

BOOK REVIEWS

Scotland's Mountain Landscapes. A Geomorphological Perspective

By Colin K Ballantyne – 2019. Published by Dunedin Academic Press Ltd. ISBN 9781780460796 (Hardback), 9781780466118 (Kindle).

Geology is the science of the earth and its history, reconstructed from the record of the rocks: their types, structures, ages and origins. Geomorphology is the study of landforms and landscapes and the processes responsible for their formation. Essentially (but not exclusively), Geomorphology focuses on the processes operating at the surface and near surface of the Earth to produce landforms ranging in scale from millimetres to hundreds of kilometres.

Most books and articles devoted to the evolution of the Scottish landforms and landscape are targeted at the professional research community of geologists and geomorphologists. At the other extreme are popular accounts, typically shorn of jargon and replete with imaginative, colour reconstructions of past landscapes but limited scientific content. This book attempts to steer a middle course. What further helps the reading of this book is that, at 158 pages, it is not too long. Even then, about a third of the pages are taken up by beautiful pictures and diagrams. Also helpful is an index of locations in Scotland and an index of Scottish mountains and hills. So, if you are visiting a certain location, mountain or hill you can locate what information about them is to be found within the book.

The following are some of the things that I've learned from reading this book:

- for a small country, Scotland contains a staggering range of rock types of widely different ages, the result of a complex and sometimes violent geological history. To understand this geological diversity, it is useful to first identify the major pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of Scotland's geology. These are termed *terranes*, zones of the Earth's crust which preserve a geological history that differs from adjacent areas. Scotland comprises five *terranes* (formed ~490 million to ~390 million years ago) that are separated by major northeast-southwest trending faults that represent vertical and horizontal movement of one *terrane* relative to its neighbour.
- the geological Union of Scotland and England occurred at ~425 million years ago and runs from the Solway Firth to just south of the Cheviot

Hills, roughly parallel to the present political boundary between the two countries.

- which mountains are regarded as being the oldest and youngest Munros, their composition and approximate age.
- how the Inaccessible Pinnacle was formed.
- when and why Ice Ages and global cooling occur.
- the last Scottish Ice Sheet expanded and contracted during the period of ~31 thousand - ~11.7 thousand years ago. Thus, most landforms in the Scottish Mountains are of comparatively recent origin, particularly the period after ~17 thousand years ago when Scottish mountains began to emerge from the thinning and retreating of the last ice sheet.
- did the last ice sheet cover the Scottish mountains?
- how dead midges have been used to indicate temperatures during late glacial periods.
- how far and how high erratics have been transported.
- how to recognise glacial meltwater runoff channels.
- how available col outlets created the “parallel roads” of Glen Roy.
- why rubble covers many Scottish mountain ridges and plateau, but not on others.
- how tors are formed.

As said above, this book attempts to steer a middle course in terms of technicality, but it does still require a bit of effort to read. However, I think that the examples of what I have learned shows that such efforts are rewarded. Reading this book will open your eyes further to what you see when you're out hillwalking and enhance your appreciation of this beautiful country of ours.

BRIAN PURVES

Mountain Friendships: the First 100 Years of the MAM

By Dave Roberts, Midland Association of Mountaineers, 256pp. ISBN 978-1-3999-4819-7.

This centennial volume is a portrait of a kindred mountaineering club based in Birmingham, with over 500 members and no fewer than three huts: in Wales, the Lake District and the Pennines. The book is organised roughly by four periods, from the club's foundation in 1922 to the present day and interspersed by profiles of notable members (e.g. Showell Styles, Rick Allen) and many sections dealing with various topics such as its London Section, hill-bagging, and of course those huts. An usual feature is the close link with the Birmingham University Mountaineering Club known as the Stoats: this has

given the MAM a valuable recruitment source, often of climbers of a high standard.

Like the Cairngorm Club, the MAM has admitted both male and female members from the start and runs a journal much like the CCJ. Its meets range from days at relatively local venues (e.g. South Wales), through weekends at its own huts (73 in 2022!) and elsewhere, to “Alpine” meets in Norway and Corsica as well as Austria etc. Most meets have a label, e.g. Family, “Mega Meal”, “New Year”, etc., and the “Walk, Run, Bike, Swim” section indicates some recent developments. Proper attention is paid to Scotland, with many tales and photographs of Munro-bagging, the Ben, Skye ridges, Fort William Easter Meets (1934 – 2003), etc., and favourable mention of the Cairngorm Club’s Muir Cottage as an oft-visited Scottish hut. Developments of its own huts range from the purchase of a semi-ruined cottage in 1945 to a similar event in 2016, with every conceivable property-owner’s nightmare in between – floods, asbestos, parking, and the rest of it.

The writing and production standard is high, with over 100 photographs and a pleasing format, though an index would have helped.

The book has been placed at Muir, where it can be consulted by anyone staying there.

