

CRAGGERS

Adventure for all

Annual Report 2013



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► On the theme of connecting and reconnecting

Chair's Report 2014

Walking into 2014

Walking south, the low, winter sun was bright enough for me to regret not bringing sunglasses. In the festive hinterland nestled between Christmas and New Year this glorious morning was a respite from the storms which bracketed it; one of those perfect days which come as such a surprise and, like a priceless jewel, are precious because of their rarity.

This is why Britain is such a very special place and why Craggers takes every opportunity to encourage people to appreciate its beauty.

On my way down to the promenade I passed the monument marking the point where the Greenwich Meridian enters the sea; dividing the world by zero.

Using faulty logic rather than empiricism I had dressed appropriately for post solstice temperatures but within a couple of minutes I was removing layers until I was down to my T-shirt. There was not a cloud in the turquoise, winter sky and the sun began to warm my bones. Large blocks of milky chalk had been plucked from the impending cliffs by the towering, wall breaching, waves in the last couple of days and lay strewn across the concrete like a giant's molars.

As well as soaking up the beauty I indulged in the traditional, end of year, introspection; what had Craggers achieved in 2013 and how can we

top it in 2014; why do we do what we do and why is it so important?

The Christmas period often produces good radio and I had just listened to a programme about the book, 'Stig of the Dump' and this had stimulated my thoughts about Craggers. I read the book to my two older sons, years ago and the life of the young protagonist was very similar to my own. Growing up in a semi rural area I, along with most of my peers, was a free range kid; we roamed the fields searching for treasure, climbed the trees and generally evaded adult supervision during the hours of daylight (and often later). Non of this seemed to worry our parents; maybe they were just happy not to have us hanging around during the long summer holidays. Some of my happiest memories are of sleeping in an old canvas tent in our garden.

The 'Stig' discussion broadened out with, almost without exception, the contributors bemoaning the lack of unsupervised adventures for modern children. Apart from the psychological advantages of self esteem and confidence conferred on kids by a childhood where self reliance is the norm, there are also the obvious health benefits which accrue.

I valued the freedom of my own childhood and tried to enable self reliance in my kids; encouraging them to take as much freedom as possible; but in an urban environment, with its rushing traffic and the unjustified fear of other people, I couldn't just let them disappear for the day. I felt I had to transport them to nature.

A couple of months after his birth, my second son woke up at Blackland Farm during an Easter Adventure Camp. I unzipped the tent door and the fabric parted to reveal a different world to the one he had seen the day before. A sparkly, white carpet of snow brightened his world. This was the start of his life in the outdoors. A year and a half later Craggers was formed to combat the increasingly dire statistics which confirm that children are isolated from nature.

Recent research has shown that only 1 in 10 children play outside.

Children aged between 11 and 15 spend seven and a half hours in front of a screen – half their waking life. It has been predicted that for the first time in human history the current generation of children will have a lower life expectancy than their parents. Children's fitness levels in the UK are falling faster than anywhere else in the world and in terms of mental health UK children were at the bottom of the table of 21 countries for childhood wellbeing. It is no surprise then that 1 in 3 children are overweight.

These are problems our project tackles by creating the opportunities for exercise and thereby increasing healthy living. With the Adventure Camp (read about the fantastic 2013 camp elsewhere in the Annual Report) I think we are able to create something analogous to my free range childhood where children can safely roam the woods and appreciate nature up close.

The bad news

It seems as if the unemployed and low waged live in a parallel universe to the one portrayed in the newspapers. In London the richest 10% of the population earn 280 times more than the poorest. The headlines say that the economy is growing, there are more jobs and things are getting better. Unfortunately one of the measures of economic growth is house prices and as these go up, rents increase and with all the benefit cuts, including housing benefit, people are facing a shortfall between their increasing rents and their decreasing housing benefit which has to be made up from other benefits. According to the Brighton Business Forum the average house price in the city now stands at £240,948; 5.5% higher than a year ago. The gap between

Brighton and the rest of England now stands at 44%. This places Brighton 3rd in the table of price increases across the country. At the end of the fourth quarter of 2013 a one bedroom flat cost £184,975 and would require a salary of £42,687 and a deposit of £46,244 and a 25% deposit. A three bedroom house at £343,383 would require a salary of £79,242 and a deposit of £85,846. Meanwhile renting a one bedroom flat would cost £811/month compared to £778/month a year ago; an increase of just over 4%. There was no corresponding increase in Housing Benefit.

When poor people needed to replace clothing or kitchen items they would visit the local charity shop, now they have to think twice about that option as even the charity shop prices become too expensive.

I don't propose to dwell on an analysis of the economic pit into which the unemployed and low waged have been consigned but it is worth mentioning that the detrimental effects on poor families is cumulative and that is not always recognised. The current crisis has been going on for over five years and for the poor at least, it can only get worse. If you lose your job, you can get by for a short time while looking for employment but soon any financial cushion you had is exhausted; you still need to pay for transport to look for jobs, you will need appropriate clothing for attending interviews etc. You will probably have to change your diet and dining out is going to be a thing of the past. You will probably not be able to heat your home as well as you had previously or buy nice Xmas and birthday presents or indeed clothing for your kids. You may even find that you can no longer afford to live in your current home. Cuts in Housing Benefit and the bedroom tax have further increased the poverty suffered by families and the levels of homelessness have increased. It is hardly surprising that tensions increase and relationships suffer over time. And time is perhaps the most important factor in looking at poverty. The longer it goes on the more intractable the problems become; chronic poverty leads to deterioration in mental and physical health. And to add to this, self esteem is further eroded by the disparaging attitude of politicians and the tabloid press who portray us as the 'undeserving poor'. It seems that you now have no control over your own life.

In Brighton since the current economic crisis began the burden has been carried, disproportionately, by the poorest people in the community. It is always shocking to read the statistics of inequality; Winnie Byanyima, the Oxfam executive director said in January: "It is staggering that in the 21st Century, half of the world's population – that's three and a half billion people – own no more than a tiny elite whose numbers could all fit comfortably on a double-decker bus." In our area which has a massive housing crisis, changes in housing benefit has made an already bad situation worse.

The faith community has become increasingly scathing about the way the poorest in our society are faring, pouring scorn on banks, the rich and the seemingly uncaring politicians. In February Britain's most senior Roman Catholic cleric accused the Coalition of leaving increasing numbers of people facing "hunger and destitution". Cardinal-designate Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster, said that while the need to reduce spending on benefits is widely accepted, the Government's reforms have now destroyed even the "basic safety net". He said the welfare system had also become increasingly "punitive", often leaving people with nothing for days on end if they fail even to fill a form in correctly. He said it was "a disgrace" that this was possible in a country as rich as Britain. A few days later in a letter to the Daily Mirror, 27 Anglican bishops (almost half of all the bishops) and 16 other faith leaders said that:

"Britain is the world's seventh largest economy and yet people are going hungry. Half a million people have visited foodbanks in the UK since last Easter and 5,500 people were admitted to hospital in the UK for malnutrition last year. One in five mothers report regularly skipping meals to better feed their children, and even more families are just one unexpected bill away from waking up with empty cupboards.

"...over half of people using foodbanks have been put in that situation by cut backs to and failures in the benefit system, whether it be payment delays or punitive sanctions."

After a few years of unemployment when all the money is gone and families need new clothing

for growing children or new (or second hand) furniture or replacements for broken equipment, that is when the queues at soup kitchens grow and applications to food banks increase and depressingly, when loan sharks flourish. The use of food banks tripled last year and now the Red Cross has become involved and is collecting food for Fare Shares and the food banks.

It is ironic then, that children continue to become obese, partly as a result of poor diet but increasingly because children are now consigned to the TV or electronic games and apart from going to and from school, never go outside.

The British Heart Foundation (BHF) reported that childhood obesity rose in England between 1995 and 2011, from 11 to 17 per cent of boys and 12 to 16 per cent of girls. In Britain at the moment, one in three children aged between two and ten years old is overweight, according to the National Child Measurement Programme. And over the past decade, the UK has seen a four-fold rise in youngsters needing medical attention. People who are obese in childhood are more likely to carry that weight into adulthood leaving them at risk of a lifetime of serious health problems.

While the rich seem to be able to evade and avoid paying their taxes, poor people are punished and people on benefit have derogatory comments poured upon them by politicians and the media who pontificate about a cycle of dependence where we see a downward spiral of despondency. We believe that we can arrest this trajectory by showing people their own worth as parents and members of society. Read the reports which follow to see how we do this.

The good news

We are feeling very positive about what we can achieve in 2014; with a strong trustee group, committed volunteers and an enthusiastic membership we can really make a difference this year. Craggers is a group which has grown out of the community to address both the specific problems, and the more intractable social implications, of unemployment, poverty and ill health.

Funding from Tudor Trust over the last three years has made a fantastic difference to our ability to respond to the ever changing problems

faced by socially excluded people in Brighton and Hove.

We have been addressing these problems over the last fifteen years but they have certainly become more acute recently and our focus has changed accordingly, as opportunities for children and young people to engage in outdoor learning have decreased. I cringe to use the term ‘paradigm shift’ but I think the position of Craggers towards our members and participants has changed recently with its emphasis shifting towards giving people both the practical skills as well as mental/intellectual techniques to tackle their situation. Our change in focus can be illustrated by a couple of quotes.

In October 2013 Andrew Thin, the chairman of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), said.

“Social advantage is a function of far more than income or wealth. It is a function of self-esteem, self-confidence, interpersonal competence, open mindedness, health and much more.

“One of the things we know is that access to the outdoors can contribute to social advantage. Self-esteem and self-confidence are key determinants of employability, and they can be gained by climbing a hill, or even a tree; canoeing across a loch or biking through a glen. Interpersonal skills too are naturally enhanced when doing things with other people in the outdoors.”

Jenny Adams of The Conservation Volunteers Scotland said:

“It is increasingly common these days to hear about young people who are disconnected from nature. Many of us will have heard the phrase “nature deficiency disorder” where children and young people are more likely to be plugged in to the electronic world and become prone to inactivity - “sitting apparently is the new smoking”. Access to nature can have a significant impact on the lives of marginalised young people, offering them the freedom, equilibrium and expertise that they have been denied in formal education.”

Meanwhile outdoor centres and places associated with outdoor learning across the country are being closed – they will never be reopened. This effectively means that an opportunity for outdoor learning for thousands of low income families and children has been removed at a stroke. This is where we step in, to reintroduce people to the outdoors and combat the worst effects of poverty by reconnecting them to nature.

