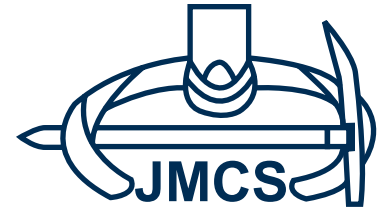


# JMCS

## Winter Newsletter **2024**

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# 2024

# JMCS 2024 Contents

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Approaching Lochnagar

“

*Planning micro-adventures  
has evolved into an art  
form of its own*

”

## The Art of the Micro Adventure

### Doug Pender

While having children is a joyous, wonderful, and enriching experience, believe it or not, there can sometimes be downsides. That perfect mid-February weather window might overlap with a dancing display, or calm and crisp high-pressure systems in early May could conflict with soft-play birthday parties. Navigating the joys of family life and personal ambitions doesn't always go hand in hand. Over the past few years, I've found that having a young family and planning a typical climbing trip has become more daunting, often filled

with anxiety that detracts from the whole experience.

“Just take some time off,” you might say. “Lower your expectations.” Fine in principle, but what about the rat? The rat doesn't understand. It stays, gnawing away in the front of my mind, whispering that a “quick” trip to the Cairngorms will keep it at bay. But it lies.

I struggled with this torment for a while until

I discovered the art of the micro-adventure: short, immersive experiences in the Scottish mountains that allowed me to maintain my sanity without sacrificing too much quality time with loved ones. Or so I tell myself.

#### Main Ingredients for a Micro Adventure

Planning micro-adventures has evolved into an art form of its own. I've done a few now with fellow climber and tormented father, Alasdair Yarrington. We focus on cliffs you need to work for. Easily accessible crags are for bolt clipping and bouldering. The climbing itself has to be worthwhile, but it's only one aspect. We also seek somewhere scenic,

with expansive views that capture the best of the Scottish mountains. I love Scotland—its rugged, remote cliffs, tranquil lochs, and compact crags offer a lifetime of experiences.

The goal of these trips is simple: maximise quality time spent in the mountains.

To achieve this, a “strict” ingredient list must be followed. Balance is paramount. If you sacrifice certain comforts (e.g., the luxury of a tent), you must offset that by increasing discomfort elsewhere (e.g., using a very slim rack or enduring suspect weather conditions). The whole experience is what matters—not just one aspect.

## Ingredient List:

- Overnight stay (mandatory)
- Bike (preferable)
- Ferry (preferable)
- Bivvy bag (preferable)
- Tent (optional)
- Weather (optional)
- Classic route (mandatory)
- Minimum 6 pitches (mandatory)
- Some climbing in the dark (preferable)
- Half ropes (undesirable)
- Thin single rope (preferable)

- Slimmed down rack (mandatory)
- Long run-outs (mandatory)
- Psychological warfare (preferable)
- Limited phone signal (preferable)
- Can of fancy overpriced ale (mandatory)

## Recent Micro Adventures

I’ve been fortunate enough that most of my climbing since 2021 has revolved around micro-adventures. Sneaking away after the kids are in bed or after weekend classes and clubs allowed me to squeeze in some unforgettable experiences within 24-36 hour windows.

### Eagle Ridge, Lochnagar (June 2021)

This was my first outdoor climb since my daughter was born in late 2019. I was champing at the bit. Big mountain, big route, perfect forecast, and long days. We planned for days, discussing options, locations, and tactics, before finally settling on Eagle Ridge (S). Though it was an easy route, I found myself slightly nervous after such a long break. But I couldn’t wait.

Then came the too familiar thought: Do I have COVID? Sore throat, raspy cough, tired.







Not ideal the day before a climb. “You should probably do a test,” Alasdair suggested. The last thing I wanted to do. The rat, having just emerged from its own lockdown, would gnaw me alive if I didn’t go.

Reluctantly, I took the test—negative. Thank f\*\*k. Off we went, feeling horrendous but liberated.

The weather was perfect as we pulled into the Loch Muick car park around 6 p.m. on Saturday. We packed up and hoofed it into the coire. As we reached the bealach with Meikle Pap, the cliffs came into view—rugged granite

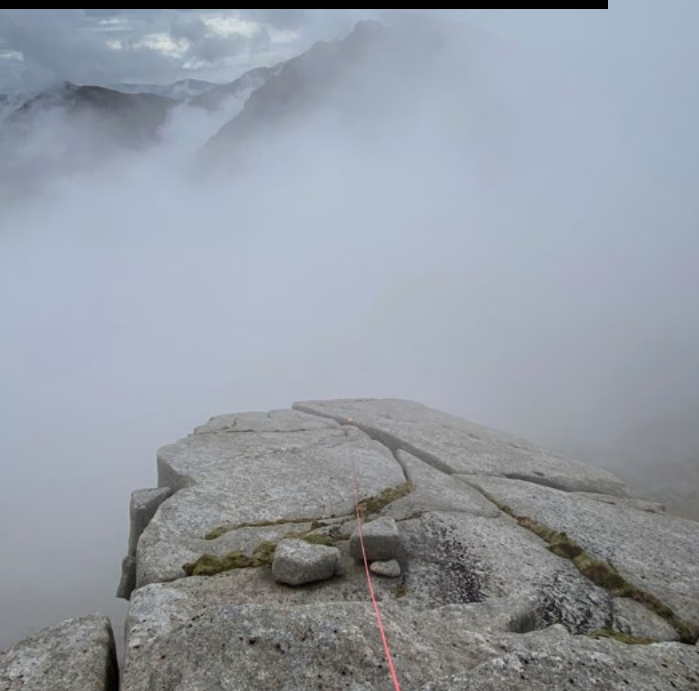
ridges interspersed with steep gullies still filled with snow. Magic, but not flat. I’d opted for a tent, given how I was feeling, and hadn’t paid much attention to the terrain. After searching until twilight, we found a flat(ish) and only mildly squelchy pitch. We wandered down to the loch, collected water and set about having dinner and polishing off our cans as the night engulfed us.

I had an awful sleep. I blame the cough and the early daylight not the cans, but whatever it was we were up around 5am. A couple of coffees and some porridge and we might as well get on the route. F\*\*k it. We approached

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*We packed up and hoofed it into the coire. As we reached the bealach with Meikle Pap, the cliffs came into view—rugged granite ridges*

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*A coin toss. It had been a bit of a crappy winter, so it was either a final throw of the dice on Ben Nevis or acceptance that winter was over*

”

through the boulders, past a couple of bivvies and got to the base of the gully. Rock hard neve. Thirty to forty meters of it to the base of the route. Hmmm not ideal in trainers. Some makeshift daggers from granite shards and some smashing of toes into the snow and we were there.

The climb flew by. Despite not climbing for ages we were charging. To be honest I can't remember much of the climbing apart from the crux pitch. Beautiful easy jams and a steep horrible cramp inducing mantle thing made worse from 18 months of not using my hip flexors. In no time we were at the top. A quick snack and a tag of the summit and we were bounding down the track, breaking camp and at the car just after lunch. The art of the micro adventure had been born. It was all I needed for a full two weeks until I found myself immersed in clag and slippery rock in Glencoe, the rat chuckling in my ear.

#### Ingredient List:

- Overnight stay
- Tent
- Classic route
- Perfect weather
- 6 pitches
- Thin single rope
- Very slimmed down rack

- Long run-outs
- Limited phone signal
- Can of fancy overpriced ale x2

#### Various, Cir Mhor (April 2024)

A coin toss. It had been a bit of a crappy winter, so it was either a final throw of the dice on Ben Nevis or acceptance that winter was over and time to search for some mountain rock. It was cold, though—around 5 degrees in the Highlands and colder overnight. We stayed south and headed to Arran.

A ferry trip always adds to the experience. After battling the CalMac booking system, Alasdair and I wheeled our bikes onto the 9 a.m. ferry on Saturday. We pedalled through Brodick, stopping only for an egg roll and the mandatory cans of ale (Brewdog Double Hazy). We pushed on with the bikes up Glen Rosa as far as we could before finally continuing on foot. The destination was reached shortly after. Not the Pinnacle, but the fabulous plush grassy pitches in the boulders. With no one to be seen, we set up camp.

With not much daylight we embraced the micro adventure mantra and went full fast and light. We ticked off Hammer (VS) in no time

and similarly Anvil Route (HVS) which took us to the latter pitches of the South Ridge of the Rosa Pinnacle. Having been here before we stormed it. Bathed in spring evening sunshine and on pristine granite it must have been close to how Honnold and Caldwell went at it on the Fitz Traverse. Climbing so fast I was breathing hard and with gear so spaced that any misjudgement would not be ideal. Impossible however, when the rock is this good.

We arrived back at the pitch as the sun was just setting, made some tea and settled on the top of the boulder to sup Hazy Jane and watch the stars. Tomorrow's weather was looking fantastic.

The bivvy was comfy but the Met Office incompetent. As we made our morning brews some spots of rain started. Light spots. "It's fine, the rock is grippy and first pitches easy. It'll pass". It didn't, it got heavier. Not ready to admit defeat we still headed up. "Give me a few nuts and I'll run up to the first belay in my boots I suggested". I was confident. I'd been there before as it was shared with Sou' Wester Slabs. I should pay more attention. Forty metres, four nuts and a some very insecure foot work later I arrived with a heart rate pushing 200bpm. No signal but adamant the Met Office were not

incompetent we sat there, in the pouring rain, for almost an hour.

