

THE FORTNIGHTLY FAFF

The Periodical Journal of the Mercian Mountaineering Club

June 2016



Pete Nielsen

Your memories and photos
of our much loved friend

March on Mull

Tips for the Cuillin Ridge

Skye - the photos

A Dream of Brown Trousers

Weekend Warriors



A word from the editor

I first met Pete Nielsen's parents on Easter Monday, three days after the fateful events of Good Friday. When we spoke about the funeral I estimated that perhaps 6 or 7 Mercians could make the journey up from Birmingham, which felt about right at the time. I wasn't even close. Truth be told I can't now recall exactly how many of you made the journey to Tranent because each time I try to count the faces I saw on my fingers I just lose track. I'm pretty sure that it was about 20, and I think that says something very special about the friendships that Pete had created within the club. I've read and heard many tributes to Pete over the past few months and the common thread I take from them is that he was a kind and gentle man who was rarely seen without a smile.

On behalf of the club I'd like to thank Fran Ibison for doing such a fine job of collating your memories and photos of Pete and arranging them into the book that she gave to his family. Like me you probably found a moment to browse through the photos at the wake but didn't have the opportunity to give the words the time and attention that they deserve. Fran kindly passed on all of your contributions so that we could publish them in this issue of the Faff.

Stew.


SIMPSON | TAYLOR | HOGG | PAPWORTH | HARDIE | MASON

MARCH ON MULL

In early March six of the Mercian Old Boys team set of for a week on the Isle of Mull to celebrate a milestone birthday for Duncan.

The Saturday was depressing with rain in Oban where we caught the ferry. The rugby was televised on the boat but the game was almost over when we arrived at the cottage. Murray however, got very excitable as Wales came back at England in the dying moments.

Sunday was dry with low cloud and the full team set out to do a couple of "easy" Grahams. Some eight hours later it was a very weary bunch who struggled back to the cars. A stiff trackless climb to the first summit followed by a knee wrenching descent losing all height gained. Then back up again to the next summit and finally a long, long descent. Totally wasted!

A wide-angle photograph showing two hikers from behind as they walk along a snow-covered mountain ridge. They are wearing backpacks and winter gear. The landscape below is a vast, deep blue fjord with several small islands and peninsulas. The sky is clear and blue. The snow on the ridge is bright white with some footprints visible.

Mike Hogg and Duncan Simpson
enjoying the sort of weather you
normally only dream of in Scotland.

(L - R) John Mason, Duncan Simpson, Murray Papworth, Alan Hardie



Monday dawned bright and clear, a glorious day and off we went again. This time another “easy” Graham followed by the island’s only Munro, Ben More. The Graham was somewhat easier than the previous day but still a stiff challenge. Onwards, down and back up to the Munro. Where on the summit we drank a wee dram and sang Happy Birthday to Duncan. Superb views across to the Ben, to Jura, and all along the coastline. Part way down Murray realised he’d lost his camera. Despite attempts to trace it nothing was found.

The good weather continued and this time a Graham and the island’s Corbett were visited whilst two of the team went all tourist on Iona. A third day of good weather and more Grahams were done and a visit to the Isle of Ulva.

By Thursday our luck with the weather was running out and with only a couple more outstanding Grahams these were duly done with one member getting lost in low cloud for about an hour. On Friday the weather really called time on us and in heavy drizzle nothing much was done and then it was time for the journey home.

So ended a good week. We were out and about for 5 days out of 7. Anyone who knows Scotland well would call that a result!

- Alan.



Mike and Duncan enjoying a bit of a breather on a fine looking hill on Mull.

In loving memory



Pete Nielsen

In the wake of Pete's tragic death in the Cairngorms on March 25th Fran Ibison asked members of the club to contribute photographs and memories of Pete to pass on to his family. Those words and images are reproduced here and are a lasting testimony to the love and friendship that we all share for Pete.

I will remember the time we were in the Brecon Beacons and we were so tired from the walk none of us could think of more than a four letter word whilst playing scrabble. In the Dolomites where we were playing animal dominoes in the mountain hut and decided it would be more fun to do the animal impressions as we played. In Munich we were in the nightclub and you had a whole side of the dance floor to yourself after one too many beers. On our first climb at Horseshoe Quarry, where I remember us being so nervous. And then how we came used to climbing but the nervous feeling returned on our first time sea cliff climbing down in Swanage and we had to abseil down to the base of the climb. Thank you Pete.

