THE CAIRNGORM CLUB JOURNAL
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CONTENTS

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EDITORIAL

The printing and distribution of Issue 113 of the Journal in 2020 was significantly delayed due to the emergence of the Covid 19 pandemic. Fingers crossed that the same fate does not befall this issue.

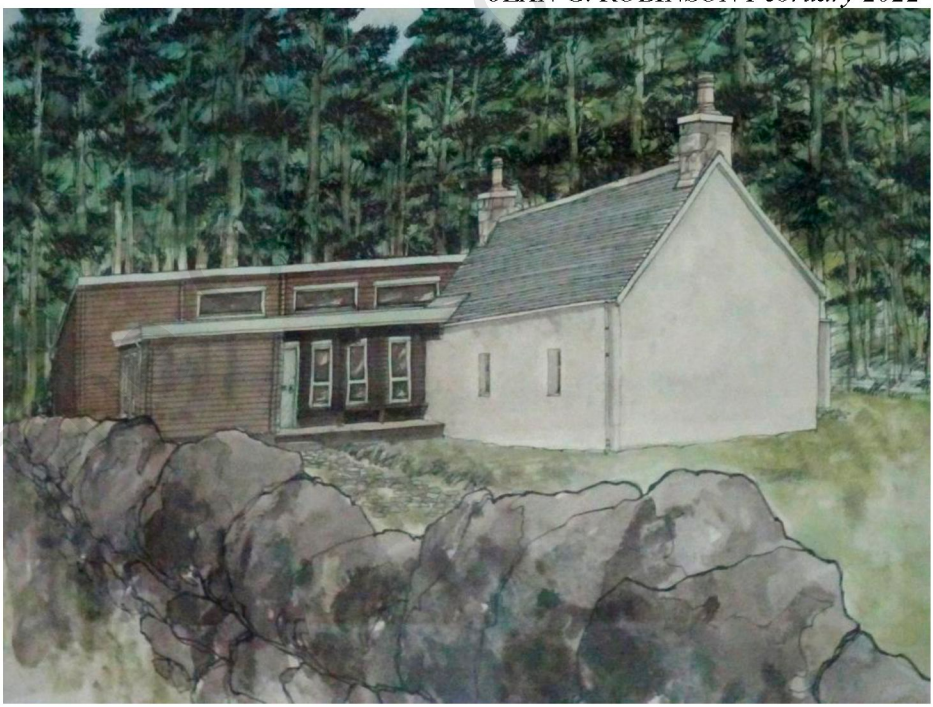
Articles gathered here variously reveal the enthusiasm, stamina and tenacity inspired by Members' passion for hillwalking and climbing and hence the loss we all experienced when deprived of our freedom to put one foot in front of the other on the hills.

Other articles speak to the richness of our landscape from its visual aesthetic to its hidden depths.

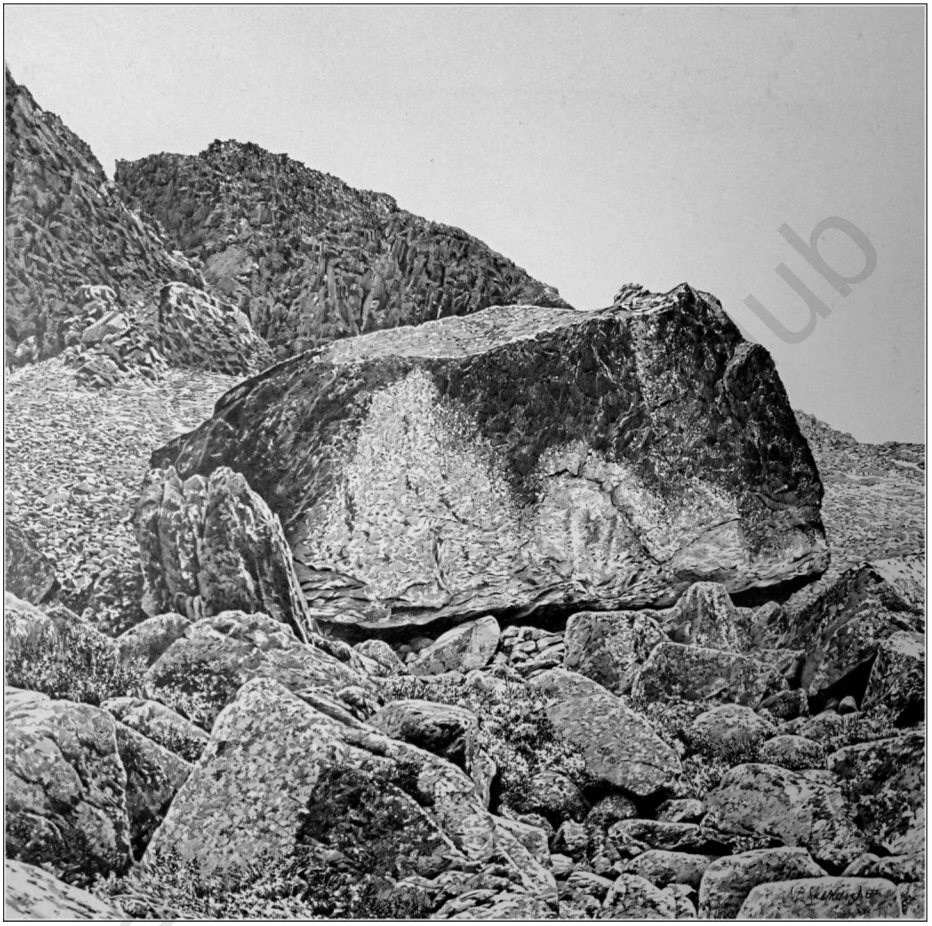
So, whatever the future holds for us, I hope this issue provides you with interest and inspiration.

The Editor is grateful to Sandy MacIntosh, Donald Thomas and Ken Thomson for their support in the production of this issue and of course thanks all the authors and photographers who make the Journal what it is.

JEAN G. ROBINSON February 2022



Muir watercolour by Norman Shepherd Photograph Richard Shirreffs
(See In Memoriam page 237)



Section from original drawing of the Shelter Stone by Norman Shepherd used for the Club Centenary poster.
(See In Memoriam p 237) Photograph Richard Shirreffs

A CLOSE ACQUAINTANCE WITH BENNACHIE

CRAIG THOMSON

It's Sunday evening, after dark, and I'm on one of my traverses up and over Mither Tap. This is my favourite route for a short and very enjoyable hike on Bennachie. It's a circuit, almost 4 miles in distance and takes one and a half to two hours. You start in the car park at the Centre and follow the Gordon Way for a mile or so through the forest before turning right and climbing the hill by the Heather Bridge path (photograph 1 below).

1 Heather Bridge Path Craig Thomson

At night it's darker round this side of the hill. The many lights of Aberdeenshire's towns and villages, farms and farmhouses, are mostly hidden from view here. These stay out of sight until you're nearly on top and you reach the crest of the bulky granite tor that forms the summit of Mither Tap. However, when the panorama eventually opens out and the lights come into view, they illustrate how really very populated is this rural landscape below.

As I walk up the path, heavy clouds are drifting over and just as I emerge through the treeline and onto the hillside, snow starts to fall. It begins to get heavier and soon all I can see in the light of my headtorch is a myriad of bright white lines as the snowflakes streak through the air. It becomes quite a blizzard and as I continue my climb the path starts to get a covering of fluffy new snow. Then after a while, just as I reach the top of the path, the snowfall eases and then stops. The clouds are much lighter now, but they've left an inch-deep white blanket lying over the rocks and slabs at the top of the hill. As I push on up to the summit, the tread of my boots leaves an impression in this fresh new snow. It's an exhilarating experience being here, with the darkness of the sky above contrasting with the bright snow-covered ground. Then I think to myself, I might well be the only person to make footprints through this snow: by morning it will be gone. It's the 11th of April after all and we're into spring, Bennachie hasn't seen any snow for several weeks now and the overnight temperature that's forecast won't hold this covering until tomorrow. As I stand by the trig-point, I can't help but think that I've been treated to my own personal snow covered Mither Tap. I'm feeling happy as I make my way off the top and start down the steep rocky steps that descend to the forest and the path back to the car park. I'm glad I made the effort to come out tonight: this has been a very satisfying hike. On my way back I reminded myself of something I've often thought while walking on this hill, no two trips up Bennachie are ever the same.

The first time I walked up this famous hill was as a youngster. I grew up in the North-East but not near Bennachie. I have memories of one or two visits on fine summer days with my parents and as a boy, I seem to remember thinking the top was very rocky. I was also on the Ben when I was in the Scouts doing the bronze Duke of Edinburgh expedition. Our group of 1st Fraserburgh's finest headed off from Daviot one weekend to

hike over Mither Tap and Millstone Hill and fend for ourselves overnight somewhere on Donside before returning to Daviot the following day. I have great memories of that trip.

Later in life when I lived in Aberdeen, I would occasionally travel out with friends to bag the hill. For several years in a row, we made it a New Year's Day pilgrimage. I remember one January the First, on a night-time descent, we strayed quite far off the path that was hidden under heavy snow. That evening we adopted the theory, if we're going downhill, we must be heading in the right direction. It was heavy going from what I remember, but we eventually managed to re-join the path somewhere in the forest.

Back then trips to Bennachie would have amounted to a few per year. Not so nowadays. For the past decade I've lived in Kemnay and these days I'm frequently getting the boots on and heading out for another climb. In the past 6 or 7 years I've been up Bennachie hundreds of times. In 2018 I gave myself the goal of doing 100 trips in

2 100 Bennachies in 2018 Corrie Cheyne

that year. This culminated on December 30th, with a group of friends and family, including several Club members, joining me on the final walk to reach that tally. I felt quite proud that day and was very appreciative of

everyone's company as I touched the trig-point on top of Oxen Craig, which at 528m (10m higher than Mither Tap) is Bennachie's true summit, (photograph 2 previous page).

Over the years I've become very familiar with the various routes on the hill, particularly the paths that lead to Mither Tap. I've walked these so often that I'm now well acquainted with every turn they take. The steep sections, the flatter sections, the numerous waymarking trees and boulders are all well known to me. I would go as far to say that these days, surely the chance of me losing the path under a bit of snow is very unlikely.

Winter

It's a dark February night and I'm out of the trees on open hillside and I've lost the path. Or rather we've lost the path. There was one other car parked at the Centre when I set off and I met its occupant close to the treeline. The guy had decided not to carry on, but on meeting me making my way up through the forest he changed his mind, his confidence boosted at the thought of another walker keen enough to attempt a push for the top. However, as we traipsed on through the drifting snow, we became aware that reaching it was probably not going to happen that night. This rare (for Bennachie that is) accumulation of snow made the going just too difficult. Eventually we stopped at one distinctively shaped boulder, a huge slab of granite that sits upright on the hillside, that I've respectfully named The Statue of Thor. It was here we acknowledged that Bennachie had got the better of us, so we turned around, said farewell to the mighty Thor and made a retreat down (photograph 3 the following page).

February 2021, the snow was earlier and the Bennachie range experienced an unusually long spell of snow cover. It had been 10 years since I'd seen snow of such depth on the hill, and I'd never known it to last as long as it did that year. For a month and a half everywhere over 200m was blanketed with snow and after a while this 1700-footer had the winter conditions you'd normally find on much higher hills. Walking on Bennachie at this time felt exciting and adventurous. At times the routes through the snow had been trampled by others, which would help progress, but at other times you needed to create your own trails by

3 The Night Bennachie Beat Us Marco Ferrara

pushing through the ridges of drifting snow that had been sculpted by the wind. On bright crisp days people were visiting the hill with their skis and their snowboards to indulge in their sport. I even met a guy on top who had carried a kayak up and was intent on sledging down parts of the hill in it. Surely something I'm not likely to see again.

One day I met a couple wearing snowshoes and I must admit feeling a tad jealous of their ability to walk across the snow instead of wading through it. For the first time ever on Bennachie, one or two of my walks needed an ice axe and crampons. On one exceptionally windy day it was so ferocious that bits of ice flying through the air would have blinded me:

it would have been impossible without snow goggles as the wind was so strong.

4 Rime Ice Craig Thomson

The isolated trees on the upper parts of the hill became other worldly sculptures as thick ice weighed down their branches and snow drifted up against them, and the rime ice that formed on the signpost just below Mither Tap was a new sight to me on this hill of modest height (photograph 4 above). I had not seen mountain hares up here before this winter either, but during this cold snap I caught sight of several, the odd

grouse, and the odd mouse scarpering around looking for a way through the snow and ice to some shelter.

Eventually, as we moved through March, the temperature rose, and the thaw came. The abundance of snow was quick in disappearing. The paths on Bennachie re-emerged from their temporary hiding place, but for the following week they became treacherously slippy with compacted ice still clinging to them. Before too long though all the white stuff had gone and as the days got longer, this uncommonly deep winter came to an end. At times over those last few months walking on the hill was more akin to being on a Cairngorm Munro and these conditions on this Aberdeenshire pimple are certainly not, in my experience, an annual occurrence.

Spring

My walks over Bennachie are normally during the evening, between 8 and 9pm is the time I usually set off. Consequently, for a large part of the year I'm on the hill after dark. As a result, I've become more aware of the lunar cycle and when clear skies permit, I get to see the moon in all its phases. Cloud free nights when there's a full moon, or at least the nights either side of a full moon, are the best. I thoroughly recommend a trek up on a moonlit night, it can be quite magical. Spring's Worm moon which occurs in mid to late March has rewarded me with the brightest of moonlit nights and when conditions are right, you find yourself following your shadow up the steep path on the east side of Mither Tap. There is no need for your headtorch on nights like these as the rocky steps are fully illuminated and the surrounding hillside is so bathed in moonlight that you can make out its colours. Then from the top looking down, the rural landscape, the fields and the forests take on a cold but comforting glow. It's always worth lingering for a while to enjoy the sight, and on returning downhill, I always feel my spirits lifted on nights such as those (photograph 5 on following page).

Nature becomes increasingly more active at this time of year. As March moves into April, frogs become brave and, in the evening, go roaming around in search of a mate. You see them dotted around on the paths through the forest and must take care not to stand on them. In mid-

5 Worm Moon. Craig Thomson

spring the cuckoo's song can be heard in the woods. They have returned from migration and are working on their dastardly plan of laying their eggs in other birds' nests.

Surrounding the forest paths, gorse bushes are beginning to flower. The small clusters of delicate petals grow denser as spring continues until they become a thick bloom of eye-catching bright yellow flowers with their distinctive coconutty perfume. Seas of bright green ferns are also emerging from the flattened brown remnants of last year's growth. There is great beauty in the way they unfurl and stretch out their infant leaves, however I'm cautious of these plants, or rather the ticks they will harbour for the rest of the year. However lush a crop of ferns might look; I would never decide to take a short cut through it.

By the time May comes around I've noticed in the evenings that bats fill the air. Just as the light in the forest is fading, they can be seen all

over the place. There's a junction on the path that has a large flat-topped boulder in the middle. On several occasions I've lain on this and looked up to watch the aerial acrobatics of these little creatures as they put on a display. Dozens can be seen at the same time, elegantly swooping and spiralling as they chase the wee flying beasties that become their supper (or would that be their breakfast?). They provide great entertainment and it's worthwhile stopping to watch.

With the longer days and warmer temperatures another change is very apparent on Bennachie; it's getting busier. This is a hugely popular and very accessible hill and as the weather improves, more and more people dot the paths that lead to its summits. Spring has transformed the slopes that skirt the hill into a spectacular fresh green landscape which draws folk from miles around to walk in its forests, over its peaks and breathe it all in.

Summer

As the year progresses and late May moves into early June the hours of daylight in the North-East of Scotland become dramatically longer. By the summer solstice in the second half of June there is barely any nightfall at all. Visitors to the hill are now heading up later in the evening and it's not uncommon for there to be dozens of people on Mither Tap, chilling out and watching the sunset at 10 o'clock at night. Witnessing the long arc of the summer sun end as a huge ball of orange light nestles behind the horizon is quite special. It's hardly surprising that on fine summer evenings so many folk climb the hill to see this. Then after the sun disappears there's still enough light in the sky to get everyone back down the hill to wherever they started from.

Mither Tap is well known as being the site of an ancient Pictish hill fort that dates from the 7th to 8th century. Today the summit is still partly surrounded by a ring of piled up rocks that are the remains of the huge ramparts that defended the fort. In June 2019, during my evening walks I was privileged to witness a sight of great antiquity. Archaeologists from Aberdeen University were given permission to excavate several places in and around the fort. The weather was unkind, and it rained for most of their 2-week dig. However, the result of their efforts were astonishing, and in one area they unearthed a beautifully built well that would have been a water source for the Pictish settlement. What the archaeologists

6 Pictish Well Craig Thomson

made visible by their digging was a wonder to see. During their time there I visited a lot. Each evening the results of their daily progress could be seen. At first a large boulder was lodged within the well, I understand this was placed there in Victorian times to stop animals falling in. With the use of some clever rope skills the team managed to remove this and reveal the well. A short spiral staircase led down to the water source and each time I saw this I was amazed at what had been hidden underfoot for so long (photograph 6 above). By the time their dig came to an end and all their trenches were back filled, this pretty, little ancient well was once again buried out of sight.

Bright and warm summer days on Bennachie are a delight. At times I've sat on top feeling the heat of the sun with butterflies floating hither and thither through the calm air and bees buzzing about the place. To rest a while and enjoy the views after a hot walk up is very rewarding. If time allows, a longer walk taking in the other tops is very tempting. With excellent paths connecting the various peaks, I can recommend spending an afternoon doing a high-level crossing of the whole range.

7 Bivvy Sunrise Craig Thomson

Another temptation in summer is to spend a night on the hill. I've twice done this, however on both occasions the weather hasn't been so kind, and a night spent under the stars that I'd hoped for hasn't quite turned out that way, with no stars being on show at all. The last occasion

was in July 2020 when I arranged a late hike and summit camp with a fellow Club member. Derek is a veteran of Bennachie bivvying, and it was a fine summer's evening when we met at Insch station and started our walk towards the hill. As we climbed higher though, the mist decided to come down and sit, rather disappointingly on the hill's tops. It was getting dark when we reached Derek's favoured bivvy spot on Oxen Craig. With some good banter and a couple of beers it was a pleasant night, but we were denied the sight of the stars above and the views of the landscape below due to the cloud that stubbornly had no plans of shifting. After a short night's sleep however, we were awarded a worthy view on wakening early the next morning. The mist was thinning and as the sky to the east started getting lighter, we could clearly see the Neowise comet which we had heard reports about during that month. A glorious sunrise then compensated for the lack of views the previous evening (photograph 7 on previous page).

The first time I stayed out on Bennachie didn't give me any bonnie sunset or sunrise. It was a Friday night after a week of perfectly warm and clear evenings. I knew some unsettled weather was forecast for that weekend, but I optimistically hoped for one more night of clear skies as I made my way up onto the hill and towards Harthill cave. Situated on the rocky crest of Craigshannoch, a short distance down from its summit, this spot gives fine views down towards the Back o' Bennachie. The cave is named after John Leith of Harthill. The story goes that in 1645, Leith who was heavily in debt and going a bit doolally, set his castle on fire to spite his creditors, then retreated uphill to the cave where he sat and watched the flames destroy his home. The ruined remains of his castle can still be seen today alongside the current Harthill Castle which was built to replace it. On the evening I chose to stay in the cave all I could see was mist and light drizzle to begin with, followed by heavier rain that lasted throughout the night. Although I stayed dry with my roll mat and sleeping bag pushed into the side of the cave, when I woke in the morning a puddle had appeared on the floor. I can therefore vouch that Harthill Cave is not watertight hill accommodation.

As summer begins to wane and the evenings get darker, it's worth looking out for the celestial display of the Perseid meteor shower. This annual event reaches its peak in mid-August and during a clear evening hike I've often stopped, looked up and counted many of its shooting stars

as they streak silently through the sky and seem to herald the changing of the season.

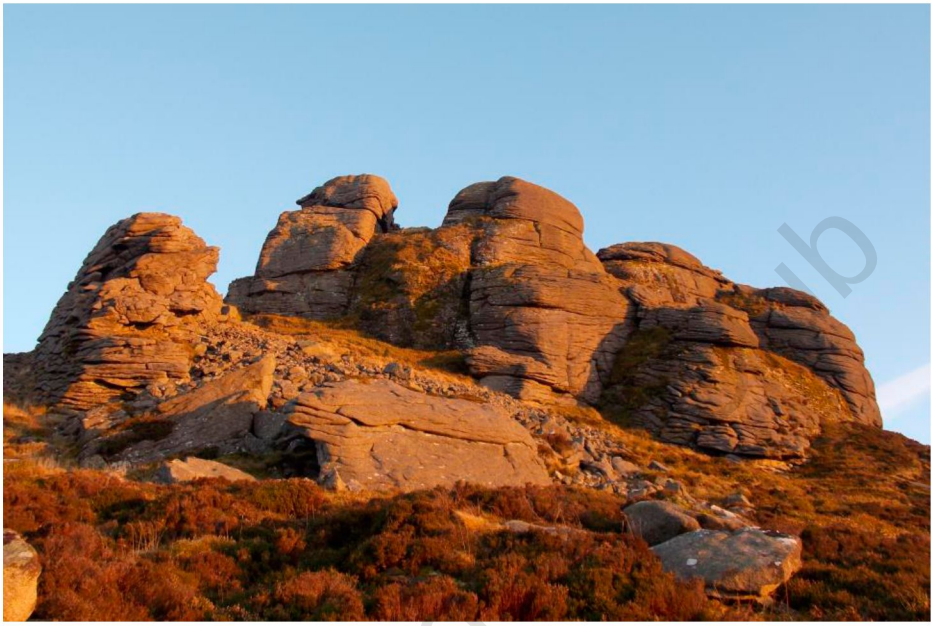
Autumn

I quite like the return of the darker nights. In early Autumn a 2-hour evening walk can start during daylight and finish after nightfall. It's time to pack the headtorch again and with the cooler weather, your jacket is needed once more. The nights when you can stride out in just a T-shirt and shorts are now past, but one noticeable advantage of this time of year is the midges are no longer a nuisance.

Walking up through the trees in late August and September you can see the abundance of mushrooms that cover the ground. At times I wish I was more adept at identifying edible varieties as I'm sure many a tasty starter is growing all around me. But sadly, the only ones I know are edible with any certainty are the Chanterelles and Porcini mushrooms, and I rarely see Chanterelles in the Bennachie forest, and the slugs always seem to get to the Porcini before me.

The colours in the woodland are changing as they do in every forest during Autumn (photograph 8 on the following page). As the season progresses the paths gain a layer of fallen pine needles that have turned an orangey brown colour. The heather covered slopes higher up are going the same way too, and the magnificent purple bloom of late summer turns the same colour as the pine needles on the forest floor.

The full moons of Autumn are big and bright. September's Harvest moon and October's Hunters moon will nicely illuminate a night-time walk, and when the loud hooting of owls is heard, which I've noticed occurs the most during these autumnal nights, it adds to the atmosphere. I'm convinced I once saw the night-time equivalent of a Brocken spectre by the light of one of these moons. A bank of mist had risen on the west side of the summit tor and positioned itself perfectly for my moonlight shadow to project onto it. There wasn't a ring of rainbow colours that you see when the sun's involved in this effect, but an eerie halo of white light could clearly be seen around my silhouette. A Harvest moon of course is no longer needed to assist farmers as they gather in their crops. During



8 Autumn Glow on Mither Tap Craig Thomson

September, when gazing down from the hill, the super bright lights of their combine harvesters can be seen going to and fro across many of Aberdeenshire's fields as they work into the night.

