

Strathaven Climbing Club

Newsletter 172, November 2014



Welcome to Newsletter 172, your all-too-infrequent source of inspiration/confession/derision (delete as appropriate). It's been a while, so it's another Bumper Christmas Edition – next year we're going to try to have more frequent newsletters but we need to hear from more of you – it would be very dull if Colin wrote it all (as I'm sure everyone would agree)

Annual Dinner 2014 (Herr President)

The 33rd Annual dinner was held at the Atholl Arms and was enjoyed by 50 members and guests. A good number also stayed the Friday night and most members did some cycling and walking was over the week-end but hats off to Iain Park and his guest for at least doing a Munro and especially Janice and her two guests, Michelle and Jill, for doing the furthest two tops on Bheinn A'Ghlo.

2015 Meets.

Your Meets Sec has been extremely busy and has assembled an unparalleled selection of meets in most corners of the country, as well as Englandshire.

More on following pages.....get

After 3 years of the excellent presidency of Stuart I had the unenviable task of picking up the mantle. I dispensed with a review of the year but sought and received the club's recognition and appreciation of the excellent work being carried out by Rob, the Meets Secretary and the achievements of Robert Manby in achieving his Mountain Instructor award and Colin McIntosh in achieving his Summer Mountain Leader award.

I retained Eric's Meet Report award which is to be called the Boozer prize for literary anything and Stuart's Piton Noir for outstanding pitch, climb, summit or expedition of the year. I introduced two new awards. The CAPTAIN OATES award for the member who went most out his comfort zone, and the award of the BLACK SPIDER for Try Try and Trying again. This years awards:



Boozer prize for literary anything:- for his meet report ice climbing with Billy:-

Billy's mate **John**

A miniature of Teacher's

Black Spider - To encourage Janice to have another go at her Summer Mountain Leader qualification:-

Janice McKinlay

A black spider(plastic,Halloween edition) and a bottle of Nimbus Blond

Captain Oates: ascent of D Gully Buttress, the Buchaille.

Donal Giltinan

A wood carving of an Edward Whymper era climber looking quizzically at the end of his rope and a bottle of The Ridge.

Piton Noir: ascent of Via Gross, Sass Pordoi with the twotosser variation.

Graeme and Stuart Johnson for their intrepitude, although they have reinforced Mike's theory that rock climbers are just hill walkers with poor navigational skills:

The Piton Noir and a bottle of Pinot Noir and two bottles of Flying Scotsman

For one year only, hopefully, Ian handed out The Real Ale award for the Real Ale that was most suited to a club member. This years award was **Skullsplitter** awarded to **John Craven**. Unfortunately I could only get hold of Dull Dunter and even more unfortunately gave it to Billy by mistake. *(So that's where the heckling about Last of the Summer Wine came from...)*

The two accordionists did us proud and the Hoochterin and Teuchterin went on 'til we were all knackered. Other activities were cut short to accommodate other hotel guests - probably just as well.

Apart from running out of draught Real Ale the Atholl Arms did a great job too.

Naismith Hut, Elphin, August: (the shortened version)

9 members enjoyed the Naismith Hut meet. Colin peaked on Friday, Billy claimed Cul Mor and Cul Beag, Dave, Donal and Ian careered over Quinag and The FJB entourage cut their stay brief on Reiff. Moy for the Crag Rats on Sunday whilst Donal and Ian returned to the environs of Friday's journey breaker for another stroll around Rothiemurchus.

Dave's story:

Naismith 1: Quinag. 23 August 2014.



Over the years I had cycled round it, driven past it and wanted to climb it. Despite good intentions and reading all the comment suggesting it as one of the outstanding hills in the NW Highlands, I had never set foot on Quinag.

