

THE FORTNIGHTLY FAFF

The Periodical Journal of the Mercian Mountaineering Club

June 2015

SEA CLIFFS

Photos of abseiling,
climbing and posing
on the Swanage
meet

SWANAGE'S DARK PLACE

Pete Nielsen's view on recently
climbing through a blow hole

HARRIET'S NORDIC SECRET

Cross country skiing in the
wilderness of Norway

LIVE TO FAFF ANOTHER DAY

Vicki waxes lyrical on the epic
faff of a typical Mercian climb

A VERY BIG DAY IN WASDALE

Lou, Anta and Khyati climbing
Grooved Arete in the Lakes



A word from the editor

Greetings,

I hope you are enjoying the 2015 meets calendar as much as I am. It's great to see the club venture to venues that I'm not aware the Mercians have ever been. Despite a weather forecast that was borderline 'Armageddon' the Swanage meet was a roaring success with people climbing on all three days (four days for some of us). The highlights for me were climbing from the sun-drenched tidal shelf at Subliminal on Sunday, watching Emma's expression as myself and Tom set her off on her first ever sea cliff abseil, and then watching 21 (it was 21 wasn't it?) Mercians squeeze into Pierce and Fran's awesome new inflatable tent one evening when it started to rain.

And then there was Wasdale. Ahh, the lovely Wasdale! What a Saturday - what a scorcher! I don't care what you say about climbing with sweaty hands if it's too hot, give me warm and sunny over cold and cloudy any day of the week. Reading Louise's article on her ascent of Grooved Arete in Wasdale shows that I'm the only one who feels that way. I can't wait to back to that part of the Lakes again.

Looking to the future last year's annual Mercian photography competition was held at the Wagon & Horses and was very well attended. We had 47 photographs entered and everyone awarded points for the best action shots, comedy photos, landscapes, and photos taken on a meet. The photo which got the most points was then announced the overall winner. This year's competition will be in November, so if you haven't already done so it's time to dust off your DSLR or grab your smart phone and get snap happy as you embark on your summer trips. Any photo taken after the 2nd of October 2014 (the date of the last competition) can be entered. The more entries we get the more fun we'll have on the night. Details of how to enter will be announced later in the year. To see last year's winners check out the November 2014 edition of the Faff.

Finally, I was sorry to learn that our friend Norman Wright, the club's founder member, passed away last week. Norman was a splendid chap, and his vitality and enthusiasm were an inspiration to us all. He will be sadly missed. I would like to include some photos and stories of Norman in the next issue and would welcome any contributions that you have.

Stew.

STOB DHUB

GLEN ETIVE
EASTER MEET

By Alan Hardie



After two days of poor visibility the cloud blew away and the sun finally came out to play. Our objective was Stob Dubh a 883 metre Corbett way down Glen Etive.

We parked the car just before reaching the loch and walked down the track that leads to the bridge over the river, near to the old cottage of Collettir. A short easy walk led us along the river bank through pleasant open woodland and brought us to the foot of our mountain on its south west side.

Rising before us a 700 metre grass slope. It looked like we were in for some hard work. Off we went with me trying and failing to set a steady pace. The slope was relentless, the grass wet and slippery and the layers of clothing came off. Frequent pauses were taken but little by little we made progress. Higher up areas of scree mingled with grass and care was required to avoid the loose rock. Up until now Duncan had patiently followed behind but finally he forged ahead leaving me some way behind. After an eternity I could see him up ahead taking a break but it was a good few minutes before I was able to join him.

We continued upwards, but more easily now, crossing large snow patches until at last we reached the summit. Needless

to say the views were superb, to the north Glen Etive and Rannoch Moor, to the south Loch Etive and the open sea. Ben Nevis in the far distance towered above all whilst closer Bidean and Ben Starav were prominent. In all from here we could probably see about twenty of even thirty Munro's and countless other hills. A steep snowy and rocky descent took us down the north east side before the ground began rising up to Beinn Ceitlin which might be regarded as a top. From here the rocky nature of Stob Dubh revealed itself, a huge buttress of black rock streaked with white snow rising above the glen.

