THE SCOTTISH MOUNTAINEERING CLUB JOURNAL

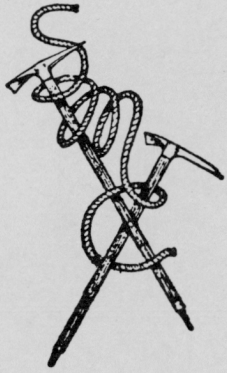

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Photo: The A. E. Robertson Collection

'Goggs & Morrison on The Salisbury Crags, 1905'

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THE GAMBLING MAN

By P.J. Biggar

ELLIOT hadn't been on the hill since November. When I visited his home on the Saturday afternoon, he was still dozing between grubby covers. He eyed me quizzically.

'What is there to get up for?' he enquired. Unemployment is not a tonic. However the embers soon crackled into life; John rolled over and rummaged beneath the bed: out came a battered axe and a Terrordactyl, both without wrist loops ...

Sunday morning was cold and calm. Our passage from the East was speedy. There was a good covering of snow on the hills, but the expected minor transformation took place as we crossed the watershed in Glen Torridon; the snowline retreated some 500ft, making the thought of the walk-in a little less discouraging.

We left the car just after nine. Liathach and Alligin sparkled through the pine trees as we walked in leisurely fashion up the stalkers' path. For John, this was new territory and he admired it.

The crossing of the burn which flows from the Narrow Coire was hazardous. Black, glinting verglas sheathed the stepping stones; on the far side the steep heather bank was tufted with fresh snow, unpocketed hands got just a little taste of winter.

Progress up the icy path towards the bealach was fairly swift until our way became an uncertain line across gleaming snowfields beneath which flowed deeply cut waterways. Although it was freezing, water was still moving beneath the snow.

Our troubles began as we left the path to turn for our objective: a lovely slender gully between a sharp buttress and a more broken snowy face; the face was to the left of the gully and the wind was coming from that quarter.

Amongst the many hillocks below the crag the quality of the snow, never very good, became extremely uncertain; going became slow.

'I feel,' said Elliott, 'as if I'm suffering from an incurable disease.' Not only was the uphill struggle arduous, but any attempt to rest was defeated by insidious cold, conveyed through outer clothing by a capricious wind which could be seen, high on the face, raising spindrift into evil little plumes.

Below a rock wall boasting a gross brittle icicle, we stopped at last to put on crampons. As a concession to safety, Elliott put on his shiny black helmet. From an unladen sac he produced our only rope; I festooned myself with gear. On looking down I noticed I'd made the stupid mistake of putting my crampons on with a layer of hard packed snow between them and the soles of my boots; while I rectified the error, my partner began laboriously to kick steps up into the ominous portals of the gully.

His effort, however, was not sustained and quite soon I overtook him. John has never liked kicking steps in any case. His usual policy is to hide behind a rock smoking pungent roll-ups until some party from London has done the dirty work. As there were no Sassenachs about that day - or any other souls - he made do with me.

'Aye,' he said, as I floundered past, 'you're a hard man, Pete. A few more years and you'll look like a Himalayan veteran.' Flattery is part of his usual approach. Perhaps he expected me to stop at the first minor ice-pitch, but I had been that way before, on my own, and was privately determined that we should gain as much height as possible before using the rope. The route was long and the January day short.

To the strains of 'Johnnie Reggae' which I began and John echoed, we fully enjoyed several rope lengths of free motion. In places the ground was quite steep, but the ice was sound and confidence grew. Just once or twice we had to cower down over planted axes as cascades of spindrift passed down the gully, temporarily blocking our view. Once, on a nearby ledge, we spied a fat white Ptarmigan feeding on heather seeds which it had managed to free from the snow. I greeted it with Edinburgh courtesy, John with Glasgow jocosities; the bird looked at us once, then went on feeding: its attitude suggested that our problems, at that moment, were greater than its own.

At length we came to a snowy bay above which there was a steep chimney. Looking down, the coire below us seemed rather remote, and the twin spines of the cleft up which we had climbed uncomfortably sharp. It was time, we agreed, to rope up. Perhaps half an hour was spent looking for something secure to which we might anchor ourselves. In the end, John found enough ice for a screw while I found a solid seeming thread between some frozen turf and the neighbouring rock. While we were thus occupied, the first real spindrift avalanche hurried by ... and then another.

'These seem,' said John abstractedly, 'to be coming about every five minutes don't they?' The implication was obvious. With deliberation, John removed his helmet, stowed it in his sac, lit a roll-up and set off up the chimney.

Shivering, I paid out the rope. To this day I don't know how many downpourings of powder snow I witnessed as Elliott made progress upwards. Each one was preceded by a roar high up on the face, followed by a horrible swoosh. I should point out that the average cascade of spindrift is of no account, what John was climbing through was more of the order of a succession of minor powder snow avalanches. On at least four occasions I actively expected my partner to be swept down the gully and I took appropriate action. Once, a disembodied voice enquired how much rope was left. Then, for a long time there was no communication between us except for the twitch of the yellow rope which lay in a snow mound between my feet.

When at last it was my turn to go round the corner into the chimney, there was no sign of his progress; tracks obscured, apart from the rope above, the pitch might have been virgin.

The chimney was long, steep and good. I was lucky and suffered only a couple of minor deluges as I climbed. Near the top the chimney, broader below, narrowed considerably. Above this narrowing John had placed a shaky peg; he had used no other protection. His belay was good, but his stance was poor, and even as we exchanged greetings, it disintegrated under his stamping feet and fell past me; it was as well his belay was good.

We had come to a choice of ways. To the left, above John's stance, a steep ice-wall led to unknown ground. To the right the gully proper continued. One look told me why John had not gone that way: all the loose snow on the stately summit of the mountain was pouring down it; the ferocity of the downpourings was increasing and threatened to become continuous. Below us the narrow chimney was invisible for long moments together as the falls poured over it. Our choice was stark: climb the ice or retreat. Time was getting on. To judge our progress by the hill across the valley, we might be half way up the route; it was less than well documented.

My vote would have been for instant retreat, but Elliott simply said 'We shouldn't be thinking of giving up yet,' as he struggled up to the base of the ice-wall. Numbly I paid out the rope and watched his progress, always with half an eye on the hell-broth below. Somehow I didn't believe we'd get much further, and, as the falls roared beneath my feet, I wasn't fancying retreat either, especially as one of our ropes, on my advice, had been left in the car.

Elliott tried and failed, but it wasn't his fault: the Western ice was rotten and fell about him in chunks. He left a peg in a crack and retreated to his original stance. 'I'm giving up this game!' he roared disgustedly.

'You may be giving it up a lot sooner than you think!' I replied. We both admire Patey's writings. The retreat had begun.

Several hundred feet of steep ground lay between us and safety. Due to my overconfidence, our longest abseil could be just seventy feet. Plainly the pitch directly below us would be the worst; it was steep and narrow; there could be no escaping the downpourings. Brains had to isolate

themselves from the chaos, the cold, the wind, the roars of the falls, and above all from fear. My thoughts seemed to retreat far into myself. I remember thinking; if only I could be so calm when leading.

With painful slowness my numbed fingers assembled what I needed, then crammed and stuffed away whatever might catch and imperil. Relieved at last to be sliding down the rope, I came to the narrowest part of the chimney below. As a minor torrent passed and the rock became visible again, I spied a little crack below my left boot. Wedging myself sideways across the chimney, the doubled rope still through the krab at my waist, my fingers, through the torn ends of my gloves, sought out a large angle peg. At first the crack was recalcitrant, but just a little further along it began to grip as I leant apprehensively downwards and tapped with the hammer. Every few moments I had to stop what I was doing and press myself against the chimney walls as powder thundered all around.

Eventually I managed to tie myself into the peg with an assortment of slings. The time taken was worth it, but to Elliott above, it must have seemed unconscionable. Perhaps unemployment teaches patience: my friend never said a word. At my signal, he slid down the rope, classic fashion, his usual way. We both own modern fangled devices, but never carry them in winter. As the snow roared about us we exchanged a few terse words. The rope followed sweetly and was cast into the abyss. John slid below me on to a small platform. Here a minor fankle ensued - I don't know why - but, cursing through chattering teeth he sorted it out and slid off into regions where I could only see him, in black and white, when the downpourings eased.

A guttural sound came from below, a hand was raised in defiance or benediction. Now it was my turn. The rope was below me. First I had to lean down and retrieve it on the outstretched pick of the hammer. That was easily done. What followed was not easy and it might have been disastrous; it was also rather ludicrous.

Perched in uncertainty some feet above the abseil point, I became obsessed by the necessity of threading the doubled rope through the krab at my waist and over my shoulder in such a manner that, when I managed to move below the abseil point, I would not be trapped in a horrid loop of frozen rope and slowly drowned by falling powder. Abseiling is easy from a nice ledge with the anchor at chest height: mine was two feet below my boots, and in order to get beneath it, I should have to move from my little back-swirl out into the main current of falling snow. Again, in the normal course of events, all impedimenta is strapped away when abseiling, but now, of course, I needed the hammer in my hand to help me climb down below the peg.

One might have thought that, with some experience and a reasonably well trained mind, the problem would not have been so beyond me ... My abiding memory of what happened, however, is of sliding down the pitch with my back to the mountain, my neck being burned by the rope, and the everlasting powder cascading over me like water over a defeated salmon.

Gasping and spluttering, I hammered the knot in the rope's end through the krab and flopped on to the bed of soft snow where we had searched so long for an anchorage on the way up. John had gone from sight, trusting in his ability to climb down, not waiting to abseil. Several times I shouted warnings as fresh roars broke out above. Now I was alone and he could have been anywhere. Through the dark slit of the gully walls, I could see Beinn na-h-Eaglaise slipping into twilight; time was against us. By the time I reached the next stance the day was really darkening. No John: either he had managed to climb down, or he had been swept away, I had no way of knowing. Incessant noise made shouting pointless.

With some anxiety I sought a weakness in the black walls. Several pegs were tapped to no avail until, at last, a slender blade sank reluctantly into a crack in the roof above my head. Gear was running low. Desperate rummaging in my drift-filled sac brought out a torn polythene bag: in it I found an ancient piece of knotted purple cord. Standing in the darkening chaos I remembered where we had found it - on a sunny day on Lochnagar. Wooden fingers tied it round the rope and through the eye of the blade.

The runout left me a few steep feet short of safety. Often an abseil rope is stiff and thrawn to pull down. Relying on this I took hold of an end and kept abseiling. Shaking and cursing, but unhurt I picked myself up at the bottom of the pitch. Trailing the rope in one hand and brandishing the hammer wildly in the other I kicked my way down the last icy step to slip and slither down the last snow chute. Defeat had become a rout.

'Cheesis!' said a voice at my elbow, 'was that no Hellish!' A soggy fish-paste sandwich and a thermos top of tepid coffee were thrust into my trembling hands. Above us the mountain was vanishing in the night, below were weary miles amongst boulders and stream beds.

'That's it,' said Elliott, 'no more winter climbing for me!'

'Put your money where your mouth is,' I retorted, 'I'll bet you a hundred pounds you'll be back!' With sadness rather than anger in his voice he declined the wager:

'I'm not really a gambling man,' he said.

ACHALADAIR

By Donald M. Orr

IT WAS DARK now, a deep blue black. Stars and a three-quarter moon were reflected in Loch Tulla where the wind had dropped to a whisper. On any other January evening it would have been a fine night to be out on the hill but now as he limped slowly through the deer grass towards the farm the pain in his thigh pulsed strongly. Ahead of him in the darkness he could hear Iain, struggling under the weight of two rucsacs, crashing through the heather and thick gorse that formed a rough perimeter boundary before the walls of the farm. He looked towards the buildings where the movement of the branches on the trees around the steading appeared to make the outside lights flicker and waver. Their brassy colour brought to mind the copper and bronze junks on Findlater's wall.

Earlier that week they had sat in the lounge bar of Findlater's in Paisley, discussing what they would try at the week-end. Half a dozen new routes on Meall Buidhe had been produced by Little during the previous winter season and they reasoned that they might be worth a look in the light of the lean, freezing conditions and general lack of snow. He tilted his glass back, happy about the prospect of the Sunday ahead, and gazed absently at the metal junks on the wall. They were the single and totally incongruous decoration in a bar devoid of any oriental quality whatsoever. Why junks for God's sake he continued to wonder as, finishing his pint, he noticed some irregularities in his glass caused the copper sails to appear to flap and waver.

Later, back at the flat, he mentioned to his wife that he would be away on Sunday. She paused; while not greatly interested in climbing herself, she was aware of the conditions.

'Where are you going?' she asked puzzled.

'Meall Buidhe, some of Little's routes that he put up last year.'

'There's no snow.'

'I know. Just a day out - o'er hill and moory dale.'

'Perilous seas and faery lands forlorn.'

'Beyond that last blue mountain barred with snow.'

She trumped his last effort by going into French and he grabbed her uttering ecstatically, 'Oh, Oh, talk dirty some more!'

'Get off,' pushing him away she added, 'It would fit you better if you tackled the back bedroom instead of some hill.'

'Okay, okay. We could get the paint on Saturday and I could get started through the week.'

'Right,' she said with finality and turning went into the kitchen, a hint of a smile forming on her lips.

'Thrashed again,' he thought and went into the lounge already mentally chasing the French verse Anne had quoted, very roughly translating it as: 'The sword of sorrows wintering on the mountain wind'. He remembered the line from years back thinking, as he had then, that it seemed a more fitting description for the MacDonalds of Glen Coe than for some French alp.

The farm lights were only marginally nearer. He bent over gripping his thighs just above the knees and closed his eyes trying to deflect the pain and resolve the question of the images that were tumbling forward, spilling into his inner vision. A surreal confusion of symbols that attempted to pass him information he was unsure how to decipher.

The walk-in had passed quickly. They had not seen each other much over the holiday and swapped family tales and New Year party stories about mutual friends as they ascended to the lip of the coire. They paused by a waterfall that spilled out from the hollow and guzzled some of the Lucozade that Iain always carried as they gazed up at the coire wall, trying to make sense of the route descriptions in the guide book. The complete lack of snow made it difficult to discern 'the formidable forked gully on the left'. They eventually picked out a gully with a fair amount of ice and many frozen turf ledges. Three enjoyable pitches followed, full of bridging, delicate placements and front pointing in frozen grass, interspersed with sound rock belays from the plentiful supply of cracks unseasonably available.

On reaching the rounded shoulder of Meall Buidhe they packed the rope and ironmongery away in the sacks and cramponed their way over the frosted turf to the summit, eventually agreeing that if their climb was a Grade III, then it was only just a Grade III. The summit with its low cairn was obviously not a popular spot with hillwalkers, judging by the lack of orange peel in the vicinity.

He perched on the side of the small cairn, leaning on the tumbled stones, and looked out over Rannoch Moor. It undulated away to the north like the vast, crumpled pelt of some colossal, sleeping beast. The fawns and browns of its winter coat seemed to pulse, to breathe rhythmically and exuded an almost mesmeric quality as they dappled off into the distance appearing to draw him to them, into the heart of that flecked and freckled land.

Turning abruptly to break the spell he looked up at the bulk of Beinn Achaladair. They agreed to finish the day by traversing the ridge and walked down to the low pass in silence enjoying the mid afternoon sunshine and the clink, crunch of their crampons in the short frozen grass.

The ascent proved more awkward than anything else. The stony flanks of Achaladair had been blown clean of snow and the verglassed rocks and iced scree through which they climbed were not the conditions that

crampons were designed for. Arriving on the broad summit ridge they were confronted by acres of frosted, shale-like stones across which they scraped and stumbled, cluntering over the rubble like deranged androids, until the situation became ludicrous. The crampons were taken off and attached to the top of his sac. Iain had already done the same and was now clumping across to the summit cairn in his rigid boots with the aid of his long axe. His own short axe was of little use here so he stuck it down diagonally between his back and his rucsac where he could withdraw it easily if needed and went to join Iain. They stood for a moment by the piled boulders. It had been an easy, pleasant day dotted with the odd juxtapositions of winter climbing on rock, cramponing on stone. They noted the edge of twilight approach with a ripple of lilac light and decided on a direct descent towards the farm.

Threading their way through the steep, verglassed boulderfield that formed the upper part of the mountain demanded care and concentration, but eventually they cleared it and came on more open terrain. The sound of a small cascade below awoke a thirst inside him and he angled his path to approach it. A patch of old snow appeared to lead straight to the stream. He stood on the upper section to test it and the crust broke under his boots. Concluding that it would be fine for a heeled descent he stepped from the ledge. His heel bounced off the frozen snow and, for a brief second, his body was horizontal before it crashed on the ice.

The speed at which he shot down the slope was alarming and his ice axe, which he could have used as a brake, was now trapped under him. Simultaneously he realised that he must keep his head down and his heels up or he might well spin round and smash his skull on one of the rocks that protruded through the ice at irregular intervals. His immediate reaction was to try to brake, and thrusting his arms out he pressed down hard with his ungloved hands on to the ice. In an instant the sensations turned from cold to hot to a pain whose intensity made him withdraw his hands. He tried to dig his elbows into the ice but there was no slackening of speed, only an uncontrolled downward rush. In the space of a second his brain had computed all possible courses of action to avoid disaster. There were none and it shut down, leaving his mind strangely empty, devoid of thought. Inside, his head held only the echoes of the ripping sound of waterproof fabric scraping over the ice.

The smash into one of the blocks, sticking out of the ice like a black, serrated blade, sent a searing pain through his upper left thigh. The impact threw his torso forward and he slumped to the right, pivoting and grabbing desperately at the rock, scrabbling at its edges in despair. Fighting down a wave of nausea and dizziness that threatened to weaken him and sweep him further down the hillside he clung to thin flakes with shrivelled fingers that were quickly welded by cold to the shattered edges.

His jacket and rucsac had been pushed up over his head and in this cocoon he heard Iain, who had paralleled his descent, crashing across the boulders to get to him. Swathed in his jacket he heard the gasping breath

and sensed the slow collapse of the man at his side. Due to the fall, nervous reaction or whatever a rasping burst of gas filled his breeches. He groaned from under his coat. 'If it farts, it's alive!'

Iain, looking down at the torn blue jacket, battered sack and bloodstains on the ice, sank to his knees, shaken. With his partner supporting his feet he started to pull off his rucsac and waterproof. He eased himself up and drew in some deep breaths. Iain shook his head and handed him a drink in silence. They sat around for some time looking at the mountains to the north, calming down by acknowledging the world they knew. Restoring their strength through its impassiveness and solidity. Slowly they patched up his hands, which bore the same ragged purple lacerations that now scored the twilight sky, as they tried to accept what had nearly happened.

It was getting dark as he stood up, testing his weight on the damaged leg. It would do; no breakages anyway. Iain took his sac on top of his own and they started off, knowing that the leg would soon stiffen painfully. He began hobbling down towards the farm whose lights were already beginning to twinkle in the gathering gloom.

He was suddenly amongst the gorse clumps around the farm and raised his head to see the hill gate not far from him. As he tottered through the farmyard Iain, having dumped the sacs in the car, came back to meet him.

'Do you want me to take you to hospital?'

'No. I'll be okay.'

'Are you sure' he asked incredulously, 'Don't you think you should get it X-rayed?'

'No. Nothing's broken. Just a bad fall.'

Iain looked at him and shook his head. 'You're a lucky, lucky man, you know. That could easily have been your head on that rock.'

'Yes. I know. Easy eh?'

He sensed the shock and relief that was coursing through his friend now that they were safely off the hill but he was too tired to talk more about it. He wanted only to crawl into the car, out of the freshening wind, and sleep it all away.

He awoke hunched on his side in the front seat of the car feeling distanced from reality. A disbelief in the afternoon's happenings had a mere toehold in his mind before it was avalanched off by the pain in his thigh. He closed his eyes again comforting himself in the warmth of the darkness and in the security of the steady drone of the engine. Opening his eyes he straightened himself out groaning with the pain caused by having to move his leg.

'Are you okay?' Iain asked quickly.