A jaunt up Bennachie on November 5th can be quite entertaining when numerous firework displays can be seen all over the Shire. I've often watched fireworks from high on the hill and not only on Guy Fawkes night. At other times throughout the year, usually at weekends, wedding celebrations at Pittodrie House which is situated at the foot of the hill, will occasionally include a display. Many years ago, I used to be involved with the setting up and firing of these shows, and I once suggested launching some from Mither Tap to coincide with the display in the grounds of the hotel. I assembled a group of friends to assist in carrying the equipment up the hill and with the help of walkie talkies to converse with the firers down below we put on a synchronised display. By all accounts it looked quite impressive to the wedding guests who had taken a break from their partying and come outside to watch the show. Nowadays, although looking down from above on these pyrotechnic displays is no doubt spectacular, my opinion of fireworks has changed,

mainly because of the noise they make which disturbs the tranquillity of a night.

By the time November's full moon (the Beaver moon) appears we are back to short days and long chilly nights. Winter is approaching and the solstice is just one month away. It won't be long until the first flurries of snow land on the hill and a year on Bennachie has come full circle.

This journey through the seasons will hopefully go some way to explain why this iconic hill in the heart of Garioch is a favourite place of mine, as well as countless others. I enjoy hiking on Bennachie, it's close to home and provides unrivalled local walks. It's a fine way to exercise too and undoubtedly helps the hill legs prepare for longer walks and higher hills. As you've read, it's mainly Mither Tap I find myself on but that's only due to its place in relation to where I live. If I stayed in Insch it would no doubt be Oxen Craig I would head up regularly. I do sometimes choose that walk, and Millstone Hill which lies to the south of the main range and gives fine views of Bennachie. But Mither Tap is the main one for me. I've watched sunrises and sunsets from this peak. I've flown over it in a microlight and seen hidden secrets under it. I've witnessed cloud inversions and Brocken spectres, full moons and lunar eclipses, shooting stars and aurora. I've stood atop this, the finest of mini mountains with many good friends and I've raised a dram to absent ones. Here's to you Bennachie.

Postscript

The day and night of Friday 26th November 2021 saw the ferocious winds of Storm Arwen blow down from the north and cause much havoc to our corner of the country. Many of the forests across the Northeast of Scotland were decimated as the tall pine trees with their shallow root systems were unable to withstand the force of these 100 miles an hour plus gales. Across the region hundreds of thousands of trees were toppled and many rural power lines were knocked out in the process. Large parts of Aberdeenshire experienced power cuts in the

wake of this turbulent storm. The following day the storm had passed, and daylight revealed the results of its power. A multitude of fallen trees could be seen in the forests around Kemnay. I had never seen anything quite like it.

Several days after Arwen struck warnings were issued by the landowners and the Bailies of Bennachie of the dangers of the damaged forests around the hill and the public were urged not to visit. The car parks were closed, and the news was that Bennachie was out of bounds until the mess could be assessed and a clear up could be done. This was going to take some time.

I had been organising a Club Day meet on Bennachie scheduled for December. Unfortunately, under the circumstances it had to be cancelled and an alternative location for the walk was arranged. The planned traverse of the hill range from west to east, crossing all its tops and ending with a visit to the picturesque, ruined Fog house and waterfall has been re-scheduled for December 2022, but for the time being this extraordinary storm had put paid to the outing I'd been looking forward to.

As I write this, I acknowledge it could be a while before I get back to my regular hill walks, but for now the advice to stay away must be respected. However, I must tell you that I did venture out, prior to these warnings, on the night after the storm.

From home I could see that the first snows of winter had fallen on Mither Tap, and I was anxious to investigate. I embarked on my favourite circuit from the Centre to Heather Bridge, up to the summit, then back. I saw the damage to the forest first-hand: there were numerous fallen trees. Around nine or ten blocked my regular path and needed to be climbed through or walked around. Smaller pieces of tree debris lay all over the place, no doubt this place would have been in chaos 24 hours ago. This evening though it was very still and after the turmoil of the previous night the forest felt quite benign and at no point did, I feel in danger. Further on there was snow and it was good to hear its crunch under my boots. Then once I climbed up onto the granite tor at the top of the hill, an unusual sight met my eyes. Large swathes of the landscape down below lay in darkness because of the power outage. Insch, Oldmeldrum, Inverurie and further away Aberdeen were lit up as normal, but surrounding the hill was an inky black expanse. From Kintore to Alford

everywhere was dark. This vast rural area, including the village where I lived, seemed to have disappeared. I thought to myself, this is as close as I'm ever going to get to seeing how the countryside would have looked to the Picts who gazed down from the fort at night, many hundreds of years ago. Then I was reminded of something I've often thought. No two trips up Bennachie are ever the same.

9 Mither Tap Sunrise Michelle Ironside

HUNTER-GATHERERS IN THE CAIRNGORM MOUNTAINS

GRAEME WARREN

Since 2013 an interdisciplinary and international team of archaeologists, geologists and palaeoenvironmental specialists have been exploring the early prehistoric settlement of the Cairngorm mountains, indicating that hunter-gatherers were very familiar with this remarkable landscape. Research is ongoing, and there is a significant role for hill walkers and mountaineers to play in helping with this.

The story of the appearance of hunter-gatherers in the Cairngorms is bound up with the climate and landscape changes at the end of the last Ice Age and the start of the Holocene era. Put simply, the Late Glacial Maximum – the maximum extent of the ice, which at its most extensive covered Scotland – was followed by a warm Interstadial (interglacial) period: the Bølling-Allerod from circa (c) 12,700-10,900 BC (this period used to be called the Windemere Interstadial). Climate and environment changed over this period, but in general the Scottish landscape was characterised by low scrub and grasslands.

During this period, hunter-gatherer groups re-settled southern Britain. These were *Homo sapiens* populations, probably small in total number and mobile. They seem to have relied heavily on large game. Their technologies, art and ritual practices were very similar to hunter-gatherer populations in the rest of Northern Europe – indeed, with lower sea levels, at this time Britain was connected to the continent, and was really an extension of it. These were groups of Upper Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers in archaeological terminology, sometimes also described as Late Glacial.

There is some evidence for the presence of Late Glacial hunter-gatherers in Scotland. A collection of stone tools from Howburn Farm, Lanarkshire probably dates to about 12,000 BC, with the possibility of some later visits. Artefacts from Kilmefort Cave, Argyll probably date to about 11,500 BC. Stone tools from closer to the Cairngorms, on Nethermill on the River Dee near Banchory, are probably of the same period.

The interstadial period ended with a return to cold conditions and the formation of glaciers in corries and valleys of the high mountains during the Younger Dryas (10,900-9,700 BC). Human settlement likely retreated. On Islay, distinctive stone tools probably date to about

10,000 BC – as this cold period was ending. Some stone tools found scattered through northern and western Scotland may suggest cultural links with northern Scandinavia at this time.

Following the end of the Younger Dryas there was quite rapid warming at the start of the Holocene, and the recolonisation of Scotland by plants, animals – and in due course, humans. The landscape changed significantly over time as rivers readjusted to post-glacial conditions, as sea levels changed, and different vegetation communities were established. In the high mountains, earthquakes and rockfalls were common as the landscape readjusted to the removal of the weight of ice that had compressed it for millennia.

Into this landscape moved groups of Mesolithic – or middle stone age - hunter-gatherers. In Scotland, this period ends at about 4000 BC with the arrival of farming and the Neolithic. Across Europe there was great diversity in how these groups of hunter-gatherers organised themselves. Some were specialist sea-fishers and marine mammal hunters, others targeted terrestrial game, some exploited woodlands heavily for plant foods. In some places hunter-gatherers became less mobile over time and marked their relationships with place through the construction of formal cemeteries. Some communities used light weight tents as a preferred form of architecture, others utilised much more substantial buildings, with what appear to have been rules, or at least strong preferences, as to how space would be used inside. Although the archaeological record for the period is dominated by stone tools, the material world of these hunter-gatherers was rich. Sites with organic preservation across Europe show us art, often decorating tools, elaborate antler head-dress costumes seemingly associated with shamanic practices: in Sweden, in a lake at the edge of a settlement human skulls were propped on poles. These hunter gatherers were characterised by diversity, complexity and creativity. They were reliant on 'wild' food, although this simple phrase fails to capture the ways in which hunter-gatherers influenced their environment through practices of management which altered those landscapes. This included importing so-called wild animals to islands, managing woodlands through practices such as coppicing as well as a host of more subtle interactions.

(continued)

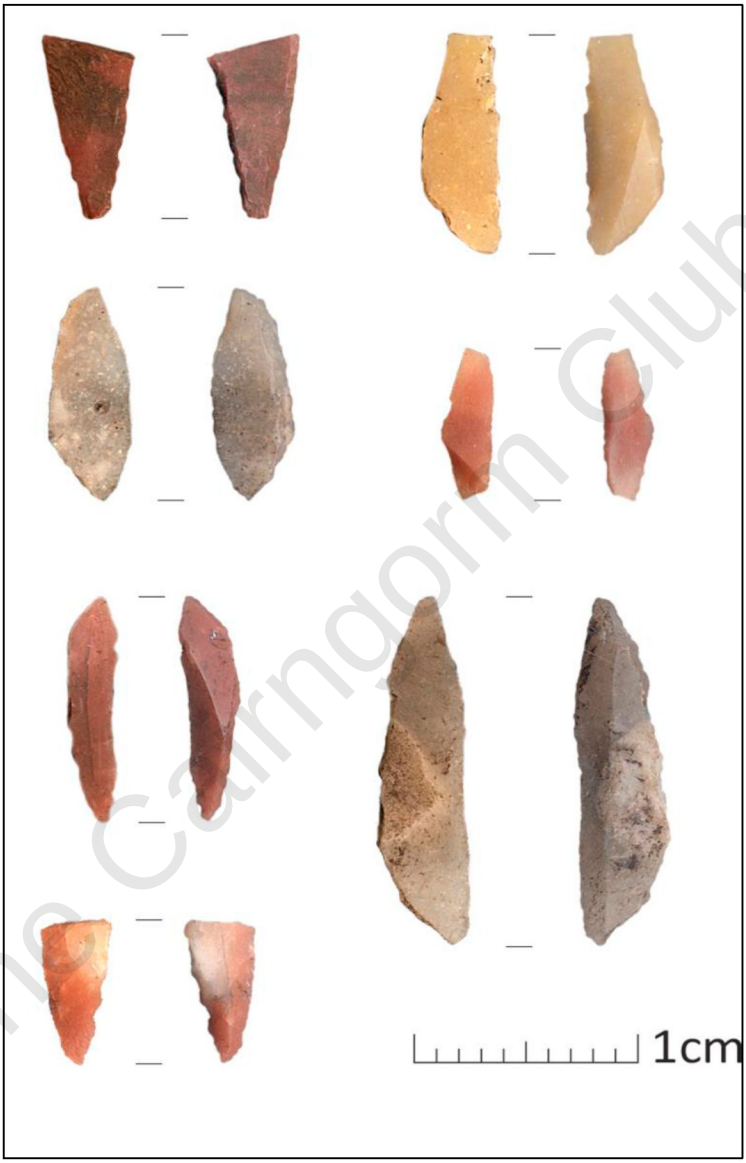
Finding Mesolithic hunters in the Mountains

Across Europe, one of the key features of the Mesolithic is the movement of hunter-gatherers into different landscape types. Mountains are a key part of this. Mesolithic communities established settlements at approximately 2300m above sea level (asl) in the Eastern Alps, probably moving into the mountains seasonally, retreating to deeply incised river valleys in winter. In Switzerland, rock crystal was quarried from outcrops at c. 2800m asl. In some parts of Norway, groups of hunter-gatherers appear to have exploited reindeer in the high mountains, carefully selecting locations on migration routes. Although accounts of Mesolithic Europe are often dominated by the distinctive forms of hunter-gatherer behaviour that developed in association with rich and productive marine environments, mountains are a key part of the story of this period.

The dominance of the coast in our accounts of Mesolithic hunter-gatherers has been true of Scotland. Most of our sites in the east and west of Scotland are near the coasts. This is unsurprising. Mesolithic sites leave little trace above ground. Most have been found through collections of stone tools from the surface: this normally means that you are more likely to find sites near population centres and in areas of ploughing. Shell middens – distinctive accumulations of shells and other material – are prominent features that can be discovered in erosive contexts. But they are – by their nature – likely to be coastal. Finally, in recent years, Mesolithic sites have been excavated in advance of infrastructural or commercial developments. These have made invaluable contributions to our understanding of the period but are also more likely to be near the coasts than the inland mountains.

Some of the challenge of finding these inland, mountain sites is demonstrated by considering the size of the stone tools in question. At one site we excavated in the Cairngorms (photograph1, following page), the average maximum size of the flint artefacts recovered by excavation was only 8.7mm. Finding artefacts of this size in a landscape that is covered by peat which has to a large extent formed after the Mesolithic period, is not straightforward. And it is here that we can turn our attention to Mar Lodge Estate and the Cairngorms.

(continued)



1 Microlith fragments from Caochanan Ruadha. Microliths are a distinctive Mesolithic tool type, small blades of flint, snapped and modified into shapes. Multiple microliths would have been hafted in a tool: forming the blade of a knife, or barbs/tips of a projectile.

The Upper Dee Tributaries Project

The genesis of all our recent work on Mesolithic hunter-gatherers in the Cairngorms lies with footpath maintenance carried out on Mar Lodge Estate, which is managed by National Trust Scotland (NTS). During routine maintenance in 2003 a small number of flint artefacts were identified in two locations: at Chest of Dee and Caochanan Ruadha, on the Geldie Burn. The footpath workers identified that the flint was potentially significant and reported it to the National Trust Scotland archaeologist. The artefacts were recognised as probably being Mesolithic in date, and in follow up work, the NTS identified a further site at Carn Fiaclach Beag in Glen Dee. All the sites were covered by peat and very close to rivers.

Because of the impacts of climate change on river temperatures, NTS were required to propose a programme of riparian afforestation. The presence of Mesolithic stone tools in riverine contexts was therefore both a challenge and an opportunity: could planting take place without damaging these sites? Were the sites just a few stone tools or did anything else survive? These were pressing management questions even before we consider the value of finding out what the sites can tell us about Mesolithic hunters in the Scottish mountains. It is worth noting that the challenges of assessing the archaeological impact of re-afforestation and re-wilding continue – as will be discussed below.

The Upper Dee Tributaries Project (UDTP) was developed by Shannon Fraser (NTS Archaeologist) to address this challenge. Shannon bought together researchers from Universities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Stirling and my own institution, University College Dublin (although I have been based in Ireland since 2002 my PhD at Edinburgh focused on the Mesolithic of eastern Scotland). The UDTP conducted geomorphological assessments of the valleys of the Geldie and parts of the Dee. This sought to confirm which riverine landforms might date to the Mesolithic and which were more recent. UCD and Aberdeen also conducted excavations at Coachanan Ruadha and Chest of Dee.

Test excavations at Chest of Dee uncovered a complex and rich archaeological site at 415m asl on the eastern bank of the Dee immediately below the waterfalls at Chest of Dee and extending,

discontinuously, down river to shortly before the modern junction with the Geldie. The site here was identified by artefacts on the surface which had been uncovered by the construction of 'high build' paths – cutting turf on either side of the path and inverting them to create the path.

It is important to stress that all the sites we have excavated so far have been found through activities associated with modern footpaths. This means that although all of our sites seem to show that communication routes into and through the mountains were important in the Mesolithic, we have to be a little careful in making this statement as it may simply be a bias caused by how we are finding them.

Returning to Chest of Dee, the earliest dates from the site, at about 8100 BC are hard to understand, but there is clearly more activity at c 7500 BC and then an expansion in activity at 6900-6700 BC, with occasional activity in the two millennia that follow – this was clearly a place of importance over the very long term, even if there may have been gaps in this sequence of activity. This longstanding use may be linked to the prominent landscape location of the Chest of Dee site – above the river junction and with the striking feature of the Chest of Dee falls, and the pools beneath them. Mesolithic sites near upland river junctions are also well known in the Tweed valley. It is interesting to note that the waterfalls at the Chest of Dee were probably formed during the period of Mesolithic occupation of the site when the Dee changed channel. The first settlement at Chest of Dee probably took place before the falls were present. This site was in, or at the edge of, forest. In the early phases of occupation, the woodland was characterised by birch and willow, with pine becoming dominant over time. Stone tools from the site were common: with flint carried from deposits on either the North Sea or Moray Firth coasts, and a local rhyolite also used. Activity on site includes hearths, spreads of material and pits.

The Chest of Dee site was used for a long time and was probably not always used for the same reasons. It is located on a natural communication route into the high mountains and near prominent landmarks. Salmon, possibly resting beneath the falls, may have been an important resource as well as game and plants from the woodlands.

The diversity of the stone tool assemblage confirms that a range of tasks were undertaken here. Given prevailing climate conditions, it is likely that the use of Chest of Dee was seasonal, winter occupation may have been challenging and we might assume that this was during the summer.

In contrast activity at Caochanan Ruadha, on the Geldie Burn, appears to have been more specialised. Here, a very low-density scatter of flint artefacts is located on the gentle slopes at the eastern edge of a large valley basin at 540 m asl (photograph 2 below).

When occupied, at about 6200 BC, the site was in light woodland, close to the tree line. The valley basin was probably a wetland, and the Geldie may not have been a distinct river in this section.

The site (photograph 3 on the following page) was identified through the presence of stone tools in a path eroded in peat. On this low hill side, a few discrete concentrations of stone tools can be found – one excavated by UCD School of Archaeology provided evidence for the use of a light

2 Overview of excavation at Caochanan Ruadha, showing site location at edge of open 'basin' in the Geldie. Note location of footpath where finds were initially discovered. © Graeme Warren

structure c 3 x 2.2m in size with a central fire-setting – presumably a tent. The preservation of this evidence is likely because the site has never been cultivated: whilst sites are hard to find in mountain landscapes, they can be very well preserved.

The flint assemblage is very specialised, mainly comprising the debris from repairing and replacing the flint components of composite tools made from wooden hafts with inserted stone cutting edges or tips. Remarkably, microscopic analysis of patterns of damage on the edges of these tools suggests that within the tent some areas were specifically associated with processing of animal products, including stone tools with characteristic impact fractures from use as a projectile.

3 Excavation at Caochanan Ruadha, 2014. Each find bag marks the location of an artefact. © Graeme Warren

It is likely that this structure was only occupied for a very short time period, perhaps only a night or two. It is located on a hill side with other

signs of activity, one of which appears to have taken place a little prior to 6200 BC. It is possible that this was a location used repeatedly – a familiar place to visit. We can't be certain why it was visited but might again assume that it was during the summer. We have evidence for hunting, and it is possible that people came here to hunt. But they may also have been travelling through this natural communication route from the Dee to the Feshie and simply hunting whilst travelling. Remarkably, the occupation of the site is broadly contemporary with a key deterioration in climate in the northern hemisphere – the so-called 8200 BP event. This dramatic cooling, caused by changes in North Atlantic Ocean Circulation, had a significant impact on the climate and vegetation of Scotland, and it possible that glaciers reappeared in the high corries at this time. It is an unexpected time to find visitors to the Geldie.

Further work

Following the completion of the UDTP, further work led by UCD School of Archaeology has sought to uncover further evidence of Mesolithic activity in the Cairngorms. This includes two ongoing projects: excavations at Sgòr an Eòin, and an attempt to predict likely site locations in the high mountains.

4 Overview of river terrace at Sgòr an Eòin. Our site is located to the right of our tent (blue). © Graeme Warren

Survey work undertaken by a UCD student team in 2015 identified three stone tools in an area of eroded peat associated with a small water course on a flat well drained river terrace on the east bank of the Dee at Sgòr an Eòin at c 475 m asl (photograph 4 on previous page). The terrace, which is about 15 m above the Dee, is of Late Glacial age, and in the early Holocene would have provided a well-drained vantage point immediately upstream of a notable valley pinch point. The area would have been wooded, with willow and birch woodland giving way to pine over time. Excavations on site were planned for 2019 but curtailed by the presence of breeding birds during the fieldwork seasons, and in 2020 they were cancelled because of Covid-19.

5 Excavation at Sgòr an Eòin, 2021 facing up Glen Dee.

We were delighted to be able to conduct test excavations in 2021 (photograph 5 above). These offer a preliminary insight into the site here, with more work planned for 2022.

Our test excavations suggest that this is another very small site, with the main area that lithics were recovered from probably less than 5m in extent. Worked stone is quite rare, with a total of only 46 found so far. They are small, and frequently burnt. Formal tool types are also rare,

although two characteristic manufacturing by-products do date the site to the Later Mesolithic period. The site today is very badly drained, but this is due to post-Mesolithic landscape change. At this early stage it is difficult to interpret the nature of activity at Sgòr an Eòin but it is superficially similar to Caochanan Ruadha: a small site, with a limited number and diversity of stone tools, located at about 500m asl in places on good communication routes and with good views.

A new project based in UCD and started in September 2021, aims to help provide better information about the hunter-gatherer use of high mountain landscapes in the Late Glacial and Early Holocene and to contribute to decisions about how to manage these landscapes. *Looking Up* is a collaboration between Graeme Warren (UCD Archaeology), Sam Kelley (UCD Earth Sciences and Alice Doughty (University of Maine) funded by the Irish Research Council's COALESCE scheme (2021-2023). It combines geological and archaeological perspectives on the high mountain landscapes to try and predict where archaeological sites might be. More specifically, geological techniques (photograph 6 below) are used to get better dating information about the deglaciation of the Cairngorms, and this contributes to the construction of models of the location and extent of the ice sheet over time.

6 Sampling in the high Cairngorms to help refine the chronological models of ice retreat. © Graeme Warren

This, in combination with previously existing geomorphological maps, means that we can reconstruct how key aspects of the landscape changed over time and when areas might have become available for settlement. A key component of this research is exploring the location of areas on the high plateau that hold long lasting snow each year. These are important places for animals to congregate and might therefore have been attractive places for hunters to target. (The longest lasting snow, such as the famous Sphinx, are located deep in corries which would not be suitable places for archaeological prospection).

Summary

The recent evidence for Mesolithic activity in the Cairngorm mountains suggests that the ways in which hunter-gatherers used this landscape in the deep-time past was varied. Some locations were returned to repeatedly over centuries and millennia, and these sites seem to indicate a range of activities taking place. Other sites appear to have been more specialised, or perhaps just used for less time. It is early days yet, but the evidence from Caochanan Ruadha and Sgòr an Eòin may suggest a pattern of using raised ground at about 500m.

At present the evidence for hunter-gatherer use of mountains in Scotland is different in character to elsewhere in Europe. We do not yet have sites in the higher reaches of the mountain landscape, although Looking Up aims to identify these. We are still seeking to understand the precise strategies that brought people into the mountains and how they influenced these mountain landscapes. More research is needed, but the evidence uncovered to date suggests that this will be widespread, if hard to find. Field survey and excavation is critical and has the chance to transform our understanding of the earliest prehistory of Scotland's mountains.

How can I contribute?

Many of these sites are most likely to be found through identifying stone tools – typically small flakes and blades of flint (although other materials were used in prehistory these can be hard to identify). The use of flint offers us one benefit in trying to find these sites: because flint is not naturally present in the Scottish mountains it looks distinctive enough to catch the eye. The people with the best chance of finding stone tools

in the mountains of Scotland are those who spend the most time there – people who work in these landscapes or those who spend time hillwalking and exploring them. If you find something, please do the following:

1) Record its location with photographs – close ups and landscape settings.

2) Get spatial information about the find (grid reference, or tag position on a phone/GPS). Try to reduce as much as possible any potential damage to the object and do not clean it or attempt to apply any substances to it (but if an object is wet and made of wood or textile it is a good idea to keep it damp by keeping it with some of the soil in which it was found and keeping it in a plastic bag).

