THE FORTNIGHTLY FAFF The Periodical Journal of the Mercian Mountaineering Club

JULY 2022

RHINOG TRAVERSE BLACK DRAGON HIKE SKI TOURING TROTTERNISH RIDGE MOUNTAIN MARATHON CLIMBING ON SKYE MEETS REPORTS ...and a whole lot more!



www.mercianmc.org.uk





A word from the editor

Greetings! I hope you don't mind an unseasonably snowy front cover to this issue of The Faff. Why a winter cover in summer? I don't know, why not! I like the image, and anyway, this issue covers a huge 6 month period beginning in winter 2021. That winter, in England and Wales at least, was laughable and I expect that only the hardiest Mercian will have found an ice line somewhere in Scotland (you know we are talking about Karl, right?).

As you turn the pages you'll a see a lot of photos of your friends suffering the wrath mother nature, with torrential rain in warm temperatures being a recurring theme. This probably explains why Paramo jackets have become the new darling of the Mercians. Go on any meet and at least one more person will have jumped on the bandwagon. I signed up in March after one too many Gore-tex steam baths, and I don't regret it, even if it does make me look a bit more like a rambler rather than une Alpiniste! Check out my mug-shot above, you can make out the retro 80-esque styling of my new pride and joy.

It's not all doom and gloom though. The dreadful start to the year gave way to many great meets in scorchio conditions. And things just keep getting hotter. As I write these words we are entering a national heat wave emergency triggered by a forecast of 40 degrees, so whether you are reading The Faff from the sanctuary your basement or an ice bath I wish you well, and hope to see you emerge safely on the other side. I'm sure there'll the dead silence on Strava for the next four or five days... right?

The Faff is also a special place to record individual and team exploits that occurred outside of the meets program. I extend my sincere thanks to Enoch, Dan2, Julie, Karl, Ian, Beth and Helen for contributing their time and imaginations.

Stew.



Cover photo Karl Stewart and Lucy Anderson enjoying (or enduring?) minus 17 temperatures and 30mph winds in northern Telemark, Norway Photo: **Stewart Moody**

DEINIOLEN

Dec, 2021

Adam proudly announced the meet to Ty Gwyn hut in Snowdonia open with the words"Lets face it, the sky will be blue, the snow will be just the right consistency, and all your bezzy mates will be there". Well, one out three isn't bad, so raise a glass and drink to great friends and crap weather. s

Snakes & Ladders, a firm slate favourite for when the weather is inclement.

Karl leading the way on Snakes & Ladders.



Bad weather = more pub time.



CRIMBO PARTY : code word for any excuse to consume lots of curry, lots of beer, lots of gin and lots of tonic in mid-December

New Year Meet

Dec, 2021

And so as the sun set on another year we migrated north once again to bring in the New Year in bonny Scotland. Yes, bonny, wet Scotland. Sometimes you are lucky with the weather, and sometimes you are not. But all it takes is one decent day, with dramatic skies and unforgettable lighting to make it all worth while. Then you know deep down that when the next Scottish meet is announced you'll probably roll the dice once more and take your chance. And you will be right to do so. Did you happen to see Dan today at camouflage practice?

It isn't often sunny in Scotland, and you don't always get a good view. But when the planets align it can't be beaten.

Days like these make you realise why so many Mercians are plumping for Paramo clothing. Have you made the change?

But days like these make it all worth while.

We need only caption one of these photos. Just loads of people enjoying the craic.

The

Weekend Warriors

Julie Taylor of the 'new year splinter group' crossing Dovedale Beck after an especially wretched slog up Hart Crag.

Photo : Stewart Moody

LANGDALE

JAN, 2022

This was the meet where having fun in the mountains was in sharp contrast to the seriousness of the sports we pursue. Ruth was saved by her helmet after a fall on steep terrain behind the ODG. Across the valley on Crinkle Crags a hiking group nearly got blown off the summit in conditions that sounded absolutely dreadful. Come Sunday morning a mass hike to Stickle Tarn seemed like a good idea, and a splinter group added on a scramble up Jack's Rake for good measure.

Tea in bed courtesy of Adam. One of the absolute joys on being a Mercian.

The calm before the storm as the hikers start the ascent of Crinkle Crags.

Always wear a helmet.



Drinks in the Stickle Barn.

Tom horsing around with Stickle Tarn below.

The gang at Stickle Tarn with Pavey Ark behind. Loving Louise's and Vicky's poses in this photo.

More shots around Stickle Tarn.

It's such a good photo we decided to include it twice.

