



Wasdale 2015





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DAY ONE (Thursday 30th April 2015)

5 head for the hills

The number of employed expo members was dwindling rapidly. Technically it was my last day at BAE Systems Advanced Technology Centre (formerly Marconi Research Centre) but instead of heading to the site I had been at for 35 years – I found myself on the eve of early retirement heading up the M1 towards the Lake District. As I reflected on this momentous event the somehow appropriate music emanating from the Radio 2 was Cat Stevens (recent recipient of lifetime achievement award) singing "Morning has broken", a familiar hymn from my youth.

A bit like an alert from the traffic message channel, this quiet contemplation was interrupted by Roger's in car medical report of a recent visit to his GP. A mysterious condition which had recently rectified itself left Roger with an appointment with the GP to check the health of his bodily functions. As anticipated an internal examination of his prostate was deemed necessary and Roger was asked to drop his trousers. After a pause he was then asked to drop his underpants too. Further uncertainty ensued when the GP announced he would need a chaperone. It was then established that the chaperone was not for Roger (his integrity was not in question) but for the GP himself. To Roger's surprise the receptionist was assigned the role of chaperone during the examination, and as pointed out by Steve she would have ample opportunity to take undercover photographs which would undoubtedly find their way onto a Facebook page (yes dear reader, I too shudder at this thought) – perhaps the chaperone would need a chaperone? On hearing this account, fellow passengers were very sympathetic – once they had stopped laughing. I am pleased to report that the prostate was given the thumbs up! Investigations are continuing however and the latest is that an ultrasound is needed with the added requirement of simultaneous active urination. I'm sure he will be relieved when it's all done.

In case you are wondering whether I have permission to reveal Roger's experiences in this publication, rest assured that he has approved the draft text with the proviso that I admit to having undergone a similar procedure from a lady GP a few years ago. Okay, it's true. Now let's leave our behinds behind and get back to the main narrative.

With slow going on the M1 (in retrospect the A1 would have been quicker), time was running out for catching a pub meal at Wasdale. So a suitable Lakeland pub was found in Eskdale, by name of King George V.





The remaining journey was relatively short and we arrived at Ling Mell at about 9.30pm in time for a swift night cap at the Wasdale Head Inn – which was also host to some local melodious musicians in the adjacent room (fortunately).

DAY TWO (Friday 1st May 2015)

Great Gable (or not) via Sty Head & Climbers traverse (~6.5m)

Ling Mell Guest House had some quirky features. For example each bedroom door number was made by using the numeral “6” arranged in different combinations: i.e. “6”, “9”, “66”, “69”, “96” etc. which is fine when there are only a small number of rooms and want to buy a job lot of the number “6”. Two twin rooms and single had been allocated with Mike drawing the short straw with Mick as a snoring partner. I was lucky to have Steve who although annoyingly falls asleep in about 10 seconds flat, did not keep me awake. Roger (in the single room) was somewhat disturbed by rattling windows caused by excess wind (outside in this instance).



The morning was the official first day of my early retirement and when I pulled back the curtains a lovely sight greeted me and I found Cat Stevens singing “Morning has broken like the first morning” in my head. Sunshine, blue skies, hills and a pub withing staggering distance of the Guest House – an excellent start to the next phase of my life.



“Morning has broken ... like the first morning [... of early retirement]”



Lingmell House – base camp

Lingmell House B&B was in an ideal location in the heart of Wasdale with direct walking access to surrounding hills. The B&B was run by Tim Brooks who also doubled as part of the local mountain rescue team. A booklet in the lounge listed all Lake District incidents throughout 2014 with all manner of mishaps from getting lost to falls and more serious injuries requiring helicopter assistance.

Shortly after a full english breakfast and with all navigational aids packed, we were ready for the day's destination: Great Gable.

Roger had his latest model hand held GPS device for keeping a log of the route while others used electronic free map methods together with the Earth's magnetic field to establish the way ahead.