For us however it was a steady walk up to the next summit and a lunch break. A long descent through deep wet snow and an equally long traverse round our mountain took us down into Glen Ceitlin. Frogs and small lizard type creatures all leapt aside as we squelched down the hillside. A small herd of deer slipped back up the hillside until eventually we arrived and back the foot of the grass slope which had caused us so much effort earlier. All that was now behind us though and a stroll back through the woods completed our journey for the day.

A grand day out, some 5 hours, only 8 kilometres or 5 miles and about 850 metres of ascent but the struggle up the grass slope will stay with me for some time to come.

THE LYNN TAYLOR GALLERY



Towards Glen Orchy from the West Highland Way



Black Rock cottage on the Easter meet



Weekend Warriors

Matt Kettle on his first ever E1, Lancaster Flyby (E1 5b), Dovestone.

Photo : Joe Norris



Weekend Warriors

With a bomber nut and cam in place Pierce launches himself at the butch overhang on The Marmoset which goes at a somewhat uncharitable HS 5a.

Photo : Vicki Cox

Weekend Warriors

Karl Stewart placing gear on Little White Jug (VS 4c) at Burbage North before pulling through the steep moves above.

Photo : **Vicki Cox**



Weekend Warriors

Stewart Moody after an snail-like ascent of Brant Direct (HVS 5a), Llanberis's classic corner crack.

Photo : Luke Perry



Harriet Stewart's NORDIC SECRET



Where were you for the total eclipse in March? Watching a herd of hundreds of reindeer cross the snowy Scandinavian wilderness as an eerie crescent sun glowed down through the swirling mist and snow? A small group of Mercians comprising myself, Karl Stewart, Simon Hodgson and Chris Johnson were, and it was unforgettable.

Photos by Karl Stewart



Crossing a high plateau - a lesson in perspective



I'd like to start by dispelling a couple of myths about cross country (or nordic) skiing:

- (1) You have to be a super-fit, super-hardy type mountain adventurer.
- (2) You have to be able to ski.

The mere fact that it's me writing this (and not, for example, Matt Kettle!) should be enough to prove that this doesn't have to be an endurance-marathon type of pursuit, and it doesn't require months of training. Yet, although popular with the Scandinavians, it's an activity that remains undiscovered by many.

Kick and glide, kick and glide, kick and glide. The skis crunch through and cut runnels in the snow and the landscape moves past at high speed. Not much more effort than walking, but each step takes you further than you expect. The snow glitters and sparkles. It's such a beautiful, peaceful scene, silent but for the swoosh-swoosh of your skis. Yet again we have the whole valley to ourselves, not a soul in sight, and we're making tracks in virgin powder. I focus on improving my skiing style, making each kick more effective, getting into a steady rhythm, and then I get lost in my thoughts.

A quick stop for some chocolate and a hot drink from the thermos, and layers that were peeled off with the exertion of the last uphill are quickly replaced. A unanimous, unspoken agreement confirmed by shivers all round means we're up and moving as soon as the last mouthful is swallowed. It's warm while you ski but the freezing air still bites at exposed skin. I start to look forward to the hut, surely around the next corner? The night's accommodation is always a welcoming sight at the end of a long day's activity, but these huts are special. Little cabins in beautiful locations, with everything you need to make yourself warm and comfortable. On arrival the work isn't quite over yet though- there's wood to chop, a fire to build in the stove, and snow to collect and melt for water. Then dinner needs cooking before it's time to relax with a game or ten of cards played by candlelight, sipping from a platypus full of rum that Karl insists is well worth its weight in his pack. A laborious night time trip to the outhouse - getting all those layers back on and trudging out through the snow- rewards with a chance to gaze up at the stars and listen to the snowy silence some more, scanning the horizon for a glimpse of the Northern Lights. Soon we're all tucked up in comfy bunks under thick duvets after another perfect winter's day.

