

I have been an active member of the LMC for two seasons now, active being the operative word. I live on the other side of the pond in the United States, Boston to be exact and this would be my second meet of the year. This past February on the annual ice trip in Gondo, Will Wheale and David Toon suggested I come over for the annual meet in Wasdale and to experience some of the fabled British crags and the plan was hatched. During the spring Richard Toon generously offered to play tour guide during the week when the rest of the group would be working. As the time drew nearer Chuck Reed another member from the US joined in on the action and we arrived at Manchester airport on June 11<sup>th</sup> in the early morning a bit bleary eyed but excited non-the-less. Richard was waiting in the arrival hall and we set off.

After a quick stop to gather some gear and have a cup of tea we wound our way on the M6 if memory serves me correctly on our way to the Lakes District, or if you are a local simply the Lakes. We arrived without incident even if we had driven the entire time on the “wrong side” of the road. Richard suggested a few pitches on Wallabarrow. After quickly changing we headed up to the crag in the sun with blue bird skies, surely the rock gods were smiling down on us with the great weather. Richard roped up and led *The Plumb* and *Digitation* both awesome routes and a good time was had by all.

We joined the ever growing crowd at the camping park in Wasdale and secured a spot in Dave Medcalf’s tent that he so generously offered to us squatters. Then it was off to the Strand Pub one of the two pubs the small town offers. The annual meet was firming up and it seemed as if the LMC had the majority of tables as the group arrived.

Morning was bright and the sun was gleaming in the sky as we sat over breakfast. Will Wheale joined us having just arrived so we were a party of four. We set off for Scafell Buttress and Richard did a masterful job of leading *Botterill’s Slab*. The day was sunny and bright but the rock was in the shade with near arctic winds and we all nearly froze having to shake out our hands as if we were on ice. The down climb was treacherous and Chuck and I found it daunting not encountering anything quite like this at home. We would normally rap or as the Brits say abseil down what we were down climbing. The guys set off to find one more pitch and as the day was on the wane I opted to hike up Scafell to summit the highest peak in England at 3200ft.



Chuck, Richard and Will at start of Botterill’s slab

Sunday we woke to drenching rains and the skies looked as if they would not be brightening up anytime soon. Richard suggested we head towards Borrowdale where we hoped to find better weather, but it was not to be, the mountain gods were not smiling and the rain fell at an annoying pace. My goal had been to lead one the classic Lakes routes *Little Chamonix*, but it was not to be. We sat near the base in a shop and drank tea looking at the crag.

We set off for the Loft, the club hut and arrived just as the rain ceased. The skies were still cloudy but we could see breaks of blue and were hopeful for the following day. After checking out the Loft and the Chapel Refuse we set off for a walk around Blea Tarn which was stunning in the afternoon glow.

Monday was dry and the skies were clearing. We soon were hiking up Pavey Ark to the base of *Arcturus* a stunning E1- that once again Richard lead with ease. This route ends half way up Jack's Rake and we moved up to the base of *Golden Slipper* which put us on top of the crag. We then down climbed Jack's Rake and called it a day and what a day it was, splendid. We celebrated at the pub at the base near the car park. After ordering a few pints we stood watching the World Cup only to run into John Harold who I hadn't seen in a few years. He was climbing with some office mates for the day and it was sheer luck that we were standing right next to one another.



Richard top of Arcturus

Tuesday found us with *Gimmer String* as our goal and instead of the boring walk up Richard insisted we do *Middlefell Buttress* which saw its first ascent 99 years earlier in 1911. With backpacks on we each struggled through the crux move laughing at whoever was wedged tightly in the crux chimney just off the deck. We somehow managed that and after two more long pitches found ourselves on slopes of grass which ambled over to Gimmer Crag about a thirty minute walk away. Countless sheep kept us company which I soon learned is the norm in the UK. Being from inner city Boston I am more used to the occasional dog and amused Richard to no end by taking endless photos of sheep.

*Gimmer String* is three pitches and each pitch had varied climbing which was a challenge and fun. We were being spoiled by such wonderful climbs and the weather which got sunnier by the day, not at all what we expected. The down climb if you have never done it is hair raising to say the least and as they say it's the first step that's the scariest.