Elsewhere in this Annual Report you will see an account of a wild food walk we led. Before the walk the Unemployed Centre had a day of workshops centred around food; on a budget; for health; how to cook etc. They also talked about allotments and wild food which is a great way not only to counter the affects of poverty but also to reconnect with nature and continue a tradition which has been lost to many. It was really well attended and very inspiring. This approach and our own are both about regaining control of your own life and becoming healthy in the process.

A surprising recent research study found that children who spend more time playing outside are less likely to suffer from short-sightedness.

Fiona Reynolds, Director-General of the National Trust, said:

“Getting outdoors and closer to nature has all sorts of benefits for our children. It keeps them fit, they can learn about the world around them and most of all it’s fun. That’s why it’s so worrying that so many children today don’t have the opportunity to experience the outdoors and nature. Building a den, picking flowers, climbing trees – the outdoors is a treasure trove, rich in imagination. It brings huge benefits that we believe every child should have the opportunity to experience. And there are huge costs when they don’t.

“As a nation we need to do everything we can to make it easy and safe for our children to get outdoors.

“We want to move the debate on and encourage people and organisations to think about how we take practical steps to reconnect children with the natural world and inspire them to get outdoors.”

- Fewer than ten per cent of kids play in wild places; down from 50 per cent a generation ago
- The roaming radius for kids has declined by 90 per cent in one generation (thirty years)
- Three times as many children are taken to hospital each year after falling out of bed, as from falling out of trees
- A 2008 study showed that half of all kids had been stopped from climbing trees, 20 per cent had been banned from playing conkers or games of tag
- The research shows that capturing children before they enter the teenage years is crucial with the research clearly showing if you get kids hooked before they reach twelve years old, you'll create a lifelong passion for the environment.

"Exploring and connecting to the natural environment is essential to children's development and not simply because this removes them from excessive exposure to the sedentary world of television viewing and computer games: establishing a relationship with the natural world not only reconnects all of us to our place within nature but also helps us understand the nature that is within us all." – Psychologist Elie Godsi.

Looking forward to 2014, our 15th Anniversary

The Adventure Camp (see the account of the Camp elsewhere in the Annual Report) is always seen as a bellwether for what we should be doing and what our priorities should be for the upcoming year. This year we were able to extend the camp to eight days and seven nights with over 50 people attending. The apparent level of poverty of people attending the camps is certainly increasing year on year. The outdoor kit people had this year was really poor. Luckily we had two huge boxes of outdoor clothing donated from the 'Gift your Gear' scheme and we were able to hand it out to the many people who needed it. Parents were quite evidently more stressed than in previous years and it took them longer to relax. We had far more teenagers than usual which made things lively. I am not quite sure what that signifies other than that those families with teenagers who would have gone on holiday elsewhere could not afford it this year

and that there was nowhere else to send the teenagers.

Having an extra day helped and at the end of the week there had been a huge positive change. We had the most positive feedback ever. We plan to increase the number of days we do activities with families in 2014 with an emphasis on shorter local activities designed to get people outdoors more often rather than just the trips to the mountains although these trips will certainly feature strongly.

We have been very successful in gaining volunteers throughout the year and we will do more training with them.

We have been getting people involved in organising things such as sponsored climbs, attending open days and putting on jumble sales, both as a way to raise funds and to increase our profile. We plan to do more in 2014.

There are a couple of recent initiatives worth noting. After meeting with representatives from BUCFP we are planning some joint projects in addition to the activities we already invite their users to. We will be inviting BUCFP to Bushcraft, wild food and navigation workshops.

Our monthly walks have always been very popular and we have opened them up to anyone who wants to join us, whether members or not. They were always quite gentle walks suitable for small children and people with minor mobility problems. In a recent change we decided to alternate the walks; one month in the countryside and the next in an area suitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs.

Because the problems faced by the poorest in society are going to increase in the years to come, even if there is an upturn in the economy, the full effect of the cuts has still not been realised and Craggers will continue to seek multi year funding to enable the long term planning which funding over multiple years allows.

More people have been asking about outdoor qualifications and we are planning to register more of our volunteers in the various National Governing Body schemes both to increase what we do with our beneficiaries and to increase the employability of our volunteers.

Experiencing the joys of the environment has always been a corollary to climbing, mountaineering and kayaking and they will certainly continue to make up our core activities. We will increase our focus on being outdoors for its own sake and continue to expand our Learning Outside the Classroom sessions as the burgeoning research evidence shows that it is vital for the psychological and physical wellbeing of the individual, society and the planet.

We will continue to target “hard to reach” families and advertise our activities wider by using our website and Facebook page. We are serious about offering ‘Adventure for All’; alternate monthly walks are suitable for wheelchairs and buggies; most of our trips are for families and we have specialist climbing equipment to accommodate very small children and certain disabilities. Research shows ethnic minorities in Britain participate less in the outdoors than the rest of the population. The latest Natural England Survey found that visits to the countryside and natural environment among the BME (black and minority ethnic) population was just 27%, compared to 41% among those of white ethnicity. The non-white population in Brighton & Hove has grown from 3.1% in 1991 to 5.8%. By contrast and as a result of seeking out the people who would benefit most from our activities the Craggers membership is now 20% BME. Included in our membership are 25% with learning difficulties or mental health problems and 85% on benefit.

Every three weeks Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project hosts a Craggers meeting. The meetings take place in the main area/cafe in the morning so are witnessed by everyone who uses the Centre. Everyone is welcome to come along and it is where all new members have to come to join the group. Living up to the ethos of Craggers, every member has an equal say in how the group is run and what activities take place. The meetings can be quite lively. We also have regular fundraising and trustee meetings. In the trustee group we have a barrister, company director, charity manager, health worker and outdoor activities instructor.

Our profile raising began last year with a two page article about Craggers in the BMC Summit magazine which is the most widely read outdoor

magazine and is mailed to the homes of 70,000 BMC members. None of this would have been possible without the tireless work of our volunteers and the support we have had from our funder the Tudor Trust who with their three year funding have enabled us to plan realistically and provide the support which has allowed people to realise their potential.

More news of connections; we are excited about having joined the Wild Network and I’m sure there will be more about our involvement in the next Annual Report. We are also now part of the National Council of Volunteer Organisations (NCVO) which has already provided us with plenty of useful information

A word about our community

From our beginnings (pre Craggers) at Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project (BUCFP) in 1996, we have worked directly with people who are at the margins of society. People from socially excluded backgrounds feel welcome in Craggers because they are amongst their peers. We are embedded in and have developed out of this community. Some members of the committee have physical or mental disabilities and most of our members are in receipt of some sort of benefit. All our activities but particularly our Adventure Camps, help people overcome isolation and fragmentation by encouraging inclusion, connection and integration through common endeavour.

We have spent a great deal of effort building up resources e.g. camping and climbing equipment so that those on low incomes can afford to come away with us. We also offer free training and will subsidise members to go on training trips by helping with travel and accommodation.

About the people we work with

Members of the group and the people who attend the events we organise have all felt excluded in one way or another because of either mental or physical disability, alcohol or drug abuse, their sexuality, age, employment or social status. They are from diverse backgrounds and include, according to our feedback forms; families, lone parents and their children, unemployed people, individuals with disabilities and mental health needs, volunteers, low paid, substance mis-

users, ex-offenders, and homeless or insecurely housed people, children with special needs including children in care. Over 240 individuals benefit directly from our project every year. The indirect benefit to the local community and beneficiaries' families are incalculable. We run local taster sessions which we advertise at open days etc. We have members from three years to over 60 years old. Attendees of our events extend this age range. Just over half the membership is female but there is a greater number of male children than female children. This is something that we are trying to address. Our equipment purchases are done to enable adaptability and to ensure full coverage of the morphology range. Members of Craggers are themselves from a socially excluded sector of society but are still made aware of our policy on equality and where needed receive training on equal opportunities. Our Equal Opportunities and Child Protection Policies is strictly adhered to, with members attending Equal Opportunities and Child Protection training both in house and provided by outside agencies.

How we know there is a need for our work

Since the 2001 census the population of Brighton & Hove has increased by 25,552 (10.3%). Health: For just over one in six residents (44,569 people, 16.3%) their day to day activities are limited because of a long term health problem or disability. More than one in ten (28,129 people, 10.3%) of the city's population is aged 20 to 24. Compared to the 2001 Census the age groups that have seen the largest increase in population are 15 to 24 year olds (11,798 people, 34.3%) Nearly a third of households in the city are private renters (35,959 households, 29.6%), this is much higher than the rest of England. For just over one in six residents (16.3%, 44,569 people) their day to day activities are limited because of a long term health problem or disability.

Brighton and Hove has a higher percentage of unemployed in the city than both the regional and national percentage. Alienation is seen by many as an inevitable symptom of living in the 21st century where the gulf between the individual and society and between child and parent continue to grow. To be long term unemployed in a town like Brighton, often leads to chronic depression. Lack of confidence, low self esteem, lethargy, poor health, lack of motivation and

children without sporting opportunities are all part of a downward spiral which many people find impossible to escape. The demand for the activities we provide is huge across the whole of society, climbing being the fastest growing sport in Britain. The opportunities for unemployed people to involve themselves, particularly in a place like Brighton, do not exist.

The content of our project is decided at our regular meetings which all members are invited to attend. All members have a vote. As we are all unpaid volunteers it is incumbent on all members to help organise certain aspects of the project themselves.

How we make a difference

The costs of outdoor activities are prohibitively expensive for unemployed people and those on low incomes we challenge this by providing free instruction and transport, lending the necessary equipment and providing a safe welcoming environment; by boosting self esteem and confidence through challenging activities; by actively encouraging socially excluded people from very disparate backgrounds to attend our week long Adventure Camps so that they can live as a big family and learn outdoor skills; by remaining flexible in our approach to disability and tailoring all our activities accordingly to enable all participants to reach their full potential, giving extra support where necessary; by running climbing/hiking/scrambling trips to Wales, Scotland in winter, the Lake District, Peak District, Dorset and Cornwall; by running trips to the local sandstone outcrops and climbing walls; by running monthly walks suitable for families with very small children; by offering support for volunteers; by targeting families, the ideal base from which to develop a feeling of community and by encouraging them to take part in every part of running our activities; by increasing self reliance so that people feel more in control of their lives and quickly develop both physical skills and mental fortitude; by encouraging children through these experiences to develop a lifelong interest in physical activity thus increasing their chances of having a healthy adult life; by inculcating a respect and love for the natural environment, organising wild food hunts and flower and bird identification trips; by actively improving the built or natural environment by clearing litter at climbing and other venues.