Our legs still just about bend after 7 days on skis!



Chief pancake tosser Karl

This was my second cross country skiing holiday. The first, a guided group trip in Arctic Sweden in 2014, was enough to master the basics (ie practise falling over) and to get me hooked. But for me the independence of a self-guided trip brings a much greater sense of adventure and reward, and so this winter we were going it alone in Norway. Just the four of us with nothing but a map and what proved to be some slightly out of date information on where the huts were and, somewhat crucially, whether they were all actually open.

We had chosen to explore the area of Huldreheim in central Norway, and with an extensive network of huts we could pretty much choose how far we wanted to ski each day and in which direction. These huts are owned by the DNT, the Norwegian mountain association, and have well stocked pantries full of delights like porridge, tinned reindeer meatballs, and even instant pancake mix. They operate on a wonderful honesty system - you just write down what you take and how long you stayed and pay later. This means packs can be kept relatively light, with ours mostly weighing in at about 15kg (Karl's was heavier due to an extortionate allowance of rum!). Birch marker posts often showed the trails between huts, aiding navigation, but the compass definitely came in handy when the clouds were low and on one occasion

we had to ski following a bearing through a white-out. Skiing downhill into nothing but whiteness when you can't see further than the next marker post was definitely exhilarating. We put in some long days and the trip wasn't without bruises, blisters and aches, but enjoyment always far outweighed any end-of-day exhaustion.

Our seven day circuit took us across sparkling plateaus with big mountain views, past frozen lakes, up hills followed by exciting swoops down long snowfields, and weaved us through fairy tale forests, where the snow blanketed between the trees was dotted with the tracks of woodland creatures. Each day felt like a winter wonderland, finishing in a cosy candlelit log cabin.

Leafing through the DNT hut guides reveals there are literally hundreds of places that can be explored like this- and that's just in Norway. So if you love expeditions in the mountains, journeying across a landscape day by day and watching the scenery change and new views unfold, then the big secret is that you don't have to limit your adventures to the summer. There's a whole snowy world out there to explore, it's stunningly beautiful, it's all yours, and cross country skiing is far and away the best way to see it. But ssshhh, please don't tell everyone!

FF

Candlelit dinners; Chris, and a slightly sinister Simon.. mmmwwahahahaha



“Karl's pack was heavier due to an extortionate allowance of rum!”

Contouring a hillside with the high mountains of Jotunheimen in the distance



SWANAGE PHOTOS

"If you don't have a
white helmet you can't
be in our gang!"



A photograph of a person sea cliff climbing. The climber is wearing a dark blue hoodie with pink sleeves, a white helmet, and is positioned on a dark, wet rock face. They are secured by a red rope and a blue rope. The background shows turbulent blue water with white foam crashing against the cliff. The text "SWANAGE PHOTOS" is overlaid in the upper right, and a quote is below it.

SWANAGE PHOTOS

"My first weekend of
sea cliff climbing...
Fantastic"

SWANAGE PHOTOS

"Oooh, a camera, I must
strike a heroic pose.
Grrrrr. OK, CLIMBING!"



SWANAGE PHOTOS

"Erm, are you absolutely,
100% , swear on your
mother's life sure that abseil
stake is firmly in the ground?"



SWANAGE PHOTOS

"That was never a Vdiff, Hard
Severe more like"



SWANAGE PHOTOS

"We've heard of a great blowhole route around here called 'Avernus', Scott Titt reckons it's awesome.

We're off to do it next."

FF



AVERNUS

"it's more like a V Diff, it's the slime and bird poo that makes it a severe"

S. Titt

"The finish is there?!
.....bugger that!"

P. Nielsen

"terrifying"

J. Gilmour



A. Armstrong

Some say it can't be climbed without getting your feet wet, some say it can't be climbed without getting covered in bird poo.....they were right

This is the true story of 3 climbers quest to discover the mysterious Avernus.