'Sure. I'm fine. Had a wee sleep,' he yawned, aware of an edge of panic in his friend's voice and recognised that while he had the pain he also had the security of knowing that there was no lasting damage. Iain, on the other hand, had received the greater fright and was still shocked by what he had witnessed.

'It's all right really. Just a bit stiff now.'

'God, you were lucky,' his partner said, slowly enunciating each word to add to its weight.

'What, us men of the mountain and the flood, the men of the high passes, lucky?'

'Men of the high bar stools more like,' retorted Iain.

'Well, there's a thought,' he said trying to keep his partner in a lighter mood, although the last thing he felt like was stopping for a beer in some cold Lomondside bar.

'You're going straight home and into a bath.'

'Does this mean we're engaged?'

'Piss off!'

That was much more like it and chuckling he turned and looked out to see where they were. Getting off the hill later than usual they had missed most of the ski and mountain traffic on the way south from Glen Coe and Iain had made good time on the way home. He found that they were going through the haughlands around the southern end of Loch Lomond and relaxed, closing his eyes again, drifting in and out of sleep and fear, floating between comfort and pain. He was already worrying about his wife's reaction to his fall and the problems of getting to work the next day.

The car slowed, gears changed and he slumped left then right. Through the haze of broken sleep he recognised the roundabout above Balloch and made an effort to sit up and clear his head of half thoughts and ragged images. Looking out, the darkness over the Vale of Leven was flooded by millions of golden drops of light that charted the street plans of Jamestown, Bonhill, Alexandria and, in the distance, Dumbarton. For him the nebulae of sodium streetlights in the blackness had always evoked a feeling of loneliness and melancholy that had first awakened on night train journeys to and from college in Yorkshire. The pensive, pleasing sadness of late rail travel, burrowing through the sleepless night, through tunnels of darkness to pass the occasional ill lit street or glowing conurbation, all emotionally linked by darkness, an amber glow and a sense of isolation which somehow mixed loss and desolation with a heartening, human quality that strengthened and lured him on into a more contemplative frame of mind.

A stream of despairing sorrow built up and poured through him catching his breath, filling his eyes. He choked and noisily coughed down the emotion, glad that the car interior was held only in a low greenish light from the instrument panel on the dashboard. Quieting himself he looked out again at the flow of golden lights, still unable to define the subtle interplay of moods that this sight continued to summon. The mingling of strength and hope, of loss and soft sadness was too fine a blend of distillates to be separated by his analysis.

His thoughts were dissolved in the glare of the lights around the toll barriers of the Erskine Bridge and could not be reformed as they sped along the dark motorway towards the multi-coloured mass of patterned light that illuminated Glasgow Airport.

Iain turned into the broad avenue and pulled up at the tenement where his companion lived.

'Will you make it to the top flat?'

'Sure,' he replied, aware of the stiffness as he prised himself out of the car.

He stood awkwardly wobbling on the pavement, supporting himself with his rucsac.

'Do you want me to take it up for you?'

'God no, Anne would have a fit if she saw you having to help me.' He paused, half smiling at his friend.

'What about next week-end?'

'Are you kidding?' Iain burst out, 'That leg will look like a month old black pudding by tomorrow morning! Get up there and get a hot bath!'

He nodded slowly and wandered up the path soliloquising on the mediocrity of modern youth.

As he approached the door of the building a series of images slotted through his central vision like a confused jumble of overlapping slides that related and questioned the events of the day; winter guides and no snow, crampons on scree, soft hands against hard ice, the walk in and limp out, the pull of Rannoch Moor, the spacing of the streetlights.

Were these omens, warnings, puzzles or simply tiredness, enlarging the problems of a day's events?

'I'll phone you during the week', shouted Iain as he got back into the car. He stood at the door of the close in a daze, laughing and waving goodbye. Only as his chuckles resounded and died in the interior of the building did he emerge from his dream state.

A wintered, mountain wind parried the echoes and thrust their mocking resonance back at him, reminding him of another problem he had yet to face and another coincidence. He paused, or was it confirmation? Shouldering his rucsac he limped slowly up the stairs to the flat.

ON THE MASTER'S TRAIL

By Greg Strange

IT WAS DARK and blowing a hoolie as Brian Findlay and I ran the gauntlet of yet another long icy section on the track beside Loch Muick. At times like this I sometimes question my motives for going winter climbing. Perhaps it has something to do with curiosity. In this high-tech world of push-button weather forecasts and snow and avalanche reports there remains uncertainty. We continue to travel hopefully, knowing that the only way to be sure is to go and see for ourselves.

We were on our way to Creag an Dubh Loch and on this occasion we were not travelling very hopefully. In fact we were in a rather black mood, especially when we found the Dinosaur howff buried and had to huddle behind a much smaller boulder to escape the full force of the icy blast. After a while we noticed two figures approaching across the loch. It was Bill Church accompanying his teenage son Eddy on his first winter climbing outing. As they stood watching the rivulets of spindrift racing down the Central Slabs it was hard to tell whether Eddy was actually enjoying the experience. Personally I had long given up thoughts of climbing when Brian, with his usual optimism, announced that we should climb Sabre Cut.

Central Gully is one of the country's more dramatic corridors. It was particularly so that day. Through the driving snow we could just make out the ice-lined corner of The Giant, while from below the Goliath Icicle looked almost friendly (it didn't once we could see it in profile). Sabre Cut lies just up the gully from Vertigo Wall. It was first climbed by Tom Patey, Freddie Malcolm and Sticker Thom, and although short, it is steep and some might say not a good introduction to winter climbing. Nevertheless, Bill has an easy-going approach to mountaineering and it seemed we were all heading in that direction. This became clear a few minutes later when a break in the weather revealed two climbers already on the route. Encouraged by this surprising coincidence (we thought we were the only fools on the hill that day) we became a united party of four.

I led the first pitch up an easy powder-covered slab then the meat of the climb appeared as a long, two-tiered pitch following the main ice flow out on the right. Brian came up and went through. He gave a little whoop as he pulled over the first steep wall of ice. By the time he had climbed the next bulging section Bill had seen enough. He had had to give his own tools to Eddy so not surprisingly he was not keen to lead steep ice with old, borrowed axes. I agreed to take up one of their ropes.

The pitch was excellent. The first step felt close to vertical while the second, although steeper, had formed in a groove so that bridging made it more amenable. When I reached the stance I explained that we would probably have to give Eddy some tension. Brian looked anxiously at his

belay. We worked for a while trying to back up a poor peg then shouted for Eddy to climb. He made good progress at first then he slowed, and finally stopped. We could only imagine the conversation taking place between father and son. Eddy, suddenly realising how steep and hard the ice was, now wanted to go down, while Bill, not wishing to miss the chance of climbing the route, urged him to keep going. The rope came in again then went tight. He was off. Somehow he got back on the ice and with great determination and a tight rope he came straight up the fall line taking the upper bulge direct. He even managed a wry smile as he came into view.

A final pitch of deep unconsolidated snow led to a vague break in the cornice left by the previous party. On the plateau I searched for a belay then remembering that it would be a while before Bill seconded the main pitch, I scraped a hollow between two flat rocks and lay down to wait.

There was a steady gale blowing and drift quickly began to build up over my legs. I could have moved or kicked out, but I was curious to see how quickly the lower half of my body would disappear. I could not help thinking back to a November day in 1971 when Mike Freeman and I climbed Auld Nick on Hell's Lum Crag in similar conditions. As we made our way that day from the top of 'The Lum' into Coire Domhain, we must have been within a few hundred yards of the Edinburgh schools' party, battling in vain to reach the Curran Hut. I often wonder if we could have done something for them if our paths had crossed. There was a sudden easing of tension in the rope. Someone was climbing.

Once all safely up we descended Central Gully and retraced our steps back across the loch. By the time we reached the bikes the promised thaw had arrived. The snow changed to driving rain and if anything the track was more treacherous than it had been in the morning. Brian and I called in at Glas Allt and found Doug Hawthorn and Rab The Flab - two kindred spirits from Aberdeen. It was they who were ahead of us on the climb. We sat for a while steaming in front of the log fire, gratefully sharing a welcome mug of tea. Then it was back to the howling night and more crunching falls before arriving back at the Spital looking like four drowned rats. We stopped in Ballater on the way home and Eddy announced that he did not think he would ever go winter climbing again! Of course, he has youth on his side. He was up again six hours later to go skiing. The older members of the party had a long lie.

After Sabre Cut we mused the possibility of continuing the Tom Patey theme. There was another Cairngorm Classic which neither of us had done, on which Patey had been one of the first ascentionists. Perhaps the time was right for our 'appointment with Scorpion'.

The Saturday evening walk to the Hutchison Hut was most pleasant. A three-quarter moon rose above the Yalla Moss and lit the last few miles into the coire. We were surprised to find four fellow Etchachan Club members already bedded down. They had been climbing at Sputan and on Creag a'Choire Etchachan, where apparently it had been thawing for most of the day. After a few brews and some good crack we turned in.

Next morning it was clear and frosty as we crossed the watershed en route to Loch Avon. From the foot of Castlegates Gully the big crag looked disappointingly bare with only False Scorpion offering continuous snow and ice. We hummed and hawed for a while then moved across to a small bergschrund at the start of Scorpion. We were keen to make a traditional ascent. After all, that was the main reason for taking the longer Southern approach as opposed to the usual race from Coire Cas.

Surprisingly steep climbing on turf and gravel welded together with black ice led to a snow ramp and an apparent cul-de-sac. The next pitch was the one with the subterranean passage. In my imagination I had always thought this to be a crack which widened to form a chimney, like the one to our left on Redguard. I scanned the wall ahead searching for something that resembled a chimney. The only feature was a rightward slanting hand crack. Still unconvinced I took a belay and brought up Brian.

A few moves above the ledge he reached a position where the crack seemed the only option; then for some reason he gave a small piece of neve a good boot and uncovered a hole in the granite roughly the shape of a large letter box. 'Surely you are not going in there' Like a terrier he began furiously excavating snow from inside the mountain. Soon the sack was abandoned and he disappeared head first into the hole only to reappear five minutes later twenty feet above, back in the line of the crack. Then he was out of sight again, muttering something about a steep wall and big jugs. About seventy feet up he belayed, pulled through one of the ropes and hauled the sacks.

After two attempts at the hole I felt sure I was too large. Perhaps the thought of being wedged by the hips half in and half out was subconsciously holding me back. The solution was to slide face in then wriggle rightwards pushing the axes out in front. Just as I was beginning to relax my right Footfang became entangled with some gear hanging from my waist. I was unable to turn or twist to see what was holding the foot and I could not reach it with either hand. My pulse rate doubled. Now I was really trapped. Fortunately I was just able to move my foot a few inches closer to the back of my leg and somehow the loop released itself. With much relief I hauled out into daylight and completed the pitch.

We wondered at Patey and Mike Taylor's good fortune in finding this improbable through-route. We only knew of two other people who had been through the hole in winter and they were by no means portly or long in limb (large climbers beware). Most of the remainder of the climb was on snow and ice. Conditions were thin yet almost perfect. In the upper gully the so-called winter crux was a move or two on steepish ice, then a long snow chute ran up to a final barrier below the plateau. There appeared to be four possibilities, none of which looked easy. We favoured the original line which went out right on a narrow shelf but had a desperate-looking cornice exit. I took a closer look at the overhang directly above before deciding to go for the cornice. After some fifteen minutes of chopping I offered Brian a shift. By now a second party had arrived from False

Scorpion. It was Sandy Allan, Doug Scott and Jim Fotheringham. Following some discussion Sandy set off for a steep groove up on the left leaving the three of us to shout encouragement and enjoy the fine view across the flat top of An Sticil to Hell's Lum and the plateau of Cairn Lochain beyond.

Sandy made impressively short work of the groove and just as he topped out there was a muffled shout from Brian. Fearing the worst I took in some rope and braced myself. Looking up all I could see was a pair of legs threshing in space, gradually being drawn up through the cornice in short, stacatto movements. It looked absolutely wild.

The pale afternoon light was fading as we walked back across the crusted ice of Loch Etchachan. The situation felt truly Arctic, similar to the 'easy going' on the surface of Weasel Valley in the Cumberland Mountains of Baffin Island. The combination of space, silence, solitude and inner warmth created a magic tingling sensation. We should be thankful that this quiet corner of Macdui retains its feeling of remoteness.

Surprisingly the good weather held right through the following week. Equally surprising was the sad spectacle of Mar Lodge going up in smoke against a backdrop of snow-capped hills and clear blue skies. That was the last day in January. Since then the place has never been out of the public eye as politicians and conservationists debate the pros and cons of purchasing the estate for the nation. Our problem was less complicated. Could we stretch our luck to a third weekend? Creagh Meaghaidh was the place we had in mind and Patey's North Post was where we hoped there would still be some ice.

Late on Friday we were brewing in a layby beside Loch Laggan. It was a memorable night. From time to time thin layers of cloud dimmed the now waning moon while in the Northern sky a faint aurora gave a crimson tinge to the ever changing cloud pattern. Owls were calling, some from the nearby birchwood, others from far across the frozen loch in the forest of Ardverikie. Every now and again sharp, hollow sounding cracks echoed from the ice, further adding to the eerie scene.

A ridiculously early walk to Coire Ardair almost put us at the front of the queue. Our attention was immediately drawn to the narrow, vertical white line of the North Post. We made our separate ways up the long approach slopes, eventually meeting at a small crevasse below the first narrows. The climb was superb. It resolved itself into six pitches, five of which were entirely on ice. The second, a huge ice-draped chockstone, was the crux. Twenty feet of vertical ice, hollow in places and fringed with icicles. A very impressive solo by Mike Geddes in 1972. I was glad it was Brian's lead.

Above an easier section we avoided a chimney by climbing to the Girdle ledge, using an ice runnel out on the right. By this stage the climb bore little resemblance to a gully. A broad, shallow wedge of slabby rock barred the last hundred feet to easy ground. Down this ran bands of pale green ice varying in width and thickness but definitely more substantial on

the right, where the ice formed an inset corner with the retaining rock wall. I pulled round the righthand rib and swung the axes into smooth dense ice. They went in first time and felt good. Initially the easiest way stayed close to the corner until a slight ramp led out into the middle and over a bulge. It was a moment to savour with the whole climb dropping steeply away below my feet. Higher up, a traverse back right gained a perfect stance and rock belay. The final ice pitch finished up a short leaning groove with a tricky undercut start.

We returned to the coire through the Window. By now the sky was completely overcast and there was a hint of snow in the air. Looking back up the Post Face we tried to pick out the line taken by Patey's party on the upper part of the climb. Somewhere they had traversed eighty feet across the terminal face from right to left, but at which level we could not decide. Much later, while driving back over the Lecht, the night took on an unusual warm glow. At the summit we emerged into artificial light and stared in amazement at a line of skiers descending a narrow strip of snow. Floodlit skiing on the Scottish hills. Whatever next?

Shelter Stone

A kind of cave.
A shelter stone.
Some twenty ton
leaning against the cliff.

Welcome enough
in blizzard or rain
or as a howff
to keep the icy stars off

and shelter your light.
You sleep safe under granite.
Out of the dead weight
of the open night.

G.J.F.D.

THE CRACK

by Rob Milne

AS USUAL, the view from the Cairngorm car park was depressing.

It was mid-January, and the view usually is depressing, but this time the hills were bare. At the time we didn't realise that this would be one of the least snowy winters in modern memory, we just thought we were a week early. Since the weather was good, Rab Anderson and I decided to walk into Coire an Lochain anyway and have a look.

An hour later our fears were confirmed. Although there was some snow, it seemed the chances of any routes being in shape looked pretty slim. We sat and told jokes about the weather with the other fools who had walked all the way to the base of the coire. Perhaps it was the encouragement of others, or perhaps the desire to show them up, but soon we were headed up to the crag anyway. We had convinced ourselves that some of the easy routes would at least warrant putting on crampons and the rope. We were too keen to walk all this way and not do a route, even an easy one. When the weather is good, one is obligated to at least try something.

We decided on the line of turf and grassy bays that formed Andromeda. The snow was deeper than it looked, and at least covered the low angled sections. Unfortunately the turf wasn't frozen. We just balanced up the low angle ground. For a challenge, I led an easy pitch with my gloves off. I thought this would be good conditioning for when the snow finally arrived. Half a pitch later, I had frozen fingers and was bleeding from every knuckle. That proved it was winter climbing, I needed to wear my gloves.

After a few enjoyable pitches, we were on the large flat ledge that formed the last belay ledge for Central Crack Route. From there it was an easy pitch to the plateau. The weather was still fine, and there was a lot of daylight left. We were warmed up and feeling ambitious. Conditions were now frozen, and it felt like winter.

Splitting the vertical headwall above us was an intimidating crack. In Colorado, it would be a three-star jam crack. But for Scotland in winter, it looked impossible, yet inviting. It went almost straight up, with a jog to the left at mid-height where it went through a two-foot wide roof. The angle seemed to decrease higher up, although this was an illusion. In fact, the top of the crack splits another overhanging section. There were virtually no ledges on the wall, only the flake and a bay below the roof.

Hundreds of climbers on Central Crack Route had passed under it. Most probably don't even notice it. But now we couldn't take our eyes off it. There was just enough snow to give it a winter aspect. The angle of the wall meant that it wouldn't hold any useful snow or ice anyway. There wasn't even much turf. Rab decided to have a go.

The move off the ground was simple enough; layback from a small flake with the left hand, place a foot high and balance into a little niche below the first roof. Rab stepped up and placed a Friend in the crack. Suddenly it looked completely different. What had looked like a low angled wall now turned vertical. The lack of footledges was all too obvious. The crack was also too wide for torques with the tools.

Rab placed a fist jam under the small roof. From ten feet away, I couldn't see his footledge. He slowly balanced up on one foot. With a long reach, he was able to hook a small chockstone with his axe. He hung there for ages from one arm while he dug out enough snow to thread the chockstone. When I seconded this section, I was amazed to see the foothold. It wasn't a ledge, but a curved indendation about half an inch wide. Although there was a ledge on the left, one had to lean to the right to get the balance right. The only real option for the feet was friction against the small ripples. In crampons, this doesn't work so well.

The next moves were desperate. The axe over the chockstone was solid, but there were no other tool placements. I had to palm the rounded edge of the crack and pull. Quickly I spotted another ripple for my crampon points and leaned back. I tried to mantel on the one hand, but had to lean back to get my feet to friction against the wall. This was modern hard mixed climbing. One tool placement and nothing for the feet. Although the protection was at Rab's nose when he was starting this set of hard moves, it was well below his feet before he was safe again.

My indecision cost me and I skidded off. On the second try, I combined laybacking from the edge of the crack with a toe jam with my crampon points. This time I focused on a few ripples and managed to get some lift from my feet. A few grunts later and I could pull into the crack and jam up to the roof. I put my Colorado jam crack education to good use.

The roof and flake had taken Rab a long time. The flake was too wide and rounded to take protection. The only other crack was too shallow. Under the roof was good gear, but the hard move was five feet higher. Given the difficulty, that was too long a potential fall. With great difficulty he finally managed to get a reasonable peg into the crack in the middle of the move.

I can clearly remember him making the big move. He slowly reached up with one tool. Gently he reached and grabbed the flake five feet to the left (in other words at full stretch). Suddenly both his feet came loose and dangled in the air. With one good handhold, and a bad tool placement, he somehow got into a layback up the flake. Now it was my turn.

The lack of holds was just cause for concern. The left wall was vertical and smooth. Not even one small ripple for the feet. It did have a thin layer of verglas which would help to hold the points. Under the roof was a good block and it was possible to hook a tool for an undercling. The right arete had one very tiny ripple. After some awkward balancing, I managed to step onto the rounded ripple while underclinging with one axe. The left foot was

placed flat against the other wall both for balance and to get maximum friction. I had a look for the key tool placement.

A few strenuous minutes later I was still looking. Although there was a corner, there was no crack. After a bit of probing I found a wee nick under a tiny roof. It wasn't really a crack, just a gap in the rock. It was wider than my pick, so I would have to torque to get a hold. Since I was going to lean left, this seemed plausible. It was also too short and shallow to take more than the tip of the pick. I had to first pull up on it, then lean left. I thought it would just work.