Introducing our Annual Report

I think there is something for everyone in this year's Annual Report with our roving reporters bringing you tales from far and wide; from the highest point in Britain in Northern Scotland to sea level on the south coast of England.

To have done all the trips you would have needed ice axes and thermal underwear, sunglasses and insect repellent.

We have navigation exercises on the South Downs in the snow, winter training on Ben Nevis, badger attacks in Dorset, wild food walks in

Brighton, a family climbing, walking and caving trip in the Peak District, local walks and climbing, a BMC climbing movement masterclass, sport climbing in Swanage, glaciation and environment workshops, a student seminar, Bushcraft, various training and CPD events, a BMC clubs conference and of course the Adventure Camp (with added harp playing). I hope you find the reports and photos as inspiring as the events themselves.

► Accounts April 1st 2013 – March 31st 2014

Outgoing funds	2013-2014	2012-2013
Vol costs		103.40
Activity and operational costs	7,573.25	4,956.27
Office and premises (including money to petty cash)	486.20	448.11
Equipment	2,395.67	1,886.24
Volunteer training	2,089.66	1,305.98
Insurance	110.74	
Misc.		150.00
Memberships	541.50	692.00
Venue Costs	556.00	1,020.00
Total	14,059.29	10,562.00

Incoming Funds	2013-2014	2012-2013
Grants	12,500	13,660.00
Membership fees	216.00	160.00
Interest	12.30	9.63
Fundraising	2,285.83	
Donations	608.75	1,386.23
Total	15,622.88	15,215.86

Restricted reserves: £ 4,950.00

Committed reserves: £ 2,201.58

General free reserves: £ 1,750.00

► Navigation training, February

One very cold snowy Wednesday morning (perfect for practicing!) four of us who are going on the Scotland expedition met up bright and early at Brighton station to go on a nav and rope adventure.

We caught the train to Hassocks and navigated immediately to a cafe.

The cafe had a big table that we were able to spread our maps out on. Tony set about teaching us all about maps and the compass and how to read them. Some things we covered were:

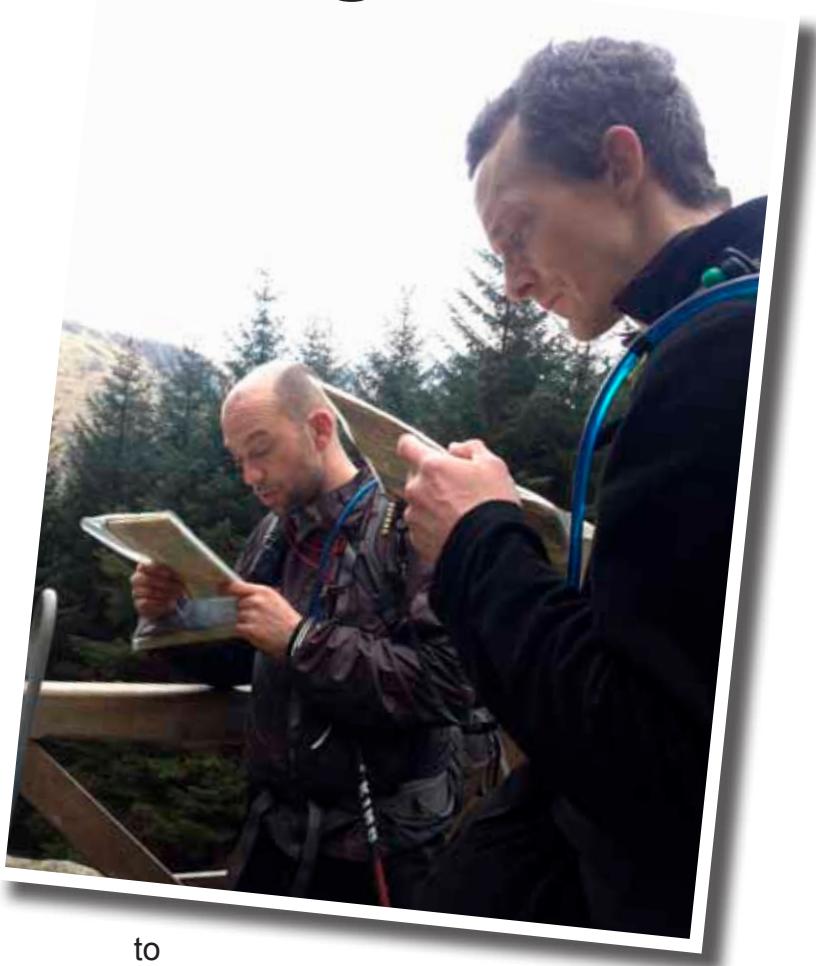
Contours lines - maps have orange lines and they go up 10 metres at a time, apart from in our own dear South Downs and the White Peak in Derbyshire, then it's 5 metres because it's not very high! And the maps have a contour line every 50 metres in purple.

The closer they are together the steeper the slope.

Map scale - 1:25k (this was the map we were using) and 1:50k and 1:40k. These different scales are marked on the flat bit of the compass and is very handy, so you can work out how far the distance is between two points.

The 3 Norths - grid north, true north and magnetic north.

How to align the magnetic north of the compass with the grid north of the map and then you need



to
take off 3 degrees
as it's changing slightly every year.

How to spot 3 different landmarks so you can work out a triangle area that you are in.

How to give a grid reference to search and rescue if you need to. And remembering that you must give the horizontal line first and then the vertical one. Two ways of remembering this are - you go along the hall and up the stairs or as I learnt at school you have to crawl before you can walk.

I've got very basic map knowledge and can tell what some of it means and read the legend. But I didn't know how to use a compass and found it a bit confusing. So it was good to get out in the snow and put it into practice.

Andrew lead us first and as went we read our maps and Tony pointed out landmarks that we should mentally tick off (like footpaths, streams etc.) to make us realise how far along we have come.

We went over the railway and passed the amazing Clayton tunnel built between 1839 and 1841, but not opened until 1880. Not designed by Brunel, as I had originally believed, being very similar to one of his on the Bath-Bristol line, but designed by David Mocatta (which must be why the DVLA in Brighton is called Mocatta house?) and built by over 6000 navvies. Anyhow Andrew did a stirring job and then it was my turn. Which started off OK but then didn't go so well and I ended up 150 metres away from target but at least I didn't nav backwards!

We took turns in doing this a few times and pacing out our steps on different types of terrain.

We briefly had some lunch on a very snowy log and talked about avalanches - how to predict them and where they are most likely to occur. This is quite a common problem in Glen Coe and as some climbers had died up there a few days earlier we were all made acutely aware that avalanches are no joke and to check with the SAIS (Scottish Avalanche Information Service). Soon we were away again. By now it was snowing on and off and bitter piercing wind was blowing.

We finally came to holly tree on the side of a steep hill, with contours very close together. The ropes came out and were tied onto the tree. Ice axes out and harness on.

Now for the horrible bit! We had dug a bucket seat out of the snow and sit in it. Then one of us wrapped the rope around ourself and then the left arm. NOT the right arm else it could

break! Then the other person tied in and was lowered down the slope. Not bad for the ones being belayed, but body belaying for the belayer sitting in the snow is jerky, uncomfortable and Ccccccccold! My fingers felt like someone had stamped on them with ice skates.

At this point I lost it a bit. I hoped I would have an accident and would be unable to go to Scotland but save face by breaking a finger or something!! Happily I cheered up and got on with it and started to enjoy myself. I remembered that winter climbing is as much about mental strength as physical.

We learnt how to descend the rope using the angel wings position if it's not a very steep gradient or using the South African, which was almost another harness out of rope.

We made ice axe anchors and anchors with the deadman. Also bollards to wrap the rope through. Quite frightening really to think we will be multi-pitching high up and abseiling off them! It got to Five pm and was nearly dark so we called it a day. I navved up to the top, then Dan got us all the way back to the station, where there was building work going on and ironically we got lost in the plywood hoarding in the small station platform! Tired but elated we just made the train, running with our heavy rucksacks. Had the best nights sleep in months. Cant wait for Scotland!

– Ellie

► Scottish winter trip, February/March



North face of the Ben

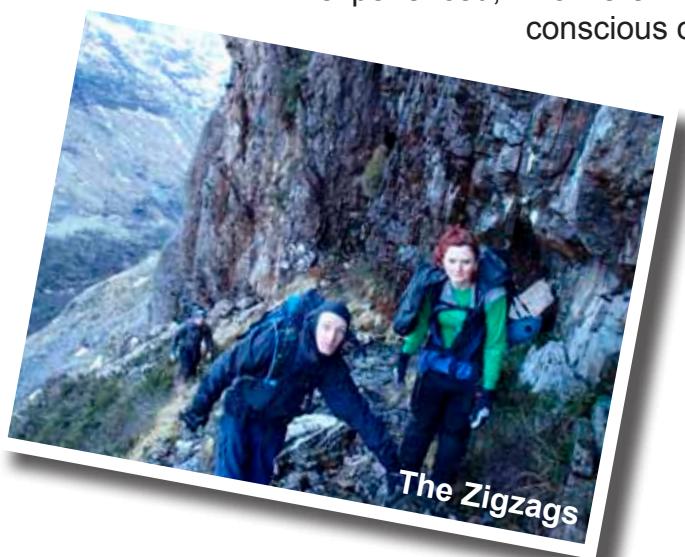
Craggers went to Scotland in February 2013 for our annual trip to the Scottish winter mountains. Every year we take a slightly different selection of people, some who have been before and some who are new. So the trips are always different, and of course there's the ever-variable weather to make it different and interesting every time.

This time the ever-variable weather was uncharacteristically invariable and also uncharacteristically completely gorgeous throughout. Not only was the weather completely perfect - clear, crisp blue skies and sunshine every day, but the snow conditions were completely perfect too. It can make a huge difference to a trip if there is lots of dangerous avalanche-prone snow on the hills, or if all the snow is too loose and powdery for climbing. I remember one day of the trip checking the avalanche forecast in town, which is normally given as a little pie-chart style diagram showing where the snow is dangerous or safer and the whole thing was green - low avalanche risk at all heights on all aspects, which is pretty much unheard of. As well as there being basically no

avalanche risk to worry about, the snow was perfect for climbing and walking - hard and crisp and great for digging axes or crampons into.