"When's the point of no return" Alasdair said.

"11am?" I suggested. "We need to be packing at 3pm latest to make the boat".

11am came. We bailed.

The rat was doing laps around my brain. We can't leave now. But what are the options in the weather.

Caliban's Creep (VD) is a funky and fascinating route for the grade. Meant to be ten or so pitches as it winds its way up the buttress. We did it in maybe four. Rope drag eliminated through lack of gear and moving together. It flew by in 90 or so minutes taking us through some wonderful pitches from steep pristine jugs, to exposed traverses and mega chimneys and slots in the slabs.

We arrived back at the bivvy bang on 3pm. Packed up, tore down the path, onto the bikes and raced our way onto the earlier boat. The trip back to Ardrossan was spent out on deck in the crisp air, tending to shredded skin. The rat calm, snoring gently in the back off my mind. For now.

“

*Forty metres, four nuts and a some very insecure foot work later I arrived with a heart rate pushing 200bpm*

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#### Ingredient List:

- Overnight stay
- Bivvy
- Classic route x3
- Mixed weather
- 10+ pitches
- Thin single rope
- Slimmed down rack
- Long run-outs
- Limited phone signal
- Can of fancy overpriced ale





The bivy at the Dubh Loch

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*As we rounded the corner on the path and the Dubh-Loch came into view we were slapped in the face by a fierce wind and some very unwelcome rain*

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### **King Rat, Creag an Dubh-Loch (June 2024)**

We were climbing well. Alasdair, being more confident, suggested a trip to the Dubh-Loch. With July and August typically filled with family holidays and poor weather, we decided to send the rat into mini-hibernation by taking on its ruler: King Rat (E1).

With a promising forecast for Sunday we left Edinburgh around 5pm, arrived at Loch Muick for 8pm, pedalled in on the bikes as fast and far as possible. As we rounded the corner on the path and the Dubh-Loch came into view we were slapped in the face by a fierce wind and some very unwelcome rain.

As we approached the loch the weather worsened and the towering cliffs were engulfed in clouds. After searching around in the dark for a while we finally settled on a flat (ish) bivy that was only being mildly buffeted. We settled down and listened to the party still on the cliff shouting through the dark (Cyclops HVS). A proper adventure they were having.

Night went and morning and better weather came. We lay on the beach, drank coffee and psyched ourselves up for the 250+ metres ahead of us. “Rock paper scissors for the crux?” Suggested Al. “Sure”. I lost (won) and even the rat breathed a sigh of relief.

I started off on Pitch 1. After teetering my way up a very creaky guillotine flake, again questioning my choices, I reached the belay. The crux pitch (5c) is mega. A beautiful delicate slab followed by some outrageously steep and exposed moves moves through the roof. After finally accepting defeat under the roof and leaving the rucksack to be hauled, I reached the belay after a short 15m and 45 mins after I started.

The “easier” pitches felt anything but. Maybe from the crux struggle, maybe from the blustery bivy but more likely from the long but easy run-outs being interspersed with short-sharp, bold and exposed mini-cruxes. We



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*Reflecting on the art of the micro adventure, I realise that it's not just about the climbing; it's the whole experience*

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The golden beach on the Dubh Loch seen

reached the top of the huge cliffs after about 6 hours on the route. I was mentally and physically done for the day.

We scuttled down, packed up the bivvy and lay exhausted in the sun for a bit feasting on cheese and oatcakes. Finally pulling ourselves together we headed back to the bikes and out to Loch Muick. The rat was nowhere to be seen or heard.

Ingredient List:

- Overnight stay
- Bivvy
- Classic route
- Perfect weather
- 6 pitches
- Half ropes
- Full rack
- Long run-outs
- Psychological warfare
- No phone signal
- Can of fancy overpriced ale

### Final Thoughts

So, as I write this, sitting inside a sports centre waiting for my daughter at her gymnastics training on a beautiful Saturday afternoon and reflecting on the art of the micro adventure, I realise that it's not just about the climbing; it's the whole experience. The planning, the travelling, the bike or walk in, the bivvy or camp, the cans, the morning coffees, and the memories. One day they may want to join me.



“

*Twenty or thirty years ago any attempts at walking in the Costa Blanca hills was likely to be curtailed by vague tracks disappearing into savage vegetation*

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## Walking in Costa Blanca

### Bryan Rynne

As many people will be aware, I have done a lot of hill-walking over the years, for example the SMC 'full-house', and many trips to Switzerland and Austria, etc. These are of course well-known bagging lists, or walking destinations. However in the last few years I have started going on winter walking trips to a less well-known area: Costa Blanca.

Obviously, Costa Blanca is well-known for its climbing opportunities (and of course for

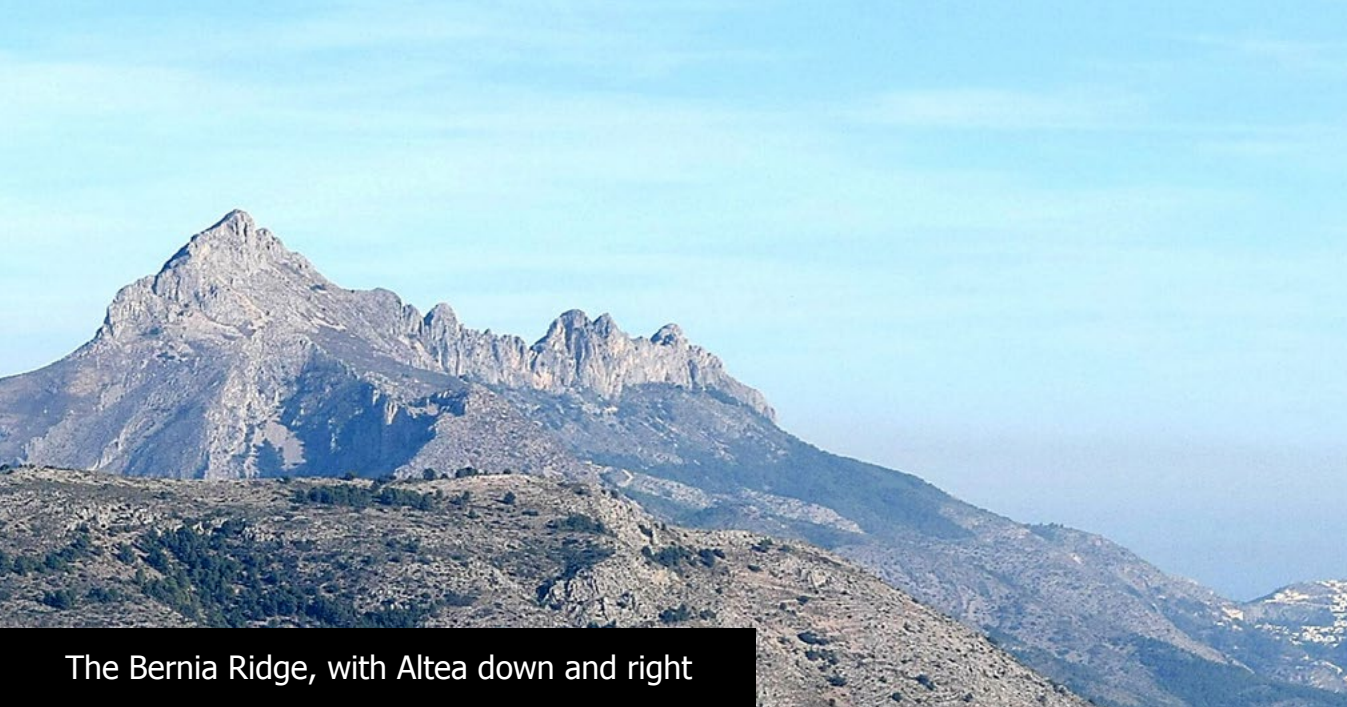
other forms of entertainment), and many club members, including me, have made regular climbing trips there over the winter months - I think that I have been there every winter since about 2000. In the course of these trips it has become apparent that there is a large amount of very enjoyable walking to be had out there.

Twenty or thirty years ago any attempts at walking in the Costa Blanca hills was likely

to be curtailed by vague tracks disappearing into savage vegetation, or simply meeting impenetrable obstacles such as barbed wire fences, sometimes at the very start of the walk, which at least meant that you did not waste much time on the walk. It was not a satisfactory experience!

However, since then conditions have improved considerably. The authorities have made a concerted effort to expand





The Bernia Ridge, with Altea down and right

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*To sort of calibrate these terms, 'strenuous' sort of feels like a reasonable Munro bagging day, while 'easy' and 'moderate' are, well, fairly easy really*

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tourism beyond the Benidorm lager lout demographic, even including attempting to attract hill-walkers (possibly not to Benidorm). Furthermore, many walking groups have sprung up to push this process along (not just in Costa Blanca), many by British immigrants.

I first become really aware of the improved walking opportunities on a climbing trip with James and Irena in December 2018. James had injured himself a few weeks before the trip and did not feel like climbing every day, so we alternated climbing and walking days. To prepare for this James

had acquired a recently published guide: 'Walking on the Costa Blanca', by Terry Fletcher, published by Cicerone. This is an extremely well-written and useful guide. It was published in 2015 and the route descriptions are up to date and reliable. It contains 50 walks at various grades, termed: 'easy', 'moderate', 'strenuous' or 'scramble'.

