

The Cairngorm Club Journal



Volume 20

1999

Number 105

THE CAIRNGORM CLUB JOURNAL

Edited by Hazel A. Witte

Volume 20 Number 105 1999

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The line drawings are by Ian Strachan, except those in the Piper's Wood report, where they are by the author, Heather Salzen.

**Published by the Cairngorm Club, 18 Bon Accord Square, Aberdeen
and printed by
Wm. Culross and Son Ltd.
Queen Street, Coupar Angus, Perthshire**

THE PRESIDENT

Richard Shirreffs was elected President of the Club at the 1997 AGM in succession to Judy Middleton. He first took an interest in the hills in his latter schooldays, and after gaining experience with University musical friends, joined the Club on leaving University in 1970. Two years later, in a weak moment on the return journey from an overnight hill walk, he agreed to take on the secretaryship, a position which he then held for twenty five years.

He and his wife Gillian, who was President from 1991 to 1994, are amongst those who remember being on the 'permanent list' for bus meets before the booking system had to change. Even the arrival of their twin daughters (who are also now members) in 1976 did not unduly reduce their support for Club activities, though it took them until June 1994 to finish their Munros together on An Teallach.

The Secretary's role expanded considerably while Richard held that position, primarily with the increasing prevalence of environmental issues on which it was felt that the Club should express a view. As President, he is still the main compiler of submissions on such matters, with National Parks the predominant current issue.



CLIMBING IN NORTH EAST SCOTLAND

STUART STRONACH

This is a personal description of some of my favourite crags and routes around the north east. Most of these are sea cliffs, but there are a few decent inland venues which will get a mention. I intend to follow the same format as used by the current SMC guidebook 'Northeast Outcrops' i.e. starting at Aberdeen and heading south, then heading north, followed by the north coast and finally the inland crags.

This is not intended as an alternative to the guide and I'm not going to waste time duplicating how to find the crags or on locating the various routes mentioned. Instead, I'm just giving a wee personal opinion on some of the areas covered in more detail in the guide and note some of my favourite routes. As more Club members attending the weekly sea cliff climbing meets become competent leaders, this may be of some use in suggesting some of the better, less popular alternative venues which are on offer in the Aberdeen area.

SOUTH OF ABERDEEN

Bridge of One Hair

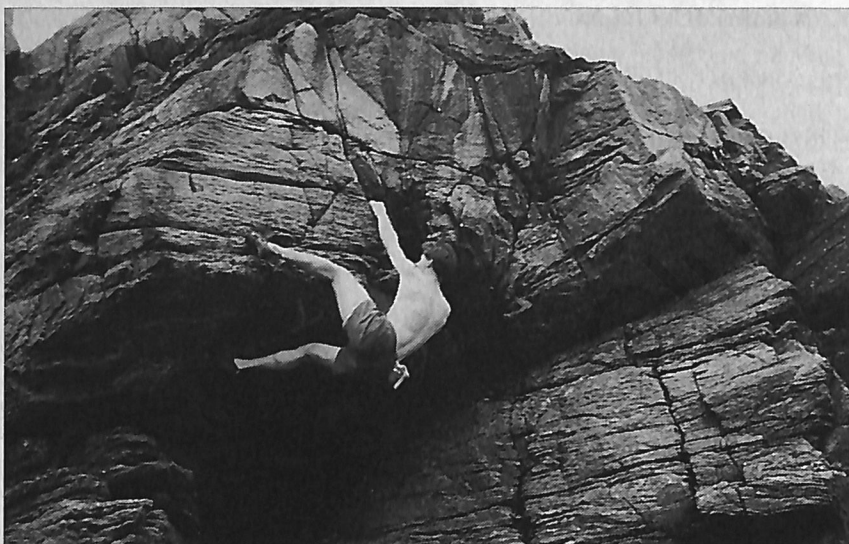
This is a neglected headland beside the first bridge over the railway on the coast road when heading south from Nigg Bay. It's neglect is probably because you've to cross a two metre high fence and a chemical waste dump to get to it! Once there, the unpleasant aromas are soon left behind. The place is really a bouldering venue with one or two bigger bits of rock.

Deceptive Wall

This is a wall of excellent rock facing straight out to sea above a tidal platform. There's nothing harder than VS here, but all the routes are worth doing, particularly Big Daddy (S) and The Somme (MVS 4b). The only down side for beginners is the awkward and sometimes greasy descent gully at the north end of the crag.

The Long Slough

The seaward end of the north wall of this inlet has some amazing routes through impressive overhangs. There are few easy routes, though Zombie (S) is quite good and Quartz Deviant (S) is bold. Moving up a few grades, Brain Death (E2 5b) is a short but fun route over a big roof - heel hook the lip, rock over and stand up and it's all over! Things get harder still with Red Death (E3 6b), Black Velvet (E4 6a) and Bob's Overhang (E4 6b), all of which are reported to be stunning. The bouldering here must also get a mention



Stuart Stronach on 'Brain Death' Grade E2 5b Long Slough

- around the base of Red Death are several hard problems, and the low level traverse of the entire crag is a worthwhile and quite sustained 6a.

Long Slough Red Rocks

This is the south side of the Long Slough - it's name comes from the sill of felsite which gives the place its distinctive appearance. The climbs aren't of the same quality as those on the other side of the inlet, but are interesting due to the unusual rock. Firebird (E1 5b) is excellent apart from the top section above the felsite. Some hard new routes were done here in the summer of 1995, of which Liquid Dancing Firelight, up the prominent hanging arête at the east end of the crag, looks superb and a lot harder than the E5 6a grade given!

The Dry Covie

This is an obscure wee bouldering inlet which is set back from the sea and has a reasonable landing on pebbles and boulders. The traverse of the south wall is quite a challenge, and the place can be a sun trap at the right time of day.

The Humpback

The Humpback is a sea stack with an entertaining girdle traverse (VDiff), best done at high-ish tide! There's a nice line up a quartz seam, Quartz Corner (Mild Severe) at the south west corner.

Black Rock Gulch

This is a fine place when quiet, but it's often busy with instructional groups. The red slab provides fine bouldering or quite easy but bold routes. The main wall is bigger and steeper. Yellow Edge (Mild Severe) is probably the best route here, but the HVS 5a through the overhangs at the back of the inlet is worth doing despite its short length. The steep wee wall below the shelves at the base of the red slab also gives reasonable bouldering.

Souter Head

Souter Head is probably the most popular venue in the Aberdeen area. This headland has several inlets with climbing in most of them. An early Cairngorm Club Journal article, reproduced in the most recent Journal (Vol.20 No. 104), describes some of the earliest climbs and constitutes the first recorded climbing guide for Northeast Scotland. The most famous climb is Mythical Wall (E1 5b) which has even been the subject of an article in the climbing magazine 'On The Edge'! Also well worth doing and on the same stack are Seawall (E1 5b), Pickpocket (E2 5c) and The Pobble (VS 4b). Further south is Milestone Inlet, which contains Milestone Direct (VDiff), and south again is Rainbow Inlet. Here, the best route is Brooker's Arête (S) which takes the prominent rib on the south wall. Tyke (E3 5b) is a fine but very bold wall to its right. Jade Traverse and Jade Buttress (VS 4c) combine to make a fine outing near the south end of the headland.

South Cove

Another popular venue, with many good routes in the upper grades (i.e. too hard for me, so I've not done them and can't comment on how good they are!). However, Space Rats (E5 6a), Cracks in Reality (E5 6a), Procrastination (E5 6b) and The Black Sheep (E5 6b), all in the Red Hole, are all reportedly magnificent multi-pitch routes. Lunatic Fringe (E7 6c) is the hardest non-bolted route in the north east and looks quite tricky! Insect Groove (VS 5a) is a classic, with the crux in the upper corner. South Cove seems to be getting worse for nesting gulls - they were everywhere on my last visit and we ended up bouldering in the quarry behind the main cliffs! You have been warned!

Clashrodney North

This crag is a crumbling heap of choss apart from one route: Wild Hearted Son (E3 5c) has a crux low down and then a pumpy thug¹ through a roof on flakes to jugs² over the lip. The other routes aren't worth the effort.

1 pumpy thug = strenuous climb

2 jugs = large handholds

Clashrodney

Another large headland just to the south of the inlet that bears the same name. The best of the routes on the most northern buttress is Birthday Treat (HVS 5a). There are good looking routes on the slab to the south, but I've not tried any of them, so you're on your own regarding quality! On the Central Buttress, Stone Roses (E2 5b) is downright dangerous with poor rock and no reliable gear until beyond the crux at 7m (with a bad landing). Chisel Chimney (VDiff) is much more fun, with some wild moves for the grade. At Cairnrobin Point, Johnny's Dangler (E1 5b) is a short and steep wee boulder problem, with big holds most of the way! In June 1998, on a Tuesday climbing meet, 6 members of the Club added a new route to Cairnrobin Point - The Cairngorm Club's Other Crack (HVS 5b) takes an overhanging wall to a ledge, moves up to a large roof and pulls through to gain a fine flake crack.

Peel Slough

This area was developed after the guide was published. There are many short easy routes on the east wall, while the very steep north wall still has one or two unclimbed lines! As this is an area which has proved popular on the Club climbing evenings, I've included the full route descriptions for all the routes recorded. Some of the routes have had few repeats, so treat the grades as suggestions rather than definitive.

These crags lie to the south of Portlethen Shore, on the southerly wall of a long inlet called Peel Slough on the O.S. 1:10000 map, with a cave on its south wall. Take the first turning off the A90 signposted Portlethen (just after an Esso garage). Access is from the road linking Portlethen to Portlethen village. Parking is on the verge by the Mains of Portlethen farm. Walk down the track at the right angled bend by the farm until a small path leads south round the clifftop. Follow this until it leads down a small boggy slope into a hollow (10-15 minutes from road). Alternatively, follow the road all the way to its end in Portlethen village and take the coastal path north to reach the hollow (5-10 minutes from road). All the routes can be reached from here.

Main Walls

These lie directly out to sea from the hollow. There are two walls at 90 degrees to one another, facing east and north. The east wall is 5 - 7 metres high and comprises a slabby face with an obvious Y-shaped crack in the middle, and a large orange niche at the left end. A wet recess separates this face from the north wall, which is much cleaner, 8 - 10 metres high and overhangs viciously in its central section. It is less steep at either end, and a deep chimney-groove splits the right end. The cliff is partly tidal. Easiest descent is by a simple scramble at the north end of the East Wall.

East Wall

Climbs are described right - left

1. Wall Street Diff 5m.
Slabby face at right end of wall.
2. Ledge Route Diff 5m.
Stepped ramp and wall above. Useful in descent.
3. Face Up VS 4c 5m. **
Smooth cracked face between Ledge Route and Broken Promise without using holds in either, finishing at a sloping ledge. Eliminate³ but good climbing. Poorly protected, with the crux at the top.
4. Broken Promise V Diff 7m. *
Climbs the Y-shaped crack by the right fork with an awkward move at half height. Nice finish on big jugs. Left fork is Diff, stepping up and left just below the crux of the right fork.
5. Niche To Be Here V Diff 6m.
Start up ledges to right of niche, step back left to first foothold above niche and climb the left slanting crack.
6. True Faith HVS 5a 6m. *
Climbs the left edge of the niche. Surmount two bulges just left of the rib and follow the edge directly to finish on platy⁴ rock. It is easier (4c), but not as good and with poor protection, to swing left onto the rib from the ledge below the niche.

The short, thin crack left of True Faith, starting from the base of the wet recess, is unclimbed at present. It is steep, looks poorly protected and the rock is suspect in the upper section.

North Wall

Climbs are described right - left

7. Cold Fire HS 4b 4m.
Undercut crack with awkward start
Slab to left is a handy descent route (Moderate).
8. Snakedance V Diff 8m.
Chimney-groove with overhang at 1/3 height.
9. Talk With Your Hands S 4b 10m.
Climbs the undercut rib directly, with the crux over the initial bulge. Escapable above, but pleasant climbing if the crest is adhered to. Cleaned by abseil and rope soloed prior to first ascent.
10. Wages of Sin Mild Severe 10m. **
Hanging corner started from directly below. Corner climbed on right wall.

3 eliminate = a type of climb where you consciously avoid closely neighbouring and usually easier climbs

4 platy = like a stack of dinner plates

11. So Be It HVS 5b 8m
Gain the obvious ledge using an overhanging flake crack and climb the shallow hanging corner above using a small hold on the slab to the right to reach a jug at the top of the corner. The corner direct is 5c but artificial. Strenuous, but escapable onto Wages of Sin at the ledge.
12. Talk Hard E3 5c/6a 8m ***
A good climb taking the right hand of the parallel overhanging cracks, with strenuous reaches between edges and slots. Protection is excellent but tiring to place. Care is needed with one or two holds. Cleaned and inspected by abseil and top-roped twice prior to first ascent.
The left hand of the two parallel cracks, about 2 metres left of Talk Hard looks possible but thin and bold.
13. Keep the Faith E3 6a 10m. *
The rising left - right flake crack left again, on the less overhanging section of wall. It is bold and strenuous with a fingery crux. Further cleaning required.
14. Phreeqey HVS/E1 5a 10m
Follow the overhanging corner of Laybacking on a Sunday Afternoon until a large, thin flake leads right under the final overhang. Hand traverse this to an awkward exit over the top bulge. An exciting route.
15. Laybacking on a Sunday Afternoon Very Difficult 6m.
Overhanging corner at left end of wall. Finish up jugs on the left.
16. Far Out Moderate 6m.
A scrappy and worthless route taking the easy wall left of Laybacking on a Sunday Afternoon.
A good low level traverse goes right - left from Talk Hard to Laybacking on a Sunday Afternoon (5b)

The Cave Slab

This is the partially cleaned slab just east of the cave on the south wall of the inlet. Easiest descent is by abseil down the slab from the hollow, but the base of the slab can be reached at low tide by descending the grassy slope at the back of the inlet and scrambling round ledges, with an awkward greasy wall to be negotiated. There is a huge non-tidal platform at the base of the area, but a pile of greasy boulders must be crossed to reach the slab itself. This may be tricky at high tide, but abseil approach should always be possible except in very rough seas. There is scope for several more routes in this area, but further cleaning is required.

17. Sutika Severe 10m. *
Pull over a bulge to gain ledges at the base of the slab, and climb the obvious crack and the wall above on unusual holds.

A traverse has been made between the main walls and the cave slab area at V Diff.

Floor's Craig

Floor's Craig is well worth the effort of finding, but with some strange grading - Slug Arête must be the easiest VS 4c around, while Blockbuster (HVS 5b) felt more like E1 5c! Sprunt's Route (E2 5c) is pumpy but with a good rest ledge at 2/3 height. The Pugilist (E4 6a) and Manassa Mauler (E4 6a) look to be magnificent, and The Prizefighter (E5 6b), a direct through Manassa Mauler done in October 1995 looks damn hard! Jap's Eye Chimney (S) is available for those of masochistic tendencies!

Craig Stirling

This is another impressive crag split into two buttresses by a central recess. Grand Diedre⁵ (HVS 5a) on the east buttress is the line of the crag, and the routes on its barrel-shaped right wall look equally good. On the west buttress, Lean Meat (E3 5c), an old Pat Littlejohn route, takes an overhanging 10m flake crack and is excruciatingly strenuous. Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea (E4 6a) is reported to be a great route, and possibly quite hard for the grade.

Rotter's Rock

This is a buttress just south of Craig Stirling. The rock isn't so good, but it's not affected by the tide and therefore provides a nearby alternative when high tide, rough seas or humid conditions rule out Craig Stirling. Nautilus (E1 5b) is another pumpy number with the crux right at the top.

Harbour Walls

These are similar to but more extensive than Rotter's Rock in the type and quality of its climbs. This crag has the attraction of being one of the few venues on the coast to catch the evening sun. Tigger (E1 5b) and Cheetah (HVS 5a) are both worth doing, but I reckon the grades should be the other way round! Acapulco (E1 5b) on the back wall is also reputed to be good.

Dyke's Cliff

This is a small steep venue with good bouldering along its base. None of the routes are particularly good or memorable, but they're not too bad either! Bad Medicine Waltz (E2 5b) is one of the better ones.

Boltsheugh

Boltsheugh is the somewhat controversial site of Aberdeen's nearest sport climbing crag. Again, these routes were done after the guide was published and details are not too freely available (George Ridge's Scottish Sport Climbs 1996 guide contains the only known (to me) descriptions). Suffice to say

⁵ diedre = an open book corner

that the place is small, very steep and some of the bolts are rusting already! But then again, the routes are fun! The longest route, Traverse of the Cods (F7a) uses bolts on three other routes plus one of its own to make a very steep outing. An enjoyable boulder problem route, Little Creatures (F7a) is short, steep and hard. Also, Boltsheugh has some great bouldering with reasonable landings including a very hard traverse.

There are more cliffs and routes south of Newtonhill, but I've never visited them and so you're best off consulting the guidebook.

NORTH OF ABERDEEN

Smuggler's Cliff

This is a bit of an interesting place to visit. The usual descent is by abseil. From limited experience, the place appears to be undergraded - Animal Magnetism (E5 6b) has a very hard move protected by a peg and tape of first ascent vintage, while Castaway (E2 5b) is undergraded and not worth the two stars given in the guide. Smuggler's Waltz (VS 4b) is a recent addition which traverses the obvious break to finish above the cave. It is said to be excellent.

The Graip

This is a friendly crag above a pebble and boulder beach. There are several corners, all of which are worthwhile. Slain's Corner (E2 5c) is particularly good. There are a couple of hard severes side by side at the seaward which are badly graded. Graips of Wrath is nearer VS 4c and Bunches of Fives is nearer VDiff! Belays at the top are a bit awkward at the landward end of the crag, and descent is by a tedious walk round the top of the bay.

Fulmar Wall

The best thing about this crag is that it is hardly affected by the tides and is sheltered to a degree from easterly winds. The Excited Atom (E1 5b) is a bold wee route up the undercut slab, and the adjacent Particle Accelerator (E2 5b) is harder and bolder! Down at the north end, The Weight (HS) is brilliant. The only down side to this place is the tricky and exposed descent.

Meikle Partans

Just north of Fulmar Wall, this is one of my favourite crags, with almost every route worth doing! The rock is perfect and set well above the sea. Worthy of individual mention are The Bridge (MVS 4b), The Band of Hope (HVS 5a and not as bold or strenuous as the guide would have you believe!) and Strawclutcher's Wall (E1 5b) just to its left. The worst routes are probably Little Sassenach (E1 5b) which is just not as good as the others, and Boardman's Crack (E2 5b), a route on which I personally know at least two people who have broken bones. Dangerous, but having finally got round to

doing it myself last year, it wasn't as bad as I was expecting! A couple of friends and I managed to squeeze in a new route between Dungo (HS) and Slanting Crack (Mod): Comedy of Errors (E2 5c) takes a central line up the smooth shield-shaped wall. The route gains independence with height and the crux is right at the top.

Harper's Wall

Tidal and undercut, this is not the place to come if you've no gymnastic tendencies! 1,2,3,Go (HVS 5a) is deservedly infamous, with a jump start for the vertically challenged. To its left, Silent Partner (E2 5b) has a very strenuous start. In contrast, Renegade (VS 4c) has a bold and delicate start traversing in above the bulge before a fine finish up a steep crack.

Greymare Slabs

These are an attractive sweep of slabs dropping straight into the sea. The main slab can be climbed by several lines from Diff to HS. The steep wall to the south of the big diedre (Groovin' High, S) has three hard lines. The Truth Hurts (E5 6b) is reputed to be Graeme Livingstone's best route on the coast.

Longhaven Quarry

There are loads of crags between Greymare and Longhaven Quarry, but I've not visited them and so I'm in no position to comment on their routes. The layout of the quarry is complex, and gives the place a very gothic feel. There are routes facing almost all directions, varying from slabs to overhanging walls, short boulder problems to multi-pitch adventure routes. Munch Buttress is very prominent and impressive, with the American Route (E2 5c) being the most obvious line. Down in the main quarry, on Lochan Buttress, Levitator (E3 6b) is an extended boulder problem with what looks to be reasonable gear. Some think it's closer to E4, however. There is a lot more climbing here than what's mentioned, but since I've not had the chance for a closer inspection, I'll leave it there.

The Round Tower

The Round Tower is a remarkable place with rock architecture reminiscent of an Easter Island statue. I've done nothing but have been for a look! Stoneface (E4 6a) is the most inspiring line up the left eye of the face. Facegod (E5 6a) starts up Stoneface before a hand traverse onto the nose leads to the bold upper wall. Several other routes thread the various features and all are hard. The south east arête of the tower, Ramadan (E1 5b) is supposed to be good if you can get it with no birds on!

Meackie Point

The Point Wall is another wall of perfect granite. There are several worthwhile

lines here, all quite hard without being desperate. The Killing Moon (E1 5b) and Legend (E2 5c) are two lines as good as any here. Impending Doom (E2 5c), apparently the last new route by the first ascensionist prior to his wedding(!), has a bold Direct Start (E3 5c). The lower half of the crag is very steep.

Hidden Inlet

Yet more granite in a very secluded setting. Finding the correct descent line is almost as hard as some of the routes here! A Secret Affair (HVS 5a) is a very fine corner line, quite tricky if taken totally direct. Lonely (E1 5a) takes it's left arête and offers fine, bold but escapable climbing. Not So Lonely (E2 5c), left again, is poorer, with bad gear and an artificial line. Pirelli Wellies (Severe) is a nice route up cracks at the extreme left end of the wall. There is an un-named E1 5c wall at the right hand end which gives delicate, bold climbing on small edges with no gear at all!

Herring Cove

Hidden Treasure (E2 5c) is a totally stunning route, while Bloodhunt (E4 6b) looks almost as good. Dwarf Stone (E2 6a) has good climbing, with a reachy crux, but is escapable at half height, and Captain Pugwash (E3 6a) is an excellent, sustained route packing in a wide variety of climbing styles into its 20 metres length. Round the arête from the main face, Herring Chimney (HVS or VS) is a lot better than the guide would have you believe.

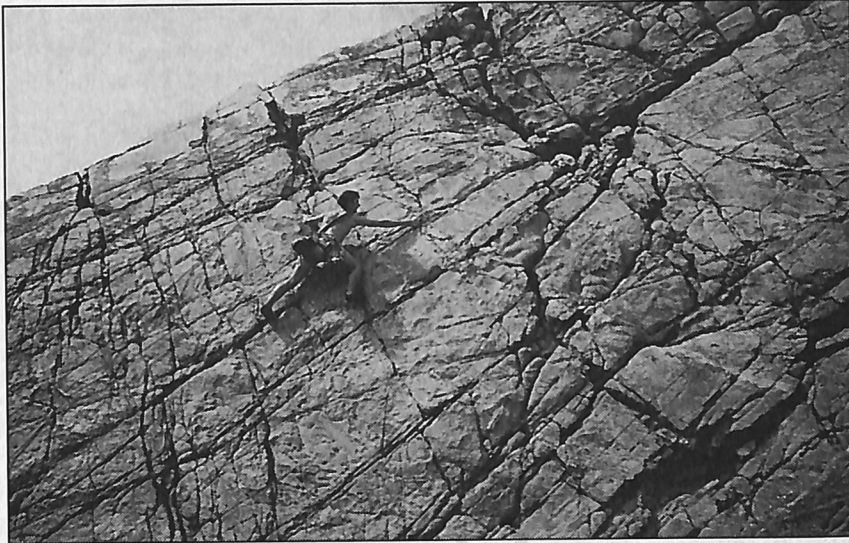
Robbie Gow's Prison

The rock here generally isn't up to the same standard as the previous two locations. Escape Route (HVS 5a) takes a good line up the left side, and the route immediately left, The Jester (HVS 5a) has a good lower half, but a very poor finish.

THE NORTH COAST

Logie Head

Logie Head is perhaps my favourite crag in the whole north east. It consists of several walls of sandstone-like rock, generally just off vertical and seamed with numerous cracks. It is a ridge running out to sea, and most of the routes can be done at high tide. On the first embankment, Cullenary Delight (VS 5a), Poacher (MVS 4b) and Sunnyside Direct (E1 5c) are particularly good. At the seaward end above a tidal platform is the Star Zone. Here, Western Star (E2 5c) involves nice delicate climbing in its upper half though it is a bit eliminate. Fallen Star (VS 4c), to its right is a great route and all the other routes are worth doing. Dark Star (E1 5b) takes a line up the north wall of the ridge and is uncharacteristically steep and pumpy. However, by far the best route at Logie Head is Sea Anemone (E1 5b) at the base of the descent gully to the Star Zone. This is one of my favourite routes of all time!



Joe Omond on 'The Central Belt' Grade E1 5b Logie Head

Cummingston

Near Elgin, this is a sandstone crag with sandy holds and brittle rock. However, many of the routes are not too badly affected and the bouldering is excellent. There are loads of sea stacks and caves to explore too. The orange wall, at the east end has a near perfect landing above a 6-8m gently overhanging wall - great for bouldering. The Diedre of Doubt (HVS 5a) is typical of many of the routes here - a very strenuous start over the undercut cliff base followed by big holds and poor gear to the top. Another great venue!

INLAND

Clachnaben

This is a granite hilltop tor, with loads of jam cracks here, if that's your thing. The walls between the cracks give nice climbs as well. Python Cracks (Diff) is a pleasant route, and Bogendreip Buttress (VS 5a) looks well worthwhile. I hate jam cracks so I'm not going to recommend them to anyone!

The Pass of Ballater

The Pass comprises several granite outcrops on Deeside, and is a very popular crag: the bad erosion at the base of the cliff gives testament to this. On the western sector, Razor's Crack (VS 4c) is short and fun, and Medium Cool (VS 4c) gives a bit of a head trip up the bold slab. However, it doesn't look to be quite as bad (bold) as Silent Spring (E1 5a). On the tier above, Little

Cenotaph (HVS 5b) gives a painful bridging problem for those with wee legs. Pink Wall (VS 5a) is excellent also. Harder routes with good reputations are Peel's Wall (E4 6a) and Smith's Arête (E5 6a). The Wiry Masters (HVS 4c/E1 5a) is a pleasant route up the wee slab below and left of the main Medium Cool slab. On the central sector, Giant Flake Route (MVS 4b) is one of the easiest routes on the sector and is good after a tricky start. Hangover Wall (E2 5c) takes a good line with some loose flakes and a well protected crux. Anger and Lust (E2 5c) and Bluter Groove (E3 6b) are the two most striking lines on the sector. The eastern sector contains short bouldery routes with hideous landings. Rock 'n' Roll (HVS 5a) is one of the easiest and best.

Cambus O' May

These are disused quarries which have been turned into a sports climbing venue with many manufactured routes! Again, these are post-guide and more information can be had from George Ridge's Scottish Sports Climbs booklet. The traditional routes in the guide have largely been retro-bolted e.g. Idiot Savant has gone from E6 6b to F7b+ and Roses from HVS 5a to F5+. There are a couple of short nasties to the left of Roses: Wimpy Construction and Bonsai Pipeline, both given F6a+, are desperate one move wonders.

Glen Clova

The Red Craig is a south east facing hillside crag with loads of great routes. Proud Corner (VS 4c), Wander (HVS 5a), Wandered (HVS 5a) and Cauldron Crack (HVS 5a) are the best routes on the Lower North West Crag. On the South East Crag, Central Crack (HS) is simply brilliant. I've not climbed as much on the other crags. However, Alder (MVS 4b) on the Upper North West Crag is excellent although the first pitch felt more like 5a then 4b! The Red Wall (E1 5b) and Zig Zag Direct (HVS 5b) are also said to be stunning. On the Upper Doonie, Vindaloo (E1 5b) is a very sustained line with the crux low down and a pumpy finish. It's a full 45m pitch, so make sure you take plenty of quickdraws! Dancin' in the Ruins (E3 5c) is given three stars in the guide, but the second pitch was found by a friend to be dangerously loose. On the Lower Doonie, Guinness (E1 5b) is the classic, but the first pitch felt substantially harder than the given 5a grade would suggest.

Legaston Quarry

This is the original home of Scottish sport climbing. Some of the routes are a bit run out, with as few as 2 bolts in 15 metres! On the Ring Buttress, Flight of the Mad Magician (F6b) is a classic, and Driller Killer (F6c) has a desperate move for anyone of average height or less. You also have to climb about 5 metres up a British 5c wall to reach the first bolt! On the Main Wall, Hunt the Rathag (F6b+) and Death is the Hunter (F6b+) take adjacent lines up the best bit of rock. Rotten Wall is better than is sounds, with First to Fall

(F6b) and Hell's Bells (F6b) both worthwhile. Round the corner on Forbidden Buttress are the two lines of the quarry: No Remorse (F6c) and Spandex Ballet (F7a+). Just do them! Babylon Buttress also has some good routes. There is some fun bouldering to be had at the base of Ring Buttress.

Balmashanner Quarry

This quarry is a steep hole in the ground with Scotland's hardest route (if grades are taken as accurate!). It takes a long time to dry out, but when it's dry, it's so steep that rain has little affect! The two classics are Hell Bent for Lycra (F7a) and Savage Amusement (F7b). Le Bon Vacance (F7a) is also fun, and The Comfort Machine (F7a) gives a good pump! Rat Attack (F6c+) has a nasty start and an easier upper section. The Niche (F8a+) has a hideous move low down before you reach the niche itself. Oh, the desperate route is Merchant of Menace (F8b+). Projects completed recently include Made to Suffer (F7c) to the left of Savage Amusement, and an F8a to the left of Hell Bent.