Although the conditions were perfect, we were a little less than perfect...

One of our party was entirely new to winter mountaineering and thus wanted to take things at a slower pace than some others, more experienced, who were conscious of



trying to fit as much into the time as possible. Also our most experienced member ended up exacerbating a previous injury that took him out of action for large amounts of the trip.

Glencoe

We started off at the Alex MacIntyre hut in Ballachulish, which is a good base to explore Glencoe. We spent the first day walking into the Glen, familiarising ourselves with walking in crampons and then going up 'The Zigzags' route into Coire nan Lochan where we practiced ice axe arrests and cutting snow bollards. We normally follow this pattern of spending day one revising key safety skills (while also getting out in the hills!)

The next day we went back to Lochan to try and do some climbing. We split into two teams. My team were trying an easy route, that you could probably climb without using ropes, but for practice and learning we were pitching it, trying to dig bucket seats to make belays to bring people up. The snow was very hard and digging seats in the snow was very hard work. However, it was good practice.

Maybe partially due to having a mix of different experience levels in the group we were not as fast as we could have been and had to retreat off our climbs in order to get back down before dark. Speed is safety in winter mountaineering - the days are often short and the conditions can change quickly, so the ability to move quickly and be slick and efficient with everything you do is a key safety skill.

On the third day out, me and Dan and Danny went by ourselves to try and do a section of the Ballachulish horseshoe, which is not in Glencoe, but sits directly opposite the Alex MacIntyre hut across the loch, so we could see it everyday from the kitchen window. It was good to go out without our leader and most experienced member - it made us more self-reliant and conscious of what we were doing. Up on the top there was very limited visibility in the cloud and snow. Not a total 'white-out' but still easy to get disorientated and potentially dangerous because large cornices (overhanging edges of snow) surround the summit which you can fall off or might crumble if you stand on them. So we had to get our compasses out and navigate carefully,



knowing there was no back-up person more expert than ourselves to appeal to if we got it wrong. This was all fine and exciting and fun. A little bit less exciting and fun was trying to take an 'obvious' and 'logical' route back down off the hill through the woods, which ended in battling our way down steep hills covered in rhododendrons and tightly-packed pine plantation trees. Not dangerous but boring and time-consuming...

Ben Nevis

We then transferred from Ballachulish across to the Ben Nevis Inn at the bottom of the path up to Britain's highest mountain. Once we had moved in and made ourselves





at home our first day out was going up 'the Ben'. On this first day we were just going to go up the 'regular route', the so-called 'tourist track', which is basically a big path to the top. However it is still not to be underestimated if you are unfamiliar with it. It's a long way with a lot of uphill and the weather can be very challenging and very changeable. In winter, you still generally need an ice axe and crampons to be safe going up the path and you need to be

and sunshine and almost no wind, which is really unheard of on top of Ben Nevis. It was bizarre having been there so many times not being able to see anything, huddling from the ferocious wind, struggling to the top and then swiftly retreating back down again, to suddenly be on the top of the Ben and being able to eat lunch, look at the view, wander about and explore a bit. It was still a long day getting up there and back down again and the way down was tricky as the lower path is made of rocks and boulders which had all been coated with an invisible layer of thin ice, making it very treacherous and slow going.

The next day we decided to try a climb on the north face of the Ben. The regular path goes up the gently sloping western side of the mountain which isn't very dramatic to look at. The must be a lot of people who go up Ben Nevis by this route and never get to see the full majesty of the mountain. If you walk up the regular path to what is often called Half Way Lochan - the small lake where the path flattens out before going up steeply - you can take a turning off to skirt the



reasonably competent with navigation as the path may well not be visible in the snow and if cloud comes down you need to be able to find your way up and back, especially as the summit plateau of Ben Nevis is deeply incut with coires taking giant bites out of it on all sides, so if you stray a little off the route in poor visibility you can easily wander off the edge. We had an 'alpine start' for our walk - which means starting before dawn in the dark in order to make the best of the available daylight. Days in winter in Scotland are short and it's better to do the easy walking on the lower path in the early dawn rather than discover yourself on the top of the mountain as it's getting dark.

Luckily however, in keeping with the amazing weather, we had perfect visibility - blue skies

mountain instead of continuing up the western slope. If you do this you end up coming round the corner and approaching the north face of the Ben, which is the really impressive bit and the section frequented by climbers in both summer and winter. The north face is a giant scoop taken out of the mountain forming a huge cliff 2000 feet high. Our plan was to climb up one of the easier gully climbs up the north face and then come back down by the regular path. We walked round till we got to the CIC hut, which is a mountaineering hut at the base of the cliffs, where we stopped to gear up with crampons, ice axes etc. Due to the exceptional weather there were huge amounts of people out climbing, seizing the opportunity to do routes they had been waiting for. We met people who had seen the weather forecast and driven up for the day



from Sheffield on the spur of the moment to get some routes in.

The easy gully climb was something inbetween climbing and walking - essentially scaling a long steep snow slope, not really needing to use your hands but using your ice axe a bit like a walking stick for extra support and for security in case of a slip. It might be technically easy climbing a snow slope, but it can still be strenuous work - it's a long way to the top after all! In addition any slip or trip could be very dangerous as on a giant snow slope if you start sliding you accelerate very quickly and it's hard to stop before you are totally out of control. Your main defence against this is to use your ice axe to do an ice axe arrest. We had practiced these back on our skills training on day one.

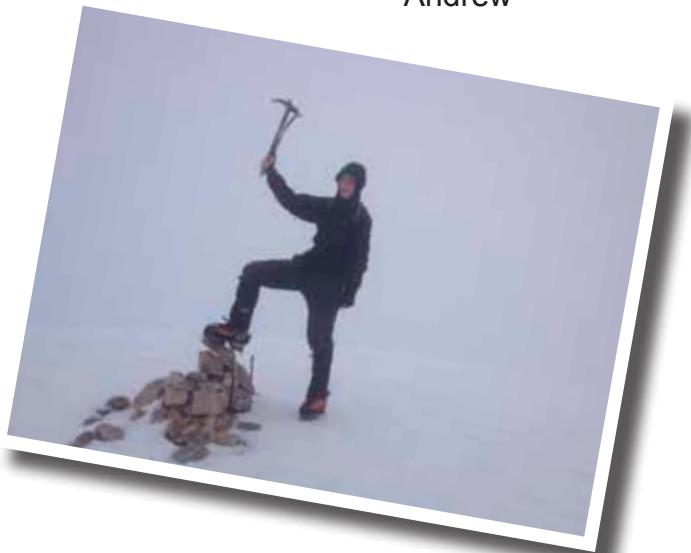
We were without our most experienced member due to injury, which again added an extra feeling of responsibility to the excursion. One of the teenagers in our party was loving it so much that he zoomed ahead to the top of the route and then got some good photos of the rest of us 'topping out'!

So overall it was a good trip, made especially memorable by the brilliant weather. We achieved some good things. We did less actual climbing than we would have liked, due to injury of our party leader and also we suffered from the disparity in ability levels in the group. If you have someone who is completely new to all this stuff you cannot expect too much from them and it is unrealistic to expect to be able to tick off a series of routes. It's something for future trips for us to be able to organise how to combine the ambitions of experienced people who want to make the best of their one annual week in Scotland together with the needs of newbies who are often happy just to be in the mountains at all and can only absorb so much information in one go.

Because of this, we ended up being too slow for what we set out to do. If you want to get up in the hills and get in a proper climbing route and get back out before dark you need to know what you are doing and you need to move quickly and confidently, which is not really possible with a mixed ability group. While at Ballachulish, we kept on missing the last bus back along Glencoe due to getting down off the hill too late and we kept ending up hitching along the road in the dark. And while people were very nice giving us lifts next time we should hire a car and we would save hours upon hours of waiting around for buses and standing by the side of the road waiting for a lift!

On our last day I went with Dan to scale Ben Nevis by another more interesting route. If you approach from the north east then there is a long knife edge ridge which runs up to the summit, which gives you really good views of the whole of the north face as you approach the mountain and provides interesting scrambling over icy snowy boulders along the top of the ridge. 'Airy' is the sort of euphemism that climbers normally use to describe such things - which means you have about 1000 feet of straight down on both sides of you as you carefully step over awkward icy boulders... Memorable stuff!

– Andrew



► Food



a wild mushroom
feast

It's March and the mild winter has ushered in an early spring; the world is turning green, sparkling with bright speckles of the first flowers. In an annual report dedicated to connecting and reconnecting we should probably talk about how we have, over the years, become disconnected from the food that we eat. Yesterday on the way to the shops where I knew we would be obliged to buy at least some over packaged processed food which had clocked up the air miles, we passed some lovely looking alexanders which would have been great to eat but were close enough to the road to have soaked up lots of pollutants. When we got home I went into our tiny, wild garden with my young sons; a huge, buff tailed bumble bee made its unlikely way through the warming air as the kids helped me excavate dandelion roots with a digging stick. We had the roots with the dandelion leaves and young cleavers as our greens for dinner last night. Connections re-established.

It should be simple; food is what we eat to keep us alive. But it is rather more complex than that. I spent a couple of seconds thinking about some of the words associated with 'food': excess, scarcity, famine, politics, religion, food mountain, glut, genetic modification, policies and five year plans, agribusiness, chemicals, pollution, kosher, halal, rationing, globalisation, localism, sanctions, protectionism and the list goes on.

So, not simple at all really and it is an issue Craggers has addressed from the start. In fact we continued with the same policy which Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project

uses and extended it. Not only did we want to be able to feed everyone on our trips but we also wanted to involve people in the preparation of the food itself.

This is our thinking; after we have found out from our trip forms if anyone has an allergy we construct menus which can be eaten by everyone; this is easier than you might imagine. To conform to religious and moral concerns about food all we needed to do was to cook vegan food. It is then that the creativity and compromises come in. Craggers sees helping people develop a respect for their environment as an integral part of what we do. Applying this to food can sometimes be problematic. To lessen the impact on the environment we would obviously like to choose local organic produce, this is not always possible, because it might not be available or is too expensive but we try to do the best we can. Our menus also reflect some compromises; we have to make sure that we get children and adults not used to a vegan diet, to actually eat the food, so we need to make meals fun as well as nutritious; we usually have one dinner which includes mashed potatoes and veggie sausages. A lot of thought goes into planning the menus not least because we have to cater for up to 50 people at the Adventure Camp.

