

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF CORROUR BOTHY.

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I FIRST visited Corrour Bothy, now the most widely known of all Scottish mountain shelters, in 1929. The building was then fifty-two years old, having served its legitimate purpose of a deer-watcher's bothy for about two-thirds of its existence and acted as an unofficial climbing hut for the remainder. I have no very clear general recollection of the bothy on that occasion though I do recall vividly, amongst some other fitments, a prodigious rough timber armchair in which my companion and I were able to sit side by side. I observed also a good deal of internal timber work, a partition, ceiling, etc. Though I never experienced the pleasure of a night's sojourn in the bothy I paid several visits in the intervening years and noted with dismay the increasing and final destruction of its interior by an irresponsible minority. Concurrently the severe climatic conditions of the Lairig Ghru began to take toll of the exterior: in recent years it was obvious that the roof would not survive many more winters and, if it collapsed, rapid disintegration of the already weakened walls would follow. From time to time climbers who appreciated the bothy's location and robust construction, so unique and suitable for a climbing hut in the vast expanse of the Cairngorms, had suggested repairs but, for various reasons, no action could be taken. Eventually and rather suddenly in May 1949 our Past President, Col. E. Birnie Reid, to whose energy and initiative our Club owes so much, was able to secure the active co-operation of the Estate in our proposal for reconstruction of the building, the understanding being that it would remain the property of the Estate, but would



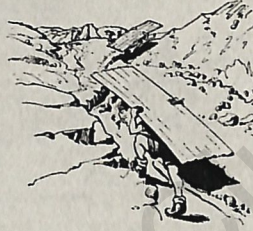
be left as an open shelter. The decision to proceed was quickly and enthusiastically ratified by our members, and a sub-committee, with W. A. Ewen as convener, had several meetings to thrash out details. Though the decision was to some extent dictated by necessity, we resolved to carry out the work entirely by voluntary labour, no inconsiderable undertaking when it is remembered that much building was involved over and above the difficulties of getting so much material to so remote a spot, keeping workers supplied with food and other necessities for over a fortnight and getting together at one time the necessary numbers. Our members, too, are mainly professional and business people and students with no first hand practical knowledge of building trades and many of them had already devoted a good deal of their spare time to the alteration and equipping of Muir of Inverey.

Obviously the first step was to raise money, the minimum amount required being estimated at £100. An appeal was published in several of the daily papers and notices were sent to all Club members. The necessary sum was quickly oversubscribed and the fund had to be closed. In many cases the subscriptions were accompanied by letters expressing feelings of regard for and touching recollections of the Bothy, and great appreciation of the initiative of our Club.

While all the talking was being done and preliminary arrangements discussed, I busied myself in quietly amassing and dumping in a multiplicity of peculiar places the heterogeneous mass of materials required, aluminium sheets, timber of various shapes and sizes and in alarming quantity (from a transportation viewpoint), door, window, fireplace, chimney can, cement, lime, steel bars, rolls of felt, etc., and smaller stuff, though the porters may not have thought so, such as tools of all types, bolts, washers, nails, screws, door fittings, camping and cooking gear, etc. Considerable care and forethought were required here as it would have been quite devastating to find oneself at Corroul without



some essential item of equipment, probably difficult to obtain even in town. Only one item was omitted—several hundreds of felt washers. I still have amusing recollections of these being improvised on the spot with the aid of a belt punch, hammer and a pair of tin-snips. I detailed my companions to hammer and cut them out from a roll of felt as a recreation after the day's work was done and supper disposed of. It was rather comforting to lie on one's camp-bed and listen to the methodical and rapid thud of the hammer from the other tent or watch a second victim deftly and impassively snip out the little discs. If I remember correctly, Drs Thomson and Stewart alleged, quite seriously, that they found it rather a fascinating pastime, but they refused to go much beyond the century at one session.



First moves in the site work took place on June 30, 1950 when I went up to Derry Lodge with all the material from Aberdeen, transport and some important fittings having been kindly provided by Mr W. J. Anderson, Contractor. On the same day Brooker, Crawford, Lyall and McConnach arrived to carry material from Derry. They were ably assisted by members of the Lairig Club in camp at the Lodge and before work started at Corroul much of the timber, all the aluminium sheeting, tools, and smaller materials had been carried there. Many amusing entries in the Visitors' Book testify to the gallant work done. Some of the loads, such as the door, being heavy and indivisible, must have been a real heart-break. Paradoxically, lightness was the trouble with the large aluminium sheets. A strong wind threatened either levitation or decapitation but fortunately the weather was fairly calm for portorage. We did have a very little trouble with the sheets at the bothy; in fact one completely disappeared, probably blown away. It is noteworthy that a large quantity of material was transported by Hutcheon in his jeep from Luibeg Cottage to Luibeg Bridge. When we built the bridge we considered that a

jeep could not be relied on to take a load up and we used manpower only, but Hutcheon did about five trips in one day with three men in the jeep and up to 5 cwts. of material. This help was invaluable since it reduced the total carry from 5 to $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles.



