

The Cairngorm Club Journal



Volume 21

2001

Number 106

Mountains? Molehills?

LEGAL PROBLEMS COME IN ALL SIZES

Bothies? Bungalows?

PROPERTIES LIKEWISE

FOR A PROMPT PERSONAL LEGAL SERVICE
FROM OTHER CLUB MEMBERS CONTACT
RICHARD SHIRREFFS OR ALISTAIR MARSHALL AT-



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Edited by **Lydia Thomson**

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THE PRESIDENT

Ken Thomson was elected President of the Club at the 2000 AGM, in succession to Richard Shirreffs. He is a third-generation member, following his grandfather James Lyon (member 1920 - 1932) and his father Angus Thomson (1940 - 1994). His early interest in the hills came from family holidays at Muir and the Aberdeen Grammar School Hill-Walking Club, and at the University he was Secretary of the Lairig Club. Leaving Aberdeen in the 1960s, he maintained his activities from Edinburgh, London and then Newcastle, with trips to the Alps and regular forays north to garner Munros, completing them in 1989. Joining the Club on return to Aberdeen in the 1980s, he soon became active in its administration, as Committee member 1991-94 and 1995-97, and Vice President 1997-2000. His profession as a rural economist gives him an especial interest in land-use issues, and he has been particularly concerned with the Club's environmental business.

Black Tea and Curried Vegetables

Alister Macdonald

This is an account of a trekking holiday in Nepal, in the month of April, 2000. Such trekking holidays are commonplace these days and some club members have doubtless enjoyed similar experiences. So what's new and what's worth writing about? Well, nothing is new and everything is worth writing about, so far as Nepal is concerned. The country comprises both highlands and lowlands of great interest and this article is about a trek in a small section of the north-east highlands. Of the world's fourteen mountains which exceed 8000m in height, eight are in the Nepalese Himalayas and by "doing" the standard Everest approach and Gokyo Ri trek I would see four of these. This is a popular priority with the trekkers who sign on for package trips in huge numbers, from all over the world. There are many companies that service the market and in my case I booked with Sherpa Travel, who passed me on to a highly satisfactory Nepalese company called Ama Dablan, after the spectacular peak on the route to Everest.

Trekking is merely walking and certainly not climbing. For the elite who wish to climb the Himalayas there is a separate bureaucracy operating a special set of regulations, but even the elite attains large numbers. When I viewed Everest from the Gokyo Ri there were nineteen expeditions at base camp preparing to climb the mountain. One was an all-women team from Nepal. Another expedition, which followed in May, was led by club member Rick Allan, on his first successful ascent, which was the subject of an article in the Press and Journal (June 6, 2000).

My trip began with a flight to Kathmandu, where I was met by a young man called Subrat Tamang, the trek leader, who had trained at an Indian Mountaineering School. Two nights were spent at a western-style hotel in Kathmandu where I met the rest of the party - Charles from London, Rob from Montreal, Alistair from Bristol and Lochee, a New Zealand lady. I was celebrating my sixtieth year by undertaking the trek and, not surprisingly, I was by far the oldest of the group. We set off with an early morning flight to Lukla where the trekking crew had assembled with the equipment. The sixteen-seater Yeti Airways plane was late, as is usual, but eventually we clambered in and it, in turn, clambered up into the clean crisp morning air above the brown smog of Kathmandu. We headed east over hill country, and squinting through the scratched windows were transfixed by the unbelievable panorama of the Himalayas. We were actually going to walk in that?

Landing at Lukla airstrip is the closest most of us will ever get to landing on an aircraft carrier. The three hundred metre dirt runway

reaches from the rim of a mighty valley up to the village, and when we saw it ahead, over the pilot's shoulder, it was obviously not for normal commercial flights such as ours. But this is Nepal, and the pilot put us down with "nae problem at a' ", or the equivalent. We clambered out, breathless with terror and anticipation, and lugged our gear over to a nearby paddock belonging to a tea house (lodge or inn) where our crew was waiting. There were porters, who carried everything (tents, food, fuel, cooking stove, and our personal gear), a cook and two kitchen boys, a "Sherpa" (guide), all supervised by the sirdar (foreman). He, with our leader, ran the show, rather well as I gradually came to appreciate. Within two hours we were ready to set off, on a short walk to camp at the village of Phakding (altitude 2800m, the same as Lukla). We soon learned the daily routine. Our tents were erected for us, in this case in a paddock by a lodge, and we had a hot meal at dusk. Yes, curried vegetables were conspicuous, but very nice, along with other Nepalese and Western food. Darkness was accompanied by a chill mist which obliterated the jagged peaks and snowcaps which hung over the narrow flood plain where we were encamped. The sleeping bag issued by Ama Dablam was blissfully cosy, especially after visiting the latrine tent pitched in a far corner of the paddock. Also conspicuous at every camp was an urn of water, soap and a towel, placed close to wherever we had our meals - mess tent or steading borrowed for the occasion. Hand washing was politely encouraged by our leader, and proof of the effectiveness of this, and the basic hygiene practised by the cook and his boys, was that no-one experienced any form of stomach upset during our sixteen-day trek.

The morning at Phakding began, as did every morning, with a kitchen boy depositing a large mug of hot black tea at the tent door. A tablespoon of sugar added energy to its marvellous hydrating quality, and zest to the now clear view of the encircling peaks, each glinting in the dawn sunlight. The frost was usually severe but the blue sky helped, and shaving in such conditions made you feel that you were a real trekker. Breakfast was western style and plentiful. Boiled water was then issued for the day; we never consumed untreated water, even for cleaning our teeth. The porters cleared the camp and helped each other to pack and balance their immense loads. These were carried on the back, in a basket suspended by a line looped across the forehead and supplemented with shoulder straps. The bulky loads projected well forward and had to be balanced very skilfully. They weighed at least 40 kg and often much more, a fact I still find difficult to reconcile with the porters' diminutive physique, and with the gradients they coped with. This, together with their lack of mountain clothing, especially boots, and indefatigable good humour conveyed a super-human quality that dwarfed us trekkers just as much as the surrounding mountains.

From Phakding we continued north, up the valley of the Dudh Khosi,

entering the Sagarmatha National Park at the village of Monjo (2800m). After crossing the river gorge by a spectacularly high suspension bridge we slowly ascended a steep 600m section to Namche Bazaar (3400m), the administrative centre of the region. It is a large village set in a bowl in the hills, and comprises numerous lodges, some shops, a school, a police barrack, a fine chorten (Buddhist monument) and an important weekly market. Altitude now became significant and two nights were spent at Namche, camped in a crowded paddock. A near-by vantage point gave us our first sighting of Lhotse and Everest in the distance and of dozens of other huge peaks ahead and around us including everyone's favourite, the ultra steep Ama Dablan (6856m).

Before describing more of the trek I need to emphasise two issues fundamental to understanding life in this region - the absence of roads and altitude. There are no roads north of Jiri, which is some five days' walk south-west of Lukla. For local farmers as well as transient trekkers, practically everything is transported on the back - of a human or a yak (or female yak or the male hybrid, the dzopkyo). The main exceptions are: first, special engineering requirements, such as cement or the cable to build the suspension bridges across rivers, where such items are flown in by freighter helicopter; second, in a medical emergency humans are transported by small helicopters. The whole region is sustained by footpaths strung along the walls of the mighty V-shaped valleys and occasionally crossing the often violent rivers. Wheeled vehicles are not used, as the paths are too rugged and steep. Even in villages surrounded by good arable land, I failed to spot even a wheelbarrow. Did you know that you can buy a Coke ten miles from Everest? That is so, but only because the lodges are supplied by porters carrying crates of the stuff on their backs!

The second fundamental fact of life is potential altitude sickness. All trekkers are made aware of the problem and the trekking companies follow well-established schedules, ascending slowly with extra rest days at critical points, as at Namche. Our leader checked us daily for serious symptoms and we were encouraged to talk about the minor ones - headaches and sleeplessness. Standard procedures are followed if significant symptoms appear; you do not ascend, you may stay put to see if improvement occurs, and you descend if it does not. It is often hard to descend, as the paths are so steeply undulating that a day's walking might be required to achieve a net descent of only 300m to the shelter of a lodge. However in the event of incipient pulmonary oedema that would be well worthwhile. Our small party acclimatised well enough at first, experiencing only minor symptoms.

So after Namche we continued along the wall of the Dudh Khosi valley, camping at the villages of Dole (4200m) and Machherma (4410m). Like all the villages in the region, these were poor places, exhibiting

squalid poverty similar to that of the Scottish Highlands in the nineteenth century. We reached Gokyo (4750m), our most northerly point in the valley, which is now a cluster of new lodges although the original village would have been too high for year-round farming occupation. Its accompanying lake, dammed by the lateral moraine of the Ngozumpa glacier, was partly frozen. Gokyo's main attraction was a local top, Gokyo Ri (5360m, more than 500m higher than Mt. Blanc), which provides a good view of Everest. After an intensely cold night we ascended 600m or more in brilliant morning light, leaving Lochee at camp nursing a bad cough. The going was easy underfoot, because the hill was essentially a giant heap of frost-fractured rocks, but we all experienced extreme breathlessness. After two hours of heroic puffing and panting we reached the summit, and lots of other trekkers, and took our fill of Everest (8848m), Lhotse (8501m) and an astonishing array of glorious, dramatic summits, including the near-by white wall of Cho Oyu (8153m) and the distant conical peak of Makalu (8463m). Despite the intense sunlight our descent was eventually prompted by the cold. My younger companions descended at speed but I was not properly rested by the sojourn on the top, and descended only slowly. We then headed down the east side of the valley to a sheiling called Na (4400m) where the camp was waiting for us. I drank lots of sweet black tea, enjoyed a hearty hot meal served in a bothy and got into my sleeping bag, well before the arrival of the chill evening mist.

Next day I felt stronger and particularly enjoyed the descent to Phortse (3800m), during which we saw a pair of soaring griffons, quite close up, and some deer. Next day we headed east, reaching the bleak upland village of Dingpoche (4410m) in the now familiar cold and misty late afternoon. The plan was to ascend the valley of Khumbu Khola to the north to reach Lobuche (4930m) and thence walk up to the second viewpoint of Kalar Pattar (5545m). However, throughout the night at Dingboche I experienced massive, unrelenting hyperventilation and concluded at breakfast that I was not well. It was as if I had lost all my altitude acclimatisation, and I could not hope to walk up to Lobuche. The leader organised my retreat. The sirdar would go with me (he was also keen to descend as he was experiencing bad headaches - most Nepalese are lowlanders, just like trekkers) and so too would a porter, to carry the gear. So we three set off to descend to Devoche (3820m), and only sometime later did it occur to me that we were the oldest in the group as a whole. The land became greener and the air warmer as the day passed, and fortunately the descent was not complicated by any nasty uphill sections. At Devoche we found a lodge where we stayed the night. I slept and breathed normally, but pottering about on the following day revealed abnormal breathlessness. Devoche is at the bottom of the hill on which the monastery of Tenpoche is situated, the monastery which expeditions to

Everest traditionally visit. The hill also gives fine, distant views of Lhotse and Everest, and its woods also provided me with a sighting of a rare musk deer. After two nights at Devoche, the sirdar and I felt we should descend further along our return route, despite our improved condition. We set off for Namche Bazaar and on the way spotted a male impeyan pheasant (the national bird of Nepal, brilliantly coloured). We continued beyond Namche, descending the 600m hill path in dusk and drizzle. On reaching Jorsale we failed to find a lodge for the night, so we moved on to nearby Monjo (2800m) where we were lucky. We spent three comfortable nights at Monjo, waiting for the rest of the party, so that gave me two full days to observe life in the village. The local children attended a school, in which each classroom was a separate hut, set around a beaten earth playground. At the end of the day the children swarmed out, descending a variety of improvised rocky paths with ease, and spilled into the main street of the village. This too was a steep rocky path, wide enough to take a single column of yaks, so there was no concern over road safety. I watched some early planting going on in the surrounding fields, and builders, both men and women, walking slowly up out of the village to a construction site. Each carried two or three dressed stones, set on a wooden bracket, slung on the back like a rucksack. Most buildings in this region of Nepal are of dry stone wall construction, in which standard wooden window- and door-frames are set. Only rarely is mortar applied on the outside. The interiors are spartan. Toilets are occasionally built-in, but generally it would be better if they were not. In my lodge the cooking was carried out by the lady of the house and her two sons on a large wood-burning stove, and there was also a cold-water tap, fed straight off the hill. I enjoyed the food, especially the giant spring rolls - or were they a fashionable veggie wrap? Mugs of black tea were a frequent hand-warmer, and a focus for chatting with passing trekkers. Some were carrying their own gear, and if descending they now knew better. Those ascending, i.e. going north, had yet to cope with the altitude.

My fellow trekkers arrived in due course, having achieved the top of Kalar Pattar, but gave me the impression that the experience was not very different from that on Gokyo Ri. We continued our descent of the Dudh Khosi valley to Phakding where we spent our final night on the trek. The last walking day was particularly hot, more humid, and one sensed the weather was transitional between spring and monsoon. We camped at Lukla, and spent the rest of the day exploring the village and its watering holes. We were to take the first Yeti Airways flight to Kathmandu on the following morning. Mercifully the weather was perfect and having passed through the check-in process within a large shed at the side of the runway, we were able to squeeze into our 16-seater minibus-with-wings. Peering over the pilot's shoulder gave a view of the runway, which simply ended in a void. Obviously it had been cut short by some cataclysmic event, an

earthquake perhaps, and we would need to use a helicopter. But no, the plane began to roar, and then, bucking and bouncing, it sped down the runway. We soared out into the immense space of the valley below, and gradually left paradise, a mountaineers' paradise, behind us.

To Dream of Mountains

I wrote this poem at 2 o'clock in the morning on board a ship while we were discharging cargo in Piraeus. The thought suddenly struck me that normal people were all tucked up in bed and in that moment I couldn't understand why it had been necessary for us to decide to add an extra night shift in order to "expedite" our departure the following day.

Escaping from the clatter of the decks for a cup of coffee, my mind drifted beautifully to the high mountains. Over coffee I scribbled these words in my log book. In later working life and probably along with many of you, I could do this equally well sitting at my desk in Aberdeen !!

To sit and dream of mountain slopes,
but my mind must work, not ponder,
must work mid clattering hooks and chains
and think of mundane matter

The words they use, "to expedite"
mean now that we must rush,
not as a rocky stream can do,
in peace, the mountain hushed

But work, make profit, loose our minds,
in a cause that's far and distant,
work round the clock, no time to sleep,
work on, insist, be insistent

Here time means work,
I know it's not
but none have time
to listen

Robbie Middleton
Piraeus 1974

Strange Encounter

W.D. Brooker

Easter was very late in 1981 and it was not until Friday, 17th of April that John and Pete were able to come up to Aberdeen to join me for a day on Lochnagar. We were late leaving Aberdeen and the sun was well up as we mounted the main path from Glen Muick. At this stage conditions still looked promising, a hard overnight frost having frozen the snow surfaces so that we crunched over the lumpy remnants of old footprints. As yet, the hill was empty although the main tourist route would see plenty of use later in the day. Just before the steepening to Cuidhe Crom we left the main path to cross to the col from where we could view the corrie and decide what to do.

There had been heavy snowfalls during the previous week and although a thaw had laid much of the steep rock bare, all the grassy slopes, ledges and fissures were still covered with snow and ice. This was the case even on the West Buttress which catches more sunshine than the rest of the Lochnagar cliffs. It was a magnificent sight, and Pete, for whom this was a first visit, was suitably impressed. Of course there was a flaw. The temperature had started to rise and a mild breeze was carrying wisps of cloud across the mountain. A weather change was obviously on its way from the south-west. Given the accumulation of snow on the upper part of the cliffs, the significant cornices, and the thaw setting in, a buttress climb was a more sensible choice than a gully even if Pete was desperate to blood his brand-new set of ice tools. We assured him that even if the snow had softened he would still find good use for them on the underlying frozen turf. In the end John and he opted for Route I on the Black Spout Pinnacle, a line which had the mixed climbing so characteristic of Lochnagar. I decided to go with them up the Black Spout to the foot of Route I and then by the Left Hand Branch to the plateau to wait at the summit of the Pinnacle.

By the time we reached the Black Spout a bank of mist was beginning to roll over the plateau edge and creep down the cliffs. On the first pitch of Route I there was snow on the initial slabs but almost no ice in the groove so it did not take long for John to establish himself on the big ledge of the Springboard and for Pete to follow while being photographed. On traversing the approach slopes no other climbers had been visible except for a pair high on Eagle Ridge and some others walking round the edge of the plateau near the regular route to and from the summit. Now, however, we became aware of someone else nearby. Climbing noises from above us on the other side of the Black Spout indicated there was somebody on the Black Spout Buttress. The mist had now reached our level and we were quite unable to see our neighbours. But we could hear them with almost uncanny clarity. There was the thumping swish that a mass of snow makes as it is dislodged to fall down

a fissure, the sound of an ice-axe head striking rock, the heavy grunt made when a body heaves upward accompanied by the scrape of crampon points. The last was repeated and there was something about it which held my attention. It had an unusual quality, a deeper note than the usual scratch of crampons and only when it came again did I recognise that what I was hearing sounded like the once so familiar noise of boot-nails scraping to hold on granite.

Conversation began to come across, and although there was no wind to speak of, it came in snatches as if deadened intermittently by the blanket of mist. This was still thin on our side of the Black Spout but much thicker on the other, from where tendrils of denser vapour drifted sluggishly toward us. I could see nothing of the other climbers. Although still fragmented, words and phrases were increasingly clear.

"That was a stiff pull," gasped a disembodied voice. "Once the snow goes there's nothing but grass beneath."

".... good grass though," said another voice, "not like the stuff I met last June Shelter Stone Crag slabs how it clung to the rock I'll never know."

".... disappointment in that big gully deserve a pipe."

A third speaker: "I was relieved to come out of that gully. The snow was much too steep to be safe in this thaw." He continued, ".... others all on the plateau well before us, even the Glas Allt group too late for the motor at Callater. Hope our bags were sent on from Ballater alright."

"Don't worry, Willie," was the reply. "If they've been missed I'm sure those coming with the later service will see to them."

".... forget Callater Ballochbuie roads still excellent even if the Top Man doesn't seem much interested in using them Braemar less than three hours by Garrawalt. If we're late the Fife will keep dinner hot. I gather there are to be a lot of us so they ought to treat us well."

"Can you see those guys?" I called up to my companions who were still visible on the Springboard.

"No, but we can hear them," John replied.

I turned away and started toward the Left Hand Branch. Before I entered it I paused and listened. The conversation from the adjacent buttress was coming across through the mist as clearly as if it were from a television set.

"This little wall looks pretty steep, just as you like it. Your honour anyway, I think."

"All right. I think there's a rocky crest all the way to the plateau, so it shouldn't need long. Take a hitch on that rock and I'll be off."

I knew from this that the party opposite were on a step of the buttress about level with myself, so I turned and called into the mist "Hello there!" There was no reply so I tried again, more loudly this time "Helloooooooooo there! Where are you from?" Even if the accents were Edinburgian, it

seemed to me rather offhand not to reply at all, so I let fly at full power with "Awaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa ye Raj!" like some dreadful Boor Boy reincarnation from the Aberdonian past. I was wasting my breath. There was no response except the continuing sound of climbing emerging from the bank of fog - for it was more of a fog, thick, with a yellowish tint, than the thin, sterile grey of a normal mountain mist.

At this point I felt a gust of colder air on my face and something seemed to be happening to the fog bank. It was rolling aside like a stage curtain to reveal two figures on the little col almost halfway up the Black Spout Buttress. One was seated, the other standing holding a rope leading from the rocks beside him up toward a third figure who was on the wall above and only partly visible. No bright colours were apparent, only the dull shades of gaberdine and tweed. I waved a greeting and shouted again, but although they must have been within a ropelength of me, they gave no indication of being willing to acknowledge my presence, or even aware of it. The mist billowed down off the Stack and enveloped me - regular mist this time and not the yellow fog which seemed to have disappeared. With the change went all sight and sound of the other climbers and I turned my attention back to my own affairs.

The steepening snow banked over the Chokestone led me up into the inner reaches of the Left Hand Branch. Most traffic had taken the main Black Spout, so there were few tracks in the Branch. The Crumbling Cranny, cutting into its right wall, was unmarked and offered an attractive alternative. At least I thought so, until I realised it had a substantial cornice which looked as if it might be weakening with the thaw. I abandoned it and regained the bed of the Left Hand Branch where the snow was more stable and the cornice easily passed on its left.

The weather conditions were unusual to say the least. The plateau and the corrie face to our east were completely clear, while a mild south-westerly air stream was bearing a cloud flow which swirled around the Cac Carn Beag and across the intervening stretch of plateau to spill over its edge and drape a mist curtain down the West Buttress crags.

I wanted to see how John and Pete were progressing on Route I, so I walked round the corrie rim, treading delicately as close to the corniced edge as was prudent. To get a clear view of the Pinnacle cliffs I had to go as far as the top of Shadow Buttress A where I was able to pick out my companions. They were past the main difficulties and moving right toward the upper Pinnacle crest. Beyond them the wall of thick mist continued to obliterate the Black Spout and the cliffs further away.

Returning around the plateau rim, I climbed carefully down to the little col behind the Pinnacle and traversed across the wall above Pinnacle Gully One, clearing the snow from the holds as I moved, until I could climb up onto its summit. Here I sat for half an hour while my two companions came up the last pitch of their climb to join me. After leaving the Springboard and

moving round to the face of the buttress, they had ceased to be aware of the climbers on Black Spout Buttress and asked if I had met them.

"No, but I'd like to," said I, "that conversation we heard was rather odd. They should be up by now so we might meet them on our way to the main summit." While talking we could see that the peculiar bank of cloud on the plateau was dispersing and the shroud over the West Buttress breaking up. As it did so, we scanned the crestal rocks of the Black Spout Buttress but could see no sign of the other climbers, so they must have completed. We seemed to have been the only visitors to the Pinnacle that day but as we reached the plateau we joined the main route up Lochnagar. This had a well trodden path of footprints on the compacted old snow and swung well away from the corrie edge to avoid the deep inlets of the Black Spout and its Left Hand Branch. Diverging to the top of the Black Spout Buttress we peered over for any sign of the party we had heard and seen so near us. We could see nobody. However, John had stepped down to a platform a few feet lower.

"They must be up," he said, pointing with his axe to where the leaning wall of a big boulder had sheltered a ledge and its drift of snow cover. "I can see their prints."

At this point the setting sun broke free to bathe the top of Lochnagar. The main corrie remained in shadow but the sunlight gilded the upper rocks and cornices of the plateau rim. A flight of half a dozen ptarmigan still in full winter plumage rose from the corrie gloom and burst into the sunlight, wheeling towards us to settle on the summit rocks of the Black Spout Buttress. They turned rich gold in the rays. It was highly picturesque and even breathtaking. John seized his camera and knelt to photograph as a pair of the birds croaked and lurched up the rocks a few yards below him. Our attention had now been redirected toward hurrying to the summit tor in time to catch the last of the sunset. This we succeeded in doing and were well rewarded by a reddened sun slipping behind a gold-lined band of cloud lying on the main Cairngorm plateau. I was still interested in making contact with the other climbers but realised that by now they must be on their way to Braemar, in the opposite direction to our own way off the hill. The daylight would soon be fading and it was time we were on our way if we were to get back to Glen Muick before nightfall.

We were all intrigued by the extraordinarily unilateral encounter with the Black Spout Buttress party and talked about it in the car on the way back to Aberdeen. We agreed that the reference to motoring from Loch Callater must mean that this group had some special understanding with Invercauld Estate, for permission to drive on that road is not easily obtained. I recalled headgear of some sort but no crash helmets; that and the absence of bright-coloured clothing might well indicate a sporting estate connection. Walking all the way to Braemar from Lochnagar was also unusual, although the quickest route would certainly be through the Ballochbuie directly to the

main road without crossing the Dee, using the estate road starting near the Garbh Allt falls. Perhaps the identity of a large group of climbers staying at the Fife Arms could be checked with the hotel. A few days later I tried this but drew a blank. Among visitors that weekend there had been no climbers corresponding to those we had almost met on Lochnagar, or any other large group for that matter. Later, as opportunities arose, I checked on whether any of the likely clubs had held a meet at Braemar on that date and drew more blanks. I let it rest, but a question mark remained at the back of my mind about the identity of the mysterious climbers.

Then one day I had a note from John. His slides had been returned and he enclosed a few for my attention. One of them was a close shot of a sunlit ptarmigan on a snow-covered ledge. In clear view were some nailed bootprints in the snow. I inspected closely and could see that none had been made by the thin blades of tricouni nails. All were the blunter marks of clinkers close set around the edge, of the boot sole, a nailing pattern which was long obsolete even in the nail-shod Golden Age of the post-war surge of exploratory Cairngorm climbing.

More recently I had occasion to look up a list of Easter dates and while doing so noticed that Easter Friday had fallen on the 17th April, 1981, the date we were on Lochnagar. This had occurred only once before during the Century, and that was in 1908. This rang a bell and I looked up the relevant Journal to find that the Easter Meet of the SMC that year was in the Fife Arms at Braemar, with a record number of over 50 members and guests attending. The account of activities at the Meet included:-

"Goodeve, Ling and Raeburn attempted the Douglas-Gibson Gully, but were driven back by the sudden thaw and avalanching in the gully. They eventually ascended by the north ridge of the Black Spout, and reached Braemar by the Garrawalt Falls."

