

Best winter – Worst Summer?

Was the 2008-09 winter the best one for a long time? And the 2009 summer the worst one?

We managed some super winter days last season. Early on, I remember a couple of excellent days around Dollywagon, soloing some excellent snow gulleys with Stuart and completing the Fairfield horseshoe with Gareth a few weeks earlier. He was a man on a mission that day, keen to get down to the jewellers in Ambleside and to a picture-framer in Kirby Lonsdale before the shops shut! One of the best days was crossing the Cairngorm plateau on skis with David across to Hells Lum where we had an exciting attempt at Deep Cut Chimney. Though we didn't manage the last few feet and had to abseil off, it was a fabulous day, perhaps most memorable for the ski down with head torches onto the Aviemore pistes.

A few of us stayed at the Loft and managed two full consecutive days of winter climbing on the Lakes. Wow! On the Saturday, we plodded up to Scrubby Crag and completed a reasonable gully climb, the day though being brought sharply into focus as we watched a walker fall the full length of the crag down steep snow slopes. Fortunately, others were close to where he stopped and quickly phoned the rescue services. A helicopter was on the scene in just a few minutes and as we summited and then walked off around the horseshoe, we could see each stage of the rescue as the helicopter came in, dropped off a recce team, then arrived with more gear, returned once again with a full team and lifted off the casualty with a final return trip to collect the remaining gear and people. A very efficient exercise. Apparently the walker was not too seriously injured. The following day saw us driving around to Honister Pass so we could access Green Gable. The crag was in what Andy Bond referred to as "good modern winter conditions". That meant that the turf was well frozen, there was little or no actual ice, but it was cold, wintry and dusted with snow. Andy stormed up our line, supposedly Grade 3 but much harder. I got up it OK but had to concentrate and think all the way – it was no roll-over! Just around the corner, David and Kate also had a very challenging pitch on thin gear and sketchy turf.

I did have another Scottish weekend, shivering as a bold attempt in the centre of Aladdin's buttress came to a halt on bare rock, with the following day seeing us walking in plenty of cloud near Pitlochry on the way home. I seem to remember other stories of LMC people brushing up on their ice driving techniques the same day over in the West, above Glencoe, but I couldn't possibly comment!!

Casting off all that winter gear usually means we can switch to rock boots, chalk bag and the Lancashire Guide to enjoy balmy Tuesday evenings. But this was to be a rare event through 2009. The evening meets got rain and more rain. It started reasonably in early April – Brownstones, Wilton 3 and Troy. Then we had the trauma of our first Tuesday evening accident – but Tim is now well on the mend – at Edgerton. What a write-up Bolton Mountain Rescue got for that one – except they arrived after it had all happened, with our casualty well on the way to hospital – but still, thanks to them for mobilising so many people. Hobson Moor was warm but poorly attended – but there is the worst traffic jam in the world always to negotiate to get there. Wet for Witches. Ha,ha – bad forecast for Blackstone Edge at the end of May and wet in Wigan, Bolton and Oldham, but a beautiful freak evening on the crag for the half-a-dozen who soldiered on!! Stronsey Bank was the first midgy evening now that June had arrived and we found a geocache (and did a clutch of very good little routes) but by then the numbers were down to a handful. Looking at the meets list, the next six consecutive Tuesdays did not happen!! I was away in the Alps after that but came back to be the

sole person to venture on to Hugencroft – and to be eventually seen off the crag by the police (Clare – there is a story here!!!). And I think none since then!! “A reet poor do!!”

And no pictures!

Richard Toon

September 2009



He's bought climbing gear as well!! Nice easy snow slopes to solo.



Who say's the Lakes doesn't get ice nowadays? Start to the gully on Scrubby



Andy describes this as “modern conditions”. I thought it was bloody hard!



Deep Cut Chimney looking promising on Hell's Lum