

THE CAIRNGORM CLUB 1887 - 2012

The Club was founded on June 23rd, 1887, on the shore of Loch Avon. Accordingly, in the year 2012 the Club reached its 125th anniversary and the special events which marked this are reported and recorded here.

The Anniversary activities organised by the Committee comprised

(a) Practical Projects;

Renovating the Footbridge in Rothiemurchus Forest

Extending Piper's Wood

Improving the path to the climbing routes in the Pass of Ballater

(b) Social and Walking Events. These were based on the Club Cottage at Muir, and went off successfully over the period June 21 to 25, 2012.

Practical Projects

The Cairngorm Club Footbridge

Ken Thomson

Historical background.

One hundred years ago the Cairngorm Club and friends funded the construction of a bridge over the Allt na Beinne (An Beanaidh on current OS maps) in the Rothiemurchus Forest (NO 927078) to facilitate access to the Lairig Ghru. At the time the Club had been established for 25 years. Its history is documented in Sheila Murray's "The Cairngorm Club 1887 -1987", which relates how six men, on June 23, 1887, on the shores of Loch Avon, "spontaneously and unanimously" agreed to form the Club. Subsequently they drew up a constitution, formed a committee and the first official meets started in 1889. Later innovations included day and afternoon excursions, and New Year and Easter Meets, the former usually at the Invercauld

Hotel in Braemar, along with social events and a Club Library. The Journal first appeared in 1893.

Two issues of the Journal, in January and July, 1912, comprised 120 pages (each priced at one shilling or about £5 in today's money) and contained leading articles by Alexander Copland, the first Club Chairman (and President in 1912). He recounted his first trip on foot from Banchory to the Cairngorms around 1850, ie before the Deeside railway line and the purchase of Balmoral by Queen Victoria. Other articles deal with hills and cross-country walks in Affric, Lanarkshire, Glen Shee (reached from Inverey via White Bridge!), and "Some Kincardineshire Coast Climbs". Overseas accounts include a descent of the Grand Canyon by Robert Anderson (a former President and later Editor), and a "Black Forest Journey" in 1908 by the then 18-year-old A. Landsborough Thomson, later to become perhaps the Club's most distinguished member. As Sir Landsborough Thomson CB, OBE, FRSE, FRGS, MA, DSc, LL.D, he gave a talk to the Club in 1976, a year before his death.

The "Excursions and Notes" sections of the 1912 Journal include paragraphs on the deaths of Whymper and the Duke of Fife, bonfires in Aberdeenshire celebrating the coronation of George V in 1911, "the passing of the Deer forest" in Scotland (if t'were only so ?), a threat to the public road from the Linn of Dee to Allanaquoich, the "vanishing osprey", and mosses growing under the Braeriach snowfield in October 1909.

125th Club Anniversary

Having noted that the bridge was looking its age, the 2011-12 Club Committee decided to repaint it as one of the Club's 125th anniversary projects. After consultation with the Rothiemurchus Estate, and an unsuccessful search for a local contractor to do the job (Speyside being too full of new development!), it was decided to go ahead and see if the Club itself could do the work. In April 2012, Ken Thomson and Sandy McIntosh removed – with some difficulty – the original cast-iron plaques, each about 10 kg in weight. One commemorates the erection of the bridge, and the other gives details of distances and timings of routes from the bridge between Aviemore and Braemar. Through the good offices of Kees Witte and John

Mitchell of Aberdeen Fabricators, these plates were blasted and recoated without charge in the summer of 2012.

On a glorious 4th August 2012, exactly 100 years after the bridge was opened, a work party of Anne and Derek Pinches, Richard Shirreffs, Brian Davey, Peter Aikman, Shona Lindsay, Sandy McIntosh and Kees Witte cleaned and repainted the bridge, and reinstalled the refurbished plaques (with the painting completed by Ken and Kees a few weeks later, as the paint had run out in the first attempt!). It was a delight to see that the bridge is very popular, not only with walkers but also a large number of mountain bikers who crossed the bridge that day.



The workers, from the left; Brian Davey, Kees Witte, Peter Aikman, Shona Lindsay, Richard Shirreffs, Anne Pinches, Sandy McIntosh, Derek Pinches.

