

Notes

MUIR OF INVEREY

Muir of Inverey has now reached its quarter century as a climbing hut, having been opened originally by the Club in 1950. Derry Lodge, now rotting, was opened a year later. The Club Huts were reviewed in 1954 (*C.C.F.*, xvii, 32) by the then Custodian, Robert Bain. Since then we have lost Derry Lodge, and vehicular access up the Derry road has not been permitted for some years. Not exactly progress.

On the credit side, 'new' Muir is now in its third year of operation since the extensive alterations of 1972, financed largely by the George Taylor bequest. Its popularity continues unabated, not least with visiting Clubs, whose organisers frequently write letters of thanks to the Custodian using such phrases as 'a very luxurious hut!'

In spite of these plaudits, there are still hazards in staying there. In the freak storm after Easter this year, two of our oldest members spent an uncomfortable night with no electricity when the power line went down at Corriemulzie, and were very nearly snowed in. With no lighting, and no means of cooking except on the fire, the two gentlemen were evacuated to Braemar by Land Rover as trees came down round about and the drifts rose. Two days later the Custodian and his two junior assistants had to dig their way in through several feet of snow at the gate - this in April!

Several other Clubs now have semi-regular meets at Muir, and at some periods the demand is such that it has been necessary to restrict these bookings in the interests of our own Members. So far as possible, a few beds are kept free for Members at all times, but at a week's notice, thus it sometimes happens that when a booking is desired only a few days in advance, there are no vacancies.

As those who have visited the area in the last few years will have seen, camping at the site near the Linn on the Mar Lodge side of the river has increased considerably. Captain Ramsay's factor discourages camping on the Muir side of the river, and in support of this the Committee has decided not to allow camping in the Muir grounds. This is undesirable in any case since the facilities at Muir are only adequate for eighteen, the full bed capacity. The no camping decision covers motor caravans as well.

There is now a handsome Muir Cottage Log Book, wherein it is hoped that details of interesting expeditions (other than to the bar at Mar Lodge) will be recorded. Items to date include an ascent of the Four Tops (Cairn Toul, Braeriach, Cairngorm and Ben Macdhui), climbs on Lochnagar and two Burns Suppers.

One problem with the log construction of the extension has been the seeping in of rain water at the West end, especially in conditions of driving rain. In spite of sealing the ends of the logs, this wetting continues, and it may be necessary to carry out more extensive protective measures on the large West wall. Work like this will diminish the surplus that the Muir account has been showing in recent years.

Another job that may need to be done fairly soon is to improve the water



Burns Nicht at Muir

supply intake, which has been silting up at the burn. In carrying out temporary repairs and modifications to that system, in clearing the septic tank inlet, and in more attractive jobs such as collecting and sawing (fallen) timber, the Custodian is indebted to a band of willing helpers. He would also be pleased to hear from Members disposing of collections of suitable magazines to while away the off-days, and to consider the occasional comfortable ancient chair that might otherwise end up on a bonfire.

DENIS HARDY

MUNRO METRICATED

Metric Munros! To be precise, *Munro's Tables and Other Tables of Lesser Heights*, first metric edition 1974, edited and revised by J. C. Donaldson. West Col Productions, £3.80.

First published by Hugh Munro (whose photograph fittingly appears at the beginning of this latest edition) in 1891, *Munro's Tables* were under constant review by their author, but their revision was incomplete when he died in 1919. Revised *Tables*, based largely upon material collected by Sir Hugh, were published in 1921, and a few further alterations, together with suggestions for future revisions, appeared in the 1933 edition.

Twenty years later a further edition was published, but the then editor, R. M. Gall Inglis, felt that 'Munro's Tables was too much of an Historical

document to alter drastically . . . the time was not ripe to institute a revision . . .' and so no major changes were made in 1953, nor in 1969 when the last edition to ignore the insidious metre made its appearance.