- Andy



Pete was always fast uphill; one of the fastest. His pace always left me panting for breath. But when the ground got harder he'd slow down and stay close to the folk at the back, lending a hand when needed. One day last month Tom and I in usual fashion shot off ahead on a scramble in Snowdonia, we were high up and the ground conditions weren't great. Pete kept closer to Vicki so she wasn't on her own. He was always a gentleman. On this day Vicki found herself in a real bit of bother on a steep, wet scramble on a line she'd taken after we said our line was pretty tough. She couldn't go up or down. She was stuck and panicking. From much higher up my heart leapt at the danger, I couldn't do much but try to scramble back down - not easy with patches of wet snow everywhere. But Pete was right there. He grabbed his pack from his back from which he pulled two slings and biner (he always carried stuff for emergencies), slung a block and helped Vicki to safety. As he pulled her onto his ledge I was just arriving at Pete's side, too late to be of any value. Vicki was very grateful and chastised me for not being more like Pete. She was right, the faster ones should never run off ahead.

- Stewart



Dear Pete, what a gentle, selfless, and smiling man: a true gentleman. Laid back and quiet, but with moments of brilliant humour. I remember once on a Mercian meet, planning what to do the following day, saying to him, 'Pete, I've got a proposal for you' to which he replied, with a grin on his face 'oh, well, it's a bit forward, but OK'... 'not *that* kind of proposal Pete!'

He also undoubtedly and by far, had the best bum in the club! I wish I'd told him, but maybe now he knows, maybe he already knew!

Nobody had a bad word to say about Pete, and his passing has shocked and saddened us all. He will always be remembered fondly by the Mercian family. May he Rest In Peace.

- Beth

Pete Nielsen I will never forget the way you looked out for others in the mountains. The times I made a meal out of an easy route and you waited, always patiently. The times you sat and belayed us to safety while your hands were bitterly cold, even numb. The fun we had as you helped us with our navigation skills in gale force winds and rain. The time you took the trouble to find a plaster at the bottom of your bag so that I didn't scratch my wedding ring while scrambling. And don't even get me started on the Christmas party and the "Oi, FORCE!" incident. There will never be another Pete. "Ah, no."

- Emma





Pete was a kind gentleman. He had a quiet smile and I had wondered for a long time what the turning cogs in his head would reveal. So when I found myself sat on the front passenger seat of his car on a long drive up to Scotland I knew that was my chance to try and unravel the mystery that was Scottish Pete. We talked for hours on that journey, he told me he had considered becoming an architect and that he had a passion for buildings and design. I asked him to explain how he designed coffee machines and we went down to the most minute details of how the compression chamber worked and the safety mechanisms that were designed into these seemingly innocent machines (apparently they can blow up!) I asked him about the books he'd read and the ones he was still to read and what his aspirations were... Scottish Pete said he was living his aspirations, he was on his way to spend a weekend climbing and walking and what more could he want from life?

I called him Scottish Pete and he never protested, always smiling that lovely quiet smile. He was a kind gentleman, ready to lend you his jacket because you'd forgotten to bring yours to the crag. A beautiful soul.

- Laira

As you know Pete didn't say much, but he was very good at one-liners and had a great sense of humour. One time on the way back from a meet I asked if we - Mercians were the only group of friends who were teasing him about 'ah no' response? To which he said "Yes - BASTARDS!" Pete is greatly missed!

- Anta Misina



To me Pete was a kind, patient and happy guy. A genuinely nice person who was always smiling. Nothing was ever too much trouble for him and he would go out of his way to help or wait for others on the mountain. He climbed my sort of grades and so we'd often end up on a route together. "You're stuck with me again Pete....." I'd say. "Ah well" he'd reply, "no bother," then shrug his shoulders and grin from ear to ear. I hope secretly he didn't mind.

Pete was also a quiet soul and a man of few words. If asked a question he would often just reply with a straight forward "errrrr.....no" or a quick bob of the head. Short and sweet but you knew where you stood. He was also a very even tempered guy and I only ever saw him raise his voice once. That was last summer in the Dolomites when Pete was belaying Joel up a single pitch slab. Just as Joel reached the top of the climb he decided to take the opportunity to show me how to thread a bolt on a sport climb.....from 20 metres up.....with me still stood on the floor. Not the best vantage point so I craned my neck up to watch what he was doing. "So you see....." he shouted down from the top bolt, whilst twirling the rope loosely in his fingers, "if I accidentally dropped the rope now it wouldn't fall because....." He was cut off. "OhJesus Christ Joel" shouted Pete, "leave the rope where it is." I sniggered and Pete raised his eyebrows at me. 'Go Pete' I thought. Joel duly relented and fed the rope back through the bolt.

