Tower Ridge 24th June 2012

Often described as one of the finest mountaineering routes in Scotland, Tower Ridge has been a route I have been wanting to attempt for a long time!! It is described in scrambling books as a grade 5 and rock books as a Diff and is perhaps a ridge that crosses the scrambling/climbing boundry – so would it be a scramble or a climb???

The weather up until the Sunday had been wet to say the least and our initial plans to try a climbing route in the Cairngorms were cancelled before the weekend had even started!! I had suggested an easier scramble or a hillwalk if the rain was to continue. When Tower Ridge was suggested it took no longer than nano second for me to agree ☺.

As it was June we did not have an extra early start and left the North Face car park (which as empty) at 09.30, the weather looked ok as we walked in with only a few light showers before we reached the CIC hut. The cloud base was around 550m and we occasionally got glimpses of our objective, looking atmospheric as the cloud swirled round and over the North Face.

We reached the ridge from Eastern Gully and up to the Douglas Gap. The ascent up East Gully was extremely wet and slimy! Care had to be taken with the wet rock and we decided to see if the rock was this wet once up on the ridge. The rock remained very wet until we had ascended the Little tower although it had not rained again. However just before the Eastern Traverse the rock seemed to dry out a little and certainly gave more friction. Up until this point the ridge had certainly got our attention and I would definitely suggest it as a climb and not scramble in these conditions. I had read many accounts of benightments , mainly in winter conditions but also some in summer, I now realised why. We had been moving slower than expected due to the greasy rock and belaying parts which would have proved a lot easier if it had been drier. However once past the Easter Traverse and through the extremely wet Cleft – a huge crack which feels like clambering out of a pot hole- the climbing started to become enjoyable once again ☺

We had entered the cloud not far above the Douglas gap and had only a few breaks, this was a shame however it made the day atmospheric and a little foreboding at times. This was most evident as we approached the infamous Tower Gap. Walking up to the gap along the narrow ledge with large drops falling away to nothingness into mist was amazing. Exposure was now on both sides and it was not long before I had to cross the gap!! It was not too difficult but the safety of being roped up helped. The consequences of a fall here would be serious! The last section would be described as a scramble to the top and it was enjoyable. Still no views though!! We then descended back to the North Face car park via the halfway lochan and got back to the car at 18.30.

A fantastic day, and probably due to the weather , we were the only party on the ridge and also saw surprisingly few people on the zig zags on our descent. My mind was also made up that is was definitely a climb and not a scramble especially in these conditions!!