This entered the guidebooks as the first ascent of Black Spout Buttress on 17th April, 1908.

It makes you think, doesn't it?

Chasing Avalanches

Stuart Stronach

The day started in the usual way - well, usual for a day out climbing in winter. The alarm dragged me from the comforts of sleep at some ungodly hour, and the morning routine saw me ready just before Diane pulled up outside.

"See you later," I said, as I kissed Sharon goodbye, "I'll be in touch before 10 p.m., but I should be home much earlier than that - this'll be just a short day out."

The drizzle on the windscreen turned to rain as we headed south towards Forfar, but as we passed Dykehead, the rain turned to sleet and then to snow. By the time we got to the car park at the Glen Doll road-end, the world was white. So much for the forecast of sunshine and showers.

The plan was to meet Stephen and Anne, Sarah and Michael at the car park at 8.30 a.m. With no sign of them by 8.45, we were getting cold waiting, so we started putting the boots on and dividing the kit between the two rucksacks. Just as we were packed and ready to set off, Stephen and Anne pulled up. Their excuse for being late? A minor accident on the snowy roads, fortunately with no injuries and only slight damage to Anne's car. Looking back, that could almost be seen as a portent of things to come. With still no sign of Sarah or Michael, the four of us set off up into Coire Fee at a steady plod.

The original intention for Diane and myself was Look C Gully. However, the thaw of the last few days had stripped much of the ice off the steeper climbs, and the old favourite, B Gully, looked like the best option. The added advantage was that this climb, a grade II, was of a standard such that we could all climb together for much of the way.

With the weather continuing to ignore the predictions and doing its own thing, conditions were rather miserable - still, misery loves company, and so the four of us set off up into the lower reaches of the gully, stopping after about 50 metres at a snow ledge for a bite to eat and to gear up.

Festooned in gear and trailing ropes, Diane set off upwards from the snow ledge. Conditions in the gully were far from perfect, and yet weren't that bad either. The snow had eased off, the weather was improving and once we rounded a corner, we could see all the way to the top of the climb. In the bed of the gully, there was about 20cm of rather wet new snow on top of an old hard layer. Progress was slow as crampons kept balling up, but with Diane performing trail-breaking heroics, the rest of us had a slightly easier time than she did.

Up ahead, the ice pitch rose steeply from the bed of the gully. There had been no sign of the small pitch that is sometimes present lower down the route, but this, the section that gives the gully its grade, was there to be climbed. I moved up past Diane and crossed the bed of the gully to a rock outcrop on the right wall. The soft snow was a little deeper now, and there was an almost constant stream of powder and spindrift down the ice pitch from the upper bowl above. In retrospect, this is where we should have stopped and said, "No - this isn't looking safe. Let's go back down." However, with the top in sight, an unspoken decision was made by each of us that it was better to press on.

The belay below the ice pitch offered a little shelter from the spindrift, which was starting to make life pretty grim. A bomb-proof no. 4 nut was slotted home and, backed up by a peg, afforded a secure stance. Diane tied on, and as Stephen and Anne moved up to find themselves a belay, I launched myself at the ice pitch.

The initial 10 metres were wading though increasingly deep soft snow. Sticking to the right hand side of the gully, I found a good blade-peg runner in rock, which also provided more solid footholds to assist upward, instead of inward, motion. Once contact with the ice was made, things became more satisfactory - ice-axes bit securely, crampons gave firm purchase, and an ice-screw was placed to give a dose of somewhat psychological encouragement.

The pitch was surprisingly technical - powder snow masked much of the ice, and a delicate leftward step had to be made at one point as I realised I had followed a groove away from the ice and onto snow-covered rock. Higher up, hollow ice, centimetres thick above the stream that was still flowing beneath, necessitated gentle hooking with the axes into holes made by the water, instead of the traditional stabbing motion.

As the angle eased, and feeling quietly pleased with myself, I continued up to the only significant outcrop of rock. Unsure of how much rope I had left, and with a biting wind precluding any verbal communication with those down below, I elected to take a belay rather than push on to the top of the climb, another 20 metres above. The pitch had been harder than expected, certainly grade III, and not that much easier than Aladdin's Mirror Direct (my one and only grade IV,4).

For what felt like a good half-hour, I scraped and scratched looking for cracks to take gear placements. As fast as I could clear snow off the rocks, the wind deposited fresh reinforcements in a battle I was never going to win. Eventually, I found a solitary crack that accepted a no. 7 rock. Several sharp tugs convinced me that it would offer a reasonable level of protection, although there was nothing with which to back it up. Eventually, I was forced to place a Deadman in the snow to the left of the belay. Although I have never been overly comfortable using Deadmen, I dug down to the old hard snow for the placement, which then survived my

test attempts to dislodge it. Feeling reasonably happy that the belay was the best available, I started taking in the rope and bellowed into the wind for Diane to follow.

Although Diane's progress was steady, it was also quite slow as she fought with the peg, then the ice screw and always with the steady stream of snow sliding down onto her from the top of the pitch. By this time, I was chilled to the bone, and unable to see for much of the time. I hadn't bothered looking out my goggles while I was setting up the belay - a decision I was rapidly regretting as the spindrift stung my eyes and forehead, penetrating into every layer of clothing I was wearing. The poppers holding my cagoule hood on had also come undone, and in the cold I had only managed to re-attach one of them before Diane started climbing. This meant that I had to keep my back to the wind to prevent the hood blowing off and away, and being unable to move much meant that the cold sank in even faster.

When Diane reached me, she looked even colder than I felt. Snow had filled the collar of her cagoule to the brim, so that she was being chilled by a necklace of ice. Her ski gloves, soaked by the wet snow during the approach, were numbing her hands; she looked thoroughly miserable.

Diane volunteered to carry on up the final snow slopes to the plateau, and I agreed, advising her to stick to the right flank of the gully to avoid the worst of the soft snow. As she disappeared from view, I retreated into the collar of my jacket in an attempt to keep out the probing snow, slowly paying the rope out as Diane inched towards the top. I remember watching the half-way markers on the ropes go through my belay plate shortly before there was a panicked cry of "Stuart!"

I didn't even have time to react. There was motion past me in the bed of the gully, the ropes went tight, the belay ripped and I found myself inexorably propelled towards the top of the ice pitch. I slid down towards the drop, feet first, on my back, thinking "No, no, no....", watching as the ground plunged away in front of me and not being able to do a damn thing about it.

After I shot off the top of the pitch, I must have shut my eyes, since I don't visually remember much else. However, I was quite collected in my thoughts. I don't remember making contact with the base of the drop, but I was aware that I had started to somersault and cartwheel, limbs flying. I was very focussed on my arms and legs, and kept thinking over and over, "OK, nothing broken yet..."

At some point, I'm not sure how or when, I stopped tumbling and ended up face first, on my front, sliding down the gully. I stretched my hands out in front of me in an effort to brake, although I doubt it actually had much effect. And then I stopped.

The emotions I felt were almost indescribable. I was alive, my God, I was alive! I was tangled up in a knot of ropes, and it took a couple of minutes to free myself. I had already given myself a quick mental once-over and nothing hurt - arms, legs, head. Was this possible? I had fallen for what seemed forever, and I was going to be able to walk away? I was almost ready to whoop with exhilaration!

Then I looked on down the gully and there was no sign of Diane. No - this can't be right. I was uninjured, and Diane was gone? I heard shouts from back up the gully. That must be Stephen and Anne. "I'm OK!" I shouted back. Despite my concern for my partner, I was still experiencing waves of euphoria. I don't know what this says about me as a person. Does this make me selfish, elated by my own survival and concerned more for myself than for the welfare of my partner and friend, or is it just that the survival instinct is dominant? Speaking to the others in the days following, I seem to have been alone in having experienced this surge of what? Adrenaline? Emotion? A potent cocktail of the two? Perhaps it was because, after we stopped, I alone was in a position to get up immediately and move about, realising what had happened without needing to focus first on how to extricate myself from where the fall had left me. In the time since the incident, it is this, more than anything else, that has preyed on my mind. I'm not sure I like what this has shown me about myself.

As I turned to look back up the slope, I realised that I was opposite the start of B Gully Chimney, and a quick calculation showed that I had fallen about 100 metres. Continuing to look round, I felt a weight lift as I saw Diane lying about 15 metres up from me. She was sideways to the slope, not moving much, but moving, thank God. Beyond her, it looked as if Stephen and Anne had been pulled down after us, as both appeared to be lying together, another 15 metres back up the gully. They weren't moving.

Finished untangling myself from the ropes, I removed the remains of the failed belay from around my waist and moved up to Diane. I realised that I had lost both my ice-axes - they were still parked neatly beside the belay at the top of the ice pitch. A jolt of pain from my left thigh shot through me as I put weight on that leg, but it was bearable. I shouted to Diane, and was comforted just to hear her reply, and that she thought she was OK. Stephen also shouted something, and it sounded as if he thought he was suffocating.

As quickly as I could, I reached Diane, checked she was genuinely OK, and hurried up to Stephen, wincing in pain as the numbing shock due to the fall left me and the pain in my thigh made its presence felt. It soon became apparent that Anne wasn't with Stephen. Her voice, thick with emotion, was shouting for me from back up the gully. "I'm OK," I

replied, "I'm with Stephen. Just sit tight and someone will be up to get you as soon as we can."

Now at Stephen, he was less panicked than before as we realised that the tightness across his throat was just some slings around his neck and over one shoulder that had come tight during the fall and were easily loosened. However, he was more concerned about his leg, which he thought was broken. His legs were lying side by side across the slope, slightly uphill of his body. Very delicately, I helped him move round so that he was more upright, freeing one leg, which had become caught in the snow, causing him to think it might be badly injured. Finally, he became aware that his back was painful, and with one of our ropes snagged tightly around his waist, I could see why.

Once he was righted, Diane joined us and the three of us tried to take in what had just happened. We couldn't believe that we were all pretty much uninjured. Diane was becoming concerned about her ribs - she could feel movement where she probably shouldn't, and was fairly sure that something was broken. However, she was bearing the pain with little complaint. She had also lost one ice-axe in the fall, but Stephen still had both of his.

Now there was the question of rescuing Anne. I thought Stephen would want to go to her himself, but he was obviously suffering, so I borrowed both of his axes and set off back up the gully. It was a long climb, following the rope that still linked Stephen and Anne up a slope scoured down to the hard snow by the passage of three bodies. Several times, I collapsed onto the axes, exhausted. Finally, I got close enough to Anne to see that her leg and foot were tangled up in the rope, and that she was hanging on the slope, supported only by the belay I had placed below the ice pitch.

Closer examination showed that nearly all the rope between Anne and Stephen had run through Anne's belay plate, but that just before it had all run out, a short length had caught around her foot and that had locked against the belay plate. This is what halted Stephen's fall. This had also forced Anne's leg up against her body in a most uncomfortable-looking position. She had been stuck like this for what must have seemed an age, so I hurriedly moved up the final few feet between us and set about freeing her. With the rope untangled and able to stand again, the gravity of what had happened seemed to sink in and, giving what comfort I could, I hugged Anne as she wept.

However, having got Anne back onto her feet, the enormity of what had happened to us, and what could have happened, now hit me like a sledgehammer. I sagged onto the snow, thinking of Sharon, of my unborn baby, and the implications of how lucky we were. Now it was Anne's turn to comfort me.

Pulling myself together, I set about arranging the belay so that I could protect Anne as she descended. As she picked her way back down the slope towards the others, the emotional roller-coaster that I was still riding brought back that feeling of elation and, bursting with energy, I mentally urged Anne to hurry up so that I could start moving as well.

Looking up above, I noticed that our descent had managed to demolish most of the hollow ice near the top of the pitch, leaving the stream visible where, only a short time before, we had been climbing.

By the time Anne had reached the others, I was chilled again as the energetic buzz had dissipated. I had also discovered that my cagoule hood was gone - lost in the fall. Moving upwards, I dismantled the belay. Stephen had backed up my original peg and nut with an ice screw and a warhog in some frozen turf. The ice screw had ripped out in the fall, as had my peg, and the warhog was so loose that I pulled it out easily with my hands. All that had stopped Anne and Stephen from continuing down the gully was the solitary no. 4 rock.

With the belay dismantled, I moved quickly back down the gully to see the others descending themselves. There was a brief delay as I stopped to recover the gear I had left at the point where my fall had stopped, and then we regrouped at the base of the gully. Amazingly, just at the point where we stopped, I came across my cagoule hood lying in the snow.

It was here, coiling the ropes, that we worked out exactly what had happened. Diane had been close to the top, climbing ever-steeper snow. A slab of this had broken off under her weight (not that I'm implying Diane weighs too much, you understand), and the resultant avalanche had carried her head first, on her back, down past me and over the ice pitch. She felt two distinct jerks during the fall: the first probably due to my belay ripping out, and the second as she was brought to a halt. Diane also told of becoming immobilised by compacting snow as she stopped and the avalanche slowed and stopped around her, but how she was aware enough to dig herself out quickly before the snow set hard. One of our two ropes had become caught round Stephen as he had been setting off up the steep section of the ice pitch, pulling him off after us. This is what ultimately stopped us, since Anne had stopped Stephen. I hadn't realised that the fall was due to an actual avalanche, since Diane, immersed in snow, had sped past me before I realised what was going on. I had effectively chased Diane and the avalanche down the gully, at some point overtaking her, until the rope came tight and I stopped. We all had to be thankful for the soft snow lying in the gully bed, since it had cushioned us from serious injury, particularly Diane and me, as we had plunged over the ice pitch into the deep deposits that I had been cursing as I waded towards the base of the steep ice on the way up. Anne also explained that she had originally thought that only Stephen had fallen, leaving her trapped below the ice pitch with Diane and me above it with no way of reaching her. She was

therefore somewhat surprised to hear my reply coming up from below her! I suppose in a way, she must have actually been glad that we had all fallen (obviously, without sustaining serious injury) and that she was not going to have to spend hours pinned to the gully while we got help.

I did feel sorry for Stephen. I mean, there he was, minding his own business, climbing the crux of his chosen route, and all of a sudden, several tonnes of snow and climbers drop on his head and knock him off. Fortunately, he has been very understanding.

I also feel that Diane, Stephen and I all owe a great debt to Anne. I still break out in a sweat when I think of what might have happened if she hadn't managed to stop our rapid descent, and all this on only her third winter route.

And so we all descended into the woods, reaching the cars as darkness fell. We later discovered that Sarah and Michael had slept in, but turned up anyway. They had followed our footprints up into the corrie and had gone on to climb D Gully, a grade I route to the right of our climb, without ropes, crampons, helmets or incident.

This really is a game of chance.

Co-operation in Footpath Repair on Clachnaben

Donald Thomas

The Clachnaben Path Trust is now entering the fourth season of construction work on the footpath in Glen Dye. The Trust is very grateful to the Cairngorm Club for their generous millennium donation. Many members have seen various stages in the work and will remember that much of the path was badly eroded. In places, the vegetation damage had spread to five metres wide and could be seen from afar. Water and frost damage had resulted in deep scouring.

The Clachnaben Path Trust was set up in 1998 when concerned local hillwalkers saw the need to put something back into the hills. The current trustees are Jim Maison, Hamish Lean, Becky Adron and Donald Thomas. We have been very encouraged by the support of the north-east clubs and many smaller donations from individual hillwalkers. The project has also received funding from Aberdeenshire Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, Texaco, the Gannochy Trust and the Scottish Mountaineering Trust. The Glendye Estate owner, Charles Gladstone, has provided accommodation for workers and free materials.

Over the past three years construction work has been carried out by Northern Conservation (Ballater), Conserve Environmental Contractors (Carrbridge) and Axiss Conservation Services (Carrbridge). Additional work has been carried out by Scottish Conservation Projects Trust, Skye Conservation and local volunteers, with Bristow Helicopters and 3 Flight Army Air Corps (Leuchars) assisting with the positioning of materials. The completed work has received acclaim from walkers, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and land managers alike.

In the first year (1998), we constructed sections of aggregate path with appropriate drainage and landscaping in and immediately above the wood. In the following year, Conserve built two technically demanding sections above the wood. The higher of these takes a new line in one wide curve to the north of the previous "desire line" path. In addition, several sections of irregular stone pitching were built and the eroded line partially reinstated. In 2000 we tackled a single section beneath the summit tor. The Club's donation formed part of the 25% matched funding for the work which consisted of stone pitching and a large area of landscaping of the exposed peat. Additional work was carried out in the woodland over the winter.

A cairn marking the completion of several stages of repairs was unveiled in July 2000, by outdoor writer and broadcaster Cameron McNeish. Around 40 members of local hillwalking groups and other bodies attended the ceremony. Walkers are now using the new line and



Steps on the New Path to Clachnaben

comments have been favourable. The existing completed sections are settling in well. Maintenance and minor repair work is necessary on a regular basis. We are also planning to try a number of methods to reinstate vegetation on the bypassed section of path.

This year's work should close the gap in the path on the open hillside, leaving further landscaping and maintenance to be carried out in future years. With the co-operation of the Estate, we have been able to plan the work despite the restrictions due to the foot and mouth outbreak. Final confirmation of grant funding is expected soon to allow the work to start.

Current proposals for changes in access legislation are only likely to increase the pressure on footpaths. Innovative approaches such as our own to tackle the problem are beginning to make a difference, but there is a long way to go. It is very heartening to be a member of a Club that leads the way in giving back to the hills, from which so many of us derive such pleasure. Anyone else wishing to contribute to the work (practically or financially) can contact us c/o Maclean and Lawson, 94 East High Street, Forfar.

Since this article was written the Trust has carried out a successful fourth season of footpath construction, which completes the work on the open hillside.

The Black Cuillin Ridge of Skye in Two Right Boots

Brian Davey

This article is published as a tribute to Kevin Broadbent, a good friend who shared this adventure with Albert Krawinkel and myself. Kevin died on 16 June 2001 aged 34 years.

A new "feet" for the record books has just been claimed as regards a complete traverse of the Black Cuillin ridge of Skye. This is undoubtedly the most challenging ridge walk/climb in the British Isles and extends for almost 13km across the most spectacular mountains of Scotland, from Gars-bheinn in the south to Sgurr nan Gilleann in the north. The traverse of the ridge comprises 18 individual tops, 14 of which are above 3000ft, and of these, 11 are classed as Munros. The new record is definitely not a speed record. Our time for the ridge alone, not counting the walk-in, the walk-out, rest periods and bivvying out on the ridge overnight, was 22 hours, and the total time from the Glen Brittle beach to the Sligachan Hotel was 35½ hours. The present time record for the complete ridge traverse between the two above-named peaks is just under 3½ hours, obviously set up by some super-fit male demi-god with a little help from his friends. In contrast, we took four hours to reach the first top of Gars-bheinn from the Glen Brittle beach. No, this expedition claims a new record on the basis that the traverse was completed by one of its three members wearing two right boots.

Albert Krawinkel, a Scot of part-Flemish descent, is a great companion on the hills. At any time his quick wit and Glaswegian humour enhance that inexplicable perverse pleasure and self-satisfaction we get from the challenge of the mountains in all their vagaries of topography and weather. Albert was dressed in T-shirt, shorts and trainers when we assembled at the Glen Brittle Youth Hostel on the Friday night before our expedition was due to begin. When he announced that he had forgotten to bring his hillwalking jacket, Kevin Broadbent and I thought this was part of a wind-up. The ridge traverse never drops below 760m (approximately 2500 ft). Although I had selected this particular weather window for the trip after waiting for two months, in my opinion temperatures on the summits during the overnight bivvy made a jacket an essential piece of equipment. While the resolution of this problem was still being considered, a few minutes later Albert announced: "You will not believe this, lads, I've brought along two right boots." But "right" enough, his two matching left ones had remained at home in East Kilbride. The Black Cuillin Ridge of Skye is composed mostly of a great jumble of loose rocks, boulders and scree of gabbro which involves quite a bit of

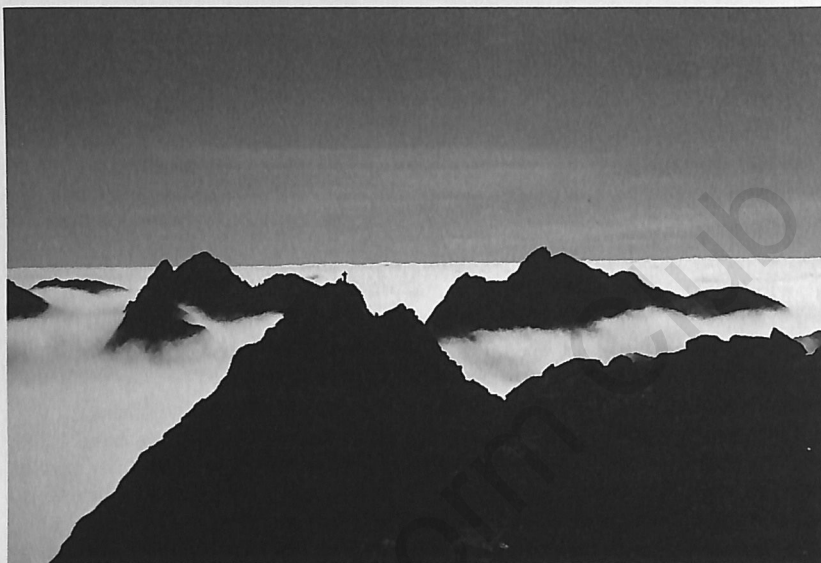
awkward climbing and scrambling. The walk-in involves a long trek across boggy moorland. A good pair of boots is essential. Trainers were unthinkable, two right boots were the only alternative. Kevin and I can vouch for the fact that Albert completed the course not only in two right boots but also without a jacket, despite all our kind offers of sweatshirts and fleeces. Believe it or not, the amazing thing at the end of our journey was that Albert's left foot was in better condition than his right. Maybe we have made a new discovery for the Footwear Research Institute, that it is better to walk/climb wearing your boots on opposite feet. Check it out sometime. Or maybe not.

Doing the ridge in one expedition was one of the most challenging experiences of my entire life, both mentally and physically. Mentally because during the complete route a rope was used only twice as an aid on ascent, and four times to abseil on descents. All this with the knowledge that one wrong unroped move on the countless extreme exposures would be fatal. Adrenalin must have helped to concentrate our minds. The physical aspect involved not just the 16 miles distance from Glen Brittle to Sligachan, but also a total ascent of over 10,000ft including 12 Munros - our chosen route took us over Sgurr nan Eag twice. In fact a strict traverse does not necessarily entail the ascent of all 11 Munros since Sgurr Alasdair and Sgurr Dubh Mor actually lie off the main ridge. In other words doing the ridge is not necessarily doing the Munros and vice versa.

In order to avoid a long slog across Coire nan Laogh and a relentless 500 metre steep ascent through large scree we had decided to reach the start point of the ridge at Gars-bheinn summit by the geologically magnificent Coir' a' Ghrunnda. This involves a steep climb across some massive sections of glaciated boiler-plate rock with some easy scrambling to the beautiful crystal-clear Loch Coir' a' Ghrunnda where we drank our fill and topped up all our water bottles at what was the last watering point before the ridge. Then another steep climb and scramble up to Bealach a' Garbh-choire, the Pass of the Rough Corrie, a very appropriate name. Here we thankfully dumped our packs and set off with renewed vigour. The early morning cloud and hill fog had become broken by this stage and our route took us along the ridge over Sgurr nan Eag en route to the start at the distant Gars-bheinn. We had to retrace our steps over Sgurr nan Eag and 2 ½ km of ridge a short time later, but without our heavy rucksacks it was a pleasant walk/scramble. Some good views of the ridge and surrounding area, including Loch Brittle, Rubh' an Dunain, Soay, Loch Scavaig, Loch Coruisk and even Rum and Canna, were possible through patchy hill fog. This helped our navigation; the magnetic nature of the rock in many parts of the Cuillin renders the compass useless on many occasions. Added to this, the rough nature of the rock makes paths difficult to detect, and the inadequacies of the Ordnance Survey maps in representing the actual contours of the craggy terrain makes for difficult

route finding. The rough nature of the gabbro rock also demanded a high price, though when dry it gave a sandpaper-like grip to our boots. Apart from the leather and rubber wear, the skin on our hands was nearly worn down to the bone and it took us a few weeks after the expedition to regrow our fingerprints. This despite the fact that I wore gloves on some of the less demanding climbing pitches.

