

MUNRO-BAGGING, MY LAST MUNRO

BRIAN DAVEY

For some people, life can be described as a long and challenging journey. Attempting to climb all the Munros can be part of that journey if you are game or daft enough to accept the challenge. In so doing, it can involve all the big emotions of life itself: love, hate, joy and sorrow. Some of these emotions we would rather not want to sample, but, like them or not, they are all part of the package. Some sampled, like the great joys of life, the wild beauty of the Scottish mountain scenery, the fresh air and the exercise, make the journey extremely worthwhile, not to mention the affection from some of the great friends you are likely to meet on that journey.

Tragically, people have lost their lives in this quest, among them Lynne Potter, a good friend from Runcorn in Cheshire, and a former member of the Cairngorm Club, as was her husband, Ernie. This raises the question, was it or is it all worthwhile? Lynne died in Raigmore Hospital Inverness on 9 June 2001 with serious head injuries after she slipped and fell 300 feet down the side of An Teallach, in Wester Ross. A helicopter from RAF Lossiemouth, which had been training in the area, airlifted her to hospital. Unfortunately, Lynne didn't survive her injuries. At that time, Lynne had only 15 Munros left to climb when tragedy struck. Just 19 months after Lynne's death, on 12 January 2003, another good friend and Cairngorm Club member John Elgie, who had accompanied me to Lynne's funeral at St Berteline and St Christopher Church in Runcorn, was swept some 800-900 feet down the Black Spout of Lochnagar in an avalanche and died a few days later in Aberdeen Royal Infirmary from his injuries. Had it not been for the fact that I was leading a Westhill Walkers Club Walk to the Rocks of Solitude in Angus on the day of that accident, I would almost certainly have been with my friend John and would very likely have been involved in that unhappy incident.

We could argue that Lynne, John and many others died doing something they loved, and, if we all must die sometime, perhaps that is a better way to go! But who in their right mind would want to put themselves through all the Munro bagging experience, and for what gain? Perhaps a celebratory drink in a silver-plated inscribed quaich, wearing a commemorative medallion together with your family and

close friends on your last Munro summit, not to mention a cheap tee shirt with your name printed on it plus the date of your Munro Completion or your name and Completion number forever inscribed on the Scottish Mountaineering Club Munroist List along with a certificate to prove it. All this perhaps, added to the memory of a bagpiper friend playing *Scotland The Brave!* Maybe for myself, of proud Irish heritage, my bagpiper companion should have played “Oh Danny Boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling, from glen to glen and down the mountain side

Believe it or not, the SMC’s Munroist List total, which stood at 2,358 in June 2000, reached nearly 7,000 names in December of COVID-19-year 2020 despite various restrictive lockdowns during the year, and it has now reached 7,127 early in January 2022. Numbers have increased exponentially since only a few hundred people had achieved the Munroist title back in the early 1970s. Cairngorm Club Munro Compleatists include former Club Presidents Ian Bryce at number 298 in 1983, Sheila Murray in 1985 at number 449 Ken Thomson in 1989, Anne Pinches also in 1989 at number 688 under her maiden name of Miss Anne H Lindsay, Gillian and Richard Shirreffs at numbers 1417 and 1418 in 1995, and Judy Middleton at number 1,435. Fondly remembered is Jim Bryce, Ian’s brother, at number 1,441 in 1995. In fact, we could say that 1995 was a great year for CCCs (Cairngorm Club Compleatists)! The present Club President Garry Wardrope compleated in 2017 to claim number 6,285 on the List, and another Past-President, Marj Ewan, compleated on 8 September 2021. The escalating figures must have some explanation to account for the popularity of this sport, unknowingly invented by Sir Hugh Munro, who unfortunately died (in his bed I might add) before he succeeded in the completion of his own invention.

Personal fitness and a vastly improved knowledge of the geography, geology, flora and fauna, not to mention the unpronounceable Gaelic placenames of Scotland, may be some of the rewards of Munro-bagging. But who would willingly endure the hardships of cold, wet, heat, exhaustion and pain for the boast, meaningless to many if not most people, of being able to say that they have stood at the summit of every mountain in Scotland which in this short microsecond of geological time rises above sea level to a height of 3000 feet or more? “So what!” they would say, and perhaps question your sanity. But it must all be part of

human psychology that we see a challenge and willingly accept the consequences, bearing the associated struggle against all the adversities involved, as some sort of self-test of our own character or an explanation of our inner self and our own individual capabilities. For some people, I'm sure that this analysis is all a lot of poppycock. Many people must take on the Munro Challenge just because it's a fashionable thing to do, like keeping up with the neighbours, at the same time undertaking the climbs in perfect summer climate conditions over the span of a lifetime, while residing in the best hotels or hostels if not Mountain Bothy Association bothies on their journey. This would involve the minimum amount of hardship, in fact quite a bit of comfort, and would finally achieve the target of getting a mention in the List of Compleatists. Others accept the challenge because their competitive nature needs to prove that they are the best. This being the case, they can then do them faster than anyone else, in winter conditions, on a mountain bike, in two right boots: see my article in the *Cairngorm Club Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 106, pp. 23-31, "The Black Cuillin Ridge of Skye in Two Right Boots", featuring my good bagpiper friend from East Kilbride, Albert Krawinkel.

On 2 September 2020, Donnie Campbell, a running coach who hails from Skye, claimed a new record for the fastest round of all present-day Ordnance Survey Munros, totalling 282, in an incredible 31 days 23 hours and just 2 minutes, covering 833 miles and ascending 126,143 metres, which is the equivalent of more than 14 ascents of Mount Everest!

Other options could be Completion barefooted without boots and without clothes: now that would be some achievement, although someone has quite recently attempted the Land's End to John o'Groats walk completely naked. A completely blind attempt might be another possibility, and perhaps without hands and feet as one climber, Jamie Andrew, has successfully done, climbing Ben Nevis on 19 June 2000. The permutations are countless to get oneself into the record books or even into Clac Dian, the Cairngorm Club Newsletter. I'll not deny that, as a meteorologist, I tried to complete my Munro ascents in the most benign of weather possible but given the constraints of shift working and available leisure time, I'm afraid that I sometimes had to take the

rough with the smooth. I'm still referring here to the weather and not the contorted, rough, volcanic terrain of the Cuillin of Skye as opposed to the well-rounded, ice smoothed mountains of the Cairngorms.

So unexpectedly, it came as some surprise, when a certain tinge of sadness welled up in me and I nearly shed a tear as I approached the summit of my last Munro, Sgurr a Mhaoraich, the Peak of the Shellfish, on that memorable day, 10 June 2000.



1. Guard of Honour, Sgurr a Mhaoraich

Graham Denyer

This mountain is rather isolated and stands near the head of sea-loch Hourn with its peaked and ribbed slope resembling a seashell. My sad emotion was at the same time mixed with a great deal of joy and pride to be accompanied by so many of the family and friends who had shared some of the journeys with me through white-out blizzards, deep snow, driving rain, severe gales, blue skies and blazing sun. From the summit of Sgurr a Mhaoraich, I looked down to the depths in which Loch Hourn lay and surveyed the vast surrounding mountains with the distant Cuillin of Skye still shrouded in cloud. I had chosen my last Munro wisely, and the late arrival of the forecast inclement weather moving in from the Atlantic made for me a perfect day. I count myself lucky to have savoured the scene!



2 Final Steps

Grahan Denyer



3 The Toast

Grahan Denyer