

AN ABORTIVE ATTEMPT TO COMPLETE A TWO DAY TRAVERSE OF THE CUILLIN

Robin Grant and I have long wanted to traverse the main ridge of the Cuillin, but, not being speed fanatics, we favoured taking two days with a bivouac somewhere on the ridge. For our most recent attempt last summer, we arrived at Sligachan on a glorious sunny evening, setting up camp the following day at Glenbrittle. After lunch, we climbed to Bealach na Banachdich in order to cache our bivouac gear. The good weather did not continue, and one 6.30 a.m. start resulted in a retreat before we reached the ridge. The following day, in spite of mist and cloud, we again left at 6.30 a.m. and eventually arrived at Gars-bheinn at about 10.15. We had engaged the local mountain guide Gerry Akroyd to lead us over the Thearlaich/Dubh gap, and he met us there at about 1.0 p.m. with a small party he was leading on a scrambling course. We abseiled into the gap, where I had been once before. On that occasion, the up-current of air from the Coruisk side was so strong that a glove I inadvertently dropped floated a few feet from me over the abyss, tantalisingly just out of reach, before, after a few moments disappearing from view! Then we had escaped from the gap by a long detour down the somewhat messy gully on the Ghrunnda side. However, with the encouragement of a top rope from Gerry, I none too elegantly thruthched my way up what seemed to me the completely smooth and holdless chimney. Robin followed rather more efficiently – he had obviously learned from my errors! We continued over Sgurr Alasdair, Sgurr Thearlaich, and, after a brief inspection of King's Chimney, we decided that it wouldn't go, and we reached Sgurr Mhic Coianich by Collie's Ledge. Conditions had by now become rather damp and greasy, which rendered even the 'easy' long side of the Inaccessible Pinnacle rather forbidding. After a rather faint-hearted attempt, which involved Robin in a hair-raising abseil to retrieve a jammed rope, we bypassed this obstacle and crossed Sgurr Dearg to our bivouac site. It did not actually rain, but it was dampish and very windy. Neither of us slept much being kept awake by the noisy flapping of a polythene sheet we had engineered into serving as a makeshift awning. Preparing breakfast took almost three hours as the wind kept blowing out the stove – and even then the porridge was not very appetising! However our bivouac site was in a most spectacular situation, and boasted a fine echo, of which we took full advantage producing at times some quite complex harmonies.

We eventually set out for our second day, but the heavens soon opened, and, convincing ourselves that we really needed good conditions for the difficulties still ahead, we sadly abandoned ship at Sgurr Thormaid, and descended Coire na Banachdich to our camp. It had been an interesting experience, and the following day as we walked round the coast to Coruisk and climbed back over the ridge to recover our gear, we vowed to come back soon to have another attempt.

Donald Hawksworth

Footnote – Robin Grant has since written an account of a successful traverse, but this will have to wait until the next issue – Editor.

70 YEARS AGO – JULY 1913

CCJ, Vol. VII, No. 41 p.296 – In the REVIEWS section:–

It is a pleasing reflection – which we may be pardoned for making and making with some pride – that of the 830 individual lots of an extensive and valuable library, dispersed by public auction a few months ago, the six volumes of the *Cairngorm Club Journal*, handsomely bound, with the accompanying maps in a case, fetched the highest price obtained for any single lot – namely £2 10/-. There was a good 'run' too, on bundles of the early numbers, the first eighteen numbers (one wanting) fetching 10/6. This demand for the *Journal*, denotes an increasing interest in mountaineering.