Although Kevin and I had between us walked/climbed the complete ridge before in sections and climbed all the Skye Munros, Albert had still to bag Sgurr nan Eag, Sgurr na Banachdich, Sgurr a' Ghreadaidh and Sgurr a' Mhadaidh. Our intentions were not to break any time records (fat chance), or to stick religiously to every single rock pinnacle along the crest, but to complete the traverse while savouring and relishing the mountains in reasonably good weather. A settled spell of dry weather with light winds is essential for a successful completion of the traverse, and Saturday and Sunday 10-11 July 1999 presented such suitable conditions. A cold front clearing eastwards across Skye on the Saturday morning was followed by a ridge of high pressure on the Sunday. Thankfully my predictions proved true - only too true as far as temperatures were concerned. The high pressure produced shade temperatures up to 26° C (77° F) as measured on my rucksack thermometer. Another essential requirement is an adequate supply of water. No water source exists on the ridge, except for very tiny, doubtful-looking pools of water, trapped in a few basin-shaped rocks from the rainfall of Friday night. The only other water was in the form of early morning dew, on the very sparse tufts of grass. All this we utilised when it presented itself, at least Kevin and Albert did. I abstained from the rock pools, although I must admit I did try sucking on the odd blade of grass just out of curiosity. Andrew Dempster in his book on *Classic Mountain Scrambles in Scotland* states that two to three litres of water would seem to be a reasonable amount for a warm summer's day. But six litres might have been a better estimate, given the way we were sweating. However the amount of water carried must be equated to the weight of one's rucksack - a gallon of water weighs ten pounds! Other essentials to be carried were climbing helmet, climbing harness, karabiners, abseiling devices, slings, ropes, survival bags, sleeping bag, first aid kit, sunscreen, food, extra clothing including hat and gloves, not to mention my hip flask. With weight in mind I decided that I would sacrifice my camera in lieu of a little extra water, which I came to regret at one part of the traverse. When the hill fog cleared around 9.00 p.m. on Saturday evening, we had just arrived at the summit of Sgurr Mhic Choinnich. The cloud evaporated to reveal an ocean of stratus below us, with all the Cuillin peaks protruding a few hundred feet above the cloud inversion. As we watched the cloud continuing to break up below, we saw a magnificent Brocken Spectre appear.



Cloud Sea on the Skye Ridge

On the summit cairn of Sgurr Mhic Chonnich there is a poignant memorial plaque to a Lewis Mac Donald, dated 25 July 1958, which reads: "One whose hands these rocks has grasped, the joys of climbing unsurpassed." This I consider a very fitting memorial to a climber, but one which I found a little spooky when I climbed this particular mountain alone in thick hill fog in July 1998. Also spooky was the sea gull which suddenly appeared out of the fog on that occasion to share my lunch, and again on this occasion approximately one year later, another gull, or maybe the same one, appeared again. We did not see it go away hungry. After we had fed the bird and ourselves, we set off in bright late evening sunshine for Sgurr Dearg and the Inaccessible Pinnacle. However before we had reached this point of the ridge a few memorable obstacles had been encountered which are worth recounting.

The traverse from Gars-bheinn to Sgurr Dearg and the Inaccessible Pinnacle is exhilarating, with first a fairly easy start, walking and scrambling over the rough top of Sgurr a Choire Bhig. We then dropped down to a col and scrambled up the shattered rocks of Sgurr nan Eag. After this came the first difficult bit of scrambling as we made our way back to Bealach a' Garbh-choire and our rucksacks. This was good practice for what lay ahead, Caisteal a' Garbh-choire and Sgurr Dubh an Da Bheinn, and the diversion down the lateral east ridge to Sgurr Dubh Mor, a mountain whose north face had presented me with no little difficulty and some considerable grief on a previous occasion. But that's

another tale. This time it was just another steep scramble. Soon we were retracing our steps or handholds back over Sgurr Dubh an Da Bheinn to reach the much-talked about Thearlaich-Dubh Gap. This is a giant cleft in the main ridge at 2950 ft (899m), where you scramble up the steep crags from Sgurr Dubh an Da Bheinn to a pinnacle above the short side of the Gap. Then you abseil down the slightly overhanging 30-foot drop to the base of the cleft, before climbing the almost vertical 80-foot upper side. The difficulty of the climb was immediately obvious and Kevin led the way using a rope and various climbing paraphernalia, with me belaying him from below. He managed to secure an anchor for the rope around a suitable rock at the top, and Albert, rucksacks and myself followed. The security of the rope made it easier, but the climb was still quite difficult where the smooth rock face presented no suitable handholds. At this point the technique for me was to jam my leg into a narrow vertical fissure in the rock and claw my way upward to a useful left-handhold above. Then I was able to lever myself up to what looked from below an impossible-to-reach hold on the right. After that pitch the rest seemed relatively easy. Before long we were on our way to Sgurr Thearlaich, but first we made a slight diversion across the top of the 1300ft scree of the Great Stone Chute to the highest Munro on Skye. This is Sgurr Alasdair, 3258ft, named after Alexander Nicolson who was said to have been the first to climb it as recently as 1873.

A slightly awkward initial scramble took us back to the main ridge and the steep ascent to the cairn on the Sgurr Mhic Choinnich col. From here the mountain ahead soars menacingly skywards, so we opted to take the not-so-obvious Collie's Ledge Route. This starts after a very steep climb of about 20 feet from the base of the col and slants up to the left around the soaring rock knob, bringing us up to the ridge just to the north of the summit. As explained above, here we rested, refuelled, fed the seagull and admired the scenery and optics with great elation.

Beyond Sgurr Mhic Choinnich the ridge leads sharply downwards to the Bealach Coire Lagan, then an exhausting climb around the steep buttress of An Stac reaches the Inaccessible Pinnacle, projecting above the summit of Sgurr Dearg. The time being 10.30 p.m., we had the luxury of having the In-Pin to ourselves - on a fine day it is usually besieged by hordes of people waiting their turn to climb it. So after depositing our rucksacks at its base, we quickly scaled this famous sliver of rock without ropes, climbing up the "easy" East Ridge. This is in fact classed as a moderate rock climb, with plenty of handholds and footholds, but with frightening exposure on each side of its steep and narrow arête. A fast abseil down the other steeper 80-foot west face saw us on our way again, just as the sun was dipping below the Atlantic horizon, beyond a clearly visible Harris and Lewis. Heading for Sgurr na Banachdich, we were now on the lookout for a suitable bivouac spot. By very good luck we soon

came upon what must be one of the best on the ridge, just beyond Bealach Coire na Banachdich. This crude shelter was a low wall of rocks about three feet high, constructed for three people by some master stone-dyke builder. For these parts it had the rare luxury of a flat earth floor with only one projecting rock, which Albert soon ejected. Our arrival time at this well-appointed residence was 11.10 p.m., exactly 14 hours after we had left the Glen Brittle Beach. Quite pleased that we had reached the halfway point of the ridge and survived to find such desirable accommodation, we celebrated with an Irish coffee and quickly made ourselves as comfortable as possible under the fading twilight and the awakening stars.

Bivvying out on the Black Cuillin Ridge of Skye cannot be regarded as the most comfortable way to spend a night in the mountains, but if you are tired enough you *will* sleep, albeit fitfully. By 4.30 a.m. we were all awake, somewhat rested and covered by heavy dew. After a quick breakfast we were underway again on what is widely acknowledged to be the more difficult half of the ridge. A blanket of hill fog, which temporarily broke up as we climbed the three tops of Sgurr na Banachdich, had replaced the clear starry skies. Unfortunately the overnight condensation had left the rocks slightly wet and slippery, which made the scrambling tricky in places. After the peaks of Sgurr Na Banachdich and Sgurr Thormaoid had been scaled, the route became more familiar to me. During one of the very memorable days of a 1999 Spring Holiday Meeting, I had led seven intrepid Westhill Walkers along this section of the ridge only a few months before. This helped to speed our progress. We were soon skirting around the narrow gap of Eag Dubh and climbing backwards down the 20-foot wall to the floor of An Dorus chasm and col. The south-west peak of Sgurr a Mhadaidh rises steeply on the other side of this gap. We kept to the axis of the ridge until we reached the first and highest of the four tops of Sgurr a Mhadaidh. On our previous visit to this part of the ridge in the springtime we had enjoyed brilliant sunshine and magnificent views of the vast basin of Loch Coruisk immediately below. However on this occasion the hill fog was still pea-soup thick when we reached the 30-foot horizontal crest of rock, which is the summit.

The next section of the route between the first top of Sgurr a' Mhadaidh and Bruach na Frithe was new territory to Albert and me. The fact that it does not have any Munro peaks may have been one reason for this, but that certainly did not make it any easier. Fortunately Kevin had traversed it alone with great fortitude during the Spring Meet and so I was forewarned. Beyond the main top of Sgurr a Mhadaidh, where the buttress from Sgurr Thuilm joins the main ridge, the route turns sharply to the east. At this point came some exposed climbing and scrambling as we traversed the other three subsidiary tops of Sgurr a Mhadaidh, with a gendarme on the second top and a steep rocky descent after the third top to Bealach na

Glac Moire, the Pass of the Great Defile. This is the lowest place on the ridge at 2492ft (760m).

The next part of our route involved not just some rough scrambling and rock climbing, but also some tricky navigation over the triple summits of Bidein Druim nan Ramh (Peak of the Ridge of Oars), whose three tops form a rough triangle. The transverse ridge resembling oars at this point is said to be associated with Viking mariners who, experts now generally agree, gave the Cuillin their name from the Norse word "kjolen" which denotes not only a high mountain ridge but also the keel of a boat. The topography here is well worthy of note because Bidein Druim Nan Ramh is the only peak in the Cuillin supported by four ridges. These may seem well-defined on the map but, in the thick hill fog, which still enveloped us at this stage, they were anything but. After a hard bit of climbing and scrambling we came to the edge of a deep chasm, where someone had left a sling anchored around a suitable rock. A nervous glance down the seemingly endless cliff below, and a quick checking of compasses, told us we had taken a wrong turn, so we had to do some difficult and time-consuming back-tracking. The western Bidein peak was relatively easy, then came the central peak, which we reached, by a series of zigzags up rocky terraces. This was followed by an awkward descent, one of the most difficult of the entire Main Ridge. Here we used the rope to descend safely in two separate abseils to reach the col below and thence attain the North Peak. From Bealach Harta below, the route leads to An Caisteal (the Castle), where a conspicuous feature is a 200-foot gash in the ridge. At one point an exciting four-foot jump was made across a deep, vertical-sided notch to save time and some difficult climbing. It was somewhere along this part of the route that the discovery of an old, faded label from a lemonade bottle led us to a secret cache of two litres of water in plastic bottles. Judging by the state of the labels they had been there for some considerable time. Many people who attempt the entire ridge, and have the time and energy, take the sensible precaution of depositing a secret water supply somewhere near or beyond the halfway stage, and it is well known that a high proportion of people fail in their attempt. So it didn't take much debate in our dehydrated state to come to the conclusion that this water had been abandoned. I was pretty certain of this when I noticed the floating pieces of fungus in the first bottle when Kevin put the bottle to his lips and took the first drink. The second bottle looked less contaminated and although Kevin and Albert indulged their thirst, I reluctantly refused. Besides the risk of typhoid, or something worse, I still had about a half-litre of water in reserve while their personal supplies were almost finished. With slight tinges of conscience, about one litre of water was replaced in the secret hidey-hole for some other poor unfortunate dehydrated souls to discover. We then proceeded along the ridge, still very

thirsty, with the knowledge that we would need another water supply if we were to survive and succeed in reaching Sgurr nan Gilleann.

Although we were still highly determined at this stage, I must admit that because of our water shortage some slight self doubts were beginning to creep into the back of my mind. By this time the hill fog was beginning to break up with bursts of warm sunshine quickly pushing up the temperature. Happily the way ahead could at last be seen, rising over Sgurr na Bhairnich and beyond to the rocky summit of Bruach na Frithe. This presented nothing worse than a good scramble, but the lengthening sunny spells increased our dehydration and by the time I reached the summit cairn of Bruach na Frithe I was feeling not only very thirsty and hungry but also very tired. At this time the shade temperature on my rucksack thermometer was reading a very warm 26° C. It was at this point that Kevin and Albert decided that the only solution to the water problem was to drop down a few hundred feet to the burn in Fionn Choire, refill their water bottles and drink the rest of the burn completely dry. For myself, I decided that my first priority was to get some renewed energy into my system by eating some food, washed down by my last few meagre drops of water. It was during this process that six strapping young Scots appeared on the summit, loaded with copious supplies of cool bottled water, which I subsequently discovered had been very recently filled on their ascent. My insatiable thirst then inspired what I now regard as the miracle on the Black Cuillin Ridge, the turning of whisky into water. Remembering my whisky-filled hip flask, I hastily enquired if anyone would like to swap whisky for water. I was suddenly inundated with more than two litres! After a short rest, any doubts of not completing the whole ridge traverse were readily dispelled and I soon rejoined Kevin and Albert a little further along the ridge at Bealach nan Lice. Now fully refreshed with plenty of food and water we were all brimming with renewed confidence. Especially since our final peak of Sgurr nan Gilleann was in sight, we found that the traverse of Am Basteir presented us with no real problems.

To save time and energy we decided to leave our rucksacks at Bealach a' Bhasteir when scaling Sgurr nan Gilleann (the Peak of the Young Men), carrying only harnesses, slings and a rope. Also conveyed was a metal water-bottle which dangled from my belt and clanged against the rocks, making me sound like a Pyrenean mountain sheep as we made our way up the steep western ridge to the pointed peak above. An exciting climb just to the right of Nicolson's Chimney brought us to a horrendously exposed part of the ridge where the now collapsed gendarme once menacingly stood. Albert was fearlessly across the breach almost without thinking. Coming up close behind, Kevin and I decided after some reflection that it was better to set up some protection at this point by using the rope to guard against a possible slip. Safely across this hazard we

made our way further upwards, crawling through a curious hole in the rock face while noting that this was only the second time we had used the rope for ascent along the whole route. Following the crest of the ridge we finally reached the summit cairn at 965m, built on a small platform. This represented the end of the traverse for us. Elated by the view, the self-satisfaction of success and our great sense of achievement, we had to remind ourselves not to be too complacent during our steep descent back down the west ridge. This time we opted to abseil down Nicolson's Chimney and we were soon back at Bealach a' Bhasteir and our rucksacks.

Flushed with success, the long two-hour walkout to the Sligachan Inn was a tedious but happy unwinding affair. The thought of that cool pint of beer at the end of our adventure spurred us onwards, and it wasn't long before we were slaking our thirst and reflecting on what had been one of our most demanding physical and psychological exercises ever. Would we do it again? Well maybe someday, but not too soon. And certainly not in two right boots!

Old Maps of the Cairngorms

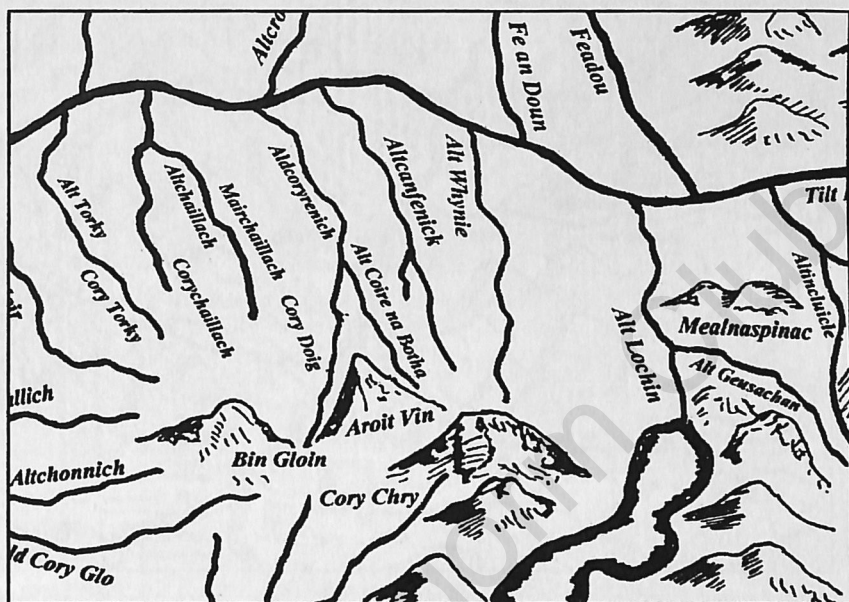
Graham Ewen

The first Ordnance Survey map of the Cairngorms area was published in 1866. Unfortunately for the purpose of historical research, by that time most of the old social order in the area had been swept away in order to create deer forests, and in consequence this map shows the area as being not very different from what it is today. There is little sign of the settlement pattern that had existed in earlier times. Fortunately however there are in existence quite a large number of earlier maps, which may not be as accurate as the Ordnance Survey maps, but they do show the earlier settlement pattern and are invaluable in locating the sites of earlier settlements and their names.

The first such map was drawn by Timothy Pont, a graduate of St Andrews University some time between 1583 and 1590. He produced a set of large-scale maps covering most of Scotland. There is unfortunately no map of the central part of the Cairngorms, but there is a sheet covering the area between Braemar and Blair Atholl, a small part of which is illustrated here (Map A)*. As can be seen, the map shows the area in great detail with even all the small burns being named. The mountains are shown in a pictorial way with most of the important ones being named, but the map shows little in the way of settlement and so is not of much interest for historical research. Its main interest lies in the continuity of place names from then to the present day, despite the difference in spelling. For example, Beinn a' Ghlo appears as Bin Gloin and Meall na Spionaig as Mealnaspinac. There is evidence that some of the script has been added by Robert Gordon of Straloch, the grandfather of the Robert Gordon who founded Robert Gordon's College in Aberdeen. Unfortunately this map appears to be unfinished as there is nothing like the detail shown on the Deeside section as is shown in Glen Tilt.

The same Robert Gordon produced a map of Upper Deeside some time between 1630 and 1640. It was drawn in the same way as the Pont map, with the hills shown pictorially, but he has added settlements which makes it much more interesting historically. The map also shows woods, but as they are more or less all over the map, including places which should be high mountains, I doubt the value of their inclusion. The place names are mostly similar to those of today but there are some interesting differences: Cairn Toul is called Soul Bin Macduff, Ben Avon is given as Badronald and Lochnagar as Bini Chichnes, although the loch at the

*As it is not possible to reproduce the originals, the maps appearing here have been redrawn by the author.

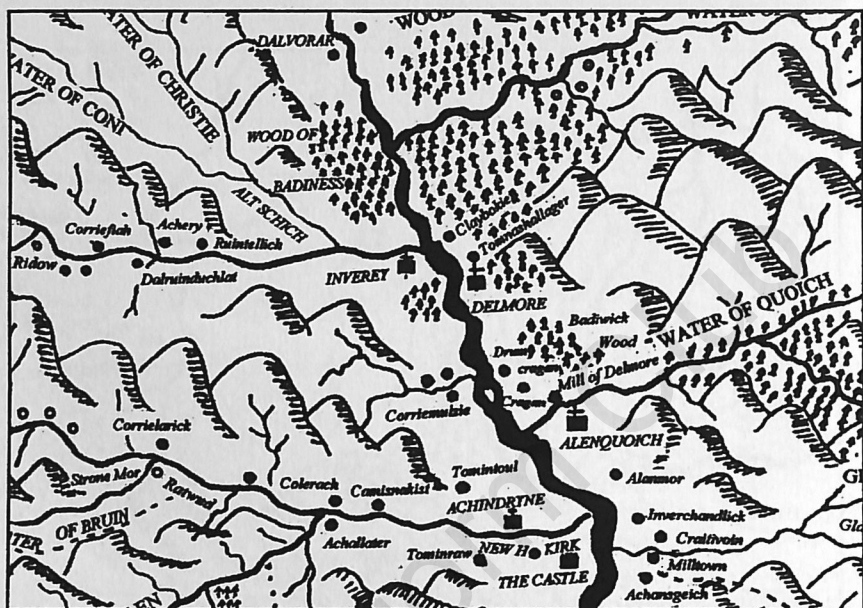


Map A Timothy Pont 1583-1590

bottom is called Lochingar. Some of the script appears in Latin, for example the wood of Dereray is given as Dereray Silva and the rivers have the letters fl along with their names, presumably an abbreviation for fluvius. This map shows one settlement in Glen Lui called Badintoy, which does not appear anywhere else. As Glen Lui was reserved as shieling grounds until around 1700, this may have been a name applied to the shielings in this glen.

In 1654 a Dutch publisher by the name of William Blaeu published an Atlas of Scotland, which contained 49 maps based on the work of Timothy Pont and edited by Robert Gordon. These maps, although pretty to look at, were on a smaller scale than the originals and therefore contain much less in the way of detail.

In 1703 a Map of the Forest of Mar was produced by John Farquharson of Invercauld, a small part of which is illustrated here (Map B). This map still has the hills drawn in pictorial form and shows settlements and woods and also some roads. The most important settlements are shown as black squares with a cross on top, while other permanent settlements are shown by small black circles. The small open circles such as at Ridow in Gleney and in the Baddoch are summer shielings. An important feature of this map is that it shows the settlement in Glenlui as shielings, despite the fact that the Roman Catholic records



Map B John Farquharson 1703

show births in Glenlui around this time. This might suggest that the settlements were not yet recognised as being officially permanent, even if they were. The area shown as woods is much more credible than the Gordon map and does not look too different from the present day. The hills appear to have been sketched in any old way, just to give the impression of a mountainous area in between the valleys. Little effort has been made to name any of them. Such a map, had it been published, while interesting historically, would have been no use to hillwalkers but would probably have helped travellers who were only interested in following the valleys. The same of course applies to the maps previously described.

In 1725 a map called "The Shire of Kincairden or Mearns with the South part of Aberdeenshire" was published by a geographer called Moll. This map is of limited interest as it is on a small scale, and although it covers the Cairngorms there is not very much detail. It is also not very accurate even in local detail. Beinn a Bhuid for example is shown extending west of Glen Derry, and Lochnagar lies well to the south-west of Loch Muick. Interestingly Ben Avon is referred to as Bad Renald and Lochnagar as Bin Chichin, very similar to the spelling used on the Gordon Map.

After Culloden a decision was made to make a proper survey of the whole area of the Scottish Highlands. This task was completed by the military between the years of 1747 and 1755 under the supervision of

William Roy, a military surveyor who finally rose to the rank of Major-General in 1781. The maps were drawn at a scale of 1000 yards to the inch, and their accuracy surpasses anything that had gone before. It is not possible to reproduce the Roy map here as it was a coloured map. The hills are shaded brown and these come up in black on photocopies, thereby obscuring many of the placenames. Coloured slides of this map can however be obtained at considerable expense from the British Map Library in London.

The Roy map is the first one to use symbols instead of pictograms. The newly completed military road from Perth to Braemar is shown by a thin red line. Other roads are shown by thin black lines, including most of the drove roads. One such is shown going right over the top of An Sgarsoch, from the bend in the Feshie to Falls of Tarf, thus giving some credence to stories of a cattle market on the top of this hill. Settlement is shown by red dots, each dot representing a single building. This makes the map particularly interesting historically because settlement in the area was at its maximum extent at the time the map was drawn. All the settlements in Glenlui, Gleney and Glendee are shown, apart from the inexplicable omission of Dalvorar in Glendee, and this map has been invaluable in matching ruins on the ground with names. Woodlands are also shown and, like the Farquharson map, cover an area much the same as the present day.

The Commission which was set up in 1803 for making roads and building bridges in the Highlands of Scotland employed a surveyor called Aaron Arrowsmith to survey the Highlands and to prepare maps to assist with road building in the area. These were published in 1807. Arrowsmith acknowledged that he made use of the Roy map, which he said had been deposited in the King's library and forgotten about. The sheet on Upper Deeside seems to be exactly the same as the Roy map except that the coloured hill shading used by Roy is replaced with hachures. The fact that the layout of the rivers is the same and the same place names are used, including all the settlements in Glenlui, which had been cleared by this time, makes one doubt if there was any re-surveying done. There is one serious mistake, with Allanaquoich being named as Mar Lodge. A secondary purpose of the map was apparently to demarcate the County boundaries.

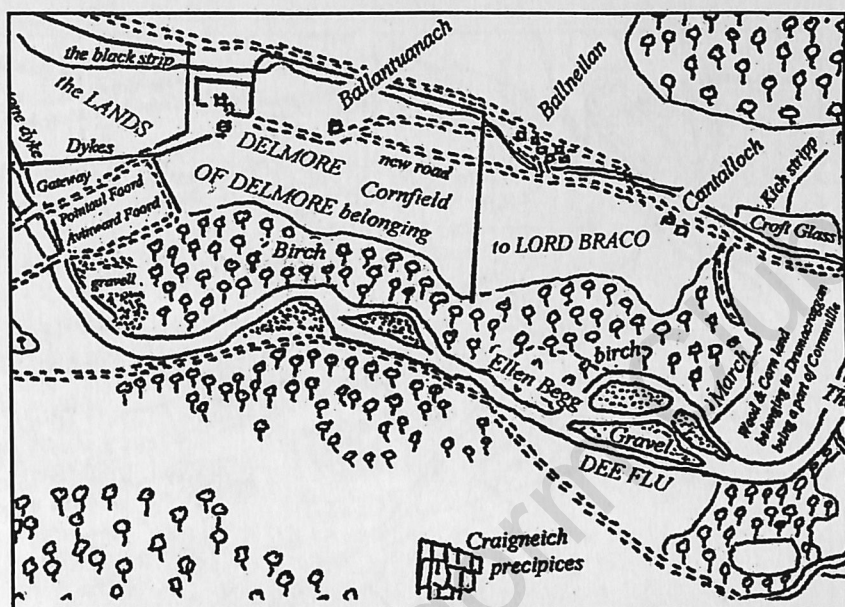
James Robertson, a native of Shetland, published a series of maps of Aberdeenshire in 1822 from a survey he had completed on his own. This is the first map where an attempt has been made to state the actual height of the principal mountains. Strangely these are not named on the map but numbered, with the names and heights given in an index at the foot of the map. He gives, for example, Ben Macdhui as 4,327ft, Derry Cairngorm as 3,792ft, and Beinn a Bhuid as 4,039ft, all within a hundred feet or so of the correct figure. Slopes are shown by a form of hachuring and the layout

of rivers begins to approach the accuracy of the later Ordnance Survey maps. The map shows woodland with much the same extent as the present day. It also shows roads and main settlements only. The scale is one inch to one mile.