On the same holiday Pete unwittingly had me in fits of laughter following 'the glasses incident.' This was when Pete got into the hire car one morning to take us to a climb but couldn't find his driving glasses. "I don't really need them anyway" he proclaimed and started up the engine "I'll find them later." He then proceeded to pull out of the hotel car park straight onto the wrong side of the road. "Drive on the right Pete!" we all screamed. "Oops" he said, looking embarrassed. The irony of what he'd just said was too much and then we all started it fits of giggles.

Another fond memory is of Pete learning to salsa with Khyati and Nima at the annual dinner last year. He wasn't keen at first but those girls wouldn't give up! Being Scottish Pete knew his way around a ceidilh but you could tell he thought salsa was a whole different ball game. Still he let the girls show him the way and got stuck right in.

I think that reflects Pete's character..... just getting involved and being one of the team. He was always there in a quiet but reassuring, dependable way. Goodbye Pete. I'll miss you.

- Lou xxx



How will I miss Pete? Let me count the ways.
I will miss Pete at every climbing wall
And remember when he took a lead fall
Onto my head landing me in hospital.
I will miss how, Pete, in a drunken haze
Across the table decided to call
"Shut up!" a comment which shocked us all.
I will miss Pete's kindness for all my days.
I will miss playing the games on the New
Year meet with the animal noises and
How Pete loved doing the dung beetles' "Pool!"
I will miss his famous response: "Er, no"
Given to things he didn't want to do.
I will miss Pete every time we walk in snow.

- Vicki



What a genuinely lovely bloke - always
calm, collected and looking out for those
around him.

- Joe

Pete was a genuinely wonderful man. Everybody who knew Pete would have felt privileged to know such a kind and warm-hearted person. He was always willing to help anybody who needed it, and would happily sit there and belay with his usual smile, for hours if needed. We had amazing days at the Roaches climbing, doing the Aonach Eagach Ridge, where we got one of my favourite photos in the car on the way back, Pinnacle Ridge in the Lakes, the list of great days was endless. The Birmingham Beer Festival last October! But one of my favourite stories happened last New Year at Crianlarich.



I was suffering from a nasty cold, but had battled on during the week to do a few Corbetts and Grahams. Pete and Joe had said they would come with me the next day as the weather was going to be horrendous and anything other than a Graham would be impossible. The next morning I awoke and got up feeling really unwell. Joe and Pete though, good to their word, were the only people who had bothered getting up. I found them sitting eating their eggs on toast. I will never forget the look of relief on their faces when I said I thought we should forget going out as I wasn't well enough to in such weather. I asked Pete whether he wanted to go out, 'absolutely not!' he said as he scuttled back off to bed. Whilst only a small story, it is a memory that always makes me smile, and means that Pete's smile will always stay with me.

Pete, you will be terribly missed, but you will always be with us, of that I am certain. RIP my friend.

- Matt Kettle



My lasting memory of Pete?
His smile, he was always smiling.

- Naomi Walker

I have known Pete only for a year but unsurprisingly feels like I have lost a very good friend. Because, in the short time I have come to know him, he has been ever present with a helping hand and a smile in all the adventures and fun

Pete is quiet and initially it is easy to take less notice of him because of his reserved nature. However, as you get to know him, his lovely nature, like a truly good scotch, burns a memory in the minds of people fortunate to have met him.

Pete was always there to take pity on me and walk with me in wet, grey weather when nobody was willing; teach me navigation skills in wet and windy conditions; climb well below his capacity and sacrifice his self interest to do a lead climb to help the less able climbers like me; take the time and trouble to rope the less skilled scramblers to safety in freezing cold; to patiently unscrew the screw gate when my fingers were numb; encourage me at the wall with tips when I expressed a particular difficulty, without being pretentious; to dance into the night and throw himself into the mood of the evening despite his tentative dancing; be cajoled into doing silly things and march to a unknown beat lightheartedly; be a sport and take part in all the games and shrug everything off with a smile; agree to give me a lift at the last minute and accommodate my bags with hardly a murmur when the car was overflowing; and drive all the way cheerfully and surprise you with insights to himself as only Pete could. Little did I realize that it would be his last journey and I would be coming back without him---

For all this and more I will miss you Pete. The memories of all the laughter, fun and joy will be treasured.