To sort of calibrate these terms, 'strenuous' sort of feels like a reasonable Munro bagging day, while 'easy' and 'moderate' are, well, fairly easy really, and I have done very few of these.

A more recent book, published in 2022, is also useful: 'Mountain Adventures, Costa Blanca', by Mark Eddy, also published by Cicerone. This covers a multitude of activities in addition to walking, including ridge scrambles, via ferratas, trail running and road cycling. Of course, it does not cover as much walking as the Fletcher book, so is not so useful as that for a walking trip, but it is worth a look for what else is on offer.

Since 2018 I have done the odd walk on my annual climbing trips out there, especially as these trips have stretched out to over 2



weeks due to retirement. However, last year, at a nadir in the UK winter gloom I decided to fly out there on my own for a week's walking and to enjoy some sunshine (and nice food and fine wine...) and top up my vitamin D levels. That was so good I did the same again this year, and I suspect that this will become a routine trip in future years!

Early February to early March seems to be the ideal time for this, with pleasant temperatures, lots of sunshine and long evening daylight hours (enhanced by Spain being on a sensible time-zone for its longitude, unlike Britain).

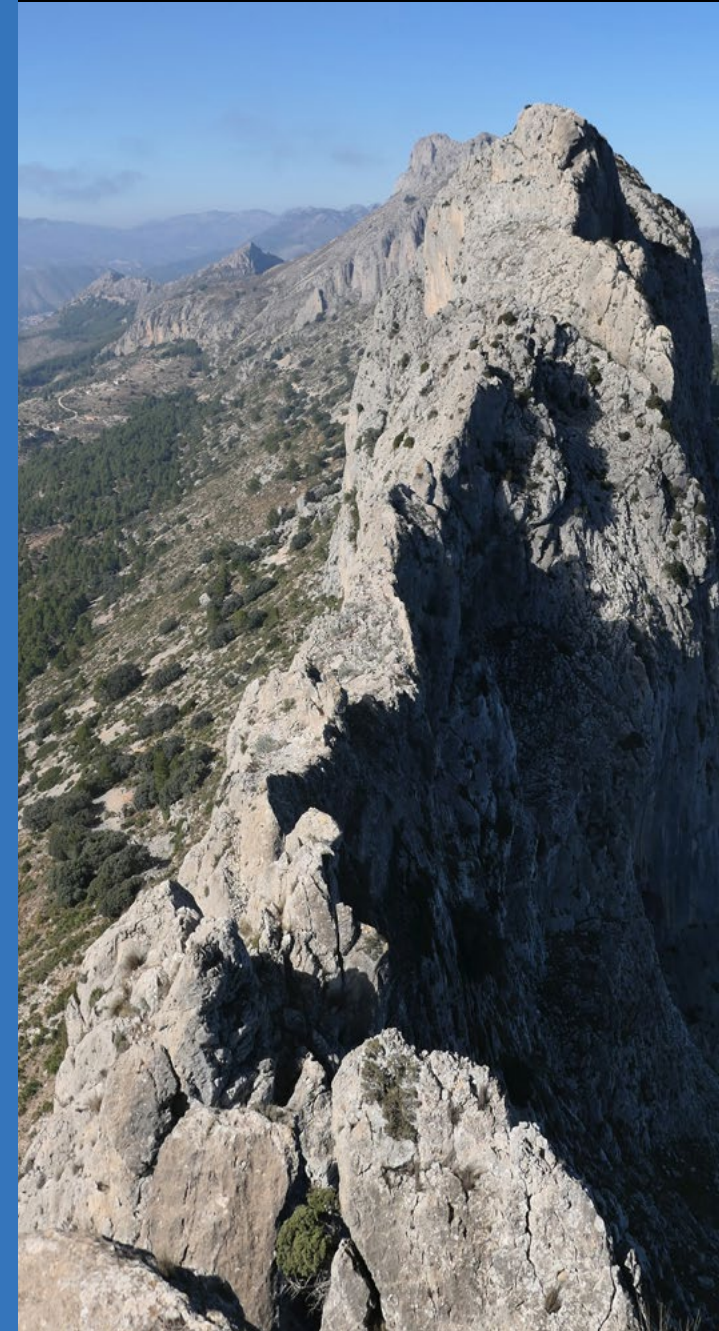
As usual, I stayed in Altea, which is a very nice, small town about 10 miles south of Calp, very close to a motorway junction which greatly eases getting places compared with the long slog from Calp. However, it is possible to have a very good week's walking without making much use of the motorway. The area around the Puig and Echo Valley (as it used to be known) has a large number of the walks in the Fletcher book, and is only about 10-15 miles drive from Altea. Within, say, 40 miles drive there is a large number of good routes to do. I won't bother trying to describe any of these (Fletcher does that job), but here are a few routes that I have done and thought they were good:

- Aitana from Font de Moli; 11 miles, 800 metres (Aitana is the highest mountain in Costa Blanca, but is nowhere near as prominent as the second highest mountain, the Puig Campana - there is a large network of paths surrounding both of these);
- The Puig from Polop, 10.5 miles, 1100 metres;
- The Ponoch from Polop and back via Echo, 8.5 miles, 850 metres;
- Xanchet circuit, 8 miles, 520 metres;
- Col de Rates, 9.5 miles, 735 metres

If anyone is interested in any of these, or any other routes I have done, I have gpx tracks of my routes which I could send out.

The above routes are good, and there are many more in the Fletcher book. However, for anyone with some modest climbing skills and a bit of kit, the jewel in the crown of walks near to Altea is the Bernia Ridge. In fact, you look straight up at this ridge from the town, although driving to the usual start takes about an hour due to the slow and convoluted road up to it. This is a tremendous route with glorious views north and south along the coast, and over to the mountains inland.

The downside, for non-climbers, but a





feature for climbers, is that there is some fairly serious scrambling (not hard for climbers), two abseils and a climbing pitch which is given 4c in the Rockfax Costa Blanca climbing guide (this 'walk' is described in the Rockfax guide, but is not described in the Fletcher book!). Personally, I don't think that the climbing pitch is 4c - I soloed it this year in TX4 trail shoes, and I don't usually solo 4c in rock boots, let alone trail shoes (this was not on sight, I had led it on at least 3 previous occasions so I knew that I found it quite

easy). If anyone wants to lead it it is very closely bolted, so very safe, and needs about 12 quick draws (no modern, high-tech protection is needed on the route).

This year, on my own, the whole route took me just over 6 hours car-to-car, and the walking distance is about 6.5 miles according to my gpx, which of course is ignoring the scrambling/abseiling/climbing. I think that it is such a good route that I have done it about 4 times, and I will probably do it again next year!

An extension to the Bernia Ridge (compared to the Rockfax route) is described in the Eddy book mentioned above. This takes in the east summit of the ridge (the main summit is the west summit). This extension involves crawling through a bizarre, narrow tunnel through the ridge (called the 'forat') a bit before and below the col where the normal route starts, and then bushwhacking eastwards to find (or not...) a vestigial path up onto the eastern end of the ridge and then heading westwards, thereby crossing the east summit and getting back to the normal starting col. There are an additional two abseils on this section, which I downclimbed since I could not be bothered with the messing around - half way down the second one I started to think that might not have been such a good idea.

Frankly, I felt that this extension was no fun, and was not worth the time and effort - I could see why it was not part of the standard route. Maybe it was just my route finding skills - lack of!

Another alternative is to crawl through the forat on the walk in, and then simply turn right and walk westwards along the south side of the ridge to the normal descent from the ridge and then around the end of

the ridge and back to the car. This is also a fun walk, which completely bypasses any scrambling or abseiling, but of course does miss out all the excitement.

An even more exciting ridge climb would be the El Realet Ridge which is also given 4c by Rockfax, but is a different proposition altogether - the 4c really is 4c, along a scary traverse where if you fall off you will go a long way. Me, James and Koralia had a go at it in 2015, and bailed out about 2/3 of the way along due to running out of time - a mix of getting the start wrong, being slow, and it was 27 December, so not many daylight hours. Since I haven't done it properly, and it is not remotely a walk, I won't say any more about it here.

I have only discussed walking in Costa Blanca here because that is what I am familiar with in Spain. I decided to go there on a walking trip two years ago in a bit of a temper tantrum regarding the weather, and given my familiarity with the area I organised a trip in about 10 minutes and I knew that it would be good, and there was a high quality guidebook available. Almost certainly there will be many other places in Spain to go to - I should do some research, or maybe someone could suggest some other places that they have been to.

It may also be worth mentioning that the Eddy book has a sprinkling of via ferratas, which sound good but I have not done any of them so can't recommend any of them. One goes up the Ponocho from Polop, which is a very short drive from Altea - indeed, a couple of the walks mentioned above pass near the start of it. Most of the others are a long way from Altea, including two very near the climbing crags in Murcia.

Finally, how does walking in Costa Blanca compare with walking in Switzerland, which I have been doing for decades? Having had about 10 days in Costa Blanca in February, and 10 days in Zinal in Switzerland in September this year, here are some comparisons.

**Cost:** as you might expect, the Swiss holiday was about 50% more expensive than the Spanish holiday.

**Food and drink:** again, as you would expect (well, I would) this was far better in Spain. In 10 days in Zinal, in a variety of restaurants, I did not have a single meal that I thought 'yum, that was good, I will have that again', and I thought that Zinal was better than some places I have stayed in Switzerland. For instance, I suspect that Bruce and Michael are still laughing at me

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*This is also a fun walk, which completely bypasses any scrambling or abseiling, but of course does miss out all the excitement*

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for my CHF 45 'fish supper and beer' in Saas Grund last year, which was the culinary highlight of that trip (until Patrick showed up and started doing some proper cooking).