Who has failed to be fascinated by Munro's Tables? You may sneer at Munro-baggers, their ranks may include hill-walkers and Lost Leaders (see the poem on page 89 of the Metric edition) but that the Tables are an historical document is not to be denied, and the pursuit of the Tops does take one to many parts of our lovely country. Let us then be thankful that Sir Hugh preceded metrication, for what a sorry thing would 'Munro's Tables of the 1,000 Metres Mountains of Scotland' be! A mere one-thirty or so separate mountains, with only one Ben More, no Slioch, Lomond, Broad Cairn nor Inaccessible Pinnacle – even the 'easy way' Munroist has to *climb* the last! The minor bonus, to those Club members who regard it as local property, that Lochnagar would be the most easterly Metro(!) would be small reward.

Thanks to Hugh Munro then we have 3,000 feet as the mountain yardstick, and although the alien metrestick translates the qualifying height as 914, an odd sort of number, the original concept is enshrined in the Metric edition.

There are some very good things in the new Tables, not least the two new Munros Ruadh Stac Mhor and Beinn a' Chlaidheimh, and Ben Tarsuinn is now numbered officially in the ranks. Most Munroists have included Tarsuinn, one would think, making the total 277 up to now. Henceforth however, Mr Donaldson makes it clear that new graduates must pass out on the new total of 279. Not that this should in any way invalidate the status of existing Munroists – George Smith of the SMC, who died last year before completing his third round of Munros, Tops and those furth of Scotland, summed up the position in pointing out that, if you have a degree, you don't lose it when the Senate changes the Regulations for existing undergraduates! The Metric edition includes a list (p. 86) of those who qualified as Munroists under the Old Regulations.

A very welcome addition is the inclusion of map references to all Tops, certainly an improvement, and another excellent feature is the sketch maps of Munro locations within each Section, which supplement the O.S. maps. These sketch maps make fine browsing when planning expeditions. (One error of omission here, Stob Poite Coire Ardair of Meagaidh does not appear, p. 32.)

But Mr Donaldson has nodded in places, a serious matter when one is re-ordering the Munros. Due to a conversion error, Ben More (Perthshire) has been promoted above Ben Avon, whereas both are 1,171 metres (Ben Avon from the metric map, Ben More by conversion from 3,843 feet, which Donaldson wrongly makes 1,174 metres). These two hills were originally given as the same height, 3,843 feet, and there would seem to be no valid reason for reversing Munro's original order. Even where hills agree in metric height however, Donaldson has been capricious in this respect, maintaining Munro's order with Beinn Mheadhoin and Carn Eige (both 1,182 metres from the metric map) and with Sgurr na Lapaich, Cnap Coire na Spreidhe and Sgurr na Ceathreamhnan (all 1,151 metres), but reversing it with Bidean nam Bian and Ben Alder (both 1,148 metres, by conversion of 3,766 and 3,765 feet respectively) and with Stob Poite Coire Ardair, Sgurr a' Chaorachain and Toll Creagach (all 1,053 metres, the first by conversion, the other two from

the metric map). In all there are seventy-odd errors in conversion to metric heights, most of these by one metre only (but the metre is such a *large* damned measure for our hills!) The Munroist who cares about these things can do his own checking (one foot equals 0.3048 metre) until the need for conversion disappears with the advent of all the metric maps covering Scotland. This is scheduled for 1976, so may we hope for the definitive order of Metric Munros from Mr Donaldson in a few year's time, perhaps with yet more new Munros revealed by the Survey for our delight. And might that grand hill, Sgurr na Lapaich (Affric), be reinstated as a Separate Mountain? Munro downgraded it in his revision, but this seems to have been an error of judgement. No-one who has climbed Sgurr na Lapaich would imagine it to be anything less than a full-scale mountain, well separated from its nearest neighbour, Mam Sodhail. (F. F. Bonsall in the *SMC Journal*, xxx, 1974, p. 254, awards it the gold medal for the most-separated non-Munro.) Above all, let us hope that the Munro tradition, even metricated, will continue, to lead a new generation of mountaineers, walkers and climbers, Lost Leaders and all, into the Scottish hills.

