

Twenty Years of Thursday Walking

Ian Bryce and Gill Shirreffs

Ian begins:

It was December when I first went on a Thursday walk. About twenty of us met at 9.30 in the car park at Banchory, where John Gibson was dispensing mulled cider from thermos flasks. "I'm on to a good thing here," I thought, "better than a day in the office." And I was, a crisp walk through interesting country on a bright frosty day, plenty of claik in congenial company, and local history as a bonus. So I learnt for instance about the search tower in the cemetery at Banchory which dates to the times of body snatching and Burke and Hare.

Although I have been on only a handful of these walks, that one seems typical, and it is easy to see why they are increasingly popular, and such an important part of the Cairngorm Club's activities. Have you been to Carnferg to see the memorial to Heavens Above? Or Byron's mother's castle on the Braes of Gight? And then there are the seals and puffins and primroses of coastal walks, forests and fields, moor and sky. And no rising in the dark to catch the bus from Golden Square.

Although the Thursday walks go back around twenty years, like all successful organisms, they have continually undergone a process of evolution, and so over to Gill for some memories of the early days.

Gill: Thursday walks - the start

As so many things do, the idea of Thursday walks started not in a formal committee meeting, but either at the school gates or after a PTA meeting in about 1984. Jeanette (Illingworth) and I were keen to keep fit and have a day a week when we went walking in a more exciting venue than Hazelhead golf course. Our constraints were simple: to be back for the girls getting out of school at 3.15. I was on the Club committee at that time, I think as Vice-President, and Graham was already expressing concerns about falling numbers on the bus meets. As Jeanette and I walked and chatted, an idea grew. Many Club members worked shifts, or off-shore, and there was quite a group of us with children of about the same age. Perhaps we could offer an open invitation to members to join us.

Judy Middleton came along, as did Hazel MacKenzie and Eva Deregowski, and latterly Bill Alexander joined us too, though generally in those early days it was often just the two of us. We went out every Thursday, exploring the lower hills and glens of Deeside, Donside and occasionally further afield, especially as the girls became older. The walks kept us fit, and we loved exploring hills we had often driven past in our haste to get to 'bigger things'. We unwound and let off steam, and most of all we enjoyed ourselves.

We had a whole mix of experiences - you can have adventures just as well on little hills as on big ones! Perhaps the most embarrassing was the traverse of the Hill of Fare, with Bill and Judy and a few others. The day was misty but this wouldn't be problem, we always carried our maps and compasses. Or thought we did! To my horror I realised as we hit the mist that I had my map but my compass was in my other jacket. Did Bill have his? No. Judy hers? No. So here were the President, Vice-President and a senior member of the Club all minus the essential piece of equipment. This would make interesting reading in the P&J! But we kept the sloping ground always to left and right, and imagine our relief as we emerged from the mist at the other end, exactly where we were meant to be. The one mystery that has stayed with me from that walk was the castellated tower that seemed to appear at intervals. Any answers?

On another occasion, Jeanette and I decided we would head to Cock Bridge, aiming to do Brown Cow Hill. Although it had been a night of gales, they seemed to have subsided to something manageable, or so we thought, but by Candacraig there were chunks of tree on the road. We managed to get round these, but the grand plan was shelved and we decided on Corndavon and beyond. However, the 'walk' was more a battle into the teeth of a gale. We sheltered by the building, had a rapid bite to eat, fought a little further, then accepted a mighty push down the glen back to the car. My birthday was celebrated one year in similar conditions, on the Broad Hill, supping wine suitably chilled as we sheltered in the stone cairn from the hail pinging down.

Not all our trips were wild and wintry. One summer we had a glorious walk taking a very different route to the Coyles of Muick from the south Deeside road. In the same area we did those hills you drive past but never seem to get round to climb, such as Craig nam Ban and Craig Ghuibais. We did get to the top, but the heather was something else, with Jeanette reminding me yet again she only had 'little legs' compared to my long ones. At the end of the day Judy did her usual trick of running down a hillside. Begging for broken ankles, we thought, as we took it much more sedately. On another summer walk I remember having a bit of a shock as I made my way up the heather-covered slope of Pannanich Hill to find, making its way down at a rate of knots, an adder! I don't know who was more surprised. Jeanette heard my squawk and was not a bit amused when I told her what had just passed me. Quite took the edge off her day, I suspect. But it was a beautiful day nevertheless.