A life that touches others goes on forever---

- Nima

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Mill Cottage near Feshiebridge, our hut on the Easter meet

Weekend Warriors

Alan Hardie on a bomber belay (quite literally) made of a Lancaster bomber that crashed in 1951. The route, quite fittingly, is called Fuselage Gully and is on Beinn Eighe in Torridon. Grade I/II depending on the conditions.

Photo : IAN ARCHER



A man and a woman are climbing a rock face. The man, in the foreground, is wearing a bright blue hooded rain jacket and black cargo pants. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The woman, behind him, is also wearing a blue rain jacket and has blonde hair. She is also smiling. They are both using their hands to grip the rock. The rock is grey and has some moss or lichen on it. In the background, there is a grassy area and a body of water under a cloudy sky.

Weekend Warriors

Hmm, can pretending to climb when you are clearly have one foot on terra firma be considered as the behaviour of a 'warrior'? The jury is still out Anta and Adam.

Photo : JULIE TAYLOR

A full-page photograph of a rock climber, Tom Morris, on the Gargoyle Buttress at Bamford. The climber is wearing a green helmet, a grey t-shirt, orange trousers, and blue shoes. He is positioned on a dark, layered rock overhang, reaching up with his right arm. A rope is visible hanging down from his harness. The background is a vast, hazy landscape of rolling green hills, a river, and a multi-arched bridge in the distance. The sky is a pale, hazy blue.

Weekend Warriors

Tom Morris making easy work of the splendid and photogenic overhang of Gargoyle Buttress (VS 4c) at Bamford.

Photo : SARAH LAIGHT

words by Tom Morris

A DREAM of Brown Trousers

“Gogarth? Gogarth is nails isn’t it, you have to climb at least E3 or it’s pointless?” And so was the received wisdom of the age which put the dramatic sea cliffs on the furthest edge of Wales out of reach of most mortals. Until now...

In September 2015, those noble souls at Ground Up released a new guidebook for Gogarth South detailing a plethora of new routes at much more amenable grades opening up one of the UKs premier destinations to those for whom self-preservation is more than just a passing fancy.

“That looks good”, thought we, “we should go”. And so we tried, on the bank holiday weekend at the beginning of May. Adam had optimistically booked 20 places at Blackthorn Farm campsite (a charming place, to which we should undoubtedly return) and all seemed set. We then checked the weather.

“That looks shit”, thought we, “we should sack it off”.

And sack it off we did. There was much rejoicing in the halls of the fair-weather craggers that day.

However, we were not deterred from the idea by the meteorological treachery that Britain is apt to engage in at Bank Holiday time and so we merely postponed our visit to the weekend of 13-15 May.

That weekend duly arrived and the signs were

good. The weather looked ok and we were keen to get climbing. Even Graham Perry, a figure thought to be mythical by some of the newer members of the club, had signed up for his first meet in over 12 months. Surely nothing could go wrong now.

Sarah and I trundled to North Wales on Friday night in good time with the gorgeous sunset we saw over the Irish sea considered a fine omen. Wondering what to do for dinner, we noticed that the campsite brochure advertised that both Indian and Chinese takeaways delivered to the site. We feasted well that night and the fact that it’s taken me this long to try this clearly brilliant idea makes me want to go back in time and slap myself.

Stewart and Vic arrived soon after, with Graham, Adam, Anta, Louise and Julie completing the Mercian contingent for the weekend. The wind was howling on the Friday night and we retired to bed early to escape it and primer ourselves for the following day.

Saturday morning arose and I left the tent to bright sunshine and calm, clear skies. Naomi had recommended a crag called Porth Saint Head, part of the Rhoscolyn range of cliffs, that she said was a perfect club venue with good ledges and agreeable climbing. We parked near the church at Rhoscolyn and tootled along the coast for the 20 minute walk in. As promised we found a large ledge with bluebird skies and millpond seas. Wunderbar.



