

The Cairngorm Club Journal



Volume 21

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Number 108

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THE CAIRNGORM CLUB JOURNAL
Edited by Lydia Thomson

Volume 21 Number 108 2007

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The Cairngorm Club

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THE PRESIDENT

Eilidh Scobbie was elected President of the Club at the 2006 AGM, in succession to Ian Bryce. Eilidh came to Aberdeen as a schoolgirl, and has only escaped the north-east for three years since. She joined the Club in 1986 after a memorable overnighiter in the Fannichs, when the setting sun and rising moon were in the sky together. Perhaps she thought all overnighiters were guaranteed the same weather!

She served on the Committee from 1996-97, as Secretary from 1997-98, and as Vice President from 2003-06. She is well-known to many Club members through her enthusiastic participation in many activities, including indoor meets, bus meets – from her home in Aboyne she enjoys an extra hour's sleep when we go out to Braemar – and weekend meets. She is famous for her organising abilities at the now traditional Burns Night Meet at Muir in January, where even the most recalcitrant members are cajoled into reciting verse.

For many years she has been a keen cross-country skier, and is perfecting her Telemarks in Italy at the time of writing.

She brings to the post the advantages of her legal mind, but more importantly an attitude to the hills which can be summed up as: good hills, good fellowship and good fun!

The Shelter Stone Revisited

John Adams

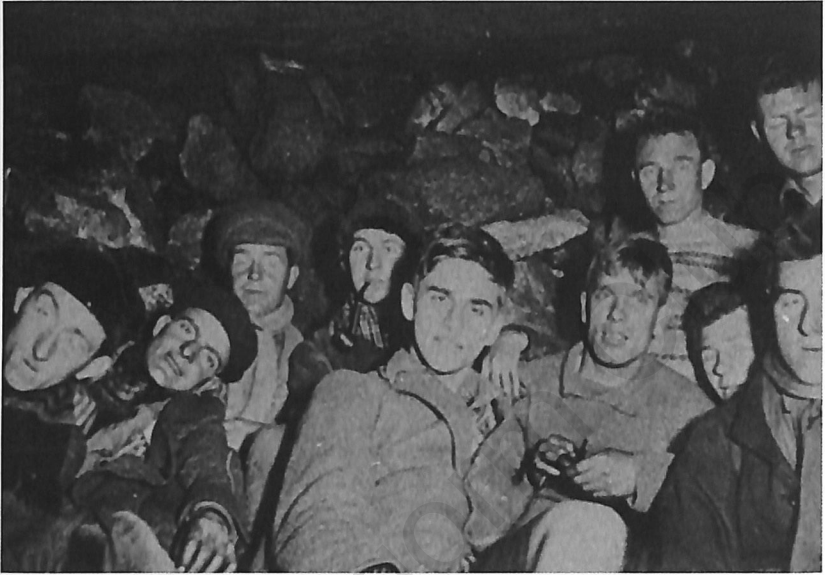
The Shelter Stone has always figured as an icon in the annals of the Cairngorm Club. The idea for a club was conceived and put into effect there in 1887, and part of the centenary celebrations of 1987 was a gathering of Club members there, after an overnighter in the surrounding hills. The wording on the Club's coat of arms is 'Clac Dian', derived from the Gaelic *clac dhian*, meaning shelter stone.

All this was unknown to me some fifty years ago, although I had heard of the Shelter Stone. In the early 1930s, during a period of unemployment in the great depression, my father had been there on one of his extreme expeditions, which involved taking his bicycle through the Lairig Ghru and other routes through the mountains.

In early July 1955, after the end of the summer term at Brechin High School, I embarked with two school friends on a week's expedition to the Cairngorms. My father was persuaded to take us by car over the Cairn o' Mount to spend our first night at Feughside Youth Hostel near Strachan (long since closed as a Youth Hostel and now a private house). In the morning we travelled to Braemar, presumably by bus, and then set off for the Cairngorms, with the intended destination of Aviemore. We walked to Derry Lodge and Luibeg where we spent the night at Bob Scott's bothy at a cost of one shilling each. The sleeping accommodation was in the hay store separated from the resident garron by a thin board partition. In the morning we decided to make our next destination the Shelter Stone and to spend the night there. When we informed Bob Scott of our intentions, I remember being told in no uncertain terms that we had to be careful in our route finding, and of the difficulties of the terrain ahead. Undaunted, however, by these warnings we set out up Glen Derry and Choire Etchachan to Loch Etchachan, and after a good deal of searching we found the Shelter Stone on our descent to Loch Avon.

Although the summer of 1955 is on record as one of the warmest, the night-time temperature at an altitude of around 750m is always low. In the dark cavity of the Shelter Stone, we managed a little light with matches and candles, and wearing all our spare clothing (we were traveling light without sleeping bags), we survived a cold and rather sleepless night. At first light after a quick breakfast we made our way up the Feith Buidhe, onto the plateau and the summit of Ben Macdui. Our first Munro, although at that time none of us had heard of Munro or his Tables!

The descent from Ben Macdui into the Lairig Ghru, down the steep and boulder-strewn slope, was difficult and time-consuming (we did not



*Inside the Shelter Stone, 1930
Fred Adams at the top right-hand corner*



At the Shelter Stone, 1955

know of the Allt Clach nan Taillear route of descent). The aim was to reach Aviemore Youth Hostel before that night, but darkness was falling as we reached the Rothiemurchus forest, and three exhausted youths were prepared to sleep under a tree, when by good fortune we came across a cottage where bed and breakfast was available.

The remainder of the trip was based at the Aviemore Youth Hostel. With hired bicycles we explored Gleann Einich in glorious sunny weather, adding Braeriach, Cairntoul and the Devil's Point to our Munro tally. Our return route was through the Lairig Ghru with nights spent at Corrou bothy and Inverey Youth Hostel, before we took the service bus home from Braemar to Brechin via Aberdeen.

This memorable first-time trip to the Cairngorms in such glorious summer weather established for me the beginning of a life-long association with the mountains. Had it rained, who knows, I might have taken up golf! Over the years, when the demands of family and work permitted, I pursued the Munros and after joining the Cairngorm Club in 1983, "completed" in 1988, in my fiftieth year.

The Cairngorm Club celebrated its centenary in 1987 and one of the events during that year was an exhibition in John Dun's house in School Hill, Aberdeen. There were old photographs and Club memorabilia marking the passage of 100 years, with a visitors' book from the Shelter Stone from the early 1930s enclosed in a glass case. The book lay open presumably at a random page. When I visited the exhibition and glanced at the book, I was astonished to see my father's name, Fred Adams. Not only his name, but there, in the middle of the right-hand page, in his own handwriting, was an entry dated 28th September 1930. This refers to a party of four cyclists, including my father, who intended to spend the night in the Shelter Stone and climb Ben Macdui the following day, *en route* for Braemar. An uncanny and amazing coincidence for me, and one which filled in a few gaps in my knowledge of my father's early life. I knew that he had visited the Shelter Stone as a young man, but did not have the exact details. Fred Adams died in 1976 and among his possessions was a flash photograph of a group of men taken inside the Shelter Stone. The visitors' book entry now put a date to the photograph and some details of his exploits of that time. The photograph, is reproduced here, my father is on the top right hand corner of the picture.

In early July 2005 I decided to revisit the Shelter Stone, retracing my first steps after fifty years, and my father's after seventy-five years. With Bramble our black Labrador for company, the first part of the journey was by car to the Linn of Dee car park. From there, we walked in via Glen Derry and Choire Etchachan, to Loch Avon as before. We were fortunate to have sole possession of the Shelter Stone for the night. Older and wiser, this time, I was equipped with a four-season sleeping bag and a Gore-Tex bivvy bag (to repel any contact with a wet dog), and a head torch to cast

some light on the interior. We spent a very comfortable night, with only a little disturbance from the resident mouse, soon silenced, thanks to Bramble.

In the morning I was pleasantly surprised by the near-daylight conditions within the chamber. The entrance faces the head of Loch Avon, which is due east, and the early morning sun streams in through the entrance opening. I made use of this near-daylight and took a few measurements. The floor area is approximate 3.6m x 3.2m giving a usable floor area of some 11.5 square metres. The height varies from 1.7m to 1.3m at the entrance side, tapering to only 0.9m at the rear. The entrance opening measures 0.7m wide by 1.2m high. While photographic evidence now exists that the Stone has accommodated at least eleven, the claim from folklore that it once held eighteen armed men is hard to believe.

Certainly the Shelter Stone has long been an icon in the annals of the Club. An icon, too, in the lives of many of our members, not least my own.

A Climbing Year ***Stuart Stronach***

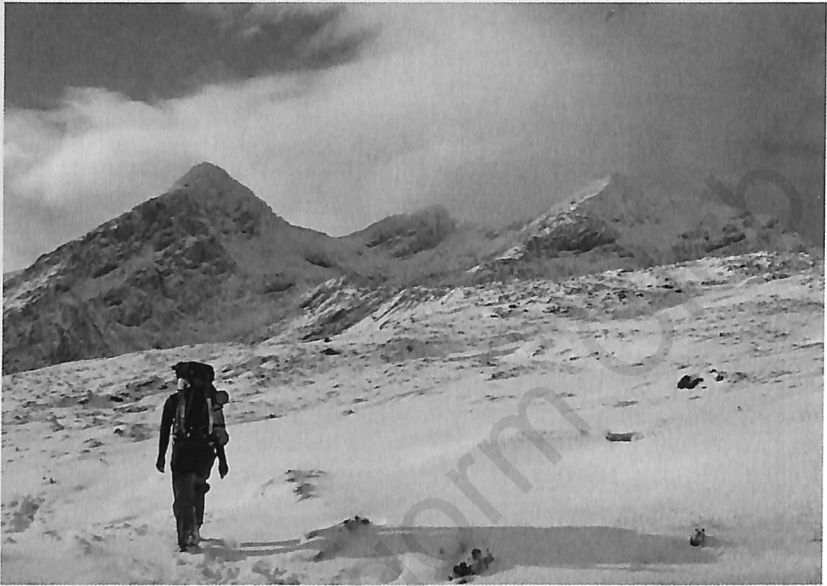
Whilst trying to think of something worth writing about for this edition of the *Journal*, it occurred to me that I'd had a pretty varied year's climbing, getting out in summer and winter conditions, taking in trad climbing, sport climbing and bouldering, on outcrops and in the mountains, at home and abroad, and including a few first ascents. The following days all stand out for one reason or another, and take in some of the lows and highs of 2006.

7th January – Central Buttress, Lochnagar

The first outing of the 2006 was a trip to Lochnagar. I first climbed there in 1986, but hadn't been back since the late 1990s, so the trudge up the approach tracks was strangely pleasant. With us were Dave and Lara, new friends who had recently moved to the area, and who were new to the Scottish winter experience. We opted for Central Buttress as an ideal introductory route, Amanda and I doing the route-finding, and Dave and Lara following on behind. This was the fifth time I'd done the route, and conditions were the toughest I'd encountered, with four pitches of surprisingly technical climbing. By the time we'd got to the end of the difficulties, Dave and Lara were out of sight below us, so Amanda and I spent an hour huddled together on a ledge waiting for them, playing I-spy and singing Monty Python songs. This was also my first opportunity to appreciate the warmth of the new Montane smock I'd been given for Christmas.

11th March – Attempt on Sgurr nan Gillean

Amanda has a bit of a thing about Skye. She visibly lights up as you drive across the bridge from Kyle, and as soon as you get onto the hill – *whoosh* – she's away and you're trailing in her wake. So it was with our attempt to climb Sgurr nan Gillean in full-on winter conditions (this was the tail end of the week of snow that brought Aberdeen to a standstill). We set off from the Sligachan Hotel in a blizzard which slowly cleared and teased us with glimpses of our target through the mists. We ploughed onwards and upwards, but by the time we were round into the upper corrie, the snow was waist-deep over loose scree and the weather had closed in again, so the decision was made to turn back. It was amazing to see the Cuillin in full winter garb – definitely worth going back for another attempt next winter.



Walking in to Sgurr nan Gillean

18th March – Perseverance Groove, Lochnagar

The final winter outing of the year saw us back on Lochnagar, this time in the company of Helen and John, friends from London. John was an experienced climber, but Helen had only been out in winter a couple of times before. The plan was to do one of the shorter climbs on the southern sector of the cliffs. I'd been given a draft copy of the new guidebook write-up for Lochnagar to proof-read, and from it we had identified a pair of grade III lines close together that looked ideal. John set off with Helen towards his chosen groove system, while Amanda led me upwards to the base of a route called Perseverance Rib. The write-up told us to start up the gully to the left of the crest, which we duly did. However, from here on, nothing made sense when compared to the description, and Amanda ended up following her nose as she led on up a groove, slab and chimney to the top of the crag. Subsequent discussion with Simon Richardson revealed that we'd just done a first ascent (which we named Perseverance Groove, grade II), and that the guide text should have told us to climb a groove in the nose of the rib, rather than the gully to the left. The text has now been altered! John, meanwhile, found his grade III line was in hard grade IV conditions, with unconsolidated snow and psychological belays.

11th April & 14th April – Portlethen and Muchalls bouldering

The first outings of the year on rock, and a chance to see if a winter of training on our home climbing wall had made any difference. First impressions were good as I manage to succeed on a problem at Muchalls which required a very strenuous undercut start – last year, I'd been unable to pull off the ground. I then went on to add a new problem from the same start, but making a long reach to a distant hold – very satisfying.

15th April – Logie Head

I'd set out this year intending to make a determined effort to be more focussed in my climbing, and to climb an increased number of harder routes. An attempt at Sunnyside Direct, a pokey E1 5c I'd done a couple of times before, turned into a real battle of nerves as I struggled and shook my way up. I really do need to improve my mental approach.

27th April – 2nd May – Bouldering trip to Fontainebleau, France

A long weekend bouldering in Fontainebleau got off to the worst possible start when British Airways managed to lose our luggage at Paris. However, the weather this year was a lot cooler than the sticky conditions experienced on a trip the year before, which helped us be a bit more productive in terms of climbing harder problems. This year, I'd actually gone armed with a tick list, inspired in part by photos of Tom Kirkpatrick on fine-looking problems from his UKClimbing.com album. One of these was a problem called Le Tiroir, at Roche aux Sabots. A confusing collection of holds saw us struggling to get anywhere, and it took the intervention of a local 'Bleusard' with the right sequence before we were successful. Our final day was spent at Bas Cuvier, probably the most famous of the bouldering areas at Fontainebleau, where I was particularly pleased with an on-sight ascent of La Marie-Rose, the first Font 6a in the forest and a real classic. Compensation from British Airways in the form of flight vouchers has been used to fund next year's trip – to Sardinia.

10th May – Legaston

Our first sport climbing of the year saw us with a friend, Ben, at Legaston Quarry. Gorgeous weather proved that even grotty quarries can be pleasant places to climb given the right conditions, even though I fluffed the sequence on Death is the Hunter, needing two attempts to get past the crux. Amanda managed to redpoint her first F6b, the reachy Flight of the Mad Magician.

6th June – Souter Head

An evening visit to Souter Head found me belaying Amanda as she led her first HVS, a very technical little route called Jaded, which she had previously top-roped. With the route safely in the bag, success was

celebrated by moving round to the girdle traverse wall and making an on-sight ascent of her second HVS, Bootlace Crack.

9th June – Arbroath

Poor conditions with coastal haar meant that Lara and I headed to Arbroath in an attempt to find some rock in climbable conditions. Things weren't great here either, and I took an unexpected fall off an F5+ arête on greasy rock. I don't fall off very often (cowardice means I rarely get that committed on a route), and this was the first one in several years. I'm sure I could climb a lot better if I could get over my fear of falling – maybe something to practise?

17th June – Choire Etchachan

After an early start and a bike ride up Glen Derry, Amanda and I arrived at the Hutchison Hut in Choire Etchachan just as the heavens opened. We sat out the downpour at the hut for a couple of hours in the hope that we could still get onto our objective, Talisman, but in the end, we had to give up and made a very sodden journey back to the car at the Linn of Dee. This is why I can rarely be bothered trying mountain routes.

1st July – Pass of Ballater

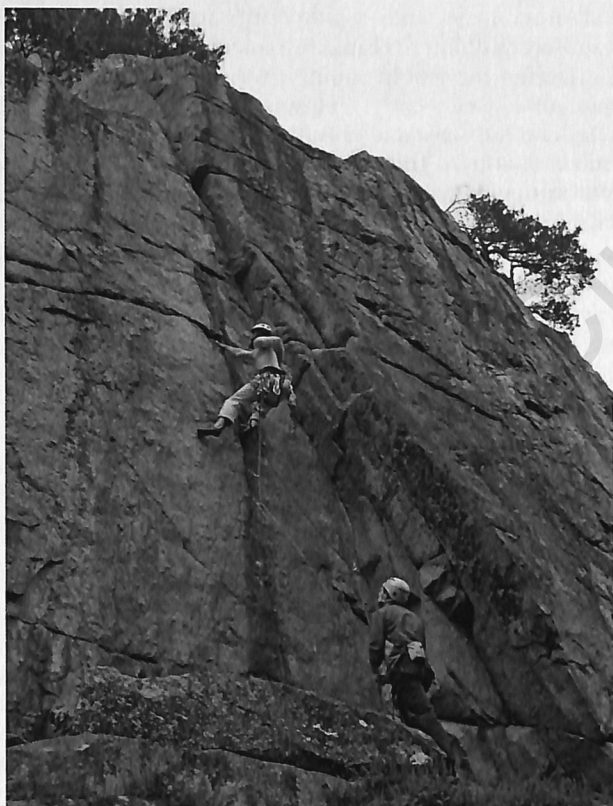
We bumped into Neil and Tim while Amanda and I were climbing at the Pass of Ballater. Tim had his eye on Bluter Crack, an E4 6c line that had only had three previous ascents since it was first climbed over 20 years ago. I offered my services (i.e. my long reach) to help clean out a crucial nut placement, and then Amanda and I took up photographer's positions to watch as Tim made a very smooth ascent of what is a desperately hard route.

12th July – Hidden Inlet

Amanda, Chris, Rowie and I visited Hidden Inlet, just south of the Long Slough, a spot on the coast where we'd done a collection of new routes/first recorded ascents last summer. We repeated each other's climbs from last year, before I managed to squeeze in a final new route, a bold but escapable E1. This is a lovely spot and deserves to become popular, providing similar climbing to Deceptive Wall, though in a more pleasant and less tidal setting.

23rd July – Clashrodney

Amanda made short work of Johnny's Dangler as her first E1 lead. She seconded me up it the previous week, but that was still her second jump in lead grade this year. I'd better get my finger out or she'll be leaving me behind.



Tim Rankin leading Bluter Crack

28th July – 12th August – UK Tour

Our summer holiday was intended to be two weeks of driving round the country, climbing classic routes. Naturally, we timed it for the weekend the summer heatwave broke. Still, we managed to climb at the Hawkcraig in Fife, Bowden Doors in Northumberland and the Slipstones in Yorkshire before the rain set in as we arrived in the Peak district. Three days of solid rain is not much fun when you're camping and supposed to be climbing, but we tracked down a cinema in Sheffield to while away the wet afternoons. Eventually it did stop raining and we got to Froggatt, the Roaches, Burbage North and South, but it was very humid and our climbing suffered as a result. Eventually we headed back northwards into Scotland, pitching the tent at the top of Glen Etive and being eaten alive by midges in the process. Next morning, we packed up and headed down to the bottom of the glen, with plans to get up onto the Etive slabs, but the

midges had other ideas and, whimpering and itching, we retreated to Nevisport in Fort William for breakfast and a look at the weather forecast. With rain affecting the whole country, we grumped our way back home, the best part of a week early. However, things improved and after a couple of days on the coast and at Ballater, we packed up the car again and headed over to Reiff. A great day on the crags saw Amanda on-sight her first E1 (Westering Home), while I manage to on-sight my first E2 in years (Flying Pig), immediately followed by my biggest battle of the year, leading another E2 called Huffin Puffin (I'd been on it previously but had to rest on gear mid-route). This route gets E2 6a in the guide, but it's really a very pumpy E2 5b perched on top of a V3 boulder problem. I climbed up and down this boulder problem three times, fixing gear and sussing out the top section before finally committing, and it was with relief that I hauled my wheezing body onto the cliff-top (the climb is well-named!). The day was finished off with a meal of fresh seafood at the Am Fuaran bar, followed by a ceilidh and folk evening at Coigach village hall.

26th August – DWS Festival

I forgot to take my Jeremy Clarkson 'brave pill', so I restricted myself to spectating at the first Aberdeen Deep Water Soloing Festival at Craig Stirling. A large turnout of climbers from all across Scotland came to climb and watch the likes of Wilson Moir and Julian Lines soloing routes up to E3 with ease. Unfortunately, one climber misjudged a jump into the sea from half way up Depth Charge, and fractured a vertebra on hitting the water. This necessitated a coastguard callout, with lifeboats and helicopter in attendance. Typically, Julian waited till after I'd gone home before making the first solo ascent of a new route up a steeply overhanging prow.

29th August – Clashrodney

Despite a sprained ankle, Matthew offered to belay me as I tried Streetwise, an E2 5c I'd done a few years previously. I climbed steadily to below the upper break, placed bomber gear and then failed completely to work out how to climb the crux headwall. Defeated, I slunk off onto a neighbouring HS, only to watch Matthew, seconding, cruise straight up through the crux, making it look a breeze. Now armed with the correct sequence, I tried again and found it straightforward, but went home very frustrated that I couldn't have worked that out for myself.

6th September – Portlethen

A bouldering and sport climbing session at Portlethen with Dan turned into something of an eye-opener. First of all, he demonstrated with ease a Font 7a boulder problem I'd been trying and failing on all summer. It really brought it home how much stronger I need to get to be able to do these things. Then we headed up to the sport wall and while Dan and Pete

worked the Dogs of War (F7c), I sneaked on for an attempt at The Lurcher, an F6c+ arête that Dogs starts up before the routes diverge after the Lurcher crux. My first attempt saw me drop off at the crux, but sitting on the bolt, I worked out a sequence, pulled back on and finished the route to the top. After Pete and Dan had a turn each on Dogs, I got my redpoint attempt and climbed Lurcher without fuss to the top. This was the hardest sport climb I'd done in years, and my good mood was further enhanced by Pete and Dan telling me that I ought to try Dogs of War next, as although the route is longer, it doesn't get any harder than the crux of the Lurcher. F7c is a grade I always thought was way beyond me, but suddenly, I'm interested...

16th September – Spartan Slab

Having failed to do Spartan Slab during our summer trip, I'd promised Amanda that we'd go back. The opportunity came in mid-September, when a fine forecast coincided with a free weekend. This time, we camped down at the loch-side, and woke next morning to a beautiful clear dawn, with the Etive hills reflected in a mirror-calm loch. The early start saw us as second party to the base of the slabs, and with the other team established on Hammer, we had Spartan Slab to ourselves. We swapped leads on perfect granite, with the climbing hard enough to be interesting without being desperate enough to worry. A damp streak on the second last pitch was overcome and the route was ours. Back at the base of the route, we performed a quick inspection of each other's nether regions to ensure that no ticks had stopped for a bite. It was only after we were fully clothed again that we realised that a party high up on the slabs must have had a bird's eye view of Amanda's behind! This was a perfect day's climbing – a classic route in ideal weather with a great partner. Days out in Scotland don't come much better – this is why, when I *can* be bothered trying mountain routes and I get a day like this, I find that all the rainy days help accentuate the feeling of accomplishment, making it that much more satisfying.

23rd September – Buckstone How

The following weekend saw us in the Lake District at a birthday get-together for a friend of ours, Jenny, along with her boyfriend Mike, and Helen and John from London. The plan was for me to take Jenny up her first multi-pitch route as a birthday present, while Amanda climbed with Mike. We had hoped to climb on Shepherd's Crag, but due to a late start, we were unable to find anywhere to park the cars within a sensible distance of the crag and so eventually made our way up to the summit of the Honister Pass, followed by a short trek up to the crag of Buckstone How. This was my first experience of climbing on natural slate, and hopefully, it will also be my last. Fortunately, our climb, Honister Wall, a

6-pitch HS, was reasonably straightforward, as there was an unnerving amount of loose rock, and limited protection. Still, Jenny seemed to enjoy herself.

30th September – 1st October – coaching session with Dave MacLeod

Keen to have a productive winter season and to maximise our chances of improving next year, Amanda and I booked a coaching session with Dave MacLeod. Unable to climb outside due to the weather, Dave worked us hard on our home climbing wall, setting problems to stretch our abilities and expand our repertoire of techniques. A comprehensive written report followed, identifying strengths, weaknesses and suggesting training regimes for us to follow. As well as being an excellent climber, Dave is a very positive and motivational coach, and has left us with ambitious targets and high hopes for next year's climbing.

29th October – Weem

The final outdoor climbing trip of the year was to the sport climbing crags above the village of Weem, near Aberfeldy. After struggling to find the various crags hidden amongst the rhododendrons, wild roses and woodland on the hillside, we eventually ended up below The End of Silence, an F7b route which takes a very steep, crimped lower wall before finishing up a vertical headwall above. There was no pretence of being able to climb the whole route that visit, but after a bit of work, I managed to link from the ground to the lip of the overhanging lower section. Unfortunately for Amanda, the only tick she came away with was the kind that drinks blood. However, with a bit more work, and an improvement in stamina, we felt that the route might well be do-able by us. This will provide further motivation to train hard over the winter and then we'll see what next year brings.

Lightning on the Mönch *Rhona Fraser*

Regular readers of this journal will be well aware of my fascination with thunder and lightning storms, for they have been the basis of many an article^{1,2}. This one is no exception. I have always been awed by the amazing power to be witnessed in the heavens during such events. The noise, the searing light, but most of all the patterns of brown and grey colliding in huge masses in the sky. No wonder the ancient Greeks believed the Gods and Titans were fighting. Nature, I suppose, having a tantrum!!!



The Summit Ridge of the Mönch

Peter Bellarby and I met at the Swiss town of Grindelwald in August 2004, he having just finished leading a Waymark holiday, I having briefly attended a Ladies Scottish Climbing Club meet. Lots of the 'ladies' had managed to climb the Mönch the week before, and having had a week of acclimatisation, we felt that this would be a reasonable target. We attempted to book the Mönchhütte beneath the mountain, but it was full, so we stayed overnight in the Kleine Scheidegg Hotel. Pictures of historic expeditions lined the hotel wall, and books in the library told of epic

battles on the Eiger and Jungfrau. The Mönch, the middle hill of the trinity, was hardly mentioned.

