

JONATHAN JAMIESON

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*Away, ye gay landscapes, ye gardens of roses,
In you let the minions of luxury rove,
Restore me the rocks where the snow-flake reposes,
Though still they are sacred to freedom and love.
Lord Byron*

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Preface

This document is my record of the year's outdoor activities. It came about from a desire to present my photographs with context so I don't forget little details (like the name of the hill I climbed). The original photobook idea morphed into something more text heavy than originally planned but I am pleased with the results. It has been a good year for getting outside, many excursions were blessed with beautiful weather. The flip side would be the terrible weather some trips were cursed with (Lochnagar comes to mind). The year has ended with the wettest November and December I can remember so hopefully 2016 will start with an improvement of the weather! Regardless, we will be back on the mountains again soon.

Ben Venue - perfect winter conditions

18th January 2015

THE FIRST WALK OF the year, and it was fantastic! Five happy walkers: Ross, David, Chris, Kristaps and myself. My new new 11-22mm lens had arrived on Friday so I was keen to test it out. We were very lucky with the weather, blue skies and no wind meant pleasant walking and photography conditions. There was snow on the ground most of the way up (although there wasn't much at the car park).



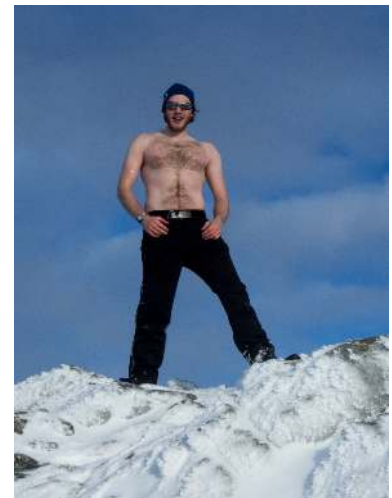
Starting off.



Ross leading the charge.

This was the first walk I've had to use an ice-axe in places. Although it wasn't essential I was glad of the support it offered. Ross kindly demonstrated the techniques for self-arrest using an ice-axe. He put special emphasis on not wearing crampons during practice because if you forget to lift your feet torn muscles are likely. You need to be able to get to the correct position regardless how you fall, so practice involves going backwards and head-first down a hill! The ascent up Ben Venue took quite a long time because progress in the deep snow was slow. You could be happily walking along and suddenly your feet start plunging down. Watching someone accidentally discover a soft deep patch is quite amusing.

Maybe all the photo stops slowed us down a bit!



No comment necessary! Ross loves any opportunity to display his chest, the freezing wind blowing wasn't going to stop him.



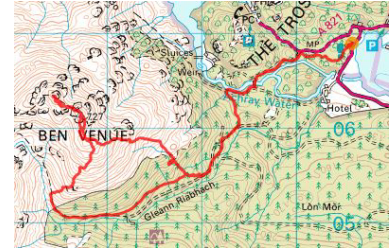
We even made the BBC news website! The URL for the BBC picture is:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-30879907>
 The caption reads: *Jonathan Jamieson and his fellow Strathclyde University mechanical engineering students scaled Ben Venue on Sunday.*



Ice axes coming out.



Could be in the alps!



The highest point of Ben Venue is 729m (there are two peaks of similar height). It is situated in the Trossachs and the standard route starts at a car park near the head of Loch Achray. You get a view of the southern end of Loch Katrine, which I shall be running round on 22nd March for my third marathon!



Group pose. Kristaps loves his ice axe!



The descent was really fun.



I am pleased with this picture of the sunset. Ross is looking across Loch Achray to Ben Venue. It's always satisfy looking back and knowing not that long ago you were up there. Good sunsets are always a treat outdoors and when you combine them with large bodies of water and mountains they are spectacular!

The Cobbler - and halfway up Beinn Ìme

ON FRIDAY AFTERNOON ROSS mentioned he was going to the Arrochar Alps. He had bought new fell running crampons and wanted to test them. I took the opportunity to tag along and have some fun. The plan was for each of us to do our own thing and meet at the car when we had finished.

I had less kit to assemble so I was first to set off. At the car park by Loch Long and for the first 20 minutes there wasn't any snow lying on the path. However, once I reached the snow line it felt more like winter conditions. After climbing a zigzag path I reached the corrie with Beinn Narnain and The Cobbler to the east and west respectively, and Beinn Ìme to the north.

Statistics	
Distance	13.7 km
Time	4h:48m
Average Speed	2.9 km/h
Elevation	1013 m
Min. Altitude	5 m
Max. Attitude	856 m

Ross's sprinting gave him an average speed of 3.7 km/h!



After walking through the corrie for a short time on the way to The Cobbler I noticed Ross behind me in the distance catching up. We both reached the bottom of The Cobbler at the same time. Since the snow was so deep and the hill so steep, Ross wasn't able to run so we climbed together.

The feeling of climbing up a slope with fresh snow is wonderful. While we were ascending there was little wind and the sun was shining on our face of the mountain. However, as we got nearer the top, the wind grew stronger. On one rather icy section, it was possible to jump in the air and be blown about a metre from where you started. The contrast in conditions after a few minutes is amazing!

When we got to the top the wind was still going strong. I searched around my bag for my mini tripod and couldn't find it. Assuming I had left it at the car I gave up and had a snack. Then two walkers we had overtaken appeared and produced a black, tripod shaped object and asked if it was mine ... very fortunate for me! Sadly, I didn't learn my lesson because on the descent I turned my head to see my balaclava whoosh out my not-properly-secured bag and fly off into the distance. RIP balaclava, maybe somebody will find you in spring.

Scrambling up The Cobbler.



Beinn Ìme, Beinn Narnain and The Cobbler are three summits that form a corrie and part of the Arrochar Alps. The Cobbler is the only one that's not a Munro, falling short by 100ft. However, its views are still splendid and I have heard more than one person proclaiming it to be the best of the three.



Needless to say we didn't reach the true top of The Cobbler. To do that you need to scramble to the top of the distinctive rock outcrop. I am informed in summer conditions this is perfectly doable. However, on this occasion, the combination of the strong wind and slippery rocks would have made it a bit of a one-way journey for me. Always best to live and climb another day!

We still had lots of time so we decided to try Beinn Ìme. I spent much of the descent from The Cobbler down to the corrie in a seated position. Still, there are worse things in life than letting gravity carry you down the hill!

By now the clouds were gathering and a sort of hail/mini-blizzard had started. After thirty minutes or so my lack of grip prevented me from keeping up with Ross (that's my excuse and I'm sticking to it!). We agreed I would head back to the car and he would continue on. Since he was going to run down we didn't think I would have a long wait in the car.

The lower I went the more the weather improved so I was soon walking comfortably. The zigzag path to Loch Long seemed to take forever and the snow had turned to slush, make it less enjoyable than on the way up.

I got back to the car and unlocked it. I was looking forward to a little read of my book but then I heard the pattering of running footsteps and saw a panting Ross arrive! He didn't quite reach the top. About 100m from the summit the snow was waist deep so he turned back. Still, a remarkably quick descent from him!



Ready to tackle The Cobbler.



A great view.



Ross practising his step cutting skills.



Me at the top of The Cobbler.

31st January 2015*Dumgoyne and Garloch Hill - with some running mixed in*

DUMGOYNE IS A POPULAR hiking hill. Situated close to the beginning of the West Highland Way, on a reasonably clear day if you look north-west (like the snowman in the photo below) you can see many of the mountains that surround Loch Lomond.

