

Chairman's speech empties room

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Ann makes history



Dartmoor chill-out



Welsh 3,000's



Dry stone walling



Bill Burt Tours



Outgoing Chairman Bill Burt failed to captivate his audience in his final speech at the Annual Dinner. Unable to face the humiliation he drowns his sorrows and exiles himself to Norway.

Chairman seeks solace in a bottle...

...and is totally wasted!



Venus in pink—and others too numerous to mention



Eddie demonstrates why he is 'Member' of the year

A Lucky Horseshoe

Reporter: Matthew Taylor



In the light of morning, we saw that there was more snow on the mountains of Glen Coe than we had appreciated when we arrived the evening before. But they were by no means deep in snow. Seen from the valley, only the highest tops had a consistent sprinkling, while lower down the dark rock gradually gave way to honey coloured slopes. More snow than we had thought, but not too much to discourage us from our decision to walk the Ballachulish Horseshoe, also known as Beinn a' Bheithir (pronounced, I am assured, Ben Vare).

So it happened that Geoff Sharpe and I found ourselves pulling our boots on in the Ballachulish car park one Saturday in early March. Independently, we had both completed parts of the horseshoe before, with its fine views over the west end of Glen Coe, Loch Leven and on a good day, the sea and the islands of the Inner Hebrides. But neither of us had done this classic walk in its entirety. Route finding was easy as we knew the way, and agreed on the approach to the mountain – a stiff ascent up moorland, over a fence, and we should soon find a path, not shown on the map, heading south up the shoulder of Beinn Bhan. However, as experienced HMC members, we were nonetheless surprised when we tripped over the unmarked path exactly where we thought it should be. As we went higher, the cloud slipped away from the lower reaches, and the sun appeared on our right. It was uncomplicated walking and we enjoyed distant views to the Mamores over Loch Leven, and behind us to the Pap of Glen Coe, an easily identifiable knob of rock marking the divide between the start of the lumpy, massive hills of Glen Coe and the flat, extended finger of water of Loch Leven. The higher peaks remained swathed in mist. A blotchy mix of colours stretched below. Long grass had turned to straw, patches of heather were a dull brown, the Norwegian blue loch was stippled with wind, shallows and shadows while the pine forests glowed a brilliant green. Then, all of a sudden, the wind picked up, the sun vanished and thick, dark cloud approached from over the loch, cutting visibility short and releasing snow and biting hail. We trudged on, hoods up, crossing to shattered rock from upland turf, and simultaneously exchanging silent footfalls for the rhythmic tap of our walking poles on stone. The shower abated, and again we had limited views, including seeing others tackling the scrambling route up the hill.

By this stage we were walking on fresh, thin snow, but even so we reached, without any outward display of euphoria, our first top. On a clear day, what is particularly attractive about this ugly stump is its location, which offers views over the next leg of the route. It is at this point that almost every writer describing the circuit reaches mountaineering ecstasy. Depending on your choice of author, the ridge is "a perfect arc that provides an exquisite aerial passage" (Ralph Storer) or "a beautifully elegant narrow arête, a graceful arching ridge" (Chris Townsend). Bill Birkett may not have fully understood, or heeded, the instructions on the packet of whatever he had been ingesting before setting pen to paper. He writes that the "slender curving ridge is sheer perfection of mathematical symmetry, beautiful to behold and a joy to walk." Returning to normal consciousness, he adds "Under snow it forms a razor-sharp edge requiring

mountaineering ability". In the Opportunity Chest of life, on this mountain and at this time, Geoff and I had been dealt the card marked "Go to Jail". Cloud all but obscured this majestic vision. Was I disappointed? No, not really. The cloud was moving around, and the sun periodically shone, illuminating some aspects of the landscape, while placing others in obscurity. It was a random light show on magnificent scenery. If the highlight was momentarily hidden, secondary attractions were given prominence and still provided immense delight. Changes in the weather often draw out the character of the hills more than stable conditions. What's more, I suffer from vertigo, so my concentration was less on beauty and more on practicality. As mountaineering ability was required on this razor-sharp edge, I felt obliged to look down at my feet as I walked along it, making sure that the left one went ahead of the right one, which then, in a perfection of mathematical symmetry, had to be placed ahead of the left one.