Next morning we got the earliest train to the Jungfraujoch. The forecast was reasonable: no storms were expected that day, though the weather was due to deteriorate over the next couple of days. On reaching the top station we were greeted with blue skies and a slightly cloudy mountain: nothing to worry about. After an easy start from the glacier, we put on crampons. As usual, being unguided, we lost time trying to find the correct route, having to retrace our steps to get round a small rocky tower. The climb then flattened out into an easy-angled rocky ridge, where I discovered the unexpected delight of climbing rock in crampons. The points cut into the small cracks, nice!!! This rocky ridge led to a narrow snow section, then to steeper rocks and a final steep snow section. The grade of the climb is PD, due I believe to the almost horizontal, but very narrow, exposed summit ridge. This proved to be not as nerve-wracking as I (with no head for heights) expected, since the cloud blanked out any sense of exposure.

We started our descent just after one o'clock in the afternoon. As we made our way down, we saw two other groups, climbing upwards. Did I hear thunder? Surely not?? The clouds were still white, and I did not feel the usual sense of pressure or foreboding which accompanies an approaching storm. Shortly after getting to the start of the narrow snow section, we crossed the path of one of the groups, comprising two men and a woman (I assume the other party had descended). Almost immediately after they disappeared from view, IT happened. My ski poles started to hum, a pressure headache formed on my forehead, and clouds darkened. We had to get down NOW.

We were indeed fortunate. The first lightning happened to arrive just as we had descended a steep rocky section and before the start of the narrow snow leading to the easy-angled ridge. We had to stay put. It was nerve-wracking, but to continue along the next exposed section would have been too dangerous. What made conditions even worse was that snow was now starting to fall. Not only was there a risk from the lightning, but also from the increasingly cold and wet conditions on the ground. It was hard staying put in such cold, but we had to reassure ourselves we were in a relatively safe position and the storm was unlikely to last long. After what seemed only a few minutes, we were surprised and relieved to see the other group descend to our location. However, I was slightly taken aback to realise that they were not stopping with us, but continuing down the hill. As he passed us, the back marker muttered "it is best to get off". We waited briefly, but as the storm seemed to be receding, the herd instinct came to play and, with some relief, we started to follow.

What a difference descending from ascending: no belays, no hesitation, as fast, and as low to the ground as possible. The other party had just reached a slight rise in the ridge when I felt a definite knock on the head: not painful but a definite brief sensation of pressure. Peter later said he felt it too. I knew it meant something, and in this fraught situation it would not be good. I sank to the snow, placing my ice axe as far away as possible. Almost immediately, the woman in the middle of the group seemed to slip, there was a streak of yellow light (I was wearing snow goggles), and the back marker crumpled to the ground – his legs had just folded under him. Nobody falls like that consciously, and from my position, at the most only 20 meters away, I knew I had witnessed a direct lightning strike. He was so still, his stillness in stark contrast to the cries of distress from the woman. I was now lying face down in the newly fallen snow with “hell” above and most probably a dead body meters away. The claps of thunder and flashes of lightning had returned with renewed vigour. The noise and light were simultaneous, almost continuous, and truly deafening, only inches above my head. Electric force was in a frenzy and I was in the middle of it. I should not be here; nothing should be here!!!! I waited for the next hit, trying to reassure myself, that if struck, death would be instantaneous and inevitable. Forked lightning was circling the summit, perhaps hitting the metal abseil posts on mountain, one of which was between me and the stricken climber.

Eventually, when the noise and the light seemed to separate, I very gingerly crawled towards the fallen man, expecting to see death. The woman enthusiastically announced he had started to breathe. Breathing or not, the lasting memory of this sad event was the appalling smell of burning flesh and the torn singed mess that was the man’s shoulder. I did not have the heart to say anything, but I knew. Peter noticed his ice axe several feet away.

We then found out that the fallen man was a guide, and that the woman had used his radio to summon help. What could we do? Believing it to be a short walk, we had failed to bring any extra clothing (a lesson in itself), the only thing we could have given to help the situation. The two remaining members of the party reassured us that help had been summoned, and we were safe to leave the scene. However, the scene had now changed from the rather benign rocky scramble to a snow-covered slippery slope. It had taken us two to three hours to climb up but was to take us five hours to descend, belaying slowly down the transformed and now dangerous hill. By the time I reached the easier lower slopes I wanted to be sick, a combination of fear, lack of food and altitude. The shaking, perhaps due to lying for a prolonged period in the snow, started shortly afterwards. For once, I was off my food. Normally, Peter has the poor appetite, but he was hungry. At the hut I only wanted my bed, safe and warm.

The next day we read in the papers that the guide had died in hospital. The woman had been his daughter. I suspect that he had taken his daughter, with her boyfriend, on a short summer afternoon stroll on the Mönch. After these events, there was little enthusiasm for the holiday and we finished by doing a mountain marathon run. At the mid-camp, I witnessed a storm over the Weisshorn: black, very black and very vicious. I stood and watched it, and pondered: a few days before, I had been at the bottom of the flashes, in the middle of the darkness.

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Walking

On the day after a wedding celebration at Braemar on the 31st July 2004

We dined simply, with ghosts,
in the ruined Bynack Lodge
before making our way towards
Carn Liath's summit.

The world was ours
until a moving hillside
drew senses across the valley
to where, on plucked staccato hooves
antlers, spindle legs and close packed bodies
funnelled the July air.

From the slowing, stopping,
turning, staring herd
rose calls
low and generational.

Umbilical severed
need not yet outlived.

Sheena M Leith

Carry On In Knoydart

A Sequel to Carry On Up the Khyber and Carry On Up the Kingie¹

Gordon Stalker

Cairngorm Club Overnight Meets being now definitely a thing of the past, I resolved to have my own Mid-Summer Meet, and, encouraged by my recent completion of the Munros in Knoydart, I wanted to see more of this wonderfully remote area.

My 1963 AA Gazetteer² describes Lochan nam Breac as 'picturesque and rock girt', and I decided to make this the object of my visit. Saturday 19th June 2004 saw me sitting in my car at the point where the public road to Kinloch Hourn diverges from Loch Quoich, watching the rain teeming down and a temperature of 7°C on my car thermometer. I therefore spent the night in my car and set out the next day laden with tent and camping gear.

After a nightmarish initial stretch over the Sron Lice na Fearna, and crossing the Abhainn Chosaidh (apparently difficult in spate), I was greeted by a motorway-standard track on which I could easily have driven my car. This can only have been constructed in connection with the dam at the west end of Loch Quoich, and the rest of it linking the public road must now lie under the loch. I was particularly impressed with the fine curved stone bridges.

I eventually arrived at the dual dam which now forms the west end of Loch Quoich. No sign of Kinloch Quoich – presumably now under the waters of the loch. A short walk brought me to the shores of Lochan nam Breac, which surpassed my expectations. I pitched my tent beside a fine sandy beach with fine views of Luinne Bheinn and after a meal noticed I was at the foot of Ben Aden, a very remote Corbett. I thought I had better climb it, which I did via Allt Coire na Cruache, descending by the difficult NE ridge. A naked swim in Lochan nam Breac from the beach completed my midsummer's night.

The following day, I continued my walk along the north shore of Lochan nam Breac, passing an atmospherically ruined shieling with a grave before tackling the Mam Unndalain and descending to Barrisdale, where part of the MBA bothy was being converted to self-catering accommodation.

On the back of a dire weather forecast, I decided not to press on to Inverie, and returned to Kinloch Hourn via the magnificent path along the south shore of Loch Hourn. While resting under the Caledonian pines on the path, I was surprised by a splash in the water and was delighted to see an otter at close quarters coming ashore to eat a crab. Somewhat tired, I reached Kinloch Hourn and called in at the farmhouse where I sampled the tea and cake of the new custodian. My problem then was that my car lay



Luinne Beinn from Lochan nam Breac

six km up a steep road on a hot day, so I weakened and took a lift on the Post Bus.

After this successful and enjoyable trip, cut short due to a bad weather forecast, I returned in August to the west end of Loch Arkaig and walked in to Sourlies bothy, which I found most comfortable, occupying the bunk by the fire. The following day, I struggled over the Mam Meadail to Inverie where I camped beside Long Beach (not California) for a couple of nights, enjoying swimming from this fine beach. The only blot on the horizon is that a new pier is being constructed at Inverie as part of the same scheme which has seen Rum, Eigg and Muck provided with new piers. Soon you will be able to take your car on the 'road to nowhere'! I then walked out via Sourlies to find myself in the deluge which caused the well reported rock-fall and road blockage in Glen Ogle. Wet does not begin to describe it – watercourses I had not noticed on the way in were now raging thigh-deep torrents! Thankfully, I reached my car at Strathan to be devoured by midges as I struggled out of wet clothes.

So much for Knoydart – heaven and hell all in one!

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The Mysterious Land of Mist and Bog – Rwenzori

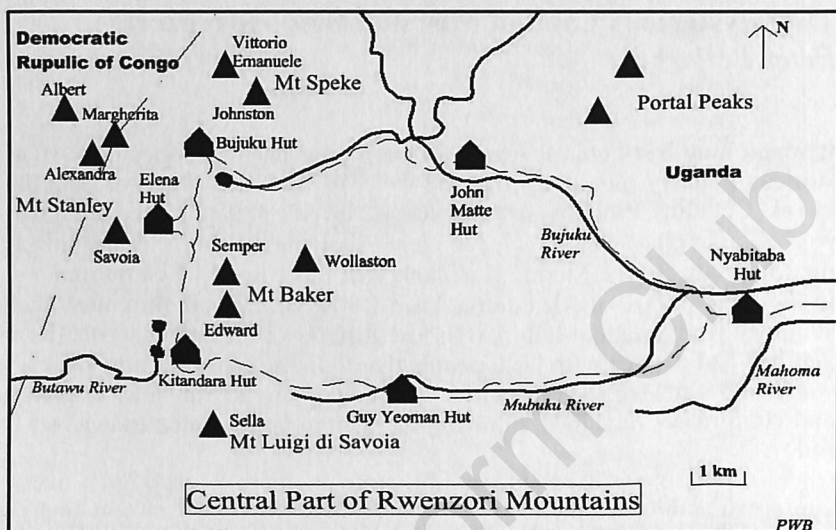
Peter Bellarby

It was a long-lost land, or was it a fable? For many centuries there were stories of snowy mountains that fed water to the Nile. It started with the Greek Claudius Ptolemy who, it seems, in AD 150 produced his great work *Geographia*¹ which included a map showing the source of the Nile at the Mountains of the Moon. It is likely that this was based on information in the great library of Alexandria, later destroyed. This in turn must have stemmed from Arabian sailors who had gone down the east coast of Africa and had had contact with local people there. In the course of time the map was lost because of the difficulties of hand-copying it, but tables of places and coordinates remained, allowing the map to be recreated in mediaeval times.

Cartographers used information from Ptolemy in their own maps, adding something of their own – was it based on factual information or just imagination? Thus Gerald Mercator Junior, basing his work on the map of 1569 made by his grandfather also Gerald Mercator, published a map² which showed three large lakes and several smaller ones. Another map is that produced by Willen Blaeu³ and published in 1643-50. This shows two lakes just below *Lunae Montes*, Latin for Mountains of the Moon. Could these be Lake Victoria and Lake Albert? Both feed into the Nile, Victoria being some way east of Rwenzori, the other being to the NE of Rwenzori. So are the Rwenzori Mountains the same as the Mountains of the Moon of Ptolemy? Not necessarily, since both Mount Kenya and Kilimanjaro have snowy tops and are much nearer to the east coast of Africa, from which it is assumed knowledge of the Mountains of the Moon reached Alexandria. We shall probably never know with certainty.

Be that as it may, the term 'Mountains of the Moon' conjures up images of remoteness, barrenness and loneliness. Enough to stir the soul and hurry the heartbeat with the thought of experiencing a little of this oneself. I had already climbed Mount Kenya and, with four other members of the Cairngorm Club, had stood on the summit of Uhuru, the highest point of Kilimanjaro⁴. Rwenzori was a dream that seemed unlikely to be fulfilled, since for many years political turmoil had prevented access. But in 2005 the opportunity arose to join an expedition there, organised by Jagged Globe. The opportunity was grasped!

We met up at the check-in at Heathrow for the flight to Entebbe in Uganda. Alun, the leader, arrived with the news that a visa had been omitted from his passport so we would have to leave without him. He promised to get it sorted and catch us up later – somewhere in the land of



mist and bog. Well, Stanley managed to meet Livingstone without modern communications, so we should be alright.

We stumbled out of the plane at Entebbe after the long but uneventful overnight flight. We were met by an agent who would ensure that we got to the foot of the mountains. There was a day to look round Kampala, with its teeming masses of people, before the 435km road journey to Kasese. This took all day as the road is rather rough, although work was in progress to improve it. To get round one stretch of road works we were instructed to drive into the bush. Two lorries going in opposite directions did this and collided. We managed to scrape by, bending a tree in the process. Fortunately the tree was pliable.

The Rwenzori straddle the border of Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We were to approach from the eastern, Ugandan side. From our hotel near Kasese we could see through the mist the foothills of Rwenzori, or so we supposed. Land of mist and bog – there is precipitation 360 days of the year – so early European explorers in the 1870s and 1880s such as Baker, Emin and Gessi passed close by the mountains but could not see them, or had only tantalising glimpses that might be hallucinations or might be real. Henry Stanley⁵ is credited with the first definite sighting in 1888. He returned in 1889 and spent more than three months in the foothills. Exhaustion and sickness took their toll of his expedition so that only one man, Lieutenant W. G. Stairs, was fit enough to climb high. He reached 3,000m but was not equipped to go further. It was Stanley who cobbled together the name Rwenzori from

several local words. It translates as 'rain maker' or, as somebody told me, 'the great leaf in which the clouds are boiled'.

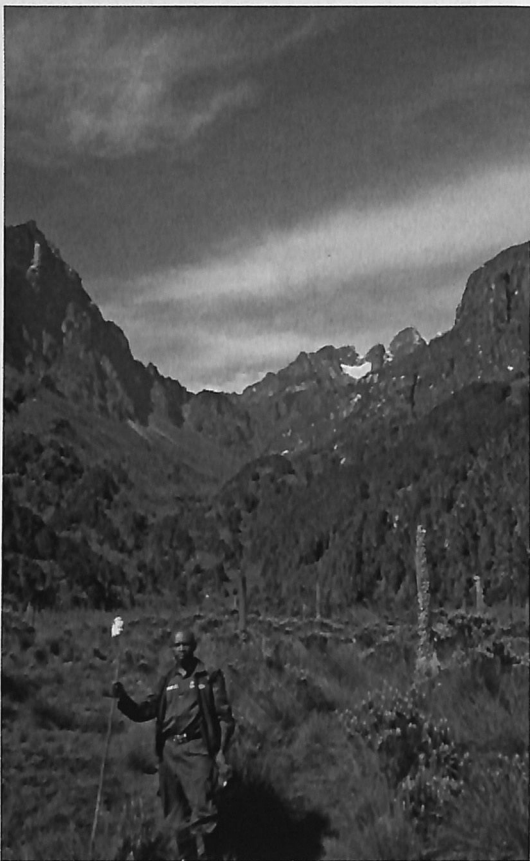
So what else does so much rain imply? It implies bogs, and the bogs of Rwenzori are notorious – deep, squelchy, extensive and impossible to avoid. It implies vegetation – and there are huge amounts, closely packed. There are heathers twenty feet high, giant lobelia and giant groundsel.

Next day we experienced the vegetation for ourselves. We reached the Rwenzori Mountains National Park offices at Nyakalengija after a bumpy ride along a dirt road. Many of the local Bakonzo men were lined up hoping to be engaged as porters. There followed much argument with the weighing scales about loads and whether they were too heavy for one man. We had two cooks, some local guides and a man with a gun. This was not really to shoot anything but rather to frighten away any animals such as leopards that we might encounter.

At last the expedition moved off. At first it was past mud and wattle Bakonzo houses and banana plantations, and we passed young girls carrying large loads of bananas. There were black and white colobus and blue monkeys. After about forty minutes we reached the National Park boundary and left the habitations behind. We followed a trail beside the Mubuku River with the first experience of clambering over tree roots and vegetation, not to mention rocks. We crossed the Mahoma River on a bridge, one of only two in the area. After a short rest and lunch, it was a change of gear as we climbed steeply up through bracken and podocarpus. Not doing too badly here, I thought, as I moved up from the back of the party to catch up those in front. We reached the Nyabitaba Hut in slight rain. Not bad at all – we expected heavy rain. Then we saw peaks – we hadn't expected to see any because of all these references to mist and cloud. Which were they? The compass came out and showed them to be Portal Peaks, not on our list of objectives, and in another direction Mount Baker, which was.

What was the plan? We were following the Central Circuit Trail. From Nyabitaba it forms a loop, which we followed anticlockwise, back to Nyabitaba. For many, this in itself is enough of a challenge, but we had ambitions to reach the summits of Mount Stanley, Mount Speke and Mount Baker, the highest mountains of the Rwenzori.

Next day I was rather disappointed after half a kilometre to find that we were going steeply downhill, realising that once we had crossed the Kurt Shaffer Bridge, which lies below the confluence of the Bujuku and Mubuku rivers, we would have to regain all the lost height. Once over the bridge we were climbing through bamboo forest with slippery mud, and then boulder-hopping. We followed the Bujuku River to reach the John Matte Hut at 3,380m, our resting place for the night. And we were able to take a photograph of Mount Stanley – a rather rare possibility according to one of our guides. Alun arrived later that afternoon, having double



Guide Justin and the Lower Bigo Bog

marched to come up from Nyakalengija in one day. Ironically he could have flown out with us, as we found that you could get a visa on arrival at Entebbe.

Day three meant crossing the two Bigo bogs. Jumping from tussock to tussock was hard at that altitude, and the penalty for missing was to get rather wet. On part of the Upper Bigo bog a boardwalk has been constructed. Rather intrusive you might think, but better than the destruction of the vegetation that would otherwise occur. We reached Lake Bujuku, an impressive place with high precipitous cliffs of Mount Baker to the south, Mount Speke to the north and the glaciers of Mount Stanley to the west. But my, was the mud deep

there. A little further on we arrived at the night's lodging place, the Bujuku Hut at 3,977m. I wasn't at the front, but secretly rather pleased to be an hour ahead of those at the back. I was feeling the altitude though, and lay down rather exhausted.

Mount Speke was the next day's objective. We left at 6.50 a.m., walking NW to the top of the Stuhlmann Pass. Then the climbing began, with a shallow gully with an awkward exit round a tree. A lot of scrambling on rocks followed, many of the rocks being moss-covered, and there was one quite hard section. We reached the glaciers and put on rope and crampons. Not too steep this part, so it wasn't long before we reached the top of Vittorio Emanuele at 11.45 a.m. At 4,890m this is the highest point of Mount Speke. On the descent the rope was used on the hard

section. I climbed down, but others abseiled. So far conditions had been good and the first objective achieved. Could this continue?

The following day was not too long, and the weather was really beautiful. We took a rising traverse above Lake Bujuku, which we could see far below us. There was one ladder and much boulder work before we reached the Elena Hut. From here next day we would attempt Mount Stanley. This had been climbed for the first time by the Duke of Abruzzi, Luigi di Savoia, in 1906⁶, so the centenary was last year. He was a navy man and organised his expeditions in military style, involving hundreds of men. This very successful expedition made the first ascents of all the major peaks. Accompanying it was the renowned alpinist and photographer Vittorio Sella, whose pictures are a joy to behold. Of particular interest is a panorama photograph taken from Edward, the highest point of Mount Baker. It is reproduced in David Pluth's book⁷ which, incidentally, includes a wealth of modern photographs. The panorama shows Mount Speke well covered with glaciers, with hardly a rock showing. Likewise for Mount Stanley, with Margherita, the highest point, showing only two very small rocky bits. Is it like that today? No! Sadly the glaciers have retreated and cover only about a fifth of the area they did in 1906.

We left the hut at 6.40 a.m. The route was up a scrambly path onto the Elena Glacier and then the East Stanley Glacier, which forms a high plateau. We then had to descend a little with some rocks to join the Margherita Glacier. This was followed steeply to the col between Margherita and Alexandra. These are the highest points of Mount Stanley, named by the Duke after the then queens of Italy and the United Kingdom. He gave the name Stanley to the mountain as a whole. From the col we traversed rightwards, still on the glacier until we came to a fixed rope leading upwards over steep rocky ground. One of the African guides suggested using a prussick loop, but that did not work as the rope was too slippery, as indeed were the rocks. Alun climbed up and belayed, and used his rope to enable the rest of us to follow. Above this the rocks were easier and we soon reached the summit of Margherita, at 5,109m the highest point of all the Rwenzori. It was 11.30 a.m. on 21 February. We were elated as all members of the expedition reached the top, not the case on Speke and Baker.

On the descent we abseiled down the slippery rocks. Then it was on with the crampons, and suitably roped we retraced our footsteps to reach the Elena Hut at 3.20 p.m. There is a problem with using this hut in that it is unsuitable for porters to remain there overnight, so the dilemma is when to ask them to return. After much discussion we had agreed they should come back on the day of the summit bid and do the carrying to the Kitanadara Hut. So at 4.40 p.m. we set off, minus two members who felt somewhat tired. The route descends to join the trail over the Scott Elliott



Margherita (right) and Alexandra (centre) taken on the ascent

Pass, which crosses from the valley of the Bujuku to that of Butawa. From the top of the pass the route goes under the huge cliffs plunging precipitously from the heights of Mount Baker. Water cascaded hundreds of feet down the cliffs in mighty waterfalls. The ascent to the top of the pass was not the end of uphill section, as there were still what would normally be considered very minor ascents. But, after a long hard day and still over 4,000m, it was a weary Peter that arrived at Kitandara Hut.

Next day was a rest day – a time to enjoy the tranquil settings. The hut lies beside the lower of the two Kitandara lakes. Two ducks swam contentedly on our lake. We had time to clean boots and inspect more closely the lush vegetation.

Mount Baker beckoned. The original plan was to climb it out and back to the Kitandara Hut in one day. But the Butawa flows west out of the Kitandara lakes and we had to go east at some point, to go over the Freshfield Pass to the valley of the Mubuku. Why not avoid the descent to the hut and the next day's re-ascent? We were in good form so the plan was changed: we would descend instead directly to the Guy Yeoman Hut in the valley of the Mubuku. Once high up on the slopes of Mount Baker, the route was marked by a confusing array of cairns which seemed to lead here, there and everywhere, with much very enjoyable rocky scrambling, until we came to an easy slope leading to the summit. There was some competition to see who would get there first, a sign that we were well-



Mount Baker from the Elena Hut, Edward the rightmost top

acclimatised and fit. So the top of Edward, 4,843m and the highest point of Mount Baker, was reached.

Edward was named by the Duke of Abruzzi after the then King of the United Kingdom. This matches Vittorio Emmanuele, the highest point of Mount Speke, named after the then King of Italy. The tradition of royal appellations continued when, to mark the coronation of our present queen, two hitherto unnamed tops on Mount Stanley became Elizabeth and Philip. The names of the main mountains come from the names of African explorers, again given by the Duke. Mount Luigi di Savoia was named after the Duke himself, but only at the insistence of the (British) Royal Geographical Society.

We had to descend, get over the top of the Freshfield Pass, and make the long descent to the Guy Yeoman Hut. I was tired and lagging behind. More bogs, vertical this time, more scrambling down rocks, much steeper this time, and more vegetation, more tangled and contorted this time, before I reached the hut, to the applause of the porters. These were a cheerful group, without whom we would not have had a successful expedition. Our cooks provided us with good food to sustain our exertions, no mean achievement in such a remote setting. Our guides had been very supportive, although we made recommendations about enhancing their skills with further training, since some of their practices were somewhat unsafe.

All that remained was to walk out past the cave with bat-eating cobras. We disdained an overnight stop at the Nyabitaba hut and ran in exhilaration down the steep slopes to the bridge over the Mahona, creating clouds of dust. Dust? Yes, it seemed we had experienced all the five days in a year when there is no precipitation. The mist had not enveloped us, and the bogs were not so deep as expected. The mysterious land was mysterious no more. This rather elderly gentleman had now climbed the five highest mountains in Africa according to some lists. But what about Mwenzi? This high mountain is a neighbour of Kilimanjaro, but the drop between them is very significant. Surely Mwenzi is more than just a top? Perhaps, just perhaps, I might get to its summit one day.

Expedition members: Alun Richardson (Wales, Leader), Peter Bellarby, Rhona Fraser (Cairngorm Club), Brad Neiman (USA), Hans Vaaben (Denmark), Pia Vaaben (Denmark), Innes Walker (Aberdeen), Leo.

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Peru Part I: Snakes!

Walter Burnett

Having had some dealings with snakes a little out of the usual, as I reported in the 1999 *Cairngorm Club Journal*, I thought I could perhaps add a postscript.

A friend was arranging a touring holiday in Peru for five of us, and was speaking to the travel company on the phone to tie up some of the final details. I asked if I could have a word with him. I told him that I was one of the very few people in Scotland who had spent some time in Accident and Emergency, having been bitten by an adder. I then told him that I had seen on a TV programme the previous evening, an event recorded on the very same part of the Amazon on which we would be sailing a fortnight later. There was a giant anaconda slowly swallowing an alligator whole. There was a short silence, then "Oh! You'll be all right there. Anacondas aren't poisonous." You don't get advice like that on the high street every day.

For those who have not yet been to Peru, I can only say that it was really amazing. Everything we saw and did was new. We were well warned that this was not a holiday but an adventure. It was. After arrival in Lima, it involved twenty-three separate trips. Six were by air, seven by boat – on the sea, Lake Titicaca and the Amazon – and the rest by bus and train.