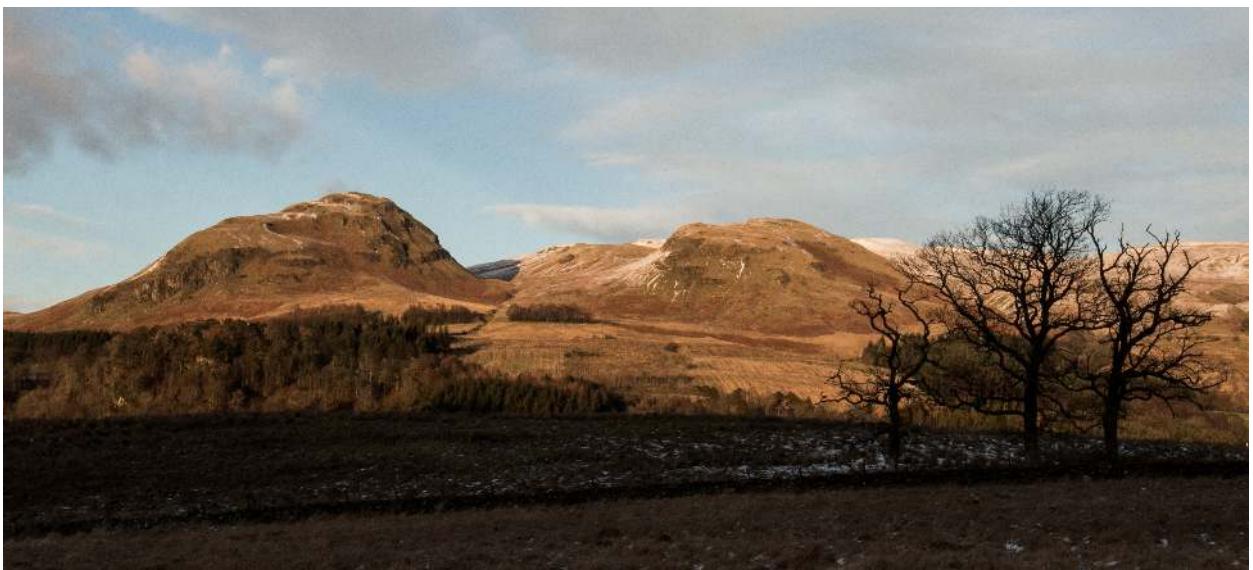
A lay-by for parking at the bottom means there is no long walk in and the ascent begins immediately. Perhaps even more conveniently, Dumgoyne Distillery is a two minute walk from the bottom, for those that enjoy a wee tippie at the end of the walk. It goes without saying, even with the best intentions, you might not even begin the climb if you visit the distillery first!



Enjoying the views near the top of Dumgoyne.



Ross and I set off from Mugdock Visitor Centre and ran along the West Highland Way. The weather was chilly but we soon warmed up, keeping a good pace until we reached the bottom of Dumgoyne. As usual, the paths around Mugdock were busy (the car-park was heaving) until we left the park. We didn't see anyone who looked like they were going the full length to Fort William.



Dumgoyne (left) and Dumfoyn (right) before sunset.

Dumgoyne is reasonably steep but nothing beyond your average hiker. However, with mutual murmurings of "too slippery to run up" and "not feeling feeling on the A-game" we slowed down from our running pace and ascended with a brisk walk.

Fortunately the face of the hill we were on was mostly out of the wind. Once we got to the top there was less shelter so we didn't stay on the summit for long.

Statistics	
Distance	23.8 km
Time	3h:46m
Average Speed	6.3 km/h
Elevation	839 m
Min. Altitude	25 m
Max. Attitude	534 m

A decent effort!



From the top of Dumgoyne we slid down a short way (I use that phrase in the literal sense) and headed towards Garloch Hill. Dumgoyne was fairly busy but it seemed nobody else was venturing any further. It was their loss, since the snow was crisp and the views back were splendid.



Ross taking a nap on Garloch Hill.



Running buddies posing.

The run back to the car was uneventful. There was a short, steep climb near Carbeth Loch up the Red Brae Road that really tired my legs and put me sharply out of breath. Fortunately, the golden light from the setting sun helped take the mind off such things!

Setting the pace, near the end, Ross must have decided we had to put in a strong finish because we were running faster again. Careful foot placement was definitely important as we approached the visitor centre because there were people around. I certainly didn't want to slip in front of any witnesses! But we got back safely to the car, did some cool down stretches, put some fresh clothes on, cranked up the heating and headed home feeling pleased with ourselves.



Covered a good distance!

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park - wheel(s)

ON SATURDAY EVENING AFTER the Dumgoyne fell run I was in lying in bed about to go to sleep when I realised if I didn't plan something for Sunday then I would probably not get round to anything. I say "plan" in the loosest sense possible because I suspect James would take issue with my usage.

I fancied taking my unicycle out for a spin. Normally I go to Mugdock for an off-road challenge but since I had been there yesterday I wanted something different. During my searches I came across Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park. It's not far from Paisley and the visitor centre is serviced by Lochwinnoch Train Station.

Statistics	
Distance	15.1 km
Time	3h:14m
Average Speed	4.7 km/h
Elevation	482 m
Min. Altitude	27 m
Max. Attitude	185 m

Wheely good time?



Unfortunately for James I hadn't spotted that particular station (or indeed the next closest station). Also, neither of us had noticed that Sunday engineering work was scheduled, so it was a bus service most of the way. The problem with buses is that it's up to the driver whether or not to let bikes on. Of course my unicycle is so compact and wonderful nobody could say no!

From Milliken Park, the 5 miles to Lochwinnoch was along a flat, little cycle path through the countryside. But we were in the middle of a cold spell and it was quite icy. It goes without saying that unicycles and ice don't go well together (unless you're gunning for a viral video) but we made it to the visitor centre safely.

The sun was shining at Lochwinnoch so the cameras came out. James enjoys photography too so any excuse to bring his lenses out is good for him. After taking some pictures I decided we should gain some height for a better view. My choice of road was probably steeper than what James appreciates. Actually, it was definitely a bit too much, he was quite vocal about on the point! I think he was pleased that icy roads put an end to my ambitions and forced us to return to the visitor centre.

Posing with my unicycle at Lochwinnoch (Photo credit: James McMinn).



We cycled along part of NCN route 75 that goes from Glasgow to Lochwinnoch. The whole route is 21 miles and on my list of long distance runs to do. Having a train to take me home after the run is a crucial element of the route!



On the way down I decided we should stop so I could play on a snow covered golf course. Riding on fresh snow is lovely because there is a satisfying crunch as you pedal along. Downhill snow unicycling races should be an Olympic sport, I'm certain it would be a popular spectator event!

(Photo credit: James McMinn)



Lots of birds at Lochwinnoch all wanting fed.



James trying to get pictures of his new best friends. For wildlife photography, it wasn't very wild! But he did get some nice snaps. Next time we will remember to bring bread to reward our models.

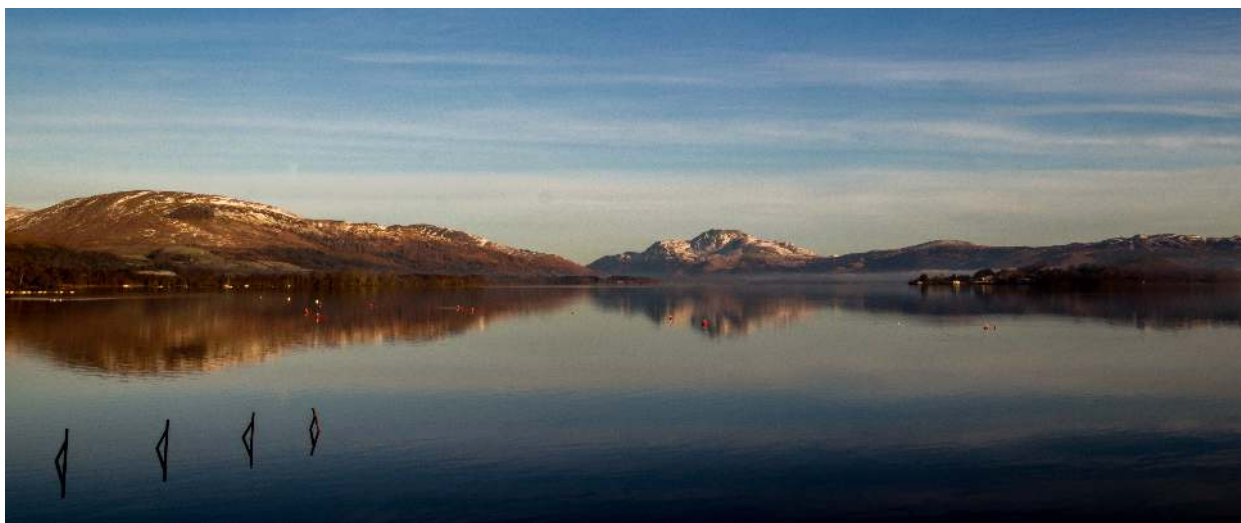
Ben Vorlich - quality time with Dom

7th February 2015

THE MORNING STARTED WITH glorious, clear weather. Loch Lomond was so peaceful and still as we drove past. We weren't the only people who stopped to take some photos at Luss, there were many cameras snapping away. In the end we stopped twice for Loch Lomond pictures, so it was a bit later than expected before we got to Inveruglas. We eventually set off from the visitor centre and followed the main road for a short way before cutting up towards Loch Sloy Switching Station.

Statistics	
Distance	14.1 km
Time	5h:14m
Average Speed	2.7 km/h
Elevation	952 m
Min. Altitude	15 m
Max. Attitude	931 m

A good day's walking.



From here, going left will take you to Ben Vane and the Arrochar Alps. We continued on a little longer then took a sharp right before the dam at Loch Sloy. Although marked on the maps, the path is not clear and the snow lying on the ground didn't help us follow it. However, navigation wasn't too tricky because we basically needed to keep going up!

