

## NOTES

### MORRONE

Morrone could be described as a massive hill, featureless compared with Lochnagar, but certainly holding more of interest than is at first apparent. The summit, at 2819 feet above sea level, commands a splendid view of the surrounding countryside and distant Cairngorms. Lower down, at 1520 feet, there stands an Indicator erected by the Deeside Field Club and from here too an excellent view may be obtained. Inscribed on this Indicator are these few and appropriate lines by George Stephen, a former Provost of Aberdeen -

“Upon this vantage point I fain would stand,  
The prospect with delight my spirit fills.  
How oft in glowing rapture have I scanned  
The waving outline of the distant hills”

Morrone also presents an area of considerable botanical interest as a belt of crystalline limestone runs through part of the hill. In this area there is a birchwood which has been described as the best example in Britain of a montane wood on calcareous soil. On account of this, the Morrone Birkwood National Nature Reserve was established in 1972. More recently too, at a botanical meeting in Edinburgh, Morrone was mentioned in connection with the finding of pollen from a species of *Cassiope* which had been located in post-glacial material on the hill. *Cassiope* belongs to the Ericaceae (heather family) and is alpine-arctic in distribution. The plant does not now occur in Britain and so it is of much interest to know that it did at one time in the past grow here - and on Morrone!

Ecologically and floristically Morrone has much to offer the botanist due to the soil and the availability of water from the many streams on the hillside. This was recognised a long time ago by several botanists of the past of whom I would mention Professor C.C. Babington of Cambridge who at times used to spend several weeks at Braemar in summer. In 1891 he wrote three articles in the *Scottish Naturalist* (a magazine of Natural Science) concerning plants seen in the valley of Braemar and on Morrone.

In this present article I should like to draw attention to a few of the many plants to be found on this good hill. Thereby, I hope, I may be able to encourage others to find an added interest to climbing and hillwalking in our area.

Setting out from Chapel Brae, Braemar, we shall make our way to the summit of Morrone pausing here and there to look at plants and places of interest. First of all we shall take a look around the lochan at the top of Chapel Brae and the wet moorland to the south. Then we strike up to the track leading to the Deeside Field Indicator and on past the outcrop of rock known as ‘The Knoll’. Beyond and uphill to the right lies the path leading to the summit.

The area around the lochan reveals two of our common insectivorous plants, the butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) and the small round-leaved sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*). The butterwort is easily recognised by its bright yellow-green star-shaped rosette of glandular leaves which attract and catch small insects. The beautiful flower is violet in colour with a white patch in the throat. The reddish sundew has small rounded leaves with long red glandular hairs by means of which it also catches insects. The white flowers are very small and often do not open at all unless there is a considerable amount of sunlight. Making our way over to the wet moorland in the vicinity of the lochan we come on the yellow saxifrage (*Saxifraga aizoides*) growing in abundance and perhaps early in the season a few salmon-pink marsh orchids (*Dactylorhiza incarnata*). In drier places on the moorland the yellow-flowered petty

whin (*Genista anglica*) can be seen, also the bitter vetch (*Lathyrus montanus*) looking like a miniature sweet pea with crimson to blue coloured flower. On the hillside south of the lochan lies a pleasant area of birchwood and it is worth while taking a look round this woodland where wood anemones (*Anemone nemorosa*) and wood sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) with its shamrock-like leaves are frequent early in the year. Here and there water avens (*Geum rivale*) are also to be seen with their delicately beautiful salmon-pink flowers. Among the larger and more conspicuous plants is the melancholy thistle (*Cirsium helenioides*) with its handsome purple flower and long green leaves white-felted on the underside. The plant is not strongly spiny like most thistles so perhaps that is why it has been called 'melancholy', or another explanation may be that it was formerly used as a medicine for hypochondria. A graceful inhabitant of the birchwood is the oak fern (*Gymnocarpium dryopteris*) which is local in occurrence, slender in form and somewhat triangular in shape. The common violet (*Viola riviniana*) is also to be seen and may be distinguished from the marsh violet (*Viola palustris*) which has a more rounded leaf and smaller less conspicuous flowers occurring earlier in the season.

Leaving woodland and lochan behind we take to the pathway leading to the Deeside Field Indicator about half way up Morrone. On the way there, and in the vicinity of the Indicator itself, there is much in the vegetation to attract attention - mountain pansies (*Viola lutea*), rockroses (*Helianthemum nummularium*), field gentians (*Gentianella campestris*), wintergreens (*Pyrola* species) etc. just to mention a few. On 'The Knoll' behind the Indicator, growing in rock crevices, are a few small and most attractive ferns called the spleenworts (*Asplenium* species).

Climbing up the hillside on our way to the summit we come on the cloudberry (*Rubus chamaemorus*) growing in the peaty soil. In summer its white flower is frequently seen, but not so often the attractive bright orange fruit regarded as such a delicacy in Scandinavia. Higher up on the windswept ground the mountain azalea (*Loiseleuria procumbens*) makes its appearance, closely appressed to the ground for protection. When the summit is reached the keen eye may discern a small but wiry plant which looks like a slender grass. This is the three-leaved rush (*Juncus trifidus*) which is to be found growing on mountain tops where it is capable of withstanding the rigours of high altitude.