3) Most importantly, when you get back, please report the find to Treasure Trove as quickly as possible using the online form (https://treasuretrovescotland.co.uk/information/information-for-finders/). Objects can also be deposited with your local museum or Local Authority Archaeologist. As with any finds in Scotland, stone tools are subject to Treasure Trove (https://www.digitscotland.com/ what-if-i-find-an-artefact-a-beginners-guide-to-treasure-trove/). If you do find stone tools in the mountains, especially in the Cairngorms, please also email me!

See also: https://www.digitscotland.com/how-you-can-help-find-prehistoric-hunter-gatherers-in-the-scottish-mountains/

Acknowledgments

Our work in the Cairngorms has been supported by many different agencies. We are very grateful to National Trust for Scotland for their support in Mar Lodge, especially Estate Manager David Frew. We are grateful for funding from the Irish Research Council, National Trust for Scotland, Aberdeenshire Council, the Society of Antiquaries of London, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, UCD School of Archaeology UCD College of Social Science and Law, the Robert Kiln Charitable Trust, the Royal Archaeological Institute, and the Tony Clark Memorial Fund. Too many individuals have helped us to name here. We are grateful to them all.

Further Reading

There are several short introductions to the Mesolithic in Scotland:

Wickham-Jones, C.R. 1994, *Scotland's First Settlers*. London. Batsford/Historic Scotland.

Finlayson, B. 1998, *Wild Harvesters: The First People in Scotland*. Edinburgh. Cannongate.

Warren, G.M. 2005, *Mesolithic Lives in Scotland*. Stroud. Tempus.

The excavation report from Chest of Dee, which summarises the Caochanan Ruadha excavations is open access

Wickham-Jones, C.R., Noble, G., Fraser, S.M., et al. 2020, New Evidence for Upland Occupation in the Mesolithic of Scotland. *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* **86**, 13-42. (https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/proceedings-of-the-prehistoric-society/article/new-evidence-for-upland-occupation-in-the-mesolithic-of-scotland/5C6A4D9DF6F5321A0BF5A37BE6712453)

Dig it Scotland have a short article on how you can help find Mesolithic sites.

https://www.digitscotland.com/how-you-can-help-find-prehistoric-hunter-gatherers-in-the-scottish-mountains/

About the author

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MUNRO-BAGGING, MY LAST MUNRO

BRIAN DAVEY

For some people, life can be described as a long and challenging journey. Attempting to climb all the Munros can be part of that journey if you are game or daft enough to accept the challenge. In so doing, it can involve all the big emotions of life itself: love, hate, joy and sorrow. Some of these emotions we would rather not want to sample, but, like them or not, they are all part of the package. Some sampled, like the great joys of life, the wild beauty of the Scottish mountain scenery, the fresh air and the exercise, make the journey extremely worthwhile, not to mention the affection from some of the great friends you are likely to meet on that journey.

Tragically, people have lost their lives in this quest, among them Lynne Potter, a good friend from Runcorn in Cheshire, and a former member of the Cairngorm Club, as was her husband, Ernie. This raises the question, was it or is it all worthwhile? Lynne died in Raigmore Hospital Inverness on 9 June 2001 with serious head injuries after she slipped and fell 300 feet down the side of An Teallach, in Wester Ross. A helicopter from RAF Lossiemouth, which had been training in the area, airlifted her to hospital. Unfortunately, Lynne didn't survive her injuries. At that time, Lynne had only 15 Munros left to climb when tragedy struck. Just 19 months after Lynne's death, on 12 January 2003, another good friend and Cairngorm Club member John Elgie, who had accompanied me to Lynne's funeral at St Berteline and St Christopher Church in Runcorn, was swept some 800-900 feet down the Black Spout of Lochnagar in an avalanche and died a few days later in Aberdeen Royal Infirmary from his injuries. Had it not been for the fact that I was leading a Westhill Walkers Club Walk to the Rocks of Solitude in Angus on the day of that accident, I would almost certainly have been with my friend John and would very likely have been involved in that unhappy incident.

We could argue that Lynne, John and many others died doing something they loved, and, if we all must die sometime, perhaps that is a better way to go! But who in their right mind would want to put themselves through all the Munro bagging experience, and for what gain? Perhaps a celebratory drink in a silver-plated inscribed quaich, wearing a commemorative medallion together with your family and

close friends on your last Munro summit, not to mention a cheap tee shirt with your name printed on it plus the date of your Munro Compleation or your name and Compleation number forever inscribed on the Scottish Mountaineering Club Munroist List along with a certificate to prove it. All this perhaps, added to the memory of a bagpiper friend playing *Scotland The Brave*! Maybe for myself, of proud Irish heritage, my bagpiper companion should have played "Oh Danny Boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling, from glen to glen and down the mountain side ....."

Believe it or not, the SMC's Munroist List total, which stood at 2,358 in June 2000, reached nearly 7,000 names in December of COVID-19-year 2020 despite various restrictive lockdowns during the year, and it has now reached 7,127 early in January 2022. Numbers have increased exponentially since only a few hundred people had achieved the Munroist title back in the early 1970s. Cairngorm Club Munro Compleatists include former Club Presidents Ian Bryce at number 298 in 1983, Sheila Murray in 1985 at number 449 Ken Thomson in 1989, Anne Pinches also in 1989 at number 688 under her maiden name of Miss Anne H Lindsay, Gillian and Richard Shirreffs at numbers 1417 and 1418 in 1995, and Judy Middleton at number 1,435. Fondly remembered is Jim Bryce, Ian's brother, at number 1,441 in 1995. In fact, we could say that 1995 was a great year for CCCs (Cairngorm Club Compleatists)! The present Club President Garry Wardrope compleated in 2017 to claim number 6,285 on the List, and another Past-President, Marj Ewan, compleated on 8 September 2021. The escalating figures must have some explanation to account for the popularity of this sport, unknowingly invented by Sir Hugh Munro, who unfortunately died (in his bed I might add) before he succeeded in the compleation of his own invention.

Personal fitness and a vastly improved knowledge of the geography, geology, flora and fauna, not to mention the unpronounceable Gaelic placenames of Scotland, may be some of the rewards of Munro-bagging. But who would willingly endure the hardships of cold, wet, heat, exhaustion and pain for the boast, meaningless to many if not most people, of being able to say that they have stood at the summit of every mountain in Scotland which in this short microsecond of geological time rises above sea level to a height of 3000 feet or more? "So what!" they would say, and perhaps question your sanity. But it must all be part of

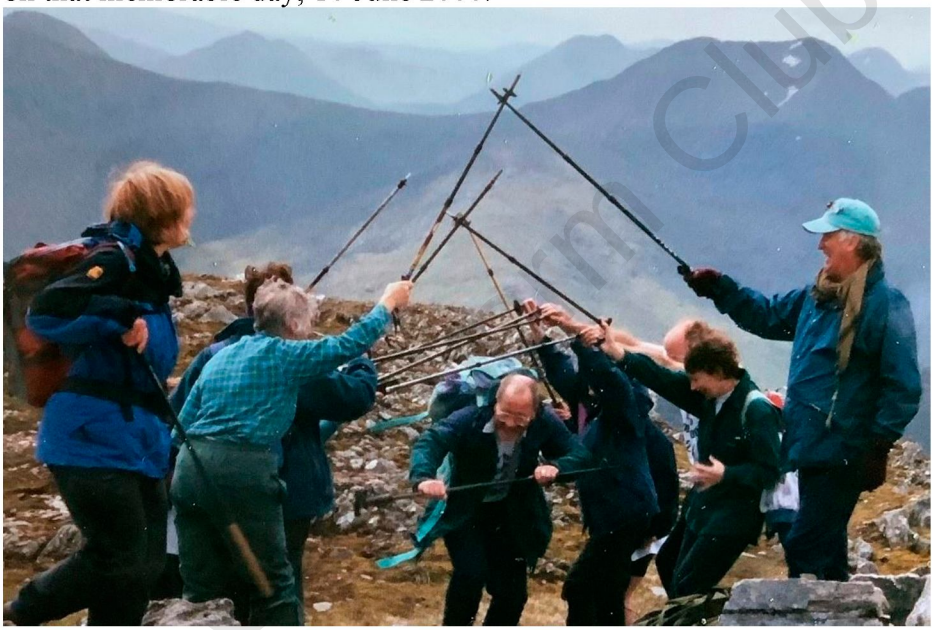
human psychology that we see a challenge and willingly accept the consequences, bearing the associated struggle against all the adversities involved, as some sort of self-test of our own character or an explanation of our inner self and our own individual capabilities. For some people, I'm sure that this analysis is all a lot of poppycock. Many people must take on the Munro Challenge just because it's a fashionable thing to do, like keeping up with the neighbours, at the same time undertaking the climbs in perfect summer climate conditions over the span of a lifetime, while residing in the best hotels or hostels if not Mountain Bothy Association bothies on their journey. This would involve the minimum amount of hardship, in fact quite a bit of comfort, and would finally achieve the target of getting a mention in the List of Compleatists. Others accept the challenge because their competitive nature needs to prove that they are the best. This being the case, they can then do them faster than anyone else, in winter conditions, on a mountain bike, in two right boots: see my article in the *Cairngorm Club Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 106, pp. 23-31, "The Black Cuillin Ridge of Skye in Two Right Boots", featuring my good bagpiper friend from East Kilbride, Albert Krawinkel.

On 2 September 2020, Donnie Campbell, a running coach who hails from Skye, claimed a new record for the fastest round of all present-day Ordnance Survey Munros, totalling 282, in an incredible 31 days 23 hours and just 2 minutes, covering 833 miles and ascending 126,143 metres, which is the equivalent of more than 14 ascents of Mount Everest!

Other options could be Compleation barefooted without boots and without clothes: now that would be some achievement, although someone has quite recently attempted the Land's End to John o'Groats walk completely naked. A completely blind attempt might be another possibility, and perhaps without hands and feet as one climber, Jamie Andrew, has successfully done, climbing Ben Nevis on 19 June 2000. The permutations are countless to get oneself into the record books or even into Clac Dian, the Cairngorm Club Newsletter. I'll not deny that, as a meteorologist, I tried to complete my Munro ascents in the most benign of weather possible but given the constraints of shift working and available leisure time, I'm afraid that I sometimes had to take the

rough with the smooth. I'm still referring here to the weather and not the contorted, rough, volcanic terrain of the Cuillin of Skye as opposed to the well-rounded, ice smoothed mountains of the Cairngorms.

So unexpectedly, it came as some surprise, when a certain tinge of sadness welled up in me and I nearly shed a tear as I approached the summit of my last Munro, Sgurr a Mhaoraich, the Peak of the Shellfish, on that memorable day, 10 June 2000.



1.Guard of Honour, Sgurr a Mhaoraich Graham Denyer

This mountain is rather isolated and stands near the head of sea-loch Hourn with its peaked and ribbed slope resembling a seashell. My sad emotion was at the same time mixed with a great deal of joy and pride to be accompanied by so many of the family and friends who had shared some of the journeys with me through white-out blizzards, deep snow, driving rain, severe gales, blue skies and blazing sun. From the summit of Sgurr a Mhaoraich, I looked down to the depths in which Loch Hourn lay and surveyed the vast surrounding mountains with the distant Cuillin of Skye still shrouded in cloud. I had chosen my last Munro wisely, and the late arrival of the forecast inclement weather moving in from the Atlantic made for me a perfect day. I count myself lucky to have savoured the scene!

2 Final Steps Grahan Denyer

3 The Toast Grahan Denyer

MOUNTAIN PHOTOGRAPHY

JAMIE VINCE

Since moving to Scotland in 2016 and picking up my first digital camera shortly thereafter, I've been hooked trying (and most of the time failing) to capture the beautiful essence of this country. The Cairngorm Club has helped me access some awe-inspiring places and views around Scotland and unless the forecast is dire, I've tried to bring my camera along for the ride. The following article looks at a handful of photographic lessons that I've learnt and tips that I've picked up during this time.

1 The Devil's Point, Cairngorms Jamie Vince

1. Find an interesting foreground

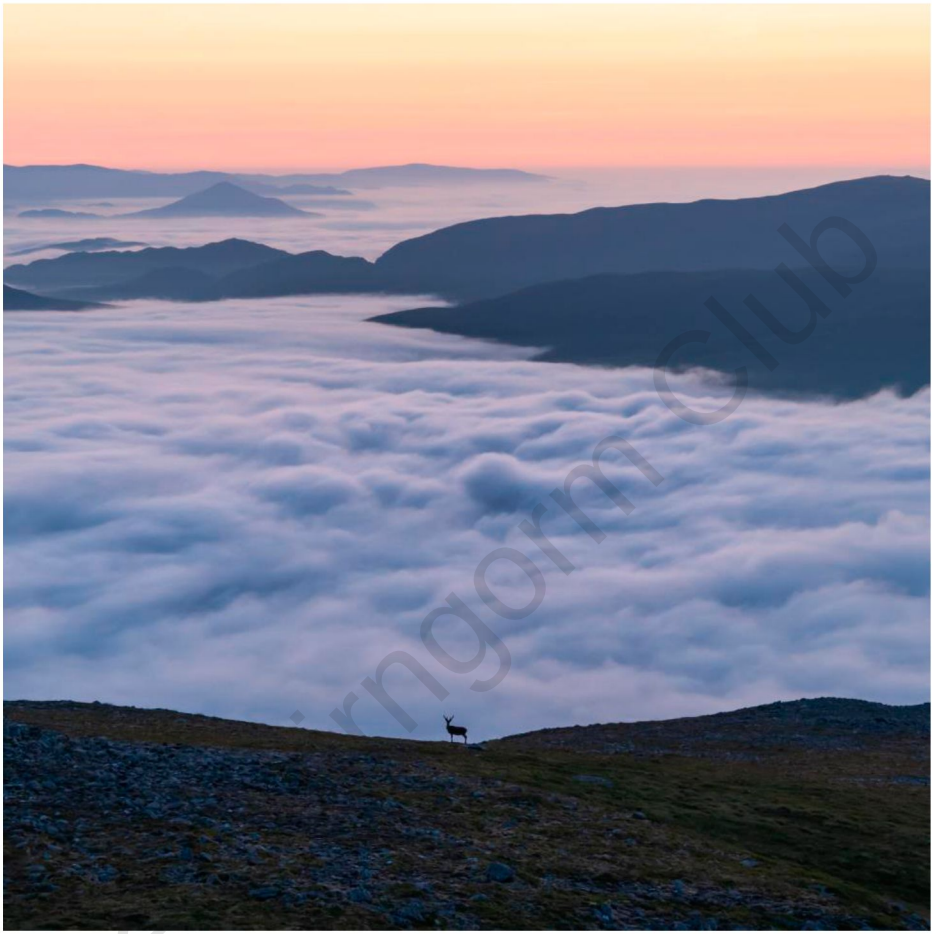
This is key. Something I quickly learnt was that an image with a clear foreground and background, with distinct separation between the two, is just simply more pleasing to look at than a flat image of a mountain skyline. Now there are exceptions here - for example long lens (zoomed in) images with the right light can be stunning - but generally an image with these two elements has so much more depth and can tell more of a story than an image with just one.

The example here (photograph 1. previous page) shows the Devil's Point and Cairn Toul, softly lit by a low November sun, which are stunning in themselves, but what I think makes the image is the use of the patterns on the partially frozen lochan in the foreground which lead the eye towards the hills beyond. I find the combination of both elements extremely pleasing to look at and I'm glad I put in the work lining up the foreground, as opposed to just shooting the hills from the path.

2.You make your own luck

I find that a lot of the time when taking photos in the mountains, the truly epic shots are technically the easiest. It is a case of being in the right place, at the right time and all you must do is press the shutter (or to tap the screen on your phone). All the hard work has already been done by getting to that spot, and without that previous effort the photographic opportunity - whether that be a golden eagle, stunning light, or a Brocken spectre - would cease to exist.

A case in point is the following photo of a stag poised above a cloud inversion at dawn which was taken from the summit of Carn Dearg near Ben Alder (photograph 2 the following page). I had put in a lot of effort to get to this position: driving to Dalwhinnie straight from work the night before, cycling into the Culra Bothy with a heavy load, then ascending the steep hill with my tent before darkness descended. I knew that inversion conditions were forecast, otherwise I would have left in the morning, but the cherry on top that morning was the stag waiting to greet me as I emerged from my tent. No fancy settings, all I had to do was zoom in and "click".



2 Staggering View from Carn Dearg Jamie Vince

3.Get panoramic

Sometimes views in the mountains can be vast. So vast that you aren't sure where to look, what to focus on, or what to photograph. It's general wisdom that in these circumstances it is best to isolate a segment of the scene, to zoom in and to tell an intimate story which comprises just one part of a boundless mountainscape. This, however, requires a telephoto lens, something not everyone may have. In the absence of this, I find that the long, thin profile of a ridge line or hilly horizon suits a panoramic format well. True landscape photographers would implore you to use a tripod when doing so to ensure a level horizon, however I find the

software these days (such as Adobe Lightroom) to be so good that if you are steady handed and get the correct amount of overlap between pictures (roughly 30%), you can achieve great results. Smartphones also now do a great job taking and processing panoramic images almost instantaneously.

An example is the following picture (photograph 3 below) of the main Cairngorms in a thick winter coat taken from the south (near Carn Bhac). This is a combination of around ten photos and because of that the resolution is huge and you can zoom and explore every hilltop and corrie. It's not my favourite image but I love the sense of wilderness and vastness it conveys.

3 Winter Cairngorms Panorama Jamie Vince

4.Don't try to get it all in

In what is a complete contradiction to my last point, here I advocate not trying to get everything into the frame. Whether you capture the whole scene or just part of it, depends on the situation. The following image is a good example of what I mean. Taken on the shores of Loch Torridon, this photo depicts gorgeous golden-hour light striking the southern face of Liathach. At the time I got excited and just tried to take a picture of the scene as I saw it, which included three elements: Liathach in light, Beinn Alligin in shade and the island in the loch. Reviewing this photo now (photograph 4 the following page), I wish that I had moved around to the left and focused purely on Liathach, excluding Beinn Alligin - which I find just distracts from the main show - whilst possibly including the island and its pines in the foreground. This was taken in March 2017, and I don't think I've seen light as nice since!

4 Liathach at Golden-Hour Jamie Vince

5.Venture out after dark

We are extremely lucky in Scotland to have some of the most stunning landscapes in the world, combined with some of the darkest skies. When the skies are clear, which obviously isn't always the case, the two can make for epic photographic potential. With the Cairngorm Club I've been able to stay in some amazing locations on weekend meets and when you are sleeping in these awesome places with dark skies, it pays to stick your head out after nightfall and see if the stars are twinkling.

I find that the best bang for your buck with astrophotography is to shoot the Milky Way with an illuminated foreground. The best times of year for this are spring and autumn and it's easy to find the galaxy, as in clear conditions in Scotland you'll be able to see it with the naked eye! Astrophotography does require a tripod to stabilise the lens for the relatively long duration of time that the shutter needs to be open for. You don't need any other fancy equipment though and even a smartphone (in long exposure mode) on a tripod these days will be able to take a half decent image; some phone cameras are amazingly now starting to rival digital cameras in this field.

5 The Milky Way, Bridge of Orchy Jamie Vince

My favourite example to date of the Milky Way (photograph 5 previous page) was taken in spring 2021 on a camping trip near to Bridge of Orchy. The incredibly dark skies led to a super bright display of the galactic core which I was able to line up between our tents and campfire. Note that the fire in the picture was in a portable fire pit (the luxuries of camping by the car) and was off the ground.

6 Snow-holing on Cairn Gorm Jamie Vince

6.The best camera is the one you have with you

To reiterate a point, I made in the previous paragraph: you really don't need a big fancy camera to take special pictures in the mountains. Smartphone cameras are now exceptional. When I use them though I try to keep in mind their limitations, mainly reduced ability to produce a sharp image when zoomed in and limited dynamic range (the ability to capture details in both the brightest and darkest parts of an image). Therefore, when shooting with my phone I aim for wider angle shots that are evenly lit and don't have bright skies and dark rocks.

Three of my favourite ever images were taken on my mobile phone and they all have one thing in common: beautiful light. In the right lighting, I feel the overall gap between a smartphone and a "proper" camera is narrowed. One of these images was the morning of the Cairngorm Club's 2019 snow-holing overnighter (photograph 6 on previous page). I love the combination of the way the soft light caresses the pitted walls of snow, the intriguing nature of the snow shovel and the expanse of wilderness beyond.

7.A great view doesn't always make for a good photo

The view of the Black Cuillin from Sgurr na Stri is my favourite view in the whole of Britain, though probably tied with that from the summit of A' Mhaighdean. I had seen photos and videos of 'that' scene, looking down over Loch Coruisk with the imposing, jagged peaks beyond and couldn't wait until I was there myself. The Cairngorm Club's May 2019 weekend meet at the Coruisk Memorial Hut allowed me the opportunity to make the pilgrimage there. After snapping every angle and focal length that my memory card allowed for, I returned home to look at the images (photograph7 the next page). I was disappointed with how they turned out and that was due to a couple of factors. Firstly, the light was incredibly flat and there is pretty much no appreciable depth in the image. Secondly it was the wrong time of day to take the shot, as the sun was setting beyond the mountains when ideally it should be rising behind the camera. I've edited this image differently a couple of times, but I feel in the end it just looks 'muddy'. I've tried to make it work as it's my favourite view but alas a great view doesn't always make a great photo. It has taught me to read the conditions on location and to know

when to judge there is photographic potential and shoot away and when to know that it's best to put the camera down and just take it all in.

7 Loch Coruisk from Sgurr na Stri Jamie Vince

8.Move your feet

Photographers often say that having a zoom lens can make you lazy. If you want a different scene, you can just zoom in or out. With what is called a 'prime' lens (one with a fixed focal length), if you want the composition of the image to change, you must move your feet. Camping on the shoulder of Cul Beag in September 2020 I was met with this challenge. As the sun was setting over the Summer Isles and the mist was gathering in the glens, I was trying to take a telephoto image of Stac Pollaidh. I was attempting to line up the northern ridge of Cul Beag to mirror the eastern flank of Stac Pollaidh but with my lens at maximum zoom I had to move quite a bit to get everything to line up. I ended up descending quite a way down the hill so as to move to my right enough to get everything where I wanted it. In the end I'm glad I put in the effort as I love the result in this photo (photograph 8 on next page).

8 Stac Pollaidh from Cul Beag Jamie Vince

9.Keep your eyes peeled

The Scottish hills are renowned for having four seasons in one day. Their mercurial nature can lead to some unexpected and very short-lived light displays of epic proportions. On days when these conditions are present, it's a good idea to try to look up from your feet every once in a while, to make sure you don't miss the show.

A good example of this was at the Cairngorm Club's November 2018 weekend meet to Glenfinnan. Whilst walking along the ridge to Sgùrr nan Coireachan I happened to look over my shoulder and to my astonishment, I saw the most incredible display of crepuscular rays. I

quickly lined up some foreground rocks and snapped away. Within probably less than a minute the light rays were gone, not to return in the glen for the remainder of the day (photograph 9 below).

As well as being aware of your surroundings, it's important to make sure your camera settings are dialled in to take advantage of these fleeting moments. I missed out on a great opportunity to photograph a nearby passing golden eagle in Glen Ey because my camera was still in long exposure mode from when I last used it for astrophotography!

9 Crepuscular rays over Glen Finnan Jamie Vince

10.Try to tell a story

The final tip that I want to share, is that I've learnt that photos which pose a question, provide intrigue, or present a story, can be some of the most impactful. Great light, composition and subject are the core elements of great photos but what I feel elevates them to something special, is the notion of a narrative which is either laid out for the viewer to follow or is hinted at and left to ponder.

