

# THE FORTNIGHTLY FAFF

The Periodical Journal of the Mercian Mountaineering Club

MARCH 2019

## FERRIES & BIKES IN BELFAST

Fabian leads a biking trip to Northern Ireland

## SUMMER COMES EARLY

Peak bouldering on a hot winter's day

## CORSICA'S GR20

In the footsteps of Geoff Taylor & Murray Papworth

## SCANDI KAYAKING

A long weekend of paddling in the Stockholm Archipelago

## CIUDAD PERDIDA TREK

A spot of hiking and a spot of culture in Colombia

## CIAO FROM ANA

Ana recites a few fond memories of the Mercians before returning to Bulgaria

## AND FOR GOOD MEASURE...

Meets reports, Photo Faff, Monster Cam, and a few other bits and bobs from the past 5 months





### **A word from the editor**

Greetings. I hope you enjoy reading this issue of The Faff. As always I'd like to extend my gratitude to those who took the time to submit stories of their derring-do; Alan Hardie, Paul Rigby (twice!), Fabian Moore. Good job folks. Your stories will live forever!

We are coming to the end of the hut season and I hope those of you that bagged a space on the Easter meet in Rhyd Ddu before it reached capacity are looking forward to it. I'm not sure if the club has had an 80's party before but it should be a giggle. As well as the hikes, biking trails, and climbing areas mentioned on the forum, I'd recommend Cwm Silyn as a great venue for easy multi-pitch trad. It's at the far end of the Nantyl Ridge. There's a Classic Rock tick to be had there; Outside Edge Route (Vdiff \*\*\*). You may not know the climb, but Khyati Patel's image of Pete Nielsen belaying that featured on the club's 60th anniversary clothing and mugs was based on a photo taken of him at the top of that route. It's a fab day out and I'll be heading there on Good Friday if the weather permits.

Looking beyond Easter there is a trip to Northern Ireland's Mourne Mountains that has attracted a lot of interest. In the summer there are groups heading to Norway and Chamonix too. And come Autumn there are a lot of people considering the Morocco / Toubkal trip. I think it was Phil Laverick, our promotions secretary, who first suggested that and my thanks go to Vicky Higgins and Beth Heeney for looking into the logistics and spearheading the trip. It may be the first thread on the forum featuring a picture of a horse's arse.

Stew.

# IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PAPWORTH AND TAYLOR

words and photographs by **Alan Hardie**

**A long time ago according to the legend, Mercian stalwarts Murray Papworth and Geoff Taylor completed a high level traverse across the Corsican mountains. In so doing they ensured their place in history alongside other notables such as Mallory and Irvine, and Shipton and Tilman, to name just a few. Inspired by their achievement I managed to obtain funding from my sponsor and secure the service of two ex Mercians, Jon Massey and Ian Moore for a repeat journey.**

The GR 20 is 120 miles long and makes its rocky way across the highest parts of Corsica. Being one of the older Mercians I allowed sixteen days for the trip and due to its popularity we took tents as we expected the refuges to be full. It climbs from almost sea level up to 1,500 metres and rarely falls below that until the end. The pattern for the day is to be up at daybreak (6.30am), eat a meagre French breakfast and then walk for anything up to seven hours frequently topping 2,000 metres before dropping again to 1,500 at the next refuge. Then you relax a while with a beer, have a shower, usually cold, and then sit down for the evening meal. Finally, you go to bed at about 8.00 pm and repeat the next day.

The weather was mostly good, with occasional afternoon showers and a downpour one morning. In September it was warm but never too hot. We managed to bag Monte Cinto, the highest point on the island at 2,706 metres. In many places there is no recognisable footpath, just a line of red and white markers to be followed. There was no shortage of

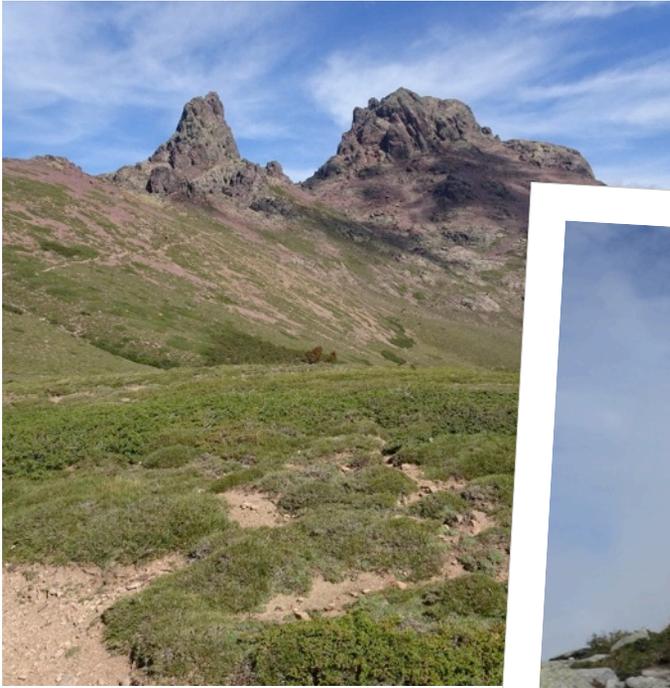


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And what of Papworth and Taylor? We enquired exhaustively wherever we went but there appeared be no trace of their passing except for one. High on a rugged mountainside an old goat herder with glazed eyes muttered something briefly about "le deux Anglaise" before becoming incomprehensible. Thus, their adventure has passed into the mists of time as all our adventures must do eventually.





[L-R] Ian Moore, John Massey, Alan Hardie





## LANGDALE

September 2018

The ever popular hut meet in Langdale rarely fails to please. The hut is right behind the Old D.G. for great drinking, and is within walking distance of lots of...erm....great walking. It's also within striking distance of some great climbing too. On Saturday a few folk went up to Gimmer Crag where Karl Stewart climbed North West Arete (VS 4c), pictured here. It's a stunning route in a magnificent situation - just look at it! Sunday saw a group head off up The Band and onto Bowfell, before descending via Angle Tarn.



The inaugural assembly of "The Breakfast Club" on Sunday morning. Some of look more bleary eyed than others. Thank you for cooking up a treat Karl.



(L-R) Karl and Joe about to abseil off Gimmer Crag after an ascent of Northwest Arete.



(L-R) Sarah, Joe and Lou hiking up The Band on Sunday.

