

JMCS 2020 Contents

The Stork, The Bat & The Badger - 23 Years in the Making

Alex Taylor

It's been a funny year.

On New Year's Day I kept to my resolution by getting on Rat Race at Upper Cave Crag, admittedly there was no real intent but my one and only resolution was ticked. Hard to believe how the year would unfold.

Since 2015 and with the exception of early spring trips to Spain with Sandy, Alf and others I was in danger of becoming one of those people at Alien who never climb outdoors. Although if asked I would have preferred to use one of Tom Patey's stock answers from *The Art of Climbing Down Gracefully*, for instance *The Responsible Family Man* ploy – I have a child and I drive a Volvo, if pressed further I could back this up with a reasonable CV of climbing exploits. This year the annual trip to Spain had reduced to just Sandy and me, but we were undeterred and booked for the end of March. As our departure date approached our trip became less and less likely, borders

closing, the government suggesting against all but essential travel, climbing walls closing and finally Ryanair confirmed they won't be going to El Chorro. The suggestion of a trip to Dunkeld as consolation was initially aired and then quickly dropped. The round of three Munros at Loch Ossian provided 40km of socially distant walking prior to the inevitable Lockdown.

Furlough followed Lockdown and somewhere in between a Lattice Rung was purchased, installed and backed up with the Crimpd app. 'Get Strong' was the answer to the question from a colleague when asked what I was going to do with all the spare time. And for the next seven weeks I was doing hangs for 10 & 30 seconds, 7 seconds on 3 off, pull-ups and pinch block training with weights of up to 45kgs – training which seemed even further removed from climbing than the habitual trips to Alien.





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After the initial easing of lockdown and the suggestion a wider variety of outdoor exercise could be undertaken (within 5km) a tentative trip to Blackford Quarry was arranged with Ruairidh Finlayson (Ru who often displays badger like traits). We made use of the in situ bolts and set up a top rope on two different lines, each line gave the option for the left, middle and right route; and each provided enough snappy rock to ensure no one shared the same holds and even at that

hands were sanitised after every route and distances were maintained as per the official guidance. We did then go onto Agassiz Rock where the risk of transmission was significantly greater – one problem each and we left to go our opposite ways.

As summer progressed and restrictions eased, I had trips to Ratho, Limekilns, Back Bowden, Polney, Aberdour, Benny Beg and Traprain – mainly with Ru, but was also joined by his old man (Brian

and my wife (Sriwong). Ru was also active in the North East, Lakes and East Lothian (bolts).

The start of August brought suggestions of better weather for the weekend ahead; our thoughts turned to the mountains. I made a tentative suggestion for a trip to The Ben - Titan's Wall & The Bat, 'back in the day' when I was the Boy Wonder the combination gave great appeal – Hard & Extreme Rock ticks in one day. Climbing with

Brian at the time this seemed to be just too much to ask – for both of us. However late in the summer of 1997 I found myself heading for the Ben with Paul ‘Stork’ Thorburn on this occasion we walked the length of the Allt a’Muillin and the rain that had threatened arrived just as we got to the CIC we spent the afternoon on Creag Dubh.

Back to early August this year with enthusiasm building and waning with the forecast going from good to bad and then dubious – rain forecast for Friday meant we would be wise to wait until Sunday, the weather for the weekend was to be superb – so after 23 years it looked like the planets were once again starting to line up – good weather, a level of fitness required to climb E2/E3, and of course a climbing partner in which I have complete faith (in 97 Stork was leading up to E7). So, with all that I was to pick Ru up at 5:00 Sunday morning.

After a three hour drive with the weather looking almost perfect we squeezed into the North Face car park with only space left for us and the midges – the little blighters were being

fed on a conveyor belt of outdoorsy types, a quick squirt of Smidge and they were spared from their impending obesity. A quick division of the climbing gear (in my favour) and we set off for the CIC. We chattered our way up the path with excitement, every step bringing more confidence in us having made the right choice. With a brief stop to take pictures and refuel at the CIC we found ourselves at the foot of Carn Dearg within a couple of hours. Ru quickly started to gear up, as he started to uncoil the rope I suggested possibly this was better done at the foot of Titan’s at which point he realised this was the start of Centurion etc we decamped and reconvened round the corner.

Now we were on the true North Face of Ben Nevis with a small stream running alongside the foot of the crag (Friday’s rain), at this point the only direction was up. With Titan’s Wall at E3 5b, 5c the division of labour was easy I would do the first pitch, Ru the second and then we would ab down and see what was left of the day.

As we were gearing up a well-equipped young family stumbled past, a trip

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With wall to wall sunshine you may have expected us to be in T-shirts & Shorts but alas the ‘Death Wind’ had got up

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to Castle Ridge had ended in outright rebellion from the youngest child and the family’s ambitions had turned to Ledge Route. A brief chat about our intentions for the day were concluded when the son declared ‘my dad no longer does Es’. To which dad pointed the finger of blame towards his offspring. There is a perfect route at Upper Cave Crag for Dad’s comeback - All Passion Spent E4 6a – should also stop any future dip in form.

With wall to wall sunshine you may have expected us to be in T-shirts & Shorts but alas the ‘Death Wind’ had got up and



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The climbing went as well as could be expected Friday's rain still seeping out of many of the cracks

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was far from warm so I left Ru to shiver as I set up the first pitch. Steady 5b climbing with reasonably adequate gear (tri-cams included) led to a fantastic ledge with an in-situ belay what could be better (slightly less wind). Took a belay and brought Ru up with little time wasted the rack transferred to its rightful owner and he set off up the 5c pitch (6a if you know where to look or if you look in my Lochaber & Badenoch guide we get E4 but no technical grade).

Ru gradually wound his way upwards, just as the crux was about to start he

realised he was overdressed for the occasion and decided to remove his puffer jacket a few contorted moves later and he sent his jacket down the as yet unclipped rope – it looked remarkably like a bat as it hurtled towards me (almost poetic but not quite). True to form and about 40mins after he left the ledge it was my turn to climb. I decided to climb jacketless and left a small cache on the belay ledge.

The climbing went as well as could be expected Friday's rain still seeping out of many of the cracks (Ru had

mentioned this but at the time I didn't think it was that important). Cold fingers moving from cold and slightly numb to actually quite useful. Gradually I delaced the route, often dodging the large wet holds for smaller and drier looking alternatives, the guidebook describes the pitch as gradually 'easing', the only easing I found was when I was able to stand upright at the belay. Quick pat on the back for all and then we set off down, clearing the cache on the way.

About 1pm and we were making good

time – good enough for a second route- oh hell yes. We returned to the original gearing up spot, fed and watered ourselves and divided The Bat into pitches for me and pitches for Ru. Ru led the first pitch (shared with Centurion), I followed and then also climbed 6m of Centurion at which point the Bat heads out right wards.

The route initially traverses a large ledge all but invisible and highly improbable from below. The ledge gradually runs out at which point there is a brief section of blank rock and then easy ground towards a spike belay, which easily claimed the prize for least comfortable belay of the day.

Fortunately, Ru climbs quickly gear is transferred one more time and he sets off downwards, almost as per the route description, and then back up again, shifts slightly to the left and finds a more straightforward way. This in turn leads to a thrutchy move onto a hanging slab exited via a vertical crack and the next belay.

I join him at the belay where we share some food and a drink, under normal circumstances this would be fine, but in 2020 sharing a bottle is riskier than

climbing, or is it? Being honest with ourselves climbing possibly provides an ideal pathway for any virus – how many times does a trad climber use their teeth to temporarily hold some gear (even your mates nuts) or grip the rope as more is pulled up?

