

It's hard as nails

Welcome to the Autumn issue of the Tricouni Club newsletter.

The autumn meet and AGM approach, and Seatoller reported that they were fully booked and had turned people away, great news after a couple of years where we have not been at capacity. A last minute cancellation has freed up a room (yes, yes, *mea culpa*), so if you can, use it!

The newsletter has taken some extra work on this occasion due to a veritable avalanche of content. Many thanks and here's hoping that other members can also send me a few lines! The club's Easter meet report arrives courtesy of Tony Reynolds. Malcolm provides a report of a Threading the Needle event in May, and some tales of derring-do in the Cairngorms. Katie delivers an account of walking on the other side of the world.

Looking forward to seeing you all at the AGM!



Malcolm and Patsy welcome visitors to the FRCC hut

Submissions for future editions should be sent to the secretary at sean@thegasman.org. Thanks.



The Tricouni Club

Dates for your diary:

- 22nd - 24th Oct 2010
 - Autumn meet
 - AGM 6pm 23rd October
- 22nd - 25th April 2011
 - Easter meet

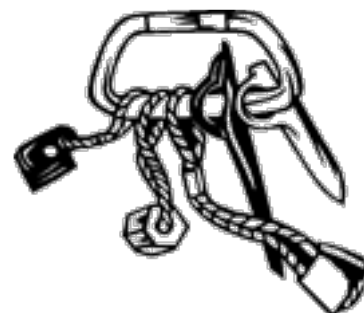
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Easter meet: Friday 2nd April

After years of saying "One day, on the way up, we will go up there" Eve and Tony Reynolds climbed Helm Crag from Grasmere.

David Baggaley went up and back down Langstrath whilst David and Joyce together with Karen, Andy Kingston, Peter Leigh, Richard and Katie Stockwell, Stuart and Kristina with baby Raya headed for Langdale. Stuart, Kristina and Raya made it up to the tarn, the rest headed for Pavey Ark, Harrison Stickle and Pike O' Blisco. Apparently only Peter reached all three tops.

According to Chris Lincoln, he, Vicky and Bob went to that "boggy place". Whilst every Tricouni is perfectly familiar with this form of topographical description it is probably worth recording that what he actually meant was Blea Tarn and Watendlath.

Jason decided to have a rest day and ran along the river to Grange, round Derwentwater, up to Watendlath, down to Rosthwaite and back.

Sandi, not quite emulating Jake's day, but with equal spiritual reward, sat and admired the hazy view of the Lake District from Morecambe.

Roy, Helen and Peter Cross who left home later than most had a quick trip up Cat Bells en route for Seatoller.

At dinner on Friday evening President Eve invited everyone to join her in toasting Richard Ling with a glass of Port - his favourite tippie.

Easter meet: Saturday 3 April

Sandi and David Baggaley started at the top of Honister Pass and climbed to Green Gable before descending via Gillercombe. On the top they met two Dutch walkers who were without a map or compass and who thought they were on Glaramara! With such classical mountain acumen they were offered immediate membership of the Tricounis

Betty, Sasha and her three children Ellana and Amelie and Andrew together with Stuart and Kristina Clode and Baby Raya walked to Castle Crag. Peter Leigh, Jason, Bob, Vicky, Chris, Roy and Peter did the Causey Pike, Sail and Grisedale Pike round and experienced an Easter mixture of climatic conditions that included sun, sleet and snow.

In a burst of quite untypical forward planning activity for Tricounis, Eve and Tony went up to Sty Head to see what the conditions on the route to Lingmell looked like.

Helen, David and Joyce Clode, Richard, Katie, Andy, Karen, John Caldwell together with a potential new member David Frisk and his son Sam walked up Langstrath taking in Eagle



Helicopter Rescue on the Corridor Route

Easter meet: Sunday 4 April

The carrying of Richard Ling's ashes to Lingmell was the objective for the day. Taking account of the conditions Eve sensibly decided not to venture forth on her titanium knee but everyone else joined the Ling family and headed up towards Sty Head. Betty, Sasha and her children together with the younger Clodes and family made it to Sty Head before returning via Grains Gill. The rest of the party continued along the Corridor Route. With snow under foot conditions were not easy and at the section just before crossing the branch off Piers Ghyll Andy found the going difficult and turned back. Because of the covering of snow the party missed the path off to the right to Lingmell and continued up towards the col between Broad Crag and Scafell Pike. Realising they were too high they contoured round and down to Lingmell Col then up to the top. The sun came through the

clouds at this stage presenting views in all directions and producing a fitting moment for Sandy and her family to bury Richard's ashes under a stone at the base of the Cairn. Vicky read the following extract from Sandi's prayer that had been read out at Richard's funeral:

"I have left you now, my much loved family and friends and have climbed my unknown mountain. Have a care for each other and we will meet again, wherever and whenever you wish to remember me".

