

## THE LURE OF THE HILLS

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I was a keen hill walker while based in Aberdeen from 1965 to 1974, and missed the companionship and challenges of Cairngorm Club outings when work took me south of the border. Easter meets became my annual pilgrimage to the Scottish hills, but offered only a limited opportunity to enjoy the countryside. In 1992 the idea of cycling most of the way to and from Easter meets began to appeal, and has now become an enjoyable habit.

It is a long way from Bedford to Dornie. Having spent my fourth night in Stirling, I reached the Pass of Glen Ogle into Glen Dochart around lunch time, but took ages to reach Tyndrum against a headwind. The signpost to Glencoe, my objective, indicated another thirty miles. This would not be daunting on a good day, but with a heavily laden bike to push up the steeper, long hills, was quite a task. The desolation of Rannoch Moor was compounded by a snow storm, and by the time I reached the summit at 1,149 feet, felt as if I had climbed a Munro on the bike. A long run downhill through a hailstorm brought me to the safety of a bunkhouse, hot soup and a welcome chance to dry out. The following day I met three young cyclists near Spean Bridge on their way from Land's End to John O'Groats - a thirteen day tour for charity, but with a car to carry their gear. Some people have it easy! It was a long push up Glen Garry, then over the pass in more snow by Loch Cluanie to Glen Sheil and the reward of ten miles downhill to Ratagan Youth Hostel. Three of us climbed A'Ghlas-bheinn on the Sunday in superb conditions. One such day makes the whole trip worthwhile.

I cycled from Land's End to John O'Groats in the autumn of 1995, raising over £2,000 for Albania. This resulted in a request to participate in a sponsored tour to raise money for 'Wheels for All', so I combined usefulness with adventure on my journey to and from Lochinver. It was a sociable journey. A guest house owner in Melrose refused payment, asking me to give the money to charity. I attempted to visit friends in Edinburgh, but they were out and neighbours invited me to join a champagne party. The Perth to Aviemore stretch was the most challenging, but the well graded hills and smooth road surface of the A9 ease the path of the laden cyclist.

The journeys are not wholly by bike. I have appreciated a lift in a school bus, and enjoyed the scenery of Rannoch Moor and the Southern Uplands from the comfort of a train. Each Easter I've cycled around eight hundred miles in two or three weeks, enjoyed the company of friends en route, and been much fitter as a result. A case of personal 'urban renewal'.