

THE FORTNIGHTLY FAFF

The Periodical Journal of the Mercian Mountaineering Club

SEPT 2018

A LOFOTEN SNAPSHOT

ELBRUS : 1 OF 7

THE KING'S TRAIL, SWEDEN

ALPINE ADVENTURES

YORKSHIRE 3-PEAKS

SCREAM FOR ICE CREAM

A DREAM OF WHITE HORSES

LIFE IN THE SLOW LANE

PHOTOS FROM MEETS





A word from the editor

After rounding up a good many folk to put pen to paper here is the latest instalment of our much loved periodical journal - The Faff. It's got a bit of everything this time; walking, climbing, and mountaineering, not to mention lots of talk of ice creams and beaches which I suppose was inevitable after the summer we've just had, the hottest on record for England....and many more I say.

Thank you to everyone for contributing (wow, there were so many of you this time), our club wouldn't be what it is without your commitment.

Stew.

Cover photo
Karl Stewart and Adam Butler on the last few steps to the summit of Liathach in Torrion, Scotland. Not very summery I know, but I quite like the photo and the sun is shining.
Photo: **Stewart Moody**

HIGH HOUSE, CUMBRIA

For the third year on the trot we hoofed it up the M6 to Borrowdale where we spent the weekend at the High House hut. With Great Gable, Great End, and Scafell within striking distance it is a plum location. Whilst Geoff, Duncan, and Roland each sought their own slice of solitude on the fells around the hut, a 13 strong gang of Mercians went up Green Gable, thence onto Great Gable, where a huge amount of navigation faff very nearly saw us descent into Wasdale which would have been both awkward and embarrassing. That's Adam and Andy in the photo, striding onwards into Wasdale having missed (as did we all) the faintest of paths leading off to the left and around the Napes back to the hut. The lesson to be learned - just because there is a path on the map, it doesn't mean there will be a path on the mountain.



Now that's what I call a gang of Mercians. Thirteen in total all bashing up the slide of the hill on to Green Gable.



The summit of Great Gable. [L-R] Naomi, Lou, Phil, Andy, Adam, Stew, Vic, Karl, Ed, Fabian, Amandeep, Vicky and Andy. Did I miss anyone?





Here's Amandeep and Vicki back on the right path which lead under the Napes and around into Borrowdale. That's the sun setting over Wastwater in the background. Nice.



A very typical view of Mercians in their natural habitat. [L-R] Andy, Karl, Vicky.



Weekend Warriors

The editor of this fine publication enjoying a post climb drink in Mallorca (yes it is a pina colada, what of it!) whilst swotting up on the next day's climbing venue. Let's not mention the dodgy hair styling eh?



Weekend Warriors

Adam Butler on pitch 5 of Avalanche/Red Wall/Longlands on Lliwedd. It's a Snowdonia classic which enjoys 286m of climbing over 12 pitches. Route finding can be tricky even in fine weather, but the positions are views are excellent.

Photo : STEWART MOODY



EASTER, GLEN CLOVA

Somewhere sandwiched between the “Beast from the East” and the baking hot summer came a weekend of surprising splendour. One moment folk were climbing icefalls in Winter Corrie, and the next they were stripped to their t-shirts drinking jugs of Gin & Tonic on the grass outside the hut. It’ll go down as one of the great winter meets. Glen Clova in the south-east of the Cairngorms delivered more than we could have ever hoped for, and the Easter bunny (the fabulous Fabian) even left a few dozen eggs scattered throughout the hut.



[L-R] Stewart, Adam and Louise in Corrie Fee, claimed by many to be one of Scotland's loveliest mountain amphitheatres.



An ascent of B Gully Chimney (III/4) with [L-R] Adam and Karl.



Everyone is back safe from the mountains and enjoying reviewing photos that Anna took of Beth eating a Cadbury's Crème Egg.



[L-R] Karl, Adam and Julie walking into Corrie Fee. Julie kindly carried a rope despite not climbing. We need more Julies in the club.



[L-R] Joel and Becky return from the massive walk around the mountains on Sunday. Sun out, gin out...good times! Man leg by Joel crowns the day.



[L-R] Louise and Stewart horsing around whilst descending from Driesh, one of two Munros that can be bagged from Glen Clova.



Karl leading the crux pitch of one of the various ice routes that were climbed.



[L-R] Beth, Huw, Vicky, Louise and Adam drinking tea, eating snacks, and soaking up the sunshine outside the hut. Were it any hotter the sun cream would have had to come out.



[L-R] Stew, Louise and Adam on Driesch.

A Lofoten Snapshot

Words and photos by Anna Flemming



I was in Lofoten for the midnight sun. For ten days at the start of June, I travelled around the archipelago of Norwegian islands with three mountaineering friends. The islands are in the Arctic circle, and from the end of May to mid July, the sun never sets. I imagined this might be disorienting: how does one get to sleep when the usual signal (darkness) never comes? Solution: an eye mask and a Casio wrist watch. I also thought the light might be boring – if the sun is always overhead then the hills, trees, and sea might constantly look a bit flat. I was wrong. The weather was so changeable that sometimes it seemed no ten minutes were the same. Make sure to take that photograph now, this very moment, because it could look very different in five, ten, twenty minutes time.

The weather blew in and out. A white tailed eagle struggles in the wind. Veils of rain passed along hills and fjords. Sharp edges – black rock, snow gullies, the shore line – softened and disappeared under light rain. Lying cosy in my sleeping bag, the gentle patter of mizzle on canvas was soothing; heavier rain fell and I hoped it would stop; a hailstorm pounded the tent, and I thought the fabric was tearing apart. When the hail fell, it bounced down slabs of rock like tiny polystyrene balls, settling into ledges, grooves, openings. Behind your back, your chalk bag (the pouch you carry climbing to keep your fingers dry and grippy) fills with hail and becomes a slush puppy.



Out kayaking in high winds, after a heavy shower, the sea suddenly lit up brilliant turquoise below us. I hadn't noticed the sun come out – I twisted to look -and it was still behind clouds – but a change had happened, less perceptible in the sky, more obvious in the sea. The gleaming aquamarine waters were so inviting, we felt we should swim one day. When the time came, it was not a lengthy immersion: sprint in, scream, swim a few strokes, gasp, sprint out. The cold was intense, the exhilaration immense. I was screeching with laughter in the madness of shock and endorphin rush. Afterwards we all settled down nicely with a rum filled hot chocolate.

Underfoot on the Lofoten mountains there is an amazing colourful diversity of trees, plants and flowers. Steep slopes are carpeted in a thick pile of moss, billbery, lichen. Crossing a boulder field, I was astonished at how different it was to those in the UK. At home, rocks are not padded with vegetation, so they teeter and grind together as your traverse from boulder to boulder, carefully minding your feet don't fall through cracks, get twisted or stuck. On Vikjordtinden peak, we toiled up an incredibly steep slope and arrived at the inevitable boulder field. Yet the crossing was easy because so many plants grow around and over the boulders: the rocks are softened, holes filled in.

At this time of year, flowers grow everywhere: roadsides are littered with cowslips, kingcups cluster around streams, orchids dot the grass. On the mountains there are many montane flowers I've never seen before. Juniper, birch, willow and rowan grow right up the hills. The higher they sit, the smaller they shrink, becoming hardy dwarves the height of your knee or ankle. Coming back to Scotland, looking at our intensively managed heather moors and grasslands, I'm slightly depressed. Our hills are impoverished: scoured by sheep and deer, burnt for grouse; the hills lack so many species of plant and tree.