60 YEARS AGO – JANUARY 1923

CCJ, Vol. X, No. 60 p.268 – In the NOTES section:–

The Aberdeen Centre of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society provided us again (Nov 7) with a lecture by Mr George L. Mallory on the year's climbing on Mount Everest; and aided by Mr Mallory's charming exposition and a fresh series of magnificent photographs, the lecture proved as fascinating as was the one he delivered in February. Unfortunately, the lecturer could tell us only of a succession of baffled efforts to reach the summit. The first attempt was made on May 19/21, when a party of four (of whom Mr Mallory was one) started from the camp at the north col, at a height of 23,000 feet. Three of the party, after very severe hardships, reached a height of 26,985 feet on the third day, but finding that the top could not be attained before nightfall, they retraced their steps, rejoined their comrade (who had been obliged to give up) and returned to the base camp. A second attempt was made on May 28, by Captain Finch and Captain Burce, who used the oxygen apparatus, which weighed thirty two pounds and had to be carried by the climber. When they reached a height of 27,235 feet (only 1,905 feet from the summit) it was found that the oxygen apparatus was not working so well as was expected and they had to turn back, a severe wind-storm being experienced. A third attempt was made by Mr Mallory and Dr Somervell on 7 June, but it was quickly brought to an end by an avalanche, which carried nine of their porters into a crevasse, two only being rescued alive. Mr Mallory furnished interesting details of all these attempts, his account being rendered all the more vivid by the accompanying photographs; and in concluding he reviewed the possibilities of Mount Everest being climbed. He is a decided optimist and thinks it can be done – possibly without oxygen, certainly with it; and he is of the opinion moreover, that the task, having been begun by Britons, should be accomplished by them. His view, indeed, may be expressed in the title of Millais' famous picture about the north-west passage – "It ought to be done and Britain should do it!"

NUMBER ONE HUNDRED

Peering though the window in the early morning it seemed as if it were snowing. Yet this was May 1st 1982 at Roy Bridge and Roy Bridge is 90m above sea level. It couldn't be snow but a further look showed that it really was snowing. After much discussion it was agreed to attempt some of the eastern Mamores. Perhaps I would be able to ascend the three at the east end.

Back in January it had seemed an easy task. Casually I said I would celebrate number one hundred at the Roy Bridge meet. Some people climb mountains for enjoyment and some people climb 276 of them, or is it 279? Somehow I had been inveigled into joining the latter group and was now in sight of a landmark on the way. Indolence and bad weather combined to make it three short on arrival at Roy Bridge. Never mind, it shouldn't be too difficult to do three in one day and meet my commitment.

So we travelled to Kinlochleven and at 10.20 began to ascend. There was much uncertainty even from the start as to whether we were on the correct route. After much peering through mist, attempting to estimate the extent of the forestry and consulting of maps, the mist lifted enough to show we were on the path intended. We dropped down slightly and met the broad track from Mamore Lodge. A little backwards movement along the track, and off we went up the path to Coire an Lochain. The mist had descended again and the snow became deeper so each burn reached was carefully checked against the map. The mist lifted momentarily to show us Loch Eilde Mor far below, just where expected – a reassuring sight indeed.

The snow began to fall more persistently and it became ever deeper under foot. The wind rose and at Coire an Lochain my companions decided to call it a day and

returned to Kinlochleven. I was glad. It's not that I dislike their company but I could not ask them to endure the conditions as they were now developing.

Sgurr Eilde Mor was the first objective and so began the ascent of the steep boulder strewn slopes leading to its summit. The wind grew in ferocity as each upward step was made. A map case was hanging on a cord round my neck. It had seemed a good idea since I had to be very careful with navigation. The wind buffeted and tore at the case – it must be put in a pocket or I would be strangled by the cord. I had never realised this danger before so now the map goes in a pocket with the compass tied to the zip of another pocket.

Higher up another problem, of iced rocks covered with soft snow, made progress slow but eventually the summit was reached. In reward the mist lifted for a time and I could make out the next objective, Beinnein Beag. So it was down the north west slopes in more mist and ever deepening snow, waist deep in places. I climbed up to join the path which wanders between Beinnein Mor and Beag. It must be a well defined path for it showed up clearly and provided a useful route forward in spite of the large amount of snow.

Peter Bellarby

ALL THE MUNROS

On the very first day of our retirement we climbed Dorain and Dohaidh. This day will always be remembered for it was then that we became aware that we were gloriously free, happily released from the nine to five treadmill of the previous forty three years. The notion to 'do' all the Munros which we had toyed with for some time began to take root, but we would take it cannily so as not to jeopardise our other interests.

From then on we have gone out about once a month for two or three days, coming home with maybe six to strike off the list, maybe four or two or maybe none at all. We climbed the near-at-hand and easy-to-get-at ones first. This may not have been the mistake it seems, for although it entailed long expeditions into truly wilderness areas towards the end of the enterprise, these excursions, being most recent, feature most vividly in our minds. As all climbers appreciate, the more remote, the greater the fascination and sense of achievement.

