

THE FORTNIGHTLY FAFF

The Periodical Journal of the Mercian Mountaineering Club

JULY 2023

SVALBARD

ICE CLIMBING IN RJUKAN

THE CHAIRMAN'S CHALLENGE

FUN ON TWO WHEELS

MID WEEK MEETS

READING THE WEATHER

MEETS REPORTS

...AND MORE





A word from the editor

Welcome to the cycling issue! Only kidding, it's not all about cycling, just look at the front cover - the Cuillin in the late evening sunshine as a pair of Mercians get ready to bivvi for the night. But this issue does have more stories of a two-wheeled variety than any other Faff. Good natured jokes have been made about the amount of biking going on in recent months, versus the amount of mountaineering. Maybe it's because there's been a swing away from the more traditional mountain biking (although that is still popular) towards gravel and road biking. I don't think it matters too much; these things tend to ebb and flow over time. If you want to ride your bike on a meet - go for it! If you want to paddle a canoe - be my guest! Just have fun.

I've taken to my bike a lot recently on account of a foot injury, and have been very surprised by the sense of achievement I can get from a long (long for me) day in the saddle. Mercian meets are great opportunities for biking as I can get an entirely different perspective on places I've been to dozens of times before. Cycling through Ogwen on the bridleways and then down the old A5 into Bethesda on smooth winding gravel was a real treat. I'm in good company too, as Naomi has taken to her bike like a duck to water, whilst Lou and Simon are getting out and organising mid-week rides to the pubs of North Warwickshire and Beth some new wheels too.

Cycling aside there's lots of other stuff going on in this issue. Norway isn't a stranger to the Faff, and we've two winter articles from those icy shores in February. There's also a glut of meets reports (weekend and mid-week) and other bits and pieces. My thanks as always to those members who took the time to put pen to paper, or who sent me through cool photos of themselves in awesome places.

This will be the penultimate Faff. It's been going strong for nine and a half years, with the first issue kicking off with an article on caving back in November 2023. I always had in mind that documenting a decade of the Mercians would be about right, and that the Faff couldn't go on forever. So we will be publishing the final issue in November-ish. Time is ticking by; if you want to secure your place in the history books so future Mercians can coo over your heroic deeds you'd better get out on a meet, have an adventure and then get writing whilst it's fresh in your mind.

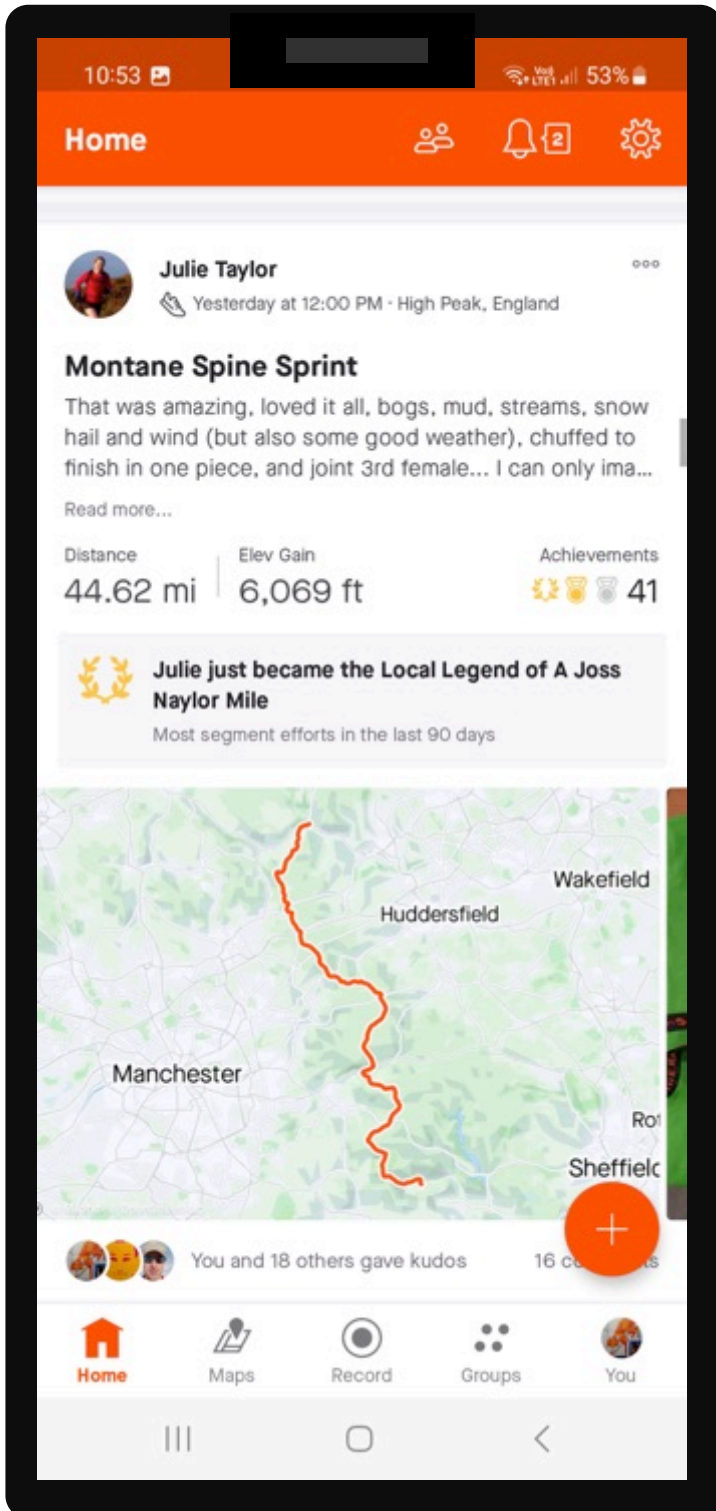
In the mean time I hope you enjoy reading this issue.

Stew.



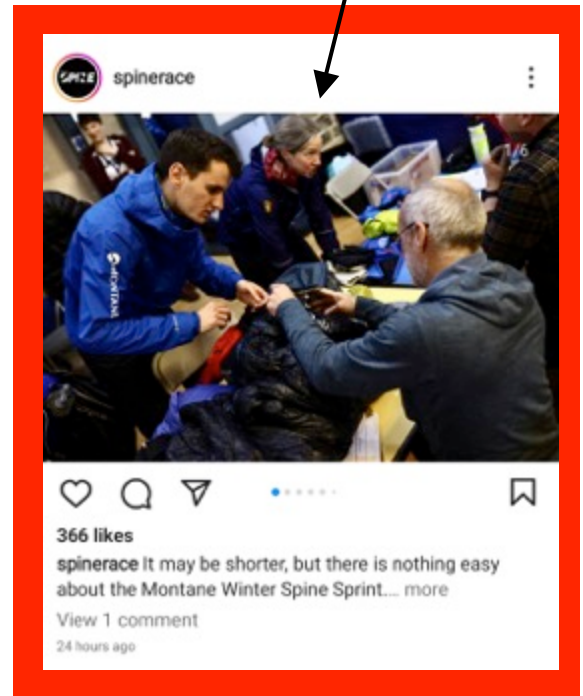
HARD AS NAILS

Julie Taylor completes the 2023 Montane Winter Spine Sprint



Every now and again a Mercian achieves something that is quite staggering. To even contemplate participating in an event like the Winter Spine Sprint deserves buckets full of Kudos. But to complete it in such an amazing time almost beggars belief. Julie, you may no longer be a serving Captain in the Army, but we salute you all the same. Congratulations. You are amazing.

*Look closer,
it's Julie*





Karl Stewart leading
Fabrikkfossen

FABRIKKFOSSEN (WI3)

by Stewart Moody

Like all our days in Rjukan, Tuesday kicked off with a 7am wakeup call, a vat of steaming porridge, and a flurry of stuffing loads of climbing kit and flasks into bulging rucksacks.

Ropes; check.
Crampons; check.
Axes; check.
Screws; check.
Right, let's go.

Out the door we went, and into a surprisingly balmy -2 degrees heat-wave. Honestly, we were shocked. We'd packed for lows of -20, but enjoyed overnight highs of up to +3). We were fortunate that our long awaited ice-climbing trip didn't deteriorate into a sightseeing tour of Rjukan's finest waterfalls. Leaving the house, we passed the rustic farm buildings owned by our lovely AirB&B hosts, and the pen where they kept the pigs. Two minutes later Adam swung the car hard left onto the main road and we headed down the valley.

We'd plumped for a multi-pitch route in the town center. I know it sounds strange..."let's all head into town to do a multi-pitch ice route shall we?". Fabrikkfossen (WI3) is a reasonably easy 7 pitch route out the back of an industrial estate. Whilst you might think "Eugh! It sounds like Harborough Rocks", it isn't. It's all very peaceful, and by the time you hike the 40 minutes up to the start of the ice the views are pretty great. We always big up the view, but honestly the view of Rjukan appearing and disappearing in the clag was pretty great that morning.

Ruth (wearing her finest Heston Blumenthal inspired ice climbing glasses) teamed up with Karl, whilst I (in identical glasses, looking equally ridiculous) was with Adam. And off we went.

The vast width of the icefall allowed Karl to generally meander left whilst I went right. The climbing was pretty fast with few major obstacles. Karl belayed at about 30 meters, I pressed on to about 50.

From here the guidebook serves very little purpose; the ice forms differently each year so you can climb until you either run out of rope or energy. But the trick today was finding a decent lump of ice to belay from at about the same time you ran out of rope. A huge dump of snow the week before had smothered a lot of the icefall to the point where a stiff bristled yard brush would not have been out of place.

On the second pitch Adam's left crampon came off whilst he was on lead and it slithered 10-metres down the ice before coming to a halt on it's own accord. On the third pitch I nearly ran out of rope trying to reach a belay. Despite this it was all jolly good fun in a relatively safe environment and we got a good shift on and gained altitude fast.

We lunched by a large tree where the gradient flattened out somewhat. Hot flasks were passed around, and sandwiches of cheese, salami, and cucumber were munched upon. "Right, time to get cracking". Adam did a big meandering pitch (if you can call it a pitch, maybe "commute" would be more accurate) to get to the base of the meat of the route.

Pitches 6 and 7 were where the water ice (WI) grade 2 turned into grade 3 as the ice ramped up. An error of judgment saw me swinging my axes at a wall of hollow ice, which promptly



Ruth belaying off some nice fat ice.

gave way under my feet leaving me dangling by both axes and panting like a dog. After an inglorious retreat back to the sanctuary of the belay neither Adam nor I much fancied the continuation, so we set off to rig the first of 4 abseils back to the ground. To his credit Karl found a good line and cracked on with Ruth. It was dark by the time we were all reunited at the hut.

As always on that trip, sleep was not a stranger that night.