On reaching the summit of Morrone on a good clear day the climber is well rewarded with a superb view of the surrounding mountains, but at all times and in any weather Morrone has much to offer. Plant and animal life are always there to be appreciated and in early summer the small but exquisite flowers of the mountain azalea would surely add a touch of cheer to the gloomiest day.

Alice H. Sommerville

#### THE CAIRNGORM 'FOUR-THOUSANDERS'

As everyone knows by now, 1987 was the Centenary year of the Cairngorm Club. The annual 'overnighter' was planned as a part of the celebrations in the form of a reconstruction of the expedition of the founders of the Club 100 years ago, with the added attraction of a barbecue at Muir to follow. Pickles and I wanted to be part of that celebration (particularly the barbecue!), but had decided to do something different in the way of the hill-walk to get away from the masses - an ascent of the four, four thousand foot Cairngorm peaks (from Linn of Dee!!).

The details of the planned walk are: ascend the four four thousand foot peaks, Cairn Toul (4241ft.) Braeriach (4248ft.), Cairngorm (4084ft.) and Ben Macdhuì (4296ft.) plus some of the lesser summits, Angel's Peak, Cairn Lochan and Sron na Lairig. This involves some 9000ft. of climbing and a total distance of about 37 miles which translate into a 17 hour stroll!

We set out from the end of the Derry Lodge road (we later learned that some lazy people got a *lift* up to Derry Lodge!!) at 12.30 pm on the Saturday afternoon and followed the 'tourist route' to Corrour Bothy which we reached at about 3.00 pm. The weather had been very good to this point, which was just as well because Pickles was wearing only shorts! After a brief stop, during which we watched another section of the 'masses' on a sponsored walk through the Lairig, we set off for Cairn Toul. Instead of going up by the usual way (up to the Cairn Toul — Devil's Point bealach and turning right) we decided on a direct approach, up what is probably the south-east ridge of Cairn Toul, straight to the summit. The slog up to the ridge was not the most enjoyable 1000ft. of the walk. Higher up the route gives some pretty good scrambling, on massive slabs of granite set at an inviting angle, if the ridge is kept to, and provides much more interest than the conventional approach — highly recommended. 5.00 pm saw the summit of Cairn Toul, the approach of a change in the weather to the north and a considerable drop in the temperature. This was more like the standard hill weather we are used to.

As we set off for Braeriach, its summit was shrouded in cloud. By the time we reached the Wells of Dee, having crossed Angel's Peak and the South Plateau of Braeriach, it was miserably cold for the time of year (midsummer, indeed!) and there was a good bit of snow on this, Britain's largest expanse of land over 4000ft. in altitude. Included in this part of the walk was a short detour to the small rise known as Stob Coire an Lochain. This was a 'demoted' top which I had not climbed - a Munro 'bagger' to the end! The summit of Braeriach was a gey dreich place that evening and I had to put on all the warm clothes I normally save for winter. We left the summit at about 6 pm and headed over Sron na Lairig for the Sinclair Hut where we had a rest, a cup of hot chocolate and a snooze for about an hour.

We changed from our original plan to gain the Cairngorm Plateau by going straight up the nose of Creag an Leth-choin to an easier route up Lurcher's Gully to Lurcher's Meadow (or Faicall an Leth-choin). By now I was getting pretty knackered and the steepish pull up on to Cairn Lochan just about finished me, so I was glad of Pickles' agreement to a rest before the final pull up on to Cairngorm. A few glucose tablets and a lot of effort later we made the third summit of the walk, at about 2.30 am. By now the surrounding peaks were clear and we could even see a lighthouse on the Moray Firth. On the summit we met up with a guy from Inverness who claimed to have done everything possible in the ski-ing world — twice! — plus a fair bit of climbing as well. His idea of a good hillwalk was one where he could yell 'punters!' at all the groups of people he passed. This was good, coming from him, as he was dressed in jet pants, plastic boots and a ski jacket — a punter himself!

We were accompanied by him as far as Ben Macdhui where, in between the flurries of snow, we saw a spectacular sunrise and Pickles finished off his camera film. This summit was the busiest one we had visited so far; we shared the top with two tents, four mountain bikes and about 15 people. Our final descent of the walk took us down the Sron Riach ridge with Pickles racing ahead. (He claims he can't go slowly downhill but I think he's just disgustingly fit). By the time I got to the foot of the ridge in Glen Luibeg he was nearly asleep — so we had our third rest.

An hour or so later, feeling much refreshed, we headed back to Derry Lodge and the landrover track, calling in at the new Luibeg Bothy en route to write our names in the log book. When we got to the road, we couldn't face the walk up to the Linn of Dee bridge so we just waded the Dee and reached Muir at about 8.00 am.

After changing, we climbed into Fraser's car and fell asleep, to be awakened some hours later by the sound of clanking beer cans and the smell of the Cairngorm Club barbecue.

I even got a day off school on Monday!

Stuart Stronach

## ORIGINAL ROUTE on SHADOW BUTTRESS A — LOCHNAGAR

'A good route.

Start in the bay near the foot of Shallow Gully. Climb to a gully to reach the spiral terrace, then go right to its upper end. Climb a narrow rib overlooking Shadow Chimney to its top. Start up leftwards, then go right to reach a causeway on the crest leading to a small tower below the plateau'.

*Winter Climbs Cairngorms*, John Cunningham.