The August Elphin meet provided the opportunity. Donal, Ian and I left Ian's car at the highest point of the road north of Skiag Bridge and set off for the first top on the ridge, Spidean Coinich. From here the outlook over a wild land of low light and water was just magnificent, with Loch Assynt and a distant mist covered Suilven providing the southern backdrop. To the north, it was raining. Down to a bealach then a steep ascent to the next top revealed the full extent of the elongated Y shaped ridge with three main tops that forms Quinag. In the distance two other climbers were heading toward us. I had thought we had the hill to ourselves. It seems that a quiet day on the hill without meeting others is an increasingly rare event, even in remote locations like this.

A longer steeper descent led to the Bealach a' Chornaidh where the path leading directly back to the road starts. Donal took this option as he was feeling cold and damp. Ian and I scrambled up a superbly positioned ridge, reaching the extended shoulder that curved round to the outlying top of Sail Gorm. At the end of the ridge we enjoyed the wonderful position and outlook above some big cliffs until the chilly wind encouraged us to get moving again. So back over the shoulder to the bealach and out eastwards to Sail Garbh, 808m and the highest top on Quinag.

By now mist was beginning to brush the highest parts of the ridge and rain threatening. So it was down to the col and the start of the descent path and a long boggy walk back down the glen to the car. The last 2km were made much more pleasant by an unexpected and well-surfaced path, by the look of it a relatively recent demonstration of the path maker's art.

Quinag was every bit as good as I had hoped and a much more substantial day out than I had expected. It will be superb in winter under consolidated snow. So that's another target added to my still lengthy list.

Any takers for this winter?



Figure 1: Ian, imitating Sail Mhor with his hat

Naismith 2: *Meanwhile, Colin was in some kind of parallel time zone whereby the hard work took place on the Friday.*

It was close to 1pm when I drew up at the west end of Loch Glascarnoch, with an optimistic forecast – only a few very small showers to worry about. The hills here are not inviting from the roadside; a mile or more of peat hag tells the inquisitive walker to move on.

Cona Mheall had been missed out in a round of the Deargs from Gleann na Squaib due to a poor choice of companion for the day – he shall remain nameless (he knows who he is) but resembles Road Runner in his pace (meep meep) on the hill. As a result I had met him returning to the col from Dearg, our first summit of the day, as I set off upwards. After being forced to take a nap on the summit of Dearg, I met him again on the col a while later after he had dashed up Cona Mheall from the west but it had always looked to me more interesting to approach from the South. Hence today's solo adventure which started by confronting that forbidding looking bog.

Ancient information from an SMC guide book editor suggested that there was a path going off in the right general direction, which would miss the worst of the potential for immersion. My plan was to weave around Loch a'Gharbhain, up to Loch Coire Lair, then into the mouth of Coire Ghranda before the challenging-looking ascent on to the flank of Cona Mheall's south ridge.



To my delight there was the path.... for all of 100 metres before dispersing into saturated wetlands. At this point the weather was dry, or at least there was an absence of rain (underfoot conditions made the word “dry” inappropriate). The conditions dictated an easy pace so an hour later I drew up at the edge of the Allt a Gharbhrain, just beside some ruined sheilings. The river crossing was completed in the approved Glenmore Lodge fashion, boots off, trousers rolled up, face the current and plant your walking poles firmly. The crossing was straightforward if painful (wish I’d remembered my flip flops)

As I got sorted on the far bank, the rain came on. Oh well, the forecast was for occasional light showers. I shouldered my pack and carried on towards Loch Coire Lair. No path to be seen, the lie of the land eased me high on the slopes under the crags of Leac an Tuadh and eventually I found myself crossing the outflow of Coire Ghranda on to steep slabs that would have reminded me of the Dubhs Ridge in Skye, if not for the 2 centimetres of peat clinging to large areas of them, that and the fine grain of the granite which made them slippery in the rain so it was a struggle up into the mouth of the coire. All the while glancing at the buttress I would have to climb which looked formidable from a distance.



At about this point I paused, contemplating retreat. I could feel the occasional light shower still beating on my shoulders an hour after it had started. It had passed straight through my soft shell as though it wasn't there, before I had decided to bring out the Goretex. The rain stopped and the sun was glimpsed. I went on.

