

High House, Borrowdale : Weekend of 24th July – 26th July

Having missed the March 2009 weekend at High House – the wife’s birthday – we were both looking forward to revisiting the hut that we feel has everything anyone who likes “doing the huts” could ever wish for – the drive from Keswick to Borrowdale is exceptionally scenic, the hut is sited in a fantastic location for walking / climbing, and the facilities are good.

Driving along the A66 into Keswick, the views of the fells was stunning – Blencathara was clear of clouds, Cat Bells and Maiden Moor looked enticing, and the drive down Borrowdale gave us an indication of the views we hoped we’d see the following day. I’d have to say it was one of the best views I’d seen of the valley for a long time – everything was so lush (as you’d expect for Borrowdale), and all the tops were exceptionally clear.

As we drove through Seatoller, then down the road to Seathwaite Farm, the views were stunning; one of our favourite sights – Sour Milk Gill – looked in full flow; always good to see. Driving upto the hut, we could see that we were amongst the last ones to arrive; as you’d expect, members were sat outside enjoying the views and a few beers. After unloading and setting up our beds for the night, we joined the rest of the crowd and saw the usual familiar faces. Whilst the hut has a location to die for, it’s the people who make it.

That night was a reasonably quiet one, staying in for our dinner and just drinking quietly and reminiscing about the good times we’d had there previously. People were sat there working out their routes for the following day. With Victor & Linda, we knew roughly what our route would be – to Scafell and back – but not how long the day would eventually be.

Waking the following morning, we had breakfast and were out walking for 08:45 (early for us). Victor had devised a route that he said would make it a long day, but with summer daylight on our side and the day looking like it would be clear all day, we were up for it.

Setting off, our initial route was upto Styhead Tarn where we found several people camping (a good location perhaps for wild camping that I know some members like). Following the Corridor Route, we headed around and up to Mickledore under Scafell, but not up Lords Rake as this was still considered too dangerous. Knowing we would head off away from the route to Scafell Pike, it was truly amazing just how many people were heading upto England’s highest peak – it was like a motorway.

Heading up a long gully to Foxes tarn, it was almost a scramble albeit an easy one. At the tarn, the wife decided to stay there for a while whilst the three of us headed up a badly worn scree slope to the Scafell summit. The views up there were stunning – you could see for miles : lots of Lakeland tops (too many to name), the Isle of Man, Galloway – absolutely fantastic.

Our route was back down the scree slope, picking the wife up en route from Foxes Tarn, then back down the gully for the next part of our walk. The next part of our route was to take us down the side of Cam Spout and it was here that something happened that you wouldn’t wish on anyone – one of our party lost their footing and took a bad tumble.

Coming down the boulder slope by the side of Cam Spout – uneven, loose gravel, but over smooth boulders – it was tricky underfoot. I’d gone down ahead of our group (mostly on my backside) and had stopped about 50 ft below to watch their descent. My wife was treading carefully, using her walking poles to test the ground, then I saw her fall. Thinking she’d be up on her feet pretty quick, I saw Victor dash across to where she’d fallen and knew it could be more serious. Dropping my rucksack, I scrambled back up the 50ft a lot quicker than I’d come down, to find her lain on her back and in a lot of pain.

Looking at the angle she lay there, I wondered if it was more serious than it eventually turned out to be but, getting her onto her feet, she was battered and bruised but okay (it brought back memories of another

incident I'd been involved with – our Hut Secretary at Coniston mine workings). Fortunately, she'd landed on her rucksack, and it had cushioned most of her fall. Maybe her Ju Jitsu training (how to fall) had helped her sub-consciously. Looking where she'd fallen, she was lucky not to have gone over the edge of the path into the pool at the foot of Cam Spout. Knowing I had a minimal first aid kit in my rucksack, we slowly descended and I applied what plasters I had, mainly to keep any wounds she had, clean. She looked like a patchwork doll by the time I'd finished with her.

Our descent down into the Upper Eskdale valley was painfully slow, but we got there in the end. Again, the views here were stunning – seeing a lot of area we wouldn't have normally seen; a vast expanse of fells, leading down to Eskdale and up to Esk Hause. Taking what was obviously only a sheep track, we headed back up the valley, and made our way up to Esk Hause, seeing very few people. With Pauline suffering after her fall, and her sister Linda suffering with her back, we got the Hause okay and began our descent down Ruddy Gill into Grains Gill.

By now it was a lot later than we thought it was, and both Victor and I arrived back at the hut first for around 8:15 – we'd been out for 11.5 hours; probably the longest day's walking we'd done as a group. As Pauline and Linda began to gently ascend up the track to the hut, help came from an unexpected source – Frank and Joss had headed down, and came back carrying the girls' rucksacks. Welcoming cups of tea and beers awaited everyone.

After a rest, and well deserved meal we're prepared earlier, we settled down to a relaxing evening; all surprised at just how long we'd been out (11.5 hrs), how far we'd walked (c.12 miles), and how much ascent we'd done (c.5,000ft). Although it had been blighted by the fall my wife had taken, we all agreed that it had been an excellent walk and one we'd now like to do in reverse (without the falls).

Whilst we ate in the hut that night (a pre-prepared moussaka), everyone made good use of the fire pit at one time or another, and a big fire was soon ablaze (we'd all brought up plenty of wood to burn). A few had brought BBQs up too.

The next day (Sunday) was so different from the Saturday – heavy rain all day. We all did our chores for cleaning the hut before our departure, and headed our separate ways home. When it rains in Borrowdale, it certainly does rain – hence it's reputation for being the wettest area in England.

One thing that did amaze our group – normally we would have visited the Scafell Inn at some point over the weekend for some refreshments. This weekend, we only saw it twice, both from the outside – once on our way in, and once on our way out. A rarity for us.....

Another excellent weekend enjoyed by all. May there be many more.....

Stuart McDonald