**Paths:** these are clearly better in Switzerland than in Spain, but the Costa Blanca tracks are almost invariably good enough so the difference is not a big deal.

**Scenery and weather:** no doubt, on a glorious day the Swiss scenery will usually be better, but on a dank, cold drizzly day not so much, and you are far more likely to get a few such days on a Swiss trip than a Spanish trip.





The Puig Campana from the top of the Ponocho

**Conclusion:** I won't give up on Switzerland, but a walking trip to Spain is a pretty good option to get away from dank UK winter weather. I am going to do some serious research on other walking areas in Spain.

### Navigation - some thoughts:

Nowadays I rarely use paper maps. So called 'Open Source Maps' are high quality digital maps which contain almost all the paths that I ever wish to use in Spain, Switzerland and most other countries (all the paths that I have used from the Fletcher book, and also all the paths that I ever walk in Switzerland, are fully mapped). Not, unfortunately, the UK. The vague, indistinct, boggy and scree covered paths that the UK specialises in have not, as yet, been fully

mapped by OSM (and are often figments of the Ordnance Survey imagination). However, the UK is limping along about 5-10 years behind the curve.

OSM maps are not topographic maps like the Ordnance Survey maps (NB: annoying clash of acronyms here), and their equivalents in other countries, but they display paths (and roads of course) and enable so called 'point-to-point' navigation such as car satnavs do, even on walking paths. Contours can also be downloaded, if desired, at 50m intervals.

On the other hand, OSM maps are excellent for following the sort of tracks that I am talking about. Moreover, they can be downloaded before you go so have no need of a signal when you are using them, which

is obviously very useful when you are in the middle of nowhere. And, before anyone castigates me (again): 'your battery might run out of power then where would you be!' That has never yet happened to me (setting the phone to airline mode dramatically reduces the power consumption), and I carry a spare, fully charged, phone with me in case it does.

There are various apps out there for using these maps - the maps are Open Source, not proprietary, so anyone or any app can use them, for free (the app might not be free but the maps are). My preferred app is 'OsmAnd'. This is an extremely good app with a host of useful (and also useless) features and settings. Its main drawback is that it has a host of features and settings! Unix/Linux users will love it, but Microsoft users possibly not. For example, its waypoint files are plain text so you can write shell scripts to do things like convert a spreadsheet of, for example, Munro locations into a waypoints file - if you like that sort of thing... Of course, there are other, considerably simpler, apps out there using these maps but I don't know anything about them.

Most club members will probably have a drawerful of OS maps, but if you want to go walking abroad, try out an OSM app.



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*We had two major gear failures on separate summits, one of which had taken us five hours to reach*

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## Lyngen Alps Norway April 2024

### David and Mary-Lucy More

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Tromso Airport April 2023: no luggage arrived for a 10-day ski tour.

We're back one year on and we have this year's gear in full! Hire car is ready and we're off on the two and half-hour drive to our accommodation. The rain has been falling pretty much for the last week, very little new snow as the freezing level is high, not looking so good. The first few days we stay low,

too much wind and low cloud - very Scottish conditions. Things start to improve on day four, it's now freezing at sea level. Snow very icy up to 300 metres, harscheisen on from leaving the car, but above 300 metres, with a sunny aspect, they are no longer needed. The summits we do in the next ten days range from 818 to 1219 metres all starting from sea level. As the summits

progress and day time temperatures rise with sixteen hours of daylight, we get spring snow on most of our ski descents. The descents are not always back the way we ascended so it's good to have a Norwegian GPS map system as finding your car in the thick birch woods below 250 metres can be tricky.

We had two major gear failures on separate summits, one of which had

“

*Tool kit out; do we have enough Duct Tape and cable ties to attach to ski boot to ski, we do!*

”

taken us five hours to reach. On the first problem summit somebody was going to have to ski back to the car on one leg, which was going to take longer than the ascent! Tool kit out; do we have enough Duct Tape and cable ties to attach to ski boot to ski, we do! Once ready to start down there is no way of releasing the ski in the event of a fall. Good progress is made until we have to skin over a col. Duct Tape and cable ties are arranged over the toe of the







boot in order for the ski skins to do their job. At the col summit attachments are completed again in the cold. Safely back at the car and the Duct Tape and cable ties can be cut off the offending ski and binned. Thankfully Lyngseidet has two supermarkets which supply most replacement odds and ends. This binding problem repeated itself again three days later on the same person's other ski, but as we had practiced the

repair this time it went like a Formula 1 tyre change! By now the small ski shop in Lyngseidet knew us well.... can they replace a broken binding every night, maybe, but they asked how long are you here for!

The rest of the stunning summits completed were uneventful and the excellent weather and snow conditions continued until our return to Edinburgh.

“

*By now the  
small ski shop in  
Lyngseidet knew  
us well*

”



## A Love Letter to Scottish Rock

### Michael Stephenson

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I moved to Edinburgh with my now wife Idoia in 2018 from London. My mother was originally from Edinburgh so I had always been brought up to believe it was the city on the hill. When the opportunity presented itself to get out of London and re-locate with my Government job I therefore grabbed it with both hands.

This in itself improved our quality of life significantly. Whilst there are some aspects of London I miss, swapping the pollution, noise and the hectic pace of existence that was frankly becoming unaffordable for the more sedate life of Edinburgh was one of the best decisions I and Idoia ever made. By way of example, to get to work, previously I had a miserable 45 minute commute on the Hammersmith and City line that took me past such joys as the burned out remains of Grenfell tower. Now I have for a pleasant stroll over Holyrood Park and up the Royal Mile.

Prior to the move my nearest crags had either been Swanage in Dorset, or Wye Valley, although my happy hunting grounds

had always been North Wales- the Llanberis Pass, Dinworgig Slate Quarries, Tremadog and the glory that is Gogarth in Anglesey. Yes, I did the obligatory time on grit in the Peak, experienced the joy of Cornish granite but my one true love (after my wife) was the big single and multi-pitch routes in North Wales.

In a manner of speaking the move saved my life (although I'll never really know). This is because I'm slightly obsessed with on-sighting and over a number of years I'd managed to climb everything I could in North Wales which only left me with the routes I couldn't. I still get flash backs to a route called 'Beasts of the Field' in the Llanberis Pass, an 8 meter fall and inversion where I ended up with a nasty rope burn and my head one foot off the ground.

When I finally settled into Edinburgh and found some great climbing partners (mostly through the auspices of this club and with thanks once again to Dougie for introducing me) it was with quiet relief that I eventually lowered the tempo and settled into the



“

*At certain times of the year the midges can turn a paradise into purgatory whilst the silent menace of ticks makes my skin crawl*

”

enjoyment of a big country full of a treasure trove of rock.

Just the sheer variety gives pause for thought. The Granite of Cir Mhor, the Sandstone of Stack Pollaidh and Torridon. Lewisian Gneiss (which truly is God's own rock) the Rhyolite of the Coe and all the varieties of rock in between. All requiring a different style of climbing, protection and all demanding our respect.

Coming from the South where an approach to a crag will normally take between 5 and 45 minutes, the sheer scale has required a change of attitude. A two to three hour walk into a British crag with a tent was a completely alien concept to me before I moved to Scotland. It took a while for me to get my head round it – thanks once again to Dougie for the inspiration and Jamie and Andrew Crowe for showing me we could do it and even enjoy it!

Of course climbing in Scotland has not all been plain sailing. Having climbed in Wales I'm used to being rained off routes but not so much blown off them. At certain times of the year the midges can turn a paradise into purgatory whilst the silent menace of ticks makes my skin crawl.

In seasons past the midge threat has been enough to send me south to the Lake District to look for my climbing after June. But this season I've come to realise that if you choose the right conditions and the right mountain or crag, the midge threat if not completely removed can be mitigated. In a sense we may have the midges and ticks to thank at least in part for the peace and solitude of the Scottish Mountains. That and their relative inaccessibility.

