

## BUMPS, BACKPACKS AND BANANAS

*Hilary Lawrenson*

"Be nice to me next week in Scotland, please, I think I'm pregnant". Here was the excuse I had always lacked for trailing behind in the hills, for refusing to do a winter climb when the conditions are appalling, for eating more than Jim. Of course the midwife would prefer not to hear that I soloed a grade 2 winter climb, rather than rope up on a grade 3/4, but luckily she seemed to have a policy of not quizzing me on my activities, as long as I was healthy. I found it better not to mention climbing after seeing her reaction when I asked about my friend (honest!) finding her harness uncomfortable. On the subject of harnesses, the secret is to dig out your old Whillan's harness and rig it up with a sling to extend round the bump.

As long as it feels right for you there is no reason for giving up climbing other than the difficulty of finding ever easier angled crags to accommodate the protrusion. Overhangs get a bit like hard work after 5 months, scrunching up is uncomfortable at 6, by 7 months you are really



Cartoon by Sue Logan

limited to easy angled rock like Rhyllstone, the Roaches or Windgather. The one advantage I found was the benefit of an extra pair of hands and feet on the E4 arete, Edgehog, in Glen Nevis, which I seconded at 5 months.

The main problem is other people and their attitude to any form of exercise in your 'delicate' condition. I was ticked off at work for cycling to work, carrying boxes, climbing on tables, let alone rock climbing. What would my colleagues have said if they had seen me on the Spring Bank Fell & Rock Family Meet, 4 weeks before son Kit was due, carrying Grace (nearly 3 years old) up Rannerdale Knotts, Buttermere, in the backpack? I found a splendid account in Gwen Moffat's *Space Beneath My Feet* of her experience as an aspirant Pinnacler climbing on Lliwedd on an Easter Meet. She declined to go on the July Alpine Meet not, as everyone assumed, because her husband could not manage without her, but because she would be having a baby. She describes the consternation of the assembled Pinnaclers spreading over Lliwedd, as they imagined the baby appearing there and then and how were they to get her off the cliff?!

Having said all that, the running/cycling books that I have read all present a much more "can do" image of the pregnant woman; running on the beach the day before the baby is born, even cycling 10 miles to the hospital to give birth (stopping en route to help a small boy adjust the gearing on his bike)! I am soft: I gave up cycling when I finished work 8 weeks before the babies

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were due; I confess to finding the 500 feet of uphill to and from work rather hard going by then. I had to go climbing 5 weeks before Kit was due because I had offered to lead a Pinnacle Meet at the Roaches and I could not let a weekend away go by without slipping in a route after the rain. You do not actually see too many greatly pregnant women climbing, so it is fun to see the surprise on people's faces, but I did find the bump got in the way a bit by then.

I shall not dwell on the birth bit, except to say that a climber may have more stamina to cope with the exertion, but you need it because the strong, firm muscles in your nether regions are not conducive to easy labour.

So, is there life after birth?

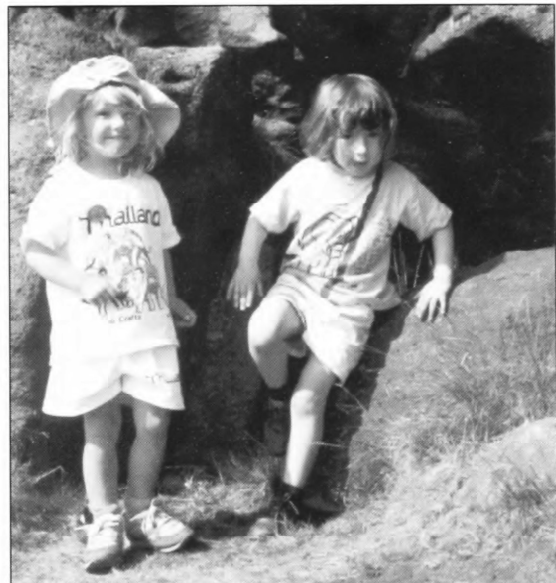
After the initial shock of being exhausted, mind-boggled, weepy, flabby and unable to get out of the house before 4 in the afternoon, things do improve slowly. Those with obliging babies and a lot of determination (not in my case) get climbing again within a few weeks. Gwen Moffat left her week old daughter under a boulder (with a passing babysitter) while she nipped up Hope and Holly Tree Wall at Idwal. A friend of mine, whose babies slept in the day and fed at night, was out seconding E2's at Burbage after three weeks. In crowded situations it is worth investing in a helium balloon to attach to the baby - they are easily mistaken for a pile of clothes and trodden on. A colleague at work once described the following scenario: very small baby at the foot of Stanage, man (presumably the father) belaying at the top of Wuthering, a route which involves extraordinarily wide bridging across a gully to get onto the face on the left; calls down to woman climber in said bridging position, "What's that doing to your stitches?" Ouch!

