

Past Proceedings

The first volume of the Cairngorm Club Journal was published in July 1893. This and the 105 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.18, January 1902

LOST ON CAIRNGORM

It must be emphasised that this cautionary tale of misadventure on the hill and an early mountain rescue does not refer to Club members!

The concluding sentence of a Note under the above title in Vol. I (1895) p. 260 of the *Journal* is: "It would be difficult to imagine a more badly equipped or a more mismanaged hill excursion from start to finish than the above." This was written of the doings of a young Grantown company, but last September another Grantown party risked their limbs and lives in an even more wanton manner. The recklessness of those in charge in these cases is difficult to explain, and can be fully appreciated only by experienced hillmen. The thoughtlessness of the excursionists of 1894 may be excused on account of their youth; but not so that of the more recent adventurers. The amateur mountaineer who undertakes to lead a mixed company to the top of any of the Cairngorms, especially when young girls are in his temporary charge, has a grave responsibility, and must make his dispositions accordingly. We should say that he must make a start from the bottom *before* mid-day, and provide himself with a map and compass, it being of course presumed that he knows how to use each. He is not entitled to assume that mist will not appear till he has conducted his charge to the bottom.

A party of twenty ladies and gentlemen drove and cycled from Grantown to Loch Morlich on 13th September last. Glenmore Lodge was reached at ten o'clock, but not left till noon - four ladies, however, preferring to remain below. Tea was to be ready for the climbers at 4.30, so they did not under-estimate their capabilities. The top of Cairngorm was reached about three o'clock, mist being entered into in the vicinity of the cairn. Apparently little attention had been paid to the nature of the ground as the cairn had been neared,

for they were not able to recognise or remember the side on which it had been approached. The wind was therefore adopted as guide for the return journey. Occasionally the wind *does* blow in one direction for several consecutive days even on the summits of the Cairngorms, but it also frequently indulges in rapid journeys round the compass. However, it did lead the party down - but on the wrong side, though they were ignorant of that fact. They only knew that, following running water, they found themselves near the edge of a precipice. They had descended towards Loch Avon at the most dangerous point; had they been more to the west there would have been a safe descent by the Coire Raibert Burn, more to the east by The Saddle. As it was getting dark, the party held upwards again, halting at a shingle and boulder-strewn patch. Their feet were wet, and they had with them absolutely nothing to eat - everything had been risked on the afternoon tea arrangement. A rough dyke was erected as some slight shelter for the night, but the temperature did not permit of a long-continued lack of motion, even though the gentlemen parted with some of their raiment to the ladies - all wraps having been thoughtfully (?) left below. The party marked the close of the 'day' by praise and prayer; we would fain hope that the leaders asked forgiveness for the great wrong they had done those dependent on them.

Shouts, whistles, and yells were occasionally indulged in, in the vain hope of rescue; the mist was even worse in the morning, and rain fell. A start was, however, made soon after 5am, but the running water was again found to lead only to precipices. At 7am one of the party had the misfortune to slip on a boulder, receiving an ugly gash on the forehead. There was, however, help at hand, as there were no fewer than three medical students in the company. This accident, coupled with the general unfortunate position, had a depressing effect, and another night on the hill seemed not improbable. A wounded ptarmigan was captured in case the involuntary fast should have to be prolonged for another day. A consultation was held between eight and nine o'clock, and again prayer was made. Soon thereafter the mist partially lifted, and the lost party imagined they were alongside the Nethy, but they were soon able to recognise Loch Avon. They estimated they were 300 - 400ft above the loch, to which they slowly and carefully descended, probably by the Feith Buidhe of the Stac an Fharaidh. When they had passed the lower end of the loch, and had decided on following the Avon to Tomintoul - an extraordinary resolution - they heard a shout on the slope to their left, and their rescuer appeared.

As hour after hour passed at Glenmore Lodge without the return of the hill party, considerable anxiety was felt for their safety. At 8pm, as it was evident that they could not descend without some difficulty, Mr. Hector M'Kenzie, the head forester, sent three ghillies, James Munro, Lewis Grant (1), and Lewis Grant (2) to the top of Cairngorm with a lantern. They returned at 1am, without result. These men, along with Mr. M'Kenzie, had to leave at 5am