Up till Friday night, our plans for the weekend had been to climb South East Gully on Creag an Dubh Loch. That all changed when Hal phoned. We suggested Parallel A on Lochnagar, he suggested Shadow A. After a two second conference, we agreed.

A 6 am start was not the most enjoyable part of the day, but once we got up and going, it got better. A look out the window made things better still — there was a light dusting of snow on the ground and hardly a cloud in the sky. Hal arrived at ten to seven and after the usual plod of a walk in, we reached the first aid box in the corrie at 10.30 am.

About an hour later, Hal was banging in pitons at the first belay. While he was doing this, dad decided that a rope of three would move too slowly! — see Tom Patey's *The Art of Climbing Down Gracefully* and so it was left to Hal and me. At the first belay Hal showed me the two pitons he had banged in. "This one here's not so good but the other one's a lot better", he said, pulling out the good one with his hands! A quick check round revealed a better placement nearby. A great start!

Here Hal informed me that he'd never led a climb this hard before. "That's O.K." I said, "I've never seconded a climb this hard before!" (Hal was fresh back from Ben Nevis where he'd done Minus 3 Gully and Orion Face Direct with Tony Brindle). He offered me the first lead but I respectfully declined, saying I might lead something a bit further up! The first pitch was a gully with an icy step half way up. Hal cut a nice big step in the ice so it was rather easy for me to follow him up. His belay was a fine snow ledge with two in-situ pegs in the rock above him. Once again I was offered the lead, but this time I said "Yes".

My pitch was a traverse along a snow ledge banked up to 60°. It was just a case of shuffling along, ignoring the exposure that had opened up below my feet. I used a friend (the metal kind) for the first time as a runner before I turned up onto a snow ramp which forms the kink that makes the Spiral Terrace spiral. Half way up this ramp I spotted a good crack and so set up a belay. A hex in the crack was combined with another friend to keep me attached. Hal quickly joined me and after handing over the gear, he led on round a corner. Suddenly he seemed to be moving much slower, indicating to me that he must have hit a hard bit. Not long after, I got the call to come up. Half way up the pitch, Hal shouted down that we were no longer alone — a second party had moved into my recently vacated stance. The hard bit wasn't too bad, just a bit of soft snow on rocks. As I reached Hal, I noticed the crux above us. A five foot overhang up a flat topped block, which was the start of a hundred foot rocky rib, did little for moral. My first reaction was "How the hell am I going to get up that?" I looked for alternatives but crampon scratches on the side of the rib showed that this was the only way. Hal's belay was 20 feet short of the bottom of the rib so he asked me to go on up to an in-situ sling. I also found a good nut placement, making sure that we had a solid belay. Hal was making noises about preferring the chimney to the right but, after putting one of his axes back on his rucksack, he made a couple of half-hearted attempts at the overhang. It was as the second party caught us up that he dropped the bombshell. "Do you want to have a go?" Now I did know that the climb was only Moderate in summer so, casting aside doubt, I said yes — again! My first thought was that I would rock climb my way up, but after an inspection, I decided that if I swapped axes (I was climbing with one long axe and one short) I would be able to hook the long

one behind a flake at the back of the ledge. Using a small foothold Hal had failed to notice, I belly-flopped my way up. No points for style — but it worked.

I was now sitting legs astride a small block. I found a good runner and then realised my next problem — how to stand up. I got as far as my knees before going back to my original position. Then my whole attitude changed. Instead of my usual reaction to leading (which is to get scared and panic!), I got slightly angry with myself. Suddenly the holds appeared and I edged my way onto the face of the rib, thinking that the difficulties were past. Wrong! I was now teetering on the front points of my crampons with the only obvious foothold three feet to my right. Reaching it was easy (I have long legs) but the trick was how to get my weight from my left foot to this new hold. Again using the long axe, I hooked it round the edge of the rib and pulled, pushing on the flat face with my other hand. Then the axe decided to unhook itself. That was not good, but the pushing hand held firm as I replaced the tool and completed the move. From this new foothold, I could reach the snow-ice above and completed the pitch with no more problems. The belay at the top was totally bomb-proof — a massive spike. Safely attached, I brought Hal up. He found the pitch tricky — because he hadn't bothered to retrieve his other axe — and at one point suggested that he might need a pull on the rope. However, he completed the pitch without it.

The next pitch was his. It looked easy as far as I could see, so I was annoyed and cold when Hal took over three quarters of an hour to get up. By the time it was my turn to climb, I had been joined by the other two climbers, and the leader followed me up the pitch hard on my heels. Turning a bend in the groove I was following, I came across the difficulty that had held up Hal. A twenty five foot ice chimney barred the way. However, next to it was what looked like an easy alternative — a snow ramp heading in the same direction with footsteps up it. Reaching the top of this I discovered why Hal opted for the chimney. The way was barred by a three foot blank wall topped by soft snow. Back to the chimney. It was a thrutchy affair which involved swapping axes half way up and ended when I got a placement in some frozen turf. Vegetation may spoil the route in summer but it sure as hell helps in winter.

I joined Hal and led on up a rising ramp with an awkward move half way up. I did this pitch of 100ft. with no runners; on a 30ft. climb at the sea cliffs I may use three or four; strange how attitudes change in different situations. The belay at the top was a reasonable spike, but what made it better was that I was able to cut myself a seat. The top was now in view a couple of hundred feet above, and dad was visible at the top of Parallel Gully B. Hal's next pitch was a continuation of the ramp I followed, but it was noticeably steeper. Fortunately, the good snow seemed to be holding out and the pitch went easily enough, though there was a twisting of ropes when the second party climbed past my belay to one further up. Above loomed the tower — a final sting in the tail.