I should also mention here that many suggestions had been made for easing the labour of transportation, such as the use of a caterpillar tractor or helicopter,

but all had been flatly turned down on the score of likely trouble or expense or both. Just before we commenced, petrol rationing was most opportunely brought to an end and with this news an art student, Jolly, suddenly appeared announcing that he owned a Bren Gun Carrier with which he was prepared to try to reach Corroul. With some misgivings, I decided to let him tackle it and diverted the most awkward and least destructible part of our load, 10 cwts. of cement in twenty drums, five rolls of roofing felt, and some other materials to Muir of Inverey. On Sunday, July 2, Jolly, Lawrie, and Douglas loaded the carrier and set sail (I use the verb intentionally after seeing it in action) for White Bridge, the idea being to abandon the paths and proceed over Sgòr Mòr. All went well on the hills for about a mile, when the carrier dropped into a peaty hole and over four hours were spent in unloading and digging it out. I did not see the rest of the performance but the vehicle proceeded at a speed of a mile per day until the effort had to be abandoned and the material dumped beside the Loch of the Greenshanks about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Corroul. It was a very plucky attempt which, in my view, should not be repeated unless under ideal weather and ground conditions (which we had) and unless more than one vehicle were available, one to help the other when necessary.

The main body of workers arrived on July 7 and 8, Thomson, Stewart, McAndrew, McKenzie and I going directly to the Bothy and all others occupying the base camp, quite a village of tents, near Luibeg. I am quite sure that

the relatively exotic, colourful and luxurious life at this camp could in itself justify an article but, having seen none of it, I must remain silent. My lot was to lead a monastic existence in the apparently incessant rain of the Lairig, roaring for more and more people to carry sand and cement and sending insistent notes for ever greater, more varied, and more frequent supplies of food. I do regret, however, not having seen the Presidential Austin returning from Braemar with its owner and Nancy Arthur, our able camp warden, food executive, base camp cook, etc., and with both or all three submerged under a bale of hay for the ponies, great stacks of loaves, piles of groceries, often some ironmongery, and a bag of cement, bacon, sausages, and a whacking dollop of mince. The two last were so high, not only in altitude, by the time they arrived at Corrour, that instant incineration was the only solution. Our poor ponies were a sore trial at the base camp. I believe that, on the first day, nobody knew how to saddle them but the difficulty was overcome with the aid of our old friend, Bob Scott, who was so helpful in innumerable ways. Towards the end of the job it was alleged that both pony and load had to be manhandled to the Bothy. In the desperate search for experienced horsemen someone discovered that Keith had been in an Army battalion where mules were used, and though that unfortunate individual had probably never been within miles of a mule, he was instantly promoted O.C. Pony Transport. However, the animals were quite indispensable in carrying drums of cement, etc.

Meanwhile work on the site had been steadily proceeding except when it was held up by more than ordinarily torrential rain. First Thomson and Stewart laid about them with great abandon, with axes, hammers and crow-bar, and tore off the old roof, everyone else standing clear as rafters and rotten planks, plentifully studded with ancient and rusty nails, hurtled radially in all directions. When the roof was off and we could



better examine the shocking condition of the walls, so loose that one hardly dared to stand on them, we felt rather despondent, particularly as it was a foul day.



The Bothy seemed such a ghastly ruin that we looked at each other and someone remarked, "Well, chaps, we're not going to be very popular if we leave it like this, and it looks as though we may have to." However, our spirits

revived in the morning and we decided that, in the prevailing weather conditions, there would be no future unless we could get at least part of the roof on so that we could store cement and lime, which were continually arriving, and proceed with interior work during bad spells. We were now reinforced by H. Robertson, who walked from Coylum Bridge in a downpour, stayed a few days, proved a most adaptable and ardent worker, and returned by the same means in a similar downpour. We cast concrete bearing-blocks on the wall-heads below the roof truss positions, erected and levelled the trusses, fixed purlins and sarking, all previously creosoted, nailed on felt and spiked on aluminium sheeting, completing the south gable which was in better condition and leaving a gap at the north gable and chimney head for further attention when John Tewnton and Bob Still should arrive the following week. Three of our party, Thomson, Stewart and McKenzie, would then have completed their very considerable share and would take their departure. After a rather thin time for the first two days our commissariat was now functioning efficiently and food arrived every day together with workers to help in hauling materials across the Dee and up to the Bothy and to riddle and carry sand from the river, a cold, wet, and back-breaking job. Over 3 tons of sand had thus to be dealt with. I must not forget to mention the generous gesture of members of the Moray Mountaineering Club. They made the long journey from Elgin by bus, giving us a day's work hauling all the remaining planks from Luibeg Bridge and carrying sand from the river. Indoor work now forged ahead. We dismantled the remains

