

Bothy life

Philosophy

Escapism



Bynack Stable..... Sadly, no more.....A memory

A fifty-nine-year journey and a treatise on human characteristics

A lifetime of mountain rambling

Scotland memories, interest and minutia

Dedicated to all the animals with whom we share planet Earth

In this modern age 'things' have changed dramatically. The internet, you tube, and endless digital aids have taken over from the 'medieval' equipment I had in my youth and early years. So very often all I had was an old Kodak Brownie 127 and a film with just 12 exposures. Pen and paper were the only other aids to recording.

I am fully aware that there are all sorts of technical 'goings on' out there. I have not utilised media, blogs, tweets, twitters and whatever these mysterious gadgets might mean.

This is merely a memory based personal experience. No clever IT input. Just memories.

Yes, it is all about memory. **My memory.**

PROLOGUE

The following tales outline the exploits of an ordinary person. I have read so very many books about epic Himalayan climbs and exploits that have often left me in awe and amazement. I am sure many other readers have also experienced this. Occasionally I have craved to read a story that relates to the climbs, journeys and ‘antics’ of a more down to earth person- yes an ordinary person. Whoever that might be.

Whatever aspect of life you might look at there is inevitably going to be a hierarchy of talent and achievement. So called professional football players earn obscene amounts of money to ply their trade whilst millions out there must be content with the pub Sunday leagues played on churned up local authority playing fields. The huge majority of us are not ‘superstars’ and to be truly honest I would never wish to be so. Whilst in the Marines I was reminded we were the jack of all trades. Not the master of one. Merely adept at a whole range of talents. This is how I want it to be for me.

I have been very fortunate in that I have managed to try an enormous number of different activities during my lifetime. Mostly I have enjoyed them but more importantly I have ‘had a go’ and gained so very much from doing so.

So back to what I was saying. Himalayan heroes are special, but they might well be a rare breed. Possibly a privileged breed. Out there are hundreds of thousands of ordinary people who really enjoy the joys of climbing the fells, hills and mountains. Maybe no particular epic tale but a massive story to be told and for others to read. Having ‘dabbled’ in travels to very high places and experienced summits such as Kilimanjaro, Vatnajokull and the Alps, and skied in areas as diverse as France, North America and even the Arctic circle I feel I do earn the right to say the hills of Britain are so very special.

Wherever I have been and whatever I have seen I can truly say that Scotland can beat it all. I now have no desire whatsoever to travel abroad. I do not even possess a passport. The mountains of Scotland are really within my heart.

In my following accounts, you will find both metric and imperial measurements. This is not an oversight but more an indication of my obstinacy. I have always disliked metric units. I am a foot and yard man. 3,000 feet yes. 914.4 m, sorry no. I have often given the measurements in the old-fashioned way.

If I have raised issues of controversy this is good. Nine years service in the Marines taught me all I ever needed to know about controversy. I don’t want my book to be an appeasement. I want people to disagree. I want people to think for themselves. I welcome controversy.

Richard John Cooke 2018

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bothy life

My bothy 'life' covers a very large span of time. Yes, in many cases 59 years is a lifetime. Some of my moments go back to the long distant past that is often called the pioneer period. These have been balanced by visits of a relatively recent timing. They have all been very special and all my memories are so precious.

I have recently read many books about the experiences of others who have experienced the bothy stopover. I found it so interesting because these good folks are mostly very young Time does not stand still and the encapsulation of bothy change is there to see for those who are bothered to look.

Philosophy

Philosophy is another issue. I was moved to look it up in my Oxford dictionary. It was an interesting investigation. "Love of wisdom or knowledge especially that which deals with ultimate reality." I did expect this. Then I read on further. "Study of principles of human action or conduct." Now I was getting closer. Humanity does intrigue me and on my long and lonely journey through the mountains I have had more than enough time to investigate human demeanour thoroughly.

It may well have started at university studying for my B.Ed. No more helicopters bombs and bullets it was now the time for considered thought and rational analysis. I looked hard into the context of where I was about to go. It is much easier to say what philosophy of education is not than to say what it is. I quickly discovered that most general comments about philosophical techniques were almost worthless. This was partly because the question, "what is philosophy?" is itself a widely disputed philosophical issue. I was going around in circles. The academic world, the world of human nature and my world of free, wild and open spaces.

Escapism

Escapism was easy.

With the passing of every year I saw more and more the actions, comporment and often-pathetic antics of so very many of the so-called superior species. So very many obsessed with the 'self' and needless consumption to obtain pointless gratification, whilst our home was slowly being torn apart by act of war greed or neglect.

The world is sick, and getting worse.

It is not only sick, but quite mad.

I wanted no part of it.

Did the bothy offer a momentary release?

For an interesting example of philosophical analysis see Appendix 2.

2. THE BOTHY

‘Half a lifetime’ ago

Corrou - where it all began

The bothy is certainly up there somewhere, hidden in this cursed blanket of cloud and sleet. I know it exists, but it is proving an elusive ally as I struggle over rocks and bog with ever increasing weary tread.

It was many decades ago when this experience played an important part in my life. I am now 74 years of age. Within a time scale such as this it is inevitable that a huge ‘bank’ of experience has been acquired.

As I look around at the world in which we live I have to admit that the whole fucking mess we have created makes me sick to the stomach. I apologise if my wording offends some people. There is much more to come and if this is the case maybe you should acquire a copy of a patronising party-political manifesto or better still a gentle, meaningless, shallow novel about empty pathetic shallow people.

Until somebody grasps the nettle and addresses the problems we all face humanity is almost certainly doomed within this materialistic rat race that is my definition of modern society.

When I was a little boy I often went out into our very small garden and lay down on the cool grass. I looked up at the enormous sky above me. After a little while my eyes became accustomed and I could see a massive tapestry of tiny stars. There were millions of them. Looking even closer more and more could be seen. Probably millions of them no longer ‘there’. It certainly put everything into perspective. It illustrated the pointless pitiful worry we have over every day personal concerns that in the total order of everything are so petty and insignificant. I looked closely at the moon. Really not a great distance away and in fact one of my first cars covered a distance that would have taken it there. I imagined the mountains on the surface; many of them even higher than Everest. And then what about the mountains on Mars. My mind ran riot. I suppose one-day humans will be climbing these heights. Only two hundred years ago the mountains on Earth were thought of as dangerous no-go areas. Look at the scene today. Everywhere people are scrambling and climbing to the summits.

Time does bring change. Not so long ago you were born, lived and died in your own village. In pre-Victorian times travel across our own country was well nigh impossible. America was an unknown landmass. Yet today our planet is such a small place and our attentions are turning to other places in our solar system. Anything that might be ‘lurking’ on Mars and other planets should well be feeling apprehension, as should have the Eskimo and Red Indian when the time of European expansion took hold.

We are moving forward and what today is science fiction will surely one day be fact. Who can tell what might be in a thousand years time. A jet fighter to Henry VIII would be as amazing as a 23rd century item might be to us. Even if we cannot achieve this ourselves, which ignoring self-destruct I am sure we will, what about others who might do it for us. Looking at a small ant in my garden I thought to myself that it was impossible for it to reach Australia. But what if it was to hitch a lift on a 747. It

certainly could reach the other side of the world. The ant would be borrowing our technology and our knowledge; but it could get there. Possibly we could be faced with such a situation, and maybe something else could help us progress by taking the long progressive 'sting' out of development. Help us jump forward in time. But often the arrogance of the human species takes a grip by thinking we know it all, that we are special. Maybe we are; maybe not. Maybe we are just an infinitesimal inconsequential in the cosmos. Conceivably life in the cosmos does not depend on the so-called habitable zone (habitable for us). Maybe other species thrive in what is habitable to them but not for us. Why do we always think we are the bottom line? Must everything be like us?

I think on and on. Am I getting anywhere?

Just for this one time I curse this infernal terrain. I had started late in the day and headed into Glen Geusachan. The rivers were running high and progress was slow. Once in the glen I moved between the impressive crags of The Devils Point and Beinn Bhrotain. This really is an impressive valley but, on this occasion, a frustrating one. I had to take off my boots to wade the river and all these inconveniences were 'eating away' at the time. Experience kept telling me of the importance of daylight in these deep winter days. You do not get much of it! I still had not decided in which order I was going to tackle the two Munros I badly wanted from this excursion. The conventional route was up to Loch nan Stuirteag and then over Monadh Mor and Beinn Bhrotain and back to the Linn of Dee. As I intended to stay in the bothy at Corroul I did not need this route. As the middle of the cold damp afternoon arrived I decided to make for the bealach between the two Munros and take it from there. The bealach (975m) is well formed but it was a steep slog up the rocks and scree to reach the depression.

It would be 'crime' not to climb both these mountains after all the effort so I stashed my rucksack behind a large boulder and headed up towards Beinn Bhrotain. Cloud was racing across the flat summit plateau, but I had little time to dwell. Just a one-minute stopover before I retraced my steps back downwards. It was here that I met the only person I had seen since I had left the Lairig Ghru path under the high crags of Carn a Mhaim. My fellow climber was also well behind schedule after climbing The Devils Point and contouring over to Monadh Mor. It had taken him a lot longer than the map seemed to indicate. A trap so many of us have fallen into and one that was going to provide me with so much difficulty in the coming hours. We chatted for several minutes before going opposite directions. The slopes down to my rucksack gave me further time to contemplate something I have often thought of throughout the long lonely journeys through my Munro ascents. I always climb alone now but I have met so very many fellow climbers over the years, many for the shortest of moments before we set off on our separate ways. I must admit this moment was somewhat poignant as the way ahead looked gloomy to say the least. Picking up my rucksack I negotiated the shorter rise to the summit plateau of Monadh Mor. It was now approaching 6 p.m. and I decided to make a direct descent from the top. (eastwards) It was very steep and there were a lot of crags to avoid and discomfort and danger were feelings that were very much at the front of my mind. However, I still think it saved time even though it was uncomfortable slipping and sliding down cold wet greasy rocks. On the valley floor, the darkness was complete as I made my way back towards the Dee. My mind was 'racing away' again. I thought of the poor souls on Everest in 96. They had summited far too late in the day and probably wasted too much time in celebration on the summit slopes. A massive storm was heading towards them and when they found themselves hopelessly lost on the South Col, just yards away from relative safety, they could not see and this led to the

sad demise of Yasuko and the horrendous disfigurement of Beck Weathers. Just a few minutes of the earlier wasted moments would have been so very valuable.

Moving east I was becoming totally frustrated. 2 km in darkness can seem a whole lot more especially when you are tired. As I reached the eastern end of Glen Geusachan I noticed a faint path swinging away to the south-east. This was not where I wanted to go. After another time consuming bootless wade, I realised I had at least 3 km. of pathless terrain to negotiate before I could reach the bothy. I decided that the best route would be to cross the Dee and pick up the path into the Lairig Ghru. This entailed another wade through deep waters and this time I just splashed in and struggled across to the opposite side. I soon picked up a path, but this was not the main Lairig Ghru path. Moving north in now utter darkness my spirits descended to an all-time low. Somehow, I lost the path. Knowing from experience just how clear the main Lairig Ghru path is just how could I lose the way forward. The ground was wet and boggy and at this point the river swings around in large meanders causing large detours to keep in touch with the fast-flowing water.

Desperation set in and I knew I was on the wrong side of the swirling waters.

I had to cross.¹

After another scary immersion, I looked up and could almost sense the dark towering mass of the Devils Point. A lull in the incessant sleet and a slight lifting of the mist and I could see it. The bothy was ahead and all the tribulations of the last hours faded as the prospect of relative comfort and warmth was so very very near.

Bothies are my escape I have often been accused of being an escapist when I go off into the hills. A weak person who cannot cope with the many problems of the so-called real world. Looking for a place to get away from it all and avoid having to make decisions and sort things out. But up in the mountains I am making decisions. I have to work out routes; and navigation through high places does require a lot of skill and common sense. No, I am sorry I cannot accept this criticism. I am not escaping from the real world. For me the real world is not the one in which we spend 90% of our time worrying about bills, work relationships and a leaky roof. The real world is up there on the hilltops doing what we were in fact designed to do. Walking, breathing taking exercise and enjoying the world in which we are fortunate to live. As a celebrated writer once noted; up in the hills the sheep are real (A Wainwright)

My 'salvation' was cold, dark and very empty. Corrou bothy of 50 years ago was by no means luxurious. However, it did have a roof and by 10 p.m. I was so very glad to be beneath its shelter. Total exhaustion swayed me against the tricky negotiation of peat bogs to the river and desire for sleep persuaded me from the inconvenience of cooking. Several swigs of navy rum from my hip flask and bits of hard bread would have to suffice as I spread out my sleeping bag on the cold earth floor and crept within to contemplate nothing more than total rest and escape??

¹ There was a bridge of sorts over the Dee at Corrou. After a drowning accident in 1950 a wire bridge was built in 1951. This entailed a telegraph pole being driven into the ground on each side of the river with 2 parallel wires slung between. This obviously required replacing. Dr. George Taylor of the Cairngorm Club and Aberdeen University designed an aluminium bridge that was built in 1959.

On my distant, desperate search for Corrou I knew of the wire bridge. However, I did not know of a replacement bridge. As my Marine Commando training was so very fresh in my memory some of the sadistic structures of the 'Tarzan' course and tree slung 'horrors' were still at the forefront of my memory. I certainly did not want a desperate wire slung river crossing in the middle of a freezing cold, dark, sleet ridden night. I waded the freezing waters. If only I had known, the bridge was there and had been for some three years.

Corrour has played many cards in my memories of the Munros. Looking back, I am amazed at just how much activity I have sometimes managed to squeeze into the 24 hours of a single day. In August 2002, I decided to return to the Cairngorms and renew my acquaintance with the high peaks of this often-desolate plateau. Leaving home (Lunt Village) I made very good progress up to and past Glasgow. The weather was okay, and I was continually considering options as I drove onwards. As I progressed towards Braemar and saw very reasonable weather I decided to ignore any introduction climbs and head straight to the Linn of Dee and take it from there. It was very hot in Braemar (80f+) and this should have set off alarm bells regarding the forthcoming weather I was to experience. Heat like this is invariably followed by monstrous summer rainstorms. I took my time getting ready amongst the trees and included enough gear for a two-night stay. No tent; this would have to be a bothy stop or a night out in the open. I left the car at 12.30 and cycled up the mountain track to Derry Lodge in serious heat. Leaving my bike behind the mountain rescue hut I set off up Glen Luibeg along the good track. No midges, in fact I hardly considered them. I forded the river just before the bridge (Luibeg Bridge) and continued around the south-east slopes of Carn a Mhaim. It was hot work and with a full load progress was slow. As height was gained the views opened even if the shimmering haze prevented distant glimpses of the Cairngorm mountains. Shortly before 4 pm I reached the top of Carn a Mhaim and looked along the impressive ridge leading eventually to Ben Macdui. The scene to the west was also impressive with the cliffs of the Devils Point showing up well. Far below I could clearly see the stones of Corrour bothy. I rested up for quite a while before setting off along the (unusual for the Cairngorms) ridge leading north north-west. The going was easy but there was still a serious amount of ascent to be undertaken. As I reached the col between the two Munros I considered making a brew using rather "dodgy" looking water in a still pool on a flat depression. However, as I was considering the merits of this a slight drizzle set in and I decided to carry on without refreshment. I climbed the slopes to the south-east of Allt Clach nan Taillear and slowly plodded on and upwards. I stripped down and put on just my cagoule. It was only a fine drizzle, but the humidity was extreme and it took a long time to reach the col at GR 996987. Here I turned north-west across the gentler slopes to reach the top of the second highest mountain in Britain. At first I was in cloud and mist, but eventually it began to thin and some reasonable views were obtained I could see over to Cairngorm and considered the route across the unforgiving plateau. A very dangerous place to be especially for anyone who did not have a good sense of direction and more importantly a good compass.

On Saturday November 21st 1971 a disaster of the most horrendous nature unfolded just some few hundred yards away from where I was sitting. It was an early winter and bitterly cold air streams had been blowing in from the north. A party of youngsters were carrying out an ambitious route march across the high plateau. Two groups had been formed and they had slightly different objectives before arranging to meet up at Rothiemurchus Bailey Bridge at 4 pm on the Sunday. Leaving the Cairngorm car park before noon on the Saturday the two groups intended to cross over the top of Cairngorm, Ben Macdui and down Allt Clach nan Taillear to Corrour bothy. The stronger group were to return the next day over Cairn Toul, Braeriach and Coire Gorm to the Sinclair hut in the Lairig Ghru. The second weaker group were to proceed direct over the pass to the Rothiemurchus rendezvous. As the weather forecast was not good alternatives were built into the plan. Hereby were sown the seeds of a disaster that chills the heart of any mountain person.

Both groups started together and after eating their packed lunches at Ptarmigan they split up. The stronger group of 8 teenagers led by Ben Beattie left first². Hindsight is a wonderful thing. If only they had all stuck together. The second group of 6 teenagers led by Cathy Davidson and Shelagh Sunderland left shortly after. They were seen on the summit of Cairngorm at approx. 1.30 pm They were also spotted slightly later heading for Cairn Lochan in weather that was getting progressively worse. This was the commencement of a scenario that was haunting in its outcome

Late on the Sunday Ben Beattie arrived back at Glenmore Lodge to report that Cathy Davidson had not made the 4 pm rendezvous. He further reported that after leaving Cairngorm he had met up with horrendous conditions on the high plateau and had been persuaded to implement an alternative plan. He reached the Curran bothy late in the afternoon and found it almost completely covered in snow. Once safely inside with his group he obviously considered the plight of the other group which were some time behind and almost certainly somewhere on the featureless plateau. Other bothies did exist in the area and he presumed that Cathy had led her group to the shelter of one of those. The night was awesome and in the morning the gale was even fiercer. So much so that after digging themselves out Ben took his group down the March Burn and eventually reached the rendezvous very late at 5.30 pm.

Cathy Davidson was not there. Obviously alarm bells rang but as in many cases the severity of the situation was not immediately realised. Search parties were sent out into the blizzard to check out several of the bothies in the area. It is just conceivable the existence of these bothies might well have diluted the real seriousness of the situation. 'Clutching at wild straws' might well be a consideration at this point. The following morning the party had still not turned up and now it was obvious something was really wrong. A helicopter was scrambled but it found flying conditions of the most serious nature. The terrain was checked without success and after a 30-mile detour caused by turbulence in the Lairig Ghru they arrived at Glenmore Lodge for further considerations. It was decided to fully check out the remaining bothies at Ryvoan, Nethy, Fords of Avon, St. Valery and Curran as well as checking out emergency routes of descent from the plateau. Nothing emerged and whilst over the storm swept plateau all that could be seen was a featureless expanse of powdered snow with a recorded temperature of minus ten. Almost at the last moment before return something was spotted on the ground and quickly it was ascertained to be a body; and what was more important it was moving. The next moments were traumatic in the extreme as the helicopter was put in grave danger whilst two crew were deposited a short distance away. The casualty was picked up and it was found to be Cathy Davidson in an advanced state of hypothermia and with frozen solid severely frost-bitten hands. She was totally confused but managed to indicate that the rest of the group were buried close to the point of pick up. In the ensuing rescue attempt seven more bodies were recovered but sadly all but one were dead.

One of the helicopter crew put this tragic event into final perspective. Mountain rescue members usually place bodies into bags and on this occasion as the crewman was kneeling on the cabin floor ready to receive he turned the bag over and could clearly see

² Having survived the 1971 disaster on the Cairngorm plateau Ben Beattie met his own fate some 7 years later. The 30-year-old instructor who had been married only six months fell more than 3,000 ft. while attempting a new route on the 24,391 ft. Nanda Devi East. A rescue team took three hours to recover his body from deep snow and he was buried on the mountain, His grave was marked by a simple cross.

the inside through a clear view panel. As it was placed on the floor he reached over to turn it around. He found himself staring into the open eyes of a terrified young girl.

I was certainly not suffering from cold but with an abundance of cloud and mist I was fully aware of the possibility of straying away from the desired route. Again, my mind was fully occupied. Eighty two years ago, the very spot where I rested was witness to a series of events almost as awesome as the tragic demise of the poor schoolgirls.

In May 1934 three men had reached the top of Macdui from Coire Etchachan. Initially the weather had been clear even if a rising wind was blowing in from the south. There has been some doubt as to the actual time that they reached the summit but there is no doubt about the tragic consequences that followed. One of the party, Charles Smith, had intended to descend from the top in order to reach Corrou bothy, whilst the other two, Norman Macleod and John Lawrie, were aiming to return to their rucksacks which they had left behind a marked cairn near Loch Etchachan. Tragically they had left their compasses within the rucksacks. Shortly after reaching the top they separated and went their different ways.

Charles Smith described how a storm rose out of a clear sky. At the inquiry Smith stated that they had reached the top about 9.30 in the morning. Very quickly into his descent the weather changed with a vengeance. As he was going down to the Lairig Ghru visibility changed as if a blanket had been dropped before his eyes. He could not see more than a yard in front. He had to walk with his compass held precariously and every now and then he slipped on the icy surface. In grave desperation, he wondered what was happening to Macleod and Lawrie who at that moment were very probably still on the summit of the mountain.

I sat there on the murky but generally mild summit and thought hard about the two poor souls who attempted a descent without a compass. The outcome was almost inevitable and led to the death of Macleod and the desperate trials of Lawrie in his attempt to raise assistance. My thoughts continually returned to the possibility of a storm arriving with such speedy and unexpected fury. I had always considered storms to give at least some warning but on reflection I could remember from my own summit memories many occasions when benign conditions disappeared to be almost immediately replaced by dark clouds of potential death. The list is compounded by endless Himalayan experiences when oncoming storms caused the demise of many of our top professional climbers.

All this contemplation was affecting me as I left the summit plateau sometime after 7 pm I traced my upward route back to the col but this time I descended alongside the stream (south-west). It was still drizzling, and the sky was very dull. I struggled on down and was so relieved to reach the valley floor and the well-marked path of the Lairig Ghru. My descent had been highlighted by the impressive views of the crags of Cairn Toul and I could easily make out the rising slopes to my right that ascended to the pools of Dee. Now on the valley floor disappointment set in as I found the path difficult to negotiate. It was very rocky with lots of standing water to overcome. It seemed to take a very long time to cover the 2 km. down the river valley to the crossing giving access to the bothy. As I approached there did not seem to be any movement in the environs of the shelter but just as I reached the bridge I noticed one person leave for probably a toilet break. I arrived at the bothy very damp and very tired. After all I had arisen at 5 am, driven 400 miles and cycled 5 km. with a climb up to 4,200 ft. Not bad for a 59-year-old.

I opened the door and was surprised to see two couples hiding under netting or whatever. Surely, I was not that much of an ogre. Suddenly they 'hit me'. The curse of Scotland; the dreaded midge. Until that moment I had not noticed them but now they were a thick cloud. More seriously they were inside and definitely in the mood for biting. I could see that the bothy could only accommodate 6, maybe 8 at a push so I set out my ground mat alongside the door. Tired though I was and hungry as well, after five minutes of getting out of damp uncomfortable clothing I declined to attempt cooking whilst being eaten alive. I just crawled into my bivvy sack and tried to get comfortable on the cold hard stone floor. One couple were in their fifties the other a young foreign couple.

I lay there desperately attempting to reach the blessed escape of sleep. I must admit I was inwardly cross that my co bothy folk had allowed this situation to accrue. Why had the door been left open? Why had not care been taken to keep the biting menace at bay? After all these were classic midge conditions. Damp, mild, no wind and food in the guise of people. Once again, my mind was back in top gear.

When I left the Royal Marines after nine years service in the 1960's I was often asked what I most missed now I was back in 'civvy' Street. My answer was always the same. Characters. Probably more accurately eccentrics. Within the services (1961) almost everyone was a character in some way or other. No-one seemed to have a 'normal' name. I was always Scouse and anyone from the good land up north was Jock. Wales added the 'Taffs' and a Janner was a native of the lovely land to the south west. Even surnames were eliminated. Clarkes became Nobby, Wright was always Shiner. Bungy Williams, Smudge Smith, Jumper Collins; the list was endless. Back in so called society everyone seemed to be almost similar. The greatest concern was the accumulation of pointless material possessions. Obsession for what might well be considered worthless junk when one considers the rape of the very home we all depend on for existence. A pretentious 4x4 BMW and a glorified house complete with wide screen television balanced against the beauty and necessity of planet earth without which none of these worthless items would be of any value whatsoever.

I had come to this bothy to get away from the shallow people of the crass urban sprawl that is inextricably spreading out to engulf our beautiful countryside. Why had my bothy cohabitants failed to do the simplest of simple tasks? Keep out the midge?

Maybe I was being cruel. Just possibly they did not realise that to give an inch to a biting midge is akin to a welcome mat with greetings of delicious food in the guise of fresh warm human blood.

The night was uncomfortable. That is putting it mildly. The elder man snored like an elephant on heat (if elephants do snore) and inside my bivvy sack it was muggy and restricted. Outside the biting midge patrolled with ferocity.

Daylight could not come quickly enough. I craved for sleep, but I wanted to be away as soon as possible. Early in the morning I crawled out to quickly get dressed. A quick brew and a pot noodle (horrendous !!!) were followed by a quick exit. I had more than my fair share of midge bites. The older couple were intending to climb Beinn Bhrotain whilst the younger ones asked me about Ben Macdui. I informed them of my previous evening ascent.

I made rapid progress up into Coire Odhar in an attempt to outrun the midge. It was hot and sultry even though it was still very early morning. I regretted using the bothy. With hindsight, a bivvy on the open slopes higher up would have been preferable. But this

was with later knowledge. The weather had stayed fine all night, but it might easily have been different. Just possibly an open night might have been pure purgatory penance. As I climbed to the top of Coire Odhar I could not but think of Baird and Barrie doing the same back in 1928 also in good conditions. For them the conditions were to turn with a vengeance and within the day they would be dead³. On reaching the top of the coire I cached my rucksack and made the short ascent to the summit of the Devils Point. This is a very good viewpoint and the slopes down to the south and east are almost vertical. On regaining my rucksack, I slowed down and did decide to have a brew. No midges up here and it was comfortable to sit in the warmth of the morning and enjoy a hot cup of tea. A 'cuppa' at 10 'ish' was more than appropriate as the way forward looked more than a little stroll.

Setting off again I made slow but steady progress until I reached the rim of the huge corrie (Coire an t- Saighdeir) with Cairn Toul rising on the far side. To reach the top the way was around the corrie rim and up the final steep slopes. Cairn Toul is an impressive viewpoint and after a long stop I negotiated the steep drop north-west to the col where I left my rucksack before climbing up the short slope to Sgor an Lochain Uaine (The Angels Peak.) The third Munro of the day was also an impressive viewpoint. The cliffs and plateau of Braeriach showed up particularly well and the descent and re- ascent was not too great even if the distance across the plateau would be somewhat tiring. At this stage, I was not really sure of my plans. One was to bivvy out at the Shelter Stone near Loch Avon, but this looked rather ambitious considering the long distances and ascent to be covered. To be honest I was fair 'bushed' and the thought of a long traverse across Braeriach and then Ben Macdui again dimmed my mind. Also, I could see ominous clouds gathering away to the south-east and distant rumbles of thunder were coming in softly from the direction of Braemar. I met a man and his son on the summit of the Angels Peak and they told me they had ascended from Glenmore and were headed back across the Lairig Ghru. They wanted to climb Cairn Toul on the way back. They also noticed the approaching dark clouds but as yet we were still in warm sunshine.

They went on ahead and I followed behind. I saw them climbing the upper slopes to the summit of Cairn Toul. On reaching the col I took up my rucksack and dropped down towards Lochan Uaine. I lost height quickly and kept looking up to the north-east spur of Cairn Toul and the route of descent of the other two. All around me were crags and cliffs but there was always a break in the wall and I descended at speed; always remembering that a slip here would be very serious indeed as I was well off any 'beaten

³ A story of more desperation and misery it is hard to imagine. On December 29th 1927 Thomas Baird and Hugh Alexander Barrie set off from Whitewell for an expedition into the heart of the Cairngorms. They intended to stay over at the lonely remote bothy of Corroul. The weather was doubtful, and a lot of snow lay in the Lairig Ghru. Once they left Whitewell they walked out of this world and were never seen again as living beings. The veil that was drawn over their sad lives was not quite as total as was thought. Almost like the strange, tragic and weird disappearance of Sir John Franklin and his doomed party in the search for the mysterious North-West passage. Small clues and notes had been discovered. A message in a cairn told of the horrors of Sir John's fate. Three months after the bodies of Baird and Barrie had been discovered a rucksack was found in the melting winter snows. Baird had kept a brief and almost illegible diary of their activities. It outlined the very misery of their stay in the by now very sparse and bare bothy. It was indeed a cold and cheerless place.

On the morning of January 1st, they left their cold shelter and set out on a return journey they would never complete. It was a bright if cold early morning, but wicked storm clouds were 'brewing' to the west. Their journey across the Cairn Toul- Braeriach plateau turned into a nightmare from which they could not escape. Barrie expired at the head of Gleann Einich just several hundred yards from the shelter of the upper bothy. Baird struggled on for another 3km before he too collapsed just a short distance from the safety of the lower bothy.

way'. A slope of scree facilitated a quick last descent and I found myself at the bottom at GR 970985 on the wrong side of the river from the main Lairig Ghru path. I rested up as I had noticed the other two higher up the ridge and I waited until they reached me. We had a long chat about mountains and whatever and during this talk it was more noticeable that the weather was changing. Even bigger rumbles of thunder were rising from the south-east and the sky was now a dark angry black in that direction. I jokingly remarked that this was 'my way'. I had made my decision and after all the height loss there was no turning back. My friends departed towards the north into the clearer weather that still graced the sky and left me to contemplate the long distance back to Linn of Dee. They crossed the river immediately, but I progressed downstream for a while which was a mistake. Eventually I had to cross and I got a foot soaking as further downstream there was a greater volume of water. I was annoyed but with what was to come this was indeed a minor irritation.

Reaching the track, I struggled along and passed Corroul bothy again. It is some distance from the path and of course on the opposite side of the river. I saw several people making their way towards it and thought to myself that I did not envy their midge ridden stay whatsoever. However, just ten minutes later I was turning the corner and walking into the bowels of an ominous storm with the sky by now a black cauldron of thunder and lightning. The path seemed to go on forever and it took an eternity to slant past Carn a Mhaim and I was becoming depressed. Thunder roared in the sky but as yet it was still dry. I was so glad to reach Glen Luibeg and declined the diversion to the bridge opting to make an improvised crossing. Certainly this would not have been possible a little time later. It was now that the sky 'caved in' just as I passed a tent on the riverbank with the occupants diving desperately for cover. The rains came, and it poured down in torrents. I had been fortunate. Within minutes the river became a raging torrent. I continued down the track and being wet I could get no wetter and so long as lightning did not strike me it was merely great discomfort. Never had I seen rain like this before. Not even in the jungles of Borneo or lower slopes of Kilimanjaro. As I approached Derry Lodge I was amazed to see a large party heading towards me going to where I had just been. It was a party of teenagers who were obviously with leaders. As I waited for them to file past I asked a girl at the end of the line where they were headed. She said "Corroul." I did not say anything. She looked very sad indeed and very, very wet. I knew Corroul was probably full as it only holds 8 or so and I had seen at least 4 people heading there earlier. The thought of putting up tents in a torrent like this made me feel very sorry. I later found out that they were on a Duke of Edinburgh award task. I can still see the sadness in the girl's face today. They were going to really earn their award on this evening. I reached Derry Lodge and took up my trusty bike and made the wet descent in thirty minutes. Arrival at the car was most welcome but here the problems really started in earnest. The rain cascaded down with greater ferocity and when I drove away the river was a raging torrent of broiling water. Just past Inveray the road was under two feet of water that was pouring off the hillside. A classic flash flood. More water than any surface could cope with. On my left was the roaring mass of water in the river and to my right a continual sheet of water was adding its strength to the flow. I realised that to stall here would probably be fatal. The water was over my car wheels and it was a nerve wracking 5 minutes before I reached higher ground and found a drier road surface. I drove on into Braemar and discovered all the accommodation had been taken and my only real prospect of a bed was the small hostel beyond Inveray. This meant another drive through the torrent I had just passed. On arrival back at this point I found the road by now impassable. I drove back and crossed the river by the bridge that leads to a private estate which was used by Queen Victoria many years ago.

This gave me access to Inveray and on arrival at the hostel I was delighted to take up the last remaining bed. This is a basic hostel. Outside loos, no showers and no hot water; but it did have beds, and this is what I wanted more than anything.

The next day there was little sign of the horrendous rains of the previous evening. It had been the flash flood of all time?

Corrou today has changed. Increasing numbers of people have led to increasing amounts of waste. This has brought about the problem of pollution and in the early 21st century the bothy was somewhat modernised with the luxury of a sleeping platform. It also has an attached long drop composting loo where it is hoped the rate of decomposing exceeds the rate of use Still the same bothy and still the same location but now a more practical unit considering the expansion of usage as the numbers of climbers increases year on year.

My long journey of bothy nights had commenced all those years ago. It had all started at Corrou and my lonely stopovers over a span of some fifty years were to follow. Memories. So very many of them.



Figure 1: Old Corrou bothy, some twenty years ago



Figure 2: Corroul bothy in the process of upgrade



Figure 3: New toilet at Corroul [2011]



Figure 4: The cosy interior of Corroul bothy [2006]

Corryhully – the good and the evil of the human race

Towards the end of my Munro journey another bothy epic took place. It had commenced with a somewhat frustrating day as I had only managed one of what is usually regarded as a two Munro ‘bag’. Leaving Glen Finnan with a full rucksack, shouldered with apprehension, I walked under the impressive viaduct and made progress along the estate track. The weather was okay, but the tops had a covering of cloud. After a ‘monsoon’ the previous day this was indeed Mediterranean weather. I reached Corryhully bothy at noon. and left all my heavy gear (sleeping bag, food etc.) I chose Sgurr Thuilm as my target and the ascent was made without difficulty other than the ‘marching’ of the clock. The onward ridge to Sgurr nan Coireachan is not a gentle stroll and there are many ups and downs. This was December and daylight was in short supply. A pity not to climb two Munros but a plan to climb nan Coireachan from Glen Pean sometime in the future more than compensated for the omission. After all it was not a race.

It was getting very dark as I reached the bothy. The interior was rectangular with a fireplace at both ends. Two wood benches provided sleeping areas, but the bare walls and stone floor gave it a cold feel.

I really did not have to stay. After all, the road was a mere hour away but maybe the morrow would give me the second Munro. And there was electric light in the form of a single bulb. As I reached the bothy a Landrover driven by the estate manager arrived. We had a long chat and he showed me how to switch on the electricity. I quickly went outside to gather some wood for the fire but it was not easy as everything was so very wet. I did find a few firelighters and commenced the onerous and probably vital task. I

was fighting a losing battle and despair was setting in. Another fifteen hours of this cold gloom was certainly no attraction.

I heard the Landrover returning. The estate manager brought me a bag containing logs and some cardboard. What amazing kindness. I must have impressed him or something as this was a lifesaver. I thanked him profusely and got to work on the fire. Ten minutes later I had a roaring blaze going. The oil residue in the bag gave the flames just enough boost to initiate the burn. I smashed up a very wet pallet that I had discovered outside and it was soon steaming away to provide future fuel for my lifesaving fire.



Figure 5: The warm end of Corryhully bothy

It was totally dark by 4.30 and tots of rum were accompanied by stew mushy peas and soup. By 8 I had nothing else to do and decided to turn in even though it would be a thirteen-hour sojourn. The fire had the bothy snug and warm. Well at least at my end. The other end was cold and very very damp.

By 10 pm The wind was rising. At first with serious gusts but eventually with frightening force that threatened to blow the windows in. This was accompanied by driving rain that even beneath the solid stone walls of the bothy was a continuous pounding on the roof. The noise of the periodic gusts did not enhance sleep and it proved to be a very long night. The fire had disappeared by midnight but within my sleeping bag I was not particularly cold.

The morning was awesome. The stream outside was a raging torrent and rain was sheeting down with a vengeance. Nothing could have persuaded me to ascend anything on this day. I kitted up and was away from the bothy by 10. Sgurr nan Coireachan could

wait for another day.

As I walked away on the solid surface of the estate road I thought back to the previous evening and the amazing thoughtfulness of my benefactor.

Every day I hear about events that almost terrify me. Things that human beings are doing out there. The massive levels of evil that can sometimes be attained. What is it about the human species? Capable of so much good and beauty. Capable of almost unbelievable achievement. The nuclear physicist. A brilliant surgeon and a musician with mind boggling skills on the piano, violin whatever. Consider Shakespeare, Chopin or even a fantastically talented sportsperson. Individuals with so much talent skill and expertise. The contrast is horrific. Certain beings are capable of despairing cruelty. Paedophiles, terrorists, murderers and people who have sub-zero consideration for just about anything else that might share our home on planet earth. The genius is relatively rare. The vast majority of us are mere mortals, whatever that might mean. I am attempting to identify the awesome gap within our species. The brilliant mind contrasted with humans living in an environment no better and quite likely much worse than those of thousands of years ago.

Could it be that just some of us are flawed? I considered the car production line. All brand new and shiny. Some will motor on for years and years whilst others will 'conk out' quickly much the disgust of the once proud owner. Good cars and the rogue vehicle. There are so many people on earth that it is inevitable there will be a huge range and massive hierarchy of talent.

If the gaps become too wide it is a sure thing that problems will 'roll in'. The privileged really should watch out. Millions are starving out there. Millions have nothing. Millions have nothing to lose. The history of revolution tells us what can (and probably will) happen. So, we must narrow the differentials. The rich must look out for the poor. But will this happen? I very much doubt it. Greed and self-interest will almost certainly play its hand. The self-imposed idea of self-importance.

But as individuals we are merely a drop of sand in an infinitesimal desert. Unfortunately, too many drops of sand. There are too many humans on earth and our planet cannot sustain this enormous increase. In my time as a teacher I used to teach about demography mainly to disinterested unconcerned youngsters who were more interested in boyfriends, football or their next night out drinking.

But if we do accept the present population to be circa 8 billion, unless the huge yearly increase is curbed we are in for big trouble. The power of exponential increase is awesome.

Consider a number. Let us pick the easiest.

Number 1.

If we were to double it and then double the result and continue to do this the number would obviously grow.

So what?

But imagine we do this for a while. Say 64 times. Not a huge increase, is it??

Have you any idea what the end number would be? Not too large surely. It goes like this.....

1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256, 512, and so on.

Do it 64 times.

The answer is eighteen and a half quintillion. The number is

18.5,000,000,000,000,000,000.

Try it for yourself if you have the time.

Right as I write this the population of planet earth is doubling approx. every 40 years.

See for yourself

2007 8 billion 2047 16 billion 2087 32 billion etc. etc.

Earth cannot sustain such an increase.

It cannot go on. And of course it will not. If there are too many numbers of any example species we as the “masters” ?? of this planet initiate a cull. Too many deer in Scotland? Our answer for the good of the species -cull them. Go out and slaughter them with guns. It is for their own good is it not? Or maybe it is a ‘cop out’ for people who derive pleasure out of killing animals with high-powered rifles. How brave!!

We must control population increase.⁴ The planet cannot host a never-ending increase in humankind. If we do not impose control nature will.

An asteroid collision

HIV

A tsunami of massive proportions.

We are not bigger than nature though we sometimes think we are. The arrogance of the human species ‘kicks in’ again. If we do not tackle the problems we are causing, we shall reap the results of our arrogance. Dinosaurs ruled for 180,000 years; yet they are no more. And sadly, if we foul up we take everything with us.

I reached my car very wet and very tired but very sure in my mind about aspects of human nature. Good, bad and downright evil.

I had survived my night because of a little goodness.

The problem of overpopulation is leading to an increase in anti-social behaviour as people in parts of our crowded planet jostle for space. Not only that, an ageing population puts greater strain on care facilities and raises the problem of who is going to pay for all this required service Schools are under immense strain as ever-increasing students (inflamed by large immigration numbers) just cannot cope.

I can remember back to the 1990’s, whilst teaching in Liverpool. An influx of refugee children were brought into the city. They obviously all required a place in an educational establishment. Most of the poor children were from Somalia and were completely out of place in their new environment. I can still see one such pupil who was struggling so hard to fit in without the necessary knowledge of the English language. I had to spend almost 70% of my time looking after this little fellow whilst other students from Garston, Allerton and Woolton were by requirement somewhat neglected. I shall never forget a staff meeting in which the headteacher praised the efforts of the teachers in carrying out this Government

⁴ Everything is ongoing. Time does not stand still. On the subject of population, I have just read an interesting article from someone who has recently passed out of the news ‘limelight.’ Jeremy Paxman was always known for his ability to skewer squirming politicians with his relentless questioning. Today (December 17 2016) he writes, “There are far too many of us crammed onto this planet, and some sort of sensible family planning is urgently needed “Paxman does not offer a solution to the problem that in reality affects us all. Does he really have to? It surely is acceptable for anyone to raise a vital issue without necessarily offering the way out.

policy of integration of students from different parts of the world. Yes, it was all so good and commendable but was it funded? No, it was not. I struggled within the classroom and so did all the other 'ordinary' teachers. I raised it all at a staff meeting with the grandiose opening.

"It is alright for the senior management and politicians to claim credit for what in reality is a commendable action."

However, it is the ordinary teacher who must carry out this policy without the necessary resources or considerations of time restraints. The reaction was as expected.

My promotion chances went out of the window.

To conclude with Paxman.

Why do all our bigwig conservationists talk about protecting the planet – none will talk about UK's environmental disaster – overpopulation.

Who cares. I retired and went mountain climbing.

Bynack Stable – company – solitude - awkward eccentricity?

Bynack More was one of the very few hills I have had to make two attempts to reach the summit. Whilst staying in Aviemore during a bitterly cold January I badly wanted this peak to complete the Cairngorm Munros. Very large amounts of snow had fallen over the previous days and the mountains were very much 'dressed' in winter attire. The going was fine until I arrived at Bynack Stable in good time. This was an old tin shed, windproof and weather resistant. The way ahead looked grim as clouds hovered at about 700m. and it was cold beyond belief. Why was I here??

Nevertheless, I was on time for an ascent before obvious darkness at probably 3.30 'ish'. After crossing the stream by the wooden bridge, I commenced the steep slopes in a south -easterly direction. At first there was a path of trodden firm snow negotiable with no problems. My spirits raised a little but after several hundred yards this optimism disappeared as the new snow cover became more comprehensive. Also because of the previous very cold temperatures no thawing or re-freezing had taken place. Everything was still fresh powder snow. Suddenly progress became ridiculously slow. Every two steps saw me sink up to my thighs in deep snow. It took huge efforts to extract myself every time it happened. By 12.30 I had been going for over two hours and was still only at an altitude of 650m. At this rate on this slope, with no change of conditions, it would take me hours to reach the final slopes leading to the summit. Depression and frustration set in. I was loath to stop but my current progress was only a hundred yards or so in thirty minutes. The weather was threatening, and no views could be seen above 700m. After a long stop and a calculation that I would still be high on the mountain when light faded I decided to carry on a little further to see if the deep snow would 'pan out'. Maybe it would have done so on the higher exposed slopes but for fifteen minutes I wallowed in deep powder making just 50 yards progress.

I decided I had had enough and turned back. Not often do I do this but I did console myself with the opportunity to make a closer investigation of the two local bothies. I ceased to climb just short of the plateau before the Lairig –an Laoigh path begins to drop towards the Ford of Avon refuge. About 1km. short of point 810m. GR approx. 037095.

The return was now leisurely and I had a good look at Ryvoan bothy. It is an impressive building offering good weatherproof shelter. Not for me on this occasion. I headed back towards Glenmore Lodge as darkness fell and the temperature plummeted. The weather

did not improve and at no time after I turned back did the dark cloud level rise above 700m. Bynack More had won this skirmish, but it bugged me greatly and a month later I was to return to exorcise this happening.

In the first week of February heavy snow had fallen all over the highlands and I could not resist. A superb ascent of Ben Challum was followed by a climb on Sgorr Dhonuill. It was on this summit that I “swam” through deep powder snow to eventually reach the cairn. I was rewarded with superb views over scores of snow covered tops. I drove to Aviemore hoping to partake in some ski-ing . If the roads had all been blocked surely the ski slopes must be well covered. When I arrived at 2 .30 pm I was amazed to see the Cairngorms not plastered in snow, merely patches spread out across the slopes. The ski reports were not good.

Where had all the snow gone? Apparently, the thaw of the previous night had taken away much of the unconsolidated snow and during the morning much more had evaporated. I was annoyed but nevertheless I drove to Cairngorm Lodge hostel and enjoyed a good evening.

The following day the weather was okay. A bit grey with a slight wind but the tops were clear especially the eastern part of the Cairngorms. I asked the lads in the hostel about ski-ing and concluded that it might well be restricted. Therefore, Bynack More was to be the target with the very real opportunity to erase my turning back on this mountain just a few weeks before.

I got an early start and left my car at Glenmore Lodge early in the morning. Walking along the forest track I noticed the snow was not as deep as it had been previously but when I reached the path break after the Ryvoan Pass my problems really started. My big dread had been the upper slopes being covered in the soft powder snow conditions I had found last time. Now it was the lower slopes that posed the big problem. The path was deep in slush with sometimes massive drifts alongside. This solved a lot of unanswered questions. Obviously, the wind had been ultra-strong during the blizzard and the snow had drifted into huge piles leaving other parts of the mountain almost clear of snow. This was the cause of limited ski. Plenty of snow indeed, but most of it was piled in one place instead of being spread across the whole piste. My progress along the track was very slow with 1200 metres causing such a long painful and very wet experience. I resorted to walking through the heather alongside the path to avoid the wet morass before the welcome sight of Bynack Stable was seen up ahead.

The mountain ahead looked okay and the outline of the Lairig an Laoigh could easily be made out as the snow cover up ahead was sparse. I made good progress where last time I had been struggling with increasing desperation. I reached the flat ground before the summit slopes and reached the top of my Munro just after noon. It was very windy and I was looking into the ‘bowels’ of the Cairngorms. Dark threatening and very ominous clouds were sweeping in to hide from view the highest summits. I sat in the sparse shelter of the summit rocks thinking long and hard, wondering just what it might be like out there on the wild and desolate plateau. This was a very lonely place to be and I wondered just how close to me was another human being. A long way away but this certainly did not concern me at all.

I arrived back at the ‘stable’ late in the afternoon as the weather took a further turn for the worse. Laying out my sleeping bag on the wooden bench I dozed away an hour in satisfied contemplation. There was even some hay lying against the side of the shed. No fireplace but the cold and angry wind was kept well at bay I blocked off the small gaps

at the base of the corrugated iron walls. I was happy and dozed away for longer moments.



**Figure 6: The tragic and lonely stable on route to Bynack Mor
Deep snow and a place of supreme contemplation. Sadly no more.**

I can take company or not take it.

To be truthful I prefer to be alone.

Solitude serenity and quality lone time.

Bynack Stable was the perfect place for me to think it all out.

I can still remember reading the words of my boyhood mentor the unique Alfred Wainwright. “Solitary fellwalking is often roundly condemned, not by solitary fell walkers but by non- solitary fell walkers, including coroners.”

So much advice is given that one must walk with others. Take one’s place in the middle of a sweating mass of humanity; the curse of the mountain scene; the large unwieldy group. The same is often said of lone camping, dossing or whatever. I am continually castigated for going out alone and sleeping out in the wilds often when no one else knows where I am. However, this is my choice. This is what I want. There is certainly more risk on a manic overcrowded motorway congested with sad pretentious egoistic specimens. Again Wainwright (a man of undeniable common sense) offers a valuable insight. He claims that the walker in a large group sees the mountains as prose. To the lone climber they are poetry. The lonely climber has nobody to talk to which Alfred claims is an advantage as there is no-one to talk back to him and interfere with

observation of the beauty all around. He concludes with the obvious claim that there is a huge difference between being lonely and being alone.

It was now totally dark and the snow was falling on my tin shelter as I spread out a layer of hay to rest my sleeping bag upon. My usual ration of alcohol brought within a definite feeling of warmth. I had food, shelter and safety. What more could one ask?

As the long night approached I delved further into the concept of being with others and the retention of links with other people. For many years after my school days I attended old boy's association events. Possibly at first this was because it was the done thing. But then I began to challenge the whole concept of this happening. Did I really want to see my past school chums in a state of wear and tear and sometimes much worse? Did I want them to see the obvious change in myself? I found that the answer was negative.

I stopped going.

The same happened with my membership of ex service societies. HMS Bulwark Association became the Bulwark and Albion as members passed over the bar and overall totals diminished. It eventually became the Light Fleet Carriers Association and by this point I lost interest.

I lapsed my membership of the Munro Society, The Joseph Williamson Society and even stopped going to my local pub because of the often banal and meaningless conversations that followed on and on.

The following day was glorious and blue skies stretched from east to west and north to south. I slowly walked back across the snow and heather stopping for an extended spell on the banks of Lochan Uaine before the delightful walk through the pines and a return to civilisation.

My recollections of Bynack Stable are very special. Sadly, it is no more as the whole structure was blown down in a ferocious storm in January 2005. It was ripped off its foundation and dumped 100 yards away upside down. My stopover had well preceded this fate and the controversy of the early 2,000's. The original hut had been burnt down many years before. It had always been known as Nethy hut or Pit Fyannich. Now the RSPB declared the tin hut surplus and wanted it pulled down. Many unsubstantiated claims had been made about the site being a cesspit and not dissimilar to a pigsty. I could never understand this. In my visits to the location I had always found it a delightful spot. Very few people ever stayed here. Ryvoan a much more substantial bothy was very close and a much more comfortable location.

I had only stopped at the stable because I wanted to assure my 'aleness.'

And anyway, I have always been a rebel.



Figure 7: Ryvoan bothy in deep drifting snow



Figure 8: The interior of Ryvoan bothy 15 years ago

Kinbreak – Man’s inhumanity to animals

I dislike the long and frustrating drive that takes you into true mountain country at the western end of Loch Arkaig. The road is very annoying as it is narrow and very undulating. It somehow seems to go on forever. Eventually Strathan is reached but this being a Sunday I found scores of cars parked up at the road end. I had now decided I was going to limit Sunday to a march in, to the lonely bothy at Kinbreak. Sgurr Mor could wait until Monday. Thus, everything was done at a leisurely pace and I drove back half a mile to find a satisfactory parking spot. It was after 11 am when I left the car in very hot sunshine and very high spirits. There are two routes that lead you into the remote Glen Kingie. In fact, this is a major problem involving an ascent of Sgurr Mor. There is a considerable distance to cover before you even put a foot on the mountain. I chose the route up Dearg Allt which was a very reasonable path being the right of way to Tomdoun. The heat was considerable and although the path gradient eased the way was long. On the wide flat bealach I met a girl who was ‘bagging’ Corbetts and we chatted for a full fifteen minutes. Sgurr Mhurlagain 880m to the right and Fraoch Bheinn 858m to the left did not tempt me. I made the long slow descent into Glen Kingie and arrived at the bothy at Kinbreak sometime around 3 pm.

The bothy was more than I had hoped. A solid construction with a cobbled downstairs somewhat cold and miserable. A ladder led to the upper floor which was wooden based with a fireplace at one end and space for many sleeping bags throughout. A large bench was situated in front of the fireplace and the whole room gave out an aura of welcome. I could imagine a lonely climber finding this a very welcome sanctuary in foul weather. Today the weather was glorious, so I sat outside enjoying the views across to Sgurr Mor and beyond. The bothy was well stocked with firewood and although it was not necessary I had decided I would light a fire later in the evening. The hours passed slowly by and for a pleasant change I was in no hurry to do anything.

In the late afternoon, I spotted another climber crossing the wide river valley and he appeared to have descended from the Corbett Sgurr an Fhuarain. He reached the bothy and it was good to share some company. It transpired he was on a long walk over these lonely hills aiming to meet up with a friend at the Quoich dam the next afternoon. He departed to put up his tent several hundred yards away but then returned for supper. We did light a fire and chatted away about mountains and bothies, politics and cars and girls and the weather

The full Monty.

My new friend departed to his tent and my bothy was both warm and welcoming and eventually offered me an ideal location for sound sleep.

Another glorious day followed and I was up early as I had a long way to go. Leaving the bothy, I walked over to say farewell to Rob. He was sitting outside his tent thinking about his route out and over Gairich. I set off up the valley following a good path. It was some three miles before I reached the end of the valley and noticed that the path began to ascend steeply towards the col between An Eag and Sgurr Beag. This was a great path to walk as it had been constructed in long easy zig zags. Height was gained without any real effort and the path that led up to Sgurr Beag was covered in super quick time. I looked all around me and found it hard to believe that this top was not a Corbett. I worked out the contours carefully. The summit was 890m and the first bealach was at an altitude of approx. 670m. Okay on his side and looking ahead to Sgurr Mor the intervening depression was about 740m. Obviously there was very little

in it, but the map people must have got it right. Sgurr Beag feels like a real mountain but mathematics denies it any true status. I geared up for the final ascent to Sgurr Mor where I happily sat and enjoyed the views of mountains spread out in all directions around me. I was aware I was coming to the end of this particular venture and wanted to make the most of this memorable moment. I had been on the go for well over 14 days and I was well tired from all the efforts involved. I looked ahead and could see two people descending the ridge and after setting off it was not too long before I caught them up. They were camping in upper Glen Kingie and like myself were in their 60's. In such a lonely place, it was nice to share some pleasant company. It really made sense to claim this Corbett (Sgurr Fhuarain) as this was such a remote area and revisits might well be rare. At 901m the summit was not far short of Munro status and it was a good viewpoint clearly illustrating the fact that just a shift of a mile or so gives you a totally different perspective of the surrounding terrain. Moving from the summit it is best to travel east for a distance as crags are in evidence all around the east and north of this hill. After a mile, I left the other two and made a direct descent steeply to the valley floor over frustrating and somewhat difficult slopes. Once on the valley floor I made my way back to the bothy where I rested up and watched the other two slowly negotiate the valley path back to their tent.

My bothy was still a lonely 'shrine' and I was determined to make the most of my last night in the mountains before a return to so called normality. After replacing the fuel I had consumed the previous night I sat down and made a very real effort to eke out my diminishing supply of alcohol. Three good gulps of whisky and then joy beyond belief as I discovered an unknown hip flask right within the bowels of my trusty rucksack.

No company tonight just thoughts and memories of my fifteen-day sojourn.

Earlier I had heard distant gunshots possibly within the valley but more likely beyond the watershed. Almost certainly stalkers were in the act of taking life upon the slopes.

I have always been an animal lover. I have written before that the world cannot be terminated by the frog or hedgehog; it certainly can by the greedy selfish human being. I fully accept that nature can be cruel, and this is indeed the intended way of existence. Birds of prey swoop on little mammals and cats torment mice. The list is endless, but the animal world does it for survival. Humans often do it under the obscene guise of sport. How brave to go out and slaughter beautiful animals so that the trophy can be exhibited as an example of achievement? Cave in a baby seals head so that some insipid, often-ugly woman can adorn her sad body with its beautiful fur. As Wainwright, wrote "It is a shocking indictment of humanity that wild animals and birds flee in fear at the approach of man who, endowed with superior intellect, abuses this gift by treating all other creatures as objects to be exploited as he wishes for his own benefit. Man is the bully, the biggest and cruellest predator of all."

If anyone still has doubts as to mankind's potential cruelty to animals do visit a slaughterhouse and witness the often-horrendous abuse many animals are subjected to in the final moments of their lives. Everyone seems to be delighted at the view of tiny lambs frolicking in a springtime meadow. Few realise that in just a few months time they will be subjected to a monstrous journey across the continent to have their throats split open to appease a foreign cultures desire for tasty meat.

I do eat meat, so hypocrisy is an accusation that I seriously want to avoid. There must be a better way of carrying out many human actions.

Just a week ago I read in a newspaper a comment from the wife of one of our England football players after scenes of violence within the stadium. She was quoted as saying “We were caged like animals and treated like animals” What a sickening comment. How arrogant. Animals should not be treated in any similar way. Compassion should be a concept for all living creatures.

Whilst climbing in the Alps I was in the company of other climbers and in the process of an evening meal conversation strayed onto the subject of animal welfare. One of the climbers was quite adamant and declared in no uncertain terms that animals had no importance whatsoever. They were merely here so that they could be used (abused?) by humans. This moron went to church every Sunday and attended mass whenever he could. Yet he was a total arsehole. Hiding behind the skirts of his sick religion to authorise his sick opinions.

God (if there is one) help him if his miserable existence should depend on my efforts for extraction from a threatening scenario. He would be well ‘fucked’, as I would be placing my care at the feet of a frog or hedgehog. Incidentally the latter creature is almost becoming an endangered species as so many have lost their natural habitat because we concrete over our beautiful countryside. Or they have been mown down and squashed by ever increasing motorists.

(Hedgehog population down from 30 million 1952 to 1 million today.)

Suffice to say that particular climbing venture did not progress as intended. I left the group, became a loner, and went my own way.

The final words go to Wainwright and they are words with which I totally concur.

“I have very little personal interest in what is going on in the world. I am a detached observer, not involved, keeping everybody and everything at arm’s length. I am unperturbed by wars and have no time for party politics. My hackles only rise when I hear of cruelty to animals. Man’s cruelty to man is not my concern I live in a shell of my own making.”

I could not have worded it better.

Barrisdale - there is nothing so strange as folk

The walk from Kinloch Hourn to Barrisdale is indeed a joy. The weather Gods were certainly ‘dishing it out’ as by 8 am the sun had been blazing out of a cobalt sky for many hours. The walk is not short and invariably people are carrying a heavy load for their potential stay at Barrisdale. There are many ups and downs as the path negotiates the shore side, however, the beauty of the walk cannot be denied. I met very many people who were walking out after their stopover and I kept my eye on the island Eilean Mhogh-sgeir as I made progress knowing that once I was just past this small islet I would be nearing halfway in distance. I passed the settlements of Skiary and Runival and eventually reached the point where the path drops down to the long beach of Barrisdale Bay. I had always wanted to visit this place and it did not disappoint me. Ladhar Beinn stood high above showing off her superb crags and corries. Once on the beachside path there is still a mile to walk to reach the few settlements, and by now I was tiring of carrying my heavy load.

The bothy was a revelation. It had taps, two toilets and plenty of room for sleeping.



Figure 9: The luxury of a toilet at Barrisdale bothy. Two in fact

There was obviously a group already in residence and I dumped my gear gratefully on one of the wooden benches and opened my bottle of wine. Just one large gulp was taken as I still had work to complete. Luinne Bheinn was to be the afternoon target. I watched with amusement as several lads pitched their tent outside the bothy. Certain difficulties were being experienced and we chatted in the warm sunshine. There were at least a dozen tents pitched on the small site. At 2 pm I set off for my hill along the good path that leads to Mam Barrisdale. I had walked to the bealach several years ago from Inverie and I was now about to link this last section of the Barrisdale -Inverie walk. Half way to

the bealach the lads who had been pitching their tent overtook me. They were on their way to Ladhar Bheinn but as my journey was shorter I was in no rush. I moved on south-east and climbed steadily upwards towards the complicated terrain of this very remote area. I actually walked past the summit ridge and climbed back to the Munro to reach the top cairn at 939m. It was gone 5pm and I lingered long on this fantastic viewpoint. The ridge or scramble over to Meall Buidhe looked every bit as 'scrambly' as all the guide books state. Knoydart stretched out beneath my feet and I was so pleased to be in this magic place.

The evening in the bothy was spent with good company and the chat and banter went on well past midnight. My bottle of wine was very gratefully consumed.

Bothy people are good. At least that is my opinion. Just possibly there are some less than good bothy people out there. Very probably there are many who consider me a loose cannon with my often very controversial views on just about everything in life today.

Sleep was difficult even after loads of physical effort. I had carefully observed the folk of the bothy as the pleasant evening had unfolded. Now I went a little further in my investigation about human characteristics.

There is nothing so strange as folk!

Have you ever watched people in your own supermarket in the process of buying just a newspaper? I have, and it intrigues me. Why do so many people not take the paper at the top of the pile? Why do so many delve into the lower levels in order to extract their purchase? It is a mystery. (Some have claimed it is done because the top copy might be spoiled, torn whatever.) I carried out my little research in Sainsburys by watching thirty good folks buying their Daily Mail, Times or Mirror. I had already placed the top six copies way beneath. 24 picked their paper from deep within the pile. Only 6 took the top copy. Can anyone help me work out why this is so? A mystery of human nature.

But why.

Supermarket car parks offer another insight into the mysteries of human nature. So many people insist on parking their often 4x4 monsters as close to the entrance door as possible. I always park at the very periphery of the car park for two very valid reasons. It is safer for the future of my car (dints and dents) and it offers just a little exercise as I make my merry way across the car park to make my purchases. Meanwhile the 'close to door parkers' waddle out their often-fat bodies with their fat bloated kids to purchase their often crap unhealthy food.

Why?

So often in these troubled times tragic events occur at an ever-increasing pace. Sadness reigns supreme and so very many people see their lives almost ripped apart with grief and concern. Many of these 'incidents' have nothing to do with nature. They are initiated by humankind and are so very preventable. These problems must be tackled at source. Investigate the causes of these evil acts. Prevention is better than so-called cure.

My great concern is what happens after these troubled events have taken place.

Horrendous accident. Put down flowers

It will be okay.

A terrorist atrocity of a magnitude unimaginable. Put down flowers.

It will be okay.

A perverted human being abuses the rights of another human in a manner almost too sick to relate.

Put down flowers on the victim's grave and it will be okay.

Then this.

“Our hearts go out to the victim's families, their loved ones.” Of course they do. This goes without saying from basically decent people. Then we further hear “Say a prayer and it will all be okay.”

Yes, these actions are harmless and to so very many people understandable. It might even alleviate some of the personal pain and misery. But does it really? It really is not okay. As I have said it is far better to get rid of the cause rather pander in ineffective floral gestures. With these the only real winners are the florists Do we do all this floral crap to appease our consciences? Do we do it because everyone else does it?

If so then we are in a bigger mess than I feared.

Human beings can be so very strange.

Many years ago, I was enjoying a climbing session in the superb mountain area of the Glen Shiel valley. Three days of 'horrible' weather were to be replaced by a week of super forecasts with endless blue skies and massive high climbing potential. I was with others and my car driver stated that we were returning to the cursed low lands of Merseyside. I did not have an option. On requesting an explanation, I was informed my driver was playing golf on Wednesday. Golf? Hitting a silly little white ball around in an effort to get it into a silly little dark hole. Golf can be played just about anytime but superb mountain weather is often a rare commodity. No mountains, just a return outside my control that lead to my personal promise to always climb alone so that I would now be in control.

Sleep was so difficult. I thought on.

Very recently there was a bad accident several miles from my cottage. The road was blocked and all the frustrated motorists were desperately seeking ways around this problem. Just outside my house there is a lane, but it has been closed for well over two years. Two large signs indicate this fact and one clearly states, “Road Closed”. I stood at my gate and was amazed and amused that car after car ignored this advice and progressed down the lane to be met with the inevitable consequence of a difficult narrow lane reverse to negotiate a return. How sad and how pathetic. A lot of them were in flash cars. Brain dead idiots who refused to accept what was blatantly obvious. No more common sense than lots of things lying at the bottom of ponds.

One of these drivers said to me on return “Oh the road was closed.” Of course it was, you banal clown, the sign says so. One even said, “Well my sat nav said it was okay to go down it “(the road)

I despaired.

All interesting stuff and another illustration of how bothy time can stimulate contemplation. I had thought so long into the night that the following morning saw a late rising. The sun was shining through the bothy window and the world was in very good shape. I shared my breakfast with the bothy folk and prepared for my journey back

to civilisation. I had enjoyed it all and particularly the company of one young lady who was just a dozen Munros from her ‘completion’.

Yes, bothy people are okay.

Unexpected passion in a bothy setting!

Claire had reached her refuge early and was happy to do so as the weather was turning with a vengeance. Lairig Leacach in 1990 was not the Lairig Leacach of today. Claire negotiated the steep steps leading to the tidy first floor and laid out her sleeping bag. The lower part of the bothy was cold and miserable but soon a ‘buzzing’ primus not only provided heat but also offered nourishing soup.



Figure 10: Lairig Leacach bothy 20 years ago

Claire ventured a sip of warming whisky from her welcome hip flask. It was only 4 pm but did this matter. Already darkness was slowly encroaching upon the vale.

Claire had climbed in from Glen Nevis and had somewhat underestimated the length of the approach. She had been glad of the dry conditions for this would have been a damp approach if conditions had been different. As all bothy occupants have experienced at some time or other she did not know what the evening was to bring forth. Would she be alone or would other weary travellers arrive to take refuge in the sparse but welcome bothy? So very many times this has happened to me, with by the far the most common outcome being a lonely but welcome night with my own company. I suppose I am fortunate to relate that I have never arrived at a bothy to experience a cold welcome or possibly the downright hostile reception that other bothy users have occasionally experienced.



Figure 11: The steep steps leading to the attic at Lairig Leacach



**Figure 12: The upper area at Lairig leacach before it was all changed
This is where Claire met Elaine**

It was dark by 6 and Claire was about to prepare for the long night ahead when voices could clearly be heard from the distance outside. Again, the moment of doubt arose. The Lairig group arrived and it turned out that six lads had also walked in from Fort William. They were initially polite and amenable but three boys eyed Claire somewhat strangely. She pushed aside an irrational concern that had risen when first they moved in from the cold exterior. The boys also placed their gear in the upper sleeping area and although the ground floor was somewhat cold and bare even more primus stoves soon had a warming heat flowing throughout the bothy. All seemed well. One of the lads was particularly interested to find out exactly why Claire had embarked upon her travels. He was probing her as if he felt she had no place in this wild and lonely outpost within the highlands. This almost seemed a sexist reaction that Claire attempted to dismiss. Why should she not be here? Surely they were not necessarily the domain of the male species.

The easy-going atmosphere was straining somewhat as the other two lads also questioned Claire as to the wisdom of her venture. The questions were 'fired in' with a lack of intervention from the three 'neutral' boys. Claire felt less and less at ease. One of the lads claimed that it was okay for men to risk death in their lofty pursuits but for a woman it was different. They should be safely at home caring for the children. For a woman to be here was blasphemous. This was pure sex-antagonism and downright wrong.

I thought back to my military career. Nine years in the Royal Marines had been a definite male dominated experience. Of course, today it is so very different. Girls serve on naval warships and several have even risen to the rank of commanding officer. However, this does not disguise the fact that male soldiers have always had trouble adjusting to a female presence in combat. It certainly would never have bothered me, but the idea of female combatants in the deserts of Aden or the jungles of Borneo would have been an anathema fifty years ago. Male climbers in so many cases resisted the inclusion of a woman on their very male expeditions to the high mountains. Some analysts have blamed the resistance on an almost biological imperative men feel to protect women. This is a pressure with potentially fatal results in the perilous environments of combat or survival on very high mountains.

A male climber on the American K2 ascent went even further. John Roskelley stated emphatically that he had never met a woman climber 'worth a dam.' He claimed they lacked either the strength or the skill or possibly both at high altitude.

How wrong he was. The proof was to be found in females like Wanda Rutkiewicz, Jullie Tullis, Chantel Maudit and Alison Hargreaves.

Claire was by now beginning to strongly dislike her situation. Direct hostility and neutral indifference were making her position decidedly uncomfortable. She left the bothy for a welcome breath of fresh air and was followed by one of the more antagonistic males. She was sick and tired of his frail masculinity as he went on and on along his theme of male dominance. She determined to 'get away' from his shallow and empty personality. He almost made a pass at Claire as she brushed him aside and returned into the relative warmth of the bothy.

Everything was sorted by a manifestation of unique proportions when more sounds were heard approaching the bothy. It was now well into the evening

The door slowly opened and inside stepped a cold and lonely girl who was clearly tired and obviously very hungry. At least this levelled up the gender gap and the relief felt by

Claire was clear to be seen. Elaine dropped off her gear and quickly realised that this bothy really did not cater for 8 unless of course the 8 were very close friends. The atmosphere could be felt and a glance at Claire informed her all was not well. Elaine went to work preparing much needed sustenance and liquid refreshment.

It was all sorted in a mystic and so unexpected way.

Elaine had brought with her a tent and fully intended to utilise her shelter and not rely on the bothy. This is a common scene around all the bothies I have stayed at. A large number of walkers do prefer the privacy of their tent as against the general occupation of the bothy. Since the introduction of light weight tents this has been more and more the case. A mere 2lb load for the convenience of your very own sleeping area is hardly anything to worry about. After her meal Elaine quickly established that she would erect her tent outside and release some of the limited bothy space for those within. Claire was in need of a toilet break and on her way back to the bothy she asked Elaine if she required any assistance in the erection of her own little shelter. Elaine agreed, and the two girls quickly had the tent in place as none of the boys ventured out of the bothy to see how they were progressing. Once erected Elaine laid out her sleeping bag and offered her thanks to Claire for assistance rendered. It was a special moment. The girls shared a hug and a slight kiss on the cheeks. The moment lengthened, and the kiss became a little more than a mere thank you gesture. It was freezing cold in the star-spangled valley, but Claire held on for more than just a moment. Did she not desire the company of the boys? Did she want the warmth of Elaine? Was she entangled on the horns of a dilemma that she could not quite understand? A kiss and a caress and a long look into each other's eyes. The die was cast; without a word Elaine indicated that Claire was welcome to share her tent. Claire quickly stepped back and retrieved her sleeping bag from a confused body of male bothy occupiers.

The outcome was both intimate and special as the two girls shared the closeness and care that only two lovers can experience. This was not a bothy stopover. This was a shared moment of love within a tent and it was something that had totally come out of the blue.

I met Claire two days later whilst climbing the Grey Corries in superb weather. For once I welcomed the company of another and we 'ticked off' all the peaks with efficiency and delight. Claire was special. She was a warm and understanding person and for me her love of the summits was enough to make her a close friend. She fully related her Lairig experience and how a crazy night of passion had been followed by a farewell as two climbers went their own ways. She had never slept with a girl before but now felt fulfilled and complete. For her to relate all this to me was special and on return to Roybridge we shared a pint or three before I moved on to explore the intriguing parallel roads of Glen Roy whilst Claire left for the Munros of the far north.

I have never seen her since but will never forget what she told me nor the moments we shared on the superb hills to the east of the Ben.

Shelter Stone - a recognition of the true human hero

January 1st 1933. Happy New Year, to all who come here. A R Mackenzie, Grantown, D A Ferrier, Forres. Arrived here 3.30pm after a stiff climb over ice & against a fierce headwind. Found Shelter Stone rather draughty so fixed blanket across entrance feeling it of more service there than on the bed. Before settling down we heated a stone which

served as a foot warmer so spent a comfortable night. 2nd dawned wilder than 1st mist driving before a fierce gale. Setting out for Glenmore 11 am.

This was the very first entry in the Shelter Stone visitors book for the year 1933.

They were also the final tragic words of two poor souls who were about to endure the horrors of a Scottish storm.

I had always wanted to experience a stay at this famous Scottish howff. My sojourn was not in the depths of a fearsome winter but one overnight stay on the high plateau certainly had its moment of serious discomfort. The ski slopes of Coire Cas were unbearably hot as I slogged up the path between and above the obscene paraphernalia of ski infrastructure. Little relief was found on the summit of Cairngorm and as I walked slowly across to Cairn Lochan I was amazed with the complete variation of conditions. My previous visit had seen me struggle through deep snow and bitter winds. Today all was warm and balmy with not a hint of danger or threat. Ben Macdui summit was crowded and my stopover was long and enjoyable with views out across the high plateau in all directions. Almost all the climbers on the summit were returning northwards but I was heading east south east along a good path. When I reached the little col just below Creagan a Choire Etchachan 1120 I dumped my rucksack and made the traverse to the summit of Derry Cairngorm 1155m. It was hot enough for me to be only in shorts. It was all so leisurely and my return to the rucksack commenced a series of calculations that were to lead to a night I wish to forget to this day. I could have stayed in the Hutchison memorial hut several hundred feet down towards Glen Derry. Another option was to stick to my original plan of reaching the shelter stone at the head of Loch Avon. However, by the time I reached the banks of Loch Etchachan it was 7.30 pm and a lovely pleasant evening. I was at exactly the 3,000-ft. contour and found a suitable bivvy spot to lay out my sleeping bag and bivvy sack. I brewed up some hot soup and consumed almost a whole bottle of red wine that I had been carrying in my rucksack. It all seemed idyllic and I was staying 'put.' To avoid the oncoming midges, I crawled into my shelter as the sun slowly set. All seemed well but two hours later I heard the steady patter of rain on my bivvy sack. This was not on the agenda and caused me some concern. Bivvy sacks are not efficient at keeping out heavy rain. By far the best way to sleep is with the top open to the elements with an all-night vista of the heavens above. But this requires dry weather. I was now entombed in a confined damp uncomfortable shroud. The rain intensified and I was now more than just damp. Water leaked everywhere as I longed for daylight to arrive. It was too dark to consider a night decent to the hut and the way forward to the shelter stone was unknown to me. Not a night time journey I wished to make. I had no light with me but I scrutinised my watch. The hands were on 2 and 4. It could be 0220 or 0410. I knew it would be light at approx 5 am so I prayed for the latter. A little time later a lightening of the grey sky confirmed I had made it through a very uncomfortable night. Strange to relate that once this was realised I fell into a deep damp sleep and re-awoke at 0545 to see a dawn rapidly approach out of clearing grey cloud. I crawled out of my sack and quickly donned clothes. Leaving everything where it was I had to get warmed up and immediately commenced the ascent of Beinn Mheadhoin. I made very quick progress and arrived on the very interesting plateau of the mountain. It is adorned with strange tors of rock the highest point being the top of one such feature. The views were great and it was still only very early morning. No-one was around and I enjoyed the total peace and solitude. On arrival back at the loch I experienced dry and relatively hot conditions after the discomfort of the previous night. My clothes were almost completely dry, and it was again a pleasure to relax with hot tea and tins of whatever beneath the imposing crags of

Carn Etchachan. These are the moments to cherish. Often everything is done at a rush and much of the grandeur of the scenery is lost to seeking eyes. Now time was of no consideration and I could take all the time I desired to fully appreciate the awesome surroundings of the very hub of the Cairngorm Mountains.

It was almost noon when I arrived on the slopes at the head of Loch Avon and came upon arguably the most famous of all the howffs in the Highlands.

The sun was shining with great power, how different from the conditions with which Mackenzie and Ferrier had to contend all those years ago. It took me little time to locate the shelter. In times of dire necessity, I think it might well be more difficult to find this famous refuge. Sanctuary is underneath a massive boulder that must have fallen down the slopes in a distant cataclysmic avalanche. This indeed is a massive boulder and using mathematics based on its dimensions of 44ft. x 20 ft. x22ft. (high) it could weigh anything up to 1,500 tons. The huge monolith rests on smaller boulders beneath thus creating a natural chamber. There is a large cairn perched on top of the boulder and all around there is a mass and maze of rocks and boulders of all sizes imaginable. I made my way up to the entrance and stooped low to gain entry. The roof slants upwards and at the far end you can almost stand upright. Once the darkness has been overcome it can be seen that the shelter can provide refuge for anything up to ten people. If comfort is a factor this could be reduced to half a dozen. The floor is made up of dirt and compressed soil with many sheets of polythene that have been left behind from previous stopovers. The sides of the shelter have been packed with stones, heather and even sods to assist in the elimination of draughts. I discovered the visitor's book, a volume of rather 'tatty' nature but with a host of intriguing entries. The visitor's book dates back to 1924 when a tin box with a book within had been placed in the refuge. Between 1931 and 1943 an average of 525 people made visits. In 1933 523 visited in July alone with 129 on just one day. It was a fine summer weather wise. Completed volumes are now kept in the library of the Cairngorm Club in Aberdeen and make very interesting reading.

The Cairngorm Club, the first climbing club in Scotland originated at the shelter stone. It was formed on the morning after the night of Queen Victoria's golden jubilee on June 24th. 1887. This preceded by just two years the formation of the Scottish Mountaineering Club.

Lots of history here.

The view out and along to the loch was superb and the waters were totally still, almost glass like. I was going nowhere and these moments were so precious. Again I thought back to the monstrously different conditions on that fateful new years day in 1933. Leaving the shelter in poor conditions the two climbers were inextricably drawn into a scenario of death and misery. As they ascended Coire Raibeirt the strength of the wind rose until it became a gale of great ferocity. Having passed the point of no return they were now confronted with an epic struggle across an open plateau. In all likelihood they resorted to a hand and knees way of movement. They probably placed all their hopes on reaching some semblance of shelter in the upper reaches of Coire Cas, but it was not to be. Their journey was doomed as the wind continued with unbridled savagery. Days later they were discovered together another sad statistic of the fierceness of a Scotland blizzard.



Figure 13: The famous shelter stone howff at Loch Avon

I laid out my sleeping bag although in the conditions of my visit it was hardly a necessary item of equipment. I am not claustrophobic and had previously tried my hand at potholing. I cannot say I really enjoyed it, but I did 'have a go'. Nevertheless, there was a slight niggle at the back of my mind. Could this monstrous monolith collapse? It will one day that is for sure but the thought of it happening when I was beneath left a strange feeling within. Totally irrational but there nevertheless. My sleeping bag was

close to the entrance though how this would alter anything was debatable. Another example of strange human reactions. This time mine!

I had no company and I had not seen a soul since my departure from Macdui some 24 hours before. I was alone and this satisfied me fully.

I thought long and hard about my location. Many people put much emphasis on comfort and convenience. This is their right and who am I to detract from this desire. The shelter stone is so very much 'divorced' from luxury but it does offer something that other places cannot offer. The view down and out across Loch Avon is amazing and a more desolate spot it would be hard to perceive. I 'fired up' my primus and looked ahead to hot soup and stewed steak. Could life be better?

I thought back several weeks when I had read of the so-called achievement of a pretentious "superstar". This reputed legend had four mansions and one article went to great lengths to indicate the ownership of three swimming pools. How can it be moral for just one human being to own a house with fifteen bedrooms whilst millions are deprived even the basic needs of drinking water. Millions are starving whilst our so-called legend flits from mansion to mansion simply because we as observers place him on a plinth of undeserved prominence. Hero worship for pop stars or celebrity worship for over paid under talented morons whose only claim to fame is the ability to kick a plastic sphere full of air. Held in almost god like esteem by brainless masses. What is all this crap about the Beckhams and the sick belief that materialism is the indicator of success? The other spice girls think of Victoria as a stuck up spoilt spoilsport who has gone all Hollywood. On the other hand, it could be that Mrs. Becks is too busy to bother. She and David are happily counting their combined fortune of half a billion. Whatever you think of it theirs is a true success story!

Total bollocks.

What have they really done?

Football legend, Football hero. The real heroes are the carers who wipe old folk's bottoms and clear up their vomit for the paltry reward of the minimum wage. The real legends are the lollipop ladies who stand outside the school gates in every type of fierce weather for £7 an hour.

Maybe there is hope within all this mess of financial greed. Juan Mata admits he earns an obscene amount of money and footballers live in a bubble. He freely admits that football has developed a reputation for greed and over commercialisation. He accepts his remuneration is unfathomable and that his life is not normal

I lay back at the entrance to my shelter. The clouds were fleeting their way across the clear blue sky and all was peace and harmony. None of this could possibly have a price. It is free to all and everyone. Not a notion of my tirade was born from envy. This was my utopia. Could it be that the so-called super rich and privileged would never experience this?

The night passed, and a new dawn saw a day of equal brightness. I made my way up the steep slopes of Coire Raibeirt and as soon as I reached the head of the valley I was once again back in the manic world. Scores of walkers were passed as I climbed up to Cairngorm and on the descent back to the base of the chair lifts I was merely a climber amongst many.

No bothy - a truly miserable 'doss' again!

Alpha went down on the Indonesian border. I remember it well as I was on the radio at the time. Maybe it did not truly register but at least no-one was killed. A lot of high technology disappeared in flames but everyone did return to base.

We had been having a remarkable time for the previous three months and all was going well. Almost too well. It reminded me of a football team winning game after game and never seeming to be close to defeat. It all does come to an end and inevitably the crushing loss does materialise to ruin the feeling of success and achievement.

A week later a Hiller was forced down and after emergency repairs attempted a return to safety. It did not work and the pilot was lost. This is the moment when a helicopter is most at risk. Loss of power in the initial stage of flight leaves the pilot no room for evasive action. We were not infallible and were beginning to fully realise the good fortune we had been sharing.

These incidents were followed by the loss of a Wessex when mechanical failure put it down onto a river shingle bank. Unfortunately the river level rose overnight and the aircraft disappeared. This was all overshadowed by a terrible accident at Nanga Gaat several weeks later when two Wessex helicopters crashed whilst attempting to land on the pads hacked out of the jungle hillside. 8 British servicemen, two Royal Navy pilots, a naval airman and 5 soldiers were killed when the Mark I helicopters touched blades and crashed into the murky depths of the Baleh. The only survivor was a Naval Airman who was only slightly injured. Petty Officer Edward Crispin was indeed a lucky man.

I had a particular reason to mourn this tragic accident, as one of the victims was a close friend and a 'scouser' like myself. Alan Rothwell was only 18 years old and was a keen supporter of Everton. Only on the morning of the crash his parents received a letter from him saying he would be returning home in several months time and he was thinking of them all on the occasion of the derby game shortly to be played. Liverpool versus Everton is always an occasion of great rivalry.

Gloom was total at the Gaat and it was coming in 'droves'. One of our mechanics went missing whilst bathing in the Baleh. His body was discovered miles downstream bloated beyond recognition, a truly terrible sight.

I still had a considerable time to serve at the Gaat and realised that I was being forced to 'grow up' very quickly. Subjects that were not seriously discussed were now well on the so-called 'menu' of existence. I spoke at length to a chief whose job it was to keep the aircraft in the air. (Without the Wessex helicopter the whole operation against the Indonesian terrorists would probably have stalled completely.)

He told me that almost all the aircraft were well beyond their airframe hours. This was 'mumbo jumbo' to me but he explained. Each helicopter had a certain flying time restriction. Almost like sell by dates on our supermarket food of 2018. All our aircraft were way past their individual service restrictions and to be frank were potentially dangerous. We had got away with it all before because of the dedication of the maintenance team and an enormous amount of good luck. The chief (Chief Petty Officer) told me that the Mark I Wessex, whilst a superb flying machine and a huge improvement on the Whirlwind it replaced, was only equipped with a single Gazelle engine. The Mark II's had two Bristol Siddeley engines. The Mark I was a potential death trap if anything happened to its sole engine.



Figure 14: Aerial view of Nanga Gaat forward helicopter base in Sarawak



Figure 15: Wessex mk 1 on jungle landing pad



Figure 16: About to venture up the Gaat

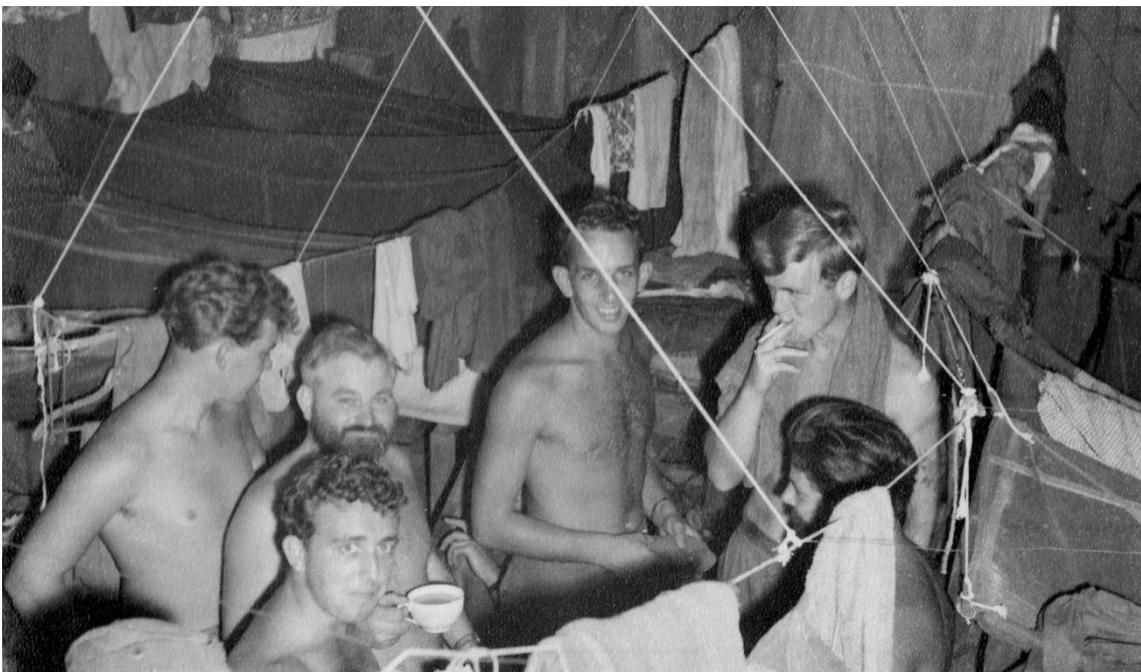


Figure 17: Primitive living space Nanga Gaat [1963]

It was both intriguing and scary to listen to this account of the situation we faced. It all made me think, whereas just a few weeks previously no such thoughts crossed my youthful mind. After all I was only 19 years old. The Chiefs words were certainly driven home to me but as he said with great poignancy “This is war.” From that moment

on I was a changed person. I began to realise the real intrinsic details of service life and repercussions of actions taken. Or not taken.

Serving with us were the greatest soldiers I have ever come across. The Gurkha is indeed a supreme fighting ally and why they have been treated so despicably by so many of our politicians is a mystery I shall never be able to solve. To the Gurkha warfare was quite simple. It was to be won. To achieve this the enemy had to be eliminated. And quite right to. I shall always think back to those epic cowboy films where a posse is chasing the bad people only to see them cross a river (border) and escape to relative safety. Did it really work like this? Not for the Gurkha. Once he was in pursuit, a border or man-made boundary was irrelevant. The chase went on and on and the enemy was hunted down and eliminated without fuss or redress. (All unofficially of course) The powers that be did not ask too many questions. I wish it were like that today.

All this was taking my mind off the interminable slog over the Cairngorm plateau as the weather deteriorated from uncomfortable to bad and then to downright threatening. It was a compass and map job as I left the vertical rim of Cairn Lochan and with great trepidation ventured out onto the vast and featureless plateau. No longer the comfort and security of landmarks and the history of this extreme area was so very well known. Was I wise to continue my journey? The fate of poor Cathy and her girls was always in my mind as I first reached Lochan Buidhe and then the rising slopes of boulder towards the summit of Ben Macdui. I must admit to a massive relief as I sheltered in the ruins of Sappers bothy. At least I knew where I was and now it would be mostly downhill

I curled up into as small a 'bundle' as possible and thought on . . .

Two years after Borneo I experienced one of the most embarrassing moments of my service career. The withdrawal from Aden. (Withdrawal ? - we were kicked out)

The terrorist campaign against British rule in Aden began in 1963. After 2 years of mounting violence the British Government announced that it would grant independence to the Federation no later than 1968 and that it would abandon its military base in Aden for good. Meanwhile, Britain appealed to all sides for restraint. Determined to achieve independence immediately and on their own terms the two main terrorist groups reacted by plunging into further bloodshed against the British and each other.

On one side stood the Egyptian backed Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY). On the other was ranged the fanatically Marxist National Liberation Front (NLF). In between was the British soldier. Women and children were fair game for terrorist bullets and bombs and senior government officials were warned that they would be shot down one by one like dogs. Rioting and arson accompanied the shooting and bombing and schools, churches and synagogues went up in flames. Unwilling to spend more lives for the privilege of being an Imperialistic Aunt Sally Britain announced that she was hurrying forward Independence Day to November 30th 1967.

HMS. Albion was detached from other duties and made all speed towards the troubled colony. I must admit that after superb shore leave in Durban and the prospect of more to come in Mombasa the prospect of Aden was less than appealing. It was all coming back to me. Strange how the mind reacts when often in uncomfortable situations in the mountains.

Aden was a sad affair, especially at the end. The amount of brand new gear that was dumped in the bay made my mind 'boggle.' Refrigerators, air conditioning units, typewriters and domestic appliances by the hundreds. Rows of vehicles had their engine

sump plugs removed and were started up until the inevitable seizure took place. If you have never heard the sound of an engine in its death throes it is hard to imagine. We were certainly not going to leave anything of value to those who were trying their hardest to inflict injury and death upon us. Earlier I had witnessed the 'steamy' side of life within certain sections of the European community serving in this precarious location. The emancipation of the 1960's and new freedoms spread into the boredom of life in a drink fuelled existence. Booze and boredom certainly made for a sexually intoxicating mix. I was not married and service 'up country' in the heat of Radfan was as different to life back at Steamer Point as could possibly be imagined.

After 128 years of Imperial rule the withdrawal from Aden was a sombre and unpleasant affair. Instead of cheering crowds the streets of Aden adorned shuttered shops echoing only to the roar of armoured cars and the whine and rattle of rooftop gun battles between the rival Arab contenders for political power.

At Khormaksar airport, the scene of the biggest airlift operation since that of Berlin in 1948, exploding mortar bombs sped the 6,000 departing servicemen on their way.

HMS Albion supplied the marine rearguard troops whilst other army units were flown out. My role was to operate the air radio link between the rapidly reducing ground forces and the carrier out in the bay. The final stages could have been bloody and chaotic and this did cross my mind in a massive way. Fortunately, the rival Arab groups were quite busy fighting amongst themselves and we managed to pull out with the minimum of casualties.



Figure 18: The volcanic rocks of Aden from HMS Albion



Figure 19: Wessex helicopter flying over Aden

The mist was further down and I could see only a few yards ahead. How different this was from my previous visit when a balmy evening tricked me into an uncomfortable bivvi on the banks of the loch. It was uncomfortable then but now I was cold and totally soaked through. This was more than discomfort. Hindsight is a wonderful thing and I know I should have made the extra effort to descend to the Hutchison hut but I had carried my small one-man tent and I was determined to utilise it for very necessary shelter.

The tent was up and I was within and now in dry clothing I generated not only heat but also just a little cheer and comfort.

All day long I had been thinking in overdrive and as I lay in my tiny tent I continued delving into the past.

At that very moment a Marine Sergeant was wallowing in jail whilst crooks and bad guys were being released. Bankers and politicians who screw the 'ordinary' folk out of their savings whilst a good soldier rots in jail for doing his job. I am not advocating a policy of none accountability. There must be a better way to make things work. This guy had served through the Balkans and Iraq and the horrors of Afghanistan. In a possible moment of aberration, he shot a dying Taliban who had previously slaughtered several of his platoon. Of course, the politicians and judges know best. These empty useless individuals who have more than likely never done a real day's work in their sad lives deemed him guilty.

Tony Blair sends tens of thousands to their death and gets away with it with impunity. The Marine Sergeant rots in jail for doing his job.

It is all so very typical. The horrors of the First World War are known to everyone today. Yet at the very time the endless sickening slaughter was taking place we were killing our own troops for having the audacity to challenge the crazy madness going on around them. No one knew of post traumatic stress disorder in 1916. Nor shell shock and war neurosis. Defy the General Officers and you would be shot. Today I find it all so bizarre.

I was a soldier but I volunteered. I was a professional. I knew what I was getting into. I suppose at first the brave young men of 1914-15 were also volunteers but it all soon wore thin. After the Somme, you were just supposed to go inevitably to your doom. Obey the orders.

I shall never forget an epic line from Blackadder 4. General Melchett says to Private Baldrick. "Remember private we are right behind you as go over the top."

"Yes, about thirty bloody miles" was the astute answer from our endearing Captain Blackadder.

As I moved around in my cramped and somewhat uncomfortable tent I progressed on to other aspects that might take my mind off the increasing rain and sleet outside. I was alone. I had chosen this and even though I was now in my late 60's I was happy.

I loathe politicians. I mean hate. Jack Nicholson in the superb film 'As Good as it Gets' has a line where he describes his dislike of pills. "I will not take pills. I dislike pills. I hate them. I really mean hate." All this to the delicious Helen Hunt.

I feel the same about politicians. Their often arrogance leaves me in a morass of amazement. The smug political class and their celebrity sycophants have been lording it over the rest of us for far too long. The moment has now come when they realise that politicians who plan to disrupt the will of the people are treading a very dangerous line. There will be a day of reckoning at the ballot box. So many of these 'smug' morons fail to understand the voter's rejection of all the 'isms' beloved of the so-called left. (Multiculturalism, internationalism and social liberalism.) What is wrong with a piece of old fashioned patriotism?

Yes 2016 has been a 'magic' year. The ordinary people have found their collective voice. This was the year the old regimes got their marching orders and a new broom swept, and still sweeps across Europe and the world in general.

However, my disdain does not only settle at this level of bombastic indulgence. Having served in the Marines throughout the many troubles of the 1960's I shall always remember the sometimes 'almost' scorn for the forces when they were not actually required. In peacetime, a financial burden that could well be done without. I had spoken to soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and listened to stories of death and maiming caused by inadequate equipment. Landrovers with no under-body protection. Weapons that just did not work in conditions they were not designed for. Even more evil, the ongoing tirade of litigation against troops by money grabbing lawyers who spend millions of our tax payers money attempting to line the pockets of evil and often horrendously guilty parasites. In many cases a soldier's best piece of equipment within a war zone in 2017 might well be a solicitor to offer advice.

Now I was thinking back to my time as a marine. Helicopters returning from the Middle East were then despatched for duty in the Arctic Circle. No wonder they did not work.

Yes, in peacetime we were a financial burden but in time of need respected and very much in demand.

It was not right then and it is not right today. Defence cuts come and defence cuts go. It is always the 'squaddie' who suffers. Tough decisions are made. Cost decisions are passed. Savings are found and new kit is often delayed (whether it be a functional boot or a missile destroyer to protect a carrier group)

It all goes on and on. Our political elite? make error after error. Waste millions after millions. Create situations where thousands if not millions suffer massively.

I hate politicians.

Dawn comes late as the thick cloud refuses to release its clammy grip on the summits all around. I was almost in the same place as my bivvy of several years ago and even though it was 9 am I had little inclination to remove myself from the warmth of my sleeping bag. It had to be done and eventually I broke camp and made the decision to stay as low as possible to avoid any further soakings. The banks of Loch Avon brought me to the Saddle and the long walk out down Strath Nethy seemed an endless punishment for my myriad of night-time thoughts.

I passed the sad site of Bynack Stable and looked in at Ryvoan bothy but did not stay.

The luxury of hotel accommodation at Aviemore was my reward for 48 hours of endless slog, some potential danger and a "tome" of thought, reminiscence and criticism.

Benalder Cottage - seeds and growth of a gadget 'cock up'

My Munro task was getting ever closer. Down to the last dozen or so I was now making serious consideration as to which mountain would be my final summit for 'compleat.' I had never had any firm plan but once past 250 I had to think more closely as logistics saw unclimbed mountains spread out far and wide.