At the Ceiba Tops Jungle Lodge, our guide apologised for the Amazon being only three kilometres wide at that point, 2,400 miles from the sea. As some recompense for this shortcoming we did see some of both species of fresh-water dolphins, white and pink, and many kinds of birds. We were warned not to trail our fingers in the water over the side of our shallow open boat, as the piranha might spoil our piano-playing skills. On a jungle walk we came upon a vulture eating a dead ant-eater. It took off and we found that the ant-eater had been ripening for some time. The most dangerous thing we saw in the jungle, according to our guide, was a colony of ants known as bullet ants. He said that they are so named because a bite felt like being hit by a bullet. I took his word for it.

Down river thirty miles or so, we visited a Yagua Indian settlement of about twenty palm-leaf thatched huts scattered through the trees, with little in the way of walls. The men demonstrated their skill with blowpipes and darts, hitting a four-inch post nearly every time at thirty paces. Walking through the muddy-floored jungle on our way back to our open boat we passed a small native girl of about six years of age wearing only an old faded pink shift. A lady in our party paused, leaned towards her

and said very slowly and clearly "Adios." The small girl looked up at her and said equally carefully "Goodbye." One up to the Yaguas, I think.

On another day we were on a bus trip on the high plains at about 10,000ft when, passing a rough-looking farm steading, I saw a small crowd grouped round a llama or similar animal, which was lying on its side. The poor thing was possibly ill, I thought. In the next couple of miles I saw at least two more such scenes. The penny dropped. The following day was to be a religious feast day and they were preparing ingredients for the barbecues.

Our food in our various hotels was excellent and a very wide choice was provided. There was one item that none of us fancied – a roast about the size of a partridge but with four small legs in the air. Guinea pig! I don't eat pets.

The remains of the Inca civilisation were very impressive. The colossal 40- to 100-ton rocks were shaped to fit together exactly without the benefit of iron or steel tools or mortar of any kind! I checked the accuracy with a postcard. You could not push it into the join. Try Sacsayhuaman and Ollantaytambo as well as the top attraction of Machu Pichu. And hurry if you do want to stroll over the terraces of Machu Pichu to examine the buildings closely. They say that visitors will eventually only see the place from a helicopter.

I only saw one snake in Peru. It was about five feet in length and I could examine it quite closely as it was wrapped round my neck at the time. No, it did not drop out of a tree, but was placed there by a teenage girl during the hotel's evening song and dance show. I wasn't bothered as I could see that it wasn't an adder or a giant anaconda.

Back in our own Scottish hills, I note that the snakes that once were so common across the road from Muir Cottage have disappeared. The sunny spots they favoured are now largely shaded by the ever-expanding trees. I saw one on the road about 100 yards towards the Linn but it was very flat and motionless. In September, I sprayed myself lavishly with insect repellent and searched the area closely, and saw none. I spent that evening extracting more than a dozen ticks from various areas of my anatomy. No one else got any. Why me?

A WARNING! There was a programme on TV recently, showing the removal of a colony of adders from an expanding motorway in England. I heard someone say that the death rate from adder bites in the UK was about one every decade, and then they went on to say that there had not been a death for twenty years. Step carefully!

Peru Part II: The Inca Trail

Ruth Payne

MACHU PICHU! Forty years ago a friend's account convinced me that I'd have to get there one day. And now it's the world's number one tourist target! With my love of hill-walking, it was natural that an approach via the Inca Trail should appeal, so this became a number one post-retirement objective.

In the old Andean Kingdom, extending far beyond modern Peru, which was ruled by the Inca (or King) from the 'Navel of the Universe', Cuzco, there were thousands of kilometres of paved trails extending through the Andes, and many remain. The best known nowadays is the 43km section which was built for noblemen to cross the hills in the Urubamba to reach the Inca's new mountain-top citadel of Machu Pichu. Many now aspire to travel this trail, which includes three high passes, the highest being Dead Woman's Pass at 4,215m.

The tourist pressure on the Trail is now so intense that there is a limit of 500 daily starts (tourists, porters, cooks and guides all count). The route is closed during February for repairs and maintenance, and this period may be extended in future. This now means that a permit has to be applied for well in advance, and porters and campsites need to be booked as well. Our group of four, organised by Journey Latin America, was scheduled to leave Km 82 on the Urubamba, with a guide, cook and eight porters, on Saturday, March 11th, 2006, and to reach Machu Pichu on March 14th to tour the site.

Our guide, Augusto, came with us from Cuzco, and we met up with cook and porters at the checkpoint, where identification was checked and the porters' loads were weighed to ensure that no burden was over 25kg. Then we were allowed through, across the Urubamba and onto the trail. The first day is defined as 'easy', and so it proved, a steady but gentle ascent from 2,600m, past cultivated fields and archaeological sites to a rest camp at 2,950m, where an excellent lunch awaited thanks to our cook and porters. After lunch the trail continued upward as a well-made path to the last village on the route, and beyond it to a campsite on an old cultivation terrace with good views across the valley. Afternoon tea and another good meal led to a comfortable night's sleep, before the warm water for washing arrived at 4.30 a.m. on Day 2, rated 'challenging'!

The 'challenge' was the combination of increasing altitude with some steep, high steps on the path, and was too much for a group of Americans, who had found Day 1 more than enough. However, the trail wound upwards through delightful cloud-forest, full of bromeliads, orchids and hummingbirds. I followed Augusto's advice to enjoy it all, and reached



Approaching Dead Woman's Pass at 4,000m

the rest-stop at 3,850m to find the 'young tigers' had just left to get over the highest pass and down for lunch! Augusto then explained that he'd never taken anyone QUITE so old across before; but he seemed satisfied with progress, and in the event we reached the top of Dead Woman's Pass in 5.5 hours (the average is 5.0) in good condition, despite the 'thou shalt not pass' attitude of a large bull llama 50m below the pass! 'Slow and steady' seemed to work, as I did not seem to be suffering from the altitude. Perhaps time on the Altiplano of Bolivia and at Lake Titicaca served well as an acclimatisation!

Photos taken, we started bouncing steeply downwards towards lunch, and I was easily leading the young Irish and Dutch groups with whom I'd shared the ascent to the top. Then – disaster! Augusto stopped once we had reached easier ground to speak with a friend, while I continued on and met one of the Rangers – they are vigilant for infringements of the Trail Rules – and stopped to chat. As I prepared to continue down I spotted an unfamiliar flower and turned to investigate it – on a small loose stone! Result? One dislocated right ankle, with badly torn ligaments, plus severe pain and faintness. Solution? To arrange myself tastefully on the path to avoid falling over the cliff, and take a rest! Fortunately, camp was in sight and I had a stick, so I was in time for the end of lunch and could soak the sore bit in a cool stream, before trying to sleep.

Day 3, rated 'unforgettable', lived up to the claim, for the sheer beauty of the cloud forest and the scenery, as well as for the problems with

walking! Uphill was OK, the Inca rest-house and the second high pass were reached fairly well on schedule; but then came the nightmare of descending steep, rather uneven steps, with a sharp drop on my bad side, and a bright purple foot twice its normal size squeezed into a boot! What should have taken thirty minutes took three hours, so Augusto found a porter. I was concerned that I exceeded the 25kg maximum, but the porter assured me "I can carry 90kg!" However, pride didn't allow help, so we omitted one major archaeological visit and arrived for a late lunch. The young ones had gone on, expecting me to reach the night's camp at midnight, but a large dose of Ibuprofen got me through the glories of the cloud forest to the final high pass, and then down, down and down to reach the campsite in time for afternoon tea.

Day 4, 'arrival', meant up at 4.30 a.m., to be ready for the final 5.30 a.m. checkpoint and the trail up to the Sun Gate with its view down to Machu Pichu. There was swirling mist, which cleared as we passed through more archaeological sites on the 300m descent to the main gate and the non-trekkers in the group. The site WAS magnificent, but the many steep steps were stressful, and the peak of Waynu Pichu was out of the question – and not just for me, as a landslide had closed the path two days before our arrival.

However, having been the oldest this year on the Trail, I'm determined to go back again, so that I can properly enjoy the magnificence of the mountains, AND Machu Pichu!

Finally, I couldn't have completed the Inca Trail without the kindness of our porters, not to mention the patient encouragement of guide Augusto – it was almost overwhelming, and terribly hard to thank them adequately!

Mountain Fayre.

I always have a sneaky admiration of what other Club members have on the hill to eat. Our 'fayre' may be frugal and light, or some may carry pints of soup, pies, and avocado dips. On every bus meet the impending 'high tea' is always discussed – whether we are having the fish and chips or if there will be scones and jam. Like great armies, the intrepid members of the Cairngorm Club march on their stomachs. My greatest food memory is of coming back to Glen Coe after a week in Skye in 1971, when Guy Scott and I cooked every item of food the group had left over, for a big breakfast before we set off for home. Oh, and some of nature's breezes on the hill have been known to make me sneeze.

What mountain glory fills the air, with sunshine breeze and sneeze
the warm air tasted honey-flower that just awaits the bees
To carry off, to process then, a feast for us to eat
with bread and butter, tea and scones, a very special treat.

What joy to tramp the mountain path below a perfect sky
beneath the tops or high above where eagle and buzzard fly
Our day is long and tired we'll be when at even' we come down
a dram, a meal and gentle talk before our final yawn.

These days are special for us all, with friends we walk the hills
with memories of other days of sweaty paths and thrills
Many years and many faces, many trips abound
let's toast the Cairngorm Club where these good things are found.

The plans and projects we have started round the fire at Muir
midweek walks and weekend meets the trip up Beinn a Bhuid
The indoor meets, the bus at seven, the ceilidh coming up
the trip, its plan, the mountain climbed, and of course where we will sup.

What is the Cairngorm Club, can it be well defined,
who are these folks who troop the hills with gastronomic mind
Comparing feeds we've had in places by the firelight's glow
or remembering that big breakfast feast we plundered at Glen Coe.

Well what's to say, we're thin and fat, we're tall and small as well,
some totter on or stride along o'er mountain path or fell
But here's to friendships old and new to mountains, paths and stovies
to scones and tea and beer and food, we become very healthy oldies!

Robbie Middleton

October 2006

Murder in Torridon? **A True Tale of the Mountains** *Douglas Williamson*

It was April 1961 when Iain, Harold, Douglas and Bill set out for Torridon in Iain's car. Bill worked in the drawing office of an engineering firm; the others were Ph.D. students at Glasgow University. We arrived at the SYHA Hostel at Inveralligin on the north shore of Loch Torridon, planning to climb Beinn Eighe the next day, which blew a gale with horizontal rain. After a few hours of struggling just to stand on the quartzite scree but making little progress even on hands and knees, we gave up and retreated to the joys of the 'Modern Mistress', as the stove in the hostel was named in cast iron letters. The only other occupants, a party of four, had gone home but there was now a stocky, tough chap in ex-army gear. He said he was Ian Simpson, was camping by the shore and wanted a bit of warmth and company. A doctor at the State Mental Hospital at Carstairs, he just wanted away from it all for a bit.

That evening, he spoke very knowledgeably about mental hospitals, but turned out to be argumentative, proposing that morals had no defensible basis and challenging us to disagree, which we strongly did – to our probable salvation did we but know. I, Douglas, took a few flash photographs in the hostel common room though Simpson was extremely reluctant to be included. However, he obviously knew the area extremely well and offered advice on approaching the local peaks, warning that the 'Horns of Alligin' should be treated with care as they had been the cause of fatalities in the past. The next day, Iain and Harold had to return to Glasgow in the car and, when Simpson heard this being discussed, he asked for a lift to Inverness as he needed a haircut and various provisions. This was readily agreed and the three left after breakfast, with Bill and I setting out for Beinn Alligin.

We got back triumphant but tired after a great day, made some supper and soon went to bed, the only occupants both of the hostel and its male dormitory, which was a wooden hut in the grounds. A bit after midnight, I was wakened by a person entering the dormitory and using an unusual torch with the beam at right angles to the barrel. I was annoyed at being thus wakened and pretended to be fast asleep, and Bill took a similar view. The person soon went out. In the morning, we went up to the main hostel to get breakfast, whereupon Bill discovered that his food had been ransacked. We quickly checked our belongings, spread out on adjacent beds in the dormitory, and realised that my camera was definitely missing. We both had a suspicion that the intruder might have been Simpson as he had had the same unusual pattern of torch. In the wet ground outside,

there were fresh boot-nail marks and, unusually even then, he had worn nailed boots. But surely he was in Inverness with our friends, so it couldn't be him. We reported the incident/loss to the warden, Kenny McDonald (also shop owner, grave digger, shepherd, garage man and ferryman, etc.), who phoned Kinlochewe police and had the local bus stopped but there was nobody on it.

Meanwhile, we phoned Iain and Harold in Glasgow, who told us the significant news that on the previous day, when they had reached Achnasheen, only 20 miles on the way to Inverness, Simpson had asked to be left there, since he claimed to have belongings, including a motor scooter, stashed away in a nearby ruined croft. He would make his own way to Inverness later. By now we were deeply suspicious and checked information at Glasgow and Carstairs, discovering that there was no 'Doctor' Simpson, and the police were told all this.

A couple of months later, I received a call from the police who said they had now identified Ian Simpson, "a bad lad" as they said. He had a string of convictions for petty theft, but was the self-styled pastor of his own church in Motherwell, a corrugated iron shack, which had a congregation of around 100 trusting, innocent souls. His first prosecution, indeed, had been for the theft of communion vessels from the local Church of Scotland to furnish his own. Subsequently, he had been committed to Carstairs State Mental Institution from which he had escaped and was on the run when we met him. Sure, he had a Carstairs connection but as patient not staff! If he could stay out for 28 days, the law then required that the process of certification be re-enacted. "No wonder," said the Police, "he objected to you taking the photograph, and he undoubtedly came back with the particular purpose of obtaining the camera which he would then have thrown in the loch. We have a warrant for his arrest and we'll find him." (It is another of the coincidences of this tale that Simpson, it emerged at the trial, had undertaken courses at a Bible Training College of which my father was principal administrator.)

Around Easter the following year, the action moves to Craig Youth Hostel, on the coast north of Diabaig, in a very remote spot about 10 miles from Inveralligin, only reached by an indistinct footpath over moorland. Shan, a Canadian research student colleague, and her friend Bridget, a languages lecturer, went there to survey the property with regard to summer opening, Bridget being the warden. When they arrived, they found a mathematics student from a London College, who pleaded to be allowed to stay, although the hostel was not formally open. He also said that the man who had given him a lift was on his way, having stopped to buy provisions. The girls agreed and the man duly turned up, introducing himself plausibly as 'Ian Fraser', a biologist at the Ben Eige Nature Reserve. When Shan revealed that she worked in the Chemistry Department of Glasgow University, Fraser pleasantly recalled that he had

met several people she might know the previous year at Achmelvich: Iain, Douglas and Harold! (A curious, self-defeating lie about location.) For Shan, the penny immediately dropped and she realised the real identity of 'Fraser' as she had heard our story from the previous year. The two girls went up to their room, and after closing the door, Shan got an amazed Bridget to help her move the wardrobe in front of it, while recounting the whole tale. In the morning, the girls hastened the several miles to the nearest phone at Diabaig and called the police, who said they needed to acquire some paperwork to arrest Fraser/Simpson but meanwhile to "keep him under observation" and "he's not violent". They explained their predicament with some irritation and apprehension, but nothing else could be done. They returned to discover that Fraser/Simpson had disappeared and the mathematics student knew nothing. On their return to Glasgow, we heard the whole story and told the police the details, most of which they already knew. (It is now known that Fraser actually went on to Achmelvich Youth Hostel, where he spent a couple of days then left, coolly stealing an antique chest whose considerable value he had recognised.)

About a month later, I was working in my laboratory when my supervisor came in stroking his neat moustache, a sure sign of perturbation and trouble. "Douglas, there is a Detective Sergeant Brown in my office; he wishes to see you." "Thanks John, I can imagine what that's about." "I dare say you can," he said, continuing to stroke his moustache with increased frequency. DS Brown said, "Have you seen the evening paper?" "No, I haven't been out." He held up the front page which, under banner headlines exclaiming 'A9 Killer Arrest', displayed a recognisable picture of Simpson/Fraser. For a couple of weeks, a double murder had gripped the press, following the discovery of a body in a shallow grave near Newtonmore and a couple of weeks later another, similarly, in a wood near Dumfries. Both had been shot at close range. The number of a car which seemed to be connected with the crimes (it had belonged to one of the victims) had been noticed and traced. The trail eventually led to Simpson's rooms in Manchester, where a huge amount of loot had been found; he worked as an antique dealer and may have stolen to order.

In August 1962, he was tried and convicted, but sentenced to be detained at Her Majesty's pleasure since he was found to be certifiably insane. It transpired that he believed he was God's vice-regent on Earth, with a commission to rid the world of evil men. He worked by pretending to reject morals: if you argued against him you were safe, but if you agreed you were marked down for death. Fortunately, I and my friends plus the mathematics student were either saintly or just argumentative. Piecing things together, we realised that, when he gave the lift to the student and arrived at Craig, he had just killed the man at Newtonmore, and when he left, after a couple of weeks, he went South back to

Manchester and en route killed the second man at Dumfries. So the girls (and the mathematics student who clearly argued) spent a night at lonely Craig under the same roof as the murdering psychopath (complete with gun), said to be non-violent. At the trial, for which I was cited as a witness but not required, a one time climbing friend related how on Liathach, roped to Simpson, he was brought up to the ledge on which Simpson was secured. Simpson untied the rope, smiled and pushed his partner off. He fell about a hundred feet over rough scree and boulders, sustaining severe cuts and bruises. He walked away, resolving never to see Simpson again. Aware of this story, I recalled Simpson's warning to us about the 'Horns of Alligin'. He had added "a girl fell to her death there" and then with a smile I can never quite forget, a mixture of pride and triumph, he went on "I was the one that found the body." I sometimes wonder about that.

There is a solemn and dramatically violent ending, which also had a moral dimension. Simpson was first confined again at Carstairs, and then for a long period at Craig Dunain, Inverness, where he took a distinguished Open University degree and learned to construct excellent violins. He was then transferred again back to Carstairs which contained some extremely violent inmates. Two psychopaths managed to obtain axes and broke out, but were confronted by the local policeman whom they attacked. Fraser/Simpson, hearing the cries, rushed to the assistance of the constable, but with him was also hideously done to death, his heroic and courageous defence of morality to no avail. This incident, with its characteristics of a classical Greek tragedy, took place some twenty years after the trial.

Climbing in Torridon has never seemed the same since, even after forty years. But on my first return, only five years after these events, I was back in the same hostel having resolved to do the round of Ben Eighe and visit the great Corrie Mhic Fhearchair with its triple buttresses. I had returned and was alone in the hostel when a walker arrived out of the dark. He was about my own age and not communicative. I was extremely disturbed and must have seemed very strange, I later realised. On being interrogated, I can put it no less, he claimed to be an RAF officer who had been doing a long walking trip and was heading for Kyle where he would meet friends. He planned to walk over the Coulin pass and, at Achnashellach, get the train to Kyle. All this was as innocuous as it could be; I had done a similar trip myself, but I was still deeply suspicious. I had a bad and vigilant night but in the morning, which eventually came without incident, we both caught the local bus and, to my astonishment, the chap got off the bus at the Coulin Pass road end.

Funny the people you meet in the hills. I still speculate about the girl who fell from the 'Horns'.

Inverey and the Duffs

Graham Ewen

When James Duff, the 2nd Earl of Fife, purchased the Inverey Estate from Alexander Farquharson of Inverey in 1786, he then owned almost the entire catchment area of the Dee west of Braemar, apart from a small area around Allanmore and a somewhat larger area of the upper Quoich, both parts of the Invercauld Estate. He had of course already been feu superior of all this area, the superiority having been bought by his father, then Lord Braco, in 1735. The following table shows the succession of the family.

1. William Duff	Lord Braco	1735	
	1 st Earl of Fife	1759 - 1763	
2. James Duff	2 nd Earl of Fife	1763 - 1809	2 nd son of 1
3. Alexander Duff	3 rd Earl of Fife	1809 - 1811	3 rd son of 1
4. James Duff	4 th Earl of Fife	1811 - 1857	eldest son of 3
5. James Duff	5 th Earl of Fife	1857 - 1879	nephew of 4
6. Alexander Duff	6 th Earl of Fife	1879	eldest son of 5
	1 st Duke of Fife	1889 - 1912	
7. Princess Alexandra	Duchess of Fife	1912 - 1959	daughter of 6
8. James Carnegie	3 rd Duke of Fife	1959	nephew of 7

The 6th Earl married Princess Louise, eldest daughter of King Edward VII, in 1889. Shortly afterwards he was created the 1st Duke of Fife. Edward VII later decreed that his two daughters, Alexandra and Maud, were to be Royal Princesses. This explains the Royal connection in number 7.

After the purchase of the estate, the 2nd Earl lost no time in trying to tighten up on the poaching, which he saw as being a constant problem. All the tenants of Inverey Estate were summoned to attend what was called a judicial rental at Mar Lodge. The proceedings were to establish exactly what each tenant paid in rent, how long their tack (lease) had to run, what their grazing rights were, and what their obligations were in terms of services to the landlord. They were overseen by William Rose of Balival, one of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace of the County of Aberdeen, and also the Earl's principal factor. In addition to the above matters, all the tenants were required to make the following oath of fidelity obliging them to their true obedience of the game laws:

"I (name of person) do solemnly promise and swear that I will not directly or indirectly by myself or by my allowance or authority rise or carry a gun or other weapon for hunting of deer, roe, muir fowl, black game or other game, hare, pigeon or partridge, and that I shall

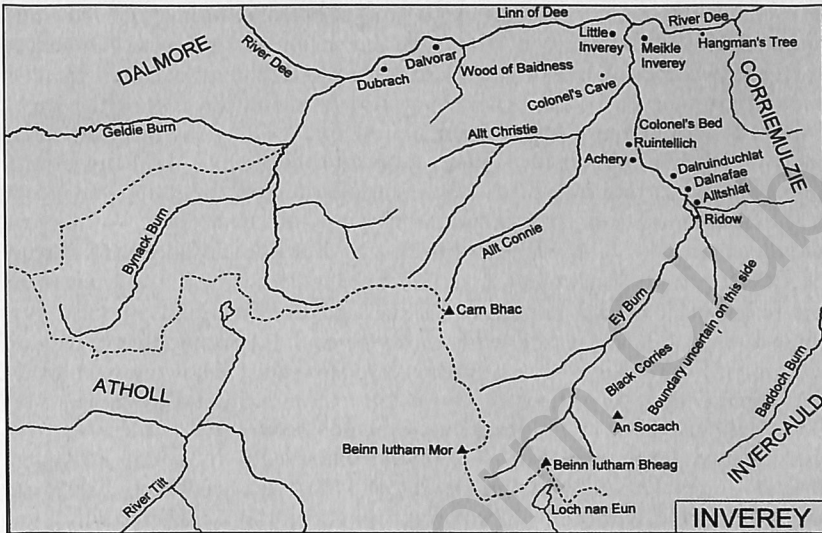
not by myself or by my family or neighbours act in any respect to my knowledge contrary to this my affirmation but give information of the same to the heritor or his servants, nor will I receive, purchase, buy or receipt or sell or dispose of any deer or roe, skins or horns of the same species without informing as above to the utmost of my powers without fear or favour. So help me God.”

Despite this effort a certain amount of poaching still continued. James Stuart, the local factor, mentions the problem at regular intervals in his correspondence with the Earl of Fife. In one letter, dated February 1799, he mentioned that he had searched the houses in Inverey for guns, and had found one in the house belonging to Finlay McIntosh. On examination, he writes, “that the gun did not appear to have been used recently”, but nevertheless, as McIntosh had been suspected of poaching on a previous occasion, he was summoned to remove from his holding. Seems fairly rough justice!

The other matter in which the 2nd Earl was interested was the improvement of agriculture in the area. A large-scale plan of Inverey was drawn in 1787, showing how this was to be carried out, by doing away with the old system of run-rig farming and rearranging the available ground in consolidated units. This did not happen immediately, but in 1799 all the tenants of Meikle Inverey were summoned to remove for the reorganisation to take place. The rental list for 1803 shows an entirely new set of tenants in place. The number of tenancies had been reduced from eleven to eight. No date has been found in the estate records for the similar reorganisation in Little Inverey, but this might have taken place a year or two later, because in the 1803 rental list the tenants here were also completely different from previously. There were, however, eleven new tenants compared with eight previously. The explanation for this may lie in an expansion of the farmed land into the area known as Moor of Inverey. There is some correspondence about ploughing, manuring, enclosing and removal of stones from this area in 1795-96.

Despite this reorganisation the tenants continued the system of transhumance farming which had been in existence before, with the cattle being taken to summer shielings, a practice that continued without interruption until the 1830s.

There were two other farming communities on the Inverey estate. The first of these was in middle Glen Ey, but this one was adequately covered in my article on Glen Ey (*Cairngorm Club Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 103) so I will not repeat it here. The other was in Glendee where there were three holdings, two at Dalvorar and one at Dubrach. In 1786 the tenants at Dalvorar were Donald McKenzie and James MacGregor, and at Dubrach, Peter Grant. By 1803 all these holdings had been taken over by a Charles McHardy, who also rented the lands of Baynock and Corryvron.



Baynock was the catchment area of the Bynack Burn and Corryvron was the area of hills to the east of the Geldie between White Bridge and Bynack. There followed in 1809 an Alexander McHardy, and then another Charles McHardy in 1816. In 1817 Charles McHardy was reduced to having Dalvorar and Dubrach, while Baynock and Corryvron had been taken over by a William Gordon. I think that the McHardys and William Gordon were sheep graziers.

Agriculture in this area must have provided a very precarious existence. Most of the tenants' holdings were quite small, and the climate would seem to have been much colder than it is today. There are frequent references in the factor's letters to the severity of the weather. For example in a letter dated 13th April 1793, he mentions that snow was still lying on Inverey, and no ploughing or sowing had yet been done. The tenants had lost about one third of their sheep and a great many cattle. Since most of the arable land was on the flood plain of the Dee, flooding was also a common problem, causing damage to crops and sometimes livestock. There were particularly severe floods in 1768 and in 1799, but no one was prepared for what happened in 1829.

