great Gable and Green Gable looking majestic. I approached Esk Hause with trepidation as I have memories of this being a very confusing place - a col on two levels. In the event we found no difficulties and were soon rounding the corner behind Great End. Here the view to the south was mind-blowing, a temperature inversion had created a magical landscape of islands in a sea of down. I thought "this is why we climb mountains!" I'd forgotten how many more downs and ups there were, but we were both going strong, and Roland seemed on top form. I probably spent more time than I should taking pictures, but it was a photographer's paradise.

> A shaft of crimson light lit up the top of Great End, and below that it was as if someone had taken a paintbrush and splashed red paint on the rocks below.

In several places there were strange formations where boots had compacted the snow, wind had stripped away the loose stuff, and what was left looked like a flotilla of little boats made of ice. Amazing! We reached the summit of Scafell Pike (3210 feet), took the obligatory pictures, and were looking for a sheltered rock for lunch when the other Mercians arrived having completed their climb. I didn't fancy the rock so I had a sandwich. We were all heading down to Lingmell Col and the Corridor Route to Sty Head, but the climbers were a lot faster than us and arrived back two hours before us. As we descended Styhead Tarn seemed to keep getting further away and it seemed to take forever.

As we arrived at Sty Head it was starting to get dark, but in the west there was a magnificent sunset and the light which lit up Seathwaite Fell didn't look real. Then a most unusual phenomenon occurred as a shaft of crimson light lit up the top of Great End, and below that it was as if someone had taken a paintbrush and splashed red paint on the rocks below. For the next hour we managed fine as the snow reflected a lot of light and we could see where we were putting our feet. The steep descent to Stockley Bridge though was a different matter altogether. It was now dark and the shadowy rocks were extremely icy. We were amazed that very few other people had head torches. We were last back to the hut, very tired but very happy. It had been one of those memorable mountain days you treasure.

FF

HIGH HOUSE MEET

The view of Borrowdale from Sty Head,
painted on the High House meet

by **Lynn Taylor**

FF

Great End

Turns out, not just a funny name

by Tom Morris

Scouring UKC the week before the Seatoller meet, my knickers were well and truly twisted with conflicting reports over the winter conditions. Some folks were saying they were perfect with others saying everything was on its way out and I was very keen to get some winter ascents in the bag.

I needn't have worried as we could not have asked for better conditions on both days of the meet. After a breezy journey up in the i20 and a convivial Friday night; Joe, Matt, Pierce, Julie, Adam and I grudgingly hefted our carcasses out of bed at 5.30am on Saturday wanting to get a head start on the hordes undoubtedly heading to the hill. For some of us, this would be one of the first if not the very first experience of winter climbing and we were keen to make the most of it. Adam and I both had our brand-new Vipers shined and ready for action whilst Pierce looked quite the intrepid Alpiniste with his Petzl Nomics and La Sportiva Batura's (more on this later).

The walk in is unfortunately something of a slog with the guidebook time of 1 hour being total fiction, especially when lugging a heavy winter pack. However, just as spirits began to wane we were treated to the stunning sight of the sun rising from behind Great End splashing the mountain with colour.

and illuminating the various gully lines which were the day's target. Donning crampons around halfway we trotted on with renewed vigour until we finally found ourselves at the foot of the snow slope at which the various routes split.

Unfortunately we weren't first at the crag having spied several tents in place where folk had camped out for the night at the foot of the mountain. Despite this, there were no queues as the campers had gone ahead just far enough for us to be able to get straight on. Julie and Adam headed for Central Gully right branch with Matt and Joe taking the left branch. Pierce and I both had Window Gully

In mind and set off along the short traverse to the base of this stupendous line which, whilst not so obvious as the others, offers a hugely rewarding climb.

Pierce took the first pitch which was an easy stomp up a snow slope with no real difficulties and placed a couple of ice screws to form a belay when he found a likely spot. I soon joined him and spotted the actual belay point not far ahead with some tat in place to help with the anchor. We ventured up towards this and I set off up the second pitch proper.