Could the final consideration be the myriad of pronunciations that I must admit I have never totally mastered? I had always found difficulty answering the question what mountain did you climb today from local people. Ben Vane, Ben Ime and Ben Hope posed little problem. But mountains such as Beinn Fhionnlaidh (pronounced "Byn Yoonly") and Beinn Dothaidh (pronounced "Byn an Daw-ee") certainly did. So was it possible the linguistic factor would be a serious consideration.

Beinn Bheoil (pronounced "byn vyawl") was in my last dozen.

I had climbed Ben Alder many years before, but fatigue on the Bealach Breabag persuaded me to leave 'Bheoil' for another day. This decision was to set in motion an epic of amusing/ controversial proportions so very many years later.

On a warm and sunny Sunday, I discovered Manchester United had won yet another Premiership, and after stocking up with supplies in Pitlochry I was once again more than ready for exploration of wild and lonely places. Loch Rannoch was sublime and midges were nowhere to be seen. I parked up on the banks to 'doss' out in perfect peace and solitude.

Monday was another glorious day; the weather gods were indeed being very kind. I moved my car some mile further up the lakeside and identified the forest rack that was to give me access, albeit long access, to the mountain I required. I made one of those all too easy first minute 'cock ups' as I progressed down one track to end up in a woodcutter's yard surrounded by impenetrable tree growth. My frustration and annoyance evaporated when I quickly realised the correct path was a mere 30 yards

further up the road. I had to resort to pushing the bike for long stretches as the incline was quite steep, but the surface of the track was good and this promised a speedy descent on a following day. First in trees, then a section of clear hillside, the track led me back into forest. A second section of open fellside made me consider leaving my bike as there was now a long slanting descent but I carried on frustrated by some of the very high gates I was confronted with. One such closure had an ingenious lifting 'lid' within the wire fence. I managed to pass the bike through without resource to a vertical wire climb. As soon as I emerged from the third section of forest I was rewarded with a superb view of the whole length of Loch Ericht. Here I did leave my bike and continued down to the waters edge close to a new construction that had something to do with the reservoir works. I moved on northwards knowing that the distance on the map would invariably prove misleading. 2 ½ miles does not sound much but my load was very heavy.

Then it happened.

I can still remember the thought process I went through as I reached an unnecessary division in the path. Track slightly right faint but clear. Track to the left wider and certainly more obvious. Both completely flat. I chose left. I turned my ankle on a flat section of grass. Pain shot up my leg and I 'flopped' to the ground. This had happened before but this time it appeared more serious. It made me think of the issue of 'what ifs and buts' in the overall order of events. I had recently been in difficult terrain where danger was very apparent. Here I was on a flat gentle path in excellent conditions and all seemed to be going so badly wrong. Life can be like this. Things can go horribly wrong when they should not and often in places of very real danger all ends well. Everything was racing through my mind. 'Never count your chickens.' 'Don't take anything for granted' and always be prepared for the possible 'whammy' that might well be lurking around the corner. I lay on the grass and after a long bootless inspection attempted to carry on hoping against hope that I could walk it off. It did ease a little but every minute or so I received a reminder with a searing stab of pain in my ankle and lower leg. Frustration set in as I could see Beinn Bheoil ahead and after all my cycling I desperately wanted this lonely and elusive peak. Within 20 minutes I met up with two lads who were pushing bicycles through the ruts of the track. The track was now nearer the waters of the loch and was subsequently very boggy. They had cycled from Dalwhinnie and after a stopover at Culra had pushed their machines over Bealach Dubh and down to Benalder Cottage. I had good news for them as within a mile or so they would be on a clear track that would offer a speedy descent to Loch Rannoch. They kindly offered me some painkillers but I declined.

The last section leading towards the bothy seemed to go on forever but eventually I spotted the walls and roof and made my painful way across an interesting bridge to deposit my heavy burden within.

Decisions had to be made. I was already well over an hour late and my ankle was now telling me it was seriously not interested in any further upward progress. I bathed my feet in the freezing waters of the stream and the swelling did appear to decrease. It was 3 pm and I made up my mind. Leaving all my gear in the bothy I 'gave it a go.' It was far from easy and occasionally I trod down incorrectly with resulting massive pain. Nevertheless, progress was made and the path was reasonable to follow. Time was marching away and I traversed over to climb point 955 from where I saw the Munro ahead still requiring a fair bit of descent and ascent to be negotiated. A momentary

doubt crossed my mind that I was not going to make it but these negative thoughts were shelved and I plodded on making very careful progress.

Never was a summit so gratefully reached. The views were magnificent. Ben Alder had masses of snow in its eastern corries. In all directions, the view stretched out to the far horizon. I sat there in total happiness; the decision had been the right one and I had my mountain.

Earlier in the day I had intended to leave my route descriptions but a lack of mobile signal at Loch Rannoch made this impossible

And here the seed of the fiasco to follow was sown

I loathe mobile phones. Indeed, I dislike anything that hints of gadget. I am not alone. Wainwright thinks the same. He clearly states that he does not get on well with the trappings of modern life. He even denies the value of a compass but this is something I cannot agree with. I was so amused to listen to Alfred. The ultimate dreamer and romanticist. You cannot appreciate the awful and utter loneliness of a man who does not understand gadgets in a world that is becoming full of them; and in a life that cannot be lived without them. (“Fellwanderer”)

I do understand modern gizmos but I choose not to want them. I still remember my junior school days when we learnt our times tables by rote. It worked, and forever I immediately knew that seven nines were sixty-three and four eights’ thirty-two. Eventually the calculator came along and I did not object so long as the foundations had been laid. A gadget can break down but basic knowledge is forever. Thus, I have no problem with the GPS (so long as you do not expect me to have one) but the climber must know about compass map and have an abundance of common sense. The GPS cannot be a replacement.⁵ I am forever in dispute with my grandsons who regard ‘bampa’ as a dinosaur. I even sent them a little cartoon on a self-made Christmas card. It showed a little boy kneeling in front of a festive tree with pile upon pile of wrapped up presents. He has opened his and looks amazingly at a book. The comment is a classic. “How does it plug in”? And heaven help my daughter if she takes them anywhere where wi-fi is unavailable.

Yes, people are obsessed with their social media ‘toys.’ Just a decade ago they did not exist, in fact when I started climbing landline telephones were a rarity. Just occasionally I look at facebook and on very rare occasions add long rambling philosophical mountain tales to alleviate the mostly banal comments of probably the people I am upsetting at this very juncture. I am amazed by the diversity of the comments. Mind numbing irrelevance of worthless little lives Ego-centricity rules OK???

So, I do not trust mobile phones. I do not desire i pads, dislike innov 8’s and am totally cold on ripple buds and tablets (except paracetamol after special brew).

⁵ An almost ‘laughable’ incident regarding human dependence on modern gadgets. Wales fans Ian and Helen Williams went off to watch their country play in the Euros 2016. They ended up in the wrong country. They were diligently following their sat. nav. in the hire car they had picked up at the airport. However, instead of it taking them to Lille in France, where Wales were playing it sent them to the tiny town of Lille in Belgium 100 miles away. Helen said, “We could not believe it. We’d never have thought we would end up in the wrong place”. The sat nav had Belgium settings and sent them north instead of south. Helen added “As we were driving we thought that it did not seem like we had crossed into France. There were no football fans in sight- just Belgium flags.” The couple missed the game they had purchased tickets to watch. Ian 37 said, “It was a nightmare. Who would have known you needed to reprogram the sat nav.”? Well, me for one. I feel for the couple involved but if common sense had prevailed instead of a total and blind obedience to ‘dodgy’ modern technology none of this would have happened.

This is me and this is my right. It was my daughter with the very best of intentions who persuaded me to acquire a mobile phone. I did it to appease her but it went against my better wishes. Fifteen years ago they hardly worked anyway

Sitting there with an aching leg a glorious view and yet another Munro bagged I discovered I did in fact have a signal on my little gadget that hid deep within my rucksack. I fully realised that as soon as I left the summit the signal would fade and disappear, so I set about using my little 'toy'. I phoned Norma to give her my grid reference and the precise grid reference of the bothy where I was to spend the night. I made sure she understood the need for accuracy when using grid references and passed on my general good spirits although I did make the mistake of telling her I had hurt my ankle. This had happened before, and it was of no grave concern to me. (A little 'porky pie' here but only I knew this.) It was now almost 7 pm and I knew that the descent would not be speedy. However, the bothy was not too far away and the weather was totally bland, a journey well short of an hour in normal circumstances. I must have set a few 'doubts floating' when I informed Norma I would not be able to make contact again until probably late the next day.

Anyway, I had told someone where I was. My problems were now personal. All I had wanted to do was give my grid references and where I was staying overnight. I did not want nor did I seek assistance.

(The saga that ensued from this conversation and the repercussions will be seen at the end of this account. A whole host of newspaper articles and Internet 'conversations'. Interesting indeed???)

The descent was not easy. In fact, going up was less painful. The rise back over 955m was followed by a slow and very careful descent ever closer back to the bothy. It was almost 10 pm before I reached the refuge and discovered I had company. Sid had a small tent erected nearby but as the bothy was empty he took down his tent and moved into the hut. I 'devoured' my hip flask of rum and gladly accepted 400-mg of ibuprofen. It seemed to work as the pain receded. We got a fire going for aesthetic reasons and carefully measured out the remainder of my wine as a night-cap. Benalder bothy is a good bothy. Wooden sleeping benches and a small room with bunk beds are augmented with a kitchen complete with large fire grate. The whole structure would provide comfortable shelter for a dozen people. Sid was an ex-army man. We chatted away about our respective service careers. I had started out a marine and after promotion to corporal ended up a marine. Sid had commenced as a gunner and after a troubled start to his army career had ended up a lieutenant colonel. Gunner to Lt colonel in 37 years, quite an achievement. He was doing the coast to coast which was to take him from Oban to the North Sea coast.

Things were getting back to normal and after Sid got his head down I sat there pondering on the days events and thinking of the repercussions for the following days.

Whilst in Borneo I always had an ability to sense the approach of helicopters long before anyone else knew of their coming. Sitting there in front of the fire I suddenly had one of my 'moments'. Surely that was a helicopter out there in the night sky. I stood at the door and listened hard. I could hear something. I shouted through to Sid who joined me at the door to the bothy. There was a helicopter and it was all the time coming closer to the bothy. In a matter of minutes, the black mass of the aircraft was hovering over the ground outside with strong beams of light covering the whole exterior area. The helicopter (sea king) landed but the rotors remained in motion. It was intriguing

although at this stage I knew it had something to do the earlier events of the day. The crewman emerged and struggled over evading the swish of the rotors and within the mass of noise we communicated. “Is there a 65-year-old Liverpool gentleman with a dodgy foot in residence” he asked. I have been called worse things. It was almost surreal. I told him that probably was me and briefly related the tale of my painful descent. I was asked if I required assistance down the hill which I declined. After all my bike was lord knows where and my car far away on the banks of Loch Rannoch. I had managed to get down from the summit, so I was certain I could get down safely the next day. Also, I had **NOT** asked for assistance. My initial annoyance was evaporated somewhat when I was informed they were out on another call when the message had come through. They decided to drop in at the bothy to see how things had ‘panned out’. All this because I had been careful to inform my wife where I was. Had I sounded melodramatic on the phone? I do not think so. Norma told me later that she would not have done anything. She had passed on the information to my daughter who obviously thought differently. It was Louise who had initiated the possible search and rescue for her high climbing father. (I have since sorted this out with her – see my letter to the press at the conclusion of this saga.)

All well that ends well?

The following morning the weather was even more settled. Sid left at 8 ‘ish’ to continue his coast to coast and I now took the opportunity to really enjoy my surroundings. Without injury, I would more than likely have marched out early searching further mountains to climb. Now I settled in to enjoy the fantastic surroundings. I bathed my ankle in the stream for a full hour almost endangering frostbite. I even had an hour’s sleep in the warm sunshine outside this very impressive and sometimes reputed haunted bothy. Not today. Everything was warm open bliss.

By 2 it was time to march out and once I got moving I found my ankle could support my weight. The path did seem long and occasionally I did stumble but progress was made and halfway back I met a couple who were also completing the coast to coast. We chatted long in the late afternoon sunshine. Shortly after, I reached my bike and made the ride out in super quick time this being another example of the huge benefit a bike can offer when ‘bagging’ the Munros of this very special land. Once back at the car I had a welcome cider and then drove round to join the A9. I was heading west and in the early evening I arrived at Roybridge and the hotel bunkhouse I had stayed in several years previously. This time I took a hotel room. I was convinced I had deserved a little luxury after the events of the previous 48 hours.

Sausage and mash and a bath followed by sleep were so very welcome.

Several weeks after my return to Liverpool whilst I was carrying out my duties at Williamson tunnels I was asked unusual questions about helicopters. This went on for some considerable time. I was in fact being ‘wound up’. For the first time, I discovered the aftermath of my adventures on Beinn Bheoil. I was shown a full-page newspaper report from the Liverpool Echo as well as detailed accounts from other newspapers north of the border. I was somewhat amazed and more than a little ‘miffed’. As far as I was concerned the articles gave a somewhat one-sided version of what had happened. I opened the centre computer and searched google. There was a stack of articles, reports and comments, some of a most amusing nature. It all made me think long and hard.

Where are we regarding all the fuss over my incident on Beinn Bheoil?

You can read the article in the Liverpool Echo and see for yourself the issues that it raised.

www.liverpoolecho.co.uk

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DRAMA: The Cairngorms in central Scotland

5-hr rescue flight heroes told: Er, I'm OK, thanks

Mersey man in mountain mix-up

By MICHELLE FIDDLER
Chief Reporter

AN RAF helicopter flew 150 miles to rescue a Merseyside hiker to discover he had only sprained his ankle.

The 65-year-old man, who is from Sefton, injured himself while walking on Beinn Bheoil in the Monadhliath Hills, in the central Scottish Highlands, on Monday night.

The man, who has not been named, phoned his wife at 5.30pm on Monday to say he had injured himself and she called Merseyside police.

Cairngorm Mountain Rescue team were called and an RAF helicopter was scrambled from Prestwick amid reports the man had broken his ankle.

But when Rescue Helicopter 177 arrived at 10.30pm - after a five-hour flight - the man turned down medical assistance.

A spokesman for the Northern Constabulary police, who co-ordinate mountain rescues, said: "This man had a reported serious injury, a broken ankle, and a search and rescue helicopter was sent out.

"To be fair to him after he contacted his family

and the rescue was set in motion he may not have been able to get in touch with anyone else."

RAF co-ordinator Michael Mulford said he could not say how much the aborted rescue had cost, but refused to blame the man at the centre of the emergency.

He said: "The situation was relayed down the telephone to his family and then to the police and

mountain rescue. There may have been several interpretations.

"I do not think the guy ever said he broke his ankle, but that is what was interpreted.

"When you get a situation where it is late, it is in the Highlands and there is a guy with a suspected broken ankle,

then that is an emergency."

The walker could not be contacted by mobile phone by rescuers to update them on his situation because of a lack of coverage and the nearest village was a day away.



An RAF helicopter was dispatched to rescue a man, only to find he'd only sprained his ankle

michellefiddler@liverpoolecho.co.uk

Figure 20: Not an unrealistic report; but an example of a one sided view

You can read my reply to the Strathspey & Badenoch Herald that they kindly printed in full some weeks after the event.

Also, some interesting comments from the internet 'chat rooms' that clearly illustrated the issue raised a lot of interest.

"It was the wife that telephoned (actually it was the daughter – author) and the guy had already told her that he did not require help. She over-ruled him. (daughter) If he could phone her then he could have phoned 999 if he needed help. In the end, he is not obliged to accept the help on offer especially if he didn't ask for it. "

"Wives always know best (daughters as well???) – so mine says."

"Got to admire his bottle in saying no to being rescued I suppose. I would have felt obliged to get on the chopper whether I wanted to or not."

"A notorious incident in the folklore of climbing in the States was when a rescue was planned to evacuate some climbers attempting a new route in Yosemite who were stormbound. The response from the team was. A rescue is unwarranted, not sought and will be resisted with force or words pretty much to that effect."

"No matter what you think though....

He turned down a lift on a helicopter.

Sod the rest of it.

You normally have to pay a small fortune to get a go in one for 5 minutes."

"I like the idea that if they had flown out a guy with an injured ankle then that is not a waste of time and money. If they fly empty it is. Since the use of military choppers in civilian rescue is justified on the basis that it is all very good training then flying in, locating rescue and flying out is surely going to be good training no matter what the outcome"?

(Interesting point here.) Just how many millions of pounds were spent on all the hundreds of exercises I took place in during my service in the Marines. When the real 'thing' came along in Aden and Borneo all this training paid back its dividend

"There is of course the explanation that the guy was so terrified by the thought of a ride in a helicopter that he preferred to endure the pain of a walk out. I know several people for whom this would be true."

"I wonder if the guy would have refused a lift in a helicopter if one of our Augusta 109's complete with leather upholstery and a fridge full of drinks turned up for him"

(Debatable???...author)

All good stuff.

Sadly, I shall not take my mobile phone with me anymore. I shall rely on my experience I shall not allow others to initiate action that I do not want.

In the mountains, I use common sense and a compass. You can put your so called modern and often doubtful aids in the dustbin of uselessness.

My letter to the Strathspey & Badenoch Herald printed in reply to their initial article which I thought did not outline all the facts.

Dear Sir,

I deeply resent the articles I have just read from certain newspapers regarding an incident that involved me in the mountains two weeks ago.

I would very much like to put the record straight and give my interpretation of events as they happened. Once again, I despair at the words of the press and how they can twist and warp the truth out of all proportion

I am an experienced mountaineer. I have climbed in the Alps, the Dolomites and Iceland and have made ascents of Kilimanjaro and Mount Kenya. I have now completed 281 of the Munros and have made over fifty ascents of Scafell Pike to name just one mountain south of the border. I think I can claim to know mountains probably more than most people. I certainly am not a 'doddering' pensioner as several of the newspaper reports seemed to indicate.

I have in front of me several newspaper articles with regard to the incident that took place on Monday May 12th. I also have many extracts from the internet which a friend showed me today. This is the first I heard of any of the fuss that has obviously blown up since the event.

Here is the truth.

I was climbing Beinn Bheoil from Loch Rannoch aiming to reach Benalder bothy to drop off my overnight gear. This was to be Munro 278 in my list of peaks. I consider I know what I am doing as over 230 of my ascents have been made alone and very often in severe winter weather. On a benign grassy path, I somehow turned my ankle. Quite amazing as in the previous days I had been tackling some serious routes that certainly did pose major problems. I was in great pain but managed to continue to the bothy. Once I arrived there I bathed my foot in the cold waters of the stream and the swelling went down somewhat. I was so determined to 'bag' my hill that I carried on and gave it a go. It was painful but I did manage and after three hours of slog (it would normally take me just over an hour) I reached the summit. Recently my daughter has insisted that I carry a mobile phone even though through my experience I find they rarely work when you really require them. As no-one knew where I was (no signal had been forthcoming at Loch Rannoch) I discovered I did have a signal from the summit cairn. I phoned my wife for the main reason of telling her where I was.

Where I intended to stay that night- in the bothy at Benalder.

***This was merely precautionary.** Something I think all sensible mountaineers might do. I did mention I had injured my ankle, but I said I would surely get down. I have suffered a hairline crack in my ankle before and did consider this might have happened again. Much more serious things have happened to me in the hills over the last fifty years.*

*I knew I would not get a signal as soon as I left the top. I did **NOT** want assistance. I made my call as a matter of information.*

*To be fair to my wife I think she would have left it at that but she phoned my daughter in Leicester. She insisted the authorities were informed. This set into motion the whole saga that followed. **All of it without my knowledge and beyond my control.** I have since had words with my daughter.*

When the helicopter arrived later that night I was amazed. I am an ex marine and I served with 845 squadron in Borneo so I have acquired an ability to hear helicopters long before others know of their impending arrival. I refused any assistance because I knew I was capable of getting out the following day. The aircrew were fantastic and we had a friendly chat. I cannot praise them enough. After all, I did this job myself in active service conditions many years ago. I based this on my experience. It obviously was correct because I did march out, albeit in some pain. Since that moment I did several things that illustrates I am not a complete fool.

I had a superbly efficient check out at Fort William hospital two days later and after the doctor had feared there was a break an x ray showed no major damage. I have since written to the hospital to thank them for their superb facilities. I took a day off to go swimming and generally resting and since then I have carried out ascents of Sgurr nan Coireachan, Luinne Bheinn and Sgor Mor.

So where are we with all this?

Drive down the motorway and act like an idiot with possibly a dodgy car and maybe full of drink and drugs an accident is almost accepted. Walk out in the fresh air and do what we were intended to do and have a mishap and you are accused of being irresponsible. I despair in this world of 'namby pansies' where children are discouraged from climbing trees, playing conkers or even skipping in the playground.

*Thank you to the authorities who were magnificent.; **but I did NOT ask for assistance.***

Everything that happened after my mobile phone call was outside my control. 90% of my climbing has been done before mobile phones were invented. Long before the GPS was in existence. I Learnt my skills with a compass and an abundance of common sense.

I hope my letter will be read by those who might have raised criticism from the sparse facts they were given.

Yours sincerely,

R.J Cooke

Bothy games - more fun at Corrour

One thing service in the Marines taught me was to make the most of a bad situation and to achieve a sense of self-entertainment. Of course, we had a more serious job to do and very many times this involved dangerous and 'hair raising' scenarios. However, it is indeed very true that all work and no play makes Jack a very dull boy. (or Jill a dull girl)

Yes, service men and women do have a talent when it comes to seeking out the brighter side of whatever situation they might find themselves. Nanga Gaat was probably my most vivid memory of this factor. Once our job was done we had so much time on our hands that without some form of diversion we would probably have all gone quite mad.

But Nanga Gaat is not my subject here. I had left the services in 1969 and it was in the early 70's on a visit to Corrour that my memory of times in the deep jungles of Sarawak came to great use in taking the mind off discomfort, with just a little concern about subsequent survival. The weather was awful.

I was still only in my late 20's when I crossed the Dee for what was in fact my second visit to this iconic stopover. Smoke from the bothy chimney informed me of company to come but I was quite unprepared for what I was about to see. I left the cold of a winters night to receive the warmth of the bothy interior. Sitting inside with the accompaniment of a roaring log fire were four lads not much older than I was and in the bothy atmosphere there was the unmistakable aroma of smoke that strictly speaking was not on the legal agenda. I was made very welcome and even more so as I pulled out several braces of cans of a lager of some dubious strength. We hit it off immediately and after some twenty minutes the jovial scene was embracing all within the bothy confines. It was now that my experiences of far off postings came greatly into use. I introduced the lads to a ridiculous game called la di da which we used to play endlessly whilst slowly consuming Tiger beer from the rusty old icebox at the Gaat. The rules are ridiculously simple but no one seems able to grasp them. In fact, I have never known a game last for more than a minute and as the penalty for failure is even more consumption of ale the outcome is not difficult to foretell.

The game is perfect for a bothy floor and it goes like this. The contestants sit on the floor in a circle and each person takes hold of two cans of beer. (preferably full ones which you will have to consume first.)

With one can in your left hand and the other in your right hand the tune la di da de da dii da di da initiates the movement whereby you pass the can in your left hand to the right hand of the person on your left. The can in your right hand is passed to your left hand whilst you take up the can being passed to you from the person on your right. The first person to 'cock it up' is required to recharge everyone's drink and as mistakes usually come every ten seconds or so you can see just how quickly this game can generate "disaster." I was always annoyed, as I seemed to be the only person who could ever master this ridiculous and possibly stupid game that certainly was fun. And it really did break down barriers if they ever needed to be dissolved. I can remember introducing la di da to the staff of the Institute whilst we were drinking in the famous Philharmonic pub in Liverpool. We did not have cans and glasses had to be improvised. After the inevitable breakages, we were rapidly told to leave (barred) and my popularity decreased to a lower league.

The bothy was now warming up and another daft game was introduced. Buzz, fizz plonk requires a certain amount of sobriety and of course this might not be found in a bothy occupied by hot-blooded climbers. In this game, the numbers 3 are replaced by the word buzz. Number 5 by the word fiz and number 7 by plonk. If a number is divisible by any of these numbers it gains an extra 'word tag.' It is easier to give some examples. 2 is plain 2. No problem. 3 is buzz buzz because it is divisible by 3 and obviously has a 3 in the number. 15 will be fiz fiz buzz. It has a 5 within, it is divisible by 5 and also divisible by 3.

It commences with the number one and operates in a clockwise decision. Each contestant gives his/ her input in turn. The whole thing is so ridiculously stupid it is brilliant and those who can master it deserve the title B.Sc. maths or more probably just plain barmy. Obviously, there is a time limit for each person to respond. A few seconds, no more. The penalty for failure are alcoholic gifts to the other players.

We were now getting on to the real games. These are now bordering on the politically incorrect to just dam rude. The dance of the flaming a..... requires the setting up of an obstacle course. Bits of furniture and old benches just about anything will suffice. At the end of the course is placed a bucket of cold water. The first competent screws up an old newspaper and places one end within his/her bottom. The other end is then ignited and the aim is to overcome the obstacles and plunge the burning paper in the bucket before it burns too well and reaches the parts it should not reach.

Played in the Sergeants mess this was usually the sign for the ladies to leave and the serious drinking to commence.

I had so many more and the evening went on and on with superb singing (one of the cockneys had a guitar) and by the time midnight arrived we were all well ready for our sleeping bags.

Fortunately, the next day was cold wet and cloudy. Who would want to venture high on a day such as this? Certainly not me so I left my new friends and staggered back to Braemar and a world where sensible??? People resided.

Nan Bield shelters

Along the rocky path from Mardale towards the summit of the Nan Bield pass can be seen several well built stone shelters. They are situated alongside the track where it crosses the boulder-strewn shores of Small Water. They were obviously built to afford shelter to any traveller who might be overcome by inclement weather. They are solid constructions and even though roughly built a solid roof offers full protection from whatever the weather gods might have in store.

They very much reminded me of the reinforced gun post situated on the perimeter of the clearing at Nanga Gaat. It would have taken a major attack from the Indonesian terrorists before I would have been tempted into that scorpion infested shelter. I thought I had similar reservations about the Nan Bield shelters as they looked a haven for creepy crawlies and whatever. Nevertheless, on one occasion a storm of massive proportions cascaded down upon me and I gladly crawled in to gain respite from the elements. The car was less than an hour away, but lightening and awesome crashes of thunder accompanied by torrential rain persuaded me the shelters were more than okay for over two hours.

A necessary 'goal' within a heat wave

Another day of almost unbearable heat. A week or more and not a hint of rain. After days of memorable ascents on the high Cairngorm plateau I turned my attention to what many consider the 'bland' heights of the eastern Monadh Liath. I followed the road to its end and then climbed alongside the Allt a' Chaorainn along a good track. As every moment passed the heat became more intense and if it were not for a tea towel dipped into the stream I think I would have dissolved. Unfortunately, the stream would not always be alongside, and height had to be gained to reach the upper slopes of my first Munro. I badly required a target to aim for. Something to break up the unrelenting climb. A small building offered this 'goal' It turned out to be a tiny bothy resting high on the slopes. As I climbed relentlessly onwards it appeared to be moving away but this was merely a trick of the mind. Never was shelter so happily reached and on this day, it was not to escape fierce weather. The bothy at GR 687023 is an old tin hut, an ex stalkers refuge, still weatherproof but certainly in a condition that leaves concern for a long future presence. Many of the internal timbers had been ripped out and although there was a flue projecting from the roof the stove had long since disappeared. It was quite quaint and when I entered I was surprised to see one wooden table alongside a shelf that ran the width of the shelter. There were still a number of timbers in situ but for how long? Engraved upon were a number of writings dating back many decades.



Figure 21: Tin bothy on slopes of A'Chailleach - interior view
How long will this stand?

I was really intrigued with this 'hut' and happily sat in the cool interior and then outside on a lone remaining bench. An hour became two and still I did not want to move on. I even considered the thought of an overnight stay, but in reality, this would serve no purpose other than curiosity and possibly morbid achievement.

I could not imagine many climbers passing this way as it is not the most exhilarating of areas. Wide, expansive, rounded grassy slopes would more than likely make overnight stays a rare event.

It was time to leave and the final slopes to A Chailleach were negotiated with two very different creature moments. Some three hundred yards from the bothy I spied an enormous frog resting on the faint path in the direct glare of the intense sunshine. I could see she was parched and possibly in a state of some distress. I thought for just a moment before I sacrificed all my remaining water supplies by giving her a true soaking. To this day I think she looked at me and said a little thank you as she disappeared into the shelter of the grass alongside.

The summit was different as the top cairn was occupied by a nest of fierce wasps who were certainly not in the mood to share their home with a weary climber. I moved on to 'bag' my second Munro Carn Sgulain hardly believing this to be a separate mountain. I made my descent by dropping to the head of Allt a Chaorainn and walked the complete length of this interesting valley. It was still baking hot when I reached my car and back in Aviemore I celebrated in the Tandori with a curry of high quality.

Whatever way I look back on this day, it was the bothy that had stood out above all. Strange how a tin hut can outscore a mountain top, distant views and a curry of high quality.

(My visit was many decades ago and I have never returned. I have always thought about the fate of my tin hut. I was pleasantly surprised to find out that as recently as 2012 it still stood. A further update was obtained in 2015 when the bothy was still occupying its lonely outpost on the grassy slopes of A Chailleach).

Culra - a lost bothy?

Asbestos.

Horrible stuff?

Years ago, it was not necessarily the known case. Forty years ago, after leaving the Marines I can remember taking on a job in a plastics factory. It entailed stripping out the asbestos lagging on a mass of old pipes. The job was dirty, dusty and unbearably unpleasant. We had no proper gear and the air was thick with dust and fibres. Fortunately, the job only lasted a month and very shortly after I found myself at university in a much quieter and obviously safer environment. Nevertheless, I can still remember arriving home with all sorts of rashes and itchy discomfort.

Even before this experience I had come across asbestos. Maintenance work on an ageing warship had brought contact with asbestos as a requirement of task completion. Then towards the end of the 80's a school in which I was teaching was closed down for several weeks when asbestos was discovered within the roof panels above a main corridor. Everyone was delighted on this occasion as a six-week summer holiday was extended by three weeks and I took the opportunity to take a longer break in the Italian Dolomites.

Asbestos has reared its head again and this time amid some very remote Munros. A recent visit to the central highlands certainly drove this point home as I approached one of my favourite bothies. Very many yards away I could see painted on the bothy walls and door the poignant words:

Bothy closed Asbestos

I had been prepared for this as it was common news within the circle of serious Munro ‘baggers.’ Walkers and climbers had been warned not to use the bothy and that only in dire emergency should anyone enter the unlocked door. Culra is an MBA maintained building and after a professional survey asbestos was found within the fabric of the building. Discussions would have to take place regarding possible renovation or more likely demolition.

Here the whole ‘world’ of litigation, blame and responsibility plays its hand. In this modern age, any organisation will understandably be wary of any action taken with the constant fear of a crippling backlash should anyone suffer and follow up with official complaint. A ‘juicy pie’ to sick modern-day solicitors?

It really does get somewhat out of hand as the grim spectre of health and safety rears its ugly head. Scrolling through the myriad of comments on this contentious issue makes interesting reading. It ranges from the bothy obliteration to total disregard.

“What a load of health and safety nonsense. An overnight stay is not going to have any long-term health implications. So, over the years the very many thousands of people who have visited the bothy are now suffering from asbestosis?...No...Thought not! “

This probably best fits my own personal viewpoint. After all I had been relatively closely connected to asbestos all those years ago. It has had no effect on me and stripping out redundant pipework must certainly be more hazardous than a one-night stay in a condemned bothy. But others disagree.

“Comments like this are ill informed. Limited asbestos exposure can lead to asbestosis and mesothelioma and all exposure should be regarded as hazardous.”

The illustrious NHS now plays a hand. “Asbestosis is a chronic long-term lung condition caused by *prolonged* exposure to asbestos. Asbestosis is a relatively rare condition as it takes a considerable amount of exposure to cause it.”

I read on with accelerating interest.

“Crashing your car or falling off a mountain can be regarded as hazardous and should be avoided. A complete overreaction because of the compensation culture of this country these days.” ‘Elf’ and safety culture is rife in the MBA these days what with the fire blankets/ removal of fireplaces and upper floor sleeping platforms “Compo ” culture prevails. The knocking down of this bothy will save no lives and benefit no-one except whoever builds the new one.

I know where I stand should I find myself out in the wild with inclement weather blowing in from the high crags of Ben Alder. The Nanny State is not for me. When I discovered that Lords Rake was ‘out of bounds’ the first chance I had was to visit Wasdale and carry out the epic traverse from the Pike to Scafell. Once again, the whole concept of the bothy is that they are basic, simple and often very remote shelters. If we listen to many of the doom and gloom merchants we may as well build a series of ‘Hiltons’ across the slopes

You must make up your own mind.

My first visit to Culra was many years ago and I can still remember the journey as though it was yesterday. A glorious day commenced at the railway station at Dalwhinnie and this was followed by a super quick bicycle ride towards and beyond Ben Alder Lodge. Loch Pattock was reached and I crossed the unique precarious suspension bridge before a rough 3 km track brought me to the bothy at Culra. In all total a journey of 15 km from my starting point. It had taken me about two hours and I was glad to get into the cool of the bothy. It was about 2 pm and the bothy was relatively luxurious compared with others I had experienced. I noticed one set of gear lying on a wooden bench. After exploring the many rooms of the bothy, I laid out my sleeping bag and had something to eat in the hot sunshine.



Figure 22: Interior of Culra bothy [2004]

The temperature in the bothy was 72 f but outside in the direct sunshine it was well over eighty. I decided to walk along the valley and seek out some Munros. Ben Alder was a possible target but after walking for some 3 km I decided on the Lancet ridge of Sgor Iutharn and the Munros beyond. I left the track leading to Bealach Dubh at GR 499744 and slogged up the lower slopes of the ridge. It was steep and hard going but once the ridge proper was gained the nature of the climb makes you forget the tiring penance. The upper reaches were quite sporty, and the ridge became narrow and exposed with vertical drops to either side. I was glad to reach the top and realise that the serious bit of climbing was now behind me as the ridge widened out and dropped to a col before the last slog up steep slopes to the plateau of Geal Charn. A walk of 1 km across the flat top brought me to a large cairn. This was as far along the ridge that I was going. I now turned north east and walked across the plateau reaching the steep drop down to Diollaid a Chairn with superb views of Loch Coire Cheap to the 'left.' After crossing over Diollaid a' Chairn there was a longish slog up the stony slopes of Carn Dearg which I reached sometime after 7 pm. The views were superb in all directions. From the

summit, I made the mistake of descending direct towards the bothy and it was very steep and rocky. A journey north east for about 1 km. would have made it easier. Nevertheless, I descended quickly and was in the bothy within the hour. An elderly couple were in residence and had anti-midge flames burning. Therefore, I had no problems drinking my bottle of red wine and consuming the steak pie I had left in the bothy that afternoon. The other occupant did not turn in. They must have been sleeping rough out on the hill. It was a reasonable night, but I still felt I had not had much sleep by the morning.

The following day was even more stunning weather wise and an ascent of Long Leachas gave me access to the flat summit plateau of Ben Alder. By now a thin haze had turned to grey clouds and in a westerly direction the clouds had a distinctively angry appearance. The thought of the slog up to Beinn Bheoil did nothing for me and I aborted further progress on the Bealach Breabag. Picking up a good path I arrived back at the bothy by 3pm and dozed away an hour or more before the long cycle out took me back to civilisation.

Bothy obsession but not mine

Success by default but not mine.

85% of my Munro ascents have been lone ventures; but there is always the odd anomaly. In May 2007, I was fully occupied in ascending peaks that had somehow 'escaped' me on previous excursions. After 'bagging' several of the missing Fannich peaks I found myself staying in the historically famous Aultguish Inn. I had my own room in the adjoining bunkhouse which in fact was possibly more luxurious than the rooms in the actual hotel. Huge old-fashioned baths with unlimited hot water. Massive breakfasts and for once in my travels good company. I had met Mark a few days previous and he was also determined to 'complete' his Munro task. Mark was climbing with John (both were doctors) and another friend Rod. Mark was almost desperate to experience a bothy stay and it was only a couple of really foul weather days that had persuaded him against the long walk in to Sheneval.

I had still to climb Beinn Dearg and it so happened that all four of us set out on a cloudy but reasonable day to climb this peak. This pleased me. Lone climbing is great but occasional company is a bonus. We parked up at the western end of Loch Glascarnoch and took the path towards Loch a' Gharbhraim. We were all aware of the need to cross rivers and this was certainly 'niggling' away at the back of our minds. The weather had been very wet for at least four days and it was obvious all that water would be finding its way back to the sea via the mountain streams standing in our way. We were delighted to discover that at the point where the Allt a' Gharbhraim entered the loch it was possible to cross without the inconvenience of removing boots. Walking alongside Loch Coire Lair we slanted upwards towards the outlet stream of Loch a' Choire Ghranda. This was impressive scenery with the awesome crags of Beinn Dearg standing out. The climb up to the ridge was very steep and I was out at the back. Once upon the ridge it became more of a scramble with a bit of hands on rock. This suited me more than endless slog and I now moved on ahead towards the summit of Cona Mheall. As I reached the top Beinn Dearg disappeared into a mass of billowing cloud. The way forward towards Meal nan Ceapraichean also disappeared when just a few moments before it was all clear. The view out to the east was clear. After a stop for food we commenced the descent to the bealach to the west and here the skies cleared again, and

the way forward was in view. At this stage Mark fully intended to continue after Beinn Dearg as this would be Munro number 99. He badly desired number 100. As I had climbed these two extra Munros two years previously in a howling gale with little or no visibility I had stated I would continue if they offered views from the top. This looked unlikely as we plodded up the slopes to the flat top of Beinn Dearg. Inwardly I decided to make Beinn Dearg my main goal and looked forward to a descent along the crest above Loch a' Choire Ghranda. Just as we reached the top of Beinn Dearg the clouds were torn apart yet again, and reasonable views were obtained, mainly to the west and south. Northwards still had a covering of dark angry clouds.

This was indeed decision time. It was 3.40 pm and Mark and John left the top at 3.45 whilst Rod and I left fifteen minutes later in the opposite direction. Our descent was interesting and in good visibility we looked down the vertical crags above the loch. A later section was very steep indeed with crags that required careful circumnavigation. We managed this steep descent taking great care to avoid slips. The valley walk out was very long and seemed never ending. Probably 4 miles at the end of a long day and the last section was particularly tiring. The cars were reached by 7 pm (3 hours from the top).

This was now the beginning of a mini epic.

We drove back to the bunkhouse as Rod had arranged to pick up the 'Docs' at 8 'ish' at the telephone box in Inverlael. After a gin and tonic and a clean-up he left at 8.20 to carry out the pick-up. We had worked out that it would probably take them longer than they had thought to descend. Also, a message had been picked up on Rods mobile which said "We are just leaving the top of Eididh nan Clach Geala after some difficulty route finding in the thick mist. It is 7 pm. "

We worked this out. From Beinn Dearg to Ceapraichean would normally take approx. 40 minutes. The second Munro should take 50 minutes or so. Leaving Beinn Dearg at 3.45 meant an arrival at the 2nd Munro at roughly 5.30. They were obviously well behind schedule and the weather was taking a serious turn for the worse. The march out was a good two hours, more likely 2-3 hours. It looked like a pick up at about 9.30 'ish'. I remembered my ascent and descent. It was in horrendous conditions. I had walked out on a strict compass bearing and fortunately picked up the stalkers path without too much trouble. I then had the very long descent to make, maybe 4-5 miles. Not easy; and difficult in poor conditions. Rod phoned the bunkhouse at 11 pm to say that they had not turned up. He again phoned at midnight after which Rod phoned the mountain rescue for advice. They suggested a delay until the morning as it was not a cold night even though visibility was minimal. Little could be achieved in the thick clag and darkness. The next morning brought no further news or developments and Rod met up with the mountain rescue teams at 9 am and a plan was formulated. As it was now 5 hours after daylight I suspected that something bad had happened or that they were completely off route. Wherever they had ended up it could not take more than a few hours to reach the roads towards the west. That is assuming they had left the summit in the correct (or nearly correct) direction. The mountain rescue teams seemed to know what they were doing. By 11 am I was really convinced that Mark and John must be way out to the east in the wild country of the Freewater forest.

I drove into Ulapool to get some supplies and much needed petrol. On return to the phone box at Inverael I noticed all the vehicles had departed. Assuming the crisis was over I returned to the bunkhouse and was 'filled in' on events.

They had reached Ceapraichean in good time and in clear weather. Spirits were high as Munro number 100 was claimed. However, conditions now deteriorated in a big way and the next Munro took a lot longer to reach than expected. In fact, a fifty-minute climb took almost three hours. Here the cloud cover caused massive confusion and tiredness and possible hypothermia were taking their toll. It seems amazing but a descent on a bearing of 90 degrees east instead of 270-degree west had been taken. In very poor conditions these things can easily happen. Mark and John struggled down featureless slopes and a state of desperation was setting in. Just where the hell were they? Fortune was certainly on their side as several hours later they came across a haven in the form of a bothy they had not known existed. Even more important was the fact the bothy was occupied. They were told of their whereabouts (Glean Beag) which came as a great shock when the map was carefully consulted. There was nothing to do now other than wait for the morning. Their newly acquainted friends dished out hot pasta and a cold uncomfortable night was spent on the cold bothy floor.

The next morning entailed a massive walk out along Gleann Beag towards Strath Vaich a trek of some 12-14 miles. Some distance along the track they were met by a Landrover from the mountain rescue team. As no signals on their mobile phones were obtained this was the first contact with outside 'agencies' after we received their message from Eididh nan Clach Geala.

My fear that something had badly gone wrong was based on the premise that it was impossible to walk out on a bearing so completely wrong.

The things some people do in order to stay in a bothy??? I knew Mark had set his heart on reaching Sheneval. Glen Beg by default was a good second?

The nasty side of Scafell Pike - claustrophobic hell

My 50th ascent of Scafell Pike took place on one of the most perfect weather days of my long mountain career. Glorious blue skies, little breeze and views out to the far distant horizon. The Isle of Man could be seen out in the Irish Sea whilst I was relatively low on the hill. On the summit, Ireland could just be made out an experience I have rarely witnessed. I stayed on the top for over three hours and 'people watched' as hundreds of folk dragged their tired limbs to the massive summit cairn.

This was all so very different from an ascent back in the late 1980's where my vivid memory leaves me with a feeling of dread as to what *might* have happened.

I left the old DG (inn) in the Langdale valley for an ascent that usually takes me 3 ½ - 4 hours. The intention was to meet up with two friends who were climbing from Borrowdale and we had a prearranged plan to leave a message under a big boulder exactly one yard due north of the triangulation column. Thus, whoever got there 'second' would know the whereabouts of the first arrival. We would then spend the night on the top of England. The weather was awful and in the valley it was raining and the wind was screaming down from Rossett Pass. I bent forward and struggled into the teeth of this developing gale. At Angle Tarn, I was almost blown into the tarn waters and I was amazed to see the spray being picked up and carried away in all directions. I was having serious doubts about my sanity even at this stage. I kept attempting to "compartmentalise" my climb. Pick out a target and get to it. Then pick another and hope that progress would follow. At Esk Hause I gladly took refuge behind the large wall shelter and huddled down feeling very sorry for myself.

Turning back has rarely been in my vocabulary so I decided to carry on even though the prospects were decidedly unpleasant.

(At this moment in time, although I did not find out until several days later, my friends had just reached the plateau top of Esk Hause and with abundant common sense decided to turn back.)

Thus, although I did not know it at the time, I was not totally alone.

I certainly felt it.

I struggled into Calf Cove and in the lee of Ill Crag was afforded a little shelter. However, all good things come to an end and once on the boulder strewn top of Ill Crag all hell was let loose. I was down on my hands and knees clutching boulders to stop myself being blown into oblivion.⁶ A climb/ walk of usually 10 minutes took me well over an hour. The last 300feet to the summit will forever haunt me and my arrival at 11 pm concluded a 9 hour climb that usually takes 4. Of course, my friends were not there. No-one was. I had slept out on Scafell Pike before on a New Year's Eve but then it had been calm; very cold, but windless. The thought of struggling back into the teeth of that hurricane was leaving me in total despair. A search for a boulder under which to hide my message was out of the question in this gale. I considered a summit bivvy and then I had an inspiration. Down on the Mickledore ridge some 400 ft. towards Scafell there was a stretcher box and within would be resting a stretcher. This was to be my refuge. Leaving the top, I descended and had one nasty moment when fatigue caused me to lose the obvious path across the sea of boulders. Fortunately, I found a cairn in the darkness and after a struggle in the wind found myself on the ridge and the hoped-for salvation of the 'box.'

The container is approx. 7 feet in length and has the appearance of a solid coffin. Entrance is by means of a lid type door at the front end, which is held in place by a clasp on the outside. The interior held a canvas stretcher that in my case was a ready made 'bed' in a hostile environment of cold and wicked wind. I crawled in and slammed the lid on the miserable world.

All night the wind howled across the ridge and although this was very disconcerting I felt relatively safe in my cramped refuge.

The true horrors of my climb were about to 'rear their head' the next morning. At 7am I realised I had to make downward progress. I had to get off this infernal hill. It was now that fear gripped me even more than the gale of the previous night climb. The box had an external clasp. It could only be operated from the outside. I could not open it as I had slammed it down on my arrival the previous evening. I kicked out and kicked again. Little pressure could be exerted, as I was lying flat. It would be no use shouting as the box was covered in sheet steel as a weather protector, and anyway I would have to time

⁶ K2 is fully deserving of the title the 'killer mountain'. The list of disasters is endless, but one does stand out above all and illustrates just how quickly mountain conditions can change. Like many climbers before her Allison Hargreaves had fallen into the trap of opting for a day of rest whilst above what is commonly known as the death zone. In hindsight, this decision was foolhardy to the point of cavalier. Thus, Allison and her fellow climbers wasted a glorious weather day lying in their tents in a futile attempt to rehydrate when in fact their very own bodies were slowly dying. Their joy was short-lived as an appalling storm was on it's way and struck them whilst on the upper slopes of the mountain. From calm to hell took a matter of minutes and all the brave climbers were literally plucked off the mountain and tossed into the void. Whilst crossing the Ill Crag plateau I experienced somewhat similar conditions. On one occasion, I was lifted from the boulder strewn path and tossed some fifteen yards away to land heavily. Not a K2 moment but still one to make me seriously think.

my 'cries' at exactly the time someone was passing. In these conditions, this could be days. I had my ice axe but had left it outside so there was no chance of me hacking my way out.

Desperation set in.

I have never considered myself as claustrophobic but now I was having serious doubts.

I later found out that claustrophobia is the fear of having no escape, and being closed into a small space. It is typically classified as an anxiety disorder and often results in a rather severe panic attack. It is also confused sometimes with cleithrophobia, the fear of being trapped.

Others noted that this was an irrational fear and that the attacks were caused by certain stimuli such as being in a small room.

My stretcher box was small.

I thought back many years. During my time teaching I was an outdoor pursuit instructor and on several occasions we undertook activities such as potholing. I cannot ever claim to have really enjoyed it, but the mystic scenery of the underground world was something worth venturing down to witness. I shall always remember a scary moment whilst crawling through the cheese press in the Long Churn cave system. An adventurer in front of me froze and she had her very own panic attack. I could not go forward neither could I retreat. Underground counselling was not a particularly satisfactory event, but it did succeed, and we overcame and arrived back into the warm sunshine. Another moment came flooding back to me. After leaving the marines I took on a job working for Big Tom and one of my tasks was to clean and paint the interior of a large tank. The entrance was through a tiny hatchway. As I knelt within, carrying out my hot and dusty task, it did cross my mind that the only route of escape was that very small and somewhat insignificant hatch. I prevailed and thought no more about it.

Now here I was trapped in this infernal mountain coffin.

Advice to think positively left me cold; as did the optimism of relax and be calm.

Bollocks. I was in danger.

I was not being irrational

I was scared shitless.

I was panicking.

I kicked out viscusly.

The lid flew open.

I shot out of with a speed I have never shown before or after that sacred moment. I 'kitted up' and at 8 'ish' I climbed back to the summit. I left a full message⁷ under a stone near the trig. point and I descended quickly over Broad Crag and Ill Crag. On the slopes towards Esk Hause I was delighted to see other people, the first I had seen for 21 hours. Never were pints in the old DG so welcome. After rejecting several tempting

⁷) On the many times I have climbed the Pike since my stormy stopover I have never managed to find my message. I know exactly where I left it. Either it has been discovered and removed or I have made a mistake in my location of the boulder. Not unlike Wainwright's buried treasure on Lank Rigg. (Lank Rigg 7 The Western Fells A. Wainwright.)

offers of accommodation, I returned to Liverpool calling in to my friends to see what had happened to them.

For days after my experience I was thinking all the time about how often our existence hangs by a tiny thread.

In my case it was the malfunction of a mere metal clasp on what had been my nocturnal refuge but may have been my daytime coffin.⁸

Do not even think of doing what I did. Even if the skies are caving in.

Penultimate Munro - trials and tribulations

Why on earth had I left Beinn Fhionnlaidh and Mullach na Dheiragain as my last two Munros? Whilst tackling them I was wishing it might have been Beinn na Lap or the Cairnwell.

For some unknown and strange reason, I was suffering mysterious feelings as I approached my penultimate climb. Four days of glorious weather had enabled me to visit Mull and Ben More was climbed along with the island Corbett. Accompanied by cobalt blue skies I had further unfinished business in the far north. Since my first visit to the Torridon giants, Beinn Eighe Spidean Coire nan Clach had been promoted to Munro status. I had only visited the triangulation point 972m and now I required the true summit 993m.

Munroists must get it right?

It was now that the weather gods were to have their say in the eventual proceedings. Leaving Torridon I drove to Achnasheen and then along Glen Carron heading towards the two Munros I still had to climb. There was much more cloud and the threat of serious rain was certainly in the air. I certainly did not fancy the thought of camping especially as access to these peaks entails a very long approach march. A diversion to the Corbett Sguman Coinntich only led to a lowering in my overall mood as the skies were now a broiling mass of dark angry cloud and although it was not actually raining the threat was so obviously there. The mountains were no longer friendly giants.

A rough 'doss' was followed by a damp and uncomfortable preparation for the long trek in to Iron Lodge and the eventual approach to my mountain. I still had hopes to climb both the Munros. With hindsight, this was a ridiculously ambitious desire. My mood was not solely darkened by the ominous weather. Serious river crossings were playing havoc at the back of my mind and my usually optimistic 'glass half full' was well and truly relegated to a 'glass half empty.' At first the track was tarmac but then it turned to gravel but still a surface along which speedy progress could be made. The rain now cascaded down with even greater force and within minutes I was totally soaked and my mood sank lower still. I reached Iron Lodge sometime after 10 am and sheltered from the heavy rain, a somewhat pointless gesture with conditions as they were. Leaving the lodge, I ascended the very steep path heading up through the pass towards Loch an Droma. This is a good path and I noticed that the sky was brightening somewhat even if my mood was still 'ultra low.' Time was marching on and at GR. 079294, 4 km from Iron Lodge I spotted marks of a tracked vehicle heading down towards the river. I followed them dreading what I might discover. The ground was marshy and so very wet

⁸ The stretcher box on Mickledore has now been changed. I noticed this on a recent ascent of the mountain. My refuge is gone but never forgotten.

but within ten minutes I reached the river to witness a raging torrent. I was in total dismay. This was not just a 'full' river. The flow of water was ominous and somewhat frightening and I had to get to the other side. Indecision kicked in. I could progress further downstream towards Loch Mullardoch and hope to cross where the river 'fanned out' as it entered the loch waters. Or could I dare a river crossing right here. I chose the latter. Drawing on all my Royal Marine experiences of river crossing I faced upstream and jammed my ski poles into the bed of the river. Fully booted I inched across the swelling waters. Half way across the water level was just below my groin and I made very slow progress, as a slip here would surely have been fatal. With enormous relief, I reached the opposite bank and immediately climbed a short rise to meet a good path heading away towards Loch Mullardoch. After another kilometre, I had similar difficulty crossing the Allt Cam but this time the distance to cross was only 5 yards. Shorter distance but even faster flow. Reaching GR 098288 I discovered an upturned boat across the path and gladly climbed beneath it to obtain relief from the torrential rainfall. It was now gone 1 pm and I looked ahead to the very long climb still to be negotiated. Looking on the map and working out the distance I had covered caused me just a little concern. The car was almost twelve miles away and I still had a considerable amount of ascent to complete. I walked along the track into Gleann a Choilich and once again realised I had another river crossing to make. I completed this with some grave difficulty at GR 103280 and after a short rest commenced the endless slog up the western flank of Beinn Fhionnlaidh. The slope was unremittingly steep before the gradient eased off. I was now on the summit ridge and a short climb north brought me to the small cairn adorning the highest point. The relief was massive but I fully realised just how far I had to return. Just a ten-minute stop before I commenced my descent sometime after 4. I had decided not to go straight down (the route I had ascended) but rather follow the ridge south towards the Bealach Beag 832m. This was taking me even further away from 'home' but the gradient was easier to negotiate. As I reached the bealach the clouds parted slightly and I obtained grand views of Carn Eighe, Mam Sodhail and other mountains to the south east.

Any lingering thought of a return over Mullach na Dheiragain was well and truly cast into the dustbin of optimism. Making my painful way back to the valley floor I regained the faint path and began to retrace my earlier route, still thinking of the river crossings yet to be made. All the time I was remembering my climbs in Iceland. Crossing glacial rivers can be a lottery. Present weather has little to do with water levels. Minimal and maximum flow depend on time of day and total distance from glacier snout. It can all turn out to be a mathematical task to enable any climber to be in the right place at the right time regarding getting across.

My mathematics was never much 'cop' and today calculations were irrelevant. The water levels had risen somewhat and my earlier escapades were now even more daunting. I must admit being fearful of motorways, but in the mountains, fear is a feeling I rarely experience. On this occasion I was just a little fearful. No-one knew where I was and these dam waters were scary to the highest degree. Time was 'running away' and after a final snack under my upturned boat I ventured again into the waters of hell. By the time I spotted Iron Lodge from my track on the slopes it was almost completely dark. The rain had returned and discomfort was a word that hardly described my true feelings. The feelings of apprehension I had experienced all the time from my distant departure came flooding back.

I entered the open lodge and took stock of my situation. The 8-mile slog in what was now cold sleet left me in total despair. It was completely dark and even though cold and

bare the lodge did offer shelter of some reliability. I looked around. The lounge had flaking plaster and one corner of the roof was collapsing. Nevertheless, it was weatherproof. The kitchen was cold and bare but it also offered total protection from the elements. The solid staircase led to the upper rooms in which there were several pieces of bedroom furniture. The lodge was cold. The lodge was bare; but the lodge was dry. I was going nowhere.

I discovered several old mats and arranged a 'bed' of sorts. A fire was out of the question. I had no matches and anyway this was not my house. I was only here because of the appalling exterior conditions. I was trespassing but only by default. My gear was wet but I did manage to salvage some items relatively dry. Total fatigue would also be my ally. In my condition, I think it might have been possible to sleep on the proverbial clothes line.

I am not superstitious and I am not a ghost believer. However, as I lay there in the cold darkness I did sense a real feeling. Something I could not quite work out. There was a presence, whatever that might mean. I thought of other long and lonely night time stopovers. My experiences at Benalder Cottage came back to mind. This place has a reputation to be haunted but that story I had completely cast aside as fantasy. Anyway, on my night there I was not alone and that does make a huge difference. Corryhully came to mind. That was spooky but almost all of it was to do with the weather. Howling winds and awesome rainfall accompanied by noises of all sorts of description. Corryhully was scary but not of the supernatural nature. I had slept out on the summit of Coniston Old Man many years ago. At midnight, I could see the lights of Blackpool and lighthouses on the Isle of Man. Just two hours later visibility was six feet and the rain cascaded down on my totally inadequate biivi sack. Scary? Yes; but only of a discomfort nature. Very many years ago when I was just a child I can remember being alone in the house and being very wary of venturing upstairs. My imagination was running riot and all sorts of irrational feelings were coursing through my being. This is the problem. The imagination takes hold and thought processes spiral out of control. Yes, it is the imagination that is to blame.

Back to the now. Back to Iron Lodge on this cold and dreary night. I was okay in my bivvy bag. I was relatively dry. I was safe from the elements.

But as sleep was searched for it was the noises that took control. Creaks and bangs, scrapings and howls all cascaded into the lodge and deep into my tired mind. I tried so hard to differentiate them. There were vibrations and movements. I was sure of this but of what? Sounds at night are accentuated simply because there are fewer other sounds to compete. When vision is not in play hearing is sharpened.; and of course, the wind can exaggerate any of the slightest noises that may abound through the hours of darkness.

Now I really was sure I could hear creaking. Was I on the edge of craziness? I desperately wanted to arrive at scientific answers to these weird noises. Creaking can be caused by the different contraction rates of different substances. Yes, that must be it. At night and in winter the whole house cools down thus creaking and rubbing takes place and it is all accentuated by the general silence.

Knocking, tapping, shuffling, creaking and bangs. There were explanations, but my mind was racing away with outlandish theories; again my imagination was in the ascendancy. I thought back to a film I had seen many years ago. My favourite actor Jack Nicholson was a very troubled character staying with his family at a remote and lonely hotel as a caretaker. The hotel had been the scene of a violent murder by a past caretaker

and the disembodied spirits of his two little daughters roamed the corridors at will. Jack becomes unbalanced and it was only by a narrow margin that his wife and son managed to escape. Jack was left to freeze to death in a most horrible manner. This memory was certainly not what I wanted at this unnerving juncture at Iron Lodge.

But total fatigue and a misfiring of my brain brought it all to an end and it was only the dull light of a cold dawn that brought me back to the so called real world. They say that animals celebrate the dawn and birds turn to a cascade of sound. For me this cold, damp, dawn daylight was so very welcome.

The walk out to my car was long and uncomfortable and all along the way my mind was occupied by the events of the previous night. All was okay in the end. Considerations of parallel universe, de ja vu and actual exploration of the noise source raced through my tired brain. I had not investigated directly because of a previous experience. Funny noises and scrapes on the door of a bothy had been caused by an inquisitive deer. Why go outside to merely see this event.

Or was it that to exit my safe bivvy sack was less desirable than lying there trying to ignore the whole escapade.

Was I genuinely scared?



Figure 23: Bedroom Iron Lodge



Figure 24: Lounge Iron Lodge [2008]



Figure 25: Staircase Iron Lodge

A hut on Lingy Hill

“I felt I was preparing a book that would have no readers at all, a script that would have no players and no public. Glorious days of absolute freedom, days like feeling the only person on earth. No crowds to dodge, no noisy chatter, no litter. Just me and the sheep and the larks above. “

Poignant words from Wainwright written in 1961 on completion of his Northern Fells volume.



Figure 26: Shooting box on Great Lingy Hill

I had ventured to these hills four years previously (1957) and experienced exactly the same feelings. Although only a teenager I fully concurred with his sentiments and if I had not I surely would have done so on reading his words. The Northern Fells were lonely and remote and 60 years ago it was possible to walk and walk without seeing a soul for days on end. I can still remember coming across a lonely outpost in the form of a shooting box on Great Lingy Hill. I loathed the original purpose of this structure as it was tied to the slaughter of the innocent but my memory of it remained fixed in my mind. In the 1990's I visited again, and this time spent a night of seclusion within its confines. It was on this occasion I met a chap whose occupation was to check out the fells and generally keep an eye on everything for the National Park authorities. He informed me he would like to win the lottery a thought that left me cold and totally without interest. I tried to assure this chap that he had almost the perfect occupation. Being paid to roam the fells and keep an eye on all that was around him. I think he

agreed by the time it came for us to depart. In 2006, I returned to the shooting box on a day of great heat and serious drought. Once again, I stayed overnight and on the following day I roamed the fells in total seclusion. At the end of a seriously hot day I reached the summit of Blencathra and almost immediately found myself enclosed within a cell of sweating ascenders. Scores of people on the popular top but not a soul had I seen on Mungrisdale Common, Great Sca Fell or Knott.

Requiem for a bothy wanderer

February 2017. Unseasonably mild and not a bit of snow to be seen. The loneliness is total although I have heard that Mosedale is no longer the seclusion zone of my youth. The bothy is almost luxurious compared to my memories of sixty years ago. Yes, it was that long ago when I first visited this lonely outpost in Lakeland.

In 1957 Mosedale Cottage was a semi ruin as I was commencing my deep interest in the drowned village of Mardale. Large sections of the construction were roofless and crumbling walls and stone strewn waste gave the appearance of a building within the confines of a wartime zone. It was not a place to linger and I had other ruins to seek out on the upper banks of the unforgiving reservoir.

It was to be another forty years before I next saw Mosedale. My obsession with Mardale had undertaken a short break as I commenced a pictorial record of the secluded valley of Swindale using one hundred-year-old maps.

As I looked down on Swindale, I had a feeling similar to that during all my studies of Haweswater and Mardale. I was thinking of the 1930's when Mardale was slowly 'dying'. Farmhouses that had stood for centuries were being razed to the ground and the old church and friendly inn were being denied to future generations. The whole valley was being prepared for the great flood. Swindale too was being prepared for a similar fate but something happened at the last moment. Almost like a young girl ready for the ball; but she did not get to go. Probably a better analogy would be preparation for a wake or funeral that never happened. In Mardale everything died. Buildings, animals, trees and birds.

But Swindale survived.

My 1997 exploration took me to all the historic buildings of this remote and lonely valley. On completion, I climbed the steep valley headwall and arrived on the flat slopes leading towards Gatescarth. Some distance short of the pass I saw it again. Mosedale Cottage stood out clearly under the steep scree covered slopes of a past mining venture.

I walked across to investigate and was pleasantly surprised to see workers involved in renovations of a sort. Only small changes, but it was obvious someone was taking an interest in this old cottage, once the home to local shepherds. In 1999 the Mountain Bothy Association formally took responsibility for the building and major improvements were put into operation. When next I visited in 2002 the bothy was almost unrecognisable and since that year further work has been carried out.

Now here I was in yet another year and so very grateful for the endless labours of the willing volunteers of the MBA.

There is nothing quite so comforting as a good glowing fire. Alcohol helps, and an imagination might just be the final element to make a bothy stopover unique. There was

nobody to distract me and I turned to my crumpled newspaper that I had intended to use to ignite my fire.

At last we were witnessing a leader who actually desired to do something. To put into operation policies that might well change the hopeless mess the world was careering towards. In just the last nine months, certain European leaders had initiated policies that no-one can deny led to death and terrorist actions. To be sure the original aim was commendable, but sadly misguided.

The world is changing and the times of doing nothing and suppressing the will of the people are over. Brexit, the exit of Cameron, the Italian resignations and the people's choice of Donald Trump have set in motion momentous change. What might be next?

France, Holland, the economic mess of Greece and the divisions within Spain over hurtful youth unemployment.

It was all in the newspaper that I did not burn. The firelights had done their work and now I could read words I would normally not see.

If you have a cancer it requires urgent action. If possible, it must be 'cut out.' You do not encourage it. Firm action is vital to carry out elimination. If liberal ideas lead to innocent people being blown up on trains and shoppers being mown down by lorries, then action must be taken. If some 'poor' sad psycho is inconvenienced, so be it. The people must be protected. The liberal ideas of Clegg and Farron, Blair and Cameron are out of touch and out of date.

9/11 illustrated this succinctly. Maniacs, for whatever reason, destroyed thousands of innocent people in acts of savagery. As soon as they embark on a journey such as this they give up any consideration of their human rights. To be blunt they are simply no longer human. They must be eliminated.

I can still think back to the weeks after Bin Laden was eliminated. A certain politician, who in my opinion should have known better, declared his dismay that the thug was killed and not captured. He wanted him interrogated. How completely out of touch this statement was. Maybe it illustrates just why he never actually held high meaningful office.

I can relate all these issues to my own service experiences. If someone is shooting at me and doing their damndest to kill me I shoot back. I do not ask questions, nor do I request he puts down his annoying weapon. I shoot and if I kill so be it. This did happen, but I would fear for the soldier of today who is now also at the mercy of the money grabbing legal system.

The bothy fire has disappeared and the wind has risen but temperatures are well above average for this time of year. I had brought in some coal but my biggest load item was a delicious bottle of the famous grouse. I poured myself a huge dram and set back to regain my thoughts.

When the Liverpool Institute closed in 1985 (a victim of the militant movement within the Liverpool Labour party) the plan was for three schools to merge to form an impressively named University School. This was to consist of 200 students from the failed Paddington Comprehensive (built in 1968 for 2000 students and now down to a tenth of that number) 700 students from the boys Institute and 200 girls from Blackburne House. Sadly, the whole project was doomed from day one. The city was in the grip of nonsensical political correctness and this filtered into every aspect of authority organisation. By 1990 the eleven hundred students of University school had

declined to just 28 and the school followed the Institutes into oblivion. I taught right through those crazy days of argument, bitterness, non-co-operation and often plain stupidity. The racial aspect 'reared its head,' on so many occasions fuelled by many who simply wanted to create problems where probably no real problems existed.

I still have a copy of the Liverpool Echo dated February 12th 1986 with the front-page headlines "Pupils quit school in race row."

Seven senior students walked out of the school because they feared for their safety. These boys, four of them prefects, moved to the girl's section because they feared they would be attacked. The boys and their parents claimed that moves to promote racial harmony had the reverse effect. New rulings included the following.

A blackboard must now be called a chalk board and school discos are to be turned into reggae parties. A pupil was told off for drawing Greenland larger than Africa. (I can relate to this issue. As head of Geography I was told in no uncertain terms that the mercator projection could not be used on maps of the world. It made Africa look smaller than Greenland. I could not believe my ears and gave the misguided teacher a full piece of my mind) Black bin liners were abolished and this was followed by wheelie bins. In Liverpool to this day they are purple. My close friend George, the school groundsman, was ordered to rename his black Labrador. He had called it 'Sooty.'

Other newspaper articles went on to state "It is like two different school in one. There is one rule for the white students and another for the black pupils. The teachers are frightened to do anything in case they are called racist".

On the occasion of a London based education advisor visiting the school I was escorting him out to his car when he spotted three black students vandalising the workshop windows. He looked at me for action, which certainly was not about to be delivered. He was quite amazed; therefore, I quickly opened the fire door and invited him to intervene with corrective measures. He thought for just a moment and then proceeded with me along the corridor and out on to the road where he had parked his car. He now discovered his car placed neatly on bricks and all four expensive wheels long gone missing. I did telephone the police regarding the damage to school but if I had done the so called 'noble' thing it is almost a certainty I would have fallen foul of the racist card and probably suspended for the next twenty-five years. The craziness went on and on and the school sunk lower and lower until in 1990 it was put out of its misery.

The sadness of all this was the fact that the problems did not actually exist. They were all 'fired up' by adults who were more than a little politically motivated. The students were great. Black or White, Muslim or Jew disabled or able bodied it did not matter. I was an outdoor pursuits tutor and myself and every section of the school ventured out to hills, bunkhouses, ski slopes and cave systems in total happiness and harmony.

Why do we allow interfering out of touch political 'meddlers' ruin everything?

Out on the mountains we were all one happy team.

It was all coming back to me and an article in my newspaper really caught my eye. People were rallying against the policies of Donald Trump. Of course, this is their right and as long as it is peaceful it is perfectly acceptable. In fact, it is the bedrock of our democratic system. However, have these people not heard of manifestos. Trump had just fought and won an election. Before this election he had very clearly stated what he intended to do. Now he was doing it the narrow-minded liberals were aghast and full of

anger. All very similar to the politicians who cannot stomach the wishes of the people of the United Kingdom who voted for Brexit and quite rightly are expecting Brexit.

Trump is not just doing the popular thing he is doing the necessary thing and anything that eases the possibility of me and my family being blown up by some maniac is very alright by me.

Time for sleep and it did not come easily. At 73 your bones are not so unforgiving and hard wooden benches just a little less attractive

February marched in and again it was a dull and damp day. I did not have far to walk but somehow it all seemed to take more time. The ground was damp and the sky was grey and my mood was low. As I walked past the ruins of High Swindale Head it all seemed too much.

I was moving back into the manic world, but my spirit was left high on the fell tops. I was finding paths that used to give me no concern just a little problematic. Strangely I could remember climbs of the distant past whilst events of just a month ago were dim within my mind. Was it like this for my dear old friend Gabriel, the 'legend' of Williamson tunnels. Sadly, now in a care home he has almost no knowledge of recent events but can certainly go back to what he continually calls the good old days. Sitting with Gabriel is so sad and a reminder that we are all so very finite. Yes, I was so very low. The inevitability of the finite and impossibility of the infinite.

I must snap out of this gloomy mood. A little further on I reach Truss Gap where workmen are carrying out serious modernisation. From seclusion and memories, I am now back to JCB's and mechanical diggers. In just a few hundred yards I am back at my motor car and the transition is complete.

I am back in the 'real' world.

Do I really want to be here???

I had come the complete circle. Bothies to wild camps. Uncomfortable doss to strange tin shacks. Strange overnight stays in vulnerable shooting boxes to a desperate night in a storm ridden stretcher box.

Almost always alone and certainly always in superb surroundings.

Why?

Ticking (climbing) Munros was 'fun.' (for me) The achievement was my existence highlight. The bothy became an integral part of just reaching many remote areas. A means to an end. But they also played an important role in their own right. "***The experience***"

No, I am not 'ticking' bothies, merely relating *experiences*. As the years pass by age inevitably creeps upon us all. Maybe I shall go out there and seek some of the famous bothies I have missed on my previous journeys. The famous Tarf Hotel which is so ridiculously named. A hotel it certainly is not. Strange that I have never visited this very lonely outpost. My ascents of An Sgarsoch and Carn an Fhithleir had been carried out from Linn of Dee. And of course, a return to the ultimate in mystery the secret howff on the rocky slopes near Beinn a Bhuid

Thus, my account has been a 'taster.' My bothy experience might have taken up over 50 years but it is still an ongoing task. Not unlike the opening of Joseph Williamsons mysterious tunnels. We had the massive task of clearing out 150 years of accumulated

rubbish and if we had waited for this task to be completed we probably would never have opened. Instead the weird attraction opened in 2002 and the tours ran alongside the ongoing clearance of junk. My bothy stopovers will continue and with the sole company of a decent malt I cannot think of anything more desirable.

This is not the place for bothy rules I'll leave that to your common sense. Where are they all? Well this is where a little controversy might 'rear its head.' I can remember in my early years of bothy stays I just came upon them. I did not have a list and this was before the MBA (Mountain Bothies Association) came into existence. Many of the bothies were indeed desperate lodgings.

I have discovered a jumble of notes in an old chest in my study. For the purpose of updating, whenever I have heard of recent developments, I have included them adding the accuracy of today to my often-dated memories.

But here I have to be very careful in reaching a balance. It is certainly true that the rise of the internet and social media (in some respects a curse?) has put bothy provision at risk. No longer a matter of word of mouth, bothy location can now be acquired by all and sundry with access to a computer. The bothy can be open to abuse and in some respects, it is.

But.

They were abused before. Human beings will always have certain traits. Many famous bothies were trashed in the 1920's and 30's. It might well be unfair to totally blame modern technology.

And.

There were paedophiles and freaks before pornography. The sickness of modern media is not totally to blame.

And.

Some people are sick and will carry out abuse whatever system or circumstances are in place.

I want you to go out there and like me seek your bothy experience. Always with total respect to animals, property and people.

3. BOTHIES AND HOWFFS

Introduction

Not a definitive list, and here I am somewhat concerned with the word list. This is not intended to be a list of bothies but more a list of my experiences. On my journeys across Scotland I have had discussions with other bothy folk. Some have been critical of bothy lists and possibly there is some validity in their concern. However, we must accept a balance. Accusations that lists will only make the bothy more susceptible to vandalism etc. are pointless. Almost all and every bothy, howff and doss are available to anyone who can read a map. If indeed they do want to go out there and cause damage can we prevent this from happening?

How do we stop the irrational (irrational to us) actions of modern day terrorists? If we had that answer the world would be a much safer place. Just how did the American sailors react to the madness of the kamikaze pilots in the dying stages of the Pacific War? Of course they could not, and carnage was the result. If you are confronted with an adversary who has no respect for his/her life the final outcome is likely to be unpleasant.

Trying to keep the bothy a secret will not work. We really have to trust human nature and hope dearly that people will act in a sensible and respectful manner.

Will this happen? I really don't know. It may be here that I find common ground with the instigators of secrecy.

Some of these bothies I have yet to visit. I doubt anyone could visit or pass by all the old ruins, crofts and bothies that exist over the whole length and breadth of Scotland. The following is an account of some of the imaginative places I have managed to see.

Regarding the bothies visited I have added some brief notes, anecdotes, and a little history where applicable. I have also included many of the ruins I have come across on my fifty-nine-year journey across the Highlands. It was within some of these ruins that I was happy to spend many a night sheltering from the often wild and windy weather Scotland can throw at the weary traveller. Some of the places of 'doss' have disappeared and others have slipped even further to ruin and waste. However, as I have written before, this applies to everything and not just buildings. The greatest example is ourselves. When I struggle up mountain slopes today I can certainly vouch for this.

I have started in the far north and moved southwards.

It does form the basis for further exploration. Yours.

Remember because several maps overlap certain locations appear on more than one OS sheet. (Example Corroun bothy will appear on sheet 36 and sheet 43. Sourlies on sheet 33 and sheet 40 etc.)

Scottish mainland

Bothy	O.S. sheet	Grid reference
Kearvaig	9	292727

Firing range nearby. Caution required. Scene of the demise of Margaret Davies who mysteriously starved within the bothy in 2002. She died at Stornoway several days after discovery. Diagnosis hypothermia.⁹

This is a beautiful location for those who seek solitude and satisfies my personal desire for aloneness. So much history within the remains of several buildings in this area. My visit was fleeting and long ago. The bothy is now in excellent condition. It was renovated in 2009. Kearvaig is a three-room cottage with a separate section 'bolted on' to the side. The right-hand room of the cottage is a communal area and the left-hand room has a sleeping platform above a concrete floor. There are two wood panel lined rooms in an attic. The end room is effectively an independent bothy with its own entrance door, hearth and sleeping platform.

Why did Margaret die so mysteriously?

She was walking the Cape Wrath trail and had camped out before retreating to the bothy. Her close family believed that Margaret was working on a treatise on the nature of solitude and at Kearvaig was seeking the intensity of isolation. Certainly, a traveller in search of isolation will find it at Kearvaig. The bothy is set upon the shoreline of a wide pristine beach where the breakers unfurl on the north Atlantic tide. All around, the land sweeps up to steep impressive cliffs.

Here another element of mystery 'rears its head.' What was such an experienced world traveller doing without sufficient food and heating supplies.?

Was it that she really was 'dabbling' into the strange cult of breatharianism a concept which promotes living on light alone with almost entirely a lack of food and liquids. Followers of the cult believe that the energy saved in digesting food and drink can be transferred into physical, emotional and spiritual energy.

Was Margaret killed by her own curiosity; a death brought about by playing Russian roulette with the concept? A little like a climber who realises the point of no return has been reached. The summit beckons but common sense is also screaming out "descend". Once terminal difficulty had been reached she would have rued the fact that it was a steep 20-minute climb across loose rocks before the single-track road could be reached. Even then it was a huge distance to any form of habitation. Did she succumb to the advanced stages of hypothermia the symptoms of which can include listlessness, confusion and Margaret's euphoric denial that anything was wrong until it was too late. Was it all a tragic misjudgement?

⁹ All that remained of Margaret's stay at Kearvaig was a Woolworths bag stuffed with rubbish, mottled tea bags, Kit Kat wrappers and empty packs of dried rations. Near the window where she left a note begging for food was discovered a jam jar of dried out wild flowers resting in a stagnant inch of liquid. The fireplace was cold and miserable. This was the depressing scene in which Margaret slipped further and further away from life, warmth and beauty.

All of this is horribly close to me. Like Margaret I am an intensely private person thriving on physical and mental challenges. Margaret was not interested in money only requiring enough to fund her adventurous travels. Money is of no consequence to me.

Maybe Margaret's mother can put this matter to 'bed' as far as I am concerned. "Margaret was a loner but never complained of being lonely." Regarding her paintings. "Her aim was to make a statement about the human condition, whether on emotional, psychological or philosophical levels. "

Margaret died in 2002 and I only came across her story several years ago.

I had put my pen to paper more than 50 years ago and so much is similar.

Scary?

Strathchailleach

9

249658

Sandy's bothy. The home of the eccentric James McRory Smith for over 30 years. One of the most remote cottages in the British Isles. Renovated after his death. Sandy like myself was partial to a can of Carlsberg Special Brew. Uncannily like myself he despised the rat race and wanted a simple life.¹⁰ He knew that walking kept you healthy. Walking is one of the first things we learn. We do it all our lives. Wandering the fells and wild places isn't dicing with death: it is a glorious enjoyment of life. (Wainwright) It all promotes your interest in birds and wild animals. At my cottage in Lunt I have a wonderful bird table that provides me so much pleasure watching the robins, sparrows, pigeons and finches taking sustenance from the seeds I put out almost every day. I have my two ex feral rescue cats that enjoy their wanderings in the wild fields next door.

When Sandy occupied Strathchailleach an arrangement was made with the MBA that the western room was to be an open bothy, whilst Sandy occupied the other room and the small back bedroom. Unfortunately, Sandy was to be uncooperative. Being a loner, he did not want others to be sharing his abode. Possibly his drinking binges dictated his mood. Maybe a bit like me. A recent birthday card I received

(73 rd.) showed a picture of a grumpy old man stating, "Old enough to know better, grumpy enough not to care."

What an amazing character Sandy was, and for those who wish to delve into the mind of an extrovert, "Highland Hermit" by James Carron answers most of your questions. My memories go back a long time. Sadly, I never met Sandy. Today the bothy consists of three rooms leading from a corridor. On the left-hand side is a room with a medium sized sleeping platform. On the right is the 'sitting room' with a fireplace in which to burn peat. It is in here that memorabilia of Sandy can be seen. At the back is a small kitchen area.

¹⁰ Inexplicably Sandy liked to listen to his portable radio' He enjoyed football commentaries, current affairs and political debates. Therefore, he did take an interest in what was happening beyond his bothy door. For someone who wished to detach himself from the 'rat race' this might seem a little odd. But who are we to judge?

A simple structure but solid. An ex shepherd cottage that has also been recently renovated by the MBA. Just below the bothy is a bridge that affords reliable crossings of the river when it is in spate. There is a lot of history regarding this crossing. My recollections go back decades, but recent hearsay gives an interesting input.¹¹

There was an interesting case of 'squatting' at this cottage in 1990.¹²

Only as long as you don't mind 'negative' roof. Solid lower walls still stand but it is a ruin some 500m west of Sandwood Loch. Superb location if wind and rain are absent! Not quite in view of the impressive Sandwood Bay. On distant visits, hardly a soul would be seen. The only access is along a path, much improved today. Sadly, in this modern age pollution is becoming a problem even in these remote locations. Filth, waste and cursed plastic are being washed up on the beach threatening wild life and spoiling the whole environment. All the fault of greedy selfish sick human beings who care not for what is around them. The solution?? There are too many human beings and until at least 70% are eliminated the problem will get worse. Sorry; I just despise the spoliation of places such as Sandwood Bay.¹³

¹¹ A weeklong deluge in October 2014 washed away the footbridge leading to Strathan bothy. I can remember a bridge very many years ago but it was not this one. Apparently in recent times there have been at least three bridges at this location. Hidden in the heather one can see some rotted wooden anchor posts from a very old bridge. If you look carefully you will see four telegraph poles which were installed by Navy Cadets in the 1980's. This bridge was effective, but like everything in life wear and tear was inevitable. After the strands rusted into the waters the remaining struts were destroyed by a massive flood in 2010. In 2012 the bridge was rebuilt using the original telegraph poles and wooden slats with all new wire. 18 months later another storm of massive proportions washed this structure away.

I have heard through the grapevine yet another bridge has been constructed at this important location. I am informed it is similar to the 2012 bridge and has 40 new 36mm wooden slats and the main suspension cable has been upgraded from 6mm to 8 mm wire rope. The handrail is 6 mm wire rope and the whole structure has a life expectancy of 25 years.

This bridge is very important and more so as the popular Cape Wrath trail encourages more and more walkers to this remote area. My long experiences have always illustrated the grave annoyance of arriving at a bridge marked on the map to discover a raging torrent of impassable water.

I have not seen this new bridge. but I am sure it exists So would any walker struggling through appalling rainstorms desperately looking for the shelter of the bothy at Strathan???

¹² A homeless pair of Cambridge graduates carried out a squat at Strathan. (Robbie Northway 35 and Anne 60). Along with their livestock (12 dogs, 40 geese some hens and ducks and a Shetland pony) they survived without electricity, running water or a toilet and utilised the shower at the fisherman's mission at Kinlochbervie. When they were served a notice of eviction it was ignored. However, as they had no title to the property their squat was doomed to failure. On April 4th, a party of officials walked into the bothy to enforce eviction. The building was secured. I have much sympathy with the Northways who being sick of the landowners, sick of the privileged, and sick of the whole bloody system attempted to live their lives in a far from ostentatious manner.

¹³ A recent survey (2016) discovered plastic particles in a third of fish caught off Britain. Microbeads barely visible to the naked eye are present as an exfoliant in shower gels, body scrubs and other beauty products. They create a gritty quality which helps to remove dirt, dead skin and grease. Microbeads do not bio-degrade when they are flushed away. Trillions end up in the marine food chain. Widespread contamination of cod, haddock, mackerel and shellfish is causing great risk to human health. An estimated 8 million tons of plastic enters our ocean every year bringing unimagined misery to wild life and the environment itself. Sandwood Bay is also a victim to this disgusting dumping. A pristine bay partly ruined by filthy human waste.

Strabeg**9****392518**

About 1.5 miles from the road. (A838) Park carefully. Landrover track for 1km then path. Bothy recently undergone renovation (2012) Large upstairs, kitchen and flushing loo, with a bathtub alongside. Originally this was a sheep farmers family home and it was sensibly constructed on a knoll to alleviate potential flooding problems. There is a nice fireplace so you can get yourself warm and cosy?

Balloch**9****321611**

A long derelict building. The front walls still stand approx. 6 feet high, up to several of the window lintels. (2008) A gable end, with chimney stack, still stands. For how long only time will tell. This ruin is totally roofless, but it would afford some shelter from horizontal wind or gale.

Lone bothy**9****308422**

To my knowledge not an open bothy and the building is locked up. This is an estate building.

When last seen the building had a good roof but some of the wall render was flaking off. There is a good bridge crossing the Abhainn an Loin However, do not expect shelter here. Often passed on an ascent of Arkle or Foinavon from the south.

**Cadha na Beaucaich
howff****9****325488**

A desperate shelter in glorious surroundings. This whole mountain range is indeed something special. The howff resembles a large cairn of boulders with a very small 'door' access to the interior. It is in fact a cairn with a roof.

Altnabad**9****463419**

On my marathon day (Aultguish- Ulapool- long drive - ascent of Ben Hope- long drive to Inchnadamph and 'knackered' mountain doss) I still found time to investigate Altnabad. All that remains are high walls and gable ends with chimney stacks. 5% shelter?

Moine House**9****518601**

After my successful ascent of Ben Hope I made a quick visit to this interesting bothy ruin. In 2008 the walls still stood in a solid form. Two gable ends along with chimney stacks gave a gaunt appearance.

Achnanclach**10****631512**

Not visited

Croft House **10** **793490**

Lochstrathy on OS map. Not visited. Very remote. 12 miles on forestry track from north or a boggy 5-mile hike from west. Substantial bothy. 2 up 3 down.

Glencoul **15** **271305**

I have yet to visit this area and maybe one day when the high summits are less than attractive I shall do so. Very long march in. Possible difficult river crossing in wet weather. However, a damaged bridge has recently been repaired. Solid bothy with small hallway and two rooms.

Glendhu **15** **283338**

Another bothy to visit. Logically whilst walking to Glencoul. Very much on my list. Solid bothy with 4 rooms.

Suileag **15** **150211**

One task above all others is a lonely re-acquaintance with the inselbergs of the far north west. I have climbed Stac Pollaidh, Cul Beag and Quinag, but not yet Suilven. A stopover at Suileag is a must before the grim reaper appears. A basic bothy but in an ideal location.

Clais **15** **138138**

This is a total ruin lying on higher ground near the eastern shore of Lochan na Claise. From inspection there were originally 2 rooms and an outbuilding. (My visit was thirty years ago) Today merely low walls remain. You will need a tent. This is indeed lonely, remote and potentially hostile terrain. In order to climb Stac Pollaidh and 2 Corbetts, Cul Beag and Cul Mor, an overnight bivvy was required.

Salachy **15** **335071**

On a long walk up Glen Oykel to Loch Ailsh I came across the total ruin of Salachy. It was difficult to locate, but this is a grand walk when the high tops are not required.

**Inchnadamph bone
caves** **15** **268170**

From the A837 at GR. 253179 make progress along an excellent track up the Allt nan Uamh on the route to the Corbett Breabag. You are in limestone 'country' and the stream will often disappear down sinkholes. After a mile or so you will see the caves high up on the right hand (south) slopes. I spent an intriguing half day exploring these caves and finally decided to abandon the toil of a mountain ascent. Whilst I was exploring I met up with a delightful family group. Myself, a father and his two daughters (aged 7 and 9 years) let our imaginations run riot as to the origin of these superb caves. I had done some serious potholing in the past and I am glad I had done so.



Figure 27: Bone caves near Inchnadamph with my two young friends

However, I cannot really say it had ‘fired me up.’ A couple of forages into these caves were quite sufficient for me on this occasion. Geologists have found within the caves bones from long extinct mammals such as the lynx, polar bear and arctic fox. Bones of 4 human beings had been discovered and radio carbon dating put them at 4,500 years of age. In total over 1,000 pieces of reindeer antler had been found within the caves, ranging from 47,000 years ago to 8,000 years.

Did ancient man ever use these caves as a home? We really do not know. However, as the whole site is a special site of scientific interest it is vital we all respect the surroundings. Visit and explore, but if you require shelter use your tent or nearby Inchnadamph Lodge. Respect our history.

Raonacloy House

16

561039

A long wait at Lairg railway station gave me the opportunity to visit this impressive ruin in the early 2000’s. High walls stand with gable ends. There is no roof, but you could still make out the location of the placement of windows. Absolutely minimal shelter. Go to the pub in Lairg.

Glens Church

16

383009

I believe it has now ‘gone’.

On the day I aborted my ascent of Seana Braigh I had time for other explorations. Duag bridge, the school house- pre-bothy when it was a stable, Craggan ruins and the unique bridge over the nearby ravine. Glens church intrigued me. When I was there it was a

simple tin structure just west of Oykel Bridge. I can remember a plaque placed to the left of the entrance. It was made up of dark wood placed on the yellow corrugated iron of the building. This church was still a place of worship as recently as the 1960's. A more unlikely looking church you will never see.

Loch Choire bothy

16

619270

Towards the end of my Munro 'journey' I set off to climb Ben Klibreck. These were the days when fitness allowed massive distances to be undertaken. Klibreck is a lonely peak and I saw not a soul on my ascent. When I reached Bealach Easach from Crask Inn I could see stalkers all over the lower slopes. I made my ascent quickly and without fuss. On return to the bealach no-one was around and Loch a' Bhealaich was easily reached. A lovely walk along the north shore eventually brought me to a character swinging bridge over the isthmus. Shortly after, I reached the wooden bothy situated right on the loch side. It was a small one room bothy with an efficient stove that gave out an abundance of heat. The walls were wood lined and sleeping platforms offered a place to rest.

Gearnary

16

732321

Leaving Loch Choire bothy a long walk along a track on the north shore of Loch Choire enabled me to reach a track that eventually led me to Gearnary bothy where further shelter was obtained. Lovely weather, no midges and everything was fine. The bothy is sound but far from luxurious. It has a cobbled floor somewhat cold in feel. A bricked-up fireplace does not help although there is a wood slat bench. Items of animal feed were in storage and alongside the bothy were the total ruins of another building. Stones a mere few feet in height could not tell the tale of past habitation. Gearnary provides shelter but I was keen to leave the next day.

Estate bothy (Ben Armine stables)

16

665247

The weather still held, and I took the luxury of taking a track to the west followed by a path southwards. I chose not to ascend Ben Armine. It was not a Munro nor even a Corbett. How sad not to climb to the top. However, I was covering long distances and without any inconvenience regarding river crossings I reached an estate bothy by mid-afternoon. This bothy was right next to a river thus water provision was no problem. It was just about as remote a spot you could imagine. Within, there were three sleeping platforms occupying the old stalls as this was originally an old estate stable. This was another bothy where imagination helped to make the stay more enjoyable. History, past occupations and life in times long since gone saw the time pass quickly by.

Another massive walk out brought me to the welcome of the Crask and beer.

Achatomlinie

16

654099

A part ruined croft with a red roof. The walls were solid when I was there. The exception was the wall to the north west which was partly collapsed. Two solid chimney stacks can be seen from distance.

Cnocan (ruin)**16****648146**

Sad ruins. 1 building has a roof of sorts the other is merely a shell. This would be a desperate shelter. Why here? The road is only a 4 mile walk out.

Many years ago, I decided to remain at low altitude and explore the featureless terrain east of the A838 and east of Dalchork Wood. Within the trees is Loch Beannach. The open land to the east is vast and many township remains can be discovered. Depopulation occurred and times brought forth change. I discovered many footing remains and evidence of old kilns. Often much land had been absorbed into adjacent holdings. Not unlike Mardale in the 18th and 19th centuries. Braegrudie is an example. Depopulation was going on around and this became a home for a shepherd. Mackay 'shepherded' here for very many years. The sheep farm was broken up in 1930 and Alltamhuilt, Braegrudie and Dalbreac were given to the crofters of Langwell. During and after the war only 1 shepherd was fully employed in Braegrudie.

I revisited Cnocan and saw that it was even more dilapidated. On my return to the forest tracks I discovered an interesting ruin within the woodland.

Ruin**16****621097**

Near to Loch Tigh na Creige. This is an old ruin. It is roofless and 25 yards long by 5 yards wide. The walls are mortared. It is now used as a sheep fold. No shelter here. Use a tent or go back to the road.

**A bike ride up Glen
Cassley****16****Glen Cassley**

During the millennium I remember undertaking a long bicycle ride without noticeable ascent. Commencing on the A839 (Rosehall) GR 469022 I passed the impressive Glencassley castle and continued speedily to Badintagairt GR 428102) and Croich. A further 2 miles brought me to Glenmuick.

Glenmuick**16****396127**

This was an abandoned sheep farm when I visited. There is a vehicle ford over the wide part of the river Cassley. Another 2 miles saw me reach Dalphaid and I quickly passed this croft before reaching Dalnaclave.

Dalnaclave**16****387164**

A very long ruin with no roof. Therefore, no shelter. 2 gable walls still stand (15 years ago). This was just before my 'compleat'. I cycled on to reach Duchally lodge where the good track terminated. Duchally lodge is a holiday let. The bike ride out was grand. 12 miles of carefree riding.

Greamachary**17****852396**

A 2-mile hike along a good track commences at the A897 and railway line. The track passes to the north of Loch an Ruathair. There are a couple of buildings and a big tree

growing nearby. This was a former farm and I believe it was once used as a holiday let. It is a long time since I was in this area and I do not know the 'status' of the building today. A short distance to the south can be seen sad low wall ruins of old homesteads. Victims of the cursed clearances.

Corrichoich

17

033297

My memories are of the late 70's. Nothing stays the same? This was a good solid weatherproof building. One construction had a sound roof whilst the other was partially roofed. It was a farmstead/cottage. Time has taken its toll on my memory but I know I did not stay here. I can remember that in my time there was no tree plantation close by. I can also just remember that some 500m to the west was another partially ruined building / homestead. I wonder what it is all like today. Morven is a fine hill. A Graham. Why don't you go and look for yourself?

Gobernuisgeach

17

985313

Whilst in this area a good long walk is to take the track from Braemor heading north west. Don't forget to turn left at Lochan nam Bo Riabhach along a good track westward. After 6 miles, you will reach the bothy It has a solid roof and sound walls. There is a nice pub style seat/ table alongside one of the gable walls. This is very lonely countryside.

Pollroy

17

071334

An old roofless shieling. Interesting history but scant shelter.

Achnaelyth

17

099338

Farmstead / farmhouse. It is kept in good condition by the estate. Good access by track from Dunbeath. Morven is impressively in view on the distant horizon (weather permitting)

There is interest here because 1 km WSW is a post medieval settlement on the south side of the Dunbeath water. GR 088335. The foundations of 2 buildings are visible. One is a longhouse 32 ft. by 4ft. 9 inches. east to west. It is subdivided into 3 rooms. A small annexe is seen on the north wall. The turf and reed covered foundations survive to about one foot in height. A smaller building is 7.5 by 4.5 ft. It is in a similar foundation condition.

Lots of history. No shelter. The farmstead is private property. Morven in the distance is the attraction.

Glen Loth means 'marshy'. It cuts north with a single-track road which requires definite care. Throughout the valley there are many broch in ruinous condition. On the slopes above the valley floor I saw many ruins with low remaining walls. This is proof that there was once a considerable habitation here. Other ruins can be seen before the road descends to Strath of Kildonan. It is quite tragic to witness all these sad memories of times long gone by. Definitely no place to contemplate a stopover.

One ruined house near the burn has lost its roof and is in a perilous state. This obviously was once a croft. Most of the roof struts are still in situ and the interior is a total mess of rubble and 'junk'. An old stove was piled amongst the other items of 'rubbish.'

This place reminded me of Joseph Williamson. Joseph became a multi-millionaire through tobacco and snuff manufacture. However, he was also involved in house building and he constructed many homes on Mason Street. These houses (his own included) were built on top of the roof constructed over old quarry remains. Indeed, the famous banqueting hall beneath his house is in fact the old quarry remains on top of which his house was constructed. Having been involved with this unique piece of Liverpool history for some forty years I have built up a large archive of Williamson memorabilia. Back in the 80's the fascia of his old house could still be seen. By now the interior was a mess. This is putting it mildly. It had been used as a territorial army base and then a garage. The whole place was littered with junk, filth and rats. In the 90's the council 'blitzed' it all and today hardly anything remains. Standing in the ruins of this croft in Glen Loth took me back to another ruin in another place.

Visit Glen Loth but take with you your imagination.

No shelter here but an experience you cannot miss. Slaggan was once a crofting community that even had its own school and teacher. By the 1940's the population had fallen to six. The last family to reside at Slaggan were the Mackenzies who lived in the big house of which only the gable ends survive. It was burnt down in the year of my birth (1943) and the family moved to Achgarve. Some have claimed that the past occupants of Slaggan were the victims of the clearances, but this is widely disputed. It is more likely that global conflict and lack of employment caused people to move away. A glorious view and stunning sunsets will not put food on the table. Today a walk through the ruins is a mystical event.