My lead. A ladder of footsteps up a six foot corner provided the incentive to go. Once up them, I found myself on top of a large boulder which I assumed was well attached. The 'ladder' now went directly up the face of the tower and looked horrendous. Here, the snow deteriorated to three or four inches of hoar frost on top of bare rock with occasional bits of ice, and soft snow on a 'ledge' (a momentary lessening of the steepness) at half way before the tower continued as a short overhang topped by a slab. I felt ever-so-slightly intimidated but there was nothing else to do — I had spotted a rope sling higher up at the top of the overhang. The placement of the short axe on my right was good, but I didn't trust the long axe in softer snow. I stepped on to the first hold, brought my left foot on to the second, and retreated down to my ledge, pulling away some of the precious ice with me. This was more my usual attitude! Then it struck me that if I didn't get up, we were stuck. I went for it again, praying my feet stayed on the steps. They did.

Once established on the ledge, I was just about to shout down to Hal that it was the hardest thing I'd ever led, when I realised that I still had the hard bit to go. I

clipped on to the runner and looked at what lay before me; ten feet of hoar frosted slab, split by a half hidden crack. I took a swing hoping to find something good. All I succeeded in doing was dislodging a load of frost which the wind pelted into my face. It was so cold. It stung like hell and my forehead ached. More swings, with similar results, convinced me that it would take a better climber than me to climb the tower in these conditions.

Looking for alternatives, I spotted steps in Shallow Gully on the left. Forced to abandon a krab, I asked to be lowered down to the belay — it was all I could do to climb up, I could never retreat without top rope protection. I did my best to climb down but came off at one point. Safely back down to the belay, I told Hal what I intended to do and he agreed, commenting that the tower looked like the final crux pitch of Orion Face Direct. The traverse went easily and I ended up on the other side of the gully, on the edge of Central Buttress, with a small cornice only a hundred feet above up a simple snow slope.

Hal came across and carried on to the top. However, his line took him out of sight and sound, and when the rope ran out, I just followed after him, up huge 'bucket' steps. Hal came into view in a small alcove twenty feet short of the top, so I climbed past him and on to the top up a simple snow slope less steep than Black Spout. We agreed not to bother about a belay at the top and Hal emerged as I took in the rope.

The climb was finished. After the usual handshakes and congratulations, Hal volunteered to take the rope on the descent and we hurried down after dad with the setting sun in our backs.

Stuart Stronach

*Footnote - It is interesting to compare the above with the article in CCJ No 74 p149 - Shadow Buttress 'A' - Lochnagar, by G. Roy Symmers, which describes a climb with W.A. Ewen on 18th September 1932. The climbing techniques may have changed and the style of the article may not be the same, but the attitudes and feelings of the climbers are revealed as remarkably similar after 56 years - Editor.*

## TRANSPORT

*The footnote to the previous article refers to one of the climbers on Lochnagar in 1932, the late W.A. Ewen, who was editor of the Journal, 1934-1953. Graham Ewen has kindly given permission for the reproduction of the following previously unpublished article, which was amongst his father's papers - Editor.*

You will have noticed in Journal 97 a short article on an ascent of Cairngorm last century, the writer having reached Ryvoan from Nethybridge in a horse brake. That's how it was when the Club was founded and so it continued for another 35 years. To get anywhere you had to start really early — 3 am perhaps. Of course you could have completed your sleep in the brake; it was necessary only that the coachman should stay awake!

If you look at the one inch O.S. Map, Sheet 42 (Ballater), you will see marked, just below Inchnabart in Glen Muick, the word 'Ford' from which a rough track leads up to the public road on the east side of the glen. You might well wonder why there was a ford leading from practically nothing to practically nowhere but, at that time, this was the public road to Allnaguibhsaich, serving a wider public than the handful of residents in upper Glen Muick. The car had hardly arrived on Upper Deeside but one, John F. Harper, Postmaster to H.M. the King, offered for hire horse-drawn brakes, wagonettes and the like to take parties to Lochnagar, or elsewhere, in the summer season. Thus it was that I came to make my first visit to Lochnagar, via the ford at Inchnabart, in August 1922, with a family party in a two-

horse brake.

It wasn't necessary, of course, to start very early; it is a matter of eight miles and I do not remember the journey being either slow or tedious. Those were more leisurely days and we were fortunate in that the sun shone. It was not only the pre-car age, it was also the pre-plastics age and this was very much a picnic outing. In those days you carried crockery (second best), cutlery, stove, tea-kettle, bottles of liquid refreshments, white tablecloth and sundry other unnecessary refinements. It was also pre-rucksack; my father carried the lot in a leather portmanteau to the Foxes' Well. Prodigious! I don't know what the cost was for hiring the brake — the equivalent in today's terms of two gallons of petrol (plus tip to the coachman pro-rata) I imagine. I remember I was adjured to stay well away from the edge of the cliff lest I be blown over in a sudden gust of wind. There wasn't a breath of wind all day but maybe it instilled in me a suitable respect for those wild, unchancy acres.

