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Scottish Mountaineer

ISSUE 81 – AUTUMN 2018

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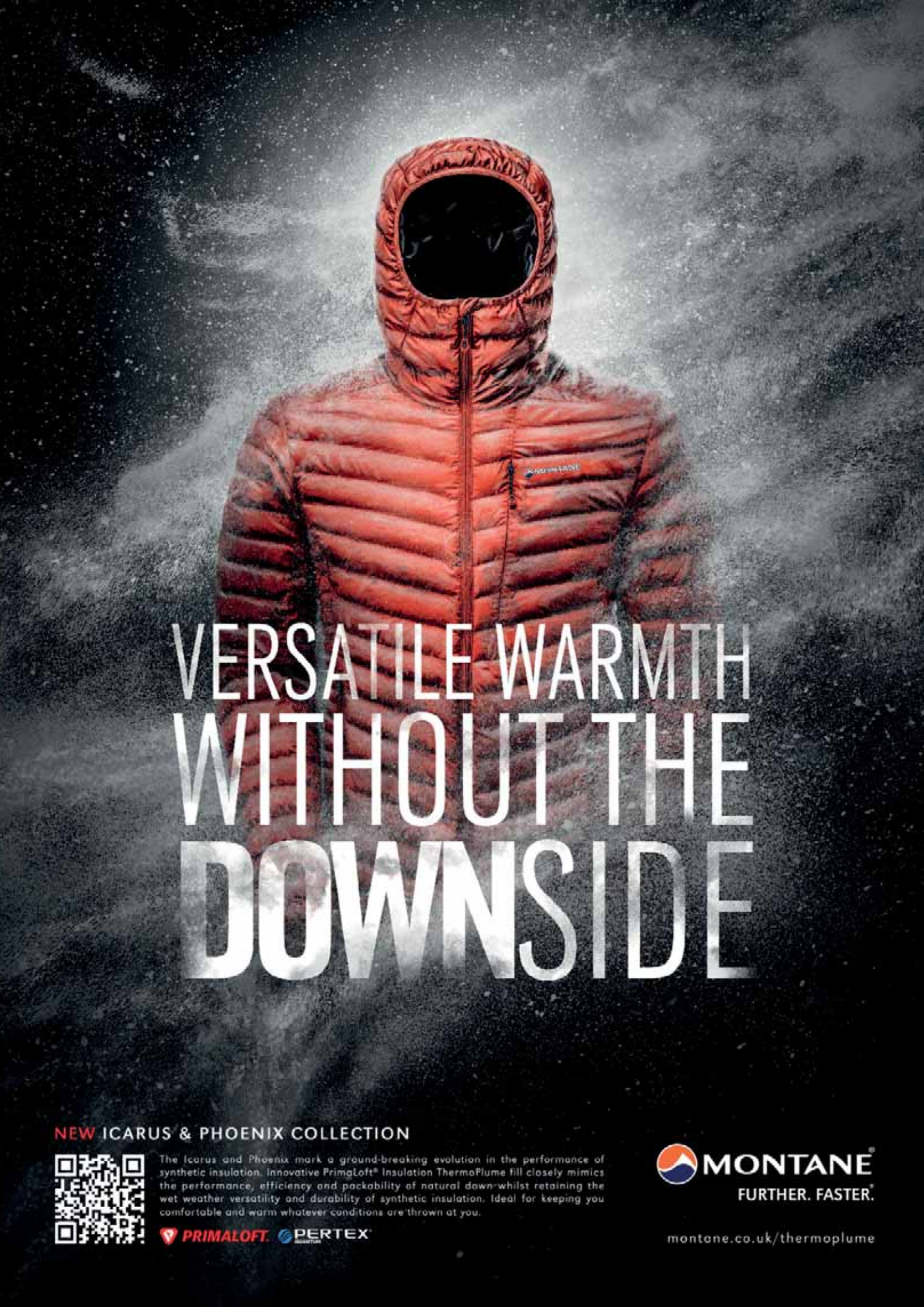

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We say we love our mountains – let's prove it!

THE results came too late to report on fully in this edition, but in October volunteers were out all over Britain's mountainous areas picking up rubbish.

The Real3Peaks Challenge was hit by appalling weather on the designated weekend, and many events had to be postponed. But the result was that all through the month groups of volunteers were heading out onto the hillsides armed with bin bags and litter-pickers, collecting more than 600kg of rubbish over the period.

It's great that such an amount has been removed from our hills and mountains, but appalling that it should have been left there in the first place – especially when the 600kg is just the tip of the iceberg. I helped out with the litter-pick on Ben Macdui and Cairngorm, where we collected a relatively sparse three kilogrammes, but the following day I picked up almost as much again on the short walk out along the track from Ryvoan Bothy.

It's good to see growing awareness of and action on rubbish in our hills, but it highlights the need for us all to clean up our act. In some areas we can blame ignorant tourists, but the amount of rubbish found in often remote areas – much of it deliberately hidden between rocks – makes it clear that experienced mountain folk are as guilty as anyone.

More people now are choosing to carry a bag to collect litter they find during their walks. That's great. But we should all – all of us – make sure we leave no litter ourselves. It's easy to say "Och, it's just a wee bit." But most of that 600kg collected in October was made up of such "wee bits".

We say we love our mountains: let's show it.

Neil

Neil Reid, Editor

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Scottish Mountaineer – Mountaineering Scotland Magazine Autumn 2018
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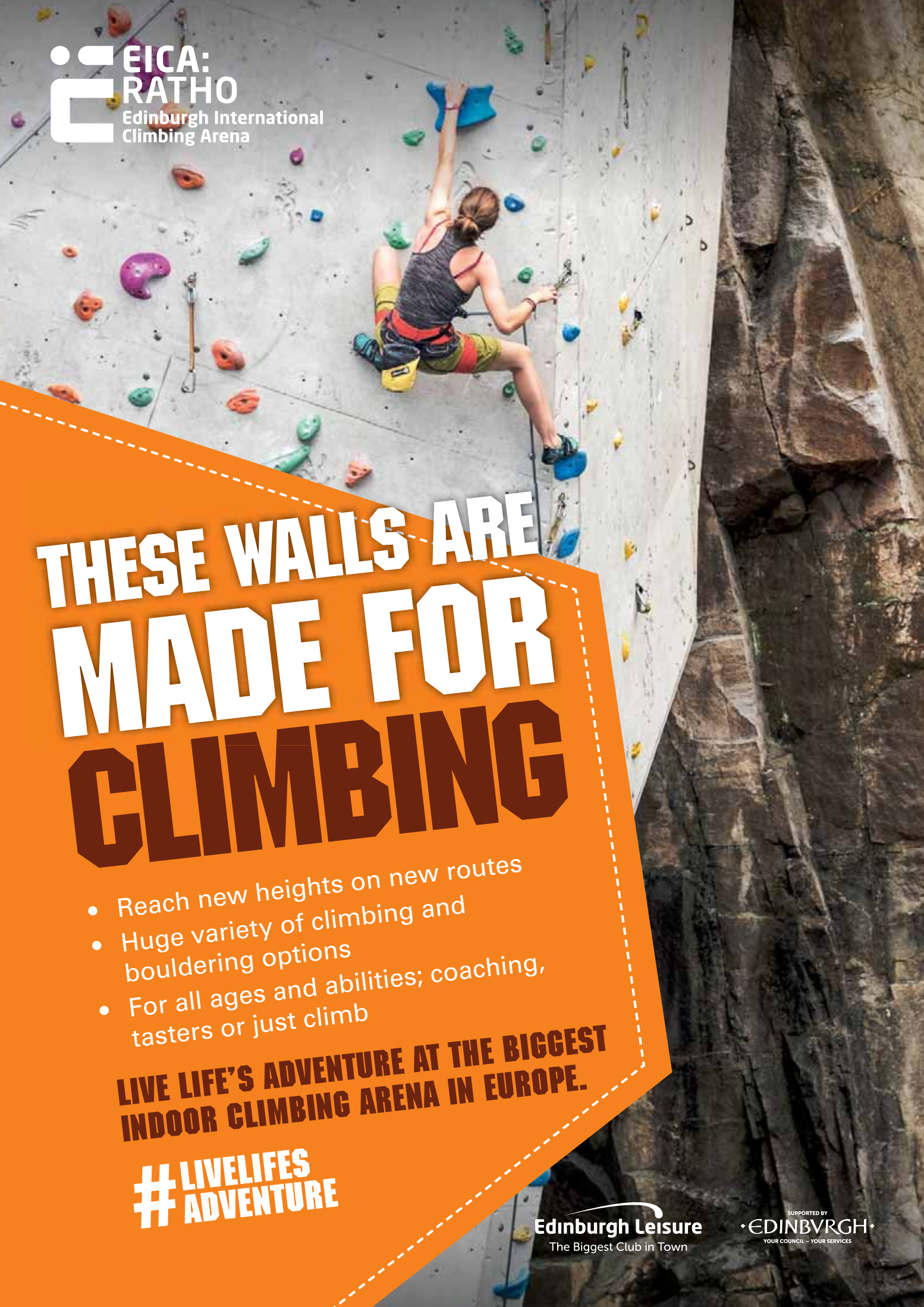
Published by Herald and Times Group Magazines, 200 Renfield Street, Glasgow G2 3QB
For advertising contact: Ronnie Dodd on 0141 302 7757 ronnie.dodd@heraldandtimes.co.uk



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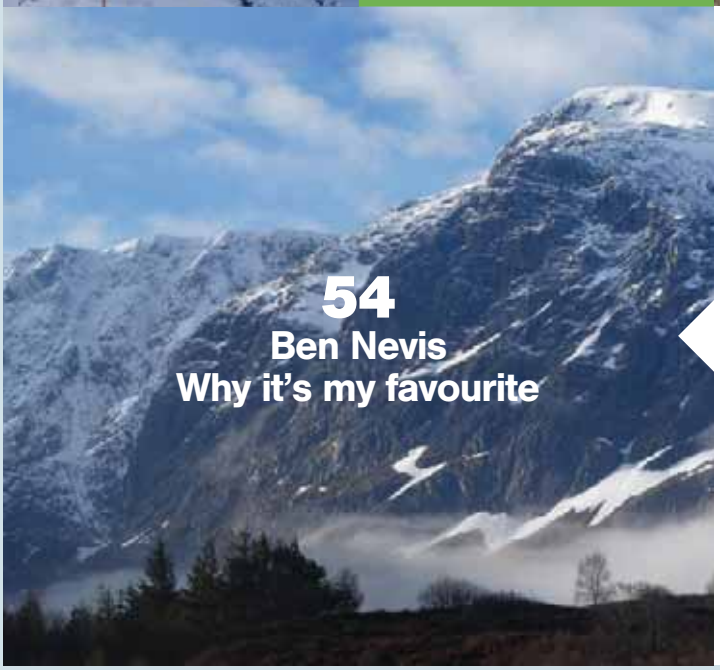

Regulars

Front cover photo: Ben Nevis from Carn Mor Dearg, by Mark Aitken

News

Welcome to Helen

MOUNTAINEERING Scotland welcomes Helen Gestwicki who joined the team in October as Member Services and Communications Manager. Her role is to lead the membership and communications team to develop our membership and member benefits. She'll be supporting clubs, raising awareness of conservation and access issues and encouraging people from all walks of life to enjoy safe and responsible outdoor activities as well as indoor climbing.

Helen joins Mountaineering Scotland following five years working at an Edinburgh-based carer organisation where she played a key role in developing the communications and social media, and supporting staff and volunteers to gain the confidence and skills to use digital tools and communications as an integral part of their day-to-day work.

Despite growing up in the Fens of East Anglia, Helen always dreamed of being in the mountains and childhood trips to Wales, the Lake District and Scotland fuelled her fascination with the mountain environment. Following an introduction to the Munros by her now long-term partner, she has spent the last 20 years exploring Scotland's mountains by foot and bike, and compleated the Munros in 2014. She enjoys hillwalking all year round with her partner and friends as well as solo expeditions, and is a long-term member of an online Scottish hillwalking community.

In recent years she has begun to explore mountain areas further afield, with trips to the national parks of Washington State and the Pyrenees, and in 2017 she completed the 10-day Tour of Mont Blanc. This has given her a feel for how other countries treat their mountain environments and a taste for long-distance treks.

Helen said: "I became a member of Mountaineering Scotland as I was keen to support an organisation that is aligned with my own ideals and felt it was time to put my money where my mouth is. I hope that I can work with our members to ensure that Scotland's mountains are preserved for all to experience and enjoy safely and responsibly. I'm delighted to be part of the Mountaineering Scotland team and am really looking forward to meeting and talking to our members and hearing what they have to say."

As well as hillwalking, Helen is a qualified archery coach and enjoys road cycling and mountain biking.

June Ross, former Vice President

WE have received news of the death of June Ross, who played an important role in the history of Mountaineering Scotland. June was nominated by the Ladies Scottish Climbing Club for a seat on the Executive of what was then the Mountaineering Council of Scotland. She served on the Executive for ten years, and was Vice President of MCofS between 1989 and 1993.

During her time with MCofS she led the drive to establish the safety work which has ever since been such an important part of the work of MCofS and now Mountaineering Scotland.

▶Turn to page 70 for an appreciation of June's life.

Making the most of your membership

Winter safety talks boost mountain rescue

FOR a number of years now Mountaineering Scotland has delivered a series of free winter mountain safety talks throughout the country.

This year the decision has been taken to start charging for attendance at these talks, with all proceeds going to local mountain rescue teams or the Air Ambulance. Mountain rescue teams will attend some of the lectures, showing their equipment, chatting to audiences and answering questions.

The safety talks will be delivered by Heather Morning, our Mountain Safety Adviser, drawing on her considerable experience in the mountains, both instructing and on her own ventures, and her experience as a member for many years of one of the country's most active mountain rescue teams. With fresh stories every year, the talks are a great night out as well as being a useful refresher to remind yourself of the extra emphasis on safety that winter mountaineering requires.

For more information

▶Full details of the talk series, which starts in Aberdeen on Tuesday 27 November, are available on the website at www.mountaineering.scot/safety-and-skills/courses-and-events/winter-safety-lectures

Winter weather explained

A new addition to our winter lecture series, with Met Office expert Dr Mike Reading delivering a talk on '*Everything You Need to Know About Winter Mountain Weather*'.

Mike is Senior Operational Meteorologist at the Met Office in Aberdeen and has worked as a forecaster for the Met Office for over seven years, including spells in the Falkland Islands and in Antarctica.

Outside of work – producing forecasts for the Scottish Highlands – Mike is a keen climber and mountaineer with over 20 years experience, and with a particular interest in Scottish winter mountaineering. So he's well aware when preparing a forecast of what's important to his fellow mountaineers.

▶ The talk will be presented at Craigdon Mountain Sports, Edinburgh, on the evening of Wednesday 12 December. Advance booking is essential. For more information on Mike's talk and how to book, go to the website at www.mountaineering.scot/news/winter-mountain-weather-talk

Making the most of your membership

Campervan discount

BASED in Fintry, near Stirling, Campsie Campers are offering Mountaineering Scotland members a 10% discount on campervan hire. The family-run firm has a selection of VW T5 and T6 campervans.

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▶ Find out more about Campsie Campers at www.campsiecampers.co.uk and learn more about this and other discounts on our website at www.mountaineering.scot/members/members-benefits/your-discounts

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Alaskan Revelations

Scots climbers new routing on Mount Jezebel

Top: Traversing the summit ridge

Above: The north face of Mt Jezebel. The intended route went up the narrower dark slot just left of the central couloir.

"Taxi for Hawthorn!"

By Uisdean Hawthorn

"We will not leave until we 'ave the chairs!" said the Frenchman; "and the table outside, the black one, is for rent, no?"

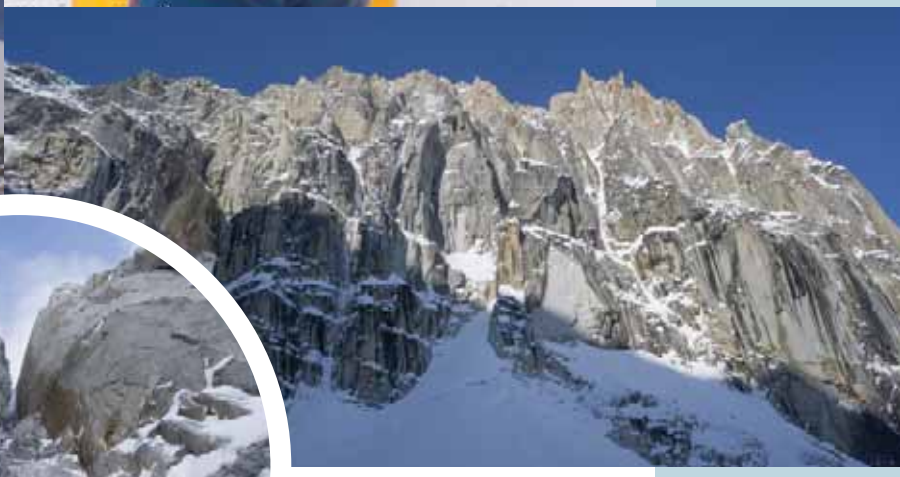
I stood in the Talkeetna Air Taxi office, watching with great amusement as the American staff tried to communicate with the French: a table really wasn't necessary. I did think it would be good to see the French lording it up on the glacier with kilos of bread, garlic, cheese and wine but, fortunately, they were going to a different part of the Revelation Mountains, so we wouldn't get jealous of their luxuries. Compared to them Tom Livingstone and I had very basic supplies for our base camp set-up – mainly freeze-dried meals and bagels.

A few hours later, we were crammed into a tiny plane with all our gear packed around us. Paul Roderick, our pilot, kept saying: "Try not to let your knee hit that lever too much."

"OK," I said, trying to act as relaxed as he did. But I probably failed when I noticed a label above the lever that said THROTTLE. After over an hour of flying, Paul said, "I'll just whip it around to give you a good look." We both stared intently at the north face of Mt. Jezebel,

All photos by Uisdean Hawthorn and Tom Livingstone

Tom with all that remained of the climbing rack after the retreat from the north face – two pegs, three wires and some tat.



The east face route followed the line of thin couloir streaks just left of centre.

High point of the north face route.

our main objective of the trip. "Looks steep, cold and cool," I thought.