Two massive gable ends stand as stark reminder to the old building that stood there. Almost like a skeletal memory of what used to be. Not unlike the rib cage carcass of a dead sheep lying on the hillside. Other low wall ruins can be seen, all that is left of the dry-stone croft houses. Often a rowan tree will be seen growing alongside the old gable wall. A traditional means of shelter from the wicked westerly gales that blew in from the Atlantic. Alongside the old ruins might be seen small enclosures in which a few vegetables could be grown, or maybe a cow kept for milk and butter.

As I said no shelter here but masses of history. It would be interesting to spend hours at Ulapool library searching out more details of the demise of this beautiful and lonely outpost. But where is the time with so many mountains to climb?¹⁴

Poca Buidhe

19

899643

This is a private estate bothy for shooting and fishing parties. It is now kept firmly locked. It is situated on the south-east shore of Loch na h- Oidhche and is very remote. Many years ago, whilst climbing the Torridon giants I found that the right-hand side of the bothy was left unlocked for the use of general walkers. Possibly this was to deter any temptation to enter the main bothy which is in excellent condition. After all the guests are paying good money. I do not know the full story. Maybe some brainless bothy occupier aroused the annoyance of the estate by abusing the concession to shelter within. The right-hand side, although small, was tidy and had an upstairs with two beds. Once again human nature 'rears' its head. Sick people trashing a shelter leaving estate management in despair at the actions of just a few. And then there are my own feelings which may be somewhat controversial. You are not welcome here unless you slaughter wild life and have lots of money. (irony)

This is where the whole question of bothy location and bothy knowledge comes back to the surface. When I commenced my long mountain journeys it was all done by word of mouth. Experience was gained slowly and respect was shown for all aspects of the mountains. Today the debate rages as to whether knowledge of bothies should be made public.

I do not know the answer; but maybe I do. It should not even be an issue. If (a big if) everyone acted in a sensible civilised manner and followed the basic rules of decency and respect, there would not be a problem. However, I doubt this will ever happen. If humankind can carry out the atrocities of the Middle East, decimation of the rain forests and tolerance towards perverted 'sickos' we are all doomed.

Respect the estate and bring a tent. If you are in dire straits it might be possible to utilise the corrugated iron Nissan boathouse at the north end of the loch.

Shelter

19

017757

This lies on bealach between A Mhaighdean and Ruadh Stac Mor This is a very rough stone bivouac shelter. Only for use in a last resort which in this area might well be the case. You could crawl in and it would afford some respite from gales. and rain/ snow. It reminded me of the stone shelters on route to Nan Bield above Haweswater. Horrible when everything is nice. Welcome when it is not.

¹⁴ For an excellent read about the depopulation of a similar area in Scotland a vivid account can be found in Calum's Road by Roger Hutchinson. The population of Raasay, Eilean Fladda and Eilean Tigh dropped dramatically from the mid 1800's to the early 1900's. The land was turned into a sheep run and maybe over 500 good folks were evicted by force. Some were moved to Skye and others to Australia. Canada was another far-off destination whilst others disappeared to unrecorded corners of the earth. However, it is not within my remit here to search further into this act of massive social change. My own feelings on Slaggan are that economics played the biggest 'hand' in people departure.



Figure 28: The small shelter near A Mhaighdean

Sheneval

19

066810

Possibly one of the most famous bothies in Scotland. I once spent four glorious days at Sheneval surrounded by fantastic mountains. An ‘orgy’ of Munro ‘bagging’ took place. I shall have to return for the Corbetts Beinn Dearg Mor and Beinn Dearg Bheag. Rarely had I seen weather such as this. The rivers that can sometimes pose massive problems were running almost ‘empty.’ On my arrival day from Coire Hallie I made a late afternoon ascent of Beinn a’ Chlaidheimh taking the mountain direct, by means of the north face. I was sure there would be a route through the crags and this proved to be true even though the whole climb was incredibly steep. It was very late in the afternoon when I reached the main ridge of the mountain and after I passed over several tops I reached the main summit at 5.30 pm I was in total awe of the surrounding views. Never had I seen such a sky of cobalt blue. When it was time to leave I declined a speedy descent to the west (a good decision, as the next day I saw steep crags abounding this slope.) Painful progress down to the valley floor was amply compensated by an almost totally dry crossing of the usual bog. I reached the bothy just before 8 and attacked my bottle of wine. It would have been nice to have reached the bothy a little earlier as it was idyllic sitting outside as the sun slowly dropped down to the distant horizon away to the west. After my meal, I decided to light a fire and soon had it ‘roaring’ up the chimney. It was not really needed I did it mainly for aesthetic reasons. Unfortunately, the fire ‘roared’ more than the chimney could cope. Nevertheless, after a little while it cleared as several other folk arrived during the evening. I moved my sleeping bag into the ‘fire’ room to give a couple the next room to themselves. I slept on the floor which was wood in my room; the young couple had a stone floor. The other occupant was Phil from Sheffield. The weather continued glorious and early starts saw the ascents of Sgurr Ban, Mullach Coire Mhic Fhearchair and Beinn Tarsuinn and again I was amazed to see

rivers with almost no water flow. My penultimate day gave me the chance to spend hours on the superb ridge of An Teallach. My previous ascent had been in thick mist and today I was afforded the opportunity to sit on the summit of Sgurr Fiona with only the eventual curvature of the earth preventing further vision. As I sat there I thought back to the terrible accident that occurred on these slopes in 1966. It was on April 15th when Ian Ogilvie, a renowned climber, accompanied two less experienced mountaineers on a traverse similar to the one I had just completed. Like myself the weather was set fair and time was of no consequence. Completing the climbing of the ridge they had sat on the summit on which I now rested and just like me looked across an array of peaks to all points of the compass. Ogilvie wanted to take in the outlier Sgurr Creag an Eich but the other two did not share his enthusiasm and said that they would await his return to Sgurr Fiona.

Ogilvie set off with haste and was about halfway when he looked back. To his horror he saw two climbers sliding down the west face of the main ridge. It was his two companions who had obviously commenced their traverse towards the second Munro. They were roped together and when one fell the other obviously followed unless of course he had been prepared to arrest the fall. Looking at the slopes I found it difficult to imagine such a serious fall, but I was looking on a hot day in May. In 1966 the mountain was covered in deep snow and ice and otherwise benign slopes were a serious undertaking. The efforts of Ogilvie to rescue his friends were an epic in mountain endeavour. Sadly, it was in vain as they both succumbed to their injuries.

I dropped down to the bealach creating the link to Sgurr Creag an Eich and opted not to 'bag' the top. I decided to make a direct descent south west towards Loch na Sealga. This was ultra steep and there was no path at all. Sections of scree helped but the rest was a knee jerking scramble. Arrival at the loch was so very welcome and I stripped off and bathed away the heat and dust of the day.

My arrival back at the bothy was earlier than on previous days and it was still very warm in the sun. Phil gave me some savoury rice and I consumed my four-day old steak pie with relish. That evening a girl arrived with a huge rucksack, but she decided to camp nearby. Another couple also arrived with tents and walked down to the main river. They informed me that the weather was going to 'break' shortly. After I turned in another climber arrived at the bothy and got his/ her head down in the opposite corner.

I was up late, probably about 9 am. The other climber appeared dead to the world. There was a large amount of cloud in the sky today, the first cloud for more than six days. Beinn a' Chlaidheimh had cloud cover at about 2,500 ft. I noticed in the bothy book that Phil had declined the Fisherfield four because of the changed weather. He had written that it almost pleased him as the prospect of the endless slog up to Chlaidheimh had almost haunted him. He had left early. The girl camper was not in her tent. Well I don't think so.

I said my goodbye to Sheneval the location of an epic stay.



Figure 29: The famous Sheneval bothy

Larachantivore

19

053801

Private estate buildings. Locked. I have passed this way many times and miraculously always when the rivers were low. On one occasion, the water did not even cover my boots. Therefore, I have not investigated these remote buildings. I believe there is a rudimentary shelter behind the left-hand building for the use of those caught in awesome weather or unable to cross the rivers in time of spate. When the rivers run high they certainly cannot be crossed. 50 m away from the buildings there is a plaque on a stone that reads:

Finlay Maclennan

Tony Roberts

and

Smudge

friends of the hill

11 October 1985

There had been a fire and the original bothy was burnt down causing the death of these folk and their dog. I had heard that there has been a new building constructed to replace the burnt ruin, but I have not been here for a long time, so I cannot confirm this.

Very many years ago on my first visit to the superb mountains of the Fisherfield I passed the ruins of Achneigie. A superb location but sadness prevailed in the form of neglect and decay. The floors were collapsing and the whole structure indicated danger. 20 years later I was surprised to see much change. Work was obviously being carried out and sky lights in the roof were in situ. I did not know who was carrying out this work or for whom it was intended. On my last visit to climb An Teallach I approached the cottage after my last day at Sheneval. It was not completed but further slow progress had been made. I wonder what Achneigie looks like today?



Figure 30: Renovation at Achneigie

Built in the late 1800's this substantial sandstone building was the home for a shepherd and his family. In 1935, it was taken over by the Scottish Youth Hostel Association before transfer to the MBA in 2003. Another post Munro 'project' for me is to walk from Lower Diabaig to Redpoint with two bothy overnights. This bothy was the scene of a major rescue in August 2014. After torrential rainfall, all the rivers were in massive spate. It became impossible for crossings to be made in safety. A group of walkers and a dog were cut off and had to take emergency shelter within the bothy. A mark 5 sea king helicopter from HMS Gannet carried out the rescue of the party which included three children. The rescue was both rapid and efficient. The rescued were dropped off at Redpoint where they had left their car before the massive deluge had stranded them.

Just as my incident on Beinn Bheoil initiated all sorts of comments on twitter this event was also the cause for comments of a very diverse nature. After praise for the emergency services different opinions were raised. Some claimed it was all a waste of

time and money as the stranded group could have walked out via the southern route. Awkward.; uncomfortable; yes; but very possible. One comment was quite scathing “The fact that they opted to call for rescue suggests a pretty low level of outdoor competence and disregard for the fact that they might be diverting rescue resources away from others in greater need elsewhere.”

Shades of my Benalder memory.

This was all followed by explanations from one of the adults in the stranded party. I have some sympathy with his comments that speculation was born so inadequately cognisant of the facts. No call for rescue had been made. It was the wife who had notified the police the night before, after receiving a call from a walker who had been in contact with the group. The message was that all were well and safe, and the course of action was to sit out the storm with their adequate food rations. All decisions to be made were then with the rescue services. Just as on Bheoil I had informed my wife solely as a call of information. Once again, the rescue helicopter had already been out on a mission and it called into the bothy on its return journey. The rescue services made the decision to evacuate, probably influenced by the presence of young children. The adult previously mentioned also took great umbrage and informed the ‘twitter’ correspondents that he had been climbing for over 25 years and had built up a vast bank of experience. He concluded with a scathing comment.” Your heroic talk of ‘self rescue’ is fatuous and ignorant.”

My feelings are varied. I loathe the ‘nanny state’. I despise the politically correct world of today. Modern day kids are fat and unfit because in many cases they don’t do anything. Fall out of a tree or injure yourself playing conkers and the world goes mad. Die in a horrific motorway smash and nobody seems to care apart from the poor victim. This group had every right to be where they were. They would have survived by their own means and it might have been a better scenario had they done so. After all we did not have helicopters seventy years ago and we still got by?

All good stuff?

The bothy is large and offers 6 rooms. There is a large sitting room complete with a stove and a big table. Another room would provide further sleeping places. There is a kitchen area that still has worktop places. On the first floor, there are 3 rooms of varying size. In total 25 good people could find a relatively comfortable space to sleep. There is an outside flush toilet. (bucket of water)

Lochivraon

19

118734

Very many years ago on my march out from Sheneval I met a chap with a massive rucksack just as I was about to climb out of Strath na Sealga. He was on a very long cross-country trek and had stayed the previous night at the bothy Lochivraon. He told me it was very basic and a tent would have been preferable. Apparently ‘change’ has taken place here. Inverbroom estate changed hands and the old cottage that was the former bothy was drastically modernised and kept locked. However, an old sheep shed had been redesigned into a modern 1 room split level interior with a wood burning stove and running water. An inside loo was also installed. The nearby Corbett Creag Rainich will give me the opportunity to stay and see for myself.

Leckie bothy**19****097646**

Estate owned bothy. Situated on a good track from Kinlochewe.

Carnmore**19****978769**

The two very remote Munros A Mhaighdean and Ruadh Stac Mor should not be rushed. A huge march in and out on one day is not advisable and I took my time and reached Carnmore late on a sunny afternoon. The bothy is in reality a hovel with sound walls and good roof. The interior has a dirt floor and several old metal bedsteads. It is quite bright inside as part of the roof is made up of transparent strips. I cooked my meal and enjoyed the bothy company. One occupant was generous with his single malt (Tom from York). As I had carried my tent I slept outside the bothy. The next day was fine and two memorable ascents were completed. A 2nd night was followed by the long walk out and ascent of the Corbett Beinn Airigh Charr.



Figure 31: The 'grotty' interior of Carnmore bothy

**Fainasheen (Feithe
na Sine)****19**

Memory is indeed a strange phenomenon. It is something that affects us all at different times and at different levels. My wife often forgets important items whilst on a shopping trip. I have to make out lists so that I do not forget to fulfil certain everyday tasks. My daughter even says she has lists of 'lists' to help her remember everything that needs doing.

I can just remember roaming this remote and lonely area decades ago. Sadly, for once I did not write anything down. There was a building that was in fact a sad rapidly

collapsing ruin. A chimney stack still stood like a skeletal monument and ‘bits’ of roof offered desperate shelter. One fact I can remember is the impressive backdrop of Mullach Coire Mhich Fhearchair.

This must have been in the late 70’s (some 38 years ago).

I compare all this to an historic cottage situated in my own village. When I moved here in 1969 it was a ruin, but it certainly had substance. Over the next decades the neglected farm cottage slipped further towards decay. Just last week I looked again and almost all the walls have collapsed even though the roof still perches precariously above. Is it not a bit like our own bodies? Time takes its toll. Do not remind me.

The building of my vague memories is a mystery. If it was well on the way to ruin in 78 today it may well have completely disappeared.

I have only included this sad reminder to illustrate the fact that nothing stays the same.

On my old maps, I can see a building at GR 092730. Could this be my mysterious memory?

Coiremor

20

305888

On my long ascent of Seana Bhraigh I reached Loch a’ Choire Mhoir and commenced the steep slopes towards point 760m GR 286885. On the lower slopes, I met up with a ‘scouser’ who was descending. We talked for a good half hour. He had stayed overnight in the Coiremor bothy. As I was not going to visit the bothy I asked him for details. He told me it was a good bothy and ideally placed after the long march in from Duag Bridge. It was also well placed for an ascent of the Corbett Carn Ban, a very remote mountain. ‘Scouse’ told me the bothy consisted of three sections. On descent, I just had to take the time to investigate. I had my bike so time was not a vital element. The bothy was divided into three sections. A small one to the right was maintained by the MBA. The larger left-hand section was also known as Magoos. This section had been renovated by friends in honour of Mark Maguire a RAF pilot who was killed in Kosovo in 2001. A small bothy in between completed the construction. The MBA section consisted of a multi fuel stove and ‘manky’ settees. Magoos offered a fireplace and /bunk beds with a large wooden table and benches. An inscription read.

He was a man, take him
for all in all, I shall not
look upon his like
again.

Mark Maguire

Kosovo

9/4/01

The small middle section had a wood burning stove.

Lubachlaggan**20****350782**

Situated on the eastern side of Loch Vaich. 2 Derelict buildings were once part of a larger community. This is often the case in the Highlands of Scotland. Doors and windows have now disappeared although there is still a fireplace in situ in the better building. The other ex cottage is in use as an animal shed. I think the masochistic side of me would enjoy a stay in this remote spot. My two doctor friends would have passed this building on their way out from Glen Beg after their emergency stay. Before they reached Lubachlaggan they were picked up by a rescue Landrover.

**Hut near waterfalls
on Abhainn Beinn
nan Eun****20****448741**

On a walk from Wyvis Lodge along the Abhainn Beinn nan, 4km will bring you to a delightful waterfall cascading down the steep slopes. Very close to this waterfall is an interesting construction. It seems totally out of place. It is an elegant green wooden pillared building almost like a cricket pavilion or ostentatious garden shed. It is open on three sides and unlocked (2008)

Schoolhouse bothy**20****340975**

Figure 32: Schoolhouse bothy when it was a barn full of hay



Figure 33: Semi ruins at Craggan

On my long-ago ascent of Seana Braigh I misjudged the rough track that takes you from the main road at Oykel Bridge. It is a fine track in a Landrover but in my car the 3-4 miles of approach was undertaken very slowly to preserve shock absorber and exhaust. At Duag bridge I came across an old 'wooden hut' and observed it was full of hay. It had the appearance of being weather beaten. As the weather was threatening I declined the massive walk in to my Munro and explored the surroundings. I spotted a peak on my map with a triangulation point. Cnoc Bad a' Choille was my target. Only a 340m peak but at least something to aim for. By my recent standards this was an extremely low top but it still took a certain amount of 'slog' to attain the summit. I found the trig. point and did enjoy the impressive views. Not having to rush around was a real bonus as on this day time was well and truly on my side.

I used this time to explore and discover things that would normally be left unseen in the rush and bustle to reach the tops. Craggan farm buildings are today in poor condition although the walls and part roof still stand in a solid condition. I sat there trying to imagine what it must have been like when a family occupied this lonely outpost in the high environment. There were very many cattle all around the old building and it was obviously the scene of a still working farm. Just a little way south of Craggan there is the river Einig to cross and this is obviously a big obstacle when water levels are high. Duag bridge is a solid construction as it takes vehicles that are bound for Corriemulzie Lodge. Just a hundred yards away to the north there is another impressive bridge that crosses the Einig. A suspension bridge no less and an interesting and somewhat 'wobbly' way over the rushing waters of the beck. Today the river was benign but on other occasions it would definitely pose a serious threat to crossing. There was a small tablet nearby and on it was inscribed.

“Due to the generosity of Martin & Shirley Reed this bridge was reconstructed in May 1986 by J Burnett K Burnett and D Snody.

The bridge was showing slight signs of age but after all it is 21 years of age. I sat there for a full hour in the now warm sunshine.

I walked back to Duag bridge and inspected the wood hut in greater detail. It was a substantial shelter and although full of hay, chimneys in the roof gave evidence of a different past role



Figure 34: Suspension bridge over River Einig near Schoolhouse bothy

When I was a schoolboy I had to walk to school each and every day, a round trip of some six miles. Buses were beyond our financial range and a bicycle when at grammar school helped to ease the problem. In the Highlands of Scotland, the situation was far more serious. Children living in remote highland areas had to be taught and it was the responsibility of the local authority to see that this was carried out. The small wooden hut at Duag was indeed the local school for a ranging number of students from homesteads spread throughout the surrounding district. The teacher more than likely lived in the premises and the children made the daily journey for their education.

The schoolhouse ceased in this function in the 1930's and for many years it was used as a barn which is how I discovered it. In 2008 the MBA took over the building and after

serious renovation converted it into the shelter you can find today. My eventual ascent of Seana Braigh was before this conversion and I have not visited since. I believe it to be a good bothy consisting of three rooms but no fireplace. By using the sleeping platform and floor space it would be reasonably comfortable to accommodate 15 people.

Knockdamph

20

286954

On the Fort William to Cape Wrath route. Will I be persuaded to attempt this lonely walk? If so I shall visit this lonely outpost. Apparently, it has an upstairs room with beds and 'doubtful' mattresses.

Alladale

20

426894

I must admit that I would not be very happy if strangers were to intrude into my garden and tramp across the large piece of land I have attached to my cottage. But having said this, for so very many years I have been doing exactly the same thing across the Highlands of Scotland in my attempt to ascend every Munro. Many years ago, there was a watershed moment when walkers in the Peak District campaigned for the right to roam with a mass trespass on Kinder Scout. Some were even jailed for their efforts. The right to roam has always been a contentious issue and one I have thought of so many times on my lonely climbs.

Is it right for an individual to 'own' land? Is this a legal matter or more one of morality? There will always be 'haves and have nots' but regarding land I never quite found out where I stood.

In the year 2007, it was announced that a bothy that stood on a northern estate was to close. The Alladale bothy stood on land owned by millionaire Paul Lister who had controversial plans for his newly acquired estate. He wanted to introduce wolves to the 23,000-acre wilderness reserve and the estate was to be surrounded by a nine-foot-high electric fence. The outcry was both obvious and immediate. Walkers groups claimed this effectively excluded the public from the land against the spirit of the country's right to roam law. Paul Lister intended to go even further by introducing wild boar, European elk and even brown bears and lynx.

Lodges were to be constructed and other places of accommodation were provided to cater for high paying guests to enjoy this wild and remote countryside. A massive forum of opinion opened and arguments and counter arguments were put forward. Probably the greatest fear being that of precedence.

I read with great interest several of the comments that individuals posted with reference to this project.

"I fully support the reintroduction of the wild animals back to Scotland, after all they were here long before ramblers/landowners. What real right had man to get rid of them in the first place. "

Wonderful idea; the only fret is us. I am sure more children/ adults are harmed in a year by cars, people, guns and planes than by wild animals. (This has always been my long term 'gripe.' Die on a mountain and it is 'megga' news. Poor kid drowns whilst swimming illegally in a quarry. Headlines. Car crash on the M1. So what!)

“What Paul Lister is trying to do is make money. The scheme is all about setting up a game park which he would charge people to visit, and a 5-star luxury hotel for people to stay in. There is nothing wrong with trying to make a business but be honest about it rather than cloaking it in environmental ‘wrapping’ for presentation sake.”

The bothy played an integral part in these plans but not for the wanderer. An MBA bothy from 1972 was relinquished in 2007.

Nest of Fannich

20

164678

No longer here. Once it was a large imposing building. It was burnt to the ground in 1991. Having seen it in its so-called glory I passed it in the early 2000's and it was a sad wreck. A gable end still stood and also a high chimney stack. If you were desperate you would find shelter of sorts within the ruins of this once imposing house. Sadly, this was an ideal location for exploration of the Munros all around. Sad because it is now in the past. Included because of my memories and ultra minimal shelter. (2006)

Glen Beg

20

314835

My memories recall two bothies. The stone bothy was relinquished by the MBA in 2012. As I write neither the estate nor the MBA seem to seek responsibility for the upkeep of this building. It is slowly falling into disrepair. This is not unlike the sad remains of Varosha in Cyprus. The Turks invaded, and the Greeks fled the almost Benidorm like resort. They were expecting a speedy return, but it never happened. Varosha is now a ghost resort. An almost total wreck as high-rise hotels slowly crumble and fall. Roads have become entangled with weeds. Is this the fate of Glen Beg? The other bothy choice was a light tin shed with a unique pot belly stove. The corrugated iron hut was burnt down in April 2012 after being struck by lightning. All that remains are a pile of slowly rusting tin and iron and the lonely stove left standing alone in this sad pile of rubbish. So ghoulish; like viewing the skeleton of our old life.

Rappaig (ruin)

20

292991

A very sad low wall ruin. No shelter here.

Lubachoire

20

265986

Two miles west of Rappaig. In 2001 this was a high wall ruin with a partial gable end. Very minimal shelter.

Glaschoill ruin in Strath Cuileannach

20

443919

Undertaking a bad weather day walk into Strath Cuileannach along Black Water an interesting ruined broch is reached at GR 454914. Not much remains. I continued into the valley and after a further mile or so reached Glaschoill. On a previous visit 30+ years go the building had a roof and was semi ‘sound’. On this visit the roof was in a parlous state. I have since heard that it is now missing. Time and the weather takes its toll. Neglect is a terrible thing to contemplate. Your car, your shed or even your body.

This old building had nobody to 'correct' the issues of time and weather. It is now well on the way to rubble.

I turned back at Lubnachoinnich - a lonely outpost if ever there was.

Arrieleitrach

20

372602

On the south shore of Loch Luichart.

When I saw this ruin it was 'sound' but today it is an animal shelter. This area was obviously once an old township. Some of the old ruins are now underwater because of the flooding of Loch Luichart. Today you can see what is left on a gently sloping delta between 2 streams. I saw my modern view through binoculars from the summit of Cnoc na- Lolaire.

Badinluchie

20

272605

On the ordnance survey map of 1875 there were marked two roofed buildings and two roofless buildings. There was one large and one small enclosure on the site. The 2nd edition map of 1903 showed three roofed buildings with attached enclosures. Today there are the remains of two buildings, still partly roofed and with attached byres and enclosures. Remains of two further buildings to the west and closer to the river can be seen. At GR 272605 a building is barely discernible apart from remains at the east end. The building is aligned east to west and measures 17 ft. by 5 ft. by 8 ft. overall and has two compartments. The main compartment measures 12 ft. by 5 ft. internally and is bisected by a deer fence. The main compartment is defined by low turf and stone walls. At the east end the stone wall has a recessed fireplace with two upright slabs forming the sides. The main compartment on the west side is overgrown but the end wall has foundations of large boulders and a stone face up to a height of 4 foot. Concrete slabs are to be seen in the floor of this part of the building. The eastern part of the building shows more obvious remains with dry stone walling still standing up to 2 feet in height. In reality it is all a total ruin but so interesting to the discerning explorer.

My long distant memories were of piles of stone. Since then I have taken on a more historic interest and reading surveys from other experts has widened my interest. I can now link this with my research into the lost village of Mardale. I have sought out the lost houses within the drowned valley and over the period 1971- to date have recorded the dimensions of all the farmhouses and homesteads, including the famous little church and welcoming Dun Bull Inn. Mardale like Badinluchie has a long and intriguing history.

This will only come to those who are willing to seek out the past.

Ruins of old lodge at east end of Loch a Bhraoin

20

155753

In 2007 I was nearing 'compleat'. Glorious weather in October persuaded me to 'finish off' the remaining far north west Munros. I arrived at the Aultguish Inn after a very long drive. I had a beer or two and a huge plate of liver and bacon. Other climbers were eulogising about their day on An Teallach with views out to 'heaven.' This pissed me

off as I had yet to reach a summit after four glorious sunny days. I left the inn at 9 pm and drove down towards Braemore junction . I slept rough just above Corrieshalloch gorge. The night was calm and the sky was littered with millions of stars. My original plan was to split the remaining 4 Fannich Munros into two groups with an overnight camp between Sgurr nan Clach Geala and Sgurr Breac. At 7.30 I made my mind up. I would climb all 4 Munros in one long day. Travelling lighter I should make faster progress. I drove some mile or so to the next lay by where I met a fellow ‘booting up’ for his ascent. He was going to climb the five Munros. I already had Meall a’ Chrasgaidh so for me it was four. Actually, this was the wrong starting point and after I had walked a hundred yards I realised this. I returned to the car and drove a further mile to locate the correct starting point. Another illustration of how most of my map difficulties seem to exist at the start of the day when low down. Certainly in territory interfered by humankind. Now on the correct track I made speedy progress to the eastern end of Loch a Bhraoin, along a good track. The waters of the loch were totally still in the calm morning air and the sun was already beating down with considerable heat. This was an idyllic setting. I explored the ruins of the old lodge, some thirty yards from the still loch waters. One gable wall was complete with a solid chimney stack. The roof was gone and other walls were in different stages of collapse. The ruin would afford shelter from horizontal wind but nothing from rain or snow. I lingered long, enjoying this magic location. I looked closely at the boathouse situated right on the water edge. It was a solid construction and the roof was completely weatherproof. Eventually I crossed the solid bridge that crossed the river. This river would pose enormous problems in times of serious spate.

I have since heard that significant improvements have been made to the path leading to the loch. In 2010 planning permission had been obtained to restore the old lodge. This new and well-designed path diverts the public right of way around the end of the loch. It is very doubtful that I shall visit this area again, so my readers will have to go and see for themselves the track improvements carried out. Since my last visit in 2007 the lodge might well be restored.

**Very simple wall
shelter**

20

173705

At the foot of the slope up to the bealach between Sgurr nan Clach Geala and Sgurr nan Each. A very simple shelter built out of piles of stones. No roof and walls just four feet high. An absolute minimum of shelter. When I left Loch a Bhraoin the weather was glorious, but after my 3 mile hike up Allt Breabaig clouds approached from the south west. I did not require shelter and considered this ‘collection’ of boulders very minimal in provision.

Salachie ruin

20

489877

Bad weather continued. Carn Chuinneag held little appeal. A low-level walk took in Glen Calvie to Diebidale and then the track over to Lochan a’ Chairn where there are the ruins of an old lodge. On return a difficult route up Salachie burn took me to Salachie ruin.

Very remote. 22 years ago, there were sections of wall 6 feet in height otherwise no shelter whatsoever. This was a very old croft house.

Pill box on Tulloch Hill

21

617921

Staying at Strafpeffer gave me the opportunity to climb Ben Wyvis. On another day I visited this interesting relic of World War two. It all took me back to my boyhood. Whilst at school (12-13 years of age) I spent dozens of Sunday mornings with a friend searching out war ruins along the beach at Crosby and Hightown. One particular structure captivated us. This was Fort Crosby which had been constructed to add protection to Liverpool and the approaches to the Mersey. This was a joyful place for a young boy and we usually got up at 4 am to arrive long before anyone else. I was thirteen therefore this would have been almost immediately after the fort was abandoned. We discovered all sorts of artefacts and all the infrastructure was still in place and much of it was working. I still have several souvenirs of my visits in my garden shed. Today almost nothing remains. If you look carefully you will see remains of footings and other entrances to underground cellars. All around this area were pill boxes. Today there are still a tiny few remaining. They were places in which we used to play and imagine we were defending our country from enemy forces. They were always smelly dark and damp places. Usually full of rubbish. I did spend a night camping in one on Crosby beach when I was fifteen. The pill box on Tulloch Hill reminded me of all this. This too is full of rubbish. If you are temporarily tired of mountains do go and have a look for yourself.

Uags bothy

24

724349

Very remote. Right on the edge of the sea. Superb views of Crowlin Island and Skye. Solid basic bothy with a large upstairs and plenty of room. I've not been to the bothy but I have enjoyed the Applecross Peninsula. Therefore, I am going to visit Uags.

Airigh Drishaig

24

769368

This is an old settlement. Only one cottage and a byre remain today. Other house remains can be seen further down the slope towards the sea.

The drowned settlements under the cold waters of Loch Mullardoch

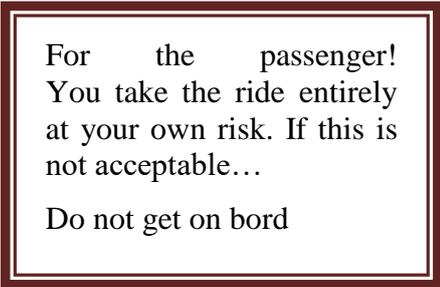
All my life I have been captivated by drowned villages. Old Mardale that now lies beneath the cold waters of Haweswater will always be number one. My interest had started so many years ago when I was a young teenager descending Long Stile from High Street. As I came out of the thick mist I looked down to where a small community should have been. I had a very dated map and it indicated a church, inn and several farmsteads. Instead there was a barren lake and although there was a lake within the valley it should not have been this large. The steep slopes disappeared into the cold waters with an abruptness that was in many respects quite eerie. I could not work it out. Mystery was total, and I retraced my steps back over the tops to the youth hostel in Patterdale where everything was explained. The warden informed me that Manchester Corporation had acquired the valley in 1919 and slowly it was all converted into a monstrous reservoir. The next day I returned and sat on the banks of this mysterious lake looking carefully into the deep cold waters. Could I see the roofs of buildings down there in the depths? The little stone bridge that crossed the beck. Could I hear the spooky tolling church bells calling the long since departed residents to service? I sat

there for hours allowing my imagination to run riot. This was the commencement my search for information about this tragically lost backwater in old Lakeland. (Mardale Mysteries R.J. Cooke.)

Loch Mullardoch also has very many secrets beneath its cold waters.

In many respects Mullardoch is an enigma to the modern Munro 'bagger.' To the north is a long ridge that contains 4 very much desired summits. Carn nan Gobhar, Sgurr na Lapaich, An Riabhachan and An Socach are very remote tops that most often are taken in one long day. To achieve this objective entails a great deal of walking, ascent and re-ascent. To arrive on the last summit late in the day will now require the walker to negotiate the treacherous and unforgiving path on the northern shore of Mullardoch. A more manageable method is to hire a boat near the dam and progress along the waters to carry out the route in reverse order. When I was there the boat charge was £20 and to be perfectly honest was an investment of the highest order. My option was take my tent and take in the ridge in a more leisurely manner. I camped out on the bealach before the rising slopes to An Riabhachan

I found the whole choice so interesting. As my recently met friend set off on his boat journey I noticed a prominent sign for the benefit of the marine climber.



For the passenger!
You take the ride entirely
at your own risk. If this is
not acceptable...

Do not get on board

I set off in serious heat to climb my first hill.

As well as the mountains to the north there are several peaks to the south that can be approached from Mullardoch. Unfortunately, there is no path on the southern shore so once again it is the boat or more often the canoe that enables walkers to gain Beinn Fhionnlaidh and Tom a Choinich.

So, what is the history of this lonely and in some respects despoiled part of Scotland.

The original Loch Mullardoch was 7 km long. A single-track road ran along the northern shore with cottages by the roadside at Mullardoch, Cozack, and Coire na Cuilean. At the head of the loch flatlands opened out and there were two lodges named Old Benula and New Benula. There were many estate buildings situated at the head of the loch. Notable also was a bridge that spanned the river that entered the loch at its western end.

From the western end, a pathway ran back along the southern shore. Looking on an old OS map pre-1951 (the date of dam construction and subsequent flooding) is intriguing. The road continued westwards on the south side of the river and then along the southern shore of Loch Lungard. Of course, this is now totally submerged and incorporated into the greater Loch Mullardoch. Eventually the road/ track reached the settlement of

Lungard with its cottages tucked under Meall Shuas. From here a path progressed westwards to cross the watershed and descend into Glen Elchaig.

‘Once bitten twice shy’ was enough for me I would not submit myself to the ‘horrors’ of the northern lakeside path again. I ascended the Mullardoch Munros westwards and then reversed my route eastwards. I had not taken the aqua choice of travel. I had ascended Beinn Fhionnlaidh from Killian and Tom a Choinich from the southern approach.

During all my research of Mardale and the subsequent raising of the level of Haweswater one of my biggest objections has been the ugly scar (tidemark) around the water’s edge, particularly noticeable in times of drought. The original Haweswater had a shoreline of exquisite beauty. Little Shingle bays and gently sloping meadowland, with trees and bushes adorning the slopes of the valley at water level, were in total harmony with nature as she intended it to be. Man works with such clumsy hands. Gone forever are these features. Today the lakeside slopes ‘dive’ into the waters at an obscene angle and when the level is low an ugly scar of bare stone and rock is all that can be seen.

When I reached Loch Mullardoch on my climb to Fionnlaidh I had little time to linger. However, I did notice this obscene scar in the distance. The rain was sheeting down and I was cold and hungry. Totally 'knackered' as well so the view of a bare and featureless Mullardoch was no way to raise my depleting spirits.

Benula Lodge, old and new, are long gone to a watery grave. So to have the cottages at Lungard. Towards the end of the 1800’s the glen was home to several shepherds, gamekeepers and one farmer. Along with stalkers they were housed in cottages at Coire na Cuilean, Mullardoch, Cozac and Luib na Daimh. The growing popularity of deer stalking led to the construction of Beinn Fionnlaidh lodge, but that too is no more. Cozac lodge was another victim of the rising waters.

But it was not all lost when the waters rose. Within Mardale all the buildings were demolished prior to drowning. This was to be a source of drinking water and everything had to be sanitised. Several of the sad ruins can be seen today as they were situated above top water level. There is not much to see and a vivid imagination is a prerequisite for any modern exploration. At Mullardoch you will also require your imagination.

No shelter but once again lots of history.

**The drowned
settlements under
the cold waters of
Loch Mullardoch**

25

Am Mam

25

126304

One eerie gaunt gable wall still stands complete with remains of fireplace. Low wall remains lie around this sentinel that very much reminded me of a first world war battlefield.

**Ruins at Gobh-
Alltan and Dorus a’
Choilich and
Lungard (all usually
submerged)**

25

**088291
Grid sqr 1028**

These low-level ruins again brought me back to Mardale. All is bleak and there is no sign of vegetation, just the bare scar of rock and boulder. The water level was indeed low and I discovered more than collapsed walls. An old gatepost, still with its hinges, was lying in the sad wreckage and a cobbled trackway could be seen to break up the otherwise mass of confused rock. I remembered my visit to Sandhill farm at Measand. Here I also found a sad gatepost with its iron attachment.

I had seen enough death and destruction. It was time to move on to discover more places of former habitation.

Achintee

25

942417

Leaving the train at Strathcarron whilst on an ‘orgy’ of peak bagging I took chance to explore some ruins just a few yards away. This is an abandoned crofting township. All that is left are low walls with some examples of lintels where the doors were placed. Some remains of gable walls can be seen.

Ardchuilk

25

268380

On the day I climbed the Strathfarrar four I searched out this ruin. I had utilised my bike and used my car so that I would not have any post climb road walking. These ruins are disappointing. 6 foot of wall and gable end and chimney stand. No roof. Emergency shelter??? But why? Remember this is a time ‘controlled’ valley. Limited vehicle access.

**Glenuaig Lodge
bothy**

25

108479

A bit of mystery here. I like mysteries. In 2006, I left Gerry’s¹⁵ bunkhouse and with my trusty bicycle made my way up the track in Allt a Chonais to eventually reach Glenuaig Lodge. (Locked up). I was aiming for Maoile Lunndaidh my final Munro in this area. The weather was changeable and there were huge cornices on the summit plateau. One moment I had unrestricted views whilst 15 minutes later visibility was down to 20 yards. I made a rapid descent back to the lodge just as a heavy shower of sleet hit me

¹⁵ Gerry was a character. He certainly would have been at ease at Nanga Gaat or on the mess decks of Albion. His was the oldest independent hostel in Scotland. Originally his cottage was built as two semi detached homes for railway workers on the West Highland line. I had several meetings with Gerry. On one occasion I had descended from a ten hour climb to find a note pinned to his door. He was requesting someone/ anyone to come pick him up from the golf course some few miles down the valley. His fire was known throughout the land. Never interfere with his fire. It was Gerry’s child and those that touched it did so at their peril. Gerry could be controversial, argumentative, abusive or simply downright rude. But he was genuine, and I liked him very much. The only person I can remember to ever ‘outdo’ him was Michelle who when asked about the room she was sharing with her partner told him in no uncertain terms “We still have occupancy of the room.” Sadly Gerry passed away recently, and a real character is gone. His son Simon now runs the hostel. The name Howkins lives on in the Highlands of Scotland.

out of a dark grim sky. I sheltered against the lodge but it was no good and being wet I decided to take to my bike and descend as quickly as possible.

This was twelve years ago. Since then I have been informed that there is a small wooden bothy almost alongside the lodge. It looks like a garden shed and is held down by cables. Within, there are two bunk beds and thin mattresses. The whole shelter would accommodate two comfortably, three at a push and twelve if the others were Scandinavian girls.

I did not see the bothy.

I just got very wet.

Was it there in 2006?



Figure 35: Glenuaig Lodge

There is an open bothy to the right of this locked building. Sadly I did not know this which resulted in my 'soaking'

I left the parking place on the banks of Loch Beannacharain. And walked past Scardroy to Corrievuich.

Corrievuich

25

203511

Former township above the fertile valley floor. Remains of 8 buildings. They were single compartment structures. Lots of things to see here- if it would only stop raining. One building has been preserved and is in good order. An L shaped modern holiday home.

Corriefeol**25****203508**

2 ruined cottages. Walls 6-8 ft high. One gable end and chimney. No roof.

I had intended to proceed west to reach Glenuaig Lodge. However, I did not fancy the 10-mile round trip in poor weather, so I allowed my imagination to roam free.

Just what was life like in the 18th century townships of Scotland. It must have involved an element of teamwork and working together. I had all sorts of similar examples. I had lived with the Iban in their longhouses where the saying “one for all and all for one” might well be true. The longhouse was a full community in which everyone played their part. I also remembered my service aboard a warship. Here were so very many roles to be played. However, they all were part of a jig saw that was vital if the unit were to operate successfully. The guy who cleaned out the toilets was just as important as the pilot on a carrier or the chef in the galley compared to the captain on the bridge. And a poignant memory of the resurgence of Liverpool football club under the expert coaching of Bill Shankly. Football is a team game. A team of ‘prima donnas’ will never be as successful as a team who play together for the overall good of the team.

Yes, all these thoughts were cascading through my mind as I sat in the rain in the ruins of Corriefeol.

Bearnais**25****021431**

From Gerry’s bunkhouse at Craig I set off to climb the three remote mountains Beinn Tharsuinn, Bidein a’ Choire Sheasgaich and Lurg Mhor. High levels of fitness which I had that day persuaded me to take them all in one enormous trip. A twelve-hour day saw this to completion. Thus, I had no need for the bothy at Bearnais. My far distant memory was of a cold stone interior, miserable and unwelcome. However, I am now informed it has been modernised with wood panels on the floor and walls. There is a good stove with a sleeping platform and a table and chairs. Are we all going soft?? If ever I climb Lurg Mhor again Bearnais bothy is for me.

Ben Dronaig bothy**25****014388**

I have not visited this bothy. It is definitely in the premier league of bothies. Running water, inside loo, multiple fireplaces and several separate rooms with space for many occupants. A friend of mine walked in to the bothy and informed me of its offerings. Being old fashioned I think I prefer Bearnais. However, that has been improved also. Am I looking for the ‘hair shirt’? I shall visit soon as I want to climb Ben Dronaig (Corbett) and can link with a stay at Maol Bhuidhe bothy.

Easan Dorcha**25****012526**

Also known as the teahouse. Very small. Rebuilt in 2010 by the MBA. No fireplace and no outside fires. Something of a little gem.

Coire Fionnaraich**25****950480**

This is an impressive bothy and relatively close to the road. I was on my way to Maol Chean dearg and it was very hot, so I stopped for an hour to explore. There were two

rooms downstairs with good fireplaces and on my occasion even a supply of kindling. (I have heard recently that the fireplace in one room has been blocked and the other one replaced by a stove.)

A wooden staircase led to two warm rooms and a box room that could sleep 15 persons in total. I was worried that I only had several pictures left on my camera film when I discovered someone had left a film on the mantelpiece. It fitted my camera. (Pre-digital days) On my visit there was a large tree outside the bothy but I believe this has now gone. (see below) As the heat of the day persuaded me from ‘bagging’ the Corbett An Ruadh-Stac I might revisit this bothy to stay overnight. At this moment in time GHR (Green Highland Renewables) are in the process of constructing a 1.5 MW Hydro Development on the Fionn-abhainn. The development received consent in 2015 and aims to be producing clean renewable energy by September 2017. The walking path is to remain open at all times but in the interests of health and safety walkers are asked to not enter any of the working sites at any time.

(The tree) In the spring 2011 newsletter No. 175 of the MBA the readers letters section throws light on this issue. A Maurice Griffin writes to say he was disturbed to see on the cover of the winter newsletter Coire Fionnaraich bothy without its rowan tree. He states it was definitely there in 2008. It certainly was in 2000 when I was there. Maurice asks why it has gone and were there any plans to replace it.

The reply is interesting.

“The tree was blown down in a storm sometime during the winter of 2008-09. Whilst there are no immediate plans to replace it the idea might well be raised. “

At least it was Mother Nature and not the senseless vandalism of human beings that caused the loss of the tree.

Maol Bhuidhe

25

052360

A very remote bothy. I had been given comprehensive details of this bothy by a colleague. 4 separate rooms, one of which has a raised sleeping platform. Good fireplace and the upstairs has walls and roof that are wood lined. 2 modern skylights in the roof provide daylight. This is the area of my epic ‘compleat’ which brings me to Iron Lodge.

Iron Lodge

25

043294

A private shooting lodge. On my final two Munro ascents Iron Lodge played its part. 25-mile journeys and 13-hour days from Killilan saw me at Iron Lodge in grim weather and desperate straits. The lodge door was unlocked and offered me welcome relief from the weather. Plaster was peeling from the walls and ceiling and part of the lounge roof had collapsed. I ventured upstairs and saw there was even a carpet in situ. The kitchen looked welcoming even if everything was cold and damp.

This was all ten years ago and what Iron Lodge looks like today I know not. Anyway, this is private property.

Tighachrochadair

26

434483

Consists of two buildings on the green flats beside the river. A very basic homestead that I would like to visit. One of the buildings is a cottage with an adjoining outhouse. From reports, the buildings are basic and very 'tired' looking. The last resident was a Donnie Ross. A family of 7 plus a teacher lived here from the early 1900's. Donnie worked for the estate and lived without electricity, running water or drains relying only on his open fire for cooking. He died in the mid 90's.

This is private property. Respect the estate if you should visit.

Loch ma Stac

26

348223

A sad tall ruin situated on an island on the shores of the loch. My memories go back over fifteen years. The lower windows were boarded up but there was a high-level door at the rear. One end also had a high-level door. The internal timbers indicated that there was once a section of the building that was full height. This ruin looks so strange in this unusual setting. The interior looked (2001 'ish') somewhat 'doubtful.' I think any shelter here would also be very doubtful.

**Corrimony or
Enrick bothy**

26

358268

There could be a little confusion here as much forestry clearing has recently taken place. This is another example of ensuring your maps are up to date. Of course, those with their little 'toys' should be okay (sarcasm.) The bothy is on a raised track alongside the river. The exterior looks somewhat 'tired' with a rusty red tin roof and well weather-beaten walls. The interior is better and offers good shelter should the weather be nasty. There are other old ruins in this area and some of the steadings are interesting to explore if you have the inclination.

Hydro bothy

26

393485

This is a concrete building that used to be used as a cement store for the pipeline to Orrin reservoir. There is a sign on the door indicating "All welcome."

The shelter has a table and chairs and a concrete floor.

Luipmaldrig

26

306484

I have not visited this bothy It is situated on a large 'flat' 2 km beyond the reservoir Loch Orrin. It is owned and well maintained by Strathcarron estate. It is a large bothy and has an efficient fireplace and table, chairs and a wooden floor.

Fasnakyle

26

319294

When I discovered Cannich youth hostel was closed after my epic 2-day expedition on the Mullardoch 4 I discovered the huts alongside were an independent hostel. £10 a night – a bargain. I spent 5 days there and on one of them I came across Fasnakyle ruin just 2 miles to the south west.

It was a ruined cottage. Back in 2004/15 years ago it looked reasonable if a little tired. It had a roof and 2 porches. I would think that today it will definitely be looking tired. Unless a benefactor has come along.

Stronachroe

26

459524

I discovered this ruin on the day I missed my chance to reach Tighachrochadair. It is a low walled ruin with 1 gable end. Or at least it was in 1999.

Camban

33

053184

51 years ago, Camban was a roofless ruin. The old croft had fallen into a bad state. I did not linger. On my next passing it was a totally different building. Apparently in 1969 a major renovation had been carried out converting it into a comfortable bothy in the environs of some superb mountain scenery. It was particularly pleasing for me to find out that much assistance had been offered by the fleet air arm. Helicopters from Lossiemouth had airlifted many vital building supplies. Sadly, unexplained vandalism took its toll and another refurbishment was carried out in 2008. Camban is now weatherproof and sound. My last visit was in 2003, thus I have not seen the present building.

Ruins

33

074192

I was negotiating the boggy path on route to Alltbeithe youth hostel. I discovered low wall ruins close to where 4 paths merged:

- a. south to Loch Cluanie
- b. northwest to Glen Affric
- c. west to Gleann Gniomhaidh
- d. south west to Camban and Fionngleann

Alltbeithe

33

079203

Remote youth hostel. Also an emergency bothy. The hostel is made up of two buildings. On one occasion I was the only guest and I had a room in the main building. Louise was the warden and we shared several drams. On another occasion I slept in the attached 'bunkhouse.' The hostel was quite full. My last two Munros were Beinn Fhionnlaidh and Mullach na Dheiragain and I had hoped to 'bag' them from Alltbeithe. Unfortunately, the hostel was closed (end of September) and although I had been informed the bunkhouse section was not locked I did not fancy disappointment. I chose the Iron Lodge route for 'compleat.'

A Chuil

33

944924

I passed this bothy twice on my two ascents of Sgur na Ciche My sort of bothy. Solid but without pretension.

Glen Pean

33

936903

Only 3 miles from Strathan and in a perfect location. Do read Trench Warfare p71 'Second Man on The Rope' by Ian Mitchell. You will learn a lot about this bothy. An interesting approach account. This is a good stone walled solid bothy with an effective stove. In the kitchen area there is a wall mounted cabinet with accompanying empty bottles; containing candles of course.

Kinbreak

33

002961

Another 'my sort of bothy.' Lower floor dust and dirt. Upper floor wood and cosy. Good fireplace, and when I was there bench seats and a comfortable couch. I was alone and got a grand fire going. Lots of lonely hills to climb nearby. (not so nearby but within reach) The scene of my long thoughts on man's sick treatment of animals.

Sourlies

33

869951

Sound small bothy. Wooden sleeping bench that holds 4 'ish' There are two other benches and when I was there a sort of hammock was hanging from the beams. I spent the night after a long walk in from Inverie. On the following day, I made my ascent of Sgurr na Ciche. This almost led to the end of my existence. On descent in poor weather I could see the bothy from above and thinking of my hip flask of rum stashed within I made a direct descent towards the bothy. There were crags in between and only my ski pole (snapping in two) stopped my potential fall of 300 ft.

Sourlies was taken over by the MBA in 1977 and was the scene of a major renovation.



Figure 36: Interior of Sourlies bothy in 2004

In 1977 the walls were down to 8 feet or less and the ruin was roofless. All the accumulated rubbish of stone and bracken had to be cleared out. The wall heads were levelled and the two gable ends were built up to the same height. A covering of creosote was placed low down the walls to eliminate re-growing bracken.

The original building had no fireplace or chimney therefore an external chimney stack was built and a hole was knocked through the SE gable so a fireplace could be fitted. In the NW gable a window was placed complete with a sound lintel. The roof trusses were fitted and were covered by the roofing sheets. Two of these were clear, to allow more light into the bothy. Lead was used to seal the chimney into the roof and the whole structure was now firmly waterproof. The front door was fitted and a perspex window installed. The final task was to completely point up the internal stonework. Surplus timbers allowed sleeping platforms to be built in and a smart table completed the interior.

All this was done in often horrendous weather. The team of workers quickly harmonised and with an amazing spirit of camaraderie no task was too difficult.

When I think of the days when I used to complete all my own DIY I can only be amazed at the progress and results of the intrepid MBA volunteers.

Ruins at Carnoch

33

868967

A day of glorious weather with a cobalt blue sky and no clouds in sight. Our plan (Norman and I) had several twists and possibilities. That night we intended to stay in the remote bothy at Sourlies which is at the head of Loch Nevis. The original plan was to climb the west ridge of Meall Buidhe and then drop down to Sourlies. On the next day, we would climb Sgurr na Ciche followed by the long weary trek back to Inverie. However, as we left we considered a direct climb to Sourlies and after dropping off our gear an ascent of Sgurr na Ciche and Garbh Cioch Mhor. All this was to change again as the toll of Knoydart distances took their toll. We left later than we should have at about 0945. The temperatures were very high as we passed the infamous Brocket memorial and branched off into Gleann Meadail. We stopped after an hour at the bothy (marked ruin on our map) at GR 806987. It was not a ruin appearing more a private climbing club hut. It was locked tight. We now thought forward. It would easily be mid afternoon before we reached Sourlies and estimating a good 5-6 hours for the ongoing climb this would mean a return almost at midnight with all the consequences of cooking late. Also, the bothy is only small and might well have been crowded. As well as this we were 'knackered.' Plan B looked better. We would continue up to Mam Meadail and leave our rucksacks on the col. Meall Buidhe could then be climbed. This would mean a very early start the next day as this would be a very long day indeed. The walk up to Mam Meadail is along a very good stalkers path that gains height slowly, but the distances are deceptive. Just after the locked bothy there is an interesting little ravine before the valley widens. As we climbed cloud was bubbling up and occasionally the tops were covered but it kept clearing and posed no threat. From the col, we climbed unladen and I found a new lease of life. At first it was very steep but once the ridge was reached it was interesting with superb views in all directions. We reached the first top and moved over to the main summit. We met up with other Inverie folk on the top as they laboured over from Luinne Bheinn. They were also exhausted and decided to abort the Corbett they had hoped to climb. On return to the col we picked up our rucksacks and descended to the River Carnach and the ruins on the flats.

The large ruin is imposing in its setting. The walls still stand to full height although the ruin is totally roofless. It has two solid upright gable ends and in the centre of the ruin is a mid- building chimney stack making the whole structure look bigger than it might have been. Other ruins were to be seen in close proximity. I sat down on a boulder for a long time taking in the ambience of this place. Or was it just that I was totally shattered? I was brought back to reality by my friend as we still had a fair way to travel. An interesting crossing of a wobbly bridge led us to the flood marsh. Rounding the headland, we were fortunate that the tide was out as it enabled us to walk along the shingle beach to arrive at Sourlies well into the evening. Carnach ruin would provide some form of shelter. Mostly from the horizontal wind but you would require a tent for vertical shelter.

Note: The suspension bridge has been in the news recently. In early 2018 it was removed after flood damage. It was rendered unsafe. It is to be replaced by late spring or early summer 2019. I must admit when I crossed it was just a 'tadge' wobbly.

Ruin

33

883994

Another day of driving rain. A soaking 3 km walk up the River Carnoch from Carnoch ruins was enough. I did not have chance to investigate this ruin.

Note: 10 years later I did locate the ruins. It was hardly worth the effort. Just low wall remains are to be seen. No shelter.

Camusrory

33

856957

Remote private location. Accessible only by foot or boat. Pier at Torr Cruinn 1 mile to the west.

Ruin

33

845909

Not visited. 2 km. south of Sgurr Breac 728m. on north shore of Loch Morar.

Reidh a' Ghuail

33

779952

Ruined farmstead. One unroofed building and one enclosure. Also, a dry-stone walled sheep shank.

Kinlochmorar

33

864912

Roofless ruin. No shelter.

Stoul

33

755945

Abandoned croft. Many years ago, when I visited it was 'relatively' sound.

Near Brinacory **33** **752915**

Ruins within trees and bracken. Roofless ruined farmsteads. Absolutely minimal shelter. They are some distance above the waters of Loch Morar.

Inverbeg chapel **33** **732923**

The shell of the chapel. A roofless ruin on the banks of the loch. It was built in 1780. Like many of nearby buildings it fell into neglect after the infamous clearances.

Ruin **33** **848934**

Not visited. Boat access would be best.

Finiskaig **33** **872947**

Several ruins. 1 unroofed building. My memory recalls a passing visit in the late 60's. This was a bothy though I did not know it at the time. A fellow climber informs me that the roof was removed in a storm in the 70's.

Ruin **33** **007086**

On a day of miserable weather, the mountain tops were definitely unattractive. I decided to carry out some lower level exploration. I commenced my walk on the western shore of the inlet into Loch Quoich just short of Alltbeithe. I proceeded in a north westerly direction along the River Quoich. Just short of the Wester Glen Quoich Burn, after a walk of less than 3km I arrived at several interesting ruins. These were the shielings of Doireleathan . They consisted of 3 unroofed huts. When I was there 49 years ago, they were indeed total ruins.

I turned back and walked back to Alltbeithe. From here I proceeded eastwards along the Easter Glen Quoich Burn.

Ruin **33** **062068**

Just over 4km brought me to more sad ruins. This was the ruin of Glacachuilinn. 49 years ago, this was also a total ruin and no shelter would be found. Several feet of stone wall still stood. Today I am sure it will all have disappeared. This must have been a desperately lonely outpost.

Ruin. Shieling hut **33** **069066**

One unroofed hut when I visited. Today more than likely a total ruin.

The weather was now even worse, and the rain cascaded down with ferocity. I had badly wanted to reach Loch Loyne as there was evidence of further ruins at the western end of the loch. I had had enough and when I reached grid reference 102061, I decided to turn back. Visibility was down to ten yards and the ruins shown on the map were not seen by me. I trudged back in a sad disconsolate mood.

Glenloyne

34

135053

I had badly wanted to walk this far but I missed out on a sight of Glenloyne. I have heard through my sources that 30+ years ago there was one roofed building and two unroofed. One enclosure was to be seen. The raising of the level of Loch Loyne has significantly affected this location.

I might as well have carried on as on my arrival back at the car I resembled a frogman.

I have always been obsessed with drowned villages and lost submerged communities. Mardale, Mullardoch, Vyrnwy, West End the list is long.

I knew the story of Loch Loyne and my obsession took on further avenues of investigation. Some thirty plus years ago I carried out this task. The initial day was gloomy to say the least. I carried out a very wet walk along the south shores of Loch Garry starting out from the warm and inviting bar at Tomdoun. Eventually I came across ruins.

Garrygualach

34

170004

Ancient township. I was so very wet and did not pay much attention. Beer in front of the hotel log fire was much more attractive. I would like to visit this area again; but on a sunny spring day.

Now to lost bridges, flooded valleys and romantic? History.

Thomas Telford constructed his road from Invergarry westwards in the early 1800's. It followed Glen Garry and Glen Quoich and then dropped down to Kinloch Hourn. He also built a road from Invermoriston westwards past Loch Cluanie onwards through Glen Shiel to Lochalsh. Several years later a link was constructed between the two roads. An investigation of the route this road took is an interesting task indeed. Well wine and dine, leave the comfort of the hotel and trace the route. It crosses over a hill and then drops down to Glen Loyne. Two bridges carried it across the river and after a further ascent and descent the 'track'/road reached the current A87 near the Cluanie Inn.

My main point of interest here were the character bridges that carried this road across the River Loyne. Remember, this was before the water levels were all altered because of the hydro electric scheme. The road carried out this crossing by means of two bridges and an island. Several times in the early 2000's drought and freezing temperatures caused the lake level to drop. The old road returned from a watery grave. It was possible to cross what originally was a river (now a large loch) Considering the road has been submerged for more than fifty years it is still in good condition. Even the two quaint bridges sport some remaining surfacing. The southern bridge is still in reasonably good condition. The road ran across the eastern side of the little island and then across the northern bridge This was a substantially larger span, but its life was limited. By 2009 the western half had collapsed leaving precariously balanced masonry.

The end was near and by 2018 the bridge had collapsed.

This all reminded me of the lovely little bridge that crossed Mardale Beck. Safe underwater for 44 years the drought of 1984 saw thousands of curious visitors who all wanted 'trophies' of their visit. The stones of the bridge were vandalised and carried away.

The waters of Haweswater could not deliver the coup de grace. Human beings could and did.

With time to spare after an interesting investigation of the bothy in Glen Pean I enjoyed warm sunshine in the environs of Strathan. Hardly any cars were parked at the road end. I spent a lot of time searching out the remains of the barracks at Taigh nan Saighdearan.

**Taigh nan
Saighdearan**

33

981914

These barracks were built by the Government during the Jacobite rebellion. They are also known as the soldier's house. It was an intriguing experience to search back in time. I was there in the 1960's and some firmly built walls still stood. By now I should imagine all trace is gone, but there is nothing wrong with you having your own search. There was a rectangular building built into the shoulder of a hill. In the 60's the north gable housed a rectangular window aperture. I could just make out the ruins of a fireplace in the south gable.

With warm sunshine and time to spare I looked ahead to Kinlocharkaig.

**Ruined cottage
Kinlocharkaig**

33

986907

Still standing (1960's)

**Ruined farmstead
Kinlocharkaig**

33

987908

The weather was still fine, and I contemplated a walk eastwards to seek out the building? at Glencamgarry. The going was rough indeed and I aborted this walk. What is at Glencamgarry GR 012906? You my dear reader will have to go and see!

In the 1960's I had stopped off at Arcabhi to search out several ruins within the woods.

Ruins

33

052924

Single unroofed shieling hut.

Very recently when I was reascending peaks from which I had been denied a view (Sgurr na Ciche 2015) I stopped off again and made an interesting discovery.

**Strange wooden
construction**

33

053923

This is indeed a strange object. It is built on stilts with a step ladder giving access to the door. I would say this is a modern construction. Purpose unknown. I contacted a Phillip Williams who had photographed this strange 'building'. He had asked the estate as to its purpose but received no reply. He told me there were no pathways to it and he wondered if it might be for hanging venison. Anne Burgess thought it might be something to do with shooting. Otherwise a mystery!!!

**Strange
construction in same
woods**

33

054923

Very strange indeed. Water flows out of one side. This is a very new construction and again its purpose is unknown, Just today I contacted Anne who photographed this strange construction. She thinks it might have something to do with the fish farms within the nearby loch. Anne lives in a house with the name Mardale. The name was bestowed on her home by a previous owner. Quite a co-incidence. Everyone knows about my total obsession about Mardale. We both like prosecco as well.

Barrisdale

33

Grid sqr 8704

I had waited a long time to visit this famous bothy. It was incorporated into the delightful walk from Kinloch Hourn. I also had Luinne Bheinn to climb, the last of the Knoydart Munros. On arrival, I witnessed a crowded scene as many walkers were erecting their tents on the pleasant grass adjoining the bothy. Before my mountain ascent I looked inside and saw a relatively modern bothy. A communal area was complemented by two bunk rooms with room for twelve plus. There was running water and two loos. This is a privately-owned bothy and therefore it is vital the facilities are respected. After my climb, I had an enjoyable evening with other bothy folk.

Runival

33

911068

I was walking along the idyllic path from Kinloch Horn to Barrisdale. I looked down on the buildings at Runival. I had a timetable to stick to and a Munro to climb so I did not venture down to get a closer look. What a joy it is to be in this location.

Folach ruin

33

793033

I had a memorable day with my close friend Norman. We climbed Ladhar Bheinn and on the summit experienced many broken spectres. Descent was long and tiring and we used the ruins at Folach as a guide to our best route down. The ruins are sad and lonely. The walls still stand high and there is a tall chimney stack. However, no roof makes this a doubtful place of shelter.

Torcuileainn

33

818005

Ruins passed on route to climb Ladhar Bheinn. Some of the ruin is still partially roofed. Some shelter could be gained if desperate.

Coireshubh

33

958053

Another sad ruin situated to the west of Loch Coire Shubh just before the road drops steeply down to Kinloch Hourn. Some of the walls still stand 6 foot tall. You can make out where doors and windows were placed. One third of the building is roofed (of a sort.) I visited this sad ruin ten years ago just before my 'compleat.' I doubt the roof is still there today. Little shelter but better than nothing in time of extremes.

Suardalan **33** **883173**

Two ground floor rooms. Both have fireplaces but the eastern room is the cosiest. It has wood lined walls, a bench, a table and chairs. The western room appears colder and has a bare appearance. There is a steep ladder that leads to the upper floor. Here two rooms provide accommodation. Recently, new banisters have been installed. Just as well as I do not think I would like to negotiate the ladder after several drams of lagavulin?

On a long lonely exploration of Bealach a' Chasain after an ascent of the Corbett Sgurr Mhic Bharraich I discovered:

Bealachsan **33** **896173**

Old settlement ruin. No shelter.

Beolary **33** **860202**

Many years ago, whilst walking the old military road I saw unroofed ruins. No shelter.

Ruin **33** **901142**

Pile of old boulders on Glenmore river. Very sad memories.

Ruin **33** **907142**

Low wall ruins. Total desolation

Achadh a' Ghlinne **33** **864100**

Private bothy. Tidy interior with neat stone walls. Tables and chairs and a good roof.

**Blackburn of
Corrieyairack** **34** **382029**

1 room bothy with internal porch. Sound green tin roof. Wooden floor and several plastic seats. The fireplace requires some skill to give out an abundance of heat.

Glenbuck **34** **336996**

Memories from long ago. Two concrete rooms with a fireplace at the gable end of each. Very damp memories and the fire was difficult to light. I can remember a lot of smoke and non-opening windows did not assist. There is an upstairs, but I cannot remember any details. Maybe it has all changed by today. You will have to go and have a look??

Luib chonnal **34** **394936**

You really must visit Glen Roy and the intriguing parallel roads. Also, three Corbetts named Carn Dearg. There is a good wood burning stove in the (cosy) upstairs. There are several items of simple furniture. The downstairs area is used for storage.

A bit of 'fun.' On my winter ascent of the two Carn Dearg's (2013) I came across this lonely chimney stack. The only remains of what was once a building. One half of one per cent shelter; but you could light a fire? (see photograph)



Figure 37: In Glen Turret a chimney stack is all that is left of a previous cottage

Bothy now closed (September 2016.) Sign outside declares 'dangerous building.' However, the building is not locked. Looking inside everything looks very 'tired' and plaster is crumbling from the stone walls. The huge beams look very doubtful. One fireplace is in a terrible condition and the roof leaks when rain is falling. Nearby there is a shed that is in the process of some renovation.

Not visited. Apparently a sound bothy with a sleeping area on 2nd floor. Ground floor has a fireplace and a table with chairs. This bothy is relatively close to the road and possibly unsavoury visitors? I hope not.

Fledden (ruin) **34** **201941**

A sad ruin. Possibly five feet of some of the walls still stand. There is a fireplace and a piece of upright chimney stack remains.

Auchivarie **34** **294932**

A disused croft.

Alltnaray (ruin) **34** **282913**

Sparse ruin on river slope.

Shesgnan **34** **440953**

Not visited. I have been informed this is a locked private bothy.

On an interesting walk carrying out a circuit from Glen Feshie to Glen Tromie you will come across several interesting old buildings. The most annoying ‘thing’ with this walk is that you require three maps and if the weather is not good you are going to have problems in the wind. Of course, today a lot of walkers will download upload or whatever and have all the details on their ‘ping pongs’.

Luibleathann **35** **738971**

Very close to the A9. Less than one mile from the road. This is the reason I declined a visit. I heard the bothy had been abused on several occasions. Bothies easily accessible sometimes suffer this fate. Luibleathann is a wooden floored bothy with wood lined walls and ceiling . It has a fireplace and several items of furniture (table, chairs and cupboard) I was informed that once the fire overcame the draughts a certain element of comfort could be achieved.

If you do visit this bothy please care for it

Bhran Cottage **35** **753913**

This is an old cottage now converted into a ‘shed.’ It is semi derelict and boarded up. It can be identified by its faded corrugated iron red roof. 41 years ago, when I passed by, it offered some basic shelter.

Lynaberack Cottage **35** **766942**

A derelict cottage close to River Tromie. It is all boarded up today. No welcome shelter here. Private property.

Between the Feshie and the Tromie there is a tract of lonely featureless land that I fully intended to explore. Sadly, bad weather and fatigue made this impossible. I had wanted to see if two buildings marked on my old maps were still in situ. They are at GR 799922 in the Allt an Dubh–chadha and GR 793966 in Gleann Chomraig. I shall have to leave it to one of my readers to complete this task.

It is all about contrast?

Glenmorangie versus a bland blend?

The local glue factory Sunday eleven versus Real Madrid?

An Teallach versus the Monadh Liath hills?

To 'compleat' the Munros you must visit this wild and lonely outpost of upland area. However, do not fall into the trap of dismissing it all as a necessary task merely to fulfil a goal. There are very many places of interest in this lonely outback and for the traveller willing to investigate, a number of bothies are there to offer a place of refuge.

The drainage basin of the River Dulnain has much of interest. My experiences of this valley are dated but still memorable as I experienced excellent weather and river crossing was of no concern. If the rivers are in spate this certainly is not the case. Be warned that the bridges at GR 789136 and 784132 are no longer in place. This causes real problems gaining Red Bothy if you are on the 'wrong' side of the waters.

Red Bothy

35

805162

Not surprisingly a definite red roof. Brown/red horizontal slat wooden walls. Vertical on gable end. There is a chimney on the gable end. The interior has wooden walls and a wooden floor. The bothy is used by the estate at different times of the year.

35

723052

You have to negotiate a drop down from the Landrover track to reach this bothy down on the banks of the Allt Mor. It is a nice wood hut with a large wooden table within. The wooden construction gives it a warm feel.

Bothy 2 Dulnain

35

762121

There is a big number two painted on the walls of this somewhat untidy and dishevelled bothy. It has wooden walls and a red roof. Inside it is somewhat uninviting with a cold stone floor and a very dirty fireplace. There are several items of old wooden furniture.

35

719094

Neat shaped bothy that is weatherproof and tidy. It has a fireplace, chimney, chairs and a big wooden table. There is no shortage of places to stay within this river basin. Also, there are plenty of good camping places close to the bothies.

Dalbeg

35

655132

On first recollection 40+ years ago it was a basic bothy. Today I believe it to be a locked estate bothy. So many years since I was here!!

Within this remote area of the Monadh Liath Mountains there are many other bothies and shelters. On my early travels, I was walking with an old 1:63360 series map. (1955).

Within my notes I jotted the following grid references for possible bothies and shelters.

GR 757062

GR 782112 This bothy is named Feithlinn. In 1999 it had a wooden floor and wood lined walls.

GR 787137

GR 841139

GR 704022

GR 734051

GR 739059

GR 745044

GR 763903 Near the weir on the River Tromie.

GR 562080 Glen Markie Burn.

Are they still shelters? Were they ever shelters? Are they still there? What are they like?

Only one way to find out.

I have to include the following!

Stronelaig Lodge or Stron na Larig

35

536068

Ghostly, spooky, spectral and eerie. This is my sort of place. I had precedents. The old parsonage in Mardale was vacated and left to ruin before it was razed to the ground to satisfy Manchester's greed for water. Wesleddale Hall left to rot and collapse gave me the chance to explore and imagine what had gone before. (see below) My detailed study of this corner of Lakeland brought me to so very many ruins and buildings far beyond their 'sell by dates'. Stronelaig was built in the early 1900's and was indeed an imposing lodge that graced the vale above Loch Killin. The nearby grouse moors became an integral reason for the success of this stately home. In the Second World War it was used as a training base for American rangers and eventually sold in 1946. It remained in use until the mid 60's but was abandoned in 68 to initiate the slow but inextricable road to ruin and death. My only memory goes back several decades. Signs indicating danger, and lower windows boarded up, seemed superficial, as the main structure was still tall and sound. First impressions can be so deceptive. Closer scrutiny told the truth. Collapsed walls and broken-down staircases had contributed to the mass of filth and debris that covered every inch of this once proud structure. Plaster had crumbled away leaving just the slats in place – a reminder of what happens to any living creature when death takes away the layers of flesh leaving just the skeletal remains. Sadness where once was joy.

Within the building it is so easy to see just how the solid bare stone of the structure had been 'fleshed out' to provide the home with warmth and comfort. Not any more. Neglect, inevitable decline and slow decay had taken their full toll.

Stronelaig is an experience that I shall remember forever.

Am I morbid? Am I weird? Maybe, but I do have a vivid imagination and I would not trade this for anything.

Wetsleddale Hall has now been bought and renovated; back from the brink of extinction. My 1990's memories of Stronelairg are dated. I am fairly certain the building is beyond the point of repair. But; I might be wrong.

Dalnashallag

35

648985

Not visited. I wish I had after my somewhat pathetic 'shenanigans' on nearby Carn Dearg. This unassuming Munro became a subject of grave annoyance. An attempt in waist deep powder snow was aborted after hours of wallowing through the white nuisance. My next attempt, although successful, proved again that this hill is not my favourite. After crossing the plateau (peat, bog and heather, Grid Square 6502) I discovered I had lost my fleece. I retraced my route hoping to find it. The weather was 'horrible' and I arrived back at the river crossing GR 660019 with no 'find.' I then took stock of my situation. Car keys in rucksack. Wallet in zipped pocket. All I had in my fleece was a banana, kit Kat and compass. Just why had I made that pathetic reverse trek? On return from the summit I realised I had crossed that infernal bog plateau 6 times for a single 'tick' in my book. How much better would it have been to ascend by way of Cluny Castle up Strath an Eilich to Dalnashallag bothy and then to Loch Dubh. Very many years ago I remember a simple open bothy on the southern shores of the loch. It was very basic and merely a tin hut. In fact, a grey corrugated iron shed and a very crude shelter. I have been informed recently that it is now lost and long gone. Anyway, I am not going back to verify this. Carn Dearg leaves me in despair. A bit unfair??

There is a derelict bothy lower down the slopes. The derelict cottage of Dalballoch would give some shelter in a desperate scenario. I have many times passed the old farmhouse at Glenballoch. At first it was in decent order but on my last visit (early 2000's) it was boarded up and looking 'tired'. Like all of us as the years pass by?

Dalnashallag bothy is a small one roomed bothy which is very homely when the fire is lit. The other end of the building is a farm storage area.

Bothy on south east slope of A Chailleach

35

687023

I shall never forget the day I met up with this bothy. I was making the ascent of A Chailleach 15 years ago in some of the warmest weather I had ever experienced in the Highlands. The featureless terrain of the Alt a Chaorainn was compensated by a damp tea towel immersed in the waters of the beck and draped over my head. I badly needed a target to alleviate the horrendous boredom of the upward slog. I saw ahead a construction on the slopes. I aimed for this and now I had my goal the endless climb seemed bearable. As soon as I reached the bothy I went inside to escape the glaring rays of the hot sunshine. The bothy was waterproof and constructed with tin with a sound roof. Most of the interior timbers had been ripped out for fuel but the interior still had some form of order. There was a rickety old table resting against one of the walls.



**Figure 38: 'Ailing bothy' on east slope of A Chailleach
For an interior view see "A necessary goal in a heatwave"**

**Ruins in Glen
Mazeran**

35

**Various
locations**

Glen Mazeran illustrates many signs of previous habitation. On a long walk from Glen Mazeran lodge to triangulation point on Beinne Bhreac Mhor 807m GR 678199 searching out ruins was a pleasant change from desolate featureless terrain. Many unroofed buildings and large enclosures and low walled ruins could be seen. No shelter. The ruins are far too 'progressed.'

**Ruins and interest
along River
Findhorn**

35

Evidence of old townships could be seen. However, the ruins provide no shelter. This is an interesting if little visited area. I passed Dalmigavie, Coignascallan, Lower Coignashie and Coignafearn old lodge before I reached Coignafearn lodge which is a very large construction. This is the sometimes residence of Sigrid Rausing, publisher and philanthropist.

From this point on take great care. This is remote wild country.

**Diamond Jubilee
hut**

35

**Near summit
of Carn na
Saobhaidhe
GR 599144**

An ascent of this Corbett forty years ago avoided all the ‘changes’. That word again!!! Change. Wind turbines, ugly mountain tracks and out of character huts. However, it would offer shelter in what might be a desolate place to be in bad weather. I have not seen any of this. I climbed in the 1970’s using compass and common sense.

Corrou

36

981958

Arguably the most famous of all the bothies. Corrou was the commencement of my long bothy experiences all those years ago. Fifty plus years in fact. Corrou was built in the late 1800’s as a living place for a deer watcher of the estate. After the first world war the ‘glory’ years of shooting estates were in decline. Corrou fell into disuse. However, it was still used for accommodation by climbers. After all it was situated in a superb location. Age and vandalism began to take their toll. In 1921 the interior was still wood lined and there were shelves, a table and even an armchair. A box bed provided a sleeping place. By 1928 the wood had been ripped out to be used as fuel for the fire. The ignorance of certain human beings leaves me in total despair. The bothy was visited by Baird and Barry over the new year period of 1928 with tragic consequences. In the 1930’s Corrou was described as ‘ruinous’ and after the second world war it was in a very sorry state. All the wooden interior had long since disappeared and there was just a cold dirty earth floor. In 1949 The Cairngorm Mountaineering Club obtained permission from the estate to renovate the bothy. A new roof was installed, and a stone buttress stabilised the north gable. My memories were from sometime in the early- mid 60’s. I know it still had an uncomfortable dirt floor and was certainly not a very welcome refuge. In later years I did hear that there had been a further renovation sometime in 1961 but by 1965 further vandalism had seen a return to austerity. The MBA took over the bothy in 1967 and a concrete floor was put in. When this happened I do not know for I am certain it still had a dirt floor as late as the 1970’s. Strange how time can confuse issues and just how the memory can play tricks. As the years passed by the bothy once again suffered, this time from overuse. Human waste was becoming a major problem. Users of the bothy were either too lazy to follow sensible toilet rules or too ignorant to realise the dangers to general health brought about by the random ‘dump.’ I stayed in the bothy in 2002 and once again suffered through the cold damp and bare facilities. During 2006/ 2007 the bothy underwent another renovation. The front door gave access to an internal porch with axe, saw and redundant spade? A sleeping platform was installed, and a wood floor put into place. Three of the walls were lined with wood. The fireplace was replaced with a multi fuel stove and best of all a composting toilet was added to the south end of the bothy. Corrou had been given a new lease of life. In 2014 the fireplace was replaced again with a more efficient model.

Ryvoan

36

005115

Formerly a farm that was abandoned in 1877. Until the early 1900’s it survived as a single room building with wooden floor and wall lining. A byre on the western gable had disappeared by the 1960’s. The late Irvine Butterfield (ex president of the Munro Society) told me that Creag Dubh climbing club saved the whole building from ruin by protecting the exposed gable with collapsed corrugated iron roofing from the byre. My first contact with Ryvoan was way back when I carried out my aborted climb of Bynack More. Several weeks later I exorcised this failure with a successful climb and an epic stay at Bynack Stable. Several years later I persuaded my wife (her reluctance?) to

accompany me on my attempt to claim the Corbett Meall a' Bhuachaille We walked through deep snow past the delightful waters of An Lochan Uaine and reached the bothy at 2 pm I had brought with me a massive supply of cardboard. In fact this was the sole content of my rucksack with just a few pieces of acquired coal. The bothy was cold and lonely, but I so badly wanted my hill. I managed to light a fire and this took the chill off the cold bothy walls. Just as I was about to leave two attractive girls arrived at the bothy. I set off and they soon followed me. The snow was deep and it made what would normally be a stroll a very difficult and time consuming trudge. First one, then the other girl turned back but I prevailed and after an hour and more reached the summit in very good spirit. I commenced my usual ultra quick descent and quickly met a chap slowly slogging upward through the snow. He told me Norma was happy? and still had the fire going. I reached the bothy which was by now quite warm and enjoyed a superb cup of tea. The girls had long since departed. This was a magic moment for me. Norma had been mostly alone for almost two hours. I climbed my hill. Everything was okay.

Ryvoan is different now. It has a sleeping platform for 4 with enough room for another dozen on the floor. There is a large lean to porch for storage. The fireplace has been greatly improved. Nevertheless Norma and I got a really good fire going all those happy years ago.

Corndavon

36

227021

Closed. Misuse and vandalism. The bothy was attached to the closed Corndavon Lodge. The pathetic antics of a small number of morons caused the bothy to be closed in 1994.

Bynack Stable

36

021105

Sadly, no more. The scene of my lonely stopover many years ago after my exorcism of Bynack More. This used to be a small tin hut that was used as a barn .It offered a bench seat and shelter. As it was close to Ryvoan very few people used the barn. I did. It was blown down in a storm in January 2005.

Fords of Avon Ath nam Fiann

36

042031

This shelter was completely replaced in 2011. It was an expert task and in reality the 'new' shelter is almost totally similar to the old one. Same location, same size. My memories are dated and therefore of the original shelter. This was constructed by the Fleet Air Arm in 1970 and as I served with this organisation in Borneo I feel an affinity. My memories go back some 35- 38 years. The shelter was single skinned and in fact a wood shed encased with huge rocks and boulders. I have been informed the replacement is double skinned and fully insulated. It has a wooden floor. There is no window or sleeping platform and no stove or fire. This is intended as an emergency shelter not a traditional bothy. If it is the same size as the old shelter it could? hold 8 people but they would have to be intimate! This all causes me to think of a favourite drinking den of mine in Liverpool. The Roscoe Head is a small traditional pub selling real ale and offering genuine company. It has several small rooms one of which is very small indeed. It has been told in drinking legend that over twenty drinkers occupied this room on one occasion. Obviously for a bet. Similar to the famous war room in Ye Cracke. Room for five drinkers. It was here that Tom Cummings used to teach his 6th formers

Greek and Latin when I taught at the Institute. Fords of Avon like the pubs is a small shelter and carries with it nostalgia and history.

An inscription on the shelter reads:

Fords of Avon Refuge
Rebuilt August 2011
with the kind support
of the RSPB, MBA
and Glenmore Lodge.

Faindouran Lodge

36

081061

This is a very remote bothy indeed. It is a 17 mile trek from Tomintoul and a long trudge across rough ground from Lairigh an Laoigh. The buildings consisted of an old shooting lodge (just the end section still stood) and very close by a stable. In the winter of 2013 a massive storm inflicted severe damage on the building that contained the bothy The gable wall collapsed, taking with it the chimney stack.

Enter the superb efforts of the MBA who carried out comprehensive repairs. These women and men are the stalwarts of the wild outdoors. The doorway leads into a single room in which will be found a table and several chairs. There is also a sleeping platform for a few folk. Most important, an efficient stove has been installed. There is a big window which gives the room a friendly ‘feel’. A steep ladder leads up to a wood floored attic Bearing in mind potential fierce outside conditions this makes this a very cosy place. The gable wall that had collapsed was originally an internal wall. It is now replaced and faced with long lasting larch. The stable just a few yards away, now has a wood floor, and although the walls are cold and potentially damp it could provide accommodation in times of need.

Garbh Choire

36

959986

This is another famous mountain shelter. I remember the late 60’s early 70’s just after it had been constructed in 1966. This is not realistically a bothy. More a mountain shelter for time of need. It is made up of a rectangular frame of angle iron filled in with steel reinforcing grid. Originally it was covered in tarpaulin and this was followed by hesian sheets all covered in boulders and turf. It measures 7 ft. by 9 ft. and there is an amount of wood on the floor. You can just stand erect at the apex of the roof. It could possibly sleep 4-6 depending on the emergency.

I missed out on an update visit 16 years ago when I was descending Sgor an Lochain Uaine into the bowels of a monster storm brewing towards Braemar. I had no time to spend investigating the ongoing condition of this shelter. In 2012 colleagues informed me of the current condition . It was no longer watertight and there was evidence of a lot of temporary repairs. In 2014 there was little change. The door had to be lifted off and the roof looked decidedly ‘dodgy.’

I really do not know if I shall ever visit again and eagerly await any developments regarding the future of this shelter.

Cave/doss

36

946987

In Garbh Choire Dhaidh there is a built up cave, which lies under the second largest boulder, just above the pools along the course of the Dee. It is NW of the corrie lip and could shelter two people if the necessity arose.

**Hutchison
Memorial Hut**

36

023998

A small mountain hut constructed to commemorate Dr. Arthur Gilbertson Hutchison a Scottish geologist who was killed in a climbing accident. His friends decided that a mountain hut would be a fitting tribute to him. It was constructed in 1954 but it was always a very basic shelter with a stone floor. Consequently it was a cold and heartless place even though it was situated in superb mountain country. My memories were thus. Cold, damp and cheerless. It was taken over by the MBA in 1993 and they put in a wooden floor and a bench along one wall. This did not alter my view of a draughty shelter. In 2012 a major renovation was carried out. The interior was wood lined and insulated with a double glazed opening window and multi fuel stove. The original open porch was enclosed and it provided a place to hang up damp clothing (pegs provided) and to get out of wet gear. Rucksacks could also be stored thus leaving more space for climbers within the small one room. There was even a carbon monoxide alarm fitted and a climber friend of mine informed me of curtains on the bothy window.

However, it is not all happiness and good news. In February 2015 thieves broke into the locked part of the bothy to steal food drink and fuel. This was intended for the volunteers who carry out maintenance on the bothy. Just today I read about air strikes against a humanitarian convoy in war torn Syria. Innocent woman and children slaughtered by evil bastards in high powered jets. The bothy incident is not on this scale but it still is important, as it destroys the trust that is so important in many aspects of life.

Once again the sickness of certain ‘scum’ human beings leaves me in total despair. I came to the bothy to get away from all this!

The ‘Secret howff’ on Beinn a’ Bhuid

In my prologue I wrote, “If I have raised issues of controversy this is good. I want people to disagree.”

This may well be where this issue crops up.

I am not going to divulge the location of this howff but I feel I must qualify this position somewhat.

This has always been known as the ‘secret howff’

So that I am clear in my mind I need to fully understand the meaning of this word.

‘Secret’ “kept private, not to be made known or exposed to view”

Interesting?

I went a little further and discovered ‘secrecy’-“Ability to keep secrets.”

My thesaurus 'threw up' all sorts of words. Concealed, covered, disguised, furtive, hidden, underground, undisclosed and unseen. I shall keep my promise of secrecy, but this is where the controversy might arise.

Is it right that a bothy should be a secret? Who has the divine right to usage and who should not be allowed access to this historic shelter. The debate might rage on and to be truthful all we are discussing here is a very small shelter perched on a slope in a delightful part of the mountains of Scotland. I suppose that if all human beings could be trusted to be decent then none of this would matter. However, as I have written time and again not all humans are decent. There are indeed some pretty horrible people out there. These people do not deserve to have the privilege of using this special shelter. Just a few idiots could go out there and ruin it all for the majority.

Several years ago I had a long discussion on this issue with an experienced Munroist and avid bothy person. He did not want others to know of the whereabouts of this howff. He wanted it all to be the domain of the old 'timers.' Our discussion went on long into the night and even with the mellowing of a good malt no progress was made; but we were contented. Just before tiredness took over I reminded him that I was an 'old timer.' As long as the bothy is respected I really do not care who knows of its location. But there is still a doubt in my mind. Are others to be trusted? Possibly not.

This basic bothy is out there but you will have to go out and find it. Everything comes to she who waits!

After Mallory and Irvine disappeared into the mists of Everest the following decades raised controversy as to whether they had reached the summit back in 1924. This was the mystery of mysteries and a tale to captivate anyone with a love of the high summits.

In 1999 A party of climbers discovered a body frozen into the slopes of the mountain. They were amazed to discover that it was the body of George Mallory. Searching through his possessions it was hoped that the answer to the long debated question might be found. However, far from finding answers, this discovery only raised more questions. The one item they were really looking for was the small Kodak camera they were known to be carrying. Even with the assistance of a small metal detector no camera was found on George's body. The camera could only be with Irvine who was still undiscovered somewhere on the cold bleak upper slopes of the worlds highest peak. Kodak Ltd. had indicated that the film might well have survived over the many years and that it really was possible the film might still be developed. The answer might well be found, and the mystery solved.

But of course the body of Irvine had to be discovered and the search intensified. So many climbers have reached the top of Everest that today many expeditions adopt an aim to locate the body of Irvine. To this date no success has been achieved. If any climber were to find the body and retrieve the camera the outcome would be momentous and the rewards unimaginable for the lucky finder.

Theories and clues and guesses and projections have been raised so much so that books have been written with titles such as Detectives on Everest, The search for Mallory and Irvine and Last Hours on Everest.

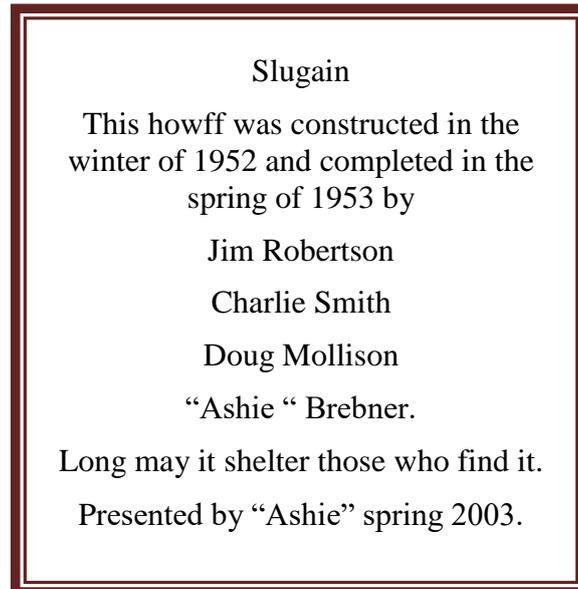
From the search on Everest. To Glen Slugain. Little clues will not do harm?

The howff is about 8 ft. by 10 ft. and has a height of about 5ft. It is quite light within as there is a skylight in the corrugated tin roof. From a small distance it certainly blends into the hillside rocks and mini crags. In fact it does not look dissimilar to my garden

shed when it partly blew down in a gale years ago. The howff is decidedly slanted but solid. Its camouflage you cannot deny. Within there are chairs, shelves and a wooden floor.

The howff has been upgraded over the years since construction. It was in good condition in 2007 as I passed by. The original builders were pioneers indeed. Sadly they pass away and are badly missed. Doug died in 2000 and I believe he was a superb story teller. I would have dearly liked to meet him. Any of them. Real people.

As you crouch in, a plaque on the right-hand wall states:



Let Ashie have the last word. Long may it shelter those **who find it**.

**The high howffs of
Beinn a Bhuird
within the high
corries east of the
summit**

36

097995

There are several howffs and they do offer a dry night if the climber is stranded high up. The largest is not dissimilar to the Shelterstone of Loch Avon. The Smith Winram bivouac will be found at the foot of the dividing buttress between Coire an Dubh Loch and Coire nan Cleach. The shelter is under a huge boulder with a built up stone wall around the entrance. You will have to lower yourself into the shelter, but within it is weatherproof and there is enough room for two good folk.

I shall never ever forget my Scafell Pike terror when I was incarcerated within that infernal stretcher box. Therefore, my stay at Beinn a Bhuird howff was a comfortable one-man venture. Anyway in three days I saw nobody at all so who could have turned up?

For those of historical ‘bent’ do look in the Cairngorm Club Journal for interesting information on the initial construction of this shelter. I wonder if a roaming fell

wanderer would have doubted his/ her sanity if they had seen the dancing lights flickering within the boulders and the out of place almost supernatural sound of steel upon rock as battering and hammering echoed throughout the still corrie slopes. Eerie laughter and gasps of energy to add to a mystic experience as the creating labourers completed their heavy task.

This is not unlike my embellished accounts of the Williamson diggers as they created their master's labyrinth of chambers and tunnels beneath the sandstone of Edge Hill.

Ruin An Diollaid

36

075972

On the approach to Beinn a Bhuid from Linn of Quoich, once you pass out of the impressive forest, there is a 'scar' track that takes you to the summit plateau. A roofless gillie stone shelter ('sort of') will be passed. The amount of shelter offered is ultra minimal.

I am informed there is a better ruin ('not much') at GR 074980 some 400 yards to the west of the track but I did not go to look.

Slugain ruins

36

119952

In glorious May weather I cycled away from Keiloch and with my trusty tent within my rucksack cycled up the excellent track towards Invercauld House and beyond towards Alltdourie. From here the track was still easy to negotiate until the trees were left behind in Gleann an t- Slugain. When the track became less 'friendly' at GR 130950 I left my bicycle and took to shank's pony.



Figure 39: The ruins of Slugain Lodge

It was pleasant and warm and although I could see a lot of snow on the higher slopes I made good progress along the valley taking the left-hand path. I soon reached the ruins of Slugain lodge. Any thought of a 'doss' at this location was immediately dismissed. The ruins were more extensive than I last remembered. In fact almost total ruin. There were several sections of wall some ten feet in height and it was interesting to see large blocks of square and rectangular stone lying within the ruins. But of shelter there was none. Slugain Lodge had been built circa 1875 as a hunting lodge for the estate. By the end of the Second World War the lodge had deteriorated alarmingly and trespass and vandalism caused the estate to remove the roof to deter any intruders. I have seen a photograph from 1947 showing the roof slates stacked neatly awaiting removal to another location. There are no door or window frames and the building is well on the way to inevitable decay and total decline. In 2007 I quickly looked around and moved away to seek out my camp site in the upper reaches of the Quoich.

**Hut on slopes of
Carn Glas-Choire**

36

913283

I have not climbed many Grahams. The Munros were my big achievement. The Corbetts are proving difficult to achieve as the years pass inextricably by. Carn Glas – Choire 659m is a short climb from the B9007, mostly on a good track. During the ascent you will pass an interesting shed/hut. It is small and has a front porch and veranda. It is painted green and has three windows at the front with a door. It has a rounded roof. This is the sort of construction I have seen on many cricket grounds. Its origin I know not.

An interesting walk is along the River Gairn from the B976 at Gairnshiel Lodge. Seeking out several ruins (shelter?) and evidence of past habitation.

Two kilometres from the road the varied ruins at Tullochmacarrick are reached GR 277015. For those who enjoy searching out ruined buildings this is an ideal place. Tullochmacarrick farm is now a deserted farmhouse and collection of outbuildings. The farmhouse is still roofed (last visit 2011) but it was very noticeable how time had taken its toll from the previous visit (early 2000's) The windows were partly boarded up and the whole exterior showed chronic signs of age and neglect. The windows that were still open to the elements were obviously contributing to the steady decline. As you look at the farmhouse a side building to the left shows a roof sliding precariously downward Today it is probably gone? In 2001 it had been quite solid. The front porch did not offer any vestige of welcome. The right- hand corner wall at ground level was slowly decaying. At the rear of the farmhouse there were several adjoining constructions. One was probably a lean- to kitchen area. A large green bush was growing to the right of the building. The whole place was dilapidated and dodgy but it would offer shelter from the elements if you were desperate.

I have always thrived on exploration of old and semi ruined buildings. Wetsleddale Hall to High Swindale Head, Wood Nook farm to Quarry House. This was no different even if great care was required.

A short distance behind the deserted farmhouse is a large byre with an enclosed courtyard. Even today this is occasionally used for the shearing of sheep. I found it interesting to stand within and imagine the farming tasks of yesteryear.

This whole area hosted all sorts of other ruins. The old manse still stood with its walls still solid and high GR 281012. It was indeed roofless but its position on a rise above the valley floor gave it an aura of importance. Nearby were other interesting ruins. A standing gable wall contained a solid fireplace. The other walls were still upright and within there was an intriguing set of steps leading down to what might have been a root cellar, now all open to the elements. Another interesting ruin showed evidence of an external staircase. This brought me back to Mardale where several 17th century cottages had a similar feature. Rowanpark and Wood Nook were constructed in a similar way so that access to the upper floor did not encroach on space on the ground floor.

My walk entailed me staying close to the river and my progress was along a good estate track. Other interesting ruins were there to be seen in positions of close proximity. The ruins at Remicras, where a number of low wall remains still stand. A nearby kiln, and the remains of a mill dam, as well as a U shaped steading. The abandoned houses at Blairglas are also there to be investigated, but of realistic shelter there was little.

My walk took me forward and across the substantial bridge at Tullochmacarrick to reach a ford that allowed a crossing of the river. Some 500m up the slope were more ruins that told of better times in the distant past. Easter Sleach consisted of several ruins all close together. Low wall remains are to be seen at GR 262020 and GR 261022. Almost alongside is a more substantial ruin (2005) where solid walls will be found, and on my visit the last remnants of roof joists. Almost certainly gone by today but absolute minimal shelter would be available here.