At about 700m of altitude the day became worthwhile; I emerged on to the shoulder of an elegant, narrow ridge sweeping round towards the summit of Cona Mheall. With cloud swirling around me the views into Coire Ghranda were thrilling, with the sun glinting off the water seemingly sheer below me. This is truly the best way to see Cona Mheall.

The ridge was spectacular but easy, with only an occasional steady hand on rock needed. As I went over the summit (number 207, not that I'm counting) the cloud closed in again and the light shower resumed its duties. Four hours 40 minutes to get here. Eastward to the outflow of Loch Prille, the bare granite bones of the land dominated, in a wonderful, ancient chaos of folded rock strata. Only the thin scrapes of peat on the top gave the game away, that these rocks weren't actually formed the day before yesterday. Expecting to see dinosaurs but having to content myself with frogs, I weaved my way down to Loch Prille, the rocks all the while trying to push me too far south.

The outflow from the loch here has stepping stones so it was easy to get across dry shod, assuming you weren't already soaked through. From here the ascent of Am Faochagach was an easy Cairngorm-ish plod after the exertions of the past six and a half hours.



The occasional light shower took a wee break as I reached the summit and I had a trace of a view; the light was already failing and I was keen by now to get back across the river before pitch dark. I plodded straight over the top without a pause, feeling the cold. I had a spare fleece in the bag but decided to keep moving to keep warm.

Imperceptibly the stoney whaleback that is Am Faochagach became the sea of peat hags and bog that surrounds it and I could put the compass away. Slipping and sliding downwards towards the dark, I aimed for the outflow of Loch a' Gharbhainn, using the remnant of light glittering off the loch. One last worry surfaced. Nine hours out by now, only half a cheese sandwich and not enough to drink – would the river crossing push me into hypothermia before I could make it back across the kilometres of peat to the car? I stopped and drank the last of my water, forced down a Mars Bar. Fifteen minutes later, I reached the river in the last remnants of dusk. Without a pause, I splunged through it, boots and all. I was no wetter, and the river water seemed a little warmer than the moisture saturating me from the thigh deep vegetation. Headtorch on now, the last weary mile took a long time; at 9.45 pm I was stripping off in the dark, in the layby and donning warm, dry clothes.

And the occasional light shower continued all the way to Elphin.....

Next day dawned with the Light Shower taking playful rushes at us all. The maneouvers involved in getting downstairs persuaded me that I wasn't up to Quinag, or indeed to anything very much, so after a few extra cups of tea I set off to explore the path over towards

2015 Meets:

***30/31 January: Burns
weekend @ Ballater***

20/21 Feb: Inbhirfhaolain

***13/14 March: Strawberry
Cottage!***

8/9 May: Froggett

29/30 May: Invercroft

Suilven. Halfway along the loch a burn in spate was crossed by a flimsy, slimy plank. Enough.... back to the hut and more tea (and two dinners) before beer time. Some weeks later, I regained the ability to walk....(Pause for chorus from Mike and Colin about sair knees)

Naismith 3: Greiff at Reiff

The following item is (or should be) sponsored by Petzl.... Mr Craven having joined the FJB band for an outing to the Reiff cliffs thought he ought to try his hand at flying. Unfortunately the minimal climbing requirements (laid down by Tom Patey) for this are (1)don't fall off and (2) have some protection in between your take-off zone and the ground. The H & S elves have ensured that there is a (3): wear a helmet The rest has been recorded for posterity and I am assured may go viral (whatever that is) on Youtube (or the other one that sounds like a toilet cleaner*. Happily, all turned out well apart from a slightly injured sea cliff. *(*Vimeo)*



More Meets:
June: Camping in Arran
10/11 July: Glen Clova
AUGUST 7/8:
Peak District
Sept. 4/5: Dundonell
Oct 2/3: Laggan
Oct 23/24: Coniston

E3 without a helmet? Thanks, but nah..... John, we love you. Buy a f***ing helmet.

