

# Strathaven Climbing Club

MAY 2013 , Issue 171



Welcome to the first SCC Newsletter of 2013.

Remember Mike's advice: Print it out!! Colour prints are dear but it's still worth it.

## *Annual Dinner 2013*

You heard it here first..... Partners are invited (nay, expected) and costs are £60 for a double. £25 for the dinner. Get those rooms booked!

A ceilidh band has been arranged. It's gonna be a good one.

*Attholl Arms*

*Blair Attholl*

*Saturday November 16th 2013*

**AND - we need fresh new scribes so tell Colin about your adventures for the next issue!**

**Polar exploring in the Cairngorms: Mill Cottage, 29th/30th March.**

A very small SCC party presented itself at Mill Cottage, perhaps due to it being the Easter weekend. On the Friday evening Eric, Mike, Colin and guest Gordon pondered the glittering Polar sunset and did what Scott would have done: went to the pub. Next day dawned bright and -9 degrees. Mike and Eric had declared for the Fiacall a Coire an Sneachda ridge, Colin and Gordon, both having ML Assessments coming up, opted for a longer day through the Chalamain Gap, up into An Garbh Coire and up the North West ridge of Sgurr an Lochain Uaine. (Surely enough Gaelic

pronunciation to satisfy the most severe Assessor).

The plan for An Garbh Coire lasted until a dozen feet into the Sugar Bowl car park, which hadn't been cleared. As the car bounced to a halt on the icy ruts it was obvious that parking here was not a goer. At 9.10am we got one of the last dozen spots in the lower Coire Cas car park and set off Fiacall-wards in the company of large numbers of clattering cross country skiers. In about -3 or -4 we plodded upwards, basking in glittering sunshine and a gentle breeze. Never having been up the Fiacall Ridge I was thinking "is this it?" as we seemed to draw almost level with the plateau before the scrambly bit suddenly appeared. Festooned with harnessed and heavily equipped climbers seemingly all intent on putting in one piece of protection for every metre of ascent, waiting in the queue didn't seem worth it so we sidled round the cheats' path (still fun, though) and up the flank of the top of the ridge to pop back out into the sunshine. With the plateau looking like a scene from "Furthest North" we couldn't resist the walk over to Macdui.



All around the sky was filled with clouds but (the thoughtful Gordon theorised) the sheer cold of the plateau's snow cap was keeping a tunnel of cold air securely in place over the high tops, with a huge oval of blue sky secure over the top of us. With all the paths covered over, people were walking or skiing all over, increasing the sensation of space even though there were lots of people up there. Eventually we reached Macdui and sat down to lunch with a Canadian skier, a couple of local folk and an enormous German snowshoer (that's what he was doing, not his name) who casually said he was going to nip down to the shop at the car park to buy some more fuel before heading back down the Lairig Ghru to Corroul bothy. This was at about 2pm.



After ten minutes the barely-perceptible breeze had gently removed all joules of heat from our heavily insulated frames and we shivered back off down the way we had come, only to meet Mike, then Eric. We explained that we had completed our proposed route early and just nipped over to see what it looked like from Ben Macdui, but no-one believed us. Mike paced on for the summit, while

Eric turned and returned with us. Sure enough by the time we reached the col our new German friend was pacing briskly up towards the northern escarpment, after a while the only trace of him was a snowshoe print seemingly every few metres. The Big Grey Man had better look to his laurels....

The climbing areas in the Northern Corries had looked deserted all day, and the Goat Track was pristine. We decided we weren't going to try being the first down. With an Alpenglow starting, we bailed off down the path beside Coire Cas, pausing to remove crampons which had by then been in place for several hours, The underfoot conditions promptly became extremely slippery and we all sprawled down the piste several times before regaining the car park and in short order the Bridge Inn.

Sunday was nearly as cold and just as bright; after a big day we all decided for Meall a Buachaille. The Lodge bar still being shut when we returned, we went our various ways. A successful weekend in rare conditions.



VENI, VIDI VICI. (The story of the SCC Steall Hut expedition.)

The Journey north was not without incident A fatal accident north of Tyndrum created a tail-back of some miles. We were a little concerned when my car, for no apparent reason went into a spontaneous judder and a pair of chopper wheels appeared outside and decided that their need for the lay bye was greater than ours. A sharp exit was in order so we opted for a detour via Oban. The Grog and Gruel in the Forth looked after us in a manner of speaking.