Stewart and I snooped around for a while looking down each likely gully, searching for a way to the bottom of the crag. Eventually we located the descent ramp to the area containing routes such as *Letters Through the Mail* and *Sea Spray Wall*. Stewart, Vic, Sarah and I took turns on two fine Severe climbs and thought well of the day ahead. We moved on to an area to the right which had as slightly more interesting descent. Downclimbing and traversing grade 2 scrambling territory took us to a slight overhanging “ledge” (if such a word can be used). Stewart quickly set up a belay at the bottom as any slip here would’ve seen us in the drink faster than you could say, “Ahh my rack, I’m drowning because of my rack!”.

The girls belayed as Stewart and I tackled the twin HSs of *Conning Tower* and *Up Periscope*. Despite only being 9m or so tall, given the grade we expected some interesting climbing. However, having climbed what can only be described as a quartzite stepladder and having placed no gear we both concluded these were the easiest Hard Severs we’d ever come across. Next to fall was the entertaining “HVS” of *Seraphim* which was fun if not particularly challenging.

We wandered back over to our original ledge to take in some more of the routes there and having just topped out myself I idly enquired as to which route Stewart had just ascended as it looked a pleasing line. “At the risk of causing a stampede, an E1” was the reply. Right then.

Down I went and set myself up at the bottom of what would be my first E1 called *The Death of The Witch*. The climbing was wonderful, reminiscent of traditional Gritstone break climbing (but with actual holds!) rather than Welsh sea cliffs. Gear was good and the moves were entertaining but unfortunately, like most of the routes in this area, it was pretty obviously overgraded. The wait for

my first, real, E1 lead continues...

After, Stewart, Naomi, Myself, Graham and Adam had all lined up and ticked off this, “E1” (ahem) we pottered around for a while longer enjoying the scenery, the climbing, the weather and saying hello to the occasional passing shoal of sea kayakers.

We left Port Saint Head feeling extremely pleased with our day’s work and with designs on ice cream vans and beer gardens. After a short drive we pulled up in Trearddur Bay and made the harrowing decision of which ice cream van to choose next to the sandy beach. Waffle-coned 99 with chocolate sauce and nuts firmly in hand (sometimes the pain is worth the dairy Vic, trust me) we plonked ourselves on the wall overlooking the beach and watched the world go by for an idle 45 minutes.

Back at the campsite, showered, changed and hungry we decided to head into Holyhead in search of a pub dinner. I don’t think it’s hyperbole to say this is the greatest mistake I have ever made in my life. Googling “best pub in Holyhead” had mixed results so we decided to just mooch around. We stuck our heads in the Stanley Arms first but saw no real ale and mediocre looking pub grub. “Let’s keep looking”. Apologies to the residents of Holyhead who I’m sure are a charming bunch but Christ what a desolate hellhole. We must’ve entered, then swiftly exited, at least 6 pubs none of which had anything approximating decent beer or food. Football showing, karaoke having, lager-selling chav holes is too kind a description. Distraught, we ended up back in the first pub which we had decided was the best of a bad lot! To add insult to injury, after I had already ordered they came back with the news that they’d run out of the gammon!

Adam and Anta on a sunny belay at Port Saint on Saturday.
Photo - **Stewart Moody**.

(L - R) Tom, Sarah, Stew and Vicki on the narrow ledge at the base of one of the Port Saint sectors on Saturday. This area is home to some of the softest grading of routes we'd ever experienced. Good for the ego, and the log book! Immediately above Tom are a pair of HSs. Photo - **Graham Perry**.



Julie, Louise, Anta and Adam had come back a little later than us and so tried the Trearddur Bay hotel with similarly mixed reviews, although this was mainly due to the lagered-up stag party in the room next door.

Retiring back to the campsite early, we found the it was still the same wind trap it had been the night before and no amount of down jacketing was going to make sitting around outside a pleasant experience. There was only one thing for it...party in the car! (or Carty, I thank you) Sat in Stew's Golf drinking wine and steaming the windows up, whilst fun, definitely has a time-limit and so another relatively early night was had. However, I didn't mind this so much given what we had planned for the next day...

For some time now, a few of us had been planning on tackling one of the most famous routes in the UK, promising a stunning traverse line across an epic, gaping zawn at the very tip of the island. A *Dream of White Horses* HVS 4C was the day's fox and Stewart, Adam, Vic and I were off hunting. For about 5 minutes. Vic decided early on that it would be too cold for her to climb that day, especially on a multi-pitch sea cliff route. No-one else was keen to take her place so, holding back the tears manfully, Stewart agreed to join the other party heading to Holyhead Mountain for the day.