From the plane we could see a line up the centre of the face, which was the only one without big seracs above it. Ten days later, Tom and I stood on a snow patch a third of the way up the route. We looked up an overhanging 10m-wide chimney, with a massive snow mushroom blocking it. Below was 40m of vertical sugar snow, with not a drop of ice in sight. "Bugger! I guess it's not possible then," we grudgingly agreed. We began the horrible process of abseiling down the eight pitches we had just climbed, most of which were 70m long, with bad gear and worse belays. We eventually made it down to the glacier, skiing back to base camp on the east side of the mountain later that night.

Base camp life resumed over the next few days, with excessive amounts of lying down and eating, and small amounts of skiing in between. The amount of butter being used to toast the bagels meant they were deep fried rather than toasted. I started to feel lethargic. All the lying down just made me want to lie down more. But we'd settled on an alternative route, tackling the east face of the mountain, and packed our bags.

The weather looked to be clearing up over the next few days, so we set the alarm for 3am. The alarm sounded – but when we looked outside and saw it was still snowing hard we went back to sleep. We didn't bother getting out of the tent until 10am, and spent the rest of the day killing time as snow continued to lightly fall.

Next day, the alarm sounded at 3am again. This time the stars were on show. Then came the usual faff and attempts to eat breakfast without feeling ill. By 6am I was following Tom stepping over the bergschrund and onto the route. I tied in, racked up and started climbing up 85 degree névé for 30 metres. Thankfully there were two runners in the rock at 15m. After 30m it steepened and quickly became vertical sugar snow and quite serious. I inched towards some rock in a corner below a roof. Eventually after thinking light thoughts and digging lots I found some good runners under the roof. I climbed the rocks on the right of the roof and shouted "Watch me!" before climbing out left to step round the roof. As I moved my feet round, the snow

under the roof all collapsed, and I hung off my axes. I quickly pulled up, with my body smeared on the ice and took a moment to relax as the flash pump slowly disappeared.

The next two pitches weren't as hard but had a total of four runners and some worryingly steep sections of neve. Tom took over the next pitch which had some hard digging up vertical snow chimneys with some interesting moves but thankfully there were more runners. Tom's third pitch looked like a wide icefall. However, it turned out that, although the middle section had two inches of ice, five inches of air separated it from the rock. Tom tried to mix climb the wall to the right but couldn't, so he dug deep, found his big balls and stupid brain then committed to the hollow section. I belayed below, listening to the horrible noises while the ice creaked and boomed as only rotten ice can. Thankfully the upper and steepest section had good ice and screws.

From here a 150m snow slope led to a junction of the gully. The right-hand branch looked like a good direct way up but had more steep snow, which would be time consuming. The left looked much easier apart from one pitch, up what appeared to be an overhanging chimney. We decided to try the left and were rewarded. I got into the chimney and found the left wall to be covered in excellent ice that even took screws. It felt weird to be climbing such secure ice and made me realise how the lower pitches had been hard and really quite serious. We nicknamed this pitch *The Gift* as it was such a surprise. A long snow slope led to a gully and this led to the main ridge.

It felt weird to be climbing such secure ice and made me realise how the lower pitches had been hard and really quite serious. We nicknamed this pitch *The Gift* as it was such a surprise.

After a few hours of alpine style ridge climbing we found a good flat spot just before dark and settled in for the night. By the time we had melted water and eaten food it was after 1am. Despite only having one sleeping bag made for two people with only a wind shield as a back board and a two-man bivi-bag we were quite warm and slept reasonably well.

I woke with the sun already in the sky and after stuffing some porridge down we continued traversing the ridge, dropping onto the left side and doing some ledge shuffling to reach a col. Just above the col we found two wires equalised. These belonged to Pete and Ben who first told us about Mt Jezebel and who were the first people to climb the east face.

From here we soloed up the easier ridge to the summit where we sat in the sun for a while enjoying the warmth and the fact there was no wind. For the descent we down-climbed back to the wires but instead of abseiling down the gully on the east face which Pete and Ben had climbed we went down the west side. Three long raps later we were in a broad gully that could be down-climbed to reach the massive south-east couloir which we walked down in 40 minutes.

This left us at the base of a col which blocked our way back to our skis and base camp. It looked quite big, we guessed six pitches, and didn't have an obvious way up. After a bit of debate and using the last of our gas to melt some water, we decided to try the steep-looking gully on the left. I sat thinking that we had made a big

Top: Uisdean on the second pitch of the east face route.

Above: The Gift pitch

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mistake and that we were about to have to do more run-out steep snow climbing.

In the end the thought of getting going was worse than the actual effort of climbing. The snow getting to the base of the gully was the worst bit. It had been fully thawed by the heat of the sun and felt like trying to climb up the inside of a slush puppy machine. Once on the steeper sections, the ice was surprisingly good and after two pitches Tom arrived at my belay. Thinking we were about halfway up I turned to him saying, "Tag! You're it!" Tom set off and tried to make his way up the side of a roof which had a small snow mushroom underneath. After some digging he down-climbed and looked around. Spotting a crack on the right wall he aided his way up it. Eventually he reached some slabby ground and quickly found his way back into the gully. A pitch later, much to our relief, we were at the top of the col.

I took the rack and looking down a gully found an anchor to abseil off easily enough but I could also see the top of what appeared to be a massive snow mushroom. "I really hope we don't have to touch that," I thought as I started abseiling. 50m later however to my huge relief I saw that the mushroom was sat on an enormous chock stone and we could just abseil straight under it.

The second ab was very pleasant - for the first 15 metres until I came to an overhang. I looked down to see a huge slot. I started abseiling, hoping my ropes reached something at the bottom. After a wild 45m I realised my ropes were about three metres short of a ledge system. I climbed back up 10 metres or so to a chock stone and, as I couldn't find anything else to ab off, I thought only one thing for it, and threw a big loop of tat round the chockstone, bounce tested it and then shouted: "Rope free!" Tom wasn't overjoyed to join me just free hanging off the chock stone, however, all went well and we abseiled to the big ledge 20 metres down. From here it was only two more abseils down to the glacier. We trudged back to our skis and were soon celebrating in base camp by eating deep fried wraps with cheese.

We flew out to Talkeetna a few days later, the French team I had seen on the way in were on the plane when we got in. We all celebrated in the Fairview Inn over beers, talking about our climbs and all the funny things we had seen in Alaska.

Massive thanks to the Mount Everest Foundation and the BMC for their support which made this trip possible, and to Ben Silvestre and Rob Smith for sending us weather forecasts.

Top: On the summit ridge

Above: Bedroom balcony

Summit selfie

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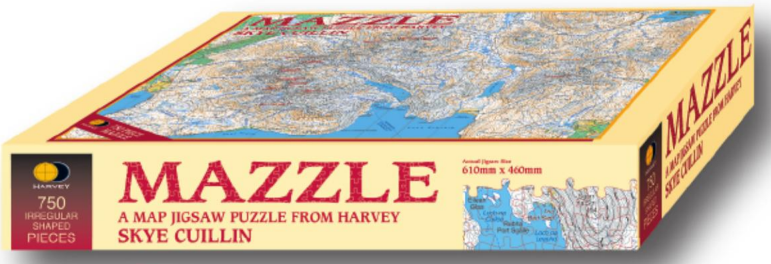

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Conservation Matters

Far left: Wide, braided paths damaging sensitive moss heath habitat on the summit of Ben Wyvis. The light coloured blocks on the paths are biodegradable geojute positioned to encourage use of a single, narrower route, and protecting moss heath transplanted to re-vegetate eroded areas.

Ben Wyvis, looking from An Cabar towards the summit, showing wide, braided paths eroding sensitive moss heath habitat.

Restoring the Wyvis plateau

By Davie Black, Access & Conservation Officer

HILLWALKERS enjoy the exercise of the climb to the top, the view from high above the glens, and the wildlife seen along the way – ravens, bright dots of wildflowers – and, individually, a boot sole makes little impact. But on popular routes, the easily accessible ones, those that give a grand view from the top, all those individual treads add up, and the fragile vegetation can struggle to survive the trampling.

This can result in a very visually obvious scar – we've all seen them – or a more subtle erosion of the vegetation, where the path can be braided as folk follow the drier, firmer line. The bare peat or thin soil becomes compacted and the plants' roots struggle to gain a hold, dying out and unable to recolonise the bare ground.

This has been the fate of the Ben Wyvis plateau. Ben Wyvis, north of Dingwall, is a National Nature Reserve and has been designated as a Special Area of Conservation, an international accolade recognising its importance. On its summit plateau it contains the largest continuous single tract of a particular type of moss-heath in the UK.

What is a moss-heath? This is a collection of plants that can tolerate the harsh environment of high, stony summits. It's usually seen as a carpet of woolly fringe-moss, a low grey-green hairy moss, and dotted throughout with very small plants like stiff sedge and dwarf willow. This rare moss-heath is very susceptible to trampling damage and disturbance. Over the years several wide paths have developed across the plateau, where the sensitive species that form moss-heath have been trampled and only bare soil and stone remains.

The erosion on the steeper, lower slopes was tackled by path construction, creating a robust surface for walkers, but the gentle slope of the plateau is a different matter. Scottish Natural Heritage didn't want to build a formal path on the summit, which they think would be out of place amid the spongy tussocks of moss-heath.

Instead, they are encouraging the use of a single route on the plateau to allow other bare areas to recover. This involves clearing loose stone from surfaces to make a route more obvious, placing stone on some other surfaces to discourage use and allow recovery, and making small piles of stones to mark routes which are less obvious in bad weather.

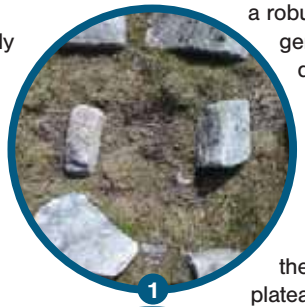

Photo 1 is *Racomitrium* (Wooly Fringe-moss) expanding from transplants

Photo 2 is immediately after transplanting - shows sparse trampled vegetation where *Racomitrium* has been eliminated.

Photo 3 is transplanted *Racomitrium* growing well 4 years after transplant - remains of biodegraded Geo-jute can be seen.

Staff have also been trying out some ways of restoring moss-heaths to bare areas by transplanting small patches of vegetation in trial plots. The thinking is that if it proves successful the techniques may be applied more widely to restore damaged areas.

Restoration is a difficult process on the open, windswept plateau, and the hard, compacted soils of the bare areas don't make it easy for the plants to grow secure roots and spread naturally. So in 2011 some trial plots were devised to aid the fragile plants, using a coarse mesh hessian mat called Geo-Jute, which degrades naturally over time. Monitoring of the transplant and other control plots to test natural colonisation has taken place, with progress being seen four years after the start.

Graham Sullivan, Uplands Adviser for SNH, said: "The results have been sufficiently encouraging for us to expand the use of transplants and jute across a wider area. We're not trying as yet to re-vegetate all the eroded areas – rather it's done as part of a wider aim of reducing braiding and continual widening of paths through steering people towards using fewer routes and explaining why this is necessary to improve habitat condition."

Hopefully this long-term action by SNH, the combination of soft visitor management and vegetation recolonisation, will help reduce the impact of the multiple routes across the plateau to the summit. It shows that what is easily done in the high summits can take time to mend. A reminder to us all to tread carefully in the hills.

Our thanks to Graham Sullivan, Uplands Adviser for SNH, for his assistance, expertise and images.

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Track construction in the hills

By Davie Black, Access & Conservation Officer

FOR many who enjoy the Scottish hills, the sight of a long, pale brown track snaking its way up the hillside is a jarring note in the landscape. Tracks are needed to allow landowners to carry out management, and can be sensitively constructed to fit with the landscape, but too often we see insensitive construction, scraping out a route that pays scant attention to the good practice guidance that is available.

A survey in 2017 of our members' interests showed that 90% of respondents thought that new hill roads were a threat to upland landscapes and that we should continue to campaign for greater controls on them. Some track construction requires planning permission, if it is for developments like windfarms, hydro power or telecoms installations, and there is a degree of control by the planning authority over how these tracks are built.

However, if it can be argued that the track is for agricultural or forestry use, then the landowner can go ahead without any need for planning permission, under what is known as Permitted Development Rights. Campaigning by outdoor recreation groups in the past led to a modification of this right in 2014 so that landowners must submit what is known as 'Prior Notification' to the local planning authority to determine if some conditions may need to be imposed.

To determine if this Prior Notification was a legislative step that works, Scottish Environment LINK launched a three-year study "to consider the extent to which the new system has addressed campaigners' concerns and meets the government's current objectives relating to responsible land use and management, and community engagement in planning."

The result of this study is a very timely report, Changing Tracks, published last month and coinciding with the passage of a Planning Bill through the Scottish Parliament. Drawing on case studies, the conclusions are that Prior Notification is confusing, that there is a democratic deficit, and that landscape and environmental damage continues.

Stuart Younie, Mountaineering Scotland's Chief Executive Officer, said: "The proliferation of these built roads in the landscape is of great concern. The legacy of damaged landscapes is something we must try to limit through greater democratic accountability. Although some landscapes receive protection in the planning system, as things stand many areas are still vulnerable to uncontrolled track building."

Mountaineering Scotland is fully behind the call for tighter control of tracks. Tracks for forestry are subject to greater scrutiny through woodland grant schemes than those for agricultural purposes which have little oversight.

When Permitted Development Rights were brought in during the middle of the 20th Century it was to address a national need post-war. Times have moved on, and with it the ability of heavy machinery to sculpt the landscape to a greater degree.

The recent defeat of an amendment to the Planning Bill going through Parliament is disappointing; that would have ensured that tracks for field sports wouldn't slip through as permitted development. But there is still time for change as the Scottish Government has committed to a review of permitted development rights as part of a wider reform of the planning system, one the Planning Bill has completed its passage through Parliament.

For more information

▶ *Changing Tracks*, the full Scottish Environment LINK report, can be downloaded from the Scottish Environment LINK website: www.scotlink.org/workareas/hill-tracks/

Have your say on forestry strategy

By Davie Black

THE passing of the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Act 2018, which completes the devolution of all forestry functions from the Forestry Commission to the Scottish Government, gives climbers and walkers a chance to have a say on future forestry strategy in Scotland.

The transfer of responsibility for forestry functions involves a complete reorganisation of the Forestry Commission Scotland: the policy, advisory and grant-giving arm becomes a department within the Scottish Government, and Forest Enterprise Scotland, which manages the National Forest Estate, becomes a new public agency called Forestry and Land Scotland.

First up on the new forestry agenda is a consultation on a new Forestry Strategy for Scotland: a 10-year framework for action to achieve a 50-year vision for Scotland's woodlands and forests. This is welcome as the existing Forestry Strategy was published in 2006 and needs refreshing to reflect the current woodland landscape.

From the mountaineering perspective we would want to see an end to dense, dark, angular blocks of conifers. Would it not be better, since there is public subsidy involved in planting schemes, for plantations to have softer edges, accommodating recreational routes through them and having broadleaf trees along paths and edges to make for a more visually pleasing look? And good for wildlife too.

More treeline woodland would be welcome too – it isn't a commercial proposition to have a scattering of trees from up beyond the timber crop, but it is a part of Scotland's landscape that is missing. Clearly it will have to go hand in hand with deer management – integrating upland management would be a progressive step forward for Scottish society with public benefits in terms of landscape and wildlife.

Have your say

▶ The consultation is open for comment until Thursday 29 November 2018 and can be found here: https://consult.gov.scot/forestry/scotlands-forestry-strategy-2019-29/

School backs path restoration

By Neil Reid

THE Mend Our Mountains Appeal received a major vote of confidence this summer from the coming generations of hillwalkers and mountaineers. Pupils and staff from Loretto School in Musselburgh have taken the appeal to heart and raised £1500 through a range of outdoor activities.

The school has a strong tradition of outdoor and wilderness activities, which stretches back to a former headmaster, Hely Hutchinson-Almond, who coincidentally contributed an article to the SMC *Journal* of 1893 about climbing Beinn a'Ghlo, one of the two hill paths in Scotland which will benefit from the Mend Our Mountains appeal.

In September a group of sixth form pupils set out to climb Beinn a'Ghlo themselves. On the way they met Julian Digby of Cairngorm Wilderness Contracts, who explained what is being done to restore the paths and why it matters – for the benefit of the hill even more than for the benefit of walkers.

The mountain theme was kept up through the week with a talk by the headmaster on the importance of Mend Our Mountains and then trips to the sea cliffs of Hawkcraig Point in Fife where senior pupils did a charity abseil. Younger pupils weren't left out, with Primary 7 classes visiting Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh and learning about geo-conservation from the Holyrood Rangers.

Meanwhile, back at school, a non-uniform day and a sale of baking added more to the total raised, and the week of events culminated in a Chapel Service for the senior school where Head of Sixth Form Dr Richard Phillips (whose idea the school's involvement was) led the address with a focus on the importance of our wild areas and why we should get out and climb.

Dr Phillips said: "All in all it was a very productive week. Our involvement started because I had been reading an article in an old mountaineering journal from 1893,

Cairngorm Club donation

THE Cairngorm Club is the latest of our affiliated clubs to make a donation to the Mend our Mountains appeal, with a cheque for £1000 earmarked for the Beinn a'Ghlo project.

The club – Scotland's oldest continually active mountaineering club – is one of the largest and plays an active role not just in walking and climbing, but also in its commitment to the preservation of our mountains. It recently committed up to £10,000 to repairs of the path on Clachnaben - one of its local hills.

"He was ahead of his time in recognising that the outdoors were central to positive mental and physical health"

written by one of our former Headmasters, Hely Hutchinson-Almond, who climbed the Beinn a' Ghlo massif on Christmas Day in 1892.

"Hutchinson-Almond was a pivotal figure at Loretto as he defined its ethos, now summarised as 'mind, body and spirit'. He was ahead of his time in recognising that the outdoors were central to positive mental and physical health and his emphasis was on access and enjoyment of the outdoors for all. Having read his 1893 article I was keen to take some students to retrace the route on Beinn a' Ghlo and when I read about Mend Our Mountains through Mountaineering Scotland, I decided to get our students involved in some fund raising events, including a walk up Beinn a' Ghlo."

The Mend Our Mountains appeal seeks to raise £1 million across the UK, with a target in Scotland of £100,000. The appeal is run by the British Mountaineering Council overall, and is led by Mountaineering Scotland north of the border. Money raised will go to help restore badly eroded footpaths on some of our most iconic and popular mountains in National Parks.

In Scotland's two National Parks – the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond & The Trossachs – the mountain paths chosen are Beinn a' Ghlo (Carn Liath) and Ben Vane. Both get many thousands of ascents every year and both suffer from badly eroded paths which not only make life harder for hill walkers but also cause growing damage to the hillsides.