The new boots (Asolo Fugitives) I had bought the week before were performing nicely. Dry feet made a nice change to cold and damp that I was familiar with. Dom was sporting a new hat from Go Outdoors with ear flaps so I think he was happy too. We took the climb at a reasonable pace, the forecast for the afternoon was not as good as the morning so we didn't want to dawdle. Once we gained a reasonable height and could clearly see Loch Lomond we were also treated to some low cloud. I always enjoy being above low cloud and mist if the visibility is still good. It makes for moody, atmospheric views when the water vapour blows through.

The promised false summits from the written descriptions were true. Ben Vorlich is a mountain that tricks you into believing you're nearly at the top when you're not. A rookie mistake, never let your eyes deceive you! When we spotted the Trig Point we knew the top was not far away.

A view from the pier at Luss.



The original plan was to climb Ben Vane but I changed it to Ben Vorlich because the views are supposedly better. They are close to each other and accessible from Inveruglas Visitors Centre. Inveruglas is the hamlet at the end of the Three Loch Way, which I plan to run in summer.



This photo was taken at Inveruglas Visitors Centre while I waited for Dom to lace up his boots. The beautiful, clear weather from early morning continued. It's unusual for the water to be so still so I took advantage and got a photo of Ben Vane's reflection.

When we arrived at the summit the visibility was fairly good but there was a lot of cloud around the surrounding mountains limiting the view. It didn't take long before the cloud was blown in our direction. We went from a reasonable view to not being able to see more than 100m. After staying at the summit for 10 minutes hoping that it would clear, we gave up and headed down.

We followed the path we had ascended, Ben Vorlich doesn't suit itself well to circular routes. One possibility if you were in a group with multiple cars would be to have one car parked at Inveruglas and the other at Ardlui, then you could descend Ben Vorlich towards Ardlui. There are also minor summits like *Little Hills* and *Stob nan Coinnich Bhacain* to visit and extend your walk.

On some sections we took advantage of the gradient and let gravity assist our descent. It Definitely beat trudging down on your! When we got lower and the amount of snow on the ground decreased it became very slippery underfoot. Dom blamed his shoes (and claimed it wasn't poor technique) as I watched him fall in a variety of hilarious and spectacular ways. Sadly none of them were caught on film. I would like to do more walks in this area, particularly Ben Vane and Beinn Ìme in a single day from Inveruglas.



Dom and me on the pier at Luss.



Proof the conditions aren't always perfect.



A moody mist on the hills.

Loch Katrine Marathon - hills, hills and more hills

FOR MY THIRD MARATHON I chose a race slightly different to my usual affair. Organised by Audrey McIntosh and in its third year, the Loch Katrine Marathon is not your standard 26.2 miles on a road. There is practically no chance of getting a personal best because the course constantly undulates. There were only 105 racers in the marathon (a 10km and Half-Marathon happen on the same day) and no big crowds cheering you on.

However, the whole event has a wonderful family feel due to the small amount of competitors due to limited parking space (this year the places sold out in a couple of days). The race boasts beautiful scenery as you skirt around the edge of the loch. I also admire the organisation of the event. Audrey has done some serious fund-raising for Alzheimer Scotland from this and other events. It's run on a limited budget and forgoes the trappings of larger events such as electronic timing; the £21 entry fee goes straight to charity. Her hard work along with the other volunteers allows runners like me to enjoy well-organised events, we just have to turn up and run! The support from the marshals and those handing out snacks cannot be overstated. A single jelly-baby goes a long way when you're feeling tired!



This photo was taken from Ben Venue on 18th January. The road on the east side of Loch Katrine is visible at the beginning of the marathon. When the photo was taken it felt like ages before race day but time seems to creep up on us.



About to cross the finish line

At my previous races I always made the same mistake of starting too close to the back and spent the beginning of the race dodging around people. This time I decided to stay near the front, although it didn't really matter because the group of runners was so small. After a minute or so the fittest racers disappeared from view and I wondered how long it take before I would see them again. All the Loch Katrine races are "to halfway and back", so unusually for a race I'd get another glimpse of the elite before the end. For myself, I kept a reasonable pace, having done a fair amount of regular exercise recently but I was aware that most of my training was cycling and circuit class related, not running.

Most of the course was vaguely familiar to me having cycled it on a tandem in October. The road closely follows the side of the loch, there are no big hills or summits to reach but the undulations should not be underestimated. Good runners have burnt themselves out by flying off too fast and not leaving enough left in the tank for the way back. I counted off the mile markers and gave a wry smile when I passed the turning point for the half marathon (just after mile 6). For the marathon, this is still early stages, so I think unconscious envy was a significant emotion! The GPS tracking on my phone that normally gives me progress updates hadn't been turned on (whoops!) and I wasn't wearing a watch so I didn't know my pace but I knew it was reasonable because only the little group that sprinted away at the start were ahead.

As a small bunch of us approached Stronachlachar we saw the leaders homeward bound, annoyingly unfazed by their exertions. Soon it was our turn to reach the hallowed halfway point and start running back to the finish. Unfortunately for me, I could my pace starting to drop. Despite my best attempts to remind myself I just needed to come back along where I had already been the pace continued to drop. Cardio-wise I felt in fairly good shape but my legs had been overworked. At this point I could go on and on about my tired legs (which was how I felt the miles home) but I'll leave it there. Never before have I been overtaken by so many runners, towards the end it felt like a constant stream of people passing me!

One climb I won't forget was the *Graveyard Hill* which had an ominous signpost proclaiming itself with a skull and crossbones. I managed to make it up and got closer and closer to the end. Passing the finishing line was a relief to say the least. An observer may have been mistaken in thinking that I had found the event easy since I wasn't out of breath. That was simply because my legs didn't permit a final sprint to the end! Still, my time was better than I expected (03:40:35 placed 32/105) and I had really enjoyed the race. I took satisfaction in knowing that I had completed a tricky little marathon so many other runners are yet to enjoy.



The marathon runners assembled at the start.



The smile on my face is because I was close to reaching halfway and the psychological boost of knowing I would be running towards the finish!
(Photo credit: Stuart Macfarlane)

Ben Lomond - my first time!

STANDING PROUD AT 974M, Ben Lomond is easily recognisable from miles around because it's the tallest in that part of the Arrochar Alps. It was one of the few major mountains near Glasgow I hadn't climbed. For one reason or another I have always gone elsewhere and there is no nearby train station or bus stop. Ross offered to drive a group of us after work on a warm Tuesday evening. We parked the car at Rowardennan, stretched our legs, got the running gear on and started the climb.

Statistics	
Distance	12.19 km
Time	2h:09m
Average Speed	5.7 km/h
Elevation	927 m
Min. Altitude	19 m
Max. Attitude	939 m

A respectable first time.



Ross assumed the lead and set what can only be described as a brutal pace. This continued for about 10 minutes and I was beginning to wonder if we would settle down to a steadier jog because the gradient was steep! We eventually stopped to cross a stile and slowed down. After asking my companions, I was relieved to find they would have also been unable to sustain that speed to the top, it wasn't just me! We began to spread out as the unrelenting climb continued and somehow I found myself at the front. Since I was the only one in the group who hadn't climbed Ben Lomond I was beginning to wonder if they knew something I didn't!

After climbing for 3km to Sithean you reach a flatter section where a reasonable speed can be maintained with relative ease. Here Jethro was faster than me, I could see him getting slowly closer when I looked over my shoulder. However, he hadn't caught me by the final section of ascent and I made it to the top first, not that it was a race or anything! "First up, last down" would sum up my performance, I can't descend anywhere near as fast as the others can. At the bottom Ross decided to have a "cooldown" dip and I joined him. The water was so cold ...

Standing proudly at the top of Ben Lomond.



The record for running up AND down is 1:02:16 (1983), which coincidentally is very close to my ascent only time! It's hard to believe how fast John Wild must have ran.

31st April 2015

The Devil's Pulpit and The Whangie - in Springtime

I HAVE REALLY ENJOYED every trip to the Devil's Pulpit. Tucked away, an unkept secret and totally surreal, it offers the finest canyoning near Glasgow. That a group of us have eagerly gone three times in less than one year is testament to its appeal. Admittedly, there was something special about the first trip when we didn't know what to expect but we still have great fun frolicking around in the water. We are hoping to explore similar locations this summer.

This trip to Finnich Glen (another name for the Devil's Pulpit) was followed by our first visit to The Whangie, an area with some strange rock formations on Auchineden Hill. It was a long, action packed day out of the city. Just the way we like it.



Getting the kit on. (Photo credit: Camila Salas)



This waterfall is one of our favourite places to jump from. The pool is big and deep, offering the perfect opportunity for silly mid-air photos. The range of facial expressions is amusing, the award of "Most Terrified" is well-earned by Amy! This photo was my favourite action shot but there was stiff competition from other photos that are unpublishable ...



