

# Lake District Meet - Agnes Spence Hut, Patterdale

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*January 2014*

Arriving at the hut just after 10pm on Friday night, there was doom and gloom. John, who lives in the Lakes, had brought the weather forecast for the weekend which for all intents and purposes said that the weekend would be crap. However it turned out to be a most enjoyable and entertaining weekend; possibly one of the best meets I can remember with challenges and comedic assertions to rank with the best.

We stayed at the Agnes Spencer hut which for anyone who hasn't been is a bit of a gem not so much because of the facilities which are superb (as long as any members don't turn) up but for the location in Patterdale at the heart of the eastern lakes.

When we awoke on the Saturday morning to the sound of heavy rain, low cloud, strong winds and pretty cold temperatures, the enthusiasm for getting out of bed was to say the least low. But since we are "mountaineers" we donned appropriate gear, split into a few groups and set off for the day. John set off to do Little Mell Fell, Mike, Kris, James, Sally and I set off for an hour's drive to do one of Birket's ridge walks from Hawswater. When we left the hut Gill & Christine were allegedly going to for out for a walk somewhere whilst Richard set off for a run.



The drive round to Hawswater was very pleasant in the nice warm car and we arrived safely at the end of the reservoir around 11am. The sound of the rain, amplified by the car roof made it difficult to open the doors and debate ensued, should we/shouldn't we but we had a new member (James) to impress so we steeled ourselves and booted up. Once out and on our way the rain eased and stopped and we gradually worked our way up the first hill, buffeted occasionally by those strong winds. About half way up I got chatting to James and discovered that he had a fancy watch, well actually a mini computer the size of a house (or it would have been 30 years ago). It turned out that this device was a watch, GPS, altimeter, compass and most importantly for this story; a heart rate monitor and calorie counter.

After some time and struggling against wind and rain we arrived at the top of the first "Wainwright" - Racecourse Hill on High Street and a conversation as to number of calories ensued. At this point the rest of the party became aware and interested in the "Watch" and James was asked, well grilled on its use, how many calories he had used and how many he had consumed on the way what his heart rate was etc. Fulfilled by his answers we set off once again to find somewhere out of the wind to eat some long overdue lunch. 15mins of sitting against a dry stone wall was enough to freeze the proverbials so we moved on towards the next objective "Mardale Ill Bell" which we quickly rattled off on the flat.

At this point Mike declared that there is another hill on his list (see sidebar) which as turns out is a ring contour requiring a slight diversion from the path which requires us to stick to the ridge rather than drop down a little. We find this pimple on the landscape and quickly move on downwards to the col at Nan Bield Pass and pause for a few minutes to take in the scenery and brace ourselves for the next ascent. It is at this point after the news about the watch has been whirring in his brain for a while that Mike declares that his max heart rate is 90bpm. Astonished cries of nooo and not possible and no way ensue as Mike tries to convince us of this fact by telling us that he was monitored for 24 hours and that's what it showed, and he has ascended Wooley Road to the top, very fast so it must be right. The banter continued as we ascended Harter Fell which is quite steep with mutterings of "must have put it on wrong" and Mike declaring that he must be super fit and a fine example of athletic ability - a natural athlete in fact.

At the top of the hill which Mike reached first (we were going slow to make him feel good) he was sitting down and trying to find his pulse when we got there and I dutifully found mine for comparison, Kris timed it and it tuned out that Mikes was about 102, mine 90 - the seeds of doubt were sown!

### Mikes List

When Mike was but a young man many moons ago he happened upon a list in a book (or so he says - no one can find it anymore) in which someone had painstakingly inspected a 1 inch to the mile OS map and located every ring contour over 2100 feet and made a list. There are just over 200 of these apparently and Mike being a poor student at the time plagiarised this list and wrote it down by hand. He still has the copy to this day and is patiently working through it.

So when you are walking in the Lakes with Mike he may suddenly declare that he wishes to depart from the path to some seemingly random location, now you know why!

The activity now turned to another of Mike's list - Adam's seat which is in fact an ancient boundary stone which lies at 666m (2185ft) altitude and sits in the 2100ft ring contour on Little Harter Fell. Mike did this by himself while we went down the path. We met up again at Gatesgarth Pass and followed it back down to the reservoir by which time the sun had started to light the slopes of Rough Crag. After a dismal start the day turned out to be a lot better than first impressions would suggest and a great time was had by all.

When we arrived back at the hut it turned out that Richard had been out running for five hours having made a few navigational errors in the mist but returned safe. Christine and Gill had in fact been out on a walk that included some pub time; Austin got dropped off by Alan somewhere up the valley and walked back as is his MO.

The evening was a placid affair with much food and some beverages being consumed. Quieter than some of the meets but all the same some lively entertainment in the form of political and religious debate ensued with some observing from a distance quietly amused while the participants engaged. Plans were made for the next day with maps and books out.

The next day proved that you just can't trust the weather forecast; allegedly Sunday should have started with clearing skies, no rain and a little cold. They got the cold bit right! However, learning from the day before we set out with gusto towards Lower Hartsop (so called because of its position in the valley) for a route devised (some might say sadistically) by Colin and Sally, taking in four Wainrights, 8 miles and 880m of ascent.

Unfortunately new recruit James was suffering with blisters; well actually fairly bad gashes in his heels so he decided to give it a miss and go to the pub (he'll fit in well). This meant that his "watch" was available to somewhat scientifically test Mike's heart rate claims. The challenge was on!

We set off at what we thought was an early start to find the car park almost full (only two places left), parked up, got booted up, set the gps's going and set off towards Hayswater where we skirted the lakeside before heading up the steep eastern flank of Gray crag. The going is pretty tough "off piste" and the group spreads out over the hillside. We all meet up again at the summit of Gray crag and take stock of Mike's statistics. "So what was your max heart rate then" someone asks; "about 150" comes the reply, and finally Mike's super-human status is laid to rest; he's normal after all!



The going is pretty easy upto Thorthwaite crag apart from a little wind. Once there we stop for some lunch and watch the skyes change rapidly from snow laden clouds through bright sunshine and back again; it is a wonderfully atmospheric place. We leave a little while later and scramble down to Threshwaite Mouth where on a clear day you can see into Threshwaite Cove and Raven Crag, but not today. The final climb of the day is up to Stony Cove Pike or Caudale Moor or John Bell's Banner (depending on where you get your information) the highpoint of which (Stoney Cove Pike) is not obvious but we find it after a bit of searching. Moving off the summit a short way we reach John Bell's Banner, then Mark Atkinson's Memorial - see side bar; which is at the intersection of two paths and then turn back on ourselves to find another of Mike's ring contours; which is the high point of Caudale Moor (according to the OS 1:25000 map). A short plod across bog brings us back onto the path to Hartsop Dodd. The wind drops to a whisper and as we descend, suddenly the cloud lifts and the sun shines through revealing the surrounding hills basking in the late evening light. There is no better way to spend a day!



### **John Bell's Banner**

Around the top of Caudale moor apart from Mikes ring contour you will find on the map two curiosities; the first is John Bell's Banner. For some (including Wainwright himself) this is just an alternative name for Caudale moor but the location on the map is quite specific at the junction of two paths not at the top of anything.

Further research would suggest that John Bell was a local landowner and the Banner, meaning boundary was the point at which he stood to turn back the grouse during the shooting season.

### **Mark Atkinson's Memorial**

The Mark Atkinson memorial was erected in memory of one of the Landlords of the Kirkstone Inn who died in 1930. He wished to be remembered where he could forever see the Inn. His son William; a schoolmaster of Patterdale is also remembered here.