The next pitch was The Hoodie Groove any pitch which has been given a name (I think this is the first for me?) has an air of mystique and foreboding, however the sixth pitch mentions jamming so to have any chance of maintaining my dignity this seemed the easier option for my skills set and it was only 15m so retreating would provide the minimum of faff. It turned out I was more than up for the challenge a skip to the right, clip the in-situ nut, few tricky moves left some more gear and a pull over to get the first glimpse of the sodden corner above. Took the next belay and brought up Ru, the belay ledge had once been made up of three pegs which possibly told a story of their own – attached to the three pegs was what looked like abseil tat – carefully linking the pegs, one of which had been completely freed from the rock – possibly an exciting retreat?

The impending wetness didn't appear

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to be a barrier to success as it was limited to the section before the overhanging crack. Again, I swapped the rack for the mini-sack and Ru headed upwards. A few moves up filled the badger with absolute joy a blue offset a gift from the crag. Then onwards and upwards the crux was gradually unpicked and laced, dry rock could be found not necessarily the juggiest of holds but for a 6a climber big enough. Then the fun of the exit cracks - technique, guile and Big Bertha (size 6 DMM Dragon) gradually unlocked the top half of the pitch, no thrills just solid climbing. Another 40mins and like clockwork it was my time to climb, halfway

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Carn Dearg had one last chance to spoil our day but obviously had lost it's fighting spirit and relinquished our ropes

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up the first section and a small (very) flake I was powering off exploded – I flapped around for a minute, had anyone been watching they would have recounted how ‘his teeth were fangs and his eyes were big red orbs’ almost bat like possibly trying to impersonate Dougal Haston but on the safer end of the rope. I quickly got back on and bridged my way to the exit. As with Ru I continued up with finesse.

The next pitch was meant to be the final and then ab down Titan’s and home, the slight issue is at this point the route loses its distinct line and

many options open up. The best we could hope for was climb upwards for half a rope length and then look out for where we were earlier in the day – easy! Highlight was the large wooden bong towards the top of the pitch – too far back in the crack to be of any use and overlooked completely by the second. Ru then set off on a rising and then falling traverse and after a further 30m stopped, I followed hoping to see familiar landmarks but on arrival there was an abseil point but not what was expected, no further options presented other than heading down. 5mins of self-reflection and the ropes went slack

– Ru had found the top of Titan’s, I clipped in slid down and joined him once more, ropes pulled through and off he went again, and within no time we were paddling in the stream. Carn Dearg had one last chance to spoil our day but obviously had lost it’s fighting spirit and relinquished our ropes; the wind even took them beyond the stream.

At about 6pm we packed our bags; I did suggest we walk out over Tower Ridge and also get a Classic Rock tick. At the same time the share of the rack was reversed from the morning and I

struggled to lift my sack. The descent to the car park although quicker was a lot more gruelling, didn't help to have mountain bikers shooting past in the lower half. At the upper car park (winter only?) we prepped ourselves for a further onslaught of midges at 7:30 we arrived at the nearly empty car park where the midge count was zero.

We packed the car and headed home arriving back in Edinburgh at 11ish.

On reflection a day trip such as this from Edinburgh is totally justifiable, it does however fill you with some guilt you read the Bat & the Wicked and how the route was first climbed by Robin Smith over several visits and often well into the night before conceding defeat. We did have the luxury of a guidebook, modern gear, modern car and a modern road network (even better once the A9 is dualled further), plus a blatant disregard for the highway code (at Dalwhinnie the traffic lights were definitely stuck on red). One small consolation is believing one of the pegs left behind by Haston has now been liberated from the crag.

And what of Rat Race?



Foinaven Now and Then

David & Mary-Lucy More

At last, we can go further afield, now the restrictions are easing. She said

Great, but I don't fancy the Cairngorm honeypots. He said

Well the weather is so good, and it's been dry for weeks, we really should get out before the crags get too busy. She said

Yeah, I'm tired of backpacking in the hills from our backdoor. He said

What about Foinaven, you often talk about when you went there before we met. She said

Not too far to drive, compared to last time when I borrowed Dad's car. We stopped overnight at The Smiddy after driving from Edinburgh on the Friday night. It was May 1977, before Ove Arup's Kylesku bridge was built. He said

Ok, should be easy this time – lightweight camping kit, and a couple of nights food, we'll only take the

essentials. She said

My Joe Brown rucksack – no waist belt, wooden shaper that fitted his back but not mine, was stuffed with climbing gear, a week's tinned food, two-person tent & a primus. I could hardly pick it up - my back aches just thinking about it. He said

Beautiful morning, excellent views, and a light breeze to see us off from the car. She said

There's the path up the glen, it'll take us a couple of hours then we'll see the crags. He said

Nobody else around. Perfect weather. Wonderful butterflies. She said

That's the second fishing bothy we've passed – locked of course. He said

Let's stop at the bridge for water. She said

Yes, I'm sure this is where we camped

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*Beautiful morning,
excellent views,
and a light breeze
to see us off from
the car. She said*

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last time. It was an Edinburgh JMCS climbing/camping week around the holiday weekend. Instigated I think by John Fowler & Mike Fleming. There were ten of. We all shared cars. I had Nigel Grant and one other in my Dad's car. John had his soft-top sports MG. Of course, we stopped at the Rhiconnich Hotel for a lunchtime pint or two before setting off. He said

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*Let' get out of here:
it's impossible to cook
or sleep with this
density of midges.
He said*

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Wow, what amazing cliffs. She said

Lots of unclimbed rock. He said

Great walking on this new hard-core track. She said

It was a peat bog trudge last time. He said

After we've found a camp site let's go

to the end of the track to look at the crags. She said

Can't find a site in this bog, but a spot beside the river will do. He said

These cliffs are overhanging, the routes must be hard. Really impressive. She said

Last time we couldn't reconcile the Corriemulzie MC Interim Guide and the Constable Hamish MacInnes Guide. Even on the route we weren't sure which route we were on! We retreated: the better part of valour is discretion. He said.

Incredible that nobody else is here in such good weather. She said

If this was in The Lakes the crags would be swarming with climbers. He said

It's so peaceful sitting in the sun looking at the cliffs. She said

Memories flooding back – woollen breeches, tartan shirt, P A.s. He said

Now we're back at the tent let's have a mug of tea. What did you eat last

time? She said

Can't remember. John would be sharing Mike's casserole that lasted all week. He said

Wind's dropped; midges are out. She said

Billions of midges. They're starved this year – lack of visitors. He said

They aren't wearing face masks & haven't heard of social distancing. She said

Let' get out of here: it's impossible to cook or sleep with this density of midges. He said

We made quicker time walking back to the car. She said

Home's only an hour & half away. And it's midge free. He said

Now I know why Foinaven climbing is undeveloped. It'll take days to get all the midges out of our kit. She said

The winter routes there may be good. He said



Beinn Eidhe campsite

Rose-tinting my Glasses: Memories from a North-West Week

Danny Carden

Memory is a funny thing.

It's a useful aspect of the human psyche that we can often wipe out the mundane, disheartening or embarrassing moments of our pasts, in favour of those that we'd rather reflect upon for decades to come.

For me, this is rarely more apparent than in climbing.

I enjoyed a memorable week up in

North-West Scotland this August with my mate Joe Spoor.

Looking back on the first few days of our trip, spent camping and climbing at Beinn Eighe, it's so much easier to remember – no, feel – those three seconds when the sun finally rounded the silhouetted shoulders of Sáil Mhor and warmed my numb limbs than the long, shivery belays that had preceded them.

I bet you'll recall a moment like that too. First the rock gets pink, then a few shards of light dazzle unaccustomed pupils, then a fuzzy euphoric glow radiates inwards through each chilled digit, then limb. All frustration with your static, swearing, in-situ leader above quickly fades.

I've a much clearer memory of a lucky sinker wire that fell perfectly into place as I trembled up the airy bit on Sumo's



Joe on Beinn Eighe

third pitch, than the infuriating itch from hundreds of midge bites across my ankles, hips and eyelids as I rustled about in my sleeping bag that night. I couldn't tell you which routes during the trip caused the scars on my knuckles that have only just faded, two months on. Yet when returning to Angel Face this summer, four years after I'd previously climbed it, I could remember exactly what micro-cam protects that tricky traverse.