In 1826 another map of the area was published by a John Thompson. This map seems to be based on the Roy map and is not so accurate as Robertson's effort of four years earlier. It contains surprisingly little detail for such a large-scale map and contains at least one serious mistake, the Linn of Dee being marked at the mouth of the Geldie.

In addition to the maps so far described there are a large number of larger-scale maps, which were drawn to fulfil a particular purpose. The first of these was drawn in 1735 by a surveyor called Joseph Avery, and showed the intended route of the military road to be built from Invercauld to Ruthven Barracks. The map is drawn to a scale of one inch to the mile and shows that the projected route was to follow roughly the line of the existing right of way from Invercauld all the way through to Carnachuin in Glen Feshie. The map is not very accurate and contains numerous mistakes; for example Dalvorar is marked on the wrong side of the Dee and the road to Blair Atholl is shown in the wrong place. It is of interest, however, that the map shows the existing road at that time to have followed the south side of the Dee and Geldie all the way to the Eidart.

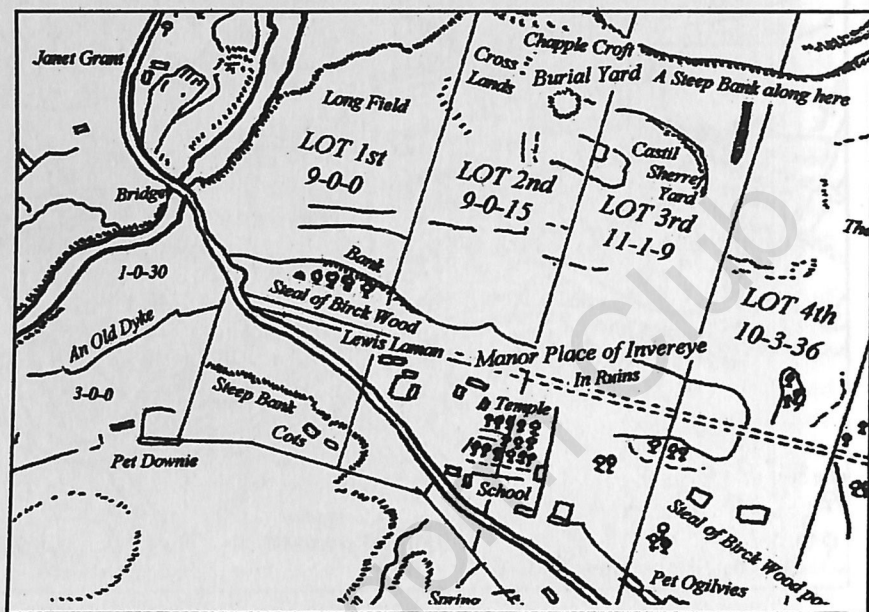
The second map of this type was drawn in 1743 to provide evidence for a protracted court case which took place between Lord Braco (later to become the Earl of Fife) the proprietor of Dalmore and Allanaquoich, and Farquharson of Inverey, who owned all the land on the south side of the river Dee and, as can be seen on the extract shown (Map C), a small part of land on the North side of the river (the part shown as belonging to Drumcraggan). The dispute arose from the fact that prior to this time the people of Inverey, when travelling to Braemar, normally forded the Dee by the Pointoul Ford, or sometimes the Avinward ford, and proceeded through the grounds of Delmore House (later Mar Lodge) before heading east towards Allanaquoich. From there they would head to Boat of Inverchandlick, where there was a ferry across the Dee to Braemar. Lord Braco wanted to establish a new road along the south side of the river, which might follow a line similar to the road existing today. This is possibly the only map which shows the positions of the old settlements of Ballantuanach, Ballneilan, Cantalloch and Croft Glass which were cleared as part of the development of the policies around Delmore House. No trace of these settlements remain as the stones were used either to build or repair the bulwarks along the river bank. The surveyor of this map was an Englishman called Thomas Winter who lived at Muthill in Perthshire, apparently introduced to Scotland by Sir Archibald Grant of Monymusk, but not much else is known about him.



Map C Thomas Winter 1743

Around 1745 a very large scale and surprisingly accurate map was drawn to show the haugh between Allanaquoich and Allanmore. The purpose of this map was to plan the drainage of the area, a scheme that was carried out jointly by Lord Braco and Farquharson of Invercauld during the 1745 uprising. The settlements of Allanaquoich, Kandakyle and Allanmore are shown with little pictures of houses. The map also shows the Mill of Delmore and the Mill of Allanaquoich on opposite banks of the Quoich, but sharing the same weir to divert the water into their respective lades. The original of this map can be inspected at Aberdeen University, where it forms part of the Duff House collection. Another variation of this map also exists, obviously drawn somewhat later and showing progress to date.

In 1787 the Earl of Fife, shortly after acquiring the Inverey Estate, had a large-scale map drawn of the villages of Meikle Inverey and Little Inverey, along with their associated areas of agricultural land. A small part of this map is shown here (Map D). It seems likely that this map was drawn with a view to reorganising the various holdings in the area. The map is interesting in that it shows a school already established in Inverey at this time. The name Chapple Croft would presumably indicate the approximate location of a former Chapel. The houses are named with the names of the people who occupied them. I cannot explain the presence of



Map D Inverey 1787

the word "temple" just below the Manor Place of Invereye. A similar map of the area around Achindryne was drawn at the same time.

There are also a very large number of very large-scale maps of Invercauld Estate, some showing the whole estate and others individual farms. They were mostly drawn during the first quarter of the nineteenth century and are too numerous to describe here individually. They were obviously drawn with agricultural improvements in mind, as certain parts are annotated with entries such as "flat mossy ground, might be drained and improved". I will confine my comments to one such map showing the Mains of the Coldrach, which was directly across the Clunie from the present-day farm of Achalater. The individual field boundaries are shown and each field annotated to show its worth, e.g. stony land, pretty good land, birch wood and grass, arable. There is a mill, and the mill-race and dam are clearly shown. Also beside the farm there is a milestone on the old military road, which of course passes through the farm. Numerous buildings are also shown.

There are also three smaller-scale maps, the first drawn in 1775 showing the whole of Upper Deeside west of Bridge of Gairn. The first map was obviously drawn in connection with a court case and shows all the estate boundaries, all the settlements and also information about timber servitudes. The second one, described as "Part of the Mains and Forest of

Invercauld", was drawn in 1808. This map shows the valley of the Dee in great detail from the Inver to Braemar Castle. The third one, drawn in 1828, shows the whole of Invercauld Estate and all the settlements at a time when settlement on the estate would have been at its greatest extent. There are for example nine settlements shown in Glen Clunie south of the existing farm of Achallater, an area which is deserted today.

The above maps are by no means the only ones that exist but they are the most interesting. Without them, the locations of many of the place-names found in the estate papers would have remained a mystery. They show how the settlement pattern expanded from the Dee valley at the time of Robert Gordon's map into the surrounding glens by the time of the Roy map. Unfortunately they do not illustrate the later contraction of settlement in the same way, as later map-makers seem reluctant to remove names if they have appeared on earlier maps. A modern example of this can be seen in the O.S. Pathfinder series of 1989 which records such places as Dubrach and Tonnagaoithe in Glendee despite the fact that they were abandoned more than 150 years earlier. The maps also have a variety of other historical information on them including woodlands, roads, estate boundaries, sites of mills and many other items of interest.

Carry on up the Khyber

Gordon Stalker

Traditional Cairngorm Club overnight meets seem now to be a thing of the past but a substitute weekend was kindly arranged by Ian Shand for the Aberdeen Holiday weekend 7th - 9th July 2001 at the Bearnais Bothy. Most members chose to walk in from Lair near Achnashellach station, although it was noted that the organizer had decided to come in from Strathcarron. Perhaps he knew something we didn't!

The evening's excitement started about 9.30 p.m. after the drive from Aberdeen, with an attempt to locate the bridge marked at 011482 on the 1988 version of OS sheet 25. When this was eventually found it was seen now to consist of two wires connected at the far side of the river only. A pleasant paddle followed across the delightfully warm River Carron and, after blundering through a forestry plantation, the start of the path up the legendary Khyber Pass was thankfully found. Members should note that under spate conditions the crossing of the wide River Carron would be difficult or impossible.

Progress at last! By midnight we were standing in mist and darkness at what we thought was the summit of the Khyber Pass looking down into a corrie in which we assumed the bothy was located. At this point we were navigationally challenged, and two GPSs in a party of three were not enough to prevent us descending some distance into this corrie when some doubts began to creep into our minds as to whether the topography corresponded to what was expected. A GPS fix showed we were in fact in completely the wrong corrie - Coire na h-Eilde. Thoughts of benightment on the hill without a bivvy bag followed, but we retraced our steps and found that the unseen path continued up a steep rocky bluff in a southerly direction. The bothy was finally reached with relief at about 1.30 a.m., without much further incident apart from my torch batteries failing and a sprained ankle a few hundred metres from our goal.

The bothy was empty except for a small body occupying an impossibly small space beside the fireplace. This turned out to belong to a lady Club member, who must have thought that she had arrived on the wrong date and/or the wrong bothy.

The morning dawned with some interesting cloud formations in which most of the day was spent traversing Beinn Tharsuinn, Bidein a'Choire Sheasgach and Lurg Mor, the latter certainly two of the most isolated Munros. Despite or because of the Presidential presence, the rest of the weekend was lost in a misty oblivion due to a combination of the weather and inferior whisky, but members of the Club also ascended the



Bearnaís Bothy

other Corbetts in the area, Sgurr na Feartaig (on which no seagulls were seen) and Ben Dronaig.

Lessons learned for future overnight excursions include:

- purchase an up to date map in case any bridges, tracks or paths have altered;
- put new batteries in your torch before leaving home and carry new spares;
- carry a bivvy bag even if it does add to your already enormous load;
- it's difficult to argue with the man carrying a GPS!

The Great Scottish Alternative Tick

David Kirk

For nearly thirty years now, "Hard Rock" has been the British rock-climber's Bible. Many climbers, myself included, have been drawn initially towards routes featured purely because they were in that book. Nothing can be more enjoyable than swinging up a pitch you have previously viewed, read, and dreamt about. The prose is classic adventure writing. The photographs, especially the older ones, stir the imagination and provide a sense of history. Pocket guide-books give practically none of this. However, even here in Scotland (where most of the climbs featured are mountain routes), the book has severely increased the popularity of its climbs. These days, it is not uncommon to slog up to the foot of *Centurion* just to find a team of three gearing up, and another on the first pitch. "Classic Rock", a similar book featuring easier climbs (and inspired by "Hard Rock"), identified this problem and gives lists of alternative routes - many equally good, but definitely quieter due to their lack of publicity. In "Hard Rock" no such list is given, and although the book is now becoming a little dated, the climbs it features do remain very popular. The following alternatives to standing in that queue may therefore come in handy!

On Arran, *South Ridge Direct* is of course an utter classic, but unsustained in difficulty. It gets very busy with a bottleneck forming behind leaders hanging Christ-like from the Y-cracks. Three alternatives come to mind. The hardest is *West Flank Route* - a fine HVS which starts rather awkwardly with the left side of your body doing slab moves and the right thrutching up a groove. It becomes more delicate with height as it rises across the open west face, crossing routes such as *Sou'wester Slabs*. *Hammer* takes a good clean delicate line up the slab to the right of *West Flank Route* to reach *South Ridge Direct* below its layback pitch. It is VS too, but easier than the *Ridge*. The guidebook recommends *South Ridge Original* if the *Direct* is busy. It's good too, but easier. It does feel a little frustrating being so close to the S-cracks (which must be one of Scotland's greatest pitches) but not being allowed to climb them.

Moving to Glen Etive, the good routes on the Etive Slabs tend to be equally busy. The guidebook no longer suggests that *Swastika* (E2 nowadays) can be ideal for HVS or E1 climbers if they employ aid techniques on the last one or two pitches. It therefore gets less traffic than it would otherwise. Swinging up that final corner from wire to wire on slings is brilliant therapy in this "everything must go free" age. The previous pitch, the wee corner below, is easier to free climb, but actually harder to aid!

To pick something instead of *Swastika*, I'd offer the following suggestions. *The Pause* is very good, but the traverse under the lower overhang to the crevasse is very thin balance traversing (although you can get gear in) - a cool second is needed. Higher up the slab, climbing is both more balancy and harder to follow than the famous quartz band pitch on *Swastika*. I remember a leader below me on this pitch getting caught in the rain - he stopped in the middle of a blank slab with no gear anywhere near him. Within three minutes we were dropping him a rope. The top vertical corner on *The Pause* is only 5a and reasonable (and even avoidable). *Hammer* too is good with a great line (probably the easiest to follow at Etive), with some short and fairly safe sections of blank slab padding - a good introduction. It used to employ a tension traverse on the upper crux - this technique can still be used if required (or even just for the hell of it). A final route I'd recommend to reasonably strong E1 leaders is *Jaywalk* - no tips given - just go and do it!

Up in the 'Coe, you'd be unlucky to find a queue for *Raven's Gully* these days - that sort of thing is out of vogue. If it is busy, however, *Raven's Edge* (VS) is the one to go for. It starts just to the right and gives a real mountain feel. It offers great views of the gully and folk on *Slime Wall*. It's quite strenuous and very exposed. I saw a party on it when I was doing *Raven's* - it looked about E2. It would also be easy to abseil from it, back into the gully, above the slow party!

Shibboleth of course is the Great Route. Having not done any of the other extreme routes on the wall, I can't give a similarly graded alternative. Friends of mine have retreated from *Apparition*, however, saying it was desperate - I would welcome any other information about it. *Bludger's Revelation* would be my best suggestion - quite tricky I thought for HVS, and a little scantily protected on the Link Pitch. The *Revelation Flake* however is a complete dream - it just has to be climbed.

Carnivore is the one Scottish route in "Hard Rock" I've yet to do, so I can't say much about it. There are no real alternatives at a similar grade on the same crag, but you can see if it's busy from the road and go anywhere else you want.

Yo-Yo is another route with few immediate alternatives - I've not climbed any other routes on that face (apart from *Ossian's Ladder* which gives near vertical grass climbing with a sting in the tail - descending the same way). However, the E1s like *The Cough* are very rarely done and look tricky. The VSs like *Tobar* and *Fingal's* don't look much better. The first time I tried *Yo-Yo* it was dripping wet, although the day was dry and sunny. We continued to the summit of Aonach Dubh (a pleasant scramble) and traversed into Coire an Lochan. There we found *Unicorn* to be bone-dry and a great, well-protected climb. What a line - I'd never had two consecutive hanging belays before (each one at exactly the same lat. / long.). The blocky andersite of this cliff dries quickly and if *Unicorn* is

busy too (it's in "Extreme Rock" after all), then *Central Grooves* - a similar but easier line on the buttress to the right - gives a good option.

Round on the west face of Aonach Dubh, *Trapeze* has two very obvious alternatives - *The Big Top* and *Hee Haw*. These days, it's common for climbers to head up intent on *The Big Top* and then, because it's busy, have to do *Trapeze* instead. All three are reasonably well protected, steep and exposed. On a busy day, *Hee Haw* is probably the one you'll get free. Although it's the least popular of the three, it's still very worth doing. It gets its crux over with very near the bottom. After that, the climbing is easier than the other two, even though it's higher in the graded list.

Up on the Ben, *The Bat* and *Centurion* can get stowed out, especially as they share a common first pitch (also shared with *King Kong*). The obvious alternative to *Centurion* is *Bullroar*. This is famous for its delicate rising traverses. Its first pitch can give a shock, however, as it's steep and tricky to find good holds when needed (try underclinging the hole!). After the meat of the route is over, you can abseil down *Titan's Wall*, making it a far shorter outing than *Centurion*.

If you do opt to abseil down *Titan's*, keep veering left on the first abseil (facing in) and watch out for the next abseil point. A team in front of us recently went straight down to a little ledge in the middle of the wall. They pulled their ropes and set up the next abseil (using their own gear). They found, however, that from that point, their rope ends didn't reach the ground and were dangling way out from the wall. Then they started to think their ledge was loose. We had to pendulum across to help out.

The Bat provides good alternatives while you are actually on it. If other climbers are stuck in the *Corner* or the *Hoodie Groove*, then you can continue traversing to the right and ascend the *Sassenach* chimneys. These shouldn't be classed as an escape route - the first chimney pitch gave the hardest, most awkward chimneying I've ever done. *Sassenach* can always be done in its entirety. Its true second pitch gives interesting aid climbing which is rarely done these days, and even less frequently done free (unless you can climb perpetually damp 6b). I did it using a pair of eight-foot and four-foot slings made up as two, two-step etriers. One got abandoned on the pitch through necessity but was later put to good use by my second. Another alternative sprouting from *The Bat* is the aforementioned *King Kong*. I've not done it, but it's supposed to be technically reasonable, with "adequate" gear but tricky route finding. *Torro* is another great route. Its crux, on pitch four, over an overhang above the *Bullroar* traverse is very hard and tends to be damp. It's been wet twice now when I've been up there and I've lowered back off on a good nut. Still, pitches one to three are brilliant and you can always traverse off as we did on *Bullroar* then head up *Centurion* for a bit before taking to the final pitches of *Torro* again.

Over in the Cairngorms, not much can be better than *The Needle* - not even its neighbour *Steeple*. The slagging *The Needle* gets in "Extreme Rock" is totally out of order - it is the classic of the Shelter Stone. However I did feel that it wasn't "bottom of the grade E1". It's long, committing, with four separate cruxes. If *The Needle* is busy, you've some recent E1s under your belt and the weather looks like it'll hold, why not try *Steeple*? The majority of its pitches are no harder than *The Needle's* cruxes. Of its two hard pitches, both can be well protected. The upper crux - the Great Corner - starts as smooth as the corner of a room but with one small crack. This pitch eases with height and is just brilliant. It contains *Steeple's* hidden crack - a crack within a crack which allows positive progress up otherwise desperate-looking rock.

The two Dubh Loch routes contrast a lot. *Goliath* is the one more likely to have a queue. There are not many other good HVSs immediately nearby. I would suggest a return back down Central Gully and an ascent of *The Mousetrap*. This is a good bit longer and quite tricky for VS. It follows a reasonably constant, sensible line and is as much a classic as *Goliath*. If it's busy too, go for *Dinosaur* / *Pink Elephant* for an even longer (although more escapable) climb. It's given HVS these days although it's similar in difficulty to *The Mousetrap*.

King Rat is famous really just for its overhang on the second pitch. Guidebooks say the rest of the climbing is VS - I thought it was a bit harder. I would not recommend it for VS leaders even if they plan to aid the overhang. I only saw one useable peg when I last climbed the overhang. As an alternative route for true E1 leaders, go for *Dubh Loch Monster* - a well sustained route with one noticeably harder crux (which has good gear). Once, I dropped a full crab of wires from about half way up the *Monster* and caught it between my foot and the rock - retrieving it was a nightmare.

Up at Carnmore, you would again be unlucky to get climbers in front of you. You should definitely try to do the two book routes, having walked in so far. *Fionn Buttress* is a great alternative, but it might not leave you time to do the others. I would recommend a short HVS to allow the folk on your planned route time to get up - either *Penny Lane* or *Trampoline* would fit the bill nicely. Alternatively, you could go for one of the routes on the lower tier to lead you up, for example *Black Mischief* at VS or *Baltron* at E1. This route had a good line and I didn't think it was any harder than *Dragon*! Then go for the classics, *Gob* first - its all in balance (even the bit through the overhang!) and it's not really as hard as HVS. Like *The Bat*, it's a Smith/Haston route. Then comes *Dragon* - a different bucket of worms. The route increases in difficulty with height. The exposure as you pull up onto the drooping flake is awesome and the traverse under the roofs which follows is mind-blowing. This route is top-stuff HVS (it may appear as E1 some day).

So to complete our alternative "Hard Rock" tour of Scotland, we have the northern and western islands. Up on Hoy, there is no real alternative if your aim is the *Original Route* on the Old Man. When I did it, there was a party of five in front of us and we were a group of six. My team of three went off for a coastal walk and didn't start till after 6 p.m. Summer days are long on Hoy - we saw the sunset after re-gaining the main cliff-top. The route and situations are really great and not to be missed just because someone else is on it. There is also an advantage of being behind people - the fulmars have used up all their ammo and just dry-retch at you.

It's a long slog up to the *Great Prow* on Blaven. Compared to some of the VS to E1 classics in Coire Lagan, the quality of this route is a little lacking, it's even got some loose rock. Its neighbouring route *Jib* is pretty good, and good value at HVS. It is said that taking the first pitch on *Stairway to Heaven* (E4) is an easier option than the first pitch of *Jib* - and it's really the correct line. Alternatively, you could climb in Coire Lagan and do *Trophy Cracks* and *Vulcan Wall*. Both of these are around the same difficulty (harder than average HVS), well protected and a finer pair you'll hardly find. As an approach to *Trophy Cracks*, if you've time, I suggest either *Crembo Cracks* or *Cioch Grooves*, which are either side of *Cioch Direct*. *Crembo*'s the easier.

Over on Harris, if you've gone to do *The Scoop* as an aid route, you'd be amazed to see other people. They'd probably be coming in to do some "normal" climbing. If they were on *The Scoop*, you could suggest teaming up - that could save everyone a lot of work (unless they were doing a free ascent, of course). If you are determined to do an aid route that you're on alone, you could go for one of Doug Scott's other biggies. These are *The Nose* and *Sidewinder* - you'd probably get the second ascent. In reality, however, no one will be on *The Scoop* in front of you. We saw no one for four days when we were there. The climbing itself is difficult, scary and time-consuming. Even the most comfortable harness cuts in eventually. The situations are fantastic however - "an exercise in fear and fascination".

We took the best part of two days to climb the route. We had a team of four: a climbing pair; a man to safeguard our retreat by keeping a rope hanging to the ground from the second belay ledge until we were over the upper crux; and a groundsman whose job it was to go for help if required! The route is so steep that a standard abseil would never touch rock again before the rope ran out so fixed ropes need to be left in place in case retreat is necessary. We had more than three full summer climbing racks plus around 20 assorted pegs, and a total of six and a half climbing ropes. The leader climbed used etriers while the second followed by jumaring up one of the lead ropes, with the other protecting him. A third rope to the leader was used as a communication rope to send up more gear when

required. The day after we climbed it, the three of us hardly left our beds due to the mental stress and physical exertion from the previous days - it was pouring with rain too.

"Unpublished Rock" was my initial title for this article; however, that would have been self-defeating as soon as it appeared in print. Hopefully this has given some new ideas which may prove useful as our sport grows in popularity. I look forward to seeing you some day, round that quiet corner from *"The Great Classic"* - I may even have to queue behind you!

Marking the Millennium

Richard Shirreffs

In 1997, when I was rash enough to say something about not wanting to be Club Secretary for ever, our good President took it into her head that I should be the next President and therefore the one to lead the Club into the new millennium. So it came to pass that a volunteer was found for the secretaryship and I had no grounds to protest that I could well enough be considered for the presidency on a future occasion. The Club in its benevolent wisdom endorsed the outgoing President's recommendation, making it fairly and squarely one of my tasks to lead our planning of what we might do for the millennium.

The first question was of course whether we need do anything at all. Even by late 1997 there was so much being said about millennium events and millennium problems that one was tempted to resist being caught up in the hype; we could have chosen to show what level-headed people we all were, and to do nothing. However it seemed likely that members did expect something, and so the thinking caps had to be put on. I had fond recollections of how, for our centenary, members from all over the country, many of whom for me had for fifteen years just been names on a list, came to our overnight meet and made it a very special event. I wondered what we could do that might prove a similar draw. For the centenary the overnight element linked with the founding of the Club, but in year 2000 an overnight meet without the historical connections was unlikely to be so popular, and would be so far into the year that members would think we were slow off the mark. Equally, doing anything too close to the start of the year might have members giving it a miss because they had so recently had their fill of millennial activities.

I think that I am not alone in having some of my best thoughts when I am not really thinking. It was as I was driving up to Braemar some time in 1998 that I came to have ideas along the lines which led to the "Braemar Gathering" of 31 March - 2 April 2000. Braemar seemed just the right place to do something, on the doorstep of our home hills, the place where we had our own cottage and where there was ample other accommodation, and with our members so fond of dancing we could intersperse outdoor activity with social activity.

The committee addressed the question of millennium events in more earnest in October 1998. It was confirmed that we should not simply opt out of millennium events, and when we discussed matters in more detail a scheme for what we might do fell into place remarkably easily. My idea for a Braemar Gathering found favour, with the preferred date late March/early April, avoiding short days and perhaps difficult travelling

conditions for those coming from afar. Geoff Cumming came up with the idea of obtaining a photograph for future generations of members to marvel at, with the venue the same as and date as near as possible to those of a Club expedition in 1890 from which we had a photograph of over 100 members and guests at the summit of Mount Keen in their Victorian finery. To complement these social and activity-centred events, we should also do something environmental.