After battling sheer cliffs, monstrous seas and wet feet they find themselves faced with a foreboding, dark, cave with only one way out....an impossible climb...they have two choices continue or sack it off and go for a cup of tea.

Guided by a mysterious guardian angel, the fearless Andy begins the ascent in to the unknown, what he discovers is slime, more slime then some bird poo, a terrifying crux with some slime and bird poo then a bit more slime a terrifying chimney - with very little slime, until finally reaching freedom...he made it. Jane begins her ascent to freedom, battling the same slime and bird poo...she expertly makes it. The reluctant Pete makes a start, giving several grunts for dramatic effect, half way up he fights trying to free Henry Hexentric no.4, he must make a difficult decision - save himself or leave Henry alone forever at the mercy of Avernus...he choses the latter, knowing it will cost him dear....

After surviving the terror of Avernus the 3 must now live with the fact that Henry Hexentric no. 4 is gone forever, their (i.e. Pete's) only saving grace is he wasn't a Cam.

Coming soon as a straight to DVD film



Suitable only for
persons of
18 years and over.

LANGUAGE	Frequent, strong
SEX/NUDITY	None
VIOLENCE	Occasional
THEME/CONTENTS	Terror throughout, scenes of bird poo

A n o d e

t o

f a f f

by Vicki Cox

You wake in the morning as the alarm starts to ring
And realise you've yet to pack a thing.
So now comes the manic rush round in hope
That somebody else will remember the rope...
And screw gates and quick drawers
And a nut key and cams
Because you're not the one who makes all the plans.

It's you who provides the biscuits and cake
That are vital for morale if the club is to make
That first ascent on the new E9
Or at least to sustain them until it's pub time.
But before that there are numerous things to do
There's an art form to faff
And rules to stick to.

Out of the rucksack gear comes one by one
And onto the harness they are clipped on.
But you can't go about this task willy-nilly
Oh no, my dear, that would just be plain silly!
Each nut and each cam must be carefully arranged
By size and by colour, by weight and by name.
By make and by model, they're arranged round the waist
According to the climber's preference and taste.
You don't want to find upon reaching the crux
That the vital piece that you need so much
As you're hanging precariously in mid-air
Is stuck behind your derriere!

Now you've been at the crag half an hour
And the clouds look like they are threatening a shower
So it's time to consider bailing to the caff
Because quite frankly the weather looks naff.
But you're all geared up now so you may as well
Get up a VDiff because you never can tell
If the weather will decide to turn out fine
So you get off your arse and get up the climb.

You reach the dizzying heights of a foot off the ground
Before you realise your belayer's nowhere to be found.
They are busy off having a nature wee
Having carefully picked the spot so that no one can see.
For they don't want to show their lily white ass
While they squat by a boulder to have a quick slash.



Out of the rucksack gear comes one by one... and onto the harness they are clipped on.



Clouds look like they're threatening a shower. But you're all geared so you may as well...

...get up a Vdiff because you never can tell.

Finally you're ready to scale the rock face
 Your gear is all racked and your belayer's in place.
 You make a bold start and are soon off the floor...
 Ready to engage in some faff some more.
 Because it's now you realise the state of your shoes
 The laces are untied and the dirt is bad news
 If you are expected to creep up that gritstone slab.
 So you call over a Merican mate to grab
 The beer mat to give your shoes a good clean
 Until in them your own face could be seen.
 Now you feel ready to tackle the world
 But it's not long before the abuse starts to be hurled.



...the laces are untied
 and the dirt is bad news

"This is never V Diff! It's more Hard Severe!"
 Is all that the spectators below can hear.
 Well, that and, of course, "F***ing arse shit!"
 When you are reach the really tricky bit.
 The bit where there is no gear for two yards
 And the next move seems desperately hard.
 The clip stick is lying out of your reach
 And anyway, you should practice what you preach
 And not simply cheat when you can't see
 Where to use an Alpine knee.



This is never Vdiff! It's
 more hard severe!