With good weather we were all optimistic about the potential views to come – what could possibly go wrong? Well reader, read on and you will soon see in glorious technicolour tracked detail.

And so we strode down the lane from the B&B with Great Gable beckoning in the distance...





Going's Good for Great Gable Group



Rocky route ahead



The route climbed steadily up the valley and Wasdale was soon receding into the distance. Despite the odd character with their trusty stick wearing a tea cosy on their head standing in the way, clear views down the valley were opening up as we ascended. Lingmell Beck trickled back towards Wasdale Head base camp (B & B & pub - now far off white specks) as we gradually climbed out of the valley avoiding the direct steep ascent.

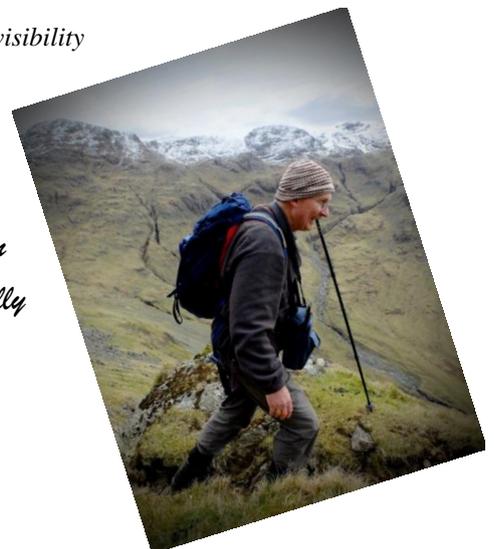


Across the valley there was a good view of the next day's destination (Scafell Pike). The previous week's weather reports had told of ice above 800 meters and sure enough there appeared to be a well defined transition layer on the hills opposite ...



The forecast said snow above 800 m – did not mention possibility of visibility limited by tea cosy stick man

The path then doubled back with a gradual ascent towards Napes Needle a vertical pillar of rock which provided quite a challenge for brave climbers. There were a few vertical routes on offer - but we were opting for a traverse which would hopefully avoid this kind of ascent.





The route we did not take - don't worry Mum – that's not me up there!



As we neared Great Napes the natural inclination was to ascend one of the gullies which presented themselves on the right. There was some uncertainty as to which gully to ascend so Steve and I traversed further while Mike, Mick and Roger started their ascent two gullies back. This was to result in a breaking of the fellowship – rather like in the Lord of the Rings when Frodo and Sam get separated from the rest of the group and head on towards Mount Doom – although in our case our prize was Great Gable summit and I didn't have to have my finger bitten off by Steve.

Apart from one hairy scramble to access a more promising gully (when I contemplated how odd it would be to come a cropper on the first day of my retirement), the green team were up, up and away. Taking advantage of their rapid progress the Summit Team rested before the final ascent to Great Gable, expecting the red team to appear in a few minutes. What seemed like several hours later with estimates increasing with each subsequent discussion of the incident (in fact it was just over an hour) there was some concern within team green that they were not seeing red. Eventually Steve received a voice mail from the red team with the news that following a photographic stop at Napes Needle and failed attempts to find a route up they were back at the original starting point.

*Let's join the red team to hear their unlikely version of events courtesy of red team spokesperson **Mike Bryant**:*

Expo members Lawrence, Mapleson and Bryant (base camp) ventured further up into Napes Gully from the southern traverse in order to get a view of a climber ascending Napes needle. Being rather more impatient, Brown and Webb decided to push on with the ascent of Great Gable (this was to become the advanced summit team) with both parties agreeing to meet up towards the summit.



*A red team member (identifiable by their **hat**) reports their position to the advanced green summit team*

The best viewing point of the Needle is from a small ledge called the dress circle. To get there required a small amount of scrambling over exposed rock. Finding a suitable vantage point, Lawrence and Bryant lingered for some photo opportunities whilst boredom dictated for Mick to head back down to safety.