I've no doubt that this phenomenon is what leads so many of us, and climbers especially, to unconsciously develop rose-tinted glasses as we age.

Doing so helps us forget our dwindling

free time, motivation or ability as our families, dependencies and bellies grow.

A common refrain from experienced climbers is that Britain's mountain routes are empty and dirty these days, with classics neglected in favour of the anodyne allure of plastic, or cheap flights to Kalymnos.

Winters... summers... climbers.... they aren't what they used to be. In truth, it is each of us who changes. None of us are what we used to be. This August, there were almost 20 climbers spread across the Far East Wall on one of our three days at the cliff.

There was something quite timeless

about the scene.

Munro-baggers labouring up the dodgy scree gully. Clinking gear and murmurs of 'Watch me!' from out-of-sight climbers. A young couple whooping as they jumped into the loch far below. It could just be the pandemic blues, or being a plateauing mid-thirties climber, but for the first time in my life I occasionally spot myself filing away moments like this in the brain folder marked Remember.

We had three golden days in Beinn Eighe's Coire Mhic Fhearchair, climbing routes so good that they leave an indelible mark on you that long outlasts the aches in the elbows.

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the stress of having to make a snap decision about where to go next as we sat soaked inside my steamed-up car, with no internet signal and clouds of midges trying to hitch a ride.

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When the conditions are right, it's a cliff to savour and to return to; in person and in the mind.

Sitting here in my kitchen on a wet lockdown evening in mid-October, it's a gift to be able to let my thoughts pleasantly wander back to The Pale Deidre's immaculate second pitch... Angel Face's rewarding long reaches... Grooving High's techy wee corner... Pale Rider's creaking flakes... and Sumo's wild exposure.

In fact, we climbed such quality lines that I have to strain to recollect the more challenging moments, like our walk out from the coire in the battering rain, wet through to the pants.

Or the stress of having to make a snap decision about where to go next as we sat soaked inside my steamed-up car, with no internet signal and clouds of midges trying to hitch a ride.

Eventually, we opted to drive north to Sutherland in the hope of stumbling on drier weather.

Sheigra rewarded our gamble, with the first morning's dense haar soon dispersing to leave the Second Geo's sheet of bubbly gneiss glistening in the sun for the most of the next three days. We fired through about a dozen routes and I was pleased to lead some of the E2s despite tendonitis causing havoc with my forearms. Bloodlust Direct and Exorcist were highlights, although they didn't go down without a fight.

While I felt a bit jaded from so many days of hard climbing in a row, Joe seemed to be just getting going. After some interrogation, he confessed to having completed a terrifying-

Danny high on Exorcist





sounding regime of pre-dawn Campus board sessions throughout the winter. His smooth ascent of the four-star E3 Monkey Man in Sheigra's First Geo fooled me into thinking it must be a soft touch; a theory soon dispelled while I hauled myself up it by the skin of my teeth on second.

Joe's onsight of the E4 Dolphins and Whales was an impressive watch from the comfort of the 'Black Pedestal' - the magnificent belay ledge that marks

the start of most tidal routes in the Second Geo.

Sheigra's Teletubbyland combination of lush grass, turquoise sea, white sand and red rock are heavenly.

So much so that I feel that visiting climbers should maybe play it down a bit when telling others. It would be a shame for it to get too popular and lose its end-of-the-world magic.

Yet dredging up any downsides is hard.

It's only by revisiting photos from this summer's trip that I've been prompted to recall being charged £5 a night for a 'campsite' with no showers, toilets, bins or even a working tap.

And how some hoodlum nicked our entire bag of cheese, yoghurt, pasta and beer that we had left cooling in the burn.

Or that we wasted a ludicrous morning charging around a heathery moor in a



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Before we set off, Joe confidently 'fixed' the sole of his only pair of shoes using my fetching pink unicorn-covered duct tape.

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vain search for a 'roadside' crag called the Red Slab.

And that I failed to leave the ground when attempting what I had planned would be a final gentle route to conclude our Sheigra stay.

That ignominious failure was a sign that a change was probably needed, but the weather gods took the decision from our hands.

Dark cloud rolled in the next morning, and we began the drive south via a claggy stomp up the rugged Sutherland

Corbett, Arkle.

Before we set off, Joe confidently 'fixed' the sole of his only pair of shoes using my fetching pink unicorn-covered duct tape.

The sun popped out briefly as we nattered and ate our slim-pickings lunch of crisps and mayonnaise sandwiches, looking north towards the grey wilderness of Foinaven.

On our eighth and final day we stopped for a quick hit on some of the steep sport routes at Weem in Perthshire.

By this stage my elbows were moving from mildly grumbly to full-scale mutiny.

My frustration at not getting up a single climb cleanly wasn't helped by having to belay Joe as he flashed the F7a+ High-Pitched Scweem, cruised the E2 Last Temptation, then led the F7b Sweeming Dream on just his second go. Watching him pull elegantly through those powerful moves had me plotting my own Campus board regime.

We're heading confusedly towards our first Covid Era winter.



I feel like I'll be needing the rose-tinted glasses more than ever to fire up some motivation during the impending cold, dark lockdown.

It's reassuring to know that I've got the fond memories of that August week safely filed away.

And many decades from now, I look forward to telling anyone who'll listen how in my day, the sun would always shine on North-West Scotland.

How the crags would be teaming with young climbers competently onsighting the Extremes.

How we'd camp up high and climb mountains in shoes held together with sticky tape.

And how these days, it's just not the same.

The First Big Munro of Summer

Laurie Corlett Donald

Blessed are those whose feet fall over the mountainside, kicking at every tussock as they move up and down. Walking soft, over the plain reaches of the plateau, reached after bealachs that seem impossible to get to at first - hidden by false peaks and fog. Endless hours spent trekking across boggy moors; time resigned to the goal of ascent. Why do we enjoy this? Are we searching for things that we cannot find in the cities amongst the urban sprawl and buildings? Seeking out the things we can't even find in the low counties, with their boundless horizontal fields. These feelings only come from the humps and mounds of rock and heather that push up into the heavens, found in the highlands of Scotland. These mountains are ours, and oh how we've missed them.

David and I stalk our way up the steep slopes of an unknown outlier somewhere near - supposedly - the summit of Sgor Gaoith. My chest is pounding, forehead drenched in sweat,

breath panting, between curses hidden under the pounding of the wind. I don't want to admit that lockdown has reduced me to what I am now, but it has. My once fit body - now resembling an old dog struggling to make its way from the fire to the worn bed it will probably die in, drags its way up the hill.

"Where is the warm whisky? The familiar surroundings of our room? The strangely comforting squeals of our neighbour's TV?" It quivers to me under the rampant roar of Cairngorm's Arctic summer wind.

I try my very best to keep up with David, who strides ahead with a pace that doesn't seem to have lost any steam. He chose to spend lockdown: running through Edinburgh's cobbled streets, cycling and doing (even if begrudgingly) - yoga. I on the other hand, over the magnitude of still months preceding this one had spent it instead - drinking heavily; smoking as heavily, and in general just being

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Why do we enjoy this? Are we searching for things that we cannot find in the cities amongst the urban sprawl and buildings?

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a layabout reprobate. I had convinced myself that climbing and hillwalking were an old forgotten dream. A worn bit of film in a camera, that you long ago pawned off for terrible netflix series; and the notion that the 100th lap of Salisbury Crags was attuned to the first time you crossed the Aonach Eagach.

As we reached the first false summit

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it became incredibly apparent that we had got this very obvious route inconceivably wrong. We looked out at where the summit was, seemingly miles away and scratched our heads.