DENIS HARDY

MORE MAPS OF MOUNTAINS

There is a continuing demand for maps that enable the inexperienced, touristic hill-walker to return safely from the hills. Provided the ability in the use of a compass is adequate, almost any map suffices in clear daytime conditions, but things are rather different in an emergency caused by reduced visibility arising from mist, white-out, blizzard or darkness. Then a map that provides the desired information unequivocally and without frills is needed. For this there is little to beat the standard one-inch Ordnance Survey map, and the promised 1:50,000 maps covering the highland areas are awaited with interest. The shortcomings of the present O.S. 1:63,360 Tourist Maps were pointed out in 1968 (*CCJ*, vol. 17, no. 93, pages 252 and 275) in a review of the series of tourist maps covering the Cairngorm area that started with our own Club Map in 1895.

Meantime Ordnance Survey have produced an Outdoor Leisure Map of the High Tops of the Cairngorms on a 1:25,000 scale (1974, £1.15) and University of Glasgow Press have published a Cairngorms Recreation Map on a 1:35,000 scale (1974, 50p). In both maps the heights are in metres, with contours at 10 m vertical intervals and grid lines 1 km apart. The area covered is essentially the same in each map, from Aviemore in the north-west to Derry Lodge in the south-east. The O.S. map, at roughly 2½ inches to the mile, extends far enough to cover the Geldie-Feshie path to the south and west and the Lairig an Laiogh to the east and north; it is in consequence more than twice as unwieldy. Both maps leave out the eastern high tops, Ben Avon and Beinn a' Bhuird.

Neither map can be unconditionally recommended to climbers. The O.S. map certainly does not carry the very dense hill-shading of the 1964 Tourist Map, but the markings for features such as boulders and scree make it impossible to follow the lines of individual contours on, for instance, the steep

slopes flanking the Lairig Ghru or Strath Nethy. In this respect the Recreation Map, which does not identify such features, is much more legible. But even on these increased scales neither map locates summit cairns satisfactorily. This is a fault of all recent O.S. maps, as pointed out in the 1968 article. This O.S. map at least reports where a cairn exists, but, as on Carn a' Mhaim, its precise location is often difficult to establish. In conditions of low visibility it is sometimes desirable to know exactly where one is starting from!

In both maps the boundaries of the nature reserves and forest parks have been made excessively obvious. As a result it would scarcely be possible, in that 'wet mist of a late autumn evening', to decide from the map whether or not a path ran along the boundary or to distinguish between a path and a county boundary.

Comparing the maps, there are differences of up to 3 metres (some 10 feet) between the heights of various tops, sometimes one and sometimes the other being higher. The scrambler on the north-east ridge leading to Angel's Peak will find the summit to be some 335 feet further away than he expects if he believes the Recreation Map spot-height rather than the contours.

The height and name of our highest summit still give rise to uncertainty. While the Recreation Map prefers the conventional Ben Macdhui, Ordnance Survey adhere to their Ben Macdui, but now give the alternative Beinn Macduibh in two words rather than three. Members will recall that in the 1964 Tourist Map the long-established 4,296 feet became 4,300. In the new O.S. map it is given as 1,309 m, although 4,300 feet converts, using their conversion factor of 1 m = 3.2808 feet, to 1,310.66 m and 4,296 feet to 1,309.44 m. There therefore appears to have been a return to the older height. The Recreation Map gives 1,311 m. The unsatisfactory nature of rounding-off to a unit of more than 3 feet becomes even more apparent on reconversion from metres to feet, as the respective heights then become 4,294.57 and 4,301.13 feet. A vast field for argument about relative positions in Munro's Tables is opening up.

The locations of the controversial high level bothies (Curran, El Alamein and St. Valery) are indicated on the Recreation Map but not by the O.S. map, which places considerable emphasis on the more reliable low level refuges.