of the old fireplace, incidentally uncovering the haunt of the famous mouse, the existence of which I credited only when I actually saw the animal. By a sort of poetic justice, it subsequently invaded our tent nocturnally and helped itself to most varieties of our food. A new fireplace was concreted up, wall-heads built up, reinforced concrete lintels cast over door and window, bench shuttered and concreted, window fitted, door posts and door (timber obtained from the old Palace Hotel) fitted by Duguid, door step concreted, and many other incidental repairs carried out. I also had the idea of spiking to the roof ties fluted aluminium sheets to form an internal ceiling. The primary purpose was to make less obvious the existence of the timber roof trusses, though it is hard to credit that even the most irresponsible would touch these, but it was found to provide rather an attractive modern counterpart of an old timbered ceiling and at the same time to reflect a great deal of light, a commodity in which the Bothy was sadly deficient. This was further helped by giving the interior two coats of "Snowcem" applied by a stirrup pump previously used at Muir to spray creosote. As the gland was leaking horribly McAndrew and I finished up as white as the walls. By this time our personnel had changed, the party now being, McAndrew, Tewnion, Still and myself. Tewnion and Still immediately got down to the masonry and pointing work which kept them extremely busy for the complete week. The north gable was built up, roof completed, chimney-head built and can fixed, all walls internally and externally ripped out and pointed and a massive buttress built against the north gable in an attempt to prevent further outward movement. Work seemed to proceed progressively later and later into the night with only a break for tea during the day, and, with the arrival of Tewnion and Still, we had the ritual of preparing by candle-light a colossal meal at 11 P.M. or later. It was a strange and amusing experience to sit back and watch these two performing mystic rites and mixing strong and always voluminous brews in the dim light of a guttering candle surrounded by numerous primus stoves, pans and unfamiliar food tins, the while bellowing out

camp songs plentifully punctuated by irrelevant and often slightly irreverent interjections. All the work which we had undertaken to carry out was completed, with one exception, on Saturday, July 22. We did not clear the rubbish dump: some of my companions protested that it would be almost sacrilege to remove the heap of tins, one of the famous features of the Cairngorms. After a fortnight's stay I was only too pleased to defer it. On our last night, McAndrew and I were the first sleepers in the reconstructed Bothy. This was a necessity since an unmentionable individual allowed a primus stove to flare up and burn out a section of our bell-tent, thereby adding one more but very appreciable leak to the many which had tormented us by day and night. As the individual had given us grand service for a fortnight we cannot afford to reproach him overmuch.

May I conclude by expressing thanks, both personally and on behalf of our Club, to Mr J. G. Munro, Commissioner of the Fife Estates, for all the facilities put at our disposal, to all the helpers whose names are listed and to several whose names are unknown. They got no reward and expected none but I am sure they will always have pleasant and proud memories of work well done on behalf of the wider fraternity of climbers and hill walkers. Let us hope that the many, who will avail themselves of the Bothy's shelter, may be imbued with the same constructive spirit.

Contributors to the building fund included the following Mountaineering Clubs: Barnsley, Etchachan, Grampian, J.M.C.S. (London and Glasgow), Karabiner, Lairig (Aberdeen University), L.S.C.C., Midland Association of Mountaineers, Moray, Polaris (Derby), Rucksack, Scottish Ski Club, Sheffield University, S.M.C., St Andrews University, the Wayfarers' Association, the Scottish Ramblers Federation (Photographic Section, Glasgow); the 1st Carnoustie Rovers and the 15th Stirlingshire (Grangemouth) Boy Scouts. Two hundred and thirty-nine individual contributions were made. Of these, 106 came from our own members and, of the remainder, 88 from Scotland and 44 from England. One donation was sent from Elizabeth, N.J., U.S.A.

Donors of materials included: the Fife Estates (Mr J. G. Munro, Commissioner) and Messrs W. J. Anderson, T. W. Brown, M. H. Gray, W. Malcolm and G. A. Roberts. The list of workers which follows

does not include the names of those mentioned in the article: Misses Arthur, Clark, Ferguson, Lawrence, Levack and Newbigging; Messrs Bain, Bisset, W. Brooker, Cameron, Duff, Duguid, Hogg, Holden, G. Mathieson, A. McGregor, G. McKenzie, Shaw, E. Smith and A. Tewnion; members of the Lairig Club and some six or eight others whose names are not known.