For more information

▶ More information about the Mend Our Mountains appeal and information on how to donate can be found at www.mountaineering.scot/mend-our-mountains

Access Matters

Snowsports touring guidance refreshed

by Davie Black

SNOWSPORTS touring is a growth activity in Scotland these days. Side-country, back-country, ski mountaineering - whatever your preference is, the peace of the open hill is an attractive option for more and more people.

But in the process of getting from the main road into the solitude, the chances are that at some point many tourers will come close to one of Scotland's managed ski resorts. Here lies the potential for conflicts of interest between those skinning up or across the slopes, and those going downhill on the piste.

There have been incidents in the past, often to do with mutual lack of understanding of the needs and expectations of different users of the snow. Resorts have reported some decidedly dodgy behaviour, including digging snowholes and building igloos on a downhill piste, digging avalanche pits on the piste, and walking or skinning up pistes and beside uplift facilities.

To help with this understanding and managing expectations, Mountaineering Scotland, through the Snowsport Touring Advisory Group and in consultation with the Association of Scottish Ski Areas, has published a refreshed guidance booklet: *Snowsports Touring, Mountaineering and managed Resorts in Scotland.* This booklet is available to download from www.mountaineering.scot/activities/snowsports-touring/code or as a hard copy from the office.

Problems can be avoided by using common sense and asking yourself if you will be interfering with others' use of the resort. If the answer is yes, then think again or ask a member of resort staff for guidance. Some resorts have discounted passes to help snowsport tourers get up or down and this may be an attractive option for getting past the busy part of the resort.

As outlined in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, access rights exist only if exercised responsibly. Access rights do not apply to land that has been developed or set out for a recreational purpose, while in use and where your exercise of access rights would interfere with the recreational use intended for that land. The key word here is 'interfere', so no skinning up the piste! Please think about whether what you are about to do is going to interfere with the operations of the managed ski resort, and if so, think again! To help you, the following advice should be adhered to. ▶

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1 Digging holes
Remember a piste isn't necessarily a groomed area between ski fences. Over the back of Nevis Range for example, the *Home Run* cuts and weaves through rocky outcrops and is only marked intermittently, so it's easy to see folk getting confused as to what is on or off piste. It's worth checking out the piste map before setting off and make sure your 'creations' are well away from a downhill skiing route!

2 Avalanche Pits
Yes, a great thing to do, to increase your knowledge of the snowpack but please do it well away from a piste and fill it in again when you have finished so other users don't ski or fall into it in poor visibility.

3 Walking up/down a piste
This is dangerous. Remember a downhill skier may not have the necessary skill to avoid you, particularly if the skier is a novice approaching at speed in poor visibility. In addition, you will leave a line of footprints in the snow (post holes) which may be dangerous and unsightly for those who have paid to use the piste. ***Stay off the piste when on foot.***

4 Skinning up the piste
This is just downright rude, as well as posing a danger to yourself and downhill skiers. Either skin in single file off the side of the piste or if that is not practical, keep as close to the edge as possible and go in single file.

5 Walking or skinning up the line of an uplift facility
Clearly when the lift is in use this is dangerous for you and the lift user. If the lift is not in use then skinning the line is acceptable, but walking is not. Leaving footprints has the obvious problem of damaging a piste but also in thawing conditions will create pools of water and increase the thaw rate with a potential economic impact on the ski area. You will create post holes which are dangerous and will create irrevocable damage to the lift line.

6 Freeloading on the uplift
Blagging a lift, call it what you like, it's no different to walking into your local outdoor store and stealing a jacket. Enough said.

7 Dogs on the loose
Dogs not under close control could cause injury or danger to the animal and/or downhill skiers. ***Never ever*** take your dog on the piste unless it's out of hours and there are no downhill skiers/boarders around.

8 Poo
Mainly dog poo on the piste, but human poo is also an issue. Ensure that your dog goes to the loo well away from the piste. If you are on or close to the piste, carry a poo bag and carry it down. Going snowholing at Cairngorm? Then check out the Snow White initiative (formally Poo Project) at www.cairngormmountain.co.uk/mountain-activities/ranger-service/conservation/, and also see Heather Morning's article on page 36.

Here's hoping for a snowy winter this year.

Strathfarrar winter access

FROM Thursday 1 November, the winter access arrangements on Braulen Estate in Strathfarrar came into effect. Access up Strathfarrar is still available on foot, bicycle or on horseback, but the road is closed to vehicular traffic until the end of March, except for Mountaineering Scotland members planning to climb the Munros on either side of the glen.

This access arrangement that has been negotiated with the estate is exclusive to Mountaineering Scotland members. It applies only to members who are hillwalking or climbing, and does not apply to lower-level walks in the glen.

There are detailed conditions that must be met, with full details on our website at www.mountaineering.scot/campaigns/safeguarding-access/strathfarrar-access. Members are reminded that this permissive vehicular access is very dependent on sticking closely to the arrangements agreed with the estate. Breaking the conditions could result in this vehicular access benefit being withdrawn from us.

The list of Munros and the designated parking locations for them is on the website – this helps with estate deer management. Access can be arranged by emailing info@mountaineering.scot or phoning the office on 01738 493942 Mon-Fri 9-5 for the padlock code, which changes regularly.

Please read the access conditions carefully before calling so that you are aware of the information we will need and the conditions you are expected to comply with. And do leave enough time for us to confirm the access with the estate; last-minute requests may be unsuccessful.

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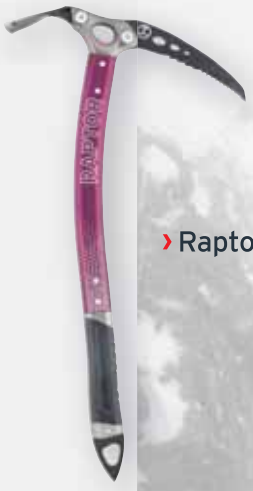

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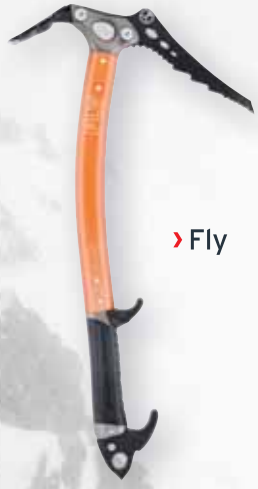

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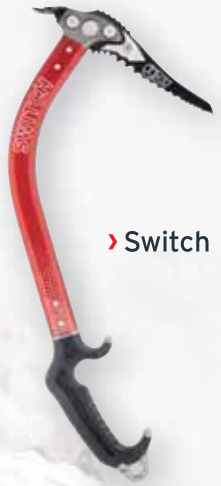

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Students take to the hills with St John Scotland

Degrees of mountain skill

Advice on gear placements

Nick Carter explains the kit

By Neil Reid

In a sensible world I'd have been sitting at home with my feet up, watching some rubbish on the telly. But here I was with the driving drizzle dripping off the end of my nose, wondering how the students beside me were not only managing to concentrate on what they were being shown but showing every sign of enjoying themselves too.

The group, from St Andrews University Mountaineering Club, were certainly up for it. The Poll Dubh crags in Glen Nevis were sodden, but all five students were oblivious as they discussed the best ways to construct a safe belay, with all points of attachment sound, independent of each other and the load on each equalised. The discussion revealed different states of knowledge: some knew a little, some were fairly well clued up, one knew only that what they had been taught before was wrong. But the key thing was that all five were learning not just the right way to do it but also the thinking behind it.

For the club this was one of their normal weekend meets – this time at Steall Hut in Glen Nevis – but with the added attendance of Nick Carter, the St John Scotland Mountain Safety Instructor, passing on safety and skills knowledge to selected members of the club.

The Mountain Safety Instructor scheme is funded by St John Scotland and is a partnership with Mountaineering Scotland, set up to help young climbers and mountaineers to acquire and pass on best practice in a range of skills and safety issues. The aim is for students to learn and pass on their new knowledge to fellow club members, reducing the chances of accidents to what has traditionally been seen as a high risk group.

When it started the scheme targeted winter skills, and initial success prompted an extension of the programme to include autumn sessions, allowing Nick to catch new members at the start of the term and instil good practice from the beginning. That's why we were out on Poll Dubh on a day when you wouldn't put a dog out, and it was testament to Nick's inspirational teaching and the keenness of the students to learn, that the rain – though it could never be ignored – was pushed to the back of everyone's mind.

There was the art of placing gear that was capable of holding a fall, of ropework and calls for trad climbing. The question of abseiling was discussed – why you'd do it, how you were almost certain to lose some gear – and was put into practice, with the students themselves setting up safe anchors, after discussions on wrong ways, right ways and better ways. Then it was a case of teaching them how to abseil with prussik protection and giving it a go.

Tackling an HS climb

Walking backwards down the crag meant they were under no illusions how slippery the rock was, and there was an 'after you' look in everyone's eyes when Nick said they'd have a go at top roping a Hard Severe to finish the afternoon session.

He'd already explained the grading system and all knew they were climbing harder than that at the climbing wall. But the rock really was slippy, and everyone was in big boots. Hesitation seemed general until Ricardo decided he'd give it a go.

It looked touch and go for the first couple of moves, then went easier until the crux at half height. Feet slipped off tiny edges, handholds all sloped the wrong way and the boots were too big to jam into the crack but... all of a sudden and against reason, a quick smear did the

Top: On the path up Stob Ban

Above: Setting up a belay

trick and Ricardo was over the overlap. A few more tricky moves above and he was on easy ground at the top of the route. The bar was set - and set high.

Competitive instincts kicked in and suddenly there was a queue to have a go at the problem. No-one else made it to the top but there were brave efforts and serious displays of determination with skittering boots and numbed or gloved fingers on tiny crimps.

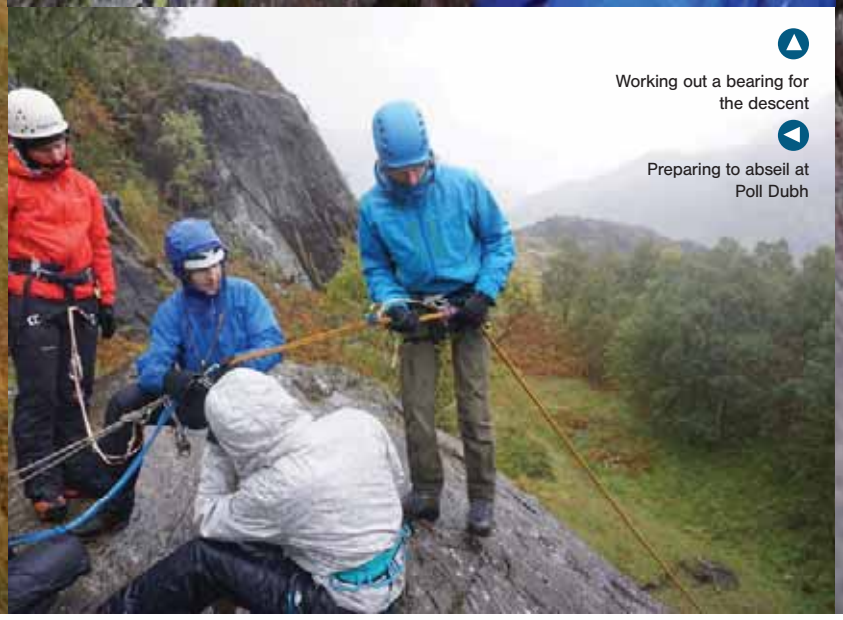
Saturday's weather had been worse than forecast, so it was unrealistic for everyone to hope for better on Sunday. In the event it averaged out the same: the rain was twice as heavy, but it paused now and then and we even caught a glimpse of something bright and yellow in the sky.

Navigation Day

Sunday was navigation day, with an ascent of Stob Ban, climbing up via Allt Coire a Mhusgain and descending by the north ridge. Nothing complicated and the visibility was never that bad, but Nick was able to show the group that there's more to navigation than walking on a bearing. We started with a look at different makes and scales of map, learning that there are often substantial differences and that, in terms of detail included, less can sometimes be more. Also that, in some situations, a larger scale map can be a handicap rather than an advantage.

Bearings were taken and walked on, but the students also had to gauge how long a section of the route would take and check their estimate once the section was complete; they had to relate the terrain and configuration of the path and hill they expected in a section and check that against the reality. And, closer to the summit, a spot question was asked: looking at the summit from where we were, with no reference to the map, how long will it take for us to reach the top? The variation in the answers was interesting.

Once there (and with a brief glimpse of sunshine doused by a sudden, but also brief snow shower) a bearing was needed to head off for the (invisible from there) north ridge, with tips including setting a bearing for the next stage from a sheltered spot rather than the exposed top which it started from. Reference to the map showed some scrambling would be involved on the descent, which allowed practice in route-finding, spotting for companions and even using a rope and direct belay to safeguard short



Working out a bearing for the descent

Preparing to abseil at Poll Dubh

“One day I might be on a cool crisp sunny trip to Auchinstarry Quarry, North Lanarkshire, and a week later battling wind and rain in Glen Nevis.”

sections of downclimbing.

It’s all designed to make students engage with map and terrain, rather than blithely following a path or – worse still – the person in front, and even by the end of that one trip a difference could be seen in their general confidence with what they were doing and where they were going.

That’s reflected in comments from students after courses. They talk about the skills they have learned, from technical skills in rock climbing to route planning on the hill. They mention the benefits of learning from a source they can trust and being able to get out of bad habits. Again and again the word ‘confidence’ comes up. And that’s not because they’ve just memorised a list of facts, it’s because on-the -hill training and guided discussions are a great way of learning the techniques and also learning how to think about problems and applying their new or confirmed knowledge to coming up with sensible solutions.

A Fulfilling Time

From Nick’s point of view the past two years have been fulfilling, seeing students develop and being able to boost the skills set of university clubs. He said: “After two winter seasons in 2015 and 2016 working with the Scottish university mountaineering clubs it was great that St John Scotland were keen to extend the project into the autumn semester. This means that I get two chances in one academic year to get out with most of the clubs.

“Over the last two autumns - 2017 and 2018 – I’ve really enjoyed working in all the different venues, situations and conditions. One day I might be on a cool crisp sunny trip to Auchinstarry Quarry, North Lanarkshire, and a week later battling wind and rain in Glen Nevis. Autumn can be an excellent time of year for scrambling routes in Glen Coe but winter can arrive early and I may be teaching winter skills on a Corbett in Torridon in November. There’s always a great variety of weather and conditions in the Scottish hills. This variety and all the different students that are keen to learn makes my job very satisfying.”

St John Scotland is delighted with the way the scheme has grown and developed. Angus Loudon, the charity’s Executive Director, said: “Through our long association with Scotland’s mountain rescue teams, we are all too aware of the large number of accidents that happen on Scotland’s hills each year, often involving inexperienced or,

sadly, ill-prepared walkers and climbers. Nick Carter's work with university and college mountaineering groups is vital to help keep younger people safe on the hills. By covering everything from choosing the right equipment for the weather and terrain, to navigation skills and more advanced climbing techniques, the training gives these young people the confidence to enjoy themselves safely in Scotland's outdoors at this early stage of their hill-walking careers.

"When the St John Scotland Mountain Safety Instructor scheme started three years ago, training was offered during just the winter season, but in response to the demand for skills training and the positive feedback from students, we've recognised the need to expand it. Now, Nick is leading training with groups every weekend from the autumn right through to springtime. It means not only can more students from across Scotland access the training – provided free to them – it also enables the groups to practise a wide range of mountaineering skills, and test themselves in the full gamut of Scottish weather!

"We're confident that, through Nick's training, we're helping to keep a whole generation of young hillwalkers and mountaineers safe on the hills, and we're looking forward to hundreds more young people being able to benefit from the experience."

Safeguarding a short section of descent

The rewards of the summit: not much of a cairn, but a respite from the rain and even a glimpse of sunshine

The Arran 700s

Ian Tupman traverses the high tops of Arran

I live in Ardrossan and the mountains of the Isle of Arran are my 'back yard'. I know them well and have often linked four or more summits on a day walk. In May 2017 however I came across *High On The Hills,* a blog by a member of the Arran Mountain Rescue Team. Kirstie and fellow MRT member Lucy had completed a charity challenge by climbing all 12 of the 700m summits on Arran in one day - a tremendous achievement. My interest was piqued.

I studied the route that Kirstie and Lucy had taken. Being of 'senior' years, I thought a more relaxed approach would be appropriate and I came up with the idea of reversing their route with a start on the east coast at Corrie and finishing at Pirnmill on the west coast. I would allow two days and include a wild camp. My original plan was to complete the walk in October last year when the midges had disappeared, but the lack of a suitable weather window and other commitments meant it had to be postponed.

Fast forward to March 2018. On a week's walking trip in Assynt I was joined by my friend Mick for a few days and I mentioned the Arran trip over a beer one evening. Mick was up for it and we pencilled in the second week of May when we would hopefully get two days of good weather while the dreaded midges would still be dormant. On returning home I realised that in the first week of May I would be on Skye attempting the Cuillin ridge traverse - it was going to be a busy fortnight!

Despite a reasonable weather forecast, conditions on the Cuillin were awful. Rain, wind and greasy rock combined to bring our attempt to an end less than one-third of the way along the ridge. By way of consolation however, we enjoyed an extended round of Coire Lagan on the last day, finishing with my third ascent of the Inaccessible Pinnacle.

Returning from Skye on the Friday, I was hoping for a few days of rest before tackling Arran but the weather forecast was showing Monday and Tuesday

Heading up to Goatfell from Corrie

Meg and Mick on Mullach Buidhe #1

Caisteal Abhail

The steep ascent to A'Chir with Caisteal Abhail and Cir Mhor behind

The precarious summit blocks of A'Chir

On the descent to Loch Nuis

Crossing Iorsa Water

as being ideal for our adventure - just enough time to wash and dry my kit.

And so on Monday 14 May, Mick and I boarded the 7am ferry at Ardrossan with Meg, my border collie. It was a glorious morning. A light breeze, blue skies and a forecasted temperature of 3C at 900m - perfect walking conditions. From the Brodick ferry terminal we took the bus and got off at the start of the Goatfell path just before Corrie. We had a big day ahead of us but with sunset not until 9.30pm, we were in no rush and made a slow but steady ascent of Goatfell (874m) in two hours. The air quality was superb and from the highest point on Arran we could see almost all of our route spread out before us.

There is no easy way to the summit of A'Chir, protected as it is by steep drops on the east and west faces and by a narrow, exposed ridge.