Midweek meets.....

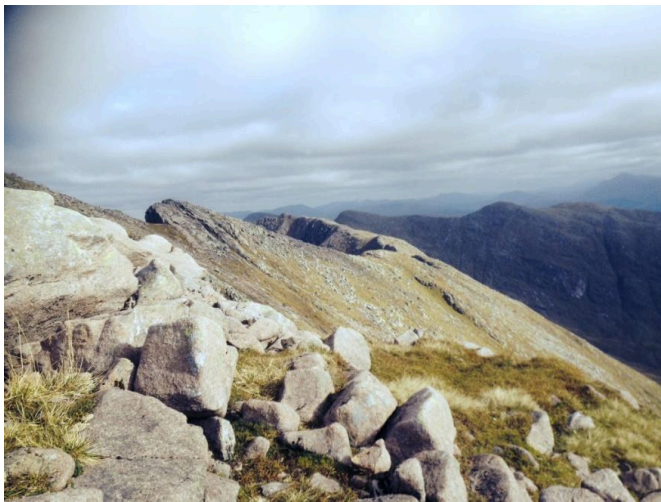
Plans are afoot to have an organised midweek day out, probably on a Wednesday tho that may change in deference to the ancient tradition of midweek cragging. Contact Charlie or Colin if you want on the mailing list for this.

Ben Cruachan -16th October. C Beaton. (*Nice to see Cruachan making a rare appearance on the newsletter – Ed.*)

Mike, Dave, Rob, Gordon and I trauchled our way round the tops of Cruachan on a fine sunny October day, marred only by high winds at the window, as usual, and a bit of moaning by someone about a sore knee. It was meant to be the Aonach Eagach, but Dave and I were overruled by a trio of teachers. No contest there. - Next time Dave.

(1) *Cruachan ridge. Note Granny Stopper*

(2) *Overleaf: Cruachan looking towards the dam, with Loch Awe below*



BLACKROCK ADVENTURES 6th – 7th JUNE 2014 (Ian W)

Charlie, Donal, Roy, Steve and I, with my guest and prospective member George, turned up on the Friday night.

Unfortunately an oversensitive smoke alarm was set off by one of our number having a very early fry-up with the result that all but Steve and Charlie were heading to do Curved Ridge at some ungodly hour.

I won't beat about the bush – we ended up doing D gully buttress. However it was something of a surprise to see from t'internet that more than 50% of people who went up that buttress did so having also mistaken the start of Curved Ridge. (including your good editor –CM) Roy had the best excuse because the last time he did Curved Ridge that was what he did, only he hadn't realised it then. Anyway we all got up there. Some unaided, some by occasional assistance of a rope and one by a system of ropes levers and manual handling that would have not been amiss in the building of the pyramids. On reconnecting with Curved Ridge we met up with the late risers. Steve decided to stretch his legs and go along the ridge but the rest of us took the easy way out and headed down the tourist route; which appeared to be a lot less messy up the top than it had been last time I was there.

Much drink was taken and George was not wanting.

Ian

Mill Cottage, Feshiebridge. 19/20 September, 2014

Gordon Bryce, Mike Dunn, Rob Paterson, Eric Rice, Peter Ross (Rob's guest.)

I loaded my trusty bike into the back of my new motor (Ford Fiesta 1.6 turbo diesel, ice white) and sauntered up the A9 past the average speed cameras (in waiting.) Finding the track to the cottage at last, I drove gingerly down. Nobody there yet. Rob's reply text said they were on their way so I went over to The Loch Insh Watersports Centre for a pint.

The day wore comfortably on, but, for lack of company, I was forced to have another pint and some grub. Still no one! Another text admitted that they were in Kingussie taking refreshments with Billy Burnside – *the bar stewards!* Talking of which, the barman eventually threw me out at 9.15. Back at the cottage I got in to join the above merry company. Worth waiting for the well appointed MC of S accommodation.