KEN THOMSON

The Hidden Fires. A Cairngorms Journey with Nan Shepherd
by Merryn Glover. Polygon Books, Birlinn Ltd, 2023. ISBN 978 1 84697 575 2.
ebook isbn 978 1 78885 517 4. 232 pp. Hardback £14.99

There are many reasons for climbing the Scottish hills. Displacement and release from everyday concerns. The exhilaration of height and space. The satisfaction of steady toil. Marvelling at the beauty of the country. Calming nerves, reducing anxiety and lifting depression. Enjoying freedom of movement. Company and conversation – attractions for some, a distraction for others. The sense of achievement.

For over 7000 people and 20 dogs the achievement has been monumental. According to the SMC Guide the 282 Munros can be climbed in 155 days, walking 3057 km and climbing 172,580 m, spending 963 hours and 10 minutes in the process, not counting stops. Goodness knows the associated car mileage and carbon footprint.

First published in 1977, Nan Shepherd’s *The Living Mountain* described a different approach, sometimes called “mountain wandering”, alerting the body’s senses to every facet of the mountain environment. Her talent and

achievement as a writer, for herself and then for others, was to set down the nature and effects of that interaction.

As Merryn Glover comments “By now it has sold hundreds of thousands of copies, been translated into at least sixteen languages and spawned countless works in response from dance, music, art, photography, a literary prize and further writing”. After 30 years in a drawer and nearly 50 years in print it is a book which keeps on giving.

Although the Cairngorm Club bus passed her home in Cults on the North Deeside Road many times, Nan Shepherd (who was not at all like her image on the RBS £5 banknote) wasn’t a member of the Club and does not seem to have taken part in Club activities. However, she did go out with the Deeside Field Club, so wasn’t “unclubbable”. Nor was the Club closed or oppressive to women. From its very first outing up Mount Keen in 1889, women were often and usually part of the company. Possibly the fixed nature of Club outings (back at the bus by a certain time) didn’t give her the freedom and flexibility her roaming involved.

However, the Cairngorm Club does have a place in her story. As Charlotte Peacock mentions in her biography *Into the Mountain. A Life of Nan Shepherd*, she was finally “pestered” into print by Harold Watt, the Managing Director of Aberdeen University Press, who was not only a neighbour in Cults but was also her publisher during the years she edited the *Aberdeen University Review*. At that time, before Robert Maxwell bought and subsequently ruined the business, Aberdeen University Press was a high end printer rather than a publisher, so taking on *The Living Mountain* was a special deal. Harold Watt was President of the Cairngorm Club at the time (1976-79).

Merryn Glover is an Australian author, brought up in the Himalayas, the daughter of missionary parents, who for 30 years has lived on the western edge of the Cairngorms, married to a local general practitioner. In 2019, as a professional writer, broadcast playwright and published novelist she was appointed writer-in-residence at the Cairngorm National Park, re-read *The Living Mountain* and was sparked into a flurry of reading, research and personal exploration. Numerous quotes from *The Living Mountain* provided footsteps to follow.

Much has changed and continues to change in the Cairngorm area since Nan Shepherd wrote her book but the massif itself and its elemental natures are largely unchanged. In twelve chapters, whose titles mirror Shepherd’s, the common thread is a series of walks through Glens Derry, Einich and Feshie and up Creag Dubh, Cairngorm, Ben Macdui, Angel’s Peak and Braeriach,

sometimes camping overnight. Special destinations were Loch Avon, Loch Etchachan, Lochain Uaine below Angel's Peak and Loch Coire an Lochan on Braeriach, each celebrated with a dip, sometimes with and other times without a swimming costume. One is reminded of TE Lawrence's description of "*that peculiarly Australian air of reckless willingness and capacity to do something very soon*".

Each account involves personal narrative, keen observation, reflective commentary and frequent digressions to: *The Living Mountain*; Nan Shepherd's earlier writing and life; previous writers on the Cairngorms including Seton Gordon and Syd Scroggie; history, geography and geology; local people, politics and controversies; the absence of midges in *The Living Mountain*; winter training and mountain rescue, to list a few. The mixture is both familiar and new. Readers may be inspired to follow Merryn Glover's steps up the usually neglected and pathless Coire Garbhlach in Glen Feshie. And who knew about the 2000 Indian soldiers posted to the Cairngorms in World War II, and their cemetery in Kingussie?

The final chapter is a close reading of what Nan Shepherd wrote about her mountain experiences, "*at first ... seeking only sensuous gratification*" but "*going on to discover the mountain in itself*" and learning to prepare herself for the revelations that walking in the mountains could provide. Like the Shelter Stone Crag, this may not be for everyone, but as Merryn Glover herself writes, "*There is something about a long walk in the mountains that opens us.*" WH Murray, the pioneer Scottish mountaineer and author, wrote similarly, his mountain climbing a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

Having grown up in the Himalayas, where mountains have a more explicit spiritual significance, mountain pilgrimages being common to many religions, Glover is well placed to compare, contrast and reflect. Shepherd was interested in Eastern religions and philosophies, especially Buddhism, but was not a Buddhist herself. She did not believe in an afterlife and was more interested in what life itself could offer, especially "*what it is to be*", devoid of mundane distractions.

Merryn Glover is surefooted in clarifying, commenting and adding to what *The Living Mountain* is about, and in making her points accessible through descriptions of her own experience. *The Hidden Fires* is well imagined, well written and fully realised. Following *The Living Mountain* was ambitious, but this book does it modestly, carefully and rather brilliantly well.

