

LAC ATC Procedures - 3 Peaks Blog

This page contains details about our ATC Support trip to the UK's three highest peaks - Snowdon, Scafell Pike and Ben Nevis.

Day 1 - 29th August 2008

We met up at the crack of dawn (about 10 past 6) at Swanwick for breakfast, to fire us up for the trip! Some of us were definitely more awake than others... but we all managed something substantial. We were very surprised to find you can't get a starbucks until 7 am. Shock horror, how can we possibly stay awake in the van?? Luckily we've got a grand total of 2 sleeping bags with us (one for genuine mountain emergencies and one for sleepy mini bus snuggling up emergencies).

After breakfast, we load up the van, & were away under the fine driving of Pete Colborne & navigation of Glynne Dawson. Chris took a turn driving next once we'd got into Wales and though we'd had mostly sunshine all morning, the weather got worse as we approached Snowdonia - first a few spots of rain, then full on rain, then the grey cloud descended and it stays that way until after we've started our walk.

We arrive at the car park at Penn Y Pass (our starting point) at 12.20pm looking remarkably cheerful considering the prospect at this point is a 5 hour walk in the rain! At 12.30 we get going – so we spent 15 minutes getting wet weather geared up, faffing around, going to the loo before starting off up the Pyg track (so called why? One web site says it stands for Pen Y Gwryd, but what that means, we're not sure and google isn't all that forthcoming on the welsh translation! Wikipedia thinks it might be named after the "pass of the pigs" that the pyg track crosses but we didn't see many pigs up there!). We don't get very far before the warm waterproofs start coming off again as we're just too hot! The rain seems to be easing too and at least we can see where we're going (for a bit!) as we start off, we're all fairly perky, but I reckon the first ½ hour is the worst - there's quite a few stops for clothing readjustment, water, photos etc before we start striding out.

It turns out all the girls have matching pale blue water proofs. Katharine and Rosie even have matching hair clips. There doesn't seem to be much room for individuality in the fashion world of walking gear! Glynne and Pete compound this theory by wearing the same t shirts.

We carry on up what seem like very big steps until we meet the pyg track/crib goch fork and just double check we're going the right way. We had been warned most strenuously to avoid crib goch as we could quite easily tip ourselves over the edge on a poor visibility. Despite swirling cloud someone scarily fit and

healthy overtakes us, and seemingly runs up the crib goch path! We just hope the visibility clears up a bit for him!

When the cloud clears it is quite lovely – we can see some of the lake below that the miners track runs round Llyn Llydaw lake.



The next part of the walk is pretty gentle – we carry on up past where the miners track joins the pyg track and the landscape starts to get a bit more rocky.

At some point on the way up we meet a guy coming down who does it every day! Apparently he's in training for a trip to the Himalayas!

As we get higher the cloud starts coming down again – getting mistier and mistier – the air is so wet that it's settling in our hair making us look like we have spider web halos and it's starting to get a bit chillier. We reach the ridge at the end of the pyg track & some of us think we've finished! No such luck... we turn left to meet the Llanberis track up to the summit, many more people and a rather eerie sound of pneumatic drills through the mist! They're building a brand new hotel up here!

We get to the top, all very pleased with our selves and pose for photos before getting wrapped up warm, eating lots of calories (Peanut Kitkat chunky any one?) and heading down.



We meet a couple of characters at the top – one of which has a freshly broken nose. We give their group a map because they say they are going down a different route to the one they used coming up. As we're leaving they tell us they don't know how to use it. Whoops.

Other odd ball on top of the mountain is tracksuit bottoms and trainer man. That's it. He's not wearing anything else. It's really cold. He's really odd

We head back the way we came and then take the right hand fork for the miners track. The cloud clears up again as we head on down.

It's a very steep descent at first, flattening out towards the lake to leave a really nice, flattish stroll the rest of the way back.

We get back to the bus at 18.50pm, having walked 7.73 miles and Chris drives us (with only 1 U turn) to the B&B for the evening. We've got about ¾ hour before meeting to go out to dinner that evening. Nice food, nice t-bone & nice rioja! Yay. Back to the B&B for some well earned rest before another early morning.