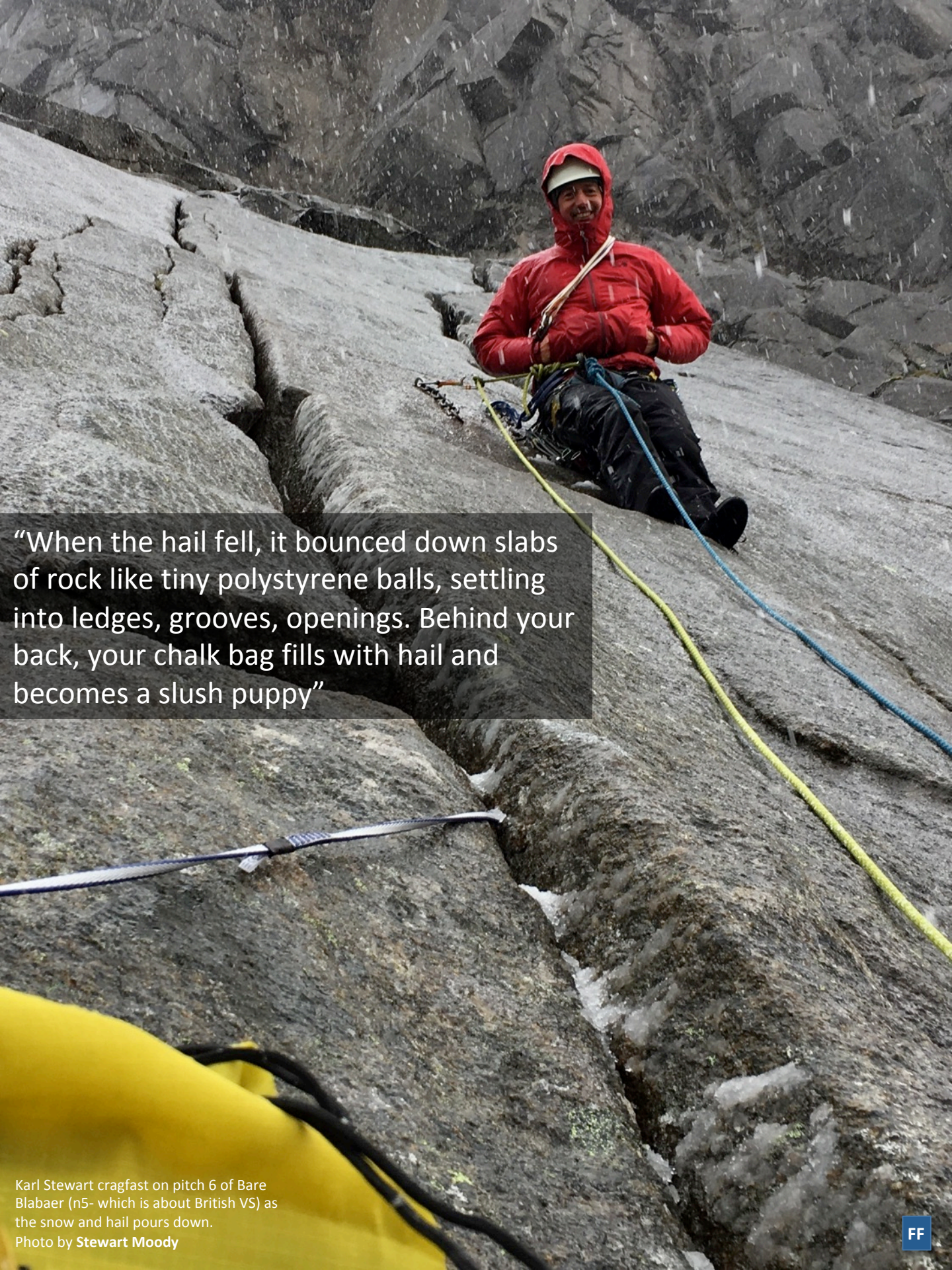
Walking up a fjord one day, surrounded by trees and mountains with no houses or electricity poles in sight, I was getting a Jurassic Park feeling. We rounded a corner, and there was a huge body on the shore line. The skull was picked clean, the bone glaring yellow-white in the sun. "A dinosaur?!" I looked closer; saw the fur and hooves, leathery skin with a purple-green sheen. It was an elk.



My ten days in Lofoten might not have been the best weather. I only got one climbing route done. We were relieved not to camp for four nights, preferring the warm, dry climate of a cabin. But the dramatic and changeable beauty of the islands more than made up for this. R.S. Thomas captures the wealth acquired by experiencing such places:

In Wales there are jewels
To gather, but with the eye
Only. A hill lights up
Suddenly; a field trembles
With colour and goes out
In its turn; in one day
You can witness the extent
Of the spectrum and grow rich
With looking.

(R.S. Thomas, 'the Small Window')



“When the hail fell, it bounced down slabs of rock like tiny polystyrene balls, settling into ledges, grooves, openings. Behind your back, your chalk bag fills with hail and becomes a slush puppy”

Karl Stewart cragfast on pitch 6 of Bare Blabaer (n5- which is about British VS) as the snow and hail pours down.
Photo by **Stewart Moody**

Memories of Stephen Newton (1948-2017)

Steve (as he was always known) joined the club in 1978 and was secretary in the mid 1980s. He was essentially a hill walker and I don't ever remember him on the end of a rope but never the less he was an enthusiastic nature and hill lover with a considerable knowledge of nature and wild life.

I picked Steve up from his then house in Perry Barr one Good Friday evening enroute for Lagangarbh. He had a stinking cold that he managed very successfully to pass onto me during the six hour journey. He seemed completely recovered by Easter Sunday whereas I was reduced to grabbing a Corbett! On the Easter Saturday we drove down Glen Etive to bag Beinn Sgulaird 3039' (approx. 926m) This involved crossing a substantial stream which he was rather apprehensive about being a non swimmer. We spent some fifteen minutes searching for the cairn in the mist on the rocky summit touching numerous rock spikes and even making a traverse descending on the far side but still did not find a cairn. The last meet I recall Steve attending was the New Year meet of 2014-5 at Crainlarich (great hut appalling weather - what's new in Scotland at New Year?). On the last day of 2014, I persuaded Steve that he would really like to climb Binnein a Fhithliar which rises steeply above Glen Kinglass in the Loch Fyne area. But not having a technical axe he back off the steep snow near the summit but waited patiently for me back at his car.

Steve was essentially quite a private person who had no close relatives. As far as is known, he worked for the Post Office his entire adult life taking early retirement. He later moved from Perry Barr to Cradley in 1990. He was regular member of the Clent Hills National Trust group with particular affection for the strimmer. Steve was also the chief gatherer up of the equipment - but that may have been an excuse just to drive their truck!

Steve was also a enthusiastic member of DITCH (for those readers who are not familiar with the acronym it stands for Digging in the Clent Hills). Beside his interest in archology he was also an avid bird watcher and he spent several holidays abroad pursuing this hobby.

Whilst Steve was not particularly loquacious, but when he did speak it could be with an extremely pertinent and witty reply. This factor was remarked upon at a tree planting ceremony held in his memory on the Clent hills attended by nearly 50 of his friends and acquaintances in January. Eight members of the Club who had known Steve from the 1980s were present and Malcolm read a prayer. Steve's 5 year National Trust medal and a packet of favourite cocoa drink was placed under the tree.

It is understood that the National Trust, the RSPB and Cats Protection League were amongst the beneficiaries under Steve's will.

- Geoff Taylor



[Car Park Faff] If it isn't enough that they've spread their crap all over the car park at Kiruna airport in northern Sweden, they've also cracked open a beer and are sharing that around whilst making sandwiches for the flight. Come on people you've got a flight to catch...did you learn nothing from the outbound journey? Get on with it.

photofaff by STEWART MOODY



ELBRUS

10 F 7

by **Phil Laverick**
(prospective member)

After a 20-year absence from the hills I rekindled my love for them late last year and set myself a goal of Europe's highest mountain, Mt Elbrus. However, the head and the body had two different ideas about this, the head being fully engaged and recalling all the joys that the hills have to offer and the body flatly refusing to take part. After six months of training and 20Kg lighter it was time to set off to Russia.

Mt Elbrus is a 5642M (18,510ft) mountain in the Russian Caucasus boasting to be the tenth most prominent peak in the world. Although the southern route is not technically difficult the weather, altitude and a 1800M ascent on summit day makes for an interesting adventure.