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it became incredibly apparent that we had got this very obvious route inconceivably wrong. We looked out at where the summit was, seemingly miles away and scratched our heads. Many map readings and compass bearings later, we established that we had clearly taken a path that was not marked on the map. This may not have been completely our fault, yet we conceded that perhaps covid 19 had

robbed us of our navigational skills. I took an inward sigh, again not wanting to show to David that inside I was dying and that this was a pretty major inconvenience.

“Right, well onward?” I suggested in a tone that suggested that this was not a mistake but in fact a good thing. Who wouldn’t want to do more walking, right?

An hour later I was trudging up the slopes towards the final bit of ridge that would lead us toward the summit. I knew I just had to get through this last bit of ascent and it would be over. The first Munro of the year would be bagged, the glory could be bragged about on my instagram feed and we could return to the bottom to claim the much deserved beers waiting for us in our Rothiemurchus abode. I pulled ahead of David, deciding on a diagonal trajectory over soft meadowed slopes that sat before the summit, hoping it would get me there faster. I felt good now. My breathing felt good, filling my lungs properly. My feet were following the contours, like they were supposed to. I stepped effortlessly over the scree that collected between

the grass, relics of another age set to trip up your average rambler, but this I was not - I was a seasoned Munroist and I was starting to remember. I ran the final steps, skipping gleefully onto the ridge which I reached in fleeting moments. The view stopped me in my tracks. Before this moment everything had been good: the comforting view of the A9, Kingussie and Monadhliaths in the distance, they were nice - but maybe not awe inspiring. I’d spent days surrounded by the same four walls, as we all had and I’d been looking for something that ruptured the norm.

This did it. The vast Cairngorm plateau stood before me. The mountain fell dramatically down on its eastern flank into Loch Einich seemingly miles below me. The deep blue of the water shimmering in a speck of sunlight, peaking through the dark clouds above me. The endless rock fields were splattered all over my horizon. The wind dropped for a moment, installing a calmness of being I’d not felt since the pandemic started. A great feeling of smallness came over me. I was nothing here, nor was the virus - nor really was time. This view transcended all these things, things that had been here in one

sense or another since the planet was formed. Tides of mass formed from past dust and carbon, lying before me now in this - my first moment of true serenity after lockdown.

“What a view eh?” David was behind me.

“Yeah really great. I actually wasn’t expecting it, I have to say.” I remarked, still a little in awe at what I was looking at. After a quick cup of tea and a sandwich the wind picked up so we started our descent back to the car.

Back at the cabin in the Rothiemurchus forest we enjoy fizz and smoked salmon around the chiminea. My mum teases David and I about our navigational mishaps. The hordes of salmon, fizz and other beverages are consumed over the night and giggling escapes us all at every moment. It was good to be back with family in a place that I had basically grown up in. This was the first Saturday night I had spent outside Edinburgh since February.

Eventually, laughter turned to contemplation, and as night falls we are left pondering the peaceful moan

of the trees and the rampant swells of the river. David heads off to bed and my mum and I talk about many things late into the night, before we too feel the call of sleep. I go outside to have a cigarette; enjoyed amongst the noises of the ancient Caledonian forest.

The river flows as it always has and always will, winding its way towards the sea, miles from here, taking its time as we’ve learned to do over this recent period. It carries no weight along its journey, as we have still not learned to do along ours. On these banks, in this cabin I’ve been to all my life - I dwell on its wonder, I breathe it in as it cleanses me. Just three days in the Highlands reminds me that my heart is truly entwined with it. It belongs here. My past is here, my memories amongst its endless spattering of heather and mountains are bound to this land. The air is fresh. The water tastes of life. The evening mist clings to my head, casting me in a mellow fog. Even the midgies don’t bother me as they cling to my beard and dig their fangs into my flesh. I’ve reset. I don’t want to return south to the city.

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The river flows as it always has and always will, winding its way towards the sea, miles from here, taking its time as we’ve learned to do over this recent period.

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The New Normal on the Same Old Hills

Thomas B

The Bauchop/Beutenmuller team, after getting off to a good start to 2020 by climbing Aladdin's Mirror Direct in the Northern Corries in early March, was forced to lie idle because of a certain pandemic that has been talked about so much. Still, armchairs are a good place to make plans, and with the lockdown easing and the weather forecast looking good for the last

weekend of August we finally saw a chance for this year's summit bivouac at last. However, as it has been difficult to feel positive in 2020, we made three different plans, each one being slightly more optimistic than the other:

Plan C:
Drive to the West Coast, watch the

wind and rain from the beer garden of the Lochailort Hotel, have a few drinks and in the end of the night crawl into our tents on a midge invested layby next to the A 830.

Plan B:
Climb the two Corbetts to the west of Loch Shiel, with rain and midges (hopefully) being bearable.

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the new normal meant that not one, but two cars with single occupants left Fife on Saturday, 29th August

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Plan A:

Climb the group of three Corbetts above Lochailort and aim to bivvy on Ross Bheinn, the main summit of the group, hopefully getting great views of a sunset over the sea and the Inner Hebrides.

And sometimes, even in 2020, things have a way of working out, and we were able to go for option A. But the new normal meant that not one, but two cars with single occupants left Fife on Saturday, 29th August, with the COOP in Corpach being identified as first rendezvous point at 11:30.

With the roads being so busy at the moment it was nearer to 12, but a late start is not a problem when you only aim to walk up a mountain.

We continued to Lochailort, past a very busy Glenfinnan, and parked our cars just after the turnoff south near some houses. We quickly put final items in the rucksacks, put our shoes on, adjusted the length of our walking poles and were on our way. As forecasted, it was a cool day with a brisk northerly wind. But chilly is good, it keeps the midges away...

We decided to tackle An Stac first, rather than climb the three Corbetts in a clockwise direction as suggested in the Corbett book, as we wanted to be at the best viewpoint of the ridge by sundown. Once we left the valley floor and were on the flanks of An Stac the views became better with almost every step we took: The slopes to the west fell away and gave us great views out into the sea towards the islands of Rum, Eigg, Muck, Skye and as far as the Outer Hebrides in the distance. It was spectacular, and I feel that the accompanying photographs



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The sun slowly set and left us with a spectacular afterglow. We snapped away at this amazing panorama.

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can describe it better than a thousand words could.

After a break and some refreshments on the summit of An Stac we had to descend quite steeply to the Bealach an Fhiona, from where we started the final ascent of the day, up the East Ridge of Ross Bheinn. As Stewart is a faster walker than me it was easy to practice social distancing, because he was way ahead of me. At the summit of Ross Bheinn I noticed a big cairn on the West Top, which is not the highest point but the top with the best view. I

could make out Stewart up there and carried on. Once I got there he had made himself a cup of tea already. I was tired and I also felt cold. Going for a summit bivouac always sounds like a good idea from the safety of your armchair, but in practice it can take a while to make yourself comfortable. After changing into all my spare clothes Stewart suggested that I should sit on the sunny side of the cairn. It was amazing how this slight shift of position made such a difference, as the evening sun warmed me up nicely. I also got my stove and

teapot out, and with a hot cup of sweet tea in me I could start to enjoy the evening views out west. The brisk wind continued, and I was glad that a foot-high stone wall next to the cairn would give us some shelter once we would bed down in our bivvy bags.

The sun slowly set and left us with a spectacular afterglow. We snapped away at this amazing panorama. Again, as the photos show, we were very fortunate to have these amazing views of the Inner Isles and along the seaboard, and we were happy

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Getting up the next morning was easy: Out of the bag, boots on, ready.

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to be in this place, despite the fall in temperature. “Lights out” was at 8:30, although the moon, almost full, shone brightly all night.

