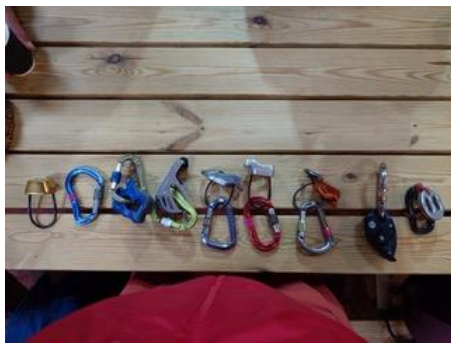


## Mountaineering Skills for Walkers – Graham Uney Mountaineering Lake District, 23-27 September 2024

In a bid to expand my mountaineering knowledge, I decided to sign up to a scrambling course. Every time I had a go, I really enjoyed scrambling – first, somewhere on the Red Cuillins a long time ago, then Tryfan's North Ridge, Devil's Kitchen, and Striding, Swirral and Sharp Edges. Daniel, who had trained with Graham Uney before, suggested this course and that he'd like to join in. What a great plan this turned out to be!

This five-day course was tailored to our individual experiences and personal objectives. I wanted to learn basic rope skills, practice scrambling route finding and get more comfortable with exposure. I got plenty of that and a bit more: I learned when to scramble unroped or when to rope up, how and when to move together, how to pitch sections, how to descend.

*Monday.* On a cold and misty morning, we started our week at Basecamp North Lakes Farm Shop and Café to make a plan. After coffee, we made our way to Keswick Climbing Wall & Outdoor Centre for our first session. Graham talked us through



scrambling grades and when scrambling becomes climbing – not so cut and dry. We then looked at a full climbing rack and what each piece of equipment is used for. To warm up (I think it was colder in the hangar than outside...) we took turns to go up a few routes on the wall to learn/ practice roping onto a harness, belaying and abseiling. After lunch, we drove to Borrowdale and Shepherd's Crag for our first scramble. We continued to practice roping up in situ, checking each other's knots and equipment,

working as a pair, using climbing techniques to scramble up a grade 2/3 route. It was a fine first day.

*Tuesday.* We met at Stickle Ghyll car park in Langdale, on what turned out to be an unexpectedly beautiful morning. Graham talked us through selecting a scrambling rack considering activity, route, terrain, exposure, and weight. We looked up Tarn Crag in the *Scrambles in the Lake District South* Cicerone guidebook to read about the scrambles and identify our route's starting point from the path. And up we went. After



about an hour on the path, we found the holly tree that marked the starting point of our scramble on Tarn Crag. Out of three possible routes we chose The Groove, a grade 3 scramble with a steep first pitch. Once roped up – figure of 8 knot, rope through belay loops on harness, rethread through figure of 8, stopper knot – we looked at anchors and protections as well as moving together when roped, before being led up The Groove.

Remembering the sequence of actions you've got to take once you've reached the pitch is a challenge in itself – securing yourself to the anchor with a clove hitch, giving back to the lead all the gear you've collected on the way up, flicking the rope, getting the lead climber on belay the right way around, belaying them, waiting for the "safe"

call, getting and shouting “off belay”, waiting to hear “on belay, climb when you’re ready”, getting off the anchor, gathering all the gear left and securing it on the harness, finally shouting “climbing” as you start your way to the next pitch. Phew! A young shepherd and his two dogs appeared out of nowhere. They were helping with the gathering; one of the dogs had to be helped down (quite forcefully) the steep crag. It was hard not to get distracted by the stunning view over Langdale and by the hundreds of sheep guided down the mountain whilst focussing on the climbing task at hand.

After lunch, we opted for a second scramble up the East Rib (grade 2) on Tarn Crag instead of going up Jake’s Rake nearby. The route looked like it had not been frequented for some time, so we had to scramble through vegetation and try different ways to set up anchors on a slope with few cracks. The rain started as we were partway, turning the rock quickly from very grippy to quite slippery; it was useful to experience, in a safe environment, how fast the terrain can change with weather conditions. My main learning of the day though was to make sure I clipped any equipment straight to my harness. I can still see the orange belay plate tumble all the way down into the overgrowth... Sorry Graham!

*Wednesday.* Because of the rain forecast – and it was colder than it should be in late September – we changed our plans. We went to Hutton Roof Crags in Lancashire, where there was some shelter should the rain get heavier. The idea was to do some easy rock climbing to build on what we did the day before and practice making



anchors, placing protections using different nuts, cams and hexes and rating their safety to achieve a score of 10+. We tried abseiling, observed how to install and use a safety rope and used a prusik knot to abseil. After lunch, we put our climbing shoes on and consulted the climbing guide to choose a couple of routes on the Ronson Kirby section. I am very proud to have successfully climbed Wings (VD) and The Rib (HS). The rain finally came, so it was time to pack our bags and go home.

*Thursday.* The weather was so uninviting that we went back to the Keswick Climbing Wall for the day. We crammed in a huge amount of revision and of new stuff, such as using a range of different belay devices, warming up, climbing games, precision footwork, climbs up to 6a, how to call out Mountain Rescue, taking coils and moving together, and tying off a belay plate. Traversing the wall blindfolded was a firm favourite.



*Friday.* The sun appeared just in time for our last day. We put all our remembered and new-found skills into practice to alternate lead up Cam Crag Ridge in a beautifully autumnal Langstrath. Again, we crammed a lot in: soloing easy scrambling ground, moving together roped as appropriate, and pitching steeper steps where needed. On the walk back, I was able to remember the IDEALS acronym for anchors we used as our mantra through the day – independent + directional + equal + angle + load + safety. A fantastic day to close a superb week.



Thank you very much to the ABMSAC for awarding me a grant to undertake this course. Thank you to Daniel for the best suggestion and for his company. And a heartfelt thank you to Graham Uney for his impeccable guidance and generous expertise: [www.grahamuneymountaineering.co.uk](http://www.grahamuneymountaineering.co.uk).

Pinnacle Ridge – here I come!

Céline Gagnon,  
October 2024