The Origins of the Bridge

Issue no. 38 (January 1912) of the Cairngorm Club Journal contains a short article by John Clarke, the Club Chairman, describing the need for a new bridge over the Alltna Beinne Moire. An accompanying photograph shows the sad state of the then-existing bridge – a spillikin-like affair, said to be also damaged by fire. Previous wooden bridges at this point had seldom survived many spates and floods, and there was anxiety to maintain the right of way through the Lairig Ghru. Having obtained the cooperation of the proprietor, Sherriff Grant of Rothiemurchus, the design and erection of the new bridge was put into the hands of James Parker, a Club member and a civil engineer with the Great North of Scotland Railway. He estimated the cost at not less than one hundred pounds (about ten thousand pounds in today's money), and the Committee only decided to go ahead when the bulk of that sum had been contributed.

Issue no. 40 of the Journal in the following year describes the opening of the bridge on Saturday 3 August 1912, “by a party of members under the leadership of the Chairman – Mr John Clarke – who very kindly provided luncheon in his country quarters at Boat of Garten”. The opening was performed by the Chairman's daughter, who, with a knife provided by Mr Parker, “gracefully cut the ribbon which served as a barrier and declared the bridge open”. The photograph of the new bridge shows it much as it is today, though the footplates have surely been renewed at some point over the last hundred years.

Two iron plaques recently renovated by the Club as part of its 125th anniversary activities were placed on the railings on either side of the bridge at mid-section. One gives times and distances to various points on the Lairig Ghru, e.g. 10 hours and 24½ miles to Braemar. The other records that “This Bridge over the Allt na Beinne Moire Lairig Ghru Route was Erected by the Cairngorm Club Aberdeen through its Committee with the Assistance of Many Mountain-Loving Friends: T. R. Gillies, Treasurer and John Clarke, Chairman”. The article recalls that there had been an “interesting discussion” in Committee as to the language of this inscription, i.e. whether it

should be in English, Latin or Gaelic; although the first was chosen, a Latin version is provided in the text.

One “enthusiastic member of the Club” at the opening, A. Landsborough Thomson (see above), had walked from Braemar to take part in the proceedings, and after the opening, five members – including Mr Parker “who regaled the party with hot drinks en route” - walked overnight via the Lairig, the summit of Ben Macdhuil and Loch Etchachan to Braemar – “which was reached in time for lunch”.

The Bridge Fund Account shows a total credit of £101 7s 1d, and costs of £50 1s 0d to Messrs Abernethy, Engineers, £36 16s 3d to Mr Lawrence, Builder, and £7 7s 3d to Mr Parker's outlays. This left a credit balance of £7 2s 7d, which it was proposed be used to put up a small additional railing at the south end of the bridge, present Mr Parker with a small memento, and to carry out any future painting required(!)

Other contemporary, relevant and entertaining extracts from the AGM and Committee Minutes of the Club:

Committee Meeting, 7 November 1906: The Treasurer submitted [a] letter from the secretary of the Scottish Rights of Way and Recreation Society Ltd, requesting a subscription towards the repair of the Allt na Beinne Bridge and was authorised to send a donation of £1.11s 6d.

Committee Meeting, 5 December 1910: The Clerk of the Meeting submitted two plans of a footbridge in connection with the proposal to create a bridge over the Allt na Beinne Mhor, and was instructed to make some further enquiry.

22nd Annual General Meeting, 16 December 1910: After the meeting, an informal discussion took place regarding the proposed footbridge in Rothiemurchus, and those present agreed that the object was one which deserved the support of the Club.

Letter (in manuscript) from J. P. Grant, Culduthel House, Inverness, 14 March 1911: The chief interest that I have is the maintenance of a clear waterway under the bridge for the right of floating timber down the burn [which] though not exercised every year is valuable to me”.

Committee Meeting, 11 April 1911:

- 1) Copy of letter to J. P. Grant DL, JP, Doune of Rothiemurchus: "... The absence of a bridge, or the presence of a dangerous one, tends to produce wandering in the forest and, in consequence, cause damage".
- 2) The total cost will probably run to over £40, and the Club will endeavour to raise the necessary funds.

Letter from John Clarke, Club President, April 1911: Estimate of expenditure runs to about £50, toward which the Committee and a few others interested in the route have (as per annexed list) already agreed to contribute £23 18s 0d.