After arriving in Mineralnye-Vody and meeting up with the expedition group, comprising of 3 Norwegians 3 Germans a Spaniard and myself, we travelled 3hrs south to the village of Terskal by mini bus, this is at about 2100M and where we stayed to start our acclimatisation. The next day was the first day on the mountain, we climbed Cheget at 3475M (11,400ft) with the aid of a chairlift to 2750M, already the thinning of the air was apparent. Over the next couple of days we continued acclimatisation: day 3, 4165M day 4, 4490M and returning to Terskal each evening. Some of us experienced mild headaches over this time but they soon passed.

On day 5 we moved up to the barrel huts on Mt Elbrus at 3850M (12,630ft) this would be home for the next few days. The barrel area is well establish even having electricity for the most part and long drop toilets. (Notes on kit: at this altitude Thermarests don't inflate properly, air bubbles appear in your compass and cameras can become temperamental.)



Over the next two days we ascended to 5100M (16,730ft) each day dropping back down to the Barrel huts. It started to come back to me; the challenges of walking while tethered together to a long rope and the patience needed by all trying to synchronise with each other's pace.

We then had a rest day which comprised of polishing up on our winter skills in the morning. The afternoon was taken up mostly by eating and sleeping, as I'm quite fond of both I rather enjoyed our day of rest. I'm not sure if it was the altitude and/or the food but unfortunately, I experienced an upset stomach on the mountain, this is no fun at all as you feel your energy levels depleting and you have dig deep for motivation. I'm glad there was some Imodium to hand.

At this point we were keeping an eye on the weather reports coming in. Summit conditions had not been looking good. Wind 40K/m, Snow 15cm overnight, Highs of -11C and lows -13C Windchill -22C but no lightening so that's always a bonus.

Summit day came and as the weather was good we got the OK to go. We started at midnight after not much sleep. It was slow going from the start. With our Russian guides pushing us on we made 4700M (15,420ft) for sunrise (5:00AM) then with head down and small steps by 8:30 we had reached the saddle at 5250M. Now tired and fatigued we individually attached to a fixed line which continued until 50M below the summit. I hadn't realized that my nose had frozen due to not putting my balaclava on (school boy error). I promptly rectified this and with my pride feeling a bit bruised I continued on to the summit with my face now fully covered.

The summit came into sight and the hard work had paid off. At 10:15 on the 24/07/18 we successfully summited Mt Elbrus. After the initial exhilaration it quickly dawned upon us we still had a lot of work to do, we had a punishing 6hr descent to endure. There were a number of trips and falls on the descent, mostly due to heel kicking and tired legs. I think this is a good time to mention when you are buying equipment and trying to justify to yourself why its worth spending that bit more on lightweight kit, it's times like this when it pays dividends and you're glad you did. We spent one more night at the barrel huts before descending to Terskal for a well-deserved celebratory drink.

There are many things from that short expedition I think about but non-more than a comment from our lead guide. "A mountain is just a rock, a stone; it is the people that you share it with that makes it a special place". Now with a new-found passion for High altitude mountaineering, planning is underway for Aconcagua in December 2019.

Onwards and Upwards.



A mountain is just a rock, a stone; it is the people that you share it with that makes it a special place



CHAPEL STYLE, WASDALE

The incredible summer of 2018 kicked off in time for the first May bank holiday when the club went up to Wasdale and camped in Chapel Style. Top of the list for some members was to climb the many Classic Rock ticks on Great Gable and Scafell. In this photo Adam stands on top of Napes Needle having climbed the Wasdale Crack (HS 4b) - the most prominent of the slanting left-to-right crack lines. Stew is belaying, and patiently awaiting his turn to climb to the summit.



[L-R] Joe, Sarah, Karl, Adam, Louise and Vicki put their best foot forward before the walk in to Wallowbarrow Crag.



[L-R] Sarah and Louise taking it easy at the top of Wallowbarrow. Lou is shaltering from the sun after getting a bit burnt the day before.



[L-R] Stew (average man leg), Joe (great man leg) and Adam (dude, did you not get the man leg memo?) make a crack of down start to walk up Great Gable to be the first teams on Napes Needle.



[L-R] Fabian and Huw enjoying a wild swim.



[L-R] Joe, Huw, Louise, Sarah and Fabian on a Wainwright bagging day.



Sarah near the summit of Scafel Pike.

KUNGSLEDEN

Hiking the King's Trail in Sweden By Julie Taylor

Following on with this summer's Scandinavian theme, I spent 8 amazing days walking roughly half the Kungsleden through northern Sweden. Starting in Abisko, not far from the Norwegian border, the trail winds through a series of national parks in between vast snow capped mountain ranges and crosses a multitude of lakes and rivers. I walked as far as Kvikkjokk, a total of nearly 200kms.

The walking is relatively easy, with only 300 - 500 metres of height gain per day, and is ridiculously well marked, so my homemade pikey maps were enough to keep me on track. I decided on the luxury version of sleeping in mountain huts rather than lugging a soggy tent around Norway, this is definitely the way to do it!

My day's walk was anything from 25 to 35kms and the huts are a far cry from Lagangarbh and the like.... kitchens, dorm rooms and a small shop selling cold beers and squeezey cheese, what more could you need.... apart from the full on Swedish sauna! Separate ladies and gents times saved the British embarrassment of 'what to wear' and they even double up as hot water for a full on squaddie wash. No running water or electric, but then who needs that when there is 24 hours of daylight?

And who can talk about a hut without mention of the toilets? Long drops, but even they were luxurious..... you can't complain about an insulated polystyrene seat on a fresh morning.

Anyway, enough of the huts. The walk was amazing, km after km of beautiful mountain scenery, river crossings, varying from wet feet to rowing boats and motor boats, birds, flowers and reindeer dotted along the way.



**You could
walk 24
hours a day
if you could
manage it!**

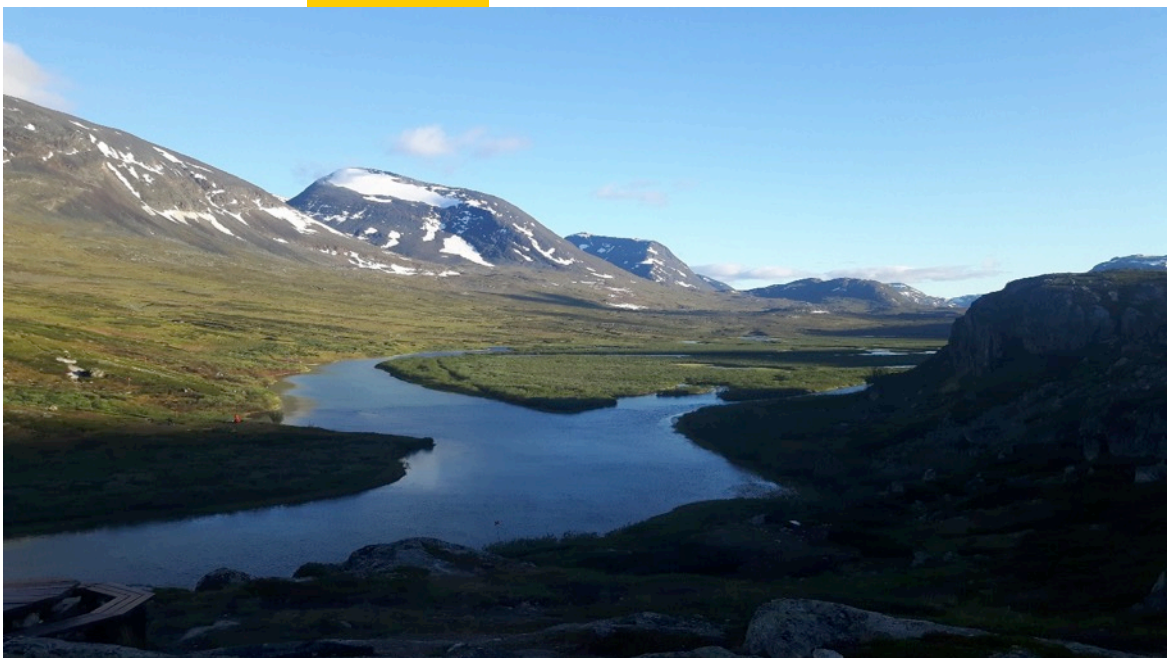
The last, and best hut I stayed in was Parte, a Swedish hut version of the Corris hostel, the hut warden spent ages telling me how she could no longer fish in the lake as the rowing boat oars were broken, but later that night a helicopter dropped them off... not sure I've ever seen a 60ish year old lady more excited! I left at 2am to make the most of the cool temperatures and reach my bus the next day. Even at that time it was full on daylight.... you could walk 24 hours a day if you could manage it!