People take turns doing the cooking, we usually have one experienced chef and two or three helpers for each meal with other people maintaining the cooking fire, collecting wood and fetching water. After the meal other people do

the washing up. It is a great way to get people involved and as it is a communal activity there is always plenty of banter.

After many years of running these camps we rarely get complaints about the food and the chefs are usually complimented on the quality and variety of the meals. The whole process is educative and gives people ideas of how they might cook at home and the experienced chefs often talk about the benefits of various foods.

On the Adventure Camps we always have one meal where many of the ingredients have been foraged, this is another way of reconnecting with the natural world and there is always excitement in eating the wild food you have gathered in the woods. Eating together is a great way to bond and it is a shame that in many families meals are not eaten together anymore. It would be great if we can encourage families to be together at least once during the day, sharing something.

► Dorset trip, 30th March to 7th April



Due to work commitments, I was unable to go to Dorset for the full duration of the trip, but had a great time over the three days I was able to attend.

Thursday 05/04/13

I arrived on site at 10.00 at Tom's Field in Dorset. It was barely above freezing, and was greeted by all who were on their way out to Swanage. I stayed behind to set up my Tent, and familiarise myself with the area. (This included a walk to Dancing Ledge). When all returned back to site, early afternoon, we got together, (and as the "newbie"), I was introduced to all. (Namely Tony, Buster, Becci, Alice, Tracy, Rachael, Ellie, Ivy, Harry & Dan). Due to the bad / cold conditions & weather forecast, it was decided it was not possible to do any Climbing. A group decision was made to go to Tyneham. The village is situated northeast of Worbarrow Bay on the Jurassic Coast, about 6 kilometres south of Wareham. The story is that villagers were told to leave their homes in order that the Army could take over the land for the duration of the war. They were promised their homes back at such time as the war ended, but in the event, they never got to live in their homes again. It is still to this day M.O.D. land as indeed it is all around the area. Access to Tyneham is only when the M.O.D. allow, mainly at weekends, when there is no practice firing on the ranges. After a circular walk around here, down to the Beach and then back to the Car Park - in a blizzard - it was decided we would warm up with a Curry at

a Restaurant. We called it a night on our return, in readiness and hope for a better day in the morning.

Friday 06/04/13

Although a cold night was had under canvas, the forecast for the day looked good / perfect for Climbing. It was agreed that we would make our way to Portland. We arrived mid morning, and commenced our day at The New Cuttings - the Bonsai Area. This was where I experienced my first Climb, "Eat, Stick & Die" - 2. (This was after I had to learn the ropes - to pardon the pun). I gained knowledge and experience of the figure of eight, together with the lock off knot. I struggled, but was constantly told by my colleagues that due to being a very popular lower-grade route, the rocks were getting very polished. I then attempted the following Climbs - and gained some confidence: "We're Only Placing Bolts for Nigel" - 3 and "Cheese & Pickle" - 4+, although I had to take an unscheduled break to prevent anyone else using these climbs for the day when I began to bleed all over the place! I was given the opportunity to try out "belaying", and although closely monitored and protected, I can confirm that I enjoyed every minute of this.

The second half of the day we moved down and round the corner to the Bower Topo, (Cuttings).

Here, we had the following Climbs available to us : The Whispering Galleries, Queen of the New Year, Suntrap, The Bumper Fun Book,

Tinkerbell, Far from the Madding Crowd, Six Finger Exercise, Godbeams & Project.

I attempted the first three Climbs, (and didn't fair too bad - I will say), and then built myself up for "Project". This involved a daunting climb out, (which for a novice, is easier said than done), followed by a climb up.....I tried a few times, but unfortunately had to call it a day after many attempts.

It was a great and enjoyable day - but I was shattered !

We left Portland at 6pm and headed back to Tom's Field. I decided after a MRE, I would call it a day and take in what I had done.

Although Saturday was to be our last day, (with everyone travelling back), we discussed and agreed that we would "utilise" the good weather, (forecast was another sunny day), with an early pack up start.

Saturday Morning 07/04/13

It was a good call for an early start. Due to the good "crisp" morning, (had to scrape the ice off my tent !), we got all our gear together and packed up. The plan was to make our way to the "Winspit" area for a further Climbing day.

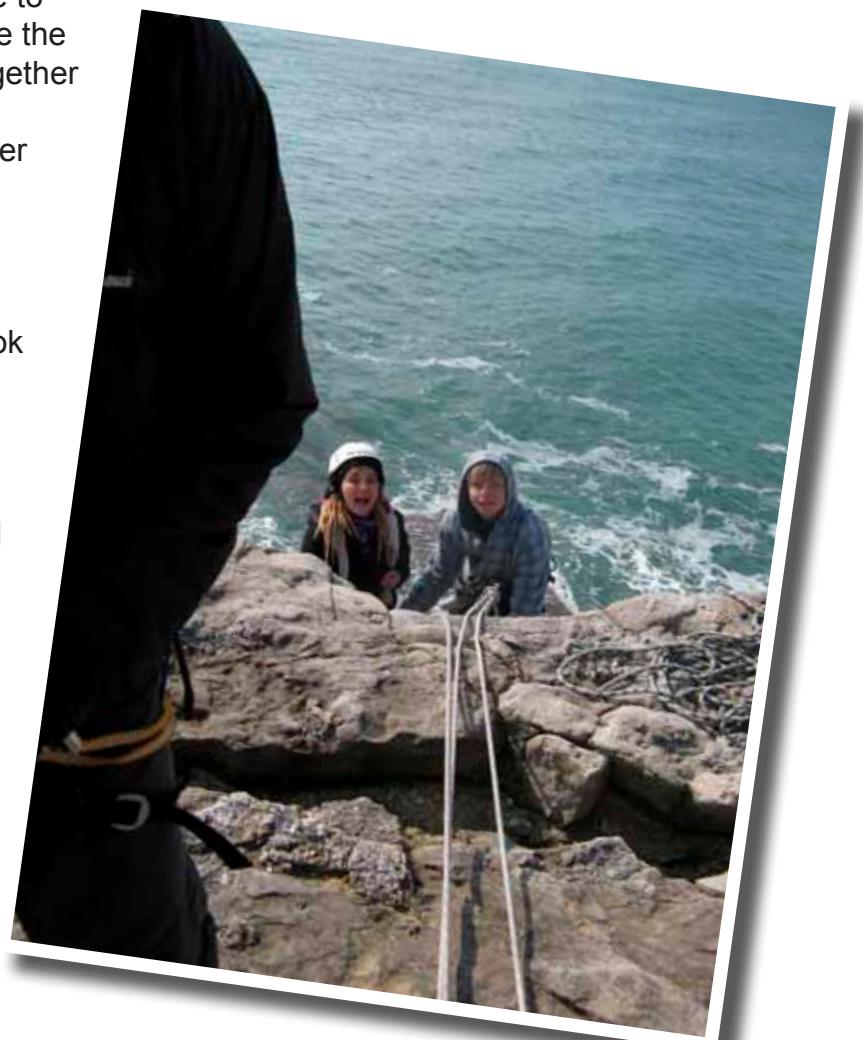
We arrived at a busy "Winspit West Quarry", and enjoyed watching the Climbers, (already set up), making it look so easy as they climbed all around us.

We studied the Climbing 'Bible', and it was decided that we would move around to the Winspit Quarrymans Wall - facing the Sea. This was great and a super experience. I had a few Climbs, and then again watched in awe as our other Team members made various climbs - with no apparent effort.

Unfortunately, I then had to make my way back home, while I left the others to continue with their day and Climbs.

In summary, I had a brilliant experience. Everybody was terrific, and I appreciated everyone's patience and assistance with me and my initial Climbing experience during this period of time.

– Simon



► My Craggers holiday

It was with trepidation that I made the journey from Brighton to Swanage in Dorset, one snowy morning during the Easter holidays, 2013. Armed with 2 teenage girls, a big tent, our thermals and most importantly, a sense of adventure we were ready for our first Craggers trip. I didn't know what to expect at all. When we arrived at Tom's field camp site, other Craggers helped to put up our tent. We unpacked and settled in. We were issued with climbing harnesses, helmets and rock shoes, which we had to look after during the trip.

The campsite, in the little village of Langton Matravers, is right on the edge of the countryside, and despite the snow in the air, evidence of spring was in full force, with abundant daffodils, snowdrops and baby lambs surrounding us on all sides. It was really, really cold, with temperature falling to -6C at night but tremendously exciting to be outside camping in these conditions. We had always been summer campers up to that point.

The objective of this Craggers trip was to rock climb on the limestone cliffs near Swanage. The climbs are a short walk away over the hill towards the coast path. On the first day we had sunshine, although it was very cold. We were a party of about 10 adults and kids most of us new to climbing. We were up and at it at about 9am, although a bit cold and bleary eyed, our excitement pushed us on. We all shared carrying equipment. We started the 20 minute walk through fields full of lambs, toward the old quarries where the climbs were situated. As we



crested the hill, the view opened out to reveal the Purbeck Downs and the sea, it was breathtaking! Woo Hoo! It felt good to be alive, away from city life in Brighton and having an adventure which was completely different to anything we had done before.

The instructors 'put up' some really easy climbs, which means they climbed the bare rock and attached a rope in a big metal hook up on the cliff so that us beginners could be 'belayed' (supported on the rope) at the bottom of the climb. Easy climbs.....the climbs felt hard to me!! I had only had one previous experience of climbing before which was indoors. Climbing outside on real rock was something else. The rock was cold and seemly unyielding, but as I caressed the bumps and grooves with my fingers, handholds suddenly emerged. We were told to place our feet firmly, and footholds offered themselves as I checked my position on the rock, rising higher and higher. But here was another difficulty, I am pathologically scared of heights! So as I climbing I was battling not only the cold and the unfamiliar movements, but also my internal voice, which was doing great job

of reminding me I was 10 feet off the ground and right about now would be a good time to PANIC!!!! But no, I over-rode my fear as I slowly inched up to the top. As my fingers reaching out to touch the anchor bolt, a surging feeling of triumph and achievement soared through me. It was fantastic!

The girls got on well too. During the week we all got to climb quite a few climbs, abseiled, and navigate during a walk through Wareham Forest. The other members of Craggers were great, so friendly, with everyone sharing their different experiences.

Without Craggers there is no way I could have afforded to go on a holiday to go climbing. Since we returned home, my daughter and I have continued climbing.

– Becci.