Committee Meeting, 24 May 1911: On the suggestion of Mr Parker CE, estimates were being taken for the erection of a longer bridge about ten feet lower down the stream.

June 1911: The engineering difficulties referred to have, however, greatly enhanced the cost, and at least £80 will be necessary to erect the bridge with the accesses, apart from any sum for upkeep, which it is also very desirable should now be provided.

Committee Meeting 9 October 1911:

- 1) The Chairman reported that Mr Parker CE had obtained estimates for the Bridge and Piers amounting in all to about £85, with extras he estimated to amount at £95 in all.
- 2) In reply to a letter from Mr Goggs (Scottish Mountaineering Club) opining that the existing bridge had been burned at one end, the Club Committee responded that it had no information on the point, but that it was planning a new bridge of iron, and invited a SMC contribution.

Committee Meeting, 15 December 1911: [The Chairman] announced that there was every prospect that as soon as the weather was suitable in Spring the bridge would be erected in good time for next year's tourist season.

Committee Meeting, 8 February 1912: A sum of £95 was agreed with Mr Parker, and alternative inscriptions in Latin and in English were considered.

Committee Meeting, 27 May 1912: The Secretary reported that the mason work of the Bridge in the Larig would be started in the

beginning of next week, and that Messrs Abernethy were being hurried on with the steel work.

Note, 29 July 1912: The Bridge over the Allt na Beinne Mor has now been completed, and would be inspected on 3 August 1912.

Committee Meeting, 6 December 1912: The Bridge Fund Accounts were submitted and approved, and the Secretary was instructed to insert an Abstract in the next issue of the Journal. Messrs Abernethy and Co's for an additional railing was passed for payment.

24th Annual General Meeting, 20 December 1912: The Chairman, on behalf of the Club, presented Mr Parker with a handsome travelling clock in recognition of his services in connection with the Allt na Beinne Bridge which he explained was to have a representation of the Bridge engraved on it. Mr Parker, in returning thanks, said that the work had been a great pleasure to him, and was unique in that it was the first occasion on which his work and his hobby had not interfered with each other.

28th Annual General Meeting, 15 December 1916:

- 1) a communication from Mr J W Drummond as to painting of the Allt na Beinne Bridge and expressing willingness to contribute £2-2/- to the cost of necessary re-painting. The acting Secretaries were instructed to accept this donation and it was remitted to Mr Parker with powers to get the work done.
- 2) The Bridge Fund stood at £10-12-11 (of which £1.10.0 was contributed for the Eidart Bridge) to be used for painting as necessary.

Piper's Wood Extension

James Friend

For the Cairngorm Club Centenary celebrations in 1987, it was decided to undertake a tree regeneration project. After much discussion, an area of Glen Ey known as Piper's Wood was selected, and a group of members which included Fiona Cameron, Eddie Martin, Robbie and Judy Middleton and Drennan Watson obtained

the support of Mar Estate, and in May 1989 an area of 4.3 acres of the Glen, about 3 miles south of the village of Inverey, to the east of the River Ey, was fenced in with some 500 meters of rabbit and deer fencing. The project was supported by a grant from the then Nature Conservancy Council, and from generous donations by members of the Club, including an anonymous donation of £1000. Articles describing the project can be found in the Cairngorm Club Journal, Volume 20 (No 102) of 1991, including a full botanical survey of the area undertaken by Heather Salzen. Another matter of interest is that the area is near the original site of three small farms, named Daldruiduchlat, Dalnafea, and Alltshlat, and indeed at least one of the buildings is enclosed within the fence. The archaeology of the Glen is described in a fascinating account by Graham Ewen in the Journal Volume 20 no 103 (1994).

In the years since then, what had been a barren area of glen floor containing about 16 ancient and dying birch trees, with no regeneration as a result of regular grazing by deer, hares and some sheep, has been transformed, as the photographs demonstrate (see page 13). A further article by Heather Salzen in the 1991 Journal (volume 21, no 106), described the growth of many multi-stemmed birches, growing from old heavily-grazed root systems, plus some new seedlings. Four young Scots Pines, and many Rowans had also appeared. Many of the ungrazed grasses had grown substantially, with some changes as a result in the flora, and over the years it is clear that the Wood has become a favoured habitat for adders, probably attracted by the deeper grass and the presence of voles and amphibians in the marshy area and stream.