# ANNUAL DINNER

October 2018

Cometh the autumn, cometh the annual dinner. This year we headed to The White Horse Inn at Scales, just down the road from Keswick. We stayed in the lodges round the back of the pub which was handy. The mealtime arrangements were tricky on account of us sharing the tiny kitchen with a platoon (?) of ex-squaddies which would have been carnage were it not for the military precision of their meal time scheduling and pot-washing. But there was no getting round the problems of sharing 7 mugs between 30 people. It was worth an Alpine start just to baggy yourself a mug for your morning cup of tea. Come Saturday morning we made an ascent of Sharp Edge and it was absolutely Baltic, don't let the bright sunshine fool you in this photo. But it was fun...of a fashion. Especially the bit when we ended up at the tea shop in Threlkeld





Blencathra summit.



Feeding time at the zoo.



Braving the cold. (L-R) Malcolm (under there somewhere), Lou, Jake, Sarah, Beth, Adam, Vic, Vicky, Alan, Ana, Vijay, Joel.



On the descent from Blencathra to Threlkeld





Pre-dinner drinks in the bar and the Mercians aren't looking too shabby.



Erm, not sure what to say about this one.



Propping up the bar before the serious drinking started.



Sunday was a helluva lot warmer and calmer than Saturday. Being late out we set our sights on the modest summit of Catbells



Catbells summit. [L-R] Sarah, Lou, Vicky, Jerl, Adam, Stew, Beth (in the World's brightest high vis jacket (the photo does it no justice), and Jake.

# FERRIES & BIKES IN BELFAST

By Fabian Moore

I pushed my bicycle outside and closed my front door behind me. The size of my panniers had forced me to travel light, and as I freewheeled down the hill from Moseley into town, I thought how refreshing it was to leave for a weekend away without the hassle trying to beat the rush hour traffic on the Aston Expressway in my car. This sense of liberation was soon tested as I was forced to battle for space with my bike on a busy commuter train departing New Street Station. I met Adam and Julie in the Birkenhead ferry terminal; there we loaded our bikes onto a trailer destined for the car deck, and boarded the ferry with the other foot passengers. To get the most of our long weekend, we had opted for the Thursday overnight ferry to Belfast. We waved goodbye to the Liverpool waterfront as the ferry cast-off and chugged its way up the Mersey towards the Irish sea. After sharing a bottle of red wine in our cabin, we were soon asleep in our bunks.

It was still dark, and surrounded by rumbling freight lorries, we were trying to navigate our way through the industrial port area of Belfast. We were still in shock from the rude awakening we had received onboard the ferry, when at 5:30AM a stern sounding voice over the ship's tannoy system had described at length (and high volume) the full range of goods and services available from the onboard shop and café. Perhaps depriving passengers of sleep makes it easier to sell weak coffee at inflated prices? After the obligatory map faff, and stopping for a couple of touristy photos of the Harland & Wolff cranes, we had found our way onto the Comber greenway. Following the line of an old railway, this cycleway winds its way past the empty and abandoned Stormont assembly towards Comber on the edge of Strangford Lough. Arriving in Comber too early for any of the cafes to have opened, we sought sustenance in a small supermarket. It was here that we made a cultural discovery about Northern Ireland – even the smallest of supermarkets sell fried breakfasts to take away!

From Comber we started to wind our way down the West side of Strangford Lough on the Strangford Lough cycle trail. The Lough is the largest sea inlet in the British Isles, and is a designated marine nature reserve. We found ourselves cycling along a beautiful coastline with green hills on one side and the lough waters gently lapping the shore on the other. The route was scattered with ancient monuments; we would stop to look at a ruined castle or monastery only to find one slightly more dramatic ruin around the next corner.

Strangford lies at the far end of the lough, where the Lough meets the Irish Sea. We caught the ferry from Strangford to Portaferry a mile away on the other side. It was here that we found our accommodation for the night having pedalled a respectable 60 miles from Belfast. The Barholm Hotel in Portaferry had been selected using three strict criteria. Firstly, it was roughly halfway around the cycle route which I had hastily thrown together. Secondly, it had availability when I made the booking 4 days before our departure. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it was cheap (£60 for three people including breakfast). I understand that some future guests might not agree with the 10 stars I gave it on booking.com, given the tired décor and furnishings. However, Chris our Polish host, was very welcoming and allowed us to store our bikes safely inside in the hotel conference suite (which also served as a general store room). He also impressed and shamed us in equal measure with his plan to cycle all the way to Poland on a bike far more basic than our own the following week.

Wandering around Portaferry in search of food, it had seemed greyer and more austere than Strangford, which we had passed through earlier. We opted to get the ferry back across to Strangford and soon found ourselves at the Lobster Pot, a lovely pub dishing out locally sourced food. Adam, confused by the menu, asked the waitress what champ was. The answer, "mashed potatoes with scallions," gave him some reassurance, but he still looked doubtful. The combination seafood and stodge were exactly what we needed after the day's cycling, and the scampi was for me a particular highlight.



It seemed that the rounds of drinks, and the return ferry timetable were always out of synch. If Julie and me sped up our drinking to catch the next ferry, Adam would fall behind and we would miss it. However, whenever we looked at the timetable, it always seemed like we had time for another one before the next ferry was due. Despite our best efforts to dispatch drinks quickly and efficiently, we still ended up on the last ferry (just!).