However, fortune favours the brave, and the sun came out ten minutes later when at the end of the much praised ridge, we reached our first summit, Sgorr Dhearg. 'Best views we've had all week', commented another walker. The views were undoubtedly fine, and hugely enjoyable. Among others, we could see the ridge which led straight to our next peak, Sgorr Dhonuill, and beyond to the shoulder which would supply our descent. Geoff even picked out the route which we were to take down. So we lunched, set forth, and soon found ourselves in blinding cloud as we ascended from the bealach separating the two tops. As we hopped over riven boulders two ptarmigan, startled by the presence of city dwelling residents of Hertfordshire on the mountain, burst into flight from close by. The loud cracking of their wings on cold air made us jump which, in view of our delicate balancing act and the precipitous sides of the hill, almost abruptly curtailed our walk. To complete the ambush, two more birds followed immediately after.

Somehow we must have strayed slightly from the main path because we were suddenly faced with making a step which genuinely required mountaineering ability. The step was not difficult in itself. It was just that when making the step, there was a gaping chasm behind. It thus called for undivided attention. Moreover, we had acquired as a walking companion a chirpy chappy who seemed not to understand that a) we didn't want him with us and that b) for us, this was a challenging step. For him, optimist that he was, the step presented no obstacle. Geoff and I lay walking poles to one side. We removed gloves. We tightened the straps on our rucksacks. We felt the rocks for handholds, footholds, lichens and creepie-crawlies. We checked just how high it was necessary to raise the knee and extend the arm. We took deep breaths. Finally, we stiffened our upper lips. But being experienced mountaineers by now, we succeeded in making the step without mishap.

Completely covered in cloud, the top was unexciting, so we hastened westwards down the slope, rapidly reaching more stable ground, sunlight and views. With time to spare, we tarried to absorb the mesmerising kaleidoscope of mid afternoon sunshine, cloud, shadow, hills, loch, sea and islands, before starting our descent. After a steep descent to a corrie, we pushed branches aside to follow a path through a patch of dank, boggy, heart warmingly natural woodland. In the setting sun, we marched briskly for a couple of miles eastwards back towards the car park. As we approached, all light drained from the sky, leaving it inky black. Then, for a poetic instant, and rounding off a wonderful day's walking, from behind cloud, and directly above the Pap of Glencoe, appeared the full moon.

Matt on poetic ridge



The Art of Walking

By a great stone-slabbed bridge, grass drenched green by summer rain, we sat quietly in the late afternoon sunshine, listening to the river rush past and drinking whiskey. The golden liquid mellow as our thoughts. The day a mix of open skies and sweeping moorland. We had no agenda that day. Simple wandering, and the delights the unexpected brings. Two parallel rows of stones leading down the hill, like a pathway into the past. A circle of stones in a clearing in the woods. The trees around silent and dark. A track winding through them up on to the moor. A deserted farm across the valley. Sometimes its good to walk without a goal, to keep the map tucked away in your rucksack. So much of our lives is surrounded by targets, that we strive to hit, only to find they are simply illusions of success. We had walked that day far further than I had intended, but that's the nature of walking without a fixed purpose. The legs ached but I had again found myself at the The Grey Whethers, two large circles of stone high on the moor, the hills sweeping away from them on all sides. In my mind one of the most atmospheric of ancient sites. A place to sit and dream and simply be. Heavy showers had sent us on, down the valley to Postbridge, to sit here in the afternoon sun. The hip flask drained, we set off. A long road of seemingly unending steepness stretched ahead up to the hospitality of the Warren House Inn. An empty landscape just two small figures wandering the way.

John Parrott



Ed's Soap Box



Eddie's article above has unwittingly raised an issue here. What next? he asks. The name Hertfordshire Mountaineering Club should tell you that what we do involves *mountains*, be it mountain walking and climbing, skiing and snowboarding and the loosely connected mountain biking. All other activities such as kayaking, swimming, even dry stone walling, have their place but tend to dilute the core sport and therefore we have less pure mountaineering and rock climbing meets.

I am not knocking this, merely an observation - I even did the kayaking course and enjoyed it - but I think it's time to get back to our *raison d'être* and be a Mountaineering club. It does exactly what it says on the tin.

Bill

P.S. I see we have a 40% female membership - anyone for flower arranging?

HMC goes Kayaking (and Horse riding!)

What next? What with rock climbing, hill walking, skiing, snowboarding, mountain biking and now kayaking I think HMC stands for Hertfordshire Multi-sports Club.

Adrian of the Hughes family thought as he can kayak some of us should be able to as well.

