

Jacobites Mountaineering Club



Journal 2018 - 2020

Committee

Post	2018-2019	2019-2020
President	Graham Pearson	Fiona Zeiner (co-opted)
Secretary	Jack Barraclough	Catherine Jones
Treasurer	Walt Robison	Rob Truswell
Meets Sec 1	Cathy Southworth	Guy Wimble
Meets Sec 2	Guy Wimble	Iain Kinnell (part)
Membership	Lisa Ferrero	Lisa Ferrero
Social	Pam van de Brug / Tamsin Gray	Karl Zeiner (co-opted)
Hut Custodian	Alan Walker	Paul Harris
Newsletter	Catherine Jones	Chris Banks
Webmaster	Chris Banks	Chris Banks
Gear	Andy Barnes	Andy Barnes
Journal	Chris Banks	Fiona Shepherd

Editors bit

It's taken a while to complete, but I've been inspired by everyone's adventures. As always, the Jacobites have been very busy and active over the last two years. Thanks everyone for your contributions, I hope you all enjoy reading it.

Fiona Shepherd

Contents

Weekend Meets.....	1
Midweek Activities.....	8
Social Events	9
Dave McHugh Award	12
Barry Winston	12
Congratulations.....	13
Climbing - New Routes.....	14
Canadian Ice Climbing - January 2019	15
The accidental canoeist	19
Burns Supper Lassies' reply.....	21
Cross Country Skiing – Norway 2019	22
A new mountain chapter calling.....	24
Climbing in Namibia	26
Lockdown Cycles	28
Botanical mountaineers.....	33
The Sierra Nevada.....	35
Oh Shit!	41
Outer Hebridean High Point Cycle Challenge!.....	43
Climbing Mingulay 2019	46
Fastpacking the Southern Upland Way (14-21 July 2019).....	48
St Malo to Nice – a solo cycle tour through France in September	54
Climbing in Oman.....	59
Glenshee Roads – The Immortal Memory of Nan Shephard.....	65
Camera Trap.....	66

Weekend Meets

Inbhirfhaolain, Glen Etive 2nd - 4th November 2018

Nine people went to Inbhirfhaolain. The weather was so appalling that Michael, Jeannie, Katherine and Tom went rock climbing at the Ice Factor on the Saturday. Pablo went sea kayaking at dusk on Loch Etive. Chris, Catherine and Guy managed to bag Coire Dubh Fraochaidh, from Achadh nan Darach (round on the road from Ballachulish), despite the weather. Katherine, Tom and Paul climbed Beinn Fionnlaidh on Sunday.

Raeburn Hut, Dalwhinnie 16th - 18th November 2018

A big day on Saturday for Adrian, Jenny, Paul, Iain, Katherine and Kasia who did a linear walk from Luiblea over Beinn a' Chlachair, Creag Pitridh and Geal Charn to near Kinloch Laggan. A couple of the group very stoically volunteered to forge ahead to get back to the cars to collect everyone else, who waited in the dark until they got back. On Sunday some of the group did Meall Chuaich, while others did two of the Drumochter Munros, A'Mhaoraich and Geal Charn on the way home.

Inver Croft, Achnasheen New Year 2018/19

On Hogmanay, a group walked a wet circuit from Achnashellach via the Tea House. On 1st January Guy, Andy, Scott and Pam climbed a Sgurr Dubh in Torrion. A late start meant they summited near sunset and were treated to a broken spectre of the whole mountain summit projected onto haze at the end of the glen. Most of the walk back was in the dusk and dark. The next day Andy and Guy did Spidean a'Chiore Leith, the eastern summit of Liaithach, with a light dusting of snow, in superbly sunny conditions.



Inverardran Cottage, Crianlarich 18th - 20th January 2019

Amanda and Jackie did a quick hike up Ben Ledi on Friday on the way to Crianlarich. On Saturday, Amanda, Walt, Lisa and Jenny did a wintry hike up An Caisteal and Beinn a'Chrion. Graham, Chris, Jackie, Catherine and Robert climbed Cruach Ardrain and Fiona and Ailsa biked into Beinn Bhuidhe on Loch Fyne. There were some stunning cloud inversions. Ken and Sarah climbed a Corbett, Beinn Cabrach. On Sunday Amanda climbed Ben Vorlich on the way home.

Lagganlia, Glenfeshie 25th – 27th January 2019 - Burns Supper Meet

Saturday was a very dreich day. Amanda, Catherine, Chris, Tim and Guy hiked from Feshie Bridge up to shoulder of Creag Dubh, then along to Sgor Gaoith, and descended via Meal Buidhe back to Glen Feshie. Graham set off for Sgor Gaoith, got as far as the Argyll Stone, saw the "interesting" weather higher up, and instead dropped into Gleann Eanaich and walked back through the forest. Ros, Margaret and Alec climbed Mullach Clach a Bhlair with Euan and Jackie for part of the way. They had an interesting river crossing, involving a tree. On Sunday Amanda and Guy had a leisurely walk through Rothiemurchus forest, while Ros, Margaret and Alec went in search of Capercaillie. Lucy and Cathy climbed Carn Dearg Mor.

Mill Cottage, Feshiebridge 16th - 28th February 2019

Tom, Katherine, Adrian and Ros walked to the head of Glen Einich together then Ros and Adrian climbed Braeriach, and Tom and Katherine did Cairn Toul, Angel's Peak and Braeriach. Tom and Katherine had a long walk back to the car in the dark. Despite everyone laughing at Lisa and Walt for bringing skis, they found some really nice spring snow on the back of Cairngorm, and skied Ciste Mhearad gully until their progress was barred by a waterfall. Guy did a solo bike/hike and bagged a Corbett, Meallach Mohr, down Glen Tromie. A number of people walked from the hut round the Sculpture Trail on Sunday.