As I was getting comfortable for the night I thought how I had gotten into bivvyng: Back in the 1980s in Germany I often slept outside in my sleeping bag. Not a big deal in the milder climate there. However, when I tried to do the same in Scotland, during a balmy summer’s night in Glen Nevis out of all places, I was almost

demented by swarms of midges and did not try it again for many years thereafter. It was Stewart, during my obsessive phase of Munro bagging, who suggested to bivvy on the North Shiel Ridge back in 2006. ‘You’ve got to sleep high’, was his anti-midge-mantra....Although we had a very wet night on that occasion I liked the fact that when we woke up the next morning it was only 20 minutes walk to the next summit. I saw the potential of this and sent for a Goretex bivvy bag right away...

More bivvy trips followed: High camps in the Grey Corries, the Fannichs, the Fisherfield Forest and on Ben Wyvis. More recently we slept out on The Merrick in Galloway, and on Cullardoch in the Cairngorms. Although I also have a lightweight tent (my brother-in-law works for Gore...), just being in a bivvy bag is a huge difference from zipping your tent shut at night and opening it again in the morning: Lying up there on Ross Bheinn we saw the stars and satellites, saw clouds drift in, worried that it may start to rain, and then were relieved when they just passed over us and it stayed dry. In a nutshell, one is much closer to nature in a bivvy, which is a nice feeling. I am

under no illusion that a second night out would have been a damper and less comfortable affair, but it is good to once in a while enjoy a night in the open on a special mountain such as Ross Bheinn.

Getting up the next morning was easy: Out of the bag, boots on, ready. The weather was not so good anymore, but we hoped that the clouds would burn off, which they didn’t. We walked back east to the main summit, headed down to Bealach a Fhiona and on to the third Corbett of our round, Sgurr na Ba Glaise. We continued along the ridge to the next bealach. As it started to drizzle we decided not to go on to the last top, Druim Fiaclaich but rather to head down. A steep descent over broken grass slopes saw us back down on the corrie floor and a further few miles back at our starting point in Lochailort. We had been out for 25 hours and were ready for a cup of coffee...not an easy feat when you have to master the contact tracing app on your mobile phone....But even with many mundane things in this “new normal” being more cumbersome than before, the Scottish hills still will be as they always have been.



On the track from the Bealach

From Sea to Summit in Applecross and Torridon David Small

The most disrespected and ignored road sign in Scotland must be that on the south side of the road from Kishorn over the Bealach na Ba towards Applecross. It says "No campervans". Linda and I approached it in August this year and hesitated for a while, wondering whether our commercial van conversion counted, until we saw a Great White RV coming down from the north and decided (illogically) that in the face of such

blatant disobedience we must be ok to proceed. So we drove up to the big parking area at the bealach and got out of the van there to enjoy the view towards Skye. Seconds later we were back in the van, having realized how bad the midges were. For the rest of the evening we watched new arrivals repeating our experience and thought back (with a degree of disbelief) to the days when we would, somehow, have managed to get a tent up, transfer

all necessary kit into it from the car and live with the hassle of midges (thriving, dying and dead) until the time came next day to repeat the process the other way round.

In the morning the weather was as good as the Met Office had forecast, with the added bonus of a layer of mist over the sea and the islands of Raasay and Rona, which lay between us and Skye, so that the Red and the



On the way back from the Cioch

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The chimney that starts the second pitch is awkward but the third pitch is a delight – steep, exposed climbing, good holds on solid rock

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Black Cuillin looked like they were one with the land mass of Applecross. We walked up the track towards the telecoms mast above Coire a' Chaorachain, then descended into the coire itself and tried to make sense of the guidebook description of how to get to start of the Cioch Nose. The description said go to the lip of the corrie, then go up left and traverse a ledge. Fine, except that there are two lips to the corrie, one higher and one lower. We assumed the higher lip was the one which the guidebook meant, so we wasted a lot of time traversing a ledge which in our minds fitted the

description and which went a long way in the right direction, but ultimately led nowhere. After lots of recalculation, fuff and retreat, we finally got to the start of the Cioch Nose, on a more obvious and much lower ledge well down the corrie.

Tom Patey, who did the first ascent with Bonington – in the rain and wearing big boots – graded the climb Difficult. It ain't so now, if it ever was – the SMC guide gives it Severe 4a. Rusty from lockdown, I struggled on the vegetated corners on the first pitch and to my shame pulled on a

bit of in situ gear. (Some weeks later I mentioned this to a friend who is a guide; he said he thought a hold had come away and that the first pitch was now more like 4c - maybe I'm not so incompetent as I feared at the time!) The chimney that starts the second pitch is awkward but the third pitch is a delight – steep, exposed climbing, good holds on solid rock – although the piton which shows the way is ancient and now has two large holes in it, only one of which was put there by the manufacturer. A short fourth pitch leads to the top of the Cioch but, in terms of metres to climb, there is still



a long way to go; some walking and scrambling leads to another pitch of climbing, and then more scrambling, and walking up and down steep grass, until at last one is relieved to be back at the track down to the car park.

We then stayed a couple of days at the Applecross campsite and had a trip in our kayaks round the Crowlin Islands from the road end at Toscaig. This trip was graded "B" in our guidebook – where A is easy and C tricky/arduous. The wind was slight, the sea calm, the tide was with us and, in light of what was to come, we perhaps got lulled into a false sense of security.

After that we went on to Torridon and I occupied the afternoon of the transition day by walking up Beinn Damh. This is a fine Corbett with superb views in every direction and some scrambling both low down and high up if one chooses to seek it out – a good example of how Munro did not get all the best tunes, if you see what I mean.

Next morning we launched the kayaks at Shieldaig, intending to cross Loch Torridon to Inveralligin, then go down to Diabaig before crossing Loch



Maol Chean-dearg and An Ruadh-Stac from Beinn Damh

Torrison south again back to Shieldaig. The forecast was good, with a light to moderate north westerly wind, and the trip was graded "A" in our book, so we reckoned that we could handle it ok. Well, the first thing we realized was that it was quite a long paddle; after stops at Alligin Shuas and then Inveralligin the prospects of getting as far as Diabaig were fading. Having rounded the point of Airde Glaise and gone about 1.5 km further on, we decided it was time to turn for home; the weather still seemed ok but doing

the full trip would mean a longer day than we felt like having – little did we know how long a day we were about to have, despite our best efforts.

In the time that it took to return to Airde Glaise, an unforecast change in the weather made itself apparent. The wind had gone round to the south east and increased in strength, blowing straight down the loch against the incoming tide and creating a lot of disturbed water between us and Shieldaig. We landed in a little bay

on the east side of Airde Glaise and decided that we could not risk the crossing as things stood. We thought of trying to paddle back up the coast to Alligin Shuas, but there are lots of cliffs and jagged bits on the way where you cannot land a boat and could easily come to grief in an on-shore wind. Waiting for conditions to improve seemed the only option; after all, the forecast had been for moderate north westerlies – perhaps the stronger south easterlies were just a passing aberration? So we waited and waited.

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We tried phoning the local taxi driver but he wasn't answering. Oh well, we still had seven miles to go

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The passage from Loch Shildaig into Upper Loch Torridon

The wind got higher while the tide accelerated and the white horses in mid-channel multiplied. The afternoon turned into early evening. By climbing up the hill a bit I managed to get enough phone signal to log onto the Met Office site and learn that they had now done a volte face and were saying the wind would stay in the south east and at its present speed. That sealed it – we were going to have to abandon the boats and walk.

The OS map optimistically shows a footpath running from Airde Glaise

to Alligin Shuas. Well, I suppose we would have been worse off without it, but for much of its way up and down, round hillocks and bluffs, it was covered by heather and bracken. Naismith would have been hard put to maintain his suggested average hill speed of 3 mph over such terrain, especially if clad in a wetsuit and paddling boots (Linda) or sandals (me). I think we got to Alligin Shuas about 9pm. As we neared the junction with the “main road” from Diabaig to Torridon I heard a car coming and dashed ahead to wave my thumb at

it. It stopped (yay!) and the couple in it kindly went out of their way to take us beyond Torridon village to the A896 back to Shildaig. We tried phoning the local taxi driver but he wasn't answering. Oh well, we still had seven miles to go, but on a main road on a clear August night surely someone would stop? No – it was too late – three cars and a lorry passed us as we walked those seven miles, and that was it. We had plenty of time to remark upon the fact that soon after we left the kayaks the wind had begun progressively to relent and – probably

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beautiful views of the Torridonian mountains and their reflections in the undisturbed sea of the loch.