Well I thought I'd give it a try. On a windswept stormy evening 10 of us made our way to the warmth of Turnford School swimming pool where we were introduced to Angela our instructor. Then we were introduced to these wobbly cigar shaped boats, and skirts. Then having skirted up and helped into the kayak, the skirt then sealed you into the wobbly thing. The next hour was spent learning how to tip it over, which wasn't difficult, and escape from the entrapment of the skirt and rise to the surface. Ominous I thought, not any instruction on how to keep it upright!

The next session was on the following Saturday at Hertford Canoeing Club. It was another bleak windswept day and after more instruction on how to wear warm clothing underneath waterproof clothing, then life jackets and crash helmets I began to think maybe this is a dangerous sport, unlike any of the other things we do.

At last we got onto the river and started to paddle around until we were all in the water (I mean on the water). It was time to move up river, but the damn wobbly thing wouldn't go in a straight line, it's going left so you paddle harder on the left and now it's going too far right. These wobbly things should have been designed for two people so one could paddle and one could steer, hell even Oxford and Cambridge with eight paddlers have to have some one to keep it going in the right direction. Having reached a less tidal part of the river we were then taught how to stop going forwards, stop going backwards, how to turn in circles left and right, how to get the kayak to go sideways. But going in a straight line-that's something else.

Lunchtime.- Hot soup and rolls, tea or coffee, don't to drink too much 'cos once your in all your gear in that wobbly thing peeing is not a thing to think about.

In a strong current and wind we practised more sideways moving and figure of eight movements, then we kayaked over a small weir which was good and elected to do it again after practising the 'low brace support stroke' this is so that when you feel you are wobbling over you can correct it.

Well, I over did it and capsized. There I was completely unexpectedly upside down under the water trapped in the wobbly thing by the skirt, panic, then I remembered what we had practised in the swimming pool, found the skirt release, gave it a tug and I was free and rose to the surface. I am alive and I haven't drowned in that murky river.

Back in the kayak it was time to run the weir again. Straight over in good style, turning to watch the others come over I got caught in the eddy and Eddie wobbled over again. I must get better at this 'low brace support stroke'. It was now time to go back, so we paddled against the current and the wind and rain back to the boat house and a warm shower, the others had to tip their wobbly things over on purpose as it was part of the test. I had proved I could do it not once but twice. I am now a 1 star wobbly boat expert.

P.S. After the Annual Dinner Meet add horse riding to the list.
Eddie Cornell



View from Venus



There have been a lot of changes within the world of HMC. The first of which is, the historic appointment of the clubs' first ever Lady Chairman, whose aim is: to *promote a lively and healthily active club that encourages people to challenge themselves and seek out new adventures in the mountains.*

The Club has been busy over the summer months, with regular weekends away climbing, biking and walking; plus two trips to the Swiss Alps, and several proposals of marriage. Is there love in the air or something in the water? What has made Cupid shoot his magic arrows at club members over these few months? Maybe it was simply, that when downing pints of

Strongbow to celebrate the day's climbing these couples got caught up in the crossfire? So, what would have happened if they had drunk "Old Peculiar" instead?

Blessings and all good wishes are therefore sent to the following on their engagements: Pete Durkin to Derina Lea Phil Whitehurst to Helen Bishop Matt Akker to Caroline

The Club has had five official summer seasons in the Alps trouble free in recent years. Although, not without the odd epic tale, to be recounted over a beer or two. (Maybe this should be a glass or two of wine... if the view is now from Venus?). Unfortunately this year, Phil Whitehurst and Andre Knirsch were climbing in the Grindewald area when they were struck by rock fall and both had to be air lifted to safety. Andre was released immediately but Phil was kept in hospital for several days due to torn knee cartilage. He has

been receiving regular physio and is currently cycling five miles a day to build up his strength again.

A gem of a location was uncovered in the Quantocks for some extreme mountain biking. Ann, recovering from suspected concussion following a previous MTB ride, joined Pete Ambrose in the Quantocks. Using the Fast-Track guides, a thrilling roller coaster of a weekend was had by all. Watch out for this one on the itinerary in 2005.

As Venus spins into the shadows once again, she only has time to mention the success of last week-end's trip to the Peak District, which included some top (if somewhat boggy) mountain biking, four club birthday celebrations and some Extreme Karaoke. And finally, who was the not-so-quiet creature that required nursing on the Saturday evening into the early hours.....??