While in Dorset i was introduced to many new and exciting techniques and skills. Here I learnt how to climb on real rock, abseil and tie various knots! Also we learnt about navigating using a map and compass. But not only did I learn a new skill, me and my mum found a new passion. It was scary at first but all the friendly volunteers helped me and my friend feel welcome to the trip. We also experienced some exciting wildlife as a badger tried to steal our grub!

– Alice. 14.



► BMC climbing movement masterclass, 19th April

I attended one of the BMC's series of Climbing Movement Masterclasses at White Spider in Surrey in April. The classes are exceptionally good value. For £26 for BMC members you get coaching from a top climber for a couple of hours and go away with a little goody bag and a sheet of personalised recommendations to improve your climbing. It's hard to imagine any other sport where you can get individualised coaching from a top athlete at that price.

My class was with Naomi Buys who is in the British Bouldering Team and is a Wild Country sponsored climber. I was going partially to improve my own climbing but also to pick up tips and tricks for my own work as a climbing instructor as to how to coach people to get better. There were 6 people in the class so there was plenty of space and time for Naomi to watch us all.

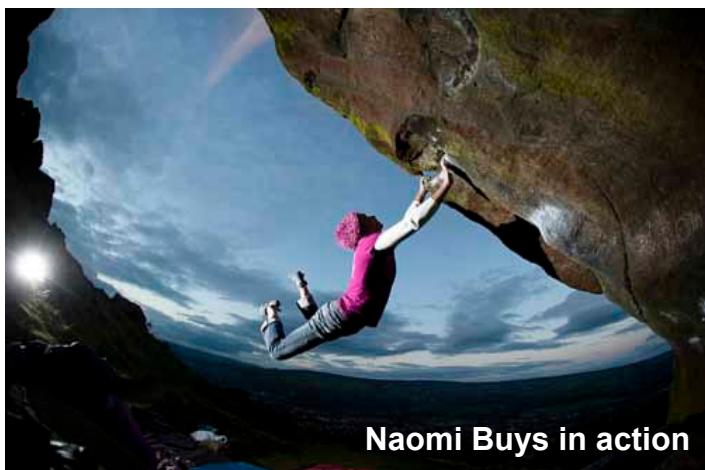
We started off with a little warm up and then a little traversing while Naomi watched our

climbing then we got straight into it with an overhanging route on the bouldering wall which we all attempted after Naomi had demonstrated the correct twisting technique where you 'flag' out with one foot for balance and keep yourself sideways on to the wall.

Then for contrast she put us on a tricky slab balance problem where you had to step up on to a small foothold with no hands and then rock over again with no hands on to a high foothold and stand up to get the top hold. I managed the first half and then came off but no one managed it properly which saved my ego.

Then we had a go at a dyno move - jumping for a hold that's out of reach. Naomi showed us how to build up a jump in stages if you are not confident about it the first time. She explained a little about how to develop contact strength in order to be able to hang on to the hold once you've got it and not just fly off.

Quite a lot of this stuff I was familiar with although it was good to run through it with someone more qualified than me. The stuff that was really pretty new to me was 'compression climbing' which is a technique you use particularly for climbing aretes (edges) and roofs - you are not free to let go with one hand in order to move as this will result in you peeling off, so therefore the feet are used in a much more active way - typically a toe hook is used to replace a hand in order to allow the hand to move freely. We tried this on a route on a roof and on an arete. The arete wasn't too hard but the roof



Naomi Buys in action

White Spider



climb was pretty tough. However after a few goes I cracked it using toe hooking, which felt good, as i've never really used this compression climbing before.

Before we finished we also had a go putting some of the stuff we'd practised on the bouldering wall into use on routes by doing one overhanging wall and doing another wall one-handed. Naomi also showed us some exercises to improve our core strength, which is all-important for climbing.

All together it was a great experience and well worth the money. We were even free to stay and climb if we wanted to as the £26 included entry to White Spider as well. Thanks to Craggers for paying for this class and hopefully I will be able to put some of Naomi's tips into use on future Craggers trips.

– Andrew

► Peak District trip, May



We arrived at Hathersage station in the rain and trekked over the hills to the campsite, me pushing a battered old buggy full of camping kit. A couple of kind fellow campers helped me pitch the tent while the kids sheltered under a tree and then Buster made the brilliant discovery of two tumble dryers in a drying room next to the shower block.

Tony and Becci arrived with climbing kit and food, among other wonders, and all was pretty much right with the world. The morning was grey so we all hiked into Hathersage for a fry up and a wander round the array of outdoor shops. To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first Everest ascent, a giant Everest cake stood on the counter of one, complete with kendal mint cake glacier, free to all comers.

By the time we'd done our bit to help with the conquest of the edible Everest the sun was just about visible and the keener climbers headed for the crags while the kids and I decided to follow a river and see where it went. On the way home the kids checked out the soaking potential of every local puddle and once again I was grateful for the tumble dryer room.

The next day was glorious and we walked from the campsite through carpets of bluebells around

rushing streams to Stanage Edge where we spent the whole day trad climbing. The kids and I both had plenty of attempts at climbing and, in between, explored the rocks lower down.

Two days' climbing in a row is too much for my children so, while the others went back to Stanage Edge, we took a bus from Hathersage village and spent the day exploring a small farm, various hillsides and streams and Treak Cliff Cavern - the only place on earth to find Blue John crystal.

On the final day of climbing we went to Horseshoe Quarry for sport climbing, which had pretty much something for everyone, including a traverse and what felt to me like an incredibly long climb but an equally incredible buzz once I touched the top. There were ponds and picnic spots and places to clamber as well as shady places for the kids to read and play once they'd had enough of climbing.

One last amble around the bluebell woods, one last night listening to the rushing water and it was time to go back across the hillside to Hathersage with the buggy full of kit. A brilliant trip with stuff for everyone - thanks all!

► Wild food walk, May 21st

Craggers has always had very strong links with Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project (BUCFP), in fact Craggers came about after I had taken people from the Centre on adventures in Wales and to Blackland Farm starting back in 1996. The connection has continued and most of the people attending our annual adventure camp still come from the Centre.

We have done one off Bushcraft events for the Centre and when we were asked to do a wild food walk as part of a day of events around food, hosted by BUCFP we were delighted. We walked a route before the event itself and surprised ourselves at the amount of good, edible food that was on offer in the urban environment. Foraging is, of course easier in spring and autumn but

can also supplement your diet throughout the year. Invest in a good foraging book and surprise yourself, enjoy some exciting new tastes and save money.

The event itself was fantastic; a wonderful vegan buffet feast and lots of informative talks and demonstrations.

At the end of the afternoon two of our volunteers led a walk through the town, starting at Tarner Park behind the Centre and then up to Queens Park. About 20, very enthusiastic adults and children were on the walk and we identified about 20 different wild foods.

► Bushcraft workshop, Derbyshire, 27th to 29th June

The mature tree canopy kept off the worst of the rain but drops congregated on leaves and intermittent cascades of water encouraged us to pitch the tent as quickly as possible.

This was certainly a big change from the glorious sunshine we had experienced over the previous four days at the Bushcraft Show. Still this was a more realistic environment in which to learn the kind of Bushcraft applicable to the UK.

The Institute of Outdoor Learning (IOL) was putting on this IOL Bushcraft and Survival Skills Special Interest Group workshop and as always they had brought together experts in their field (or woodland) to pass on some of their knowledge.

As a member of the Special Interest Group (SIG) I get to attend these events for free or at a greatly reduced rate. Becci attended because she was interested and paid the full rate herself – she still thought it was good value.

The two days were packed with workshops and we had to dash between them and still couldn't attend everything.

The evening before the workshops started we erected a huge tarp to keep us relatively dry.



There was a mixed group of people with over half being Forest School people and the rest of us being Bushcraft instructors, consequently some of the workshops were designed to appeal to children – making whistles and flowers etc. In other workshops we made pump drills and bows and arrows. We went tracking and found wild food, some people worked with a pole lathe and built various types of fire rigs.

Becci made by far the best bow and earned a place on the IOL website.

It was a great couple of days.

► Hanging by a thread: Blackland Farm training, August

You look up at the knot but it is not really a knot; it is more of a wrap, the Mariners hitch. You had connected yourself and your climbing partner to one end of a 8mm sling and then turned the other end a couple of times round the bar of a karabiner before you twisted it around itself a few times and then tucked the free end through the sling. You look again at the flimsy length of textile and consider your position. You and your unconscious partner are dangling, 200 metres above the ground and in a second you are about to disconnect from the rope and then the only thing standing between you and certain death will be a slim bit of fabric and an altogether unlikely looking knot. You go through a mental check list one last time and remove the rope from your belay device.

You had both been having a great time on this huge, multi pitch climb. You had led the last pitch, set up an anchor and were belaying your friend up to you. He was obviously enjoying himself as well. Suddenly, you heard a rumbling above you. You pulled hard on the rope, mashing it into the grooves of the belay plate and locking it fast. You pushed yourself as hard as you could against the wall, before a huge block came hurtling past, inches from your body and narrowly missing the rope. The block crashes into the rock and smashes into dozens of smaller missiles. And you watch, in horror, as one of them hurtles towards your friend. It hits hard, smashing his helmet. Your friend slumps over, dangling in his harness.

You are faced with a multitude of possible decisions. You take a couple of breaths. Think.

OK, first priority; give first aid. If your partner isn't dead, he could be dying, so getting to him as quickly as possible is vital. Second priority is to get you both to the ground and safety. Two more breaths and you have formulated a plan. Attach your partner to the anchor. Escape from the system and convert the anchor into one you can abseil from. You take the strain and free his rope from the anchor. You begin the abseil; he is held in place by your weight on the rope. When you reach him you lock off the rope. He is alive and there is no blood but he is still unconscious. You leave the shattered helmet in place. You fashion a chest harness to keep him upright then connect him to you.

You both continue to descend and you keep a close eye on him to see that his condition doesn't deteriorate. You will be running out of rope soon; you must find a place to set up another abseil anchor. Just in time you find a place and put in the protection to make an anchor. Time to tie the flimsy knot.

It has held. You pull through the rope and set it up ready for another abseil.

That was the scenario; but by the time Andrew had to tie the Mariners hitch he and Buster were suspended only half a metre above the base of the abseil tower. But the anxiety was still there. It was a lot to remember and everything had to be done in the right order and mentally double checked.

This was the final and most complex exercise of the trip and it was done perfectly. Every

year, before the Adventure Camp we come to Blackland Farm to practice. We spend a couple of nights and three days setting up abseils, zip wires, top ropes at the rocks and all the thing we do under the tree canopy; prussiking, stirruping, caving ladder and roped tree climbing. This year, for the first time, we also had to practice setting up The Perch.

