

## THE OVERNIGHTER

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It is 66 years since what is perhaps the most eagerly awaited Club excursion and also, paradoxically, the most avoided came into being. Over the years members have certainly had strong feelings about the overnighter which started with the high-sounding title of the Summer Solstice outing back in 1932. This became over the years the Midsummer, Midnight and even the Midsummer Night's excursion before becoming the pedestrian overnighter in recent journals. Club members as long ago as 1898 had experienced the joys and agonies of a night on the mountains as Mrs E. Robertson described in an evocative piece entitled 'Sunrise on the Mountains' where *"the climbers stood huddled together to keep warm"* on Cairngorm, but with the reward *"the mist became a sea of palest gold, whose shadows were of pearl and whose depths were amethyst. For a moment the vision stayed, a revelation of heaven, and then the glorious sun rose above the mist and all shone cold, white and glistening - only to fade into the commonplace of life"* (CC Journal 10). We must remember too that the six stalwart founders of the Club did so on an overnighter.

The President at the first Summer Solstice was James McCoss who had a keen interest in astronomy as well as climbing. Present day climbing members will find interest in his article of 1912 'Some Kincardineshire Coast Climbs' illustrated by photographs of chimneying techniques at Souter Head (CC



Judy and Sandra Middleton on the Mamores - June 1996

Journal 38). He was an enthusiast for high camping in the Cairngorms and in 1912, after the opening of the Club's bridge over the Allt-na-Bienne Moire, left Coylumbridge with four others and, lanterns lit, went through the Lairig Ghru then up the side of a snowy Ben Macdhuì, down by Loch Etchachan and on to Braemar for lunch. A war in which he served, and 21 years were to pass before he made such excursions part of Club activities.

The late J E 'Eddie' Bothwell, surely the doyen of overnighters to his contemporaries, attended the first one in 1932 and gave some personal recollections in an entertaining article in 1975 (CC Journal 96). His last overnighter, his annual highlight, was in 1980, the year of his death.

For the devotee there is an air of expectation leading up to the 'curiously popular' adventure, with the weather the great unknown. However, it must be said that this enthusiasm is not shared by all. Quite a few members will confess that they have participated - but only once! Over the years tales of frost and snow, rain and wind have been well documented: 'midsummer weather dogged the party,' 'weather back to normal - difficult to know why one member considered it a night to prolong unduly.' 'Why spend the best part of two fine days on a bus to endure a miserable night on the mountains' - so goes the argument.

The best remembered and recorded overnighters have been anniversary excursions. In 1937, the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Club saw the last journey up Speyside by train, and an extraordinary meeting led by the President at the Shelter Stone, followed by fireworks. There was an expedition to the same location for the 75th anniversary, but planned celebrations had to be abandoned due to atrocious weather. The centenary expedition in 1987 retraced the route of the founder members - from the Linn of Dee to the summit of Ben Macdhuì at midnight, then down to the Shelter Stone and the Dairymaid's Field at 6am. Here the President proposed and a company of about 100 drank a toast to the Club. The celebrations continued with a memorable champagne barbecue at Muir of Inverey with almost 300 present.

The post-excursion meal has always been an important part of the overnighter. Most ended at Braemar in the early days with hot baths and a hearty breakfast at the Invercauld Hotel. These delights disappeared during the war when Club activities were restricted, but the Club breakfasted again at the Invercauld in 1946 - no word of hot baths. Nowadays the overnighters are more ambitious and end at lunch time. Some parties have completed all eleven Mamores or most of the Fannichs in one outing. Earlier groups sometimes started out after 'a noisy meal' and in one account looked in the mists on Ben Avon like 'a belated company recovering from the revels of the previous night.'

Midsummer night does conjure up thoughts of spooks and things which go bump in the night. This may explain what one lady member of undoubted sobriety described in the 1970's as "a most remarkable happening" when an object appeared in the sky, advancing menacingly in her direction, only to

dwindle and disappear like a puff of smoke. As she reflected in unbelief "Do UFO's really exist?"

And so, long may the overnighter prosper. Every year provides a fund of memories and stories. To the doubter, come and join in the midsummer madness and perhaps you too will experience the delight of an unforgettable sunrise on the mountains. You may even become an enthusiast!

### LINN OF MUICK

Quietly, I sit and watch  
the tumble of brown flecked cream,  
those tinted shocks of water  
which make leapfrogs of foam.

And, where dark rock shines through,  
white horsetails streaked with black  
hang down their hair of spume  
past grey and mossy rock.

So, by a high banked birch,  
I can but pause and ponder  
this fall of churning chaos,  
release of liquid thunder.

And track the time loaned flow,  
which dives with maverick joy  
to pound and splash anew  
stones well acquaint with spray.

O what innocence  
in this rumbling, crashing linn,  
unlike the dark perversion  
in the quiet Fall of Man.



George Philip