En route to the car park we were waived down by a group of exciteable young women from Leicester Uni wanting to link up with some of their colleagues. Having taxied them to their destinations we set out for Steall a little later than intended.

We arrived well after dark, half cut, found the bridge. Ian extended his limbs to reach the thin wire cable and assured me that if he could do it so could I. "Ah but a man's reach should exceed his grasp or what's a heaven for"!

It has been a while since I slept in such a cold shelter. The taste of the food was enhanced by the smell of CO mixed with rodent dropping. Both were in plentiful supply. One could fingerprint the mice in the dried gravy.

#### INCOMING CLUB MEETS.....

24/25th May Inverardran	CRIANLARICH
26/27th July Lowstern	CLAPHAM
30/31st Aug Cabin	LAGGAN The
27/28th Sept Inbhirfhaolin	GLEN ETIVE
25/26th Oct Blackrock	GLEN COE

Details in the usual place - come on, you know where to look!

#### *Alps '13.*

*The SCC. Alpine trip this year is to Mayrhofen in the Zillertal in Austria, such a popular venue that it is fully subscribed.*

*Ten hardly alpinists will head off to Munich on Tues 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept' and after an overnight in Munich(I think they make beer there), we head off next morning to Mayrhofen by train(2 ½ hrs, 3 changes).*

*On Wed' 11<sup>th</sup>, Tam, Stewart G, and Tifter head for home, while Alistair, Donal, Cammy, Ian, Alan Y, Roy and myself head off to do a couple of nights hut to hut before travelling home on Fri' 13<sup>th</sup>.*

*A good time will be had by all, and that's an order.*

VENI, VIDI VICI. (continued)

On the Saturday we set off in search of Luibelt and Staonaig and having seen them in the distant horizon, confirmed that it was what we were looking for and waded home through slush.

The second night was no warmer than the first and the fire was no less smelly so we opted to sleep in one of the upstairs room as far away from the gas supply as possible.

On Sunday Morning we were treated to group of semi naked students crossing the river bare foot. We offered to help but they refused. (*Editorial note: there was a disgraceful rumour of an impromptu wet t- shirt competition but Ian has firmly denied it was him*)

At that point we decided to flee.



#### CLUB DINNER, KINGSHOUSE, 17th NOVEMBER 2012

*There was even some mountaineering carried out but no-one has gone public about their achievements....*

#### Committee thingies

**Meets:** Rob has taken over as Meets Secretary as from the AGM and has begun by innovating boldly. The process remains the same - Huts should be booked by emailing Rob. However please note the new email address - [strathaven.climbing.club@gmail.com](mailto:strathaven.climbing.club@gmail.com)

Payments should be made to Roy in the same way as before.

**Media Luvvies:** In a nod to the computer age, and for another means of publicising our endeavours to current and potential members, the Club now has a Twitter feed, see below

<https://twitter.com/LoudounHill#>

For those not acquainted with Twitter, if you are selective with who you follow, Twitter can be a great means of staying in touch with news and developments from organisations and with what's going on generally. Twitter is a good gossip and keep-up-to-date facility: an ever present pub night with photos in place of beer. Everyone should be encouraged to make posts of their recent activities. It could provide a genuine representation of what the club gets up to. Its informality is its strength - web sites are managed and can give a false picture.

Meanwhile Roy, our resident computer genius is grafting away developing a website, with a bit of help from BT. More news on this soon.

These days most organisations have a Twitter account ( For instance MCofS, MWIS, TCA Glasgow, Strathaven Striders and Ales).

**Note: the primary method of contacting members with news and notification of events will still be e-mail, as before. The source of details for booking meets will still be the Blog.**

The Twitter account can be used for members to post photos and notes of what you have done. If you would like to utter a tweet let Rob know and he will give you the login details. Or, to learn more about Twitter, try this link:

[:http://www.wikihow.com/Use-Twitter](http://www.wikihow.com/Use-Twitter)



*This isn't Patterdale...Rob & dog atop the Cobbler.*

#### **PATTERDALE 14th,15th and 16th February 2013**

With advancing years certain things become less flexible and other things sag and droop. However 6 members, retired and self employed, were able to enjoy this flexibility to head down to Patterdale on the Thursday to make full use of the predicted more reasonable weather. The venue was the

Agnes Spencer hut just as you enter Patterdale on the Glenridding side. The hut was named for the lady whose bequest allowed its conversion to a club hut, she being a Spencer of the M&S of St Michael. It was an excellent hut and we had the added pleasure of some members of the Cleveland Mountaineering Club on all three nights, a happenstance that added to rather than detracted from the meet.