for a grouse drive at Dunachton - Mr. Cooper being lessee of that moor as well as of the deer forest of Glenmore. Dunachton was reached at 7am, when Mr. Cooper, whose sympathy was of a practical nature, on being informed of the non-return of the climbers, sent his men back to Coylum Bridge in his motor car. Mr. M'Kenzie and the ghillies started from Glenmore Lodge, accompanied by two gentlemen who had arrived in search of their missing relatives. Two search parties were formed for the rocks above Loch Avon - one to descend to the Shelter Stone and return by Coire Lochan, the other to return by Mam Suim and Ryvoan. The latter party consisted of Mr. M'Kenzie and Lewis Grant (2). Before setting out Mr. M'Kenzie ordered telegrams to be sent to the Fife Arms Hotel, Braemar, and to the forester at Inchroy. He sent a man on horseback to W. Cameron, the 'Watcher' at Ryvoan, directing him to go up the Garbh Allt (Nethy) to Loch Avon; and also a message for assistance from an adjoining forest - but this request received no attention. Such a plan of campaign was almost bound to be successful, and the Ryvoan 'Watcher' had the good fortune to pick out the lost party with his telescope, finding them about a mile below Loch Avon. His supply of food was eagerly devoured, and stimulants were given to such as required them. A snap-shot was then taken of the group, and thereafter, Cameron leading, Ryvoan was reached, *via* the Garbh Allt, about 6pm. The effects of the long exposure were evident, except in the case of the youngest member - a twelve-year-old boy. A waggonette picked up the party near Glenmore Lodge.

Had the weather been stormy the result to the ladies and the weaker members would have been very serious. It is such hare-brained excursions as these that bring discredit on hill-climbing, besides causing anxiety to friends and relatives, and expense to those on whom falls the work of rescue. Cairngorm, though it is over 4000ft in height, is one of the easiest and safest mountains to climb we know, when the sun shines; but to those lost in the mist it is one of the most dangerous.

Fifty Years Ago

From Volume XVI no. 88, 1951-52

To celebrate the opening of the Cairngorms National Park in 2003, we reprint this prophetic glimpse of its possible future development by L.B.Perkins, then Honorary Meets Secretary.

NATIONAL PARK S7 (BLUESTONES)

I was glad to leave my class of 450 youngsters. I still feel that 400 is a reasonable maximum, even with the aids that science gives us today. So I was looking forward to my holiday, even though I had made S7 my third choice, and had now been given accommodation at the Corner Hotel. My acknowledgement card informed me that my room number was 635 and that I could have a bath on Tuesday and Friday, at 9pm, and that meals would be served to me at the fifth sitting.

The bus-train was late at Dee Falls, and as I waited in the checking-shed for the hotel car I reflected on the recent revision of names carried out by the Survey Committee. Some of the old names had become debased, losing their original meaning. The Committee had attempted to rename every point of interest, selecting names to accommodate local legend. For example, the Grey Pass was named to link up with the Grey Man of Black Mountain, and the former names of Larig Grau and Ben Dubh were no longer to be used.

An official approached me as I ruminated and asked me what I intended to do, as he was about to go off duty and had to lock the gates. The hotel car had left and there was no other means of transport. I asked if I could walk, and permission was granted after the official had taken part in a four-cornered telephone conversation between himself, his supervisor, Glasgow, and London. If I filled in an indemnity form . . .

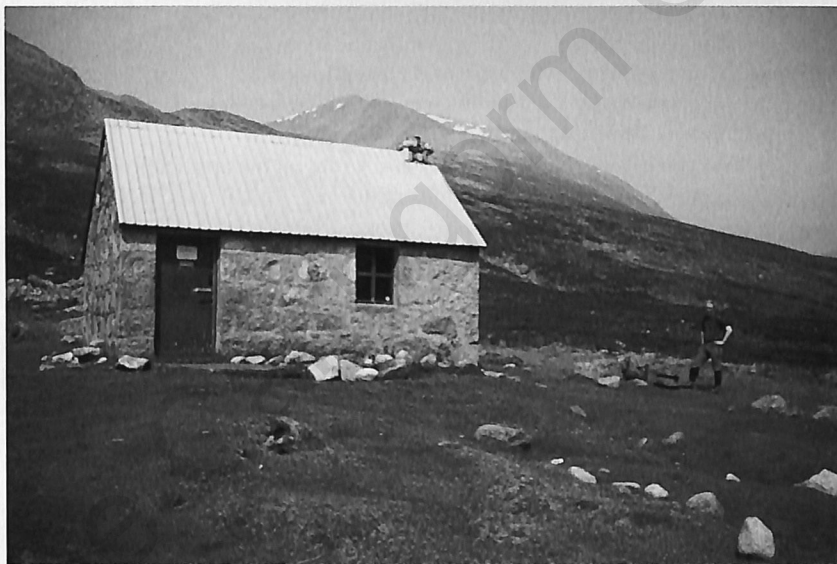
The official explained that the red path led to the Border Mountain, the green to the Low Pass, the black to the summit of Black Mountain, and the grey, leading up the Grey Pass, was the one for the Corner Hotel. The plastic tiles were electrically heated and glowed with fluorescent colours at night. It was forbidden to leave the paths.

