

THE FORTNIGHTLY FAFF

The Periodical Journal of the Mercian Mountaineering Club

December 2015

DOLOMITES

Mountain biking and via ferrata
on the big summer trip

THE GOWER

Khyati's report on one of our
favourite coastal climbing venues

PHOTO COMP

The winners and runners up from
the 2015 photography competition





A word from the editor

I hope you all had a great summer. As I'm sat here typing this it's a chilly 3 degrees outside and some dude on twitter reckons there were a few flakes of snow in Birmingham last night. Winter is certainly up on us and I'm really excited about it. Mike, Roland, Vicki and I had the pleasure of attending Malcolm Imhoff's audio visual show last night in support of MacMillan Cancer Support. One of his newest films featured images taken on the Seatoller meet (more amusingly known as the Great End meet) in February. The Mercians were blessed with the finest winter weather and ice conditions to summit Scafell. What a weekend, it's a shame a missed it. Looking at Malcolm's photos has me chomping at the bit to get out in the mountains this winter so let's all keep our fingers crossed for lots of snow and freeze-thaw cycles.

The run up to the festive season which is jam packed with activities to keep us busy. The AGM is next week and it'd be great to see as many of you there as possible. If you've not already done so get yourself signed up for the Cwm Dyli meet on the 4th to the 6th of December in Snowdonia. There'll be plenty of opportunities for hiking, scrambling and biking. The more hardy of us may even bosh up an easy rock climb if it's dry and bright. We've then got the Christmas dinner on the 12th of December and I'm sure there'll be a trip (or two) to the Christmas market in Birmingham for a few drinks and a bockwurst. On Friday the 18th of December Vicki and I welcome you to our house for the first ever Reel Sutton Mock Film Festival - basically it's an excuse to sit around watching mountaineering films (of which we have amassed many) projected onto a big screen. Check out the poster on the last page on this issue of The Faff.

Stew.

Julie on the Sella Ronda, amongst the fine scenery of the Dolomites. Photo by Adam Butler

the 2 wheeled version

by Julie Taylor

DOLOMITES

As most of the Dolomites stories will be about the ups – via ferrata, epic multi pitch climbs, sport ‘rest day’ climbing and summiting endless metal -cross implanted peaks, it’s about time to hear about the downs. Kilometres and kilometres (or miles if you are a true Brit) of fast flowing, swooping, bumpy single-track linked together by numerous leg resting, bum plonking cable cars. The only way to experience biking in the Dolomites.

Although we learnt this the hard way. After finding a couple of said trails, we found ourselves in Selva for the afternoon, at the bottom of a valley, too tight to pay for the expensive lift up and keen to get back to the top of the pass, a measly 8 kms away. Inspired by numerous Italian lycra clad road bikers, Adam and myself (or actually, maybe it was just myself) were keen to power up the hill and smash down the other side. 1.5 hour target to the top. Easy.

That is until half way up the monster. The ‘stop once’ became a ‘stop every km’ and the head down philosophy was in full force as we inched up the winding, steep roads. Morale was maintained at a low level

by the chap on the electric mountain bike who whizzed past, grinning, as well as the skinny road biking dude not even breaking a sweat.

Eventually the top was summited and ice cream rewards eaten. The compensation was a long sweeping run down to Canzai, sometimes on gravel roads (Italians seem to love these) but also numerous footpaths and tracks through the rooky woods, zipping in and around mountain huts, lakes and the narrow road. The bottom of this was the best biking trail we found and we rode it several times over the next few days. Perfect biking and well worth the slog up (although I’m not sure Adam would agree!). Beer deserved.



The next biking phase was Val di Fassa Bike Park, which was definitely uplift territory. The 'Double U' and '4 Cross' trails were long, natural, earthy, trails with plenty of berms and roots chucked in. Italians must find it amusing to only put warning labels on half the jumps – nothing like suddenly getting air when you are a big fan of 2 wheels on the floor. A great park, although the last run down – a mixture of blue and black (we couldn't tell the difference, it was all just nails), just about beat us – steep, off camber and with ridiculous north shore (slippery, awkward, boardwalk type affair, should be banned). Time to head to town for an urgent brake pad restock and to let the brakes cool off before we hit the next trail, the '530 footpath', or otherwise known as the trail of doom. After sliding face first into a small tree and somersaulting several metres down the side of the valley my enthusiasm for the 530 was somewhat dented. A bit of pushing/sliding down the next section was needed. Beer again deserved.