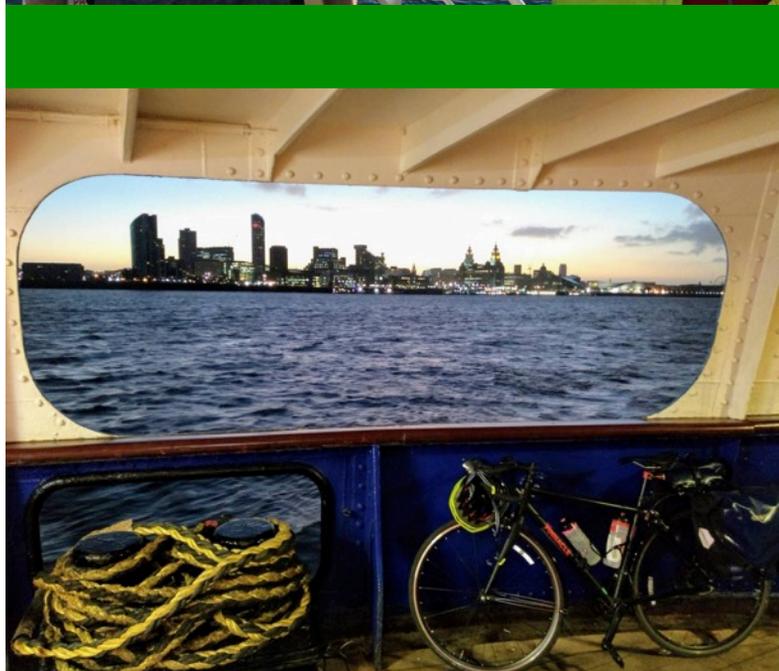
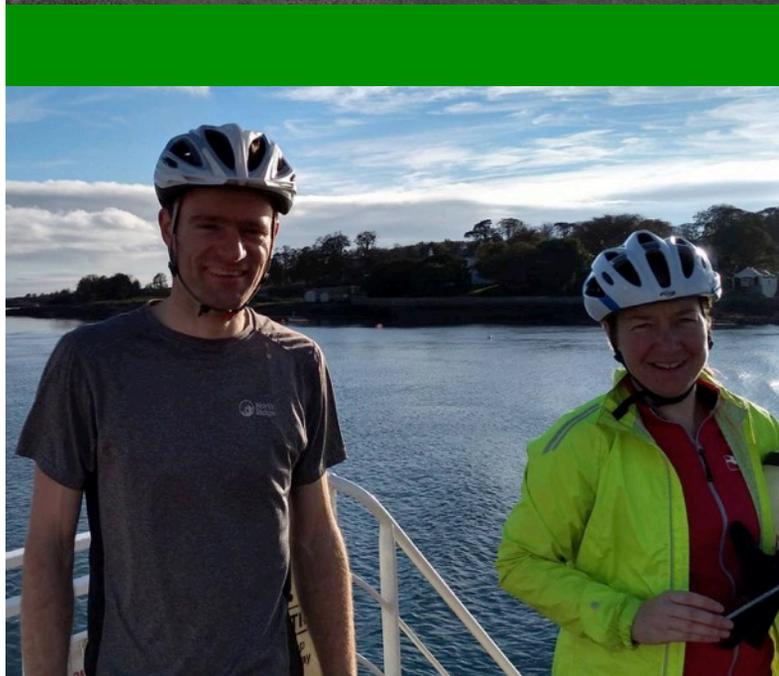
Waking up in our shared hotel room, it was clear that all three of us had a cracking hangover. Julie seemed surprised, “we caught the last ferry back at 10.30, so we must have been in bed by 11,”. Adam reminded us that we had called in to Dumigan’s bar, on our walk back from the ferry to our hotel in Portaferry. The sign outside had claimed that it was probably Ireland’s smallest pub, and it had seemed rude not to pop in. Between the three of us, we pieced together the facts, and they didn’t look good. We definitely discussed politics and nationality very drunkenly with some locals in the bar. Worst of all, I am reminded that I attempted to sing along to some Irish folk songs... oh dear.

To return to Belfast, we continued on the Strangford Lough trail up the Ards Peninsular which sits between Strangford Lough and the Irish sea. After passing some beautiful beaches, the trail heads inland, taking us through rolling green hills. Cycling with a hangover into a blustery headwind meant the cycle ride was harder than the day before, and by the time we arrived at the YHA hostel in Belfast 55 miles later, we were fairly tired. Although the receptionist at the hostel said no bikes had ever been stolen, the “secure” bicycle storage area consisted of a couple of bike racks in a dodgy looking back alley. Unwilling to take the gamble, we chose to store our bikes in a local bike shop overnight (the very helpful “Belfast Tandems”).

We spent Saturday evening in Belfast at a couple of bars, first stopping at Kelly’s Cellars before settling at Maddens Bar. Here there was a music table in the corner, where a rotating cast of musicians were playing traditional Irish music; if the banjo player left, another would seem to turn up moments later, or if there was a surplus of fiddle players, one would swap to the tin whistle. After enjoying all this over a couple of pints of Guinness, it was time for bed.

Sunday, our last day, was spent looking at some of the landmarks from the Troubles which now make fairly sombre tourist attractions; A tour of the political murals followed by a visit to the Crumlin Road Gaol. When all this education of recent conflict got too much for us, we sought refuge in the Crown Liquor saloon. This pub is truly a sight to behold; covered in ornate Victorian tiling and carvings, it presents a history that is much easier to celebrate - which we did, over a pint!

We returned to Liverpool from Belfast on the overnight ferry, arriving at the Birkenhead dock before dawn. I said goodbye to Adam and Julie before cramming in my 6<sup>th</sup> ferry journey of the weekend – the Mersey ferry across to the centre of Liverpool. From there I caught my train home (again fighting for space on a commuter train with my bike!).





**HALLOWEEN  
KNEES UP AND  
FIREWORKS @  
HUW & BETH'S  
PLACE**



# BEDDGELERT

September 2018

“You weren’t there man, you weren’t there. You’ll never know what it was like”. Joe Grainger displays the 1,000 yard stare after scrambling a few hundred meters on slippery wet rock covered with patches of loose heather. Sketchy doesn’t quite do it justice. Things improved massively when we reached our objective; Notch Arete (III).

This was certainly a meet of two halves. Saturday was claggy, and pretty miserable despite a reasonable forecast. Sunday on the other hand was a beautiful day, apart from the gale force winds that battered us all the way to the summit cairn of Snowdon - and not everyone made it to the top, such was the severity of the gusts.

Our learned meets sec booked us into an out of the way hut behind Beddgelert which was an inspired choice. Modern, cosy, and super warm. Good work.





(L-R) Anna, Joe and Adam moving together on the upper section of Notch Arete (III) on the much overlooked west face of Tryfan.



Sarah gunning for the summit of Snowdon. We ascended from Rhydd Ddu. Many started, few succeeded. The wind was ferocious.



(L-R) Sarah, Harry and Joe nestle between some rocks to shelter from the wind. Only Sarah's unconventional hairstyle bears testimony to the inclement weather.

“Ok everyone, line up nicely please. Come on now, get organised, I want to see even spacing between you. This will be an awesome photo. Vic can you move a little to the left...no a bit more to the left...no now right a bit please, it’ll be great, I promise!”



“Right, that was fab, this time just do something funny, doesn’t matter what..but it has to be funny though”.



Oh f\*ck this for a good walk, I’m off...

Another fantastic example of “up to your elbows in rucksack faff”. Ana is seen to be emptying her entire rucksack over the Rhyd Ddu car park, including a cake tin - yes that’s right, a cake tin! She’s been at it for so long that Sarah has started doing lunges to keep warm. But what sets this picture apart from others in the PhotoFaff series is that the king of Faff himself, Adam Butler (blue jacket), is clearly impressed with her performance. That’s a bit like Delia Smith complimenting you on the quality of your cheese soufflé. A rare 10/10 on the Faffometer.





