

# The Cairngorm Club Journal



Volume 22

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Number 110

ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY FIVE YEARS

# THE CAIRNGORM CLUB JOURNAL

Edited by Alister Macdonald

Volume 22 Number 110 2013

## CONTENTS

Page

Editorial	3
The Cairngorm Club 1887 – 2012	5
In the Beginning <i>Drennan Watson</i>	26
Two Heaps of Black Ashes <i>Michael Dey</i>	37
Terra Incognita <i>Hugh Spencer</i>	46
A taste for Munros <i>Ken Mills</i>	50
The big dogs of the Haute Maurienne <i>Alister Macdonald</i>	54
In Praise of Windfarms <i>Editor</i>	57
Running the Cairngorm Munros <i>Paul Raistrick</i>	58
A Trilogy of “What Ifs ?”	64
The Climbing Life of Bill Brooker <i>Margaret Brooker</i>	71
Rick Allen <i>Editor</i>	75
Book Reviews	76
The Moor of Inverey <i>Graham Ewen</i>	83
Club News	100
The President	100
Honorary Member	102
Proceedings of the Club	103
In Memoriam	114
Readers’ Views	125
Membership List	126

The Cairngorm Club

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## EDITORIAL

Lydia Thomson, our former editor, stepped down after a decade of excellent work. I will follow in Lydia's footprints and begin this issue number 110 with both optimism and trepidation. Our previous President, Anne Pinches, has also stepped down after a very successful tenure and the new President, Adrian Scott, is introduced to readers on page 100.

The Journal exists to record Club activities, the views of Club members, their individual activities and much else besides, all for posterity. Number 110 has appeared somewhat earlier than might have been expected from the cycle of previous publications, but with good reason. Last year, 2012, was a special year. Not only were the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympic Games celebrated, but the Club, founded in 1887, achieved its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The latter was marked in a number of ways, all reported here, and the anniversary also prompted a number of special articles.

We can still identify with the enthusiasm of the Club's founding members, although life has changed a great deal during the past 125 years. In case that sense of common purpose obscures those important differences I will merely remark that, in 1887, my great grandmother, raising her nine sons in Elgin, did not get out on the hills very often.

Only a few articles deal with the past. Others report Club business and describe contemporary activities but I hope that they all inform, interest and stimulate us to be as active as we can, in our individual ways. I am grateful to all the contributors, including Club office bearers whose reports are published here, and in particular to our Secretary Ken Thomson.

*Alister Macdonald*

## THE CAIRNGORM CLUB 1887 - 2012

The Club was founded on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1887, on the shore of Loch Avon. Accordingly, in the year 2012 the Club reached its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the special events which marked this are reported and recorded here.

The Anniversary activities organised by the Committee comprised

(a) Practical Projects;

Renovating the Footbridge in Rothiemurchus Forest

Extending Piper's Wood

Improving the path to the climbing routes in the Pass of Ballater

(b) Social and Walking Events. These were based on the Club Cottage at Muir, and went off successfully over the period June 21 to 25, 2012.

### Practical Projects

#### The Cairngorm Club Footbridge

##### *Ken Thomson*

Historical background.

One hundred years ago the Cairngorm Club and friends funded the construction of a bridge over the Allt na Beinne (An Beanaidh on current OS maps) in the Rothiemurchus Forest (NO 927078) to facilitate access to the Lairig Ghru. At the time the Club had been established for 25 years. Its history is documented in Sheila Murray's "The Cairngorm Club 1887 -1987", which relates how six men, on June 23, 1887, on the shores of Loch Avon, "spontaneously and unanimously" agreed to form the Club. Subsequently they drew up a constitution, formed a committee and the first official meets started in 1889. Later innovations included day and afternoon excursions, and New Year and Easter Meets, the former usually at the Invercauld

Hotel in Braemar, along with social events and a Club Library. The Journal first appeared in 1893.

Two issues of the Journal, in January and July, 1912, comprised 120 pages (each priced at one shilling or about £5 in today's money) and contained leading articles by Alexander Copland, the first Club Chairman (and President in 1912). He recounted his first trip on foot from Banchory to the Cairngorms around 1850, ie before the Deeside railway line and the purchase of Balmoral by Queen Victoria. Other articles deal with hills and cross-country walks in Affric, Lanarkshire, Glen Shee (reached from Inverey via White Bridge!), and "Some Kincardineshire Coast Climbs". Overseas accounts include a descent of the Grand Canyon by Robert Anderson (a former President and later Editor), and a "Black Forest Journey" in 1908 by the then 18-year-old A. Landsborough Thomson, later to become perhaps the Club's most distinguished member. As Sir Landsborough Thomson CB, OBE, FRSE, FRGS, MA, DSc, LL.D, he gave a talk to the Club in 1976, a year before his death.

The "Excursions and Notes" sections of the 1912 Journal include paragraphs on the deaths of Whymper and the Duke of Fife, bonfires in Aberdeenshire celebrating the coronation of George V in 1911, "the passing of the Deer forest" in Scotland (if t'were only so ?), a threat to the public road from the Linn of Dee to Allanaquoich, the "vanishing osprey", and mosses growing under the Braeriach snowfield in October 1909.

### **125<sup>th</sup> Club Anniversary**

Having noted that the bridge was looking its age, the 2011-12 Club Committee decided to repaint it as one of the Club's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary projects. After consultation with the Rothiemurchus Estate, and an unsuccessful search for a local contractor to do the job (Speyside being too full of new development!), it was decided to go ahead and see if the Club itself could do the work. In April 2012, Ken Thomson and Sandy McIntosh removed – with some difficulty – the original cast-iron plaques, each about 10 kg in weight. One commemorates the erection of the bridge, and the other gives details of distances and timings of routes from the bridge between Aviemore and Braemar. Through the good offices of Kees Witte and John

Mitchell of Aberdeen Fabricators, these plates were blasted and recoated without charge in the summer of 2012.

On a glorious 4<sup>th</sup> August 2012, exactly 100 years after the bridge was opened, a work party of Anne and Derek Pinches, Richard Shirreffs, Brian Davey, Peter Aikman, Shona Lindsay, Sandy McIntosh and Kees Witte cleaned and repainted the bridge, and reinstalled the refurbished plaques (with the painting completed by Ken and Kees a few weeks later, as the paint had run out in the first attempt!). It was a delight to see that the bridge is very popular, not only with walkers but also a large number of mountain bikers who crossed the bridge that day.



*The workers, from the left; Brian Davey, Kees Witte, Peter Aikman, Shona Lindsay, Richard Shirreffs, Anne Pinches, Sandy McIntosh, Derek Pinches.*

## The Origins of the Bridge

Issue no. 38 (January 1912) of the Cairngorm Club Journal contains a short article by John Clarke, the Club Chairman, describing the need for a new bridge over the Alltna Beinne Moire. An accompanying photograph shows the sad state of the then-existing bridge – a spillikin-like affair, said to be also damaged by fire. Previous wooden bridges at this point had seldom survived many spates and floods, and there was anxiety to maintain the right of way through the Lairig Ghru. Having obtained the cooperation of the proprietor, Sherriff Grant of Rothiemurchus, the design and erection of the new bridge was put into the hands of James Parker, a Club member and a civil engineer with the Great North of Scotland Railway. He estimated the cost at not less than one hundred pounds (about ten thousand pounds in today's money), and the Committee only decided to go ahead when the bulk of that sum had been contributed.

Issue no. 40 of the Journal in the following year describes the opening of the bridge on Saturday 3 August 1912, “by a party of members under the leadership of the Chairman – Mr John Clarke – who very kindly provided luncheon in his country quarters at Boat of Garten”. The opening was performed by the Chairman's daughter, who, with a knife provided by Mr Parker, “gracefully cut the ribbon which served as a barrier and declared the bridge open”. The photograph of the new bridge shows it much as it is today, though the footplates have surely been renewed at some point over the last hundred years.

Two iron plaques recently renovated by the Club as part of its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary activities were placed on the railings on either side of the bridge at mid-section. One gives times and distances to various points on the Lairig Ghru, e.g. 10 hours and 24½ miles to Braemar. The other records that “This Bridge over the Allt na Beinne Moire Lairig Ghru Route was Erected by the Cairngorm Club Aberdeen through its Committee with the Assistance of Many Mountain-Loving Friends: T. R. Gillies, Treasurer and John Clarke, Chairman”. The article recalls that there had been an “interesting discussion” in Committee as to the language of this inscription, i.e. whether it



should be in English, Latin or Gaelic; although the first was chosen, a Latin version is provided in the text.

One “enthusiastic member of the Club” at the opening, A. Landsborough Thomson (see above), had walked from Braemar to take part in the proceedings, and after the opening, five members – including Mr Parker “who regaled the party with hot drinks en route” - walked overnight via the Lairig, the summit of Ben Macdhuil and Loch Etchachan to Braemar – “which was reached in time for lunch”.

The Bridge Fund Account shows a total credit of £101 7s 1d, and costs of £50 1s 0d to Messrs Abernethy, Engineers, £36 16s 3d to Mr Lawrence, Builder, and £7 7s 3d to Mr Parker's outlays. This left a credit balance of £7 2s 7d, which it was proposed be used to put up a small additional railing at the south end of the bridge, present Mr Parker with a small memento, and to carry out any future painting required(!)

Other contemporary, relevant and entertaining extracts from the AGM and Committee Minutes of the Club:

Committee Meeting, 7 November 1906: The Treasurer submitted [a] letter from the secretary of the Scottish Rights of Way and Recreation Society Ltd, requesting a subscription towards the repair of the Allt na Beinne Bridge and was authorised to send a donation of £1.11s 6d.

Committee Meeting, 5 December 1910: The Clerk of the Meeting submitted two plans of a footbridge in connection with the proposal to create a bridge over the Allt na Beinne Mhor, and was instructed to make some further enquiry.

22<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting, 16 December 1910: After the meeting, an informal discussion took place regarding the proposed footbridge in Rothiemurchus, and those present agreed that the object was one which deserved the support of the Club.

Letter (in manuscript) from J. P. Grant, Culduthel House, Inverness, 14 March 1911: The chief interest that I have is the maintenance of a clear waterway under the bridge for the right of floating timber down the burn [which] though not exercised every year is valuable to me”.

Committee Meeting, 11 April 1911:

- 1) Copy of letter to J. P. Grant DL, JP, Doune of Rothiemurchus: "... The absence of a bridge, or the presence of a dangerous one, tends to produce wandering in the forest and, in consequence, cause damage".
- 2) The total cost will probably run to over £40, and the Club will endeavour to raise the necessary funds.

Letter from John Clarke, Club President, April 1911: Estimate of expenditure runs to about £50, toward which the Committee and a few others interested in the route have (as per annexed list) already agreed to contribute £23 18s 0d.

Committee Meeting, 24 May 1911: On the suggestion of Mr Parker CE, estimates were being taken for the erection of a longer bridge about ten feet lower down the stream.

June 1911: The engineering difficulties referred to have, however, greatly enhanced the cost, and at least £80 will be necessary to erect the bridge with the accesses, apart from any sum for upkeep, which it is also very desirable should now be provided.

Committee Meeting 9 October 1911:

- 1) The Chairman reported that Mr Parker CE had obtained estimates for the Bridge and Piers amounting in all to about £85, with extras he estimated to amount at £95 in all.
- 2) In reply to a letter from Mr Goggs (Scottish Mountaineering Club) opining that the existing bridge had been burned at one end, the Club Committee responded that it had no information on the point, but that it was planning a new bridge of iron, and invited a SMC contribution.

Committee Meeting, 15 December 1911: [The Chairman] announced that there was every prospect that as soon as the weather was suitable in Spring the bridge would be erected in good time for next year's tourist season.

Committee Meeting, 8 February 1912: A sum of £95 was agreed with Mr Parker, and alternative inscriptions in Latin and in English were considered.

Committee Meeting, 27 May 1912: The Secretary reported that the mason work of the Bridge in the Larig would be started in the

beginning of next week, and that Messrs Abernethy were being hurried on with the steel work.

Note, 29 July 1912: The Bridge over the Allt na Beinne Mor has now been completed, and would be inspected on 3 August 1912.

Committee Meeting, 6 December 1912: The Bridge Fund Accounts were submitted and approved, and the Secretary was instructed to insert an Abstract in the next issue of the Journal. Messrs Abernethy and Co's for an additional railing was passed for payment.

24<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting, 20 December 1912: The Chairman, on behalf of the Club, presented Mr Parker with a handsome travelling clock in recognition of his services in connection with the Allt na Beinne Bridge which he explained was to have a representation of the Bridge engraved on it. Mr Parker, in returning thanks, said that the work had been a great pleasure to him, and was unique in that it was the first occasion on which his work and his hobby had not interfered with each other.

28<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting, 15 December 1916:

- 1) a communication from Mr J W Drummond as to painting of the Allt na Beinne Bridge and expressing willingness to contribute £2-2/- to the cost of necessary re-painting. The acting Secretaries were instructed to accept this donation and it was remitted to Mr Parker with powers to get the work done.
- 2) The Bridge Fund stood at £10-12-11 (of which £1.10.0 was contributed for the Eidart Bridge) to be used for painting as necessary.

## **Piper's Wood Extension**

### *James Friend*

For the Cairngorm Club Centenary celebrations in 1987, it was decided to undertake a tree regeneration project. After much discussion, an area of Glen Ey known as Piper's Wood was selected, and a group of members which included Fiona Cameron, Eddie Martin, Robbie and Judy Middleton and Drennan Watson obtained

the support of Mar Estate, and in May 1989 an area of 4.3 acres of the Glen, about 3 miles south of the village of Inverey, to the east of the River Ey, was fenced in with some 500 meters of rabbit and deer fencing. The project was supported by a grant from the then Nature Conservancy Council, and from generous donations by members of the Club, including an anonymous donation of £1000. Articles describing the project can be found in the Cairngorm Club Journal, Volume 20 (No 102) of 1991, including a full botanical survey of the area undertaken by Heather Salzen. Another matter of interest is that the area is near the original site of three small farms, named Daldruiduchlat, Dalnafea, and Alltshlat, and indeed at least one of the buildings is enclosed within the fence. The archaeology of the Glen is described in a fascinating account by Graham Ewen in the Journal Volume 20 no 103 (1994).

In the years since then, what had been a barren area of glen floor containing about 16 ancient and dying birch trees, with no regeneration as a result of regular grazing by deer, hares and some sheep, has been transformed, as the photographs demonstrate (see page 13). A further article by Heather Salzen in the 1991 Journal (volume 21, no 106), described the growth of many multi-stemmed birches, growing from old heavily-grazed root systems, plus some new seedlings. Four young Scots Pines, and many Rowans had also appeared. Many of the ungrazed grasses had grown substantially, with some changes as a result in the flora, and over the years it is clear that the Wood has become a favoured habitat for adders, probably attracted by the deeper grass and the presence of voles and amphibians in the marshy area and stream.

For the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Club, the Committee decided to extend the size of the Wood, roughly doubling the area by including another 4 acres or so to the east of the present fenced area, and with the encouragement of Mar Estate and Captain Mark Nicholson. It is hoped that this work will be completed during 2013, with a new length of fencing and repairs to the existing fence to be undertaken by a local contractor. The work will be paid for by a substantial donation from a Club Member (Derek Beverley) and Club funds. The new area to be enclosed is somewhat higher on the side of the glen, and mainly a heathery slope, but many birch seedlings have been noted in the area. A group of Members with

botanical interests and skills intend to assess the flora and subsequent developments.



*Piper's Wood: upper in 1989, lower in 2010*

While it is difficult to imagine what the Glen may have looked like in the days before man altered the face of the highland glens, it is remarkable how only 23 years of enclosure have allowed a significant wood to develop. As to how long the fencing should remain is not clear – animals such as deer, hares and rabbits will no doubt always be in the Glen, and have their impact on the trees and plants. But the growth of a number of large trees may create a different habitat, though who can say which is the most “natural” habitat? But there is no doubt that the vision of those who first suggested enclosing the area has been amply rewarded by the growth of an attractive and flourishing area of woodland which should continue to enhance the glen for many years, and provide much interest to Cairngorm Club members and all those who walk the glen.

## **Pass of Ballater Path**

*Ken Thomson*

The rocks on the north side of the Pass are an attractive roadside climbing location, used by both individuals and adventure guides for training purposes, especially as its southerly aspect dries out fast. The best-known routes include Peels Wall (E4 6a), Rattlesnake (E3 6a), Anger and Lust (E2 5c), Smith's Arete (E5 6a), Lucky Strike (VS 4c) and Little Cenotaph (HVS 5b). On a couple of visits in 2011, considerable erosion was noticed, especially on the central area of scree which separates the two sections of the cliffs, and the idea of encouraging an alternative route was born. After a joint survey with Club office-bearers James Hirst and Ken Thomson, Murray Swapp of the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT) produced a detailed specification which was then put into effect with Club funds of about £1500. Pillar way-marks with the Club logo now direct climbers west below the slopes, and then up an improved slanting path through trees to the foot of the routes to the west section. It remains to be seen if further work will need to be done in future, but in the meantime the project recognises the Climbing Section's contribution to Club Activities.

## Social and Walking Events

Marjory Ewan writes: When it was decided we would combine the overnighter and weekend meets to celebrate our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary it took quite a bit of organising to get everything to fit into place. Muir was the obvious choice for accommodation and thus the base for the Overnighter. The weekend was extended to cover the five nights from 21<sup>st</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> June 2012.

As the names started coming in it soon became apparent that Muir wasn't going to be able to accommodate everyone who wanted to attend, so as a back up we booked Blackburn Cottage, which is the old Youth Hostel. It is now owned by Aberdeen Air Training Corps and is next door to Muir. Six of us took up residence there during the five nights.

A variety of expeditions took place on Saturday, some were short, sociable and not too physically demanding, like visits to the coffee shop in Braemar! Other walks took longer and on the Saturday night quite a few were out overnight at the Shelter Stone and surrounding area. There was a total of fifty nine bed nights used with twenty seven people using the accommodation. Some members organised their own stay in Mar Lodge.

To mention a few who were present; Clive Summerson travelled from London and Ken and Pip Broomfield from Edinburgh. Martyn Batchelor, a school and university colleague of Richard Shirreffs, came from the north of England. There were younger members, Graeme McEwan, Shona Lindsay, the climbers James Hirst, Chris Wilson and the veteran Fred Belcher. This list must be incomplete but let's include Fiona Cameron, Eilidh Scobbie, Gordon Stalker, Bill Morgan, Sandy McIntosh, Carol Henderson, Peter Fayers, James Friend, David Brown, Ben Mellor, and Evelyn Massie. Then there were "couples" the Ewens, Shirreffs, Thomsons, Macdonalds, Middletons, and more. It was especially nice to have Dot Batchelor, Eva Foubister and Frances Macrae Gibson join us to stay. They are names that I have heard over the years as long time members of the club. It was great to spend the weekend with old and new faces.

Derek Beverly led, and here recounts, the Overnighter:

Leaving Muir after a cooked breakfast, Graeme McEwan, Willie Robb and myself set off under a steely sky for a gathering at The Shelter Stone to mark the founding of, and 125 years of, The Cairngorm Club.

We walked in through the green and the granite to the “special place”, by blaeberry and bog cotton, by tumbling, mumbling streams and past quiet red and silver pine trees that had been there a very long time. Dampened by the leaden sky that the high hills disappeared into, onwards we travelled, each in his own thoughts... and all for the Stone.

Beyond the Derry Flats Willie left us for Coire Etchachan and Loch Etchachan and we continued on our way through the trench which separates Beinn Mheadhoin from Beinn a’ Chaorinn. A ford by the Dubh Lochan took us to the chuckling River Avon for tea, and then onwards we stravaiged, through a heavy shower, bundled in our waterproofs, to a place where we found “the sun glistening on the waters of Loch Avon”, just as it had 125 years before.

We saw no Water Kelpies as we trod on, beyond and through this “secret corner” of The Gorms, despite scanning the dancing waters in earnest. And great snowfields held our view at times, high up above the Garbh Uisge and Feith Buidhe. There was snow too at the top of Castlegates Gully.

Soon we could see the stone (and someone by it) and a little below, on The Dairymaid’s Field the COAT encampment we were expecting (this organisation were undertaking path works in Coire Domhain). We found Willie by the Stone and retreated to a nook up above where the stove went on for tea and coffee. As the afternoon wore on a handful or so of stout club members arrived and in time all were within the Stone.

Meals were cooked, tea was drunk, and the whisky flowed and soon a pleasant warmth developed within the place, aided in no small part by a “fire log” in the back corner which was tended by musician and able fire master Garry Wardrope. Events, as the evening progressed, are hazy. Not all who arrived at the Stone stayed. Some returned to Muir and others bivvied, nearby or elsewhere. Two of our number camped, one on The Dairymaid’s Field and one by Loch Etchachan. But before all this there was the matter of “the speech”



which Anne, our lady President, felt I should deliver to the assembled masses in her absence.

Working class, daft laddies generally don't go in much for public speaking but of course I said "yes" and then spent many a sleepless hour pondering just what I would say. I needn't have worried however, as Sheila Murray's excellent book, "The Cairngorm Club 1887-1987", was at hand and a photocopy of her "Early Years – Founding of the Club" chapters, recovered from the top lid of my rucksack, seemed to work just a treat.

We didn't manage the 100 or so members that made it to the same spot 25 years earlier. However all who made it, in June 2012, despite it being the wettest and dullest June on record, were, in my opinion, truly "men and woman of heroic spirit".

I spent the night under The Shelter Stone with Willie Robb and we left together in the morning for Muir, where a warm welcome awaited us.



*Loch Avon – looking South West*

## The Barbecue Lunch

For many the barbecue lunch at Muir, on Sunday June 24<sup>th</sup>, was the main focus of the celebrations. Anne Pinches, then President, was the prime organiser and her account, first published in the Club Newsletter, is reproduced here:

As dawn broke on Sunday 24 June, Muir was looking at its best, having been spruced up by a small but dedicated group on the Work Weekend and the Aberdeen Mountain Rescue marquee having been erected on the Friday evening. This was the day of the barbecue at Muir Cottage to celebrate the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Club.

The weather overnight hadn't been very good, the forecast wasn't great, and the thoughts of us cosily ensconced at Muir, or nearby Blackburn Cottage, turned to the group overnighting at the Shelter Stone.

As the morning wore on, there were mutterings: "Where are the caterers, shouldn't they be here by now?" Tables and chairs were arranged, the bar was organised and there didn't seem anything else we could do despite that feeling that we should be doing something! The caterers from Glenshee Ski Centre did turn up in plenty of time, of course, and went about their business very efficiently. Now all we needed was the people: 93 had said they would come. As the planned time for the barbecue got closer just about everyone was there including those who had braved the conditions and stayed at the Shelter Stone overnight or, in one case, on the top of Macdhui! Two other members who had started off in Speyside the day before and walked through to join the others for the celebrations at the Shelter Stone were also welcomed when they got to Muir. It was good to see all the damp and weary walkers arrive safely.

The weather was mixed, with sun and showers, but we were fortunate in that there was more sun than showers. The President then made her speech and proposed the toast to the Club.

Here the Editor inserts the first part of the speech;

"When the Club was formed 125 years ago Queen Victoria was celebrating her Golden Jubilee. This year, co-incidentally, Queen Elizabeth II is celebrating her Diamond Jubilee. I wonder how the

monarchy will be faring when we celebrate our 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary! Many of you will have heard me say this before but I am very proud to be the President of the Club, particularly in this special year.

There are, as always on occasions like this a few people to thank and the first of these is a group of six men, Alexander Copland, Alexander McConnochie, Robert Lippe, Charles McDonald,, William Anderson, and William Hawes. According to Robert Lippe they, on the 23rd of June, 1887, “ spontaneously and unanimously agreed to form ourselves into the Cairngorm Club, the name being naturally suggested by the monarch mountain so full in the foreground”.