Weekend Warriors

Adam Butler grabs 10 points for trying a new outdoor pursuit. That's cross country skiing in the bag. Photo taken at Gaustatoppen, Norway.

Photo : **Stewart Moody**

It's always great to hear from past members of the club...

From : Tony Cowles

To : committee@mercianmc.org.uk

Re : Club Hut

16th February, 2023

Hello

I am a past member of the club - when it changed its name from Birmingham Athletic Institute Mountaineering Club. The club rented a 'hut' at Cwm Silyn, Snowdonia.

It was a good era when I was involved - in the late 60s and early 70s.

Today, with my wife Annie we revisited Cym Silyn - walked up to the Llyn and photographed what remains of the hut.

Cheers

Tony Cowles

Cwm Silyn, photo by Stewart Moody



A note from the editor:

In those days, few members had cars so a coach or minibus was hired for weekend meets and since this was before the advent of the M6, most of the meets were held in Wales. The first club hut was acquired around 1960 in Cwm Silyn about 8 miles South East of Caernarvon. The rent was the princely sum of £13 per annum! This was gradually improved with the addition of piped water and the greatest of luxuries, a flush toilet with septic tank in the late Sixties.

Over the years, our links with the BAI had become more tenuous with the majority of members coming to us through adverts and connections, so it was decided to change the name of the Club, and in 1972 we became the Mercian Mountaineering Club to represent the greater geographical spread of the membership.

Photo by Tony Cowles





BIKE MAINTENANCE CLASSES WITH HELEN



Does a puncture on your morning commute fill you with dread?

Do your mates in the peloton giggle because you don't know what a sprocket is?

Would you rather go five rounds with Tyson Fury than take your rear wheel off?

If the answer to any of these is yes than you'd have done well to join Helen on her basics of bike maintenance classes held in February at Vijay's warehouse. Tips and practical advice aplenty, thank you Helen, you're a star (as well as a really hard-core cyclist)

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Chris scrambling Jack's Rake (I) on Pavey Ark on the Sunday morning after a link of scrambles lower down the valley.

LANGDALE

March, 2023

The Mercian's were in the mood for bagging lots of Chairman's Challenge points on this meet. Some (Naomi), with more enthusiasm than others. Ten mile hikes, four Wainwright's in a day, were some of the points claimed. It was also discovered that there's a Top 50 Vdiff multi-pitch climb a mere 8-minute walk from the Robertson Lamb hut where we were staying. Something we'd managed to overlook until now. Incredible! Clearly that had to be the inaugural trad route of the year for some, whilst others went scrambling higher up in the mountains. We'll hear more from Naomi after the photos.



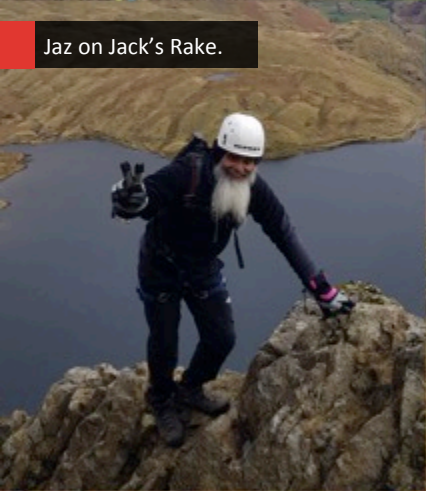
The Wainwright bagging party lead for the day by Naomi.



Jaz on Jack's Rake.



Isn't it strange how all paths in Langdale seem to lead to the exact same pub at the exact same time?



Jaz on Jack's Rake.



Vic hiking in to Scout Crag in Langdale to kick off the trad season. It wasn't warm, but nor was it cold.



Is that a wrap sandwich? Well I never!



Our humble abode for the weekend.



Naomi bags another summit.



Very pleasing gaps between the subjects in this photo. Kudos!



Dan put Stew through his paces on a 'little' Sunday bike ride



The 2023 CHAIRMAN'S CHALLENGE

Mercian Mountaineering Club

Your goal is to collect and log as many points possible between the 1st of February to 31st August 2023 where you can submit your form to demonstrate your awesomeness and perhaps even be crowned the winner.

There is no "I" in team, but there are 5 in "individual brilliance" (Tom Morris, 2010)

Challenges need to be completed individually except cooking, where you can split the points with another member. The white number shows the points you get for completing a challenge. Do something once and bag the points. Yellow numbers denote a maximum, where you can repeat something more than once. Fill in the grey letter-boxes with details of your completed challenges and then work out your subtotals, and then your grand total.

meets

Attend some meets **5** **25**
I had a splendid time at (list meets):

Cook a meal on a meet **10**
I whipped up a feast of:


Do the morning tea run **1** **15**
I got one measly point for each cup I served to their bedsides (hut/no. cups):

Travelling to a meet with 5 different Mercians (2pt each) **2** **10**
I enjoyed the company of (names):

Be the designated driver to & from the pub for your pals **10**
I was altruistic at (pub/passengers):


SUBTOTAL =

climbing

Visit your residential County Top: **10**
Can see the pub from there! 

Lead a Hike or a Graded Scramble. **10**

Summit a foreign peak. **10**

Och, noooo. Scotland is not foreign enough. Nor is Wales. Take a photo from the summit: 

Climb 20 different routes at the wall in a single session **10**

I got totally pumped on (date/wall):

Lead a route above your grade **10**
I was a total boss on (route/crag/grade (or wall)):

Second a route above your grade **10**

I sweated blood and nearly pulled my belayer from their perch whilst climbing (route/crag/grade (or wall)):

Climb a route from Classic Rock or Hard Rock **10**

I kicked ass today, and sent (route/Grade):

Spend half a day bouldering **10**

It's not all beanies and tea! I saw how the other half really live at (venue/date)

SUBTOTAL =



karma

Pitch somebody else's tent (as well as your own) **10**


I did a good deed for (name/size of tent):

Learn a new skill and teach it to another **10**

I taught a lesson in (skill/pupil):

Provide home made cake or snacks at the wall or meet **10**

I laboured in the kitchen to produce a batch of (food/diners/venue):

Carry a bag of rubbish (not your own) out of a crag or walk **10** 

I wiped the nose of (crag/hill/date):

Help a newbie **10**

I gave something back when I (date/newbie/gesture):


Take the rubbish or recycling away from a hut meet **10**

I loaded my car with everyone else's empty alcohol receptacles on (meet):


SUBTOTAL =

selfies

Tea shop selfie **10**

I papped myself today (shop/date): 

Gear shop selfie **10**

The staff looked at me like I was a flippin' lunatic (shop/town/date): 

SUBTOTAL =

promotions

Write an article (400 words min + photo(s)) for the Faff

20



I put pen to paper and wrote about (meet/route/day-hit/social/holiday):

Get the club publicised in printed, audio or digital media

10

I got us a shout out in/on (media/date):

Post a photo of yourself in action wearing club merchandise

10



I threw some shapes in my hoodie/tee and posted the shot on social media:

Provide a sketch to the promotions secretary for the next merchandise run

10

I learned loads from watching Neil Buchanan's Art Attack on ITV, so I got my pencil case out and drew a picture of:

Recreate a photo from a guide book

10



I got someone to pap me on:

SUBTOTAL =

grand total

I scored:

out of a possible 410 points

walking

Walk 10 miles or more in a day
I blazed a trail up/near/around (hill):

10

Bag 4 Wainwright's in a day

10

I was knackered after the second summit, but dug deep and prevailed the day I bagged (Wainwright's x4):

Bag a Munro

10

Now I understand why there isn't a challenge to bag 4 Munro's in a day. It took me all day just to get to the top of:

Get a personal best

10

Get those Strava's going..

Try a new outdoor Pursuit.

10

I hear Sky diving is good:

Recommend a campsite / pub / crag (or hill) combo for meet

10

I emailed the committee about an undiscovered gem, shhhh, don't tell anyone, it's...

Alpine start.

10

Have a pre-dawn start to achieve your objective, Getting up early for a fry up is not in the spirit of things.

SUBTOTAL =

random

Take library books on a meet

10

Grab the guides/maps for the meet and take them for everyone to use.

Donate some kit

10

Could be a 'biner to a newbie, or an old sleeping bag to a homeless charity:

Fire-starter

10

Bring, wood, coal or BBQ on a meet:

Hot shot

10

Submit an awesome high-res photo to the promo sec:



She-wee

10

Find a secluded spot at Burbage North where one can have a wee without being seen. Note down the what3words location:

SUBTOTAL =

Notes on daisy-chains

One of the most efficient ways to rack up lots of points is to complete challenges simultaneously. Here's an example. Go on a meet to North Wales, climb Grooved Arete, top out at Adam and Eve on the summit of Tryfan. You'd bag 15 points in total because you went on a meet (5 points), climbed a route from Classic Rock (10 points). Were you to belay a newbie up behind you you'd get 10 karma points as well.

Notes on photos

Where you see the camera icon you must submit photographic evidence by one of the, (1) Faffer's Whatsapp group, (2) the Mercian Facebook page, (3) Emailing the photo to the chairman.



POINTS BAGGING ON...

...THE LANGDALE MEET by Naomi Simmonite

The Robertson Lamb meet was the penultimate Lakes hut meet of the 2022/23 where 14 Mercians gathered for an activity-packed weekend in Langdale. And I managed to bag a few Chairman's Challenge points too.

Nothing like a bit of controversy to kick off preparations – should Tom (and Beth) travel from Scotland after Tom had unfortunately tested positive for COVID. Now, it's something that some of us don't think too much about these days but in essence, the general feeling is that if you've tested positive for COVID, or even if you're not feeling well generally, please don't come on a meet. The right decision was made though, as much as we missed out on their company.

It's funny how, as a climber, you rarely get to see some of the sights that walkers get and vice versa. So, I deliberately planned a walking route that took in 4 Wainright's (10pts) that I'd not been to before. Lou, Harry and Jaz put faith in my navigation skills (10 pts) and joined me in the slog up to Pavey Ark, and then onto Harrison Stickle, Pike of Stickle, 'blink and you'll miss it' Thunacar Knott, 'good photo opportunity' High Raise and, my favourite of the day, Langdale Pikes.



Naomi with Louise, Si and Vicki on the Sunday hike.



81 points in a single meet is impressive. Congratulations Naomi.

Thank you
Mr.
Chairman.

On our way down to the pub we bumped into Malcolm and Roland who had done a version of our walk and then, within a matter of moments, Karl and Lucy appeared who had been scrambling nearby. I had vague recollections of this footpath from a previous visit to Gimmer Crag on a Ceunant meet when I'd topped out with Fiona just before dark. A few years on and coming down in daylight I was particularly impressed with the fact that on that evening, Fiona and I got down to the Old Dungeon Gill in just over an hour. Perhaps it was because I knew I was in trouble with David for being back late, or the fact that I couldn't see the polished rock sections I was on.