We made mistakes of course. We often wonder if anyone else has climbed the wrong mountain as we have done on two occasions, or descended on the wrong side of a bealach to follow a stream running north instead of south. These can be bad moments with severe complications.

Our most curious experience was on an overnight expedition to A'Mhaigdean and Ruadh Stac Mor. We set off from Poolewe, motoring as far as we could, cycling as far as we could, then walking to Carnmore Bothy which we had permission to use, arriving at midnight. We found it full of bodies all in identical black sleeping bags. We flashed our torches around and were anything but quiet, but not a body stirred, not a head looked up. We were strongly reminded of bodies prepared for burial. Bill and Lewis squeezed in somehow and stayed for two hours, but in spite of the noise they inevitably made there was no response whatsoever from their companions. (We discovered later that they were men from an Army Music School. Were they playing low key?).

There has been much fun and laughter, especially perhaps when cycles were used. Outstanding was the day we made little of the ascent of An Sgarsoch and Fhìdhleir by cycling all the way to Geldie Lodge and the day when we approached Mhanach by Auch Gleann, crossing the river nine times when it was full flowing with stepping stones awash.

Ten years on, with all the Munros behind us, what have we gained? We have seen the mountains from all angles and on days of clear visibility have gazed in awe upon half of Scotland. We have watched the white mist foaming out of the valleys and skirting the surrounding peaks and we have seen the dark clouds brooding over those same peaks. We have walked on the high tops with the sun and the wind in our faces and have tested ourselves in the most bitter weather, battling our way to our goal, exulting in our endeavours. Above all we have experienced the spiritual uplift which the remote wilderness engenders and gathered memories to last a lifetime.

Perhaps we have not studied in depth the flora and fauna of the mountains, but can recall with pleasure the many occasions we have marvelled at the beauty of the birds and flowers existing in high inhospitable places. Geology has been discussed too, with more enthusiasm than knowledge. To our amazement many people have taken an interest in our progress and we are most grateful for their unselfish encouragement. In particular we would like to acknowledge the support of Bill Baxter, Sandy Black and Lewis MacAllan who have accompanied us on many of our expeditions. We hope they – and others – share with us the memory of many perfect days.

To finish on a romantic note, we two have stood together on the summit of all the Munros with the exception of Ben Wyvis and this we plan to remedy soon. Surely this is a record of some sort.

Kenneth and Tibbie Fraser

Footnote – I am sure that Club members will wish to congratulate Kenneth and Tibbie Fraser on their achievement which is all the greater since it was a project which they set themselves to complete after retirement. – Editor.

A SUMMER WEEKEND IN KNOYDART

Wednesday, June 29th, 1983 dawned bright and fair in Edinburgh and Margaret Munro and I set off in high spirits, the car laden with more camping gear than any normal two-some would ever think of taking, bound for Mallaig and the head of Loch Nevis by courtesy of Bruce Watt and 'The Western Isles'.

Some weeks beforehand we had telephoned both from Edinburgh and Aberdeen in an attempt to make a definite arrangement about being taken to Camusrorry at the head of the loch and were assured there would be no trouble on the day. We reached Mallaig some two hours before the boat was due to sail to be informed by the woman in the office that the boat would go only as far as Tarbet, which was worse than useless to us. Outside the office a board advertised the cruise up Loch Nevis, the chief attraction being the many seals to be seen on the rocks well up beyond the narrows. However, we were told, the seals had not been seen for several weeks, hence the boat going no further than Tarbet. We then spoke to 'Brucie' on the telephone, but he was no more forthcoming and he would see us when he came down to the boat about 1.30. We could not do more, so went to the fish shop round the corner and bought superb freshly-boiled prawns which we ate from a bag each in the warmth and comfort of the car, while waiting for 'Brucie' to arrive, biting our nails the while.

About 15 minutes before the boat was due to sail he appeared. It took a fair amount of tact and diplomacy, some might call it 'charm', before we were sure that we were making progress, though how far he would take us remained to be seen. All we knew for sure was that he could not take us as far as Camusrorry.