From Goatfell we headed north and dropped down onto the east side of the ridge. Continuing under North Goatfell, we left our 12kg packs at the head of Coire Lan and climbed the easy ground to the summit of Mullach Buidhe #1 (830m). Returning the same way, we collected our packs and ascended the steep grassy slope to the base of the rocks on North Goatfell. A short refreshment break, followed by a scramble onto the granite blocks of North Goatfell (818m) gave us our third summit.

We had collected water on our ascent of Goatfell but I knew there would be no more until our climb towards Caisteal Abhail. Before that however, we had the knee-jarring descent to The Saddle and 355m of steep ascent to the summit of Cir Mhor. This is a 'proper' mountain with steep drops on all sides. It is known by some as the Matterhorn of Arran and is my favourite mountain on the island. We stood on its summit (799m) and admired the 360 degree panorama.

En-route from Cir Mhor we located the two natural springs which rise on the south slope of Caisteal Abhail and are marked by cairns approximately 30m to the west of the path. We stashed our packs and with the loads lifted from our shoulders, marched up the easy slope to Caisteal Abhail. The two granite tors which mark the summit are shown on OS maps at 859m and 834m. We scrambled up both to bring our total to six. We were feeling pretty good and after filling our water bottles and collecting our packs we took the faint traverse path on the west side of Cir Mhor to arrive at the cairn at the head of Coire Buidhe.

There is no easy way to the summit of A'Chir, protected as it is by steep drops on the east and west faces and by a narrow, exposed ridge. I completed a north-south traverse of the ridge several years ago and, knowing how tricky it is in places, I had ruled out a ridge ascent with heavy packs and a dog. So, from the col, we dropped south-east down the stepped path and traversed across the bottom of Coire Buidhe to reach the steep, grassy slope below the east ridge of A'Chir.

We could see the summit rocks but didn't know how easy it would be to reach them from the lip of the corrie. This was virgin territory for us both. Tiredness was accompanied by doubt as we slogged up the steep ground but ▶

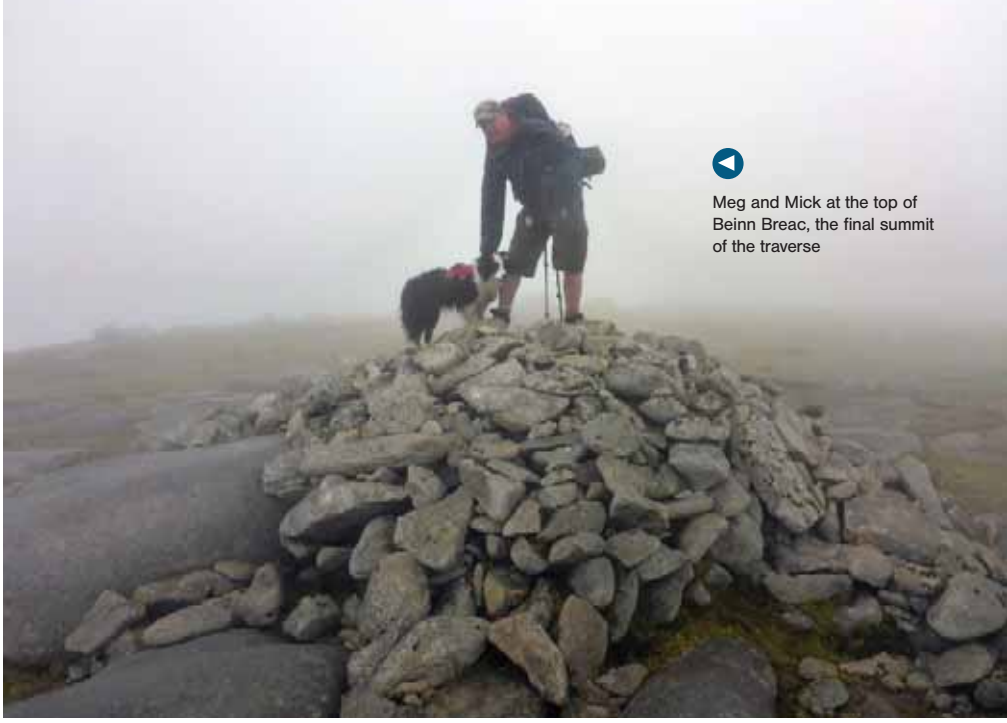
our concerns were swept away as we reached the corrie rim to be greeted by a wonderful panorama to the south. A short walk brought us easily to the base of the summit rocks. I saw that the scramble to the top would be beyond Meg's ability so I tethered her to my pack. She lay down in the shade, grateful for a well-deserved rest while Mick and I undertook the ten metre scramble.

A large boulder forms the highest point of A'Chir (745m) and even with rock shoes it would be a very brave person who attempted to climb onto it. Kirstie and Lucy had been given a bunk-up onto the boulder by a friend but Mick and I were not feeling that energetic and settled for touching the boulder as high as we could reach. We down-climbed to collect Meg and our packs and set off along the ridge towards our next objective. Our progress was slowed on the ridge as we had to negotiate some exposed slabs and down-climbs before we arrived at the col below Beinn Tarsuinn.

We were back on familiar ground now and made good time on the ascent to the summit of Beinn Tarsuinn (826m). The time had flown since we set off from Corrie at 8.15 and we were surprised to see that it was now almost 7pm. We hastened the pace south along the fine ridge with its excellent views to the east and west. With the summit of Beinn Nuis (792m) in the bag we now had the long descent to Loch Nuis - our overnight billet and our next source of water.

The ground around Loch Nuis was wetter and more uneven than I remembered but we found suitable spots to pitch our tents, collected water from the loch outfall and ate our evening meals as the sun set behind the Mull of Kintyre. We were footsore and exhausted as we zipped up the doors of our tents and fell quickly into the deep sleep that comes after a long day on the hill.

We had hoped for a dry, early start to Tuesday but at 5am the sun struggled to find its way through a veil of mist. If truth be known I was pleased, and turned over for a couple more hours of sleep. By 8am we had breakfasted and struck camp. The mist and cloud had lifted slightly and we set off to reach our final three summits up in the north-west of Arran. Our route would take us down into and across Glen Iorsa before climbing to the base of Mullach Buidhe #2. On most maps of Arran the floor of Glen Iorsa is shown largely as bog, and our task was to cross it and to stay as dry as possible but this was not easy. Between the large tussocks of dry grass lay sucking bog and within minutes our boots were filled with foul smelling water. However, the crossing of Iorsa Water provided some relief and we donned clean socks on the other side as the sun came out.



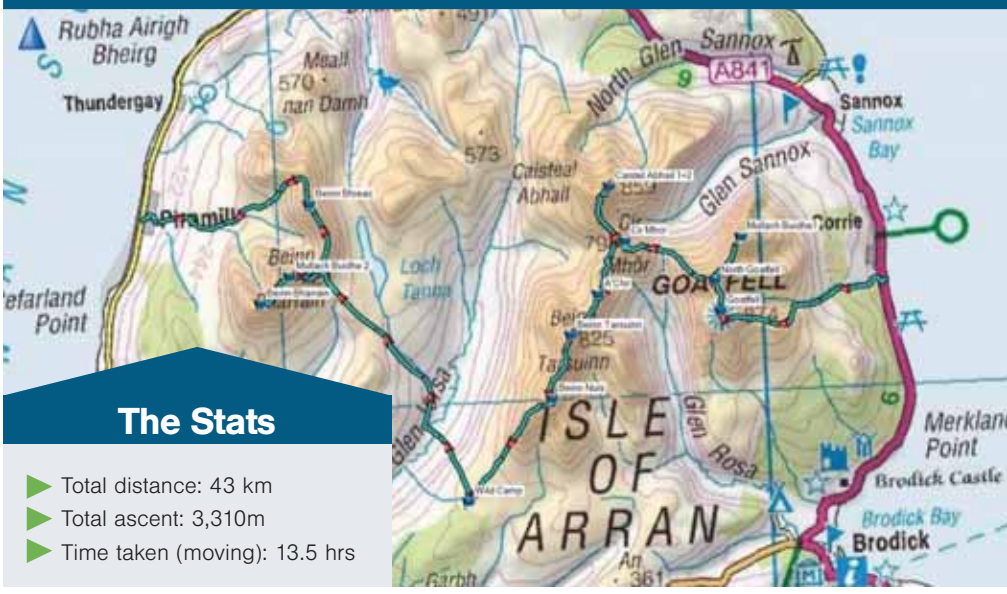
Meg and Mick at the top of Beinn Breac, the final summit of the traverse

Using the stream of Allt Tigh an Shiorraim as a handrail, we walked up increasingly dry ground on its western side to reach Dubh Loch. Cloud was shrouding our final three summits and after a short rest we made a slow ascent towards Mullach Buidhe #2. Just short of the main ridge we stashed our packs and logged their position on my GPS. The relief from our heavy loads was instant. We strode purposefully along the ridge to pick up Mullach Buidhe #2 (721m) and then on to the blocky summit of Beinn Bharrain (716m). I could only imagine how good the views would be from here in clear conditions - the Mull of Kintyre to the west and maybe the Antrim coast of Northern Ireland to the south west. Instead we had to settle for a canvas of grey emulsion in every direction.

Retracing our route along the ridge, we located and collected our packs and made the relatively easy ascent to our twelfth and final summit, Beinn Bhreac (711m). Handshakes, however, could wait until we were safely off the hill. We agreed that a straight descent of the steep west face of Beinn Bhreac in these conditions would be folly and so we continued north to the col at 653m where we turned south-west for the long descent to pick up the headwaters of Allt Gobhlach. The small streams join to form a substantial river that, over the years, has cut its way through the softer rock to form an impressive ravine with waterfalls and an abundance of flora and fauna.

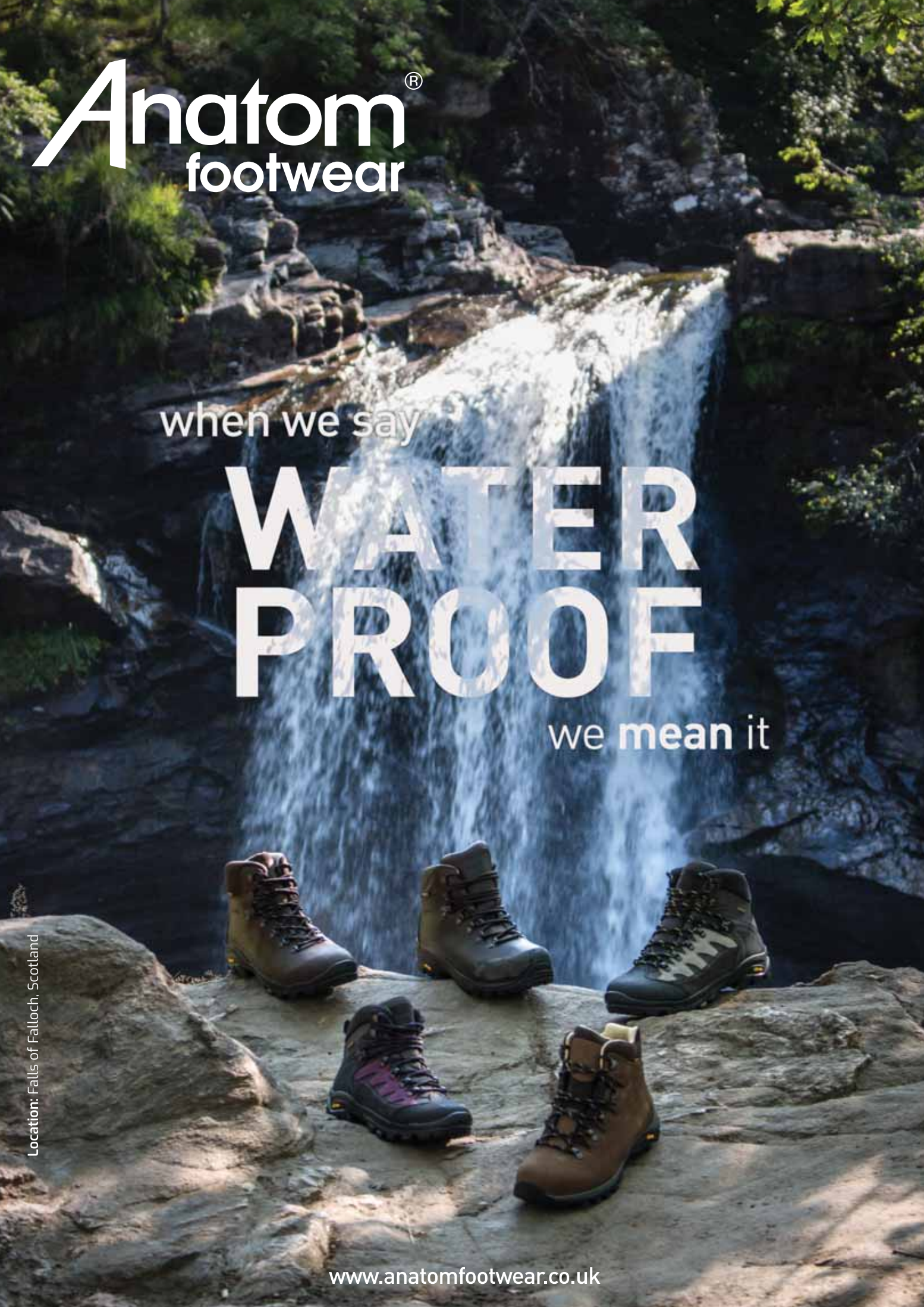
By now we had descended below the cloud base and the coast was visible below us. Half an hour later we were sat outside the Pirnmill Post Office and store. Thankfully it was open and after congratulating ourselves with the customary handshakes, we enjoyed a couple of bottles of beer - Arran Blonde, naturally.

The Route



The Stats

- Total distance: 43 km
- Total ascent: 3,310m
- Time taken (moving): 13.5 hrs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Learning how to ‘go’

Heather Morning wonders why poo is taboo

WHY don’t we talk about it? That sticky, sometimes smelly subject of poo, faeces, shit, No 2, jobbies, crap, keech, chod, turds, nuggets or just going for a dump. Call it what you like, but humans discharge waste matter from their bowels usually once a day. This makes it a very relevant topic if some of your days are spent on the hill well away from the nearest available toilet.

2018 marks the tenth anniversary of the Cairngorm Mountain Poo Project (now re-branded as ‘Snow White’). It’s a unique initiative set up by the rangers at Cairngorm Mountain to encourage people heading out to snowhole overnight to call in at the Ranger Base and pick up a free bag and pot. Once the user’s poo is in the bag they drop the bag into the airtight lightweight plastic pot and carry it down. The contents of the pot can then be dropped off at the disposal point by the car park at the end of the trip.

It’s all a numbers game. When there were very few people heading out snowholing and they were well dispersed it didn’t matter if poo was left in what was effectively a freezer until the snow melted in the spring. Nowadays however, snowholing is a popular activity and many people will choose to dig their snowhole at one of a handful of key locations which are easy to access and relatively safe – hence the development of the Poo Project.

This initiative has been incredibly successful: statistics provided by the Cairngorm Mountain Ranger Service show that as many as 100 Poo Pots per season are taken out and used. That’s a lot of poo which would otherwise have been left to potentially pollute our mountain watercourses and drinking water and, of course, provide a very unpleasant experience for anyone unlucky enough to stumble across some of it.

As hill walking becomes more popular, organisations like Mountaineering Scotland endeavour to educate people on ‘Where to go in the great outdoors’ at any time of year. Different schools of thought recommend different techniques: digging or kicking a small hole and burying your poo seems to be the best option if that is available to you, and using moss instead of toilet roll will minimise the increasing amount of loo paper we see on our adventures. Choice of location is just as important. I recommend at least 100m from any path or water source and never in locations which

Cairngorm poo pots waiting to be emptied

people will be drawn to for shelter.

Areas where hill walkers congregate (such as bothies and good camping sites) are under particular threat from thoughtless toilet behaviour. Check out the photo on the right, taken this summer within a short distance of Corrour bothy, right by the burn upstream of the point from where people take their water. (This was during a period when the toilet at Corrour was temporarily closed for maintenance, but that's no excuse.)

Ever been in that situation where it's foul weather and the only shelter for your lunch is behind that one large boulder? And then you get to the lee of the rock and someone's used it as a toilet? A classic example of this is the large rock on the bend at the Halfway Lochan on the Ben Nevis path. Another 'hot spot' is the weather station on the summit of Cairngorm. In winter this is a windy and hostile place where shelter on the leeward side of the building is essential for taking on board food and drink and concentrating on your navigation. It's also the place that people seem to think is OK to use as a toilet.

When you are heading for a poo on the hill next, give some thought to the people who will pass that way after you and how your actions can impact on others and the environment.

So how can we as a hill walking community improve the situation? One solution is to start talking: let's make it okay to talk about poo so people don't feel embarrassed to ask for advice. And if you're still not happy to talk about it? Then make a point of reading our *Where to Go in the Great Outdoors* leaflet. You can find it at www.mountaineering.scot/where-to-go

For more information

▶ Details of the Cairngorm project can be found at www.cairngormmountain.co.uk/mountain-activities/ranger-service/conservation/, or phone 01479 861327. Bags and pots are available to use free of charge all year round.

The Winter Mountain Leader Scheme: **what happens?**

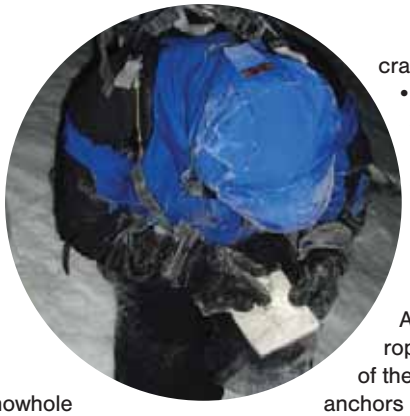
By Pete Hill

MANY of you will have completed at least the training, if not the assessment, of the Summer Mountain Leader scheme. Have you thought about going on to winter?

For many folk summer is enough and winter is a time to keep for personal enjoyment, but for others the Winter Mountain Leader (WML) scheme is a sound way of progressing and enhancing their skills, either for work or, increasingly these days, purely for personal satisfaction and confidence.

Full details of the scheme and syllabus can be found on the Mountain Training website. The scheme consists of several main steps: personal experience; registration on the scheme; attendance at a six-day training course (or exemption from training for very experienced candidates); a consolidation period (the length of which depends on a number of factors, not least what is fed back to you during your training course debrief); and finally a five-day assessment.

The topics covered within the syllabus are many and varied, but all are designed to be appropriate to leading others in the winter mountains. They include navigation in various forms, leadership skills, snow and avalanche awareness (utilising the very important BAA approach to snow and avalanches), personal snowcraft skills (such as self-arrest, step kicking, step cutting and cramponing), emergency procedures (including the use of a rope for safeguarding yourself and others), emergency shelter and snowhole construction and expedition skills.