I quite enjoy the following photo of the Cuillin Ridge from Gars-bheinn (photograph10 on the following page) with the gradational tonal

contrast from the warm grasses transitioning into the cold blues of the snow dusted ridge beyond. What I really like in this image however is the inclusion of the stone circle in the foreground. I know that this is a bivouac site for those intrepid climbers who aim to complete the Cuillin Ridge traverse - the pinnacle of mountaineering challenges in the UK. For me, the image evokes the tension, nervousness, and excitement that those who use this small stone shelter must feel, as they toss and turn in their sleeping bag, waiting for their shot at 'the ridge' - which is laid out in the background for the viewer, in all its terrifying glory.

10 Gars-bheinn bivouac Jamie Vince

So, after five short years taking photos, those are my top tips and some of the lessons that I've learnt. I hope they may be of use to you, and I'll try to remember to practice what I preach! I'm looking forward to seeing your photo of the month on the website soon!

AMPHIBIANS IN THE CAIRNGORMS

LAUREN SMITH

A movement catches my eye as I head down from Beinn a' Bhuird, another frog (*Rana temporaria*)), probably the most frequently sighted amphibian in the Cairngorms although the toad, *Bufo bufo* and the palmate newt *Lissotriton helveticus* are also seen in good numbers.

1 Cairngorm Frog Lauren Smith

Today has been what my friends and I would call a classic Cairngorms session, a 35km loop taking in Beinn Bhreac, Beinn a' Chaorainn and Beinn a' Bhuird, clear skies for the most part and what cloud did sweep in had the decency to stay high level.

I crouch down to take a quick picture of the frog (photograph1 above) before continuing on my way. I would send that photograph to Ivor later, together with some other landscape shots from today. Ivor Howitt is my friend with a fascinating history which inextricably links the Cairngorm Club with a small group of adventurers who formed the first post-war recreational SCUBA diving club in the UK, the Amphibians Club.

In order to explain this, I will start with how I first came to be in contact with Ivor thanks to a chance encounter at a dive show in late 2014. At the show I visited the Historical Diving Society's stand (I was attracted by the books they had for sale, and was ecstatic to find Cousteau's The Silent World, Hans Hass' Diving to Adventure and Eugenie Clark's Lady with a Spear), where I started to chat to someone about where I was currently living (Aberdeen), and they mentioned Ivor's name and his early experiments with homemade SCUBA set-ups.

Upon my return to Aberdeen, I trawled the internet and found a link with Ivor's email address, and so began our correspondence half a world away from one another; between Scotland and New Zealand, where Ivor emigrated in the 1950's.

A teenager at the end of the Second World War, enthused by William Beebe's underwater descriptions, Ivor was determined to go diving. The Scottish temperatures, lack of equipment and training did little to put him off. Instead, Ivor improvised with materials to hand, he modified a civil defence gas mask and connected it to a motor car foot pump with a length of rubber tubing. Then together with a friend Hamish Gavin, went to a farm dam on a cold wintry day with frost on the ground, where they stripped off and took it in turns to submerge in the icy water with teeth chattering, almost paralysed with cold to complete their inaugural dives.

Following this there were plenty more inventions and adventures that followed including a 1920's style diving helmet made from a sheet of copper wrapped around a dustbin lid, with 60 pounds of lead weights bolted in place. Air was supplied via a garden hose connected to two pairs of trusty car tyre foot pumps, all of which were transported on push bikes to Souterhead, a sheltered inlet just a few miles south of Aberdeen, which became a favoured spot to test out equipment (photograph 2 the following page).

Diving was fast becoming a core pursuit of Ivor and his friends (Les McCoss, Hamish Gavin, Alf Goodwin, Hamish McIntyre, John Gavin, Laurie Donald, Ken Fraser and Ron Macdonald) together with their other main focus, mountaineering with some rock climbing on sea cliffs, caving, skiing and canoeing thrown in for good measure. Together the friends decided that the name 'Amphibians' was an obvious choice to cover their above and below water pursuits and so in 1948 The Amphibians Club was made official.

2 Testing the Helmet at Souterhead photograph attribution unknown

A giant leap forward came in late 1948 when Ivor purchased the British version of the French Cousteau-Gagnan aqualung from Siebe, Gorman and Co. Getting the cylinders filled was not straight forward, Home Office regulations wouldn't allow the cylinders to be filled with air for civilian use and so instead the British Oxygen Company supplied pure oxygen which meant dives were limited to less than 10m.

Ivor revelled in the task of designing and making all the club's underwater breathing equipment. In 1949 Ivor wrote to the Dunlop Rubber company enquiring about the production of fins, as they had made the naval frogmen's fins during the war. They did reply, but incredibly said that "they could see no commercial market for swim fins in peacetime". A response Ivor notes, that reflected the virtual non-existence of sport diving in the UK at that time.

By late 1950 Ivor decided to emigrate to Australia, it was time to realise his dream and try-out his Siebe-Gorman in warmer waters! By May 1952 Ivor took his first colour shots whilst diving off Lindeman Island, in The Whitsundays. His precious camera and film encased within his homemade 'cooking pot' housing. In November 1953, together with Bill Young, Ivor took some of the first underwater colour photographs of the Great Barrier Reef.

In late 1954, a family emergency saw him return to Scotland. After this Ivor travelled to New Zealand where he settled in 1956 with his wife Mary, and his and the other Amphibians' pioneering exploits remained dormant until 1999, when Dive New Zealand published Ivor's 'Memories of an Aberdeen Amphibian'. This was later followed by Ivor's publication of his book in 2007, '*Fathomeering – An Amphibian's Tale*'. Shortly after I first contacted Ivor, he was kind enough to send me a copy of this (there is also a copy in the Cairngorm Club library).

Whilst reading Fathomeering I soon discovered that when not underwater I, like Ivor and his friends would head to the hills. Throughout Ivor's book the hills mainly the Cairngorms (thanks to their relative proximity), are a regular feature of those early years prior to Ivor moving away. His descriptions of cycling for miles to reach a different hill whenever he had a free Sunday are as inspiring as they are sobering. He says that these experiences developed his ability to look after himself in remote areas, and in all weathers.

The River Dee and the Lui Burn featured as part of the Amphibians' exploits, with a pool where they would dive if the sea was too rough. Further up the burn Luibeg Cottage and Corrour Bothy feature in his writing where in 1946 Ivor and friends sought shelter after escaping a white-out on the Ben Macdui plateau (photograph 3 on page 165).

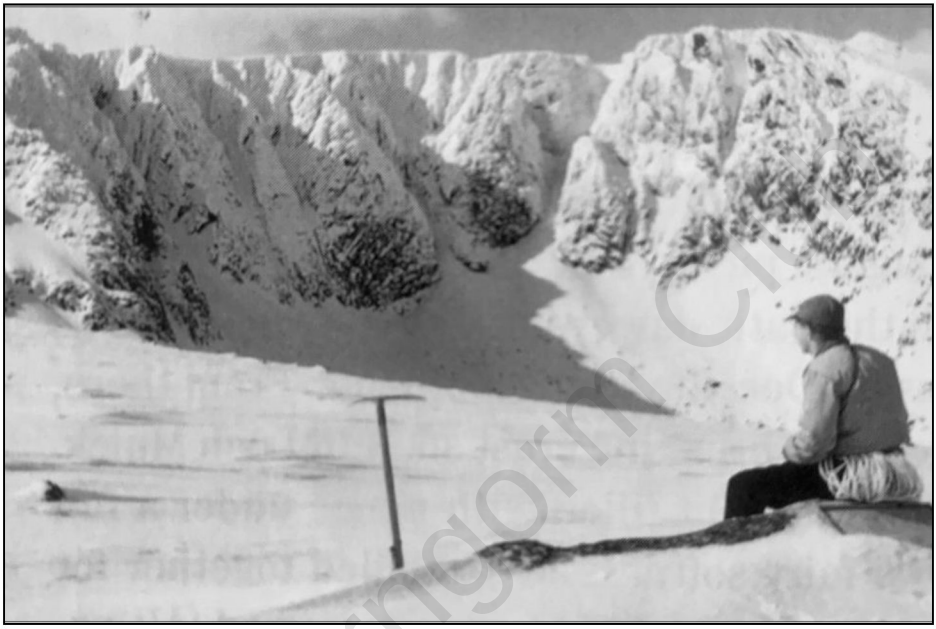
71 years later in 2017 my friends and I left Corrour at just after 4am to start our ascent of the Devil's Point.

In 1947 Ivor describes the deep snow drifts in the Black Spout which meant an attempt instead on Raeburn's Gully, only to be blocked

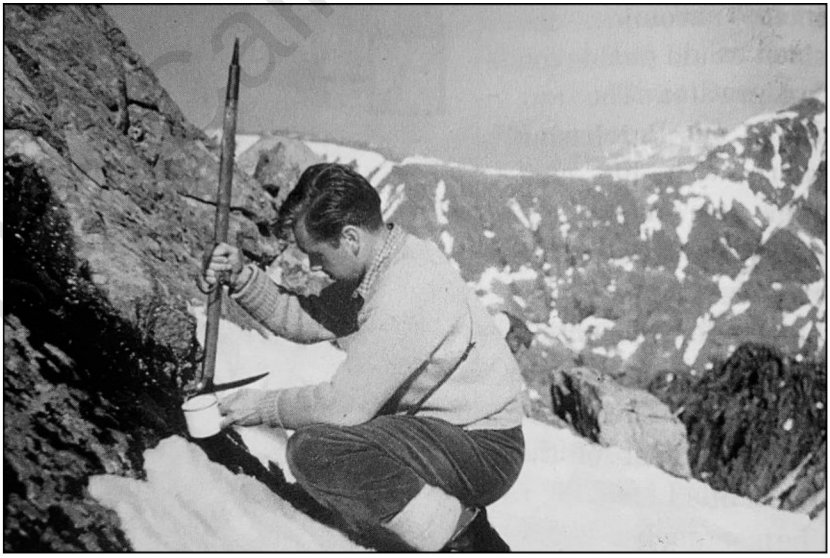
3 Sheltering at Corrour Bothy in 1946 photo attribution unknown

eventually by a polished sheet of glistening black ice sweeping upwards to bulging green ice and clusters of enormous icicles overhanging the full width of the gully (Photographs 4&5 the following page). My husband and I on an unseasonably warm day in early spring 2012, carefully

negotiated the rapidly melting ice that remained in the Black Spout and finished our final scramble to the summit of Lochnagar.



4 Lochnagar 1947 photograph attribution unknown



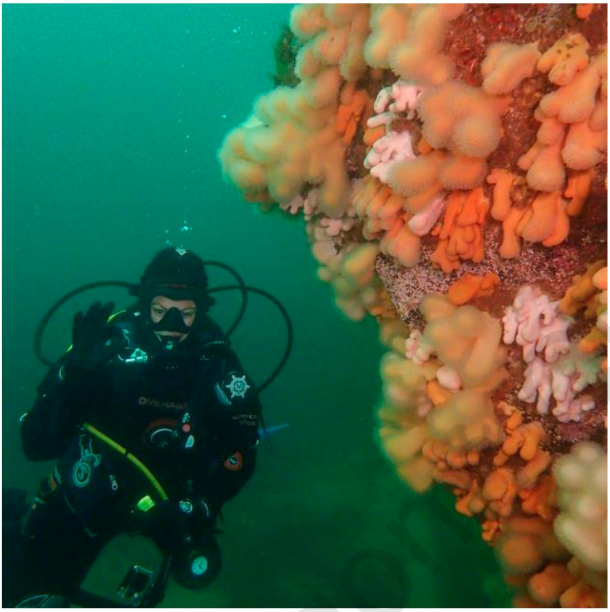
5 Ivor collects drinking water from moss with the aid of his ice axe.
photograph attribution unknown

In a passage of his book Ivor recounts his experience with a Brocken spectre, a phenomenon which gave rise to the legend of Fearlas Mor the 'Old Grey Man of Ben Macdui'. *I was fortunate to see this apparition for myself on a hillside one day: there was a low sun behind me and downhill from where I stood a giant figure materialised in the mist, created by the refraction of my own shadow through the moist atmosphere. In modern living surrounded by technology we don't really experience the magical side of nature. This magic is one of the charms of mountaineering. The luminous quivering of the atmosphere over warm heather or perhaps the plaintive whistling cry of a curlew on the moors can evoke a heightened awareness of inner spirit at one with the quietude of the natural world. I have never felt alone when walking the hills of Upper Deeside.*

Ivor is 94 now, but recalls these adventures with absolute clarity, there are many parallels between our interests, having dived and hiked the same locations, albeit many years apart. In 2019 I asked Ivor's permission to reinstate the Amphibians Club. My mission is to continue the outdoor adventures and to honour the original members' legacy. If you would like to find out more about the Amphibians Club or get in touch, then please visit www.amphibiansclub.co.uk or catch us on Twitter @AmphibiansClub or Instagram @fathomeering

Ivor Howitt *was born in Aberdeen in 1927 joining the Cairngorm Club as a Junior Member in 1946. Although living on the other side of the world Ivor maintains contact with the Club Secretary and recently donated to the Club a copy of his 2007 book "An Amphibian's Tale". This available in the Club library at Aberdeen University Library*

Lauren *is a marine biologist and scuba diver, also happy on terra firma - just like amphibians! She spends a lot of time outdoors mountaineering and enjoying wildlife photography" (photographs 6&7)*



6.Lauren diving off Rosehearty Chris Rickard

7 Lauren with the Ben Lawers range in the background. Gordon Diack

Postscript In the spirit of the Amphibians Club, it has come to the Editor's attention that Cairngorm Club member Anne Pinches has recently added wild swimming (Photograph 1 below) to her list of hillwalking and distance-cycling exploits.

1 Knockburn Loch January 18th, 2022. Kathleen How

SOME HIGHER LOCHS AND LOCHANS IN THE CAIRNGORMS

KEN THOMSON

In the regrettable absence of glaciers in the Cairngorms since the end of the Loch Lomond Readvance, the higher lochs and lochans of the area seem next best for study and enjoyment and are certainly worth the occasional reference and article in this *Journal*. An irreverent limnologist (a lake scientist) has said that "*a lake is no more than a bulge in a river*", but bodies of standing water offer a rich variety of sites and environments. This article brings together some scraps of information – historical, scientific and "other" – for Cairngorms lochs in general, and for some in particular, which have interested the author while by no means pretending to be comprehensive.

As with Scottish islands, the number of lochs and lochans in the Cairngorms is an uncertain quantity – not only due to the various alternative boundaries that might be taken to encompass the mountain range, but also as to the minimum surface area (itself a variable quantity) to be considered. The Cairngorms National Park Authority carefully says that "*there are around 60 lochs throughout the Park, and many lochans*". And lochans are even known to appear, e.g., Lochan a' Chreagain where the Quoich "*reluctantly enters the Dee*", or disappear, e.g., on the upper ridge of Carn na Drochaide north-west of Braemar. Others have no doubt disappeared over time through their natural tendency to fill up with detritus brought down from the slopes above.

This article seeks to cover all bodies of water in the higher reaches of the Cairngorms down to around 0.1 ha (10m square) in area: roughly, those at an altitude over 400m (1300 feet), plus a few of the major lochs below that altitude, e.g., Lochs Morlich, Muick and Lee. Lochs west and south of the A9, e.g., in the Monadh Liath, are not covered. A data set compiled by the author using these criteria includes about 240 lochs and lochans.

Historical

The first comprehensive examination of Scottish lochs was the 1897-1909 *Bathymetrical Survey of the Fresh Water Lochs of Scotland*. Its text and its rather beautiful engravings are easily available via the National Library of Scotland's website. In 1883 and 1884, the Royal Societies of Edinburgh and London strongly represented to the

government the value of such a survey, but the Treasury replied that inland water fell outwith the functions of the Admiralty, whilst the Ordnance Survey was to confine its attentions to dry land! The Survey was therefore undertaken with private funds by the experienced oceanographer Sir John Murray, (photograph 1 below) at first on a small scale assisted by his young friend Fred Pullar of the once well

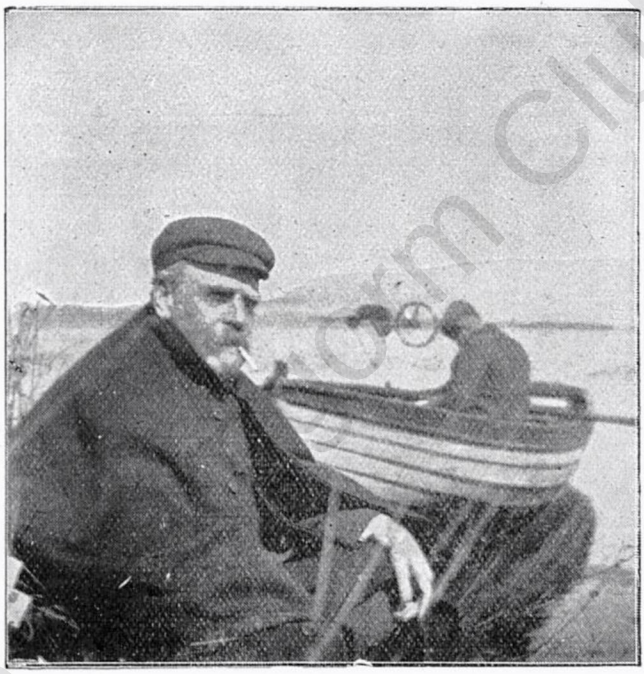


FIG. 2.—Sir John Murray, K.C.B.

(From a photograph taken by the late F. P. Pullar, F.R.G.S., during lunch-time on their last sounding expedition together. Loch Leven, 1st September 1900.)

1 Sir John Murray

-known dry-cleaning family. However, in 1901 Fred drowned whilst rescuing people who had fallen through ice on Airthrey Loch near Bridge of Allan. Murray nearly abandoned the Survey, but a £10,000 donation from Fred's father, Laurence Pullar, enabled the Survey to continue, with a substantial team of assistants in the fields of surveying, geology, chemistry, biology, etc.

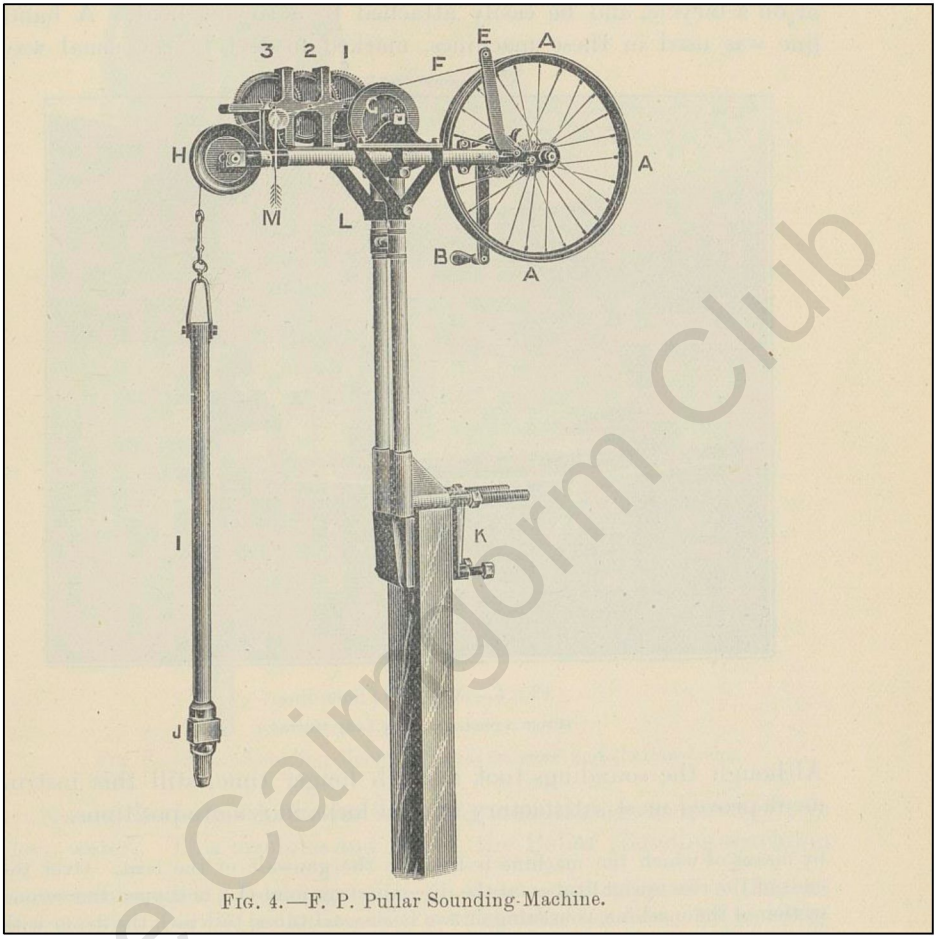


FIG. 4.—F. P. Pullar Sounding-Machine.

2 The Pullar Sounding Machine

After some trials, a "Pullar sounding-machine" (photograph 2. above) based on bicycle tubing and a drum of 1,000 feet of galvanised wire was fixed to the gunwale of a rowing boat. The device worked "*admirably and accurately*" and was subsequently used by Robert Peary in his Arctic expedition of 1905. A simpler apparatus, capable of being carried on a bicycle, was used on smaller and remoter lochs. Lake deposits were collected in brass tubes attached to the lead. After difficulties with more elaborate methods such as the use of a sextant, depth soundings were taken along fixed transects, the oarsman taking a fixed number of strokes

to ensure even intervals. This was found to be remarkably accurate except across wide stretches without islands, and the results are still used in OS maps today.

Over 10 years, some 562 lochs all over Scotland were surveyed, with their depths, widths, volumes and temperatures being measured, and their biological species (29 new at that time) enumerated. The Survey included 6 lochs in the Aberdeenshire Dee basin, 16 in the Spey basin, and 67 in the Tay basin, but the difficulty of getting a boat to the water led to the exclusion of Lochs Avon, Etchachan and Einich, as well as the Dubh Loch, Lochnagar itself, and the many other high-lying lochans in the Cairngorms.

Modern methods have of course moved on. A current unofficial website (sites.google.com/view/lochbagging) lists 141 lochs – named the "Crawfords", after the website founder – within the Cairngorms National Park, 9 above Munro height (914m), and 23 above Corbett height (762m). The highest are Lochan Buidhe to the north of Ben Macdhui at 1122m, and – though a rather dubious "lochan" – at the Wells of Dee on Braeriach, even higher at 1213m. The lowest Cairngorms Crawford is the Fairy Loch in Glen Tanar, but at 159m that is well below the altitudes considered in this article.

Data

There are currently two major official databases for lochs and lochans in Scotland and beyond. For about 3,000 Scottish lochs, the Standing Waters Database (SWD) – maintained by the statutory nature conservation agencies in Scotland, England and Wales – gives a six-figure OS grid reference, altitude to within 10m, and surface area to about 0.1 ha, plus environmental survey information for the larger lochs. The UK Lakes Portal (UKLP) – originally developed in 2004 by University College London and the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology– is an inventory of about 25,000 water bodies in Scotland with a surface area over 1 ha. For each "lake", the website (eip.ceh.ac.uk/apps/lakes/index.html) gives basic information such as surface area, location and elevation, while subsidiary panels give additional data on shoreline length, surrounding land cover, connectivity (e.g., Strahler numbers; a measure of stream branching complexity), chemistry and biology.