On the 3rd August, following a morning of heavy showers, the wind and rain increased during the afternoon until by 5 p.m. it was heavier than anyone could remember. In the early evening there was a spectacular thunder and lightning storm, which ceased by 7 p.m., but the rain continued unabated into the night. By 7 p.m. the water in the rivers was beginning to run very high and, by measurements taken at six different

places in the Braemar area by a Dr Robertson of Crathie, the Dee rose about fifteen or sixteen feet. Six of the houses in Inverey were submerged by the flood, and the inhabitants were forced to flee to an elevated piece of ground, by then an island, where they had to spend the rest of the night, and were not rescued until between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m. the next day when the water started to subside. The wooden bridge across the Linn of Dee was entirely carried away. At Dalvorar, the tenant, his wife and seven children escaped from their house by wading and made their way to seek shelter in Inverey. The whole of his crop and 11 acres of arable land were destroyed. Hugh McDougall, a gamekeeper, whose house was situated on the peninsula between the River Geldie and the Water of Bynack, was trapped in his house along with his wife and family, with no way of escaping. Fortunately they all managed to survive. There is no record of the damage to crops in Inverey, but it must have been considerable. This flood has since been called the Muckle Spate because it was the worst one that anyone could remember. Following this event, stone bulwarks were erected along the banks of the Dee in 1834. A less substantial bulwark was built at the west end of Dalvorar Haugh in 1837, and in 1845 stone bulwarks were built along parts of the Water of Ey, where it crosses the flood plain of the Dee.

When James Duff, the 4th Earl succeeded to the title in 1811, the estates must have been in some financial difficulties because he did not get control of all the estates which the family owned. A trusteeship was set up to control the whole area north of the Dee, which had originally been the estates of Dalmore and Allanaquoich. The 4th Earl was left in control of the Inverey Estate along with Corriemulzie and Auchindryne. When the trustees decided, in 1830, to let out Mar Lodge and the shootings on the area they controlled, the 4th Earl was obviously going to have to pursue his own shooting interests elsewhere. This was the main reason that the Inverey estate was converted from a largely agricultural economy to that of a shooting estate, although the process was to be a gradual one.

The Earl gradually assumed control of areas which had previously been let out. First of all, William Gordon lost the lease of Baynock and Corryvron in 1830. Charles McHardy's lease of Dalvorar and Dubrach was terminated by 1834. In 1836 the tenants of Little Inverey had lost their grazing rights in the Glen of Christie, and in 1839 the tenants of Meikle Inverey lost theirs in the Glen of Connie. Their rentals were reduced by one third in compensation for this loss. When in 1843-44 all the tenants in middle Glen Ey were cleared out, this left the small area immediately around the village of Inverey as the only area on the estate still in agricultural use. The remainder was all deer forest.

The next twenty years or so saw a flurry of building activity to provide the infrastructure required on a shooting estate. Cottages were built at Altanour and Bynack in 1838, and work began to build a road up

Glen Ey to connect Altanour with Inverey. The road to Bynack of course was mostly in what used to be Dalmore Estate, and only entered the Inverey Estate after fording the Geldie and Bynack Burns. Trees were planted around both cottages to provide some shelter. A stable and byre were built at Bynack in 1840. In 1841 a bridle road was constructed through the Glen of Christie. It was connected to the Glen Ey road by a footbridge. This bridge became known as Ricardo's Bridge, after John Lewis Ricardo of an old Jewish family, who married Catherine Duff, a daughter of General Sir Alexander Duff (second son of the 3rd Earl). He must have taken a keen interest in the estate as there were also Ricardo Stables and a Ricardo room at New Mar Lodge. In 1844 the cottages at Bynack and Altanour were slated; perhaps we can assume that they were thatched originally. In 1855 a cottage was built in Glen Ey, presumably to house the keeper at Acherrie. In 1868 a deer larder, coach house and dairy were built at Altanour. The shootings on the estate were never let out during the nineteenth century but were kept for the enjoyment of the Earl and his family and guests.

At the time the Earl of Fife acquired the Inverey Estate, it is likely that the inhabitants were all still living in fire houses, i.e. crudely built, one-roomed thatched houses with the fireplace in the middle of the floor, the smoke escaping through a hole in the roof. In 1860, when the first Ordnance Survey was made, the surveyors wrote notes about Inverey. The houses were all still thatched and in indifferent condition, those in Little Inverey being in a much worse state than those in Meikle Inverey. Both the Catholic School and the Assembly School were said to be in good condition, as were Inverey Cottage (The Knock), Bynack and Altanour Shielings. As the years passed the houses were gradually improved, with thatched roofs being replaced by slates or shingles. Some thatched roofs survived into the 1900s. In 1911 the original cottage at Muir, then standing on the south side of the road, was destroyed by fire; presumably sparks from the chimney had set fire to the thatched roof. The present building was a conversion from a barn situated on the other side of the road. By this time the population of Inverey was declining and as houses became empty they were usually demolished, to stop vagrants using them.

On the September Holiday Week-end in 1858 there occurred what might have been the first modern climbing accident on the Estate. A young bank clerk from Aberdeen, by the name of William Roger, had gone for a hill walk in Glen Ey with his older brother George. He slipped and fell into the Falls of Connie and was drowned. At a later date a plaque to his memory was inserted into the rock face on the south side of the falls. This plaque can only be partly seen today, as most of it is obscured by moss and other vegetation. Sadly this is not the only death that has occurred here.

It is not clear when tourism became an important part of the local economy, but the above accident shows that people were visiting the area by the 1850s. By 1900, most of the houses in Inverey were offering accommodation for summer visitors, although of course they were not allowed to do so after the shooting season started.

Although mention of fishing occurs in all the earlier records, it does not seem that it was as important to the local economy as shooting. However, interest was increasing by the latter part of the nineteenth century and in 1894 blasting work commenced at the Linn of Dee, in an effort to ease the passage for salmon. This had no sooner started than there was an outcry all over the country, the operations being characterised as 'vandalism', 'irreparable injury', and 'destruction' etc., so much so that the Duke of Fife immediately ordered the operations to stop. Fortunately the works, so far as they had gone, improved the pass so much that fish were able to ascend with wonderful ease. Similar blasting work took place much later in 1950 to improve access for fish in the vicinity of the Colonel's Bed, apparently without any protest.

In 1897 a suspension bridge was erected across the Dee at the west end of Mar Lodge Haugh. This was to provide access to an extension of the golf course, which then existed on the ground in front of Mar Lodge. Four years later the estate took over 14 acres of Miss Gruer's holding at Craigview for further extensions to the golf course; the Duchess of Fife was very keen on golf. This would have been very much a private bridge, and it is recorded that in 1897 a Charles Lamont was paid 1/- per day for 100 days as a watcher at the suspension bridge.

The well at the roadside near the Catholic School is now enclosed with stone slabs and the Gaelic words Tobar Mhoire are cut into the slab behind the well. This work was carried out in 1902, without the knowledge of the local estate manager. He thought that the Roman Catholic Church had something to do with it, as in English Tobar Mhoire means St Mary's Well.

In 1903, estimates were obtained by the estate for providing a water supply to the nine houses in Meikle Inverey. There was also to be a branch to Inverey Cottage (The Knock). The water was to be obtained from a source on the hill above the Bridge over the Ey, and carried over the Ey in a wooden box shaped structure. The supply was to stand-pipes outside and on no account were the tenants to extend this into their houses. It was probably constructed during 1904, as rentals were increased in 1905. However a year later the Duke of Fife decided to reduce the rentals to 5% of what they had been, in order to bring the holdings outside the scope of the Fixity of Tenure Act, although this did not actually become law until 1911. The tenants of Little Inverey also had their rents similarly reduced at this time.

During the First World War the area was assessed to determine how many sheep the estate might be able to carry. Apparently by this time the tenants of Inverey had been allowed to graze their sheep in Glen Ey, and the estate was unwilling to see the number of sheep increased. However at the beginning of 1918 the Government ordered that the number of sheep were to be increased by around 2,700. This move went ahead and the order was not rescinded when the war ended.

In 1920 the Gallows Tree fell down and after some discussion about the matter the Duchess of Fife ordered that it should be re-erected at approximately the same site. It stands to this day now in a very decrepit state held up by four wire stays (see the *Cairngorm Club Journal*, no.107, p. 122).

In 1924 a Mr. Stanley Bond took on the rental of the shooting and fishing on the Glen Ey beat. The terms of the lease made it clear, however, that should the Duchess of Fife wish to go fishing in Glen Ey, she would be free to do so. It was also made clear that she was to be left in peace when fishing there. Although called the Glen Ey beat, the area rented was much larger and may have included the whole estate, apart from populated areas, and may even have extended into what had been the neighbouring estate of Corriemulzie. Mr. Bond was obviously a wealthy man, and he also rented Braemar Castle during the season, which he described as a good place to entertain guests, much better than staying in a local hotel. He continued as the tenant until the end of the 1939 season when he gave it up. Although Mr. Bond obviously thoroughly enjoyed Glen Ey, there were a number of things that he was unhappy about. The presence of sheep in the Glen annoyed him, although he understood the estate could do nothing about that. He had a Ford car, which he used in the glen, but at the beginning of the lease the road was very bad, and the car could only get as far as the ford which crossed the River Ey a short distance south of Achery. The estate seemed somewhat reluctant to spend much money on the road, but some work was done and attempts were made to improve the ford. It would seem that Mr. Bond became impatient with these efforts and started spending his own money on the road, including the construction of a new bridge to replace the ford. This bridge is situated at least half a mile south of the ford and ever since it was built has been known as 'Bond's Bridge'.

In August 1933, the Deeside Field Club approached the Estate to obtain permission for the erection of a memorial to Johan von Lamont, the noted astronomer, who had been a native of Corriemulzie. A site was agreed in Meikle Inverey, roughly opposite Thistle Cottage, and the memorial was officially unveiled by the Duchess of Fife on September 10th, 1934. John Lamont, as he was first known, received his early education at the Assembly School in Inverey, but at the age of 12 was sent



The Canadian Bridge, around 1950

to a College at Ratisbon in Bavaria, run by a Scottish Order of Benedictines. He eventually became Astronomer Royal of Bavaria.

During the Second World War the largest pine wood on the estate was felled by the Canadian Forestry Corps. This was the wood historically called the Wood of Badness, which occupied the hill opposite Muir Cottage and extended eastwards from there right round the hill into Glen Connie. Ricardo's Bridge was crudely widened at this time to facilitate extraction of timber from the Glen Connie side. The Canadian Forestry Corps built another wooden bridge across the Dee at this time, about a quarter of a mile upstream from Muir, which became a familiar landmark for many years thereafter, until it was seriously damaged by a spate.

It is not known when the first school opened in Inverey, although a school was shown on the 1787 map, more or less in exactly the same place where the house known as the Old Schoolhouse stands today. It therefore seems likely that this school dates back to Farquharson of Inverey's time. The school was probably run by the Church of Scotland and was usually referred to as an Assembly School. Little mention of it appears in the records, except for one entry in 1850, noting that the Assembly School in Inverey had 16 scholars, that almost all the protestant children who could attend did attend during the winter, and that the teacher was Mr. Matheson with a salary of £25 per annum. There was by this time another school in the village. A John Morgan had been trying to run a Catholic School in

Braemar in the early 1800s, but at this time there was still much religious persecution and in 1822 he decided to remove his school to Little Inverey. Attendances at both schools tended to be bad. There were frequent epidemics of infectious diseases and pupils were often kept at home, particularly at harvest time, to help on the farms. In 1910 the school board for Crathie and Braemar, in the hope of improving attendances, decided as an experiment to provide a conveyance to take pupils from Corriemulzie to the two schools in Inverey. It is not known what type of conveyance was involved, but it must have been successful, because it was decided to continue the practice for a further year. In 1917 the Protestant School was closed and the remaining pupils transferred to the nearby Catholic School. By 1928 there were more protestant children at the school than catholic ones, and some of the protestant parents were unhappy that the Catholic Church still had the right to insist on having a catholic appointed as teacher. Perhaps as a result of this, the school was taken over by the Aberdeenshire Education Authority in 1930 and run thereafter as a normal public school. The number of pupils at the school was described as being quite large and a number of improvements were carried out. A partition was removed to enlarge the classroom, a new floor was laid and a porch was added to provide cloakroom accommodation. The coal cellar was converted into a closet for girls. There was no mention of similar facilities for boys. Over the years the school roll declined, however, particularly from 1941 onwards, and the school closed altogether in 1947.

When the Duchess of Fife died in 1959 her own son having predeceased her, her title passed to James Carnegie, her sister's son, who became the 3rd Duke of Fife. The estate, however, passed to Captain Ramsay, a nephew by marriage. Thus ended the association of Inverey with the Duffs.

Most of the information on which this article is based derives from the Duff House Papers, which are held in the Special Libraries and Archives of the University of Aberdeen, and also from some private papers kindly lent to me by Captain Nicolson.

Sunset from Brimmond Hill

I love the turning of the year
The slow slide of the sun along the horizon.

Sleepy December, long shadows at noon,
On Brimmond Hill, the tinsel of frost.
Sunset by half past three,
In the deep south, a molten ball slipping
Behind the Hill of Wirren.

Equinox, the far high hills still white,
But daffodils by the door.
And the sun curling through the sky
To drop in fire and gold, west
Beyond the solitary cone of Morven.

Midsummer, green days and white nights,
The sun flirting with the horizon,
Dawdling till past ten,
North of the lion crouch of Bennachie.

And then to turn again,
The long journey south begun,
Stepping back along the edge of the sky.

Past Ben Rinnes, the Buck,
Through the rusts of autumn,
The long line of the Hill of Fare,
Mount Keen, Mount Battock,
Clachnaben.

To begin again,
North with the hope of the New Year.

Lydia Thomson

Spain's Highest Mountains

Brian Davey

Perhaps I was inattentive to my geography teacher at school, maybe I missed that particular lesson, perhaps I *was* present but, as some of my so-called friends assert, senile dementia has already set in. Whatever the reason, I was always under the impression that the highest mountains in Spain were situated in the north of the country, somewhere in the Pyrenees. Hence it came as a bit of a surprise to learn that the highest range of mountains in the whole of the Iberian Peninsula lies in the south of the country, and is the Sierra Nevada. These are, according to the translation, the range of mountains of the Sun, Air and Snow. Yes, *Snow*, for these mountains despite their low latitude are covered in snow for half the year and contain Europe's southernmost ski resort, with 45 ski-runs of varying difficulty, situated between heights of 2,000m and 3,300m. At present there are 19 ski-lifts in place on the north-west side of the mountain range, served by Europe's highest road, from the once ancient and now modern city of Granada only 25km away.

However to escape from the skiing development and to explore and best experience these mountains, I would recommend approaching them from the Alpujarras, the southern foothills, with their delightful assortment of small whitewashed villages, mainly situated above 1,000m, and built into the steep, southern and western sides of the valleys or gorges which drain the high mountains towering above them. The Moors originally established the villages after the Christians expelled them from Granada and Seville during the *Reconquista*, the re-conquest of Spain from the Arabs in the late 15th century. Today, evidence of the Moorish occupation of this country can be still seen in a few ruined castles and mosques. A more striking memorial may be the amazing network of *acequias* or irrigation canals. These run almost parallel with the land contours, watering the terraced fields of vegetables, vines and orchards. Some historians give credit for this irrigation system to an earlier occupation by the Romans some 2000 years ago, but whoever invented it bequeathed a relatively green and productive landscape to future inhabitants. Despite the fact that often in summer it does not rain for at least four months, water from mountain springs pours down the hillsides into this ingenious system in a continuous stream of crystal-clear water.

The *pueblos* or villages of the Alpujarras have square, flat-roofed, whitewashed houses, each connected one to another like a honeycomb. The winding narrow streets, obviously designed for an age before the motor car, are adorned with colourful gardens of hanging pot plants. In spite of their steep gradients, they are an absolute delight to walk through.

Although the villages are relatively close to each other as the crow flies, there is plenty of wild country in between. They are connected by a multitude of overgrown former mule tracks, lined by some of the most productive brambles, offering some of the biggest and sweetest blackberries I have ever met. But there is a price for this luscious fruit, since the brambles have some of the sharpest and longest thorns ever seen and sampled. Therefore, if for no other good reason, a hiking pole is an essential piece of equipment. Perhaps in future years as this area becomes better known and the tourist potential more fully exploited, these old tracks will be restored to their former importance. In themselves they provide the basis for an excellent series of hiking trails, and a happy holiday could be spent exploring them and their charming villages, and sampling the delights of the local food and *vino*, without ever leaving the valleys to venture into the high sierra.

However, for me the goal of my first week's holiday in this area was to scale the three highest mountains of the Sierra Nevada range, including mainland Spain's highest metric Munro, Mulhacen at 3,482m (11,421ft), the height varying by about 5 metres depending on which ordinance map you believe. The other two mountains I had in my sights were Veleta at 3,398m, and Alcazaba at 3,366m. Veleta is the mountain whose northern slopes have attracted all the ski development. Visible from Granada as well as from my holiday village of Bubion, it is appropriately translated from Spanish as the Weather-Cock. There's no doubt about the approach of winter, when glancing up at its freshly covered white slopes.

My base was the pretty village of Bubion, hanging on the sunny east side of the deep Poqueira Gorge, which drains most of the rain and melting snow from the south facing slopes of Mulhacen and Veleta. A short one-km uphill walk takes you to the neighbouring village of Capileira. From here a winding zigzag road leads to the boundary of the recently established (1999) National and Natural Park of the Sierra Nevada. The admirable objectives in the establishment of this park were the protection and maintenance of the natural environment, with reference to the necessary social and economic development of its people, and the encouragement of its use for recreational and educational purposes. These objectives have limited access for vehicular traffic to the highest parts of the Sierra Nevada, except in very special circumstances. However, to ease problems of access for the walker and climber, a park minibus will transport you, for a very modest fare, from the vehicle control gate of Hoya del Portillo at 2,160m to Alto del Chorrillo at 2,727m. This has the advantage of taking you quickly up six kilometres of winding Z-bends along the Loma de Piedra Blanca (the Ridge of White Stone), through rather uninteresting pine forest, and also gives marvellous views to the tiny white villages in the valley below, and the faint outline of the Moroccan

Rif Mountains in northern Africa, far across the blue Mediterranean to the south.

On the August day which I had chosen for my first expedition up Mulhacen and Alcazaba, the other thing I observed in the excellent visibility of the clear high-mountain air were the *virga*, trails of precipitation falling from the overcast layer of altostratus cloud covering the sky above, but not reaching the ground. Given the long-term records of zero days of rain during August in the Costa del Sol, and my limited Spanish, I had rather contemptuously neglected to obtain a weather forecast. I should have known better, and on reading the sky above I didn't like what I could see. The high winds buffeting the park minibus were not a good sign either. Stepping out at Alto del Chorrillo, the wind was near gale-force and this soon increased to severe gale-force as I gained height, almost taking me off my feet in the frequent gusts. The mountains were still clear of cloud and almost free of snow save for what the Westhill Walkers' current Chairman, Keith Masson, calls a little Indian snow (Apache here, Apache there).

Anyhow, initially the ambient temperature was not too low, probably about 10°C, not allowing for wind chill. At this stage I was still dressed in shorts and tee-shirt, as appropriate for the high temperatures of the valley below. The route I had chosen to climb my two mountains was based on the careful study of a 1:40,000 Mapa Excursionista Turistico, Sierra Nevada La Alpujarra, obtained by post from Stanfords, 12 Long Acre, London WC2. Although fairly detailed, some of the features this map does not show are cliffs, crags and scree. On discussing this point on the minibus with a Park Guide, who was taking a group of ill-equipped British visitors up the tourist track of Mulhacen, he suggested I climb Alcazaba first, before tackling the 116m higher Mulhacen. "Porque?" (Why?) I was assuming that wind direction and strength might have been the reason for this advice. "No," he replied in his pretty good English, "it might be an easier descent to the Col between the two mountains." This led me to the immediate suspicion, later confirmed, that my map might be a wee bit misleading. The 20m non-touching contours indicated a nice, uniform 1.75km distance for the descent and re-ascent of 469m of height between the two peaks. "Is a rope needed?" I enquired. "No, but you will certainly need two hands."

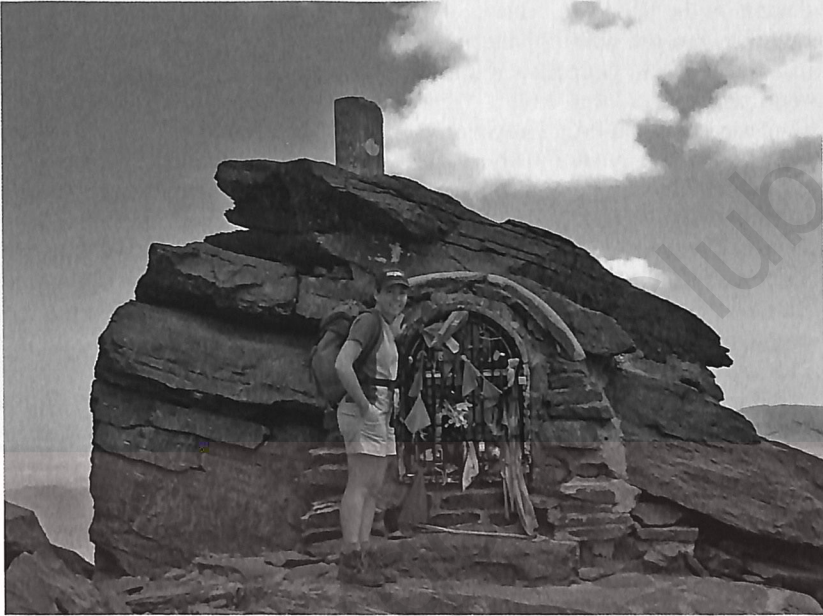
As it turned out three or four hands would have been handy, and the company of someone with a rope would have been doubly reassuring. Anyhow, with the very strong south-south-westerly wind in my back, I set off alone and soon found my first map feature, *Laguna Del Penon Negro* (or Dubh Lochan translated into Gaelic). It was here that I was delighted to see one of the fairly rare wild ibex, a species of mountain goats I had read about. It was having a quiet drink before I disturbed it, then timidly

disappeared into the crags above. Until recently these goats were regarded as fair and prized game by local trophy hunters.

Another 2km of rough walking took me to my next easily identifiable map feature, *Canada de las Siete Lagunas*, the Glen of the Seven Lochs. From the route I was taking I couldn't see them all, perhaps some evaporate completely during the long dry summer months. But I did walk past the largest with its easily remembered (shades of car) name, *Laguna Hondero*. Near this collection of lakes, I was soon to experience the full brunt of the fierce wind as I struggled up *Loma Culo De Perro*, amusingly translated as the ridge of the dog's backside. Around the 3,000m contour a large gust of wind blew me over. With just over 300m of ascent before me, and three minor 3,000m plus peaks to transverse before La Alcazaba, I was feeling a little apprehensive about whether I would achieve my goal or not. I was also beginning to feel a little chilled, and the first drops of rain were just reaching the ground. However by dropping down to the more sheltered east-facing leeward side of the ridge, I was able to have a quick change into my wind and waterproof mountain gear, wisely carried in my rucksack. This was then followed by a small snack, while pondering the reassuring thought that I had experienced a lot worse in the Scottish hills in my time. Also the rain did not amount to much and was evaporating almost as fast as it fell. So I was soon confidently able to proceed onward and upward.

The terrain, not unlike the Skye Cuillin, was very rocky with little or no vegetation. Nevertheless despite the lack of a path, navigation was easy since the peaks were still clear of any cloud. Having reached my first goal of La Alcazaba a little breathless (because of the thin atmosphere rather than my level of fitness, I would claim), a more substantial meal, consumed at leisure among the sheltered rocks below the summit cairn, quickly recharged my energy tanks. I was soon off again heading for Mulhacen, Spain's highest point, a mere 116m above me, but separated from me by a steep rocky col.

The pathless descent to this connecting col was not easy. Intimidating cliffs and crags blocked my route, but I somehow managed to find a way down by traversing along a series of fearfully exposed ledges, never quite knowing if I would reach the bottom or have to re-ascend to try another route. Thankfully I did get there safely, all the while strongly pumping adrenaline. Mulhacen was now towering above me at the top of a jumble of rocky crags and very loose scree. Again there was no path, but I was able to pick a suitable route, involving some fairly difficult scrambling while setting off the occasional mini-landslide on the screes, which eventually led me triumphantly to the summit. Nearby were a few roofless ruined stone shelters, also a large fallen iron cross, no doubt the victim of the hurricane-force winds likely at this height, or a massive bolt of lightning. Here I met a young Spanish couple who had climbed the



The Summit of Mulhacén

mountain from the west, the first people I had encountered since leaving the park minibus that morning. After taking a few photographs, a rapid 43-minute 5km descent had me back at Alto del Chorrillo with just 2 minutes to spare before catching the 5 p.m. minibus back to the Hoya del Portillo. In the hotel swimming pool about an hour later, it was great to have a quiet swim while reflecting on the day's adventure and gazing upward at my next target, Veleta, exactly 2,000m above.

The ascent of Veleta (3,398m) from the village of Bubion is quite straightforward, since there is a good road and land rover track which goes almost to the top. On this 22km expedition a fellow hotel guest from County Durham joined me, and although we didn't stick strictly to the track we didn't encounter any serious difficulty, apart from laboured breathing in the thin air. On this day there was very little cloud, but we were well equipped with hats, plenty of water and high-factor sun-tan cream. Interesting stops en route were two purpose-built refuges, Refugio de la Caldera at 3,050m sited near the beautiful mountain lake of Laguna de la Caldera (although the lake looked inviting it was just a little too chilly for a swim), and Refugio La Carihuela, sited just one km below Veleta at 3,229m. The refuges were very well designed, constructed to be almost vandal-proof and well insulated with a thick layer of natural stone over their Nissen-hut, corrugated steel frame, and a stout door and double-

glazing on the windows. Inside, two pine-wood platform beds, one above the other, ran the width of the tunnel-like shelter to provide the sleeping area for about 30 people, while a stone base overlaid by a thick layer of wood served as a large table. Adjacent benches of a similar construction were used for seating. However there was no fireplace or chimney to tempt a freezing visitor to burn the wood of the structure for heat, as regrettably happens in some of our Scottish mountain bothies. Despite their admirable design and construction, the one feature these bothies did not possess was any sort of toilet facilities. In the rocky terrain, the provision of a spade was of little use, and the absence of any vegetation made matters worse. Nevertheless, these shelters could perhaps, some day in the distant future, be the prototype for bothy construction in the National Parks of Scotland.

