

WMC New Year's Day Walk 2018

We assembled at the Live and Let Live pub on Bringsty Common for the traditional first meeting of the year. It was a showery sort of morning, some had come better prepared than others, but being a hardy bunch we all trooped off. Apart from John Rye who beat a hasty retreat when he “suddenly” realised he hadn't brought the correct footwear...!

The first slope to a trig point proved a little challenging due to the well trodden and slippery path but soon all were safely up. We were then pointed in a downwards direction and this was equally slippery. The dogs didn't seem to mind though – advantage of having four legs.



Onwards through the woods the next point of interest was the wooden horse...

As walk leader Tom was obliged to mount the beast to pose for photos...



A little further on we stopped at a picturesque lake...



Food and drink were taken on board. Thanks to Harry and his wife for the excellent ginger bread and mulled wine!



Time for a group photo on the Brockhampton Estate...



Then it was just a short way back through some woods and across a stream...



And back to the pub in the sunshine. Great way to kick off the year!



Bring It On, Beast!

By Charlie Eden

I suppose John can't be blamed entirely. OK, he wanted to go to Torridon in the first place. OK, he wanted to go in February. But when he made the booking he didn't know the Beast would rip in from the east for the whole week.

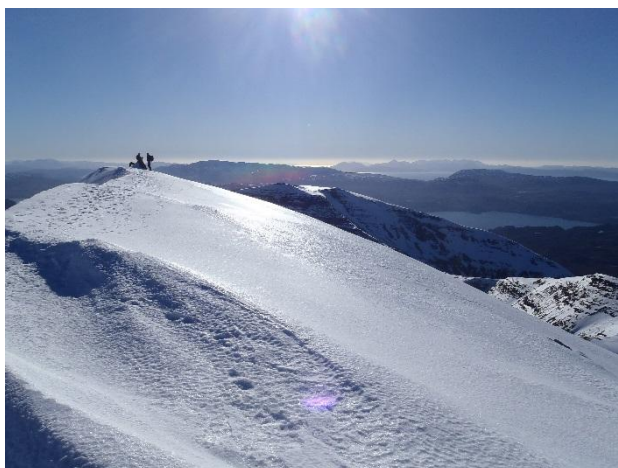
Fortunately, he had assembled a powerful team who would clearly show the mountains no mercy. Firstly himself, conquistador of Kilimanjaro by way of training. Bill, circumnavigator by sail of the British coastline. Jez, the climber though not yet quite so much mountaineer. And Charlie..... well just a Charlie.

So, Conquistador, Circumnavigator, Climber and Charlie. The four 'C's.

Personally, I'd thought that driving the 550 miles north on Saturday would make Sunday a day of rest. My companions are clearly made of sterner stuff. Objective: The Horns of Alligin, a good chance to see how the team would bed.

The Traverse of Ben Alligin

A perfect day, still and cloudless. Starting at virtually sea level on the shore of Loch Torridon at Inveralligin, the good path climbs steadily through Caledonian Forest. After 2K, over the bridge and northwards towards the bealach (trans: col, bwlch, pass, gap). A steep scramble up the shoulder takes us to a levelling where the snow begins, and we gear up. A horn looms – the first of the three rocky towers that give the horseshoe traverse its name.



This is scrambling terrain with the added complication of snow and crampons. The downs are harder than the ups because the penalties for a mistake are more evident. Oops, don't snag that gaiter or you could fell yourself. Easy to do when you have to step inside the other planted foot.

Descent of the third horn down to bealach is the longest and steepest, down snow crest and through rock gaps. Now the long steep snow crest to get us to the first Munro (Sgurr Mhor) a climb of 700 feet. Cornices and verticality to the right and a vast steepening ice field to the left offers high speed doom-slides.

But what is that on top? A bloody dog! A couple and their dog out for a Sunday stroll! No, they must be the local mountain rescue training-up their 'berghund'. Phew! Ego under attack for a moment there.

Now a steep icy snow slope to descend and plenty more ups and downs on the crest before the flog up to the second Munro, Tom na Gruagaich.

Here we bump into the young minimally clad and equipped Chinese guy we met on the Horns. Bill has been conducting a full depth interview and will give us instalments of his biography on the way down. Also, on the top we meet a Cumbrian and his lovely Highland lady, both now resident in Inverness. What a privilege to be here. What views to the west over Skye to the Outer Hebrides. We follow them off by the snow gully descent – long, quite steep and at one point displaying a worrying fracture line through the snow. Bill plunges down it swinging between his twin poles while the rest of the team show it just a little more respect.