On Auchineden Hill with Loch Lomond in the background.



Heading back down the gorge.



Summit of Auchinaden Hill looking back at Glasgow.



Camila silhouette.

After finishing the Devil's Pulpit we popped into the car and had dinner at The Beech Tree Inn. My slightly unusual choice of a large chocolate fudge cake dessert served simultaneously with a side of potatoes and vegetables did provoke some discussion. However, I maintain that it was a fine choice, simultaneously being very healthy and unhealthy at the same time!

After dinner we drove to The Queen's View car park and set off for The Whangie. My assertion that it would be a flat walk was soon busted when the climbing began. However, we had committed ourselves and the beautiful views proved enough to disperse any doubts my companions might have had.



The hill in the distance to the left is Dumgoyne (featured elsewhere in this journal)

4th May 2015*Ae Forest - first major spin with a 29" wheel*

I SUCCUMBED TO TEMPTATION and bought my third mountain unicycle. A 29" wheel has always been on my agenda and when a sale for the old stock of Kris Holm unicycles started at unicycle.uk.com I snapped up the last one. A larger wheel allows you to go further and faster but makes technical sections harder to ride. Since most of the riding I enjoy is not particularly technical but is fairly long distance, a 29" wheel makes sense. Before this ride, I had taken the unicycle to Mugdock and Drumlanrig but this was my first proper session.

Statistics	
Distance	21.7 km
Time	4h:42m
Average Speed	4.6 km/h
Elevation	562 m
Min. Altitude	124 m
Max. Attitude	317 m

Slow because of photos!



The Red Route at Ae Forest begins with a singletrack climb full of switchbacks that provide an intense warm-up. It also served as a warning that climbing sections I've done previously on a smaller unicycle are much harder with a larger wheel and shorter cranks. The suffering was soon worth it when the descending began. This unicycle really can fly! Of course it didn't take long before I learnt the hard way that with great power comes great responsibility...

On my 24" unicycles it's very difficult to achieve high speeds (10+ mph) but on this puppy you can suddenly find yourself going too fast to run out of your UPD (unplanned dismount). Fortunately, my first "proper" tumble only resulted in a sore left knee (I was wearing leg armour) and wounded pride. The short crank setting allows for faster speed but it's hard to resist the motion and slow down, especially on descents. Careful application of the brake is a skill I'm still to master. The rest of the ride passed off without major incident, I survived to ride another day!

Descending the final part of The Edge.



The Ae Forest tracks are part of the 7Stanes trail centres. We followed the Red Route.

7th May 2015*To Dumgoyne and back - epic post-work run*

WITH THE FORECAST SHOWING a beautiful Thursday evening I ditched my normal post-work gym class (Box Circuits) and got the train to Milngavie. Following the West Highland Way past Craigallain Loch and Dumgoyach I eventually made Dumgoyne itself. For better or worse, Dumgoyne is very prominent in the local topology so you can see it from a long way off! Just as I was entering Mugdock park I passed a group of runners and a couple of dog walkers but from then on I didn't meet a soul.

Statistics	
Distance	27.98 km
Time	4h:33m
Average Speed	6.1 km/h
Elevation	859 m
Min. Altitude	25 m
Max. Attitude	533 m

The sunset cost me time.

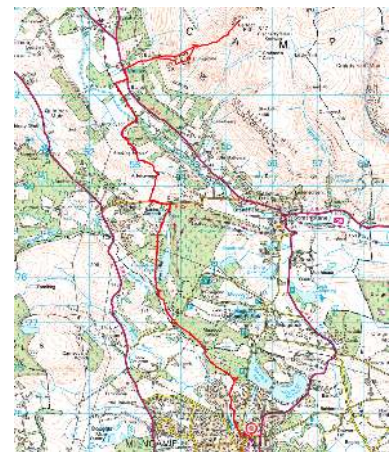


A brisk effort saw me to the top of Dumgoyne and the chance to admire the fine views. There was little wind and the conditions were very pleasant. Upon checking the time I discovered it had taken slightly longer than I expected (no I wasn't slacking!) and it would be quite late before I got back to Milngavie. I also noticed in fifty minutes or so the sun would set at 9:06pm. Me being me, unable to resist the possibility of a good sunset, I determined to press on to Garloch Hill for a place to set up my camera.

The twenty minute wait on the summit of Garloch Hill caused me some regret because I had neglected to pack gloves. My hands were a bit shaky as the sun disappeared behind the hills on the other side of Loch Lomond. Fortunately I had remembered my little tripod but it needn't have mattered because the sunset was nothing special and 11-22mm lens I had with me was unsuitable.

Half of the return journey was lit by a wonderful twilight, it was a real pleasure to run along in the tranquil evening light. The rest was under the glare of my head-torch and by the time I got back to Milngavie Station it was almost 11pm. I made it to my flat at 12pm. Needless to say I was a tired little bunny and I had an exam to invigilate in the morning at 9am so no lie-in. Maybe my planning wasn't perfect but it was a lovely evening.

Admiring the golden hour on Dumgoyne.



To Dumgoyne and back. The map makes it look deceptively easy.

30th May 2015

Exploring Montserrat - first day in Catalonia

NEVER TRUST ALBERT WHEN he suggests a short, gentle morning walk! Our trek through this stunning mountain took over 6 hours and consisted of some unavoidable (thanks to Albert's navigating) scrambling sections that as a non-climber I can only describe as terrifying. Montserrat can be literally translated to "the serrated mountain" and is unlike any place I have visited, the rock formations were stunning.

We had planned to do a via ferrata but the forecast suggested the weather would be rainy. That turned out to be false, the weather was fantastic. It took a little over an hour to reach the car park next to Can Maçana from Albert's family's apartment in Barcelona.



Holding on tightly for my life.



The peculiar rock formations and the mountain itself are composed of pink conglomerate, a form of sedimentary rock. Millions of years ago the mountain was underwater and erosion caused the shapes we have today. The highest peak in Montserrat is Sant Jeroni at 1236m but the highest point we reached (1071m) was near la Monja.



Albert posing near Els Merlets (he wanted a new Tindr profile picture).



Albert and I cheering.



Having lunch in a secret mountain refuge.



Alexander Polli flew through that mountain cave!

When searching for the path after we had veered significantly off-course courtesy of Albert's lackadaisical approach to navigation we came across a little mountain refuge cut into the rock. In the past it was probably used by monks and there was still statues and candles burning that gave a pleasant aroma. It was a secluded and comfortable place to have lunch. Later, we had a spectacular view of the stone archway wingsuit jumper Alexander Polli flew through in the Roca Foradada mountain. I had seen the video before but it was only when I saw the gap with my own eyes I appreciated just how small it was. Describing the jump as threading the needle is entirely justified, the man must be fearless!



Montserrat was Spain's first National Park and after visiting I can understand why.



Albert being silly with his camera.



My suffering knew no bounds.

31st May 2015*Via ferrata Agulles Rodones - hanging out on a mountain*

I AM NOT A CLIMBER, my limited experience of the sport has been on indoor climbing walls. Tellingly, Albert doesn't consider via ferratas "climbing" because of the man-made iron holds. He's been scaling mountains from an early age so his standards are much higher. Still, even he said this was the hardest via ferrata in the area and the perfect place to take a beginner.

One of his friends, Laia, accompanied us and had also lots of climbing experience. After picking her up a little bit late (Barcelona won the Champions League the night before and Albert needed to celebrate) we parked near Pantà de Can Dalmau and set off.



Disappearing over the edge.



Instead of using a rope for safety. on a via ferrata you have two carabiners that clip onto a steel cable that runs alongside the path. At no time should you be unsecured, at least one of the carabiners attached to you should be connected to something fixed to the rock. This does not make the activity safe. Falling can mean a 2m drop before your carabiners meet the last bolt you clipped above and on the way down you'll probably bounce off the iron holds you were using to climb. Modern via ferrata gear has energy dissipating technology so you aren't jolted to an instant stop but I am told it's still very uncomfortable. I wasn't willing to find out, so I climbed with extra care!

Despite the great weather there weren't many people on the route which was a bonus for me because I didn't fancy being overtaken by a large group. Although it is possible to pass someone, there are sections where it would be very difficult. One of the most challenging parts required a rappel whilst hanging from the cliff. Setting this up and holding onto something is practically impossible so you must trust your equipment!

Laia and Albert chilling.



On the edge.



This photo was taken just after lunch, the town behind us is Santa Cristina d'Aro. I think the view made up for the hardships endured to get there. One of the things I liked about Catalonia is the greenery. Some of the other parts of Spain I've visited feel barren and lack colour because the rainfall is so low. Here, however, the whole countryside was covered in trees.