For the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Club, the Committee decided to extend the size of the Wood, roughly doubling the area by including another 4 acres or so to the east of the present fenced area, and with the encouragement of Mar Estate and Captain Mark Nicholson. It is hoped that this work will be completed during 2013, with a new length of fencing and repairs to the existing fence to be undertaken by a local contractor. The work will be paid for by a substantial donation from a Club Member (Derek Beverley) and Club funds. The new area to be enclosed is somewhat higher on the side of the glen, and mainly a heathery slope, but many birch seedlings have been noted in the area. A group of Members with

botanical interests and skills intend to assess the flora and subsequent developments.



Piper's Wood: upper in 1989, lower in 2010

While it is difficult to imagine what the Glen may have looked like in the days before man altered the face of the highland glens, it is remarkable how only 23 years of enclosure have allowed a significant wood to develop. As to how long the fencing should remain is not clear – animals such as deer, hares and rabbits will no doubt always be in the Glen, and have their impact on the trees and plants. But the growth of a number of large trees may create a different habitat, though who can say which is the most “natural” habitat? But there is no doubt that the vision of those who first suggested enclosing the area has been amply rewarded by the growth of an attractive and flourishing area of woodland which should continue to enhance the glen for many years, and provide much interest to Cairngorm Club members and all those who walk the glen.

Pass of Ballater Path

Ken Thomson

The rocks on the north side of the Pass are an attractive roadside climbing location, used by both individuals and adventure guides for training purposes, especially as its southerly aspect dries out fast. The best-known routes include Peels Wall (E4 6a), Rattlesnake (E3 6a), Anger and Lust (E2 5c), Smith's Arete (E5 6a), Lucky Strike (VS 4c) and Little Cenotaph (HVS 5b). On a couple of visits in 2011, considerable erosion was noticed, especially on the central area of scree which separates the two sections of the cliffs, and the idea of encouraging an alternative route was born. After a joint survey with Club office-bearers James Hirst and Ken Thomson, Murray Swapp of the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT) produced a detailed specification which was then put into effect with Club funds of about £1500. Pillar way-marks with the Club logo now direct climbers west below the slopes, and then up an improved slanting path through trees to the foot of the routes to the west section. It remains to be seen if further work will need to be done in future, but in the meantime the project recognises the Climbing Section's contribution to Club Activities.

Social and Walking Events

Marjory Ewan writes: When it was decided we would combine the overnighter and weekend meets to celebrate our 125th anniversary it took quite a bit of organising to get everything to fit into place. Muir was the obvious choice for accommodation and thus the base for the Overnighter. The weekend was extended to cover the five nights from 21st to 25th June 2012.

As the names started coming in it soon became apparent that Muir wasn't going to be able to accommodate everyone who wanted to attend, so as a back up we booked Blackburn Cottage, which is the old Youth Hostel. It is now owned by Aberdeen Air Training Corps and is next door to Muir. Six of us took up residence there during the five nights.

A variety of expeditions took place on Saturday, some were short, sociable and not too physically demanding, like visits to the coffee shop in Braemar! Other walks took longer and on the Saturday night quite a few were out overnight at the Shelter Stone and surrounding area. There was a total of fifty nine bed nights used with twenty seven people using the accommodation. Some members organised their own stay in Mar Lodge.

To mention a few who were present; Clive Summerson travelled from London and Ken and Pip Broomfield from Edinburgh. Martyn Batchelor, a school and university colleague of Richard Shirreffs, came from the north of England. There were younger members, Graeme McEwan, Shona Lindsay, the climbers James Hirst, Chris Wilson and the veteran Fred Belcher. This list must be incomplete but let's include Fiona Cameron, Eilidh Scobbie, Gordon Stalker, Bill Morgan, Sandy McIntosh, Carol Henderson, Peter Fayers, James Friend, David Brown, Ben Mellor, and Evelyn Massie. Then there were "couples" the Ewens, Shirreffs, Thomsons, Macdonalds, Middletons, and more. It was especially nice to have Dot Batchelor, Eva Foubister and Frances Macrae Gibson join us to stay. They are names that I have heard over the years as long time members of the club. It was great to spend the weekend with old and new faces.