“And so, on that morning,,,,, with the sun glistening on the waters of Loch Avon, our Club was born”. Had the weather been like last night’s it may not have happened!

I hope and think that they would be pleased with what the Club has achieved since then. We have a very hard working committee who continue to develop the activities of the Club”.

After the speech the special cake was cut, and Anne’s account continued.... Ruth Payne had offered to bake a cake as part of the celebrations. As the numbers for the barbecue increased daily, I was concerned that the cake might not be big enough. I knew that Ruth had baked it early on and had been 'dosing' it regularly with alcohol and I didn't want anyone to miss out. I need not have worried. Ruth produced a magnificent cake which catered easily for the assembled throng, and there was even some left over which at the time of writing is still being enjoyed by the President! A healthy-sized chunk was also delivered to Sheila Murray who was unable to come because of illness. Sheila was the first lady president and the author of "The Cairngorm Club 1887 - 1987".

Sheila's book had been referred to more than once during the celebrations. The cake was cut by the longest standing member present - Anne Cordiner. Coincidentally Ruth had made a cake to celebrate the Club's Centenary and Anne, being President at that time, also cut that cake.

The wine flowed, the food was served, eaten and appreciated, and we all had a lovely time. It was good to see so many members and

guests at Muir. Lots of photos were taken including one of 8 past presidents with the current presidential group, (see page 25).

Many people made things easier for the organiser. Jane Torrance, who worked at Mar Lodge at the time, arranged for the chairs and tables we hired from Braemar village hall to be delivered and then returned. Aberdeen Mountain Rescue Team lent us their marquee and anyone who watched it being put up on Friday evening or taken down on Sunday afternoon marvelled at the teamwork. We felt that if we ever needed the team's help then we could feel confident and safe in their hands.

The bar was manned very effectively, and thanks to Derek (Pinches), who had kept an eye on the deals around at the time, a good selection of wine was available. Thank you to all of those who attended and helped in any way; I suspect that I wasn't even aware of some of the things that people were doing to make the occasion go more smoothly.

The biggest thanks of all must, of course, go to Messrs Anderson, Copland, Hawes, Lippe, McConnachie and McDonald for deciding to form the Cairngorm Club in 1887: they could never have guessed what they started!

**Postscript.**

*At the barbecue Club Badges bearing the anniversary dates of 1887 – 2012 were on sale, along with commemorative whisky.*



*The Barbecue Lunch: The President, Anne Pinches, opening the proceedings and pages 23 and 24, lunch in full swing.*





*The Barbouac Lunch: The Project  
proceedings and pages 22*





*Eight Past Presidents and other Office Bearers. Back row: Eddie Martin (Past Pres 1988 – 91); Eric Johnston (Past Pres 1982 – 85); Anne Cordiner (Past Pres 1985 – 88); Ken Thomson (Past Pres 2000 – 03, present Secretary); Judy Middleton (Past Pres 1994 – 97); Gill Shirreffs (Past Pres 1991 – 94); Richard Shirreffs (Past President 1997 – 00); Eilidh Scobbie (Past Pres 2006 – 09); Front Row: Graham Ewen (Hon Pres 2009 - ); Marj Ewan (Vice Pres 2009 – 12, Week End Meets Sec); Anne Pinches (2009 – 12, Social Activities Sec); Derek Beverly (Vice Pres 2009 – 12, Day Meets Sec.)*

## IN THE BEGINNING

### *Drennan Watson*

*“Before taking our several ways, we spontaneously and unanimously agree to form ourselves into the Cairngorm Club, the name being naturally suggested by the monarch mountain so full in view in the foreground, and calmly looking down on our meeting.”*

As members will know, it is the Reverent Robert Lippe, writing in the Club’s first journal in 1893, who records how, after meeting five friends and spending an uncomfortable night under the Shelter Stone, he parted from them at “Maghan no Banaraich” to go his separate way home, but not before they all made the above declaration. But what were the Cairngorms they saw like in those days of the Club’s founding? What were the people, the landscape and the wildlife they encountered like, and what had shaped that scene? A detailed description would require an entire book, but some of the key features of change at that time and leading up to it give us a sense of how we came to where we are now.

The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century were a convulsive times in rural Scotland as major historical trends surged through it. As Mark Shucksmith summarises it in his chapter on Land Use in the Cairngorms within *The Ecology, Landuse and Conservation of the Cairngorms*, “*Following the union of Scotland and England in 1707, however, the Highland economy was transformed from feudalism to capitalism, hastened by the dismantling of the clan system after the Jacobite rebellions and the vesting of property rights in the clan chieftains.*” From this flowed many, but not all, of the changes that early club members were still witnessing in their Cairngorm outings and which are still exerting their influence. A separate important historical trend was the Romantic movement, with its focus on nature. It gathered strength in Scotland in the late 18th century, but a key event for hillwalkers and climbers was certainly Sir Walter Scott’s publication, in 1810, of his poem *The Lady of The Lake*, centred on Loch Katrine. It had massive national and international impact, selling 26,000 copies in its first year. Scott’s work through this and later publications like *Rob Roy*, forged an enduring link in

the Scottish mind between wild scenery and national pride. It was a major influence in transforming how we regarded mountains. That transformation was why the Reverent Lippe and his friends were there that day and formed the Cairngorm Club.

Other changes swept over the land in the early years of the 19th century and moulded the landscape and communities which early Club members encountered. In the great Irish famines of 1847-49, caused by the destruction of the potato crop by the newly arrived fungal pathogen *Phytophthora infestans*, two million people “disappeared”, one million dying of starvation and one million emigrating. The disease swept on to the Scottish Highlands where also large populations depended on potatoes, causing epidemics up to 1855. Famine had been a major problem in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Cairngorms, killing many people. However, in this case, a massive voluntary effort by the people of Scotland prevented such mass death, but huge numbers of people emigrated from the Highlands.

The Eastern Highlands were less affected by this last disaster and lost fewer people, but they did not escape another major influence – the Lowland Clearances! Scotland, till then, had no village tradition. Rural families lived mainly in small groups called townships, sharing common grazings and working the land jointly. Through the agricultural improving movement, common grazings were abolished, tenants removed, and enclosed fields of the kind we now see surrounding individual farms with steadings created, each with an individual tenant farmer. Increased agricultural productivity was to pay for the increased rents. Large numbers of people were ejected from their only living, especially the numerous cottars. Where it started in the southwest as in Galloway, it was done with such reckless cruelty and disregard for peoples’ welfare it provoked open rebellion. “Drystone dykes”, now an accepted part of the hill scenery, marched over the hills, forming the bounds of sheep lets. The “levellers” groups of now landless people gathered at night and tumbled down long lengths of them and the army had to be called in to control the situation.

Coming late to northeast Scotland, the changes were done with more humanity and regard to the law. Nonetheless, many people were displaced from their land. Enter the “planned villages” of

Scotland, created by landowners to accommodate many of the displaced. They included places such as Huntly, Tomintoul and Grantown. Aitchison and Cassell, in their book *The Lowland Clearances* state the villages were "*holding centres for agricultural labour force in the countryside created by the lairds*" and were meant to be better places to live, with a more secure economic and social framework. They had other forms of industry like weaving and linen. It was held they would improve the character of the local people; that is keep them virtuous and respectful of authority. By 1850 it was all over. The whole movement antagonised rural people. Large numbers left the Church of Scotland in silent protest, and replaced the former almost cringing respect for lairds with animosity. One major impact of the the arrival of new agriculture and its production of cattle, and of the emergence of alternative ways of transporting them, was the decline of cattle droving to the markets of the south and the gradual abandonment of the drove roads over the hills.

Ballater had a rather distinct origin. Here, Alexander Farquaharson of Monaltrie, returning in 1776 from exile in Herefordshire, enforced by his support for the 1745 rebellion, began to develop the Pannanach Wells as a spa. People needed accommodation beyond that offered by the hotel and this stimulated development. Ballater as such hardly really existed before 1790 and most of its growth is held to have taken place in the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as both Victoria and the railway arrived. However, in our copy of *A New History of Aberdeenshire*, published 1850, Ballater is already described as "*a neat clean village*", with well laid out streets with granite houses and slated roofs, a central square, a parish church, good water supply, sewage services and gas supplied to the houses. The agricultural improvements observed by Farquaharson during his exile in Herefordshire however, strongly influenced his reorganisation of his estate.

Hence, the landscape 19<sup>th</sup> century Club members travelled through in the straths was broadly similar to today's, but not ancient – quite newly created. Already fewer people lived in the glens than when these first club members were born. Gaelic was still heard, but probably already under pressure. John Hill Burton, in his idiosyncratic book *The Cairngorm Mountain*, published in 1864,

recalls losing his way in his younger years when he mistook Loch Avon from above as “*the little Tarn of Etichan*” and ending up going towards Speyside instead of Deeside. He encountered a drover searching for lost black cattle. He spoke little English but led Burton to a low-roofed, turf thatched bothy made of bent pine roots. Here, he was joined by ten “*rough and surly individuals*” who, he contended, avoided communication by pretending only to speak Gaelic while, “*in the midst of their Celtic communications with each other, they swore profusely in the Scottish vernacular.*”

Despite the large population losses due to historical processes, our early members would still have seen much more populated glens than today. MacGillivray, for example, in *The Natural History of Dee Side and Braemar*, published in 1855, describes two small villages encountered after passing Mar Lodge on his journey from Braemar, stating that between them and the Dee, “*is a level tract of land, well cultivated, and bearing crops of oats, barley, potatoes and turnips.*”

What else was dramatically changing the landscape, societies and wildlife? Great forests of the Highlands had lain largely intact until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when felling increased dramatically. By 1850, most were gone, with drastic impacts on wildlife, but large-scale fellings continued until about 1850 and as late as 1870 in Glen Feshie. Much of Rothiemurchus Forest was felled to provide timbers for the Highland railway.

Getting this timber to market provided the next issue. The only feasible way was to float the timber on the rivers, often by building dams to store up water released to create a flood. But that collided with fishing interests. Salmon, in these days a useful source of food and income, were caught by individuals using thrown spears, and by owners of fishing rights by traps called “*cruives*”, set in rivers. Floating logs destroyed these. Basil Dunlop, in his 1994 research paper, *The Native Woodlands of Strathspey*, describes the endless 18<sup>th</sup> century legal disputes between loggers and fishing right owners and fights between ghillies and loggers that occasionally led to deaths. When Telford started building river bridges in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, logging was a menace to his efforts, as Haldane describes in his book *New Ways Through the Glens*. The bridge at Ballater narrowly escaped destruction in 1809 but the bridge at Potarch was

not so fortunate. In 1813, Farquharson of Monaltrie sold pine to an Aberdeen merchant who floated the logs down just before the bridge was complete, the logs removing supporting scaffolding and leading to its destruction. An Act of Parliament that year forbidding logfloating when a bridge was being constructed downstream resolved this issue. But log floating was also colliding with the emerging sport of salmon fishing with rods, with characters like Mr Bass the Brewer claiming it "*injured his fishing.*" Dunlop concludes that legal actions threatened by such as those and the development of better roads and better methods of transport, notably the traction engine, probably led to the cessation of log-floating by about 1900, so early club members would have witnessed it.

During the world wars, manufacture of vital ammunition depended on coal for smelting and this in turn depended on a supply of wooden pit props – which by that time were being imported. The U-boat campaign of the First World War, threatening timber supplies, revealed the fundamental weakness of this dependency. Hence fellings during two world wars to provide home grown timber depleted the forests further. Until recent decades, you could still meet old men who recalled felling pines north of the Lecht and in Glenshee and elsewhere, extracting logs from high hillsides by the skilful but potentially dangerous technique of "skyelining" – that is using overhead cables. The dense blueberry cover that established itself below them, and persists, can often identify land formerly covered by these pinestands. This situation led to the creation of the Forestry Commission in 1919 to expand Britain's forests. From this period stem the dense stands of conifers that now cover entire hillsides.

But what wildlife did early members find in their expeditions? Long before the advent of sporting estates, many species were heavily persecuted as pests of agriculture or forestry. The scale of destruction, much of it ill-informed and pointless, has been huge over centuries. Ritchie, in his important book *Animal Life in Scotland*, published in 1920, records that, on the Sutherland estates of Langwell and Sandside, between 1819 and 1826, 2,647 carrion crows and magpies and 1799 rooks were killed. Clive Ponting, in his book, *A Green History of the World*, records, on probably the same two estates, the destruction of 295 adult eagles and 60 young plus an

unknown number of eggs, and of 550 dippers (then called kingfishers). Between 1776 and 1786, 70 eagles were killed in the five parishes around Braemar. Similar efforts continued into recent times. The red squirrel, for example, as a forest pest, was heavily persecuted to extinction over much of Scotland, with loss of habitat also playing a part. The Highland Squirrel Club was formed in 1903 to counter claimed damage by red squirrels in forests of the Northern Highlands. In fifteen years it killed a staggering 60,450. In the Cawdor plantations, the reward of a few pence per tail, led to the elimination of 14,123 red squirrels in 15 years. The forests have survived its return and growth in numbers. How attitudes change!

Polecats, martens, wildcats, and otters were all persecuted to near extinction or in fact local extinction. To these pressures was added the Victorian collector of specimens and eggs. Even a species like the St Kilda wren was eagerly pursued. The last ospreys nested on Loch an Eilen or nearby. Between 1843 and 1849 their eggs were stolen on 15 occasions. It is not surprising that McGillivray, in his famous text on Deeside, describes the golden eagle, otter, wildcat and marten as rare or very rare by 1862, although the polecat was apparently still present. Much of the wildlife that those early members would have enjoyed seeing was nearly gone.

Perversely, some species were being successfully reintroduced. The red squirrel, even as it was persecuted, was widely reintroduced, usually from England, in various places. In 1793, the 4<sup>th</sup> Duke of Athole reintroduced it to Dunkeld, probably with Scandinavian stock. Lady Lovat introduced them at Beaufort Castle near Beaully in 1844. From such centres it rapidly spread up the more wooded valleys. In the Cairngorms, it is thought that a native stock may have survived in the Forest of Rothiemurchus and spread throughout Speyside and further from there from the 1840s onwards. Squirrels, from whatever source, reached Grantown by 1856 and were recolonising Deeside in the 1860s. So early members would have seen this attractive animal in the Cairngorms.

The Earl of Fife's attempts to reintroduce the Capercaillie at Mar Lodge in 1827 and 1829 failed, but reintroductions in Taymouth in Perthshire a decade later succeeded and it spread rapidly reaching up the Dee to Banchory by 1878 and spreading into upper Deeside. So

the red squirrel and the capercaillie were part of the scene, although rather newly returned, for early Cairngorm Club members.

The price of sheep had been falling by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, making sheep farming much less profitable but, by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, hunting had become status symbols for the old aristocracy and hence also for nouveau-riche industrialists intent on aping their "betters." Landowners began to allocate hunting rights for deer and salmon and other game as their private property, although deer and salmon had been widely left open for many to take before. Traditional methods of fishing for salmon, by spearing for example, were not made illegal until 1886. Enter the Highland Sporting Estate, which is not, as often misstated, a landuse. The landuse is recreational hunting. A Sporting Estate is an imported social construct imposed on the activity, drawing much on ancient Norman feudal traditions of royal beasts, exclusive hunting rights for elites, and social hierarchies. With tartan and kilts added by Victoria and Albert, Balmorality had arrived. Now, more people were cleared to make way for deer forests. Nethersole-Thompson and Adam Watson, in their 1974 text, *The Cairngorms*, record, "*Around 1859 Karl Marx became very excited about word of new clearances for deer at Gaick, Glen Feshie and Glen Tilt ---*". Any wildlife species considered damaging to game were grimly pursued, including species harmless to grouse or fishing like owls, kites and even dippers. To some extent, it is a picture that persists. From this time stems the loss of species like the osprey, red kite, polecat, goshawk and sea eagle.

Surveys of tourists consistently show that landscape and wildlife remain the key attractions that are the foundations of the Highland tourism industry. The influence of Scott and Stevenson in the development of this attachment to wild landscapes and nature was thus fundamental in creating that industry. Victoria and Albert's fascination for highland scenery and the romance of hunting added fuel to this fire but did not create it. The growth of tourism was aided by the construction of the railways which, for the first time, made long distance travel easy and affordable. These included the Deeside line built in the 1880s and certainly used by early members in excursions.

Consequently, there was a publishing spate of tourism literature and guides of Scotland, by authors like H V Morton. Dipping into the



sizeable collection of Scottish books held by my wife and myself yields a tattered copy of Rhind's *The Scottish Tourist*, dated 1850, already in its 9<sup>th</sup> edition. His *Excursion up the Dee to Ballater* even provides details for the ascent of Ben Macdui via the Sron Riach, declaring, “--- *but the tourist, when mounted on the cairn, may truly say, that he is the highest subject in the United Kingdom, being, by the most recent measurement, 4390 feet above the level of the sea, and from ten to twenty feet higher than the summit of Bennevis.*” (but our *New History of Aberdeenshire*, published the same year, records its height as 4296 and on recent maps as 4294.6. It keeps shifting). One cannot complain about such errors. Gross errors in OS maps of the Highlands persisted into the 1960s at least, even in the Cairngorms. Published guides of the times characteristically described, not only scenery, but also flora, fauna and geology. MacGillivray's text “*The Natural History of Dee Side and Braemar*”, mentioned earlier, was a classic of this kind, describing geology, flora and fauna alongside detailed physical descriptions of the area. This was a tradition successfully restored in 1974, underpinned with much research and scholarship, by Nethersole-Thompson and Adam Watson in their publication, *The Cairngorms*. Alex Inkson MaConnachie's three substantial articles in the first two volumes of the Club's journals, describing the eastern, central and western Cairngorms in turn, are undoubtedly the first descriptions of the area in the form of a climbers guide. The first SMC guide to the Cairngorms was not published until 1928. An interesting addition was Charles Plumb's “*Walking the Grampians*” published in 1935, describing ascents of all the main summits including that of Beinn Muichdhuì (The various spellings of which he discusses regarding their merits). Muichdhuì was unusually busy that day he says and several descending parties inform him that the Cairngorm Club was erecting an indicator on top that day, “*sure enough we found them in force, with men, women, with ponies, with paraphernalia, almost with brass bands*”. He clearly did not approve of such mass intrusion in lonely areas or the erection of such indicators, which he looked on as “*a sort of desecration*” and responded curtly to the welcome received when mistaken for admirers of the project.

Victoria and Albert bought the old Balmoral House in 1842, the land in 1852 and opened the current Balmoral in 1856. The Highland

sporting estate developed apace as sundry aristocratic landowners and nouveau-riche industrialists bought sporting estates, principally to gain prestige. As Andy Wightman's recent research shows, it is the motive that persists. Many estate owners took exception to hillwalkers or others "stravaiging" over their land. The attitude of many such is captured, as late as 1948, in "With Gun to the Hill", by Stephen M Pilkington, - a man so addicted to shooting and fishing that he openly confessed he was never happy unless he was killing something. "*One day I hope I may set foot on Inchrory again*" he says, "*but I do not know the present owner and hear that he does not approve of strangers on his land - for which who can blame him - not I anyhow, in these days when half the forests in Scotland are in a fair way to be ruined by hikers. Who set the moors on fire with their supposedly burnt-out campfires and cigarette ends and litter the place with paper and empty cigarette cartridges.*" Do we recognise ourselves here?

As a result of such attitudes, freedom of access became a key issue involving club members. Bob Aitken's essay "Stravaigers and Marauders" in the Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal of 1975 gives an excellent condensed history of the struggle for freedom of access. He points out that, "*The continued extension of the deer forests and the gradual decline in use of the great drove roads combined in a threat to the hill rights of way which became acute in the 1880s, especially where the proprietor or shooting tenant was an outsider.*" It was, he points out, in the Eastern Highlands that deer forests were most prominent and hence here that the acutest conflicts occurred. Consequently, "*the Cairngorm Club had its origins in a tradition altogether more radical than that of the SMC. The political background of the North-East was Liberal; the members, hillmen rather than mountaineers, were usually afoot on the Cairngorms during the stalking season;*"

The debate, note, has been essentially about legal right of access, not about disturbing shooting, though the landed interests often presented one as the other - and still do. The access struggle centred around two issues. One was the assertion of rights of way, often focused around routes of old drove roads, led by the Rights of way Society. They fought classic battles over confrontations in Glen Doll and over Jock's Road ( Cairngorm Club members were much

involved in supporting these efforts). However Bryce, first Honorary President of the Club, was addressing a wider right of access across the land in general. In contrast, the first Scottish Mountaineering Club Guide, *The Cairngorms* by Sir Henry Alexander MA, LLD in 1928 starts with a *Proprietary Note on Sporting Rights* declaring that, "*The Scottish Mountaineering Club desires to impress upon all those who avail themselves of the information given in their Guide Books that it is essential at all times to consider and respect proprietary and sporting rights*". It goes on to tell readers they must "*obtain the consent*" of stalkers and keepers before walking on shooting lands and declares "*The sport of mountaineering ought not to be conducted so as to interfere with the sport of shooting*".

In contrast, within the Cairngorm Club Alexander Copland, Thomas Gillies and Alexander Inkson McConnochie, writing in the Aberdeen Journal in the 1880s, under the names like Dryas octopetala and Thomas Twayblade, described their expeditions in the Cairngorms in essays notable, as Aitken says, "*not only for their adventurous bivouacs and cuisine on the tops, but also for their encounters with, escapes from, and diatribes against stalkers, ghillies, and lairds.*" They were all prominent Cairngorm Club members active on the access issue. Bryce, in the final paragraph of his opening address in volume 1 of our journal in 1893, *Some Stray Thoughts on Mountain-Climbing*, wryly concludes, "*Perhaps I ought to add a further charm of Scotch mountaineering – the risk of encountering a band of hostile ghillies, or having an interdict applied for at the instance of Mr Winans. But as this source of excitement is threatened with extinction, I pass it by for the present.*" Mr Winans had very extensive long running leases on land in the Affric-Kintail area in the 1800s and 90s. and who aimed to enforce total exclusion of the public from 'his' deer forests by maintaining a large force of ghillies to deter walkers. He was responsible for the notorious Pet Lamb case in Kintail, where he took out a ludicrous interdict to prevent a pet lamb from straying on to his land.

In short, the Cairngorm Club was in the vanguard of the movement that led, ultimately, to that broader right of access we enjoy today. Nonetheless, there was perhaps in the Club something of a schism. The Reverent Lippe, in his article in Volume 1 of the Club Journal, published in 1893, quoted at the start, concludes, "*For*

*all these mountaineering enterprises, the club received the most courteous facilities from the various proprietors and lessees and dependents. In return for these favours, the Club hereby records its most grateful thanks to all these benefactors, and more particularly to Sir William Cunliffe Brooks, Bart, of Glen Tannar, Sir Algernon Borthwick, Bart, and lessee of Invercauld and Mr Findaly of Aberlour, for their truly Highland welcome and splendid hospitality”*  
 .....YUCK?

## Two Heaps of Black Ashes: The Battle for the Lion's Face

*Michael Dey*

Graced with the presence of Queen Victoria the Braemar Gathering of 1891 was a grand affair. The ageing queen *swept* into the grounds at Invercauld, acknowledged the cheers with a *gracious bow* and sat herself down on what the Aberdeen Journal described as a *luxurious chair* of brocaded silk and silk plush. This throne appropriate for a queen was set in a domed pavilion, lined in purple cloth and floored with Persian rugs.

The event epitomised that sense of reverence and respect for royalty and aristocracy associated with Deeside and the Braemar Gathering. But at the very same moment, behind the glamour and respect for Victoria, a struggle over a right of way was raging which for a brief time highlighted a very different sense of loyal Deeside.

Like the Gathering this also centred on the lands of Invercauld: Lion's Face Drive which ran from Castleton of Braemar round the southern flank of Creag Choinnich, east to Dubh Chlais to meet with the Ballater road. This was one of Victoria's favourite paths. But what was fit for a queen was also deemed by locals and visitors to be suitable for free-born commoners. Not that it was Victoria who contested the right to walk by the Lion's Face. No, opposition came from Alexander Haldane Farquharson landowner of Invercauld.