Jamie at the top of South Ridge Direct





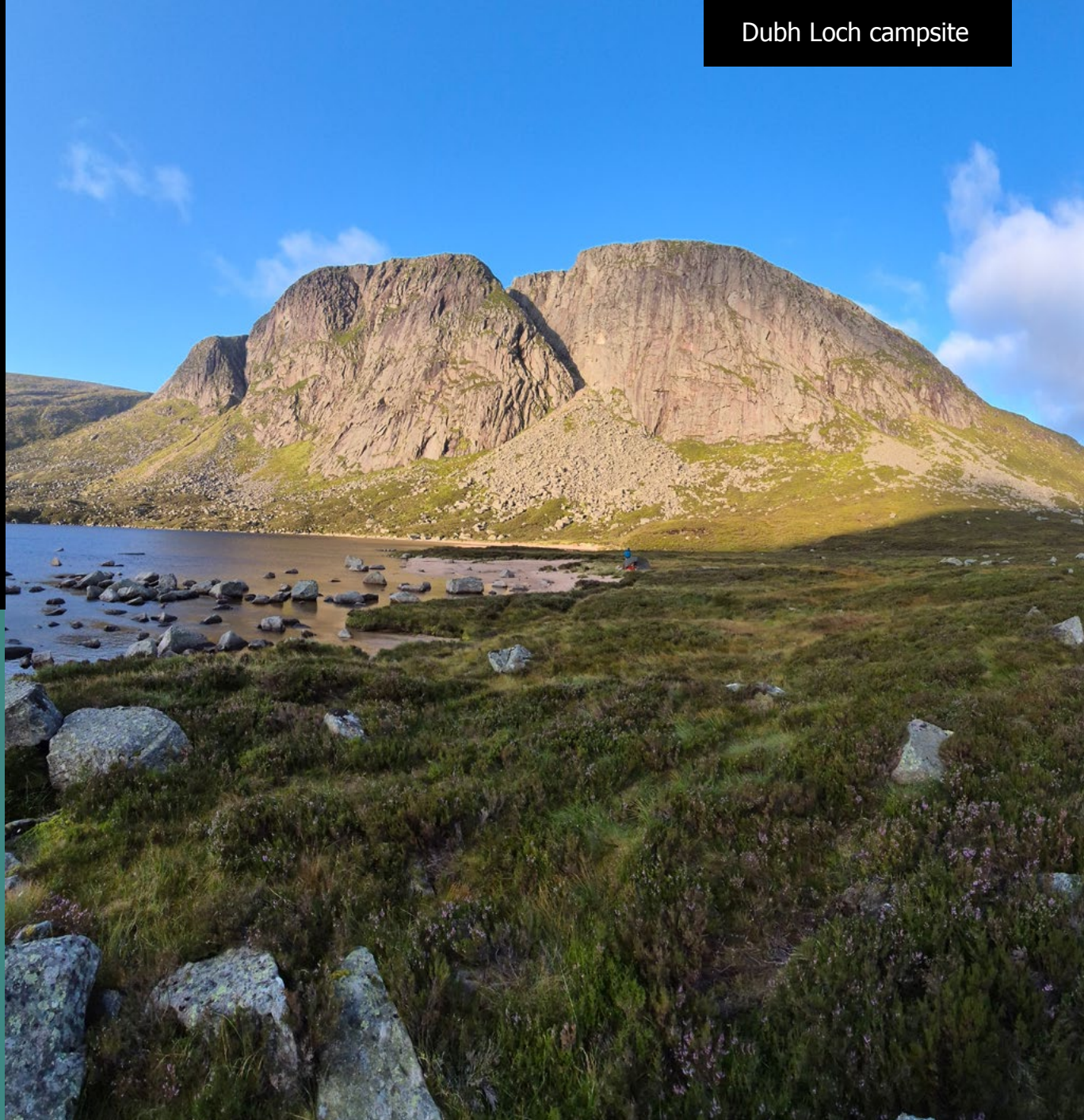
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*I'm always delighted to see anyone else on a Scottish Crag or mountain in summer, particularly as some of the routes on the high mountain crags do need more traffic*

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I'm always delighted to see anyone else on a Scottish Crag or mountain in summer, particularly as some of the routes on the high mountain crags do need more traffic. This is in contrast to what I've heard from friends down south who still frequent the crags and mountains of Wales how, particularly post covid there has been a massive upswing in visitors to something that feels like a saturation point.

Paradoxically I do however still slightly struggle with this issue of accessibility



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*My final observation is that whilst I love the Scottish Highlands they can sometimes feel quite desolate places*

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Suilven - beautiful and remote

though. When I lived in London, it was major undertaking to get to the highlands requiring at least a nine hour drive and more if coming by train. The fact that living in Edinburgh, we can easily do a day trip to Glen Coe and back still befuddles me.

My final observation is that whilst I love the Scottish Highlands they can sometimes feel quite desolate places. It really is noticeable when looking down into some mountain valleys, the lack of trees and forests.

I'm really pleased there is a continuing discussion around this and the need for re-wilding. Whilst I'm not expecting to see the re-introduction of wolves any time soon, It's heartening to see the beginnings of new woods and forests being nurtured – hopefully a gift we can impart to future generations.

In reading this quick write up I'm hoping it encourages you to look at the beauty that is our home country with fresh eyes

and maybe appreciate things more that you've always taken for granted. I'd also like to encourage you to get out there are really make the most of what it has to offer. This requires a commitment to adventures and all that they may bring. Things won't always go your way, but that really is part of the whole package – creating deep and rich experiences and hopefully building strong bonds with like minded people and lasting memories that will stay with you forever.





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*It's unusual for the weather to be bad everywhere and often means that it's possible to climb somewhere outside*

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## Using Technology to Help Identify Where to Climb

### Andy Bladon

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We're very lucky to have a large and diverse range of climbing options within 2 – 3 hours drive from Edinburgh. These include varying terrains (e.g. mountains, low-lying crags, and sea-cliffs), rock types, and climbing disciplines (i.e. winter, traditional, sport, and bouldering). Conceptually, this sounds great, but in a country with weather that varies rapidly over short distances

and timeframes, it's very rare for all options to be viable on a given day. This spatial variation in the weather, however, means it's unusual for the weather to be bad everywhere and often means that it's possible to climb somewhere outside. The challenge, therefore, becomes efficiently and accurately identifying where to climb, which often requires an understanding

of the spatial and temporal variations of multiple weather variables (e.g. rainfall, windspeed, and temperature). Typically, every climber has their own process for doing this, but this often involves scouring forecasts at multiple locations and building a mental model of where the weather might be favourable for climbing across an area of interest. Analysing so much



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*I'll spend the start of the week getting excited about the different climbing options, only to become more despondent as the weekend approaches because of a troublesome weather forecast*

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data and memorising the condition at multiple locations is time-consuming and error-prone, and if the forecast changes a complete re-review is required. Additionally, the analysis is subjective, meaning different climbers might reach different conclusions about the suitability of the forecast. To remedy some of these issues, I've created a software application that retrieves the weather forecast for multiple locations and performs a review of multiple weather variables. The intention of the application is to make the review process more efficient,

repeatable, and less error-prone, increasing the chances of having a successful day climbing, which is especially important for the time-limited climber (i.e. any non-professional climber).

Commonly, the week prior to an upcoming climbing day I'll spend the start of the week getting excited about the different climbing options, only to become more despondent as the weekend approaches because of a troublesome weather forecast. The challenge then becomes finding anywhere that's viable to climb, as well as finding a climbing partner with similar aspirations and an optimistic interpretation of the forecast. To identify locations where the weather might be ok for climbing, I commonly use one of the following methods:

1. Review locations individually and try to remember the condition when comparing with subsequent locations:
  - Positive: Multiple variables can easily be assessed for each location, using a table for example.
  - Negative: Requires lots of information to be memorised when comparing current location with others (e.g. "How bad was the wind in the northern corries again?").

Near the summit of the Gran Paradiso



2. Assess time-series maps (i.e. maps that show variations over time and space) for each variable and try to identify location where all variables are ok:
  - Positive: Nicely visual and easy to see how one variable changes spatially and temporally.
  - Negative: Hard to remember how each variable evolved through time and space when reviewing other variables (e.g. “It looked very wet in the central belt, but I can’t remember if there was a spot of rain over Eive slabs on Saturday morning?”).

The examples above are just two possible ways – there are many others and each climber has their own process, which is highly personal. Despite the many approaches, fundamentally we’re all doing the same thing. This is to categorize the weather at several possible climbing locations according to a set of personally acceptable criteria. My categories are something like:

- Definitely not! (i.e. conditions look bad).
- Maybe, if there’s nowhere else (i.e. conditions are marginal).
- Definitely an option! (i.e. conditions are good).

As someone who struggles to remember

things, I often forget how a location was categorised when reviewing multiple locations. Additionally, if the forecast changes the categorisation process needs to be restarted, which is inefficient. For people who balance climbing with other commitments (e.g. work or family), time-consuming and inefficient processes would ideally be avoided and mistakes are especially upsetting. This is where technology can help!

A lot of the categorisation process involves work that can be automated, for example looking at the weather forecast (i.e. acquiring data) and applying some common criteria to the forecast. To help do some of the heavy-lifting I’ve created a software application that:

- Automatically retrieves weather forecast for locations of interest and makes it easy to review the forecast.
- Allows you to specify a set of personally acceptable criteria for categorising each location as good, marginal, or bad.

To date, the application has primarily been used by myself on trips to the Alps. An initial version of the application, which was called “Conditions Navigator”, was used on a trip to the Dolomites in 2023. The weather was good for the entire 10-day trip though, so the benefit was limited.