These walks continued over a period of ten years or so with the numbers of members joining us growing slowly, but for Jeanette and me returning to work put paid to our Thursdays. However, Bill Alexander had started coming out with us regularly and was willing to take over the organisation of the walks, with help from his sister Jean. They planned the walks carefully and seemed to find some really interesting places to go. We had been positively *ad hoc* in comparison. And now the walks have gone from strength to strength. As with

so many things, they have met a need, though not quite as we had originally intended.

Ian continues:

As Gill has explained, for seven years or so Bill Alexander organised all the Thursday walks himself, researching the literature on the area meticulously, and walking the route in advance so that he could make it as interesting as possible. In 1999, after sterling service leading around seventy walks, Bill decided that it was time to pass on the baton, and a new format evolved.

The current arrangements are that Jack Connell calls a meeting once a year when 12 walks are agreed for the next year. Different people define and lead the walks, which take place on the last Thursday of every month. There is a great variety: some walks take in historical sites, others are just mountainous, some take in flora and fauna; some are circular, while for others a car-shuttle is arranged so that they can be A to B. The present guidelines for organising these trips are:

1. Transport is by car and sharing transport is encouraged;
2. The start and finish of the walks should be within 1¼ hour's drive of Aberdeen;
3. The walking time should be limited to about five hours;
4. Easier, low-level walks should be chosen for late autumn, winter and early spring.

Over the years, the participants on the walks have changed. Working mums no longer have time for days in the hills, and their places have been taken by the growing numbers of members who are enjoying active retirement. Of course, everyone is still welcome, and participants include people with time off from work and even children on holiday. Often there are as many as 25 members and guests taking part.

Jack has produced the impressive list of 111 Thursday walks that have taken place since 1994, appended to this article. Although I do not believe that Jack wants them to be known as Connells or Alexanders, why not think of ticking off some of these - it's not just Munros, Corbetts, Grahams or Marilyn's that can keep some members busy! Join one of the monthly Thursday groups if you can; details of meeting places and contacts are always given in the current Newsletters. Or you could do some of them on your own when you have a short day available.

We should remember that in his classic book *A Progress in Mountaineering* J. H. B. Bell extols the virtues of starting on small hills, cutting one's teeth in hillcraft, navigation, scrambling and route finding, before working up to the big hills and the Alps. (And, tell it not in Gath, the then-President, a Vice-President and others once got quite lost in the Kirkhill Forest on one

January Thursday walk!) So whether your mountaineering career is on the way up, winding down gracefully, or somewhere in between, a local hill or a local walk can be very enjoyable, not to say educational, and the Aberdeenshire countryside has much to offer. The Cairngorm Club is not just about the Cairngorms, and its strength lies in its members and their love of the hills whether big or small. Over the years, the Thursday walks have become an integral and important part of the Club's activities, thanks to the efforts of all involved. Long may they continue!

The Cairngorm Club

Thursday Walks: January 1994 to March 2004

AB = A to B; C = Circular. The number in parentheses is the relevant OS Landranger map. The walks are arranged chronologically. Four early walks are omitted because of current inadequate car parking.