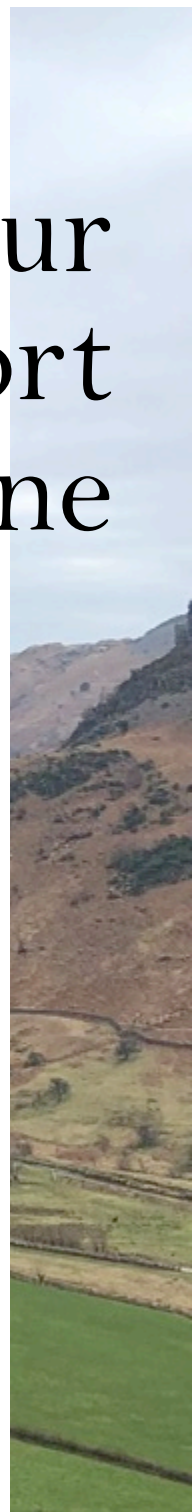
After a swift drink in the New Dungeon Gill, I left Lou and Harry to meet up with Vic, Stew, Si and Ruth in the Stickle Barn while I walked back to cook dinner (10pts). Vic and Stew had been climbing; Ruth demonstrated that she had her mojo back with an impressively long but fast walk over similar Wainright's but across to Bowfell and Pike O'Blisco; while Si had been on a similar route to Ruth but running. Dan, naturally, had been out training on his bike.

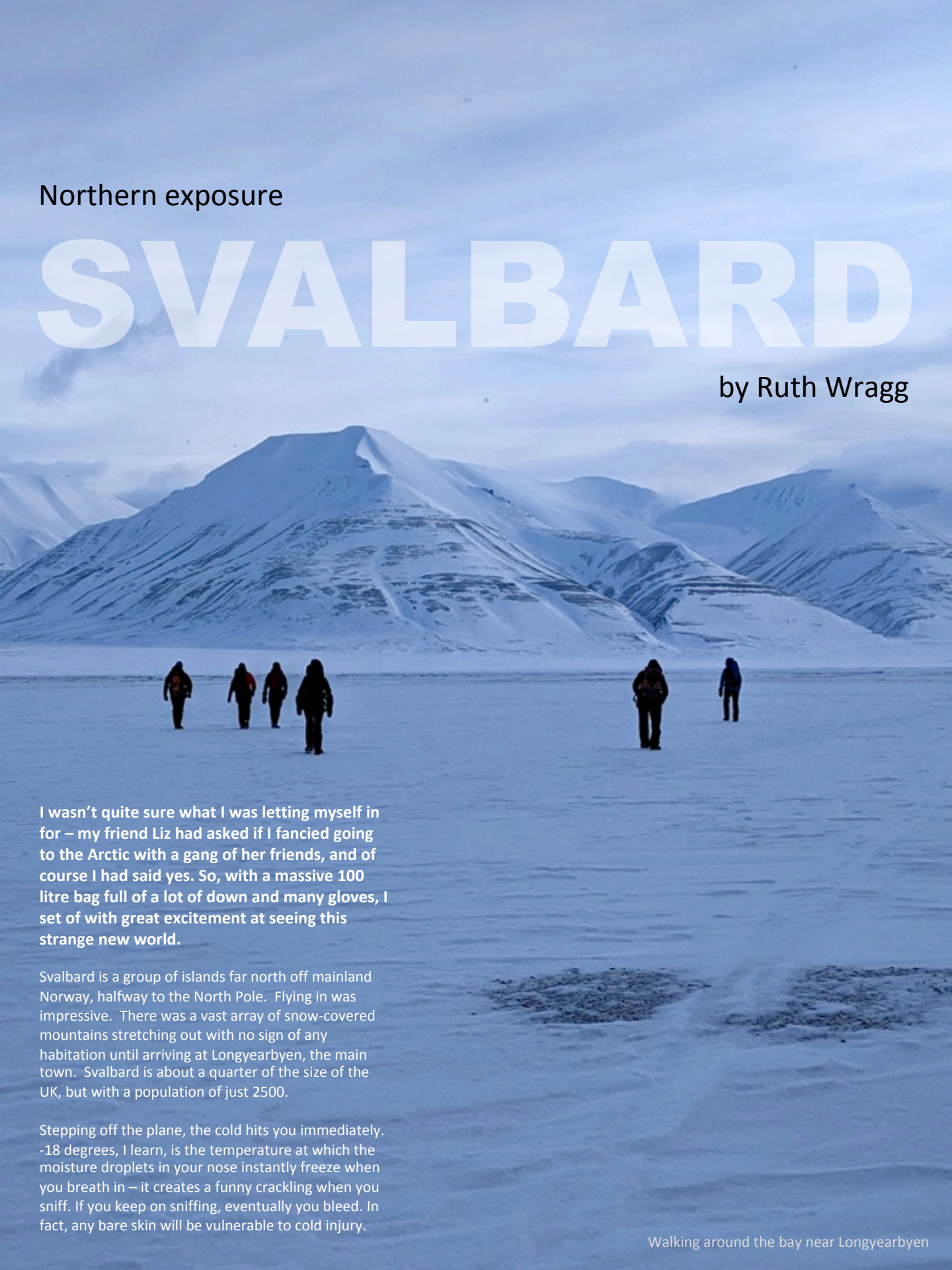
There was no let up on Sunday. Vic had attempted to do the Saturday morning tea run but unfortunately for her, everyone got up before she had the chance. I'd reckoned that Sunday morning was the better bet but I still only got tea for 4 (4pts) – why don't people stay in bed on Sundays?? Oh well, more biking for Dan and Stew on the Sunday while a group of us walked up Pike O'Blisco and another group went scrambling on Pavey.

In total 81 Chairman's Challenge points were earned in this weekend and a great example of how to rack up points by daisy-chaining:

Attending a meet (5); cook a meal on a meet (10); morning tea run (4); travel to a meet with a different Mercian (2); designated driver (10); lead a hike (10); take recycling home (10); bag 4 Wainright's in a day (10) and this article (20)

Extend your comfort zone





Northern exposure

SVALBARD

by Ruth Wragg

I wasn't quite sure what I was letting myself in for – my friend Liz had asked if I fancied going to the Arctic with a gang of her friends, and of course I had said yes. So, with a massive 100 litre bag full of a lot of down and many gloves, I set off with great excitement at seeing this strange new world.

Svalbard is a group of islands far north off mainland Norway, halfway to the North Pole. Flying in was impressive. There was a vast array of snow-covered mountains stretching out with no sign of any habitation until arriving at Longyearbyen, the main town. Svalbard is about a quarter of the size of the UK, but with a population of just 2500.

Stepping off the plane, the cold hits you immediately. -18 degrees, I learn, is the temperature at which the moisture droplets in your nose instantly freeze when you breathe in – it creates a funny crackling when you sniff. If you keep on sniffing, eventually you bleed. In fact, any bare skin will be vulnerable to cold injury.

Walking around the bay near Longyearbyen



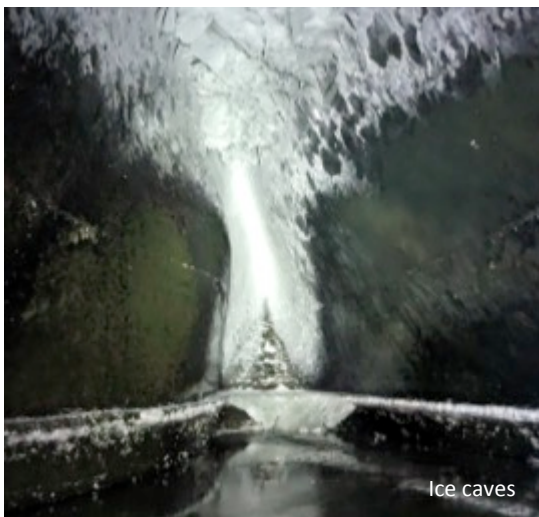
Those tyres didn't stand a chance

There are some day one logistics required. Firstly, a walk to town, to get the layering right. Then a trip to hire a gun and a walk to the rifle rang for shooting practice. You are not allowed to leave the town without a gun incase of polar bears – there are about 3000 of them out there somewhere, but we are unlikely to see any, apart from the taxidermied ones around town. Of course, if you actually do have to shoot a bear, you would be automatically arrested - something to think about. On the way we pass the global seed vault – there are over 1 million back up seeds in there – just in case of a disaster of some type.

Suitably kitted out, the next few days are spent exploring the hills and bay around the town. The bay is not completely frozen due to the gulf stream washing in there, but there are still icebergs to pose for photos with. The whole place is stunning. Walking is hard work, kicking and cutting steps all the way, but the pay off in the views is worth it. Whenever you stop for a break, the first job is a frantic fight to put on all your extra layers and mittens before the cold gets you. Then you can quickly stuff down some food and hot chocolate before hastily moving on.