The Braemar Gathering was the element that needed the greatest forward planning. We had to have reasonably complete plans before we could ask members if they were interested, but had to know that we had enough support before taking the plans too far. For our envisaged social evening, we set our sights on the Stag Ballroom at Mar Lodge, a setting as distinctive as we could hope for, and we thought that if the self-catering accommodation at Mar Lodge were available it would hold appeal for quite a number of members. We were lucky with both. The Stag Ballroom, while not used a lot, was occasionally used for private functions, and yes we could have it, as long as we accepted that the loos might be a little primitive if hoped-for improvements did not take place fast enough; at least the fall-back measure would be portaloos, not the plantation at Linn of Dee. The accommodation within the Lodge was not normally in much demand until Easter, and so our end-March slot was fine from that point of view. We half-hoped that the old Mar Lodge bar might be capable of re-opening on a one-off basis to rekindle fond memories for those who had been able to partake of a drink there by the roaring log fire in the days before Panchaud closed it, but whilst we were readily allowed to see inside it there could be no question of restoring it to its former use.

With the feasibility of this venture established, it was time to gauge if it and the Mount Keen photograph idea appealed to our members. So we circulated members with an indication of the proposals and sought responses. We knew that some members would be keen but unable to commit themselves so far ahead, and we therefore invited them to rate themselves in one of three categories - keen and as sure as they could be, keen but unsure, or uninterested or unavailable. My postman must have wondered over the next three weeks why I had such a surge of mail with handwritten addresses. Yes, the response was good, for both events, and whilst there were the inevitable disappointments in that some distinguished members could not manage, there were the heartening instances of members from afar who could and would make the effort to come to one or both of the events. Certainly the level of support was more than enough to warrant the plans being taken further.

For the Braemar event we had to consider detailed plans for our Ceilidh Dance, other activities for the weekend, accommodation, transport and booking arrangements. For the Ceilidh Dance we were pleased to find that Reel Din, who had played very acceptably at our October 1999

Ceilidh Dance, were free and willing to come to Braemar. The provision of a meal initially seemed more problematic, but we then learned that Robbie Paton, the new steward at the Braemar Golf Club, would relish an opportunity to exercise his culinary talents. We thought that a bar facility might also be appreciated by drouthy dancers and arranged that with the Moorfield Hotel. We reckoned that the Ceilidh Dance would be a suitable occasion to show our appreciation of the support we have from a number of local people whom it would not be realistic to invite to the Club Dinner, and we extended invitations to about 15, of whom all that were free did choose to join us.

For other activities we wanted enough of a programme to afford opportunities for members to do things in company, not necessarily just walks, and yet not have them feeling that they were expected to join in pre-arranged activities for a whole weekend. We settled on a Friday evening rendezvous in the Fife Arms Hotel, a Saturday morning rendezvous for those wanting a whole day out, a later Saturday morning rendezvous for an escorted walk up Glen Ey, slots for "viewings" of Mar Lodge, a ranger-led low-level walk on the Sunday morning, and a Sunday lunchtime barbecue at Muir Cottage. These we felt offered a reasonable number and range of options, none individually needing major planning or such as would leave us embarrassed if they did not command support.

In regard to accommodation there were some 26 places available in self-catering suites at Mar Lodge (plus the possibility of overspill in staff quarters) and 18 bunks at Muir Cottage; others would have to stay with friends, take rooms at a hotel or bed and breakfast, or camp. We reckoned that we should offer the Mar Lodge accommodation first of all to a selected band of worthy, mainly senior, members, whom we hoped would attend, including some coming from further afield who had been out of touch for some time. (Do I hear rumblings of Undemocratic? Unconstitutional? Well, that is how it was done and it worked out very well. Those who stayed in the Lodge loved it, and no-one to my knowledge felt passed over.) To save members who wanted hotel/B&B accommodation the trouble of tracking down names and contact details, we compiled our own list from the published tourist brochure and circulated it; this too seemed to work well. Muir, surprisingly, was not in undue demand, and, so far as I know, no-one ended up camping.

Having made all our preparations we had to see that members were informed of them, and we had to log their responses. I should perhaps have delegated more of this to others, but having arranged much of the detail myself and having relatively recently stood down as Club Secretary and therefore still having up-to-date membership details on my PC, I found it as easy just to follow through with this myself. Apart from accommodation at Mar Lodge and the Ceilidh Dance, for which we did need definite numbers, we did not want members to feel obliged to

commit themselves in advance, and the form which they were invited to complete was more a request for indications of probable intentions than a booking form. Again my postman must have wondered what had triggered such a surge of non-business mail. At this point I was a relative novice on a PC with MicroSoft applications, my earlier computer experience being on something quite different, but my facility with spreadsheets and sorting of data improved by leaps and bounds as I sought to record members' answers in a form which could be updated daily and yield information quickly about this and that.

At the outset we had no real idea how many would want to join our Braemar Bash as it came to be known. We priced the Ceilidh Dance tickets on the basis of an optimistic turnout of 100 paying members. I would have been disappointed if we had not managed 80 but would not have been too surprised if we were short of 100. Little did any of us realise how well our members would respond. The support for the Ceilidh Dance, which of course included guests, had us wondering if we would have to set a cut-off number. We sold 139 tickets and had 15 guests of the Club. Altogether 102 members took part in the weekend.

As the time approached there were happily few snags to resolve, just a change of plan about the bus to allow our Braemar-based dancers to enjoy their drams and get to and fro in comfort. Inevitably there were one or two last minute call-offs, but these were balanced by a few late extras. My last job before heading for Braemar was to print off copies of an overall attendance list, a Ceilidh Dance list, a bus list, and a programme of times and rendezvous, and to arrange weather-proofing for those which would be on display outside. For once I took an extra day off from the office, so that I could go up early on the Friday and check a few things on the spot. The previous Sunday I had in fact stopped past Mar Lodge and gone to the Stag Ballroom. It was in a most undanceable and unusable condition - the floors were awash with lengths of wood panelling, incomplete wiring was in evidence here and there, and the WCs and wash-hand basins were arranged as an obstacle course over the dance floor. Yes, Sandra Dempster acknowledged, the works were a little behind schedule, but there was still a week to go and there was always the possibility of portaloos (at no extra charge to the Club!). Five days later all was different, not quite complete but within striking distance, and with the threat of portaloos lifted. At the Golf Club Robbie Paton and his wife had everything in hand - though having only newly extricated their full panoply of cooking and serving utensils from the container in which they had been stored while the new clubhouse was built. So by the Friday afternoon I could actually almost switch off from organising and look forward to meeting up with members. At Mar Lodge, we found members arriving and being most impressed at the plush accommodation and warm welcome. In the village in the evening we stationed ourselves at the Fife

Arms to meet up with others as they arrived and to ensure that they were aware of plans for the morrow. The weather on the Saturday morning was not what we might have hoped for, and whether for that reason or because most wanted to conserve their energies for the evening, only a handful undertook a full day's exploit. However the walk up Glen Ey, with Graham Ewen and Eddie Martin pointing out things which they had learned from their researches into the history of the glen, and Hazel Witte saying a few words about the Piper's Wood, was attended by about 80.

By the late Saturday afternoon the Stag Ballroom was at last looking a fitting venue for a function in the evening, and the catering and bar facilities started to appear, soon followed by the band. At this point however disaster nearly struck, for whenever the band connected a particular piece of equipment a fuse blew and a whole side of the hall lost power. The problem was still unresolved as members and guests started to arrive in force, and your President was torn between the need to be sociable and welcoming and the need to do what he could to promote a solution to the problem with the electricians. Eventually our indispensable local member, Norman Robertson, although joining us as a guest, was able to make his contribution as sparkie and to get us going. After this the evening went extremely well. The dancing was varied and the dance floor was invariably full. The meal was a veritable feast and the only disappointment of the evening was that having eaten our fill we saw so much fine food still left.

By the time we were leaving the Stag Ballroom, the weather had turned to light but persistent snow. By the Sunday morning the snow was quite considerable. I suspected that the walk up Glen Quoich, which we had arranged with Peter Holden, one of the Mar Lodge Rangers, would have a nil turnout, but no, there were a dozen or so stalwarts there still keen to go, and we had our walk followed by a cup of tea by the fireside at Allanaquoich. In Glen Quoich the conditions were not unpleasant, and I was thinking that our projected lunchtime barbecue might still be possible, but as I later drove past Muir a skyward spiral of spindrift told me that this was not to be. Many members had in fact by now decided to head for home, but a few of us took ourselves to Mar Lodge, where those in residence were staying another night, and imposed ourselves upon their hospitality - enhanced by the plush comfort of their quarters. So the first of our millennium ventures had been successfully accomplished.

The Mount Keen photograph trip on 6 May seemed less of a logistical exercise, but that may just have been an impression because of Graham Ewen looking after the bus bookings and Brian Davey arranging the photographer. My part in the planning had been sounding out hotels (with just the one real option emerging) and trying to obtain permission for

limited vehicular access up Glen Tanar (something which all approaches through official channels and a few less official ones failed to secure, but which was accorded to a select band of members in response, I can only infer, to the feminine charms of the past President who many years before had inveigled me into taking on the secretaryship!).

It had been a worry that our chosen day, which we obviously could not change at the last minute, would turn out to be one with cloud which would prevent a summit photograph, and we had contingency plans for stopping everyone short, below the cloud base, so as to get at least some sort of photograph. In the result our worries were needless. Although there was some low cloud as we left Aberdeen in the morning, by the time that we started up Glen Tanar the weather was fine and sunny, albeit a little chilly. We were a mixture of slow walkers, fast walkers, cyclists and even runners. We had set 1 p.m. as the time for the actual photographs at the summit, hoping that this would allow everyone plenty of time to get there and also time to get back to the bus or to private transport soon enough to make our evening meal rendezvous at Aboyne. Inevitably many were at the summit with much time to kill, whereas others were still pecking up the last lap as we tried to shepherd those already there into the best location for the photograph. Despite the good overhead conditions, there was a brisk breeze at the summit and most members felt the need to don their full complement of outer layers. I had set myself the task of "photographing the photograph", taking video footage as well as slides of all the setting up arrangements. It was Ken Thomson who along with the photographer Mike Davidson took primary responsibility for positioning the company of 107. Eventually, with everyone (or so we thought) in place, the "shoot" began. Mike Davidson had just the right manner to get people to smile repeatedly as he took what seemed to be an endless sequence of shots, these mainly in colour but some also in black and white. After the photographs with the whole company, we thought that when we had a goodly number of past Presidents and other past office-bearers, as well as most of the current committee, present together with a photographer, we should take some shots of them.

We learned afterwards that despite the length of time that we stayed at the summit there was one person on his way to join us who did not quite make it in time. The son of a member up from the south, who had, I recall, been flying from Amsterdam to Edinburgh and then taking a hired car to Glen Tanar meaning to run up the glen and the hill, suffered delay over the hire car and reached the summit just after the photo session was over.

Those who had travelled independently returned to their starting points in Glen Tanar or Glen Esk, but the bus party descended to Bridge of Muick. The route seemed extremely long and hard underfoot, though sharing part of the photographer's heavy load of equipment may have

exaggerated this impression! When we met up at the Charleston Hotel in Aboyne, there were several members who had felt they could not manage the ascent of the hill, and on the basis that it would be a shame not to include them in any of the day's set of photographs our ever-willing photographer re-assembled his kit and had us all arranged at the edge of the Aboyne Green for still more photographs. All in all the day was a complete success.

A little later Brian Davey received a batch of prints from Mike Davidson. Mike had already chosen those photographs which he rated best (those with the fewest grimaces, shut eyes and hair-obscured faces!), and it was left to Brian and myself to decide which to offer to our members. It would not have been feasible to let everyone see a whole range of prints and let them choose the ones in which they personally looked best. The photographs were all of excellent quality and we were well pleased with our choice of photographer. We circulated members with requests for orders and showed what was on offer at as many Club events as was possible. There were one or two members who attended and for some reason showed no interest in having any of the photographs, but in general the uptake was good and we provided a total of 181 to our members.

Graham Ewen and I were keen to put names to all the faces in the main summit photograph. The majority were no problem, and some whom neither of us immediately recognised we could identify from the list of names as having been in company with someone whom we did recognise. Eventually, with a little help from others we managed to identify all but one, who we think must have been a non-member just choosing to join us when he saw us all there. The results of our efforts can be seen on page 58.

These then were our millennial activities. In addition, however, we had our input to an environmental project, the giving of £2000 to the Clachnaben Path Trust to help with their work on the footpath to the summit of Clachnaben (*see the article on page 21 - Ed.*). In July 2000 that the Trust had a small ceremony to inaugurate the path (notwithstanding that some work nearer the summit still had to be completed). I as President and Gill as past-President went along on a morning of splendid weather to attend the ceremony. Unfortunately with it being a week-day and both of us having to get back for commitments in the afternoon we were unable to inspect the path all the way to the summit. However a number of members recovered quickly enough from the Annual Dinner in November to complete the ascent on the Sunday, and to admire the impressive progress on the path, which was well worth our support.

I wonder what our next big event will be. Will 125 years from our foundation be worth marking? Or the time when our cherished

Cairngorms become a national park? Only time will tell. But I am sure that our members will still be as enthusiastic as they were in 1987 and 2000.

The Sounds of a Lonely Mountain

If we are very lucky, there are moments on the mountain when time seems to stop. The beauty of these moments is that we often carry them with us for the rest of our lives. They are only a thought away when needed.

The sound of the lonely mountain
sweeps as music to my ear
I stand in peace and wonder
that I ever stood in fear

Because of understanding lost
through strain or ever giving
Parts of soul that should be mine,
that were, in the beginning

The mountain soft beneath my feet
the hillside stream that's flowing,
Strength floods back and doubts subside,
my heart's wild beat is slowing

And now I stand at peace again,
with all the sweetest sounds
The small bird's call, the rushing stream
fond memories all around

So watch the sky and feel the peace
smell the beds of heather
Smile at a friend or hold a hand
share your time together

Along life's path you'll cherish this,
this lasting glimpse in time
As memories come flooding back,
through a picture put to rhyme

Robbie Middleton
June 2001

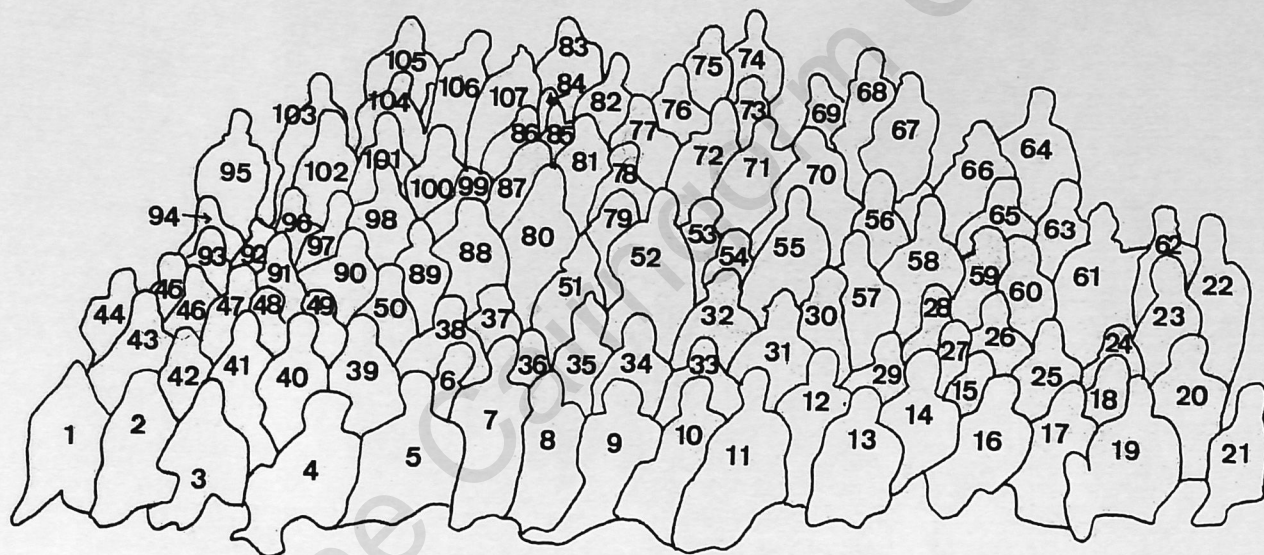


The Cairngorm Club at the Summit of Mount Keen, May 6th 2000



The Cairngorm Club at the Summit of Mount Keen 1890

The Cairngorm Club: Members and Guests at Mount Keen May 6th 2000



1. Elizabeth Friend
5. Helen Shirreffs
9. Catriona Shirreffs

2. Isabella Fraser
6. Brian Davey
10. Dani Garcia Alis

3. Judith E Thrower
7. Richard C Shirreffs
11. Christina Mackenzie

4. Alexander J K Monro
8. Gillian Shirreffs
12. Murray R Smith

- | | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 13. Garry Sutherland | 14. Walter H Burnett | 15. John Elgie | 16. Hilary O Cromar |
| 17. Judy Middleton | 18. William Robb | 19. Neil Cromar | 20. Graham Ewen |
| 21. Mrs. W. Burnett | 22. Ken Thomson | 23. Geraldine Davey | 24. William J Foubister |
| 25. Geoffrey Cumming | 26. Dr Rhona B I Fraser | 27. Eilidh M Scobbie | 28. Eva Foubister |
| 29. Dr Peter W Bellarby | 30. Leonora McAndrew | 31. Dr Les Batt | 32. G Anthony Cole |
| 33. Douglas G. Williamson | 34. Jack J Connell | 35. Evelyn Massie | 36. Jean Alexander |
| 37. Frances Macrae-Gibson | 38. William Alexander | 39. Hella Alexander | 40. Margaret Brooker |
| 41. Isobel H Paton | 42. Joan Johnston | 43. Ian M Lowit | 44. Alexander D Macmillan |
| 45. Alasdair I Macmillan | 46. Donald E Macmillan | 47. Christine V Macmillan | 48. Calum C Macmillan |
| 49. Eva Deregowska | 50. Brodie Lewis | 51. Hellen Matthews | 52. Gordon M McAndrew |
| 53. Marilyn Stronach | 54. Lydia Thomson | 55. Gordon C Stalker | 56. Anne Pinches |
| 57. John Hetherington | 58. Donald Hawksworth | 59. Ruth Ward | 60. Hazel J Mackenzie |
| 61. John Adams | 62. Ian Shand | 63. David Rawlinson | 64. Dr Gordon Terry |
| 65. Peter R Ward | 66. Allan Adams | 67. Derek H. Beverley | 68. Martin N Duguid |
| 69. Fred Belcher | 71. Andrew W Martin | 71. Fraser Stronach | 73. Susan Stewart |
| 73. Pamela Shand | 74. Nigel McBearn | 75. Rowena Jay | 76. Not recognised |
| 77. Jane Nee | 78. Diane Giulianotti | 79. Sharon Stronach | 80. Stuart A Stronach |
| 81. Andrew P Lane | 82. Garry Wardrope | 83. Martin O Slocock | 84. Shona Loutit |
| 85. John T Parnell | 86. Joyce Ritchie | 87. Adrian Scott | 88. Kees Witte |
| 89. Hazel Witte | 90. Alister G Macdonald | 91. Jenny Macdonald | 92. Anne F G Cordiner |
| 93. Sheila Murray | 94. John Gibson | 95. Christopher Howard | 96. Robin Kay |
| 97. Douglas Murray | 98. Angus J P Reith | 99. Alan M Dunworth | 100. Sheila Rusbridge |
| 101. Ian J B Murray | 102. Douglas MacInnes | 103. Derek B Pinches | 104. Fiona Cameron |
| 105. David J Yule | 106. Shirley Slocock | 107. Ela Krol | |

Piper's Wood, Glen Ey: the First Decade

Heather Salzen

For a description of the habitat recording zones, sketchmap and flora, see Cairngorm Club Journal 1991.

The enclosure has now been protected from grazing for eleven seasons. So what has changed? The plot now has a very different aspect from that at the time of first enclosure. Groups of young birches are clearly visible from the track across the river and the whole aspect of the vegetation has changed, becoming higher and more varied than the closely deer-grazed sward outside the fence. "Piper's Wood" is not yet a wood but now encloses groups of small birches which are showing steady growth. As yet they do not cast enough shade to influence the ground flora, but with increasing leaf fall each autumn enriching the soil, there is the possibility of a birchwood flora developing beneath them.

Trees

The *birches* fall into three categories:-

1. The original 14 scrappy old trees, which are now reduced to 11, two of which will not survive much longer. Only a few bear a few catkins, so little seed is being produced.
2. Small birches, which as seedlings before enclosure were repeatedly grazed to ground level, forming many-stemmed mats. These, with the absence of grazing, have grown into many-stemmed bushes. Several have reached a height of three metres, where one of the stems has grown away from the others. These "old" small birches are the most visible result of the enclosure.
3. Much younger seedlings, which have originated since enclosure and thus have not been grazed. Birch seeds are very small and need bare soil on which to establish successfully. Hence this category of birches are most numerous on the upper and lower banks and the river gravel, where there were patches of bare eroded soil at enclosure. It is very unlikely that they will ever become numerous on the grassland, where matted grasses prevent delicate birch seedling roots reaching mineral soil.

Rowans are becoming almost as numerous as the birches. New seedlings appear each season and a few saplings are as tall as the tallest "young" birches. Since only one stunted old rowan exists on the upper bank, berries have, presumably, been distributed by birds (though I have rarely seen a bird in, or near, Piper's Wood!).

Four young *Scots Pine* have now been recorded. Three of these are three to five years old, and growing vigorously. The fourth, slightly older,

is in a poor state of health, appearing to suffer some insect attack. Seed must have blown in on the wind. At present, it is not possible to tell whether any or all of these plants are the native "Caledonian" pine (*P. sylvestris* var. *scotica*) or of plantation origin. The latter is most likely.

Willows: A bush of the *Goat Willow* grows on the lower marsh, and the creeping *Dwarf Willow* survives above the dyke.

The Herbaceous Flora

In contrast to the trees, whose growth was not immediately noticeable after exclosure, the herbs very soon showed great changes. Cessation of the grazing allowed them to grow to their full (natural) height and to flower, giving several seasons of bright and varied colour, especially on the upper and lower banks. (This, I believe was a glimpse of what rural Scotland was like before the advent of the all-devouring and too numerous sheep and deer!). Annual species such as the *Field Gentian* were able to seed into patches of bare soil but once these were covered by perennials such as grasses and heather they were unable to do so, and so declined, becoming rare or virtually extinct within the plot. The *Moonwort Fern*, which was a notable "find" in the first year has disappeared, overgrown by grasses.

The grasses, being ungrazed, seed and now dominate much of the vegetation, while heather successfully competes above the dyke, on the upper and lower banks and on the river gravel.

One of the features of the ground vegetation (apart from the dominance of grasses and heather) is the dispersion of species from a single original site into new areas. Examples are *Rockrose*, which has spread to the grassland from the upper bank, and *Goldenrod*, which has spread from the river gravel to all habitats apart from the marsh. Some species which were first noted as a few non-flowering plants have spread and now flower abundantly, for example *Melancholy Thistle*. In 2000 the beautiful yellow *Globeflower* first flowered in the upper marsh, and in 2001 *Oxeye Daisy* arrived in the grassland.

The colony of *Fragrant Orchids* is of interest. They occur only along the strip of ground above the old and now crumbling head dyke, an area originally a patchwork of short grassy turf and heather hummocks, now becoming wetter and more acid, as shown by the arrival of marsh species such as *Bog Asphodel*. Previous experience indicates that ground orchids need a particular regime of grazing to keep down growth of grasses, with which the orchids cannot compete. Over 200 flowering spikes were counted in the first season after exclosure. Since then numbers have fluctuated widely and were down to very few in some years, but over 30 plants flowered in 2001.

Wildlife

There are few records so far. The small trees have not yet attracted birds. This may change when the rowans start fruiting. *Adders* are common; they have been seen on every summer visit since 1989, except on one cool, wet day. The grass tussocks probably shelter a population of *voles* (I have not seen any, but their holes are obvious) affording an ample food supply, and shelter, to the adders (wear boots and watch your feet in Piper's Wood!). Only three species of *butterflies* have been noted as yet: *Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary*, *Small Blue*, and *Pearl-bordered Fritillary*. *Lady's Smock*, foodplant of the Orangetip, now flowers in the marshes, but no butterflies have appeared.

I am sure there are many sightings of animals and plants by Club members which have not been recorded, which is a pity. Please send any such records to the Secretary, or myself:

Heather Salzen,
25 Rubislaw Park Crescent
Aberdeen AB15 8BT



Globe Flower, Trollius Europaeus

A Midsummer Walk: The Ascent of Mount Vinson, Antarctica

Rhona Fraser

Introduction

Mount Vinson (4897m), of the Sentinel Range in the Ellsworth Mountains, is the continental summit of Antarctica. It was discovered by U.S. Navy aircraft only in 1957 and named after Congressman Carl Vinson of Georgia, who had encouraged the U.S. government to support Antarctic exploration in the 1930s-1950s. It was first climbed by an American Alpine Club expedition led by Nicholas Clinch on 17th December 1966, the last continental summit to be ascended. The second and third expeditions to the mountain were in 1979 and 1983. Antarctica is the fifth largest continent, ahead of Europe and Australia. It is the coldest, the driest, the highest and the windiest landmass in the world. The mean annual temperature is -57°C, ranging from slightly below freezing in January along the coast, to the lowest-ever temperature recorded in nature of -89.2°C.

The Worst Lost Luggage Story in the World!