I took a couple of detours off the route for some of the smaller peaks but bailed on the option of Kebnekaise, the highest peak as it was banked in cloud and the especially long slog would mean I would miss sauna o'clock. There are so many more mountains and routes to explore, it needs another trip!

Long days of walking meeting lots of nationalities, hills, scenery and a bit of civilisation (including a 3 course dinner in a remote mountain hut), for anyone who wants a civilised trek through some amazing mountain areas, put Kungsleden on your list!



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Feb 2014

UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT
PHOTO SPECIAL OF MERCIANS CAVING IN THE YORKSHIRE DALES

Climbing in the dark on **NEW YEAR'S EVE**

IMPROV-MEET
A somewhat the best of Merclan's 2013

Fiona Boyce on **Snow Week**

Långdale **first snowfall** of the year

Matt Kettle's **CAPEL CURIG MEET**

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May 2014

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

Norway **Cross country** skiing

Weekend Warriors
Low photos from all but one

Julie Taylor does the **SNOWDON HORSESHOE**

BMC Nav Course

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CAIRNGORM EASTER
Muir's alpine cat's paw and a 1000m scramble

A TALE OF TWO KITTENS
Col Cox does battle with Welsh rock

FOUR GO TO RHOSILLI
Andy Armstrong and friends go sport climbing on the Gower

BECOM BEACONS
Training walk for the Welsh 3000ers

HEBRIDEAN HOPSCOTCH
Richard goes island hopping

"HE WHO DARES..."
His sky climbing actually achieved in Cornwall

Training (part 2)
The second Welsh 3000ers training walk

PEMBROKE
The annual Merclan pilgrimage to South Wales's sea cliff climbing Mecca

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FEB 2018

VF GIOVANNI LIPELLA

MEET REPORTS GALORE!

ANDORRA VIA FERRATA

WOMEN'S CLIMBING SYMPOSIUM

WEEKEND WARRIORS

THE NEW YEAR MEET

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April 2013

LLANBERIS MEET
Winter climbing and scrambling in the, um, Ogwen Valley!

HIGH HOUSE
"One of the three best meets ever!" (Morris, 2013)

THE B TEAM
A member of the Merclan B Team compares his day to the B Team

SNAKE & LADDER
A semi-successful attempt at the Downes state meet relative to the source

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Sept 2014

VIA FERRATA
Riding Italy's 'Iron Road' with Harriet Stewart

WELSH 3000s
The Merclan club bag every one of Snowdonia's major peaks

TRADFEST
Who needs Glasto when Llanberis offers up it's very own climbing festival

MULLARDOCH
Matt Kettle completes one of Scotland's longest day hikes

CENTURION
100 Shots of Beer in 100 minutes

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Mercians summit a 4000m peak

BARRE DES EGRINS

VIA FERRATA
Riding the iron road with Louise

DRESSES, KILTS & CLIMBING
The annual dinner meet in Capel Curig

MAN ON A LEDGE
Alan Hardie settles a score with The Ben

Weekend Warriors
The photo competition with the club's 2013 winners

Blue Bookings 2013
A review of the PATTERDALE route

WEEKEND WARRIORS
The photo competition with the club's 2013 winners

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June 2016

Pete Nielsen
Your memories and photos of our much loved friend

March on Mull

Tips for the Cullin Ridge

Skye - the photos

A Dream of Brown Trousers

Weekend Warriors

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June 2013

SEA CLIFFS
Photos of abseiling, climbing and posing on the Swanage meet

SWANAGE'S DARK PLACE
Pete Hawkins goes on rock climbing through a low hole

HARRIET'S NORIC SECRET
Cross country skiing in the wilderness of Norway

LIVE TO FAFF ANOTHER DAY
Mick's special report on the aff of a typical Merclan climb

A VERY BIG DAY IN WASDALE
Lou, Andy and Kieran attempt Gwynedd's highest summit

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December 2013

DOLOMITES
Mountain biking and via ferrata for the big summer trip

THE GOWER
Kylie's report on one of our favourite coastal climbing venues

PHOTO CLIMB
The winners and runners up from the 2013 photography competition

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Aug 2013

NORMAN WRIGHT
1930 - 2015
Founder member of the Merclan Mountaineering Club

FEATURING
Derivation Club
Training in Greece
Rise 'Thru'
Outback Edge Meet
Tremadoc/Beet
Weekend Warriors

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May 2017

OGWEN VALLEY
Naomi's take on the Cassing Frith hut meet

GREAT END MEET
Was England's most creative winter venue as great as last time?

WELSH WINTER
On the shame of 81 Louise grumbles about the meet

CURVED RIDGE
Andy and James on Glasto's finest scramble

CODE BROWN
The great British bog-off by our most prolific top snorkeler

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BORROWDALE
A WAINWRIGHT BALDING MISSION

PEAK DISTRICT
Climbing on 'THE GET AT' RAMPAGE EDGE

MAP FAFF
THE THINKING ARTICLE BY HARLAN MADORE

60TH BIRTHDAY
A VERY GOOD KNEES UP

BANK HOLIDAY
A GOOD ROCK FIVE DAYS IN SPOONDALE

SNOWDON SUNRISE
THE QUEST TO WYNN ON THE SUMMIT CONTINUES

NORTHUMBERLAND
WALKING ALONG HARRIET'S WALL

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March 2015

MATT KETTLE
An exclusive interview with the club's most prolific hill walker

SELLA RONDA
The B team sits around the Sella group in the Dolomites

TRYFAN AGAIN!
Another mass ascent of the classic North Ridge

BEN'S LENS
Photos from a stroll around the state quarries at the Ty'n Llan meet

THE KRACKEN MEET
Power cuts, rum, floods, and heroic rescues in Cwm Dyli

WEATHERING STORMS
Nora's tip for surviving the Langdale floods

SUPER INDIRECT
The Faff's new feature: stories of navigational ineptitude and misfortune

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Sept 2016

Limited edition protest cover

ARE YOU NOT IMPRESSED?

Norway's national mountain

Land's End to John O'Groats

I can't believe it's not Buttermere

The Reluctant Alpinist

The Moseley Festival of Chips

Photos from The Roaches meet

...and a whole lot more

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Jan 2017

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF CRUXY DRAW
A Roman tragedy by Tom Morris

Fabian's 2nd Faff Article
What will he open up with to beat the A.C. 1000s climb?

A round up of recent meets
A summary of previous meets in England, Scotland and Wales

And a whole lot more to boot
Comments on the Challenge Rocks Faff art

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The Aiguille du Midi shrouded in cloud with the Cosmiques hut in the foreground.

AN ALPINE ADVENTURE

By Joe Grainger

It was July and at last, our much anticipated two week family trip to the Alps had arrived. Having been to Chamonix many times before, the routine is fairly well rehearsed; spend several days before washing clothes and hoping none of the children (or us) come down with some form of lurgy, spend the day before packing the car multiple times to get everything to fit and then get ready for the long drive the next day. This Summer for a change we stayed in a great campsite in Saint-Gervais-les-Bains, about twenty minutes out of Chamonix, meaning a whole new area to explore but still close enough for me to make a two day escape to get my alpine fix.

I won't proceed to bore you with a blow by blow account of our family holiday but will say that Saint Gervais is certainly more laid back than Chamonix, not quite as up to date with public transport but definitely has more of an alpine town feel about it. The area is great for walking and for those that like hurling themselves down mountains on two wheels there are plenty of bike trails on the skiing side of the valley.