This was a peach of a pitch with sustained interest all the way. For someone like myself who'd never climbed with two axes in my hands or

Great End in all its winter glory

placed an ice screw in anger it was a constant joy as I surged upwards along steep snow slopes and several sections of ice. Protection was hard to come by and I ended up running a fair bit of the pitch out. Whilst my heart was certainly racing when I came to the next belay where someone had helpfully carved some platforms, my Joy/Terror ratio was most definitely swaying towards the former.

For the next pitch, Pierce had a decision to make. He could enter the gully or, feeling spunky, he could attempt the beautiful vertical icefall pitch just to the right. The icefall proved too tempting and our hero set off with a gleam in his eye. This pitch proved to be both bold and committing and with only three ice screws to our name, it was an excellent lead by Pierce who later claimed that it was the most "exhilarating" (NB may not be an exact quote, this is a family magazine…) pitch he'd ever led. I could certainly believe this as it felt bold when seconding. Front-pointing a vertical icefall isn't necessarily what one expects when entering what's supposed to be a grade III gully but I can honestly say it's one of my favourite climbing experiences thus far. A fabulous pitch.

We reached the summit in good spirits to meet the rest of the group for a spot of lunch whilst drinking in the incredible panorama. Given that it was still early in the day and the weather was so agreeable we decided to make a day of it by yomping over to Scafell Pike. This was possibly more of a trek than it looked from Great End and we were puffing a bit by the time we joined the hordes on the summit. On the way, Joe and Matt were accosted by a gentleman insisting that this was CRAMPON SNOW! (we'd taken ours off) and seemed to feel we were rank amateurs despite our assortment of axes, ropes, helmets, grizzled visages and steely glares. Matt (having retained his lid) unfortunately missed the opportunity to smugly enquire as to the whereabouts of laddy's helmet if he was so bloody safety-conscious.

We met Roland and Malcolm on the summit of Scafell Pike and set about having a conflab in the lee of the massive cairn. Pierce cut quite the figure with his Batura's, Nomics, rope and helmet in place amongst the jeans and jumpers brigade and earned a few incredulous looks. The descent down the corridor route took longer than we'd hoped and we all feeling a little bored of trudging by the time the hut came back into sight. We made it back by 5pm making for a 10 hour day on the hill.

The next morning, (following the birthday bash of Saturday night, ably described elsewhere in this publication) I found myself distinctly lacking in motivation. Specifically, my thought process was, "They'll have to bloody drag me out of this sleeping bag if they think I'm going anywhere"). Unfortunately, Adam was pretty much prepared for this eventuality and shook me out of my stupor at around 6am. We re-shouldered our sacks (I swear it was lighter yesterday…) and strode off back along the arduous walk in to the crag (I swear this was shorter yesterday…).

This time I teamed up with Adam to take on the Left Branch of Central Gully whilst the Matt, Joe, Karl and Harriet all liked the look of Southwest Gully. We moved together up the initial pitch as it was an easy stepped-out snow slope and Adam set up a belay when it became a little steeper. The second pitch was mixture of snow slope and a couple of icy steps to maintain interest, ending just before the gully splits into two.

The third pitch was mine to claim and what a pitch it was. Again, a beautiful vertical icefall and with my confidence boosted from yesterday's successful ascent, along with having 5 ice screws dangling from my harness, I set about it with gusto. Tremendous climbing followed although I will admit to taking the path of least resistance a little up a corner when I ran out of screws instead of boldly carrying on up the steepening ice. A large boulder made for an easy belay and Adam's head soon appeared. "Good that, wun't it", "Aye" (brevity is the soul of wit).