Blackwater Outdoor Centre, Glenshee. 1st – 3rd March 2019

On Saturday, most people parked at Dalmunzie House Hotel and then went up Glas Tulaichean, Carn an Righ and Beinn Lutharn Mhor. Graham did a traverse of the hills East of Glen Shee from Black Hill to Mount Blair. On Sunday Catherine, Chris and Graham went up Badandun Hill from Little Forter.

Blackrock Cottage, Glencoe 15th – 17th March 2019

10 people went on this meet. It was a very snowy weekend. Most people walked along part of old military road on Saturday morning, then went to climbing centre at Kinlochleven in afternoon while Ken and Sarah went sledging. Everyone enjoyed Sarah's huge birthday cake in the evening.

GSG Hut, Elphin 5th – 7th April 2019

On Saturday the weather was good, albeit hazy. Phil, Lucy, Pam, Guy, Cat and Iain climbed Quinag with a car shuffle enabling a north to south traverse. Amanda, Adrian and Kasia did Arkle and Meal Hourn, while Katherine and Tom climbed at Reiff. Mike went for a big bike ride to Lochinver and Ros and Margaret cycled round the very hilly road round the top of Quinag to Lochinver and back along Loch Assynt.

On Sunday the weather was a bit miserable. A large group went up Braebag, while Cathy and Lucy ran up Canisp and Amanda, Adrian and Ros had a day out on Quinag. Mike went for a short ride near Aviemore on the way back home.

A few stayed on til Monday - it was a stunning day. The snorkelling branch of the Jacobites (Pam and Lucy) snorkelled off Achmelvich beach for 20 minutes! BRRRRR! While Cathy did solo trip up Ben More Assynt and Conival and Adrian, Amanda and Ros climbed Cul Mor.

Inver Croft, Achnasheen Easter Weekend 19th – 21st April 2019

Amanda, Adrian, Jenny, Robyn and Anya went up A'Chailleach and Carn Sgulain en route to Inver. On Saturday Amanda, Adrian, Robyn, Jenny and Anya climbed Beinn Eighe. After completing the two Munro tops Amanda, Jenny and Robyn continued on over the Black Carls to finish off the day.



On Sunday Alan, Iain, Alison, Jenny and Anya climbed Beinn Damh while Amanda and Adrian headed to Pinnacle Crag to do some climbing. It was a gorgeous sunny day with big views. Monday was baking hot Adrian, Amanda and Robyn did the traverse of Liathach.

Carbost, Skye 3rd – 6th May 2019

Due to some fine planning by the meet secs, the club celebrated Star Wars Day by doing some Skye walking. May the fourth be with you. On Saturday Miles, Fiona S, Cat and Lucy did Sgurr nan Gilleann and Am Bastier via some very airy pinnacles. Amanda and Adrian did the same, but did Bruch na Frith beforehand. Ken, Sarah, Graham, Scott and Pam did a traverse of Belig (Graham) and Garbh Bheinn (Corbett) with fine views. A group including Catherine, Chris, Fiona, Iain, Ben, May and Alison climbed Sgur nan Eag and Sgurr Dubh Mor from the Glenbrittle car park via Coire Ghrunda. Ros cycled a big loop north from Sligachan round the northern peninsula and back via Uig.

Sunday was forecast to be windier and a big group went to the Red Cullin and did the Beinn Dearg and Glamaig while Ros and Adrian went for a coastal walk.

Fiona Z and Miles both did Sgurr Alasdair, their "last Skye Munro" on Monday. They went up the Great Stone Chute which was snowy higher up. As they came down off the summit, they met a woman in Doc Marten boots going up. Adrian, Catherine, Chris, Graham, Amanda and Martin all climbed up Sgurr na Banachdaich then down over Sgurr nan Gobhar with an interesting descent down a ridge that treated them to a stone chute then a scree run. Ros cycled from Glen Brittle to Shiel Bridge.

Inver Croft, Achnasheen 17th – 19th May 2019 – work meet

A medium size team worked hard and efficiently to complete the big walkway project started by Adrian several years before. It was already fully functional but after much discussion it was decided to widen the first section because of its height above the bog and also because wind from the west seems to funnel strongly at the area of the bridge. Lateral supports were constructed to take 8 extra planks from the bridge to the first passing place. This section is now 4 planks wide, giving a good sense of security because you can now get along it in the wind. The other big job was the annual purging of the water pipe to clear out the air-locks. So then on the Sunday everyone got back to the old routine for workmeets - a full day of hard work on Saturday then Sunday free for the hills.

Strawberry Cottage, Glen Affric 24th – 27th May 2019

Fourteen people went on this very wet weekend. On the Saturday Karl and Fiona did Sail Chaorainn, Sgurr nan Conbhairean and Carn Ghluasaid. They made it back to the Cottage about 30 minutes after it started raining hard. Graham on the other hand waited for the rain to start before traversing Sail Chaorainn and Sgurr nan Conbhairean. Adrian and Ros climbed Carn Eithe and Mam Sodhail. Most of the others went out to Mullach nan Dheiragain. Sunday was the wettest day. Paul did Ciste Dubh, Karl did a low-level 30km run, Alison and Fiona did Corbett Sgurr Gaorsaic. Graham, Jackie and Euan walked to the Youth Hostel and ate scones.