**MERRY  
CHRISTMAS  
EVERYONE**

Sightings of deer, the fitting of gadgets into Simon's orifices, explanations of the the role of hereditary peers in the House of Lords, an absence of tea, and enough alcohol to sink a battleship. – Not just your basic, average, everyday, ordinary, run-of-the-mill, ho-hum sea-side holiday.



**In early May 2018, Karl Stewart sent an email to the Mercian email list asking for volunteers to head to Sweden with him for a few days of sea kayaking, wild camping and outdoor fun off the coast, just south of Stockholm. Nine volunteered, and a plan was hatched to travel in August.**

The entire group had booked to fly out of Stansted airport on everyone's favourite airline, Ryanair (technically not everyone, Simon drove from Norway, but that complicates the narrative). Unfortunately for us the dates we booked coincided with a dispute between Ryanair and it's pilots, leading to them cancelling flights on our day of departure. We had to change our trip dates by one day but the disruption meant that Julie 'JT' Taylor had to drop out.

We were also warned that due to the incredibly hot weather in Sweden over the few weeks preceding our trip there was a complete fire ban meaning that no stoves and campfires were allowed. This meant for the entirety of our journey we would only have cold food and drinks. While, for most, this would be an inconvenience for others it was unacceptable. Legendary tea drinker and true Brummie Mercian Louise Bullock had to reconsider her place on the trip when confronted with the possibility of 3 whole days without her sacred hot brew. In the end she gave in, choosing instead to use her flights to visit her friend in Stockholm where she could consume as many caffeinated hot drinks as she wanted. Then there were 7 left and so Adam, Sarah, Vicky, Alan, Simon, Karl and myself headed to Sweden.

When the group finally arrived in Sweden the necessary trips for supplies of food and drink had to be made. Stocked up with booze and a selection of food that could be eaten cold we headed to meet Klaas who would be supplying our boats.

We were then introduced to our kayaks. Many of us had never been sea kayaking before, but when has that ever stopped a Mercian from trying something? Packing the boats with tents, sleeping bags, clothes, food, water and copious amounts of alcohol took longer than expected, but once Simon had finally fitted the last of his gadgets into every available orifice we set out to onto the water. After a little time getting used to the paddles and the pedal operated rudder we headed out and onto our adventure with captain Karl leading the way. Heading south and then west we made out way through the maze of tiny islands that are splattered around that part of the coastline. After a short paddle to acclimatise to our new method of transport everyone's minds soon moved to finding a good camping spot for the night. An island was spotted and in the tradition of British colonialism we arrived on someone else's land and called it our own. With boats pulled ashore tents were pitched, beer cans were opened and our Scandinavian adventure had really begun.

The next morning began with a beautiful sunrise and a few sore heads. The usual Mercian faff took up a chunk of the morning as we packed our gear onto the boats, but no one expected anything different. Soon we were back on the water heading east.

story and  
photographs by  
**Paul Rigby**

Instead of the incredibly hot weather that had bathed most of Sweden for the previous months we were treated instead to grey skies and occasional rain showers. After a few hours on the water we stopped for pre-lunch and scuttled around another island looking for Viking treasure. Heading further east we came to our biggest crossing of the trip.

Over a kilometre of open water between the mass of scattered islands. It does not sound like much but it looks a long way when your head is only 3 ½ feet above the water. So, intrepid travellers that we are, we struck out heading for the islands in the distance.

For relative kayaking newbies the group stuck together well and after a long slog of paddling, spurred on by calls of 'last one there is a Ceunant', we reached the safety of the islands. With our kayaks weighed down by large amounts of alcohol we decided the safest thing to do that evening was to find a campsite and reduce the weight by consuming the ethanol tainted beverages which would help with the balance and speed of the boats. Ironically the consumption of the alcohol does the opposite to the people operating the kayaks but...whatcha gonna do?

The beginning of our second full day of kayaking had the best and worst aspects of our trip. The weather was glorious. The waterproofs of the previous day were replaced with t-shirts and sun-creamed was applied. Gently paddling between the tiny islands that litter that part of the Swedish coastline was an utter delight in the baking sunshine. It also turned out to be a great day for spotting the Scandinavian wildlife; mink, sea eagles and deer were all spotted but they don't tend to stick around for photo opportunities. While navigating between the densely

packed islands, which are sheltered from the wind and waves, was a joy crossing open water was a completely different experience. While navigating the open patches of water it was obvious how light and flimsy the kayaks were, compared with the force of the sea. While the waves were not large, only a few feet high, they looked enormous while sitting in a kayak. As each wave passes underneath the kayak and lifts you as if you weigh nothing is a humbling and unnerving experience and demonstrates the huge power the sea possess.

With Sarah and Vicky doing the island choosing once again we pitched our tents on a Swedish land for the final time and enjoyed highbrow tales from fellow Mercians with Adam doing an excellent job of explaining the role of hereditary peers in the House of Lords.

We awoke the next morning satisfied with our work and sad that our adventure was coming to a close. A short excursion back to the kayak rental place and we were soon heading back to civilisation. We arrived back in Norrköping in the early afternoon and with our flight not until the early evening we had some time to kill. The hive brain of the Mercian's came together with Alan suggesting we to head to the local leisure centre to ensure the water temperature was adequate and the large slide met EU safety standards. After splishy- splashing around for an adequate amount of time and checking out the compulsory Swedish sauna we finally headed to the airport and another faff filled Mercian trip was complete.



Sarah Laight, ready to go...



Simon Hodgson, not ready to go...

"An island was spotted and in the tradition of British colonialism we arrived on someone else's land and called it our own".

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## COPPERMINES

December 2018

The new year meet is known for the serving of the finest cuisine that climbing hut kitchens have ever seen. The 2018 meet was no exception. Vijay, the ever enthusiastic chef, cooks up (or should that be reheats) an incredible lamb curry to feed the masses. We ate like kings and queens and sort of enjoyed some type 2 fun in the mountains - most days were characterised by mizzle....until the morning of new year's day when the sun shone over Coniston with uncommon brilliance in a deep blue sky. The perfect weather for a mountaineering club who are busy sleeping off hangovers, packing their cars and driving down the gridlocked M6. Bloody typical.





(L-R) Vijay, Karl, (Dylan, looking very dapper I might add), Vicky and Vic on the summit of Wetherlam on the 29<sup>th</sup>.