The ongoing route brought me to Daldownie which was at one time a substantial settlement. Today it consists only of ruins. A derelict steading (now barn/ animal shelter?) with a red roof can be seen but the main interest point now is the crossing of the river. This is achieved by an excellent bridge that was in fact intended to carry the railway across the river at Ballater. The railway never materialised and the bridge was placed at Daldownie instead. The trackway continued along the river side towards the next buildings of interest. Corndavon Lodge was built as a shooting lodge for royalty. It was an impressive building and a separate building alongside housed the members of staff. The lodge as seen today used to be much larger. The 'left hand side' has been demolished after a fire, and today apart from occasional estate use as a bothy it is closed and locked with the windows adorned with metal grills. The map indicates this to be a ruin which is not strictly true. However, walkers are not welcome here or at the adjoining building which used to be a popular bothy. Needless vandalism caused this function to be withdrawn. A sad sign of the times?

Another 4km brings one to Lochbuilg Lodge on the southern shores of Loch Builg.

Lochbuilg Lodge ruin

36

187028

Nothing here other than total ruin. Just the lowest part of walls remains of the previous lodge. It is a fine setting and the grass is perfect for a campsite. You will need your tent, as there is no shelter here.

It was now time for me to turn back. As the weather was set fine and my mood was high I decided to return by following the River Gairn to its source and re-joining the path to Slugain ruins, just to the south of Carn Eag Dhubh 784m. This was a long and very lonely walk and not a soul was seen.

I had thoroughly enjoyed my exploration of this small section of the Gairn valley. I had investigated many ruined buildings all in different states of decay. Sadly the ex 'official' bothy at Glendavon is no longer available and most walkers now utilise their tents for overnight accommodation. Having said this, several of the ruined buildings would afford some shelter if the necessity did arise. I was also aware that further interesting ruins were to be explored further east of Gairnshiel Lodge. Shenval, Ardoch and many others are waiting there for the walker with imagination to discover.

Drakes hut

36

883056

Hidden in the trees in pleasant surroundings this is merely a wooden shed that is in fact an open shelter for wanderers. It is indeed like a garden shed. It reminds me of my sheds in my cottage garden. I have three and am very proud of them all. One is for tools and the other for garden equipment, lawn mowers, hedge cutters and the like. The third one is my real pride. It is a shrine for me when I am working hard on all the necessary tasks that must be done. I have my own bar with six optics and a fridge always full of beer. The walls are adorned with my Royal Marine memorabilia and photographs of high places that I love. My own music centre finishes it all off.

I am a 'hoarder' and do not like to throw anything away. My wife is a 'chucker out' and puts just about anything in the bin. I usually extract it when she is not looking and hide it in my shed. Sometime in the future it will be useful. Of this I am certain.

Drakes hut is about the size of my shed and a lovely place to shelter if that is what is required by the passer by. It has wooden bunk beds a bench seat and a table. There are shelves along the end wall with a selection of reading material.

It was all constructed as a shooting bothy in the 1930's when the Inshriach estate was owned by the Drake family. It is now owned and maintained by Scottish Natural Heritage.

Inshriach bothy

36

Close by

This is a modern construction designed by the architect Iain Macleod and artist Bobby Niven. The bothy was built in 2012 with the support of the Royal Scottish Academy and Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop.

During the summer you can stay here in order to become creative??? You will investigate rustic living???

This is NOT a bothy that interests us. You have to book your stay and you have to pay.

Corryhully

40

913845

Unique in so much this bothy has electricity. This was the scene of my stopover in horrendous weather when the kindness of the estate manager turned a cold miserable night into one adorning a roaring log fire.

The bothy is basic but solid. A cold stone floor does not add to comfort but if the fire is burning it all changes. There is a fireplace at each end of the bothy. A table separates two wooden sleeping benches. This bothy is easy to reach, as it is only 2 miles from Glenfinnan viaduct along a good estate road.

Treat the kindness of the estate with respect.

Brinacory

40

Grid sqr 7591

Probably an old township that reveals interesting ruins. Time has marched on since my memories of a ferry trip from Inverie to Tarbet and a delightful walk along the northern shore of Loch Morar. This was 1990 (27 years ago) and I discovered 2 roofed buildings and 5 unroofed. One of the farm buildings had a solid roof although signs of loose slates were in evidence. A lean to was looking much the worse for wear. This was another location that made me think of Mardale. Just how quickly decay and decline can set in once human care and attention is withdrawn. One of the unroofed buildings had walls intact and in one gable end there was a solid chimney. Another showed walls down to 4 ft. and the interior was completely full of ferns. The old croft with a roof would have provided shelter even if to be honest the interior was a 'mess'. Over the course of 25 years I am sure these ruins are more terminal. This is lonely country and for the lone wanderer there is so much to see.

Oban bothy

40

863901

Locked during the stag season. The bothy is situated 100 yards from the waters edge. This makes it a favourite for kyak adventurers. Attached is a utility shed and on the ground floor there are two rooms with fireplaces. The right hand one is the favourable choice. A staircase leads to an upper area complete with iron bedstead and wooden floors. Around the top of the stairs is a metal banister to prevent any 'falls' after too much malt? My visit was twenty+ years ago and I am informed the bothy has undergone a renovation recently.

Kinlochbeoraid

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857850

An imposing derelict house situated at the head of the loch. It is still roofed with two chimney stacks. Part of the roof is somewhat 'misplaced' and future weather will almost certainly cause problems here. There is a front porch of corrugated iron and the windows are mostly boarded up. This intriguing building would provide welcome shelter should conditions become grim. (the house is locked, and you should not enter). It is weatherproof (as of now) but this would not disguise the gloomy unattractive interior.

**Carlotta bothy. Also
Captains bothy.
Sometimes
Carlotta's eyrie**

40

671840

Another of the fabled bothies. Hopefully this will be respected. The building is marked on the map at Camas Ghaoideil. The bothy sits on a crag top which is why it is sometimes called Cragtop bothy. It is not marked on the O.S. six-inch map of 1873 (sheet CXXXV) for the very good reason it was named after a 2nd world war special operations executive trainee saboteur who built it.

The bothy is indeed special. Its perch on the rocky headland offers superb views of the sea. There are secluded beaches to either side. The interior hosts a wood table and wooden bench. The roof is of solid wood and within the corner is an efficient stove.

Look after this bothy. Please.

Essan

40

817817

Grand location but difficult to access. It is forbidden to walk along railway lines, but this is the best way to arrive, although technically illegal. If you break the rules, make sure you know when the trains are running. (Consider goods trains.) 2 rooms with two fireplaces and an additional small room.

Peanmeanach

40

712805

Idyllic beach location. Within the ruins of the lost village of Peanmeanach. This was a fishing village abandoned in the 20th century. Many of the old ruins can be seen, roofless and tragic. The bothy is the one remaining habitable building. One room has a fireplace and wooden bunk beds. There is also a kitchen room. On the first floor there is a wood floor sleeping area. For me a 5* bothy and if you do not want a tiring uphill day a splendid walk in magical surroundings.

Glasnacardoch ruins

40

707806

Sad ruins. Eight feet of wall still stands in several buildings No shelter here. Head for Peanmeanach.

Resourie

40

862709

The location is a bit dark now as the bothy is surrounded by trees. Within are wooden bunk beds and a stove to generate warmth. Reading material is available. Always a predicament for me in high wild places. I can remember finding a massive pile of mountain magazines in Gerry's bunkhouse. Probably at least weeks of reading. But the counter attraction was bothy talk, drams of whisky and general tiredness after long mountain ventures. Also many bothies and bunkhouses are poorly lit and for the senior citizen reading can be quite a chore.

Gleann Dubh- Lighe

40

944819

In 2011 a catastrophic fire completely destroyed this bothy. All that remained were the walls. With great support from the Fassfern estate the MBA volunteers carried out a complete rebuild. The bothy was re-roofed, and windows and doors were replaced. A wood floor was installed, and the bothy divided into two rooms. One has a table and fireplace with a raised sleeping platform. The wall behind the very efficient fireplace is bare stone.

Lochan nam Fiann

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612642

An awful weather day and no consideration of anything above 1,000 ft. A short walk from Glenborrodale leads to Lochan nam Fiann. Nothing like the majesty of An Teallach, Glencoe or the Cuillin of Skye. The rain cascaded down and the little ghillie hut on the banks of the loch was so very welcome. Nothing more than a shed (tatty light green) with pieces of furniture. But at least cover from the rain that was as wet as any other in Scotland.

Lairig Leacach

41

282736

I cycled in from Corriechoille but most of the way I pushed my bike along the rough track. However, at the end of my stay it would be possible to cycle out. I left my bike at the highest point of the valley and walked in to the bothy. On the occasion of my stay (many years ago) the bothy had a stone-floored kitchen with a wooden ladder leading to an upstairs sleeping area. The ladder was quite steep but for a climber a 'doddle' I believe things have changed now and the upper floor has been taken out of use. Is this so that poor simple folk cannot delve into the world of litigation brought about by stupid health and safety? I don't really know as it is so long since my visit. I believe the bothy now has wooden bunkbeds. I do know the cycle out was great. Downhill along a rough track is different from uphill.

A year or so later I was climbing in this area when I met up with Claire. She related the story of her stopover at the bothy. A memorable stay. I met Claire on a frosty ridge leading to the Grey Corries. Her story is outlined in 'Unexpected passion in a bothy setting'.



Figure 40: This is the ridge where I met Claire

Note the frost still resting on the north slope of Ston Coire Na Ceannain 1123m

Staoineag **41** **296678**

Fine location on banks of river. The bothy has three rooms two of which are on the ground floor. Wood lined walls and a wooden floor make this a cosy bothy once the fire is lit. Upstairs is a large wooden sleeping area.

Meanach **41** **266685**

Sometimes spelt Meannanach or Meadhanach. The name Meanach is painted on the wall next to the door. The bothy has 2 rooms. There is a Fireplace in both. In the right-hand room there is a bed platform and tables and chairs are available. On the OS map there are 3 buildings shown to the south west of the river. (Luibeilt) The bothy is the building to the north east. Take care with river crossings in this area. Many years ago I can remember a wire bridge enabling you to cross the river. Sadly many bothy users used this access to rip the heart out of Luibeilt.

Luibeilt **41** **264684**

This was once a fine house and the home of shepherds and their families. Today it is a sad ruin. All the roof has gone and presumably occupants of the nearby bothy also ripped out floorboards and window frames to be used as fuel.

The walls still stand high and solid but shelter here would be minimal. Once again, this ruin reminded me of the bare bones of a skeleton, once the flesh and organs have long disappeared. Tall trees stand guard on this sad wreck. A nearby shed to the north west still stands and would offer a smelly ultra-basic shelter. You would have to be desperate to use this, but then Scottish weather is often desperate?

**Boat house on
shores of Loch Eidle
Beag** **41** **251652**

This boat house is still in use as at 2011. It is sometimes locked and sometimes open. Last seen in 2003 when it would have afforded shelter in bad weather. If open. Private property.

**Ruin Loch Eidle
Mor** **41** **245648**

On the north shore of the loch. This ruin still has tall walls. Not much more, certainly no roof. You might find some shelter from the wind.

Loch Chiarain **41** **288633**

As you look at the bothy you see a green door in the middle with a red sign naming the bothy. There is a window to the left and one to the right. There are two dormer type windows in the roof and a skylight. At each gable end there is a chimney stack. On entry there are solid wooden stairs giving access to the upper rooms. To the left is a somewhat basic room with cold stone walls and a fireplace. The room to the right is similar but when I was there it had a table and four chairs. The fireplace was bricked up.

Moving upstairs you will find two rooms both with fireplaces. One has woodlined walls and the other sloping timber beams. The whole bothy would sleep a fair number even if some would be better off than others.

Lubnaclach

41

373644

A gaunt almost ghostly apparition when seen from the train window. The walls of the building still stand up to where the roof gutters would have been. The two large gable end walls stand as do two massive chimney stacks. Once again memory plays tricks. It was thirty plus years ago when this shelter was gratefully accepted on a night of persistent rain and wind. I would not do it now, but youth is often the initiator of discomfort. There was a roof of some sort back then although it has completely gone today. This wreck will offer some protection from horizontal wind and precipitation but nothing in the form of vertical discomfort. Take your tent and camp on the soft green lawn in front of the walls.

Tigh na Cruaiche

41

371547

A very old building with no completed door frames. A rusting red tin roof gives scant shelter. In fact, a pretty desperate 'doss.' Alongside are other ruins that are almost indistinguishable.

Creaguaineach Lodge

41

309689

My memories are over ten years distant. The lodge was boarded up on the ground floor, but the upper windows were open to view. This is private property and we should respect the estate that allows other bothies in the vicinity to be maintained. Nevertheless, I had a brief look around. There once used to be a sizeable settlement here before the waters of the reservoir were raised. Occasionally the walls of the sunken village of Creaguaineach and Kinlochtreig can be seen when the water level is low. (The name Treig translates to Loch of Death). These communities once hosted local markets and were the end- point of cattle drove roads. A door to the lodge was open and after a despairing look at litter that had been left behind I noticed some of the wall plaster was crumbling away. The building was still relatively sound, but it was certainly on the 'road' to decay. Not unlike Iron Lodge when I visited after a storm experience on my penultimate Munro. It all illustrates clearly just how quickly a building can 'fade away' when it is not lived in. Buildings like humans need heat and care.

I heard in 2011 that the building was open and sadly more vandalism had taken place. Why do people abuse 'things' that are around them? The curse of graffiti had taken a hold. On passing shortly after, I discovered the lodge once again locked up.

Probably just as well. I despair for some of my fellow human beings.

**Mountain rescue
hut Steall**

41

178685

Very solid building. All firmly locked.



Figure 41: Mountain rescue hut Steall

**Emergency shelter
Ben Nevis summit**

41

167713

For emergency only. However, climbers have used this as a bivvy. Other shelters on the Ben were removed after a number of fatal accidents that occurred when climbers wasted crucial time seeking out shelter when immediate descent would have been preferable. The shelter sits on top of the old observatory tower. The roof actually tops the main summit by some feet. It is therefore the highest man-made construction in Britain. It is small and on my first acquaintance in severe winter weather I found the shelter covered almost to the roof in drifting snow. I was with a party of 4 or 5 and we all squeezed into the cramped interior. It was made up of a metal floor and covered in drifting snow. I can still remember sitting there to this day briskly rubbing my dog Sach. I believe that there is now a raised wood platform. I wish I had a pound for every head that has been poked into this high-level shelter. (donated to the animal sanctuary of course.)



Figure 42: Summit shelter on Ben Nevis - winter view 1977



Figure 43: Summit shelter on Ben Nevis - summer view 2005

Taighseumas a Ghlinne

41

022539

Said to be the birthplace of James Stewart who was hung at Cnap a Chaolais in 1752 for the murder of Colin Campbell. He was innocent of this crime. His body was left hanging at the south end of the ferry at Ballachulish as a warning to other rebellious clans. The event was the basis for the book ‘Kidnapped.’ There maybe a little romantic ‘licence’ here. It is more likely that the current building replaced an earlier cottage on this site. When I was researching lost houses in the drowned village of Mardale I discovered the homes that were to be submerged were mostly built in the late 1600’s and 1700’s. They were constructed on the site of previous buildings which obviously were lost beneath the foundations. Whatever the history, this bothy is well worth a visit. There is a large single room with a built-in stove in the gable wall. A large wooden bench offers plenty of seating. The walls are solid, and the floor is of wood. Outside there is a pub style bench seat. You cannot miss the bothy, it has a conspicuous red roof.

Corbhainn

41

083516

Glen Creran is a valley of heavy afforestation. My daughter ridiculed me on the occasion of a walk in the Peak District when she was pregnant with her first child. We got lost. But not really. Trees were situated where trees should not have been and no trees were to be seen where they should have been. I declared “They have moved the forest” This is where the ridicule originated. They had moved the forest. Commercial plantations never stay the same for very long periods of time.

Thus Glen Creran changes.

And will probably do so in the years to come.

Within the newly cleared area at GR 083516 can be traced the ruins of an old township. They are total ruins now but forty years ago when I was aiming for Meall Lighiche the slopes were deep in forest covering. A collection of ruined buildings, one of which still had a portion of roof attached, could be seen. If I had been inclined, a modicum of shelter would have been available.

Today you will have to hide amongst the forest remnants. Or you can await the growing of the next batch?

Lairigmor

41

122640

On the old military road (now West Highland Way) this ruin is passed by thousands every year. A roofless ruin with walls still standing to original level. Two large gable ends give the building an eerie effect as does the large standing chimney in the centre. You could shelter from the wind here but that is about all.

Tigh-Na-Sleubhaich

41

137844

2 km. East of Lairigmor and a very similar ruin. A deserted and slowly decaying farmhouse, not necessarily inaccessible as it stands on a good Landrover track. Nevertheless it is remote. Who would want to live here? If it were not on the West Highland Way, myself for one. This is a long ruin adjacent to the track which will not shelter you from precipitation being without a roof.

Glensulaig

41

029834

A basic three roomed bothy. The room to the left is somewhat cold and bare. The fireplace is (or was when I passed by many years ago) in poor condition. It has a cold stone floor. In the middle is a small box room with a wooden floor. The room to the right is much better with a good fireplace and a table and several chairs. This room has a wooden floor and the fireplace wall is also wood panelled. I did not stay here as midges were in total control and I do not like to be 'food fodder' to those beasties. The bothy is recognisable by its somewhat 'tired' yellow door and yellow windows. Some of glass and some of plastic.

Invermallie

41

136888

Just several years ago, with a massive hangover, I walked the delightful track along the southern shores of Loch Arkaig. No mountains today. I passed a locked-up house (used by fishing people? GR 143884) and arrived at Invermallie bothy. This is a sound but basic bothy and the area around is prone to flooding. On this occasion it was in an untidy state. In fact the previous nights beer prevented me from taking too much notice. On other occasions the bothy has proved to be a comfortable haven.

I suddenly had a surge of energy and continued up the track into Glen Mallie.

**Glenmallie cottage
ruin**

41

078872

The miles were long, but I was recovering quickly. I reached this interesting ruin by early afternoon. The walls were down to approx. 6 ft. and the main ruin was roofless. The door and window frames were long gone but the interesting feature was a lean-to constructed at one end of the ruin. This had a good corrugated iron roof and I saw two good plastic seats. Under this roof you would receive shelter from rain (or sun). I would imagine this is the point where cyclists leave their machines when carrying out an ascent of the Corbett Meall a Phuibill. Some 500 yards away I could make out another ruin.

**Ruin near Allt a
Cham Dhoire**

41

071872

It was obvious this was once a large building. It is situated on a grassy meadow at the junction of the Allt a Cham Dhoire and the River Mallie. The walls are down to a height of only three feet and apart from a wind shelter this is indeed a total ruin.

I had had enough and although my hangover was history I realised I had a 7 mile walk back to my car.

Corrou Old Lodge

42

408648

The original hunting lodge. It was replaced by a lodge situated on the eastern shore of Loch Ossian. This was in turn replaced by the lodge that stands there today. Old Corrou Lodge is today a sad and tragic ruin. A large expanse of low wall remains. Some of the walls are a little higher and in places you can make out where the doors were situated. There are some nice lintels to be seen above these doorways. This all reminds me of past visits to Chester when excavations for modern buildings and car parks revealed old Roman ruins. For just a fleeting moment we can look back two thousand years and see just what was there all that time ago. Our excavation of Joseph Williamson's tunnels have a similar effect. This is where the power of human imagination plays such an important part. I often stand in the dark and intriguing tunnels and let my mind 'run riot' I picture the workers of the 18th century hacking away at the massive sandstone walls and building roofs over disused quarries in order to reclaim what would have been useless land. When guiding I turn off my torch and try to install this imaginative feeling amongst my guests. It almost always works and they seem to really appreciate the experience. I remember the ruins of Old Corrou from 38 years ago. Today they are most likely just piles of stone. I doubt I shall ever return. Maybe you can go and have a look.

**Banks of Loch
Cuaich**

42

691873

A night temperature of minus 18 had been recorded in Aviemore. This was followed by a glorious but bitterly cold day. I decided on Meall Chuaich and fully realising the shortness of daylight did not linger. The walk to Loch Chuaich from GR 653866 was in deep snow and the path soon reached a levada type waterway coming down from the loch. Progress was fast and after passing the pump house I reached the dam at the loch

and discovered a building (bothy?) on the southern shores of the loch. I did not linger and made my difficult ascent of the Munro, struggling through the deep snow cover. On the flat summit plateau the clouds were massing to the east in an angry show of defiance and I quickly left the top at 3 pm with darkness already approaching. On arrival back at the loch side I looked more closely at the building. It was completely locked up and absolutely no access was possible. The temperature was now well below freezing and a little shelter would have been welcome. I left and rushed down to my car. 40 minutes to Aviemore and single malts were welcome. To this day I do not know the function of the building.



Figure 44: The private locked bothy on the banks of Loch Cuaich

Benalder Cottage

42

499680

Scene of my ‘epic’ helicopter incident. Also the objective of four good people who never arrived. It was a twist of events and a diabolical machine of fate that led to a disaster of horrendous nature for five climbers on new years eve 1951. (For full and detailed accounts of this tragic occurrence see “Death and Survival at Corroun” P163 ‘The Black Cloud by I.D.S. Thomson.’).

I always remembered the so-called tales that Benalder Cottage was haunted. It made me think of all sorts of other incidents and claims I had come across in my long involvement with Williamsons tunnels (www.williamsontunnels.co.uk) All sorts of ghostly stories had surfaced as we diligently cleared out all the long-accumulated rubbish. Many of them all the better after the long time telling by word of mouth. I also thought back to Spooky tales of rusting, haunted warships lying idly at their terminal moorings after a lifetime of action and often death.

Never having been superstitious my contact with this bothy was regarded as merely a stopping off place between one mountain day and the next. Apart from one occasion I was alone and sleep was perfect. Not a sign of ghoul or ghost was seen.

I knew the story well and had listened to other climbers making their claim as to the supernatural. (To me- bollocks!!!) It had been said that this was the scene of the hanging of a gamekeeper. But like my Williamson tales everything had been passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. Wild tales of strange noises and of objects taking off and flying around. A slowly rotating corpse hanging in grizzly fashion from an old oak beam.

The victim was reputed to be Joseph McCook who was originally a stalker in the Ben Alder estate. However, fact is very different from legend. Joseph did not die at the cottage. He died peacefully in his bed at Newtonmore in 1933.

I shall always remember a line from a famous western movie starring John Wayne and James Stewart. It regarded the story of a somewhat timid lawyer who gained a reputation for killing a sadistic murderer played by Lee Marvin. However, it was not Stewart who shot Liberty Vallance. It was John Wayne. Right at the end a journalist who had been writing a story about the events tore up his script and made a very true declaration. "When the legend becomes fact; print the legend."

So just how was the legend of Benalder Cottage born? After the death of McCook the cottage was empty and became the haunt of deer poachers. They needed scaring off and what better way than to fabricate stories of suicide and haunting Further deterrent was given by a story of a woman who was cut off by winter storms. This resulted in her killing and eating her baby. She was claimed to be seen later with mad staring eyes headed for Rannoch.

If you dear reader want to believe in ghostly apparitions, fine. I do not. But everyone to themselves.

Ruighe Ghlas

42

519637

A roofless ruin. Door and window frames long gone. A scene of sad dereliction in a 'nice' setting.

Saunich

42

641634

A ruined building above the Allt Ruighe nan Saorach. In vile weather this would give you shelter. It has a dirt floor and cold stone walls. The door is missing as are the window frames. There is a dilapidated fireplace.

Ruighe nan Saorach

42

669646

Another ruined building. This is situated on the southern bank of Loch Errochty. It is distinguishable by a red corrugated iron roof. It also has a dirt floor and once again the door and window frames are missing. The walls are of bare stone and a rather 'doubtful' fireplace adorns a gable wall. The timbers of the internal roof look very 'dodgy.' This building is well on the way to total ruin.

Duinish

42

618670

This is an estate building, but it appears the estate have no objection to walkers using it as a bothy. Take care of it and be respectful. My knowledge of the bothy relates back to a climb of the impressive Corbett Beinn Mholac.

Originally the building had a long appearance from the front. Looking from the left there was a small window and then the wooden porch. Two more windows were followed by an impressive stoned up doorway with a large lintel in evidence. Right alongside was an open doorway before two more windows. On the roof was a chimney stack (two pots) more or less above the third window. At the right-hand end of the building was another large square chimney stack.

The reason I can remember all this is that I sat there and sketched what I could see. Why? I really do not know. It is a bit like my sketches of Mosedale Cottage above Swindale that I drew some forty years ago when it was a ruin. It is now a sound bothy.

My connection with Duinish saw holes in the roof of the right-hand section of the building. It was beginning to look somewhat 'tired.'

Today all the roof to the right of the boarded-up doorway has been dismantled. The walls still stand but the covered part of the building is now much smaller. Nevertheless, the bothy does offer good shelter and within there is a huge fireplace. There are two rooms on the ground floor and a sleeping area upstairs. People I have spoken to who have visited Duinish have told me they always have found a good supply of logs for the fire. Once again this is another example of the decency of the estate. Another reminder of my stay at Corryhully when the estate worker was my saviour.

Small bothy

42

705616

In order to climb Beinn a Chuallaich from the B847 you can leave your car at GR 706616 and within 100 yards you will come across a unique little bothy. It is like a large garden shed / hut. It has a door, windows and a curved roof. Inside it is wood lined and very clean. There is a bench seat. Iron frames on the wall angles stabilise the structure.

Culra

42

523762

The bothy is now closed due to an asbestos risk. I have already made my feelings known about all this. Culra is a superb location and it would be tragic if this stopping point were taken away from the explorer of these remote areas.

This is another example of how nothing stays the same. Change is ever apparent. It will be necessary for the future walker/ explorer to check out current situations.

**Blackburn of
Pattack**

42

544817

I remember a large wooden shed with a porch at the left end. There was one large room and one small room. A grand fireplace provided both the heat and probable death. It was completely burnt down in 1993 and today nothing is left other than charred remains. Don't look for shelter here; there is none. Wood, like people, is very vulnerable. Actually wood is fine. It is people who are the curse.

**Bothy in Glas
Choire**

42

732774

Visited in 1999 on an ascent of A' Chaoirnich. A small neat bothy in the upper reaches of the Allt Glas Choire It has an unmistakable red roof. Regarding size the bothy is not unlike the one on the slopes of A Chailleach but with stone walls.

Badnambias

42

713738

On a very long cycle ride in to Sronphadruig Lodge and the Corbett An Dun this very solid building was passed alongside the track. It was 1 km beyond a sheep wash fold and just before several shieling ruins. No access

**Sronphadruig
Lodge**

42

716783

Ten years ago time was short as the summits beckoned. (An Dun, A' Chaoirnich.) As I passed the lodge it looked neglected and sad. I believed it to be uninhabited, but I did not have a look and anyway this is private property. I had heard that next to the lodge there used to be a bothy but words through the grapevine told me it was boarded up and signs of a dangerous building warned walkers away.

**Ruighe Chail lodge
(ruin)**

42

752725

In 2005 this ruin was quite substantial. Some of the walls stood high and it would have been possible to gain some shelter here even though there was no roof. When I passed by in the 70's an outhouse did offer some shelter.

Surrounding ruins

42

751724

Some of the ruins were large houses but now they are in serious terminal decay

Old shielings in a ruinous state can be found at GR 745753 GR 794737 and in grid square 7772. There appears to be a ruin on my old map at GR 732729 on the banks of the Allt Geallaidh at the end of a track. I did not have chance to visit this ruin if indeed it is there.

Ruigh Aiteachain

43

847928

Ruigh Aiteachain is currently closed for renovation by the Glen Feshie estate (2016) it is hoped to re-open towards the end of the year. This is also known as the Feshie bothy. I can remember a spacious bothy with two rooms and white washed walls. On one very early visit I remember an upper floor but apparently this was closed off for safety reasons. As you enter the bothy the first room hosts 3 sleeping bunks and has a rather cold appearance. An elaborate door leads you into the second room. This is far more 'homely' and has tables and chairs and benches on which to cook. There is also a fine stove that works efficiently. The question of toilets is solved quite nicely at this bothy.

There is a separate building some 30 yards away from the bothy. This has a septic tank that has to be flushed with water from the nearby stream. This loo whilst very welcome when one considers the problem of human waste reminded me of many similar experiences. The loo at 'Feshie' is smelly. It consists of a long chamber behind a locked door. The hole in the concrete is where you squat. For those of a more daring spirit there is (or was) a partly dismantled chair with a space covered by a doubtful toilet seat. It reminded me of a tour I conducted at Joseph Williamson's tunnels. A somewhat posh family group were intrigued by some of the artefacts we had dug out of the general domestic rubbish. One item was a 'potty' or more accurately a commode. A young female teenager asked me what it was. Her mother almost begged me to explain. This I did. Years ago (in fact not so many years ago) most folk did not have indoor toilets. The 'privvi' was down at the bottom of the back yard. In winter it would be a desperate place, especially at night. Cold, dark, smelly and damp and always full of creepy crawlies. Therefore, good folk had a potty placed beneath their bed for use if necessity reared its head. The young girl was horrified at my graphic description and her mother was delighted as her daughter was quite obviously badly spoiled and very probably did not appreciate the things she took for granted. So this all reminded me of the very smelly loo at Feshie. A necessary human need and far better within the privacy and convenience of the outside loo than all over the pristine ground that so many people seem to want to desecrate.

Ruigh Aiteachain is also known as Landseer's bothy. Legend tells us that this was the place where Sir Edwin Landseer a famous Victorian artist studied native red deer stags. One of them became the model for his famous painting 'Monarch of the Glen' However, Ruigh Aiteachain is not where Landseer stayed nor is it the location of his famous frescoes that were painted on a chimney breast. That location was just a few yards away and although the building and frescoes were there to be seen as little as 55 years ago all have now vanished in the murk of time. All that can be seen now is a solitary chimney stack appearing like a statue in the mystery of the vale. It is one metre wide and six metres high, fully intact and constructed from neatly shaped blocks of masonry.

The modernisation plans by the estate include a stone built porch and a flight of stairs leading to an upper floor and sleeping accommodation. New wood floors are to be placed in downstairs rooms along with new built in sleeping bunks.

I do not know when the bothy will re-open. It is possible I shall not have chance to return and see for myself (74 years old now) It is up to you to go and have a look for yourself. Remember the rivers are a big problem in this area. After heavy rain they can be an enormous undertaking. The bridge at Carnachuin 846938 was destroyed in a flood in 2009. It might be back in service by now.???

Corarnstilbeg

43

830990

A derelict farmstead. It is in a ruinous condition. It has a strange mini L shape. There are three chimney stacks and one roof of red corrugated iron and one of normal slate. There is a porch, but everything is slowly decaying.

Corarnstilmore

43

832983

Ruined farmstead



Figure 45: Exterior of Allt Scheicheachan



Figure 46: Interior of Allt Scheicheachan

I cycled in from Blair Atoll along a good Landrover track (7 miles). After leaving my gear at the bothy I made a stormy ascent of Beinn Dearg with gale force winds on the top. The return to the bothy was most welcome and it offered respite from the worsening conditions. The bothy consisted of two ground floor rooms. Each had its own doorway. The one to the left was the best with several items of furniture and a fireplace that soon offered much needed heat. The floor was stone and the door looked a little tired in its attempts to keep at bay the howling wind. The room to the right was dark and gloomy but it did give access to a floored loft that could act as a sleeping area. Outside there was a lean to attached to the building.

This was all well over 20 years ago and what it is like now I know not. I have been told the lean to has been removed and that there is now a wooden bench outside the front entrance. Like those you see in public houses. Originally the building was used as a stable for estate ponies. The MBA took it over in 1974. It was about then when I visited.

Baileguish

43

825982

Ruined steading

Hut?

43

868717

I never actually made this journey. On my 1954 map a track on the west side of Allt Slanaidh ended at a hut 1 km south west of Elrig. My later ascents in this area were from Glen Tilt, Glen Banvie, Glen Bruar and Allt an t-Seapail to Allt Sheicheachan. My newer map of 2002 also shows the track ending at a small hut. I believe that today, beyond the hut (not visited), the track continues on the east bank of Allt Slanaidh (okay for cycling) and continues over to Allt Sheicheachan.

This all needs to be field checked. Is there a hut at GR. 868717?

Cuilltemuc

43

817713

Once recorded as a bothy. This building is now boarded up and private property. I cycled by 13 years ago when the structure was sound. Today I know not. Have a look as you pass by.

Ruichlachrie

43

819707

This is an abandoned cottage still in place. Well it was when I passed by (2004). This also is private property. There is a big tree growing alongside, and parts of the building are beginning to crack up. Once this commences decay will speed up quickly.

Allanaquoich saw mill

43

115914

An amusing interlude. There is a ruined sawmill on the left bank of the Uisge Quoich. The obvious ruins are still visible. It was probably built in the mid 1800's and possibly replaced an earlier sawmill. You can see the pit for the water wheel and channels that

carried water to drive the wheel. There would have been a dam across the stream. Spates of water would have swept it all away in later years. If you want a stone 'coffin' in the ground full of ferns, then you can have it here. Unconventional shelter ???.

The Muckle spate of August 1829 was a great flood that devastated much of Strathspey. The Dee rose 15 ft. in places and bridges over Linn of Dee and Linn of Quoich were washed away. It is quite possible this flood destroyed the 1st sawmill at Allanaquoich.

I had experienced the frightening results of a flash flood when I descended from my stay at Corrou bothy. My car was very nearly washed into the raging waters of the river.

Luibeg (Bob Scott's)

43

042930

Some might argue the most famous of all the bothies. But not for me. In fact I have never stayed there. Just shows you how stubborn and obstinate I am. Or maybe its location meant I never required a bothy when I passed by. I can remember seeing a light in the window as I reached the bothy. It gave me encouragement for the last few miles of hike to Linn of Dee

This was a gamekeeper's cottage on the Mar estate and had always offered a welcome to passing walkers. When Bob Scott moved in during 1947 this privilege continued. It is true that many renowned climbers did stay at the bothy over the years that followed. I was told that for those who walked and climbed in the Cairngorms a stopover at the bothy was regarded as essential. That is why I stayed away.

In 1986 the bothy was burnt to the ground but a group of enthusiasts (friends of Bob Scotts)¹⁶ came into being and rebuilt the bothy on the proviso that a toilet was constructed. Everything seemed to be okay but in 2003 the bothy was again stricken by fire. Once again it was rebuilt, and it opened in 2005 to maintain the tradition of a bothy on this historic site.

You can consider yourself very fortunate if you ever have this bothy to yourself. (One reason I never wanted to stay) Inside there is only one room after passing through a hall. There is a raised sleeping platform and also room on the floor for possibly six people. A septic toilet helps to control the never-ending problem of human waste.

Callater Stable

43

178845

Another prime example of the superb efforts of the MBA members. I first visited this location on an epic climb to Lochnagar, probably in the early 80's. (35 years ago) The wind was awesome, and I lingered only briefly. The building was a stable with no glass or even door. The floor was cobbled and it all looked very cold. My next visit was even briefer. I had read about the tragedy of New Year 1959 when 5 good men met a

¹⁶ When enthusiasts of Williamsons tunnels aimed at opening this attraction to the general public a society was formed. The Joseph Williamson Society were in the vanguard of clearing out the rubbish of so many decades and raising funds to provide a visitor's centre. Sadly, personality clashes led to the formation of a rival group 'Friends of Williamson Tunnels'. Instead of all 'singing from the same hymn sheet' petty back-stabbing and pointless arguments diverted the energies of promoting this unique underground attraction. It was all so sad and if only co-operation had been the order of the day so much more progress could have been achieved.

On a happier note Friends of Bob Scotts have managed to retain this piece of bothy history.

horrendous death on the plateau beyond Tolmount.¹⁷ It all made me think. 1959 was the year I commenced my long journeys across the mountains of the north. On my second visit I hardly looked at the buildings as I was climbing Tolmount and five other Munros. The MBA took over Callater Stables in 1993. In 2015 the bothy was given a major renovation. The interior was divided into two rooms and you enter the bothy into a living area with lots of chairs and a table. There is a small sleeping platform. The second room is the main sleeping area. It has 4 bunk beds with more room to sleep on the floor. There was, as yet, no fire or stove and this made the whole ambience somewhat cold. This was partly countered by 'light wells' in the ceiling. On my final, most recent visit I discovered a toilet had been constructed in April/May 2016. Members of the 3rd Aberdeen Company Boys Brigade built a dry toilet on the end of the wooden stable beside the bothy. The toilet has a dual seat (room for two). It again triggered off memories of my service in the jungles of Sarawak at Nanga Gaat. The whole helicopter squadron shared a very basic loo just outside the edge of the clearing. Strange how memories such as this can be retained whilst patrols in the jungle are long since forgotten. Callater does not have a ghost? It does host a family of mice? Callater has a toilet. Fact.

Eidart bothy (hut)

43

906885

A ruin. This is lonely and featureless country and should always be respected. To be caught out here in bad weather is certainly not to be recommended. On a long and wild walk from Achieum to Linn of Dee the river (Allt Coire Bhlair) was crossed at Ruighe nan Leum with an impressive gorge upstream. The path was boggy and well worn. Shortly before the River Eidart was reached a strange small hut was discovered about one hundred yards up from the River Feshie. 9 years ago it was in a perilous condition. Only a roof of red corrugated tin and part of one wall remained. I suppose it could best be described by saying, think of a large garden shed with over ¾ of the walls missing. You could find some shelter here but to be honest I would not be surprised if it was all gone today. A little further on the path curves up hill and crosses the Eidart by means of a bridge.

Ruigh Ealasaid

43

003869

Twice I made the long journey to climb the Munros An Sgarsoch and Carn an Fhìdhleir. On gaining the summit of An Sgarsoch in the early evening, deteriorating weather persuaded me to descend directly. Several years later I returned for the second 'hill.'

¹⁷ In 1959 five men set out from Braemar intending to walk over to the youth hostel in Glen Doll. This was a long trek and the weather was threatening. They never arrived.

A massive search was initiated to try to discover their fate. As the weeks went by the mystery deepened and with continuing foul weather little progress was made to find answers. It was a full 3 ½ months before the final body was located. The inquest was intriguing. The men had set out late in the morning and were last seen by Charles Smith at Auchallater farm sometime after noon. They would soon have passed the lodge at Callater before progressing alongside Loch Callater towards the headwall of the valley. A steep ascent would see them arrive at the plateau. It was here that the fierce storm hit them. It is just conceivable they could at this point have retraced their upward route, but a decision was made to continue. This was to cost them all their lives. Once again, this was a case of a diabolical machine of fate that the men could not or would not escape. The lodge at Callater, the barn or any building could well have been their salvation. A miserable cold lingering death on the unforgiving plateau was their fate.



Figure 47: Ruagh Ealasaid in 2005 - approaching terminal decline



Figure 48: Interior of Ruagh Ealasaid

On both occasions my bicycle was of great benefit, progressing from Linn of Dee to White Bridge and then the track to the junction of the Geldie Burn and Allt an t Seilich.

At this point I came upon the sadness of Ruigh Ealasaid. In 2005 it was in poor condition. The roof was sound, and the walls were solid, but a look inside showed a scene of neglect and a desperate condition. The floor was all dirt and ‘dust.’ The walls were cold stone and although the roof beams looked solid the whole structure was ‘doubtful.’ There was a good fireplace at one end of the ‘shack,’ for want of a better word. There was evidence of a recent habitation as there were ashes in the firegrate.

3 years later I returned, and after my speedy bicycle ride I rested up on the grass outside the old building. It was much the same but by now the doorway was boarded up with large planks. The windows were also closed with barriers and signs indicated this as a dangerous building. I managed to look inside. Much the same as 2005.

The history of this building is interesting. It was built in the early years of the 1800’s. The stubs of four original cruck timbers are still in the walls. It probably was built as a home for a shepherd, but at a later date it housed the family of a keeper of the estate. The census of 1851 tells us the resident was a Robert Stewart (gamekeeper) and his family. In 1860 Queen Victoria stopped at Ruigh Ealasaid on an expedition to Strath Spey through Glen Dee, Gleann Gheallaidh and Glen Feshie. In Victoria (1877) we can read. “Started at eight with Lady Churchill and General Grey for Castelton where we changed horses. We went on five miles beyond the Linn of Dee to the shepherd’s Shiel of Geldie where we found our ponies and a guide, Charlie Stewart. We mounted at once and rode up along the Geldie which we had to ford frequently to avoid the bog. “

Ruighe nan Clach

43

008875

A ruin. A desperate non-shelter for a desperate situation. Walls still stand some ten feet high in places. It is set well back from the estate track and is an interesting interlude to a long slog or a cycle ride if time permits. It is shown on the 1869 6-inch map as a group of three buildings. Even Queen Victoria came close by this area in 1860. Very few mentions of this mysterious building can be found. In 1928 Alexander wrote. “Lying back from the road is another cottage which looks peculiarly desolate in the wide bare moorland. The name of this cottage, Ruigh nan Clach is interesting as preserving the word ruigh (pron. Rui) the term used in the Gaelic of the eastern Highlands for a summer sheiling.”

A lonely ruin. Go and have a look.

Geldie Lodge

43

955867

I love the ruins of Geldie. It was a welcome place of rest on my many visits. The ruins also satisfy my love of all ‘things’ old and my deep interest in history. Geldie Lodge is a ruined 19th century shooting lodge in upper Gleann Gheallaidh on the left bank of Allt Coire an t- Seilich. The census of 1861 records the names of two buildings in the glen. Geldie Cottage and Geldie house. (both unoccupied) The 1861 census suggests a period of building in the glen starting in the early 1860’s That period of building might have included the building of Ruighe nan Clach as well as the first phase of Geldie Lodge. Both these buildings are shown on the old 6-inch map of 1869. This map also shows the first phase of the shooting lodge as a rectangular oddly oriented building. Its front was facing south east toward nothing in particular.



Figure 49: Sad ruins of Geldie Lodge
Almost a total ruin



Figure 50: Small wooden bothy attached to the ruins of Geldie
It might not be there today?

A square building, shown a short distance to the south, may have been a stable. Possibly the larger square building shown standing alone near the west bank of Allt Coire an t-Seilic was a larder where carcasses were kept before being taken to Mar Lodge. The second phase of building appears to have added the western gabled wing. This had the effect of turning the shooting lodge to face the high tops of the Cairngorms by adding more windows to that side. Later building phases further extended the shooting lodge by adding gabled wings to the east and south.

When I first saw Geldie Lodge it was a total ruin. Some of the walls still stood like gaunt skeletons of what used to be. Within, I discovered the rusty remains of an old stove. The stones from broken down walls lay all around and although some of the walls would have offered a little shelter Geldie would not be the answer to your needs in time of bad weather. In 2005 there was a sad and very precarious wooden hut/ bothy attached to one of the walls. It looked as though a good storm would blow it to oblivion. However, when I was there this would have been a blessing to maybe two or three people in time of need.

This whole valley has an intriguing history and there are many shieling huts dotted throughout Gleann Gheallaidh. The traditional shieling practice had given way to commercial grazing by the late 1700's. But this is not what interests us at this juncture.

On flat grassland along the banks of Allt a Chaorainn there are to be seen the outlines of 2 buildings and up to 15 huts. On my descent from Carn an Fhidhleir I really did not have time to investigate closely. My day had been long and the distance still to cover was great. However, I could make out foundation marks within the grass. It is also reputed that this was the site of a structure named Boandu Geoldie (Black bothy) GR 923868. Whether the claims of John Farquharson regarding Black Bothy are correct I really know not. It has raised some serious debate and other good folk have come up with their own theories.

All I know is that there is little place for shelter in this particular part of Scotland and if you find yourself out on a limb in bad weather your problems are definitely severe.

Bynack Lodge

43

001856

Ruin. So very sad. Once this was an imposing building with a lot of history attached. It was a 19th century shooting lodge standing on a pleasant river terrace forming a peninsular between Bynack Burn and Allt an t-Seilich.

The 'road to ruin' reminds me so much of the death of Mardale. The water engineers had their greedy hands on the valley and slowly the farmhouses, church and inn were converted to an obscene pile of rubble.

Although this is not necessarily in the remit of this bothy listing I find the demise of this once imposing building intriguing.

Let us investigate this avenue to termination.

Bynack Lodge had its origins in the 1800's and it was a well-established holding well into the 20th century. By 1919 walking visitors to the lodge found it occupied. An account tells us of one such visit. "I received a hospitable welcome from the solitary keeper stationed within." By 1928 it was reported that the lodge was inhabited in summer only, but the condition of the building was still excellent. In 1938 it was 'open' and still offered a comfortable resting place for hill goers. An avid description of a visit

clearly illustrates this. “When we entered that musty lobby through one half of a creaky old-fashioned door we found that the three downstairs rooms were locked. The two bedrooms upstairs were open and there we carried our rucksacks, our boots clumping hollowly on wooden stairs. We settled in for the night. “By 1959 the lodge was deteriorating rapidly, and another vivid description explains this clearly. “Far gone in dilapidation and decay, though sound enough in its granite walls and roof of Ballachulish slate. The windows were out, the first-floor boards were up, and the lathes showed through broken plaster in the macabre manner of an anatomical drawing. Regarding the furniture once locked upstairs, only a large Kist remained, empty but for an old wine bottle.

Nevertheless it did still afford shelter for the cold and weary traveller.

Then came the fire.

By 1968 it was all too late.

It was now a ruin total and irreversible. Destroyed by the vandalism of inconsiderate visitors.

A real asset condemned by a few who ripped out firewood for just a moments warmth.

Shelter here for the wayward hiker is a desperate search for the leeward spot of any incoming wind or storm. Better than out in the open but desperate indeed.

Coirenlarig

43

136836

I had to include this bothy even though it no longer exists.

Today I possess a complete collection of OS maps and after my Munro ascents many are weather beaten and ‘tatty’. However, when I was a teenager I possessed a collection of maps of the 1:63360 variety. My sheet 41 is dated 1955 and it was this map I used for exploration in the 1960’s. I never stayed at Coirenlarig but to this day can still remember the sadness of the environs of the old building. Just as we all age, and possibly wither, time can be a cruel equaliser. All the young pretty things out there will one day be fodder for arthritis and dementia. When I saw Coirenlarig it had a collapsed roof and all the timbers and floor were rapidly disappearing. It was still (just) a building but not for long. Today there is almost nothing to tell of the existence of this once lonely habitation.

Yet it was an often-used bothy.

On the subject of holidays I have always counselled that it is not necessarily the resort that really matters. Probably more important are the people within, at your time of stay. This is a trap people often fall into when they return on a later date. The second, third and so on experiences are never quite the same.

A dodgy bothy, structure wise, with grand folk within, will always win over a luxurious building full of ‘tossers.’

I had heard of many tales regarding the bothy at Coirenlarig. The blessing of imagination possibly helps at this juncture. I thought back to some of the hilarious times we had shared in the old DG in Langdale. On one occasion we virtually took over the bar area with an amazing game/ sting. This requires a victim who is under the influence and easily ‘kidded.’ It is called the spoon contest. 2 opponents sit opposite each other and they both have a second who acts as their advisor. After the toss of a coin the first

person places a spoon in his/ her mouth and the opponent bends his head forward. The aim is to inflict a ‘bash’ on the opponent’s head by bringing down the spoon as hard as possible. Of course if thought through this is almost an impossible task – a spoon held in the mouth inflicting pain? This is why the victim has to have a rogue second who is very much in on the sting. Instead of assisting his player he is in on the spectacle. When the victim holds his head forward, instead of the spoon ‘flopping’ down, the impact is provided by a firm crack from a large solid object held by the traitorous second. It can all be embellished with amusing comments and advice from an army of interested spectators. Advice such as aiming off to allow for wind from an open window etc. The non-victim can add to it all by stating the blow to his head was enormous (when it obviously was not). After many cracks of the rogue implement the victim has not only a headache but is the brunt of total joy and laughter from the audience. Whether the victim is ever told is up to the ‘watchers’ but it does prove a riveting spectator sport.

Sadly today activities like this tend not to happen. Pubs are full of food, ping-pong machines, televisions and whatever.

The old DG has memories. Coirenlarig bothy had memories.

The old DG is still here. I am still here. Sadly Coirenlarig has long gone.

Baddoch farmstead

43

131828

On the occasion of my mini epic climb to the summit of An Socach I had little time to linger as snow conditions were severe. I hardly looked at Baddoch which is now a deserted house. The building looked relatively modern, but it is private property and definitely not for walkers. The whole area was the site of a depopulated township. Baddoch is only a short distance from the main A93.



Figure 51: Deserted farmhouse at Baddoch

Roofless shelter**43****183811**

After an early start (0500) from the A93 I reached the summit of Carn an Tuirc at 0600. The weather was not pleasant although later in the day it cleared to be a lovely day. I saw a roofless stone shelter perched above the steep slope down to Loch Kandar.

Ski hut ruin**43****172810**

Many years ago a wander across the slopes of Carn an Tuirc saw the discovery of an old ski hut that was well on the way to total collapse. The roof was in a perilous condition. Almost certainly gone by now.

Altanour Lodge**43****082823**

A beautiful setting within Glen Ey It is a 5-mile hike from Inverey but this can be shortened time wise by use of a bicycle along what is a very good track. In 1952 the structure was slowly decaying but it did afford shelter. When I first passed this way some thirty years ago it was rapidly on the way to ruin. 15 years ago I cycled in and spent several hours resting within the ruins. It would be an ideal place to camp and plenty of grassy flats could be utilised. The walls had fallen further but shelter of sorts would still be found in the lee of any oncoming wind. Many of the trees surrounding the ruin are merely skeletal remains.



Figure 52: Altanour Lodge ruins 2003

**Auchelie. (Ach a
Cheiridh)**

43

087863

A total ruin. Just a small pile of stones. No shelter here. The only reason I have included this sad loss is that I can just remember a boarded-up farmstead on the way to termination.

**Tarf bothy (Tarf
hotel)**

43

926788

Strangely I have never visited this unique and lonely bothy. I once came very close (3km) on my ascent of Carn a' Chlamain. However, I chose a speedy descent of Glen Tilt upon my trusty bicycle. My ascents of An Sgarsoch and Carn an Fhithlier were from the north. From any habitation it is a good fifteen miles to reach the bothy. North south east or west, it makes no difference.

Over the decades on my journeys across the mountains of Scotland I had listened to many tales of the bothy of mystery. I had taken many notes from other climbers who had tales to tell of stopovers in the middle of nowhere. I read them through and found that the bothy consisted of 4 rooms. Three were reached through the main door and it was reasonable to conclude they were a living room, bedroom and kitchen area. The eastern room was a half open porch with access through a door at the rear. The whole bothy suffered from chronic damp intrusion. Indeed it was a totally cheerless place. All the rooms had a fireplace, but no amount of heat seemed to 'fight off' the insipid dampness I have a note from the 70's declaring the bothy to be in an even more desperate condition. Vandals had torn out remaining timbers and the roof was stripped in many places. With damp from beneath and rain from above the bothy was in dire straits. Was this going to be the end of the Tarf?

(The reason for this somewhat outlandish title was a large AA sign that someone had attached to the bothy door indicating this to be a 3-star hotel.)

The first building to be established on this site went back to the 1680's. In 1806 the collapsing dry-stone structure was replaced with a stone and lime building with a slate roof and 2 rooms. It was occupied by deer watchers and poachers. This construction was burnt down in 1826 and remained a ruin until 1870. At this time the walls were repaired, and a thatched roof built. In 1873 this was replaced with a slate roof and inside wooden floors were put in place. The walls were also lined with wood. Outside a stable was added and the building continued to be occupied throughout the 1880's with further additions being made. In 1909 it was once again burnt to the ground. The onset of the Great War prevented the proper rebuild and after peace had been signed life was very much different for the folk of the highlands. The building began its slow 'path' to decay although it did offer good use as a hill bothy to growing numbers of walkers and climbers. However, there is nothing that can compensate for neglect and inevitable wear. In the 60's and into the 70's the bothy was becoming a hovel. If I had held a slight inclination to visit Tarf, possibly conversations with fellow climbers up to the 1990's would have put me off. (Doubtful)

In 1992 salvation came along in the guise of the MBA. They took control of the bothy and with the assistance and consent of the estate Tarf was given a new life. Drain ditches were cleared out and the open porch was enclosed. A major renovation took place in 2013 and new fireplaces were fitted along with chimney stacks. Wooden floors

were replaced, sleeping platforms installed, walls were re-pointed and the whole structure became an almost 3* hotel as the sign indicated.

Maybe I shall get my chance to see the Tarf. Time passes by so quickly and after a lifetime of highland wandering it may be difficult to arrange. Is it possible I shall never meet the ghost of this rather special place.

(If dear reader you should visit Tarf do remember the huge efforts put in by the hard-working MBA people; male and female. Without them this would now be a rotting pile of stones and hidden memories.)

Glenlochsie Lodge

43

063726

This was an experience that is firmly fixed in my memory. The previous day I had made my long lonely trek from Linn of Dee to ‘bag’ a Munro I had missed out on my 63rd birthday. An Sgarsoch had been climbed but darkness prevented my ascent of Carn an Fhithleir. On return to Braemar I enjoyed a single malt in the Fife Arms before booking into the lodge bunkhouse. I met up with Alan who turned out to be a real character. He had been dropped off by his friends who were proceeding west, and he told me he had business with Lochnagar on the following day. We settled down to some serious drinking and after my efforts of the day I considered they were fully deserved. Alan was ex RAF and there was some banter about ‘cabbage heads’ (marines) and ‘airy fairies’ (RAF personnel). I think I ‘clobbered’ my vodka a little too much. I turned in very drunk and very tired.

My Royal Marine powers of recovery were really needed the next morning. To put it mildly I did not feel well. (self-inflicted) I had covered massive distances over the previous three days. Quite scary to work it all out. 55 miles and many a thousand feet of ascent; all after a 400-mile drive from Lunt. I advised Alan of the route for Lochnagar and after a forced breakfast agreed to drop him off at Auchallater farm to save him a two-mile road walk.

I wanted the two Munros to the west of Spittal of Glenshee. Unfortunately these were very remote hills and my precarious condition was making an ascent of both the hills an optimistic proposition. I would climb one and then work out my policy. Decisions on the ‘hoof.’ I parked up at Spittal in very hot conditions and cycled gently up to Dalmunzie Hotel. I decided to take the bike further up the valley although this was a decision that posed problems on the return. At this stage I was thinking of just one Munro and possibly a long bike ride in for Carn an Righ the following day. I managed to get my bike right up to the ruins of Glenlochsie Lodge where I stopped for a long much needed hangover rest. Here I hid my bike.

It was ‘ultra’ pleasant sitting alongside the ruins relaxing and imagining just what this building must have looked like during its prime. In 2007 it was still partly roofed but any remaining sections looked very precarious. One gable end, complete with a chimney stack, still stood but the other end had collapsed leaving a pile of boulders and stones lying within the ruin. Roof beams were still partly in place, but they were rotting and bare. The collapsed gable end allowed any inclement weather access to the bare and uninviting interior. To be honest this was a complete mess and within a few years it will almost certainly all collapse in on itself.



Figure 53: Ruined Glenlochsie Lodge

From the lodge there is a bulldozed track (scar) that leads steeply up the southern spur of Glas Tulaichean. The sun was even hotter, and I now managed to get a signal from Alan who was making slow progress over the two Munros that were in his line of approach to Lochnagar. I was feeling better as I climbed. The track just skirts the summit where a trig. point offers good views out across the remote terrain of this area. I looked ahead and after deliberation decided to go for the second Munro. It was not a short journey and again it emphasised the length of some of these Scotland forays. From the summit I descended north east down the long wide spur aiming to pick up the path on the northern side of Gleann Mor. I had spotted several other climbers on distant ridges and this made a change from my lonely journeys of the last three days. The final slog up to Carn an Rìgh took longer than the map suggested, and I was well tired when I reached Munro number 277. I now had serious considerations to make. I could climb back over the summit of Glas Tulaichean but the thought of all that climbing left me in a state of numb despair. Also I had to consider my bicycle that was resting within the ruins of the lodge. Another factor now came into the equation. I noticed some very angry clouds building up in the not too far distance. I made up my mind and descended rapidly. I would cross the bealach south of point 858 and make the long descent of Gleann Taitneach. The bike would have to wait for another day.

As I reached the bealach I noticed 'spits and spats' of rain but as yet nothing substantial. I knew there were two climbers ahead of me as I had spoken to them near the summit of Carn an Rìgh. As I dropped down into Allt Easgaidh a massive deluge hit me. It was only short, but it gave me a monster soaking. As I was hot and tired this did not really concern me. 15 minutes later another short blast of rain and hail hit me with ferocity. Again it lasted just 5 minutes, but I was now as wet as any person could ever be. None of these discomforts prevented my fast progress downwards and after half an hour I had completely dried out. I quickly caught up the two climbers ahead and was surprised to

discover that they had missed completely the short but intensive rain showers. Apparently, the showers were very 'local'. Just half a mile made all the difference. I walked back with them and eventually reached the car in hot sunshine. It was now that I received a text from Alan. He was well behind schedule and had left the summit of Lochnagar just as the weather was closing in. Visibility had decreased, and he was aiming to march out northwards over difficult terrain to eventually reach the A93. He was having difficulty route finding. The text ended abruptly. I arrived back at the bunkhouse to find he had been in touch saying he would be late back. I suspected I might be useful as a pick-up person as his point of contact with the A93 could well be 4+ miles from Braemar. I resisted alcohol and then eventually received another message late in the evening saying he was somewhere in the trees in the woods of Garmaddie. I left the bunkhouse at 11 'ish' and drove towards Balmoral. It was by an amazing quirk of fate that I just reached the point on the road as Alan emerged from the forest. Seconds before and I would have missed him completely. We drove back and never was a bunkhouse so totally welcome.

The following day offered 'lousy' weather and cloud covered all the local hills. Alan was off to climb Mount Keen and I drove south towards the ski centre to enjoy an amazing experience. I passed from cloudy drizzle into warm sunshine in the matter of just a few hundred yards. This had happened to me before, most memorably on the Kirkstone Pass when in a matter of minutes I passed from heavy misty rain into glorious sunshine and distant views.

I had the small issue of retrieving my bicycle.

I walked in to Dalmunzie and picked up the course of the old railway line that originally ran up the valley to the lodge where my bicycle was stashed. I walked along the easily recognisable track bed and crossed over several bridges that still stood. At the end of the line I could make out the terminal platform which was stone made but now covered in grass. For the second time in two days I sat alongside the ruins of the old lodge and let my imagination run freely.

Climbs, hangovers, local engineering infrastructure, old and tired buildings and a myriad of other thoughts kept me company as I sat there in what for me was a memorable spot. My search for an old residence and consideration of a possible resting place had brought so much to light.

The Dalmunzie railway was a 2 ft. 6-inch gauge private line built for carrying quarried stone and for ferrying shooting parties. The line was commissioned by Sir Archibald Birkmyre who was the owner of Dalmunzie House. The track was 2.5 miles long and gained a height of 500 ft. It ran from Dalmunzie house, which is now a hotel, to a grouse moor near Glenlochsie Lodge. Operating on the line were two 20-hp petrol-paraffin simplex locomotives. One of these is still in existence at Dalmunzie. Two passenger coaches also still survive. One of them is a first-class carriage with windows, upholstered seats and sides. The second class had bench seating. Several goods wagons can also be seen at Dalmunzie resting in a nearby field.

(All this was fact at the time of my visit in 2007)

The line closed in 1978 due to new safety rules governing railways. Improvements to the line would have cost £60,000. Again it all made me think of the overhead railway in my home city of Liverpool. Dismantled in 1957 and lost forever. A potential tourist attraction that would today have attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors.

**Howff on bealach
between Glas Maol
and Creag Leacach**

43

160759

On the first day of a climbing expedition I parked up near the ski centre and waited for the rain to ease. By 2 pm this happened and I set off for Glas Maol climbing through all the ski paraphernalia. On the summit plateau I was hit by sunshine and showers. This did not deter me, and I set off to claim my second Munro. On the bealach before the rise to Creag Leacach a shower of massive strength forced me to utilise a small howff that I was so pleased to find. It was indeed tiny and offered only room for one walker. (two at an absolute push) It has a narrow entrance and kept the rain at bay. I stopped for 30 minutes and 'polished off' my packed lunch. The shelter is on the east side of the wall.

**Invercauld estate
bothy**

43

**Just north of
Carn Mor**

Recently constructed this is a bothy I have not seen for myself. My maps are all thirty years old and apparently there are now Landrover tracks on the slopes between Ben Gulabin and Carn a Gheoidh. Proceeding south from the Munro just before you reach Carn Mor you will find this modern bothy for possible shelter from the weather. Inside it is wood lined and has tables and chairs. Coat hooks are placed along the wall and there is even a gas heater (probably no cartridge)

I'll probably not see this bothy as with passing years spent efforts on The Cairnwell and Carn Aosda might be better placed on other peaks.

It reminded me of my ascent of Ben Gulabin

On my first visit I passed at GR 109727, on the bealach between Ben Gulabin and Creagan Bheithe, an old ski building. On my last visit in 2006 all I could see was the original foundation and a pile of metal junk.

If you want shelter get up to the bothy.

Hut

43

923679

It is not so much the hut that I remember on this somewhat 'strange' day. I drove up to Loch Moraig and parked up. It was 1030 when I left the car for the 2km walk to the foot of the south west ridge of Carn Liath. A chap and his son had left ten minutes before me and I could see them on my ascent of the steep spur. The hut on the track where the path leaves to climb upwards is no longer a bothy. It was all locked up and a sign clearly indicated that this was no home for walkers. (2002) Probably because it is very near to a road and an unnecessary refuge for people other than 'bingers' or whatever.

I have since discovered this hut has been blown down and my informant tells me it lies partly collapsed. This information was given in 2010. What lies there today I know not.

However, it is not this ex bothy that comes back to mind when I think of that day 15 years ago. The day was cloudy and once at an altitude of 700m visibility was 30 yards. I knew there was the man and his son ahead and soon after I commenced climbing another chap reached me. We walked the last few feet to the summit together. The other two reached the top some ten minutes later. They must have stopped lower down, and I had passed them by. I walked along the ridge with Graham and we talked about climbs

and climbing equipment and the distances just ‘raced away.’ Before reaching the summit of the 2nd Munro, Braigh Coire Chruinn bhalgain, I said to Graham “You go on ahead” as he did have a time schedule to keep and I was just happy to ‘plod along’ at my own speed. Just before I reached my second Munro the sky brightened, and I could see adjacent ridges clearly through the mist. I reached the top and had a tuna and cheese bap and sat by the cairn in sometimes mist and sometimes near views. I made sure I had a good look at the way forward as on the map it looked a little complicated. After 20 minutes on the top the young lad joined me and we set off together. His father was some way behind. We had dropped down about ½ km to a flat small col and we contemplated the way forward. By now the mist had returned. In fact we had not gone far enough, and a descent here would have taken us down very steep slopes into upper Allt Bealach an Fhiodha. The father of the boy caught us up and fortunately we walked on for another ½ km before reaching a col just before point 1004. Here we moved east and dropped out of the cloud to see both a path and the col directly beneath us. It was all a little awkward but once on the col a deep path carried us up to the next col with Airgiod Bheinn to the right and gentle slopes up to Carn nan Gabhar to the left. As we were negotiating these last slopes we met Graham descending. He was not all that much ahead of us. Maybe he had stayed on the top for a while and I jokingly commented that the tortoise was better than the hare as by now the sky was brightening. I was confident of acquiring a summit view. We continued and after 10 minutes reached a large cairn realising that this was not the top as a triangulation point could be seen on another large mound of rocks across a sea of boulders. Progress was slow as the rocks were wet and greasy and when we reached the trig. point we further realised this was not the true top. This was a further hundred yards on and some nine metres higher.

All three of us were glad the climbing was over, and we enjoyed the good views now available. After 30 minutes I was becoming cold and so I packed up my gear and set off just as the cloud was returning with some apparent menace. I presumed the other two would follow quickly but I did not see them again which was a shame. Had I known I would certainly have stayed another 5 minutes so that we could all descend together. I passed the trig. point and then the big cairn. Looking back I could see the young lad but not his father. I made rapid progress down to the col and then over the top of Airgiod Bheinn. From here the ridge drops very steeply and it is not an easy route across wet and greasy rocks. Half of the way down the ridge I looked back again and could see the lad at the very top and we exchanged waves. It was now that the weather turned with a vengeance. Any vestige of clarity was cast aside as sombre black clouds covered everything. It was still dry and just occasionally the clouds were torn apart to give slight views of nearby ridges. It seemed an eternity before I reached the bottom of this ‘infernal’ ridge and picked up a good path that had been worn through the heather. I now looked back again during a momentary break in the clouds. I was amazed to see the other two still almost at the top of the ridge, probably no more than 100 feet on their difficult way down. Why were they so far behind? I know the father had told me he did not like descending rock, but their position meant they would have at least another hour (or more) on the ridge. It reminded me of that fateful day on K2 when Wanda had moved on ahead of the Barrards to get down to the shoulder. They were all horribly hypoxic after so many days in the death zone. At the foot of the bottleneck Wanda looked back and could see her two friends just about to leave the treacherous traverse. She continued down but never ever again saw her two friends. Their battered bodies were eventually found at the bottom of the mountain months later. Lillian and Maurice were no more.

And now the heavens opened. Torrential rain cascaded down out of the now deadly black sky. I pushed on and the track seemed never ending I did not look back again I just felt for my friends sliding their way down the ridge in this monsoon downpour. Eventually I picked up the track and raced past the useless ex bothy and arrived back at my car truly soaked and thoroughly miserable at 8.30 pm.

The other two could not have made it down before 10 and as they were expected back at the caravan site at 7 some explanations might well have been necessary.

To this day I wonder what did happen to my two friends.

Creag-choinnich lodge

43

918703

When I first saw this lodge in 2006 it was a sad lonely deserted building, but it still had its roof. Two chimneystacks were in place at each gable end. The window frames were missing as was the door. Seven years later the building had deteriorated even more. The down-slope roof at the gable end had partly collapsed and the chimneystack was missing. You might still get some shelter here, but it would be uncomfortable.

Balaneasie

43

910719

I did not visit this interesting building on my very rushed cycle in to climb Carn a Chlamain from Forest Lodge. I wish I had because I have discovered a certain amount of history about this construction courtesy of my daughter who unlike me is a lover of the 'net' and all its glory. It is a small ruined cottage. I passed within a few yards of the bothy back in 2000. I can remember seeing a 'dodgy' aerial 'ropeway' stretching across the waters of the Tilt. I should have investigated. Curse the hold Munros can sometimes have over you.

My daughter passed on to me some interesting detail. Fifty years ago when I was busy in other parts of Scotland several enthusiasts wanted to renovate the building as a bothy for use within the mountains. Eventually an arrangement with the newly formed MBA was made and work commenced to carry out this improvement. Snags soon arose as the landowner did not fancy a bothy that was open to all and everyone. He preferred a hut that could be used by specific club members only. A club was formed. (Glen Tilt Mountaineering Club) A certain amount of bad feeling arose between the MBA and other members of the Glen Tilt Club. By the mid 1970's the rift had widened and the former instigators of the hut improvement left. I further found out that as the bothy was on the awkward side of the river a crossing was required. Royal Navy members of the original club constructed a rope and pulley bridge. I have seen a photograph of this crossing and it all looks very impressive and reminds me much of my commando training back at Lympstone in 1961. The aerial ropeway I saw in 2000 was a shadow of what had been in place. After the departure of the founder members of the club I can only assume the bothy declined and became a locked up deserted memory.

So very sad.

My daughter also forwarded to me a tweet or whatever you call them regarding this interesting place.

Apparently, a David Hughes often visited the bothy many years ago and he reports it to be a stunning 7 mile walk from Blair Atholl. He remembered he once fancied a pint and

set off for Blair to obtain the required sustenance. He made his way back up the glen at afternoon closing time only to later fancy another beer or two. He made his way back down the vale and had the required drinks. On making his second return to the bothy he commented on a brilliant days walking – 28 miles!!!

I have complete empathy with this particular action. Whilst camping at Styhead Tarn in the 1960's I also fancied a pint. More than a few were consumed in the old climbers bar of the Wasdale Hotel. These were the days of generator electricity and closing time did mean closing time. On the car park at 2245 hours a quite considerable ascent loomed ahead into the night. All of us were full of beer and whatever and it must have been an amusing sight to witness our pathetic efforts at inebriated ascent. I struggled and struggled and in fact it was past dawn before I reached my tent for welcome black out. Some of the lads went so badly astray that they ended up on the summit of Gable. Just what were they drinking.

Happy days.

Aldandulish

43

905692

This is a derelict farm set in a perfect location. What will happen to it? What a waste.

I do love the remote and deserted areas of the Geldie, Tarf and Tilt. Of course it can never quite compete with the majestic grandeur of An Teallach and the Cuillin of Skye, but it does have its own special attraction.

This is not unlike the Northern Fells of Lakeland all those years ago when I commenced my hill 'apprenticeship.' The Far Eastern fells were the same until the introduction of the motorway and the ever-increasing influx of the motor car. From that time on the hills saw ever increasing numbers of walkers and some of the inevitable problems this can bring.

Very many years ago on a lonely wander north of Pitlochry I came across Loch Loch and as the weather was poor I was persuaded to stay down within the valley. Anyway I would not have seen much from the summits and I was happy to roam and investigate terrain often rushed past in the desire to reach the tops.

I did not write anything down and I have not returned since (40+ years)

I can remember many farms, deserted houses and a large number of ruins scattered throughout the valley. I have just been on a nostalgic journey across my map and have delved deep into my memory 'bank.' To see if anything is there.

The whole area abounds with old buildings and ruins in varying stages of decay. They are all probably on the inevitable 'road' to terminal decay. Of course what state they are in will very much depend on the time of your visit. My visit of 45 years ago is a distant memory that can be linked to a more recent passing some ten years ago.

Tomnabroilach

43

936669

Lycondlich

43

922657

Shinagag

43

953673

Coppagach

43

934657

Reinakylich	43	949665
Loinmarstaig	43	934657
Leekscriadan	43	922652

If at some time in the future you are not tempted by the slog up Ben Vrackie this is an area that will certainly give you an opportunity to investigate the history of this very interesting part of Scotland. Go out there and see what you can find.

Shiel of Glentinar	44	401895
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Almost nothing remains of this former single-story shooting lodge. It burnt to the ground in 1992 and the remains were cleared away in 2003. All that is left is a very low retaining wall. Nothing else. No shelter here. I climbed Mount Keen from the Glen Tanar visitor centre in 2002 and with the benefit of a bicycle made very fast progress. I cannot even remember seeing the remains.

Halfway hut. Glen Tanar	44	436931
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In the forest of Glen Tanar, just before you emerge onto the open hillside, you will see this charming hut at the side of the good track. It is like a large garden shed and offers good shelter from wind or rain. Almost everyone on route to Mount Keen will have a short rest here. As it is only 3 miles from the valley car park a lot of casual walkers will make this their days 'target.'

Shieling of Saughs	44	396757
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Forty years ago Water of Saughs was an alternative and quieter approach to the Corbett Ben Tirran. It is changing with the construction of fences and many Landrover tracks. Most people ascend the Corbett from Glen Cova. Shieling of Saughs is at the head of Water of Saughs 2km east south east of Muckle Cairn. It is a simple grass and heather roofed bothy that will afford shelter from bad weather.

Small wooden hut near summit of Cairn Hillock	44	369884
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After 'compleat' in 2008 I began to spend more time searching out places of interest other than high mountain summits. I looked at tops with interesting names like Gathering Cairn 790m, Fasheilach 721m, Black Hill of Mark 774m and Cairn Hillock 708m. On the summit of Cairn Hillock there is an old wooden shed almost at the highest point. It is probably a shelter for people using the nearby shooting butts. It is only small and looks very frail indeed. It has a pent style roof.

It might not be there today. Nine years is not only a long time in politics but also regarding bothies.

Stables of Lee**44****375815**

2 km west of Johnny Gordons bothy. A somewhat better maintained bothy. At least it was several years ago. However, it is still very basic. This is not an MBA bothy.

Johnny Gordons**44****392816**

My memories are of a bothy almost concealed by trees. Hidden in fact. I believe many of the trees have now been felled and the bothy stands out more clearly. The bothy has one room with a small front window. There is an old (character) wooden door. The fireplace offers the chance for great warmth and there is certainly no shortage of fallen wood in the vicinity. For me this is a 'real' bothy even though it has an earth floor. No ostentatious luxury, the only items of furniture are several sawn-off tree trunks that act as stools. Some might call it a hovel. I think more a shelter from the elements.?

Bachnagairn**44****254797**

Bachnagairn is a total ruin. It was an old pre-Victorian shooting lodge built in 1819. All that is left are the lower part of walls forming two large rooms. You can make out the location of the old doorway and there is a tumbled lintel hewn from granite lying in the rubble. Much of the old lodge was taken to Moulzie when it ceased to function. Nearby there is another ruin with an iron back boiler in the derelict fireplace.

It would have to be a desperate scenario for anyone to seek out shelter here. The unfortunate individual would have to be at their last resorts and would probably not survive.

This all reminded me of the infamous drinking den hidden away in the trees of Naddle above Haweswater. The old beer house or jerry catered for the charcoal burners and copper miners of Guerness. It was only pulled down at the end of the 1800's and the tradition of Ram Tam, Middle Brew and Pinkie came to an end. During my research for "Mardale Mysteries" I was determined to locate the remains of this unique drinking den. After many hours of search I was partly successful when I located the ruins exactly where they were supposed to be. Merely piles of stones and layers of brick and rubble remained, all entangled in gorse heather and bushes. A sad reminder that nothing is forever. I sat there and let my imagination run riot.

The beer house of Mardale and the shooting lodge of Bachnagairn in their glory.

But now lost and gone forever.

**Sandy's Seat
(Allan's hut)****44****257808**

Broad Cairn is a very popular climb from the Spittal of Glen Muick. The path is very clear and from the summit looks almost like a road. 2km down, below the final slopes, there is a junction of paths and here is located an interesting animal shelter with a 'famous' bench placed alongside. Above this welcome resting place is a sign indicating it is Sandy's seat. On a hot summers day almost everyone will probably take a short rest here. The farm hut/shed would provide emergency shelter if a climber were to find themselves in dire straits at this juncture.

**Jocks hut (Davy's
Bourach)**

44

232778

Historically and tragically famous. Were the sad climbers who perished close by in 1959 actually seeking out this shelter? Their bodies were found in close proximity, but the shelter would have been invisible in the raging storm and the men were severely hypoxic. Today much has changed. The path is much clearer and the original 'hut' has been replaced by another shelter nearby. Placed by the original shelter there is a small discreet plaque commemorating the plight of the unfortunate storm victims. The new refuge was built by Davy Glen. (1966) The stone turf and corrugated iron howff is intended to be a safe haven in times of storm. It is accessed by a red metal door and it consists of a single room with a hard earth floor. As it is merely an emergency shelter there is no stove and the ceiling is low. Certainly bigger than my desperate night in the stretcher box on Mickledore. Major repairs were carried out in 1984 and again in 2001. The shelter is maintained by Forfar & District Hill Walking club.

Finalty Hill

44

213752

Many many years ago a traverse of Finalty Hill brought memories of a hut right on the top. It was only just standing. Today it has totally disappeared.

**Shielin of Mark
bothy**

44

336827

Certainly a remote location in so much it is in the middle of nowhere. A solid bothy maintained by the MBA. (1994) Bare stone walls but this is a solid construction. 5 years ago there was some debate over the attributes of open firegrate versus stove. I don't remember the open fire. The stove whilst being restrictive in heat output is certainly more efficient. Just recently (October 2016) I stayed overnight at Gregs Hut in the Pennines. Descending from Cross Fell I met up with Ian who had stayed in this bothy very many times. Once within we got a superb fire going and this was very much due to Ian's past experience. Fires, like husbands or wives, often require careful attention. Ian knew how to operate the bothy stove to perfection. At 8 pm a young couple arrived and they were very glad to enter what might have been a cold miserable bothy.

Within Shielin of Mark there are a number of benches that can be moved around.

Gelder Shiel Stable

44

257900

Taken over by the MBA in 1983 this famous bothy is very different from early memories. I have never returned to relive my recollections of a cold old stable with a cobbled floor and a window well past its sell by date. No fire, no furniture, this was a wet uncomfortable bothy. Today I believe it has been 'modernised' and is a solid stone haven with a sound tiled roof. You enter into the one room that has 4 bunk beds that would sleep 8. Not unlike one of my Royal Marine barrack rooms. Functional; very; comfortable; hardly. There is a big table and several chairs. As with all bothies human waste became a major problem. Permission was given to link up with the estate water supply and sewerage system. Volunteers built a flush toilet behind the bothy. A JCB was used to open up a trench for the sewer connection and other volunteers filled it in and landscaped the area to make it estate friendly.

Although I would very much like to climb Lochnagar again I very much doubt if this will happen. Therefore, I probably will not see these improvements. My memories of Gelder will be the old building. Never mind!

Glas- allt Shiel

44

276825

An open bothy in somewhat 'different' surroundings. This is in fact an outhouse of the Queens old holiday home. From Loch Muick car park walk or cycle along the north shore of the loch. Go towards the back of the imposing house into a passageway that leads into a tiny courtyard. The door to the bothy is the furthest one in (5th). Doors 1 through 4 are locked. On the bothy door you will see a plaque. It is just a little gloomy inside, but it has been improved with the installation of polycarbonate panels in the ceiling of the upper room. The main room is spacious with a large table and several chairs. The floor is wooden, but the walls are of stone giving a cold feel to the shelter. Since the stove has been fitted (2012) it has become easier to heat. Suspended in front of the fire is a wooden maiden (not a sacrificial female!!) on which you can hang your damp gear. I have mixed feeling about these pieces of equipment. Obviously, everyone wants their gear to dry out but if overdone a potential warm cosy bothy can become a steamy, without character drying room. There is a steep ladder that gives access to the well-lit sleeping area. A banister is in place to prevent sleepwalkers tumbling to their doom.

A stream outside provides ample water and the luxury of a toilet will be found separate from the main building. It is a hole in the ground and is to be flushed by a bucket of water from the stream. I had been informed someone had placed a seat over the hole for those of an unbalanced disposition. This brought back reminders of service in Borneo. The toilet facilities were a huge pit along the side of which you crouched precariously. Straining bars had been placed so one could cling to the wooden structure for security.

Glas allt Shiel is the creation of Dundee University Rucksack club. It was 'created' in memory of a member who was killed in a climbing accident in 1988. The work was done in the summer of 1990 and the following year. It opened in November 1991.

Boulder bivouac

44

Grid sqr 2382

A small boulder bivouac exists in the screes below Central Slabs at Creag an Dubh loch. Very much emergency shelter that I have yet to visit.

Boulder doss Lochnagar

44

252864

Doss under boulder in north east corrie holds three at a push.

Loch Esk shelter stone

44

239793

I never had chance nor necessity to seek out this shelter. I was on an 'orgy' of Munro 'bagging' and mountain summits took my full attention. The shelter is situated by a small outlying pool to the east of the main body of water. The boulder has a natural overhang providing significant cover. As with the famous Loch Avon shelter stone gaps

have been filled in to attempt to eradicate draughts. I would only want to utilise this shelter in a dire emergency. I would not want to be here in any circumstances such as this. Not now I am in my mid 70's. The 5 men who perished in 1959 are a continual reminder of the dangers of this area in foul weather.

The original use of this shelter would be a hiding place for marauding cattle thieves many years ago.

Balnamoon's Cave

44

395832

This cave is very difficult to locate. It is situated on the lower rocky hillside south of the Water of Mark. It will be found above a flat platform of grass. The cave is one of many in this area. It has a very narrow entrance that leads to a claustrophobic hollow that is dark and dank. It would just cater for three people. It is wind and waterproof because of the efforts of climbers who have closed any gaps with rocks and boulders. The cave was the refuge place of James Carnegy 6th Earl of Balnamoon. He was a leading Jacobite who hid for many months after the fiasco at Culloden in 1746. He was warned whenever the Redcoats were approaching and managed to avoid capture for a long period. Eventually captured he was released on a technicality. It all reminds me of the tribulations of Hugh Holme who also fell upon dangerous times. The story began when a valiant squire who had come over with William the Conqueror was rewarded with an estate in Yorkshire. All was well until his grandson Hugh was outlawed by King John about the time of the King's excommunication. It was claimed Hugh had sided with some monks from Canterbury. Hugh fled northwards and discovered the secluded backwater that contained Haweswater and the village of Mardale. He hid in a secret cave on Rough Crag high on the slopes above Riggindale. As the months passed by the danger receded and Hugh Holme came out of hiding to commence a family line that was to last for some 700 years.

I often think long and hard about the desperate seclusion of these men in their moments of grave danger. If you have an imagination here is a task for you to undertake. Go and look for Hugh's cave and see if you can locate Balnamoons cave on the lower slopes alongside the impressive Water of Mark.

Charr bothy

45

615831

Is this bothy a little too clinical? Possibly for me it is. A modern and very clean bothy but lacking in the most important asset. The fireplace is boarded up and there will be no long evening in front of a roaring blaze. There are a number of plastic garden chairs to sit on and one of the walls has a sort of mosaic pattern to give an artistic appearance. Painted on the wall outside is a clear message- "no fires". Within a message tells of the providers of this shelter.

By kind permission of Fasque estate and with the funding provided by the family and friends of the late John Whitley this bothy is now maintained by the Mountain Bothies Association.

After leaving Charr bothy to make the ascent of Mount Battock a large wooden hut will be passed. (GR 566849) It was open when I passed by and within were lots of wooden chairs and several tables. I do not know the reason for this construction, but it is not a bothy. It could well be a location to feed the shooters and so-called sports people who slaughter innocent birds with their high-powered weapons (lunch house). It could possibly be a place to hang the deceased victims. A little further on a very modern construction is passed (GR 567853) but it is all locked and boarded up. This must also be something to with grouse shooting. All around this area are situated shooting butts and some of them are quite ingenious. If you were desperate for shelter they would certainly be better than being out in the wild open spaces.

Leacraithnaich

49

742471

Not visited. The bothy is on the western shore of Loch Tearnait.

**Bothy in Allt nan
Caorainn**

50

Gone !!

No longer in existence Just a pile of rusted corrugated sheets and a heap of scrap.

It all brought back to mind the tragedy of my old warship Bulwark. Initially a fixed wing carrier Bulwark was converted into a helicopter carrier and along with HMS Albion were the vanguard of amphibious tactics in the 1960's. I spent so much of my service on board Bulwark both in the Far East and within the Arctic circle. Bulwark was deemed surplus to requirements when the Invincible carriers (through deck cruisers) came into service. She was almost reprieved during the Falkland War, but this did not happen and shortly after she was towed away to Cairn Ryan to meet her fate. As I have written before a warship is almost like a person. When in commission it is a living almost breathing entity. When shut down and finished it is equivalent to a corpse.

I went to Cairn Ryan in 1983 to see if I could have one last look at my proud warship. What a mistake. They would not let me near (health and safety) and all I could see was a sad pile of scrap metal lying all over the cold cruel jetty.

Bulwark was a pile of junk.

This is the fate of some bothies.

Narrachan**50****111365**

Eleven years ago (2006) this was a primitive bothy with window and door open to the elements. It did have a fireplace, but the dirt floor made it an uncomfortable 'doss.' The bothy has been updated in 2014 and the estate are slowly working on it. The door and window are now fixed in place. I have not seen these improvements, but the estate is to be given credit where credit is due.

Cadderlie**50****046369**

On the shore of Loch Etive. Nice bothy. 3 rooms. The right-hand room is a communal area with a modern brick fireplace a table and even a small library. The left-hand room is sparser but also has a fireplace. The central room is the dormitory with a large bunk bed.

Gorton**50****375482**

I like this bothy. It can be cold, but it has an effective firegrate. Some bothies don't; this one does. There are two big rooms and originally the building was the home of a shepherd. Life was tough with just a cow, calf a few hens and a small horse or pony. Basic crops were grown in a small hayfield. Peat was cut from the moor for fuel. A small river flowed nearby. Obviously outside contact was by train. Nearby was Gorton siding where there was a signal box and a platform. On the platform was a small rail carriage that acted as a school for local children.

Kinlocheteive**50****126454**

No longer an open bothy. My last knowledge was a prominent sign on the door indicating

"Kinlocheteive bothy closed."

It is now leased by Venture Scotland.

Inverchorachan**50****229179**

I have close memories of this quite impressive building. I passed it twice. The first time was my frustrating experience on Beinn Bhuidhe when the summit put up such a 'fight' before I succeeded in reaching the top. The second time was on a glorious day when slow deliberation and exploration was not only possible but mandatory.

This is a well-preserved estate cottage built in the mid 1800's. The central block is the main house and is of one and a half storeys with loft rooms. There are single storied wings on either side. The main entrance has windows on either side. The single storied wings have an entrance each. The roof is slated with chimneys rising at the apex of the gables of the main building. There are cast iron rainwater gutters etc. throughout. The structure is rubble built now obscured by flush pointing or render. To the rear is a central window in the main section with small windows in each of the wings. A rubble built lean to with a tin roof sits against the east wing

A solid and sound structure. It was locked up on my two visits.

**Allt Coire a
Chearcaill**

51

673497

I commenced my circuit of the mountains (Carn Mairg group) in good weather. By the time I reached Meall na Aighean it was pouring down with massive force. I was in no mood for bothy investigation. I looked down and saw the bothy through the driving rain. It looked decidedly frail. (15 years ago) It had a distinctive red roof but the rest of it looked as though a good storm would despatch it away. It is probably an old stalkers bothy. I believe the landowner discourages visits. Anyway I was not tempted. I wanted dry clothes and alcohol.

Geal Charn

51

683543

Unique memories. Geal Charn is a 792m peak south of Kinloch Rannoch. Just a few metres from the top is a bothy. So unexpected. It is very small and from my memory very 'tatty'. This simple structure is surrounded by heather and has solid walls of scavenged stone covered with rusty corrugated iron sheets. The wooden front door is very 'tired' and inside there is a wood sleeping platform. Hardly a weather proof bothy but it satisfied my masochistic eccentricities There is a dirty window with superb views of surrounding hills.

Blar na Feadaig

51

698545

Very small bothy buried into the side of the hill. There is a small burn at the front. Neat stone walls are topped with a red corrugated iron roof. (pent style) Within there is a unique sign.

*This bothy is provided
free of charge. Do not
misuse our kind
hospitality. Children and
adults on the roof cause
structural damage. Thank
you.*

*The ghost you may see is
called Hendry a fine chap
he was, but died of dust
inhalation some bugger
burned the brush.*

All my memories are some time ago. Is this bothy still in existence?

Glen Sassunn bothy**51****652541**

I have not visited this bothy and I have gathered different locations from different people. This could be an interesting task for anyone who likes a mystery. You could try your search in Glen Sassun at the above grid reference.

Pheiginn**51****740518**

Not visited. There is an abundance of accessible bothies in this area.

Glenmore**51****712526**

The bothy is ageing somewhat. Not an MBA bothy and water is finding its way into the structure. Like the old saying 'if you don't give it care it wears away'. Am I talking about our bodies here?

It may well be locked so be prepared. There are two wooden shacks at each gable end that might provide shelter.

**Bothy of Loch
Farleyer****52****819524**

(Note: Map 48, 1:63360 map 1955). Very many years ago a walk to Loch Farleyer was commenced at Camserney. This was a walk through very lonely land and aided only by a very old map. Intentions to climb Meall Tairneachan were abandoned, only to be completed some 30 years later on a memorable day. From Loch Farleyer a short walk ENE brings you to a unique little shelter/ bothy. It is a neat hut/ shed with green painted walls and a brown painted roof. There was a tin chimney stack and to the front there was a neat door with two windows. A window was also seen to the side. On a horrible day this shelter is most welcome. I did not climb my Corbett. This had to wait until 2005 when I had an amazing experience. It was Christmas Eve and I was staying in a log cabin with my family. As I had paid for the whole holiday my deal was that I could go off climbing whenever I fancied. Christmas eve was cold, clear and glorious. I made my ascent and consumed the soup my daughter had made for me and sat there enjoying a view of total magnificence. Schiehallion stood out in prominence and I pondered for well over an hour in this special place. I was only a few km. from Loch Farleyer and my visit of so many years ago. I had my hill. I had my memories. I was totally happy.

Sarah's bothy**52****038541**

A cute tin shack! with a wood burning stove and several items of furniture. This bothy is well away from the high mountains and more frequently visited areas of the Highlands. This is the sort of place I like to visit now that I am in my mid 70's. I have always been a climber and have read so many stories of the Himalayan adventurers. However, most of us 'ordinary' climbers, whatever that might mean, have been restricted to the mountains of Scotland the Lake District and Wales. At this point in time I am quite satisfied to visit places like Sarah's bothy. Anyway it really is my favourite name.

The bothy can be included in a long walk or preferably cycle ride from Dunkeld. There are many uphill sections of the track but these will be compensated by downhill slopes. On the round tour you will visit 7 lochs. (Cally Loch, Mill dam, Rotmell Loch, Dowally Loch, Loch Ordie, Lochan Oisinneach Mor and Loch Oisinneach.) More or less halfway round you will come across an interesting ruined cottage. (GR 028527) It is now full of growing nettles and useless as a shelter, but the sight of the high gable ends, and tall chimney stacks compares with the other walls which are all crumbling away.

Sarah's bothy is a green tin 'shack' next to a clump of trees. The interior is comfortable and functional.

Carron

55

944996

One room bothy. There is a good fireplace and a wooden sleeping 'bed.' The door is to the right-hand side with a window in the middle. The floor is wooden. The walls within are of nice stone. There is a big tree to the front and two ruins on either side of the bothy. It might be a good idea to wear wellies in order to reach this bothy?

This bothy reminded me of a past venture with my 'annoying' daughter. I have already outlined this, but it is worth repeating. I had an old map and it showed trees where no trees should have been. It showed no trees where trees should have been. My daughter was pregnant and getting annoyed as we were lost. No we were not I claimed. "They have moved the forest."

Well of course I was correct. Forests do move because humankind keep cutting them down. I have taken 'stick' from this day so very many times since. Beware this area is a heavily forested one and trees do disappear. You have been warned?

Fineglen

55

931187

A sad tragic pile of stones alongside a lonely tree and bushes. All that remains of a previous farmstead. All is not lost as the stones have been 'recycled' and turned into sheep pens. A classic example of the outcome derived from what many call 'ticking off.' The ruins were found whilst climbing the nearby Marilyn Beinn Chapull 515m. Nearby Loch Avich is another Scotland gem that many will not know of.

No shelter at these ruins in Allt Dearg. If you want to stay you will need your tent.

Doone Byre

56

332144

Very much on the West Highland Way. Good fireplace with whitewashed stone walls. A large interior with plenty of sleeping platforms. Because of its location on WHW it sadly suffers from certain misuse in the form of litter etc. This is another example of human disrespect for basic decency Why are so many people unable to respect the environment? I remember a lovely card posted on the bothy wall. "One life live it. \But respect animals."

Rowchoise

56

336044

In 1759 9 families lived in this area. The bothy was the byre of Rowchoish Cottage. The building was renovated in 1965 with the consent of the Forestry Commission. It was

taken over by the MBA in 1977. The bothy is situated in woodland and has a dirt floor with a raised sleeping platform. There are tables and basic plastic chairs and the bothy is light as there are skylights built into the roof. It all reminded me of Carnmore and to be truthful is not a lot more than a hovel.

There is a plentiful supply of fallen timber in the vicinity.

My big interest near Rowchoise is the search for other old buildings. Many of them are merely piles of stones but several still have standing walls of 4-5 feet. Some of them have trees growing within the middle of the sad ruin. Again I thought back to Mardale and my search for the lost houses that lie beneath the cold dark waters of the reservoir. Of course I did not see the remains low down in the valley as the waters rose in 1940-41 and I was not alive when this happened. However, many ruins are still there to be discovered higher up on the slopes. As Haweswater was to become a reservoir for drinking water all the buildings were collapsed and sanitised. The destruction was carried out by pushing in the walls after the roof timbers and slates had been removed. The whole site would then be 'sanitised' and almost always a tree would be planted in the middle of the sad pile of stone.

Delving around in the ruins of Rowchoise was intriguing. Well it was for me.

Mark Cottage

56

229952

Known as Mark Ferry Cottage as the building was once part of an old ferry system.

I visited the bothy in November 2016 and had quite an experience. This area is another example of the care required when travelling through areas of forest, especially if your maps are somewhat dated. I cycled away from Ardgartan along the solid tarmac road. I had only negotiated a few hundred yards when I spotted several buildings down the slope towards the loch waters. I left my bicycle and walked down to investigate. The first building was an old garage/storage shed made up of prefabricated concrete sections. It was full of litter and human rubbish. Certainly weatherproof but not a pleasant place to doss. A few yards away was another somewhat strange building. It was a long block of toilets in early stages of decay. It had sinks and cubicles at each end as though these were gender divided. Tree growth was slowly covering the strange construction. 50 yards further towards Ardgartan hotel was another mysterious building. This also was a concrete construction and at one end there was a functioning fireplace. The roof was sound and the opposite end of the bothy? had a vivid example of graffiti painted on the wall. Outside were several old fire pits and the whole area showed evidence of previous camps.

Time to move on and I continued along the tarmac road passing a delightful waterfall to the right. Shortly after passing the private track down to Coilessan I came to a parking area which had a large container and several imposing JCB's. There were several cars parked and I presumed the owners were away climbing the newly promoted Corbett Cnoc Coinnich. Moving round the locked gate I moved into a morass of mud before mounting my bicycle to make further easy progress. It was here that I fell into my self-imposed 'trap'. My map was old, but this was not the real reason for my mistake. After cycling a long way I began to consider I had covered enough distance. I knew the track I wanted slanted away on a downward route to the left before curving round to reach the bothy. I made a stupid mistake. At GR 247988 I spotted a good track descending to the left, so I immediately followed it. A huge 'cock up' as I was still a good three miles short of the correct track. I ended up on the lochside and quickly realised my error.

There was no way southwards along the waterside and my frustration was complete as I slowly trudged upwards and northwards through ever increasing slimy mud to regain the parking area I had left some hours previously. I now worked it all out from the map, but it was too late, so I cycled back for liquid sustenance in the local inn at Arrochar.

The following day I got it right. I drove to the car park and decided to walk. I made good progress but once again underestimated the distances somewhat. The best advice on this walk is to ignore all tracks left or right and scrutinise the opposite side of the loch. Once you are opposite or just past the northern jetty look for a grassy track descending the left. You still have well over a mile to negotiate but as you descend you will see the tanks of the oil depot and more than likely a tanker moored up alongside the pier. The track swings round to the left as you approach the waters of the loch and very shortly you will see the welcome sight of the bothy roof.

I was very impressed with the bothy which was in immaculate condition. The bothy was taken over by the MBA in 2010 and a complete renovation was carried out. The fireplace was improved so that it 'threw out' more heat. I certainly found this to be true as it took me only a few minutes to achieve a roaring fire that raised the interior temperature from a chilly 44f to well over 60. There was an enormous pile of cut logs arranged alongside the fireplace and this area certainly is not short of dead wood and driftwood from the lochside. The bothy consists of two rooms, the communal area, with a kitchen place and a dormitory with three very large wooden bunk beds. No mattresses.

In the communal area there are two large wooden benches and even a small bookshelf with a selection of mountain reading. In one corner a large lifebuoy stands proudly on the wall.