After dinner drinks sat around the fire waiting for news of Ruth who was getting fixed up at A&E. Dan, the hero of the day drove her to Lancaster and then Preston.

No faff here is there...Adam!

N.

En route to the pub

THE WELLINGTON SOCIAL

18-03-2022



It's often the case that the best socials are the simplest.

An email from Zoe to the members with the suggestion of a few beers in The Wellington was the spark that lit the fire.

If you turned up expecting a few quiet drinks and an early night you were to be disappointed. About 13 or 14 of us ended up crammed into the corner of the pub, and next thing you know you're about to miss the last train home. Good times.

And Welly himself put in an appearance at the bar too.



LOWSTERN

Mar, 2022

March saw us staying at the Clapham hut once more where we enjoyed a game of girls -v- boys Trivial Pursuit, a lovely veggie meal cooked by Beth and the most enormous portions of crumble the world has ever seen courtesy of Roland.

Saturday featured a mass ascent of Ingleborough. The descent was seemingly too much for a couple of unnamed Mercians who cracked into the cans of gin and tonic on the way down.

Pen Y Ghent was the target of the mass ascent on Sunday and while we walked up the one side Simon ran up the other. Sunday's pub wasn't one to return to in a rush, unless you like a large expanse of builder's bum with your beer, but it was nice to rest the legs before jumping in the cars to head home.

Roland enjoying some piece and quiet.

There goes Fabian.

Vic (left) doesn't have the faintest idea what she's summited here. Fact.

And there goes Adam.

Meanwhile...

Book signing.

Contributing the local economy is important.

Weekend Warriors

On an unseasonably scorching day in March Vicki Moody tops out on Wrinkle (HVD) in Llanberris Pass with knife edge ridge of Crib Goch in the distance.

Photo : Stewart Moody

BEDDGELERT

JAN, 2022

A ELKAN ZE

The theme of diabolical weather continues with this meet report from Snowdonia. Even the most wretched forecast couldn't deter a plucky group of Mercians from their quest to enjoy the great outdoors. The running A-team of Dan an<mark>d Simon</mark> Perhaps we should have a "caption this picture" competition. I know you all want to.



I present your dinner.

Actually, this is your dinner.

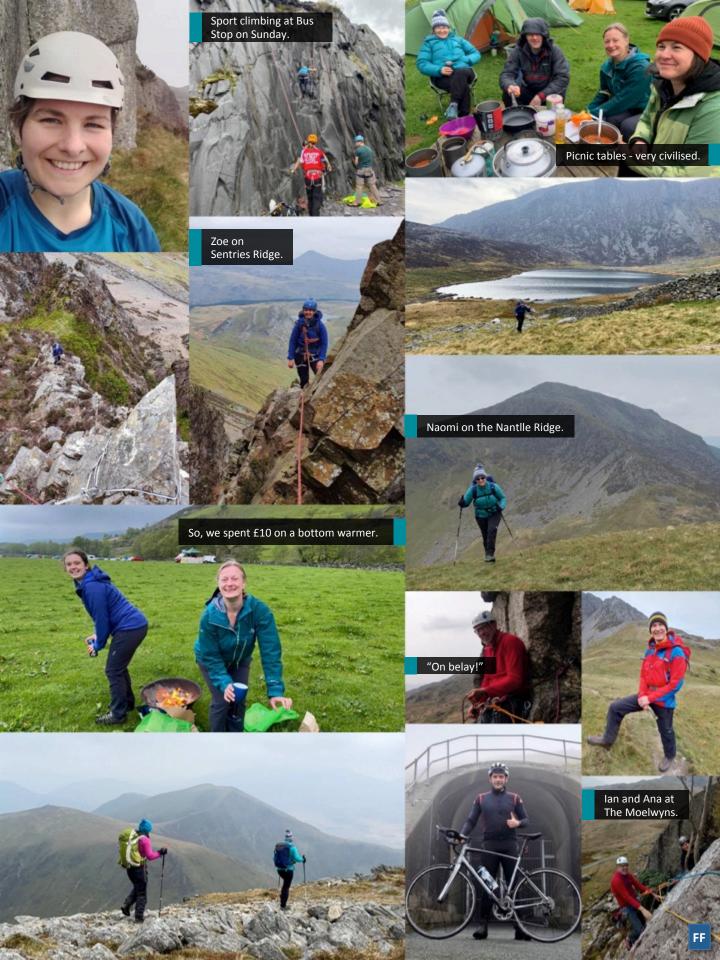
Rain = time to go to The Beacon.

Wet but (somewhat) happy.