Alan did 5 or 6 Corbetts, including Carn a' Choire Ghairbh & Aonach Shasuinn from the cottage and Beinn a' Bhathaich Ard in Glen Strathfarrar and Sgor na Diollaid at Mullardoch by bike.

Monday was the best weather day. Miles, Fiona and Karl ran back to the car park along the nicer, northern side of Loch Affric, while their luggage travelled in the Land Rover. Adrian and Ros did A Chralaig and Mullach Fraoch-Choire.

Lagangarbh, Glencoe, 14th – 16th June 2019

Six people went on this meet. Ken climbed Fraochaidh. Ros, Adrian, Miles, Jackie and Kasia climbed Ben Starav. Everyone had a singalong and played a climbing game on Saturday evening. On Sunday Ken & Miles climbed Ben Mhic Chasgaig.

Muir Cottage, Braemar 28th – 30th June 2019

Adrian, Amanda, Ros and Thomas climbed Eagle Ridge on Lochnagar. They finished the top two pitches in a thunderstorm and got soaked - quite an adventure.

Wasdale, Lake District 12th – 14th July (Camping) - No attendees.

Inver Croft, Achnasheen 26th – 28th July 2019

Alan Jackie and Euan stayed at Inver for the weekend. The weather was good on Saturday and Alan went up into Coire Laire looking for alpine plants to photograph. Sunday was wet, so nothing was done.

Arisaig 9th – 11th August (Camping) - No attendees.

'The Pearson Estate', Aviemore 23rd – 25th August 2019

On Saturday Graham went solo Corbett-bagging up Geal Charn above Nethy Bridge while Adrian and Ros did Fiacall Ridge and Cairngorm. On Sunday Graham, Tom and Katherine met up with Amanda for a circuit of Meall na h-Aisre and Geal Charn, aided greatly by the shiny new wind farm road on the way up. Ros and Adrian climbed Bynack Mor and Corbett Craig Mhor whilst trying to listen to the last test in The Ashes. Graham then stayed on for the rest of the week, joined at different times by different people.

Ardvullin House, Ardgour 6th – 8th September 2019

On Saturday Phil and Cat climbed Beinn Odhar Bheag and Beinn Mhic Cedidh - a long, wild and rough day but superb weather and not a soul in sight. Tim, Lucy, Kasia and Cathy did two Corbetts: Fuar Bheinn (766m) and Creach Bheinn (853m) and swam in the sea after. There was an epic Giant Connect 4 competition in the evening and (a very competitive) Pam was the winner. Cat freaked everyone out by sharing that she had been attacked by deer keds earlier on in the day, and one was trying to burrow into her head to lay eggs.

Euan, Cat and Phil did Sgorr Craobh a'Chaorainn on Sunday - Cat and Euan spent most of the ascent stopping to discuss flowers so it wasn't the quickest, but a good day out. Pam, Tamsin, Tim, Lucy and Scott walked up through oak woods and along an old mine railway, then stopped for a coffee.

Alex MacIntyre Memorial Hut, Ballachulish 20th -22nd September 2019

Ken & Sarah climbed Creach Bheinn (Corbett).

Braemar Youth Hostel 4th – 6th October 2019 - Annual Dinner weekend

The weather was cold but dry, so everyone got out on the hills during the day. Ros, Tamsin, Sarah (2 of), Katherine and Graham climbed Carn na Drochaide. Iain, Catherine, Chris, Guy, Ken, Phil and Cat climbed Morven. Lisa and Walt snatched a weather window and got up Carn a Mhaim (with cycle assistance) before the cloud came down. Others biked into Carn an Fhidhleir and An Sgarsoch. Sunday was a relaxed start, some went on a woodland walk, while others walked up a hill next to Braemar

Inverardran Cottage, Crianlarich 18th -20th October 2019

Kasia, Robyn, Sarah and Ken climbed Beinn nan Oighreag and Meall Gheordie, while Michael did the Cruach Ardrain five. Ken did a munro quiz game in the evening.

Glen Affric Cabins, Cannich, 1st – 3rd November 2019

Amanda, Adrian, Ros, Margaret, Alec, Kasia and Robyn had a very wet walk up Sgurr na Ruaidhe and Carn nan Gabhar. Guy and Cathy bagged a Corbett, Aonach Shasuinn, south of Glen Affric, it was very wet under foot, with intermittent rain. They had to wade a river in spate to get onto the return path. The next day everyone went to Plodda Falls, thundering mightily in the rain.

Lagangarbh, Glencoe 15th – 17th November 2019



Amanda and Adrian climbed Cruach Ardrain in pretty wintery conditions with Adrian en route to Glencoe. On Saturday, the majority of people did Bidean via the slightly scrambly Beinn Fhada ridge, while others did the Ben Starav group. On Sunday Beinn a'Chrulaiste, was climbed before descending to the newly refurbished Kinghouse where the food was very nice, and the staff were very

welcoming, given that the group were covered in bog.

Braedownie, Glen Clova 29th November – 1st December 2019

On Saturday everyone did similar circuits over Broad Cairn and Cairn Bannoch in clear, snowy conditions, but in three different groups. Some included Tom Buidhe and Tolmount; Graham included Creag an Dubh Loch and Craig of Gowal.

On Sunday Chris and Catherine walked around Loch Brandy, and Adrian, Ros, Robyn and Kasia did Driesh and Mayar.



Inver Croft, Achnasheen Christmas Dinner Meet 13th - 15th December 2019

See Social Events.

Inver Croft, Achnasheen New Year 2019/20

A group of 12 were at Inver for Hogmanay. Various walks and cycling trips were done.