(L-R) Malcolm, Huw, Vicky, Amandeep, Vijay and Beth on the walk up Coniston Old Man.



Beers in the pub in Coniston on New Year's Eve after a mammoth 'not as advertised' hike to Little Langdale



Cheese, wine and tea in the Coppermines hut



Sitting around in kitchen passing the time before the drinking games began.



A rare moment of sunshine on New Year's Eve bring smiles to faces and Sarah gets her leg out in the hope of a tan.



Cathedral Quarry in Little Langdale. A slightly longer walk than anticipated. Par for the course when it's a walk that Stew organises.

Mercian athlete Adam Butler up to neck and in a whole load of trouble on the most under-graded off-width in Derbyshire. Photo : Stewart Moody

# MONSTER CAM

- Supersized for the most horrendous off width imaginable
- Weights the same as a medium sized pork pie
- Gives a psychological advantage even if you just let it dangle from the rope



**climb now  
work later**

[dmmwales.com](http://dmmwales.com)



## DINORWIC MILL

January 2019

“The best hut of its kind in Snowdonia”. Quite the boast from the Bowline Mountaineering Club website with regards to their hut near Deiniolen. True, ‘tis not too shabby, in fact ‘tis brand spanking new. It was our home for the two nights of the inaugural meet of 2019. Nestled half way between the Ogwen and Llanberis valleys we were spoiled for choice when it came to planning our activities. On Saturday we ventured into the Carneddau from Bethesda, and scrambled the Lllech Ddu Spur which most of us had never clapped eyes on before, and on the Sunday we opted for a firm favourite, Cneifion Arete (photographed here with Ed leading and Jennifer following) in Ogwen. In both cases the snow added a bit of spice. Two great days out in the hills in good company. Thanks for the memories.



(Left) Stew & Vic with the Llech Ddu spur rising in the background. (Right) Adam at the crux traverse.



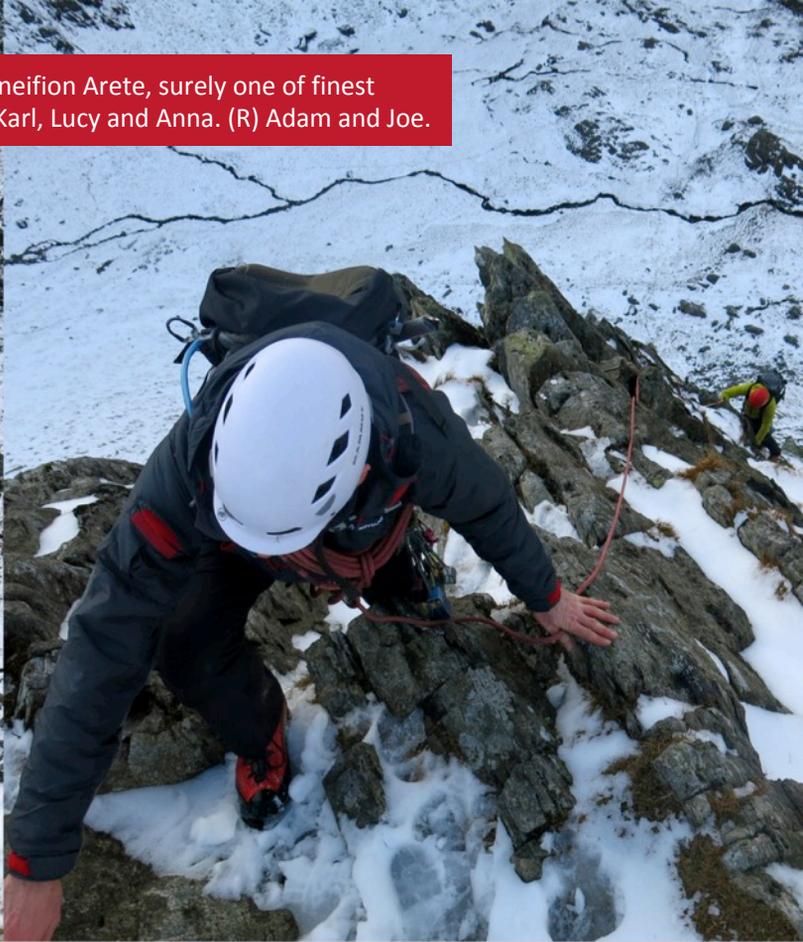
(L-R) Anna, Ruth, Ed, Jen, Vic, Adam, Joe, Karl, Lucy. A group ascent of a the Llech Ddu Spur under our belts.



The descent back down to the cars.



Teams topping out on Cneifion Arete, surely one of finest scrambles in Snowdonia. (L) Karl, Lucy and Anna. (R) Adam and Joe.



The west face of Tryfan on the descent from Cneifion Arete.

