

Lakes Meet – FRCC Hut, Buttermere

October 2014



“Season of mist and mellow fruitfulness”

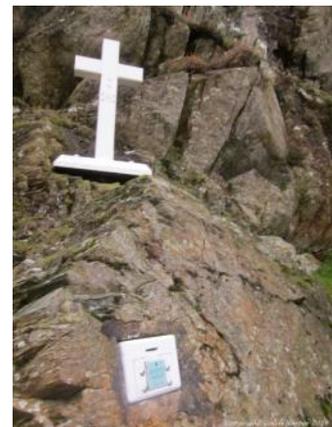
(Keats)

There were dire warnings on the Derwent chat room: rain, floods, more rain, enough to bring back memories of all those water ravaged Lakeland weekends.

In the event, Buttermere was at its early autumn best throughout the weekend with rich warm colours glowing in ever changing light. The juggling of cars outside Birkness Cottage (FRCC) on the Friday night was not too complex, and by eleven, final cups of tea had been finished, vague plans suggested, and sleeping bags occupied. Another wild Lakeland evening.

Colin had well organised and well developed plans to continue his collection of Wainwrights, and I opted to join him on his ascents of Fleetwith Pike, Grey Knotts, Brandreth and Green Gable. Great Gable was left open, depending on strength, will, and weather. The gentle walk along the valley was all too brief, before the serious ridge of Fleetwith Pike reared up in front. There was an early pause to stop at the bright white cross that marked the accidental death of Fanny Mercer in 1887. Some later Google work reveals that:

"Fanny Mercer was an 18 year old servant visiting the lakes with the family of her employer. Here is the definitive answer from the original inquest. On the day of the accident Fanny, and two other servants were given the day off and set out for a walk over the fells. Eventually they arrived on Honister Crag and decided to return to Buttermere via Fleetwith Pike and Fleetwith Edge. It was on their descent, as they neared the road that the accident happened. Fanny, who was at the rear,



apparently jumped off the ledge on which she was standing, using her alpenstock for support. The effect was to propel her upwards and outwards, so she fell a considerable distance and unfortunately struck her head on a rock.

Fanny suffered severe head wounds and was carried down to Gatesgarth Farm, alas to no avail. A messenger was sent for a doctor from Cockermouth but, by the time he arrived, several hours later, Fanny had died.”

How many servants in that era were so well commemorated?

Colin and I resumed our energetic start, with my being anxious to prove I was not too much of an impediment to rapid progress. Colin had an excellent collection of electronic devices to monitor and evaluate our performance. Layers were shed, before the mist turned to slightly more serious stuff, so on with the waterproofs for the first and only time that day. The cloud base was around 2500ft, so the top of Fleetwith Pike was both deserted and clear with splendid views across to the hills of Dumfries and Galloway, but the Scafell massif remained hidden. There was a breeze, and we were to be treated to a kaleidoscope of ever changing light and shade, as clouds came and went. We ascended both tops of Grey Knotts – each looked higher from the other – before Brandreth, and a misty Green Gable. We determined that Great Gable should be left until there was sufficient views to reward a first ascent, so at



Windy Gap, we paused... and headed up Great Gable encouraged by the tiniest hint of mist lifting. The path here has been much improved (how many helicopters flights of stone?) The poignant FRCC war memorial at the top of Great Gable was restored in 2013, with the spelling mistake corrected. A Remembrance Day service is still held each year.

The mists did not clear though, and despite all our technology and experience, we manage to select a nasty scree filled gully 300 metres SW of the usual and desired path to the start of Moses trod. We had few excuses.

Meanwhile, Pete, Judy, Mick, John, Pete, Laura, Alan, and Jill were heading for High Scales, and thence onto the higher fells. High Scales was reported to be a disappointment, mainly hidden by trees. Red Pike and High Stile, however, were excellent rewards for the effort expended, and so the traverse continued.

There was an unplanned reunion. Colin and I found Pete in best Wainwright tradition waiting patiently (or impatiently in other versions) by Innominate Tarn for the rest of his group who we're enjoying good conversation and splendid views on the top of Haystacks. Pete later produced electronic evidence to show that he was stationary for three of the nine hours of the expedition. He also suggested that his

gadget wasn't working properly, so the evidence was not admissible. Colin and I opted for the easy return down Scarth Gap, whilst the rest headed on to Innominate Tarn (Pete had abandoned the wait, and returned to join all at the top of Haystacks) and thence the descent via Marnscale. The ever energetic Pete and John opted for further delight and the descent of Fleetwith Pike. The series of steep steps was a good reminder of how easy it would be to follow in the footsteps of Fanny Mercer.



The lakeside was beguiling in the still early evening. The day needed prolonging, photos needed taking, and there was a whole camera club doing just that. We were all eventually safely back in the hut as darkness fell. Meanwhile Austin had circumnavigated Buttermere, and had done the critical job of getting the fire alight for the returning desperadoes. Colin and I enjoyed our hot showers, but we're the last to do so. The hot water was fickle and despite extensive research and

repeated application of the boost button, tepid or cold remained the default state for the others. Elaborate cooking soon ensured that good smells prevailed throughout the hut. Pete and Laura's shepherd's pie looked especially tasty.

On Sunday, plans were slower to emerge, but the hut was thoroughly cleaned, and eventually all emerged to enjoy a gorgeous sunny Lakeland autumn morning. Activity was concentrated on the Grasmoor complex, but a variety of starting points and routes were employed. Pete, Judy, Jill, Alan, John and myself started from the hut itself, resisted the temptation of cakes and ice cream in Buttermere itself, and enjoyed a steady (some were steadier) ascent of Whiteless Pike on a delightful green sward of a path, winding through the russet bracken.

Pete, Laura, and Mick headed for Rannerdale as their starting point, and Pete and Laura made good time to ensure there was another joyful reunion on the upper slopes of Whiteless Pike, whilst Mick



pursued his own explorations. Colin meanwhile continued his Wainwright collection with Starling Dodd and Great Borne, making a total of seven additions for the weekend. He too visited High Scales, but by deviating 20 yards from the path obtained excellent views (and photos) of High Scales in spate.

The Grasmoor group diverged at the col between Grasmoor and Crag Hill. Pete and Laura headed for Grasmoor itself to complete the horseshoe back to Rannerdale, whilst the rest headed on up Crag Hill to meet the steady stream of walkers coming up from Braithwaite. The views were delightful and unusual; familiar Lakeland tops appeared from unfamiliar angles, and it took some time (for me anyway) to work out that Bassenthwaite was Bassenthwaite. We descended down the ridge to Sail, then a little further, before we cut back right to a traversing path down the quiet, lonely valley of Mill Beck (the valley is unnamed on my OS, but we can claim to have quietly trodden over the delights of Whiteless Breast). A lunch stop was allowed on the tinkling banks of Addacomb Beck. We again resisted ice cream and cakes in Buttermere village, so we arrived safely back to the huts at one minute before the appointed hour of four o'clock. Austen had enjoyed another circumnavigation the beautiful lake.

Back to the final pack, Honister Pass or Newlands Hause, then motorways, traffic, and everyday concerns but with some excellent memories of good walking, good scenery, and good company to sustain us. Thanks to Fell and Rock for an excellent hut, and to everyone for making me, as a relatively new member, so welcome.