TALYMIGNEDD

May, 2022

Some would argue the Talymignedd campsite is one of the best in Snowdonia, and so it was no surprise that this was the second year running where we based a meet in the stunning Nantlle valley. Friday evening saw the usual haggling with the farmers son over the cost of the fire pit and logs. Andy and Ruth headed up the Mercian negotiating team and got him down to £10. The following morning some folk went multi-pitch trad climbing in the Moelwyns (apparently there are lots of Severes), some bagged the Nantlle Ridge, and others ticked off the local grade 3 scramble - Sentries Ridge.



Ian Moore reports on the MID WEEK MEETS

Following the suggestion at the last AGM about activities during the week we have successfully arranged several walking meeting which generally take place on the last Tuesday of the month.

The group generally consists of the older retired members of the club although all Mercians or perspective members are welcome.

We have also attracted former Mercian Members with John Harrison joining us on the last meet with others interested.

We have walked an Orienteering course on Cannock Chase and completed circular walks starting at Monkswood Nature Reserve and Bradgate Park and are planning a camping meet to Black Rocks.

The group have all been active in suggesting ideas for meets with Roland, Mike Hogg and Geoff Taylor planning outings as well as myself.

We have around 9 people attending the meetings which have proved popular. However we are all active in other groups and go away on frequent breaks as we are all retired so it's becoming harder to arrange meetings as the summer approaches as many people have other commitments. However we are all keen to set up more meets in the future.

I cannot end this without wishing, friend and active member Alan well in his recovery in hospital on behalf of all the group and all Mercians





Weekend Warriors

Right Route (Vdiff) at The Roaches upper tier gives Vijay pause to smile and enjoy the moment before heading back down for another helping of his cheese board.

Photo : Stewart Moody

Julie and Ruth enjoying the early morning sunshine on day two of their Rhinog Traverse.

By Julie Taylor

Photographs by Julie Taylor and Stewart Moody

RHINOG

TRAVERSE

"Short in altitude but utterly uncompromising" said one website, "a long one day walk but perfect over 2 days" said another. The north-tosouth traverse of Snowdonia's Rhinog mountains sounded a perfect weekend wild camping jaunt in a quiet area of the national park. After a bit of train Googling and some mozzie spray and midge net coordination we arrived at Vicki's family cottage to a feast of chilli and wine while Adam settled into his room for the evening.....



Further fuelling with Stew's bacon butties and a drive to Barmouth saw us on the 10:01 train up the North Wales coast, Ruth with an early morning ice cream to start the holiday (09.53 for the record). A bit of map faff and a helpful train conductor later (how were we to know it was a demand stop?), we set off from the station at Talsarnau, with the first part a steep uphill through a bluebell wood and then a detour from the suggested route to what we considered the true start of the Rhinogs, the summit of Moel Ysgyfarnogod at 623 m.

And then across some lumpy, barren, rocky plateaus, beautiful and scenic and perfectly remote, totally different to the terrain across the rest of Snowdonia and almost Norwegian like. Beautiful but hard going, plenty of heather and snakes and ladders type wandering around crags looking for the best way up upwards and downwards. Avoiding the Roman/ Russian/Spanish steps we chose the crosscountry option which made for fairly slow progress and far less distance travelled than we'd planned. But finally, we arrived at the perfect camp spot, next to Llyn Ddu, enough grass for 4 tents and even for the chap who arrived a short while after us. It was a perfect evening to sit out and enjoy the daylight, rum hot chocolates, cans of wine and various pre packed meals whilst making sure not to scoop up the newts out of the lake with the water of course.

Further fuelling with Stew's bacon butties and a drive to Barmouth saw us on the 10:01 train up the North Wales coast





See the path? No! That's because there is no path...for mile after mile...



Now this is a landscape you don't see much of elsewhere in Snowdonia

The goal is the top of that mountain way off in the distance, but how to get there is a bit of a mystery.

And more blue skies in the morning. Morale was high as we easily summited Rhinog Fawr, then started the huge descent and re-ascent to the smaller (but not much smaller) Rhinog Fach which we summited about 4 hours after striking camp. This is the spot where we had intended to spend the night! And after that summit, a terrain swap from the rugged, brown rockiness to big grassy slopes and the anti-climax of the biggest hill Y Llethr, then a long ridgeline and some rough footpaths down into Barmouth. Two long days and difficult terrain made for tired legs on the last couple of miles and the decision to drive rather than walk the 5 minutes into Barmouth was unanimous. Fish & chips and ice creams made a perfect end to the walk. An amazing, scenic and very quiet wilderness walk, well recommended but not to be taken lightly.