I immediately tackled my hip flask and spent a delightful hour or more soaking up the bothy heat. Eventually I sat outside on the garden seat watching a large tanker slowly discharging its cargo.

I thought back to the history of this famous little building. I knew it was part of a ferry system before the new roads were constructed and when this role became redundant the building was used by school groups as an outdoor pursuits centre. The MBA took it over in 2010 and carried out the renovations that created the bothy of today.

However, it is not this sort of historic fact that interested me most; more the details concerning a very elderly occupant at the turn of the 19th century. James Grieve is reputed to have been the oldest man in Scotland at the time of his death. He was born on January 1st. 1800 at Invergarry and was fifteen years old when the battle of Waterloo took place. His role in life was that of a shepherd but it was his great age that brought him his celebrity. He lived at Mark Cottage and towards the close of his life many people paid a lot of money to have their photograph taken alongside the old man. A lot of these folk were boated over the loch from the eastern shoreline. James would sit outside his cottage selling photographs and post cards of himself to the general public. A centurion entrepreneur without doubt. On July 14th 1910 James reached 110 but his health was failing, and he had to take to his bed before he moved away from his little cottage. He lost all interest in his sheep and even gave up his pipe. When his lack of interest in his dram took control the writing was truly on the wall. On November 29th 1910 James passed away at Corntee Loch Esk

A great character. A great smoker and an admirer of a decent malt.

As I tackled my malt within my hip flask I thought back to the times when James might have occupied this same building.

On my return I reflected long and hard about my route mistakes within the forests of the western shore of Loch Long. I was relating my experience to a colleague when he produced his new and highly technical ‘toy’. He ‘googled’ maps and within a minute had acquired a detailed map of the entire area. He then proceeded to zoom in and showed me an aerial photograph of the whole route I had followed. It clearly showed where I had gone wrong. The grassy track that led me down to the loch waters 3 miles too early. He then ‘zoomed’ further in and I could even see the large boulder I had sat upon when I was deciding to descend instead of scrutinising the map more closely. All wonderful stuff???. His advice “go and get yourself a smart phone, make use of technology available.”

I thought long and hard about all this. He was of course right, and his gadget would have saved me an awful lot of inconvenience. But then I realised my mistake was all about complacency and carelessness. I went further into thought. These aids (GPS, smart phones, I pads whatever, did not exist 13 years ago.) I would then have been 60. I managed then and therefore I was sure I could manage now.

I remembered my teaching days when calculators came into existence. All the students wanted one and they became a common part of the learning process. No more logarithmic functions and all the mysteries of advanced mathematics. The calculator could tell you all. I advised (warned) my students of the dangers they were encouraging. Calculators were fine but never as a replacement. Only as an addition. Students had to know, and instantaneously know that 7×9 is 63 and 6×8 is 48. One must always remember these modern pieces of equipment require power and batteries can and do fail. There will never be a substitute for common sense and practical knowledge. I had ‘cocked up’ because of carelessness and once I accepted this I realised there really was no need for all this modern ‘stuff.’

I left Mark Cottage after a three-hour stay and negotiated the return path with increasing frustration. Distances seemed to be greater and known landmarks were only reached after annoying delays. I was in some despair when at 4 pm I heard the sound of a vehicle approaching from behind. A mountain rescue Landrover pulled up and the driver kindly offered me a lift. Normally I would have declined but on this occasion I was more than happy to accept. The last three miles were completed in comfort and on arrival back at Arrochar several pints of real ale went down like nectar.

This was a really enjoyable day even if the message of encroaching age was somewhat exposed within the trials of a ten-mile hike.



Figure 54: Marks ferry cottage exterior



Figure 55: Comfortable lounge area



Figure 56: Sleeping area



Figure 57: Kitchen area



Figure 58: Bench seat in lounge

Very many years ago I climbed Ben Narnain from Succoth in freezing conditions. On the lower slopes I discovered I had left my map in the car. I declined any further climb from the summit. Years later I climbed Ben Ime in humid muggy conditions but as the haze was excessive the Cobbler did not attract me. Very recently I climbed the Cobbler in deep snow and slowly clearing visibility. Initially the conditions were so poor I had set myself the target of merely reaching the famous Narnain boulders. I arrived and took shelter in the lee of a massive monolith. I had remembered that these ‘monsters’ had been used in the ‘pioneer’ years by the lads of Glasgow who hitch hiked up to enjoy a weekend climbing with free accommodation under the boulders. Shelter of a sorts they offered but this was no luxury stopover. There was a lonely tent in a battered condition just standing alongside the boulder. Obviously left by someone. Or had the owner come to an unfortunate end on a high crag above? Waterproof groundsheets were lying within and under the rocks. I had been told of the location of several caves in the region and these also were the sleeping location of many of the adventurous lads. I was not sleeping at the boulders but stopped there for some two hours waiting to see what the weather was going to offer. My imagination was given free reign as I considered many of the experiences of the long-lost pioneers. I eventually ‘went for it’ and after great difficulty reached the main top of the Cobbler. All was hard ice and it was a dangerous place to be. I did not climb the last few feet. Touching the top rocks was enough for me on this occasion. This whole area reeks with history and past endeavour.

So many years ago I had climbed Ben Vorlich (Loch Earn) in poor weather that deterred me from the awkward traverse to Stuc a’ Chroin. A week later on a sunny warm day I corrected this omission. Looking at my notes and searching out the vestiges of my memory have managed to bring back my experiences. I drove up the road alongside Keltie Water right up to the farm at Braeleny. Leaving the farm, the walk was easy along a good track. Some 2 km. further I passed a small building to my right. This is where my memory fades. It was a small construction, but I did not check it out. Was it locked? I do not know. Was it a bothy? I do not know. Was it something to do with the dam? I do not know. Shortly after it is necessary to cross the Keltie. I am almost certain that I crossed by means of a bridge but others since have informed me the bridge is no more. My ascent was some thirty years ago so it is possible the bridge has since ‘gone.’¹⁸ After the crossing two buildings/ cottages were reached but they were all totally boarded up. Solid but inaccessible. From here a long slanting traverse enabled me to gain the wide col at the end of the long south-east ridge of Stuc a’ Chroin. The first section was steep but as soon as the ridge levelled out I could see the complete way ahead. It looked a long way away and it did take some time to negotiate. All the time I had impressive views of Ben Vorlich across Gleann an Dubh Choirein. The top of Stuc a’ Chroin consists of two large cairns. The descent was long and easy, and just after I reached the farm track I had another of my tragic epic and marathon tadpole rescue sessions. At first it was the odd puddle I found them in but as I walked along the track I came across hundreds of thousands of the little creatures, probably all doomed as this

¹⁸ The bridge at Arivurichardich had been washed away in 2004. It has since been replaced by a sturdy ‘bog standard’ bridge. Therefore I did cross the Keltie by a bridge with no necessity for a wade. Anyway on my climb the weather was dry and the rivers were flowing low. None of this should be confused with the new and impressive bridge across the Bracklinn Falls gorge further downstream

was obviously a used farm track. Therefore a death by ‘squashing’ or a lingering fate in a dried-up puddle was looming on the horizon of existence. Therefore after passing hundreds of masses of tadpoles I filled all my lucozade bottles with a few lucky survivors and decanted them into two large 2 litre bottles when back at my car. The next day they became Lunt tadpoles in a nice big relatively safe pond and ditch.

This must have been a long time ago because I was still teaching. I can remember in one of my lessons relating my rescue operation to a class of eleven-year-old girls. I told them that I could always tell the Scotland tadpoles from my ‘scouse’ taddies. One of the girls asked me how. I replied in all seriousness “Because they are wearing little kilts.” She said, “oh yes I understand.” The innocence of youth.

Regarding the bothy, which really is what all this is about- you will have to go and have a look for yourself. Go on don your boots. Climb two Munros. Have fun.

The Islands of Scotland

There is only so much time in a day. The same applies to a year and also a decade. Add to this the fact that we are all so very finite and it is easy to see how the years can slip away. I often thought about this on my long lonely climbs across the Highlands. Consideration is also required for the necessity of work so that bills can be paid and children brought up. Unless one is very rich, time can be a precious commodity in the mountain areas.

Living on Merseyside logistically put Scotland a fair distance away. The Munros took up an enormous amount of time. Of course to ‘compleat’ them it was necessary to visit several islands. Skye is indeed a paradise for climbers and the island of Mull is a location that should not be missed. The same applies to the superb scrambling on Arran. However, this leaves out many other islands and here the difficulty of access plays a big part for a traveller who has a 400 mile journey just to reach the ferry providing access.

My attempts at the Corbetts adds incentive, but as I write this I approach my 74th birthday and being realistic, fully realise that to visit all the island gems is very probably an unrealistic goal.

Therefore some of my research into the island bothies is based on word of mouth from others who have visited these places. Do not become obsessed with the big hills. Always find time for the lesser peaks. The loneliness should be well worth the decision.

Uisinis (South Uist)

22

850333

Small bothy that would not be suitable for large parties. When I saw it the bothy was something of a mess. It has now been upgraded. There is a quaint stove with a pipe going up through the roof. A super setting and well worth a visit.

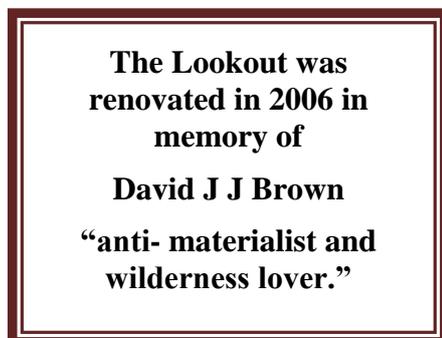
Ollisdal

23

213394

Remote bothy on the Duirinish peninsular close to the wild clifftop walk from Ramasaig to Orbost. Look for superb cliff scenery such as an impressive arch GR 223380. The bothy has two rooms one of which has a dirt floor and bare stone walls. The other room has wood panelled walls and a wood floor and a fireplace. Drift wood will be available nearby.

A large brass plate screwed to the wall of the bothy informs us...



With my simple outlook on life any plaque such as this is certainly going to attract my attention.

This is a former coastguard watchers post and offers superb views out over the Minch and the Isles of Lewis and Harris. Time does not ‘stand still’ and as technology advanced this lookout became largely redundant. Whale watchers and bird lovers visited but few others came to this beautiful remote spot. In the year 2005 a massive storm inflicted what could have been terminal damage on the vulnerable construction. Most of the windows were smashed in and the interior was left in a terrible state. The MBA came to the rescue and over the next few years renovation was carried out. The outside of the wooden structure was re-clad in western cedar . All of the window frames and most of the internal panelling was replaced and a new floor was laid in the main watch room.

My knowledge is of the ‘modern’ bothy. I cherish the thoughts and memories of what has gone on in this lonely outpost over the long decades.

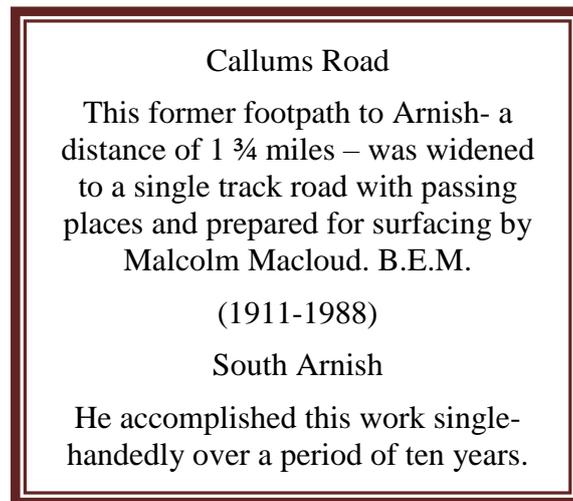
For the bothy visitor today there is a sleeping room with a wood platform and room for two or three. Above is a bunk bed with room for one. A small kitchen area adjoins the main sitting room which was of course the original lookout position. Apart from the stunning view there are several chairs and a table. If you do not mind the floor you could sleep here It is all very intimate as there are no internal doors. Take in your own plentiful supply of water. Respect the toilet facilities. (shovel and common sense.)

This is the classic example illustrating that climbing mountains is not necessarily the ultimate objective in the Highlands of Scotland.

There are no significant hills on Raasay. History abounds in every space.

The weather might well be a ‘problem’ but a visit will bring rich rewards and an insight into the varied history of the past few centuries. I was captivated by the story of one mans stubborn desire to improve the communication links at the northern end of this

lonely island. Very close to his epic achievement can be seen a plaque attached to a prominent cairn. It reads:



Any sign such as this would surely make one want to visit and find out more of this eccentric event.

The bothy consists of one open plan room with a fireplace at one end and a sleeping platform at the other. The floor is of wood and there are several chairs and a wooden table.

**Taigh an Achaidh
known as Kyle Rona
House**

24

A semi ruin. The north end of the roof has collapsed and the remaining tin section has large leaks and holes. The walls are slowly collapsing This would be a desperate ‘doss’ for only life threatening situations. Anyway the bothy Taigh Thormoid Dhuibh is only a short distance away. I can go back several decades. Memory is dim but 40 years ago the building was sound. By the 1990’s it was well on its way to ruin. It was being used as a store place for wool

Be different. Do make the journey to Raasay.

Camasunary

32

517183

Camasunary(old bothy GR 516188) has always been a favourite bothy situated in superb mountain country. Several years ago the owner indicated that he required the bothy to be returned. It was then that plans were put into operation to construct a replacement bothy some 1 km from the old one on the eastern side of the bay. The structure of the building was put up by 59-commando squadron Royal Engineers. It was made up of a block and timber frame faced with local stone. The 2 room one storey bothy was fitted out by the MBA. The building has no fire or stove but is well insulated throughout. It has a sleeping platform and will accommodate 15 climbers/ travellers.

I have not seen the ‘ new’ bothy as it only opened in the spring of 2016. The bothy it replaced suffered severe storm damage in early 2016. A lot of the roof tin sheets were blown off. This is the bothy of my memory.

Will I ever have time to visit the new bothy? The years pass by with ever increasing speed. Possibly not!

Dibidil (Rum)

39

393927

I would dearly love to visit Rum. I have heard the climbing is superb and the views out across the ocean are beyond imagination. Of course a lot depends on the weather

Dibidil bothy is situated in a rocky bay with grand views to Eigg and the mainland to the east. The bothy gives an appearance of solidity with a good sound roof. The interior is comfortable with wooden bunk beds, bench seats and a wooden floor. It was taken over by the MBA in 1970 and a large renovation took place. Skylights in the roof make the interior bright.

Very close to the bothy is a deep fissure and care must be taken to avoid this danger.

Before renovation Dibidil was merely a roofless ruin and it took a major effort to bring in the necessary building equipment.

Guirdil

39

320014

In 1982 Guirdil was a ruin. The walls still stood tall and the gable ends were solid. Two chimney stacks were still in place. The MBA took it over in 1982 and work commenced to renovate this building. The roof was dedicated to the memory of Tom and Margaret Brown and also commemorates Peter Davies who fell to his death on Askival in 1996.

I have yet to visit Guirdil but from what I have gathered on my travels this is a comfortable bothy.

Tomsleibhe

49

617372

This is an old shepherd cottage that was adopted by the MBA in 1980. It was inhabited by a shepherd Donald Maclean on the night of February 1st. 1945 when a Dakota crashed very close to the summit of Beinn Talaidh. Some of the aircrew perished whilst some survived. Wreckage of the aeroplane can still be located on the mountain side. The MBA were working on the bothy during 2016. The bothy has a small porch and within the two spacious rooms are sturdy wooden bunks. In both rooms there are sturdy tables with long wooden benches. There will also be found a bookshelf containing a mini library. The walls are plastered white and the fireplace has a neat green surround.

An Cladach

60

439623

Not visited. Just seven yards from the sea makes this an ideal bothy for the kayak enthusiast. It is a delightful small bothy with just one room. It has an efficient fireplace and bunk beds on which to sleep. There is a wood bench seat and the floor is also wooden. The roof is solid and sound. A nice set of shelves are adorned with a number of books

On the outside hang a number of coloured buoys and a lifebuoy. There is a 'doubtful' wood bench on which to sit and enjoy the beautiful sea views. The 'sound' bothy is alongside a roofless ruin which originally made this a much bigger building. It was taken over by the MBA in 1999.

As this is a very remote bothy and access is more than difficult it is interesting to read from the MBA accounts how renovations were carried out.

"It would have been almost impossible to carry in by land all of the building materials required. So the good ship Angie was chartered to ferry the materials from Port Askaig. Human power was still required, however, as Angie could not get close enough to the shore to unload. The problem was solved using an inflatable dinghy, pulling a rope through a pulley block to unload the boat."

Mountain Bothies . Celebrating 50 years of the MBA page 107.

Proaig

60

458577

I have not visited this bothy but I would dearly like to. My most favourite whisky is lagavulin and it is the Isle of Islay from which it originates. Is there hope for a visit for me?

There used to be considerable settlement at Proaig but the bothy with some ruined outbuildings is all that is left of it today. The location had a role in the illicit distillation of whisky which further 'charges up' my imagination. This building was constructed in the mid 1800's and was a shepherds cottage with sheepfolds. A report of a visit in 2008 (the year of my 'compleat') stated that the bothy was a mess. The door was off its hinges and a window had been smashed in. Pigeon 'muck' covered the entire interior. To be truthful this would not bother me at all. Certain human beings do go on about animal mess but why I cannot quite understand. It is human waste that concerns me most. Filthy human sewage, obscene nuclear waste and discarded drug syringes dumped randomly in the street causes me real upset. Of course we should know better but we still follow the 'road' to possible certain doom. Where does the poor dog or cat go when it requires its toilet? We have covered everything with concrete and the landscape is not a-natural scene. Not only does the concrete deprive animals of their natural habitat it adds seriously to the problem of flooding.

When will we learn?

Probably never.

Back to the bothy. Other reports tell me the building has been renovated since 2008. A new tin roof has been constructed and a new concrete floor established. The main part of the bothy is now 10m x 5m (internal) and a second room has been built on measuring 8mx 5m. To the front is an enclosed garden and to the rear ruined sheep pens. To the north there are a large range of outbuildings.

Thus to summarise, we have a new floor, good roof with nice wooden beams and an efficient fireplace. Bunk beds with mattresses are provided.

But all this is hearsay for me. You should go and find out for yourself.

You never know you just might meet me sipping my dram of lagavulin happy to be in such a n idyllic place.

Glengarrisdale**61****644969**

This was a home to one of the last working crofts on the west coast of Jura. It is now used as a refuge for walkers, stalkers, kyakers and those who wish to escape from the infernal rat race of modern life. It is so easily recognisable with a red roof and bright white walls. There are two rooms, with sleeping benches, and a tool store on the ground floor. An attic space offers further sleeping areas. One of the ground floor rooms has a hearth whilst the other has a pot belly stove. The water from a nearby stream has a distinctive peaty taste(like lagavulin) and is perfectly safe to drink (like lagavulin)

Nearby there are several ruins with intact walls but minus a roof. One of the ruins is on a raised beach with previous sea cliffs as a backdrop. The surrounding flat land was once arable. Some of these ruins still had a roof as late as the 1930's.

Cruib**61****566828**

This fantastic location was taken over by the MBA in 2012 with the agreement and assistance of the Ruantallain estate. In the same year a large work party made the bothy wind and water tight. New doors and new windows were installed. The bothy is set in a lovely sweeping bay looking south over Loch Tarbert. It has 2 rooms with tables, chairs and sleeping platforms. Over the fireplace there is a long shelf containing books and reading material. If a fire is required it is possible that drift wood could be collected or the alternative of digging peat will ensure the necessary fuel.

The MBA and the estate must take real credit for the renovation of Cruib as before 2012 the building was slowly fading to decay.

If you look at the bothy from the 'front' there are three doors and three windows.

Ruantallain**61****505832**

It is a long coastal walk from Glengarrisdale to Ruantallain bothy (13 miles +) However, the scenery is fantastic with a rocky coastline, many caves, sea stacks and bays with always the vista of Colonsay out to the north west. The bothy will be found near a low band of crags . You might have to look closely especially if the weather is 'thick.' The bothy is a row of two cottages owned by the estate, whereby a single room at the end has been kept open for bothy use by tired and cold walkers. As this part of Scotland can be very much open to awesome storms the room is relatively cosy with wood panelled walls and wooden floorboards. 3 ancient and rusted bed frames can be utilised. (at time of writing) It reminded me of Carnmore. I certainly would not utilise these somewhat ' doubtful' aids to sleep??

**Tigh Mhor at
Kilchrist****Skye 1:25000 map****615200**

It almost saddens me to make these jottings. I have not included any ruins on the islands of Scotland. In fact, I have only visited Skye, Mull and Arran in order to climb the special peaks these islands offer. However, I make an exception here. I suppose Skye is far too wonderful a place to waste time 'ruin spotting'. My ascents on the Cuillin ridge are so very special to me. I accept that it is very unlikely I shall ever return to these magic peaks.

The ruins at Kilchrist are poignant. The walls are high. There are two solid gable ends. This was when I was there thirty years ago. 2 chimney stacks stood firm. The standing wall at the northern end showed that the ruin had 2 floors and two fireplaces on both floors. I have slept out several times whilst negotiating the wonderful Cuillin ridge. Those 'dosses' were not comfortable. Therefore, to doss within these ruins would be reasonably 'okay.' Therefore this is my only concession to ruins on Skye. There will be others but please do not neglect the superb climbing on this magical island.

It all made me think again. After my broken leg sustained on Mardale Ill Bell my chances of high climbing look bleak. Broken legs at 75 are not a good thing to 'get.' I arrived at this unfortunate point by failing to follow the words of my boyhood hero. Watch where you re putting your feet was the advice given by AW Wainwright. I did not, and massive pain was my consequence. I wish I could be eighteen again and start out all over again. But I cannot. I think a few words from Wainwright might help at this point.

"Would I could start my fellwalking all over again! But time is running out. Every day that passes is a day less. That day will come when there is nothing left but memories. And afterwards, a last long resting place by Innominate Tarn, on Haystacks. "Last page of Fellwanderer AW Wainwright.

I must admit I have struggled a bit with my maps over the last few days. I even use a magnifying glass to check the grid references. But I did prevail and will continue to do so. I have a goal I still want to achieve. Suilven is a peak I must climb, and a target of 2020 is firmly fixed in my mind.

It is good to have goals.

Lost bothies of the Cairngorms

All through my account I have been emphasising the idea of change. Change is all around us and will always be so. Over the course of time many famous bothies have been lost to the climbers. There have been many reasons for this change. Even if it had not happened the situation would have changed with inevitable certainty. Either now, in the near future, or in the long term.

Change has been happening in the relatively few years that I have been visiting the bothies even though fifty years is a good length of time.

There had been plans to dismantle the tin barn known as Bynack Stable 021105 sometime back in 2003. My knowledge of this establishment was from well before 2003. I had stopped in the very basic hut recording it to be a draughty earth floor dry shelter. The RSPB wanted it removed as they claimed it encouraged surrounding sewer like conditions. I consider this a somewhat inaccurate statement. Apparently, it was not demolished at that time, but its reprieve was short lived. Bynack barn blew down in massive gales of January 2005. The whole corrugated iron structure was ripped off its foundation and dumped 100 yards away.

This is a classic example of how writings can become dated. It illustrates the requirement for continual update. This is something the reader might want to undertake.

Bothies come, and bothies go. However, bothy loss is not a modern phenomenon. Many bothies have disappeared from the map and the ground as the years have passed by.

Sometimes it has been the ravages of time. Sometimes accidents and occasionally human intent.

We have seen that on November 21st 1971 a disaster of the most horrendous nature unfolded on the high plateau of the Cairngorm mountains. Lessons must be learned from incidents such as this otherwise life loss will be totally in vain.

Mount Everest can give us some input into this issue.

Often climbers on this the ultimate of mountains are deluded into going on simply because they are in a group. Strength and comfort is gained from the nearby presence of others. A foolhardy and false strength that has on many occasions brought forth demise. Once in the death zone reality kicks in. The body is slowly dying. Each climber is very much in his or her own world. If something goes horribly wrong help from others may well not be feasible. Every climber is very much on his or her own. How many times have climbers gone on and reached this point of no return.

I am reminded of a scene in the film *One Eyed Jacks* starring Marlon Brando. In a particularly violent section he accuses one of his fellow outlaws as 'getting right on the edge' after a sarcastic comment about a girl. We probably all experience this at sometime in our lives even if we never go close to a mountain. Mountaineers do get close to the edge and here I am not referring to a vertical drop. A point of no return is a necessary safeguard especially if the climb is to high altitude. Once you pass this moment you are very much dicing with death. It is easy to be philosophical whilst in the comfort of your home. When very close to the attainment of the summit, after possibly weeks of strenuous effort, it is very easy to make the decision to go on a little further.

On the south ridge of Everest a turn around time of 2 pm is usually regarded as 'sensible'. In 1996 this was ignored, and many climbers perished.

The whole debate rages on with a myriad of discussion and a host of philosophy. In recent decades there have been many tales of climbers walking past comatose fellow climbers. No assistance was offered, and the unfortunate souls were left on the slopes with inevitable death the consequence. It is a case of 'every man for himself.' A walk past a dying climber to fulfil a dream. Where is the morality in this scenario? But it can be argued that there is no place for morality above 8,000 m.

Often stricken climbers are beyond help.

But are they? There is the incredulous example of Beck Weathers who was left for dead on the south col after the tragic descent in 1996. Miraculously he was not dead and he staggered into camp the following day after spending the night out in the open in a raging gale. He was horrendously frost-bitten, but he did survive. Doctors could give no explanation as to how he managed to live through the storm.

For a detailed account of his ordeal see 'Left for Dead' Beck Weathers. (Warner books)

So just why did those poor souls die a monstrous death on the sometimes-friendly plateau of Cairngorm and Ben Macdui?

Even before the disaster there had been calls for the removal of several mountain shelters. The shelter on the summit of Carn Dearg, approximately one mile to the north west of the main summit of Ben Nevis (GR 158718), was removed. A similar fate befell the basic shelter in Coire Leis at the head of Allt a' Mhuilinn (GR 174714). One of the reasons given for the removal was the fact that they were often buried in snow and

extremely difficult to locate. The argument progressed that fruitless time spent trying to locate them might better be used on an attempt to descend to safety.

In 1971 was it the fact that bothies did exist that led to the diabolical chain of events and ultimate death?

This might be the poignant clue. If the youngsters on the Cairngorm plateau had not planned an emergency contingency, based on high altitude bothy stopover, their priceless energies in time of awesome need might well have been used up on rapid and expeditious descent.

Once again it is easy to make conjectures whilst sitting in front of a warm fire in our living rooms. Very few people have really experienced the full horrors of a Scottish blizzard. What was it really like up there on the plateau when those poor young girls were fighting for their lives?

How much time was spent on the search for shelter?

Were they hopelessly lost and just what was going on through the mind of the unfortunate leader who now held the massive burden of responsibility.

We shall probably never know and from my few experiences of similar conditions I would never dream of asking poor Cathy what thought processes she might have been going through.

So just what has the climber lost on the high ground of Scotland?

Much.

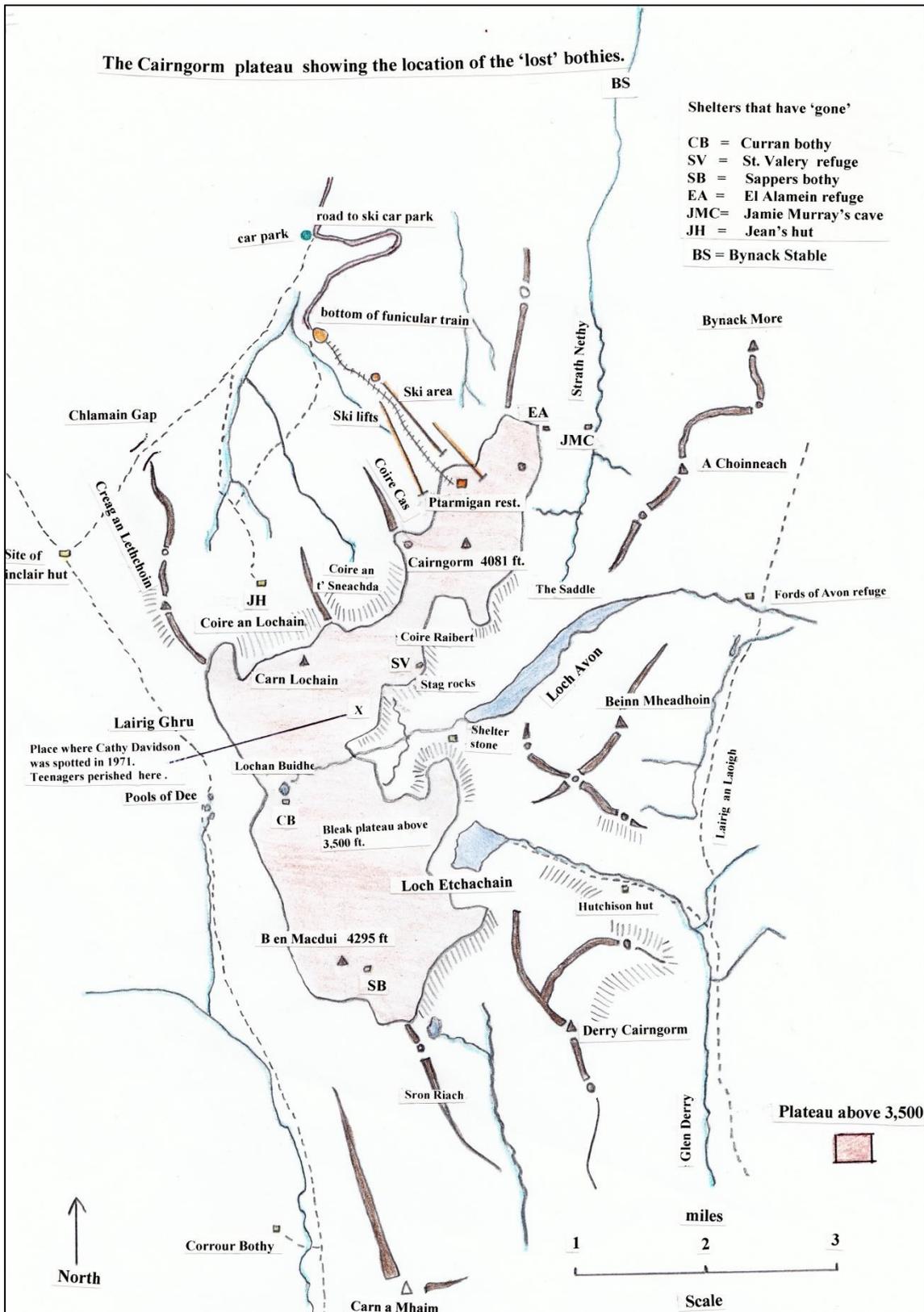


Figure 59: Cairngorm plateau showing the location of the lost bothies

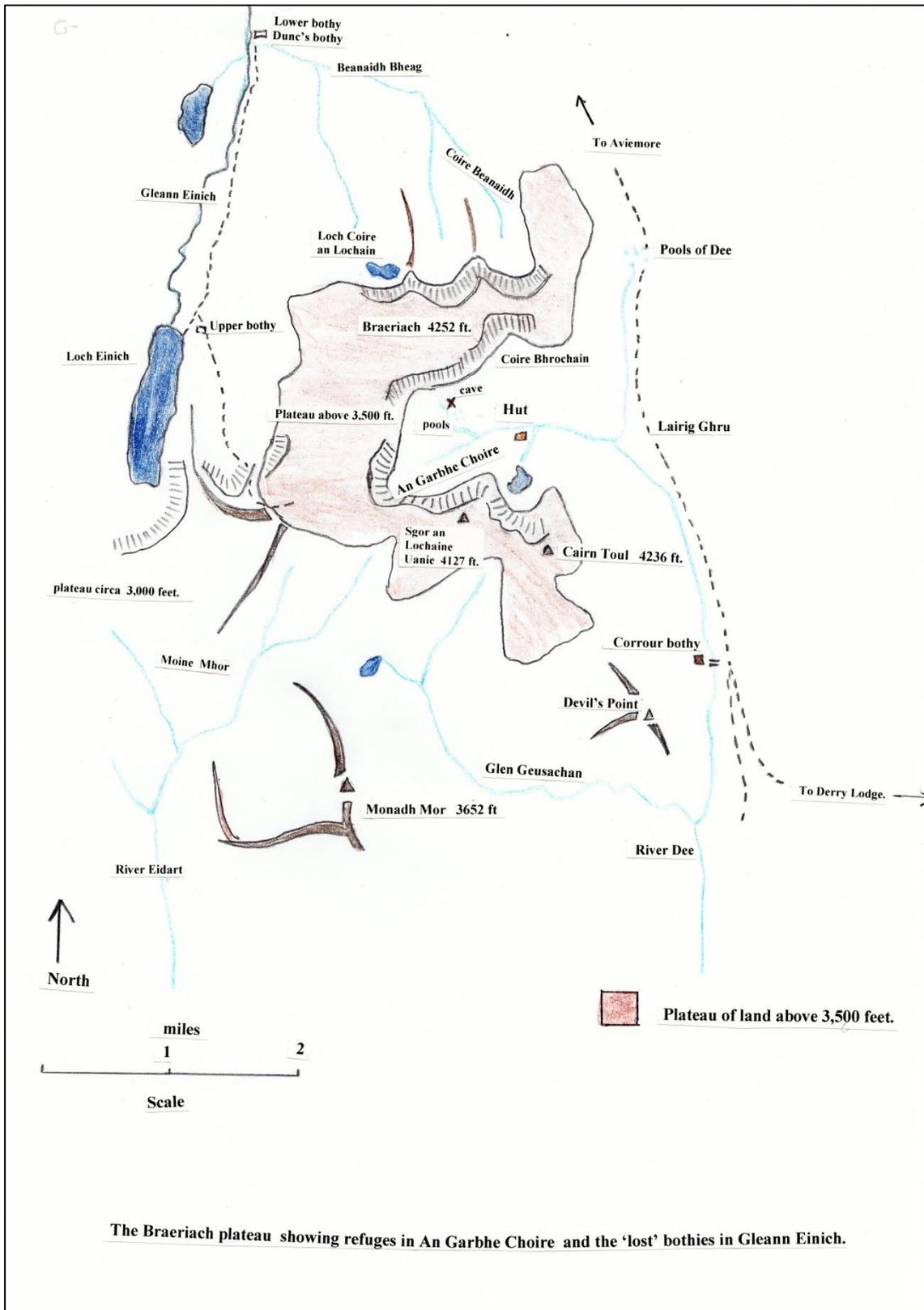


Figure 60: The Braeriach plateau
Showing the refuges in An Garbhe Choire and the lost bothies in Glenn Einich

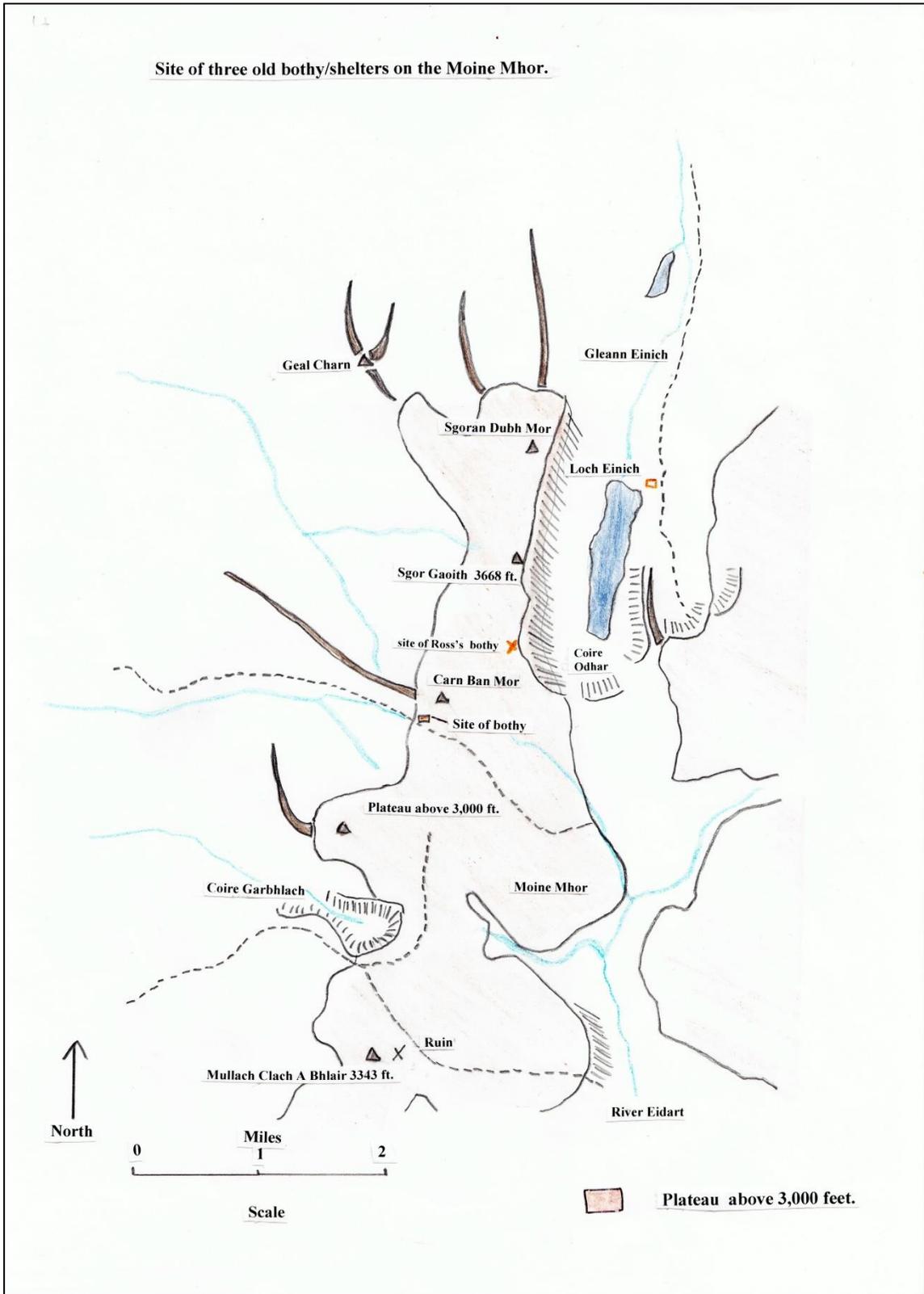


Figure 61: Site of the 3 old bothy /shelters on the Moine Mhor

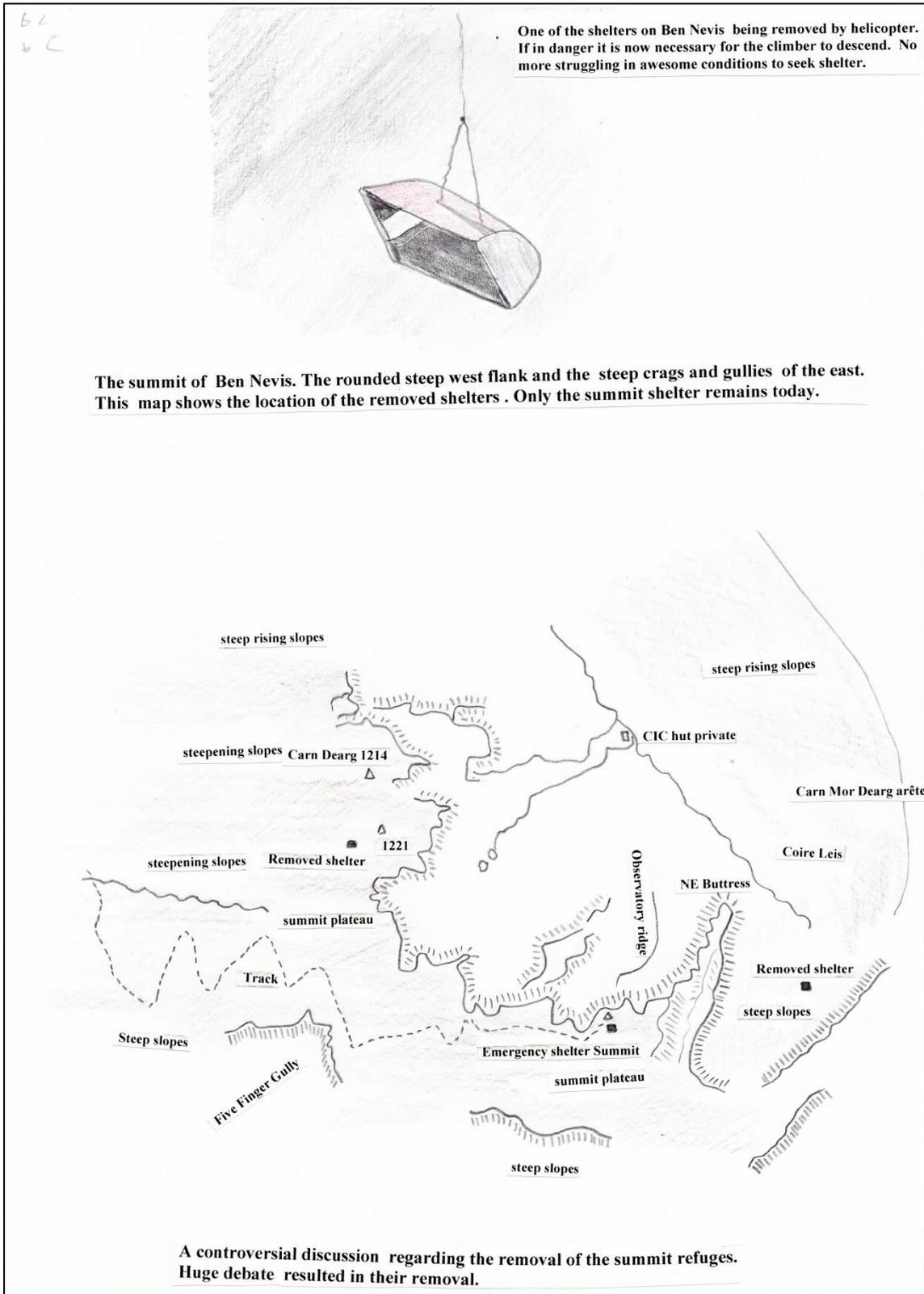


Figure 62: Controversy regarding the removal of the summit refuges
A huge debate resulted in their removal

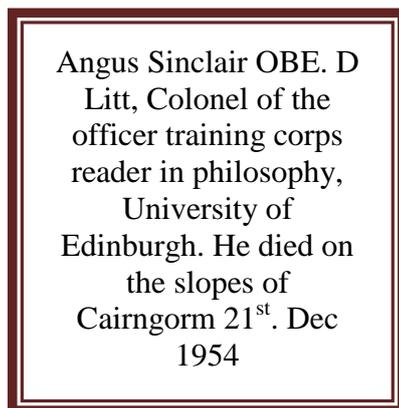
The Cairngorms have suffered more than most places. The following illustrates this fact.

**Sinclair Memorial
Hut**

36

959037

1957-1991. The bothy was constructed in memory of Angus Sinclair who died a horrible death in the Cairngorms in 1954. A plaque on a stone explains this succinctly.



My memories are very distant. I can only say that I always found the bothy cold, gloomy and almost soulless. It was constructed in a strategic position and was placed on a concrete base. The walls were made of pre-cast concrete blocks. From my memory there were two rooms and I can vaguely think of several items of basic furniture. I returned in 2011 to see just what remained as I knew it had been demolished in 1991. This was a week that had been promised to bring heatwave weather. Not where I was. I left Corroun at 10 am and by the time I reached the pools of Dee it was raining and quite cold. 90 degrees+ down south, miserable and gloomy in the Lairig Ghru. All that was left of the Sinclair hut was a concrete base. The place was as morbid as I remembered.

St Valery's refuge

36

001022

Originally situated at 1060 ft. it was a tiny storm refuge measuring 8x5x5 feet. It was situated amongst rocks at the east end of a small flat grassy shelf east of where the broad ridge from the top of the Coire an t-Sneachda cliffs ended at Stag Rocks. It was immediately west of a tiny tor. It was built in 1962 mainly for climbers on the Loch Avon cliffs. It was made up of small pieces of local stone and turf. Small pieces of framework held it all together. It was very hard to locate, especially in thick weather. In fact I never found it, although I did not need to, as the weather was good when I was there. I had other things to occupy me. I wish I had because after the disaster of 1971 this bothy was doomed. It was removed with the assistance of the Royal Navy, the police and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland in 1975.

Eventually I did find the location and discovered a simple plaque to indicate where the shelter had once stood.

It is said that in its hey day a long pole projected from the roof with a bell that 'jingled' in the wind to tell of its existence.

El Alamein refuge**36****015054**

Whereas St Valery's refuge and the Curran bothy were dismantled El Alamein still survives. It was intended to be situated on the plateau edge just above the sloping grassy Coire na Spreidhe. It was in fact built a little beneath this little coire on the steep boulder strewn slopes of Stath Nethy. It was intended as a storm refuge and originally a line of cairns led a weary traveller to the safety of its protection. After the disaster of 1971, whilst other bothies 'met their fate,' El Alamein was left untouched.

There is a stone embedded in the wall of the shelter that reads "El Alamein refuge 1963" It has the badge of the 51st Highland Division.

The bothy was built by artificer apprentices from HMS Caledonia Rosyth led by CSM Jim Curran Royal Marines. It is constructed on a concrete base and heavy iron panels form a frame for the compact structure of granite boulders There is an apex roof in which it is just possible to stand. The whole structure is right on the edge of a severe drop down to the valley below. The shelter is 3ft. by 6 ft

So many people have found this bothy difficult to locate and that was the same for me. Possibly this is why it still survives when other more accessible bothies disappeared. 15 years ago I saw it as a pile of stones (from above) and noted that the shelter was very 'airy'. Gaps in the walls and parts of the roof missing made this a very doubtful shelter. The interior was a dirt floor with a scrap metal bench along one side.

I located the inscription and was happy to sit and think of all the others who had come before me even if my mountain ramblings had begun before it had been constructed.

Bynack Stable**36****021105**

Blown to oblivion in January 2005.

Sappers bothy**36****991988**

On one of my ascents of Ben Macdui I noticed menacing clouds building up to the west. Visibility was decreasing by the minute and I was desperate to reach the summit cairn and negotiate my descent. Just when I thought I had reached the top I came across a large construction (ruin) with part standing walls but no roof. Very shortly after I reached the obvious summit with its triangulation column and view indicator. The ruined building intrigued me, and I determined to find all the details I could.

It was indeed a building, and by the 20th century was known as Sappers bothy. It dated back to the early 1800's. Britain was in the process of being mapped for the first time properly. The triangulation survey commenced in 1802 and went on until 1852 when results were published. Survey positions were most ideally situated on top of high ground such as mountains or hills so that the survey could be more accurate. Also it involved heavy cumbersome equipment and because of potential fickle weather long periods at altitude had to be negotiated. In order to make the most of any good weather soldiers of the ordnance survey set up encampments on the top of many hills. Sometimes these would be tents but often turf or stone constructions were utilised. Occasionally tarpaulin was spread across the walls to make the structure weatherproof. Chimney stacks would also be built to provide the necessary fires for heating and

cooking. On Ben Macdui ponies carried equipment up the slopes including fuel food and other supplies. Possibly between 6 and 12 men would have occupied this 'residence' just yards away from the second highest mountain in Britain.

Today all that remains are walls that stand about five feet high with half a gable end. Signs of an original fireplace can still be seen.

This would afford some shelter, but you would have to be in a desperate state to consider this course of action.

Jamie Murrays cave

36

023055

I have never found this somewhat basic shelter. I Cannot say I tried very hard when superb mountaintops were calling me upwards. It is situated on the west side of Garbh Allt about 2km north of the Saddle. It is a meagre shelter under a big stone. Possible shelter for three.

Jeans hut

36

981034

A famous refuge with a lot of history. It was first erected in Coire Cas before the development of the ski centre caused its move to Coire an Lochain. My memories are somewhat dim, and I know I never saw the bothy in its original location. The whole business of memory is a strange phenomenon. I served 2 years on an aircraft carrier through some of the most significant events of the 1960's. The departure from Aden, the Nigerian civil war, conflicts in the Middle East and so very many more. Yet I can hardly remember any of it as I think back. This is even more mysterious as I was an avid recorder of my role within the events. I did not know the original hut, but I can just remember the second placement. Jeans hut was originally gifted by Dr. Alasdair Smith in memory of his daughter who died in a skiing accident in 1948. It was built in 1951 where the white lady shieling now stands. All the materials were carried up from Glenmore lodge. This was hard graft and many volunteers were co-erced into action. It was a nice hut with an apex roof and a porch. It was made up of prefabricated wooden panels on a solid concrete foundation base.

When the ski area expanded it was moved to its second position (GR 981034) and this is where I can remember seeing the hut. Jeans hut was a useful base for winter climbers who used as their playground the cliffs and crags of Carn Lochain. The hut was furnished with a three-layered wooden bunk bed that could easily sleep 10+ There was a table and a bench. I can remember a food cupboard that housed left over supplies from past visitors. Not unlike youth hostels were a variety of items are left by departing guests. Whilst I was there the bothy was very popular and almost always had resident 'guests.' Popularity and the fact that no-one was directly responsible for its upkeep was part of the problem. The disaster of 1971 had raised huge controversy over the role of high mountain bothies. Jean's hut survived but by 1983 it was looking very 'tired' and even shabby. The final blow came in the 1980's when 3 students perished in a blizzard whilst looking for the shelter of the hut. Jean's hut was to go the way of Curran and St. Valery's. It was demolished in 1986

I still remember the controversy of this raging debate.

I discovered an interesting contribution from a contemporary magazine. The Climber May 1985 put this view forward via the readers letters section.

“The Scottish Sports Council and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland are very obviously and very forcefully trying to ‘steam roller’ the removal of the dilapidated mountain refuge. (Jeans hut) The SPC who have for the past few years been responsible for the hut (without success) now want the burden of the hut ‘off their back.’ The easiest way out for them is to have it demolished. The MCS took their stand on the subject after a vote cast at their Annual General Meeting, when only a fraction of their membership was present. How representative of their members is their support for the demolition of the hut.

I live locally to the Northern Corries of Cairngorm and either work or ‘play’ in those corries 6 days a week. I therefore come into contact with a vast number of mountaineers, the majority of whom ‘I may say,’ are not in favour of the removal of the hut. There is no question that something must be done about the condition of the existing building but to put a deadline on its future by early summer 1985 is absolutely ridiculous. It also appears that if the retention of it is to be left to the rescue services, this is bound to put strain on an already overworked facility.

The Highlands and Islands Development Board are the owners of the estate on which the hut stands. Will they not do something to help the situation? The estate ranger has already indicated his willingness to maintain a new hut were it built.

Has the Local Planning Authority been asked as to their viewpoint on a new building?

I have had access to most of the visitor’s log books from Jeans Hut for the past 5 years. Thousands of people and hundreds of clubs and organisations have used the hut over this period.

Please do not allow the bulldozing of this issue or the hut.

Graham F Clark, Nethybridge.

Correspondents on this issue do seem to favour retaining the hut. Editor.

It was all to no avail. The hut is no more. All that can be seen of it today are several metal rings that used to hold the bothy down.

Lochan Buidhe or Curran bothy

36

981034

This was the scene of the horrendous disaster in 1971. I have written about this several times in my account as it is so very important. I consider the most important detail now is to attempt a critique of events and outcome.

Curran was a metal construction covered by boulders and measured 12ft. by 7 ft. It was not a true bothy in the sense of the word but more an emergency shelter that had been built without consent in 1967. It was situated at high altitude on the south shore of Lochan Feithe Buidhe. I can remember it as a wide boulder construction with a small red chimney projecting from the roof. My visit was on a calm sunny day in summer and

I hardly gave the bothy a second glance. No need for shelter in these conditions. How different it was for the poor schoolgirls in 1971.

Often the bothy was filled with blown snow and on occasions it was almost totally covered by snowdrifts according to the direction of the wind. But this was not always the case and it is vital that we look with more detail into the conditions on that fatal day. It was certainly true that the weather was worsening, and probably reaching an awesome level. However, Ben Beattie did manage to find the bothy and by 3.30 pm had his group safely enclosed within. Cathy was not so fortunate although it is tragic to realise that she was only some 500 yards short of the bothy when she made the fatal decision to undertake a bivouac. The big (and unanswered question) is just how bad was the weather at this moment (circa 4.30 pm) Some have reported that it was bad but not that bad. It only really deteriorated during the night and the next day it turned with a vengeance. So just what could Cathy have done. If only she had continued for another twenty minutes they would have reached the bothy. Or they could have turned back on their outward route and negotiated descent as soon as possible. This is easy for us to say but the most important fact was that shelter or retreat were absolutely vital

This is where my experience of a cold weather warfare course might have some input. We had been trained in the art of Arctic survival and after undergoing brushwood bivvys and then tent accommodation we were taught the aspects of a night in a snow hole or more realistically igloo. They turned out to be by far the most comfortable and warm shelter available. Constructed properly survival in even bitter temperatures is possible . Of course this is the clue. A good snow hole requires solid snow. Powder snow is next to useless and if the party is already tired and suffering from hypothermia the problems increase dramatically.

The ‘if only ‘and ‘what ifs’ in this scenario will abound forever. It is so easy for us to speculate in the here and now. Cathy had to act in the there and then. Of course they wanted to survive but so too did Anne Tewnion and her group where four strong men perished in the glen above Loch Ossian. The 5 men on Jocks Road did not want to die but they did. Baird and Barrie met their horrible end on the blizzard swept slopes north of Braeriach. They all might have done things differently, but they did not. Death was the outcome. Cathy’s poor schoolgirls also met their premature fate.

In June 1975 the bothy was demolished probably on the grounds that it lulled the unwary into terminal danger.

There has been so much written about this disaster. It might be interesting to consult Climber 12 (1973) or read ‘A bobby on Ben Macdui ‘by John Duff.

**Fuaren Diotach or
Ross’s bothy**

36

902976

From the head of Loch Einich a stalkers path climbs A Phocaid to the Fuaran Diotach or Breakfast Well. There used to be a hut here known as Ross’s bothy named after Duncan Ross the Invereshie watcher. Almost nothing remains. Just a pile of low wall stones. Keep moving for shelter!

Carn Ban Mor

36

890968

Originally this was an old wooden shelter. Nearly 50 years ago it was in a collapsed state. There is no trace today. It was known as Margaret's Kist which could be a chest or coffin. The kist is said to be the place where Margaret, a jilted shepherdess, half insane with sorrow succumbed to exhaustion after wandering for days over the hills without food or shelter. This could be the coffin version. According to the chest version she used to hide the Cairngorm stones she had found in this hut.

East of cairn on Mullach Clach a' Bhlair

43

885927

Total ruin. Originally a roofless shelter at the rock outcrop of Clach a' Bhlair 200m east of summit cairn.

Lower bothy in Glen Einich

36

925029

Also known as Dunc's bothy after Duncan Cameron a watcher of Rothiemurchus. It was situated near the confluence of the Beanaidh Bheag and Am Beanaidh. It consisted of a bothy and stable of Rothiemurchus fir and was simply furnished. This bothy played a big part in the tragedy of Baird and Barry in 1928. They had set out from Corroul but perished in the glen. Baird almost made it to this lower bothy. The bothy was blown down in a storm in 1944 and never replaced.

Upper bothy in Glen Einich

36

075972

It stood at the foot of the stalkers path leading up Coire Dhondail. As Baird and Barry were dying in the horrendous blizzard of January 1928 Seton Gordon was in residence within. He might have been instrumental in their possible rescue. More than likely they were beyond help. In 1944 the bothy was burnt to the ground by vandals. There were later attempts to have the bothy rebuilt as a memorial to Eric Beard, but permission was refused.

Mountaineering club huts in Scotland

I have occasionally stayed in several of these huts but have to admit I much prefer the basic and freedom and aspiring character of the ordinary bothy or 'doss.

This is my listing of the club huts that I know of. Further details will be found from the clubs that use and maintain these huts. This is where modern technology will assist. I am heartily sick of an infernal advert that is almost consuming my television set. It is only compensated by the fact that it is introduced by a charming young girl. Otherwise Trivago dot com can go boil its head.

If you wish to utilise these huts go on line and initiate your enquiry.

Better still do what I did back in the 50's and 60's. Go out there and find your own 'salvation' with nature.

Ling Hut	958562
Invercroft	149559
Glen Licht House	004173
Naismiths Hut	216118
Strawberry Cottage	132207
The Smiddy. Glen Etive	116455
Coruisk Hut	487197
Glen Brittle Memorial Hut	412217
Smiddy Dundonnell	095877
The cabin	638944
Milehouse	839043
Mill Cottage	847047
Muir Cottage of Inveray	078896
Raeburn	636909
Inverdardran Cottage	392251
Alex Macintyre Memorial Hut	044612
Blackrock Cottage	268530
C.I.C hut. Ben Nevis	167722
Clash Gour	256424
Inbhirfhaolain	158507
Laganarbh	221559
Riase	271811
Steall	177684
Manse Barn Onich	031611
Braedownie	286758

That is about it. I still consider the years of the 1960's and 70's by far the best. Today there are so many places for you to find shelter. Bothy, doss, tent, howff, B&B, hotel and the back of your car. I have often slept wild in the heather (pre or post midge only)

It is all part of the 'fun' although I must admit that as the years pass by luxury is just a little more appreciated.

My last word on this subject.

I once took a group of upper 6th formers to the Lakes in a mini bus and on arrival at Coniston we discovered a paddy field as the rain had been falling for a constant five days. We were resilient (well I was) so we drove over to the Old DG in the Langdale Valley. Once gathered within we enjoyed the warmth of the log fire and the ambience of what is still one of the most famous bars in any climbing territory. Anywhere. Six hours

later as closing time rapidly approached the awesome question of accommodation reared its head and questions were being asked. All our camping gear had been dropped off at Coniston and eight pints of Old peculiar made it totally impossible for our return in any circumstances whatsoever.

Sir had the perfect solution.

This was to be an initiative test. After all they were all 18+ and some nineteen. They also had not been drinking ribena.

“Go forth and find your place of rest” came the command from a merry and mellow Sir. I ‘bagged the back seat of the mini bus and my daughter took the middle one. The perks of leadership?

Others went where I knew not. The next morning was a revelation as we all gathered and swapped tales of our adventures. Two had booked a room at a ridiculous price and four others bunked in to help share the overall cost. One enlightened lad found sanctuary in a nearby barn whilst two utilised the warmth of the nearby camp site drying room. One lad ‘copped off’ with a climbing ‘space hopper’ and shared her tent and two of the girls played the sympathy card by knocking on a local farm door and blinking their eyelashes in order to gain refuge from the incessant rain.

I was so proud of them all and Scafell Pike fell to our boots the next day with tales of improvisation ringing off the adjacent slopes.

I can seriously say that the students were still talking about our epic day some decade later.

This would not happen in 2016. But the 1970’s were a different age ???

Go out and enjoy Scotland. You can do it.

Epilogue and a look into the future

What might the future hold? Of course we do not know what is going to happen in future times. We do not know for certain what is going to happen in the next moment. If we did, horse racing and the lottery would become immediately redundant. During my many climbs I often thought long and hard about time travel, causality and the ongoing consequences of our daily actions. It may have helped me overcome endless hours of slog and toil on a scree covered slope but of answers I found none.

I think forward to the time when I shall not be able to climb. Of course it will come. I feel it will be like turning out a light. Will there be any future? Something similar had happened before. Being a very useful cricketer I always recognised that some day would come when the game would be history for me. Also the day when I would no longer don my skis to tackle the freshly snow covered Alpine slopes. I was fully aware that one can go on too long. I continually think of that fantastic athlete Muhammad Ali. Without doubt once the greatest boxer imaginable, but near the end a tame shadow of the fighter of his youth. The great Wally Hammond a shadow of his former self on England’s first post war tour of Australia. Time and the bell had taken away his youth. This was the image that persuaded me not to take the often-frequent route of ‘playing down’ the teams. In cricket I left at 40 when a rotund medium pacer hit me on the nose. Once I would have hooked him for six. Not for me the step down to the Sunday team.

But there are other things to do in the mountains. So many glens to explore, bothies to visit and company to share; There are superb mountains in remote areas that Munro 'baggers' sometimes neglect. Who could argue with the quality and setting of Suilven and Stac Pollaidh?

But eventually it will all be over, but then we are all going to be 'over'. It comes to everyone. We share but a fragment of immeasurable time.

Once again, the gap between good and evil; kind and cruel; brilliance and stupidity; haves and have nots must be eradicated. Change must happen.

And here we are again with this magic word; change.

Everything can change in an instant.

Buhl through his cornice.

Sagan in one moment of sound health, love and comfort saw his life tremble and fall away into oblivion.¹⁹

Bruce Herrod out of the jaws of success let his life thread slip away in an instant of failure.²⁰

The search for 'good' involves so very many factors. Intertwining threads woven together to create the 'whole.'

But what is the whole? Complete! Faultless! Flawless! Unimpaired!

More importantly what is the whole within life?

Good? Perfection? Truth?

Does it exist? Will it exist? Can it ever exist?

All human beings are rational, socialised, constructive and forward moving; each individual has the potential for growth and self-actualisation (Patterson 1986).

Rogers assumes that basic human nature is positive; that there is nothing inherently negative or evil about us. Humans will turn out good and live in ways that enhance both themselves and society. In his eyes basic human nature can be trusted.²¹

¹⁹ Carl Sagan the famous scientist and author died far too young in the year 1996. In his last book he describes the moment that he discovered the eventual cause of his demise. He was in apparent good health with thriving children and a career that was flourishing. He wrote that when things are 'going grand' there can often be a real sting in the tail. A climber on a fragile edge will certainly agree with this scenario. One fateful morning he noticed an ugly mark on his arm. A bruise? Maybe. Well black marks cannot be too serious, can they? It was. After routine blood tests it was discovered he had a disease called myelodysplasia. His time was seriously limited. 18 months later he was dead.

²⁰ The death of Bruce Herrod was a tragedy. He was climbing Everest by the south ridge but was seriously behind his two climbing companions. They met him ascending well into the afternoon. Failing to persuade him to descend he continued his ascent alone. He reached the summit very late in the day at 5 PM. seven hours after his companions had summited. From the summit he made contact with base camp over his radio. Coincidentally his girlfriend was on a satellite line from London. She recalled her feelings when she heard that Bruce was on the top of Everest at this late hour. "Fuck. He can't be on the summit this late. It's five fifteen. I don't like this". They talked after a line had been patched through. He seemed okay and stated his desire to get down safely even though he must have been exhausted.

Nobody heard from him again and he became yet another casualty of the disastrous Everest year of 1996. In the following year his body was found entangled in the ropes of the Hillary step. He must have slipped and injured his head. Possibly he just 'ran out of steam' and died on the mountain that became his tomb.

²¹ 3 Views of man Robert D Nye 1975

Freud is less sanguine about the basic nature of the human person. Evil is seen not only as something done by people but as something natural to them. The unconscious is the master of every fate and the captain of every soul.²²

What if Freud has hit the target. Maybe man is basically a savage beast. Without socialisation havoc would reign supreme with everyone attempting to use others for personal sexual and aggressive pleasure. Here is an idea. Strange, haunting and evocative. Maybe there is an infinite hierarchy of universe. Penetrate an electron in our universe and it would reveal itself to be an entire closed universe. Within it are an immense number of other much tinier elementary particles. These themselves are universe at the next level. And so on forever. An infinite downward regression.

And upward as well. Our familiar universe is merely a single elementary particle in the next universe up.²³ Maybe we do flatter ourselves in believing we are 'special'; almost unique. Maybe we are merely an organism in an infinite hierarchy.

I sincerely hope that you will all go out and seek your summits. Do it now. Do not wait. Life is a finite 'commodity'. I am always reminded of a little story that clearly illustrates the importance of quality and not quantity. 'Three very old ladies (or men) sitting in a sheltered home. They are all incontinent and have tubes in just about every orifice. 'Jibbering and jabbering' one suffers from Alzheimer's and the others from Parkinson's. Salivating and slobbering one of them turns to the others and says with poignant meaning. "Just think Mabel. (Fred) If we had smoked cigarettes, drunk alcohol and had sex we would have missed all this." '

In times when hope is a scarce commodity and depression sets in like a swirling mountain mist it is worth remembering that things can also change dramatically for the better. From being lost in a thick murk of cloud and rain a sudden clearing of the skies can tell you all you need to know.²⁴ Light at the end of the tunnel is the corny cliché that fits here. But it is worth considering.

I am convinced you will find the hills supremely rewarding. I suspect you might also 'get hooked' like myself. It will help your fitness levels. It will take you to amazing places. It will teach you to respect and appreciate this special place in which we survive. It might very well teach you to think things through at a level you have not yet acquired.

Maybe you might just find the answers to the myriad of questions that are 'out there.'

Even if you do not maybe it will be fun.

²² Readings in ethical theory p. 572 Wilfred Sellars & John Hospers. Editors. 1952

²³ Cosmos by Carl Sagan p 265-267

²⁴ After their epic conquest of K2 in 1986 disaster struck Kurt Diemberger and Julie Tullis. Another case of climbers reaching the summit far too late in the day. Cloud had slowly turned a day of cobalt blue skies into an evening of mist and murk. On the descent Julie suffered a serious fall that caused them to bivouac high on the mountain slopes. It was imperative that they should reach the camp on the shoulder the next day, but non-existent visibility was preventing them from doing this. Then just as all hope was disappearing a momentary lifting of the clouds gave them a glimpse of the tents down below. It was enough, and they struggled down to the sanctuary of their tent.

Sadly it was not enough for Julie. As they arrived a fearsome storm hit the mountain, and this confined the climbers to the tents for many days. During this time Julie died from her injuries. Alan Rouse was another casualty of this epic rearguard. Kurt Diemberger did manage to struggle down the mountain days later in very poor condition.

The temporary clearing of the clouds might just have saved them both had it not been for the awful storm that came along.

Diemberger did make the most of this momentary visibility.

4. A LIFETIME OF MOUNTAIN RAMBLING

Accident on the Ben

August 1998.

After waiting nearly eight weeks for just a hint of reasonable weather (not much to ask for) three or four days of settled conditions were promised over the bank holiday weekend. Being retired I would not normally go anywhere over that particular period. However, as the Scottish weather had been so fickle during the summer, I made a decision and went for it.

I rose at 4 am on the Saturday and drove direct to Fort William. Arriving at 11 am I had great difficulty locating accommodation and joining the crowds I took the last resort of the visitors centre. The address I was given was that of a bungalow where I had stayed 4 years previously. I had suffered a serious accident to my hand whilst ski-ing in an Arctic blizzard on Aonach Mor. The plastic sleeve of a pommel had sheared off and tore into my glove. Possibly a fair number of strong beers had made me a 'tadge' careless and I nearly lost two fingers in the process. It was so cold the blood from my hand froze as it spurted free into the cold air.

I don't know what the odds were on finding the same room and I suppose I might just have considered the 'fate' factor of what was going to happen the very next day.

Being late on this day I cheated a bit and took the cable car up to 2,000 ft. and commenced the interminable slog up the grassy ski slopes to gain the ridge of Aonach Mor and Aonach Beag. The views were superb and it was a wonderful place to be. A few beers in Fort William and a Chinese meal sealed off a good day; more so considering I had driven 400 miles as well.

Sunday dawned wonderfully fine and clear. Ben Nevis was the target. I had climbed the Ben before and considered this seriously. However, linked to the Ben is another Munro Carn Mor Dearg joined by possibly the finest ridge in mainland Britain. This offers more than a bit of exposure and care is required on the sharp and steep route. So a re-ascend and another Munro it was to be.

It was amazingly hot on the lower slopes and the midge was having a 'field day' in the hot still air. I was taking a slanting rise aiming to gain the ridge between Carn Dearg Meadhonach and Carn Mor Dearg. I was moving very slowly in the heat but even so I passed 4 others finding the grind of ascent even more tiresome. It was a man and his wife with daughter and husband. The slope went on and on and it was past 2 pm before I reached the top. The views were magnificent. The cliffs and crags of Ben Nevis captured the eye across Allt a Mhuilinn. I waited for the others to catch up, but it was almost a further hour before they struggled onto the airy summit cairn. By then it was quite cool as the sun had disappeared behind some annoying high cloud. It was in fact past 3 pm before we tackled the hardest part of the day's climb. Seeking warmth I was out in front making my usual speedy progress.

Age comes to us all. We often foolishly refuse to accept this. Footballers must one day hang up their boots. Skiers must one day say farewell to the piste. Climbers should realise that the body can no longer be subjected to the 'bashing' that youth could shrug off.

I was moving far too quickly, putting far too much faith on precarious footholds. Even attempting to admire the crags and ridges of the Ben whilst still on the move.

It had to happen.

I slipped forwards and my speed exasperated the fall. As there were very steep drops to either side I can still remember a thought process to fall directly to the front. This was probably just a fluke. My fall was considerable, and I had taken all the skin off my lower arms and punctured the palm of my left hand. Blood was spurting all over the place which was my first necessity. In a state of heavy daze I sucked away at the flow of blood. It was some minutes later that I violently coughed and blood was projected all over my fleece. Moments of panic with a fear of internal injury were unfounded. The blood was merely that which I had sucked off my grazed arms. After ten minutes it was under control and I now discovered I had badly damaged my knee. A dislocated shoulder did not help although a sharp move to the left allowed the joint to slip back into place. As the shock of my fall passed away the pain in my shoulder became quite excruciating. The others soon arrived and were obviously gravely concerned. For me there were not too many decisions to make. We were more or less exactly halfway round the circuit. I certainly did not fancy the slog back down the slope that had taken me some three hours to 'get up'. The others were a little uncertain about the ridge ahead but the weather was superb, and the top of the Ben was so tempting although still some thousand feet above. Once moving, my knee was not too much of a problem but my shoulder was almost useless. As it was my right knee and left shoulder all my balance was out of 'synch' but scrambling along this airy ridge would make most people forget even a raging toothache.

I climbed on alone with the others following some distance behind. Progress was slow, and my mind was 'churning away'.

Everything can change in an instant. A heartbeat. In life you can be blissfully happy and blessed with good health and happiness. Yet, however strong the foundation of this well-being is based it still trembles on an edge as fragile as any snow cornice adorning an icy ridge. Just as a climber can put a foot momentarily wrong and pay the ultimate price of oblivion so too can our lives slip away from the comfortable plain of happiness. Hermann Buhl my boyhood hero, lone conqueror of Nanga Parbat, stepped through a cornice and in an instant his life was history. He should not have done so but he did. Our existence is a tenuous strand that holds everything together. And how frail this strand can be. The huge part that a freak of luck can play in the whole issue. Imagine two climbers both massively experienced and possessing all the latest in modern equipment having an accident. One climber escapes from a hell of snow and tumbling ice. He struggles and crawls and makes it down the hill.

His friend is not so lucky. He is dug out of an icy tomb days later. Unmarked, perfectly preserved; but very very dead. The slope was not particularly steep. The snow was in good condition. It was not a dangerous place to be. Why did one live whilst the others life was torn away?

Maybe he was just damned unlucky. Experience is vital but outside elements can dilute experience. Sometimes they can overcome all your experience and bring you down. Whilst young and inexperienced most climbers take 'dodgy' risks; but mostly we get away with it. But accidents know no boundaries. With all the experience in the world a bit of bad luck or a misjudgement makes it all meaningless. You can break a thousand

rules whilst gaining experience and get away with it. You live on. But break just one rule in the wrong place and all your experience becomes worthless.

I climbed on thinking about my foolish slip and the pain and discomfort it had brought me. I was fifty-four and in future crazy fast descents were off the agenda. For now it was too late. After two hours of very hard work I reached the summit plateau and enjoyed the fantastic view denied me on my first ascent 21 years previous. Even with my injuries I was ten minutes in front of my new friends and whilst waiting my leg really began to seize up. This was a growing worry because I could see the coast down below and it was a long way away. As my car was parked on the loch side every foot of Ben's 4400 had to be descended. Leaving the summit at 6.30 pm the struggle down the slopes was harder than I had anticipated. I made another miscalculation when I chose the direct path rather than following the long zig zags. I had one nasty fall when my leg gave way and I badly damaged my thigh muscle but as the hours passed height was lost and by 9 we had reached the lochan. This left just 1,000 feet of mostly tufty grass to negotiate before reaching the forest track and relative comfort. It was at this stage we must have looked a very sorry group. Even with my 'gammy' leg I was out front trying to find the best route in the rapidly approaching darkness whilst Julie had almost collapsed with exhaustion and was being half carried down by her husband and father. We reached my car in darkness and I decided that as the pubs were shut to pay a visit to Fort William hospital and get cleaned up. I was in a right old mess. It was almost eerie sitting in the same room I had visited previously when an obliging nurse cleared my hand wound of pieces of ski lift plastic.

The next day my knee was like a huge balloon and walking was impossible. However, it was my shoulder that hurt most. I decided to drive home and this was almost as painful as my long descent. My arm was so immobile I could not even push home a cassette.

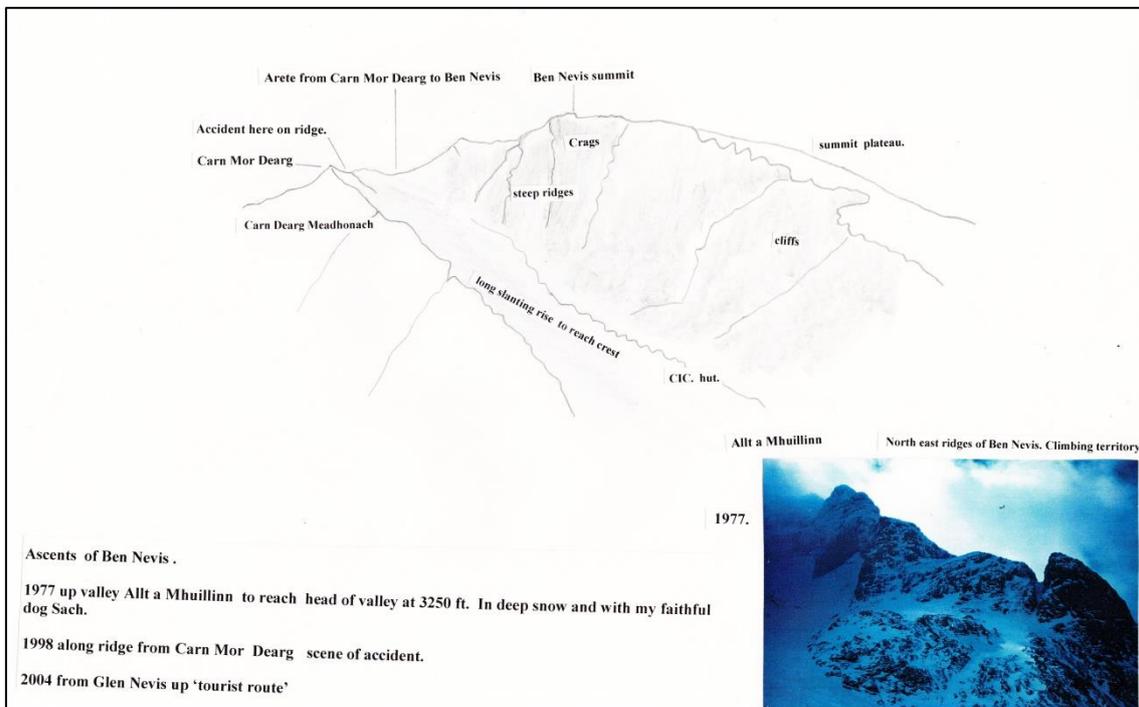


Figure 63: An ascent of Ben Nevis

On return to Liverpool I attended the x ray department at Fazakerley to be sure no major damage had been done. As I was sitting awaiting the result I was surprised when an orderly came up to me and insisted I got into a wheelchair. I was immediately taken down to another ward and put right in front of the queue. By now I was really worried. When the doctor saw me he started to manipulate my knee asking me if each twist and turn hurt. I answered in the negative and he was amazed. He said I should have been screeching in pain. What had happened was the x ray had shown serious scar damage on the picture. This was the result of a ski-ing accident some five years ago. My recent accident had done no 'new' damage. I immediately commenced a severe course of swimming therapy building up strength in my knee. The shoulder still hurts twelve years later.

An Sgarsoch (but not Carn an Fhidhleir)

October 15th 2006 63rd birthday

In 1924 a chain of events was set into motion that created one of the most intriguing mysteries that has ever graced the mountain scene. This was the tantalising disappearance of Mallory and Irvine on the upper slopes of the world's highest peak. For 75 years the debate raged as to whether they had reached the top in the hours after they were seen for the last time high on the northern ridge of the mountain.

Odell had spotted them through a temporary break in the clouds. For just a few moments he witnessed the images that captivated the mountain world for decades. Striving boldly towards the summit they were soon enveloped in cloud and their lives lost forever.

An Sgarsoch is no Everest and I am certainly no Mallory but the concept of turning back is something all mountain climbers will come across at some time in their travels. If at the critical point of Mallory's ascent he had turned back it is very probable he would have survived. We shall never know. Whatever the pressures and thought processes he went through it is very understandable why he may not have taken the prudent decision. He had dedicated his life to the task of climbing Everest and was fully aware that it was now or never. To turn back at that stage would have been an impossibility.

I wonder how many Munro 'baggers' have climbed An Sgarsoch and Carn an Fhidhleir on separate occasions. I did; it was one of the very few times I turned my back on an ascent.

These mountains are very remote peaks situated in one of the wildest and inaccessible parts of the Highlands. They are situated at the centre of the headwaters of the rivers Feshie, Geldie and Tarf.

October 15th 2006 was my birthday. The morning was somewhat dull, but I hoped for a brightening as the sun rose. Being my birthday I had afforded the luxury of a B&B and a hearty breakfast. Unfortunately this necessitated a slightly later start than I would have liked. My bicycle was to be of enormous benefit.

The area I was to move into was sparse of any habitation. Many old buildings and ruins but acres and acres of desolate featureless terrain.

I cycled out of Linn of Dee and quickly reached White Bridge. Here I went south west and reached a desolate bothy at the joining of the Geldie Burn and Allt an t-seilich. The

track was great for cycling. The surface was flat and the gradient gentle. All along the Geldie Burn I made good time even if some of the streams posed a crossing problem. 1km from the final crossing accessing the ruins of the Geldie Lodge I left my bike. I needed to take off my boots for this last crossing as the stream was wide and almost knee deep. I was now well out on a limb and in very remote country being some 8 miles from my starting point. The cloud level had not risen and the way forward to An Sgarsoch looked 'gloomy'.

Time was 'marching on' and this was October.

Geldie lodge is a ruin but there is a wooden shed (bothy?) attached to a crumbling wall that would provide basic shelter (very basic) if required in an emergency.

In 1971 after the fateful storm that claimed 6 young lives on the Cairngorms a keeper on Mar lodge estate was caught on the Geldie – Feshie watershed. He was unable to reach even the safety of these ruined walls. Death was the consequence. A proposal had been put forward to use stone from the ruin to construct a pony stable and small two bunk bothy. The estate was to provide the materials and volunteers the necessary labour. Sadly the inconsiderate behaviour of a group of walkers alienated the estate owners and negotiations bore no fruitful ending. This remains an area of severe remoteness.

I left the ruined lodge and continued up a track that passed north of Sgarsoch Bheag 774m. I was continually looking at my watch. After coming so far it would be ludicrous not to reach the top of at least one Munro; however, both summits were looking doubtful. For some reason the 'bad angel' was hanging around me.

I thought back to the Everest scenario in 1924. Did Mallory have such thoughts as he approached and possibly climbed the second step. The summit was now so very close. A lifetime ambition so very near. In 1996 a 2 pm turnaround time approached with very many climbers spread out below and above the Hillary step. How could they turn back? The weather was still okay. It might have been late in the day but the 'goal' was within reach. They continued and we all know the consequence of this decision.

I headed for the bealach between An Sgarsoch and Sgarsoch Bheag. The going was not easy, pathless and with continual depressions in the heather and peat slopes. As I moved up into the cloud I walked on a compass bearing that should have brought me directly to the summit cairn. The slope was long and seemed to go on forever but eventually it eased and to my delight I arrived exactly at the large cairn on An Sgarsoch 1006m. Visibility was about 30 yards and it was cold and damp. I used my mobile phone to tell my daughter Louise where I was as no-one knew my whereabouts. In this remote terrain a somewhat sobering thought

This was the 'crunch'. Misty and murky. Uncomfortable and damp. Daylight rapidly disappearing as the afternoon wore on. Carn an Fhidhleir was very accessible but even so it was probably a good hour away. Also it would mean I would be walking away from my route back. Decision time? After all the effort of the long ride in I considered these two Munros as peaks particularly well deserved. To come back again and undergo the long approach would be very galling, but this was not a race. Not a military operation. The mountain would always be here, and other approach routes would certainly offer a fuller insight into this remote part of Scotland. It may not be the most impressive mountain scenery, with regard to crag and cliff, but there is so much to see that obsessive peak 'bagging' does not allow. The Tarf bothy, the long Glen Feshie approach and excellent general walking on mossy turf.

I commenced my descent. A variation no less. The Allt Coire an t-seilich led me back to the ruined lodge where in semi darkness I congratulated myself on a wise decision.

I managed to wade the river without taking off my boots and now discovered the true value of a mountain bike. It was a superb benefit. I raced down the slopes in the gathering murk and reached White Bridge in less than thirty minutes. A fantastic way to end the day but I still had regrets as to not 'bagging' the second Munro. It may well be that this will be the last of my Munro ascents. Along with Inaccessible Pinnacle Munro himself did not climb this one.

At this point I think it might be helpful to give the idea of turning back a little more consideration.

I have rarely done it but fully realise the need for sensible decisions when in the mountain environment. Unfortunately many climbers get caught up in the obsessive desire to reach the top. Turn around times are ignored and often common sense 'goes out of the window'.

However, I keep thinking of the sentence "Nothing really of value will ever be gained without often a great deal of effort."

And sometimes real risk.

If you want something really badly you have to push out the limits.

The counter to all this is the list of people who might well be alive today if they had heeded 'common sense' and possibly taken different decisions at certain times.

George Mallory? Julie Tullis? Bruce Herrod? Doug Hansen? Scott Fischer? Pete Boardman? The list is endless.

But then the counter argument tells us that Everest might not have been climbed and Hillary might not have been a hero if the cautious approach had always been taken. How many climbers have really ridden their luck and achieved something they had always wanted. I think it is part of the good side of human nature that certain people are willing to take enormous risks and often be willing to place the most valuable thing they possess on the line.

Their lives.

Also consider this.

People who are cautious or even cosseted in their climbing, like those people sheltered in life, are unable to cope with danger when it comes. It is all part of the process of building up an experience bank.

An Socach (Glen Ey) March 2005

My journeys to Scotland could well be placed into two categories. Wild journeys where I utilise bothies and howffs and often spend the night out high on the hill. Munro bagging becomes the major aim. A second journey takes place when Norma accompanies me. On these trips we stay in 'posh' hotels and almost luxury places. Usually a visit to Glasgow or Edinburgh is 'tagged on' so that an element of shopping can be included. Please do not accuse me of being a chauvinist; like most men I just do not like shopping. The bars and pubs of Glasgow, now that is a different matter. On arrival in the Highlands I then utilise the days for further inroads into the Munros.

Norma actually did ascend two Munros and a Corbett but on the occasions I go off climbing she finds other activities too keep her occupied.

The famous Nethybridge hotel was our base for four days and ski-ing at the Lecht provided great fun on one windy afternoon. A drive over to Braemar in awful weather was followed by some serious consideration as to what to do on what day.

Saturday was to be a Munro day.

I spoke to a couple in the Invercauld Arms who had left a route card for An Socach. They were skiers and intended to drive to Glenshee and ski over to the Munro. At 9.30 the road was still closed after night snowfall. I intended to wait for the road to re-open and tackle the mountain via Baddoch Burn. I left after a hearty breakfast and parked up by the plantation near Baddoch. As I 'kitted 'up two girls with skis left for a venture into the valley. It was re-assuring to know others would be in the vicinity as the weather was bitterly cold. Nevertheless, the sky was reasonably clear and it did not deter me. Just before I left a lad from Edinburgh parked up with the same objective after assessing the ski slopes and realising the rising wind would probably mean lifts closing.

As I reached the ruins of Baddoch it was snowing and the wind was strong. I could see the girls ahead of me on the flats as they negotiated the snow on their skis. The track up the valley is a good one (4-wheel drive track) and I made reasonably fast progress. The skies were still cloud covered but there was a slight brightness in the direction I was going. I was looking for the end of the track before I was to make my slanting ascent to the col between the two summits of An Socach.



Figure 64: The track up Baddoch Burn

Deep snow here, masses on the middle slopes and none on the summit plateau because of the horrendous winds

I decided to leave the track when I saw two skiers ascending some two hundred yards behind me. I assumed they were the girls who had left just before me and whom I had passed walking up the valley. I also saw the lad from Edinburgh some ten minutes behind me ascending slowly and not making any progress towards me. I made a direct ascent after reaching complete snow cover and spotted the two skiers again. I eventually reached their tracks and followed across a steep slope with just an occasional concern of avalanche. With what was to follow I noticed that the air was still and I was sweating as I sank my boots into the knee-deep snow to gain good purchase. The lad behind me was some two hundred feet below and seemed to be about to ascend the snow slope. Once I reached the col I caught up with the two skiers who turned out not to be the girls but the couple I had spoken to at the hotel. Looking down the slopes I could see two skiers a long way down. This must have been the girls.

The couple left their skis just after the col, as the plateau was sparse in snow cover. I was about to find out why.

I was now in the lead and ‘cursing’ the fact that the summit cairn was about a mile across this rock covered obstacle at the west end of the summit plateau. Only a few feet higher but Munroists have to get it right.

The wind suddenly hit me with hurricane force. It was a north westerly and the cold was intense. I had read so many times about climbers walking out of calm into the teeth of a hurricane. Baird and Barrie on the Braeriach plateau on route to Gleann Einich. Their epic struggle was rewarded with a slow death near Loch Einich. Mackenzie and Ferrier on their route from the Shelter stone back to Glenmore lodge

And the amazing survival of Anne Tewnion after her four male companions perished above Corroul lodge in 1951.²⁵

The wind was howling in from my right rear and I shuddered at the prospect of the return journey. How could this be so? Just minutes before I was sweating as I slogged up deep snow slopes. I have hardly ever experienced such ferocity of wind and it was difficult to make any progress. At long last I reached the summit cairn and watched as the other two struggled to the top. The wind ‘screamed’ across the plateau and this was no place to linger. Even so the view in all directions was clear. The journey back to the col was horrendous. On several occasions I had to lie down and clutch a boulder to stop

²⁵ This is yet another tragic event that illustrates how fate plays such a huge part in outcomes experienced. Four men and one woman were intending to depart the train at Corroul Halt and walk over the Uisge Labhair to reach Benalder Cottage for the new years celebration. On a cold but mostly clear evening they struggled through deep snow once past Corroul Lodge. They were also carrying very heavy loads. A decision was made to bivouac before the Bealach Cumhann had been reached. This was a fatal decision as a storm of horrendous nature was slowly approaching from the south. In the morning it was still calm enough for them to contemplate continuing their journey but by mid morning retreat was forced upon them and the disaster quickly gained pace as they struggled back down the glen. The distance to be covered was by no means large but conditions were those of a one in ten thousand nature. One by one the men perished and only Anne Tewnion managed to struggle to the safety of the lodge leaving her husband behind, dying alongside a sheep fank.

The whole tragic mess is surrounded by kismet. One of the deceased failed to take an earlier train as he was delayed in the station lavatory. Therefore he joined the ‘doomed’ group. The train made a complete mess of the halt at Corroul- some claim because the driver was under the influence- and other climbers could not retrieve their gear from the baggage car. The Tewnion group did alight quickly and were offered a lift down to Corroul lodge. As it turned out they were the only climbers to embark on the final leg of the journey. The others stayed the night at the Loch Oscine hostel.

If nothing else this tragic event illustrates how in conditions of extreme nature it is often the case that the female of the species might be better able to survive.

myself being blown into oblivion. I looked back several times and could see the couple making painful progress behind me. They must have reached their skis as when I next looked back I was lower down and in some form of shelter from the hurricane. I could see two figures struggling desperately on skis. I could also see a figure rapidly dropping down the eastern snow slope and this must have been the lad from Edinburgh who had obviously aborted his final ascent across the plateau. I now virtually ran down the snow slopes that had taken so much time to ascend. Occasionally I sank into the snow but mostly the snow surface was frozen and took my weight well. I aimed directly down to the path wanting to gain the re-assurance of a known way back down the valley. The wind was now a fraction of its plateau ferocity. Just before I reached the path I sank through the snow and my feet were immersed into freezing water. Nevertheless as I would now always be on the move it did not cause too much concern. As I reached the path I looked back and could see two skiers descending towards me. I did not wait. I commenced the long trek back as quickly as possible. Just before reaching the ruins at Baddoch I saw a massive herd of deer on the river flats. They were searching out grass through the now patchy snow cover. I also saw many arctic hares on this climb.

I reached the car and noted that the other cars were still there so the girl skiers and the lad were still some way behind me. The couple on skis with whom I had shared the wind-swept plateau would have had to ascend back up towards Carn Aosda in order to ski down the slopes back to their car.

I drove back to the hotel very pleased that an otherwise 'ordinary' Munro had posed such an enormous challenge in negotiating the last few hundred feet.

That night the luxury of the hotel went down very well.

A memorable day on the Cluanie Ridge

All mountain days are special, but some are just a little more memorable. In October 2003 I was extremely fortunate with the weather and had carried out many days of ascent in continual blue-sky conditions. In fact cloudless skies had almost become the 'norm'. I had managed to climb many peaks from the hostel at Altbeithe and enjoyed a bit of luxury on my 60th. birthday at the Cluanie Inn. Eventually the luxury had to be 'shelved' and Ratagan hostel was my bed for my 8th night. This was after a memorable day on the Forcan ridge of the Saddle.

I awoke after a superb sleep and this was **the day**. The one that won't go away. On reflection one of the most memorable days I have had in the hills anywhere, anytime.

At Ratagan the day dawned glorious and clear after another sharp frost. I decided not to rest up; how could you in weather like this? I picked the west end of the South Cluanie ridge as my 'target'. I drove up Glen Shiel and after a few miles moved into damp white cloudy mist. A little further on it became more solid and caused me just a little concern. I knew that out towards the coast there was not a thing in the sky other than cobalt blue. Why was I here?

It became difficult to locate the correct lay by to leave my car. As I could not see the ridges (visibility was twenty yards or so) I had no idea as to how far I had progressed. And of course they keep cutting down trees so maps over ten years old are not tree accurate. I was getting frustrated when I spotted three lads in kilts getting kitted up in a lay by. I stopped and asked where the path to the main ridge left the road. "Just over there, about ten yards away" was the reply. I was relieved as I now knew exactly where

I was. The lads left me as I donned my boots, but this was of no concern as from the road a clear, broad stalkers path wended away into the damp murk.

I set off and followed the path. I had by now abandoned my original aim to climb Druim Thollaidh to gain the ridge. Instead I would follow the lads and make my second ascent of Maol Chinn–dearg before heading out west for the other three Munros. This would complete the ridge albeit in two excursions.

For forty minutes I was walking in damp thick cloud and the sky was not getting any brighter. Nevertheless my experience told me this clag was cloud inversion and somewhere up there was glorious blue sky. I just hoped the cloud inversion did not extend upwards to 3,000 ft. or more.

Thenall of a sudden, the sky was brightening. I was now at about 1,800 ft. and as the path zig zagged up the steep slope tiny breaks appeared in the thick clag. Within seconds I broke through from the dampness into a different world with nothing above me but deep blue sky with a warm sun beaming down on me. Below me was sea of cloud almost like an ocean. It was perfectly level and smooth and the most ethereal sight.



Figure 65: On the ridge to Maol Chin-dhearg - a surreal moment

All the major peaks projected from this white sea like a lot of separate islands. I soon caught up with the lads and we all gazed with amazement at the view below our feet. Height was gained but the sea of cloud remained; all day in fact. I steadily climbed up to the summit of Maol Chinn-dearg and enjoyed the views in all directions with the level cloud layer at all points of the compass. Gleouraich and Spidean Mialach were particularly impressive rising upwards like two giant peaks out of a level line of shear white some 1,000ft below their tops.



Figure 66: On the summit of Sgurr an Doire Leathain

After a long stop I followed the lads and was surprised to discover one of them only had one leg and one arm. We moved westwards along the ridge traversing below Sgurr Coire na Feinne and then steeply up towards Sgurr an Doire Leathain 1010m. All the time the view remained as it had been the moment I broke through the cloud layer; the cloud did not disperse. In fact later in the day it slowly crept upwards making the peaks seem even more like islands scattered across a white flat ocean. From the second Munro I progressed towards Sgurr an Lochain with the little lochan down below to the right. Long stops on these summits were ‘grabbing’ much of the daylight hours but it was too much to rush on a day like this.

Leaving the third Munro I decided to take the path that slants along the slopes of Sgurr Beag 896m as I intended to return over this top to descend from the ridge in a slanting descent. This would avoid road walking later on. I was now ahead of the other climbers I had been talking to. It was interesting on this traverse as I was walking just at the cloud level. Away to my left was a flat level of white cloud appearing as water on the shores of a still lake. Above me to the right was the slope of Sgurr Beag and deep blue skies. However, the cloud was creeping upwards and by the time I reached the bealach I was enveloped in damp misty white. The temperature dropped alarmingly. All day, after I had broken through the cloud layer, I had been walking with no top and just shorts. Now it was time to ‘kit up’ at least temporarily. After I had climbed some 300 ft. from the bealach I again walked through the flat layer of cloud and was again in clear warm ‘open’ heaven. I spent a lot of time on the summit of Creag nam Damh 918m enjoying the views north towards the Saddle and further on the Skye ridge line. It was possible to pick out all the main Cuillin peaks. Looking back I noticed the cloud had now completely covered the bealach with a serious thickness and it was spilling over and

down into Glen Shiel. The cloud layer was now a full 500 ft. higher than it had been. Only Munros were projecting above the level layer. After a while the 'lads' arrived and then a couple with a super dog named Skye. The dog had ascended this Munro at least four times by the time his owners arrived. My plan to climb back over Sgurr Beag did not seem a good idea anymore. This mountain was just about to be swallowed up by cloud and anyway the re-ascent was considerable. Thus I descended with the couple and dog towards the north east. The 'lads' were going to carry on to the next bealach then descend towards Achnagart, a long way away from all the cars?

The descent was steep and needed care over grass and crag. After ten minutes we descended into the white damp murk which quickly became grey and damper. Then we moved below the cloud and Glen Shiel could be seen clearly. It took some time to reach the road and just as we approached through thick trees the city link bus rolled past.

On the road we had 6 miles to walk so we left the female to shake out her hair and use the old thumb. The two men and the dog plodded off along the road. Not a pleasant task as it is an extremely busy highway. We had only walked 1km. when she whizzed past in a Landrover to go to Cluanie to pick up their car. We sat in a lay by and shortly were relieved to see the saviour of an otherwise six-mile hike returning. I was dropped off at my car and we said our goodbyes.

