

## CLUB LIFE IN COVID LOCKDOWN

*EILIDH SCOBIE*

As 2019 drew to a close, I knew my life was about to change, as I moved from “gainful employment” to the life of an indolent retiree. I was looking forward to being able to have regular wee adventures, with various skiing and walking trips planned, to break me in to my new life, away from the regular routine of the office.

In January and February 2020, I was skiing in Norway with fellow Club member Rhona Fraser, when we became aware from the TV of this strange new pestilence affecting the Chinese, which had resulted in them building enormous general hospitals in a matter of days. We noticed that the Orientals travelling through Oslo Airport were all wearing masks, little thinking that by the end of the year, this would be the norm at home. By mid-March, we were in Lockdown, the end of my planned adventures for the first year of my retiral.

So, without work, without meeting friends, and living on my own, I had to rely on my own inner resources. Of course, the garden beckoned, and tidying out cupboards helped to fill the day, but it wasn't enough. Chamber Music Scotland started making available on YouTube performances by young musicians from their own home. It was clear that no sophisticated technology was required, and asking how they did it, I discovered Zoom.

A couple of emails to the Committee, and I was running a sample Zoom talk for them on my cross-country skiing exploits in Norway in January. Though I think that some committee members may have been doubtful about the idea, I was given the go-ahead, and the first official Cairngorm Club Virtual Indoor Meet was held on Zoom on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020, when that habitual volunteer, Rod Campbell, talked about a Via Ferrata trip in the Dolomites. This event was attended by some 31 attendees, a promising start to the venture. The series continued fortnightly thereafter, until we took a break at the end of June 2021, after some 29 sessions. Just as with a normal Indoor Meet, members were able to “bring along” friends, so raising the Club's profile. Numbers attending gradually increased, and from counting faces on the screens (photograph 1 the following page), I ended up counting screens, with us reaching an all-time high of 47 screens for a talk about a ski traverse of the Pyrenees. While most of the attendees were Club members living in Aberdeen or

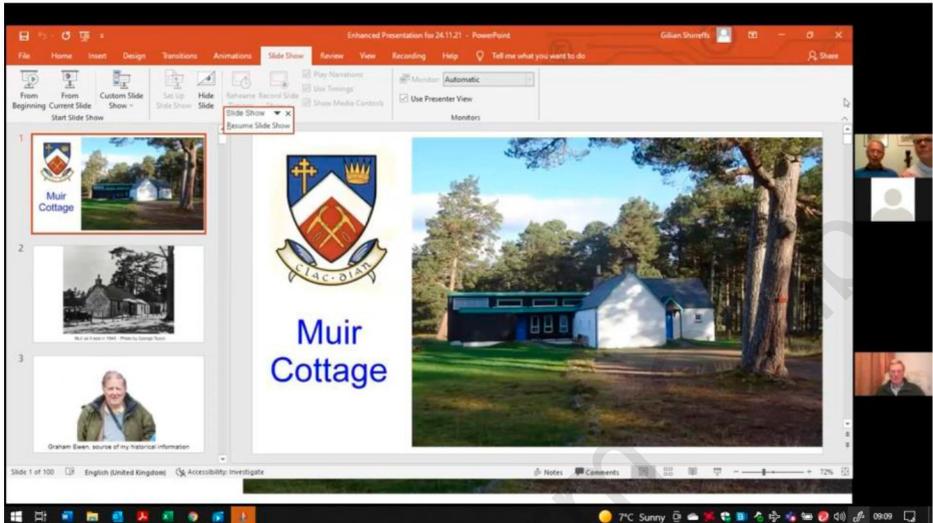
Aberdeenshire, folks living in distant Edinburgh, Inverness, Nethybridge, Chester and even Germany attended on a regular basis.



1. Screenshot of Club Zoom talk. Eilidh Scobbie/Mike Duguid

I was able to record the sessions, and so showed them as repeats when asked, and with assistance from Mike Duguid, they are gradually becoming available on YouTube. The full list of our Zoom talks to date is set out below.

The speakers at the Virtual Meets were a combination of the people whom I had asked to give talks at our monthly indoor meets, and volunteer Club members (photograph 2 the following page). While my experience is that only a few people brought photos along to Members' Nights, members have risen magnificently to the challenge, and some 28 have been involved in our Zoom talks so far, ranging from trips to the Himalaya, to a tour of Aberdeen's Blue Hill, and everything in between. We have also been able to access speakers from India and South Africa, something that we would not normally have been able to afford, and their tales have added to our experience under lockdown. Aboyne member, Doug Riach, facilitated Club Members joining some of the Zoom talks in the Aboyne & Deeside Heritage Society programme, including a fascinating presentation on Bob Scott (the Mar Lodge gamekeeper) and one on the rebuilding of the Fife Arms Hotel, Braemar.



## 2. Screenshot of Club Zoom talk on Muir Cottage Eilidh Scobbie

For much of the time during Lockdown, these Virtual Indoor Meets were the only form of Club activity permitted, as we were initially limited to exercising within 5 miles of our home, and any trips to the hills were banned because it was impossible for the Mountain Rescue Teams to carry out socially distanced rescues.