I set off along the multi-coloured path and passed the Cleft of Yearning, where the red one went off up to the right. Derry Lodge, the notorious home of the Cairngorm Club, was skirted, and later I passed over a charming rustic aluminium and concrete bridge, up a long flight of steps, along the path, now grey in colour, and eventually came in sight of the Corner Hotel, which stands at the base of an impressive mountain called the Devil's Point.

From where I stood, looking up the Grey Pass, I could see the great mass

of the wind barrier, with its patterned openings in which revolved the great wheels generating electricity. I would have a closer look at Norlek's schemes during my holiday.

I turned away, crossed under the Dee through the famous tunnel, and entered the hotel. Its interior was familiar, as it was one of the standard ones built by the Tourist Board in the latter half of the century. The reception was also familiar and I entered my room in possession of only my most personal belongings. However, my room had a view to the east of a long, towering ridge, nameless because the Survey Committee had not agreed, as indeed they had failed to do with many others. As the use of the old names, either by word of mouth or in writing, was forbidden by statute, the position was obscure at least.



The Site of the Corner Hotel in Earlier Days

I went to the dining-room, but ran into difficulty when I found that I could not get a meal without production of my acknowledgement card, which was at the hotel office with my other identity papers. Explanations of a busy television channel leading to delays in contacting the identification section of Somerset House did not satisfy me, and in desperation I said "Cairngorm Club" and was immediately given a reserved table.

It should be explained at this stage that the Cairngorm Club found themselves in a very strong position on the founding of the 'S' group of parks. At that time its members, by clever negotiation, obtained for themselves and

their nominated successors the right to travel within the park by any route and to enter or leave it at any point. They also had the right to obtain full-service at the Corner Hotel free of charge, in view of their connection with the previous building. Among other things, they also held the right to feed the reindeer and bears which comprise the principal indigenous fauna of the area.

After dinner I walked in the ornamental park surrounding the hotel. The use of soil-warming has allowed the introduction of many exotic plants into this garden, but perhaps the most interesting sight is the artificial hot spring and geyser, the latter working on the introduction of a £1 note into a slit. The display in colours is very fine and well worth the trivial expenditure.

My luggage was in my bedroom when I returned and I took the opportunity of trying the fit of the nailed over-soles I had smuggled in. Nails, of course, are forbidden on the paths. To leave the path is also forbidden, and the application of these rules is carried out by checking the entry of nailed boots. Cairngorm Club members, who were of course allowed, in fact entitled, to leave the paths and very rarely used them, were given over-soles of polythene, but apparently they never used them.

I arranged to leave the hotel early and wrote on the application form that I wished "to study temperature variations at dawn." This is much safer than to mention the study of flowers or animals, as one never knows when an inspector will appear to catch one stealing specimens or taking photographs.

Arising at 5am I took breakfast from the preateria, getting the standard meal of fruit juice, protein slab, toast and coffee by the simple process of pushing six £10-note packets into the machine. I noted that porridge was available with the served breakfast. The Parks Executive do really try to maintain old customs; and I mean 'try'.

Leaving the hotel a little later, it was with little hesitation that I crossed the Dee by the stepping-stones, now an ancient monument, and set off across the heather, spurning the path, towards the slopes between Black Mountain and the unnamed hill. I would have been better advised to keep to the path, but my unorthodox route enabled me to see the fence denoting the boundary between land controlled by the Parks Executive and the high tops controlled and owned by Norlek.

In an hour I was at the fence, and soon found my way along it to a gate - open. I hesitated and then slipped inside. Now I would find out what happened inside the Norlek enclosures, the enclosures surrounded by a ring fence with open gates. The wind-stations were, of course, obviously generating electricity, but since the Nature Reserves had been taken over by Norlek some disconcerting tales had been given currency. However, the area within the fence had the appearance of being fairly normal but rather bare. I soon detected the absence of indigenous plants, contrasting with the carefully random planting of

them in the 'Park' area.

Bare stones with obviously misfit plants such as crowberry, cranberry, and moss campion seemed to indicate a reversion to the mid-century conditions, when 'indigenous' was taken to mean that plants found growing in any place were natural to that place, when in fact they might be merely relics from glacial ages. In these more enlightened days 'indigenous' is applied to plants and animals which are fitted to certain climatic conditions, and it was on this basis that the Parks Executive introduced strains of animals and plants, suitably conditioned, into the area and removed the misfit relics of glacial epochs.