So, after nearly a week of family hiking and sport climbing at the local Parc Thermal my two day escape was approaching. This year I decided to do two individual guided days so I could be back in the evening for food and the kids bedtime. Before that time came though we had one final bit of adventure in the form of a two day trek with night in a mountain hut. For my wife Alex, Katherine (7) and Henry (2) this was to be their first night in a mountain hut. The adventure started around an hour drive away near Sixt-Fer-a-Cheval with around 13km of trekking to reach the Refuge Alfred Wills (1807m). We were a little concerned about the impact little Henry was to have on our dormitory neighbours but after a days hiking, lots of fresh air and a great hut meal he was out like a light! The second day took us up to the Refuge de Sales (1877m) for lunch and then back down to the car with fantastic waterfalls, great views and to top it all (for Henry and Katherine at least) a children's play area at our lunchtime stop! I certainly felt that having carried Henry for the week, I was in reasonably good shape for my two guided days.

I had been in touch with my guide, Gav Pike, a couple of days before and had decided, weather permitting, to tackle the Aiguille d'Entrèves traverse (AD ***) from the Helbronner lift on the first day and then all being well hit the Midi and climb the Arête des Cosmiques (AD ***) on the second day. On the first morning I got up early, forced down some breakfast and made my way to Chamonix to meet Gav. It was a little overcast with some rain/snow forecast but as we made our way down the steps from the lift, the weather had improved a little and it remained dry for the day.

Alex and Katherine celebrating on arriving at The Refuge Alfred Wills which sits under the imposing Rochers des Fiz.



On the traverse across the Aiguille d'Entrèves



We kitted up and made our way over the glacier under the Aiguille de Toule North Face to the start of the route. Despite my preparation, I could certainly feel the altitude as we passed several other teams on the one hour approach. The traverse itself was fantastic – very atmospheric with cloud billowing around, serious exposure and good company. Time seemed to pass quickly and before I knew it we were back on the glacier and heading towards one of the best hot chocolates that I have ever had!

That evening, I felt as though I had run ten marathons and proceeded to try and rehydrate myself as best I could, cook some dinner and get an early night. At that point I wondered what on earth I had done, signing up for a second day but the following morning I felt great and made my way to meet Gav. We headed up the lift to the Aiguille du Midi (3842m) and made our descent down the snow arête onto the glacier. Our plan was to tackle the Arête à Laurence (PD **) first and avoid the early morning rush on Cosmiques. The plan worked well and apart from passing one couple we didn't see anyone else on the route. Having read a lot about the Cosmiques Arête before I went out, there were two things I was a bit apprehensive about – the crux slab which in the end I found pretty straightforward and getting over the rail onto the viewing platform at the end. This may seem like a strange thing to worry about but I have seen plenty of reports of people completing the route and then falling over the rail to the amusement of passing tourists! Fortunately, I managed to make a graceful landing on the platform and was inundated by amazed tourists asking where we had come from!

Gav had provided two days of excellent guiding and a great step up for me in terms of my alpine experience. After a debrief it was time to head back to the campsite and all too soon it was time to return home but the alpine bug has definitely got me.



Climbing the final chimney on the Arête des Cosmiques with the Glacier des Bossons far below.



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Y3P by Louise Bullock

22nd July 2017...A slightly tipsy Mercian decides to write a list of things she wants to achieve in her upcoming 40th year. After numerous suggestions from other equally tipsy Mercians the Yorkshire Three Peaks emerges as a target. 24.5 miles, 1585 metres of ascent, sumitting Pen Y Gent, Whernside and Ingleborough in under 12 hours. A fine idea.

28th July 2018...just over a year later the day arrives. Sarah Laight and Ruth Wragg decide to join in too. Here's how we got on...

Vay
1 3/4 mi

Yorkshire Three Peaks
High Birkwith via Whitbet



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We parked the car in Horton in Ribblesdale at 7:50am. Unfortunately, the three-month heatwave that Britain had seen over the summer came to an abrupt end and it started to pour with rain. However, after some faffing with waterproofs/food/ cameras, and a verbal kick up the bum from Ms Laight, we put our heads down and set off.

Within the hour we had reached the top of Pen Y Ghent. It came round remarkably quickly and even with water cascading down the scramble it didn't seem too effortful. A quick summit photo and we pressed on. During the next 2-3 hours the weather gods smiled on us and the skies cleared. We covered 6-7 miles in sunshine over flattish ground with little bridges and fields of white flowers providing lovely scenery.

We wound our way towards Whernside when the first of two tea stops came into view. Blissfully the Yorkshire Three Peaks route crosses the B6255 at two points. This has lead business-minded locals to set up hot food/drinks vans at the intersections to serve and refresh the steady flow of hikers. As a virtual chain tea-drinker I was delighted at this prospect. Sadly the woman serving the refreshments at the van didn't share my enthusiasm (or perhaps had served just one hiker too many) and curtly handed me my mug of tea whilst sighing loudly at the £20 note I gave her. One cup of tea and a snickers bar later we continued on our way up to Whernside.

At the foot of Whernside lies Ribblesdale Viaduct. A beautiful Harry-Potterque feat of engineering. We stopped to admire it and to pose for photos for a while before heading on. A game of 'guess the animal' passed a good half an hour or so and it turns out that Sarah has a freakishly encyclopaedic knowledge of weird and wonderful animals which are near on impossible to guess. On the way up to Whernside the heavens opened and we got soaked once more. This pattern of a complete drenching followed by sunshine set the routine for the rest of the day so we were getting used to it by this point. Thankfully the sun came out again by the time we got to the summit of Whernside. This allowed us to look back down on where we had come from and see some pleasant views down the valley.

By this point we'd reached about 15 miles, further than I'd ever walked in one stretch before and I was feeling tired but fine. However, during the descent from Whernside my heels began to twinge. An unusual sensation that I'd not experienced before. It was like someone flicking an elastic band at the back of my foot (I now know this to be my achilles and it is most unpleasant). By the second tea stop in the valley at Philpin Farm they were really hurting and I have to admit I was tempted to duck out at this point. Thankfully with Ruth providing the drugs, and Sarah the verbal kick-up the backside (again), I decided to continue and we headed on up towards Ingleborough.



[L-R] Ruth and Sarah in front of the splendid Ribblesdale Viaduct

The guide books had counselled of a steep ascent up to Ingleborough and it really was. A complete morale drainer. On any other walk it would have been fine but after 17-18 miles it felt like the world's steepest path. The heavens opened again and for good measure a thunder storm also began to roll its way around the valley. I was falling well behind the other two by now but kept going by settling into a slow but steady plod. Leftrightleft..... right. Ruth kindly turned back every few minutes to check I was still moving and we trudged on.

As we approached the summit of Ingleborough the clouds cleared again giving us welcome respite and an opportunity for a sunny (ish) summit photograph. Buoyed up by the tick of the third peak we headed enthusiastically down the descent path. The end was in sight! Well...almost. Another 3-4 mile walk back into Horton in Ribblesdale was all that stood between us and the finish. I had been warned by several people that the descent from Ingleborough was brutal. They were right though it didn't make it any easier. I needed more drugs to get me and my ankles through the last few miles and by the time we hit the Ribblesdale train station I was limping like an old lady.



Success! Now where's the pub that serves a pint of coke, a steak and ale pie and a sticky toffee pudding?

At 7:00pm, 11 hours after we left the car, we traipsed into the pub at Horton in Ribblesdale and were greeted by our fellow Mercians. I was shattered and felt like an old rag doll who'd been shaken about in the jaws of overexuberant puppy dog. One helpful Merican remarked "the other two look OK but you look like you've just come back from a war zone"! (Thanks). However, after a pint of coke, a steak and ale pie and a sticky toffee pudding I felt life oozing back into me. I looked over at Sarah, who was curled up sleepily in the corner, then at Ruth who was chatting away at the table and felt a sneak of satisfaction creep in. We'd done it. We'd made it. Not unbroken but certainly not defeated.