Joe Norris leading Central Gully Left Branch (III) on Great End. Photo by **Julie Taylor**

An enounter with Mattt Kettle in his full winter plumage. Photo by **Adam Butler**

The final pitch to the top presented no special difficulties and we found ourselves on the summit plateau bathed once again in glorious sunshine. A gear amnesty/sandwich stop was had and we were joined by Vicki, Tom, Emma, Chris and Jenna who'd taken the walking route from the hut. They were planning to go the long way back down but we managed to convince them to join us in descending the nearby Cust's gully. Crampons were re-donned and for Tom and Emma this was a new experience. Tom took to it instantly, and set off like a kid in a spiky sweet shop.

The enthusiasm was infectious and we were soon bounding down snow sloped and down climbing ice steps. Tom was loathe to give them back to Stewart at the end of the day and resolved the get some as soon as he got home!

A bit of hut faff was had before we set off back towards Birmingham having enjoyed one of the finest climbing meets I have had the pleasure of attending. With Great End now in the bag, I find myself scouring the weather forecasts, looking for any more sign of the colder temperatures returning to Wales or the Lakes for one last hurrah before spring. Here's to yet another successful Mercian Mountaineering Club Excellent Adventure!

> "A large boulder made for an easy belay and Adam's head soon appeared. "Good that, wun't it", "Aye" (brevity is the soul of wit).

FF

A day in the life of the Mercian Mountaineering Club on the

HIGH HOUSE MEET

The Mercians are a diverse bunch, united by a love of exploring the great outdoors. This article describes a typical day out with two alternative groups.

by **Fabian Moore**
with Laira, Huw and Julie

Fabian lobs a snowball. We can't tell who the target is but we are pretty sure it's someone from the A team. Photo by **Huw Davies**

THE ‘A’ TEAM		THE ‘B’ TEAM
The A Team wake at 5.30 sharp. They eat cold porridge in silence in the dining room.	05.30	As this is clearly night time, and the weekend. It is time to sleep! The B team understand this.
The A Team return to the dorm room to noisily move metal climbing equipment between assorted rucksacks repeatedly. In between periods of loud clanking the dorm lights are switched on and off. Because this is the A Team, this is "preparation" and definitely not Faff!	05.45	The B Team are strong restrained individuals of good moral character who do not rise to the loud interruptions (even though the urge to kill is strong).
Leave hut.	06.00	Period of restorative sleep.
	08.00	Eggs on toast are served, and the mood in the dining room is cheerful. Tea and coffee sooth sleepy body and mind.
Having summited their 3rd peak, the A Team press on.	09.00	Sandwiches are made. However there is some misunderstanding over the pickle situation leading to frustration and much confusion. A call to the local police station is narrowly avoided.
At peak No. 5. Nobody is smiling.	09.45	Some thought is given to the sock situation, and the most appropriate pair is selected.
Extreme climbing, or something like that I guess.	10.00	These things are supposed to come in pairs! Where are you, you little bugger?
Burst of jogging to keep on track of packed schedule.	10.30	Someone has found a map, and the route is discussed over the 5th cup of tea.
See above.	11.00	Leave Hut.
	11.15	Return to hut to locate missing Wagon Wheels.
See above.	11.17	Eat Wagon Wheels.
	11.45	Huw is too hot; the group stops as he takes a layer off.
See above.	11.56	Laira stops for a wardrobe change. Huw puts a layer on.
See above.	12.00	The B team stop for lunch at a nice spot. Huw takes a layer or two off, complains of being cold, and then puts them back on.
Definitely no lunch or stopping.		