Ann Peden, Lady Chairman

Welcome to Norway

The first thing you notice about Norway is the rocks. It is a very rocky place. I have been to Oslo, Bergen, Haugesund, Stavanger, Hardangervidda, Jutenheimen and it is all rocky. Roads don't have embankments they have cliffs cut out in the rock. There seems to be national shortage of soil. But for lovers of mountains and rock climbing, read on Macduff....



I live in Haugesund, on the west coast of Norway, south of Bergen, North of Stavanger. The Newcastle ferry stops here. The nearby hills are called Etne and Sauda. They rise to 1650m and cover an area of 100kmx100km. The DNT is the national walking club and they have hundreds of huts all over Norway and there are 10 or so in the region. Just to the North is a glacier, that has no right to be there, only 1600m high and this far south. Folgafona is its name. It has Summer and winter skiing region and 3 huts for cross country skiers and walkers. To the East of that is the Hardangervidda, a massive plateau at about 800/1000m full of lakes. The locals seem to only go in the Winter.

Waterfalls are another Norwegian speciality. Recently we canoed along the Naeroyfjorden, (which is Narrow fjord) a spectacular vertically sided fjord where waterfalls stream from every angle, 600m, / 800m, superb. Put this down as 'Worth a Trip'. It is strange to be canoeing on what looks like a lake, but is sea water and has a tide and hundreds of kms inland. The longest Fjord (Sognefjord) is something like 120miles long and a Brit swam it's full length, starting at the 6C glacial fed inland end, fact fiends.

Tunnels. Tunnels is what the Norwegians are good at too. Going to Jutenheimen there is a 24km tunnel, complete with lay-bys in case you get tired. Not just long ones, but lots of them too. Our 300km route was about 50km inside tunnels. Tunnels. Cool.



Simbluhytta (Pretty hut)

The Etne/Sauda region is not known outside of here, but are some pretty and decent mountains. Walking here makes you fit as 1200m height gain is normal. Nearly always starting at sea-level (those pesky fjords get everywhere), means the 1200-1600m peaks in Sauda/Etna are all good day walks. When I have a weekend in Norway, the routine has been: get plastered on Friday night. Leave Haugesund on Saturday afternoon, giving time for recovery from Friday night, where every bar is open till, well till it's time to go home... 2/3/4am. Drive up. Park, walk to a Hytta. These are very picturesque mountain cabins, with facilities, like Gas cooker, pots, pans, blah blah provided. They are always next to lakes, because a) there are so many lakes it is not possible to be NOT on a lake, and b) as the Noggies like to fish. Two of the huts I have been to have rowing boats. So in the evening, eat, play cards by candle light. Dry/warm up over the log fire. Watch the sun set (if available), chat to the locals. Plan the route up. This is because there are very few paths. Not enough people to make paths, so a decent map and decent navigation skills are needed. The maps don't show crags, so you can easily come up against an impenetrable cliff, so you need time to navigate round these. Arise on Sunday morning, check the weather and go anyway as it can change in 10mins and once we climbed above the

cloud and had the most stunning scenery and weather. After summiting, the full descent to the car, down is punishing here, if it's not rock it's thick heather or juniper bushes or gorse or birch trees or pine trees or streams or bog. Heck you get the (very pretty) picture. Then back to Haugesund for a beer. OK, you need to hear about beer. Expensive. How bad? 42 to 55 NOK per beer. 0.4l if on tap or 250ml if in a bottle. Which is £4.85 to £10 per pint! Always have the compensation though of the very friendly, lovely blond ladies who love to practice on their English!

I must tell you about Jutenheimen. It is a national park, with hundreds of serious looking peaks up to 2500m. John and I did the classic 5 day Jutenheim circuit, but did it in 3 days and threw in an extra glacier for extra spice. A superb walk. We met in Bergen and drove the 300kms over some spectacular fjords, high mountain passes and up a dirt track to the Spiterstulen Hut. Not really a hut but a large complex of huts added over the years. Friday we walked up Glittertind and then onto the Glitterheim hut. A good 7 hr walk with 1500m gain. Glittertind is the highest mountain in Scandinavia in the winter and Galdopigen is the highest in summer. Due to the snow cap on Glittertind. Both are very popular routes, with a good 30/40 people going up the day we did it. The walk down was about 50% on snow fields which made for swift progress and we were accompanied by a large herd of reindeer. The Hut was full, but they have a policy of never turning anyone away, so we slept in the drying room in the attic. They provided mattresses and duvets, and at £6 each we had a nice large attic to ourselves. The hut had no cooking facilities, so we ate in the restaurant and it was eat as much as you want and very nice too. Saturday we planned to do 2 days worth of route in one, with the option of taking a ferry up the lake. We did take the ferry and so treated it as a sort of rest day. The Hut was at the end of the lake. We did find some eating implements, so cooked the food we carried on an open fire in idyllic surroundings, swam in the lake, they even sold draught beer at the reception.