SOUTHERN PEAK

May, 2022

Much closer to home than most meets, it came as a relief to not be locking horns with either the M6 or A5 traffic. The meet coincided with the Hathersage Hurtle, a 20 mile run through Derbyshire's Hope Valley, and here are Julie and Simon ready for the off. Meanwhile the climbers headed to Black Rocks for a real treat if the guidebook description is anything to go by. Words like "rounded", "bold", "challenging" and "dark" litter the description. We can't understand why the crag wasn't mobbed with other climbers!

293

THEHURT



8

Andy making short work of one of the routes at Black Rocks under the watchful eye of Ruth. Accidental E1

Bold climbing on rounded rock.

Challenging climbing

More climbing on rounded rock.



FF

Jim & Rab

Our congratulations to Mr & Mrs Levy who after a lengthy courtship ("About time Jim" featured prominently in the guest book) tied the knot in Birmingham on Friday the 20th of May. Thank you to Malcolm Imhoff for sharing a few snaps from the ceremony. It was great to see many current and past Mercians come together to celebrate the occasion, and eat an enormous amount of cake.

20th May 2022



DRAGON SLAYERS





Both Daniel and Enoch had a plan to get physically fitter in 2022. One day Enoch came across the Black Dragon Challenge Walk (BDCW) and thought this could be a perfect little project for both of us. Enoch sent Daniel a quick message one day and he readily accepted the challenge. According to the official <u>website</u>, the BDCW is an annual event that first took place in April 2019 and replaced the Black Mountains Roundabout (BMR) which had been running on an annual basis since 1982. However, you can also do this challenge any time yourself. Not only would it save us the entrance fee, we could also enjoy the walk in peace.

The walk starts and finishes in Crickhowell, a tranquil little village in the Brecon Beacons National Park. The 42km standard route that we picked (there are also 30km and 49km alternatives) links up three mountain ridges in the Black Mountains - first a whale-back ridge to reach Waun Fach, then the twin peaks of Mynydd Troed and Mynydd Llangorse, and finally the Dragons Back Ridge. Since most of the walk is at relatively high level, there's no short of spectacular scenery along the way, and we were lucky to have some amazing weather.

We woke up early and aimed for a 7am start. From Crickhowell, we took a tarmac road to the village of Llanbedr, where we picked up a path up to the first ridge. Another 8 miles, and we reached Waun Fach, the highest point in the Black Mountains (811m). "So far so good", Enoch said.

Very soon, it's obvious that Daniel and Enoch took different approaches. Enoch kept a steady pace, but Daniel got competitive and started running! We didn't start with any time target; in fact we would be pleased if we could complete the entire walk. On the other hand, Daniel was thinking that he needed to run on the downhills just to keep up with Enoch's 'steady' uphill walking pace! Following the descent from Waun Fach, we realised we were making good time, so we kept up the pace.

Then the challenge came. The climb up Mynydd Troed is a steep ascent on a rough path. Without giving us a chance to rest, it is immediately followed by a quick descent to a col, then another sharp hike to Mynydd Llangorse. There the route picks up a path on OS Maps to get down to the valley of Cwm Sorgwm. On closer inspection Enoch wondered if he was on the right path when a steep amphitheatre of brown bracken was all Enoch could see. Instead of retracing the route back and looking for another path, Enoch bit the bullet and gingerly navigated down to the valley to meet Daniel strolling along the longer path down.

By now we had done over 30km. We didn't talk much while gobbling up our lunch, but we had our minds focused on the wall in front of us - 600m of it. Wary of the time, we stood on our heavy legs and set off again. Enoch said, "It's the final ascent!". Daniel's knees agreed a little too enthusiastically with this sentiment as he reviewed his prior determination to keep up with Enoch when a local retired couple overtook us. After a generous donation of their antiinflammatories, Daniel was able to continue to pretend being a fit young hiker and we overtook them half an hour later on the way to the final peak.

Continuing along the ridge we reached Pen Cerrig-Calch (701 m), and walked down to the earthen ramparts of Crug Hywel. This Iron Age fort sits high on the hillside with a commanding view of the valley and gave the town below its name: Crickhowell was just in front of us. Maybe this was the home of the black dragon, following on from the theme of a previous visit with the club to Beddgelert and Dinas Emrys, home of the red dragon. We checked our time. We could potentially out perform Daniel's Yorkshire 3 Peaks time. Without losing any seconds, we picked up our pace and ran...ish: down the fields, past the terrace housing, by the Swan Inn that we walked past in the morning, and back to the car. We made it in 9 hours 43 minutes, an enormous two minutes early!