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|-----|---------------|---------|----|---|
| 1. | Hill of Fare | (37/38) | C | Round estate roads |
| 2. | Clachnaben | (45) | AB | 649868 - Miller's Bog - Clachnaben - N to estate track - 650892 |
| 3. | Tyrebagger | (38) | C | Kirkhill Forest - Tappie - stone circle - Chapel of Stoneywood |
| 4. | Correen Hills | (37) | C | 547231 - Mire of Midgates - Edenbanchory Hill - Lord Arthur's Hill |
| 5. | Aboyne | (37) | AB | Aboyne - Mortlich - Corse Hill - 561067 |
| 6. | Bennachie | (37/38) | C | Pond Croft - W tops - Pond Croft |
| 7. | Morven | (37) | AB | 413040 - SW ridge - E ridge - 412043 |
| 8. | Kerloch | (45) | C | 699917 - Kerloch - Hare Hill- Pitreadie |
| 9. | Scolty | (45) | C | 633944 - Scolty - River Dee |
| 10. | Dinnet | (37) | C | Dinnet - Cambus - upper Burn o' Vat - Lochs Davan & Kinord |
| 11. | Birse | (44) | C | 533906 - Firmouth - Gannock - down estate track |
| 12. | Gairnshiel | (37) | C | Gairnshiel Lodge - Tom a Catha - Cannock Hill - Cam a Bhacain - Shenval |
| 13. | Slains | (38) | AB | 005270 - Old Slains Castle - 043286 |
| 14. | Glen Tanar | (37) | C | Braeloine - round Baudy Meg - Braeloine |
| 15. | Ballater | (44) | AB | Ballater - Etnach - Tombae |
| 16. | The Buck | (37) | C | 422252 - The Buck - Clova Hill - 422252 |
| 17. | Tyrebagger | (38) | C | Tyrebagger Sculpture Trail - Brimmond Hill |
| 18. | Catherthuns | (44) | C | Catherthuns - move cars to Edzell - Rocks of Solitude |
| 19. | Carnferg | (44) | C | 533906 - Fungle track - Carnferg - Glencat |
| 20. | Ballater | (37) | AB | Cambus Suspension Bridge - Ballater - Craigendarroch - 7 brigs |
| 21. | Cairn o'Mount | (45) | AB | Clatterin' Brig - Deer Dyke - Hound Hillock - Charr - Spital Cottage |

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|-----|---------------|---------|----|---|
| 22. | Glenbuchat | (37) | AB | 400150 - Little Firbriggs Hill- Creag an Eunan - Creag na Gamhna - Newseat |
| 23. | Wirran | (44) | C | Cornescorn - Hill of Wirran - East Wirran |
| 24. | Mona Gowan | (37) | C | 312026 - Scraulac - Cairnagour - Mona Gowan - Morven Lodge |
| 25. | Collieston | (30/38) | AB | Collieston - coastal path - Whinnyfold |
| 26. | Corse Hill | (37) | AB | 561067 - Corse Hill - Mortlich - Aboyne |
| 27. | Brown Cow | (36/37) | C | Cockbridge - Inchmore - Brown Cow - NE to Cockbridge |
| 28. | Cairn o'Mount | (45) | C | Bridge of Dye - Heathery Hill - Hill of Gothie |
| 29. | Crathes | (48) | C | Banchory - Crathes - Banchory (railway track) |
| 30. | The Gramps | (38) | C | Bridge of Dee - Loirston Country Park - Baron's Cairn - Greg Ness - Torry Battery |

January 1997

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|-----|---------------|---------|----|---|
| 31. | Kemnay | (38) | C | Cottown Wood - Fetternear - Leschangie Quarries |
| 32. | Cairn William | (37/38) | AB | Tillyfourie - Green Hill - Cairn William - Pitfichie Hill - Pitfichie |
| 33. | Drumcholzie | (44) | C | 326885 - Drumcholzie - Hunt Hill - Cairns of Cul nan Gad |
| 34. | Cruden Bay | (30) | AB | Cruden Bay - S of Boddam - 124407 |
| 35. | The Socach | (37) | C | Edinglassie - Relanquhein - The Socach - Ernan Water - Edinglassie |
| 36. | Am Mullach | (44) | C | Ballater - Lach na Gualainn - Am Mullach - Cairn Leuchan |
| 37. | Bennachie | (38) | C | Hermit Seat - Watch Craig - Oxen Craig |
| 38. | Rocking Stone | (44) | C | 439969 - Slai na Gour - Craigrae Beg - Rocking Stone - Tombae |
| 39. | Strathfinella | (45) | C | Glen of Drumtochty - circuit of Strathfinella Hill |
| 40. | Baudy Meg | (37) | AB | Aboyne - Baudy Meg - Old Glentanar School |
| 41. | Inverurie | (38) | C | 749207 - Aquhorthies stone circle - River Don - Urie circuit |