With five minutes to spare our gear was out of the car, on to the boat, the car parked at the far side of the harbour and Margaret was back just in time to jump aboard before we sailed off to an unknown destination. Our hopes rose as mugs of tea were served after we had made our last official stop at Tarbet, and through the

narrows we sailed. By this time even the seals were on our side, for there they were making their ungainly way down the rocks to splash into the water as we passed. The boat then headed towards a bay and we and our equipment were manhandled into the dinghy and rowed ashore, some half mile or more short of Camusrorry. The passengers and crew waved farewell to the two white haired figures left behind on the loch side with tent, three rucksacks of varying sizes, three cardboard boxes and one zipp bag. This was still Wednesday, and our next contact with the outside world was to be at 3.45 pm the following Monday.

Fortunately we found an excellent site to camp at no distance from where we had landed and in no time the tent was up and all our home comforts unpacked. Splashing along the boggy hillside for 25 minutes we reached Camusrorry only to find it deserted, with water pouring from a burst pipe right on to the rear wall and looking as though it had been unoccupied for some time. We did spot one distant figure disappearing further into the distance and as we were a party of only two we would have welcomed the sight of some other human life. However nothing daunted we returned to the tent and fortified by some liquid refreshment and a good meal, we gazed in admiration at the summit of Sgurr na Ciche our objective for the next day framed in the tent door.

The following morning was clear but grey as we set out wearing our 'wellies' to splash through the bog till we reached the foot of the ridge where we donned our boots and left our 'wellies' to await our return. Our climb to the top was uneventful and we were rewarded with magnificent views in every direction. On our way down we spotted an excellent new bridge over the river just below the ruins of Carnoch. (We had been able to wade across the river on our way up, but on subsequent days that would have been impossible).

That night or the next day the rains really began, so, one Munro in the bag, we decided to take the day off and visit Sourlies, a very fine and well maintained bothy at the other side of the head of the loch.

As we passed Camusrorry on our return we were quite relieved to hear sounds of activity, and learned that two instructors from the Loch Eil Outwardbound School were preparing for a party of twelve due to arrive next day for a fortnight's Survival Training Course.

This left us with two days and two Munros to go, so though the mist was well down we set off for Luinne Bheinn, informing those at Camusrorry of our intention as we passed. We splashed for what seemed miles up the side of the Carnoch river before putting on our climbing boots and starting in earnest up the hillside until we reached the summit ridge, by which time the mist had lifted and remained so until we reached the top. Looking across to Meall Buidhe we decided to leave it till the morrow which was just as well, for the cloud immediately came down again. We were relieved some time later to see the river appear below. No more navigation problems, only the long, weary plod back to our tent.

Another night of relentless rain was followed by a long lie. The prospect of spending a whole day in the tent did not appeal, so we decided to have a go at our final objective, Meall Buidhe, knowing that there was a good track to take us so far on our way. On reaching the bealach we were each privately feeling anything but enthusiastic, but, having come so far and being as wet as we could be, we set off into the unknown, making our way around what in the mist appeared to be vast rock faces, leaving a trail of upturned boulders as we went. We plodded on for what seemed an eternity until at last we attained the ridge where we built a fair-sized cairn to ensure that we knew at which point to leave the ridge on our return. The mist hung all around as we made our way up and down along the ridge until we passed one, two, three cairns, the last the most westerly and therefore the summit. We paused briefly and then retraced our steps, successfully finding our markers, till we thankfully reached the track and set off at a spanking pace. Soon we realised the surroundings looked somewhat unfamiliar and on checking our compasses discovered

we were heading for Inverie instead of Camusrory! Turning right about we headed for home and our last night under canvas.

Our appointed hour for pick up was 15.45 hrs. on Monday and great was our delight when only 10 minutes behind schedule we saw 'The Western Isles' coming up the loch and in no time the dinghy was being rowed towards us. We went aboard sad that we were leaving that area without ever having seen its full beauty, but most gratified that in spite of the weather we had achieved all we set out to do and one of us at least was able to score off another three from her slowly decreasing list of Munros still to do. I have never been a committed Munro-bagger, but having reached a certain age and more important, having climbed the Inaccessible Pinnacle last year, a fresh impetus is spurring me on to try within the next year or so to complete all those in the original table and, with the help of Margaret, Gordon, Peter, Ruth and John and anyone else willing to take me on, I hope so to do, more of which, I hope in the next *Journal*.

Sheila Murray