A lofty view from Napes Needle – rather her than me



Preparing for a tricky ascent



Nearly up Napes Needle





After taking a few classics, Roger and Mike started the tricky descent to rendezvous with Mick further down the gully. During his descent, Mick had a confidence shaking experience and decided his day would be better spent at lower elevations and headed back down to sea level whilst Mike and Roger continued on, still aiming to meet up with the summit team. A quick mobile call to Steve ascertained they had ascended a gully a little further on and were relaxing awaiting our arrival. After some fine photos of Sphinx Rock, the base camp boys pushed on ahead into the bosom of the gully amid increasingly steep and exposed rock and narrowing ledges.



Sphinx Rock

The final impasse occurred at a six foot vertical step with loose soil and moss and no suitable foot or hand holds. I admitted defeat and offered the lead to Roger who had one valiant attempt before slithering back down with me nervously restraining him from sliding too far.

Roger's GPS bared testimony to the red team's numerous attempts to find a way upwards.



“Base Camp to Summit Team – we have a problem!”

Looking at the subsequent GPS track we weren't far from the Great Napes summit, nor from the gully we should have taken, yards past the buttress we were trying to overcome, but we lacked the benefit of this hindsight and the thought of finding ourselves cragfast with the embarrassment of a potential rescue from our B&B proprietor was not a good position to be in. However, we were now faced with a particularly hairy retreat back down to the southern traverse and the option to continue and try to find another route of ascent to rendezvous with the summit team, or throw the towel in and return to Wasdale. The latter was unanimously agreed with the (misguided) option to take the direct decent down the rock field. A message was left on Steves mobile and we began the perilous and tediously slow descent through the loose boulder strewn slope. This was a hellish descent, definitely not to be recommended, that went on and on like an ankle twisting treadmill. Eventually reaching the base of the slope back on Moses trod, I de-booted, rehydrated and refuelled; recumbent on a glacial dumped rock the size of a shed I awaited the arrival of my fellow suffering companion. Whilst there, I was passed by the Napes climbing party we had earlier photographed who had began their descent after us. They confirmed they had returned along the traverse toward Styhead to rejoin Moses trod: a much more sensible option in hindsight and one Mick had also taken. Thus a cursing Roger finally arrived and we proceeded back down the valley to the welcome comfort of Lingmell House, warm showers, soft beds and a refreshed Mick on his lonesome but not a sign of the summit team! Where could they have got to?

Meanwhile back with the patient summit team ...



After a while we received a further update to say that the red team were heading back to base camp. Steve was like a puppy that had been promised a walk and was straining at the lead with plans to continue on to Great Gable and then head towards Black Sail skirting Kirk Fell back to Wasdale.

We soon reached Great Gable summit and as time was also marching on, after a few hill top snaps we headed down towards Green Gable and then towards Black Sail, scene of



Great Gable summit proof – without the aid of photoshop

a previous visit to Wasdale by the same expo members in a previous millenium (October 1998 according to my notes). My plan of reconstructing the 1998 pose for this trip was now abandoned – although I notice that I was still wearing the same blue fleece for continuity.