Katherine, Tom, Zoe and Robyn did Beinn Alligin. It was really cloudy but the cloud lifted just as they approached the summit, so they got good views to Skye.



Jill and Alistair did a mountain bike ride towards Torridon. They drove SW a few miles to the head of Loch Dughail, then rode up landrover tracks to Loch Coulin and Loch Clair, finding some great single-track downhills on the way back. It was a beautiful crisp and clear day, and great views. The next day they, Katherine and Tom, went mountain biking at Strathpeffer.



On Hogmanay Graham, Guy, Iain and Alison walked up Sguman Coinntich and Ben Killilan with spectacular views across to Skye and a fantastic sunset.



The Hogmanay meal included Haggis, followed by Alistair's speciality sticky toffee pudding. He also provided some substantial homemade Cloutie dumpling for the hungry ones, and it all vanished!

Lagganlia, Glenfeshie 24th – 26th January 2020 - Burns Supper Meet

For the second year running, Graham got as far as the Argyll Stone before deciding that the weather on Sgot Gaoith looked too unpleasant to go any higher. Since the weather looked so grotty high up, a group of 6 (Amanda, Jackie, Chris, Catherine, Fiona, Guy) walked across the Cairn Gorm plateau before dropping to the Fords of Avon and ascending Creag Mhor. Ken, Sarah and Neil walked to Loch an Eilein and Adrian, Ros, Margaret, Alec and Jenny climbed



Sgor Gaoith from Achlean, walking back down to Lagganlia. Ken did a sterling job cooking the Burns Supper in the evening. On Sunday a few people went for a run while others climbed a small hill near Lagganlia.

Blackwater Hostel, Kinlochleven 7th – 9th February 2020

Very high winds were forecast so quite a few dropped out. Ken and Sarah climbed Glas Bheinn on Friday en route to Kinlochleven. On Saturday all 5 on the meet (Sarah, Ken, Jackie, Lisa, Walt) did a one way route, (some walking, some running) from Kinlochleven to Fort Bill. The runners had time for a late lunch and cake before they all got the bus back in time to watch the rugby (Scotland v England).

Raeburn Hut, Dalwhinnie 21st – 23rd February 2020

The forecast was horrendous, so quite a few people did not go. On Saturday Iain, Alison, Chris, Catherine and Andy climbed The Fara and Fiona and Ailsa headed for Carn an Fhreiceadain, both parties turned back due to blizzard conditions. Alan forced his way through the blizzard up Meall na h-Aisre – he was glad to get off the hill, although returned minus his goggles.

CIC Hut, Ben Nevis 28th - 30th February 2020

No attendees due to appalling weather conditions.

Kintail Outdoor Centre 6th – 8th March 2020

Four people, Fiona, Karl, Euan and Jackie, attended in the end – the forecast was not great. All 4 went skiing at Glencoe on the Friday. On Saturday it rained and all the snow melted, so the rivers were very high. They all set out to walk to the Falls of Glomach but the weather higher up was so rubbish they turned back. Fiona and Karl did a run near Glen Garry on the way back to Edinburgh, while Euan and Jackie headed north.

Unfortunately, Covid-19 put a stop to any further weekend meets in the 2020/21 meet year.

Midweek Activities

Climbing

Midweek Climbing at Ratho/Alien Rock continued on Tuesdays throughout the winter months and moved outdoors in the summer. On the dry Tuesdays in 2019 people climbed at Rosyth, Traprain, Limekilns, and Berwick Law. Outdoor evenings at the start of the summer were organised so that those new to outdoor climbing were supported while 'learning the ropes'. The midsummer BBQ on 25th June 2019 was arranged to coincide with climbing at Hawkraig, and about 20 members enjoyed a sunny BBQ at Aberdour. Unfortunately, due to covid-19 and the social distancing rules, it was not possible to organise group climbing from March 2020 onwards.

Walks

Monthly mid week walks took place in 2019, with walks along North Berwick beach, from Burntisland over The Binn to Kinghorn, and up East Cairn via Thieves Road. In 2020, local mid week walks started in July in line with covid-19 restrictions. Walks included the Pentlands, Braid and Blackford Hills, and Holyrood Park, (and a cycle to Queensferry) and were a good way for people to get out and catch up, while exploring the local area.

Orienteering

What started off as a few adhoc 'Nocturnal Navigation' outings, turned into a monthly orienteering evening, with up to 10 Jacobites running (and walking) through the scrub/parks in and around the Edinburgh area. A mixture of fixed routes (Corstorphine Hill, Pentlands) and made up routes (Crichton Castle, Pathhead, Adrian's house, Humbie Woods) have been used. It is always a fun evening, and a good way to get out and explore different parts of the local neighbourhood while learning to navigate for free! To top it off, areas good for orienteering always seem to be near good pubs, so there was a chance to support some local businesses and catch up afterwards. Tom also had a BBQ one evening which was a great success and the plan is to have one again next year. Like walking, orienteering started up after lockdown and it has been a good way to get back out and see people in person and to try out the new Map-run app. The app will give us lots more courses to explore in and around Edinburgh. The plan is to keep this going with at least one orienteering event a month.

Social Events

Burns Supper 2019 – 31st January 2019

Fun was had at The Grange with everyone enjoying the usual rituals of a Burns Supper, with Soup, Haggis, Neeps, Tatties, Cranachan, washed down with a whisky toast and interspersed with a variety of songs, poems and stories.

Annual Dinner Weekend 4-6th Oct 2019

A great weekend in Braemar. The weather was cold but dry, so everyone got out on the hills during the day and returned for fizz and nibbles in the Braemar YH, before dining at the newly refurbished and quirky Fife Arms.