That, however was the end of an era; by 1923, certainly by 1924, John F. Harper had abandoned the horses in favour of the charabanc, which proved much less reliable than the horses and, of course, could not cope with the Inchnabobart ford. They may have gone to Spital, I don't know, but the south road was very bad and very narrow then. The charabancs had a short life, being superseded by the bus within a very few years.

In 1924, five of us, all Gordon's Boys, camped for a spell at Maggie Gruer's, Inverey, resolved to walk off the debilitating effects of too much Shakespeare and a lot else. We still had a transport problem, although the situation had eased a little; we had a bicycle — one bicycle. You might think that one bicycle was not of much use in the circumstances, but you would be wrong. If you had walked from Maggie Gruer's to the summit of Lochnagar and back, you would have learned that it is near bliss to take your weight off your feet when your turn of the bicycle comes round again. So we cannot claim to have walked all the way from Inverey to Lochnagar and back, since one fifth of the road journey was accomplished on a pedal cycle. I suppose it is all of thirty miles, say twenty-six or more on foot and three or four by cycle — quite enough for one day certainly. Little remains in my memory except that it was a good day and that, as we rounded Cairn Taggart en route for the Stuic, we came across the remains of a wooden hut. Some years later I came across A.J. McConnachie's book on Lochnagar and discovered the origin of the hut and of its odd history. Apparently the Laird of Invercauld had acquired a number of ex-army huts surplus to requirements in the Crimean War, one being erected on Cairn Taggart to house workmen who were building a fence there. McConnachie implies that it had actually been used in the Crimea as a shelter hut and re-shipped to this country after the conflict. The Army is not as a rule so economically minded. There was nothing else remarkable about the journey, bar one thing. We must have shared the bike pretty equitably, since nobody had any complaints on that score.

In 1925 I attended the inauguration of the Ben Macdui Indicator, cycling from Ballater, leaving at 6 am — so as to be sure of being in time! — and getting home around midnight. How the other one hundred and thirty plus people reached the Derry I don't know, since I arrived ahead of them and returned after they had gone. They may have had a bus, or charabanc, and there were a few cars by that time (the bullnosed Morris) but the general transport situation hadn't changed very much.

In my impecunious student days I cycled several times to Lochnagar, often alone, which came near to altering my life. Twice I met an elderly gentleman on or near the summit, a regular visitor to Ballater, who had also cycled to Alltnguibhsaich. On our second meeting he invited me to consider becoming a tea-planter in Assam when I finished University. He had, apparently, interests or influence or both in a tea garden there. I had only to go and see him. My goodness, there were many times in my later life, faced with a class of near idiots, when I regretted not having gone to Assam.

By 1929 a public bus was running to Braemar and this opened up new possibilities

for us. In April 1929, three of us determined to take the last bus to Braemar, find some sheltering bield for the darkest hours and climb Ben Macdhui the next day. We still had a lot to learn but at least we had discovered the usefulness of a torch. It was a frosty night and the only way to keep tolerably warm was to keep walking. So we arrived, before sun-up, at the summit of the mountain. The moment the sun rose the landscape was transformed; the picture was unforgettable — the blues of the shadow side of Macdhui, the rosy flush on the snow on Cairn Toul, the dark red shadow under the cornices in the Garbh Choire, all set against a pale green sky — exactly the tints of Edward Wilson's Antarctic watercolours. Marvellous, unsurpassed in my experience.

We descended to the Shelter Stone and, as usual, we were late back. Indeed we reached Inverey with one hour left to catch the bus — the last bus out of Braemar that day. Footsore and sun-burned we made the best time we could and just made it. It was late in leaving but we didn't mind — we were sitting down. The bus brought Macdhui a little bit closer but didn't help much with Lochnagar. Occasionally we were flush enough to hire a taxi to Spital but these days were few enough. Still, I liked my bike. Do you know that you can free wheel all the way from Alltnguighsaich to Ballater with no more than three short stretches where you have to pedal? Of course, you have to get up there first!

W.A. Ewen

#### LETTERS FROM AMERICA

*In September 1987, Jeanetta McLeod Ross wrote from New York asking for a copy of CCJ No 100. Unfortunately there were no spare copies, but a copy of No 99 was sent to her. The exchange of correspondence produced an interesting 'exile's view of home' and also some reminiscences which will strike a few chords with those of us who were doing similar things in those days - Editor.*

New York,  
U.S.A.

October 15, 1987

Dear Cairngorm Club:

In the 50s as teenagers and Cairngorm hikers noting things like the Glen More Center, we lamented the fact that "they'd seen be sellin fishn'chips at the top o' Dhui!" Last year in the bothy visitors' book I affirmed that I would never tell anyone where the bothy was. And between the 50s and the 80s, with a Nature Center on Lochnagar, time-shares in Ballater, nasty bulldozed scars on Ben a Bhuid, two bulldozed roads up Glen Ey, Derry Lodge vandalized, Bob Scott's bothy gone — our dire predictions seem close to actual fact.

And I know I'm being selfish. I suppose I should be willing to share 'my' hills with others but — it bothers me that in a television program HRH Prince Charles stated that "Dark Lochnagar, written by Tennyson..." I'm concerned that statements like that are indicative of a carelessness (or non-caring attitude) being directed at the hills. 'Nagar was obviously meaningful to Byron, I doubt that Tennyson ever knew it existed.

