

## TEENAGE DIARIES or THRICE UNDER THE STONE

KEN J. THOMSON

*Hugh D. Welsh (1886-1969) joined the Club in 1908, and was its President 1938-1946, and Honorary President from 1956 until his death. A handwritten diary, recently come to light, includes three 2-week stays at the Shelter Stone, when Hugh would have been aged about 17 to 19. The following edited extracts throw light on various activities and attitudes in the hills, some still extant, others somewhat changed! The diary has been placed amongst the Club's "deposited records" (reference MS 3405) in the Special Collections section of the University of Aberdeen Library at Kings College.*

1904

*Saturday July 2:* At Braemar, we got our packs together and made for the Baker's, where we had a good tea, as much as we could eat for 1/- per head and left about 2. After a look at the Falls of Corriemulzie, we came within hearing and sight of the roaring Linn of Dee. Off we started again, singing odd songs to keep up the spirits, and disturbing numerous herds of deer by the noise. Not wishing to be seen by the inmates of (Derry) Lodge, we skirted the woods on the left, and picked our way through the boggy ground (location unclear, but probably west of the Derry). After wandering through a wood, we came on dry ground. With the heavy load, we made slow progress. We only managed another mile and a half before settling on a camping place. A fire was started with dry, rotten wood, of which there was abundance. It being the first time I had camped; I had some difficulty in falling asleep.

*Sunday July 3:* We wakened in the icy cold of the morning but tramping over rough ground with a steep slope on the right, and slipping and scrambling with a heavy pack soon makes one hot and in a "semi-fluid" state. Trying to whistle or sing something but needing all the breath we had for other purposes, we gave that up. At last up a crumbly, boggy, slimy rise, the small lochs called Dubh Lochan "charmed our gaze". What with a biting wind, a cold rain, and a dense mist, it was no laughing matter. From Dubh Lochan, we had to turn into Glen Avon. Ploughing through oozy ground, jumping from sod to sod with a cycle

cape flapping over one's face, made us wish we had never come. The rain ceased, and we once more beheld the "azure blue", and the sun. The Shelter Stone was pointed out to me, a mere speck at the bottom of the "steep frowning glories" of the Shelter Stone Crags. On we hirkled. Willie (Hugh's elder brother) and I staggered on very slowly. We saw our (camping) pitch on the opposite side of the burn (which) we waded just where it entered the Loch. Cold wasn't the word for it: a score of galvanic batteries applied to the feet would have been nothing to it. The opposite side being reached, we gladly and stiffly took off our packs, and proceeded to get the tent up. This done, heather, rather damp, was gathered to make a bed, and we turned in. How delightful it was to get into fresh stockings. What a night, howling wind and pelting rain, with the canvas making a noise like a pistol shot. Every moment we thought we would be covered by the soaking canvas, for the tent swayed about fearfully. Little sleep was got.

*Monday July 4:* Rising at 4, it was discovered that we had no firewood. Glen Derry was thought of, and it was decided that Willie and John would go there for wood. Getting tired of doing nothing, I resolved to get my first near acquaintance with the Shelter Stone. Out into the rain I went and scrambling and slipping among the huge scattered rocks and boulders, reached the far-famed stone. Overhead a solid rock 28ft thick; on one side, another huge rock, on another side a wall of stones of all shapes and sizes, sods, etc., artificially made; and the back resting on the ground, with a few open spaces. In this natural chamber I found a whole candle, 2 stumps, a cracked teapot patched up with stamp paper, a rusty spoon, and bits of newspapers.

*Tuesday July 5:* Still raining, but we resolved to "do" Cairngorm. A stiff climb landed us at the Stag Rock overlooking the Loch, where we had a good rest, and a fine view, considering the drizzle. We amused ourselves rolling boulders down into the loch. The summit of Cairngorm was ultimately reached in a biting north wind. All the way across from Cairngorm to Ben Macdhui was stony, and bare. The biting wind did not let us stay long to enjoy (the summit view), so we made our way down to the crags above the Shelter Stone. Several huge snowfields were crossed on the way, on which we etched out our initials in small stones.