Christmas Ceilidh 6th December 2019

With music by Da Hooley, about everyone danced the night away at Watsonians Football Club. There were some particularly unusual and imaginative prizes in the raffle this year.

Christmas Dinner Meet 13-15th December Inver Croft 2019

The annual Christmas Dinner weekend at Inver Croft was as popular as ever, with a full house. A large group climbed Sgurr Dubh, a Corbett on south side of Glen Torridon, before returning to Inver for a feast with canapés (Guy), starter (Adrian and Ros), main (Mike) and dessert (Cat and Karl).

Nan Shepherd Supper 22nd January 2020

To add a bit of variation to the usual Burns Night, a Nan Shepherd evening was held at the Grange. Forty Jacobites enjoyed haggis, neeps, tatties, and Nan Shepherd themed songs, poems and toasts. See 'Glenshee Roads' article from the 'Immortal Memory' of Nan Shepherd.

Other Social Events

Evening Talks

The regular Thursday evening pub meets continued in the Cumberland Bar throughout 2019 until March 2020 when Covid-19 prevented people meeting up, and forced the pub nights to become 'virtual'. Regular slide shows were held in the Cumberland Bar in 2019 and 2020.

- 17th January 2019 Phil McLean - Stok Kangri Ladakh
- 7th February Paul Harris - Ice Climbing in Canada
- 28th February Oli Warlow - Classic Rock by Bike
- 14th March Stuart McLeod showed a selection of photos from his climbs in 2018
- 21st March Cat Trebilco – 3 peaks 3 passes – Cat talked about her experience guiding an expedition of 14 clients over the 3 Peaks and 3 Passes route in Nepal.
- 2nd April Tim & Tamsin - Planes Trains and Snow Mobiles – Tim and Tamsin showed photos from skiing in Siberia.
- 7th November Catherine Jones - Canoeing the Great Glen -see 'The accidental canoeist'
- 21st November - Ros Clancy talked about her cycle trip in France - see St Malo to Nice – a solo cycle tour through France in September
- 12th December 2019 Guy Wimble – Ski-touring - Guy talked about his recent ski-touring trips in Scotland and Norway.
- 9th January 2020 Robert Durran / Shauna Clarke / Zoe Strong / Lucy Spark – see Climbing in Namibia for a selection of photographs from the trip
- 16th January Graham Stein – Winter Mountaineering in Scotland and Beyond
- 6th February Karl Zeiner 2020 – Fastpacking the Southern Upland Way - see 'Fastpacking the Southern Upland Way' for details
- 20th February Stuart McLeod - Rock and Ice Climbs 2019 – find out about Stuart's Canada trip in 'Canadian Ice Climbing'

Virtual Pub Nights

Covid-19 put a stop to all inside events from March 2020, so social secretary, Karl, organised a weekly virtual pub night in the 'Zoomberland' bar, with the first virtual pub night on 26th March 2020. These evenings were a very successful, enabling members to keep in touch with the club and each other when all meets and social events had been stopped. Virtual pub nights continued throughout the rest of the year with various mountain related quizzes and slide shows:

- 9th July 2020 Karl & Fiona - bikepacking trip between Laggan & the Great Glen
- 6th August 2020 Catherine & Chris - backpacking in Glen Feshie and Glen Tilt
- 27th August 2020 Katherine and Tom - backpacking in the Fisherfields
- 17th September 2020 Ken Humphreys – walking in Glen Dessary

Jacobites Making Club

It was a dark and stormy night when Pam brought a crocheted hat to the Cheese Party. The hat was passed around in wonder and in non-wonder to Pam's screams of 'Don't stretch it with your big head!'. When it was Cat's turn she placed it on her similar to Pam's sized head and seething with envy she demanded to know the secret of how to make one. Meeting to crochet in the backroom of a seedy tavern in the New Town became a regular thing for Pam and Cat. Despite their discretion word got out (mainly through Facebook) and soon other crocheters, knitters and embroiders came out of their haberdashery closets and joined them. The Jacobites Making Club was born. Nowadays, they still gather, sometimes in parks, on ferries, online and in extended households.



1. Cuban graffiti cross stitch by Catherine Jones
2. Using up oddments of wool to make a rainbow jumper by Catherine Jones
3. Star blanket modelled by new niece by Cat Trebilco
4. Highland cow cushion by Cat Trebilco
5. Easter duck by Cat Trebilco
6. Otter's holiday hat by Alison Beresford
7. Mirror with African fabric by Alison Beresford
8. New slippers in progress by Alison Beresford
9. Cardigan in progress by Pam van de Brug
10. Tea cosy by Pam van de Brug
11. Crochet blanket by Sally McNaught
12. Otis Taylor's new born hat by Pam van de Brug
13. Otis Taylor's 2-6 months hat by Pam van de Brug
14. Knitted hat by Jean Waddie

Dave McHugh Award

The Dave McHugh award honours the memory of Jacobites member Dave McHugh who was tragically killed in a road accident over 25 years ago. The award is made annually to an individual or group of individuals who have made an exceptional contribution to the club that year either by personal Mountaineering achievements or services to the club.

2018

The Dave McHugh award for 2018 was given to Alan Walker in acknowledgement of his consistent service to the club over the many years.

2019

The Dave McHugh award for 2019 was made to Lucy Spark for achieving the Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor Award (MCI) that she'd been working on for the previous couple of years.