After lunch the group, with the exception of Bob, headed back down the Corridor Route. Bob extended the day by heading up onto Broad Crag and Great End before descending to Seathwaite. As a result of this detour Bob missed out on the helicopter mountain rescue witnessed by the rest of the Tricounis who, having reached the point where Andy had

turned back in the morning, were stopped by the Wasdale Mountain Rescue Team. They had been called out to assist a climber injured by a rock fall. They in turn had called out the helicopter and asked the party to keep back on the path until the rescue had been completed. It took about 45 minutes before the party was again able to continue the descent but the delay did mean that they had a front row view of a medic and stretcher being lowered and the injured person and medic being winched back - the operation being carried out with admirable efficiency.

Back at Seatoller the Dan and Lynne invited the members into the garden to toast Richard in champagne before dinner at which David Baggaley shared his memories of days out with Richard.

Sandi laying Richards ashes on Lingmell





Tricounis on Lingmell

Easter meet: Monday 5 April

It was raining and most of the group travelled home after breakfast. Stuart, Kristina, Raya, David and Joyce went in to Keswick in the morning. Their intention was to walk by the Lake but it was too windy

so instead they sensibly embarked on the time honoured pursuit of repairing to the warmth of the shops to price up non-essentials such as up to date maps, compasses and the like. Stuart and family

left when the rain stopped and David and Joyce met up with Richard and Katie about lunchtime. Afterwards they walked from Ashness Bridge to Rosthwaite via Watendlath.



Raising a toast at Seatoller

Threading the Needle 2010

Ideas for informal Tricouni gatherings spring from many sources. Two mountain expeditions in recent years have been directly related to Tony and Eve's pursuit of bionic metal knee joints. A couple of years ago we crammed in a quick visit to Glencoe to satisfy a request from Tony to do the Aonach Eagach ridge before he had a joint replaced and this Spring we assembled in the Lakes at the command of Madam President 'erself so that she could repeat earlier triumphs of the Climbers Traverse on Great Gable.

The party consisting of me and Patsy, Tony and Eve, Lynn, and Betty met at Birkness, the FRCC hut in Buttermere on Sunday 23rd May.

In improving weather we set out on Monday for a training walk. A secondary agenda for me was to test the repaired leg that I'd damaged in the Cairngorms in February. We ascended Red Pike via the path that climbs at the side of Scale Force and returned to the valley by the usual route across the ridge to Scarth Gap. Joyce and David, who had motored up that day, greeted us when we arrived at the hut.

Betty had to leave us on Tuesday to take part in a VIP do involving the judiciary of Newcastle-upon-Tyne but the rest of us took to cars and hopped over Honister to Seathwaite where we set off for Styhead and the Climbers Traverse.

The Climbers Traverse, sometime referred to as the Gable Traverse, is a grade 1/2 scramble with walking between the interesting sections. The real focal point is the process of threading the needle, which everyone in the party successfully negotiated. Of particular note was the style and aplomb of Madam President and her regent who, since it is no secret can comfortably combine their ages to nearly a century and a half, demonstrated to us all that such challenges and conquests are there to be enjoyed and savoured even with enough metal in the body to refurbish a battleship! As the person deputed to look after the rope management I was not able to witness Eve's bottom soaring upwards so it



Eve attacks the chimney below Napes Needle

is Tony that we have to thank for the glorious photograph that is included in this report and which will grace the annals of the Tricouni Club in the future.

Lunch was taken in the Dress Circle. This afforded the entertainment of viewing some young climbers on the Needle who were there with a camera crew to do a promotional video for the Tourist Board. The party continued the traverse, squeezing behind the flake known as 'Fat Man's Agony'. This little problem also presented a further tricky descent into yet another gulley after which the group turned

upwards at the Sphinx Rock to complete the airy scramble to the top of the Napes.