The highlight of the biking was without doubt the Sella Ronda tour. A 60km loop around the Sella Ronda massif, 400m of uphill only and all lift assisted, this was such a good mtb day out that we did it twice. Canezai – Selva – Corvara – Arabba – Canezai all in a few hours - this would take all day in a car. Lots and lots of long, alpine runs, steep but not ridiculously so and plenty of berms, switchbacks and smiley face biking. Not to mention the baby marmots (all avoided). Perfect.

Adam at the Val di Fassa Bike Park.
Photo by Julie Taylor





Photos and words
by Khyati Patel

As usual a last minute decision to tag along; this was my fourth meet and the destination was the much talked up Gower peninsula in South Wales. Even with a dodgy ankle (otherwise referred to by Vijay as “Matt Kettle syndrome”), and the dread of the upcoming night-shifts, I couldn’t resist. After a hurried food-shop in Tesco’s, followed by piling various bits of clothing, camping and climbing gear into and on top of a progressively unbalanced backpack, I was all set to go. I nestled comfortably at the back of Beth’s car, and spent the next three or so hours getting an education in music and learning the cardinal sins of motorway driving (i.e. never hog the middle lane people lest you want to experience the wrath of the Morris finger). Two rounds of “Psycho Killer”, a Welsh rendition of “New York” (or rather “Newport”), a nice sing-along of “Riptide”, and some good old folk music later... we had arrived at Nicholaston campsite; and unusually for me, still within daylight hours!

THE GOWER



A short while later, Ferris towers constructed, we gathered around its entrance and sat down to a meal of fresh soup and bread; and for Pierce, a questionable 3-day-old chicken risotto (which thankfully didn't resurface in any other form). Fed and content I was soon comfortably inside my sleeping bag and only part registered the arrival of the others in my state of slumber.

The next morning looked promising. The sun was out, the air was warm, the group set off towards the sea with much hope for the bank holiday. Fran, Little Pierce and I began at a leisurely pace. I was amazed to find so much sand just a short walk down from the campsite. We walked across the beautifully pristine and deserted expanse of beach half-trying to identify footprints in an attempt to guess the correct direction; thankfully Geoff and Lynn soon caught up with us and we could make out the others in the distance.

By now the tide had come just far enough in to obstruct a straightforward passage to where the group would be climbing. What with my annoyingly restrictive hobble and Fran having Little P aboard, we decided against a potentially hazardous scramble across the slippery rocks, and opted instead to follow the blotches of colour resembling Fabian and Beth (on what seemed at the time to be sensible detour). We made our way up the cliff expecting there to be an equally defined route down to the other side. Instead we reached the top and followed the endless curves of the path

at times getting teasingly close to somewhere that might lead back down to the beach; only to be disappointed. I gradually gave up any hopes of climbing that day; meanwhile Little P bobbed up and down in his throne snoozing as contentedly as ever. Having eventually returned to sea-level and plodded across another long stretch of sand; the next hurdle was traversing the mini river-rapid that had somehow formed in the middle of the beach. Walking boots in one hand, stick in the other, Little P still aboard, we waded across and were finally met with the familiar banter of Mercians'.

A much needed chomp of my sandwiches later, I clambered up to an optimal position and began my usual pictorial documentation of the weekend (or for want of a better term, Paparazzi-ing). At this point Pierce was amidst attempts to coax Fabian into braving his first outdoor climb (which he went on to perform effortlessly!) The rest of the group were at various points in their climbs, on different parts of the rock; making the crag looking wonderfully Mercian from afar.

The remainder of the afternoon passed quite happily; largely involving a good workout of my upper body whilst holding Little Pierce during numerous bouncing sessions; as well as testing the limits of my MK syndrome by scrambling as high as I could (barefoot) for an aerial shot of Fabian's sand art (aka "PIERCE SMELLS"); and finally swimming backwards into crashing waves in an attempt to de-sand my suit. Meanwhile, others in the group (Tom, Adam, Pierce, and Anta) had gone on to show serious climbing skills on some of the trickier routes.

On heading back to the campsite after a tiring day, a combination of ice-cream, home-made hummus and crisps kept the hunger at bay until barbecue time (somewhat aided by the distraction of firstly

Louise very nearly loses her front teeth playing frisbee with Anta on Saturday evening.

trying to remember what owls looked like, and secondly trying to draw a convincing interpretation in Lynn's sketchbook... undoubtedly most of us failed). Of course, a meet wouldn't be a meet without at least one evening in the company of Pierce's Japanese friend. After a premature charcoaling of sausages, the flamethrower accompanied us back down to the beach, riding in a place of honour beside Little Pierce (Big Pierce's idea unsurprisingly). The group collated various bits of wood en route (my pride at having two sticks in each hand soon deflated after seeing Tom and Beth excusing their way down with something of a small tree!) After a fruitless debate about the best method of maintaining the fire (i.e. flamethrower versus no flamethrower) – during which time the discovery of "sand-lice" had managed to traumatise most of the group – Anta finally took charge. It wasn't long before we had a textbook perfect campfire with singing to boot!