The recreational and leisure facilities in the Aviemore area, around Loch Morlich and in Coire Cas are well publicised in both maps, although only the Coylumbridge Hotel is specifically named. The O.S. map identifies many of the better known gullies and ridges while the other merely indicates areas of general climbing interest.

The Recreation Map, which was produced by the Department of Geography of the University of Glasgow with the assistance of the Countryside Commission for Scotland and the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland, reprints the Mountain Code for Scotland on its cover and, around its margin, details the simple rules of good behaviour set out in the Country Code.

These maps are obviously intended to serve the dual purpose of guiding the summer tourist to nature trails, forest walks or simple hill walking as well as the downhill skier to the ski-tows, but, as already pointed out, they should also be able to take them out of unanticipated perils, and should therefore be as foolproof as possible. The bright colours, particularly in the Recreation Map, the heavy markings and excessive emphasis of recreational features could well

be a nuisance, if nothing more, in such circumstances. There might be a market for a conservatively updated reprint of Sheet 43 of the O.S. One-Inch Popular Edition, which in 1947 sold for two shillings and threepence. The writer still has mint copies of this and Sheet 50 (Lochnagar) acquired when they were sold off cheaply in 1957 on the publication of the less conveniently sheeted Seventh Series. The hills themselves do not seem to have changed all that much, but it would be unwise for the uninitiated to use such old maps, as they do not give the up-to-date information on paths, obstructions or reliable refuges that could mean survival.

R. L. MITCHELL

IN THE HIGH TATRAS

My interest in this fascinating range of mountains began in a Prague record shop in 1969 when the Symphonic Poem of this title by Vítěslav Novák was recommended to me. For two years I enjoyed this beautiful music which conjured mental pictures of rugged peaks standing against the skyline in its majestic main theme, airs of mystery and peace, a thunderstorm, and a pervading sense of the power and eternity of Nature.

It was a warm Sunday morning in July 1971 as our overnight train arrived at Poprad in central Slovakia and my mother and I alighted with our Czech friend, a lady who knew the area well and had arranged accommodation privately for the three of us for a week. As we looked northwards, we could see for the first time what we had previously enjoyed in sound, the magnificent peaks of Slavkovský Štit and Lomnický Štit before us. A picturesque mountain railway connected the small resorts that were dotted along the southern foothills of the range, the most central of these being Starý Smokovec, within easy walking distance of where we were staying. As the day approached noon and we went for our first short exploration of a well-used mountain track, we were greeted in earnest by Novák's thunderstorm. These storms frequently built up in the central area in the middle of the day and cleared by late afternoon.

Our three climbing days on that first visit included the Velka Studena Dolina - the Great Cold Valley - which rises to about 6,000 feet and is still surrounded by rugged peaks at the end, where there is a large chalet. One can obtain refreshments and there is seating room for well over 100 people in the event of thunder. All supplies are brought up by sturdy youths on their backs, a good eight miles' walk each way. There are passes over the peaks surrounding the Dolina for those able to do a cross-country expedition. The northerly passes go into Poland. The High Tatra range is in fact quite a small clump of mountains about 25 miles across, surrounded by plains. The easternmost part is called the Belanský Tatry and there is a splendid 6,000 foot pass between this and the main range. We crossed this pass, a walk of about 18 miles from Javorina to Talianska Lomnica on our second visit in 1973. The mountains are of granite, generally in rugged formations, the nearest comparison in Scotland perhaps being the mountains on Skye. The highest peaks rise to between 8,000 and 9,000 feet. Some of these are not accessible to the average hill walker and anyone wishing to climb them must have prior permission and go with a trained

rock climbing guide. The High Tatras are a state-owned National Park and people are expected to keep to the paths which are indicated by coloured marks. A guide map shows where each of the paths leads and there are beautifully made indicators showing in hours the times needed by an average climber to a particular objective.