Once things have settled down a bit and you can actually get out before midday, life opens up again. Here are some of the places my friends and I found amenable in the Sheffield area ...

Burbage Boulders - mums boulder while babies sleep or grovel in the peat. Short climbs, so babies do not have to be separated from mum for too long. Watch out for inquisitive sheep. Stoney Middleton - we used to put the pushchairs face to face so the babies entertained each other. This method usually broke down just as we reached the crux. Horseshoe Quarry - would have been similarly accommodating, both at a pushchair or toddling stage, but for the quarry inspector who would not let us stay. He did seem intrigued to find two women and babies picnicking there.

Once the children are mobile it is handy to recruit a retired teacher as an extra climbing partner so that there is always one person on the ground to make sure the wee ones do not kill themselves.

There follows a relatively sane period when you can stride out with a nice comfortable backpack; go for the best - something like a MacPac Possum is worth every penny. On the hill the challenge really starts when the child no longer fits in the backpack. You either need a similarly pint-sized friend to egg them on or you take out dental insurance and keep up a perpetual bribe of sweets. Terminology is important - Grace, at 4, will happily "go climbing" or "climb a mountain" (do not be too ambitious), but is much less keen on "going for



*Grace Lawrenson (right) and friend*

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a walk” The main difficulty for the adult is maintaining gyroscopic stability, no mean feat sometimes, given the slowness achievable by a young child. I imagined that I would become an expert on flora and fauna, looking at books while the child walked slowly on, but the reality is you are so busy chivvying and inventing reasons for going faster that you dare not stop because forward motion will dwindle to a slug’s pace. Our most successful technique for rapid progress is to launch ourselves down a good slope yelling “Bananas!” and running as fast as we can. Anything over about 6 miles or 3,000ft is only achieved when the children are absent.

Rock climbing is best with another family or with no family at all. A Good Day Out (especially with the father) becomes a rarity. More often than not we each go climbing with someone else and pass on the doorstep.

If you are going with the children you pack for 2 hours, walk slowly to the crag, chase endlessly after kamikaze toddlers, slip in a quick route, then leave early before the children get tired and ratty. Sigh, when will the little angels be old enough to leave at home?

The Pickle Club (sic) highlight of the year is the Easter Family Meet at Cwm Dyli. You do not have to have children to come on the meet; the first time we went Grace was the only child there. It might seem a drawback to be on a meet where someone might cry in the night, but you are still more likely to be woken by Loud Snoring. The meet this year actually enjoyed a few days sunshine, when we could mooch around the hut without subjecting the poor children to mammoth hikes. They were at their happiest messing around making stone factories by the river or just wandering out the back, falling in streams and running after sheep. Other traditional activities include egg decorating and rolling, bunny hunts and tunnel walking in Beddgelert, windy trips to the seaside and, of course, egg hunting and eating galore.

To most members Cwm Dyli would be unrecognisable. The floor is polished to a fine sheen by crawling babies; saucepans, lids and toys litter the entire building; the hut echoes to the sound of tears and laughter in quick succession, of “Keep away from the fire, please”, “Oh no, NOT the coal!” and the sickening thud as yet another skull lands on the slate floor.

Yes, we do pine for those long, late days on the crags and hills; we resent climbing partners (without children) who want to return home while there is still light in the sky, but Grace and Kit persist in being amazingly cute and, after all, someone has to do their bit for the future of the Pickle Club.