

## BOOK REVIEWS

*A Century of Scottish Mountaineering*, W. D. Brooker, Scottish Mountaineering Trust 1988, £15.95

This book is a collection of articles, notes, letters, poems and illustrations taken from the S.M.C. Journals from 1890 to the present. The book begins with details of the events leading up to the foundation of the S.M.C. in 1889 and the decision to start publishing a journal in 1890. The first articles describe some of the exploits of the earlier members and it is surprising at the present time to realise how little was known about the Scottish hills at that time. It was not known how many hills over 3000 feet there were, and with no guide books available the best routes to follow were not known. Access to many areas was difficult and remained so even after the advent of the motor car, a fact well illustrated by the photograph of the Glen Coe road at Achtriochtan. The earlier photographs also illustrate how differently the climbers dressed then compared with the present day. The book goes on to trace the development of mountaineering in Scotland from these early days to the present time. There are articles on all aspects of mountaineering – hill walking, rock climbing, snow and ice climbing, skiing, accidents etc. Many of the authors are very well known names in Scottish Mountaineering, W. W. Naismith, H. T. Munro, W. H. Murray, B. H. Humble, to name but a few.

G. E.

*The Book of the Climbing Year*, Cameron McNeish, Patrick Stephens Ltd., 1988, £14.96

What exactly does a "climber" do at the weekends? Where do "climbers" go on their holidays? What, in fact, is "climbing". Read this book and find out, if you don't already know.

I enjoyed this book, if only because it brought home the multitude of ways we can enjoy the hills and mountains of the world, throughout the year, whatever the weather. The writing is good.

Cameron McNeish, (former editor of *Climber Magazine*, now with the *Great Outdoors*) has pulled together twelve writers (including himself) some of them well known to us already, who each describe one month of their "climbing year". The range is broad. We hear adventures described from places as far removed from each other as the Nepalese Himalayas (Bill O'Connor) and the small, but justly lauded gritstone outcrops of West Yorkshire (Dennis Gray). From rock climbing in New England (Jill Lawrence) to the Cairngorms at Christmas (Hamish Brown) – this climbing game certainly is a varied experience. I won't give away all the goodies, but my favourites were Ken Crocket on a Scottish Winter Climb (poetic almost, but not cloyingly so) and Elaine Brook on the majesty of the mountains, respect for the forces of nature and harmony with the world! Jim Perrin's writing is as polished as ever, but I didn't enjoy David Craig's as much as his book '*Native Stones*'. Terry Gifford's piece, I found all a bit much.

There are some typographical errors, especially in the photo captions, which could cause confusion. The photos themselves are secondary to the writing, but mostly excellent, and relevant. To sum up, I'll quote Cameron McNeish from his introduction – "simply a celebration of the climbing year in all in guises, in all its ambiguity, in all its controversy and in all its glory."

Well worth a read.

A.P.M.

*A Chance in a Million? Scottish Avalanches*, Bob Barton and Blyth Wright. Scottish Mountaineering Trust 1985, £4.95

Over the last few years avalanches have been identified as a Scottish problem. It is perhaps part of a growing awareness of mountain safety fostered in part by increasing media interest in Scottish winter accidents. Barton and Wright's book is well worth reading even if only to confirm, should any remain in doubt, that the risk of avalanche is real.

The book begins and ends with the story of avalanches in Scotland – a collection of cautionary tales. Even the best prepared and most experienced can come adrift as the events of December 1976 involving two Glenmore Lodge parties make clear. Both were perhaps ironically involved in snow hole exercises, one in Garbh Uisge Beag and the other closer to home at Ciste Mhearadh. The message is plain. Everyone on the hills in winter must be aware of, and beware of, avalanche.