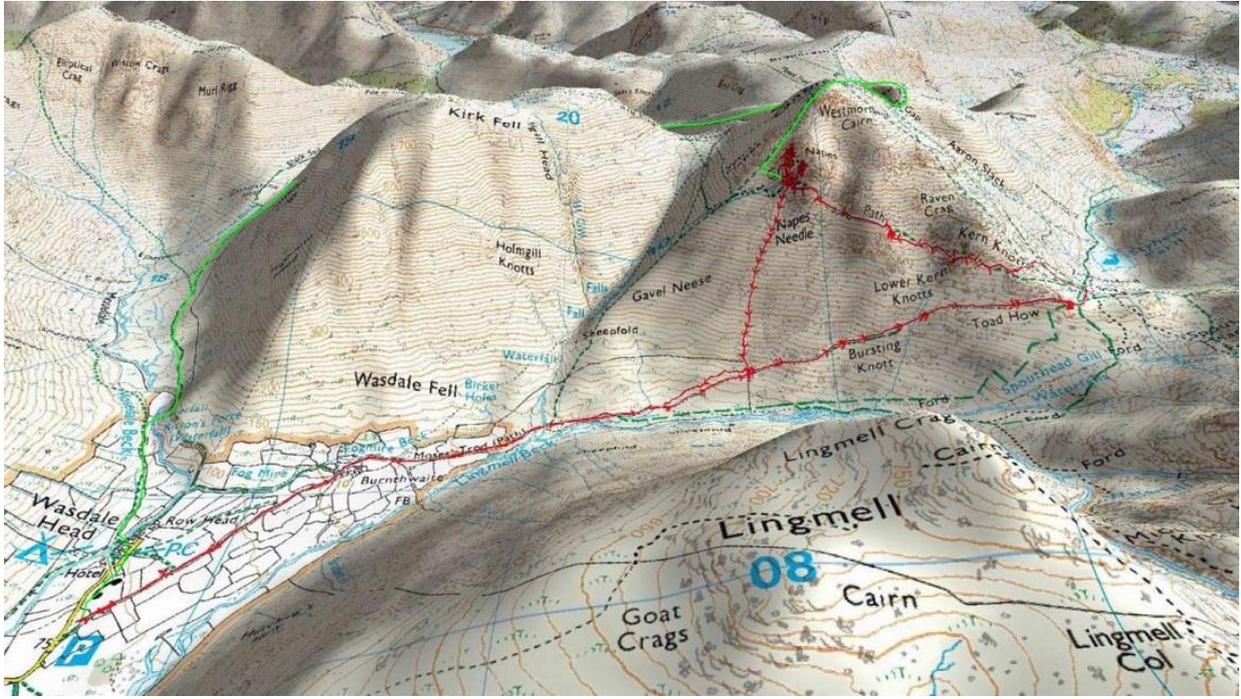
Black Sail then flash back (1998)



Black Sail now (2015)



The remainder of the descent was incident free, apart from Steve harbouring a small doubt that we had indeed come down the correct path into Wasdale. His worry was unfounded and eventually we were back at the B&B re-united with the red team and looking forward to a drink at the local pub.



Roger's 3-d rendition of route – (green team route added)



A Wasdale Head looking back



May 1st Post Script: Paragliding accident report

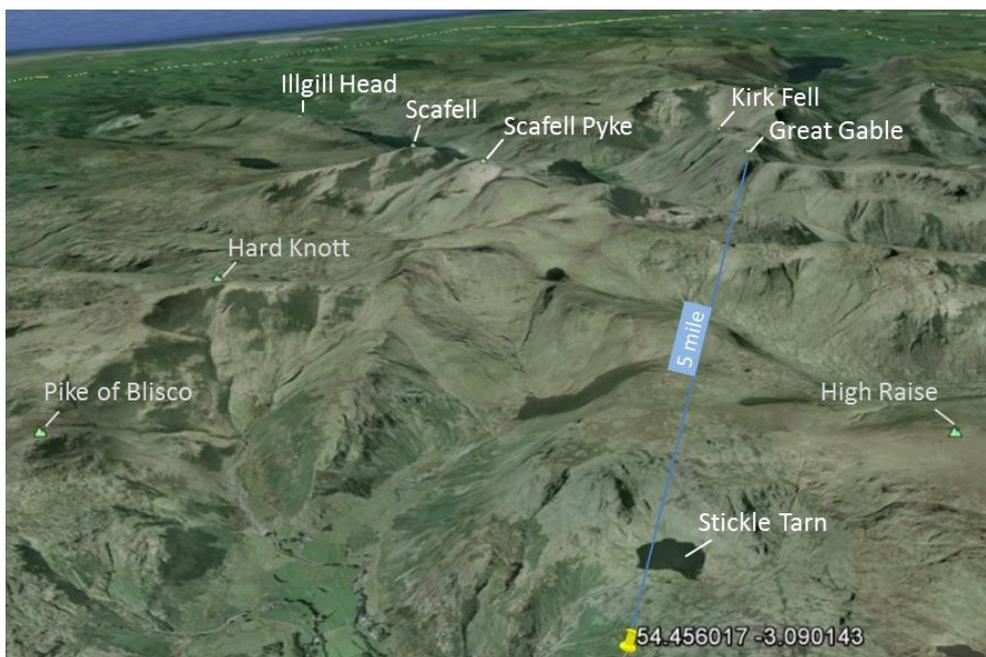
Just out of curiosity after the trip I had a look on-line at that day's Mountain Rescue Team (MRT) incidents – we could see paragliders in the distance on that day – here is what we did not see:

Incident Report #37 2015 Fri, 1st May 2015, 11:06

A paraglider was witnessed crashing in to the ground near Tarn Crag. The team responded and assistance was requested from air ambulance and military SAR helicopter. The pilot was treated by team members and air ambulance paramedics and then evacuated by RAF Sea King to a place where he was transferred to the air ambulance and flown to the nearest major trauma centre.

Man Hours: 12 team members for 3 hours, plus Kendal MRT standing by

Lat-Long: POINT(-3.090143 54.456017) ... which I have plotted below.



Paraglider accident (1/5/15)

A paraglider has been badly hurt after crashing on a fell in the Lake District.

The Great North Air Ambulance (GNAAC) was scrambled after reports of the accident near to Tarn Crag, in Little Langdale, near Ambleside. The man was treated at the scene then flown to the Royal Preston Hospital which took 15 minutes, the GNAAC said. A spokesman said the victim suffered life-threatening injuries but was stable.





DAY THREE (Saturday 2nd May 2015)

Scafell Pyke

The weather prospects for Saturday were not so good as the previous day. After another fortifying cooked breakfast the five expo re-united members gathered for a group shot in front of the B&B.

I noticed from comments on Mike's facebook page regarding the group shot that apparently we looked like a cast from Last of the Summer Wine. Well I suppose I'll go down as Compo, Roger makes a good Foggy while Mike's leg wear could put him in the Nora Batty league. Mike's hat was also targeted for comment.



Last of the Wasdale wine

If Steve had his cap on he would have made a good Clegg whereas Mick looks like he might have strayed in from the Captain Birdseye granddad in Only Fools and Horses.



Path leading out from the Wasdale Head Inn (looking toward Kirk Fell)



*Yesterday's sunshine
made way for today's drizzle
and as we ascended
this gradually turned to a blustery sleet.
It was time to don waterproofs, gloves and hats
as the temperature dropped at higher altitude.
The first part of the path
was almost a repeat of the previous day's walk,
but this time instead of heading up on the left towards Styhead Tarn,
we skirted Ling Mell to the right up the Piers Gill route.
Onwards and upwards
to the highest peak in England,
Scafell Pike*



The patches of snow on the ground became more frequent as we neared the top until our path was covered in a layer of hillwalker compacted snow which was quite slippery in places. Mick took a couple of tumbles and I was treading very gingerly with a couple of slips here and there.