The seed vault

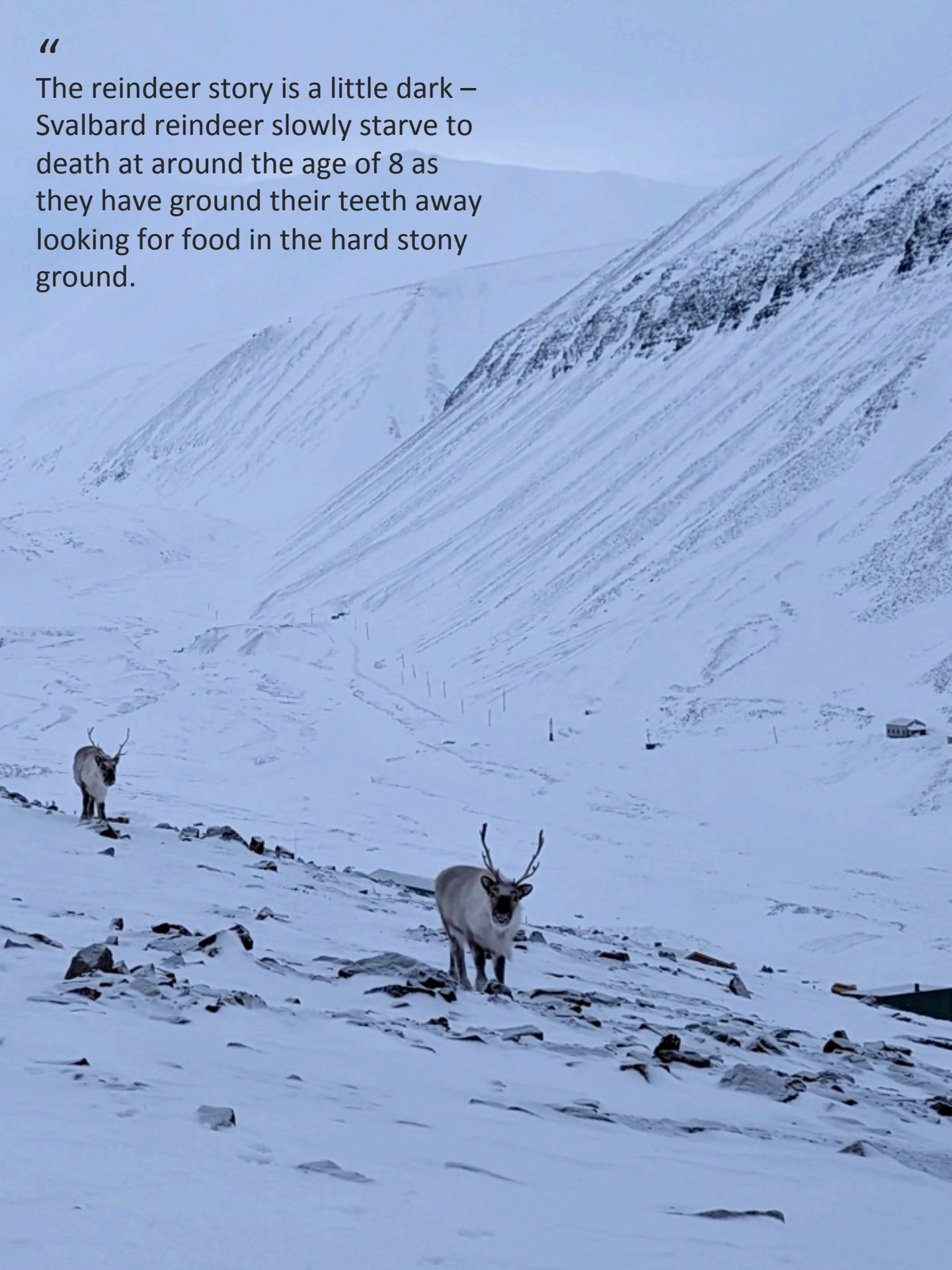


Ice caves

The glaciers nearby are static, and therefore not crevassed, but they do have some wonderful ice caves to explore. The vast runs of passages are quite confusing – we put in ice screws to mark the way back. At the back end of one of the more popular caves it is possible to rig the following passages. We found rope and screws insitu – someone was back there. Hauling up to look beyond it looked like it was quite a complicated undertaking that could take all day. On the way back we found some Austrians looking for their friends who had entered the cave that morning and were long overdue back. They had no kit with them as their friends had taken it all. We lent them all our remaining screws, ropes and crampons so they could go looking, to make sure all was well– turns out they had gotten over enthusiastic and lost track of time.

“

The reindeer story is a little dark – Svalbard reindeer slowly starve to death at around the age of 8 as they have ground their teeth away looking for food in the hard stony ground.

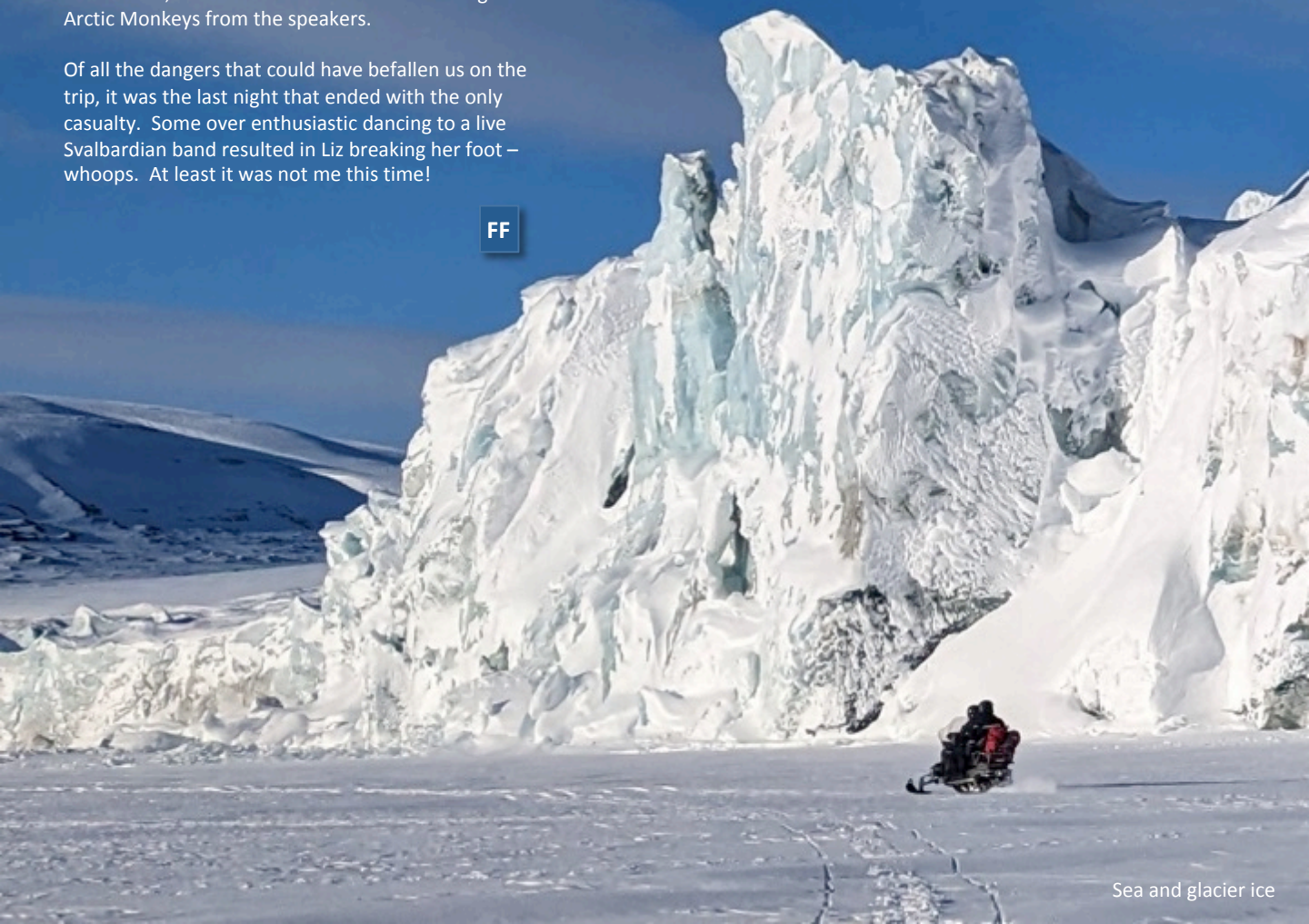


To get away from town and into the interior the best way was via snowmobile. We managed to hire 6 of these on the back of Liz's one driving license! What could possibly go wrong? Turns out snowmobiles are quite fast and not quite as stable as they look I managed to flip one and bury one in a snowdrift! Getting out into the vast wilderness was amazing. When you turn off the engines it is silent out there. The only sign of life is the odd reindeer digging through the snow looking for shoots. The reindeer story is a little dark – Svalbard reindeer slowly starve to death at around the age of 8 as they have ground their teeth away looking for food in the hard stony ground. Getting out to the east coast, the sea ice was vast and we took our snowmobiles over it to look at the tall glacial wall on the other side of the bay.

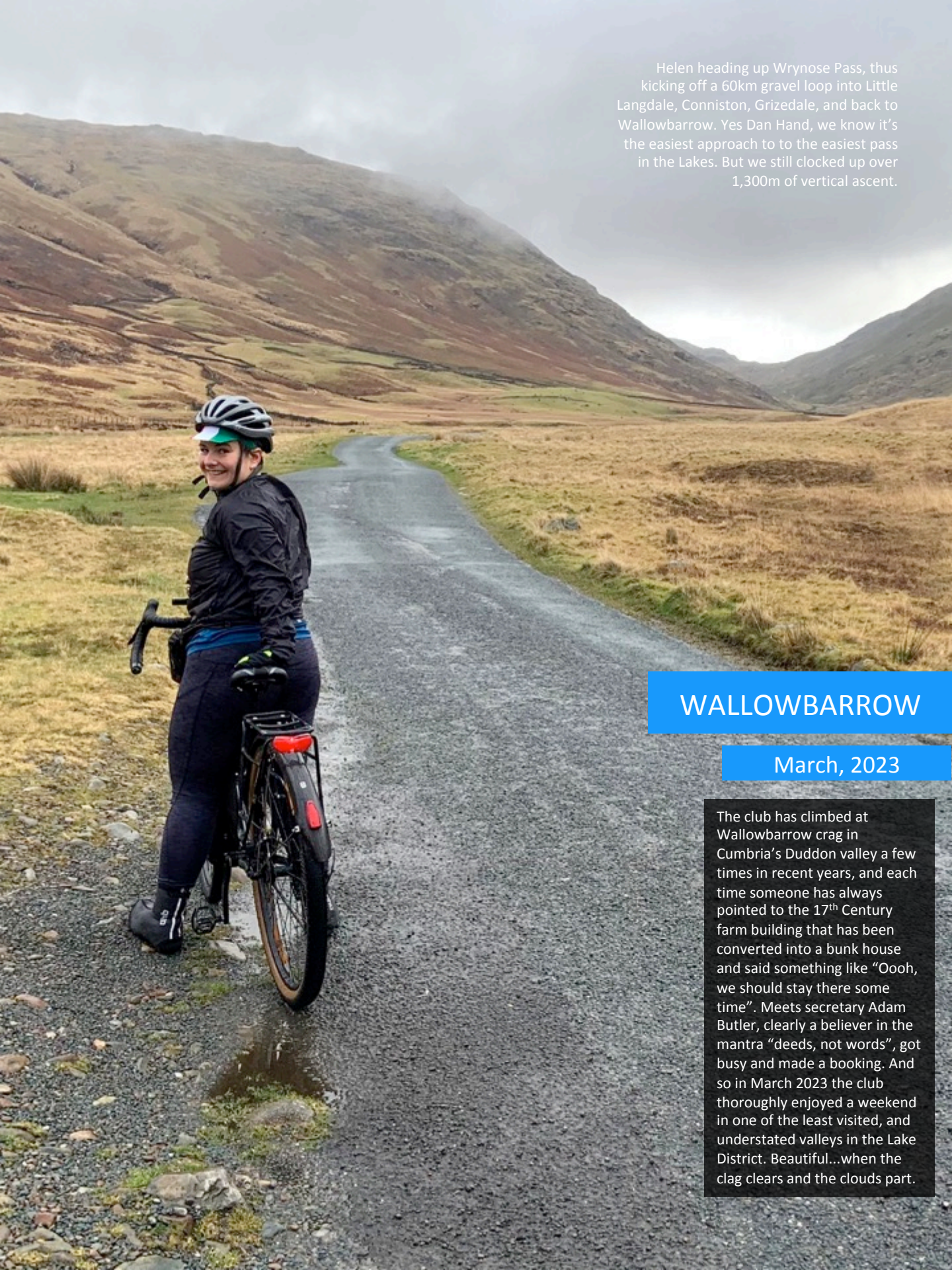
You can even take a snowmobile to “Russia”. Barentsburg is a Russian coal mining town on the island. It is a peculiar situation, in that the land is Norwegian, the people are half Russian and half Ukrainian, and there is a Russian consulate (the most northern diplomatic mission in the world). It clearly has little to do with what is going on in Russia and Ukraine further south. The coal mining conditions sound pretty horrendous. The mines go under the sea so the working conditions are wet and freezing. It is a pretty desolate place, which felt rather dead. We had lunch there, in a “Russian” bar that was blasting the Arctic Monkeys from the speakers.