Ley Quarry

This is a fairly pleasant place for a quarry! The wee wall beside the car park (you can belay from the car if you want!) has few nice wee routes that aren't in the guide, but the best is still Magic Pockets (F6b+). April's Arête is the rightmost line and is given F3+, but I doubt it's that hard! Down by the pool (don't fall in!), the routes are all quite enjoyable. Footfall (F6a) is a good warm up, and Five Magics (F6c+) is sustained with a very reachy move at the crux. More routes have been added here than are in the guide.

And that's it. I hope that some of the descriptions here have provided a little inspiration for some readers. See you on the coast!



A LOCHNAGAR CLIMB

RAY CRAIG

I had climbed Lochnagar by various routes and the time had come to see the hill from a different perspective. An interest in microlight flying had consumed some of my past enthusiasm for the hills, but certainly not extinguished it. On a calm, sunny summer day - a rare combination of late, I rigged up my microlight and took off from the picturesque grass strip in Premnay heading for Lochnagar. With a patient and stoical passenger to take photographs, we climbed steadily over the Alford area and the relatively friendly green pasture below us for the more forbidding approaches to the foothills beyond Aboyne. At 1500 metres with a bird's eye view of a dull Morven flattened out in it's new perspective, all was calm around us. It is one of the enlightening experiences of life to discover that, contrary to the expectations of a hillwalker or anyone else travelling on foot, the air around us, especially on a fine clear day with pretty white cumulus clouds is constantly on the move, sometimes disturbingly so.

As we passed by Morvich heading for the entrance to Glen Muick the fields started to disappear disconcertingly. One of the dubious pleasures of microlighting using a two-stroke engine is that you fly as if you were back in the 1920's and 30's, carefully ensuring that there is a large field within gliding distance! One of the advantages, or is it a disadvantage of having walked round areas such as Lochnagar, is that you are well aware that the bowling



Lochnagar and its corrie with the Stuic and Loch nan Eun beyond

green texture of a field seen from 1200 metres or more is often an illusion, particularly if you have traipsed over that bowling green in some discomfort in the past. Passing over to the west of the car park at Loch Muick, the elastic delusion which persuades you that you can still glide to a safe landing place finally snaps, and you are aware that from now on the engine had better keep its sweet and constant note. The old story of the ancient aviator, who on being asked what the propeller was for, replied that it was to keep him cool, is quite apt. You certainly feel very warm when it stops.

On the approach to the corrie loch, Lochnagar shows a magnificent vista of grandeur, texture and colour, rich in light and shadow. Enjoyment of the view was instantly curtailed by the sudden sharp buffet of a rotor wind rolling over the top of Cac Carn Mor, causing already tense knuckles to clench harder on the control bar.

Seeing Lochnagar from 1500 metres or so does underscore the effect of countless walkers on the mountain skin. Erosion stands out very sharply. There are scores of people on the hill this glorious day. We do not linger in the area, conscious that any one person's pleasure can intrude into the enjoyment of others. We sweep like a bird totally exposed to the elements, exhilarating in the marvellous view and gradually descending, head back for Loch Kinord and the promise of a cup of hot coffee to thaw out exposed hands in an open cockpit and frozen feet on a hot July day. Why is it that so many pleasures can only be fully enjoyed with a sufficiency of discomfort - followed by a good dram?



BENIGHTED

JOHN E. M. DUFF

Transcript of a letter from Charles McHardy, Chief Constable of Dunbartonshire, in 1912. His father William was Head Keeper on Mar Lodge Estate.

Millglen, Helensburgh,
Dunbartonshire.
15th. December, 1912.

Revd. Dear Mr Lundie,

As promised, I now send you an account of my experience on the Cairnwall, in a winter night in 1867. In the beginning of that year, I received a telegram from Braemar, that my Father was seriously ill and that he wanted to see me. I accordingly made arrangements and proceeded north the following morning by first train from Glasgow, arriving at Blairgowrie about ten o'clock. There was a good fall of snow on the ground, but a thaw had set in with heavy rain, so I made up my mind to call on Factor Cumming, my old master who resided at Rattray, Blairgowrie, with a view to getting his pony to ride on to the Spittal, but on calling at his house I was informed that he had died and was buried on the previous day.

This was indeed sad news for me. I then started to walk to the Spittal, but before going very far was drenched to the skin. Every 50 yards or so, there were wreaths of snow upon the road, knee deep, and being soft made walking very difficult. I arrived at the Spittal about 4pm, and the weather had then changed from rain and sleet into dry snow and frost. After getting something to eat at the hotel, I started for the Ruidorrach, intending to stay there over night with the keeper, (who I understood was a son of the late Harry Michie, of Glengairn, whom I knew well), if he thought I would be unable to cross the hill.

Before reaching Ruidorrach the snow storm had increased to, what the Braemar people would have called, a 'Hurricane of Blind Drift'. On my arrival there I rapped at the door and a man, whom I did not know, appeared, partly opening the door. I asked if Mr Michie lived there. He replied no. I then endeavoured to explain to him that I was on my way to Braemar, and seeing the storm had set in so severe I was in hopes of obtaining shelter for the night. The answer I got impressed me with the idea that this man and Michie were not on friendly terms, and that I was looked on as a spy. I asked if he thought I could cross the hill. He replied yes, and closed the door. You can easily understand my feelings under such circumstances, and how kindly I would have been welcomed had your father and mother been still there. I would have felt quite pleased if the keeper had even offered to show me over

the hill. I had to consider whether I should return to the hotel for the night, or attempt the hill.

My clothes, which had been soaking wet, were now hard and frozen over with snow. I however felt quite warm and fit, and seeing that it was early in the night (5.30pm) I calculated, that if I got over the hill all right, that I would be at my Father's house, in Mar Forest, by 10pm. I also thought that if I went back to the Hotel, and the storm continued that I might not be able to cross the hill for some time, so I made up my mind if the hill could be crossed, that I would make the attempt, and started off, finding my way by pressing my walking stick down in the snow until I felt the iron on the end of my stick touch the road metal, but on making my way up the shoulder of the hill till about the elbow, I could not make out the road after that, as the snow became so deep and the drift so severe that I could not make headway with any degree of certainty, and dreading getting into the glen, as I was not sure if the road was above or below where I was.

I did endeavour to make my way back to Ruidorrach, but failed, and for a time could not make out south, north, east or west. I then endeavoured to clear away the snow in different parts as best I could, to discover the lie of the ground, and so far, discovered my position. I saw I had no alternative but remain where I was for the night, which I did until 5am next morning. I knew from the state I was in, that if I allowed myself to cool down, that I would perish. I then started to dance, and continued dancing the whole night. About midnight I became very sleepy and hungry, and was sorry I had not a piece of bread in my pocket. I remember, so well, of my tumbling down in the snow, then fast asleep, and the sudden fall in the dry snow almost suffocated me, which caused me to waken up, and I continued my exercise as best I could. While so engaged I prayed earnestly to God to protect me, and I seemed to have a keen presentiment that I would be able to pull through.

About 4am I felt my feet beginning to get numb and very heavy. Just then, the snow storm ceased, and the sky became clear, which enabled me to survey my position and ground, with some degree of confidence. I felt satisfied that I was considerably above the road, and as dawn set in (about 5am) I discovered an object which attracted my attention, from the strange appearance it had in the snow, and I made my way down to this object, which turned out to be the wooden fence on the side of the road at the top of the Cairnwall. I knew then exactly where I was (and the locus, thus described, will be quite familiar to yourself). I made tracks as quick as I could down the other side and on reaching the Shinvel Bridge I felt quite fresh again, and vigorous, and I ran (trotted) all the way from there, in the snow, to my friends house at Croftmicken, Braemar, where George McHardy then stayed; arriving there before they were out of bed.

On my rapping at Croftmicken door, and calling out, "Eirich agus leig a teach me", (rise and let me in) I fancy still I hear Mrs McHardy's voice saying "that's Tearlach Bhuie at the door", and her husband saying "No, no,

it cannot be him". I replied "Yes, it is Tearlach Bhuie, please let me in". The old man immediately opened the door for me, and his wife having procured a light, I walked in, and seeing the state I was in with frozen ice and snow, they were very much affected, and gave me a little spirits, and endeavoured to take the ice from off the hair of my head, whiskers, and eyebrows etc., but after having entered the warm room, my eyelids etc. etc. became so inflamed, and so painful to me, that I could not suffer them to touch, even the ice that was attached to them, so with difficulty I got off my clothes and got into bed and covered myself up (ice and all) with blankets and immediately fell fast asleep.

I wakened up about 11am and felt quite fresh, and was very thankful indeed to find that I was none the worse of the severe trial I had undergone, and so were my friends at Croftmicken. After getting breakfast, I proceeded on to my father's (west of Mar Lodge), and my visit there in such a storm was an agreeable surprise for my parents. After a time I told my father and mother how I had been storm-stayed over the night on the Cairnwall, and mentioned how disappointed I was at the manner in which the keeper at Ruidorrach had received me, and after relating the whole circumstances, my father told me that he had heard that there had been a quarrel between there, and that Michie had been removed, and he advised me (seeing I was none the worse of what had occurred) to say nothing about the matter, as from what I had said, it appeared to him that the keeper had possibly a 'deer' in the house when I called, and that he would be suspicious of me, when I mentioned Michie's name, as the quarrel between these keepers was over the killing of deer. I quite agreed with my father's opinion, and took no more notice of the matter.

When the snow cleared away, I returned south again by the Cairnwall, but did not feel inclined to call at Ruidorrach, not that I had any unkind feelings against the keeper, but as I had resolved to take no more notice of the occurrence I thought it would be better for me not to call.

Now that I am getting up in years, many times do I think of my experience on the Cairnwall that night, and although I feel strong and healthy, I am sure I could not undergo one tenth part of what I suffered then, without fatal results.

I must now conclude with kind regards, and I hope if you have occasion to come this way you will give me a call, you may rely on being made heartily welcome.

Yours sincerely,

(sgd) Chas. McHardy

The McHardy family of Braemar originated in Daldownie, Glengairn, and included many heavyweight athletes of outstanding prowess. Charles's father, William, who was head keeper on Mar, was described as 'a great man for

heavy lifts', and once, in some sort of elephantine joke, threw the lifting stone at Inver (2681b) into the carrier's cart. William's brother John won so many prizes at early Braemar Gatherings that rules had to be devised to prevent the same person winning first prizes year after year. Charles himself, as a youth of 18 years, beat Donald Dinnie, aged 25, into second place at the caber at Braemar, and was an outstanding 'heavy' for many years. This branch of the family was known as the 'Buie' McHardys because at one time they lived in the Ballochbuie: hence 'Tearlach Buie'.

William's family, however, nine in number, have another claim to fame, being unique in Scottish police history. Alexander became Chief Constable of Inverness-shire, and Charles, the writer of the letter, was Chief Constable of Dunbartonshire. Between them, they completed 104 years Police service, with 75 as Chief Constable. A third brother, William, became an Inspector in the Aberdeenshire force, while a fourth, Peter, went in a different direction and became an Officer of Customs and Excise.

The steading at Croftmicken, George McHardy's farm, is now the Braemar Golf Clubhouse, while the old house at Ruidorrach in Gleann Beag was recently demolished to make way for a modern home. William McHardy died in June of 1867, so the occasion of the snowstorm was probably the last time that Charles saw his father. Charles's great grandson, Bruce McHardy, visited Braemar recently from his home in Ontario, and it was from him that I acquired the above copy letter along with other documents, including an eye-witness account by William of a deer drive in Mar Forest in 1850.

John Duff continues:

I am not suggesting that Highland Dancing is a potent survival tool for the benighted climber, but I do think Charles McHardy's experience highlights some relevant points. Firstly, he was an extremely powerful young man of 23 years, in peak of physical condition, otherwise he would never had the stamina to expend the amount of energy that he did over an extended period. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, he never allowed himself to lose control of the situation in that as soon as he realised he had lost his bearings, he stopped, assessed the position and took a rational decision: he never allowed himself to become hopelessly lost. Thirdly and crucially, he never panicked, even when he thought he might well perish.

THE HAZARDS OF HILL WALKING

BRIAN DAVEY

The hazards of hill walking are not all topographical or meteorological as anyone who has been pursued by an amorous or aggressive stag during the rutting season can testify. One of the greatest hazards of hill walking is not recognising the fact that we are engaged in a potentially lethal sport. Acting sensibly with regard to the weather can greatly reduce any risks taken. Weather related hazards include low level cloud, resulting in poor visibility, mist and fog, strong to hurricane force winds, low temperatures coupled to wind strength producing deadly wind chill and hypothermia, heavy rain causing swollen bogs, burns and inland lochs, not to mention sodden overwear and underwear, heavy snow together with strong winds resulting in blizzards, white-outs, deep drifts and avalanches. Even excess exposure to sunshine runs us the risk of sunburn and skin cancer. At high altitudes, burn times are shorter due to the thinner and clearer air. This means more of the harmful ultra violet rays striking our delicate skin, especially if we are foolish enough to expose it when the rays can be reflected from a snow cover. Even high temperatures can be a problem leading to dehydration.

Another hazard some would argue is just as unlikely as sunstroke in Scotland is thunder. Although thunderstorms are fairly rare in this country, they do represent a definite hazard to the hill walker and most people will encounter them at some time in their hill walking career. This article hopes to illustrate weather patterns and signs leading to their development and ways of minimising this threat to our comfort and well-being, or to put it more realistically to life and limb.

What is the first thing you do when caught out in the hills in a thunderstorm? Well if you believe in God you quickly make your peace in a good Act of Contrition for all your past sins. If not you get out your lucky rabbit's foot and give it a good rub. Unlike lightning, thunder is not much of a hazard. It is the noise made by the rapid expansion of air when a giant electric spark carrying up to 250,000 amps at potential differences of up to several million volts heats the air in a millisecond or less to over 30,000 degrees Celsius. That is five times warmer than the surface temperature of the sun which is only around a mere 6000 degrees Celsius. The sound of thunder is not usually a problem except to your eardrums and nerves, though the resultant shock waves have been known to throw nearby people in the air and strip them of their clothes. So that's one good reason to avoid thunderstorms unless you want to become an involuntary nudist or naturist when out in the hills. If the thunderstorm is not directly overhead and you are not struck by lightning, the thunder clap might be your first warning of the impending storm. Since sound travels much slower than light, the time difference tells us the distance the storm is from our present location. A time

lapse of three seconds represents a distance of one kilometre, or for the older generation, myself included, five seconds represents one mile. Lightning at night can be seen from 80 kilometres away but thunder, depending on atmospheric conditions and topography can be heard only up to about 19 kilometres.

For those technically minded people with a knowledge of the current upper level wind profile, radar studies have shown that thunderstorms travel at about 20 degrees to the right of the mid tropospheric wind. They are usually complex in structure, consisting of several cells one to five miles in width. As old cells decay on the left flank, new ones grow on the right side. They will often last for less than half an hour, but with new cells developing, a storm can last for several hours over any one place. Sods Law For Hillwalkers will dictate that this one place is likely to be where you are climbing in the mountains that afternoon as they are usually associated with rising parcels of excessively heated air. This is not always true. Sometimes thunderstorms occur embedded along or ahead of a slow moving cold front (See Chart 1).

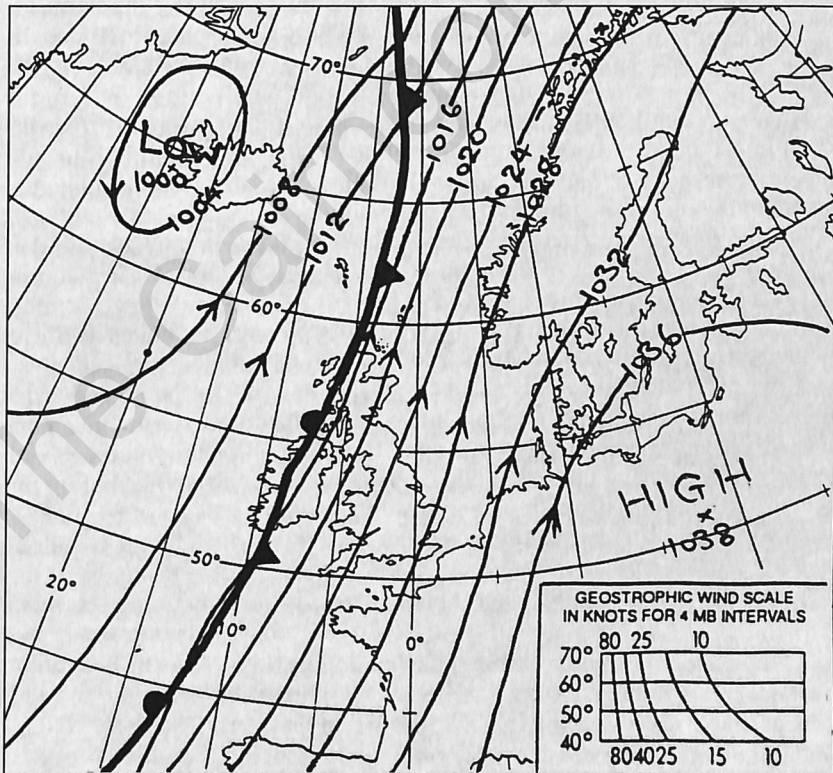


Chart 1 A slow moving summer cold front producing outbreaks of thundery rain along and ahead of the front

They can also be triggered by convergence of wind flow caused by topography or by the collision of cold down draughts from adjacent cells displacing warm moist air aloft. The resulting Cumulonimbus cloud will extend to heights greater than approximately 3,300m over Scotland in winter, to greater than say 6,000m in summer. So we can immediately forget any scatter-brained idea of climbing above these clouds as we might do with low level Stratus and Stratocumulus cloud that we might encounter, trapped below a temperature inversion in an anticyclone. Over tropical regions Cumulonimbus clouds have been measured with tops above 20,000m. You will need more than your own executive jet to get above that height. If you're not of the opinion that they are most impressive of clouds, you must agree that Cumulonimbus are certainly the most awesome.

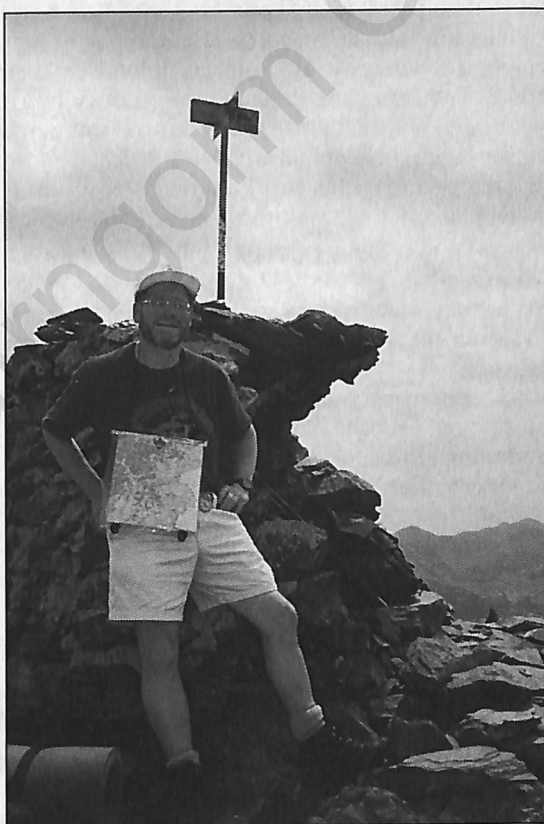
Getting back to earth, if you see a flash of lightning with a 9 second time gap before you hear the thunder, this means the storm is 3 kilometres (1.5 nautical miles) away. If the storm is travelling towards you on a 30 knot wind, (34.5 mph), this means that the storm will be overhead in (1.5 divided by 30) hours, i.e. 3 minutes. Not a lot of time to say another Act of Contrition or another rub of the lucky rabbit's foot. That lightning doesn't strike the same place twice is a fallacy. Just ask any occupant of the Eiffel Tower in Paris or the Empire State Building in New York. These buildings are struck on average between 20 and 30 times each year. Lightning tends to strike projecting buildings, hill top cairns or tall rocks. Hence these are not the best locations for shelter unless you are fitted with your own lightning conductor to safely take the massive electric charge to earth.

Even meteorologists have been caught out in the mountains in a thunderstorm. On a recent holiday in the Pyrenees I witnessed every surrounding summit cairn being struck in turn in a space of about 45 minutes. Standing on one of these peaks, Pic de Cataperdis at 2805 metres above mean sea level a short time before, I decided it was extremely wise to rapidly descend to a mountain hut I could see some 900m or so below. Relief at reaching this mountain refuge just as the first rain and hail was beginning to fall was quickly turned to dismay or even shock (pun) when I discovered to my horror that it was an iron structure with a damp wooden floor. I have read in various books that one of the safest places to be in a thunderstorm is seated in your car where you are insulated in what is effectively a metal box. However I wouldn't want to put this theory to the test especially if I was driving down the A96 at 60 mph. But the thought that this hut would make a good lightning conductor with the knowledge that lightning can pass through moisture in rock cracks, tree sap, floor boards etc., sometimes exploding in the process of almost instantaneous boiling, expansion and vaporisation of water soon dispelled any notion of staying. I very quickly decided it was more of a risk to remain rather than brave the elements of wind, rain and hail. After half an hour of pummelling from hailstones the size of garden peas I began to question the wisdom of my decision but now with hindsight it was probably the best thing

to do in the circumstances. The newspaper headline, WEATHERMAN FRIED IN STORM HE FAILED TO FORECAST may seem kind of funny to some people with a perverted sense of humour but it wouldn't do my reputation as a meteorologist any good or even help in the writing of my obituary. Not that I would be around to worry too much about it. I couldn't even claim I was doing research for an article in the Cairngorm Club Journal.

During my rapid descent from the metal hut I saw the nearby, (2 kilometres away), Pic de Coma Pedrosa, Andorra's highest peak at 2946m, being struck by a giant lightning bolt. On climbing this peak two days later I discovered that the concreted summit cairn had been partially blown apart, probably by this particular strike. (See Photograph below)

The cairn had been reported as intact by a Holiday Representative who had climbed this mountain only a few days before. It is extremely unlikely that the damage had been caused by other natural causes such as wind or by any juvenile delinquent for that matter. Anyhow these delinquents having climbed the peak would be too knackered to do much damage and they can always find easier targets be it in Andorra or Aberdeen. When I eventually arrived panting at Pla de l'Estany, the next mountain refuge, I was greatly relieved to find it constructed of stone. By this time the storm had almost finished. Dripping wet and still sore from the hail, I was



Brian Davey standing beside the shattered summit cairn of Pic de Coma Pedrosa

welcomed by a friendly group of Dutch students who I suppose had become bored climbing their local sand dune.

So having safely survived this episode, the best course of action I can recommend when on a ridge or summit in thundery weather is to descend if possible as quickly as you can to a less exposed place where the risk of a lightning strike is much smaller. Avoid elevated places, high rocks and isolated trees. If you are on open level ground and if it is not possible to descend both safely and quickly, the best advice is to crouch down, keeping your head as low as possible but don't lie down. The theory of this course of action is that large amounts of electrical charge concentrate at the surface in upward projecting objects near the point of a lightning strike. Therefore you must minimise the contact area you have with the ground by keeping your feet together with your hands on your knees and wait for the storm to pass at the same time trying to avoid brown pants. The warning signs to alert you of an imminent strike is your hair beginning to stand on end, skin beginning to tingle and you may also hear crackling noises. You may even glow with St Elmo's Fire. This is an electric corona discharge named after the patron saint of sailors, who in days of old were awe-stricken when this phenomenon was observed around the masts of their sailing ships. However, instead of a lightning stroke, this is a luminous, greenish or bluish halo of continuous sparks that appear around objects. This discharge is also sometimes seen around power lines, pylons and the wings of aircraft. Although usually quite harmless, when St Elmo's Fire is seen and a thunderstorm is nearby, a lightning strike may occur in the near future especially if the electric potential gradient is increasing. If this is the case make yourself scarce. Retreat immediately to a less exposed place. If you are lucky enough to escape and you see someone else being struck, immediately apply CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation) if they are unconscious and not breathing, since this is the state in which a lightning strike normally leaves its victim.

Apart from the immediate warning of an approaching or nearby storm by a thunder clap, one should take heed of recent local forecasts and be on the look out for signs of rapid build up of large anvil shaped cumulonimbus clouds which in Air Mass Thunderstorms will develop in unstable air of maritime origin away from any weather fronts. They will bubble up in the late morning or afternoon triggered by rising thermals over the warming land surface, assisted by dynamic uplift of the air mass as it moves over the mountains. Their life begins in the early morning as fair weather cumulus, resembling benevolent small balls of cotton wool. But that will all change with time. A typical sequence of cloud development associated with thunderstorms is shown in the sketch overleaf.

Other indicators are heavy rain or hail showers falling from thick dark cloud. The tell-tale fibrous anvil cloud top is not always visible due to the presence of other clouds.

Although it is difficult to illustrate every potentially thundery situation of the synoptic weather chart, discrete, scattered afternoon thunderstorms over Scotland often develop in an unstable Polar Maritime airstream. See Chart 2 overleaf.

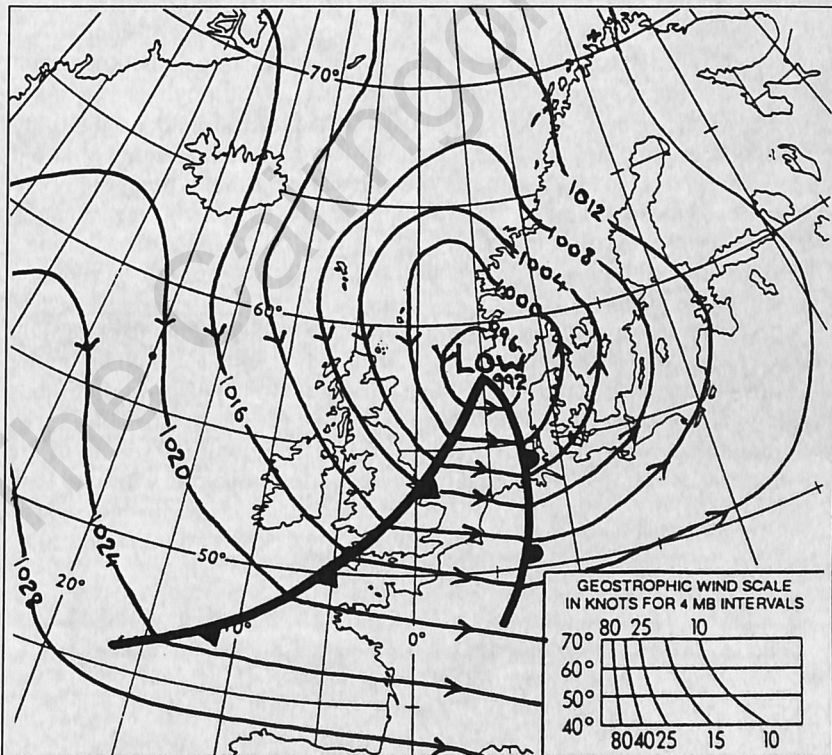
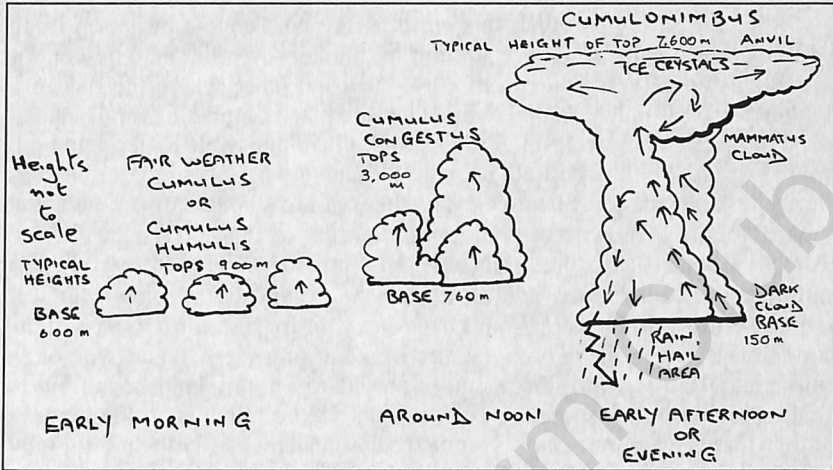
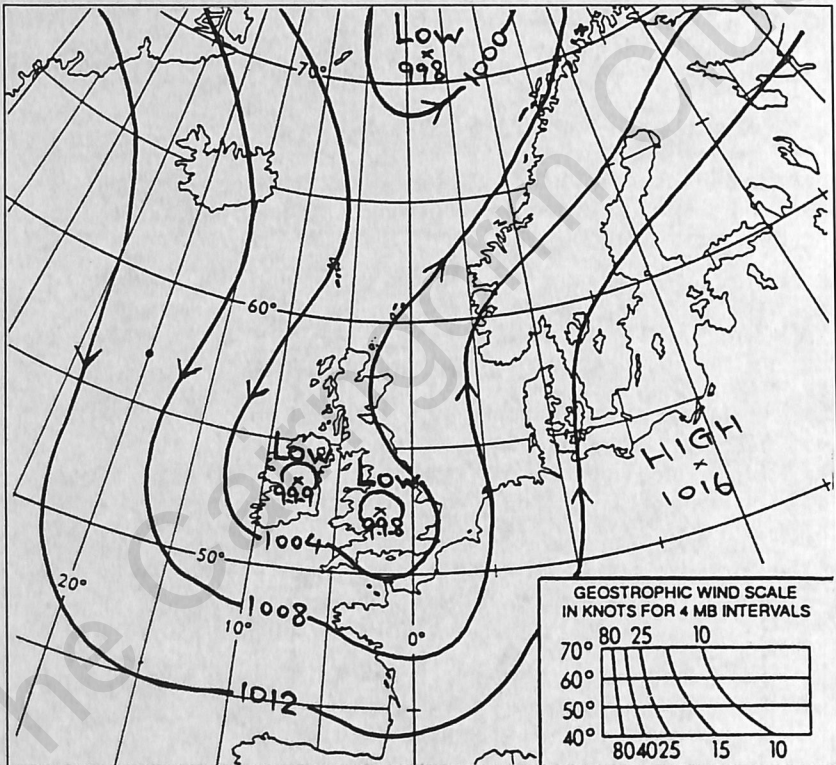


Chart 2 A deep low in the North Sea centred just to the south of Norway bringing a showery Polar Maritime airmass over Scotland

More widespread and prolonged thunderstorms with heavy rain and hail can sometimes come by day or night in summer when we have a slow moving cold front tracking into Scotland from the west to replace a very warm, moist South-south-westerly Tropical Maritime airmass. See Chart 1 again.