On the death of his father, Lieut. Colonel James Ross Farquharson, the estate passed in 1888 to the twenty one year old A.H.F. Graduating from Christ Church Oxford in the same year, by no stretch of the imagination could the young laird be said to have experience in handling the niceties of running such a vast estate (reportedly 100,000 acres including lands in Forfarshire) let alone the politics and economics of village life. But things started well, at least as far as his bank balance went. Within three months of his father's death he had managed to let Invercauld estate to Sir Algernon Borthwick M.P. for the not inconsiderable rent of £4,500. For this the Conservative press baron not only had the social cachet of a pile in the Highlands, the Queen for a neighbour, but also access to extensive fishing and shooting rights. According to the local newspaper this renting was fortuitous otherwise Invercauld *would*

have been an overshadowing white elephant for Alexander Farquharson.

It's an uncertain point as to whether the new tenant pressed the laird for exclusive access to deer forest and grouse moor. What we know for certain is that within two years of becoming proprietor of Invercauld, Farquharson was erecting barriers at either end of the Lion's Face, an action which the Dundee Courier reported as creating much indignation and making clear where it stood on the matter stated,

*Mr Farquharson seems to have been very successful in every way since commencement of his reign in making himself unpopular with his tenants and dependents who . . . are powerless to resist his usurpations for fear of eviction or some other equally unpleasant form of retaliation.*

In challenging the right of access to land Alexander Farquharson set himself literally and metaphorically on one side of a fence which separated contending political ideologies. Almost fifty years previously, the great Glen Tilt struggle had been resolved in favour of access, although it should be said that this was the right to follow a designated path rather than to roam freely across the hills. Nonetheless, it was a significant victory. In 1886 the struggle centred on Glen Doll when proprietor Duncan Macpherson decided to obstruct what had once been a commonly used drove road. Macpherson was challenged by Thomas Duncan of Kirkton of Clova, shepherd James Farquharson from Auchallater and the Scottish Rights of Way Society. Of particular interest in this dispute is that in July 1886 it was reported that Colonel Farquharson, the elderly and dying laird of Invercauld over whose land the drove road passed, expressed no opposition to access, indeed, he agreed that it was a right of way and said that he had never sought to restrict use. This, however, was later contradicted by his factor R. G. Foggo who, in January the following year, claimed that Colonel Farquharson did not recognise a right of way through Glen Callater. All travellers who

crossed Farquharson's property were allowed, he said, on *sufferance* only. In March 1887 Lord Kinnear ruled in favour of those who claimed right of way. Duncan Macpherson appealed the judgement in the Court of Session and lost. Dissatisfied, and clearly unafraid of possible expense, he fought to establish his right over the public's and took the case to the House of Lords which also found against him.

From the Glens Tilt and Doll cases it might be thought that questions of rights of way were matters only of rural concern. Not so. Around the same time that Macpherson's claim was being rejected by Lord Kinnear, Aberdeen Town Council fought its own battle. In April 1887, the trustees of Ruthrieston estate, adjacent to the Bridge of Dee, had taken it upon themselves to build a wall across what had been the medieval road leading out of Aberdeen. Unlike a more recent City Council which looked to divesting the town of an "ancient" asset, the Victorian City Fathers fought to defend their heritage. Let the reporter for the Aberdeen Journal take up the story:

*The committee gave orders for the demolition of the barrier... [and] the surveyor's staff to proceed with the necessary tools to the place. The wall erected was eight feet high, and semi-circular in form. In the course of Monday afternoon, a breach four yards across was made in the wall and a paling was demolished, leaving a clear space for vehicles and foot passengers.*

Differing from many rural rights of way struggles, this dispute was quickly resolved in favour of the public. A combination of swift militant action and legal interdict meant that by May the affair was over.

Back in Braemar Alexander Farquharson, having let his *white elephant*, settled into his lairdship and, in August 1890, approved the erection of a barrier across the Lion's Face drive. Invercauld factor R. G. Foggo, who had worked on the estate for twenty years,

oversaw this new policy. Discontent simmered until June 1891 when local indignation erupted into direct confrontation with the laird.

Despite the fact that Victoria had put a stop to the Deeside Railway pushing beyond Ballater, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Braemar was an important tourist centre, attracting not only walkers keen to penetrate deep into the Cairngorms but also those who preferred, or could only manage, the more gentle pretty walks and drives such as that round Creag Choinnich. These professional and literate visitors became the public voice of opposition.

At the first confrontation something approaching four hundred demonstrators gathered to vent their anger, made up, it was said, of *the elite of the village of both sexes . . . mostly composed of visitors, although a considerable sparkling of villagers was present.* And they were angry, so angry that they set about tearing down the fence and then, with *deafening cheers* and in an *enthusiastic fashion*, began burning the timber. All this to the music of a “German” band engaged for the event; especially popular was the tune The Bogie Man and unpopular the factor Foggo. A newspaper report notes that it was as well that none of Farquharson’s men were present as harm might have been done to them.

Not to be outdone the laird had his factor re-erect what was described as the *obnoxious palisade*; and turned to the law to protect his property, seeking an interdict against James Head Staples portrayed as *one of the most enthusiastic and resolute protesters of the daily smashing up of the fence.* Staples was interdicted but as the legal restriction only applied to the individual, the mass protests continued: locks on gates were smashed, paling was cut, paraffin was brought and as the Aberdeen Weekly Journal put it *a splendid bonfire was the result . . . The scene is very picturesque, the bonfire lighting up the excited faces of the crowd.* When visitors were unavailable for such good-works *village boys* gathered to make their own mischief. By mid September the fence had been destroyed and repaired no less than sixteen times and from reports it is clear that it was treated by locals and visitors alike as an occasion for carnival, where an assertion of rights was seen as not only a political imperative but as an opportunity for fun and games at the laird’s expense. Despite the efforts of the estate workers all Foggo and



Farquharson had to show for their determination were *two heaps of black ashes, a large coil of wire . . . [and] a piece of paling.*

The young laird, unimpressed by picturesque fence burning, turned again to the law, seeking to interdict identified trespassers. His statements to Lord Kinneir at the Court of Session show why Farquharson was so adamant in looking to prevent the right of way. The land, he said, was for sporting purposes and any disturbance of the deer *seriously* depreciated the worth of his property and this, he said, was why he erected barriers in 1890. With a request for further interdicts the Procurator Fiscal hastened to Braemar. The Fiscal ensconced himself in the Fife Arms Hotel to interview witnesses. In the course of these unprecedented events the local reporter sought village opinion.

Alex. Geddes told the man from the Press that the Lion's Face was as far back *as he could remember* part of a *public market stance* but there had been,

*gradual encroachments made upon it, and several buildings erected . . . the only commonty about the village . . . I believe it has been a public road ever since Adam was a boy.*

A Donald Macdonald – *a hale man of 67* - told a similar tale of the drive being a route for bringing cattle to market and a place where villagers played games and enjoyed themselves. N. Fabyan Dawe, a visitor and a member of the local Rights of Way Committee, stated the case for public access and raised the matter of yet another restriction imposed by Farquharson, saying he wanted to,

*vindicate the public right to public paths in the district . . . [he] believed that the public were fully entitled to use certain roads on the opposite side of the river from which they were at present excluded.*

Echoing the cries of many rights of ways enthusiasts he called on County Councils to take up the challenge and side with the public against malicious landowners.

However, this combination of local knowledge and political attitude was not enough to prevent interdicts being granted against five individuals including the above N. F. Dawe. Amongst the five it is worth noting that one was Alexander Hendry, son of the Braemar Postmaster and another was B. J. Ottewell, landscape painter and one of Queen Victoria's favourite artists. Local Liberal M.P's. James Bryce (First Honorary President of the Cairngorm Club) and Robert Farquharson made donations to the fund set up to fight the men's cause.

From slightly further afield the editor of the Dundee Courier opined that, while not defending *rioting and malicious mischief* he believed it was,

*Satisfactory to find that throughout Scotland there has been manifested a patriotic determination to maintain the people's claim to Nature's scenic treasures.*

Further south the London Standard gave its opinion taking what some might call a more "balanced" view. No doubt with an eye to the recent "Crofting War" in Skye when there was a successful challenge to landlordism, the Standard warned against the *professional agitator, who sees his political account in the discontent of the rural crofter*. However, the writer also cautions against owners and tenants of deer forests expecting to have sole access. To so claim was,

*filching of another's share in the property. Ordinary honesty forbids a Highland laird to close a mountain path, quite as much as it debars a Southern squire from fencing a common for which he has never paid.*

The writer concluded that landlords like Farquharson would be well advised to assert their legal rights as *in a manner accommodating as possible*.

With intimidation failing, Alexander Farquharson gained an insignificant victory. He realised that it was beyond him to name all and restrain all who might choose to walk the drive. Awaiting a ruling on his rights Farquharson accepted the best he could achieve was to monitor those "trespassing", perhaps take their names but let them pass unhindered.

The evidence brought forward in favour of public access established that the Castleton end of the Lion's Face was the site of a market stance where cattle and other livestock had been gathered and sold. With the coming of railways this traffic had all but ceased, nonetheless the drive was still used as public access for those attending church or school in Braemar. And even when the late laird, Colonel Farquharson, had erected gates sometime about 1880 to protect saplings, pedestrians continued to have free access. On the other side of the argument Farquharson stood by his ownership of the land arguing simply for the right to protect a capital asset and that public disturbance would deprive him of value gained from the shootings of his estate. But as with the Glen Doll case the weight of evidence favoured the right of way cause.

Agreement was reached in early 1893. The interdicts were lifted and Alexander Haldane Farquharson conceded the right of access from Castleton to Dubh Chlais and beyond to join with the Ballater Road but with the restriction that there was no right of entry from the 20<sup>th</sup> of September until 30<sup>th</sup> November, thus protecting some shooting rights of Invercauld. In addition to this the agreement also dealt with the contentious matter of a path on the north bank of the Dee which Farquharson had also attempted to close to the public. This path led westward from Keiloch, crossed the Sluigan burn, continuing past Braemar eventually on to the Linn O' Dee. Invercauld pledged the estate to put forward up to £75 for the construction of a suitable path which thereafter was to be maintained by the County Council.

With this agreement both parties were able walk away with a degree of comfort. Rights of way activists had won access if not the right to roam at will; Farquharson was able to legally prevent entry

during the height of the game season and thus protected an important economic asset but he had been forced to concede that ownership of land did not give him absolute and final say in who and who should not walk on his estate.

The combination of forces which faced the laird demonstrates shifting relationships of power in late Victorian society. When 67 year old Donald Macdonald from Braemar was interviewed by the Aberdeen Journal he was clear that shutting of the drive posed a threat to local businesses; in his words the area would be ruined by closure. Whilst it was certainly the case that renting property to men such as Sir Algernon Borthwick could help fill the coffers of Invercauld it was less obvious that this could sustain the burgeoning tourist trade of Deeside. What was required was the flow of middle class professionals intent on walking or driving the area. With this economic imperative it is hardly surprising to find villagers supporting liberal demands of visitors. And we might speculate that the obvious pleasure displayed by locals at Invercauld's discomfiture was perhaps a sign that the ways in which past Deeside lairds had handled estates and their tenants were not always approved of. Through the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries there had been a gradual erosion of rights such as taking timber, the limitation of shielings, associated grazing and a resultant decline of fermtouns; followed by more systematic sheep farming which in turn gave way, at least in part, to the extension of deer forests. As we know these policies had a profound effect upon local populations, not to say the physical geography of Deeside, and perhaps the "folk" memory might have retained a smouldering sense of injustice which was ignited by the spark provided by "professional agitators" like the Queen's favourite watercolourist Benjamin John Ottewell. If this was the case then the folk memory happily corresponded with the questioning of the landed aristocracy's absolute right to the land. Liberalism and emerging labourism combined to propose new principles looking to displace what we might call older hegemonic aristocratic system; the new way was founded on mass democratic ideas underpinned by the politics of an enfranchised and wealthy middle class and rising working class movement which at times went so far as to question the right to property.

In a sense Alexander Haldane Farquharson was victim of this growing democratic swell. But we need not feel too much sympathy with his predicament. His right to Invercauld remained unchallenged and when in January 1893 he married Zoe Caroline Musgrave the couple's list of wedding gifts hints at the wealth within their circle: a diamond pin from the Prince of Wales; diamond and sapphire rings; an "old" painted fan which had belonged to the Queen of Bohemia; gold mounted bottles; sofas mounted in gold and brocade and so the glittering list continues. The event was said to have *caused great rejoicing among the tenants of his estate*. However, when one reads the report of the banquet at the Invercauld Arms in Ballater, held to coincide with the London wedding, there is a sense that the rejoicing was for a man somewhat distant from his employees and tenants. In toasting the couple Chief Magistrate Burnett said many kind words but noted that the laird was *not so very well known to them as they could have wished, that during the last few years Mr Farquharson's visits to Invercauld had not been very frequent*. Nonetheless, he, Burnett, was confident enough to state that *during the last twelve months Mr Farquharson, had by his actions, displayed his interest in the community*. Undoubtedly the heat of the bonfires at the Lion's Face played a part in attracting his interest.

## **Terra Incognita - The North Slope Tors of Ben Avon.**

*Hugh Spencer*

We are in one of the strangest places in the Cairngorms. The great grey stones to be found elsewhere on this hill are here too but in a crowded abundance and in an extraordinary arrangement of shapes, sizes and patterns. We are in a vast sculpture gallery created by nature but so redolent with atmosphere as to possibly involve the hands of the gods. This is a very unusual place, an eerie place, and perhaps a secret place for it is mentioned in no texts, not even the sacred ones by Seton Gordon, Alexander, Firsoff, and Watson. Welcome to the north spur of the West Meur Gorm Craig on Ben Avon.

(The West Meur Craig is the 1023m top marked but un-named on OS maps at GR 154036. It is named on the Harvey 1:25,000 map of Ben Avon).

I was a small boy when I first climbed Ben Avon. I had already climbed Lochnagar but this was very different. We breasted the top of the Allt Phouple under a dull grey sky and there etched black on a patchwork of Spring snow were the great tors - a landscape as strange to me as a child in the fifties as anything I had seen in books or films.

I have that first image in my head today, nearly 60 years on, like a photograph. It was the beginning of an addiction to Ben Avon that has never left me. I have been compelled to wander this hill in summer and winter at least once every few years for most of my life and can never drive over the Lecht or be anywhere with a distant vista of the hill without stopping repeatedly to study it through my binoculars.

Sometimes my wanderings would take me down northwards from the plateau to the amazing rhino horns which are the Clach Bun Rudhtair, or into the Caol Ghleann, or sometimes along the estate track from the Linn. Always on these occasions my eye would be drawn to this north spur of the West Meur Gorm Craig. There seemed to be something different here, an oddness to the colouring, a strangeness to the shadows, an indication of something meriting a closer look. But even through binoculars nothing conclusive could be

gleaned and this northern spur of Ben Avon is on the way to or from nowhere significant. For an exploration it would have to be a destination in its own right or a major and pathless diversion from the normal ways on the hill .

One hot midsummer day in 2003 I made this journey to the hill. I would forego the wonders of the plateau tors and the summit and instead explore the shadows and markings on the northern slopes which had for so long beguiled me. It was a journey of such singularity I would make it again every summer for the next four years before feeling replete.

I cycled to Inchroy from Corgarff, a rough ride compared to the Tomintoul approach but the sudden view of the hill and its northern slopes from high on the track is wonderful and a fitting prelude to this journey and it still takes less than an hour. From the Linn of Avon I climbed the Carn Fiachlach spur to the col below Meall Gainimh with its giant slug. My wife and I bivvied here one moonlight night with wine, a fire, and a steak dinner all to celebrate our twenty fifth anniversary - such being the grip this hill has on me. Serious addictions always impinge on family life. Water was readily available from the big pool hidden in the nearby Clach Ban - itself always worth a diversion to explore and to make yet another attempt to find its hidden subterranean passage mentioned in one of the early Club journals.

Onwards now to the 885m col at GR 160045 and it is here that the north slope reveals its first surprise and something unique in the Cairngorms. Looking down the slope to-wards your right, north-westwards, you will spot an amazing giant stone block about half way down - a huge piece of a tor dislodged from the plateau in the ice ages and now slowly sliding, or maybe tumbling, downwards in geological time . It sits on the slope tilted at just about the angle one would expect a block of this size to topple. Drop down to it and eat your lunch under its overhanging side to test your luck in the geological time stakes. You may not believe it is tumbling but query the potholes on its bottom upside down edge.

It is a short leftward slant downwards from here to the rocks of the Clach Fiaraidh. This outcrop turns out to be much much larger than it looks from above, a sort of two tier structure with a deep canyon in the middle. There is a lonely feeling to this place which is

not surprising as very few people venture onto the north slope hereabouts - a "no mans land" between the hill's main thoroughfares.

Across from here to the south-west is our main objective, the north spur of the West Meur Gorm Craig and now revealing a line of intermittent rocks and tors on its back. The plan now is to go over to the spur and follow this line up to the highest tor. You may be tempted to forego this objective due to the necessary descent and re-ascent and with the excuse the rocks and tors don't look so interesting from here as to justify the effort. Don't be so tempted. The tors on this spur are very big, structurally extraordinary, and the whole place highly atmospheric. If like me you are fascinated by Cairngorm landscapes or by big rock formations, then the exploration of this spur is something you will relish.

So we drop down now south-west to the burn at GR 153048 from where a green swathe avoiding the heather leads quickly up to the spur. Climbing the spur soon becomes a slow wander between and around a fascinating array of giant blocks, tors, outcrops and boulders and a feeling of being in a "lost world". Indeed one might be climbing the back of a Stegosaurus. And its a game of I - Spy because every shape and feature to be found in Cairngorm tors are all here in just one half mile, plus innumerable new ones. There are squeezey corridors into rooms, chokestones, elephants' backsides, cohorts of blocks standing guard like a stone army, or are they tombstones, gargoyles, warts like fossilised dinosaur eggs, and more, and best of all a wall with a bas relief of carved figures reminiscent of the temples of ancient Egypt.

From the highest tor one could carry on up to the plateau, visit the plateau tors, and finish by dropping down to the Glen Avon track via the mighty Clach Bun Rudhtair tors. My preference has always been to descend back down the spur so as to view the exhibits again but from the different perspective. By this time of the day the shadows will be lengthening to add even more atmosphere.

This also enables a visit to what is probably the least visited corrie loch in the Cairngorms and possibly the least seen as it is visible from no-where on the plateau. This is the little bowl of Lochan nan Gabhar. There is a black and white picture of it in V.A Firsoff's book "On Foot and Ski in the Cairngorms" where it appears



a dark and inhospitable place. One winter I skied down from the Stob Bac an Fhurain to one of the few points on the hill from where the loch is visible and this confirmed the impression. In fact it is a pleasant place with a waterfall and a flat green platform by the shore probably ideal for a camp or bivvy. I have not tested this for it remains the only significant corrie in the Cairngorms in which I have not spent a night.

This omission will be my excuse to make this remarkable journey yet again. I hope you too will make it and especially if you are also a Ben Avon druggie. It's a big hit befitting of this hill. Variations are possible but do make sure it is a fine, preferably sunny day, for in mist it would be a complete waste of time.

The absolute Cairngorm romantic will end the day lying on the grass in the evening sun beside the track back to Corgarff listening to the curlews and oyster catchers down by the infant Don and watching the dancing hares on the hillside beyond.

## A TASTE FOR MUNROS

### *Ken Mills*

'This is all we've got, men', shouted the perspiring Canadian Army Major as he pulled a small flask from the leg pocket of his battledress. The sun blazed down from a cloudless blue sky. The brown-green landscape was dotted with darker green patches of conifers marching up the hillsides. Splashes of blue-silvery water painted the scene in strips and pools below us. The horizon was very, very distant in a faint heat haze. We imagined that we could see the curvature of the earth. The air was perfectly still, embracing a palpable silence around us.

The men he addressed were a Royal Naval Lieutenant in his cap and dark blue uniform (but with his shirt unbuttoned to his waist) , and me, a 16-year-old schoolboy, carrying a tweed jacket, wearing flannel trousers, and a shirt also flapping about. The Canadian had army boots but the other two of us wore civilian shoes suitable for pavements (when they were dry). "What's in it?" enquired the naval officer. "Rye Whiskey from Toronto" was the reply. "Here, take a swig".

The situation seemed desperate; we were all severely thirsty and had not taken any food or water since breakfast, about 5 hours and 5 miles before. The Navy and the Army had no hesitation in taking one long gulp each. I took a small gulp (the residue) and was startled by the sharp gasping taste and the column of fire that ran down inside. That was it: the Rye was all gone.

There was nobody visible in any direction; indeed we had seen nobody since leaving the loch, more than 3000 feet below us. The naval officer pulled out a small pair of binoculars to look around. He gave me a squint as well. Could that be Bell Rock Lighthouse out east? Certainly the tiny object was far beyond the Forth Bridge and the Fife coast. What about those undulations and peaks to the north? That must be Ben Nevis, for sure. The Paps of Jura were quite close, "But was that Newfoundland beyond?" enquired the Canadian. Southwards stretched the Firth of Clyde, filled with grey shipping at the Tail of the Bank. Ailsa Craig stood proud but Ulster was too far in the haze.

“Let's get down fast”, said the Canadian, “or here we die”. We had ceded leadership to him on the ascent, and were glad to follow. The path on the rocky summit was faint at first but we had no trouble with direction when we could see so far. By early afternoon with the heat at its zenith, we were low enough to find a stream to quench our overwhelming thirsts. No thought of beasties, grasses, or infections. Lower still, we reached the shade of trees and strolled along towards the jetty where we hoped to meet a man in a dinghy who had said he would come in the late afternoon to row us back across the loch to the starting point of our day's expedition.

It was July 26th 1945. We had scaled Ben Lomond – the first time for all of us – a trio of innocents devoid of any equipment or supplies (except the naval binoculars and the whiskey). We had started from the small hotel at Inverbeg surrounded by a few houses and cottages. The A82 weaved its way northwards, mostly following the line of the old military road leading to Crianlarich. Perhaps 20 or 30 vehicles, mostly military, passed by each day.

During WW2, the only holidays for my family were on Loch Lomond on Saturdays, perhaps 2-3 times per year, taking the steam train (no corridors) from Glasgow to Balloch and then the old paddle steamer up the Loch to Ardlui and all the piers en route. There was a pause for 2 hours at Ardlui before the return journey to Balloch and Glasgow, bringing us home in the early evening. At Ardlui, I usually spent the 2 hours in rushing up the hillside behind the pier as far as I could get through the vegetation without risking missing the steamer's return. A toot on the whistle echoed across the glen 10 minutes before sailing time. I looked admiringly at Ben Lomond towering over the eastern side of the Loch but we never landed at Rowardennan for me to begin an ascent. My only hill experiences at that time were cycle trips to the Campsie Hills and scrambling up the steps of Dumgoyne north of Glasgow. In July 1945 my family opted for 3 to 4 days at Inverbeg. The war in Europe had ended in May and there was a feeling of relief in the air. We seemed to ignore the continuing war against Japan in the Far East whence so many troops, ships and aircraft were migrating.

We took the well known route from home; by tramcar, past the smoke-blackened tenements to the station, then the train, then the paddle steamer in the clean air of the Loch, to the pier at Inverbeg

and the final short walk to the Hotel, nowadays the 'Inn at Inverbeg'. There were very few guests staying there. The ones that I can remember were the Canadian Major on leave from his unit in NW Europe and the Royal Naval Lieutenant and his very new bride. I was flattered to be invited to join these two men on an ascent of Ben Lomond the next day.

