

THE FORTNIGHTLY FAFF

The Periodical Journal of the Mercian Mountaineering Club

JAN 2023

DENT DU GEANT
THE PEAK PILGRIMAGE
A SPELL IN THE BALKANS
EXPLORING ABERDEENSHIRE
LOCKWOOD'S CHIMNEY
PEAK DISTRICT CAVING
BRISTLY RIDGE
MEETS REPORTS
BOOZY MERCIANS
...and a whole lot more!





A word from the editor

Greetings. Welcome to the latest issue of the Faff. Can you believe it is the 18th issue to be published? It all began in February 2014. We only printed copies for the first edition as it felt so special, but now after 9 years I'm starting to think we should collate all the issues and get a couple of bound copies. Maybe something for this time next year when the Faff will be a decade old.

We kick things off with an account of an ascent of the Dent du Geant on the Mont Blanc massif. It was commented on our Facebook page that this climb might be the club's most impressive feat. Maybe. But if we dig back into the history of the club, before some of us were even born, you might be surprised by the scale and audacity of some of the objectives our predecessors went after. The Eiger, The Matterhorn, Mount Kenya (HS climbing above 5,000m!!!). Not to mention leading VS on static nylon rope tied around the waist.

Sadly, in the last couple of years we have lost some of the club's longest standing members. Few of the current membership will remember them, but the obituaries and recollections we are publishing in this issue highlight how, whilst the members themselves may change, our antics and adventures remain timeless. We thank Roland for collecting the memories and images of Don Teanby, and Geoff Taylor for writing the obituaries.

I also extend my thanks to everyone else who contributed their time and effort, and writing and photographs: Lynn Taylor, Enoch Chan, Malcolm Imhoff, Ruth Wragg, Paul Rigby, Adam Butler, and Tom Morris, Daniel Hand. May your exploits be the source of fireside story-telling for decades to come.

Enjoy!

Stew.



A Bonus Night in the Torino Hut

Words by Adam Butler

Photos by Ruth Wragg and Adam Butler

← This way to the
Dent Du Geant

A note from the Editor

In the November 2014 issue of The Faff Adam Butler wrote his seminal work “Avec Mon Du”, in which he described his thoughts on French sport climbing. And he took many well aimed pot shots at French climbers and their ethics. Now Adam turns his attention to Alpinism in Italy, and points both barrels at Italian climbers, and even the Italian Army don’t emerge unscathed. Bellissimo!

Aiguille d’Entreves
traverse →

← Alpiners (for scale)

Happy Ruth

Aiguille d'Entreves summit



The plan

On our summer trip to Chamonix, Tom, Ruth and I had a plan for some alpineering. We set our sights on the Italian side of the Mont Blanc Massif, with the Aiguille d'Entreves Traverse for some acclimatisation, followed by an overnight stop in the Torino Hut, then up the Dent du Geant the next morning, followed by an afternoon gondola ride back to Chamonix in time for beers in the hot tub. What could go wrong?

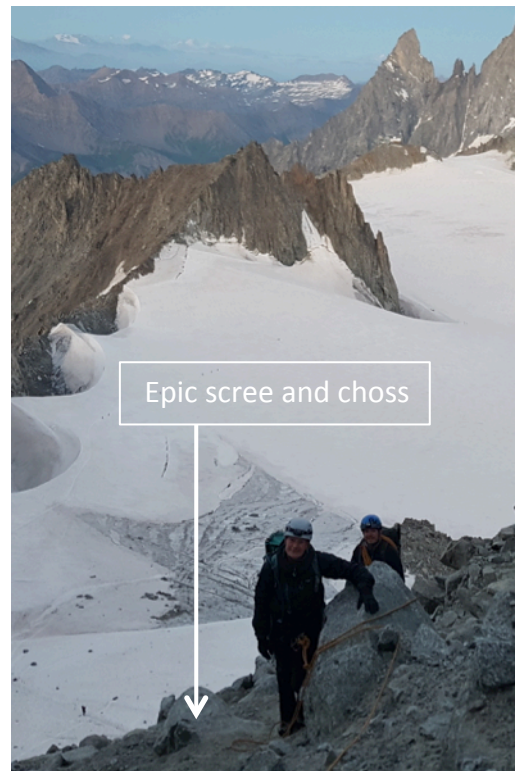
Day 1 . 6th July 2022

6am.

Up and out at sparrow's fart, to catch the first lift up the Midi and onto the Panoramic Gondola over the Vallee Blanch and Glacier du Geant, to the Torino Hut.

We then toolled up and followed the well-worn glacier path to the start of the Aiguille d'Entreves Traverse. The heat of the summer and global warming made themselves evident. Boulders tumbled from the Aiguille du Toule as we hiked the slushy the path.

The ridge was busy, with the Italian army out doing mountain training. They have natty little hats that makes them look like a shit robin hood, and they can't climb. This affords us a good hour on a ledge, half way along the ridge, sun bathing. We bag the peak and head back to the Torino hut.



Epic scree and choss

Dent Du Geant



Day 2. 7th July 2022

2.50 am (yes, that's two fifty in the morning).

In the dorm everyone's alarm goes off. We all trudge downstairs to force down breakfast, pack our kit, have a safety poo and leave as soon as possible.

It's 4am, it's dark, and I'm out of breath from the altitude. As we slog our way across the glacier, I look at the Dent du Geant in the distance and think, is it worth it? Should we sack it off, get the lift down and go back to bed? I quickly force these thoughts away, we've come a long way and you don't get many opportunities for this kind of climbing. Thanks again to global warming, what should be an amenable snow slope to the foot of the climb is now a treacherous hour of scree bashing. We make it to the Salle a Manger when the scramble turns into the climb, stash crampons and axes, have a bite to eat, gear up and flake the ropes. Two French lads ask if they can go in front. They'll clearly be faster so we let them go.

Having decided the previous day to "haul the shit out of the fixed ropes", I set off doing just that. This is about getting to the top, not abiding by somebody else's ethics. Reaching the belay where the French youths are, a small amount of faff ensues before the teams spread out along the route. The next pitch is a nice groove with a sting in the tail, the top of the groove and edge of the belay shelf are solid with ice. This gives me a sinking feeling the rest of the route will be iced up and as easy to climb as a bar of wet soap. I bang in three cams and the French youth shows me the way round the ice, on to the ledge.

By now it's 9am, we've been on the go for 5 hours, and have reached the foot of the Burgener Slabs. The fixed lines from here up look like you could anchor a ship with them, except where they have frayed to half their thickness from exposure to the rock and the elements. Handily though, you can just wrap a sling round them like a prussik to protect any tricky bits.

From the top of the slabs, we cross a flake and head for the crux pitch, a 4c chimney. At this point an absolute cock-womble of an Italian, pushes his way past everyone on the flake and starts



trying to climb my shoe laces whilst I'm half way up the pitch. After reaching a convenient place to stop, I use my finest collection of four-letter words to let him know exactly what I think of him. I assume he didn't understand English, as there was no response.

Clipping into the next belay, it struck me as odd that the bolts and chain looked as if they had been welded together. Only realising when Tom and Ruth were half way up that they had been struck by lightning. Well, we are on a very pointy bit of rock, high up in the atmosphere. Fingers crossed they are safe.

We skirt the sub peak of Pointe Selle, as the line of least resistance, and then

dangle from a piece of rope that's not quite long enough for us to reach the floor of the col between the two peaks. From here it's quickly across the col, up a short face and onto the summit. Made it; my first 4000m summit. I walk over and finger the holes in the Madonna's head, whack a sling round her and bring Tom and Ruth up for a round of handshakes and a summit selfie.

It's 12.30pm, the days pushing on, we've been moving for eight and a half hours. The weather is coming in and there's a cloud trailing off the summit. We've got multiple abseils to get off, then must descend the scree, cross the glacier and get back to the lift before 4.30pm. It's time to get the fuck off this rock.

The hero shot. Adam on the
summit of his first 4,000m peak.
And what a beauty it is.

Madonna with the
holey head





We abseil off, but get pushed onto a different line as the group next to us have crossed our line. It's for the best though, as further down they end up dangling in space without enough rope to touch down, and too far out to reach the bolts. We crack on. In the mist it's a guess where the next set of anchor bolts are, there's plenty of them but many look old and untrustworthy. On the last abseil Tom stops halfway, unsure if the rope touches the floor in the mist. Ruth heads down to join him. I reach them on the ledge just as a gap opens in the mist, seeing the ropes are on the floor I abseil past them to finally reach terra (semi-) firma.

We collect our crampons and axes from the Salle a Manger, it seems a long time since we were last here. A quick bite to eat (our first in several hours) and we scramble back down the scree, on our race to the gondola. By now the clag is really in, all we can see is the trail disappearing 50m away into the white out. If we lose it the trail we're in trouble. Tiredness is also well and truly in, I just want to stop for a breather, but there's a lift to catch and not long to get there. By the time we get back to the lift station at the Torino hut it's too late. The

door is locked. We're stranded.

Ruth tries to get us some beds, but to no avail. Tom refuses a beer, declaring it a ridiculous situation and he's not giving them any money until they give us a bed, even though Ruth's buying. If we can't get beds, the backup plan is to sit down in the bar and refuse to leave, until 3am when everyone else gets up to go climbing, we can then go and jump into pre-warmed beds for a few hours sleep, free of charge.

Finally, at 8pm, the hut warden comes and gives us beds in the guides room. In her excitement at being given somewhere to sleep, Ruth gets shushed by the guides for waking them up. Then it's straight to the canteen for food.

After dinner we (some of us at least) have another beer and look at the Matterhorn and Gran Paradiso as the sun sets over the alps.

A bonus night in the Torino Hut, everything's coming up rosy. An easy day tomorrow, we'll be able to sleep in, breakfast at 7am, first lift at 8am, back at the chalet by 9am for hot tub and croissants. Bon Oui.

Day 3. 8th July 2022

7am.