The formation of lochs is a geomorphological process, driven by the underlying geology, the actions of glaciers, and more recent erosion. Most of the Cairngorms glens are believed to have originated as lines of weaknesses formed, perhaps surprisingly, by hot water ("geothermal alteration"), and later eroded by ice and water. In these glens, lochs have resulted from both "rotational flow" of the ice deepening a hollow (a corrie) until a rock lip retained water, and at lower altitudes from the glacial deposition of material in moraines behind which water has been trapped. Other lochs are in "kettle holes" left behind by ice blocks isolated from the main glaciers, most notably Loch Morlich, but probably also many of the smaller lochans found on flatter moor, especially in the south of the Cairngorms as defined here.

Every loch has its catchment area, whose size and nature determines the amount and characteristics of its water as well as its landscape setting, and nearly all have their inlets and outlets (usually several and one, respectively), even if these are very small and fragmented in the case of small pools lying in flat areas. Together, these define the loch's retention time (the mean time that water spends in the loch), which has been found to vary from 1.2 hours to 4.25 years – a period that presumably varies greatly with rainfall and thaw.

The variety of life forms to be found in lochs, even in higher-altitude ones such as those in the Cairngorms, is far too large to be discussed at any length here, let alone their interactions (e.g., the food web, parasitism) and their relationships to the physical environment (e.g., water depth and acidity, seasonality). But in general, the ecosystems of the higher Cairngorms lochs extend from plankton (e.g., algae), bryophytes (e.g., mosses) and macrophytes (aquatic plants), which form the food base, through invertebrates such as beetles and dragonflies, to vertebrates such as fish, frogs and waterfowl. Most is known about the larger species, particularly fish and birds, but many of the smaller species are difficult to study (as well as boring to many!), so that scientific knowledge is incomplete.

The higher and smaller the loch, the more oligotrophic or dystrophic it is likely to be, i.e., to have low or very low nutrient status. This limits the number of species able to survive, and the maximum size of at least the larger ones such as fish. However, the peat surrounding many of the smaller lochans in the high flat Cairngorms moors can lead to higher-

than-expected diversity, though dominated by sphagnum mosses and lesser bladderwort, along with associated species such as some dragonflies. The larger oligotrophic lochs are also acidic, but are dominated biologically by salmonid species, while their plant life can extend to shoreweed, quillwort, water lobelia and awlwort.

The Cairngorms host several designations, being a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a RAMSAR Wetlands site, a Special Protection Area (SPA) for birds, and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The SSSI Site Management Statement says:

"*Fringed with ice polished boulders, those* [lochs] *over 600 m are oligotrophic and arctic/alpine in character, with a very impoverished fauna and flora and have continuous ice cover from December to May in most winters. Winter populations of phyto- and zoo- plankton develop below the ice while diatom growth occurs only after the ice has melted. The corrie and plateau lochs, on rocky substrates above 900 m, suffer the harshest climate and the lowest levels of nutrient, leading to low species diversity of flora and fauna, mainly phytoplankton with a few zooplankton and invertebrates, but no aquatic plants (macrophytes) or fish. The larger glacial trough lochs in Glens Einich and Avon enjoy more sheltered conditions. The occurrence of finer sediments in Loch Einich allows the limited establishment of higher plants such as shore-weed, six-stamened waterwort and bulbous rush, and several species of fish are also found, including salmon, sea trout and Arctic charr.*"

The RAMSAR statement covers five Cairngorms lochs (Etchachan, Uaine, Coire an Lochain, Avon and Einich), noted as: *"exceptional examples of high-altitude oligotrophic lochs [which] are of considerable limnological value and support highly specialised populations of zooplankton and phytoplankton",* and as being *"in favourable condition".*

At one time, trees would probably have been found around all but the highest lochs, but the effects of historical climate change (cooler, wetter, windier conditions) and relentless grazing has left only scrub remnants above ground, and fossilised remains in the deeper waters, as well as in the surrounding bogs.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Jerry Light – the originator of the Garbh Choire Refuge – used snorkel and scuba equipment to carry out scientific work on bryophytes in Lochnagar, Loch Muick, Loch Avon,

Lochan Uaine of Ben Macdhui and Loch Coire an Lochain on Braeriach. He found the bryophyte flora to be "*surprisingly varied*", with most of the 15 species not previously recorded in British lakes.

Salmon and sea trout do not usually reach the higher water bodies of the Cairngorms, and in any case prefer flowing water for spawning. Even brown trout seldom venture above 800m, but they have been noted or caught in Lochnagar lochs, and in Lochs Etchachan, nan Eun near Beinn Iutharn, and Vrotachan. Similarly, eels seldom go above 500m, but have been caught in the Lochnagar loch, at 780m. Humans probably introduced pike into some higher lochs (e.g., Loch Callater at 500m, though they are not found in Loch Muick at 390m), to the detriment of indigenous salmonid-dominated fish communities. They have been found to exhibit "*slower growth, due to a shorter growing season and the low availability of forage fish.*" Arctic charr are a post-glacial relict (a remnant of a formerly widespread species that persists in an isolated area), present in Lochs Einich, Builg, Lee of Glen Esk, and an t-Seilich of Gaick, but are not recorded in Lochs Avon or Muick. They are a conservation feature in several Cairngorms SSSI lochs, including Loch Builg.

While lower-lying lochs are well-known haunts of many bird species, even the higher ones attract residents and visitors, both common and rare. Amongst the former are gulls (common and black-headed), which breed at Loch Tilt, in Glen Derry and near Loch Builg, and even up to 750m. The latter include various divers, and dippers and oystercatchers coming up from their more usual lower-level sites, sometimes as far as the Pools of Dee. Geese, swans and teal have sometimes been noted to use high-level lochs as temporary staging posts.

Perhaps thankfully, there have been few direct human uses of the higher Cairngorms lochs, which have thus been spared most of the touristic attentions nowadays devoted to Loch Morlich. A crannog in Loch Builg (see below) is perhaps an early exception, and no doubt fish received widespread attention then as now. Perhaps some lochside summer sheilings were occupied until the 18th century by those looking after cattle, goats and sheep driven up from lower ground, but most of these seem to have been located on higher, drier, ground. Moreover, numbers (of humans and livestock) are likely to have been small, and

not to have affected much the shape and nature of the water bodies. Dams have been built to establish or enlarge a few lochs and lochans for fishing purposes (or water supply in the case of Loch Einich). Nowadays, in addition to "lochbagging", some hardy souls like to swim in the larger ones, or even to dive under their ice in winter; videos are available online. And a commercial course offers instruction in "altitude diving" (which requires specialised dive plans) in the Cairngorms.

More indirectly, human pollution of loch water by "acid rain" became of pressing interest in the 1970s:

... the production of some algae and mosses increases [but] *the diversity and production of most macrophyte communities decrease with decreasing pH, and the same appears to be true of zooplankton and zoobenthos, though the situation is more complex with invertebrates .... If the acidification is sufficiently great to exclude fish, then their absence as the normal top predators can lead to an unusual abundance of some prey species. Amphibians ... and birds ... can also be affected.*

However, such effects were found to be much more serious in Galloway (e.g., some lochs rendered fishless) than in the Cairngorms (both granitic regions), and the effects of organic soil – particularly peat – reduced the risk of aluminium toxicity. Since 1990, there has been some improvement, arising from reduced emissions from power stations etc.

Some Individual Lochs

Loch Avon, (photograph 3 on the following page), (pronounced, and sometimes spelled, A'an; "river", a Brythonic or Ancient Celtic term). According to Queen Victoria, "Nothing could be grander or wilder", and W. H. Murray considers that the loch's corrie "has no match in Scotland, save only at Coruisk, for utter remoteness and the sense of loneliness imparted". Along with the Shelter Stone, it is the scene of many a description and tale, including the formation of the Cairngorm Club itself on the Dairymaid's Field in 1887. In the 1890s, the loch was *proposed* – initially by a Club Member, Thomas Jamieson – as a source of water "of exceptional purity" for the City of Aberdeen, via an £1,000,000

aqueduct. Club members expressed enthusiasm both for and against this scheme, which eventually fell through.

3 Loch Avon Mike Duguid

Loch Beanie (also Bainnie, suggesting Bainne, or "milky", though perhaps simply from "Ben"; originally called Loch Shechernich, Sesatur, Schechyr, etc.) in Glen Shee has an artificial island, on which the local clan chief is said to have lived. The loch does *not* drain into Glen Beanie!

Loch Brandy (said to derive from *bran dubh*, or "black raven", possibly from its colour) in Glen Clova has The Causeway – actually a curved natural moraine – shallowly submerged at its south end. Several boats have been hauled up to the loch for fishing, but all but one (which was removed after unauthorised usage) were eventually smashed by strong winds. A large area of the corrie headwall has partially slipped downslope.

Lochan Buidhe ("yellow") high on Lochnagar was stocked in 1856 with two dozen trout from Loch Muick. Below the lochan, the remains of an old shooting hut of the Gordons of Abergeldie could still be traced in 1891.

Loch Builg ("bag-shaped") was used to investigate ice cover in the Cairngorms about the time of the Loch Lomond Readvance about 14,000 years ago. Its waters sometimes run in both directions, i.e., north to the Avon and the Spey, and south to the Gairn and the Dee. A possible/

probable crannog – "*period unassigned*", and some 5m in diameter – lies some 12m from the NE shore and is approachable by a ruinous causeway. It is the scene of "Two Lady Members of the Club Bathing" on 9 September 1933 (photograph 4 below). A satellite lochan was the site of a young man's suicide in 1950, exactly ten years after his father did the same in Glen Girnock. In 1961, 15 ATC officers and cadets carried two bomber-type dinghies plus normal camping gear up the loch, "and spent some time paddling across the loch".

September 9, 1933. *Mrs. Donald Sinclair*

TWO LADY MEMBERS OF THE CLUB BATHING IN LOCH BUILG.

4 Ladies Bathing 1933

Loch Callater ("hard water"; Brythonic, not Gaelic) is currently said to contain trout, salmon, eels and perch, and to be a very good water for pike, possibly the highest in the British Isles.

Loch Dubh ("black") on Lochnagar led the New Statistical Account of 1845 to be quite carried away: "*The stupendous overhanging cliffs of*

Craigdhuloch, surpassing in grandeur the celebrated rocks of Lochnagar, rise on the south side of it to the height of more than 1000 feet, and, by throwing their gloomy shade over it, give a dark and sombre appearance to its limpid water ... A mountain rill falls into it from a height of 200 feet, over a projecting rock on the north side, which renders it altogether the most awfully sublime object in these parishes". By contrast, the scenery of Loch Muick is merely "*bold and romantic*"! Its trout may be the descendants of 35 brought from Loch Muick in 1852.

Dubh Lochan ("black"), Beinn a'Bhuird's main loch (photograph 5 below), provides fine camping/bivvying sites on its shores, sheltered

5 Dubh Lochan Beinn a'Bhuird Mike Duguid

from the westerlies, and not far away is the Smith-Winram howff, under a huge boulder beneath Dividing Buttress. The cliffs around were the site of much prospecting for cairngorm stones and are still of mineralogical interest.

Loch Einich ("marshy"; also, Eanaich or Eunach) was once used as a water supply source for Strathspey and has been noted for containing

charr (photograph 6 below). The loch was once used as a water supply source for Strathspey, hence the dam at its outflow.

6 Loch Einich Ken Thomson

Loch Etchachan (perhaps "boisterous") once had a fishing boat (the mooring ring is still there, at the SW corner), and other boats have been carried up there more recently. In 2012, "Reginald Rat", snorkelling in clear water, reported a water temperature of 11°C, a depth of at least 6m, and a bottom surface of brown and green algae, but no fish. Amongst birds seen here have been mallard, golden-eye, common sandpipers (breeding), sand martin, and a black-throated diver.

Clais Fhearnaig ("hollow of the alders") between Glens Derry and Quoich was dammed in the 1800s – or possibly in 1928 – to create a fishing pool: the trout are still there.

Loch Kander (*Ceann-mor* or "big head(water)") in Glen Callater lies in a corrie with an assemblage of barium-rich minerals [e.g., armenite] "*unique in Britain*". In 1862, a Rear-Admiral Jones, on a botanical

expedition, got stranded for two nights above the loch, and only his geological hammer stuck in the rocks saved him from a nasty end before the search parties arrived.

Lochnagar (the loch) ("goat") has had an entire scientific book (Rose, 2007, *Lochnagar: The Natural History of a Mountain Lake*, Springer) devoted to it and its surroundings (photograph 7 on the following page). Over the last 9,000 years, 1.55m of largely organic debris has accumulated in places on the loch-bed, with the sedimentation rate increasing in the last 150 years, and probably into the future. Fossil pine stumps about 7000 years old occur near the eastern shore of the loch, indicating marked changes in the surrounding vegetation. Water temperatures, and ice-free periods, show increasing trends over recent decades. Acidification increased over the 150 years until about 2000 but is now decreasing. However, the catchment soils contain a large store of pollutants yet to be carried into the loch. At the top of the short food web, trout are scarce, slow-growing and (partly due to atmospheric pollution) in poor body condition. The only other recorded fish species here is the European eel.

Loch Muick (probably "misty") was of course a favourite spot of Queen Victoria, who had Glas-allt Shiel built on its shore in 1868. The loch was the site of an aircraft crash in 1992, when a light aircraft from Aberdeen disappeared from air traffic view. Three weeks after wreckage was identified on the lochside, the aircraft was located in about 50 feet of water some 300m from the SW end of the loch, and the bodies of the two occupants recovered. Trout up to 6lb have been caught in the loch, and larger fish at various depths. Salmon and sea trout are now getting to the loch via the refurbished fish ladder at the Falls of Muick. However, drinking from the loch is not advised, with some 21st century reports of walkers and cyclists developing strains of E. coli and campylobacter. The Pools of Dee have both been reported as containing trout of different sizes, indicating a lack of underwater intercommunication.

Loch an t-Seilich ("willows"; Loch Gaick on some old maps) is the source of a 4½-mile tunnel, completed in July 1940. Built for hydroelectric purposes, it leads to Loch Cuaich. It was once believed to contain a large but mysterious fish called the dorman, which prevented salmon gaining the loch from the river Tromie.

7 Lochnagar Mike Duguid

An Lochan Uaine ("green") on Derry Cairngorm was the site of a turf hut built and used by an eighteenth-century Abernethy poet and deerstalker (or poacher), William Smith.

Lochan Uaine ("green") on Cairntoul has been used to examine the productivity of organic matter as a measure of climatic change over 4000 years, in a situation largely unaffected by human activities. A "*few trout*" were placed here in 1912, but by 1935 had "*never been seen rising, so that it is difficult to tell whether they have survived*".

Loch Vrotachan ("cattle-feeding" or "-fattening"; variously Bhrotachun, Valican, Bhrodichan or Bhrot-choin) near the Cairnwell lies in a fertile basin surrounded by lime-rich schists. It is reported to "*hold the largest trout of the lochs in the region with several 2 lb fish taken every year*". It is used, along with a corrugated iron hut, by a local angling club, who may at one time have constructed a small dam (since breached) at the SW corner.

Loch Wharral, in Glen Clova is "*abundant in good small trout*". In 1964, two youths were drowned here when their canoe capsized; a body was recovered by frogmen.

End Words

The first Honorary President of the Club, the Right Hon. James Bryce DCL MP, managed to author the first-ever article ("Some Stray Thoughts on Mountain Climbing") in the Club's journal in 1893 without a single mention of "loch" (or "lake", "tarn", "water", "burn" or "river" – though he did manage "snow" several times). However, a "Grand Old Man of the Club", Alexander Copland, said in 1890:

"*Even the most unscientific members* [of the Club] *could hardly indulge in the pastime* [of mountain climbing] *without considering and discussing the natural phenomena to be met with – how moraines were formed, how corries were scooped out, how lakes came to be left in the bosoms of the hills.*"

and another respected early writer (Colin B. Philip, in 1910) went so far as to assert that "*Corries that have no tarns are to me always a little disappointing*". This author agrees!

A longer version of this article, with footnotes giving sources and further information, and an Excel database, are available from the author, who would like to thank Alec Macmillan, Roger Owen and his own siblings Alan and Julie for help on certain points. None of these kind people bear any responsibility for the contents above.

LABYRINTH DIRECT

GRAHAM WYLLIE

Back in early March 2020 I enjoyed fantastic ice climbing conditions throughout Scotland, the highlight of this being an ascent of Creag an Dubh Loch's Labyrinth Direct. The guidebook proclaims it to be one of the most sought-after ice routes in the Cairngorms and it has its place in the history of Scottish climbing. The line was first attempted by Tom Patey and Alan Will in 1955 but they were stopped by the crux. It wasn't until 1972 that Jim Bolton and Paul Arnold made the first ascent in the early days of front pointing – an incredible feat, and very bold considering the standard of equipment they would have been using at the time. Alongside rudimentary front points and axes they had no axe leashes or meaningful protection. It waited seven years for a second ascent, and it remains one of the hardest gully climbs in Scotland. It was my dream winter route: too hard to be on my short-term radar, and yet all the pieces fell into place to give us a shot.

For those who haven't done any ice climbing then here's a basic introduction. The climbers will be equipped with a pair of technical ice axes and crampons with one or two front points. A route will be divided into pitches based on length and practicability, with progress made in the normal climbing fashion of a leader moving off from stances (belays). After the leader has completed a pitch of climbing, he creates a new belay stance and then the second climber follows, cleaning the pitch of any protection that the leader has placed. Specific winter protection tends to be more marginal than rock protection. Ice Screws are tubular screws that are threaded into the ice and their reliability depends completely on the quality of the ice in which they are placed. Bulldogs are serrated blades that can be hammered into cracks, ice, and frozen turf, and tend to be pretty marginal. While falls in rock climbing are fairly common and often a part of improving as a climber, it's generally accepted that falling in winter – especially when ice climbing – is to be completely avoided.

There had been a thaw before the weekend and the weather was coming in from the west. Doug and I were trying to figure out what our options were. Good conditions had been reported on Creag an Dubh Loch the previous week, but we couldn't be sure what had survived the thaw. On Sunday I took a reconnaissance run in to see if it was going to

be worth Doug driving down from Torridon. When I reached the lochside, I was pleased to find that the cliff was still holding onto plentiful volumes of ice. I reported my findings to Doug, we hatched a plan and I headed home to catch an early night. My alarm woke me at 03:00 the next day and by 05:00 I had met Doug at Glen Muick and we were marching along the track towards Glas Alt-Sheil. The moon was bright enough for us to shun our head torches and soon the night passed into a fine morning. By the time we arrived at the lochside, the red dawn sun was illuminating the great cliff (photograph 1 below). Crossing the verglassed rocks over the outlet of the Dubh loch, we closed the final distance with the face.

1 Dawn on the Dubh Loch Graham Wyllie

Looking upwards we assessed our options. We had initially penciled in Hanging Garden route. I had missed out on it a couple of winters ago due to work and had been keen to get a proper shot at it however our eyes were drawn to the far more impressive Labyrinth Direct. Its famous crux pitch appeared to have formed brilliantly. Doug and I were both climbing well with a lot of mileage on Torridonian ice in the previous couple of weeks. Neither of us had ever climbed a grade VII –

in fact, I had never even climbed a VI. Both routes start up the Labyrinth Couloir so we thought we could just get started and make our route choice where Hanging Garden route breaks off.

I took the first pitch which was delicate to say the least. I would probably have backed off had that been practical but continuing boldly up the thin melting ice was the best option in any case. The temperature seemed to be warmer than forecast and we assumed this was due to the sun shining on the cliff. Doug led another pitch up into where the route breaks off into the Hanging Garden. There was little decision to be made and I led up towards Labyrinth Direct, belaying a pitch (photograph 2 below) before the crux.

2 Doug, Pitch 3 Graham Wyllie

The route to this point had been pretty variable with thin ice, hard névé, sugary snow and even some frozen turf. Protection was sparse but we managed to get good rock belays.

On the next pitch the route began to steepen.

3 Doug, Pitch 4 Graham Wyllie

It was Doug's lead (photograph 3 above), and it was some time before he led out the 40m to a belay in a rock wall to the right of the crux.

4 Graham, Pitch 4 Doug Bartholomew

I followed up some very bold, steep, and insecure climbing (photograph 4 above), brilliant lead by Doug. I was doubtful I would have got up it

on lead although retreat options were few and far between so I guess the choice wouldn't have been mine to make. By now, given how much thawing was going on, we had worked out that it was not the sun that was to blame and there had to be a higher freezing level than forecast. It was still cold enough though, and ice can often be perfect to climb when slightly above the freezing level.

From Doug's belay the crux looked wild. Steep ice on a high angled slab had merged with a vertical ice pillar cascading down from an overhang. I was apprehensive as it was my lead. While I had been climbing well these last couple of weeks, the previous insecure pitches had left me feeling a bit strung out and this was harder than anything I had ever climbed before. It was, however, my turn – and the ice looked like it was in good condition. Furthermore, switching out the precarious belay to let Doug lead again would have amounted to no end of hassle, so I got my act together and started collecting all the remaining

5 Graham traversing into the corner, Pitch 5. D Bartholomew

climbing gear off Doug. The initial part of the pitch was a descending traverse across some of the steep crud I had just seconded up. I managed to get in a marginal Bulldog and found enough good axe placements to eventually get me over onto better ice where I could make faster progress.

6 Graham placing an ice screw, Pitch 5 Doug Bartholomew

I realized the ice I was now on was hollow underneath but provided I didn't kick it to shreds, it held my weight without complaint. Traversing under a row of dripping icicles I also ended up getting saturated. Eventually I reached good ice and got a good screw in. I traversed further left into the bottom of the steep corner that forms the crux (photograph 5 page 189) The exposure and position were incredible. 250m of gully dropped impressively below me to the entry fan and frozen loch below.

Inching up the corner and taking rests where I could I was soon forced out fully onto the near vertical slab. Axe and crampon placements were good however and I managed my feet as best I could to avoid exhausting my arms. I edged up the wall, placing screws as I went – which was exhausting (photograph 6 previous page). Placing ice screws involves getting a good high axe placement then 'hanging' off it with one arm while trying to keep as much of your weight as possible on your feet but this gets harder and harder as the ice gets steeper. The angle finally eased slightly, and I could give my arms more of a break. As I moved higher the angle relented more and more and I led out another 30m of rope over what would probably constitute a grade V pitch. Just as the angle eased both Doug and I heard a strange high-pitched noise. Initially I thought disconcertingly that it was the ice, but it turned out to be my camera. It had got wet through my Gore-Tex jacket and was having a bit of a wobbler. The camera never fully recovered but this is preferable to the ice collapsing beneath me! The pitch provided a final hurdle when I had to excavate a rock step out of bottomless powder snow. I then found a belay at the edge of the bay below the cornice. An astounding pitch.

Doug made it up to me in fine spirits just as the weather was closing in. It had begun to snow, and the upper part of the route was getting blasted by occasional squalls loaded with spindrift. Doug led through the cornice direct, cutting though it to make a suitably aesthetic, if a tad unnecessary finish to an incredible route. Once on the plateau the weather was not so bad, so we sorted the gear out before heading towards Central Gully to inspect it as a descent route. There was a small cornice which we broke and then down climbed. We then headed down the gully (photograph 7 next page), taking in its incredible ice draped rock architecture.

7 Descending Central Gully Graham Wyllie

We retraced our approach over the river and down the path to Glas Allt-Sheil, the thawing precipitation around us failing to dampen the elation of our success. We got back into the car park at around 19:15 making for a glorious 14-hour day. Completing a route on the Dubh Loch never disappoints.

For anyone interested in reading more about the route there is a good account of the first ascent starting on page 234 of Greg Strange's '100 years of Cairngorm Mountaineering' as well as an entry in Ken Wilson's 'Cold Climbs'. For more of my writing visit grahamwyllie.blogspot.com

THE SECRET HOWFFS OF BEINN a' BHUIRD

DUNCAN L. MACRAE

Just as it says in the song - the howffs are not a secret anymore! But they were in the early 1950's and had I written this article then, I probably would have been assassinated.

