

## FIRST AID COURSE

MARLYN STRONACH

All day long reports came in about impending blizzards, as schools throughout Grampian closed to allow pupils to return home before the storms struck. Colleagues at work questioned my sanity at proposing to drive to Muir Cottage in the face of repeated news bulletins declaring the A93 closed at Braemar. Armed with a flask of coffee, shovel and sleeping bag, and the reassurance that the Shirreff twins were already on their way, I set off. I was relieved to discover the Braemar road closed beyond the village, allowing me an easy if not clear run to the cottage, where Judy had a fire blazing and the kettle on the boil. By ten o'clock, most of the eleven eager conscripts for the first aid course had arrived, and were swapping tales of what they had heard of it from the ten who took the qualification in May 1994. They didn't have 60 centimetres of snow and freezing conditions to contend with!

Next morning, just after breakfast, Mario's Merry Men arrived, amazed that everyone had turned up. Our instructors were introduced - Mario Di Maio, Charlie Hunter, Alan Crighton and Gordon Reilly from the Aberdeen Mountain Rescue Team - Phil and Mike would arrive the following day. We were issued with a very comprehensive handbook and told a bit about the HSE Emergency Aid Certificate, and how we would be assessed the following afternoon. What we had to learn between now and then seemed awesome. For someone who earns her living teaching children with learning difficulties, I suddenly developed a great empathy for how they felt.

So began two days of intensive instruction, demonstration and practical training. Lectures were interspersed with action, so time raced by. Every room at Muir was called into service as we were split into pairs to practise and develop skills. The tutors were marvellous, patiently demonstrating and repeating procedures, building up skills and encouraging us to be less self-conscious. I don't think any of us would have been awarded an Oscar for our performance in acting being first on the scene after an accident. We went around chanting A B C; not a sign we had reverted to the nursery - they stand for airway, breathing and circulation.

After lunch we were advised to wrap up well as we were going outside. I did wonder why Mario and Gordon appeared looking like Michelin men in several layers of clothing and soon discovered why. They were to be the 'victims' of hill accidents - our task to find them, work out what had happened (have you ever tried a body examination on someone dressed in a dozen layers of clothes?) and to respond as a first aider. By the time each member of our group of six had groped Mario and guessed where he might be injured according to his groans, the 'victim' looked very blue and was shivering uncontrollably - and he was not acting!

His final simulation was of a road crash, where the car was rammed against

one of the trees at the front of Muir with the bonnet open. It was while we were attempting to remove him from the vehicle, which was supposedly about to burst into flames, that we noticed a landrover pulled up at the gate and the occupants looking in anxiously. Fortunately they turned out to be our instructors for Sunday morning come to make our acquaintance. The evening was spent reading over the handbook - we 'oldies' were wishing our brains were more receptive to new information - and practising on Annie, the resuscitation model.

Next day was bandaging. We learned all the useful things you can do with a triangular bandage, a must now for the rucsac, and how to improvise in an emergency. We covered fractures, burns, hypothermia, asthma attacks, diabetes and epilepsy. As lunch approached we realised that time was running out. Soon we would be tested on all we had learned. We wanted to have another go with Annie at C.P.R. (cardiopulmonary resuscitation). We tried to cram the contents of the handbook into brains already on overload. It was little consolation that all ten of the May group had passed. What ignominy if we should fail.

Doctor Linda McKee (alias Mrs Di Maio) arrived and spent some time talking to us about what should be in our first aid kit. Her recommendations included plaster, wound dressing, crepe bandage, triangular bandage, roll of general purpose medical tape, painkillers, sharp scissors and a pair of rubber gloves. Before we knew it we were into the assessment. One at a time we were questioned by the doctor on some of the things we had learned. One by one we had to demonstrate our competence at C.P.R. In pairs we showed our expertise with a triangular bandage and our ability to improvise. While waiting our turn, we had a written question paper which covered all aspects, and which we were told later didn't count unless we were borderline fails.

What a relief when Mario told us we had passed and could be let loose on an unsuspecting world. Most of us wondered when, if ever, we would use our expertise. I'm sure the boy who tripped and fell down the stairs, landing at my feet first day back in school, was there to test my reactions. Fortunately the school nurse was only a shout away and I gratefully left her to do her stuff.

I was later extremely grateful to the Cairngorm Club for providing me with the opportunity to do this course, when a climbing companion stumbled on a greasy log at the end of a climb up Beinn Sgritheall, breaking her leg in three places. I was amazed at how quickly I visualised Phil and Mike demonstrating how to immobilise the damaged limb by strapping it to the good one on the table at Muir. And my triangular bandage was out of my first aid kit!

I would thoroughly recommend this course to all hill users, young and old, novice or experienced, for we never know when these skills might be called for. We must not forget too, that first aid skills are easily forgotten and the qualification lasts for only three years, so it is essential to re-train. There

are other first aid courses, but if you want one geared to walking on our hills, which is presented in a professional way and which is fun to do, then look no further.

*Both First Aid courses were instigated and largely financed by the Club.*



In December 1995, the Cairngorm Club donated £1,000 to the Braemar Mountain Rescue Centre Appeal. The picture shows Club President Eric Johnston on the right, presenting the cheque to Graham Macdonald, secretary of the Braemar Mountain Rescue Team, flanked by Club and Team members.