I wake. The doors seemed to have been banging all night. There can't be that many people coming and going. It was in fact the wind causing the doors to bang. After breakfast we head up to the lift station, only to find the Panoramic Gondola back across the Vallee Blanche closed due to high winds. After waiting until 10.30 we decide to go down the other cable car to Courmayeur and get the bus back through the Mont Blanc tunnel to France. Half way down Tom announces "the Panoramic's open".

We decide to stick with plan B and carry on down, we could always come back up if the bus doesn't arrive. Except we couldn't get on the bus, because you still needed to wear face masks on public transport in Italy. Fortunately, the bus came and nobody cared about masks, so we were whisked back to Chamonix.

Three days, and a little less spritely than when we left, we were back in the chalet for a well earned sit down and a nice cup of tea.



LLANGOLLEN

JULY, 2022

Packed with happy-go-lucky Scousers, we late arriving Mercians were lucky to find a lovely patch of grass at Llangollen's popular Abbey Farm Camp Site on which to pitch our tents. Later that night it dawned on us why that area was free. It had a strong whiff of a Victorian Sewer due to its unfortunate proximity to an open drain. Such is life! We sparked up our BBQs all the same and proceeded to have a very nice meet where we maximised the opportunities available to climb rocks, paddle the canals. And drink the local beer.

Good drive over? Yes, nice one.
What's that smell by the way?



Helen climbing at Pinfold.



It's a nice sunny day and Vic is wrapped up in several layers like she's heading out in winter. Some things never change.



Contributing to the local economy.



Pork. The cornerstone of a healthy breakfast.

In those bushes is the unfortunate open sewer spilling out from the toilet block.



Dan cruising his first ever HS 4b at World's End. Nice.



All smiles after a great day single pitch trad climbing at Pinfold. We were the only ones there and it was lovely.



Is that a wrap sandwich? Well I never!



The struggle is real. No matter where you sit the smoke will follow you.

John Lishman, 1932- 2021

By Geoff Taylor

It was said of John, "he was the friend of all who knew him" and I do not know of any truer words.

John was born in what was then called Bombay (Mumbai): his father being the general manager of Sun Life Assurance. He was nearly seven when his mother brought him back to the UK and sent him to school in Darlington before returning herself to India. WWII broke out shortly afterwards, so John did not see his parents again until he was 13. In 1941 he started at Newcastle Prep School which was evacuated to Eslington Hall, the home of Lord Ravensworth.

Unlike many, John thoroughly enjoyed his National Service. His years spent with the Royal Engineers at Elgin giving him plenty of opportunity for climbing, hill walking and skiing. Afterwards, he joined his parents who had relocated to Knowle, and worked with his father at Sun Life, a period of his life which was only enlightened by the friends he had made at the BAI (Birmingham Athletic Institute) climbing course.

It was during one such holiday in the Lakes with George Harmer (hut warden when I joined) that the idea of formulating a club was raised. The rest as they say is history though it was around June 1970 that the name changed from the BAI Mountaineering Club to the Mercian Mountaineering Club.

I first met John at our hut, Maen-y-Gaseg in Cwm Silyn, in my capacity as hut warden with responsibility for repair and maintenance. He did not require much persuasion to join me armed with torches, hammers and a jemmy to salvage some tongued and grooved boarding which was lining a ceiling in a derelict cottage some half mile down the hill. A great improvement to the kitchen!

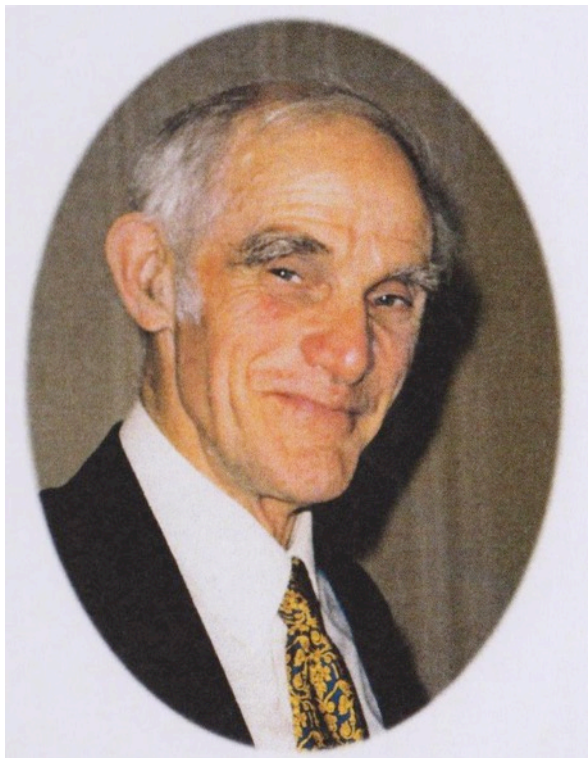
When our member, John Gregory was killed skiing across the Adler pass near Zermatt in 1968, John became a founding member of the Greg's hut Association which as a memorial to John, renovated a miners' bothy on the north side Cross Fell at an altitude of nearly 700m. (In the last couple of years, the Mountain Bothy Association have spent tens of thousands of pounds on reroofing, replacing windows, doors and generally upgrading it.)

In 1975 John joined Cumbria City Council estate management department doing a job he described as "blessed in being paid to do work he loved, in an area he loved, among people he loved". He and Kate later moved to Renwick, a small village to the west of Cross Fell where many of their friends enjoyed their hospitality and generosity for over 30 years.

John had great respect for farmers and recognized their part in preserving the landscape. He was also a member of the Royal British Legion and one of his proudest moments was representing the Armathwaite branch at the Remembrance Parade march past the Cenotaph.

John considered the finest day he had ever had on the hills was a traverse of An Teallach accompanied by two members who subsequently became "Completionists" of all Munros and tops (approx. 540 in total). His favourite mountain route was Blencathra accessed by Sharp Edge. Whilst traversing Ben Eighe during Whitsun 1970, John expressed a wish to climb Curved Ridge on the Buachaille. I promised to go with him. Sadly, it never happened.

John was laid to rest on a glorious summer's afternoon at his local church at Renwick where he had been the churchwarden for over 30 years. A Northumbrian piper played the farewell.



The Peak Pilgrimage - Backwards

Words and photos by Malcolm Imhoff



The Peak Pilgrimage trail is the latest of the Long Distance Paths completed by Mike and me. Having done the Coast to Coast, and Offa's Dyke, we wanted something a bit shorter and nearer to home. Unlike the first two this trail this does not have the high mountains, steeper tracks, and long days, but is nevertheless lovely, relaxing, accessible, soul-restoring, and passes through some fabulous landscapes. It has the added twist – it is designed as a spiritual experience.

The trail is between 35 and 40 miles depending on which options you take. It starts in the South at Ilam at the entrance to Dovedale, and ends in the North at Eyam, the plague village. On the way it passes through thirteen churches, all of which are usually open during the day, a result of the creation of the path. We did it in three and a half days.

The guide book by ex-vicar Bob Jackson is essential and an absolute hoot as he has a wonderful sense of humour. I have included some of his opinions in this article (*in italics*).

Each of the churches that have signed up to be part of the pilgrimage have provided a stamp so you can stamp your book, and a sheet of stickers with a Bible quote, each one of which seems totally appropriate to the location or the patron saint of that church.

Why do we do these walks backwards? Well, we have two vans, so although we walked from South to North we started in the North. Er? We take both vans to point A, take one van to point B where we will be stopping overnight, walk to point A, pick up the first van and drive down to point B. It is the minimum amount of driving possible and each van only travels the distance once.



Day 1 – Baslow to Eyam (5 miles)

We met up at Eyam, left Mike's van there and drove in my van to Baslow, parking in the car park of the Wheatsheaf pub. There is a network of pubs that allow overnight stopovers, often free, and obviously we would always have a meal and a few drinks. We then walked to Eyam. Because we only had a half day we were not able to do the longer alternative over Curbar and Froggatt Edge so this was a short walk along the Derwent Valley, 5 miles.

We started at St. Anne's Church in Baslow (St. Anne was Jesus' grandmother). The valley route was absolutely delightful with lots of autumn colours. The route calls at three more churches, All Saints, Curbar, past the Roman bath house to St. Martin's Stoney Middleton, one of only two octagonal churches in the country, and St Lawrence's, Eyam. I'm sure you all know the story of The Parcel of Cloth which came to Eyam in 1665 from London carrying fleas which spread the Black Death plague. To protect people from outside the village the rector, William Mompesson, made the decision to self-isolate the village, knowing that this was a great sacrifice and that many of the villagers would die. Does this sound familiar? I can just hear the present day residents exclaiming, "oh no, not again!"

The route passes several plague sites such as the "boundary stone", a large boulder with many holes where the villagers would leave money in exchange for food from outside. We also passed the outdoor hollow where the rector was able to hold socially distanced church services during the plague.



Day 2 – Monyash to Baslow (10 miles)

We took Mike's van to Haddon Grove Farm camp site and walked steeply down into Lathkill Dale, probably my favourite of the Derbyshire Dales. It was a severe frost pocket and freezing cold. Once out of the Dale in the afternoon we were into glorious sunshine.

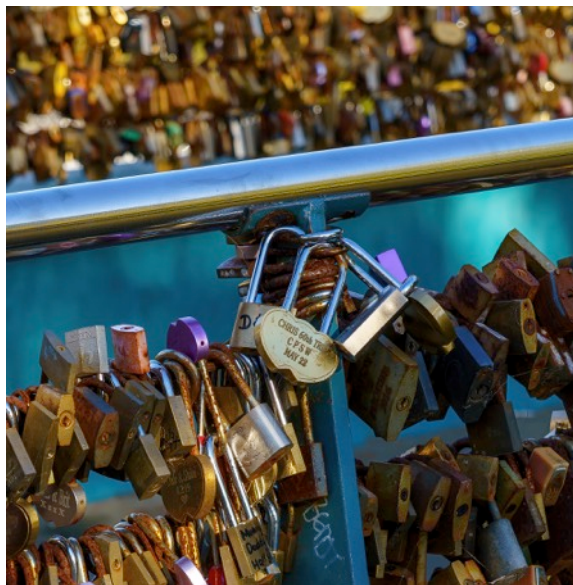
In Over Haddon the route goes past the Lathkill Hotel where, as the guide book states *"only the strong or single-minded will walk right on past"*. We displayed both of these attributes, honest! We had to go through Bakewell where we checked out the Bakewell tart shops to find the original (there are several "original" Bakewell tart and pudding shops in Bakewell!).