Unfortunately I didn't get any pictures of the overhanging ladder sections. Although not technically difficult they required a good amount of upper-body strength and endurance. Progress was slow because of my limited technique and the need to leave a sizeable gap between you just in case someone fell. I actually quite enjoyed the abseil sections. When done with appropriate safety gear it's fun and nothing like some of the terrifying Montserrat chain-descending sections from the day before.

The whole via ferrata took about 8 and half hours. Upon inspecting my legs back at the car it was clear they had taken some abuse. As I write this, two weeks after the event I still have the cuts and bruises. At the time I was more concerned with staying on the rock but on the next trip I will avoid sharp bits.

We had a lovely dinner in a restaurant overlooking the beach at Platja d'Aro before dropping Laia back at Sabadell. It was very late before we got back to Albert's home in Barcelona, the worst part being we had to wake up at 6am to get the train back to Sabadell and make our way to the course we were to attend. I think it at least 3 days to catch up on all my sleep.



Cursing Albert as I descend.



Albert finds a convenient cork tree to sit on.



Putting the rope away after an abseil.

28th June 2015

Loch Lomond Kayak - taking the inflatable out

DAVID'S SPANISH WORD OF the day *dominguero* perfectly summed up the activities this trip. Literally translated as "Sunday person" it is basically a way of describing someone doing something in particularly amateurishly way. The stand-out example was 30 seconds after David and I got into the kayak and managed to capsize it (jet-tisoning us in the process). This occurred 10 seconds after agreeing that we would keep David dry since he was the only one without a wetsuit. Capsizing an inflatable kayak is not an easy thing to do but together we managed! Another *dominguero* moment was David realising he'd forgotten the gas for the stove so there was no tea.



Ross's water selfie.



We parked at Milarrochy Bay on the eastern side of the loch. David had kindly come prepared with a Spanish Omelette freshly prepared that morning. After satisfying our appetites we donned our wetsuits (well Ross and I did), inflated the kayak and set sail. After the accidental inversion incident we set out sights on Inchfad island and started paddling.



Ross and I paddling with our hands. The town in the distance is Luss.



Testing our balance.

With three of us in the kayak there wasn't much space and the pace was slow but we made the island eventually. After stretching our legs and removing the water taken on board (which was enough to turn the kayak into a floating paddling pool) we started home. Fortunately our paddling technique improved on the return journey. Working together in a synchronised rhythm is the way forward! After returning to base we posed for some silly photos and played with my *waboba* ball that bounces on water. While we were frolicking three men turned up with a very nice wooden canoe. Our amateurish horseplay contrasted nicely to their professional manner!



David proudly sitting in the kayak without me.



Banana skin?

10th July 2015

Up the Campsies - a little evening walk

LOS TRES DOMINGUEROS strike again! Knowing it would be our last chance for a while to head outdoors together we took the opportunity to have a pleasant evening walk up Cort Ma Law in the Campsie Fells. Located in Central Scotland just north of Glasgow, the Campsie Fells is a range of gently rolling hills. Perhaps not dramatic like their Highland cousins they still offer enjoyable walking to those looking for something a bit more accessible. When we arrived at the car park on Crow Road it wasn't busy but upon returning we found it heavily populated with an assortment of characters participating in a range of activities that included eating chips and driving round in circles.



Me and a fellow dominguero.



At the top we broke into an impromptu game of footbag (OK - it wasn't completely spontaneous because I had packed my footbag). It turns out the hiking boots are not optimal footwear for such activities but that didn't stop us trying. Another highlight was a "bog volcano" that oozed mud when you stamped on nearby ground.



Trig point jumping. It's practically mandatory.

12th August 2015*Perseid meteor shower - viewed from Dumgoyne*

NORMALLY AFTER JUGGLING CLUB on Wednesday evenings I am ready for bed, not for heading to the hills at 11pm. However, I am up for something different if an opportunity presents itself. The Perseid meteor shower with clear skies and a new moon was just such an occasion so I joined Ross and Ciara (in true third wheel fashion) and left the light pollution of Glasgow. I decided to enjoy the view from the comfort of my new deluxe camping chair. Unfortunately the combined weight of my seat and camera gear didn't make for the easiest Dumgoyne climb ever.



My tent overlooking Glasgow.



A bit of astro-photography practice would have been beneficial because I failed to get any reasonable pictures of the night's events. Jianlin wasn't with us but he made a better job of it than me so I've included one of his pictures. Dawn and sunrise photography are more familiar to me so I took lots of photos. The hardest part was persuading myself to obey the alarm clock and wake up having slept for only 2 hours. After enjoying dawn and watching the sun appear above the hills we started the descent which was significantly easier than the slog of the night before. I got to university at 10am although I was barely awake for the rest of the day!

Posing before the sunrise.



Sky (Photo credit: Jianlin Cao).



Mugdock is covered in a layer of early morning mist.



A pretty cloud formation over Garloch Hill.

16th August 2015*Ben Lomond Stroll - a Sunday afternoon promenade*

THE SUBTLETIES OF THE ENGLISH language can cause communication errors with even the best non-native speakers. Something was definitely lost in translation when Dominik invited Thanos and I to join him for a Ben Lomond walk. I was ready to climb the 183rd highest Munro but Thanos was expecting a little walk by the loch and dinner at a nice restaurant. He got one of those but possibly underestimated the walking part Dom had in mind for the afternoon!

Statistics	
Distance	12.00 km
Time	4h:26m
Average Speed	2.7 km/h
Elevation	937 m
Min. Altitude	18 m
Max. Altitude	940 m

Maybe not a record time.



We followed the same route up I ran with Ross & Co back in April. There were a lot more walkers because it was a more sensible time to be in the mountains than on a school night. The conditions were good, it was pleasantly warm with no wind. I was grumbling a little bit because the heat is not good for photos when the landscape becomes hazy. The pace was slow and steady because Dom was breaking his new boots before his Italy trip and in the morning I had already ran to Clydebank. Thanos was happy to keep it easy.

After posing for the obligatory photos at the top we continued our walk. Unlike last time, we didn't go down the way we came but followed Ptarmigan Ridge. The view to the north was much better five minutes along this path than at the top, something I'll keep in mind for photos next time. Since none of us had brought much food we pressed on down the hill, gradually losing height until we were level with Loch Lomond. After walking a short stretch of the West Highland Way we made it back to the car park and headed off to the nearest restaurant, which greatly pleased Thanos.

Southerly view from Ben Lomond



We did the loop in an anti-clockwise direction.

5th September 2015*Pavey Arc - this time up Jack's Rake*

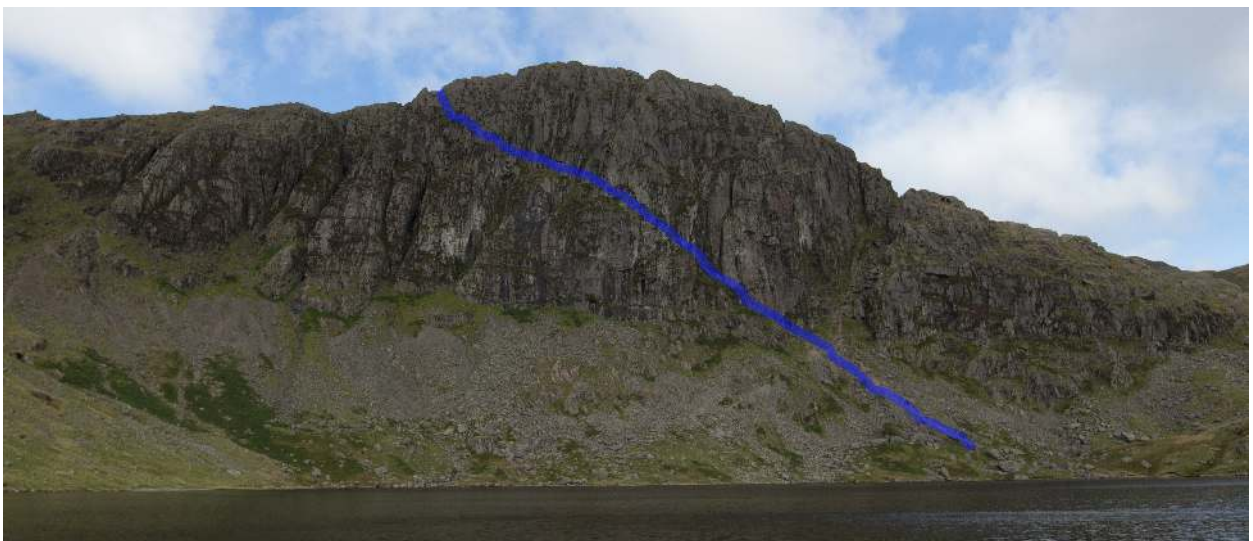
FOR THE PAST 3 YEARS my family and I have gone for a long weekend to Ambleside. This year my mum, dad and I climbed Skiddaw on Friday before continuing our journey to Ambleside but the cloud obscured the view at the top so there were no pictures. Fortunately the weather was better on Saturday when we went to Pavey Arc for our first proper family walk of the holiday. I had been to the Pavey Arc area twice but only climbed it once. It's a good 15 mile walk there and back from Ambleside which is a little much for my mum and sister (and nearly destroyed my dad two years ago!).