With fire in our veins, Adam and I wandered vaguely off in the direction of Gogarth North Stack. In preparation, we engaged in a traditional game of, "Where's this bloody abseil!" for half an hour, meeting up with another team who were keen on the route. During, this, we got our first real look at our goal. A huge sweeping line across the zawn, with waves crashing over the rocks below, it was a stunning scene and hugely intimidating. We'd head that the climbing was meant to be pretty straightforward but the seriousness of the situation and the consequences of a fall on the last pitch (involving prusiking back up your rope to get back on the route) gave it it's grade.

We eventually found our ab point and geared up nervously. After a few deep breaths Adam set off to find the high tide ledge which was to be out starting point. I waited breathlessly at the top, nervous and hugely excited at the same time. After some time, Adam indicated that I should follow and I made short work of the ab down to the ledge.

The high tide ledge is a small outcrop which barely fits two people and the belay that one is forced to construct is mainly based on juggy flakes which move and creak ominously when weighted. It didn't take long for Adam to decide that he didn't like the look of the route that day



A selfie to make even the master, Joel Taylor jealous. (L - R) Stew, Sarah, Tom, Julie, Lou and Vicki enjoying the carty. It was flippin' baltic on the camp site. Photo - Stewart Moody.



and he admitted that it had got the better of him. Whilst disappointed, I couldn't be too upset, as it was very much a case of "There, but for the grace of God, go I". I would defy anyone not to be intimidated by the situation and on another day it might've been me backing off. Adam decided the most efficient way to extricate ourselves from the situation would be for him to belay himself back up the abseil rope, then put me on a top rope to climb back up. It didn't take long to decide this was actually Une Grande Ballache as our Gallic cousins might say. Adam ended up prusiking himself all the way back up our 50m abseil, cursing himself, the rock, the cold, the prusik and probably the French all the way. By the time he'd got to the top I had been standing on the small ledge in the shade for over an hour and my fingers had gone completely numb. By the time Adam put me on belay, I was pulling back my throwing arm to launch my toys from the pram.

Keen to be out of there, I set off with as much gusto I could muster up what was probably a pretty pleasant, flaky, pitch of maybe VS although it wasn't in the book. When I reached the top and the sunshine, with hot aches beginning to kick in, I said I would claim the route as "*Adam Butler is a Knobhead VS 4c*" (before some pedant waiting to ab down said you can't claim a route on top rope. He must be fun at parties). However,

a minor sense of humour reboot later I decided a better name would be A Dream of Brown Trousers, to be used when one's sphincter control has let one down upon sight of the epic route ahead of them ;).

Despite all this, I knew the route would be waiting there for another day and we headed off to meet the others fairly light of step. Sarah and I left them to do a few more climbs on Holyhead Mountain whilst we went get ice cream and a head start on the drive home.

Another cracking meet was had by all, with adventure, excitement, romance (hey, I bought her dinner!), triumph and disaster. We shall return to Blackthorn Farm and I shall definitely return to A Dream of White Horses.

TOP(-ISH) TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL BASH AT SKYE'S CUILLIN RIDGE

by Julie Taylor

The Cuillin Ridge was built a long time ago by a bunch of bored cavemen. They created the longest, rockiest ridge that they could manage with the materials they had to hand (mostly rocks). The resulting ridge is classified as 'high' in international epic-ness ratings and has reduced even the gnarliest mountaineers to dribbling messes (fact). It's a beast. Brilliant, long, sustained, challenging, amazing, and a great way to spend 2 days. For those attempting this little jolly, the recently returned Mercians can offer the following top tips for success*:



1

Get yourself a good guide book. Route finding is tricky and constant short detours will eat up time and energy. A couple of good scouts in the form of Anna and Tom, commanded by a book-toting Stew is a fine recipe for success.

2

Leave earlier than you did. Your plan to enjoy a boil in the bag under the stars after bimbbling over the top of the first couple of Munros will change once you get first sight of the start point from the ridge itself; Gars Bhein is officially 'flippin miles away' and Sgùrr Dubh Mòr is a pretty long scramble. This all makes for a cold, dark o'clock bivvy with the realisation that tomorrow is going to be a monster.

3

Pack the right equipment. This is not necessarily a tip for the Cuillin but for bivvying. One's spoon is a personal article and should therefore be packed/allocated to others personally. Failure to bring one's spoon will unfortunately relegate the spoonless to the back of the spoon queue. This could have dire consequences for both food temperature and sense of humour.