Fire out; we turned in for the night, exhausted but content. Any dreams of a return of the glorious sunshine were soon crushed by the sound of persistent rain and overhang of grey that we rose to. Although this was not unheard of on a meet, there was a hint of bitterness about yet another sodden August bank holiday...meh really?!

It wasn't long however before Beth's enthusiasm had convinced even Pierce that a dip in the sea would be a great morning spent. So as the most of the group suited up and headed off for a swim, semi-drenched already, Fran and I chose the comfort of the tent and another cup of tea. Even Little P chimed in with his attempts at burbling "brew". Lynn joined us shortly afterwards and tempted me with her colourful and skilfully knitted wrist-warmers. I passed the morning fumbling between plain and purl stitches (Lynn patiently guiding me), all the while cherishing the diversity within the group.

Before we knew it the others had returned ravenous from their swim, aching to head to the nearest pub for lunch. The King Arthur Hotel housed us for much of remainder of the day and might have earned a Mercian stamp of approval had it not been for certain disappointments. The fury in Tom's and Fabian's eyes when they encountered their minimalist serving of a single roast potato and barely visible Yorkshire pudding was... well let's just say it, frightening. The silent rage was only fuelled by the arrival of Pierce's plate which housed not only a generous dollop of mash (that in all fairness he had specifically requested), but also dare I mention it again... An Extra Roast Potato. *Everyone gasps*.





However, the salt was truly rubbed into their wounds when Fran having sat down between the pair was spotted by a kind waiter eating our cold leftovers and treated to an entire plate of complementary roast potatoes. We could barely contain our laughter by this point. After this misfortune it was a wonder that the boys agreed to go back. However, following a brief walk in the drizzle to cool down and a refreshing snooze back at the campsite, we returned to King Arthur in the hope for some evening entertainment. The singers were okay enough, but we hadn't anticipated the comical yet somewhat disturbing supporting dance-act provided by an unusually precocious (?) five year old and her friend (perhaps trialling an audition for Britain's Got Talent). Needless to say, it wasn't long before the group had created their own form of entertainment. Namely the 'let's-see-if-Anta-can-toss-a-beer-coaster-inside-Fabian's-mouth' game (and vice versa). After tiring of this, we escaped upstairs to wind up the evening.

As I snuggled once again into my sleeping bag that night; I had the soundest sleep in a tent to date. I woke up the next day, still hobbling, still dreading the night-shift ahead, but thankful for a weekend that removed me blissfully and entirely from the sobriety of my every-day life. Who can say that two days without climbing could ever be a waste when you're with the Mercians'?!

What do Mercians get up to in the pub when it's too wet outside to go climbing? Anta tries to throw beer mats into Fabian's mouth.



BY STEWART MOODY

I've stood in some big queues in my time; at the multiplex cinema the night Jurassic Park opened in 1993 and on the London underground escalator up to embankment on New Year's Eve 1999. A queue I stood in earlier this year in the Dolomites was much smaller by comparison, but caught me quite by surprise. I was just outside the town of Cortina and stepping onto the Punta Anna via ferrata that had been recommended for its breath taking line and mountain atmosphere.

The route is graded 5C which equates to hard and strenuous in a serious and remote environment. We'd driven 90 minutes from our Mercian base in Canazei to the car park at the base of the mountain near Cortina, from where 2 chair lifts had whisked us half way up the mountain to Rifugio Pomedes (2,203m). A track of steep switchbacks led 15 minutes later to the base of the ferrata. As I crested a small ridge and turned a corner I was greeted first by a man gearing up, and as I craned my neck I saw a queue of proportions that puts Tryfan's Grooved Arête on a sunny bank holiday to shame. I'd expected a little congestion as the ferrata is one of Italy's finest and this was a good weather day after all, but my jaw dropped a little when I saw the 20 or 30 people bumper-to-bumper on the first hundred meters of cable. "You've got to be kidding me!" I muttered under my breath. So we did what other self respecting English folk would do, we politely joined the queue and got on with chatting with the folk in front of us – "Hey-up, nice weather for it!".