My family and I at the top of Pavey Arc.



I thought everyone should enjoy the scenery at Stickle Tarn and Pavey Arc. I also wanted to do a scramble called Jack's Rake which if added to the walk from Ambleside would be too much for day. Therefore, we got in the car and parked about 1km from the tarn to save a lengthy walk. I got my scramble and excitement (nobody else volunteered to join me) but there was an alternative ascent for the rest of my family.



The blue line marks Jack's Rake up Pavey Arc.

Jack's Rake is a Grade 1 scramble (the lowest rating) but is something that should be attempted with care. Alfred Wainwright said that it is the limit of what can be reasonably expected of a hill walker and I am inclined to agree with him. Although there are many holds and you're not forced too close to the edge there is some exposure and panicking is not an option because going down is harder than going up! However, the views are magnificent and definitely worth the small risk taken to see them.



Statistics	
Distance	7.14 km
Time	6h:23m
Average Speed	1.1 km/h
Elevation	657 m
Min. Altitude	97 m
Max. Attitude	710 m

Scrambling is slow.

My family took an alternative route up Pavey Arc called the North Rake and we met at the top. I got there first because they stayed at the bottom for a while watching me ascend. From a distance the face of Pavey Arc suggests Jack's Rake is worse than it actually is. We had lunch at the top and I enjoyed dangling my feet over the edge to the horror of everyone else.



Dangling my feet over the edge above Stickle Tarn.



Pavey Arc and Stickle Tarn in black and white.

After lunch we headed south-west to Harrison Stickle before continuing the descent to Dungeon Ghyll Force whose name is misleadingly exciting. I believe there may be some scrambling around the area so I might return someday. The prolonged descent caused some dissent and gnashing of teeth from the pain of already tired thighs. All those squat exercises in the gym paid off for me! By the time we got to the bottom, had coffee and got back to Ambleside the shops were closing. However, this didn't cause much of a problem because that meant it was dinner time and we happily headed to the Salutations Hotel for fish and chips.



Covered a good distance!

6th September 2015*Ambleside Sunday - three short walks*

THE EARLY BIRD CATCHES the worm so the night before I bit the bullet and set my alarm clock for 5:50am, not an easy thing to do when you're supposed to be on holiday! My early morning run would take me up Wansfell Pike, one of the hills closest to Ambleside I had previously neglected because it's not that high but plenty for pre-breakfast. I was treated to a beautiful dawn view of Lake Windemere and Ambleside covered in mist. There were lots of sheep around who seemed more interested in the grass than me. After taking plenty of photos I made my way back down to the hotel and was still first for breakfast!



Wansfell Pike Sheep.



After breakfast we set off to Lily Tarn on a walk we had tried two years ago but suffered some critical navigational errors. This time we managed well and finished in time for lunch, which we had in a little shop in Ambleside. Shopping took up the rest of the afternoon. I also went to the swimming pool, sauna and hot-tub to relax, as is my custom. We said goodbye to Emma after dinner and on her advice walked to Lake Windemere to enjoy the sunset.



The jetty at the Ambleside end of Lake Windemere.

7th September 2015*Helvellyn - taking the Striding Edge option*

MY SOLO WALK in the Lake District this year was a pleasant loop that started at Glenridding before taking in Lanty's Tarn, Striding Edge, Helvellyn, Fairfield and St Sunday Crag. The sun was shining when I set off so my Buff was on to avoid a repeat of the head-burning from the day before. It wasn't long before I reached Lanty's Tarn which, to be honest, was a little disappointing because the water level was low and the location not very pretty. Undeterred I continued up Griesdale Brow towards Striding Edge.



Statistics	
Distance	19.61 km
Time	5h:47m
Average Speed	3.4 km/h
Elevation	1452 m
Min. Altitude	158 m
Max. Attitude	935 m

A brisk hill-walk.

Striding Edge is probably the most famous route onto Helvellyn and regarded as the best ridge walk in the Lake District. Although rated a Grade 1 scramble I don't think it offered any challenge, certainly when compared to Jack's Rake. There is an easy path most of the way with minimal exposure.



The view on my way to Lanty's Tarn.



Resting on St Sunday Crag.

In 1926 Bert Hinkler landed a bi-plane on Helvellyn, an usual stunt but you can see why he chose this mountain for his adventure. With a large, reasonably flat summit there is plenty of room for a take-off and landing. I left Helvellyn by taking the straight, direct and steep path to Griesdale Tarn. Most people choose the path that zig-zags down and takes you in the direction of Griesdale. However, I wanted a longer walk so I ascended Fairfield, an old favourite I have visited twice, normally on the loop from Ambleside. This time I headed south over Cofa Pike and along St Sunday Crag. When I got back to the car my dad was still away on a walk so my mother and I enjoyed some English Lakes Ice Cream.



Plenty of scenery seen.

Lochnagar - the domingueros get washed out

THIS WAS AN EAGERLY AWAITED TRIP. It was me who suggested the location, having wanted to visit the area since hearing it immortalised in Lord Byron's song "Dark Lochnagar". Although considered an English poet, Lord Byron lived the first ten years of his life in Scotland and clearly enjoyed his boyhood wandering of the "craggs that are wild and majestic". Convincing Ross and David we should go camping at Lochnagar wasn't difficult so we set off on Saturday morning despite an ominous forecast.

Statistics	
Distance	13.07 km
Time	4h:00m
Average Speed	3.3 km/h
Elevation	661 m
Min. Altitude	397 m
Max. Attitude	1020 m

The rain made us slow.



Our optimism was sadly misplaced. From leaving Glasgow in the morning till late in the evening it never stopped raining. I have been in heavier rain but not anything quite so consistent. Ross was keen to try his new hammock, when that seemed more and more unlikely we hoped the tents would do the job.



Taking refuge in my storm shelter.



No longer a stream, we had a river to cross on the return.

But in the end we didn't stay overnight. We didn't even get to the top of Lochnagar. Visibility got worse with altitude and a strong wind picked up as we neared the summit. With nothing to gain by carrying on (better to live and walk another day) we turned round and went back the way we came. We arrived back to the car much earlier than planned just after 5pm. Pitching a tent and waiting in the car till bedtime didn't appeal to any of us so we just went straight home. We'll try the walk again, I really want to take some pictures of the scenery. The photos here are from Ross's waterproof camera!



Wonderful area... unseen.

19th September 2015*Three Lochs Way - in a day*

THE DAY DIDN'T START WELL, after getting up at 6:00am to catch the bus the driver told me my unicycle wasn't permitted on the bus. Apparently Citylink only accept boxed or well padded bikes in the hold. Disappointed but undeterred, I returned the unicycle to my flat and changed into my running gear. By the time I got to Inveruglas on the later bus it was 10:20am which was a much later start than I had planned... Oh well I'd just have to run a bit quicker!

Statistics	
Distance	54.74 km
Time	8h:14m
Average Speed	6.6 km/h
Elevation	1237 m
Min. Altitude	6 m
Max. Altitude	265 m

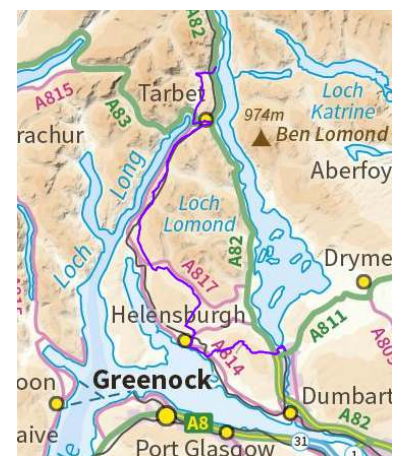
My longest run so far.



I chose to do the route in reverse because there is a reliable and regular train service back to Glasgow from Balloch till late. Being stranded in Inveruglas at the end of the day was not my idea of a good time! After following the path next to the A82 for a short time the path takes you up the road that leads to Ben Vorlich and Ben Vane. There were a few groups heading up for their day's walk but I soon left them when I headed south. The section from Inveruglas to Tarbet is very pleasant and testament to that was the frequent groups I passed travelling in both directions. In comparison from Tarbet/Arrochar to Garelochhead I barely saw a soul, just two cyclists and a few cars but not a single walker.