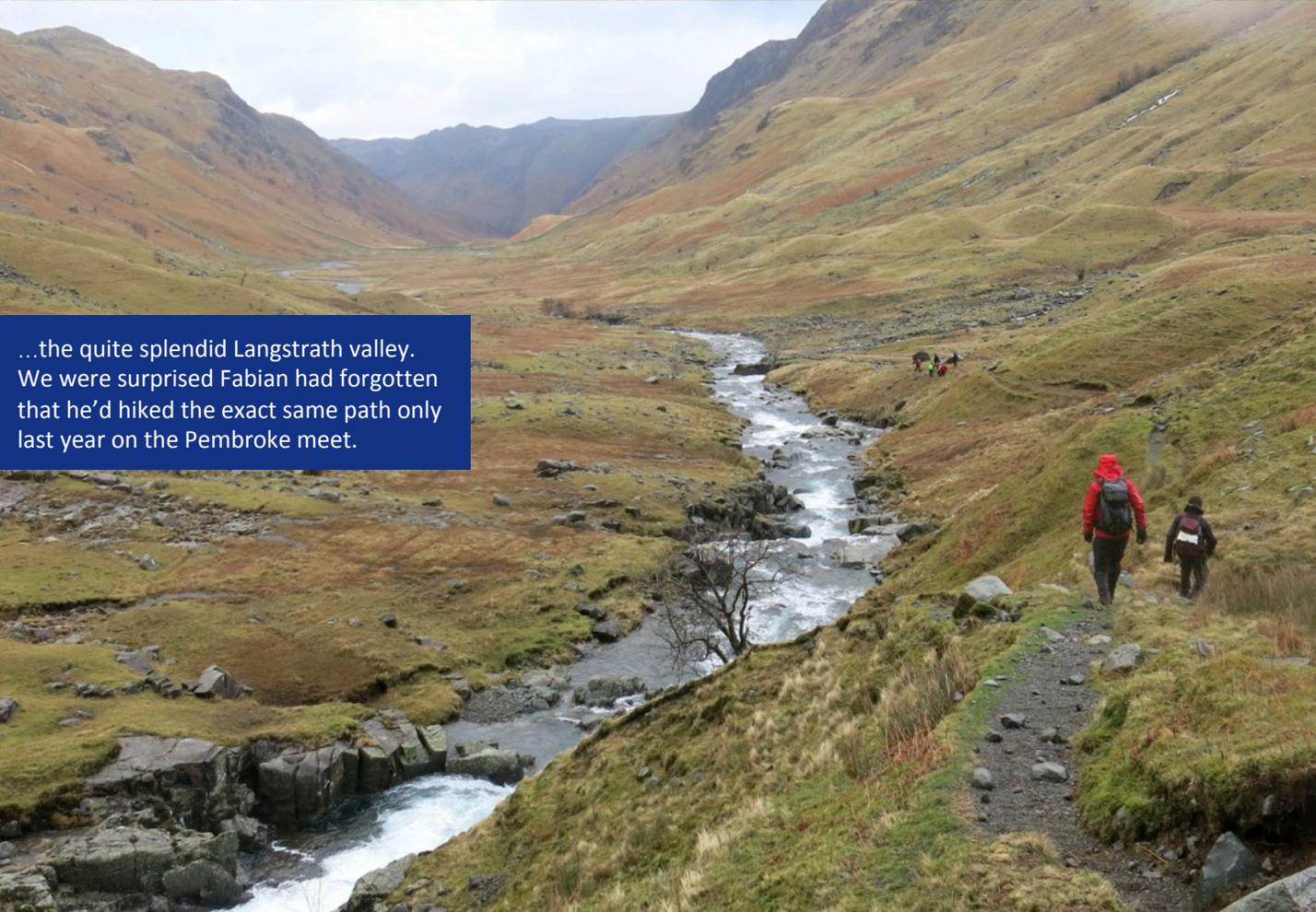
# HIGH HOUSE

February 2019

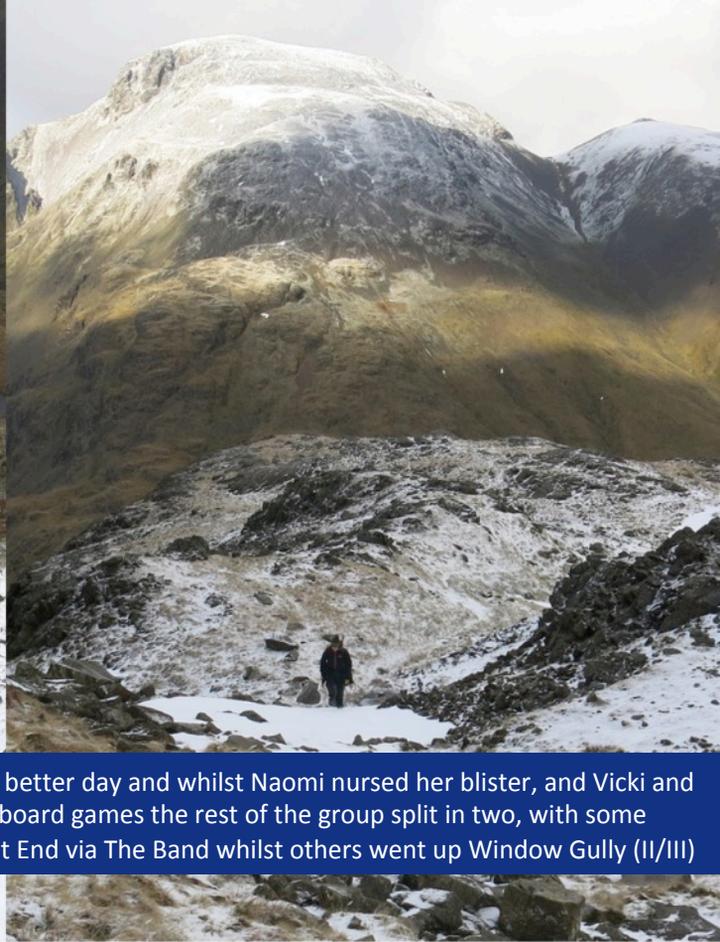
It is with a sense of ritual that the club descended on the High House hut in Seathwaite, Cumbria. We go so often as it sits in the shadow of Great End, which is not only a Wainwright but also home to one of England's most reliable ice climbing venues. Though from the valley this year there didn't look like much ice to climb. I'll let Karl and Joe argue to toss about whether they found Window Gully (II/III) to be in condition on their ascent or not. Regardless of ice conditions we all enjoyed our time on the fells. This photo shows Vicki on the summit of Great End on Sunday after an ascent of The Band.



(L-R) Karl, Fabian, Naomi, Lucy, Lou and Joe as we ascent from Seathwaite up towards Great End. The hike was 'not quite as advertised' to due the length then took us back to the hut via...



...the quite splendid Langstrath valley. We were surprised Fabian had forgotten that he'd hiked the exact same path only last year on the Pembroke meet.



Sunday was the better day and whilst Naomi nursed her blister, and Vicki and Lou played board games the rest of the group split in two, with some summiting Great End via The Band whilst others went up Window Gully (II/III)

(L-R) Vicki, Huw and Fabian on the summit of Great End.