Day 2 - 30th August 2008

Up very early again for a 6.30 meet for a drive up to Scafell Pike - so called due to an typing error on an ordinance survey map (according to Wikipedia). Apparently the name "Pikes of Sca Fell" was the collective name for Scafell Pike, Ill Crag and Broad Crag, but one day the contraction appeared on a map and has stuck!) The land was donated to the National Trust in memory of the Lake District Soldiers who died in the first world war.

The B&B have made us breakfast to take away with us - consisting of cold bacon sandwiches (or cheese for the vegetarians) which are interestingish. Rosie drives for a bit, although Pete has to reverse the van for her which is a great start. Katharine does some fine navigating and manages to stop Rosie throwing the sat nav out the window for talking too loud!

Pete drives us again and thr weather gets progressively more windy. It started off with lovely sunshine, only to get greyer and greyer as we approached our destination. The last road round Waswater is very twisty turny and some of us feel a wee bit travel sick. We get there and park up and find Emma who has driven up from Leeds to meet us. She beat us there (even though she had a puncture and fixed it herself on the way!). There's a bit of milling about in the car park while we get sorted then by 12.20pm we are on our way.



The first bit of the walk seems nice, it's very green and we start off by walking through a field. The path meanders a bit, and as we turn the corner we start to get some of the best views we've seen so far! It's not raining either, some sun is straining to get through the clouds and we're all feeling pretty positive and smiley! Our first obstacle is a stream that we spend a bit of time thinking about. Hmm which stepping stone to use? which one will get us the least wet? Katharine strides across and the rest of us realise that if we do the same we've got a better chance of staying dry than hopping from stone to stone and actually falling in!. Chris helpfully films us all, as he's predicting disaster. We don't realise he's taking a video and all stop to pose for the photo! No one slips & we carry on up the hill (we manage to snap Chris crossing too). It's almost a paved path for quite a while and only problems are occasional gust of wind which rushes round the corner. Scenery is lovely if sometimes misty. Pete and Emma are off up the hill like a pair of mountain goats!

Turning the corner the path gets much more boldery and difficult and we have to pick our paths much more carefully. From here we can see an alternative route up which looks really really hard (no takers)! Along this stretch we get over taken by a pair of guys (one of them has one brown leg and one blue, we think he went over in a puddle!) moving quite fast but looking pretty tired. We ask them if they're doing the three peaks, and they say no, just Scafell pike twice in one day . "Why?" We ask. It turns out they got to the top, turned round and went down, then when we got to the bottom they realised they'd gone the wrong way to the wrong car park. The quickest way to their car was to walk back up the mountain again!!!

We Kept bumping into the same couple too and we weren't too sure how keen they are on the walking, because we did overhear her saying "if I had any water

left I'd throw it all over you!". It's great to hear there's some real harmony on the mountain!!!!

Further on up, another couple are lost and we give them a look at the specially laminated map (cheers for those Chris) but they're non the wiser. Luckily (weirdly??) there are a pair of fell runners who set them straight before sprinting on down the mountain.

Eventually (about 15.45) we all make it to the top & all very pleased with ourselves. Emma rewards us with kitkats (she is truly great) and we plod on down very happy with ourselves.



It's a nice, straightforward and quite brisk walk down the mountain and back to the mini bus to finish our approximately

8 mile walk (to be awarded with more fudge – thanks Emma) and off we go towards Cockermouth where our hotel is waiting. The plan is to take us a bit nearer to Scotland before the morning. So we arrive at the hotel (Fawlty Towers) at about 8.15. We are told by the (overly) chatty manager that they can only serve dinner til 8.40. he wont stop chatting either so by the time we get to our rooms its less than 10 mins each in the shower! (and we can't do with out, we are probably fairly smelly). Anyway, we meet downstairs for a well earned pint and a very peculiar menu of various things served on hot stones. It is weird and we question a) what Gordon Ramsay would make of such a fad and b) whether the gammon is really cooked - it is, after all twice the size of the hot stone it's sitting on. There may be some raw bits....