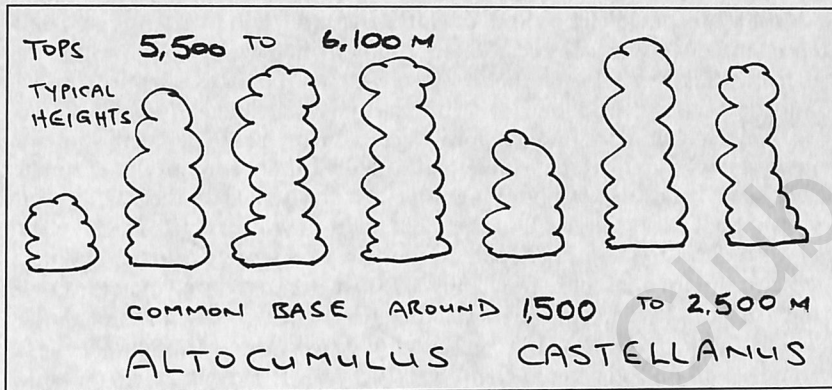
Another situation for thunderstorm development over Scotland in summer may be a slow moving area of low pressure drifting north-eastwards across Ireland and Britain. See Chart 3 below.



A slow moving area of low pressure in summer bringing widespread thundery rain from the south

In this case be on the look out for *Alto cumulus Castellanus* clouds. These are medium level towering cumulus clouds which as their Latin name suggests look like a row of castle turrets sprouting upwards from a common base typically between 1,500m and 2,500m. See the sketch overleaf.

If these clouds are observed to spread in and grow as the low pressure area approaches, (falling barometer), there is a good chance of thunder to come, be it by day or night. Hopefully for you it will be at night when you



are tucked up in bed with a good book or better still a good partner, secure under your warm, dry duvet and not in some cold, damp bothy in Scotland or metal hut refuge with a wet floor in the Pyrenees.

ON CLIMBING BEINN DUBHCHRAIG

A quiet pause amid the purple, scented heather,
 where curving interspersions of graceful bracken, feather
 highlighted richness green beneath unsullied skies,
 that spread their cloudless wrap above the eagle's cries.

And there I sat my tiredness by a pristine, crystal pool,
 a liquid mirror unequalled for clear and still reflections,
 and thus recalled the words that 'climbing's for a fool,'
 so said by those in chiding with dearth of hill connections.

But was this cold reality that I could then divine,
 for in that glassy water a face resembling mine
 looked up in brief appraisal then gave a youthful smile,
 and a voice spoke to my heart as I rested yet a while.

"I know you well, my friend, so heed not the voice of others,
 for you have learned perspective and wisdom from the hills.
 the ancient rock writ messages of Earth, old Mother of mothers,
 which brings its own deep peace far from the world's ills."

A ripple stirred the water, and face and waving frond
 were swiftly wind erased, and to Dubhchraig beyond
 I raised two grateful eyes for a hill I'd climb refreshed,
 unburdened by blind critics simplistically enmeshed.

George Philip

A LADIES' TOUR OF MONTE ROSA - 1997

LYDIA THOMSON

I was deep in the stacks of the University library, looking for reading to prolong the pleasure of a recent holiday with Eilidh Scobbie in Zermatt. There we had walked the high footpaths, and from beneath the Matterhorn and from the Gornergrat we had marvelled at the snowy ridge, which swept from the multiple summits of Monte Rosa to the Lyskamm, Castor and Pollux, and the Breithorn without falling below 4,000 metres, towering over the bowl of the valley and the long trails of the glaciers beneath. Now I found a pink and gilt volume published in 1859: "*A Lady's Tour Round Monte Rosa, with visits to the Italian Valleys in the Years 1850-56-58.*" I read with much pleasure the Lady's reminiscences of Zermatt, "*a miserable village*" now so different, and of the surrounding mountains so much the same. There followed tales of visits to the "*sweetest and most cultivated*" Italian valleys, where the "*majestic snow-capped mountains are set in a frame of the richest vegetation. The noble chestnut and walnut trees spread in the grandest mass of luxuriant foliage*" and "*the little Alpine plants and flowers abound more profusely than in Switzerland.*" The Lady wrote of long excursions, often on mule-back, of mountain passes and villages, of gold-bearing rocks, and spectacular views of the peaks of Monte Rosa, the highest point of which had just been conquered in 1855.

I reached the peroration: "*Gentle readers! Let me assure you that it requires neither very great strength nor a very dauntless spirit to make the Tour of Monte Rosa. I feel certain that any lady, blessed with moderate health and activity, who is capable of taking a little exercise "al fresco" and has a taste for the picturesque may accomplish the Tour with great delight and few inconveniences, and all who do so must bring back with them a store of delightful recollections for the solace of future years.*" And so an idea was born, to retrace the Lady's steps, to see the vistas she so delectably described, and to discover what had changed in 140 years. The idea then took a more concrete shape with the discovery of a more up-to-date Guide, the two volume "*Grand Tour of Monte Rosa*" by Chris Wright (Cicerone Press, 1995).

Thus it was that three years later Eilidh and I found ourselves once more in Zermatt, having spent a week toughening ourselves up at the Club Meet in Saas Fee. One thing had definitely changed since the Lady's day: there were no mules available. So for the first and highest of our mountain crossings the 3,290 metre Théodule Pass from Zermatt to Cervinia, we intended to use the late twentieth-century equivalent, the ski lift up to the Trockener Steg. Like the Lady, to see us on our way we had engaged the services of a trusty guide, my husband Ken. He, though, had to return to Zermatt as he was due to fly off to a conference in California the next day, and so with our first steps into Italy we would be on our own.

A worrying thunderstorm the previous evening had produced a sparkling blue morning, and as we made our way to the pass up the hard snows of the glacier the views across to Monte Rosa, to the Dom and beyond to the Bernese Oberland, were superb. Close at hand was the Matterhorn, metamorphosing from its chocolate-box profile to the black triangle of its southern face as we worked round its flanks. In the Lady's day there was already a hut on the col, kept by an old man and his daughter. Now the Italian Alpine Club hut provided welcome coffee and a marvellous vista over the blue Italian valleys to the snows of the Gran Paradiso, before we waved goodbye to the dot that was Ken returning down the northern slopes and set off for the deep south.

There was little snow high on the southern side of the pass, only fields of silt and rubble left from the ski activity. However, we were soon sunbathing on warm flowery slopes, under the impressive barricade of the Grandes Murailles, which stretches from the Matterhorn over the Dent d'Hérens, enclosing the west side of the Valtournanche with steep rocky walls and tumbling small glaciers. Once over the main chain, the country to the south was well described by the Lady: *"There is a series of spurs springing from Monte Rosa like fingers from an outstretched hand, and every one of these spurs, which itself forms a smaller chain of important mountains, has to be crossed in succession by the traveller."* Our route would thus take us over a series of high cols at around 2,800 metres, dropping down to the villages in the valleys at around 1,500 metres.

After a night in Cervinia we continued along the grand balcony route, high on the eastern side of the valley, a little embarrassed at losing the path in the first half hour. Italian maps are much more imaginative than the Ordnance Survey, and the path numbers helpfully marked on them seemed to bear little resemblance to the numbers on the signposts (at least that's our excuse). A delightful walk through alpine lawns, rich with clover and delicious scents, and cool pinewoods led to the little village of Chamois perched on a broad shelf accessible from the valley only by cable car. With the aid of the guidebook and my limited Italian, I had telephoned ahead for a room at the Hotel Bellevue. When we arrived, thirsty and weary, we couldn't understand why we were left sitting in the rustic little bar for hours. Finally we reached our room, passing on the stairs the carpenter who had just finished reconstructing it. Everything seemed to tremble at a touch, the stair-rail, the light switches, the taps, but the water was hot, the food excellent and the company friendly. The next day the owner apologised for being so much "in confusione," and gave us parting gifts of key rings and good wishes.

Our way now led through a series of hidden hanging valleys, where cows grazed watched over by camping cowherds, up to the narrow pass of the Col di Nana. Leaving our packs, we scrambled up to the Becca Trecare, 300 metres above, with glimpses back to the Matterhorn and of the closer, rocky Grand Tourmalin, only to reach the summit cross as cloud blew up from all sides. Once over the pass, and swinging round the mini-cirque on

the other side, we had views up to Castor and Pollux, where through the binoculars we could watch ropes of dots toiling on the snowy ridge. Down and down we went, through grassy meadows and woods, eventually slipping by the back door into St. Jacques at the head of the Ayas valley. A little further down we stayed at a hotel bursting with Italian holidaymakers up from the plains, dining at rows of tables laid out with military precision. In contrast to the quiet Swiss villages, the Italian valleys are very busy in August, particularly around the feast of the Assumption on August 15th, as we were to learn from an exhausting telephone session trying to find accommodation for the days ahead.

The evening haze had thickened next day into mist, as we took the short ski lift from Champoluc up to Crest towards the Rothorn Pass. On the grassy plain visibility fell to 50 metres, and the new bulldozed ski-road bore no resemblance to the path on the map. Plaintive moos echoed around us, and little tarns loomed out of the fog. Just as we were about to declare ourselves completely lost, we came across the towers of another ski-lift, and at last we were able to strike the bottom of the path to the col, leading up through a Scottish mixture of grass, rock and boulder field. Over the top, we passed two grey lochans, and then joined the dots of the yellow paint markings along a narrow sheep-track, admiring the only things visible, the flowers decking the steep grassy slopes. At last we dropped below the cloud above the village of Stafal, at the head of the Gressoney valley. This gave us another interesting hotel experience, this time scores of Italian babies with attached families, at a hymn-singing convention.

To our delight, the next morning revealed blue skies, and the "*majestic snow crowned head of the Lyskamm, which blocks up the end of the valley*" as the Lady had promised. On the way down to Gressoney la Trinité the special character of these valleys could be seen in the charming groups of Walliser houses, with deep slatted wooden balconies around three sides. The Lady explains: "*In the upper parts of the principal valleys the people are of German origin, and still speak the German language. It is not really astonishing that the Germans, who were living on the more inclement and barren side of the Alps, should have crossed the easier passes and settled themselves in the upper parts of the valleys on the southern side, which were at least as fertile and fit for habitation as the places they came from.*" Another mule-chair-lift took us up towards the Col d'Olen, with spectacular views to the head of the valley, and back to the Rothorn Pass, now revealed as a classic V-shaped nick in the high ridge on the other side of the valley.

The Lady had traversed this col from the opposite direction, in a marathon day, up and down 2,000 metres of steep path, only parts of which were possible side-saddle on mule back. We had the advantage of a choice of two high huts, situated just over the col, and so could meander at a gentle pace, admiring the views as we rose through the debris of the ski fields. But the Col was unchanged: "*It is formed by a narrow opening between steep rocks, and we*

observed a low wall or barrier of masonry probably erected in the calamitous times of the plague, when it was provided with a guard to stop all passage between the two valleys, and to keep the deadly scourge at a distance."

To the north of the pass still rises the Lady's Gemstein (now in Italian the Corno del Camoscio, or Horn of the Chamois), up which we scrambled in the afternoon. Although the main ridge to the north was in cloud, the southern views were very fine and we, like the Lady "*were attracted by the beauty and profusion of the wild flowers,*" gentians, King of the Alps, saxifrages and androsace. We sat on our hill, watching the mists come and go, until at last engulfed we navigated down to the hut by the sound of its throbbing generator. In the evening, the cloud sank down to the valleys, and we were left floating on our island, with the high ridges etched against the twilight around us.

At six thirty next morning, a row of heads emerged from the dormitory windows, to watch an orange-red sun creep out of the valley mists into a milky blue sky. Soon afterwards we were again on the summit of the Gemstein, where "*a scene of stupendous magnificence burst upon our sight, and called forth exclamations of delight and astonishment. On our right hand were the magnificent summits and gigantic masses of the Vincent Pyramid, and the Parrot Spitzen, two of the noblest peaks of Monte Rosa visible on the Italian side, and on the left there stretched away in an unbroken line of snow, the elongated ridge and lofty crest of the mighty Lyskamm, whilst beyond that mountain were to be seen the snowy tops of Castor and Pollux, and the broad round head of the distant Breithorn.*" The only difference was the hosts of ant-like figures making their way across the snows of the ridge from the high huts.

It was hard to leave for the long drop down into the valley to the flesh-pots of Alagna, at 1,100 metres the lowest point of the trip. Here we struck the Assumption problem - our hotel could take us for only one night, aborting the planned rest day, and every hotel in Macugnaga 10 hours away in the next valley seemed also to be full. Close examination of the map showed a blob marked Bivacco Lanti half way over the pass, so a compromise was hatched. We would spend the night at the Rifugio F. Pastore, on the Alpe Pile an hour and a half above Alagna, and the following night bivouac at the Lanti, where enquiry suggested there would be shelter but perhaps no cooking facilities. Faced with this problem, Cairngorm Club survival initiative was called for, and soon the curious sight might have been observed of two Scottish Ladies of a certain age crouched in the woods testing out their latest invention, a tiny saucepan heating water over a nightlight purchased from a handy ironmonger.

Satisfied that we would be able to stave off hypothermia, I set off on foot for the Alpe Pile, leaving Eilidh to carry the rest day to extremes by travelling up the valley on the bus. As I tottered up the tarmac in the noonday heat, with the sweat dripping from the end of my nose, I recalled the Lady on her visit to Alagna: "*I felt some uneasiness as to whether I could manage to go*

so far on foot beneath the broiling sunshine in a hot Italian valley. It is not difficult to walk a considerable distance when one breathes the cool, light air of a mountain top, but to trudge along dusty roads at the bottom of a valley is a very different undertaking." Soon, however, I was able to leave the road, and the spoil of the old gold mines, for the path through the woods climbing up to the Alpe. "On arriving at the Pile Alpe we had to first pass through a little cluster of chalets and cow-houses, which were as unsavoury as can be imagined. We then found ourselves in a beautiful green meadow in the midst of the richest verdure, beside a pretty rivulet. The hillside to the left was covered with larches rising abruptly above it, whilst immediately in front was seen the mighty mass of Monte Rosa, lifting itself up to a prodigious height in the unclouded sky, its summits covered with snow, and its sides clothed with glaciers, out of which rugged dark rocks projected in strong contrast to the ice fields on every side of them. On our right hand was a deep valley, which commences in the very heart of the mountain. If Mont Blanc is the monarch of mountains, surely Monte Rosa is justly called the Queen of the Alps, and a mighty queen she is, and beautiful under every aspect!"

The cow-houses are now the very savoury Rifugio, the green meadow was covered by frolicking Italian families who had come up the kilometre from the road-head, but the view was the same, and I sat under the larches, gazing like the Lady at the wonderful panorama, and reading her words.

We spent a pleasant evening, chatting to the warden of the Rifugio - Scots were welcomed as a group from Glenmore Lodge had used the hut as a base for running courses earlier in the year. He said that increasing numbers of people were doing the Tour of Monte Rosa each summer, but that most rushed through as fast as possible, without stopping to enjoy it properly. We had not come across many fellow tourists, probably because as far as Gressoney we had used longer and less frequented variants of the direct route. The warden was concerned when we said we would stop at the Bivacco Lanti, and offered to phone a friend in Macugnaga for us, but we decided that with all our intrepid preparations we should stick to our plans.

The Col Turlo leading across from Alagna to Macugnaga had a bad press from the Lady: "We could not persuade ourselves to make the Turlo our route, in consequence of the unfavourable description given which Professor Forbes has given of it. He pronounces it to be one of the most tedious passes in the Alps, although it presents no difficulties." We however, found the ascent from the south delightful, first through woods and then traversing across flowery alps with scattered stone shielings, and the view behind us of the steep flank of Monte Rosa. Below the col we were reminded that this was an ancient trade route by the sight of a couple of panniered mules. The northern valley is certainly long, stony and barren, but the skilfully engineered mule-track, renovated by the 4th Alpini in 1918, makes for easy passage of what would otherwise be purgatorial boulder fields. About 500 metres below the col we came on the Bivacco, a tiny stone hut which to our relief contained



Monte Rosa from East – Alpe Faller on Col Turlo Pass

calor gas cylinders and giant pans. There was an even smaller, green-and-white-striped tin shelter, with three three-tiered bunks crammed into it, which we shared with two French students and a couple of German Valkyries doing the Tour in the opposite direction. We were glad of the shelter during the night, as the clouds built up and a thunderstorm swirled around.

It was still misty in the morning, as we swung down the track to the Valle Anzasca, passing a tiny church with a clanging bell and a procession of old ladies with crosses and statues, accompanied by chanting priests with a microphone. Macugnaga was pullulating with tourists, and we soon took the lift up the valley to the Belvedere *“the summit of an enormous ancient moraine at the very foot of Monte Rosa, which separates into two limbs the great glacier of Macugnaga. It is not however like ordinary moraines - a huge mass of earth and stones without vegetation - but its surface has become clothed with a forest of firs and an abundance of grass and bilberries.”* When the Lady visited she had looked in vain for *“a summer house for the convenience of travellers”*. Luckily for us there is now a charming little ristorante, with terrace attached. A further three-quarters of an hour up the glacial moraine brought us to the Alpe Pedriola, and the Zamboni Zappa hut. Henri de Saussure (who had made the second ascent of Mont Blanc in 1787) camped at the Alpe in 1789 and ascended the nearby Pizzo Bianco, in an attempt to measure the height of Monte Rosa. The lady quotes his description of this *“truly delicious spot. We were encamped in a meadow carpeted with turf, hemmed in by the lofty Alps, and enamelled by the most beautiful flowers: these meadows were bounded by the glaciers and rocks of Monte Rosa, whose*

lofty pinnacles were magnificently cut into sharp relief against the azure vault of heaven. Near our tent flowed a rivulet of the freshest purest water." To Scottish eyes, the Alpe with its grassy flats, random giant boulders and little streams is reminiscent of the Lost Valley in Glencoe.

This spot was a pilgrimage not only in the steps of the Lady: another of my Alpine writer-heroines, Janet Adam-Smith, writes in her classic "Mountain Holidays" of Professor W.P. Ker, who had introduced her to the Arran hills in the years just before the Great War. W.P. himself died in 1923, on an expedition to the Pizzo Bianco with his goddaughters, one of whom was Freya Stark. "*As we came through the corrie above the Alpe, where the stream was shallow in the grass, and one can look out on the ring of Monte Rosa and see all the hills of the Val Anzasca, he said: 'I thought this was the most beautiful spot in the world, and now I know it'. A few minutes later his heart stopped.*" We had looked in vain for his grave in the churchyard at Macugnaga, under the lime trees.

We spent a day at the Rifugio, wandering through the meadow to the stony desolation of the glacial basin above, watching the clouds through which we could catch glimpses of the peaks, and listening to the ice falls grinding down the flanks of Monte Rosa. In the evening, a stir of wind promised change, and in the night the view from the dormitory window was of brilliant moonlight on the snows. In the morning I rushed outside, half-dressed, as the huge eastern face of the mountain glowed red in the rising sun. The walk down to Macugnaga was through crystal air and sharp shadows, always with the bulk of the largest face in the Alps looming at our backs. The Lady seems to have had a knack with the weather, and she was passing her luck on to us as we made for the Monte Moro pass back to Saas Fee.

"By reason of the excessive steepness of the Italian side, it would be an almost impracticable undertaking for any lady to cross the Moro from Macugnaga to Saas, and no lady should attempt it unless she is prepared to travel in a chaise à porteur." Thus, faithful to the last, the Lady was even providing us with the perfect alibi for avoiding the 1,500 metre ascent, and justifying our use of the lift. As we swung effortlessly upwards, we could look back up the Valle Quarrazza to the Turlo Pass, and the blue ridges beyond, and back up the route of the morning to the great mountain. "*All the peaks that form her crown became visible, and beneath them was an immense wall of perpendicular rock, so steep that the snow could only rest on a few projecting ledges, and in the hollows of the deep fissures with which its surface is seamed. Below our feet, at an immense and almost inconceivable depth, were the glaciers, valley and little village of Macugnaga.*"

North from the col stretched Switzerland, and the long valley leading past the blue trough of the Mattmarksee, back to the familiar skyline of the Saas Fee mountains. In the sunshine we idled down the rocky path, against the tide of perspiring tourists struggling up to the golden Madonna on the crest. As we sat enjoying the view, we noticed a frieze of ibex horns high on

the ridge to the left; they seemed to be performing especially for us. Beyond the last difficulty, on the last grassy slopes before the track along the lake, I said to Eilidh "Well, we've done it!" Two minutes later, she tripped on a stone, and, though neither of us realised it at the time, cracked a bone in her elbow. Rather shaken, she opted for the bus from the dam at the lake end. I took the paths along the valley side, through the fragrant woods, and beside the rushing stream, finally climbing up the Waldweg to Saas Fee, deeply satisfied at the completion of our long circuit. One hundred and forty years had separated us from the Lady, but we felt in her a kindred spirit. We had shared with her the valleys and the high places, the long views and the flowers underfoot, and returned as she had promised with our own store of delightful recollections.



APPROACH TO THE HILLS

JOHN NISBET

Perhaps a better title would be 'A Chapter of Accidents,' but that would give entirely the wrong impression. Instead I have borrowed the title from Eric Shipton's chapter where he describes how he came to enjoy walking and climbing on the hills. My story, though not so dramatic, may strike a chord with others of my generation, now in our mid-70s. What was it like two generations ago for a youngster first discovering the attractions of the Scottish hills?

The first time I fell down a cliff was on the Moray coast when I was seven. My cousin and I were returning to Cullen along the shore from Sunnyside Beach, a rough track, and I suggested it would be easier to climb the cliff and walk back through the fields. On the steep part at the top, I pulled on an old root of gorse and tumbled down the grassy slope to where my disapproving cousin had waited. I sprained my ankle, but persuaded him to tell my mother that I had hurt it on the rocks. Climbing might be excusable: falling was not.

It was my brother Stanley who introduced me to the hills proper, in Arran in 1932 when I was nine. He was ten years older and his stories of walks with his friends on the Scottish hills impressed me. One July evening, he took me up the slopes of Beinn Bharrain behind the farm in Pirnmill where we were holidaying. I assumed it would be easy to climb to the top, but there are patches of scree before reaching the ridge, and my first venture on the loose stones was too much and we sat down. In the calm of the evening, the sun was beginning to drop behind the distant Paps of Jura over the Mull of Kintyre. To me, the view was unlike anything I had experienced before. I remember vividly the thoughts that passed through my mind at the time. Possibly in the descent I would slip on the scree and hurtle to my death: but in my state of exultation I did not mind (so I said to my brother) because this experience had made it all worth while. I was a serious child, and my brother was understanding and did not laugh.

An old diary entry for 10 July 1934 reports that I climbed Beinn Bharrain that day, looking for sheep with Stanley and the farmer at Alltgoiach where we were holidaying, and the nearby Beinn Bhreac on July 14. By 1935 we had climbed all the hills on the western half of Arran. Now I was able to enjoy scrambling on the summit rocks of Casteil Abhail, and as a ten year old I revelled in the physical exertion and the achievement. There was also that feeling of rapture that I had experienced on my first venture on to the hills, even when it was misty and wet and windy, the great expanse, the solitude, the sense of a greater world. A favourite walk was to a lochan in the corrie of Beinn Bhreac, crystal clear with a little beach of red granite gravel, where we could picnic and paddle and sometimes even swim. I visited it

again sixty years later, in 1998, when my brother was 85. We walked up the path again together and the scene was unchanged.

Next year, July 1936, saw my introduction to the Scottish Highlands (again with Stanley) and to two of its common characteristics, midges and rain. On the first day we cycled from Dunfermline to a camp site at the foot of Ben Ledi, for which, my diary indignantly notes, we were charged 1s.6d. Next day (to quote my diary "The midges were so bad that in the morning, although it was raining, we got up, and after getting the tent packed, we got away as quickly as possible, at about 6.45am. It poured so much that we stopped at Inn and had breakfast there... At Bridge of Orchy we pitched our tent on an exposed position because of midges. It was a fine evening, there being no rain but just wind. (Next morning) the rain was coming down and there was a gale blowing, and later it was so bad that we shifted our tent to a quarry. The rain continued, and in despair we went to the hotel and ordered supper, bed and breakfast."

This was at enormous expense which we could not really afford, but Stanley had his Post Office Savings book with him. Embarrassed at not having ready cash for the hotel, we waited till the nearby Post Office opened, only to find that the person behind the counter was the hotel proprietor. "We waited till 12 to get a train to Tyndrum from where we intended to cycle home. We missed this, and also missed the bus. We determined to dash (across Rannoch Moor and) through Glencoe. We did this, doing the 26 miles in 3 and a quarter hours, and although we were soaked, enjoyed it. We both had punctures before Ballachulish... and had tea at Clachaig Inn... We caught the train home." This was my first sight of Glencoe, in mist and rain. I wrote in my diary, "We enjoyed it." I'm sure that was an understatement: I had never seen mountains like this before. I was thrilled, and I resolved to come back as soon as I could.

The next visit to Glencoe, however, does not seem to have impressed me in the same way. This was in 1937, a hostel tour with two of my brothers and an older friend. The tour gave me my first Munro, Carn Dearg by Loch Ossian - "Loch Ossian is a wonderful place," I wrote in my diary. The pass from there over into Glen Nevis was an exhausting struggle; but we climbed Ben Nevis the next day. Then came the cycle trip south across the Moor of Rannoch, in mist and rain against a head wind. In my diary I described it as "the most barren, the coldest, the wettest and the windiest road in Britain."

By the summer of 1938 I was now 15 and thus fully experienced to go to the hills without an older brother - and even to 'lead' a group of younger boys. So four of us set out on a cycling tour which I planned. As with many novice planners I set a hard programme, averaging over 50 miles cycling daily, 70 miles on the first and last days, and two 4000 feet tops on the 'rest days.' Yet we did it all. We had neither map nor compass: at Aviemore Post Office I copied the route up Cairn Gorm on the back of an envelope. From the top, looking over into Loch Avon, we saw what seemed to be a sandy

beach and on impulse dropped down to the loch without thinking of the climb back. Then the mist came down, and remembering tales of walkers lost in the mist I suggested following the river down for safety (which would have taken us 15 miles out of our way to Tomintoul); but mercifully we opted to risk it through the mist. As a result of this, and several other later foolhardy adventures on the hills, I have never felt able to make righteous pronouncements about the folly of inexperienced climbers.

Nowadays people buy expensive mountain clothing and equipment; we went in our oldest clothes and our worn out school shoes. We had no money: the hostels were a shilling a night (5p) and we carried our own oatmeal for porridge. There were no courses or advice for beginners, and Ordnance Survey maps at (18p) were beyond our reach. It is remarkable that we didn't run into trouble, but the idea never worried us.

By 1939 I had three main leisure interests: golf, walking and climbing, and girls - definitely in that order of priority. My diary records that I played 506 holes of golf in the first three weeks of May, with a best round of 76 and 767 holes in the five weeks following. In the early months of the year, a school friend, Edward, and I roamed the local hills in Fife on our bikes: East Lomond, Dunglow, the Cleish Hills and the Ochils. In the Easter holidays we went to Monachyle Youth Hostel in Balquhiddy, and from there climbed Ben More, Stobinian, Stob Coire an Lochain and Meall na Dige "and got thoroughly wet". Then we crossed the rocky ridge of Stob a' Choin in mist "and nearly ended in Loch Katrine", then on to Ben Vorlich above Loch Earn "glorious view... got soaked."

