

SPEND

Slacklining is great fun for teenagers and good for core strength and balance. This lightweight Charko Spider Band is a two-part set, comprising 20m of webbing and a ratchet mechanism for getting the right tension. Pick two sturdy trees, secure the line in place and get practising. £30, www.cotswoldoutdoor.com



The insanely lightweight Trailroc 150 weighs just 150g but still offers superb grip on off-road trails. Perfect for the trail running man in your life. RRP £90, www.inov-8.com for stockist information



Mountain bikes are made for adventures but you need a rucksack that lives up to the challenge. Trust the Osprey Raptor 10 hydration pack to do the job beautifully. RRP £74.99, www.ospreypacks.com



If your special lady is always cold, choose the Berghaus Women's Furnace Down III Jacket. The innovative hydrodown insulation works whether it's dry or wet. £170, store.berghaus.com



Even walking boots can be beautiful! These attractive and colourful Helly Hansen Razora Mid HT boots are also waterproof and highly practical. £110, shop.hellyhansen.com



Frog Bikes are kids' bikes made for kids. They are lightweight, with good quality components and come in a range of appealing colours. Prices start from £185. See www.frogbikes.com for stockists in Scotland.

RIDE AROUND SCOTLAND IN FIVE EVENTS

Entries have opened today for a popular series of Scottish cycling challenges.

Hands On Events organise five sportives each year – ranging from around 40 miles to almost 100 miles.

For example, in June 2014 there is a two-distance sportive in the Cairngorms, then in August riders can take on the undulating roads of Skye.

Hands On are also behind the epic Bealach Mor, a 90-mile challenge taking in the UK's biggest road climb at 2053ft from sea level in just six miles.

The sportives often fill up so make sure you get your entries in as soon as you can.

See www.handsonevents.co.uk

KEEP TAKING THE TABLETS



Are you an adventurous backpacker or camper but you can't imagine a trip without your precious smartphone or tablet?

In that case, you'll value a new gadget called the Brunton Hydrogen Reactor, which offers an innovative recharging solution.

There's no need for the usual recharging energy because the Reactor uses hydrogen in rechargeable cores combined with natural oxygen to create power on the spot.

The reactor is around 12.5cm long, weighs only half a pound yet it can charge an iPhone up to six times.

The Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild awarded the Brunton its Derryck Draper award for innovation this year.

Buy the Brunton Hydrogen Reactor for £134.99 at www.ellis-brigham.com

SANDISON'S SCOTLAND

BRUCE SANDISON IS A JOURNALIST, ANGLER AND AUTHOR OF A STRING OF BEST-SELLING BOOKS ABOUT SCOTLAND'S OUTDOORS. HE LIVES IN SUTHERLAND.



IN A BLIZZARD HALF WAY UP A BEN..I MUST BE INSANE NOT TO BE IN THE PUB

I don't really know how I found myself one December day in a blizzard tramping through deep Perthshire snow on Ben Vorlich and trying to keep up with Bruce Reynolds, my disgustingly fit cousin.

Even worse, Bruce was chatting, unconcerned by the elements, as though we were strolling down Sauchiehall Street on a summer evening – which I wished we were.

Earlier that morning, Bruce had roused me from a warm bed with a cup of tea in one hand and an ice axe in the other. "I think we might need these," he said.

Minutes later, I found myself shivering out into a grey dawn, Vorlich-bound before I could invent even the smallest glimmer of an excuse.

We parked by Loch Earn at Ardvorlich near the Coire Buidhe burn and were greeted by a bad-tempered wind, glowering clouds and soul-dispiriting, nagging drizzle.

The summit of Ben Vorlich, The Hill of the Bay, which rises southwards from Loch Earn in a slow shoulder of grassy slopes and jagged outcrops to a ridge, had disappeared in the blizzard.

At the summit, this ridge is joined by three others, crossing to form a plateau, trigpoint-pricked north and grandly cairned south.

I had often seen these features from the tops of other hills – from West Lomond near Kinross, Tarmangie Hill in the gentle Ochils and from the Pentlands and Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh.

They looked inviting from a distance and I reminded myself of this as I struggled through the deepening snow now falling in thick flakes from mist-grey heavens.

Panting like a pensioned carthorse, I snatched a quick breath from the wind and managed to gasp to my companion: "I suppose you are used to this? Just one of life's little tribulations?"

On a reasonable day, Vorlich is easy to climb and one of Scotland's most popular Munros.

However, in bad weather, when icy blasts bustle down the glen, things are very different.

Glancing at the ice axe strapped to Bruce's pack, I wondered where the rope was hidden, thinking of the actor Vincent Price, who remarked: "I once took a climbing expedition and found the real reason those mountain climbers rope themselves together. It's to stop the sensible ones from going home."

Out of the storm, two figures appeared, heading downhill. "Not much fun up there," they called.

Hiding gloom-laden forebodings, I suggested that perhaps discretion was the better part of valour and that our quickest descent was urgently required.

"Thank goodness," said Bruce, "I was beginning to think that I was climbing with a lunatic."

As we beat a hasty retreat, Bruce asked, "What about doing Inverarnan instead?" I was momentarily speechless.

Gathering my courage in both frozen hands, I inquired, tentatively: "How high is that, Bruce?" He snorted: "Don't be daft, it's a pub at the north end of Loch Lomond."

Shortly thereafter, we parked at the Drovers Inn by Ardlui. There was a huge open fire blazing in the hearth of the stone-floored bar, peopled by other walkers and climbers who had come to the same conclusion as we had, that discretion was indeed the better part of valour.



VORLICH Not much fun to climb in inclement weather

PICTURE OF THE WEEK



Leading Scottish landscape photographer Colin Prior tells us about a spectacular view from Lochnagar and the north-east corrie, Balmoral Forest

Lochnagar lies at an altitude of 785m in the centre of the granite massif, which comprises much of Balmoral Forest.

The name Lochnagar actually refers to the lochan that lies in the hollow of the north-east coire and

that rises 200m to a summit of the same name.

After a number of reconnaissance trips and years spent waiting for the right conditions, I finally managed to capture what I consider to be a definitive image of Lochnagar.