As I reached Achnagart I spotted one of the lads in kilts hitch hiking along the road. I stopped and ran him the 6 miles back to their car before returning to Ratagan.

A pint in the disappointing pub at Invershiel was followed by welcome drinks in the hostel and a sleep that followed the best day in the hills ever???

Quite a statement but on reflection it must run all other climbs very close.

Change in the Mullardoch Mountains

Dr. Jekyll !!!

At least a couple of good days forecast so I prepared my gear for an expedition to the central northern highlands. I was now working on the principle of 'getting in' as many decent weather days as possible before any probable frontal system brought in the inevitable wind and rain. I left Lunt at noon and made good progress on a Sunday M6 and M74. It was fresh and clear all of the way and I drove up to and beyond Aviemore towards Inverness. From here I took the road to Beaully and then to Struy where a pub stop went down very well. I next passed Cannich as I drove on towards the dam at the end of Loch Mullardoch. I arrived at 9 pm and it was very breezy as I prepared for an overnight in the back of my car. I carefully laid out my full-length bed and all seemed well with the world. There was another car parked up and I wandered over to chat to the driver. He was intending to set off at 5 am in order to do the whole ridge and return by the arduous loch side path. I had plans to camp out somewhere along the ridge, so an ultra early start was not particularly necessary. As we chatted another car pulled up and then all of a sudden, the breeze faded, and the curse of Scotland arrived in their millions. The dreaded midge drove us all into the safe refuge of our vehicles. After my very long drive I was glad of this chance to sleep and in fact had a very comfortable night stretched out full length, comfortable, warm and midge free. The next morning at 0500 the midges were still there merely awaiting the emergence of the three drivers. It was as if they knew the 'score.' Patience would be rewarded with a breakfast of warm human blood. I remained in my car awaiting the sun to fully rise hoping it would

persuade them to 'go away.' Shortly after I woke up the other driver left to commence his long journey. I got up at 7 and had a five-minute respite to grab a quick breakfast before I desperately 'threw together' all my gear. As it was my intention to camp out high on the ridge I was convinced I was about to forget something in my midge driven haste. Nevertheless I managed to get it all together and dashed away from the car, the calm shelter of the dam, and the curse of the midge. It was 0715 and the other car occupant was still asleep. It was a glorious morning. A cobalt blue sky with serious heat even at 0730 and the surface of the loch was as smooth as glass. I walked along to the point where Allt Mullardoch reaches the loch and then commenced the steep climb up to Mullach na Maoile 763m. It was horrendously hot, my estimate being 80f + and it was still only very early in the morning. As I gained height and the power of the sun increased the midges became a thing of the past. During this ascent I looked down and saw a boat chugging along the still waters. This was the other chap who had 'dossed' at the dam. He had hired a boat for £25 in order to eliminate the long walk back along the loch at the end of a very long day. I would expect to see him later in the day on a reverse route to mine. Arriving at the top of Mullach na Maoille I stopped and took out all the contents of my rucksack in order to carry out a more convenient repackaging. The weather in all directions was superb but I was somewhat concerned to discover I had left my fleece in the car. I further discovered I had not placed my cagoule at the bottom of my rucksack as I almost always do. In fact I had only two other T-shirts and with hindsight I cannot think how I managed to commence this climb with such little clothing. My food was dry produce to eliminate the need for a stove, tins of food or mess tins.

I made slow progress up to the summit of the first Munro Carn Nan Gobhar where I found a very large cairn on a foretop which was in fact some hundred yards short of the main summit. Here I enjoyed a very long stop sitting against the main summit cairn. I had all sorts of plans and timetables in mind but as I had my tent it was of no great concern and my relaxation was complete.

Dropping down to the Bealach na Cloiche 796m I saw the cool waters of Loch Tuill Bhearnach some 150 ft. down to the 'left.' I decided to dump my sack and make a dash for the waters fully armed with my water bottles. I drank half a dozen off straight away and washed down in the waters. I arrived back at the bealach fully stocked up with liquid. The climb up to Sgurr na Lapaich from the bealach is along a steep but well marked path. I had one long stop when I heard footsteps from above. This was the fellow who had 'boated' along the loch earlier in the day. He had made very good progress but of course he was carrying a light load. We chatted for some half-hour before I recommenced my slog upwards. He had told me of a suitable bivvy site on the next bealach and although it was only early in my ridge climb I was happy to erect my tent at any time in the late afternoon. The summit of Sgurr na Lapaich is a fine place and the views were exceptional in all directions. After I left the top I spotted a small flat piece of grass next to an old vertical chimney. (obviously a ruin from long ago) I was almost about to put up my tent (only 30 ft. from the summit) when I decided to descend further. I dropped down to the next bealach and at 2,800 ft. I did erect my small one-man tent. It was a hot late afternoon and I dozed away an hour or so before descending some 300 yards to a stream to wash and restock with much needed water. The evening commenced and at 9 'ish' I turned in after putting up the flysheet though I had been tempted to just sleep in the inner. I slept well after the labours of the day and half a bottle of wine certainly helped. It had been well worth the weight of ascent.



Figure 67: My tent pitched near Sgurr na Lapaich

Mr. Hyde !!!

Oh how things can change! The morning of June 30th 1953 was a memorable one on the slopes of Nanga Parbat. It ushered in something that nobody had thought possible. A sudden and complete change in the weather. the sky was swept clear of cloud as if by magic. The hygrometer sank to 50% humidity, and in the course of the next few days dropped even further. None of the climbers dreamed that this brilliantly beautiful weather was to last for a whole fortnight.

My boyhood hero Hermann Buhl grabbed his chances. Defying orders from below to descend and regroup he realised the stupidity of this command and took his chances. A magnificent solo effort without food tent or support saw him spend a night out at 25,000 ft. in temperatures of minus 15. But the summit had been reached. As Del Boy says, “He who dares wins.”

Weather within the mountains can be so very important; the difference between life and death. In fact Hermann experienced this just several years after Nanga Parbat. Tragically he walked through a cornice on Chogolisa in shocking visibility and his life and achievements became history.

I had slept well and at 0430 it was already light, but the sky was broken with cloud with massive banks building up away to the west. The light gained strength but by 7 there was a thick mist on the bealach and visibility was down to twenty yards. For thirty minutes I could occasionally see the sun through the tent flysheet, but this was so dissimilar to the conditions of the previous day. There was a strong wind blowing as well. I delayed my start expecting the sun to ‘burn away’ the clouds but by 9 little had changed and if anything conditions were deteriorating. I decided I had to go for it whatever. My total lack of gear was now proving a big problem. Three T-shirts in temperatures of 85f were totally adequate. Today it was probably a good 40 degrees

lower I packed my rucksack and left the tent at 0915. The ridge up to An Riabhachhan was covered in cloud and I made speedy progress towards the plateau having ‘donned’ all my inadequate t-shirts. Once on the long summit plateau ridge I walked into even more angry clouds and the wind from my right was strong and more than a little chilly. I reached the main top and walked right over it hoping that later in the day I would see a view from the cairn. On reaching the south west top 1086m I was temporarily given a glimpse of the sun hovering above through the thick cloud but as I descended towards 1040m north westwards the clouds came down even lower and the temperatures dropped even more. The ridge down to bealach Bholla is steep but straightforward and once on the col I realised that I would comfortably make this fourth Munro. All the time I was aware that I was really out on a limb and all this route would have to be covered again on my return. I reached the summit of An Socach 1069 and sheltered in the lee of the trig. point contemplating the long distance I still had to cover. The route back was uneventful, but no views were afforded as the cloud now seemed somewhat ‘angrier.’ As I was descended towards my tent on the bealach I met another climber ascending. It was good to see someone else and we chatted for ten minutes. He was going to do the ridge as I had done then negotiate the long arduous track back along the loch side. I did not envy him his task. He told me my tent was still standing which was reassuring as the wind was now rising by the minute. In fact I reached my tent in a mini gale and never was shelter so welcome. So too was my half bottle of wine as I lay out and held on to the shaking and rattling walls of my flimsy shelter. I had a little doze and on awaking noticed another amazing change in conditions. In just an hour the cloud had dispersed, and the wind had dropped completely. The temperature had risen an amazing amount and it was once again warm as I climbed out of my little sanctuary. I was thinking about how conditions can change and how mountains can be a ‘different’ place when this happens. I also made a mental note to ensure I knew where my tent was whenever I put it up in future glorious weather. I had relocated my tent but if visibility had been closer it might well have been a challenge to find my very small home.



**Figure 68: The weather is now glorious - hot to horrible and back to lovely
Looking southwards from the summit of Sgurr na Lapaich**

It was now 4pm and after taking down my tent I made the steep ascent up towards the col between Sgurr na Lapaich and Sgurr nan Clachen Geald 1095m. The clouds had completely evaporated, and the temperature was rising dramatically, similar to those of the previous day. I headed towards point 972m and then made the long descent towards

the loch. I was once again very hot and again marvelled at just how conditions can change in such a short period of time.

Once down by the loch I made a slanting approach back towards the dam which seemed so far away. This part of the route seemed to go on forever but as time drifted away I reached my path of the previous day and took the lower route back to the dam. I was well tired by the time I reached the car and although there were no midges to fend off I wasted no time in driving away.

The youth hostel in Cannich was closed down but I found sanctuary in the backpacker's hostel adjacent. This was a perfect location for me. I had my own basic room and never did a shower seem so welcome. I cooked a big supper and turned in after two arduous days and four Munros climbed. I already felt as if I had been away for a week not two days.

Never disregard the setting sun

Many times in winter I have taken to the hills and especially in the depth of the cold season I have taken the precaution of setting out very early. In fact on some days I have been walking two hours before the warmth and encouragement of the sun has given the whole scene a different perspective. It is on days such as these that the vital necessity of the sun is apparent. Without it Earth would be a lifeless lump of rock. The mountains are indeed a different place when the sun blesses the slopes and turns a grey damp and unfriendly location into the superb setting we often witness.

It was December 1st and the early morning brought forth a superb sunrise at Glencoe. I should have arranged an earlier start but the bright sun somehow 'kidded me' that all was well and the day would be grand. It was 10 am before I left my car in Glen Etive and crossed the bridge over a deep dark stretch of water. I was in high spirits and the first mile or so was along a good track. Once I reached the bridge over the Allt Ceitlein I followed a slight path on the south side before aiming directly up the NW shoulder of Beinn Chaorach. At first it was just steep but slowly it became extremely steep up slopes consisting of tufty grass interspersed with vertical crags. My way forward was determined by a zig zag route between these defences. I was doing what I liked most finding my way up a mountain without recourse to a definitive path but after 30 minutes I realised I was in a difficult situation. A fall here could well have led to a slide of hundreds of feet. With many of the crags now beneath me this was a sobering fact. Several times I had to resort to hands on climbing and all of this was 'eating away' at the clock. The weather was still glorious although I did notice that cloud had billowed over Bidean nam Bian. A small alarm bell was ringing but I was so pleased to reach the top of the 60-degree slope and rest on a flat slab of rock enjoying the view back into the main Glencoe mountains. The way forward was across many slanting rock slabs that made for reasonable progress. It was warm, and I took off my shirt to enjoy the welcome rays of the sun. Middle of winter???

It seemed to be taking me a long time to reach any height and I skirted round the top of Beinn Chaorach to find myself on the final slopes leading to the summit of Stob Coir an Albannaich. This was a very long 'plod' up slopes covered in snow and as I ascended the summit disappeared into whitish cloud. It suddenly became very cold and from bare buff I quickly changed to shirt, dry flow and fleece. It had taken me nearly four hours but I was now on the summit hidden in cold dark cloud with visibility down to ten yards. The way forward was not 'simple' and I was a bit worried about route finding.

My concerns speedily evaporated. As soon as I dropped a hundred feet down the east ridge I moved into clear weather and all the range was now visible. The sun was back; the warmth was back, and spirits were back in ascendancy. I made a steep and at first icy descent down to the col between the Munro and Meall Tarsuinn. I climbed over this top and dropped down to another col. The last slopes up to the plateau of Meall nan Eun were frosty with an inch of snow lying on the flat wide summit plateau. I was so pleased with my progress and delighted that timing had allowed me to see superb views in all directions. The problems of route finding had not materialised. Everything was fine, but something was ‘jangling’ away at the back of my mind. Complacency is a dangerous thing in the hills. It has not often been a curse to me, but inevitably it has had occasion to rear its dangerous head. I was revelling in the superb setting. It was now well after 3 pm and a big orange sun was slowly sliding along plateau rim making everything glow in an orange red light. It made me think of moments on the beach when I had witnessed the sun slowly sinking beneath the far horizon. As it dropped lower and lower the glow passed from a bright glare to a deep red tint. The world was slowly changing but the majesty of the event meant everything was put on hold. I remembered thinking how quickly the sun moved as it approached the far distant horizon. Towards the end it slipped beneath the skyline and was gone for another day. Darkness did not immediately prevail as reflected glow offered further light, but heat was now a diminishing commodity.

This did set off the alarm bells. The sun was now a red ball of fire but a very low one and it was not going to be in situ much longer. Daylight was very finite. I was very high and a long way from where I now needed to be.

I set off quickly and made the initial descent to the Allt Ceitlein in good time. But as I reached the headwaters the light rapidly disappeared. It may have had some impact high up, but I was now delving down into a long pathless and dark valley; and it was long. I could not locate any paths and by 5 pm I was struggling across uneven ground in total darkness. I kept to the river but was forced to both sides by treacherous ground. I was in despair as the valley seemed to go on forever. What I would have given for just a little of that fading sunlight I had so carelessly forsaken whilst high on the summit plateau. Hundreds of climbers have experienced this. The poor souls on Everest in 96 would gladly have sacrificed a small portion of their summit celebration once they found themselves hopelessly lost on the South Col. Just yards away from relative safety but huddled out in the cold because they could not see.²⁶

²⁶ It is usual to have turn around times when climbing mountains such as Everest. 2pm. is a common time when approaching the summit from the south. This is carried out to ensure a safe descent to the South Col before the onset of night. In 1996 a huge bottleneck during ascent led to many climbers reaching the top well after the turn around time. Rob Hall did not turn around Doug Hansen at 2pm. He did not turn him round at 4 pm. Doug arrived on the summit shortly after 4 totally exhausted and just as his precious oxygen expired. A massive storm was just about to hit the mountain. Hall and Hansen struggled down the ridge for more than ten hours when normally the descent would take less than one. The following morning Hall contacted camp 4 by radio to say he was stranded on the south summit alone and badly frost-bitten. Although he was urged to attempt a descent he never managed to set off and weeks later his body was discovered in a cold and lonely drift of snow. Nobody knows what happened to Doug Hansen or Andy Harris who although seriously debilitated turned back to climb the precipitous ridge to assist Hall and Hansen. This act of amazing heroism was to cost him his life. Many other climbers had ‘wasted’ too much time celebrating their achievement on the summit. This was time they would have cherished when hours later they were caught in the ‘monster storm’ just yards from the safety of their tents. Once again never disregard the setting sun



Figure 69: Summit of Meall nan Eun

Just moments before the sun dropped below the horizon

In just 20 minutes brightness was replaced by total murk

Just as my mood hit all time lows I spotted a faint track. It was enough; confidence and hope returned in bucket loads. When I found a gap in a wall the track improved somewhat. In complete darkness as black as any I had ever experienced I found myself back at the bridge and moved onto the decent track I had walked along earlier. It still took a good thirty minutes to reach the second bridge and this was followed by a short steep ascent back to the car. It was after 7 when I debooted in black darkness.

Back at the hostel a massive portion of Irish stew mushy peas and rum made me contemplate on lessons to be learnt from a day which whilst memorable certainly had its nasty moments.

At this time of year you must start early. Start in darkness if necessary. Remember there are only 7 hours of daylight. And once it starts to disappear it certainly does not take its time.

Where's the 'bloody' summit?

30 minutes; 45 minutes; now an hour 'faffing around' on these dam slopes. Annoyance rose and rose as frustrating tops turned out to be false, misleading and downright hostile.

This was not a Himalayan giant nor was it an Alpine challenge. Merely an inconspicuous Munro, and not a particularly difficult climb in times of normalcy.

Beinn Bhuidhe was to cause me much grief on this day of utter frustration.

When I revisited the mountain years later in benign balmy weather I was glad to exorcise this horrible day of confusion and annoyance.

It had all commenced sitting in my car on a curve in the old road waiting for the incessant rainfall to stop. I was listening to the test match and England were not doing too well at all. Was this an omen?

At noon I could delay my departure no longer and I mounted my trusty bicycle to undertake the six-kilometre ride to Inverchorachan. Leaving the bike I climbed the steep ravine to gain the middle slopes of Beinn Bhuidhe I was still clear of cloud and mist but at the top of the ravine it all went horribly wrong. The mist dropped and almost immediately I was walking in visibility of no more than ten yards. I was walking on a northwest bearing and just when I needed it most the path 'fizzled' out and left me on undulating 'tufty' grass and marsh in increasing wind and rain. Wearing glasses compounded the difficulties as map reading became an almost impossible task as glasses became wet, misty and maps were continually blown around. The problem really stemmed from the fact that before the summit ridge could be gained the undulating hummocks of Meall an Daimh had to be negotiated. For some unknown reason I had considered I had made enough progress and spent my frustrating hour climbing just about every top within the maze of ups and downs. I should have stopped and thought it all out. It would have been obvious I was only at an altitude of 700m and the top was still some fair way ahead hidden within the murk. My 'faffing' around went on and on before common sense prevailed. The top must be north west, and it must be somewhere much higher up than I was at that time. I trusted my compass and took a bearing walking forward with determination. It worked as I quickly came across a steep rise and several steep gullies that eventually led me to a definite ridge, and more importantly a definite path wending away to the left. I followed it upwards into the thickening mist and thought to myself it was now a sure thing I would gain my summit. It was still a fair distance before the path reached an obvious summit. I ventured ahead, and the slopes dropped steeply downwards so I went back to what I thought must be the top. There was a large cairn. I had found the cairn but was dismayed to discover there was no triangulation pillar.

In total despair I sat on the stones of the cairn and said to myself in total frustration "where the hell was I?"

I would have to return as my climbing career had always told me a summit is a summit and the very top must always be confirmed.²⁷

²⁷ This is indeed an interesting subject for debate. If you almost, but don't quite get to the highest point of a mountain, have you climbed it?

The main summit of Shishapangma is 8013m. The central summit is 4m lower and this point is reached after a relatively uncomplicated climb. The 'real' summit is some 30 minutes away and involves more serious climbing. If a climber reaches the central summit can he/ she claim to have climbed the mountain? In my eyes no. But then I am a stickler for accuracy. Why otherwise would I have gone back to Ben Eighe to climb from the trig. point to the real summit, which is 21m higher. Also why did I climb just about every top on Beinn a Chroin when they were all shrouded in mystery and doubt as to the actual highest point. The famous Reinhold Messner claims that you have only climbed a mountain if you have reached the highest point, but the debate will always rage on. If a true top is one meter higher than another after thousands of metres of climbing surely the latter suffices a successful ascent.

You must work it out for yourself. As Geoff Pierce claims, it is an intersubjective matter. Perhaps the summit is not the mathematically highest point but the general undefined area around it. I know where I stand. You must stand on the very top. But then again who is to say I am right.

As depression set in I looked more closely at the pile of stones I was sitting upon. There was a base foundation within the pile. Some of the cairn stones were cemented together. It all fell into place. The triangulation column had recently been pushed over and had collapsed into the summit cairn stones. The problem was solved, and I am not ashamed to relate that I stood upon the cairn and let out a cry of joy to recognise my solution of the mystery.²⁸



Figure 70: Beinn Bhuidhe collapsed trig. column

Freedom of the heights - trapped beneath deep waters

Something was wrong.

Something was very wrong.

As descent was made beneath the clouds visibility returned. A large expanse of water stretched out below where no water should be.

It was 1957 and a teenager was making one of his frequent visits to the hills of Lakeland exploring the fell tops and valleys and carrying out an apprenticeship of ‘pleasure’. Leaving the summit of High Street with visibility down to 20 yards a descent was made

²⁸ Years after my first ascent of Beinn Bhuidhe I returned on a glorious sunny day. Everything that I had been denied was there to see. It all fell into place. I spent two hours on the summit enjoying the fantastic views in all directions. I could clearly see the broken trig. point lying within the large pile of summit stones. It was amazing to see just how a situation can be so different in varying weather conditions. The journey to the top had taken much longer but then again it was hot and I was twenty years older.

of the ridge Long Stile armed with knowledge from an old guide book. The highly coloured map indicated a village at the foot of the spur complete with church, inn and farmsteads.

A stop was made to take another look. Now well below the cloud it could be seen that water stretched right up to the valley head. From here the slopes rose steeply to the fells. There certainly was a lake at the foot of the ridge but it should have been much further down the valley. Where were the fields and stone walls? Where was the church? Where was the friendly inn?

Confusion was complete. No amount of consultation with the map could solve the mystery. Was this the wrong valley? No that was not possible. This certainly was Long Stile and to the right was the unmistakable water of Blea Tarn. Descent continued until the waters of the lake that should not have been there were reached. The slopes descended steeply into the waters and the lakeside was devoid of any vegetation. Walls mysteriously disappeared into the waters and no people were to be seen. No amount of searching could find an explanation to this mystery. Eventually a decision was made. The route of descent was reversed and after a climb back over the top of High Street Patterdale was reached.

That evening in the youth hostel a chat with the warden and use of a 'modern' map brought light to this confusion. In 1941 the waters of the original lake were slowly raised to create a reservoir to supply water to the City of Manchester. The village of Mardale was 'drowned' and all the farmsteads in the valley disappeared beneath the deep waters of the reservoir. This explanation had been denied because the lake was at full capacity and there was no tell tale 'tidemark' of bare stones and rocks that often distinguishes a reservoir from a natural lake. Standing at the waters edge the grass and ferns disappeared straight into the deep waters.

So great was the interest that a return was made the next day and with the help of a rather inadequate map our young explorer sat on the slopes of the Rigg trying to imagine what might lie beneath the deep waters in view.

Imagination ran wild.

Could the top of the church spire be seen through the dark waters? Were the rooftops of submerged farms hiding beneath the surface of the lake? A promise was made to investigate the history of this intriguing valley. What had been there before the flood? How did the Haweswater of old compare with the somewhat stark and sombre valley that could be seen now? This 'new' valley looked unnatural. It appeared too full. Absent were the shingle beaches and gentle meadows that nature fashions on natural lakes.

The discovery of a poem titled 'The Submerged village' fired the imagination even higher.

*Calm, the surrounding mountains look upon
the steeple's golden cross, that still
emerges from the centre of the rising lake.
Like a sinking raft's bare mast and spar,
anchored to earth by chains of stone and the unbreaking
ropes of death, it stands alone, becalmed.
No other evidences now remain*

of what was once a village in the plain.

A fitful bell bangs in the belfry's suffocating tank.

In the churchyard, vaults and tombs burst open with dead

gusts of air, and coffins, single manned, are launched

like death- ships over the yews now green for ever.

The wave-packed windows darken, leak and spring apart.

Dead as the drowning wind, the centuries of prayer

sink with the stifling sands, that drift through doors

and wave-picked locks like fine draughts over heaving floors.

What were the feelings of the wild springs, the sweet

wells that without warning began to feel themselves

rising, filled with an overwhelming dread?

The kitchen sinks flowed over to the ceiling, as if some

careless hand had turned on all the taps, and left them running;

and startled, homely ponds felt all their fences falling

and their natures changing as their growing shores contained

more mysteries than their simplicity could comprehend.

Taken from the Submerged Village James Kirkup.

The long search for information started from that moment; sat looking into the mysterious waters of Haweswater.

Considering the tragic loss of both Mardale and the homes of Mullardoch this diary account of a visit to Haweswater in 1936 illustrates clearly mans inhumanity to man.

Mardale late 1936.

'Leaving the train at Shap it was immediately evident that big changes had arrived in this 'outpost' on the high fells. In the previous decade there had been talk of a 'concrete road' that would wind six miles across the moors from Shap to Haweswater. Today it was an accomplished fact. The road found its way across becks and fell side until it arrived at a curious collection of buildings gathered within the trees where the surrounding crags and slopes narrowed.

The village of Burnbanks, erected by the Manchester waterworks department for its employees, consists of a collection of double bungalows housing about four hundred people of whom half are workmen. An entertainment committee has been formed. Soccer is played on a field at the entrance to the village and in summer a cricket team competes with other local sides. Religious services are held by Nonconformists,

Anglicans and Roman Catholics in the same room - an example of unity believed to be unparalleled.

There is an elementary school at Bampton, a mile or two lower down the valley, and some children travel by bus to a secondary school at Penrith. The bus service is one of the most important institutions in the village. The driver, who is also conductor, has charge of scores of parcels and messages, which he delivers for a few coppers. On Friday he is particularly busy for he has to superintend the collection and distribution of the weekend shopping- not to mention the transport of a large box of fish.

Above the site of the dam the old road to Mardale which follows the western shore of Haweswater is still open. Some of the houses along its course are now derelict but others are still occupied. Measandbeck Hall is a pile of rubble within its boundary walls. This is the result of last month's army explosions when new plastic explosive ended the hundred-year life of this fine building. A building still occupied is the schoolhouse situated at the foot of the track that slants up towards Low Whelter now an empty cold building. Miss Forster, mistress of the school for some 42 years, still resides in the school building but very shortly she will have to leave, and the school will face the ultimate fate of all the houses in Mardale. She is reticent about her work that she dismisses as 'ordinary elementary teaching.' She is faintly annoyed at the publicity her position as unofficial keeper of the parish annals has attracted.

Moving on along the old road the parsonage is passed and today it looks sad and forlorn with slates missing and obvious signs of preliminary destruction. Another sad memory is the farmhouse Flakehowe and just after passing this famous old homestead the road bends around a prominent crag and crosses a small stream to give a view of the ruins of the old church. In its present state it looks as if it has suffered from an explosion. The roof has been taken off and the top line of the walls is indefinite. A notice warns the public that the tower, still standing, is dangerous. The church is to be demolished by hand and soon it will be impossible to tell that this was once the site of an ancient house of worship. A range of low farm buildings, now derelict, about halfway between the church and the Dun Bull will be blown up by a party of Royal Engineers some time in the near future.

The Dun Bull hotel, comfortably sheltered in the valley of Mardale Beck, shows no sign of its approaching abandonment. It welcomes drenched walkers with a hot log fire before which sodden raincoats can be dried in an hour. It is hard to come to terms with the tragic desolation of buildings so recently seen with the almost untouched hotel, still surrounded by its guard of loyal trees. The church had its trusty guardian yews just a year ago but now they are gone, and the remains of the building are vulnerable and open to abuse. But this is only a stay of execution for the Dun Bull. Next spring its fate will also be sealed, and workmen will get to grips with the grisly task of tearing the heart out of the famous old inn. It is almost like watching one's friends slowly give in to the ravages of time and pass away from this world. Sadness somehow brought home to the mind with the fact that this fate awaits us all irrespective of our creed, wealth or position. The last leg of our journey into the heart of Mardale ends abruptly when the rough track beyond the Dun Bull reaches the terminus of a modern, hard surfaced road right beneath the crags of mighty Harter Fell.

The view from the new Mardale road that runs along the eastern side of Haweswater shows clearly what will be the greatest loss when the bottom of the valley is submerged. Even on an overcast day the meadowland bordering the lake is a vivid green shining at the foot of sombre hills decorated only with patches of bracken, reddish purple in the

distance. The tiny farmhouses give a majestic scale to the hills behind. The placid lake, on which an official motorboat can be watched drawing graceful curves with its prow, will soon be swollen into a mighty reservoir.

Just after the new road has entered Guerness wood the new Dun Bull hotel appears. It has a view across the lake of Bunty Howe and the amphitheater down which runs a foamy stream from Laythwaite crags. The hotel is well advanced in construction and its general appearance, except for roofing material, may now be judged. It has a long plain front with three tall windows, round headed, forming a bay in the centre. The stone has been quarried besides the building and is hardly distinguishable in colour from rain clouds. The roof timbers are now being fitted and the frames of dormer windows have been put in position. Floors and partition walls have yet to be made inside.

All this whilst an opposite act takes place across the lake waters. Flakehow, Sandhill and Rowanpark are being torn apart and turned to rubble.

When the road finally leaves the hillside and descends to the valley below the dam site it crosses Haweswater Beck by a bridge 24 ft. wide. Looking over the eastern parapet you can see the remains of a narrow humped back bridge that the newer structure replaced. It is a curious relic of less bustling times.

The final church service had to all respects initiated the reality of the 'end.'

For the end this really was. In the few short years after the last sad service Mardale was systematically stripped of everything.

Mardale was raped.

Millions, thousands and hundreds of years had seen change. Some of a cataclysmic nature However, events had taken their time and Mardale had evolved only slowly to form the beauty and seclusion that could be found at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In just four short years Mardale ceased to exist.

Mardale was junk.

For the result of this lifelong search see Mardale Mysteries R.J. Cooke

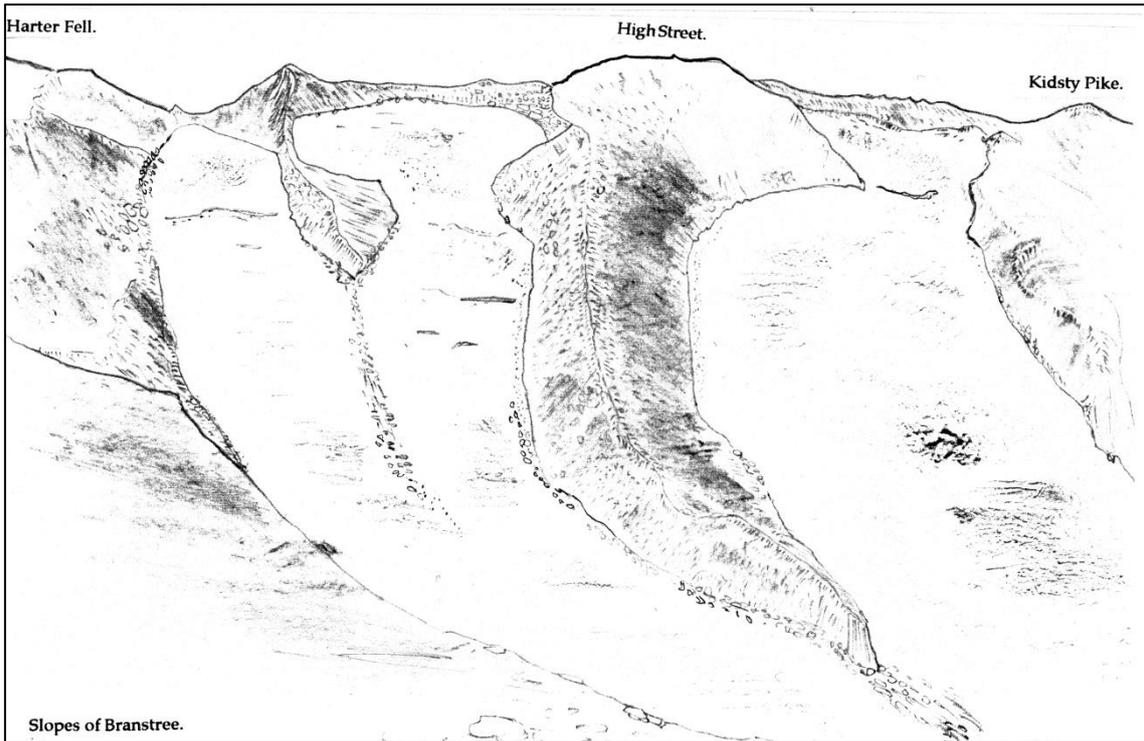


Figure 71: The Haweswater valley thousands of years ago
It was hidden under a huge mass of ice. Glaciers grind away forming the valleys and lakes of tomorrow



Figure 72: Mardale of old
A peaceful valley head; tiny church; friendly inn; tranquil scenery



Figure 73: Mardale head [1939]

For three years a slow death has been creeping into the valley. After the last church service in 1935 the buildings were slowly devastated



**Figure 74: The waters have risen, the lake is full
Mardale lies beneath deep waters**



Figure 75: The water level is slowly dropping [1989]



**Figure 76: September 30th 1995 - the lake waters are at their all time lowest
Mardale returns from a watery grave. It was intriguing to walk the old road and
seek out the remains of the old buildings**

Knoydart - a wilderness supreme

I have just been captivated by a film that shows what inevitably will happen to our planet if and when the influence of human beings ceases its hold. It was an eerie scenario to see just how quickly nature 'grabs' back her domain. Within months weeds and trees burst through concrete and tarmac. Buildings crumble in just a few years and famous features such as the Eiffel Tower eventually rust and fall. It is true that the great pyramids have lasted thousands of years but also true that nothing is infinite; except maybe time itself.

I had witnessed this reverse change at the entrance to the Mont Blanc tunnel when it had been closed for well over a year. I had completed an epic lone climb on Mont Blanc and was in fantastic spirits as I descended back to Chamonix and creature comforts such as beer. My previous experience of the tunnel had been one of noise, pollution and hustle and bustle. Today it was totally different. In fact surreal. Everything was quiet and still. Not a soul could be seen, no roaring smoky lorries; nothing. Small weeds in the concrete road told of what might be the future.

An even more recent example has given me a stranger illustration of man's delicate hold on the surroundings in which he survives. An idyllic summer holiday in Cyprus was made even more interesting by a visual study and historical research of the lost resort of Varosha. It was 'spooky' indeed to walk along the beach and witness the massive crumbling ruins of countless hotels and buildings that have made up this ghost town for over 34 years. The history is known. The Turks invaded the island to safeguard the welfare of the Turkish Cypriots and a huge holiday area, not unlike Benidorm, was evacuated by the Greeks. So quick was their departure that washing was left on the lines and food left on table plates. Probably the terrified Greeks thought their return was going to be soon, but this did not happen. Behind the barricades of wire and oil drums weeds attained tree like dimensions on the streets and inside the buildings. Cats, rats and snakes prowled and the whole scenario became that of a ghost town staggering further towards terminal decline.

With all the ramifications of modern day politics little seems likely to change in the near future. Unless Northern tourism sees a huge increase in demand the Turkish Cypriots have little need for the row of 33 mouldering, not quite state of the art hotels which line the long narrow beach. It is indeed probable that the point of no return has been reached and the buildings are doomed to a fate of demolition.

What a waste. What sadness.

This is Varosha.

Knoydart could be claimed to be yet another man-made wilderness. Today it is a wild and lonely place and one of the most sought out locations for lonely wanderings. But it was not always like this. Several centuries ago there were over 1,000 young men working the land. Skiary, Barrisdale, Doune and Gleann na Guiserein flourished and inland there were sizeable farmsteads growing wheat and potato. A visitor today will find only Inverie as a sizeable settlement. It does have a pub and several guest houses offer accommodation for the traveller across from Malaig.



Figure 77: The ghost holiday resort of Varosha

Where did all the people go?

The Highland clearances are well recorded in history; a somewhat sordid and grossly unfair event that placed little consideration to the ‘welfare’ of ordinary Highland folk. People were evicted from the homes that they had held for almost countless generations. They were forced out by landowners in an act that was little short of ethnic cleansing and all in the name of potential profit. It is true that potato blight and herring problems had caused many to seek a living elsewhere, but these events only partly explain the almost total migration that eventually occurred.

I suppose greed and desire for profit and gain were at the core of the reasons. It was deemed that the future lay in sheep. There was no place for the small individual crofter. People were thrown out and their homes torn down around them. These were destitute people who already had the burden of trying to keep alive. They now found themselves without even the shelter of a roof over their heads. The land which although difficult and cruel had been a home and a living of sorts. Now it became a sheep walk and shooting ground for the rich and privileged. The locals were sent away, and sadness and guilt lay behind.

So Knoydart, something like Varosha, became a wilderness; a land emptied of people. Whilst Varosha is a wreck at least Knoydart is a haven of peace. A place that can be enjoyed by the modern walker.

But at what cost?²⁹

²⁹ You can find in Inverie a memorial to seven men of Knoydart who made a heroic stand against the ‘big wheels’ of the privileged. It reads.

“In 1948, near this cairn, the seven men of Knoydart staked claims to secure a place to live and work. For over a century Highlanders had been forced to use land raids to gain a foothold where their forebears

Thus the Munros led me to come to this land and how fortunate I was on my first visit. I had been warned that Knoydart weather could be fickle.³⁰ Indeed I was warned it is often awesome. I timed my visit to perfection. A short stay but a dry one and I was not disappointed.

Ladhar Bheinn is a grand mountain. The weather was settled even though there was some cloud in the sky. As I set off I was passed by some estate lads who requested I did not climb to Mam Suidheig as they were conducting a deer count. I was asked to climb up to Mam Barrisdale. I was not too concerned as there was a good track along the Inverie River up to the Loch an Dubh-Lochan. However, 6km were covered before the track became a path and now there was a further 4km up a slanting and ascending path that in places was quite wet. Mam Barrisdale is 450m in height and here I caught up with four other climbers resting on the bealach. The cloud was hovering around the 650m contour, but it promised to rise higher as the heat of the sun got to work. I climbed over the undulating terrain of Stob na Muicraidh to gain the ridge terminating in Stob a Chearcaill. The last slopes were very steep but once gained the ridge was well defined. The way forward was taking time but it was all so hugely enjoyable. I was in a mischievous mood. I had only recently retired and normally I would be trapped in a noisy claustrophobic classroom. The temptation was too great. Alan a friend of mine was still teaching. Some several feet from the summit ridge I made contact by mobile phone. It took several minutes but once through I could hear the rabble of young voices in the background and with poignant directness I exchanged our two locations. He was understandably envious to the extreme. Knoydart and Ladhar against thirty maladjusted youngsters in 5C? No contest.

It was six hours from my commencement to the moment I reached the first summit. The main top is the middle one and the third top is adorned with a triangulation column. The views were fantastic even if the corrie to the north was full of cloud. With the sun streaming in from the south these were perfect conditions for Broken Spectres. It was to be; I saw this phenomena in majestic clarity. I was amazed at the length of time I witnessed this event. A full thirty minutes passed and still my image was to be seen cast on the clouds that filled the corrie beneath. The summit of Ladhar is a grand place to be.

The way down is long and after passing the ruins at Folach and then when the track near Easan Buidhe was reached I still had miles to hike. The inn was reached at 7.30 pm and three pints went down like nectar. I have always liked my beer, but these pints were something quite special.

lived. Their struggle should inspire each new generation of Scots to gain rights by just laws. History will judge harshly the oppressive laws that have led to the virtual extinction of a unique culture from this beautiful place.”

There is a powerful story behind these words. An uncaring landlord wished to finally clear the land of this beautiful peninsular so that his rich cronies could come and shoot innocent deer. A somewhat nasty piece of work, he discouraged visitors and commenced making redundant older local employees. Without employment they had to leave, and the depopulation commenced all over again. On return from war service seven men refused to lie down and see the land deliberately go to waste. They believed they had a right to live and work here. In their search for justice they decided to take the land for themselves clearing small areas and marking them as their own.

Sadly they were doomed. The landowner had ‘friends in ‘high places’. He launched a legal battle that the reinstated crofters could not combat. Even the Socialist Government of the day turned a blind eye to their plight.

³⁰ In the visitors centre at Inverie there is a wall chart giving information of weather on the peninsular. It records that on one occasion there were forty continuous days on which rain fell.



Figure 78: The ruins of Folach on the descent from Ladhar Bheinn

The routes in Knoydart clearly show the magnitude of the terrain. Everything seems to take much longer than the map might suggest and for me there was indeed a ‘sting in the tail.’

But oh how it is all worth it.

So very much has been written about the infamous midge. I have on my shelf in front of me a lovely little book ‘Midges in Scotland’ by George Hendry. It really is a best seller, and this has resulted in many reprints.

However, my trip to Knoydart did not involve the ‘common midge.’ My problems stemmed from the tick. This was the little monster that gave me so much trouble and continued to do so many weeks after my return to the lowlands. Just what is this little creature all about?

This little pest (*Ixodes ricinus*) is the most potentially serious British parasite that affects hill walkers. They can transmit *Borrelia burgdorferi* a bacterium that causes Lyme disease. They grow through three life stages; larva, nymph and adult. The biggest problem to the walker is in the spring when ticks typically lurk on vegetation on well-trodden tracks. Once they have a grip on you they find a suitable bit of flesh and the ‘fun’ begins. They are true parasites and live off your blood. They are difficult to dislodge and if you pull them out they part with their heads and this can lead to infection. In Borneo we used to utilise matches and cigarette lighters to encourage? leeches to leave our bodies. Someone once recommended drowning them in whisky a move I did not follow for obvious reasons. I prefer a much simpler form of prevention, wearing long trousers, long sleeves and boot gaiters.

When I returned from Knoydart I did not feel well and I could not ‘put my finger’ on my ailment. I looked in books and discovered the classic sign of lymes to be a ring-shaped rash slowly expanding from the bite. I had bites, but I did not see evidence of

any rash. Other symptoms I did have. Flu like chills, fatigue and muscle pains were a plenty. Further investigation offered a host of other symptoms quite frightening in reality. Facial paralysis, stiff necks, sleeplessness, memory loss and mood swings. I was becoming paranoiac. I had all these to a certain extent but was the little tick to blame?

My recovery was relatively quick and the bites soon went away. I was now certain I had been bitten but not in a too serious way.

A procedure I would recommend to any walkers venturing into the hills, especially Knoydart hills, is to keep a close check on your body. Look very closely and utilise a mirror to get at the places you cannot see.

This all reminded me of a lecture we had been given whilst serving in Borneo Royal Marine times. We were told to check out every part of our bodies after any jungle patrol to ensure leaches had not prevailed. Further advice was given on the counter action from serious snake or insect bites. A particularly gnarled sergeant was telling us of the speedy requirement to cut at the intrusion wound and immediately suck out any poison before it could get into the body system. It was all rather grisly and dramatic. After a moment of silence one of the marines in attendance asked a very poignant question.

“What if you are bitten on the backside sergeant”?

“That is when you find out who your true friends are” was the speedy reply.

Ticks can be difficult to spot but do make the effort. The consequences could be very nasty indeed.

An affair with Scafell Pike

Scafell Pike is the highest mountain in England. At 3,210 ft. it would not look amiss with many of the Munros of Scotland. It is a mountain I first climbed as a schoolboy and since then I have summited well over fifty times. I have often been asked why I bothered to climb the peak so many times. I could give many answers. A mountain can show very many faces. It may be the same rock and ridge, but no two ascents are ever quite the same. It can be climbed in warm sunshine or bitter winter frost. On a calm day or in the teeth of a howling gale. On rock or sometimes under many feet of freshly fallen snow. Most ascents are made in daylight but on occasions it can be climbed though the darkness of night. There are probably as many as eight or nine different approaches to the mountain ranging from simply following a path to scrambling, and even serious rock climbing before the summit cairn is reached. I have climbed it alone, with a few friends, and occasionally with a large party of keen enthusiastic schoolchildren.

The combinations are almost endless, and every ascent has been a special moment for me. I can remember persuading my reluctant wife to join me on one occasion. Unfortunately it rained solidly for five hours and on reaching the summit we were rewarded with a three-yard view of wet mist. Not today the vista of the distant Irish Sea and the Isle of Man on the horizon. If there had been a resident solicitor on the summit I think divorce proceedings might have started there and then.

Scafell Pike is not as inaccessible as Kilimanjaro or Mont Blanc or Vatnajokull. No, Scafell Pike is available to you; it can be climbed by any keen fit person. That could well be you and if you do make the effort I sincerely hope you gain as much pleasure from the climb as I have experienced over the last 50 years.

Ever since I was a young boy I have built into my mountain ambitions bivouacs on the summits. Sometimes they have been a necessary shelter from worsening weather or caused by a lack of time to complete a prearranged route. On other occasions they have been planned, with a host of suitable gear, and hope for the beautiful dawn that may just arrive after the long cold hours of darkness. Dawn on the summit of Scafell Pike can be a magical experience. It can also be an uncomfortable reminder that mountains are not for the faint hearted.

Many years ago I planned to sleep out on Scafell Pike. This was on a new years eve which added even more significance to the climb. It doubled up with a desire to get away from all the predictable nonsense of the exact moment when the clocks ring out twelve in some crowded pub or smoky club.

In 1978 I made the first of such attempts. I left the Old Dungeon Ghyll at 10am carrying a full load. In the valley it was cold but there was no wind and the cloud level hovered at 2,500 ft. I had serious ventilation problems on the stiff climb up Rossett Gill. Near the top of the gill a light covering of snow was found and the wind increased quite dramatically. At the top of the gill I left my heavy load behind a boulder and made the short detour to the summit of Rossett Pike. There was deep snow on the short rise and I wondered how it was possible to pass from clear terrain to deep snow cover in such a short distance. Visibility was restricted, and the temperature was dropping rapidly. I returned to the top of the pass and made the short descent to Angle Tarn. As it was now early afternoon I cached my supplies and climbed Ore Gap through deep powder snow. The going was difficult as I continually sank into the soft snow up to my thighs. From Ore gap I ascended the north-west slopes of Bowfell in varying wind and much spindrift. The temperature had dropped further, and my beard and eyelashes were frozen solid. The summit was reached just before 3 pm to give me occasional views of the impressive Scafell Massif. Almost immediately the clouds dropped to deny this pleasure and I reversed my route to Angle Tarn, arriving in increasing snowfall and rising wind. Erecting the tent was a difficult task and I cannot say I was particularly happy at this juncture. Once erected I had the task of clearing out all the windblown snow. It was dark by 4.15 pm. The night was cold, but I was reasonably secure in my tent. The temperature dropped to minus 9c and occasional gusts of wind really shook my haven.

Saturday December 30th 1978

Much snow had fallen in the night and loads of it had drifted against the windward side of the tent. It became light only after 0800 and I had been restricted to the tent for 15 hours. The morning was very cold with still a strong gusty wind. The start of the day was uncomfortable but after difficulty donning boots and gaiters I left at 0900 and ascended towards Esk Hause which was just below the dark cloud cover. As I neared the col the weather worsened and on top of the pass visibility was only fifty yards. However, very shortly the sky to the south east began to brighten and very small pieces of blue sky could be made out within the general darkness. Optimism 'reigned' supreme as I continued over the southern slopes of Great End, and just at the top of Calf Cove the clouds began to break up completely. The strong wind was tearing great holes in the sky. As I reached Ill Crag col the view to the south west opened and I could see as far as the coast, and glimpses of the western fells could be seen. I climbed over Broad Crag as the fairly deep snow cover made the usual crossing of huge boulders much easier. On the summit of Broad Crag the view finally became complete and the last slopes to the Pike were negotiated relatively easily. I was rewarded with a fine panorama with the

mountains of the far north complementing the Isle of Man with winter snows covering Snaefell. I remained on the summit for an hour and tuned my 'walkman' radio into cricket news from far away Australia where Rodney Hogg was tearing into the English batsmen as a Kerry Packer weakened team struck back in the third test at Melbourne.

I returned over the top of Broad Crag and Ill Crag before visiting Great End. The gullies were ice filled but no climbers were to be seen today.

I ascended Esk Pike from Esk Hause but by now the weather had turned nasty again and I quickly descended to Angle Tarn and the refuge of my tent. Everything was frozen solid. I arrived at 3 pm and spent almost an hour preparing for the long night. Several other tents had been pitched nearby. The night was bitterly cold and again the wind 'tore' at the tent in fierce gusts. The next day I proceeded back towards Esk Hause in foul weather and looking back I could see that the tents that had been pitched close to mine were being dismantled. The occupants rapidly climbed up to Rossett Pass and disappeared over the skyline. I suddenly felt very lonely and on arrival at the Hause the wind was even stronger. I climbed up to Allen Crag and on return sheltered in the wall shelter of the Hause. I sat there for a full half hour not knowing what to do. I drifted back to my tent disappointed that my plan to sleep on Scafell Pike summit had been thwarted by storm and total lack of supplies. I broke camp at noon and descended Rossett Gill in awful conditions over ice covered rocks. If only I had known it, out in the Irish Sea, away to the west, the clouds ceased to be and in just a few hours time the weather would be totally different. Rain and sleet lashed down all the way to the Stake Pass turn off but very shortly after the sky brightened and the precipitation ceased. How many times has this happened on mountains. This was a massive weather improvement but it had come too late to make any real difference. I pitched my tent on the camp site at 4.30 pm and whilst doing so the weather completely cleared and calm conditions promised a cold and frosty new years eve.

This occasion was spent in the bar of the old DG which is one of the very few pubs in Britain that have not changed over the passage of time. Not here a pizza paradise or a place for 'yuppies'. The interior is little changed from that of many decades ago. I have spent many an hour 'supping' lethal ales under the roof of the Old Dungeon Ghyll.

Six years later I was again despairing a new years eve of what might be considered a conventional manner. I was determined to spend it on the top of England. My wife and daughter Louise were not so sure and our new dog Polly was possibly undecided. We drove up to the Lake District in our old Triumph Herald estate and when we got to the Langdale Valley it was wild, windy and very wet.

I had a few pints in the pub and in front of a roaring log fire it took some considerable sacrifice to say goodbye to my little family and set off into the oncoming dark towards Rossett Gill. At first the going was easy and by 5 pm I had reached the steep slopes below Bowfell. It was now quite dark and I kept thinking of Norma, Louise and Polly in the pub and the warm fire. The ascent up to Angle Tarn was not easy and my torch was slow to find the best way forward. It was nearly 6.30 pm when I reached the top and now I was 'hit' by a fierce gale blowing down from the heights. It was wet and cold and shortly after the rain turned to wind driven snow. I was climbing into the teeth of a hurricane and on several occasions I was lifted off my feet and blown to the ground. However, I was still determined and carried on at a very slow pace. It was almost 8 pm before I reached the plateau of Esk Hause and took refuge in the very basic wall shelter on the exposed col. I felt very sorry for myself and almost wished I had stayed behind to

enjoy endless pints in the warm cosy bar. The way ahead looked very grim but at least I did know the ground having climbed the Pike many times before.

After a chunk of Christmas cake I prepared to move forward when I dropped my torch. It smashed on the rocks and without light I knew I was probably doomed. A five-minute agonising thought persuaded me that it was indeed time to turn back. Anyway I could now be with the girls to maybe celebrate new year together. The journey back was horrendous. The wind rose and driving sleet and snow drove me into a rapid pace and by 11 pm I was approaching the old pub where I had just one ultra quick pint before the mile-long trudge down the road to where Norma had said she would park the car. It was just five minutes before midnight when I banged on the roof of the car and stirred the three of them into life and we all hugged and were grateful to be together again.

That night in the back of the car will forever haunt all four of us. The wind rose to even higher levels and the car felt as if it would be blown into oblivion. Nevertheless we survived and after a makeshift breakfast the following cold dark morning we drove away and returned to our cottage on Merseyside.

But..... I had failed so I was determined to have another go at welcoming a new year on the very summit of England.

It was now 1986 and this time I decided to go alone as this might enable me to be more focussed in my attempt. The drive up to Langdale was carried out in awful weather and although the forecast promised a few hours of calm conditions later in the night I doubted the wisdom of an attempt in these conditions. Once again I left Dungeon Ghyll at about 4 pm and after a cruel soaking moved up into snowfall which at least I could brush off my clothing. The wind rose to a level just as bad as 1984 and it took me over three hours to reach Esk Hause where the climbing really commences. I must admit I had real doubts as I hid from the wind behind the meagre shelter but today there was no welcome family to greet me down in the valley. So I made my decision to go on. The higher I climbed the worse the wind became and at one stage I was down on my hands and knees crawling over the boulder strewn plateau alongside Ill Crag. It was totally dark and not very pleasant, but I now realised that only a major accident was going to stop me from reaching the top. The last slopes to the summit that would take just 20 minutes on a good day took me nearly an hour to negotiate. At 9 pm I reached the big pile of stones that adorn the summit of England and I was relieved to know the hard work and total effort was now over.

Now I had to consider the very act of survival.

I found a wall shelter just below the highest point and rolled out my sleeping bag. I crawled into the warm inside and set up my walkman to listen to Dire Straits and Pink Floyd. I took out my hip flask of rum and tucked into more Christmas cake. I was okay and felt contented. At about 11pm I felt a presence and after a moment or two I realised I was no longer alone. Four huge lads came alongside the wall shelter and immediately I realised they were Geordies.

“Away lad room for some more in your little shelter?”

I welcomed them and watched as they laid down several large strengthened bin liners. I supposed that they would extract from their bags down jackets and sleeping bags to cope with the long cold night ahead.

But I was wrong. They brought out endless cans of Newcastle Brown ale. They sat down in the shivering cold and began to ‘crack’ open cans and tell tales of epic episodes

in the past. It was strange for me as I was relatively comfortable in my sleeping bag and the ‘lads’ just talked away all through the night as it got colder and damper. By morning it was really miserable and daylight did not appear until after 8. Our preparation for departure was wet and uncomfortable but by nine we were ready to leave. After another fleeting visit to the summit cairn we set off down the slopes. The previous evening I had enquired as to how and why they had arrived on the summit of our country in such an unprepared manner. Their answer impressed me beyond limits.

“We were sitting in the pub and realised that we were drifting into yet another inevitable and predictable drinking session. Terminated most likely by a state of utter and complete inebriation. “

“Let’s do something different. “was one such solution to this predicament.

“We shall climb Scafell Pike. That is different.”

It certainly was and something I would have been proud of. Well I was there was I not?

At Esk Hause our paths parted as the Geordies had come up from Keswick. It is strange to say but when you spend a cold and windy mountain night with complete strangers it is almost as if you know them better than your own brother whom you might have known for some forty years or more. We stood there shaking hands and exchanging bear hugs. None of us ever expected to meet up again and anyway exchange of telephone numbers would have been a bit ‘naff’ on the freezing wastes of Esk Hause on an unpleasant January 1st.

The climb down was miserable and long but by noon I reached the pub again just as the bedraggled bodies of last night celebration were rousing themselves for probably even more alcoholic punishment.

I was bright and clear minded and so pleased that I had achieved my aim of a bivvy on the summit of England over the actual moment of the change from one year to the next.

And I had gathered at least four more genuine friends, even if the chances of ever meeting them again were somewhat remote.³¹

Sometimes the things you really want demand quite a sacrifice.

³¹ Eight years later I was drinking in the Dungeon Ghyll and was well into my sixth pint of old peculiar when I was grabbed from behind by a tall equally inebriated climber.

“Away Scouse man you crazy” I was amazed. It was one of the Geordies and he remembered our ‘crazy’ night out on that cold and miserable occasion. It was amazing to meet up again and we shared more than a few beers that was sensible. The hills were off the agenda for the morrow, but we did have a right old time in the bar.

Yes, I have had an affair with Scafell Pike and to be truthful it almost certainly is my most favourite mountain of them all.



Figure 79: My resting place new years eve 1986-87

Skye - a paradise for climbers

1991 was a special year for me. After 14 years I made my return to the Cuillins of Skye. People I know have visited Skye many times and have had terrible misfortune with the weather. Indeed some have spent weeks on the island and hardly seen any summits. No such fate for me. My three visits were ‘blessed’ with superb weather, clear visibility and memories galore.

This was to be one of the few ventures I made with company. On Skye this is very much common sense as the terrain is demanding, and care is required on all parts of the ridge.

We planned to climb the ridge from south to north but only had three days at our call.

Dave called around at 0515 on Saturday May 25th and we picked up Norman and Andy before setting off up the M6. We were in Glasgow by 0900 and made good time up through Fort William and Invergarry arriving at Kyle of Localsh in mid afternoon. The weather was fair, and we enjoyed good views of the peaks around Glencoe and the Ben Nevis range.

We had a 40-minute wait for the ferry, as this was a bank holiday weekend. Once on the island we made quick progress to Sligachan where we parked up and prepared for the venture. I had torn loyalties at this stage. Several pints in the bar were most welcome and the prospect of more was indeed tempting. However we had come to climb hills, so it was to be that we left the pub before 7 and set off with our loads. It was very warm on the walk in along Glen Sligachan and every now and again we obtained fantastic views of the Cuillin ridge as the mist and thin cloud first covered and then dispersed over the

peaks. Just before the steep slopes out of Glen Sligachan over to Loch Coruisk we had a longish stop. At this point the valley swings westwards into Harta Corrie and eventually up into the heart of the northern Cuillins. We had an ascent of just over 1,000 ft. before we could drop down to our intended bivvy site. On restarting I noticed a slight pain in my groin and was more than a little concerned. Memories of a painful descent of Helvellyn some months earlier haunted me. It was only a desperate taking of half a dozen anadin that had 'got me down'. Nevertheless progress was made and by 9.30 pm we had crossed over the watershed of Druim Hain and commenced the descent to Coruisk. We began to spread out as we moved down Allt a Choire Riabhaich but eventually all met up at the stepping stones at the seaward end of the loch. This point is interesting as the river that flows out of Loch Coruisk twists for some few hundred yards before 'spilling out' into the sea. All around were fantastic peaks soaring skywards. Once Loch Coruisk was reached I discovered that the waters proceeded further inland than I first thought. The head of the loch was in some of the most impressive mountain scenery imaginable. It reminded me very much of my time in the Norwegian fiords when on exercise Polar Express in the 1960's. The skyline to the north west of the loch was a continual line of jagged peaks.

It was past 10 pm when we reached the banks of Scavaig and prepared for our night of rest. We were some hundred yards from the Coruisk memorial hut and as the grass was damp we chose to lay out our sleeping bags on a slab of smooth rock. We had filled our water bottles from Loch Coruisk. The waters of Loch Scavaig are saline. The midges were a little annoying during the night but as the weather appeared settled no other problems were apparent.



Figure 80: Preparing for departure to climb Cuillin Ridge

The next morning was cloudy and mist covered the tops above 1500 ft. During the night there had been a very slight drizzle or more realistically dampness from sea mist but we still had high hopes for a clearing of the skies later in the day. All my hill experiences told me that once altitude could be achieved the chances of breaking clear of this murk were very real. We broke camp in a leisurely manner; merely a task of rolling up our gear and grabbing a light breakfast.

We now had to traverse around the coast as we had decided to gain the main ridge as soon as possible rejecting the idea of climbing one of the corries. We made a slanting ascent up above the peninsular of Eilean Reamhar after we had made our last water bottle filling from Allt a Chaoich. Looking down I spotted a few other people camping in the vicinity and I also spotted a group of seals in the loch waters.

As height was gained we moved into a misty cloud and at one time a very fine drizzle set in. Fortunately this only lasted a few minutes and from now onwards the weather was quite dry. At one stage it became necessary to gain real height and the slopes just beneath the ridge were a real slog. We had worked it out correctly and sometime around 10 am we came out on the broad ridge south east of Gars-bheinn near to point 686.

We were now in cloud, but it always had the impression of thin cloud with a noticeable lightening in the sky above. Could it be that up above on the ridge the skies were clear?

The final pull up to Gars- bheinn was tough and we were well tired when we reached the airy summit. Now at 910m we were very much at the southern end of the Cuillin ridge. Our spirits were further raised when suddenly 'holes' began to appear in the clouds and momentary views along the ridge were seen. It was almost magic because this did not happen all at once. It was almost as if the mountains were teasing us by giving small 'tasters' of what might be to come. Then covering it all up again in a misty shroud. The only downturn to all this was the fact that we could now see the full extent of cliff and crag and the sheer drops that fell away from both sides of the ridge. We made careful progress along the ridge crossing the summit of Sgurr a Choire Bhig and dropping to the depression between this peak and Sgurr nan Eag. The last 400 ft. to the summit of our first Munro were steep but they posed no problems. We sat alongside the large cairn and took stock of our position. To be honest we were rather later in the day than I would have liked. There was a long way to go and so much to see. Progress would by necessity and desire be slower than normal. We now were meeting up with many other climbers, presumably those who were Munro hunting, and who were traversing southwards. It was on the summit of Nan Eag that we finally achieved the weather break through. All of a sudden, the view to the north opened. I was the only one searching ahead as the others were resting by the cairn I can still remember my excited shout back

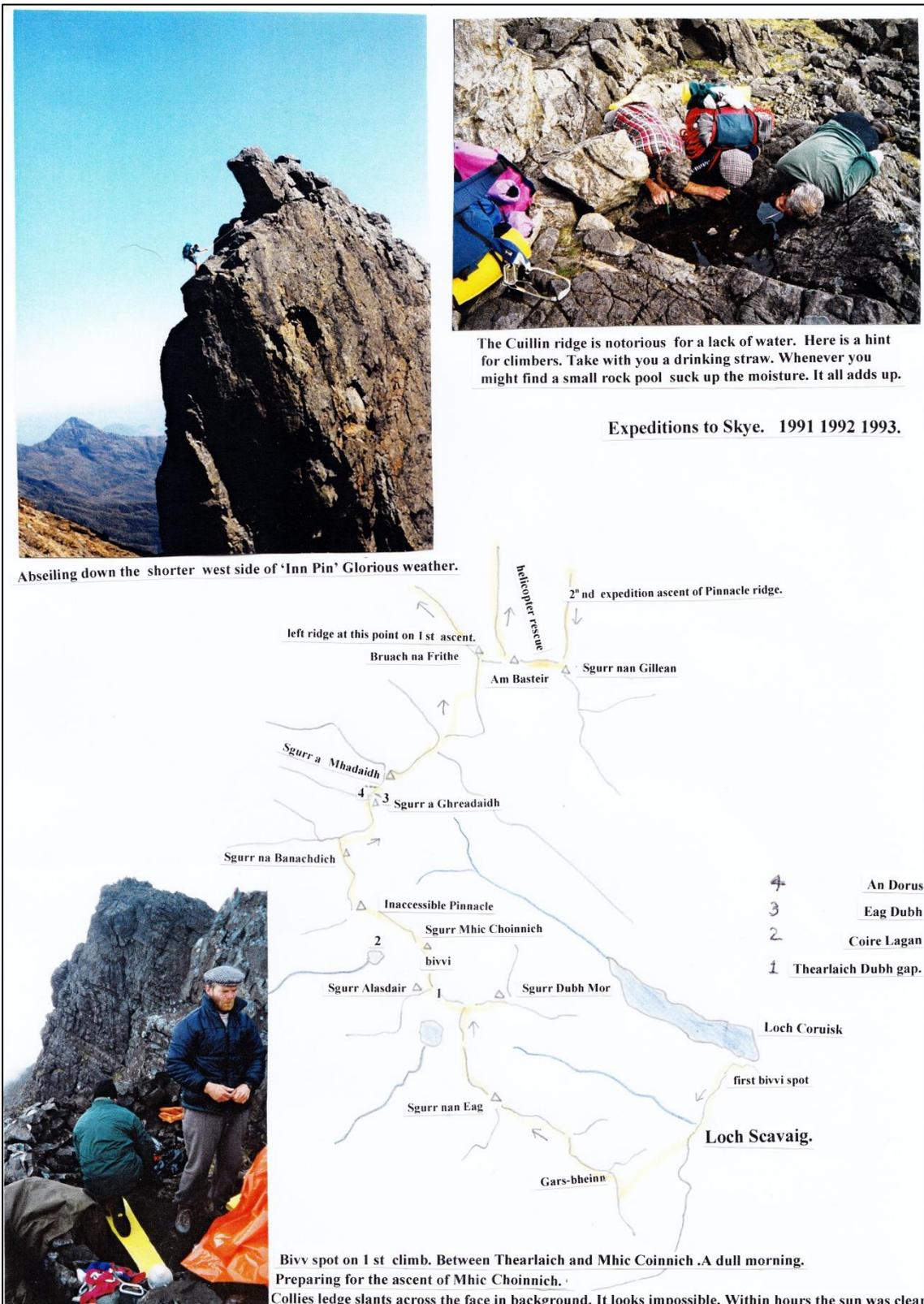
“Come quick the whole ridge is appearing.”

It certainly was. Sgurr Alasdair and Sgurr Thearlaich were now fully visible and within five minutes the ridge beyond could be seen clearly. A truly magic moment.

By now I was having little difficulty with my groin and it seemed to have worked its way out.

After the long crest of Sgurr nan Eag there is some scrambling down the north-west ridge. All the time we looked down longingly at the waters of Loch Coira Ghrunnda as continually our water reserves were depleting in the now warm sunshine. Norman introduced us to the art of water survival by producing straws and looking out for any

rock pool however small it might be. Some pools, maybe half an inch deep, gave us two or three small swallows of water but it all helped to save our carried supplies.



Dave was lagging a bit as the early afternoon approached and we slowly made progress across Caisteal a' Garbh-Choire to the upper slopes of Sgurr Dubh an Da Bheinn 3078 ft. Here Dave took a rest and looked after our rucksacks as we quickly (as quick as is possible on the Cuillin ridge) bagged the summit. There were a lot of people on the top, so we wasted no time making our way for the col leading to the second Munro Sgurr Dubh Mor 3096ft. On the col Norman and I partook of snow eating to ease our never-ending thirst. The snow was really ice and it had the desired effect. The steep crags of Sgurr Dubh Mor can be turned on the right although care is required. The summit of Sgurr Dubh Mor is a narrow crest with a cairn at one end and a mossy tuft of grass perched precariously at the other end beyond which the ridge continues level for some distance before descending steeply over Sgurr Dubh Beag and down to Loch Coruisk.

We returned the way we had come and by now the view had opened completely. The whole of the Cuillin ridge was now visible. We returned to Dave who was refreshed after his rest and had the doubtful pleasure of donning our rucksacks again. There is no time to waste on the Cuillin ridge and we scrambled towards the imposing cliffs of the south-east face of Sgurr Thearlaich. The main ridge north of the bealach Coir an Lochain rises to Sgurr Thearlaich and is a no go area for walkers. It contains the infamous Thearlaich Dubh gap a great cleft in the ridge that is a polished difficult rock climb on both sides. Even reaching the south side of the gap involves an exposed rock climb. We roped up and climbed the first slopes that led to the gap. On reaching the slope above the gap none of us fancied the 80-ft. rock climb ahead. It would involve a difficult chimney and with large rucksacks would not have been easy at all. Thus we abseiled down into the gap and noticed the sheer vertical drop away to the right. The gully down to the left was steep but posed no problem. This led us down to scree slopes that eventually gave access to the ridge leading from Sgurr Sgumain to Sgurr Alasdair. Looking at my watch I was surprised to see it was rapidly becoming late, as afternoon 'drifted' into evening. The weather was also closing in somewhat as the cloud dropped down. We made slow progress over the broken scree and aimed up towards the Bealach Sgumain. It was rough going but once on the bealach we quickly realised our problems were not over. Observing the ridge ahead we saw that it was very steep and somewhat exposed. Our initial task was to overcome a slab of rock to the right of the ridge. Norman resorted to using a lasso to coil the rope over a notch and I managed to scramble/ haul myself up the slope. From here I hauled up the rucksacks and we proceeded up the steep slopes. I honestly cannot remember a great deal of this ridge. We were tired, and it was becoming dark and gloomy as clouds had dropped to obscure the view. I can remember the top of the highest peak on Skye as being an exposed and very airy perch.

Leaving the summit with regrets that there had not been a distant view we dropped down the steep scramble to the col between Alasdair and Thearlaich. We spotted an ideal bivvy site on the bealach (just enough room for five people) but although it was late we wanted to make further progress before darkness. The ascent of the slope up from the bealach was not easy but it was accomplished by dropping some twenty feet to the right and climbing a rift in the rock wall. From here it was an airy scramble to the summit of Sgurr Thearlaich 3208 ft. with steep drops on all sides.

Progress was now made along the ridge northwards searching carefully for a site where we could spend the night. It was now 10 pm. We came across a patch of snow and a nearby low wall shelter offering refuge for two. We carried on. The ridge requires moderate scrambling and when we reached the slanting slab of rocks that offered the only way down to the Bealach Mhic Coinnich we decided we had had enough. A small

bivvy site with just enough room for four was chosen. Although on the windward side a little wall building made it more suitable. Dave and I went back to the snow patch and we filled mess tins with snow and ice for tea. In a moderate wind, but not too cold, we settled down for the night at very close to the 3,000-ft. contour. There was a very slight drizzle during the night, but the dawn was dry, and we began to prepare for the day shortly after 6.30 am.

Our first obstacle was the thirty-foot slab angled somewhat steeper than a house roof. There were reasonable cracks and grooves, but a slip would have resulted in a considerable fall onto the crags below. Therefore we utilised the rope and I descended. All the rucksacks were then lowered down. Norman was the last down looping the rope around the summit crest to aid his descent. Once down we all saw that the rest of the slope down to the col was also very steep and would probably require a rope assisted descent. We looked for a way to avoid this drop and traversed to the left finding steep but negotiable slopes. The last fifty feet to the col required a lot of 'hand' on rock and it was a great relief to stand on the narrow col. Norman was at the back assisting Dave in his descent.

From a higher point the route up to Sgurr Mhic Choinnich had looked almost impossible. It looked as if its reputation as a wedge-shaped peak whose traverse is one of the most difficult on the ridge was true. The ledge recommended as an alternative to the direct ascent via Kings Chimney appeared to be extremely exposed. Andy and I were first down to the col and whilst waiting I decided to do a recce of the ledge known as Collies Ledge. After a 15 foot climb up the slabs on the Mhic Choinnich side of the col the ledge slants up the slope to the left. Once on the route the exposure was not as great as it had appeared from a distance. My initial recce was extended and I passed around the corner and made good progress. At one point the ledge narrowed considerably and the fearsome drop beneath was apparent. Nevertheless it was much easier than I had feared and after short while I realised I had almost completed the traverse. I made my way back to pass on the good news as this traverse was going to save us a considerable amount of time. The alternative would have been a big descent into the upper Coire Lagan. I collected my discarded rucksack and we all made the traverse of Collies ledge.

At the end of the traverse we regained the ridge by means of some scrambling. The final section is dramatic passing over exposed slabs and a 'morass' of rock and boulder. The scrambling may only be moderate but for anyone suffering from just a hint of vertigo it provides much to be considered. There is a memorial tablet fixed into the summit cairn. A truly remarkable place to be but we did not stay long as we could see the distance we still had to cover that day.

As we descended northwards we could see a large party approaching from An Stac. We met them just above the lowest point on the route from Mhic Choinnich to Inaccessible Pinnacle. We now girded our muscles for the long scree ascent to the Pinnacle. It was now very warm and progress was slow up the steep loose rock. Diversion was received by watching the 'reverse' progress of the group we had recently passed. It was possible to see them ascend to the top of Mhic Choinnich and then take on our route via Collies ledge. Meanwhile our slog continued. Andy was first to reach 'In Pin' and Dave and I were some ten minutes behind him.

It was now past 10 am and although the Pinnacle was clear of climbers we had to make some quick decisions. The ascent would take at least an hour and that would mean no

further progress along the ridge until after noon. It was warm sitting in the sun thinking about our choices.

The summit of Sgurr Dearg 3209 ft. is a short arête that is one of the most awesome spots on the Cuillin ridge? Looming even higher is the vertiginous blade of rock known as the Inaccessible Pinnacle. This mighty monolith teeters some 80 feet above the south-east slopes of Sgurr Dearg. Overtopping the summit by some 25 feet, it is clearly the most difficult Munro in all Scotland. The sensational situation above abysmal drops on each side have been known to cause many normally rock steady ridge walkers to hug the ground for the comfort of its solidity. Although the east ridge is only moderate the exposure makes this a very difficult climb.

Bearing in mind we still desired to climb the entire ridge in two days we decided to leave In Pin until next year. (As things turned out even with this omission we did not have enough time to complete the whole ridge.)

We moved north meeting a growing number of climbers. Dave was again having a little difficulty and once past Bealach Coire na Banachdich our progress slowed down even further. We decided to make a decision on the summit as we were now well past midday. There were no further problems other than scrambling before we reached the summit of Sgurr na Banachdich 3166ft. Dave decided he would descend from here and we said our farewells as he set off down the ridge to Sgurr nan Gobhar and the valley inland from Glen Brittle.

There was still a long way to go on the ridge that snaked away to the north and east. Many ups and downs with almost certainly many time-consuming pitches to hold up progress.

We scrambled down the shattered ridge of Banachdich and quickly came upon the steep crest of Thormaid. I looked ahead and was in awe at what confronted me. The ridge of Ghreadaidh hung high in the sky like the sharp edge of a fierce cutlass. Much more severe than Striding Edge and more exposed than Crib Goch the ridge offered scrambling of the highest order. Once on the south top I could look ahead to the narrow knife edged ridge with drops to abysmal depths on both sides. I attempted to negotiate the ridge on the crest but must admit I occasionally dropped a little to one side to make progress. This was no place to hurry but we did have time constraints. The ridge down from Ghreadaidh was less 'fierce' and I took the challenge of 'leaping' the gap known as Eag Dubh. Maybe not a wise decision but all went well. Very soon after we reached An Dorus where a short rock climb down led to the base of the gap. We now had to negotiate very steep scrambling before the highest point of Sgurr a Mhadaidh was reached. I managed to keep to the crest of the ridge all the way up and was delighted to top out on this fantastic viewpoint. I had made a bid some hour earlier that I would stop for something to eat as near to 2 'ish' wherever I was. Thus the top of Mhadaidh was a perfect place for such a halt. There were many climbers in the vicinity, so we moved northwards for some twenty yards and unloaded our rucksacks on the sharp ridge. In fact our perch above the drop down to Coruisk was somewhat precarious. As I was eating my 'butties' it came to me that if I was to start slipping down the slope below I would not stop for some three thousand feet. I made sure my rucksack was firmly 'planted.'

After half an hour we moved off along the exposed ridge. After a few minutes scrambling we reached the point where the ridge makes an important 'turn'. It swings north north east at the point where the long ridge from Sgurr Thuilm joins the main

crest. At first, we could not work out how to proceed. Down to the right of the ridge a slab of rocks led around to what looked like a gap/ gully. I dumped my rucksack and attempted a recce but was not happy about the last few steps to see around the corner. A slip would have had serious consequences. I re-joined the main slope and Norman spotted the scratched signs of an ascent up the rock face I had tried to turn. It must have been the stop for lunch or my dislike of climbing with rucksacks because I was not happy about a small pitch that should not have caused a problem. Something was at the back of my mind. I kept thinking of my accident on Pike o Stickle back in 82. Then I had been dragged off a vertical wall and only managed to arrest my fall by good fortune. I watched my rucksack and worldly possessions disappear from view. They returned into view seconds later some thousand feet below bouncing off crags like a delicate toy. Never to be seen again. Once on the top of the intervening crag we moved more eastwards along and down the ridge to the col between the highest Mhadiadh peak and the second top north eastwards along the ridge.

Each col between peaks was now 'throwing up' its own little time-consuming problem. On the first col after the main peak of Mhadaidh we had to look for a way round the vertical crags that protected the main ridge. It was obvious there was no way round to the left. We dropped down to the right for thirty feet or so and found a way up the sloping 'shelves'. It was here that I had my second unaccountable 'freeze'. There was a way up a slab by means of convenient holds. I did not like the look of it and after the others had ascended I went back down and attempted a route that was more exposed and less obvious. It worked out but defied logic. Re-joining Norman and Andy I made the slight detour to the top of another Mhadaidh peak. We moved on and found another pitch between peaks. No real problems but it was all taking up time and the afternoon was 'marching on.'

It was at this point of the ridge that maps; guide books and other notes do not seem to be consistent. We dropped down from the northern peak of Mhadaidh and reached the Bealach na Glaic Moire. Here I discovered a large patch of ice and I filled my 2-litre bottle after drinking the last vestiges of my water supply. When Norman and Andy reached the bealach they did the same, but I had already trekked off ahead as my upward progress was somewhat slower than the others. The slopes of Bidein Druim Nan Ramh were nothing more than a slog but An Caisteal and Sgurr Na Bhairnich looked to pose many problems. Time was again a problem. We reached another col and confronted a large number of army lads out on exercises. With full kit and weapons on a hot day it took me back to Marine training. After we passed them the imposing crags ahead gave us inspiration. There were no further Munros until Bruach na Frithe and our pause was for just a moment before the irreversible 'dive' down a scree run into Coire a Tairneilear. This was done to avoid the almost certain difficulties on the main ridge and also the obvious descent and re-ascent required. Our progress was ultra-quick. We stopped for 15 minutes to witness the horrendous abseil of the army lads who were descending from the ridge leading to Sgurr an Fheadain. To our surprise the climb back to the ridge took little more than fifteen minutes. We had succeeded in avoiding a probable hour or more of climbing. Initial estimates as to how long our journey along the remaining ridge to Bruach na Frithe would take turned out to be hopelessly wrong. It was certainly no stroll. Towards the last depression I was out in front and was dismayed to find a ledge leading to a sixty-foot vertical drop. As it turned out we avoided this very nicely by crossing the crest to the other side. Now we were on the last leg and after another long slog it was with much relief we reached the top of 'Frithe.' It was now well past 6 pm and a look along the ridge confirmed we had come to the end

of our onward progress. Without ferry worries we may have gone on but to be perfectly honest we were probably 'bushed.'

In fact we had decided some hours before that this was to be our ultimate peak. We chatted to the many climbers on this the easiest Munro of the Cuillins. Then we made off in rapid style down the long narrow ridge to the north west. Height was lost quickly along the crest which in places was sharp edged. As we descended the ridge became broader and I took many backward glances to the route we had forced our limbs over the last two days. It stretched out sharp and clear all the way back to Gars- bheinn

Soon we were down in the valley and the long walk back to Sligachan was indeed painful.

We had agreed to return and complete the few loose ends of the ridge. 'In Pin' and the obvious challenge of Nan Gillean and Am Basteir.

The last few hundred yards saw us move through a bog of squelchy character.

Four pints in the climbers bar were ample consolation.

A return in 1992

Norman picked me up at 4 pm and we made tracks to Andy before moving up the M6. The traffic was fairly light, and we made good progress. Just north of Glasgow we had a meal and being midsummer we were well into the Highlands before the sun set. The ferry crossing was quick and our arrival at Sligachan was about 2 am. Sadly the pub was shut!!!

We parked on the road side and slept out in the open. The weather was still and clear.

This was amazing fortune as good weather was becoming the 'norm' for us on this magical island. In the morning we had our breakfast by the roadside and noticed the skies were completely clear with hardly any wind. This was the promise of a brilliant day.

Suitably refreshed after our sleep in the heather we moved off at 0900 towards the lower reaches of Pinnacle Ridge. The ground was surprisingly dry and what was a bog and marsh last year was today quite passable. It became very warm as the sun gained height. The whole scene captivated me. The ridge ahead was a jagged succession of sharp peaks and crag. All leading to the summit of the peak I so badly wanted.

Once we gained the ridge proper the scrambling relieved the pain of the uphill slog. The rock was in good condition and we made steady progress up to the top of the first pinnacle. An almost level walk followed, and the next steeper section was ascended by a slanting slab, eventually reaching an unusual grassy area. Further easy scrambling led to the even broader summit of the second pinnacle. I was amazed at the almost complete lack of any vegetation on this rocky ridge into the sky. Just like Iceland this was a place where nothing but rock and boulder exists. A place of rocky extreme. We now met two lads who were intending to climb the entire ridge to Gars bheinn though they appeared to be in no particular rush. Hours later they were only a short distance ahead of us and it was then obvious they had plenty of time or had aborted their task.

We made progress up towards the third pinnacle and again we found the scrambling fairly easy. On reaching the top of the third pinnacle we observed that the ridge now took on a more serious nature. The top of this pinnacle was indeed an airy perch. The way onwards was by means of an abseil down a well-scratched chimney leading down to a col. It could be climbed without an abseil, but this would be a tricky manoeuvre.

On the summit we had caught up with the two lads we had spoken to earlier. They were about to abseil down. We sat on the top and watched events and enjoyed the warm sunshine. Everything was moving in 'slow motion' and looking back I could see other climbers ascending behind on the ridge. We made a snap decision and decided to leave our rope in the rucksack. We retraced our steps and skirted round the base of the pinnacle on the left side. This scramble led to the gap between the third and fourth pinnacle. It was on the short descent back that we met a girl who suggested we join our ropes. A tempting offer (she was very attractive) but as we had almost reached the 'skirting' point we continued round to the gap. From the top of the fourth pinnacle we watched her make her abseil descent. By this time there were some 10 to 15 climbers on the small top.

From the gap between the third and fourth pinnacle the climb had been on initially steep but sound rock to reach a ledge sloping upwards to the right. Gaining this ledge was difficult as an overhanging rock lay just a distance above it. Beyond this the climb was a long obvious open groove for some distance at an easier angle. The descent to the gap between the fourth and final summit required some care. Andy chose the direct route involving some awkward reaches down. Norman and I moved away to the right before reaching a grassy groove leading back to the gap.

The last scramble to the summit of Nan Gillean was a delight. The top of the mountain was a short airy ridge with sheer drops on both sides. As the ridges that lead to the summit are not seen from the actual top a feeling of being perched high in the sky is so real. Of all the mountains I have ascended this summit must be very high in my list of grandeur. We were confronted with a large number of climbers who had ascended by other routes. The weather was still brilliant, and lunch was taken with views in all directions.

What a place to be.

When the time came to leave the summit we descended to a hole in the ridge some fifty feet below the summit. On further descent we caught up with a lot of climbers and it became obvious there was a difficult descent from the ridge. Some climbers were roped up and others were scrambling down by a variety of routes. We selected a gully from a guide book and commenced our climb down. I went out ahead and soon came to the conclusion this was not really a gully. In fact later in the day we named our descent route "not really a gully-gully." The scrambling was somewhat difficult, but progress downward was made. Near the bottom I met a couple climbing upwards with a dog. Memories of Sach my trusty mate. In fact they eventually made it up our 'down' route. As in many cases it was probably easier going up than down. We now found ourselves on the bealach with the next Munro looming up ahead.

Scrambling up to Am Basteir is an anti-climax after Nan Gillean but nothing can be taken away from the amazing rock formations seen all around. I was ecstatic at the fortune we were receiving with reference to the weather. Rarely, so very rarely does this part of Britain see endless blue skies. We had experienced this now for some eight hours and still not a cloud could be seen anywhere in the cobalt sky.

Looking down on the Basteir tooth I was in no way tempted to attempt this climb. The view was downward, and I was contented with my Munro. Having already climbed Bruach na Frithe we were in no hurry. Today we had the time to fully enjoy the amazing surroundings. I contemplated that Munro 'bagging,' whilst enjoyable and really grand, does occasionally spoil the experience. Desire to 'tick off' summits can

lead to a 'dash syndrome.' It is possible to move too quickly and often the glory of the surroundings are not fully appreciated. I sat on Am Basteir and fully appreciated it all. There was just another moment of drama to follow.



**Figure 82: John Cooke on the slopes of Am Basteir
Looking to the rocky ridge of Sgurr nan Gillean**

On our descent we came across a climber who had fallen and badly injured his leg. A mountain ranger had radioed for assistance and they were all awaiting the arrival of a rescue helicopter. After ten minutes the sound of the rotor blades could clearly be heard and very soon after the helicopter was hovering high above the injured climber. I moved back along the ridge for some distance. All my past experiences of helicopters came flooding back into mind. Many of my colleagues died in the cold waters of the Gaat when two Wessex collided on approach to Nanga Gaat. Two others crashed into each other on the airstrip at Sibiu and a piece of rotor blade was found days later embedded in a doorway, a good quarter mile away. Watching this precarious rescue I fully realised that if anything went wrong the air would be full of flying razor blades. Nevertheless the whole operation was interesting to watch, and it was carried out in a totally professional manner. The injured climber was lifted out and the mini drama was complete.

The next five days saw many more repeat climbs and never a cloud was seen. Of course Inaccessible Pinnacle was climbed and the biggest problem we experienced was just getting on the rock. Dozens and dozens of others were queuing for the opportunity and all the aspiring climbers had a very large audience monitoring progress from the nearby top of Sgurr Dearg.

But I shall not go on about Inaccessible Pinnacle. Everyone has climbed this magic rock??? I was still full of the memory of a week of totally cloudless sky (Skye). Magic.

Dolomite adventures

In 1975 via ferrata sounded more like my dreaded Latin vocabulary book than a passport to high places without the burden of huge load carrying. It was well known in the climbing clubs that I did not like big packs on my back. The one exception might have been an initial booze carry before a spell of tenting in high places. Otherwise I was not keen to emulate the yaks and donkeys of treks to base camps, wherever they might be situated.

The via ferrata opened up the high places without all the need for masses of ‘jingly jangly’ gear. It was possible to venture on a high mountain armed only with a harness, sling or two and a carabiner. Rucksack space could now be given over to a bottle of beer or other such creature comforts. The via ferrata exist because of two major factors. Dolomite rock is naturally striated providing unique ledges along which paths can be forged. Sometimes these ledge paths can cross a rock face with hundreds of feet of vertical rock above and awesome drops into the abyss below. But of course this would be useless to the lightly loaded climber unless a network could be created to provide a high-level route into the highest of high places. The Italian Alpine club provided the ‘link’. Ingeniously they have inserted ladders fixed to the vertical rock faces and cemented fixed wires across the sections that would otherwise put many a climber off. All linked together it is now possible to progress up and across fearsome faces armed only with a sling and carabiner with which to clip into the fixed safety. Of course there is another very special requirement. A good head for heights as a peep down through your legs to a vertical drop of two thousand feet may well deter many an intrepid explorer. I always looked at it this way. If you are not going to fall off it is irrelevant that a huge drop is lurking below, and anyway a fall from your upstairs window cleaning operation can be just as fatal as a slip on an awesome face. The key is do not fall off.

Some of the ladders are long and even with my optimistic philosophy of ladder climbing they can cause very moist palms and a tenuous time ascending. To be sure of success on such ladders two carabiners can be used so that as you make upward progress you are always attached at some point. Coming down is even more of a scare; but as is written. “No pain, no gain.”

Our first Dolomite venture saw us based in Cortina which in winter months is an impressive cosmopolitan ski resort. We took advantage of cable cars and chair lifts to take the ‘sting’ out of long treks through the tree line. Thus we arrived at ten thousand feet fresh and relaxed to commence a high-level traverse with only a slight dizziness to overcome. This can be the big snag of a rapid upward lift as altitude can have an effect as low as this if artificial modes of ascent are used to gain height very quickly.

Tofana Di Mezzo and Tofana Di Rozes were traversed in a day with the aid of the cable car. Cinque Torri 7,689 ft. was another memorable climb, the mountain had the appearance of a large butte similar to those of Monument Valley Utah; but here there was no John Wayne. We ascended by way of a vertical split in one of the sides. Our sojourn on the summit was only ‘spoilt’ by the fact we had to abseil down from the top to an unseen ledge hundreds of feet below. Hope that the guide book as correct was a definite thought as the initial backwards leap was made. It was on Cinque Torri that I can remember releasing some upward adrenaline just short of the flat top of the crag. We climbed past a couple who were taking every precaution and putting in place just possibly an unnecessary amount of safety. As I passed the young girl at the bottom of the rope I heard her boyfriend shout down to her.

“slack Alice.”

I commented, as I negotiated a crevice out on the rock face.

“I wouldn’t let him talk to me like that, young lady.”

We all met up on the summit and enjoyed the extensive views.

A later climb has become known as the day of the nun. In beautiful sunshine we were negotiating a not too difficult climb, but this was not going to stop my imagination. As far as I was concerned I was on the last thousand feet of Nanga Parbat, and with screwed up eyes and my head firmly down I was in a world of my very own. Height was gained, and my mind was far away. Suddenly a cry from behind warned me of other climbers who were rapidly closing the distance on our group. I emerged from my fantasy world of Himalayan giants and stepped aside at a suitable point to gain a steady stance above the drop. I looked down and to my utter amazement I saw a nun climbing in her flowing cassock with just a glimpse of occasional plimsoll. She was followed by many more and it took a full ten minutes for this unlikely group to climb through our party. No ropes for them and not a sign of a carabiner to be clicked on to the adjacent wire. My illusions were shattered, and my images of Nanga Parbat destroyed. I continued to the summit very much ‘put in place.’ At the huge crucifix adorning the neat top we all witnessed a service of some seriousness before the nuns turned away to find their very own way down to the valley. We later found out this was an annual ceremony and had been going on for many years. I refused to use any aids on our descent. If it was good enough for a nun it was certainly good enough for an aspiring Herman Buhl.

Usually the Dolomites can offer very reliable and decent weather. But as in all aspects of life the usual is not always the eventuality. In 1978 we left Liverpool for an intended ascent of Mont Blanc but this year the weather gods were out to thwart almost every plan and hope to which we aspired. Chamonix was good but of the mountains above we saw little. The camp site became a paddy field and days of continual rain kept us locked into the valley floor. Of course all this rain could well be snow higher up, and our chances were diminishing with every drop that fell. Boredom set in and days of cribbage were no longer sufficient to pass away the time. Cheap wine did the trick, but it also brought forth many problems. After more than a week a rift set into the group; we had not even seen the mountain yet and alternative plans were being raised for the remainder of the expedition. I badly wanted this mountain and was prepared to lay siege indefinitely. However, the dreaded vino had its say and after one enormous drinking binge I was quite helpless. Whilst in this state of inebriation decisions were being made. Accusations of anti-social behaviour and the idea we were being thrown off the camp site did not impress me at all even if it were possible they contained some fact. We broke camp and drove away from the big hill to find solace in the Dolomites. At least we could expect some fine weather?

We arrived in the Dolomites and found what we had left behind. Torrential rain cascaded down and everything was drowned and wet. I kept very quiet but had an inward urge to speak forth. People who keep repeating “I told you so” are never very popular.

In a monsoon proportion downpour we arrived in the ‘sunny’ Dolomites and if nearly running out of petrol was bad an inability to find any camp site was trying everyone’s patience to the full. Nearing midnight we stumbled on a church log house and asked the nuns for permission to camp. They went one better, offering us the use of a barn.

The next day was brilliant and we drove up the valley to Madonna di Campiglio. This was to be very much a lull in the storm but of course we did not know this. We were looking ahead to the Brenta Dolomites as they rose in splendid isolation. Facing them across the deep and wooded valle di Campiglio rose the snowy tops of the granite Adamello- Prescanella range. As a group the Brenta is neat and compact, roughly a north south ridge extending 20 km. Most of the interest lies south of the Groste Pas where pinnacles and towers can be seen, including the sensational Campanile Basso, the Dolomites ultimate erotic gesture.

Supplies were acquired, and we drove as far up the valley as possible before having to resort to backpacking. Leaving the vehicle at Rif Valliesinella we made the steep ascent to Rif Casinel and then followed a long path contouring the slopes until Val Brenta Alta was reached. It all had to be done twice as our supplies had to last for many days. A rucksack loaded with cheap fierce wine does have a considerable weight. Here in the high valley our camp was set up and now our problems really began.

The following day the weather returned with a vengeance and the rain cascaded down above and beyond our Chamonix experience. If ever an 'I told you so' merchant was vindicated it was me. I was so disgusted I hardly set foot out of my tent. One attempt to climb Cima Tosa was made but I totally ignored it. Stagnation a la sleeping bag was my order of the day.

The stream alongside the camp was raging for three days before it disappeared and moved back upstream. This was limestone country and it was usually a dry valley. It was only the heavy rain that caused the surface drainage to be where it as. By the fifth day, even though it was still raining, a 300 yard walk across rough terrain was necessary to reach a water supply.

I remained in my sleeping bag for endless hour and by the end of the sixth day was ready to abandon the whole climbing expedition and seek solace in a bar.

Out there were ridges and summits but we couldn't reach them

Then the weather broke.

A glorious morning welcomed us.

Leaving camp early, breakfast was taken at Rif Alberto o Maria ai Brentei and from here we climbed up the glacier Vedr. Dei Brentei. The sun was burning down and after so much inactivity this was most welcome. Kicking steps up steep ice with the sun burning down was nectar to climbers who had been tent bound over so many rain sodden days. We reached the route and here the group split. To the north were three peaks that could be climbed. I wanted them all.

Cima Molveno 2917m and Spallone dei Massodi 2999m were worthwhile summits but ahead was the top of Cima Brenta and this was luring me forward akin to a moth in a flame. We traversed across steep slopes and reached a point we were sure led to the summit. I was not sure if crampons would be of assistance and this caused my delay in putting them on and then removing them when snow cover diminished. I was climbing a full 5 minutes behind the other and I caught them up while they were resting on a ledge at one end of a fifty-yard ridge. I was dismayed; the summit was set back above a near vertical crag which extended up above the opposite end of the ridge obstacle. No-one liked the look of the rig and it was warm sitting in the sunshine. We were going nowhere, and decisions had to be made. In the distance above the crag I could just make out the large crucifix on the tiny summit crest. Without a rope this was not going to be particularly safe but after so much 'tent rotting' the temptation was just too great. None

of the group could be persuaded so I donned my helmet, borrowed an extra ice axe and took the plunge.