Piers Gill route to Scafell Pike

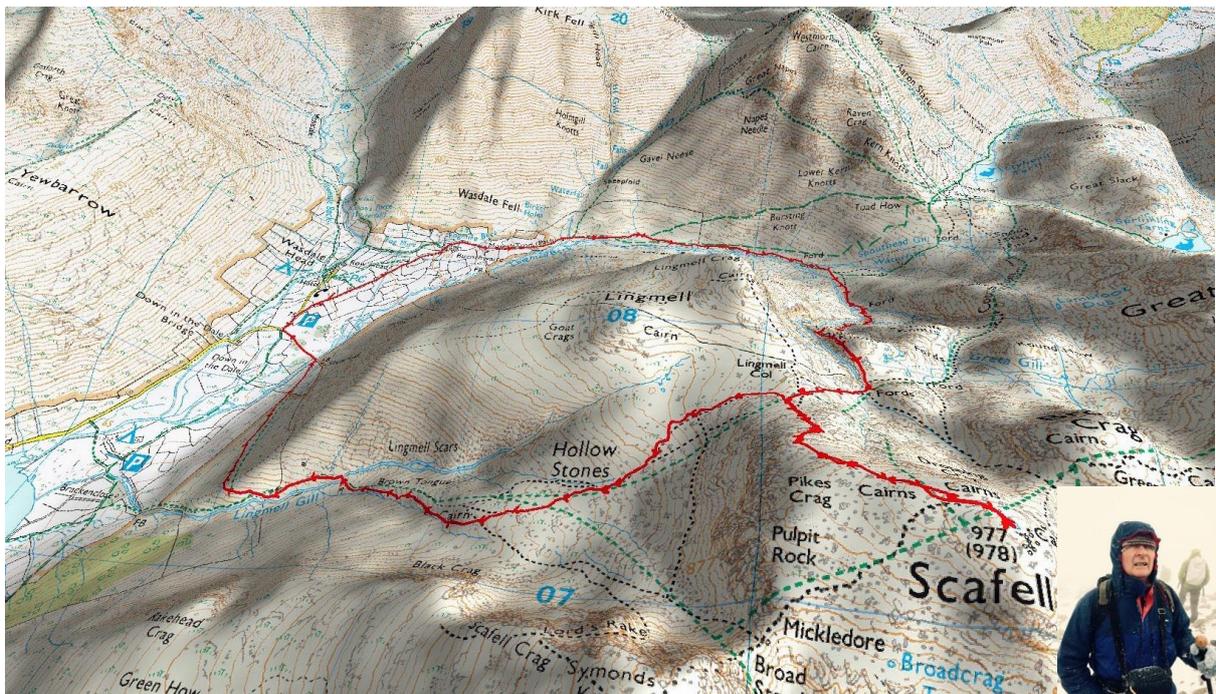
With poor visibility and blizzard conditions we arrived at the summit of Scafell. In the chilling cold and with no prospective views it was not the place to stay too long and after a quick summit group shot we trudged back down the slope.



Scafell Pyke peak



Mike reflects on Scafell's landscape



Scafell Pyke from Wasdale courtesy of Roger and his GPS tracking device



The route back to base camp skirted Lingmell to complete a circumnavigation as shown by Rogers's GPS track. A well developed path down Brown Tongue was taken – this was the route I took up to Scafell Pyke in 1989 as part of the three peaks challenge with the Marconi Baddow Outdoor Activity Club – oh oh another flashback ...

Peaks of achievement

Most people would be satisfied with climbing one mountain in a day, but members of the Baddow Outdoor Activities Club (BOAC) decided to try scaling three. The three in question were Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon, the highest peaks in Scotland, England and Wales respectively.

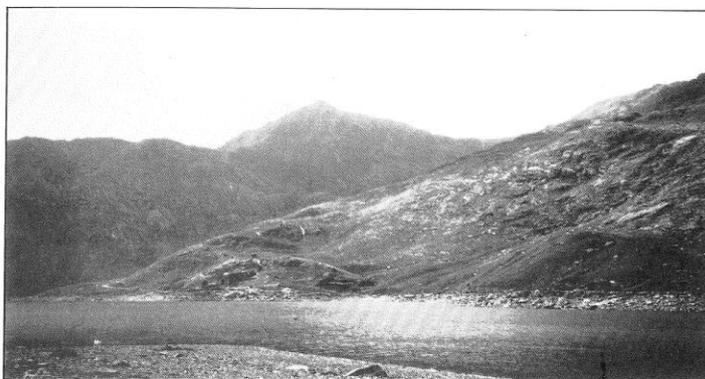
It began as a hairbrained idea returning from a weekend's activity in Wales one Sunday evening. The idea caught on and eventually 13 people found themselves in Baddow car park on Friday afternoon, 23rd June, with a hired and decidedly tired looking minibus and a new Ford Orion loaned from a local supplier, Trimoco.