Barry Winston

We were sorry to hear that Barry Winston died on August 15th 2020, aged 75. He was an active member for about 30 years from the early 1980s: a walker, climber and occasional skier, and a regular on meets.

Barry was a physicist by training, then latterly an IT specialist. He ended up maintaining vintage mini-computers for the NHS, for which he was the only expert and yet only required the occasional day of input, leaving a great deal of free time in which to travel widely and tramp the hills. Barry spent months at a time in India, where he had many friends as well as sponsoring a young person through their education. Many days and weeks on end were spent wandering the Scottish Highlands and Islands, revelling in their wildness; the very last thing to interest him being 'Munro-bagging'. A less known interest was railways and train spotting, as anyone who visited his house or waited patiently in his car with him for the 17.45 from Mallaig to pass Lochailort would have seen...

He's possibly best remembered on club meets for his extra-dry wit and clever puns, as well as his curries - always cooked the night before consumption to allow them to mature in flavour. Equally, his 'Rob Roy' walks are not easily forgotten. Who else would test their resilience and their understanding and knowledge of the Scottish hills by heading out from a hut for a long summer day (or several days) with little more than a bag of oatmeal and no map, compass, watch or phone, or indeed much in the way of clothing (and sometimes all of it in his rucsac). He navigated (usually successfully) by reading the landscape, never showed off about what he could do and never came to harm, although he did occasionally give other hill-walkers a bit of a surprise.



Congratulations

Congratulations to Cathy and Lucy for gaining the following qualifications:

- Cathy Southworth - Mountain Leader
- Lucy Spark - Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor (MCI)

Congratulations to the following members who completed their Munros:

Tim Taylor
Slioch
1st Sept 2018



Pavla Pospichalova
Sgurr nan Each
15th December 2018

Alison Beresford
Beinn Bheoil
21st July 2019



Cat Trebilco
Slioch
8th June 2019

This was Cat's second attempt. The first attempt was during Storm Erik. No one got over 500m and they had a day long party.

Cathy Southworth
Ladhar Bheinn
19th September 2020



Climbing - New Routes

By Michael Barnard

On the Mingulay trip last year (see Climbing Mingulay 2019), Scott Herrett and Franklin Jacoby managed to tear themselves away from Geirum Walls to put up the quality 'Fulmars Fly for Fun', while non-members Nathan Adam and Matthew Rowbottom came away with a route memorably named 'Franklin Loves the Big Juicy'. Both routes went at around VS. Lucy and I did a new starting pitch to the brilliant 'Eye of the Storm'. It's only a bit harder (E2 5b) than the usual way, but whichever way you go the route gave one of the best days of the trip.

On this year's Lewis trip, Lucy and I found that the start to 'Internal Exam Crack' at Rubha na Beirghe had perhaps fallen down and no longer looked like a nice E1, but consoled ourselves with an ascent of the steep crack just right of it; 'Blended Learning' gave a quality E2 5c jamming pitch.

Robert and I may have managed a few first ascents in Oman, information is scarce so it's hard to know. The Wadi Goul/Nakkar (see Climbing in Oman article) went around the E3/4 6a mark and was titled 'Walk Like an Omani' in reference to the nastier Walk Like an Egyptian on the Reiff sea cliffs. The Jebel Misht ones are the very Scottish names of 'North Buttress' (400m, VI+ or E1) and Crest Route (350m, VI- or HVS). The latter is perhaps wishful thinking and we maybe won't ever really know, but as the best route of the trip I'd love it if it was new!

Canadian Ice Climbing - January 2019

By Stuart McLeod

In January 2019, I returned to the Canadian Rockies to visit Chris Petrauskas, an ex-Jacobite who moved to Canmore to climb ice and ski, amongst other things. This part of the Rockies is excellent for water ice climbing as the limestone based geology leads to a lot of water seepage and drainage lines, and it is reliably cold for much of the winter. As a result, a mass of ice falls reliably from each winter, and an abundance of steep water ice climbing may be enjoyed there. This climbing is very rewarding and worthwhile in its own right, and it allows for a rapid accumulation of steep water ice climbing experience, that is not always so easy to gather in Scotland due to the more variable ice conditions found here.

I was joined on this trip by Justin, a climber from Manchester that I met through Chris, and who I climbed with, the previous year in Canada along with Zoe Strong. Whilst driving up from Calgary to Canmore, it became clear that there was a lot less snow on the ground than during our visit the previous year. Whilst this may have been un-welcome from a skiing point of view, it was great news for us as it would make accessing climbs much easier than during our previous visit, and it would reduce the risk of being avalanched: something we were keen to avoid. We started our trip by staying in the Lake Louise Hostel which is around 2 hours' drive from Calgary Airport via Canmore. The hostel is a nice place to stay with good food and beer, and it has a sauna.

On our trip the previous year we had wanted to climb the Weeping Wall, but we could not get close to it as the road north of Saskatchewan River Crossing had been closed by an avalanche. On this trip the roads were clear, so we decided to head there for our first route of the trip. The Weeping Wall is around 1.5 hours' drive north of Lake Louise and it is generally



The Weeping Wall – Ice Fields Parkway.

more convenient to stay in the Rampart Creek hostel which is only a 10 minute drive away, but with jetlag causing us to wake up at 3am this was not really an issue. The wall is only a 5 minute walk from the road, so it is an easy approach. We were the second team there and started on the Left Hand line which is graded WI4. The continental ice grading system seems to be 1-1.5

grades harder than the equivalent Scottish winter grade, so it was a bit like a Scottish Grade 5 winter route. At dawn, Chris set off up the first pitch, which was a full rope length of steep hard ice. It was bemusing and unexpected, when a



The Weeping Wall

climber by the name of Eric appeared a few metres to the right of us at the first belay, apparently solo climbing the wall: he seemed to have a more relaxed attitude to this activity than we did. I led the second pitch which had a bit of a crust on it due to being affected by the sun, and I found a nice piece of frozen turf at the top which lent the route a Scottish feel. For Justin and I, this was our first ice climb of the season and this was a nice wee route to kick off with.