Derek Beverly led, and here recounts, the Overnighter:

Leaving Muir after a cooked breakfast, Graeme McEwan, Willie Robb and myself set off under a steely sky for a gathering at The Shelter Stone to mark the founding of, and 125 years of, The Cairngorm Club.

We walked in through the green and the granite to the “special place”, by blaeberry and bog cotton, by tumbling, mumbling streams and past quiet red and silver pine trees that had been there a very long time. Dampened by the leaden sky that the high hills disappeared into, onwards we travelled, each in his own thoughts... and all for the Stone.

Beyond the Derry Flats Willie left us for Coire Etchachan and Loch Etchachan and we continued on our way through the trench which separates Beinn Mheadhoin from Beinn a’ Chaorinn. A ford by the Dubh Lochan took us to the chuckling River Avon for tea, and then onwards we stravaiged, through a heavy shower, bundled in our waterproofs, to a place where we found “the sun glistening on the waters of Loch Avon”, just as it had 125 years before.

We saw no Water Kelpies as we trod on, beyond and through this “secret corner” of The Gorms, despite scanning the dancing waters in earnest. And great snowfields held our view at times, high up above the Garbh Uisge and Feith Buidhe. There was snow too at the top of Castlegates Gully.

Soon we could see the stone (and someone by it) and a little below, on The Dairymaid’s Field the COAT encampment we were expecting (this organisation were undertaking path works in Coire Domhain). We found Willie by the Stone and retreated to a nook up above where the stove went on for tea and coffee. As the afternoon wore on a handful or so of stout club members arrived and in time all were within the Stone.

Meals were cooked, tea was drunk, and the whisky flowed and soon a pleasant warmth developed within the place, aided in no small part by a “fire log” in the back corner which was tended by musician and able fire master Garry Wardrope. Events, as the evening progressed, are hazy. Not all who arrived at the Stone stayed. Some returned to Muir and others bivvied, nearby or elsewhere. Two of our number camped, one on The Dairymaid’s Field and one by Loch Etchachan. But before all this there was the matter of “the speech”

which Anne, our lady President, felt I should deliver to the assembled masses in her absence.

Working class, daft laddies generally don't go in much for public speaking but of course I said "yes" and then spent many a sleepless hour pondering just what I would say. I needn't have worried however, as Sheila Murray's excellent book, "The Cairngorm Club 1887-1987", was at hand and a photocopy of her "Early Years – Founding of the Club" chapters, recovered from the top lid of my rucksack, seemed to work just a treat.

We didn't manage the 100 or so members that made it to the same spot 25 years earlier. However all who made it, in June 2012, despite it being the wettest and dullest June on record, were, in my opinion, truly "men and woman of heroic spirit".

I spent the night under The Shelter Stone with Willie Robb and we left together in the morning for Muir, where a warm welcome awaited us.



Loch Avon – looking South West

The Barbecue Lunch

For many the barbecue lunch at Muir, on Sunday June 24th, was the main focus of the celebrations. Anne Pinches, then President, was the prime organiser and her account, first published in the Club Newsletter, is reproduced here:

As dawn broke on Sunday 24 June, Muir was looking at its best, having been spruced up by a small but dedicated group on the Work Weekend and the Aberdeen Mountain Rescue marquee having been erected on the Friday evening. This was the day of the barbecue at Muir Cottage to celebrate the 125th Anniversary of the Club.

The weather overnight hadn't been very good, the forecast wasn't great, and the thoughts of us cosily ensconced at Muir, or nearby Blackburn Cottage, turned to the group overnighing at the Shelter Stone.

As the morning wore on, there were mutterings: "Where are the caterers, shouldn't they be here by now?" Tables and chairs were arranged, the bar was organised and there didn't seem anything else we could do despite that feeling that we should be doing something! The caterers from Glenshee Ski Centre did turn up in plenty of time, of course, and went about their business very efficiently. Now all we needed was the people: 93 had said they would come. As the planned time for the barbecue got closer just about everyone was there including those who had braved the conditions and stayed at the Shelter Stone overnight or, in one case, on the top of Macdhui! Two other members who had started off in Speyside the day before and walked through to join the others for the celebrations at the Shelter Stone were also welcomed when they got to Muir. It was good to see all the damp and weary walkers arrive safely.