January 1998

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|-----|-----------|------|---|---|
| 42. | River Don | (38) | C | Persley CP - E down River Don - Beach Ballroom and return |
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|---------------------|-----------------|---------|----|--|
| 43. | Ythsie | (30/38) | AB | Prop of Ythsie and stone circle - Tarves - Udney Green |
| 44. | Slug Road | (45) | C | Carn-mon-Earn - Mongour Hill |
| 45. | Coyles of Muick | (44) | C | 341951 - Creag Liath - Meall Dubh - Coyles - Glen Girnock |
| 46. | Findlater | (29) | AB | Portsoy - Findlater Castle - Cullen |
| 47. | Auchtavan | (43/44) | C | Keiloch - Bealach Dearg path - E at 178963 - SE at 191972 - Auchtavan - Felagie |
| 48. | Burnt Hill | (44) | C | Invermark - Loch Lee - Burnt Hill - Gleneffoch |
| 49. | Bennachie | (38) | C | Essons - Gordon Way - Oxen Craig - Craigshannoch |
| 50. | Drinnie's | (30) | C | 974506 - White Cow Hill - Loudon Wood - Drinnie's Observatory |
| 51. | Goyle Hill | (45) | C | 696799 - Goyle Hill and return |
| 52. | Bin Forest | (29) | C | 531408 - River path W - Cleanbrae - round Bin Forest - Castle Hotel |
| 53. | Lumphanan | (37) | C | Lumphanan - Newton - Kincardine O'Neil - return |
| January 1999 | | | | |
| 54. | Benholm | (45) | C | 807690 - old railway - Johnshaven - coast path - Gourdon - Inverbervie - Benholm |
| 55. | Liddell's | (38) | AB | 887139 - River Don - Liddell's Monument - A947 - old railway - Newmachar |
| 56. | Shillofad | (45) | AB | 724912 - round Mulloch Hill - Nine Stanes - Garrol Hill - W side of Shillofad - NE to 761915 |
| 57. | Fourman Hill | (29) | C | 547485 - 585465 - Fourman Hill - Redhill - Milltown of Rothiemay |
| 58. | Pennan | (30) | C | 886646 - coast path - Pennan Head - 855653 - East Mains and return |
| 59. | Mount Battock | (44) | C | Millden - Burn of Turret - Hill of Saughs - Mount Battock - 541836 - Millden |
| 60. | Glen Tanar | (44) | C | Tombae - Glen Tanar - Bridge of Muick |
| 61. | Geallaig | (37) | C | 280000 - Geallaig - 267987 - Blairglass - 262009 and return |
| 62. | Millstone Hill | (38) | AB | 672190 - round Scare Hill - Millstone Hill - 665200 - Birk's Track - Essons |

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|-----|---------------|------|---|--|
| 63. | Banff | (29) | C | Banff to Bridge of Alva and circuit of old town |
| 64. | N of Ballater | (44) | C | Ballater - cinder path - 379985 - 364993 - Pass of Ballater - old railway line |
| 65. | Tyrebagger | (38) | C | Kirkhill Forest - Tappie - stone circle - Chapel of Stoneywood |

January 2000

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|-----|--------------|------|----|---|
| 66. | Dunnottar | (45) | C | Stonehaven - Dunnottar Woods - Dunnottar Castle - coast path - Cowie Church - Stonehaven |
| 67. | Huntly | (29) | C | 537394 - Battle Hill - Kinnoir Wood - railway - car park - A96 - 548387 - Caimhill - 542375 |
| 68. | Craiglich | (37) | AB | 526063 - Craiglich - Wartle - Tulloch - Lumphanan |
| 69. | Clachnaben | (45) | AB | Three Stane Hill - Mount Shade - Clachnaben |
| 70. | Cross path | (44) | C | Spital of Glenmuick - Glas Allt - 267835 - cross path - 274862 |
| 71. | Lazy Well | (37) | C | 425110 - E of Gallows Hill - Lazy Well - Broomhill - Badronach |
| 72. | Gartley Moor | (29) | C | Gartley Moor - Hill of Corsbie - move cars - Dunnideer |
| 73. | Morven | (37) | C | Lary - 341023 - W ridge and return |
| 74. | Fetteresso | (45) | C | 853862 - Cheyne Hill - Burn of Day |
| 75. | Arbroath | (54) | AB | Arbroath - Auchmithie |
| 76. | Scolty | (45) | C | 633944 - Scolty - River Dee |

January 2001

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|-----|------------|------|---|---|
| 77. | Forvie | (38) | C | 005270 - 023279 - Collieston - coastal path |
| 78. | The Gramps | (38) | C | Bridge of Dee - Loirston Country Park - Baron's Cairn - Greg Ness - Torry Battery |
| 79. | St Cyrus | (45) | C | Coast walk N of St Cyrus |
| 80. | Dinnet | (37) | C | Dinnet - Cambus - upper Burn o' Vat - Lochs Davan & Kinord |