Another interesting find was a meteorological rain gauge. I didn't recognise it at first, due to its height above the ground, but on reflection I soon realised that it was constructed for a location with heavy and deep snow cover for much of the year, and that our present sunny and fairly warm environment was not typical. Views from the top of Veleta were superb, with the city of Granada spread out in the plains 25km to the north-west. To the east and north-east were the other high peaks of the Sierra Nevada including Mulhacen and Alcazaba. To the south far below in the Poqueira gorge we could just make out the village of Bubion 12km away, though to have recognised our hotel, not to mention its pleasant cool swimming pool, would have been impossible even with a good pair of binoculars. Nevertheless later that evening it was a great feeling as I chilled out in that very pool looking up at Veleta and musing to myself, "*Been there, done that, what a great day!*"

El Teide

If you have read this far, I must confess to having misled you slightly, for the Sierra Nevada does not after all contain the highest mountain in Spain, but only in the Iberian peninsula. In fact Spain's true highest mountain lies in the middle of the Atlantic, on the island of Tenerife, and is El Teide, at 3,714m 236m higher than Mulhacen.

One of the amazing wonders of our modern world is our ability to walk aboard that thin, long, cylindrical piece of metal we call an aeroplane, on a bitterly cold, grey, January day at Dyce. Then after being comfortably transported southwards for nearly 2,000 miles at great speed, we re-emerge some four hours later at the foot of this giant peak, into the year-round warmth of the Canary Isles. Only a century ago such a scenario would have seemed impossible, except perhaps by magic.

To reach the summit crater of the volcano of El Teide is not difficult, at least in theory. A cable-railway, the *teleferico*, takes you from a point

on the mountain road at 2,356m, up the steeper part of the mountain to La Rambla at 3,555m, an altitude change of just under 1,200m in only eight minutes. Here on a clear day an overpriced café gives magnificent views over the southern half of Tenerife. Peeking up from the surrounding Atlantic Ocean are the adjacent islands of La Gomera and El Hierro to the southwest, also Gran Canaria to the southeast. A mere 163m ascent up a steep path from this point is all that is needed to bag Pico Del Teide. But as you might have guessed, it's not that simple. El Teide, being an almost extinct volcano, still emits sulphurous fumes and puffs of steam from what are technically called fumaroles. So from La Rambla access is restricted to protect the summit's fragile ecosystem, and I suppose the gullible general public. Joe and Josephine Public troop out at the top of the *teleferico* in attire suitable for the beach at Los Americas around 11,500ft and 20°C warmer below. Many people just do not realise that temperature generally falls with height gained, wind speed increases the wind chill factor and the air becomes rarefied. Or perhaps they do not bother to read the multilingual warnings at the bottom of the *teleferico*. But then there are people at the top of Ben Nevis in tee-shirts and flip-flops. Here on El Teide, smugly snug in my full mountain gear, I observed a great array of beautiful goose pimples on certain scantily-clad females anxiously awaiting the next cable-car back down the mountain. Please don't accuse me of being sexist at this point, but for some reason I just didn't notice the scantily-dressed men.

Anyway, once suitably kitted out, the real difficulty from here is the uniformed guardians of the mountain who spring up from nowhere and block further ascent unless you can produce a permit, plus passport or ID. To acquire a permit involves a bureaucratic nightmare. Needless to say, for me that's not what holidays are all about. But for future reference, and for those of you with more time and patience than myself, after some research I did discover how to obtain a permit. First get yourself to the Island's capital of Santa Cruz de Tenerife, then find the office of the Parque Nacional Del Teide, Servicio de Uso Publico, on the 4th floor of 5 Calle Emilio Calzadilla between the hours of 9 a.m. and 2 p.m., Monday to Friday. Take along a photocopy of the personal details pages of your passport or ID and you will be issued with a free permit. This specifies the date and the 2-hour time slot during which you are allowed to get beyond the barriers on the path at the top of the cable car. And remember to take along your passport or ID when you actually do the walk. Apparently the permit scheme allows only 50 people at the summit during any 2-hour time slot, only a very small proportion of the 3.25 million people who visit the Parque Nacional Del Teide each year.

But as I've already suggested, the hassle involved in climbing those final 163m is probably not worthwhile. A much better day in Tenerife can be spent at the slightly lower altitude of around 2,000m, walking across

the crater of what used to be a much larger volcano than El Teide. Yes, countless million years ago before mankind had been invented, when the El Teide volcano wasn't even a twinkle in its parent's eyes, a much larger volcano existed at this very place. Now the gigantic sunken crater of that volcano, considered to be one of the largest on earth, forms a relatively flat area, which is a mixture of sand and rock known as Las Canadas. In the clear, thin, unpolluted atmosphere which this altitude offers, Las Canadas provide a delightful 15km walk, through an extraordinary weird and colourful lunar landscape. Planet of the Apes was filmed here and there really is no other place on earth like it that I've seen. The walk starts at the Visitor Centre of El Portillo Alto. In the guidebooks it is given the category of 'strenuous', not so much for its length, but for the noticeable lack of oxygen at this height. Before you begin, I would recommend viewing the free half-hour film in the Visitor Centre, describing the amazing geological events that brought about today's landscape. The walk also provides magnificent vistas of El Teide, a few kilometres to the north, at almost every turn of a very good landrover track.

Thus on a calm and cloudless January day we parked our hire car at the Parador de Canadas del Teide, the location of the finish point of our walk. At this state-run hotel we sampled the local pastry and washed it down with a welcome mid-morning coffee. We then caught the once-daily bus running from the resorts on the southern part of the Island to the Visitor Centre at El Portillo where our walk began, which meant that we were not dependent on catching the one and only 4 p.m. bus back to our vehicle. Thus we could proceed at a leisurely pace and enjoy our strange environment. The vegetation was very sparse, as in a desert region, but we did see a few unusual plants among the even more bizarre rock formations. We met a charming young German lawyer along the way, who had just descended from Guajara a 2,715m peak along the rim of the old crater, having taken a day-off from her temporary job at a Puerto de la Cruz law firm. For us the ascent of this peak, and a future walk along the outer rim of the old crater, will be reserved for another day.

When we arrived back at the Parador, the bus had already left, proving the wisdom of our strategy. After changing out of sweaty boots and clothes, our hired car had an easy task transporting us 2,211m downhill, through magnificent pinewoods to our resort hotel at Playa de Fanabe. Here, over evening sundowners, we could relax and reflect on another very enjoyable walking expedition which can be recommended to all Club members who in the depth of a cold Scottish winter may somehow dream themselves to that wonderful Spanish Canary Island of Tenerife.

Climbing with Jeff Knowles

James Hirst

Jeff Knowles, Cairngorm Club member and enthusiastic climber, tragically died on Monday 12th December 2005, whilst out running. He was just a few weeks short of his 40th birthday. Jeff is survived by his wife Lynnette, his son Jamie, father Andy and sister Claire.

Jeff was a local Aberdeenshire lad and was employed in the oil and gas industry. He had been a member of the Cairngorm Club since 2001, and was a regular face at the Tuesday night climbing sessions as well as climbing at weekends, when time and family commitments allowed. In 2002 Jeff married Lynnette, his teenage sweetheart, and in 2004 he became a proud father when his son Jamie was born. In addition to climbing, Jeff was also a keen runner, cyclist, skier, snowboarder and hill walker. In general, Jeff loved outdoor pursuits.

My lasting memories of Jeff will be the friendship and banter that he, Andy and I shared whilst climbing and also Jeff's 'can do' attitude. This did result in some epic encounters, but also in many fantastic and enjoyable routes. Please excuse me the indulgence of recounting some of my memories of climbing with Jeff.

2001

Jeff and I joined the Cairngorm Club around the same time (April 2001). On the evening I first met Jeff, we were both trying to find the meet on the regular Club Tuesday night. After about thirty minutes of searching in vain at Souter Head, I saw Jeff coming in the other direction and wondered if he knew where the meet was. To be honest, he looked a bit of a poser as he was wearing wrap-around shades at the time. He too was looking for the Club and similarly could not find them. So instead of wasting any more time we decided to climb together and thus our climbing partnership began.

I quickly realised that my first impressions of Jeff were completely wrong. Far from being a poser, Jeff was a down-to-earth guy who was really easy to get on with. The first few times we climbed together were interesting, to say the least. Some of Jeff's belay techniques were unconventional, although my biggest worry was his rope, which was particularly worn about five metres from one end. Jeff repeatedly assured me that seeing the core through the sheath was not a problem. Eventually Duncan and Dave Shaw confirmed my concerns. A pair of scissors later and Jeff became the proud owner of a slightly shorter (42m instead of the conventional 50m) but slightly safer rope. (Jeff's 'dodgy rope' remained

an in-joke between us and Andy, even up to the last conversation I had with him).

The only records I have of climbs completed in 2001 are: Quartz Deviant at Long Slough (10m S, with 'lead – scary' written against it in my guidebook!) and Scylla at Overhanging Gulley, Souter Head (8m, V Diff, 'Jeff's bogey climb #1').

2002

2002 saw us try our first multi-pitch climbs, but not before an epic or two on the Aberdeenshire sea cliffs. Those that knew Jeff will be fully aware of his positive approach to life in general and climbing in particular. Thus egged on by each other, we quite often ended up climbing, even when common sense (and our lack of ability) said go home. One such time was at Fulmar Wall. It had been raining all day, and Jeff and I were the only two to turn up to the Club meet that night. Buoyed on by clearing skies we did a few V Diffs and probably should have left it at that. Instead we decided to get in the infamous 'one last climb'. Over an hour later with the night drawing in and the drizzle making Fulmar Wall resemble an ice rink, we were still trying to get up Oh Well (20m, HS). It was the first of the many abseil retreats and gear retrievals that make climbing so much fun.

Jeff married Lynnette in the summer of 2002. The build-up to the big event being recorded by three climbs we nicknamed at Dry Covie – the one by Jeff was Usher's Anger (6m, V Diff, JK Lead 28/05/02), so named because of the hassle Jeff was experiencing at that time with one of his wedding ushers.

Our first multi-pitch of the year was on Skye. We had hired a guide and turned up early on Saturday morning, raring to go. Little did we know that our guide (Jerry) was also in the Cuillin mountain rescue team and as we arrived a rescue was just under way. We seemed to wait for ages, Jeff getting distinctly peeved by the inaction of the mountain rescue team, who seemed to be putting more effort into brewing up than finding the missing walker. Fortunately for us, the missing walker did turn up (or did they just run out of tea?) and an afternoon's climbing ensued. Cioch West (215m, S), Arrow route (60m, V Diff) and then onto the Cioch for butties and cakes. A great day out, even after the morning's tea-drinking delays.

We also climbed Eagle Ridge (250m, S) on Lochnagar that year, after at least one unsuccessful attempt (when we only got as far as the bealach at the Meikle Pap before being beaten back by heavy rain). However, we finally made it on the first of September. We had a slight route finding problem at first (I still blame Dave Shaw who soloed the climb and chaperoned us that day), but once we had found our bearings we were away. The crux lead for me was the Sentry Box pitch. A magnificent climb with excellent position and exposure. I still remember

the look of disbelief on Jeff's face as he pulled into the sentry box. From memory he said something like "how did you get here?". A tough, very long but enjoyable day out.

2003

2003 passed in a similar vein to 2002, with both of us steadily progressing through the grades (my favourite of the year being the Pobble at Souter Head, 10m, VS). We still had the odd epic here and there. Waves (8m, HS) at Deceptive Wall provided our main psychological challenge, following Fred Belcher's previous fall and medi-vac by the air sea rescue. Probably the best weather of the year was in late July at Greymare Slabs, where we were blessed with sunshine all day long. JK led Ornithology (30m, D), Ginhouse (35m, S) and Groovin' High (35m, S).

2004

2004 saw the addition of Jeff's son Jamie to the Knowles clan. This year Andy (Guthrie) also began climbing with us too. The addition of someone who knew what they were doing, and had done it all before, was a real bonus. And so 2004 saw Jeff and me progress into VS / HVS territory with growing confidence and surprisingly – for us – very few epics.

The big climbing event for the year was to be our attempt to complete the Cuillin Ridge, over two days with a bivouac half way along. We arrived on Skye to heavy rain and things did not look good. A couple of pints of Busty Jugs beer later, buoyed up by the Sligachan bar man who claimed that the weather was about to break, we decided to get a head start by walking in and camping in Coir a' Ghrunnda. And so started my first wild-camping experience. We did not really sleep at all that night, due to the torrential rain and gale-force winds. At about 5.00 a.m., cold and soaked to the skin (by that time there was a small stream flowing through the tent) we finally admitted that our Cuillin attempt was over.

All was not lost though, as a short drive later we were at Logie Head climbing in sunshine. JK led Poacher (10m, VS), and identified the Cullen caravan park as a future family holiday venue, with the added bonus of bouldering at Logie Head thrown in.

2005

The summer of 2005 was Jeff's best climbing season to date. The year started where 2004 had left off, with each of us leading a VS on the first day of outdoor climbing: Giant Flake Route (30m), Convoy (25m), and Strawberry Ripple (8m).

The mid-June meet at Clachnaben was one of the best Tuesday evening meets. Here Jeff's appetite for barbequed food was only matched by the quality of routes climbed. JK's longest-day lead was Solus's na h-Uamhan (20m, S), mine the Cairngorm Club Crack (12m, S) and Crack o'



Jeff Knowles on Black Guillemot

the Mearns (25m, VS). I'm sure all who were there would agree that it was an outstanding evening's climbing, with a sunset to match.

In August, Jeff, Lynnette, Jamie, Emma and I attended our first Club weekend away. Reiff delivered what Dave Ogden had promised – with excellent weather on the Friday evening and all day Saturday. The climbing was exceptional too. JK leads: Black Pig (20m, VS), Black Guillemot (20m, VS), Hy Basil (10m, VS), and Mac's Route (8m HVS) amongst others. Even Jamie had a go, 'bouldering' on the rocks near the chalets – a natural climber at 11-months old. On the Sunday night we went for a celebration dinner at the Summer Isles Hotel, but only after Jeff had confirmed with the baby sitter that she was not a mad, axe-wielding murderer (well he had to ask as it was the first time that Jamie had been left with a non-family member). Good food and company – a fitting end to the weekend. Jeff vowed to return to Reiff after being wowed by the quantity and quality of routes.

My last conversations with Jeff were about unfinished business: Insect Groove (30m, HVS at South Cove), Little Cenotaph (10m, HVS at the Pass) and Sip from the Wine of Youth Again (10m, HVS at Reiff). The multi-pitch routes we wanted to climb in 2006: Agag's Groove (Glen Coe), Square Face / Mitre Ridge (Beinn a' Bhuidr) and Centurion (Carn Dearg). And Jeff's plans to buy ice climbing gear off eBay. As ever, the

conversation turned to Jeff's dodgy rope – one rope for sale, slightly worn but very useful for short routes. There are many more stories, too many to tell succinctly here, but thanks for allowing me to re-tell those that I have. I hope I have conveyed the attitude and humour with which Jeff approached climbing. It was a privilege to have been Jeff's climbing partner and friend.

A Light on the Hill

I often look for manmade things in remote places. There is something about coming across an old building, a kiln, a cairn, or drovers' meeting point. There is a world of adventure in thinking of those who went before us on a hillside, and the reasons for the great wall they built to nowhere. Hills were used to send important signals of impending danger, attack by strangers, even a first sighting of invasion. Some overlook valleys and villages and some burned a light, visible from a vantage point far down below. People come and go.

A hill with a beacon, a skyline, a sunrise
a place on a map with a name that you know,
that old signal station that worked for a moment
the last time, a long time ago.

A hill the same colour and still the same shape
and still our own people come here,
a new head of party, a new type of worry
new ideas of what's fair.

They change and I change, or we think that we do
and the beacon doesn't shine anymore,
but the rock and the hill that the men put it on
still look down on the valley below.

Robbie Middleton
October 2006

More than Mountains

Geoff Cumming

Kazakhstan, in Central Asia! Previously part of the USSR, but now independent, Kazakhstan is the ninth-largest country in the world, stretching from the shores of the Caspian Sea to the distant Chinese border, and can truly be regarded as a bridge between Europe and Asia. Nowhere is this more evident than on the streets of Almaty, the largest city, and until recently the capital, of Kazakhstan. Here a heterogeneous mixture of European Russians and Asian Kazakhs can be seen and heard in this youthful, vibrant 'city of apples', once described as the most beautiful city in the world. Although I wouldn't totally agree, it certainly is attractive, with wide open streets, trees everywhere (especially apple trees), numerous small parks and fountains, and a beautiful backdrop of mountains. From anywhere in the city, the view looking south is dominated by the Tien Shan, the Celestial Mountains, over 5,000m high near to Almaty but rising to more than 7,000m high at Khan Tengri and the Marble Wall, near to the Kyrgyzstan border.

Living and working in Almaty for two years, I was able to make many trips to these remarkable mountains, and I was very fortunate to meet many interesting people, and make many good friends, in the worlds of Russian and Kazakhstan mountaineering. My office, situated in the city centre, provided a wide panorama of mountains, including several 4,000m peaks: all of them steep and impressive-looking, and all easily accessible from Almaty. A twenty-minute bus ride, costing the equivalent of thirty pence, was all that was required to reach Medeo, the largest, and, at over 5,500ft above sea level the highest, outdoor ice rink in the world. The combination of thin air and fast ice, made from glacial melt water, has led to countless ice-skating speed records being set at Medeo, and it is an ideal access point for the mountains. Five miles further along the road is the Shymbulak ski resort, nearly 9,000ft above sea level and, as I soon found out, the gateway to a mountain wilderness extending for hundreds of miles to the Chinese border.

During my time in Almaty I was invited to train and climb with CSKA, the Army Alpinist Club, where I met many interesting and accomplished mountaineers, such as Denis Urubko and Serguey Samoilov, who were twice nominated for the Golden Ice Axe award for daring Himalayan alpine ascents, and I was also able to take part in many interesting mountaineering events.

A favourite activity in the world of Russian mountaineering is speed ascents, and I had great fun in some of these events. Unfortunately I was never able to take part in the annual Christmas race, held in memory of another CSKA member Anatoli Boukreev, the legendary Soviet



*Typical Kazakstan Mountains
Manshuk Manetova and Panfilov Heroes Peaks*

mountaineer who died on the south face of Annapurna on Christmas Day 1997. Starting from the Memorial to Perished Mountaineers, climbing through the Gates of Tuyuk Su to Almageldy Peak (4,000m), the race was won both the years that I was in Almaty by my friend Denis Urubko, wearing cheap Chinese football trainers which were only fit to be thrown away after one wearing on this difficult terrain. Denis considered that he would be able to move faster by not wearing traditional heavy mountaineering boots, and, in the snow and ice, he would benefit from the studded soles on the trainers. It seemed to work, as Denis managed to break the course record previously held by his friend Boukreev, who is generally recognized as having been one of the fittest and fastest high altitude mountaineers of all time. Interestingly, given that day-time temperatures at that time of year were generally in the region of -30°C , Denis chose to sleep in a tent at 3,500m on the night before the race, in

order to sharpen his acclimatization conditioning. Like Denis Urubko, Anatoli Boukreev was actually Russian but the opportunity to live so close to the Celestial Mountains had persuaded them both to live in Almaty and take out Kazakhstan citizenship.

Another popular feature of the Kazakhstan mountaineering world were Alpiniads – mass mountain ascents, where, in true Soviet style, as many people as possible are encouraged to take part in a healthy pastime. Alpiniads were seen as a way of encouraging people to reach the summits of the more technically difficult mountains and were very popular. Experienced mountaineers, many from CSKA, would set up fixed ropes on the steep sections and exposed traverses. My Russian friend Anton and I decided to join in the fun when an Alpiniad was organized for Abai Peak (4,010m) to celebrate the 110th anniversary of the death of Abai Kunanbaev, Kazakhstan's national poet. Although I went to the mountains most weekends with Anton, and we had long admired the striking and distinctive shape of Abai Peak, towering high above the ski resort at Shymbulak, we had delayed climbing the peak as we wanted to take part in, and support, the Alpiniad. Many of our friends would be involved in preparing the route and, as we went to our warm beds the night before the event, we knew that many of those friends would be spending a cold night in tents, high on the mountainside, in readiness for the early morning start.

Pre-dawn, lots of snow, ice crystals shining brightly in the clear bright moonlight. "Anton, it's a bit cold this morning, -17°C." A muffled voice in the dark, "Not too bad, it's -40° at my home in Russia." "Hmm, OK."

We eagerly set off and joined several hundred other people heading in the same direction. Despite the weather, the altitude, and the technical difficulties that lay ahead, we appeared to be the only ones with proper mountaineering gear. The Alpiniads are a great way of encouraging people to go to the mountains, but with an average wage of \$300 US a month, not many people in Kazakhstan can afford the same luxuries that we in the west take for granted. Anton and I joined a long line of cheap trainers, Chinese rucksacks, and heavy Russian jackets moving slowly uphill. Dawn arrived slowly, somewhere above the 3,000m mark, the snow-capped mountains shimmering in the golden rays of the early morning sun. We sat on snow-covered rocks enjoying a Kazakh breakfast of horse meat and green tea. As far as the eye could see, mountains were rising and falling like waves on a great sea.

We knew that in the valley far below, a small group of mountain runners would be preparing for the start of a mountain race, staged in parallel with the Alpiniad – uphill from Shymbulak ski resort to a small high col that we would cross on the way to Abai Peak. I had hoped to be one of the runners and had put in a lot of training for it, but an injury had

changed my plans. Anton and I delayed our journey to Abai long enough to see Svetlana, a friend from CSKA, take the prize for the first lady home. Svetlana was the best female climber in Kazakhstan, strong, fast and daring, but was new to mountain racing. We had thought she would win, but it was still good to watch her run past, effortlessly making her way across a large plateau scattered with debris from one of the area's many glaciers.

We continued on our way, climbing a steep scree slope to the narrow col where the running event had ended. Delayed by our interest in the race, we were now near the back of the Alpiniad, and joined a small crowd of people waiting to clip onto a fixed rope traversing a steep-sided, snow-covered valley. Anton and I were conscious of the time and the distance still to cover to reach Abai Peak. We wanted to speed up, but the protocol was to stay in position on the network of fixed ropes that we now faced – no overtaking and no unclipping from the safety line, so we were surprised and delighted when Svetlana, fresh from her race but now changed into warm mountain clothing, came steaming up to us, moving free of the fixed line. A few people shouted at Svetlana to clip on and join the long queue, but today was her day and she wasn't to be stopped so easily.

We joined a bottleneck at the foot of a band of steep rock. Svetlana carried on toward the summit, climbing over and past people, but Anton and I thought it prudent to wait our turn. A short climb, more fixed ropes, not necessary here so we unclipped: exposed ground but not too technical. We were able to move faster but a band of steeper rocks and another bottleneck soon stopped us. We shared hot drinks with friends from CSKA who had set up a tent in a snow-filled col to monitor events. The summit was close – we could see people waving a large blue Kazakhstan flag, with its golden eagle and rising sun – but I could also see dark clouds brewing and was beginning to regret our earlier delay. After waiting so long to climb Abai Peak, I began to wonder if today would bring success. We were close to the 4,000m level but it was beginning to get cold and dark. Messages began to filter down that the organisers were concerned about the changing weather, and people began talking about retreating back the way we had come. In the end the weather made the decision for us: it began to snow heavily. Anton and I shrugged and turned to descend. Quickly down-climbing the rock bands, and glissading down the snow slopes, we made it in time to catch a chair-lift back to the valley, with a vow to return to Abai Peak.

The snow continued for several weeks. From the city we watched hopefully as each parting of the clouds revealed Abai's towering summit slopes, each time with a little more snow than before. When the weather eventually improved we decided to approach the mountain from a different side, from the Malaya Almatinka Gorge, as it would allow an early start by staying in a hut close to the foot of Abai. Scattered in the trees above the



The Malaya Almatinka Gorge

Shymbulak ski resort was a small collection of climbers' huts. Most of these are old railway goods wagons (the Soviet Union had a very large rail network), fitted out with stoves and sleeping platforms, but the woods and adjacent rocky crags also housed a collection of rudimentary shelters and caves, built by Almaty's colony of climbers.

Anton and I arranged to spend Saturday night in Sergey's hut. We arrived in the early evening. Tramping across the snow, our head torches lighting the way, we could see the lights of other climbers moving silently through the night. The hut was cold and dark, but Sergey soon arrived to light the stove and open the first of the evening's bottles of vodka. We shared drinks and toasts as we waited for Denis and two friends from Siberia to arrive, before setting off to visit friends in another hut. Conditions in the huts are typically cold and basic, in contrast to the warmth of the friendship found inside. Russian hospitality meant there was a lot of vodka being drunk, and the Kazakh tradition was a big pot of Manty – a traditional dish of boiled noodle sacks full of meat and vegetables – freshly cooking on an old-fashioned stove in the corner of the hut.

In anticipation of the following day's effort, Anton and I avoided the vodka, only drinking cheap Georgian wine. My basic Russian prevented me from following all of the conversations, but it was clearly high-spirited

and good-natured, as these sons and daughters of the Soviet Union shared stories and laughter, just as in Muir and probably all around the world.

I was enjoying sitting and soaking in the atmosphere, but when Anton suggested we return to Sergey's hut and get some sleep I reluctantly agreed. The walk back through the woods was a real highlight for me. The ground was covered in a deep layer of frozen snow and an inky black sky was filled with a million stars. The light of a new moon reflected on the white of the snow, making it unnecessary to use our torches as we walked slowly back to Sergey's hut, anticipating the morning's climb. It was a bit of a surprise when Anton suddenly slid on the ice and went clattering to the ground. He uttered a few Russian curses but seemed none the worse for the fall and we continued on our way. The temperature was in the region of -30°C , so I was glad that Sergey had lit the stove before we went out. The sleeping arrangement was a simple wooden platform, similar to alpine huts. Anton and I crawled into our sleeping bags and quickly fell asleep. Some time later I was awoken by the sounds of people entering the hut. In the dim candlelight I could see it was a young couple from CSKA; they spread out sleeping bags and climbed onto the platform next to us, as Anton slept on. Later again I was wakened by the sounds of Sergey returning. It sounded as if he'd had rather a lot of vodka but he managed to find a space and I soon fell asleep again.