The footbridge over the river here is straining under the weight of thousands of padlocks and *"Should you be considering setting up business in Bakewell I recommend opening a padlock shop. Hordes of lovers will snap them up, fasten them to the bridge, and throw away the key. Having retained the spare key you will be able to recover your stock at night and re-sell the next day"*.

Out of Bakewell the path climbs and crosses Bakewell's Golf Club's hilly course; *"My opinion of golf? Yes, you've guessed it, a good walk ruined"*.

This was definitely my best day as the route went through the grounds of Chatsworth Park where the views overlooking Chatsworth House illuminated by the low sun were stunning. We spent some time watching a herd of young deer as the stag elder kept them all under control and quickly rounded up and ticked off any strays.

Having picked up my van at Baslow we called in at Bakewell for our tart and afternoon tea, and, no longer strong or single-minded, called at the Lathkill Hotel for a well-earned pint.






Day 3 – Hartington to Monyash (11 miles)

Leaving my van at the Haddon Grove camp site we took Mike's van to Hartington, too early for St. Giles' church to be open. Today's walk took us along the Tissington Trail, so very easy walking on the flat. We just had to watch out for trains, and bikes. *"If cycling I'm plagued by dozy pedestrians with zero cycle awareness who blunder in front of my wheels while I'm overtaking. However if walking I always seem to attract mad eye cyclists hurtling towards me at supersonic speeds intent on mowing me down".*

The whole route is well waymarked. We left the old railway line at Hurdlow (confusingly marked "Sparklow" on the map) and soon reached a 'Clapham Junction' of paths where there is a barn which used to be used by potholers as a changing room. *"The current rector of Eyam is just as in thrall to potholing as he is to rock climbing, to which I have exactly the same reaction - a good walk ruined".*

At Monyash St. Leonard's church was locked, the only one on the whole trail to be closed. Maybe the vicar was on holiday or ill. We continued to the little bit of Lathkill Dale that we didn't do yesterday, climbed out of the dale to pick up my van, back to Hartington to collect Mike's van and visit the church, now open, and on to Barracks Farm camp site: no electric hookup, no lights in the toilet block, no hot water, no toilet paper, a meter for lukewarm water in the shower – all for £12 each! Definitely not recommended! We walked along Beresford Dale into Hartington for a much-needed pint or two.

A man with glasses and a beard, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and dark trousers, stands on a large, flat stone in a river. He is smiling and holding a small object in his hands. The river flows around the stone, creating a small waterfall. In the background, there are lush green trees and a rocky cliff face.

Day 4 – Ilam to Hartington (9 miles)

It rained heavily in the night, was drizzling in the morning, and the rain got heavier and heavier as the day went on. We left my van at the camp site and took Mike's van to Ilam Hall. We walked into Dovedale, a place I know very well indeed. Mike was now on a field trip as this is where I brought my second year geography kids every year. The current rector of Eyam is a keen rock climber, and his favourite climb in this dale is Ilam Rock. *"Why does he do that? In my view rock climbing is like golf, - a good walk ruined".*

I was amazed and disappointed that many of the places where we used to stop, look at the landforms, draw field sketches, were totally overgrown and not visible. You would not even know that Reynard's Cave was there. At Milldale (*"My own view is that it is never too early for an ice cream, and if you have children with you they will agree"*) we found the smallest of the thirteen churches, a tiny Methodist chapel. We continued along Wolfscote Dale and Beresford Dale to reach the van, very wet, but since we were going home we didn't mind.

The current rector of Eyam has recently run the entire pilgrimage route between breakfast and tea (*"I beg you, sensible reader, not to spoil this wonderful walk in this ridiculous way"*).

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In the footsteps of our ancestors

Exclusive Digital Feature

In partnership with



mountain-heritage.org

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, black trousers, and a large yellow and grey backpack, stands on a rocky mountain trail. She is holding two black trekking poles and smiling at the camera. The trail is made of loose rocks and patches of green grass. In the background, a steep, grassy mountain slope rises, leading to a rocky peak. The sky is overcast with grey clouds, and a glimpse of the ocean is visible in the distance to the right.

Weekend Warriors

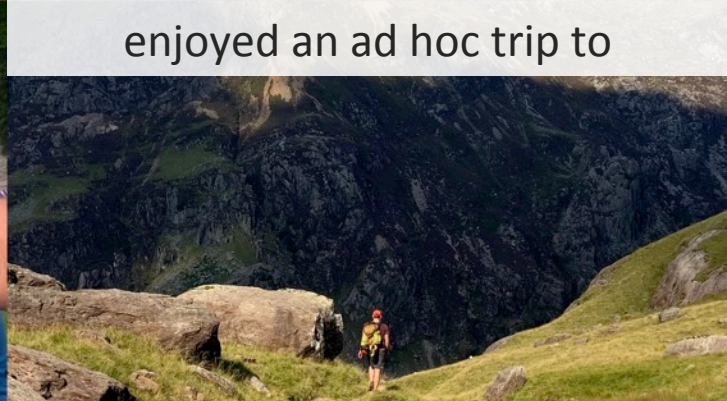
Vicki Moody walking from Nant Peris to Llanberis via Y Garn and Eillidir Fawr to watch England's women's football team win the European cup.

Photo : Stewart Moody

Some random photos taken



when a bunch of Mercian's



enjoyed an ad hoc trip to

Llanberis on a stunning weekend



for some multi-pitch trad fun.

FF

About 30 years after Lynn wrote about her trip to Bulgaria we are pleased to publish it for the first time ever here in The Faff. Let's step back in time...

A SPELL IN THE BALKANS

by Lynn Taylor

A few years ago I went on a trekking holiday in the mountains of north west Bulgaria. Samuel butler once wrote that exploring is delightful to look back on but not comfortable at the time. After my holiday I knew what he meant. When I arranged the trip I wasn't looking for five star luxury or a restful interlude of the usual holiday type. What I got was certainly a lot more interesting and energetic than most people are used to. For a start, alarm bells rang when I discovered that my fellow travellers were nearly all keen marathon runners who would think nothing of twenty odd mile hikes over rough terrain. Then after the first night I began to think not of five star accommodation, but I started to wonder if we would see anything warranting a star at all. Breakfast in Sofia was a novelty. It involved a short walk, a tram ride into the city and another walk to find a coffee shop. We installed ourselves there while our leader went off in search of a bakery. We then enjoyed our rolls straight from the bags in the coffee shop and nobody seemed to mind.

Next morning saw us in the town of Vratsa, and another hike for breakfast. This was just to warm us up before the real walking began. Vratsa is surrounded by steep limestone mountains and we were soon panting our way upwards, falling in with a goatherd and his flock as we went. It was a relief to reach the plateau and the welcome shade of the odd scrappy tree. Here we were able to enjoy our picnic while the bells of the grazing goats tinkled gently in the distance. Onward then, and it was delightful walking through scented herbs of all kinds. Maps in Bulgaria are not as detailed as those we are used to, so route finding even with a guide could be tricky at times; at one point our leader had to show the guide where he had built a cairn the previous year. It seems that very few Bulgarians go mountain walking for pleasure so there are not the well worn, way marked tracks that we know in this country. On occasions this meant that what should have been a twelve mile walk turned into a twenty mile ordeal, but in general it was only a minor inconvenience and gave us the added excitement of venturing into the unknown.

Our next stop was at Belogradchik, a very basic hotel but with a view to beat all others. Meals were taken on the balcony so that we could appreciate to the full the stunning landscape of sandstone outcrops with the mountains of Serbia ranging behind. It was fun putting names to the weird and wonderful gargoyle-like shapes of the wind sculpted rocks; our worst enemies must have had burning ears that day! In the morning we headed off into the hills again intending to circle round the outcrops in a big loop. The wisdom of this was soon to be debated as all the berry pickers that we met made it very clear that we were straying too close to the Serbian border. Discretion seemed to be the better part of valour so we altered our route accordingly and returned in safety.

There was quite a difference between life in the cities and in the more rural areas that we visited. Townspeople were notable for their air of head-down stoicism in the face of immense hardship and grinding poverty. By contrast the self sufficiency of the village

folk with their little smallholdings and allotments gave them the confidence and the self assurance that only comes with the guarantee of a well filled larder. Feeling less energetic one day than the rest of the party, I took the opportunity to explore on my own. I only needed to express admiration for a handsome donkey and there was an immediate invitation to partake of fresh picked fruit or the local brew rakiya. Everywhere I went I met with kindness and hospitality. There was a gaiety in the village that was lacking in the towns and by the time the others came down from their ridge walk I felt quite refreshed. I have to admit to a certain smugness too when I heard about their day. They returned exhausted from a much longer outing than intended, having raced along the Serbian border dodging imaginary bullets from the snipers that the guide insisted were behind every hummock. No wonder he was in such a hurry!

Not every day was fraught with this kind of danger; in fact some of the walks were quite idyllic. We would set out early along with the goats on their way to pasture, passed by the occasional donkey cart and its owner. We would stroll among beech and hazel woods, or else in open country where it was possible to pick bilberries or ripe windfalls from plum or pear trees; liquid refreshment came icy cold from wayside springs. Flowers abounded; we walked through clumps of the huge swallowwort gentian or tiptoed amongst the diminutive scabrous gentian. At other times we picked our way through patches of grass of parnassus or passed the dusty orange heaps of the dried viagra plant. Birds too were in profusion, the bright blue of the roller and the distinctive darting flight of the bee eater being two of the most commonly spotted. Our return in the evenings was often accompanied by the now familiar tinkling of goats' bells as the flocks trotted back through the village to their welcoming owners.