The path from Tarbet starts well as you are treated to a nice view of Loch Long while you follow a path that seems to have been planned by someone with a twisted sense of humour (it's never flat, you just climb and descend constantly). Unfortunately when Craggan Hill separates you from Loch Long in my opinion something is lost. It's nice countryside but the road is uninspiring and when you get to the MOD testing site it's not exactly a friendly place. Every 20 metres there are signs warning you to clear off if red flags are up or the lights are flashing! On Saturday the area was

Finally at the end!



I did the route in reverse (Inveruglas to Balloch).

open to the public but there was some training going on, however, I didn't hang around to find out more.

At Glen Fruin my body started reminding me that I hadn't done much long distance running recently. Resisting the urge to try and cadge a lift from the passing locals speeding along in their cars I resolved to focus on getting to Helensburgh. Occasionally stopping for breaks and walking for short periods I finally got to the path that heads north-west to Helensburgh. It was great to be finally off a road and onto a path even if it was an ascent.

The descent into Helensburgh took me past Hill House which has a garden run by the National Trust. You have to admire the choice of route, it has been carefully designed to ensure you pass "areas of interest"! Now that I had finally made it to Helensburgh I had a choice to make, continue on to Balloch or call it a day and take the train home. This is one of the nice points of the Three Lochs Way, there are plenty of bailout points. I decided to soldier on after refuelling at the Co-Op, of course!

I'm happy to say the final section from Helensburgh to Balloch was worth it. I enjoyed the scenery and the feeling of seeing Balloch and Loch Lomond below was a massive encouragement. By this time I was splitting my time between short periods of walking and short sessions of running. Normally I would thunder down the kind of descent presented by the one into Balloch but somehow after 8 hours on the move this wasn't quite possible.

I've been to Balloch a number of times, normally I do the 20 mile run along the Clyde Canal Path from Glasgow. However, it's flat and certainly much easier than what I had just done so it was with great satisfaction I made the Tourist Information Office that marks the end of the route. I bought my ticket and was told I had about 25 minutes before the next train, plenty of time to get fish and chips from Lomond Fish Bar and pose for a photo. I stretched my legs out on the journey home with a smug satisfaction of having done a good day's exercise.

For a multi-day walk I don't think the Three Lochs Way would be my first choice, but as a long distance run or cycle it's a good day out. The long road sections are more suited to pedal powered machines and the short unrideable sections can be easily pushed over. Although there are no major climbs (the highest point is about 265m) you continually ascend and descend which can make the going tough. No problem at all for a multi-day walk but for an unexperienced runner (or someone who has been a bit lazy on the running front recently like myself) this is a tough challenge to do in a day. In saying that, there are people who seem to be able to run the West Highland Way comfortably in less than a day so it can't be the toughest thing in the world!



I got off the bus at Sloy Power Station.



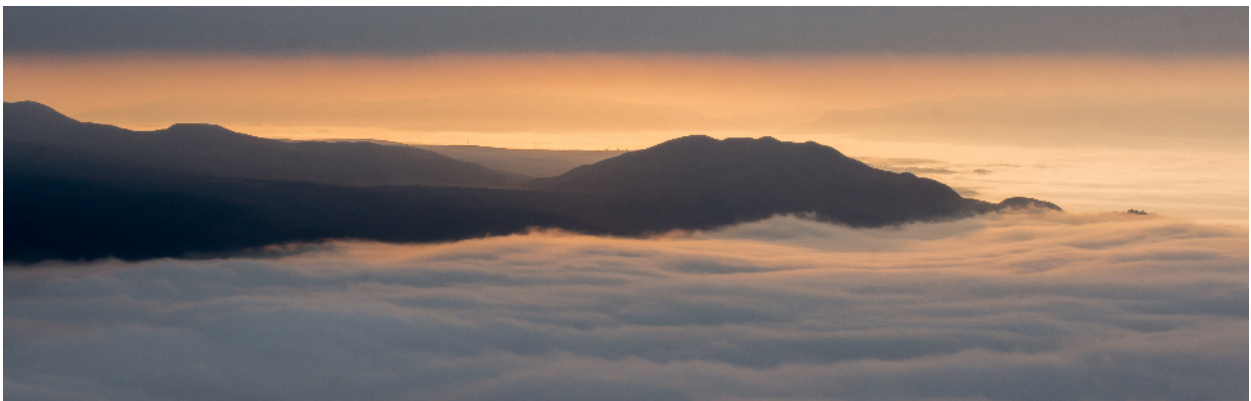
One of the waymarkers along the route. Photo taken by Lairich Rig.

28th September 2015*Supermoon Lunar Eclipse - enjoyed from Beinn Dubh*

I PERSUADED JAMES TO join me for an overnight expedition to watch the lunar eclipse. It was a special lunar eclipse because the moon was at its perigee (the closest point to earth on its orbit) so it appeared slightly larger than normal. I chose to view the spectacle from Beinn Dubh because the mountain is a reasonable distance away from Glasgow's light pollution but not too far for travelling. Megan kindly offered to drive us to Luss and was going to walk part the way up the mountain but her family phoned so we said our goodbyes and parted. James and I almost made it to the summit before needing our head torches such was the lighting.



The moon before the eclipse.



After pitching the tent, cooking dinner was our priority. Once our appetite was settled we left our cosy tent and took some pictures. We were back in our sleeping bags by 10:30pm to get some shut-eye before the main event. The eclipse started at 1am but when I poked my head out of the tent I couldn't discern any difference. Finally at 3am the eclipse became clearly visible so I dragged James out of his sleeping bag cocoon for some not-quite-but-almost once in a lifetime photography. A lunar eclipse is challenging to properly photograph but the results were not too bad. We awoke again for the sunrise at 7am and were treated to a wonderful layer of cloud over Loch Lomond. The pictures speak for themselves!

Covered by clouds.



Blood moon during the eclipse.



My tent and the eclipse, long exposure photograph.



James and I posing as we headed down to Luss.

Kelvin Walkway - Saturday morning stroll

THE KELVIN WALKWAY WAS the first walk I did with my old flatmate Angus. It's a nice path that goes from the centre of Glasgow to Milngavie. From there you could do the West Highland Way if you were feeling adventurous. Living in the West End, I never bother beginning the walk from the official start since the path almost goes past my doorstep. The weather was pleasant so we stopped halfway at the aqueduct by Balmuilty Bridge. I provided some homemade cookies whilst David and Margit brought some macaroons that Kim and I have become a little addicted to.

Statistics	
Distance	12.91 km
Time	3h:39m
Average Speed	3.5 km/h
Elevation	93 m
Min. Altitude	29 m
Max. Attitude	50 m

Incredibly flat.



The path continued through the countryside and we crossed the Antonine wall. However, like most of the Roman forts marked on the map nearby in this area nothing obvious remains of the past. We left the Kelvin and started following Allander Water. In no time at all the walk was nearly over. Once we got into Milngavie we walked through the park before heading into Costa to pick up some hot drinks. David had prepared a tortilla for our lunch. He wasn't very happy with how it had turned out, calling it "egg and potatoes" but we enjoyed it regardless.

We saw a few people in Milngavie who looked like they were kitted out for the West Highland Way. Sadly today our walk was over and we headed to the station for the train to Glasgow. On the way we stopped at Barnado's and had a very successful shop. I got some books, Kim found a Hilary Duff film she didn't have, Margit spotted a fondue set and David snapped up an old OS map of Ben Nevis. Not many walks end with a bargain shopping trip!

Nearly at Milngavie.



From Glasgow to Milngavie.

10th October 2015*Glenkiln cycle - Margit and David's first visit to Dumfries*

DURING THE SUMMER BEFORE I started my PhD I did a lot of road cycling. Dumfries has lots of great routes but my favourite is a loop round Glenkiln so when David and Margit came for a visit it was first choice. After meeting them at the station and giving a short tour of Dumfries (there isn't that much to see) we got on our bikes and headed off. The route starts along what a disused railway that has been turned into a path before continuing along quiet country roads.

Statistics	
Distance	42.2 km
Time	4h:49m
Average Speed	8.8 km/h
Elevation	519 m
Min. Altitude	55 m
Max. Attitude	268 m

Pedal power.



During lunch we sat at where the statue *John the Baptist* used to be situated. For many years there were six sculptures around Glenkiln until one was stolen so the rest (bar one) were removed. After lunch a short climb was required before the scenic down Speddockhill. The final point of interest was Routin Falls. We also found time to fill the containers our lunch had been in with blackberries from the brambles that line the road. This year hasn't been good for them but they were still good for cooking. Margit made a wonderful cake with them that came to Glen Etive the following week! Also, all the photos from this trip were taken by her.

Looking down Glenkiln.



The Glenkiln loop.



The Valve Tower in the distance.



Picking blackberries.