In the morning Anton had a badly swollen ankle, from his fall the night before, and it was clear that, once again, he wouldn't be able to climb Abai. Knowing how much this meant to him, I offered to return to the city, but knowing how much it meant to me he stubbornly refused my offer. I could only guess at Anton's disappointment as he stood framed in the doorway of Sergey's hut watching our small group set off in the cold dark morning.

A long, slow walk, feet crunching on hard-packed snow, led us to the foot of Abai Peak. For the next few hours we steadily climbed steep slopes of deep, soft snow, sweating heavily in the sub-zero temperatures. The dry Kazakh air and big snowfalls mean that the snow remains soft, deep and unconsolidated for long periods of time. Arriving at a small col we prepared for the final climb up a steep band of rock. Denis effortlessly led the way, followed by the Siberians who were training for an ascent of Everest. I followed, a little more slowly, feeling the effects of the altitude. In my time in Almaty, I discovered that I am normal up to the 3,500m level, but above that I notice the lack of oxygen and need to adjust accordingly. Sergey told me that he is okay up to the 6,000m mark. Denis, clearly with a better physiological make-up and numerous high altitude trips behind him, including ten 8,000m summits without artificial oxygen, says that he never feels the effects of altitude.

The summit was small and exposed. All around, the horizon was shaped by the grandeur of the mountains. To the south the blades of the

Tien Shan erupted from cushions of cloud, turned pink and harmless by the rays of the climbing sun. I thought of Anton waiting in the valley far below: it was time to descend. On a small, snow-covered ledge we stopped to eat and help the Siberians erect a tent. As part of their acclimatisation training they would spend the night here.

The distant horizon seemed far away as the sun crept slowly towards it, and then quickly slid out of sight, leaving only a soft red glow in the sky as a reminder of its warmth and energy. We continued our long descent. Anton was waiting patiently at the hut and together we returned to the city. I was a little sore and tired... but happy.

Once again Anton and I vowed to return to Abai, but this was never to happen. Several times we looked at Abai's steep slopes, planning to return, but Anton's contract in Almaty ended and he left for his home in Ekaterinburg deep in the heart of his beloved Russian motherland, and I moved on to Azerbaijan on the other side of the Caspian Sea. I hope that some day Anton will be able to obtain a visa and come to visit me in Aberdeenshire, to enjoy Scotland's hills and mountains; but the experiences I had in Kazakhstan, the sights and sounds, and the friendships I made, reminded me that there's more than the mountains.

Art in the Cromar Hills

Donald Hawksworth



St Kilda Wake

I live at Boultenstone, near Strathdon, and I have become familiar with the country surrounding my home. A favourite walk is to Baderonach Hill, where there is a fine cairn in memory of Gavin Astor, former owner of the Tillypronie Estate. The estate is now the home of the Hon. Philip Astor, and it is he who, with a perceptive eye for things artistic, has commissioned artists to produce art in the hills. On one visit to Baderonach, I was astonished to see intriguing faces peering at me, carved on a granite boulder beside Overlook Loch (map reference 433086). On enquiry, I discovered that this was the work of Ronald Rae¹, an Edinburgh sculptor. The title of the carved stone is 'St Kilda Wake'. It forms a striking foreground to the small lochan and the distant hills.

Another artistic find was on the northern approach to Morven. I have often walked up along the Deskry Water to Pennystone Green on my way up the mountain. On one occasion, I explored a left-hand branch in the wide track wending upwards from the ford over the stream, and I was amazed to see an eagle perched on a rock to the left of a shooting cabin (map reference 384058). Anxious not to disturb the bird, and hoping to get a fine close-up photograph, I gingerly approached, only to find that I was looking at a cast-iron sculpture of the bird. I got my photograph more easily than I had anticipated(!), and found later that the object was the work of Helen Denerley, who lives quite near me. It is very realistic and striking in its mountain setting.

Perhaps, however, Philip Astor's patronage has found its fullest expression at lower levels. Migvie Church had lain unused and derelict for some time, when he engaged the well known artist, Peter Goodfellow, owner of the Lost Gallery at Strathdon, to create a plan for the restoration

of the building as a shrine, partly in memory of his parents, but also to be a place of beauty where visitors could find a haven of peace for meditation. Some of the interior art work takes up ideas from the carvings on the Pictish Stone in the churchyard, particularly the figure of a horseman, which features, for instance, in the stained glass windows created by Jennifer Bayliss. Other local artists involved were Gavin Smith, a wood carver, whose work can be seen in the beautiful door, and Louise Gardner, whose four throne-like chairs, carved out of stone, occupy a central place in the 'nave'. Round the walls are a number of inscribed plaques with quotations from a wide variety of sources from William Penn to Basil Hume. Peter Goodfellow's

work is also prominent, in his portrayal of six early Saints associated with this area, and in the many wood panels. Perhaps his most charming contribution was the frescos of the two birds which had their nests in the church as it was being restored. Visit the Church if you are in the area – it is always open, and the lights come on automatically once you open the door and step in. Finally, you may have noticed on entering Tarland from the Aboyne direction, three carved stones on the right as you come to the bridge. These are the work of Janet McEwen, and were placed there to commemorate the advent of the Millennium.



The Eagle

Reference

1. Ronald Rae's best known work is his "Lion of Scotland", at present entrusted as part of an outdoor exhibition of his work in Holyrood Park, near to the Scottish Parliament. This exhibition runs to 20th July 2007.

The Grahams

Rhona Fraser

I finished the Grahams on **Druim na Sgriodain** in 2003, in the usual awful Completion weather. The Grahams are the newest of the four lists in *Munro's Tables*¹. They were first published by Alan Dawson in April 1992, in 'The Relative Hills of Britain'² which also listed all the British Marilyn's, i.e. hills of any height but with a drop of 150m on all sides. In November 1992, completely independently, Fiona Torbet (née Graham) published in the magazine *The Great Outdoors* a similar list, though only of hills north of the Highland Line. The two authors later met to organise a definitive list of hills between 2,000 and 2,500ft with a drop of 150m. It was agreed that the collective name should be 'Grahams', which proved a fitting memorial, as Fiona Torbet was tragically murdered several years later, whilst on a walking holiday. There are 224 Grahams including the recently demoted Corbett **Beinn Talaidh** in Mull.

Being a relatively new list, I had climbed several of the hills before they were mentioned in *Munro's Tables*. My first Graham was **Culter Fell** in 1979. I was working in Lanark at the time and had only been hillwalking for a few years, and it was the first hill I ever climbed without the reassuring presence of a path. I well remember looking at the contour lines on the map and thinking: this is going to be very difficult and steep!! Now of course such a relatively gentle, grassy slope would be counted as an easy hill, but not then. I was absolutely delighted to get the top, in my usual manner completely alone and without anybody knowing where I was. No reassuring mobile phone communication in those days!

Having a love of the Galloway area also meant that I had climbed all of the south-west Grahams early on, though they would be in the Donalds list at the time. Particular favourites are **Mullwharchar** and **Craignaw**, the backbone of the wonderfully remote and rough hills between the ranges of the Awful Hand, which includes Merrick, and the Rhinns of Kells, including Corserine. When I did them in the 1980s there were no paths, in fact no people, the tussocky terrain making for long but rewarding days. The views from these hills are just as beautiful as from any Munro. In fact, the butterfly-shaped Loch Enoch, amongst a sea of rusty-coloured autumn grass, is as good as it gets. Then there was an autumn 'bracken-swim' to ascend **Lamachan Hill** from Glen Trool. I found the only way to progress through the head-high vegetation was to use a breast-stroke technique! Once past this barrier, the easy grassy summit ridge was a delight.

From my various homes, Grahams have frequently been the nearest local hill. From Dumfries, **Queensberry** is a well known landmark,

though not as obvious as the lower Criffel to the south. It looms like a small Schiehallion, conical and distant, from the higher part of the town. In Turriff, I made numerous ascents of **The Buck**, helped by the high road from Lumsden to Dufftown, and the close proximity of the Clashindarroch cross-country skiing woods. If snow conditions did not allow skiing, I would be tempted up the easy north ridge from the high point of the road. Now in Inverness, the local Graham is **Meall Fuar-mhonaidh**, a hill which I drive past when working as a locum in either Foyers or Fort Augustus. It dominates the west side of Loch Ness, being particularly spectacular from the consulting room in Foyers, the morning light emphasising the roughness of its face. From its summit, the whole of Loch Ness can be seen.

Of course, there are views. By their very definition Grahams have good ones! The best? One of the most stunning is from **Millfore** in Galloway, for its magnificent head-on panorama down the bog known as the Silver Flow. Deep and very wet, a rare floating bog on which, even today, it is impossible to walk safely. However, in my opinion, by far the best view is from **Stob na Cruaiche** in Rannoch. Its central location and the lack of nearby hills means it has unobstructed views of Glencoe, Nevis, the Mamores, Ossian, Lawers, Achaladair, Cruachan and Blackmount, and of course the easterly Rannoch hills. Go on a summer's evening to catch the fading sunlight on the mountains, and you will wish to be nowhere else. I gave up counting Munros when I reached fifty!

The normal response, on hearing someone is doing the Grahams, is to ridicule them as being too easy. Oh dear! I well remember an expedition with Peter B. to **Shee of Ardtalnaig** on the south side of Loch Tay, where we thought the walk would be a quick 'up-and-down job'. We started from the farm of Claggan, believing the ascent would only take a few hours, as there was a landrover track most of the way up the hill. Peter, who was suffering from a sore back, was understandably rather hesitant and slow, but I was not much faster, as we soon encountered masses of soft, deep snow. There were periods of whiteout conditions which caused problems in the never-ending, almost flat summit ridge. It seemed to go on and on and on..., very physical and very draining. It took us four and a half hours to reach the summit! We descended off the steeper south-east nose, arriving at the bottom of the hill just as the weather improved. Peter's suffering continued, however, as he had followed my 4WD Subaru into a field at the top of the road. The local farmer and I watched with hilarity and much discussion, as poor Peter struggled to get his car out of the mud. I suppose the farmer had every right to be upset about the hole that Peter was rapidly digging in his field, but seeing the struggle was probably the best local Sunday entertainment he had had for some while. Eventually the poor car was towed out of its misery.

There are, of course, extremely remote Grahams. The classic is **An Cruachan**, between Lochs Monar and Mullardoch, and almost 9km from Iron Lodge. Roger and I cycled in on the Saturday, did the Corbetts Faochaig and Aonach Buidhe, camped near the lodge, and did the Graham on the Sunday. Unfortunately, the weather was rather cloudy, so limiting the views. However, looking south down the Allt Coire nan Each from the lower slopes of An Cruachan, shafts of watery sunlight were focused like beacons down this remotest of glens, giving it added atmosphere. We were perhaps the furthest away from anywhere significant that it is possible to be in the whole of Scotland.

Equally remote but done in much better weather were the northerly **Ben Armine** and **Creag Mhor**. I slept overnight in the car at Badanloch Lodge and cycled the 12km to the east side of the two hills. They reminded me of Galloway – easy-angled and grassy on one side, steep on the other. The views were rather bland and hazy, only a few mountains sticking out of the flat, northern moor.

One of the areas that I thought would be very rough under foot, but proved surprisingly easy, was the expedition to **Beinn Gaire** and **Croit Bheinn** which I did from Glen Moidart. The long east-to-west summit ridge of Beinn Gaire was very pleasant walking, though there was a fair pull to get to the attractively conical summit of Croit Bheinn. Surely, the north slope of this mountain must be one of the steepest in Britain. There was a tremendous aerial view directly down Glen Aladale, the equivalent of paragliding with a reassuring bit of grass beneath your feet. In perfect weather, I continued north to the Corbett Sgurr na Ba Glaise, making a circular traverse of the far end of Glen Moidart. The worst terrain was actually below Assary near the River Moidart, where the marked footpath was floating in an enormous bog.

One of the most enjoyable expeditions was to **An Stac** at the west end of Glen Pean. The scenery to the west is typically rough and wild Knoydart. I used the good stalker's path from Oban bothy to get beneath Cnoc Gorm, reaching the Graham summit as the sun was setting. There was a magnificent view down Loch Morar towards Rum, the water of the loch a mixture of purple reflections from the dark sky and orange glow from the disappearing sun. That evening, I spent a cold night in a bivvy bag not far from the summit, watching the colours disappear in the west. The next morning I decided to be adventurous and return via the Corbett top Beinn Gharbh and the two Munros, Coireachan and Thuilm.

An equally excellent trip was had to the Letterewe Wilderness in the hunt for **Meall Mheinnidh** and **Beinn a Chaisgein Beag**. Needless to say, I also included the Corbetts Beinn Lair and Beinn a Chaisgein Mor. In the evening I walked in, camping overnight just south of the Fionn Loch causeway. The next day, in excellent weather, I easily managed the two

northerly hills in the morning, making myself lunch at the campsite, and walking out over the two Loch Maree mountains in the afternoon.

Stupid outings? In 1980, when working in Montrose, I used to walk with a nurse from Brechin, whose local hill was the **Hill of Wirren**. He had been up this hill several hundred times, so I was happy to dispense with a map. It was decided to have a walk on my last evening in the area, starting from the south at Bridgend. It was to prove the longest walk we ever did! Setting off at 6 p.m., we did not get back to the car till midnight. We reached the summit with no problem, but in gathering mist and dark, with only a compass and no map, we had no idea how to get off. (N.B. A compass is little use without a map). Eventually after walking around in circles for hours, we decided just to descend – and you guessed it, we ended up on the wrong side of the hill in Glen Esk. Twenty kilometres later, via an unplanned trip to Edzell, we arrived back at the car.

Memorable outings? Being adopted by a dog whose local walk was **Beinn Mhor**, near Dunoon. It was quite obvious that he knew how to get up the hill and even on to **Beinn Bheag**, his owner telling me that he had on occasions been found running home from the north end of Loch Eck via the middle of A815! However, I was impressed by his loyalty when he continued on to **Creag Tharsuinn**. I do not think he had been there before, as he kept quite close to my side. At the other end of the country, there was the ascent of **Meall an Fheur Loch** from the west end of Loch Merkland, done in commando style due to the foot-and-mouth restrictions at the time. Ridiculous really, as I had been nowhere near any source of infection, but necessary in the climate of hysteria. And then Geoff C. and I ‘happened’ to find our way to the summit of the Arnisdale Graham **Druim Fada** during the Lowe Alpine Mountain Marathon, it being, in my opinion, the best attack point for a control high up on the ridge. It was just as well that I was into ticking summits, as several people had great difficulty finding this control, and had to relocate their position from the very bottom at the loch shore, with a 400m climb back up the hill.

Rough outings? Combining the three Grahams **Beinns Bhreac**, **Molurgainn** and **Mheadhonach** (to the west of Loch Etive), from the high point of the B845. Climbing the first two was very enjoyable. However, I made the mistake of trying to avoid Meall Dearg by contouring round its west flank. The terrain was extremely rough and wet, and very slow going was made worse by confusion caused by the lack of forest on the area. The OS map clearly shows an extensive block of wood, which does not exist on the ground. Once I reached Mheadhonach, feeling rather the worse for wear, I was rewarded by a magnificent view down Loch Awe, but I will not be climbing that hill from that angle again.

Of course, last but not least, climbing the Grahams gives you the opportunity to go to unusual areas, for example the remote areas to the north of Beinn Wyvis and to the Outer Isles. I well remember my

curiosity on the Paps of Jura, seeing what appeared to be a woman carrying a set of golf clubs up **Beinn Shiantaidh**. The puzzle was solved when she unfolded a large kite on the summit of the hill. I joined in her enthusiasm, helping to launch this object into the air, a difficult task in the calm conditions of the day. Waves of laughter drifted from the summit, as I tried to hold on to the kite, and boulder hop as fast as possible, as she struggled to get it to fly. We could imagine the headline news: 'Experienced hill walker breaks leg flying kite'!

So this may have given you a taste for the Grahams, and their quality is even more obvious if I remind you that they include they include the magnificent **Suilven** and **Stac Pollaidh**. Now all my Grahams are done, what else to do? Well there are the thousand-odd Graham Tops³. That should keep me busy for some time!

References

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Muir Cottage, Inverey

Ian Bryce

Nestling amongst the Scots pines and the mountains at the side of the River Dee, the Cairngorm Club's Muir Cottage at Inverey dates from the 1800s. The Cairngorm Club originally leased the cottage in 1950, when Aberdeen University Civil Engineering lecturer Dr. George Taylor led volunteers to adapt it for use as a club hut. There was a living room used as both a kitchen and sitting room, and beds for 12 in three bedrooms, two in adjacent wooden annexes. At a cost of £150, a brick lean-to was built with a scullery and washroom. Twenty bags of building sand were purchased and delivered in hessian sacks. The sand was sixpence a bag, but the sacks were two shillings each. Graham Ewen, an Aberdonian like many Club members, cleaned the bags for return, thus saving the Club two pounds.

George Taylor, latterly an honorary Club member, was the same man who for real busman's holidays designed and managed the construction of many of the bridges in the Cairngorms. In 1972, through his generous benefaction, Muir and the surrounding land were purchased from Captain Alexander Ramsay of Mar for £1,275 and 50 new pence (we called them new pence in 1972). The original deed of ownership of the feu of Muir of Inverey was signed, after much debate, on August 16th 1972, about the time of the opening of the upgraded cottage. The ground was sold to Sheila Murray, President, Eric Johnston, Secretary and Alexander Reid, Treasurer. You can see a photograph of the opening inside the hut. Also present at the 1972 opening were Robbie Middleton and his fiancée Judy Wilson, who six weeks later became Mr. and Mrs. Middleton.

I first visited Muir as a member of the Glasgow Glenmore Club in 1974 and remember that it was considered then to be very up-market as a club hut. Along with others I have enjoyed many stays at Muir for winter walking, last Munro parties, and Burns Suppers, and I have particularly enjoyed family holidays there, walking and seeing children of all ages mixing, playing and socialising. Often one parent would be away hillwalking whilst the other parent took the kids out on expeditions and then vice versa the next day. It was never certain which parent had most earned their evening drink.

The Hut Custodian in 1972 was Peter Howgate. Under his direction the timber building was constructed, with four dormitories sleeping a total of 18, two toilets with showers, and a small sitting room separate from the dining room (later devoted to four beds normally reserved for Club members). After Peter, Denis Hardy was custodian for 8 years, Eddie Martin for 13 years and then Robbie Middleton from 1993 to 2005.

To begin with, the use of Muir was mostly by the Club's members, often with their families. However Muir came to be very popular with members of other clubs, and the level of outside usage has for many years been greater than the level of member usage. Further, over the years, the hut has accommodated groups with disabled pupils for summer breaks, including those from Marpool School, Beechwood School and Rosehill Special Needs Centre, all from Aberdeen. Hut Custodians have received letters from children enthralled at seeing red deer and red squirrels. The cottage has also often been used by scouts, girl guides, groups training for Duke of Edinburgh's awards, pensioner groups, over-50s walking groups, Glenmore Lodge trainees, and many other hillwalking and mountaineering clubs and outdoor centres.

As with any property, regular general maintenance and improvements have been carried out, such as double-glazing the windows, emptying the septic tank, renewing the shower cubicles and stove, repairing the roofing, waterproofing the walls, and replacing barge boards. The water supply was originally piped from a small burn, but this sometimes ran dry, and there were reports of visitors being all lathered up in the shower but without rinsing water. Some visitors even had to drink their whisky neat, poor things! The burn water was potentially subject to pollution such as cryptosporidium from animals, and some years ago the Club renewed the water supply by installing a few hundred metres of piping from a well on the hillside. Using this, we were also able to supply the next-door Inverey Youth Hostel with a more reliable free supply. The Youth Hostel is sometimes used jointly with Muir, when extra beds are needed.

Each April, the Club has a work weekend, when the custodian enlists the remarkably willing and diverse help of members as scrubbers, painters and general odd-jobbers, and the building is given a thorough spring clean, inside and out. It seems to be traditional – if sexist – that the custodian replenishes the supplies of cleaning materials, while his wife washes the curtains and pillow cases. The sight of Robbie staggering out of the Braemar chemists under 150 jumbo-sized packs of toilet rolls has provoked some local comments not fit for publication in the *Journal*.

In 2003, it was decided that the hut needed more than its annual spring-clean, and that major improvements and an upgraded extension were required to support the increasing numbers of users. Those who had seen flashes around the common room also reckoned there was a need to upgrade the electrics. The demand for use by school parties and disabled groups had increased materially and the Disabilities Discrimination Act had come into fuller force. It was felt that doors needed to be widened to permit easier access, and that a new toilet with a shower suitable for the less able was needed, as were safety features such as rails on the bunk beds, access ladders to upper bunks, access ramps and exterior lighting. There was considerable heat loss through the dormitory roofing, and the



Rebuilding in Progress

felt tiles, which had lasted 33 years, were even to Aberdonians well beyond their sell-by date. The existing 1950s lean-to was unsightly, damp, suffered from mice, was poorly insulated and awkward to reach. The water-supply pipe under the road and the water storage in the hut needed upgrading to complement the new water supply from the hillside. A sub-committee was set up comprising Robbie Middleton (Custodian), Ian Bryce (President), Derek Pinches (Treasurer), and Mike Forsyth, i.e. a master mariner, two civil engineers, and a quantity surveyor. Many other Club members willingly gave help and advice.

One of the difficulties facing the sub-committee was how to consult the Club members, many of whom care passionately about Muir and some who even regard it as their second home. In order to allow the members as much say as possible, plans were produced by our architect (Andrew Keir of Robb Keir Design at Aboyne) and these were posted on our website, printed in our news letter and displayed at indoor meets. Members were asked to study the plans and to comment on them. Both verbal and written comments were made and the sub-committee considered these with the architect. Certain lady members insisted on being involved with choosing the kitchen fittings and as a result the sub-committee had little say about the layout in the kitchen. Unfortunately the kitchen is not wheelchair-friendly, but it was decided that it would be too expensive to achieve this.

Fund-raising started in December 2003, after the extent of the project had been defined and agreed with the Club. By September 2004 we were confident enough to proceed. The £75,000 project was co-funded by the Cairngorms National Park LEADER+ (40%), Aberdeenshire Council (16%), Aberdeen City Council (8.5%), the Scottish Mountaineering Trust (6.5%), and the Lottery Awards for All Fund (6.5%), with Club members themselves donating the remaining 22.5%. In order to allow tax benefits and to meet the demands of funding bodies, the Club changed its legal status and is now classed as a Community Amateur Sports Club (CASC).



*Robbie and Judy Middleton
at the grand opening*

Mike Forsyth arranged tenders, and from October 2004 to January 2005 the hut was closed for renovations. The lean-to was demolished and a new extension provided, more in keeping with the style and standard (and floor level!) of the rest of the building. The car parking area was improved, and the main door approach provided with a ramp. Insulation followed by aluminum sheeting was fixed onto the existing roof of the dormitories. Joyce Ritchie, then our booking secretary, became concerned about the Club's honesty in accepting bookings for January. She wondered if the President and Hut Custodian were telling her porkie pies about how long the hut would be shut. In order to be within budget and on time we celebrated New Year 2005 (starting on the second of January) by painting and cleaning to prepare for the first booking of the year (and saving £3,000 into the bargain). What a way to celebrate New Year! After a few hours painting the ceiling, even stale mince pies tasted wonderful, and a few hours' work gave you quite a drouth.

Muir was officially re-opened on Friday 25th March 2005 by the Club's Honorary President Anne Cordiner. Over 90 members attended this 'Easter' meet, staying in Muir and at various places around Inverey, and climbing several different hills. After champagne at the opening, we

had a celebration ceilidh/dinner on the Saturday night in the Stag Ballroom at Mar Lodge, with Dennis Mortimer and Colin Dewar playing. Someone at the opening suggested that Muir should be regularly available for champagne receptions and weddings, as well as for the many birthday parties, last Munro celebrations and barbecues that are held there. But hey, it is in a good hillwalking and climbing area, and the aims of the Club do not mention such activities.

Now, although some small works remain to be completed, we can offer first-class accommodation for outdoor activities in this beautiful mountain area, with access for less-able groups in a comfortable building where their needs can be catered for. The Club is almost certainly the first in Scotland to improve its hut in line with the new disabilities discrimination legislation. We also offer contact with the locally run charity 'Sport Any Way', which offers outdoor equipment for less-able people and is based in nearby Braemar.

Readers will hardly need reminding that there are over thirty Munros in this Cairngorms National Park area, where winter often lingers long on the high tops and serious winter routes abound. With new footpaths by the National Trust and UDAT, some are within easy reach and some require longer high-level approaches. There are also many fine traverse routes that can finish at Muir, such as over Ben Avon and Bheinn a' Bhuird from the Lecht road, from Spittal of Glen Shee or Blair Atholl in the south, or from Aviemore over the big tops like Macdui and Braeriach or through one of the Lairigs. Fine routes from Muir itself include that over Derry Cairngorm, Ben Macdui and Carn a' Mhaim, or (after a short car trip) Lochnagar, not to mention the hills to the south that can be climbed from the door.

The Cairngorm Club has been extremely fortunate to have had over the last twelve years as hut custodian Robbie Middleton, backed up by his wife Judy. In view of his commitment to running Muir so efficiently and spearheading the refurbishment, Robbie was made an Honorary Club Member at our last AGM. Richard Shirreffs has now taken over as Custodian, with Alex Barbour taking reservations at muirbooking@cairngormclub.org.uk. The hut is almost fully booked at weekends for the next eighteen months. Many thanks to the funding bodies and all the members who gave up time and money to ensure that Muir Cottage will for years to come provide a comfortable and all-ability hut in this beautiful area of The Cairngorms National Park.

Please support your new Hut Custodian Richard Shirreffs by helping out at work weekends.

Past Proceedings

The first volume of the Cairngorm Club Journal was published in July 1893. The 108 issues to date bring vividly to life the activities of the Club, the hills and the history of the time. With our current concern about changing climate, it is interesting to compare meteorological conditions, and to discover that extreme weather events were as much the subject for discussion then as now, as the following extracts reveal.