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*The ability to monitor climbing conditions across the region prior to our arrival and the ability to rapidly review the forecast during the trip was very useful*

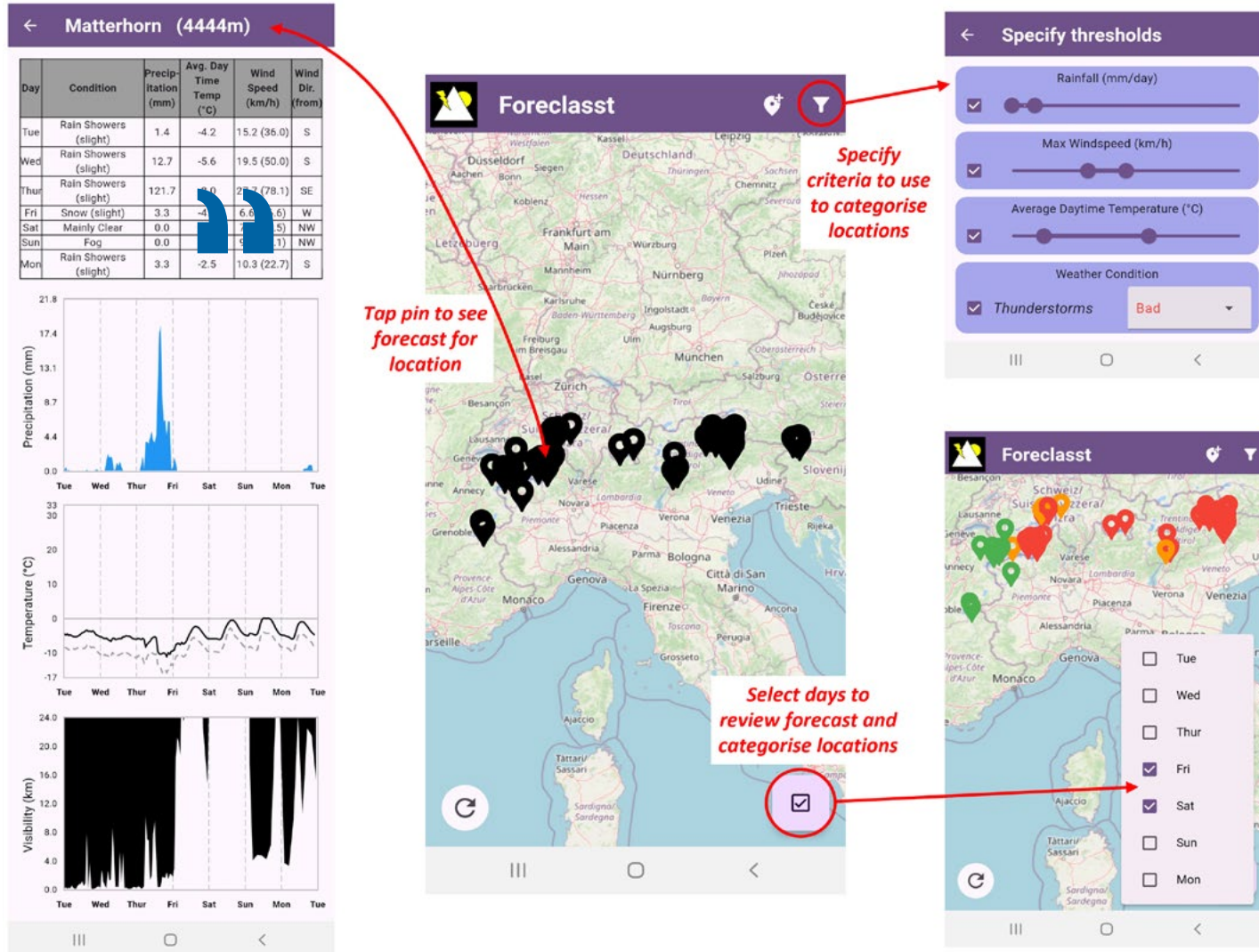
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However, the ability to monitor climbing conditions across the region prior to our arrival and the ability to rapidly review the forecast during the trip was very useful. The second version of the application, which is called “Foreclasst”, which is shown on the next page of the Newsletter, was used this year on a trip to the western Alps where the weather was more variable. I was able to use the application to quickly assess the state of the weather and climbing conditions with little effort. We were able to use the application to identify areas where the conditions would be good for

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We were able to use the application to identify areas where the conditions would be good for mountaineering and move accordingly

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*The result was less time spent reviewing forecasts and more time spent sitting in cafe's enjoying the local Rosti*

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mountaineering and move accordingly. The result was less time spent reviewing forecasts and more time spent sitting in cafe's enjoying the local Rosti! Ultimately, we had a very successful 8-day trip, summiting one 3000m peak and three 4000m peaks across three different regions (Pennine Alps, Bernese Alps, and Graian Alps).

So, what's next for the application? I'd like to start using the application to help

identify the best locations for more local adventures, such as day-long climbing trips from Edinburgh, hill walking, and locations for weekend camping trips with the family. The application could already do this, but there are some features that could be added to make it easier to use (e.g. changing the locations being reviewed). Longer-term, if people think the application could be useful to the wider community I might consider making it available for others. If you think the

application sounds like it would be useful to you, please let me know!

For anyone who's interested to know more about how the applications works, you can find out more by reading the following blog:

<https://www.esri.com/arcgis-blog/products/sdk-qt/developers/creating-app-to-identify-climbing-locations-using-weather-api/>





## Salisbury Crag: an Historic Article Denise Hesketh

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The crags were the first thing I saw as my bus drove into Edinburgh approaching from the south. They sat high on a hill looking out proudly towards the setting sun, their colour pink and glorious. Salisbury crags: an impressive volcanic sill hanging over the city of Edinburgh. It was my first time here. There were 2 other cities I could have chosen to study in. Looking out of my window at these beautiful outcrops, I knew I had made the right choice.

The first place I lived in was not far from the crags. Just a short walk away.

### **Stepping out onto golden rock**

At first my steps were tentative. I played around on easy scrambles close to the end of the quarry looking out into the distance at a man on black wall. He played with his black and white collie in between attempted sends of his chosen project on one of the steep and polished test pieces on the black wall.

“

*Often used as a descent route. I was never brave enough to descend it. It took me all my courage to go up*

”

Eventually I went to talk to him and took my first steps on the sun stroked Eastern buttress and main area of the face where the gentler routes are. It was a very popular wall where the longer routes were soloed as there were no areas for belays at the top. It was often used as a traverse wall with a beautiful line about a meter off the ground plus a couple of higher lines and variations.

The moves were varied and beautiful. Most

of it was fairly easy but it took a while to string together. In the end there were still a few sections that I didn't manage. There was a section that was very polished and both the lower and upper section. An area called black slab had a choice of traverse moves: one high up and a lower one which was more technical. I was only able to do the higher one with a mat there.

### **The lift**

I had been climbing there for well over a year before I was brave enough to attempt my first solo. The wall was about 12m high and the routes were too high to be named highballs. But they were harder than scrambles. The easiest of these was a moderate called the lift. Often used as a descent route. I was never brave enough to descend it. It took me all my courage to go up. It felt harder than a moderate, more like a V diff and without ropes.

On the top out you would leave the apparent safety of the ledge to swing round a corner using an airy foothold out onto the wall on the left, making moves up using a break with not quite positive holds for your hands, reaching high for the slightly rounded top holds. But it wasn't

over yet. The next bit was a tentative skip over the abyss to finish up the easy corner and scramble to the top. It was always so exhilarating to top feeling so alive. It always felt so exposed, more like a crag than a 10 metre route.

Technically, the hardest part of the climb was the start. I remember scuttling up the corner on very polished holds before throwing my left leg onto the ledge before pushing myself up. It was always such a thrutch. The climb was only moderate but I believe this was because the crux was so close to the ground. I would have given this move 4a especially with all the polish. Afterwards there was a series of rock over and mantel moves to a ledge you could have your lunch on. Before moving on to the committing moves to the top. Although generally I love downclimbing, I was never happy about reversing the route. Topping out was always topping to a place of safety. Going down the reverse was true. Stepping off the safety of the hill into the void. There was always a lovely atmosphere at the top. Such good energy. Often there was a dog to pat. People admired your bravery and were delighted to share in your experiences.





“

*But the climbing made the area extra special. Gave it that ingredient of magic*

”

Then there was the squeaky nippy shoe experience on the way down. So much less pain had I braved the downclimb. But the walk was pleasant enough with a panoramic view of the city and its views of the sea. I usually carried my phone up there on a small belt so I was able to take pictures. An easy scramble down a small outcrop in an area called Huttons rock shortened the walk considerably. Climbing added that extra magic to a popular area.

Many people used these paths including walkers, fell runners, many visiting the landmark Arthur's seat. There were many dog walkers and cyclists. And even a sled or two in winter.

But the climbing made the area extra special. Gave it that ingredient of magic. On a sunny day so many students as well as seasoned climbers would be gathered there trapped by the sun.

Topless rock athletes with their graceful bodies soloing the more difficult routes to effortlessly meander back down. While nearby a group of beginners would be taking their first tentative steps on real outdoor rock. Such beautiful granite. The way it would go red in the setting sun. There was some loose bits, but south quarry had been sculptured by our movements into a place of safety. The only rockfall I witnessed was in an area where there were no climbs.

“

*Everywhere else including the city would be freezing cold while we wore only T-shirts as we basked in the warm sun*

”

### **A sun trap**

Due to its South West facing aspect, climbing was possible all year round. It was often comfortable in winter, especially when sheltering from the North wind. Everywhere else including the city would be freezing cold while we wore only T-shirts as we basked in the warm sun.

It wouldn't be so pleasant in a west or south westerly but the crag always dried really quickly if it rained.

Sometimes your fingers got cold but that was okay too. It was close to the city and a warm café or bar.

It was such a wonderful place. There are so many fond memories. Located close to Pollock Halls and the University, it was very popular with students.

### **Black wall**

Many hard climbers would come to visit the area as there were some serious challenges on the very polished black wall. These problems were not only polished and slippery, but very hard indeed with black wall traverse at 6c and a low black wall traverse at 7b. The leftwall and layback problem being the more doable ones at 6b, but still very hard. Especially with the shiny polish.

An enchanted place with challenges for everyone.