And I know I'm being petty. And in truth I have not even been on Lochnagar since 1959 so maybe the nature reserve is working and it is in fact protecting the owls and deer we used to find on the hill — its just that time-sharing suggests new people every week, and new people trekking the same old path ... well, I guess I worry about erosion (or lack of respect).

When they developed the Aviemore side we thought "aye, aye but skiers are ham



n'eggors" (and soft) "Aberdonians are bothy lads" (and tough), "we'd never let that happen Braemar way". (And now they're time-sharing in Ballater!)

Last year I sat at the Luibeg ruin (faint foundation of charred stone and stick). It amazed me the place was so tiny, it never seemed so from inside. I remember coming through the Lairig alone on my 18th birthday and taking photographs of Bob Scott. I don't remember being afraid to go through the Lairig alone but I do remember being too scared to answer Bob's booming voice as he stood silhouetted in the doorway next morning "Are ye awake girrul?" (I was too chicken to face breakfast with Bob and Mrs. Scott so I sat very still and pretended not to hear). I still don't know why I did that; a group of us had had cups of tea 'in the main hoose' before but this time I was alone, I suppose I thought I'd have to 'talk'.

And as I sat by the ruin I thought "but you **can** take it with you, because if Bob Scott had been here there wouldn't have been a fire". It's not that I'm being vindictive but I thought "O.K. if they can't take care of the hills and the bothies they won't have them, I'll just have to be glad that I had them back then".

But the truth is I want them now and I want them in the future — to be the way they were back then — and I want the hills to be for individual wanderers, or little groups of twos and threes (not bloody bus loads of tourists with video cameras and tape recorders recording the 'sounds of nature' — ("...and here's the cute sound of the sweet little Falls of Muck, gurgling over the stones, and here's a curlew calling below the King's favourite butt".)

And I **know** there are guardians of the hills and I know that there are others, **there**, (not 3,000 miles away), actively working to protect the hills, the ptarmigan, the freedom, the space, the air, the cold, the stoney paths, the barren hills, who will protect this land where you can wander all day and feel that nobody has **ever** been there before. And then, when you're lost and cold and very scared and the mist is low and it starts to rain, to find a little cairn to show "right enough, people have been here before, maybe even a long, long time ago, but there — that's the way home". And you still feel lonely, bone weary and wet, but very connected, to all the wanderers, drovers, soldiers and ghillies who've past this way and loved the hills.

Sincerely,  
Jeanetta McLeod Ross

New York,  
U.S.A.

November 13, 1987

Dear Mr. Chessell:

I was very happy to receive issue 99. Thank you for letting me have it.

I would be delighted if you printed my letter but if you do will you delete both references to ..... (in the first paragraph) and substitute 'bothy', (so that I can keep my promise).

I don't know what to tell you about myself. I'm nobody important. This year I became Secretary of the New York Caledonian Club and I'm quite pleased about that. I'm an Aberdonian born and bred; married an American in London (he was studying at the London School of Economics), we went home to Los Angeles, eventually divorced and I came to New York. I got my B.A. (sociology) at New York University and now work at NYU School of Law (secretary to a labor lawyer).

I love this city (8 million people from all over the world packed into a few square miles — dynamic and exciting), and the University is a great place to work; (the students are bright, enthusiastic, ambitious, hard working). I live in the neighborhood so can walk to work. The neighborhood also is great, I can go round to the deli. at 2 in the morning and there will still be people in the street — it's fun, exciting, stimulating

and — it's so nice to know that the hills are there, and please God may the 8 million people never find them.

A lot of the experiences from the hills have held me in good stead in New York. One of my first hikes was over Jock's Road with an SYHA group. We'd spent the night at Glendoll and a bus had taken us to one end and would meet us at the other. Instead of leaving my pack on the bus I took the whole weekend load with me. The guys suggested I go back and leave it on the bus, I insisted I'd be fine and they said "great you'll carry it" and through the whole trip none of these big hefty lads ever offered a hand — long slog! Lesson learned: you're an equal, you're capable, you handle your own load.

One Hogmanay I decided at the last minute to go to the hills on my own and caught the last bus from Bon-Accord Street. I'd planned on Braemar, it turned out the terminus that night was Ballater. Problem two, Ballater Hostel was officially closed. The Warden (an older lady) and her son reluctantly and apprehensively let me stay and took me with them to a party. All the young girls were in beautiful party dresses and I was in boots, cords, and torn shirt — but, I'm a very nice dancer. I had a great time. Lesson learned? — I suppose that I could be feminine **and** strong, (or, country people are very accepting). I now dance with the New York Branch of the RSCDS.

Another time I was at Luibeg on my own for a few days and a party of Gordonstoun schoolboys arrived. The masters stayed in the bothy, the boys were camping and for a few days we hiked together. I'm not sure what I learned from that trip. I had fun. I think my being there scared the masters a little, they didn't know what to make of me. The boys' personalities may be the main thing that stuck in my mind, how different they each were — the cheeky lad, charmer, shirker, the one 'on the hill under protest', family historian ... all very sweet, nice kids. (Photo enclosed). Do you know who any of them are?