The team in high spirits.

Yorkshire Three Peaks – tick. Big tick.

26th August 2018 (Update): Now in her 40th year the same Mercian reflects on the walk. Was it worth it? Well...we saw some beautiful scenery, we drank tea (!) and endured all the British summer could throw at us. Ruth and Sarah are great walking buddies. I'm proud of us all for rising to the challenge and for keeping each other going. However, next time I suggest writing a list of challenges (a 50 at 50 if you will) remind me to put the Pinot Grigio down first.

FF



Whernside summit pit stop.



Despite the unzipped jacket it still looks pretty grim.



I SCREAM, YOU SCREAM, WE ALL SCREAM FOR ICE CREAM!?

A story of strong winds, wild swimming, moderately reckless driving, and the tireless search for a frozen snack.

by Beth Heeney

The late May bank holiday saw us, after some deliberation about the weather, heading up to the Lake District to a campsite just north of Thirlmere, near Keswick. Fabian, Vicky and I arrived at the same time as Louise and Tom, who was making a special guest appearance whilst visiting from Chamonix. We opted for a spot near the wall; it will be sheltered from the wind, we thought. It was not.

As more Mercians arrived and tents were erected, some tents were promptly taken straight back down again as poles broke and patience thinned. Tom, who had borrowed a tent from Vic and Stew, was kicked out when a pole on their first choice tent snapped, and was taken in by Adam. Efforts were made to create more shelter by parking cars in strategic positions. This didn't seem to make much difference and most of the time at the campsite was spent holding things down, adjusting guy ropes, or chasing things you'd failed to pin down across the field!

On Saturday some of the group went climbing, whilst myself and Vicky escorted Fabian, with a broken collar bone following an unfortunate accident on his bike, up Blencathra. As you can imagine, it was even windier up there, but it was clear and sunny and we had a jolly good time. We dropped back down via Scales Tarn where we had lunch and a swim (the latter met by a round of applause by fellow walkers on their lunch break), and then on to the pub!

Fabian giving Swindale the thumbs-up



After a browse of the gear shops in Keswick we met up with the others in the pub then headed back to the campsite for a breezy barbeque.

Sunday brought more sunshine (and wind) and the climbers headed out to do some long multi-pitch routes, whilst myself, Fabian, Vicky and Louise headed to Borrowdale to climb Glaramara. We were rewarded by beautiful 360 degree views, it was hot and sunny, and we were all soon thinking about our post-walk dip. The walk down the valley felt quite long in anticipation of our dip at Galleny Force, and we stopped for a moment to watch the (braver than us!) swimmers taking the leap into Blackmoss Pot. After the traditional towel dance we all tiptoed in and certainly cooled off! Then it was back to the pub for a cheeky pint, to the chippy for some sustenance, then to the campsite for another breezy barbeque. The wind did eventually die down in the late evening, which everybody was happy about for 5 minutes, which was about the time it took for the midges to join the party!

Monday was another beautiful day, but also time to head home. Fabian, Vicky and I chose another swimming spot out of the guidebook, this time opting for Swindale Beck, a lesser-known area of the Eastern Lakes, near Shap. On our way, I spotted a sign for an Ice Cream farm, and a few seconds later, obviously very concerned that I might miss the turning, Fabian shouted 'there! get in get in!' so I slammed on the anchors and we went careering around the corner and on our merry way, only to have our hearts broken on arrival when discovering it was closed. Disappointed but promising ourselves ice cream later in the day, we carried on to Swindale, which was absolutely lovely! The valley has been subject to a big project to 'rewild' it and return the river to a more natural state, reversing previous efforts to straighten it. It was almost deserted, and all the shiny new unnecessarily high fencing had our imaginations running wild with talk of 'the Swindale beast' that had eaten all the tourists and was the real reason behind all the new fencing...

Scales Tarn




We walked to the head of the valley and found what we were looking for; a series of pools cascading down the hillside, bathed in sunshine. We explored further uphill a little bit before choosing a pool beside a nice grassy bank perfect for lunching, napping, and listening to Bob Marley. After drying off in the sun we'd warmed up enough to fancy another dip, so we tried out the lower pool, where a middle-aged couple were enjoying a picnic. Fabian had his L'Oreal moment under the waterfall, and then we did the towel dance to change back into dry clothes. No sooner had we turned our backs to begin the walk back to the car a quick glance back made us sorry for disturbing the couple, who were already completely naked and wading in!

Blencathra summit



Our thoughts returned to ice cream, but with a long drive ahead, and the ice cream farm being out of our way, we decided against making the trip. Vicky used her expert research skills to find an alternative quality ice cream establishment about an hour into our route. On arrival our hearts were broken for the second time that day by the sight of the queue for the ice cream shop which extended about 100m down the road. Reluctantly we decided it was too long to queue, so we ended up with consolation prize ice creams from Tesco.

On the way home we learnt of floods in Birmingham, so despite the ice cream related heart-ache, we thought ourselves lucky to have enjoyed such a sunny weekend, gourmet ice cream or not!



Karl approaching the tricky moves on the second pitch.

A DREAM OF WHITE HORSES

Words by Stewart Moody. Photographs by Karl Stewart and Stewart Moody.

This sea cliff climb in Wen Zawn on Anglesey has been on my tick list since I first started climbing and a chap called Dan Ashfield mentioned it to me. It is described by everyone who climbs it with superlative after superlative. It goes at HVS 5a (some sources say 4c, I'm on the fence) and is a real adventure with a committing abseil in a very intimidating setting. The route follows a line (150m, 4 pitches) from just above the low tide mark, rising diagonally leftwards across a steep slab, and finally across a wall above the roof of a massive cave. The route traverses sideways more than it climbs upwards so needs a steady head and equal ability from both climbers. A fall by either would lead to a big swing and a potentially a lot of problems getting back on the route.

The planets aligned in July when I asked Karl Stewart to give it a bash with me. Karl, being the adventurous sort, was more than happy to oblige. We arrived bright and early at North Stack car park and walked briskly for 20 minutes to Wen Zawn. We descended on to a promontory to the side of the cave that offered the perfect vantage point to size up the entire route. We tried to translate what we could see in the guidebook to what we could actually see on the cliff face. It was all a bit confusing, the book spoke about lines of flakes, the only ones I could see looked hard, the rock itself looked quite blank. Hmm. We discussed the route for 20 minutes before gearing up and rigging the 45m abseil. A 45m abseil for a 150m route – see what I mean about the traversing nature of the climb?

Karl was a more than willing abseil poodle and went first ('poodle' (*noun*) the first to go into the great unknown to encounter and fix anything that goes wrong; akin to crevasse poodle in glacier crossing parlance). With a quiet whimper he committed his weight to the rope and dropped through a chimney and onto the slab below. A few minutes later I heard the customary "off belay", so I connected to the rope, double-checked everything and abseiled down. The belay ledge was about 5m above the sea and a curious seal was bobbing in the water nearby. The air was damp, and the sky was grey. We pulled the ropes down and they fell into a heap at our feet; "Well, we're committed now" said Karl, "Indeed" said I. The only way out now was to climb our route. We'd agreed to swing leads. Karl would lead P1 (5a, 45m) and 3 (4c, 35m), and I'd have P2 (5a, 25m) and P4 (4c, 45m).

Just before Karl set off on P1 a dead bird floated past, face down in the dark water. "I hope that isn't an omen" he said. He set off leaving me in the company of seal who I tried to amuse by doing a bit of a disco jig which also helped keep my muscles warm. My time to climb came so I dismantled the belay and shouted "climbing...Karl" even though no one else was around. The rock was solid and blessed with plenty of good holds. Karl's gear was good and soon after I joined him on his perch on the far right of the zawn. I was pleased to be on the move and the climbing was straightforward. Karl tied me off to make me safe and passed me the leading rack. I was enjoying myself immensely now, the damp air had passed, there were moments of sunshine, and the air was still. The occasional fishing boat and kayaker passed by.