Wednesday saw a deterioration in the weather that led to a split group – some going to get victuals and charcoal in Keswick but found the others, Lynn, Joyce and David, ascending Dale Head in some quite severe weather. We learned the following day that some walkers had been struck by lightning less than a couple of miles away on Whiteless Pike so our jeers at the tales of our trio of Tricounis retreating in the face of adversity were, it seems, ill founded.

Our final day was a gentle and sedate affair that involved ambling around Buttermere and Crummock Water via Rannerdale Knotts. Marigolds were donned and vacuum cleaners brought into action as the Tricounis fell to cleaning duties in the hut before departing at the end of a very satisfying few days that were much enjoyed by all.

Malcolm Barton

The full group at Crummock Water



Patsy, Lynn, Tony, Eve and Betty on the summit of Red Pike (Madam President flashing her scar!)

Ski-touring in the Cairngorms (or having the wisdom to know when to give it up!)

Friday 12 February

Even though we had been climbing on skis for several hours Jason wasn't even remotely out of breath. Not even a slight pant when he suggested that tomorrow we might consider extending the planned route by taking in Ben Macdui. I pretended to give the idea some thought before saying that we should wait and see what the weather would be doing. In my heart I already knew that I was far too wrinkly to pursue that particular tour since it represents a most formidable excursion into the remoter part of the Cairngorm plateau.

We were ascending the crisp névé on the flank of Carn Ban Mor and we had been climbing for some time having set out from the valley floor in Glen Feshie earlier that morning.

We had skins on our skis and these were providing adequate grip so the harscheisen (ski crampons) that we both carried were, for the time being, not necessary. Ski-touring is all off-piste of course and for this reason the equipment carried has to allow for all the vagaries of, snow conditions, terrain and climate. For this reason, in addition to the expected skis and poles, our individual kit list included ordinary crampons, harscheisen, ice-axe, shovel and sufficient warm clothing, food and drink to cater for our expected needs plus some emergency rations in the event of encountering the

unexpected. Over the years my pack weight has moved inversely to age. This reduction has been achieved through a judicious and detailed attempt to equip myself with the very lightest of gear. Nevertheless, I was still skinning uphill with some 10 kg on my back – and the notion of having the fillings drilled out of my teeth was becoming appealing!

Carn Ban Mor is higher than Scafell Pike, by nearly 100 metres and we had been climbing for several hours when we came to the summit to be rewarded by the most glorious views westward towards Cairn Gorm. We skinned along towards Sgor Gaoith but realised that the February day would mean that we would need to return if we were to avoid a descent through the lower level trees and scrub in the dark. Back on the summit of Carn Ban Mor we exchanged pleasantries with the only people to be seen that day and we removed the climbing skins from the soles of the skis and prepared for the descent. Whilst our ascent had been broadly similar in technique the descent showed up the contrasting nature of our equipment. I had Fritschi ski-mountaineering bindings that clamped at the heel giving me full downhill functionality with my Salomon Cross Mountain skis whereas Jason had elected to use his more purist Telemark bindings and skis. The difference was in the way turns were initiated. I

employed a traditional parallel turn whilst Jason glided stylishly downhill in a series of elegant linked telemark turns – rising and sinking on one or other knee depending on the direction of the turn. Now stylish and elegant are not terms that I normally apply to Jake but I have to say that on this occasion this was the effect and I can't claim that dementia or the poetry of the situation, though undeniably present, could account for what I saw!

The lower part of a ski-tour descent often involves the negotiation of decreasing snow cover and increasing vegetation and this excursion was no exception. In a perverse way, the manoeuvring around trees and selecting a path from one snow patch to another is very engaging and pleasant. Disaster and resulting hilarity are rarely far away when two skiers are negotiating a long strip of pathway that is passable because a ribbon of snow little more than a metre or so wide remains as a remnant when surrounding slopes have melted. We experienced this when I was in the lead and spotted the end of the snow approaching and did a very restricted skating stop. Jason, following close behind, had nowhere to go, and passed me on the uphill side managing a full 5 metres of traverse on the heather before collapsing in a heap. By coincidence, many years ago, on the self same hillside John Leigh and I

had a similar experience whilst we were attending our first ski-mountaineering course at Glenmore Lodge. On that occasion John had perversely taken the unconventional route of trying to ski below my legs. The resulting heap of skis, heather, silver birch saplings and bodies was much the same on that occasion too!