All had bikes and plans to cycle up Cairngorm glens to pick off remote tops. The Saturday expedition was to Glen Einich and a climb of Braeriach. Setting off bravely on tarred roads, I found that the way to the glen became a very rough path. The others had serious mountain bikes with full suspension – mine was a sedate "Town and Country" model. After a while I realised that my bike or my bum or both weren't up to it so I turned back. A pleasant tour of Glenmore brought me to a watering stop at The Old Bridge Inn in Aviemore. Meanwhile the others survived a hail of stalker's bullets and a hail of freezing rain on bare knees.

On the way back to the cottage I passed the Cairngorm Mountain Rescue post at Inverdrue, and remembered that Mr. Burnside had invited us to their barbecue that evening (as I thought.) Back to an empty! The others eventually rolled in from the *afternoon* bunfight which had been in full swing when I passed.

Same scenario on Sunday, this time to Glen Feshie for two in the far South end. Tarred roads a long way into the beautiful glen, then a stony Land Rover track. Again I gave up, retiring to the cottage with my tail between my forks. For compensation, I sat outside in the sunshine with my last bottle of beer. Nae bad!

The rest cycled/pushed to summit of Meall an Uillt Chreagaich then walked on to bag Leathad an Taobhain, one of the remote Corbetts . Bliss in the sunshine.

Eric Rice.

Coruisk, 2nd-5th May. C Beaton.

Those attending-too many to mention, full hut and tents to boot.

Ah, Skye, the misty isle, don't we just love it. Sometimes bliss, sometimes purgatory, sometimes both together.

Bliss: After an uneventful sail in the hut was easily found as signage had been supplied by the advance party,(see Photo).The usual Friday evening festivities ensured a not too early start, and as it was a great looking Saturday morning we were all fired up.



Stuart and John ambled round the corner,(about right),to throw themselves at some pieces of rock in the hope that they would stick, and stick they did. John, "sticking "to a new route by name of "The Cock Inn", well done to John, and a return to an old F J B's first ascent, "Old Mortality" (see pic).

“The Dubhs”. You just can’t not do it. So everyone else, as a rather fragmented group, launched themselves at it, with me at the rear, as I had a problem leaving my bed behind. However we all seemed to catch up/wait for/overtake each other, during the course of the climb.

Weather was stunning views tremendous and scrambling up to its usual fabulous standard. Some dangled at the abseil from Sgurr Dubh Beag, while I charged a pound a skull, to guide the avoiding route.

At the top of the ridge, after all the fun and hard work was done, one member of the party was so beside himself that it was all over, threw himself to the ground in a fit of pique, and was inconsolable. After trying to restrain him, we eventually had to send for help and had him taken away by men in white coats,(he’s ok now),we think.



SCC doesn't often have much to do with these things, apart from Billy....best just to say no!

2015 Meets: Get booking! Only 4 easy moves:

- 5. Book with Rob**
 - 6. Pay Roy**
 - 7. Buy beer**
 - 8. Turn up!**
-



Purgatory: Saturday night it rained, and rained, several tents got washed out, and notice of stormy waters meant a retreat on Sunday was prudent. After democratic and adult discussions, places were allocated in the available boats,(women and children last),and the retreat was complete.

Ah Skye, the misty isle. Would I go back-certainly. Will I ever, ever, enter An Garbh Choire, ever, ever



again.

Those who were there know the answer.Ch.



Gratuitous pic of the Inn Pinn – Infinite and overhanging drop on one side, and even steeper and longer on the other. That's Graeme Ettle on the top, he came down complaining about how slippery it was. And unconquered this year by SCC....even harder to get than Mont Blanc!

To follow soon... we have such a feast of adventure in foreign climes that we're going to have an Alpine Supplement, just as soon as the remaining *auteurs* get their fingers out (they know who they are. And loads of pictures. Watch this space!