

## **Carry on up the Khyber** *Gordon Stalker*

Traditional Cairngorm Club overnight meets seem now to be a thing of the past but a substitute weekend was kindly arranged by Ian Shand for the Aberdeen Holiday weekend 7<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> July 2001 at the Bearnais Bothy. Most members chose to walk in from Lair near Achnashellach station, although it was noted that the organizer had decided to come in from Strathcarron. Perhaps he knew something we didn't!

The evening's excitement started about 9.30 p.m. after the drive from Aberdeen, with an attempt to locate the bridge marked at 011482 on the 1988 version of OS sheet 25. When this was eventually found it was seen now to consist of two wires connected at the far side of the river only. A pleasant paddle followed across the delightfully warm River Carron and, after blundering through a forestry plantation, the start of the path up the legendary Khyber Pass was thankfully found. Members should note that under spate conditions the crossing of the wide River Carron would be difficult or impossible.

Progress at last! By midnight we were standing in mist and darkness at what we thought was the summit of the Khyber Pass looking down into a corrie in which we assumed the bothy was located. At this point we were navigationally challenged, and two GPSs in a party of three were not enough to prevent us descending some distance into this corrie when some doubts began to creep into our minds as to whether the topography corresponded to what was expected. A GPS fix showed we were in fact in completely the wrong corrie - Coire na h-Eilde. Thoughts of benightment on the hill without a bivvy bag followed, but we retraced our steps and found that the unseen path continued up a steep rocky bluff in a southerly direction. The bothy was finally reached with relief at about 1.30 a.m., without much further incident apart from my torch batteries failing and a sprained ankle a few hundred metres from our goal.

The bothy was empty except for a small body occupying an impossibly small space beside the fireplace. This turned out to belong to a lady Club member, who must have thought that she had arrived on the wrong date and/or the wrong bothy.

The morning dawned with some interesting cloud formations in which most of the day was spent traversing Beinn Tharsuinn, Bidein a'Choire Sheasgach and Lurg Mor, the latter certainly two of the most isolated Munros. Despite or because of the Presidential presence, the rest of the weekend was lost in a misty oblivion due to a combination of the weather and inferior whisky, but members of the Club also ascended the



*Bearnais Bothy*

other Corbetts in the area, Sgurr na Feartaig (on which no seagulls were seen) and Ben Dronaig.

Lessons learned for future overnight excursions include:

- purchase an up to date map in case any bridges, tracks or paths have altered;
- put new batteries in your torch before leaving home and carry new spares;
- carry a bivvy bag even if it does add to your already enormous load;
- it's difficult to argue with the man carrying a GPS!