Else abandoned Ian to go across the water to Howtown in the company of Mrs Young's husband. They made their way back by the undulating lakeside path which proved every bit as arduous as the undertakings of the other four members. Donal, Roy, Charlie and Ian planned to head for Angle Tarn but on reaching the top of the Angletarn Pikes a sufficiently broad panorama presented itself to dissuade them from going to the frozen tarn-side and they contented themselves by watching a Czech girl wandering off into the white expanse that led up to High Street. Returning to Boredale Hause, another Lake District Piccadilly, they sought the lofty heights (657) of Place Fell, above Ullswater. This proved sufficient exercise for the day and led to a retreat to Patterdale, the pub and a recharging for the morrow.

During the evening one of the members discovered he had mislaid something that he required for mastication so a search party was arranged for a return up Place Fell next day. Ian, Else, Donal and Mrs Young's husband did this, with Donal and Ian extending the descent by heading towards Bridgend and opening the views up into Deep and Dove dales, Kirkstone and Scandale Pass. Steve, you could well be Lynch, arrived on the Friday night and was joined by Roy and Charlie in heading for Hellvellyn. On reaching the hole-in-the-wall Roy was not drawn on by the engulfing white, but Steve and Charlie persisted and despite indifferent weather and strong winds enjoyed a hard day out doing Hellvellyn and then on to Sticks Pass and a return down Glenridding. The Saturday night in the hut was much enjoyed even though the search party had proved unsuccessful. The unfortunate member was unmercifully ribbed but i muff fay he fook it in ferry good fart.

Fuzzy heads made their way home leisurely on Sunday.

### **River Deep, Mountain High.**



*Al fresco prostate checks are fun.....the team after their river crossing adventures.*

***Badrallach Bothy meet. 8 – 10 March 2013.***

Participants – El P, Rob Patterson, Roy Bradley, Donal Giltinnan, Ian Wilson, David McLennan.

Maybe my meet suggestion had not been such a good idea after all. Interesting location on the north side of Little Loch Broom, but about 8 miles from the main road, and worse still, Dundonnell Hotel was closed. Where's the nearest pub? Ullapool? Unexpectedly one was found in Laide, and selling food too. Still, here we were, and it was a bothy, albeit a posh bothy. We knew about having to bring stoves, but did not quite expect to have to sleep on the floor. Just as well there were only six of us. Any more and floor space would have been at a premium.

Saturday morning was fine, but with a powerful and very cold wind. And this was at sea level. An Teallach looked in fantastic winter condition but it was obvious that the ridge was no place to be in winds like that. Stuart and Rob decided to head for the Fannichs to find something more amenable. The rest of us opted for Ian's suggestion for a horizontal walk starting at the Gruinard river and running into the area on the west side of An Teallach. And a fine walk it was, eventually cutting round to the north shore of Loch nan Sealga and heading back to the west end of the loch where a handy land rover track ran down the side of the river back to the starting point. The map showed that the river was quite broad and we were on the opposite side of the river from the track, so obviously when we got there, there would be an easy way across.

Except there wasn't. Five minutes milling around simply confirmed that the choice was either to wade or follow rough and trackless ground downriver until a crossing might be found. Wading won, partly helped by the idea that if one of us crossed, a small boat moored on the other side could be commandeered and the rest ferried over in style. Ian volunteered, and soon

his sturdy legs were churning through water that proved much deeper than it appeared. Unfortunately the boat was securely chained to a post, so it was wading for all. Once in, it proved not too bad despite the freezing wind. By the time the water was up to the knees, you were numb to the waist and survival was simply a matter of not falling in and being washed away. Donal scorned the idea of stripping off and crossed fully clad. Five damp miles down the track to the start point and it was off to find a pub in Aultbea.

Back at the bothy Rob and Stuart recounted their day. Despite being on the west side of the hill and theoretically enjoying some shelter, they had struggled to the top of Meall a' Chrasgaidh in the face of increasingly strong, bitter winds, then had been happy to retreat to the pub in Ullapool.

So sterling performances all round, but wading rivers in temperatures like that? – definitely character building. So much so that when Sunday dawned with the weather much the same, there was a general retreat south to warmer climes.