Ben Starav - with camping in Glen Etive

I NEED TO HEAD NORTH more often. The hills around Glasgow and Loch Lomond are lovely but the real wilderness begins around the Cairngorms and Fort William. A few months ago we got together and pinned down a free weekend for some camping and walking action. Eventually we settled on camping in Glen Etive from Friday to Saturday, do a day walk and then return to Glasgow. We had a route in mind but were flexible if something caught our eye. That proved to be the case, as we drove down the road towards Loch Etive we spotted Ben Starav too tempting to resist.

Statistics	
Distance	16.16 km
Time	7h:25m
Average Speed	2.2 km/h
Elevation	113 m
Min. Altitude	23 m
Max. Attitude	1053 m

According to the OS map the summit is actually 1078m.



The trip began with a food gathering expedition at the wild and dangerous place that is Maryhill Tesco. David felt this was a suitable occasion to experience the joy of *Buckfast* or “buckie” as it is known locally. Unable to find it in Tesco (I suspect they voluntarily don’t stock it) we turned to the friendly neighbourhood off-licence. On reflection, I think David must have been under the influence of *something* already because he chose the larger of the two bottles proffered to him. Maybe he was just hopelessly optimistic. After a drive of about two hours we chose a camping spot by the River Etive. David and I erected our tent while Kristaps and Ross started the camp fire since they were sleeping in the car which to be honest, I don’t think counts as camping! We all enjoyed dinner, I had tortelloni and the rest had beef stew. After taking a few pictures, chatting and watching Ross fall off his chair into another and break it, we went to bed.

At the summit of Ben Starav.



Staying warm by the camp fire on Friday night. The temperature hovered around 0°C during the night so it wasn’t the warmest temperature I’ve camped in, nor the lowest.



Ben Starav is a good looking mountain to the South of Loch Etive. A key selling point would definitely be the fabulous 360° view from the summit. We spotted Ben Nevis on the horizon and there was wilderness for miles around. Ben Starav means *hill of rustling*. We didn't hear much rustling there was lots of roaring because it was rutting season.

After breakfast we drove a few miles down the road to the start of the walk. The map showed a bridge that was no functional consisting of a wooden box on wheels suspended by cables. We soon got on the right track and started to warm up when the sun shone on us. The climb started with some of the most boggiest terrain I've traversed. We passed the same area on the way back and I derived much entertainment from watching my fellow walkers' boots and legs disappear. After the bog section we had to cross the Allt Mheuran. I believe there is a bridge for crossing it but since the water level was low we just made our own way across. From then on it was climbing mode as we went south west following the ridge that leads to Ben Starav. According to my new hiking watch, we stopped for lunch at 625m. I had some bread and olives with a rather sorry looking pan au chocolat that had seen better days.

We didn't spend long on the summit because we wanted to be off the hill before sunset. The highlight of the descent was the ridge that led to Stob Coire Dheirg. On another more energetic day we might have included some of the other nearby Munros but this time we left the mountain by following a path along a stream called Allt nam Meirleach.



The view to Beinn Trilleachan.



The derelict "box bridge".



The sun was setting as we walked to the car.



Lots of deer around.

Ben Gulabin - circumnavigating the hill with Douglas

MY FRIENDS FROM DUMFRIES and I stayed at Gulabin House near Glenshee in the Cairngorms for the weekend. Saturday was our only full day and I was keen to go for a reasonably long walk somewhere. Unfortunately in the morning there was heavy rain which put most people off but the forecast held true and the afternoon was lovely. My old flatmate, Douglas Muir, was eager to join me so we headed out just before noon when the last heavy rain show passed while the others went to Blairgowrie.

Statistics	
Distance	12.18 km
Time	4h:21m
Average Speed	2.8 km/h
Elevation	509 m
Min. Altitude	339 m
Max. Attitude	797 m

A pleasant speed.



Our walk began with a short walk along the A93 (an Old Military Road that is spectacular to drive along) before we headed west and started climbing Ben Gulabin. Although Ben Gulabin is 806m we actually started at about 340m so there wasn't much ascending. The final section to the top is quite steep and the ground is soft.



The summit of Ben Gulabin.



Douglas crossing a ford.

At the lower summit I left Douglas in my storm shelter to stay warm while I went to take some pictures. As I was walking along, about 100 deer crossed the top of the hill only 50 metres away from me. I didn't get any good photos but it was an amazing sight. We continued climbing to the proper summit and after a short stop for more pictures we headed down the hill. I knew we had to cross a large stream without a footbridge, in the end we found a way across that involved a bit of a jump but we both made the other side safely. However, our water crossing problems weren't over, one ford required the removal of socks and boots. Thankfully Douglas is a good sport!



We followed a nice loop.

22nd November 2015*Mugdock and the selfie stick - unicycling around the park*

IT WAS ABOUT TIME the weather took a break from rain. This has got to be one of the wettest Novembers I can remember. Give me cold, clear skies over warm, wet weather any day. Fortunately, the only decent two days so far this month fell on the weekend. I decided to take advantage and travelled to my usual mountain unicycling haunt. One of my latest purchases is a small helmet camera that is capable of good video, especially considering the price. Combined with a selfie stick there is much fun to be had.

Statistics	
Distance	21.23 km
Time	3h:24m
Average Speed	6.2 km/h
Elevation	329 m
Min. Altitude	47 m
Max. Attitude	171 m

Narcissism takes time.



I took the earliest Sunday morning train from Partick to Milngavie. After picking up some snacks at Tesco I pedalled along the West Highland way until I got into Mugdock. The camera was duly attached to the pole and I set about recording some of the ride. It turns out the unicycle is well suited to the selfie stick because your hands are free and can move it around easily. By the afternoon the park was very busy (all the car parks were full) and I think I might have surprised a few people, if it wasn't the first time they had seen a mountain unicyclist it was definitely the first selfie taking one! I edited my favourite clips together and uploaded the result, which can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrJpy7LThTo.

Craigallian Loch (Dumgoyne in the background).



Wondering around Mugdock.



Pedalling on the road near the Gun Site.



Enjoying the ride.

29th November 2015*Castle Campbell - celebrating St. Andrew's day*

EVERY YEAR HISTORIC SCOTLAND gives away free tickets to castles around Scotland to celebrate St Andrew's Day. David requested Castle Campbell (near Dollar) so Ross, David, Margit and I headed from the pouring rain in Glasgow to the countryside hoping for an improvement in the weather. Thankfully we left the worst of the rain as we crossed the Kincardine on Forth Bridge. We parked in Dollar and walked north by Dollar Burn and Dollar Glen to get to the castle.



Castle Campbell.



Dollar Glen contained some waterfalls that were roaring from all the rain recently. Gorge walking at this time of year would be beyond our capabilities but we eyed it up for the summer, hopefully we can pay a visit again soon with our wetsuits. After 20 minutes of pleasant walking we made it to the castle.

Castle Campbell is partly ruins but there is one complete tower still standing. At the top there is a great view of the surrounding country side. We were very lucky because between the time of us starting to climb the steps to emerging on the top the skies went from grey to blue. It wasn't to last and we made our way down the glen back to the car in the pouring rain. We took a detour to Callander on the way back to Glasgow for some baked goods to finish off our day.

Group shot in Dollar Glen.



The view from the tower.

6th December 2015*Dumgoyne - final fell run of the year*

ROSS AND I WERE KEEN to enjoy one more fell run before the end of the year. Dumgoyne was chosen again because of its convenience, however, this time we parked at the bottom instead of Mugdock. My two main excuses for wanting a shorter run: shorter daylight hours and my stiff hamstrings from the 5km treadmill race I participated in on Friday (for the record my time was 17:44). There were lots of ominous clouds around but fortunately we didn't experience any significant rain.

Statistics	
Distance	10.89 km
Time	2h:10m
Average Speed	5 km/h
Elevation	655 m
Min. Altitude	32 m
Max. Attitude	568 m

Finishing in style.



The ground was very slippery from all the rain that has fallen in the past few weeks. I don't think I have fallen over so many times on one trip. Ross and I took slightly different routes to the top of Dumgoyne before meeting at the top for a "dynamic" photograph. We agreed to continue the run on to Garloch Hill because there are great views from that path.



Ross having fun on the descent from Garloch Hill.



It was blowing a gail on Earl's Seat.

At the top of Garloch Hill we still had some energy left so we continued towards Earl's Seat. I erroneously believed it wouldn't be as muddy along on that section, if anything it was more so. My feet passed through the cold stage, to the painfully cold and finally the "I can't feel them anymore" stage. I cursed myself for accidentally leaving my waterproof socks in the office. For most of the path between Garloch Hill and Earl's Seat it was also blowing a gale. We soldiered on, it's not everyday you go fell running so you may as well enjoy it when you can. Before we knew it, our final run of the year was over!



Goodbye 2015!