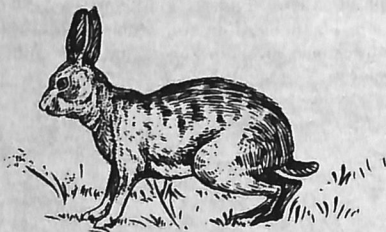
"Avalanche Anatomy" is the title of Chapter 2. It is for those genuinely interested in self preservation, the most important section of the book. It is at first sight a trifle offputting. It requires the reader to come to grips with such topics as "Equitemperature Metamorphism", "sublimation" and "MF met". In essence, however, and on closer study, it is simply a description of the various types of snowpack and the effects of different melt, freeze, snow combinations. The diagrams are informative and helpful as are the book's efforts to relate theory to matters with which the average reader will be familiar such as parts of the Cairngorm plateau, more particularly Coire an Lochain and, on another subject, a standard weather map.

"Improving the Odds" advises how you the reader can avoid the fate suffered by the book's examples. It was one I read with particular interest having come closer than I would care to becoming a statistic in recent years. The suggestions were not difficult nor time consuming, simply easy to forget in impatience to arrive at the summit or the bar. How often have you checked the weather forecast for the Saturday only ignoring the weather patterns over the last three days? The rules are few but vital. Carry the right gear – consider for example the use of avalanche cord, ensure you are aware of mountain conditions over the previous week and in particular have regard to wind conditions and weather extremes which affect critically the build up of unstable snow deposits on lee slopes and the likelihood of apparently stable snow resting on an unsafe surface. On the hill beware of the snow conditions – consider digging a snow pit to study the layers of fallen snow and to assess the stableness or otherwise of the slope on which you are, of course, by then standing! Such a pit does not take long to dig and, indeed, as a recent convert to the concept it becomes both entertaining and interesting, increasing one's knowledge of the mountain environment.

Finally of course is the question of survival. What to do if you or a member of your party is caught by an avalanche. Blyth and Barton provide much helpful information. Bear in mind on the hills their diagram as to where an avalanche victim is most likely to be found. The authors even recommend backstroke as opposed to the more traditional breast stroke as a means of self rescue for the victim. From experience I can comment that a frantic doggy paddle is your more likely response.

Seriously however this book is one which you should read. I understand that the author's next edition is to be entitled "One in Three?"

M. M. G.



*The Handbook of Climbing*, Allen Fyffe and Iain Peter. Pelham Books 1990, £20.00

When my dad bought me this book for Christmas, he wrote a comment inside the cover saying he hoped there was something here I didn't know. This book is such a wealth of information that, authors aside, there can be few people around who would not learn something from reading it. With both authors having worked at Glenmore Lodge, the reader can rest assured that all information has been gathered and all the methods have been tried and tested after years of experience in climbing and instruction.

The book is split into three main sections, presumably aimed to cover the likely requirements of most British mountaineers. These are: rock climbing, snow, ice and winter climbing, and alpine climbing. These are supplemented by a series of appendices covering grades, navigation, avalanche prediction, psychological skills, first aid and more. The text, all 373 pages of it, is presented in a very readable form, and is well illustrated throughout by diagrams and black and white photographs. There are also three sections of glossy colour photographs. For the Aberdeen climber, it is these photos, both colour and black and white, that help make the book that extra bit special, because many are taken at local crags such as Logie Head near Cullen, and at the Pass of Ballater, and give a distinct north east feel to it.

My criticisms are few. One or two diagrams are incorrect, and more information about the colour photos would have been nice, such as route name and grade, and the name of the climber – a minor quibble, but I'm sure I'm not the only one to flick through the pages and wonder.

On a final note, the book also carries the Full Endorsement of the BMC, and as a text guide to climbing skills, it will provide a firm foundation on which to build personal experience – an expensive but invaluable guide to a successful and safe life in the mountains.

S.S.

*Climbing the Corbetts*, Hamish Brown, Gollancz. 1988, £14.95.

Corbetts are Scottish peaks between 2500 feet and 3000 feet with a minimum reascent of 500 feet. Hamish describes expeditions to all 221 Corbetts, his adventures leading us from the Galloway hills to Sutherland, from Aberdeenshire to Harris.

The introduction and preamble will strike a chord in the heart of many a time-served Munroist and dare them to pit their experience and determination against the daunting task of the Corbetts. Corbetts are more widely scattered and '...independent in character and setting...' than Munros and, as Hamish often repeats, they frequently provide a more dramatic viewpoint from which to savour neighbouring peaks. No easy runs of Mamores or South Shiel Ridges here but a dogged ticking-off of never more than a handful a day and more usually only one.