*Thursday July 7:* My first night under the Shelter Stone gone. After breakfast, Willie and John started for Coylum Bridge, and Mr F. and I discovered several plants of the “Globeflower”. In fact, a great variety of flowers was found. A few cairngorms were imbedded in the rock, but they were ‘*ungetatable*’. In the evening, John looked out and saw 6 fellows clustered round the tent. In a very short time, they fixed it up with their walking sticks. We allowed them to occupy the tent, and to dispose of some eatables. Offering us a “nip”, we all declined with thanks.

*Friday July 8:* We were wakened by the tent lot, who had not slept a wink: ‘*Too d.... cold*’. They had come across a party of 6 (one being a guide) under another stone, looking very done up. John went down and asked them to come up and have something hot. They were ‘on it like birds’. They had expected to get a sunrise from Cairngorm but were disappointed. How they expected to do hillwalking in thin boots, high collar and cuffs, and ‘Sunday best’, I don’t know. We discovered that we were reduced to oatmeal, butter, sugar, tea and cocoa.

*Saturday July 9:* Rose at rather a late hour (for us) and disposed of some brose and cocoa. We left to attempt Braeriach and Cairn Toul. Before reaching the Dee, we had to descend a steep slope of boulders of all sizes, a tedious undertaking occupying the best part of 1½ hours, after which we had a very stiff climb up Braeriach. Mist soon descended, but we reached the summit. John and Willie were determined to round to Cairn Toul, by the aid of map and compass. Mr F. and I made our way down to the Dee again. After a short rest, we made for the boundary stones on Ben Macdhui. What a climb that was. We landed nowhere near the marches, so started looking for them. It was no use, completely surrounded by mist. Dimly we could see what appeared to be small lochs all near each other. When the mist rose completely, we discovered only two lochs, the others being patches of snow. We had come right over the top of Ben Macdhui without knowing it. In due course we reached ‘home’, dead beat. Cauld steer (i.e. oatmeal mixed in cold water) refreshed us greatly, and while discussing our day’s labour, rain came down. After about an hour we heard a ‘*coo...ee...*’ and saw W. and J. on the skyline. On reaching us they threw down a few pounds of meal and potatoes that, after descending to the deer watcher’s bothy

(i.e. Corrou) in Glen Dee, they had commandeered, (leaving) an explanatory note and a shilling.

*Sunday July 10:* Breakfast was made of brose, tea, potatoes, having nothing else. The tent was visited and found quite dry. What a pleasure it was to laze about on the heather in our shirt sleeves. Mr F. and John were away most of the day (to Ben Macdhu), and when they came back, said we had missed the grandest view ever seen, the Sidlaw Hills to the South, West beyond Ben Nevis, North across the Moray Firth, and East almost to the sea. After brose, Mr F., J. and I set out to get a sunset from Beinn Mheadhoin. The blues, reds, purples and greens were magnificent, Lochnagar was one mass of beautifully blended colour. We reluctantly made down the hill to the lochside, and after brose, sat around a cheerful fire. Willie's shoes being in a dangerous state, we settled we should go after dinner. Accounts were squared, and we retired for our last night at the Shelter Stone.

*Monday July 11:* The very small amount of food we had left was placed in a bag for instant use, and Beinn a' Bhuid was made for. A halt was called by the side of a burn to get something to eat. A fire was soon started with heather. By this time the skin was peeling off our faces, our necks were sore and red, and our lips were black and swollen with the heat. The potatoes were started to fry, the tinned meat was set out on the plates, and we anticipated a good meal, but "ooch" the meat was black with midges. Taking off as many as we could, we mixed in the rest, and finished it off. Climbing semifluid in a boiling sun with loads on our backs was no joke. After a weary climb, we reached the north top of Beinn a' Bhuid. The tent was pitched, and we quickly fell asleep.

