

## MUIR OF INVEREY

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Muir of Inverey is known locally as 'The Moor'. The original Moor Cottage was on the south side of the road and was burned down on May 10, 1911. It had a thatched roof, and it is thought that the cause of the fire was a spark from the chimney. The two brothers who occupied it, Lachie and James Gordon, were offered Quoich Cottage – where Bob Scott lived after he left Luibeg – but as they were reluctant to move so far away from Inverey, the estate agreed to convert the barn and byre on the north side of the road into a dwelling house for them. This was completed and ready for occupation on September 27, 1911. The cost of conversion was £82 6s 7d less £60 received from the Royal Insurance Co. for damage done to the original cottage by fire. The fact that Muir is a converted barn explains why it is the only cottage in Inverey which is gable end to the road. All the other cottages face the road. The O.S. map of 1869 shows Bench Mark 1144 at Muir. This was rediscovered behind the fireplace wall in the dining room during reconstruction in 1980.

Muir was first leased by the Cairngorm Club from Mar Estate in November 1949. As the club also had the lease of Derry Lodge from 1950, the cottage tended to be used more by our own members than other clubs. Family parties were a feature of the summer months. The George Taylor Bequest was specifically for use in developing a heritable property, so to extend Muir, the Club had to own the feu of the cottage. The late Alan Watt, President from 1967 to 1970, approached the factor of Mar Estate in December 1967 regarding purchase of the feu, in the knowledge that estate policy was that feus should not be sold. However, Captain Ramsay of Mar was willing to make an exception in the case of the Cairngorm Club, and negotiations were finally completed and the Feu Charter agreed in February 1972. Under the direction of Peter Howgate, Huts Custodian 1970/72 and President 1979/82, work on the extension and reconstruction of the existing cottage was well in hand, and the new Muir was formally opened on July 1, 1972 during the Presidency of Sheila Murray. A fuller account of Muir appears in "The Cairngorm Club 1887-1987" by Sheila Murray, but this brief history is provided as the Centenary book is now out of print.

Being a new building, maintenance at Muir was minimal for the first few years. However, the log extension has some inherent defects which have proved difficult to resolve, notably a tilt to the west and south. This caused some concern, so in 1984 Graham Ewen's two brothers carried out a structural survey which was initially quite alarming. Tie bars should have been inserted at the time of construction, to prevent lateral movement of the logs, but this was not done. It had to be established whether the distortion was due to initial shrinkage and settlement, or whether it was a continuing process. An annual check of verticals since then has indicated no appreciable further movement.

There has been water penetration at log joints and gable ends. Weather boarding and mastic on the west gable has partly resolved the problem, but shrinkage allows water penetration during westerly gales and rain. We hope to cure this during 1994. Sanitation has also presented problems. The septic tank has functioned well, but frost damage to the glazed drain pipes in the inspection manholes between the cottage and the tank, caused recurrent blockages. Replacement with plastic piping sorted this out, but one memorable New Year we had another blockage. We eventually discovered, after much digging, that the soakaway had silted up causing the whole system to backfill. These recollections are not happy memories.

We are greatly helped by people living locally to tackle these problems. It used to be almost impossible to persuade tradesmen to go out to Inverey, but I have recently located people nearby who will do electrical, plumbing, building and carpentry work which we cannot do ourselves, or for urgent jobs. When it comes to fence repairs, digging trenches and ??????? out drainpipes, Bill Lobban of the Old Schoolhouse at Inverey is always willing to give the benefit of his experience and practical help when needed. Bill has even bulldozed snow out of the car parking area to give access to Muir in winter.

Water supply can be erratic. Whenever there is heavy rain, heather tips are washed down the burn and clog up holes in the perforated intake pipe. With very heavy rain and thaws after snow, the intake pipe vanished under a foot of gravel. Exhortations not to meddle with the valves inside are often ignored, and the resultant overflow from the pipe at the east side of the cottage, is a sure indication that someone has fiddled with the valve marked "Do Not Touch" in the ladies' loo. Anti-frost heaters were installed throughout the cottage in 1985, and this has done much to take away the dampness and chill from the rooms.