As far as I know I don't know any Cairngorm Club members. Often I hiked on my own, mainly though with the SYHA group. We took the 3.15 Saturday or the 7.15 Friday night. We danced at Braemar Saturday nights, tried to look grown-up and serious in the Fife Public Bar Sunday evenings and going home sang bothy ballads and hiking songs and in a delicious, exhausted daze watched the black night, the River Dee, the trees, a puckle o' hooses, a bridge, a sleeping town, all roll by. Then the final proud gather-it-all-together-3-abreast march down Union Street to the Queen, grubby, blistered and fair chuft w'oorsels, past the casual strollers comin oot o' the pictures. We didn't care if we were mucky — we'd earned it.

With best regards.

Sincerely,  
Jeanetta Ross

encls. photos, then and now.

P.S. I've been back 4 times in the past few years.

### THE THREE HIGHEST CAIRNGORMS ON SKI

It was early April and a ridge of high pressure had settled over Scotland. In Aberdeen, Spring was in the air, but I knew the high tops of the Cairngorms would have a good covering of snow, acquired during the long winter of arctic blizzards which had swept across the elevated plateaux ...

The ski tour over the Cairngorm 4000ers is a justifiably, popular outing, involving some fairly challenging descents along with serious navigation problems should the weather close in. Most folk chose to start at Cairngorm (possibly using the chairlift) and continue over Macdui, Cairn Toul and Braeriach in that order, crossing the Lairig Ghru low down near Corroul. It seemed to me however that a more aesthetic trip could be made by starting at the Linn of Dee, thus avoiding any moral dilemmas

concerning the Cairngorm Chairlift Co., and also crossing the Lairig Ghru fairly near the watershed, making a more 'natural' route.

So a plan was devised: I would start at the Linn of Dee and cycle as far up past Derry Lodge as possible, then ski over Macdui and whatever else I could, hopefully returning to my starting point in a fairly comfortable day.

Everything went as planned, once the technical problems of cycling with skis were overcome (beware of low slung branches in Derry woods) and by 9 am I was skinning up the Sron Riach, the bike stowed away down at Robbers' Copse. The day looked promising; the sky was blue and the snow plentiful and in excellent condition, thawing slightly but not too soft yet. One of the great joys of ski-mountaineering is being able to travel long distances comfortably, in snow conditions which would be slow and laborious for the climber on foot — this would certainly be the case, I thought, later in the day.

As I steadily climbed higher, clouds engulfed the ridge from the north, but they were thin and I could make out the pale yellow disc of the sun overhead. Then, on reaching the top of Sron Riach itself, the mists rolled back dramatically to reveal the triangular aspect of Stob Coire Sputan Dearg thrusting out of a turbulent sea of cloud. I became very excited, as the situation was quite superb, and even started singing aloud. Eventually I calmed down and continued up the wide snowfields overlooking the Tailors' Burn, revelling in the sunny, windless conditions. Over in the east, the distant tors of Ben Avon were just protruding through the blanket of cloud, showing the starting point of what must rank as a very satisfying day's ski-mountaineering — the traverse over Beinn a' Bhuird and the four 4000ers — first completed by Adam Watson Jnr. in 1962.

In seemingly no time I had reached the summit cairn of Ben Macdui where I was surprised to be greeted by a mysterious figure, hidden behind mirror specs and sun cream, who apparently recognised me. It turned out to be Sandy Allan who I had first met in a queue on Ben Nevis and since bumped into a couple of times. He had skied up over Cairngorm with a couple of friends and intended continuing round Cairn Toul and Braeriach, so it seemed our paths would cross again, somewhere on the other side of the Lairig Ghru.

Even as I skied northwards off Macdui the thought of getting over to Cairngorm was still in my head but on reaching the col at the head of the Feith Buidhe low clouds appeared from the north, covering the plateau and I made a decision. Rather than navigating back and forth to Cairngorm in the mist I could enjoy 560m of superb skiing down the Allt a'Choire Mhoir, and best of all, the sun. So I made a short traverse back south and was soon making glorious sweeping turns down the wide coire, poised above the Lairig Ghru, gradually degenerating into traverses and kick turns as my legs began to feel the pace and the snow softened drastically. All too soon I was down in the glen, where I sunbathed, had some lunch and contemplated the next long ascent up the east flank of Braeriach.

After a steep initial climb out of the Lairig Ghru the angle eased and soon I reached the sloping floor of Coire Ruadh where I stopped to look at part of an aeroplane engine protruding from the snow. Apparently there are a couple of wartime crash sites in this area — I remembered seeing some wreckage higher up on Sron na Lairige during a previous summer visit. In one of his books, Hamish Brown tells of finding here an old flying boot, complete with bones inside ... I had a wee look for anything as exciting, but was unsuccessful.

As I continued up the narrow shoulder, a short steepening forced me to carry my skis. Floundering on foot through the deep wet snow, cursing and swearing, I fully realised the benefit of skis in the present snow conditions, and was mightily relieved to step once more into the bindings as the ridge levelled.

Unfortunately now, thin clouds had moved up from the Spey Valley, completely obscuring the view, and I skied over Braeriach without even noticing the summit!

Huge cornices on my left testified to the might of the mid-winter storms, and marked the line of my route round the Garbh Coires — Dhaidh and Mor. The mists were thin, as they had been earlier in the day, and I navigated across the plateau using the sun, and another useful technique, following other ski tracks!