Sunday was a long walk back to the car. We cut off the path with the intent of doing an awesome looking ridge. But awesome and very flippin vertical made us abandon after two peaks and cut off across the glacier. We were glad we did as we were walking for 12 hrs and were pretty knackered by the time the hut hove into view. Our last day was up Galdopigen, made easier by the reduced packs as we left all our stuff in the car. Up and down in 5hrs and then the 6hr drive back to Bergen. We stayed in the YHA and toured the bars. Next morning John got the flight back to Manchester and I got the ferry back to Haugesund. We were both back at work by 11:30.

So I like it here. I have a flat looking out over the harbour area on the seafront, there is miles of mountain biking in the forest straight from the flat, and a white sandy beach a few miles away. Even if it's raining, the lakes, the views, the fjords, the range of walking opportunities and the amount of space makes it a great place to visit. Shame about the beer.



Bill on Glacier Juteheim

Drystone walling in the Cotswolds

Fifteen of us ventured to the distant lands of the Cotswolds – less than two hours drive, to take part in the surveying of their lovely dry stone walls. The weather was gorgeous, the campsite good, and the pub only a 15 minute walk away. The first night we walked there via a somewhat muddy path only to find next day there was a much better way.

Saturday morning Sally, from the Cotswold AONB Partnership, came and gave some instruction on how the survey would be carried out and distributed guidance papers and coloured pens to denote which black lines on blown up copies of the ordnance map were walls, fences or hedges. We were to describe the condition of the walls and then they would know which walls were to be repaired. So off we went to our first area-The Slaughters, Upper and Lower. Split into groups of threes we went off to do our given area.

During our first hour or so, we found plenty of walls, some had holes built in them at the bottom so that small animals could move from one field to another easily and then there were lengths of about ten feet which were wooden logs but not as high as the walls. We were later to find out that this was to enable horses to jump the walls, as we were in a very popular fox hunting area. As we moved further down

the valley the walls disappeared and it was hedges and fences. We enquired from a local why this was and it was simply that on the higher ridges the ground had stones in it, and when years ago the fields were ploughed the children followed the plough that disturbed the stones and took them to the edges of the field and later the walls were built. Down in the valley the soil was clay and there were no stones, hence hedges and later fences.



Nearly all our walls were topped with upright stones alternated with large ones and smaller ones. Some walls were capped with large flat stones, and these were near-

ly all around large Estate Houses because these flat stones were expensive.

Saturday evening we had a barbecue and then went to the pub, well some of us, back late again as they don't seem to have closing times in these quiet country pubs.

Sunday we went to Northleach and did similar to the day before. Each day my little group, Christine, Caroline and myself surveyed between 30-40 walls, some beautiful walls recently restored and others completely overgrown and not much left standing and lots in between. It was very interesting and we all met back in the pub in the afternoon to discuss the walls we had seen, and are now dry stone wall geeks. But everyone agreed that they had enjoyed the weekend, the weather definitely helped.

The Cotswold Heritage Centre is based in an old prison and we were given a guided tour. It was open to the public until recently, for viewing not for imprisoning people. Then to finish off some of us went with Jonathan, the Project Officer, to see one of the walls being rebuilt, where there were about 15 people working on a 10 metre stretch and they were only half way up by the second day, but it was a double skinned wall and capped. We may get an opportunity to go for a weekend course on dry stone walling. I will keep you all advised.

Reporter: Eddie Cornell



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How I completed the Welsh 3000's

Dave Bird reports



‘Dave, are you awake?’ says a voice from outside my tent. ‘No, have a nice walk and tell me about it later.’ What am I doing here? It’s 3.30am and only seven hours ago I was still in St Albans. I’ve been lucky if I managed to get two hours sleep. Half an hour later and after several gear fuffs I find the other four members of our group (Geoff Deans, Richard Bailey, Matt Taylor and Barbara Lonsdale) loitering around my car hopefully as if to say ‘we’ve decided and you’re driving’. Luckily my car’s been to Pen y Pass before and needs little help from me to get there. When we arrive, I’m still too sleepy to remember to buy a parking ticket; needless to say nobody reminds me.