All providers of WML courses have variations on how their week will run, but they all end up with the same result: delivery of a good percentage of the syllabus. The six-day training course would typically run as follows (noting that topics such as navigation and avalanche awareness will run through all six days):

- **Day One.** Following introductions, course outline and briefings, it would usually concentrate on personal skills such as self-arrest, step kicking, step cutting and cramponing.
- **Day Two** will often be the steep ground day where time is spent looking at how the rope can be deployed to safeguard yourself and group members across a section of awkward ground. Although avoiding use of the rope is the primary skill, use of the rope and various snow anchors in ascent and particularly descent will be looked at throughout the day.
- **Days Three and Four** will have a variety of elements such as emergency shelter construction, in-depth avalanche and snow structure analysis, further personal and group skills and plenty of navigation.
- **Days Five and Six** are devoted to an expedition. This is the highpoint of the course for most people and will cover a whole range of syllabus areas (with the exception of technical ropework). Leadership, navigation in good and poor visibility (including navigating at

night where appropriate), skills for safely moving across snow-covered ground and techniques for avoiding navigating over potentially avalanche-prone slopes will all be looked at. Expedition skills will also be covered, as will the digging of a snowhole suitable as an overnight base. This is not a small hole in the ground dug out in an emergency but a planned and comfortable snow cave, and candidates will be well equipped with shovels, sleeping bags, stoves and other relevant kit. That should provide a pleasant night and the snowhole is used as a base from which some evening and night navigation exercises can take place.

At the end of the course there will be a group debrief followed by individual debriefs during which the trainer will give honest feedback about where candidates are in relation to the syllabus.

So that's the training; what about assessment? Once you feel ready and have covered all the prerequirements, the assessment course is usually five days in duration. The format is quite similar to the training course except the assessors might not be quite as forthcoming! They will be looking for candidates to demonstrate various aspects of the syllabus throughout the week so lots of leadership and navigation will take place, along with related snow skills.

A big difference between the training and assessment courses is that the expedition will now be for three days and two nights. This allows the assessor to ensure that candidates are able to deal with the winter environment over a sustained period of time and can look after both themselves and the group which they are leading. Although this might sound rather formidable, a good background of experience and practice, allied with the ability to think clearly while dealing with the issues of navigation, snowy terrain and a group will all go towards making the expedition phase of the assessment very fulfilling.

Something to consider when planning an assessment date is that the assessor is on your side. That may sound a bit odd but we really do want candidates to succeed: all they have to do is demonstrate to us that they are able to perform various areas of the syllabus at the appropriate standard and have the experience to be a winter mountain leader. If that is all in place then the outcome of the week should be a great success for all concerned.

Winter weather can, of course, be rather challenging at times, so both the training and assessment courses will be flexible enough to work round this. If you are thinking about heading for the WML scheme then spend time in the mountains under winter conditions, but don't try to do too much too soon. Ensure that you have the required skills to look after yourself in the hills in winter and read and understand the BAA approach to snow and avalanches mentioned earlier. Look through the WML requirements on the Mountain Training website to find the syllabus and register with the scheme and use the Scottish Avalanche Information Service, along with related weather forecasts, as part of the planning for your time on the hills. Stay safe and remember that, should conditions look poor, the mountains will always be there another day.

Association of Mountaineering Instructors (AMI)

The Association of Mountaineering Instructors is the representative body for professionally qualified Mountaineering Instructors in the UK and Ireland. AMI members are highly experienced mountaineers who have undergone rigorous training and assessment to qualify under the Mountain Training UK (MTUK) Mountaineering Instructor scheme. AMI is committed to promoting good practice in all mountaineering instruction. By employing an AMI member you will be in the very best of hands. Look for the AMI logo as assurance of high quality instruction. www.ami.org.uk

Pete is a past-President of Mountaineering Scotland and, in recent years, has course directed more WML training and assessment courses than anyone else in the UK. An Honorary Life Member of the Association of Mountaineering Instructors, Pete can be found at www.petehillmic.com

Be prepared for Winter

By Kev Mitchell, Ochils MRT and Vice-Chair of Scottish Mountain Rescue

We all know the joys of walking and climbing in the winter, and a good number of us will have finished climbs in the dark and been chastised by loved ones when we got in at 1am! This is known as being 'an experienced climber' – until you need to be rescued, which is when you become 'dangerously irresponsible and risking rescuers' lives'. The reality for most of us is somewhere in between, and winter is an exciting time to be in Scotland's wild places; but you do need to give it a bit of thought and preparation before venturing out.

I was on my way to the Scottish Mountain Rescue AGM at Carrbridge and the early snows set me thinking about preparing for winter. By the end of September we'd already had a number of call-outs throughout the country for hillgoers who had been benighted, lost, torchless, jacketless and clueless. So what can you do to avoid becoming a Winter Wally – or worse?

Most SMR team members start with 'winterising' their rucksack and equipment. What additional stuff do you need to carry? This list is in no particular order, but you could start with spare gloves, at least two pairs: one thin and one winter pair. Buffs are fabulous for using as scarfs, hats etc, so take a few with you. They weigh very little and a dry hat is a lovely feeling at the top of a wet climb!

Make sure you have new head torch batteries and spares; most mountain rescuers carry a spare torch to avoid having to change batteries in poor weather or darkness. Do NOT rely on your mobile phone light. A belay jacket rolled up and put into a waterproof stuff sack can go into the bottom of the rucksack for when it gets colder than you expected.

Dig out the ice axe and crampons and check they are sharp, and have a few goes at putting on your crampons, to make sure they still fit properly – if using step-ins, the front of your boot wearing away from a good summer of scrambling can affect the fit. Remember, if you think you need your crampons on because the slope is getting steep, you should have them on already. If you have a small bivvy shelter it should be in your rucksack all year round.

Make sure you have either a laminated map or good quality map case as a soggy map is a disappointment for all of us; make sure too that your compass is working well and doesn't get a bubble in it when it is cold and high up (it happens). Maps and compasses on watches or phones are NOT to be relied on. Keep the mobile phone for emergencies, not for looking at mapping software. In addition, keep the phone in a waterproof bag in an inside pocket to try to extend battery life.

Carry a flask with hot drinks even if, like me, you are normally a juice person. There's not much comfort in half frozen peach juice, and Heinz tomato is very warming (other soups are available). And an extra chocolate bar is a must to maintain energy levels (that's my excuse anyway!). Last but not least, make sure your rucksack is waterproof; if not, get a big drybag to put inside it.

To go or not to go?

Make sure that you know what the weather forecast is for the day you intend

to go – right? Wrong! Well, half right. It is vital that you check the weather for the week preceding the big day. If it has been raining solidly for three days you might not want to plan a route which involves multiple burn or river crossings, even if your chosen day is sunny. And if it has been snowy and/or windy in the preceding days this will have a huge effect on avalanche risk. Windslab is probably our biggest enemy and is a condition we need to be very aware of. Bear in mind you may need to change your route choice and perhaps even your day choice! Make the most of online weather forecasts which are specific to the mountains – and it goes without saying that, for checking snow conditions, being able to interpret Scottish Avalanche Information Service (SAIS) snow forecasts is a must, so if you don't know how to – find out.

Don't be alarmed – get up early

First rule of winter wanderings is get up early and get back early. That way, if something unexpected happens you have a bit of leeway to sort things out while it is still light. Mountain Rescue teams spend a lot of time training in the dark and navigating in the dark. That's because lots of hillgoers get benighted in winter and, although uninjured, need to be escorted off the hill, so we need to know how to operate in the dark. Make our lives a little easier: get out of bed an hour early and you might see the descent route.

The subject of descent routes leads me nicely to the ability to navigate. I often get asked about the benefits of GPS, and they are undoubtedly a useful addition to our navigation skills tool box. However, before shelling out a couple of hundred quid on a GPS, enrol yourself on a navigation course (Mountaineering Scotland organise excellent courses) and then buy a GPS. We all know navigation is a vital skill at any time of year but in winter you are more likely to encounter low cloud, sleet, snow and general lack of visibility, so have a day out before the season gets fully underway and brush up on the basics.

Make sure you know how many double paces you take to cover 100m, and how long it takes you to walk a kilometre, so that in a white-out you can pace and time to get to a descent route or correct corrie etc. If you want to get really good, join the local orienteering club to see what accurate navigation is about. The root cause of many mountain rescues is poor navigation followed by a slip, trip or fall.

Stay safe and enjoy

Scotland's wild places are a special, life affirming environment to enjoy in the winter. However, they will bite you on the bum if you don't prepare properly and make sure you have the skills to enjoy all that winter can offer. So start thinking winter now.

Contacts

▶ Mountain weather forecasts can be found at www.mwis.org.uk

The Scottish Avalanche Information Service website is at www.sais.gov.uk Details of Mountaineering Scotland courses can be found at www.mountaineering.scot/courses

Mount Keen and The Mounth

By David Jarman

Top: Glen Callater

Above: looking north from Tolmount

Keen by name, blunt by nature? Let's see what New Twists can do to sharpen appreciation, to whet a jaded appetite, for this simplest of bumps on the skyline.

In sampling each 'Area' of the Highlands for interestingly different ways up old favourites, this is the furthest east - Area 16 in Sir Hugh's original list, before SMC tinkering made it Area 7. Here lie the swelling uplands of The Mounth and its surrounds, beloved of Dundonians and Aberdonians, but rather sniffed at by pursuers of bolder crests.

Delving into the records strewn around the New Twists bothy does suggest that east of Cairnwell and south of Dee, routes not prescribed in *The Munros* SMC bible have been followed for all but two of the 14 'Mounth' Munros: Mayar and Carn an t-Sagairt Mor still await inspiration (head sinks glumly onto fists). And while we who naturally incline west and north may sigh, there are fond memories buried away in the less well-known approaches here. Thus:

- **Glas Maol and Creag Leacach** make a fascinating circuit from Glen Isla, especially if the great glaciated trough of Caenlochan Glen is followed to its head. A choice of steep simple climbs out go up through some intricately intriguing terrain.
- **Tolmount, Tom Buidhe, Carn na Claise and Carn an Tuirc**, likewise usually grabbed from the A93, are much better appreciated from the deep-cut trough-head of Glen Callater. It's better

going anticlockwise, up Jock's Road and - special joy - descending a very steep smooth grass slope to beautiful Loch Kander from its west rim (if you've done Claise, a traverse round it by the 970m contour avoids the nasty jeeptrack and reveals the surprising lushness of the high Mounth).

• **Cairn Bannoch and Broad Cairn** are usually climbed from Loch Muick, but the spaciousness of The Mounth is savoured to the full by a circuit from Glen Clova - up Glen Doll through its tedious forestry (that in a National Park ought to be converted to native woodlands), over Crow Craigies and Fafernie, round the Munros, and down into the handsome trough of upper Glen Clova (known to connoisseurs as Glen Guy, probably from gaoithe, as in rabbiting on windily). This is quite a long circuit but steady going; we opted to bivi near tiny Loch Esk.

• **Lochnagar** - the circuit from Glen Muick only sees the great northern corries from the rim: they deserve better! Coming in from Bridge of Dee by Ballochbuie, we ascended directly to Cac Carn Beag, then circled back round the rim of Coire nan Eun, taking in the second Munro, Carn a' Coire Boidheach.

• **Dreish** by name, can be dry by nature - the great blessing of the east. Usually twinned with Mayar to overdose on dreary forest and worn trails, Dreish is much better approached as a fine culmination to a promenade along the rim of Glen Clova, starting from the Hotel. Gluttons can drop down to the road-end at Acharn and return along the opposite rim, descending

Top: looking south from Tolmount

Above: Loch Kander

New Twists for Old Hills #19

Top left: Glen Tanar

Top right: The Quartz Cliff

Middle: The view from Mount Keen

Left: Mounth skies from Jock's Road

from splendid Loch Brandy.

As so often, all except the last benefit from a bike, especially Glen Callater, with a good track right to the head of the Loch now, on its south side.

MOUNT KEEN

Which brings us to the eastmost Munro, and a bit of a challenge to twist a simple camel-hump into something new. Its shoulder is crossed at 760m by the Mounth Road path. The good Munros book hedges its bets, depicting the shorter southern approach from the roadhead of Glen Esk, but also allowing the northern access up Glen Tanar. In their lower reaches, both are attractive - the steep confines of the Water of Mark versus the native Scots pine woods of Tanar (scorched by a runaway muirburn last spring, but already regenerating - just don't do it too often).

The truly ambitious New Twist would be to come in at right-angles, along the main Aberdeen–Angus divide (no, it does not go over Brown Cow Hill). From the west, out of Glen Muick, it crosses featureless trackless wastes with much peat haggery. From the east, coming along from say Mount Battock (fittingly as eastmost Corbett), it's a mere 17km top-to-top alone. On satellite imagery, the many bumps look pleasant enough, but there is much detraction from estate tracks, muirburn patterning, and of course peat bogs in the dips. We say 'on satellite', as New Twists ain't good at long flogs like

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this, unlike some we could mention; we like to linger in the odd nooks and crannies round the back and sides.

And so, hike (or preferably bike) the good estate road up Glen Tanar to its head, where a footbridge gives onto the Mounth Road. Go up this, leaving it after half a km for an estate track down left across a steep valley. Where the track ceases on a brow, either follow the Cowie Burn and cut up at will to the summit of Mount Keen, or perhaps take a wider loop over Gathering Cairn and Braid Cairn (which is only 10m short of being a Corbett).

Now the interest begins. Drop steeply west across the Mounth Road (which is nowadays much less worn than the well-worn trod over the summit) and range out along the broad divide to a slight rise, the Head of Black Burn. Veer off NNW down an open shoulder, holding to its left side until you should encounter (at NO389881) a strange quarry-like cavity. It's too small and quite wrong to be a corrie. Turns out it's a fair-size landslip, for these eastern parts where they are rare. But where has all the debris gone? It's just a hole - known as the Quartz Cliff - 20-40 metres deep. Think on't while finding a way down the gorge of the Allt Deas beneath the Linn of Tanar and out down the glen head.

New Twists chose to camp on the grassy flats by Shiel of Glentanar, an oasis in a rough valley floor strewn with granite boulders, and once a famous drovers' stance - with an inn at the ford. Chose to camp in a July heatwave, biking up in the not-very cool of evening after a day in the shade at the excellent Finzean café. Had the wee circuit done by late morning. Chose to go for a skinnydip before breaking camp. Very refreshing. And walk-hopping back over the toasty grass just the same way, came within inches of treading on a handsome adder, coiled and basking. It slithered back into the bracken. Sadly, Eve had given this east neuk of Eden the swerve (it's the heat, darling).

Back in the nearest hostelry - no longer by the ford but in Ballater - the barmaid got to hear this tale. Hmm, her boyfriend had been riding out on the moor, jumped off the horse bare-legged into a nest of vipers, and been bitten so badly that the air ambulance crew said he might have died had they not existed. So much for those bragging rights then.

Top: The head of Glen Doll

Middle: Lochnagar

Left:: mountain hares

Footnote – a mystery solved

AND what of the mysterious landslide with no debris? Sometimes oddities come in pairs – think of that rare oasis not far below. How's about, the landslip dams the Allt Deas, a lake builds up behind it, it overflows, the floodwaters carve a deep channel through the loose debris, the material is carried away down the burn and deposited where the glen shallows and widens. Maybe several times over; if the landslip creeps down more each time space is freed up. It has happened elsewhere, big-time: Inverness is built on a flood delta which traces back to the ice-dammed lake in Glen Roy bursting. Look at the Upper Rhine at Flims. And today, landslide dams are huge hazards in the Himalaya and Andes.

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Get **Climbing**

RealRock: it's the real thing

By Calum McBain

RealRock sessions aim to support the transition from indoor to outdoor climbing for young people aged 8 - 17 years old. Whether it is trad, sport or bouldering you're into, come along to progress your outdoor climbing experience. We also run RealRock sessions targeted at the ClimbScotland Youth Squad; these have more of a focus on technique coaching at sport and bouldering venues.

THAT time of year has returned. The leaves have started to fall, the evenings have turned chilly and the ClimbScotland RealRock kit has all been tucked away for a long winter. Being a bit of a solar-powered climber myself, I couldn't help but reminisce about the RealRock season just past, to help me get through a winter of pulling on plastic, counting reps and many cups of tea.

We made a few changes to our RealRock sessions this year, one of the biggest being the pilot of our Youth Squad RealRock weekends. The idea was to take our squad formed from YCS competitions to some outdoor crags that would really test their honed indoor technique. Exploring some of Scotland's best sport and boulder venues also highlighted the massive spectrum of ways to participate in climbing, demonstrating that comps and indoor climbing are just the tip of a rather large iceberg.

These kids are too strong, on Malc's Arete already

Lorna Brown's cover photo for her upcoming super hero blockbuster

My own climbing path started in a similar way to many of the climbers in the Youth Squad: a chance taster of climbing, a birthday party at the Glasgow Climbing Centre. I drifted out of climbing before being involved with any competitions, but outdoor climbing managed to rake me back in while I was at university. I've never looked back since, enjoying many trips, misadventures and epics with people who have grown to become my closest friends. It was a real pleasure for me to start the Youth Squad off on a similar path.

The young climbers seemed psyched to take on the challenge, as the four sessions we ran were almost all filled. Although it's not too hard to sell bouldering in Scotland when you get Torridon on a bluebird day, with no midges and a 'sending' breeze. We also took the squad to Kirrie Hill, Glen Lednock and Moy Rock, where we were fortuitously blessed with wall-to-wall sunshine – apart from Moy. But on a rainy afternoon at Moy a slightly shorter session was actually well received after a particularly long and skin-intensive day on sublime but sandpaper-like Torridonian sandstone.

Despite their well-honed indoor technique, many of the young climbers struggled at first with some of the outdoor-specific techniques. The bouldering days focused on footwork on bad feet, getting used to holds that aren't jutting out fluorescent blobs and, of course, the dreaded top-out mantle. After an ego-bruising start to the day, the indoor strength and technique was starting to adjust to the intricacies of outdoor bouldering. Everyone was having a blast, having their own little successes and failures on their projects while supporting their squad mates.

The sport climbing days at Kirriemuir and

Moy focused more on transitioning youngsters from indoor leading to outdoors. Re-threading a lower-off, using quickdraws and movement coaching were among the topics looked at. A broad spectrum of abilities made the days even better, with the more experienced climbers helping to pass their knowledge on to those marking the milestone of their first outdoor leads.