By the time you reach the belay stance
 You've climbed more 'free' than those grimpers in France
 But at least you made it to the final ledge.
 So now to ensure you don't fall off the edge,
 Your anchor has to be the best.
 But yours looks like a birdie's nest
 With rope in knots around the tree
 It looks like piles of spaghetti.

After epic faff about which knots to use,
 And whether to take off your climbing shoes,
 You finally sit down and are in for a shock
 As right up your trumpet sticks a needle sharp rock!
 But it's too late now to change your stance
 If your second is to even get a chance
 Of climbing before the sun sinks low
 So you shout 'On belay' and off they go.



More faff ensues when
 a nut gets stuck

F***!

More faff ensues when a nut gets stuck
 And the air is turned blue with cries of "F***!"
 By now the sun has started to dip
 And the rope goes tight as your partner slips
 On a piece of slime where you blazed a trail
 And took the route beyond the pale
 Because you were damned if you could get up that groove
 Without having to do a contortionist's move.

With a momentous grunt your second tops out
And they're barely upright before they shout:
"On the slab you were on the bloody wrong side!
It clearly says 'go right' in the guide."
So you must justify your route finding
While you start the task of the rope minding.
You try to coil the rope but you're clearly not able
Because it resembles a giant cat's cradle.
After much tugging and cursing the rope comes free
But now the sun's down and you can barely see.

"Where's the descent? Is it there or left?"
"I don't know. Does it go down that cleft?"
"I thought you'd done this route before!" they moan.
"I have but all these bloody trees must have grown.
I'm sure they weren't all here before.
Last time it was a clear ab to the floor."

Finally after a good look around
You find a way to reach the ground.
By now it's pretty much pitch dark
And you struggle to find where the car was parked.
You'd think that now all the faff was done,
That you could head to the pub and have some fun.
But it's not to be as the rack must be sorted
Before the adventures of your day can be reported.
Your harness is off and slung in your bag
But your second's still taping their new crag swag
And counting their rack, not once but twice,
While you point out that: "sometime today would be nice".

The epic over: you reach the pub
And tuck in a pint and some grub
While you recount the mental battle you won
And rule it was definitely type two fun.
But you live to faff another day
Because you are a Merican and that's our way.



You try to coil the rope but you're clearly not able

It resembles a giant cat's cradle.



The epic over: you reach the pub. And tuck into a pint and some grub.



Because you are a Merican and that's our way.

[Clipstick Faff] Pierce used his clip stick to hook a third quickdraw onto his 6b "project" during the Swanage meet on the May Bank holiday. After nearly an hour and having rotated through two belayers his progress was deemed glacial but he persevered and made it to the lower off in the end.

photofaff by VICKI COX



Beg, Borrow & Bingo

You could be in seventh heaven with an instant £25 cash payout by playing this exciting new bingo game.

It's easy to play, just snip along the perforation to claim your free lucky ticket and take it to the next Mercian camping meet.

Unlike other bingo games this one has a great twist. Tom Morris is our unsuspecting bingo caller (sshhh, don't tell him). Keep an ear out at all times as Tom realises what he's forgotten to pack. As he begs, borrows or buys cross the items off your winning ticket.

The first person to get a line wins £5*. For the whole lot one lucky camper will sweep £25 **

Win up to £25 instantly!



YOUR LUCKY TICKET!

* This cash prize is fictitious.

** And so is this one. Sorry!



Beg, Borrow & Bingo

SLEEPING BAG	TENT PEGS	DOWN JACKET	MUG
SHOWER GEL	KITCHEN ROLL	COOKING OIL	CAMPING CHAIR
GAS CANISTER	TEA SPOON	MATCHES	KITCHEN KNIFE

A very **BIG** day out on **GROOVED ARETE**

words by Louise Bullock

**photos by Louise Bullock, Khyati
Patel, Pierce Ferris and Anta Misina**

During the second bank holiday weekend in May a large group of Mercians headed up to the Lake District for the usual assortment of camping/climbing/drinking/walking. Our goal - attempts at 'proper mountaineering' fun in the stunning setting of Wasdale. What could go wrong? As it turns out ...quite a lot...a comedy of errors was the order of the day on Saturday.