Of all the dangers that could have befallen us on the trip, it was the last night that ended with the only casualty. Some over enthusiastic dancing to a live Svalbardian band resulted in Liz breaking her foot – whoops. At least it was not me this time!

FF



Sea and glacier ice

A woman wearing a black cycling jacket, black leggings, and a white and black helmet is standing next to her black road bike on a gravel path. She is smiling and looking back over her shoulder. The path leads into a vast, open valley with rolling hills and mountains in the background under a cloudy sky. The terrain is covered in dry, yellowish-brown grass and some patches of green.

Helen heading up Wrynose Pass, thus kicking off a 60km gravel loop into Little Langdale, Conniston, Grizedale, and back to Wallowbarrow. Yes Dan Hand, we know it's the easiest approach to to the easiest pass in the Lakes. But we still clocked up over 1,300m of vertical ascent.

WALLOWBARROW

March, 2023

The club has climbed at Wallowbarrow crag in Cumbria's Duddon valley a few times in recent years, and each time someone has always pointed to the 17th Century farm building that has been converted into a bunk house and said something like "Oooh, we should stay there some time". Meets secretary Adam Butler, clearly a believer in the mantra "deeds, not words", got busy and made a booking. And so in March 2023 the club thoroughly enjoyed a weekend in one of the least visited, and understated valleys in the Lake District. Beautiful...when the clag clears and the clouds part.



Climbing was a little damp and a little cold, but worthwhile when it's on your doorstep.



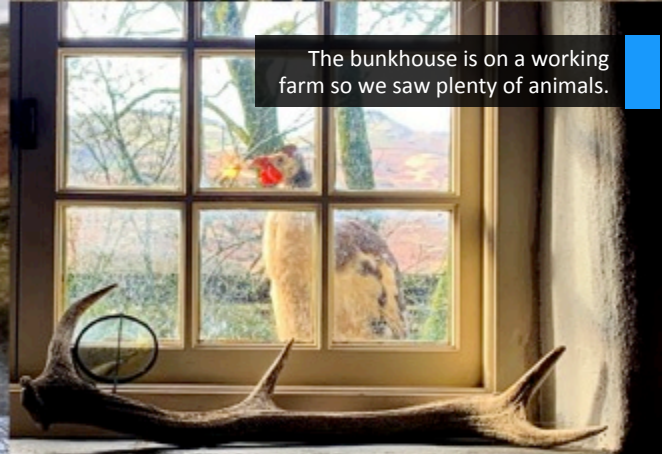
Stew posing with Tupac



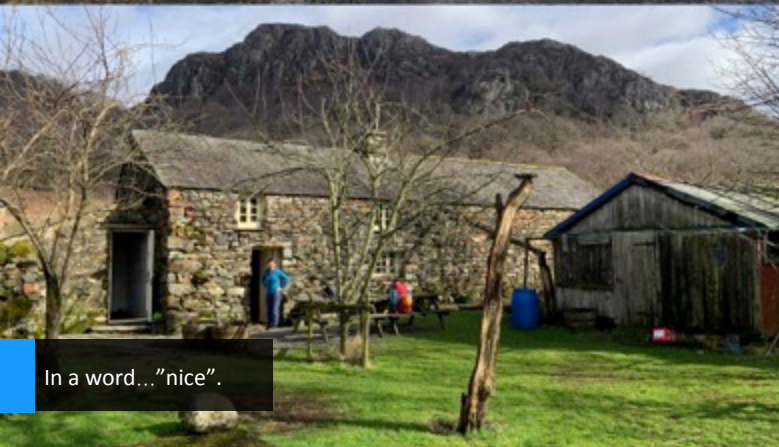
Vegan curry, naan bread, rice and raita formed the basis for Saturday's dinner. Followed lemon drizzle cake.



At the top of Wrynose.



The bunkhouse is on a working farm so we saw plenty of animals.



In a word... "nice".





£20 for a HUGE basket of wood was pretty good value.



Lou and Nima arrive back on Saturday after 10 Chairman's Challenge points for hiking 10 miles.



Yes, well, no meet is perfect, I suppose.

LOWSTERN EASTER

April, 2023

Some people ascended Ingleborough three times. Some people visited the Game Cock in Austwick three times. No matter what your priorities were it was guaranteed that the Easter meet in the Yorkshire Dales would deliver the goods. We all enjoyed the first BBQ of the year, some got slightly suburnt, and others rekindled their love for outdoors climbing.

And how did things end with regards to the relationship status of a certain flatmate of a certain club member?





Climbing was a little damp and a little cold, but worthwhile when it's on your doorstep.



The UK's hardest HS 4a?



Sunny cooking up a feast



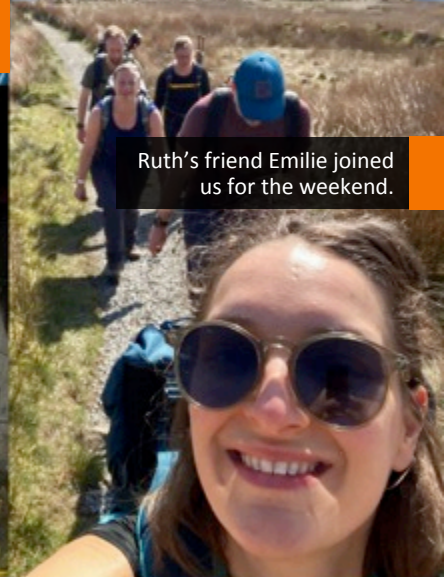
Was this the first, second or third ascent of Ingleborough?



Beers near Ingleton after climbing at Twistleton.



Sunset the night we arrived. A portent of good things to come.



Ruth's friend Emilie joined us for the weekend.



Lunch on Monday after the rain eventually came.





Photoshoot o'clock at Pot Scar with Dave taking snaps of Anna on the classic VS of the crag.



Sport climbing at Robin Proctor's Scar.



Dinner with a view.



Visit 1 to The Game Cock, Austwick.



Dave picked the best camping spot.



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Testimonials \ New home owners



“We couldn’t be happier with our new country home”

Anna and Amandeep, Clapham, Yorkshire

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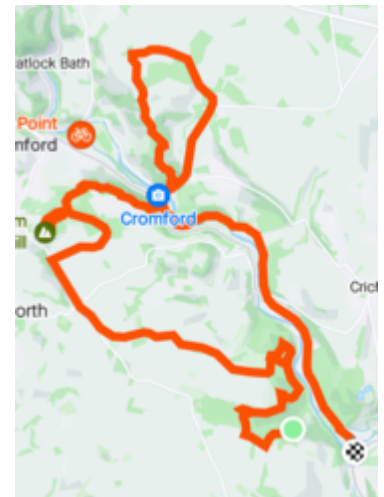
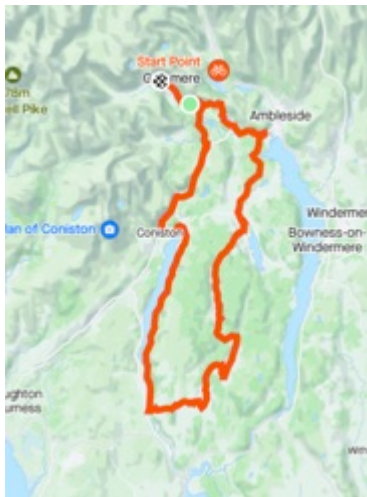
WHAT'S THE MOST FUN YOU CAN HAVE ON **TWO WHEELS** ?



If you want to inject a bit more **BIKE** into your HIKE, BIKE, CLIMB then you're in luck. The Faff editorial team (Stew) reviews three cycling experiences with three different Mercian guides to help you choose the best way to spend a day in the saddle.

	Road	Gravel	Mountain
Best for	Experiencing what it's like to be part of the peloton on 'The Tour'.	A great all-round day out with a variety of pit stops.	A rollercoaster ride combining joy and terror in equal measures.
			
Guided by	Dan	Helen	Adam
Start/end	Little Langdale, The Lakes	Eskdale, The Lakes	Ambergate, The Peak
Presentation of the guide	Head to toe in spandex, lycra and rubber cycling boots with foot beds to maximise power output, Dan looks the part.	A strong dark gravel ensemble topped by a peaked cap in Italian tricolour. Nice.	None of that Fox or Troy What-his-chops attire. Just non-chalant baggy shorts, battered waterproof and slightly disheveled hair.
Distance	60km	60km	28km
Elevation	914m	1,338m	575m
Ride highlight	Lovely traffic-free lanes down the 'other' side of Coniston Water.	Beautiful smooth gravel in Grizedale forest and off-road descents.	Flowy single track through Coumbs Wood.
Hardest bit	The climb up from Coniston towards Grizedale forest.	The final steep uphill back into Eskdale was a kick in the teeth.	Steeper ground with wet tree roots that will ruin your day.
Pace	Fast. Keeping up with Dan is a good challenge of anyone's stamina.	Consistently steady, ideal for any relatively fit cyclist.	Adam is hardcore on the downhill, but always waits patiently at the bottom.
Nav	Spot on. Good route finding using an up front Garmin, but needed my help finding a decent café.	Excellent. Helen had previously scouted out the best café stop in Coniston to ensure its suitability which was a nice touch.	The odd wrong turn, but that's a minor gripe given the micro-nav of unmarked woodland trails.
On route flexibility	I'm not saying it was "my way or the high way" but no options were given. And in fairness, none were needed.	Helen had diligently planned short, medium and long versions. Though deep down she was gunning for the long one.	Myriad shortcuts were offered with clear instructions of how to regroup at the bottom. Very safety conscious.

Route Map



Scenery

Pretty rolling hills between Coniston and Grizedale.

Amazing views from Wrynose coming into Little Langdale.

Some pretty rural scenes but mostly in the trees.

Café

The excellent Minstrels Gallery café in Hawkshead serving the best sausage sandwich I'd had. Great cake and panninis, but we had to sit outside to mind the bikes.

Good vegan meals at the busy Blue Bird Café on the shore of Coniston. Helen had thoughtfully brought a bike lock so we could sit inside. We recommend the carrot cake.

