

BOOK REVIEWS

The Cairngorms: 100 Years of Mountaineering. Greg Strange, 2101. Scottish Mountaineering Trust, 400pp. ISBN 978-1-907233-1-1

This magisterial volume by the author of a well-used SMC climbing guide to the Cairngorms, covers the century from 1893 (the ascent of the Douglas-Gibson Gully) onwards. To this Club, founded six years earlier, that choice of starting date may seem odd, even contentious, but it signals that the focus of this book is firmly about climbing on rock and ice, even if there are occasional mentions of skiing, bothies, some environmental issues (hill tracks, the Lurcher's Gully Inquiry, but not climate change) and even walks.

Given that focus, it is hard to fault the book, at least from a non/ex-climber's viewpoint: it takes the reader through each main first ascent with a happy mixture of background information on the participants, the day (and/or night) as a whole, and sufficient detail on the main pitches, including verbatim (or at least reported) conversations. Delightfully, most pages carry a photograph of the relevant route, landscape or character(s), the accumulation of which must represent a tremendous effort in contacting club and personal archives. Throughout the century the energy and endurance of the pioneers are evident, perhaps most to those who have themselves tramped the approach miles, and sampled Cairngorm weather and terrain, even if they have never attempted the technical feats here described.

The 12 main chapters cover the period in a balanced way, but the pride of place must go to the central chapters on 'The Golden Years' (1950-1960) in 56 pages, 'The Ice Revolution' (1970-1972) in 38 pages and 'The Quickening Pace' (1980-1985) in 58 pages. All the well-known names – Brooker, Cunningham, Dinwoodie, Fyffe, McArtney, Patey, Smith and, yes, Strange – are there, with multiple index entries, but also their companions, however obscure. A Postscript briefly reflects on developments since 1993, with a very lukewarm acknowledgement of the Cairngorms National Park, with its Authority's dubious concern with conservation and 'wild land' in the face of visitor and estate pressures.

Well-produced in SMC guidebook style, and with a bibliography of 60-odd book and journal references, two comprehensive indices (one general including route names, and one people) and only a few typos, this volume is a definitive work.

Ken Thomson

A Bobby on Ben Macdhui: Life and death on the Braes of Mar. John Duff. 2008, Leopard Magazine Publishing. 160pp. ISBN 978-0-9534534-3-6. Available second hand at Deeside Books, Ballater.

“A Bobby on Ben Macdhui” is a book based on a series of articles which were published for the Aberdeen Leopard magazine. The book covers the experiences of police officer John Duff who was involved in Mountain Rescue in the years before, and in the initial setup of, the Braemar Mountain Rescue Association in 1965. After 33 years connected with Mountain Rescue he severed his connections in December 1992. His book is an account of those years and gives an insight to his experiences. It also includes the author’s time as a Churchill Fellow in North America. The book is well illustrated with pictures of rescue scenes and some well known Deeside characters. The Cairngorm Disaster of 1971 and its aftermath is particularly well covered. This book is well worth reading but perhaps it suffers a little in its flow by being made up from several magazine articles. John Duff’s narrative is what one would expect from our local Aberdeenshire bobby - matter of fact and to the point, but not without humanity. The Cairngorm Club does get a mention as it seems to have had members available for call outs in those early days. It is a worthy addition to the Club library.

Sandy McIntosh

Cairngorm John. A life in mountain rescue, John Allen with Robert Davidson, 2009, Sandstonepress. 302pp, ISBN-10 905207-24-7.

This book is both a biography of John Allen and a history of the Cairngorm Mountain Rescue Team which he led from 1989 to 2007. It comprises 32 short chapters describing his youth and his involvement with the Team when he and his family moved to live in Kingussie. There are numerous accounts of mountain rescues interspersed with descriptions of how the Team developed its modus operandi and its funding. The book is well illustrated, well organised and its businesslike, no-nonsense tone carries the reader from the routine to a crisis and back again in a reassuring manner. The contributions of many of the Team members are described and the award of the MBE, in 2000, to John Allen their leader, seems to be well deserved. Sir Chris Bonington's Introduction concludes by describing the book thus: "...by turns exciting, funny, informative and wise, an indispensable addition to the literature of the mountains". With this I fully agree and would add that it is a book which should be regarded as essential reading for all those who walk and climb in Scotland.