After the usual mind numbing drudge up the M6 on the Friday night, Saturday dawned bright and sunny. We were up early and keen to get going. As there was so many of us, discussions and feverish planning soon began on who was going to climb with who, which routes were suitable for newbies to have a bash at, which crags faced the sun, which routes were classics and just 'had' to be done this weekend etc...etc... Not liking to rush the decision making process, and with everyone being uncharacteristically polite about their preferences for the day, approximately an hour later we had a plan - Pierce, Beth, Karl, Harriet, Nima, Tom, Joel, Anta, Khyati and myself would head over to Central Buttress on Scafell. It wasn't even 9am. So far, so good.

Roughly 6 miles later we pulled into the car park at Wasdale Head and it was at this point that Tom set the tone for the rest of the day. Before we even parked up he trotted over from Joel's car to ask Beth for her car keys. "My car keys?" remarked Beth quizzically, "sure you can have them but my car's back at the campsite." "Yes," Tom replied sheepishly "just got to pop back and get my rope." Oh dear. Not wanting to wait around for Tom and Joel to return from the 12 mile addition to the day, the rest of us carried on. It was an hour and half walk in to Central Buttress and my God did I feel it. My little legs ached and my lungs complained as I panted and huffed my way up the hill. "Keep a slow but steady pace" advised Beth. I tried but still my body hurt and I had to keep stopping every few metres to catch my breath. Even giving the rope to Anta didn't help much. I need to get fit!

Eventually though, after walking to the top of the tourist path, scrambling up some grotty scree and tramping across a grassy ledge, we found the bottom of our climbs. So it seemed had Karl, Harriet and Nima who had already started on a nearby route. I looked up to find our climb. However, what awaited us was a less than appealing sight. Somehow, despite the glorious sunshine and hot weather on the walk up, we seemed to have found the only shadowy, breezy spot on the mountain. A wet, greasy, cold and oily looking slab faced us. Not appealing. Pierce and Beth started gearing up regardless whilst myself, Anta and Khyati looked on hesitantly. "I'm not sure I fancy this" said Anta, "me neither" I

said (having to stop myself from saying "thank the Lord"), "shall we find something else?". And so with that we started the short down climb from Central Buttress. I was all for going for a walk instead but Anta was keen to find another route. It was now about 12pm so we stopped, had lunch, and made a plan B. After flicking through the guide books we decided that Grooved Arete on Pikes Crag would be our new target. This was a 7 pitch, VDiff, on a south facing crag. Lovely.

We got to the bottom of the climb and geared up. It was now 2pm. It was only then Anta and I realised Khyati had not done a multi-pitch climb before. Ahhhhh... slight stumbling block. However, Khyati seemed keen, I guess everyone's got to start somewhere and with Anta's relentless Eastern European pragmatism fuelling the day we decided to carry on. Also as I looked across the valley I could see Pierce still making his way up the first pitch of 'greasy misery' (or whatever it was called) which reassured me I had made the right decision. In comparison our first pitch wasn't too bad. Anta had only gone a few metres up before declaring "it's great! This is why I freaking love climbing" so all was looking good. She was making easy work of

it. So easy in fact that she decided to run the first two pitches together. Good idea I thought – no point in hanging around. I waited for Anta to get to the top and start setting up the belay before tying in to the middle of the rope. It was only when Anta disappeared up round the corner and the rope began to look a bit thin on the ground that I realised we may have a problem. I picked up the guidebook and looked at the lengths for the first two pitches. I can't remember the exact figures but something like 18m then 15m. Right OK. "How long is your rope?" I yelled up as Anta disappeared from view. "50 metres," came the reply.

