

NOT TOO FAR AWAY

April to June 2018

My priorities had to change and far off motorcycle adventures put on hold for a few months. I'd agreed to help support a good friend and world renowned mountaineer, Sandy Allan with his attempt at a new route on Broad Peak in the Karakorum mountains of Pakistan. The opportunity to join him at some point was far too good to miss, so the focus would now be on improving my fitness for the end of June.



Langdale

GREAT LANGDALE AT EASTER

After six weeks of a new regime I ventured out into the mountains and tackled a few of the Lake District's finest. It was a really pleasing and rewarding outing, the first in a long while.

IRELAND IN APRIL

I'd not completely forgotten my motorcycle and ventured off to the Emerald Isle for a few days. It was dark when we disembarked at Dublin Port but within 30 minutes I was witnessing the sunrise over the Wicklow Mountains. The hotel at Glendalough was still in night mode, so I rode on and for the first time in my life sampled a McDonald's. A whole new world beckoned.



The Burren

I meandered south through the Irish countryside in the direction of Cork and later north west, taking the ferry across the lower reaches of the Shannon and up the Wild Atlantic Coast. The car parks at the Cliffs of Moher were overflowing, so I crept past and journeyed through the lunar like landscape of the Burren before cruising into mystical Connemara.

For me this was Ireland at its best, mountains, glens and sleepy villages. It was not until my final day that I experienced the legendary rain that makes Ireland so green. I've decided to rename Ireland "The Friendly Isle" as everyone was so welcoming and hospitable.

LAKE DISTRICT IN EARLY MAY AND AN EXTRACT FROM MY DIARY...

The only thing that accompanied me, as I ascended Sourmilk Ghyll, was the sound of tumbling water and the call of a distant Cuckoo.

Dotty the dog was moving fast, high up ahead, until she encountered a slab wall of rock that halted her progress. An outstretched palm on her hind quarters assisted her delicate move with her nails extended for a tenuous grip and a scramble onto a more recognisable path.

Read more overleaf...



Contact Gordon

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LAKE DISTRICT IN EARLY MAY (cont.)

We climbed high into the wind across grassy slopes and on to the summit of Green Gable, before a steep descent on a loose rocky path. I felt secure in my new boots but they should have been tighter for the downhill section.

We arrived at Windy Gap as the cloud lifted and the next climb up to the summit of Great Gable exposed itself. Two young ladies were progressing upwards ahead, so I followed a little behind and one not so little behind. By now the dog was well ahead so I called to her "Dotty come". The expression on her face seemed to say, "bugger off, I'll wait here while you come up".

Sadly, the summit was clad in mist and the view down Wasdale obscured but never mind, I'd seen it all before. The satisfaction was in reaching the summit, not the view. We continued on, only stopping to tighten my boots and took the steep, well-worn path down to Sty Head.

The path back to Seatoller tumbled down the valley until for once I was well ahead of Dotty. There was no point calling her now, as the wind preceding the oncoming storm would have carried my voice in the opposite direction, all the way to Keswick.

Perfect timing. The rain arrived, making patterns on the windscreen as I clambered into the car after climbing two iconic mountains, 3000ft of ascent and all in five hours. A route described in the guide book as "very difficult".

Very satisfying is what I thought.

SCOTLAND IN LATE MAY

It was possibly the most perfect weather forecast for Scotland and certainly not to be missed. I'd just time for a four day ride up through the Western Highlands and across to the Grampian Mountains before turning south over the Eastern Cairngorms and the Pennines.

I wasn't far from the ferry across the Clyde to Loch Lomond, following behind two female cyclists. For reasons unknown they collided, barging shoulders before falling into the road. I anchored up and put on my hazards, holding up the traffic whilst the motorcyclist behind stopped and helped them onto the pavement.

As the motorcyclist took off her helmet, she turned out to be small but perfectly formed and before departing commented, "let's hope no more females fall for you today". Why not I ask, thinking it might be no bad thing?

The mountains and passes were a delight, in the best of weather on offer across the whole of the British Isles, a rare treat.

Read more overleaf...



Approaching Glen Coe



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SPAIN IN EARLY JUNE

It was hastily arranged, around the best flight schedule, so that I arrived mid-afternoon in a sleepy little town, that remained firmly planted in an earlier age. I'd organised three days of walking inland from the Mediterranean coast.

The route climbed up out of town on the first day before rounding the mountain skyline and dropping down into the valley well below. The climb back up on an old mule track was relentless but worthwhile.

The second day's walk took me along a narrow vertiginous path, high on a mountain side, with great views into the distance and down into the gorge below where I'd walked earlier. It continued past spectacular limestone arches before dropping down to my overnight stay. The final day was pure exercise, climbing steeply from the village on a narrow path to the summit of a mountain, dominated by the ruins of a castle.



Els Arcs



Pen y Gwryd

NORTH WALES IN MID-JUNE

It was 50 years ago that I first set foot on the mountains of North Wales. This time I'd decided to stay at the Pen y Gwryd hotel and soak up the history and nostalgia that's filled the place for over a century. Known as the home of British Mountaineering this unique hotel, at the foot of Snowdon, was used by George Mallory in the 1920's as a training base before his three unsuccessful attempts on Everest and by Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing before the successful 1953 Expedition.

From here I set off with Dotty the dog around the Snowdon Horseshoe, a fine day's outing for us both. The following day we scrambled up the Glyders before departing.

If you'd like to know more about the Pen y Gwryd hotel you might like to read "Tales from the Smoke Room". Each individual chapter is written by a character from the British Mountaineering world and available from www.mountaineeringbooks.org

I've just two more outings to the mountains before departing for the Karakorum at the end of June.



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