Whilst crossing a steep slab of ice on crampons, the A Team discuss the merits of French crampon technique. The discussion is cut short when Adam becomes very derogatory towards France and French people.	12.15	Laira stops for another wardrobe change (see photo on the next page), and ends up flashing some ramblers that are overtaking.
Peak 17 has been reached and the group press on without celebration.	12.45	Huw realises that he has left his water bottle at the lunch spot, and starts to retrace his steps. The rest of the group stop for snacks.
	13.15	For the eighth time that day, Fabian hopefully suggests going to the pub for a pub lunch. The group briefly dreams of relaxing in a beer garden in the sun.
Pierce takes a fall and is saved by a single tenuous piece of gear. He seems unconcerned, and excitedly discusses the extra gear that he will need to purchase to avoid the situation reoccurring.	14.30	Huw returns to the group, and they make a push for the summit. A vertigo inducing 114m!
Bored of the mountain the group spice things up with a press-ups competition.	15.10	After posing for several photos, it is time for lunch number two. Huw claims to be both too hot and too cold. He basically spends 20 minutes taking his fleece on and off again, before opting to go topless.
The Kettle 'bags a quick peak' on his own and catches the group back up.	15.30	Fabian elects to put his crampons back on despite the improving terrain. This is a three man task, and the group are passed by several groups of walkers.
Insert bold story displaying mad mountaineering skills.	16.00	Laira is on wardrobe change number nine. The group are treated to a fashion show as she tries on various outfits and asks for feedback. She manages to flash the same group of ramblers she flashed earlier.
Endless marching.	16.15	Return to hut for tea & cake.
The Mercian A Team return tired and miserable.	19.30	After several high value beers the Mercian B Team are in high spirits.
The A team attempt to impress the B Team with endless stories of the mountaineering prowess they have displayed.	19.45	The B team Feign interest long enough so that it seems polite to enquire about when the exhausted looking A team members will cook supper.

FF

PHOTOFAFF

photofaff by **HUW DAVIES**

[Wardrobe Faff] Laira having a costume change in the Lake District. Fabian does his best to avert his gaze whilst Julie makes a show of doing up her wind proof zipper to apply some gentle social pressure.

Deiniolen Meet

A snake, a ladder, and a scramble

words and photos by **Stewart Moody**

I've walked up Elidir Fawr four times and have been repeatedly appalled at the wretchedness of this featureless slog. In my opinion this mountain has no redeeming qualities. I would applaud those men who for nearly 200 years toiled on the mountain's southern flanks, in the Dinorwic slate quarry, to reduce it to rubble. Alas the mines closed their doors in 1969 and Elidir Fawr remains. At 3,031 foot high it is a torment to hill walkers bagging the Welsh 3000s. Some consider the Dinorwic quarry to be a scar on the Snowdonia landscape but I disagree. I see awe inspiring landscapes of gargantuan proportions – labyrinths of derelict tunnels, terraces, passageways, old buildings and ironworks nestled amongst the yawning holes and sweeping walls of endless slate. Considering the number weekends I'd spent in Llanberis I surprise myself that I've only been to the quarries three or four times and only then to climb on its periphery.

I'd heard of Snakes & Ladders from friends who described it as "a sort of obstacle course for climbers". It takes you on a tour of some of the best bits of the quarry – requiring nothing more than a harness, rope, abseiling gear, skeletal rack and a good deal of faith in the structural integrity of the rusty ladders, bolts and chains you'll entrust with your life.

(L-R) Louise, Beth Laira and Pete enter the first of many tunnels on Snakes and Ladders.

Adam and the belay. It's best that the anchor is not in shot.

Pierce climbs the chain

Given the cold and soggy forecast for the Saturday Adam had come prepared with print outs of various accounts of the route. He announced his plan on Friday evening whilst we lounged by the fire with our beverages. Saturday was always going to be a slow day. At 9am most of us were still in our sleeping bags drinking tea courteously brewed and delivered to our beds by Adam. Perhaps he thought this gesture would get us moving? Perhaps he was wrong! Pierce, having stayed up till past 2am looked especially immobile but gradually emerged from his sleeping bag. Laira, Pete, Pierce, Lou, Beth and I rallied to Adam's cause and got packing rucksacks, making sandwiches, and filling flasks. Alan headed off with a wave to walk up Snowdon as we faffed in the lounge. Vicki was rooted to the couch wearing her slippers and with her kindle in hand. On account of the diabolical forecast she'd committed herself to doing no form of mountaineering at all on this meet and was pretty pleased with her decision.