My shoulder muscles were pulled in every direction at once. I had to lean right to get my foot on the half inch ripple. I had to lean left to torque on the tool. I had to pull straight up to get high enough to reach for the flake. The balance was all wrong, but I managed to get high enough to think about releasing the undercling and reaching left.

To get the angle on the foothold right I had to twist my ankle one way while leaning the other way. This was not an easy move with crampons and plastic boots, but afforded the only chance of staying on the rounded ripple. Just when I could almost grab the flake, I accidently changed the angle of my boot. Not only did both my feet come free, but both hands as well. Time to think about it again.

Rab shouted down that he used a good hook above the peg. I could barely reach to just below the peg. After close inspection, I spotted another ripple. It was four inches higher, but less than a quarter of an inch wide, and rounded. It was my only hope. The move to stand up was even harder. I had to high step onto the tiny ripple and then layback up from the underclinging tool. It was very strenuous to lean back, but was the only way to get the angle right to keep my foot on.

Soon I was probing the crack at full stretch for the hook. My left foot kept sliding where I was trying to smear it flat-footed against the other wall. The temptation to hook the peg was great, but this was too good a line to waste by cheating. Finally I found the hook.

It accepted only a small part of my pick, but felt solid. I slowly pulled up and left. I released the undercling and held myself by one arm. I had to shift my weight onto the foot smeared against the vertical wall. This is no easy trick when you don't have a foothold. I wanted to rush the move before my feet slipped, but had to be steady. At last my gloved hand got the vertical edge of the flake.

Suddenly I felt solid. I let both feet swing free and pulled up. My arms were almost spreadeagled. One hand on the vertical edge of a flake, the other holding my tool in a small, but solid nick. There was a small, rounded ledge to smear a crampon on, and I pulled onto the flake.

From below, it looked like it would now get easy. Rab had still taken his time to protect it. The wall overhung, with the crack leaning right and getting wider, encouraging me to fall off. The crack was too wide for tools, and there wasn't much else. I jammed one arm in the crack and leaned

against the small corner to stand up. All winter we had been carrying a giant bong I had bought in the days of pegs. After owning it for 20 years, it was used for the first time. It was the only piece of gear that would stay in the icy crack.

The last moves were a real struggle. It was like climbing a leaning off-width crack in crampons. Once again, skills learned during my crack climbing days came in handy. With great effort I moved up using a combination of toe jams (in crampons), arm jams and who knows what. Finally, a crack appeared in the final blocks. I swung out onto the steep face from the deep crack. A few solid tool hooks and I was up.

It was a great view. Blue skies and sunshine. There was snow on the top. More snow on the route would have made no difference, it was too steep and lacked any ledges or turf.

Sitting on the cairn we celebrated. The day had looked hopeless, but our keenness had produced a route. Although the snow gullies and ice climbs were not in condition, the hard mixed routes didn't need much snow and hence came into condition quickly. We couldn't ask for better conditions. More snow would not make the climbing easier, would cause a lot of digging and snow clearing, and make the arrangement of protection harder.

Although the route had been done in summer, no one was sure of its exact grade or name. It is a direct finish to Central Crack Route, but at a very different grade. Rab just called it 'The Crack'.

The last problem of the day was how to grade the route. The Crack is typical of the harder modern mixed pitches. It is much harder than the older grade IV and V mixed routes, but too short to get a traditional grade VI. A leader able to do only mixed Grade V, wouldn't have a chance on that pitch. Only leaders with a lot of mixed experience could lead it in the clean, no falls style which Rab had just exhibited.

The Crack is exactly the type of climb that is motivating a change in the grading system. Overall the climb is a Grade V. But because of the technical nature of the climbing, a technical pitch grade is accurate, and the only way to convey the needed leading skills. Under the new system, this route would get a technical grade of 8. Deep Throat in the same coire is a typical 7. On a 7, hooks, torques and small rock footholds are essential in places, but these are always combined with larger rock holds and good tool placements. An 8 requires good crampon and tool work, with few rock hand and foot holds. Just as on this climb, there are major sections where the use of such techniques are required. There is not yet a consensus whether any pitch climbed so far would warrant a 9.

During the walk back to the car, we continued to discuss the grading. The route deserves three stars and also to become a classic pitch. The technical grade for The Crack will help others to assess whether they should attempt it. However, if you eventually try it, it will be easier for you. I've just told you the secrets of the hard sections!

MUNRO'S TABLES, 1891-1991

By Robin Campbell

IN THE YEAR following the centenary of publication of these Tables it is worth pausing to look back at the original list. In the eight editions that have appeared since 1891, much has been changed. However, there have only been two major revisions. The first of these was Munro's own revision, which appeared in 1921 when the Tables were published in Section A of the Club's Guide (known in later editions as the 'General Guide'). The second major revision occurred in 1981 when Jim Donaldson and Hamish Brown instituted certain reforms, possibly following the prescriptions of Frank Bonsall (see SMCJ, xxx, 153 and 254). In the intervening period of 60 years the only changes made were consequent on changes in mapped heights and hill names. It is generally recognised that the 1981 revision was a substantive one: indeed Donaldson and Brown have been castigated by many commentators for daring to tamper with the Holy Writ of Munro! However, it is not widely recognised that Munro's own revision was also substantive, involving an altered view of the significance of height in deciding what constituted a separate mountain. So my purpose in the present article is to establish the nature of the changes between 1891 and 1921 and to offer an account of the criteria operated by Munro.

Since Munro died in 1919, the 1921 Tables are posthumous. President Ling made the following observations in his Prefatory Note:-

'Unfortunately, [Munro's] revision was only partially completed at the time of his death, and no definite information has been found as to his views on many facts that had been brought to his notice. In these circumstances, it has been thought desirable simply to reissue the Tables substantially as he left them, leaving the debatable questions of inserting additional tops, or of deleting old ones, to be settled when more complete information is available.'

Before 1969, editions of the Tables were supplemented by clarifying Notes. While most of those in the 1921 edition were supplied by Munro, there are various other notes added. Fortunately these are clearly marked as 'foreign' additions and so it is reasonably easy to distinguish in this edition what is attributable to Munro and what is not. In the quotation from Ling the weasel word 'substantially' implies that there may have been some tampering after all, and this possibility is kept open later in Ling's Note, when he observes that 'the re-classifications of the new tops, cancelled tops, and separate mountains are all from Sir Hugh's card index, *with only a few exceptions*.' So it may be that the 1921 Tables are not quite the Holy Writ (Revised) of Munro. My own guess is that there was very

little tampering, and that little rather unimportant. At any rate, subject to this small doubt, it is clear that the 1921 Tables represented Munro's view of what constituted a 3,000ft. mountain, just as did the 1891 Tables.

The 1891 Tables

Munro drew up these Tables at the Club's request between December 1889 and the summer of 1891. He was then 33 years old: no doubt the vigour of youth was an essential tool for the job! His other tools were the O.S. 1" and 6" sheets, supplemented by advice from other climbers - notably Norman Collie and Colin Phillip - whose knowledge greatly exceeded his own. When he began to compile the Tables he had visited only 42 tops (counted from his Application Form and early articles in Volume 1). The 3,000ft. tops are spread over 30 1" sheets. The number of 6" sheets to be consulted would obviously vary considerably, with a maximum of 36 per 1" sheet. A guestimate of 600 maps in total would not be far off the mark. The two sheets provided quite different information: there were no contours on the 6"; on the other hand, there were very few names and spot heights on the 1". So Munro's effort was indeed heroic. That there were a number of anomalies and even a mistake or two in his Tables is hardly surprising. The surprising thing is that there were so few.

Three years ago I published a piece about Munro in the Journal in which I drew attention to the anomalous listing of the Inaccessible Pinnacle in the 1891 Tables. Although listed as higher than Sgurr Dearg and clearly marked as belonging to Sgurr Dearg, Sgurr Dearg summit is counted as the Munro, and the Pinnacle as a mere Top (I use 'Top' with capital T to mean 'top that is not a Munro'). What I did not realise at the time was that this type of anomaly was to be found elsewhere in the Tables. The anomaly may be defined as follows:-

1) Two tops are such that each is the nearest top to the other and at least one of them must be reckoned a Munro.

2) The lower top is designated as a Munro and the higher only as a Top.

In fact, as Table 1 shows, there are 8 such anomalies in the 1891 Tables. In the Table I have indicated the current name for each top where it is substantially different. The names of some tops are marked with an asterisk. This signifies that the top is named only on the 6" sheet available in 1891. Absence of an asterisk means that the top is named on both 1" and 6" sheets. Hereafter I shall use 'unnamed' and 'named' with these meanings. The heights given are those of the 1891 Tables and follow the conventions described on p.278: that is, a plain height signifies that a height is given on both 1" and 6" sheets and that these heights agree. If they disagree, or no spot height is given on the 1", then the 6" height is given first and the 1" height or contour is given in brackets. When no 6" height is available, the 1" contour height is given, or an approximate height from members' own surveys.

Case	Name	Height	Mtn	Top	Section
1a.	Beinn Dheiceach	3074	231	423	3
	(Beinn Cheataich)				
1b.	Meall Glas*	3139(3000)	-	363	
2a.	Meall Chuir	3007	274	499	3
	(Meall a'Churain)				
2b.	Sgiath Chuil*	3050ap	-	445	
3a.	Crom Leathad*	3441	80	140	6
	(Stob Poite Coire Ardair, East Top)				
3b.	Creag an Lochan*	3460(3250)	-	128	
	(Stob Poite Coire Ardair, West Top)				
4a.	Maoile Lunndaidh	3294	126	214	9
4b.	Creag Toll a'Choin*	3295(3250)	-	213	
	(deleted 1981)				
5a.	Meall nan Ceapraichean*	3000c	282	529	12
5b.	Ceann Garbh*	3063(3000)	-	430	
6a.	Meall a'Chaoruinn	3004	279	509	15
	(deleted 1981)				
6b.	Fuar Bheinn	3064(3054)	-	428	
	(A'Bhuidheanach Bheag)				
7a.	Carn Bhac	3014	269	491	15
	(Carn Bhac, S.W. Top)				
7b.	Top of Coire Bhousneag*	3098	-	402	
	(Carn Bhac, N.E. Top)				
8a.	Sgurr Dearg (Ordnance Point)	3234	157	279	17
8b.	Sgurr Dearg ("Inaccessible Peak")*	3250ap	-	256	

Table 1: 'Inaccessible Pinnacle' anomalies in the 1891 Tables

In Case 5 there is a qualified height for Meall nan Ceapraichean, namely 3000c. This means that neither map offered an exact height; the top is above the 3000ft. contour but below the 3250 contour. Obviously this presented Munro with a difficulty! Whether it is rightly regarded as an anomaly is debatable.

What common factors can be discovered in the 7 remaining anomalies? Cases 1,2,4,7 and 8 share the feature that the Munro is named on both sheets while the Top is named only on the 6". In case 6, while the name Fuar Bheinn appears on both sheets Munro notes that 'The point of which the height is given is 1 1/4 mile N. by E. of the *name* Fuar Bheinn on the maps', so in fact the Top is not named on either sheet, strictly speaking. Case 8 is a special case, since Munro states in the Table introduction that he took Cuillin names from Pilkington's Map and approximate heights from Collie's aneroid measurements. In fact it is clear from examining the entries that he did this only when O.S. heights and names were unavailable. Reference to Pilkington's Map shows a name for Sgurr Dearg Summit, but - despite being clearly indicated as a peak - the Inaccessible Pinnacle is *not* named, a surprising piece of modesty by its conqueror! So, strange as it might seem, it looks very much as if Munro took the presence of a name

on the popular sheet as an important condition for a top to be considered a distinct and separate mountain, so much so that the presence of a neighbouring unnamed top - known to be higher - was disregarded. Case 3 remains unexplained.

This proposal is fairly extraordinary, since (I presume) whether or not a base map name was transferred to the 1" map rested entirely on the whim of the Ordnance Survey. It seems very odd that Munro should have taken the Survey's preferences into account, unless he was so pressed for time that he felt that, having to start somewhere, he might as well start there.

An obvious first question to ask about these anomalies is whether Munro applied this curious rule in every case where he might have done so. What must be examined are cases where we have two tops in proximity, the lower named and the higher unnamed, one of which must be deemed a Munro. Apart from the 8 anomalous cases, there are 3 which are not anomalous, shown in Table 2.

Name	Height	Mtn.	Top	Section
Geal-Charn*	3688(3500)	31	51	5
Aonach Beag	3646	41	64	5
Stob Coire an Laoigh*	3659(3500)	35	57	5
Stob Coire an Easain	3545	-	100	5
Aonach Meadhoin*	3284(3250)	131	221	8
Carn Fuaralach	3241	-	274	8

Table 2: Pairs of tops where an unnamed higher top is a Munro.

Munro had visited the first two of these cases and gives interesting explanations (when none is required) in the accompanying Notes, as follows. 'It will be seen that although unnamed and only a 3500 contour given on the 1" map, Geal Charn is the culminating point of the large range immediately to the N. of Ben Alder'. Although Stob Coire an Laoigh is not mentioned, 'It will be seen that although unnamed on the 1-inch map and only a 3750 contour given, Stob Coire Claurigh is the culminating point of the large portion of the Lochaber hills, of which Stob Coire an Easain appears on most maps as the most prominent.' Similar comments are offered about the unnamed Munros west of Lochnagar in Section 16. It is plain from these Notes that Munro was tempted to treat these cases anomalously. Only his personal acquaintance with the topography stayed his hand! There is no evidence that Munro had climbed Aonach Meadhoin, but he did visit Glen Affric, traversing to Glen Shiel, in 1889 (see his retrospective article in SMCJ, xv, 67) and may well have examined the group from a distance, since he enjoyed fine weather. These cases then, with the possible exception of Aonach Meadhoin, tend rather to support the view that Munro strongly favoured - even to the point of height anomaly - tops marked prominently on popular maps.

Although the 8 anomalous cases are evidence enough for my claim - since they are otherwise quite inexplicable - it is interesting to examine

Photo: Campbell Collection

Sir Hugh T. Munro (left), in conversation with Robin Campbell

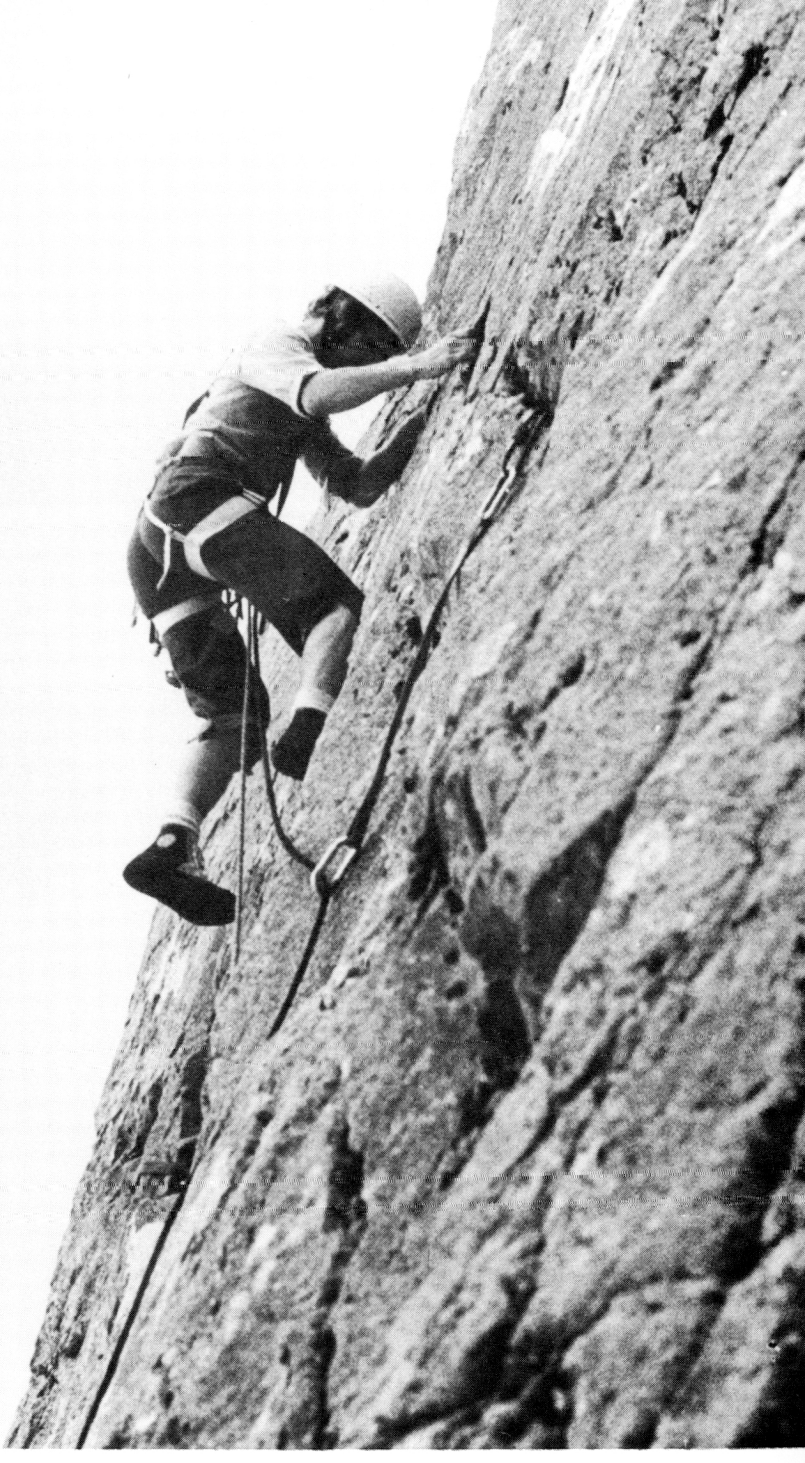


Photo: K. V. Crocket

A. Walker starting the Serendipity Variation, Minus One Direct

other aspects of the Table for supporting evidence. For example, we might expect Munro to apply a rather high criterion of *separation* when considering the 'promotion' of an unnamed top to Munro but a low criterion of separation when contemplating the 'demotion' of a named top to Top - a kind of banker's spread! Various measures of separation were discussed by Bonsall in the articles referred to: I have used his own measure - the Naismith time to walk to any higher ground.

Considering the named tops first, there are 306 of these in the Table and 59 of these are 'demoted' to Top. All but a handful have separations of 22 minutes or less. There is an obvious factor common to the remainder, which is that they are tops in mountain groups with distinct *range* names - Liathach, Beinn Eighe, An Teallach and Ben Wyvis. In each of these ranges there is no top with the same name as the range, and in none of them did Munro designate more than one Munro. Yet Mullach an Rathain of Liathach has a separation of 42, Sail Mhor of Beinn Eighe 52, Glas Mheall Mor of An Teallach 30 and Feachdach of Ben Wyvis 52. So Munro plainly considered that such ranges should have only one Munro, regardless of separation, and so the criterion applied has to be modified as follows: for a named hill to be accounted as a mere Top it must have a low separation unless it is a top of a distinctly-named range. I am left with one exception, which is Braeriach South Plateau. This named Top has a very large separation of 44 or so, as noted by Bonsall, and does not belong to any distinctly-named range.

There are 232 unnamed tops in the Table and 36 of these were 'promoted' to Munro. Thirty of these have separations of 32 minutes or more. Of the remaining 6, one is the inexplicable case of Crom Leathad already mentioned and another is An Gearanach (Mamores). This latter top was visited by Munro in 1891 and reckoned to be at least 3250 ft., thus higher than neighbouring Stob Coire a'Chairn (3219). However, he was plainly unsure of himself and entered it in the Table as 3200ap. It may be that he made both tops Munros because of these uncertainties. However, the remaining four unnamed Munros seem to have rather low separations and for some reason the presumed 'banker's spread' has not been applied so as to exclude them. These are Stob a Choire Mheadhonach, Sgor Choinnich (Corrour), Creag na Dala Moire (Ben Avon) and Sgor an Lochain Uaine (Cairn Toul). The last three were demoted to Top in the 1921 revision.