Bulgaria is a country of immense contrasts. Turkish and communist legacies in the cities were far from beautiful; huge blocks of high rise flats do nothing for the soul, vast town squares that look as if they have been steamrollered by armies of tanks were not for lingering in, but if one had the time to search them out there were things of rare beauty to be found. In an unobtrusive museum in Vratsa we saw Thracian treasures that the British Museum would give its eye teeth for and ancient textiles that would not have disgraced the V. and A. The only clue to the identity of the building was a plethora of Roman tombstones and mosaics lying carelessly in the vicinity as if they had been tumbled out of the back of a truck and left just as they had landed. In the same town we had the privilege of listening to singing of breathtaking beauty from an unseen choir in an almost empty church.

Walking in Bulgaria cannot be said to be easy, but if one is prepared to put up with a certain amount of discomfort then one can certainly take home some wonderful memories. Walks were often punctuated by the unexpected; spectacular gorges, a vast network of underground caverns, priceless dimly lit icons in ancient monasteries stewarded by seemingly equally ancient monks. As we passed through villages we would be offered grapes straight from the vine or hailed from an upstairs window by an opportunist carpet weaver. Homeward bound we would be welcomed by a group of elderly ladies as they spun their wool in the warmth of the evening sun. It is these ordinary everyday touches that make a trip so memorable and we felt that for a short time we had been allowed to take part in a way of life that has become an anachronism in the modern world. Comfortable it may not have been, but delightful to look back upon it certainly was.

NORTH LAKES

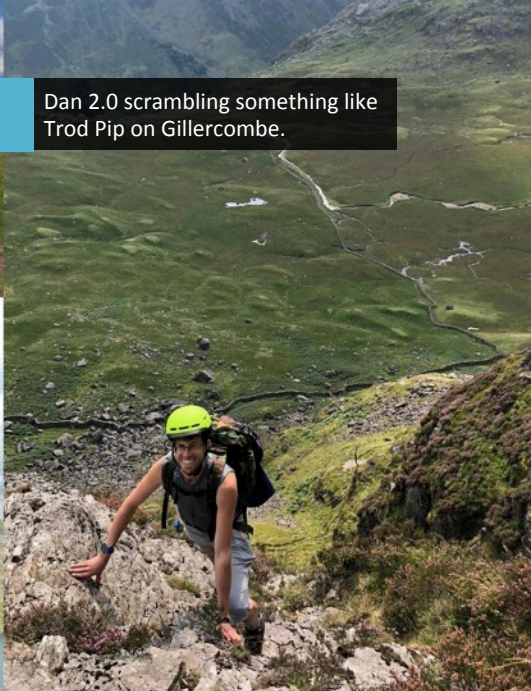
AUG, 2022

Cometh the bank holiday. Cometh the Mercians. Bridge End Farm campsite is perhaps the windiest in the World, but it's HUGE and we love it. Hike, bike, climb, paddle...it had it all. The editor confesses to not having attended this meet as he was swanning around Lincoln with his wife in their finest Steampunk attire, so if the captions seem vague (or non existent) you now know why. I'm pretty sure though that this is the awkward top-out on glaciated slab where Adam and Anna are now perched.

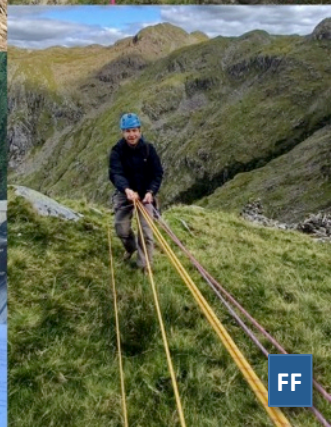





Dan 2.0 scrambling something like Trod Pip on Gillercombe.



I'm guessing the toilet block was a long way from the tents.



A woman with dark hair, wearing a dark swimsuit with a colorful patterned strap, is standing in a shallow pool of water at the base of a waterfall. She is smiling and looking up at the falling water. The waterfall is composed of many small, cascading streams of water, creating a misty spray. The surrounding rocks are covered in green moss. The water in the pool below is dark and turbulent, with white foam from the falling water.

Zoe taking a bracing dip in the Thirlmere pools.



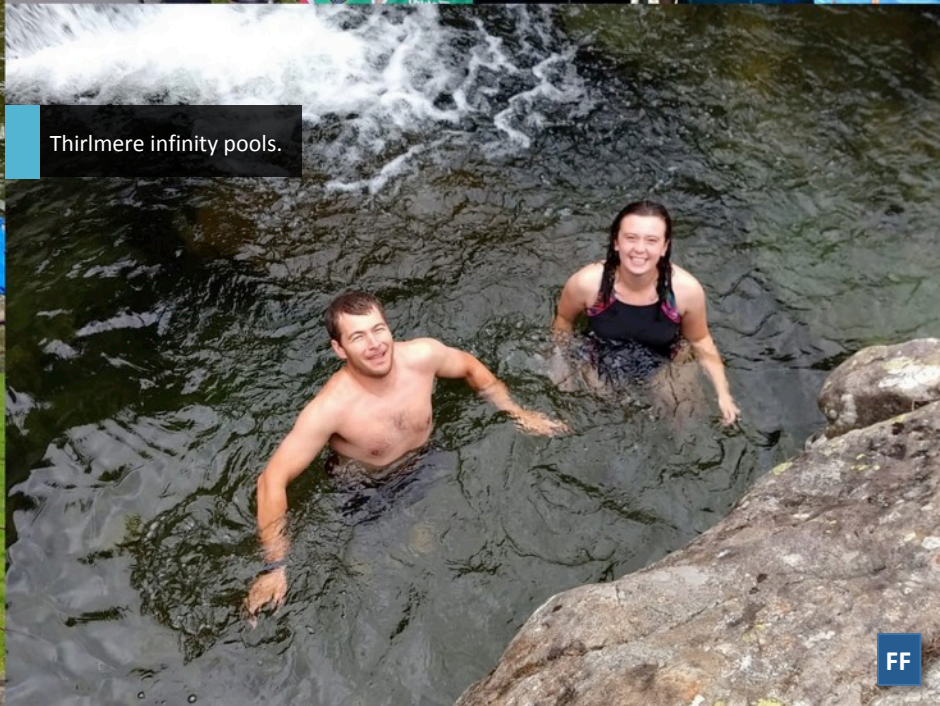
Mai enjoying the scrambling...somewhere.



Ruth on Murray's Route, Dow Crag.



Thirlmere infinity pools.



Fran and Percy.



photofaff by STEWART MOODY



Pants Faff. Never let your being amongst a crowd of people to prevent you stripping off to your kecks to switch into a pair of shorts because you're worried about sweating your boll*cks off. Fair play Tom Morris for this public display of faff in a car park, the likes of which we've not seen since the fabulous Anna Milluschiva emptied the contents of her pack (including a baking tray) onto the Rhydd Ddu pay and display. Tom would like me to point out that the Samsonite Dolly-Trolley isn't anything to do with him as "il c'est un Alpinist, not un touristel!". Hey, is that Dan's red cap?





EXPLORING ABERDEENSHIRE

words and photographs by Roland Clarke



I have had several holidays visiting the Aberdeenshire area. I chose this area because it is not seen as a tourist area and thus the accommodation is much cheaper. Nevertheless it offers a great variety of walking including the east side of the Cairngorms. This picture is of Loch Muick which I enjoyed walking around.

Before my most recent visit I decided to seek out a local Ramblers group and found one in Stonehaven. They had two walks organised during the time I was staying in the area. I contacted the two leaders and asked if I may join them on their walks. I found them helpful and welcoming. We met to share transport at the Stonehaven leisure centre car park. The first walk was alongside part of the river Dee with beautiful woodland along its banks.



The second walk was in the Cairngorms near the Glenshee skiing area. We did start at 500m altitude and climbed three peaks over 1000m high; Carn an Tuirc, Cairn of Claise and Glas Maol. A fabulous day!





Pen Ceunant Uchaf

OCT, 2022

Blimey! We've been to Wales a lot this year haven't we. And we've usually been dealt a dreadful hand by mother nature. The Pen Ceunant Uchaf hut meet above Llanberis in Snowdonia was no exception. It rained almost constantly and it was blowing a hoolie on both days. So, if you can't climb outdoor on dry rock, why not climb in a cave on dry rock. Here's Ruth in the (in)famous Lockwood's Chimney with Karl and Jaz looking on with some degree of trepidation. Keep reading for Ruth's full account of this...erm... very special (?) climb.



Dan and Helen ascending Snowdon the hard way.



It's a bit grim on Cloggy!
Indian Face anyone?



Torrential rain on Sunday morning saw glum faces all round, until someone said "Hang-on, how about Lockwood's Chimney?".



Communal dinner prep in full swing.



The 'gateway' to Lockwood's Chimney. If indeed you can find it.



Cloggy.



Lunch on Moel Elio.



A full-page photograph of a person climbing a narrow, vertical rock chimney. The climber is wearing a green long-sleeved shirt, dark pants, and a helmet. They are positioned in the center of the frame, reaching up with their right arm. The rock face is dark, textured, and appears wet. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the climber and the rock's texture against a dark background.

Into the bowels of the Earth

LOCKWOOD'S CHIMNEY

It is traditional to climb Lockwood's Chimney (Vdiff) "on a wet day with a large team". It must be true, it says so in the Rockfax. Who are we, the Mercians, to go against this tradition?

Words by Ruth Wragg
Photo by Everyone Else

Safely ensconced in a hut on the Llanberis path, there was a general pessimism about the weather forecast. We had fought the wind and the rain that day to go and have a look at the Cloggy – home of the legendary Indian face climb – a climb so gnarly that the guidebook stresses that they have included it just to show you where it goes, not so that you should actually consider climbing it. It certainly looked a bit blank, so we left it for another day. Sunday's forecast was barely any better, but on a meet where Karl is involved, you can trust in him to find us an adventure. Last year it was Snakes and Ladders – this year was the turn of Lockwood's chimney.