GRAHAM WATT

One Man's Legacy. Tom Patey

By Mike Dixon, Scottish Mountaineering Press. 2022

ISBN 978-1-907233-46-3, 464 pp, Hardback £30

Many readers will know that the title of this book is a play on the book *One Man's Mountains*, a collection of Tom's writings published in 1972.

Mike Dixon spent several years researching the book and this attention to detail is one of its strengths. He has managed to write a book that sits easily alongside Tom's own output.

The author's style makes this book easy to read or to put it another way, hard to put down. I had no trouble reading it again for the review. Yet, throughout the book there is a sense that Mike Dixon has gone to great lengths to ensure the veracity of the story. This was made more difficult by Tom's casual approach to the dates of some events.

This book will appeal not only to the climber but to anybody with a love of the Cairngorms and its history. This is very much a human story written with great sensitivity. There are a large number of photographs, mainly black and white but a few coloured ones with many coming from the Patey family. These images are dispersed throughout the book and play a significant part in the narrative. Just like the climbing, some of these photographs were taken in extreme conditions.

Altogether there are 22 Chapters, which chronologically follow Tom's various careers. I liked the titles given to the Chapters, many having a play on words. For myself the reason for the title often only became obvious after reading it. 'After you Mike' refers to being invited on Mike Bank's Rakaposhi expedition where after six weeks he summited with Mike. The Admiral in the 'Admiral and a Christian' refers to Tom's naval heritage.

In each chapter there are a few numbered footnotes, their explanations are easily accessible at the end of each chapter. The clarity of the explanation is impressive, far better than in most books of this nature. There is no chronological list of Tom's first ascents and in my opinion, it is not needed in this book. As the story unfolds there are plenty of references to climbs completed, many readers will know these climbs and will have done them. The lack of any lists is compensated by the excellent eight pages of Appendices, where you can look up and see if your 'Patey' route gets a mention. Also of interest, particularly to a collector of this genre, is the comprehensive seven page bibliography.

The 1950-51 Cairngorm Club Journal contains Tom's first published accounts of two of his new routes. This is my only disagreement with Mike

Dixon who claims that Tom's first published account of a climb was in the SMC Journal of the following year.

An example of the author's regard for Tom's family is his inclusion of a little detail regarding Betty Patey neé Davidson. At the end of the book, I realised that the true hero of this book is Betty. Her loyalty to Tom, her hospitality to his friends and her success as a mother are testament to a remarkable woman. The book deals with Tom's foibles with great sensitivity but the reader is left to make their own judgement. It is over fifty years since his tragic death. His demise was the end of a mercurial man whose range of talents made him almost superhuman.

We should always remember that his first Club was the Cairngorm, and he was one of our own. For me this is the best Mountaineering book to be published in the last few years. I know my friend Bill, an Etchachan climber, ordered his copy in advance and was not disappointed.

MARK PEEL

First on the Rope

by Roger Frison-Roche, first published in France in 1942 as Premier de Cordée by Arthaud, Paris, and in English in 1949 by Methuen. Translated by Janet Adam Smith. Re-issued in paperback (250pp) by Vertebrate Publishing, Sheffield, 2019, ISBN 9781911342458.

Amongst mountaineers, Janet Adam Smith who translated this book, is a name to conjure with, especially for *Mountain Holidays* (1946), her account of pre-war walks and climbs in the Cairngorms and the Alps. But she was a literary figure (and more) on a much wider scale, including translations with Nea Morin of Maurice Herzog's *Annapurna* (1952), and *Gervasutti's Climbs* in the Dolomites, Alps and Andes.

The book considered here is a semi-autographical novel written by an eminent French guide, the first non-local to join the "hermetic" Compagnie des guides de Chamonix. With the help of family and friends, young Pierre, an aspirant guide, overcomes a tragedy on Mont Blanc to re-build his passion for climbing. If pre-war simplicity and romance appeal to you, have a read of this!

KEN THOMSON

Fiva: an Adventure That Went Wrong.

By Gordon Stainforth. Golden Arrow Books, 2012. 210pp. ISBN 978-0-9570543-0-1.(cont)

Written some 40 years after the “adventure” – actually a “near-death experience” – this book describes the 1969 ascent of the Fiva (pron. “fever”) route up the 5500-foot (1788m) Troll Wall in Norway’s Romsdal. The two Hertfordshire twins had minimal training (“a couple of quite big mountains in the Alps with guides”, and a week’s winter course in Glencoe), equipment (hemp waistlines, an ice-hammer and ice-axe with shortened shaft, and seven pegs), and food (three cheese sandwiches and two Cadbury Fruit & Nuts). The “breathless teenage voice never wavers”, as they absorb the enormity of their surroundings, the endless route-finding (and route-losing) problems on rock and snow-ice, the vanishing of time, and even their fall, miraculously survived at the cost of a single bruised knee. They make it to the top after two days, only to be faced by a horrendous descent, starving and sleepless, taking another 24 hours. A wonderful story, masterfully told, and with a happy ending!

KEN THOMSON