A final fascinating product of my scrutiny of these Tables is the discovery of a serious clerical or typographical error. In Section 8 An Socach (Affric N.) is listed as Munro 283 and the following top, Creag a'Chaoruinn, is listed as Munro 265. Creag a'Chaoruinn has a separation so low that it is barely measurable, easily the worst Munro in the Table. However, the top-number for An Socach is 486 and for Creag a'Chaoruinn it is 127. Evidently the Munro-numbers are far too high. What happened was that the Munro-number of 283 belonged to the preceding top - the Ridge South of Creag a'Choire Aird, and the Munro-number of 265

belonged to An Socach. Most unfortunately, these two numbers had slipped down the page a notch somewhere in the process! So Creag a'Chaoruinn was intended by Munro to be a mere Top and the Ridge South of Creag a'Choire Aird was intended to be a Munro. These designations and numberings are listed correctly in Table II of the 1891 Tables, which of course nobody but a pedant would read. So here is a further flaw in Robertson's traverse of the Munros. His notebooks show that he took the trouble to climb insignificant Creag a'Chaoruinn but neglected the worthy Ridge South of Creag a'Choire Aird! Robertson must have remedied this deficiency later since, along with Munro, he is credited with supplying an aneroid height for this top in the Notes to the 1921 Tables.

The 1921 Tables

The 7 certain anomalies in Table 1 were all set to rights in these Tables, showing that Munro had come to the view we share today, that where relative height and other criteria are in conflict, height wins! Several named Tops were added, resulting from the demotion of unworthy Munros, showing that he had narrowed the previous 'banker's spread' of 10 minutes or so. This narrowing of the spread was applied only to the lower end, since the only genuine promotion of a previously-unnamed Top was Na Gruagaichean. The application of the distinctly-named range principle remained in place, unchallenged until the Donaldson/Brown reforms. Of course, it would have been impossible for Munro to persist with his enthusiasm for named tops, since - as a result of his own efforts - the Ordnance Survey had now added 76 named tops to their 1" maps, bringing the total of named tops to 382.

A Moral for Baggers

Given the considerable differences between Munro's and the present Tables, a question which often presents itself is what the intending bagger should climb. Some advocate completing the original Tables, on the grounds that only these hills carry the *imprimatur* of Munro. But against this we can be perfectly sure that Munro would have included the Fisherfield tops had he known that they were of adequate height, etc. Moreover, as I have shown, the 1921 Tables are very largely Munro's own revision. Only very minor changes were applied in the revisions of 1933, 1953, 1969 and 1974: so all of these lists carry the stamp of Munro too. Most baggers adopt the strategy of completing the Tables current at the time of their own round. This occasionally presents difficulties when a new edition of the Tables appears *en route*! This strategy, though very satisfactory from the commercial point of view of the Scottish Mountaineering Trust, suffers from the drawback that, to the bagger, the arbitrariness of his quarry is very evident, particularly in the case of the pursuit of Munros, rather than Tops. In truth, this arbitrariness is inevitable. I have demonstrated, I hope, that Munro himself changed his mind about what were Munros between

1891 and his death, and in quite a fundamental way. As he wrote in 1891 (p.281), 'The decision as to what are to be considered distinct and separate mountains, and what may be counted as "tops", although arrived at after careful consideration, cannot be finally insisted on.' So no bagger should submit to bureaucratic constraints imposed by Masters of the Tables or Clerks of the List. The individual bagger should choose whichever one of the published lists suits best, or better still make up his own Table - after careful consideration, of course, and bearing in mind the recommendations of Mr Bearhop, or whoever! Finally, these ruminations suggest an alternative for the bagger too weary or aged to contemplate moving on from the Munros to the Tops. Climb all the demoted Munros!

THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

By Alan Dawson

ONE OF THE problems faced by English walkers in Scotland is trying to talk about where they're going, where they are, and where they've been. I suspect that many Scots face similar problems, though they seem less willing to admit it. The English are well known throughout Europe for their pathetic attempts at speaking even a few words in another language. In this respect only the Americans are regarded as equally inept, though they seem less conscious of their linguistic inadequacies - even rather proud of them.

Many English speakers seem to see little point in attempting to learn anything in another language, since there are perfectly good English equivalents for all those foreign words. When it comes to the names of Scottish hills however, this is not the case, and so the problem arises of what to call the damn things. Ben Nevis is fairly straightforward of course (though you may come across attempts to call it Beinn Nibheis), but as 90% of the rest have Gaelic names, there is very little correspondence between what is printed on the map and the supposedly correct pronunciation.

Some guidebooks do their best to be helpful by including lists of selected Gaelic words and names and their English equivalents. I have found it well worth studying the phonetic pronunciation given in Munro's Tables before setting out for the hills. Somehow you feel very foolish when you return from a walk and discover that you have climbed a set of hills that sound completely different to those you have been talking or thinking about during the day.

The obviously unpronounceable names are not too bad - no-one can seriously be expected to say something like 'Leabaidh an Daimh Bhuidhe' correctly. It's the deceptively straightforward names that catch you out. Take An Teallach for example; a magnificent mountain, which I have been forced to retreat from by a severe blizzard in late May. It is a mountain to be treated with the greatest respect in fact. An Teallach was the subject of a fine drama/documentary produced by BBC television a few years ago. This reconstructed the circumstances of a tragic accident and the heroic attempts by the leader (Iain Ogilvie) to rescue his two companions. The introduction to this film, by Hamish MacInnes, revealed to me that the mountain is not called 'Ann Tee Lack' at all, but something like 'An Chellach'. Somehow a discovery like this changes the way you feel about a mountain.

A more bizarre example is that of Ben Chonzie - a fairly undistinguished Munro, but one that is conveniently located for climbing in the morning and still allowing time for a long drive south the same day. On paper it looks

easy - 'Ben Chon Zee'. Yet according to Munro's Tables it is either 'Ben Honzay' or 'Ben ee Hoan'. Even the security of being able to say 'Ben' is not always guaranteed - they would have us believe that 'Beinn' is generally pronounced 'Bine', though I remain very suspicious of this one.

One of my favourite phonetic descriptions in Munro's Tables is that given for Ben Lawers. All it has to say is "pronounced as in English". You have to admire the cheek of it - how on earth do you say 'Lawers' in English I've heard many variations - 'lawyers', 'laywers', 'lorwers' etc. Most people seem to mumble something like 'Ben Laws' and hope they get away with it.

There are different schools of thought about how walkers should try to tackle the Gaelic problem. One approach is to try to 'go native'. This means looking up the recommended pronunciation beforehand, trying to use it and hoping that others will do the same. Using this tactic it is possible to pick up a few of the rules, e.g. pronounce both 'Bh' and 'Mh' as a soft 'V', and generally ignore the last half of any word. This strategy does not always work however. For a start, the phonetic pronunciation of hills less than 3000 feet high is not widely available - and there are an awful lot of such hills. Furthermore, as anyone who has attempted communication abroad using a tourist pronunciation guide will know, what's spelt out in a book does not always prepare you for the real thing when uttered by someone who actually knows the language. This was vividly brought home to me a few years ago by a friendly farmer in Glen Lochay.

Easter 1988 brought a settled period of brilliant weather to much of Scotland. Good Friday was dull, with snow showers on the hills, but the next four days were fine, sunny and hot. The main disadvantage of this weather was that the snow remained soft everywhere. Where it was deep as well, this meant very heavy going underfoot. The weather was too good to miss though, and so after four days of superb but tiring hill walking around Glen Clova and Glen Shee, my partner and I decided to make the most of the last day of our holiday by tackling Creag Mhor and Beinn Heasgarnich. It was the first time we had visited Glen Lochay, and we were very impressed. On the map the three-mile walk along the glen (from the end of the public road at Kenknock) looked a bit of a chore before we could begin the 'proper walk'. In practice it was thoroughly enjoyable, largely because our eyes remained focussed on a sharp peak that glistened a snowy brilliance in contrast to the pure deep blue of the surrounding sky. Inspection of the map (or rather the maps - as usual our route kept crossing from one to another) revealed this to be Ben Challum. This is not a particularly distinguished-looking hill when seen from the A82 near Tyndrum, but it was a real jewel seen from Glen Lochay in these conditions.

The ascent of Creag Mhor via Stob nan Clach was hard work but invigorating, with views that grew more stunning as the top grew nearer. To begin with the nearby Corbetts (Cam Chreag and Beinn Chaorach) were dominant, together with Ben Challum, but on the summit ridge it was Ben

Lui that insisted on its presence, showing near perfection of form and beauty from this direction. By contrast the normally impressive Bridge of Orchy hills looked relatively featureless and indistinct from each other. As ever, Ben More and Stob Binnein were familiar landmarks, while Ben Cruachan looked mightily impressive even though about 25 miles away.

The heat was so intense that we were genuinely relieved to see a thin film of high cloud form in the centre of the sky. I was even able to remove the handkerchief that was protecting my scalp from further damage. Already my forehead and lips had started to crack, encouraged by the blinding reflection from the snow and my obstinate refusal to limit the damage by smearing slimy stuff all over my face.

On top of Creag Mhor there was a short, north-facing slope where we encountered the only ice of the day - a small patch but just angled enough to make us feel that the ice axe was a healthy reassurance. We declined to take the direct descent to the col, but ran down the more gentle slope north towards Meall Tionail.

The sight of 'Meall Tionail' on the map reminded me of another strategy for coping with the names of Scottish hills. At 895 metres high, Meall Tionail is not far short of 3000 feet, and if it were located in England or Wales it would have appeared in many lists over the years as a summit of great significance. In Scotland however it has been widely ignored, and no doubt this state of affairs will continue. I would have widely ignored it myself, but for its name. Even now I don't know the correct pronunciation, but it looks irresistibly like 'Meall Toenail', and that is how I will always think of it.

This game of inventing English equivalents for Scottish names is probably frowned upon by hardened Scots, but I know from experience that it can be a great aid to remembering the 'names' of hills as well as an aid to communication amongst the English. It is not a game I am particularly skilled at, but I can appreciate the talents of those who are. Our friend Garrett, for example, was a master of the art. He first revealed this talent on a trip to the French Pyrenees in 1985. French is of course a tricky language for anyone, not least the French, but most of us have some vague memories of French teaching at school, so we at least have some idea of what a French word ought to sound like. For example, we know that as in Gaelic you can generally ignore the second half of any word. Not Garrett however. His inability to master even the simplest of foreign words was almost admirable. Yet this incompetence was also a source of great creativity, as he developed the ability to translate names into English. At first inadvertent, he managed to nurture this talent, refine his craft, and ultimately try to pass on his teachings.

I think his initial strategy was to look at the first and last letters of a word and guess the rest. So en route to the Pyrenees we passed through places such as Blouse (Blois) and Chatterbox (Chateauroux), and later visited Luncheon (Bagneres du Luchon) and Gridirons (St Girons). We also made an abortive attempt on Mount Pernod (Mont Perdu). In Scotland

the following year Garrett's innovation grew more daring, as we climbed Tom O'Connor (Tom a'Choinich), A Bloody Bog (A'Bhuidheanach Bheag), Big Cheesecake (Bidein a'Choire Sheasgaich) and Stop Gobbling the Chocolate (Stob Coire a'Chearcaill). This last name may not mean much to those whose horizon begins at 3000 feet, as it's only a Corbett, but it looks very tempting under snow from Corpach, where we happened to be staying at the time.

I occasionally tried to put these tactics into practice but I could only come up with really obvious translations such as Ben Eunuch (Beinn Eunaich) and Meryl Streep (Streap). I remember on the long walk up Glen Squib (Gleann na Sguaib) from Inverlael, near Ullapool, that a small group of us were missing Garrett's presence. The problem was, we had trouble remembering the names of the Munros we were intent on bagging. We knew Beinn Dearg all right, as its name was on the front of the map and it was the dominant peak in the area. It was the others we didn't know. After consulting the map again and giving the matter some thought, we decided that Meall nan Ceapraichean could be known as 'Me No Capricorn', while Beinn Dearg was simply 'Being a Drag'. Someone suggested Cona Coffee for Cona'Mheall, but I felt this wasn't good enough - Garrett would have done better. I've no idea what he would have made of Eididh nan Clach Geala, but as it happened time and weather prevented us getting that far. We had also decided not to attempt nearby Am Faochagach, as we had read that it could only be reached by wading waist deep though a stream, if you were lucky! It wasn't too difficult to think up a suitably abusive English translation for that one. Garrett would have appreciated it I'm sure.

All these memories flitted through my brain as we turned away from what had now become 'Meall Toenail' and began to plod through some deep drifts toward the slopes of Beinn Heasgarnich. The ascent was enjoyably steep in places but never difficult, as we weaved a route through the snow patches, pathetically trying to keep our feet dry. The views from the summit ridge were not as spectacular as those from Creag Mhor, as the light had become a little less brilliant. On the other hand, we had an excellent view of Creag Mhor itself, and the satisfaction of looking back at the distance we had covered. The route was picked out for a long way by our footprints in the soft snow. We had seen no-one else all day. The only sign of human presence was another pair of footprints that we had been following since the summit of Creag Mhor. They looked fairly recent.

Up to this point we hadn't decided which way to descend from Heasgarnich. There was no obvious route from the map, so I thought we'd wait and see what the terrain looked like from the top. In fact it looked pretty much the same east and south - extensive slopes of very soft-looking deep snow. We eventually opted to head east to join the private road from Glen Lochay to Glen Lyon and finish the walk along the road, rather than return direct to Glen Lochay and retrace our steps from the morning. The going was every bit as wearying as it looked, as we ploughed through the snow at somewhere between knee and waist level. We tried running for

short bursts, taking long strides with legs spread wide, John Cleese-style, hoping somehow our momentum would carry us forward rather than downward, but usually these efforts ended in an undignified plunge into a particularly soft and deep patch. Skis would have been ideal, except that they would have been a useless burden until then, and anyway neither of us had ever tried skiing.

When the snow eventually thinned out the peat hags took over, and it was a great relief when we reached the road just upstream of a small loch. I generally enjoy having a couple of slow gentle miles at the end of a long hard walk, to savour the pleasures of the day and look forward to a couple of drinks and a meal in a nearby pub. And, I have to admit, to mentally tick off some more hills from the list. I think I was reflecting on this as we descended the zigzags in the road towards Kenknock. By this time we could see that our van was now alone in the makeshift car park at the end of the road. It was after 8pm, and we had begun to wonder whether we would find a pub still serving food by the time we reached it. We had still seen no one all day, so it was something of a surprise when strolling up the hill towards us we saw a local farmer, coming to check on some of his calves. We exchanged greetings, commented on the wonderful weather, and said how attractive we found Glen Lochay.

'Where've you been then' he asked innocently. He was genuinely interested. My hesitation must have been obvious. As far as I was concerned we had climbed two hills - one called 'Craig More' and one called 'Ben Hees-gar-nick'. Yet somehow I knew I probably hadn't got the names quite right. With brilliant anticipation he told us their real names:

'Crayak Vorr and Beinn Heskarneech I expect!'

'Yes, that's right'.

It was so obvious, hearing him say their names so quickly and naturally. Somehow seeing written down the phonetic 'Heskarneech' gave me no idea of the proper pronunciation, with correct speed and stress.

'Aye, that's a grand walk today. How many Munros is that then?'

'61' I proudly replied. As I'd just been counting up while walking down the road I didn't need to stop to work it out. He laughed at the fact that I was obviously keeping a careful count. We chatted for a few more minutes - we enjoyed his natural welcoming friendliness and interest, while he enjoyed the fact that we showed such appreciation for his glen and local mountains. I found it hard to envisage a similar encounter in England or Wales. Most farmers are probably friendly enough once you get to know them, but we'd often found them suspicious of walkers, particularly in Wales and Yorkshire, though rarely hostile. Presumably they've seen walls or crops damaged and gates left open by careless walkers, and so they tend to regard everyone as potentially guilty. In Scotland and Ireland farmers seemed to have a rather more positive and welcoming attitude to walkers (a sweeping generalisation of course, but one based on experience).

The encounter left us in good spirits as we quickly got changed and drove down the valley to Killin in the gathering gloom. We knew there was little chance of a meal after 9pm. We dashed into the first pub we came to, which happened to be the Bridge of Lochay Hotel, just outside Killin. It was ten minutes to nine, and we were just in time for what turned out to be an excellent curry. The place was almost empty, but seated at the bar were two men obviously enjoying their beer. One had a face like a beetroot and the other's was several shades deeper. I was reminded of what I probably looked like after four full days in the sun and snow. It was obvious they had been out walking, and I couldn't help hearing their conversation as I was being served. They were from Leeds, but one had given up his job the previous year to concentrate on full-time Munro bagging. He reckoned it would cost him about £50,000 in all by the time he finished. He had 49 left to go, and was desperate to finish them so that he could start to 'relax and enjoy walking for its own sake again'. He made me feel thoroughly sane by comparison.

'Where've you been today then?' I asked.

'Oh we had a super day....saw no-one at all...went over Craig More and Ben Heesgarnick...brilliant. What about you?'

I realised that these were the owners of the feet whose steps we'd followed from the top of Creag Mhor.

'Och we had a brilliant day as well...very hot though...saw no-one either, just a pair of footprints. We've been over Crayak Vorr and Beinn Heskarneech as well!'

The proper names tripped fluently off my tongue as though I'd been born and bred in Glen Lochay. However, I decided not to mention Meall Toenail. They might not have understood what I was talking about. Not everyone has bridged the language barrier.

EARLY MORNING LIGHT ON BEINN ALLIGIN JOHN MITCHELL 1992

SUB-MUNROISM

By Don Green

IS THERE life beyond the Munros? Well, there are the Corbetts and then, for one's declining years, the Donalds. After all, they have for long appeared in successive volumes of The Tables under cover of the phrase, 'and other tables of lesser heights'. And one could finish the book.

Another list remains - the Dochartys. These are hills which, while including Corbetts and Donalds, defy definition and might most safely be described as sub-Munro.

The late William McKnight Docharty, M.C., F.R.G.S., a member of the S.M.C., is No. 13 in the roll of Munroists (1948), Topists (1948) and Furthists (1949). Compleation for Docharty, as for many after him, brought a time for decision: a second round of Munros or 'to open up a new series on fresh ground' with the Munros and Tops 'no more than incidental' He chose the second option.

In the following years Docharty climbed and catalogued the Corbetts, plus what he considered their Tops, independent mountains 'of interest under 2,500 feet' and some of the Donalds. He also went furth to England, Wales and Ireland to list their 3,000 foot eminences and certain lower heights. The fruits of these efforts in the field, at his desk and in correspondence with the Ordnance Survey were published privately in 1954 as 'A Selection of Some 900 British and Irish Mountain Tops', a handsome volume with nine panoramas in black and white from photographs taken by himself.

It was followed in 1962 by two supplements including a Selection of 1,000 Tops under 2,500 feet.

Docharty's trilogy, copies of which he presented to certain mountaineering clubs and individuals, is much more than a meticulous collection of facts and figures, heights and map references. The foreword to the first volume gives a brief biographical sketch of the mountain enthusiast behind the lists. Having nearly lost a leg in the First World War, Docharty went on to become a hillman of the old school of long walks, for which he mapped out detailed itineraries.

The writing in all three volumes is shot through with evocative shafts of mountain experience and weather, and in a time when foreign travel was far less common he could compare and contrast scenery from the Dolomites to Dingle.

To the word pictures, he added the monochromes from his camera. 'While on excursions over homeland hills, I have taken about two hundred panoramas. Conditions and my performance with the Leica have varied

widely, so in selecting the nine which appeared in the first book and the present eighteen I looked for examples where fortune smiled at the time of exposure combined with subjects most likely to be of interest to the hill walker.'

In a 'tribute to the creed of the long traverse' Docharty strikes chords most hill-goers must know in good weather and bad. Who will not recognise his description of doubts relieved when, on breaking cloud after a long descent of compass-watching, landmarks below and around 'take their rightful places in the picture as do the pieces in a jigsaw ...'