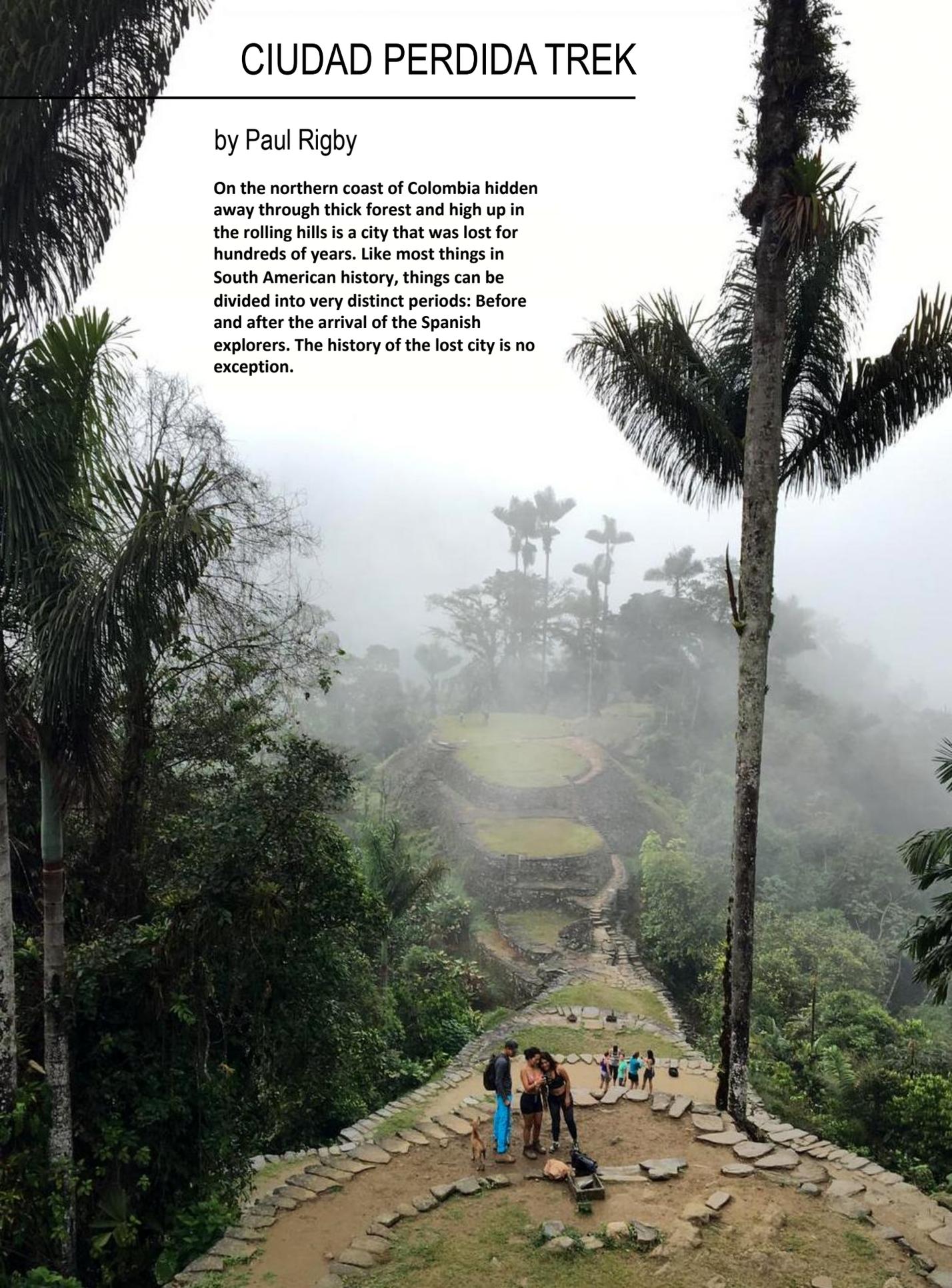


# CIUDAD PERDIDA TREK

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by Paul Rigby

On the northern coast of Colombia hidden away through thick forest and high up in the rolling hills is a city that was lost for hundreds of years. Like most things in South American history, things can be divided into very distinct periods: Before and after the arrival of the Spanish explorers. The history of the lost city is no exception.



The indigenous Tayrona people began to build their city around 750AD, about 600 years before the better-known Machu Picchu was constructed. To see this incredible creation for yourself involves a four day trek through the Sierra Nevada mountain range and that is exactly what I did in March. Joining one of the few licenced companies that are allowed to take visitors up to the site I set out in early March to discover the lost city for myself.

A two-hour drive from the nearest town of Santa Marta the off-road trucks take you high up the hills to the start of your journey. A huge gaggle of eager tourists trundle around the village of El Mamey all wanting to find the treasure at the end of the trail and with our bags packed for the long journey we finally began. The first day was relatively easy day with just under 4 hours of walking along dirt roads but in the high humidity of the forest and with some steep roads it is not exactly a stroll. The first night was spent at a camp which had rows of bunk beds with mosquito nets covering them. After a meal and a bit of chat amongst the group everyone was eager to get into bed ready for 5am wake up call to begin the walk at 6.

The second day was the hardest with steep climbs and rough roads we covered 18km with a hour break for lunch. On the route we were greeted with stunning vistas of the hills around and wonderful wildlife in the form of humming birds, leaf cutter ants and even toucans. We camped very close to the Ciudad Perdida and early the next morning we ascended the 1200 steps that lead the way to the ancient stone terraced city. The city was abandoned when the conquistadors arrived and either directly killed, through warfare, or indirectly killed, through disease, 90% of the indigenous people in the area. The survivors climbed higher into the mountains away from outsiders and stayed there, out of the reach of outside world for the best part of 400 years. Now the indigenous people do have contact with outsiders but have simple lives living in mud huts but that does not stop them enjoying the smart phones and beer.



A few hours exploring the city, of which only a small portion is accessible, was impressive as it had all been built by hand using simple techniques to break and shape the rocks. Some of the inhabitants of the city are still buried in stone circles where their houses once stood so there was always a need to be respectful of the site, despite it now being a major tourist attraction. The whole trek was arduous and very sweaty but it was well worth the effort. If anyone ever finds themselves on the Caribbean coast of Colombia with 4 days to spare, I can certainly recommend the Ciudad Perdida trek.

FF



[Left] Paul and his trekking group at the lost city. [Top] Paul and Pedro, his group interpreter.

# PEAK BOULDERING

by Stewart Moody

**Who'd have thought it? Bouldering in t-shirts, lounging on the grass, and enjoying a slow lunch on a gritstone edge, all whilst bathed in glorious sunshine...in February!**

The "anyone doing anything this weekend" conversation was floated by Adam and was quickly shaped by me into a day of bouldering at Froggatt and Curbar. Why that venue? Well there are easy (easy being a relative term) problems, and lots of them, and it is right next to Grouse Inn, that well loved bastion of real home made short crust pasty steak pie. "Did someone say pie?" chimed in Lou, "I'm in".

And so we rendez-voused at the hairpin layby at 9:45am; me, Vic, Lou, Adam and Ed. The pictures say it all. We had a great time. We kicked things off at the Pinnacle Boulders at Froggatt, and worked our way around the Orange Circuit as described in the Rockfax. We didn't push the grades too hard nor spend hours and hours falling off the same move. Instead we moved around a lot of different areas, where there was plenty of standing around watching each other, learning from each other, and offering advise and encouragement, like "Adam, you just need to try harder". We quickly reached the conclusion that bouldering is hard. Even easy bouldering can be desperate. The highlight of the Pinnacle Boulders was Air Bear (V1 5b), a pretty cool problem consisting of an easy start and a harder burly swing up and over a blunt nose. Everyone had a go, not everyone made it to the top. But we all summited the 3m high boulder one way or another, and some of us (you know who you are) found getting off a damn site harder than getting on. I'm surprised we didn't attract an audience. We decided against an adjacent problem called The Broken Chair (V4) which was described as a "...rockover using a sloping horror". No thanks! Let's move on.