When *'Climbing the Corbetts'* first appeared in 1989 we were aware that a gap in the literature had indeed existed. Since then the SMC have published *'The Corbetts'*. The two books are truly complementary. Hamish states in the introduction that his book '...is not a guidebook... It is one man yarning about his Corbetts...' Hamish is an artful teacher, he suggests, he inspires but leaves the minutiae to the student. He has a wealth of anecdotes and, for the hills, a warmth and affection which are infectious and easily become one's own in sentimental moments. In contrast, the SMC volume, to which, incidentally, Mr Brown is a contributor, is the definitive guidebook.

The Corbett areas have been revised since the book was published and I suppose that will be a mild irritation to the user as will an index which fails to indicate page numbers. I found the Renny maps useful for finding the hill on the OS Map but no help at all in

visualising the topography or the routes described. A fine volume like this deserves to have more photographs culled from Hamish's vast collection. The 15 photographs which are included are splendid and nicely cover the range of mountain situations spanned by the Corbetts. Occasionally I feel that there is too little description of the hill and its personality and perhaps rather too much emphasis on the weather and fellow walkers. But these are petty niggles and anyway this is '...not a guidebook.'

Hamish's is a voice crying in the wilderness that aspiring Munroists should not ignore adjacent Corbetts and he appends an encouraging list to that end. However it is not that Munro-baggers are more blinkered than most but just that many of us can cope with only one challenge at a time. Even I used to utter the aphorism that I was too young to do the Corbetts. Alas for many of us our salad days are past and Hamish's book appeared on the bookshelves at precisely the right time to inspire us to be reborn as Corbett-baggers.

Perhaps not a book for your rucksack but surely one for your bookcase.

D.F.G.

*The Corbetts and Other Scottish Hills*, S.M.C. Hillwalkers' Guide. Scottish Mountaineering Trust, 1990. £14.95

This is the younger brother of the S.M.C.'s classic guide to the Munros – five years younger to be precise. It has a similar, and largely admirable, layout. And if you don't like being spoon fed, you don't have to read it. It is first and last a guide book, concise and to the point; if you prefer your information to be interspersed with anecdote, you can read '*Climbing the Corbetts*'. Either way Hamish Brown wins.

It pays to read carefully the suggested routes, which have very up-to-date information; on at least two occasions I regretted not having done so, finding myself on the wrong side of a new deer fence.

I am not sure about the propriety of the editor's entry into the new game of Christen-the-Corbetts. Take the case of Point 2526 (S.M.C. Southern Highlands 1st ed. 1979 p76) just south of Loch Voil. This is subsequently referred to as Ceann na Baintighearna (Her Ladyship's Head), but it transpires that Her Ladyship's Head is in fact at the north end of the ridge. Presumably to avoid confusing the summit with any other part of Her Ladyship's anatomy, the editors suggest the name Stob Feartomhais (The Surveyor's Peak). How dull.

A few suggestions for the 2nd edition – Freeze the list of Corbetts – Borrow from Hamish Brown the regional maps which precede each chapter in his book – OR show all the Corbetts (not just a sprinkling) on the maps at front and back – Distinguish more clearly in the text between Corbetts and Other Hills (imagine the chagrin of a serious Corbett-er, who discovered that he had climbed Another Hill by mistake).

In all seriousness an excellent book.

J.M.C.G.

*The West Highland Way*, Robert Aitken, HMSO Revised 1988. £6.95

*On The West Highland Way*, Jimmie Macgregor, BBC 1985. £3.95

*The West Highland Way*, Footprint Map 1988. £2.25

*West Highland Way, Long Distance Route*, Countryside Commission for Scotland Free Leaflet (Annual)

One could walk the West Highland Way with only a map. To have any of these guides would ease the planning and increase the enjoyment. Robert Aitken's official guide gives plenty of information about scenery and history, is small enough to be slipped in the pocket

and comes complete with an O.S. map in a plastic case. The guide book is printed in sepia and yellow ink. I see no point in avoiding black and white for the text and the pictures would be clearer in black and white. While I am usually a devotee of O.S. maps, I did not care for the layout of this one with awkward sections and oblique grid lines, and found the footprint map, also in a plastic case, preferable. This map is derived from the O.S. but is printed clearly and folded in such a way as to expose in its clear envelope a days travel at a time. Along the margins of the route are paragraphs of useful information, altogether much handier than the HMSO combination.