The Aberdeen climbers in the Golden Age of Cairngorm climbing (1950-1960) had 3 main destinations when they left on "the 3.15 from Aberdeen". In the bad old days when climbers were forced to work long hours and nobody owned a motor car, everybody went to the hills in a bus run by Strachan Ltd. It left Bon-Accord Square at 3.15 pm every Saturday. Strachan's main garage was in Ballater in premises now occupied by the Co-operative Society and managed by a Mr Blackhall, father of Sheena Blackhall, the Doric poet and writer.

The climbers' destinations were Lochnagar, Beinn a' Bhuird and Ben Macdui and her neighbours. For overnight accommodation, Lochnagar had Lochend bothy and Jock Robertson's barn at the Spittal of Muick. Macdui had Bob Scott's both at Luibeg and Derry Lodge if you were a member of the Cairngorm Club. Beinn a' Bhuird was however devoid of any such conveniences, especially since the old shooting lodge at the head of Slugain Glen was rendered uninhabitable by Invercauld estate following the discovery there of silverware which had been stolen from the "Big Hoose". What to do? The answer was simple, build a howff. That's easy to say, but not so easy to achieve without the necessary materials readily at hand. Fortunately, an abundance of conveniently shaped flat rocks was available.

The new howffs were built between 1952 and 1954. Prior to that the well-known and respected character Mac Smith built a howff in 1949 somewhere 3,000 ft up in Coire na Ciche. I was never able to find it. In 1962 Mac Smith edited the definitive Climbers' guide to the area, published by the Scottish Mountaineering Club and now a much sought-after book. The only other shelter was the small entrance hall to the ruined shooting lodge previously mentioned, the doors to which had been blocked in, leaving only a window space for access (photograph 1 the following page). It could sleep 3 at a pinch.

The working-class climbers in the early 50's mainly belonged to Hall Russell's (shipbuilders) Climbing Club, Kincorth Mountaineering

Club (a district in the north of Aberdeen City) and the slightly more elite Etchachan Club. Members of these Clubs and sundry others

1 The "makeshift" howff at the old Slugain Lodge. photograph attribution unknown

transported building materials on the Strachan bus from Aberdeen, with materials being supplemented by what they could beg, borrow or steal locally. With Herculean effort, countless torchlit safaris, warily passed the Laird's door and up Glen Slugain, shouldering mighty beams of timber, window frames, stove piping and sheets of corrugated iron.

At the end of many months of hard work there were around 5 or 6 habitable howffs within a radius of some 4 to 5 hundred yards on the hillside to the north-east of "Fairy Glen". Most were partly subterranean and well-hidden. Some had glass windows and a small fireplace providing a degree of comfort during the winter months. Except for the howff that remains in use today there was no standing room, and the normal sleeping space was for 2-3 persons. At the height of their existence, Saturday night was like Hogmanay with climbers visiting their neighbours with much ribaldry, conviviality and singsong.

The largest and still going strong howff was built between 1952 and 1953 by Charlie Smith, Jim Robertson, Doug Mollison and Ashie Brebner. The fact that Jim Robertson was a stonemason with much building experience must have something to do with its longevity. The howff has been mentioned in many climbing books and journals and has been used by such notable mountaineers as Tom Weir, Hamish MacInnes and Chris Bonnington.

The other howff worth a mention was built by Raymond Ellis and David Gaffron, both colleagues of mine in Hall Russell's drawing office (photograph 2 on the following page). Raymond went off to Alaska to avoid National Service and built a log cabin for his wife and himself in the Alaskan wilderness. He passed away in 2019. David spent many years sailing with me on my small yacht on the West coast and has a house in Aboyne. He is still climbing Lochnagar at 84 years of age.

Without doubt, the Glean an t' Slugain howffs enabled the pioneer Aberdeen climbers to discover and achieve first ascent rock climbs both in summer and winter in the 3 corries of Beinn a' Bhuird just as they had done on Lochnagar and the high Cairngorms albeit from somewhat more comfortable and long-established bases.

2 Author emerging from Raymond and David's howff 1957 photograph attribution unknown.

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ARTISTIC INSPIRATION ON SKYE

BRYAN THURSTON

My initial visit to the Island of Skye, on my self-made bicycle was in 1949. We arrived in a gale force 9 at the bottle-green-painted Norwegian-type Glen Brittle youth hostel; in such skirmish weather we tried to open the hostel door, but because of the strong wind I could not. So, knocking on the window hostellers came and pushed, helping the door to be open. The next day, Saturday the storm ceased a bit, and we knew that the fisherman from the Island of Soay, named Tex Guedes (this because once he was apparently in Texas) should come in a fishing vessel to take passengers from the head of Loch Brittle over sea direct to Mallaig. So, I with my friend waited a long time looking out seawards to the entrance to Loch Brittle, but no sign of a boat. Dismayed for the weather was still rough we cycled back up Glen Brittle partly even having to carry our bikes over the track to Sligachan! In those days one had to take the road which goes all the long way around the inner sides of Loch Ainort (the new shortcutting road was not then built). So eventually we reached wet through, the ferry over to Kyle of Lochalsh on the mainland. I read recently that if one gets wet on Skye this is dreadful, but to get wet through to the skin is marvellous!

Years elapsed, until in 1976 from the Sligachan Inn we climbed up the Fionn Corrie and over the pass a bit to the east of Bruach na Frithe, and down steeply into the Lota Corrie, me tearing the backside of my mountain breeches! -passing the Bloody Stone and over bog-moor on the western side of Glen Sligachan, back to the Inn. After this, I was a few times in Glen Brittle and at the Sligachan Inn. The most memorable memories are with my wife: Cecile of the viola`s, staying once in a B+B and for last time on Skye in still bottle-green, newly furnished Glen Brittle SYHA, this in 2012. We walked up to Coire Lagan, traversing on the way the amazing debris, rock-chaos of deep orange and silver colouring, that shatters down the steep slope from Sgurr Dearg. The Coire is wild-riveted by rock faces, and gigantic "Torso"-like basalt rocks in its stone shoot are criss-crossed by pinkish veins. Descending direct to Loch Brittle, cascading water gushes its way downwards and I had the feeling that a giant of old had thrown down in mighty fury boulders valley-wards.

In earlier geological times the Red Cuillin were many times higher than the Black Cuillin--but ages of erosion and weather denudation has drastically lessened their heights. The Western Red Cuillin are formed of numerous intrusions; direct evidence that the normal granophyre is in contact with gabbro. The streaked appearance of these colourful mountains I relate to "strawberry-cream". The Black Cuillin gabbro mountains in e.g., Coire an Creiche depict many typical cone-sheets that cut the gabbro. Repeated gravitative concentration of olivine, with an upward migration of alkalis, accounts for rhythmic banding in the peridotite; a rock which on the Island of Rhum is found in extensive sheets for example on Barkeval with its southern cliffs built of the indigo-coloured rock. In a glass vitrine in Kinloch Castle there is or was a lump of peridotite together with a piece of rock from the moon; these two rocks are similar.

Especially during these week-long stays, I worked in the Black Cuillin and Red Cuillin in sketch books and watercolours; back at home in Switzerland many etchings were made; one in special is a "mad" depiction of the strawberry-cream" streaked Red Cuillin! My artistic works wish to convey the difference `twixt the Red Cuillin and the Black Cuillin on Skye (see the following page).

RED CUILLIN Etching with cadmium red, natural pigment

BLACK CUILLIN

Above: Sgurr Dearg over Sgurr Alistair to Sgurr Sgumain.
Below left: ink drawing of The Inaccessible Pinnacle of Sgurr Dearg.
Below right: watercolour of Sgurr Sgumain.

CLUB LIFE IN COVID LOCKDOWN

EILIDH SCOBBIE

As 2019 drew to a close, I knew my life was about to change, as I moved from "gainful employment" to the life of an indolent retiree. I was looking forward to being able to have regular wee adventures, with various skiing and walking trips planned, to break me in to my new life, away from the regular routine of the office.

In January and February 2020, I was skiing in Norway with fellow Club member Rhona Fraser, when we became aware from the TV of this strange new pestilence affecting the Chinese, which had resulted in them building enormous general hospitals in a matter of days. We noticed that the Orientals travelling through Oslo Airport were all wearing masks, little thinking that by the end of the year, this would be the norm at home. By mid-March, we were in Lockdown, the end of my planned adventures for the first year of my retiral.

So, without work, without meeting friends, and living on my own, I had to rely on my own inner resources. Of course, the garden beckoned, and tidying out cupboards helped to fill the day, but it wasn't enough. Chamber Music Scotland started making available on YouTube performances by young musicians from their own home. It was clear that no sophisticated technology was required, and asking how they did it, I discovered Zoom.

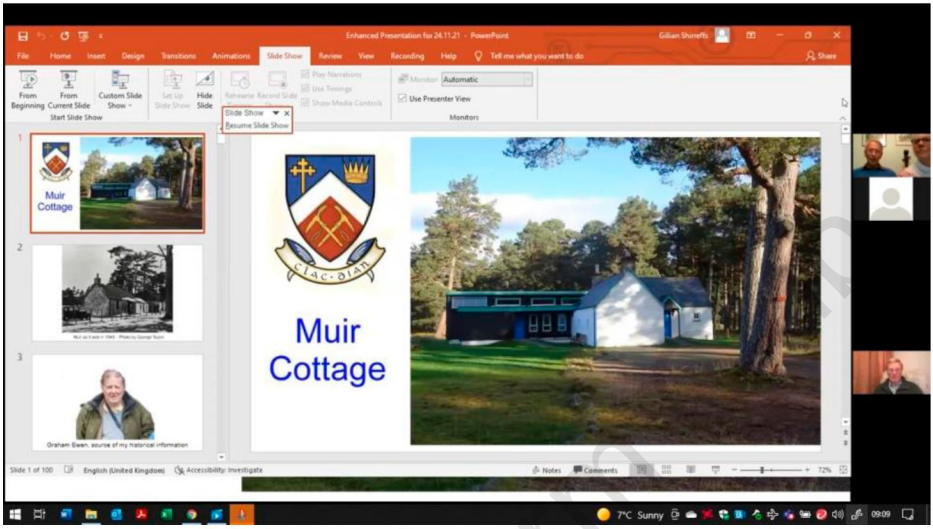
A couple of emails to the Committee, and I was running a sample Zoom talk for them on my cross-country skiing exploits in Norway in January. Though I think that some committee members may have been doubtful about the idea, I was given the go-ahead, and the first official Cairngorm Club Virtual Indoor Meet was held on Zoom on Wednesday 15th April 2020, when that habitual volunteer, Rod Campbell, talked about a Via Ferrata trip in the Dolomites. This event was attended by some 31 attendees, a promising start to the venture. The series continued fortnightly thereafter, until we took a break at the end of June 2021, after some 29 sessions. Just as with a normal Indoor Meet, members were able to "bring along" friends, so raising the Club's profile. Numbers attending gradually increased, and from counting faces on the screens (photograph 1 the following page), I ended up counting screens, with us reaching an all-time high of 47 screens for a talk about a ski traverse of the Pyrenees. While most of the attendees were Club members living in Aberdeen or

Aberdeenshire, folks living in distant Edinburgh, Inverness, Nethybridge, Chester and even Germany attended on a regular basis.

1. Screenshot of Club Zoom talk. Eilidh Scobbie/Mike Duguid

I was able to record the sessions, and so showed them as repeats when asked, and with assistance from Mike Duguid, they are gradually becoming available on YouTube. The full list of our Zoom talks to date is set out below.

The speakers at the Virtual Meets were a combination of the people whom I had asked to give talks at our monthly indoor meets, and volunteer Club members (photograph 2 the following page). While my experience is that only a few people brought photos along to Members' Nights, members have risen magnificently to the challenge, and some 28 have been involved in our Zoom talks so far, ranging from trips to the Himalaya, to a tour of Aberdeen's Blue Hill, and everything in between. We have also been able to access speakers from India and South Africa, something that we would not normally have been able to afford, and their tales have added to our experience under lockdown. Aboyne member, Doug Riach, facilitated Club Members joining some of the Zoom talks in the Aboyne & Deeside Heritage Society programme, including a fascinating presentation on Bob Scott (the Mar Lodge gamekeeper) and one on the rebuilding of the Fife Arms Hotel, Braemar.



2. Screenshot of Club Zoom talk on Muir Cottage Eilidh Scobbie

For much of the time during Lockdown, these Virtual Indoor Meets were the only form of Club activity permitted, as we were initially limited to exercising within 5 miles of our home, and any trips to the hills were banned because it was impossible for the Mountain Rescue Teams to carry out socially distanced rescues.

At the start of Lockdown, not many people had participated in Zoom meetings, so I ended up giving training sessions to both speakers and members wanting to attend. For some reason, though only a couple of lessons ahead of the others, I quickly got a reputation of being a Zoom expert – I would have called myself a "have-a-go Zoomer". In order to avoid the risk of Zoom "bombing" and undesirable activities, we adopted the now-standard waiting room device. So that everyone could check that they would appear with a name that I could recognise, I opened a Zoom room for a whole day. Half-way through the morning, I thought I had better check if it was working, and found one member on the Zoom screen, who told me what a fine time she had been having, chatting to the various Club members who popped into the Zoom room to check their name. So out of that chance conversation came the idea of having open-house Virtual Coffee Mornings, on the week between the Zoom talks. Though only about a dozen members – all retirees – regularly attend, it has been a time for lively and stimulating conversation.

The response of members to the Zoom talks has been very encouraging, and out of the basic concept of running Virtual Indoor Meets, the program expanded not just to the Virtual Coffee Mornings, but also to a Virtual Dinner (with guest speaker Peter Cairns giving an impressive presentation on Re-Wilding, private dining in the Zoom Break-out Rooms, and the usual toasts), a Christmas Party (with competitions and quizzes), a Virtual Burns Supper (complete with our current President piping in the haggis, a massed committee "Address to the Haggis", the conventional Toast to the Lassies and Reply, and a collective "Immortal Memory"), a virtual AGM, and photographic competitions; Colin Brown judged the entries to the Xmas photographic competition, and Rhona Fraser's wining image of bog cotton graced the Club's Christmas Card (photograph 3 below).You name it, we have tried and experimented to the full with all the options that Zoom can offer.

3. Club Xmas Card Photo Eilidh Scobbie

When Club member Hazel Witte died suddenly, a few weeks after giving a Zoom presentation on "Exploring the Silk Road", we had a morning when we exchanged our memories of her – the Covid rules at that time permitted only a few of us to attend her physical funeral, but it seemed right to mark her passing in this way.

With the country reopening in summer 2021, our autumn calendar advertised hybrid events – our talks, Dinner and EGM and AGM happening in Aberdeen for those who were able to attend in person, and on Zoom for everyone else. These hybrid events presented me with new challenges, learning to handle the audience on screen, as well as that in the room. Our 2021 Dinner was particularly memorable, as it clashed with Storm Arwen and some 13 members and guests were caught out by the storm and texted or phoned with their apologies. Power cuts meant that not all those booked to join us on Zoom managed to attend. Fortunately, the speaker had arrived early, and our power lasted the evening.

I think that our Zoom events have given members the chance to see each other, to be supportive to those faced with challenges under lockdown, and best of all to talk of adventures in the hills, and to spend time with like-minded people, without the word "Covid" featuring. For me, it has given me a new – but hopefully short-lived – career.

2020

April	*Rod Campbell*	*Via Ferrata in the Dolomites*
	Sue Chalmers	*Walking in the Canadian Rockies*
May	*Lydia Thomson*	*Italy: Mountains and Flowers*
	Gill Shirreffs	*Greece: not just Beaches, Sun and Blue Seas*
June	*Dave Kirk*	*Ski touring in Norway and the Cairngorms*
	Anindya ("Raja") Mukherjee (Calcutta)	*Kellas Peak Revisited*
July	*Judy Middleton*	*Looking back at adventures in Skye*
	Club Members	*Photographic Challenge*
September	*Mike Duguid*	*Photography in the Hills*
October	*"Raja" Mukherjee (Calcutta)*	*Nanda Devi: How the Goddess Kept Her Secret*
	Mike Duguid	*The Cumbria Way*

November	*Susan Jensen*	*Mountaineering on the Edge of the Tibetan Plateau*
December	*Graham Ewan*	*Climbing in Scotland Pre-Lockdown*
2021		
January	*Iain Campbell*	*From the Lion's Mouth: Travels in Kashmir and Tibet*
	Stuart Message	*Some Interesting Climbing Experiences*
February	*Steve Kentish*	*Trans Pyrenees in Winter*
March	*Susan Jensen*	*The Silk Road revisited - Kashgar*
April	*Colin Brown*	*Munro Compleation in Covid Year*
	Peter Aikman	*Boat Building*
May	*Keith Milne*	*Alpine style in the Karakorum Range*
	Rick Allen	*Exploring the Mountains of Central Asia*
June	*Neil Cromar*	*Mountain Sunrises and Sunsets*
October	*Paul Fatti (Pres, Mountain Club of S.A. 1986-1995)*	*Risk and Reward in Mountaineering*
	Peter Aikman	*My Involvement with the Mountain Bothies Association*
November	*Richard Shirreffs, Robbie Middleton and Kees Witte*	*Muir: The Club Hut*
December	*Anindya ("Raja") Mukherjee (Calcutta)*	*Life in Covid as an Indian Mountaineer*

Eilidh Scobbie, Social Activities Secretary

MUNRO COMPLEATION

MARJ EWAN

My first Munro was Carn an Tuirc on 22nd March 1992. It was a cold winter day; I still remember it well.

I never actually ever intended doing all of them and it wasn't until I had only 50 left that I decided I had better compleat.

It's been a great journey meeting so many fantastic and interesting people on the way.

I compleated on The Saddle from the Forcan Ridge on Wednesday 8th September 2021. It was a beautiful sunny hot day.

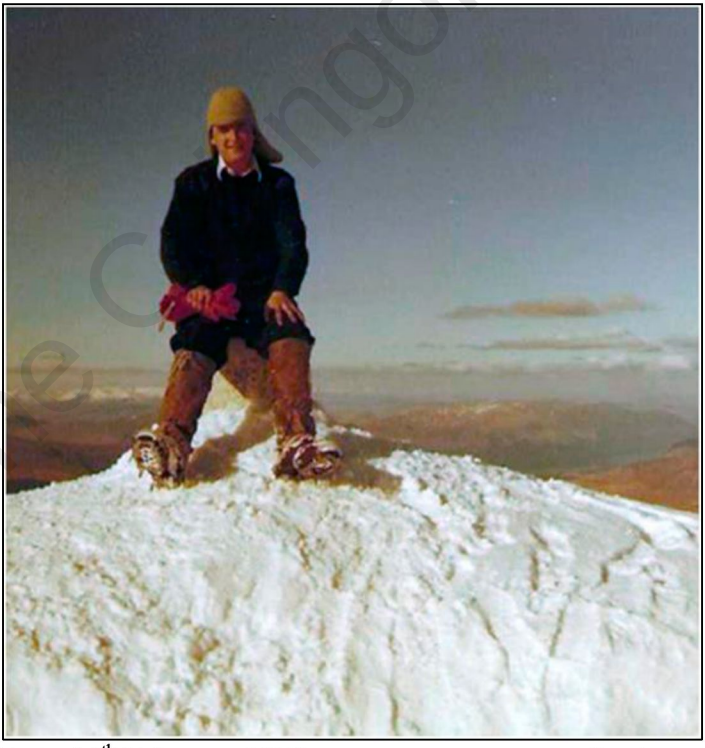
Marj Compleating on the Saddle 2021 photo attribution unknown

A COVID YEAR COMPLEATION – A MUNRO JOURNEY FROM BEN NEVIS TO MULL

COLIN BROWN

In 1979, and indeed until around 1998, I had not heard of 'the Munros' and little did I know back then that an ascent of Ben Nevis would lead 41 years later to my Munro compleation in Mull during a global pandemic.

My Munro journey began while I was working as an invoice clerk with Grampian Regional Council. The Divisional Road Surveyor for Kincardine and Deeside at that time, John Adams (a member of the Club and Munro Compleater) called me into his office to ask if I would like to take up one of two places given to the Council by Outward Bound, on a three-week course at their Loch Eil centre, near Fort William. I agreed to go and on Wednesday 14th Feb 1979 in brilliant sunshine, with the mountain covered in snow, I ascended my first Munro, Ben Nevis via Coire Leis (photograph1 below).



1 Ben Nevis 14th February 1979 attribution unknown

Although I thoroughly enjoyed the day and the sense of achievement, it was around 18 years before I went up another '3000-footer'. This was in 1996/97 (exact date not known) and it was Mount Keen via Glen Tanar. Lochnagar was climbed the following year and in 2000 I was given a gift of Cameron McNeish's book 'The Munros'.

Back then, with no intention of ever Compleating, I, then Doris and I, set off on walking trips just enjoying parts of Scotland we had never been to before. The Munros around the Cairngorms, Arrochar and Crianlarich were some of the first.

Quite soon it became obvious that we required some navigation "training" so I bought the excellent Peter Cliff book, Mountain Navigation. We also attended one of Club member, Malcolm Duckworth's excellent navigation courses at the College of Education at Hilton. It was also about this time that Garry Wardrope, who I worked with, suggested that I join the Club. I learned a lot of hill-craft from other members whilst partaking in Day Meets, then run by Graeme Ewen.

Armed with this new knowledge I felt confident to venture out alone and for several years went on weeklong bagging trips (usually in May before the midge appeared) logging sometimes up to twenty summits in the week. On several of these trips I joined volunteer work parties on the Loch Quoich Munros, organised by Lea McNally, son of the writer of the same name. The remainder of these years were spent picking up a few more first ascents and repeating some climbed in May, with Doris.

After 3 years, in June 2003, I chalked up my 100th Munro. We decided to ascend Ben Hope to see the mid-summer sunrise from the summit, before heading to Orkney for a short holiday. However, it drizzled all the way up and the summit was in cloud from sunrise so all we saw was a faint glow to the east. We did however partake in a small bottle of Champagne, and strawberries and cream, on the summit.

As the years progressed, I still had no intention of Compleating, as I had heard horror stories of the Skye ridge (from sane people!) and its eleven Munros. Also, work and life have a habit of getting in the way.

I became more involved in the Club and started to go on Weekend Meets and Overnighters on which I was able to get to some remote locations and pick off the Munros. These included Knoydart and Glen Affric where some of my best days and nights on the hills have taken

2 The Saddle in Glen Shiel Colin Brown

place. I also particularly liked the Glen Shiel area (photograph 2 above)) where over twenty Munros are within easy reach of Ratagan Youth Hostel and Morvich. Three Overnighters saw me pick off eleven Munros, three of which I had done before on the south Glen Shiel ridge. It was not all Munro bagging, however, with another memorable Overnighter seeing four of us go over Meall Mheinnidh & Beinn Lair on a traverse from Poolewe to Kinlochewe.

Approaching my 50th I tried to get up to 200 Munros by my birthday and this I did with only days to spare on Stob Ban (photographs 3&4 on the following page) in the Grey Corries from the Lairig Leacach.

After 2010, my pace slowed considerably as we chose to undertake walks on long distance paths, and abroad in Mallorca, Poland and Corfu. At the time I had reached 200, I had also made successful forays to Skye and remarkably, in only two trips, I had done nine of the twelve Munros,

3 Stob Ban, my 200th Munro Colin Brown

4. Selfie at the Summit of Stob Ban Colin Brown

including the In Pinn. This was climbed during a memorable week with a mix of Cairngorm Club and Turriff Hillwalking and Mountaineering Club members. These mountains are best done in fine weather, and we certainly got that on the trip. This left three on Skye which were done on Club meets in 2014 and 2015, the latter trip seeing my total Munros reach 258 and, with that, thoughts that a Compleation was possible.