### CIC Hut 2013

Unusually, the talk as we gathered in the pub before the trek to the hut was not about routes, grades or the weather. It was all about Craig and more to the point who should be sacrificed to climb with him.

Tam's response was the same one I suspect he uses for most tricky situations—*“fuck that for a game of soldiers!”*. The rest of us were rather more circumspect in our choice of language but still managed to get our message across. Unfortunately (for him) Mike went to the toilet at the wrong moment and was duly nominated, mainly on account of his having sexy new crampons.

The walk up to the hut went smoothly due to the new improved path and we were all ensconced well before midnight. It was busy but Tam's diplomacy managed to secure us some space at the table and we settled in for the night.

Morning dawned promisingly enough and we all ventured out with high hopes. Robert and Tam aimed for Garadh Gully, Mike and Craig were still negotiating over Route 1 and Martin and I decided to bite the bullet and go for Zero Gully.

To say the approach slopes were worrying would be an understatement. We both moaned and whined all the way but strangely, for us, never seriously thought of turning back. We were first in line and after digging out quite a good belay Martin headed off up the first pitch. A young team arrived laden down with shiny new gear, and then an older couple with not much gear at all. Martin informed me that the ice was ok for axes but shite for screws as he headed manfully up.

Then the unexpected happened. The older man started up after Martin, completely un-belayed by his younger female partner who had simply piled the rope up in front of her. He made fast progress, overtook Martin, got his ropes criss-crossed with ours and started dropping ice on our heads. Martin

wisely took an intermediate belay on two poor screws and (unwisely) brought me up. I was not happy, even more so when the leader of the young team started climbing, got his ropes tangled with the other party's and drew level with us where he belayed to an ice hook! I had a premonition of disaster but then we had a brain wave. There has been a rope hanging down Zero for several years after a particularly nasty accident and fortunately a piece was poking out of the ice right next to us. I secured a prusik to it and suggested tactfully to Martin that we *get the fuck out of there!*

We did. As I touched down at the bottom stance the younger team's second suggested that what I had just done was *quite dangerous*. Noticing that he too had decided not to attach himself to any form of belay I lost my temper completely and started a middle-aged rant about the youth of today. (Thankfully there were no subsequent reports on UK Climbing of mountain rage incidents.) Martin and I consoled ourselves with an ascent of Slingsby's Chimney and a leisurely return to the hut.

There was beer (only an eight pint cask of Dark Island), there was wine and there was a fine selection of whiskies to sample, including a small perfume bottle of something rare brought by Tam. We cooked food (eventually) and had a convivial evening bantering with members of rival clubs. It turned out that one of our members (who might remain nameless if he makes me a good enough offer) had already been fraternising with the Lomond Club for several weeks. It took Mike most of the evening to find the right word to describe this kind of behaviour, the right word being *promiscuous!*

Take a wild guess what we all did the next day? That's right, we went home early! (Why break with tradition?) All in all it was a successful meet. We all got up something and lived to tell the tale. The Ben and it's half-way hut will be there next year and I suspect so will we, if we're spared. Amen....

### ***Naismith Hut August 2012 - a partial account.***

A suitably diverse SCC group assembled in Elphin on the Friday night. Billy and Robert had been on some crumbly bit of rock on Stac Pollaidh that day, and were discovered later in the bar in Ullapool.

Saturday dawned brightly, enticing us all on to great things, only to sneak round and bite some bums later... Billy, overwhelmed by mainland air, set off back to his parish in time for the main bit of his working week. Robert and Janice went off for the Old Man of Stoer only to be blown off the second pitch by rising winds, Dave declared for the Dearg group with Martin and Colin, then at the car park produced a bike. As Martin and Colin set off up the track he was footering with the bike and was never seen again before the hut.

Martin set off at his customary pace towards the hills. After 20 minutes it began to rain at which point we both discovered neither of us were carrying any outer shells, so soft shells and dampness were to be the order of the day. Some Scouts we would make! Fortunately the showers remained showery rather than joining up.

Colin, meanwhile, kept a more sedate pace, excuses being waiting for Dave, taking photographs, checking the navigation and doing Mountain Leader things, but the reality was he is slower than

Martin. By the time the col arrived Martin was a speck in the distance, near the summit of Dearg, and Colin was hungry. A conference was held 100 metres up the slope towards Beinn Dearg, as Martin was descending. Martin bounded on towards Cona Mheall while Colin ploughed wearily up to the summit of Beinn Dearg where the emergency shelter was deployed and a very pleasant nap



partaken.