En masse (read “bum to face”) we moved up the initial section of steep cable that offered no overtaking opportunities but did give great views of the surrounding mountains and some nice exposure. Already I was looking at my watch and doing some arithmetic. It was about 10am, and the last cable car down from the end of the ferrata at the summit of Tofana di Mezzo (3,244m) was at about 5pm. The guidebook reckoned it would take 4-6 hours to complete the ferrata, covering nearly 2km of distance and about 1,000m of ascent. At our current pace, which I could only describe as glacial we’d be lucky to reach the summit by midnight. This was frustrating to say the least and it continued for nearly an hour. A bunch of American lads and who were clearly being guided up their first ever ferrata (5C! Really sensible) let us by when Naomi politely asked if we could overtake at the next safe opportunity. To say we were applying social pressure would be an understatement. To say we were right up their trumpet and applying principles of Matt Kettle’s flat-track-bullying would be spot on.

We accelerated away with a ‘courtesy spurt’, a phrase we coined to describe not dawdling in front of someone who has just let you through. So we sprinted on for a few minutes only to hit the back of a family of three from Germany; a husband, wife and teenage daughter. Even though Tom was enjoying the cracking view Tom he was frustrated at being almost stationary for another 20 minutes. The moment the wife sat on her husband’s head in order to rest on a particularly strenuous section was a personal low point for me and the last straw for Tom. The devil on his left shoulder gave the angel on his right shoulder a bloody nose and he began a series of loud and not wholly inaccurate grumbles about “politeness” and being “out of one’s depth”. It was funny and tragic at the same time as the woman was clearly struggling, conscious we wanted to pass, and wasn’t holding us up intentionally. Seeing a nice view to the left I asked Naomi and Vicki to pose for a photo; “Smile” I chirped, “...if you’re able” interjected Tom sourly. It was the comic relief I needed, on paper his words aren’t funny but at the time it was hilarious and we belly laughed for ages. A short while later the family allowed us a moment to overtake and we rewarded them with a courtesy spurt.

Naomi and Vicki on the lower section of the ferrata with fine views of the surrounding Dolomites. Despite the crowd they still manage to smile



As mid day passes we reach nice sections of path free of cable where overtaking is possible. From here we really start to motor

Fifteen minutes later I came upon an old-ish dude who looked quite French. From his equipment he looked like he'd spent a lot of time in the mountains so I didn't think he'd hold us up too much. A moment later I watched him with incredulous eyes as he tried 8 times (count them, 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8) to open the gate of his karabiner to move it onto the next rung of the cable. "You've got to be kidding me!" I muttered under my breath again. Seeing that the terrain wasn't too hazardous I simply unclipped and walked past him before re-clipping.

Free of the crowds for good we really started to motor with one eye on the clock. We passed the summit of Punta Anna without really noticing it and continued upwards. Here the cable became more intermittent than lower down so passing the few other parties on the route was never an issue. We didn't stop for rest, water nor food, even when it became clear that our blistering pace meant we'd reach the top with hours to spare.



There was a well known part of the ferrata known for it's exposure where we paused for some photographs and to enjoy the moment. After the crowds in the lower section this upper section was fantastic. The mountain kept on coming; a steep section of cable, a scramble, a short walk across an exposed ridge, a ramp along the side of a tower, ladders, more cable, ledge after ledge. As the ferrata snaked it's way up the ridge the green valley passed from view and the environment changed to a pale grey rock; this is a what grade "C" ferrata is all about, you pass an invisible divide into the high mountain environment, the wind feels that much colder and the mountains were quieter than ever. Down below I could see other climbers working their way up the wire – we pressed on to stay well ahead of them. We climbed higher and higher, through swirling mist that that mercifully parted from time to time to reward us with views on all sides

Joel on one of the tougher and more exposed sections of cable. A great position and fantastic views.

We'd been climbing fast for over two hours and Naomi said she needed to stop for food. None of us were going to argue, we'd been going full bore without rest – this was turning into a really physical day. We sat for 10 minutes and ate, drank and joked. All time pressures were off but the weather was coming in. "Time to get going again" I said. More ladders led to more rock ledges and then we passed through a splendid rock window. The end looked close and after a few more ladders we were free of the cable and in scrambling mode as it started to drizzle. I could see a few tourists walking on a ledge above me so decided not to put my waterproof on as the end was so close. But no matter how much I scrambled they didn't get any nearer. The route eventually topped out at a huge iron cross, against which Tom struck a quite inappropriate pose. We saw nothing but swirling mist in the damp air. With minimal ceremony we posed for photos and left. A short stroll led to the cable car station and we awaited the next departure. It was about 2:30pm. As the cable car whisked us back down to the car park the sun came out once again – bloody typical. We split up the 90 minute drive back to Canazei with an ice cream sundae and beer at Arabba – nice! It was the most memorable day of the holiday for me.