Chris' local friends had told him that there was a climb in the Ghost Wilderness area called Lacey Gibbet that was in fine condition and advised that we should give it a go. The Ghost is a reasonable drive from Lake Louise back towards Calgary, so we moved down to Canmore and stayed in the Boswell Cabin at the Alpine Club of Canada for the next few nights.

The previous year we had an epic day in the Ghost Wilderness area when we became stuck in a snow drift due to the 4x4 not working on our Jeep. The day was salvaged when two climbers called Mike turned up and drove us to the climb, Wicked Wanda, and towed us back up the hill at the end of the day. Keen not to repeat this debacle, the next morning we set off with a thoroughly tested and functioning 4x4 and encountered no snow or ice on the drive in, arriving without incident. The approach to Lacey Gibbet was a 2.5 hour walk in, which was long by the standards of this trip, but it was well worth it.



Lacey Gibbet, Ghost Wilderness – final pitch

The climb comes down a drainage line and is 300m long. There are several nice steep ice pitches with the top pitch being the crux at WI5. We had the route to ourselves and didn't see another person all day: the climbing was a joy as advertised. When we rounded the penultimate pitch, the top icefall came into view and looked majestic. It was steep, well featured ice, and stood in stark contrast to the bare rock around it.



Anorexia Nervosa

Having had a reasonably long day in the Ghost, we decided to rest the following day. However, buoyed by the ease of our trip to the Ghost compared with the previous year, we decided to return to the Ghost the next day. Chris was working, so Justin and I went for our inaugural un-supervised trip in there. There were a couple of routes close together and with a shorter approach called Anorexia Nervosa and Weathering Heights, both at WI4. We thought that climbing both could make for a nice day out, and so it proved. Anorexia is so named as it can form thin ice, but we found it to be reasonably fat by Scottish ice standards. The climbs are on opposite sides of the Planters valley and it is nice to look across at each, from the other. We climbed Anorexia first which is a 3 pitch route, and then went over to Weathering which is two pitch. There was a guided party doing the opposite, so it was nice to chat with them as we swapped routes. The guide was Brent Peters who wrote a guidebook called 'Ice Lines – Selected Waterfalls in the Canadian Rockies'. We found this to be a useful book of selected climbs of the area. There is also an App by Will Gadd which is another great source of information for Canadian Rockies ice climbs.



Weathering Heights

During our 2018 ice trip the avalanche hazard had been generally quite high, and this

prevented us from attempting some climbs; Professor Falls was one such climb. It follows a drainage line in a similar way to Lacey Gibbet and consists of 280m of climbing split into 5 pitches with shelves between each pitch. It can be a very popular climb and we understood that the approach involved 7km of walking along a track by the Bow River from the Banff Springs Hotel. Picturesque as the walk may have been, we were keen to get to the route early and first. To this end, we found that the Banff Springs Hotel hired out fat bikes with studded tyres to their well-heeled guests. Following strong



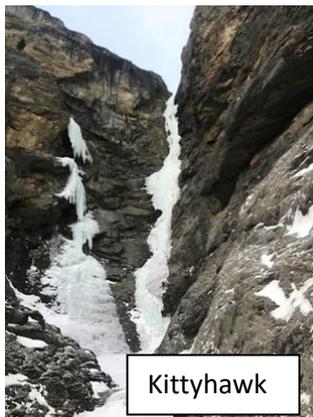
Professor Falls, Bow River Valley – Final Pitch

reassurances, they kindly lent us bikes for our trip, which made for a relatively easy 30 min cycle down the river to the base of the route. The first pitch was a little wet, but the individual cascades were a pleasure to climb and it made for a very nice outing finishing with the last pitch as a WI4+ crux. From the top of the last pitch there is a nice view over the Bow River valley and surrounding area.



View of Bow Valley

Kittyhawk is a classic ice route on the David Thompson Highway, North of Lake Louise and East of the Saskatchewan River crossing, which is known to be avalanche prone. However, snow conditions were relatively lean, and we understood the route had been climbed recently with favourable reports as to the overhead avalanche hazard, so we decided to head there. There is around 100m of WI2-3 ice on the approach to the route and we decided to solo this, as even with the relatively favourable avalanche reports, we were keen to avoid spending too much time on this route. The meat of the route is then a 60m WI4 pitch followed by the crux WI5 pitch. I led the first pitch which was a beautiful bulging pitch leading to a belay on the left wall of the gully beneath the imposing top pitch.



Kittyhawk

Having brought Chris and Justin up, Chris then led through the crux. The crux was steep and had formed mushrooms of ice which made it difficult to place ice screws but made for decent foot placements and exhilarating climbing: a very nice pitch. We wasted no time on the descent and were both content and relieved to have climbed this route without issue.

On our final day we thought it would be nice to squeeze in a route before our evening flight home. It seemed sensible to get on a route that was neither hard nor far away. Cascade, a 300m WI3 which sits above the roadside at Banff fitted the bill nicely. We got there before dawn and wrote our route name in the mud on the back window of the jeep.



Kittyhawk, David Thompson Highway.