*Tuesday July 12:* A very cold morning. As Mr. F. patched up his unmentionables, I went to the top of the hill to get a view. All the valleys were choke full of thick white mist which rose and fell like billows, with the jet-black tops of the surrounding hills showing above the surface. Brose put out of sight, all that remained in the shape of eatables was tea. Before leaving, a small cairn of stones was set up, in the middle of which was the tentpole with an empty cocoa tin on top. A rest was taken at the Sneck and we started to tackle Ben Avon: a fearfully hard climb. The heat was frightful and the climb worse. At the top, a splendid view was got, in spite of the haze. We pushed down into Glen Gairn. What a difference it was walking on a road again. We



decided to take the road leading to Corndavon Lodge. Taking into account our trampish appearance, we thought it best to go to the back door. In we went and sat down to the first square meal we had had since leaving Aberdeen. (After) a very pleasant hour or two, we set smartly off, and reached Shenbhall (farm) to be put up for the night. How queer it felt to be in a bed again, after heather, oilsheet and rug.

*Wednesday July 13:* W., J. and I found the Braemar road ankle deep in dust. Just as we emerged on the road, heavy rain began to fall. Nevertheless, donning cycle capes, we strode through the mud, and arrived in Ballater at 1.30, the awfullest looking tickets imaginable: no wonder people looked at us. Caring for nobody, we went to a Café and had something to eat. The packs were found to each weigh about 33lbs. The usual railway journey was endured till Holburn Station was reached. Thus, ended a very cheap (*words inserted!*) enjoyable, interesting, healthy holiday.

*Expenses for one:*

Train fare (Ruthrieston to Ballater)	3	5	$\frac{1}{2}$
Coach fare to Braemar	2	6	
Tea at Braemar	1		
Share of food consumed	5	10	$\frac{1}{2}$
Fare back to Holburn St.	3	6	
In all	16	4	
Expenses per day (12 days)	1	4	$\frac{1}{3}$
Average for 1 day without train fare or tea at Braemar		5	$\frac{3}{4}$

*Note:* A pound (£) contained 20 shillings (s), each of which contained 12 pence (d). Thus 5(s) 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ (d) or about 28p, is now (2019) worth about £23, and 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ (d) or about 2.4p, now about £2!

1905

*Saturday July 15:* We arrived in Braemar at 11.50. The Baker was made for and the “inner man” refreshed. In Aberdeen, I had purchased half a dozen bottled soups in my oilsheet, along with 2 dozen mealie

puddings. I soon found those bottles digging into the small of my back. I put up with it until the Falls of Corriemulzie were reached, at which place I repacked them. A look at the falls was taken – very little water, but nevertheless magnificent. The water rushes down a slope of solid rock almost perpendicular, about 100ft high. The whole sides of the gorge are one mass of dense, rich vegetation, trees, ferns of huge size, flowers of every description. Getting into harness again, we trudged on to the Linn of Dee, and the “Black Bridge” was reached along a dusty road in a scorching sun. At the bothy (i.e. Luibeg Cottage) we had a hearty tea, which cost us 8d each, and worth it. We set off again about 7.10, to do about 8 miles. Picking our way through the wooded portion of the Glen Derry, and crossing a light wooden bridge, we pushed on. The upper end of the Glen was quite hidden by the rain, and with the wind driving it into our faces we got pretty sick of the whole thing. Darkness coming on apace, we began a weary climb up the Corrie. Willie and Co. had left a vasculum of oatmeal about halfway up. Telling Forbes to keep to the path, the vasculum was found, (but) arriving at the head of the ridge we saw no sign of Forbes. A few yells were given, awakening the echoes, when all at once Forbes was seen stumping up the path leading to Ben Macdhui. At last Forbes came splashing through the burn. I led the way over the boulders and in course of time the Stone was reached.