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|---------------------|-----------------|------|---|--|
| 81. | Correen Hills | (37) | C | 547231 - Mire of Midgates - Edenbanchory Hill - Lord Arthur's Hill |
| 82. | Shielin of Mark | (44) | C | Spittal of Glenmuick - Allt Darrarie - Shielin of Mark - Black Hill - Capel Mounth |
| 83. | Bennachie | (38) | C | Back of Bennachie - Oxen Craig - Mither Tap - Nursery Cottage |
| 84. | Mormond Hill | (30) | C | Mormond Hill - White Horse - Strichen stone circle |
| 85. | Durris | (38) | C | 774916 - Cairn mon Earn - 780910 |
| January 2002 | | | | |
| 86. | Tyrebagger | (38) | C | Sculpture Walk - Brimmond - Elrick |
| 87. | Potarch | (37) | C | Potarch car park - W along forest track - 584972 - Balnacraig - river - Boat Cottage |
| 88. | Builg Mounth | (45) | C | 647854 - Garlot Hill - the Builg Mounth - Heatherhaugh |
| 89. | Corrichie | (38) | C | 773037 - 732036 - 735041 Meikle Tap - 715027 - Corrichie - ruined cottage - 700033 |
| 90. | Cults/Culter | (38) | C | Den of Cults - river bank - St Peter's churchyard - return by old railway |
| 91. | Allan's Hut | (44) | C | Spittal of Glenmuick - Black Burn - zig-zag - Allan's Hut - Corrie Chash - return |
| 92. | Pressendye | (37) | C | 475076 - Glasschill Burn - Pressendye - Broom Hill - Lazy Well - E Davoch |
| 93. | Kerloch | (45) | C | Pitreadie - Little Kerloch - Kerloch |
| 94. | Mount Een | (44) | C | Millden - Blackcraigs - Mount Een - Bennycraig - 541836 |
| 95. | Clachnaben | (45) | C | Millers Bog - Clachnaben - Mount Shade |
| 96. | Glen Gelder | (44) | C | Easter Balmoral - Glen Gelder - Little Conachcraig - Gelder Shiel |
| 97. | Crathes | (38) | C | Crathes Castle trails |

January 2003

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|------|---------------|---------|----|--|
| 98. | Tyrebagger | (38) | C | Sculpture Walk - Brimmond -Elrick |
| 99. | Cryne's Corse | (45) | C | 868038 - 765902 - S along pylons - Cowie Water - Bread and Cheese House - return same way |
| 100. | Pitfichie | (37/38) | AB | Pitfichie - Green Hill - Cairn William - Monymusk |
| 101. | St Cyrus | (45) | AB | St Cyrus - Coast path - Inverbervie |
| 102. | Caterthuns | (44) | C | Caterthuns - move cars to Edzell - Rocks of Solitude |
| 103. | Conachcraig | (44) | C | Spital of Glenmuick - Allt na Guichsaich - 274861 - Conachcraig - descend E |
| 104. | Wirren | (44) | C | Lethnot School (537684) - W Wirren - Hill of Wirren - E Wirren - Auchowrie - start |
| 105. | Tap o' Noth | (37) | C | Brae of Scurdargue - Tap o'Noth - descent - Kirkney Water - E of Finglenny - Mytice - car park |
| 106. | Gairnshiel | (37) | AB | 311025 - Mammie - Ardoch - Balno - Inverenzie - Lary - rail-bed to Ballater |
| 107. | Carnferg | (44) | C | 533906 - Fungle track - Carnferg - Glencat |
| 108. | Dunnottar | (45) | C | Stonehaven - Dunnottar Woods - Dunnottar Castle - coast path - Cowie Church |
| 109 | River Don | (38) | C | Persley CP - E down R Don - Beach Ballroom and return |

January 2004

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|------|---------------|------|---|--|
| 110. | Blacktop | (38) | C | Countesswells CP - circuit - King's Hill Wood |
| 111. | Braes o'Gight | (30) | C | Methlick - W to Braes o' Gight - Craig Horror - Hagberry or Otter Bridge - Gight Castle - 840392 |