The group had decided that all this effort was worth sponsoring. One member, Neil McDonald, was then President of Chelmsford Rotaract Club - a junior branch of Rotary - who raise money for charities and the two clubs decided the money raised would go to Guide Dogs for the Blind and Hargrave House, a local home for physically handicapped children. The local press and BBC Radio Essex took an interest and gave them some publicity and a few moments of fame.

After an overnight stop at Sheffield, they were ready to tackle Ben Nevis at 5.45 p.m. on the Saturday. Though much of the country was enjoying fine weather that weekend, Ben Nevis was not. The party split into three groups and battled through rain, strong winds and 100 feet of snow. At the top the temperature was below zero!

Fatigue

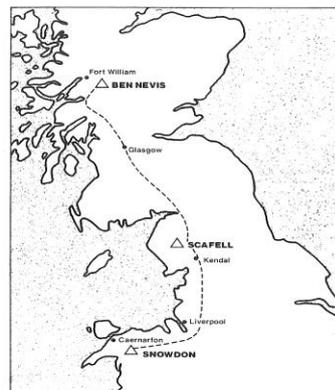
The first group were back down in 3 hours 5 minutes and after sandwiches and drinks they left for Scafell at 10.45 pm. The next ascent began at 4.15 a.m. in two groups. Fatigue and aching joints were beginning to take their toll: the top of Scafell was also wreathed in cloud and



Snowdon from Llyn Llydaw in a more welcoming mood than BOAC members found it.

people were beginning to wonder why they were there! But the first group were back down by 9.00 a.m. and on their way to the final peak, Snowdon, ten minutes later in the car.

The minibus followed half an hour later, but, by now its age was telling and it ascended the lower slopes of the Snowdon range with only third and fourth gears available. Some remarkable driving techniques by Merry Williams and an increasingly overheated clutch enabled it to limp into the car park at the foot of the Miners' Track at 3.05 p.m.



It's a deceptively long drive from Ben Nevis to Snowdon.



Celebrating their success at the foot of Snowdon: left to right: Neil McDonald, Dave Matthews, Tony Smithson, Andy Baslington, Andy Brown and Adrian Kyte, who all completed the climbs. Neil has now moved to Walsall with GEC Card Technology. Other MRC members of the party were: Tim Lee, Martin Smith, Paul Sleep, Merry Williams and Ian Shorey.

Again the weather on the mountain was unpleasant, but six members of the party completed the climb: the first two with half an hour and the last one with just over a minute to spare! So the venture was, in the end, a worthy success despite the minibus, which the RAC had to relay back to Chelmsford.

Altogether 25 miles walking, a total height climbed of 9,500 feet and 470 miles of driving combined to raise £800 for the charities. The team members expressed their gratitude to MRC's management for their support in the venture and to all those who sponsored them.

Flash back to 1989 when a young 30 year old Brown had another memorable trip up Scafell Pyke



Coincidentally further flashback photos have come to light courtesy of Mike, also dating back to 1989 – in this case May 5th – 8th. According to weather records there was a bit of a drought between 1988 and 1989.



Roger reflects on previous successful Great Gable conquests when he allowed himself a celebratory Marathon bar (in the days before they were called Snickers). Jim is in relaxed position.



On this occasion we basked in sunshine with blue skies over the Scafell



Scafell 7th May 1989: Steve – Andy – Roger – Mick – Jim – Bill



Enough of this reminiscing - fast forwarding 26 years back to May 2015...

After the day's walk we were ready for an evening in the pub. Saturday night of a bank holiday weekend resulted in Wasdale Head Inn being over subscribed, so Steve kindly offered to drive us to a pub which could provide both seats and food - The Screes Inn could not but beyond there the Bridge Inn at Holmrook could.

*Let's leave the expo group in the pub and look forward to the next edition *walking into the infinite plasticity of time and space ...**



The End



News just in: Reports are emerging of a mysterious new peak found in Wasdale



... and the photo that did not quite make it to the final edition

And finally let's go over to the one of our avid readers for their live reaction to this edition ...