It was 10:15 when we walked from the hut and headed up the road that leads from Deiniolen to the quarry. After a swift hop over the fence ("shhh, we were never here") we rounded Dali's Hole and with helmets on and head torches beaming vanished into a tunnel as per the printed instructions. We emerged moments later on a terrace with a large hole on one side and a sheer slate wall on the other.

A pleasant waterfall cascaded down the hole and another tunnel lay ahead. Through that tunnel we found the first obstacle; a rusty 20-meter iron chain lead up a blank wall to yet another tunnel.

We geared up and Adam formed the vanguard - well, this was his idea after all. He settled into a rhythm of clipping a 4 foot sling to the chain, putting his foot through it like a stirrup, and then standing up. Then he'd clip the other sling higher up and then stand in that and then simply repeat-repeat-repeat. I belayed as he clipped the occasional quickdraw to the chain in case he fell off. He vanished from my view for several minutes. It was getting cold for those of us not moving. "Are you safe?" I shouted. His head popped into view "I am whilst you've got me on belay". Fair point well made.

I scuttled up after him removing the quickdraws and using his aid climbing technique – it was surprisingly physical and the chain was ice cold on my hands. I got to the top and my watch told me it'd taken the best part of 45 minutes to get the two of us up. There was a suitable bit of faffing as we then rearranged the rope and belay so we could get two climbers moving at the same time. It was a good shout by Adam. Let's not focus too much on the quality of our belay – given what was available it was as good as it could have been.

"Let's not focus too much on the quality of our belay. Given what was available it was as good as it could have been.

(L-R) Adam, Pierce, Lou, Pete and Laira passing through the magnificent slate quarries

> To say that we "did" Snakes and Ladders would be false but we can say that we did a Snake and a Ladder.

Everyone else then took their turn ascending the chain. There was much grunting, blowing of warm air into hands, and even a call from Laira stating "I can't go left, I'm too committed" as she employed the Alpine stomach on the crucial upper section. Exciting times indeed. It was cold but the forecasted rain mercifully didn't come. As Adam and I belayed Pete and Pierce those who had already climbed sat behind us in the entrance to the tunnel and snacked whilst others (naming no names here) visited the ladies room (oops, I've given away the gender) down the other end of the tunnel. Now then, I've often seen signs on lorries stating "if you can't see my mirrors I can't see you" and I now feel the need to put a sign on my helmet stating "If you can't see me it doesn't mean I can't see you".

We exited the far end of the tunnel, abseiled from a tree and found ourselves in…Dali's Hole. Hm. We were still on route but moving slowly and it was now 1:30pm. The route description mentioned a hidden tunnel to the part of the quarry known as Australia. Well it must be bloody well hidden because we never found a trace of it. We found many other tunnels but none that fit the description. Tick-tock tick-tock - time was slipping by. We collectively plumped for an obvious tunnel that after 30 meters or so branched in two; one branch turned into a dead end so we backtracked, the other went to Australia. Things still didn't quite match the description – we were looking for a series of rusty ladders. We faffed around for a while, with Beth scrambled up high to see if there was a path that traversed around the vast crater (there didn't seem to be). I aimlessly scrambled down a bit but found nothing more than three guys looking equally lost having entered Australia via a different tunnel.

One of us (me) stood in some freshly excreted human faeces and we all got a bit cold and a bit demotivated. The awful smell didn't help the situation. With the help of a climber who clearly knew the quarry better than us we spotted the ladders high above us but team enthusiasm had dwindled. Talk of "tea", "cake" and "hut" were rife amongst the group – in fact I might have been a ringleader; I can't clearly remember because I was distracted by visions of me drinking a pint of Glaslyn in Llanberis. To say we "did" Snakes and Ladders would be false but we can say we did a Snake and a Ladder.

We bumped into Alan as we exited the quarry. Apparently his day hadn't been too productive either. He chuckled as he told us how he failed to find the start of Llanberis path up Snowdon, one of the busiest and most trodden paths in the whole of the United Kingdom! By the time he corrected his mistake it was too late summit the mountain and he was walking back through the quarry when he spotted us. Together well all headed back to the hut.