Lockwood's chimney is a legendary climb too – just for significantly different reasons. Karl had done it before – “it's easy” he said, “no need for gear, only need ropes for the abseil off.” So a suitably large team set off with a spring in our steps and a few slings (just in case) hanging off our harnesses. The approach was straightforward to start with and once we had spotted the little path winding up to the crag we struck off uphill. It was wet and slippery underfoot – but this is what it was all about, right?



The climb starts by scrambling up through a rock arch, and up some 'easy' rock steps to get to the chimney. Well, they would have been easy, except the rock was so slimy that our boots refused to stick. Karl bravely made the climb with no gear making a belay out of one of our few slings. The rest of us were glad of the rope he threw down to safeguard our passage. Limbs flailing widely, and cursing loudly we each made the ascent to arrive at the entrance to the eponymous chimney. This was guarded proudly by a bloody great big tree that we had to climb around to enter the cliff – over or under was the choice, and both were awkward.

The chimney loomed dark above us. It looked simple enough but oh how wrong we were. Andy set off up it squirming and grunting. After some time, he re-emerged at the bottom and sent Connor up for a go. More squirming and grunting, and a few choice words later he had cracked it. What could be so hard I thought? It's only a VDiff. I was soon to find out. Charley and Stew had made similarly hard work of it and now it was my turn. I shuffled up the first few moves and into the chimney proper. The walls were smooth, polished and damp. Not really the ideal combination for optimal climbing. Pushing myself up by any means possible I wedged myself between the walls. Feet skidded all over the place, failing to find any traction. I had one little rubbish handhold and my arms wheeled widely, blindly grasping to find anything better. There was nothing – I needed to get a foot higher to get a hand over something decent. I tried and tried with Stew guarding me tight from above. All I needed was for my boots to stick for just a few seconds. Repeatedly trying and slumping back again, eventually I got lucky and made it over the top gasping for breath but with a grin on my face.





This was just the start of the journey in the cliff. A narrow passage lay ahead. During my struggles the rain had set in and the wind was howling. Relatively protected from the elements inside the cliff and strung out single file along the passage with a shaft of light streaming down from the crack above us, it all felt quite atmospheric. Communication was interesting – messages were passed person to person along the passageway. Who knows if the message was right by the time it had reached the back of the team – but they seemed to make vague sense. Stew, Connor and Charley had forged ahead whilst I belayed the others up the chimney, taking in tight as Jaz, Karl, Lucy and Andy took it in turns to make the alternating squirm and slump climb up towards me.

Making progress along the passageway was simple compared to what had gone before – a few rocky boulders to squirm over with just a little bit of grunting, and we arrived at the base another chimney. With some trepidation we climbed this final journey, and whilst awkward in places it was thankfully significantly more straightforward. Almost like actual climbing!

Conner and Stew were perched on a platform above the chimney's exit setting up the abseil in the howling wind, which they were now exposed to having exited the cliff. Trying to be helpful Charley and I attempted to flake and coil the ropes, making a right hash of it in our confined spot. Disentangling several knots we finally manage to sort it all out – this is why the Mercians have a reputation for faffing I guess!

One by one, we climbed up out of the chimney, teetering onto to the platform in the wind, to zip down the ropes to safety. We pulled the ropes and beat a hasty retreat back to the car where Naomi, Vicky and Magda were anxiously awaiting our somewhat overdue return.

What an absurd adventure. The guidebook is right – defiantly one to enjoy in the wet with all your friends – just remember to take some gear!



Vernon Bennett

23rd Sep 1925 - 5th Aug 2021

By Geoff Taylor

Vernon joined the BAI Mountaineering Club (as the Mercians were originally known) in the late 1950s.

He had climbed in the Alps counting the Matterhorn and the Eiger amongst his achievements. He was also a competent VS leader, bearing in mind this was in the period when one tied on directly or by means of a thin nylon waist rope and karabiner: way before the days of harness, helmets and cams.

He tells the tale that one March Saturday, he and fellow member Melvin Bradley were at the foot of Clogwyn Du'r Arduu surveying possible routes when they saw an object come hurtling over the cliff edge some 150m above them. The "object" turned out to be a boy scout walking up Snowdon who had slipped on the icy ground and having no ice axe, had been unable to save himself. The boy had landed on a steep snow runnel and slid down. They hurried over fearing the worst but he was alive though in pain. Two metres either side it was rocky scree. They visited him in Bangor hospital on the way home on the Sunday and found him sitting up in bed with a broken arm and superficial cuts.

Vernon and his wife Marjorie were great supporters of Greg's hut, attending the reunions in the Alston area.

Vernon was also quite an astute businessman. In the early 1950s he and Marjorie had a stall selling ham rolls outside the Villa ground. They decided that if they arranged the ham so that it overlapped the edges of the roll, the punters would think they were getting extra filling!

Later, he had a fish and chip shop in the Handsworth area and use to stay open all evening to catch the pub throwing out time: thus having to keep his fryers, lights etc... on in order to get half a dozen sales. This meant that Vernon would rarely arrive at a North Wales hut much before 2am. He put up a notice informing his customers he would be closing at 7pm and found that his sales did not suffer and he had saved on his overheads and had his evenings free. Mushy peas were the most profitable as they were cheap to buy and he kept on adding water as the peas hardened. Friday nights were unsurprisingly, the most profitable. In those pre-decimal days, the going rate for contributions to petrol costs for a trip to N. Wales was £1, (Petrol was around 25p a gallon!) Vernon would charge 1d. a mile which usually worked out more expensive. (240d = £1.00)

Vernon was a keen sailor, but I have no record of his exploits. We do however have a record of his exquisite watercolour paintings in the form of cards which Lynn and I looked forward to receiving each Christmas.

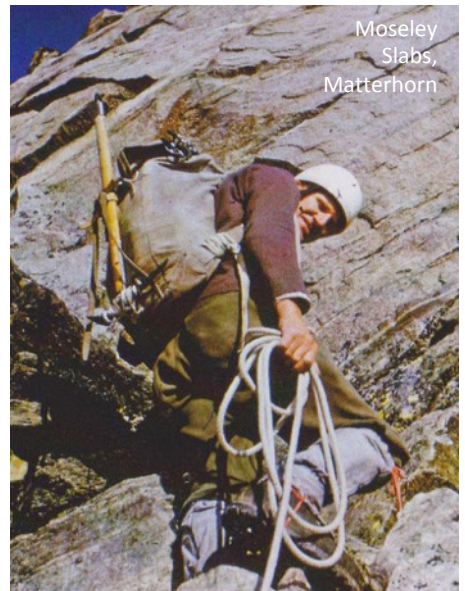
As an expedition swansong, he and Norman Wright attempted Mount Kenya, Vernon leading the harder pitches. After several days on the ascent, Vernon was injured by a falling rock and Norman was distinctly peeved when Vernon decided to abandon the climb.

Unknown to almost all, Vernon was an accomplished bag piper player and at his funeral on the first of September, one of his group, a Wee Willie, in full Highland splendour, played the entrance and exit music.

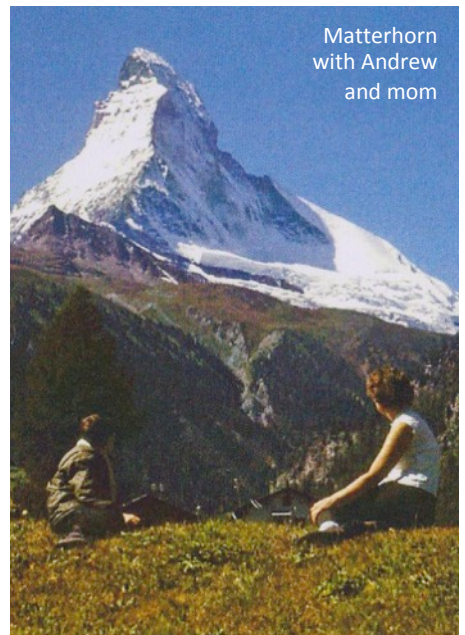
On the Eiger



Moseley Slabs, Matterhorn



Matterhorn with Andrew and mom





DEINIOLEN

SEPT, 2022

Oh, what's this? A booking at the Lincoln Mountaineering Club hut in Deiniolen! Excellent. They have the most divine tea towels and oven gloves, all embossed with their "LMC" acronym. Our meets sec Adam, who is from Lincoln himself you know, delights in this booking and it's become a bit of an annual event. And rightly so, as it gives access to hundreds of amazing multi-pitch trad routes in Llanberis and Ogwen. It might be a tad chilly on the belay in September but Chris is clearly in fine fettle on Idwall slabs.



The orange team photographed sometime in late 70's before digital photography was a thing.



Somewhere near the top of Idwall slabs (I think)



Naomi leading on Spiral Stairs (I think).



Lou and Simon yomping up Pen Yr Ole Wen





L A N D S C A P E



Category Winner.

Hiking beneath The Matterhorn.

By **Beth Adamson**.

A C T I O N



Category Winner.

Stepping out onto the Midi Arete.

By **Beth Adamson**.

M

E

E

T

S

Joint Category Winner.

Vic scrambling on Gillercombe.

By **Stewart Moody.**



Joint Category Winner.

Beth on the Cosmiques Arete.

By **Tom Morris.**



F

U

N



Taken on the club meet to Kalymnos in October 2022, Adam's stunning photo shows Ruth on the rather exciting 80-meter free-hanging abseil. Ruth, Adam, Vic and Stew had just climbed Three Stripes (5c+) at Spartacus, topping out at about 1pm.

Having enjoyed the view from the top, they were keen to call it a day and head to the famous pirate bar for some refreshments. This ab, in theory, offers the quickest way back down to the 'climbers village' of Massouri seen in the distance.

After a bit of effort to locate the bolts (not easy!) Adam boldly went first with a nervous smile on his face. From the back of the grotto he had the chance to get this amazing shot of Ruth who was second to descend.

Category Winner & **Competition Winner.**
Ruth abseiling into the Grande Grotto.
By **Adam Butler.**



Incidentally, this photo of Adam came third in the fun category.

Adam Butler;
photographer
and muse.