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Liathach from Beinn Dearg

– if we’d waited long enough we could have paddled back to Shieldaig after all.

A late finish meant a late start the next morning, but it didn’t really matter because the Met Office were forecasting high winds, and indeed bad weather lasting for the next few days. Needless to say, the high winds did not materialize that day, and in retrospect we could, with a bit of determination, have retrieved the boats, but we were tired, lacking in oomph and preferred to play it safe. So the boats stayed

where they were at Airde Glaise until we came back four days later, rather better equipped for the walk in, and paddled them round to Inveralligin on a lovely, calm August morning, with beautiful views of the Torridonian mountains and their reflections in the undisturbed sea of the loch. Indeed, the weather stayed fine all day, so that afternoon I walked up Beinn Dearg, another Corbett which must be among the best for its scrambly terrain and its all round panorama of other grand hills.

The varied fortunes of the holiday

had one more twist to them. We had thoughts of climbing Ruadh Stac Mor (the remoter summit of Beinn Eighe) on our last day. The weather wasn’t great but Linda has never seen the Triple Buttresses so we thought we’d at least go and have a look at them.

We left our overnight spot by the shore of Loch Torridon and had just begun the drive eastwards when a large car/open van appeared coming the other way. Now on single track roads most drivers stop some way distant from each other and there



Why can't it always be like this?

is usually a bit of time allowed for options to be reviewed and a decision made about what can reasonably be done. Not this time – the van came on at speed and stopped right in front of us. This gave us a problem as if we reversed we would be heading towards a blind bend at the foot of a steep downhill section of road, creating obvious potential for an accident. So Linda, who was driving, rightly stayed

where she was. I will spare you the detail of the next few minutes, but it involved a lot of tension and us being on the receiving end of a good deal of abuse. Mr Angry eventually backed up, but that gave us no pleasure. The morning was soured psychologically and the weather seemed to respond by taking its cue to get a lot worse; the wind got up, the clouds came down, the mood of the whole glen was grey

and bleak and we abandoned our walk half way in towards the corrie. But of course, while the weather may be unpredictable and can seem aggressive, it is merely doing what it does; unlike benighted humanity, when it menaces it is not letting itself down.

Rock Rock Sun and Spanish Fever Denise Hesketh

The journey

Embarking on my most intensive winter training season ever, I had not trained like this for a long time. That was until covid came along like an unwanted intruder, ruining all our best plans. I was trying hard to send those wasps and the peppermint V2s at the bloc, training hard on the Ratho auto belays; 2020 was to be a really good year for climbing. It was going to be the year.

I was looking forward to climbing with a partner again and dreamed of climbing outside as I watch the nights draw out.

As a club this is normally the time when we are looking forward to meeting up at the crags again, meeting up for a meal together after our first meeting of the year: Rosyth or maybe Aberdour if the tides are right.

Instead we were locked up: all of us, climbers and non climbers alike. We couldn't go anywhere and there was nowhere to go. Of course we were allowed some exercise and gentle bouldering at Salisbury crags was OK. Or would have been if I hadn't caught covid.

Well, what else could it have been? I

had all the symptoms for sure: fever, dry hacky cough, tight chest, restricted breathing, no appetite.

I was a long covid, my symptoms were mild but went on for a long time. By the time it was done everything and everyone was locked up.

Nobody was operating online. Everyone was keeping to the rules, which was good. It is important to stay safe.

The lockdown went on for ages as time dragged on. But gradually things began to open up. So naturally I was delighted when we were allowed to fly again. I booked myself on a climbing holiday in Spain for some professional guiding together with some climbing coaching. I was to be their first client since lockdown: the first post covid climber.

It sounded awesome and it was. So naturally I was determined to go. I decided at short notice so it took some fiddling about online. At that time, things hadn't properly opened. Scotland was still at a standstill so I had to get to the south of England by train as there were very few airports operating.





Me on Denise Denise

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So it was a night to remember on a bench at Bristol airport. The security guard was really understanding and brought me some food and drink.

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And the trains were also reduced so it was a faff trying to connect a train to a plane. It involved getting a train from Edinburgh in the morning to arrive in Bristol at 11pm. This would have worked well enough if the Bristol airport tavern had been open, as it appeared to suggest on booking.com. Lucky I packed the jacket and all the warm things for a trip to Spain. Deep down I knew what I needed them for.

So it was a night to remember on a bench at Bristol airport. The security guard was really understanding and brought me some food and drink. He showed me where everything was: the

toilets, he gave me directions to the makeshift terminal where I would be boarding in the morning. Everything was surreal and reminiscent of being in a bizarre type of hotel. Luckily it was a warm night. But not for long. I lay down in my t-shirt and Jeans, but shortly I woke up shivering, quickly donning all my layers I had brought, fumbling around in my backpack for more.

It was a cold metal bench, built to be as uncomfortable as possible in order to discourage loiterers.

At dawn my smartwatch told me my sleep period had lasted 6 hours, but it

said I had been awake for 3 of these. It knew I had to be awake because periodically I had to get up and stretch my legs, needing relief from my cramped position and to keep myself warm. It recorded one hour of deep sleep. How I managed that, I'll never know.

I was so pleased to be finally boarding. At last I was about to fly. Into a completely different world. Although Spain still had restrictions like everywhere, it was a lot more open. There were far fewer cases in Spain at the time compared to the UK. I felt like a pioneer, being one of the first

passengers to fly out of lockdown.

A different world

It was the start of something magical. I've met some wonderful people who are great friends as well as inspiring, encouraging and excellent climbing coaches. Trevor and Desiree made feel welcome and at home. They looked after me throughout my stay: meeting me at the airport when I arrived, driving me to the villa where I had the entire top floor of the building to myself and also making sure I got sorted out at the supermarket so I had plenty to eat.

We drove for what must have been about 2 hours and arrived at the villa which was one of several nestled in the mountains. It was situated in a small village called Lliber where much of the climbing is. The scenery was breathtaking. The villa was beautiful. It had everything one needed including a pool in the garden overlooking the mountains.

I told Trevor I wasn't keen on early starts first thing in the morning. "OK we'll set off at 9am" was his reply. I had been thinking 10am. At that time I knew absolutely nothing about the Spanish climate in the height of summer.

Our late start meant we had to begin our adventure at Pena Roja in Lliber, where the routes were more strenuous and sustained than I would have liked for a warm up after having been in lockdown and still recovering from my epic journey.

The crag sports several areas on different sides of the dried up river. We begin in the shade and try and climb as many routes as we can before the sun comes round onto the rock, then we need to cross the river and climb the routes on that side until the sun comes over onto these routes then we leave. There are some routes further along on the main wall that remain in the shade but they are very hard.

It is unusual in Scotland to see sun while we are out climbing and often we are simply happy that it is remaining dry. Therefore it is difficult to imagine feeling such a strong need to get away from it quickly. The sun is far hotter in Spain and a lot more powerful. Many of you will know about this and most climbers avoid travelling to Spain at this time of the year to climb, but our know how it is. After lockdown it just felt good to be travelling and having an adventure.

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It is unusual in Scotland to see sun while we are out climbing and often we are simply happy that it is remaining dry. ”

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Everything was safe. Trevor and Dees were professional throughout and all the social distancing measures necessary were in place.

