

Summit's up

Mountains? Love them or loathe them you'd be mad not to just look at them! Today I'm in the Lake District. I've just completed a short stroll around the path at Brother's Water which is surrounded on both sides by beautifully tall and foreboding peaks. Tiny dots are attempting to scale them. They will all be successful in their attempt. I know this because even I have been known to do it. Runners, mountain bikers, dogs and the over 70s. All can do it. So why am I down here then, in a pub car park trying to spot Nicola's lurid orange windcheater among the crags? Its simple. I don't like it.

I'm a little out of shape admittedly but even so I'm what you call a horizontal walker. The mountains don't call to me as they do to some people. And, when I have scaled or am scaling one I always feel dragged rather than drawn. So, what is it that 'draws' people up these lung busting crags? Well, according to Nicola, qualified I fancy to answer this question, top of the list is 'the achievement' followed by 'the views' and then, bringing up as it were, the rear, 'for fitness'. Nestled amongst these three there is an overpowering feeling of solitude, which doesn't sound healthy, and where one can take stock, cogitate, philosophise and ruminate, sometimes literally but more often metaphysically on the nature of one's existence. But if that's the case, you're already where you want to be in the first place, a place that fills you with happiness and reduces stress, although I can't think why. So if you were to sum up your existence, think about your life, including the peaks (where you are) and the troughs (where I live), then you are already in a kind of heaven, a heaven which has diluted negative thought and planted a smile in your soul. Maybe that's the point. You already know how you're going to feel when you're up there and that's the reason you go.

It's a drug then? Its not those three main points at all is it?! It becomes addictive, like sitting in a Lakeland bar at midday drinking Guinness, smoking and wondering why. This then can preclude any fell walker from a true sense of perspective, like evangelists or vegans. Be wary of them, like people who own more than three dogs.

So its where you find an equilibrium, where you can wash the concrete and fumes of the cities from your memory and clothes? Trouble is, people want to share this alternative reality with you. Can't really blame them. If I found heaven, I'd want to share it too, it's the human way. A person's heaven though changes with every individual and so to join in your *game*, I'd too, have to love it. And I don't love it. I don't hate it either but I'd much rather ascend when I too fell the urge. Maybe it comes down to one pertinent question? Is Mother Nature the most qualified councillor at our disposal?

This is the simplest of pleasures, is it not? Walking. And, after the amount laid out for walking shoes, jackets, trousers, flares, rucksacks, poles, waterproofs, compasses, maps, all camping gear and lunch, it is a very inexpensive pastime or necessity which can appeal. I mean I like walking. Have to. I don't drive for a start. The odd spot of rambling is fun, good for you and gets you out in to the hoary old cliché of fresh air. If the majority of the terrain is reasonably flat I can go for miles and miles with no problem. If I happen to have a transistor radio stuffed about my person and a bottle of Scotland's finest I can go even further.

I don't feel a sense of achievement, well all right, a little bit, as when that's all you've got to look forward to you cannot deny yourself this small pleasure, as taxing as the climb may have been. Yes, I've felt it surge within my breast a couple of times, once the palpitations have subsided and I have ceased dicing with death on ludicrously vicious scree next to a chasm. The views can sometimes be magnificent yes, but for the ascent to see them I'd want to see 'battle cruisers off the arm of Orion...' and no amount of 'Oh look, you can almost make out the car' will ever justify the assault! Ever!