We arrived in the valley in the gloaming and wandered very contentedly back to the car. Jason revisited the notion of Ben Macdui but I explained that the day we had just had, as tremendous as it had been, had highlighted my diminished capacity for big days on skis and I announced that I thought that my days of touring were coming to an end. Little did I know how prescient that statement was to prove the next day.

Saturday 13 February

The weather was nothing like as pleasant as the previous day as we set out to the base

of the Cairngorm ski area. The cloud base was very low so all of the lifts in the White Lady ski area were disappearing into the murk. Various hopefuls were taking the route to the base of the main climbing area in Coire an t-Sneachda. We were later to learn from other members of the FRCC who were sharing the hut in Aviemore that mist and snow conditions were sufficiently difficult to make them unsure as which routes they were actually climbing.

We followed in their footsteps for a short way before swinging to the southeast and towards the base of the Fiacail Ridge. With our fabric climbing skins stuck to the underside of our skis we made steady progress uphill until the levelling of the gradient signalled to us that we had reached the lip of the Coire. Here, joining a party of young climbers who had ascended just in front of us, we took a brief stop to check on the GPS. They were discussing the merits of GPS devices and the leader declared that he did not

use them because he considered them too inaccurate and he felt it dangerous to rely on them. They, like Jason and I, appeared to be planning the traverse of the rim of Coire an t-Sneachda followed by a descent of Lurchers Gulley.

Now the rim forms a large crescent curving away to the southwest. It is bounded on the north by the vertical crags and buttresses and navigation is notoriously difficult in mist.

As they glided silently into the mist I pondered how, since they were moving on skis and not on foot, they would be able to work out the distance forward they had travelled. Without some idea of this I couldn't see how they would know where they were because it is remarkably easy to cover lots of ground in a short time when drifting downhill on skis. Thinking rather than them, Jason and I turned our skis towards the summit of Cairn Gorm – with my GPS snuggled in my chest pocket.

(contd. next page)

*Jason on
Carn Ban Mor*



We had decided to take in Cairn Gorm as a means of extending the day since I had just about convinced Jason that Ben Macdui was beyond my capabilities. I remember noting that the infamous winds on Cairn Gorm had done their stuff and that the leeward side of the summit was covered in a snow formation known to skiers as sastrugi. This is a frozen ripple formation that can make turning skis rather testing. We quickly reached the summit and given the conditions saw no reason to linger in such inhospitable conditions.

We stripped the skins off the skis and went through the unappealing process of draping them around our necks within our anoraks. This masochistic process keeps the glue on the skins warm and dry and makes it easier to get them to adhere the next time they are called into use. We agreed that I would descend first with Jason checking my direction with his compass. I would stop before I was lost to his view and he would join me. We were to proceed thus until we had returned to the rim or the mist had lifted.

The process worked well for the first couple of rounds but I soon found myself back on the sastrugi terrain in ever steeper conditions and with no way, whilst moving, of determining the boundary between snow and sky. I hate such 'white-out' conditions because without a visual reference a sense of forward motion is all but impossible. Jason later had a similar experience when he was descending in a

snowplough position whilst simultaneously looking at his compass to maintain his bearing. He suddenly realised that he was, in fact, not moving at all – but he had no clue as to how long he'd been stationary.

As conditions became more difficult I caught an edge on the ridge of a sastruga and fell over the top of my skis. Jason's first reaction was to ask if I was OK. His second was to compliment me on the fact that I had landed, full stretch on the snow and perfectly in alignment with the intended compass bearing.

Whilst I had made a bad job of the descent, Jason quickly descended to me in an effortless series of telemark turns. Of course he had me as a marker to give him some notion of the distance and gradient!!

As I picked myself up it quickly became apparent that we had a bit of a problem. My left ankle was clearly damaged because my bindings had been a fraction of a second late in breaking. A plan was going to be needed and as far as I was concerned that plan did not include the mountain rescue team. Jason, intent on wringing as much valuable data and experience from the event as was possible wanted to experiment by digging a snow hole and popping me in for a while to see if the pain would reduce. Now we were both carrying shovels to cover this type of contingency but there was no way that I was going to become a vehicle for Jason's study of foul-weather

emergency techniques. I had fortunately taken the step of loading my GPS with waymark data to get from Cairn Gorm to the ski lift system at the Ptarmigan Restaurant so we replaced the skins, grateful for having kept them dry inside our clothing, and re-ascended to the summit.