A Hundred Years Ago

From Volume V no.25, July 1905

Accident on Ben Nevis

A distressing and somewhat peculiar accident occurred on Ben Nevis on 6th April last, by which Rev. A.E. Robertson, Edinburgh, the well-known mountaineer, was severely injured. Notwithstanding that the day was a most unsuitable one for climbing, and there being an almost continuous fall of snow, accompanied by thunder and lightning, Mr. Robertson set out alone to make the ascent of Ben Nevis. He succeeded in reaching the summit, and on his downward journey the severity of the blizzard which prevailed made him rather keep further to the south than the line of the bridle path in order to avoid the cliffs, but owing to the mist and driving snow he had unconsciously deviated further than had been his intention. He distinctly recollects that the thunder and lightning seemed very near, and that the steel of his ice-axe hissed with electric sparks, doubtless St. Elmo's fire. It is Mr. Robertson's belief that a flash of lightning struck either his ice-axe or the ground near where he was, thus rendering him unconscious. On falling he must have been hurled with terrific force down a thousand feet over the frozen boulders strewn upon the hillside, but of what actually took place he has not the faintest recollection. He can recall nothing until he found himself making for the path from the direction of Glen Nevis, and at an altitude considerably over a thousand feet lower than the point where he calculated he was rendered unconscious. He had lost his cap and ice-axe, his clothes were torn, and blood was oozing freely from his wounds, but, as already stated, he managed by a supreme effort to walk unaided to Fort William, which was distant nearly three miles. Mr. Robertson, has, we are glad to say, now quite recovered, but bears more than one mark of his terrible accident.

From Volume V no.28, January 1907

A 'Cloud Burst' in Glen Eunach

We went to Coylum Bridge on August 7th last, and stayed in the cottage close to the bridge, a few yards below where the Drue is formed by the junction of two streams, the Luineag from Glen More and the Bennie from

Glen Eunach. On the following afternoon a thunder-storm visited the district, and the rainfall was heavy. In the evening we were sitting chatting, not having yet risen from the supper table, when we heard a sound of a most unusual kind, but not much unlike the rush of an approaching motor-car. Scarcely had we begun to listen when loud cries from the other inmates of the house called us out to look at the river. The mysterious sound had rapidly grown in volume, and now declared itself as the wild rush of the greatly swollen Druie, foaming in full spate but a few yards from the door. We hastily ran out, and looking at my watch I noted that it was 8.35 p.m. The Druie was big with dark water, and, swirling and foaming, was as impressive to the eye as it was insistent to the ear. Logs and tree branches were surging along, and what looked like the carcass of a sheep or deer.

A little examination of the streams at the junction, in full view from the bridge, showed that the spate was entirely on the Bennie, and not on the Luineag. I went up the Bennie just beyond the junction, to a frail suspension bridge that swung across the stream. Here by 8.55 p.m. the water had risen so high that the broken billows were shooting across the middle of the bridge. This indicated a rise in twenty minutes of more than three feet. Numerous logs and snags struck against the bridge, but its elasticity saved it, and it seemed to suffer no damage. All through the evening could be heard not only the rush and roar of the water, but also the bumping of the floating timber, and the dull, hard thuds of big stones rolled along the bed of the stream.

The generally accepted explanation of the spate was that the thunderstorm rain had overflowed Loch Eunach and broken its sluice gates: this however proved not to be the case. The keepers went up the glen the following morning and found the sluice all right. The spate was due to a somewhat local but unusually heavy rainfall.

I visited the glen myself, and went all round the upper region of it to see what evidence it bore of the rainstorm. There was nothing noticeable below the lower bothy except that the Allt Ruigh na Sroine had been running full. But beyond the bothy the drainage from the west face of Braeriach crosses the driving road, and here there was abundant evidence of the heaviness of the downpour. Some hundreds of yards of the driving road had been completely torn away by the rush of water, and where had been a road was a gully in the ground, the material previously constituting the road bed having been carried across into the heather and bog of the lower ground. I was struck by the value of the coating of the vegetable growth as a protection against such denudation; the bare road had been torn up, but the adjoining plant-covered ground was comparatively uninjured.

In Coire Dhondail there were no special marks of heavy rain, but on the other side of Loch Eunach, nearly all along the northern or lower

section of Ross's Path was evidence of a striking kind, more marked even than on the driving road. Numerous burns come down from the crags and slopes of Sgoran Dubh Mor and Sgor Gaoith, and across the path on their way to the loch. Each of these had been temporarily converted into a fiercely raging torrent. At each such crossing the path had entirely disappeared, and the deeply scored gully of the stream was bordered by great banks of rocks, gravel and sand, which seamed the hill-side for hundreds of yards, and showed themselves far into the waters of the loch.

From the relative positions of these two areas of destruction, it seems that the cloud burst crossed the glen obliquely from south-west to north-east, from the neighbourhood of Sgor Gaoith to that of the lower bothy. The condition of the hill-sides in the affected areas reminded me forcibly of the condition of Glen Dee near the Corrou Bothy after the cloudburst of July, 1901.

From Volume V no.29, July 1907

Ski-ing notes

The arctic character of the winter that has just closed has given ample scope for the enjoyment of the Norwegian sport of ski-ing without leaving our own shores. On New Year's Day, a friend and I ascended Bennachie from Oyne. We travelled from Aberdeen by the early morning train and managed to strap on our ski in Oyne station, and get through the village without any great demonstration on the part of the inhabitants. The snow was in perfect conditions until we got into the wood, but there it became somewhat heavy. We ascended Craig Shannoch, taking slightly longer than a fellow Clubman who was on foot, and then struck over towards the Mither Tap.

Once on the crest of the hill we flew downwards, soon reaching the woods of Pittodrie, then dodging in and out among the fir trees, kept on at an immense speed till we reached a farm about two miles from Pitcaple station. The good farmer was struck almost dumb at the speed with which we came down his sloping pasture: and on our enquiring how long we should take to reach Pitcaple we were informed that it took "about half-an-oor tae walk, but ye'd gang in about twa meenuts on thae things!" However, he underestimated our time, as we found that the snow on the turnpike was not in very good condition, so our progress was slow. On reaching Pitcaple we kept on to Inverramsey, where we caught a suitable train home.

On the morning of 3rd of February, four of us started from Ballater with our ski to ascend Morven. We wended our way up the Tullich Valley, and put on our ski about half way up the glen. On reaching the head of the valley we found the snow too hard for ski-ing uphill, there having been a thaw the day before, followed by a sharp frost through the night, so we unstrapped our ski and tramped up to the cairn. The view was

superb in every direction, but we were too anxious to try our 'Telemark' swings on the way down to spend too long on the summit. We put on our ski about a hundred yards from the cairn, and got a most glorious run right down to the Lary Burn, about two miles from Morven Lodge. The run was so splendid that two of us re-ascended about 800 feet to enjoy the return flight. We ski-ed down to the junction of the Lary and the Gairn, and then walked home, down Glen Gairn so well known to us when the trees are green, yet in that calm winter's evening, with the daylight flickering we found many a charm in the glen which she does not reveal to her summer visitor.

Fifty Years Ago

From Volume XVII no. 91, 1957

Luibeg Bridge

It is a great disappointment to report that Luibeg Bridge, which was built by the Club in 1948 as a tribute to our former President, the late James A. Parker, was demolished by floods following a storm on August 13-14, 1956. My reaction on receiving the news was one of utter incredulity, but the nature of the report indicated that no mistake was possible. The bridge was of particular personal interest, as not only was it the first of several jobs which I have enjoyed undertaking for the Club but because it had a certain technical interest: it was the first bridge in Scotland, and in fact, at that time one of the few in the world, to be built of aluminium alloy.

On the Sunday following the storm the President, Ewen, Bain and I made haste to visit the scene. Signs of flood damage appeared at the Canadian Bridge at Inverey. Its approaches had been torn up and the bridge closed to traffic. Rather extensive damage had been sustained by Black Bridge and the previously damaged access bridge to Luibeg Cottage had been swept about a mile downstream. It was very clear that a storm of extraordinary severity had struck the valley. It seems that the main storm centres must have been on Beinn Bhrotain and in the Carn a' Mhaim - Ben Macdhuì area, since there are signs of extensive erosion on both, while a washout on the Dhaidh, a tributary of the Geldie, has been reported. This followed a severe storm about a fortnight earlier in which some estate bridges were washed away, but it is not known whether Luibeg Bridge sustained any significant damage on that occasion. The scene there was fantastically unfamiliar. Upstream, the Burn had gouged out a new course to the westwards. At the site of the bridge, the bed was over three times its original width and practically central with the old bed, in which the abutments lay on their sides. The complete superstructure had been ripped away, and deposited on the bank about 100 yards downstream in a wilderness of boulders, partially buried in sand, shingle and vegetation.

Large trees had been uprooted and swept downstream and a huge hole had been torn in the moraine between the Luibeg Burn and Allt Preas nam Meirleach. The devastation will be apparent for many years to come.

Examination of the bridge indicated that the deck had been carried upright and bodily downstream, since one of the concrete footpath slabs, which were not attached but simply laid in place, still rested undamaged on its supports. As the deck was being wrenched from the abutments and before the holding-down bolts snapped, the main beams were somewhat bent at one end but were otherwise nearly unmarked. Extensive damage was sustained by the footway beams, bracing, and handrails. The parts were dismantled and removed to the safety of higher ground.

I understand that the Committee is determined that the bridge shall be re-erected. I believe that the girders could be straightened, at any rate to a reasonable extent, though the job is not easy on the rough site and without powerful tools. Most of the remaining members would require renewal. I have prospected the vicinity and located a narrow part of the bed with solid rock on each side about 200 yards upstream of the old site, where I feel the bridge could be re-erected by voluntary labour and with reasonable assurance of permanence, as the flood mark at the point is clearly visible and it would be easy to keep the deck above it. Naturally the bridge would not be quite so attractive for day-to-day use, though quite a small detour is involved if a path were once defined. On the occasions of high water it would efficiently serve its real purpose.

I should mention that the west pier of Black Bridge in Glen Lui was seriously undermined by the spate and that pronounced subsidence has taken place. At the time of writing no cars, except those of residents at Derry Lodge, and that only driven without passengers and at low speed, are permitted to cross. I understand that the Estate propose to institute repairs without delay, and certainly if that is not done before the winter, irreparable damage could ensue. The Club is making a substantial contribution to the cost of the repair of the bridge in addition to undertaking the replacement of Luibeg Bridge.

IN MEMORIAM

The Club notes with regret the deaths of the following members since publication of the previous *Journal*:

(date of admission to the Club; type of Club membership; Club service)

Jean Arthur (1953; Ordinary Life; Committee 1957-66, 1970-73)

James Christie (1972; Associate)

Bill Foubister (1981; Ordinary)

Tibby Fraser (1965; Ordinary; Committee 1975-78)

Elizabeth Friend (1989; Associate)

Jeff Knowles (2002; Associate)

John MacLachlan (1963; Associate)

A. Sommerville (1931; Ordinary Life)

Alison Wolstencroft (2000; Associate)

ELIZABETH FRIEND

Elizabeth died on March 26th 2005 aged 66. Born on Speyside, her early hill-walking began at school when a group of pupils went regularly by open lorry to the old Glenmore Lodge, walking in the Cairngorms with an enthusiastic teacher. She always loved the hills, made walking part of every family holiday, and after her three children had grown up she returned to hill-walking with a major triumph, along Liathach from end to end, on a perfect summer day. Subsequently she was a regular participant on bus meets and on several weekend meets, and she also went hill walking with her 'Speyside gang', a group of four old friends who met every six weeks or so for a walk and an evening of feasting and jollity.

Of her early Club days a friend writes: "Elizabeth suggested that I came with her on a bus meet about 20 years ago. After going several times as a guest with her and her husband James, she encouraged me to join. James was often on call on a Sunday, so we went together. I used to pick up her rucksack and drive it to Queen's Cross, whilst she limbered up by walking. I remember climbing Mt. Keen for the 100th anniversary and we moaned about the long walk in. For Elizabeth (and me) it was a light-hearted complaint and once we got to the top we were laughing, enjoying the photo pose and as usual Elizabeth was chatting to everyone. If you were in trouble on a hill she was helpful and practical. When you felt like giving up she chivvied you on with phrases like 'of course you can get there'. Once we were walking near Loch Muick in horizontal sleet and hail, when she said, 'this is awful, we don't have to do this walk', so we sneaked back to the bus early. Elizabeth was always full of life and fun to be with. I knew her for over thirty years and I miss her badly."

Of more recent times another friend writes: "We both joined the mid-week walking group at about the same time after we had retired, and often shared transport. Elizabeth was comfortable in the hills. An experienced walker, she had an infectious enthusiasm for walking in all conditions, but she was not competitive. She was content to ramble gently or to walk determinedly to 'the top', according to

circumstances. Elizabeth was always good company and we talked about everything under the sun. She was quietly knowledgeable about the hills, the plant life and the birds. She is sorely missed.²⁷ Her last mid-week walk was as joint leader with James, of a tour of the Balmoral Cairns in November 2004, just a few weeks after major surgery for the bowel tumour which caused her death.

Elizabeth's professional work in nursing and then in health visiting allowed her to use her caring and common sense skills. Latterly she was Motor Neurone Disease Care Adviser for the whole of the north of Scotland including the Northern and Western Isles, a post which involved much travelling. She accomplished this very stressful work with immense sensitivity and gave hugely valued support to patients and their carers. Elizabeth was a dearly loved mother, grandmother and wife. She leaves an abiding memory of someone who was a bright light in any gathering, and with a prodigious capacity to care and to love. For those who knew her, the hills will be a little quieter and certainly less fun.

Various Club Members

TIBBIE FRASER

Mrs. Isabella Fraser, who joined the Club in 1965, was always known as Tibbie, apparently from the very start of her life due to her father's concerns over a ewe and his favorite sheepdog. She was always full of energy and enthusiasm for all she did – the descriptor that comes to mind is 'sprightly'!

Tibbie and her husband Kenneth both contributed to changing the Club 'atmosphere'. In late 1965, when I joined the Club, their warm and enthusiastic welcome on my first bus meet differed from the politeness of the 'old school'. Soon it was clear that Tibbie and Kenneth were determined to encourage more young people to join – in those days the average age on a FULL bus must have been close to sixty! Many adventures were shared, Munros conquered, and there were weekends away in other Club Huts. Tibbie always enthused: "I love rock" as we scrambled in Skye, Glencoe and elsewhere. Tibbie and Kenneth completed their Munros simultaneously, and were congratulated as the 'we twa' of the Club.

Work took Kenneth and Tibbie to Perth for a few years, but contacts were well maintained and they retired back to Aberdeen. Along with Bill Baxter, Lewis McAllan, Sandy Black and others, they formed an active group in addition to attending bus meets. The Club's midweek walks were a regular enjoyment until Kenneth's death. Fairly soon after that Tibbie moved out to Aboyne, but still joined in activities as often as possible, coming in to town for the Dinner with her daughter Elizabeth.

In the late 1960s Kenneth was Custodian of Muir Cottage, a role very much shared with Tibbie. A very happy memory is of a creosoting brigade of young(ish!) women members – Tibbie kept hoping she'd find husbands for them all!

After Tibbie's death there was a small family funeral, then a memorial service in Aboyne, at which the Club was well represented, a fitting tribute to a member who added so much to the enjoyment of the Scottish hills and to Club activities.

Ruth Payne

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CLUB

When a new Club Secretary comes to write his (or her) first Proceedings, he (or she) is aware of the beady eyes of Club officials upon him (or her), especially those of the Editor of the Bicentennial Book of the Club due in 2087, when the details of names and events in those far-off days in the early twenty-first century will have faded from the memory of man (if not woman). More immediately, all those Club members who have assisted in its activities over the three years since the last issue of the *Journal* will be expecting their efforts to be fully and accurately recorded for both the current readership and posterity.

In such circumstances, one naturally turns to the output of his (or her) predecessors. Slight hopes were raised in the breast of the current Secretary by his discovery that the first volume of the *Journal* ('*Issued Twice a Year*!') contains no Proceedings but only 'Excursions and Notes'. However, the bureaucratic rot of the Proceedings seems to have set in early, and to have continued ever since. But reading previous Proceedings is a chastening experience. Five of the ten Secretaries in the twentieth century served for more than ten years, and two for over twenty: Alexander Inkson McConnachie between 1889 and 1910, and the perhaps less splendidly named Richard C. Shirreffs for a record 25-year stretch between 1972 and 1997. Their Proceedings cover Club activities comprehensively (in the early days there were no Secretaries for Day Meets, Climbing, etc., and indeed the Secretary was also the Treasurer) and in detail (in 1935, "*The party left Aberdeen at 7.35 P.M.*"; and "*the front four seats were occupied by the Presidential stick, the Presidential rucksack, the Presidential boots, and the President*"). Standards may have fallen slightly since then, but there seems no option but to obey the Editor's *diktat*.

GENERAL MEETINGS

The three Annual General Meetings since the last issue of the *Journal* have been held as follows, all at the Aberdeenshire Cricket Club, Morningside Road:

17 November 2004, with 45 members attending; the following were elected(*) or re-elected as Office-Bearers: Anne Cordiner (Hon. President), Ian Bryce (President), Eilidh Scobbie (Vice-President), Garry Wardrope* (Vice-President), Ken Thomson* (Secretary), Derek Pinches (Treasurer), Robbie Middleton (Hut Custodian), Andy Lawson (Bus Meets Secretary), Peter Bellarby (Social Activities Secretary), Kevin Bannister (Climbing Activities Secretary), Tim Walmsley (Week-end Meets Secretary) Garry Wardrope (Communications Secretary). The following were elected to vacant Ordinary membership of the Committee: Alec Macmillan, Ruth Payne, Claire Marris, Bill Stephenson. Club membership was reported as 503, down two from the previous year. Robbie Middleton made a presentation on the Muir Cottage refurbishment, which was already at an advanced stage.

16 November 2005, with 30 members attending; the following were elected as Office-Bearers, others being re-elected as in 2004: Richard Shirreffs (Hut Custodian), Alec Macmillan (Day Meets Secretary), Dave Ogden (Climbing Activities Secretary). The following were elected to vacant Ordinary membership

of the Committee: Alex Barbour, Colin Brown, Julie Bruce, Adrian Scott and Tim Walker. Club membership was reported as 501, down two from the previous year. During the meeting, Robbie Middleton made a presentation on the near-completion of the Muir Cottage project.

15 November 2006, with 32 members attending; the following were elected as Office-Bearers, others being re-elected as in 2005: Eilidh Scobbie (President), Adrian Scott (Vice-President), Anne Pinches (Social Activities Secretary). The following were elected to vacant Ordinary membership of the Committee: Derek Beverley, Neil Gauld, Ben Mellor, James Hirst. Club membership was reported as 468, a drop of 33 from the previous year. Ian Bryce and Richard Shirreffs (a member of the MCoFS Working Party) led discussion of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland's incorporation proposals, which had taken up much Office-Bearer and Committee time during the year and appeared to be coming to a head on terms more satisfactory than had at first seemed likely.

ANNUAL DINNERS

The three Dinners since the last issue of the *Journal* have been held as follows:

20 November 2004, at the Treetops Hotel, with Jamie Andrew giving an impressive account of his 1999 ordeal in the Alps, and afterwards signing his book *Life and Limb* despite amputated hands (and feet).

19 November 2005, at the Treetops Hotel, with Ken Crocket of the SMC, who showed some of his personal and historic slides during his talk 'The Path to Minus One – Tales of the Grippid'.

10 November 2006, at the Old Mill Inn, Maryculter, with the well-known SMC member and mountaineering guide Andy Nisbet, who showed his own slides of local climbing, often in dubious conditions, during his talk. This Dinner differed from previous ones in several respects, being held on a Friday, before the 2006 AGM, determinedly informal (no speeches!), and about 30% cheaper than the one a year before.

THE COMMITTEE

Though not a regular feature of these Proceedings sections of the *Journal*, it seems appropriate occasionally to lift aside the veil of secrecy that may seem to shroud the main executive body of the Club. The practices and structures of the Committee naturally vary over the years, with changes in the Constitution (the most recent being the creation of a Communications Secretary in 2003), and in activities (for example, a dedicated working group for the Muir refurbishment). The agenda and deliberations of the Committee are also influenced – more or less, usually the latter – by the personalities and preferences of the President and Secretary.

At time of writing, the Committee consists of ten Office-bearers (excluding the Honorary President) and nine 'Ordinary' Committee members. This makes for a large group at meetings, which are held every six to eight weeks on Wednesday evenings in the Aberdeen Grammar School Former Pupils' Club Centre on Queen's Road. In addition to the usual approval of minutes etc., the regular agenda includes new membership applications, reports and proposals from Office-

Bearers, and in recent months the Club's relationship with the Mountaineering Council of Scotland (see below). Responses by the Club to the various consultation exercises are also considered, though usually only formally for lack of time at and between Committee meetings. In the period covered by these Proceedings, these included consultations conducted by the Scottish Executive (planning system), the Cairngorms National Park Authority (25- and 5-year Plans, and their Outdoor Access Strategy), and the National Trust of Scotland (new paths at Linn o' Dee).

The Committee also appoints or confirms individuals to various representational roles (e.g. with the Aberdeen and St. John Mountain Rescue Association, the North East Mountain Trust, and Upper Deeside Access Trust), and to non-Constitutional posts, of which the main ones in recent years are:

Membership and meet enquiries: Alec Macmillan and Jean Robinson
 Muir Cottage bookings: Alex Barbour
 Librarian: Gordon Stalker, Claire Marris
 Thursday Mid-Week Walks: Jack Connell
 Piper's Wood: Robbie Middleton, James Friend
 Training coordination: Neil Gauld
Journal Editor: Lydia Thomson

THE MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL OF SCOTLAND

The Club has been a member of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS) since it was formed in 1970 by the Association of Scottish Climbing Clubs to represent the views of the mountaineers of Scotland. At the MCofS Annual General Meeting in 2005, a decision was taken in principle to move to incorporation, i.e. to convert to a limited company, giving it a legal identity in line with recommendations from Sportscotland, the Scottish Executive agency which funds certain MCofS activities. In spring 2006, draft company Memorandum and Articles gave rise to serious concerns amongst several clubs, including the Cairngorm Club, and these drafts were withdrawn by the MCofS Executive Committee at the June 2006 AGM. At the same time, a MCofS Working Party was set up, with Richard Shirreffs as a member.

Throughout the rest of 2006, many revisions were made (mostly by e-mail) to the draft Memorandum and Articles, some after a series of Club Forum meetings, one of which was held in Aberdeen. Throughout this process, the Cairngorm Club maintained its own MCofS working party, comprised of Eilidh Scobbie, Ian Bryce, Ken Thomson, Richard Shirreffs and Derek Pinches. The main improvements, from the Cairngorm Club's point of view, concerned:

- maintaining club membership of the MCofS members, rather than having clubs act only as "post-boxes" for individual MCofS members
- retaining the block voting system (under which the Cairngorm Club has 40 votes), instead of moving to some form of individual and proxy voting
- clarifying the procedures for conveying notices to the MCofS membership and for the adoption of MCofS policies.

At a Special General Meeting of the MCofS on 17 February 2007, when the Cairngorm Club was represented by Ken Thomson and Richard Shirreffs, a motion to turn the MCofS into a company without share capital, and limited by guarantee, was passed after minor amendments. A separate motion to adopt a Child Protection Policy Statement (which would affect clubs only indirectly) was also passed. At the time of writing, it is expected that the legal steps will be completed during spring 2007.

Ken Thomson
Secretary

MEETS AND EXCURSIONS

This is the first report on day meets since Graham Ewen demitted office as Bus Meets Secretary at the November 2003 Annual General Meeting, following his 36 years of service. Ken Thomson paid tribute to Graham's heroic effort in the last (Number 107) issue of the *Journal*. I would like to add my own thanks, having come on bus meets and been a beneficiary of his efforts since the mid-eighties.

Graham was succeeded as Bus Meets Secretary by Andy Lawson, and over the past year by myself. This may be an appropriate point to review the bus meets situation over the past three years and look to the future rather than give a blow by blow account of each meet.

Among the innovations which Andy introduced was a widespread use of e-mail communication for bookings as well as an advertising system over the Club website reminding members of upcoming meets. This reflects the reality that most active members are now in e-mail communication, but full details of meets are of course still available in the *Newsletter* for those who are not. This system is working well.

A number of other significant changes have now been put in place by the Committee. The Bus Meets Secretary (now called the Day Meets Secretary) is no longer responsible for all aspects of organisation, indeed the role is now more one of a coordinator. Most of the work now falls to Day Meet Organisers, who are appointed in advance for each meet. Detailed protocols have been drawn up by the Committee to give guidance to organisers and to ensure a consistent approach. Protocols are also in place for those leading the President's Parties. The role of the Day Meets Secretary is pretty well limited to booking buses, booking meals if appropriate, and drawing up a schedule of meets in consultation with the Day Meets Sub Committee and of course with the approval of the main Committee.

It is clear from reviewing the *Journal* reports of the past twenty years or so that there has been a shift away from bus meets as a primary area of Club interest, at least for the time being. This is in strong contrast to other activities which are in a very healthy state. Avoiding all attempts at a sociological analysis, there are probably economic factors at work. Day trips are increasingly expensive. The cost of fuel and therefore of bus hire continues to rise steeply; few hotels will serve a meal any longer at a price which is palatable; and the legal restrictions on drivers' hours now limit the scope for long distance day meets in summer time.

For the eight years between 1985 and 1993, attendances averaged 32 per meet with 52 turning up on the Cairngorm Traverse in 1991. Thereafter a long decline set in, now reaching a point where attendances have averaged 20 per meet over the past three years. The maximum was 37 on the Cairngorm traverse of 2004 and the minimum was 9 on the Ochils trip in November 2006.

The Lochnagar meet in January is still well attended, as is the Cairngorm Traverse in September. And there have been adaptations to changed circumstances. For the past three years, February meets have been epic ventures by minibus, catering to smaller groups of members and allowing some flexibility in destination depending on weather conditions. More use of minibuses will be made in the future. And of the nine meets in 2006, only four involved set meals. This is probably the trend for the future, with optional bar meals being the rule and set meals on special occasions, such as perhaps the Lochnagar meet in January and the end of year meet in December.

I would like to thank all those who have acted as Day Meet Organisers over the past year, all those stalwarts who have headed up President's Parties over the past three years, and Andy Lawson particularly for easing my transition to Day Meets Secretary. May you all step forward again and volunteer your skills and services in the future!