> “Adam assessed the situation well and was already pulling the rope out of his bag. We pitched it from there, 5 people on a 60m rope – you do the maths.

My visions of a beer in Llanberis proved accurate – how very foresightful of me. After a cuppa and a change of clothes we drove down to town. No trip to Llanberis would be complete without popping into Joe Brown’s and V12. Laira contributed some of her hard earned wages to the local economy by picking up screwgates, slings and a nut key under the watchful scrutiny of myself, Pierce and Adam. Back at the hut I cooked up a Bolognese with garlic bread for dinner which seemed to go down pretty well whilst everyone got stuck into the wine and beer. We fed the fire a steady stream of wood and coal. Some one stared a jig-saw which kept many of us amused.

Sunday began like Saturday, with a cup of tea in bed. Thank you Laira. We tidied the hut, loaded the cars, and drove over to Bethesda for a cooked breakfast at Fitzpatrick’s Cafe (highly recommended for the food, service and bearded dragon). Out the window the sky looked promising.

We drove up Ogwen valley and parked at the Milestone layby just as the heavens opened. I sighed. Vicki sat in the passenger seat and looked indifferent as she pulled her down jacket over her knees and got her book out; she wasn’t going anywhere except possibly to sleep. To my surprise the rain hadn’t dampened everyone else’s enthusiasm so we split into two groups (well, technically three if you include Vicki in the car) with a plan to meet back at Ogwen Cottage in an hour and a half.

Laira squeezing the water from her gloves

I joined the scrambling group. Our goal was a swift ascent of Milestone Buttress Approach (SG3). Off we went; Laira, Adam, Pete, Alan and myself. We got to the base of Pulpit route where I asked Adam where it started. “Erm, well, I’ve left the guide book in the car”. We weren’t sure what line to take though Adam knew it was to the left of the Pulpit so we did our best to improvise. It was raining quite steadily. We scrambled at first, covering 30 meters or so. I was the first to cave at a bad step and called up to Adam “Erm, are we going to get the rope out then?” He’d assessed the situation well and was already pulling it out of his bag. We pitched it from there, 5 people on a 60m rope – you do the maths. Mother nature was not kind to us, it rained, than it snowed, then it cleared and I saw the pristine white summit of Y Garn, then it sleeted and snowed some more and visibility plummeted. It was cold and we all struggled to keep our hands warm. My gloves were sopping wet and did little to fend off the icy cold. I did a star jump or two whilst waiting for my turn to climb. My enthusiasm of topping out stretched to me offering myself as abseil poodle. The abseil gully off Milestone Buttress channels all the runoff from that part of Tryfan – I wouldn’t describe it as torrential but it wasn’t far off. The rope by this stage had almost doubled in weight having soaked up several pints of water. Several times I had to stop to untangle it before setting off again. With 2 meters to spare I reached the bottom. “Off!”

I list all the routes that I’ve climbed without exception. When in doubt I’ll cross reference any climb or scramble against the guide book and UKC to see what line most resembled my route. We followed a line that crossed so many other climbs and scrambles that it’d be fanciful to say we did anything other than blaze a trail up a wandering line following the path of least resistance at almost every step. Nice! I’ll claim it as a new ascent and call it Milestone Buttress Approach Super Indirect (SG2). Note for any budding second ascentionists: please add a grade if done in the wet and don’t forget to take a dry treated rope. Four hours after waving good-bye to the others we walked into the visitor centre at Ogwen Cottage. Coffees were purchased and after a quick conflab people began to drift off to their cars to lock horns with the A5 for the return journey.

For your interest the jig-saw was never completed.

(L-R) Pete, Adam, Laira and Alan looking suitably soaked to the bone after our semi-successful ascent of Milestone Buttress.

FF

Naomi Walker climbing Gully II (I) on Red Tarn Cove, Helvellyn. Photo by **Vicki Cox**

HIKE | BIKE | CLIMB