KALYMNOS



Get up at about 8am, drink a nice coffee, scoff down some breakfast, poke your your head out the door to breathe the cool morning air, grab your smimming cossie off the line, sit back down for some tea, thumb through the guide book, find somewhere that takes your fancy, hop on a scooter, buzz round to the other side of the island, smash out some awesome sport routes on beautiful warm flowstone, with tired forearms call it a day, hop back on your bike and grab an ice cream, head to the beach, have a swim, go shower, crack open a cold can of high-value Euro-lager, sit on on the terrace, buy some new socks or a cap from the La Sportiva shop, pop over to snackbar Fatolitis for a draught beer in a frosted glass, realize you're running late, and then enjoy dinner with 22 of your mates at the fabulous "colourful chairs" tavera. It's just another day in the life of a Mercian on Kalymnos. Perhaps you can start to see the allure of the island and why we return year, after year, after year. Interested in coming in 2023...? Of course you are.



Weekday Warrior

Adam Butler enjoying proper limestone on Karpouzi (5c+) on the club trip to Kalymnos.

Photo : Stewart Moody



DON TEANBY

2nd February 1927 – 30th June 2022

By Geoff Taylor

Don joined the BAI Mountaineering Club (as the Mercians were known then) in 1966 having learnt the rudiments of mountaineering by abseiling down, and prussiking up, the stairwell in the old Birmingham Athletic Institute building in John Bright Street. He was the club secretary for two years in the early 1980s and in 2016 he was awarded honorary life membership in recognition of his longstanding membership and service to our Club.

Don was an accomplished skier and went on several trips to the Alps and North America with the BAI Ski Club. He also accompanied Alan Hardie and former member Mike Bailey on a trip to Nepal when Alan was attempting Mera Peak (6512m).

Although he was competent on the easier grades, he preferred walking and was a frequent attendee on the Scottish meets. He was also a regular attendee at the Greg's hut meets in Cumbria and helped with the renovation, as indeed he did with installing the toilet at the Club's former hut, Ardwyl Wen, in Capel Curig.

Don was born, and lived, in Scunthorpe for the first few years of his life acquiring a local accent which was not always easy for others to follow. However, that did not stop him from becoming a manager at Round Oak Steelworks in Oldbury or doing a law degree at Aston after the works closed adding to his existing degree: a Masters in Social Studies.

He was a very modest man, and never talked about the several gold medals (with bars) he had won in ballroom dancing. In later life he became a keen bridge player hosting friends in the flat in Walsall that he had moved in to in 1962.

Mercian members past and present outnumbered the family at the funeral on 1st. August 2022 at the Streetly East Chapel. Interestingly, the bollards placed to direct visitors bore the name "BROXAP" having been made by Bob Broxap's Manchester company. Bob, also a former member, drowned in a canoe accident off Anglesey in 1994.

Memories of Don

"Don was a member before I joined Mercian MC in 1978. He had a soft Lincolnshire accent, sometimes difficult to follow. Not someone who needed to be the centre of attention.

He was interested in astronomy asked me questions about say black holes, I had to admit I had limited knowledge even though I have a degree in physics, but it was good to talk about it.

We had a short backpacking trip over Wild Boar Fell in Yorkshire. I remember him telling me some time after how much he enjoyed that trip." - Roland Clarke.



"Don loved Maggie, and Maggie loved Don. In conversation about Christmas 2006 Maggie was trying to find out when Don's birthday was. He was a very private person but no match for Maggie, and when she found out that his 80th birthday was coming up in February 2007 she invited him to our house for a roast dinner. Mike came too, and we had a birthday cake. Don said it was the first birthday party he had ever had. He was so happy and at times overcome with emotion. The trade off was that Maggie had to reveal to Don when her birthday was, and every year after that Maggie got a card from Don with love. On visits to Don's home, I noticed with great joy that every birthday card that Maggie had sent to him was displayed on his living room wall.

Don was a friend we didn't know we had until we needed our friends. When I had my operation for prostate cancer, I had some serious issues in the period afterwards. One day I could not pee. I had to get to the hospital in Oxford PDQ. Maggie phoned several "friends" but it was Don who came to our rescue, saying "well, I'm shaving at the moment but I'll drop everything and be there right away". It was then we found out who our real friends were.

I was able to repay the debt when Don needed transport to get to Walsall Manor Hospital for his operation." – Malcolm Imhoff

"I first met Don in the late '70s as a result of him meeting my sister on a French A-level course.

We were all interested in hill walking and he joined us with a trip to Scotland and later introduced me to the Mercian Mountaineering Club. We also shared a love of skiing and he joined me on some of these holidays to the French and Italian Alps. The most memorable was with the West Midland Ski Club to Lake Tahoe in California with wide open ski slopes, excellent quality snow, and plenty of open space, so it was a pleasure to do the runs despite it being very cold! I soon joined the Mercians and participated in their autumn maintenance of Greg's hut, the mountain bothy on Cross Fell in the Pennines.

Another time when we were in North Wales at the club hut in Cwm Silyn the weather was very wet so one of the members suggested we should go underground. It was a slate workings with side branches. As we made our way down, I followed someone wearing a helmet and every time he bumped his head I ducked! Eventually we arrived in a huge cave where we all turned off our head torches to experience the darkness. Our exit involved us walking up to our knees in water.

We much enjoyed the Mercian Easter trips to Scotland for winter walking. I equipped myself with winter boots, ice axe, crampons and duvet jacket. I learned many new skills. It was exciting!

Don was a very private person and apparently had never had a birthday party. He became friends with Maggie and Malcolm Imhoff. Maggie managed to find out when Don's 80th birthday was and she invited him to her home for a roast dinner. Don had never had a birthday cake before! For several years afterwards various Mercian members and friends met for a meal to celebrate Don's birthdays. He was a good friend to me and will be missed!" – June Bell (former MMC member)

"When I first joined the club, Don was a frequent attendee at the Thursday night post climbing pub socials. Mild manner and softly spoken, he seemed to exude an aura of calm. He always seemed interested in hearing what the club's latest activities were despite him no longer attending meets." – Vic Moody



The fireworks. Ooooooh, aaaah.

The guy(s).

BONFIRE

NIGHT

The appreciative crowd.

2022

The bit where his head burst into flames.

The host and chief fire starter.



ANNUAL DINNER

NOV, 2022

Pack your Gore-tex and Paramo, and pack your glad rags. That's right, it's the annual dinner. The car parking situation was almost as competitive as the jenga. A decent pub crawl on Saturday set us up nicely for dinner at The Three Shires in Little Langdale which was awesome. We had the whole room, open fire and bar pretty much to ourselves which was just as well as it was just a wee bit raucous. A bumble up a hill on Sunday blew away some of the hangovers, except for Zoe who decided to go into Ambleside and had a massive full English instead. Wise beyond her years is our Zoe.

The stunning Cathedral quarry in Little Langdale. The first stop on Adam's guided pub crawl.



Meanwhile on Saturday the A-team went running.



Pub crawl stop 2. Someone photoshopped Stew's beer out!



The B-team muster outside the hut in Little Langdale before setting off on the Saturday pub crawl.



DRESSING FOR THE ANNUAL DINNER

Exclusive photos of miraculous fashion transformations by Adam Butler.



Before

BAG LADIES



After

GLAM LADIES

Let's party...



Time for dinner. The Mercian ladies all looked splendid in their Sunday-best.



Vijay kindly bought a massive round of whiskies.



Pre-dinner drinks at The Three Shires pub.





Say to people "Try to look sexy"
and this is what happens.



Beth kicks-ass
as Jenga.



In to Giant's Hole

By Enoch Chan

I have a mixed feeling about caving. On the one hand, caving gets me to the secretive underground world with all its fossils, but on the other hand, I do find squirming through narrow passage ways tedious and sometimes off-putting. However, whenever my friends Eloise and Andrew call for caving companions, I will always try to go along.

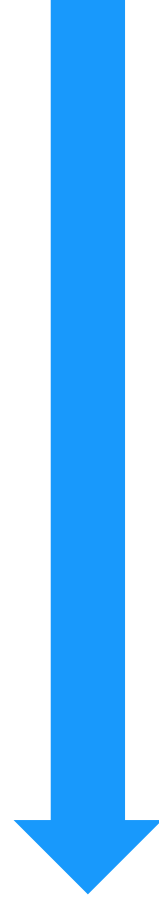
One of my favourite caves is the Giant's Hole in the Peak District. Giant's Hole is a caving classic consisting mostly of large passages. We started early on an August morning, hoping to avoid the crowds. The Giant's Hole is popular amongst novices and groups, thanks to the easily accessible entrance passages. Indeed, the start was an easy scramble through relatively spacious passageways. Some crawling was required, but nothing arduous. Very soon, we arrived at the top of the Garlands Pot, which was a 7m deep chamber with water flowing down the walls to the stream at the bottom. To reach "the rest of the cave", we needed to descent to the bottom of the chamber. Since the chamber had already been bolted with anchors, we threaded our rope through and abseiled down.

Just when I landed on the base of the pitch, the sound of water became clearer. Over my feet a stream flowed into the Crabwalk, a 220m narrow and winding canyon that I had to walk through sideways like a crab. With my front and back touching the rocks, I delicately treaded down the stream. Occasionally, icy water splashed inside my wellington boots, sending a shiver up my spine, but I was amazed that the stream was so clear. Along the way, I encountered a variety of fossils of seashells and starfish, as well as the stunning and intricate flowstone formations such as stalactites and stalagmites, which were formed when minerals in the water are deposited on cave ceiling, floor and walls. Every now and then, Andrew took out his UV torch. When the UV light shone on the wall, the minerals gave a different colour in an instant. It was like magic.



A bit more squirming and scrambling, we arrived at the Eating House, a chamber with convenient boulders to sit on and enough space to reorganise or to snack. After lunch we continued the exploration, so far so good, I think, until we arrived at the infamous Giant's Windpipe. It was a narrow passage which we had to crawl through mud, and worse still, part of it was filled with water. I twisted my body in a contortionist way so to keep my mouth and nose above the muddy water, but I still managed to have a few mouthful along the way. It was only 23m, but it was enough to get my gear all covered in mud, inside and out.