Day 3 - 31st August 2008

Again it's an early morning, we meet at the bus at 6.30am, and get on our way by 6.45am. The hotel left us continental breakfasts the day before so we're all sorted, and away we go. Today is the big one, Ben Nevis (or Beinn Nibheis in Gaelic).

Some of us get a bit of sleep on the way up, and a few of us are starting to look slightly the worse for wear! Again it's lovely and sunny when we get up but the day gets worse as we head further north – more and more rain! Once we've arrived in Fort William we are lucky with parking and get a spot in the lay-by right at the beginning of our walk. Water proofs are put on and there is no doubt that it's raining so it seems like a good time to get the NATS brollies out for a test. Chris has bought himself some stunning headgear on the way to Ben Nevis so he puts it on (and doesn't take it off until the end of the day), Katharine and Rosie even look a bit scared of him!



We start our walk at 12.23pm on the popular "pony track" and as we do, we can see an SAR helicopter flying down the valley. We do hope they are just practising.

The walk starts off climbing up what seem like endless steps (in the rain!). There's lots of water around – Rosie's lunch even ends up in the stream. Katharine

is really helpful (i.e. she takes a photo) while Rosie fishes it out and still eats it anyway. It's just a bit soggy round the edges!

After all the steps, the path seems to level out a bit - apparently this is known as "the saddle by Lochan Meall an t-Suidhe" and it seems as if it would be really nice for a picnic and a game of rounders (shame it's still raining & getting misty, otherwise we could play 3 a side!). This stretch is quite easy walking so pretty pleasant really but it doesn't last! The next 700m of ascent are on the stony west flank of Ben Nevis in a series of zig zags. We are a bit worried about the time and if we'll get down before dark – it's difficult to tell, as the weather has completely closed in at the top. Katharine was up there by herself for a bit, and said it was definitely a bit spooky. It really didn't have the same celebratory feel as Scafell & Snowdon - partly because it's just us and there was no one we could get to take our group picture. We reach the summit (1344m or 4,406ft) at 4.45pm, but we turn straight round and steam off down the hill. Some of us are definitely more wobbly than others and in need of some food and drink. Before we all got to the top, Chris walked rather close to the edge of one of the cliffs - he didn't even think it was that bad until we looked at some maps and some aerial views back at the bunk house – he was very scared then!



It turns out we have missed the annual Ben Nevis race by just a week. This is probably a good thing as we would have lost Katharine to it. We don't think she'd have been able to stop herself joining in!

We are really quick getting down (about 2 hours and 20 minutes), almost running sometimes in case the light gets bad. On the way down, Pete slips & there is a terrible pop! What if it's a disc in his back? what if he's broken something? It turns out he has broken something - it's the bottle of champagne he took all the way up to the summit, but didn't get time to crack open. Everything in his bag is soaked, but it seems as if the champagne has cushioned his fall, because he's fine. When we're near the bottom we have a sit down, and call up to see if those in the bus can come and get us, and a quick drink & some photos. Gosh don't we look gorgeous. We are freezing and soggy by the time we're back at the bus at 7.15pm after 9.13 miles, but we jump in & get whisked away to the bunk house (8 bunk beds, 1 shower!) and take it in turns getting clean before driving into town for a well earned curry and some beers. Once we're back at the bunk house, watch some Billy Connolly (how very Scottish of us!) and doze off on the sofa before all collapsing into bunk beds.

Day 4 - 1st September 2008

We get our first lie in of the trip today (about 7am) and go and get some breakfast before setting off on our mammoth drive. We all have a turn driving (and try and have a turn sleeping) and finally get back to Swanwick about 9.15pm (11 hours in the bus). We are very tired and could do with out going into work tomorrow but no such luck!

Though it's been a long weekend and really tough for some of us (and rather sore - one of the abiding memories of the trip will be the potent reek of deep heat) it's been worth it. Chris did a wonderful job organising the trip for us and we've raised more than £2500 for FASS (Fareham Autistic Spectrum Society) which was the primary aim of the weekend but we've really enjoyed ourselves and had lots of fun too which has been a real bonus!