From the sanctuary of the belay I set off leftwards on a rising traverse along flakes and passing a few difficulties. My favourite green Totem cam went into a small pocket right when I needed it the most - nice! Eventually I reached a fractured vertical crack in which I built an awkward hanging belay. It took about 15 minutes to rig, as dangling from the rock I wanted it to be absolutely bomber – it ended up with 5 pieces of gear including an old rusty in-situ peg. Satisfied, I clipped the rope bag to my harness and coiled the rope into it as Karl climbed across to join me.



Stewart leading pitch 2. The route continues up to the wall in the distance and traverses above the cave.



The view back across pitch 4.
Karl is removing his belay.

Far below my feet waves were washing into the cave and I could still see the odd seal break the surface of the water. I'd heard that when the seas are rough the waves crash into the back of the cave with an almighty "BOOM!". Today it was very peaceful which made communication easy. I shuffled aside to make room for Karl at the chimney and connected him to the anchor so I could redirect my belay. I was uncomfortable at this point as I'd been hanging for about 20 minutes making small adjustments here and there to ease the pressure on my toes and expected to be there for a further 20 as Karl lead P3.

We repeated the gear swapping routine and took another look at the guide book to study the line and read the route description. With that done, Karl set off leftwards towards the third belay at what we'd dubbed 'The Acorn', a lump of rock that look a lot like, well, an acorn. Karl dispatched the pitch in good style, putting lots of solid gear, and built his belay with his usual efficiency. A moment later he shouted "safe". My turn to climb. Personally, I thought P3 was the toughest of the lot, but I often find that seconding feels harder than leading, perhaps because I'm rubbish at extracting stubborn nuts from deep cracks. It was strenuous in places and rose up and left along a good handrail of flakes and average footholds. When those ran out I found myself about 5 meters above Karl where I then had to shimmy down a broad chimney to join him on a comfortable little ledge.

Right! Pitch 4. Karl had graciously let me have this pitch, which folk generally agree is the plum pitch. It goes through the most unlikely looking terrain, crossing a steep wall above the yawning cave below. In goes neither up nor down, only across. At this point the clouds had dispersed, the sun was warm, and with the end in sight my spirits were high. I struck out left to reach a roof, and followed the line of massive holds below it, around a few tricky ribs and bulges. Climbing just above the cave I was mindful that a fall could leave me (or Karl) swinging in thin air so I was cautious to place plenty of runners – "thank you for your diligence" said when Karl when I retreated a couple of meters to plug an extra runner into a gap that I'd missed. My plan of extending every runner to reduce rope drag was working...kind of. The route was easy to follow, and the climbing was incredible. I had to remind myself to stop from time to time to time and look around at the improbable situation. All too soon I reached the final bottomless groove that leads to the top.

What a pitch! I looked back across to Karl still on his belay and couldn't help but marvel that someone actually found this route in the first place, and that despite the unlikely terrain it goes at such an amenable grade. I gently belayed Karl over, being mindful not to pull him off balance and he joined me at the top of the route...or perhaps I should say the side of the route. And what a route! I can't recommend it highly enough. Thank you for sharing the rope with me Karl.



Stew heads out onto pitch 4. The route follows the wall just below the bulges. Juggy all the way, but tricky in places.

BOSHERSTON, PEMBROKE

The August bank holiday saw the club head to the easy going camp site at Saint Petrox near Bosherton. Home to good climbing, coastal walks, and beaches, not to mention a premiere venue for going running. It turns out that if you add up the total miles run by Mercians on the meet you'd be able to do the round trip from Birmingham to Pembroke (ok, I might have made that up). In this photo Fabian and Vicky are enjoying the good weather and fine coastal scenery.





Classic Pembroke scenery.



A trip to the beach just wouldn't be the same without ice cream.



Climbing at Saddle Head.



Fabian and Dylan out for a walk.



Becky and Karl half way up Blue Sky (VS 4b).



Karl happy on his perch.



Fabian cooking on the camp site and perhaps drinking too much wine.

LIVE CLIMB REPEAT

Climbing enthusiast and renowned eater of pork pies, Stewart Moody enjoying the comfort of a top rope whilst making the much sought after 574,617th ascent of the Gogarth classic A Dream Of White Horses (HVS 5a).



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LIFE IN THE SLOW LANE

Lured on by the amazing summer we'd been enjoying, Stewart and I decided to sack off heading abroad for the holidays and instead plumped on a Welsh road trip.

To be honest, the initial plan had been to head up to Yorkshire but a change in the weather forecast, and a request to road test the new Central Wales guidebook, led us to change our minds.

We'd already decided that the main thing we wanted from our holiday was that it should be slow. Life seems to move at such a pace these days, and we are particularly guilty of trying to cram in as many things as possible into days, that we really just wanted a proper chance to relax. Ideally we would come back from our holiday not feeling like we needed a holiday to recover from the one we'd just had!

In the spirit of slowness we decided to saunter down to St Petros in Pembrokeshire on the Saturday morning rather than rushing down on Friday night. It was wonderful not to rock up at the campsite in the dark and we were able to pick the perfect spot for the tent because we could actually see where we were pitching it!

After a leisurely lunch, we hopped in the car

and headed down to Boshoston to scope out some of the climbing for the following day. We quickly decided that we would give Huntsman's Leap a miss (entry level E1 5b) and instead took a fancy to St Govan's Head. A swift pint in the pub and then it was back to the campsite for our slow dinner. Laura is to be thanked for the culinary masterpiece we enjoyed as the recipe came from the book of campsite cooking she got me years ago. (I really should use it more often but I'm guilty of falling for the ease of the bbq.)

Over the three days that we were down there we climbed 10 routes, spent an afternoon on the beach, a trip to the stunning lily ponds and a morning in Pembroke and yet never once did we feel we were rushing. We had decided not to set a 'must be at the crag by' time and instead got up when we woke up and took our time over breakfast. I was expecting a massive drop in what we got done but surprisingly it felt like we crammed in as much as we would usually but without the stress that often accompanies it.

Stewart was particularly keen to lead Army Dreamers (HVS 5a), as it had been on his wish list for a while, and it was well worth it. The holds were all really positive all the way and it felt less than the HVS grade it gets.

Buoyed up by his success on that, he decided to have a go at an E1 and picked Cool Hand Blues Band. What followed was a series of curses and grunts but he got up it and that meant I had to follow. While I was belaying the guy next to me turned round and said: "I don't fancy that! It looks really blank for an E1." That obviously filled me with confidence. I managed to get up it but it wasn't a pleasant experience. It was only afterwards when we looked on UKC that we found it's graded on there as an E2 5b. That felt more like it although it didn't really make Stewart feel better about not having cleaned the route.

Whilst climbing that day, we were recommended to go and climb Blue Skies (VS 4b) and it was definitely a good call. It was a lovely route which I'd recommend others to go and do. Stennis Arete (HS 4b) is also one to add to your wish list. It's got a bollock of a first pitch, where you really need to break it into two or take walkie talkies with you, but the second pitch is a beaut.

Leaving St Petrox behind us, next on the

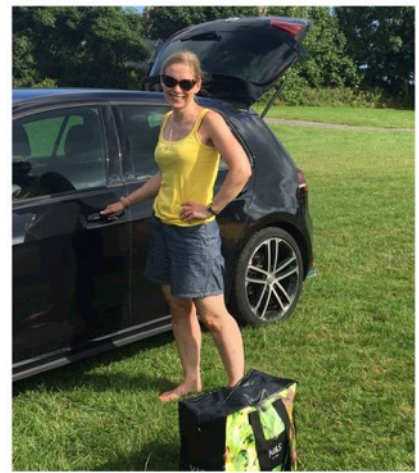
road trip was New Quay. Given that we hadn't had to pay out for flights and had pretty much only spent £30 on the campsite and about the same on beer whilst down in Pembrokeshire, we decided to treat ourselves on this leg of the trip. The forecast was looking a bit dodgy so we ditched the tent and booked into an adorable 1940s' showman's wagon. The wagon shares a field with Betsey Trotwood (not a pig but an equally cute vintage 1890's tram) and has its own toilet and shower.