To get to this total involved many camping and bothying trips, camping for the Fisherfield 6, the southern Cairngorms hills, Carn an Fhidhleir & An Sgarsoch, and a few at Derry Lodge. Bothies used included Ben Alder Cottage (no ghost seen!) and Culra on a 3-day trip, and also Bendronaig for Lurg Mhor and Bidein a' Choire Sheasgaich. Many other bothies were visited, and I also made good use of Scottish Youth Hostel Association establishments.

Days in the hills are not always a bed of roses. In my twenty years of walking the Munros I made many winter ascents, however, turning back was sometimes the best option when alone, as on An Gearanach in the Mamores (photograph 5 below). I also had my fair share of wet and blustery summits in all seasons of the year.

5 An Gearanach Ridge. Colin Brown

As I crept towards the final few Munros some remote summits were picked off, notably Seana Bhraigh and Mullach na Dheiragain. At the start of 2019 with nine still to do I began to hatch a plan to Compleat on Ben More in Mull on my 60th birthday. The aim was to do the other eight in 2019 leaving me 2020 to plan and contemplate my Compleation and celebrations in September. However, 2019 seemed to fly past with wet and stormy weekends and family commitments meaning that by the start of 2020 I had only done two of the eight required before Mull.

This meant the schedule changed to get the remaining six done in the spring of 2020; only for a little matter of Covid-19 and lockdown to scupper that plan. In the 3-4 months of 'movement restrictions' it was impossible to get to the hills I needed, and it was only at the beginning of August that a window opened for me to get out to them. In the meantime, I had decided to retire on my 60th so finished work on 7th August and was at the end of Loch Arkaig two days later for a round of four Munros. Sgurr na Ciche, Garbh Choich Mhor, Sgurr nan Corieachan, and Sgurr Mor were completed in a punishing sixteen and a half hours. This left the two Munros on the Aonach Eagach ridge to do. My pal Kevin who was with me at Loch Arkaig had been over the ridge a couple of times before and we agreed to go the following week to do it. However, he developed a painful knee after the last trip, so with days to go till we went to Mull, I went down to Kinlochleven and slept in the car at the Ice Factor. The next day I ascended both summits as up-and-downs from sea-level to make the Compleation possible as planned.

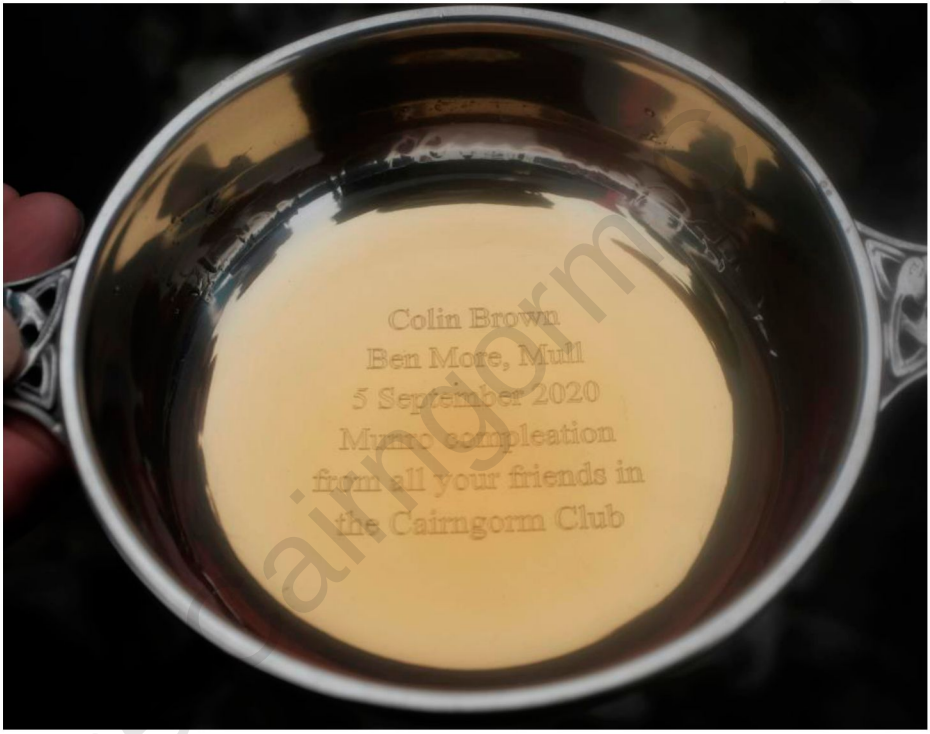
On the long-awaited day, a good number of family and friends, including the current and three past Club Presidents, were on the summit of Ben More to witness the end of my 'Munro journey'. I was very lucky with this as within days of getting back from Mull, restrictions were again implemented meaning the six weeks gap I had, and made good use of, was the only time in 2020 that it could have been done.

Over the piece, I have met and enjoyed walking the Munros with, family, Cairngorm Club members, Turriff Club members and others, making many good and lasting friendships. However along with this there is the sadness of those who are no longer with us, notably Club Members: Jim Bryce, Graeme McEwan and my good friend Satej Shirodkar

6 Guard of Honour 5th September 2020 John Kingsley

7 Ben More, Touching Stone, 5th September 2020 John Kingsley

What next, I am often asked, the Corbetts? No, I'm not going to go there but instead I think we will, at our leisure, revisit some Munros and hopefully go to ones we never got a view from first time round, in nice weather obviously! Also, the Aonach Eagach ridge is high on that list of things still to do.



8 The Toast John Kingsley

CORBETT COMPLEATIONS

Ken Thomson compleated his round of the Corbetts on 5th June 2021.

1 The Summit of Ben Aden Lydia Thomson

Lydia Thomson compleated her round of the Corbetts on Ben Rinnes on 29th July 2021.

CLACHNABEN FOOTPATH

DONALD THOMAS

In recent years the Club has carried out repairs to the Clachnaben footpath. There has been a path here for many years, enabling generations of walkers to reach the summit tor on this fine hill. An estate track crosses flat ground ("Miller's Bog") from where several routes made their way through the plantation to emerge at the foot of the hill proper. From there, the most direct "desire line" ascended over peat, passing several springs. With continued trampling, the peat was much eroded with a progressively widening and braided path, as walkers avoided the soft, wet ground. In the mid 1990's, the late Jim Maison, a walker from Forfar, realised that the state of the path was largely due to visitors and had little to do with estate activities. He set about tackling the problem. With several other walkers drawn from local clubs, he formed a trust which was supported by Aberdeenshire Council, Scottish National Heritage (SNH) and Texaco. Over the following years, the trust funded contractors to repair the worst of the damage. The landowner, Charles Gladstone provided accommodation for the workers and had three pedestrian bridges constructed where the landrover track fords streams. He favoured a single line along the lower edge of the woodland, which had the benefit of views of the summit along the way (photograph 1 below).

1 The Tor in Sight Donald Thomas

After several years of work, it was time to tackle the boggy section on the open hillside. Rather than stabilise a line through the peat, the decision was made to re-route this stretch of the path, taking it onto firmer ground a little closer to Mount Shade and re-joining the "old" route once the tor was clearly visible.

Too steep in places for an aggregate path, much of the new section is stone pitching. Most work on the hill was carried out by hand, with a power barrow and limited use of a mini excavator. Some of the stone for drainage features (photograph 2 on the following page) was moved from elsewhere on the estate by helicopter. Once the full length of path was in good repair, little maintenance was carried out, beyond removing fallen trees and occasional clearing of cross drains (photograph 3 the following pages). The hill remained popular with successive generations of walkers, with an estimated 10,000 visitors per year. The estate established a small car park in a former quarry, replacing roadside parking.

In 2017, the Cairngorm Club was alerted to the need for some fresh work. Several sections were eroded and there was a further fallen tree. Metal pins, once securing logs at the side of the path, now protruded into the walking surface in several places. The Club successfully applied for a lottery grant, enabling a detailed survey (by the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland) and the priority remedial work (by ACT Heritage) to be carried out. The Club, North East Mountain Trust and Ramblers Scotland made additional financial contributions towards this work. Volunteers from the John Muir Trust NE Scotland local group have cleared drains on several occasions.

The estate has recently (2021) changed hands and we await an indication of the new owner's willingness to allow or support further work. One section is badly eroded, another is often wet and recent storms have brought down trees on the path (photographs 4&5 on the following pages).

The author also recently contributed an article on Mountain Path Construction published by North East Mountain Trust (Mountain Views 84, Autumn/Winter 2021/22).

2 Stone Pitching Donald Thomas

3 Cross Drain and ditching (funded by the Club) Donald Thomas

4 Path Erosion awaiting repair Donald Thomas

5 Fallen Trees (2022) Donald Thomas

WALKING UPHILL

KEN THOMSON

"Strange as it may seem, mountaineers strenuously avoid going uphill unless their objective is a mountain top."
H. W. Tilman, *Mischief Among the Penguins*, Ch. 11.

It is of course difficult to scale mountains without going uphill, which some may consider to be healthy exercise, but others regard as a necessary but painful prelude to standing by the cairn or waltzing along a level ridge. In an effort to assist the latter group, the following hints are offered to ease the process:

1. *Route*: Mountains quite often have several sides, and your approach can often be varied, at least in places, to take account of the wind, terrain, views, etc.
2. *Topography*: Some prefer Cairngormsian convexity, with the slope easing off ahead, if often reluctantly, while others prefer concavity, steepening until one pops out at the top.
3. *Slow down*: It is better to keep moving, however slowly, than to "stop for a rest". If you stop, do so only as long as it takes to draw breath, and no longer.
4. *Zigzag*: This varies the view, and, by altering the angle, the pace, if wished. It also reduces erosion and makes it easier to keep an eye on those lagging behind you.
5. *Posture*: Clasping hands behind one's back maintains posture, and encourages a steady, gentle pace. It also makes one look confident and authoritative.
6. *Stride*: Though perhaps better suited to established trails than to rough Scottish hillsides, the "Indian step" of pushing forward at every fifth step is one way of increasing the pace.
7. *Think*: Balance between physical and mental activity can be improved by reciting to oneself a half-remembered poem or song, or by proving in one's head that the square root of 2 (or, better, 3) is an irrational number.

8. *Look Ahead*: One does not want to miss the views (see *Zigzag* above) but paying close attention to the stones and plants underfoot can ease the walking and inform the mind.
9. *Poles*: Considered essential by some but a nuisance by others; can also erode paths. Take your (mental, not physical) pick!
10. *Stop at the Top*: It's not compulsory to freeze to death at the cairn; choose a more sheltered spot within 50 yards or so.

"There is no easy route up it [Mount Kenya], but much virtue may be got from a mountain without climbing it."
H. W. Tilman, *Snow on the Equator*, Ch. 4.

ADDENDUM

Crossings Extra: Additions & Amendments since Publication in Early 2018

Following the article "Crossings in the Cairngorms" in the CCJ no. 112 (2018), the following items of information have come to hand. More will always be welcome!

1. At the Falls of Tarf into the Tilt, where the Bedford Bridge now is: "A stone bridge had been built here in 1770, but it was deliberately demolished by the estate in 1819 to discourage access through the glen" (from "On the Trail of Queen Victoria in the Highlands", by Ian R. Mitchell, Luath Press, 2000, p. 63).
2. In 1930, there was a "new bridge built for carting wood, at the junction of the Clunie and the Dee" (presumably over the latter), used by Club Members on the New Year Meet that year. (CCJ no. 69, 1930, p. 169-170).
3. In 1938, there was a footbridge – possibly the same as the one above – over the Dee at Braemar Castle, "a welcome short cut to … a luxurious hot bath and an enormous breakfast in the Invercauld Hotel" for Club members who had "completed another interesting outing", i.e., a wet night at the summit of Ben Avon. (CCJ no. 80, 1939, p. 68).
4. In 1942, when the Club held an Easter Meet at the Inver Hotel, there was a "woodcutters' bridge over the Dee near the Hotel": this was probably built for the same wartime purpose as the "Canadian Bridge" near Muir, but, unlike the latter, apparently did not last as long, i.e., until the 1960s. (CCJ no. 83, 1942-43, p. 240).
5. Near the Shelter Stone, a "rough wooden footbridge was recently put over the stream [the Feith Buidhe] just above the loch" (The Cairngorms, by Sir Henry Alexander, 1928; rev. Dr Adam Watson et al., 1968). This was presumably in the 1960s, but the bridge has long since disappeared.
6. At some time over 20 years ago, there was a footbridge (still marked on the 2007 OS 1:25000 map, though long gone by then) over the Geldie near the current White Bridge. This would have provided a useful fall-back for parties crossing between the Tilt and the Dee in times of spate.

KEN THOMSON

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Benefield
Woodhall Lane
Ascot
Berkshire
SL5 9QW
williamsonjx@gmail.com
September 2021

Dear Editor

Further to Douglas Williamson's article *Murder in Torridon? A True Tale of the Mountains* (Cairngorm Club Journal 108, 2007); I was at Craig Youth Hostel the night Ian Fraser Simpson stayed at Easter 1962 while he was on the run between his murders of George Green by the A9 and Hans Gimmi near Dumfries. I am 'the mathematics student from a London College' mentioned in the article. The night in question was certainly memorable, made more so by the reports of Simpson's arrest in the national press in May. Until recently, when I came across Douglas Williamson's article, I had known almost nothing about the events after Simpson's arrest. Indeed, I had not seen any references to his night at Craig anywhere and began to think that I might never get corroboration of the story of that night at Craig.

Many of my recollections of that night are clear and agree with much of what is described in *Murder*. However, missing is the presence of another person at Craig that night. *Murder* confuses me with that person. Here is my story.

I had first visited Craig in summer 1961. It was a long way (for me anyway) north to the next hostel, and I ended up staying at Craig for the remainder of my walking holiday. Interested in returning the next summer, and Craig being a long way from a shop, I arranged with Bridget, the Warden, to meet at Easter in order to sow some vegetable seeds.

So, at the start of the Easter vacation 1962 I travelled by train and local bus from London to Diabaig and walked to Craig, spending at least the first night alone. A day or so later Bridget arrived with a colleague. Sometime later, maybe the next day, much to our surprise two men appeared, walking to the hostel down the path from Diabaig. They were

Simpson and Steve, who said he was at school in Oxford, and had hitch-hiked. Douglas Williamson's article confuses me and Steve.

I recall a few things about the discussions that night, conducted in the light of an elegant paraffin lamp with a tall glass. Simpson dominated the wide-ranging conversation. I don't remember a discussion about morality, but Simpson did talk about the A9 murder, which was much in the news, and, oddly, claimed that Phoenician remains had been found near Loch Shin. This last, Bridget, knew to be false. He claimed to be working for the Beinn Eighe conservation agency. Eventually we retired, the three men upstairs to the men's dormitory. The next morning, I woke to see Simpson furtling around in his rucksack. He said he was leaving and soon departed on his own. Steve did not go with him, and he may have carried on to Red Point. Ann Ross, a resident of Diabaig, whose father was a special constable in the 1960s was told of this visit to Craig, confirming the presence of Simpson's accompanying hitchhiker. It was thought in Diabaig that this visit to Craig contributed to the hunt for the A9 murderer, but there is no mention of such a visit in the published accounts of the investigation.

In 1963 I returned to Craig as Warden for the summer months: Bridget having married the colleague who gave us a lift back to Glasgow after Easter 1962. One of my hostellers was a doctor who stayed a few days. We walked the Liathach ridge from East to West, in good weather with strong winds on the long walk down into Torridon. Another day we climbed Mullach Coire Mhic Fhearchair. He was an excellent companion, and I am pleased in retrospect to have known nothing of Simpson's behaviour on Beinn Alligin and Liathach.

Yours sincerely,

John Williamson

THE NEW PRESIDENT

Garry Wardrope was elected President at the November 2020 AGM, in succession to Marj Ewan.

1 Garry on the Dubh Slabs, Club Skye weekend Marj Ewan

Garry writes "I was born and raised in Glasgow, with my first summit attempt at the age of 4 when I disappeared from a family picnic in the Campsies and was eventually caught a few 100 m away heading to the top and returned to my grateful mother; so was born my love of the hills. My first visit to the Cairngorms was with the 1st Glasgow Scout Group on their annual September weekend expedition - The Lairig Ghru - from Blair Atholl to Aviemore, where we camped by the Club footbridge.

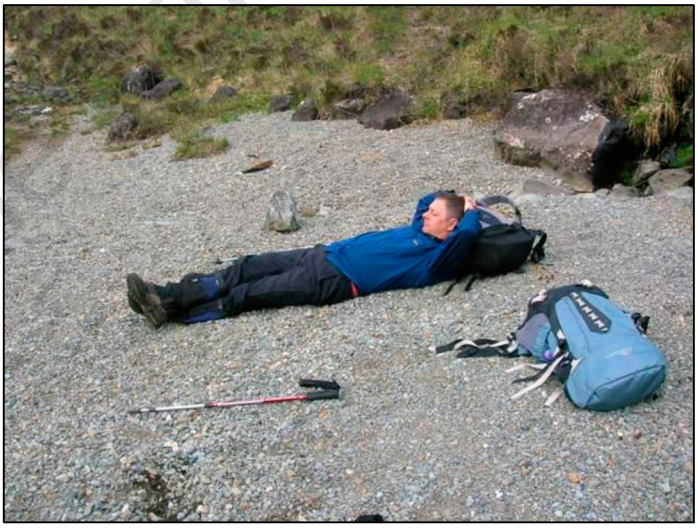
Later I took to evening climbs at the Whangie in the Kilpatrick Hills with the occasional day trip to the Arrochar alps before joining the Langside College Mountaineering Club weekend trips further afield. It was on one of these weekend trips to their Club hut at Altnafeadh that I

ascended my first Munro – the mighty Buachaille. It was a few years before I formally started Munro bagging, with an ascent of Ben Lomond in 1985 and quite a few more before completing them with the Club on Stuc an Lochain in 2017.

Work took me to the South of England, but my longing for the hills led me to start looking for a new job and I applied for a position with the Shire Council IT department and arrived for an interview on the sleeper from Euston. Needing somewhere to stay for the evening, the choice was 'obvious' – Gelder Shiel Stable, with suit stored in a locker at the station it was off to Deeside on the bus. From the bothy I had a great day on the White Mounth hills, returning to the far south the following day.

I took the job late in 1996 and just over 2 years later joined the Cairngorm Club, where I served twice as a committee member 1999-2002 & 2011-2014, was Newsletter Editor 2001-2003, then Communications Secretary 2003-2008. I took over as Day Meets Secretary in 2014 (and still have that job for my sins) and was Vice President twice, 2004-2007 & 2019-2020 before becoming President.

I have made many good friends in the Club and have collected some amazing memories along the way. It is an honour to now serve as your President and hopefully I'll manage to give a tiny bit back to the Club.



2 Coruisk Beach Marj Ewan

BOOK REVIEWS

Britain's Habitats, A Field Guide to the Wildlife Habitats of Great Britain and Ireland.

by Sophie Lake, Durwyn Liley, Robert Still, Andy Swash. Princeton Press 2020. ISBN 978-0-691-20359-1. 416 pp. Hardback £25.00

This book suits all readers – young, old, experienced and not so experienced.

It classifies habitats into 10 groups: Woodland, Scrub, Heathlands, Grasslands, Mountains, Rocky Habitats, Wetlands, Freshwaters, Coastal Habitats and Other. Each group is further divided, thus in the case of Mountains into Montane Dwarf-Shrub Heath, High Montane Heath and Snow-bed, Mountain Ledge and Montane Scrub.

Each sub-division covers a general introduction, origins and development, conservation, what to look for, how to recognise, when to visit with accompanying distribution and extent statistics, clear map and many well captioned photographs of flora and fauna. For example, Montane Dwarf-shrub Heath has 10 photographs covering Creag Meagaidh plateau, Cul Mor (Assynt) plateau, dwarf juniper, fir clubmoss, High Spy (Lake District), trailing azalia, dotterel, cloudberry, ptarmigan and Beinn Eighe.

The authors are experienced ecologists with graphic design and photography backgrounds which shows in the clear, user friendly layout and visuals. Together Sophie Lake and Robert Still founded and manage the Wild Guides series of books which include for example *Britain's Reptiles and Amphibians* and *Britain's Ferns*.

Appendices include lists of English and scientific names for flowering plants, mosses and liverworts, fungi, lichens, macro-algae, invertebrates, fishes, amphibians, birds and animals mentioned in the text.

If your experience is mainly in Scotland this book will not disappoint, since Scotland is fortunate in having a diverse range of habitats. Therefore, it will not take long to find a photograph you recognise. My recommendation would not be to read this book cover to cover but to dip into it at random and be fascinated by what you discover. Initially, I found myself trying to find as many photographs as possible of places that I had visited. I then became absorbed by the places I had not visited. Thus, the

book has become a useful resource when planning my next trip. The book would make an excellent gift, especially for the younger person. Once the book is opened the reader will experience new vistas and a greater interest in the world around them. For families planning an outing this could become a 'where to go next' book. Even those familiar with their local surroundings will get greater enjoyment and appreciation as habitats are explained and key features identified. At almost one kilogram this book is not rucksack friendly. It is, however, an excellent resource to be read on your return.

I recently climbed the Merrick, a Corbett and a County Top. Where the path moves from forest to montane a large stone slab has been placed. On my descent I placed my feet in the footprint impressions in the rock and reading the names of the two habitats I was straddling I looked about me, hoping others would do the same. Which section of your bookcase should hold such a text? My advice - leave it out! Encourage others to pick it up, dip in and see the delights it offers. For some it will bring back happy memories of places visited and friends they shared them with. For the eager, younger reader it will be 'When are we going?'

MARK PEEL

The Munros in Winter

by Martin Moran, first published in 1986 and recently republished by Sandstone Press 2020. ISBN 9781905207695. 273pp with a newly added foreword by Joy Moran. Paperback £14.99.

In 1984, the late British climber and mountain guide Martin Moran became the first person to conquer all the Munros (at that time a total of 277) in a single winter journey of 83 days. This book chronicles this incredible achievement.

It is chronologically split into areas, for example The Cairngorms Complete 17-21 February and Climax on the Cuillin 4-7 March. Each section gives lots of detail on the conditions, route, terrain and challenges encountered. At times diary excerpts of his own or his back up support wife, Joy's, add an immediacy to describe the mood or thoughts they were having that day.

Packing in their jobs in Sheffield and selling their home to fund the trip, Martin and wife Joy head for Scotland in a rented Ford Transit caravan. The aim is to complete the challenge between 21st December to 20th March. A window of ninety days holding the greatest probability of winter conditions. Bar the occasional company of friends Joy is the sole support crew for Martin on the trip completing 120 Munros herself in the process.

The couple undoubtedly experience all the weather that the mountains have to throw at them, at one point both are caught in a full-depth, slab-avalanche above Coire na Feola on Ben Wyvis.

From start to finish this book was an engaging read. Although the success of Martin's trip is known from the outset, I still felt drawn into both his highs and lows, those moments of self-doubt where a positive outcome seemed far from certain.

Martin's writing is humble and his passion for the mountains shines out through the pages. One particular highlight is the story of Joy and Martin's relationship. Three months living in a caravan, with little other for company, would be a test for any marriage. The bond between them is strong however and the affection and occasional squabble provide humour and a real lift to the writing. It's worth noting that in those pre-mobile phone days, a certain amount of telepathy was required for the caravan to be in the right place at the right time, on days when plans changed whilst on the hill.

An estimate of 1,028 miles of walking and 125,580m of ascent was required to complete the round. This averaged at 13.9 miles and 1700m ascent per day for the 74 active days not spent waiting out storms or resting.