4

Be good at scrambling. If you are a bit of a scardey-cat when it comes to exposed scrambling you may not like this venture. Hours and hours of exposed ridges, scrambling up then down climbing and not much time to stop and faff about. The many airy steps will turn you into a scrambling ninja and the gabbro rock is like velcro and will give you lots of confidence, but bring gloves if you have office hand syndrome.

5

Know the do's and don'ts of abseiling if you are not happy soloing down climbs. Lots of abseils mean you will need to be pretty slick with your rope work or you will feel heaps of social pressure. Having 9 people in the group on abseils slowed us down a bit but good time was still made. Oh, and it also helps if you take your rucksack on the abseil with you rather than leave it at the top (no names!).

6

Take minimal kit. One 45m rope per team, a few bits of gear, slings, nuts etc, scotch eggs, 3 litres of water, skin so soft for the midgies, suncream, more scotch eggs and a warm layer. If the weather isn't great you probably won't do the ridge, so go in fine weather and take minimal clothing. Water is hard to find on the ridge so we took water from the bivvy site. Oh, and tape your feet, lots.

7

Slog back up to your bivvy site the next day with a few bottles of Prosecco, swimming gear and a good book to rest the weary legs for the afternoon. Then sit in a storm shelter in a howling gale in all your warm kit, neck the prosecco and then hot foot it back down to shelter. (All good ideas and all that).

8



And finally.... this thing will hurt. Conserve energy when possible.

* following these top tips does not guarantee success, no responsibility is taken for such

Success! The smile says it all. Tom Gape reaches the summit of Sgurr Nan Gilleann (xxxm), the 11th and final Munro of the Cuillin ridge traverse. This summit marked the end point of two huge mountain days separated by a 5 hours bivvy by a high mountain lake. The photo was taken at 5:30pm and he'd been on the move for 14 hours and we still had another 3 hours to reach the car.



THE PHOTOS

With a good weather window that dreams are made of a group of Mercians (and 'Scottish' Bob Ellis from the Ceunant) headed to The Cuillin mountains of Skye for a week of scrambling on the gnarliest terrain these shores have to offer.

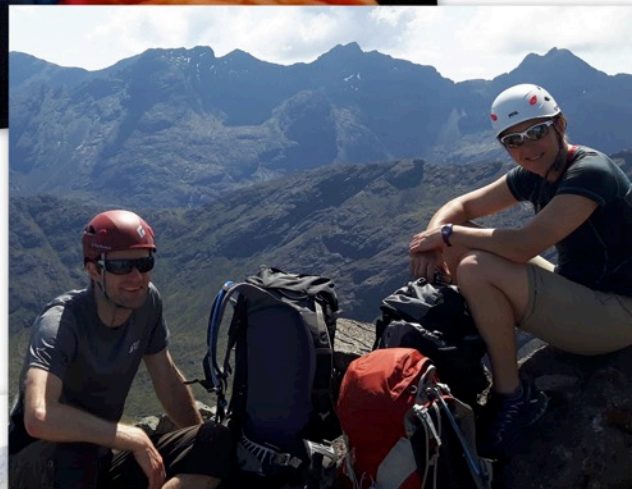
The objective was a traverse of the 11 mile main ridge which combines endless graded scrambles with sections of mod and diff rock climbing. Throw in a handful of abseils, a lakeside bivvy and an ascent of the Inaccessible Pinnacle and you've got the recipe for one of the most memorable meets ever.

Of the hundreds of photos that were taken on the ridge here is a selection of the finest.



Julie abseils off the top of the Inaccessible Pinnacle under the watchful eye of Adam and Sandy. Coming up the ridge on the right, in a lime green jacket is Tom Gape.





We didn't climb all the time though

As awesome as the weather and the mountains were it simply wasn't possible to climb or scramble every minute of every day. Here are a pair of photos taken to prove that sometimes sitting around drinking tea and doing some sight seeing can be pretty great too.

[L-R] Bob, Julie, Stew, Sandy & Anta kick back on the penultimate day of the meet with a road trip around the north of Skye punctuated by stops for posh lunch, ice cream, and Cuillin photo opportunities.



[L-R] Geoff, Tom, Lynn and Anta relaxing in the afternoon sun on the porch of the Glenbrittle memorial hut whilst drinking tea and swapping stories of the day.

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