Bill gives Jez a crash course in ice-axe breaking at the bottom (Yes, I know, we should all practise it, and frequently). Thereafter an endless steep path through rock steps and bog moors leading us finally back to the car. (6 miles and 4000' of ascent)



The Traverse of Liathach

“a major winter mountaineering expedition”

Ralph Storer, 100 Best Routes on Scottish Mountains.

“An arrow-headed crest suspended in an ice-blue sky. Liathach in Winter’s clutch is the possessor of true majesty. A brilliant glass gleam in the midday sun down the southern flank, while a muted chalky matt hushes the shadowed northern cirques. These two sides soar up to meet in the glittering apex of the summit ridge. Only the sheer cliff bands of ancient sand break the icy glare, thrusting bold and black against the hazy western seas.



To straddle this winter crest is to perch atop a cathedral whose polished eaves plunge down both left and right to unseen voids. Here is natural geometry and symmetry of stunning simplicity, drawing eye and mind into grand designs, and here too is found a mountaineering which combines classical purity and technical intrigue”

Martin Moran, Scotland’s Winter Mountains

A pre-dawn start was necessary. This is a linear traverse, and some leave a car at either end. Again, we started at sea level in Glen Torridon. The usual direction is east to west. Find the path that descends next to the stream, make with the wattage for a couple of thousand feet. Here as the angle steepens in a barring thousand-foot rock wall, move steeply right (east) for about 400 meters to a snow gully and climb this to the ridge.

A strong wind greeted us, the forecast warned of temperatures down to minus 30 °C allowing for wind-chill. We turned left along a knife-edge horizontal ridge with steeply plunging icy flanks. Don't snag those gaiters with your crampons! Both cold and cloudy and lots of horizontal as well as up and down.

We stopped from time-to-time behind a rock and scanned one another for signs of incipient insanity. Alarmed, we carried on.

A ruler straight snow crest led us steeply up from a bealach to the summit of Spidean a Choire Leith – another Munro (and variously spelt). Here we paused and looked down on Fasarinen - the Pinnacles. As we looked the weather moved in and visibility was suddenly yards. Decision needed. We agreed with some reluctance that we'd have to reverse our route rather than go on. The flanks are so steep that we'd need to get back to our ascent gully. Veteran advice to younger readers: Always be prepared to retreat (Oops! Didn't want to use that word. Let's stick with 'reverse'.) Put it like this. We're doubling the length of the traverse. Boring? I beg your pardon, we're doubling the sport! All the downs are now ups and the ups are now downs. And the views (if visible) are 180° different. You even change the wind direction.



The ascent/descent gully has had the sun on it and is now sugary. Just steep enough to need to face in. Some of the bucket steps collapse underneath us.

Finally, the crampons come off and we are back at the car in the gloaming.

Portland Trip in May

This trip organised with military precision by Bernard saw 5 members of the Worcester Mountaineering Club travel to Portland on Friday afternoon/evening.



Having gained access to “the Bunker” as our lodgings were dubbed owing to the lack of windows, the advanced party set off to explore the surrounding area. As the pub wasn’t open the coastal area provided entertainment with 3 individual solo ascents of Pulpit Rock in less than ideal conditions. Having safely negotiated the tricky descent (coming down is always harder than going up) the party retired to the “the Bunker” to await the arrival of the second party. As it was getting close to bedtime and no one had appeared a phone call was made – neither of the following group had been to the bunkhouse before and darkness had fallen – it transpired that these 2 individuals had gained access to a private dwelling just adjacent to our shelter and were considering which room to put their bags in! Strangely the owners weren’t in, or maybe were just asleep and had left the door unlocked. Either way, Jort and Guy were considered lucky not to have got on the wrong side of the law!

Also during the evening a group of students from Imperial College arrived on a scuba diving weekend. A large amount of beer and whiskey were unloaded and but fortunately they seemed a fairly steady bunch, the Eurovision song contest being a highlight for their evening on Saturday night.

Saturday dawned and conditions were favourable, almost too good – not too warm, but generally dry – excuses for poor performance would have to be found elsewhere. Our party breakfasted and then headed out to find the crag. Battleship was the destination but it proved tricky to find – the suggested route in the guidebook may have collapsed? – anyway a way down to the cliffs was found with cables and steps.

The climbing went well with a few 4's to start with. Guy and David both learned to re-thread the rope at the lower off and Bernard shook off the rust of the winter period, competently climbing some of the trickier offerings in the area.



In the afternoon our group moved to another area (the Veranda) where there were some quality little climbs. All very pleasant!



We returned to the bunkhouse, scrubbed ourselves to look respectable then ventured to the pub. It was open this time! Bernard ordered the fish and chips. This was the last portion they had! The other meals weren't quite up to the same standard but no one begrudged Bernard having it....