Our greatest day was on our second visit in 1973, when we were staying at Nova Lesna, about a mile and a half distant from the mountain railway station. Our objective was Kriváň, a beautiful 7,000-foot peak on the western side of the range. One might call it the Lochnagar of Slovakia as songs and poems have been written about it. We were up before 6.00 am and on the little crowded train by 7.00 am. When we reached Štrbské Pleso, the western terminus, the morning mist had not yet lifted but we all felt that we were set for a really fine day. It was nearly 9.00 am by the time our friend Milada had completed preparations for the day and by the time we had completed most of the approach walk and had our breakfast, the mist had cleared and the day was warm and sunny without being oppressively hot. As we climbed, we had a fine view of the surrounding plains, all very good agricultural land, the nearer approaches being wooded, mainly with tall pines and spruce. The indicator showed Kriváň as being $2\frac{3}{4}$ hours distant, but in fact we took much longer to reach the summit. Mother needed her time and I also wanted to stop frequently for photographs. There were many people out on the climb, mostly East Germans and we found on more than one occasion that they were glad to speak to anyone from the forbidden West. The panorama of peaks viewed from the summit was impressive indeed. A certain amount of permanent snow lay in some of the gullies. We stayed up there for nearly an hour before time compelled us to pick our stony way down, and it was quite dark before we reached the lower approach track where we rested for our evening meal, only reaching Štrbské Pleso with five minutes to spare before the departure of the last train. It was a day we will never forget.

The High Tatras are part of the Carpathian range which extends into Hungary and Rumania. They display an abundance of plant life and alpine flowers, but one feature that stands in the memory as especially characteristic is the miniature pine which grows like a thick bush on the higher slopes before one reaches the levels of bare rock. Animals include the Marmot and the Chamois. We have enjoyed two separate weeks of wonderful peace in this area, which is Czechoslovakia's most famous resort. We would certainly go again and recommend the district as being most rewarding to all lovers of the mountains.

LOUIS FUSSELL

TOMINTOUL TO THE SHELTER STONE

The advent of a particularly fine and sunny weekend in mid-May tempted me this year to set out on a journey I had long wanted to make – from Tomintoul up the River Avon to its source in Loch Avon. There is something especially wild and grand about the wilderness to the north of Beinn a' Bhuid and Ben Avon. I had often looked down on this scene, but had never tramped through it, so I persuaded a friend to drive with me to the Linn of Dee, where I left

my car at about 4.0 pm on a warm Saturday afternoon. My friend then ferried me in his car to Tomintoul, where we had high tea, after which, suitably fortified, we drove a little way from the village to just beyond Delnabo. There, I shouldered my pack, said a fond farewell to my friend, and set out in the evening sun on the road by the Avon. I enjoyed the peace of the walk up the glen, and reached Inchroary while it was still light. It seems sad that what must once have been a pleasant moorland track up the Avon from here has now been turned (or churned) into another estate road. Here and there, there are traces of the original path, but now, for the most part, the walker has to trudge up a wide Land Rover track, similar to the one which has despoiled the route to Lochnagar up the Allt na Giubhsaich. However, I was relieved to find a workers' shack near Coire Grealach, and I dosed down for the hours of darkness in this primitive structure, with only a mouse for company. This creature seemed very fond of paper, and it chewed away at an old P and J during most of the night. At the first light of day, I left this hovel, and walked for a couple of hours to Faindouran Lodge, now practically derelict but for one room which has been kept in repair by the Mountain Bothies Association, and seems to be a comfortable enough shelter, complete with Visitors' Book. During my walk from my overnight resting place, a perfect day had gradually dawned, with the northern aspect of Ben Avon and Beinn a' Bhuird growing clearer and more magnificent. Just before reaching the Lodge, what might have been a vixen, or even a wild cat, crossed the track. It loped from boulder to boulder, over the heather, pausing every now and then to eye me suspiciously, before finally disappearing over the top of the ridge. I made myself some breakfast at Faindouran, and then continued up the Glen in the brilliant light of the early morning.