Alister Macdonald

Moray Coastal Trail, Sandra Bardwell, 2010, Rucksack Readers, 64pp. ISBN 978-1-898481-40-9

This guidebook describes two very contrasting long distance walks, the Moray Coastal Trail (MTC) which follows coastal paths, beaches, quiet country roads and a railway track bed and has the coast rarely out of sight, and the Dava Way which crosses moorland and a relatively high plateau with vistas of mountain, moorland and farmland. The two walks can be naturally linked at Forres to form a longer walk of 67 miles between Grantown on Spey and Cullen.

The author packs a great deal of information into the book, beginning with an excellent Planning and Preparation section, helpful

to those who are new to long distance walking and experienced alike. This ten page section includes travel details of airlines, trains, buses, and taxis, with times and distances, and also the availability of accommodation. A list of useful websites gives access to up-to-date information ranging from weather and tides to midge forecasts!

Interesting information on geology, landscape, habitats and wildlife is supported by beautiful photographic images. The history of fishing and railways, aspects which have influenced the development and settlement of the area, is well researched as are the details of towns and villages and other items of interest encountered on the walks. The coloured maps are large scale, plentiful and clear, but shorter on detail than an Ordnance Survey map which the walker would be advised to carry as well, particularly on the Dava Way. Surprisingly, a map and compass are listed only as desirable rather than essential.

The author chooses to describe the Dava Way first, starting at Grantown on Spey. The route which mainly follows an old railway track bed is remote with no villages or refreshment stops during its 23 mile length. Although there are escape routes mentioned in order to break up the walk into shorter sections, there are no clear instructions on how to access possible off-road parking nearby as the Walking World website clearly does. The MCT is more flexible along its 44 mile route, with plenty of road access, some budget accommodation and local bus services linking the coastal towns and villages. Overnight stops are suggested for 3,4, and 5 day itineraries. Both walks are divided into sections, each section headed by a panel clearly setting out distance, gradient, availability of refreshments, side trips, and a summary and is followed by a series of bullet-pointed instructions, a format which would be easy to read while walking.

The book is in spiral bound notebook format which makes it easy to open and keep in place. The waterproof paper, whilst of benefit, adds to the weight. It is a very practical handbook which makes every effort to provide the reader with an incentive to visit and explore the area.

Evelyn Massie

The power of the sea. Tsunamis, Storm surges, Rogue waves and our quest to predict them. Bruce Parker. 2012, Palgrave Macmillan, pp306. ISBN 978-0-230-61637-0.

Walkers and climbers usually have a strong interest in mountain weather and disasters caused by avalanches, rock slides, earthquakes and floods. These are important, overwhelmingly so for the victims, but they are a very small part of the global system, meteorological, oceanographic and geological, with which Parker's book deals. It is not a book for the faint hearted. The human catastrophes which Parker describes are the biggest and most prolonged in human history. He writes with the authority of an oceanographer, a former Director of the World Data Centre for Oceanography

The sea is a major component in global weather and geography, hence the title of the book. The first two chapters explain the tides and their prediction. There are some exciting accounts of tide and wave height predictions made for amphibious operations in World War II. Subsequent chapters explain storm surges such as that of 1864, which flooded West Bengal (ie Eastern India) and present day Bangladesh, killing at least 80,000 people. A chapter on rogue waves explains their origin and the difficulty in predicting them. They have sunk numerous otherwise seaworthy ships. Submarine earthquakes and land slides cannot be predicted but the tsunamis they cause can be tracked to give practical warning to coastal regions at risk. They cross oceans at the speed of a jet aeroplane.