At last I trundled down out of the clouds into the sun again, passing Sandy and friends someway west of Sgor an Lochain Uaine. Strangely, the pall of cloud seemed only confined to Braeriach; Cairn Toul was completely clear, and looked magnificent, principally, I think, because it signified the end of the climbing for the day.

I skirted Sgor an Lochain Uaine by its southern slopes and began the final slog up Cairn Toul, probably the most interesting of all the Cairngorm peaks. The terrain here was very rocky and it was only after many zig-zags that I reached the airy summit at 4.30 pm.

The final long descent to Corrou bothy was a worthy end to the day's skiing. It started easily enough, down the broad south slope of Stob Coire an t-Saighdeir, where I experienced an incredible feeling of surrounding space and ease of movement. This contrasted sharply with the confines of Coire Odhar, under the Devil's Point, where I was forced into some testing turns down the headwall — probably the steepest ground of the day, under the threat of a creaking cornice. The angle then eased and the final run down the line of the burn was a relaxing finish — a ribbon of snow leading all the way to the bothy itself.

Resting in the grass enjoying my cherished tin of grapefruit segments, I realised the descent from Cairn Toul, some 700m above, had taken only 20 minutes.

All that remained now, was the long trudge round the never-ending side of Carn a' Mhaim, back to the bike, and the comfort of a seat for the final miles to the Linn of Dee.

Down here it was Spring again ...

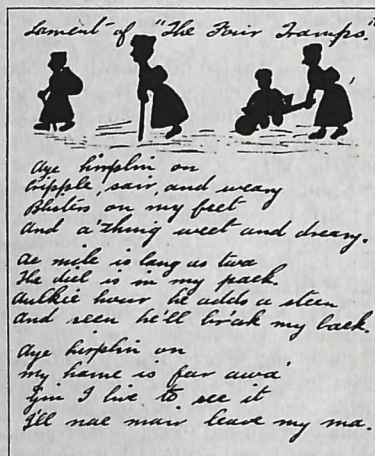
Alastair Matthewson

#### LAMENT OF 'THE FOUR TRAMPS'

Aye Hirplin on  
Cripple, sair and weary  
Blisters on my feet  
And a' thing weat and dreary.

Ae mile is lang as twa  
The deil is in my pack  
Aulkie hoor he adds a steen  
And seen he'll brak my back.

Aye hirplin on  
My hame is far awa'  
Gin I live to see it  
I'll nae mair leave my Ma.



Written on a postcard (stamp a halfpenny) and sent to 'The Tramps', c/o Post Office, Blair Atholl, The postmark is Aberdeen, dated July 3rd, 1911. I found it in a photograph album given to me by Miss Janet Ross, aged 96.

Jean A. Callander

### W. A. POUCHER ON BEN MACDHUI

News of the death in August 1988 at the good age of 96 of W. A. Poucher prompts the suggestion that our *Journal* might record the following story about him, as reported to me by one of his publishers and copied now from notes of its telling at the 1977 Club Dinner:

Everybody knows who Poucher is, the expert photographer he has been of the mountain scene, the practical, helpful, down-to-earth, slightly dogmatic advice his mountain books have provided.

But *not* everybody knows his real-life profession. For most of his life - he must be quite old now - a chemist, on the staff of Yardleys. In that capacity, he became a considerable authority on the scientific 'recipes' for the kinds of thing that company sells. I know, because in my earlier days in my business there came up for production every few years a reprint, or new edition, of one or other of the three volumes in the three-volume work published by Chapman & Hall called Poucher: *Perfumes, Cosmetics & Soaps*, quite a formidable title for quite some textbook.

Well, within Yardleys, in the thirties, forties & fifties I imagine, Poucher was a great protagonist for the idea - quite new then, though almost commonplace now - that if, as was demonstrably the case, there was a vast market for perfumes, cosmetics and soaps among the female of the species, then there must be a potential market for same, at least of some profitable dimension, among *men*. 'Cosmetics for men'. I believe he pressed his view within Yardleys with something like missionary zeal. At any rate, his friends and associates were aware of the fact that he was practising what he was preaching: he was using his *own* preparations.

His friends also knew of his periodic departures from the English scene, on photographic forays, often in the mountains of Scotland. Particular friends one year, without knowledge of where Poucher was at the time, decided to have a holiday on Speyside, and, when there, found their way on to the Ben MacDhui plateau. As sometimes happens, the mist came down, in earnest, and visibility was so bad as to cause them, after a good deal of floundering, just a little apprehension, which was turning into something worse, when - no it wasn't footsteps they were aware of - they *sniffed* something. One of them - with a shout of relief and a whiff of instant identification - called out to the other: "It's Poucher!" And sure enough, in a few moments, the tall, reassuring figure of Poucher, camera round his neck, strode out of the mist towards them. And his sure knowledge of the ground got them safely down the hill.

Harold Watt

### THE FOUR PEAKS RECORD

Club Member, Mel Edwards holds the Men's Record for the Four Peaks run, in a time of 4hrs 34mts 08 sec (reported in CCJ Vol. 19 No 98).

On 16th July 1988, Kath Butler, Aberdeen (34 years old) was the first woman to establish a time over the same route, of 6hrs 44mts 58sec. The standard route is: Glenmore Lodge, Braeriach, Cairn Toul, Ben Macdui, Cairngorm, Glenmore Lodge, comprising 25 miles and 7,600 ft of climbing.

The run raised £365 for Aberdeen Sports Council.