At the start of Lockdown, not many people had participated in Zoom meetings, so I ended up giving training sessions to both speakers and members wanting to attend. For some reason, though only a couple of lessons ahead of the others, I quickly got a reputation of being a Zoom expert – I would have called myself a “have-a-go Zoomer”. In order to avoid the risk of Zoom “bombing” and undesirable activities, we adopted the now-standard waiting room device. So that everyone could check that they would appear with a name that I could recognise, I opened a Zoom room for a whole day. Half-way through the morning, I thought I had better check if it was working, and found one member on the Zoom screen, who told me what a fine time she had been having, chatting to the various Club members who popped into the Zoom room to check their name. So out of that chance conversation came the idea of having open-house Virtual Coffee Mornings, on the week between the Zoom talks. Though only about a dozen members – all retirees – regularly attend, it has been a time for lively and stimulating conversation.

The response of members to the Zoom talks has been very encouraging, and out of the basic concept of running Virtual Indoor Meets, the program expanded not just to the Virtual Coffee Mornings, but also to a Virtual Dinner (with guest speaker Peter Cairns giving an impressive presentation on Re-Wilding, private dining in the Zoom Break-out Rooms, and the usual toasts), a Christmas Party (with competitions and quizzes), a Virtual Burns Supper (complete with our current President piping in the haggis, a massed committee “Address to the Haggis”, the conventional Toast to the Lassies and Reply, and a collective “Immortal Memory”), a virtual AGM, and photographic competitions; Colin Brown judged the entries to the Xmas photographic competition, and Rhona Fraser's wining image of bog cotton graced the Club's Christmas Card (photograph 3 below). You name it, we have tried and experimented to the full with all the options that Zoom can offer.



3. Club Xmas Card

Photo Eilidh Scobbie

When Club member Hazel Witte died suddenly, a few weeks after giving a Zoom presentation on “Exploring the Silk Road”, we had a morning when we exchanged our memories of her – the Covid rules at that time permitted only a few of us to attend her physical funeral, but it seemed right to mark her passing in this way.

With the country reopening in summer 2021, our autumn calendar advertised hybrid events – our talks, Dinner and EGM and AGM happening in Aberdeen for those who were able to attend in person, and on Zoom for everyone else. These hybrid events presented me with new challenges, learning to handle the audience on screen, as well as that in the room. Our 2021 Dinner was particularly memorable, as it clashed with Storm Arwen and some 13 members and guests were caught out by the storm and texted or phoned with their apologies. Power cuts meant that not all those booked to join us on Zoom managed to attend. Fortunately, the speaker had arrived early, and our power lasted the evening.

I think that our Zoom events have given members the chance to see each other, to be supportive to those faced with challenges under lockdown, and best of all to talk of adventures in the hills, and to spend time with like-minded people, without the word “Covid” featuring. For me, it has given me a new – but hopefully short-lived – career.

## 2020

<i>April</i>	<i>Rod Campbell</i> <i>Sue Chalmers</i>	<i>Via Ferrata in the Dolomites</i> <i>Walking in the Canadian Rockies</i>
<i>May</i>	<i>Lydia Thomson</i> <i>Gill Shirreffs</i>	<i>Italy: Mountains and Flowers</i> <i>Greece: not just Beaches, Sun and Blue Seas</i>
<i>June</i>	<i>Dave Kirk</i> <i>Anindya ("Raja")</i> <i>Mukherjee (Calcutta)</i>	<i>Ski touring in Norway and the Cairngorms</i> <i>Kellas Peak Revisited</i>
<i>July</i>	<i>Judy Middleton</i> <i>Club Members</i>	<i>Looking back at adventures in Skye</i> <i>Photographic Challenge</i>
<i>September</i>	<i>Mike Duguid</i>	<i>Photography in the Hills</i>
<i>October</i>	<i>"Raja" Mukherjee</i> <i>(Calcutta)</i> <i>Mike Duguid</i>	<i>Nanda Devi: How the Goddess Kept Her Secret</i> <i>The Cumbria Way</i>

<i>November</i>	<i>Susan Jensen</i>	<i>Mountaineering on the Edge of the Tibetan Plateau</i>
<i>December</i>	<i>Graham Ewan</i>	<i>Climbing in Scotland Pre-Lockdown</i>
<b>2021</b>		
<i>January</i>	<i>Iain Campbell</i>	<i>From the Lion's Mouth: Travels in Kashmir and Tibet</i>
	<i>Stuart Message</i>	<i>Some Interesting Climbing Experiences</i>
<i>February</i>	<i>Steve Kentish</i>	<i>Trans Pyrenees in Winter</i>
<i>March</i>	<i>Susan Jensen</i>	<i>The Silk Road revisited - Kashgar</i>
<i>April</i>	<i>Colin Brown</i>	<i>Munro Completion in Covid Year</i>
	<i>Peter Aikman</i>	<i>Boat Building</i>
<i>May</i>	<i>Keith Milne</i>	<i>Alpine style in the Karakorum Range</i>
	<i>Rick Allen</i>	<i>Exploring the Mountains of Central Asia</i>
<i>June</i>	<i>Neil Cromar</i>	<i>Mountain Sunrises and Sunsets</i>
<i>October</i>	<i>Paul Fatti (Pres, Mountain Club of S.A. 1986-1995)</i>	<i>Risk and Reward in Mountaineering</i>
	<i>Peter Aikman</i>	<i>My Involvement with the Mountain Bothies Association</i>
<i>November</i>	<i>Richard Shirreffs, Robbie Middleton and Kees Witte</i>	<i>Muir: The Club Hut</i>
<i>December</i>	<i>Anindya ("Raja") Mukherjee (Calcutta)</i>	<i>Life in Covid as an Indian Mountaineer</i>

Eilidh Scobbie, Social Activities Secretary