We don't do things by half at ClimbScotland. Alongside the Squad RealRocks we also reviewed the public RealRock sessions.

These sessions are aimed at helping young climbers towards being independent boulderers, sport climbers or trad climbers. This year we trialled a few new venues alongside some old favourites, but in particular we tried to link these venues into local climbing hubs, be that walls, clubs or schools. This seemed to work quite well, as we had good numbers for all the sessions. We even had two sessions that had more than 10 people involved - a bit of a RealRock record. Much like the Squad RealRocks, these sessions were blessed with good weather and enthusiastic participants.

The RealRock sessions are usually the highlight of the Regional Development Officers' calendars and this year has been no exception. The changes we've made have had some great feedback and we're already planning more exciting things for 2019.

Top left: Summer 2018 - parasol part of necessary equipment

Above: 'Look mum no hands!'

Top right: Warm up traverse at Moy Rock

Right in descending order: An army of boulder pads approaches the Torridon Celtic Jumble

Duncan on his first problem of the day

Obligatory group shot on the 'Ship' boulder

Call to action

Have you been climbing outside with your club? Let us know of any great adventures or achievements and we'll share the best on social media and our ClimbScotland website. Your story might even make a future edition of Scottish Mountaineer!

Images: Sandy Carr

The paraclimber's story

By Kai Johnson

Kai Johnson is a 15-year-old climber from Elgin. He took part in his first Paraclimbing competition at this year's Scottish Paraclimbing Festival at EICA Ratho in September – and won, becoming Mountaineering Scotland Paraclimbing Champion 2018-19.The competition was also the first round of the British Paraclimbing Series and Kai intends to attend the remaining rounds across the UK. He tells his story here.

I started climbing by going to the wall with a friend three years ago. I found I really liked it: it was fun, challenging and sociable. I started going climbing twice a week around two years ago and have enjoyed it ever since. The wall I learnt to climb on was Spireroxx, but when it closed in February I started climbing at Speyside.

What I like about climbing is that it is mentally and physically challenging. If there is a route that I'm struggling at it gets really frustrating, which makes it all the more worth it when I finally manage to complete it. It is also a great social environment where, no matter what wall you're at, it always feels like you're surrounded by friends.

My disability is hypermobility. While it is a subtle disability it severely affects me in sport. I do about 16 hours of sport every week during and outwith school so I am very used to having to relocate a hip, shoulder, ankle or finger but it can sometimes take a bit of time and cause pain for other joints. When climbing I prefer to climb with able-bodied climbers as they often push me well beyond my limits but still give me time to relocate whatever has dislocated.

Hypermobility allows all of my joints apart from my knees to hyperextend (go back on themselves), however my knees do often dislocate if I am running. This makes many normal competition routes very difficult as I can't build the strength of the end of my fingers, which is one of the main reasons I don't compete in the youth series. Paraclimbing competitions make it possible for me to compete, whereas ordinary competitions are just beyond my grasp (I can't manage small holds).

In the future, I would like to continue to develop my climbing skills. I hope to keep competing and learn to coach so that I can potentially find full-time work in climbing.

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The League of Boulderers

THERE'S still time to put your bouldering skills to the test in this year's Scottish National Bouldering League. The nationwide competition started last month in Edinburgh, with the Aberdeen round taking place at the start of November.

But with competitors' scores made up from their best four results, there's still everything to play for if you can make the remaining four rounds. The whole point of the league is that it's not all about who is the best on the day, but also who is willing to travel to the different rounds throughout Scotland at an amazing selection of venues. The league uses one of the rounds of each host walls' scheduled winter bouldering competitions. Prizes have been donated by Edelrid and Red Chili.

The remaining rounds are:

Friday 7 December – Avertical World, Dundee
Sunday 6 January – Three Wise Monkeys, Fort William
Saturday 23 February – TCA Glasgow
Saturday 16 March – Eden Rock, Edinburgh

For more information

▶ Details of the Scottish National Bouldering League can be found on the website at www.mountaineering.scot/snbl

Youth Climbing Symposium

SCOTTISH speed climber William Bosi will be among the leading climbers and coaches helping to inspire climbing's next generation at an event in Bracknell later this month.

The second Youth Climbing Symposium will take place at Oakwood Climbing Centre on 24 -25 November. Last year it was the UK's first climbing symposium dedicated to the next generation, introducing 160 young athletes to some of the best coaching and training the world has to offer.

For 2018 an even more exciting line-up is promised, with more expertise to help youth climbers reach their potential. This year's line-up includes workshops from leading climbers and coaches such as current world champion Shauna Coxsey, Leah Crane, Dicki and Patrick (Gimme Kraft), Udo Neumann, Neil Gresham, Ollie Tor, Louis Parkinson, Tom Greenall and speed climbing with Will Bosi.

▶ The event is open to all young climbers between the ages of 9 and 18. Further details can be found at http://youthclimbingsymposium.com

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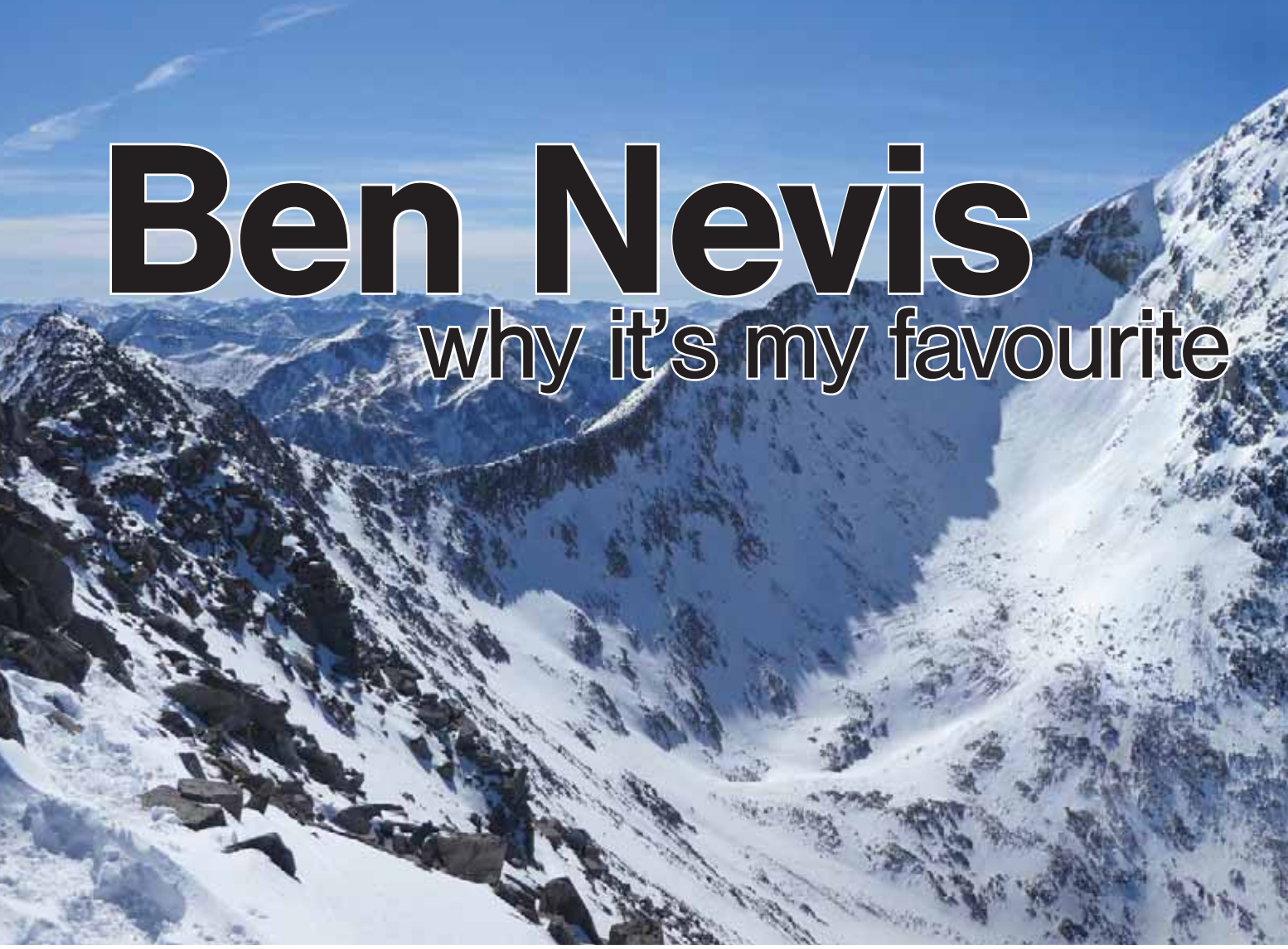
Ben Nevis
why it's my favourite



"Ben Nevis is monarch of mountains, They crowned him long ago, On a throne of rocks, in a robe of clouds, With a diadem of snow". JHB Bell, 1950.

By Mark Aitken

All photographs by the author

"What's your favourite Munro?" is a popular question amongst Scottish hill-walkers. I've given many different answers over the decades. When I lived in Aberdeen, it was Lochnagar. When I moved west and became a keen rock climber it was Buachaille Etive Mor. Then I travelled further afield, and the spectacular rocky massifs of An Teallach, Liathach and Beinn Eighe all competed as favourites. After finishing the Munros some 20 years ago, I decided my final one, the remote and quiet Lurg Mor, was the best. However, after climbing Pinnacle Ridge and witnessing the truly outstanding view from Sgurr nan Gillean, I decided this must be the greatest Munro. Later, as I became addicted to winter climbing, the Munro top of Stob Coire nan Lochan became a regular haunt and my favourite mountain.

Throughout all this time I'd also enjoyed many walks, scrambles and climbs on Ben Nevis. It wasn't my favourite mountain initially. I'd many wonderful memories but I also had some tinges of disappointment and sadness. However, my strong love of the Ben gradually developed over time, and for the last decade it has undoubtedly been my favourite Munro.

Earlier this year I went up the Ben by the Carn Mor Dearg arête. It was a beautiful clear day, with snow above about 600 metres. I normally prefer to climb with friends, but on that day I was happy to enjoy the mountain alone, and to have some thinking time. As I wandered up the slopes of Carn Dearg Meadhonach, the ever-opening panorama towards Ben Nevis excited me. I started to think how much the Ben had meant to me over the years. I looked towards Castle Ridge and remembered the enjoyable long climb on superb rock leading up towards the summit of Carn Dearg.

Memories of Carn Dearg Buttress - and a fall

I reached the summit of Carn Dearg Meadhonach and looked across to the magnificent Carn Dearg Buttress with its vertical walls, protruding slabs and sweeping overhangs. For many years my forays onto this buttress were limited to Ledge Route and Route II. There wasn't much else suitable for a mediocre climber like me. The amazing looking climbs of Titan's Wall, Centurion, King Kong, The Bat and Sassenach were for better climbers to enjoy.

I've regularly scrambled up and down Ledge Route,

Panorama from CMD to Ben Nevis in winter

revelling in its situation and its wonderful views across the Ben's north face. I've also enjoyed the route in winter; just a Grade II but continuously interesting and fun. On one occasion however, pride came before a fall. I had climbed Tower Ridge in fabulous winter conditions and then chose to climb down Ledge Route instead of descending the easier route of Number Four Gully.

Halfway down Ledge Route and unroped, I temporarily put one of my ice axes into my harness loops so I could use a handhold. A few minutes later I found myself falling head first on a steep, hard snow slope. One of my crampon points had attached itself to the wrist leash of my axe, which was dangling far too low from my harness. I knew that a big drop down a long vertical wall was rapidly approaching, so my ice axe arrest had to be extremely fast. Other than an injured wrist, some bruises and very badly dented pride I was OK. I knew I had been lucky. Another lesson learnt!

Reminiscing climbs and camaraderie

I soon reached Carn Mor Dearg's summit which gave me an outstanding view of the Ben's magnificent north face. This face is riven with ridges, buttresses, towers, gullies and pinnacles, and contains many famous rock and ice climbs. I gazed across in wonder at the Trident Buttresses, the Comb, Tower Ridge, Observatory Ridge and Buttress, Point Five Gully, Orion Face, Zero Gully and the North-East Buttress. I reminisced about my first climbs on the Ben with friends 33 years ago. We'd initially climbed Tower and Observatory ridges and felt like real mountaineers! It was a thoroughly enjoyable and unforgettable experience which inspired us. It gave us the confidence to tackle other routes on the Ben, and to climb in the Alps a few months later.

As I gazed across to the Ben I could identify many of the routes we'd enjoyed climbing and memories came flooding back. I recalled exhilaration and joy, but also a few instances of fear and exhaustion. I remembered crampons and ice axes biting into perfect névé on steep icy routes. I also thought about intensely cold belays, spindrift and bitingly cold winds and retreats due to bad conditions. I then remembered days of dry rock, warm sun and intense thirst. I thought about the relief of finding a 'thank god' hold, particularly on a

Ben Nevis from Stob Coire nan Lochan across Aonach Eagach

Ben Nevis

Ben Nevis winter NE Butress, Observatory Ridge and Tower Ridge

Deer and Ben Nevis

Ben Nevis NE Buttress and Tower Ridge

Tower Ridge approaching the gap

solo scramble, or of getting some protection securely in when it was really needed. Most of all I remembered the camaraderie of getting safely up routes with friends, and the fun we had. I also thought about friends who had been badly injured, and one very sad loss. I whispered my thanks to the Mountain Rescue Teams who carry out outstanding work on the Ben.

It was time to get going. I put my crampons on and descended to the arête. The CMD arête is an exhilarating outing and I enjoyed staying on its sharp crest, seeking out the firm snow. I eventually reached the headwall of Coire Leis, where the arête merges into the Ben. I started up the final climb, grateful to use other footprints in the snow. Instead of continuing to the busy summit, I lingered for a while on the south-west top of Carn Dearg.

Wildlife encounters

Shortly after I sat down, a snow bunting landed gracefully on a nearby boulder, singing its heart out. This small bird with its striking snowy plumage is one of the rarest breeding birds in the UK. Although it's common to have snow bunting near the summit of the Ben, I always feel privileged to see them. The bird looked at me quizzically and then returned to its singing. Like me, it was enjoying being alone that day.

After it flew away I thought about the other wildlife I'd been lucky enough to see around the Ben over the years. I've seen ravens chasing a golden eagle above Glen Nevis, ptarmigan courtship displays, and rutting stags fighting each other. Lower down, I've been pleased to spot red squirrels and pine martin in Glen Nevis. My love of wildlife and my commitment to protect the environment probably stems from my early days on Scottish hills, including the Ben.

Ben Nevis summit

I reached the main summit and thought back to my first ascent of the Ben, up the tourist path 37 years ago. It was my first Munro and I was very chuffed. It was to be the start of a lifelong love affair with mountains.

I looked south across Glen Nevis to the snowy Mamores, Glen Coe and Beinn a' Bheithir. It was cloudier in the north so there were no views of Torridon or the fabulous Skye and Rum Cuillins which I've seen from the Ben in very good conditions.

Ben Nevis in late spring showing North-East Buttress and the Orion Face

When conditions are ideal you can also see Morven in Caithness, Lochnagar, Ben Lomond, Barra Head and Knocklayd in Northern Ireland. There were only about a dozen people round the summit, far quieter compared to summertime. The Ben gets about 100,000 ascents a year, the majority in summer and by the tourist path, and this popularity has led to concerns over the impact of visitors on the mountain. This in turn led to the creation of the Nevis Landscape Partnership, an important five-year programme which aims to protect and enhance the Ben, including improving the paths.

Climbing history

It was time to get moving again. I headed towards the Ben's north-west top of Carn Dearg. From its summit there's a sensational view of the Ben's main ridges, and I thought about its fascinating climbing history. The poet John Keats climbed the Ben in 1818 and compared his ascent to *'mounting ten St. Pauls without the convenience of a staircase.'*

The first recorded rock ascent on the north side of Ben Nevis was by the Hopkinson brothers. They completed the ascent of the North-East Buttress and then descended via Tower Ridge in 1892. Subsequently, many groundbreaking climbing routes were recorded before WW1 by pioneering Scottish climbers including Norman Collie, Willie Naismith and Harold Raeburn. Between the wars, classic routes were put up by Graham Macphee, J. H. Bell and others. During WW2, Brian Kellett made a phenomenal number of first ascents, many of them solo.

In the 1950s legendary climbers such as Tom Patey, Robin Smith, Dougal Haston, Jimmy Marshall, Hamish

MacInnes, Don Whillans and Joe Brown completed major new routes. In later decades, further routes were made by Mal Duff, Mick Fowler, Dave Cuthbertson, Rab Anderson, Simon Richardson and Andy Nisbet. More recently in 2008 Dave MacLeod and Joe French completed a Grade XI, the hardest winter climb on the Ben. Dave also completed an extreme rock climb on Echo Wall, a contender for the most difficult traditionally protected climb in Europe.

Climbing on Tower Ridge

Climbing on North-East Buttress

Final thoughts

I'd no more time to think about other people's pioneering ascents; I had to focus on my own descent. The sun was getting low and I was keen to reach the forest road before it got dark. I carefully climbed down Ledge route, taking the longer but safer path to Coire na Ciste. I focused on my safety, well aware of my previous mishap here. Once I reached the Allt a' Mhuillin the sun was setting. There were bands of gold and orange in the skies across Loch Eil. It had been a wonderful day traversing the Ben, and I had enjoyed the introspection that solo walking encourages. Bill Murray wrote that *'No man will ever know Ben Nevis. On the other hand Nevis will always help him to know himself. There is no end to such knowledge. Likewise there is no end to the joy of getting it.'* I now knew why the Ben was so important to me. It was the memories of walks, scrambles and climbs with friends, its beauty, its outstanding variety of challenging summer and winter routes, and its rich wildlife. All of this had made me happy, and I knew the Ben will always be my favourite mountain.

Meet the **Members**

CLUBSPOT

Stonehaven Mountaineering and Hillwalking Club

By Roger Owen

STONEHAVEN Mountaineering and Hillwalking Club was formed in 1978 after a local newspaper advertisement placed by a couple of keen mountaineers, Brian Heaton and George Farquhar, attracted a great deal of interest.

I attended the first meeting and, as I asked a couple of questions, was immediately drafted onto the inaugural committee. The first outing was to Lochnagar in February of that year and this is re-enacted every year, although thankfully not in the original garb of those times; some of us well remember the knee length tweed breeches and bright orange cagoules with that huge single chest pocket. On one such wintry Lochnagar outing our first secretary, Alistair Clarke, arrived with a broken windshield but was not put off the day's climb. Alistair prepared for the return 50-mile drive by donning every item of clothing and a ski mask but still had to stop three times to have his fingers prised from the steering wheel.