The ferry from Inverbeg to Rowardennan moved on a request basis that summer, so a trip had been arranged the next day at a suitably sedate time after breakfast at 09.30. We were rowed the short distance across the narrow Loch, and walked leisurely up the obvious path to The Ben. The weather was perfect and I think that we felt that all was perfect in the world. As a fit 16-year-old, I was slightly surprised to forge ahead of my two seniors. The summit proved to be a permanent, unforgettable mind-picture upon which I can reflect with pleasure today, so many years later.

Our return to Inverbeg in time for supper was a relaxed, lazy, contented – but short and hungry – journey, as the western skyline above threw long shadows across the Loch. Our nearest and dearest (except for the Canadian, who was so far from home) were looking out for us, and the naval officer was greeted in an embarrassingly (to me) affectionate way by his bride. My father said “so you got to the top?”, and left it at that. Almost the only topic of conversation at supper was the news that Winston Churchill had been soundly defeated in the electoral count that day, and was no longer Prime Minister. There was astonishment all round the table; who was this fellow Clement Attlee? The election had taken place 2-3 weeks earlier, but the counting had been delayed in order to gather all the votes from distant military units scattered over the world. There was an air of excitement and optimism in Inverbeg that evening.

I realised in retrospect that there was a surge of opinion against the possibility of a repetition of the hard times that followed WW1 in the 1920s and 1930s. As a keen Army cadet at school, I had gone to various training courses in different parts of the country in the past two years – Barry, Largs, Troon, Barnard Castle, Redford Barracks Edinburgh, and the Army School of Physical Training in Aldershot (what hard work that was!).

At all these units there were political discussions organised in the evenings when the older men talked about their aspirations for

the future structure of society (virtually all left-wingers so far as I can remember). There were no ill feelings in the audiences on the times I attended. The cadets from school had never considered these matters before. I presume that political awareness was being fostered throughout the British Forces in the second half of WW2. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of July, everything was changing! As usual after supper, a piper marched in the middle of the road outside. He was an expert. No fears of passing traffic in those days! He has been a delightful poignant memory for 65 years, a soft, warm, lemon-yellow summer evening, with the Loch and the Ben as a background.

That day gave me a taste for Munros which I failed to quench in later years. O me miserum! But a taste for Rye Whisky ---No!

## The big white dogs of the Haute Maurienne

*Alister Macdonald*

This story comes from a September walking holiday in that part of the French Alps confusingly called the Haute Maurienne and which is more obviously the valley of the river Arc. This runs east – west, along the southern edge of the Massif de la Vanoise. The Alps to the south of the valley are called the Cottian Alps and those to the north are the Graian Alps. The region is a delightful assemblage of villages, meadows, side valleys, a profusion of snow capped peaks and not a few glaciers. Visitors can conveniently get there from the Lombardy Plain, ie from Milan or Turin, a route which provides a particularly attractive approach to the Alps, rising abruptly as they do from the plain. The region is rich in history and pre-history.

As the main thrust of my account is very critical of just one aspect of the region I will praise its attractions for just a little longer. My wife and I were based in the village of Bonneval sur Arc, altitude 1800m. It is the last village as you drive north and east on the D902, which on passing Bonneval, swings north to cross the Col de l'Iseran (2764m) to the famous, (infamous in my view), ski resorts of Val d'Iserre and Tigne. Bonneval comprises houses built of stone slabs with remarkably little wood visible, either structural or decorative. Seen from the surrounding heights the village looks like a Neolithic settlement, and at ground level the modern Neolithic is very attractive. Some years ago the village was cut in two by an avalanche but now it is in good commercial shape, catering for skiers in winter and walkers and tourists in summer. Upstream the neighbouring village of l'Ecot is similarly of modern Neolithic design, but off the main road and reached by a dirt track. Upstream of l'Ecot the extensive post glacial flood plain of the Arc is unstable and raw and a very attractive approach route to a number of tops, cols, corries and refuges. The more distant main tops are the Levanna Central (3619m) close to the Italian Parco Nazionale del Gran Paradiso and the Grande Cimarella (3676m). Closer by lie la Bessaneas (3592m) and Ouille d'Arberon (3554m). As walkers we enjoyed these as a backdrop to our efforts. A typical example was the walk up to a magnificent corrie and refuge, the latter being advertised in advance,

on a rickety old wooden board; “ Refuge des Evettes à 5 minutes. Pâtisseries Maison: Tartes à la rhubarb sauvage. Tarts au Beaufort”. Oh the joys of the Alps combined with French cuisine. We learned to love Beaufort cheese, the speciality of the whole region. And now for the big white dogs.

We first learned of them from a leaflet obtained from a tourist office quite late in our holiday. Printed in several languages it announced the following “In the course of your walk you may encounter the local Guarding dogs. These are large white dogs whose task is to guard the flocks.” It went on to explain “that the return of bears, lynx and wolves to the mountains has prompted a revival of the traditional practice of using dogs to guard the flocks. These dogs are born and raised in the sheepfold, and form strong social and affectionate bonds with the sheep. Their natural instinct is therefore to defend them. As soon as a guarding dog (also called a Pastou) scents danger he places himself between the flock and the intruder and barks a warning. If the intruder fails to heed the warning, the dog may be provoked to attack”. There then followed a lot of detailed suggestions as to what the intruding walker should do and not do when confronted by a Pastou, ending with the information that large signs indicate the presence of the dogs. Our first encounter with the dogs came near the end of our stay.

On a grey afternoon we had decided to drive down the valley to Modane and undertake a forest walk in a side valley penetrating the Vanoise National Parc. The attraction was the forest, an ancient larch forest set on a hillside, conveniently reached from a roadside refuge and car park. We enjoyed the walk very much. The way marking was clear, there was a variety of fine views and some of the ancient trees were enormous, almost on the scale of Redwoods. Near the end of the circuit we had to descend to an amphitheatre close to the refuge and our car. Sheep could be seen scattered across the amphitheatre but by the time we had descended they had been gathered together by the sheep dogs, controlled by the shepherd. And then we saw the other dogs, the big white guard dogs, variously positioned. Our return route would take us through the amphitheatre and naturally we tried to keep well clear of the sheep, and the guard dogs, which were pretty big. Think Labrador and double the size. They strutted and barked fiercely and would not let us pass. We kept well away from

them and eventually called out to the shepherd, who was conspicuously out of sight. The dogs then responded to some remote command and retired, letting us continue on our detour around the flock. The extra distance was not seriously inconvenient, but crucially, it was possible. The flock could have been positioned much more inconveniently in the amphitheatre and we might have had to retrace our entire route in order to get back to our car. When we reached the refuge we entered with a sense of relief. So that was that, an unpleasant disturbance at the end of an otherwise nice walk.

The next encounter with the guard dogs was rather different. On our last day I opted for an afternoon walk, up the steep hillside from Bonneval to meet the long distance path GR5 (Lake Geneva to the Mediterranean) which contoured high up along the valley wall. It would enable me to reach the village of le Villeron from whence I could walk back to Bonneval, along the valley floor, taking in some prehistoric paintings on the Rocher de Chateau. It was hot and the walk up the very steep grassy slopes to the GR5 proved very difficult. The ground was dry so traction was not a problem, but both the gradient and the route were. First I tried a hint of a path through a dried up ravine but had to retreat in the face of an impenetrable rock wall. I settled for an oblique line, clawing and heaving upwards, hoping to gain height to intercept GR5 which undoubtedly lay high above me. I struggled for a long time, gaining impressive height and keeping a safe distance from the area where the valley wall was near vertical, but I failed to find GR5. During this time I had noticed a few sheep scattered across the slopes and thought nothing of them. And then, whilst scanning the view upwards, I saw, standing on a promontory, a big white dog. It was surveying its territory, along the valley and downwards. I immediately ducked down, hoping to be out of sight. I was immediately aware that if I could not retrace my route then I was in trouble. And worse, were those few sheep scattered about and below me part of the dog's flock? I started my retreat promptly, driven by rational assessment and sheer fright. "Was I going to meet any more guard dogs on the way down?" was the question which nagged at a sub conscious level, but I was too preoccupied to face directly. It was a long descent, necessarily obliquely angled to avoid near the vertical sections, but eventually I was able to cross a shallow gully which led to an expanse of less



steep ground where I was hopeful that I could circle round any guarded flock. Eventually I reached terrain which was manifestly sheep free and really rather nice. So I sat down and enjoyed the view – an immense void of the Arc valley in brilliant autumn sunshine, and pretended that all was well with the world. But it wasn't and I was still experiencing the fear of being held captive between fierce dogs and impossibly steep hillside....so much for the Parc National de la Vanoise!

The leaflet explaining the role of the white guard dogs was published by the Ministry of Agriculture. The extensive literature made available to visiting walkers makes no mention of them. In a region where walking, both long and local distances is actively encouraged, it is clearly unreasonable for these guard dogs to be allowed to behave in the way they do. On my return I should have written to an MEP about the matter, but I never got round to it, partly because I believe the French farming lobby is immensely powerful. Perhaps I am wrong to assume that other walkers have been inconvenienced by the practice and perhaps no one has seriously suffered on the hillsides. I am, however, quite clear about my own solution to the problem they present. I cannot imagine ever returning to walk in the region where these dogs prevail, which is a pity as the Haute Maurienne is magnificent.

## **In Praise of Windfarms**

*Editor*

## Running the Cairngorm Munros

*Paul Raistrick*

*Editor's note:* Hill running, Trail running and, in England, Fell running, are terms used to describe an endurance sport of which few of us have much knowledge. In the following article Paul describes, in his breathless style, a non stop run over ground that would provide some of us with a week long walking holiday.

### **Before the run**

Tuesday is a good day; running the Glenfeshie training 13.1 mile loop in 77mins, a PB by 1minute. Wednesdays is another day entirely, the run home from Aviemore to Kincaig via Cairngorm is abandoned at Loch Morlich and the remainder of the run is full of stops, knackered, the run nearly becomes a walk. Eilidh suggests a weekend camping trip to Glenmore. Saturday's mountain forecast is for 80% chance of cloud free Munros and wind of 10-15 mph; there is a deep low moving into the North-Western Highlands Saturday night - it's going to be tight. Thursday night is spent computing bearings and drawing them onto an extended 1:50000 (7 Tops map); the pressure begins to build. A cut off time time for Ben MacDui of 13:45hrs is computed based on a 03:00hrs start. 3hrs of Friday morning is spent packing family and camping kit into the car for the 15 minute drive up to Glenmore; such is camping with kids! Eilidh's parents, Ewan and Isobel, on hearing the plan kindly offer to play with the kids on Saturday, abandoning their planned walk on Braeriach. Ewan (Paterson) comments that Saturday will be my last chance of the round in 2012. Father and daughter Paterson are top mountain runners and are generally pretty 'cool' to the whole affair, Eilidh does not even ask my route.

We are moving to Oslo in November and left with 2 kids for the next 24 hrs she has more pressing issues. A 3 week offshore trip looms in 4 days. A return attempt in 2013 will be very expensive and not just 15 minutes up the road. The window in which to complete the 5 Cairngorm Long Distance running records is closing. The desire to possess the finished article is there, but is the strength of will to complete it? This question will soon be answered.

The alarm comes as a surprise; it implies that there has been some sleep. It also means that it is 02:55hrs. Remembering the mobile's low battery necessitates some fumbling in the half-light swapping out for Eilidh's fresh battery (the mobile will be used for the splits and to provide Eilidh with updates in the later part of the run). Creeping out of the tent and pushing a route map back inside, it's already too light. The fact that the dog has not barked is scant consolation. At the toilet block there are a few late night weak bladders being emptied. The head torch is removed for the rest of the day.

Gear and food is sorted into bum bag and camel back (minus bladder) respectively. Suntan lotion and Vaseline is applied. Cereal and banana are consumed. Compression calf guards and Nike Lunaracers are donned. It feels like a very early race morning.

### **The Start**

Standing at the entrance to the Youth Hostel the sky is clear and there is good natural light. Earlier worries for nav'ing off the back of Cairngorm were misplaced. Mobile and Stop watch are synced and started. 03:49hrs 5 steps down the YH path and something hits the ground behind. It's the spare map that has jumped out of the open pack sleeve. Good start. It is re-gathered and stuffed into tiny pocket on the front of the pack where it will stay.

Ski road is easy, 2 days off running has aided freshness to a degree. The Allt Mor trail is pleasant and eminently runnable. The first tent of the day is passed in the lower tier of the upper car park. Then it's day lodge, access road, White Lady tow - occasional stream line, exiting beneath the Ptarmigan and up the roped access path into the cloud base and to the summit. Cairngorm 01:16 (1min behind schedule). Finding a hopeful line to the tor and a bit below the cloud base is left for the first and last time till Braeriach. The choice of racing flat Lunaracers over studded X-tallon 190's (sitting back at the campsite) is immediately regretted upon hitting the wet grass down to the saddle. This footwear decision will loom ominously from now till Carn a Mhain Larig descent.

From the saddle a second tent is passed and Bynack More 02:18 is reached. Staying high along the ridge gives a strong sense of free running over fast gravelly ground past the fantastic Bynack Tors. The Eastern Cairngorms provide faultless granite plateau rock architecture. Staying on Bynack for too long leads to a steep heathery

descent into the Larig an Laoigh. Drumlin and hag navigation to the refurbished Fords of Avon Refuge, over the stepping stones and then the drag up Beinn a' Chaorainn, 03:18.

Forgetting about any pre-calculated efficient lines to Beinn a' Bhuid the running takes a snaky route through light boulders and hag trying to minimise disturbance to 2 large herds of deer. Missing the Aghaigh lochans is a bit confusing but the summit of Beinn a' Bhuid 04:17 comes quickly.

Having messed up this next section in cloud during the November round of the 7 Tops, the clear air over to Ben Avon is a welcome sight. This section provides the best running ground of the day and following a (luxurious) pause to remove stones following a scree run down to the saddle it's up and over to the Ben Avon Tor 04:54. A fine dry scramble to the tor summit - far more pleasant than in November's hoar frost. In theory straight back via Beinn a' Bhuid but as ever the corrie's edge seems to suck you in and you end up rimming it.

The run over Moinne Bhealaidh is initially great, then boggy, then good as the walkers' path to the rolling lowly top of Beinn Bhreac 06:31 is reached, ultimately, much faster than you would think.

Again a theoretical re-trace of steps and then more Moinne bog action over to the descent into the Larig an Laoigh again. First luck of the day as a faint but genuine path is located, thus avoiding further bum sliding action. A steep heathery line to the left of the main burn flowing off Beinn Mheadhoin Eastern slopes. Then a traverse over to the scrabbly grand summit Tor of Beinn Mheadhoin 07:55 and the first humans of the day. (from earlier saddle tent?). More fine running over a sausage in a roll to a Loch Etchacan descent.

A brief climb then the Macdui path is left for the coll over to Derry. Boulder fields are mixed with handfuls of trail mix. A busy summit at Derry Cairngorm 08:51 then back over boulders to the Macdui path. Suddenly the mental state changes. Thoughts of bailing at Macdui, which have been slowly hatching over the preceding hours, begin to fade as thoughts of life across the Lairig Ghru come to the fore. Timing is crucial; the 13:45hrs cut off (based on a 03:00hrs start) now seems extremely conservative. It would be crazy to bail now carrying a potential 1hr of bonus time over onto the Western tops. Arriving Ben Macdui 09:36 summit at 13:25hrs the

call is made to Eilidh to tell her: "Going for it, Ben Macdui...it's 13:25hrs ....all's going well ...hoping to be back before midnight.. started late...". That's it, decision made. Leaving at 09:42, 13:31hrs; shit...6 minutes for a phone call and some pasta and peanuts, cursing the inefficient use of time - the race against the sun is truly on. Never will such a long stop be taken again.

Why would you look at a map when you can see the ridge of Carn a' Mhain straight ahead? Because if you did it would stop you trying to run down the Taillear Burn. A bit more rimming action leads to the boulder ridge that drops 500m down to the main ridge. 30 minutes were allocated for this entire leg in my head but it drags and drags. Carn a' Mhain 10:29 feeling the pressure again and knowing the grip 'crux' is approaching. Returning back along the ridge to the first low section the gentle entry slopes of the top of the gully are located (I try to link the photo from the internet in my head to the convex slope ahead). Some loose ground action and memories of Castlegates stone falls abound. Terrain like this is much better descended solo. Keeping (descenders) left seems to work then breaking out further left onto more open ground avoids the steepening / seepage point at the 'narrows'. Stay focussed to the Lairig track and then over the bridge past the Corrou hut and up an excellent new track to water. Kind walkers politely step aside and pass comments about knackered knees (during previous encounters the path had been left to avoid such communication but now direct lines are best). Stop thinking about the Ramsey - you have not even finished this you fool! Devil's point 11:21 and then the grassier track up to Cairn Toul's boulder ring. Lots of walkers and boulders, Cairn Toul 12:12. More boulders and slight drop and fast climb back to Sgurr Lochain Uaine 12:29. For the first time the 1 top per hour barrier is broken. The Lunaracers have come into their own through the boulders and will continue to repay the faith placed in them over the forthcoming hours. Let's just hope they don't disintegrate (this is their 3<sup>rd</sup> ever outing and they have just doubled their mileage).

A fast line down to the coll at Loch nan Stuirteag. And it is necessary to drop further height to a boggy spring. The last of the pasta is now gone, lucozade powder is taken. Monadh Mhor 13:17; reminisce about a fox spotted in snow free March, thin grass provides fantastic fast running on tiring legs. A short drop to the

Bhrotain coll and then lots of fine flat stable boulders to the summit Beinn Bhrotain 13:46. Back over via the subtle coll on Monadh Mhor, mental tiredness shows its first signs with a lost path and confusion of where my pack and bumbag were dropped (for this out and back leg – a process that had worked successfully at 5 previous out and back legs). Relieved to have resolved a stupid mistake the punishment is in the form of a compass bearing – the first of the day. The viz is great, the terrain OK, just the pressure not to make any more mistakes is growing. Pretending not to look West for the next top as, quite frankly, it is not truly obvious where or what it is.

The Moinne's unsightly landrover track is a very welcome sight! During the run out to the Mullach Clach a'Blair, a rounded top, plans can now be hatched for the route back to Sgorr Gaoith and thoughts can drift to the trip with my father in late 1996. Old snow patches, old sportivas, landrovers and a girl running up here with her collie...came back to me. Think of my father's enthusiasm when telling him of this plan last weekend.... this is going to happen. 3km up the track to Mullach a glider is seen, banking on a thermal over the top of Carn Ban Mhor. Decided not to take the high hagged but direct route on my way back, instead, foolishly, a last shot at hag bashing is pursued in a direct line to the top of Mullach Clach a'Blair 15:13. A lone figure is spotted descending East off the summit.

The track is used for the return leg to Sgorr Gaoith as far as possible then more hag before fine grassy slopes and the eerie Sgorr Gaoith 16:10 summit. Another message is left on Eilidh's phone. These hills will always remain special to us. As the crow flies, home is 9km away; fortunately this thought does not enter my head (it had earlier as a final bail out option). Instead my daughter Sky's songs are in my head now. Try to eat the last sausage in a roll but fail after 2 bites.

The moraines at the head of Glen Einich are normally a nightmare but for some reason tonight they give easy passage. Digestion of crisps also fail at this stage but a Snickers works before all food is abandoned. The grassy slopes up to the Braeriach plateau and Wells of Dee are very friendly. But just as you believe you can drop your guard, cloud rolls in from behind and suddenly the wells and plateau disappear. This same weather hit me during the 4000 round and through fear of losing time to navigating, time was instead lost to

poor route finding (and the 4hr barrier was missed). Some runners never learn. Fortunately tonight Braeriach is kind and as quick as it came it goes. Though this descending cloud sheet has brought on dusk sooner than anticipated.

As ever West Gully is reached (but not investigated tonight) just prior to the summit of Braeriach 17:38, 21:27hrs. The last call is made and a short but failed phone video made. Bizarrely a tent and group of mountain bikers are pitched 10m from the summit. You are real aren't you? Do you want my food? But it's too late and the darkness is pushing me down.

The descent along the Sron na Lairige is pushed hard in fading light. By the time the old Sinclair hut path is located light headedness is setting in. Water at the Lairig spring helps and eating 2 dextrose tablets (1 left) improves matters slightly. The new section of the Lairig path helps and avoiding trips (where my 'under carriage' was nearly removed during 2007's race) is good news. Easily locating the Rothiemurchus lodge track before all light is lost brings more positive thoughts. Some dirty path water drinking is a reflection of where things have got to. A slight detour on the lower path to the lodge frustrates and then relief as the main track is reached 19:01.

Panicking that the 20hr barrier may be slipping, the pace is pushed for the next 3km downhill, then as it flattens the pace slackens. Hitting the main road, thoughts of a 7 minute mile pace are long gone. But it's OK, it's going to happen; only cramp, dis-integrating Lunaracers, getting lost, or a car can stop me now. At 23:22hrs the front door of the Youth hostel is reached. The stopwatch is stopped for the first time in 19hours 33minutes and 50seconds. It's over.

*Summary:* Conditions; no rain, 6 – 12 C, wind 10 - 15 mph NW, wet under foot. Distance 72.95 miles (117.4 km). Ascent 6,974m. Duration 19h 33min 50 sec. Unsupported.

*Postscript.* In the book, "Survival of the Fittest", the physiologist Mike Stroud advocates that the average human is "designed" to cover such distances. Consistent with this is the popularity of jogging and mass marathon running which have greatly increased in recent decades. In the distant past and even in some parts of the world today, distance running was, and is, a practical need and not done for pleasure. We in the West are just fortunate that we can pursue such activities through choice.

## A Trilogy of "What ifs...?"

On the basis that the wise learn from their mistakes and from those of others, Club Office-bearers were asked for accounts of their hill walking/climbing mistakes. What is striking about the three which follow, in order of increasing gravity, is the ordinary, even trivial, nature of what went wrong and how narrowly huge inconvenience or worse was avoided.

## An Interesting Experience!

### *Anne Pinches*

Many years ago around Easter, with snow on the hills and a very definite chill in the air, Derek and I set off to climb Ben Vane, south west of Loch Sloy near Loch Lomond. As I had driven the car I locked it and then thought about putting my keys in the top pocket of my rucksack, zipped and safe, unlike my breeches pocket which didn't have a zip. However I did as usual and put the keys in my pocket.

We were equipped for the day with the usual bits and pieces but also had crampons and ice axes. The day was going well and up we walked, making good progress and we weren't very far from the summit. We'd eaten some food and had some hot tea and were enjoying the day when underfoot conditions and weather deteriorated. It was time to stop and put on the crampons. Unlike the procedure followed at the start of the walk with the car keys, I deviated from my normal practice. Instead of finding somewhere to sit before taking my crampons out of my rucksack, I took them out, closed my sack and then found somewhere to sit, leaving my sack a short distance away. Part way through putting on my crampons a light gust of wind blew and I noticed that the sack moved a little.

I finished my task and had both crampons safely attached. At this point a stronger gust picked up my sack and it was on the move! Instinct told me that I should not run wearing crampons and all I could do was stand and watch as my rucksack was trundled to the edge of a steep slope and duly disappeared. I peered over the edge but there was no sign of my old, red, faithful rucksack which had been my friend on many Munro trips.



Derek and I looked at each other, looked again over the edge; definitely no sign of the red rucksack. At this point I mentioned to Derek that some people I knew kept their car keys in their rucksacks. He looked horrified and said "But you don't, do you?" I assured him I didn't, and after a moment we looked at each other again and said, almost simultaneously, "Let's get down."

So there we were, luckily fully dressed in waterproof jacket, hat and gloves with crampons fitted. Map and compass were in my pocket, ice axe in hand, and car keys in pocket! We descended as quickly as conditions allowed and were pleased to get to the car. As soon as we found a 'phone box I spoke to the police telling them that if anyone reported finding a rucksack then there was no need to look for a fallen and thus injured walker. I often wonder about the quality of the rucksack and if it's still there waiting to be found. The yoghurt will have gone off but the lunch box, flask and Goretex trousers may still be there.