Soon after Faindouran, the estate road ends, and thereafter, the route lies on a narrow but well cairned mountain path – much easier on the feet. I was surprised to turn a corner and find a blue tent, out of which was emerging a young chap who was criss-crossing the Cairngorms as a camper/cyclist. Although the path at this time would have been unfit for cycling, he was heading for Inchroary, and the road from Faindouran would have been much pleasanter to cycle down than it had proved for walking. The Glen now narrowed, and the scenery became even more spectacular. Soon, I came to the summit of the Lairig an Laoigh, and looked into the mountain shelter there, before following the rough and boggy track up to Loch Avon. I walked up the northern side of the Loch, with the wonderful panorama of the Shelter Stone Crag and the whole great rocky cirque looking particularly fine. I had never before visited the Shelter Stone (Clac-Dian), and, on reaching the head of the Loch, I strolled up to the historic spot where the Cairngorm Club had been founded in 1887. I was unable to sign the Visitors' Book, as there was no pencil. After a longish rest for lunch, I set out on the well defined track to Loch Etchachan. There was a great deal of snow about, and the scene was quite Alpine. As the weather was still superb, I did not hurry, but gently strolled down into Glen Derry, past the sadly neglected Derry Lodge, and along the familiar track via the Black Bridge to the Linn of Dee, where I was quite glad to become reunited with my car, as I was beginning to feel slightly weary after my 30-mile trek through the Cairngorms.



Loch Avon, May 1975



Glen Avon, near Faindouran Lodge

[photos by D. Hawksworth]

A MOST REMARKABLE HAPPENING

All those who attended the 1975 'overnighter' share many wonderful memories of that remarkable night, memories of the delicious scent of the woodland approach, the splendour of the sunset whose orange glory never left the sky entirely but lingered eastwards towards the dawn, the moon almost full making a lunar-like landscape of the grey corries, the falling stars, the pink tinted morning snow and much more. But I have a memory of that night shared with only two others of an experience dramatic and baffling at the time and which remains very vivid in the mind.

We stood on the summit of Stob Coire Clairigh at midnight and I was looking around for the thousandth time at the wonder of the night, when an object suddenly mushroomed from the northeastern horizon, black against the orange rim of the sky, forming wings as it rose and followed closely by another, the image of itself. The pair hovered briefly as if trying out those wings, then to my amazement began to move rapidly in our direction, at great speed straight towards us, wings beating in ghost-like fashion. Were they ghosts? Were they birds? Eagles - giant owls? My impulsive mind guessed wildly. 'Nonsense', said my companions not altogether convincingly. On they came, more sinister now, silent, black nosed, wings outstretched, aeroplane-like, secret weapons maybe; do U.F.O.'s really exist? There was no doubt about their objective and judging their height at 3,863 feet (Stob Coire Clairigh 3,858 feet) I instinctively sat down, thoughts awhirl, gazing in disbelief at the fast approaching things.

Over Fort Augustus it must have been they suddenly changed their minds and dwindled, first one and then the other into nothingness like puffs of smoke.

The experience was very real; ask the President. Mention of him may lead some to suppose that there had been an untimely celebration of his hundredth Munro. Not so. That came later, on Sgurr Choinnich Mhor, very soberly in orange juice with just a dash, say 99 per cent, of clear or not so clear pure highland water.

TIBBIE FRASER

CLUB LIBRARY

We have received several journals of kindred clubs, and we express our thanks for these interesting publications, which can be found in the Club Library.

The Editor has also received a fascinating report to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust by our member, Anne Cordiner, Warden of 'Rhowniar' Outward Bound Girls' School, Merioneth, on the subject of Leisure and the Natural Surroundings in Poland, Czechoslovakia and India. Anne visited these countries between August and December 1973, and the full and informative report will be of general interest to Club members, and of particular interest to any involved in Physical Education. A copy is to be found in the Club Library.