Jimmie Macgregor's narrative provides an enjoyable description of the journey interspersed with fragments of verse in the characteristic style of the author. A book to be enjoyed but perhaps not included in the pack to be carried, though I had a happy evening reading it on one of the B&Bs recommended in the list issued by The Countryside Commission. If one does not fancy roughing it in bothy or tent there is a good choice of excellent B&B accommodation bookable in advance. These are listed in a brochure updated annually by The Countryside Commission for Scotland and available free from tourist information offices.

R.W.

*Balmoral – Queen Victoria's Highland Home*, by Ronald W. Clark, Thames and Hudson 1981. £10

Although this book was published ten years ago in America, the author is British with a wide knowledge of the Victorian era. He has a special interest in Victorian mountaineers on which subject he has written a book of that name.

Although basically a history of Balmoral, its various castles and Queen Victoria's association with Scotland, it will fascinate Club members especially those who love Lochnagar and the Braemar area.

The history tells the story of the castle site, from the 15th century, through pseudo-Gothic then mock Abbotsford to Queen Victoria's acquisition of it in 1848. It was then much changed and details of the architectural work are of interest. The book then dwells on the visits to Balmoral by Victoria and Albert, on his death, the Queen's association with John Brown, her death, then the use of the castle by George V, Edward VII, George VI and up to the present Royal Family.

There are many photographs to illustrate the book, all black and white, including early ones by George Washington Wilson, the Aberdeen photographer. One of our members, George F. Collie, contributed photographs to this edition and the Cairngorm Club Journal is mentioned in the bibliography. On page 107 there is a fine photograph of a Cairngorm Club meet to Lochnagar on the 23rd September 1889 with seventy plus walkers including many ladies – no problem filling that bus meet especially as Mr Begg of Lochnagar Distillery sent along a sample of his well known spirit.

This book, at present in the Cairngorm Club library is well recommended to all members.

A.P.M.

*Avonside Explored: a guide to Tomintoul and Glenlivet*, by Edward H. Peck, published by Edward H. Peck, Tomintoul, revised Ed. 1989. £3.30

This little book is exactly what its title suggests. It describes the countryside around the Banffshire Avon. This quietly beautiful area is one which most of us know very well

topographically but perhaps are less aware of some of its historical, geological and social associations.

The guide, first published in 1983 and updated to 1988, is described by its author as a "tribute to Dr Victor Gaffney (1910-1974)". It seeks to expand Gaffney's *"Tomintoul, its Glens and Its People"*.

This guide is organised neatly into two main sections. The first part, after a general introduction to Avonside, describes the Avon; Tomintoul; and Inveravon to Glenlivet (from Ballindalloch to Bridgend) including Kilnmachlie, Lower Avonside and Dounan. This section contains a wealth of fascinating information, both topical and historical.

The second part of the guide offers readers eleven Driving and Walking routes, the eleventh route dealing very briefly with Inchrory, Ben Avon and Upper Glen Avon. The routes are aimed primarily at the motorist but suggestions for walks are dovetailed especially as many of the points of interest described are accessible only on foot.

The guide is most valuable for the historical details and descriptions of landmarks it contains. In this respect, it is a real gem. It supplies answers to the many questions raised on seeing curious stones, ruins and other enigmatic items of interest when one is in this area. For example, the solitary "lums" on the Grantown road; these were used by roadmen for their fires. They set up wooden shelters against the chimneys. And how many people know about the little gorge containing a linn near the Bridge of Brown? The Battle of Glenlivet in 1594 is described – noteworthy among other things for being the last time the harp was carried into battle; after that the pipes accompanied the fighting. Also mentioned is the Lecht Iron Mine which started in the 18th century. The mine closed finally in 1847 but some of its buildings can still be seen. In this same area and in more modern times, Percy Toplis, "the monocled mineur" holed up in a cottage for a short time before wounding two local policemen in making his escape.