On the other hand it was apparent that Norlek had done nothing. With its statutory control of Nature Reserves, obtained during the notorious 'access' action at the New Bailey between itself and the Parks Executive, it had maintained the status quo.

As I stood, a flock of ptarmigan wheeled, circled, and landed and I noticed a man feeding them; that is, he threw some food on the ground and the ptarmigan ate it. It was evident that the food wasn't being weighed, the ptarmigan were not counted, nor even a photograph taken. I couldn't understand this lack of desire to collect statistical information when the opportunity was so splendid. I approached and we had a long conversation. His job was with Norlek, in the wind-station. When not on duty he did what he wanted. He hadn't studied the diet of ptarmigan, but they liked the remains of his and his colleagues' meals. If they didn't they could go down to the Park and be studied. He didn't fill up a daily statistical card, he had a universal permit, he ... well, he was as free as any human being could have been in the early part of the last century, and that is saying a lot. The world of to-day seemed a long way off, with its standardisation, planning, control; statistics, and official orderliness.

After further conversation we parted and I was free to roam where I liked on the tops of the Black Mountain. Below me lay the Grey Pass, with its carefully planned random groups of indigenous trees and plants; its path, properly graded; its standard rock-climbs, constructed, classified, and labelled in varying degrees of severity and conforming with those in every other National Park. I turned and went over the bare Norlek zone, untouched except for the wind-stations, linked by pylons, and after an exciting hour reached the summit cairns.

There were three. One erected by the old Ordnance Survey sheltered a little stone pillar with a badly chipped, porcelain top. This was once a viewfinder, but none of the old names was now visible. Dwarfing the other two was the plastic-bonded transparent one set up in the middle of the twentieth century by the Society of Strangers to commemorate the Great Fire of London. The State, of course, had control of cairns now, following the indiscriminate erection of them to commemorate odd events, which aroused public feeling

recently and led to the official destruction of all the destructible ones.

I sat for a time and relaxed. I may have dozed off, but suddenly sat erect. Was I alone? I didn't feel alone. Surely someone, something, was watching, studying me, from behind one of the cairns. A picture of an official taking photographs and making notes sprang to my mind - I would break his beastly little camera. I jumped up and did a gyratory run round, in and out of the cairns. Nobody was there. I sat down again, still feeling watched. The Grey Man! The thought came to my mind and a flood of recollections of metaphysical studies poured into my conscious thought. Telepathy, hypnotism, thought control were established - spiritualism, demonology, black magic, all laughed out of existence, except for children's games.

Yet there was something - some nervous tension, something passing the thought to my brain that there was a better place for me than the summit of Ben Dubh.

I reached for my 'Familiar', the only term I had for the complete and ingenious instrument with which all mountaineers provide themselves, a device indicating every variable factor concerning natural conditions, and with many more functions as well. "Check everything," said my mind, and I started. Temperature normal; wind direction and force normal; relative humidity normal; light value - a little low for the clear sky and sunshine I was enjoying, but so was the temperature, possibly my eyes had got over-acclimatised. Magnetic field normal, as were total radiation from sun, colour of sky, ionisation - wait, ionisation was high. High indeed, it was visibly rising. I checked the temperature again. It was lower than before. Switching to humidity I found it rising; that was consistent with temperature drop. Light value was dropping, but sun's radiation the same. Ionisation was rising still and fairly rapidly, and a visible drop in temperature became apparent. I began to feel cold. The Grey Man or no, there was something inexplicable, and as I worked the instrument I felt fear, for I could feel darkness and cold creeping over me. Darkness and cold. No heat in the sun now and little light.

And then a sound came, a footfall, and I jumped up and fled. And as I did so, I thought I was followed, but had no time to look around and ran till I was exhausted and in bright sunlight again.

Later, as I neared the open gate in the Norlek fence, I met the man again. He has been busy, he ventured; trouble on the summit line. Queer it was, they often had flashovers on this line - just like a lightning stroke - when there was no storm within miles - and always when somebody was wandering about. It was maybe warm air currents rising. Queer, it was.

Queer indeed, thought I, but not warm air currents rising. Cold currents coming down. Cold currents coming down.

REFERENCES.

Dee Falls	Linn o' Dee
Black Mountain	Ben Macdhui
Ben Dubh	Ben Macdhui
Border Mountain	Beinn a Bhuird
Low Pass	Lairig an Laoigh
Corner Hotel	At Corrou
Grey Pass	Lairig Ghru
Cleft of Yearning	Clash Fhearnaig
Committee Hill	Carn a Mhaim
Norlek	Northern Electricity Authority