A quick team photo and by 4.25am we’re tearing along the path from Pen y Pass (Geoff and Barbara must have breakfasted on heroin). I’m still sleepy and having difficulty picking



up my feet which keep catching the ground while the others chatter inanely in the manner of people who’ve had no sleep and are trying to hide it. ‘God’ I think ‘it’s a long way to go’. Luckily the temperature is mild and its dry so far. We begin the climb to Snowdon and layers

begin to come off. It starts to drizzle, and they go on again. In no time at all it seems we’ve reached the summit (perhaps I really dreamt it all?). We all finger the trig point, as one does, and then we’re heading off first for Crib y Ddysgl and then Crib Goch, the third of the 3000 foot peaks on the Snowdon massif. At intervals I glance at my watch expecting to find that its two or three in the afternoon, but am puzzled to discover that it’s only 5.30 am or 6.30 am or something equally unlikely. We decide to drop off the ridge early on the descent from Crib Goch and partly scramble, partly run down the scree slopes leading off the ridge. When I’ve negotiated the scree and joined Geoff and Richard, I can hear Matt and Barbara behind us bringing half the mountain down with them, but can see nothing of them through the low mist that has descended. Eventually, we drop down to the Llanberis pass, surreptitiously refill our water bottles at the bunkhouse and turn left onto the road towards Llanberis. After quite a stroll in warm sunshine we turn right off the road to take the path up to the Glyderau Range, which consists of five 3000 peaks, the first of which is Elidyr Fawr. We pause briefly at the bottom amongst cowpats for what we laughingly call lunch and then begin the climb. It’s a bit of a slog but we press on single file though Matt and Richard soon begin to drop behind. Geoff, Barbara and I reach the boulder strewn summit, pick our way over it and drop into the shelter at the top. There we stumble across two fellow sufferers who are also doing the 14 peaks and whom we somehow managed to avoid on the Snowdon massif. We will be leapfrogging each other until we finally lose them near the summit of Tryvan. Matt and Richard arrive and promptly announce they are turning back. I’m disappointed for them naturally but also am concerned that we are arguably losing our best

navigator. Worse still I’m thinking, “who’s going to write this up for *Crux* now?”, whilst knowing that I’m probably the only one left daft enough to volunteer! (Thanks-Ed.)

So now we are three and I’m trying not to recall Elspeth Bartlet’s final email warning to me “whatever you do, don’t follow the one with grey hair!” He might sound like a Middle Earth Wizard, but Geoffrey the Grey is of course none other than our esteemed club Secretary. But who knows, perhaps he has cast a spell because today his navigation seems faultless (good old GPS). Even when we later have poor visibility and fading light on the Carneddau, we barely put a foot wrong.

Mindful perhaps of his heroic failure on this same route three weeks earlier with Elspeth, Geoffrey the Grey now picks up the pace on the climb up to Y Garn. We overlap the pair from Elidyr Fawr once more. They assure us that if we make Ogwen by 4.30pm we’re in good shape. When we do eventually get there at 4.25 pm we will discover that this prediction is somewhat optimistic, but that’s all in the future. We take another planned food break by the lake at Uyn y Cym, where I feed the fast moulding crusts of my sarnies to an enterprising Welsh seagull. Then we start the steep climb up to Glyder Fawr. The Glyderau Range boasts some lunar-like landscapes and is a dream for scramblers. Unfortunately, the wet slippery rocks are treacherous underfoot as we are now often walking in low cloud. Apart from a pause to snap Geoff and Barbara balancing precariously on the impressive Cantilver Stone, we press on and are soon descending the steep rocky spur that connects Glyder Fach to Tryvan. We have the advantage of not losing too much height approaching Tryvan and the climb to the top from here is relatively short. We decide to drop our packs, take some bearings and press on to the summit somewhat lighter than we arrived. Tryvan is one of the five Welsh 3000’s I’ve done before and perhaps the most familiar to me. There is no real path up just a scramble from boulder to boulder. We bump into the Elidyr Fawr pair once more and quickly lead them astray. When we turn back to try and find the correct path they seem too weary to retreat and we leave them climbing an increasingly vertical route never to be seen again! At the top of Tryvan we bump into a local from Anglesey, Harry Jones. He is soloing the Welsh 3000’s after failing this walk some weeks before with a group. It’s not the first time we have bumped into him and we are destined to meet again.