By now I was a little better equipped: I had a compass, a half-inch to mile map of Central Scotland and an OS inch to mile tourist map covering from Loch Lomond to Loch Tay. That was it: we used cycle capes if the weather was bad, and since we wore our school shorts even in snow - only our bare legs got wet. No one had ice axes; only aristocratic Alpinists could afford these.

It may seem absurd that I spent 1940, a crucial year of the war, sitting examinations, playing golf and wandering across the hills of Central Scotland. In the Easter holidays, Edward and I climbed Cruach Ardrain and Stob Garbh; in the long hot days of the summer we went to Loch Ossian again and climbed Ben Alder from there. Stanley and I camped at Lochain na Laraig as I had resolved the year before and climbed in the Ptarmigans, taking with us a portable radio to listen to the news of the Battle of Britain.

From 1940 until I joined the RAF in 1943, every holiday was spent on the hills. Now I preferred to take a tent, a load too heavy for cycling; and so the bike was left at home and I caught bus, train, the mail-boat for Ben Starav at the head of Loch Etive, or hitched lifts, once on a goods train across the Moor of Rannoch. Then I discovered the delights of sleeping under bridges, though with the discomfort that sheep had usually been there before me. One enjoyable week discovering the Cairngorms was spent in Bob Scott's

bothy in Glen Derry, which we had to ourselves since wartime had emptied the hills of walkers. Also I came to discover the enjoyment of walking alone on the hills. In this way my tally of Munros grew to over 30 before the war took me away.

In these three years, almost all these vacation expeditions involved some excitement or other. I recall our adventure on Aonagh Eagach at Easter 1940 after an unusually heavy snowfall. Edward and I had been staying at Glencoe Youth Hostel - we were still just inexperienced schoolboys, with no equipment for winter conditions. We each broke a branch off a rowan tree to use as an ice axe of sorts. Starting from the west, we got half way along to the start of the more difficult part of the ridge, and then decided to stop and descend into Glencoe, a route definitely not recommended in the guide book. We found ourselves on 50 degree slopes of soft snow, plunging our rowan branch deeply between each step. And so we got down, quite thrilled with our day. Looking back now, horror rather than thrill is my reaction. I resolved to go back some day and finish the ridge, but I could not have guessed that it would be 55 years before that ambition was realised.

1946 saw me back in Britain, and at the end of the year gathered two friends to bring in the New Year at Crianlarich Hotel. This was the start of an annual gathering until 1950. After seeing the New Year in, we somehow or other managed to climb Ben More on January 1. We might have chosen a lesser hill but we seemed to have plenty of energy. On New Year's Day 1948, emerging above the mist, we saw the Brocken Spectre. In 1950, I started the new half-century by glissading out of control over the line of rocks near the summit: Doug was 400 feet below me and threw himself on my spinning body, with my ice axe strapped to my wrist flailing wildly. I was unconscious for 20 minutes, and the axe slashed my jaw and punctured my temple: I still recall the sight of the square hole when I looked in the mirror back at the hotel, but miraculously no serious damage was done. With the help of the others I walked off the hill and in the evening rode pillion on Ian's motorbike to Killin, and the nearest doctor. He put a couple of stitches in my jaw without anaesthetic, and I didn't feel anything.

In July 1951 I proposed to my future wife in a tent in Glen Slugain. In April 1952 we were married in Yorkshire, and spent our honeymoon at Kingshouse Hotel. A friend met Brenda in Aberdeen Station, and seeing her rucksack with climbing boots and an ice axe, remarked "Going climbing"? "No," she replied, "I'm going to get married"!

In later years my son Andrew took me up, appropriately equipped this time, some of the classic climbs: Crowberry Ridge, Tower Ridge, Observatory Ridge, Raeburn's Gully on Lochnagar in winter and the Pinnacle Ridge of Sgurr nan Gillean. When it came to my 75th birthday, I celebrated it by climbing Half Dome in Yosemite. Then, for the time being at least, I finished off my record in much the same way as I had started at the age of seven. We climbed the 11,000 feet Sonora Peak in the Californian Sierra Nevada; I was

taking a photograph of the others on the summit, but couldn't quite get them into the frame - and so I stepped back! I just bounced down over the volcanic rock, uninjured. Whatever fates had watched over me through all these years were still kind.

NOT LONELINESS BUT SOLITUDE

There is in the mountains no loneliness, except
 that which is carried to crag and cleft,
 deep within the crevices of one's heart and mind,
 and which the searching wind can never find.
 No one is alone on peak or ridge,
 above the valley, vexing midge,
 with buzzard mates and calling sheep,
 for here one learns what friends to keep;
 and down the mountain slopes the burn
 chatters with rocks on its downward turn.

There is in the mountains no loneliness, except
 that secretly borne in a heart bereft,
 and here no misty thoughts but certitude;
 it is not loneliness but solitude
 that enfolds the walker striding high,
 and makes his innermost being sigh
 to see the timeless, infinite scene
 of furrowed, brow-like hills serene;
 and here the whispering wind and laughing sun
 are clearly heard and speak of fun.

There is in the mountains no loneliness, except
 that hidden with a skill so deft,
 for not all faces are openly exposed,
 and there are those with darker thoughts enclosed.
 But even when inner thoughts are clouded,
 here too one's soul ends peace enshrouded,
 for though in solitary paths one walks,
 one is not lonely when nature talks;
 and here stones tell of distant days
 while grass proclaims remembered ways.

George Philip

The poet's daughter Sandra is a Club member

ASCENT OF THE MATTERHORN

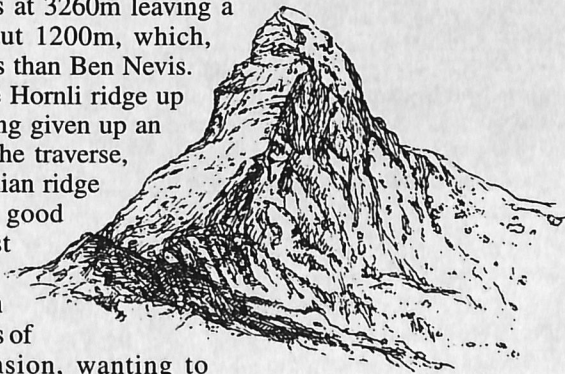
ALAN DUNWORTH

Ever since my first climbing trip to the Alps I had dreamed of doing the Matterhorn. Its spectacular position over the ski slopes of Zermatt and its amazing and terrible history had given it prime position in my list of challenges. No one who has seen or read about this mountain can be unimpressed by its grandeur or fail to understand its attraction. On the other hand loose rock, volatile weather and crowds of climbers are dangers that inspire fear as well as admiration. For several years various setbacks, work, weather etc., had caused me to postpone my attempt but in 1998 everything fell into place.

After a couple of days walking in the hills near Leysin I teamed up with my guide from the well-known alpine village of Kingussie. For preparation we climbed the Pointe de Zinal, a good mixed route from the Schonbiel Hut which offers superb views of the Dent Blanche. In Zermatt we stayed for a night at the Bahnhof hotel which has been recently refurbished but still offers a warm welcome to the climber and at reasonable prices. We then headed up to the Breithorn, surely the easiest of the 4000m peaks. It was interesting to see the Swiss national ski team, with thighs like tree trunks, on the 7am cable car from Zermatt carrying three pairs of skis as they went up for their daily practice - such is the glamour of international sport. We duly arrived at the famous Hornli hut, which resembled a Victorian hotel that has gradually been downgraded to a youth hostel. Here we saw that most graceful of alpine creatures, the waitress who effortlessly carries a tray of six two litre glasses of beer over an obstacle course of rucksacks, ice axes and half-dead climbers and then returns with an even heavier load of Swiss franc coins. We had to ignore the beer in recognition of a 4am wake up call the next day. That's quite a late start by Swiss standards because the hut is right at the bottom of the climb, thus avoiding the long walk in which is so popular in the Cairngorms. The hut is at 3260m leaving a summit ascent of about 1200m, which, being optimistic, is less than Ben Nevis.

We planned to take the Hornli ridge up and down the hill having given up an earlier hope of doing the traverse, and descending the Italian ridge as it looked as if the good weather might not last long enough.

The night before an alpine ascent is mixtures of exhaustion, apprehension, wanting to



throttle a snorer, sheer excitement and a desperate hope that the weather will hold. At 4.20 am we were roped up and moving in a semi dazed state into the darkness. A rude awakening soon followed as with bursting lungs and aching muscles I struggled to keep up with the guide. Suddenly the reality of the Matterhorn became clear. It's just hard work. An endless succession of ledges, all just over knee height, strenuous scrambling, short of breath, no time to admire the view, try not to dislodge loose stones, keep going, wouldn't it be nice to find something difficult to make the guide slow down. After twenty minutes we met a Zermatt guide who was leading his client back down; someone had already given up. Most hills need will power or bloody mindedness and this was no different. Soon it was obvious we were making real progress, not particularly fast, but good enough, the weather and the conditions under foot were just right. Here and there we found a short rock pitch, never more than diff. and often with fixed ropes, which weren't needed in these easy conditions. Even the famous Moseley slabs turned out to be really simple. There was no let up from the steep scrambling, there just aren't any flat bits where you can recover your breath. From a climbing point of view it was straightforward, just a long scramble but always with spectacular exposure. It's a strange contradiction that one of the world's most beautiful mountains offers a pretty ordinary climb, although there are harder routes.

The recent scorching weather had burnt off a lot of snow and crampons weren't needed till well over 4000m. Eventually we came to the summit block where footprints led through the hard firm snow to that final very welcome summit ridge. It had taken four and a half hours which is a reasonable time although it felt longer. From a comfortable stance we relaxed and enjoyed a stunning view, great peaks in all directions, Mont Blanc and the Mont Rosa looking so high, the Dom and Weisshorn so graceful and the Dent d'Herens so close. Those few brief minutes at the top are worth all the hours of hard work and months of planning. We basked in the sun knowing that a dangerous descent had to be done and noting the gathering clouds. Going down was no quicker than the ascent as you're facing outwards looking down into the void instead of studying nice firm handholds, and the bottom of your rucksack keeps catching on the rock. We got down without undue fuss and only minor delays caused by other parties, but there was always a need to concentrate and avoid a minor slip, which could easily have disastrous consequences. I remembered Whympers' sad warning that "A momentary negligence may destroy the happiness of a lifetime" Being roped to a professional guide is a great comfort in these conditions and it certainly makes for a quicker descent.

True satisfaction comes when rope and harness are removed and litres of mineral water drunk, regardless of cost. Back at the hut I wondered why it had all gone so well and the answer was mainly that the conditions were right. There must have been about sixty people on the hill that day although they spread out well and the hill didn't feel crowded. The later parties had to

contend with a spectacular hailstorm, which merited wearing a helmet. Those hailstones lay overnight on the ledges and became like a layer of ball bearings so that nobody reached the top next day. What a difference a day can make, it's all about being in the right place at the right time. I reckon that in good conditions the Matterhorn can be climbed by any competent climber with alpine experience, but in bad conditions it can be lethal and it is noted for rapid changes to the weather. Fitness, preparation and a light pack count for a lot. I climbed without an ice axe having agreed with the guide that his axe would give us enough protection on the short snow slope at the top. Leather boots, provided they can take crampons, are essential because plastics are too cumbersome for easy movement over the rock ledges. Timing is tricky, as no two summers are the same. The route is usually open from mid-July to mid-September and we were there in the middle of August. Ideally you should be on the hill after two or three days of hot settled weather so it is helpful to be able to plan a week's climbing around this ascent rather than be committed to only one possible day. It's a much-climbed hill, someone even took a bear to the top but it has also claimed many victims both famous and unknown. I'm most impressed by Lucy Walker who was the first woman to the summit in 1871 - what a thrill it must have been in the Golden Age when men were men, ladies wore long dresses and ice axes were made of wood.

The hailstorm meant a wet if dramatic walk down to the valley for the real pleasures of a shower, good food, a full nights sleep and of course another hill to climb. There's always another hill!



ALLANAQUOICH

GRAHAM EWEN

Most members will be familiar with the farm of Allanaquoich which today occupies a small area in the south-east corner of Mar Lodge Estate. In historical times however Allanaquoich was a separate estate which belonged to a branch of the Farquharson family. The meaning of the name is somewhat obscure, but it may come from the Gaelic Ailean Quoich, ailean meaning a meadow or a plain. In historical documents, however, various different spellings of the name appear such as Ellancoich which appears on Robert Gordon's map of 1630 or Ellanaqueich which appears on William Roy's Military Map of 1746. Ellan in Scots means an island and so perhaps the name derives from a former island at or near the mouth of the Quoich. It is supposed that the name Quoich comes from the Gaelic word cuach, which means a cup or drinking bowl, and is so named after the cup-shaped hollows in the rocks at the Punch Bowl.

The eastern boundary of the estate was similar to the present boundary between Mar Lodge Estate and Invercauld running from the River Dee opposite Dalgowan northwards across the flood plain and straight up the hill to the top of Carn na Drochaide and from there along the ridge to Carn na Criche. It continued down the northern slope of the latter, crossed the Quoich and the Allt an t-Sneachda on its way to the south summit of Beinn a' Bhuid. From there it continued along the ridge to the North Top. On the north side the estate marched with Glenavon and the boundary followed the watershed westward over the tops of Beinn a' Chorrainn and Beinn Mheadhoin. On the west the boundary was the watershed between Glen Derry and Glen Luibeg. From the junction of these two glens the boundary was undefined and it was stated in a sasine¹ granted to Joseph Farquharson in 1731 that the boundary from here across the hills to the Quoich was to be demarcated in agreement with Mackenzie of Dalmore, but this never happened for reasons which will become clear later. The lower part of the River Quoich below the Punch Bowl was however fixed as the boundary across the flood plain of the River Dee, and the River Dee itself formed the boundary on the south side.

According to the Legends of the Braes of Mar the estate was originally in the possession of the Lamonts who were once powerful in the area. It is said that it was confiscated by the Farquharsons following the murder of a wealthy drover at Inchroary for which Lamont's son was falsely accused. The lairdship was then given to Alexander (Alister), third son of Donald Farquharson of Castletown. It is not clear exactly when these events took place or for that matter how accurate they are but there is no doubt that the first Farquharson laird was called Alister Farquharson and he was certainly there in 1632, when he received a charter from the Earl of Mar. From that time the estate passed on in the

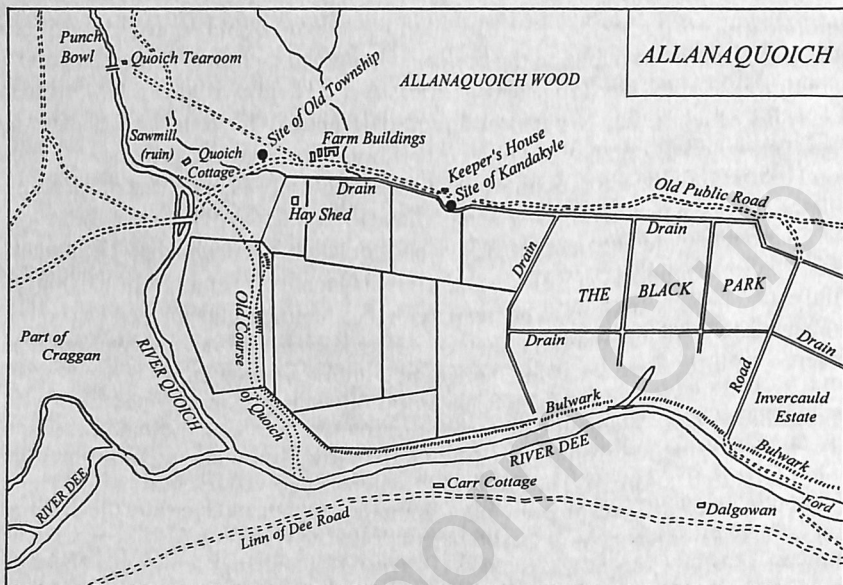
¹ Sasine - the law involved in the act of giving or registering possession of a feudal property.

normal way to the eldest sons, Donald Farquharson around 1670, Alister around 1684, and John prior to 1715. Then in 1727 John Farquharson disposed the estate to his eldest son Joseph in fee, while retaining a life rent on it for himself. (This meant that John would continue to enjoy all the advantages of ownership of the estate but that the title to it had been passed to his son).

It is likely that by this time the Farquharsons were having considerable financial difficulties. Joseph borrowed 1000 merks from Farquharson of Invercauld in 1728 and as no repayments had been made by 1732, Invercauld instituted legal action to recover his money. Despite these difficulties a house of some pretensions was built at Allanaquoich by the Farquharsons around this time and the cost of this probably accelerated their demise. In 1735 Lord Braco bought the Superiorities of the estates of Allanaquoich, Inverey, Dalmore and many others from Lords Grange and Dun. Then on 21st October 1736 Joseph sold the estate of Allanaquoich to Lord Braco, whose date of entry was fixed to be at Martinmas following the death of Joseph's father. This finally enabled Joseph to repay his debt to Farquharson of Invercauld which he did on the 17th December of that year. In 1738 Lord Braco came to an agreement with John to buy out his life rent and so obtained entry to the estate in that year. This was not however the end of the matter because, as it was an entailed estate, the sale had to have the agreement of Joseph Farquharson's eldest son and at the time he was still a minor. He had to sign a document called a registered homologation to ratify the sale and he could not do this until he reached the age of 21. This was apparently done on the 28th May 1747 but it was not actually registered in Edinburgh until the year 1761. When Lord Braco also bought Dalmore from the Mackenzies in 1739, the absence of a properly demarcated boundary between the two estates became academic, and this is why the instruction contained in the 1731 sasine was never carried out.

The charters granted to the various Farquharsons of Allanaquoich by the Earls of Mar show that they held the estate under very similar conditions to those of the neighbouring vassals. The fir woods and mineral rights were reserved to the Superior as was the hunting of deer and roe. They did however have the power to cut and dispose of birch wood and they and their tenants were entitled to a certain amount of fir wood as servitude timber i.e timber which they required for their houses and other buildings. The charters from 1632 onwards all mention that they had liberty to build a mill, but it is not until 1727 that it is mentioned that the mill had now been built. They were also expected to perform various services and these included supplying two persons with dogs at all huntings arranged by the Superior and attendance at all hostings (military musters).

The poll book of 1696 gives us the first indication of how many people lived on the estate. Alister Farquharson is mentioned as the laird under the name Alexander. He is listed as having one man servant, two women servants along with four tenants and twelve sub-tenants. The poll book of course does not include children under sixteen or paupers, so that all we can say



from these figures was that apart from the Farquharson's own household there were at least sixteen others.

At the time of the sale of the estate to Lord Braco there were 15 tenants. They were split between two townships, one called Allanaquoich which was situated near the site of the present farm buildings, and the other named Kandakyle which was about a kilometre east of this near where the keeper's cottage is today. Unfortunately the earlier rental lists do not distinguish between the two townships but in 1750 there were eight tenants in Allanaquoich and six in Kandakyle.

It has always been supposed that no-one lived permanently in Glen Quoich but at the time of the sale, John Farquharson told Lord Braco that he had had a tack in Glen Quoich which paid him ten pounds Scots yearly, but that the same had been waste these eight years past and that he had received no rent during that time. All the tenants had lease agreements or tacks. The conditions of these were all very similar and it will suffice here to describe one of these, a tack granted in the year 1750 to one John McGregor for part of Kandakyle. The tack was for 12 or 19 years at the proprietor's option. He was allowed to have sub-tenants with the heritor's consent and had shieling rights. The money rent was £30 8s 4d Scots² and he had to supply 88 loads of peats in creels and one reek hen³ for himself and one for each sub-tenant. He also had to pay multures,⁴

² £12 Scots was equal to £1 sterling.

³ reek hen - one hen per chimney

⁴ Multure - a duty consisting of a proportion of the grain or meal payable to the proprietor or tenant of a mill on corn ground there.

ground officers dues and perform miln (mill) services, but these are not specified. He was required to maintain the buildings occupied by him in at least as good a condition as they were in when he took over. There was also a list of other services which he had to perform if required. These were 8 shearers one day at harvest, 4 horses one day leading corn, 4 horses one day repairing river banks on Dee or Quoich, 4 horses one day leading limestone, 4 horses one day leading slates, divots or heather, 1 horse and carriage to Rothiemay, 3 horses and carriage to Glenbuchat and one man to carry errands or letters to Glenbuchat. The tenants had shieling rights in Glen Derry and in Glen Quoich. When Lord Braco bought the estate he was anxious to do away with the shieling rights in Glen Derry, but the tenants were adamant that they could not keep horses or cows without it as there was little or no grass in Glen Quoich until midsummer.

In 1743 Lord Braco began an ambitious scheme in co-operation with Farquharson of Invercauld to drain the marshy parts of the haugh, which stretches eastwards from Allanaquoich to below Braemar, and to protect the haugh from flooding by the Dee. This scheme involved the building of stone bulwarks and earthen embankments along the Quoich and Dee and the digging of several kilometres of open ditches to drain the water away. The work was completed by 1746 at a cost of well over £400 sterling which was a large sum of money at that time. In the accounts it is noticed that a pound was spent on whisky, and it was explained in a footnote that when the ditching began the ground was very wet and it was necessary to purchase the whisky so as to encourage the men by giving them drams from time to time. The part of Allanaquoich which was affected by this scheme had previously been partly wooded as well as marshy and was called the Black Ward or Black Park. Lord Braco had originally thought that the newly reclaimed land might be used for growing flax, but this never happened and the area was simply apportioned among the tenants of Allanaquoich at a rental of £1-6-1 sterling each.

From 1767 onwards the number of tenants was reduced to around ten and those remaining were instructed that they had to erect properly constructed neat dwelling houses with two chimneys of stonework built with lime. A report in 1782, which seems to have had the view to reduce the number of tenants further, lists ten tenants and eight sub-tenants. Of the sub-tenants one is stated to be a tailor, one a weaver and one a packman. It is likely that some if not all these sub-tenants were removed about this time. In 1786 a number of tenants were summoned out as they were unable to pay their rent arrears. In the same year James Stuart, the Earl of Fife's factor, moved into the house which the Farquharsons had built at Allanaquoich and took over a proportion of the land for his own use. In a submission to Lord Fife in 1788 he complains that he has no tack, but that he has built four office houses in a substantial manner, and was obviously worried at his lack of security. All he got at this time however was a promise of up to 50 pounds meliorations for the buildings should he have to remove. There were still tenants listed in

1791 but from this point there is a gap of twelve years in the estate records and the next rental list for 1803 shows that Allanaquoich had been consolidated into one unit which was now tenanted by James Stuart. It was not until 1808, however, that James Stuart finally got a tack for his holding, but when he did it had two unusual features in it, possibly because he was the factor. Firstly it was stated that the tack would last for all the natural days of his life and secondly he was to be at liberty to fish with the rod for salmon and trout in the River Dee and branches thereof for his own amusement.

The estate of Allanaquoich has always had very substantial woodlands. In all the historical records these are normally divided up into four parts:- (1) Allanaquoich Wood which covered the face of the hill behind the farmland of Allanaquoich and extended eastward to the boundary with Invercauld estate; (2) Glen Quoich which was the valley of Glen Quoich from Allanaquoich to its junction with the Dubh Gleann burn; (3) Dubh Gleann which covered the whole area of the said glen; (4) The Beachan which was Glen Quoich above its confluence with the Dubh Gleann burn. The river in this section was also called the Water of Beachan at that time. It is unlikely that most of these woods were much exploited in the early days because of their remoteness. However a sawmill had been established at Allanaquoich in 1695 by a consortium of John Farquharson of Inverey, Donald Farquharson of Camasnakist and Duncan Shaw, who had obtained a fifty year lease for cutting wood in Glen Quoich. In 1736 Lord Braco had all the woods in the area surveyed and it was reported that in the area called the Dubh Glen there was some good old wood. To the north-east of Glen Quoich in the wood called Beachan there was a great deal of good timber and down the glen from there was a mixture of old timber but also a lot of young thriving wood, not at that time fit for cutting. The surveyors reckoned that the total value of the saleable wood from these areas at 50,000 merks Scots money⁵. In a similar survey taken in 1763 it was reported that there was a great quantity of old great timber in the Beachan and that in Glen Quoich where fir trees had been felled birches were growing in abundance. The woods between Allanaquoich and the Invercauld march were described as being of little value as the trees were yet young and too small for felling. However the Reverend Charles Cordiner, who visited the area in 1776 reported that when one looked up Glen Quoich there was not a tree to be seen except in the most inaccessible parts, but on closer inspection he found that there were thousands of young seedlings growing. These may well have been planted rather than naturally sown. Certainly eight years later in 1784 the Earl of Fife⁶ planted a large number of trees in Glen Quoich. This planting consisted of 20,000 firs, 1,000 birks (birches), 800 rowan, 500 poplar and 80 large firs. It is clear from the reports that the best of the wood available was in the area called the Beachan

⁵ Merk - two thirds of a Scots pound

⁶ Lord Braco was created Earl of Fife in 1759

⁷ Sarking deals - roof boarding

but being remote it must have been difficult to harvest. Attempts to exploit it were made however and an Estate Account from 1761 lists 13 men floating timber on the Beachan. The 1763 report mentions that there were a good many logs ready to float down from the Beachan which were at that time lying in the water. It must have been very difficult to float large logs on such a small stream. Probably for this reason a new sawmill was built in 1787 at a cost of £36 in the Beachan situated on the south bank of the river about halfway between its junction with the Alltan na Beinne and the Dubh Gleann burn. In the same year a new road was constructed from Allanaquoich up the east side of Glen Quoich to the site of the mill. In 1788, the first year of its operation, the mill produced 1509 planks, 3684 sarking deals⁷, 5165 flooring deals, 248 slabs and 1363 laths. It is not clear whether these were then carted out along the new road or floated out along the river. The mill was still being worked in 1797 but by 1826 had fallen into ruin and was so described in a map published at that time. There is no trace of it to be found today. The old track up the east side of the Quoich remained usable, at least for walkers, though rather overgrown and known to comparatively few people, until recently when it was opened up again to become the bulldozed track that we know today.

Flooding had always been a potential hazard to the tenants of Allanaquoich. A serious flood occurred in September 1768 which carried away the stooks of corn from the fields, causing so much hardship that the proprietor waived the payment of rent for that year. Another bad one occurred in 1799 but no previous recorded flood could compare with the Muckle Spate of August 1829, which had a very severe effect on the farm of Allanaquoich. The tenant of the farm at the time was Mr Charles Cumming, Lord Fife's factor on Mar Estate. Accounts from the time suggest that the bulk of the farm was inundated to a depth of at least eight feet. Once the water had subsided great tracts of the soil had been scoured out by the water and other parts were covered in sand and gravel. On the Craggan side, which had been run as part of the same farm was a large lake. A bridge which had spanned the gorge of the Quoich just above the farm had been washed away. By the time the waters had subsided the Quoich had adopted a new course well to the west of its former one. The old course is shown on the map. It can still be seen today from a vantage point on the Inverey road where it shows up as a slightly different colour of green compared with the surroundings, and it can be followed on the ground. Some time later a fragment of a mill was found on the farm. It was later proved that this had belonged to the sawmill previously mentioned which stood in the upper part of the glen. The damage to the land was so severe that the tenant was unable to continue in the farm at the same rent as before. It was obviously some time before repairs were effected as an advert appeared in the Aberdeen Journal in January 1831 looking for contractors to erect a considerable extent of earthen embankments and stone bulwarks at the farm of Allanaquoich. This work was executed by the end of

the year by a local contractor James Gruer for the sum of £172 sterling. Charles Cumming remained as the tenant at a reduced rent and during the remainder of his tenancy worked hard to repair the rest of the damage done. At first he was only able to plough certain areas which had not been too badly affected by the flood. Year by year this area was gradually extended by clearing away piles of gravel and filling up holes torn out by the floodwaters.

In these early days the shooting interests on the Allanaquoich estate were not of any economic importance. The Earls of Fife all enjoyed shooting and it was kept for themselves, their families and their own private guests. Glen Quoich was however included in the area let out to Sir Henry Goodriche in 1830 along with the occupancy of Old Mar Lodge. These shootings continued to be let to a succession of different tenants until 1870, of whom the most prominent was the Duke of Leeds, when they again reverted to private use by family. In October 1850 Queen Victoria, accompanied by Prince Albert, attended a deer hunt in Glen Quoich as guests of the Duke of Leeds. In 1886 a bothy was built in the Dubh Glen to accommodate deer watchers during the Season. The first such was a J. McHardy and he was there for the whole of August and September. The 6th Earl of Fife (later 1st Duke of Fife) married Princess Louise, one of Queen Victoria's grandchildren in 1889 and from that time onwards many of the shooting guests had royal connections.

It is not until 1841 that it is possible to ascertain the exact population of the area. At this time there are only four families listed and a total of 27 people. Of these 12 were in employment, Charles Cumming, the factor, 10 agricultural labourers and two female servants. There were twelve children below the age of ten. There is no mention of a sawmill at this time. The table below gives the full breakdown from 1841 to 1891.