2004

11 January	Lochnagar (29)
8 February	Ben Lawers, minibus (13)
7 March	Mount Keen and Loch Lee hills (25)
28 March	Ben Avon and Beinn a' Bhuid (31)
9 May	Ben Chonzie (27)
5 June	Achlean to Coylumbridge (26)
12 September	Cairngorm Traverse (37)
10 October	Bridge of Gairn to Invercauld (12)
7 November	Sidlaw Hills (19)
5 December	Ben Vrackie (26)

2005

9 January	Lochnagar (28)
13 February	Laggan and Craig Meagaidh, minibus (9)
13 March	Glas Tulaichean and surrounding hills (15)
10 April	Braes of Glenlivet to Corgarff (13)
15 May	Drumochter hills (21)
11 June	Ben Lawers Traverse (19)
11 September	Cairngorm Traverse (23)
2 October	Baddoch to Inverey (15)
November 12	Speyside Way, minibus (13)
4 December	Ben Rinnes and Corriehabbie (15)

2006

8 January	Lochnagar (24)
12 February	Am Faochagach, minibus (12)
12 March	Glen Clova (13)
14 May	Loch Rannoch to Dalnaspidal (12)
11 June	Cockbridge to Invercauld (22)
10 September	Cairngorm Traverse (32)
8 October	Schiehallion (17)
12 November	Ochil Hills (9)
3 December	Glen Shee to Braemar (24)

Alec D Macmillan
Day Meets Secretary

WEEKEND MEETS

I must confess that I didn't realise that the position of Weekend Meets Secretary involved writing this piece for the journal. If I had, then I would have kept better notes or chased up meet coordinators a bit more robustly for details of what went on during their meets. As it is I'm relying on the Weekend Meets Diary (very incomplete – there is a gap from February 2005 through to May 2006!) and my memory (even less reliable than the Meets Diary) to put this piece together.

The first meet covered in this account is the 'Easter' Meet of April 2004, which was to Inchnadamph, Assynt. A good Club turnout was achieved with members staying in the hotel, lodge and also some hardy souls camping. Various adventures were had but the prize must be awarded to Fred Belcher, Garry Wardrope, Stephen Kirkpatrick, Fiona Sutherland, Kevin Bannister and Froach the dog for their expedition to Sulven using canoes and a sail made from Stephen's shower curtain! Other parties ascended Quinag, Glas Bheinn, Conival and Ben More Assynt other the course of the weekend.

The next meet also had a watery theme in that it was to Mull and Arle Lodge, with 25 members attending. The weather was very kind with warm sunshine for at least two of the days. Ben More received many ascents although one party headed to the south of the island for some climbing and took on some unwelcome visitors in the shape of ticks. McKinnon's Cave was visited as was the island of Staffa and Fingal's Cave, while others went to Iona.

After the Glenmore Lodge McofS AGM meet in June the Club headed to Culra Bothy and Ben Alder for the July meet. Some people walked, others cycled but an intrepid foursome decided to paddle down Loch Ericht in two canoes lashed together. Ben Alder and Beinn Bheoil were ascended on the Saturday followed by a campfire on the shores of the loch. A good tail wind allowed a speedy return to Dalwhinnie on the Sunday.

In August ten hardy souls made the long slog up the Allt a'Mhuilinn path to the CIC hut underneath the north face of Ben Nevis. Various climbs were completed and a traverse of Carn Mor Dearg and Ben Nevis was also achieved.



On the summit of Glas Maol

A wet weekend over in the Arrochar Alps was the next outing, staying at the Ardmay House Field Centre. Various parties ascended Ben Vorlich, Ben Arthur, Tullich Hill, Meall Bhuidhe, Ben Reoch, Ben Narnain, Ben Vane and Ben Ime on the Saturday. One couple went mountain biking, avoiding the heavy showers that afflicted the hill walkers. A fine communal meal was enjoyed that night back at the house. Sunday was even more of a washout than Saturday and everyone returned home early.

In October a large group headed over to the Glen Coe Ski Hut at the Bridge of Orchy. Once again the weather was pretty wet and misty. However, various parties ascended Beinn Dorain, Beinn an Dothaidh, Stob Ghabhar and Stob a Bhruaich Leith. The Corbetts, Beinns nam Fuaram and a' Chaisteil were also ascended with views of Glen Lyon a highlight of the day. The Strathconnon Inn Hostel was the venue for November's meet. On the Saturday some went up the Corbett Bac an Eich, whilst the majority went up Maoile Lunndaidh. Sgorr na Diollaid and Sgurr Fuar-thuill were ascended on the Sunday. The December meet was to the Aberfeldy Glassie Farm Bunkhouse. The approach involved a steep drive up through the forest, and had there been any snow or ice very few members would have made it. Fortunately, the weather was fairly mild although an atmospheric cloud inversion was seen on the Saturday morning over Loch Tay. Some went canoeing, whilst others went up Schiehallion, and a group took in Meall Greigh and Meall Garbh before deciding enough was enough and descending to a fine communal meal. Others spent the day mountain biking at the

Wolfrax trails at Laggan. Meall nan Tarmachan was ascended in thick mist on Sunday, but the ridge was left to a better day.

A Club record for a Burns Night meet at Muir took place in January 2005. Fred Belcher managed to entertain forty-two club members – well done Fred! In February, another stalwart of the Club was in action for the Killin Youth Hostel meet, when Anne Cassidy did an excellent job of providing a communal meal for the twenty-four members who attended. One party went up Ben Lui via the excellent Central Gully and then onto Beinn a' Chleibh. On the Sunday Meall Ghaordie was ascended via Glen Lochay.

The 'Easter' meet was the re-opening of Muir Cottage after extensive upgrading and this was celebrated in fine style with dancing to the music of the Reel Thing Ceilidh Band at the Mar Lodge Stag Ballroom. In April a visit to Willie Nicolson's Bunkhouse in Glen Elchaig took place. Andy Lawson did a lot of driving this weekend as he bailed out of going up Ruadh-Stac Mhor with a bad knee, drove to the hostel and then went home. However, his knee improved so he drove back west again and did Seana Bhraigh during the Saturday night – good effort Andy! Sgurr nan Ceathreamhnan, An Socach, Creag a' Mhaim, Druim Shionnach, Aonach air Chrith, Maol chinn-dearg, Sgurr an Doire Leathain, Sgurr an Lochain, Creag nan Damh, and the Forcan Ridge and the Saddle were all completed on the Saturday though not by the same party. In May the Sligachan Bunkhouse meet was the scene of typical Skye weather, rain and high winds. Pinnacle Ridge was ascended along with Sgurr nan Gillean and Am Basteir.

The MCofS AGM took place at Glenmore Lodge in June with a number of members attending and taking part in the organised activities prior, during and after the AGM. A trip across to the 'forbidden island' of Rum was the July meet. Whilst the rest of the country was sweltering under a heat wave, those on Rum enjoyed the best of Scotch mist until the heat arrived on the Monday morning, the day of departure. The Cuillin ridge was tackled in challenging conditions whilst low-level paths were taken by the less adventurous. A ceilidh was organised for those who hadn't had enough exercise, including Willie Robb, 'fresh' back from his 12-hour day on the Cuillin.

The good weather continued for the August meet to Achiltibuie and camping at the Achnahaird Bay campsite. Most people went climbing at Reiff though one party ascended Stac Pollaidh. Others went fishing and also diving for scallops. A fine, though midgey, barbeque was enjoyed by all on the Saturday night. Stan Urbaniak celebrated his last Munro on Mullach an Rathain during the September meet to Torridon Youth Hostel. A group continued the traverse of Liathach with the awkward descent off Stuc a' Choire.

In October the ever-popular Alex McIntyre Hut in Onich was visited by a large group of members. The weekend went well although the weather could have been better, wettish on Saturday and even wetter on Sunday. On Saturday Andy Lawson plus friends went up Bidean nam Bian via Sgreamhach. This was Andy's final Munro and they had a wee celebration on top, which continued through the rest of the day. Another party went from Mamore Lodge up Sgurr Eilde Beag and Na Gruagaichean. Other summits conquered included Beinn Odhar Mhor and Beinn Odhar Bheag from Glenfinnan, the Buachaille Etive Beag, and the Pap of

Glencoe. The others indulged in the Ice Factor at Kinlochleven, and retail therapy. On Sunday there was some canoeing at Roy Bridge, ascents of Carn Dearg, the Glen Roy Corbett, and more visits to the Ice Factor.

The meet at Mill Cottage, Glen Feshie in November was one of the best, with a real winter setting more like the grand snows of 1963. With deep snow and gales this was a time to see wild life, and wonder at the strength of nature. On Saturday the entire party of 7 set off in gales and were really proud to manage a wee Corbett above Aviemore in an hour over the guidebook time and on Sunday they managed another Corbett within the guidebook time. The attendance was select, with the rival attraction of Adrian's 50th birthday ceilidh leading to several cancellations. A new stove at Mill Cottage kept the party very warm. There were also seven members at Weem Bunkhouse in December. On Saturday a variety of Corbetts were climbed and also on Sunday. The bunkhouse was warm but probably over-rated.

The Burns Night Meet 2006 was held at Muir Cottage – a big thank-you to Eilidh Scobbie for organising this big event in the social calendar of the Club. February saw sixteen members staying at the Grey Corries Lodge in Roybridge. They enjoyed good conditions with ascents of various Munros of the Grey Corries, Corbett-bashing in Glen Roy and skiing at Glencoe. They found the accommodation a bit lacking, so no communal meal was possible.

The 'Easter Meet' was held at the ever-popular Laggan Potteries Bunkhouse with a small contingent in the Monadhliath Hotel. There was also an excellent ceilidh organised by Ian Bryce and Eilidh Scobbie amongst others. One party went up Sgairneach Mhor and Beinn Udlamain on the Saturday. In April a bit of a mix up ensued as the JMCS (Glasgow) managed to overlook our booking and give the hut to another club.

The meet in May was to Inverarden Cottage, Crianlarich. Cruach Ardrain, Beinn Tulaichean, Meall Ghaordie plus all the Ben Lawers group of hills were ascended on the Saturday in wet and windy weather. The meet in June can't be classed as a meet as only one person turned up for it – Tim Walmsley! I didn't mind, as I'd always wanted to do the Fisherfield Six over two days with a camping stop near the summit of A' Mhaighdean. The weather was excellent too with very few midges.

July saw the Club down on the shores of Glen Etive staying at Inbhirfhaolain Cottage with good weather, few midges and a composting toilet – what more can you ask for? The Smiddy, Dundonnell was the choice of venue for August's meet although half the people who turned up for the meet found alternative accommodation in Dundonnell; a bonus for those staying in The Smiddy, as it's a wee bit on the small side. One group traversed the pinnacles of An Teallach in the mist, although the weather cleared for the arduous descent off Glas Mheall Liath.

The weekend meet to the Lake District for the Aberdeen September holiday was attended by a hardy few who were prepared to put up with the 4½-hour drive south – less time than it takes to get over to Skye – as Fiona kept on reminding me. First we had to break-in to the Bowderstone Hut – no, we did have a key and it wasn't my Wirral upbringing kicking in – it was just that the Yale lock barrels kept rotating when the key was turned. We found out that the previous weekend

occupants had had a similar problem. Nice of the hut custodian to have warned us!! On Saturday a party went to climb Scafell and Scafell Pike and all the other 900m peaks en route, but Meg the dog wasn't happy climbing the gully on to Scafell. Poor Meg was very tired after her day out but not bad considering her age, in human terms, of 91 years. Fiona and I climbed Troutdale Pinnacle, a classic Severe, on Troutdale Crag Borrowdale, whilst Jim Bryce cycled part of the National Cycle Network around Cockermouth. After a communal meal and a few games of Uno Extreme, at which Willy turned out to be a real wizard, we all turned in. Sunday morning was wet but this didn't stop Brian and Willy heading up Skiddaw, Judy up Blencathra and Gordon heading back to Aberdeen to watch the Ryder Cup, while Jim continued his cycling odyssey. The weather turned planned rock climbing into a pleasant walk over Comb Fell. On Monday Willie, Judy and Brian made a quick ascent to the top of Helvellyn in one and a half hours, then descended by way of Lower Man, White Side and Brown Crag in beautiful weather.

October saw a welcome return to Blackwater Hostel, Kinlochleven and a large turnout by Club members, including four lady members who had walked there from Glasgow via the West Highland Way. Binnein Mor, Binnein Beag and Sgurr Eilde Mor were just some of the Munros ascended. Ten members visited the Wester Caputh Hostel in Dunkeld in November. Peaks included Ben Vuirich (a Corbett near Beinn a' Ghlo), Cam Chreag (a Corbett in Glen Lyon), Sgairneach Mhor and Beinn Udlamain, Beinn Dearg (the Munro north of Calvine), and Auchnafree Hill (a Corbett north of Crieff). On Sunday, Meall na Leitreach (a Corbett at Drumochter), A' Bhuidheanach Bheag and Carn na Caim (both Drumochter Munros), Beinn a'Ghlo, Creag Uchdag (a Corbett north of Comrie) were ascended.

The final meet of 2006 was to the Blackrock Cottage, Glencoe. Only ten members could share the delights of this homely wee cottage and the fine meal laid on by Bill Morgan on the Saturday night. One party went up the north-east ridge of Creise and then round to Meall a' Bhuiridh before following the ski lifts back to the cottage. Others went Corbett-bashing, or wandered around the Lost Valley. Buachailles Etive Mor and Beag were also climbed. The weather on Sunday gave everyone a good excuse to return early to Aberdeen.

What of weekend meets for 2007? Well, after a slow start but pushed into action by my enthusiastic wife, Fiona, and the publication of my scruffy Weekend Meets note in the July 2006 Newsletter, all of the meets have now been planned. Highlights include Dunkeld, Glencoe, Arran, Durness, Strontian to name but a few. Weekend meets allow for exploration of the far flung hills of Scotland. They are great fun and long may they continue!

EASTER MEETS

2004	Inchnadamph Hotel and Bunkhouse	(39)	Derek Beverley
2005	Muir Cottage	(20)	Robbie Middleton
2006	Laggan Potteries Bunkhouse	(32)	Adrian Scott

WEEK END MEETS**2004**

January	Muir Cottage	(34)	Fred Belcher
February	Laggan Potteries	(18)	Jean Robinson
March	Glen Affric Backpackers	(19)	Claire Marris
May	Arle Lodge Mull	(25)	Marjory Ewan
June	Glenmore Lodge (MCofS AGM)	(12)	Neil Gauld
July	Culra Bothy / Camping Ben Alder	(8)	Derek Beverley
August	CIC Hut Ben Nevis	(12)	Andy Lawson
September	Ardmay House Arrochar	(21)	Garry Wardrope
October	Ski Club Hut Bridge of Orchy	(20)	Ian Bryce
November	Strathconnon Inn Hostel	(13)	Jim Bryce
December	Aberfeldy Glassie Farm Bunkhouse	(16)	Tim Walmsley

2005

January	Muir Cottage	(42)	Fred Belcher
February	Killin Y.H.	(24)	Anne Cassidy
April	Willie Nicolson's Bunkhouse	(10)	Derek Beverley
May	Sligachan Bunkhouse Skye	(15)	Garry Wardrope
June	Glenmore Lodge (MCofS AGM)	(11)	Ian Bryce
July	Kinloch Castle Hostel, Rhum	(15)	Eilidh Scobbie
August	Achilitibuie Camping	(20)	Dave Ogden
September	Torrison YH	(25)	Claire Marris
October	McIntyre Hut Onich	(19)	Marjory Ewan
November	Mill Cottage Glen Feshie	(7)	Ian Bryce
December	Weem Bunkhouse	(7)	Jim Bryce

2006

January	Muir Cottage	(34)	Eilidh Scobbie
February	Grey Corries Lodge Roybridge	(16)	Anne Cassidy
May	Inverarden Cottage Crianlarich	(14)	Fiona Walmsley
June	Glenmore Lodge (MCofS AGM)	(10)	Ian Bryce
July	Inbhirfhaolain Cottage Glen Etive	(8)	Dave Ogden
August	The Smiddy Dundonnell	(11)	Julie Bruce
September	Bowderstone Cottage Borrowdale	(8)	Claire Marris
October	Blackwater Hostel Kinlochleven	(22)	Marjory Ewan
November	Wester Caputh Dunkeld	(10)	Andy Lawson
December	Blackrock Cottage Glencoe	(10)	Joyce Ritchie

Tim Walmsley
Weekend Meets Secretary

ROCK AND ICE CLIMBING

Well, after a year and a bit as the club 'Climbing Secretary', ably assisted by Tim Walker, Bill Stephenson, Kevin Bannister and James Hirst at various stages, I am pleased to say that the climbing scene has remained as active and as vibrant as ever! Whilst the old faithfuls continue to get out and about on a regular basis, it is encouraging to see new members, both experienced and inexperienced alike coming along to check the club out.

As usual I have left writing this until the last minute, and being stuck in a London hotel room, I am a little unsure where the last Journal article left off! I do however think it appropriate that I begin in April 2005, with a fairly significant development in the Aberdeen climbing scene, which was the long-awaited opening of our first proper climbing wall, at the new RGU Sports Centre. In fact, it seems that climbing walls in Aberdeen are a little like buses, but I will expand on this a little later. With a proper, albeit small and hot wall, we now had no excuse not to train, so every Wednesday evening members of the Club could be found sweating it out and pulling on the plastic. This did of course mean that we were all like finely-tuned machines when it came to the Tuesday evening sessions on the local cliffs in May.

The evenings sessions were as well attended as previous years with weekly trips (weather permitting of course) to the local sea cliffs with the occasional foray inland to the likes of the Pass of Ballater and Legaston Quarry. Perhaps the highlight of the year was however an excursion to Clachnaben on mid-summer's night. This year we were treated with excellent weather, which inspired James Hirst to initiate the idea that we take a disposable barbeque up with us. So, in between burgers and the occasional beer to re-hydrate, people even managed to fit in the odd route, before walking off with a stunning sunset behind us. Also of note from this year was James Hirst and Jeff Knowles epic ascent of a route at Clashrodneay, resulting in perhaps the Club's only benighting of the year!

An excellent weekend was also had at the Costa del Reiff in August, with 20 or so members enjoying ceilidh dancing, fishing, more barbeques and midges. Some people even went rock climbing as well, on crags as far flung as the Leaning Blocks cliff, and Stac Pollaidh, making a change from the usual honey pot of the Pinnacle area.

With summer drawing to a close, the focus turned to winter climbing, and more climbing walls. From the first fall of snow in November, the enthusiasts were up to the high corries in search of some quality winter action. Bill Stephenson started a winter climber's e-mail list, which has remained active this year, with people looking for partners, sharing stories of adventure and reporting on conditions. I have even found myself signing up and getting the tools out from time to time. A wee jaunt was made to the CIC hut on the Ben, where despite conditions being a little thin we managed ascents of a number of the classic routes. This was also despite leaving the lunches up to Tim Walmsley, who considered a grown man could survive on a tube of Fruit Pastels and a pack of Mini Cheddars for 2 consecutive days in the hills. I should have thought he would know better, with his vast experience of Cairngorm Club bus and weekend meets!

Like many others, I am however more at home in a dusty climbing wall once the nights draw in. So, just as we were starting to get bored with the RGU climbing wall, it was announced that Aberdeen was to get a brand new 'extreme sports' facility down the beach, under the name of Transition (see what I meant about buses?) I must have mug written on my forehead, as no sooner had the announcement been made than I found myself a member of the 'advisory board' for the project. Of course for any venture like this, the subject of fundraising comes up, so after a promotional evening in the Blue Lamp for any interested parties (read mugs again!), a sponsored climb was organised involving a team from most of the climbing clubs and groups in the area. The objective was to climb the height of Everest (collectively that is!) on the RGU climbing wall, over a period of six hours. In actual fact we must all be far better climbers than we gave ourselves credit for, as it was actually completed in around three, so just for the hell of it we all kept going in an effort to double the height. The Cairngorm Club Team (consisting of myself, Diane Colvin, Julia Harker, Jon Yearsley, Marj Ewen and Dave Kirk) managed a credible fourth place out of eight, and so at least managed to avoid total humiliation. Our efforts were not in vain however; the Cairngorm Club team raised a total of £1,500, as well as an additional contribution of £1,000 from the Club funds which all went a small way towards getting the Transition wall off the ground, and it is now due to open in March 2007.

So now let's get back to some proper climbing. Summer 2006 started somewhat surprisingly on the sea cliffs. After the success of the previous year it also seemed reasonable to think that we were charmed, and would enjoy another fine evening on sunny Clachnaben. I don't know that the few hardy souls who went up that night would necessarily agree with me. On the subject of drowned rats, the addition of a new venue in the form of Harper's Wall caught at least one member by surprise, when the nature of the somewhat dynamic and strenuous start resulted in an early bath in a rock pool for Mike Brian. Even the usual 'relaxed' Pass of Ballater was also not without incident, when James Richardson did his best 'Fred Belcher impression', by landing at my feet from part way up Pretzl Logic.

We also managed time for an impromptu barbeque at the Arbroath sea cliffs (seems to be a bit of a theme going on here) with the catering ably handled by Tiana Walker this time. A few hardy souls managed to brave the midges for a weekend meet to Glen Etive, where ascents of the classic Spartan Slab, Bludgers Revelation and January Jigsaw among others were enjoyed in excellent weather (for the Coe at least!).

It also seems the Club has turned in to something of a dating agency of late, with no fewer than four weddings in 2005, and a further one in 2006, and those are just the ones I can remember off the top of my head! I'm sure you will all join me in wishing all the happy couples all the very best for the future.

Anyway, here we are in winter again. A few folk already have a few routes under their belts and reports are starting to filter in about fat ice on the Ben. It's even snowing in London!

The program for the summer's climbing has now been finalised and promises an action-packed time for all, with trips to the classic venues, as well as some new tasty ones to catch out the unwary. So, I will leave it there for now, and again

hope to see you all in the hills and on the crags over the forthcoming year(s), for some more fun and frolics!

Dave Ogden
Climbing Activities Secretary

THURSDAY WALKS

The current format for Thursday Walks continues to be as described in the last *Journal* (number 107 p. 144-147). Jack Connell has acted as coordinator, and routes are organised by individual Club members. Attendance continues to be very healthy, with an average of around 20 taking part, and on occasion as many as 30, and the walks are a great chance for socialising, as well as taking us to a wide range of landscapes, from the seashore, to the countryside, to the less-known but very attractive lower hills around Aberdeen.

2004

January	Kirkhill Forest
February	Countesswells Woods
March	Methlick – Braes of Gight – Gight Castle
April	Seven Bridges Walk, Ballater
May	North of Cruden Bay
June	Mona Gowan
July	Mount Battock
August	Craig Leek
September	Cairn Leuchan / Am Mullach, Glen Muick
October	Rowan Tree to Back o' Bennachie,
November	Royal Cairns, Balmoral
December	Kerloch

2005

January	Green Chain Walk in west Aberdeen City
February	Hill of Fare above Millers
March	Scolty from Shooting Greens
April	Ballochbuie Circle
May	Clash of Wirren and West Wirren
June	Mona Gowan
July	Strathfinella Hill
August	Morven from Groddie
September	Correen Hills
October	Culblean Hill – Tullich – Burn of Vat
November	Tarves – Tolquhoun Castle – the Prop
December	Above Tarland



A Winter Outing above Tarland

2006

January	Kincorth Hill – Tullos Hill (Loirston Country Park)
February	Circular walk around Aboyne
March	Glen Tanar
April	Coyles of Muick
May	Loch Phadruig
June	Collieston – Forvie National Nature Reserve
July	Glen Esk – Burnt Hill
August	Geallaig – Glen Gairn
September	Birse – Gannoch
October	Clachnaben – Charr
November	Brimmond and Elrick Hills
December	Riverside Drive – Deeside Railway Track

BOOKS RECEIVED

Hostile Habitats: Scotland's Mountain Environment, editors Nick Kempe and Mark Wraitham, Scottish Mountaineering Trust, 2006, 256pp, ISBN 0 907521 93 2, £15.00.

Subtitled 'A hillwalkers' guide to the landscape and wildlife' there are sections covering: Geological Foundations; the Mountain Landscape; Vegetation Cover; Invertebrate Life; Mountain Birds; Mammals, Reptiles, Amphibians and Fish; Human Traces; and the Future of Our Mountains. Although anyone with a specialist interest will need more, its very breadth means that almost everyone will learn something. Most sections have a general introduction, and then pages on identification of the mountain species. There are lots of excellent illustrations, and the book is a real pleasure to browse.

Scotland's Mountain Ridges, Dan Bailey, Cicerone Press, 2006, 253pp, ISBN 10 1 85284 469 8, £17.95.

In larger format than the usual pocket-sized Cicerone Guides, and illustrated with many spectacular photographs, this unusual book aims to plug the gap between scrambling guides for hillwalkers and climbing guides which tend to skip over easier routes. Difficulty ranges therefore from grade 1/2 scrambles to Severe (with one HS and one VS) for summer climbs, and up to grade III winter ascents. It covers many of the great Scottish ridges, 48 in all, with full details of the approach, extracts from OS maps, and descriptions of the climb itself. A good antidote to the attractions of indoor walls, and sport climbing!

Walking the Munros, Volume 1: Southern, Central & Western Highlands, Volume 2: Northern Highlands and Cairngorms, Steve Kew, Cicerone Press, 2004, 269pp and 303pp, ISBN 1 85284 402 7 and 1 85284 403 5, £12.00 each.

Walking in the Cairngorms, Ronald Turnbull, Cicerone Press, 2005, 317pp, ISBN 1 85284 452 3

The usual clear and careful Cicerone productions, and if you were starting from scratch certainly worth considering. Parking places, maps, accommodation suggestions, access information etc. The two volumes on the Munros give rather more information on each route than in the standard SMC Guide, and have the usual lists to tick (though only of Munros, not tops). The Cairngorms guide to 'walks, trails and scrambles' has 102 routes, of which around two-thirds are graded as 'mountain' and include 17 scrambles, with the remainder split between low- and mid-level. One can only regret, however, the increasingly prescriptive nature of such guides, almost eliminating the thrill of setting out into the unknown with just your imagination and a map.

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