Joel strikes a less controversial pose at the summit of the ferrata. Five minutes later we are in the cable car station and ready to head back down to the car



A large, grey, craggy rock face dominates the background. The rock is heavily fractured with numerous vertical and diagonal cracks. At the base of the rock, a hiker is standing on a rocky outcrop. The hiker is wearing a dark jacket, dark pants, and a blue backpack. The foreground is filled with green ferns and other low-lying vegetation. The overall scene is a rugged, natural landscape.

Weekend Warriors

Stewart at the foot of the surprisingly straight forward King Bee Crack (HVS 5a) at Holyhead Mountain.

Photo : TOM MORRIS

Weekend Warriors

Joe leading P2 of Intern (E1 5b)
on Gimmer Crag, Langdale.

Photo : JAMES WALKER



Weekend Warriors

Tom Morris and Luke Perry colour coordinated and racing for the chains at Sea Breeze on Kalymnos.

Photo : STEWART MOODY





Crafnant Valley Meet

On Saturday the 24th of October a crowd of Mercians ascended Tryfan via Heather Terrace. We were there to scatter the ashes of Norman Wright on one of his most beloved summits. By mid morning rain mercifully gave way to clearer skies and a dry summit. Stewart read Psalm 121 and everyone marked the moment with a nip of ginger wine, one of Norman's preferred tipples, before Alan scattered the ashes a few meters north of Adam & Eve. We then returned to the hut in the Crafnant valley where Roland cooked up a fine chicken casserole. The evening was spent in front of a roaring fire where some folk played board games whilst others chatted or read.

FF





THE SHOT 2015

the annual MERCIAN
MOUNTAINEERING CLUB
photography competition

the WAGON & HORSES at
21:00 on THURSDAY the 5th
of NOVEMBER

Have YOU entered your
best shot?

four
fabulous
categories

1. FUN

2. MEETS

3. LANDSCAPES

4. ACTION SHOTS

Rules:

There are four categories (i) Fun/Funny, (ii) Meets, (iii) Landscapes, (iv) Meets. You can submit up to two photos per category. Entries must have been taken after last year's photo competition which was held on the 2nd of October 2014. Entries to be sent to the Chairman by Sunday 1st of November.

OVERALL
WINNER



LANDSCAPE

Winner of the landscape category and overall competition winner, This image of the SMC Lagangarbh hut was taken by Vicki Cox on the Easter meet to Glen Coe when the club had the pleasure of staying at this hut.

The runner up of this category was Joe Norris' s photo of Buchaille Etive Mor on the New Year meet. Joe, Karl and Pierce were up before dawn to bag a route in Glen Coe during a good weather window.





**CATEGORY
WINNER**



FUN

The winner of the fun category by a narrow margin was this entry by Stewart Moody who caught the precise moment that Tom slipped from his table traverse attempt in the Coniston Coppermines hut.

The runner up in the fun category is a great photo taken by Khyati Patel of PF3 imitating Joel (or is it the other way round) on the beach in Kalymnos. A very popular photo.

CATEGORY
WINNER



ACTION

Malcolm Imhoff took this winning photo of scramblers on striding edge and captured a great silhouette.

Runner up was this photo taken by Stewart Moody of Joel on the Punta Anna via ferrata on his summer holiday to the Dolomites.





MEETS

This year's winner of the meets category was Khyati Patel's photo of a gang of Mercians climbing like lemmings up one of the rock formations in Three Cliffs Bay. Interestingly enough (for you fact fans out there) this is the second year on the trot that this category has been won by a sea cliff photo.

The runner up was Vicki Cox's photo of Joe Norris on a tough E2 route at Twistleton Scar on the annual dinner meet to Yorkshire. Both Joe and Pierce put in a mighty effort but the route didn't yield.

Presented by Stewart Moody and Vicki Cox at their house from 7:30pm



REEL SUTTON MOCK FILM FESTIVAL

Films will be featuring none of the fabulous Mercians in any of the photos on this poster



GOALZERO



Please bring your own booze and sleeping bag if you want to stay over. A chilli (or something similar) will be provided by your hosts



FILM TOUR COMING ONLY TO SUTTON DECEMBER 18

HIKE | BIKE | CLIMB