

BOOK REVIEWS

The UK's County Tops, Jonny Muir, 2011, Cicerone; £14.95, pp. 205, Paperback, ISBN 978 1 85284 629 9

The UK's County Tops was Jonny Muir's second book and it is the one I want to recommend to you. The first book is an account of his personal journey to ascend all the County Tops of the UK in one continuous walk, the book is entitled *Heights of Madness*. From the walk and this first book, emerged his second book: *The UK's County Tops* which is a guide to walking all the County Tops. He chose to take as his starting point the Counties that existed in 1974 before local government reorganisation and the subsequent reduction in the number of Counties. He had 91 Counties, 92 if Ross and Cromarty are divided.

The guide gives 82 walks to the Tops of 91 Historic Counties. There are two explanations why there are less walks than Tops. Firstly, there are a few Tops which are shared by a second County. An example of this is Ben Macdhui which is the County Top of Aberdeenshire and Banffshire. Secondly there are some Tops which are close together and with one walk you can gain two Tops. An example of this is Kerriereoch Hill shoulder and the Merrick which are the Tops of Ayrshire and Kirkcudbrightshire respectively. Note it is not the summit of Kerriereoch Hill as this lies 100m south of the county boundary.

If Ross and Cromarty are counted twice, there are 34 Counties given for Scotland. The smallest in the UK is Clackmannanshire, with Shetland the most northerly. The highest Top is in Inverness-shire (Ben Nevis, 1344m).

In the book each walk is given a two-page spread. The information given includes the number of the OS Landranger map required. A small section of this map is included in the description. However, from my experience it is unwise to set off with only the guidebook. Many of these Tops can be made part of a longer day's walk. This then lets you understand the setting in which the Top is found. There are usually two, coloured photographs, one showing the Top and the other a more panoramic view of the area.

The first pleasure to be gained from the book is to explore it and spot those County Tops that you have already climbed. Thus, some Munros,

Corbetts, etc. feature in the list. Those readers of a certain age may find themselves reminiscing on walks done long ago and wondering whether they climbed the summit. For those newer to the hills, can come the realisation that not only will a planned walk be a new Munro, it will also be a new County Top. This book certainly deserves a place next to your maps where you can pick it up at any time and gain a sense of hills walked and those that have yet to feel your feet.

My only word of warning is to be discreet when talking to the local inhabitants. They often have very strongly held views that your choice of County Top for their County is not correct.

Whether you choose to concentrate on one or all four parts of the UK you will quickly realise how diverse an island we share.

MARK PEEL

The Salt Path, Raynor Winn, 2018, Michael Joseph part of Penguin Random House Group, £9.99, Paperback, pp. 288, ISBN 9780241349649

This book is one of the most inspirational books I have read. It is the true story of Raynor and Moth, her husband of 32 years. Days after losing their Welsh farm and family home which they had spent their hearts and lives building, and where they had raised their two children, Moth was tragically diagnosed with a terminal illness. Finding themselves homeless and penniless they made a brave and mad decision to walk the 630 miles of the South West Coast Path, England's longest waymarked long-distance footpath.

This Path runs from Minehead in Somerset, along the Devon and Cornwall coasts, to finally finish at Poole Harbour in Dorset. The rise and fall of the trail at each river mouth give it a reputation for being a challenging one, with the total height climbed calculated to 114,931 ft or 35,031 m nearly four times the height of Everest.

I found I really connected with Raynor and Moth as their journey unfolded. The freedom of their time spent wild camping, swimming in the moonlit sea and surviving on fudge and pasties as they come to terms with their situation makes it an immersive, joyful and uplifting read. It makes you question what you would do if faced with their situation. Raynor's way of describing their experience of homelessness

and the reactions of others towards them is both thought provoking and sensitively told. It sheds new light on our own attitudes and preconceptions, hopefully changing them for the better. What I found stuck with me the most was how often people would react with fear or disgust when they said they had lost their home. Yet if they presented themselves as a couple who had given everything up to go walking, they were fully embraced, even revered. The fine line between the two situations is choice, whether they made the choice to give it all up or whether that choice was made for them.

Overall the writing is wonderful (the book won a Costa Book Award and The Wainright Golden Beer Prize), with vivid descriptions of the weather, scenery, wildlife, observations on society, nature, other people and their own relationship. This is a beautiful story of coming to terms with grief (or premature grieving) as well as the redemptive powers of Nature when it seems that all is lost.

It makes you want to immediately get your tent out!

IZY KIRKALDY