Our party, consisting of myself, two other Cairngorm Club members, Robin Howie and Peter Bellarby, with three Englishmen and two "Himalyan Kingdoms" (now Jagged Globe) guides, arrived at Punta Arenas (PA), the town at the "bottom" of Chile, via Buenos Aires, a stunning aerial view of Aconcagua and a seven hour wait in Santiago. We had expected a day's rest in PA before leaving for the Antarctica, little realising the problems facing the Adventure Network International (ANI) flight to Patriot Hills (80°S 81°W). The Hercules plane was to land on a wind-scourged blue-ice runway, the hardness of this ice making landing possible. The visibility had to be perfect but, more importantly and far more difficult to predict, the wind had to be less than 15 knots, as the pilots could not brake to slow down or manoeuvre. The flight took eight hours, and if the plane took off, went all the way and failed to land, the profits of ANI were virtually wiped out for the whole season. We were about to start a very long unscheduled wait in PA. What an exciting place it was: visits to the local cemetery, the rundown and unused (it was summer after all) ski centre and of course the immensely interesting town museum. We did see the local Magellanic Penguins on a spit of land that had a very strong resemblance to the wind-blasted Scottish Outer Isles and a most amazing experience, for a climbing holiday, of a guided tour of a British naval frigate. At least Robin could practice his Spanish.

On the fifth night we left Chile. We were now nine, having been

joined by a very experienced climber from America, Martin Adams, who had been involved in the Everest disaster in 1996. We were under instructions to wear full down clothing, our insulated climbing boots and to carry our sleeping bags in our hand luggage, in case we had to make an emergency landing en route. The flight went quite quickly. We excitedly took turns to view the scene from the cockpit window, as we flew into the sunrise and 24-hour daylight. The orange glow on the horizon slowly replaced the dark navy of night as we headed towards the sun. An endless sea of cloud drifted beneath us for hours, till I suddenly realised that the "clouds" were actually the snows of the Antarctic Peninsula, scarred with grey crevasses. It looked big and white and very unforgiving.

The landing was breath-taking and noisy, the plane bouncing along the rutted surface, before sliding to a precarious halt on the icy runway. Silence. A long silence. No rush to stand and make a grab for the luggage as on a normal flight, for nobody dared move. The ANI staff on the ground were insistent that they would remove my rucksack from the plane, whilst I was to concentrate on the hazardous journey over the ice to the large tent that acted as restaurant and airport lounge. I felt a little uneasy, parted from my sack with its all-important, specially made 3/4 length sleeping bag, but felt reassured when I saw it leave the plane and join the other kit bags on the waiting sledge. **THAT WAS THE LAST I WAS TO SEE OF IT FOR TWO WEEKS.** I have yet to understand how a rucksack, labelled clearly with the name of Rhona, was removed by a German camera team (all male) heading back to South America!

So there I was, in the coldest continent on earth, with no sleeping bag, no crampons, no goggles, no hill rucksack, only a thin pair of gloves and no film for my camera (the least of my worries). The nearest shop? Well, only on the next continent, a few thousand miles away. At the start I was a picture of calm and restraint. Even when they told me that it had never happened before (except to the luggage of an already dead paraglider who had had an accident jumping out of a plane at the South Pole). After all, there was nothing that could be done about it. The Patriot Hills staff seemed to be more upset than I was, and wandered the base in search of spare clothing and equipment. Some of it was excellent. The crampons were lethal to anything unfortunate enough to come within their vicinity. I received professional slide film and very comfortable high altitude gloves, but the rucksack had been up Vinson four times already (and looked it), and the Chinese sleeping bag was not, in my opinion, fit to deal with a Scottish winter, far less one of the coldest environments in the world. My initial calm was now turning to anger and concern. My worst nightmare was being realised. I was in this most desolate of places with inadequate equipment and without the comforting safe haven of a proper cold-weather sleeping bag.

The Vinson Massif: Base Camp to Camp 3

We then transferred to a Twin Otter for the one-hour journey to Vinson Base Camp. I was in no mood to appreciate the views of the Ellsworth Mountains, mountains mostly unnamed, unknown and unclimbed. A flight that should have been full of excitement and anticipation was tainted with anxiety and dread (having several long-standing leg injuries did not help either). I wanted home on a holiday that I had only just begun and that had cost an enormous amount of money. The landing was very impressive, as we sprayed our way to a stop on powdered snow on a gentle upward slope, framed by steep mountains and encircled by hidden crevasses.

Vinson Base Camp was at approximately 2300m, in the middle of the Branscomb Glacier at 79°30' S 86° W. Also at the site were an American team and an Israeli/New Zealand/French group. We pitched our tent on platforms levelled out in the snow. Preparing food was a long, laborious act, requiring us to first cut snow blocks and build a kitchen area, then cut more blocks to boil water for drinks and to rehydrate the food. That night I fell into a long exhausted sleep. The temperature in the tent was not too bad, only -2°C.

The next day's task was to take supplies using sledges up to Camp 1½, which was (logically) between Camp 1 and 2. The setting up of this stage was to give us a rest day at Camp 2, before the most difficult part of the climb, ascending the headwall of the Branscomb Glacier. We were roped together to safeguard against crevasses, which occurred where the glacier turned an acute left on its approach to the headwall. Unfortunately the weather was not inspiring - the cloud was down, the light completely flat, the views nil. It felt like walking in wet cement, with a white blind-fold and a heavy rucksack, in a large freezer. I wished I was anywhere else but there.

At Base Camp the following morning, things did not start well. Robin felt awful and I was sick. Robin is very sensitive to high altitude but then rapidly acclimatises, but I am usually reasonable till over 4500m (see note 1). The expedition leader had to persuade us to continue to Camp 2 saying it would help the others to reach Camp 3. The weather was the same as the day before, with no discernible horizon. This gave the interesting illusion at Camp 1¾ (!) of the American camp with its orange tents floating in the air, the snow blending perfectly with the white sky. Camp 2 was at 3220m, two to three hours from our food dump at Camp 1½, situated in a large wind-scoop to the right of the Branscomb Glacier, and tucked in close to the flank of the unseen Vinson. On arrival I felt better (note 1) but Peter looked tired and short of breath. It was very cold: -19°C outside, -11°C in the tent. That "night" I was wearing three pairs of socks, a full layer of thermal underwear, fleece *and* down salopettes,

Karrimor windbloc jacket, down jacket, hat, and gloves, whilst in the Chinese sleeping bag and lying on two Grade 5 thermal mats.

The following are extracts from my diary:

Saturday 28.11.98

Cairngorm Club dinner tonight! Very cold at this camp site but enjoyed the rest day socialising around the tents. Then suddenly the wind increased, the snow blew up and within minutes the other tents only yards away were almost impossible to see. Fortunately Peter was in our tent when the storm broke. He increased the temperature inside to -8°C and I became a female sandwich filling between the 2 men.

Sunday 29.11.98

Next day blew the same. Simon, our expedition leader recorded an outside temperature of -23°C, before he gave up, fearing he might lose a body part if he persisted. The Americans lower down the mountain thought the wind speeds were 20-30 knots. Movement at the camp was very difficult. It was impossible to see/locate the toilet pit - mark you the exposure of any body part to the elements risked frostbite. "Bodily functions" were performed in the tent using pee bottles. I got in a panic at one stage when I thought my urine had frozen in the bottle and that I would have to carry it all the way up the mountain and back to Patriot Hills before I could empty and reuse the container! Our two leaders, Simon and Dave, worked hard to melt snow and provide hot food in their tent, whilst we took turns to deliver it. I remember doing a round of tomato soup lasting five to ten minutes and shivering in my "sleeping bag" for 30 minutes afterwards. Spent time watching a stalactite grow to four inches above my head during the day.

The Antarctic Cairngorm Club entertains itself by playing word games.

I am reminded frequently that it was my suggestion to come here! I tell them to ignore my suggestions in the future!!

Monday 30.11.98

Day 3 of the storm. Weather is everything here. I can understand how Scott was fatally trapped in his tent before Ten Ton Depot. The wind chill and poor visibility makes thought of travel impossible. Later on the visibility much improves though it is still windy. Getting warmer in the tent - my stalactite has disappeared and I can cope without my down jacket whilst in the tent.

Tuesday 1.12.1998

We arrived at Camp 2 on Friday "night" and have been trapped here since. Have hardly walked more than 100 meters all that time - surely a record for inactivity.

On Tuesday the weather appeared more settled later on, so we broke camp and load-carried up the headwall of the Branscomb Glacier to Camp 3. This was the steepest part of the whole climb, involving snow slopes of up to 40 degrees and quite a long period below huge seracs, zigzagging between deep crevasses. One GREAT advantage of the lost luggage was the imminent demise of my rucksack, as Dave removed stuff from my sack, as he had done on every day and gave it to the others to carry! The heat on the lower slopes was surprisingly intense and, combined with the heavy sacks, the pace settled into a sweaty crawl. The views higher up were spectacular, for now we were above the valley walls and looking down on to the vast Antarctic plateau. A sea of white was speckled with isolated peaks, most broad domes though some were jagged and formidable (Pyramid Peak is just that). As soon as we hit the flat plateau between Mts. Shin and Vinson, the wind appeared, dropping the temperatures like a stone.

We set up camp at 3650m on the lower slopes of Vinson (yet unseen), overlooking the big bulk of Mt Shin (at 4667m the 3rd highest mountain) with its conical top. I could not be bothered to change clothing after we pitched the tents and ended up shivering violently. Even several hours in Peter's huge Grade 5+ sleeping bag *with* Peter failed to get me completely warm (see note 1).

The ascent of Mount Vinson, Wednesday 2.12.98

Good weather. In fact our guides were uttering the warm word, for the first time in the holiday. We were in our two teams - the young fit men led by Simon "the A team", and "the B team" with Dave Walsh, the older men and me. We slowly climbed the 30-degree slope above the camp, reaching the long valley leading to the summit of Vinson. This was our first view of the hill and somehow, bearing in mind it is the continental high point, it appeared rather benign. It reminded me of a flattened Ben More and Stobinian with a wide bealach between two summit ridges, the left one being the highest.

I was just starting to feel the first signs of altitude (i.e. shortness of breath) when conditions changed. The wind suddenly appeared from nowhere, whipping up the snow and leading to severe wind-chill. Dave and I did not have any problems, I having been (over) cautious about exposing any flesh, from the very start of the expedition. However, John discovered his gloves were too small and Peter had to remove his boots to get on his overtrousers. Dave looked on in amazement at the chaos around him and said "we cannot continue like this!" Absolutely astonished!! Absolutely delighted!!! The perfect excuse to go down, get off the mountain and get back a.s.a.p to Patriot Hills. What I had been wanting since I had lost my sleeping bag. However, as we descended back to Camp 3 I could not believe the thoughts in my head. Dave was "doing"



Mount Vinson from Base Camp

the Seven Summits. He had only the Carstenz Pyramid and Vinson left (note 2). How could we leave Antarctica without getting him up this hill?

Whilst "the A team" struggled up Vinson in 50mph winds, we relaxed in the windless and "warm" Camp 3 and for the first time soaked in the holiday atmosphere. But thoughts of a second attempt on the hill would not go away. The next day there was no doubt that Dave was keen to try again. Three of us set off, Dave, Robin and I, encouraging ourselves with the thought that this was only a Munro (1200m ascent), the same as any good winter hill day in Scotland. Ahead, going at a very similar pace, was the American group of four. After the initial steep climb from High Camp the slope eased, but then increased as it approached the upper corrie leading to the bealach between the two tops. At this point we came across the hardest ice I have ever felt - blue and totally unyielding. But when was the last time it was in its liquid state? I was by now starting to feel the altitude, as was Robin. The route up to the col was marked by wands, and the aim was to keep going for two to three wands distance and then rest. We zigzagged up the 35-degree slope leading to the bealach, getting increasingly confident as we got higher. We were entertained by the American team who bawled and cursed at each other all the way up this section.

We rested just before we crested the ridge and prepared for the "inevitable" onslaught of the elements. Nothing happened - no noise, no wind. In fact higher up I had a bite to eat *without* wearing gloves, an

action which yesterday would have risked frostbite. The first part of the ridge involved easy scrambling, then it rose gracefully to become a wide bouldery slope topped by an apparent cornice. The pace was now slow, aiming from one boulder to another. Our pace dropped to 15 paces and stop, then 10 stop, 10 stop, 10 stop, till we stood under what I had hoped was the final slope. One final short heave over the cornice and we were there, about eight hours after we had set off from Camp 3. Dave could not contain his delight.

We seemed to be on top of an extensive high plateau, with numerous isolated peaks sticking out of a sea of white. It seemed as if it would be possible to launch yourself from the top of Vinson and ski easily for miles on low angled slopes, only Mts. Shin and Tyree (the later having the reputation of being the most difficult peak in the continent) rising harshly from the undulating vastness. And it felt *warm*, in spite of the -17°C temperature. We could relax, eat, take pictures and enjoy the vistas. Yesterday's party had only managed a touch of the summit ski stick before fleeing from the wind. Dave re-lived his Everest success, again with a "B team". I could not believe I had been successful after all the anxiety that preceded the climb.

As usual I was quite scared of the descent, believing that I would be pulled off my feet by the stronger men in their haste to get down. But in fact the downclimb was very easy, the hard snow between the upper corrie and the lower valley showing unusual shallow linear lines on its surface, probably from pressure differentials at the boundary of the two types of slope. Slightly over 11 hours after leaving, we arrived back at the camp.

Descent, Patriot Hills and Hypothermia

As we descended in one push back to Base Camp, the main problem was again excessive heat at the base of the headwall of the glacier and the impending collapse of my overlaid rucksack. Luckily the weather was now perfect, giving us magnificent views of the Matterhorn-like Mt Tyree. I had a tent to myself at Base Camp but despite wearing every stitch of clothing I was still cold (note 1). The next day was glorious - brilliant blue skies with the tiny cone of Vinson clearly visible in the distance directly above the east wall of the Branscomb Glacier. The air felt warm for it was completely calm. A perfect Antarctic day.

Due to our group size, we had to do the flight to Patriot Hills in two separate journeys. I did not mind staying behind as it gave me time to catch up with my diary and soak up the dramatic atmosphere beneath Antarctica's highest mountain. Unfortunately there was a long delay turning round the second flight, as the French skiers were still on a neighbouring mountain. All our equipment was packed in the plane as we waited for them to descend. Not only was I getting increasingly impatient with the wait, but was feeling hungry as we had eaten very little since

breakfast. Suddenly I felt very tired, and in desperation for rest, lay down in the snow (this is not as stupid as it seems as the Base Camp hut seemed quite cold and all the tents etc. were packed in the plane). I felt warm, pain-free and happy, and briefly wondered if this was exhaustion/hypothermia, for I had hardly eaten or stopped since climbing the mountain 3 days before. The next thing I remember was being teased for missing the flight call. I wanted to get up but my brain seemed to be unable to send messages to my limbs. My legs felt like chunks of wood detached from my body, and the 10-20 yard walk to the plane was far worse than anything on Vinson, far worse than any marathon.

I still felt weak as we arrived at Patriot Hills but was determined that I was going to walk *all* the way back to the mess tent. A strong wind buffeted the camp and seemed to sap my strength even more. As I opened the door of the mess tent, I was greeted with reassuring words from a down-clad Susan (note 4), the American woman on the climb. Suddenly I collapsed into a shivering wreck. The penny dropped - HYPOTHERMIA. At last united with my proper sleeping bag, I tried to eat/shiver it away, but hot drinks, four hot-water bottles, two sleeping bags and several duvets later I was still struggling. Familiar symptoms from the climb to Camp 3 appeared. I felt tingling in my extremities, whilst cold patches, particularly on my back and trunk, flitted about my body. Episodes of breathlessness and nausea swept through me, associated with bouts of intense shivering. I was reassured by the Base doctor, ironically Dr Neil Kennedy, a Banff GP, that these peculiar sensations were the effect of the cold on my body biochemistry and the result of re-diffusion of blood of varying temperatures. The nausea was the first to go, then the shortness of breath. Last to disappear was the tingling, which noticeably moved up my body as I improved, till it became a claustrophobic sensation of heat (note 5) around my face and head, creating an intense desire to shed clothing. About four hours after it had started, I had stopped shivering and was deemed safe to move to a warmer part of the tent. Warmer? I felt extremely hot (note 5), but was in no state to argue, as I was bodily lifted next to the cooker. The change of position had an immediate and devastating effect (note 6). The shaking returned but with more violence. I could not prevent myself moaning like a wounded animal, with the intensity of the muscle spasm. I felt that I would blow up with the heat, my hands and head seeming to be on fire. The ghastly waves returned time and time again, until very slowly (after about two to three hours) they drifted away and my inner heat settled.

That morning the hottest place in Antarctica was the Patriot Hill mess tent. I still felt quite cool, but the others sweated over their breakfast. I was eventually transferred to the medical tent where it took a full day for my temperature sense to return to normal. At times I was convinced they were overheating the room, only to see the frost on my breath as I exhaled.

We had three more days at Patriot Hills, our plane toying with weather fronts, damaged parts and then more weather fronts. Some became quite hooked on Scrabble, others read and caught up with journals. We visited the nearby crashed DC-6 plane, wandered briefly around the wind-scoured icy surface and looked in wonder at the white line that was the distant horizon. How can people bear to walk for weeks/months towards this nothingness? Strangely, when it came time to leave, I really found it quite hard. The purple glow on the Patriot Hills seemed to emphasise the eerie magic of this beautiful yet unforgiving place. I felt privileged to have been touched by its moods, in storm and in silence, witnessed by so very few on this earth.

Perhaps, after all, I could almost forgive myself for coming.

NOTES

1. I suspect I was suffering from chronic mild hypothermia at Vinson Base Camp and at Camp 3, hence the brief episodes of nausea and shivering.
2. David Walsh completed the Seven Summits on the Carstenz Pyramid in 1999.
3. Once I had lain down on the snow at Base Camp, I would have drifted into unconsciousness, unless helped by others. Once on the downward slope of hypothermia, the victim loses the will to help himself. On the hills this is extremely dangerous.
4. This was a visual hallucination. Susan could not have been present as she was at that moment flying back to Chile. She was dressed in the clothing she had worn on Vinson summit day. It is common for hypothermia victims to suffer visual illusions.
5. I did not feel cold. Hypothermia victims are often found stripped of clothing.
6. Change of position induced a relapse, probably due to stirring of cold blood around the body. It is unwise to move a hypothermia victim.

The Tien Shan or Celestial Mountains

Alan Dunworth

The border between western China and the southern states of the former Soviet Union is marked by the great ranges of the Pamirs and the Tien Shan. The sensitive frontier area has rarely been visited, especially by westerners, so it is no surprise that the mountains are largely unexplored. Maps of the area focus on the passes, which have potential military significance, rather than the hills themselves. To travel to this remote area and try some of the many unclimbed peaks was a rare and exciting opportunity. Pat Littlejohn of the International School of Mountaineering and local climber Vladimir Komissarov have been exploring these parts for several years and were able to set up a three week expedition.

We flew to Alm Aty in Kazakstan and took a coach to Vladimir's base in the Kyrgyzstan capital Bishkek. Kyrgyzstan is a small country trying hard to make its own way forward following independence from the USSR. It seems to have been a fairly friendly split, and although many military buildings are empty and decaying, the basic infrastructure is pretty sound. Some Russian people have stayed on to lead a new and different life. The Soviet occupation only lasted about seventy years, not long in the context of a country where traditions have changed little since Marco Polo traveled on the Great Silk Road. In some respects it's a poor country but it produces plenty of good food from land irrigated by the many rivers that gush from its abundant mountains. The old nomadic traditions are maintained by farmers who live in yurts, wooden-framed buildings covered with felt, during the summer months whilst their animals graze in the higher pastures. Fruit, vegetables, dairy produce, eggs, home-baked bread and a freshly killed sheep were to give us the basis of a reasonable diet, which was complemented by the local beer and vodka.

A couple of days' acclimatisation were spent in the Al Archa range just outside Bishkek. The USSR's most prestigious mountaineering training centre was located here, but it did not survive the loss of funding from the Soviet Union after independence. Vladimir, a former director of the centre, stayed on to establish a climbing and trekking business to exploit the tourist potential of the country's mountains and culture. His climbing and logistics experience were crucial to the success of our expedition. Here we were able to sort out our gear, and get used to the heat, altitude and snow conditions and to climb our first 4000m peak.

After that curtain-raiser we set out into more remote territory. Our truck was loaded with fourteen people, one sheep, food, fuel and camping equipment, so it was not surprising when we brought down an electricity



Constructing the Yurt at Base Camp

cable which was strung a bit too low across the road. Later on the heavy vehicle sank deep into the mud and it took about eight hours of digging to extract it. These setbacks did not prevent us from enjoying a fascinating journey as we moved into progressively more remote and unspoilt country. As the roads got worse and the villages got smaller, we found yurt settlements in the summer grazing areas. We were struck by the wide-open landscapes, clean air and the simple traditional lifestyle. Vladimir acquired a travel permit for the frontier region but returned from the police station in a terrible state. It is the local custom, on signing a document, to shake hands and down a glass of vodka - and there were many documents. When we got to the frontier post all was well, and the guards were delighted to see someone to relieve the boredom of defending an impregnable mountain range.

Two and a half days travelling into the West Kokshaal-Too Range brought us to the terminal moraine of the Kotur glacier, where a grassy terrace provided a perfect campsite. Here we created a substantial base camp, which was both comfortable and safe. We even had our own yurt, complete with wood burning stove, which served as the mess tent. At an altitude of 3900m we had cold nights and a couple of snowfalls, but warm sunshine and the dry air soon cleared the snow. It was a very healthy location, with no contamination other than anything we brought in ourselves. The views down the valley and across to the mountains far

away to the North were fantastic and there was an overwhelming sense of peace and quiet. We were a long way above the tree line and the rolling moorland gave way abruptly to the snow and ice of the mountain range. There was very little wild life, a few insects, a couple of small birds and someone got a distant view of a splendid Marco Polo sheep, but this dry environment offers little food and must have desperately cold winters.

Our first task was to establish an advanced base camp further up the glacier. Although the glacier was flat and looked safe, for the first trip we roped up in case of crevasses. We went further up the glacier than anyone had gone before and all round the untouched mountains were truly impressive. Trudging through the snow with a heavy pack, including tents, was hard work but very necessary. After about five hours we pitched camp at about 4500m and returned to our base. The inevitable storm happened that very night, but we were safely back at base camp where we sat out the next day whilst the fresh snow settled down. Up at advanced base, one of the tents was blown away but was fortunately recovered with only trivial damage and a few lost tent pegs. The second trip up to advanced base was much easier even though the fresh snow had refilled the trail. It turned out to be a comfortable place to sleep, although it was cold and the winds whipped up an awful spindrift, which found its way through every opening in the tent. The main drawback was the need to melt snow for drinking water, which meant that cooking was a very slow process. The great advantage of the high location was proximity to the hills to be climbed, so that early starts and long walk-ins were not required.

For our first day of serious climbing we split into three parties on two separate routes. Because of the altitude and soft snow, uphill progress was slow but as we climbed west out of the steep sided valley we could see immediately that our objective was feasible. It was a combination of mixed rock and snow or simple snow slopes, which was technically undemanding, but in such a remote location there is no margin for error. Three hours' hard work brought us to a splendid peak at about 5150m, which we wanted to call the Peak of the Old Buffaloes in honour of our two cantankerous guides, but subsequent research showed that it had already been climbed. From this vantage point a truly fantastic panorama of mountains unfolded. Almost all of the visible hills were unclimbed but we could see a line of footprints where our other party had walked up the glacier to a hill at its southern end. The main ridge, which marked the border between China and Kyrgyzstan, was clearly visible and included some very challenging peaks up to 6000m. The descent was even gentler with firm snow in an easy gully giving a quick route down.

On the next day my party went for a peak on the east side of the valley, which unfortunately started with a one-hour walk down the glacier. Here a steep snow slope under an imposing serac took us up to an



The Author and Vladimir on their First Summit

impressive ridge, which was only moderately corniced. The climb up the ridge was straightforward until we reached a peak at about 5000m, which I named Pic Oleg in honour of the porter who had broken trail for most of the way. Again there was a spectacular view, both of the hill we had climbed the previous day and also down into the glacier to the west and to the imposing peaks of the frontier ridge. The next peak along the ridge looked feasible but I was finding the altitude very tiring so there was no question of going any further. An easy descent was followed by the walk back up the glacier to advanced base, but as there was plenty of time this walk could be slow and relaxing. I stopped often to enjoy the warm afternoon sunshine to reflect on the peace and quiet of this utterly unspoilt environment where the lack of wind, running water or any wildlife caused an absolute silence.

The next day I returned to base camp to get some rest from the effects of the altitude whilst other members of the party climbed more new peaks. Life at base camp was great fun, with plenty of food and drink and warm sunshine during the day. On a rest day I was able to stroll out of camp on my own and reach the top of a 4300m hill and again appreciate the pleasure of being in the middle of nowhere. My colleagues, who had been forced down by strong winds and heavy snowfall further up the mountain, soon joined me at base camp. Altogether we had climbed five 5000m peaks, including four first ascents, and had a couple of near misses.

The climbing was particularly enjoyable because an advanced base camp on the glacier gave easy access by 500-1000m of moderate snow and ice slopes to spectacular virgin peaks which could easily be climbed in a single day.