Back at the bunkhouse Eurovision was in full swing. Sadly the UK didn't do too well (blame Brexit?) but it was won by a singer from Israel! When did they become part of the EU?!

Fortunately the students were fairly serious about their diving so didn't get too drunk. The WMC group shuffled off to bed at a reasonable hour too. Except for Jort who insisted on sleeping outside under a table! (He muttered something about a lack of oxygen in the room – or maybe it was the chorus of snoring!)

Next day, Sunday, saw blue skies and calm seas. The students had packed up and gone before we emerged!

After packing and tidying we set off for the Cuttings. Here some incredibly slippery 4's were climbed in the Bonsai area. Then we headed to the Bower area for more quality limestone fun.

A visit to the inviting beach below the footpath on the way back provided some entertainment. A rock throwing contest developed, with the object being to topple a piled up arrangement of rocks by "wanging" smaller rocks that were to hand. Much fun was had.



Then we made our way back to the cars. Fare-wells were said and the journey back commenced (via KFC in Jort and Guy's case...)

Canooooing on the Wye

A journey down the River Wye is a favourite among WMC members and so it proved again this year. We were fortunate to be joined by experienced sailor Bill Douglas, veritable sea-dog and veteran of many a watery adventure. The other crew members were Tom Stenson – an outdoors expert with an impressive array of useful camping kit; Luke Green – our President, a stalwart and dynamic incumbent; Bernard Lee – a steady approach to the task at hand, lover of fine ales; Allan Watson – your author, enthusiastic but occasionally mis-guided adventurer.

Anyway, we met at the rather lovely but heaving campsite set in an old orchard next to the river, were issued life jackets and paddles then set off in the van to be put in up-river.



The journey back to the campsite was filled with laughter, booze and some questionable navigation skills. However, I can report that there was not one instance of man overboard or capsized on this first day – must be a record for the club!



Arrival at the campsite and preparation for the evening meal started in earnest. We were to have steak and chips provided by camping genius Tom. Real chips too. Cooked in a cauldron of boiling fat. On a campsite. Pretty awesome stuff! Red wine and beer flowed freely and eventually the fire was just glowing embers. I may have collapsed half in and half out of my tent.



Chips!



Campsite grub.



Luke explains something to Bill.

Next morning another it dawned on the fertile minds of Tom and Bill that the kit they had used for sleeping could be converted into a sail and therefore miles of effort free canoeing! The aforementioned kit was a lightweight tarp and the poles from an original vango force 10. Using all their scouting skills with knots and lashings, the mast was erected and the good ship VangoTarp set sail. Well, as long as there was a bit of wind and it was blowing in the right direction.... otherwise it was back to good old elbow grease for propulsion. The sail was surprisingly successful though, adding a welcome boost on occasions but becoming a bit of a flapping nightmare on others.



So, the day passed travelling in a more or less straight line down the majestic Wye. A cheeky stop at the Weir Gardens for lunch and then on to Hereford to be picked up at the rowing club. The canoe hire folk were impressed by our sail!

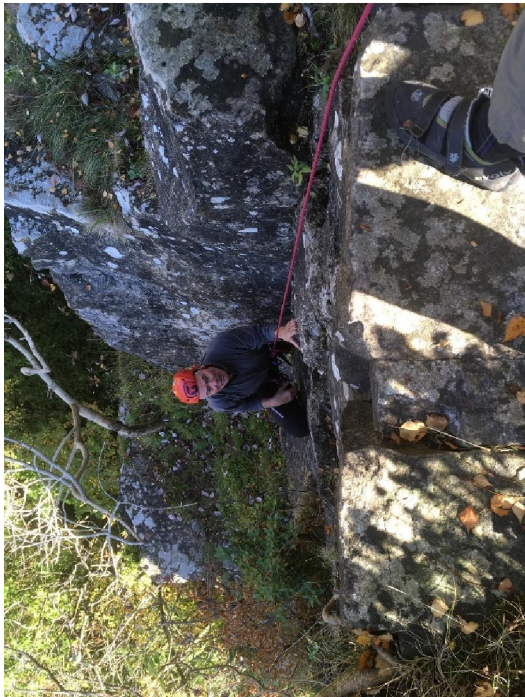


Wintour's Leap day trip.

A bunch of WMCers visited the Wye Valley one Sunday in October. A multi team assault on Central Buttress then some single pitch messing around followed by beer and crisps and laughs at the Boat Inn. Great day!



Easy way down was slippery!



Bill fighting the pump..



Party ledge.



Kris tops out.



Climbing team.



Off to the pub.