Ed warming up on the Pinnacle Boulders

So we headed to the Cioch top boulders at the near side of Curbar. We (well, I) overshot the Ciock as I was preoccupied with chatting with my fellow boulderers and taking photos of the unseasonal spectacle. After 30 minutes of walking we ended up in the vicinity of the Small Quarry at the far side of Curbar. "I think the Cioch top boulders are 750m back that way" said Adam. "Aye" said I. We stayed put and did several problems, but the jewel was Chippy (V2 5c), a steep wall of tiny crimps that Ed, Adam and I took turns battling for half an hour. Ed reached the high point, a lofty 5 foot off the ground. It was hard, but great fun trying different tactics, deciding what we did wrong, then trying again, seeing how the next person approached it, then trying again. I guess that is what makes bouldering a fun and sociable outing. We moved on soon after a bunch of scrawny, bare chested youthful boulderers who were smoking dope as a loud speaker blared out rubbish music put in a later afternoon appearance. They busily set to brushing bucketful's of chalk on a blank looking wall and one of them was wearing what looked like Elvis sunglasses. Clearly we'd stumbled into the "cool" area, we should have known because it was suspiciously close to some parking. We were happy to make a hasty retreat and leave those dudes to it.

We headed back to try and find the Cioch Top boulders. They were so, so - nothing to shout about. But then we stumbled upon Left Arete (V0 4c) which I hadn't noticed at first. It was (relatively) easy; steep and high with a slightly tricky top out, and a great descent. Bizarrely for the area it has really positive holds too; hallelujah! It was so good I climbed it twice (or should I say "sent it twice"? Damn, I should have asked those dope smoking dudes for a lesson in bouldering parlance). The sun was hanging low in the sky, which made for great photography. We lost Adam Lou to a trad route back at Froggat, and picked them up on the walk back. As people tired, motivation waned, and it was clearly time to be off to the pub for that pie. We met Naomi and Dave over beer and platefuls of food and enjoyed a fine feast.

Top day out.

Vic spotting Ed on on Air Bear (V1 5b)



Vic on the Care Bear (V1 5b)



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Ed on his 6<sup>th</sup> (or was it 7<sup>th</sup>) attempt at Chippy (V2 5c)

## Mercians, thank you and ciao for now.

Thank you for the warm welcome and great times, walking, drinking and dancing. I really enjoyed sleeping "on top of" Joel at the annual dinner meet in Blencathra. I still laugh at the swinging door situation that kept waking a few of us up throughout the fine windy night. I really dressed down for that weekend but overcompensated at the Christmas dinner! Sharp Edge was my first ridge and I really enjoyed it, with thanks to Adam and Vicky, my heroes. The next day on Catbells I nearly kissed the ground rushing to join the group photo. I was determined to join this time, having missed a few along the way. Yes, I know I need to stop taking photos and enjoying the scenery, should maybe try to walk faster.

Thank you for putting up with me in Snowdonia – don't remember the exact location. I was even slower; blame it on my film camera. I was trying to remember how to shoot on film. Results are not great but my memories are! Walking the South Ridge of Snowdon was memorably windy! I had never been in a situation where the wind was physically moving me.

Thank you for the warm welcome and very tasty shared meals. I will miss drinking with Vijay, he is a king at buying me drinks in glasses without bottoms.

Thank you for putting up with my nervousness resulting in constant chatter. You can call me the Bulgarian chatterbox.

Thank you for introducing me to pancakes with lemon and sugar. They are delicious! I can't believe I resisted for 16 years.

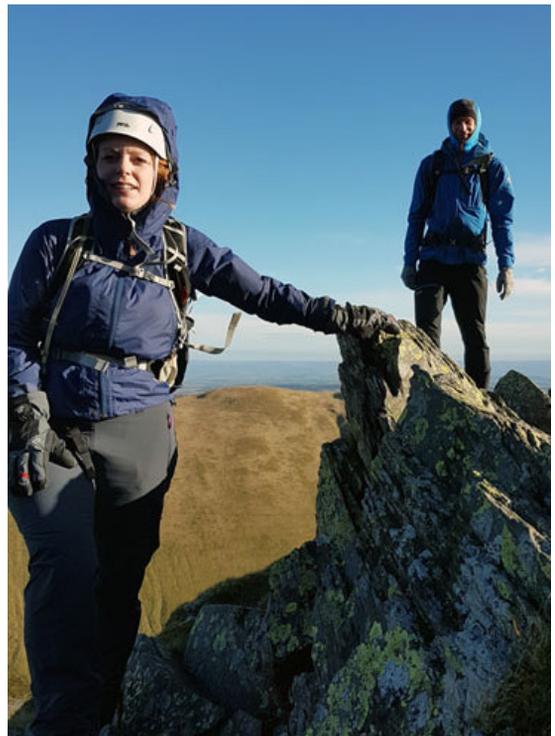
I leave the Mercians with memories of beautiful people and high doses of laughter but I may miraculously join the meet in Morocco.

I decided to Brexit and retreat to my homeland. My roots have been calling strong for the past 5 years. The time to move back with my grandma has come, I'm not 9 years old anymore but I'm sure we'll make it work. It's time to embrace and explore the mountains of my beautiful motherland. I will be working in the Rila Mountain for the next 3 months in a family run hotel. Come visit if you can.

See you again in July I hope, when I will be back for a month to make art. I have decided to cycle back to Bulgaria at the end of July /beginning of August. It will be a slow journey but feel free to join me for all or some of it. The plan is to bivi and use "warm showers" where possible. More details to follow.

I will truly miss everything British, especially the hills, the sky - Britain has the most beautiful sky! - and the ice cream! Ah, and Fish and Chips Friday! And milky tea...keep in touch fellas!

- Ana Milusheva



[Top] Adam and Vicky on Sharp Edge. [Middle] A friendly bunch of Mercians. [Bottom] Snowdonia landscape shot on film. All photos by Ana Milusheva

Ana sandwiched between Harry and Fabian on the Nantyl Ridge with Snowdon in the background. Bye for now Ana, we'll miss you.  
Photo by **Beth Heaney**

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