Looking back after 2 months, it's still a highlight of the year so far. Maybe because of spectacular scenery or the little achievement before my birthday, but we also found our inner dragons which called for further adventures.



Weekend Warriors

The latest Mercian to move to Scotland (splitter!), here's a belter of a shot of Fabian cruising the trails near Gisburn (hero!).

Photo : Adam Butler

Always smiling when on skis, Simon on a training ski up to a mountain hut.

HESTRA

SKI TOURING

Your crash course in Norwegian cross country skiing

by Stewart Moody

One of the great privileges that being a Mercian will afford you is the opportunity to make great friends and try new things.

I first met Simon Hodgson about 10 years ago; he was the chairman when I was a prospective member intent on courting the club secretary (another story entirely). Simon moved to Norway with his girlfriend Jodie a few years later where they are now settled, married, and residing in a lovely home, with an incredible view, and a beautiful dog, and an even more beautiful baby daughter. through our club, distance is seldom a blocker to staying in touch and sharing adventures. Having ice-climbed, rock climbed, and trekked in Norway, I thought I'd seen most of what Norway offers the outdoors enthusiast. That was until the opportunity to join Simon on a weeklong cross-country ski trip to the mountains north of the Hardangervidda came up.

A stipulation was that we have a practice week to hone our skills and get used to the equipment. "That sounds a bit like overkill", I thought to myself at first. How utterly, utterly wrong I was. How absolutely right Simon was.

As has been proven by many friendships forged

Here are some of the random learnings from that week in early February 2022.

Being able to cruise red runs in the Alps in no way makes you a good cross country skier. Skill in one discipline does not translate to the other.

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- Cross-country ski boots have a 'free heel' so you can pretty much walk with them on. But, as we quickly learned, the technique is to keep your toes on the ground and push and glide...
- Cross-country skis are bound to your boot in a way that they don't come off in the event of a crash. Even a big crash. That's good in the sense that you don't have to hunt for them in a snowdrift, but bad that you can end up in some pretty torturous tangles when you stack it. And you will stack it. Many times.
- I'd never have guessed that waxing the underside of your skis was a thing. It helps give you traction. And that there are different types of wax for different temperatures and snow conditions. #confused Skiing across a frozen lake is a wonderful way to warm up on your first day. It is wonderful because it does not include any uphill, nor any downhill. Be prepared to be overtaken by small children and old folk. There is no shame in this. These kind Norwegians love that you are taking a heroic stab at their national sport (even if you are making a total arse of it). Trails in recreational ski areas (think Clent rather than the Carneddau) are prepared by piste-bashers, and they put two channels in, about a foot apart for you to ski in should you want to reduce the amount of effort you are putting in. Skiing uphill isn't as unpleasant as you might think...once you have the herringbone technique. But you have to step out of the channels to do that. Accidentally sliding backwards down these channels, even slowly, is nothing short of
- terrifying.
 10. Curling and having a sauna are both excellent ways of unwinding after a day of skiing. And curling is a lot harder than it looks too.

Karl and Lucy skiing on prepared trails around one of the many frozen lakes near Simon's house.



Snow plough practice. Lucy makes it look easy.

Home for the night



Putting the practice to good use as we go up to a DNT hut Plateau sunset selfie

In a DNT hut planning the next day's route

Digging out the front door

-7 in the hut

Practice day 1 on a flat frozen lake. Easy....so far.

- Skiing downhill is a bit of a nightmare. Achieving even a mediocre snow plough on the shallowest gradients is a hard won skill.
- 12. Lighting a small fire at lunchtime and grilling sausages is a custom in Norway that we must adopt in the UK.
- On the open hillside, when you ski beyond the piste-bashed trails, snow conditions vary a lot. Ice patches are not uncommon and pretty scary.
- 14. In these back-country environments, the ski fairies drive wooden stakes in the ground to mark the way so you don't have to spent too long navigating.
- 15. Always carry and roll mat and sleeping bag. If you get benighted you'll freeze without them. Even with them it'd be a flippin' bad night sleep.
- 16. Cross country skiing is very, very photogenic.
- 17. Despite the trials and tribulations of learning the skills, cross country skiing allows you to access some pretty amazing places.
- 18. These places are often far from human habitation, and the wide open plateaus and mountains are punctuated by a series of small wooden huts run by the DNT.
- Temperatures of -17 in Norway aren't nearly as bad as -3 in Scotland.
- The DNT huts can be hard to gain entry to when there is a massive snowdrift blocking door.
- 21. Even with the snowdrift clear, the DNT huts can be hard to gain entry to when the padlocks are frozen solid.





