

### 3 Peak Challenge

Me (Rob Jackson) and Dan Jackson both of the Hundred of Hoo Lodge 8986 along with two of my work colleagues Richard Lait and Nick Egan successfully completed the three peaks, Ben Nevis, Skafell Pike and Snowdon.

Dan and I travelled to Fort William on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> April arriving at 2130 hrs, we had a pint in the pub and was advised by a climber who had been up that day that Crampons were needed to get to the top due to the amount of snow. He told us of a place we could hire them in Fort William. We then got our heads down in the Ben Nevis bunkhouse. Richard and Nick were working on Sunday at the Chelsea V West Ham game and got off late. They arrived at the Bunkhouse in Fort William at 0530hrs. They got their heads down for a couple of hours sleep.

Dan and I were up at 0600hrs and went off into Fort William to hire Crampons for the climb from a very trusting chap called Alan Kimber, He hired the Crampons to us for £5 each, and He didn't ask for a deposit and didn't even take our names. We then had some breakfast (fry up) in the local Morrison's before returning to the bunkhouse. When Richard and Nick woke up they decided that they weren't going to bother with Crampons but went out for a much needed McDonalds breakfast instead.

The Team set off to Climb Ben Nevis at 1020hrs, at the start it was a steady walk with a slight climb, a mile into the walk I was regretting eating a fry-up earlier that morning and had stomach cramps. I later found out that it was at this point one of the team thought I might not make it and give up. I managed to clear my problem and we continued up the mountain. Dan was leading us with his selfie stick in his hand, I had promised to take photographs of the team for the province and work. It was a steady climb and then we hit the snow, 18inches in places and very steep. At 1248hrs we were just over half way and I broadcasted live on Facebook. This was more for a breather for me than to broadcast, but I didn't say that to the team. I was finding the climb very hard and knew we still had a long way to go on this mountain and two other mountains to climb later. After the breather we continued the climb through the snow. None of us had ever done the 3 peaks before, and we didn't have a GPS to assist with the route. We couldn't see any track as the snow was so thick and visibility had been reduced to about 10 feet. It was a complete 'white out'. After about 15 minutes of hard graft climbing through the thick snow we could hear voices in the distance. We continued to climb towards the voices, hoping to get back on the track. We eventually met up with a couple with their two teenage kids, the young lad was unhappy with the climb and was pretty vocal. I heard his dad say 'fifteen minutes more of hard work and were at the top' Nick said to me 'did you hear that skip' this was music to my ears as I was really feeling it, I was tired, cold and every muscle in my lower body was hurting. We decided to follow the family as he seemed to know where he was going, unlike us. Well the 15 minutes past and there was still no sign of the summit and we carried on climbing. After another 40 minutes we finally reached the summit, it was cold, windy and visibility was poor. We asked the Dad to take a picture of us huddled around the summit stone. I got my hipflask out from my rucksack and had a long slurp of whiskey, I shared this with the team. I wasn't looking forward to the climb down, but this turned out to be great fun. Guided by the chap who had done this before we lined ourselves up with some rocks that would stop us going over the edge, we sat down and slid down on our backs. Nick was the first to go off course and went into a role, but still managing to stop at the rocks. I went down controlling my speed as Dan went flying past, all of a sudden he stood upright then into a forward roll. He had put his foot down to slow down and the Crampons had dug in, causing him to stop sharp. Richard also came down straight, getting snow up

his top. We then moved to another stretch and continued to slide down as far as we could. We then had the dreaded ledge, which was trodden snow about 12 inches wide with snow going up on the right and a steep drop to a river at the bottom on the left. This was a dangerous part of the climb but essential to get up or down the mountain. Richard went across first with Dan following, as I was halfway across I tripped on the strap from the Crampon losing my footing. I dug my fingers into the snow on the right and steadied myself, breathed deeply and continued across. It was only after when I got across and looked down I realised how lucky I was. Having seen me slip, Nick carefully manoeuvred himself across safely. After a short while the snow started to disappear and the climb down became Stoney. This was starting to hurt in different areas than before. We finally made it back to where we had started. Our total time up and down was 4h 52m, longer than we had hoped, but there had been an unprecedented amount of snow on top of Ben Nevis.