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The hard move at the top; Desiree on Pena Roja

Trevor and Desiree Everything was safe. Trevor and Dees were professional throughout and all the social distancing measures necessary were in place. Now more important than ever to stay safe as one is getting a business on the road again during such precarious times.

There was much emphasis on safely with regards to the climbing. Everything was safe while also being friendly and fun. We had such good times.

I climbed with Trevor on my first day while Dees worked at home, organising

holidays for future climbers. He taught me how to use a click up belay device. Now I have purchased one of these for myself as I like it so much. Its an assisted braking device, like a GriGri, only a lot easier to use and its also lighter.

This was my first trip to Costa Blanca. Subsequently I returned for another trip during mid September. (I mistakenly believed it was going to be cooler then.) We had 6 days climbing plus 2 days off to explore the area. We only visited 2 areas during my first trip as the sun was on the easy climbs. I

climbed at Pena Roja where my friends Trevor and Dees climbed locally and have recently put up several new routes and we climbed at Sierra de Toix a beautiful coastal area near Calpe which has a beautiful slab of easier and mid grades routes of 4,5 and 6a. I learned a lot about technique; as the routes were slabby, one was able to concentrate on footwork.

You needed to move fast however to beat that sun as it came over all too rapidly. Its appearance would make you lose interest in climbing and you would want to pack up your gear as

quickly as possible and run down the hill to an air conditioned car or van.

I soon learned about the importance of early starts in the morning and would have been happy to set off even earlier. The more climbing we could get in the better, before we are pelted by that raging sun.

There are a lot of routes at Pena Roja of the hardest grades: 7+. During Lockdown, Trev and Dees were able to work the area as it is close to their home in Lliber. They began to clean off some of the unclimbed rock creating several new lines, many in the easy grades.

I didn't find them all that easy and believe (as many have since agreed) that Trev and Dees have undergraded them. Trevor just tells everybody that they are only hard if you don't do them properly.

He taught me about technique that very first day as I got on this 4 that we had began to top rope, quickly I began to struggle running out of strength and falling off. As he lowered me to the ground he told me that the reason I was getting so exhausted was because I was using my arms too much and my feet not enough. "I can make you become a better climber " he said to

me and he did. I learned so much from both Trevor and Desiree that first week and I learned even more during my 2nd trip in September.

On day 2 we had an early start and made our way to Calpe and Sierra de Toix. Such a beautiful place with a magnificent view of the water where you could see all the aqua-sports enthusiasts enjoying the sun before it finally came round onto the rock and us.

Before it did we got lots done, learning lots about technique: positioning ones body, conserving energy and making use of smaller footholds. I got to lead several 4s and 4+ which was really awesome. I was in my element here as I generally enjoy slab climbing. I don't do well on pumpy stuff.

Pena Roja
However I was to apply what I had learned to Pena Roja the next day. I couldn't believe these routes were the same grades as what I had led yesterday. It seemed like a different world. I was told to stop psyching myself out and to apply what I had learned.

The routes hadn't been named at this point but that route from the other day had been a 4 apparently. It was my

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I couldn't believe these routes were the same grades as what I had led yesterday. It seemed like a different world.

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first attempt on lead but today I didn't send it. I rested on the rope just after the crux. I nearly fell off at the crux itself, scratting about and scrabbling, putting my knee on the ledge. I finally got the clip in and rested.

On my day off I had a look round Lliber. There were bikes kept at the villa which we were allowed to take out which was really awesome. They all had locks with a shared code. I had a meal on the Patio which turned out to be a plate of pork. It was nice to sit out in the sun as things were just beginning to open after lockdown. There were quite a few British holidaymakers about.

I climbed with Dees at Sierra de Toix for the next few days, practicing technique



improving exercises such as flow. I learned lots and the climbing is so lovely there. It isn't really like anything in the UK, but Beeston Tor in the peak district comes closest with its lovely little pockets. The rock in the area is limestone, which is the rock type that I grew up with, so the holds are generally positive.

It was my final day of my first trip there were 4 of us: Trevor, Dees and Trevor's daughter Kiera who does much of the admin organising holidays and trips. There were many good opportunities that day for taking photos so naturally we all got loads. Today was the day all the new routes got named.

I finally got to send the route which was to be named 'Denise, Denise' which was the route I had been having difficulty with. The name came about because of when I had attempted to lead it earlier, I had put my knee down, hence the name 'de kneez de kneez'

The key to getting onto the ledge was using a sequence of holds. This made it a lot easier and it was more technical, less strenuous. Trevor had taught me well. I was really pleased to finally send it: to climb it in really good style.

I would recommend the area for

climbing as there is a lot of really good routes there within a variety of grades. There's an easy route called Cuarentena which I attempted to lead. I didn't do so well on it and fell off. This seems to be the story of my life in these post lockdown times: falling off my quarantine.

So the aptly named Cuarentena is a 4 to the first anchor, 5 to the top anchor. I haven't actually managed to even top rope the next section as it is very hard. Awesome is similar and I have managed to top rope most of it fairly OK apart from the final move at the top. That gets a 5.

Corona is a 4+. I struggled up this on a top rope, especially during my first trip. On my 2nd trip I didn't need a tight rope. Maybe one's chest isn't as tight should one catch corona a second time.

To summarise: these are the new routes from left to right in the tree area:

- Barney Rubble 6c
- The flintstones 6c
- Estate de alarms 6b
- Cuarentena 4 to first anchor 5 to the top anchor
- Corona 4+
- Distanciamiento social 6a+



Due to covid, it was still a bit fiddly getting on a flight as there were fewer flying, but i was able to get a night landing which was pretty awesome flying through the sunset.



And on the first area that I visited on the far side, where the shade is in the morning:

- Denise Denise 4+ the easiest route in the area
- Awesome 5
- Mi casa 6a
- Tu casa 5+

The area

Liber is a small town just outside Xalo (or Jalon valley.)it is fairly close to the villa. Xalo is somewhat bigger and contains a substantial supermarket, the aptly named masimas (more and

more)plus some lovely walks and cycle rides. Benisa is another quaint town. It is larger than lliber and is situated between Calpe and Xalo.

Pena Roja is the local crag of the area and is also known as lliber by many locals. There is much activity at the crag and it still has much poor development. The routes are mainly of a harder grade, some being very hard indeed: for example; Roja techno and Roja techno direct are at 7b+. There is El desafio at 8a there are also several routes in the 6a,6b,6c and 6c+ grades. So there is something for everyone at the harder end of the spectrum.

A list of all the climbs at the main wall and sector Alejandria are on the UKC website together with extensive information regarding the area including travel information and approach notes

https://www.ukclimbing.com/logbook/crags/pena_lliber

Returning

I had been really looking forward to my second trip. Although I was confronted with the usual covid related obstacles such as having to change airlines at the last moment due to jet2.com cancelling most of their flights (I would definitely

recommend Ryanair) the trip was much easier than my previous trip. No long train ride across the country and no overnight stay on an airport bench. I was able to fly straight from Edinburgh Airport. What a doddle.

Trevor, Desiree and Kiera had made me feel really welcome at their lovely villa and had become good friends as well as professional climbing coaches.

As I knew there was much more I could learn from them, I began to get ready for another trip. I was even able to get onto a wall, courtesy of our friends down south.

I was hoping it wouldn't be quite as hot and there wouldn't be any mosquitoes. And I was especially looking forward to not having to put up with that dreadfully scorching sun. So I was expecting September to be much cooler. How wrong I was!

Due to covid, it was still a bit fiddly getting on a flight as there were fewer flying, but i was able to get a night landing which was pretty awesome flying through the sunset. Desiree was happy to meet me at the airport again and do the pickup at a small extra cost. It gave us the opportunity to have a chat during the drive, catching up on things such as



The view from Sierra de Toix

the state of the world in these crazy times with Spain in the grip of a second wave and the UK about to follow suite

The villa was waiting for me. It was as if I'd never been away.