On the descent this time Jason led in conditions that were slightly easier in terms of snow under our skis but were made yet more difficult in terms of visibility by the added nuisance of a light precipitation of fine spicules of snow. This time he was the downhill marker that provided the all-important sense of gradient as I slowly followed.

When John Leigh and I first started climbing mountains on skis we were pretty good at going uphill but equally inept at descending (OK, OK I can hear some smart-arse saying "so what's changed?"). Between us we developed a survival methodology that was based on a combination of a traverse, followed by a stop to the hill and finally a downhill kick turn. We descended many, many metres of alpine mountainside using this inelegant but effective technique. The ability to execute a kick turn whilst facing downhill on a very steep gradient became second nature to us and I can recommend all who tour on fixed bindings to master this trick. Now, when the need arose on a Scottish summit, it enabled me to descend to the safety of the ski system at the Ptarmigan Restaurant. I was also saved the embarrassment



Jason heading for the valley and cutting sweet tracks on Cam Ban Mor

of a more dramatic assisted descent by having the resource of GPS available as well as some forward planning that had allowed me to enter the necessary navigational data in the comfort of home. So much for the climber's comments that GPS should not be relied on!

Back at the FRCC hut in Aviemore, we applied frozen bags of peas that Jason had kindly procured at the local Tesco's - but by the following morning it was clear that our skiing was over. On my way south, as I paused at Caroline's flat in Edinburgh, I

threw my ski-touring boots in the rubbish skip and donated my cross-mountain skis to Caroline - who has always coveted them and stolen them in the past anyway. The American poet, Max Ehrmann once advised, 'take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth'. In other words - know when to give up!

I reckoned that descending steep mountains in white out conditions was something that I could probably live without. Six weeks or so later, I had the cast removed that I had needed as a result of the

fractured fibula sustained in the fall. The total cost, apart from the inconvenience of the pot was some four months of reduced walking and mountain activity. But do you know what - it was worth every bit of inconvenience and discomfort just to have experienced that last full day with Jake on Carn Ban Mor. It was a day of good craic, fine landscapes, excellent snow, interesting terrain and a satisfying sense of total completeness. Travelling in mountains on skis - pure unalloyed magic!

Malcolm Barton

Coles Bay, Tasmania

Monday February 8th

We arrived at our accommodation at about 2.40 and within minutes we were having a nice cuppa with Joyce and David making plans for our few days together in Tasmania. The weather was fabulous so decided to start off with a swim at Muirs Beach near where Joyce and David were camping at the Iluka Holiday park. The

day was rounded off with a chicken stew and lemon meringue pie with copious amounts of Australian wine.

Tuesday February 9th

We met at 10am and visited the Visitors Centre to get the weather forecast on the way to do the Wineglass Bay circuit. This is one of the most popular

walks in Tasmania, so even though it was a week day the car park was very busy - including the odd wallaby looking for a snack! It is a steep climb to the lookout and unfortunately the weather was a bit cloudy, so the view was not as seen on the postcards! We descended steeply to the bay where there were thoughts of a swim but it was very surfy so we decide to wait until we

reached Hazards Bay across the isthmus. The beach was deserted so we all went swimming and had our lunch. The only visitor we had was a huge hermit crab. You can do the walk as a there and back but we thought it best to do the circuit and return along the coast. The walk took about 3 hours and 45 minutes, so we had time for a drink at the Freycinet Lodge and another swim at Richardson beach near the Lodge before having a BBQ in the evening.

Wednesday February 10th

We met again at 10am and decided to do the Mount Amos summit which is described as

steep and arduous and not for the faint hearted. We were not sure what we were letting ourselves in for, but the weather was cloudy, bright and with no rain forecast we thought it would be ok for hardy Tricouni members. It was quite a steep climb until we reached the slabs which we had to traverse and climb up and over. This was quite tough as it was sheer up with gullies and not much to hold on to - not the kind of walk you would want to do in the wet. The view of Wineglass bay on this day was much better - a real postcard view so it was worth the climb for this. We returned by the same route and had our lunch further down the path as the cloud was coming across

and we didn't want to get stuck on the top if it did start to rain especially with the thought of sliding down the slabs. We had a swim at Muirs beach but as it wasn't so sunny today it was not quite as warm. In the evening we had a delicious steak meal at the Freycinet Lodge.

Thursday February 11th

Joyce and David headed south to Port Arthur and Kate and Richard north to Launceston.

Katie Stockwell