This guide is packed full with information, historical anecdotes, useful local knowledge (not forgetting whisky associations) as well as being written with great affection for the area. There is one map which unfortunately does not show all the places mentioned although it does cover most of the area covered by the guide. A map for each route would be useful but this is a minor omission as it is suggested that the relevant O.S. maps should supplement the map in the guide.

This is a guide which considerably enhances enjoyment of this attractive landscape. There are very pleasing black and white illustrations and a brief bibliography for those who want to take their interest further.

G.C.

*RHUM. The Natural History of an Island*, Ed. T. H. Clutton Brock and M. E. Ball E.U.P. 1987. £7.50

Rhum is not the easiest of islands to visit, but there is much to commend it. As a change from bagging its magnificent Cuillins, slightly smaller than their brothers across the water in Skye, there is much to see and explore.

This enjoyable book is a collection of essays by experts in different fields of natural history, geology, human history, botany including woodland and forestry, invertebrates, birds, red deer, domestic and feral animals. There are useful checklists of flora and fauna which are helpful in the identification of species.

The island, an extinct volcano, has now no native population and nearly all its inhabitants are the employees and scientists of the Nature Conservancy, to which the island and castle were gifted by the last owner, Lady Bullough and from which permission to visit must be obtained. There are remnants of former inhabitants from ruined crofts and lazybeds to the magnificent Kinloch Castle with its contents, the former home of the Bulloughs, now

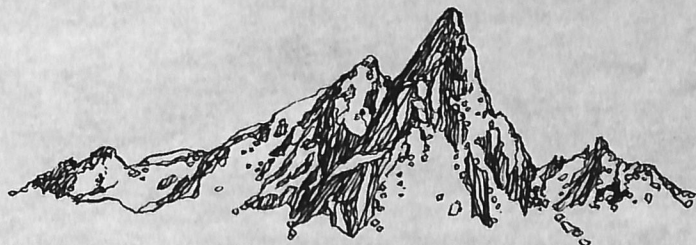
a hotel of decaying splendour.

The animals show less fear of man than those on the mainland and include feral goats, Rhum ponies, red deer and many rats (but no rabbits, frogs, toads or snakes). The vegetation includes several rarities and there is an important nesting colony of Manx shearwaters.

One very evident form of wildlife on Rhum is the notorious midge population. It is said that Sir George Bullough insisted on the builders of his castle wearing the kilt, but they were given a generous tobacco allowance to deter the midges!

This little book is small enough for the anorak pocket, and is recommended to add greatly to the enjoyment of the visitor.

P.W.



*Midges in Scotland.* George Hendry, Aberdeen University Press 1989. £3.95

Did you know that midges were described as early as the fourteenth century by three travelling monks from Peebles who resorted to swatting them with bundles of twigs? George Hendry gives an entertaining account of this little beast and her exploits, which cause so much grief amongst people in the Scottish hills.

Thirty four species of biting midge are known in Scotland, but one, the *Culicoides impunctatus* (Meanbh chuileag), better known as the Highland midge is responsible for most of the trouble. It is said to be fairly easy to identify with a wingspan of a mere 1.4 mm and six or seven blotches or dark spots on each membranous wing. Males feed on plant nectar and rotting plant remains but females love human blood. It's only one ten-millionth of a litre per bite, but this can cause discomfort for three to four days. Mr Hendry writes that the biting season lasts from mid June till well into August, but some of us might expand his timescale.

The highland midge doesn't like light and bites most vigorously towards twilight and in cloudy weather. The writer gives a good account of the other biting insects in Scotland including cleg, stable fly, black fly, and mosquito. It's not only us who suffer as cattle, horses, sheep, wild animals and birds can all be badly affected. Midges have been blamed for distress in cows and a decline in milk yields in particularly midgy summers. It seems that our little friends attack fiercely when you are on the move but often leave you alone when you want to enjoy the scenery. The foresters have an old saying that a midge never attacks a man standing with his hands in his pockets.