To get to the hills and use his time to the full, Docharty would work out masterpieces of transport arrangements. On one expedition he travelled by air from Renfrew to climb Beinn Mhor (2,034 feet) and Hecla (1,988 feet) in South Uist. Then, by means of a succession of MacBraynes coaches and steamers, trains, hired car and friends' cars, he climbed sub-Munros in Mull, Jura and on the mainland, with the two 'final days of the holiday devoted to a couple of excursions on the Galloway hills'.

He was also a cyclist and reveals at one point that he had covered '2,558 miles by bicycle, 5,291 miles afoot' and had 'reached the summits of 1,628 different Mountain Tops' on his homeland hills. It was a record of achievement which the reviewer of the trilogy in the S.M.C.J. considered was unlikely to be surpassed...

SCRIBBLE LING

By D.J. Broadhead

THE GENEROUS presentation by the President of the Ladies Scottish Climbing Club at our Centenary Dinner, of a rebound volume of the CIC log book from 1949-61, reminded me that I had inherited a similar tome when I took over as Custodian of Ling Hut. Anxious to return this piece of history to its rightful resting place in the Club Library, I rummaged through my loft and eventually located the black leather bound volume, embossed in gold leaf capitals 'S.M.C. CLIMBS VOL. III LING HUT' covering the period 1955-81. Having enjoyed flicking through many such books in various huts and bothies, looking for familiar names or the rare interesting or entertaining entry, I thought that some of the entries in this particular book would be of interest to readers of this Journal.

Unfortunately there is no preamble or introductory remarks, just the first brief entry:

1955 April 9 G.S. Johnstone, D.J. Fraser, A. Horne and D.G. Horne

'Ruadh Stac Mhor by way of Coire Mhic Fhearchair, Coinneach Mhor, Spidean Coire nan Clach. Descent by snow in direction of Hut.'

Spanning almost twenty-seven years, the majority of the entries which follow maintain the same factual and economic style. However, the first page is enlivened by the description of a new route, and the only diagram:

1955 July 11 I.H. Ogilvie & P.M. Francis

'Beinn Liath Mhor and Sgorr Ruadh. Probably a new route on Sgoor (sic) Ruadh (sketch opposite). The buttress lies to the west of Raeburn's Buttress & is divided from it by a deep scree filled gully. It is bounded on the left by a series of overhangs and on the right by steep rocks and a prominent pinnacle. In the centre a line of weakness is afforded by a number of vertical cracks. We started just right of the overhangs in a short steep corner and then traversed along a ledge for 40 feet to the right. From there the route runs almost directly upwards, traversing back and forward only slightly to use the easiest line of ascent. The main difficulties ended about 300 ft up where a through route was made below a boulder jammed in the right hand crack. (Cairn just on the left.) Standard:- Very Difficult. From here 400 feet of interesting scrambling leads to the top.'

This entry was made in pencil, and interestingly the first digit of the numbers detailing pitch length have been altered in ball point, presumably in the wisdom of hindsight following a second ascent

Another entry later that month, also in pencil, has an amendment in ink of a censorious nature, underlining with disapproval some dubious practice:

1955 July 28 J. Mallenson, A. White, R.M. Ower

'Rose at 4 am hoping for a long day out, but thick mist all day prevented a full programme. Spent a happy afternoon pegging routes up overhanging boulders/'tut-tut!' and short walls on rocks at the foot of Mullach an Rathain.'

Then as now, University clubs were active in the north during their Christmas and Easter vacations:

1956 January 3-10 C.U.M.C. MEET

'Jan 3rd. R.O. Downes, M.J. O'Hara arrived. P.R.C. Steele, J.M. Scarr later.'

Apparently not satisfied with the attractions of the hills and crags close at hand, some members of this party made a sortie further afield:

'Jan 5th/6th MJO, ROD, PRCS and Miss J. Scarr. Walked through to Lochen Fhada; over to Fion (sic) Loch and down to Poolewe via Kearnsary.'

They obviously liked what they saw, returning to the Carnmor area later that year and the following for an orgy of new routes. However, Ling Hut obviously retained some appeal:

1957 December 11 Mrs. D. Evans, P.E. Evans, G. Cruickshank, M.J. O'Hara

'Arrived by car from Poolewe after an enjoyable if snow spattered few days at Carnmore. No climbing and the weather is now becoming rather unpleasant.

12 December Tidied and departed for places south.'

The party that followed were apparently as active in the kitchen as on the hill:

1957 December 31 St. Andrews University Mountaineering Club New Year Meet

'Bill Bouthrone & Stan Yeoman climbed Cor'an Laoigh of Beinn Eighe ... Weather comparable to summer Alpine conditions.

Returned at 3 pm. for Hogmany (sic) Dinner consisting of:-

VELOUTE AUX CHAMPIGNONS

WIENER SCHNITZER A LIATHACH
ou
BIFTEC A LING GRILLE
DES PETITS POIDS VERTS
CAROTTES TORRIDONES
POMMESAUX COIRE MHICFHERCHAIR

FRUIT COULIN

FROMAGE MOUSETRAP

CAFE NOIR ou CARE AU LAIT

This prowess on the domestic front was gratefully acknowledged by the next party:

1958 January 11 Norman & Mona Tennent

'It was wonderful to come into such an immaculate hut. Thank you St. Andrews. (My wife says due to a mixed party - Maybe that's why Laggangarbh was a bit squalid at times)'

In the days before local club meets filled the hut most weekends, Ling was a popular base for small parties. SMC members were often active with their hill-going spouses and one wonders why it took so long before women were entitled to join.

1957 May J.H.B. Bell & Mrs. P. Bell

'5th May Beinn Dearg; 6th Beinn Liath Mor & Sgurr Ruadh; 7th Alligin traverse; 8th B. Eighe; 9th Spidean a Choire Leith of Liathach. Cold E. wind all days & snowfall at nights a lot 3000' or more ...'

1962 May W.H. Murray & Anne Murray

'May 3rd Traverse of Beinn Alligin.

4th -do.- Beinn Eighe (east to west)

5th -do.- Sail Liath Mor, Sgor Ruadh, Meall Chin Dearg.

Blue skies and sun.'

Most parties tackled these classic ridge traverses in various conditions of weather and season, while for rock climbing the Triple Buttresses of Coire Mhic Fhearchair were ever popular. There was also some notable exploratory activity from the hut:

1960 August C.J.S. Bonington T.W. Patey

'8th August Left 2.30 pm for Coire Mhic Fearchair. Climbed Central Buttress part way, then traversed onto the East Wall of the West Buttress - direct ascent abandoned after 130ft of the vertical section - traversed right onto West Buttress & finished out. Wet.

9th August In the best traditions of Ling & Glover, we picked the most remote hill we could find on the map - An Ruadh Stac - & spent a happy day toiling through bogs etc. culminating in an ascent of the north face mentioned in the guidebook as unexplored. The main cliff is in two tiers & gave 600 ft of excellent V.Diff climbing on gneiss & quartzite. Our route started just left of a prominent white scar up a 200 ft slabby rib of impeccable rock - thence walk 100 ft to left of a prominent wet twisting chimney & take the most attractive line on the upper tier trending upwards for 200 ft, then straight up. Doubtless more routes could be made here, probably shorter & harder. Returned via Annat, much the better path.

10th August Patey reported sick with a large carbuncle on the buttock. Bonington attempted some surgery with a razor blade, but only succeeded in causing a minor haemorrhage. Thence to Kinlochewe in search of a chemists - nearest one is at Dingwall. Returned to Torridon & located the local doctor (female) who supplied the necessary pills - also offered to lance the carbuncle, but this was graciously refused.

11th August Sleepless night for Patey lying on his stomach. Left at noon for Mhic Fhearchair. Climbed Central Buttress to top, thence descended to foot of Far East Buttress & made 1st crossing of the Upper Girdle of Mhic Fearchair 2,000 ft Severe. Route follows an obvious fault fully 2/3 way up the cliff, at half height on the quartzite. Most of the difficult climbing was on the traverse of the Eastern Ramparts as far as the Edge of the East Buttress 4-5 pitches of severe - also on traverse of East wall of the West Buttress - 2 pitches of Severe. A fine climb - very little walking - almost entirely clean rock & continuously exposed. Finished by a new direct variation to West Buttress - the whole of the summit slabby tower being climbed on the left, instead of the usual R hand line which is more indirect. Only difficult move is the start up a clean little wall of 30 ft. Then up the left hand crack behind the flakes. Standard:- Very Difficult.

12th August Day of reckoning. 4 days of dirty dishes to wash up. Then off to Glenbrittle calling at the Cioch of Applecross en route.'

1961 October

'6th October Ben Alligin - A. Fraser, J. Glidden, R.K. Holt, N. Macniven, B. Wakefield (EUMC) R. Smith & A. Wightman (SMC): Left at dawn for Mhuch Fhiercher (sic) (1st Cliff South of Hut). Climbed Eastern Ramparts to top, thence descended to foot of Far West Buttress & made 1st Crossing of the Lower Girdle of Mhuch Fhiercher 200 ft, x.s.

7th October Coire Mhic Fhearchair Central Buttress, Ben Eighe - A. Fraser, J. Glidden, R. Holt.

East Wall of East Buttress - route up centre of steep face! Start below obvious smooth pale diedre. 50 ft - up, right, up & left to ledge. 120 ft - Up corner on left to ledge on left. Pull up to right & climb smooth groove (piton runner). Crawl left over loose blocks, then go up & right to foot of obvious diedre. 130 ft - Go 20 ft right & climb grooves & great flakes onto crest of pillar bounding diedre. Climb half of a corner on right, hand traverse right round edge & go up to stance. 100 ft - step left & climb corridor between roofs to top. Piton Belays. V.S. R. Smith & A. Wightman.

Attempt up grooves 50 ft to right foiled at half height. Ben Eighe. N. Macniven & B. Wakefield.'

If you study your elderly copy of the 'Climbers Guide to the Northern Highlands Area Volume II' you will recognise the description of 'Boggle', though no mention of that first day's activity. Accounts of other new routes seem to have gone no further than the Climbs Book:

1962 June 17

'Central Triple Buttress by 'Brookers Variation'.

W.D. Brooker, R. Harper & C. Gall.

Gnome Wall, Eastern Rampart. (New start - 'Gnomies Passage'.)

A. Graeme Nicol, K.A. Grassick

Fusilage (sic) Wall - new route (R. Wall at top of W Buttress)'

1966 March 19 A. Park, P.F. McDonald, D. Beamish

'Applecross - Bealach na Ba. Climbed Sword of Gideon & 2 new routes on same crag. Both M.S. - 2 obvious lines in gully on right of Sword.'

This latter party was part of an enormous Edinburgh University Mountaineering Club meet, '24 personages in all!' including 'R. Campbell (SMC)'. Custodians were apparently more lenient in those days.

Another Edinburgh party was soon back at the hut, recording two excellent new routes:

1966 May 28 & 29 Bill Sproul, Jim Brumfitt - Squirrels & SMC

'Eastern Ramparts 'SAMURAI' 400' V.S., and Far East Wall 'KAMIKAZI' 350' V.S.'

In contrast, there was little notable exploration in winter, and the true potential of the area remained undiscovered, possibly due to the well documented vagaries of the weather:

1961 December

'30.12.61 A wander round the back of Liathach in deep powder snow - G. Wallace, I. Scott, G. Lehser.

31.12.61 Ascent of first obvious gully on Stuc a'Choire Dhuibh Bhig as seen from path. Deep powder snow with two pitches of water ice - C. Macleay, G. Wallace, C. Stead.

1.1.62 Beinn Eighe, thawing - C. Macleay & C. Pollock

2.1.61 Still thawing

3.1.61 Still thawing

4.1.61 Still thawing

5.1.61 Still thawing probably - went home yesterday C. Pollock, A. Gilmour, M. McKay & M. Watson.'

However, a new decade saw the arrival of new figures who would make a significant contribution to the development of climbing in the area and improvements to the hut itself:

1969 December P. Nunn, A. Riley, D. Goodwin, C. & S. Rowland

'Sat. 27th Dec. Arrived with a surfeit of English Christmas.

Sun. 28th Dec. Set off on beginning of local 'Grand Tour'. To Coire Mhic Fhearchair and up an Alpine approximation to Collie's Climb, finishing up the steep chimney sixty feet left of the dreadfull (?) exit to B Gully, and via rock and snow ramp to top of Central Buttress. (Snow easy with one step) Rock severe with ice and aid.

Mon. 29th Dec. A languid haul into the NE Coire of Liathach, buffeted by a belligerent east wind. Up right hand gully there. Maybe 'George' - see Feb 11.67. Anyway II/III.

Tues. 30th Dec. Seaside trips - to Applecross via Pass of Flying Pigs for some, Tollie for others (Poolewe). Ascent of The Handrail in last half hour of gorgeous daylight, (P.N. A.R.)

Wed. 31st Dec. Eventful New Year's Eve. Some in Fannichs on walkies, some wandering quartz hills behind hut, one dying of the Plague

of Ross. To Achnasheen for Hogmanay to become grateful, drunk and unintentional residents of the Station Hotel after first footing for miles. Returning.

Thursday 1. Jan 1970 Cleanse absolve and leave in vile weather.

CC (Alpha Section) Party - Thanks for the hut. We were unable to take it with us.

1970 April 10 John, Brenda, Andrew & Elizabeth Nisbet

Beinn Liath Mhor.'

An entry between these two suggests the existence of a North-South divide, in hut standards at least!

1970 February W. Skidmore SMC J. Crawford Greenock M.C.

'Saturday 21st Arrived in black night bringing foul weather with us so here follow the moans

1) The hut was dirty (very)

2) Three mantles out of four broken & no spares.

3) Gas a bit low

4) One small pail of coal in the hut & the remainder buried under 1 foot snow between here & Alligin

5) Coal sufficient to demonstrate the uselessness of the stove due to large hole in pipe badly 'repaired' by a piece of tin & some wire

Sunday 22nd. High winds & hail. Cleaned out hut & repaired stovepipe. Now almost up to Lagangarbh standards.

Weather improved throughout week - conditions didn't. Kneedeep powder universally. Apart from the odd pad, concentrated on the social side of things.

Thursday 26th. Involved in a rescue - benightment on Alligin - reached them (English couple) with 2 RAF boys at 10 a.m. and brought them down out of any difficulties. Both well but girl a bit exposed. Easy, well organised rescue.

Friday 27th. Return to civilisation (Greenock)'.

The Climbs Book is not really the best place for making complaints. No doubt there was the intention 'pour encourager les autres' but this merely prompted a couple of succinct comments in the margin:

'IT'S NOT PARADISE SKIDMORE!'

'ACH, QUIT YER HAVERIN, YE GREAT GREENOCK GRUMBLERS! AWA HAME DOON THE WATTER AN STUFF YER GEGGIES!'

Any book of this nature inevitably attracts comments on all sorts of topics other than climbs done. Often attempting to be humorous, the briefest comments are usually the funniest:

1970 December Lomond Mountaineering Club, Glasgow.

'Hogmanay Party in cowshed (friend with key failed to arrive)'.

The plight of the party which forgets the key is a familiar one to custodians, but even they are not immune. I recently received a sheepish call from a roadside phone box from a former custodian of Lagangarbh who fortunately realised his error south of Inverness.

Most of the comment in the book relates to the weather since almost every contributor seems to have felt duty bound to record the conditions encountered. Surprisingly they seem to have been more reticent with their impressions of the climbs recorded. However, a few uninhibited comments confirm that the rock climbs at least are as variable as the weather:

1974 April 21 G. Cohen, I. Rowe, G. Tabbner.

'Groovin' High Far East Wall. Surely the best route in Coire Mhic Fhearchair. Congratulations to 1st ascensionists. + cloud inversions Broken Spectres, Newcastle Browns & French birds.'

1975 April

'19.4.75 West Buttress - Coire Mhic Fhearchair, Beinn Eighe. Very wet on final pitches but a fine buttress with excellent rock scenery. F. Fotheringham & J.R.R. Fowler.

21.4.75 Route 2 - The Bonnaidh Donn - an old Bell climb and not recommended. Pitch 1 only I.D. Brodie & G.J. Paul. Whole route J.R.R. Fowler & J. Durham.'

Surprisingly few comments record the rich wildlife of the area:

1971 September Roger Gaff

'2 Sept. Slioch

3 Sept. Alligin tops and Horns.

4 Sept. Sgorr Ruadh and Beinn Liath Mhor.

5 Sept. Liathach Traverse.

6 Sept. From Bridge of Grudie Ruadh Stac Mor and Traverse of Beinn Eighe Tops.

Fine area this - Heron, Divers, Wild Goats (Slioch) Eagles (Liathach) and very large sea trout and salmon reach the wee lochan ... Look out for Concorde he almost brought down Slioch's ricketty sandstone.'

Nearing the end of the book, one is left with a feeling that part of the appeal of climbing in the North West is the strong element of uncertainty, even on relatively popular routes.

1980 October 25 D. Simpson, S. Kennedy.

'Got lost on Piggot's Route, Central Buttress, padded up verglas on to snow ledges, thereafter all feeling was lost in the fingers, memory is vague thereafter, couldn't decide if summer was finishing or winter had arrived. But Dave really did enjoy his first ever rock (!) climb, or did he? Andy Nisbet had a brainstorm & decided to leave rucksacks at foot of climb, but what can one expect of such an experienced Alpinist?'

1982 January 9

'Helen Geddes & Linda Taylor: Easy Gully of Coire Mhic Fhearchair.

Nigel Rayner, Tony Walne & Mike Geddes: A fine gully of 800 ft, IV, in the coire north of the Giant's Coire, Ben Bhan.

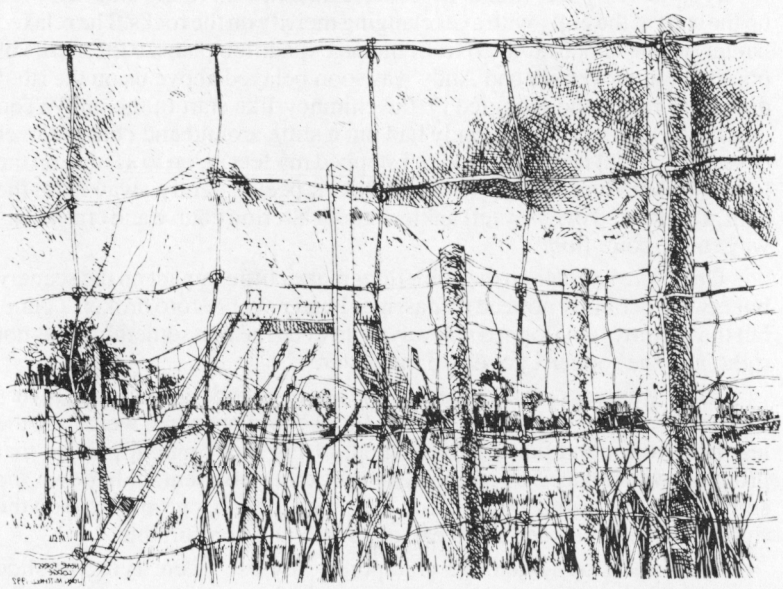
Illumination for the return of both parties spoiled by a full lunar eclipse.'

This is the final entry in the book, followed sadly by a gap of almost a decade in the record of climbing activity from Ling Hut, since the 'Visitors Book' which replaced this one records the barest details of names, dates, home town and club. This has recently been remedied with a new 'Climbs Book' in the hope that users of the hut will continue to record their activities on the hill.

One message on the last page is echoed on almost every preceding page:

1981 October 24-29 Hereford Mountaineering Club

'... Thanks to S.M.C. for the use of this excellent hut once again.'



APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

By Hamish Irvine

HAVING PAID my money and been promised bucketfuls of free wine, I was looking forward to the SMC dinner in Pitlochry.