...and after graduation, fast forward to April 2022 and the big trip...

Simon and Karl assessing the way ahead on our 7 day trip in April where we skied from hut to hut, covering just over 100 miles with plenty of up and down. The Star Wars fans out there might recognise the landscape as being the filming location of the ice planet Hoth in Episode V. One hopes you enjoyed the jubilee celebrations?

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It was great ma'am. Ay-up your button came undone, let me help...

SAINT DAVIDS

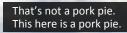
JUNE, 2022

Also known as the 'Platty Joobs' meet. We descended on the UK's smallest city for the extended bank holiday to celebrate the platinum jubilee. Some would say spent more time in the beer garden of The Bishops and eating BBQ than we did in pursuit of climbing, biking and hiking objectives. Maybe that's because no one was too sure which day was the official celebration, so we celebrated everyday. It was a relaxing 4 day meet with a bit of everything, including several minor confrontations with the camp site owner over things as trivial (i) as settling the bill, (ii) finding a mirror to use to remove contact lenses, and (iii) using an appropriately high wall to do physiotherapy.

Prosecco from Vijay to celebrate his upcoming milestone.

Topping out on Red Wall.

Some of the climbers.



Cycling route 4.

Dicit

Beers at The Bishops...again!

We enjoyed a few BBQs when the sun was shining.



The scrambling group eyeing up the challenging terrain..

A long(-ish) coastal walk on the worst weather day. Our destination was predictable. The Bishops.

Drinks in The Bishops...again!

words and photos by Beth Heeney

TROTTERNISH RIDGE

"Fairytale surroundings, Hebridean grandeur and geological weirdness all blend to create a walk like no other. Best enjoyed over two days, this is 22 miles of some of the best hill-walking in the UK. Save it for good weather and it'll be a route you'll never forget"

UKHillwalking.com

I wake before 6am and notice drops of water on the tent inner. It's been raining for much of the previous 24 hours. I notice that the drops are unfortunately making their way through and landing on my down sleeping bag. This is more than enough to get me out of bed, and I soon discover that everything is a bit soggy and there's an actual puddle by my feet that the deck of cards is soaking in. Urgh, should have gone to Cornwall, I think.

A couple of hours later and the bus drops us off by the path up to the Quiraing. The forecast for our two day hike along the Trotternish Ridge is grey and wet to start with, brightening later, then glorious tomorrow. Head to toe in waterproofs we head on up and wind our way through the unusual landscape of the Quiraing, looking forwards to the views from the ridge later in the afternoon. At the Quiraing car park Tommy buys some bin bags from the tea van and does some top quality Mercian faffing, trying to envelope his belongings in said bin bags whilst they are flailing around in 30mph winds. We continue south. It's windy with intermittent rain, which just stops long enough for us to dry off before beginning again. We're still waiting for the cloud to clear, but luckily the navigation is straightforward. We set our sights on a particular saddle hoping that we will find a sheltered spot to camp. As we are dropping down to it, the clouds begin to clear, we find a flat and perfectly sheltered spot to erect our tiny tent, and we finally get to enjoy the view. As the sun sets we tuck into our gourmet dinner of cheese and broccoli packet pasta and have a look at the map for tomorrow. We still have a long way to go!

The next morning I unzip the tent and it's blue skies all around. This is more like it, I think. We

soak up the views as we follow the ridge south to the Old Man of Storr, where we will drop down to the coast and follow the clifftops back to Portree. There are a few more people on the hill today but still we have the ridge largely to ourselves until we reach the Old Man. Hot and thirsty we're hoping for an ice cream van in the car park, but we are sadly disappointed. We push on, aware that it's already late afternoon and we still have many miles ahead of us. As our legs tire, our skin burns and our shoulders ache, each uphill section is harder than the last. In the end, we decide to cut off the final corner, and do some classic Scottish bog hopping and heather bashing to get down to the road for the last mile or so into Portree. It's started to feel like a slog, but Tommy introduces me to this Peter Jackson masterpiece which lifts our spirits and we dance and giggle our way into the campsite. We finish the day in the most fitting Scottish way, with well earnt fish, chips and cans of Irn Bru!





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photofaff by BETH HEENEY

Is this really an acceptable way for a grown man to pack his camping gear so that it stays dry? The truth of it is that this is the sort of behaviour we'd expect from a fledgling DofE bronze award wannabe, not a Mercian. And in 30 mph wind too! Dear God, he'll be there for ages. Let us be hopeful that the noise of all that flapping plastic was enough to drown out the ticking of Beth's watch during what must have been a pretty traumatic episode. Tommy, this is a pretty special way to earn your place in the faffing hall of fame. We welcome you warmly into our midst with a solid 9 out of 10.