I decided to make an insurance claim for my rucksack and its contents. After submitting the relevant form I received a letter from the insurance company asking what attempts had been made to retrieve the rucksack. I wrote a fairly long letter describing exactly where we were and what the weather was like. They sent me a cheque by return!

Moral of the story would seem to be, no need to change habits without very good reason! There is, however, perhaps a good reason for us both to have keys for the car we are using!

## **My Walking Mistake**

*Alister Macdonald*

This is a very odd mistake to recount. I frequently walk alone, which means that there is only one person responsible for navigation, so the title is accurate. The walk was to the Munro Beinn Mhanach which, with its lower partner, Beinn a Chuirn, lies on the eastern side of Rannoch Moor. I started from the farm at Achallader, just off the A82 by Loch Tulla. The ruined castle by the farm is particularly interesting, but I did not dally long. The sky was grey, although not

threatening, and I wanted to get into the hills while the going was good.

The route for the entire walk approximated, very roughly, to a "T", with the initial ascent up the Allt Coire Achaladair being the vertical stroke. At the top of the ascent I was to take a left turn, down into a valley. To the right lay other valleys, of which more later. So up the the Achaladair I went and it was very pleasant. At the top there is, on the map, the Coire Daingean, but on the ground it was more a bealach which gave way to a huge grassy valley, the far (eastern) side of which is the flank of Beinn a Chuirn. I had in mind that I was leaving a V- shaped valley at its right-angle intersection with a bigger valley, through a sort of notch. I descended into the big valley and headed round the flank of Beinn a Chuirn to ascend Beinn Mhanach. (I was now off the end of the left-hand bit of the "T"). The top was not spectacular but typical of the huge grassy hills in those parts, giving a wonderful sense of space. It was a grand place to be.

I started my return, retracing my outward route. So there I was, in the relaxed state known to all Munro baggers, walking steadily along that huge valley. I was now back onto the left-hand stroke of the "T". I was looking for the right hand turn to take me down the Achaladair burn, the vertical stroke of the "T". It would appear as a V-shaped notch, high up on the northern (right-hand) side of the valley, wouldn't it? As ever there was some uncertainty about inter-converting distance walked and time, but I was still quite relaxed as I began to wonder why the right hand turn seemed a long time coming. It was obviously higher up the valley wall. So I ascended, well aware of the tendency to drift down rather than up hill when intent on simply walking ahead. I laboriously ascended and spent a long time looking for a connecting valley, which I knew to be there. There was a great deal of height and ground to cover, but nothing presented itself. I began to be perplexed and double-checked the map, matching it as best I could to where I had come from and to my surroundings. It was not easy to do. The huge void of the valley, on whose side I was perched, gave no specific clues. I was encouraged, however, by the fact that the gross topography matched the map. The flank of what I took to be Beinn a Chuirn, facing me, led to big sweeping valleys heading to the west and south west, (the right hand

stroke of the “T”). If that was right then the valley I needed, remembered as a V-shaped notch intersecting the valley I was presently in ...well it should be above me. But I had just searched there and it wasn't.

Perplexity intensified. I felt at a loss. I was not yet short of daylight but I was getting weary, and distinctly short of ideas. The valleys heading west and south west could provide an escape route, the right-hand stroke of the “T”. Either one would lead me, eventually, to the A82 where I could hope to get a lift, either north towards my car or south to my base near Tyndrum. But if I was correct about the escape routes then the valley I was looking for had to be above me, V-shaped notch or not. It would therefore be illogical to follow an escape route (a putative escape route). I had to find that valley somewhere above me. So I ascended again, up over the shoulder of the valley side, onto the extensive flank of Beinn Achaladair, which seemed far removed from a plausible search area. After plodding around for ages, suddenly, as I rounded a hump in the ground, my line of sight uphill to the north opened up and I found myself staring down a V-shaped valley. I was in the Coire Daingean and I was looking down the Allt Coire Achaladair, the upstroke of the “T”. All was resolved !

The walk down to the farm was light hearted and relaxed, even though I was two hours later than anticipated. The gloaming was verging on darkness but I would be “off the hill” just within the arranged time; there would be no alert.

That evening I worked out how on earth I made such a mistake in so simple a walk. There was no V-shaped notch and the valley did not cleanly intersect with the valley from which I was escaping. That was my schematic memory of the route at the junction of the “T”. The smooth, featureless and extensive expanse of ground there gave me little option. Should I have made a cairn or two, which would have probably disappeared in the vast scale of the landscape? There were a few stones about and perhaps the effort might have paid off. Somehow I should have made some special effort to indicate that my “T” junction was nearby and that I should proceed no further along the big valley. Perhaps there were some memorable clues available but of course, in retrospect, I could not recall them. For those who advocate using GPS this is clearly a case where it might have served

me well. However I prefer to navigate by map, compass and a running dialogue with the terrain around me.

So my main conclusion is that I should have been more alert and in tune with the vast smooth and featureless topography, especially around the junction. It is a simple conclusion but difficult to put into practice. I will try harder next time!

I was lucky. Visibility might have deteriorated and then my search for the schematic notch-junction would have probably been unsuccessful. Either of the two escape routes would have been a grim salvation. If somehow they had proved false options then the details of my intended route, which I had left in safe hands, would have, probably, eventually guided a search party to me – but oh the shame of it!

## **A Nasty Shock – 40-odd Years Ago, and Nowadays**

*Ken Thomson*

We'd gone up to Glencoe – probably in November 1968 or 1969 – myself from Edinburgh where I was a graduate student and Paul from London where he was beginning a much more successful career (he became Professor of Statistics at the University of Witwatersrand in his native Johannesburg) to give a Scottish flavour to Paul's mountaineering life – which was already extensive. It was to become more so in later years when he became President of the Mountaineering Club of South Africa after a string of first ascents around the world. I think that I had already inveigled Paul to the Shelter Stone in mid-winter (we were all mad then), but Glencoe held the attraction of a SMC Dinner – which I have totally forgotten!

There was a good deal of snow about that November, and days were already short, so we decided to have a look at Coire nam Beith, thus giving Paul a chance to see a fine corrie and to stand on top of Argyll (the summit of Bidean nam Bian) at the same time. I think that we had had another route in mind, but weather conditions didn't look good, with light snow starting to fall, and there were others elsewhere, so we headed for the easy Summit Gully (or was it Boomerang Gully?), up a broad fan of firm snow to where the cliffs

closed in on either side. As we did so, loose snow started to accumulate beneath our feet, and more was coming down, but we thought that we'd make it before things got too serious.

However – as the alert reader will have guessed by now – we didn't (make it). Without the rope on – if we had one with us; we certainly didn't have helmets! – there was a sudden swish, and I was tumbling downhill quite fast. There was no sense of falling, or even starting to move, just a whirlwind of white all round, until I came to a halt, a bit winded but undamaged. Paul was not far away, with a bruised hip. Whether we had started the avalanche, or we had been both hit by a substantial fall from above, I don't know, but we'd been lucky; boulders were sticking out of the snowfield on the way down. The lightness of the new snow posed no danger of burying us (I think), but at the same time made our ice-axes (we did have those!) useless.

We looked at each other in relief, and looked uphill in case some climbers above us had come down in more thorough fashion, but really there was nothing to do but decide that the big hill and the worsening weather were against us that day, and troop down to the Dinner with a carefully limited account of our day in the Glen.

The above was submitted to the Editor only a few days before four climbers descending a snowfield were killed by an avalanche in the same corrie, in mid-January 2013. The Editor then asked for some “fuller comment on avalanches and the present warning system”, provided below: While this was being drafted, a further three people – two of whom were off-duty RAF MRT members – were killed by avalanches in the Chalamain Gap. While having second – and third – thoughts, I have not altered the views below.

I have to admit to being less than excited by the current system of multi-sponsored avalanche warnings in Scotland, where such events may be common but do not generally trouble hillwalkers who mostly keep to ridges. One learns by experience (one does not go out simply to enjoy oneself, does one?), and avalanche risk must come a good way below the probability of making map-reading mistakes, tripping over stones (and crampons!), forgetting gear or food, and simple under-estimation of the weather and terrain.

There is now a multitude of more or less institutional avalanche-related activities, from the Scottish Avalanche Information Service

(SAIS) to various semi-official courses and even a Scottish “foundation”, and of course there is gear to be bought, from an “avalanche card” at £4 through search poles at £35 each and distress “emitters” at £50, to airbag systems in an “avalanche backpack” costing heaven knows how much. In the jargon, “MRTs are nearly always outside the window of survivability”, and on-the-hill mental awareness seems cheaper! The cost of SAIS itself is not easy to find, but the Mountain Weather Information Service (MWIS), while good, costs over £40,000 per year – and how many hill trips does it discourage?!

As the MCoFS website says: “Mountaineers should be independent, self-reliant and able to look after themselves”. I could not agree more. We are thankful for – and contribute to – the unpaid MRTs, and the armed service helicopters, but further taxpayer-funded assistance for mountaineering, whether through SportScotland or otherwise, seems to me largely unwarranted. Here endeth the sermon from a grumpy old economist!

## The Climbing Life of Bill Brooker

### *Margaret Brooker*

As a member of the 1<sup>st</sup> Aberdeen Scout Group Bill, aged 12, made an ascent of Mount Keen from a camp at Aboyne, and soon joined a splinter group called Senior Patrol, displacing school rugby in his sporting interests. When fourteen, he cycled to Skye with a fellow scout and they climbed Sgùrr Alasdair. He overheard climbers discussing the Inaccessible Pinnacle. He asked the Warden at the Glenbrittle hostel if it was truly inaccessible and was told that "it is for the likes of you". The next day he donned gym shoes and climbed it solo.

Bill may have been influenced by his late elder brother Ian who was very active in the Cairngorm Club, but he was more attracted to the group of ex-servicemen led by Mac Smith who claimed the Deeside hills and crags every weekend. They camped, made howffs and used the estate bothies, especially in Glen Muick and Luibeg on Mar Estate. They built up a tough, carefree and fun loving culture, which included an intense feeling for the natural and social history of the Cairngorms. No small influence on them all was the figure of gamekeeper Bob Scott of the Derry, an ex-serviceman himself and witty dispenser of hill wisdom and lore.

Into this scene strode the seventeen year old Brooker, along with the late Johnny Morgan and Doug Sutherland. In the years 1949-50 they proceeded to astound the Aberdeen climbing world with over a dozen climbs including: Ben Macdui, Coire Sputen Dearg; Crystal Ridge (W), Anchor Route (W) and Snake Ridge: Creagan a' Choire Etchachan; Winter Route (W), Flanking Ribs: Braeriach, Coire Bhrochain; Pyramus (W): Lochnagar; Black Spout Pinnacle - Route 1, the 3rd Ascent (free from aid) of Eagle Ridge, Giants Head Chimney (W), Shadow Buttress A (W), West Rib (W): Skye - Sgùrr Alasdair; Abrahams Route (W).

Bill was drawn to study for a BSc in Geography at Aberdeen University. There he encountered a band of keen climbers in the medical faculty. Patey, Leslie, Taylor and later Grassick and Nicol, and this led to an outburst of hard exploratory climbing during his university life, pushing up standards to match the best in Britain,

especially in winter using the tools of the thirties; long ice axes and Tricouni nails.

Among his new climbs were Lochnagar; Eagle Ridge (W) (a Scottish jewel to this day), Gargoyle Chimney (W), The Stack: Creag an Dubh Loch; Labyrinth Edge: Beinn a' Bhuid; Mitre Ridge (W): Ben Macdui, Creagan a' Choire Etchachan; Red Scar Route. In Skye with Mike Dixon from Leeds, in 1950-51 he opened up the Coireachan Ruadh face of Sgùrr Mhic Choinnich with Fluted Buttress, Crack of Dawn, and Forgotten Groove. On motor bikes, with his medic friends he visited Nevis, Glencoe, Ardgour, and opened exploration in Applecross with Cioch North Wall on Sgùrr a' Chaorachain.

When the Aberdeen party set off for the Alps in 1952, Bill went by way of his beloved BSA Sloper. In Chamonix he climbed on the classic Aiguilles with Johnny Morgan. At the end of the holiday they crossed the Col du Géant. After a night in the Entrèves woods they climbed the Brouillard Glacier to bivouac on Pic Eccles at the tragic scene of destruction of the small cabin in a rock fall a few days earlier. They crossed Mont Blanc by the beautiful Innominata face and a fine high summit walk in perfect conditions, to descend to the ancient Grand Mulets hut. In the morning they were awakened by a terrible storm which chased them down to the valley; they were glad to be a day ahead.

During 1953 Bill continued to add new routes to the Deeside Cairngorm crags in the summer and winter, often climbing in this period with Tom Patey and Mike Taylor. All are worthy of mention, but those that stand out are the winter ascent of the Eagle Ridge with Patey and Taylor, and the winter ascent of Mitre Ridge of Beinn a' Bhuid with Patey in the same year. In the summer of 1953 he went to Skye with Patey, and they added another five new routes to his favourite Coruisk side of the Ridge, on Sgùrr Dearg including the impressive Thunderbolt Shelf.

After university came National Service as a lieutenant in the Royal Engineers. On return he often wore the trademark black beret while climbing and later on he had a blue UN beret from Cyprus days. In the summer of '55 Bill had the opportunity to spend three months prospecting in East Greenland for a Danish mining company which was an experience he treasured all his life. At the time few



people ventured there, and it was a real wilderness experience. After that he was employed by George Wimpey as a site investigation engineer based in Milford Haven. He then decided to return to University to take Honours and then a teaching certificate.

So Bill had less opportunity for climbing now but in 1958 he formed a partnership with Dick Barclay. They opened up the formidable Central Gully Wall of Creag an Dubh Loch with Waterkelpie Wall and other routes. In Skye they added Dawn Grooves to the Sgùrr Mhic Coinnich Crag. Bill then rounded off this decade of magnificent climbing with a winter ascent of Labyrinth Edge on Creag an Dubh Loch. His contribution to the exploration of the Deeside Cairngorm crags and the neglected Coruisk crags of Sgùrr Dearg and Sgùrr Mhic Coinnich was outstanding, and marked him out, along with Tom Patey, as the most notable climbers of his generation on our native crags.

In 1959 Bill married and started teaching Geography in Aberlour and then became Principal teacher in Keith Grammar School. He had joined the Scottish Mountaineering Club (SMC) in 1957 and kept in touch and climbed with other members when possible. After a couple of years his need for adventure took him to King Richard School in Dhekelia, Cyprus for a three year contract with the Army Institute of Education. It was an ideal base for him to pursue his interest in ancient civilisations and there were trips to Egypt, Jordan, Crete and mainland Greece where he climbed Mount Olympus.

In 1965 he returned to Keith briefly and soon after was appointed Tutor Organiser in Extra Mural Studies, now called Continuing Education, at Aberdeen University, becoming Director before retiring in 1992. Bill always felt he was so fortunate to be paid to do what he enjoyed. He lectured on current affairs, ancient civilisations, climbing and the natural world. Every January he taught a week long course in expedition planning for Combined Services Personnel based in Boat of Garten.

Following the Cairngorm disaster of 1971 when 5 children and an instructor died, Bill was involved with Mountain Leadership training to improve mountain safety.

Although the most intense of his climbing days were over, he remained heavily involved in mountain activities, much of it through the SMC. It was a great pleasure to him when son Iain led him up

Eagle Ridge and in 1986 became a member of the SMC. Bill had been active in SMC committee work since 1966. He became Vice President in 1970-72, President 1972-74 and later Honorary President in 1996. He was Editor of the SMC Journal from 1976 – 1986 and Clerk of the Munro Compleatists which he retained until 1992. For the centenary of the Club in 1989 he was the Editor of the Anthology of A Century of Scottish Mountaineering.

In the 1990s he had more time for writing and had a series on coastal walks and a few individual articles on sledging, cycling and river swimming published in The Leopard. He was a member of the Etchachan Club and was Chair of the North East Mountain Trust, where he was held in high regard, and went to their lectures as often as he could. He went every year to the ex-presidents' lunch of the SMC.

In 1999 he became an Honorary Member of the Cairngorm Club, and gave a talk on "Mountain Memories" at the annual dinner.

During his last few years he was sustained by worldwide correspondence with old friends and had frequent visitors. He remained interested in the outside world and showed a lively interest in other peoples' adventures. His contribution to Scottish climbing was remarkable and will endure as his permanent memorial.

(See obituary page 116)

## **Rick Allen**

### ***Editor***

In her history of the Cairngorm Club 1887 – 1987, written in 1987, Sheila Murray wrote “ three young members have been preoccupied with serious climbing and more arduous expeditions to the Himalayas”. Her list of three included Rick Allen who joined the Club in 1980 and is now living in Australia. Sheila noted that all three will “doubtless contribute more to climbing history and the next Club’s history will surely have further achievements of theirs to report” .

Here, let us note in the interim, and with admiration, the recent climb by Rick Allen and Sandy Allan of Newtonmore in July 2012. Both in their 50s they climbed Nanga Parbat (8,126m) via the Mazeno Ridge, a feat described by the Alpine Club of Pakistan as “truly extraordinary”. (see the Times, July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012 and other newspaper and website accounts).

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

*The Cairngorms: 100 Years of Mountaineering.* Greg Strange, 2101. Scottish Mountaineering Trust, 400pp. ISBN 978-1-907233-1-1

This magisterial volume by the author of a well-used SMC climbing guide to the Cairngorms, covers the century from 1893 (the ascent of the Douglas-Gibson Gully) onwards. To this Club, founded six years earlier, that choice of starting date may seem odd, even contentious, but it signals that the focus of this book is firmly about climbing on rock and ice, even if there are occasional mentions of skiing, bothies, some environmental issues (hill tracks, the Lurcher's Gully Inquiry, but not climate change) and even walks.

Given that focus, it is hard to fault the book, at least from a non/ex-climber's viewpoint: it takes the reader through each main first ascent with a happy mixture of background information on the participants, the day (and/or night) as a whole, and sufficient detail on the main pitches, including verbatim (or at least reported) conversations. Delightfully, most pages carry a photograph of the relevant route, landscape or character(s), the accumulation of which must represent a tremendous effort in contacting club and personal archives. Throughout the century the energy and endurance of the pioneers are evident, perhaps most to those who have themselves tramped the approach miles, and sampled Cairngorm weather and terrain, even if they have never attempted the technical feats here described.

The 12 main chapters cover the period in a balanced way, but the pride of place must go to the central chapters on 'The Golden Years' (1950-1960) in 56 pages, 'The Ice Revolution' (1970-1972) in 38 pages and 'The Quickening Pace' (1980-1985) in 58 pages. All the well-known names – Brooker, Cunningham, Dinwoodie, Fyffe, McArtney, Patey, Smith and, yes, Strange – are there, with multiple index entries, but also their companions, however obscure. A Postscript briefly reflects on developments since 1993, with a very lukewarm acknowledgement of the Cairngorms National Park, with its Authority's dubious concern with conservation and 'wild land' in the face of visitor and estate pressures.

Well-produced in SMC guidebook style, and with a bibliography of 60-odd book and journal references, two comprehensive indices (one general including route names, and one people) and only a few typos, this volume is a definitive work.

*Ken Thomson*

*A Bobby on Ben Macdhui: Life and death on the Braes of Mar.* John Duff. 2008, Leopard Magazine Publishing. 160pp. ISBN 978-0-9534534-3-6. Available second hand at Deeside Books, Ballater.

“A Bobby on Ben Macdhui” is a book based on a series of articles which were published for the Aberdeen Leopard magazine. The book covers the experiences of police officer John Duff who was involved in Mountain Rescue in the years before, and in the initial setup of, the Braemar Mountain Rescue Association in 1965. After 33 years connected with Mountain Rescue he severed his connections in December 1992. His book is an account of those years and gives an insight to his experiences. It also includes the author’s time as a Churchill Fellow in North America. The book is well illustrated with pictures of rescue scenes and some well known Deeside characters. The Cairngorm Disaster of 1971 and its aftermath is particularly well covered. This book is well worth reading but perhaps it suffers a little in its flow by being made up from several magazine articles. John Duff’s narrative is what one would expect from our local Aberdeenshire bobby - matter of fact and to the point, but not without humanity. The Cairngorm Club does get a mention as it seems to have had members available for call outs in those early days. It is a worthy addition to the Club library.

*Sandy McIntosh*

*Cairngorm John. A life in mountain rescue*, John Allen with Robert Davidson, 2009, Sandstonepress. 302pp, ISBN-10 905207-24-7.

This book is both a biography of John Allen and a history of the Cairngorm Mountain Rescue Team which he led from 1989 to 2007. It comprises 32 short chapters describing his youth and his involvement with the Team when he and his family moved to live in Kingussie. There are numerous accounts of mountain rescues interspersed with descriptions of how the Team developed its modus operandi and its funding. The book is well illustrated, well organised and its businesslike, no-nonsense tone carries the reader from the routine to a crisis and back again in a reassuring manner. The contributions of many of the Team members are described and the award of the MBE, in 2000, to John Allen their leader, seems to be well deserved. Sir Chris Bonington's Introduction concludes by describing the book thus: "...by turns exciting, funny, informative and wise, an indispensable addition to the literature of the mountains". With this I fully agree and would add that it is a book which should be regarded as essential reading for all those who walk and climb in Scotland.

*Alister Macdonald*

*Moray Coastal Trail*, Sandra Bardwell, 2010, Rucksack Readers, 64pp. ISBN 978-1-898481-40-9

This guidebook describes two very contrasting long distance walks, the Moray Coastal Trail (MTC) which follows coastal paths, beaches, quiet country roads and a railway track bed and has the coast rarely out of sight, and the Dava Way which crosses moorland and a relatively high plateau with vistas of mountain, moorland and farmland. The two walks can be naturally linked at Forres to form a longer walk of 67 miles between Grantown on Spey and Cullen.

The author packs a great deal of information into the book, beginning with an excellent Planning and Preparation section, helpful

to those who are new to long distance walking and experienced alike. This ten page section includes travel details of airlines, trains, buses, and taxis, with times and distances, and also the availability of accommodation. A list of useful websites gives access to up-to-date information ranging from weather and tides to midge forecasts!

Interesting information on geology, landscape, habitats and wildlife is supported by beautiful photographic images. The history of fishing and railways, aspects which have influenced the development and settlement of the area, is well researched as are the details of towns and villages and other items of interest encountered on the walks. The coloured maps are large scale, plentiful and clear, but shorter on detail than an Ordnance Survey map which the walker would be advised to carry as well, particularly on the Dava Way. Surprisingly, a map and compass are listed only as desirable rather than essential.

The author chooses to describe the Dava Way first, starting at Grantown on Spey. The route which mainly follows an old railway track bed is remote with no villages or refreshment stops during its 23 mile length. Although there are escape routes mentioned in order to break up the walk into shorter sections, there are no clear instructions on how to access possible off-road parking nearby as the Walking World website clearly does. The MCT is more flexible along its 44 mile route, with plenty of road access, some budget accommodation and local bus services linking the coastal towns and villages. Overnight stops are suggested for 3,4, and 5 day itineraries. Both walks are divided into sections, each section headed by a panel clearly setting out distance, gradient, availability of refreshments, side trips, and a summary and is followed by a series of bullet-pointed instructions, a format which would be easy to read while walking.

The book is in spiral bound notebook format which makes it easy to open and keep in place. The waterproof paper, whilst of benefit, adds to the weight. It is a very practical handbook which makes every effort to provide the reader with an incentive to visit and explore the area.

*Evelyn Massie*

*The power of the sea. Tsunamis, Storm surges, Rogue waves and our quest to predict them.* Bruce Parker. 2012, Palgrave Macmillan, pp306. ISBN 978-0-230-61637-0.