*Sunday July 16:* Souter, Forbes and Willie set out to do Ben Macdhui. They had topped Ben Macdhui but had got a poor view. On coming down, they had disturbed a herd of goats.

*Monday July 17:* West and I thought we should try Ben Macdhui, but when halfway up the Feith Buidhe, we discovered two other fellows at the Stone, a Dr Levack and Mr Reid (members of two stalwart Club families for many years). We set off together but were disgusted to find the hill shrouded in dense mist. Levack and Reid struck across to Corrie Etchachan, while we made tracks for “home”. Willie and Souter were seen coming down from Corrie Etchachan, with huge loads of firewood, and pretty done out. Food soon warmed them up, and we turned in.

*Tuesday July 18:* Willie and I climbed up to a small cave in the crags above. This climb was very stiff, as the slope here and there was very loose, in other parts mossy and slippery. All sorts of wildflowers flourished - red campion, forget-me-not, ragged robin, lesser celandine,

bluebell, globe flower, a kind of saxifrage, mint, and many others. At the very back of the cave we found a goat's skeleton.

*Friday July 21:* We made up the slope of rock over which the Feith Buidhe runs. The first snowfield was examined, and the depth of snow was found to be about 20ft. The summit was reached after a tedious climb, and we were rewarded with a magnificent view. The hut, now in ruins, used by the ordnance survey men, was paid a visit. At a cornice in the crags we amused ourselves rolling boulders over, and enjoying the smoke and fire, and rumble and roar that they made. "Home" we went for the usual tea or cocoa, brose and mealie puddings.

*Monday July 24:* As we had got rather tired of brose, we decided to go to Coylumbridge for something fresh, and set out for the summit of Cairngorm. On the cairn under the stones, we found several slips of paper with names and addresses, one of about half a dozen females. To continue, a narrow pass between two crags was traversed. In this pass we had a feed of delicious large blueberries. Rothiemurchus Forest was soon entered and a 10 or 12 wire fence climbed. We could not go very fast, as the heather covered the path. Almost halfway to Coylum Bridge we came across a deserted bothy in a clearing. Crossing the Allt na Beinne Moire by a footbridge, we saw that several trees were being cut down. Eventually Coylum Bridge was reached in rain, and a fresh supply of provisions was laid in, and we invested in three new half-loaves – price 3<sup>d</sup> for the lot. Getting loaded about 6, we struck up Creag na Leacainn, and the driving mist soon surrounded us. The rain came down in buckets, and standing behind some boulders to get shelter, we discussed the situation. Should we turn back to the deserted bothy? We found a splendid room with a wooden floor, a large fireplace, and above all dry firewood and matches. A roaring fire was started, and we started to dry our clothes. A loaf was divided into three, and the cheese cut with a penknife. Never will I forget that night. Not a wink of sleep did we get. I began to be troubled with cramps, and the pain was so bad that I rolled about the floor to get relief. Just before we left, I had a delightful snooze – lasting about one minute – stretched out on the floor, and with my head resting on my camera.

*Tuesday July 25:* About 4 we trudged off, and the tedious tramp and climb up the Learg to the watershed was accomplished with many a groan (*although Welsh devotes 2 or 3 pages of his diary to the scenery,*

which included “a splendid view of the Spey” and “exceptionally brilliant” colours). The path, or rather what is more like a deer track in some places, runs along the Braeriach side, and in some places there is no path at all, as it gets lost among the stretches of piled up rock fallen from above. At the first Pool, we sat down on a boulder and groaned. We were quite dizzy with not having slept the night before. We tackled the slope. West came to a slab and getting the hook of his stick fixed under the top edge of the slab he started to pull himself up. Now the slab began to move. W. managed to jump off, but in doing so dislodged a few more boulders, which came crashing past me. However, no damage was done. The top being reached, we found ourselves on a flat bleak plain of coarse sand studded with boulders. We pushed on as best we could by compass and came to the shore of a small loch. The map had no indication of it. Just at that moment the sun shone through a rift in the mist, and we got a glimpse of Loch Avon, and the tops of the precipices. We were now in the glorious sunshine, and found it was only 8.15. At the Stone, all three of us flung ourselves down, and simultaneously remarked that it had been an awful time. We got some hot tea despatched and turned in to sleep.

