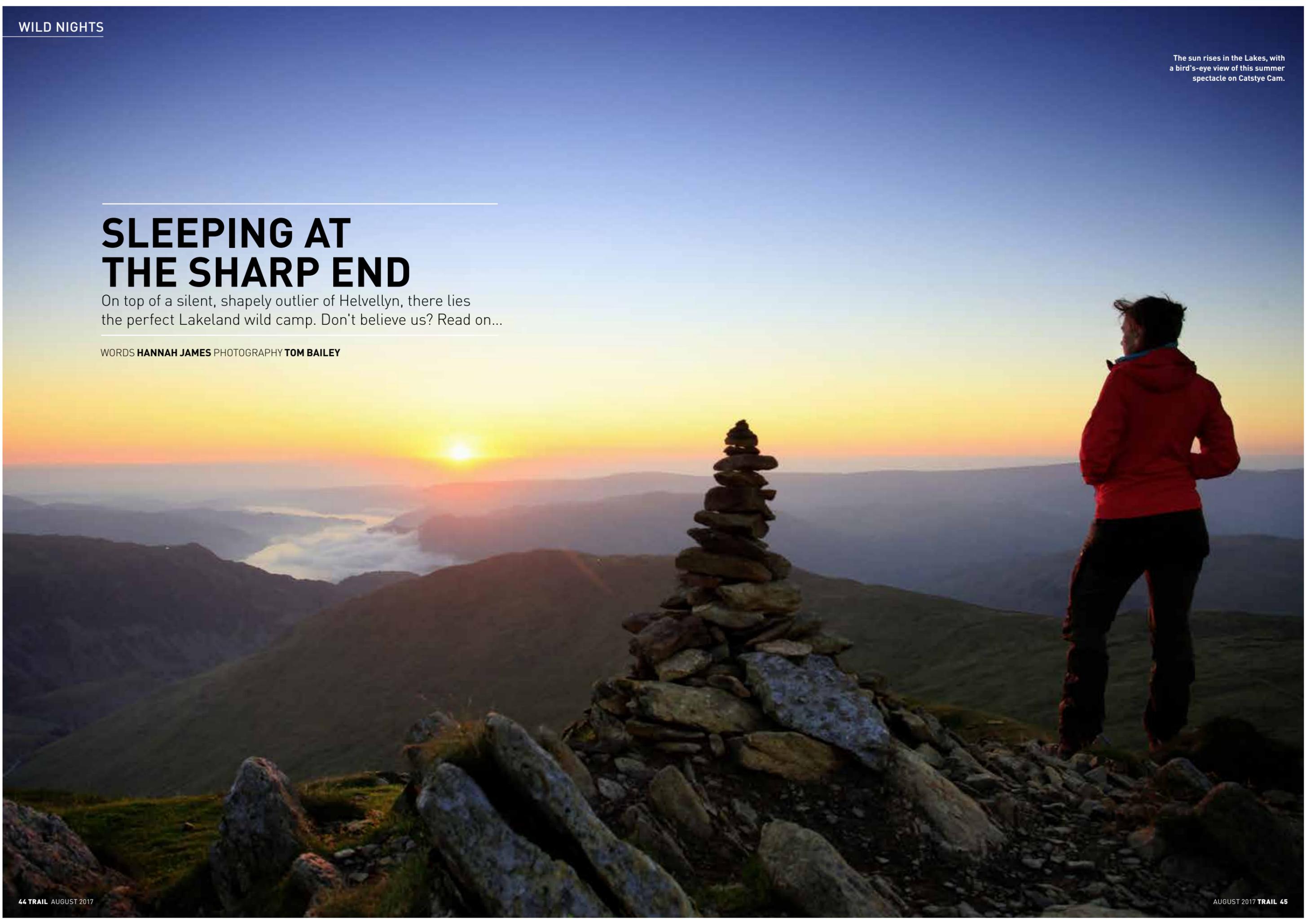


The sun rises in the Lakes, with a bird's-eye view of this summer spectacle on Catstye Cam.

SLEEPING AT THE SHARP END

On top of a silent, shapely outlier of Helvellyn, there lies the perfect Lakeland wild camp. Don't believe us? Read on...

WORDS **HANNAH JAMES** PHOTOGRAPHY **TOM BAILEY**



Looking towards Catstye Cam from Greenside.



A dash of deep red, a splash of gold and veins of vibrant pink were blended expertly together across the sky, as though from an artist's brush. It was 5 o'clock in the morning and the air was still, everything unmoving apart from the rays of sun casting bright beams one by one onto the mountainous landscape in front of us.

It was the morning after the impulsive decision of the day before. The weather forecast had read sun, sun and yet more sun. A rarity too good to miss, and so after my sister, Martha, and I scabbled about to hurriedly pack bags, the car was soon pointed north toward this precious window of opportunity. When the weather was this good, there was nothing for it but to load up the packs with tents, collect Tom the photographer, and find somewhere high to enjoy the views. This meant the Lakes.

In his pictorial guides, Wainwright said of Catstye Cam that if it were to stand 'alone, remote from its fellows, it would be one of the finest peaks in Lakeland'. Sitting on the end of Swirral Edge, it has a classical pyramidal mountain shape from below and, with its sharp and pointed summit, boasts a dominating shape on the skyline when approaching from Glenridding.