The tsunami of December 26, 2004 centred on Aceh, on the Indian Ocean coast of Sumatra, led to some 300,000 deaths. At the time the Indian Ocean had no monitoring system like that of the Pacific; now it has. If these death tolls are hard to imagine then consider the consequences of the El Nino. Essentially this arises when warm water displaces the normally cold sea off the coast of Peru. The local effect is severe flooding with much loss of life, but on the other side of the world the El Nino drastically reduces the monsoon rains which sustain the food growing regions of India, eastern Africa and large parts of China. The result is drought and famine. It is estimated that as a consequence of the 1877-79 El Nino 20 to 30 million people died from famine. The devastation caused by

more recent droughts arising from the El Nino – Southern Oscillation, to use the formal name, have been shown to TV audiences around the world. The El Nino is difficult to predict, but it occurs quite often and has done so for the past 130,000 years. Once identified however, its effects can, in theory, be mitigated by good agricultural management. These catastrophic phenomena are liable to be affected by the current change in the Earth's climate (Global Warming), leaving the reader with the cheery thought that perhaps we are making a difficult situation worse.

Alister Macdonald

Adam Watson Publications

Dr Adam Watson FIBiol, FArcticNorthAmerica, FRSE, FCEH, FRMetSoc, is an Honorary Member of the Cairngorm Club and the pre-eminent scientist associated with our mountains. Now aged over 80, he has recently donated to the Club an almost complete set of his published papers, which range from several on Baffin Island zoology and local hill trips in the 1950s to several in recent years on contemporary issues in the Cairngorms. There is also his long series (annual since the mid-1990s) on snow patch survival in the Cairngorms and elsewhere. These papers have been deposited in the Club Library, and a list will appear on the Club website.

In addition, Dr Watson has donated a set of his recent books, which are briefly reviewed below. Unless otherwise specified, they are published in large (approx. A4) format, with soft glossy covers, by Paragon Publishing, and with local support from Bert McIntosh.

Cool Britannia: snowier times in 1580-1930 than since, by Adam Watson and Iain Cameron (2010), 64pp. This consists of 18 short chapters, most covering groups of British hills, from Ben Nevis to "Hills and lowlands in Southern England", and each summarising observations from the earliest days (e.g. the 16th and 17th centuries) to recent data. A bibliography of nearly 200 items provides an invaluable reference resource.

It's a Fine Day for the Hill: hills, folk and wildlife, 1935-62, by Adam Watson (2011), 189pp. Each of the 20-odd chapters deals with

an episode in Adam's life, from "a few early schooldays" through "North Iceland on £10" to "Four winters on the Glen Esk hills". Many photographs, often with well-known people (Tom Weir, Tom Patey, Bob Scott) add much to the volume.

Human Impacts on the Northern Cairngorms, by Adam Watson (2012), 169pp. The first part of this volume is based on Adam's scientific evidence to the 1981 Lurcher's Gully Public Inquiry on proposed ski developments at Cairngorm. The second consists of about 20 unpublished papers associated with human impact (erosion, wildlife disturbance, etc.) in the northern Cairngorms and nearby, including some up to 2011.

A Snow Book, Northern Scotland, by Adam Watson (2011), 137pp. "Based mostly on the author's field observations in 1938-2011", this book covers long-term studies of snow on high land in the Cairngorms, and the influence of snow on lichens, birds and mammals to be found there. Photographs, tables and other data (e.g. a list of "vantage points for snow patches, from roads in north-east Scotland") add interest and usefulness.

Some Days from a Hill Diary: Scotland, Iceland, Norway, 1943-50, by Adam Watson (2012), 132pp. With its self-explanatory title, this book brings to life the day-to-day experiences and feelings of the young Watson.

Vehicle Hill Tracks in Northern Scotland: an independent, factual report on numbers, distribution, impacts, ground reinstatement, by Adam Watson (2011), 149pp. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this volume was not sponsored by Bert McIntosh of plant hire fame but by the North-East Mountain Trust. Half the book deals with tracks over a variety of space and time; the rest is occupied by 10 appendices dealing with particular cases, ranging from the Mar Lodge Estate removal to roads for access to the Beauy-Denny power-line. Given recent political (non-)developments, the story continues ...

A Zoologist on Baffin Island, 1953: four months of Arctic adventure, by Adam Watson (2011), 240pp. The main part of this volume describes the sequence of the trip, while two others briefly cover some biology (including some flowers and insects in addition to Adam's focus on snowy owls and lemmings rather than the intended ptarmigan), and members of the expedition.

Ken Thomson