I had expected it to be cooler but it was as hot as it ever was: if anything it was even hotter. Apparently a hot front had appeared just before I was due to fly. This was an unusual situation. It had been very hot in Scotland at this time. Now this was unusual; a rarity.

Sierra de toix

It was quite intense for the first few days of climbing coaching; a lot of work on improving my technique. One of the exercises to improve footwork involved climbing in boxing gloves. We had a lot of fun and I learned a great deal as a result.

Sierra de Toix is a lovely crag with superb views of the sea. Situated in Calpe it is an impressive ridge which juts out into the sea. There are rock outcrops all along the ridge facing in all directions including some of the more atmospheric areas of Toix Este with routes of a more serious nature and fairly hard.

There is shade in this area in the afternoon apparently. There is a sea cliff on the southern side which is well worth a visit. There are routes in a range of grades with easy 4s, mid grades including a 4c called Chasing the Sun. There are hard grades from 6a 6a+ right up to 7a and 7a+.

Historically this was one of the first areas to be developed for sport climbing back in the 1980s.

There are a wide variety of routes in the mid and lower grades, so according to UKC, it is probably one of the most popular areas in Costa Blanca.

We concentrated our climbing in the Toix Oeste area where the shade is in the morning. This is the area where the easy sport routes are. We got lots of climbing in here during this second trip: the routes I led included:

- La roja unable 3
- Asombroso 3+
- La roja cuatro 3
- Bella Ruth 4
- October fixe 4
- El endo 4
- La Cagona 4+

I top roped La Rocha Tres, a 5 which I had struggled with, due to a technical move mid height. I top roped it several times and would probably have led it but the sun was ready for it before I was.

In the afternoons we could visit the main wall at Pena Roja where Trevor and Dees showed me lay backing techniques on a 5 which was probably the easiest route there. The climbing is very hard there but it is popular with the locals and can get busy. It was also possible to visit the other areas of Pena Roja again where I got to lead Denise Denise again as well as struggle up some of the harder routes on a top rope.

Alcalali

On our final day of climbing, I woke up to something unusual: the sound of rain drip dripping into the pool as I looked up at the drizzly sky. As predicted the rain didn't last and it gave way to perfect conditions: a cloudy day at last. This meant we were finally able to spend an entire day at Alcalali.

As it faces south into the raging burning sun, climbing here in the peak of summer is unbearable. But with the cloud cover it was perfectly doable and awesome. Very occasionally there was a shower, but it didn't put anything down. Occasionally the sun tried to come out. But it didn't do much either. We had an ace day.

Situated close to the small quaint town of Benisa with its narrow Ginnels, Alcalali has an extensive collection of routes. There has been a lot of new developments. The routes are of a more accessible grade and the area is often busy. The routes are fairly long and very enjoyable. One of the first things one notices while stepping out on the rock for the first time is how delicious everything smells. A heady aroma fills ones nostrils as one enters into a herb wonderland: a mixture of lavender and thyme.

The climbing is incredible with 6as on

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I finished on a high, leading Hedgehog, a 5, which was a perfect conclusion to a perfect day and to a truly awesome trip.

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the left with seductive names like Lilac Wine. I climbed all the 4s in the area. The routes I led included: Beginners rib, Spare Rib, Rib Eye, Cornered and Tasha Mitica.

I also top roped a 6a called Monoslabic which was pretty good as I don't usually get up 6as outdoors. The bolts however are a bit spaced out for me leading at the limit of my grade.

I finished on a high, leading Hedgehog, a 5, which was a perfect conclusion to a perfect day and to a truly awesome trip. What a lovely route to finish on.

Roger and Tommy

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On Saturday the sun got its revenge. I had complained about it too many times ”

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Trevor and Desiree had been awesome throughout and have guided and supported me in such a friendly and professional way. A father and son team had joined us midweek for some private guiding: Roger and Tommy . We were all climbing together as a 4 that final day. I climbed with Dees while the boys climbed with Trevor. We all had a really great day, with Roger and Tommy also leading the sport routes I had climbed as well as learning some trad stuff for their guiding session the following day on Penon Y Ifac, the big rock and prominent feature that stands out like a giant's finger as one enters the town of Calpe.

Alicante

To conclude my holiday: I had booked 2 nights at a hotel in Alicante. I stayed at Tryp y cuiad which I would fully recommend.

On Friday I visited the castle which included a lovely walk through the medieval Old Town. There was an opportunity to explore the history of the castle and surrounding area as well as take some amazing shots. The views from the top are breathtaking.

Burnout and peel

On Saturday the sun got its revenge. I had complained about it too many times as I missed the cold winds of Scotland.

I spent the day on the beach: sunbathing and swimming. Unlike the rest of my body, my legs hadn't been allowed to get used to it and I paid the price. As I hadn't applied any sun cream to them, I burned them quite badly. They were as red as a lobster for a week, my left ankle swollen, everything was stinging, and as I sit here writing, still I peel..

And hope for the best. I cannot wait to return. As I sit here at my window gazing at the grey, there is a longing. Soon I will have finished my quarantine and will be let loose onto the walls. Booked a session at the Bloc and one at Ratho. Time to start getting ready for February. Trevor tells me there won't be any early starts when I return. We'll be waiting for the sun to come up. It will be like Scotland only without

The view from the villa



the rain. Guess one shouldn't really complain. It is such a rarity in Scotland and its nice when it does come to our crags. But do be prepared as it is easy to underestimate the power of the Spanish sun so do take a hat, a sun scarf. Take some sun cream and use it.

The start of many wonderful adventures Let's hope this is the start of many climbing adventures for all of us. Hopefully we will be able to traverse quickly past this pandemic, layback the crux of this second wave and top out to normality fairly soon.

Hopefully there will be JMCS meets happening in the near future, meeting outdoors on Wednesday nights. And once more the keys to the huts will be handed to us as members. Soon these dark days shall pass and there shall be many wonderful adventures. In the mean time we can look forward to having our AGM on zoom. Such strange times these are. I may even do an elaborate meal and watch some climbing vids after the talk.

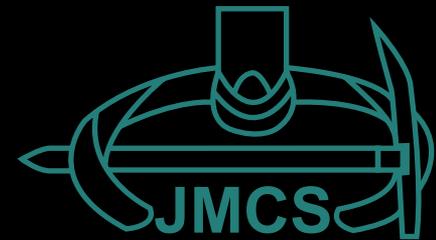
A holiday suitable for everyone I would thoroughly recommend a Rock and Sun climbing holiday. They offer climbing coaching at all levels. Level one is for most of us mortals who climb up to 6b. Level 2 coaches climbers 6b-

7a and level 3 is for 7a+ climbers so there is something for everyone at all levels from beginner to very advanced. They are very thorough and methodical . They also offer trad climbing as well as sport climbing and offer one to one guiding. They are quite versatile and flexible and will tailor a holiday to ones wishes and needs.

They run courses as well as coaching and guiding all over the world including the UK. In winter the holidays in Thailand are generally very popular but they are unlikely to be happening this year due to the pandemic. This means rock and sun will be operating from Spain this year. So i am looking forward to a rock and Sun holiday in more comfortable conditions. There are bouldering holidays available to in Alberacin.

I would recommend the luxury spacious villa. The pandemic did have its advantages. Not only was I able to benefit from one to one climbing, (this would normally be unusual but now things are so quiet) It meant I had the villa to myself on both occasions. I tried to make the most of this rare occasion and enjoy it as much as I could with its lovely pool, extensive garden and sun lounge chairs. There was a huge area for practicing rope skills and pull ups

together with an outdoor eating area. In pre pandemic times one was able to have barbecues. It would be ideal for couples and perfect for families and largish groups. It is located in such a beautiful setting. As well as swimming in the pool, there are several beaches just a short drive away and nearby there are many walks and cycle rides. Anybody interested in finding out more should check out at: www.rockandsun.com



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