High Peak Junction at Cromford offering al fresco seating. Coffee and pleasingly 'heavy' tiffin and flapjacks, but cakes were conspicuous by their absence.

Dogging

Moving so fast I failed to notice any four-legged friends.

A smattering of assorted dogs in busy Coniston.

Three cute sausage dogs by the canal. Win-win-win.

Pub

No pub stop was proffered on account of us having to drive home after the ride. Full marks for safety consciousness.

The perfectly located Blacksmith's Arms in Broughton Mills. A rustic country inn 6 miles from the end with a roaring fireplace, friendly staff and local ale.

In eyeshot of the end was the unusually named Hurt Arms (even though it was my legs that hurt) with a tidy beer garden. Nice IPA.

Take it to the next level

Join Dan on one his custom routes specifically aimed to maximise the amount of uphill...and suffering.

Try a fantastic linear route to a meet and grab a lift home.

A fabulous West-East traverse of The Peak picking up Potato Alley and other fun named descents where "you're fully committed once you're on it"

And if none of that lights your candle and you want something really different... how about pushing your bike through a really dense forest for a day?



It all kicked off with Connor finding a tick in his armpit which wasn't the beginning any of us had hoped for. Ruth showed her medical prowess and butchered said tick with a combination of tweezers and extraction kits; it was a stubborn little bugger. But the highlight of the meet was retreating into Helen's huge bell tent in the evenings. Well, that and the hiking, and the biking, and the climbing. The Vanner campsite was a cracking venue, peaceful with a brilliant shower block, and unlike other csampsites featuring a ruined abbey, this one didn't smell of a Victorian sewer.

Beth enjoying the swimming in the shadow of Cadair Idris.





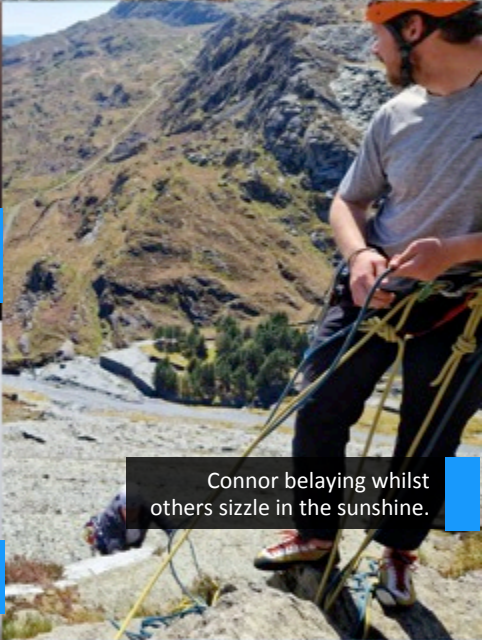
The 'gravel ladies' on their loop from Dolgellau to the Coed Y Brenin forest and back.



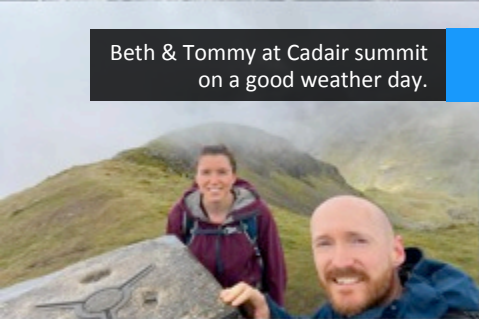
Climbing at Crag Y Clippiau in the Moelwyns



Glamping in Helen's bell tent, complete with tea-light chandelier.



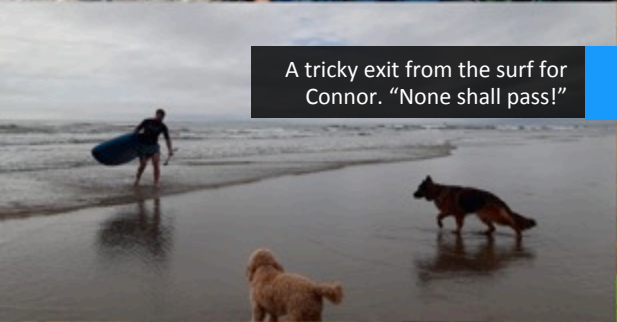
Connor belaying whilst others sizzle in the sunshine.



Beth & Tommy at Cadair summit on a good weather day.



Ruth at the Cadair summit on a dreadful weather day.



A tricky exit from the surf for Connor. "None shall pass!"



Team summit selfie on Cadair Idris.





Man-leg that'd put Tom Randall's belayer to shame.



Helen didn't think it was going to be quite so deep!



Stew & Helen on their 60km gravel ride.



The descent from the climbing crag near Blah-Blah Ffestiniog.



The Stag Inn on Sunday night for pizza and beer.



Kicking back and drinking coffee in the bell tent..

Ian Moore reports on **MID WEEK MEETS**



The mid week meets continue to grow with a regular monthly meets to areas around the West Midlands. The last two meets have welcomed back Alan Hardie to the active group following his life changing illness.

The April meeting organised by Malcolm Imhoff took place in Sutton Park with two options. One route visited all the lakes in the park while a shorter route designed with Alan in mind consisted of a shorter circuit which Alan managed walking with two sticks, pushing himself in his wheelchair or been pushed by others including a short stint by Geoff Taylor.

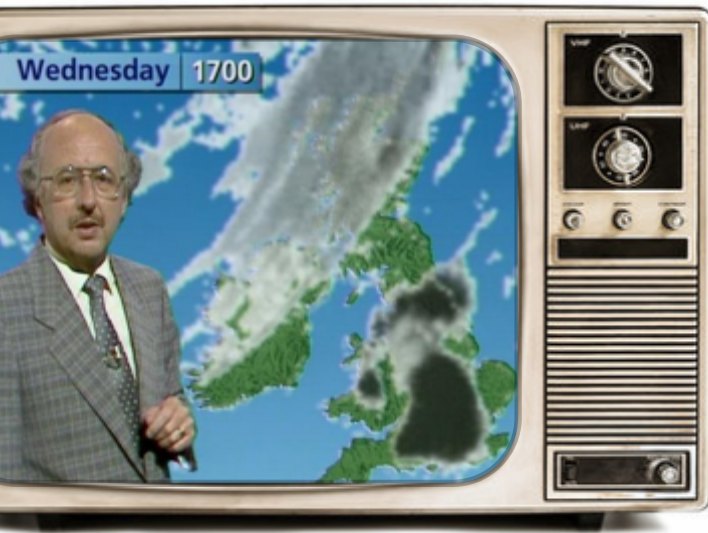
After the walk we all had a fulsome meal in the nearby pub. The May meet arranged by Mike Hogg took us to Parsley Hay on the Tissington trail. Mike and Alan cycled up the trail 3km and back. Mike on his electric bike while Alan peddled a rented tricycle. The rest of the group completed a circular route around the cycle trail. We all met up afterwards for a food from the snack bar near the cycle rental store. Mixing in with a large group of kids who had just completed the two day duke of Edinburgh challenge.

Dave and I have made sure Alan has no respite as we have supported him to climb at Red Point. Richard Holland who also had some health issues hopes to join us at some future meets so it will be great to see him again.

FF



Weather Forecasts are for Winter



A few hours before the Great Storm of 1987 broke, on 15 October 1987, Michael Fish (pictured) famously said: "...if you're watching, don't worry, there isn't a storm coming!". What followed that night was the worst storm to hit south-east England for three centuries.

Was that epic gaff the seminal moment that resulted in forecasts having a strong whiff of pessimism? **Helen Coulson** offers her view.

Picture the scene. It's mid afternoon and you're back at the hut after a downscaled day out looking wistfully out of the window at the mountains that definitely are not as wet and windy as the forecast said they would be. Or perhaps you're sitting at home looking at the sunny photos for the meet you decided not to go on because the forecast was bad. Sound familiar?

Weather forecasts are intentionally pessimistic. "Wet bias" is where forecasts overestimate the chances of undesired outcomes so that we, their audience, have better chances of staying warm and dry.

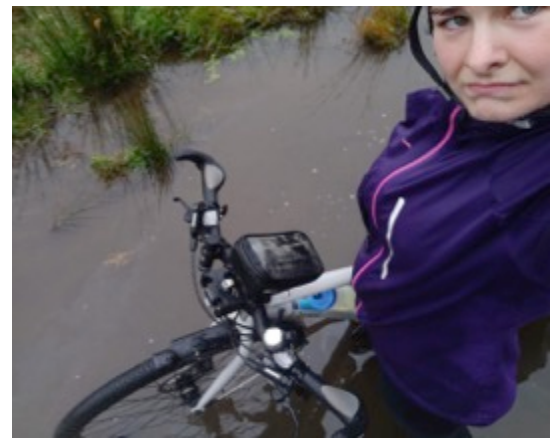
Except that if we're heading up a mountain we (probably!) aren't looking to stay warm and dry, only to avoid dangerous or particularly miserable conditions. The vast majority of the time a step out the door in the morning and a look at the sky will tell you what you need to know about the weather for at least the next few hours and reassessment when you're out will let you decide between continuing as planned or taking a less exposed or shorter route home.

I don't make plans based on the forecast anymore because I've had too

many days where it's put me off going out, or going far, and then I've been sitting at home looking out at a perfectly OK day where I could have ridden that originally planned extra 60km without issue. Instead I have contingency plans both in terms of the kit I take with me and route options for coming back early. I'm now so accustomed to re-planning on the fly that I find sticking to a set plan quite restrictive.

There are always exceptions; during winter conditions, when a plan is committing enough to make bailing difficult and for activities where moderate weather could be dangerous (no one wants to be out on the water with an inflatable craft in 20mph winds) then of course, check the forecast! But next time you fancy a walk or a ride or even a swim maybe give the forecast a miss and see if it turns out so badly. The worst that can happen is you get wet and go to a pub.

Besides, there's a certain joy in being soaked through and letting go of restraint to gleefully splash through puddles knowing a hot shower and dry clothes are only a few hours away.



Connor and Charlie having topped out on a route on Holyhead Mountain on the Saturday. The subtle but effective man-leg pose from Connor hasn't gone unnoticed.

Anglesey

May, 2023

Bank holiday number two, or was it number three? Either way they seem to come thick and fast at the moment. This time the club headed into Snowdonia....and out the other side...for fun, sun, sea cliffs, beaches and a fabulous camping location at Church Bay on Anglesey.





Firing up the BBQs on the Saturday evening. Holyhead Mountain in the distance.



The cornerstone of every healthy meal.



Huw tending to his sausages.