It was always an excellent place for hard training with several problems at 7a and 7b. There is also a little black wall with little black wall traverse at 6a with side pulls and a distinctly fierce crux. As well as a couple of 6as and an apparently very forgettable

Evening light



6b, there are a couple of easier problems. There is even a ramble at 4+: a couple of easier problems called the flake and the juggy undercut.

Hope amidst the sadness.

There was something for everyone at Salisbury crags. Even the walkers are now limited to certain paths to walk on as many beautiful walks including the radical way remain closed off. It has been this way for a very long time.

Now big fences surround the entire section of climbing and walking. There is always the downclimb. I was never brave enough to do this and right now I wouldn't trust a scramble down there, having had no previous visit to check things. The rock is probably horribly loose now, especially after the authorities vandalised it. It broke my heart to see the rubble that was once the crux of my one solo called the lift. This beautiful section of the Wall lay there in a slab close to the ground like a tombstone, gently angled, felled down to insignificance by these louts. What in the world were they doing? They said the area was unsafe, loose! It is now!

There is a rumour that some folk still visit. Apparently the fence isn't that hard to scale. If you really want to go there that badly it's all there still. I don't know what state is in now but I can only hope some climbers are saving the area from growing to seed.

As for me, I am willing to wait. I have a belief in my heart that these beautiful outcrops will openly welcome us again, and legally. I don't want to jeopardise this. I have faith in the SMC, the BMC and all the affiliated clubs such as our good JMCS. Yes there were some good times to be had on the final outdoor meet of the year. It was a quick trip up to Salisbury crags followed by a meal in the nearby pizza hut. I believe this meet is indoors now.

Hopefully such happy days can return. Maybe the crag can be improved. Maybe it will be a better and even safer place. We can live in hope and with fond dreams.

Postscript – this article was written in the autumn of 2023. There appears now to be some prospect of bouldering at the South Quarry starting again in 2025 – maybe more real than a dream, keep hoping. See the update on the Mountaineering Scotland

“

*I have a belief in my heart that these beautiful outcrops will openly welcome us again, and legally*

”

website <https://www.mountaineering.scot/news/welcome-update-on-future-of-radical-road>

Sources:

SummitPost [www.summitpost.org](http://www.summitpost.org)

Org>Salisbury crags. (online article)

UKC crag logbook

UKC link to guidebook purchase

No thrills guidebook :Salisbury Crags

Reading app: GUMROAD





“

*Up there a herd of cows lives on and around the tarmac – they may or may not decide to get out of your way but, whatever they do, they do it slowly*

”

## Three Hills in the North West

### David Small

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#### Beinn Ghobhlach

Why should a man climb Beinn Ghobhlach?  
Because it is there!

Applying Mallory's famous statement about Everest (8849 metres high) to Beinn Ghobhlach (635 metres high) may seem ridiculous; but Beinn Ghobhlach is so prominent in the view from the A832 road

between Gruinard and Dundonnell that its draw on the hillwalker is out of all proportion to its modest size. You just want to be up there on top of such an obvious challenge – the objective dimensions of the challenge are secondary.

One morning in early September I drove along the narrow B road that leads from Dundonnell House towards Badralloch on

the north shore of Little Loch Broom. This road starts off in luxurious woodland more typical of Gloucestershire than Wester Ross, but then climbs on to tree-less, grassy moorland. Up there a herd of cows lives on and around the tarmac – they may or may not decide to get out of your way but, whatever they do, they do it slowly. Sounding my horn seemed to have no particular effect on them, neither did gesticulations or oaths,

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*It would have been a fine place to linger if the midges, and my own desire to push on to the summit, had allowed it – a case of itchy skin and itchy feet*

”



Liathach above Glen Torridon

but eventually they shifted around enough to allow me through and past them to the end of the road at Badralloch, where the path to the isolated village of Scoraig begins.

There was no wind, and the surface of Little Loch Broom was completely flat. Looking down from the path (about 50m above sea level) I could make out a porpoise making its way up the loch towards the open sea, repeatedly surfacing and submerging in a way that left a pattern of stitch marks

on the water. And, as I walked, families of stonechats flitted around in the vegetation on either side of the path, perching on stalks long enough to advertise their presence, but moving on before I could focus my binoculars on them.

Quite soon it was time to stop gazing around; the way to Beinn Ghobhlach leaves the path at a place of one's own choosing and then (compulsorily) tackles 200 vertical metres of steep, trackless hillside. Figuring

out the best route and slogging upwards, head down, absorbed all my attention until I reached a bealach in the ridge and could have a breather and look across a corrie containing two large lochans to the summit cone of the Beinn. The corrie is not objectively big – nothing on this hill is – but it is nevertheless impressive, wild and beautiful. It would have been a fine place to linger if the midges, and my own desire to push on to the summit, had allowed it – a case of itchy skin and itchy feet.



Losing some height and crossing between the lochans, I started towards the summit with another heathery slog until the vegetation receded and the going got easier on the gravelly, rocky slopes that lead to the final ridge. Because it is so isolated, Beinn Ghobhlach is a superb viewpoint for the mountains to the south, east and north and for the Hebrides to the west. A haze impaired the visibility when I was there, but there was still plenty of landscape and seascape to look at, much of it carrying memories of climbing and kayaking trips in the past, mostly carefree times, but with the odd near disaster thrown in. I had a sense of looking down, not only on creation (as per the New Seekers' song Top of the World) but also on scenes from my life; no doubt a sign of advancing years – so much to look back on.

It is possible to return to Badralloch by following the outward route, but I went down Beinn Ghobhlach's rocky west ridge, making for the point where the outflow from one of the lochans pours in a waterfall over the corrie rim. The going was easy enough to get to that point, but continuing in descent westwards involved a lot of steep, tussocky grass interspersed with rocky steps and, lower down, boulders and holes hidden by the long vegetation. Care was required, and I looked well to each step.

At last I regained the path and turned to walk back to Badralloch. The porpoise had gone, but the stonechats were still there. So were the cows on the road home. With the inner satisfaction of a fine little walk completed, I was more tolerant than I had been earlier of their reluctant, slow motion manoeuvring to let me through.

### **Sgorr nan Lochan Uaine and Sgurr Dubh**

Six weeks after my walk up Beinn Ghobhlach, the season had definitely turned from late summer into autumn. The green in the landscape had changed to brown, the highest hills were dusted with snow and the stags were roaring as I drove down Glen Torridon in the early morning of a fine day. My aim was to walk up the two Corbetts on the south side of the glen, opposite Beinn Eighe - Sgorr nan Lochan Uaine and Sgurr Dubh. They are not such obvious hills as Beinn Ghobhlach.

In truth, I knew little about them and was mainly motivated to climb them by the wish to complete my list of Torridon Corbetts. Approaching them with no particular expectations, I was to be delighted with how things turned out.

I set off on the stalker's path past the Ling Hut. It would be the only real path I would

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*Because it is so isolated, Beinn Ghobhlach is a superb viewpoint for the mountains to the south, east and north and for the Hebrides to the west*

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*But taking in the view from the summit erased any hard feelings about the difficulty of getting there*

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be on all day. After about 3km I had to abandon the path and take to the bog, heather, rock and undulations of a typical Torridon hillside. The worst feature was the undulations – time and again I would go up a miniature escarpment only to find I had to descend some way on the other side before tackling another of the same. It felt like an ascent of 20 metres for every 10 metres of real height gain. Getting higher, the ascent grew more constant, with stretches of solid rock among the vegetation, some patches of sandstone (lovely and grippy to walk up) and some of quartzite (best avoided, especially if wet).

Like Beinn Ghobhlach, Sgorr nan Lochan Uaine has a distinct summit cone. In the Sgorr's case it is a wasteland of shattered quartzite, not at all easy walking. But taking in the view from the summit erased any hard feelings about the difficulty of getting there. The morning sun was picking out mountains galore – the Achnashellach peaks, the Fannichs, the Fisherfield Munros, An Teallach, Beinn Eighe and Liathach, Beinn Damh and many others, with the blue of Loch Torridon leading west to the distant northern end of Skye. A sight to provoke more reminiscences of past exploits. It was worth resting for a while to take

in the view, because the descent towards Sgurr Dubh was clearly going to be awkward. It seems on the map that there is a connecting ridge between the two hills, but it is so heavily featured with boulders, bumps, lochans, streams, crags and natural obstacles of every kind that it is impossible to plot a course along it by working from the map alone. You just have to pick a way, when you are actually there, with as few false starts and as little wasted energy as possible. Fortunately, although not designed for smooth or straightforward progress, the scenery is fascinating – I cannot begin to imagine the geological forces that created





the landscape and produced the boulders of all shapes and sizes that lie strewn around. (I glimpsed a dipper on one of the lochans – I did not know that they could be found so high up, or indeed on still water.)

Eventually I started the ascent of Sgurr Dubh's summit lump – to call it a cone would suggest something more elegant than is consistent with the reality. It is completely covered with scree and boulders and the climb is rather tedious, but there was pleasure in finding and skirting round

another lovely little lochan on the way up. From the summit I could look down into Glen Torridon and see the car park from which I had started earlier in the day. There were 700 vertical metres between me and it.

I would have given a lot for a parapente, and the skill to fly it, but I had to do things the slow way. So I descended the summit lump on foot, then threaded a way from lochan to lochan to find a stream in a gorge, which I followed on its true right bank, down some surprisingly steep ground, to join the path back to the Ling

Hut and, beyond that, my van.

