

Did Things Still Turn Out Well?

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When it comes to getting through the Covid-19 pandemic with our spirits intact, one consistent message we're hearing from healthcare professionals is that being outdoors can have lots of positive effects. There are those among you who may know I am a keen rock climber (Wood, 2016; Wood and Brown, 2014). With a few extra precautions, most climbers in England, at any rate, have been able to get out and enjoy the sport we love and feel some semblance of "normal".

Nevertheless, the crisis has limited some of our face-to-face meetings and, like many others sport and hobby communities, active engagement with social media has played an important role in maintaining personal relationships. One specialist website is [UK Climbing](#) (UKC). UKC is a key source for climbing and mountain-related news in the UK and beyond. In addition to articles and reviews, it provides different forums for a range of discussions—Rock talk, Hill talk, Expedition and Alpine, Skiing, Biking, Training, you'll get the idea.

Toward the end of October 2020, as the clocks "fell back" by one hour in the Northern Hemisphere and it began to feel like a long time since the blue skies of summer, I started a thread on the "Off Belay" forum. In climbing parlance "off belay" is a standard call between team members to confirm release of the climbing rope. In other words the "Off Belay" forum is a repository for social conversations following a day's climbing; the sort of banter that either takes place in the pub or, in Australian slang, is "taken to the poolroom".

In any case, the opening post read as follows:



 **Summer 2020: Did Things Still Turn Out Well?**

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 Martin Wood  11:02 Wed 


The leaves are falling and Autumn is upon us. How did the Summer turn out?

There have been some major new routes and some fine hard repeats, as well as new Bob Graham and Lakes classic rock records. There's also been some sad passings and trouble at t'mill in the Grampians and at Arapiles in Australia. Then there is the still unsolved mystery of the Lamborghini underpants!

For me the highlights have to be the miles of empty Peak District roads during lockdown, losing 3kg and as a consequence climbing some harder routes again. And, of course, not catching Covid ... yet.

The lowest of the lows has to be the extreme litter in the National Park, particularly in some of the hotspots. Whole festival-esque campsites simply tossed and scorch marks left on the grass by disposable BBQs.

What were the significant highs and lows of your Summer 2020?

I asked this question in the hope of gathering a small, virtual group to share their views and experiences of these extraordinary times. An early reply suggested I probably shouldn't expect too many "highlights". Our generation has never seen so many people's work and social diaries empty so quickly, as companies lay off thousands of workers, the Foreign Office advises against holidays abroad and the new normal of social distancing makes most family gatherings increasingly difficult.

Yet this was not solely a thread about the unsettling anomie that we might assume to follow from the fear of job losses, the absence of physical contact and even a lack of sunshine. Instead, what struck me most was how, amid the coronavirus gloom, people had managed to find some real positives.

Many responders placed a focus upon the comfort of things that really mattered to them (Miller, 2008). I found that people had concentrated on the little things in life, things close at hand. These, it turns out, are ordinary things: being at home with kids, the dog and in the garden. Some felt their bodies were more balanced, the pleasure of seeing muddy post-run sneakers in the kitchen or had realized relatively modest aims. The posts also showed just how many of the consumer goods we spend our money on are actually completely unnecessary.

Above all, the thread revealed my own conventional ways of relating to my surroundings. I realized that my focus had been quite individualistic: being *fitter*, cycling *faster*, climbing *harder*. This got me wondering. Perhaps I should strive to connect rather more than I try to conquer.

To endure these trying times and to help rebuild the economy post-coronavirus many of us will have to tolerate some very odd conditions at work, and we will do this in the corporate jargon of *being more* enterprising, *more* innovative and *more* productive. But I also wonder if how we live now, during a pandemic, might also guide us in the post-Covid-19 future. How we might create an aesthetic that is different and how we might thrive by doing so.

Conceivably we can start by altering the frame of our attention to the *particulars of life*. This is not a new concept and is similar to the phenomenon of taking a "worm's eye" close up view. Just as we have learned to appreciate the things that matter to us within our immediate environment, no doubt because of their familiarity, even naturalness, so also we can learn to make sense of the thoughts and feelings that surround us. Learning to live with coronavirus encourages us to imagine how different the world could look if we try to engage with the smallest details of our perception.

Or perhaps we can try to connect with the *ordinariness of things*. Again, this is not a new idea. The highlights selected by the people I met in my forum thread turned out to be pretty commonplace—their home, family, dog, running shoes. By and large these are the kinds of things that make everyday life something to inhabit and animate (Stewart, 2007).

The pandemic is giving us a glimpse of what might be important in the future, right now. In this difficult time, after months of enforced working from home, the general implication seems to be that eventually things could turn out all right if we *do less* not more in the "new normal".

References

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