Andrew and Buster have been volunteering at the Adventure Camp for years and have done the set ups many time. But as we only do it once a year we need to have it well practiced and slick and 100% safe for the people who attend

the Camp. This year we had a new volunteer, Becci, which gave Andrew and Buster the opportunity to do some of the teaching. At the end of these sessions we use the abseil tower to practice various advanced rope techniques. Including; lowering and abseiling past a knot and various types of hoist. Even the most complex manoeuvre is just a combination of skills. So by learning the basics you will be prepared to face the worst that could happen to you.

As always it was a physically and mentally exhausting few days but it was also very satisfying and everyone did very well.

► Flames in the forest – Blackland Farm adventure camp, 24th to 31st August

There is something atavistic in our relationship to fire.

We are drawn ineluctably to the flames and I don't know whether it is the thousands of years when our ancestors relied on fire for warmth, food and keeping predatory animals at bay which has genetically hard wired our fascination with it; or whether it is just the beauty of the flickering light. But the hypnotic affect of a camp fire is almost spiritual.

After a day of adventure and a great meal and possibly a night time wide game, people gather around the fire. There is usually at least one guitar and often a bit of singing but people still talk and the music is a pleasant background.

On this magical night however there was no talking. A tall blonde woman approached carrying a curiously shaped case. She opened it and took out a Celtic harp. The stillness around her spread out like ripples on a pond as the first golden harmonics floated on the air. The people around the fire were rapt as the woman's fingers flew over the strings conjuring magic from the instrument. An already enraptured audience were further transported when the woman began to sing, bringing to life the songs of the ancient Gaeltacht.

This was just one of the highlights of this years Adventure Camp. The Ashdown Forest is alive with enchantment. During the day there is the sound of woodpeckers tap tapping food from the



trees and the clanking of geese overhead as their squadrons fly in V formation to Weirwood reservoir. At night the lack of light pollution coaxes constellations into being and we go to sleep listening to the call and response of owls.

With 50 people in total attending the Camp we were at our full capacity. In theory we could easily take extra people, there is always a waiting list but there is a limit to how many people we can incorporate into what we want to be a (albeit extended) family environment. We added an extra day this year – eight days and seven nights – just to be able to fit in all the things we wanted to do. In total we ran over 50 sessions, splitting the group in two for many of the activities. Our major new activity this year was 'The Perch' which really got the adrenalin flowing. It involved climbing a telegraph pole to a small platform then jumping for a trapeze bar. The kids did far better than the adults. Other activities included climbing at the local rocks and on an artificial wall, abseiling, zip wire, wide games, kayaking, assault course, yoga, running,

swimming, bushcraft, crate challenge, atal atal, making and competition, archery, wild food hunt, treasure hunt and various craft sessions.

As always everyone took part in the day to day running of the camp; carrying and chopping wood, fetching water, cooking cleaning etc.

The feedback we got was very positive.



Harp playing round the camp fire



► Feedback from Blackland Farm adventure camp

Participants in the 2013 adventure camp were given feedback forms to enable them to tell us their thoughts and impressions of the camp as well as any ideas for improvement. Here is a selection of the comments received.

1. What did you hope to achieve on this trip?

- To get outside into the greenery again and mess around in the woods and the mud, in order to escape city life.
 - Having a holiday with young children.
 - Relax and spend time outside.
 - To learn how to climb. To try some different activity, be outside, spend fun time with my daughter, meet new people, see the stars.
 - To be in nature, eat wholesome food, exercise, have a laugh and be with kids, learn more wild food and bush craft.
 - Meet people, relax, participate, challenge myself.
 - Some bonding with my son.
 - Archery, chilling, Rock climbing.
 - Cultivation of helping/assisting with he adventure activities.
 - Outdoor life, fitness and community.
 - Fresh air, woods, camping, play for children.
 - A lovely outdoors holiday.
 - A holiday. A safe place for my boy to go wild.
 - A break from city life. Quality time with family.
- 

2.What have been the highlights of the trip for you and/or your children?

- Being more active and feeling better. Feeling healthier and more relaxed by virtue of being outside. Meeting new people.
- Lovely evening fires with chatting and music. Beautiful countryside and fun activities.
- Climbing on the rocks and zip lining.
- Cup of tea in my tent every morning – How cool, loved it all, never been up high as much ever except in a plane.
- Feeling healthier physically, mentally, achieving a rock climb and tree climbs. Kids really enjoyed making friends.
- Animal hide and seek game in the woods for my child. Climbing wall for me, kayaking for my older child.
- Zip wire, climbing.
- Rock climbing, chilling and tucking in.
- Archery.
- The amazing sunsets, yoga, community life.
- Space and free play for kids. Cycling around.
- Climbing the rocks. Kayaking.
- All the children had a brilliant time. He learnt stuff. Experienced very good things and grown in the process.
- Kayaking, zip wiring, climbing, trampolining, eating around the fire, enjoying time with friends.
- Abseiling/climbing/ den in woods.
- Climbing, abseiling, night walk, zip wire, trampolining, kayaking, Having fun with other children.
- Sitting in a field surrounded by trees with a stormy sky overhead, alone, with glimpses of sun shine.
- Kayaking, abseiling, archery, evening activities.
- It has been great lovely group, loads of fun. Well organised, people all formed a lovely group, cooperation, new friends, Learning new skills, seeing children playing together.
- The community life.



3.Have you experienced any difficulties? If so, what were they?

- Leaving, back to the real world.
- Kayaking – would like to have paddled out and not so many games.
- Physically unfit.
- Keeping my younger child away from the snack table.
- A few.
- As a parent with MS, keeping track of daughter and getting around.
- The rain.
- Not really, a bit of rain and kept losing socks.
- How to place myself in.
- Finding common ground with my fellow human beings.
- Dynamics between children, and heights.
- Sometimes the kids games have got out of hand and become too aggressive and violent. It was upsetting at times trying to figure out and calm tensions.
- Missing cutlery, cups, bowls, etc.

4. Have you tried anything new on this trip? If so, would you like to try it again?

- Archery, bush craft, outdoor climbing, YES to all!
- First time rock climbing – yes I would like to do it again.
- Climbing.
- All of new to me and my child!
- Rock climbing. Prusik tree climbing.
- Tunnels.
- Rock climbing and I would love to try it again.
- Crate challenge.
- My child has moved some personal boundaries and experienced growth.
- Most of activities were new or I hadn't done for many years, I'd enjoy doing all again.
- Everything was new! We loved them!
- Wood crafting, cooking outdoors.

5.What have you and/or your children gained from this trip? Please describe:

- Re-connecting with nature and how we're designed to live. Overall, fantastic trip – my favourite week of the year so far, if not of the past two years.
- Doing more outside things.
- Health, diet and exercise.
- Sharing experiences with other people.
- How to resolve conflict (he fell out with friends) How to deal with different peoples attitudes and feelings, Team work and solo effort.
- Fresh air, exercise, healthy food.
- Greater fitness and healthy eating.

6. Are you or your children likely to get involved in outdoor activities as a result of this trip?

- Yes possibly even instructor training/ qualifications.
- Yes.
- Yes we are going to try jogging together and join Craggers.
- Join kayaking club. Climbing?

- A painting workshop for banners.

10. Do you have any suggestions for improving future adventure camps?

- Longer Archery session.
- No.
- Hot tub, massage, fire pit, manicure and pedicure.
- To remind people that if they do not like campfire singing to put their tents far away from the fire.
- A fixed time when everyone is quiet for bedtime, by 9.30 perhaps.
- Everyone to their own dishes so washer uppers only have plates to do. It is quite a massive job even with helpers especially when it is getting dark.
- More goes on everything.
- Water fights. Well behaved dogs should be allowed.
- More tables for a bit more space for working/ cooking?
- Need to find a way to help kids learn calm techniques for getting along. Keep a closer eye.
- Provide own cutlery, crockery etc.



► First storm of Autumn: Training and CPD 12th to 16th September

Horizontal, exfoliating, rain lashed our faces and a brutal wind whipped up plumes of water, sending them rushing across the lake and over the white caps which had formed on the normally calm surface of Llyn Idwal.

We staggered like drunks, pushing our bodies against the force of the wind, feet slipping on wet rocks and boots sinking into bogs. Natural forces were acting upon the landscape and upon us. Geology in action.

Two days earlier and the three hundred mile drive to Snowdonia had taken six hours. We pitched our tent and crawled into sleeping bags anticipating the next day's activities.

I was going to take part in an Association of Mountaineering Instructors (AMI) workshop on teaching multi pitch rock climbing and Becci was going to go for a mountain walk. After a series of communication snafu's (Capel Curig appears to be in a mobile phone dead zone.) Becci drove me to Tremadog where the workshop had been transferred due to heavy rain in the mountains.

To work, the training needed three trainees taking turns at being a leader or one of the two clients. Unfortunately one of the trainees had not turned up so Becci was roped in (pun intended) to play the part of a client. It was great having a real person on the end of the rope rather than a trainee and Becci played her part to perfection.

The clear skies soon clouded over and it started to rain. This obviously makes climbing more

challenging and safety procedures become even more important.

The rain increased throughout the day as we climbed, abseiled and descended treacherous paths. It was a great day.

The next two days were Continuing Professional Development (CPD). I need to demonstrate that I am still active and learning new skills or developing current skills to maintain my professional qualifications.

The first day was environment and involved a slow walk around the mountains identifying and learning about mountain habitats, flora and fauna and human impact. It was a great, very informative day and provided me with plenty to pass on to the people I lead in the hills.

The wind picked up during the afternoon and with predictions of Armageddon, I thought it wise to tie on all the tent guy lines, tighten everything I could tighten and generally batten down the hatches. We had gathered chanterelle and boletus mushrooms during the walk and I fried them up with garlic that evening to enhance the usual dull camping fare.

Next morning, after meeting up, we had a cup of tea and listened to a presentation on glaciation. And although everyone was really interested in some on the ground learning, leaving the warmth of the classroom was not very appealing.



The progress around the lake was very slow. Most of our party – some of them quite big men – were blown over at some point and it was a real effort to raise our heads to take in the evidence of the North Wales glaciation – Darwin's boulders, Roche Moutones, synclines, breccia and the rest. But it was a surprisingly satisfying session. From the mountains it was down to the beach where the signs of deposition were really evident and then back to the classroom for a debrief. And all too soon it was over.