Figure 83: The author on the final slopes to Cima Brenta

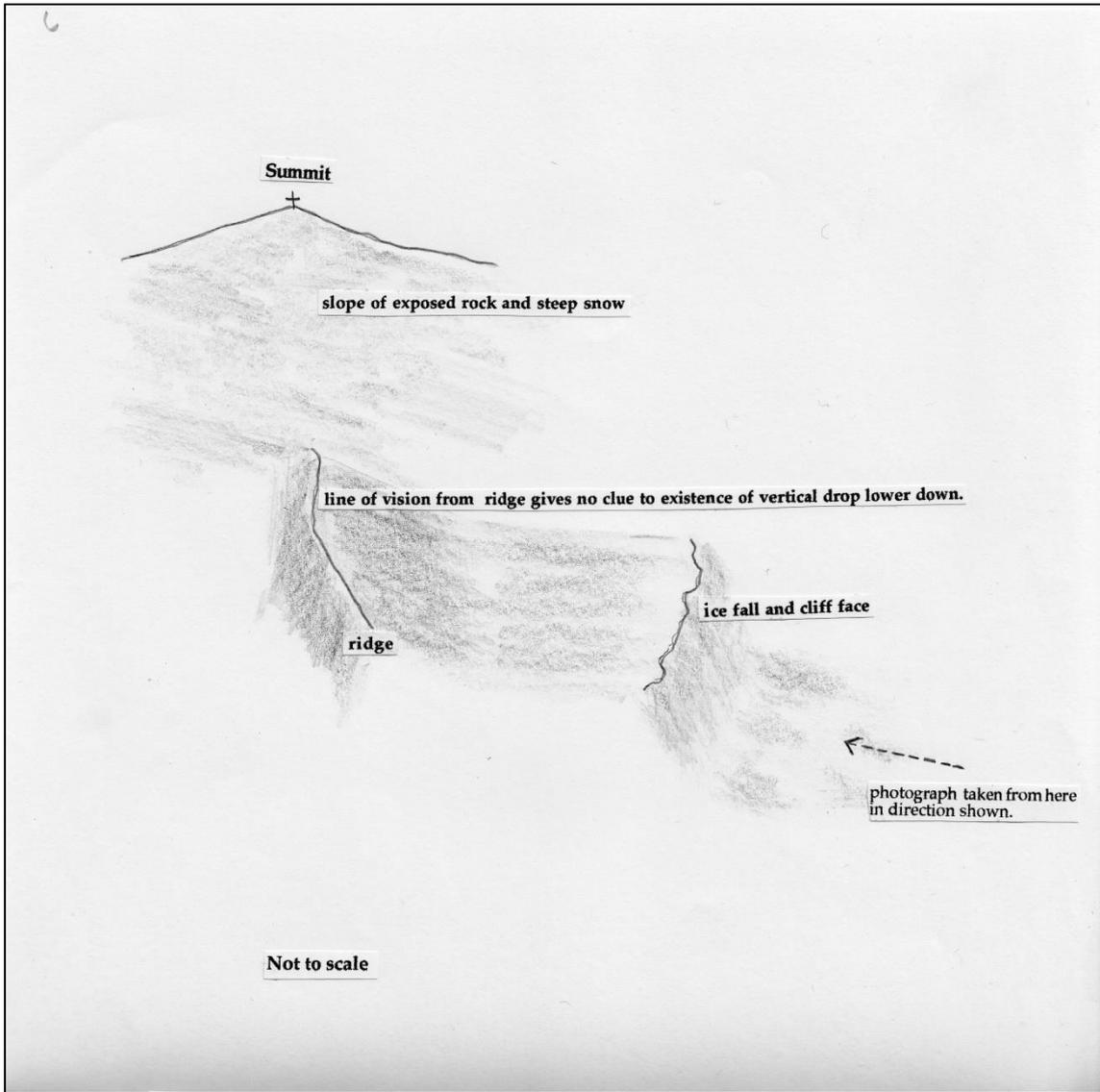


Figure 84: Final slopes for Cima Brenta



**Figure 85: Many hours later I had descended to the valley and looked back up
This is the awesome cliff I would have tumbled down had I slipped to the right
on my summit traverse**



Figure 86: The lads of the 1977 Dolomite expedition

Left to right: Dave Riley (Clunk), Mark Mooney, (Spock), name unknown, Alan Boyle (Ali Bongo) leader, Kevin Boyce (Boycey), John Hull, Simon Dawes, John Cooke, John Day, Artie Ash, Paul Illot (Lippo)

The snow was soft and by using my two long ice axes as a makeshift zimmer I leant into the lope. There was a near vertical drop to the left and fortunately the cornices of winter had long since disappeared. To the right a less steep slope of snow and ice slanted away hundreds of feet and disappeared to the lower part of the mountain. (see photographs) A single line of footprints encouraged me onward. I must admit to a feeling of extreme vulnerability as I slowly plodded on with advice from my fellow climbers relaxing in the warm sunshine. Leaving the ridge was awkward and here I had to remove my crampons to negotiate the rocky crags. Sitting there I noticed my breath was coming in short sharp bursts and this had nothing to do with altitude. The ridge beyond looked very unsafe so an approach was made over rock with the speed of ascent fully acknowledging the difficulty of the terrain. All the way along the ridge I had been contemplating the consequences of an avalanche or a fall. I had even concluded that a 'slip' to the right might even save me hours of exhausting descent later in the day. Yes, an ice axe controlled slide might not be a bad way of getting down. Later in the day this idea was well and truly 'laid to rest' just as I would have been had I slipped.

Never was a summit so welcome to a nervous climber. The top was graced with a huge crucifix and I sat there glad that the airy scramble was over but just a little concerned that the ascent ground had to be covered again and the descent would certainly be more difficult. All around me were cliffs and crags and the spires of rock that so characterise the dolomite mountains. Descent was difficult, but I had the assurance that my upward steps had not set off a downward cascade of snow and rock; therefore by placing my

feet in exactly the same footholds I slowly made progress back to my companions. All the time I was remembering the steep drops to either side.

It is quite amazing just how adrenalin can give you the necessary 'fuel' when contemplating the last slopes to a much-desired summit. I was now in this position and after the nerve jangling hour or so on Cima Brenta I relaxed and followed the others down the slopes almost without a care in the world. I let the others move on ahead and by the time we were well down the Vedr. Di Brenta it was just 'lippo' and myself bringing up the rear-guard. On one very welcome stop I looked back up at the slope I would have fallen had I slipped from my summit ridge. The snow and ice ended up perched on a horrendous cliff over which I would have tumbled.

Definitely a case of looking before one leaps...or falls!

Early that evening we reached the comfort of a refuge but the thought of an arduous ascent back to the tents was always 'niggling away.' Myself and lippo were starving and we sat down at a table and ordered four huge plates of spaghetti and meat. The waiter laid out places for four, but we told him they were all for us. I don't think he could believe it but on completion we ordered another two huge dishes to 'cement' his amazement. Climbing can be a very hungry business.

They were good days even if just occasionally arguments and dispute surfaced to cause just a little friction. I think everyone should have a chance to be part of an expedition at some stage. It gives you an amazing insight into the need for co-operation and the concept of working together to reach a common goal. It does not always work like that, but the theory is sound.

Lippo was my mate and we shared a tent and spent many an hour playing cribbage, perched in all sorts of positions. On our return journey from the Brenta we shared an amazing day which is still firmly fixed in my memory bank. Sadly neither of us possessed a camera so the memory will have to suffice.

Camped at St. Moritz we found everything so ridiculously expensive. We were surrounded by superb mountains and the weather was fantastic. Even the lure of 'rip off' beer did not tempt me. I only managed to enthrall Lippo to venture up to the heights so the two of us set off to find a cable car to take the first thousand feet or so out of the equation. We made steady upward progress in warmth that was amazing considering we were now climbing upwards of 9,000 ft. The views continued to open in all directions and after a tranquil stop at a lake we saw a ridge leading away to snow covered peaks. We had little gear, but this was too much of a temptation and another two hours of ascent saw us on an airy summit surrounded by massive ranges and sunlit summits. It was completely still, and I can remember sitting there looking all around in amazement. As the conditions were perfect we moved along the ridge to see if we could discover another route of descent. Being completely 'unequipped', without crampons or ice axe this might have been a risk too far, but the discovery of a long snow slope/ gully persuaded us to ride our luck a little further. Lippo had one long fall/ slide which he had difficulty arresting but he was not hurt. I practised perfect self-preservation tactics by stepping aside as he slid towards me calling out in vain. We reached the foot of the slope with nothing more than very cold hands and numb fingers. On meeting a fully equipped climber at the lower end of the slope we must have demoralised him for I had not even a rucksack. Merely a George Henry Lee plastic carrier bag. He chastised us for taking such risks in an area where the weather can turn foul in as little as half an hour. Nevertheless we had ridden our luck and been rewarded with a fantastic day in

impressive surroundings. All the long way back to the valley where we were camped the weather remained perfect. It was well dark when we arrived back at the tents after one of the most memorable and possibly unexpected days I have had in the hills. Lippo was an ideal 'foil' for me. Awkward, argumentative but grand company.

Godhaborg -Vatnajokull ice cap

Preamble

Vatnajokull is the third largest ice cap in the world exceeded only in size by Antarctica and Greenland. For the explorer it is an amazing location offering just about every aspect of physical Geography. Volcanic activity to glacial erosion with the added attraction for climbers of surreal peaks projecting above the ice like islands poking their heads above the waters of an ocean.

As we all know Munro 'bagging' is fun and it leaves one with a memorable sense of achievement. Why else would we do it? I have been fortunate to have visited Iceland and have spent many weeks climbing peaks on the edge of the ice cap followed by more adventurous journeys out onto the ice itself. I was able to reach and climb spires of rock that gave not only a similar sense of achievement but set fire to the coals of imagination.

1975

I was fortunate to travel out to Iceland as part of a three-man advance party. By hiring a Landrover we managed to establish base camp much more quickly and this gave me a golden opportunity to climb many surrounding peaks, thus gaining an overview of the area we were to be working in.

This four-week reconnaissance had its amusing moments as well. As Iceland was a 'dry' (alcohol) country we managed to smuggle many cans of beer within the struts of our expedition stretcher. We were given an allowance by the leader with strict instructions not to exceed this quota. Of course temptation and hard work made this an impossible order and by the end of the 2nd week we had consumed all the main party's beer rations. Our only hope for possible salvation was in the guise of a home brew kit we had brought out with us.

We set about our attempt to dilute inevitable wrath when the others arrived by commencing the brewing operation. As most folk know this entails two processes and does require an element we did not have. Time. The brewing act was assisted by surrounding the bucket with closed cell foam mats and keeping a hot water bottle between the bucket and mats. Nevertheless two weeks would still be a reasonable time for proper fermentation and two weeks we certainly did not have. I can still remember an amusing conversation, some five days after commencement. This was the day we 'illegally' drank the last of the expedition cans.

It was 7pm.

"Ron do you think the brew is ready yet?"

"No the 'thing' takes days if not weeks," was the reply.

8.30 pm.

"Do you think it is ready now?"

“Oh yes I am sure it is.”

Using a sparklet kit we tucked in and it was delicious. However, there were serious side effects. Ultra frequent visits to the sandur for calls of nature were the result of our hasty brew.

We still received massive wrath when the main party arrived even if their home brew was less like avgas.

Our biggest problem once we had established base camp was the discovery of a large ice marginal lake at the snout of Hoffellsjokull. The area we were exploring was not well mapped. In fact we were fortunate to obtain the maps we had. Our main sources were the 1949 American maps compiled from aerial photographs and not field checked. In 1975 they were dated some 26 years. Hence our many problems.

The ice marginal lake made it almost impossible to gain the main ice cap from Hoffellsjokull. Any exploration ice cap peaks would entail an initial walk in the opposite direction to gain access to Hoffellsdalur. So annoying and so very inconvenient.



Figure 87: Ice marginal lake at Hoffellsjokull

My first objective was to be an ascent of Godhaborg which was an impressive nunatak projecting out of Vatnajokull where the ice crept downwards by means of the glacier Lambatungnajokull.

We left our base camp at the snout of Hoffellsjokull carrying a very full load and walked south east down the outwash plain of Hoffellsjokull to the farm at Hoffell. At this point we rounded the ridge of Hoffellstindur and commenced the long footslog up Hoffellsdalur. The weather was windy and with heavy loads the going was difficult. The river wanders wildly across the valley floor and crossing rivers in Iceland does pose

many problems. Much time can be spent searching out suitable crossing points. Sometimes we waded and on other occasions we took off our boots and crossed barefoot. Another variation was to follow the bends and twists of the stream to find a convenient access to the opposite side. All this was very time consuming. I can remember deciding to just 'go for it,' in other words a dead straight line of advance regardless of the waters that appeared on the line of approach.

At the head of the valley it was necessary to cross the river for a last time and it proved very difficult to find a safe crossing point. The river was narrower but faster flowing. The seriousness of mistakes was 'driven home' at this crossing. Ron lost a boot in the fast-flowing waters and all attempts to recover it failed. In some respects this meant the end of the expedition for Ron. I had two pairs of boots with me and this incident clearly illustrated the wisdom of having a spare pair.

This accident forced us to make camp at only 5.30 pm - much earlier than we would have liked. Also the weather seemed to be settling. We found a good campsite on a plateau of grass with close access to fresh water. We were several hundred feet below the watershed between Hoffellsdalur and Lambatungnajokull.

During the evening the weather really settled, and the strong wind disappeared. I made a recce to the col at the head of the valley always aware I was soon to see a whole new area of ice and rock. The last slopes out of Hoffellsdalur are fairly steep and a little awkward with some very loose footing. Nevertheless, my excitement could not be dulled.

A new world was revealed to me as I reached the col. Below stretched Lambatungnajokull and at the head of the glacier was the end of the ridge we were aiming to climb the next day. To the north stretched miles of peaks we were hoping to climb later in the expedition. The col or watershed at the head of Hoffellsdalur is easily recognisable even in thick mist. The glacier that aeons ago used to spill down into Hoffellsdalur from Lambatungnajokull had scoured out a perfect U-shaped trough.

I sat for a long time soaking up this view. I was amazed at how just a few extra feet of ascent could bring into view so much more terrain. From the confines of Hoffellsdalur I could now see across mile upon mile of ice cap and accompanying nunataks.

The weather the next day was brilliant but we wasted many hours by not rising until mid morning. This was almost sacrilege as good weather in Iceland can be a very rare commodity. Many climbers have made this mistake and paid with their lives for this climbing procrastination. We also had the problem of the bootless one. Ron unselfishly refused to prevent our progress up towards Godhaborg and we designed an emergency boot for him made from foam sleeping mat attached with tent cord. He left to make his slow and painful way back down Hoffellsdalur.



Figure 88: Ron's makeshift boot

We left camp by late morning and even at this stage I was inwardly cursing our less than tardy departure. Progress was slow even though the weather was brilliant and clear. Our loads were heavy, and the terrain was difficult. All the rivers in this area are heavily ravined and it should not be assumed that it is possible to cross them at any given point. There were six others in the group and it was my responsibility to keep them moving. Even though Icelandic days are long I was acutely aware that the weather could be so very 'fickle'

I was greatly relieved to reach the southern end of the ridge that leads up to Godhaborg. This col is well formed but it does have one potentially confusing factor. The ridge to Godhaborg does not start from the col, it slants away to the east and to actually gain the

ridge we had to proceed north up a steady slope. This part of the ridge could prove difficult in mist as was to be our fate some hours later.

We reached the col in the afternoon and as the weather was still brilliant we cached our rucksacks some fifty feet down the eastern side. We did this to lighten our load. How many of us have done this in our travels across the Munros? It was a decision that could have cost us dearly in the coming hours.

Along the ridge, which was now completely snow covered, there were several large crevasses, but they were negotiated without too much difficulty. As we climbed further out onto the ice cap I was continually thinking things over. It was late in the day and we had left our rucksacks behind. Our reward was definitely within reach, but each step took us further away from safety. We had come a long way to reach this point and in my own mind there was no way I was going to turn back. I kept these thoughts very much to myself. We were many hours behind schedule and on one particular stop a serious discussion took place. I declared I would go on alone if necessary. The others reluctantly agreed to continue. It was past 7pm when we first saw our objective. Godhaborg is a square table like crag of rock projecting out of the ice. The flat top was the size of a tennis court. The near vertical face confronting us was made up of loose slate like rock, and if it were not for a slope of snow and ice that spilt down, it would pose huge problems of access. We had great trouble climbing these last two hundred feet and one pitch of fifty feet gave us much concern. We regrouped at the foot of the crag and attempted to climb directly up an ice wall but once again we were forced to retreat. Time was passing relentlessly, and the minutes were 'nibbling' away. Our third attempt would have to be successful. Somehow, I managed to negotiate a different ice slope and quickly shouted down for the others to commence their ascent. With no time for complicated belays I brought the climbers up on a hand-held rope whilst I was firmly fixed to a deeply laid ice axe. The relief of ascent was immense. Once we had regained our breath we had chance to look closely at the summit of our peak. It was indeed a small table top and from this the slopes dropped away vertically on all sides. I located a small cairn on the southern rim, which was presumably built by the farmer at Hoffell back in the 30's, the only other recorded ascent of this peak. Looking to the Northwest the ridge continued with the ice cover being complete. Several spires of rock protruded from the ice cap but any attempt to proceed further would necessitate much crevasse crossing.

We had reached the summit at 8.30 pm and I was loath to leave the top. During my observations of the impressive view I had noticed a 'sinister' change in the sky to the south. It was still fine and the views across the ice cap, stretching for unlimited miles towards the horizon, were only altering as the couple of hours without sunlight were approaching. However, to the south banks of ominous cloud were gathering and they were undeniably on their way towards us. I did not mention this to the others who seemed jubilant at their conquest of the summit. As we climbed down the ridge the sky changed. At first it was a 'watery film' of cloud but as the hours passed it was obvious that this was more than a mere dusk covering. By midnight we were walking in a dark shroud of damp mist and this was soon followed by sleet then snow as the wind rose. Visibility was down to twenty feet and the burden of route finding was placed on my shoulders as several of the group were obviously exhausted by their efforts. To be perfectly honest I had no idea of the exact way down as the newly falling snow had obscured all our outgoing footprints. We had left no sign of our upward trek.



Figure 89: The final slopes of Godhaborg

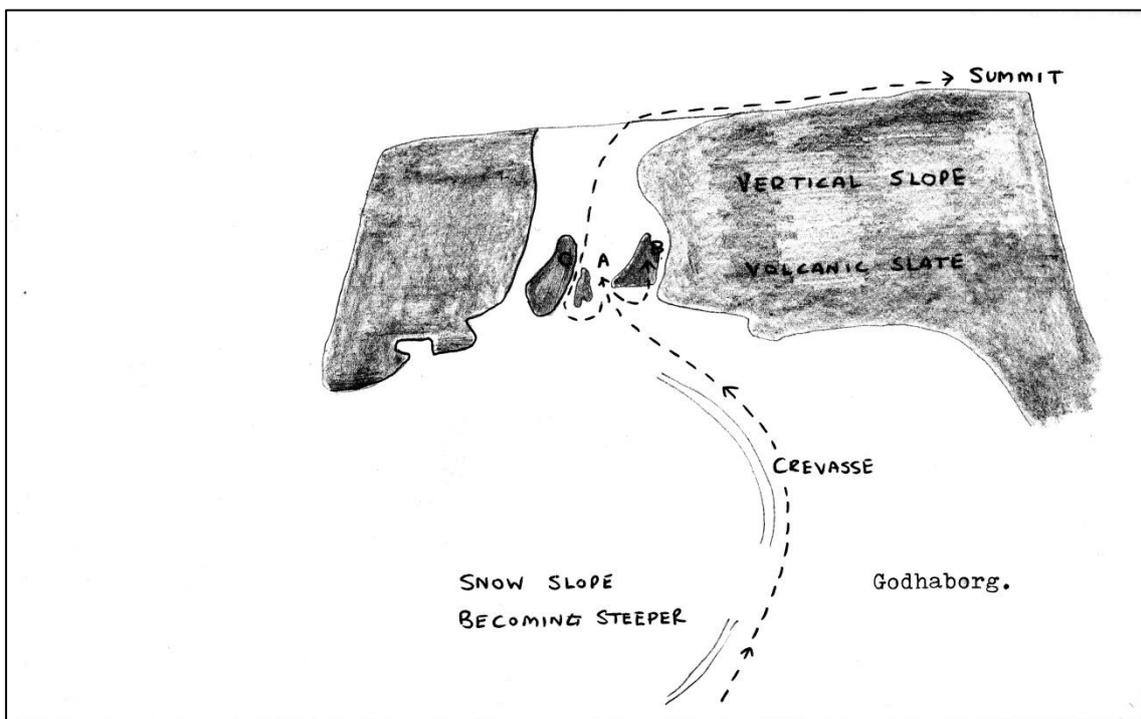


Figure 90: Our route of ascent



Figure 91: John Cooke on summit of Godhaborg

It is in moments such as these that the trials and tribulations of other climbers can be a curse at the back of your mind.

In 1967 one of the most tragic mountaineering accidents of all time took place on the highest slopes of Denali. Close to the summit the expedition was caught by an awesome storm which left most of the climbers dead. Even those who survived suffered greatly. As we struggled around on the lower slopes of Godhaborg I must admit the horrors of their predicament did cross my mind. A first summit party had made a successful ascent on the early evening of July 15th. It had been an expedition dogged by disagreements and possibly chronic personality clashes. Nevertheless, this first group enjoyed almost perfect conditions and stayed on the summit for almost two hours enjoying stupendous views across the many miles of Arctic landscape. The following day the second group set off to emulate their colleagues. This is where it began to go horribly wrong. This was another case of delay and procrastination leading to the horrors of a long and drawn out death in conditions that are almost too traumatic to describe. Hours were wasted whilst the leader of the seven men awaited signs that the weather was indeed as calm as it appeared. Initially they made reasonable progress with clear visibility, but once on the main upper ridge the problems came thick and fast. The first party had wanded the ascent route, but it had not been carried out properly. After all, they had experienced superb conditions and was it necessary to do this when the far horizon could be seen in whatever direction they looked. The answer to his question is of course it did matter. When very young I made this mistake and the consequences, although obviously not fatal, were inconvenient to say the least. From that day onwards, as I ascended, I pretended to myself that visibility was not good. I memorised certain landmarks and

placed them securely into the bank of my memory. On future occasions this policy did indeed pay rewards.

The Denali climbers had no such fortune. An annoying mist had enveloped the upper mountain and visibility was down to less than 300 yards. A poignant radio message outlines the total frustration of the group. Although they did not know it then, this was the precursor to their eventual death.

“We’ve lost the wands. We’re just floundering around. We don’t know whether we are on the summit ridge or not. We are floundering around on the flat here. If we could find just one more wand it’d probably be enough.”

The outcome was an emergency bivouac probably a mere 600 ft. from the summit. The last contact ever with these men was the following day, when they radioed from the summit to explain their progress. In the morning they had found the final ridge and made the relatively easy ascent. It was misty, but the weather was as yet still reasonable. Their final words indicated they intended to commence descent.

The next week or more is best forgotten as they suffered massively as a monster storm hit the mountain just an hour after they had reached the summit of North America.

I was using intuition and probably guesswork as the hours passed and the group was becoming more and more exposed. Like very many climbers before us we were now deeply regretting the lost time of earlier in the day. As in so many occasions on the Munros, it was driven home how quickly a benign mountain scene can become so very hostile. After a necessary stop and a temporary huddle several of us ventured out into the mist as far we dared, and it was at 1 am that I spotted a feature that looked familiar. I used my sixth sense and descended a short slope to find our rucksacks already half covered in fresh snow. The relief was enormous and after bringing the rest of the group down we set up an emergency bivouac consuming some much-needed hot liquid and food. The night was unpleasant and very wet, but we had shelter of sorts, so no permanent damage was done.

The following morning was foul, and we quickly abandoned any thoughts of a return over Graskiljatindur. We retraced our steps of the previous day and after some difficulty route finding we arrived at the head of Hoffellsdalur and descended below the thick cloud. We now began the long slog back to Hoffell and this took many hours. We did not reach base camp until late in the evening. Two of the climbers were in very poor condition but whatever the circumstances Godhaborg had been climbed.

The expedition ended on a light note. After many days of insisting that the terminal lake was occupied by glacial trout (wearing thermal scales?) Dave almost began to believe us. After the loss of his boot naughty Ron sneaked off with the bike and cycled twenty miles to Hofn and purchased some fish.

On return he borrowed Dave’s fishing gear and disappeared to the moraine. An hour later he came back with his impressive catch. Dave was taken in and now spent many hours trying to emulate the mischievous Ron.

All good fun.



Figure 92: Dave and the 'big sting'

Chamonix

Wasdale	Scafell Pike
Fort William	Ben Nevis
Zermatt	Matterhorn

Very often places and valleys have an intrinsic connection with a mountain. Another example that readily comes to mind is that of

Chamonix Mont Blanc.

I had read of Chamonix for many years. It had always conjured an image of excitement, history and legend. Throughout my schooldays I studied the epic climbs in the 1800's when Alpine peaks were systematically 'ticked off' by famous climbers. This was the golden age of Alpine ascents. An aborted climb of Mont Blanc in the late 70's had been my only real memory of the town. This was a summer of unseasonable rain with the upper slopes of the mountain blanketed in deep snow. Towards my retirement I had the opportunity to visit Chamonix again and several weeks of wandering the slopes in this valley left an indelible impression in my mind.

Chamonix in 96 was an eye opener. All that Scotland had to offer but on a scale just a little greater. It had memorable summits and day after day I explored the slopes with always superb views to distant ridges and ranges high above. Initially I had some feelings of scepticism as there was so much to do in the UK. What could be better than the Cuillin of Skye or Munros like An Teallach. Why spend time and money going to far off places. However, a month or so in the grand company of the Chamonix peaks put a different aspect into all this consideration. The valley walking was excellent and cable cars did take an awful lot of leg work out of ascents. The glaciers added something that even Scotland did not have to offer.

Chamonix must have been a 'gem' of a place in the last century. But everything changes. I had seen this in Britain. What had they done to Aviemore? Presumably this was once a quaint village nestling in the lee of the mighty Cairngorms. Wasdale had changed from a climber's valley, and the advent of electricity had changed the whole atmosphere. The small climbers bar is now a pizza parlour. Only the Old Dungeon Ghyll had resisted change even if the valley itself is a ghost of its former self. Walkers have been replaced by cars, caravans and tents. How green was the Langdale of old?

Time and money and improved transportation changed the village of Chamonix into a town and when the tunnel through to Italy opened Chamonix took on an even bigger role. Some might argue that it became ugly with vast hotels in unsightly clusters and buses and cars clogging the streets as more and more people arrived to exploit the mountains. Chamonix was no longer a true 'backwater.' However, there is still a chance to find this goal if you are willing to get off the beaten track.

Like everything in the mountain world the greatest rewards come to those who are willing to push to the limits. The memories of reaching the high places, accessible only on foot, last a lifetime.

My first visit was with a group of friends who realistically were walkers. We did achieve much, and it was all an introduction to the valley. Walks from Le Buet to refuge de la Pierre through the last of the winter snows and ascents along Montagne de la Cote with close examination of the Bossons glacier and the parallel Tacconnaz ice. This was

all followed by long ascents through the foothills to the very heights of the Argentierre glacier.

By the third week I was looking further afield and after failing to persuade others I planned a solo venture into the high mountains. I was blessed with perfect weather and set off very early in the morning. I saved hours of time by utilising the very first Aiguille cable car disembarking at the first station. Sitting there in the warm sunshine I planned my route. I had considered an exploration of the glaciers De Blaitiere and Nantillions with an eventual climb to the Mere de Glace but this was probably on the agenda for the following week and I really fancied something just a little more adventurous. A couple of skiers passed me on their way to Les Grand Mulets and probably Mont Blanc.

I decided to head that way.

The track across the flanks of the Aiguille Du Midi were covered with at least three avalanche trails which made the route doubtful. Nevertheless, I followed a distinct path from the cable car station until continuous snow cover was reached. I then took a slightly lower traverse, crossing the glacier Des Pelerins and contouring across snow covered slopes towards the old cable car station, Les Glaciers. I passed under the modern cable car that was slowly making upward progress high above me. My route was across angled scree slope (snow covered) with a steep slope away to the right. No real difficulties were met and by late morning I had reached the deserted cable car station that had preceded the modern Aiguille du Midi. The roof was off and the walls were crumbling. There was even a cable car in dock a memory of what used to be. I was glad to be alone as my imagination had no distractions. I explored and studied and thought away without interference from anyone.

No desolation is so complete as the ruins of abandoned buildings. Decaying ruins where once was bustling activity. Death where once was life. Wainwright commented that it was hard to look at ruins without thinking what the person who planned it all, and probably once stood back in admiration of their finished work, would think now of their proud project. Would sadness prevail? Wainwright was right; tragedies such as this are all around us even in our own lives.

I am somewhat amazed at the time and expense that many people utilise in the pointless search for eternal youth. Many in their teenage years and twenties think they are invincible. Infinite. But you can be very sure that this is not so. When you reach sixty you begin to realise just how finite you are. Aches and pains, eyesight problems and a whole host of other ailments 'rear their head.' Often young people scorn their elders a complete reversal of the wisdom of the young climber 'tapping in' to the experience bank of the senior mountain man. Some adolescents think they will always be young. Age comes to us all. It is inevitable. Recently I watched several hours of music videos. Many of the stars were from the decades just after the war. Talented, beautiful and so very young. Now these stars are in their seventies and the physical difference is so very sad. Change...Change...Change...we cannot stop it.

In my service days I used to ponder long and long on the words "They shall not grow old as we grow old." Several of my close friends died far before their time in the course of duty. Photos of squads and on board ships remain showing them respondent in uniform and the peak of youth. The photos live on as the embodiment of wasted promise; unburdened by early demise. The wasted lost years. The lucky? ones survived

to face the inevitable wearing down of time. Disappointment, divorce, arthritis dementia and Father Time calling in for his payment.

Here I was sitting in this deserted cable car station. Looking at shrinking glaciers, thinking of global warming and Antarctic ice collapse.

It was time to move on.

It was now straight up noon and I took a slanting rise above the redundant station moving into deep soft snow. Infuriation followed as every fifth step saw me sink thigh deep with all the requirements of extraction. Progress was slow but I managed to gain height and reached a line of steps contouring towards the Bossons glacier. This was the higher route from the Plan de L'Aiguille and the tracks were fresh. I approached the edge of the glacier and negotiated the short ice cliff to gain the snow-covered ice. The sun bore down with intensity and the glare was immense. I was crossing the glacier with ice falls above and below me but at this point the glacier was level and covered in soft annoying snow. A neat line of footsteps into which I placed my feet indicated the way forward and after twenty minutes I caught up with several climbers who were roped to each other. After all, this was a glacier and the covering of snow could well hide a multitude of sins. Strange how the mind can play tricks. Until this moment no negative thoughts had crossed my mind, but now, less than positive 'vibes' began their insidious work. Years ago on Denali Jim Wickwire had offered to take the lead whilst crossing a potentially dangerous glacier. Chris Kerrerbrock declined the offer and thereby sentenced himself to a long and lingering death. A subsequent fall saw Chris deposited head down within a crevasse staring into the endless void. Rescue was imperative but it was all to no avail. Because of a broken shoulder Jim could not get his friend out. He had the monstrous task of listening to his friend through all the stages applicable when people approach inevitable death. Denial, anger, negotiation, depression and acceptance. These were not the best of thoughts for a lone climber crossing a glacier even if conditions seemed as perfect as could possibly be.

I had no idea how far I wanted to progress. It was becoming apparent that this was an ideal opportunity to take in Mont Blanc. The weather was benign and the day still yet young. However, I had left no message of my intentions. As I only had day gear and limited food it was almost impossible to even consider this goal. The refuge Les Grand Mulets was some hour or so ahead but was there any logical reason to continue. I stopped in the heat cursing the fact that age had left me with the requirement for reading glasses (map work) distance glasses view forward, and sunglasses to negate the huge strength of the sun. A plan formulated in my mind. Cross the glacier to gain the rock at La Jonction and make my way down by way of Montagne de la Cote. Close scrutiny showed a mass of crevasses making this a very dangerous option. By now the other climbers had moved on far ahead and I could see them negotiating some steep ice in the far distance. I was alone in the centre of this glaring heat bowl. I decided to progress until 4.30 pm then turn back. The onus was now on the clock and I could fully take in the superb surroundings. I looked in awe at the tumbling mass of ice away to my left. 4.30 arrived and I somewhat sadly reversed my outward route. The way back was very easy, I merely followed my deep steps in the glacier surface, edging ever closer to the lateral moraine of the mass of ice on which I stood.

It was now that I had another amazing and probably undeserved piece of luck. I looked forward and saw a precarious snow bridge collapse right in front of me. Obviously, the edge of the glacier was more prone to crevasses and bergschrunds and I should have been taking more care. In fact I was stupid to be here at all but once again the

motorways of Britain are hardly safe and we all use them. I looked gingerly into the crevasse which descended deeply into the bowels of the glacier. What would have happened if the bridge had collapsed just a moment later when I was crossing. A cold sweat broke out all over me and I negotiated the next section with the utmost care and attention. Off the glacier was a relief but I now had the infuriating deep snow to overcome. The afternoon heat had softened it even more and I was now sinking deep every other step as I approached the ruins of Les Glaciers station. It did not appear to be getting any closer but by 7 pm I had reached the redundant building to let out a cry of joy. There was no-one to hear it but the relief to me was massive. I took a huge 'slug' of rum from my hip flask and thought back to the exploits of the day.

The descent from here was ultra- quick. I have always climbed down with great speed and this route was perfect. At first it consisted of deep soft snow, then smaller patches, before an excellent path was picked up. It took less than 30 minutes to reach the middle station at La Para. I did not stop and a further speedy descent saw me down to the entrance of the infamous Mont Blanc tunnel.

My day was not yet over.

The theme of change and neglect, of age and difference, had one last card to play. The tunnel was closed. A huge fire had caused major damage to the interior fabric. My last memory of the tunnel was many years before. It was of noise, congestion, diesel fumes and in such glorious surroundings horror at mankind's intrusion with his infernal machines.

Today the silence was greater than in any graveyard as I walked across the huge vehicle entrance park with no vehicle in sight. Barriers were everywhere but people were not. Not a soul. Not a sound.

Even Mother Nature added her input as small weeds were showing through the edge of the tarmac gradually taking their hold. Obviously only a temporary intrusion but a clear example of how tenuous man's hold can be on the total order of things. I sat there for a full half hour intrigued by the change and difference the exclusion of human beings can bring.

I had to move. It was now late and if I wanted a beer a speedy descent into town was required. I rushed down paths along roads and moved back into civilisation. An Irish bar offered superb Guinness which was so very welcome after my journeys up high. The company was great and my arrival back at the apartment was in the early hours of the morning. There was a full moon and from the balcony I could make out the bulk of Mont Blanc and even trace my route of the day just gone. It looked ridiculously high and it was hard to believe that just a few hours ago I was up there in the snow and ice below the highest summit in Europe.

The Chamonix valley does contain big mountains but it is possible to fell walk and many routes will take you to high places with no greater risk than a day out in Lakeland or on the one of the Munros of Scotland. However, many walks will take you into a different league of mountain experience. It is true that unless the biggest mountains are tackled problems of altitude sickness and other such nasties will not be a major problem but the existence of glaciers and often winter snow lingering well into June does require the climber to 'dust off' his/her mountain skills.

At the turn of the millennium I was afforded the luxury of a longer stay in the valley and I was really hoping for a serious attempt at Mont Blanc. Sadly, the weather again intervened and it was earlier in the season. The Gouter hut was not open until my

penultimate day and I had not managed to meet up with any other climbers. With deep snow on the upper slopes the 'big one' was not a realistic proposition for a lone climber. A trapped nerve in my knee did not help although it did not stop me from carrying out many intermediate climbs from the valley floor, eventually linking up the entire valley side from Le Brevant to Lac Blanc. La Jonction was reached after climbing to the top of Montagne de la Cote and Gite Balmat made this an interesting day as this bivouac was the overnight stay for Jacques Balmat and Dr. Michel Paccard on their epic first ascent of Mont Blanc August 8th. 1786.

On another day of threatening weather I managed to salvage much and was really pleased the initial efforts had been made. It was raining in the valley and leaving the bus at Le Tour I was pessimistic about any high level views on this occasion. Climbing up below chair lifts is always a 'whammy' for me and no skier likes to slog upwards when just above his head is infrastructure that would save enormous amounts of leg ache. However, this was early in the year and the lifts, although closed to skiers, had not yet opened for walkers. As height was gained the clouds appeared to be lifting and when I reached the Chalets de Charmillon nothing in the sky was particularly threatening. A small plateau of snow caused a temporary loss of bearing but it was all worked out and once the original aim of climbing to the Albert Premier refuge was aborted I turned northwards towards the Col de Balme. The weather was definitely improving and by the time I reached this very obvious pass it was reasonably pleasant.

I was now in peak bagging mode and after three days of col bagging I badly wanted a summit. I could not persuade anyone else to accompany me so I set off alone to climb Croix de Fer 7686 ft. This was a summit at the end of a rocky ridge that extended into Switzerland from the Tete de Balme. Initially it was a longer than expected walk over a narrowing ridge and after I stashed my rucksack the ridge became rocky and narrow with exposure on both sides. It all reminded me of Crib Goch on Snowdon and the final scramble to the summit was very exposed with the summit being an airy perch. The drops down to the north were severe and the views in all directions superb, further proof of the rewards that a little effort can bring forth. It was even more satisfying that this was not a Mont Blanc but merely a top that almost anyone could go out and reach. When I think of the Himalayas I think of Everest and so do many folk. However, out there are hundreds of unclimbed peaks. Yes, they may be lower but they are waiting for climbers to come and reach them.

There was One last memory of my climb to Croix de Fer. On my return to the Col de Balme I discovered a huge mass of frogspawn in a small 'puddle' and the obvious fate of the tadpoles really upset me. I spent more than thirty minutes constructing a dam to divert a nearby stream. At least my efforts would ensure their survival as long as other predators did not intervene. The very achievable Croix de Fer may be small but I was well pleased.

Another 'episode' clearly illustrates the possible difference between Chamonix and the mountains of the UK. Avalanches do occur in Scotland but they are a rarer breed, particularly now climate change seems to be 'kicking in' with a vengeance.

On a balmy day with broken cloud and lots of blue in the sky I took the Planpraz cable car up to Gares de Planpraz (6558 ft.) and set off along the Tour du Mont Blanc footpath. Being so early in the season there was a huge amount of snow covering the slopes. After all, ski-ing had only ceased a few weeks previously. This factor does change the whole aspect of a climb such as this. In August, maybe a summer stroll ; today it was more of a mountain expedition and the snow being so soft did not help.

Leaving the Mont Blanc trail I started up what is normally a good path, aiming for a notch in the cliffs up ahead. Today the path was hidden in deep powder and I looked to my left at the steep crags sweeping down from Aiguille de Charlanon. The weather was perfect and I soon left behind the climbers who had been in close proximity. They all appeared to have made a lower traverse. I was in high spirits as I negotiated the long slanting traverse sinking deep into the soft snow. All of a sudden I heard a deep cracking sound. I froze, and was alarmed to see snow and ice breaking off the upper slopes some three hundred feet in front of me. I watched as huge blocks of ice and lumps of snow slid down the slope with ever increasing speed. If I had been just two minutes ahead I really do not know what I would have done. The avalanche track was some fifty yards wide and to have got out of the way might have been very difficult. The debris slid down into a hollow at the foot of the slope where the gradient levelled out. This was the resting place of all the snow debris. The slope down was slightly more than 35 degrees and I very much dislike giving up height after the slog of gain. However, this seemed prudent although it went against my previous logic. If a slope has avalanched it is probably safe as the snow 'has gone.' However, there still appeared to be a lot of snow still clinging to the slopes high above. And I was on my own again. I descended some six hundred feet before continuing my original direction. It was now a level surface and I soon came to the point below the avalanche trail where the debris had come to rest. Some of the 'chunks' of ice were the size of garden sheds and the mass of icy litter certainly gave me much to think about.

All this diversion had taken much time and my plans for later in the day would have to be revised. I rounded the crags beneath the 'notch' and commenced the long slog upwards in deep snow. This was now the steep ski run beneath the telesiege du Col Cornu. It was really tiring plodding up the snow and for some reason I wandered too far off to the left. At times I felt the slope was dangerously steep especially just under the ridge. Why I had ventured this far left I really do not know. You sometimes do strange things in the hills and no explanation can be found. I gained the ridge after a scary scramble up a 70 degree slope. I now saw what I had done. I was halfway from the col to the top of Aiguille de Charlanon and the mist and cloud were just about my height which was 200 ft. above the actual col. (7919 ft.) I was at a height of approx. 8200 ft. I settled down for a bite to eat and after my airy scramble I felt much more relaxed. The route down the ridge to the col looked very steep and my consideration was that it looked very 'dodgy.' As I sat there half in and out of a filmy mist I saw a climber approaching me from the col. It was grand to see another human being and we exchanged few words before he continued his climb to Aiguille de Charlanon. He was an American and he also was alone.

Time was 'rearing its head' as I had used much of my day on my detour lower down the slopes. I was determined not to miss the last cable car from Planpraz and it was obvious I would not make much more progress along the ridge. The weather now began to deteriorate and the top of Aig Poire with its triangulation point (8402 ft.) was covered in angry dark cloud.

The decision had been made and I raced back down the ski slope, the snow aiding a super quick descent.

The avalanche was the highlight of this day; another superb experience on the slopes above Chamonix.

Chamonix offers much . You do not have to be an expert climber and as in many aspects of life everyone can take their share. A little initiative and some determination will bring rich rewards.

You can vary your ventures from one day walks to mini expeditions into the higher reaches. You can take in easier terrain or tackle more serious routes according to taste. Scrambling, snow and ice, and glacier visits, it is really up to the individual. Common sense will keep you in one piece and although I have read so many accounts written by ‘ serious’ climbers I feel it is the ordinary walker who often gains most from forages into the wild high places this valley offers.

Treat the mountains with respect and plan your routes carefully. Always remember these are the Alps and winter snow can survive well into June. This all adds to the excitement and it presents the walker with a surface that brings forth real challenges.

Once a certain amount of confidence has been acquired it will be possible to extend the limits by using the superb selection of mountain refuges. This gives the walker the opportunity to stay overnight, high up in the hills thus make early starts on the long summer days. They truly are fantastic bases and an integral part of the high mountain environment. The social factor is also a big advantage as you will meet many like minded people.

For me little can compare with Scotland, but a visit to Chamonix is a vital part of any hillwalkers experience. Even if you cannot make the journey get hold of the superb 1:25000 map, Chamonix Massif du Mont Blanc. Follow my few listed routes. Ponder; think; and plan?

Maps can be such a joy.

Note. The Funiculaires Aériennes was the first of its kind in the world. This was the original Aiguille du Midi cable car. Construction began in 1911 but the project was interrupted by the First World War. The final section from Gare des Glaciers to the Aiguille du Midi was never completed.

A service cableway runs to the refuge des Cosmiques 11,811 ft.

Just ‘shy’ of 20,000 feet

An ascent on Mount Kenya and Uhuru summit Kilimanjaro.

It was only 0800 hours, but the sun blazed down from a cobalt sky with almost unbearable intensity. The air temperature was a full 8 degrees below zero and each step became more laboured as the snow plastered crater rim was slowly negotiated. I had read many times about climbers reaching their summits after often weeks or even months of toil and labour. Krakauer on Everest had stared absently down at the vast plains of Tibet and hardly took in the immensity of his recent efforts. He had been fantasizing about this moment and longing for the release of emotion that would accompany it. But now that he was finally there he just could not summon the energy to care.

I was not on Everest, and indeed my approach toils were considerably less. Nevertheless, I was into my eighth hour of climbing and the thin air and endless slopes were rapidly taking their toll. I can vaguely remember the amazing view across the vast plains of Africa with a level cloud platform some seven thousand feet below; all I

wanted was for this interminable slog to be over. Nothing mattered more, which is an almost amazing thought considering the unique situation I was in.

In July 1997 I had the opportunity to take early retirement from teaching. This came out of the blue for it was not a case of disliking my job. I was teaching outdoor pursuits and thoroughly enjoyed the enthusiasm and ‘antics’ of the students in my care. However, other aspects of the job were losing appeal. Bureaucracy, authority interference and the failings of senior management made me consider if I really wanted to continue for another seven years. I had always regarded retirement at 55 as the ideal time but I was only 53 and had lots to ponder. I sat at home for many a night trying to work out the finances of leaving work. Sometimes it did not add up and today it amuses me to think I might conceivably have turned down this ‘golden offer’.

I was just about the only candidate able to consider this opportunity as the vast majority of other interested teachers were just under the age requirement. The big point in favour of my acceptance was an offer of enhancement. I had only completed 23 years’ service but with the ‘add on’ factor I reached 30 years and considered I would manage financially.

Thus, my best move was taken, and I prepared for the end of the summer term with a ‘blitz’ of activities at the ski slope, water sport centre and climbing wall.

It was indeed strange on September 2nd not having to get up and trudge along the motorway into school. Instead I took the opportunity to make serious inroads into my research of Mardale and the flooded valley of Haweswater. Many visits were made to Bampton and Burnbanks and masses of information were gained about life in the pre-flood Haweswater.

Nevertheless, I did miss the kids and quickly discovered that canoeing on your own is no substitute for group activities. No one to splash and sink and with whom to generally have a buzz. By early December I was just having a tiny doubt as to the wisdom of my move into retirement when I received a phone call that would forever answer the question. Was it right to go?

An expedition was in preparation to go out to Africa and carry out an ascent on Mount Kenya and climb to the very summit of Africa – Kilimanjaro. These were two mountains I had always wanted to climb. One of the team members had suffered a broken leg and his place was up for grabs. It was certainly late in the day to join an expedition of this nature as the other members had been in preparation for almost 12 months. However, as I had been regularly fell walking my fitness was of little consequence. Possibly the ‘interference’ of Christmas and New Year would interfere with any plans on an improvement but I had remembered reading it was often the slower more reserved climber who generally had more success on free standing mountains such as Kilimanjaro.

As I had my retirement pot, money was no great problem and the personal cost of £1100 was excellent value for the experiences we were hoping to achieve. This was a charity climb for Alder Hey hospital and sponsorship and donations helped to increase the amount of money we could actually donate to the worthwhile cause. I can still remember standing at the turnstiles of Everton football club rattling a tin box in front of the Newcastle fans as they made their entrance into the terraces. The Geordies were generous beyond belief and I was almost pleased when Everton slipped to a 1-0 nil cup defeat.

Although I had been on several expeditions before I was quickly caught up in the excitement of preparation and obvious requirement for speed regarding necessary bureaucracy and form filling. Visas, currency exchange and kit acquisition were followed by the consideration of a little insect that we are fortunate not to have to worry about in this country. I spent several days at the Liverpool School for tropical medicine completing injections for tetanus, hepatitis A, polio booster, typhoid and yellow fever. I declined rabies and meningitis. After long and careful consideration I decided against any anti malaria medicine. This was a marginal decision and one that might well have caused catastrophic consequences

(See retrospective thoughts on an ascent of Mount Kilimanjaro)

Rising at 0330 on a cold and wintry January day the short drive to Manchester airport was followed by the 0650 flight to Brussels. We were slightly delayed in Brussels as a passenger was missing and all the baggage had to be unloaded and reloaded. At approx. 11 am we took off for the long flight to Nairobi. There was one stopover at Entebbe in Uganda and the plane landed at Nairobi just short of midnight. Transport awaited us and after a prolonged baggage collection we set off for our overnight accommodation in the community centre in Forest Road. The road from the airport was severely flooded after the recent unseasonable rain and it was also badly potholed. Our arrival in Kenya was not what we had hoped for. The weather patterns would be very important to the success of our climbs. Already the Chogoria route on Mt. Kenya was a no go because of severe flooding. Eastern Africa had been pummelled by exceptionally heavy and continuing unseasonable rain, probably best blamed on the El Nino. We were under no illusions that we would receive more than a few 'rain showers'. 12-14 hours of rain had taken out bridges and Landrovers had no chance of making it even halfway to the park gates. Of course, higher up the hill this would very probably be snowfall.

The next two hours were bizarre to the extreme as the driver could not find the community centre. We drove up and down Forest Road, in and out of ruts and dirt tracks, and after more than an hour the experience was wearing 'thin'. Almost at the point of giving up we discovered we had already been to the centre several times. The problem in Nairobi is tight security. All establishments are firmly locked at night because of the high crime rate. At 0300 after a tiring day we found our accommodation and grabbed 4 hours of needed sleep after the luxury of a cold shower.

The next morning was dry and after a good breakfast our transport arrived, and we loaded up. We undertook a drive of a few hours to the Sagana River Lodge where we put up our tents and prepared our gear for the climb ahead. The river was very swollen and everywhere was totally soaked. Although the weather was hot and sticky massive clouds were slowly gathering with ominous threat. Hopes that the unexpected wet season had 'blown itself out' were somewhat dashed. Whilst most of the group entertained themselves white water rafting I settled for a few beers and a relaxing afternoon. In the evening, we had more beers with the army lads who were also at the centre to carry out river rafting.

The next day we left early to drive round to the foot of Mount Kenya and commence our first ascent. As expected it was not possible to get the vehicle right up to the park gate as the heavy rain had decimated the track and turned it into a holed mud bath. About a mile short we disembarked and walked along the track to the gated entrance. It commenced to spit with rain as we walked therefore we elected to have our lunch under cover of sorts at the gate hut. At 1pm we set off along the rising track and the rain began to fall with increased force penetrating just about every gap in our inadequate

(inadequate for a rain forest) clothing. It was impossible to avoid the mud and very quickly I realised just how much rain had fallen over the previous weeks. The downpour totally ruined what might have been an interesting walk through tropical vegetation. The conifers gave way to hardwoods and then thick bamboo forest with magnificent vistas over thickly vegetative mist shrouded valleys. The park gate altitude was 2450m (8037 ft.) and by 5 pm I was first to reach our first camp at the meteorological station at 3050m (10,006 ft.) Within the hour the rest of the group arrived, and we put up our tents in damp cool weather but without any real rainfall. We ‘dined’ in an open shed and by 7 it was dark. With little to do we turned in for the night and because of some overcrowding I elected to sleep under the awning of the tent. It was not a particularly good night for sleep as my mind was racing away with thoughts of the coming climb and prospects of success.

I hardly knew my colleagues³² but they appeared a really nice group and we all seemed to get on very well. However, from my past experiences I was fully aware that expeditions have been doomed from the start by inexperience and social incompatibility. Careful consideration would have to be given to the nebulous interplay of personalities. Nothing is more paramount than the psychological and emotional checks and balances among expedition members. I had seen this so often on my Alpine, Icelandic and service career interludes.

Just what is the stereotype of a mountaineer? You must work this out for yourself. Why do we do this ‘climbing lark’? So many people have spoken so many words when asked this demanding question. It is claimed the immortal George Mallory answered the query why he climbed on Everest with the words “Because it is there.” But as Sayre says, adjacent to his house a huge pile of junk known as the town dump is also there: there is little desire to go out and scramble this summit³³.

³²

Mike Foster	Age 40	Corporate Development Consultant
John Doyle	Age 45	Ice cream manufacturer
David Cox	Age 57	Land Surveyor
Cheryl Gilbert	Age 40	Teacher
Adrian Shandley	Age 32	Investment Consultant
Alistair Howard	Age 37	Banker
Mike O’Byrne	Age 39	Operations Manager for Index Extra
Ijazz Jabbar	Age 32	Software Consultant
Dr. Jillian Foster	Age 27	Medical Doctor
Nigel Gilbert	Age 42	Scaffolding & Asbestos Consultant
Graham Street	Age 36	Police Constable
Jemain Foster	Age 34	Social Worker
Ken Eddie	Age 41	Managing Director Nutri
Mike Cheston	Age 36	Financial Controller Everton FC
Richard John Cooke	Age 54	Retired Royal Marine/ Schoolteacher

³³ Four Against Everest Woodrow Wilson Sayre P 201

Many climbers submerge into a myriad of phrases to answer this question; romantic, poetic and often very meaningless.

I have often thought of this when on difficult climbs, probably alone and more than likely when the weather is showing an awesome face. Why put yourself through all this misery. Limbs screaming for rest, water dripping everywhere, tired, hungry and the net reward a view of some twenty feet of mist murk and wet.

My experience on Beinn Sgulaird provides the answer that is applicable to me. Six hours in the most amazing conditions above a frothy layer of cloud some 16 hundred feet below, whilst all those down in the cloud were experiencing a day of miserable clag. That made it for me and as Del Boy says in the famous 'sit com' - he who dares wins. I also remember a jingle from the distant past.

Life itself can't give you any joy,

unless you really will it.

Life just gives you time and space,

it's up to you to fill it.

The next morning was dry and we left our camp at 9 am. One of the climbers had suffered badly the previous day and he was in poor shape as we ascended a steep track through the trees to eventually reach the police signals station. Here our ailing colleague had to give in and after exchanges of gear and currency he descended with a porter. We did not see him again. Nairobi is not a place to spend time as a tourist. This is a sad fact. A prominent writer once gave the city the title 'Nairobberia.' Nairobi is indeed the capital of crime in East Africa. Pickpockets are common on the crowded streets and whilst incidents during daylight hours are less common, night time wanderings are paramount to almost inevitable misfortune. Whilst we were in the city a story was circulating that an unfortunate Canadian had been dragged into an alleyway and relieved of all his possessions. Sadly his expensive watch was firmly attached to his wrist, so the evil thieves used a machete to remove his whole hand before disappearing with their ill begotten gains. I would not wander these streets for all the beer in.... well anywhere. Our exhausted colleague did not wish to spend any time more than possible in this city, so he returned home whilst we were descending Mt. Kenya.

Within an hour we broke out beyond the tree line and were now walking through scrub and bush vegetation. Just after noon the skies began to cloud over and visibility dropped alarmingly as our enemy, rainfall, began to compound the problem of juicy underfoot conditions. We struggled through the vertical bog as the rain cascaded down with ever increasing force. It was not cold just totally miserable as everything we possessed took a complete 'drowning.' This is where a good quality golf umbrella would have been an asset almost beyond imagination. Graham had such a piece of equipment and all eyes were turned on him with undeniable envy. My small flimsy version was hardly a measure for the incessant downpour and was quickly buried under a pile of rocks. We had a very uncomfortable lunch at the picnic rock standing together eating our packed food with little enthusiasm. Just after 3 p.m. The clouds began to break up and impressive views up the Teleki valley were there to be seen. Excitement increased intensely as I forged ahead and in the company of Graham we crossed the Northern Naro Moru river. After my many experiences of river crossings in Iceland this negotiation caused little problem and suddenly, the skies cleared completely. The snow-covered peaks and glaciers stood out at the head of the valley. It was almost as if someone had drawn open a massive curtain and let in a secret light. In just a matter of

minutes we had passed from damp misty visibility of 50 yards to a view of unimaginable splendour. Mount Kenya is a series of vertical rock spires soaring into the sky and the sense of height is awesome. We stopped and allowed all the others in the group to reach us and together we all enjoyed the total 'majesty' of this special moment. We were now within a mile or so of the Mackinder's hut and hopes of not having to erect tents were rising. Vegetation had now changed from bamboo and hardwood forest to stunted trees. This was followed by heather and tussock grass moorlands with giant yellow flowered groundsel (senecio) and giant lobelia standing up to 30 feet in height. We reached the hut before 5 pm 4200m (13,780 ft.) and found sanctuary. The hut was a hovel, but it was better than tents after the tiring day we had experienced. During the evening, the skies remained completely clear and all the mountain was exposed providing an impressive sight. The evening was spent in heated discussion regarding our plans for the next day.

Mount Kenya consists of three main peaks two of which are in reality rock climbs. The highest summit is Batian 5199m (17056ft.) which is some 11m higher than Nelion. My whole life of mountain climbing had been involved with the concept of reaching the summit. However, the expedition had never undertaken the consideration of climbing to the very top. The group had neither the equipment or the knowledge how to use it to make an ascent of Batian even a remote possibility. I had accepted this when I joined the expedition and realised why the aim of climbing to the summit of Lenana was the objective. Lenana is at an altitude of 4985m (16354 ft.) some 214m lower than the true summit and separated by the remnants of the Lewis glacier. 214m is only a matter of 702 ft. beneath the very top so I was satisfied. Anyway, I was merely a member of the group and I had to accept this even if I knew I had the necessary experience to reach Batian.

The discussions continued into the evening and my input was to go for the summit of Lenana straight away in order to ensure success. Other ideas were 'floated'. I think it was more or less decided to traverse the mountain the next day to help gradual acclimatisation.

As I looked out of the hut window at the massive cliffs of the mountain the whole concept of leadership came into focus. I remembered most of the expeditions I had participated in and fully understood the need for a leader to 'take charge.' After all a football team of superstars will rarely gain success unless they can work together for the overall good of the team. Service in the Marines had highlighted that leadership can often be a lonely 'place.' I had also read often of friction between expedition members in a range of activities from the Himalaya to the Alps and beyond.

Any successful group has to accept a common code of conduct. Sometimes a group is too large and heterogeneous to sustain loose group consensus within decision making. However, what is the opposite? A dictatorial state of affairs? I remembered on one memorable expedition we were forced into a meeting to clear the air and solve problems that were rapidly turning into 'cancers.' Battle lines were drawn based on group versus individual. Did the individual have the right to choose a course of action that endangered only himself? Probably not, although it went against all my 'loner/ recluse' characteristics. I must admit that a man who endangers himself endangers the entire expedition and its objectives. Think of the selfish climbers on Everest who take stupid risks and push themselves way beyond their ability levels. Often, they then depend on others to extract them from their self-imposed 'mess.' Others then fail in their dream of the summit.

Our expedition had discussed the situation. There was no rancour and our leader did make the decision which almost certainly turned out to be the correct one.

Anyway, this was not Everest nor K2. Surely we would prevail.

It was not a great issue for me so we got our heads down to await the dawn.

The next day was glorious and we prepared for our traverse. Leaving Mackinder's at 9 am we made a very steep ascent up a scree slope with constant stops in the thinning air. At this stage, I completely changed my mind about the attributes of walking poles. Until this moment I had regarded them as an unnecessary aid to climbing and something pretentious climbers used. The steep slopes we encountered above Mackinder's changed this thought forever. Poles proved to be a distinct advantage. A delightful stop was made at Hut tarn 4480m (14697 ft.) ft. before we continued our traverse in warm still air. Ups and downs across steep scree were negotiated always with the superb views of the glaciers and sharp ridges of Batian and Nelion. Mount Kenya is a three-million-year-old volcano with a base diameter of about 120 km. It is probable that the original cone was over 6,000 m. in height but erosion, mainly glacial, has worn away the original upper part of the mountain. What is left is a jagged glacial topography of knife edge ridges, pyramidal peaks, and rock basins containing deep glacial tarns. Around the lower slopes many streams in steep sided valleys form a radial pattern of drainage. All this has taken tens of thousands of years to form. Batian and Nelion are part of the 'plug'. Composed of nepheline-syenite, a coarse grained intrusive igneous rock, they make a startling image rising out of the dense rain forests below.

Over the passage of time global climates have changed dramatically. Huge ice sheets covered Northern Europe and Canada and glaciers on Mt. Kenya extended down to about 3,000m. Erosion caused by this massive movement of ice caused the creation of deep U-shaped valleys around the base of the cone. Within these valleys you can see terminal moraines made up of boulders and gravel eroded from higher up the hill. These moraines provide us with evidence as to the former extent of the glaciers and the different episodes of glaciation. They also give us clues of the various stages in the retreat of the glaciers. Today the glaciers are retreating at an alarming rate. The ice is becoming thinner. I estimate that if this present rate continues, in as little as thirty years there will be no permanent ice left on the mountain. Since records were first made in 1893 seven of the eighteen glaciers on Mt. Kenya have disappeared.

The group was stretched out in a fair line and at different moments I managed to walk and chat with most of the members. We eventually reached the two tarns of Hausberg and Oblong and by 2.30 pm we had reached the Kami tarn at an altitude of 4439m (14,563 ft.) Here the disputes resurfaced. It was decided to make an immediate attempt on the summit. There were over four hours of daylight remaining though it was obvious several of the climbers would never make it by nightfall. I was frustrated by the delay and had left 15 minutes before the rest to break trail up the steep scree. When I had gained several hundred feet I noticed the clouds were dropping and it started to rain lightly. I stopped as the rest of the group had ceased climbing some 400 ft. below me. After a damp 15 minutes they called me down and the plan was changed again. We descended to Shipmans Camp 4236m (13,898 ft.) and drew up an itinerary for the following day. The group was split into two and the first would leave at 2 am after rising at 1. They would be followed by the second group leaving at 3 am. The aim was for all climbers to meet up somewhere short of the top for a joint ascent. I decided that as sleep was almost impossible in the crowded hut I might as well go along with the

first group. Also, I could assist with climbers who had been experiencing a little difficulty the previous day.

Two climbers were suffering severely from the altitude and it was impossible for them to join either group. Leaving the hut at 2 am we climbed in starlight with no particular difficulty. I was 'torching' the tail enders in the group and we made steady if unspectacular progress. At 3 we could see the departing torches of the second group far below. We gained height, but the second group caught up before we reached the top of the long spur. Passing the Simba Col (15157 ft.) we moved into snow cover. At first it was patchy but within half an hour it became more complete. One climber was experiencing some difficulty and with encouragement from myself and two others we fell some way behind the rest of the group. It was very misty, and visibility was poor, but the hint of dawn encouraged us. Surely the sun would 'burn away' this annoying cover of cloud. It was also becoming very windy and after a few stretches of deep snow, calling for great care, we reached a large rock and met up with a guide of the first group. Mike was clearly exhausted after his efforts and decisions had to be made. Alistair looked at me and I returned the concern. The guide indicated that the top was a full 40 minutes away and we considered it would be dangerous and difficult assisting Mike up the steep snow slopes disappearing upwards in the murky half-light. Mike decided to call it a day and stayed with the guide. We continued up the very steep snow slope and traversed along a short ridge to discover we were on the summit where all the others were gathered. This both surprised and upset me. It had only taken us 15 minutes from Mikes highest point and surely we could have helped him up this last 'bit.' It was too late; the decision had been made. I was the last climber to reach the summit and joined in the celebrations although I felt slightly subdued. The dawn had arrived some fifteen minutes earlier and distant views were across miles of frothy cloud thousands of feet below. The very summit was adorned by a large iron crucifix and the wind was strong enough to take your breath away. It was obvious to me that as the sun gained height much of the cloud would disappear, but would there be enough time to witness this happening? Occasionally Nelion and Batian appeared through the thin misty veil and the much-reduced Lewis glacier could clearly be seen. Strange to think that not so many years ago you could walk from Lenana across to Nelion on the surface of the ice. Today the surface of the ice was hundreds of feet below. A typical glacier starved of snow and new ice, and in major retreat.

The others had by now departed and I lingered alone on the spectacular summit. My mind was 'racing away' again and I thought back to all the hundreds of summits I had reached over the past decades. Often, I had arrived in horrendous conditions only to witness a miraculous change in just a matter of minutes. Scafell Pike from a murky clag of some twenty yards to a view that encompassed Ireland, Blackpool tower and the hills of distant Galloway. This climb had not disappointed me, but it really was time to descend. My usual very speedy descent allowed me to rapidly catch up the rest of the group who were sensibly negotiating the deep snow slopes with care and respect. Passing through I raced down the long spur up which we had struggled during the hours of darkness. I reached the hut about 9 am, some 2 hours 30 minutes after leaving the summit. It was now warm and clear and after a breakfast we all prepared for the long arduous walk away from the mountain. It was long, and Ken and I moved further ahead arriving at the Judmeir hut after many hours. Here commenced the track through the forest to the park gate. Gradually all the climbers joined together, and we negotiated the mud filled ruts as nightfall slowly appeared. It was gone 8 pm when we bade farewell to our porters, the final act being a payment that was almost embarrassing. The porters

accepted amounts of money that were almost insulting to the climbers. Nevertheless, this money was real to them. Another example of the appalling gaps within our societies regarding the haves and have nots. The wages for porters have increased in recent years. Twenty years ago, when we were on the mountain this was not the case. It was amazing to witness the awesome loads they carried, often with minimal footgear. I was informed that the porters wages were paid by the agency we hired for the ascents. All we were required to do was take care of the size of the tip. I regarded the amount recommended as almost an insult and paid my porter considerably more. My porter was efficient and friendly, and I had no complaints whatsoever with his service. My gratuity went along the lines of my experiences in English pubs. Good service and a friendly welcome receives a decent tip. Short, abrupt and poor service gets nowhere with me. With the massive increase in commercialisation since our time on the mountain I am sure it has changed completely.

It was past 11 pm when we arrived back at Sagana for beers and welcome food. A 22-hour day was over and one of the impressive peaks of Mt. Kenya had been climbed.

The night following our return from Kenya was spent in satisfied contemplation. I needed sleep after huge physical efforts, but I just could not switch off my racing mind.

The following day we enjoyed a beer or three at a sophisticated hotel that reminded me very much of the imperial age. I have always liked beer, and this was my opportunity to drink as many as I could before we boarded a far from luxurious bus to commence the journey to Tanzania. As soon as we left Nairobi the road became a sequence of flat level tarmac interspaced with deep precarious potholes. I settled down to think about the main climb of our expedition, which was getting closer as every mile passed by.

Kilimanjaro stands alone and rises to nearly 5900 metres from a plain just 750m above sea level. On the mountain is one grand ecosystem within which lies virtually every environment on Earth. From waterless desert to tropical rain forest and glacial ice field to sweeping savannah. You could argue that the ascent of Kilimanjaro is akin to travelling from the equator to the Arctic.

Let us never forget Kilimanjaro is a volcano and is the highest and youngest of the big three volcanoes of East Africa. The oldest lavas are less than one million years old and small-scale activity has taken place within the last two hundred years. 'Kili' is a central vent type of volcano and the crater is almost a perfect circle two and a half kilometres across. Its wall is 180m high on the southern side, but rather lower elsewhere. Eccentrically situated within the crater an inner cone rises to about 5,800m – 100m higher than Gillman's Point and less than 100m below the true summit at Uhuru Peak. Within the cone there is the inner crater with another cone. In the centre of this minor cone is the ash pit which is 360m across and 120m deep. This is the core of the mountain.

We could best describe 'Kili' as dormant rather than extinct. It is unlikely that a further large-scale eruption will take place but active fumaroles within the inner crater show evidence of the mountains potential for activity. The presence of sulphur and steam is evidence of sub surface heat.

Is this the final stage in the activity of this mighty volcano?

Our bus route took us through interesting savannah terrain and after several hours we negotiated the border crossing into Tanzania doing our utmost not to annoy or upset any of the officials. They really do have 'power' and if they wished to do so could well upset the most meticulous plans for any group passing through.

As we negotiated the necessary procedures I thought back to other times I had made sensitive border crossings. In 1978 I was co leader of a school party returning overland from Moscow and Leningrad. This was the time of the cold war and once in East Germany we had to be extra careful of our behaviour patterns. The actual crossing in Berlin (Checkpoint Charlie) was as scary as any mountain face I have climbed. It took a full three hours before we were cleared for entry into West Berlin. Going in the opposite direction took a matter of minutes. I 'moved on' to my experiences in Iceland when I attempted to hurry our expedition gear through the warehouses, so we could speedily move on to our proposed base camp. Backhanders, bribery and just a little corruption 'oiled' the machinery of negotiation and most of our duty free was lost in the process.

Today, travel across the continent is border free and in many respects this is a good thing. However, there are always down sides to any arrangement. Europe has become a haven for radicalised terrorists who flaunt our lapse border controls and create horrendous acts of terror on the people who allowed this to be set up.

At about 5pm the bus developed problems with its cooling system and rapidly lurched over to the side of the road belching out clouds of ominous steam. Amazingly the driver managed to improvise temporary repairs but there still remained the problem of a serious lack of engine coolant. We used our initiative and provided bodily fluids as a replacement liquid. Successfully, we reached Arusha and transferred vehicles. Our arrival at Moshi was not until 9pm which considering the relative luxury of our hotel was a pity as we had little time to enjoy it.

My overriding memory of the hotel stay in Moshi was my almost paranoia over packing and gear selection. In my early days of climbing I had an almost careless attitude to selection of gear for forthcoming climbs. I can remember just 'going for it' and it was only as the years passed by that I resorted to lists and ticking off items on ever increasing pieces of paper. The ramifications of not having a list were brought home to 'roost' whilst on one of my last Munro ascents. On route to a high camp on Ben Avon I discovered I had left behind some rather important pills that really were part of my continued existence. On another climb I discovered just when I needed them most I had no plasters available in my first aid kit. I shall never forget reading about a famous female climber who achieved so much but who died far too young. Chantel Mauduit was in many respects a mountain genius but she also had a carefree attitude to scaling the peaks. Her brother Francois said years after her demise it was just fun all the time. "Life is great, let's enjoy it." Before one of her expeditions her friends and family threw a goodbye party and it was only when the last of the guests left in the early morning that Chantel bothered to throw together boots, clothing and other vital items required for eventual success. An activity that takes many climbers months of lists, organisation and careful consideration Chantel accomplished in less than two hours.

Sadly I had lost this ability and my stressful fuss over gear selection did indeed spoil my hoped for restful sleep in Moshi.

The next day was another early start and we drove round the mountain to arrive at the park gate at the commencement of the Machame route. (1828m 5997 ft.) We had passed many small holdings and seen a profusion of crops, banana being my most vivid recollection. It was warm and pleasant at the gate and for two hours we walked through the forest. This was a perfect environment for plant life. Hot, wet and little affected by mankind. Camphor, podocarpus, fig and other trees with lush undergrowth containing many giant ferns. At about 1pm it began to rain. And for the next four hours it 'teemed' down without respite. The track became a mass of thick deep mud into which we sank

up to our thighs. I looked longingly at Graham's large golf umbrella. At this stage, I was making a mental note to list items I would consider to be most valuable on an ascent of this mountain, particularly in the lower reaches. Golf umbrellas and wellington boots were the obvious answer. I was at the back of the group with Ijazz, some way behind the others, and we climbed on in surprising good spirits. Ijazz was good companion and as he had missed out on the final day on Mount Kenya I admired his enthusiasm. I can remember leaving the indistinct track at one stage for a call of nature. Just ten yards into the thick jungle was as though I had moved onto another planet. I did not linger as I really did not know what might be lurking in the dense plant growth. At 6 pm we reached the Machame camp site to witness a miserable location. (3032m 9948 ft.) Everything was wet, and the hut was a disgusting smoky hovel. Our tents provided shelter whilst the porters crowded into the tin hut. The porters were an incredible group. Totally and inadequately equipped, some even with sandals to negotiate a 19,000 ft. mountain. They were always cheerful and used to hardships that we would not contemplate. This was their job, over and over again, and they carried massive loads, shunning the use of rucksacks. The preference was a sack or gunny bag or even a box carried on the head.

An hour or more was spent attempting to dry out our gear in front of a somewhat inadequate wood fire and we prepared for a miserable night in an uncomfortable camp. The toilet facilities were primitive. A huge deep hole in the ground had 'straining bars' to act as necessary support as you balanced yourself over the perimeter edge. Whilst on large exercises in Malaya and Borneo huge cess pits were dug into the ground to act as latrines. Often these holes were many yards across with again the bars placed around the perimeter of the pit. For those of a delicate nature this was an embarrassing procedure, but it never bothered me. After all we all do it. For many the pit became a location for chat and exchange of news etc. Within our squadron there was one person nobody liked, and he would never use the pit whilst others were in attendance. His ruse was to awake early and sneak away whilst all the others were still asleep. One evening a mischievous member craftily sawed through the vertical poles holding the whole structure in place. The next morning the victim went for his lonely constitutional and three distinct sounds echoed out for all the jubilant squaddies to hear. Shuffle shuffle shuffle followed by creak creak crack. This was followed by a human sound of Argh Argh Argh and finally a dull plop as a body slid down into the foul mess below.

Kilimanjaro latrines brought all this back to me.

No doubt the hole would be filled in and moved to another location at some time in the future as ever-increasing numbers of climbers used this particular route. Later during the climb we just had to find a place of our own and like a cat bury the waste.

Just before nightfall we were rewarded with our first view of the mountain. A long way away but very impressive in its setting. A huge amount of fresh snow was seen on the mountain slopes down to a very low level. This was most unexpected and raised doubts in my mind that prevented the sleep I desperately required.

Centuries ago most of the summit of Kilimanjaro was covered by an ice cap possibly 100's of feet thick. Glaciers extended well down the mountain forming moraine ridges clearly visible today. I was expecting to see only a tiny remnant of this ice on my ascent in 1998. However, my very first glimpse of the 'hill' showed a blanket of white well down to the 14,000 ft. level. From my time as Geography teacher I was fully aware of glacial advance and subsequent retreat over periods of many thousands of years. We all know of global warming but there are other factors to consider. Could not the ice be

melting because of the heat of the equatorial sun? However, the sun has always been shining down and it is not quite so simple. The direct melting of the sun on ice at high altitudes is limited. Flat ice surfaces reflect so much of the sun's radiation. Paradoxically, glacial ice in places like Kilimanjaro melts most readily where it is suitably shaded from the direct rays of the sun and thus able to absorb a greater proportion of radiant energy. Glistening ice reflects much of the sun's energy. Dull brown lava absorbs much; the ground becomes warm.

Thus, melting will destroy glaciers, but often other factors come into 'play.' Failure of the wet seasons denies the mountain of its future supply of ice. Massive volcanic eruptions will also play a huge part in snow and ice cover. The mountain has been constantly changing.

It is awesome to imagine how the mountain might have looked whilst in the firm grip of a desperately cold spell. A blanket of ice down to well below 13,000 ft. Both Kibo and Mawenzi completely engulfed. Compare this with the vision of a mountain tearing itself apart with massive eruptions of fire and lava.

Our expedition was a microcosm of this fact. I saw the mountain clothed in snow when just two years previously a friend had climbed it in almost snow free conditions.

The next morning the heating effect of the sun rapidly dried out our wet gear. We set off in warm conditions and climbed steadily. Today was to be a 'shortish' day as the haul up to the Shira Plateau was in reality little more than a half day venture. Just before we had reached the Machame site the rain forest had petered out and now we were marching through the heather zone which in turn eventually merged into real moorlands with rocky outcrops. We became stretched out as a group as each member had his/her own comfortable climbing rate. This can cause potential problems.

I can to this day remember a story from way back to my junior school days regarding the wisdom (if not speed) of the old tortoise as against the brash speed of the impatient hare. I was slogging up Brown Tongue from Wasdale after probably far too much ale the previous night, courtesy of the Wasdale Inn. For a spell, I was walking with a younger climber and we chatted away for some hour as we plodded upwards. He seemed okay but almost like the weather he 'changed'. With a curt comment, he declared he could no longer maintain this slow speed and forged on ahead. My reaction was of indifference. I hadn't really liked him anyway. It was another good hour before I was nearing the summit and 300 ft. short I met this fellow again as he descended. It was raining, and visibility was down to ten yards. He declared the top to be a dismal and uncomfortable place as he passed me no doubt not envying me my final steps across the sea of boulders. But... just as I reached the top there was a magical change in the weather. The clouds were sent on their way by a rising wind and the view rapidly opened in all directions to the far distant horizon. Timing is a wonderful thing and not always are we blessed with it. I certainly was on this occasion and if I had acted like the young hare all the rewards I was enjoying would never have been savoured.

When I got down to Wasdale I saw the young lad sitting there drinking his *fizzy lager*. As I purchased my *cask ale* I could not resist the temptation to go over and inform him of the superb views he had missed in his rush to get up the hill. I wonder if my point had any effect.

I remembered all this as the frequent stops occurred during the ascent to Shira. Yes, within a group climbing at different speeds can bring forth conflict. Often faster climbers have been at rest for some thirty minutes before the tail enders come to the

stopover point. This is often followed by the faster climbers immediately restarting the climb. For some this initiates resentment.

Who is right and who is wrong? The answer is both and neither. In mountains, as in life, there is no one right way to do anything all the time. The error is insisting one's chosen course of action is the only way. This is just one reason why I prefer to climb alone. Any decisions to be taken are mine and there is to be no long negotiation and sometimes dispute.

Our Kilimanjaro 'moments' were not serious, although they did cause some discomfort for the slower climbers.

We reached the Shira Plateau in mid-afternoon and settled in to enjoy the stupendous views both up and down. Now at 3847m (12,621 ft.) we were above the cloud layers lying over the vast plains of Africa and Meru and other peaks soared into the sky with Kilimanjaro always holding prime place in any view. Today there are specified camp sites in this region but on our ascent we put up our tents almost on the edge of the plateau rim. I saw no sign of any huts.

It was at this camp that I first took a sleeping tablet. I have always been accused of being a bit of a hypochondriac, but sleep was certainly an important issue as altitude was gained. Whether it worked I cannot tell; sleep was always difficult in the thin air and headaches never far away. I was always very aware that during the night breathing can be considerably lowered leading to lower oxygen levels in the blood. I was also reminded that sedatives and sleeping tablets can very much worsen this problem. One of the group climbers offered some extremely interesting information. On Mount McKinley evidence had been received of an association between sedatives and the development of HAPE and HACE. Even more worrying was the fact that these life threatening ailments can affect even the strongest of climbers and it can come upon one in often the most frightening of time. Hypoxemia worsens because of increasing fluid in the lungs, and brain function deteriorates because of profound lack of oxygen. I thought it all through, took my pill and got on with the rest of my life.

We were now getting close to the last stages of our climb and I sat outside my tent gazing at the distant skyline as the sun slowly sank into dense cloud below. The whole subject of 'pills' and other medications came right to the fore of my attention. Before I left Liverpool, I had taken the precaution of 'jabs' for a host of problems that might just 'rear their head.' This was sensible, but after long consideration I declined any anti-malaria medication. This was a marginal decision and probably based on my time in the Marines. A year in the jungles of Sarawak and endless exercises on the Malay peninsula with only the precaution of paludrine persuaded me to lean heavily on basic common sense as a preventative measure. The mosquito horrors mainly bite at dusk and if you fully cover up and use a sleeping net, avoiding contact might just be possible. Also, frequent spraying with mosquito repellents, containing diethyltoluamide (DEET), can greatly reduce the risk. Just like the much-maligned Scotland midge the suffering from mosquitos reduces massively as altitude is gained. Of course other problems then arise but more of that later.

I had considered Lariam but once I read about the potential side effects I quickly dismissed this option. Just getting up the 'hill' was difficult enough without induced dizziness, depression, anxiety and sleep difficulties. The very high cost was also something to consider. The same applied to Chloroquine and it is worth noting that no drug is 100% effective. I did opt for a herbal remedy in the form of *Artemisia Annua*

(Chinese Wormwood). It had been used traditionally for treatment of fever in China for over two thousand years. It was not until the early 1970's that its potential for treating malaria was recognised.

It is indeed strange why we put ourselves through all this potential misery just for the privilege of standing on a distant summit, miles from assistance, and almost always in a location of total isolation. If 'things' do go wrong it is up to the determination and fortitude of the climber and his/her colleagues to overcome the obvious danger.

However, we still do it!!!

I took a long drink from my water bottle which was laced with carbogold. This is a high carbohydrate fluid replacement drink specifically developed to support peak athletic performance. It is also developed to provide maximum energy to fuel your muscles when they need it most during intense and extended workouts. Carbogold supplies more servings per container than most fluid replacement drinks and it was free, courtesy of one of our climbers who was managing director of Nutri. (Nutritional Supplements Company) Better still, it tasted good.

I was feeling fine and I looked around at the others within our group. Some were suffering, although no-one had offered any complaints and it was obvious upward progress was assured for the next day. One of the lads had acquired uncomfortable sunburn and this was causing much discomfort. There were the inevitable cold sores that are an almost certain consequence of this extreme environment. Chapped and cracked lips, mouth sores and other grave inconveniences make even drinking water unpleasant. Look after lips I had been told. Apply lots of protection cream and zovirex is often worth its weight in gold. The unfortunate plight of poor Sandy Irvine on Everest was forever at the front of my mind. He suffered serious sunburn. His lips were cracked, and pieces of skin were peeling off whenever his face rubbed against anything. Others were going through the inconvenience of 'tummy' problems. Hygiene is super-important on any equatorial mountain and hands should be thoroughly washed and scrubbed for around 3 minutes before eating, and certainly after toilet visits, to reduce the risk of debilitating gastro- enteritis. To ensure a continuous supply of much needed water we carried with us three filters which were very efficient, enabling us to filter out all impurities from even water taken from a mud pool. This eliminated the need for iodine tablets which often rendered drinking water almost too foul to drink. It cannot be stressed how important it is to take in plenty of liquids. As height is gained this becomes more vital. I was consuming many litres a day and as we only had to carry about 2 litres the filters helped to keep the overall load down. The filters were not cheap (£45) but a vital piece of equipment. On Kilimanjaro the route taken determines whether you have water for washing. We also carried bottles of hand antiseptic to facilitate cleanliness.

As the others slipped into their tents I thought back into the past. Whilst on my first tour in Sarawak during the period of Indonesian confrontation cholera was a serious threat to the well-being of the troops and marines serving in the jungles. Even in the towns, some as large as Kuching, precautions had to be taken. When out on the town we were forbidden to drink out of glasses as they could well have been washed in contaminated water. There even came a directive not to drink directly from the bottle as often this was an unhygienic practice. In fact the recommendation was to drink our alcohol by means of drinking straws which often lead to alarming consequences. It is a known fact that beer taken through a straw leads to a much-increased state of inebriation. Professionals (drinkers) who could normally manage a dozen plus bottles of Tiger were speaking an 'unknown language' after half this amount.

Once again, thought processes were helping to overcome the undeniable discomfort of a camping experience on the cold and desolate Shira plateau. Is all the modern fuss regarding water purity really justified? I recall a friend of mine who had been raised on a farm where all the drinking water had been obtained from hill streams which flowed direct into a collection tank. He was never concerned with what microscopic nasties were lurking in the water or where the sheep had chosen to do their business on the slopes high above. What the eye does not see comes to mind? Occasionally the lid of the tank was lifted and any obvious 'foreign' matter was diplomatically removed. When friends and relatives from the urban world came to visit they all seemed to remark on how much better the water tasted in the countryside. Was it all the drowned beasties and deer shit that contributed to this rural taste? There is certainly an issue to consider at this stage. Often many people go down with inevitable bugs that so often do the rounds, particularly during the winter periods. Immunity, resistance and natural body counter measures can be so very important. Common sense and care are the most important issues to consider. Just what is it that gives mountain water its wonderful taste?

Very many years ago a worthy representative of Manchester Corporation was despatched to sample the purity of the water to be found in Haweswater. Several 'cronies' at the Dun Bull Inn saw to it that the Alderman had his water well-seasoned with best whisky. Becoming more and more elate and more enthusiastic as the evening waxed older he declared it the finest water he had ever tasted. On return to Manchester he informed his colleagues in glowing terms. This eventually led to an influential and well attended deputation. No tally was kept of the numbers of gallons of pure Lakeland water consumed but their illusions were well pricked.

On return they 'hanged' the false prophet.

I thought on and remembered a vivid jungle survival lecture given by a battle-hardened Sergeant in upstate Malaya. He gravely informed us of the dangers of being bitten by any 'creepy crawly' within the confines of the dense undergrowth. The emergency action was vital and had to be carried out with all haste. A direct bayonet cut over the bite had to be made, the poison rapidly sucked out from the wound and quickly spat out. A silence within the group was followed by an intriguing question from one of the lads. "What happens if you are bitten on the backside, Sergeant?" "That is when you find out who your true friends are" came the immediate reply".

It was now time for sleep. One last glimpse across the plateau before the zip was closed on another day.

The next morning was clear with cloud lying thousands of feet beneath us. The mountain 'sparkled' in the bright sunshine as we set off on a long haul up the lower flanks with several annoying long descents. After so much work gaining height this was frustrating, but it was good for acclimatisation. Climb high sleep low had been the advice given and this also applied to Himalayan experts. We passed by the lava tower 4642m (15,235 ft.) and as always, I was thinking through different routes by which the summit could be reached. Had I been alone I am sure I would have taken the more challenging route past the Lava Tower and upwards to the Western Breach. This is harder, shorter and more dangerous but would certainly appeal more to the experienced climber. As with all routes on any hill, anywhere, there are inherent dangers and discomforts engaged within this ascent route. Today the Arrows Glacier campsite is a filthy mess of rubbish and if the toilets lower down were obnoxious up here they are distinctly foul. As well as all the foul shit, dangers from avalanche and rock fall must also be taken into consideration.

Being in the right place at the right time is usually perfect. One might just get away with being in the wrong place at the right time. But, the wrong place at the wrong time is usually very serious indeed. I have never been superstitious but on my long Iceland expedition I certainly used up three of my so called nine lives in very varied circumstances. The first mishap was when I was about to cross a road heavily used by trucks from the nearby American air base. Careless day dreaming caused me to step out into the dangerous area thinking mistakenly that danger was coming from the right. It was not, as just like America vehicles drive on the right-hand side. I was looking the wrong way and was a second from certain oblivion under the monstrous wheels of a massive lorry. Three weeks later I was ascending a narrow gully on Lambatungnatindur when I heard an awesome sound cascading down from above. I just managed to squeeze my body against the walls of the cleft when a massive pile of boulders came crashing down sweeping all before them. It took me a full twenty minutes to regain my composure and rapidly climb to the top to extract myself from the scary chute of rocks and potential death. On the dying days of our visit out onto the ice cap I was making progress on the lower slopes of the Austurtungnajökull glacier when my attention was taken in by other issues. Towards the snout I was walking on stagnant ice and just as I was about to place my right foot forward a massive piece of ice disappeared into a huge cleft in the glacier surface. I was a micro second from committing my weight forward but just managed to throw myself back from the ominous hole beneath me. A swirling deep sub glacial torrent could be seen some twenty feet down and if drowning was not to be my fate immersion in the freezing water or suffocation beneath the huge overburden of ice would have been equally fatal. I hardly thought about these incidents until much later whilst sitting in a vehicle negotiating the long journey back to Reykjavic when the full significance came home to plague me.

On January 4th 2006 three American climbers were killed in a rock slide on Kibo. This occurred near the Arrow glacier when a glacial deposit collapsed and tumbled down the slope. It was a viscously windy day, and this possibly prevented them from hearing the fall which would have reached them seconds before they were struck. Evasive action such as that taken by me in Iceland was impossible. Whilst researching this tragedy I discovered that different measures had been taken to prevent re-occurrence. Rock falls will always happen and plans to change the route so that climbers are only at risk for a short time seem a sensible way forward. However, life is a risky business. When I discovered that Lords Rake on Scafell was 'closed' the first thing I did was to go to Wasdale and climb this iconic route. Just because someone dies on the M1 does not necessarily mean all motorway transport grinds to a halt. A balance has to be found and common sense must prevail. Fears that the whole Western Breach route should be abandoned must be cast into the dustbin of pessimism'

We were headed for Barranco and with the Lava Tower looming to our left we descended into a gully by means of a series of zig zags before coming out on the Southern slopes of Kibo. Traversing south eastwards we crossed two further streams before a final long downward slope led us to the delightful Barranco valley. Rich in senecio and lobelia this is a huge gouge on the southern face of the mountain and is almost 900 ft. deep. It was formed when a huge land-slide swept southwards down from the summit some 100,000 years ago.

I had thoroughly enjoyed my day climbing and had acclimatised very nicely although others in the group were not doing so well. Barranco is at a height of 3985m (13,078 ft.) and although we had reached a day high of 15,235 ft. we were now only 451 ft. above our Shira campsite of the previous day. Unfortunately as the afternoon turned to

evening the weather changed and rain prevented us from having the impressive views so well deserved after the efforts of the day.

Sadly, this was the moment Ijazz suffered most. He had not had a good day and it was obvious he was suffering from the reduced atmospheric pressure and lack of oxygen when gasping for breath. Indeed it is considered that on the upper slopes of Kilimanjaro one only receives half the oxygen provided at sea level. It was distressing to hear him vomiting violently in his tent, an unfortunate action that is a tremendous sapper of body energy and vital moisture. Poor Jill, our doctor, spent most of the night giving him the necessary care he required but by the morning his condition had seriously deteriorated. Lengthy discussions took place and it was very obvious Ijazz had to descend. This had to be immediate and direct. His acute mountain sickness, with all the attendant misery (headache, sleep disruption, nausea and vomiting) was replaced by much more serious high altitude pulmonary oedema. Ijazz was coughing violently and there was an ominous gurgling sound within his chest. Blood in his sputum was the final decider. He left at 0800 and descended immediately to much lower altitudes.

I must admit at this stage I delved into my rucksack and took out my little box of Diamox tablets. I had been given these tablets at the commencement of the climb on Mount Kenya. I cannot really remember taking any, but I must have as my quota was somewhat depleted. Acetazolamide is a known drug that really does work at increasing altitudes. It acidifies the blood, which stimulates breathing. This allows a greater amount of oxygen to enter the bloodstream. I had been warned that it might be best to delay administration until symptoms of altitude were felt. Diamox is often the first potential remedy if nasty symptom do occur. Seeing the state of Ijazz and my known potential for pill taking caused me to take it prophylactically. I was confident it would do me no harm and none of the possible side effects (rash, fever, visual difficulties, tingling sensation in fingers, loss of appetite and dizziness) were experienced. As for the final possible symptom, I jokingly told the others I am drowsy and confused at the best of times.

Diamox worked for me. Strange to think a remedy for glaucoma can assist you up on the very big hills?

Our penultimate day commenced with an interesting and very steep scramble up the Great Barranco Wall to the east of the campsite. It was good to get my hands on rock, and altitude was gained quickly. Technical scrambling can be a blessing on 'Kili' as it certainly takes the pain out of endless slog which makes you even more aware of the rapidly thinning air. At the top of this airy scramble 4233m (13888ft.) I looked longingly at the mass of ice making up the Heim glacier perched high above towards the crater rim. Time passed quickly and by the middle of the day we had reached the Karanga valley which was adorned with ferns, heather and other greenery. Here we all filled our water bottles as this vital commodity would now be in very short supply. Unlike many groups we were not intending to break our climb with a camp at Karanga as we now negotiated a bleak 'moon like' scene of desolation.

In all my experience of climbing there is one aspect that always leaves me in utter despair. My grave dislike of certain elements of the human species is certainly well known. I abhor litter of any description and on the mountain slopes, and particularly the very summits, the sight of human filth makes me almost sick to my stomach. Why is it that very many mindless idiots are willing to haul up the hill full and heavy plastic bottles yet once the internal liquid has been disposed of they dump them for all to see? My hillwalking mentor Alfred Wainwright encapsulated it perfectly in one of his

mountain guides. Boys on holiday from a school outside the district wilfully destroyed a beacon on Nab Crags and left a pile of abandoned litter lying all over the pristine ground. Two masters were with the party during this senseless act of vandalism. Two brainless idiots, a disgrace to their profession, took no action and left the summit in a state of what can only be described as disgusting.

I looked down at the dust and grit of Kilimanjaro.

There it was, a pile of human waste and not of the bodily type. Mars bar wrappers should not be here! The boredom of the next hour was alleviated as I delved further and further into this whole issue.

On the South Col of Everest the pile of expedition junk is becoming more and more serious as the number of climbers aspiring to reach the summit increases. Within a relatively small area the north ridge of Everest offers a true sightseeing trip through history with each historic campsite and its artefacts representing stages in the development of equipment for high altitude climbing.

At this very moment many climbers are in the planning process of the search for the body of Sandy Irvine, lying somewhere on the frozen upper slopes of the mountain. Might his body lead to the discovery of the camera that explorers have been talking about for decades.

Yes. Just when does a piece of garbage become an archaeological artefact?

My service career now provided an important input into this fatigue reducing mindset. Sophisticated missile destroyers spending so much time gathering and analysing waste collected from the surface of the surrounding ocean? This vessel contains weaponry of total destruction, with masses of technological electronic warning. Here it is contemplating a raft of garbage, slime and muck much to the disgust of the plaintive calls of skua gulls who were seeing their much desired dinner being denied.

A dip net over the ship side followed by a cherry picking detail of potential refuse. Did it originate from a potential enemy submarine? An analysis of rubbish, crap, waste and garbage might well tell you something very important. Could it be that one man's waste is another man's gold?

And what about the intriguing Williamson tunnels. The creation of an eccentric philanthropist these structures fell into total decay on his death in 1841. They became merely dark damp smelly holes in the ground and the perfect place for the fly tippers of the nineteenth century. During excavation in the 1990's we discovered an amazing array of what can only be described as junk. However, it was old junk and in fact a perfect illustration of social history looked at through the items cast away all those years ago. I often ask my guests if they are hoarders or 'chucker awayers' and there is a very good reason for this mandatory question. Many people are not aware of just what they possess. Think of Del Boy and his famous chronometer. Lying in his lock up garage for decades and all the time he informed Rodney that one day they would be millionaires. The watch sold at auction for 7 million pounds They already were 'megga' rich; they just did not know it.

Don't throw anything away. Build yourself a shed and keep it.

But never throw it down on the ground. Never despoil a pristine mountain slope.

Our objective for the evening was now very near and after a short but steep scramble we arrived at Barafu 4681m (15,358 ft.)

I had very mixed feelings on arrival at this final camp before the long night climb to the crater rim. The sight of poor I jazz was still very much in my mind and several of the other climbers were also showing signs of altitude sickness. Often the effects of altitude can 'hit' you at very short notice. No-one wants to get this far on any mountain and find the summit snatched away.

In 2006 Lincoln Hall had reached the summit of Everest in almost perfect conditions. The timings were right and everything was good, all was going according to plan. The relief and the prospect of easier terrain on the descent was reinforced with the thought that very soon the air would become thicker with oxygen. He downclimbed the dihedral to the thin traverse leading to the top snow slope down which he initially made decent progress. Within a frightening minute he was suddenly overwhelmed by extreme fatigue. Right out of the blue the deleterious effect of altitude had arrived powerfully and without exception. Whatever clarity he had held on to above was suddenly gone and all sense of time and place slipped from his grasp. Halls desperate fight for survival is well known³⁴ but it was the awesome speed that his affliction arrived that worried climbers most.

In 1998 these events had not taken place, but I had read so many accounts of climbers suffering similar experiences. Barafu was no place to harbour negative thoughts such as these but we all are all human and it is sometimes impossible to cast them totally out of the mind. Also there was the very sobering consideration that so very soon a 4,000 ft. upward slog was beckoning. Thin air, loss of appetite and lack of sleep were the problems stacked against us all. Determination to reach the summit would be a massive ally to aid us through the next twelve hours.

It was imperative to gain some rest though this was easier said than done. I could not face any food, so I climbed into my tent sometime around 7 pm and shivered deep into my sleeping bag.

As I lay there I thought back to other climbers who had experienced this moment on their often much more serious climbs. Just how did Mallory and Irvine feel as they huddled in the their very frail tent high on the northern ridge of Everest. The following day would see their chance to gain the summit. It would also be their last day alive on Earth. Hillary and Tenzing also had an uncomfortable night on the south side of the mountain before their successful ascent the following day. And just how did Herman Buhl feel as he arose at 1 am to prepare for the summit of Nanga Parbat. Buhl did not set off until 0230 and it was a further hour before Otto Kempter followed him.

Suddenly there were sounds of activity and a glance at my watch informed me it was 30 minutes before midnight. I must have acquired some sleep as this was something of a shock to me and the infernal task of extraction from a relatively warm sleeping bag to a cold almost desolate tent floor had to be carried out. Getting kitted up for the ascent was not pleasant but then only those who have climbed high mountains will know this moment is often the worst of the whole experience.

Everything took so very long and tasks that would normally take minutes at sea level determined it was another hour before I was fully clothed and out in the cold night air. It was very windy but stars 'twinkled' in a clear black sky as I walked over to the large

³⁴ It can be said that Lincoln Hall died on the slopes of Everest in the 'killer year of 2006. He was left for dead in a season when 11 others perished in horrendous manner. Hall made a miraculous recovery and did not become victim number twelve. For a comprehensive account of his ordeal see 'Dead Lucky' life after death on Everest.

mess tent that was situated in the middle of the individual tents. Warm tea was all I could face and an attempt at a biscuit made me balk. I could clearly hear some unfortunate soul vomiting out in the darkness. I recalled past school trips when one sad coach passenger was sick all down the aisle of the motor coach. It invariably set off a 'chain reaction' of others and quickly the coach became a cauldron of 'puke'

Departure time was set for 1 am and I returned to my tent for a final check of gear and to pick up spare batteries for my headtorch which was rapidly fading in strength. This was another somewhat amazing moment for me. I fully knew I had many spare batteries but however hard I looked I could not locate them. I searched for a full fifteen minutes and then had to give up and consider solutions for the hours ahead.

We left our camp in a long and slow crocodile each climber very much within their own world. I partly solved the problem of little torch power by relying on the assisted torch power of a fellow climber I had befriended. Initially we climbed over several small cliffs and almost immediately reached large patches of snow where normally no snow would be. Climbing upwards through the night in very cold temperatures was very unpleasant and the frequent stops to search out the snow-covered route were causing great annoyance to some members of the group. Another problem was the 'ventilation' issue. It was difficult to work out just how much clothing to wear.