We got changed out of our wet clothes, Drove down into Fort William and returned the Crampons we had hired. We then set off for the Lake District and Skafell Pike. The scenery was beautiful through Loch Lomond and the Scottish countryside, it was a long drive back to England and it was starting to get dark. The plan was to get to Skafell Pike and climb it at night. We didn't have a dedicated driver, but shared the driving. This was a good 5 hour drive. After a fair amount of motorway driving, we went through country lanes. At one point I thought we had gone wrong as we went across a cattle grid into the darkness. We couldn't see what was around us, it was pitch black, we could only see the road ahead in the headlights. I had no signal on my phone, We drove for miles and miles, going over cattle grids and into another 'field', it was only the next day I realised we had travelled through the Lake District National Park and this was the only route in and out. We reached one of the cattle grids and the road was blocked by a very large Highland Bull with massive horns. Dan was driving, he flashed the headlamps and sounded the horn, but the Bull was not moving. He says to me 'get out and move it' 'No chance' I say. Dan reversed back and we drove to the right of it just getting through the gap, as we passed it, it swung its head towards the car just missing us, but we got through without any damage. We still didn't know if we were in the right place, trusting the sat-nav we had programmed when we had signal. Eventually we came to a car park. It was pitch black, there was a pub and shop at the end of the lane which were closed and we were surrounded by mountains. They all looked very high, I didn't have a clue which one was Skafell Pike. It was very wet in the air and we now had to wait for Richard and Nick to arrive. After about 20 minutes I could see headlights approaching in the distance, this turned out to be Richard and Nick arriving. They too had come across the Highland Bulls and had also managed to get through without incident. Like us they didn't have a clue what mountain was Skafell Pike. It was now 2330hrs and we were not going to make the 24hr challenge, but were still determined to complete all three mountains. I suggested that as we didn't know which mountain to climb, we didn't have maps and there was nobody around to ask, that we got some sleep in our cars and started at first light. This was agreed by the team. Next morning day broke at 0600 hrs, the silhouette of the mountains were clearer and I thought I could work out the tallest of them, I even said to the team 'it's probably that one' pointing to the tallest one I could see. We got ourselves ready and looked for the start of the trail. Finding a map on a poster by the shop, we discovered we were in the wrong place and Skafell pike was in the far corner of the car park behind another mountain and couldn't be seen from where we were. I am so glad we didn't set off the night before otherwise we would have climbed the wrong mountain.

We set off at 08.05hrs, from the off, this was a much steeper climb from the one of Ben Nevis and I was hurting all over. Every step was painful, my calves, thighs, quads, and knees you name it, it hurt. To make matters worse the mountain was in a cloud and it was pouring with rain. We were soaked through, the rocks were slippery and some were loose, we all slipped at some point, but managed to steady ourselves. After 2.5 hours of climbing I again broadcast live on Facebook, you couldn't see too

much as we were in the cloud and rain. You could see the pain on my face though. My broadcast wasn't so long this time either as I wanted to save my phone battery incase anything went wrong. I couldn't help thinking of the dodgy climb down we would have on the wet rocks once we reached the top. I was grateful to Dan, Richard and Nick who had much more energy than me and wanted to plough ahead rather than stopping for a breather every 15 minutes. I said to them 'I will get to the top, slowly but surely' I didn't know who I was trying to convince, them or me. We carried on and on. Seeing the Summit was such a great feeling, I had made it along with Dan, Richard and Nick as a Team. Dan took a video and photo with the selfie stick to prove we had made it and then it was time for the dodgy climb down. And yes it was dodgy, again we all slipped onto our bottoms coming down, tiredness, aching muscles and slippery rocks all had their part to play. We did get down safely and without serious injury. We were soaked through though and it was pouring down with rain on the ground. We completed Skafell Pike in 4h 50m.

We had nowhere to change from our wet clothes so we decided to have a hot meal in the Pub and change in the toilets there, which we did. After a hot soup of the day and a lovely 8onz steak with all the trimmings we got into our cars at 1330hrs for the 6 hour drive to North Wales and Snowdon. Dan took the first stint of driving for us and Richard for him and Nick. Again the scenery was beautiful, I couldn't believe that the trail we had driven along the night before through the national park had a river running alongside us most of the way without any fencing to stop you going over the edge, park land and mountains the other side. We didn't see any of this on the way in as it was pitch black. I wasn't looking forward to Snowdon. I was tired, hurting all over and I knew that it would be dark climbing it. Once we got onto the A6 I shut my eyes for some sleep. After a few hours I swapped over with Dan and continued our drive in traffic to Snowden arriving at the carpark at the bottom of Snowden at 1840hrs. We arrived first and waited for Richard and Nick. It was still light, so I scouted around and found a picture of the routes up Snowdon. The Pyg Track was the most direct route, but dodgy. Richard and Nick arrived and we kitted ourselves up in our wet boots and coats, head torches and provisions for our final climb.