9 out of 10

FAFFOMETER

BORROWDALE

JUNE, 2022

One of leafier valleys of The Lakes, and teeming with great climbing and hiking opportunities, it's a surprise we don't camp here more often. But alas, the meet began with tragedy Naomi and Andy, who had booked the Friday as leave had their dreams of sunny climbing shattered by a closure of the M6 northbound which left them sat in traffic for much of the morning. They snatched victory from the jaws of defeat though, and bagged some routes at Trowbarrow. Later in the afternoon, at the camp site they were greeted by a lot of midges. Not on the scale of the horrors of Scottish midges, but still pretty unpleasant. Luckily we had 2 large-ish tents between us and we sat, somewhat anti-socially, inside them in two groups. Scrambling and climbing was enjoyed on both days as the photos testify. Shall we also mention that the showers were far enough from the camping that the site owner has posted a above the cold water tap saying "please do not drive to the showers". Anyone want to guess, to the nearest 100 meters, what that distance was?

A lush green forest setting for our camp, but teeming with midges.

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Andy on Corvus.

The walk in to Corvus on Raven Crag. Dan giving his new 'hand-on-hip' pose another outing.

Climbing at Shepherds.

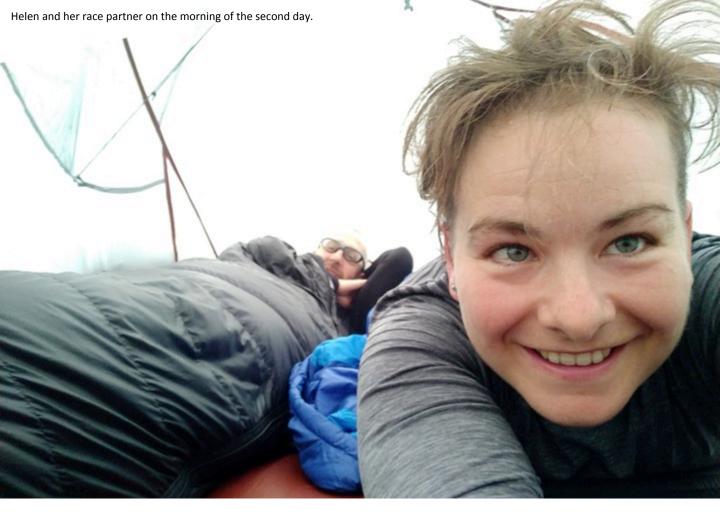


Midges! Take shelter in Dan's new tent.

Enoch at Ravens Crag.

Near the summit of Catbells.

The sole purpose of this photo is to make Ruth jealous.



123456



things I learned on the Saunders Lakeland Mountain Marathon

words and photos by Helen Colson

The Saunders had been looming on the horizon of my calendar for months. 2 days of entirely self sufficient fell "running" - mostly off path, over mountainous terrain and navigating between checkpoints via whatever route you think is best. It's not a set distance (it's definitely not a marathon!) and you don't get your map or list of checkpoints until you've officially started the course.

Last year I had to retire at the end of the first day due to injury so this year I wasn't at all confident I'd finish it but I didn't want to let my race partner down again. Now it's over there are parts of my feet that hurt that I didn't know could hurt, my legs are so sore that my cats standing on them is too much, and my shoulders are rubbed completely raw from my rucksack straps. In summary, I had a fab time and I can't wait to do another one!

Here are some of my top learnings from the weekend...

1. There are holes in marshes that are deeper than I am tall.

Thankfully this was discovered by my running partner and not me as he (like most of the population) is taller than me and didn't drown as a result although he did face some difficulty getting out and his pack, which included our tent, was completely soaked from the incident.

2. Scrambling up streams can be nice.

All prior experience of following streams up mountains pointed to this being a terrible way up. They're usually some combination of slippery death trap rock, far too steep and already trampled by 50 fell runners unconcerned about the mudslide they've left behind them. Unfortunately they are usually the easiest way to find a "source of stream" checkpoint and as such are a necessary evil. However this particular unnamed stream on the side of Esk Pike was delightful. Not so steep that you needed to rest and plenty of dry rock around the stream to clamber up. 5/5 would go up again.

3. It is still possible to run when your legs feel completely alien to your body.

Following a long and steep descent down the sort of grassy hill that contains lots of sneaky rocks to trip you up, tussocks to turn your ankles and already flattened bracken to land you on your arse we crossed a cold and deep river that was the last straw for my quads. They staged a rebellion and went completely numb - it felt like they were no longer part of my legs. It was a very strange experience running numbly down the last bit of path to the final check but we got there with only a couple of minor slips.