*Thursday July 27:* We rose just after sunrise. There are few things in this world more suggestive of absolute purity than the sunrise on Loch Avon. The intense radiance that comes up the glen from the east, the limpid clearness of the water, the lovely glow of the golden granite gravel, are things that cannot be forgotten. It showed every sign of being a warm day, and we groaned at the idea. Ten o'clock past so we “hustled”. Glen Derry was descended into. A keeper said that taking the staghorn moss is taking the deer’s food. He wore a kilt, and told us how many people had passed, who they were, and how long they had been away. After a long 8 miles, Braemar was reached, semifluid, what a heat, what a dusty road, and by the time we reached civilisation we were sorry frights. However, as we kept to the back roads, very few people saw us. A hearty tea was disposed of in double quick time.

1906

A return to the Shelter Stone was voted for, but West called off. Sandy Reid was suggested by Souter and approached. He was one of several who walked to London in the summer of 1905, so would be fit for hill climbing. As he had not been beyond Banchory, he was enthusiastic.

*Saturday June 30:* The usual uneventful journey to Ballater ended, and Braemar was set off for. A good tuck in at the Baker's set us up for our day's work, and a start was made shortly before 1. Once on the road we fairly devoured the distance to the Falls of Corriemulzie. Sandy was greatly interested in the delta formed by the Quoich as it runs into the Dee. His first sight of the snow patched mountains greatly delighted him. The keeper of Derry Lodge said that a great quantity of snow lay on the slope between Loch Etchachan and the Stone, and it was impossible to get down. The wooded portion of the Glen was soon traversed and the footbridge reached. One by one we crossed, the bridge sagging fearfully, and before us lay a long stretch of bare, bleak glen, the upper end, in fact most of it, hidden by driving rain. However, being Scotch with a fair amount of dourness, we pressed on, and were well soaked. By the time Corrie Etchachan was reached the rain had ceased, but the mist hid the hills round us. On the way up no rest was taken, and not long after starting the rain came on as bad as ever. With many groans and sighs we toiled up the seeming never-ending slopes, and at last arrived at the shores of Little Loch Etchachan. The steep pathway down to the Stone was negotiated safely, and at last with a cheer, the Stone was reached. Inside we got, and our wet clothes were taken off. All we had to sleep in was: Willie: - drawers, 3 pairs socks, 2 shirts and waistcoat; Sandy: 1 shirt, 2 pairs socks, pyjamas and waistcoat; myself: 3 pairs stockings, 3 shorts and waistcoat. Having disposed of a strong mug of Bovril, cocoa, and oatcakes, we tucked in for the night.

*Monday June 2:* After breakfast, the snowfields at the top of the Craggs were settled on. By dint of kicking footholds and digging our hands in, we managed to get up over 100ft. We found the snow became harder and more perpendicular. We tried to go backwards, but in endeavouring to turn around, Willie lost his balance, and started to slide. As he came swishing down to me, I made a clutch at him, but he whizzed through my fingers. Down we whizzed, ploughing up the surface with our hands, elbows and feet in vain endeavours to stop ourselves. However, we landed safely at the bottom with swollen fingers. Sandy roared with laughter.

*Tuesday June 3:* Our way lay down Corrie Etchachan and Glen Derry as usual. Where a burn runs over the road to join the Lui, Willie suddenly gave a yell 'What ho! here's a moonwort'. We had a hunt for more and

found about a dozen. As we passed through Inverey, we called on Miss Gruer and arranged for the night. Here we had a splendid tea.

