

Snowdon Rangers '97



(28th February - 3rd March 1997)

Snowdon

(28th February - 3rd March 1997)

Friday : Sneak off to Snowdon



Steve is such an obliging chap, particularly when it comes to transporting expo members to far away hills. Despite offers from other quarters to drive, he valiantly volunteered the services of himself and the deluxe Alpha transport vehicle, claiming a preference to driving than being a passenger. This seemed to suit the passengers too and it was not long before the passengers (Rog, Pete and myself) were nodding off amidst in car CD tracks of the Pink Floyd album, "Wish you were here".

An extraordinary amount of traffic on the M6 near Birmingham was encountered and we were stuck in bumper to bumper crawling cars for ages. We had managed to hit the Friday rush hour and the motorways were clogged solid. In fact Tanya and Tony left much later on the Friday afternoon and arrived at the hostel less than an hour after us.

After the horrors of the M6 we decided to stop off at a Little Chef for a bite and for Steve to consume vast amounts of strong coffee from his bottomless strong coffee pot. In addition to normal meals we all pigged out on Little Chef pancakes which were on special offer and were also advertised via enormous pictures of delicious looking pancakes plastered on the wall. Pete pointed to the picture when the waitress arrived and then pointed to his mouth.



We proceeded onwards and a strange noise started coming from Steve's offside rear (on the car) when braking. On previous expos this was just a small squeak, but now it sounded like two surfaces which were not designed to rub against each other were ... rubbing against each other. The graunching noise was consistent with worn out brake shoes, but as we still had three brakes left we continued on our way and turned up the CD a couple of notches in an effort to ignore the problem.

We arrived at the Snowdon Ranger youth hostel and booked ourselves in. I was a bit slow and ended up with a top bunk which, unsurprisingly, was the only bed left when I joined the others. I was reminded of the perils of the top bunk from previous expos when a certain Jim Whitehead had woken up in the middle of the night and forgot that he was in the top bunk. Instead of the normal 18 inches, he descended the abnormal 5 foot and woke the whole dormitory as he thudded to the floor.

We went in search of a suitable watering hole which unfortunately turned out to be a car drive away at the Cwellyn Arms. At the end of a long days travelling all we wanted was a quiet night cap before retiring to slumber land. This was not to be the case, however. As we trooped through the pub entrance we were accosted by a loud man with a microphone who introduced us to the rest of the pub as the Chipendales. We were subsequently coerced into entering a pub quiz, relieved of entrance money only to find that they were half way through the quiz already, which made a significant dent in our chances of achieving a high score.

A variety of questions ensued including: What letter is to the right of z on a keyboard, which we managed to get (x). Another question which we failed to get: What is a C138. The answer turned out to be a Hercules transport aircraft, although we all thought it should have been C130.

We managed to score a meager 11 out of 20 for our efforts, which was surpassed by a young family on the next table who scored a proud 15.

After all the commotion had died down we returned to the Youth Hostel and clambered into our bunks. Steve took a couple of extra microseconds to go to sleep due to the strong coffee and I laid awake for quite a while listening to a certain colleague snoring away contentedly. Note for future expos : get some ear plugs.



Saturday: Snowdon





Next morning we met up with Tanya and Tony at breakfast and indulged in Youth Hostel offerings (except Steve who had an aversion to fried food first thing in the morning).

Tanya noted that it seemed quite windy outside which turned out to be a bit of an understatement as we were to find out later.

A route plan was organised amongst interested parties. It was decided that a ridge walk would be deferred to improve our survival chances. Instead an ascent to Snowdon was agreed especially as Pete had not been up Snowdon - he had an aversion to crowds on mountains. He need not have worried about crowds...

The ascent would take the Snowdon Ranger path which started conveniently from the Youth Hostel of the same name. To save trudging along the road later Steve's car was dropped off at Rhyd-Ddu and we set off in the bracing wind.

Steve's trusty stick was joined by an identical looking but untried companion (Roger's stick). The stick was in pristine condition with a handsome polished knob and perfect paint finish. Although he wasn't sure what to do with it at first (I had to show him the acceptable ski pole grip) he was soon prodding it here and there and discussing the potential benefits with stick convert Steve.

As we ascended the wind strength increased and we soon came across fellow hill walkers who had decided that the weather was not suitable for them. A gap in the ridge ahead was experiencing gale force winds due to funneling effects and their party had decided to turn back at that point.



Preparing for blast off

Leaning into the wind, we slowly made our way up the path, although sometimes we had to stop to regain balance and fight just to stay on our feet. Stick owners were able to maintain balance by forming a human-stick tripod . . . stick use number 62 was noted.