Sadly we dismantled our base camp a day early because of the change in the weather and started the long journey home. In the town of Naryn we appreciated sleeping in a hotel rather than camping and enjoyed a leisurely stroll up a deep wooded gorge, or horse riding for some. In the evening brightly dressed local folk singers entertained us with passionate singing accompanied by a type of mandolin, and some biting satire referring to their former communist leaders.

Back to Bishkek, where we stayed in some dachas in the wooded foothills of the Al Archa Mountains rather than in the heat of the city. The dachas turned out to be fairly basic wooden huts, but they were cool and dry and one of them even had a sauna, which gave us the chance to get properly clean for the first time in two weeks. Eating and drinking amongst the apple trees was delightfully relaxing after the rigours of the hills. We still had a spare day to do some rock climbing in the Al Archa range, which gave a stimulating contrast from the snow and ice work of the previous week. There was a little time for shopping in Bishkek but there wasn't very much to buy, it's simply not geared up to the tourist business. So we boarded the bus and said farewell to Kyrgyzstan but there was still a sting in the tail. Somewhere in Kazakhstan about an hour and a half from Alm Aty the bus broke down and resisted all attempts to restart it. Fortunately some of our party got a lift into town and ordered a couple of taxis, which enabled us to reach the hotel in time for a few late beers. The flight back to London went smoothly but it was a culture shock to emerge into the scrum of Heathrow after so long in such a wonderfully unspoilt part of the world.

Past Proceedings

The first volume of the Cairngorm Club Journal was published in July 1893. This and the 104 issues that have followed over the subsequent years bring vividly to life the activities of the Club, the hills and the history of the times, and are fascinating for both the similarities and the differences when compared with Club activities in the twenty-first century. As many members may not have the opportunity to peruse these early volumes, it seems appropriate that as the Journal enters the new millennium it should reproduce a few extracts, some taken from a hundred years ago and some from fifty years ago.

A Hundred Years Ago

From Volume III no.15, July 1900:

Mount Keen was revisited by the Club on 7th May. The party left Aberdeen at 8.5 a.m. by train to Aboyne, where conveyances were waiting for the drive to Coirebhuach. Glen Tanner was in beautiful form, and its Water, owing to recent rains and snow-melting, was swollen to the dimensions of a river. A short halt was made in the Forest on the way up, and the company were hospitably received by Sir William C. Brooks. Coirebhuach was reached at noon; and here the ancient right-of-way, the Fir Mounth, was taken. Corrach, in addition to a fine cornice, had several patches of snow, and when the cone was tackled snow-fields were numerous. Mist had possession of the mountain-tops all morning, and as the summit of Mount Keen was neared, it became very dense, and rain fell. The cairn, so familiar to the Club, was duly found without having recourse to the compass; there was, of course, no view to be had. After luncheon the usual meeting was held, and a candidate admitted to membership, with time-honoured ceremonial. The descent to the Tanner was made under better conditions, though the mist was gradually creeping lower. Another halt was made in the Forest, when, after partaking of the hospitality of the house, Sir William conducted the party through the public rooms so that a few of the treasures might be inspected. There is much to admire in Sir William's Highland home, but perhaps Peter Graham's "Highland Spate" - which, it may be mentioned, the generous owner intended to bequeath to the City of Manchester - received the most attention. On departure, the Chairman of the Club, Mr. William Porter, J.P., thanked Sir William Brooks for the facilities afforded to the excursion, and the kindly reception he had again personally given to the Club, which was proud to have him as an honorary member.

The cordiality of the reception of the members of the Club, on the day of the May excursion to Mount Keen, and the heartiness of the welcome personally extended by Sir William Cunliffe Brooks, give an almost personal tinge of sadness to the announcement of the death of the

genial baronet, which took place on 9th June. The Club had been twice previously (1890 and 1894) obliged to Sir William, and on the latter of these two occasions he was elected an honorary member. His personal worth and his great merits as an improving tenant and landlord have been duly - and very properly - extolled in the daily press. One of the biographical sketches managed, in an ingenious "aside", to remind its readers that there exists a right of way up Glen Tana despite the deceased baronet's attempt to close it, but all the notices have omitted to mention that Glen Tana - or, to give it its proper name, Glentanner - was the place meant in William Forsyth's pathetic dirge, "The Pibroch o' Kinreen". Glentanner has a history of its own in connection with deer-foresting and depopulation. It came under the scrutiny of a special Commissioner of the *Free Press* in a series of articles on "Game and the Game Laws" published in January, 1873, and Sir W. Cuncliffe Brooks had even been obliged some time before, to defend his position, his chief self-justification being that he had increased the population of the glen by 17 per cent.

From Volume III no. 17, July 1901:

The death of Queen Victoria took place on 22nd January 1901. The Club Journal comments:

It may perhaps be well to point out that a great deal that found its way into print at the time of the Queen's death in the shape of "incidents" of Her Majesty's life at Balmoral was purely fictitious. In particular, prominence was given to a "well-faked-up story" which will not bear a moment's examination. It was solemnly stated that "There is a tradition which avers that when snow appears on a certain part of Lochnagar, the laird of Balmoral dies", and that "No snow has been seen on this part of the mountain since the late Queen became landlord until the present year". This is the sort of legend to be at once accepted by the credulous, more especially as it has a family resemblance to well-known instances of the summer's drought being gauged by the decrease or disappearance of snow in certain mountain corries. We have made some enquiry, however, and can find no trace of such a tradition as that alleged, nor any evidence of the professed natural phenomenon - which, to those of us who know Lochnagar, would be something like a miracle. There can be no part of Lochnagar that would not be covered with snow in a snowstorm of ordinary severity and duration. A correspondent we consulted settles the matter plainly and decisively - "I have seen Lochnagar spotlessly white - yes, even painfully so - hundreds of times, and I do not think that any disposition of such snowstorms as we have at Balmoral would allow of any part of the mountain not being covered with snow, unless perhaps the under sides of overhanging precipices. There are corries on Lochnagar which I believe retain snow all the year round - at any rate, I always find

snow in them - but for a certain spot never to have been covered with snow till now is an impossibility". Our correspondent proceeds to call for the continuous observations which have determined the existence of the un-snow-covered portion of Lochnagar; but, obviously, that is asking far too much. Suffice it to have slain the legend. Returning to the Queen, let us quote a sentence from an article on "Lochnagar in March" in the Aberdeen Free Press: "Among the many good deeds of Queen Victoria, it must not be forgotten that the Lochnagar track was made at the orders and the expense of Her Majesty".

Fifty Years Ago

From Volume XVI no. 86, 1948-49

Avalanche in Raeburn's Gully

At the Club Excursion to Lochnagar on February 13, 1949, four members entered Raeburn's Gully about mid-day. Although the leading party (Hendry and Still) had thought that the snow which had fallen the day before would have put the gully out of condition, they found the snow in splendid order and decided to continue. Mathieson and Anton followed soon afterwards. The leading party climbed the ice pitch in one and a half hours (using a piton as a running belay), and had reached the top of this section about 2 p.m. At this point a small fall of snow in Pinnacle Gully no. 1 suggested a thaw on the upper part of the mountain and this was borne out by the condition of the new snow encountered. Retreat was contemplated but abandoned in favour of an almost immediately attainable escape on the Tough-Brown Ridge. (This could have been accomplished in ten minutes and seemed, therefore, safer than retreat which was attended by the risk of the party being caught in a fall of snow while descending the ice pitch.) Accordingly, Hendry commenced to cut steps upwards but, soon afterwards, the cornice, which was about 200 feet above and not overhanging, sloughed off, and growing in size and momentum, was sufficient to sweep Hendry off, although he had previously driven his axe well in. Still, who was well belayed, momentarily checked the fall but was dragged off when the rope belay broke his axe; both went down with the avalanche to fetch up on the scree fan of the gully within three feet of each other. Still was quite uninjured; Hendry was less fortunate but able to walk off the hill.

Anton, who was nearing the top of the ice pitch and who had clipped a Karabiner on to the piton inserted by the first party, was at once dislodged by the avalanche. Mathieson was safely out of harm's way in a cave, with a good axe belay and he was able to bring Anton to a stop at the full extent of the rope (120 feet 1¼ inch nylon). Piton and Karabiner were later found on the rope; the 8 inch ice piton had broken. Anton had apparently suffered injury and was unable to climb down; Mathieson's

hands suffered from friction of the rope. Anton's injuries were not so serious as was at first feared, but having been lowered to the bottom of the gully, he was then carried to Allt-na-guibhsaich.

It was fortunate that an R.A.F. Mountain Rescue team from Kinloss was in the area and their aid was enlisted; this splendidly efficient unit was wholly responsible for the rapid evacuation of the injured man. The avalanche was presumably due to the rapid thaw which, unknown to the climbers, was in progress on the plateau. In the unusual circumstances, it does not appear that the climbers could have done anything to alter the course of events. The incident, however, emphasises, once again, that Scottish avalanches are dangerous, a fact not yet generally appreciated. The Press was not informed, not because there was any mountaineering blunder to cover up but because the sensational treatment of such incidents by some newspapers not only brings undesirable publicity to the victims but also presents a distorted impression of mountaineering to the public.

From Volume XVI no. 87, 1950-51:

Muir of Inverey

The idea of building a Club Hut among the hills has been a recurring item before Committees for the last twenty-five years or more, but financial and other difficulties have always proved insurmountable. Immediately after the war the matter was raised again and, for a time, we appeared to be in danger of acquiring a Mountain Hut, a Club bus, and a Ski Lift in Coire Sputan Dearg, all without the means of paying for them. However, immediate need boiled down to a Club Hut, and negotiations for a lease of Derry Lodge, having finally broken down in 1949, we returned to the building problem. But Taylor's estimate of costs soon convinced us that we should have to make do with some existing building which could be adapted to suit our purpose at a relatively small financial outlay. And that led, eventually, to Muir of Inverey, the nearest available cottage to the hills, providing reasonably adequate accommodation and requiring no substantial alterations.

Such work as was required was carried out entirely by volunteers, under the tutelage of G.A. Taylor, at week-ends and holidays, and was, consequently, rather protracted. The kitchen was enlarged by the removal of a wooden partition, and the dust of ages; the annexe was lined with hardboard, walls painted and sundry less enjoyable tasks completed. But the most spectacular operation was the installation of a water supply, involving the digging of an incredibly long trench and various other holes in almost solid rock. The original lead pipe, punctured in seventeen places, was replaced by a new copper one, Taylor performing in the role of plumber. Taylor is not a plumber; he is a magician whose chief stock-in-trade is a wonderful sequence of mystic runes, crooned over all the joints

to make them water-tight. One had only to listen to discover which stage of the operation he had reached. (I remember some of the words and shall be happy to impart them to any member thinking of setting up in the trade). I have sometimes wondered whether our faith in Taylor was altogether justified; certainly he was the one who exhibited most surprise when it was demonstrated that the thing really did work.

By June 1950 the work was sufficiently far advanced for the cottage to be opened to members, which was done without ceremony. The cost of equipment and renovations was met from the Works Fund, to which members had been asked to send donations. These amounted to £142.16s.0d., and the cost of furnishings and repairs to £211.12s.6d. A copy of the regulations governing the use of the cottage was posted to members, together with a list of the facilities offered. The following table of distances may be useful in planning excursions:

Altanour, Glen Ey	5¾ m.	(Cycle or foot-slog)
Auchelie, Glen Ey (nursery ski-slopes)	2½ m.	(")
Derry Lodge via Canadian Bridge	4 m.	(Car or cycle)
White Bridge via Linn of Dee	4 m.	(")
Linn of Quoich	3½ m.	(")
Invercauld Bridge	8 m.	(")
Loch Callater Cottage	10 m.	(")
Glen Clunie Lodge	11 m.	(")



Muir of Inverey in 1951

IN MEMORIAM

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

Bruce M. Cockie (O 1959)	Frank Connon (OL 1956)
A. Leslie Hay (OH 1927)	Mary Jessamine (OL 1962)
William McBey (A 1973)	Kathleen Murdo (A 1992)
Gerard (Geoff) O'Neill (O 1996)	Lyn Potter (A 1998)
Ann F.W. Sharp (OL 1947)	William Squair (O 1974)
Ian Strachan (O 1956)	Teresa Wallace (OL 1961)

Many of the above were members for a long time and had served on the committee. Some current Club members will have affectionate memories of them.

ANDREW LESLIE HAY

Nine days after his ninety-fourth birthday, Leslie Hay, for seventy-two years a member of our Club, died peacefully at home on the afternoon of 13th August 1999. Twice he had served as a Committee Member (1928-31 and 1949-52), and twice as a Vice President (1934-38 and 1952-55). He was our President from 1955-58, and Honorary President from 1980-84, and an Honorary Member.

Born at Peterhead in 1905, the younger son of a coal merchant, he was educated at Peterhead Academy and the University of Aberdeen, where he graduated MA in 1925, and LLB (with distinction) in 1927 (the year he joined the Cairngorm Club). While practising as an advocate in Aberdeen, where for many years he was the senior partner of Cooper and Hay, he maintained his links with the University as part-time lecturer in evidence, pleading and procedure from 1945-64, and in taxation law from 1961-77.

Leslie married a hill-walker. Descending one day the hills to the south of Glen Affric, Leslie and a fellow member, who were staying at Alltbeithe, met on the track to Alltbeithe two young lady members of the Grampian Club, who had just traversed Carn Eige and Mam Sodhail from the shores of Loch Mullardoch. At some personal inconvenience Leslie and his friend arranged for the two also to stay at Alltbeithe. One of the two was Williamina Yeaman. Three years later Mina and Leslie were married in Dundee on 12th September 1933.

Mina introduced Leslie to the Alps, where she had spent many family holidays, and, among other ascents, Leslie, at the age of sixty, climbed the Matterhorn with a guide by the Hörnli route. After that Leslie made many treks in the Himalaya. On his first trek to Everest he was badly affected by dysentery. But ever afterwards he proved that by careful attention to diet one could remain completely fit, and his second trek to Everest, at the age of seventy, was a great success; it included the ascent of Yum Cho (16,650 feet) and Kalar Pattar (18,192 feet). But that was not the end of his Himalayan treks. He subsequently crossed the difficult high snow pass from Rolwaling to Khumbu, the Tesi Lapcha (18,865 feet), so well described by Tom Weir in his book *East of Katmandu*.

Leslie made a point of walking every day, usually averaging fifty miles a week, and a walk from the Linn of Dee to Blair Atholl was likely to include all the tops of Beinn a' Ghlo. In the words of Alexander Pope it could truly be said of him:

*"By nature honest, by experience wise,
Healthy by temp'rance, and by exercise."*

H. Brodie M. Lewis

IAN STRACHAN

Ian Strachan died in March 1999 after a long illness during which he remained his cheerful gentle self and maintained as best he could his varied interests, welcoming many friends to his beautiful home in Aboyne. Ian was Head of Art at Aboyne Academy and his handsome line drawings featured in the Club Journals from 1983 right up to the latest issue in 1999. His design for the cover of the 100th issue is especially memorable. His poems and photographs also appeared regularly in the Journal. Ian was an outstanding photographer - his climbing companions required a degree of patience as he went to work in all conditions! - and I recall the pleasure he gave with his several slide shows to the Club. In retirement he found time to write a regular feature about his beloved Scottish mountains in the Leopard magazine.

Several Club members were in the party led by his wife Joanna and his son Alexander when Ian's ashes were scattered on Craig Leek above Invercauld on a brilliant spring day, which brought to mind the closing words of his poem of the same name inspired by that beautiful spot:

*"Neath waving birch, the nimble hinds move as shadows
On emerald slopes, where primrose shows its face
In velvet gold."*

Eric Johnston



Ian Strachan

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CLUB

GENERAL MEETINGS

A Special General Meeting of the Club was held at the Treetops Hotel, Springfield Road, Aberdeen on 24th November 1999. Its purpose was to change the Constitution by creating two new office-bearer positions - Climbing Activities Secretary and Weekend Meets Secretary - whilst avoiding any enlargement of the committee by removing from the list in the constitution the offices of Editor and Librarian, on the basis that these positions could be held by ordinary committee members or by non-committee members. The committee's proposal was approved.

The 1999 Annual General Meeting was also held on 24th November. Andy Lane was elected Climbing Activities Secretary, and Geoff Cummings was elected Weekend Meets Secretary. Derek Pinches was elected Treasurer in succession to Alex Matthewson, and Anne Cassidy, Ian Shand and Garry Wardrope were elected to vacant positions as ordinary committee members.

The 2000 Annual General Meeting was held on 22nd November. Ken Thomson was elected President in succession to Richard Shirreffs and Ian Bryce was elected to the vacant position of Vice-President. Fiona Cameron, Derek Beverley and Fred Belcher were elected as ordinary committee members.

ANNUAL DINNERS

The 1999 Annual Dinner was held at the Amatola Hotel - now named the Jarvis Aberdeen Hotel - Great Western Road. Bill Brooker, recently made an Honorary Member of the Club, gave a talk on his mountain memories.

The 2000 Annual Dinner was also held in the Jarvis Aberdeen Hotel. Robin Campbell from the SMC recounted the history of Scottish mountaineering up to the First World War.

Les Batt

MEETS AND EXCURSIONS 1999-2001

The average attendance for the period covered by this journal was 23.3, a drop of 4 from the average of the previous period. The attendance for each one is given in the list at the end of this report.

The New Year of 1999 started off with the traditional excursion to Lochnagar. On this occasion there was a lot of snow, but nevertheless many members got to the top, most by the Ladder route, but some members went up the Black Spout. Unfortunately one of our members was involved in a fall in Raeburn's Gully and although unhurt himself a member of a following party got his leg broken. The following excursion to Glen Clova was also a day of wintry conditions. Some members climbed Driesh and others Mayar, and two members did a climb in the Winter Corrie. In March the excursion to Glas Tulaichan also experienced very wintry conditions with a very strong cold wind blowing. Most

members climbed Glas Tulaichan, but there were at least three who contented themselves with the more lowly Ben Gulabin.

The 1999 Easter Meet was held at Kinlochewe with fourteen people staying in the hotel and a further ten in the bunkhouse. The weather over the weekend was rather mixed, but nevertheless a good many hills were climbed, including Beinn Eighe, Fhionn Bheinn, Maol Chinn Dearn and a number of Corbetts. The hotel was rather basic but cheap with good food and a friendly atmosphere.

In April the excursion was to the Capel Mounth. It was a clear day but there was still a lot of snow on the ground which made progress slower than normal. On the Capel Mounth track itself there seemed to be more snow on the track than elsewhere and so one had the choice of wading through snow or walking on rough ground nearby. A number of more ambitious members did the traverse via Broad Cairn. The excursion to Ben Vorlich and Stuc a Chroin turned out to be a very misty day. A large party set out to cross the hills from the east end of Loch Earn to Ben Vorlich, but were forced to give up before reaching Ben Vorlich due to slow progress and navigational difficulties. Another party climbed the two Corbetts, Creag Macranaich and Meall an t-Seallaidh, at the west end of Loch Earn. On the following excursion to Beinn a Bhuidr the weather was poor in the morning but improved as the day went on. Most of the party reached the summit.

The overnight excursion of 1999 was very poorly attended on what turned out to be a very wet night. Three people got off the bus at Kinlochranoch and did a traverse of Carn Mairg finishing off at Coshieville. The rest continued to Bridge of Erich and walked in from there to Ben Lawers Cottage. It still being wet in the morning they all walked out by the easiest low route from there to Rannoch Station.

The August excursion was from Inverey to Spital of Glenshee on a fine day, most members doing either An Socach or Beinn Iutharn Mor. On the Cairngorm Traverse it was a beautiful day after some early morning mist had cleared. Most members went over Ben Macdhui, some descending via Derry Cairngorm and others via Carn a' Mhaim. On the Monega Pass the weather conditions were particularly unfavourable with a fierce north wind blowing and it was also a bit wet. Most members, on leaving the bus in Glen Isla, decided to cross the hills using the Caenlochan Glen as their approach route rather than the Monega path in the hope of getting more shelter. This proved a wise decision as the one party which tried to use the right of way route were forced to turn back and get a taxi round to Glen Clunie.

In October the excursion was to the Mounth from the south end. On this occasion the day was pleasant enough, but we walked through thick mist from just above the Queen's Well almost all the way to the footbridge across the Tanar. Thereafter we had clear views on the section leading over to Ballater and the autumn colours in Glen Muick below us made a pleasing end to the walk. The excursion to Morven took the form of a traverse from the Boultenstone to the Burn of Vat. All but one member went over Morven, despite the fact it was mist covered, and went on from there to Culblean Hill which was clear. The descent from there to the Burn of Vat proved to be particularly rough with a mixture of long heather, rocks, bog, bracken and trees and so took much longer than anticipated. On the December excursion to Invercauld most members set off to go to Culardoch but were very much hampered by deep soft snow almost all the way



A Happy Group on the Summit of Culardoch!

and very few managed to get there, in fact those that did were all late for their tea at the Inver Hotel. There followed a short but much-enjoyed ceilidh dance.

The first excursion in January 2000 was as usual to Lochnagar. It was a fine sunny day with quite a bit of snow underfoot and most members reached the top via the usual route from Alltnaguibhsaich, with at least one party going by the Black Spout, and descending the hill via Glas Allt Shiel. The following excursion to the Lecht was very poorly attended. It had been intended to take the bus up to the ski car park, but on reaching Cockbridge we found that the road was for the moment impassable beyond that point. Most of the party headed westwards along the Don into a very strong headwind and returned via Craig Veann, Tolm Buirich and Carn Ealasaid, where at least they had the wind behind them. The excursion to Ben Chonzie took the form of a traverse from Glen Lednock to Hosh. It was quite a pleasant day but unfortunately the mist never cleared from the upper reaches of the mountain.

There was no Easter Meet arranged for the year 2000, largely because of the weekend that was planned for Mar Lodge and the Committee felt that to try and run an Easter Meet as well would be too much. The first excursion after Easter was to Ben Avon from Altdourie Cottage. Almost the whole party attempted to go to Ben Avon but most turned back at or before the Sneck due to heavy snow conditions and lack of time. All those who reached the top were late in getting back to the bus, but not seriously.

The decision to have a retake of the 1890 photograph on Mount Keen in May certainly attracted a lot of interest with a total of 107 people altogether appearing in the photograph. By far the largest number travelled by the route up Glentanar, some using bicycles on the glen road, while others walked over from Ballater and a sizable party made the trip from Glen Esk. Fortunately it turned out to be a

beautiful day and everything went according to plan. This was followed by an excursion to the Pass of Drumochter which took place on a rather wet day. Nevertheless most of the party climbed the four Munros on the west side of the A9. In June on Carn Bhac we had a good clear day with members ascending and descending the hill by a variety of different routes. This excursion of course replaced the usual overnight excursion. It was with some regret that the Committee decided not to run an overnight excursion but lack of interest and mounting losses over the past few years made this decision inevitable.

The August excursion was from Glen Clunie to Spital of Glenshee, with most members climbing Glas Maol, Creag Leacach and a number of smaller hills to the south. It was a beautiful day with good views all round until mid-afternoon when the heavens opened. On the Cairngorm Traverse the omens did not look good in the morning with thick mist covering the hills but after about two hours it suddenly cleared to give a good clear day. As usual most members went over Ben Macdhui but the president's party went over Beinn Mheadhoin. From Auchallater to Glen Muick there was thick mist, which did not prevent most members reaching the top of Cairn Taggart, but led to a change of plan beyond that point with most members descending from there to the Dubh Loch and Loch Muick.

From Cabrach to Glenbuchat it was clear with a rather unpleasant wind for most of the day. On this occasion almost the entire party followed the same route starting with Buck of the Cabrach and following the ridge south and west from there as far as Hill of Three Stones and afterwards descending into Glenbuchat. On the Ochil Hills it was a misty day on the higher reaches with the odd shower but quite pleasant lower down. The majority of the party climbed Ben Cleuch via the Alva Glen and descended to Dollar via the Dollar Glen, visiting Castle Campbell en route. At Gairnshiel the day was clear but there was a rather unpleasant wind which was quite cold at times. A variety of routes were completed including a traverse of Geallaig Hill from Gairnshiel Lodge to Ballater, an ascent of Brown Cow Hill and a round including Carn a Bhacain and Camock Hill.

The year 2001 started off as usual with the excursion to Lochnagar. It was a beautiful clear frosty day with quite a strong wind blowing. Most of the party reached the top of Lochnagar by the Ladder route and quite a large number via the Black Spout. The going was somewhat slow due to the underfoot conditions with the result that few people returned by the usually popular descent via Glas Allt Shiel. The February excursion to Loch Lee took place during a very snowy day. It was decided not to risk taking the bus up the glen. The bulk of the party attempted an ascent of the Hill of Wirren from Gannochy but had to turn back short of the summit due to the underfoot conditions and lack of time. We had the misfortune to get stuck in a snowdrift on the way to Marykirk. Another bus had to be sent for to take us home, and we missed our tea. The excursion planned to Glen Clova in March had to be cancelled due to the Foot and Mouth outbreak.

The Easter Meet was held at the Glen Affric Hotel in Cannich. Activities were largely but enjoyably restricted to the hills around Glen Affric as Glen Cannich and Glenstrathfarrer were closed due to foot and mouth precautions. Around a dozen people stayed at the hotel and a similar number at a nearby private hostel.