A few remedies are mentioned, one being not to wear dark clothes. The only natural repellent is an Australian concoction made from a blend of oil of citronella, pennyroyal, cajaput, lavender, bergamot and saffras. The chemical repellants such as Autan and Jungle Formula have been around for a long time, but a truly effective one has yet to be produced.

I bought this book thinking that there was a solution for the itching and scratching, but my hope was idle. I might as well pay the price for enjoying the Highlands.

K.W.



Richard Grant



*The Fell and Rock Journal*. No. 71 (1988) and No. 72 (1990) (Journal of The Fell and Rock Climbing Club of The English Lake District)

There is much to enjoy in these issues of the admirably produced journals of a distinguished kindred club. There are historical articles as well as climbing articles, and I especially enjoyed a collection of pieces on Brackenclouse in Wasdale (the venue of the CC weekend meet in October 1991) in the 1988 issue, and a collection of pieces on Waters Cottage, the Fell and Rock's Scottish hut, in the 1990 issue. This is relevant to the suggestion at the 1990 AGM that the Cairngorm Club acquire a further hut in Scotland.

Also in the 1990 issue is an article by June Parker, "Walking in the Winter Sun". June Parker is a former librarian of The Fell and Rock Club and her book "Walking in Mallorca" is in our library.

There are many other articles to interest members of the Cairngorm Club. The editor and contributors are to be congratulated.

P.W.

*The Birds of North-East Scotland*, Ed. S.T. Buckland, M. V. Bell, M. Picozzi. North East Scotland Bird Club. 1990. £19.95

*"The Birds of North East Scotland is much more than a local bird atlas. Introductory chapters on geology and flora were invited to set the scene for readers unfamiliar with north east Scotland. Maps of the semi-natural vegetation communities are presented and novel analyses of the atlas data are described. The final chapter comprises articles on the special bird communities of the area, the birds of the high tops and of the ancient pinewoods, wintering wild fowl, sea birds and shore birds"*.

This quotation from the preface gives a good summing up of the contents of the book. By any standards it is a monumental work, with contributions from 290 collated over a period of thirteen years. For readers not particularly interested in detailed records, there is plenty of interesting text and maps, and the tables are clearly set out. The illustrations are delightfully varied. The editors are to be congratulated on producing such a fine volume.

J.A.

*Moray Coast Railways*, Rosemary Burgess and Robert Kinghorn, Aberdeen University Press 1990. £8.90


This is a companion volume to Speyside Railways by the same authors, published in 1988, and reviewed in the last issue (Number 101) of this Journal. The lines dealt with in this work comprise that from Cairnie Junction (south of Keith) to Banff via Tillynaught Junction and from Tillynaught to Elgin along the Banff and Moray Coast via places such as Portsoy, Cullen and Buckie, and, in addition, the branch lines from Keith Junction to Portessie. The last mentioned was part of the Highland railway system, whereas the others were for most of their life run by the Great North of Scotland Railway (later to become part of the LNER). A well-researched account is given of the building of each line. There follow detailed statements about all the stations, with various facilities such as station buildings, signal boxes and track layouts, well described as they were during the operations of these lines. In each case an indication is given as to what buildings still remain after closure of the rail services more than twenty years ago. The book is copiously illustrated by 143 photographs and 34 maps, most of them depicting things as they were when the lines were operating, but some showing surviving buildings and viaducts.

While what is written will be generally fascinating to railway enthusiasts, the general visitor to the area is not forgotten. Each town or village which had a station is described historically and in other respects, and natural features are not neglected. It is pleasing to note that favourable comment is made on hills near the Moray Coast: viz. the Knock Hill (1409 ft.) at Glenbarry and the Bin Hill of Cullen (1055 ft.).

L.McA.

### CONTRIBUTIONS

All contributions will be considered for the Journal, although the editor reserves the right to edit, abridge or omit material submitted for publication. Main articles should be between 1500 and 3000 words in length. Shorter ones will be welcome for the Notes section. It would be appreciated if they could be typewritten or on computer disk, and assistance can be given in locating typing facilities. Black and white photographs need not be larger than contact prints and it is helpful if negatives are available.



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