

SCHOOL VISITS: “The Evidence”

ANNE PINCHES

Some time ago, the then President Adrian Scott and I were invited to speak to a Primary 4 Class at Newburgh Mathers School. The children had been doing a project on the Antarctic, and their teacher thought that to hear from people who walked and climbed in the snowy hills in Scotland would allow the children to relate more closely to their project.

Adrian and I went to the school dressed in our winter gear with rucksacks packed for a Winter day. We both showed the children how we would use the equipment we had taken with us and talked about the clothing. The children were fascinated and paid close attention, especially when Adrian belayed himself to the radiator! They asked lots of questions and added their own comments!

It was heartening to learn later that because of our visit one boy got his parents to take him up Bennachie and another two children had started indoor climbing.

The opportunity arose again to speak with a group of children and I was very happy to be involved; the Head Teacher of Kincardine o’Neil School, Frances Ridley, is a Cairngorm Club member. She had noticed from her *Club Newsletter* that the February 2017 Mid-Week Walk was planned to start and finish in Kincardine o’Neil and she invited the group of walkers to come to the school after the walk for refreshments.

It was a snowy day and we were glad to get wet boots off and into the warmth of the school hall. Apart from some children who were snowbound at home the whole school was present! We were firstly entertained by the children who sang several songs accompanied by Frances on the piano. This was followed by the children serving us tea and a selection of their home baking – most welcome.

Once the children were settled again I described what I was wearing and carrying with me for a big day in the hills in Winter. I first spoke about what was in my pockets, the first essential item being a ‘real’ hanky as I said tissues were of no use for me as I needed to blow my

nose quite a lot. When I brought out tissues from another pocket they knew why I needed those! I talked about the need to “go” when out and about, and they got over any possible awkwardness, so when I produced a little trowel they smiled. I asked what they thought I would bury with the trowel and one little boy’s hand shot up and he said, “*The Evidence!*” Another boy suggested that I would need hand sanitiser, and that too I was able to produce.

We were all impressed by the children’s attention span as I worked through the contents of my rucksack and they were happy to ask more questions. I also asked if anyone knew what to do if they found a sheep on its back. One boy replied that you should leave it, which is true for most situations in nature. I explained that the weight of the fleece would prevent it getting up and it would die, so you would need to help it up by approaching it from behind, grabbing its fleece and pulling it up onto its feet. After I had finished, one lad, who had obviously been thinking about what I had said, came up to me and asked what I would do if the sheep had been shorn and had no fleece to grab hold of! I was able to explain that the situation would probably not arise, but you may have to put your arms round its tummy to help it up.

When I had finished we moved through to a classroom, and Ken Thomson showed the children slides of some mountain views and told them a bit about the Club. Again, the children paid attention and asked some thoughtful questions.

It was a lovely day and all of us enjoyed the walk, the refreshments and the company of the children and their interest in our hobby. Writing this reminds me of some other things I have heard about children in relation to the Club’s Muir Cottage.

One member was in the habit of booking Muir for herself, her daughter and two grandchildren. When one of the grandchildren, aged 9, realised that the reason they could go to Muir was because grandma booked it she was rather concerned. She asked mum “What happens when grandma dies, will we still be able to go to Muir?”. Her mum then joined the Club and has booked Muir many times since, though

happily grandma is still very much alive. The young lady in question is now old enough to join the Cairngorm Club herself.

Other grandparents were looking after 3 grandchildren and were thinking of taking them to Muir for the first time. They mentioned this to the children's mother. She apologised for the children not being "outdoorsy", thinking the children would not enjoy being at Muir and thus make life difficult for their grandparents. There was no need to be concerned - combine running water, stones and children with the optional extra of sunshine and you have the recipe for a good time. Add in toasting marshmallows, barbecue and a treasure hunt, and fun will be guaranteed.