Plans for the day were very much driven by 'must-do-a-route-before-the-dinner' thoughts, and with little snow or ice to be seen Western Rib in Coire an t'Sneachda was chosen as an easy rock climbing option. Dave Saddler, Andy Tibbs and I left the ski car park at a civilised, early-ish hour to squeeze in a quick climb before driving to Pitlochry for the AGM and dinner. The weather surprised us, being dry and cold with little enough wind to make belaying pleasant, and our expectation of a token route grew to anticipation of a really fine day out.

Puffing our way up the Goat Track we came to hard snow and donned crampons to make our way up to the point where Red Gully and Goat Track Gully go their own ways and Western Rib rises between them. Water ice smeared the lowest rocks of the buttress and dribbled out of the gullies; not enough to be useful but it persuaded us to start up Red Gully in order to by-pass the initial steep snout of the rib.

A solid belay was found, ropes were attached all round and Andy led up the start of the gully with axes clanging merrily on the rocks. The relaxed banter on our stance rambled from Indian expedition plans to the merits of possible dinner venues and Andy was soon belayed above us on the rib. I quickly scraped and wriggled up the chimney-like start of the gully. Too quickly! The block which Andy had put a sling around and climbed over deserved careful treatment, and as I stepped my feet up on to a ledge on the left, with both hands on top of the block, it peeled gently away from the wall, accelerated over my left ankle without altering course and crashed its way to the coire floor.

One more boulder on the coire floor makes little impact on the scenery but my leg certainly noticed its passing. I had never before broken a bone, but the way my foot flopped sideways told even me that something was not right, and the sooner I got down the better.

Andy was reassured that despite the lethal-sounding crashes, we were 'all right', and began to lower me. At first I could put some weight on the leg, but soon found that any movement of the foot brought pain so that progress was reduced to an inelegant but quite efficient slide down the snow slope. By resting on my good side, with the left leg supported on the right, I was able to keep the break quite still and comfortable.

With one stop to remove crampons - useless when trying to slide smoothly down snow - and another to untie from one rope and transfer

weight to the one held by Dave, I reached the Goat Track remarkably quickly and painlessly. Had it been an exercise I would have been most impressed by Andy and Dave's evacuation of the casualty.

Dave came down and made me comfortable on the track then set off to the car park and a phone. I had brief second thoughts about a Rescue - sure, if I really had to I could crawl the two and a half miles to the car park, but such heroics would certainly be painful and would probably damage the leg. I left the heroism to Dave, who was running to the car park in plastic boots.

Andy was helped by some climbers from Stirling who were passing, and splinted the broken leg against the good one with slings and cord, then lifted me to a level seat against a rock. This was a gripping manoeuvre for me, but the others merely thought I should relieve some of the weight on the leg. The following hour or two passed quickly and comfortably - ensconced in my duvet and Dave's bivvy bag I was quite warm, despite having the shivers, and several passers-by provided entertainment, painkillers and coffee.

A friendly yellow helicopter appeared, dropped smoke flares and then circled annoyingly for half an hour before dropping a crew member on the floor of the coire. I later learned that Coire an t'Sneachda has notoriously awkward down-drafts which were pushing the Wessex frighteningly close to the rocks. The winch-man sweated up the track, clearly not enjoying the hard snowpatch on the way. He was quite happy with my splinted legs and we awaited the return of the chopper to lift me off. It tantalised us with several more sweeps round the coire before hovering nearby and lowering a wire with a pair of wide slings - to tuck behind my knees and oxters ready for the big wheech into the sky.

The winch-man pointed out what I had already guessed - when the weight came on to the two strops that leg would hurt! It did, but sickening spins on the end of the winch-wire took my mind off it quite well. Pulled inside the body of the chopper, we rattled down the coire as the turbulence slammed us up and down.

Soon I was outside Raigmore, loaded on a stretcher and saying cheerio to the RAF crew. A hundred-yard ride in an ambulance took me into the hospital where a syringeful of painkiller went into my bum, and slings, crabs, boots, breeks and long johns came off. As I lay there, comfortably drugged, I weighed up the embarrassment of all this rescue if my leg proved to be just bruised, against the frustration and inconvenience of a broken leg. I was definitely hoping to be embarrassed.

Within an hour I was X-rayed, diagnosed and plastered, and the Sunday Post had phoned. Later, as I tucked into my NHS mince and tatties, I thought of the dinner at Pitlochry, and of Andy inheriting my free wine. I think he deserved it!

CAVEMAN

By Peter Warburton

THE CIRCUMSTANCES of my first visit to Scotland did not, at the time, disturb me although, in retrospect, I realise that they ought to have caused grave disquiet. I had taken a summer job with a holiday organisation. Some secretarial and accounting duties were involved and there was a moral obligation to take part in evening jollities (mainly country dancing of the rougher sort), but the essential element was the leadership of hill walking excursions, as laid down in a fortnightly programme.

The long term effects of this regime were predictable: I became a convinced non-dancer and a solitary walker. In particular, I developed a lasting aversion to the music of Jimmy Shand and to the ascent of Ben Nevis by the waterslide route. However, these blights on my social life lay ahead. At the time I was in clover - all found, plus 30/- per week honorarium and 5/- boot allowance, free passage on the Ballachulish Ferry and on MacBrayne's buses to Fort William, together with profits on all the Bill Thomson postcards and photographic booklets I could sell to the guests.

On my first mountain excursion, in bad weather on the Mamores, I had a stroke of great good luck. A small experienced party were of one mind in believing that we were mistakenly climbing Sgurr an Iubhair when our route from the Lairigmor should have taken us up the S.W. ridge of neighbouring Stob Ban. Nervously I had backed my own judgement. It is the sole merit of quartzite scree to be unmistakeable, even in heavy cloud. The sense of relief when we came upon it is firmly lodged in my memory. A few days later I was on Bidean for the first time with a much larger party. In the afternoon, as I peered into the mist, surreptiously casting about for what the route book insisted was the only safe way down from Beinn Fhada to the 'Lost Valley', I was amused to hear one of the group assuring another: 'He doesn't say much, but he knows every stone of these hills'. With a reputation like that, however spurious, you can get away with a lot, and I did. However, among the shrewd minority who were not taken in by the myth of the great navigator, was 'J'. This was a source of regret, for I aspired to that young lady's good opinion.

Many of the domestic staff of the guest house were girls who, by profession nurses or secretaries, were taking a sabbatical between jobs, attracted more by the opportunity of access to the hills than by the possibilities offered by the evening jollities. I fell into this category and, having spent the previous summer in the same way, had considerable local knowledge. One day, outwith the official programme, a small select group tackled the Aonach Eagach ridge, east to west. I led in the sense that I went first. J, who was familiar with the ridge, was of our number. After Meall

Dearg, not being one of nature's gymnasts, I grew increasingly thoughtful until contemplation of a chimney brought me, after some unproductive scrabbling, to a halt. J expressed impatience and urged me to stand aside so that she could show the way. It seemed a good idea to call her bluff. Up she went - confident, graceful, apparently untroubled by the exposure. From an uncertain perch at the top she then gave instructions in some detail and, worse, reached down, grinning, with the offer of a hand. A symbolic gesture, given her own insecure stance, but very telling.

On my next free day I wrote the words 'Ossian's Cave' in the guest house route book - but in pencil, so that the entry could be rubbed out if, later, that proved politic. It was a perfect day, bright and cool, the rock would be dry and I had plenty of time.

These reassuring thoughts did not survive my introduction to Ossian's Ladder. Progress was deplorably slow, a fact I attributed variously to an introspective nature and to shortness of limb. Nowhere did there seem to be a resting place from which to plan my next move in any sort of comfort. Indeed most of my halts found me inelegantly spread-eagled as in a still from a silent film. I soon learned that holding the pose brought on a nasty attack of the knee wobbles. At this stage I still had some confidence in the secret weapon I was holding in reserve - a washing line bought in the conviction that it would prove an invaluable aid on the descent. I was accordingly delighted to find just one point where this concession to artificial climbing might prove its worth. With infinite care I found the mid-point, knotted the rope to a small knob of rock, wound it round several times and left two equal ends dangling. Eventually I hauled myself ashore, entered my name in the visitors' tin and sat down to a cheerless meal. The floor of the so-called cave lies at so steep an angle that I felt myself in real danger of sliding out into space, sandwich in hand, but it was thoughts of the return journey that made swallowing so difficult.

Advance planning involved the use of the fixed rope for a gymnasium style descent of perhaps half the full pitch, but the fallibility of the anchorage became obvious when I drew level and that little scheme had to be abandoned. Having reached a point 8 feet or so below the belay, I decided to disengage the line. It would not budge. I would not climb back. Emulating Alexander, I resolved the dilemma by unconventional means, effortlessly dismissing from my mind a vague notion that the action might be in breach of climbing etiquette. Happily, the salvage operation was fully vindicated thirty-odd years later when the two ends were used to subdue and truss up a lively old mattress for conveyance to the municipal rubbish tip.

In 1802 Coleridge, after a hazardous descent from Scafell, probably by way of Broad Stand, wrote: 'My limbs were all in a tremble. I lay upon my Back to rest myself, and was beginning according to my Custom to laugh at myself for a Madman ...'*. I recommend this lying down and laughing

* Coleridge at this point had a vision but Allowance must be made for a Poet with a Drug Problem.

therapy; it seems to have a purgative effect on the mind. Sobered and rested, I came to a decision. Rock climbing (sic) was an utterly pointless pursuit. The day, any day, would have been far better spent in the safe pleasure of reaching the top of some new or favourite hill by orthodox means. RESOLVED - that never again would I venture beyond dignified scrambling. Well pleased with this evidence of an incisive mind in action, I prepared an edited account of the expedition in which becoming modesty should not entirely obscure the splendour of the achievement. Although reasonably well read for my years, I had not yet come across Haskett Smith's reference to solo climbing with 'no ropes or other illegitimate means'. I fear that, if I had, it would have been woven, quite shamelessly, into the intended narrative.

In the event, the rehearsal of any such meretricious embellishment to my tale would have been time wasted, for the first performance never took place. J received my news with frank disbelief. Indeed, she hooted and snorted in the melodious way of which only pretty girls are capable. I led her gently to the route book. I spoke earnestly of my name in the tin. Whereupon, with disconcerting swiftness, she changed position. If I could do it, it must be easy and I should go again, taking her. On the instant I was committed. It would be more creditable if I could report having carefully weighed my responsibilities before agreeing, but the SMCJ is a journal of the record and it was not so, although such considerations did disturb my thoughts in the period before our free time first coincided.

That happened when, following a stormy night and a very wet morning, I cancelled the official excursion, a rare event. The rain eased and faltered at noon, but it was not until about 2 p.m. that we reared our bikes against the trees at Achtriochtan. There were already two motor cycles sharing the same shelter and two figures could be seen on the near bank of the river. We agreed on speed in case they should be bound in our direction. At the river we exchanged brief greetings with two climbers we judged to be Glaswegians. No information on destination was offered on either side. The two were engaged in an elaborate rope coiling routine, an operation they briefly interrupted to look on, with unspoken disapproval, as we crossed the stream, after a minimum of reconnaissance, by the direct, wet feet method. We made good progress up the hillside and, a few minutes later, noticed the serious pair, ropes now over their shoulders, patrolling the bank in search of an approved crossing point.

I cannot claim that our time on the climb showed much improvement on my first effort as the wetness of the rock largely offset the advantage of previous experience. The remains of the line were still in place, looking old and weathered. I was reminded of dramatic sketches of Whymper's party on the Matterhorn (did it break, or was it cut), but J confined herself to a succinct inquiry as to its supposed use. The view across Glencoe from the cave was impressive without being exhilarating: the 'horrible grandeur' of eighteenth century mountain descriptions came to mind, but did not seem a suitable topic. J was not her normal ebullient self. I recognised the mood

Photo: Donald Bennet

Ben Cruachan and the Taynuilt Peak from the East

Photo: K. V. Crocket

'Two halos and a bunnet.' Smart, Leval & Weir on Garbh Bheinn of Ardgour.

and had just enough sense not to comment. She surprised me by showing no interest in the visitors' tin perhaps it looked too much like a repository for last messages. Even my attempt at portrait photography was barely acknowledged. The result reflects the limitations of a box Brownie in such unpropitious surroundings. J is just about recognisable to the partial eye a brooding figure in the general murk - but it does not do her justice. We did not linger.

Soon after we began the descent I looked down between my legs to see two hooded faces gazing anxiously upwards. Assuming as suave and genial a tone as I could muster, I apologised for any hold up that we were causing and confessed that we were a slow party. The reply was an assurance that we were not inconveniencing them, but would we like any help? Clearly we had been under observation. I declined with thanks. J, not above playing to the pit, now began to deploy a full repertory of girlish squeaks, interspersed with urgent and highly articulate demands for immediate action on my part. Girls did not use bad language in those days but 'For goodness sake, Peter, move. I don't care if you fall off but MOVE. I can't hold on here any longer' was wonderfully forceful in its vigour and clarity of delivery. I responded to these signs of restored spirits with a series of instructions much concerned with the placing of the knee, which indeed featured prominently in my technique. A quip about the lack of any satisfactory *locus standi* died the deserved death in both the gallery and the stalls, but I made an impression with the direction 'crawl backwards along this ledge, noting first that there is not space for two knees abreast'. These almost innocent exchanges and the demonstration of the knee-first and backward crawl school, with which they were possibly unfamiliar, added to the alarm of those below. The watchers, who had seemed a little taciturn on first acquaintance, were by now half way to babbling. Three times more they offered assistance. In truth, we owed them a debt of gratitude for, in a perverse way, their mere presence was of real help. J at least was enjoying herself again and had no wish to be rescued. We all forgathered at the foot of the ladder, J radiantly bedraggled, me odiously nonchalant, they a little shaken. It had not been a sunny summer but I fancied that they were a shade paler than at our first meeting. I hope the experience did not spoil their climb.

We did not see them again as, for no reason that I remember, we returned by a different route. Beginning upwards along a wide terrace, we made height comfortably until the easy ground tapered to an untimely end. The trickles of water coming down from our left disappeared as miniature waterfalls into the mist filled abyss to the right, but the left hand wall offered an escape route into the unknown up a short chimney. We each inspected it in silence and silently considered retreat. Then I recalled illustrations of the art of backing up. To my surprise, it worked. J, even more surprised, uttered a cry of admiration. With this music in my ears, I extricated myself unhesitatingly at the top, which was not so well adapted for the purpose as in the remembered drawing, but then this was the real

world and I in no way matched the casual athleticism, or even the neat turnout of the exemplar. J had a little difficulty with the steep gravel slope at the exit. Grinning, I offered a hand - not an original gesture but, I hoped, symbolic. In deteriorating visibility we headed off by what I announced as the Dinner Time Buttress. It probably was. Certainly we got down in gratifyingly quick time, confident in the staying powers of our tricounis.

We chose the mahogany top of the new road in preference to the Clachaig route and had it to ourselves as we glided down the gentle gradient to Glencoe village. At which point refreshment seemed in order. We called at a modest establishment for the speciality of the house, ham and egg, with tea and the usual accessories. Towards the end of a leisurely meal I awoke to the realisation that we were already on the point of missing the last ferry from Ballachulish which, in September, left at quite an early hour. J said crisply that in no circumstance was she going to cycle round Loch Leven, and rested her case. I hurried out to telephone for a taxi and, before it arrived, had arranged to leave the two bicycles at the tea cottage until such time as I could collect them. The taxi arrived promptly and the driver, very good natured and obliging, offered to bring the bikes. With care and skill, but also a maddening lack of urgency he loaded up and in due course we set off for South Ballachulish at a very sedate speed. J was perfectly relaxed, but I was greatly agitated by the prospect of our missing the ferry and my then being obliged to retain the taxi, at untold cost, for an additional twenty miles. Girls did not offer to pay for themselves in those days.

The last boat, over ten minutes late, had put out when we arrived and the crew had already swung the turntable. Our driver tooted the horn, the ferry returned, the skipper even refused to accept J's fare. I ought to have known that nothing would go wrong that day.

THE ACCESS QUARTET

THE QUARTET of articles which follow have as their leitmotiv the increasingly vexing question of access to the hills. Some areas excepted, this is not yet a problem, but with the continuing growth in the numbers of hill users some form of crisis seems inevitable. So we begin to raise our awareness levels with the report on a seminar on access which was held last December. Following this formalised debate, we look at a practical problem which faced the members of the Publications-Sub Committee of the SMC. This was the policy regarding the dissemination of information about climbing in a remote area of Scotland - Ladhar Bheinn. The last two movements are more personal, with a past and the current President of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland giving vent to their experiences and feelings.

Not all of us are politically-minded, which might make it even more logical to support those who are and those whom we can entrust to promote our collective responsibilities. A reading of the entrails on the ground indicates that the problem has arrived; to ignore the signs would be disastrous.

THE GREAT ACCESS DEBATE

The Journal and the Club is indebted to Bryan Fleming for taking the notes that recorded these proceedings.

THE MOST NOTEABLE innovation at the 1991 annual general meeting of the SMC in December was the seminar organised by the President, Iain Smart, to discuss present and future problems relating to access to the Scottish hills. When this idea was first mooted at a committee meeting there was some nervousness, not least on the part of the President, about the numbers that it might attract. However, attendance by approximately 100 members and guests more than justified the decision to proceed.

The President had assembled a well qualified panel of speakers consisting of himself, representing the point of view of the concerned individual, David Laird, Chairman of the North East Board of the Nature Conservancy Council, and Patrick Gordon Duff-Pennington, till recently the Convenor of The Scottish Landowners Federation, all under the benign chairmanship of Malcolm Slesser.

THE MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM.

IAIN SMART opened the proceedings by saying that Scotland could not be considered in isolation. World population would double in the next few decades; the great conurbations were already becoming less and less

pleasant places to live in, hence the phenomenon of the aesthetic refugees, who were tending to move north in search of a better life. Equally important was the fact that there were no restrictions on land purchase, which coupled to the mobility of capital enabled its possessors to buy whatever land they wanted - today the Japanese could buy Pearl Harbour for a fraction of the cost of attacking it! Nearer home a large Highland estate could cost less than a waterfront property on Lake Geneva. Individuals and companies purchasing wild or even rural area may assume they have also purchased the right to secure privacy by restricting access. Institutional capital may also bring problems associated with the objective of maximising returns on investment.

IAIN SMART referred to the growth of the outdoor leisure industry, which, like others, seeks to expand its market as much as possible. Commercial developments in the form of time shares, residential areas and leisure complexes may grow in size to encompass a whole estate; for example an inner sacrosanct mountain core.

The emergence of professional guides, each of whom might take three to five hundred people to the hills in the course of a year introduced an element in which landowners might legitimately argue that they share in the profits, and so introduce a precedent for payment for access. Another issue was also the psychological effect of land passing out of local ownership on the behaviour, often deleterious, of local residents and visitors. A landowner might well ask why the users should not pay for damage or pollution caused.

The President concluded by saying that we must re-assess our approach to these problems, bearing in mind that pressures increase during booms and decrease during recessions, and now was the time to build defences before the next economic boom. He said that the Countryside Commission's study on access to mountain land was very impressive, not least in the zoning principle which it advocated. Zoning seeks to maintain the essential wildness of the core area by limiting commercial developments to its periphery. A good start would be to put the Club's weight behind these proposals.

FUTURE ACCESS PROBLEMS.

The next speaker, DAVID LAIRD, began by saying that the views he was about to express were his own, and not necessarily those of the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland. He outlined the historical background to the problem in Scotland, beginning with the 1745 Rebellion in Scotland against the British government, and the Hanoverian policy of eliminating the clan system. As a consequence of this the highland chiefs ceased to be trustees of the land which their clans occupied and became outright owners. This led to the assertion of rights and was followed by the clearances, large scale sheep farming and the conversion of much of the land to deer forest.

Mr Laird pointed out that the tacit right to roam at will came to be restricted, and a series of cases led to the trespass law of 1865 which created a form of criminal offence under the act, including for example lighting fires and camping without permission. At the same time casual trespass for recreation came to be tolerated and access is now regulated by a combination of tolerance and the Trespass Act. However he emphasised that freedom to roam is a myth with no legal standing, and the present position is a combination of three main elements:-

1. There are statutory powers under certain Acts to create rights of access, although these have not been invoked to any significant extent.