We managed to live to tell the tale and headed back to the Loft to get our gear. We headed back to Richard's in Chorley for the night prior to the next leg of our adventure and even though we arrived near 11pm Jean Toon was waiting with a full dinner for us.

Wednesday we set off for Wales and Holyhead to climb at the fabled Gogarth. Dave Metcalf joined up with us and he and Chuck did *Dream of White Horses* while Richard and I did the *Concrete Chimney* and Britomartis both stunning routes in a setting that has to be seen to be believed. The Irish Sea lapped at our heels and waves crashed around in a caldron of churning water – impressive to say the least. The sun beat down on us relentlessly and by midday we were in t-shirts complaining about the heat. I never thought I'd be saying that on this trip. At the belay on Britomartis we lucked out and had low tides which enabled us to rap, or abseil down to the very bottom stopped just short of going in for a dip. I stood belaying and enjoying the scenery when I heard a loud nose clearing. A seal was just next to me on its back in the water with flippers on his chest floating dreamily watching us, just amazing.

Dave Medcalf generously offered us to spend the evening at his home in Porthmadog Bay and we arrived to yet another full dinner as the clock neared 10pm. Cathy Woodhead, Dave's partner did an impressive job of feeding us and playing hostess.

The next day the sun was blistering hot as we sat over morning coffee. Their home Delfryn overlooks the small village Borth-y-Gest and we could see sail boats bobbing in the Irish Sea from the comfort of the garden. Cathy jumped up and noted it was low tide if we wanted we could sail and canoe to Port Meirion. We jumped at the opportunity and set off quickly for the vessels. Port Meirion if you have never been is quite the take in and well worth a couple of hours in you are in the neighborhood.

After our adventure on the high seas it was so hot and sunny we spent a listless day in the garden enjoying the weather and rest. As it neared 5pm we set off for the LMC's newest hut in Wales which at this point in time is a rubble of rocks. Still one can envision a hut set in a breathtaking setting which will happen some day in the not to distant future. Dosh was procured from us Yankee LMC members, and I can only hope the local club members donate as well.

Richard had business in the city the next day and he dropped us off at Barbara and Steve Lyon's home where once again we were met with a sumptuous dinner and good conversation. The following morning I made friends with the littlest Lyon, Toby the tortoise, prior to setting off for Stanage and some of the UK's fabled gritstone. For me the place teemed with history as I envisioned Doug Scott and Don Whillans romping about knocking off the big ticks. I found the rock to be a bit intimidating with its rounded holds and all those bloody fist jams. On my second lead, an easy but awkward corner, I certainly did not impress the locals with a full body belly flop onto a ledge. I guess this gritstone is an acquired kind of rock.



Will, Ben, Ellie, Richard and Frank

We were back in Richard's care and set off the following day for some Limestone in Yorkshire. Dave Toon and Kate Hawkins worked some hard problems on the opposite walls while Richard and Will led Chuck and me up some of the bolted limestone climbs. Martin Jolly and Sarah joined in the fray as well. My finger ached and it was a rather humbling day doing what I call the Tetley, aka teabag, which is dangling on the rope at overhangs. By the fifth route I had all I could do to untie hoping my fingers would regain some strength to hold a much needed pint later that night. Will's noble hounds Ben and Ellie jumped about with Ben trying to make off with any unattended shoe. It was a great day spent in good company.

Sunday Chuck left for home and I was a bit sad that this would be my last day not only to climb but to enjoy the company of my friends. Truth be told all the people I've met through the LMC over the years are top notch and I only wish I were closer to enjoy their good company.



Richard leading Central Route

Jean Toon joined Richard and me as we headed off for Wilton One the local quarry where I met with the local hardman Hank Pasquill. Our first route was the Cameo which is spectacular. Next up Central Route which was hard but in a sick way fun. We did three more routes after this but my memory wasn't sharp enough to record their names. Suffice it to say I was beat. My fingertips were sore and my forearms had indeed gotten a workout.

All too soon I had to bid the gang goodbye. The days had flown by and I remained cheerful as I departed as I thought about all the routes and new areas that Richard has suggested for next years tour – the sequel ☺