Kitchen arrangements have given rise to some criticism. The initial concept of two sinks was well thought out, but it was not possible to create a watertight seal between the worktops and the wall. Over the years water penetrated the joint, and rotted the plasterboard wall and blockboard under the worktops. The present single sink was installed in 1991, with the able assistance of Dick Newton and Peter Howgate. It is a bit too low, but a wire basket raises the washing up bowl. Like most things in life, it is a compromise.

Safety boards have now been constructed for the top bunks in all bedrooms. It may take some agility to climb in, but once there you cannot fall out. The old foam mattresses have been left for those who prefer them to the interior sprung ones, and to allow for overflow when accommodation is over-subscribed.

Bookings have increased dramatically over the last few years. In 1981/2 the occupancy was 1654 bed nights, but this has risen to 2475 in 1992/3. Weekends are booked solid a year in advance, the present policy being to allocate weekends at the beginning of one year for the following year. Some outside clubs have used the cottage regularly for more than 10 years. Many of

our members have regular bookings at Muir. Aileen Cook takes two parties from Beechwood School there every year. It is a delight to read letters of appreciation from youngsters who have never seen deer or squirrels before, and who have been given an opportunity to enjoy a well-supervised, yet, unrestricted holiday in the country. Neil Cromar and party have the Braemar Gathering weekend, except one year when the new custodian let it to two other parties who had not left a telephone contact number. Being the gentleman that he is, Neil accepted that a mistake had been made and settled for a day trip instead. Burns' night and New Year are Club-only weekends, and for the last 20 years this Hut Custodian has had a regular Muir week at the end of July.

Comparing notes with other Hut Custodians can be very revealing. It seems we all have a list of undesirable outside clubs whose identities are only revealed after a dram or two. Another common experience is the need for constant re-stocking of toilet rolls. Apart from the obvious, what do people do with them? All huts are short of teaspoons which are bought by the dozen but simply disappear. Crockery and glasses need steady replacement but it is unusual for anyone admit to breakages. If people phone or write to say they have left something behind it is rarely found, yet there is always an accumulation of old shirts, socks and towels in the drying room, fit only for the rubbish bin. There is still a pair of inners for winter climbing boots awaiting an owner.

Each year we allocate a week in May for spring cleaning and general maintenance. It is hard to strike the balance between 'many hands make light work' and 'too many cooks spoil the broth', but experience has established that around 10 is the ideal number. We can usually guarantee a few fine days within the week for outside work. The policy is that if the cottage is clean when a party arrives, it is usually left in a similar state. Accidents can happen, and in 1993 a fall of soot left the kitchen and dining room in an almost indescribable state. Five man-days were needed to wash down the walls and two woman-days to remove all soot from the floor. Increasing use by our own members helps, as they often take on such jobs as washing down the food shelves or cleaning the cooker when in residence.

Deliberate abuse is rare, but on one occasion a party punched holes in the metal waste bins, and filled them with live coals to use as braziers in the hall to heat up the building. They were black listed. There have been two fires, one in the dining room when socks left to dry fell on to the stove and set alight the old mantelpiece and wooden linings. The other happened when a plimsoll dropped behind the old tubular heater in the two-bedded room, and ignited when the heaters were switched on. Fortunately, in both cases the fires were contained and damage was limited. George Kynaston now regularly checks the smoke detectors and fire appliances.

The scope for increased usage of Muir is limited, but mid-week parties are becoming more frequent and are to be encouraged. The Club is making a valuable contribution in providing reasonably-priced accommodation for outdoor enthusiasts, and this is appreciated by all who use the cottage.

Unsolicited testimonials rate it as the best hut in Scotland. It is fascinating to read the log book and to appreciate how many people from all over Britain and abroad, have stayed there. The Cairngorm Club owes a deep debt of gratitude to its earlier office-bearers who had the foresight and resources to purchase and improve the cottage. Let us hope that Muir continues to prosper for many years to come.

**Editor's note.**

*Eddie Martin has recently demitted office as Huts Custodian having served the Club in that capacity since 1980.*



Ian Stuart