We find our backpacks without too much difficulty and then descend to Ogwen, pausing briefly en route just once to refill with water at a stream. I am beginning to feel tired now and whilst I still feel pretty good when we arrive I have anticipated this break and the café stop here for so long that within five minutes I feel

suddenly exhausted. I never once consider quitting but I am surprised by how tired I feel at this point. I had expected a nice sit down café, and am disappointed with the facilities. I don't think I can face the stone wall (the attractions of stone seats are beginning to wear off!) but we manage to find a nice park bench (with a back!) and suddenly I'm more comfortable than I have been since I crawled out of my sleeping bag at 3.30 in the morning. You cannot under-estimate the restorative effects of hot food and drink. A large cup of tea and a hot Cornish Pastie later and I am beginning to feel human again. Geoff is champing at the bit to press on but in the end we have a full half-hour break (by far the longest of the whole day) and I for one needed it.

When we cross the road and begin the ascent to Pen yr Ole Wen I feel literally like a new man. We meet a wag coming down who tells us how many hours it's going to take us to get to the "top". Looking at Tryfan opposite and considering the fact that we're clearly not far below it in height I'm thinking, the top of what? In fact it takes us only a little over an hour to reach the first of the seven 3000 foot peaks on the Carneddau Ridge and that's from



Dave and Barbara on Tryfan

the bottom! One web-site I looked at states that this ridge "is cursed in poor weather, but in good conditions it is a most enjoyable walk". I am told you can even see Ireland and the Isle of Man from here on a good day. Needless to say, we are experiencing "poor weather" today. We're in cloud now and this will be with us for the rest of the walk, with no prospect of any views across the Irish Sea. Much of the time, we'd be happy if we could see a few hundred yards. It's now getting a lot colder, and we drop into the first shelter we see on the ridge to add extra layers and waterproof trousers. At which point we are unexpectedly joined by Harry Jones who's taken a slightly different route up via Fynnan Lloer. Pretty soon we seem to be the only four souls up here. Anybody with any sense is heading for the pub. I made the mistake of thinking that once we cracked the last big climb we'd practically done it, apart from a nice gentle ridge walk to finish off, but Geoff wisely cautions me that it is still a long way to go and how right that advice proves to be.

Our problem now is gradually decreasing visibility from the combination of cloud and failing light. In good weather we could keep up a good pace on this wide ridge and throw all navigational aids away, but now we are slowed down by the conditions. The biggest problem is spotting the turn off from Carnedd Llewellyn to Yr Elen, which is on a spur off the main ridge. Luckily, Harry knows this part

of the walk pretty well and his assistance is invaluable in preventing us all from wandering around in ever decreasing circles. This proved to be a peak too far three weeks earlier for Elspeth, which is a shame when you consider that with navigational errors she actually did the full distance. Fortunately we hit the right path. We get glimpses of the route ahead as the clouds temporarily part. We climb to the top of at least two false summits (and at one point even Harry is sure we're there until the clouds part again to reveal higher ground). Finally, we reach Yr Elen, and simply turn around and retrace our steps to Carnedd Llewellyn and the main ridge.

Back on the ridge we strive to keep to the top of the ridge but periodically wander off and onto sections of path. It really is a slog now. There are in fact fifteen Welsh peaks over 3000 feet. Calling this walk the "Fourteen Peaks" is actually a misnomer based on the last Ordnance Survey, which apparently catalogued only fourteen peaks. The fifteenth peak is actually the penultimate one on our walk, Garnedd Uchaf, but as I walk across it I am too tired to worry about such technicalities. Fortunately, around this point we hit a good path that we can just about see and are able to follow it at a reasonable pace even though it is now getting towards 11.00 pm. We get excited when we spot the trig point at the last peak, Foel Fras, but when we get closer it turns out to be nothing more than a rock sticking up, so we reluctantly press on. Shortly thereafter we find the trig point and take some obligatory flash photos. It's a little after 11.00 pm and I'm wondering where the helicopter's going to pick us up from. I'm not the only one hallucinating because Barbara keeps calling Harry, Barry, but he's too polite (or too tired) to correct her. Geoff's plan is to follow the fence that we can just make out to the right past Drum and then to cut across a field and drop off the ridge at a point where the fence turns imperceptibly to



Cantilever Stone

the left. It sounds about as smart as General Montcalm's agreement to allow the first volley at the Battle of Quebec in 1759 to be decided by a coin toss, with the consequent loss of the colony to the British, but I digress...