	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891
farm servants	10	3	5	4	5	5
factor/overseer	1	1	1	1		1
house servants	1	3	1	1	2	1
gamekeeper		1		1	1	
sawer		1		1	1	2
boot & shoe maker					1	
pauper		2	1	1		
children	12	8	1	14	3	2
not employed	3	1	1	5	4	4
total	27	20	10	28	17	15
no of households	4	4	2	4	4	4

It is not easy to draw conclusions from these figures, coming as they do from such a small sample. It is difficult to know why there should only have been two households in 1861 when there are four at the time of every other census. There is one house listed as uninhabited at that time, but perhaps this was just a temporary feature and we cannot take the figures for this particular year as being reliable. The way the total population fluctuates up and down is almost entirely caused by the number of children at the time. The number of people employed is more consistent, starting with the high of 12 in 1841 and thereafter varying between eight and ten if the 1861 figure is ignored. The people listed as not employed are either wives of those that are or old people. Quoich sawmill is listed from 1871 onwards. It is not possible to trace the population figures from 1901 onwards as detailed information from the census remains confidential for 100 years, but at the time of writing only one person lives in Allanaquoich.

When Charles Cumming gave up the tenancy in 1857 the farm was let to John Hunter, the tenant of the Auchindryne Inn (now the Fife Arms Hotel), who continued there until 1867. The let then passed to George Clark, a sheep farmer, who was also tenant of the sheep grazings around Bynack at this time. From 1880 the lease passed back to the Fife Arms Hotel and this arrangement continued until 1912 when the farm was taken over and thereafter run directly by the estate. It continued to be run as a normal mixed farm as was common at that time on Deeside, but was expected to provide certain produce such as eggs to Mar Lodge when the family were in residence during the summer time. During the First World War they were forced to increase the amount of grain grown by order of the Agricultural Executive Committee.

Some time during the 1930's a major breach occurred in the bulwark beside the Black Park causing flooding to occur in this area even at normal river levels. Despite protests from Invercauld Estate whose land was also being affected, repairs were not carried out until after the Second World War. The breach can still be seen as the bulwark was not reinstated properly and the present bank protection consists of a wooden fence of old railway sleepers with a facing of corrugated iron and backed up with all manner of rubbish including old cars, lumps of concrete etc.

A letter written in January 1904 describes the sawmill as being very badly situated, requiring constant repairs. The wheel had to be thawed out every morning in frosty weather, causing the short winter days to pass without much to show for them, although the workers may have been labouring hard. By 1923 the sawmill had been shifted to a new site immediately east of the farm buildings and now driven by an engine. This was very much designed as a small scale operation for use for estate purposes only. It did not have a happy history, being burned down in November 1923 and again in 1943. It continued in use however until comparatively recently but is now in a ruinous state.

During the Second World War a great deal of tree felling took place in the



Allanaquoich farmhouse and steading showing the asbestos roofing which has now been removed

area. At the end of 1941 12,000 trees in Allanaquoich Wood were sold to Messrs Gray & Co, timber merchants, and a further 11,000 were sold in February 1944. These were all felled by the end of the War. A bridge was erected across the Dee opposite Allanaquoich to facilitate their extraction,



The Punch Bowl

but this was removed at the end of the operation at the request of Princess Alexandra, as she felt that leaving it in place would affect the privacy of the estate. In 1954 the farm buildings and dwelling house underwent substantial reconstruction. This was presumably the time that the recent asbestos roofing was put on. The roofs were certainly slated before that. At the same time the farm and also Quoich cottage were connected to the mains electricity supply for the first time. Also in 1954 the road bridge across the Quoich was substantially reconstructed by Aberdeen County Council.

Today the farm of Allanaquoich seems a very remote place, standing as it does at the end of a long narrow winding road. However this was not always the case as the road down the north side of the Dee to Invercauld was a public road. There was also a ford across the Dee at the lower end of the Black Park which gave easy access to Braemar except when the river was in spate. Originally called the 'Timberfoord', it was shown on a map published in 1742 and continued in use well into the present century. A boat was also used at this point until much more recently. In 1952 the People's Journal published a photograph showing two ladies from Allanaquoich crossing the Dee here in a rowing boat with their bicycles. No trace of the ford remains today but the roads leading to it on either side are still clearly visible.

When the Duke of Fife died in 1912 the estate was left in life rent to his wife, Princess Louise, and his daughter Princess Alexandra became Duchess of Fife. The two Princesses, who spent every summer on a long vacation at Mar Lodge, were very fond of the area around the Punch Bowl and liked to take their guests there for picnics. The small cottage beside the Punch Bowl was used to store the necessary cutlery, plates, china, tablecloths etc., which were required for this purpose, and presumably also acted as a shelter in inclement weather. For this reason the cottage became known as the Quoich Tearoom or sometimes the Princesses' Tearoom. Today there seems to be a move to recreate this as Queen Victoria's Tearoom but I do not have any evidence that it was ever called that at the time.

Princess Alexandra was very keen on fishing and in 1928 a trout pond was constructed by a local contractor on the Clais Fhearnaig burn. It was restocked with trout every year. Today the dam remains in a fairly good state but I do not know if any trout remain in the pond above it. In 1961, following the death of Princess Alexandra, Duchess of Fife in 1959 all the Mar Estate on the north side of the River Dee was sold to the Panchaud brothers, Anglo Swiss businessmen, the new estate thus formed being subsequently known as Mar Lodge Estate. During their ownership a considerable amount of reforestation took place including the replanting of part of Allanaquoich Wood and three new plantations in Glen Quoich. They have later been criticised for the fact that these plantations were not 100 per cent Scots Pine. They were also responsible for extending the road in Glen Quoich, which before that time hardly went more than 1.5km up the glen, to a fairly high point up on Beinn a' Bhuird. The purpose of this road was to open up the south face of

that mountain for skiing but perhaps fortunately this idea never came to fruition. The road however remains an obvious scar, particularly on the higher reaches of the mountain. During their ownership the farm continued running with an emphasis on rearing cattle. In 1989 following the death of Panchaud the estate was sold to an American businessman, John Kluge. During his ownership Allanaquoich ceased to function as a farm and was let as grazing for sheep during the winter time and cattle during the summer.

In 1995 the estate was bought by the National Trust for Scotland. They have since repaired the Quoich Tearoom and have started repairs to the farmhouse. There are plans to repair the farm buildings as well and to restore the Black Park to wetland. Perhaps even more important, they hope to encourage the natural regeneration of the pinewoods in Glen Quoich, but that is in the future.

Most of the information on which this article is based, derives from the Duff House Papers which are held in the Special Collections Department of the University of Aberdeen Library.



RUM WEEKEND, MAY 1998

DREW McMAHON

Evening sunshine bathed Loch Scresort which lay beyond the lawn outside the tall windows. "Please all stand for a toast.....to the Queen."

"To the Queen!" boomed the company and raised the glasses of vintage port to their lips. A fitting end to one of the most memorable dinners in recent Cairngorm Club history.

It had all started as just another visit to the 'Bistro' room in Kinloch Castle on the Island of Rum. But it moved exhilaratingly upmarket when our party received a surprise invitation to use the impressive formal dining suite. The self-caterers that night were kicking themselves when they came in later one-by-one to gawp, because this was serious luxury: solid mahogany table and chairs, expensive wooden panelling and carvings all around the walls and ceiling, mounted stags' heads, large oil paintings, antiques and curios from around the world. The dark and brooding Edwardian grandeur would have been at home on the Titanic, but here was softened by the bright Rum landscape seen through five full length windows. In our motley collection of fleeces, checked shirts, and trainers, we felt distinctly underdressed.

"And I'd like to propose another toast.....to David Plant."

David, our organiser, was still at large in the forest outside. Was this meal yet another of his 'fixes,' part of his master plan for the weekend? What could he do next after five star dining, accommodation in a castle and a Saturday night ceilidh in Rum Community Hall still to come? Later, as Dave let rip on the dance floor in an energetic 'Hoolihan's Jig,' rumours went round that he really had been jumping in and out of different suits since Friday morning - dolphin, seal, stag etc. - as he strived to keep his 18 strong party entertained on the boat from Mallaig, and on the hill. Most people staggered out of the ceilidh before 2am but the six enthusiastic young musicians, from as far afield as County Tyrone and San Francisco, apparently kept playing till 8am in the empty hall, fuelled by Tennents lager.

The meal and the ceilidh polished off a Saturday full of big walks for most of the Club. A large bunch spent about 11 hours traversing the famous narrow ridges of the Rum Cuillin. Askival and Ainsival, the two Corbetts plus most of the smaller tops have inherited Norse-style names from the days when Viking longboats plied these seas and used the sharp peaks as landmarks. No such luck for us unfortunately, with everything shrouded in moist mist. Every so often a sinister looking goat would swirl eerily into view perched on a rock nearby, like a vision of Auld Nick. These days there are plenty of goats and deer on Rum but no sheep.

Geoff and John completed the fullest traverse, starting at Barkeval, taking in all the scrambles, and going beyond Sgurr nan Gilleann at the southern end



Some of the Cairngorm Club party on Rum

to include Ruinsival where, as the mist began to lift they enjoyed some of the best views on the island across to Muck and down to Harris Bay. In fact those who lingered at the castle that morning, and started out late, had the best of the weather, because after 3 o'clock blue sky and sunshine revealed all the splendour of the mountains and the rugged sea views. Bloodstone Hill, Harris Bay, Orval, Kinloch Glen, Loch Scresort, Hallival, Kilmory Bay and many other sites were all successful targets for Cairngorm Club parties.

The island is now owned and administered by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the successors to the Nature Conservancy Council. SNH have 18 permanent staff living on Rum, all in the village of Kinloch around the castle. Visitors swell this number to about 100 on a weekend like ours, most arriving aboard the Lochmor, the Cal-Mac steamer to the Small Isles from Mallaig. The vessel stops in the middle of the sheltered anchorage of Loch Scresort and it takes over an hour to transfer people and gear to and from the shore on a smaller boat called the Rhouma. The name commemorates a huge racing yacht sailed in the 1900s by the previous owner of Rum, George Bullough. It was George's widow, Monica, who sold the island to the nation in 1957 for a knockdown price.

The Bulloughs were super-rich mill owners from Lancashire who bought Rum in 1888 as a holiday retreat for hunting and fishing with their friends during 2-3 months each summer. They spared no expense to build Kinloch Castle out of red Arran sandstone, develop the surrounding grounds (including a squash court and a lavish walled garden), and maintain a year-round presence of caretaking staff. Altogether the family spent the equivalent of £70 million

in today's money on the island. Rum was the second place in Scotland to have electricity after Glasgow. But in 1929 they tired of the place and never returned, leaving it idle until the sale in 1957. The Friends of Kinloch Castle now visit for regular working weekends helping SNH to maintain and restore the buildings and gardens. A party were in attendance during our trip.

The guided tour of Kinloch Castle gives an astonishing insight into the extravagance of the Bulloughs' lifestyle. It's like going back in a time machine to a different world. Each custom-designed room is dripping with expensive artefacts, some of which could do with protection lest they find their way into unscrupulous pockets or rucksacks. Guest entertainments included an 'orchestron' (a type of automated organ), a billiard room, and a ballroom which was designed with a sprung floor and also high windows so that the servants couldn't see the frolicking inside. Indeed, the SNH guide alleged a variety of spicy social and sexual scandals which don't make it into Magnus Magnusson's official handbook. Eighty years on, the ballroom is silent and the Bullough name and businesses have disappeared. Monica, George and his father John are buried in a grand mausoleum like a Greek temple above Harris Bay, with wonderful views towards the Cuillin of Rum.

The monuments to the original people of Rum are a lot more humble: a low wall perhaps, or a pile of stones gradually greening over, which once were houses - the only remains of 420 inhabitants who were brusquely cleared in 1826 to Nova Scotia aboard two unannounced ships. We saw plenty of these sad memorials on Sunday when we all strolled out to Kilmory Bay about 8 kilometres away from Kinloch along a Land Rover track. Whole generations once made a hard and unsung living from this rough land. The graveyard at Kilmory looks out over a beautiful sandy beach towards Skye. Only a few of the stones are legible, one recording the deaths of 6 children in the Matheson family from diphtheria in 1873.

The Cairngorm party rested on the dunes above the beach for a while and soon were ready for an adventurous return to Kinloch over the hills instead of the track. Everyone agreed to head for the modest summit of Mullach Mor - all of 304 metres - even Alec in his trainers and Eilidh with her blisters. The top proved to be a fine viewpoint on this clear day with a broad pavement of rock and a tidy trig point. Pamela was already deep in earnest conversation with Alec about a bird she had just seen. "It was mostly grey, with red feet....a white tail....green breast....blue beak....," ran the improbable description of this mysterious feathered friend spotted flying low across the moor. "A parrot?" offered Alec hopefully as others thumbed unsuccessfully through their bird watching guides.

Most people planned to go directly down to Kinloch Glen and pick up the good track. Brian saw his chance. He and a few others wanted to continue along the ridge for a bit longer "to take in the view" and then circle round to the castle. They said their farewells and steamed off. The race for the showers had begun!

Rum, 15-18/5/98

Geoff Cumming
Sandra Cumming
Eilidh Scobbie
John Gibson
Alan Dunworth
John Adams
Fiona Cameron
Judy Middleton
Ian Shand

Alec Hidalgo
Drew McMahon
Brian Davey
Geraldine Davey
Ken Mills
Gordon Stalker
John Elgee
David Plant
Pamela Strachan



PIPER'S WOOD 1998

HEATHER SALZEN

The Cairngorm Club marked it's centenary with a tree regeneration project in Glen Ey, by enclosing an area known as Piper's Wood at map reference 098857. Dr Salzen made the first botanical survey in 1989. Her article in Cairngorm Club Journal number 102 in 1991 provides a base for her subsequent reports in each journal since then.

It is only two years since my last report but changes in the vegetation are even more apparent. The most obvious is the increased growth of the 'young' birches, for they are now clearly visible from the track across the river. A less obvious change is the dispersion of herbaceous plants within the enclosure. Examples are Rockrose, formerly only on the upper bank and now spreading in the grassland, and Melancholy Thistle, formerly only on the old head dyke which has appeared by the runnel at the end of the lower bank.

The weather on my last visit in late July was typical of the summer of 1998; a dry morning with increasing cloud followed by cold wind and rain. The lack of sunshine meant that no adders were active, nor insects (in 1997 I saw Small Blue and Pearl-bordered Fritillary butterflies) but has not affected plant growth. Indeed, the abundant rainfall may have contributed to the rapid growth shown by the small birches.

TREES

Birches—14 of the old trees survive, and one almost dead. They may have ceased to produce seed as no catkins could be found in 1998. The 'young' birches are far too numerous to count. They are growing on all habitats within the enclosure except the upper marsh, and are most numerous on the grassland, lower marsh and river gravel. The tallest birch is near the upper fence and has reached nearly 2.3m in height. One on the grassland is 2.2m, others have almost reached 2m and many are over 1m.

Rowans—One old small stunted tree survives on the upper bank and many seedlings are visible especially on both banks, the lower marsh and river gravel. Most of the seedlings are only two to four years old but an older one on the river gravel has reached 1.8m.

Willows—A bush of Goat Willow in the lower marsh has reached the height of 1.8m.



Briza media
Quaking grass

Pine—A seedling Scots Pine is growing on the north end of the upper bank. Why has it not been noticed before? At four years old and evergreen it is not difficult to see. Whether its parentage is native Scots Pine by the River Dee not far away (*Pinus sylvestris* subspecies *scotica*) or a plantation pine of mixed origin, will be difficult to ascertain until it is more mature.

Notes on changes in the vegetation zones

This section should be read in conjunction with the botanical survey and map in the 1991 Cairngorm Club Journal No. 102.

D - The dyke and strip of ground above it

This still has a remarkable variety of species but is becoming wetter and more acid, indicated by the growth of *Sphagnum rubellum* hummocks and the appearance of Bog Asphodel. The Fragrant Orchid, whose production of flowering stems fluctuates widely, appeared in moderate numbers in 1997 and fewer in 1998. The old head dyke now has water running over most of its length and is becoming increasingly overgrown. Melancholy Thistle has increased and now flowers abundantly.



Festuca vivipara
Viviparus Fescue

UB - The upper bank

This is still colourful with a variety of flowering herbs, though some appear to be decreasing. There is no bare soil into which annuals such as the Field Gentian can seed. Heather seedlings are abundant and becoming more prominent.



Polygonum viviparum
Alpine Bistort

UM - The upper marsh

This very wet area between the south end of the upper bank and the grassland is now the only true marsh within the enclosure, since the lower marsh has been largely colonised by grasses. Meadowsweet flowered for the first time in 1998.

G - The grassland

This is becoming more varied in spite of the dominance of grasses, as plants seed down from the upper bank. An increase in Heath Bedstraw and Mat Grass may indicate some acidification of the soil. The croft ruins and the old dyke near the north west corner are becoming increasingly overgrown.

LB - The lower bank

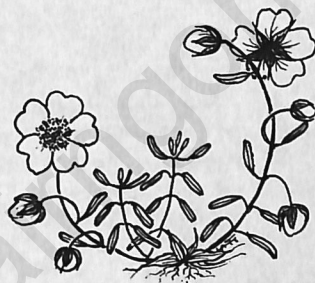
Now covered in vegetation except for a few very small patches of bare soil, and still dry. Bell Heather is still dominant but decreasing while there is more Heather and an abundant growth of white Cladonia lichen.

LM - The lower marsh

Grasses now dominate this area, Yorkshire Fog being most abundant. Wet areas remain with sedges, Meadowsweet and a fine growth of Water Avens, while Kingcup flowers along the runnel at the base of the lower bank.

R - The river gravel

This area shows the least change in vegetation and has not acquired any new species, though plant cover does appear to have increased slightly. Petty Whin flowered prominently in 1997 but has now decreased. Many small birches show slower growth than those in other habitats.



Helianthemum nummularium
Rockrose

The illustrations are of upland plants which grow in Piper's Wood. Rockrose and Quaking Grass are indicators of basic (non-acid) soils. Alpine Bistort and Viviparous Fescue show vivipary, a type of vegetative reproduction in which bulbils or plantlets are produced in place of seeds.

I repeat my appeal made in the 1996 Journal to Cairngorm Club members to send observations of flora and fauna in Piper's Wood, either to me direct or via the Secretary. This will enable a more complete and thus valuable record to be made of the development of this most interesting experiment. Observations made in different seasons could be of great interest. To date none have been received, which means that quite possibly, many records have already been lost. Heather Salzen, 25 Rubislaw Park Crescent, Aberdeen AB15 8BT Tel. 01224 324503.

FERLA MOR

ALEXANDER TEWNION

“The strange phenomenon of Ben Macdui variously described as Am Fear Liath Mor, which is sometimes corrupted to Ferla Mor or worse, and even Ferla Mhor (a crowning indignity for the aspirate denotes the feminine) or Am Fear Glas Mor, The Big Grey Man, has excited the imagination of the public and particularly the mountaineering fraternity, for the last fifty years or more.” The quotation is the first paragraph of Affleck Gray’s preface to the first edition of his book *The Big Grey Man of Ben Macdui*, and I take the liberty of quoting it because I am the cringing ignoramus responsible for eliciting the parenthetical blast of condemnation. This unforgivable faux pas was unwittingly penned in a letter I wrote to Gray in 1966, giving him details of some of my experiences of the now legendary Grey Man. He quite rightly took me to task at the time; but having acquired a smattering of Gaelic since then, it is unlikely that I shall ever again cast such a slur on the Ferla Mor’s undoubted masculinity.

The various psychic or pseudo-physic phenomena reported by walkers and climbers from Ben Macdui and other localities in the Cairngorms are recounted at length in Gray’s book. There were no well authenticated accounts, indeed there was little more than a few meagre hints in local legend and folklore, to justify belief in the existence of a mountain spectre on Ben Macdui until an astonishing tale was divulged by Professor Norman Collie F.R.S. at the annual general meeting of the Cairngorm Club in Aberdeen in 1925. His long-concealed secret - it dated back to 1891, was subsequently published in the press, and in Vol. XI, No. 64 of the Cairngorm Club Journal in 1926. My friend the late Hugh Welsh, one time President and later Honorary President of the Cairngorm Club, knew Collie well and during our many discussions on matters pertaining to the Cairngorms he described Collie as austere, honest and sincere, but so sensitive and reticent that unless he had genuinely experienced the phenomenon and considered it worth others knowing about it, the story of his encounter would never have been told. Briefly, the story goes thus:

Professor Collie was returning from the summit cairn in a mist when he began to think that he heard something other than merely the noise of his own footsteps in the snow. For every few steps he took he heard a crunch, as if someone was walking after him but taking steps three or four times the length of his own. Collie told himself “This is all nonsense,” but he listened and heard it again, though nothing was to be seen in the mist. As he walked on the eerie crunch, crunch continued behind him and he was seized with a dreadful terror. Taking to his heels he ran, staggering blindly among the boulders for four to five miles towards Rothiemurchus forest. Professor Collie concluded his story by saying “What you make of it I do not know, but there

is something very queer about the top of Ben Macdui and I will not go back there by myself, I know?"

From Collie's statement it is clear that he did not see any kind of ghost or apparition, large or small, grey or otherwise. Nevertheless the concept, if not the proved existence of a Grey Man was known to a few people for a number of years before Collie's story was publicised. Dr A.M.Kellas, a very experienced mountaineer who died in Tibet with the first Mount Everest expedition, also had an eerie encounter on Ben Macdui. On learning of Collie's experience some 12 years after it had happened, he told Collie that one June night he had seen a man climb up from the direction of the Lairig Ghru and wander round the summit cairn, near which his brother was sitting, and then descend into the Lairig again. Dr Kellas rejoined his brother to find that he had seen no one.

These two phenomena are difficult to explain and perhaps also to reconcile. In the one case, sounds but no shape or figure; in the other, a man-like figure but no sounds and the figure seen by only one of the two people present. The two are so much at variance that it seems probable that two distinct agencies were involved. Two Grey Men perhaps, one only audible and the other only visible! Or perhaps the sensory organs of some people are far more acute than those of others. The latter is of course quite correct, but no living person has yet seen a ghost. Or even - and one should not lightly dismiss even the faintest possibility out of hand - some people do possess powers of extra-sensory perception beyond the comprehension of ordinary people. This may be so, but frankly I do not believe it. The only powers of extra-sensory perception that I would accept are the powers of deduction and thought possessed by the human brain. That these may go badly astray at times is so well known that the point does not need stressing. While I certainly would not claim to be an expert in psychical matters, I think that a review of my own Ferla Mor experiences will help put some doubtful minds at ease.

During my sixty years or so knowledge of the Cairngorms I've visited the Ben Macdui summit cairn on over 50 occasions, covering all seasons and a wide variety of approach routes, which have included rock and snow climbs as well as easy walks. I have frequently camped in the corries and on the plateau, in some years for days on end and sometimes in very mixed weather, and have slept out shelterless on the plateau a few times, though the weather is often so changeable that I would not recommend this course to anyone. Yet in all those years there were only four occasions in which Ferla Mor merited some kind of mention.

The first was in September 1939 and a simple explanation was forthcoming. Peter Marr my friend and one time climbing companion and I were both serving apprenticeships at the time in Aberdeen, and at the start of the local autumn holiday we packed our kit at 2pm and set off on bicycles to spend a long weekend at Corrour Bothy. Dusk was falling as we entered the little village of Inverey and knocked at Sandy Grant's door. He had been

stalker at Luibeg cottage near Derry Lodge from 1926-37, and as Peter's mother was related to him, etiquette required that we could not pass without at least enquiring after his and Mrs Grant's health. Sandy was a tall man, slow-spoken with a soft highland accent, and so gentlemanly and considerate that two more hours elapsed before Peter and I got away on the road to Derry, our belts considerably tighter after a large helping of excellent venison. It must have been about midnight, quite dark and moonless but with a star-lit sky, when we walked wearily on to the flat, gravelly approach to the then site of the Luibeg footbridge near Preas nam Meirlach, the Robbers' Copse as it became more familiarly known to Aberdeen climbers. Only the occasional bellow of a rutting stag and the scrunch of gravel beneath our heavily clinkered boots broke the silence. Suddenly, we halted simultaneously as we both noticed the spectral vision at the same moment. Above the dark-capped pines of the Robbers' Copse towered a menacing figure, hooded and gowned in white and at least 20 feet tall - the perfect ideal of a ghostly giant. Mystified, we stared at it for about a minute, trying to determine what it could be. We were both familiar with the story of Ferla Mor but dismissed that possibility as unlikely, since we were several miles from the summit of Ben Macdui and a mile or more from the foot of the Sron Riach. Nonetheless the apparition was disturbing, but as we had to pass near it or make a long and tiresome detour, plucked up sufficient courage to make a cautious investigation. What a let-down, or maybe relief! The eerie figure was revealed as a wavering column of smoke rising from a camp fire concealed in a hollow at the edge of the pines. I need hardly say that when we accepted the campers' invitation to join them in a cup of tea, we vouchsafed no hint of our earlier qualms. Had we been genuinely frightened? Not really, but if you consider that we had done a hard morning's work at our trade then cycled 70 miles with heavy rucksacks, it will be obvious that we must have been physically and mentally tired and thus very susceptible to vagaries of the imagination.

My second encounter with Ferla Mor occurred in a much more typical atmosphere, with conditions very similar to those experienced by Professor Collie, except that there was no snow on the hills. It happened in October 1943 when I was enjoying a few days well-earned leave from the army. By then I had climbed Ben Macdui eight or nine times, and as it was seldom possible to find a climbing companion at short notice in those war-time days, I was hill walking on my own. A few months earlier I found a scalp with long, blond hair among the scree, about 600 yards north-west from the summit. It had belonged to one of the crew of a bomber which had crashed on Ben Macdui in mist. "God rest his soul" was my thought as I buried the scalp beside the cross which marked the crash site. But that had been an otherwise enjoyable day, just as this promised to be until dark clouds swept across from the west in front of a strengthening wind. As I looked westwards from the plateau the swirling cloudbanks blotted out the cliffs of An Garbh Choire Mor and advanced rapidly towards the Lairig Ghru. Evidently a storm was

brewing. Even as I retraced my steps past the ruins of the Sapper's bothy the sky became ominously dark overhead and the first tattered fingers of mist raced by in the teeth of the wind. The mist quickly thickened, reducing visibility to 20 yards, so that all I could see was the faint track underfoot and the vague outlines of rubbly granite all around.

At that time I was physically very fit. Wearing army denims and boots, and carrying a .303 Lee Enfield rifle I could jog along over rough ground and cover 14 miles in under two hours. This day I didn't have a rifle, but carried a .38 revolver to pot any mountain hare or ptarmigan that chanced across my path. I had no qualms about this. Rations were in very short supply then, stalkers and gamekeepers equally scarce, and being a reasonably good shot I wasted few bullets, and little time departing the scene. Altogether a hard case you might think; not the kind of weak-minded person likely to see a ghost. Up until then I thought so too, but alas, my self-confidence was to be disagreeably shattered.

A short distance above Loch Etchachan lies a little pool by the Ben Macdui path. Above it on the west rise steep slopes littered with huge screes, among which the now vicious wind snarled and whined. Above the wind I heard a different sound, just like a loud footstep. It was followed by another...then another...separated by quite appreciable intervals, perhaps a couple of seconds. "It's Ferla Mor!" was my instant reaction. No time was given to analyse and reject this idea. Through the eddying mist a strange shape loomed menacingly towards me, receded then came charging straight at me. Without stopping to think I whipped out my revolver and sent three rounds rapidly into the wraith. Crack! Crack! Crack! When the shape came on I turned and hared at breakneck speed down the path to Glen Derry.

Often since then I have felt thankful that I was so supremely fit at the time, otherwise I would almost certainly have suffered some injury on the descent, probably on the steep, gravelly section of path at the head of Coire Etchachan, where pebbles rolling under foot present some hazard to a careless traveller. Often too I have been asked "Was it really Ferla Mor that you saw?" At the moment of shooting I had no doubt, but certainty lasted only for the few moments of panic. Down in Glen Derry when the cold light of reason re-asserted itself, several possible explanations presented for consideration. The most probable is that the sound of footsteps was caused either by a falling rock dislodged by wandering deer, or by some freakish effect of wind in the rocks; while the ghostly spectre was indeed a wraith, but of cloud and all too easily transformed by a too suggestive imagination into Ferla Mor. Alternatively, the figure could have been a deer or even a man, magnified by the mist into a peculiar, menacing giant. Such a ghastly possibility did occur to me down in Glen Derry, and I suffered some uneasy moments contemplating the consequences of possible murder; but the absence of shouts or cries of distress seemed proof enough that no human other than myself was involved.

Nowadays I am more than ever convinced that all of the Ferla Mor

phenomena arise from natural causes and can be explained quite rationally when studied closely. Two later personal experiences give this view considerable weight. In July 1957 I was camping at around 3,650 feet in the snowy Corrie of Ben Macdui while studying the snow bunting. That month was a very wet one, the Cairngorms being veiled in cloud for days on end and with rain most days. On the evening of the 17th, after writing up my notes I was sitting in the tent smoking a contemplative pipe when I heard a curious soft whistling. There was steady rain and dense mist all around, but I ventured out to investigate. The mysterious whistling continued and came nearer, and then out of the mist stepped a truly gigantic figure of a man. Once again the distorting and magnifying effects of the mist were at work, but not too much this time as the whistler was revealed to be Colonel Pat Baird, well-known mountaineer and Arctic explorer, who was carrying out a study of climate and snow-lie on Ben Macdui. Pat was a very tall man, and knowing well the effects of mist on size and aware of Ferla Mor, had considerably announced his pending arrival by whistling a warning. This was just as well since he was wearing gym shoes and his noiseless approach could easily have given me a sudden start - or perhaps he had heard of how I had shot Ferla Mor and had no wish to provide a possible target!