Walkers and climbers usually have a strong interest in mountain weather and disasters caused by avalanches, rock slides, earthquakes and floods. These are important, overwhelmingly so for the victims, but they are a very small part of the global system, meteorological, oceanographic and geological, with which Parker's book deals. It is not a book for the faint hearted. The human catastrophes which Parker describes are the biggest and most prolonged in human history. He writes with the authority of an oceanographer, a former Director of the World Data Centre for Oceanography

The sea is a major component in global weather and geography, hence the title of the book. The first two chapters explain the tides and their prediction. There are some exciting accounts of tide and wave height predictions made for amphibious operations in World War II. Subsequent chapters explain storm surges such as that of 1864, which flooded West Bengal (ie Eastern India) and present day Bangladesh, killing at least 80,000 people. A chapter on rogue waves explains their origin and the difficulty in predicting them. They have sunk numerous otherwise seaworthy ships. Submarine earthquakes and land slides cannot be predicted but the tsunamis they cause can be tracked to give practical warning to coastal regions at risk. They cross oceans at the speed of a jet aeroplane.

The tsunami of December 26, 2004 centred on Aceh, on the Indian Ocean coast of Sumatra, led to some 300,000 deaths. At the time the Indian Ocean had no monitoring system like that of the Pacific; now it has. If these death tolls are hard to imagine then consider the consequences of the El Nino. Essentially this arises when warm water displaces the normally cold sea off the coast of Peru. The local effect is severe flooding with much loss of life, but on the other side of the world the El Nino drastically reduces the monsoon rains which sustain the food growing regions of India, eastern Africa and large parts of China. The result is drought and famine. It is estimated that as a consequence of the 1877-79 El Nino 20 to 30 million people died from famine. The devastation caused by



more recent droughts arising from the El Nino – Southern Oscillation, to use the formal name, have been shown to TV audiences around the world. The El Nino is difficult to predict, but it occurs quite often and has done so for the past 130,000 years. Once identified however, its effects can, in theory, be mitigated by good agricultural management. These catastrophic phenomena are liable to be affected by the current change in the Earth's climate (Global Warming), leaving the reader with the cheery thought that perhaps we are making a difficult situation worse.

*Alister Macdonald*

### *Adam Watson Publications*

Dr Adam Watson FIBiol, FArcticNorthAmerica, FRSE, FCEH, FRMetSoc, is an Honorary Member of the Cairngorm Club and the pre-eminent scientist associated with our mountains. Now aged over 80, he has recently donated to the Club an almost complete set of his published papers, which range from several on Baffin Island zoology and local hill trips in the 1950s to several in recent years on contemporary issues in the Cairngorms. There is also his long series (annual since the mid-1990s) on snow patch survival in the Cairngorms and elsewhere. These papers have been deposited in the Club Library, and a list will appear on the Club website.

In addition, Dr Watson has donated a set of his recent books, which are briefly reviewed below. Unless otherwise specified, they are published in large (approx. A4) format, with soft glossy covers, by Paragon Publishing, and with local support from Bert McIntosh.

*Cool Britannia: snowier times in 1580-1930 than since*, by Adam Watson and Iain Cameron (2010), 64pp. This consists of 18 short chapters, most covering groups of British hills, from Ben Nevis to "Hills and lowlands in Southern England", and each summarising observations from the earliest days (e.g. the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries) to recent data. A bibliography of nearly 200 items provides an invaluable reference resource.

*It's a Fine Day for the Hill: hills, folk and wildlife, 1935-62*, by Adam Watson (2011), 189pp. Each of the 20-odd chapters deals with

an episode in Adam's life, from "a few early schooldays" through "North Iceland on £10" to "Four winters on the Glen Esk hills". Many photographs, often with well-known people (Tom Weir, Tom Patey, Bob Scott) add much to the volume.

*Human Impacts on the Northern Cairngorms*, by Adam Watson (2012), 169pp. The first part of this volume is based on Adam's scientific evidence to the 1981 Lurcher's Gully Public Inquiry on proposed ski developments at Cairngorm. The second consists of about 20 unpublished papers associated with human impact (erosion, wildlife disturbance, etc.) in the northern Cairngorms and nearby, including some up to 2011.

*A Snow Book, Northern Scotland*, by Adam Watson (2011), 137pp. "Based mostly on the author's field observations in 1938-2011", this book covers long-term studies of snow on high land in the Cairngorms, and the influence of snow on lichens, birds and mammals to be found there. Photographs, tables and other data (e.g. a list of "vantage points for snow patches, from roads in north-east Scotland") add interest and usefulness.

*Some Days from a Hill Diary: Scotland, Iceland, Norway, 1943-50*, by Adam Watson (2012), 132pp. With its self-explanatory title, this book brings to life the day-to-day experiences and feelings of the young Watson.

*Vehicle Hill Tracks in Northern Scotland: an independent, factual report on numbers, distribution, impacts, ground reinstatement*, by Adam Watson (2011), 149pp. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this volume was not sponsored by Bert McIntosh of plant hire fame but by the North-East Mountain Trust. Half the book deals with tracks over a variety of space and time; the rest is occupied by 10 appendices dealing with particular cases, ranging from the Mar Lodge Estate removal to roads for access to the Beauy-Denny power-line. Given recent political (non-)developments, the story continues ...

*A Zoologist on Baffin Island, 1953: four months of Arctic adventure*, by Adam Watson (2011), 240pp. The main part of this volume describes the sequence of the trip, while two others briefly cover some biology (including some flowers and insects in addition to Adam's focus on snowy owls and lemmings rather than the intended ptarmigan), and members of the expedition.

*Ken Thomson*

## **Muir**

*Editor's note:* Graham Ewen, Honoray President of the Club, has published the results of his historical research in numerous issues of the Journal. They include articles on the village and the estate of Inverey and the associated lairds, Glen Ey, Dalmore, Allanaquoich and in the last issue, Derrylodge. In this issue he sets out the complicated history of the Club Cottage we now call Muir but which was originally known by another name.

## **The Moor of Inverey**

### ***Graham Ewen***

The area called the Moor of Inverey covered an area extending from near the bridge across the Black Burn, at Blackburn Cottage westwards to the far end of the flat ground near where the Canadian Bridge used to stand. A 1787 map of Inverey, which had obviously been prepared to assist with a reorganisation of holdings, simply shows the area as Stoney Moor. All the holdings to the east were always listed under Little Inverey and those to the west were listed under Linn of Dee. The Moor may have extended up the hill to the south in places, but much of the hillside was probably covered in woodland called the Wood of Badiness. This area was not originally populated and was simply used as a grazing ground by the inhabitants of Little Inverey. As such it attracted little notice in the Estate records except for some complaints by the local factor that the tenants kept making muirburn in this area, which endangered the nearby fir woods.

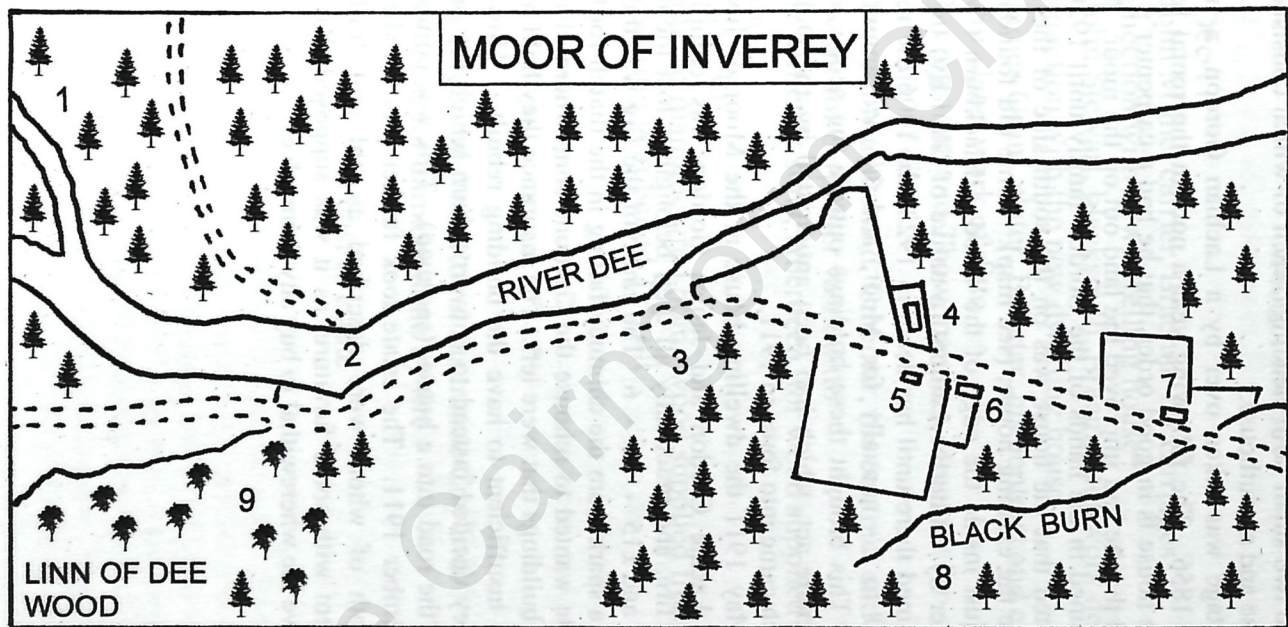
The first mention of any other economic activity in this area comes in a letter from James Stuart, the local factor to Lord Fife, dated 27<sup>th</sup> July 1795, in which he stated that the trenching of the moor and houses was going forward, but offers his opinion that the cost of doing so will far exceed any profit, for the expense would be great and the soil was very bad. By the 9<sup>th</sup> October he reported that the moor was now ploughed and manure was being spread on it. At this time it would appear that the estate was farming this new land on

its own account, By July 1798 the horses were still being employed in carting stones off the new ploughed land and carrying manure to it.

Although there are rental lists from 1785 onwards there is no specific mention made of the Moor of Inverey until the list of 1823. From 1785 until 1809 Meikle Inverey and Little Inverey were listed separately, but from 1810 to 1822 all the tenants were lumped together on one list under Inverey. From 1823 – 1827 only two tenants are listed for Moor of Inverey, an Alex McDonald paying an annual rent of £1 5s and James Miller who paid £2. These rents were low compared with the rest of the Estate. The tenants in Little Inverey paid an average of around £4 18s while the rents in Meikle Inverey averages around £6 3s.

From 1828 there were three tenants, the additional one being a Widow Thomson, whose annual rental was £1. James Miller had by this time died and his widow is now listed as the tenant. In 1837 these rentals were reduced by a third because the Earl of Fife had taken over their shielings in Glen Connie and thrown them into the deer forest. In 1844 Widow Miller at Moor of Inverey presented a petition to the Trustees of the late James, Earl of Fife, describing the injury done to her croft by the flood of 1829 (the Muckle Spate), and craving that a stone bulwark should be erected for its protection. This request was considered by the Trustees at a meeting in Turriff on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1844. The Committee, having heard from the factor that the place was not worth the expense of bulwarking, agreed to allow her a donation of 4 bolls of meal in charity to the widow annually. Why this request was not made much sooner after the Muckle Spate remains a mystery.

By this time it becomes clear that Widow Miller occupied the holding that became the Muir Cottage of today, Widow Thomson was in the holding that became Blackburn Cottage and Widow MacDonald was in the other holding, which was demolished by order of the Trustees, when she gave up the holding in 1866, (see Map). Thereafter there were only two holdings on the Moor of Inverey. The Ordnance Survey name books, which are held in the National Archives of Scotland in Edinburgh, contain notes made by the Ordnance Survey during their original survey of the area. They list two buildings under the name "Muir", the first time this



KEY

- |                                |                              |                            |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Canadian Camp               | 4. Present Muir Cottage Site | 7. Blackburn Cottage       |
| 2. Site of Canadian Bridge     | 5. Former Muir Cottage Site  | 8. Old Water Supply Source |
| 3. Possible Site of "The Camp" | 6. Other Holding             | 9. New Water Supply Source |

variant of the spelling has been found. The entry states that this name refers to two small farm steadings, each of which consists of a dwelling house and an outhouse.

Moor Cottage was taken over by a Lachlan Gordon, a house carpenter in 1856. The following year a note in the rental ledger states that the house is in good order, that he had a carpenter's shop adjoining and that he had improved the land out on the moor. Moor Cottage remained in the hands of the Gordon family until 1920. It should be noted that the house was on the south side of the main road, opposite the existing house, (see map). Some old foundations can be seen just inside the edge of the wood. Blackburn Cottage was taken over by Catherine Lamont (a native of Glen Ey) in 1876 and she remained there until her death in 1923. In 1906 the rentals were reduced to 2/- annually for Moor, and 1/- per annum for Blackburn. This brought these holdings outside the scope of the security of tenure act, which had been anticipated by the Duke of Fife and which came into force in 1911.

On 10<sup>th</sup> May 1911 the dwelling house at the Moor of Inverey occupied by Lachie Gordon and James Gordon was completely destroyed by fire, and practically all their belongings lost including two watches and £15 - 12 - 6. The cause of the fire was thought to have been a spark from the chimney falling in the thatch roof. At first the Estate wanted to rehouse the Gordons somewhere else and demolish the buildings that were left. The insurance they held on the building was insufficient to have the building rebuilt. However, eventually they decided instead to convert a barn which lay on the other side of the road into a house, (see map). This was completed on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1911. The estate took further pity on the two Gordon's, both of whom were described as old and frail, by supplying them with some furniture, as it was supposed that they would not have the wherewithal to buy any themselves.

Account for the conversion of a barn to a dwelling house at  
Moor of Inverey

1911 Dec 11

Paid John Milne, carrier, Braemar for carriages in connection with new dwelling house	£3 10 0d
Paid John Stewart, blacksmith, Braemar for work done in connection with the new dwelling house	1 7 2
Paid James Grant, slater, Ballater, his contract and extra work for slater work of ditto	37 0 0
Paid Livingstone and Thow, painters, Braemar for painter work of ditto	2 15 0
Paid Donald MacDonald, Braemar, his contract and extra work for carpenter work ditto	20 10 0
Paid R. Miller & sons, Aberdeen, for wood supplied for ditto	16 2 4
1912 Sep 30	
To value of manufactured home wood supplied from Estate during year ended 31 <sup>st</sup> . ult	1 2 1

Less Received from Royal Insurance Coy Ltd.  
Aberdeen, for damage done by fire

60 0 0

Net cost to estate

£22 6 0

In 1915 the out houses of the above property had become ruinous and at Lachie Gordon's request a new wooden shed was erected, and the tenant was to remove the old houses and renounce all claim to them. This was probably the wooden annex which was still attached to the house in 1949.

After Lachie Gordon died in 1920 there were a number of tenants, mostly fairly short term between then and 1949 when the Club took on the lease of the property. The first was a C. MacDonald who was removed from Claybokie on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1922. He was only there for a short time and was replaced by John Christie, who had been a gamekeeper at the Linn on 19<sup>th</sup> October of that year. Christie had a cow and this necessitated the building of a byre, which of course is now the woodshed. By 1939 a B. Robertson was the tenant. In a letter to the factor, dated 4<sup>th</sup> January 1939 he complains about the small size of the house, stating that it was too small for a family, the fact that the kitchen range smokes badly and the water supply being very poor. He had tried to use a force pump to cure this but it was no use.

In 19<sup>th</sup> September 1927 a boy called John Lindsay was admitted to the school in Inverey. His address was given as The Camp, The Moor of Inverey. This was followed on the 18<sup>th</sup> February 1929 by two girls, Betty and Jessie Newlands, presumably sisters, who also came from The Camp, The Moor of Inverey. Unfortunately the teacher omitted to fill in their dates of leaving in the admission register, and so how long they stayed there is unknown. It seems likely that they were travelling people, The 1900 O.S map shows a disused sand pit with road access at point 3 on the accompanying map. Although no trace of this remains today, a certain amount of hard standing survived here off the road right up until the 1950's and caravans and tents could often be seen at this point at that time. It seems quite likely that the Camp mentioned would have been here.

The area of hill opposite Moor Cottage (ie the future Muir), was completely wooded before the Second World War. This area of woodland was cut down by the Canadian Forestry Corps during the war years. They also constructed a bridge across the Dee at the West end of the Moor of Inverey, to connect their camp with the main road, which became known as the Canadian Bridge, (see map). The bridge had a narrow gauge railway crossing it. This railway led from their



camp, across the bridge and seemed to follow the far side of the public road eastwards. I do not know how far it went.

During the war years a family of Ellis's were in residence. However by the time in early 1949, when the Cairngorm Club was showing an interest in the property, it was about to be occupied by workmen employed by John McAdam, civil engineering contractors, Mugiemoos Road, Aberdeen. They were building a fish ladder on the Falls of Lui for the River Dee Salmon Fishery Board and they were to have a six months lease from 28<sup>th</sup> May. At the same time Aberdeen County Council was trying to requisition the cottage for homeless people. A party of at least four Club Members carried out an inspection of the property in July 1949. The party consisted of Col. E. Birnie Reid, William A. Ewen and at least two others. Negotiations were opened with the estate and by August an agreement in principle had been reached and a six year lease was signed at the beginning of November, despite the fact that McAdam's men were still in residence. Vagaries in the weather were blamed for the delay in finishing the fish ladder contract. Macadam's men were eventually shifted to Woodside Cottage in May 1950

Despite the presence of McAdam's men, structural alterations were started in 1949. Partitions were removed in the stone built part of the building to change it from a three roomed area to one of two rooms, a small room which was to be a bedroom and a larger room, which was to be the common room. Interestingly the wood from these partitions was carefully removed and taken away by the estate to be stored in a dry place of safety somewhere around Mar Lodge, so that the partitions could be restored in future, on the Club's waygoing. Priority was given to the water supply, which at the time consisted of a stand pipe in the garden, which didn't work at all. The water supply came from a burn on the hillside opposite and club volunteers had a very hard time digging up the old lead pipe and replacing it with a copper pipe. The old lead pipe had at least 17 leaks on it. The new pipe was connected to a new sink, which had been installed in the new common room. At this time the water supply was carried over the Black Burn in a wooden box shape similar to the structure which to this day carries the water supply across the River Ey to Meikle Inverey, (see map). This was eventually removed and the pipe sunk underneath the Black Burn. During 1950 the wooden annex had a proper floor laid and

hardboard linings put on the walls to provide two bedrooms. They both proved to be rather draughty due to the presence of badly fitted outside doors on both rooms. The cottage was opened to members without ceremony in June 1950. The first Huts Custodian was Robert Bain. The following year a new fence was erected along the north and east boundaries of the property. At the time toilet facilities consisted of an Elsan which was located in a small hut, adjoining the wooden annex. Lighting was by a Tilley lamp, which hung from a hook in the ceiling of the common room, and ordinary oil wick lamps elsewhere. Due to the forestry operations which took place during the war, there was plenty of wood brash lying about, which members of the Club were able to collect and saw up for firewood. Fresh milk and eggs could be obtained locally and Messrs Collie, general grocers, Braemar, delivered by van on Fridays. At this point there was accommodation for 12 people, sleeping in three four bunk rooms.

It was after the Club took over the cottage that the spelling "Muir" came to be used. In all the correspondence in the Estate papers prior to this time it was always called Moor Cottage. At that time the word Muir appeared on the Ordnance Survey map about half a mile west of the present building. I can distinctly remember my father mentioning to George Taylor that the building was marked as Muir on the map. Thus possibly the new usage was simply the result of a map reading error. The modern map of course shows Muir Cottage in the right place, but the other "Muir" is also shown where it has been all along.

Catherine Lamont is the last entry in the Estate Rental Ledger relating to Blackburn Cottage. She died in Nazereth House, Aberdeen on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1923. On her death certificate she is described as a Lodging House Keeper, although in all the Census entries up to 1911 she described herself as a crofter. The cottage was taken over by a Charles MacIntosh on or around 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1923 when he had three children admitted to the Roman Catholic School. He was an estate Labourer paying no rent, which explains why his name does not appear in the Rental Ledger. He was still there in 1936, when he was apparently reprimanded for appearing at Colonel Farquharson of Invercauld's funeral rather under the influence of drink, while wearing Mar Check Tweed. By 1950 the Scottish Youth Hostels Association were showing an interest in the Cottage, and after negotiations obtained a lease of the building at a nominal rent.

In 1954 the Scottish Hydro Electric Board extended the public electricity supply to the village of Inverey. Cooking and lighting were thereafter by electricity and at Muir a slot meter was installed to pay for it. Users of the cottage had to make sure they had a good supply of coins with them for this purpose. The following year, 1955, the lease was renewed for a further six years.

In 1958 the small porch on the east side of the cottage was replaced with a much larger structure, which was to consist of a small bathroom and kitchen. The maximum length was restricted to the distance between the two windows on that wall and the width was also restricted by the fact that it was to be a flat roof. Work started at Easter time and continued mostly at weekends until the summer time. It also involved the construction of a septic tank and soak away which are located in the wood, not far from the woodshed. Once finished the sink and cooking facilities had been moved into the new kitchen area. The bathroom consisted of a small foot bath, a wash hand basin and a toilet. Once this was in operation the Elsan was disposed of, and the shed that housed it was demolished.

In 1959 Peter Howgate took over as Huts Custodian from Robert Bain, who had retired to live in Crieff. He continued in this post until 1967, when Ken Fraser took over for a short time. During this time a new weir was constructed across the burn to try and improve the water flow into the supply tank. This was to be the first of many attempts to improve the water supply since the original installation in 1950.

In 1962 the Canadian Bridge, which had become a well known landmark in the area, was demolished. It had been damaged by the flood of July 1956, which washed away the Luibeg Bridge. The bridge became impassable to motor vehicles and could only be used by cyclists and walkers. It was a very useful shortcut for those going to Derry Lodge. The excuse for the demolition was given that the bridge had become unsafe, but I think that with the sale of Mar Lodge to the Panchaud brothers, the possible complications of a private bridge joining what had become two different estates could have had something to do with it. Ricardo's Bridge across the River Ey was later similarly demolished immediately upon the sale of the Dalvorar Beat to the Panchauds. In the early 1960's the hill opposite Muir was replanted with trees. This involved the erection of miles of fencing and took several years to complete. A special one sided style was

erected on the south side of the fence to give club members access to the water supply for Muir. A portable ladder, kept in the wood shed at Muir had to be used on the north side of the fence to get access to the stile on the other side.

During the time that the Club had the use of Derry Lodge demand for places at Muir tended to be weak, especially in the summer time, when most members would prefer to go to Derry as it lay nearer to the hills. At this time the cottage was let out to family parties at reduced prices, during the summer holidays in order to create a demand. When the Club gave up the lease of Derry Lodge on Whitsunday 1967, there was an immediate increase in demand for places at Muir. This led to some restrictions being put in place for members of other clubs who wished to come to Muir. A short time later Captain Ramsay announced that he would look favourably on any request by the Club to purchase Muir. Negotiations began in 1968 but proved to be extremely protracted, but were eventually concluded with entry at 28<sup>th</sup> February 1972. A contentious issue in the proposed title, which stated that the property belongs to the Cairngorm Club, which effectively would have meant that the Club could never sell the place. This was eventually watered down to allow sales to other walking groups. The purchase price was £1,275 - 50 new pence.