Almost entirely decked out in dark wood, the wagon features beautiful mirrors, etched glass and has its own log burner. It was only when we arrived that Alison, the owner, told us that the bed is only 6ft. Stewart is 6'2". Somehow he managed to sleep diagonally and I squiggled up in the corner. They weren't the best nights' sleep I've ever had but you can't complain when the venue was so gorgeous.

Despite the fact that we had been not rushing at all, the holiday gods decided we needed to slow down even more so when we woke up on the first morning we discovered that we couldn't get into the car. Volkswagen, in all their wisdom, think it's a good idea to have car keys which will only let you in with the bipper. Not ideal when the battery in the bipper has died. Our first morning was therefore spent walking down to New Quay to find a shop that sold bipper batteries. That we also happened to find a shop that sold watermelon Nerd's flavour sorbet was by the by.

We followed the pattern we'd set in Pembrokeshire and took things slowly mixing climbing with a bit of beach time and sight-seeing. As the wagon was right next door to Wales' biggest honey farm, it seemed rude not to pop in. For £3.50 you can see a whole range of bee colonies, read lots of interpretation and watch a, now rather dated, video. The shop also sells mead (Pierce take note) and some rather nice bees' wax climbing balm.

Whilst the climbing isn't technically anywhere near to the quality of that in Pembrokeshire, the location wins hands down. Pembroke is rugged, mean and moody but Ynys Lochtyr is sweeping bays of golden sands, rolling fields and more dolphins than you can shake a stick at. (Stewart: "Are you watching me?" Me: "Of course!" *under breath "I'm not mesmerised by the frolicking dolphins at all.") There was also an inquisitive seal and



a flying fish that put in an appearance while we were climbing.

Given that the guidebook has only just come out, the routes feel rather loose in places but hopefully a couple of seasons of climbing will clear off the choss and will leave more pleasant routes behind.

The bad weather finally looked set to make an appearance and so the planned finale that was to be my ascent of A Dream of White Horses on Anglesey didn't happen. Instead we spent a very enjoyable last day watching competition sheep shearing and admiring the entries for 'longest weed' and 'oldest coat' at a good old-fashioned village show. The only disappointment was the lack of swing-boats and the clearly rigged fancy dress competition which saw the prize go to the smallest child and not the one that was actually the best dressed. At least I know why I used to walk away with a prize every year!

I can definitely recommend taking time for a slow holiday and I only hope I can apply the brakes a little in everyday life now.

Notes:

1) The Saint Petrox Campsite is only £10 per night for 2 people, car and tent. It has fridges and free, hot showers. It also has cute cats and cha-cha chickens. It is not, however, walking distance from a pub.

2) Unless you want to pay in some cash or get a haircut then it's not really worth going into Pembroke as it's almost exclusively barbers and banks.

3) If you climb Army Dreamers, the worst bit is getting off the route! There is quite a large (or at least to a person with little legs) jump from the pillar the route is on back to the cliff top. I made Stewart go first and belay me across it. It's actually quite an easy jump but it feels very bold if not on a rope.

4) You can find the Showman's Wagon on West Wales Holiday Cottages website. <https://westwalesholidaycottages.co.uk/showmans-home>

5) Ynys Lochtyn is a bit like a mini Worm's Head and you can only get on and off it when the tide is out. Giving on the two days we were there, we reckon that you can access it three to four hours either side of low tide.

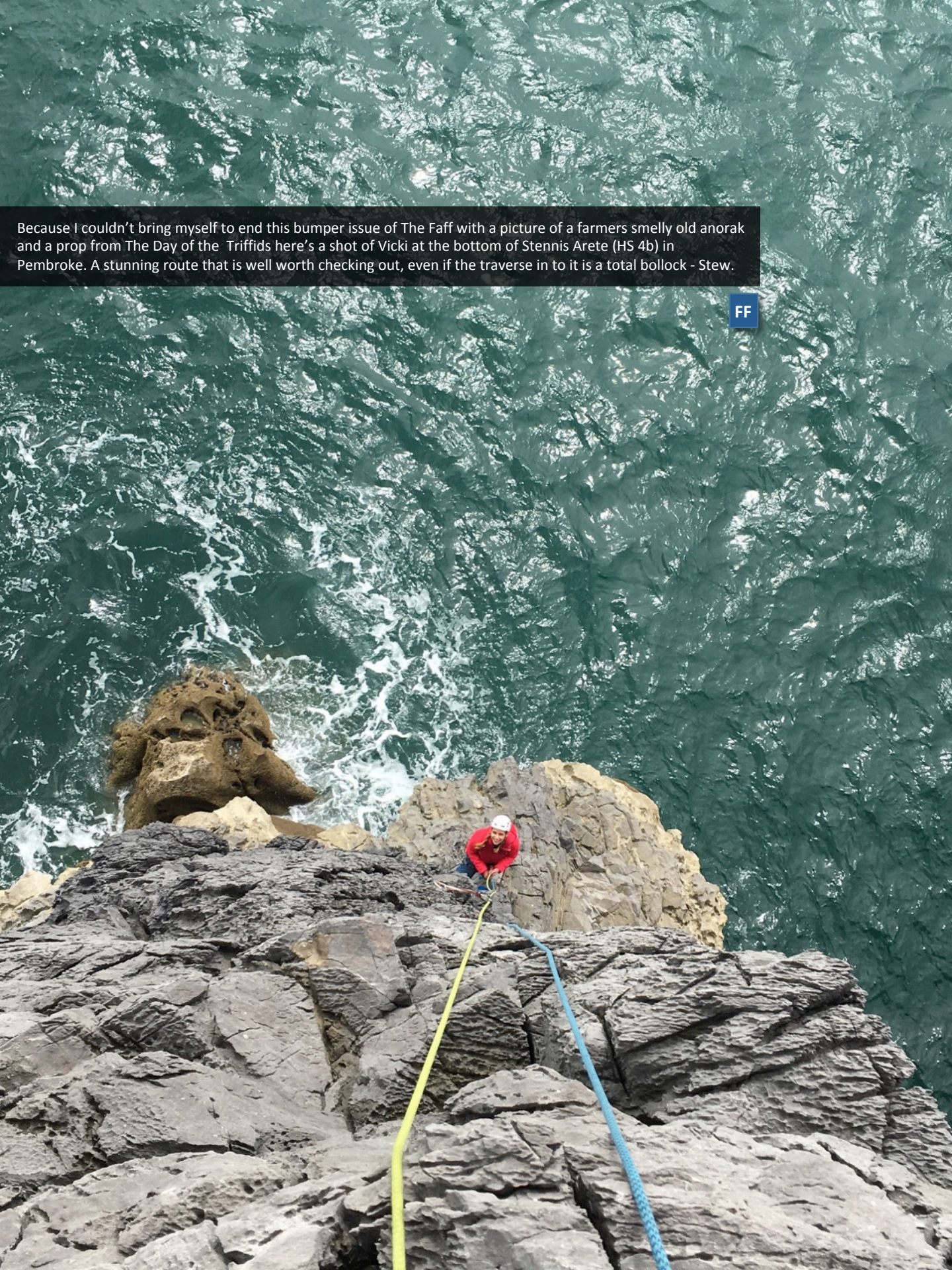
6) The shelf with all the climbs off it on Lochtyn is like death on a stick when it's wet so don't head down there until the sun has been on it a bit to dry it out. It does slope towards the rock, so you wouldn't end up in the sea, but you'd be quite likely to slide down and faceplant the crag.



I'm sure you want to know what the winning entries for oldest coast and tallest weed looked like, so here they are...

Because I couldn't bring myself to end this bumper issue of The Faff with a picture of a farmer's smelly old anorak and a prop from The Day of the Triffids here's a shot of Vicki at the bottom of Stennis Arete (HS 4b) in Pembroke. A stunning route that is well worth checking out, even if the traverse in to it is a total bollock - Stew.

FF



HIKE | BIKE | CLIMB