As we leave the Trig Point we switch on our head-torches, for what is remarkably the first time. In the mist this is arguably of little use, and to begin with I switch mine off again. As we begin the descent proper, we say our good-byes to Harry (who will be taking a slightly different route) and embark upon what feels like the hardest part of the walk. We have been slipping and sliding on wet rocks all day. Add to that 18 hours of fatigue and we are now stumbling along over the uneven ground like

drunks. In places there are boggy pools that appear so black and dense they must be sucking what little light remains into them. About this time, I am reminded of a poem by Wilfred Owen, "bent double like old beggars under sacks, Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge..." but I decide not to share this thought with the others and at least no-one is shooting at us! The high point for me is when I follow Barbara across one of the bogs carefully placing my feet precisely where hers have just been. By some miracle of science she steps across unmolested whilst I am buried to the groin in black sucking muck. I quickly struggle free whilst practising my French.



Matt, Dave, Richard and Geoff

Eventually, we reach what Geoff thinks is the tell-tale kink in the fence and clamber over into a field beyond. It is an act of faith to leave the path and follow him at this point, but we know the proper path involves a much longer walk. The terrain here is really tricky in the dark owing to large wet clumps of grass often hiding wet and slippery rocks beneath the combination of which knocks us off our feet more than once. I am very tired now and grateful for the periodic halts that Barbara calls for. At one point as Geoff and I have drifted ahead I am reminded that she is after all merely human when we are arrested by a cry of "Wait for meeee!" from somewhere behind us. After what seems like an age, we hit level ground, spot the pylons that are supposed to be in front of us and make a near perfect and seemingly miraculous landfall at Geoff's car at about 1.00 am. Unfortunately we still need to collect my car from Pen y Pass. When we arrive there Barbara and I discover that our legs have completely seized up but we somehow manage to get both cars back to the campsite. I'm too tired to be pleased that I did not after all get a parking ticket. I climb into my sleeping bag take a large nip of Balvenie from my hip flask and fall asleep at 2.30 am.

A week or so after we got back, Geoff received the following email from Harry Jones:-

Many many thanks to you and your colleagues for letting me tag along with you over the Carneddau, I appreciated it very much, I'd hate to think the time I would have taken on my own. Following day I was like an old man, saying never again! As usual, by Monday was feeling fine and thinking of the next challenge.

All the very best

Harry

I think he probably speaks for all of us. A little while later, Harry sent us twelve bottles of wine by way of a very generous thank you!

The Dibona

A glimpsed streak of light, a shooting star falling in the night sky. It felt like a good omen. We were in the campsite at La Berarde, the night was clear, mountains dark shapes against the stars. The sound of a river filled our ears and wine gave the world a mellow glow. Life was good. We had driven down from Paris in a day of summer heat and blue skies. Tomorrow we were going to walk up to the Soreiller Hut which sits below the south face of the Dibona and then go climbing. Lionel had sent me a photo of the Dibona about a year ago and ever since then it had sat quietly but insistently in my imagination. Now was the time to go. I had just packed in my job, everything was uncertain, a thousand thoughts were spinning in my brain. What you need, said Lionel is to go climbing. I've some time off let's go to the Dibona.

It's a long walk up to the Soreiller Hut and as usual we were carrying far too much stuff. One day I shall crack the minimalist code and not have to stagger up the hillside like an overloaded donkey. It's a good path though, and at a lovely spot by a cascad-

ing river you turn into an upper valley, and there sits the Dibona in the distance. It is wonderful spire of rock. It looked so far away, not just in terms of distance, but steep and scary, well beyond my capabilities. I kept my



thoughts to myself and plodded on. Fortunately Lionel being much fitter than me arrived well ahead, so that when the exhausted, sweaty blob that was me arrived, I was presented with a beer, which aided recovery immensely. One of the good things about the hut was that although lacking hot water and showers, there is wine.

Later that evening I sat with a glass watching the evening glow on the surrounding peaks and the first stars appear. The air was perfectly still. Light and warmth shone from the hut. The world below was a long way away. It

couple of tricky bits. At one belay someone had placed a small garden gnome in the back of a crack. He watched knowingly at we passed by. From the breche the summit ridge curves spectacularly upwards. Two superb pitches of straightforward V Diff climbing, but with massive exposure and we were there. As we stood on the top under a cloudless sky, I found it difficult to believe that we were able to climb this amazing spire at such an amenable grade. The everyday was far below us, it was a place to feel alive, and taste again the reason we are climbers.

John Parrott

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