I sometimes struggle to finish books these days so it's testament to Martin's skill as a writer that he was able to keep me engrossed to the end, including the appendices! The hand drawn maps added a nice touch to help visualise the routes taken. It's one to stay on the bookshelf and be re-read again and again.

IZY KIRKALDY

Regeneration: The Rescue of a Wild Land
by Andrew Painting. Birlinn 2021. ISBN 978 1 78027 714 1. 306pp, with 16pp of photographs, plus notes, references and index. Hardback £20.00.

This book, by the Assistant Ecologist on the NTS Mar Lodge Estate since 2016, will interest and please all members of the Club as it deals with many different ecological aspects of the estate, and the people working to conserve and enhance them. Its 16 main chapters, each of 10-15 pages, are structured into three groups: Woods (including roe deer, and grouse), Moors (including red deer, and hen harriers), and Mountains (including snow patches, and dotterel), plus an Epilogue (mainly about 'rewilding') and a final short Afterword on the year 2020, when "an overstretched National Trust for Scotland realised it was facing an existential crisis".

The main chapters mix personal experiences (e.g., "we work our way up one of the burns that falls off Carn Bhac"), some science background with references for those who want to dig deeper, and the relevant management problems being encountered by the Estate. This structure works quite well, although some items have had to be fitted in somehow (salmon within Moors, footpaths within Mountains), and other topics are largely neglected, e.g., the ecology of lochs, and the terrible trio of midge, cleg and tick. Humans come into it, of course, but from an ecological perspective (field sports, camping fires, wildlife disturbance) rather than e.g., landscape appreciation (other than by the author). However, many places familiar to Club members get a mention: Derry Lodge and dam, bothies (on the estate, not the Shelter Stone etc.), and "the wild land without pretension" of Carn an Fhidhleir.

The book has been widely praised for its content and style, and rightly so. From his inside position on the estate, Painting does not duck the difficult ecological, social and political challenges: only when it comes to the meagre public funding for nature conservation does his frustration show. Otherwise, the book is full of interesting information even to those familiar with the area, and it can be warmly recommended.

KEN THOMSON

IN MEMORIAM

RICK ALLEN

Many worthy obituaries were written following the tragic death of Rick Allen on July 25, 2021, in an avalanche on K2.

Rick joined the Cairngorm Club in 1982. He was also a member of the Scottish Mountaineering Club and belonged to the Cosmic Hill Bashers, an Aberdeen based hill running club.

In her *The Cairngorm Club 1887-1987*, Sheila Murray wrote *"three young members have been preoccupied with serious climbing and more arduous expeditions to the Himalayas*". The list of 3 included Rick. Sheila noted that all 3 "*will doubtless contribute more to climbing history and the next Club's history will surely have further achievements of theirs to report"*: in 2012 Rick and Sandy Allan climbed Nanga Parbat via the Mazeno Ridge which earned both a Piolet d'Or, Alpinism's highest honour.

Anne Cordiner noted him to be "*a quiet young man*" as recorded in Club Proceedings, CCJ 101. This did not stop Rick regularly attending Club Zoom talks and social meets and indeed giving a talk in May 2021 just a few months before his final trip to K2.

Rick died on K2 on a new summit route to raise money for the educational and health needs of refugees fleeing Myanmar via the Partner's Relief and Development Charity.

He is remembered by those who knew him as an extraordinarily kind and generous man as well as a daring climber.

ELIZABETH HARDY

Elizabeth was born in Hamilton in 1929 and grew up in Falkirk and Edinburgh before training as a teacher at Moray House College of Education. During her student days she youth-hosteled around Scotland by bicycle and spent summers working as an assistant warden at Loch Lochy Youth Hostel in the Great Glen, a defining point in her lifelong love of the Highlands.

After starting work as a teacher, she met her future husband Denis through the Edinburgh Mountaineering Club. A brief sojourn in the East

Riding of Yorkshire followed, but in 1967 they returned north to Aberdeen, where they both joined the Cairngorm Club.

Elizabeth was very involved in all the Club's activities; Ordinary Life Member since 1967 and serving three times on the committee, 1968-1971, 1973-1976 and 1977-1979. Her entire family spent many weekends and working holidays at Muir Cottage during the 1970s when Denis was Hut's Custodian. Bus meets were Elizabeth's great enjoyment, and she continued to join these meets for many years after her move away from Aberdeen to walk the hills in the company of her many friends who were Club members.

Elizabeth and Denis retired in 1984 and moved to an old croft above Beauly where they constructed an alpine garden, planted a lot of trees, and travelled widely in Europe and northwest America. Elizabeth cared selflessly for Denis throughout his long last illness, and she never lost her own youthful spirit, sleeping under canvas in her 89th year and still taking immense pleasure in walking in wild places and ascending modest hills.

Elizabeth died in January 2020 and is survived by her daughter, her son and three grandchildren.

ERIC F. JOHNSTON

With the death of Eric Johnston on 21 January 2020, the Club lost one of its most devoted members. Born and brought up in Aberdeen, he embarked upon a career in banking. This was interrupted by his war service; his spirit of adventure leading him to volunteer for the Royal Armoured Corps and to join the tank crews of the 4/7 Royal Dragoon Guards. His experiences of the D-Day landings were later to be the subject of a book which he wrote and were to earn him the French Légion d'Honneur as well as UK medals. He was amongst those war veterans who had their portrait painted by Catherine Goodman on commission from the Price of Wales; this now hangs in the Royal Collection in Buckingham Palace.

Resuming his banking career after the war, he took a keen interest in climbing. On a trip to the Alps, he met his wife-to-be, Joan, with whom he had a long and happy marriage and brought up two daughters, Sheila and Helen.

His career in banking led eventually to Eric becoming an area manager with Trustee Savings Bank (Scotland). He did not allow this to detract from his passion for climbing and the hills. In the early 1950s, before he joined the Club, and when there were no organised mountain rescue facilities, he assisted in occasional mountain rescues which happened to be needed where he was climbing. He joined the Club in 1954 and evidently made an immediate mark, as he took on the position of Meets Secretary in 1956, serving in that role for eleven years. During this time, he helped with the establishment of more organised mountain rescue facilities. Later he took on the Club Secretaryship for five years from 1967 to 1972. But his service with the Club was far from over, and after two terms as Vice-President he became President for three years from 1982-1985 and Honorary President from 1994 to 2003; he was also elected an Honorary Member in 1997.

On the hills he did much climbing, including new routes, with other members, but he also enjoyed just walking the hills, both with Club members and with his wife and family. He also enjoyed ski mountaineering, an activity which he kept up even into his 70s.

EDDIE MARTIN

Eddie was born in Middlesbrough on September 11th,1928, and brought up in York. He was a bright pupil at school, was a Scout, a member of the Clifton Church Choir and a founding member of York Mountaineering Club. Upon leaving school Eddie went straight into National Service after which he passed the Civil Service entrance exam and joined HM Revenue and Customs. Posted to Stornoway in 1949 he met a pharmacist called Irene who lived in the same digs, which they also shared with a young TSB banker called Eric Johnston. After Eddie & Irene married in 1952, the Martins and Johnstons were to become lifelong friends and between them they helped form over 60 years of Club history.

Eddie joined the Club in 1961 serving as Auditor 1967-70, Committee member 1978-80, Hut Custodian 1980-93, Vice President 1985-88 and President 1988-91. During his time as Hut Custodian, he was responsible for many exciting projects at Muir such as new heating, a new water supply and fencing off Pipers Wood. After passing on the baton of Hut

Custodian to Robbie Middleton in 1993 Eddie continued to take a keen interest in developments at Muir and was generous with his support and advice.

Eddie died on January 8th, 2020, leaving many with great memories of a gentle yet strong man, a good climber, a keen Club historian and a great friend and mentor to many.

Eddie and Irene leave daughters Jane and Susan and his son Andy, who is a Club member.

SHEILA MURRAY

Sheila was born in 1920 in Staffordshire where her father was a Vet. He died suddenly at the age of 53, a tragic event which affected the rest of Sheila's life. Following this 11-year-old Sheila, her older brother and her mother moved north to Aberdeen. Both Sheila's parents came from Aberdeenshire so coming north was a bit like coming home for the family, albeit in tragic circumstances. Most of Sheila's childhood holidays were spent in and around her parents' home village of Lumsden.

Sheila's close family consists of two nieces and two nephews and their families. Although they live in England, they were all introduced to the delights of Donside, Deeside and especially Muir Cottage. Their connection with this part of the world continues.

After graduating from Aberdeen University with an MA Sheila completed teacher training and her career as a Primary School teacher concluded with her retirement from Skene Square Primary School in 1978.

Sheila was introduced to the Cairngorm Club by a friend, Ethel Scott and developed close friendships with Anne Cordiner and Jean Arthur among others. Sheila joined in 1953 and was a member until the time of her death in 2020. Sheila was involved in many work parties at Derry Lodge, the Club's base before Muir Cottage. Three years after joining Sheila was elected to the committee. She served three terms on the committee before being elected Vice President and then in 1970 Sheila became President. After 27 male presidents Sheila had the honour of being the first lady President! She made new members feel welcome and while in office always made sure everyone on the bus had someone to walk with. In 1972 she presided over the opening of the reconstructed Muir Cottage.

In 1976 at the AGM Sheila presented to the then outgoing President, Sandy Black, a beautiful Presidential badge of office. The centrepiece of the badge is the club coat of arms with a Cairngorm stone above. Each president since then has been proud and privileged to wear the badge on formal club occasions.

As well as time at Muir with family and friends Sheila spent a lot of her holidays on trips abroad, usually cross-country skiing or walking, including trekking in Nepal. She visited North Africa, Australia, North and South America, the Azores as well as the many of the mountain areas in mainland Europe, including Switzerland, Austria and Italy. These foreign trips started in the 60's when foreign travel was a bit of a novelty. Nearer home Sheila compleated her Munros on Ben More in Mull in 1985, being No 449 on the list. When trips to climb the hills were no longer possible Sheila enjoyed time spent close to the hills such as the one described by her good friend Donald Hawksworth in CCJ No 109 entitled "Gourmandising in Skye" where good times and good food was shared with Donald, Leonora and Gordon McAndrew and Alan Bell. In the same issue of the Journal is Sheila's excellent account of her trip to Cortina in the Dolomites at the age of 89 along with a group of Club members. Other interests included attending orchestral concerts in Aberdeen's Music Hall and Sheila was an enthusiastic supporter of the national rugby team.

To mark the centenary of the club Sheila took on the momentous task of writing a wonderful book entitled "The Cairngorm Club 1887 - 1987". This contains a huge amount of information about the Club and its place in the development of so many hill going activities, especially Mountain Rescue. The book is out of print but from time-to-time copies appear for sale on-line and in second-hand book shops.

Sheila often said that joining the Cairngorm Club was the best thing she ever did in her life. Those of us who have benefited from her friendship and appreciate her massive contribution to the Club could only agree.

Sheila died at home in April 2020 within weeks of her 100th birthday, those close to her miss her greatly. A life well lived.

NORMAN SHEPHERD

Norman was born in Aberdeen in October 1947 and died on 8th December 2021.

After training at Gray's School of Art he spent his entire working life in Aberdeen first working for Mearns and Gill latterly as Head of Graphic Design and then in a self-employed capacity.

Norman joined the Cairngorm Club in 1971 and remained a member until his death in December 2021, just after receiving his 50-year membership certificate. His creative flair provided the Club with many illustrations, prints and paintings, most memorable being the watercolour on the wall at Muir (1971), (see page 111) and his detailed drawing of the Shelter Stone reproduced in a limited-edition print run of 200 for the Club Centenary (1987), (see page 112).

Although active in the Club for a relatively short time he was a very regular attender of Day Meets with his friend and colleague Guy Scott. In the days before weekend meets Norman and Guy were part of a group who regularly went to the hills for weekends away, camping or staying at Muir or other Club huts.

Norman was also a climber and one of a group who helped several members reach the summit of the "In Pinn". Norman and Guy did much of their climbing in the early days on Skye and in Torridon, which became Norman's favourite place. They and two other climbing friends also went to the Alps where Guy and Norman were successful in climbing the Matterhorn with a guide.

On as well as off the hill Norman was excellent company, his quiet sense of humour never far from the surface, an excellent attribute on long walkouts or when the going was getting tough.

Although latterly no longer an active Club member, Norman continued with his love of the hills, getting out with his family and passing this love on to his daughters, one of whom is now Munro bagging.

Norman is survived by his wife Sheila.

HAZEL ANNE WITTE (NEE COUBROUGH)

Hazel who died suddenly on 16 October 2020 after a long fight with cancer, was born in Glasgow in 1943 and grew up in a Lanarkshire

farming family. She obtained her teaching qualification at the Moray House College of Education in Edinburgh and her dietitian's diploma at the Glasgow and West of Scotland College of Domestic Science, starting off as a dietitian at the Bridge of Earn hospital. In 1967, she was appointed (at the age of 24) as Chief Dietitian for the Grampian Health Board, where she remained until retirement in 1992. In 1977, she was awarded a Winston Churchill Fellowship to study nutrition in surgery and intensive care in Sweden.

Hazel joined the Cairngorm Club in 1976 and took part in many weekend meets in Scotland. She also started travelling the world, with treks in Morocco, Nepal, the Sierra Nevada, Peru, Iran and Mongolia. She was a committee member between 1987 and 1990, and Editor of the Club journal from 1990 to 1999, producing the first computer generated issue (no. 103) in 1994. Hazel herself contributed articles in Issues 99 ("*Food Intake and Endurance Events*"), 100 ("*Food for the Hills*"), 107 ("*Enjoying CIA - the Club Alpino Italiano*") and 112 (*two articles on the botany of the Glen Ey enclosures).*

In 1991 she married Kees Witte, a fellow Club member. She joined the Mid-Week Walkers, and with a small group of Club ladies had a yearly walking/botanising holiday somewhere in Scotland, Ireland or the Mediterranean. She loved her flower garden as much as mountain plants and was deeply involved with several community groups; chaired the local community council and the Friends of the Cruickshank Botanic Garden, edited their newsletters and organised the plant sales. When the local community bought out the Maryculter Woodland, Hazel surveyed the plants. She was an excellent cook and continued to travel the world (USA, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Jordan, Egypt, Uzbekistan) until shortly before her death.

The Club has also received notification of the following deaths:
Dionne Macmorran; July 2020, Associate Member 1997.
John Mutch; January 2020, Ordinary Life Member 1951.
Graeme Page; 24th January 2020, Associate Member 1969.
Eleanor M Young; 10th May 2021, Associate Member 1973.

Deaths occurring after December 2021 will be recorded in Issue 115.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CLUB

GENERAL MEETINGS

The 2020 AGM was held – for the first time – by Zoom, with 43 members attending. The Treasurer reported that Club membership had fallen from 361 to 334, but that the Club's bank balance on 30 September 2020 stood at £110,697 (2019: £100,586). The following were elected or re-elected as Office-Bearers: Ruth Payne (Hon. President), Garry Wardrope (President and Day Meets Secretary), Joyce Ritchie and Izy Kirkaldy (Vice-Presidents), Ken Thomson (Secretary), Donald Thomas (Treasurer), Kees Witte (Hut Custodian), Sue Chalmers (Weekend Meets Secretary), Stuart Message (Climbing Activities), Eilidh Scobbie (Social Activities Secretary), Colin Brown (Communications Secretary); and the following as "ordinary" Committee members: James Hirst, Mark Peel, Adrian Scott, Debbie Fielding, Ivan Hiscox, Jamie Vince, Susan Jensen, Mike Duguid and Stuart Dick.

On 10 November 2021, a "hybrid" Special General Meeting, with 37 members attending, was held to approve revisions to the Club's Constitution, mainly to enable meetings to be held in physical, virtual or hybrid form, and to simplify the holding of General Meetings. The proposed revisions were all approved unanimously. At the AGM immediately following, the Treasurer reported that Club membership on 30 September 2021 had risen to 338, while the bank balance on 30 September 2021 stood at £108,015, a sum which at time of writing is leading to several possible Club projects in 2022 or thereafter being considered.

Most Office-Bearers were re-elected, with the following replacements: Robbie Middleton (Hon. President), Ivan Hiscox (Vice-President) and Helen Russell (Weekend Meets). Mark Peel, James Hirst, Adrian Scott, and Jamie Vince all stood down as "ordinary" Committee members, while Susan Jensen, Mike Duguid, Stuart Dick, Craig Thomson, Mike Culley and Kolbjørn Akselvoll were all elected as new "ordinary" members. Honorary memberships were conferred on Derek Pinches and Dave Kirk.

MEETS

Due to the Covid-19 lockdowns in spring/summer 2020, and again in winter/spring 2021, with vehicle-sharing restrictions in place at other times, all Club meet programmes were severely disrupted, but the following subsections record what was nevertheless achieved. Throughout, the Club tried to adhere to Government and Mountaineering Scotland guidelines, e.g., keeping contact lists of meet participants for NHS "Track and Trace" purposes. Such a list was used once, in 2021.

DAY MEETS

In 2020, Day Meets in January and February were held to Lochnagar and Ben Gulabin/Carn A'Gheoidh respectively, and then in the autumn months to the Stui (Lochnagar), Loch Esk (Glen Clova), Culardoch and the Baddoch. In 2021, the Hill of Fare was ascended in April, followed monthly by Lochnagar, Glen Ey (instead of the Mamores, minibus hire becoming unavailable at the last minute), Faindouran (overnight camping), a Feshie-Einich Traverse (camping), a N-S Cairngorm Traverse, Carn Bhac, Morven, and Clachnaben (Bennachie being out of bounds due to windthrow after Storm Arwen) in December. On average, there were about a dozen participants on each of these meets.

WEEKEND MEETS

In 2020, the first three monthly meets were held in Muir for Burns Night, at Rothiemurchus for Winter Training, and at Corran, but all later ones had to be cancelled, mostly with bookings deferred. In 2021, meets were not possible until a camping/climbing meet was held at Achiltibuie in July, and thereafter meets were held at Sanachan in September, Glen Brittle in October, Corran in November, and the Raeburn Hut near Dalwhinnie in December, all proving very popular.

CLIMBING

After some indoor activity in early 2020, all meets had to be cancelled until Meikle Partans in August that year, and some separated City/Shire meetings outdoors thereafter. Again in 2021, formal meets could only get underway from late summer onwards, but these included two subsidised self-rescue training sessions.

MID-WEEK WALKS

The following table lists the Walks undertaken in 2020 and 2021, with blanks indicating months when planned Walks had to be cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions:

	2020	2021
January	Hazlehead – Countesswells	
February	Sands of Forvie	
March	Hill of Cat	Tom's Cairn/Lower Donside
April		Aboyne Circular
May		Carn Liath
June		Geallaig
July	Elrick – Tyrebagger	Ben Rinnes
August	Stonehaven – Dunnottar	Clais Fhearnaig
September	Morven/Monagowan	Millstone Hill – Mither Tap
October	Glentanar	Invercauld Circuit
November	Balmoral Cairns	Ballater – Cambus o' May
December	Brig o' Dee – Cults	Dunecht – Barmekin Hill

A restricted programme of "Lunch and Dauners" was organized by Ruth Payne, including Haddo, Dunecht, and Forvie.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Eilidh Scobbie organized the 2020 "Dinner" by Zoom (61 "attending"), with wildlife photographer Peter Cairns giving an illustrated talk on "Scotland: A Rewilding Journey". The 2021 Dinner was a "hybrid" affair, with about 50 attending at the new venue of the Royal Northern & University Club, and 10 or so joining by Zoom, both numbers being lower than expected due to Storm Arwen bringing down trees and power lines that evening. Steve Goodwin spoke on "Nepal: Everest to the Crystal Mountain (or 'from the ridiculous to the sublime')".

It was not possible to hold the traditional Club Barbecue in 2020, but in June 2021, after an appetite-whetting outdoor stroll above Peterculter, the next best thing – a waitress-served meal – was held under canvas at Kippie Lodge in Milltimber.

For Club "Indoor Meets", see elsewhere in this issue.

COMMUNICATIONS

Throughout the review period, Colin Brown maintained the Club's website www.cairngormclub.org.uk, and indeed extended it, e.g., links to a "Muir Availability" sheet, and to current Covid-19 guidance. The June 2020 Newsletter was cancelled, but 12 short "Bulletins" were emailed out fortnightly over that summer. The October 2020 Newsletter was reduced in length, and the February 2021 issue was solely in "electronic" format. In December 2020, the Club's email system was changed from Yahoo! to Google Groups. Due probably to much-reduced outdoor activities, the Members' Forum saw fewer posts, but by November 2021 had 177 members, 1300 topics and over 7200 posts. Facebook was well used by the climbers, and a Club Instagram account was opened.

MUIR COTTAGE

Kees Witte continued as Custodian, and in November 2020 Jamie Vince took over bookings from Dave Kirk. With Covid-19 lockdown, Muir was closed in March 2020, re-opening in July of that year to members only, with a 72-hour gap between occupations. Complete closure had to be repeated in January 2021, with re-opening in July that year. Accordingly, the number of bed-nights was 700 in 2019-2020, and 500 in 2020-21, compared to around 2000 in "normal" years. Nevertheless, modified Work Weekends were held in both years, and in May 2021 the kitchen worktops were changed to stainless steel (a big hygienic improvement), and new curtains were supplied to four of the bunk rooms. The trees planted a few years ago are coming along nicely, and plans are afoot to renew the electrics. Storm Arwen on 26 November 2021 cut power to Muir, to the detriment of parties who had booked in for the following two weekends, but thankfully caused no further damage.

FINANCE AND PROJECTS

After 21 years of service, Derek Pinches stood down as Hon. Treasurer and Membership Secretary in November 2020, handing over to Donald Thomas, a member of the Club since 1994, and a stalwart of several other outdoor organisations. Donald has had to cope with the shift away from cash, cheques and standing orders towards electronic bank transfers, and with the complications of Covid-19 meet cancellations.

In recent years, the Club has received substantial income – around £17,000 annually – from Muir bookings. This of course stopped with lockdown in March 2020, with only a limited period of re-opening in autumn that year. However, the Club benefitted from a £10,000 Scottish Government "small business" grant snapped up by Derek in June 2020, and in 2021 from a successful claim under its Business Interruption Insurance. More regular though diminished inflow restarted in summer 2021. Other areas of Club revenue and expenditures (including those on Muir repairs and improvements) have remained largely unchanged, except for significant flows associated with repairing the path on Clachnaben (see below), and production of the *Cairngorm Club Journal* no. 113 in 2000.

In Donald's other area of responsibility, it is pleasing to record a small increase in membership during the Club's financial year 2020-21, after several years of slow but steady decline, in common with other similar clubs. The reasons for the rise are unclear, but lockdown has clearly led to increased appreciation of outdoor activity.

In 2019, the Club received nearly £10,000 of funding from the National Lottery Community Fund to carry out repairs on the Clachnaben footpath. This path underwent considerable work between 1997 and 2004, when a new line was formalised above the Miller's Bog wood and onto the shoulder of the hill. It has stood up quite well to the boot-pounding of 10,000 - 20,000 people per year but needed further remedial work, including removal of metal pins protruding into the walking surface, removal of a fallen tree and formation of drainage, and a new surface at several damaged sections. After technical and cost estimates by the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland (OATS), the work was carried out in December 2019 – January 2020 by ACT Heritage Ltd. of Daviot. The Club contributed about £3000 from its own funds, with more modest contributions from North East Mountain Trust and Ramblers Scotland. At time of writing, a few more relatively minor repairs to the path seem desirable, and the Committee is looking into this. No other major projects were undertaken or supported during the period under review, but the Club did pay for a set of "droppers" to discourage bird strike on the fencing at Altanour and Piper's Wood, and the usual range of Club donations, subscriptions and training grants to members were made.