Much refreshed, Colin made his way back to the col thinking about a future trip round Am Faochagach and Cona Mheall together, in good time to intercept Martin on his way back from Cona Mheall. Reunited, the party pushed north, now moving at compatible speeds. Over Meall nan Capraichean, with the view to the north and west coming sensationally into its own. The Coigach peaks seemingly stood to attention facing west, as though sentries waiting for the next tectonic plate incursion.



On down to the north, Colin got his own back on Martin by letting him lead us off the steep bouldery north flank of Capraichean instead of sidling north east for a few hundred metres to get the easy way down. Then a last slog up on to Eididh nan Clach Geala, mound of white stones, where there are indeed some very striking quartzite gashes visible on the summit dome. A long-drawn-out wander led back down to a stalker's path back to civilisation and a welcome pint in Ullapool.

Sunday dawned bright again but your scribe had to be back early so pausing only for a wander round the geopark site (very interesting too) headed south. Lots more adventures were brewing, I'm sure....

### **Book Review: Wade Davis's " Into the Silence - the Great War, Mallory and the Conquest of Everest"**

This is a meticulously researched story of the "discovery" of Everest and the three British expeditions of the 1920's. It won a prize for non fiction and it is easy to see why; a rigorous historical approach brings out vividly the post-traumatic (post WW1) social climate and also the exclusivity and sheer concentrated snobbery of that class of English public school individual. A delicate web is woven, of links between the public-school ethos (to produce rulers, whether of England or India), the gung ho promotion of the war as a jolly adventure, and the sheer scale of horror and loss experienced by the erstwhile innocents who actually got to go; and how this motivated the men who went to Everest.

The 1921 Reconnaissance, and the 1922 and 1924 Expeditions, for many seemed to provide an answer to the sheer barrier of experience that prevented them from communicating even with close

family members who had not witnessed the trenches, offering a similar experience of hardship and risk whilst being directed by distant people who actually had no idea of what they were facing. Out of this detailed picture of a social context emerges, from letters, newspapers and minutes, vivid impressions of the key personalities of the primal Everest story; Hinks, the Bond villain of the National Geographical Society's Everest Committee; Mallory, the brattish, snobbish prima donna climber, apparently brilliant but not very safe; George Finch, the strongest Alpine climber of that generation who also happened to be the leading authority on the new technology of portable oxygen, first developed for the RFC, who was nearly excluded altogether because he was Australian; Harold Raeburn the veteran Scotsman, vastly experienced but ultimately mentally fragile ( no wonder, in this company) and apparently at 56 too old for the rigours of the Himalaya. (that scuppers next year's overseas trip for us, anyway)

The thrill of the chase is forensically presented; at the start no one knew how to get near Everest or what routes might go and incidental to the reconnaissance was Oliver Wheeler, a India Survey officer who went off surveying at the very start of the trip and subsequently spent more time above 20000 feet than anyone else in the whole enterprise; his mapping was still the primary source of information for the Everest region well into the satellite age. The account of the probing and gradual elimination of the impossible and impractical, and the missed chances prior to the eventual uncovering of the right road, make thrilling reading and for the first time I have found a Himalayan account in which the process of discovery comes to life as a coherent and vivid story.

The individual actors in this drama would no doubt seem insufferable to modern perceptions (it recalls that the spoken, as opposed to written history of WW1 suggests that about as many British officers may have been shot from behind as from in front) but you have to admire the indifference to hardship and sheer bloody minded persistence, in clothing in which I would hesitate to go for a walk in the Cairngorms.

And did Mallory reach the top? In the 1990's, after the discovery of Mallory's body, Conrad Anker tried to free climb the Second Step. At one point he had no choice but to step on the Japanese ladder, installed in the late 80's. Reinhold Messner graded the Second Step free at about UIAA VI. Only a handful of people in the world had climbed UIAA VI in the 1920s, even at low altitude, and that handful did not include Mallory or Irvine. So the sober money is on "no he didn't".

It would be nice to think that he did, though.

*Who's been eating MY porridge.: Patterdale Pic: - Above Donal - Black Crag and Birks. Roy - Striding Edge, Helvellyn, Catstye Cam. Charlie- Birkhouse Moor*