Wainwright continued to describe the peak as having 'nearly, but not quite, the perfect mountain form, with true simplicity in its soaring lines, and small pointed top, a real summit, that falls away sharply on all sides.' He heavily hints that although it should be a truly sublime mountain, he thinks it marred for having the bulky form of Helvellyn behind it, and he could be on to something. With no through path it's a neglected peak,



Leaving Swirral Edge, with Red Tarn looking quite blue.



with walkers favouring the more renowned Helvellyn massif and dropping to Red Tarn before reaching the gem that is Catstye Cam's 890m summit.

Deciding to give this characterful fell the benefit of the doubt, it was agreed this was the place to spend the night and decide for ourselves.

Starting in Glenridding, we wound our way up the path over Glenridding Common, veering right before Keppel Cove. Having been a prime mining spot within the past century, this area has wide, level paths to follow. I was excited to be getting up there and experiencing a less well-travelled path. The pyramidal shape of our destination loomed up high above, dark against the bright blue evening sky. I realised that I'd never noticed its distinct shape before, or at least appreciated it as a peak in its own right, but now I knew that was where we were going, I simply could not stop looking at it. There didn't even look to be enough room on the summit for us all to camp...



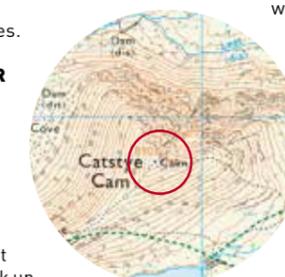
Wild Rating ★★★

GETTING HERE → Catstye Cam (NY348158) can be reached most easily from Glenridding. There are several different routes you can take for a direct approach to it via Red Tarn, or try a longer route which could take in one or both of Helvellyn's infamous ridges.

early and carry absolutely everything out with you. In the large car park in Glenridding (NY385169) you can park overnight for a small fee.

WHAT'S NEARBY → You'll find Helvellyn (NY341151) within easy reach of Catstye Cam, with access to

STAYING OVER
→ Wild camping is the only option but it's important to leave no trace of you having been there. Get there late, pack up



Striding Edge and Swirral Edge. Both involve minor scrambling, have some exposure, with a small 'bad step' on Striding Edge.

Our plan was to reach it via Swirral Edge, Striding Edge's northern mirror. Accounts of people falling from this ridge played on my mind and I felt somewhat apprehensive. Walking towards the edge of Helvellyn's summit plateau, I could see no path down. Indeed, there was no obvious route until we were right on the edge looking earthwards. As we started to descend, my eyes were glued to the scarred terrain. Long claw-like scratches were etched into rock where sharp crampon teeth had struggled to gain purchase on its icy surface.

"IT'S A PITY THIS NOT-SO-LITTLE FELL ISN'T MORE FAMOUS IN ITS OWN RIGHT."

This would certainly be a sketchy route in the winter! However, this was summer – and the terrain turned out to be a lot of fun. Dropping from boulder to boulder, the path was reasonably obvious once we were on it and it was over before I knew it.

Far below we heard the quiet murmur of voices and we knew we weren't alone. Peering over the edge we spotted multiple groups pitched up to enjoy a mountain night nestled in the valley between Striding Edge and Swirral Edge, taking advantage of Red Tarn on the doorstep.

We withdrew and each thought aloud that we were glad to have made the effort to walk to higher ground. After all, tucked away down there they had no view. Why come all the way up here and not find somewhere to enjoy the views? But regardless, it meant if they were battling over turf down there, they weren't battling with us for turf up here. This was just as well as there simply was no room. It was certainly a case of first come first served. The ground was ragged and rocky, with only a couple of spaces large and level enough to pitch a tent. Two tent spaces and three

people. We drew straws on who was getting the bivvy bag. Tom lost. In one way, I feel he actually had the better deal for the sky was crisp and clear with glittering stars stark against a vivid blue backdrop. Tucked away in my tent, I missed most of it.

Waking with the sky, we were up, packed and enjoying coffee before the sun rose. Watching the colours and delicate summer rays spread further and further skywards, it's at times like these I realise all the effort is worth it. It was a scene truly worthy of a masterpiece. Ullswater spread out into the distance and, behind, the flat plateau of Helvellyn summit overseeing it all. These views were memories to cherish for all those moments when I start to doubt my sanity at hauling heavy camping gear to the top of a hill. Don't lie – everyone who calls themselves a mountain lover will have, at some point, wondered why they do it. But then you get to the top, or see views like this, and you remember why.

It's moments like this I want to describe to my friends, family and, well, anybody who will listen. I want them

to experience it, too, and to understand how inspiring and important these places are.

The rich reds, pinks and gold of the sunrise soon faded into a light blue and all traces of the magnificent morning show vanished. So, with packs loaded on to backs we started to descend to Red Tarn. There were no signs of life in any camp. They'd slept through the dawn and missed the whole thing.

Glancing back at the near-perfect form of Catstye Cam basking in the sunlight, I couldn't help but think it's a pity this not-so-little fell isn't more famous in its own right. If the saddle between Swirral Edge and Catstye Cam were dropped by 30 metres or so to make it more prominent, I could see it having pride of place on many a hillwalkers 'must-do' list. As it is, to most, it's seen merely as an unnecessary extension of Helvellyn, which is a shame as it's a truly delightful peak. But then, in another respect, it's nice it's 'unfound', as the rich reward of enjoying this spectacularly un-touristy Lakeland gem is so very worth it for those of us that seek it out! 📍