Now, I'm no expert in setting up a belay but even I know that 18 + 15 plus some extra for the belay equals getting on for 50m. Fine if you only have to bring up one person, have two ropes, or have clear sight to throw the rope back down for the third person. None of which we had that day. "I don't think we'll have enough rope" I shouted back at the now empty cliff face. A small pause. "Well, you'll have to tie on a few metres below Khyati and I'll pull you both up on the same rope" shouted Anta. Shitski. Comedy error number 1.

Route replanning at lunch. (L-R) Anta Misina, Louise Bullock



Fortunately pitches one and two were easy and we managed to reach the first belay shelf through a weird combination of stop/start, 'wait for the person above you to move out the way', climbing. Surprisingly no more faff was had and Khyati was beaming so clearly enjoying herself. Once at the top we huddled on the belay ledge and looked in the guidebook at the next pitch. All is well I thought. Then literally, as those words left my consciousness, I looked over to see Khyati turn round and gently nudge her bag over and off the ledge. "Watch your.....bag" I offered but it was too late. The bag plummeted to the floor bouncing off the rock as it went. "Oh no" we said as a collective three. Poor Khyati looked on forlornly as Anta explained that we really had to carry on up the climb and could perhaps try and retrieve the bag on our way down. Inside the bag was Khyati's coat, water, food, walking boots and a non-too cheap (and also borrowed) DSLR camera; nothing important then! Double shitski. Comedy error number 2.

So, now a little lighter in weight, we cracked on with pitches three and four. Pitch four had a tricky move on it as I remember but nothing difficult and we kept up a good pace. We could also still see Beth and Pierce on their climb across the valley. Pierce was on a belay ledge about three quarters of the way up and Beth was on what looked like the second or third pitch. It's funny how the valley funnels sound and we could hear them as clear as a bell even though they were a fair way away. "This is horrible Pierce" shouted Beth. "I know, my dear, I know" he shouted back. It made me smile and reminded me that things could be worse. I could be climbing in the cold and grease!

We started off up pitch 5 and I glanced at my watch. 5pm. So, it had taken us 3 hours to do 4 pitches. Another 3 remained. So at this rate the ETA of the top out would probably be around 8pm. It was getting on for mid-summer and was still a very sunny day but another thought ran through my mind at that point - 'I wonder what time sunset is?'. "Have you got a head torch with you?" I asked Anta and Khyati, knowing that I'd left mine in the tent earlier that morning. "Tom's got mine" said Khyati, "No" said Anta. Arse. Comedy error number 3 - always pack a head torch when you are likely to be somewhere like the highest point in England at sundown.



Louise reaches the belay after pitch 2.

Anyway, as I pondered on how good my night vision might be and how many carrots I'd eaten over the last few days I was distracted again by shouting from across the valley; this time by Karl, Harriet and Nima. They had topped out on their climb and were shouting down to Beth and Pierce to see whether they had also finished their route. They hadn't but weren't far away. They couldn't hear Karl and Harriet's yelling and so were oblivious to what was going on. I shouted across to Karl "they're still climbing, they can't hear you!" but the sound just bounced back. So, I watched as Karl, Harriet and Nima abseiled off their climb and made their way down the scree slope again towards the valley floor. Sounds of scraping echoed around the hills as they dislodged loose rock. Amusingly as they approached half way down the slope Beth and Pierce then appeared at the top of their climb and began shouting a similar chant of "Karl and Harriet, where are you?" I tried the same

We made it to the top...the view was well worth waiting for and was totally awesome. The sun was setting and looked positively celestial as it broke through the clouds.

tactic of “they can’t hear you, they’ve already gone” but it was futile. Beth and Pierce then disappeared from view and descended via a different path off the back of the hill.

It was getting on for 6:30pm by now and, being coatless, Khyati was looking a bit chilly and hungry. I gave her my waterproof and a bite of an apple. Anta continued with her Latvian stoicism and regularly updated us during pitch six on more ‘bomber’ gear placements (and she was bloody right). As we got to the top of pitch seven I spotted Karl, Harriet and Nima making their way down the path. They were closer than before so I wondered if they’d hear me this time. If so they could try and find Khyati’s bag.