I remember very little of the climbing hours from 0100 through 0330 other than it was steep, rough and very dark. Ahead loomed a never-ending climb of shale and gravel with a series of attendant zigzags. This was where the deep snow cover brought assistance as we could now negotiate a more direct route by kicking steps into the relatively soft snow before increasing altitude changed its texture more to ice. It was poignant to consider that in this very place just two days earlier a German girl had dragged her guide off the slope initiating a fall to their deaths. Sometime around 4 am I moved ahead and as I had the best boots (Gabilier Super Guides- no ice axe or crampons) commenced the laborious task of kicking steps in the 40-degree slope just as the hint of dawn was showing in the night sky. After one long slope I was totally exhausted, and I lay on the ground heaving for air as the rest of the group slowly climbed past me. It took a long time for me to recover from this effort and meanwhile the others moved ahead towards the rim of the crater after utilising the neat line of steps I had kicked into the slope. Inwardly I was 'cross' but it did not really matter as everyone was very much in their own world by now surviving the high altitude as best they could. A beautiful dawn had almost arrived unnoticed, visibility was outwards to the far horizon.

The last three hundred feet to Stella Point were painful and I was now out at the back of the line. I have very little recollection of reaching the rim, surprising as this is certainly a major moment in the course of the climb. I seem to remember the others waiting and resting as the last climbers slowly ascended the final steep snow slope. I was amazed to see the whole of the inside of the crater was filled with deep snow. The ridge up to Uhuru loomed ahead. Only some 700 ft. higher and approximately one mile away it looked like a mountain in itself.

The sun was now fully above the horizon and we turned our attentions to the final slog up towards the very top. It was not particularly steep and there was no real sense of exposure. It was just the lack of oxygen that caused us to restrict movement to seven then five steps before an enforced stop saw us leaning on ski poles heaving away. I can vaguely remember Jill, who had suffered badly on the climb, descending with a porter towards Gillman's Point. It was almost certain that her care towards Ijazz had led her to

this early descent. After another short distance I can remember a group conversation as Mike obviously came to the end of his tether. He had missed out on Mt. Kenya by just a few hundred feet and now he was advised to commence the long descent, again at a point when the summit was very close. (probably some three to four hundred feet above.) My ascent became slower and slower and several times I felt great annoyance as what had appeared to be the top turned out to be another annoying false summit with the rising crest continuing beyond. The summit glaciers were dazzling in the rising sunshine, but I had little energy to fully appreciate them. The temperature was minus 8 when at 0830 I climbed the last few feet to the summit and sank down in the snow glad it was all over.

The others were understandably ecstatic and mini celebrations were taking place. The first climber to reach the top had been some fifteen minutes ahead of me and after regaining my composure I looked around at the stupendous view. Thick clouds covered everything some six thousand feet below and everywhere I looked I could see the masses of snow that had fallen over the previous weeks. Kilimanjaro rarely looks like this and I felt almost privileged to see a sight that might never reappear in future years. Looking ahead along the rim I had a notion that the next rise was higher and even contemplated the hundred-yard traverse to ensure the top was climbed. A rational thought (difficult up here) eliminated this idea as the top was adorned with a huge Tanzanian flag and other paraphernalia.

A high mountain is an excellent place from which to contemplate the world and its phenomena. I have done this on many peaks since I first climbed the innocuous Sergeant Man as a teenager. Indeed, this is one of the reasons I now climb alone. I really do not want people, boring me with issues of income tax, mortgage and messy divorce procedure. Kilimanjaro in pure bright sunlight after an endless freezing dark slog is a perfect place to think it all through. I watched the other climbers negotiating the snow covered ridge we had just painfully climbed. Very shortly I was the only one left and I took this opportunity to place this moment firmly into my mind. I thought back to a memorable film I had seen recently. Terms of Endearment involved the relationship between an astronaut (Jack Nicholson) and his neighbour (Shirley Maclaine). In one very intimate and profound moment he was asked what moment stood out above all others within his life. He described the moments of total peace whilst in Earth orbit when the total silence was only broken by the sound of his heart beating. Lying next to him, his partner answered with total feeling. "This is mine"

I was able to enjoy the total peace and quiet of this magical location. After the last climber had disappeared over the final lip in the ridge I gathered my possessions to commence my own way down. After all the tribulations of the ascent it was almost amazing to experience the difficulty of even the smallest upward section on the return. Even the mercurial Peter Habeler had written about this after his epic oxygen free climb up Everest. During descent he found it almost impossible to cope with a counter gradient. The climb back to the south summit almost proved impossible. All power was gone and the issue of merely a few feet was solved by crawling on all fours to overcome the obstacle. Strange also that Habeler took photographs of his climbing companion behind him negotiating the Hillary Step. He did not remember how he raised the camera nor how he pressed the trigger. He did not remember taking any photographs, yet he did and just like myself actions were taking place almost by instinct.

Some distance before Reaching Gillman's point I moved down into a thin misty film that quickly became thicker with visibility dropping to fifty yards. I was alone and made

a unilateral decision to stop and sit in the deep snow eating a Kellogs nutri bar. On recommencing my traverse I can only vaguely remember reaching Gillman's point. As this is a major point of the normal ascent route I find it strange I did not search out the obvious cairn. In any other circumstance I am sure I would have obtained a photograph but this I did not do. I had certainly lost all track of time and the whole experience is lost behind the mists within my mind. Was this the same for Odell when he acquired his historic vision of Mallory and Irvine on the upper slopes of Everest. In the weeks that followed and then the years beyond he seemed to change his mind many times. The location of exactly where they were on these high slopes only added to the overall mystery.

Other examples spring to mind. The loss of the Titanic has always raised many issues of controversy and dispute. Just what certain people actually saw on that fatal night is so very important. Within a conversation with Commander Boxhall very many years later he said that he would stick to what he had said at the time and he also dryly remarked that his recollection after more than 52 years was not quite so firm as it had been just two weeks after the tragedy. In the enquiries that followed many examples of disputes can be found. Striking examples of how varying and approximate were some of the estimates of time that fateful night.

I was at Gillman's' Point and I had carried out a successful ascent; but I can remember so very little about it all. Twenty years ago and today, it is all lost at the very back of my mind.

I can remember much more about the long descent to Kibo Huts. Some hundred feet below the rim I met up with the others making very careful progress down the steep and precarious mass of scree that was now plastered in deep snow. This aided my usual rapid descent and I quickly passed all the group members and sinking up to lower thighs I almost flew down the mountain. As height was lost patches of scree replaced the snow and this made it possible to move even faster. It took me less than one hour to descend some 3200 ft. I was first to reach Kibo and meet up with Jill and Mike to enjoy a very welcome beer or two whilst awaiting the arrival of the remainder of the group.

The rest was something of an anti-climax although it certainly should not be so. There is still so much to see on the descent to Horrombo 3719m (12,201 ft.) and then down through Mandara 2705m (8875ft.) My biggest recollection of the last leg from Mandara to the gate at Marangu was the impressive delve back into forest and a return to massive rainfall in the guise of a monsoon like downpour. As with our commencement the track down to the gate was a total quagmire of mud and slime into which we slipped and wallowed with total abandon.

Kilimanjaro had really been the experience of a lifetime and whilst thousands have climbed this 'hill' millions have not. I can certainly think of many of my friends who would barely be able to reach Horrombo.



Figure 93: Summit rim Kilimanjaro 1998
A view from the crater rim taken minutes after leaving the summit
Deep snow cover with Mawenzi in the background



Figure 94: Summit rim Kilimanjaro 1996
On this occasion there was only a thin cover of snow



Figure 95: Summit glaciers Kilimanjaro 1998



Figure 96: Mawenzi from Kilimanjaro



Figure 97: Traversing Mount Kenya to the west

I studied the remnants of the glaciers clinging to the slopes. They were rapidly disappearing, and it is estimated that in just 20-30 years they will have gone

Retrospective thoughts on an ascent of Kilimanjaro

I jotted down these notes some twelve months after my ascent. Time had given me the chance to reflect.

After talking to many schoolchildren when giving slide shows and lectures on the many climbs I had achieved one factor continually arose. I was often asked exactly what the last few feet before the summit were really like. After five days of painful slog through rain forest and then volcanic scree to arrive high above the clouds on ice and snow I suppose this is a very relevant question. Yet as much as I delve into my memory I keep coming up against a mini blank. I was there, but if I had not my photographs to check back on, it is almost as though the climb had not taken place. The issue of photographs is another example of how thought processes slow down as altitude is gained. I have no recollection of using my camera after we departed from the Shira plateau. This was the time before digital cameras and selection of views had to be considered carefully. Today everyone seems to take hundreds and hundreds, only to delete with abandon at some future moment. On arrival back at Arusha I had real regrets that I had not taken any views from the summit. After all, the conditions were perfect, and this was a once in a lifetime moment. Imagine my total surprise (and delight) when on arrival home I discovered within my camera at least a dozen perfectly composed summit views.

I do not remember taking them, but I obviously did.

The almost pathetic search for torch batteries at Barafu was another incident that amazed me after the climb had ended. A headtorch is a vital piece of equipment for the final climb up to the crater rim. My desperate search for my spare batteries ended in failure but it did not curtail my ascent. On arrival at the foot of the mountain I discovered the batteries safely tucked away in a side pocket of my rucksack. Just how had I overlooked them?

I would not recommend an ascent by way of the so-called tourist route. (Mandara, Horombo and Kibo.) Be different and find an alternative route. You will be rewarded with a better experience. However, be prepared to camp as the huts on other routes are quite foul and filthy (written in 1999). On the tourist route the huts are reasonable but the route can be crowded, and you will be one of many making the ascent.

My thoughts are now somewhat dated and as the years pass by Kilimanjaro will change after all it is a major source of income for a country that can hardly be considered rich.

This brings me to my final and in some respects tragic sequel.

Several weeks after our return I received a telephone call that set off alarm bells in my mind. Graham, with whom I had shared a tent told me that he had been out on the town and suffered horrible symptoms on return. This time it was not a case of too much alcohol. On visiting his doctor he had been told it looked very much like malaria. His phone call was to warn me of the possibility I might have also contracted this nasty bug. I was understandably alarmed and immediately visited the school for tropical medicine in Liverpool. Blood tests, urine samples, saliva check and tests on a stool were all undertaken and instructions to come back at the end of the week for the results left me with the so-called sword of Damocles hanging very much over my head.

The day before I was to receive the results I received what might be considered the happiest and yet saddest phone call of my life. It was Graham again. He did not have malaria (a sigh of total relief from me) he had leukaemia. Standard tests had found no sign of malaria parasites so further investigations had discovered this even worse case scenario.

This was a massive ‘whammy’ for Graham and an eye opener for all of us. The central areas of Africa are dangerous places and often the risks taken have little to do with the mountain itself.

‘Compleat’

After my trials and tribulations on Beinn Fhionnlaidh I was totally unable to climb the next day. After all I am only human. I was somewhat annoyed to find decent weather all around when the forecast for the week ahead was somewhat ominous. The bad angel was all around me yet again. I drove over the new Skye bridge and indulged in several pints in the almost deserted township of Kyleakin. I sat on the loch side looking at the monstrous bridge regretting the fact that all the mountains were totally clear of cloud and I was down here at sea level. Although not in the same league, I was reminded of K2 in 1986 when a large group of climbers carried out the suicidal decision to waste a day of glorious weather on the shoulder well above the ‘death zone.’ There were many reasons for this tragic decision, but it played a massive part in the loss of two of our greatest climbers several days later. Although they did reach the summit the weather

was turning with a vengeance. Just one day too long and they were all caught in a terror storm on their descent. Julie Tullis, Alan Rouse, two Austrian climbers and Dobrosława Wolf paid for this mistake with their lives.

I had booked in at the youth hostel at Ratagan and returned to enjoy the ambience after my recent days of doss and discomfort. My plan to walk in to the hostel at Albeithe was thwarted when I discovered it was closed for the season. I knew the 'bothy' part was unlocked but I did not fancy the long and boggy walk in from Cluanie. In fact I was totally undecided and caught well and truly on the horns of procrastination. The latest weather forecast did nothing to change my mood. Colder, wetter and now a strong wind to contend with. I decided to put it all off for the now and climb a nearby Corbett. I would stay another night at Ratagan and make my mind up 'off the cuff.'

Leaving the car at the Glen Shiel campsite at 11 am I followed the excellent track up into Allt Undalain and in sometimes warm sunshine noticed surrounding peaks were clear. The five sisters had no cloud cover and the Saddle occasionally showed its impressive northern crags and corries. Optimism set in; maybe just a little too soon. I reached the top of the pass and next to the Loch Coire nan Crogachan I left the path to climb north towards Sgurr Mhic Bharraich. It was now that the weather turned completely. A rising wind and driving rain made the going difficult and the clouds blew in to spoil any views. The slopes seemed longer than I had expected, probably because of the conditions. Nevertheless I eventually located the three small knolls and more importantly the highest one adorned with a large cairn. I sat there miserable and wet but was delighted when five minutes later the clouds parted to give some semblance of view. Maybe not distant but at least something to see. It also gave me my bearings for a quick descent to the east that I carried out with little fuss. Once back on the track I made my way back to the car with impeccable timing. Almost as soon as I reached the car park the skies opened and it poured down. Torrential rain cascaded down from the leaden sky and for twenty minutes it was impossible to move. I stocked up with some provisions in the garage shop and returned to Ratagan

I was still not sure of my plan. I am sure we have all been in this position- uncertainty, doubts and concerns. But this was my 'complete' Munro. By 7 pm I had made up my mind. Whatever the weather gods had in store for me I was going for it. I went to bed early and set my alarm for 0630.

I was up early and away early. I drove back to the starting point and this time I was going to utilise my bicycle. The memories of Beinn Fhionnlaidh and Iron Lodge still haunted me. I commenced my cycling at 0845 and although it was drizzling I made decent time along the track I had negotiated just a few days previously. Just short of the lodge I met a female shepherd who asked me to look out for some straying sheep. Straying from what I wondered. And what exactly could I do about it. She was attractive and pleasant, so I agreed to her request. I left my bike behind the lodge and retraced my route onwards realising I had a real bonus to come. I was not going to have to progress as far as I had on my Fhionnlaidh climb and this would save me time. Also I discovered a bridge crossing the stream at GR 068288. This was the outflow stream from Loch an Droma and although only small this cheered me greatly. More joy was to follow when I reached the point to cross Allt an Fhraoich-choire and Abhainn Sithidh. I discovered a solid bridge affording easy passage. At this point the map (my map- like me quite old) was wrong. The bridge crosses both streams after they have joined. Now on the correct side of the rivers all I had to contend with was long upward slog and very 'dodgy' weather. I could still see the summits of the mountains, but this was obviously

not going to last. After progressing upstream (Abhainn Sithidh) for a mile I took a slanting traverse up the slopes aiming for the bealach between Mullach Sithidh and my Mullach and the long awaited 'compleat.' I was hit by several fierce sleet storms that were followed by short drier moments. Half way up a massive blast of wind hit me and I went down on hands and knees to preserve some stability. The sleet raced across the slopes and found every chink and gap in my clothing. The slope went on and on and the bealach seemed just as far away as ever. It was becoming incredibly steep across wet grass and boulder field but apart from being blown into oblivion the danger element was low. As I did not have a watch with me and my mobile phone was drowned from the previous day I had no idea of time but realised it must have been nearing 2 pm. At last I reached the bealach and could see I was only just below Sithidh which was at an altitude of 974m. My Mullach was 982m so I realised I was very close. I climbed southwards along a good path and very soon realised my long journey was almost over. I climbed up to the summit of Mullach na Dheiragain probably at 2.30 pm and sat down with immense relief that the climbing was over.

There was no view, but the wet snow had ceased to fall. I could sense that the clouds were only just above the tops but hope of a clearing was not on my mind. I took a photograph of myself (which has since been consigned to the bin as it depicts a climber looking nearer a hundred years than 64.) and immediately noticed the clouds being 'torn off' the ridge I had just climbed. For three minutes I could see the top of Sithidh and also the next rise on the ridge (Carn na Con Dhu 967m) 2 km to the south. It was not all doom and gloom as far as views were concerned.

I reflected on my journeys across these mountains. I had no feeling of enormous euphoria This was just another summit in the long list of summits in my memory. I remembered a conversation I had had with a climber who had climbed Everest. Reaching the summit was supposed to trigger a surge of intense elation; a release of emotion after what had been many months of toil. He told me he just could not summon the energy to care. I had a similar experience on Kilimanjaro when I slumped down on the snow plastered summit and hardly bothered to enjoy the amazing early morning view across the vast plains of Africa.

However, huddled against the inadequate cairn on Dheiragain I did realise it was a special moment. Maybe it wasn't a particularly special or impressive peak.; possibly it isn't a separate mountain at all. It could be described as the end of a long outlying spur from Sgurr nan Ceathreamhnan. But, however one ponders, it IS a Munro and it just happened to be my 'compleat' Munro. Hence it was special.

Now I had to get down. The annoyance of having no timepiece was playing hard as I could only estimate it was around 3 pm. The descent back to the floor of Abhainn Choilich was not easy as everything was so very wet. The showers of snow kept 'bashing in' but I was well pleased. Once on the valley floor I noticed the grey clouds had risen above the ridge I had just climbed. Even so distant views would not have been possible. I made my way to the bridge and here I picked up my spare boots. (This had been one of my plans to avoid soaking feet after the river crossings I had made on Fhionnlaidh. When I discovered there was a bridge I realised I did not need the boots. To save weight I hid them under a piece of wood intending to collect them on my return.) The track back to Iron Lodge was again easy but long and it was a huge relief to arrive back and discover my bike was still in one piece. I used the lodge for a thirty-minute rest. No ghosts this time just the warm glow of a complete hand of Munro summits.

It was total darkness when I left the lodge on my trusty bike. However, there was still one terrifying moment to survive in what had been a somewhat scary three days climbing. This amazing escape certainly 'scratched' one of my nine lives. I was cycling quickly (too quickly) in almost total darkness when I sensed something up ahead. I slammed on my brakes and stopped just as my front wheel touched a closed gate across the track. Two days later I found that another cyclist had not been so lucky. He didn't stop and crashed into the gate at high speed, resulting in him being thrown forwards and into the gate slats. His jaw was torn off and he was rendered unconscious. He was discovered hours later in a very critical condition.

What had told me to slow down?

I do not know to this day but attached to my strange and dangerous dreams at Iron Lodge it certainly made me ponder.

Back at the hostel I celebrated with the few people still in residence. A simple affair but the company was good. Masses of scrambled egg and warm rolls went down like nectar as did the bottle of shiraz.

Sleep that night came very easily.

5. SCOTLAND MEMORIES INTEREST AND MINUTIA

A bit about railways

Most men like trains. Well I think I am right in saying this. I still have my Hornby Dublo train set I had when I was a young boy. My grandsons have their eyes on it and will probably have it one day. For now it lies in an old oak chest and slowly gains in value. Wherever I find myself on my travels I have always liked to visit railway stations. I really don't know why but stations do have a strong attraction. A great number of us spend a lot of time waiting on platforms. Just tonight I watched an hour of television devoted to the famous platform at St. Pancras. Railways must be popular because I have seen so many books adorned with thousands of photographs of trains and stations.

I also love old maps. They are a superb source of local history showing just how the land looked like in years gone by. When one of my schools closed down I discovered a mass of old maps hidden away in an old geography storeroom. I saved them from a bonfire fate and still spend hours of my time going over the detail they show of times past. These maps invariably show a huge network of railway lines because in the early 1900's the railway network did indeed cover the whole country. On my journeys up Glen Ogle I often look over at the deserted viaducts on the opposite side of the valley. Someday I shall walk this old route, maybe at a time when the summits are not so readily accessible. Today, looking back I think how sad it is that we allowed the old lines to disappear. In my own city there used to be a unique line that spanned the entire dock system. The overhead railway was indeed special to Liverpool. I can still remember taking journeys along this line and observing many of the large ships that used to visit Liverpool in days long gone by. Today the overhead railway would be a massive tourist attraction but in the late 1950's it was merely a huge source of scrap. Another thing that amazes me is the fact that we did not preserve just one of our famous battleships. They have all gone and the only reminders we have today are photographs of what once was the backbone, the strength, of our country and empire.

Today I am still stirred by the sight of a steam train 'chuffing' forwards along the permanent way. When this happens in scenery as majestic as the Scottish Highlands the image is almost perfection. I also like to explore where the railways once had been. In many places no trace can be found but in others there is a lot of evidence to be seen in very many ways. The idea of Ballaculish having its own railway station intrigues me. Of course most of it all came to an end in the 1960's when nation-wide closures were the order of the day. The only reminders are the thousands of photographs taken by enthusiasts from all over the country. Imagination also helps greatly. On my waits at Crianlarch station, anticipating future climbs from Corrou Halt, I think of what it must have been like when Crianlarich was indeed a major rail junction.

I have a collection of hundreds of photographs I have taken on my many visits to the Highlands. Some were taken when the hills were out of bounds because of fierce weather and some were taken to help stir my imagination of what used to be.

Others were taken simply because I have a great love of the railway. And why not?



Figure 98: Corroul station - a desolate railway halt



Figure 99: Approaching Oban [2006]



Figure 100: Bridge of Orchy [2010]

Single malts

Now here is a topic that should be close to the heart of any real ‘Munro bagger.’ Being an ex Royal Marine and the recipient of a daily tot of fierce navy rum I have always been a ‘rum rat.’ I can still remember when just 19 partaking in a massive drinking binge when more than a few bottles of whisky were polished off. The sickness and hangover was massive and for obvious reasons I considered the Scottish nectar with some trepidation. In fact I hardly ever drank it from that day onwards. A big drinker- Yes; but a whisky drinker- no.

It all changed on my 60th birthday.

I had decided to travel north and make inroads into the many mountains that adorn the Glen Shiel area. The weather was superb. Day after day of glorious blue skies with hardly a cloud to be seen anywhere. This became an orgy of ‘ticking off’ and it gave me chance to visit the remote youth hostel at Alltbeithe. On the first night I shared the hostel with Louise a super efficient warden and on the next nights others came along to enjoy some good company and mountain banter. On my actual birthday I had to leave. By now I had no food left and more important my bottle of rum was empty. Anyway I had pre-booked a room at the Cluanie Inn in consideration of the fact I had reached senior citizen status.

The route back took me over the peaks of Mullach Fraoch-Choire and A Chralaig and it was early evening before I reached the sanctuary of the inn. Not wanting to waste any time I got stuck into several pints before I could tear myself away from the bar for a

welcome shower and change of clothes. That evening was pleasantly spent going over my maps and taking great pleasure out of the fact I had added another eight Munros to my list even if missing the outliers of Beinn Fhionnlaidh and Mullach na Dheiragain was a little annoying.

I was well mellow when at 11 pm a very well dressed elderly gentleman approached me with a delightful opening line.

“Good evening young man. I do believe this is your birthday.”

I immediately liked him. Anyone who wanted to call me a young man certainly would hold my strict attention. It all got better.

“I would like to buy you a wee dram to celebrate your day.”

It was getting better every moment that passed. I replied that I did not appreciate whisky but would gladly take up the offer of a tot of rum. I can still see the shock and horror in his face as I uttered these words. I cannot remember what he said but it certainly did not look as if I was going to get my rum.

I did get my dram. I was carefully asked to describe the experience. I did not think it would be a good one. Similar to a wine taster in a famous chateau I smelt, sipped and then gulped a sample of my drink. It was delicious. I answered the questions by saying it had a peaty taste and a strong aroma of camp fires. It was superb. The elderly gentleman was delighted. He even got the bottle from behind the bar and showed me the description on the label. It all agreed with my ‘diagnosis’. His colleague then produced another dram and on top of all my beer and previous rum a mellow world of complete satisfaction took over. It was then my turn to approach the bar but I was told in no uncertain terms that these had been my birthday drinks. No reciprocal gesture was required. But of course being a Scouser I insisted and asked the young girl for a repeat order. Not being a single malt expert I had no idea what it would all cost. I pulled out a ‘tenner’ from my pocket and awaited the arrival of the nectar. £17 (doubles?) was the total which took me aback although it really mattered nothing to me. My whisky was Lagavulin. What the others were drinking I know not. The gentleman turned out to be a local laird with his gillie for company. It was all a magic moment and a perfect cap for my 60th birthday. After they left I added another strong beer to my consumption and by midnight was ‘advised’ as to the benefits of taking to my bed.

Sleep that night was never so welcome.

I had become so hooked on Lagavulin that I visited a whisky shop in Fort William on my route home. I was horrified to discover the price of a 25-year-old bottle. The 16-year-old bottle was £39, and this was only marginally cheaper at the Green Wellie in Tyndrum. Ironic that I managed to eventually purchase my bottle back home in Liverpool. Sainsbury’s offered it at a mere £24.99.

Gore-Tex - a myth?

I started my journeys to the hills back in the 1950’s. Probably a little late to be a true pioneer but certainly before the time that saw climbers and walkers spread out across the hills north south east and west. My first climbs in the Lake District were pre-Wainwright ventures. Yes, his books were in the process of being printed but being a schoolboy well outside my price range. I had to make do with map compass and an abundance of common sense. In these early years the gear we used was basic by the

standards of today. Medieval some might say? I can still remember the hierarchy that gear subscribed to. When items were no longer suitable for everyday wear they were demoted to outdoor purpose. On further wear and use they moved down to jobs around the house and eventually ended up as apparel used to climb underneath the car to facilitate an oil change or to creosote the shed. We did not have the cash to go out and buy trendy stuff from shops., gear that did not exist anyway. The Army and Navy store was the place I used to love browsing around. The apparel played its part but by today's standards much of it was rubbish.

But was it?

I can still remember my long foray onto Vatnajökull with just an old anorak to keep out the weather. Climbs in the Dolomites were undertaken with gear little better. But we managed. Then came the occasion I purchased my first modern jacket. It promised so much. Breathable fabric, elimination of condensation, total protection from the elements. In fact the ultimate in weatherproof 'clobber'. It cost me an enormous amount, but I was happy in the belief that it would last me a lifetime. No further requirement for cash outlays.

How fooled I was. Okay it did work quite well at first and it certainly was an improvement on the gear it replaced but was it worth the huge dent in my post office savings account?

There were several factors that persuaded me that this was not the panacea for keeping dry and warm in the hills. We do not always wear our trendy jackets, but of course we always need to have them ready. Inevitably our gear spends much of its life squashed up and squeezed into a rucksack along with a host of other items, quarrelling for space. Whenever you squash up Gore-Tex it does commence its inevitable breakdown. The manufacturers will not tell you this, but it happens. Every time you take your posh jacket out, even if not to don, it is on the road to 'wear out.' The £250 is not a one-off burden of debt.

Also I found that whatever model I wore another weak point was the shoulder area. It is almost always certain that a hill walker will have a rucksack. The sack straps will always provide friction to the shoulder area of your garment. How many times have you seen a walker without a rucksack? This constant friction does bring forth-speedier 'erosion'. Once a weakness has been established water will always find its way through. I was taken in with the promise of strengthened shoulder areas, but it never proved effective. Gore-Tex was not what it was claimed to be. Looking back and armed with hindsight (a wonderful thing) I would not have bothered with the 'stuff.' I fully accept that condensation can be a nasty enemy but just what is the best way to combat this obvious problem. On Ben Macdui I came across one way. I stripped off almost completely and just donned my cagoule. I did not sweat so condensation was minimised; but this occasion was not a cold one, so I got away with it. I am reminded of how we coped very many years ago, particularly in rain whilst cycling. We used to wear those large loose fitting waterproof capes. I often consider that this might be the best way to cope in the hills. A large 'flowing' cape that covers everything but is not close to anything. A sort of skirt with the waist band at the neck. Condensation should be countered, and a good oilskin should keep out external moisture. Warm clothing underneath should suffice. As for the 'Holy Grail' of keeping dry; I do not think it is possible. If the weather is going to throw everything at you it is best to accept that you are going to get wet. You cannot be wetter than wet, so it might even be a good thing to let it all happen. As long as you have something dry and warm to change into it might

all turn out okay. But this is advice you will not find in any texts. And if the weather is appalling to the extreme it might well be bad advice. But then again if the weather is that bad it might be true that there is little you can do to overcome the inevitability of wet and cold.

Many hill walkers lost their lives in the 1900's because little was known of the invidious creep of Hypothermia. The terrible stages that took them from safety to a slow inevitable demise. Unsuitable clothing played a part in this and modern gear has helped many to survive when otherwise a doubtful end was looming.

But has it'?

I have always been obsessed with the epic story of George Mallory disappearing into the mists on the upper slopes of Everest long ago in 1924. Did the climbers achieve their goal and perish on their descent or did their clothing and equipment prevent them from having a chance to fulfil their dream. Many so-called experts today dismiss their chances based mainly on their clothing. A foolish stand to make and for me somewhat arrogant. The true pioneers may have possessed less trendy gear, but they certainly were not short of spirit, determination and in most cases sheer guts. The discovery of the body of Mallory in 1999 was thought to be the final clue in the solution of this intriguing mystery. As the weeks passed it became obvious that far from solving unanswered questions this discovery only raised many more issues.

After I retired from teaching I spent several years taking on supply work. One of my favourite lessons was the story of the events of that fateful day when Mallory and Irvine disappeared forever. The kids loved it all and contrary to usual practice I found it almost impossible to get them to leave the classroom even when the bell was giving them the freedom to do so. I left them with all the facts and all the clues. It was up to them to work it all out. The discovery of Irvine's ice axe. Mallory's watch frozen in time but not on his wrist. Was the final reading am or pm? Remember a watch has two 1.40's. His snow goggles again tucked away in his pocket. Why? Was it now darkness and they were no longer required? If this was the case where had they been in the nine hours since they were last seen on the ridge. Little bits of paper in his pocket threw up more clues. Jottings showed that they might well have had more oxygen available than previously thought; and for me an almost trivial but vital piece of the jig saw. Mallory had intended to leave a photograph of his beloved family on the summit. It is known he had it with him but on searching his body no picture was found. Unpaid bills and other trivia but no family photograph. If it is not still within his frozen body where might it be?

The summit? Who knows?

Modern day tests have been carried out to test the true effectiveness of 1924 mountain clothing. Mallory was wearing many layers (more than six) made up of silk, cotton and wool. I have always been told that a lot of separate layers traps much air and this provides excellent insulation to keep your body warmth intact. 21st Century research tells us that Mallory could well have endured temperatures of minus 30 degrees as long as the wind did not interfere and take away the much-required body heat. We know that the weather on Everest that day was relatively benign. What it was really like on the upper slopes we shall never know but there is every indication high winds were not prevalent.

I fully accept that modern gear will have advantages but am still unconvinced this fact could have ruled out the possibility of a 1924 ascent. Zips are better than buttons and

down and polyester does offer superb levels of insulation. But there is one indisputable fact that again brings me back to the discussion of how well clothed they were. Layering. Each time Mallory wore a coarse layer, for example wool, he layered it with a slippery fabric, such as silk. When you package these types of fabric together the clothing moves very easily which means the movement of the person wearing them is not restricted and energy cost is low. Mallory was an efficient 'machine' on Everest and the lack of down gear was not necessarily a massive burden to him

Ergonomically Mallory's clothing was very well designed.

So where are we with all this theory and thought? If you have unlimited funds do go out and buy trendy jackets. But my message to everyone is do not think that this alone will keep you safe. And be prepared to replace it at regular expensive interludes. This is not an attempt to give advice on how to keep alive. It is an attempt to explode a myth that spending money can sort out all the problems you might discover up in the hills. It might well be better to rediscover some of the facts and techniques of the pioneer climbers. They were tough guys and in many respects we should be looking up to them for their amazing achievements.

Incidentally do I think Mallory and Irvine were the first to summit Everest? Not a 'cop out' but I really do not know. What I am prepared to say is that real determination to succeed is a very vital factor. I have occasionally turned my back on a mountain, but these have been mostly Munros that I could relatively easily return to. Mallory was in last chance saloon territory. This was his last 'throw of the dice'. He knew he would not return. He was 38 years old and this was his big opportunity. After all he had dedicated so much of his life to this lump of rock and ice. I think he might just have been willing to lay the biggest stake possible to achieve his goal. His life. Yes, I think he might just have pulled it off. Maybe it is best left as a mystery.

Boots and feet

I have five pairs of boots and when I venture into the hills I take them all with me. Not in my rucksack but available to be worn should I wish to do so. Many ask me why I do this. The answer is simple. Certain boots have certain roles to play. One pair is a 4-season winter boot with the necessary crampon compatibility. Not that warm winters really require me to have this type of boot today. Others are 3 season boots for less demanding terrain. Finally I have a couple of pairs ideal for shorter, possibly grassy ascents, that do not require stiff soles and total support. Bendy boots I call them.

Another important factor is that of comfort. Unless you are rich enough to have a pair of boots personally made for your feet it is presumed you will attempt to find a pair off the shelf. This can be a difficult task and often an impossible one. Just about every pair of boots I have bought has had one weak point within. Pair A might cause heel discomfort whilst pair B give the toes 'jip.' Pair C can cause tenderness to the upper foot whilst pair D rub the ankle. With a choice of boots I rotate daily the wearing and thereby eliminate the aggravation of any particular weak spot. Also my boots wear out on an equal level. This does cause problems when they all require replacement, but this financial burden is well spaced out through time.

Something else I have done in the past might well prove of interest. Whenever I have come across a boot that does give grand comfort and potential for long lasting wear I have gone out and acquired another pair to the same specification. I then place them in a

cupboard and await the wearing out of my front-line pair. When this happens I have a ready pair of boots available for the mountains. The benefit of this is the obvious fact that manufacturers are continually changing their models, often for economic reasons. Years later it might not be possible to replace a pair that has given you such loyal and trusty service.

Long ago I was accused of foot hypochondria by the lads in the Institute mountaineering club. A favourite comment was "If I had another plaster I could go a little faster." This referred to my habit of placing plasters on my feet before I even set off at the start of the day. Prevention IS better than cure and this obvious act has stopped many a trip-threatening blister long before its origin. This is particularly applicable if you are embarking on a long trip with continual 'bashing' of the feet. Remember on these occasions foot care is vital and very necessary.

Which brings me to another very valuable hint. Today the following aids are well known but as little as fifteen years ago few people knew about them. Plasters that can be used when the blister has already formed. Previously once this had happened you were in deep waters. These special plasters (compeed etc) actually produce a replacement film of skin and are also counters to infection. No longer gloom and doom if on day three of the Pennine way you are beset with a foot full of blister. Of course it should not have happened but at least you can now carry on with little counter effect.

Finally avoid any boot that claims to have a Gore-Tex interior. No I am not a Gore-Tex enemy. Merely a realist. Within the boot the Gore-Tex element may have a very limited life especially if you bash your boots about. Waterproof at first they might well be, but this will rapidly fade and the extra money you might have spent will have also faded away. Clean your boots. Use a good shoe polish and always remember - if an item is given care and attention it invariably gives back good service. This might even refer to human relationships although I certainly am not going down that avenue.

The airborne beastly

Every Munro 'bagger' will have their own experience of these horrendous little creatures. Unless of course all the ascents have been made in the depth of winter when a host of other problems will have inevitably risen. I have seen grown tough men crying in frustration caused by the attention of the dreaded Scotland midge. They have even been part of the cure to stop my over excessive intake of alcohol. After descending from Liatach on a hot and calm day in late May I was invited to as much cold beer that I could 'sup.' My friend was camping by a stream whilst I was staying in the Torridon hostel. It was a superbly pleasant evening and never had cold beer been so welcome. They had been resting in the cold waters of the river and on opening the first one I took a long swig and sat back contemplating at least another dozen awaiting my attention. Within minutes I had deserted this utopia and turned my back and run away. They had appeared from nowhere. A cloud of the biting stinging little horrors bringing forth misery out of the heaven of unlimited cold beer. How I hated the midge that late afternoon. I can remember another arrival of this scourge literally out of a calm blue sky. We had undertaken five superb days of climbing based at Sui Lodge hotel near to Crianlarich. Ben Lawers in a heat wave was followed by Ben Cruachan in even hotter conditions. It even 'forced' me to purchase a floppy hat at a ridiculous price from the Green Welly in Tyndrum. We completed the round of mountains on the splendid ridge and approached the summit of Cruachan in the late afternoon. Being a rapid 'descender'

I informed my friends I was going to stay on the top for a full hour. The views were stupendous, and this was to be our last Munro that trip. They set off and I knew I would catch them up lower down the hill. I sat down and leaned back on the summit cairn. It happened. Up till now we had not seen a midge. It was late May and I knew they were due to arrive but nothing could describe the amazement as a cloud of the horrors came out of the calm blue sky. This was 3,600 ft. and never before had I experienced them at this altitude. They were all over me like Focke-Wolf 190's out of the sun. Worse than any mosquito in a damp rain forest. I covered my head and picked up my gear and virtually ran from the summit. My friends were amazed to see me so soon and could not believe my story of the arrival of the summer pest. In fact they were nowhere to be seen lower down the hill. Maybe the midges were into Munro bagging and Ben Cruachan was on their list?

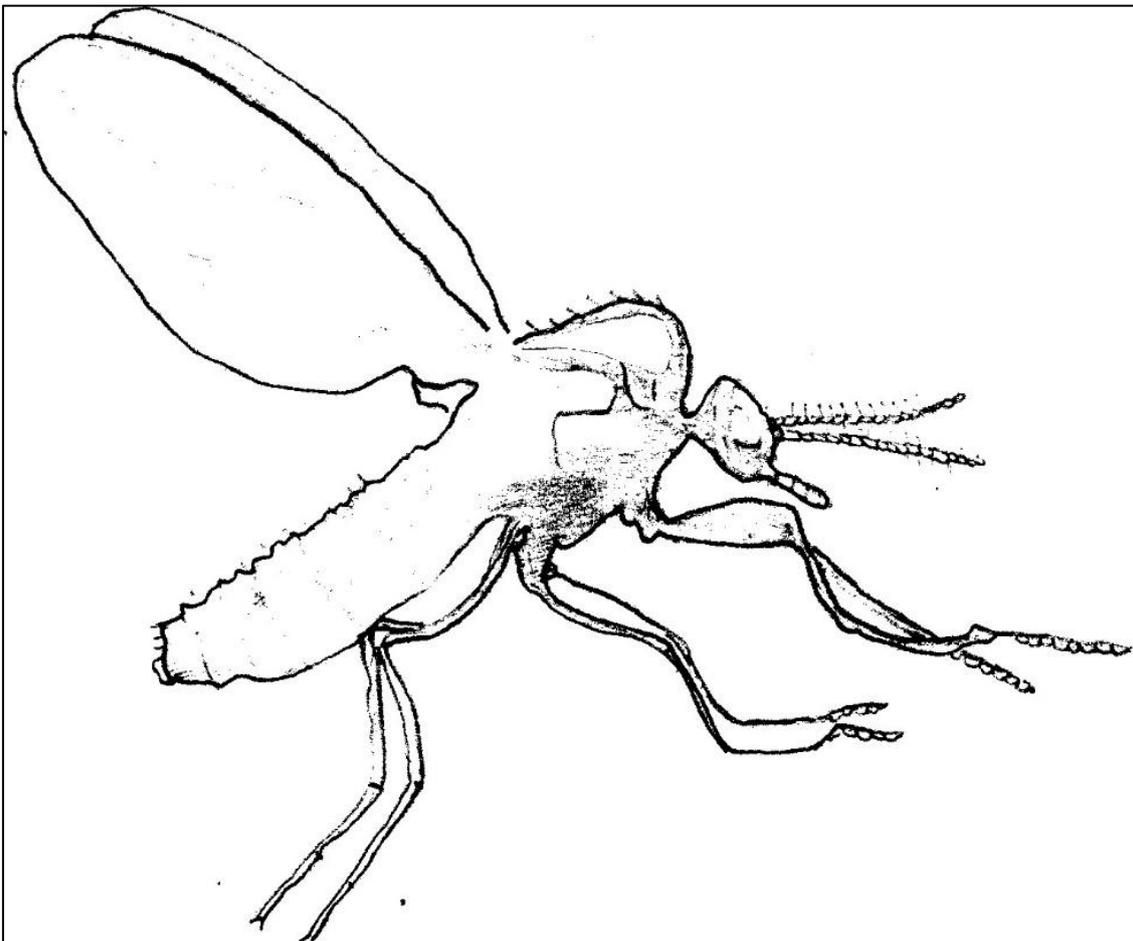


Figure 101: The dreaded Scotland midge

What can be done? A great number of people have spent a lot of time and a lot of money attempting to answer this question. Bearing in mind the fact that tourism is a vital part of the Scottish economy the midge has a lot to answer to. Campsite owners and caravan people regard them as the enemy and all sorts of 'machines' have been designed to deter them. Whether they work I do not know. I also know that a lot of money has been made by many people claiming to have the answer to the summer monsters. I have tried several and must admit I have experienced little success. Sprays

of all descriptions might have deterred them, but nothing has worked completely. Maybe this is the key. The midge either likes you or does not. Is it that there is something within our body aroma that determines our fate? Why can it be so that one person is eaten alive whilst another close by is relatively unhindered? I sometimes think I am targeted because they regard me as a walking off licence. The alcohol in my bloodstream might make me a particularly attractive proposition. In truth I think the answer might be out there and it might be a different answer for every separate person. A bit like antibiotics. One might work for you whilst another might bring forth awesome side effects. There are so many of them that the key is finding the one that is right for you. Several climbers have told me about the effectiveness of 'skin so soft bath oil' manufactured by Avon. Yes, maybe trial and error is the way forward in the search for midge relief. Try everything and keep on trying until you find the magic formula that works for you. It might well be a long search. If all else fails I still consider the best solution is alcohol. It does absolutely nothing to deter the midge. It does absolutely nothing to relieve the pain and misery of the bite. But it does help you to forget. And the administration can be so very pleasing unless you are camped at Torridon on a calm, balmy sunny evening??

Bicycles and Munros

It was only towards the end of my Munro journey that I came to fully appreciate the value of the bicycle in making ascents. It is difficult to express the feeling of supreme joy when you reach your machine and transfer the pain in your feet to that of slight discomfort to your rear areas. When you have already completed well over ten miles and many thousand feet of climbing the free wheel descent is certainly the icing on the cake. It may be true that the upward journey necessitates much pushing but the end of the day will always compensate for this fact.

Whenever I venture forth now my bicycle will always be found in the rear of my car resting on the made-up bed I sometimes use when other accommodation is not forthcoming.

It is interesting to read that the celebrated first Munroist the Reverend A E Robertson also made much use of this particular form of transport. Of course these were the days when motor cars were a rare commodity and the bicycle was a much more used means of getting around, even if the ordinary person would have found them outside their financial reach. From his autobiography you can read that he considered the machine both a boon and a bane. The benefit was gained from the easing of long approaches to the mountains, but there was always the inconvenience that you had to return to the place where you had left the machine. Also there was the nagging doubt that it might not be there when you returned. On his 1898 walk, when he climbed so many Munros he was particularly uneasy because a party of tinkers had been seen in the area. If the doubt had been in his mind during ascent it was soon dismissed on his return to the lowlands.

*Don't be afraid your bike will run away or be stolen in your absence!
Turn him loose in the heather, and he will be waiting for you when
you return.'*

Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal volume 7 page 11

I find this indeed interesting. Being a Scouser I have always resented the image that others have of the natives of the noble city of Liverpool. 'Scallies' and other doubtful characteristics are not really the true stereotype of the typical Liverpudlian. Lots of things do get 'robbed' but this also happens everywhere. Liverpool is no better or worse than any other location. Having said this I must admit a certain doubt when I have left my bike partly hidden in the heather, even though I know the chance of it going missing in the hills is rare.

This all reminds me of an occasion when the bike saved me a huge descent at the end of the day. I was staying at Gerry's in Craig and had pushed the bike up the Allt a Chonais almost as far as Glnuaig Lodge. I was after the remote Munro Maoile Lunndaigh and the bike would save me a 6-mile slog at the end of the climb. Nearing the lodge I came upon a small quarry in the hillside. It had been dug out to provide stones and ballast for the track leading into the upper valley. I deposited my bicycle inside and chained the wheels to the pedal. The mountain was climbed and on my slanting descent I could clearly see the mini quarry alongside the track. I aimed right towards it and was anticipating the ride out with great joy. I walked in and was enraged to find no bicycle in 'residence'. I could not believe it and looked around in great detail even though it was obvious my trusty steed was not there. Anger turned to disappointment as the burden of the walk out was now a real certainty. I did not really mind about the bike it was the loss of the super quick downhill cycle that was bugging me with fury. I set off after a quiet curse to the clouds above and had covered no more than a hundred yards when I came across another mini quarry alongside the track. Could it be I had aimed for the wrong quarry? Could there actually be two quarries? And could it be that my bike was going to be found after all my previous doubts? I was overjoyed to discover it exactly where I had left it. The super quick descent was mine again. What would have happened if I had left my bike in the upper quarry and made my descent to the lowest does not bear thinking of.

Another thought crosses my mind when I compare the journeys of the 'pioneers' to those of the modern cyclist. Bone shakers might be a fair description of the 1800's machines. Today we take for granted the luxury of hydraulic suspension and choice of twenty gears. The illustrious Robertson would have used a sturdier velocipede with heavy panniers and a lack of gears to ease the steep slopes encountered. He even used a tandem that he could share with his first wife Kate.

I would not be without my bicycle and have such fond memories of the service it has given me over the long years of my Munro journey. So much so I have listed some of the climbs where my memory tells me that bicycle power was an integral part of the overall achievement.

Cycled up Glen Ey to Altanour Lodge to climb Beinn Iutharn Mhor and Carn Bhac. Good track. Fast going.

From the end of the road at Glen Tanar House I cycled up the track to where the bulldozed track climbs steeply up the Mounth Road. Mount Keen was climbed. Excellent bicycle approach.

So many times I have cycled from Linn of Dee to Derry Lodge. This makes available a very large number of impressive mountains. The track to Derry Lodge is excellent for cycling.

Leaving the car at Old Bridge of Tilt I cycled along the fine track into Glen Tilt. The approach bike ride is approx. 9 km. and I raced along the track passing Auchgobhal,

Marble Lodge, Clachghlas and on to Forest Lodge. I then ascended the zig zag path to the summit of Carn a Chlamain.

In truly awful weather I cycled 6 km. to just short of Inverchorachan before climbing Beinn Bhuidhe. The track is good until you have to leave your bicycle at a high deer fence. I repeated this route to exorcise my frustrating first climb of this Munro. On this occasion it was a baking hot summers day.

I cycled from Cairngorm Lodge youth hostel aware of the huge distances ahead of me. I cycled to Loch Morlich and took the track through the forest of Rothiemurchus. Crossing the Cairngorm footbridge I made a pleasant ride along the track that leads into Glen Einich. In parts the track was difficult, and I walked these sections. One of the footbridges was down in the valley and I had to take off my boots to wade the stream. By now the sun was hot and all the summits were clear of cloud. I reached the stream Beanaidh Bheag and crossed without difficulty. This is the site of the lower bothy in days of old. I cycled the last part speedily and left my bike at GR 920000. The ascent of Braeriach was carried out. in leisurely fashion because of the time saved cycling. Otherwise this would have been a very much 'rush' day.

On descent I cycled directly to the road at Coyumbridge passing Whitewell on route. The return did not take long, as most of the route was downhill. Nevertheless the road cycle back to the hostel (6km) was long and certainly not as flat as it seems in a car. 20 miles of biking, 6 miles of ascent and 4,000 ft. of mountain left me well tired.

I left my car at Dalwhinnie and shouldered my large load for a long cycle into the hills. The track alongside Loch Ericht is very good (almost a road) and it is reasonably flat. Really good progress can be made. I passed Ben Alder Lodge where the track passes down a grade but is still relatively sound. After another 3km. Loch Pattack is reached, and the inlet stream is crossed by means of a precarious suspension bridge. This is another example of the unique ways of crossing Scottish rivers. I once read a book about stiles and gates within the highlands containing a massive section on the different types of closing devices to keep them shut. Next time you are sloggng up an endless convex slope give this some thought the list is indeed endless. Bridges are a similar 'breed.'

Once over the bridge the track deteriorates and becomes very rough. After 3km I reached Culra bothy and was so happy to take shelter within as by now the temperatures were in the high 80's.

There had been wild weather in Scotland in late September and an amount of snow had fallen on the tops. On October 6th the weather promised a more settled spell. After a night at Loch Lochy Hostel (now closed) I used my bicycle to cover the first section of the route to the north side of Loch Lochy and the path that leads to Cam Bealach. This saves about three miles of walking and facilitates the ascent of Sron a' Choire Ghairbh and Meall na Teanga.

At the close of a long and lonely sojourn into the Munros, with now well over 200 climbed, I made use of my bike for the last ascent of this trip. This is a climb that really 'demands' a mountain bike. The route to Beinn Dearg (Atholl) is a long one and the first section is along a good track that can easily be cycled. I reached the bothy at Allt Sheiceachan. The mountain was climbed and my shelter was readily available. The cycle out was ultra fast.

Leaving Fort William I drove towards Moy in Glen Spean stopping off at the bunkhouse on Tulloch station. I made a provisional reservation to stay the night. When I

arrived at the lay by in Moy I had decided to climb just Creag Pitridh. When I was 'booting up' I spoke to a fellow called Mark who said he was going to do the same but probably with Geal Charn as well. It was almost 2pm and there was not enough time to climb all three Munros in this area.

I left a while after Mark and cycled along the fair track to the end of Lochan na h-Earba. After dumping my bicycle I climbed up Allt Coire Pitridh and soon caught up with Mark. From here on we climbed together which was a welcome change for me. The cloud was blowing across the sky and occasionally it rained but at times the tops were visible. Somehow the distances seemed to be shorter today and we found ourselves at the head of the burn and took off in the direction of Geal Charn. The summit was clear, but it was becoming very cold. After a short chilly stay we dropped down to the col, a journey I would not want to negotiate in mist, and climbed the short steep slope to the summit of Creag Pitridh.

Descending the south west ridge was speedy and when I reached my bike I said goodbye to Mark and raced on ahead. I did not see him again.

On arrival back at the bunkhouse I found out from the lady they were shut. This annoyed me somewhat and after getting 'snarled up' in a traffic accident along the way I was not happy. However, it all worked out well as I found sanctuary in the bunkhouse in Roybridge and acquired my own room and some good company. Campbell was a good talker and a man of much mountain experience whilst Sarah Natasha was peak bagging and mountain cycling.

Many times I have 'pushed' my bicycle up the steep track from Craig. The return journey has been ultra quick and so pleasing. The journey into the upper reaches of Pollan Buidhe has assisted in ascents of Sgurr Choinnich, Sgurr a Chaorachain, Maol Lunnaidh, Bidean a Choire Sheasgaich and distant Lurg Mhor.

An early start as I wanted to be at the locked gate in Strathfarrer by 0900. At 0700 it was sunny but with high cloud. By the time I reached the lodge it had clouded over, but the cover was well above the tops. There were two other cars parked at 0830. Ten minutes later the gate opened to allow a farm tanker through. We managed to persuade the lady to let us through as well. Time is very important when you aim for the four Strathfarrer Munros. This is another example of where the bicycle proves to be of enormous assistance. I chained it to a telegraph pole at GR 224393 and drove back along the valley to leave my car at GR 283387. The long ridge to the north gives relatively easy access to the 4 Munros even though the miles are long. The descent back to the valley floor brought me back to my trusty cycle where a 4-mile hike is converted into an enjoyable 20-minute bike ride.

One of my original plans had been to cycle in to Fannich Lodge and with the aid of my tent climb all the Fannich Munros. On closer scrutiny of the map I saw that An Coileachan was somewhat 'out on a limb.' Therefore I shelved my long ambitious plan and decided to concentrate on the end Munros and enjoy the cycle in and out. I left my car near Grudie and initially the road surface was excellent and the going very easy. It was tarmac as far as the dam at the east end of loch Fannich. Once past this point it became a rough track but still no problem for a mountain bike. I cycled nearly 12 km. Before I left my bike on the track side some 400m short of the lodge.

I had certain business in the Loch Ossian area. I decided on the later train instead of the 0745 sleeper from Crianlarich. This gave me time to have a slow breakfast. I acquired

provisions from the local spar and discovered the afternoon train was delayed and this meant an hour and a half wait on the platform. No problem.

The train was quite full and the journey to Corroul Halt pleasant. There were only two people disembarking at the lonely halt and as I had my bike I cycled away to reach the hostel at approx. 4 pm. I remembered my stay of a few years previous. The hostel was quite full but not crowded. Again there was some good 'crack' in front of the roaring log fire.

The following morning I had a dilemma. I seriously wanted the two Munros above the Uisage Labhair, but the forecast was for better weather the next day. As all the weather forecasts had been rubbish on this trip I decided to go for it immediately. My bicycle was a huge benefit here. I left the hostel at 9 'ish' and it took me only 25 minutes to cycle to Corroul Lodge. The walk would have been an hour or more. The weather was okay with cloud on some tops but the valley I was approaching was reasonably clear. Apart from difficulty crossing the river (the bridge was down) the day went well and both Beinn Eibhinn and Aonach Beag were climbed. I cycled back along the northern shore of the loch.

Seana Braigh is a long climb from whatever direction you might approach. The bicycle helps greatly with this problem. I approached from the north and from Corriemulzie lodge the track up Strath Mulzie is okay and cycling is reasonably pleasant. Mostly flat with just a few rough sections. Eventually I reached the head of the valley and could clearly see the steep crags of Creag an Duine. At the crossing of the stream (sometimes a difficult prospect) I decided to bike in much further and headed towards the outlet of Loch a Choire Mhoir. I had now cycled over six miles and it was time to commence the ascent of this very remote mountain.

The cycle out at the end of the day was a life saver.

To conclude my appreciation towards my trusty bike my final Munros are proof of its inestimable value. Ben Avon and Beinn a Bhuidhe. Carn an Fhidhleir and An Sgarsoch. Glas Tulaichean and Carn an Righ. Beinn Bheoil. And of course my epic 'complete' climb of Mullach na Dheiragain.

If you are an inspiring Munro 'bagger' go out and get yourself a bicycle. It will be of enormous value.

Inselbergs

Henry Ford and John Wayne will forever be linked to the majestic scenery of Monument Valley and the states of Utah and Arizona. This is indeed spectacular country and an area I have been captivated with all my life. In many of the classic westerns you will see the massive mesas and buttes that are flat topped remnants of former highlands. They stand alone and soar to ridiculous heights above the surrounding plain.

You do not have to travel to America to witness scenery such as this. We have our own inselbergs (island mountains) here in Scotland. Whilst I was 'bagging' the few Munros spread across the wild northern wastes of Scotland I took several days off to explore these prominent peaks. The unique hill Stac Pollaidh only reaches a height of 613m but it is an awesome sight clearly illustrating the results of the weathering action of frost rain and wind. Suilven is another famous peak and on my visit to this area I was

rewarded with superb weather. Day after day this isolated peak was visible to enhance the surrounding terrain. I was indeed fortunate as several of my friends have yet to see the mountain even though they have spent many days in the vicinity.

Suilven is a mountain of Torridonian sandstone sitting on a landscape of Lewisian gneiss. The surrounding rocks were eroded during a period of past glaciation and Suilven was left poking up above the level of the ice sheet as a lonely nunatak. The flow of ice created the distinctive narrow teardrop plan, while carving and scouring the vertical sides of the hill.

Apart from famous movies like Rio Grande, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon and Stagecoach I suppose my serious interest might be traced back to an expedition to Iceland. 1975 was a special year in my mountain experience as I was a member of an expedition to Vatnajökull where one of the objectives was to explore the area and climb spires of rock that projected above the surface of the world's third largest ice cap. I shall never forget my ascent of Godhaborg which was reached after a long tiring climb across crevasses and glaciers. Standing on the table top summit at 8.30 pm was a magic moment and I looked out across miles and miles of ice stretching away into the far distance. Right on the horizon I could make out far away mountains on the opposite side of the never ending ice. Some moments weigh against a lifetime and this was one of them.

The far north of Scotland is another instance of the importance of not being 'blinkered' by Munros. I was merely a dozen or so away from 'compleat' but four days on Stac Pollaidh, Quinag and Cul Beag were moments I shall never forget.

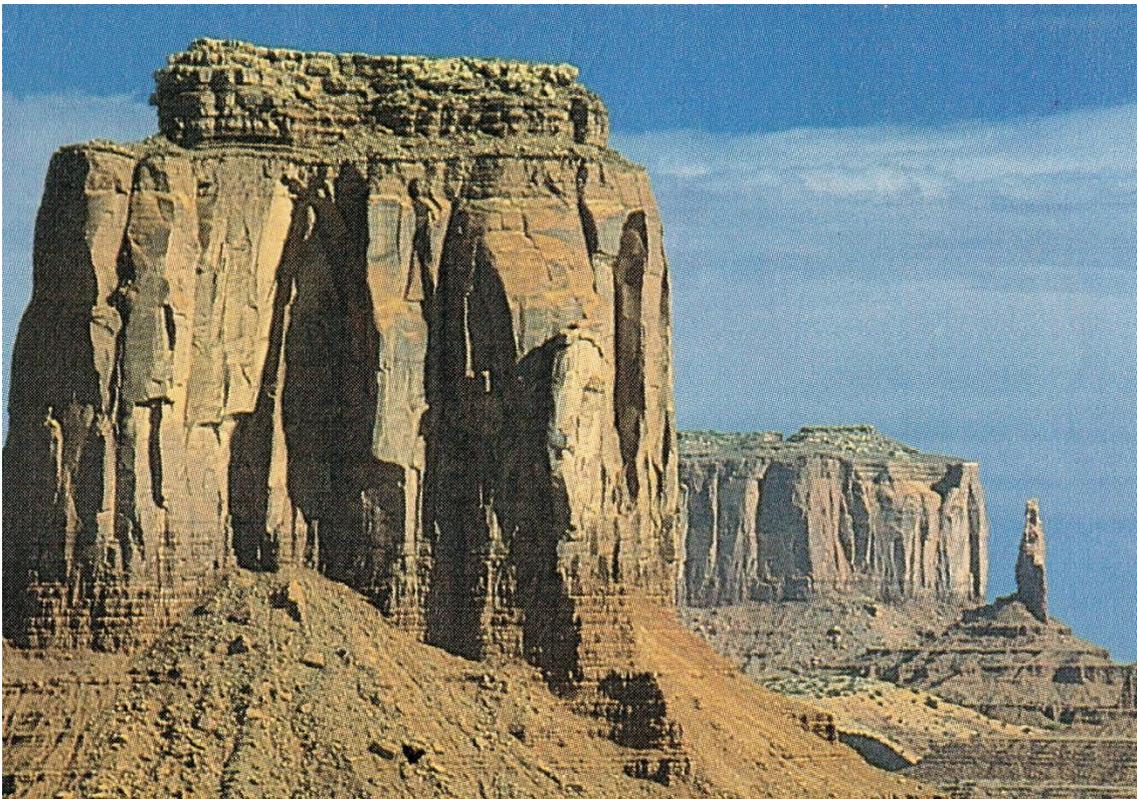


Figure 102: Monument Valley America



Figure 103: Looking down to Stac Pollaidh from Cul Beag



Figure 104: Sulven looms large on the horizon

6. BITS ON SUMMITS

I enjoy the exercise. I adore the views. I love the country in which my mountains are found. The exhilaration I experience when the top is near I find difficult to express.

So maybe that is what it is all about.

The summit.



Figure 105: Triangulation column on Mam na Gualainn

After several days of Munro ‘bagging’ from Glencoe the weather began to turn wintry. An original plan to stay at the bunkhouse on Corrou Halt was abandoned when I discovered it had closed down. This ‘foxed’ my plans for a march up the Uisige Labhair and a stopover at Benalder Cottage. A closer consultation of the map led me to decide on a Corbett before a drive to Fort William for the Saturday. This day was forecast to be a terrible day with driving rain and low cloud.

I drove round to Loch Leven and parked up a short distance from the track that leads over Allt na Lairige Moire and the West Highland way. The weather was okay even though cloud was down to 1,500 ft. I made good progress to the highest point on this track and then set off north east to climb to the summit of the Corbett Mam na Gualainn. This was a longer than expected climb but all the time the cloud appeared to be clearing. I reached the summit triangulation point and stayed on the top for nearly an hour. It was very cold but after twenty minutes the views opened up and I had good visibility. In the summit triangulation column is an inscription to a fallen marine who died in 1997. The alarms bells ‘jangled’ a little bit but this was certainly no danger point

for me. The descent was uneventful, and this Corbett proved a worthy target for an interim day. The inscription reads:

*In Memory of Marine
Anthony Callow Royal
Marines reserve Scotland
1968-1997
Keep on climbing 'Tony'*

Mam Sodhail

I climbed Mam Sodhail on a lovely sunny day whilst staying at the remote hostel in Glen Affric. It was the end of the stalking season and much activity was going on. I made my ascent up Allt Coire Ghaidheil and once on the main ridge beyond point 1068 I could see what looked like an enormous building ahead on the summit of Mam Sodhail. It reminded me of my first ascent of Scafell Pike so many years ago. Here also was a very large summit cairn.



Figure 106: Mam Sodhail summit

On arrival at Mam Sodhail I discovered another massive cairn. Apparently, it was used by the men of the Ordnance Survey as they carried out their primary triangulation of Scotland in the early 19th century. The cairn is supposedly hollow although I cannot confirm this as my desire to reach Carn Eithe necessitated a short summit stop. I have heard that you can climb the walls and get inside this ‘monster’ cairn. It would be very difficult to miss this summit even if visibility was down to just a few yards. Several yards below the summit are the remains of a small bothy with remnants of walls, fireplace and chimney. It was used by deer stalkers and watchers to keep sheep and walkers off the mountain.

Ben Challum

Be very careful when ascending this mountain especially if the weather is thick. I climbed Ben Challum in deep snow on a day when visibility was to the far horizon. However, I can easily see how walkers might go wrong when all is not so clear. Climbing from the south the route is straightforward, even the railway line is no problem to cross. It is when the south top is reached that great care is required. On this top you should find a large rock and a small cairn nearby. The confusion might arise from the fact that the main summit is still some distance away. It is a further kilometre to the north. However, do not go due north. This will lead you into rapid trouble. In fact it will take you to the top of very steep and dangerous crags. You must descend west. Not too far. Maybe only a small number of metres but you will then drop down into a little hollow. On the far side of this hollow you will ascend (only a little height) to a ridge. Now you can go due north as you are on the correct line. The ridge takes you down to a col and then a steeper ascent will bring you to the main summit where you should find a large summit cairn. Do not go any further north as there are very steep crags.



Figure 107: From Ben Challum main summit looking towards south summit

Ben Lawers

This is another hill with a history of large cairns.

Recently I watched an amusing film about a hill in a Welsh valley. The locals badly wanted a local peak that surpassed 1,000 ft. The villagers went to enormous effort to achieve this. A comical and light-hearted plot saw them trundling barrow after barrow of soil and rock upwards. This did in fact happen in Scotland. Many years ago local people wanted a 4,000 'footer' to rival the peaks further north. As Ben Lawers fell just a little short at 3983ft. plans were put into operation to raise the summit above the magic 4,000 ft.

Today there is little left of the massive cairn that was constructed. Ben Lawers remains a big hill but falls short of the big four thousand by some 16 feet.

Beinn Dorain

Many climbers have ticked off Beinn Dorain when in fact they have not reached the true summit. On my ascent I saw this for myself. Climbing from the bealach you can follow a good path towards the summit of the Munro, eventually reaching a large cairn. Here the ground drops away steeply to the south and many folk consider this to be the top. On my ascent there were at least ten walkers resting there eating their 'butties'. 'Maybe they were just hungry. In fact they had not reached the true top. To do this you have to proceed another 200 yards, where beyond the drop already mentioned the true summit is reached after a short upward climb. If you are climbing in mist..... beware!!!.

Beinn a Chroin

When I made my ascent of this Munro there was a great debate as to exactly where the highest point was situated. I wanted to be absolutely sure, so I climbed every rise/ top on the summit plateau. This all came from an ordnance survey statement that the true summit of the Munro was not the one previously listed. It had been thought that the main summit was at GR 394186 with a spot height of 940m. At GR 386185 was another top with a 940m contour ring with the possibility? of slightly higher ground within.

A statement from the Ordnance Survey press officer threw more light on the issue.

“Current OS maps of the mountain are completely accurate, but we are aware that there has been some confusion about which of the two peaks is the higher because of the way spot heights and contours are shown. Following enquiries we carried out technical checks to determine the highest point within the 940m contour on the western peak. This showed it to be 941.5m. To avoid future confusion we plan to add an extra spot height of 942m (we do not show fractions of metres in spot heights) on future editions of our maps of the area. “

There you have it. If you are really not sure it looks like you have a return journey to make. It may only be a matter of a foot or so, but you must get it right? Which brings me to a spot of bother in Torridon.

Many years ago I carried out some memorable ascents of the impressive mountains surrounding Torridon. On one day I climbed to the summit of Beinn Eighe which thirty years ago was at the end of a long spur from the main mountain chain. Ruadh stac Mor

by way of Coire Mhic Fhearchair is a superb way to reach any summit. As I returned to the main ridge the weather turned really nasty and sleet became my enemy number one. I had great difficulty in reaching the triangulation point which carries a height of 972m. I fully realised that the true summit was just a little further away and some 70 feet higher. However, Spidean Coire nan Clach was not a Munro and the weather was becoming steadily worse. The valley below beckoned and without a second thought I descended with all haste to escape the awful conditions.

Things never stay the same and in 1997 the listings were revised and Beinn Eighe was now credited with two Munro summits. I had to go back and make the short but necessary traverse to the main summit of Spidean at an altitude of 993m. All that effort for a mere 21m. but what an impressive 21m it was.

Gulvain

Gulvain really annoyed me. It is a frustrating hill because it falls exactly between two maps. You require both sheets 40 and 41 to obtain all the details necessary. It also has another 'sting' to trap the unwary climber. If you are ascending from Loch Eil you will eventually reach an obvious summit adorned with a triangulation column. In mist it would be easy to think you have reached the top. This would not be so. The true summit lies a further kilometre away with a fair drop to be negotiated. Another example of how a triangulation column might 'fox' a careless climber.

Tobarlies or Charlobies?

In 2006 I booked a log cabin for the family and we spent a delightful Christmas near Oban. This was the occasion of my special ascent of Beinn Sguilard a never to be forgotten experience. On Boxing day we all decided to stay together. Everyone agreed to attempt a route I had worked out that allowed us to climb a peak even if it were not a Munro, Corbett or Graham. We drove to Benderloch and parked up in the forest car park. From here there are many splendid forest tracks that lead upwards through steep slopes. It was not difficult and we met a lot of other walkers doing the same thing. More than likely working off excessive eating the previous day. I was determined to visit every viewpoint and the short diversion to Eagles Eyrie was well worth the effort. We had lunch in an ideal spot just before we left the trees. Just beneath the summit we had to cross a bog and we all squelched across the soft ground. But it was fun?

The last slopes offered a steep slog up a near vertical grass slope or a route up a very well-worn path. The top of Beinn Lora is only 308m or just a fraction over 1,000 ft but the views are superb. A huge reward for just a little effort. It was really nice that the whole family was together and Toby (8 yrs) and Charlie (5yrs) enjoyed their introduction to the Scottish mountains.



Figure 108: Toby on the summit of Beinn Lora

When we were back at the cabin I was asked what a Munro was. I fully explained and then went on to describe Corbetts, Grahams and Marylins. Charlie then asked me what we had climbed that very day. So I had to have an answer. I considered for a moment and thinking of their names replied:

“We have just climbed a Tobarlie or for that matter a Charloby.”

They were satisfied. This is now what we call any hill over the height of one thousand feet but below 1,500.

So much bad publicity is given to the youngsters of today. However, the younger generation can offer so very much for the future of our country. I have two incredible grandsons and we have already seen Toby on the summit point of Beinn Lora. Just over 1,000 ft we named it a Tobarly. But... quite correctly Charlie was not keen on this. He said this mountain classification should be a Charloby. He could be right. Does it matter? This is Charlie on Striding Edge Helvellyn when he was nine. He is alongside the Dixon memorial. A dalesman named Dixon fell off the ridge at this point and this memorial is often missed by passing scramblers.



Figure 109: Charlie's 'bid' for Charloblies - Striding Edge Helvellyn aged nine

Broken triangulation columns

I have always ‘enjoyed’ climbing hills that have a triangulation point on their summit. An obvious reason is that there can be no doubt as to eventual success should cloud and rain obscure the view. In such circumstances it is often difficult to find the highest point. A triangulation point is also a “real” target and many a time whilst travelling I have stopped my car and carried out a very short ascent to a point I had discovered on a map.

Sometimes Triangulation columns can cause more problems than they solve. This is when a trig. Point is not a trig. Point. Yes it does happen sometimes and my epic search for the summit of Beinn Bhuidhe fully illustrates this predicament. I have just completed a satisfactory half hour with a single malt and a delve into the memory ‘bank.’ Where else have I come across the location of a collapsed, missing or merely broken column?



Figure 110: Summit of Sgurr Dhearg

The stump of the triangulation column adorned by other stones

Sgurr Dhearg on Beinn a Bheitheir no longer has a standing trig. point. Sgurr nan Clach Geala in the Fannichs shows a half-demolished column. Beinn Airigh Charr above Loch Maree also ‘owns’ a half-demolished column. Carn Gorm in the Carn Mairg group also hosts a broken pillar.

I am sure there are others out there, but these are the ones that come to my mind as I take a second sip of my malt



Figure 111: Summit of Sgurr nan Clach Geala

The Cairnwell

This Munro has strong claims to be the easiest of all the 282 summits. It can be climbed from the road that crosses the pass at Glen Shee ski slopes in a matter of 40 minutes. With only an ascent of 870 ft. this can be considered a 'stroll.' The Cairnwell is an excellent viewpoint and in reality, is a steep sided top. However, it is also a very strange summit. Next to the cairn is a collection of buildings and weird aerial masts. This really does spoil the surroundings and if this is not enough just a few feet below there is an array of ski infrastructure that really gives The Cairnwell an individual and unwanted look. Ski paraphernalia when the snow has gone really does leave one in despair. The fences that are used to trap the snow stand out in clear view and tracks and bare slopes give the mountain a totally artificial look. In all directions are the tow bars and chair lifts. Several hundred feet lower are the cafes and ski buildings and even in summer you can see the ski trucks and snow cannon that lie adjacent to the ski slopes.

If you really want to cheat, you can 'bag' this summit with no more than a thirty-foot climb. Take the chair lift in summer and make the last few feet a one-minute stroll. You would not think of doing that?

An Gearanach

An interesting summit I first climbed in 2003 on a bitterly cold day in January after days of severe frost. I was staying in Fort William with Norma and 'pinching' days off to go climbing. Therefore long traverses were not really on. With the very short daylight hours I simply would not have the time.

The weather was not as clear as on previous days and there was a lot of dark cloud at approx. 2,500 ft. I drove up to Glen Nevis and was cheered to see that Sgurr a Mhaim was below cloud as well as Stob Ban. I left the car at the furthest car park and carried out the delightful walk through the ravine on a path that required care because of the ice. On reaching the flats I was rewarded with a superb view of An Gearanach with its long-frozen waterfall on the lower slopes. The peak was also clear whilst in other directions cloud was much thicker. The walk across the flats is interesting and after ten minutes or so I arrived at the 'wire' bridge. I did not even consider the crossing. It looked very precarious and as the river was frozen solid there was no need to take the risk of a sporty crossing clinging to the wire. I merely walked across the frozen waters. A steep ascent then commenced, mainly on a good path. At 800m the snow cover increased and the wind rose as I reached the final slopes towards the summit which I reached sometime around 1 pm. The Munro is the end peak of the ridge but looking ahead the summit of An Garbanach looked higher. In fact there is very little in it as the true summit is listed as 982m whilst An Garbanach is shown as 975m. My curiosity took the better of me and I decided to traverse and see for myself. The ridge between the two tops starts out fairly broad and in summer is mainly grass. Today it was seriously ice covered and required great care. As you approach An Garbanach the ridge really narrows with very steep drops to either side.

I did not know how far I was going to progress. The next Munro along the ridge was Stob Coire a Chairn which was just clear of cloud, but the rest of the horseshoe was covered in dark angry clouds with a serious threat of snowfall. The fact that Stob Coire a Chairn was clear was the reason I was urged onwards. I suddenly realised that this was a dangerous place to be as the drop away to the right was almost vertical and the rocks were sheeted in glassy ice covered by a thin layer of powder snow.

Why was I putting myself in this position?



**Figure 112: Looking back to the Munro An Gearanach
Taken from the increasingly difficult ridge leading to An Garbanach**

I stopped after one difficult stretch and had a boiled egg and a long drink. Going further had no real point and as I sat there I wondered why I had traversed so far as the difficult climb I had just negotiated had to be done again in reverse. The weather deteriorated, and I turned back towards the Munro I had just climbed. I had to go down on my hands and knees to get over the dangerous section with a feeling of almost dread engulfing my being. It is strange how the mind can play tricks with you, as I had walked this section on the outward route. Now I was rock grabbing with more than a little trepidation. Back on the Munro I was certain I had made the correct decision as it now started to snow, and the temperature dropped alarmingly.

Just short of the car I slipped on the ice of the path and fell some twenty feet towards the ravine wall. Apart from bruises I was okay, but this incident made me realise just how vulnerable you can be in conditions such as these.

An Stuc

I had climbed Beinn Ghlas and Ben Lawers in 1997. I then made the ascent of Meall Greigh and Meall Garbh in 2005. At no time in the day had I gained views of the tops and the snow on the ground was relatively deep. On Meall Garbh the magic moment arrived when the clouds parted and within five minutes I could see for miles in every direction. It was almost 4 pm and I had some serious decisions to make. An Stuc was very close but the slopes leading up to the summit looked very steep indeed. I debated long and hard and then took the prudent step to retreat. There was a limited amount of daylight remaining and I was cold hungry and thirsty.

I eventually climbed An Stuc in 2006 on a cloudy day in October. I have one very vivid memory of this climb that fully vindicated my decision to leave it alone the previous year. The north ridge dropping down to the bealach below Meall Garbh is very steep and rocky. I struggled a fair bit on the loose rock and scree all set at a very steep angle. This was October and the rock was merely wet and loose. In fact the whole of this unpleasant descent set alarm bells ringing in my mind.

If I had attempted this ascent and descent in 2005, with failing daylight and in conditions of icy rocks I doubt I would be typing this out today.

My message to any climber making the traverse of these fine hills is treat An Stuc with full respect. In winter the descent or ascent of the north ridge is a major undertaking and requires great care.

However, An Stuc is a fine mountain and the views from the summit are a full reward for the efforts put in to gain the top.

Note. An Stuc is a Munro promoted in the revised listings of 1997.

Accompanying me on the ascent of Meall Greigh and Meall Garbh and contemplation of continuing to An Stuc was my son in law Andrew. Without him this climbing volume would have remained a dust gathering account on my study shelf. Compared to him my IT skills are medieval. However, I do know he respects my mountain knowledge. I admire his desire to carry on to the 3rd summit and admit I was tempted; but I must be honest. If we had carried on An Stuc might very easily have been our epitaph. Andrew has my warmest gratitude.

Ben Nevis

The highest mountain will always hold something a little more special. Whether it is the Alps, the Himalayas or anywhere. Ben Nevis is our highest peak and something special it is. The summit area is a large stony plateau covering some one hundred acres. Walkers arriving along the so-called tourist route will see little of the awesome north facing cliffs and crags. By far the best route of ascent is along the Carn Mor Dearg arete from which the famous rock climbing routes show up clearly. The summit is littered with constructions of interest. There is a large solid cairn with a triangulation column perched on top. An emergency shelter sits atop the old observatory tower. The roof of this shelter is certainly the highest man-made structure in Britain. Next to the observatory ruin is a memorial to the dead of World War Two and occasionally many other bizarre objects have been seen. On May 17th 2006 a piano that had been carried up to the summit and buried under one of the cairns was uncovered. It had been carried by removal men from Dundee sometime back in the 1980's. An interesting charity event?

It is the observatory that has always interested me most. In 1877 David Milne Holme, chairman of the council of the Scottish Meteorological Society proposed that an observatory should be built on the summit of Britain. In 1878 at the age of 73 he climbed the mountain, no mean feat for a man of his age. As Ben Nevis is in the direct path of Atlantic weather systems, weather observations would be invaluable in building up knowledge of general weather patterns. Before construction was completed a Clement Lindsey Wragg offered to make daily summer ascents and this he did. Starting out at 5 am he climbed continuously from June to mid October in sometimes ominous conditions even though they were the summer months. These feats of endurance earned him the nickname 'Inclement Rag'. Construction soon commenced and a pony track with a gradient of no more than 1 in 5 gave easier access. The first part of the observatory opened on October 17th 1883. There were very many applicants for the job of manning this lonely outpost. Out of those for the position of superintendent a Robert Trail Omond was successful much to the chagrin of Wragg. He was so 'miffed' he left for Australia. It was quickly discovered just how severe the winters could be. Many times the men had to dig themselves free from the huge drifts of snow. The following year the building was enlarged and a wooden tower added. Heat was provided from an open cooking stove in the kitchen and a closed one in the office. They were fuelled by paraffin and coke.

Observations made included hourly air pressure, dry and wet bulb temperature, precipitation, wind speed/direction and visibility. The observers recorded a very high frequency of hill fog, often as much as 80% per month.

Valuable though this project was, troubled times lay ahead. The cost of running the observatory was high. Of the £ 1,000 per annum required only £350 was covered by Government grant. Closure was threatened but donations kept this at bay. It was to no avail. In 1902 the grants ceased and despite a public outcry the end was just around the corner. In 1904 the observatory shut down and although it briefly functioned as a refreshment room the building slowly fell into decay.

A combination of weather, vandalism and a fire in 1932 saw the once proud establishment crumble to the ruin you can see today.

7. SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT IDEAS FOR FURTHER READING

Different threads weaving towards the whole.

The Mystery of Mallory and Irvine

Tom Holzel and Audrey Salkeld

So much has been written about the disappearance of Mallory and Irvine on the north ridge of Everest in 1924. Since the discovery of the body of Mallory in 1999 the story has gained even more interest. Every book has its 'angle' but the above title was the one that really captivated me. For anyone interested in mountains this story is a must. The titles published after the discovery of the body are similar to a detective story, piecing together all the evidence and clues. All in an attempt to answer the question "Were they really the first persons to reach the summit of Everest"?

The Endless Knot

Kurt Diemberger

This is the story of the ascent of K2 by Kurt and Julie Tullis in 1986. They also were 'caught up' in the tragedy of other climbers who died on this unforgiving peak. This is a very long account and particularly interesting regarding the theme of what might have happened had different decisions been taken at different moments. An endless 'line' of possible choices. Many opportunities to avoid the impending disaster by the taking of just one decision.

The Caine Mutiny

Herman Wouk

I experienced the often-futile life of the men serving in the navy. (Women also today) Particularly the lower ranks. Nevertheless, I mostly enjoyed it all. This novel tells the story of an American minesweeper serving in the Pacific during the war. A new captain takes command and a series of incidents take place leading to a mutiny during a storm. Full of character and human interest this book was also the theme for a film starring Humphrey Bogart.

The Searchers

Alan Le May

This book is the theme for the famous western starring John Wayne. It tells the story of two men scouring the lost wilderness of Comanche country for a white girl taken by the Indians during a death raid on a homestead. It relates their ultimate revenge. Quite 'frightening' for the time scale of the search and the dogged determination of the searchers. Possibly a good story for anyone embarking on a conquest of the Munros. You will have to show a stubborn streak and real determination. Munros do not come easy. It will take up so much of your time.

Other than that *The Searchers* is a fantastic story and well worth a read.

The Black Cloud

I.D.S. Thomson

A captivating account of mountain misadventure in Scotland 1928-66.

It tells the story of seven disasters that overcame climbers, mostly because of the onset of awesome weather. The chapters take the reader through all moments of the climb from commencement to death. Once again, the theme of what might have been is very apparent.

Cosmos

Carl Sagan

A book to make you think deeply about the vastness of the universe and the insignificance of ourselves in the general 'order' of things. If you have a huge problem delve into this book. I suspect your problem may not seem so large after you have done so.

Billy Bunter the Bold

Frank Richards

Or any Billy Bunter book for that matter. Old fashioned fantastic stories for boys. Sadly they are frowned upon by the politically correct lobby of today. This makes it an even better read for me.

The Sabre Tooth Curriculum

J.A. Peddiwell

A satire on curriculum published in the U.S.A. in 1939. It tells the story of a prehistoric tribe that decided to introduce systematic education for its children. The curriculum was specifically designed to meet particular survival needs in the local environment. However, the climate of the region changed and much of these skills became redundant. Attempts to change the curriculum in order to meet the new survival needs encountered stern opposition.

Another insight into the theme change.

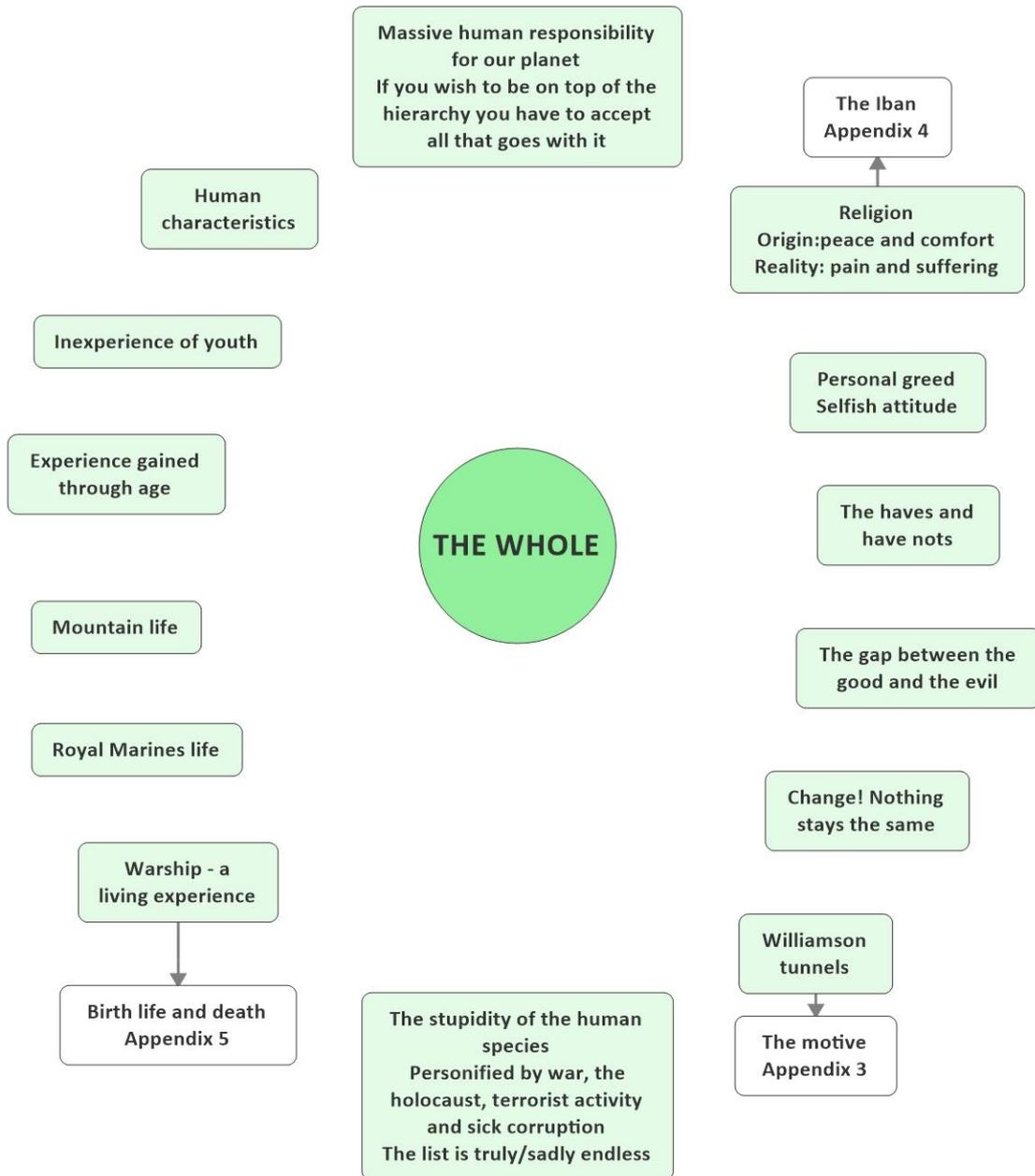
The Munroists Companion

Robin N. Campbell

A superb book with just about everything for the lover of the mountains of Scotland.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – The elusive search for a better world



**Figure 113: The elusive search for a better world
As a result of a half century of mountain thought**

Appendix 2 – Philosophical thought

Richard Stanley Peters' analysis of the concept of education is a fine example of the procedure that should be grasped if one requires to attach philosophy and deep thought to any subject. Peters argued that there were three criteria which an activity must satisfy if it were to be called 'education.'

The first and most important was that something of value had to be passed on. This immediately becomes obvious when we consider training a group in the art and skills of torture. This would not be classified educational. Harmful, destructive; yes. Educational; certainly not. But what about an activity that is not harmful but more neutral. It would be possible to teach a child to read and write but as soon as the process was over the said student never read or wrote a word for the rest of her life. Is this education. Surely the acquisition of reading skills are merely a necessary precondition for engaging in activities which are valuable.

Peter's next criterion was that the activity should be associated with other activities thus giving a wide cognitive perspective. Knowing all about the awesome events of the French Revolution without any knowledge or perception of freedom, equality and social justice can hardly be interpreted as education.

He finally concluded that those who are engaged in an activity must actually care for it and regard it as something worth doing. A third analogy illustrates this perfectly. A scholar completes her university studies having passed all her exams with honours. The subjects are 'valuable.' They indeed cover a wide perspective but on completion our highly qualified scholar takes a deep intake of breath and spends the rest of her time engaged in reading trashy comics and playing simple card games. A total neglect of the skills acquired. Can we really say this girl is educated?

It is all intriguing thought and only by searching through our minds might we ever find the answers to the questions raised.'

Appendix 3 – Underground mysteries

In many respects Joseph Williamson was a mystery. Just why did he construct a labyrinth of tunnels and chambers under the sandstone of Merseyside in the early 1800's?

Nobody really knows but this is a big part of the interest in this unique attraction. When I take visitors through the complex that is open I make an admission that many find unusual. I claim that we are not standing in a tunnel at all. In fact we are in an old quarry upon the top of which a roof has been placed. This is almost certainly the case. Williamson had many motives for his creations but the main one was probably a land reclamation attempt. By roofing over old disused quarries he was creating land on which he could build houses. We also know he was a philanthropist and wanted to help the workers of Liverpool by providing employment. Over a thirty-year period he must have given jobs to thousands of men whom otherwise would have faced starvation. No charity from Joseph, just the chance to work. He was eccentric and eccentric people do strange things and for anyone who has visited this attraction it will become very apparent these tunnels/ chambers are somewhat strange.

My own personal view is that he commenced his task for one reason and then became 'hooked' onto his achievement. This often happens within our lives. We try something for the first time and like what it brings to us. Thus we do it again and from a small start often a huge ending is achieved.

So where are we with the life and work of the famous Joseph?

He was an amazingly rich man who desired to share his wealth but not by giving it away. Jobs for the boys was an admirable characteristic. This indeed was the epitome of an attempt to narrow the gap between the haves and the have-not's. I do not think he had personal greed shrouding his being. I know I may be biased but I consider Joseph a decent guy. Strange, eccentric, mysterious yes. In this world of greedy self orientated selfish morons he stands out.

Appendix 4 – Religion

How does religion ‘play its cards’ within my existence?

I shall never forget the amazement in the Iban face when confronted with a helicopter deep in the jungle of Sarawak. Even more poignant to me was the reaction to my back-pack radio emitting dots and dashes and voices from the sky above. I wonder just how we would react to something from two centuries in the future? The Iban quickly came to terms with all these strange gadgets with which they were confronted. This was 1963 and today I am sure Sarawak is well and truly embedded in the 21st century even though there could well be outposts in the deep jungle that have still not been subjected to modern ‘change’

I found the Iban fascinating and even learnt their language. Sadly this is a pretty useless skill in England, but it had assisted me in my study of their life and customs 54 years ago.

Strangely over three-quarters of the native Iban are Christian having converted from their pagan beliefs many decades ago. Many still observe traditional ceremonies particularly during marriages or festivals but Christian they mostly are.

I always found the Iban generous, friendly and exceedingly hospitable as well as showing a placid and composed nature. Maybe this is partly explained by their way of life within their longhouses placed at intervals along the banks of the rivers of their homeland. The longhouse is a communal existence and all the community plays its part in the well being of the whole. Some of the longhouses I visited housed over fifty separate families with a total number of 300 residents. Their life and religion were intricately intertwined within the belief that nothing happens without a cause.

On my many visits to stay with the Iban I thought long and hard over issues that related to the so-called civilised races of the western world. In many respects the selfish stupidity of our past actions.

European expansion and the colonisation of America destroyed the indigenous population of the Red Indian. Their lifestyle maintained the balance of nature by taking only what they required for survival. The white man was driven by greed and often personal gain wiping out everything and anything that got in his way. The buffalo was by far the biggest loser. Between 1868 and 1881 31 million buffalo were slaughtered by the sick and greedy white man and amazingly by 1885 only 500 remained before the senseless slaughter was halted.

I thought further to the vicious wars between Christians and Muslims during the crusade campaigns. At a more personal level I shall always remember the hatred and loathing felt by the extremists in Northern Ireland towards the end of my service career. Here were people belonging to the same religion, or denomination of religion, disagreeing about what was really important or true. People were slaughtering people just because the rules were not to their liking.

I went even further within my mind. It was not only in religion that human hatred and bigotry could be seen. In the 70’s and 80’s I was a ‘rabid’ football fan following Liverpool to just about every game they played. I can still think back to the scenes of pure hatred a huge number of fans showed to the opposing supporters. Foul chants, racist tirades and often savage physical violence were the consequences of these actions.

All this from supposedly civilised people.

The sickness of Heysel, when my own fellow supporters caused death and mayhem was almost enough for me and when the incidents at Hillsborough took place I stopped going and left the game I had once loved so dearly.

I had to put all this into perspective within my experiences of the Iban.

I had been brought up to go to church. This was the directive of my parents and I did not mind. (Except for the fact that the service took place whilst 'Journey into Space' was on the radio) I fully realised I could make up my own mind later.

This I did when I was fifteen and I turned my back on religion to pursue my own beliefs in being generally good and always respecting the animals who are part of our precious planet. I had no quibble with others who pursued their religion as long as they respected my viewpoints

Anyway there are so many religions and for all of them to claim that they were the true religion could not be right. The list was endless. (Christianity and sub divisions, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Judaism etc etc.)

Atheists and secular humanists consistently made the claim that religion was the number one cause of violence and war throughout the history of mankind. The crusades and the thirty years war were certainly rooted within religious dispute. However, further thought brought forth other factors. Non-religious motivation and naturalistic philosophies bore the blame for nearly all of humankind conflicts.

Consider Hitler and Stalin. Certainly non-religious dictators they caused the demise of 60 plus million lives. Mao Tse-Tung had the blood of thirty-eight million people staining his hands and religion played a minor part in this sphere of tragedy.

If religion can't be blamed for most wars, then just what was the cause? I consider the principal trigger is the same thing that produces crime, cruelty and the taking of life. In a nutshell human sin.

In the end, the evidence shows that the atheists are totally wrong about what causes war. It is the sinful human condition that is the number one cause of wars and violence. Not religion.

So as I sit here and type out my viewpoint humans are slaughtering each other in Syria, Palestine, the Balkans, the Far East and many other places.

Not necessarily through religion.

Almost certainly through greed and mental stupidity.

Hence my stance. I am a misanthropist and an animal lover.

It was my time with the Iban and memories of their way of life that tied up all these loose ends

Appendix 5 – Warship life

You have to serve on a warship to fully experience the ambience. A man of war is indeed a living breathing creation with terrifying potential and unlimited power.

I shall never forget the amazing feeling as HMS Albion powered across the Indian Ocean en route to the troubles of Aden. Urgency was vital as troops were being put under enormous strain by the terrorists plying for power. Albion was needed. There is never a moment of silence on board. At speed the decks quiver and shake and the whole superstructure vibrates as the screws plough the ship forward with ever increasing speed. Even when stationary the ship gives out a feeling of life as machinery hums and other unidentified noises add to the feeling of being.

On board a carrier there are extra sounds to add into this equation of life. Jets and helicopters continually pound on and off the heaving carrier deck.

Yes, a warship is a living creature and everyone on board plays his/ her part in the achievements that are required.

On one of my long climbs I pondered long and hard on the loss of the mighty Hood which was sunk by a salvo of heartless shells from its nemesis the awesome Bismark. One minute it was a pounding living mighty machine, when in just a few seconds it was liquidated to nothing, in a massive explosion of horrendous nature. Just three poor souls survived out of a crew of over 1,400. The speed of destruction and change left me in contemplative amazement.

I thought on, and other ideas passed through my mind. A person can be struck by a bus and immediate demise is forthcoming. A bit like the Hood. Or one can slowly succumb to the rigours of cancer and the demise will be a long and possibly painful one.

This is where the warship analogy comes in.

There is nothing so sad and tragic than to be within a decommissioned warship. Cold and rusty, damp and silent, and all around the ghosts of sailors past. I did revisit one of my old ships and it was an experience I shall never forget. The passageways were flooded to a depth of twelve inches and all around the silence was complete. No moving crewmen, no moving parts and in most semi locked compartments total darkness reigned 'supreme.' Parts of ship that had been meticulously polished and cleaned in days long gone by lay covered in dirt and dust. No hum, no buzz, no throbbing of engines. Just a total and spooky silence. I moved on deck and searched out the quarterdeck, a location of usual immaculate nature. Today it was covered in grime and the memories of distant times.

No officer of the watch. Abandoned gangplanks and no colours to salute.

The ship was junk.

(Not unlike Mardale in 1939. Or Mullardoch post 1951.)

The author with his loyal and trusty friend Sach on the summit of Stob Coire nan Lochan 1115m. This was forty years ago in the deep snows of winter.

Sach was a loyal and dependable soulmate who ventured up hundreds of mountains and enjoyed every minute in the process. The loyalty and company of an animal is something quite amazing. None of the human 'traits' I had experienced in fellow climbers over the years. We were alone and had no-one to bore us with problems of mortgage, tax returns or pending divorce.



Not a Messner, Hermann Buhl or Dougal Haston. Like a million others a mere mortal who loves the hills and achievement of the summit. A tale of both stopovers, memorable ascents, magic moments, hardships, achievement and a 'chunk' of philosophy in the form of heavy criticism of the human species. In my 75th year misanthropy is taking over more and more of my thoughts.

No Everest or K2 but many tops you should recognise from a journey across the Highlands whilst 'compleating' the Munros and Corbetts. September 30th 2008 was the magic day Mullach na Dheiragain concluded a very special journey.

There are a lot of you out there just like me. I've met so very many on my travels.