The club turned out 30 or more members for each outing in the first 15 years or so and we hired a bus to take us on our monthly outings. These were pretty memorable: one driver, John, repeatedly rammed the snow drifts on the Ben Lawers high road until he got through. Imagine that today! On another occasion the bus got stuck trying to squeeze across a narrow bridge on the South Loch Earn road. Rocketing fuel costs and drivers' hours policies sadly put an end to the buses and nowadays our monthly outings are by sharing cars.

We are a very wide range of people tied by a common love of the hills and glens of Scotland and the club has a reputation for its friendliness to new members – we are sometimes even friendly to the long-serving members! Unfortunately, we don't allow dogs

Beinn Eighe, 1998

Top, down: Burns Supper Braemar 2015; Drochaid Glas Ridge; Sgurr nan Gillean

A hot day on Buchaille Etive Mhor in 2001

Climbing on Kirrie Hill

on our outings after someone's Alsatian bit another member; we think it was the bright orange boiler suit he was wearing that did it.

We enjoyed annual week-long trips away right from the beginning, initially to Skye, which were mostly about rock-climbing and scrambling, and occasional pub visits. Many an entertaining night was spent in the Glen Brittle Hut with table traversing (traversing over and under a table in a complete circuit without touching the floor) being introduced by a member from New Zealand and adopted by the more flexible club members. Those early Skye weeks were quite formative for some of us and we learned much from old masters, like the infamous George Farquhar. Years later, climbing in the Alps, three of us were high on a glacier when one guide remarked to us that he hadn't seen ropework like that since the 1950s.

Later we began to visit many different locations in Scotland, so long as there were Munros and Corbetts around them, and that continues today. There have been some memorable expeditions. Some members enjoy long backpacking trips across the Highlands, camping high and watching brilliant sunsets. There are great memories: four of us walked the six highest tops of the Cairngorms in just under 24 hours in 1983, and since then there have been a couple of coast-to-coasts as well as walking over the Munros from Ben Macdui to Ben Nevis on a memorable walk we called 'The Roof of Scotland', an account of which appeared in Scottish Mountaineer some years ago.

Top: Skiing off Cairngorm

Above left: Exiting Crumbling Crannie, Lochnagar 1990

Above right: Andy Christie and Roger Owen on the summit of Grossglockner

Club members have been much further afield, climbing high mountains in the Himalaya, Africa, Alaska, Mexico, Greenland, Iceland, the Arctic and many other places. Two members have climbed Denali in Alaska, using a very professional British guiding company – except for the fact that they had no permit to guide in the USA and did not reveal that until the ascent was underway! A fair number of 4000m alpine summits have been climbed, including the Matterhorn, where I lost a contact lens halfway up; my guide really earned his fee leading a half-blind climber to the summit.

It will come as no surprise that there are 20 Compleat Munroists in the Club, the first in 1988 and number 20 compleating 30 years later, in October 2018, on Ben Hope from where Anne Sinclair caught a glimpse of her Orkney homeland. One last Munro celebration was memorable, not for the day on the hill, but for the forgotten stew prepared for everyone's dinner. The enterprising wife of the forlorn Munroist put it on the train for Achnashellach where it was handed over by the train guard. A newspaper headline read 'Goulash Dash Saves Climbers in a Stew'!

There are also quite a lot of Corbett compleaters and one person, Karin Marshall, has added the Grahams as well. The club still has two of the original founder members in Roger Owen and Ron Spark and one of us is still on the organising committee after 40 years! We celebrated our 40th anniversary this year with a ceilidh in Stonehaven, well attended by members old and new. It was a great catch-up and there were many stories of great and exciting adventures over the years.

The Club holds a monthly Sunday meet all year round and we roam quite widely from the east coast in a day, reaching Crianlarich, Blair Atholl or Aviemore. But of course, the Cairngorm National Park is our home ground. Weekend meets have become very popular, staying in hostels or club huts wherever there are Scottish mountains and hills to climb, and many of us love a good old bothy night with stories and a dram; the haunted ones are the best. A week-long trip to the great hillwalking venues of the north and west of Scotland in May every year is always fully subscribed.

A number of members like ski-touring in Scotland and there is now also a healthy biathlon group combining hillwalking and cycling on some spectacularly long routes in the highlands. Climbing, both on indoor walls and outdoors on local cliffs, is rapidly increasing in popularity amongst our members.

The club welcomes new members into the fold and we look forward to meeting you! The club's website is: www.smhc.eu/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Anne makes her way to the top through the guard of honour

Everest – 67 times!
Anne Butler's Full House

By Heather Morning

MOUNTAINEERING Scotland member Anne Butler completed her Full House on Saturday 15 September with an ascent of Fiarach, a 652-metre Graham to the south of Tyndrum. It completed an amazing tally of 592,816 metres of ascent, which would equate to climbing Everest 67 times.

The term 'Full House' was devised by Dave Broadhead, SMC member and 'Clerk of the List', who is the person you inform to register your completion of Munros, Corbetts etc. To claim a Full House you need to climb a total of 1073 mountains, which comprise:

- **282 Munros** (Mountains over 3000 feet in Scotland as defined by Sir Hugh Munro in 1901)
- **227 Munro Tops** (All the other mountains in Scotland over 3000 feet which did not make the grade and get into Sir Hugh's

Anne (centre, in blue) with some of the friends who accompanied her to on Fiarach

prestigious list)

- **222 Corbetts** (Next on the scene was J.Rooke Corbett who compiled a list of Scottish mountains between 2500 feet and 3000 feet that have a drop of at least 500 feet on all sides).
- **219 Grahams** (Followed by Fiona Torbet (née Graham) who listed mountains in Scotland between 2000 feet and 2500 feet with a drop of 500 feet on all sides).
- **34 Furths** (Mountains over 3000 feet in England, Wales and Ireland)
- **89 Donalds** (Percy Donald compiled a list of all the hills over 2000 feet in Southern Scotland that have a drop of 100 feet on all sides.)

For her final Graham – Fiarach (NT344262) – and the completion of the Full House, Anne was joined by 56 of her hill walking pals, plus eight furry friends, several kilos of cake, a crate of champagne and half a tonne of sausages (for the dogs not the people). [*Editor's note: The author's implausible estimate of the weight of sausages is possibly coloured by the fact she was carrying them all.*] Following toasts and cake at the top, the company repaired to a Crianlarich hotel for tea and more cake.

Anne, a retired nurse, is only the 53rd person to complete the Full House – and hasn't wasted any time in getting there. It was just 20 years ago she started climbing Munros, with an ascent of Ben Lomond on which she claims: 'I nearly died of exhaustion.'

Ten years ago her hill-bagging got easier when she moved from Devon to live in Aviemore, and with five rounds of the Munros under her belt, she's already over halfway to a second Full House. She is Vice Chair of the Munro Society, and a member of www.scottishhills.com

Mountaineering Marcus

The young mountaineer who's scaling the heights while still at primary school

EARLIER this autumn nine-year-old Marcus Tinley from Bearsden in Glasgow made the headlines with what was claimed as the youngest ever ascent of Tower Ridge on Ben Nevis. While there's no denying the achievement on rock was impressive, some were just as impressed by the meal Marcus wolfed down afterwards, which included 20 chicken nuggets, fries and a medium strawberry milkshake, followed soon after by half a chicken and mushroom pizza. Well, you've got to replace those calories somehow!

Scottish Mountaineer editor Neil Reid caught up with Marcus and his dad Simon Tinley for a chat about small children and big mountains.

First he spoke to Simon, an experienced mountaineer, and asked:

How do you handle the worry?

We have been walking and climbing for seven years so I have an intimate knowledge of his strengths and areas for development and also what to watch for. The attention he has received from the media and social media is always about the successful big routes but what the public don't see is the years of training, knowledge building and experience building that goes on behind the scenes. We've had to turn around on MANY occasions and perhaps the most important lesson for Marcus is that you don't have to reach the top and the mountain will always be there, so we enjoy the moment. I must add, he only wants to turn around when we absolutely must!

I see from your Facebook photos that your daughter Lucy also goes out with you, but there don't seem to be any photos of Marcus and Lucy together.

They have been out together on occasion but it's much easier and safer to control one at a time! They have different personalities and Lucy is more into the nature and wildlife while Marcus is into the thrill of hands on rock and winter hills, where the environment is more challenging.

How much of Marcus's adventures are driven by him? Does he come up with the ideas himself or do you come up with ideas and see what he fancies?

His ideas come spontaneously. When we are out on a simple path, he opts for the difficult line or to climb over an obstacle that doesn't need to be climbed. My advice on energy efficiency is still falling on deaf ears! For planning graded scrambles I show Marcus YouTube clips and photographs to see what he fancies and we take it from there.

Does he do any rock climbing? Or indoors?

We used to do that when he was younger but he was less motivated. He plays for two football teams so time is limited, and both of us prefer to head north to the mountains in the van and have an adventure and a long day on the hill.

Marcus's take on that answer has another element.

Sure he enjoys spending time with his dad and scrambling ridges and running downhill, but there's also the grub. "I like all the sweets and chocolates we have on the hill," he adds.

Marcus started his mountaineering at just two years old on 'The Dumpling' – the 142m lump of Duncryne, offering great views up Loch Lomond – before moving on to Dumgoyne in the Campsies and the ever popular Ben A'an, and had climbed Ben Lomond by the time he was four.

Plans grew more ambitious, and a favourite day out was when Tinsley Snr and Jnr went all the way along the challenging Aonach Eagach above Glen Coe – and back again! – after camping up on top. 'Awesome,' he reckoned.

Tower Ridge was a momentous day in itself though, and as well as a sense of achievement gave Marcus a taste of the spotlight of publicity. 'It felt amazing,' he told Scottish Mountaineer, 'and everyone is talking to me about it!'

He's in no doubt that it was the hardest climb he has done. At 600 metres in length and with a climbing grade of Difficult, it's one of THE classic mountaineering routes in Britain and remains no more than a dream for many, demanding as it does both physical and mental stamina as well as technical ability and confidence in the face of considerable exposure, particularly on sections such as the Eastern Traverse and the notorious Tower Gap.

'I knew how hard it would be as me and my Dad watched a lot of YouTube clips before we went' said Marcus. 'We talked a lot about it so I was prepared. I enjoyed it so it didn't seem too bad, but I was never going to give up! It was scary at the Tower Gap,' Marcus admitted. 'It was a steep drop at both sides and so difficult to climb out. But I knew I was on a rope and I trust my Dad.'

Dad is a help on the way down too, keeping Marcus going once the adrenaline surge of the ascent is over with a ready supply of snacks for energy and plenty of moral support. 'Having fun helps me keep going,' Marcus says. 'I like running, jumping and rolling downhill. My Dad makes me laugh, and we sing songs too.'

It's no surprise that, though he has met and chatted with Chris Bonington, and loved watching film of Dani Arnold climbing the Matterhorn in record time, when asked to name his mountaineering heroes, Dad comes out without hesitation at the top of the list. 'He's funny and cool.'

But then it's as well to keep Dad sweet, because far from resting on his laurels with the Tower Ridge ascent, Marcus is hoping to climb more Munros this winter – 'And maybe climb in the Alps next summer!'

And a long-term ticklist?

Mont Blanc and Everest – and maybe K2'.

Donate

Marcus climbed Tower Ridge in aid of the children's charity, Variety, which funds specialist equipment and fun days out to help disabled and disadvantaged children. If you would like to donate to Marcus's just giving page for Variety, visit: justgiving.com/fundraising/marcus-tinley

your view

This is your chance to let fellow members see what great days you've been having in the mountains. If you'd like one of your photos to feature on these pages – and be in with a chance of winning a **Sigg Hot & Cold ONE Bottle**, whose double-walled insulation will keep hot drinks hot and cold drinks cold, just send a hi-resolution jpg file (at least 1MB in size) to the editor at **neil@mountaineering.scot**. Let us know where and when you took the photo and who's in it, and we'll choose a winner from the best. (The winner's name and contact details will be sent to SIGG for the purposes of despatching their prize.)

Glen Doll – Jim Bunting took this moody shot of Glen Doll looking down from The Lunkard on Jock's Road, Angus. This was taken on an early morning run in late August and repaid the effort required to get there at that time in the morning, with the light and the classic U-shaped form of the glen winning it this edition's prize of a Sigg Hot & Cold ONE Bottle.

Suilven – John Syme had a great walk from Glencanisp Lodge to Inchnadamph at the end of June, climbing over Suilven and Canisp. He took this photograph looking back to Suilven from Canisp across the glittering Loch na Gainimh.

An Teallach –
Peter Robinson just couldn't resist taking that classic shot from An Teallach when he visited in July – and who could blame him? A long way to go for a day trip from St Andrews, he said, but worth it!

Mitre Ridge –
Rob Lovell was on a mission this summer, with a five-day trip round the Cairngorms picking off all the Classic Rock routes in a single push. This was day two, at the top of Mitre Ridge on Beinn a Bhuird, with Rob's climbing partner Oli Warlow sitting back after completing Cumming-Crofton Route.

Cairngorm pine –
And one from the Editor. A lone pine catches the autumn light under a threatening sky. This was on Craig Bhalg in the Cairngorms, with Beinn a Bhuird in the background.

Rum Cuillin from Harris –
Jim Bunting was also on Rum this year and sent in this photo looking over the incongruous Bullough Mausoleum at Harris to catch a barest glimpse of the Rum Cuillin. "This was as much as I saw of them in the two days I spent on Rum," he said, after spending a day on the ridge without seeing any summit until he was standing on it. He had to miss out Ainshval too, although he confessed that would be a good excuse to return!

June Ross: an Appreciation

By Kevin Howett

IT was sad to receive the news that June Ross, who played a highly significant role in the history of what was then the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, had passed away.

June joined the Ladies Scottish Climbing Cub in 1955. She was a very keen skier, mountaineer and ski mountaineer and served on the club's committee as an ordinary member without specific portfolio from 1968 to 1971. She was the club auditor from 1986 to 1995. The LSCC nominated her for a position on the Mountaineering Council of Scotland Executive where she served for over ten years and was Vice President between May 1989 and 1993.

I first met her at my interview for the position of National Officer, where she grilled me alongside then President Graham Little. I got the job and June took me under her wing and supported me while I was finding my feet. Graham remembers her fondly. "She was very professional in all her duties, provided first class support to me and was an enthusiastic and warm individual".

In 1990 Bob Reid took over as President and Nick Kempe was elected as an Ordinary Member representing the Red Rope Club. Bob was young and would have been viewed as quite radical but he felt that having June's backing at crucial moments, whether in committee or during other meetings, was always reassuring. Bob's four years as President were a period of significant advance in terms of access; however, those four years now seem far more significant for the mountain safety work. Bob explains: "The period 1990 to 1994 had just about the highest incidence of mountain fatality ever experienced in Scotland because of a series of very severe winters. It was the subsequent changes in terms of safety work which were the most significant when viewed with the benefit of hindsight. And June was the guiding light for much of that progress."

Nick recounts his initial discussions with June: "I will always remember June's first words after I was elected to the Executive; she hoped that as a member of Red Rope I was not trying to make the Mountaineering Council political. After getting this off her chest, she was charming and helpful and by the time Bob's Presidency ended four years later I suspect she had privately decided I was quite moderate really!"

June had been a senior civil servant and helped the Executive understand how government and the Scottish Sports Council worked and why they found it hard to contemplate involving mountaineers. June was passionate and determined about this and had an uncanny ability to get to the centre of issues, as can be seen from this extract from the Executive Committee Minute of 8 December 1994: *'Safety Officer. JR spoke at considerable length. She emphasised several salient points. SMSG and the police are opposed to MCofS having the Safety Officer. We do not have a high profile as regards safety with the general public.... JR stressed therefore that MCofS must raise our profile*'.

And that she did. Along with Kate Ross she became the bedrock of the safety and training committee and June became our first rep and key player in the Scottish Mountain Safety Group which the Sports Council had set up to advise them. She persuaded Andy Anderson, then Principal of Glenmore Lodge, that MCofS, as the representative body of mountaineers, should have the key role in mountain safety and her negotiations resulted in the group being serviced by MCofS and funding for a half-time post to do so. This laid the basis for all MCofS's subsequent safety work.

While June had very strong views herself, she was fundamentally a democrat, who believed in empowering MCofS members and also getting them to think ahead. Behind all this was a deep love of the mountains and a strong bond with other people who shared that love. June was very intrepid and after retiring from the Exec and in her late 70s still managed the odd expedition. Alison Higham (archivist for the LSCC) notes that in the LSCC 1998 Journal June wrote a very interesting article about a trip to south-east Tibet with a group led by Kenneth Cox, a rhododendron expert from Glendoick, following in the footsteps of early botanists. She visited a noted botanical valley where few Europeans had been and she was likely to have been only the second European woman to have been there.

After June completed her term of office we occasionally kept in touch. My last memory of June was of her striding through a mess of tents to search me out while I was climbing on the island of Mingulay; she was on some extensive maritime trip and heard I was on the island. I like to think she convinced the captain to stop on their way to Iceland so she could say hello; I am sure she would have had no trouble doing so.

Rebecca Christian – climbing mum

IN the last edition of Scottish Mountaineer was a well-received article about climbing possibilities in Scotland's far north – Caithness and Sutherland – written by Rebecca Christian.

Rebecca, known to most as Bekki, knew she was dying from cancer even as she wrote the article, yet there was no hint of that in her words, which were full of positivity and enthusiasm as she praised a corner of the country she believed should be better recognised for its climbing potential. She died at the end of August, just weeks after her article was published.

The mother of an exceptional young climber, Edward Mills, who at the age of eight climbed the 450-ft Old Man of Hoy to raise funds for the charity Climbers Against Cancer, she would almost certainly have contributed more, both to this magazine and to the Scottish climbing scene.

Born in Cambridge in 1980, she graduated in English and Italian from Manchester University, and soon after met her future husband, Nathan Mills. They had two children, George and Edward, both of whom became interested in climbing at a young age and both of whom were wholeheartedly encouraged in their passion.

While George's interest gradually waned a little, Edward remained keen and Bekki went to great lengths to ensure he had every opportunity to progress, developing her own love of climbing at the same time.

Nathan said: "It's what you do as a parent: nurture your children's interests and passions, whatever they are. It's what she did totally. She wasn't just a crazy tiger Mum but also wanted Edward to have these precious memories too. One thing we talked about is that she just wanted the boys to remember stuff with her and her being a part of it all. And she knew she only had limited time to do that."