Welsh wind-swept modified route

Several times we considered turning back as the wind was making this a less than pleasant experience. We eventually joined the Snowdon railway track and decided to head to the summit for lunch at the Snowdon cafe building.

As we paused for a moment and mouthed unheard words to each other I felt something trip over my leg as I braced myself against the wind. I looked round to see Roger and Pete rolling around in the undergrowth in a pile of flailing arms and legs. During this unplanned encounter Roger's teeth managed to impact on Petes head, but luckily no permanent damage was caused to either party.

At this time of the year the Snowdon cafe was shut and we tried to find the least windy facet to consume our lunch. In addition to the wind it was now quite cold (there was still snow on the track) and we set off promptly back down the railway track. Tanya suggested that the Miners track may offer some shelter rather than returning down the exposed path we had previously ascended. This seemed like a reasonable idea at the time with only one drawback - the Miners track led in the opposite direction to where we wanted to go. The promise of shelter gave way to windy alternatives and we descended the Miners track in search of calmer climes.

The plan was sound in theory, but in practice we were buffeted by periodic gusts which were not the sort of thing required when descending steep slopes next to steeper hillsides. Roger had an involuntary experience on the way down. He was levitated picked up by a gust and transported towards a ledge rather like the advert for Saab cars where the road disappears and a precipitous drop looms below. Unfortunatley Roger did not have the benefits of aeronautical appendages so the approaching view was not very inviting. He was unceremoniously dumped next to the ledge, however, and survived to tell the tale of his problem with the wind to fellow walkers.

We paused briefly next to lake Glaslyn and watched the water being whipped up by blustery blasts. Pen-y-pass was reached with no further mishap and a tea break stop was called for. Within the reassuring shelter of the cafe a plan of how to get back to the youth hostel was hatched. The optimal solution turned out to be a hired mini-bus and driver for the reasonable fee of £3.50 per stranded walker.

Steve was dropped off on the way to collect his car from Rhyd Ddu before the rest of us were returned to the Snowdon Ranger Youth Hostel.

The Cwellyn Arms pub was revisited for the evening meal and drinks. Tanya sampled a Bison steak while the rest of us opted for more conventional cuisine. We reflected upon the events of what to many was possibly the worst day's hillwalking on record. What would the following day's weather throw at us we wondered. . . .

Sun-day: Y-Garn and Nantlle Ridge



Y-Garn beckons

Sunday saw an ease in the wind and so it was decided to do a one way walk up Y-Garn and along Nantlle ridge. This plan involved dropping Steve's car at the end of the walk and bringing Steve back to the start of the walk (at Rhyd Ddu car park) in Tanya's car.

As the morning progressed the skies began to clear and eventually rare views were witnessed with the prevailing clear air conditions.



Nantle Ridge

The western welsh coastline was clearly visible together with the island of Anglesey and Steve pointed out the turrets of Caernarfon castle.



All clear on the western front

The contrast to the previous day's hill walking was significant. The ridge provided a good mixture of scrambling and interesting views although another author's description of the walk as being gently undulating was disputed by some of the foot weary members of our group.

An inspection of Roger's stick showed significant wear and tear inflicted by the previous day's hill walking calamities. The two sticks were now easily identifiable as Roger's stick now looked as though it had been used for several decades (rather than one day)



Figure 1oijjioij

with a sadly scratched knob along with other abrasions. Steve's stick seemed to have escaped relatively unscathed and looked in better shape despite having endured several outings. Functionally, however, both sticks were operationally sound and in one piece.

Half way along the ridge we said farewell to Tanya and Tony who were heading home that afternoon. By the end of the day the sky was almost completely clear as we descended from the ridge toward the return vehicle. Pete's knees were suffering a bit on the way down - a common problem when descending steep slopes.

Monday : Myndd Mawr - Homeward bound

The weather was still reasonable on Monday for our half day jaunt. A local hill called Myndd Mawr was selected for the remaining expo quartet.

Steve's car was dropped at the head of Llyn Cwellyn and we made our way through woods along established footpaths. Although it was not as clear as the previous day, it was dry and the wind had all but disappeared.

Plenty of aeronautical activity was to be seen with a helicopter practicing manoeuvres and several military aircraft heading along the valleys.

We somehow managed to lose the path on the way back despite having been warned about where to go by the V&H warden. We ended up making a highly unconventional path through densely wooded region back to the banks of Llyn Cwellyn.

After brushing ourselves down and a quick tea and cake stop at the teashop next to Capel Cwrig V&H we returned home...

The End