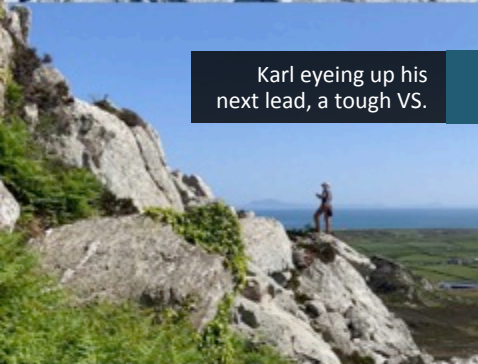


When the sun set and the breeze picked up it got a tad chilly, but Karl and Lucy had a great firepit for us to gather around.





Connor giving it the beans on King Bee Crack (proper HVS 5a) at Holyhead Mountain. A great lead.



Karl eyeing up his next lead, a tough VS.



Connor and Charlie on the warm up route on Holyhead Mountain.

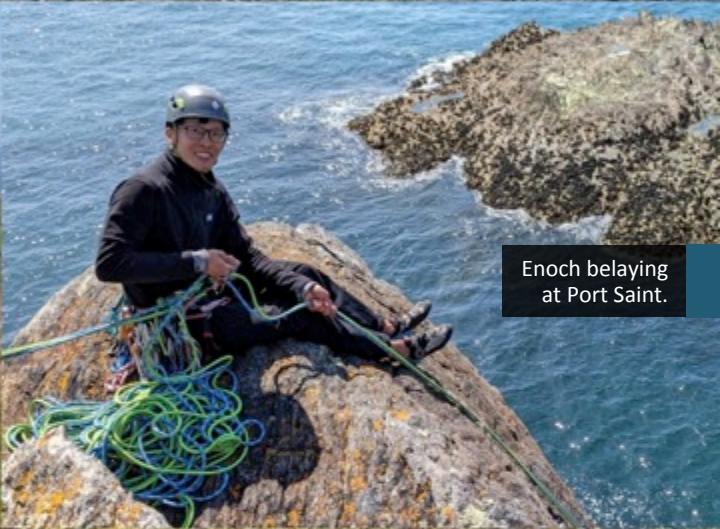




One of many trips to the pub.



The Sunday hiking team.



Enoch belaying at Port Saint.




Ice cream in Ogwen for Ruth and Zoe who wanted some pre-Skye scrambling training.



Helen doing a nice 160km ride round the isle of Anglesey.



A man wearing a red helmet, a blue long-sleeved shirt, and black trousers is scrambling on a dark, jagged rock face. He is smiling and giving a thumbs-up. He has a backpack and climbing gear. In the background, there are vast, rugged mountain ranges under a clear sky.

Dave scrambling on the Cuillin.
Who doesn't want to be Dave in
this photo?

Skye

July, 2023

They say lightning doesn't strike the same place twice. They also say that you're lucky to get amazing weather for a whole week on Skye. What the heck do "they" know about anything. Those who made the massive schlep up to Skye were rewarded with some amazing adventures and a few epics whilst staying in the lap of luxury - the Glenbrittle Memorial Hut.



Beer o'clock after the first day of scrambling



Zoe abseiling off the InPin on her traverse of the Cuillin Ridge.



Nima on the ridge.

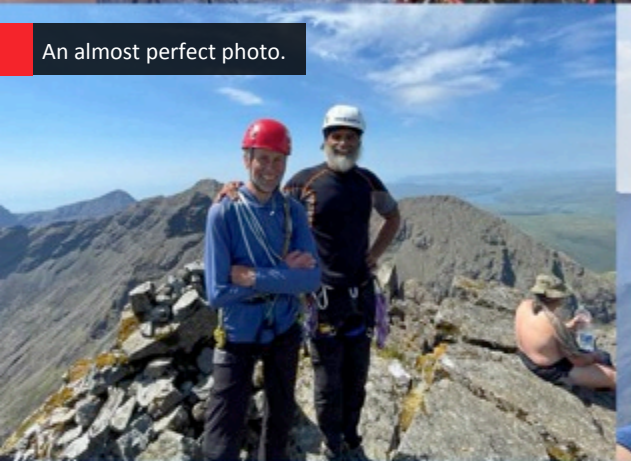


Yes, there is more to Skye than the Cuillin, it has some amazing sea cliffs too.





Communal dinner of leftovers on the last night in the hut.



An almost perfect photo.



Descending the Green Lady at the northern tip of Skye.



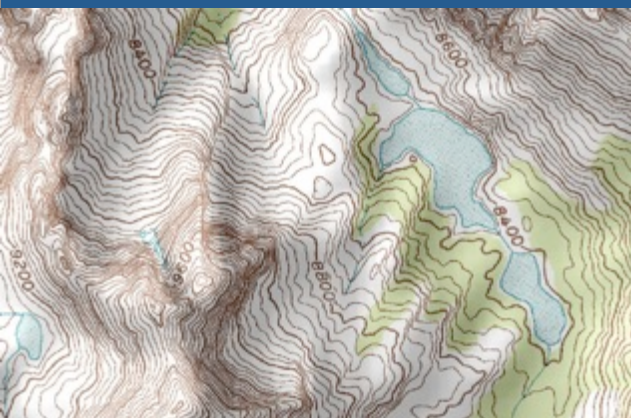
In the last Faff we reported on the results of the Mercian 2022 Elevation Challenge. Founded by Dan 1.0, this now annual battle exists in the digital world of Strava, where each vertical meter logged pushes the contestant higher up the leader board.

Debates (let's not call them arguments) have been rife, and include Garmin elevation -v- Strava elevation, whether ski lifts are included (they aren't), recording the same activity on two devices (shameful), contestants accidentally leaving their Garmin on whilst driving to the Roaches (scandalous, but easily fixed), and a lively discussion about bikes.

This last discussion is interesting. In 2022 Beth Adamson bagged the award for "highest ranked contestant to achieve all their elevation on foot". An accolade of merit for sure.

But just how much does a bike help...or hinder?

Helen Coulson picks up with the science part...



The Elevation Challenge A Cyclists Defence

It's not easier to cycle up hills than to walk up them, you're just climbing the wrong hills.

Cycling is a very energy efficient mode of transport along *flat* routes. On flat ground running and walking consume about 100 kcal/mile, while biking at a moderate pace consumes about 30. However, due to the added weight of the bike and the inability to cycle very slowly without toppling over it becomes less efficient and less practical the steeper the incline. There is, after all, a reason cyclists get off and push after a certain point; it's easier to walk up a steep hill pushing or carrying a bike than it is to ride it.

To briefly flash back to GCSE physics, the Work done in climbing a hill is calculated as $9.81 \times \text{total mass in kg} \times \text{metres climbed}$. So that's...

$$\text{Work} = 9.81 \times \text{Mass} \times \text{Elevation}$$

For cyclists, that mass includes the bike, which unless you've spent Dan 1.0 amounts of cash on getting the lightest, most aerodynamic, and hi-tech bike available, and refuse to even consider carrying a frame bag for extra snacks, will weigh significantly more than an average* rucksack for a day hike.

At a certain steepness for any given rider and bike combination, biking goes from being more efficient than walking to less efficient. That point at which the gradient becomes too steep will depend on your gear ratios, combined weight of the rider and bike, cycling fitness etc. But it will exist for everyone.

To put it in perspective, the bike record for the race up Mt. Washington in the USA (1,420m elevation over 12.2km @ 11% gradient) is 53:00 whereas the run record is 56:41. An 11% gradient isn't particularly steep as UK hills go, and would probably feel like a bimbly to walk, but start getting consistently into the 15-20% range and the road bikes will start dropping off. Even the mountain bikes will be struggling past 25%.

An in depth** analysis of imperfect*** data from Strava shows that the amount of time we've each spent moving is relatively well correlated to the elevation we've gained so far this year. That is to say, generally, the longer you've spent moving, the more elevation you'll have logged on the challenge. No surprises there.

* Not Vic's rucksack

** Not actually in depth at all.

*** Data up to and including 29th June 2023. I couldn't get data for Mai so her efforts aren't accounted for. Time spent moving includes non-qualifying activities for the elevation challenge (e.g. swimming, canoedling, ballroom dancing etc..).

The data also shows that certain people have an average of more elevation gained per hour of movement than others, namely those who have been obsessively hill training for one of Europe's toughest mountainous sportives all year (Dan 1.0) or whose primary social activity is mountain biking up the hill in their backyard (Fabian). This should also not come as a surprise. What might surprise you is that 3rd place on the most efficient elevation : time ratio is Mr Moody who has clearly done a good job of prioritising his activity time even without Tom snapping at his heels on the leader board.

The people who have focused their efforts the least on metres climbed are Vic (that lack of hill training for the Round Sheffield Run is showing), Beth H and Zoe (rivers are pretty flat and you rarely paddle uphill).

So...what does that mean for you, and how can you increase your standing in the elevation challenge before New Year?

Firstly, and most obviously, spend more time moving. Spend an extra 50% of the time that you currently do outside doing your usual activities and you'll suddenly gain metres at 150% of the rate you did before. It does help if you're willing to spend all your annual leave on activity time.

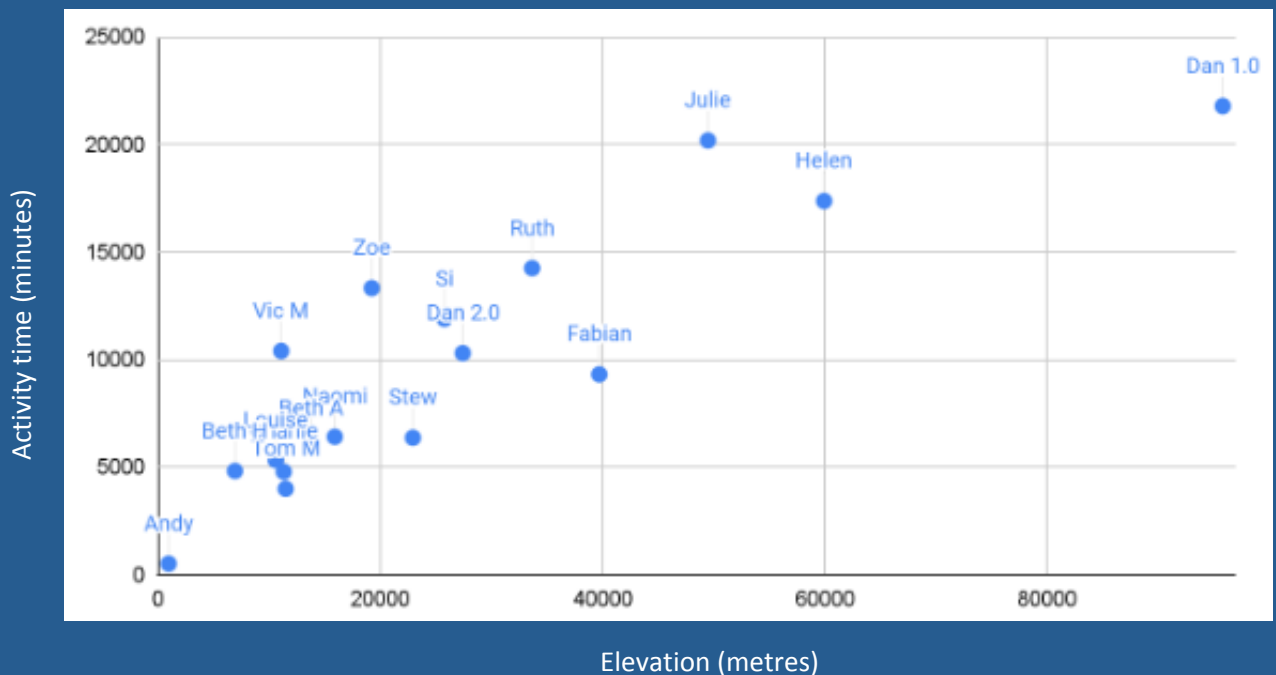
Secondly, seek out those hills! A park run around Cannon Hill Park isn't going to gain you as many metres as one at Wyre Forest. A nice pootle through Woodgate Valley isn't going to help you overtake your nemesis as much as a walk around the Lickeys. Make your time count.