The fact that Muir Cottage was to come into the Club's ownership paved the way to expensive improvements, which could not have been justified, had the property still been rented. The cost of these were to be met by the Taylor bequest, which had been left for this purpose. The plans eventually agreed involved the demolition of the existing wooden annex, to be replaced by a much larger structure approximately four times the size of the old structure. It was to be of a log cabin type construction which could be assembled fairly quickly and therefore very suitable for such a remote site. The new main door enters the extension through a verandah into a vestibule and then into a fairly large hall. This is surrounded by two six bunk dormitories, one four bunk and one two bunk. There are also two wash rooms rooms and a small lounge and a drying room for wet clothes. In the original cottage the one remaining partition was to be removed making for a much bigger common room. The fireplace was removed to the opposite end. The kitchen/bathroom extension was to be gutted and knocked into one room, which was the new kitchen. It also involved

moving the large water storage tank from the upper corner of old bathroom into the attic. The bulk of this work was carried out by a contractor from Innerleithen, but a lot of the finishing jobs including installation of bunks and painting were carried out by Club members in order to reduce costs. Peter Howgate had by now returned for a second stint as Huts Custodian and he supervised all the necessary work which was done by these volunteers. This work was only just completed in time for the planned official opening on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1973. The Taylor bequest did not quite cover the whole cost, but grants were obtained from various other bodies which made up the relatively small shortfall. The cottage was reopened by the Club's Honorary President Col. E. Birnie Reid in the presence of over 100 people including Captain Alexander Ramsey of Mar, Councillor George Collie of Aberdeen City Council, Mr John Russell representing Aberdeenshire Council and a cousin of the late George Taylor, Mrs M. Mackenzie of Nethybridge.

During the time that Denis Hardy was Huts Custodian two major problems became apparent. The first of these related to the water supply which required quite a lot of maintenance to keep it working properly. Movement of stones and bits of wood in the burn tended to block the intake from the burn from time to time and these had to be cleaned out. The water storage tank on the hill also used to silt up rapidly and this had to be cleared out regularly too. The flow of water at best of times was not very good and I can remember George Taylor saying, probably at the time of the 1958 extension, that he had bitterly regretted installing such a small pipe from the burn to the cottage. It was only a half inch pipe. However by 1975 the problems with the water supply seemed to be increasing. The trees which had been planted in the early 60's were growing and there seemed, possibly as a result of this, to be a reduction of water flow in the burn. Another factor was probably that the increased accommodation, showering facilities etc had led to an increase in demand for water. It was to be many years before this problem was resolved. The second problem was one of water seeping through the west wall of the new extension and an attempt was made to solve this by fitting weather boarding on the outside of the west wall.

During the time that Eddie Martin was huts custodian (1980 - 1993) the following maintenance jobs became necessary. The weather

boarding on the walls of the woodshed were substantially replaced especially on the south and west sides, the original boarding having become rotten. The sole plates on which the walls rested, also made of wood, had to be replaced for the same reason. Over a period of years all the windows in the cottage were double glazed. A new soak away had to be constructed for the septic tank, and this was not surprising because the old soak away was never properly made, an old rubbish tip having been used for the purpose. The weather boarding which had been fixed on the west wall of the dormitory block had not proved to be a success. Water seepage had continued to be a problem especially when the wind blew strongly from the west. The old weather boarding was removed and replaced by new weather boarding supplied by Invercauld Estate. This time a waterproof membrane was fitted to the outside of the west wall before the new weather boarding was put in place. The new weather boards also have a much bigger overlap than the original ones. Another problem that occurred at this time related to the kitchen roof which had been built in 1958. It was of cement and asbestos construction and was beginning to leak to some extent. Such roofs are difficult to repair and eventually the asbestos sheets were taken off and replaced by boards, which were then covered in felt.

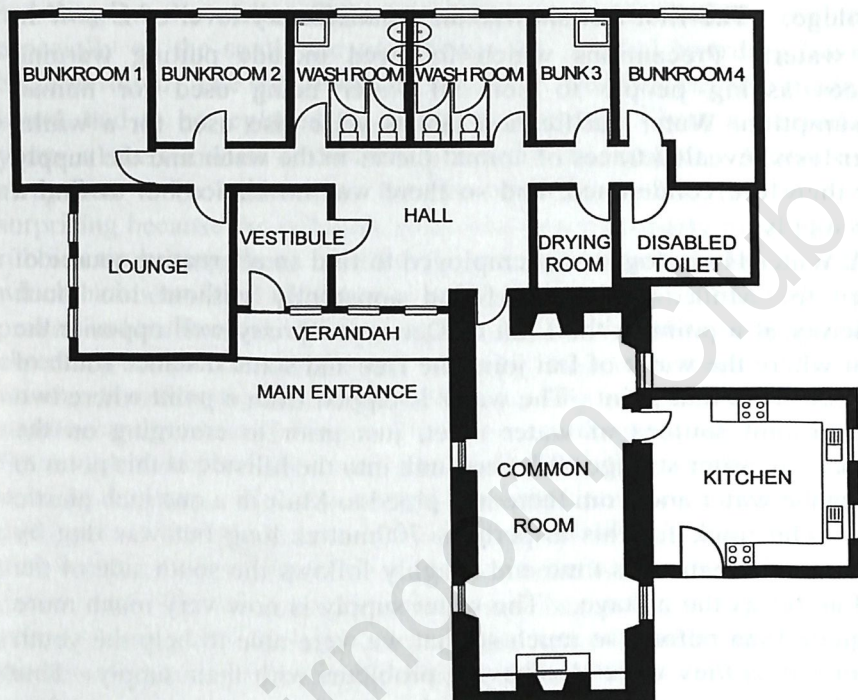
During this period there were two fires in the Cottage. The first one occurred in one of the dormitories where a gym shoe fell down the back of one of the heaters and started to smoulder. This led to the curtains catching fire but apparently all the wood in that area was fireproof so the only damage was a bit of minor scorching. The second fire was potentially much more serious and happened in the common room. It is thought that some socks which had been hung up above the stove fell down on to it and took fire. This led to the wood panelling on the adjacent wall taking fire and almost half the wall panelling on that gable was burnt. Fortunately all the doors were shut and the fire apparently starved of oxygen simply went out. Those who were staying in the Cottage at the time were unaware of what had happened until they got up in the morning. It was decided it would be safer to remove what was left of the wood panelling from that wall and replace it with cement roughcast.

In the second half of the 1980's it became compulsory to have our water tested by the local authority, which of course charged us for the

privilege. The first test showed an unsatisfactory level of *E coli* in the water. Precautions which followed include putting warning notices asking people to boil all water being used for human consumption. Water purification tablets were also used for a while. Later tests revealed traces of animal faeces in the water and the supply was therefore condemned, and so there was no choice but to find a new supply.

A Water Hydrologist was employed to find an alternative source of water for Muir. This was found apparently without too much difficulty at a point in the Linn of Dee wood pretty well opposite the point where the water of Lui joins the Dee and some distance south of the road from that point. The water is tapped from a point where two underground sources of water meet, just prior to emerging on the surface. A water storage tank was sunk into the hillside at this point to gather the water and from there it is piped to Muir in a one inch plastic pipe. The track for this is perhaps 700metres long but was dug by mechanical means this time and roughly follows the south side of the road as far as the cottage. The water supply is now very much more adequate than before, so much so that we were able to help the youth hostel out as they were also having problems with their supply. This was done temporarily to begin with by running a pipe on the surface through the wood from just inside our gate, but this has since been trenched in to make it permanent. Now that the water is coming from an underground source it should be much safer than it was before, but it still has to be tested every year. (See map).

In October 2004 Muir was closed to allow for a further major refurbishment to take place, (see floor plan overleaf). The existing kitchen, which had been originally built in 1958, was demolished. It was rebuilt the same width as before but now extended right out to the line of the boundary fence. The floor level of the new kitchen was raised to be level with that of the rest of the cottage. This was made possible by the adoption of a pitched roof in the new building, which did not have the constrictions caused by the use of a flat roof as in the old kitchen. The new kitchen is much bigger than the old one and the cooking, washing and storage facilities greatly expanded.



There are now two cookers, two microwave ovens, two sinks and two fridge freezers and ample work surfaces and cupboard storage. They provide plenty of room for two separate parties to prepare a meal at the same time. Other major improvements made at the time included the provision of disabled ramps leading to the outer doors, the widening of the passageway between the common room and the rest of the building to allow access for wheel-chairs and the provision of a disabled toilet. A substantial amount of electrical rewiring was also done at this time.

This project costing around £75,000 was funded from donations by Club members (22.5%), the remaining money coming from grants from Cairngorm National Park LEADER + (40%), Aberdeenshire Council (16%), Aberdeen City Council (8.5), Scottish Mountaineering Trust (6.5 %), and the Lottery Awards for All Fund (6.5 %). In order to meet the demands of the funding bodies the Club had to change its legal status and is now classed as a Community Amateur Sports Club. Muir was officially reopened on Friday March



25<sup>th</sup> 2005 by the Club Honorary President Anne Cordiner. This was followed by a celebratory ceilidh/dinner on the Saturday night in the Stag Ballroom at Mar Lodge.

Such was the demand for places at Muir, especially at weekends, that sometimes our own members were unable to get accommodation even when planning ahead. In order to solve this problem the small lounge situated on the west side of the building has now been set aside for the use of Cairngorm Club members only. There are now two beds and two mattresses stored there and so there are always four guaranteed places for Club members. This notionally increases the capacity of the Hut from 18 to 22.

All the dormitories have been equipped with new bunks. These have fixed step ladders fitted to them to allow safe access to the upper bunks which are also fitted with guard rails to prevent people falling out of them.

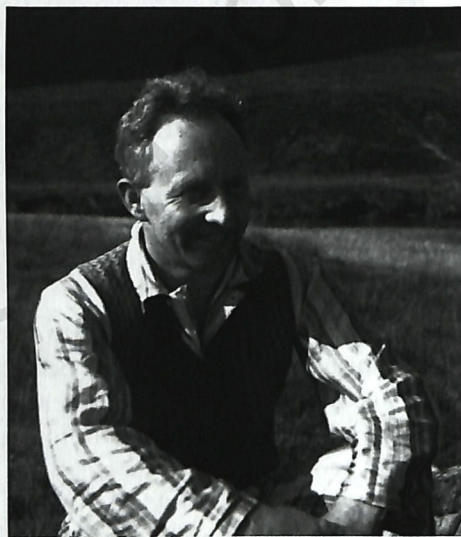
The Scottish Youth Hostels Association decided in 2007 to close around eight of the smaller hostels. The list included the hostel at Inverey, which it had occupied since 1950. The closure took place in 2008. Blackburn Cottage has now been taken over by North East Wing ATC based at Gordon Barracks, Bridge of Don, as an outdoor activity centre for ATC cadets. It is intended primarily for local cadets, but it is available for other wings. They have carried out some improvements, notably the installation of a new kitchen and some improvements in the dormitories. The accommodation is still very cramped compared with that of Muir.

At the time of writing, Muir Cottage has been a climbing hut for more than sixty years, during which time it has performed its primary purpose of providing accommodation in the area for parties of hill walkers and climbers. From 1967 onwards, following the closure of Derry Lodge, the hut has been very busy, especially at weekends. It is still possible to find quiet times midweek. Usage by members of other clubs far exceeds usage by our own members. The hut has also been used by school parties, scouts, girl guides and disabled groups. A large barbecue was held in the grounds on the Sunday of the Club's hundredth anniversary, following a visit the night before to Ben Macdui and the Shelter Stone. This was repeated for the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, (see page 19). A Burn's Supper, held on the weekend nearest Burns Night, has become a fixture of the calendar.

The building has been very extensively altered and improved since the Club took it over in 1949, and the facilities provided are now quite superb, making Muir possibly the best climbing club hut in Scotland. A plaque on the wall of the common room records the Club's gratitude to George A. Taylor whose bequest originally made the whole project possible. It reads as follows;

The Cairngorm Club,  
Muir of Inverey  
1972

*Purchased and extended through the benefaction of GEORGE A. TAYLOR, MA, BSc, PhD. (1905 – 1964), CIVIL ENGINEER and some time Honorary Member of the Club.*



*George Taylor*

Most of the early 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.



*A photograph of Muir taken by George Taylor in 1950. The seated figures are William A. Ewen and Robert Bain.*

## CLUB NEWS

### THE PRESIDENT

Adrian Scott was elected President of the Club at the 2012 AGM, in succession to Anne Pinches. Adrian writes:

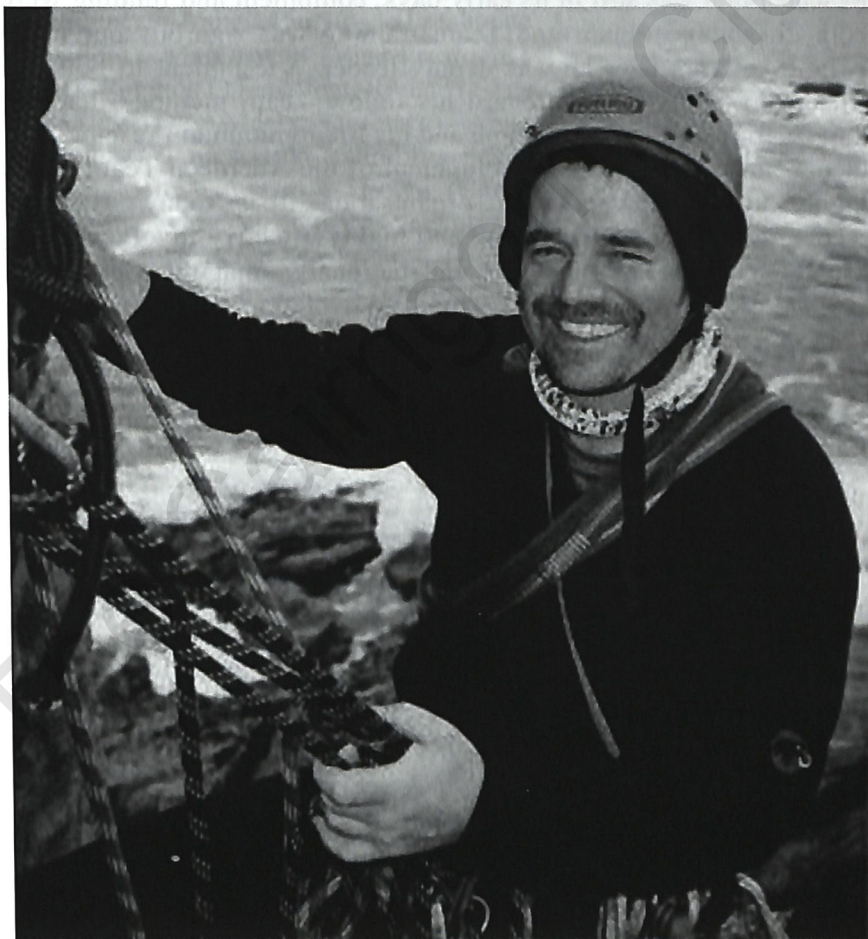
I have served on the Committee for much of the last decade (most recently as Vice-President 2006-2009), and was an active climber, so I hope that I'm well known to many Club members. Born and bred in Derbyshire, I was introduced to outdoor pursuits such as camping and walking in the Peak District by my youth leader father, and only realised later in life that my mother had also been a climber! Family summer holidays were usually taken at Gairloch in Wester Ross, a place that has many happy memories, such as climbing Slioch as my first Munro – although at the time I didn't actually know what a Munro was!

After joining British Steel as a trainee and then going on to study Engineering Science in the Open University, my career moved into breathing apparatus and gas technology. There was a period when outdoor pursuits were abandoned in favour of marriage to Elizabeth, and rearing our son Nicholas. When I got the opportunity to work in Aberdeen, I came like a shot, expecting to relive my childhood experiences on holiday in Scotland. I founded a breathing apparatus business, Scotsafe Testing Ltd. This was acquired by Houston-based Total Safety in 2010, and in "retirement" I have taken up woodland management near Stonehaven: hence the need for my rugged set of wheels!

Once in Aberdeen I started hill walking again in the early 1990s. I got the climbing bug after a day's abseiling at Rua Riedh near Gairloch (it was originally intended to get 7-year-old Nick enthused about outdoor life). A short while after that, I was introduced to the Cairngorm Club and to Stuart Stronach, who later suggested a HVS as my first lead ascent! The Club took me on my first winter hill-walk, on Glas Tulaichean, where halfway through I realised that I needed to know a lot more about mountain craft to keep safe. Thankfully, the Club and its experienced members have provided the environment and knowledge to achieve that, and I thank you all. I

have attended several winter skills weekend courses and the “Single Pitch Award” training at Kenmore Lodge. I have been responsible for arranging the winter skills and Mountain First Aid Courses for the Club.

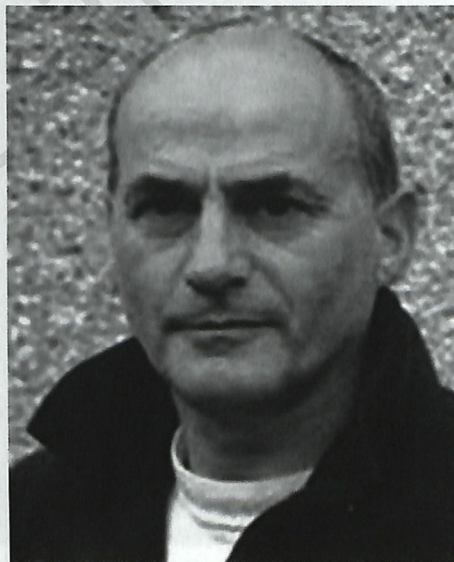
I'd like to encourage all members to participate in the many and varied Club activities: I've always found the events enjoyable with lots of good company. I would like the Club to remain friendly and open whilst continuing to aspire to high standards in all that it does.



*Adrian Scott*

### **Honorary Club Member    Mario Di Maio**

Mario has recently retired as Aberdeen Mountain Rescue Team leader, a position he has held for the past 19 years. He has been a member of the team for over 40 years and involved in Mountain rescue at a National level for much of that time. Mario joined the Team when he was 17 years old and developed what has become his lifelong enthusiasm for mountaineering. In 1970 Aberdeen Mountain Rescue Team was still in its early days; equipment and funding were both difficult to obtain and Team training was rigorous but fairly basic. Six years later he was deputy leader, a testament to both his leadership skills and the regard his fellow Team members had for him. Mario has devoted his time and his life to mountain rescue since then, as evidenced by the development of the Aberdeen Team to the highly trained and efficient organisation it is today. It is in recognition of this longstanding and highly effective involvement in Mountain rescue, both locally and nationally, that the Committee decided that Mario should become an Honorary member of The Cairngorm Club.



## PROCEEDINGS OF THE CLUB

### GENERAL MEETINGS

At the Annual General Meeting, held on 9 November 2011 at the Aberdeen Grammar School Former Pupils Club Centre on Queens Road, Aberdeen, with 34 members attending, the following were elected(\*) or re-elected as Office-Bearers: Graham Ewen (Hon. President), Anne Pinches (President), Derek Beverley (Vice-President), Marj Ewan (Vice-President), Ken Thomson (Secretary), Derek Pinches (Treasurer), Richard Shirreffs (Hut Custodian), Derek Beverley (Day Meets Secretary), Anne Pinches (Social Activities Secretary), James Hirst (Climbing Secretary), Marj Ewan (Weekend Meets Secretary), Colin Brown (Communications Secretary). The following were elected to vacant Ordinary membership of the Committee: Peter Aikman (Associate), Eddie Alaszewski (Associate), Arthur Dickie (Ordinary), Sandy McIntosh (Ordinary), Ruth Payne (Ordinary), Kees Witte (Ordinary) and Garry Wardrope (Ordinary).

Notable external issues during the year had included: proposed windfarms at Pressendye and Corriemoillie; various MCofS issues, e.g. a "children in clubs" survey, the £1.25 rise in MCofS subscription rates, and its new Board, with Karin Froebel Overton as Clubs Director; the independent Mar Lodge Estate Deer Management Review; MBA bothies; and National Park planning issues. Internal issues had included: donations from Margaret Munro (books) and Diana Mahaffy (climbing gear); production of the final issue of Volume 21 of the Cairngorm Club Journal edited by Lydia Thomson; production of the 2012 wall calendar by Sandy McIntosh; revision of the Club Incident Protocol; tighter pre-approval of expenses; proposals to celebrate the Club's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The Treasurer reported that Club membership stood at 417 (5 down from the previous year), and that the bank account stood at £70,919. The main Club subscription rate was kept at £13, plus £14.25 for the MCofS.

At the Annual General Meeting held on 7 November 2012 at the same place, with 30 members attending, the following were elected(\*) or re-elected as Office-Bearers: Adrian Scott\* (President), Sandy McIntosh\* (Vice-President), Derek Pinches\* (Vice-President), Kees Witte\* (Hut Custodian), Chris Wilson\* (Climbing Secretary), other Office-Bearers being re-elected. The following were elected to vacant Ordinary membership of the Committee: Sue Chalmers (Associate), Arthur Dickie (Ordinary), James Friend (Ordinary), Donna Ryan (Ordinary), Stan Urbaniak (Ordinary), and Garry Wardrope (Ordinary). Mario di Maio, recently retired Leader of the Aberdeen Mountain Rescue Team, was elected, *nem. con.*, as an Honorary Member. (see page 102).

The outgoing President reported that 2012 had been a special year for the Club, with the main event being the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Meet at Muir on 23-24 June. As reported elsewhere in this issue, this involved an Overnight/Weekend Meet to the Shelter Stone, and a barbecue at Muir. Projects during the year included the refurbishment of the Club Footbridge and its plaques in Rothiemurchus Forest, repair to a Pass of Ballater path, cloth Club badges, some commemorative whisky, and an extension to Piper's Wood, for which a generous donation had been made by Derek Beverley.

Notable external issues had included: windfarms at Pressendye, Glenkindie and Glen Lethnot; Club responses to consultations re CNPA (An Camas Mor), hill tracks, adventure licensing, and small-scale development in Aberdeenshire; the NTS Mar Lodge Management Plan 2012-16; and MCofS, NEMT (lead: Sandy McIntosh) and COAT (e.g. Adopt-a-Path). 'Internal' issues included donations and disposal of books (Donald Hawksworth) and gear (Mahaffy, Ken Mills), the appointment of Alister Macdonald as Journal Editor, a 'new' Slugain bothy and the future of the Garbh Choire shelter.

The Treasurer reported that Club membership stood at 415 (2 down from the previous year), and that the bank account stood at



£75,758. The main Club subscription rate was kept at £13, plus £14.25 for the MCofS.

### MEETS AND EXCURSIONS

#### DAY MEETS

Derek Beverley acted as Day Meets Secretary over the period under review, and reported as follows at the 2011 and 2012 AGMs. In 2010-11, a total of 158 participants averaged attendance at 13.2 per meet, and made a surplus of £26.35. In 2011-12, a total of 164 people (guests as well as members) averaged attendance at 14.9 per meet, making a surplus of £95.85. The 2012 Overnight Meet from Muir formed part of the 125<sup>th</sup> Club commemorations. Travel modes included coach (some shared, at considerable financial advantage, given that a day's hire with driver now approached £500), the Westhill Community minibus driven by a Club member, shared cars, and train (to Inverurie). There were no major (or minor) accidents or other unfortunate incidents over the period.

	2011	2012
January	Lochnagar (coach)	Lochnagar (coach)
February	Cancelled	Bennachie (train and car)
March	Deeside (service bus)	Schiehallion
April	Monega Pass (shared coach)	Prosen - Clova (shared coach)
May	Drumochter	Ben Wyvis
June	Achnashellach (overnighter)	Shelter Stone (overnighter)
July	Ben a'Ghlo	Ben Vorlich/Stuc a'Chroin (car)
August	An Sgarsoch (cars)	Beinn a'Bhuird/ Ben Avon (overnighter)
September	Cairngorm Traverse (shared coach)	Cairngorm Traverse (shared coach)
October	Sidlaws	Mount Battock - Clochnaben
November	Corriehabbie Hill/Cook's Cairn	Carn an Righ/Glas Tulaichan
December	Glen Clova	Moray Coast

### MID-WEEK WALKS

This popular series of monthly walks – usually originating by shared cars from Kingswells, and involving a 5- or 6-hour route – continued under Arthur Dickie's genial supervision. Both years under report were excellent for mid-week walkers, with reasonable weather even in 2012 apart from the walks to Creag Bhalg in April, Carn Liath in May and Loch Muick in June. Attendance ranged from 10 to 28. A few problems cropped up in 2011, such as part-participants, "stragglers" and even a "lost" group on Tap o'Noth(!), but in 2012 the only problem was with a gamekeeper on the Kildrummy walk who claimed that we were disturbing his pheasants - which, as far we could see, couldn't have cared less!