Anyone who has read this far may be sneering with disdain or smiling pityingly by now. I wouldn't and shouldn't blame them, but now must stress what I mentioned earlier. Given the proper conditions, which implies some genuine physical factor or factors which are inexplicable at the time, plus the knowledge of the Ferla Mor stories, people who are otherwise sane and sensible can persuade themselves that they have seen or heard the Big Grey Man. I unwittingly played the leading role on one such occasion which involved three English visitors to the Cairngorms.

In summer 1972, still studying snow buntings, I camped several weekends on the high plateau at heights of around 3,700 feet. Towards the end of June, enduring once again the vile weather so often prevailing on the snow bunting nesting grounds, I felt early on Sunday afternoon that I'd had enough, so packed my kit and tent and set off in mist and rain towards distant Cairn Gorm. The alpine meadows at the Feith Buidhe cleared of mist as I crossed them, but the cloud base repeatedly lowered and lifted, each time leaving behind arms of mist which lingered in hollows and on ridges. Forging the rain-swollen Feith Buidhe gave some difficulty, and while casting up and down the south bank looking for a reasonable crossing I chanced to glance back along the way I had come. Three people appeared out of the mist and halted abruptly on seeing me. I thought little of this, soon found a crossing and climbed steadily towards the Ben Macdui-Cairn Gorm path which traverses the side of Cairn Lochan. Halfway to the path I stopped and looked back again, not only to see the same three people but also to see them halt again. "Curious" I reflected, but when the mist descended I plodded on and up for a few minutes, until the clouds unexpectedly lifted for a few minutes

to reveal rain-swept slopes. Stopping, I looked back once more - and again my three followers drew up sharply in their tracks. By now I realised that something was amiss although I had not guessed the reason. It seemed as if the three were playing some odd kind of game, trying to stay hidden from me in the mist. There was absolutely no question of their reluctance to catch up on me. When the mist fell again I remained motionless, leaning on my walking stick. A few minutes later voices became audible, then suddenly the cloud was blown away and there the three were, only 30 yards behind. Slowly they approached, at first casting rather apprehensive looks which slowly changed to sheepish smiles when I greeted them. They were two young men and a girl who had come up Cairn Gorm on the chairlift and walked along the plateau before the weather deteriorated. Then, uncertain of the route back, they had seen a huge grey giant playing tricks with them in the mist, appearing, disappearing and reappearing, all in a very disconcerting manner. They had been, they admitted, more than a little frightened, thinking that I was Ferla Mor. I was quite taken aback. They were talking about me! Admittedly I am above average height and well built, but to be mistaken for the Big Grey Man seemed a doubtful compliment. Nevertheless I could appreciate their predicament, a wry turn of thought taking me back to my own eventful mistake. Now, wearing grey trousers, a grey cagoule and carrying a large old-fashioned frame rucksack on my back and a smaller one with camera equipment slung over one shoulder, little imagination was required to transform me into Ferla Mor if the observer knew the story, and the mist played it's usual magnifying tricks.

After I had given them directions to the Fiacail a' Choire Chais path, they departed in a happier frame of mind along the mist shrouded path. But there was a finale to the tale. With my heavy load it took me another hour to reach the cairn at the top of the Fiacail a' Choire Chais, where I heard voices from the corrie, at that point quite steep with broken crags on the west and a large curving snow wreath at the corrie rim. Leaving my pack at the corrie rim, I went to investigate. It was the three walkers again, this time stuck on rocks near the snow wreath and hopelessly lost in the mist. Following my shouted instructions they climbed up to the rim of the corrie and safety, then I led them round to the cairn and showed them the start of the narrow gravel path they had missed earlier. My comment was: "Maybe you'll remember your Ferla Mor - a benevolent ghost, not a malevolent ogre."

THE CHILKOOT TRAIL

DOUGLAS BRUCE

The words Alaska, Yukon and the North West Frontier have always made my blood tingle. Somehow or other I have an affinity with Indians, bears and wide open spaces. I have climbed and roamed all over Scotland and England, been to all the other well known climbing areas in the Rockies, but the call from the far north west of Canada tugged at me. I could see no prospect of heading into this unknown until, completely out of the blue, an invitation came from a cousin in Anchorage to join up with her party of mainly USA Airforce personnel, to trek the Chilkoot Trail from Skagway to Lake Bennet.

I hadn't even heard of this trail, but was soon sold on the idea when 'Alaska - a Walking Guide' arrived. However, talk of the Panhandle, Klondykers and Dawson City were still a bit of a mystery, but trawling the Internet helped and I was able to order the trail guide from Seattle. The Chilkoot trail came about during the late 1800's as the most accessible means of getting to the gold rush centre of Dawson City from either Seattle or Vancouver. Prospectors sailed to Skagway via the Inner Passage, crossed the Rocky Mountain barrier then journeyed down the Yukon river to Dawson City, a journey of 2,500 miles which could take a year.

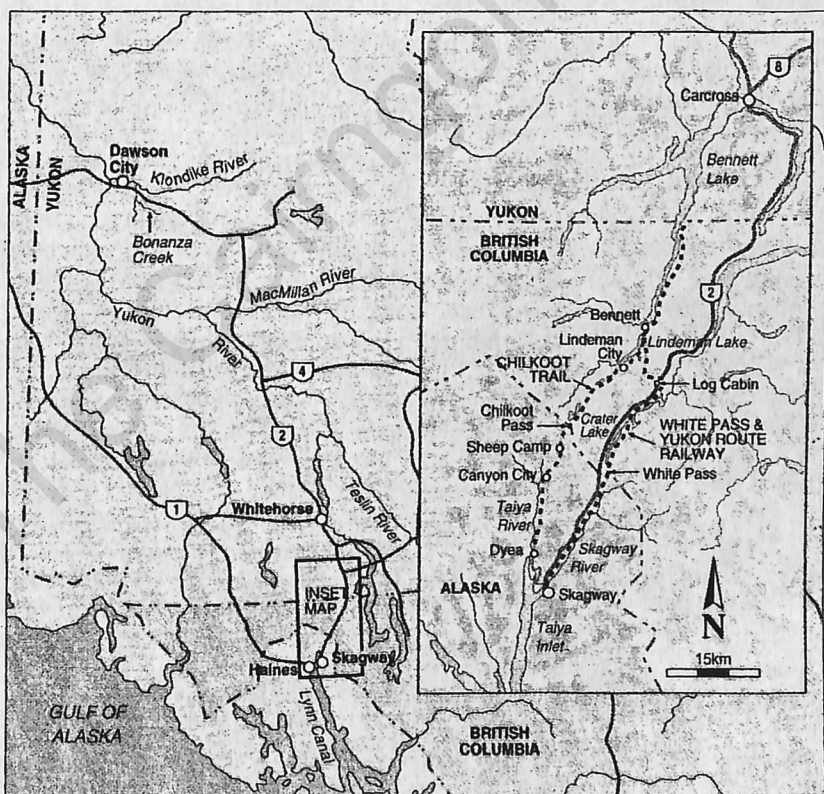
I also discovered that the trail is now an important National Heritage site and strictly controlled. Booking a back country permit was essential as was an itinerary. This was accomplished after much transatlantic telephoning, so the next step was to become really fit. This was an opportunity to walk and climb new routes in the Cairngorms, carrying increasing amounts of liquid as heavier loads to improve my stamina and back strength.

Plans were well advanced when news came that the US airmen had been placed on 24 hour standby due to the Middle East crisis. I suddenly found myself on my own, but willing and ready so off I went. It took four days of ten hours at the wheel to drive the Alaskan Highway to Skagway. On speaking to a couple of sunburned back-packers at Log Cabin, where the trail crosses the highway, I learned that the trail had been closed for the last three days because of a serious forest fire. Imagine my thoughts after eight months of planning and travelling some seven thousand miles! Just my luck that the weather had been very sunny to make the undergrowth tinder dry. The scenery was magnificent with snow-capped peaks, glaciers and endless forests, but the last 30 or so mile descent towards to sea level was even more spectacular as the valleys narrowed.

Skagway was like being back a hundred years in time with wooden buildings and boardwalks. The Ranger office confirmed that the trail was closed, but while discussing my plight news came that the fire source had been located at a remote trapper's cabin, and that it would re-open the following day for 50 back-packers. Unfortunately around 100 were already

in the vicinity and I felt my luck was running out. The only salvation could be to turn up at 7am next day and hope. So there I was listening to group receiving trail instructions - sterilise all drinking water, stay on the trail, don't leave any food which would encourage bears and so on, while another ranger did a head count. A group from Texas had ten bookings but only eight had signed in. The ranger looked at me "You are number nine, get yourself ready." I was certainly ready with Bergan rucksack, Icelandic special sleeping bag, spare clothes, stove, food for three days, tent, bear bell, cord to suspend food over high poles and three litres of tonic water to relieve beastie bites. A coach took us the nine miles to the trailhead at Dyea, our permits were checked, and we were off.

Even although it was only 9am the temperature was in the high 70's and very humid. The trail immediately disappeared into dense woodland and started to rise gradually, then more rapidly. The undergrowth was so dense that I seemed to be walking on my own. The heat and humidity were almost unbearable and fluid intake exceeded my estimations, but after some five



Route of The Chilkoot Trail

miles of uphill toil Finnegan's Point and a well earned rest was reached. Next stop was the ruins of Canyon City. It was hard to visualise how massive equipment was manhandled into such an inhospitable area, and how 30,000 Klondykers survived here in the depths of winter, to be ready for the dash to Dawson city when spring arrived. Most did, but some succumbed as we read on short epitaphs seen on makeshift headboards. Such was the lure of gold.

We passed Pleasant Camp and the woodland became less dense with majestic peaks, ice blue glaciers and towering cliffs in view. Sheep Camp, our destination was 13 miles and some 1,000 feet above Dyea and very well maintained. We learned from the notice board to expect a ranger at 7pm, and a rifle-carrying slip of a girl appeared to give us instructions for the next day. Everyone must be up and away by 6am to allow good walking on the several miles of snow near the summit, and there were brown bears, so we must be vigilant.

I left at 5am, my bear bell providing accompaniment. Members of one group ahead whistled in turn while the other picked up sizeable stones and sang. We were soon beyond the treeline, and the valley narrowed with huge boulders to negotiate and torrents to cross. It was a relief to reach Scales and rest before the steep climb to the summit. This 45 degree ascent was known as the Golden Stairs, and the image of the moving line of men, like ants on some gigantic anthill, was with me all the way. Pieces of machinery were scattered amongst the boulders at the 3,600 foot summit, and again I was dumbfounded by the determination of the Stampeders to move heavy equipment over such hostile ground. We were now back in Canada and the going became easier as we traversed long snowfields, and followed the winding trail past Stone Crib, Crater Lake, Morrow Lake and Happy Camp to our campsite at Deep Lake, some 23 miles from Dyea.

There was a low mist next morning although blue sky was visible. I broke camp at 6am and made my way to Lindeman City with yet another graveyard. Lindeman Lake was the starting point for the Stampeders to float the 550 miles to Dawson City, by whatever means they could muster. Half way along the lake is the Cut Off Trail which meanders through woodlands to reach the Bennet to Skagway railway line. Six miles back along the line is Log Cabin, the end of my 39 mile trail.

It was a superb trek with well managed campsites, plentiful indicator poles and not one piece of discarded rubbish. The scenery was magnificent but we saw little wildlife. An extended trail from Seattle to Dawson City which takes about a month is becoming the 'in thing' for American backpackers. I was pleased that all my preparations had been worthwhile, although I had to sterilise water by boiling since I hadn't taken enough with me. And yes, I cannot wait to receive another invitation to that magic land of four seasons - Winter, June, July and August, Alaska.

SNAKES ALIVE

WALTER BURNETT

The best of being a member of the Cairngorm Club for me is having the occasional use of Muir Cottage for a weekend with a group of friends and no radio, telephone or television. After a hard walk or climb on the Saturday we come to the social highlight in the multi-course evening meal. Everyone seems to bring enough food and wine for two so we try hard not to waste anything, especially the wine.

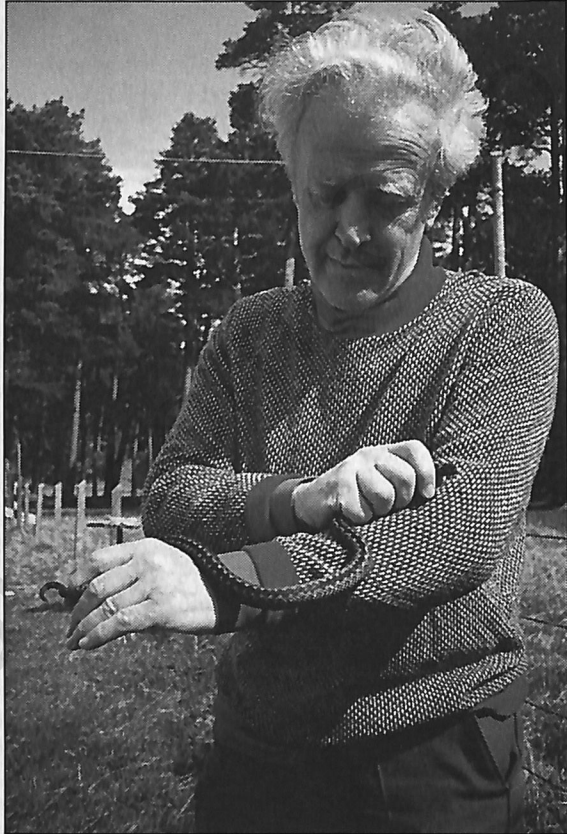
Sunday is usually a day for a gentle stroll and some amateur nature spotting. Early one morning one of our lawn-mowing red deer was doing a stint at the west end of the cottage. I got out the video and filmed as I herded it towards the river, intending to record the dainty standing leap with which they clear the fence. Just beyond the wood shed it got down on its knees and crawled under the bottom wire, walked a few paces and resumed grazing. On another occasion three of us came upon an astonishing brick-red frog. The only lady present refused to remove the spell by kissing it, on the rather feeble grounds that it didn't look very like a prince, and we men declined since there is no authentic record of a frog princess.

Across the road from Muir there is a mix of woodland, bog, dry banks and running water that is worth a careful look. There are fingerling trout in the burns, tadpoles in season above the deer fence, an occasional frog or toad and, if it is warm enough, a snake or two may be sunbathing. Like many a hill walker I had never seen a snake until I started looking in the most likely habitat on sunny days. With my sister and fellow member Hazel Elrick, I found my first near the water intake. With some trepidation and a lot of care I picked it up and handed it to her while I ran for my camera. The resulting photograph has hung in Muir for several years just to remind everyone of the sort of neighbours we have there. The rest of our company were idling around the cottage and, thinking that they would like to see this colourful chap, we took it across to them. It was an instant cure for Sunday morning lethargy. Two nameless persons gave the impression that they had suddenly recalled urgent business in a neighbouring county. Provided I held it by both head and tail, all the rest gave it a stroke and were impressed by its clean, silky smoothness. From that time I have made it my business to persuade friends that snakes really are quite nice and not at all nasty like those great, hairy, horrible house spiders lurking about in dark corners with more legs than a respectable insect has any need for. We put the snake back exactly where we found it and on checking about an hour later, it was lying sunning itself on the same spot, apparently not a bit put off.

The first one is still the most dramatically coloured I have seen. The lozenge shaped dorsal scales were laid out like a Moorish mosaic and the underside was of black, overlapping strips laid from side to side like the

apron of a medieval suit of armour. Looking at it straight on, the expression was a bit stony-eyed and the occasional flicker of its black tongue gave the distinct impression that it was studying me equally intently.

Five is the most that I have found at one time opposite the cottage. I had taken the tall plastic bucket from the kitchen with me and popped them in as I found them and took them to the cottage to let everyone see how varied they were. Having heard several people say that on seeing a snake they ran for their lives, I was able to demonstrate on the lawn that any one of those five would have had difficulty over-hauling a reasonably active zimmer driver and, on the linoleum in the dining room they made very poor progress indeed. Funny thing was that during the latter demonstration, most of the spectators sat



The author handling an adder for the first time

with their legs tucked underneath them. Perhaps this was because the biggest one was hissing both while inhaling and exhaling.

At an indoor meet last winter, our journal editor asked if I would care to write something on snakes, having heard of my interest and ability to find them. Being a complete amateur, I was not sure that I could do the subject justice. Since then however, I have added a snippet to my knowledge of snakes that is freely available to all but rarely taken up. There seems to be a fairly widespread belief that any snake one sees is a grass snake. This is highly unlikely and the only safe assumption is that all Scottish snakes are adders and therefore venomous. A slow moving, pencil-sized one could be a slow worm, but beware of immature adders in cold weather.

One day, fifty metres West of our water intake, I came upon a couple of snakes that appeared to be practising for their scout knots badge - or perhaps these adders were multiplying. I crept quietly away, not wishing to cause offence. On the Saturday morning, all my companions but Ray Clark having left for the hills, I was talking to a lady whose two dogs were running around on the grass across the way. I asked how they reacted to snakes and she said that she had never seen one. I immediately went a few paces through the trees, and there on its usual patch was the dark one I had shown to the work weekenders in April. I picked it up. It bit me!

There was no sudden flashing strike but a rather casual dab at my right index finger. I thought "Drat!" or something very similar and checked the damage. A small bead of blood appeared and, having left the Bowie knife back at the ranch, it was a case of suck and spit. It was no more painful than a jab with a darning needle if my long term memory serves me correctly. I tied a rough tourniquet round the finger with a handkerchief, bundling the spare material into my fist to conceal it and returned to the cottage.

I knew that when the hikers returned from the hills there would be fits of laughter at my expense and a large hole in my 'snakes are cuddly' campaign. To avoid this I swore Ray to eternal silence. It didn't last more than twenty minutes. My finger was now hard and a fetching shade of mauve, and he persuaded me that a visit to the doctor in Braemar could do no harm. Dr. Cruikshank made some phone calls then said that Accident and Emergency were expecting me. This seemed a bit over the top, but there is no point seeking medical advice and then ignoring it. Back to the cottage we went, where my car was loaded with canoe, bike etc. Ray laid down the law again - in royal Navy terms he outranks me by a dozen levels or so - and he would take me in his car. I reckoned we would be back in good time for the evening meal.

On the way the car became quite hot and Ray was slow to open the windows. He told me a week later that it was quite cool. By now I had loosened the tourniquet and my hand was like an inflated surgical glove while my arm had become round and featureless. A mild pain had spread along my arm, up as far as my larynx and almost down to my waist. My thoughts were mainly on the ribbing that was coming my way. On arrival at A and E the waiting time was zero. A venflon was fixed in my left arm and I was given Piriton and hydrocortisone while blood samples were sent for analysis. About three hours after the bite I suddenly felt rather weak and lay down, but was still able to exchange witty repartee with Ray. He told me later that I had been talking a lot of rubbish. Did he have to add "as usual!"

About this time I was whisked through to the resuscitation unit where I noticed that the tubular lights were funny shapes. What with all the gowned figures, heart monitor, blood pressure and pulse monitor, drip and oxygen mask, I began to feel quite important and heard some interesting medical talk "His BP has gone through his boots. Yes, here it is - sudden onset of hypotension." Next they gave me an infusion of European viper venom anti-

serum and I began to feel much better. I was later congratulated for having gone through the list of symptoms as per the book, fortunately stopping somewhere short of the last.

Of later non-medical opinions, I heard several of "accident waiting to happen" From one young man - "no fool like an old fool" (Thinks - "How sharper than a serpent's tooth etc." and consider redrafting will) and from a colleague on hearing that I had not been bitten on the ankle or such but had been picking the thing up, "Nae the hale shillin!" I suppose there is some truth an all of these.

I was kept at A and E for about thirty hours during which I received eight different medicines, including an antibiotic lest the snake's oral hygiene was poor. I was sent home with dented pride and swollen from neck to waist. My forearm was bluish and the rest of the area was a mild smoked haddock yellow. The pain was never anywhere near to unbearable, perhaps aided by drugs at the beginning. A slight discomfort persisted for about a month and the blood bank banned me for six months.

It was some time later after all the fuss had died down that I realised my good fortune. Left to my own devices I may well have reached the wobbly stage three hours into the hills, with the ignominy of requiring the rescue services and the attendant publicity of 'the old fool' nature. I am most grateful to Mr Raymond Clark and Dr. Cruikshank for setting me on the straight and narrow to the expert care and attention at A and E. So now I offer some entirely superfluous advice. There is only one course of action for dealing with a snake bite. Get immediate medical help, no matter how trivial it seems, especially if the victim is a child or elderly.

After all that I still feel well disposed towards snakes. I have only once come close to a genuine accident. There is some dry stone walling built into a bank just a few steps above the water intake, and at just the right height to put your hand on for a rest. An adder sometimes lies where a stone is missing. I saw it just in time. Look before you lean.

Oh, that snake? You will be pleased as I was to know that there are so many nature lovers at A and E. I think that there were as many enquiries after its health as mine. No, I did not take it with me in two pieces. No, I did not kill it. When last seen it was gliding gently away into the long grass with a thin-lipped smile on its face that looked distinctly smug. I feel that we shall meet again.

THE OVERNIGHTER

ERIC JOHNSTON

It is 66 years since what is perhaps the most eagerly awaited Club excursion and also, paradoxically, the most avoided came into being. Over the years members have certainly had strong feelings about the overnighiter which started with the high-sounding title of the Summer Solstice outing back in 1932. This became over the years the Midsummer, Midnight and even the Midsummer Night's excursion before becoming the pedestrian overnighiter in recent journals. Club members as long ago as 1898 had experienced the joys and agonies of a night on the mountains as Mrs E. Robertson described in an evocative piece entitled 'Sunrise on the Mountains' where *"the climbers stood huddled together to keep warm"* on Cairngorm, but with the reward *"the mist became a sea of palest gold, whose shadows were of pearl and whose depths were amethyst. For a moment the vision stayed, a revelation of heaven, and then the glorious sun rose above the mist and all shone cold, white and glistening - only to fade into the commonplace of life"* (CC Journal 10). We must remember too that the six stalwart founders of the Club did so on an overnighiter.

The President at the first Summer Solstice was James McCoss who had a keen interest in astronomy as well as climbing. Present day climbing members will find interest in his article of 1912 'Some Kincardineshire Coast Climbs' illustrated by photographs of chimneying techniques at Souter Head (CC



Judy and Sandra Middleton on the Mamores - June 1996

Journal 38). He was an enthusiast for high camping in the Cairngorms and in 1912, after the opening of the Club's bridge over the Allt-na-Bienne Moire, left Coylumbridge with four others and, lanterns lit, went through the Lairig Ghru then up the side of a snowy Ben Macdhuì, down by Loch Etchachan and on to Braemar for lunch. A war in which he served, and 21 years were to pass before he made such excursions part of Club activities.

The late J E 'Eddie' Bothwell, surely the doyen of overnighters to his contemporaries, attended the first one in 1932 and gave some personal recollections in an entertaining article in 1975 (CC Journal 96). His last overnighiter, his annual highlight, was in 1980, the year of his death.

For the devotee there is an air of expectation leading up to the 'curiously popular' adventure, with the weather the great unknown. However, it must be said that this enthusiasm is not shared by all. Quite a few members will confess that they have participated - but only once! Over the years tales of frost and snow, rain and wind have been well documented: 'midsummer weather dogged the party,' 'weather back to normal - difficult to know why one member considered it a night to prolong unduly.' 'Why spend the best part of two fine days on a bus to endure a miserable night on the mountains' - so goes the argument.

The best remembered and recorded overnighters have been anniversary excursions. In 1937, the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Club saw the last journey up Speyside by train, and an extraordinary meeting led by the President at the Shelter Stone, followed by fireworks. There was an expedition to the same location for the 75th anniversary, but planned celebrations had to be abandoned due to atrocious weather. The centenary expedition in 1987 retraced the route of the founder members - from the Linn of Dee to the summit of Ben Macdhuì at midnight, then down to the Shelter Stone and the Dairymaid's Field at 6am. Here the President proposed and a company of about 100 drank a toast to the Club. The celebrations continued with a memorable champagne barbecue at Muir of Inverey with almost 300 present.

The post-excursion meal has always been an important part of the overnighiter. Most ended at Braemar in the early days with hot baths and a hearty breakfast at the Invercauld Hotel. These delights disappeared during the war when Club activities were restricted, but the Club breakfasted again at the Invercauld in 1946 - no word of hot baths. Nowadays the overnighters are more ambitious and end at lunch time. Some parties have completed all eleven Mamores or most of the Fannichs in one outing. Earlier groups sometimes started out after 'a noisy meal' and in one account looked in the mists on Ben Avon like 'a belated company recovering from the revels of the previous night.'

Midsummer night does conjure up thoughts of spooks and things which go bump in the night. This may explain what one lady member of undoubted sobriety described in the 1970's as "a most remarkable happening" when an object appeared in the sky, advancing menacingly in her direction, only to

dwindle and disappear like a puff of smoke. As she reflected in unbelief "Do UFO's really exist?"

And so, long may the overnighter prosper. Every year provides a fund of memories and stories. To the doubter, come and join in the midsummer madness and perhaps you too will experience the delight of an unforgettable sunrise on the mountains. You may even become an enthusiast!

LINN OF MUICK

Quietly, I sit and watch
the tumble of brown flecked cream,
those tinted shocks of water
which make leapfrogs of foam.

And, where dark rock shines through,
white horsetails streaked with black
hang down their hair of spume
past grey and mossy rock.

So, by a high banked birch,
I can but pause and ponder
this fall of churning chaos,
release of liquid thunder.

And track the time loaned flow,
which dives with maverick joy
to pound and splash anew
stones well acquaint with spray.

O what innocence
in this rumbling, crashing linn,
unlike the dark perversion
in the quiet Fall of Man.



George Philip

TRAVELS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

CALLUM HETHERINGTON

Students reading for degrees in Geology at the University of St. Andrews are encouraged to see for themselves as wide a range of geological features as possible and to undertake fieldwork wherever this is practicable. This applies particularly in the honours courses where students are required to submit a dissertation as part of their final year, and the staff responsible make every effort to identify interesting projects. As a result of contacts amongst African geologists, my supervisor was able to arrange a number of placements in southern Africa for members of my class during the summer of 1996.

I was fortunate to be offered one of these placements and it was arranged that I would spend six weeks that summer on a field project in Botswana. I was to work alongside a student from the University of Botswana in Gaborone, to produce a geological map of an area in the south of the country adjacent to a small village called Moshaneng where I was to stay. My journey began in Edinburgh on 31st May and I flew to Johannesburg by way of London and Rome. After two days in Johannesburg I travelled onwards by coach to Gaborone where I joined the local student, known to all as 'Bones.'

In geological terms the main feature of interest to us was the Moshaneng Complex. This is a body of intrusive rock formed as a result of two magmas of different compositions coming into contact with one another while in the molten state. As well as attempting from field observations, to plot the extent of the complex, we were to collect samples of rock which could be examined in the laboratory for their chemical and mineralogical characteristics. Such evidence, together with analyses of rock textures, can provide information about the origins of the rock and the conditions under which they formed and in this case the extent of reaction between the two liquid magmas. The area had been identified as being of interest by local geologists, but detailed information was limited due to resources being directed at other areas of the country which were targets of commercial value.

Mapping in Southern Botswana was pleasantly different to field work in Scotland. In the preceding year I had endured 12 days of more or less continual rain in southern Skye, and I worked through blizzard conditions in the north west highlands near Ullapool. By contrast, conditions in Botswana were as near perfect as anyone could hope for with warm sunshine every day, tempered only by an occasional cooling breeze. My working day began shortly after 6am and finished about an hour before darkness fell, around 5pm.

Besides the climate the countryside was also very different from my home territory. The terrain was relatively featureless, the only landmarks of any prominence being a radio mast and plateau type sandstone escarpments. These had steep sides and stood as high as 100 metres above the surrounding plains. Exposure of the underlying rock was generally poor and the task of recognising

outcrops of potential interest was made doubly difficult by the dense covering of thorn bushes.

Pinpointing one's location in the study area was also difficult for several reasons. Topographical base maps of the area were available but they turned out to be of limited value for geological surveying. In particular their altitude data appeared to have been based on the same mixture of inspection from a distance and inspired guess work used to produce the earliest OS sheet for those parts of the Scottish Highlands which were inaccessible to the survey teams. It also quickly became clear that the topographical maps had not been updated to take account of the network of roads that had sprung up in the area in recent years, or changes in geomorphology caused by natural processes such as flooding. In addition there was the problem posed by the presence of a strongly magnetic doleritic rock which meant that caution was needed before relying on compass observations.