2. Rights of way.

3. Rights of access negotiated between landowners and user groups. David Laird could not see the problems being resolved by either tightening or revising the present laws and believed it would be unwise to try to restrict access by legislation. Instead he put forward the following principles:-

1. Identify a common objective, which he suggested should be to secure facilities to ensure that all who wished to do so could resort to open spaces for recreation.

2. Users of the open country have corresponding obligations to exercise their freedom in a responsible manner.

3. All parties must recognise that there would always be other legitimate competing interests and therefore some form of partnership must be established to bring the various interests together.

4. A change of attitude was required rather than a change of law.

He added that he could not see the possibility of any satisfactory mechanism for paying for access. He quoted the passage from John Buchan's 'The Three Hostages' in which the stalker, Angus, sharply distinguishes 'Towrists, blatant, foolish and abundantly discourteous, who were the poison in his cup, from Muntaneers, a class which he respected as modest and civil folk, who, if they came in the stalking season, discussed their routes with him'. He concluded by saying that this respect in which we (i.e. mountaineers) were held should be used to help to preserve Europe's last wilderness.

CHANGING ATTITUDES TO LAND STEWARDSHIP.

PATRICK DUFF-PENNINGTON introduced his paper by saying that he believed that everyone in Scotland had the right to go to the hills and that legal processes could solve nothing. The only solution was through information, education and people talking to each other. More people would inevitably wish to come to the Scottish hills, and it was no good saying that we did not want them; the only objectionable ones in his view were those who wanted to make a political point. He added that he was appalled by the fact that the education system virtually ignored the question of access.

He referred to the practical problems involved in posting notices about stalking and continued by saying that direct payment for access was probably a useless idea as there was no way in which the money could be reliably collected. He thought that any money required would have to come from taxation, perhaps tied to voluntary access agreements.

Speaking of the political aspects of the problem he said that the government had to realise that it was desirable to have a certain number of people living and working in the countryside to ensure the maintenance of the kind of environment city and rural people wanted. If the Common Agricultural Policy were to be abolished then other means would have to be found to enable the rural population to survive.

Patrick Duff-Pennington's paper was enlivened throughout by quotations from various poems which supported his views in a most apt and attractive way, and he concluded by emphasising that de facto freedom to roam would be his position to the end.

DISCUSSION.

MALCOLM SLESSER, as chairman, opened the discussion by commenting that though much had been said about the pressure of hill walkers, neither of the other two speakers had responded to the President's point about the pressure of mobile capital. PATRICK D P replied that this (sic) was absolutely repulsive, and the main problems in his experience stemmed from absentee landowners; there must be an identity with the land, otherwise land ownership had no point.

ADAM WATSON raised several points:-

1. Referring to the effects of people on wild life, he said that many of the problems had nothing to do with hill walking, but were due to forestry and agriculture. There was a tendency to over-state the damage done by people and there was a need for proper, objective independent research on this subject.

2. Referring to conflicts between mountaineers and other hill users, he said that, in the case of deer stalking, for every stag moved away from the stalk there must, logically, be one moved into range, although the quality of the stalk might be different. Walkers and cross-country skiers could, however, cause difficulties on wintering grounds. He added that there could also be conflict with skiers, bikers and sponsored walkers.

3. He said that freedom to roam must go with responsibility, and referred to the biologist Garret Hardin's seminal paper 'The Tragedy of the Commons' - what nobody owns nobody respects. Experience in the U.S.A. indicated that pricing could lead to better management.

4. Real wild land quality must go along with elitism, but the answer was not to keep people out but to make them work harder for their access.

SCOTT JOHNSTON asked if a local tourist tax might be an acceptable way to raise money from all users. PATRICK D-P replied that this had been suggested in the Lake District but appeared to be unacceptable. SCOTT

added that information about access was read by only a small fraction of hill users, and it could surely be given to tourist offices. Patrick D-P agreed that this was a very good idea and it would be much simpler to have only one reference point in each area.

BILL BROOKER endorsed the point about information, but he pointed out that this was often needed at inconvenient hours, when information centres were closed. Referring to rights of way, he said that the concept was not very popular on high ground, but it may be more important (and acceptable) on lower ground. Little information was available and he wondered if there should be some kind of legislation to make the establishment of rights of way easier. Finally he spoke of the economic imperatives on the land owner and raised the question of the claim that there were too many red deer in the highlands.

DAVID LAIRD, replying, said that the Scottish Rights of Way Society had produced a paper suggesting various ways in which the law could be simplified. He said that a right of way is intended to join two points, but in practice there was little possibility of a simple system because of fragmented ownership. PATRICK D-P responding to BROOKER's other main point, said that there were certainly too many deer in some areas, but not everywhere. He said that we must consider the welfare of both the deer and the land, and the deer were getting a pretty raw deal. He said that he would like to see deer and forestry run on German lines, and that it could not be in anyone's interest to run unsustainable herds. Nothing had been put back into the land to restore fertility after years of culling sheep and deer.

IAIN SMART raised the question of planning, saying that we could not rely on people's good intentions. He said there was 'gold' in the hills, and asked what there was to stop someone from building a time-share or leisure complex in a sensitive area He also asked if the National Heritage Council would implement the Countryside Commission's plan for the Cairngorms.

DAVID LAIRD replied that his crystal ball was slightly hazy on that subject. He felt that existing controls were inadequate and in time there would have to be an extension of planning rules for forestry, agriculture and open land.

PATRICK D-P described the situation in the Lake District as a mess. He said that the people who live in the area must feel that they were properly represented because without their co-operation any conservation plans were doomed to failure. He thought that things were gradually getting better in this respect.

JOHN MACKENZIE said that the Club needed an agreed policy on access and he read a draft policy which he had prepared, covering access, conservation and policy. Because of its length and time constraint on the meeting the chairman suggested this be referred to a future Club AGM.

DONALD BENNET referred to the changes proposed by the Scottish Rights of Way Society to move towards a more administratively based system. He commented on the composition of the Cairngorms working

party and said there was no one on it to represent recreational interests, which was very disappointing, and there had been no response from the Scottish Office to a complaint about this.

Referrring to money for access, he said it was right that money should be put into the land, as, for example, the Scottish Mountaineering Trust was doing for footpath repairs, but he suggested that the landowners themselves should receive some money to maintain their own paths.

DAVID LAIRD, responding, said that one of the problems was the feudal nature of land tenure. A proposal to abolish feudal tenure was being considered but it was not likely to be implemented quickly. However when it came it could make an administrative rights of way scheme workable.

ROBIN CAMPBELL said that we should not lose sight of other pressures on land, such as over-grazing, crop forestry and convenience road building. The scale of the problem, he said, is under-estimated, and if the number of Munro completers continued to grow at 15% per annum, then stronger measures than education would be required. Radical problems needed radical solutions.

PATRICK D-P responding said all a private landowner could do was his best. He added that it had been suggested that an administrative rights of way system worked in England, but he had to say that in his experience it was not satisfactory and still left many problems.

BOB REID asked how the Club could effect or influence change when we seemed to have very little representation or influence. In his view every club should have someone within specifically addressing these problems. He said that he did not want to see any changes in the law, apart from abolishing 'Criminal camping', and asked how David Laird saw these problems being addressed by the Scottish National Heritage Council

DAVID LAIRD replied that they were not being sufficiently addressed, but the Heritage Council must build on the very good work done by the Countryside Commission. The question was how to get the message across to the general public.

ADAM WATSON interjected that in the past the bulk of this work had been with problems near towns, less on open country, but there was now much more concern about open country.

PATRICK D-P said that he hoped the Scottish National Heritage budget would stretch to doubling the ranger service.

GEOF. DUTTON thought that restriction of access coupled with pricing would probably increase. This already existed in skiing developments and they were getting away with it. In effect you had to pay to get on to the Glenshee hills as you were forced to pay for parking in the skiing season. He added that it had to be recognised that many activities were completely incompatible.

BOB AITKEN (guest) said that it was very encouraging that the SMC should have had this meeting, but though the times were propitious for these concerns, the political environment was not encouraging. The

Countryside Commission proposals had been very firmly slapped down by the present government and current administrative mechanisms had failed miserably. He pointed to the fact that Scottish National Heritage had only one mountaineer to represent the whole area of recreation, whereas there had always been a reasonable representation on the Countryside Commission. He said the time had come when none of us could afford to be complacent, and if we wanted to see proper protection of the environment then we must all start doing something.

DOUGLAS NIVEN said the meeting had been interesting but cosy, and the reality was that anyone could buy a piece of the Scottish highlands and do what he or she liked with it. The landscape was degraded and continued to be further degraded all the time. Local people could not afford to live in their own places and too much was being sacrificed to vested interests in sheep, deer and crummy forestry. He regretted that the discussion had not been on a higher plane.

DAVID LAIRD, responding, agreed that degradation was continuing and that there were too many mouths to feed on the hill, but he pointed out that many of these mouths were owned by tenants and crofters who had statutory rights.

JOHN HAY asked why we should not pay for our recreation if fishers and shooters paid

PATRICK D-P that the difficulty lay with the many people who did not belong to any organisation and he did not think that this was a practicable approach.

ALAN WALKER suggested that we could make access more difficult by restricting information.

SANDY COUSINS said that education and communication were the only ways to solve these problems. Communication between the hill goers and the people living on the ground was essential and the contact points should be the stalker and the farmer; we should stop and talk to people more often. In the case of education he thought that it should be through colleges rather than schools.

BILL BAND (guest, Countryside Commission) said that the Commission had been undertaking an access review over the past two years and the results would be published in 1992. There were three important topics:-

1. The cumbersome nature of the proceedure for establishing rights of way.

2. The enormous scope for the government to channel funds to land owners and farmers for conservation purposes.

3. The mismatch between the rights the public think they have and the reality of the law.

DONALD BENNET referred to the SMC guide books, saying that the Club was continuing the past policy of publishing all the best information available but he accepted that it was legitimate to question if this policy were appropriate for the future.

BILL WALLACE described the way in which the Scottish Mountaineering Trust was ploughing money from guide book sales back into footpath repair.

IVAN WALLER said that he had been very upset to hear of all these problems which he had not hitherto known existed, as he had been mountaineering for seventy years with no trouble whatsoever!

MALCOLM SLESSER, in summing up the discussion, reminded us that the pressure came from economics as well as from people. Litigation and different laws were not the answer - tolerance was the important thing, and rights and obligations must be balanced. As the President had pointed out at the beginning, pressure was arising from mass migration northwards, and that pressure was ending up right here in the Scottish highlands. PATRICK D-P said that he had been going back to Ardverikie since he had been a boy and hoped that everyone else who came would feel welcome and at home, and he invited the Club to come for a day out.

BILL WALLACE thanked the chairman, the speakers and all who took part in the discussion. He said that education had cropped up frequently in the course of the afternoon and there was clearly an awful lot we all had to learn. On behalf of the Club he warmly accepted this invitation to visit Ardverikie in the summer.

LADHAR BHEINN - DECENT OR INDECENT EXPOSURE

Edited by I.H.M. Smart

IT WOULD BE a great thrill to stumble on a part of the Highlands that was completely unknown, an area perhaps with a couple of Munros with mighty ridges and gullies that had somehow escaped the surveyors. Let us call it Gleann Paradise. Once we had bagged everything in it we would record our ascents in the New Climbs section of the Journal, write an article or two for some glossy magazine and eventually, maybe, become the Editor of the Definitive Guide Book to the area. Alas, close on our discovery competitors would press upon us. They would publish better photographs and better articles. Our most recent book 'Jock Tamson's Gleann Paradise' would have to compete in the Christmas market with other titles by other authors; 'The real Gleann Paradise', 'Secret ways in the heavenly glen' and no doubt a dozen others. Gleann Paradise would become a commercial success and a factory farm for golden calves. When it comes to the point we will all turn the sacred Ben-lore into gold (SMCJ, xxxiv, 720-1). We don't need a black affrontit Deity to turn us out of any garden of Eden we happen to chance upon; we are quite competent to do that sort of thing ourselves. Any serpent that got between us and the apple tree would be trampled in the rush to grab the fruit.

More to the point the members of the Publications Sub-Committee were asked recently to consider excluding Ladhar Bheinn from the forthcoming Northern Highlands Guide, in order to protect that area from guide-book-attracted visitors. The suggestion came from Con Higgins in a letter to Douglas Anderson, the Convenor of the Sub-Committee. Douglas circulated the letter to the other members and asked for comments. Most sighed and said what a good idea it was. Then reflected sadly on the failure of the Rowe-Tiso Moratorium of the seventies, which forbade publication of any details about climbs north of the Great Glen; it was ineffective in practice. Most respondents in the end gave way to the populist view expressed most enthusiastically by Andy Nisbet, that everything should be revealed to everybody as quickly and efficiently as possible - any other course would be selfish. We, the Committee, being children of our time went along with this view; most of us, to our credit went sadly but nevertheless we went. This was the realistic decision. The alternative, however attractive, would require a degree of intellectual sophistication and commercial self-discipline impossible to exert in our present society where the populist approach we have decided to follow is consistent with increasing the cash flow, the major force that drives the windmills of our mind. The coffers of the Trust and freelance entrepreneurs,

however dubious, are filled alike by selling the wilderness. Indeed, the ambience in which we live persuades us that somehow it would be selfish to try to hide any commodity that can be profitably marketed. By this logic the solution would be to discover how to make unspoiled, unwritten-about wilderness generate a bigger cash-flow than the hack-ridden, sub-utopian alternative. We print the edited correspondence below. It gives a good cross-section of contemporary opinion.

Letter from Douglas Anderson, Convenor of the Publications Sub-Committee to members of the Committee:

'As convener of the SMC Publications Committee I have recently received a letter from Con Higgins regarding the inclusion of Ladhar Bheinn in the forthcoming Northern Highlands Guide. I attach a copy of his letter which explains his view. I would be grateful for comment on the specifics of Ladhar Bheinn and also the concept of information restriction to reduce public awareness and hence pressure on particular environments.'

The letter from Con Higgins:

'I'm writing in connection about the inclusion of Ladhar Bheinn in the forthcoming Northern Highlands Guide being prepared by Geoff Cohen. Whilst realizing that it is rather late in broaching this subject to you, I hope not too late.

I would like you as chairman of the SMC/SMT Publication Committee to consider not including Ladhar Bheinn in this guide. All information regards climbing on this mountain (indeed any mountain in Scotland) is readily available thro' SMC Journals and kindred sources, any inclusion in a formal guide will only exacerbate the human pressure on this quite special area. Pressure of this type should be lessened wherever possible. That Ladhar Bheinn should be singled out for exclusion would I know be setting a precedent. The area does not have a guide book at present - the information is available for those who want to climb and who won't let the lack of a guide stop them (has it ever anywhere). This is one major difference from other areas - but not be used as an excuse to produce a guide book. Can't Knoydart be left as a much needed mountaineering lump free from the tyranny of a formal guide.

It is quite possible that the human presence may not increase and in fact may even decrease quite independent of whether there is a guide book or not, but the evidence from recent history does not suggest this. While we can act, we should.

The views expressed are personal and I hope that they may elicit some action by your committee in meeting them.'

Response fron Bob Duncan (climber, joint editor 'Climbers' Guide to Central & Southern Scotland', 1986):

'If it was entirely up to me and any guide was purely for my own benefit, I would happily go along with Con's suggestion. Knoydart is

different and it would be nice to have one area where some mystery remained. The rest of the country is available if people want detailed descriptions for everything. Moreover, such a course could well reduce pressure on Knoydart in the future and help preserve its special qualities.

However, the guidebooks operation is to an extent a service, and so it could be argued that what we might consider desirable should be tempered by what we think is actually wanted by climbers in general. The last guide to the area was deliberately selective and left much undescribed; it did not go down well, or at least pressure to have it updated in a comprehensive fashion has been enormous, as you well know. People always want to know what's been done.

Against that, I think that the Club has a right - if not an obligation - to make decisions based on more than just what we think 'the herd' (or maybe just those who shout loudest) want, and associated commercial considerations. There are precedents elsewhere for such an approach. I don't think we should be in the business of being pimps nor forgetting our responsibilities to future generations.

I've always been one for trying to extract the average person's point of view from the noise generated by all the special interest groups, like the new-routers and tickers. It may be that there would be support for Con's idea, or something like it, but I feel that we'd have to seek a wider mandate for it.

I suggest that this item is put on the agenda for the next Pubs. Sub-ctee meeting, unless the timescale makes that impossible, and that members are encouraged to ask around in as disinterested a fashion as they can manage (!) so we can have a proper discussion, based on more than just personal prejudices. The notion of deliberately withholding information in order to help reduce pressure on particular areas is one which at least merits discussion, and certainly in a wider forum than just the Publications Sub-committee. As I write, it sounds hopelessly idealistic, but I live in hope.'

Response from Roger Everett (climber, Editor, SMC Climbers' Guides):

'..presents a point of view that has been discussed before: indeed, at one time there appeared to be a policy that no climbing routes in the whole Northern Highlands be published. The aim of this idea was to preserve an environment where climbers could engage in exploratory mountaineering in a way which would not be possible if a guide book existed. This viewpoint no longer has the support of the vast majority of climbers, who eagerly await the publication of the guide. However, Con Higgins' argument is rather different. He is worried by the impact of a greater number of climbers visiting Knoydart as a consequence of the guide's publication. While I too enjoy wild and remote places, and the solitude of a good climbing weekend on Ladhar Bheinn, I think that his argument is aimed in the wrong direction for the following reasons:

1. The overwhelming majority of visitors to Knoydart and Ladhar Bheinn

are walkers, not climbers. Indeed, I suspect it would be a rare day to find more than one party climbing on a crag in Knoydart at any time of year.

2. It follows that anyone desiring to reduce the human pressure on the mountain should argue for the elimination of Ladhar Bheinn from the District Guide and The Munros (not to mention Munros Tables!). This questions the whole publishing aims of the SMC and SMT; a difficult problem which in my opinion is now circumvented by SMT donations to footpath funds and conservation bodies, including the owners of Ladhar Bheinn.

3. Another far more effective deterrent to visitors to Knoydart would be to remove all the bothies. Again, I suspect this would not be acceptable to the majority of hill users.

4. If the SMC were to restrict the climbing information in its guides, logically it should also do this in the Journal. Such restrictions (why limit them only to Knoydart) would not be acceptable to those who collate the new route information.

5. Climbers who wish to limit the impact of future climbers could do so by not publishing their first ascents, something which Con Higgins has not adhered to in the past.

6. The owners of Ladhar Bheinn wish to encourage responsible recreational usage of the mountain by all interested parties.

So, I am strongly against removing Knoydart from the forthcoming guide, both in principle and on the practical grounds that it wouldn't make the slightest difference to the overall human pressure on the mountain. There will never be a large number of climbers willing to walk in to Barrisdale, guide or no guide. So why penalise this small group for a problem which (if it even exists) is not of their making. I respect Con Higgins' viewpoint, but he is aiming at the wrong target.

In more general terms, I am also against restriction of information as a means to reduce access to the hills. This is rather a non-policy which will be ineffective because, once the demand for information is present, it will be filled by someone, so why don't we do it properly ourselves (the argument put forward for publishing The Munros in the first place). If one really wants to restrict access, the only effective way is to introduce entry quotas and booking systems, as in North American National Parks.'

Response from John Fowler (climber, Secretary SMC):

'I have read Con Higgins letter - interesting. The idea of course is not new and you will probably recall that the idea of a moratorium on recording or publishing of new routes in the North-West was suggested by Iain Rowe and Graham Tiso back in the seventies, all too sadly after the publication of Rowe and Turnbull's guide books to the area. The damage had been done and there therefore seemed little point in denying further information. Also the area was vast and restriction of information would have been hard to control.

The situation here I think is different. This is a small isolated area for which no information has previously been published other than in the Journal. My view is that the idea of a moratorium in this area is worth a try and might be appreciated by many climbers who still like to visit unrecorded areas. It would also fit in well with the aims of the John Muir Trust who now own the substantive part of the climbing area and who are keen to retain the unspoiled character of the area.