I did not need any cows on the road in Glen Torridon to make me take my time driving to Kinlochewe and, beyond, taking the long road home; I was loath to leave the delights of that lovely glen and its magical hills. Note – I had enquired by email on the previous day whether any stalking was taking place in the area where I would be walking. I received a very polite and encouraging reply from the estate - [neilcoulin@gmail.com](mailto:neilcoulin@gmail.com)



“

*The main change is the number of routes, reflected in the size of the guidebook*

”

## Leonidio - is it still the 'new Kalymnos'?

Bryan Rynne

I went to Leonidio in October 2018, with Davy, James and Sue, when there was a lot of hype about it being the 'new Kalymnos'. At the time my conclusion was:

We had an excellent trip, with very good climbing and weather. However, I don't think that this is 'the new Kalymnos', mainly because there is much less climbing in the

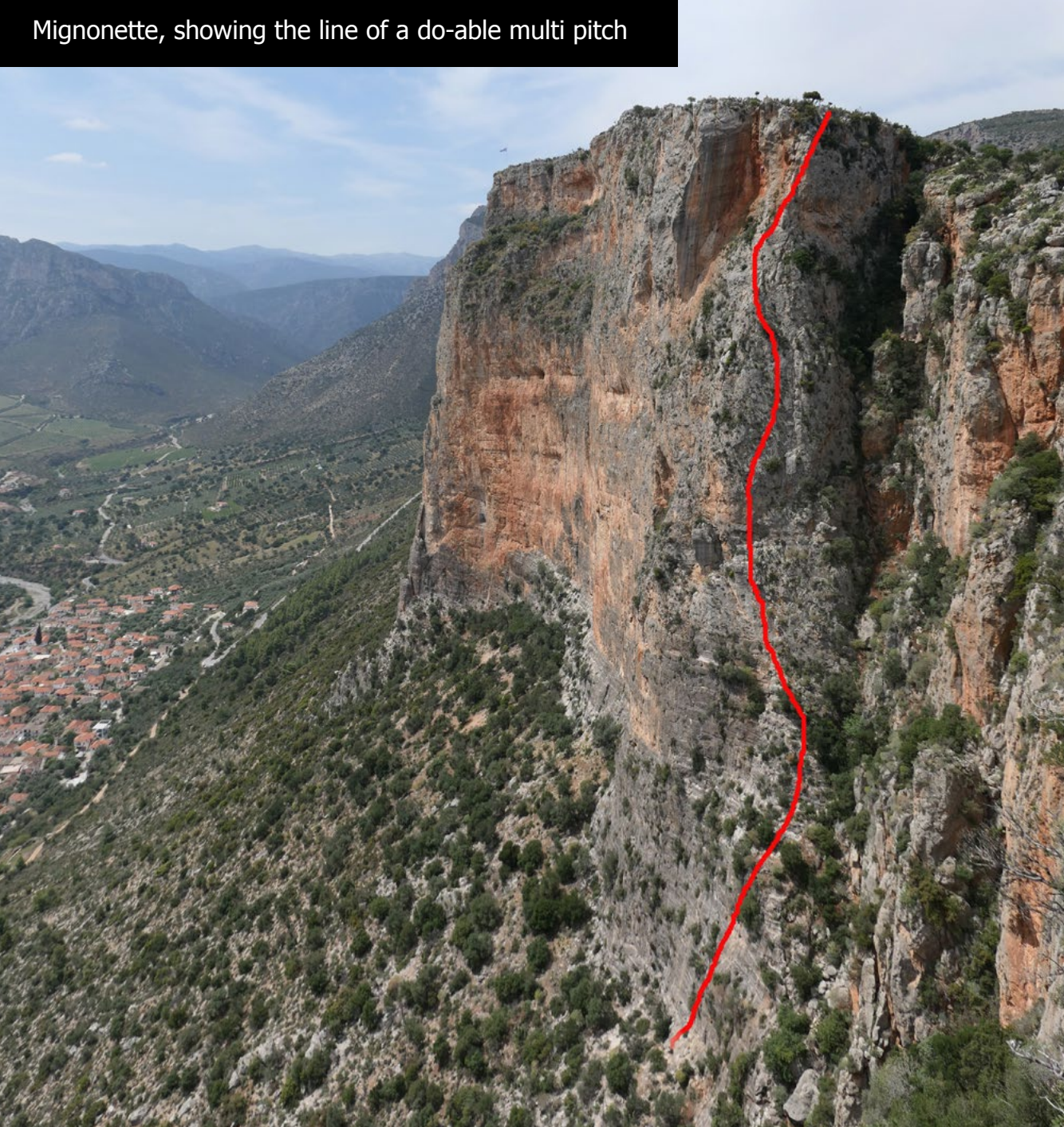
near vicinity of Leonidio than there is in Kalymnos. I would happily go back, but not as often as to Kalymnos. If we did return, we would probably end up repeating many of the routes that we did this time.

I returned in April this year with Patrick, so I thought that I would mention a few of the changes that I observed since 2018.

The main change is the number of routes, reflected in the size of the guidebook. In 2018 the main guide to Leonidio was a (large) section of a selective (I assume) guide to the entire mainland Greece, by Aris Theodoropoulos, who also produces the standard Kalymnos guide. In 2024 Leonidio has its own, quite fat, guide also produced by Aris. There is also a guide produced by



Mignonette, showing the line of a do-able multi pitch



the local Panjika climbing cooperative. This apparently existed in 2018 but was hard to obtain (even the Panjika cooperative shack in Leonidio did not have copies...), but has since been greatly expanded. As you might expect, there seems to be a certain amount of animosity on the internet complaining that the outsider Aris (who is Greek) is taking the bread from the mouths of the local climbers (who appear to be German!). I am simplifying this since I could not be bothered reading beyond about the first paragraph of a diatribe - I just bought the Aris book, since it was easy to get hold of, and bunged Eu 20 into the Panjika bolt-fund when I got there.

So, there are a lot more climbs there than in 2018.

I also got the impression that the town is a lot nicer feeling than in 2018, with more cafes and restaurants and generally possibly a bit more prosperous than before. I can't be sure since I did not stay in the town on either trip, but my recollection is that it just felt a bit more vibrant than in 2018. The Panjika cooperative have certainly moved to considerably fancier premises.

This year we stayed in Poulithra, a





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*Considering the time, weather, and imminent darkness we were expecting to be walking into the darkness alone*

”

15-minute drive south of Leonidio, in the direction of Kyparissi but we did not go and try out the climbing in Kyparissi. This was a very nice place to stay, a very quiet little village with a tiny supermarket which kept us going after a big shop in Leonidio and a superb restaurant, right on the seashore, about 5 minutes walk from our apartment. The food was stunning - people clearly drove long distances to eat there.

The fish was the best of the lot. In fact, if you ordered fish you got taken out the back to a fridge and asked to pick a fish - yes, an entire fish, almost certainly straight from the sea

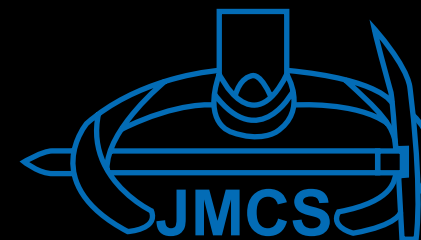
that day. Actually, the waiter was a smart guy and already knew that I was British, and so of course he knew that I would not have a clue, so he immediately rattled off the names of all the fish and how they could be cooked etc. I think that he thought that would help, but he clearly overestimated my culinary skills. Rather feebly, I pointed at the smallest one and said how about that one... Whatever it was, and however they cooked it, it was excellent. I had fish for most of the rest of the week, and I gradually managed to get the waiter to decide what I wanted (and gave him big tips for doing so).

Anyway, what about the climbing? Somewhat counterintuitively, despite the much bigger guide book, when it came to looking for crags to go to we seemed to end up going back to many of the crags that I had gone to in 2018. It just seemed that given the grades we wanted to climb at, and from the descriptions of the crags, the best crags had ended up in the first guide, which I suppose is not too surprising. Clearly, the bolters are likely to start on the best crags. Obviously, we did not just repeat what I had done before, and if we had been there for two weeks we would have moved on to far more crags. But the much fatter guide does not entirely reflect





The restaurant in Leonidio and some of the crags in the distance



# 2024

the visitor experience, unless you were to go there regularly, and even then I suspect that many of the new crags would be out of my league.

One big difference between 2018 and 2024 was that it was far less crowded this time - maybe the hype has worn off a bit. Of course, I am not comparing like with like here since I went in October in 2018 and in April in 2024 which I am sure made a difference. But I am not sure if that explains all of the difference. Whatever the reason, on many occasions in 2018

we were literally queuing for routes and being jostled by people next to us (it was like being at Ratho on a crowded evening), while that only happened once this year, on a very roadside crag which was also in the shade.

One other difference was that it seemed a lot hotter this year, but again that might be the time of year. Within a few days of our arrival we were quite definitely seeking out shady crags, and it was clear that other people were doing likewise. The locals were complaining about their olives not growing,

which I was also hearing in Kalymnos.

So, what is the conclusion this time? We had a good trip, with good climbing. But for whatever reason (hard to explain) I just prefer Kalymnos. I have been to Kalymnos quite often now (verging on annually by now) and I keep on enjoying it. I can't quite say the same about Leonidio. I would go again if someone wanted to organise a trip for me, but I don't think that I will organise one. But don't let me put anyone off - if you haven't been and want a (hot) sports climbing holiday give it a go.