Following the muddy crawl, we swiftly by-passed the Crabwalk using the upper passages and were back to the Garlands Pot. Just when I wondered if I needed to ascend up the rope which we left earlier. Andrew took out a folding ladder from his rucksack and said "you can use this". He came prepared. It felt luxurious to have a ladder inside a cave even though it's a flimsy one. Some more scrambling, and we then saw a light in the distance, and a few minutes later, I was pleased we were back to the world we were familiar with. However, I would not look at this landscape in the same way again, for I know down under our feet, there's another world waiting to be explored.



HELYG, OGWEN

DEC, 2022

Get in there Enoch! After a few pretty rubbish years of winter conditions in North Wales the weather massively over-delivered in early December when temperatures plummeted almost as fast as energy bills soared. What better way to avoid the cost of living crisis than to take your weekend breaks in fabulous communal accommodation that costs £10 per person per night and feast on a huge plate full of sausage, mash and veg for less than a fiver. Bargain! To an outsider, like Vijay's friend Enrico the whole thing seemed like great fun. Indeed it was. Here Enoch stands on Moel Siabod on a glorious Sunday afternoon. The day before people hiked in the Glyders and climbed on Bristly Ridge (more on Bristly Ridge later in this issue).



Jane and Enrico by
Lynn Idwall.



Hiking up to Heather Terrace on Tryfan. Quite
deep and unconsolidated snow, but fun.



Outside the Climbing Club's
Helyg hut in Ogwen.



Owen and Dan on
Heather Terrace.



Stew and Vic sheltering
from the wind on Tryfan



Ooooh, a nice cup
of tea. Oh yes!



THE BATTLE FOR BRISTLY RIDGE

About a decade ago, a mountaineering epic was entered in the annals of Mercian folklore when a trio of intrepid climbers (you know who you are!) embarked upon a winter ascent of Bristly Ridge that took a whopping 13 hours door-to-door. Unlike the speed record for climbing the Nose of Yosemite's El Cap which is broken on an almost annual basis, the 13 hour record set that day in the 'Battle of Bristly Ridge' has stood the test of time. In 2015, two pairs of Mercian's completed the ridge in just less than 8 hours, blaming "great conditions" for returning to the hut in daylight. We can now report that on Saturday the 10th of December 2022, on the Helyg hut meet, a team set out at 9:45am with determination and the mindset to smash the record into smithereens. **Paul Rigby** tells their story...

Stock photo of Ceunant climbers (boo-hiss, villains!!) approaching Bristly Ridge in 2016. The Pinnacle Gap which our team of Mercians (huzzah, heroes all!) skirted can be seen close to the summit to the left of the imposing dark pillar. Photo : Stewart Moody.

In early December a fantastic piece of skill and wit meant the Mercians arrived at the Helyg hut in Ogwen, when their was snow on the ground. At the base of Tryfan the hut is perfectly placed for some patented Mercian faffing and occasional walking and climbing.

On the Saturday morning Riggers, Ruth and Adam headed out to climb something magnificent and feel closer to the timeless formation of mountains that make up Snowdonia National Park.

After a brief walk-in we attempted Nor' Nor' gully. However, even with Adam's skillful climbing and expert gear placement the route was giving out danger signs. With ice and snow littering the gully it was decided to turn back and find a way up a mountain which did not offer such significant chances of death or serious injury.

A long trek along Heather Terrace found us at the bottom of Bristly Ridge. None of us seemed to notice that it was already 1.30pm when we started this scramble, something which would come back to haunt us later in the day. Once again we roped up. Adam fearlessly lead our ascent, Ruth took the all important middle position with Riggers doing his best donkey impression by bringing up the rear.

For an hour or so we continued our steady climb, working well together to place and pick up gear on our way up. With brief stops to admire the views below us we started to notice the time and the narrowing window to get to the top before it got dark. With calmness and effortless grace we continued our climb, navigating some tricky bits which were only made trickier by loose snow and patches of ice. With occasional gear placement the pace was good until we got to Pinnacle Gap, a technical part of the scramble even in the best of conditions. Adding more bits of gear slowed our pace but was necessary as we climbed and then abseiled over the gap.



(Top) Adam getting stuck into the imposing Nor' Nor' Gully in 'sub-optimal' conditions en route to Bristly Ridge. (Bottom) Riggers and Ruth on Bristly Ridge with Tryfan behind. This could be game-on for a record attempt.



It was after a second short bit of abseiling and while stood in the dip of Pinnacle Gap that we faced the most ominous part of our climb. Looming over us was the huge pinnacle of the ridge.

Glyder Fach's igneous middle finger to anyone who dared to ascend via Bristly Ridge. The giant tower of rock, sheathed in gleaming, white ice was as magnificent as it was indifferent to our presence. Standing in that gap was a stark, timely reminder that we were utterly insignificant to the mountains on which we stood. We basked in its beauty while knowing it could deliver our ruin and despair in one, simple misplaced step. These mountains should inspire awe and fear in equal measure and that is certainly what I felt as I gazed up at the pinnacle on that ridge.

Knowing the ridge was impassable in the wintry conditions Adam wisely choose to veer around that tower and not test Glyder Fach's wrath.

With the most technical part of the climb over with it was a relatively straight forward scramble to the top of Glyder Fach, just in time as the sun disappeared and the light faded. A headtorch lit scrabble off the ridge followed by a long walk down back to civilization was our reward for our effort.

We arrived back at the hut tired and worn but fulfilled by our experience on the mountain and keen for another chance to feel as close to an eternal structure again.

- Paul Rigby.



(Top) Adam leading on Bristly Ridge. (Middle) Riggers and Ruth wading through soft snow on the descent. (Bottom) Back to the hut in darkness, just in time for sausage mash and lashings of gray.



At 9 hours and 15 minutes this was a valiant effort by the team, but alas only good enough for a silver medal place on the Bristly Ridge leader board. The decade old 13 hour record remains, perhaps for at least another year. But as sure as snow will fall in the mountains, others will come to test their mettle.



Boozy Mercians

By [Vicki Moody](#) ★★★★★☆ 164 ratings

Boozy Mercians is a dish typically served in the UK national parks at new year, though variations can be enjoyed year round. A summer alternative, Midedged Mercians is a favourite best enjoyed al-fresco in a large field.

Prep time: About 30 minutes

(or two days if you are Lou)

Cooking time: 36 hours

Ingredients

A mixed bag of Mercians.
50 gallons of misc. booze; a mix of beer, wine, cider.
A tippie of three of whisky or random liqueur.
A catering sized pack of Yorkshire tea bags.
Waterproofs. (Gore-tex is fine, Paramo is best).
Assorted ice axes and crampons.
Several good helpings of fresh air.
A large quantity of water.
A good selection of board games.
One sturdy table.
A variety of cakes and crisps.
An equal weight of potatoes as you have Mercians.
A hundred weight of sausages.
A Spotify playlist of eclectic music.
A family sized pack of paracetamol.

1. Take all ingredients to a good sized hut, ensuring it is in a mountainous location. The temperature required is warm(-ish) so we recommend North Wales or the Lake District. Scotland has proved popular in the past but can result in a particularly soggy batch of Mercians so is best avoided.
2. Take your mixed bag of Mercians and introduce them to the hut slowly over the course of an evening. Any excess can be decanted into a separate hut or hostel as available. (Simply scale down the recipe accordingly.)

3. Immediately begin to introduce the alcohol, slowly at first and then with more vigour. (Reserve the whisky and liqueur for later in the recipe.) Alternating the addition of alcohol with the occasional cup of hot tea can help the mixture from developing too quickly. Leave overnight to marinade.
4. Dress the Mercians in the waterproofs, wrapping each one tight so little flesh is exposed. Now leave them to rest in the hut for at least 40 minutes whilst nothing else seems to happen.
5. You can add the ice axes and crampons at this stage, but they are purely decorative.
6. Now agitate the mixture in the fresh air for several hours. At this point it is usual to add the large amounts of water.
7. Leave outside to cool. Suitable cooling venues include Lockwood's Chimney and Dinorwic Quarry. If you add too much water at this stage, the mixture can be saved by the addition of board games. (These should be considered a store cupboard essential as they can spice up any recipe which is lacking in flavour.)
8. Return the Mercians to a warm, humid environment and continue to drip feed with a mixture of alcohol, tea and cake in equal measures. If needed, increase the humidity by hanging more sodden clothes by the fire in the lounge, ignoring the sweaty smell. Set the Mercians aside to rest.
9. Meanwhile, grill the sausages, and boil and mash the potatoes. (It's assumed you know how to do this Nima and Dan!)
10. Introduce the sausages and mashed potatoes to the Mercians, which should absorb both in a matter minutes.
11. It's now vitally important that you don't let the mixture dry out. Add liberal amounts of alcohol and turn the eclectic music up to 11.
12. Now is the time to whip the Mercians into a frenzy. You will know when the sturdy table is required because the Mercians will begin "to feel like a woman" and the volume will have risen to twice its original level.
13. At this point you can add the optional whisky / random liqueur.
14. The Mercians can now be left unattended for the remainder of the night. Excess air is usually expelled by the Mercians during this time so make sure you leave them in a well ventilated room.
15. In the morning, peel back the sleeping bags and take a look at the Mercians. If they have a green or greyish tinge, add copious amounts of tea and paracetamol. Or, if they have a more flushed hue then it's safe to proceed to the final step
16. Take the Mercians and re-dress them in the damp waterproofs. More water is required to make sure that the final consistency is pleasing so either place on a beach or near a mountain lake for maximum exposure to the air to remove any residual moisture.

Other popular dishes...

