

## Past Proceedings

*The first volume of the Cairngorm Club Journal was published in July 1893. This and the 104 issues that have followed over the subsequent years bring vividly to life the activities of the Club, the hills and the history of the times, and are fascinating for both the similarities and the differences when compared with Club activities in the twenty-first century. As many members may not have the opportunity to peruse these early volumes, it seems appropriate that as the Journal enters the new millennium it should reproduce a few extracts, some taken from a hundred years ago and some from fifty years ago.*

### ***A Hundred Years Ago***

*From Volume III no.15, July 1900:*

Mount Keen was revisited by the Club on 7th May. The party left Aberdeen at 8.5 a.m. by train to Aboyne, where conveyances were waiting for the drive to Coirebhuach. Glen Tanner was in beautiful form, and its Water, owing to recent rains and snow-melting, was swollen to the dimensions of a river. A short halt was made in the Forest on the way up, and the company were hospitably received by Sir William C. Brooks. Coirebhuach was reached at noon; and here the ancient right-of-way, the Fir Mounth, was taken. Corrach, in addition to a fine cornice, had several patches of snow, and when the cone was tackled snow-fields were numerous. Mist had possession of the mountain-tops all morning, and as the summit of Mount Keen was neared, it became very dense, and rain fell. The cairn, so familiar to the Club, was duly found without having recourse to the compass; there was, of course, no view to be had. After luncheon the usual meeting was held, and a candidate admitted to membership, with time-honoured ceremonial. The descent to the Tanner was made under better conditions, though the mist was gradually creeping lower. Another halt was made in the Forest, when, after partaking of the hospitality of the house, Sir William conducted the party through the public rooms so that a few of the treasures might be inspected. There is much to admire in Sir William's Highland home, but perhaps Peter Graham's "Highland Spate" - which, it may be mentioned, the generous owner intended to bequeath to the City of Manchester - received the most attention. On departure, the Chairman of the Club, Mr. William Porter, J.P., thanked Sir William Brooks for the facilities afforded to the excursion, and the kindly reception he had again personally given to the Club, which was proud to have him as an honorary member.

The cordiality of the reception of the members of the Club, on the day of the May excursion to Mount Keen, and the heartiness of the welcome personally extended by Sir William Cunliffe Brooks, give an almost personal tinge of sadness to the announcement of the death of the

genial baronet, which took place on 9<sup>th</sup> June. The Club had been twice previously (1890 and 1894) obliged to Sir William, and on the latter of these two occasions he was elected an honorary member. His personal worth and his great merits as an improving tenant and landlord have been duly - and very properly - extolled in the daily press. One of the biographical sketches managed, in an ingenious "aside", to remind its readers that there exists a right of way up Glen Tana despite the deceased baronet's attempt to close it, but all the notices have omitted to mention that Glen Tana - or, to give it its proper name, Glentanner - was the place meant in William Forsyth's pathetic dirge, "The Pibroch o' Kinreen". Glentanner has a history of its own in connection with deer-forestry and depopulation. It came under the scrutiny of a special Commissioner of the *Free Press* in a series of articles on "Game and the Game Laws" published in January, 1873, and Sir W. Cuncliffe Brooks had even been obliged some time before, to defend his position, his chief self-justification being that he had increased the population of the glen by 17 per cent.

*From Volume III no. 17, July 1901:*

*The death of Queen Victoria took place on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1901. The Club Journal comments:*

It may perhaps be well to point out that a great deal that found its way into print at the time of the Queen's death in the shape of "incidents" of Her Majesty's life at Balmoral was purely fictitious. In particular, prominence was given to a "well-faked-up story" which will not bear a moment's examination. It was solemnly stated that "There is a tradition which avers that when snow appears on a certain part of Lochnagar, the laird of Balmoral dies", and that "No snow has been seen on this part of the mountain since the late Queen became landlord until the present year". This is the sort of legend to be at once accepted by the credulous, more especially as it has a family resemblance to well-known instances of the summer's drought being gauged by the decrease or disappearance of snow in certain mountain corries. We have made some enquiry, however, and can find no trace of such a tradition as that alleged, nor any evidence of the professed natural phenomenon - which, to those of us who know Lochnagar, would be something like a miracle. There can be no part of Lochnagar that would not be covered with snow in a snowstorm of ordinary severity and duration. A correspondent we consulted settles the matter plainly and decisively - "I have seen Lochnagar spotlessly white - yes, even painfully so - hundreds of times, and I do not think that any disposition of such snowstorms as we have at Balmoral would allow of any part of the mountain not being covered with snow, unless perhaps the under sides of overhanging precipices. There are corries on Lochnagar which I believe retain snow all the year round - at any rate, I always find

snow in them - but for a certain spot never to have been covered with snow till now is an impossibility". Our correspondent proceeds to call for the continuous observations which have determined the existence of the un-snow-covered portion of Lochnagar; but, obviously, that is asking far too much. Suffice it to have slain the legend. Returning to the Queen, let us quote a sentence from an article on "Lochnagar in March" in the Aberdeen Free Press: "Among the many good deeds of Queen Victoria, it must not be forgotten that the Lochnagar track was made at the orders and the expense of Her Majesty".