We started out at 1930hrs, I had been told that Skafell Pike was the hardest to climb as it was the steepest, Ben Nevis was the tallest and difficult due to the snow, but Snowden was the easiest of the three, even pensioners have been to the summit. This was a dig at me I think as I am much older than Dan, Richard and Nick. We started up the Pyg Track, about a mile in and Nick was starting to feel it, He hadn't had much sleep from the off due to working on the Sunday. I was just glad that it wasn't just me now holding the team back. This mountain was a steady climb with sheer drops to the side. No room for error without serious consequences. At 1956hrs I again broadcast live on Facebook. Dan spoke to his young family and my grandchildren Rosie and Charlie on facetime. We had to make the most of the phone signal as it was touch and go if there was any on the ground. We continued our climb and darkness started to fall, head touches went on and our concentration levels increased. Watching every step. It was very difficult to make out the track as visibility was short and the fog was thick. Five or six times we had to back track as we were off the path and came to the edge with a sheer drop. On one occasion we went across a knife edge ledge, I could feel my knees shacking in fear of falling as I crossed it. I wasn't happy we were going the right way and asked Dan, who was leading if he was sure we were going the right way. He said he thought it was the right way but couldn't be sure. Nick and I remained put to save energy whilst Dan and Richard went ahead to check out the route we were taking. They were gone a good 5 minutes when they returned and said it lead to a sheer drop at the side of the mountain. I was glad that we hadn't gone any further, but now we had to go back over the knife edge. We got back over the knife edge and I opened Google maps on my phone, it showed roughly where we were on the mountain and the Pyg Track. We were way off where we needed to be. We went back to where we thought we went wrong and Nick found

a small sign saying Pyg Track this way and an arrow pointing in the opposite direction we had taken. We were now back on track. We continued to use google maps as best we could to give us an indication of where the Pyg Track went. We kept climbing, it was slow, but steady, this was partly due to the darkness, but also Nick and I having to stop for a breather every 10 minutes or so. It was pitch black and we were well above the clouds, the sky was lit up with stars and satellites, really beautiful to see. I could of stayed there all night watching them (mainly for the rest) During our many stops we would turn off our torches and stare up at the stars, we also saw a few shooting stars. We thought we were near to the top of the mountain when Richard pointed to a dark silhouette in the distance and said 'we've still got that to go yet' I wasn't going to give up now, I blocked out the pain, gritted my teeth and we continued the climb. On one of our stops we could see torch light some way down and thought we heard voices. We thought this must be other climbers and we shone our torches in that direction without any response. We continued up and up and up finally getting to a flatter bit, we could see the lights from the town and could make out the A5. It looked so clear on that side of the mountain. One of the lads pointed out a train track running up the mountain, leading up towards the summit. I thought to myself now I know how pensioners have got to the top of this mountain. We still hadn't made it to the top, there was still a fair way to go but it was rocks laid as steps but still very steep. The torches we had seen earlier were now getting closer. We continued up to the summit. I felt so relieved that I had made it and as part of a team. Dan again took a photo of us with the summit stone and I again for the final time at 2250hrs broadcast live on Facebook from the summit of Snowden. I was still dreading the climb down in the dark as we had had some very scary moments on the way up. We were joined by three lads in their early 20s. They jokingly said they were disappointed we had got to the summit first. They were really friendly and chatty. They were students studying at the local university. I asked them if they knew the way down as we had got lost on the way up. I explained we only know that way back. They advised us that it was too dangerous to go back in the dark along the Pyg Track and would show us another way down. We were happy with that. He followed on by saying that the route we would be taking was very slippery, but not as steep, if we stick with them and follow where they go we would be ok. He then told us that someone had slid off the side, 800 feet down and died in February. We had made it this far and I wasn't about to make any mistakes now. The descent felt great, my ears were popping, the air was fresh and I was ready to go home. We followed the railway track down and followed every footstep our new friends made. As we passed through a very icy slope, they pointed out exactly where the man had slipped to his death, there was a bit of an eerie feeling as we passed the spot. The lower we got the more the pain I felt in my shins, it was a long way down. Even Richard was now starting to get pains in his knees due to the constant jarring of our feet controlling the speed down.

It was a great feeling knowing we had achieved the three peaks. Yes I would have liked to have completed them in 24 hours, but since I have been back and read up on the challenge, we went about it all wrong making it difficult for ourselves. If I was to give advice on anyone doing this trip, put some time into planning it. Hire a minibus with a dedicated driver, that way none of the climbers have to drive and can get some rest between mountains, Take a map of all three mountains and a climber who has done it before and knows the routes to take and do some training to build your fitness up before you go, this is no walk in the park.