My own view is that we should give the idea a try. We can always add it to future reprints if there is enormous objection.

Exclusion of the area from the guide might not however bring the desired result. The area will soon be seen to be missing from the guide and if it becomes general knowledge that this was as a result of a policy decision then might this not serve as an attraction for people to go and see what they have been missing?'

Response from Andrew Nisbet (climber, joint author 'Climbers' Guide to the Cairngorms', New Climbs Editor SMC Journal):

'I cannot agree with Con Higgin's suggestion that Ladhar Bheinn be missed out of the Northern Highlands Guide. Although a personal opinion, I presume that the committee would be in agreement. In the mid seventies there was a moratorium on publication (even in the SMCJ) of routes in the Northern Highlands. This was unpopular amongst SMC members and others and was overturned. I remember as a young climber finding it frustrating and disappointing, and was pleased to see the end of it. Soon after, the Northern Highlands Guide was initiated. Having made the decision to 'publicise' these remote areas, I cannot see the arguments being different in Ladhar Bheinn's case. No doubt there are others with a special affection for Letterewe/Carn Mor, and who would like to see it omitted. Apart from the general principle that secrecy is unreasonable (selfish), I doubt if it is effective in the long term, private publications and similar undermining it.

The Knoydart area is a special wilderness, but much less so than 10 years ago. Thousands of walkers and bothy users now travel through (largely due to publicity, but not by the SMC). Let's say Ladhar Bheinn is in condition once every 5 years and 5 parties climb there. This is two per year compared to thousands of walkers so from the environmental point of view will make no difference. As a personal view, I quite like other climbers on a cliff. It is more sociable, and only occasionally are they on my intended route.

From a practical point of view, whoever put the time and effort in writing up Ladhar Bheinn for Geoff's guide cannot be expected to see their work thrown away.

I have sympathy with Con's viewpoint but omission of Ladhar Bheinn would be symbolic only and might even attract climbers for that reason.

As a general principle, information restriction is only going to work if

carried out on a huge scale, both walking and climbing guides, SMC and others, and even if it were practical, I would see it as slightly selfish. More important I think is to educate the increasing number of visitors about protection of the environment, and climbers are very much the minority over walkers.

Response from Iain Smart (climber, President SMC):

'I am in favour of the idea. However I can't decide how it could be done. The options are:

1(a) Just leave that section out with no explanation

(b) a declaration that this has been done purposely and exhort others to follow our lead.

2 Include it but write about Knoydart in opaque, ambiguous prose, conveying the message that it is a part of Scotland not really worth visiting.

I am inclined to favour 1(b) above. That is to try to make a 'cult' of keeping this area obscure so that anyone who writes about it will be considered a vulgarian who is on the make.

However I imagine if Geoff Cohen has put in a lot of work on the area, he will be unwilling to ditch it. In this case we could rely on Knoydart surviving unknown because it is described just like anywhere else.

In the end we are going to lose.'

Response from Noel Williams (climber, author 'Scrambles in Lochaber'):

'Regarding the letter from Con Higgins. I had already been in contact with Con myself back in April when I was putting the finishing touches to the manuscript for Knoydart. It was Con that first told me about Ladhar Bheinn and encouraged me to go there back in 1979. He probably knows more about the climbing there than anyone else, and I asked him if he would be prepared to look over the chapter that I had written. When I spoke to him face to face he agreed, but a couple of days later I had a letter from him withdrawing his offer of help. I quote ...

"... my original feelings about this mountain being included in a guide book have surfaced again. I can see no justification whatsoever in wilfully increasing human traffic in this area that a formal guide would do. It is not needed. Those who wish to climb there will - and won't lack information.

Therefore it would be hypocritical of me to be connected in any way with the production of such a guide and I withdraw my consent to look over your manuscript. I'm sure this will not hinder your project."

I was rather disappointed in his change of heart, especially since he is responsible for putting up more routes on Ladhar Bheinn than anyone else. But I have a great respect for Con's opinions on many matters to do with mountaineering, and so I did not pursue the matter any further with him.'

While I have some sympathy with his position I do not agree with him for two reasons. Firstly, it is not true to say that the information on Ladhar

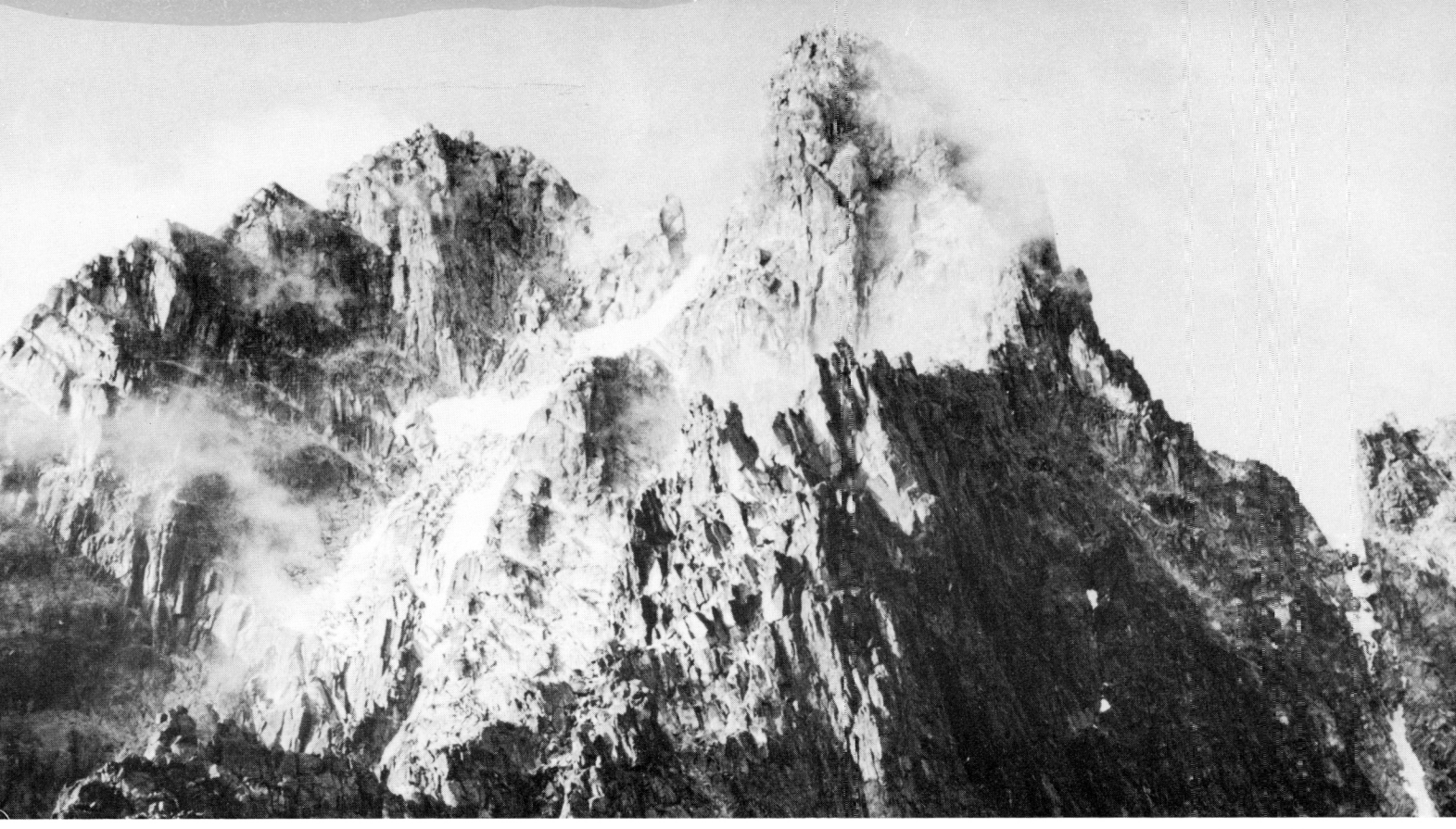


Photo: Donald Bennet

Mt. Kenya

Photo: R. M. Adam (with thanks to St. Andrews University)

Trotternish from the Quiraing, July 1938

Bheinn is 'readily available' as he claims in his letter to you. Not everyone has easy access to a full set of SMC Journals (the routes on Ladhar Bheinn date from 1897). And secondly, the combination of fairly difficult access and the rarity of good climbing conditions on the extremity of the west coast together tend to restrict the number of climbers anyway. It would be horrible to see Knoydart become as popular as Ben Nevis, Glen Coe or the Cairngorms but I cannot see that happening.

A possible compromise might be to omit star ratings for the routes on Ladhar Bheinn and/or give minimal descriptions. I think it would be worth discussing this option at the next meeting of the Publications Sub-committee.'

Abstract from Minutes of the Publications Sub-Committee of the SMC:

'D. Anderson referred to the letter that he had received from C. Higgins proposing that information about climbing routes on Ladhar Bheinn should not be included in the forthcoming Northern Highlands Rock and Ice guide. The views of Sub-committee members had been sought by letter, and it was agreed that there should not be any such withholding of information. D. Anderson would write to C. Higgins accordingly.'

ACCESS - THE NEXT DECADE

By Robin N. Campbell

I HAD the good fortune to be MCofS President from 1982 to 1986. A tour of duty with the MCofS gives a perspective on the world of mountaineering which is not available to the inward-looking, complacent SMC member, secure in the knowledge of his superiority, and confident that the 100 years of the Club's existence gives his opinions weight and authority, however eccentric and stupid these might be - to someone like me as I was in 1982, for instance. In fact, our mountains are a battleground fought over by a rabble of owners, developers, farmers, voluntary bodies, government and other statutory agencies. We mountaineers - despite our intimate knowledge of the terrain - are a small and puny force. Moreover, our opinions, even when well-turned and dexterously delivered to the other players by the MCofS - which sometimes happens - rarely leave the faintest scratch. We don't live in the mountains, we have no financial interest in them, we provide jobs only in the equipment business, and no statutory body is obliged to take formal account of our views. We are just barely in the game. So although I agreed to take part in this Journal discussion, I do so with considerable misgivings. The last thing that MCofS needs is to have its carefully-considered, democratically-approved and astute policies undermined by our Club trying to do its job for it, in the utterly mistaken belief that we know better. What *we* should be concerned with is how to inject new purpose and direction into our own Club, and with how best we can assist the MCofS in its struggle to defend our recreation from the predatory forces which threaten it.

I see two main *new* developments affecting Scottish mountaineering in the next 10 years: restriction of access and internal schism. As for old threats, these will continue to vex us, of course. Some come from without, some from within. In the first category are an appalling forestry and worse forestry practices - most especially the barbarous practice of ploughing hill slopes, ski-facilities that rape our mountains even more vigorously than do those of the Alps, sporting roads, nannying safety-mongers, overgrazing by sheep and deer, etc. In the second category are various self inflicted wounds: sponsored walkers, hill-runners and scotblobbers; head banging uses of deplorable mountaineering aids such as bicycles, chalk, bolts, and ice-picks - an ice-tool is nothing but a piton which is easily inserted and removed, and besides, it is a piton used not just for protection or resting, but for upward movement! These threats, then, are always with us, the bad knees and ingrown toenails of an ailing recreation.

Restriction of Access

Some make out that the coming crisis over access is due to changes in patterns of ownership, with good old traditional chaps being displaced by newly-rich yuppie foreigners, sheikhs and samurai. Even if it were true that some such radical change in patterns of ownership had occurred (I doubt that it is), I would not share this view. The crisis is coming because of burgeoning mountain recreation. A variety of indicators show growth rates of participation of between 10% and 15%. For instance, if sustained at this level, the millionth Munro-compleater will reach her final cairn around 2050! We turn paths into quagmires or grooves, we drive up any road or track not efficiently locked, we park our cars at need on road verges or simply on the road, we go wherever and whenever we please, dropping litter, enraging owners and disturbing wildlife. Fundamentally, there are just too many of us to be assimilated comfortably by traditionally-managed estates or by a local authority structure in which the provision of roads and car-parks is completely sundered from the servicing of leisure and recreation, and in which there is no statutory responsibility to provide for tourism. Those agencies that do have responsibilities for tourism have little money and in any case they have a different sort of tourist in mind. Unchecked, the combination of *de facto* unrestricted access and rocketing numbers will result in yet another 'tragedy of the commons', with the price of our access being paid for by the land.

I do not think this will be allowed to happen. This is not because government will stand up for hill land - it has seldom done that, and then only when scientific values have been involved - but because it will act to defend landowning interests as soon as nuisance and loss of value become intolerable. We will be made to pay, probably not directly but through payment for car-parking or by other indirect means. It is a moot point, of course, whether this would have any lasting effect on numbers, but I imagine it will be tried anyhow. Can we or should we do anything do prevent this? I do not think so. Where hill land is concerned, recreational interests have always been squeezed out between the opposing forces of scientific and commercial interests. Our effort should be to make sure that whatever money is extracted from us is well used for the benefit of the mountain recreation, and not simply put in the pockets of landowners already bulging with grants and tax concessions, nor swallowed up by government agencies such as the Forestry Commission, Scottish Natural Heritage, or the Sports Council - bodies that have done precious little to serve our interest in the past. Moreover, the fact of payment will make it impossible for these agencies to resist demands for proper representation of mountaineering interests.

There is no point in being down-hearted about any of this. The only satisfactory solutions to the problems of access depend upon there being fewer people interested in obtaining it. While this could be achieved by reducing population, or by educating the public to loathe and fear mountains as they once did, neither of these programs is at all likely, although there

is always the chance of an outbreak of plague. So the only option left is to reduce interest by making access costly, by one means or another.

Internal Schism

Old fashioned types like me may choose to sneer at quarry-climbing, competitions, climbing walls, weight-training, etc., but these are undeniable symptoms of a sport emerging from a recreation and it is futile to hope that the sport will go away. The problem will come to the MCofS long before it comes to us, since our traditions and entrance qualifications make our Club an unlikely refuge for the sporting climber. Moreover, we have the great good fortune that our mountains are too worn down to offer any really steep rock, so sporting climbers are unlikely to be much interested in going up hills. By the time they burn their underwear, with any luck assorted sports injuries will have taken such a severe toll that they won't be *able* to go up a hill! So my guess is that the amount of shared interest between sporting and recreational climber is so slight that schism is inevitable. This development should be welcomed: its advent will make it easier for us to concentrate on enjoyment of mountains and on preserving them from damaging exploitation.

Whither the SMC

We badly need to find a new purpose to guide our activities, or to revive an old one. The pursuit of technical prowess clearly falls to the sporting climber now. And lobbying on behalf of mountains or mountaineering is the MCofS's task now, not ours. What is left to keep us interested, besides the routine maintenance of traditions such as our Journal, our Huts, our Dinner and our publishing programme? I think that the only basis for lively continuation of our Club is exploratory mountaineering. We ought to place more emphasis on this in our existing traditions, in the location of Meets and Huts, in entrance qualifications, in the subject matter of our Journal and publishing programme and, of course, in our personal recreation.

I'D LIKE TO SOLO THE EXUM

By Bob Reid

'I'D LIKE TO solo the Exum.'

'I'm sorry, the Exum's fully booked.'

The Park Ranger's words affronted sensibilities I hadn't imagined existed. Was this really mountaineering in the USA and was I really being sandbagged by a uniformed bureaucrat? His gun looked real enough judging by the way its weight tugged at his belt.

'Excuse me,' I said again, trying not to sound indignant or pompous. 'Could you run that past me once more?'

'The Exum? Man, there's enough of you climbers up there already.' He sounded like Garrison Keillor affecting grumpiness.

He turned and pointed to a notice board behind him. At its top were the names of the more popular of the Teton routes. I read them off quickly; Owen-Spalding, Irene's Arete, the Northwest Couloir of South Teton, the Black-Ice Couloir amongst others. Beneath some were white dockets, which I soon realised were climbing permits, with lists of climbers neatly written out in the prescribed manner. The Exum had more dockets below it than any other route.

The ranger explained that this climbing permit system was designed to minimise the impact of climbers on this fragile resource, which soared up ruggedly behind the ranger station for fully 7000ft. Even climbers heading in for a day's cragging had to register.

I couldn't help feeling as though I'd fallen into one of those dreadful fictional pieces written about evil bureaucrats governing climbing. Since the exploration of these methods was in part my purpose, I hung in there.

'Well, if the Exum's fully booked, can you recommend something else that isn't?' Guide books and aerial photographs of the Tetons were produced as I tried to decide upon an alternative. The photos were spectacular, Bradford Washburn black and whites taken from the air. I liked the look of the Owen-Spalding on the Grand, but that too had been over-subscribed, and I was pointed in the direction of the Middle Teton's Southwest Couloir.

'A classic?' I asked.

'Three stars,' the ranger assured me with all the enthusiasm of a car salesman. So I duly filled out my permit. A copy was kept and pinned on the board, along with several dozen others. I remember noting at the time that mine was the only permit on that particular route, and my heart momentarily quickened at the prospect of having the route to myself. Of

course I'd leapt to the wrong conclusion. The scarcity of permits issued strongly correlated with the paucity of sound rock in Middle Teton's Southwest Couloir, as I later discovered.

The walk-in that evening led me to a bivouac site known as the 'Meadows' at the entrance to the upper South Fork of Garnet Canyon. Several such bivouac sites were set aside, with notices urging climbers to leave the grassy bits alone and camp on the gravel. A not-unreasonable request, but one that underlined the old adage that hard won is well remembered. A stony bed and a temperature inversion weren't ideal partners for a good night's sleep.

A local couple on the neighbouring bivvi-site (their's was number 8, mine was number 9, according to the metal spikes that had been hammered into the ground) were in fact climbing the Exum. I had been duped. It was not the ridge that was too busy, simply that the best bivvi-sites were taken. In theory I could have done the Exum from the Meadows, but alas I had the wrong permit.

A dilemma presented itself. There I was, a stranger in a weird system, sponsored by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, (a more august body you couldn't imagine) with thoughts of 'just-nipping-up-the-Exum'. My bivvi-neighbours even encouraged me in what would undoubtedly be considered a pre-meditated felony. Press headlines flashed before my eyes. 'Churchill Fellow climbs wrong route', 'Environmental crime admitted by Scottish climber'.

Sense in the end, perhaps sadly, prevailed. I headed up Middle Teton, where, if I were to be completely even handed, I would have to admit that there was a splendid view from the top.

On the way down I met another ranger, perhaps two miles from the trailhead. My feet were weary and I whiled an hour with him discussing his work. During that time climbers heading for bivvi-sites passed us and showed their permits on request. Two parties had none, for it was Labour Day weekend, the hills were busy, and the sites were fully booked. The ranger gently but firmly turned them back, in spite of their pleadings that they had travelled many miles. And head back they did, without histrionics. My new found friend however did seem a little disappointed, as though still hungry after an expensive meal in a restaurant.

'I'll book the next party that arrives here without a permit,' he assured me as I left.

Trudging down into the darkness, I passed other parties heading up and a complicity with their purpose led me to warn them of the ambush up the trail. As if to pour water on my rebellious act they of course all had permits.

The ranger service is the police service in American National Parks. Criminal, as well as environmental law is enforced by them and I don't envy them their task. One more enlightened ranger (he was a climber) left me with my other abiding memory of the Tetons.

'If you're going to manage visitors to the mountains in Scotland, DON'T have a compulsory registration system for climbers. It sucks.' The finality of his words suggested that he knew the individuality of the Scottish climber, indeed of all climbers, only too well.

I was reminded of W.H. Murray's words on mountaineering in Undiscovered Scotland. 'Here is a field of free action in which nothing is organised, or made safe or easy or uniform by regulation; a kingdom where no laws run and no useful ends fetter the heart'.

Footnote: The author, who is currently President of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, received a Winston Churchill fellowship in 1991 to examine the techniques employed in the USA's National Parks for managing the impacts of climbers and hillwalkers. This account is one of the more lurid experiences that he remembers.