And lastly, choose an appropriate mode of attack for the hills you've got available. Going for a pub lunch? Get the bike out, it'll be quicker and more energy efficient. Wainwright bagging? Hike it, and run the flat bits and descents if you really want to optimise your time spent, you might even get an extra hill in.

Of course, if you don't want to do those things, that's fine! But in the words of the challenge founder "Quit complaining about not winning when you haven't put the effort in."

Elevation v Distance in the 2023 Challenge



photofaff by VICKI MOODY



Car Faff. Tommy joins the rare brotherhood of Mercians who have appeared twice in the throes of an almighty waste of time. Unlike most people who have genuinely had car trouble on a meet (Adam and Vijay come to mind, but Julie takes the biscuit), Tommy decided to play a little game of Postman Pat on the Anglesey meet. All that's missing is his back and white cat.



descent of Hard Knott Pass



SWEAT, SUNTAN AND SWEARING

Conquering Europe's Biggest Bike Climbs

by Dan 1.0

A line of riders stretched out in front and behind me as we passed the snowline on the winding hairpins of the Col du Galibier, a 32km long unclassifiable category climb at 2642m altitude with 1924m ascent. I was starting to feel quite ill in the baking heat of summer in the alps and already riders were getting off and walking. Determined I pushed onto the summit gripping the handlebars tightly and focusing on each metre.

I was 8 hours into the Marmotte Granfondo Alpes widely regarded as one of the hardest in Europe at 185km and 5530m elevation. However this was the final event of 6 months of training in the UK, Spain and the Pyrenees.

I started 2023 overweight (a capital crime in the elevation world) and with no-go areas on the bike, which I knew I couldn't get up. In fact the whole biking malarky was relatively new to

me, having picked it up as an addition to running in the pandemic. In 2023 could I get fit and truly prove my cycling credentials by playing in the big league and get up these mountains alongside lifelong riders?

As a motivator as well as signing up for the Marmotte I also entered the Fred Whitton Sportive, a Lake district event of 112 miles (182km) and 3500m of climbing covering the major passes of the national park. In order to have any chance of successfully completing these events, I would have to start getting serious about training and dieting to get as fit as a mountain goat in time for the end of May deadline for the Fred. This meant most weekends I would be found spinning or grinding my way up the Hills of Peaks, Snowdonia or the Lakes. Plus during the week I would stimulate the last climb of the Marmotte, the Tour De France classic Alpe D'Huez on my indoor bike trainer with a pumping



power metal music background. I would also do nighttime 'hill rep' sessions up the Clent Hills with lights to get used to the eye watering 20% plus gradients of the Fred Whitton.

Gone was trad climbing, mountaineering and trail running. I was all in for this endeavour come what may.

And so it was on a Sunday morning in May I woke up in Grasmere and freewheeled to the startline of Britain's premier cycling sportive. The weather gods had smiled on us with a good weather window in what had been weeks of rain and wind. This was excellent news as we were about to tackle the mountainous passes of Kirkstone, Honister, Newlands, Whinlatter and the monsters that were Hardknott and Wrynose.

I set off at a probably too brisk pace on the approach to ambleside passing the waves in front with a few other fast and worryingly lean riders. My ambitions were soon reigned in as I tempered my excitement and settled into a gentle pace with a goal of completing the event and not

embarrassing myself.

We soon left Ambleside and started up the relatively gentle Kirkstone pass in the beautiful morning mist. Unfortunately this is where the first of my problems arose as I got the first of several punctures that cost me up to 40 minutes of time during the day. It's certainly a little demoralising seeing half the field pass you as you sort your bike out. This was quickly forgotten with a stunning descent into Patterdale followed by a breakneck pace into Keswick with a swift peloton of riders I had latched onto the back of.

The turnout in Keswick was amazing with locals filling the streets shaking cowbells and shouting encouragement, this was replicated at the top of whinlatter with an almost Tour de France atmosphere and again up to Hardknott the local farmers were all standing outside!

The first real challenge of the day was Honister Pass, with a brutal 20% section in the first kilometre out of Seatoller (you remember engaging your 2nd or 1st gear driving up

this!) This was easily dispatched at a steady pace before a dangerous descent and up onto Newlands Pass climb back towards Whinlatter.

Another section of 20% gradient presented itself on what some judge to be the most picturesque pass of the park. However this time the road was narrow with hapless trapped cars in a sea of 2500 cyclists. It was at this point I heard the first sound of people falling back off their bikes and clattering to the road. You have to lean forward and balance your weight between the front and rear wheels to avoid this fate, all while avoiding obstacles and straining at low RPM on the pedals!

I got through the remaining climbs to the West side of the lake district and about 100 miles before the beast of the day Hardknott pass presented itself. I could not see the climb directly in the mist and light drizzle that had rolled in later in the day to the western lakes. However I could make out an almost inverse landing stripe effect of rider lights snaking their way up vertically, this was a truly horrifying sight. Especially knowing that 20%, 25% and 30% sections awaited me,



ascent of Col Du Tourmalet in the Pyrenees

could I get up this on the bike?

The answer was no, I did have to walk up the hardest section as did at least half the field. In fact this isn't surprising as some cyclists consider it a lifetime achievement to get up still on the bike after repeated attempts. It was truly impressive to see the grit and determination of riders tackling the 30% plus sections while being cheered on by hardcore fans. I carried on up Wrynose and then Blea Tarn to the welcoming sight of the Langdale Pikes and all downhill to the finish with a respectable time of 8:45.

The first challenge was done, but I still had the alps to contend with, which while not as steep as the UK climbs, are much longer and at altitude. To help, I decided I needed to get experience climbing some of these beasts as well as descending safely (the descents can take 30-60 minutes at 60 kph on 26mm tyres!). I went to Argelès-Gazost outside Lourdes in the Pyrenees where I tackled Tour de France classics such as the Hautacam, Col d'Aspin and one of the most famous Col Du Tourmalet.

The Col Du Tourmalet is a 18.3km, 1404m ascent climb to 2101m at an average gradient of 7%. It took me 1 hour 37 minutes to complete in June and was absolutely beautiful, one of the best climbs I've done on a bike. These climbs are all about keeping focused for the effort ahead and maintaining a pacing strategy. The issue was that three weeks after this I would need to do three of these Hors Catégorie (HC) unclassifiable climbs in a row. What's more, a week out from the event the organisers emailed with a course update that would add another climb and 500 metres of ascent, bringing the total to 5530m in 186km, not welcome news!

And so it was that I found myself moving away from the startline in wave two at 0720 hrs in Le Bourg-d'Oisans near Grenoble in the French Alps. There were a few fast moves in some of the only flat road of the day before the pace slowed as we hit the first climb of the day the Col de la Croix-de-Fer up to 2021 m altitude over 28.1km and with 1537m of ascent, I paced myself and enjoyed the cool and picturesque climb

punctuated by the sight of the first of many crashes of the day on a short intermediate descent. With one rider sitting dazed by the side of the road with blood and road rash over the back of his body, this was the first reminder to stay sharp, people have died in this race!

The first climb was completed in style with a full alpine vista reward on the summit before a swift descent and then ascent of the add on climb the Col Du Mollard. It was the descent on the other side of the Mollard that 40 potholed hairpins claimed many more victims with at least 4 serious accidents and riders shaking out their brake lever hand to relieve numbness.

In the valley time and temperatures were getting on, it was absolutely sweltering with temperatures in the high 20s and we were just about to start the biggest challenge of the day, the Col Du Galibier, starting with the Telegraph climb out of the valley. This was dispatched with ease but I was starting to see riders lying down talking bakes at the side of the road in the baking heat, not ideal when you

need to reach a tight cut-off of 16:30 at the top to avoid being pulled out of the race!

With a short drop and water refill we reached the Galibier where the wheels started to come off and we started this story. The higher I got on this climb the worse I felt, was it the altitude? Maybe small in mountaineering terms, but for an endurance event every little counts, however I guessed it was probably the heat. I truly wanted to stop in the last 3km but kept pushing to get the time limit which I finally got to with 40 minutes to spare.

It was almost an hour of descent back to the start where I had to stay sharp and not get distracted by the the stunning views of the La Grave glacier, in fact I later found out a poor rider's next memory during the ride down was waking up in Grenoble hospital will no memory of what happened in between!

One final challenge remained, another HC unclassifiable climb up Alpe d'Huez for another 1118m of ascent for

13.9km at 8% average over 21 famous hairpins. I had recovered a little on the descent and managed to eat something, but I could tell I was in a bad way. The first 11% ramps up the Alpe were a brutal sight but taken in good spirits despite the many stationary cyclists on every hairpin after, this optimism gradually melted away as the sickness of the Galibier returned and I ground through to 3km up the climb, no more I wanted to throw up my body was telling me there was something badly wrong, I got off my bike wondering what to do.

I was past the last cut-off, within reason I could still finish, but it was a long way up with at least 9km of hill to bike or walk, on top of that I didn't want to end up in hospital with heat stroke or worse as has been known to happen in the events history. I decided to walk and see what would happen, I wasn't the only one with visibly sick cyclists strewn along the roadside. I got back on my bike for a kilometre or two then walked most of the rest of the climb with one water fountain to drench myself, lifting the spirits. Although seeing the people you have been riding by for much of the race come back down with medals with quite a bit left to go yourself was a little disheartening!

When the gradient eased with 2km to go I got back on the bike and tried to finish in as much style as possible with a short effort into town the finish line and a finishers medal. I had managed to complete both my goals, and perhaps just for a moment at least contend with, rather than conquer, these mountains on a bike.

FF

the stunning descent of the Galibier, with La Grave in the background



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