We undertook a preliminary survey of the area as soon as we arrived and began mapping in the second week. To begin with we checked and rechecked all our observations in view of our doubts as to whether we would be able to relocate any given outcrop once we had left it. This meant that progress was initially slow, but as our confidence increased things improved and we were able to complete the fieldwork in the allotted time. The information collected was used to produce a geological map of the area and it was a great relief to learn subsequently that this was broadly consistent with the conclusions reached by the local geologists from the Geological Survey in Lobatse, on the basis of their own observations.

The village of Moshaneng was an isolated place full of interest to a visitor like myself. It was approximately 15km from Kanye, the nearest town, and some three km from the main road. The population of the village was about 300, with surrounding farms and small holdings adding a further 200. There were some public buildings and the odd private house constructed with modern materials, but domestic dwellings were mainly traditional mud huts with thatched roofs and no more than two rooms. There was no electricity, and as far as I could see none of the huts had running water. Cooking was done over open fires or in a few cases on a cooker using bottled gas.

My home was a traditional hut with a single room measuring some 5 x 2.8m. The local primary school loaned me two tables (but not chairs which were in short supply) and these, together with a camp bed, washing up basin and cooking equipment made for a perfectly comfortable existence. The hut's other main amenity was its unrestricted view to the rear over the local football pitch. The local league consisted of two teams, from the east and west of the village, and with no other competition available, these teams played each other every Saturday afternoon. This was a popular fixture and I always had company to share my grandstand view and a pot of tea.

Before setting off on the assignment I had been concerned about how I might be received by the local people especially in the more remote



Callum's home in Moshaneng – a traditional thatched mud hut

countryside. I had been warned that in some areas visitors had been treated with suspicion or indifference, if not outright hostility. I need not have worried. The people with whom I lived were unfailingly polite, generous and as keen to learn about me, my work, and my country and origins, as I was to learn about theirs. Looking back it was the friendliness of the villagers that made my stay in Moshaneng so enjoyable. They accepted me into their community and treated me as an honoured guest. I consider myself lucky to have been able to live alongside them albeit for a short time. They seemed happy and contented and the degree to which they were at ease with their environment left me with many doubts about the supposed benefits of living in a more highly developed environment.

While in the area I made several visits to other places of geological interest and I was able to join some field trips organised by the University of Botswana for its senior students. One of these was to the town of Jwaneng whose fame lies with a nearby geological feature. This is a igneous pipe of ultrabasic rock called Kimberlite. It is in such pipes that diamonds are found for which southern Africa is renowned, and the pipe at Jwaneng is one of the best in the world in terms not only of the abundance of the diamonds but also their quality. It was a sight of the highest interest from a geological point of view and one I was very pleased to have seen.

After completing my field project I continued my visit for a further three weeks. In the first week I visited Zimbabwe and northern Botswana including the Victoria Falls and the Chobe National Park. These were very interesting times as I travelled alone, often overnight and all my company was from

local people. This was very different to travelling with a group of friends. Outstanding memories of these trips are the overnight train to Victoria Falls from Bulawayo where I travelled with a man from Zambia. He was on his way home after working in the gold mines of South Africa. We chatted extensively, and it was very interesting to hear about his way of life; a man who returns to his family once every two months by taking a six day round trip by train over three countries. The other great memory was a bus journey through almost the entire length of Botswana, going from settlement to settlement, picking up and setting down all manner of cargo.

The last part of my trip took me from the most northerly parts of South Africa all the way to Cape Town and Cape Agulhas, the most southerly tip of the continent. On the way I visited Pretoria and the Pilensberg National Park where the highlight was being able to watch white rhinos from a distance of no more than four metres. I continued by way of the Karoo plateau which is another national park by reason of its geological interest. Finally I joined two of my class mates from St. Andrews who were also on projects in southern Africa and we travelled into the area of the Paarl Mountains and the Cape. We visited Stellenbosch and the wine growing regions, Cape Point and the Cape of Good Hope and finally Cape Town and Table Mountain itself. From here we drove along the so called Garden Route stopping at Cape Agulhas where the Indian and South Atlantic Oceans officially meet, and the next stop going south is Antarctica. We then travelled further east to Port Elizabeth before turning northwards and re-crossing the Karoo on our way to Orange Free State and the town of Welkom. Here we toured one of the Witswatersrand gold mines, and descended to 1800 metres to look at some of the seams which are presently being worked. A very eye opening experience.

It remained only to return to Johannesburg and my flight home. I was sad to be leaving such a fascinating part of the world but content that I had done what I could to take advantage of the opportunity to see it all first hand. In particular I had shared the life of an African village to a much greater degree than is possible for most western visitors. In addition I believe the fieldwork gave me experience which will be invaluable to me in my future career.

I would like to thank the Cairngorm Club for the grant which it gave me to help towards the costs of my trip. The award covered my living expenses for the whole of my stay in Moshaneng and was much appreciated.

A WALK ACROSS SCOTLAND

JACK CONNELL

The exigencies of work, family, etc. have prevented me from attaining the ambition of many other hill walkers, namely, to become a Munroist. In recent retirement years, however, I pondered attempting a less time-consuming target such as solo ascents of the much fewer 8000 metre peaks. This particular idea I quickly discarded on account of not having the necessary gear. On another tack, I have always wanted to have a taste of Knoydart (until 1996 unknown territory for me) and to traverse Corrieyairack, the only other long distance Scottish pass that I had not walked. I decided, therefore, to combine the two by tackling one of the 'classic' trans-Scotland treks i.e. Mallaig to Montrose. This has been done hundreds of times before, and the only virtue in setting down my story is that it might encourage other elderly members to think of trying something similar. The trek has been popularised since 1981 as a back-packing expedition by 'The Great Outdoors' magazine who loosely organise a group event at the end of May each year. This used to be called pretentiously the 'Ultimate Challenge' but it is now the 'Great Outdoors Challenge.' I could not manage May so settled for the last two weeks in June 1996 - in the event an inspired choice, weather-wise.

The two major prior considerations were route and logistics. With regard to the route, I was not entirely confident of my long-term shoulder strength or stamina, so opted conservatively for lower-levels and relative shortness. These choices inevitably resulted in a fair amount of road walking, which although not ideal, turned out to be quite pleasant since the roads I used had little traffic on them. I also made it easier by including two rest days in the total of 14 that I allowed, as well as six nights in hotels: five and two nights were spent camping and in bothies, respectively. The total distance was 283 km (an average of nearly 24 km per day), most of which I had not walked before; the total height climbed was 3970 m. With regard to logistics, my first thought was to appeal to my friends in the Marines who could supply copious back-up transport, and a rescue helicopter on constant stand-by. However, Peggy, my wife, thought this plan would attract too much unwanted publicity for the Club, and as a better alternative, very kindly volunteered her own services. Without her substantial help in ferrying supplies I could not have achieved more than a few stages. For camping I used a Saunders Jetpacker ultra lightweight one-person ridge tent weighing about 1.4 kg. This is an excellent product, the only snag being that to secure complete watertightness it is necessary to pitch it very accurately in order to avoid the outer and inner fabrics touching: accordingly, in stony ground it is not always easy to find the ideal position for pegs. Backpacking breakfast consisted of a pre-prepared mixture of muesli and dried milk powder moistened as required with hot water, and a marmalade sandwich. Lunch was a brew of Batchelor's

dried soup, sandwiches, fruit cake and fruit. Supper was a reconstituted pack of Reiter Travelunch dried meal (reasonably tasty and stomach-filling, as well as being extremely convenient), a 'Now' chocolate biscuit and fruit. Drinks were invariably a pre-prepared mixture of Nescafé and dried milk. Initial weight of the rucksack with three days food, including six large apples, was about 10.5 kg; most days it was probably about 9.5 kg.

So, having spent the night at the Marine Hotel, Mallaig, off I went across to Inverie on the 'Western Isles' mail boat, full of romantic feelings, pleasant anticipation and some excitement. Pausing only to read the poignant inscription on the monument to the seven men of Knoydart, I took the first of many steps eastwards on a clear, dry and warmish morning. Beside the Brocket memorial stood the first two of many deer that I saw en route: they watched my slowish progress intently. Resisting the temptation to capture one for use as a pack-carrier up-hill, I pressed on. At the top of the Bealach Mam Barrisdale I also resisted the temptation to divert along the barely discernible track to Luinne Bheinn: massed dark clouds had gathered and I was anxious to pitch the tent in dryness. I arrived at the camp-site outside the Barrisdale Bay bothy just in time to meet a hillwalker from Kilmarnock who was packing his gear after descending from Ladhar Bheinn thus completing his Munros. I said it was a privilege for me to be the first person to congratulate him. I then proceeded to occupy the patch of nice, green sward that he had vacated, and to enjoy the lovely setting, made even more idyllic by grazing deer.

Despite the expected midge attacks and development of itchy spots, I had a good night and was on my solitary way right early. Intermittent drizzle did not spoil my appreciation of the switchback path and magnificent scenery to Kinlochhourn. My only human company was two canoeists making their way slowly along Loch Hourn. Whilst taking an early lunch at Kinlochhourn I idly read the map, looking forward to some smooth, level walking to end the day. To my chagrin I realised there was a previously unnoticed 230m climb up to the level of Loch Quoich. However, a steady plod saw me to the top. Passing Loch Coire Shubbh I remembered how 250 years ago almost to the day, Bonnie Prince Charlie had skirted it on his way north, evading Hanoverian troops positioned nearby. The numerous knolls thereabouts must have provided useful cover for him and his companions. At the road alongside Loch Quoich I encountered two prostrate figures. These were Croatian hillwalkers who had trekked cross-country from Glenfinnan. They had run out of food, were near exhaustion and were waiting for a hitch towards Fort William. I was relieved later to see them waving to me from a passing van.

My planned campsite that night was somewhere along the west side of the spur of Loch Quoich that points North to Alltbeithe bothy. In fact, this idea materialised because I found a good flat space about 400 metres from the bridge and below the track to the bothy. Not having secured permission to camp from Glen Quoich Estate I was slightly apprehensive about stopping

there. My feelings turned to near alarm when just before supper time I noticed a truck (only the fourth vehicle I had seen all day) cross the bridge and turn along the track below which my tent was situated. Either the occupants, who I suspect were checking on a herd of cattle near Alltbeithe, did not see me or were not interested because they did not stop then or on their return 30 minutes later. Accordingly, I was able to settle down to prepare supper and to pass the drizzly night undisturbed.

Continuing beside the Loch, I passed some of the time trying to spot the location of the now submerged Glen Quoich Lodge and thinking about Ewen MacPhee, allegedly the last bandit of Scotland who lived early last century on a similarly submerged island somewhere west of Gairich. Three or so kilometres below the dam, Peggy, having motored from Fort Augustus, met me with a welcome change of clothes and a razor. Feeling slightly more human I made good time to the Tomdoun Hotel where I downed a delicious pint of beer. I was then able to have a leisurely lunch stretched out on Inchlaggan enjoying glorious sun and scenery. Peggy had told me in the morning that she had confirmed my hope that it would be possible to find a campsite beside the Allt a' Bhiora just East of Ardochy House. The spot I eventually chose was delightfully secluded in a sylvan glade where that evening I was lulled to sleep by the tinkling stream.

After again road-walking eastward, I left the A87 at a track leading to Munerigie croft and then picked up another good one which traverses the east side of Loch Lundie. Eventually I was confronted by the only potentially serious block on the whole walk: I had planned to enter Inchnacardoch Forest at a bridge shown on the map as crossing Invervigar Burn, but found it collapsed. Luckily, the dry conditions enabled me to ford the burn without difficulty and so avoid a long detour, only to be faced on the other side by the highest deer fence I have ever seen. Again luckily, I got over this without damage to either myself or the fence, and then walked along forest tracks to the public road with its magnificent pine trees on the left hand side. My mid-afternoon bath at the Lovat Arms hotel in Fort Augustus felt very luxurious. Peggy had found an excellent restaurant at the Lock Inn, and so that evening we indulged ourselves there. The following day she left for home leaving me to enjoy a quiet time reading the Sunday papers, drying the tent and strolling round the village. At 6 am on Monday, missing breakfast, I left the hotel for the long haul over the Corrieyairack Pass. The day was near perfect, still, cool to warm, and dry. After being appalled by the severe erosion at the start of the track, I moved on happily, trying to imagine being in the company of drovers, redcoats or BPC (again). There was, in fact, a complete absence of human company all the way across except for a motorcyclist whom I passed when approaching the summit. My curt greeting of 'Hi' conveyed, I hope, my disapproval of his exploit. I learned later that a group of Germans had traversed the pass on four-wheeled motorcycles the day before. Can nothing be done to stop the actual and potential damage caused to the track by vehicles? Outside Melgarve bothy I was warmly greeted

by the boiler-suited Mr Meek, a retired crane driver from Glasgow. It turned out that he and a few other hill walking friends were in the habit of renovating mountain bothies in their spare time - a very public-spirited activity, though they had no formal connection with the Mountain Bothies Association. They had been asked by the Laggan Community Council to do their best with Melgarve, which they have improved very impressively. His friends had just gone, leaving him to do odd jobs. Later, he refreshed me with a brew and we had a very enjoyable half-hour together, swapping experiences and knowledge. At Garva Bridge I was met unexpectedly by Peggy who had motored from home. It was nice having someone to help me erect the tent near the bridge and to give me fresh socks, Around 8 pm I had another scare when a convoy of five land-rovers sped westward over the bridge. I expected being turfed out for trespass, however, they returned later without stopping. What were they up to, I wondered. Perhaps viewing the herds of deer that came down off the hill in the evening to feed on the sweet grass by the river, and then stayed there all night.

Despite striking camp early, and disturbing the deer, I was met near Crathie by an attentive Peggy who relieved me of the tent and sleeping bag, and then drove back to the Royal Hotel, Kingussie where we were to spend that night together. I chose to walk the quiet A86 and B9152 (old A9), and on them was amused to pass several gate-houses which are now completely cut off from their mansions on the other side of the new A9. After a hotel breakfast the following morning I made my way uneventfully, but enjoying gracious Strathspey and a light pack, to the Coylumbridge Hotel for another night with Peggy.

Then to the Lairig Ghru and very familiar ground. Opening the gate beside the caravan site I somehow managed to cut my finger quite badly on the latch. The resulting stream of blood gave rise to visions of a medical emergency and the abandonment of the walk. However, skilful application of plasters and holding the finger vertically at shoulder height staunched the flow, and I decided to proceed. Luckily, the injury caused no further problems. At the Pools of Dee, whilst enjoying lunch in good weather, I became aware of a flock of screaming gulls approaching from the South. I thought they were protesting at my presence until I noticed a pair of eagles wheeling high above the flock. Had the eagles been making a raid on the nesting site at Loch nan Stuirteag? Corroul was my overnight stop. I had the place to myself except for the resident field mice, who were more than a little nuisance. As soon as the light started to fade and I had entered my sleeping bag, they emerged noisily from the fireplace and started to run about the floor. If I kept motionless they would cheekily stand on their hind legs about a foot from my face. With their huge ears and oversized whiskers they really are cute, but the idea of them actually invading my person kept me awake until I resorted to semi-suffocation in an almost totally enclosed bag. The combination of mice-induced insomnia and the concrete floor made getting up next morning unusually pleasant.

During the previous late afternoon I had been very surprised to hear a couple of metallic clangs which seemed to originate from the base of Carn a' Mhaim. With the naked eye I could not see anything to explain the phenomenon. However, a solution offered itself when I passed the junction of the main path and of the one to the White Bridge. It was clear that the Scottish Rights of Way Society signpost had been very recently renewed, so I presumed that SRWS members had been busy. Because I was meeting Peggy at the Linn of Dee car park for lunch, I took the Glen Lui route. At the Robbers' Copse I passed a Dutch campsite - the third Dutch group that I had met so far. I suppose I encountered about 20 walkers on the whole trip, but, interestingly, the Dutch were by far the most numerous. They all told me that they adored Scotland.

Having dumped most of the weight in the car at the Linn, I had an easy passage to Braemar where I stayed two nights (the first with Peggy) at the Fife Arms in a spacious room overlooking the main entrance.

Missing the hotel breakfast again, at 6 am I was on the road to Invercauld Bridge where I entered Ballochbuie, having previously obtained precautionary permission to walk through the Royal estate. In the forest I took a path which traverses the bealach between Cnap a Choire Bhuidhe and Cnappan Nathraichean, and thereafter joins the land-rover track to Gelder Shiel. Gathering my things together after a brew at Gelder bothy, I realised with dismay that I must have dropped my sun hat on the path. This article is an essential part of my kit because without it my bald head would quickly become unbearably sore. Not wishing to retrace my steps in a possibly vain search, I decided to push on whilst pondering what to do. My eventual idea was to utilise the towel I was carrying as a sort of burnous. Unfortunately, the towel was not large enough to fasten firmly and comfortably under my chin so I determined to call in at the Ranger's Office at the Spittal of Glenmuick in the hope of scrounging some string or twine. On explaining my problem to the ranger she said "You don't need string, you need a hat" and immediately produced a large box full of hats of all kinds, scarves, gloves, etc. This was the lost property brought in from all corners of the estate and unclaimed for months or years. I was allowed to take my pick - a natty baseball cap which saved my pate for the rest of the hike. Then south-east up the Allt Darrarrie mini-ravine and over to the Shieling of Mark in gathering mist and rain. From this direction the bothy is hidden until the very last moment : a little compass work is advisable. Peggy and I had visited it twice before and knew it to be in reasonable condition. However, as the result of recent work it is now, in my opinion, one of the best overnight stops in Scotland. As well as being very weatherproof and mice-free it has a good fireplace and furniture, including raised bed-frames and, luxury of luxuries, a 5 cm thick foam mattress. In consequence I had an excellent night's sleep, again with sole occupancy. The bothy book showed it to be much frequented by Great Outdoors challengers.

Next morning it was over Muckle Cairn, playing hide and seek at the top with deer among the head-high hags, and down to Glen Lee. Up till this point I had enjoyed very good weather on most days, but mid-morning at Loch Lee the heavens opened in a torrential downpour that lasted the rest of the day and most of the night. My route was on the Whisky Road through the Clash of Wirren. I was surprised that the broad land-rover track on Eskside turned at the summit into a much narrower path, single track and feet-soakingly heathery lower down. My overnight stop was on a pleasant, level grassy bank just downstream from the keeper's house at Stoneyford on the West Water. Some weeks beforehand I had obtained readily-given permission to camp there from the keeper. This place is on the Hunthill Estate, whose attitude I contrasted with the adjoining Gannochy Estate which is liberally dotted with signs warning against fires and camping. Peggy delivered the tent to me at Stoneyford and I erected it during a lucky, brief respite from the rain. However, the next 15 hours were a good test of how to keep a tiny tent's ground sheet dry in monsoon conditions. It is not a matter of water ingress through the tent as how to deal with water dripping from one's external clothing and rucksack.

Despite the wet I had a reasonably good sleep, packed up in moderate rain and set out road walking on the final and longest stage of 30 km. Towards the opening of the Glen I was met again by Peggy who had stayed at Brechin and who took my heavy items. By that time the rain had ceased and I finished in virtual dryness. After climbing slightly breathlessly to the top of the Caterhuns I wondered whether it would not have been wiser to go by the low level route via Tarfside and Edzell airfield, but in compensation I was rewarded with a lovely long distance view of my end point at the coast. As encouragement, Peggy walked a few kilometres with me into Brechin having parked there earlier, and later we had a picnic lunch together in the grounds of House of Dun. Thence to journey's end - the crumbling dunes of Montrose - something of an anticlimax without cheering crowds and a welcoming band, particularly since it was my 69th birthday. There was, however, a kind of celebration later at home in that we shared a bottle of champagne with the neighbours.

What, then are the lasting impressions? Gratitude at being able to experience more of the unsurpassed beauty, grandeur, and wildlife of Scotland. I counted 51 species of bird in the 14 days including some uncommon ones such as snipe (Loch Lochy), greater spotted woodpecker (Inchnacardock) and twite (Corrour). I saw a lot of other wild life including red squirrels, Sika deer (I think) and a red deer fawn. Apart from a slightly sore toe which soon cleared up, I thankfully suffered no physical problems either during or after the event. I also admit to some feeling of satisfaction at having done it. An uncanny accompaniment was that on almost every day of the walk I heard cuckoos. Perhaps they were mocking my effort, but, yahboo, I had the last word.

IN MEMORIAM

The Club records with regret the death of the following members :

Mr William A. Baxter	(O 1960)	Miss Juliet Hardy	(A 1978)
Dr Edna M. Beyts	(OL 1967)	Mrs Geraldine Howie	(O 1979)
Mr William A.J. Bryce	(A 1993)	Mrs Sylvia M. Simpson	(O 1973)
Mrs M. Lyra Crawford	(O 1935)	Prof. V. C. Wynne-Edwards	(OL 1947)
Mrs Maureen M. Duthie	(O 1979)		

GERALDINE HOWIE

Geraldine Howie died at home in Auchterhouse on September 20, 1997. She joined the Club in 1979, and was a committee member 1980-83 and again between 1988-90. Not only will she be remembered as a walking 'phenomenon', currently holding the record for the greatest number of Munro rounds completed by a woman, but as a superb cook, appearing at Club barbecues with wonderful vegetarian dishes.

Born in Essex in 1942, she came to Scotland with her first husband Alan in the late 1970's. After their divorce she started to hill walk, driven from the beginning by the desire to become the most prolific female Munroist. She completed her first round on Ben Starav in October 1981, the second with a round of the tops on Ben More, Crianlarich three years later. Although intent on setting this record, she had a deep interest and love of all aspects of the Scottish countryside, including ornithology and botany. On rainy days she often visited ancient monuments.

From 1980 -1989 she was personal assistant to the boss of the oil company Texaco in Aberdeen. I visited her once at work to find an elegant, well-groomed creature, in stark contrast to the tidy, but often wet and muddy hill walker I knew at weekends. She loved the remoteness of Knoydart, the ruggedness of Skye but shunned the Alps, believing them to be too busy. She first walked abroad in 1992 when she successfully climbed Kilimanjaro. Her first round of the Corbetts ended on Canisp in 1986; her second, probably also a record, on Sgurr Dhomhuill in 1995. Her dedication to her task was amazing. She once required stitches to a laceration in her knee. A week after the accident, stitches still in situ, she ascended Meall Greigh. "OK going up" she said, "but was embarrassed on the descent as I could only go one way, walking down in a very long traverse, just like a haggis!" In 1987 she completed the Furths of Scotland, her third round of Munros and second of Tops. In 1990 and 1992 her fourth and fifth rounds were finished. During a trip to Bolivia in 1994, however, something was obviously wrong. Despite her usual tremendous enthusiasm, her walking ability seemed strangely blunted. A year later Motor Neurone Disease was diagnosed, a particularly cruel blow to someone so active. In 1995 she completed her sixth, and what

was to be her final round of Munros on Braeriach, struggling to reach the summit in six hours, a walk which she would previously have done in half the time. She died peacefully in her sleep two years later, survived by her second husband Robin, who had been her constant hill companion since 1982.

R.B.I.F.

WILLIAM A BAXTER

Bill Baxter was born in Aberdeen in 1908. After training as a lawyer, he worked for the Aberdeen City Council and was latterly Deputy City Chamberlain. Joining the Club in 1960, he became a committee member two years later and was Vice President from 1965-66. After retirement in 1973 and the death of his wife the following year, he 'took to the hills' with Ken and Tibbbie Fraser and other friends whenever conditions were favourable. They thrived on these expeditions, returning with tales of fighting their way through dense forestry plantations on compass bearings and other hilarious incidents. Over the years he developed an intimate knowledge of most of the Scottish mountains, and was always generous with detailed advice for those of us with less experience. His sense of fun was infectious, and he will be remembered for the happy atmosphere which always seemed to surround him.

I.F.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CLUB

GENERAL MEETINGS

The 1996 Annual General Meeting was held on 27 November. There were no changes in the ranks of office-bearers.

The 1997 Annual General Meeting was held on 26 November. Richard Shirreffs was elected President in succession to Judy Middleton, at the same time retiring as Secretary after twenty-five years in that position. Eilidh Scobbie was elected Secretary in his place, though with an indication that she wished to serve only until a longer term successor could be found. Ken Thomson was elected to the vacant position of Vice-President. Subscription rates were increased for the first time since 1988.

The 1998 Annual General Meeting was held on 25 November. Ken Forbes demitted office as Librarian after five years in that position and Alex Hidalgo was elected in his place. Les Batt was elected Secretary to replace Eilidh Scobbie and Stuart Stronach was elected to fill the vacant position of Vice-President.

ANNUAL DINNERS

The 1996 Annual Dinner was held at the Elphinstone Hall, King's College, Old Aberdeen, Professor Seaton Baxter giving an illustrated talk entitled 'Reflections on the Cairngorms'.

The 1997 Annual Dinner was also held at the Elphinstone Hall, the talk on this occasion being given by the Club's own (inimitable) Neil Cromar on 'A lighthearted and personal look at Mountaineering' with superb slides.

The 1998 Annual Dinner saw a change of venue to the Amatola Hotel, Great Western Road, Aberdeen. Martin Moran entertained us with an illustrated talk on 'Mountain Adventures in North West Scotland.'

Richard Shirreffs

MEETS AND EXCURSIONS 1996 - 1998

The average attendance at excursions for the period covered by this journal was 27.4, about the same as for the previous period. The attendance for each one is given in the list at the end of this report.

The August 1996 outing from the Cairnwell car park to Spittal of Glenshee began overcast with mist on the hills but cleared later. About half the party went over the Cairnwell, Carn a' Gheoidh and Carn Bhinnein while most of the others reached Glas Maol, Creag Leacach and some of the smaller hills to the south. The Cairngorm traverse followed a period of very heavy rainfall which caused all the rivers and streams to be in full spate. This rather limited the options available on this overcast day. Approximately half the party walked through the Lairig Ghru while the other half went over Ben Macdhui. In contrast the next excursion enjoyed beautiful weather. Around half the party climbed Beinn Tulaichean and Cruach Ardrain, while the others climbed An Caisteal and Beinn a' Chroin. One member managed to do all four.

It was a very misty day on the traverse from Auchallater to Glen Muick. Most of the party went over Lochnagar but some preferred the 'low level' route via the Dubh Loch. The Cromdale Hills had a light covering of snow but the whole party completed the traverse from Bridge of Brown to Advie on a rather windy, cold but clear day. The last meet of the year was somewhat unusual in that the bus took us to the highest point on the road from

Rhynie to Upper Cabrach from where we climbed Buck of the Cabrach, and later Tap o' Noth from Howtown.

At Lochnagar in January 1997 the weather was very poor and few people managed to reach the top because of the near white-out conditions. Another poor day was experienced on Ben Rinnes with strong winds and mist on the higher reaches. The weather improved for the excursion to Mount Keen which was climbed from the Glen Esk side. It was a beautiful sunny day, the only difficulty being crossing the burns beyond the Queen's Well. It was back to misty conditions for the trip to the Lomond Hills, at least for the first part of the route from Scotlandwell over Bishop Hill and West Lomond. East Lomond was however, clear and we had good views for the latter half of the route. It made a change from our usual venues looking down on expanses of farmland with villages and small towns scattered about. High tea at the Lomond Hills Hotel in Freuchie was particularly memorable.

The Easter meet at the Inverve Hotel in Tyndrum had poor weather, so the 17 participants did little climbing. The excursion from Finzean to Tarfside took place on a beautiful day. All the party climbed Peter Hill to begin with, and from there some went on to Mount Battock, some followed the ridge westwards from Peter Hill as far as the Fungle track, while others went through the valley in between. On the traverse from Loch Muick to Crathie most of the party opted to cross over Lochnagar despite early mist, but this cleared away during the morning. At Ben Ledi we had a beautiful day. The President's Party traversed Stuc a' Chroin and Ben Vorlich but all the others opted to climb Ben Ledi and Ben Vane. One far-seeing member had arranged to have a taxi waiting for him at Ballimore, thus saving himself, what proved for the rest of us to be a rather long walk along the road to the Kingshouse Hotel where we had our tea.

The overnight excursion in 1997 was in the Cairngorms, followed by a barbecue at Muir Cottage to celebrate the 110th anniversary of the Club. It had been hoped that this would give members an opportunity to cross over Braeriach and Cairn Toul, a route that has generally proved too long for a normal day excursion, but unfortunately it turned out to be a rather poor night. Most of the party opted to go through the Lairig Ghru and got rather wet. A smaller number who went by Glen Feshie were luckier, where although it often threatened to rain, it stayed dry all night.

The Inverve to Spittal of Glenshee outing was on a fine dry day with all the tops clear. A wide variety of routes were followed, some people climbing An Socach, others Beinn Iutharn Mor and Beag, while others took the 'easy' route through between them to Loch nan Eun. The Cairngorm traverse took place on a beautiful day. Most of the party went over Beinn Macdhuil and from there either by Derry Cairngorm or Carn a' Mhaim. Rather poorer weather was experienced on Ben Chonzie, where although quite pleasant at glen level, the mist did not clear from the top of the hill until late afternoon, by which time everybody was well down.