“KAAAARRRRLLLL” I bellowed. “HeIIIIloooooo” came the reply and a reassuring wave. Brilliant. A relay of shouting ensued with Karl agreeing to go and look for Khyati’s bag. Anta had now topped out and from her position on top ‘o hill could see said bag. By directing Karl at loud volume she managed to guide him towards the bag which he dutifully retrieved and left by the path for Khyati to pick up later. Happy days.

We ploughed on with the last pitch. It was now 8pm. We made it to the top without difficulty and I have to say the view was well worth waiting for and was totally awesome. The sun was setting and looked positively celestial as it broke through the clouds. Khyati summed it up in one word – “wow.” Feeling quite pleased with ourselves we looked for the way down. “It’s a small abseil first I think” said Anta “then a walk down to the scree slope.” Cool I thought, I can do that.

Rope admin after topping out in the evening sun with Wastwater in the distance. (L-R) Louise Bullock, Khyati Patel.

So, Anta set up the abseil and, as I'd not done that much abseiling before, gave me a quick reminder lesson on which bits of gear to put where. As we were running through the equipment needed comedy error number 4 emerged when Khyati remarked "a belay plate? Oh I don't have one of those." I think my face said it all at that point (and I hope Khyati has since forgiven my expression). It's just that after 7 pitches and at what was now 8:30pm at night those are not words that you want to hear. Fortunately both Anta and I had a spare belay plate so quickly passed one to Khyati. We completed the abseil and Anta and I started to put our approach shoes back on ready for the walk off (poor Khyati's were still in her bag which was now by the side of the path thanks to Karl). Again feeling pretty pleased with ourselves all that was left to do was pull the rope down. Or so you'd think.

Anta gave the rope a quick tug... nothing. "It's probably just caught on a crack in the rock" she said and gave a harder tug. Still nothing. I then grabbed the other end and between us we tried to flick the rope over the top. Still nothing. We repeated the process several times but to no avail. Comedy error number 5 – the rope was wedged. My heart sank as we contemplated what to do. "Leave it, I'll buy you a new rope Anta" I suggested "let's just get down off this hill. "I'm not leaving my rope" she retorted, "I'll climb back up to get it." Who was I to argue with that? So I watched as Anta climbed/ scrambled her way back up the rock, without tying in, to untangle the rope and re-abseil back down. I looked around and realised we were now the only people on the hill. What had been a busy, sunny spot with tourists at every turn was now a chilly, lonely place. 'Please don't fall Anta' I thought to myself 'as I don't fancy calling mountain rescue out to pick you up'.

I checked my phone for reception in case it was needed but it was dead. Comedy error number 6. However, just as I was thinking the worst Anta reappeared with the rope perfectly coiled and a smile on her face. "Right... let's go" she said. I needed no more prompting, I was off.

It took us about an hour to walk out and by now my head was pounding as I'd run out of water about 2 hours earlier. It was dusk but we could still see and head torches were far from necessary. As we descended down the path we also started to meet more and more people coming up the other way. Group after group paraded past us. What were they doing at this time of night I wondered? Then it dawned on me... The 3 Peaks Challenge. Suddenly it didn't feel so lonely and the hill came alive once more. We were spurred on to continue to the car.

At 9:45pm we reached the car park and easily spotted Pierce's car. He and Beth were in good spirits (considering they'd been waiting for us for nearly 2 hours and had given up on 'I Spy' after 'm' for mountain and 'w' for Wasdale) and welcomed us back into the fold. After a brief synopsis of our comedy of errors we headed home.

And so after getting on for 13 hours out on the hill we arrived back at the campsite at 10:15pm. Shower, food and then bed were all we could think about. I was happy to snuggle down in my sleeping bag and as I drifted off I couldn't help but laugh at all the hiccups we'd had. It had been a very big day out.

Oh and by some miracle... Khyati's camera survived it's 50m tumble! Maybe someone was smiling on us after all that day.

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