At least the workshops were over; we still had to survive a night in a tent which was threatening to

blow away all night. The sound of the cracking fabric, the flexing of the poles and the howling of farm dogs ensured that we had a sleepless night.

Thanks to Becci for managing to drive back the next day. The return journey took much longer than the outward one and I am sure Becci would like to thank the makers of her caffeine filled energy drink and sugar filled sticky sweets.

► BMC student seminar 5th and 6th October

I have never seen Plas y Brenin so crowded; registration for the Snowdon Triathlon, a rescue exercise, the Brenins own courses and the reason I was there, the British Mountaineering Council's (BMC) student safety seminar weekend. I was to be one of their four Association of Mountaineering Instructors (AMI) volunteers.

The BMC had paid for food and accommodation and for some inexplicable reason I had a four bedded bunk room to myself for the whole weekend.

The first day was something of a trip down memory lane for me, the destination was Craig y Gesail where I led my first route, a multi pitch called Bramble Buttress, about 18 years ago. And guess what I got to lead it again – fantastic. It is still as good as I remember. We made a couple of abseils back to the ground and then moved onto a far more serious VS route, Acropolis.

The first pitch was horribly greasy, vegetated and lacking in protection. The second pitch was not much better but the route itself was made worthwhile by the fantastic third pitch; bold airy, exposed and very exciting. The views across the bay towards Porthmadog were stunning and although the tang of rain on the air had been with us for much of the afternoon we remained dry all day, and arrived back very tired and hungry to join the dinner queue at 7p.m. We didn't have much time to savour the meal though as we had to meet the students we would be taking out the

next day which gave us fifteen minutes to eat dinner.

My two students were very affable second years, the representatives from Swansea University.

The weather forecast for Sunday was not good and sure enough it was wet and windy when I went in for breakfast. The rain soon abated but the bruised sky, squatting over the lake behind the Centre, looked really menacing. After collecting kit from the Brenin stores I met with my students at the Milestone Buttress but as that venue was really busy we relocated to Tryfan Bach, which although quite crowded itself really lends itself to teaching.

Tryfan, I think, is by far the most imposing and aesthetically pleasing mountain in Wales and Tryfan Bach is its small but perfectly formed little brother.

I only had the students for a day so I proposed to make the most of it and pass on as many skills as possible so that they could safeguard the new members of their university mountaineering club.

Good practice is often demonstrated by example and no words are needed, so on arrival at the crag I immediately put on my helmet at the base of the crag and they followed suit. There is very little chance of them being around when a chunk of mountain falls off at Tryfan Bach but on a busy day with plenty of novices about there is a very real possibility that they could have a belay plate,

karabiner or sundry other bits of climbing gear dropped on their heads.

Watching people gear up always tells a story; how efficiently do they fit their harness, how do they rack their gear, how do they tie on etc gives pointers to their competence.

There is very little point spending a long time giving a lecture at the base of the crag but that does mean that you do not know for sure if they can belay safely, this is something you have to judge through observation during the course of the climb.

Climbing in parallel for the first ascent of the crag gave them both the opportunity to build lots of different types of anchor and we climbed five pitches before scrambling to the summit and then walking down into sunshine.

Next, I soloed 40 meters, trailing a rope which was tied onto one of the students allowing him to lead while being on a slack top rope. He led very well, built an anchor and then brought up his partner.

When they were both at the top I showed them how to set up an abseil station and they both abseiled down using a prussic while being on a safety rope.

The other guy then led the climb and after asking him if he was happy with the last piece of gear he had placed and getting an affirmative I told him to fall. The gear held. Which was nice. I talked them through how to set up a stacked abseils and then as time was running short, the wind was picking up and there were a few drops of rain I decided to solo up to the top and bring them up in parallel. When they got to the top they asked me to explain the principals of using a magic plate and as that was what they both carried as belay devices I showed them how I had just brought them up.

Then it was back to the Centre for closing ceremonies presentations etc. I was given a few climbing and hill walking publications and DVD's which I will pass on to Craggers.

A great weekend. Three cheers have to go to Jon Garside of the BMC who organised the whole thing.

► BMC clubs seminar, Derbyshire, 12th October

Tony and I left Brighton early on Friday 11 October. The seminar was all day Saturday, so it made sense to go the day before. I volunteered to drive as this was quicker, easier and cheaper than public transport. Much to our surprise, we zoomed up the M1, arriving at lunch time. We had found accommodation close to a local crag, and had a plan of getting some climbs in, but the weather had other ideas. Most of our stay in Derbyshire was accompanied by rain; however this did not detract from the wild beauty of the landscapes and the charm of the little stone villages we passed through.

The first afternoon there we found where the seminar was going to be next day, and then went into Castleton itself. It turns out that Castleton is a very ancient settlement with the castle of the town name still in evidence. It is surrounded by some very dramatic gorges and edges which are famous in the climbing community. Also there are very famous caves where Blue John precious stones are mined. All these natural features are the stages for much of local life, with festivals happening inside the caves, even weddings! The local museum had plenty of information about all this, and provided welcome shelter from the rain.

On Saturday we were up early to drive through the rain back into Castleton to register at the BMC seminar and avail ourselves of the coffee provided. The day was divided up into different lectures specifically designed to help people who are running climbing, mountaineering and walking clubs, with talk from current experts in those fields. The topics ranged from

club insurance to social media to kit advice, something for everyone to help with the business of providing the best for your club members.

1. Top Tips for Club Officials.

This was the first talk the help with topics around managing and administrating a club.

- Remember why you have a club in the first place and do not get lost in the minutia/trivia of the administration.
- Continuity. All people holding roles need a proper handover and training in handling their roles. Written guidance should be available and regular meets should be planned during handover process. Every role should have a proper folder with guidance.
- Touch base with each other often and focus on people's skill sets.
- Have a plan!
- Have people behind the scenes with skills you need to support running the club.
- Treasurers – check your tax liability.
- Have a solid guidance, policy and procedure so you do not 're-invent the wheel' every time there is an issue.
- Don't be too ambitious or do too much.
- Use social media to your advantage to advertise events and connect members and potential members.
- There is great guidance on Lottery and charity commission website.

- Governance checklist is on BMC website.
- Crisis management guidance, have a plan. i.e. what to do in event of death on a trip, next of kin etc.

2. Advice for treasurers.

I went to this talk especially. It is a role I am interesting in doing in Craggers.

- Use handover notes
- Have an EASY system for clear record keeping
- Have a routine.
- Make time to prepare the accounts for the end of year/AGM.
- Regular checks by committee of the bank account and spending details.
- Have a back up plan in case something happens to the treasurer, someone else who can takeover.

3. Equipment advice with Dan Middleton.

Why have club equipment?

- It removes barriers to participation
- Encourages new members.
- Provides opportunities to expand range of activities.

Or not to have equipment?

- Costs.
- Upkeep – time effect to manage and maintain it.
- Liability - people fear this.

The BMC can help with the costs, advise on liability, management and kit does not just need to be monitored by one person. Duty of care (liability). A club has a duty of care to take reasonable steps to ensure that club equipment is suitable and safe for the use of its members. Consider safety and suitability. Who makes sure it's safe to use?

An equipment officer should be doing the following;

- Pressure checks,

- Reporting issue to the club.
- Quarantine and retiring suspect equipment.
- Ensuring equipment is stored and looked after properly.
- Keep records of all these jobs.

Other notes:

- Pre-use checks can be carried out by everyone!
- Before use check for obvious defects.
- Train novices how to do this.
- If you travel with your equipment, beware of crushing, dropping and cutting damage.
- Regular checks should be completed by a COMPETENT person, against records which are managed by the equipment officer.
- Establish what you need to do to carry out a detailed inspection. Be systematic, keep records for duty of care, records of gear use; look at photos of gear samples to compare.
- Retirement and disposal – do this when it is damaged or fail an inspection. Gear has exceeded its life time when it is 10 years past manufacture or other as guide by manufacturer.
- Throw it away so that no-one else can use it.
- Recycle what you can. Use Green Peak Gear.
- BAD EQUIPMENT CAN KILL. This area of club management needs to be 'done by the book'.
- Storage and transport – wash and clean kit after use, dry using ambient heat. Lubricate moving parts. Check manufacturer's advice. Store in cool, dark place away from strong sunlight and dangerous chemicals.
- Transport carefully using kit bags and rope bags.
- BMC has free videos about caring kit/guidance for your club.

4. Social Media.

Use social media if it SERVES A PURPOSE for your club!!

- P People – who are your audience.

- O Objectives – what are your goals.
- S Strategy – How? Ask your audience.
- T Technology – use it to serve a purpose.

5. Walking Officer

The BMC walking officer Carey talking to us about his role in expanding hill walking within the BMC. Club members said what would work for their clubs. We are to watch this space!! And check Summit magazine for walking features. We can contact him on carey@thebmc.co.uk

So in conclusion I was struck by some ideas for us at Craggers that would be useful to look at and discuss.

- Look at website called ‘meet –up’.
- New members meetings separate?
- Have meetings with 2 halves 1st half business 2nd half teaching on equipment, technique, hand care etc
- Look at Local authority database

- Walking brotherhood – make contact with other clubs.
- Check the BMC events page. Go to more BMC south eats events.
- We need to think about recruitment and retention of members for Craggers. What is working for us?
- Run a better AGM – guidance on BMC, what is an AGM? When should it happen? What should be addressed?
- Social media presence. Look at the London Mountaineering club for a good example.
- Assemble folders with ‘role’ advice.
- Equipment Officer – keep records of dates of annual check. Do annual check. Retire & trash. Check news stuff before it goes into service, inspect and retain after fall or incident. Follow manufacturer’s advice. Keep manufacturer’s packaging/instruction/date of purchase on file.

– Becci



This is to certify that,
Unemployed climbers Club (Craggers)

Membership No. 910487

is affiliated to the British
Mountaineering Council for the year
2013

The British Mountaineering Council is the representative body that exists to protect the freedoms and promote the interests of climbers, hillwalkers and mountaineers, including ski-mountaineers.

By continuing membership to the BMC Unemployed climbers Club (Craggers) is supporting:

- The BMC's vital Access and Conservation work throughout England and Wales
- Supporting the BMC's work in representing climbers and hill walkers' interests to the government
- Helping to ensure that the BMC can continue developing its safety, training and technical work and services

Dave Turnbull

Dave Turnbull
Chief Executive Officer





Adventure for all



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