Curry a'la
Vijay's mum

Dessert a'la
Dan 2's mum

Pepsi ham &
trimmings



New Year Meet

DEC, 2022

It rained the whole time. It's hard to say much more than that. Ok, by the time most people had headed back to their respective homes the sun did come out briefly on the 2nd of January, but other than that it rained. There was big fat rain, rain that came in sideways, and even rain that came down the inside of the walls of the overflow hut. On the plus side there was a lot of dancing, and a lot of great food, and we didn't really have any neighbours to annoy with all our noise.

Nima enjoying the luxury of the overflow hut booked on AirB&B as the meet was just so damn popular.



The gentlemen are on the whiskey.



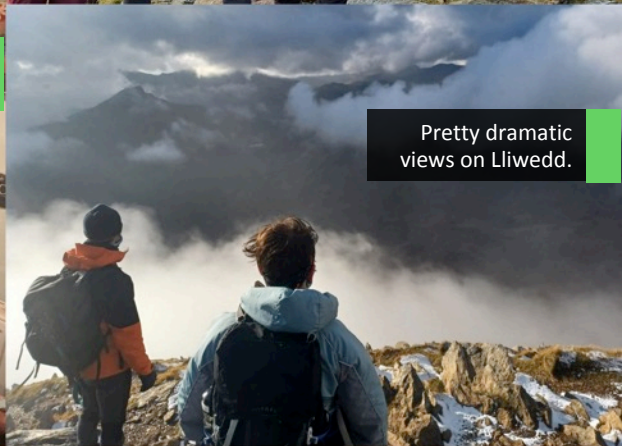
About 10pm on NYE and drinks are flowing and the music is pounding.



An ascent of Lilwedd.



Dinner time in the overflow hut.



Pretty dramatic views on Lliwedd.



Dancing was inevitable.





Scrambling on Lliwedd.



The team either setting off for, or retreat from, Lockwood's Chimney.



By 1am on new year's day it was getting very loud



Tom, please explain your hammer.



I'm not sure what's going here. Some kind of drinking game?

Tom Morris @AdmiralTom

Lockwood's Chimney
3 star classic Vdiff
In the rain
My thoughts?
#won't_rush_back



 Follow



"Tom, have you got your waterproofs?"

"Yep!"

I did not have my waterproofs. An inauspicious start to an inauspicious day.

The morning of 30 December 2022 started as many others on Welsh meets since time immemorial - by drinking 4 cups of tea while gazing mournfully at the sheets of water cascading down the window. In the lead-up to the meet Anna F had suggested that given the torrential forecast, an ascent of Lockwood's Chimney, a 3 star (!) V Diff (!!!) could be in order. A route which is traditionally climbed as a large party in the wet in big boots. "Sure", we thought, nothing else seems on and it'll be nice to get the harnesses on.

Anna unfortunately left us to head home due to feeling unwell undoubtedly accompanied up the M6 by the sound of her own cackling at the success of her Machiavellian scheme to make the rest of us extremely wet and miserable (it worked).

Adam, Zoe, Anna R and I set off in the Butlmobile for the 20 minute drive to the start of the route. Adam eschewed the suggested parking, instead assuring us that parking at the nearby Emily Kelly hut would result in a cunning shortcut to the base of the crag. It is often said of shortcuts that, "if it was easy it would just be 'the way' " and so it was for us. Ascending the grassy bank far too high up and slithering our way up suspicious looking slabs we found ourselves on the wrong side a rocky outcrop with no sight of the crag.

"I think it's over there"
"How do we get there?"
"Back down?"

Eventually finding a likely looking stile and spying the so-called 'Marble Arch' we made it to the bottom of the climb.

Going back in time to when we parked up, I had realised that both my waterproof jacket and waterproof trousers were still on the bench in the hut where I had put them while re-packing my bag and marvelling at my ability to slim it down so much...

Garbed only in my trusty blue softshell and deciding that the current conditions were somewhere between 'active cloud' and 'persistent mizzle' I decided:

"As long as it stays like this, I'll be fine"

It did not stay like this. As I stood, belaying Adam up the treacherous first pitch, fine mizzle gave way to frequent heavy showers and even Anna and Zoe in head to toe Gore-tex looked like their morale was being tested. Cracks began to show.

"We could just go to the pub hahaha"
"haha yeah"
(cue fervent eyeing of each other to judge the level of seriousness)

Adam eventually reached the top of the first pitch and the base of the eponymous chimney. Anna was next and after battling up and slithering down the slab eventually made it to the belay with the help of a coil of rope that had innocuously made its way halfway down the pitch. Zoe was next and then me. By this point my torso was soaked through, teeth were chattering and fingers were like icicles.



I'd long since ran out of sh**s to give when it came to sitting on the rope to retrieve gear or yarding on the rope because I couldn't feel my fingers and I maintain that those holds would be pretty churlish at VDiff in rock shoes and sunshine!

Gallows humour was abound as we stood – soaked to the bone – staring up into the abyss of the eponymous Chimney and Adam was the first to squirm into its murky depths.

Some time passes. We're unable to see Adam, only hear the scrapes and muttered curses as he tries desperately to back-and-foot his way up the gearless channel with water cascading down and making every inch of rock utterly treacherous.

"...I don't like it"
"I don't think we like it either!"

It was at this point all pretence was dropped.

"Pub?"
"pub?"
"pub?"
"PUB!"

Morale took an instant turn for the better as we all agreed that this whole thing was a

terrible idea and that a nice cold pint next to a nice warm fire would be infinitely preferable. We squelched our way back to the car with renewed vigour and after stripping off to protect Adam's vehicular upholstery we were soon on our way – blowers at maximum – back towards the Llanberis pass.

Our first stop was the Pen Y Gwryd – closed for the winter. Oh well, the Vaynol is just down the road. Vaynol Arms – shut for unspecified reasons. The day was beginning to feel cursed and the fear that we might have to retreat, soaked, bedraggled and thirsty, back to the hut was becoming palpable.

Fortunately the day was rescued right at the last minute by the North Wales pub of last resort, Llanberis' own The Heights. 8 pints (between us!), 2 plates of cheesy chips and a good radiator session later we were feeling marginally more human.

Lockwood's remains, for us at least, elusive. Whilst it is a wet weather and big boots classic; on this day the conditions, the disappearing daylight, the lack of waterproofs and a general vague sense of self-preservation came together and rules against us.

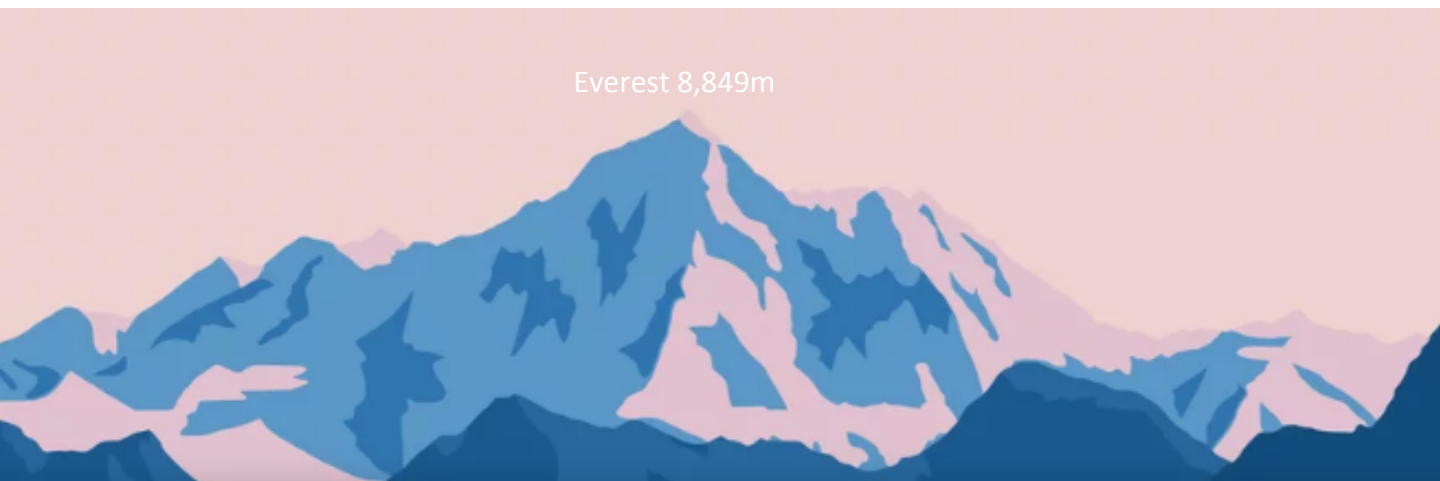
I'll leave Adam to have the last word.

"...I won't be rushing back"



ELEVATION CHALLENGE

At the start of 2022 **Dan Hand** set up a Strava group for club members to record their hight gain by hike, bike, climb and claim the ultimate kudos, bagging the top spot on the leaderboard. To add a bit of perspective height gains have been presented in total metres as well as 'Everests'.



Place	Athelete	Everests	Elevation (m)
1	Daniel Hand	9.2	81,477
2	Helen Colson	6.9	61,257
3	Fabian Moore	5.7	50,583
4	Julie Taylor	5.6	49,236
5	Beth Adamson	4.6	40,818
6	Si Young	3.2	28,699
7	Ruth Wragg	3.0	26,340
8	Vic M	2.1	18,321
9	Stewart Moody	2.0	17,955
10	Tom Morris	2.0	17,707

Lucky for Fabian, he lives in Scotland. But given he probably got most of his height by mountain bike we must doff our caps.

We salute Simon who most probably ran 90% of his elevation.

No shame in being bottom. In fact Tom could have smashed out 288m on New Year's Eve (Eilidir Fawr was just out the back door) to put Stew into 10th place, but he just couldn't be arsed. Or was he too much of a gentleman?

The challenge was not without controversy. How to deal with mechanically assisted height gain (i.e. cable cars) being 'accidentally' included, when people 'accidentally' failed to stop their Strava before getting in the car. But never mind all that hullabaloo. It's all just for fun. By anyone's measure, Kudos must be given at every turn to the competitors, especially the 'machines' in the top 3 spots. Get in touch with Dan to join the 2023 elevation challenge.

HIKE | BIKE | CLIMB