The weather was mixed, with sun and showers, but we were fortunate in that there was more sun than showers. The President then made her speech and proposed the toast to the Club.

Here the Editor inserts the first part of the speech;

"When the Club was formed 125 years ago Queen Victoria was celebrating her Golden Jubilee. This year, co-incidentally, Queen Elizabeth II is celebrating her Diamond Jubilee. I wonder how the

monarchy will be faring when we celebrate our 150th Anniversary! Many of you will have heard me say this before but I am very proud to be the President of the Club, particularly in this special year.

There are, as always on occasions like this a few people to thank and the first of these is a group of six men, Alexander Copland, Alexander McConnochie, Robert Lippe, Charles McDonald,, William Anderson, and William Hawes. According to Robert Lippe they, on the 23rd of June, 1887, “ spontaneously and unanimously agreed to form ourselves into the Cairngorm Club, the name being naturally suggested by the monarch mountain so full in the foreground”.

“And so, on that morning,,,,, with the sun glistening on the waters of Loch Avon, our Club was born”. Had the weather been like last night’s it may not have happened!

I hope and think that they would be pleased with what the Club has achieved since then. We have a very hard working committee who continue to develop the activities of the Club”.

After the speech the special cake was cut, and Anne’s account continued.... Ruth Payne had offered to bake a cake as part of the celebrations. As the numbers for the barbecue increased daily, I was concerned that the cake might not be big enough. I knew that Ruth had baked it early on and had been 'dosing' it regularly with alcohol and I didn't want anyone to miss out. I need not have worried. Ruth produced a magnificent cake which catered easily for the assembled throng, and there was even some left over which at the time of writing is still being enjoyed by the President! A healthy-sized chunk was also delivered to Sheila Murray who was unable to come because of illness. Sheila was the first lady president and the author of "The Cairngorm Club 1887 - 1987".

Sheila's book had been referred to more than once during the celebrations. The cake was cut by the longest standing member present - Anne Cordiner. Coincidentally Ruth had made a cake to celebrate the Club's Centenary and Anne, being President at that time, also cut that cake.

The wine flowed, the food was served, eaten and appreciated, and we all had a lovely time. It was good to see so many members and

guests at Muir. Lots of photos were taken including one of 8 past presidents with the current presidential group, (see page 25).

Many people made things easier for the organiser. Jane Torrance, who worked at Mar Lodge at the time, arranged for the chairs and tables we hired from Braemar village hall to be delivered and then returned. Aberdeen Mountain Rescue Team lent us their marquee and anyone who watched it being put up on Friday evening or taken down on Sunday afternoon marvelled at the teamwork. We felt that if we ever needed the team's help then we could feel confident and safe in their hands.

The bar was manned very effectively, and thanks to Derek (Pinches), who had kept an eye on the deals around at the time, a good selection of wine was available. Thank you to all of those who attended and helped in any way; I suspect that I wasn't even aware of some of the things that people were doing to make the occasion go more smoothly.

The biggest thanks of all must, of course, go to Messrs Anderson, Copland, Hawes, Lippe, McConnachie and McDonald for deciding to form the Cairngorm Club in 1887: they could never have guessed what they started!

Postscript.

At the barbecue Club Badges bearing the anniversary dates of 1887 – 2012 were on sale, along with commemorative whisky.



The Barbecue Lunch: The President, Anne Pinches, opening the proceedings and pages 23 and 24, lunch in full swing.





*The Barbouac Lunch: The President
proceedings and pages 22-23*



Eight Past Presidents and other Office Bearers. Back row: Eddie Martin (Past Pres 1988 – 91); Eric Johnston (Past Pres 1982 – 85); Anne Cordiner (Past Pres 1985 – 88); Ken Thomson (Past Pres 2000 – 03, present Secretary); Judy Middleton (Past Pres 1994 – 97); Gill Shirreffs (Past Pres 1991 – 94); Richard Shirreffs (Past President 1997 – 00); Eilidh Scobbie (Past Pres 2006 – 09); Front Row: Graham Ewen (Hon Pres 2009 -); Marj Ewan (Vice Pres 2009 – 12, Week End Meets Sec); Anne Pinches (2009 – 12, Social Activities Sec); Derek Beverly (Vice Pres 2009 – 12, Day Meets Sec.)