

Trip Report: Touching The Void

Date: 20th March 2004

Group: Jim Walker (leader) Dave Cadman, Jim Grant, Lesley and Mike Arrowsmith, Bob Harris, Sue Lancaster, Dave Collins, Colin Christie

Route: - Fairfield Horseshoe. Leaving from Rydall Hall and returning via Ambleside

Total Distance: 10 miles

Total Ascent: Unknown

Weather: Storm Force Wind

A 7am start from Bunbury for 9 members - Dave Cadman, Jim Grant, Lesley and Mike Arrowsmith, Bob Harris, Sue Lancaster, Dave Collins, Colin Christie, and Jim Walker. The weather was overcast when we set out, with the forecast of rain showers and wind in the Lakes scheduled to die down in the afternoon.

The route from Rydall Hall is straight up for one-mile approx, to gain access to the ridge. Some having done this walk before, were promising superb views over Grassmere and Windemere. The early slog proved too much for Dave Collins, on his first expedition, and he therefore wisely turned around. Bob Harris unselfishly volunteered to go with him, and they spent a good day walking around the lake area, and even visited a tearoom!

The slog up the hill for the remainder of the group, now wearing full waterproof kit, carried on. The conditions worsened, and although facing strong gusts circa 50/60 mph and rain showers, no real problems were experienced, and the walk continued. Regular breaks were taken where shelter could be found. It was after one such break at the furthestmost point of the walk that the first major problem arose. Leaving a shelter, from nowhere it seemed, the wind suddenly turned nasty. The last pair to leave, Lesley and Jim W, were blown off their feet, towards a significant drop. Fortunately they managed to stop themselves before going over the edge. Lesley in falling hurt her leg against a rock. Initially it was feared broken, and this added to the predicament of Jim W and Lesley lying at the edge of a drop.

Fortunately Sue turned around to see where we were, and Jim W managed to attract her attention. Realising the danger, Sue used her whistle using the emergency code, but the wind was too strong for anyone to hear. Finally after what seemed an age, but in reality was only about 10 minutes, Dave Cadman struggled back and help Jim W to move Lesley to safer ground.

The others had taken shelter themselves, but realised something must have happened, turned back to assist, crawling in some cases on hands and knees. The wind by now was at its strongest, and was knocking anyone who stood up off his or her feet. The two Jims together could not move Lesley, so strong was the wind. Moving was impossible, and the only practical thing to do seemed to be to wait until the wind eased off a little. It showed no sign of doing so, and despite wearing good kit, early signs of hypothermia seemed to be affecting some people.

Finally after 20/30 minutes the wind eased slightly and with everyone taking it in turns to assist Lesley, the group moved off.

The walk back was not uneventful. Having decided to abandon the planned route and retrace our steps, the conditions meant that we were not fully focussed on the route we were taking. The intervention of Jim G and Mike stopped us going too far astray, and in fact we ended on the planned ridge to finish the walk.

The way back was punctuated with several stops to get out of the wind, and everyone was blown over on several occasions. During one of these moments Mike hurt his ribs and a leg. In the storm on the descent gloves were lost, Lesley's hat blew off and was last seen heading into a valley, and a walking pole was left behind.

With Ambleside in view, and an obvious path to take, the two Jims and Colin, struck out on a direct route to Rydall to fetch the cars to Ambleside, thus cutting short the journey for the others. This detour was not without incident, as the storm had caused the river to become a torrent, and impossible to cross. This meant a further detour.

The route to Ambleside in the cars proved interesting with one road too narrow for Jim G's vehicle, causing some paint to be scrapped off. Finally we arrived at the closest point possible to the path, and as they had not yet arrived, Bob set out to assist them. Finally everyone turned up safely. The final episode of the day out, ended with the owner of the house we were parked alongside telling us in abusive language to move on. Despite trying to point out we were waiting for an injured walker, she was still abusive.

The hero of the day was undoubtedly Lesley, Bunbury's equivalent of Joe Simpson. She never complained in all the descent, despite having what has now been diagnosed as a ruptured Achilles. How she did this in the obvious pain she was in is a matter of admiration for us all. Lesley's leg is now encased in plaster, and she faces having this on for 12 weeks or an operation.

Other lessons learned were the value of proper kit, and a level of fitness. The entire group were properly attired, and fit. All had mountain experience. It is frightening to think of the potential consequences if any of us had fallen short in any of these requirements. The other noticeable fact was the lack of any panic in the group, when things were looking dicey on the hill. This, and the constant help, given by the entire group to each other, got us through the dangers. Team bonding is now strong, and we all will do all we can to assist Lesley, to ensure she is back on the hills with us as soon as possible.

Jim W