*Wednesday June 4:* O what a glorious breakfast. Porridge and good thick milk, oatcakes, scones – this dish had to be refilled several times. For a good bed, and a glorious tuck in, I recommend Miss Gruer's. The Linn once behind, off again in the heat up Glen Derry we went and struck off to the bank of the stream at the ruined huts (location uncertain). The Derry was forded, and a good supply of firewood gathered. Into Corrie Etchachan, with the sweat running from our faces in streams, we reached the top. The Stone was reached at 5.15.

*Saturday June 7:* Sandy and Willie set off for the summit of Cairngorm to go to Coylumbridge. Jim and I decided to go for a further supply of firewood. We traversed the Corrie at breakneck speed. Our wood gathering spot was duly reached, and we set about gathering as much as we could carry. After a seemingly never-ending climb, we reached L.E. (Loch Etchachan). By this time, rain was falling, and it was bitterly cold. We made all haste and reached the crest of the last slope pretty quickly. Just at the head of the path we almost stepped onto a mother ptarmigan and 7 young, nestling in at the side of the path.

*Tuesday June 10:* Just as we got outside, I saw 4 figures moving about down the Loch. They had walked all night from Tomintoul. The chap who arrived first appeared to be the leader of the party, as he ordered the others about. They had never done hillwalking before and would hardly believe we had been there so long. Jim and I started off to do Beinn Mheadhoin. A little hail fell, and we took shelter under the second highest barn, enjoying the splendid view. The hail going off we started back. The other party were going to sleep outside. We were not many hours in when two of them came in shivering, and after one o'clock the other two came in. Their leader would not allow a word to be spoken. We gave them two of our rugs to cover themselves with as they had only 1 thin one each.

*Wednesday June 11:* The other party were up and away long before we wakened. Somebody coming down from Loch Etchachan turned out to be J. Rennie of Gordon's College followed by Geo. Burnett, Echt, and I. M. Clarke, the missionary of Braemar, whom we had met the day we went for Souter. Rain in torrents when I returned. A motor accident had taken place at the Devil's Elbow, but details were lacking.

*Thursday June 12:* Blazing hot day, so determined to top Cairngorm. Scrambled up by Coire Raibert, and once on the open hillside, a grand view was obtained.

*Friday June 13:* The whole day was spent getting roots. As this was our last night at the Stone, we decided to have a bonfire of rubbish etc. 3 keepers from Abernethy and a young boy arrived, on a hunt for cairngorms.

*Saturday June 14:* a dull day, but soon reached Derry Lodge without mishap. At the burn, we gathered a good many moonworts, and about half a dozen *Malaxis Paludosa* (green orchid). Inverey was soon reached, and tracks were made for Miss Gruer's for tea. After a good tuck in, we set off again. What terrible red, dusty tickets we were on arriving at Braemar. Quite German gipsies. We heard long afterwards that we were very much talked of by the visitors.



Fig 1.

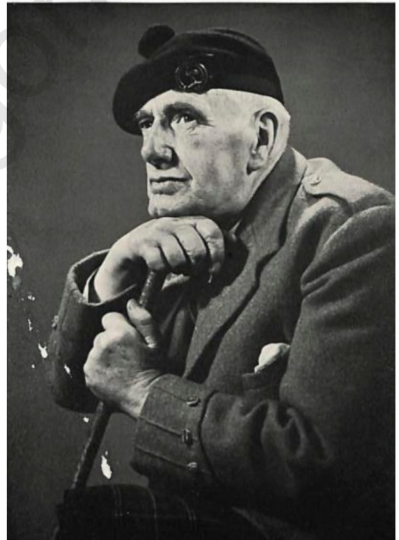


Fig 2.

Fig 1 shows Welsh lower right. The cartoon appeared in the Club Centennial book and is attributed to Ian Munro.

Fig 2 shows a photograph of Welsh to be found in the Club Journal, 94, 1971 opposite p.44.