

Team Three Peaks – reaching new heights for Southampton eye research!



A team of University of Southampton students, scientists and supporters completed the ‘Three Peaks Challenge’ at the weekend, raising more than £5000 for vision research.

Team ‘Gift of Sight’ took on the highest peaks in the UK – Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon (Yr Wyddfa) on 7-8 September 2024. Every mountain presented its own challenges, from intense heat to a scary storm, with a range of highs and lows in between.

Scotland’s **Ben Nevis** was bathed in glorious sunshine with clear skies and breathtaking views. However, the unexpected 26 degrees heat made climbing difficult, with little opportunity for shade. Some of the party suffered with heat stroke, others were running low on water supply – one even drank from the waterfall to stay hydrated. As the sun went down, so did the temperature and it was a tough zig-zag hike to the top. The long descent in darkness then put the head torches to good use.

Highs: “racing the sunset to the summit” and “a great sense of camaraderie on the mountain”; Lows: “wobbly legs and exhaustion towards the end”.



England’s highest peak, **Scafell Pike** welcomed the team at sunrise the next day, with a steep rocky climb all the way. Time was against them, so they powered through, clambering over the never-ending boulders to the summit. Knees took the brunt of the work heading down, and there were several hobbling bodies hauled into the minibus for the journey onto Wales.

Highs: “walking over a waterfall and reaching the top in impressive time”; Lows: “excruciating pain walking down, slowing the pace considerably”.





Heavy traffic and poor weather meant a delayed start for the final challenge - **Snowdon**. The team eventually set off at around 6pm, with light rain and darkening skies. They made great progress on the gently undulating path of the Miners Track, which was welcome relief for tired legs. Visibility was poor, but spirits were high as they began the steep climb up the rocks, picking their way through the track to the top. Four of the team had gone on ahead and almost reached the summit when the

weather suddenly changed. Fog descended, the wind speed quickened, and rain came lashing down. Clinging on to slippery rocks in these conditions was particularly frightening and the group below were forced to retrace their steps.



The top four had gone past the point of no return so battled on to the peak, before taking the more forgiving Llanberis Path down. It was later they found out that the wind speeds had been gale force and mountaineering in these conditions is definitely not advised!

Highs: "adrenaline rush from the scramble up" and "relief that everyone was ok"; Lows: collective despair, as we realised we had no choice but to abandon the summit".

Thankfully all the party returned safely, feeling very fortunate to have come away unscathed – and proud of themselves for such an achievement. A scary way to end an incredible challenge with memories that will last a lifetime.

All in all, the team hiked for 15.5 hours, completed 890,000 steps between them and had about 4 hours sleep over the 28.5 hours of the challenge.

The Justgiving page is still open: www.justgiving.com/page/visionsciencepeaks. All funds raised are going to the University of Southampton's Gift of Sight Appeal. This supports many of the team's work in understanding what causes blinding eye conditions and looking at ways to help patients by developing new treatments.

Sapphire Eye Care kindly sponsored the costs of the minibus transport between the mountains. University of Southampton researchers Ellie Keeling, Catherine Robertson, Anna Muir, Charlie Ellis, Isaac Mondon, Angus Moffat, Samuel Liu, along with Lab technician Raquel Mendes and Gift of Sight's Jennie Mugridge were joined by supporters Josh Ronchetti, Mark Aarons and Hayden Fosling to make up the Gift of Sight team.