From Glen Isla to Glen Clova we had a fine dry day with most of the party taking in the summit of Mayar and some doing Driesh as well. At Ben Vuirich we had a dry day but it was very misty on the tops. Despite this most of the party climbed the hill, but others opted for a low level walk, one party reaching as far as Loch Loch. On the Gordon Way we had fine clear weather and all the party followed the route from Suie Hill as far as the Mither Tap, from where our route descended to the Rowan Tree car park.

The first excursion of 1998 was Lochnagar as usual, and everyone who wanted to reached the top on a windy but pleasant day. It was misty at Cairnwell where a large party alighted at the Shan Spittal Bridge and did the round of Carn an Tuirc, Cairn of Claise and Glas Maol. Most of the others did Glas Maol and Creag Leacach from the car park. At the

Linn of Dee most members went up Glen Derry and climbed Beinn a' Chaorainn returning over Beinn Bhreac on what was a reasonably fine day. One party climbed Carn Bhac. The traverse of Schiehallion took place on what was a good day at lower altitudes but persistently foggy on the top of the hill. This was the Club's first winter excursion so far into Perthshire for very many years, but there was very little snow.

The 1998 Easter Meet was held at Spean Bridge, where once again the hotel offered us very favourable terms. It was a weekend of rather mixed weather, but a considerable amount of climbing was done. One party climbed Ben Nevis and traversed the Carn Mor Dearg arête in snow conditions. Other climbs done included a traverse of the Grey Corries, Creag Meaghaidh and Meall Teanga. About 16 people stayed in the hotel and 12 in the Grey Corries Lodge Bunkhouse.

The first excursion after Easter was to Beinn a' Bhuird from Alltdourie Cottage. It was a fine day but a number of people were slightly late in getting back, having been held up by the amount of soft deep snow on the plateau. We had beautiful weather on the excursion from Auchallater to Glen Muick. The President's Party went over Cairn Taggart and Broad Cairn, but most of the others did Cairn Taggart and Lochnagar. Only 11 people went to Bridge of Orchy, the poorest attendance for 30 years on what was a beautiful day. One party left the bus at Tyndrum and climbed Ben Oss and Beinn Dubhchraig. The main group went to Beinn a' Chreachain and Beinn Achaladair, with some managing to do Beinn an Dothaidh as well.

The overnighter gave the choice of climbing either in the Fannichs or in the Beinn Dearg group. Only one party chose the latter with the rest getting off at Loch a' Bhraoin to climb some of the Fannichs, one group actually managing all except the most westerly two. The night was made memorable by the spectacular thunder and lightning storm from midnight until around 4am.

The excursion in August to Jock's Road was on a rather wet day with mist on top. The majority followed the Jock's Road path for most of its route, but some got off the bus at the Cairnwell car park and went over Cairn of Claise and Tom Buidhe. Another group alighted at the Old Glen Clunie Lodge and went from there over Carn an Tuirc and the Tolmount. The Cairngorm traverse started off in rather poor weather with mist on the tops and very windy and cold, but the day improved and by afternoon was quite pleasant. The most popular route was over Ben Macdhuib and Derry Cairngorm, but others visited Loch Avon, some went to Braeriach and Cairn Toul and one party went through the Lairig an Laoigh. On this occasion a large number of people were seriously overdue at the bus, these being the parties who attempted the latter two routes.

The next outing was from Glen Esk to Glen Clova. In the morning it looked as if we were in for a really foul day, but the weather cleared up. Almost everyone followed the route along Loch Lee and from there to the Falls of Unich and Falls of Damp and from there westwards by various routes towards Loch Brandy. At least one group found time to take in Ben Tirran, the Corbett which lies above Loch Wharral. The excursion to Beinn Mholach was intended to be a traverse from Kinloch Rannoch to Dalnaspidal, but high rivers and doubts about bridges led us to leave the bus at Kinloch Rannoch. All but two of the party climbed the hill on what was a rather pleasant day.

The excursion from Dorback Lodge to Tomintoul was a rather mixed day, very wintry higher up, with a covering of snow. Some members climbed Geal Charn while others contented themselves with various low level routes. Snow was also present on the last excursion of this report. From the Forest of Birse most members went on to Gannoch and from there joined the Fir Mounth track which they followed as far as Glen Tanar. One

party went through the Fungle route, climbing Carnferg on the way.

The end of 1998 marks the end of a long association going back over fifty years between the Club and three generations of the Duguid family, bus hirers, following the decision of Sandy Duguid to retire from business. The business has been taken over by Whyte's of Newmachar. What implications, if any, this change may have for the Club remains to be seen.

Graham Ewen

EXCURSIONS

1996

25 August	Cairnwell to Spittal of Glenshee (28)
7 September	Cairngorm Traverse (41)
29 September	Cruach Ardrain (25)
20 October	Auchallater to Glenmuick (37)
9 November	Cromdale Hills (27)
8 December	Buck of the Cabrach (35)

1997

12 January	Lochnagar (43)
1 February	Ben Rinnes (27)
23 February	Mount Keen (26)
16 March	Lomond Hills (25)
20 April	Finzean to Tarfside (27)
11 May	Loch Muick to Crathie (27)
31 May	Ben Ledi (22)
21/22 June	Coylumbridge to Inverey (31)
24 August	Inverey to Spittal of Glenshee (25)
13 September	Cairngorm Traverse (29)
5 October	Ben Chonzie (24)
26 October	Glen Isla to Glen Clova (31)
15 November	Ben Vurich (23)
7 December	Gordon Way (33)

1998

11 January	Lochnagar (39)
31 January	Cairnwell (25)
22 February	Linn of Dee (14)
15 March	Schiehallion (25)
25 April	Beinn a' Bhuird (22)
10 May	Auchallater to Glenmuick (19)
30 May	Bridge of Orchy (11)
20/21 June	Fannichs/Beinn Dearg group (15)
23 August	Jock's Road (28)
13 September	Cairngorm Traverse (40)
4 October	Glen Esk to Glen Clova (22)
24 October	Beinn Mholach (23)
15 November	Dorback Lodge to Tomintoul (35)
6 December	Forest of Birse to Aboyne (27)

EASTER MEETS

1997	Tyndrum
1998	Spean Bridge

WEEKENDS 1997 - 1998

Since the introduction of Weekend Meets to the Club programme in 1979 there has been a wide variety of accommodation and venues used - ranging from hostels to hotels with a few bothies and bunkhouses thrown in for good measure. I believe that in those fledgling days doubts were expressed about the viability of holding regular weekend meets, but I hope that the continuing successes of the meets since then have erased those doubts and shown that weekend meets are truly a core function of the Club, offering an opportunity for Club members to visit and explore a wide variety of locations around the Highlands and Islands (and sometimes further afield) and also giving newer members to the Club a chance to get to know the hills in the company of more established members.

Since the last Journal there has been a change of Weekend Meets Convener, with John Gibson standing down and Geoff Cumming taking on the role, but John's unique sense of humour has been missed in the bothies and bunkhouses and we will be trying to arrange venues that may tempt him along again (but maybe not to the bothies!).

The rest of the weekend meets committee remain basically the same - Judy Middleton, Dave Plant, Ian Bryce and Derek Beverley - but for 1999 Derek is taking a sabbatical and a relatively new member to the Club, Drew McMahon is taking his place (I suspect that Derek is arranging something special for the millennium!).

One recent feature of the weekend meets has been a joint Club Easter Meet with the weekend meets people going to the same venue as the official Club Easter Meets Party i.e. those who stay in hotels rather than hostels. In 1997 this was at Tyndrum where one of the hotels and the local bunkhouse were utilised and in 1998 the venue was Glen Spean, with accommodation in the Spean Bridge Hotel and the Grey Corries Bunkhouse. We will be continuing with this policy in the foreseeable future, as we believe that it widens the community of the Club, and gives an opportunity to some of the newer Club members to meet and socialise with some of the more senior members. In 1999 the joint meet is at Kinlochewe, and reservations have been made at both the Hotel and the adjoining Bunkhouse.

Highlights of the 1997 meets were undoubtedly the trip to Mull in July with the boat trip in ideal weather to Iona and Staffa, and in December the Christmas barbecue at the Shelter Stone where, on a beautiful clear night, some Club members were fortunate to be entertained by an impressive display of shooting stars. 1998 was full of highlights - Alpine conditions in Glencoe, Dave Plant's wild ceilidh on Rum, Ian Bryce's cultural weekend in Pitlochry, and sharing the hostel at Loch Ossian with Windswept the stag. (We did find time to climb a few hills as well)

Something that we are hoping to make a regular feature of the weekend meets calendar is a week long meet. In 1998 Judy Middleton kindly organised a week in Skye and for 1999 Brian Davey is busy planning a trip to Ireland. As Brian works for the Met Office we encourage him to come to as many meets as possible and it seems to have worked - we nearly always have good weather!

If any of this sounds of interest why not come along and join us.

Geoff Cumming

WEEKEND MEETS 1997 - 1998

1997

January	Glencoe	Torren Cottages
February	Muir of Inverey	Club cottage
March	Newtonmore	Independent hostel
April	Tyndrum	Independent hostel
May	Cannich	SYHA Hostel
June	Glen Nevis	Steall Hut
July	Mull	SYHA Hostel
August	Glen Etive	The Smiddy Hut
September	Loch Lochy	SYHA Hostel
October	Inchnadamph	Independent Hostel
November	Crianlarich	SYHA Hostel
December	Shelter Stone	

1998

January	Glencoe	Torren Cottages
February	Muir of Inverey	Club cottage
March	Crianlarich	SYHA Hostel
April	Corpach	Snowgoose Bunkhouse
May	Rum	Kinloch Castle Hostel
June	Glen Affric	Strawberry Cottage & SYHA Hostel
July	Skye	The BMC hut at Glen Brittle
August	Kinlochleven	West Highland Bunkhouse
September	Pitlochry	SYHA Hostel & Guest House
October	Carbisdale Castle	SYHA Hostel
November	Achnashellach	Gerry Howkin's Hostel
December	Loch Ossian	SYHA Hostel

ROCK AND ICE CLIMBING

I wrote my first report for the Club journal back in 1991. Then, climbing was very much a minority activity undertaken by a few members, and with limited ambitions. The report gave a potted history of climbing within the Club, noting the pioneering exploits of members in the early part of the century. It concluded by stating that although we would no longer be forging new routes of our own, we were still as active as possible and having fun. In the space of only seven years, it's nice to have been able to render the first half of that last statement obsolete!

This year, 1998, has seen probably the most active programme of climbing activities in the Club's history, the highlight of which (from a publicity point of view) was the first ascent of a couple of new rock climbs on the coast south of Aberdeen. One of these, 'The Cairngorm Club's Other Crack' received a mass ascent by members on a Tuesday evening meet, and has since been mentioned in 'High' magazine's review of the Scottish climbing year. The name is a reference to the oldest recorded climb in the north east of Scotland, 'Cairngorm Club Crack', on Clachnaben, first climbed by W. Garden in 1901.

When I became Climbing Sub-Committee Convener back in 1991, we were fortunate

to have received such staunch support and financial assistance from the Committee, enabling the purchase of the climbing equipment we required. Activities comprised almost entirely of weekly meets in the summer and the very occasional winter adventure. During the intervening years, I have been very grateful for the regular assistance provided by the more experienced Club members. We have been lucky in that just as one climber has moved on, another has become available to help on a weekly basis. These members, Peter Bellarby, Nigel Eastmond, Graham Callander and Hal Taylor, have been essential in allowing the continuation of climbing activities. Stephen Kirkpatrick is the latest club member who has generously given his time on a regular basis to help other Club members literally learn the ropes. It has been largely due to Stephen's influence that this last year has been by far the most successful in the Club's recent climbing history.



Diane Guilianotti on Central Buttress, Lochnagar (Grade II) 1.11.98

We were, and continue to be, very fortunate in that we are the only climbing club in Aberdeen with access to the Aberdeen City Council climbing wall at Summerhill Community Education Centre. This allowed a regular get-together of members over the 1997/8 winter which was, unfortunately, too poor to have allowed any winter climbing activities of note. Following on from the Summerhill sessions, outdoor climbing started, as has become usual, in the first week of May. Despite a rather poor summer weather-wise, only a couple of weeks were lost as a complete washout, with a few wet evenings becoming devoted to technical training rather than actual climbing. Attendances at these meets rose to such a level that it became necessary to purchase additional climbing equipment, topped up by Stephen's personal spare kit. Many of the attendees were new to the Club, attracted by the climbing as well as (or in some cases, instead of) the walking activities, although a few 'well-kent' faces made welcome reappearances. One of the most satisfying outcomes of the regular activity was that several climbers progressed to leading others up climbs, thus enabling the large numbers to be catered for without excessive queuing time. In that respect, Diane Guilianotti has been one of the star performers of the summer!

On top of the weekly evening meets, Stephen managed to arrange regular trips to the mountains at weekends, with ascents made of Savage Slit in Coire an Lochain, Crystal Ridge in Coire Sputan Dearg and Ardverikie Wall on Binnein Shuas to name but a few. Additionally, an unofficial climbing meet took several members to the Penine Alps, where a collection of 4000 m peaks were climbed during a couple of weeks of variable weather. More recently, as the nights have drawn in and outdoor evening climbing has been curtailed, we have shifted to the dubious pleasures of the Beach Leisure Centre climbing wall, where we have continued to attract new members. The weekly visits to the beach are generally followed by a quick pint in the pub, helping to develop a good social scene away from the climbing itself.

Back at the start of November, five of us managed an ascent of Central Buttress on Lochnagar, under rather tricky early season conditions, which provided a rather extended introduction to winter climbing for some. Then again, Cairngorm climbing tradition does dictate a finish in the dark!

A new climbing sub-committee was formed following the 1998 AGM. Now with five members (Stuart Stronach, Stephen Kirkpatrick, Diane Giulianotti, Anne Cassidy and Andy Lane), this is the largest the sub-committee has been since it was first formed back in 1988. We had a Christmas night out in early December, a Hogmanay trip to Gairloch (where, despite talking a good climb during the celebrations on the 31st, the planned winter climbing on the 1st was reduced to a short rock climb near the village by two of our party with smaller hangovers than most! Six of us recovered enough to climb a Corbett beside Loch Maree on the 2nd, just to prove that we can climb hills as well as cliff faces!). Finally, plans are afoot for an April sport climbing trip to the limestone crags of the Ardeche region of southern France.

A positive pointer to the future is that amongst our regulars this coming year we have at least six who will be undertaking training (and hopefully assessment) towards the Single Pitch Supervisors Award, the climbing qualification most appropriate for assisting in the Club's climbing activities. No longer will the Club be dependent on one or two of us with the experience to look after others. We are no longer a minority activity - climbing in the Club has never been better!

Stuart Stronach

THURSDAY WALKS

The monthly Thursday walks continue to be well supported, and are very sociable. Unlike the long established Meets and Excursions where members select their own routes in a set area, participants follow the route previously planned by the leader. Transport is by private car and the walks, lasting four to five and a half hours are either C (circular) or AB (from A to B). The list below indicates the wide range of walks done during the last two years, including two along sections of magnificent coastline within easy reach of Aberdeen. Part of the enjoyment is in diversions to castle ruins, Pictish Symbol Stones or other items of interest such as the Rocking Stone on Creag Mullach south of Cambus o' May pictured overleaf.

Bill Alexander

1997

January	C	Kincorth Hill - Tullos Hill - Nigg Bay
February	C	Kemnay - Burnhervie - Cot-town Wood then
	C	Leschangie quarries



The Rocking Stone

March	AB	Green Hill - Cairn William - Pitfichie Hill
April	C	Drumcholzie - Hunt Hill - Cairns of Cul nan Gad
May	AB	Cruden Bay to near Boddam
June	C	The Socach from Edinglassie
July	C	Ballater - Sheil of Glentanar - Am Mullach
August	C	Hermit Seat - Watch Craig - Oxen Craig
September	C	Deecastle - Slai na Gour - Craigræ Beg
October	C	Strathfinella Hill
November	AB	Aboyne - Baudy Meg - Old Glentanar School
December	C	Newseat - stone circle at Easter Aquhorthies then Don and Urie at Inverurie

1998

January	C	Persley - Brig o' Balgownie - Broad Hill
February	C	Prop of Ythsie and stone circle then
	AB	Tarves to Udney Green
March	C	Cairn-mon-earn then another C, Mongour Hill
April	C	Coyles of Muick - Glen Girnock
May	AB	Portsoy to Cullen
June	C	Invercauld - Auchtavan - Felagie
July	C	Loch Lee - Burmt Hill - Cairn Caidloch
August	C	Esson's - Gordon Way - Little Oxen Craig - Craigshannoch
September	C	White Cow Wood - Loudon Wood - Drinnie's Observatory
October	C	Glen of Drumtochty - Goyle Hill
November	C	Nordic Ski Centre, Huntly - Bin Forest
December	C	Lumphanan - Kincardine O' Neil

THE LIBRARY

The library continues to be a popular Club resource amongst the more sedentary members. The collection is housed in Special Collections, University of Aberdeen, Old Aberdeen, from where, despite the somewhat restricted opening hours, borrowing continues at a rather greater pace than at the Club's winter indoor meets. New accessions have again covered a wide variety of topics with some emphasis on our local hills. The cataloguing of the collection has finally been completed in the last few months with the recording of our large collection of Journals and ephemera. These listings are all available on the University's online catalogue which will soon be accessible on the World Wide Web. The Club's WWW site will also carry this list, but members can always refer to the comprehensive list in the last issue of the CCJ, Number 104, and to the Club's Newsletter which reports more recent acquisitions.

Ken Forbes



BOOK REVIEWS

Scotland's Mountains before the Mountaineers, Ian Mitchell, Luath Press, 1998. £9.99

The beginning of mountaineering as an organised sport in the middle of the nineteenth century was the catalyst of mountaineering literature, of interest to people who had begun to go to the mountains for no other reason than they wanted to climb them. Prior to that time, the author tells us, the mountains of Scotland were visited by people who were not intent on climbing but may have done so incidentally, whilst prospecting, map-making or escaping from their enemies. It is these people who are the subject of the book, not the mountains, as the title might suggest. However, not all of these people wrote accounts of their travels and those who did were not primarily concerned to record their incidental ascents. Hence, written records of routes are comparatively imprecise or lacking. Nevertheless, the author conducted an extensive literature search for evidence of high mountain visitations and, if a case could be made, first ascents.

The author's findings are set out under four headings, the Central Highlands, the Cairngorms, the West Highlands and the Western Isles. Thus, the section on the Cairngorms begins with Agricola, Mons Graupius and Bennachie, and proceeds chronologically with the evidence of Timothy Pont in the sixteenth century, John Taylor in the seventeenth century and Thomas Thornton in the eighteenth century. Thereafter, sources are more numerous, including Thomas Colby of the Ordnance Survey, the Rev. George Keith, minister at Leith Hall and William MacGillivray, Professor of Natural History at Aberdeen University. Inevitably, some of these travellers are also important in the other three areas of Scotland, necessitating some repetition of biographical detail, but readers will appreciate the focus on areas well known to them, such as the Cairngorms.

In evaluating his many sources for evidence of ascents, the author draws on his own personal knowledge of the hills, to make some convincing route identifications. Indeed, he contributes to the on-going debate over the escape route of the fugitive Prince Charles Edward Stuart after Culloden. However, many of his sources were inevitably a little disappointing, in not providing adequate evidence of routes taken and obliging the author to resort to such phrases as "it is reasonable to assume...", "it is not impossible that he traversed..." and "could well have climbed...". If you define your subjects as those people who had no particular interest in climbing mountains, then any written records that they compiled are not likely to provide evidence of ascents.

The book is written in an engaging style and includes eight magnificent colour reproductions of mainly nineteenth century paintings. A bibliography of over 160 titles is a measure of the author's search for evidence in historical sources, although a footnote system of referencing might have been less disruptive of the continuity of the text than his less than rigorous use of bracketed references. Incidentally, the publisher seems to have made a curious error in the date of publication ('First Published 1988') on the copyright page, which should confuse future bibliographers! The publisher is presumably also responsible for several typographical errors in the captions. The author concludes with a short chapter which he somewhat tenuously relates to his travellers in the past, in which he sets out his views on the question of access to the hills today and the related issues of land ownership and blood sports. However, the strength of the book is surely that it will challenge the reader to add to this very substantial compendium of pre-mountaineering ascents, near ascents and possible ascents of the Scottish mountains, both within and beyond the four areas which the author covers.

Who Owns Scotland, Andy Wightman. Canongate Books, 1996. £25

That this book has become so topical ahead of a Scottish Parliament, is due in no small part to the enthusiasm of its author. Andy Wightman has provoked debate on Land Reform in Scotland and devoted much time to that debate. The task of unravelling land ownership in Scotland has rarely been tackled. The only official survey dates from 1872 with a thorough review by McEwen in 1977. The present author strives to correct and update that work. Despite "the entertainment and long cultural tradition" of doing so, he "does not seek to criticise landowners". He is looking for patterns and principles and opening up the debate to the people of Scotland. The book traces the historical context of land ownership in Scotland, then documents the currently known information by (pre-1975) county. The changing patterns since the earlier work are discussed in chapters on agriculture, sporting estates, forestry, crofting and the conservation landowners. In the third section Andy Wightman discusses the issues that emerge from the work.

By its very nature such a book is out of date before it reaches the shelves. Despite considerable effort, over 30% of land is not accounted for. The work and the debate are on-going and a further (major) revision is due soon. This book defines the agenda for Land Reform in Scotland and challenges politicians, academics and other interested parties to take the debate further. It provides interest on each of these levels, whether for dipping into or for detailed study.

D.T.

The Munro Phenomenon, Andrew Dempster. Mainstream Publishing, 1995. £14.99

An enjoyable read from the author of 'Classic Mountain Scrambles in Scotland.' This A4 sized hardback book covers the history of Munro-bagging - and anything notable that has ever been associated with the Munros. Firstly the author gives us a brief but fascinating biography of the man who first compiled and gave his name to the list as well as a biography of the first person to climb all mountains on that list. He moves logically through history recalling any notable feats and achievements relating to Munros as well as explaining the sociological changes that led more and more people to the hills. He summarises the many awe-inspiring Munro linked achievements and records set mainly over the past three decades and tries to explain what drives people to head to the hills. Changes to Munro's list as well as other hill classifications (Corbett's, Donald's, Graham's, etc) are discussed in detail along with descriptions of the criteria used for these lists.

Conservation, recreation and safety issues are briefly discussed, as is the humorous side of hillwalking and climbing. The author's own attempt at humour doesn't quite fit in with the rest of the book and this section sits rather uncomfortably in an otherwise factual (and somewhat statistical) book. However, this is a thoroughly researched and well written summary of all to do with Munros and Munroists, full of interesting facts and figures. It should appeal to all Munro-baggers, be they beginner or compleat, active or retired.

CPM

Recreation Ecology, The ecological impact of outdoor recreation and ecotourism, Michael Liddle. Chapman & Hall, 1977. £55

Our population, once local and rural, has become increasingly mobile and urban. This move to an indoor lifestyle has led to interest in outdoor leisure pursuits for recreation. Accompanying this, there has been an exponential rise in ecologists interested in the effect on our fragile environment. Initial concern for species found on paths and tracks has

widened considerably in this young science. After considering the forces involved, this book has chapters on soil, plants and aquatic as well as land animals. It draws from a wealth of global examples, but from a North American perspective. It applies scientific measurement and modelling to problems that we could only estimate - such as the relative amount of bare ground created by trail-bikes or horses as compared to a walker - the short result was four times. Experimental work presented includes the study of a sheep as a man approaches - a rise in heart rate occurs before any change in behaviour. The book lays out what is happening and leaves it to the reader to take the next step and respond. With location and species indices and over 900 references the reader is well able to pursue any topic of interest. It is not a book I would sit down to read from cover to cover, but one I read a little at a time.

D.T.

Deep Play, Paul Pritchard. Baton Wicks, 1997. £16.99

As the winner of last year's Boardman/Tasker Memorial Award for Mountain Literature, you know even before you open the cover that you're in for a treat with this collection of 18 tales of derring-do, encompassing adventure climbing from North Wales and the Outer Hebrides to Patagonia and the Himalayas. Paul Pritchard has been at the forefront of bold British climbing for over a decade. His routes on the sea cliffs of Gogarth and the Llanberis slate quarries are still cutting edge, and with Johnny Dawes, he is responsible for Sron Ulladale being developed into one of the world's leading locations for hard on-sight traditional climbing. Indeed, it is the Sron Ulladale chapter, 'On the Big Stone', that particularly sticks in my mind, describing, as it does, how a half-baked notion inspired by photos in 'Hard Rock' was turned into a rain-soaked, midge-tormented but ultimately stunningly successful free ascent of the grossly overhanging 'The Scoop', Doug Scott's tour-de-force from 1969. It appears that getting to the crag was as much of an adventure as the climbing itself: Johnny Dawes cornering his van on two wheels on the Loch Lomond road, shopping in Fort William for supplies of cabbage, olive oil, vinegar and petit pois (hardly the standard food to fuel a few days climbing in the wilderness!). Fortunately, fishermen took pity on them and left two trout at their tent after being waved at from half way up the cliff.

But as well as the quality of the stories which are told, it is the quality of the writing itself that captures the imagination and transports the reader to alongside Pritchard as he tackles a particularly exposed pitch: "That feeling grabbed me again. That same feeling as when I first went to the Verdon at sixteen. The space, the updraught, the freedom. This is why I go climbing."

In addition to the successes, there are also the failures, with one almost costing him his life. 'A Game One Climber Played' tells of a fall off a relatively easy route in Wen Zawn at Gogarth, which ended up in Pritchard falling onto rocks at the bottom of the zawn, and then being stuck wedged underwater for about ten minutes until his belayer could get to him. More shocking than the injuries to the body is the inference of how inviting death can appear: "Someone takes my hand - she must be knelt beside me. I don't open my eyes, nothing need be physically gestured. Then the hand slips inevitable away and I am left in a cavernous night with all the contentedness of a young child dozing in the afternoon. This is it, the most beautiful part of all my life. Utterly final. "Paul." A distant voice calls out. "Paul, wake up." Nearer now. "WAKE UP" "Leave me alone. Let me sleep. Let me go."

In amongst all this are stories that cover more familiar ground to readers of the adventures of climbers, but always written in unusually honest and personal way: of being banned from climbing in Pakistan, new routing on Baffin Island, north of the Arctic Circle, and in Patagonia, and of course, the obligatory Chapter 1, describing how it all began. If this book serves no other purpose, it shows unequivocally that British adventure climbing did not die with the arrival of sport climbing. Read this book the first chance you get - you will not be disappointed.

S.S.

The Living Mountain : a celebration of the Cairngorm mountains of Scotland, Nan Shepherd. Aberdeen University Press, 1977. This has been published again in *The Grampian Quartet*, Nan Shepherd. Canongate, 1996. £8.99

This is a delightful gem which is as fresh as when it was first written 30 years before publication in 1977. The author takes us on her very personal journey to the Cairngorms. Finding first the high plateau she takes time to discover the many attractions of the "recesses". She takes in "rock, sun, scree, soil and water, moss, grass, flower and tree, insect, bird and beast, wind, rain and snow - the total mountain."

"So my journey into an experience began. It was a journey always for fun, with no motive beyond that I wanted it. But at first I was seeking only sensuous gratification - the sensation of height, the sensation of movement, the sensation of speed, the sensation of distance, the sensation of effort, the sensation of ease: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life. I was not interested in the mountain for itself, but for its effect upon me, as puss caresses not the man but herself against the man's trouser leg. But as I grew older, and less self-sufficient, I began to discover the mountain itself. Everything became good to me, its contours, its colours, its waters and rock, flowers and birds. This process has taken many years, and is not yet complete. Knowing another is endless. And I have discovered that man's experience of them enlarges rock, flower and bird. The thing to be known grows with the knowing." "Five miles from Glenmore and safety, crawling down Coire Cas on hands and knees, the boys could fight the wind no further. It was days later till they found them; and one of the men who was at the finding described to me their abraded knees and knuckles. The elder of the two was still crawling, on hands and knees, when they found him fast in the drift. So quick bright things come to confusion. They committed, I suppose, an error of judgement, but I cannot judge them. For it is the risk we must all take when we accept individual responsibility for ourselves on the mountain, and until we have done that, we do not begin to know it."

The beauty that she found is still there for us to discover today. Sadly some of the problems are too and many are continuing to grow. I found this a fascinating read.

D.T.

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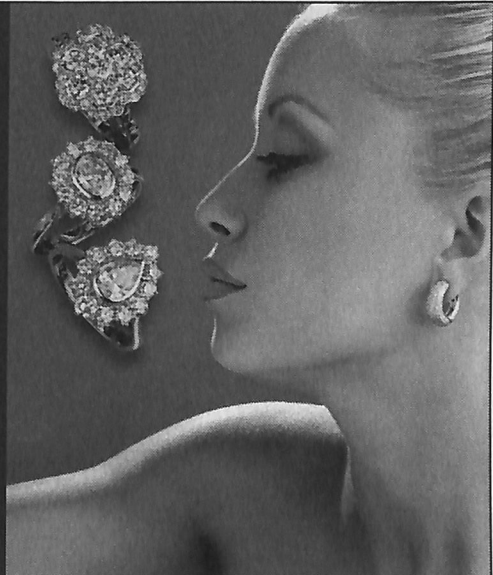
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