The excursion after Easter was to Beinn a Bhuid from Alltdourie Cottage and finishing at Allanaquoich. It was an overcast day with a lot of snow higher up but most of the party reached the top, finding it with the aid of a GPS. There followed an excursion to Schiehallion in May. There were still some restrictions in this area because of foot and mouth precautions which precluded the possibility of traversing the hill as intended, and as a result of this and two other large parties on the hill, many members chose to climb the nearby Corbett of Beinn a Chulloch instead. In June we went from Glenfeshie to Linn of Dee, which turned out to be a beautiful day despite an uncertain start. A small party followed the right of way throughout, but the bulk of those attending did a traverse of Carn Ban Mor, Monadh Mor and Beinn Bhrotain. The last excursion in the period covered by this report was to Jock's Road, on another beautiful day. Most of the party followed the right of way, taking in the summit of the Tolmount on the way. Others chose to debus at the Cairnwell Car Park and traversed the hills from there to Glen Clova.

Graham Ewen

EXCURSIONS

1999

10 January	Lochnagar (38)
7 February	Glen Clova (23)
7 March	Glas Tulaichan (23)
18 April	Capel Mounth (20)
9 May	Ben Vorlich/Stuc a Chroin (23)
29 May	Beinn a Bhuid (30)
19/20 June	Bridge of Erricht to Rannoch Station (10)
22 August	Inverey to Spital of Glenshee (21)
12 September	Cairngorm Traverse (43)
3 October	Monega Pass (29)
24 October	The Mounth (17)
14 November	Morven (21)
5 December	Invercauld to Inver (43)

2000

9 January	Lochnagar (28)
13 February	Lecht (12)
12 March	Ben Chonzie (21)
16 April	Ben Avon (17)
6 May	Mt Keen (37)
28 May	Pass of Drumochter (23)
25 June	Carn Bhac (17)
20 August	Clunie to Spital of Glenshee (19)
10 September	Cairngorm Traverse (23)
1 October	Auchallater to Glen Muick (22)
22 October	Cabrach to Glenbuchat (20)
12 November	Alva to Dollar (20)
3 December	Gairnshiel (23)

2001

14 January	Lochnagar (43)
4 February	Loch Lee (12)
22 April	Beinn a Bhuid (16)
27 May	Schiehallion (16)
17 June	Glenfeshie to Linn of Dee (22)
26 August	Jock's Road (14)

EASTER MEETS

1999	Kinlochewe
2001	Cannich

WEEKENDS 1999-2001

Since the last Journal in 1999, the Weekend Meets group have continued with their tour of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Several of the previous regular meet attendees have moved on, while some new faces have appeared, keeping the average attendance of the meets at approximately twelve; and though this number keeps the logistics simple we always welcome new faces.

Although the weekend meets sub-committee tries to select a variety of different venues which will appeal to Club members, it's fair to say that we sometimes get it wrong. Favourite venues like the Burns Supper at Muir and Kath's Hostel in Glen Affric always attract high numbers, but locations like wild camping in Ardour on a midge-infested wet weekend don't seem to have the same appeal. I hope this isn't a sign that Club members are turning soft, but we do welcome suggestions from other Club members.

With the growing prevalence of independent bunkhouses, many of them such as Station Lodge at Tulloch and the Potteries Bunkhouse at Laggan offering excellent accommodation, we have recently tended to make less use of the SYHA Hostels. However with the news that the SYHA has lost £1million as a result of foot and mouth it may be appropriate to help to support an organisation that helped to introduce many people to the outdoor world.

Highlights since the last report have undoubtedly been the week-long trip to Ireland where Brian Davey's detailed organisation gave everyone the opportunity to climb the Irish "Munros"; the Muir-Mar Millennium meet; and Ian Bryce's berry-picking trip to Arran. We tried to maintain the idea of an annual week-long meet, but unfortunately the outbreak of foot and mouth forced the cancellation of this year's trip to North Wales. However, we are hoping to reinstate this trip in 2002. The Ling Hut meet planned for earlier this year also had to be cancelled because of the foot and mouth outbreak.

In recent years the overnight meet has been poorly supported and this year the weekend meets group took on this responsibility. Ian Shand did an excellent job, planning a trip based around Bearnais Bothy in Strath Carron and despite indifferent weather it proved highly enjoyable for those who attended. Many Club

members feel that the overnight meet should remain a feature of the Club calendar, so if anyone has ideas for suitable venues please forward them to the committee.

In June of this year a weekend meet was held at Glenmore Lodge in order to coincide with the AGM of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland. During the weekend a series of activities and talks took place, and Club members who attended were so impressed that it will probably become an annual event: they even managed to get one Club member - Fred Belcher - elected onto the MCOS Committee.

Geoff Cumming

WEEKEND MEETS 1999 – 2001

1999

January	Glencoe: Torren Cottages
February	Muir: Burns Supper
March	Loch Morlich SYHA
April	Kinlochewe Bunkhouse
May	Skye: Camping at Glen Brittle
June	Ireland: Week-long trip
July	Kintail: Ratagan SYHA
August	Ben Nevis: CIC Hut
September	Arran: Loch Ranza SYHA
October	Killin SYHA
November	Arrochar: Ardgarten SYHA
December	Torridon: Ling Hut

2000

January	Muir: Burns Supper
February	Laggan: Potteries Bunkhouse
March	Glen Affric: Kath's Bunkhouse
April	Mar Lodge/Muir Millenium Meet
May	Knoydart: Torrie Shielling
June	Skye: Portnalong
July	Fisherfield: Shenaval Bothy
August	Ardgour: Camping
September	Glencoe: Lagangarbh
October	Ullapool SYHA
November	Callender: Trossachs Bunkhouse
December	Tulloch: Station Lodge Bunkhouse

2001

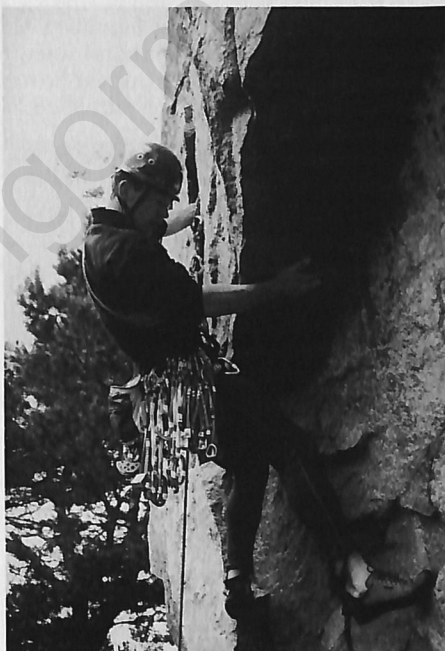
January	Muir: Burns Supper
February	Crianlarich SYHA
March	Torridon: Ling Hut (cancelled due to foot and mouth)
April	Glen Affric: Kath's Bunkhouse
May	North Wales week-long meet (cancelled due to foot and mouth)

June	Glenmore Lodge (to coincide with the MCoS AGM)
July	Strath Carron: Bearnais Bothy (overnight meet)
August	Ben Nevis: CIC Hut

ROCK AND ICE CLIMBING

In the three years since the last report, climbing as a Club activity has consolidated its position as one of the most active section of the Club. A wide range of climbing events have taken place, from simple summer cragging on the NE sea cliffs through to winter climbing in Scotland, bouldering in the Peak District, competing in indoor climbing competitions, bolt clipping in the south of France, ice climbing in Colorado and full-on mountaineering in the Alps.

Attendances have remained constant at climbing events, although some of the faces at the centre of things have changed. Stuart Stronach has stepped down from the climbing sub-committee after 10 years in the thick of things, and Stephen Kirkpatrick has left the Aberdeen area to pursue a career in outdoor education. His unfailing enthusiasm for nurturing beginners proved a key feature in the development of the climbing section. Andy Lane was elected as the first ever Climbing Secretary for the Club, following the restructuring of the committee at the 1999 AGM. He has been ably supported by Anne Cassidy and Diane Giulianotti, who currently comprise the Climbing Sub-committee. Fred Belcher and Garry Wardrope also made a notable contribution on a more *ad hoc* basis.



Stephen Kirkpatrick Cragging at Saas Fee

The core activity of the climbing section has been the weekly Tuesday meets. Attendances have typically been in the region of 20, sometimes escalating to the 30 mark on particularly fine summer evenings. Out of season, the momentum has been sustained with the weekly venues moving indoors to the Beach Leisure Centre wall with spells at the wall at Summerhill Education Centre, and then the climbing wall at Peterhead.

Garry came up with the inspired suggestion of a group e-mail facility and this new development has been a great boost to the climbing section and has allowed many impromptu weekend meets.

Highlights from the past three years are many. In 1999, one of the main events was the sport-climbing trip to the Ardèche region in the south of France in April. This was plagued by bad weather, but every day nevertheless saw some climbing as everyone adapted to the continental lifestyle, staying in a gîte in the mountains, enjoying the cheap wine that was also on offer and in Adrian's case, driving like a local!

On the seacliffs, we dabbled in the new-routing scene at Alan's Cliff, just south of Aberdeen, where up to fifteen first ascents were recorded by assorted members. The summer season finished off with an indoor meet at the Blue Lamp, which was attended by over 40 climbers, and consisted of a slide show, quiz and buffet.

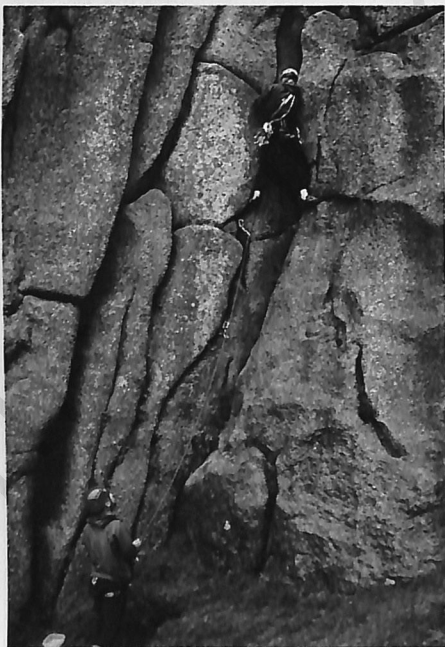
The Millennium was seen in with style at Muir, where the place was full of bursting (and that was just the beer and whisky!). Party games, firework displays, walks to the Linn of Dee, bottles of warm milk (well, one of the partygoers was only 18 months old!), champagne and cake make for a memorable occasion for all.

In 2000, another trip was organised to the Ardèche. This time, we went in

May, stayed in an apartment in a holiday village and enjoyed scorching sunshine for much of the week. Later on in the year, a huge gathering was organised at the Reiff sea cliffs, near Achiltibuie on the west coast. Stuart brought the football, Anne brought the barbecue and Dan found a dead tree that fuelled the campfire well into the night.

While some were in France, others were attending a Single Pitch Award training course. This course has now been attended by several members and has provided invaluable in ensuring that best practices are used as far as possible during all Club climbing activities. The climbing group wishes to acknowledge the support of the committee in helping to fund these training courses.

In summer 2000, a group went to the Alps and accomplished ascents of the Mönch, and the Weissmies. Unfavourable conditions meant that the Jungfrau had to be abandoned tantalisingly



Maggie Whyte and Kevin Bannister at the Cairngorm Club Crack on Clachnaben (Severe)

close to the summit,

During the winter season, while some members took to the snow and ice climbing, other members competed in an indoor bouldering league. Diane put in a consistent performance to finish as second placed female, and Helen succeeded on one problem that even stopped top local climber Wilson Moir! Stuart also competed in an event held in Dundee, managing a respectable joint second place finish.

The annual spring climbing trip 2001 went to the Peak District in May, just as things were opening up after the Foot and Mouth outbreak. Again, we were lucky with the weather, having a week of unbroken sunshine in which to learn the art of climbing on "God's own rock", as the locals refer to their beloved gritstone. Some managed this better than others - Dan led his first E4, but Stuart on the other hand decided it was all too scary and stuck to bouldering!

Another Reiff weekend in July saw better weather, more climbing and less partying (although we did discover that 12 people really can squeeze into Maggie's wee van as we attempted to escape the chill of the evening!)

Anne organised a weekend at Muir at the end of August that had the hut almost as full as at the Millennium. Rock climbing instruction at the Pass of Ballater given by Pete Hill, MIC, was the main focus of the meet, and sixteen members took the opportunity to receive training. Much was learned about new techniques. The weather was great and in addition to the climbing activities at the Pass, several mountain routes were accomplished. A barbecue on Saturday evening (liberally seasoned with midges) topped off the meet and everyone came back raving about a wonderful weekend. The Club's generosity in subsidising the instruction costs was much appreciated.

A new feature of the weekly climbing meets this year has been the publication of a meets list. This has allowed people to turn up at a time that suits, enabling earlier starts, further afield venues and much more climbing each evening than the previous system had allowed. This success will therefore be carried on for next year's events.

Last year, Fred went on a winter reconnaissance trip to the Ouray ice park in Colorado. Suitably inspired, he is organising a return trip for those interested this year. Other forthcoming activities include another bouldering league, and some talk of a climbing trip to Spain.

The climbing section continues to attract new members to the Club. Whilst there is still a steady flow of novice climbers, interestingly, several of our new members are climbers of significant experience. The signs are that climbing as a Club activity will continue to go from strength to strength.

Anne Cassidy

THURSDAY WALKS

The monthly Thursday walks remain popular with members who do not have a work commitment. The planning of these outings is made easy by the variety of locations so readily accessible from Aberdeen. The new Millennium saw a change in the organising of the walks. Under the Chairmanship of Jack Connell, a meeting of walks participants is now held at which all are invited to put forwards routes

that they are prepared to lead. From these a programme of walks for the year ahead is planned.

Bill Alexander

C - circular AB - A to B TB - there and back by the same route

1999

January	C	Benholm Mill - Johnshaven - Inverbervie - Gourdon Hill
February	C	Dyce - Liddell Monument
	AB	Dyce - New Machar (Formartine Way)
March	C	Mulloch Hill
	AB	Nine Stanes - Durris TV Mast Car Park
April	C	Rothiemay - Fourman Hill
May	C	Old Aberdour - Pennan Head
June	C	Mount Battock via Turret and Hill of Saughs
July	AB	Tombae - Glen Tanar - Bridge of Muick
August	C	Braenaloin - R. Gairn - Blairglass - Geallaig Hill
September	AB	Donview - Millstone Hill - Bennachie Centre
October	C	Banff - Bridge of Alvah - Old Town
November	C	Ballater - Creagam - Riabhack - R. Dee
December	C	Kirkhill Forest

2000

January	C	Dunnottar Woods - Castle - Cowie Church
February	C	Huntly - Battle Hill - Kinnoir Wood - Ba' Hill
March	AB	Craiglich - Lumphanan
April		Cancelled because of flooding
May	AB	Three Stane Hill - Mt Shade - Clachnaben
June	C	Loch Muick - Glas Allt - Lochnagar Crosspath
July	C	Lazy Well - Broom Hill - Baderonach Hill
August	C	Gartly Moor
	TB	Dunnideer
September	TB	Morven from Lary
October	C	Cheyne Farm (Stonehaven) - Cowie Water
	C	Fetteresso Forest
November	C	Arbroath - Auchmichie
December	C	Shooting Green Car Park - R. Dee - Scolty

BOOK REVIEWS

Hermann Buhl: Climbing without Compromise Reinhold Messner and Horst Höfler, Baton Wicks 2000, ISBN 1-898573-48-4, £16.99.

This book is translated from German; its authors' purpose is to rescue Buhl from what they see as the falsely romantic picture of him in *Nangba Parbat Pilgrimage - The Lonely Challenge*. Re-issued recently in English, the original German edition (1954) has Buhl as author. However, Messner and Höfler claim that the editor made very significant alterations and additions to Buhl's manuscript (now lost). In contrast the current text makes extensive use of Buhl's climbing diaries, which unfortunately are dry reading for the general reader, and there are also personal memoirs from friends and family.

Both Buhl and Nanga Parbat were iconic for post-war German and Austrian climbers. The expedition to Nanga Parbat (1953) was in memory of Willy Merkl, the German climber who died on the mountain in 1934. Buhl's achievement as the solo summiteer on "the Fateful Mountain of the Germans" made him famous. He died four years later: according to Messner "without doubt he was at the time *the* mountaineer in the whole world".

The book has some fine moments, in particular Buhl's account of his assault on the summit. From leaving the last camp at 6950m, the ascent and descent took 41 hours, including a bivouac at 8000m. "The thought of bivouacking at 8000m with no sleeping bag, no survival bag, not even a rucksack doesn't seem particularly strange to me: I take it for granted."

We have to admire Buhl's tremendous will power; but there are surprising aspects of the ascent. He set off alone at 2 a.m. because his climbing partner wasn't ready. "Otto tells me I said 3 a.m. yesterday. Thinking he'll easily catch me up, I pack provisions for the summit in Otto's rucksack." Otto never did catch him up, and Buhl was seriously hungry. He abandoned his own rucksack hoping to increase his speed. He left his ice-axe as a summit flagpole, descending with two ski poles. "That one small mistake in the equipment department could almost have been the death of me." He loses one crampon and is left "standing like a stork on one leg ... without the faintest idea of how I can get off the slope. With the utmost caution I finally manage to reach rocky ground again." Buhl had frost-bitten feet and subsequently lost two toes.

When the expedition returned, Buhl and the leader, Karl Herrligkoffer quarrelled over Buhl's right to give lectures. We can't today discover the whole truth, but it is clear from the personal memoirs that Buhl was a very strong individualist and not a team player.

In 1957 Buhl led an alpine-style expedition to Broad Peak. Buhl and Kurt Diemberger were the second pair on the summit day, and unusually Buhl wasn't going well. Diemberger asks if he may go ahead and Buhl agrees, sits down and waits for his return. But then "I notice how quickly Kurt is getting up the last rise. We did - the whole team - want to stand on the summit. I'll give it a go. I meet Kurt returning. When I tell him I still want to go he walks with me. At 7 in the evening we are standing on the summit. It is a solemn moment". They descend, carefully, by moonlight.

With some days remaining, Buhl and Diemberger attempted Choglisa. On the final ridge they were suddenly hit by vicious winds and a white-out. They had to retreat while their tracks were still visible as the ridge was heavily corniced. Diemberger was leading. "It was almost impossible for me to see. Crack! Something shot through me like a shock. I jumped to the right - an instantaneous reflex action, and followed the slope downwards a little way, shattered by what I had seen - the rim of the cornice, with bits breaking away from it. My luck had been in - I had been clean out on the cornice - what would Hermann have to say about that, I wondered." When Hermann failed to appear "I dragged myself a little farther. I could see his last footprints in the snow, then the jagged edge of the broken cornice. Then the black depths." Buhl's body was never found.

Frances Macrae-Gibson

Nanda Devi: Exploration and Ascent, Eric Shipton and H.W. Tilman, Baton Wicks 1999, ISBN 1-898573-43-3, £10.99.

Eric Shipton: Everest and Beyond, Peter Steele, Constable 1998, ISBN 0-09-478300-4 £18.99.

Nanda Devi by Eric Shipton was first published in 1936 and *The Ascent of Nanda Devi* by H.W. Tilman in 1937. They are both currently available in the authors' omnibus editions (Shipton *The Six Mountain Travel Books*, and Tilman *The Seven Mountain Travel Books*) but for those who balk at buying thirteen travel books at once, Baton Wicks have produced this new edition, with both books in one volume. They make a natural pair in respect of the subject matter, and afford an opportunity to compare the style of these two well-known climber-writers. A new introduction by Charles Houston, who was on Tilman's successful expedition, has more to it than a mere string of platitudes. An appendix details all the attempts on the mountain, and lists successful ascensionists and the fatalities.

Shipton describes the exploration of the area with Tilman, in particular the struggle up the Rishi Ganga gorge, where previous explorers had been defeated; the last four miles up the gorge took nine days. Black and white photographs dramatically illustrate the problems of the gorge. The expedition, which lasted from April to September 1934, cost about £300. When at the end of their five-month journey together, Shipton suggested to Tilman "Call me Eric", Tilman replied that it would sound ridiculous.

In *The Ascent of Nanda Devi* Tilman describes the Anglo-American expedition of 1936, which culminated in the final ascent by himself and Noel Odell. After the successful bid Tilman wrote: "It is pleasing to record that in climbing Nanda Devi no mechanical aids were used, apart that is from Apricot Brandy. Our solitary oxygen apparatus was fortunately drowned, pitons were forgotten at the Base, snow-shoes and crampons were solemnly carried up only to be abandoned." Ice-axes and step-cutting were apparently permitted; not a helmet was in sight. Recalling the moment on the summit Tilman said: "I believe we so far forgot ourselves as to shake hands on it."

In 1934 Shipton and Tilman came and saw; in 1936 Tilman and Odell conquered. Both books are extremely readable and give a fascinating insight into

mountaineering in the thirties, but it is a pity that so many of the photographs in the first edition of Tilman's book* have been pruned, for economy no doubt.

If your interest has been aroused by the Nanda Devi volume, you can proceed to a new biography of Shipton by Dr. Peter Steele, who is well qualified to write about life in high places. He gives a vivid picture of mountaineering and mountaineering politics of the day. Probably the greatest upset/milestone in Shipton's life was the appointment of John Hunt to lead the British Everest Expedition in 1953, after Shipton had been instrumental in the discovery of the route through the Western Cwm. Following that, Shipton had a spell at the Outward Bound School in Eskdale; he left there under a cloud because of marital indiscretions, after which he and his wife parted company. The final phase of his active career, exploration in Patagonia 1958-66, is described in a chapter appropriately entitled "Essays in Masochism".

Maps in travel books are a frequent source of irritation to an ignorant reader: in this connection Dr. Steele comes out well, whereas the maps in the Nanda Devi books are a mixture of the original with (appropriately) Imperial measurements and the new with metric measurements. A magnifying glass would be a useful accessory for studying the new maps. The proof readers have done their work well, but to the publishers of *Nanda Devi* a query - where are pages 23 and 24?

*available in the Queen Mother Library of the University of Aberdeen

John Gibson

Walking in the Alps, Kev Reynolds, Cicerone Press 1998, ISBN 1-85284-261-X, £25.00.

Many members will be familiar with the very useful series, published by the Cicerone Press, of pocket-size guides to walking in various areas in the Alps, such as the Engadine or the Valais, and often authored by Kev Reynolds. Typically these give descriptions of a number of individual routes, with some broader detail on huts and valley bases. This current volume, however, is not intended as a *vade mecum* - indeed it would weigh down your rucksack by over a kilogram - but rather as an aid to making that tantalising decision of which Alpine region you will visit next. The whole of the chain is covered, in 19 sections ranging from the Maritime Alps in the West to the Julian Alps in the East. For each area there is a general introduction, often drawing on evocative descriptions taken from the writers of earlier ages of Alpine exploration. The main walking attractions are outlined, valley by valley, with clear synoptic maps. There are suggestions for multi-day tours, both those well-known such as the Tour of Mont Blanc, and those less frequented. More straightforward glacier crossings and peaks are included, and in the Dolomites *via ferrate*. A summary page gives details of location, principal valleys, principal peaks, centres, huts, access, maps and guidebooks, and further reading.

A perfect book for browsing beside a roaring fire in the long winter evenings, to plan next year's travels, or to recall those of past summers.

Lydia Thomson

Regions of the Heart. The Triumph and Tragedy of Alison Hargreaves, David Rose and Ed Douglas, Penguin 2000, ISBN 0140-28674-8, £6.99.

This is a fascinating, but disturbing, biography of the UK's foremost woman mountaineer. Drawing heavily on the diaries of Alison Hargreaves it portrays a charming child, delighting in both the big outdoors and success at school. As an adolescent, within easy reach of Derbyshire gritstone crags, she revels in success on routes of escalating difficulty. Frustrated at the inactivity imposed by an injury she takes a temporary job in an outdoor shop. There Alison finds herself in a new circle of acquaintances, and is thrilled to rub shoulders with some of her climbing heroes. As her fitness returns she finds her own climbing abilities attracting increasing recognition. She is hooked.

On her eighteenth birthday Alison moves in with Jim Ballard, the proprietor of the shop. She leaves school without sitting her 'A' levels, and begins to manufacture outdoor gear under her own "Faces" label. Her developing reputation as a climber and her engaging personality are good publicity for both the shop and the gear.

Living with Jim, working and climbing hard, Alison becomes increasingly isolated from former close friends and family. Against their advice she has been drawn into the trap of a personal relationship which allows her to develop her considerable talents in a thrillingly precarious world, but leaves her no easily acceptable escape route, should the dream turn sour.

Adding two children to her responsibilities brings undoubted delight, but, predictably, also adds to her problems. Whilst business at the shop is brisk Alison can climb mainly for pleasure, but when business slumps her climbing is seen as an expensive hobby. Only sustained outstanding success can justify it as a livelihood. She describes her first attempt to find fame and fortune in her book *A Hard Day's Summer*, when, with her husband and children camping in the valleys, she completed solo climbs of six classic Alpine north faces. Her subsequent triumph on Everest, so soon followed by her tragic death after reaching the summit of K2, caused a predictable media see-saw. Should climbing and motherhood be mutually exclusive?

Written by two climbers, *Regions of the Heart* tries to weigh the arguments in the light of Alison's own thoughts and aspirations. The picture that emerges is of a complex personality, who found in the mountains simplicity and release from the stresses of a difficult life. It provokes us all to consider what motivates our participation, at whatever level, in the sport, and the boundaries between selfishness and the will needed for success.

Fiona Cameron

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