*Mid week walkers heading for Kerloch, November 2012.*

	2011	2012
January	West Aberdeen	Donmouth
February	Braes of Gight	Sands of Forvie
March	Portsoy to Cullen	Loch Kinord
April	Mount Battock	Creag Bhalg
May	Corgarff	Carn Liath
June	Glen Gelder	Loch Muick Circular
July	Falls of Damph	The Socach, Strathdon
August	Carn Bhac	Mona Gowan
September	Braeroddach Loch	Clochnaben
October	Hill of Fare	Kildrummy
November	Scolty	Kerloch
December	Stonehaven Coastal	Seven Bridges, Ballater

## WEEKEND MEETS

Marj Ewan acted as Week-end Meets Secretary over the period under review, and reported as follows at the 2011 and 2012 AGMs. In 2010-11, there were 143 attendances over 12 meets, most of which broke even, with a small overall loss of £23.50. A special event (not recorded in the table below) was the Winter Skills Training Weekend held in February 2011, and voted a great success by the 3 participants, who snow-holed overnight in Coire Laogh Mor on Cairngorm. In 2011-12, there were 150 attendances over 11 meets: a December 2011 meet to Roy Bridge had to be cancelled at short notice due to power cuts, although some members found alternatives. The June 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary Meet at Muir and nearby Blackburn Cottage (recently transferred to the Air Training Corps) clocked up 59 bed-nights – probably a Week-end Meet record. Most meets broke even, but there were losses of about £103 for the Crianlarich meet in October 2011, offset by a surplus of £112 for the Tyndrum meet in March 2012.

	2011	2012
January	Muir Cottage (Burns Night)	Muir Cottage (Burns Night)
February	Glen Nevis Youth Hostel	Strathspey Mountain Hostel, Newtonmore
March	Invercroft, Achnasheen	By-the-Way Hostel, Tyndrum
April	Glenfinnan Railway Carriage	SMC Naismith Hut, Elphin
May	Causeway Foot Farm, Keswick	Drinishader, Harris
June	Inbhirfhaolain, Glen Etive	Muir and Blackburn Cottage
July	CIC hut, Ben Nevis	Ling Hut, Torridon
August	BMC Hut, Glenbrittle	Forest Way Bunkhouse, Lael
September	Lochranza, Arran	Morvich, Kintail
October	Crianlarich Youth Hostel	Great Glen Hostel, S. Laggan
November	Blackwater Hostel, Kinlochleven	Inverardran Cottage, Crianlarich

## OVERSEAS MEETS

Stubai: in June 2011, six members and a guest based themselves in Fulpmes in the Stubai valley, and explored the Stubai glacier in Neustift, the Kreuzjoch and Schlick. Three in the party climbed the Elfer via ferrata.

El Chorro, Spain: in October-November 2011, 9 members spent a week (with some instruction) at this venue, with its many climbs (e.g. in the Valle de Abdalajis, Escalera Arabe) and via ferrata, e.g. the Camina del Rey (King's Walkway).

Pyrenees: in September 2012, six members plus a guest spent a week in the spa town of Cauterets on the French-Spanish border. A variety of lovely walks were undertaken, with visits by cable car to the Pic du Midi observatory, and on foot, especially downhill, to the impressive Breche de Roland in the Cirque de Cavarnie.

## CLIMBING

James Hirst acted as Secretary for this aspect of the Club's activities during most of the period under review, being replaced by Chris Wilson at the 2012 AGM. Summer activities continued as usual, i.e. weekly evening visits to various coastal locales, with occasional forays elsewhere, e.g. to Clachnaben and the Pass of Ballater. The numbers joining these evening meets gradually increased over the 2011 and 2012 seasons, with several joining the Club. At the weekends, there were trips to both local crags and some that are too far away for evening meets, e.g. Glen Clova and Logiehead. In April six climbers participated in a one-day course held at the Pass of Ballater on "improvised self rescue".

Although 2012 was one of the wettest summers on record, Club climbers still managed to get out into the Scottish mountains and complete some classic mountain climbs at the weekend. Some notable climbs included Cairngorm classics such as Cyclops on the Creag an Dubh Loch and Eagle Ridge on Lochnagar. Further afield, on a weekend meet in Torridon, five members climbed the Cioch

Nose on Sgurr a' Chaorachain in Applecross and Ardverikie Wall on Binnein Shuas was climbed on a hot weekend.

During the winter months, most activities switched to the indoor climbing walls at RGU wall and the Transition Extreme facilities at the Beach. However, despite freezing temperatures, a number ventured outside on sunny days to climb on the bolted sport routes in Angus.

## SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

### Annual Dinners

The two Dinners held since the last issue of the Journal were both held at the Old Mill Inn, Maryculter. Anne Pinches reports;

18 November 2011:

There was no customary speaker. Instead a twenty minute documentary film made for Japanese Television was shown. This unique event arose because the producer of documentary programmes, looking online to find out about Scottish mountaineering Clubs, came across the Cairngorm Club's impressive website. The weekend meet at the Great Glen hostel, the Lochnagar Day Meet and the 2010 Club Dinner were filmed. The then President of the Club, Anne Pinches and Eric Johnston, a former past President, were interviewed. In the latter case Eric's complete set of Club Journals was a focal point.

The TV recording was very entertaining. Much was in Japanese, including the subtitles used to translate comments spoken in English. It was good for the Club to have been the object of this little export to Japan, where mountaineering has been growing in popularity but where a tradition of mountaineering clubs is lacking.

14 November 2012:

The guest speaker was a Club Member, Mike Brian, who had been working for the British Antarctic Survey Team for eighteen months. His talk described some of the trips he made with other Team members during their breaks from work. Mike's photographs were wonderful and his stories interesting – an entertaining combination.

### Indoor Meets

(\* indicates presentation by one or more Club members)

2011

January: Members' Night\*

February: Marj Ewan\* and friends: The West Highland Way and Other Long Walks

March: Nicola Seal: Lyme Disease

October: Peter Aikman\*: My Road to Shenavall - a Club member's account of his work with the Mountain Bothies Association

December: Colin Brown\* and friends: The Resurgence of the Overnighter, 2007-2011

2012

January: Members' Night\*

February: Karin Froebel Overton – MCofS Q and A Session, and personal slides

March: Glyn Jones: The Balmoral Ranger Service

October: Anne Harper: Timber on the Dee

December: Annie McKee: Highland Estates: not all Tweeds and "Monarchs"

## Outdoor Social Meets

A barbecue was held at Templars Park, Maryculter, in June 2011.

The 125th Anniversary Event at Muir in June 2012 is recorded elsewhere in this issue.

## Danders

During the period under review, Ruth Payne continued to organize these meets, which involve a gentle morning walk on a well-made path, before resort to a reliable lunchtime venue. Most were attended by about a dozen Members.

### 2011

January: Park Bridge/Drumoak

May: Castle Fraser; Kemnay

August: Dinnet

November: Shooting Greens/Finzean Farm Shop

### 2012

February: Dunecht

May: Haddo/Tarves

July: Scolty/Milton of Crathes

September: Fetternear/Kemnay Church Centre

November: Park Bridge/Drum Garden Centre



COMMUNICATION

During the period under review, Colin Brown continued as Communications Secretary, maintaining the Club's website, the Members' Forum which increased from 103 to 122 members, 351 to 614 topics and from about 1700 to about 3100 individual posts, and the Yahoo! email system. He also produced three Newsletters each year, and saw to the monthly updating of Club Meets posters for display at shops, libraries, etc.

The Cairngorm Club

**IN MEMORIAM**

The club notes with regret the deaths of the following members since the publication of the previous Journal (with dates of admission to the Club and of Club service and type of Club membership).

William Brooker (1999, Honorary)

Betty Chilton (1944, Ordinary, Com 48-50)

George Dey (1971, Ordinary)

Alastair Gammie (1961, Ordinary)

Jack Doig (1967, Ordinary, Aud 66-69)

Donald Hawksworth (1958, Lib 69-70, Ed 69-79)

Shelagh Lawson (1961, Ordinary, Com 65-66,67-70, 76-79)

Angus Middleton (1963, Associate)

Peter Monro (1976, Associate)

John Nisbet (1955, Ordinary)

Ian Rattray (1956, Ordinary)

William Robb (1982, Ordinary)

Arthur Stubbington (1971, Associate)

Gordon Terry (1972, Ordinary)

John Vigrow (1958, Ordinary)

Douglas Williamson (2000, Ordinary)

## OLD WARRIOR

Sentinel on the mountain, mist enshrouded,  
Twelve points glisten in the dewy balm  
His head held high, nostrils twitching,  
The stag surveys his hillside realm.

As the sun arises and the cloud burns off  
The grand old beast stands proud and tall  
Pondering his youth in years of agility  
Chasing his hinds with wanton recall.

But now he is aged, bearing scars of his ventures  
The mind is still virile but the body is spent  
As the warmth of the day heats tired and sore muscles  
The old boy remembers and snorts with content.

*Shelagh Lawson*

## WILLIAM BROOKER

Bill Brooker was born in 1931, in Calcutta, where his father was an engineer. In 1940 his mother, with Bill and his brother, returned to Scotland whilst his father remained in India until 1945.

As a boy Bill had enormous energy. He enjoyed his time at Aberdeen Grammar School, becoming a Prefect, Vice Captain of Byron House, Captain of Swimming and Athletics, and a member of the First Fifteen. He grew tall, strong and well coordinated. He was an enthusiastic scout, and spent many hours on Deeside with the "Senior Patrol" of the first Aberdeen Scout Troop. His mother rented a cottage in Aboyne for the school holidays, and there he explored the hills, where his love of nature and landscape were fostered. It was a natural move then to study geography at Aberdeen University. There he pursued his passion for climbing and he also took part in many other aspects of student life.

In 1959 Bill and I married, and first we lived in Banffshire, and then, with our son Iain, we moved for a three year spell to Cyprus. The Mediterranean climate meant more time outdoors, on the beach, swimming, snorkelling and learning to water ski. There were trips to Egypt, Jordan, Crete and mainland Greece where he was fascinated by the ancient world.

In 1965 the family, now including our daughter Fiona, returned home and settled in Aberdeen. Bill's enthusiasm for the outdoors led to the family climbing, walking, bird watching and skiing. We explored parts of Scotland and abroad. Highlights included island hopping in the Hebrides using an inflatable speedboat, skiing in the Alps, and climbing in the Pyrenees and Picos de Europa. Bill climbed the Black Tusk in the Garibaldi National Park, British Columbia.

In the 1980's Bill and I began to tick off the Munros in the company of various friends from our base in Boat of Garten. There were some special trips; Yosemite where we climbed up Half Dome to watch the sunrise, the Dolomites with SMC friends, a six week holiday in New Zealand where Iain and his wife were working for 2 years. This included a coastal walk in Abel Tasman Park, a traverse of the Southern Alps via the Copeland Saddle in stunning conditions and a trip to Fiordland and the Routeburn track.

In 1996 Bill was honoured by his Alma Mater with the award of the Honorary Degree of Master of the University, an occasion shared with his family.

Throughout his life Bill was an enthusiastic photographer and has left a wealth of photographs and slides, along with many climbing books and papers, for his family to enjoy. His infectious enthusiasm for the natural world continues on to the third generation; Ruari, is a member of the student mountaineering club at Glasgow University, Harris, is a keen birdwatcher and Finlay, enjoys canoeing and canoe polo.

In the last few years of his life Bill was wheelchair bound. He coped with that in an extraordinary fashion, and never complained. He remained a hugely sociable character, enjoying Probus, monthly meetings with old friends, and was always warmly welcoming all those who visited. He continued to show a lively interest in other peoples's adventures.

In 2011 Bill died peacefully after a long debilitating illness. He died with a great feeling of having had a happy life, well fulfilled. We all walk together and Bill was rightly proud of his family. His influence lives on.

*Margaret Brooker*

(See *The Climbing Life of Bill Brooker*, page 71)

## **DONALD HAWKSWORTH**

Donald was most widely known as a notable pianist and organist, but he was also a dedicated mountaineer. Born in Yorkshire in 1930, he studied at the Royal College of Music in London. His first teaching post was at Brechin High School, followed by a move to Aberdeen Grammar School. Subsequently, he became the Music Advisor for the local education authority and an examiner for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music.

With his colleagues, Ian Stephen (a longstanding Club member), James Will and Patrick Scott, Donald was the driving force in running the AGS Hillwalking Club, which took many boys to the

hills. They accomplished some quite serious climbs. For example, they traversed the Aonach Eagach ridge (a school expedition that these days would involve a mountain of paperwork, if allowed at all), and overnight expeditions saw groups traversing the four four-thousanders in the Cairngorms. One of the pupils involved was Andrew Nisbet, the immediate past President of the Scottish Mountaineering Club.

On the hill, Donald's demeanour was always calm and collected, an excellent example for schoolboys, or indeed more mature fellow-mountaineers. He is recalled ascending Ben Macdui beside the Taillear's Burn at a steady Alpine-paced zigzag, hands behind the back, the epitome of good mountaineering practice. He also had those essential skills of organisation and command that maximise the pleasure and experience for everyone. He also allowed a schoolboy to lead a party through a virtual white-out on the Beinn a' Bhuirid plateau with map and compass in hand – a terrific boost to self-confidence when one was too young to notice a schoolmaster taking an interest in the safety of the group from not too far away. On the other hand, in more refined company, a female Cairngorm Club member recalls Donald offering “ladies first” when it came to breaking through an Invergarry snow cornice!

Donald joined the Cairngorm Club in 1958, acted as Librarian in 1969-70, and in 1969 took on the Editorship of this Journal in what he called a moment of weakness, producing four issues over 10 years. He completed the Munros in 1967 (and the Furths two years later), being no. 72 in the List. The climbs that he accomplished in Scotland are too many to list, but include Tower Ridge on Ben Nevis, and a two-day traverse of the main Cuillin Ridge. A final article from Donald in the previous issue of this Journal recalls “wandering up” the Inaccessible Pinnacle in 1956, then over the Cioch, Sgurr Alasdair's ‘bad step’, and finally traversing the Dubhs from Loch Coruisk. Even aged nearly eighty, he managed to ascend Skye's most northerly hill – Meall na Suiramach, a “Marilyn”.

In the Alps, he climbed the Matterhorn in 1966, Mont Blanc in 1968 and the Gran Paradiso in 1971. On summer climbing courses, he ascended various other Alpine peaks by harder routes, for example one of the faces of the Obergabelhorn above Zermatt. After retirement, he visited the base camps of several major mountains in

the Himalayas and elsewhere, for example Everest from both the Nepal and Tibet sides, K2, and Kanchenjunga, and he completed a circuit of Annapurna. In addition, he had trekking holidays in Bhutan, Sikkim, Africa, the Andes, Patagonia, and the Milford Trail in New Zealand. Until 2012, Cyprus seemed to be one of the few places in Europe that he had not had the chance to visit, so it is pleasant to record that he took his final holiday there during February that year, a month before his death.

Donald invariably did his utmost to mix his two main interests of music and mountaineering. Finger exercises on a Glen Nevis Youth Hostel table were not to practise a tricky rock move but to keep his fingers supple for piano playing. A trip to Glentamar saw him nipping into St. Lesmo's chapel for a Toccata and Fugue on the small organ there, and a certain arpeggio passage in Chopin's F Minor Ballade was compared by him to the huge pinnacle which once blocked the west ridge of Sgurr nan Gillean. In later life at least, he appreciated good food: his article "Gourmandising in Skye" in the Journal issue mentioned above records mouth-watering menus in the better restaurants of that island!

Many people enjoyed Donald's mountaineering in Scotland and elsewhere through his slideshows – a reliable mainstay in the social programmes of many a club and society. Delivered with erudition and wit, Donald's presentations took one on a delightful tour des montagnes, embroidered not with dashing tales of exertion and foolhardiness but with a deep appreciation of the mountains, their scenery and their people, over all seven continents. As with his music, so with his mountaineering: Donald was a man who enjoyed giving pleasure to others. We will miss his genial company but we will not forget it.

*Ken Thomson*

## SHELAGH LAWSON

Shelagh was the third generation of her family to be a member of The Cairngorm club. She joined as a Junior member aged 16 in 1961 and was recognised in 2011 for her 50 years of membership.

Shelagh was born and brought up in Aberdeen, educated at the Girls High and then 'Dunf' (Dunfermline College- a specialist college for young people talented in sport or wanting a career in sports training). Thereafter she taught in various schools in Aberdeen.

Her sporting prowess was evident on the hill in her speed on ascents, always at the front along with Richard (Shirreffs) and Guy (Scott), also her fearless speed running down hills as well as her enjoyment of scrambling and some rock climbing. Shelagh loved being out in the Scottish hills and as a young woman spent most weekends with Cairngorm Club friends and her trusty Mini, wild camping in order to get close to the hills.

It was Shelagh, who with some others made Richard and I so welcome when we first joined, including us in the 'young' group. We were the youngest active members at that time and Shelagh was close to us in age. We had so much fun in her company exploring the hills and of course doing our Munros. Easter Meets were memorable not just for the walking but also the Scottish Country Dancing in the evenings - Shelagh directing those of us who were new to many of the dances. Laughter was never far away when Shelagh was around.

Her love of Scottish Country dancing reflected her passion for all things Scots, the music, dance, literature as well as the countryside.

Shelagh was a committee member 1965 -70, 76-79 and remained active in the Club until family and other commitments began to demand more of her time. However she never lost her loyalty for, or interest in, the Club and its activities. She took an active part in the original renovations of Muir Cottage and was a key player in the original Families week at Muir. Shelagh and I also used to enjoy having a day out when she was a very new mum,(Fred child minded), and I was ante natal. We would have a walk, meeting up with the bus for High Tea and chat with friends before heading back home.



Although ill health finally resulted in her having to give up walking she always retained her love of life and the countryside. She loved going up Deeside; she and Fred had a house in Ballater they visited regularly, she also looked forward to the week they had in Speyside in addition to various other trips to the west. More recently she turned her hand to writing poetry and was delighted when some of her verse was published.

Shelagh is survived by her husband Fred and daughter Jennifer – who continues the family tradition of membership of the Club. She is much missed by those of us who knew her.

*Gillian Shirreffs*

### **ANGUS MIDDLETON**

Angus was an Associate member of the Club since 1963. He was born in Stoneywood, Aberdeen in 1931 and after leaving school he started work at the Cooperative Drapery Department in Loch Street. Thereafter he went on to study History at Aberdeen University and subsequently taught History at Hazlehead Academy and at Summerhill Academy. Apart from hill walking his other interests included researching the ships built in Aberdeen and he was a member of the Aberdeen Historical Society. Additionally he was Canon and organ player at St. James Episcopal Church, Holburn St. Aberdeen. He died in 2011, aged 80.

*John Henderson*

## JOHN NISBET

John was born in Rosyth in 1922, the youngest of four brothers. After two years at Edinburgh University he was called up to the army in 1942. As Italian was one of his subjects he was offered training as a linguist for RAF Intelligence, at Edinburgh University. There, with a nod and a wink from the Dean, he continued studying for his Honours English degree and graduated in 1945 while on leave. After a year in the Far East he left the RAF in 1946 and started a teacher training course. As a “promising young teacher” he was persuaded to go for a Masters degree in Education at Edinburgh University, which he passed with distinction.

In 1949, with four job offers (changed days!), he opted to join the Education Department at the University of Aberdeen. In 1963 he was promoted to the first Chair in Education and remained in the department until well after “retirement”. His research was concerned with environmental influences on intelligence, but his professional interests and skills ranged much more widely, as reflected by his teaching and project visits to many countries, his six books, his editorship of the British Journal of Educational Psychology, his chairmanship of the Educational Research Board of the Social Science Research Council, and his first presidency (and later honorary life membership) of the British Educational Research Association. He was awarded an OBE for services to Scottish education in 1980 and an Honorary Doctorate by Edinburgh University in 2004.

John played golf from a very young age, at one time with a handicap of 5, and he continued to play 18 holes until the age of 88. With two others, he wrote a 71-page guide “The Limekilns of Upper Donside: a Forgotten Heritage”, with photographs and map references. After his retirement he took up orienteering and competed successfully in international events, being Scottish champion in his age group on several occasions. John’s article “Approach to the Hills” (CCJ No. 105, 1999) describes his introduction to mountaineering, from being taken up Beinn Bharrain on Arran in 1932, through penniless youth-hostelling (or worse, e.g. “the delights of sleeping under bridges”) before, during and after the War, to a marriage proposed in a tent in Glen Slugain and celebrated

at the Kingshouse Hotel in 1952. He joined the Cairngorm Club in 1955. John had always fancied climbing but could not afford the equipment when young. He was later able to climb some of Scotland's classic climbs with his son Andy and once also with his daughter Liz.

He died in October 2012, aged a few days short of 90, and his cremation two weeks later was attended by his family and friends, including several Club members.

*Andrew Nisbet*

## **WILLIAM DAVID ROBB**

Willie was born in Aberdeen, in 1937, the only child of William and Christina Robb, and was brought up at Donald Place where he attended Skene Square School and Rosemount Junior Secondary. A quiet and unassuming man Willie spoke little of his own life on Club Meets, which he seldom missed, but when he did say something it was nearly always significant, at times profound and because of this many found him to be an ideal mountain companion.

As a young man Willie was a member of the Boys' Brigade and on leaving school took up his father's trade as a stonemason. National Service in The Highland Brigade saw him in Aldershot in 1961 and later some time was spent in Germany. His conduct whilst a reservist was found to be exemplary and a testimonial states he was a "first class tradesman... and a man of high character". Willie did not take to stonemasonry, though he was inducted into the Freemasons in 1964. A long period spent as a labourer with an engineering firm was followed by work in the food processing industry in Aberdeen. He would of course walk to and from work in all weathers and often this round trip was 7 miles or more.

Something of a dark horse, Willie enjoyed bowling when not in the mountains. A member of various Aberdeen Clubs he was a regular singles champion and was Northern Bowling Club Champion in 1977. He enjoyed Indoor bowling also and in 1963 gave a generous donation which helped to facilitate the building of the Aberdeen Indoor Bowling Rink. He attended Scottish Country Dance classes as a young man and could waltz on the dance floor almost as

effortlessly as he could deliver a good bowl or glide up a mountain. What he did he did well.

But it is in the mountains that most of us knew him. His first real taste of hillwalking was with a Christian club. He joined our club in 1982 and completed his round of the Munros on A' Mhaighdean in 1998. In later years especially he enjoyed organised foreign excursions which took him to the Swiss, French, Italian and Austrian Alps, the Pyrenees, Spain, Poland, Slovakia and Ireland. Many trips were with the Cairngorm Club.

Willie worked till age 65 and recovered from a serious illness in 2008. His return to the hills saw ambition only slightly dampened; Willie spent a night under The Shelter Stone to mark the Club's 125 years in June 2012 and managed an ascent of Ben Macdui on the Cairngorm Traverse in Sept 2012. He very much enjoyed the BBQ buffet which accompanied the 125 event at Muir Cottage and his liking for High Teas (especially cakes) is legendary, as was his indefatigability and stamina in the hills when a younger man. Willie died suddenly on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October, 2012, whilst out walking on The Speyside Way.

Both a gentleman and a "hard man" on the hill, Willie Robb will be fondly missed.

*Derek H. Beverley*

## READERS' VIEWS

The Editor is interested to learn what readers think of the Club Journal and consequently invites comments to be passed to Committee members or sent to

[journal@cairnngormclub.org.uk](mailto:journal@cairnngormclub.org.uk)

Several specific points are of particular concern, namely the frequency of publication (averaging four issues per decade), the relationship with the Newsletter, and the range of information in the Proceedings. However all constructive suggestions and comments on any aspect will be welcome.



*Garrons ascending – but where? Answer in a forthcoming Newsletter.*