4. The most important quality in a race partner is their ability to withstand mid run grumps.

Grumpy running partners was a common topic of discussion at the event camp. There were stories of people having bottles of suncream thrown at them for navigational mistakes, excessive competitive pressure and enduring unreasonable requests such as stopping to wait for their partner's feet to dry out. For me, the harder something is the more tunnel vision I get about continuing to move forward until it is completed. Any distractions or deviations from making progress become more and more unwelcome. Even so much as pointing out a nice view or suggesting we might stop to discuss which route we should take to the next check instead of instantly picking one and committing to it can be enough to send my grump levels through the roof. It takes a certain kind of person to brush off let alone not even notice the pointed negativity in their direction.

5. Lightweight gear really is better

I hate to admit this as it feels like a very expensive door to open but having borrowed and begged light weight and compact kit for this race I had a much easier time of it. Just having extra room in my bag to allow for suboptimal packing and rummaging made a huge difference.

6. I am completely useless the next day

Last year I learnt not to drive home the day of the event and this year I've learnt not to have a to do list for the next day. I can barely hobble to the kitchen to put the kettle on, never mind unpacking and dealing with my washing and definitely not cleaning my bike. I'll have to stick to browsing for kit improvements for the next one instead...





A WEEK ON



Photos and words by Karl Stewart

Lucy climbing King's Chimney (VD), one of the major obstacles facing suitors of the ridge traverse.

Great start to the holiday, as we did a 2 day kayak expedition with some friends round the Garvellachs, a series of small islands just south of Oban. This tour took in a close encounter with the Corievechan whirlpool and a tide race called The Grey Dogs. Weather was excellent, although we struggled to find a campsite with all of the pre-requisites: flat ground, sunset view and plenty of firewood, finally chancing on the perfect spot at about 7pm!

Our holiday was almost entirely scuppered on the Monday however, as the Adventure Wagon broke down on our journey north. A quick inspection from a mobile mechanic suspected a snapped timing belt (aka a new engine is needed), and finding a recovery lorry to rescue a 6m long vehicle proved no easy matter. But through the help of locals and friends, not only did we drop the van off at a garage in Fort William, but we had also secured load of another campervan in which to continue our holiday whilst our own one was diagnosed fully.

And so by Tuesday we were on the road again, spending the day exploring the beautiful coastline around Arisaig, before catching the ferry to Skye to find some point rock. And pointy rock we did find, in abundance. We based ourselves at the Glen Brittle campsite within easy striking distance of the Cullin Ridge. By way of an introduction, we headed first to Window Buttress, a 3 star VDiff on the flanks of Sgurr Dearg. This was our first experience of gabro, that amazingly grippy rock that the Cullin is made from. It give great traction, but it wasn't long before we were locked out of our phones, as our finger prints were sanded flat by its course nature. The route itself didn't quite live up to the hype IMO, as after the first grotty (and stiff!) pitch it turned into more of a scramble. But it when combined with a continuation on the upper buttress, it made for a great half day.

On our descent from this route, we spied over into Corrie Logan, which by this late hour was now fully bathed in sunlight. Sooooo much rock. Like seriously, loads of it. And so we made this our destination the next day, as we headed to climb something on the Cioch Buttress. Here we climbed the popular (although deserted today) 3 star Cioch West, a 215m 7 pitch Severe. This was a great route, well within my grade and therefore really relaxing, it's most definitely in-escapable, and feels like a proper big mountain route. This topped us out at the bottom of the Cioch Slabs, and directly under the infamous Cioch itself. Although we still had 6 hours of daylight left, it was gone 6pm, so we opted to gracefully retire and come back another day.

On the Friday we opted to have a 'rest' day, and so drove off to explore a bit of the island to the north, and to do a low level circular walk that was to give us great views of McLeods Maidens, a series of impressive spikey rock pinnacles. Unfortunately, the guide book failed to adequately impress just how lacking a path was present in the first half of the route, giving us a very slow and quite exhausting few hours to begin with. When we finally made it to the coast and a proper path, the views of the coastline more than made up for it. But at nearly 14 miles, this wasn't quite the rest day we had envisaged.

And so to out last day on Skye, the big one. The day dawned fine and clear, just as it had every day that week. We made an early departure of 7am, to put time on our side and so that the initial climb was in the shade. We intended to do the Corrie Lagan circuit, 18km horseshoe that takes in the best the ridge has to offer. But that's a story for another day...as I've ran out of time.



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