Bekki was diagnosed with primary breast cancer in 2013, while the family was living in Gloucestershire, but over the course of the next two years they holidayed and gradually moved up to live in Dunnet, in the north of Scotland, after getting married in 2015.

In November that year they learned Bekki's cancer had returned, had spread to her liver and bones, and was terminal. After a spell back in Gloucestershire the family decided to move back up north in 2017 for the quality of life in what Bekki called "her Special Place".

Still determined that Edward should have every opportunity to develop his climbing, she arranged mentoring for him from local climbers Rob Christie and Simon and Louise Nadin.

She also worked hard to set up a climbing club for kids in Caithness, so they could enjoy a little of what Edward loved and arranged for ClimbScotland's Calum McBain to run an event on an old wall in the scout hut in Wick. It was so well subscribed that two sessions had to be run, and even then some kids had to be disappointed. She was also working hard on trying to secure funding to get an indoor wall built in Caithness.

Even as her health deteriorated she was delighted and proud to see Edward's growing success, coming first in his category in the Youth Climbing Series this spring and earning himself a place on the ClimbScotland Youth Squad.

In May Edward completed his climb of the Old Man of Hoy, which he did in aid of Climbers Against Cancer. To date his JustGiving page has raised over £30,000.

Speaking to Scottish Mountaineer, Nathan said: "We had a wonderful summer with Bekki, one that we never thought we would have. We were camping in Torridon for climbing, we went to Edinburgh so she could see Edward training a little at Eden Rock with the Scotland Squad. She nurtured the boys with all her heart - their passions and interests - George his swimming and violin, Edward his climbing and beginnings with the piano."

Donate

▶ Donations can still be made to Edward's JustGiving page in aid of CAC at https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/edwardandtheoldman

Tom Webster

TOM Webster, who has died aged 94, grew up in Glasgow's Southside, a self-proclaimed 'street child'. His natural intelligence and scientific curiosity went unchallenged when aged 15 he started work with Glasgow Corporation. So he lived for the weekends and vividly recalled days cycling from Glasgow to Arrochar to climb the Cobbler, cycling back in time for bed – an 80 mile round trip.

The Second World War was to change the course of his life. He joined RAF Coastal Command and although he originally intended to train as a navigator he qualified as a pilot and spent the war flying B24 Liberator bombers on low altitude reconnaissance missions in South Asia.

The war catapulted the working class boy into higher education. With the benefit of a government grant to ex-servicemen he obtained a degree in agriculture at Glasgow University and did and a postgraduate course at Aberystwyth, and so Tom's chosen vocation finally matched his voracious intellect. During his career at the National Institute for Agricultural Botany in Cambridge the work he was most proud of focused on collaboration with new EU colleagues to harmonise standards in crops and agriculture.

It was at a dance on the island of Cumbrae that Tom, always a charmer, met a young nurse interested in going climbing. Alice Spence and Tom were married in December 1951 and had two children: Glynis and Tom. The family spent many years in Cambridge, their house full of pets, but he still managed to find time to climb mountains both in the UK and also in the Alps, including the Matterhorn.

A keen sportsman, Tom was an enthusiastic member of many teams from basketball to cricket but his sport of choice was hockey, which he played regularly throughout his working life until his retirement, when he and Alice moved to Argyll in 1984 and he joined Oban Mountaineering Club, of which he remained a well-loved member until his death. During those years he was very active on the hills, usually to be seen with his beloved dog (either walking beside him or in his rucksack) and wearing his trademark welly boots – sometimes with crampons! In 1996 he became Munroist no. 3449. Climbing the Cobbler with Tom to celebrate his birthday became something of a tradition in the Oban MC. He was also an active member of Oban Mountain Rescue Team until he reached 80 when insurance cover was no longer available.

At the age of 87 a medical condition required the amputation of a leg below the knee but this did not prevent him from venturing into the hills and on one occasion skiing at Aviemore. He marked his 90th birthday by climbing the Cobbler as far as the Narnain Boulders.

A celebration of his life was held in North Connel on 27 August, which would have been his 95th birthday. More than 70 friends attended to hear a eulogy, offer a toast and share reminiscences. He will be fondly remembered by all who knew him.

Acknowledgement: With thanks to Tom's family who supplied much of this information.

John Leftley

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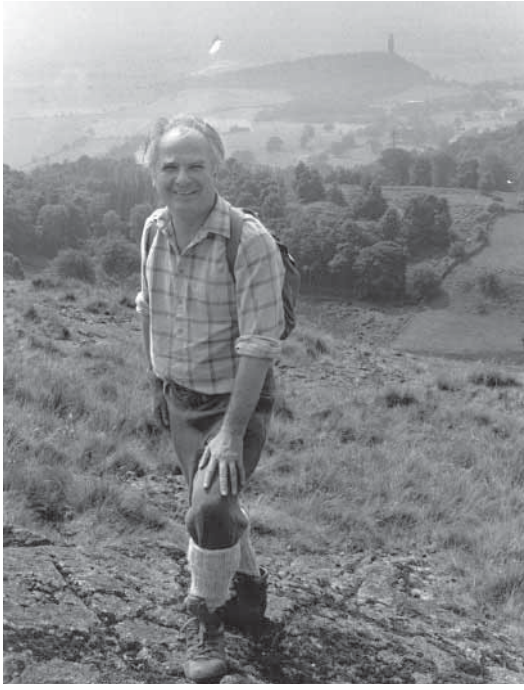
Out **There**

Obituary: Rennie McOwan



AS Scottish Mountaineer went to press we received the sad news that writer, broadcaster and campaigner Rennie McOwan had died. Rennie, who was 85, had a long and distinguished career as a journalist and environmental campaigner.

As a journalist on The Scotsman newspaper in 1957 he founded the Scotsman Mountaineering Club, which involved into the Ptarmigan Mountaineering Club, which is still active and affiliated to Mountaineering Scotland. He was one of the founders in 1982 of the Scottish Wild Land Group, still an active environmental body today. He was also a former president of Ramblers Scotland.

His campaigning work was outstanding, and in a tribute to him, Cameron McNeish said: "In terms of campaigning for freedom to roam and land reform, Rennie McOwan was a giant. He will be remembered as an excellent journalist, mountaineer, historian, environmental campaigner and a true son of Scotland."

Fellow campaigner Dave Morris said: "Rennie was a huge influence on me as we made the case in the 1990s for access legislation. He was so helpful in providing advice, encouragement and information on a regular basis. His passing is a big loss to Scotland, but he leaves us with an impeccable legacy."

Rennie was born in the Hillfoots and lived for many years in Stirling. He founded the Friends of the Ochils in 1992, and held an honorary doctorate from the University of Stirling. He spent much of his working life contributing to the Catholic press, and was editor of the Scottish Catholic Observer while still in his twenties. He also wrote fiction for children, his best known book being Light on Dumyat, set in his 'home hills', the Ochils, which has been through several editions.

Rennie won several awards during his life, including the Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild's Golden Eagle Award for his contribution to Scottish culture and access debates, the Provost of Stirling's Civic Award for arts and culture and the FX Tourism Award for exceptional service to the tourism industry.

Into The Mountain

INTO The Mountain is a performance project led by artist and choreographer Simone Kenyon. Informed by exploratory workshops, outdoor education programmes, mountain leader traineeships, talks and meets, the project culminates in a site-specific performance journey for a live audience presented within the Cairngorms in spring 2019.

Into The Mountain is inspired and informed by the prose of Nan Shepherd's 1974 book, *The Living Mountain*, and sets out to explore and celebrate women's relationships with unique mountainous habitats while addressing historical and current perspectives of gender in relationship to the Scottish landscape.

Simone said: 'Walking out of our bodies and into the mountain relates to a quote from *The Living Mountain* and for me it acts as an invitation and gesture from Nan Shepherd towards a collective experiencing of the Cairngorms, guiding us toward the possibilities for transformation and the more-than-human connections that can be made within these mountains.'

Upcoming activities, events and opportunities include:

24 November 2018

Into The Mountain - A Meet at Tramway in Glasgow

This day-long programme of talks and workshops sets out to share an exciting mix of practices from mountaineering, arts and sciences, informed by Nan Shepherd's approach to mountain ecologies and landscapes. For more info and to book a place: www.intothemountain.co.uk/project/intothemountainmeet/

Image credit: Lucy Cash.

From January 2019

The *Into The Mountain* team are looking for women to join a new scratch choir and sing as part of the closing performance in the spring. The scratch choir will learn a series of new compositions by artist and composer Hanna Tuulikki, inspired by the sonic descriptions in *The Living Mountain*. Email info@intothemountain.co.uk for more details.

24-25 February 2019

Winter nature writing weekend with Linda Cracknell at the Scottish Sculpture Workshop, Lumsden, Aberdeenshire. www.intothemountain.co.uk/project/writingweekender/

Into The Mountain is produced and commissioned by Scottish Sculpture Workshop and co-commissioned by Cairngorms National Park Authority, City Moves Dance Agency, Dance North Scotland and Tramway. The project is also supported by Mountaineering Scotland, Aberdeenshire Council and Creative Scotland.

Find out more

▶ To find out more about the project visit www.intothe-mountain.co.uk

Stephen Venables talk

STEPHEN Venables, mountaineer, writer, broadcaster and public speaker, was the first Briton to climb Everest without supplementary oxygen. Since then he has made 12 expeditions to the mountains of the far south – sailing, skiing, and making first ascents on the remote mountains of Tierra del Fuego, the Antarctic Peninsula and South Georgia. His stories have enthralled audiences all over the world.

Tickets available

▶ The Royal Scottish Geographical Society present Stephen's talk Go South – Unclimbed ***Summits in Antarctica*** at Perth Concert Hall on Tuesday 11 December at 7.30pm. Tickets can be booked by calling the Box Office on 01738 621031 or visiting www.horsecross.co.uk

SMC Journal **2018**

WINTER climbing is prominent in this year's Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal. Where is the longest continuous cliff in Scotland's mountains? Read Andy Nisbet's article. The cliff he describes has only recently been developed. It isn't the longest either!

Murdoch Jamieson describes a day ending in the dark on Beinn Eighe's Far East Wall, a modern epic balanced by Neil Quinn's account of step-cutting in Zero Gully. Roger Webb took years to get close to The Seam in Coire an t- Sneachda: a witty tale of frustration as he and companions faltered and equipment failed. A wise conclusion is reached.

Abroad, Helen Rennard traverses the mountains of Corsica, spotting the elusive fire lizard. Ann MacDonald and Colwyn Jones tackle the Miroir d'Argentine and Rob Lovell makes an adventurous ascent in Patagonia.

Back in Scotland Richard McHardy makes an early solo ascent of Carnivore, while Noel Williams faces up to old age by climbing a fine new route on Lewis. Finlay Wild goes skiing in Kintail and Tim Pettifer tackles three avalanche incidents.

Mike Jacob goes skating on Duddingston Loch with an early great of Scottish mountaineering. Donald Orr discusses mountain art. Robin Campbell describes the climbing scene in early 1960s Edinburgh and Bob Sharp contributes an authoritative history of the development of the mountain rescue service in Scotland. Simon Richardson documents the highlights from an excellent winter season. New Routes abound: summer and winter. New Munroists are listed.

▶ The SMC Journal costs £16.95; members of Mountaineering Scotland receive 10% discount. To order contact Roger Robb, Blaven, Upper Knockbain Road, Dingwall IV15 9NR, or email roger07robb@btinternet.com

Touching the boards

THIRTY years after the book, fifteen years after the BAFTA-winning documentary, comes *Touching The Void* the stage play. The classic tale of disaster and survival in the Andes is adapted from Joe Simpson's book by David Greig and directed by Tom Morris, who was responsible for bringing the much acclaimed *War Horse* to the stage.

The play opened in Bristol, receiving five-star reviews in the Times, Guardian and Telegraph, and will be coming to the Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh from 24 January to 16 February and Perth Theatre from 7-10 March.

Using a minimalist stage set, the play concentrates on the mental turmoil as Joe Simpson battles against despair and broken bones to haul himself back from almost certain death. It also looks at the dilemma of Simon Yates, Joe's climbing companion, as he takes the decision to cut the rope on which Joe's life hangs.

Mountain films galore

IT'S only a matter of days to this year's **Dundee Mountain Film Festival**, which runs from 22 to 24 November, always a favourite at the start of the winter film season. You can check out what's on at http://dmff.co.uk/, and while you're online it's worth checking out a few more film opportunities.

With a range of films including some starring Scottish climbers Robbie Phillips, William Bosi and Dave MacLeod, the **Brit Rock** film tour has been going around the UK. Scottish dates still to come include 22 November at Eden Court Theatre, Inverness; 29 November at Glasgow Climbing Academy, and 5 January at Three Wise Monkeys, Fort William.

Find out more at www.britrockfilmtour.com/

The Banff Mountain Film Festival Tour starts on 19 January at Edinburgh Festival Theatre, with dates in Glasgow on 21 January, Stirling on 30 January, Inverness on 31 January and 1 February, and Pitlochry on 2 February. Full details are at www.banff-uk.com/

Edinburgh Mountain Film Festival takes place on 3 and 4 February, with details at www.emff.co.uk

And finally, there are several Scottish screenings of *The Dawn Wall*, the tale of the week-long ascent of the seemingly impossible 3000-ft Dawn Wall in Yosemite National Park. Check them out at https://uk.demand.film/dawn-wall/

Book Reviews

Extreme Scotland

By Nadir Khan
Vertebrate Publishing, £25

Wild Light

By Craig Aitchison
Vertebrate Publishing, £25

These two large format photo books are very different. While Wild Light is all about the light and the landscape, in Extreme Scotland the focus is on people's interaction with the terrain. Each shows the art and craft – and vision – of the photographer.

Craig Aitchison often decides well in advance what he wants from a photograph. Few of his pictures exist because he just happened on them; in most he has decided on a position, a time of year and a time of day.

Most of us with a reasonable camera can capture a good shot when we come across one, but Craig Aitchison makes it his business to seek out the good shots time after time, whether it's gazing to a distant horizon under a blue sky or glimpsing half-revealed marvels through veils of cloud.

Nadir Khan's muse is very different. The book starts with a bang, with photos of Ines Papert's first female ascent of the Grade XI The Hurting in Coire an t-Sneachda in dreadful conditions of wind and cold, where climbers and photographer were getting battered and the camera controls were icing over. The results, like the climb, are sensational.

Whether he's setting the climber in the immensity of the scenery or focussing tightly into the action, taking inspirational shots that make us want to get out there and do it, or getting in close on the grit and pain of survival in extreme conditions, Nadir knows how to get drama into a photograph.

But he's very much like Craig Aitchison in that his photos don't just 'happen'. Nadir, too, often has the picture in his head before it's in the lens.

These books – one landscapes the other action – are likely to appeal to different people for different reasons, but both show photographers at the top of their art and capture amazing images of Scotland's mountains and mountaineers.

Neil Reid

Waymaking - An anthology of women's adventure writing, poetry and art

Vertebrate Publishing, £17.99

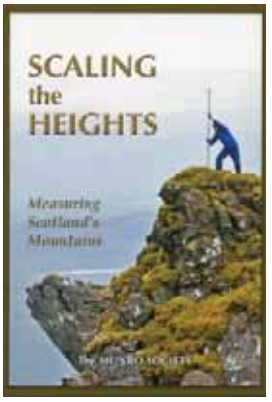
Waymaking boldly sets out to redress the balance in outdoor writing, to give a "women's narrative of wild adventure" through prose, poetry and visual art.

What is a women's narrative of adventure? For the editors of Waymaking, it is a rich seam of delicious, unique perspectives. It's an often-heard cliché that women focus less on the machismo of adventure, with a more sensitive, experiential outlook. However, this book is as diverse as the women we meet, and contributors eloquently tackle subjects ranging from the fear and heroics of swimming and mountaineering, the companionship of journeying, relationships, motherhood and the visceral sensation of encountering nature. Each morsel must be digested thoroughly before moving on, making this a perfect book to dip in and out of. I found the journey intensely powerful, condensing and evoking many of my own experiences. Often I would put the book down with an intake of breath, my thoughts whirring in approval, my minds eye wandering amongst glaciers, forests and tangled memories.

The list of contributors is extensive, and includes outdoor royalty such as Hazel Findlay, Krystle Wright and Libby Peter. I found it fascinating to read about the personal reflections of these women on their world. It was also glorious to discover new voices (to me) such as Ruth Wiggins, whose poem "Out There" is a glee-filled celebration of all the girls that ever found freedom in nature, and artist Nick Davies, whose painting, "Waterfall Series No 5" is as wet and sparkling as a cascade of blue and white light.

This isn't just a significant book for women. Men too will find inspiration and beauty amongst the pages. I also believe that this book represents a paradigm shift in how we value creative works by women. It is shameful that in 2018 we need this book, but we do, and the canon of adventure writing and art is richer for it.

Lucy Wallace



Scaling the Heights: Measuring Scotland's Mountains

The Munro Society, £12 + P&P

THERE'S a popular theory – said most often in jest, to be fair – that the SMC make changes to the Munros List just so they can sell more books. But for those who take their Munros seriously it's less a joke than an added fascinating aspect to the business of getting out there and climbing them.

Some years ago the Munro Society decided that someone had to settle a then current debate on the status of some marginal hills, which could be just above or just below the magical 3000ft line. Over several years, a series of peak surveys checked heights using modern GPS technology and working to exacting standards accepted by the Ordnance Survey.

As a result two Munros were lopped from the list, as was a Munro Top, which could be a good or a bad thing depending on your attitude. It meant non-scramblers doing the Tops no longer had to make the precarious journey out to Knight's Peak on Skye, but it also demoted that classic test-piece the Fisherfield Six to the Fisherfield Five.

Scaling the Heights tells the tale of those eight years of surveying from the perspective of those involved, including both surveyors and porters. A chapter on the history of Munros from Robin Campbell sets the scene, with Hamish Brown adding a chapter in answer to those who think that 'messing with the tables' is a new phenomenon.

Other chapters cover the justification for the new surveys and we get perhaps more science than most will understand about the detail, with both surveyors and porters giving their different perspectives of events, which saw some marvellous days lolling about on hilltops admiring the views, and other days when hypothermia was a very real possibility.

A fascinating look at some very offbeat hill activities, Scaling the Heights is available from dsbatty@btinternet.com at £12 plus £3 post and package. It will also be available at the Dundee Mountain Film Festival, which runs from 22 to 24 November.

Neil Reid

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