### ***Fifty Years Ago***

*From Volume XVI no. 86, 1948-49*

#### **Avalanche in Raeburn's Gully**

At the Club Excursion to Lochnagar on February 13, 1949, four members entered Raeburn's Gully about mid-day. Although the leading party (Hendry and Still) had thought that the snow which had fallen the day before would have put the gully out of condition, they found the snow in splendid order and decided to continue. Mathieson and Anton followed soon afterwards. The leading party climbed the ice pitch in one and a half hours (using a piton as a running belay), and had reached the top of this section about 2 p.m. At this point a small fall of snow in Pinnacle Gully no. 1 suggested a thaw on the upper part of the mountain and this was borne out by the condition of the new snow encountered. Retreat was contemplated but abandoned in favour of an almost immediately attainable escape on the Tough-Brown Ridge. (This could have been accomplished in ten minutes and seemed, therefore, safer than retreat which was attended by the risk of the party being caught in a fall of snow while descending the ice pitch.) Accordingly, Hendry commenced to cut steps upwards but, soon afterwards, the cornice, which was about 200 feet above and not overhanging, sloughed off, and growing in size and momentum, was sufficient to sweep Hendry off, although he had previously driven his axe well in. Still, who was well belayed, momentarily checked the fall but was dragged off when the rope belay broke his axe; both went down with the avalanche to fetch up on the scree fan of the gully within three feet of each other. Still was quite uninjured; Hendry was less fortunate but able to walk off the hill.

Anton, who was nearing the top of the ice pitch and who had clipped a Karabiner on to the piton inserted by the first party, was at once dislodged by the avalanche. Mathieson was safely out of harm's way in a cave, with a good axe belay and he was able to bring Anton to a stop at the full extent of the rope (120 feet 1¼ inch nylon). Piton and Karabiner were later found on the rope; the 8 inch ice piton had broken. Anton had apparently suffered injury and was unable to climb down; Mathieson's

hands suffered from friction of the rope. Anton's injuries were not so serious as was at first feared, but having been lowered to the bottom of the gully, he was then carried to Allt-na-guibhsaich.

It was fortunate that an R.A.F. Mountain Rescue team from Kinloss was in the area and their aid was enlisted; this splendidly efficient unit was wholly responsible for the rapid evacuation of the injured man. The avalanche was presumably due to the rapid thaw which, unknown to the climbers, was in progress on the plateau. In the unusual circumstances, it does not appear that the climbers could have done anything to alter the course of events. The incident, however, emphasises, once again, that Scottish avalanches are dangerous, a fact not yet generally appreciated. The Press was not informed, not because there was any mountaineering blunder to cover up but because the sensational treatment of such incidents by some newspapers not only brings undesirable publicity to the victims but also presents a distorted impression of mountaineering to the public.

*From Volume XVI no. 87, 1950-51:*

#### **Muir of Inverey**

The idea of building a Club Hut among the hills has been a recurring item before Committees for the last twenty-five years or more, but financial and other difficulties have always proved insurmountable. Immediately after the war the matter was raised again and, for a time, we appeared to be in danger of acquiring a Mountain Hut, a Club bus, and a Ski Lift in Coire Sputan Dearg, all without the means of paying for them. However, immediate need boiled down to a Club Hut, and negotiations for a lease of Derry Lodge, having finally broken down in 1949, we returned to the building problem. But Taylor's estimate of costs soon convinced us that we should have to make do with some existing building which could be adapted to suit our purpose at a relatively small financial outlay. And that led, eventually, to Muir of Inverey, the nearest available cottage to the hills, providing reasonably adequate accommodation and requiring no substantial alterations.

Such work as was required was carried out entirely by volunteers, under the tutelage of G.A. Taylor, at week-ends and holidays, and was, consequently, rather protracted. The kitchen was enlarged by the removal of a wooden partition, and the dust of ages; the annexe was lined with hardboard, walls painted and sundry less enjoyable tasks completed. But the most spectacular operation was the installation of a water supply, involving the digging of an incredibly long trench and various other holes in almost solid rock. The original lead pipe, punctured in seventeen places, was replaced by a new copper one, Taylor performing in the role of plumber. Taylor is not a plumber; he is a magician whose chief stock-in-trade is a wonderful sequence of mystic runes, crooned over all the joints



to make them water-tight. One had only to listen to discover which stage of the operation he had reached. (I remember some of the words and shall be happy to impart them to any member thinking of setting up in the trade). I have sometimes wondered whether our faith in Taylor was altogether justified; certainly he was the one who exhibited most surprise when it was demonstrated that the thing really did work.

By June 1950 the work was sufficiently far advanced for the cottage to be opened to members, which was done without ceremony. The cost of equipment and renovations was met from the Works Fund, to which members had been asked to send donations. These amounted to £142.16s.0d., and the cost of furnishings and repairs to £211.12s.6d. A copy of the regulations governing the use of the cottage was posted to members, together with a list of the facilities offered. The following table of distances may be useful in planning excursions:

Altanour, Glen Ey	5¾ m.	(Cycle or foot-slog)
Auchelie, Glen Ey (nursery ski-slopes)	2½ m.	( " )
Derry Lodge via Canadian Bridge	4 m.	(Car or cycle)
White Bridege via Linn of Dee	4 m.	( " )
Linn of Quoich	3½ m.	( " )
Invercauld Bridge	8 m.	( " )
Loch Callater Cottage	10 m.	( " )
Glen Clunie Lodge	11 m.	( " )



*Muir of Inverey in 1951*