This is a customary politeness in Canada so that if someone turns up afterwards, they do not waste their time walking into a route to find it occupied. There is also a strong etiquette here



Cascade Icefall, Banff

of not climbing under other parties to avoid pressuring them and being hit by falling ice: which also seems sensible. There were some approach pitches which we soloed leaving a couple of pitches of steeper ice to be enjoyed. The crux pitch briefly crosses some transparent ice with a stream flowing behind it which is slightly off-putting. We read that this has been the scene of a few soakings, but it was mercifully thick on the day. We descended on the ridge to the side of

the route leaving it free for others to climb and headed to the airport: a pleasant end to the trip!

The accidental canoeist

By Catherine Jones

Years ago I got into paddling kayaks. I found open canoeing a bit too much of a faff, which is saying something considering that paddling (kayaking and canoeing) in general involves huge amounts of kit faff, boat faff, shuttle faff, and going for a pee is a mega-faff. Canadian Canoes are big unwieldy objects which are heavy, are a right old pain to paddle in the wind and are too big to easily go on the roof rack on my car. However, several years ago I worked my way through the syllabus for the lower level coaching awards, and back then it was a requirement to be able to coach (and paddle) canoe and kayak. So I learnt to canoe, and subsequently got into multi-day canoe touring by mistake.

These things always seem to stem from chance discussions in pubs. Sat in The Diggers, one wet and cold December evening in 2018, my friend Lynn mentioned she would like to paddle the Great Glen, and a plan was hatched. Following a huge amount of organisation from Lynn, eight of us found ourselves more than 100 km from our cars at the lock gates at Banavie on the Caledonian Canal in May 2019. Five days of paddling, and four nights in tents later, we got back to Inverness, in one piece and are still talking to each other. En route we did some sailing on Loch Lochy, with serious levels of type-two fun: “just put the sail down!” was shouted as the strong winds combined with laden canoes with sails, caused things to start going out of control; paddled the length of Loch Ness; I discovered that my single skin tent was no longer water tight, as it capitulated in a soggy mess on night three; successfully negotiated 3 portages, several lochs, two rivers and learnt a rhyme about beavers.



The Spey with Glen Feshie hills in the background

The whole thing was remembered as being sufficiently fun to start planning a trip on the River Spey for 2020. The “training” was all sorted: multiple days in canoes at the annual Scottish Canoe Association (SCA) weekend for canoe club coaches and volunteers at Glenmore Lodge, a warm-up two day trip down the River Tweed, another day on the River Tay. And then we’d all be experts at this open boating thing, and would fly down the Spey.

Then Coronavirus happened. We couldn't even go paddling on the Union canal, let alone down some river outside the city limits of Edinburgh.

But not all was lost. With time, local paddling was allowed, then travelling more than 5 miles to go paddling was permitted. Somewhere along the line Lynn bought her own canoe, a bright yellow number, which was christened the "Banana Boat". As restrictions eased and Covid cases reduced, a window of opportunity to paddle the Spey presented. Lynn once again swung into action, organising everything for six of us to get out paddling open boats, including two days with a coach on the Tay. On the 30th of August we set off in canoes from Newtonmore, destination, Spey Bay.

Over five days of paddling we went from the relatively slow river, to the bouncy rapids just up from Blacksboat bridge (the "Washing Machine") and Knockando, and the fast twists and turns towards the end. We paddled past the Cairngorms, fishermen having lunch at a table with tablecloth and butler, big red sandstone cliffs, the Baxters soup factory, under the must-see landmarks of the A9 and A96. We saw many, many salmon jumping, an otter and an osprey. Along the way, as happens on such trips, we had a multitude (about three, on repeat) in-jokes combined with utter hilarity over things which I am sure are really just not that funny, unless you've not had a good night's sleep for several nights and have not really spoken to anyone else for the past few days either.

The Spey is not as well equipped for multi-day canoe trips as the Great Glen trail in terms of taps and toilets. Toilets became major landmarks, with opportunities marked for each day, e.g.: Boat of Balliefurth farm campsite with toilet (and hot water!) (night two); the Knockando composting toilet (utterly disgusting, smelly and rank, but a toilet nonetheless); public toilets in Craigellachie and toilet in the visitor centre at Spey Bay. The portaloo at Ballindalloch Station campsite, when we passed, was the wrong side of a right of way through a field of cows and calves, and was therefore inaccessible to canoeists. For water, we just had to take advantage of taps when we could, carrying water with us.

So what next? The Spey and Great Glen are the two longer, easier, Scottish multi-day trips. The Tweed, which was in the calendar as a practice for the Spey before Covid got in the way, is high on my tick list. And after that, an ultimate goal is the crossing from Rannoch Moor to the Tay. But that requires a higher level of open boat skill, which means I'm just going to have to get out and practice, and accept the significant faff factor. And once the library is accessible again, I've got the SCA Scottish Touring guidebook on request.

Burns Supper Lassies' reply

Compiled by all the lassies present, except 2 lines added by the president (can you spot which ones?)

The Jacobite Laddies are bonne and gay,
Find then up mountains, you well may!
A special species, a breed of their own,
With many that tell jokes that make you groan.
They fart and they burp and they smell really bad,
And yet we Lassies should be so glad,
To have the company of Laddies so fine,
Even when they have been drinking wine.
But on the hill, they are so swift,
At rescuing sheep, they have the gift!
And chatting up girls they're very swift,
Whisky tasting is just the ticket,
Nuts and cracks within the thicket,
But what about those harder climbs?
And when the deep snow, whiteout blinds,
When out on the hills they're out of their minds,
They're needing their supplies of whisky, beer & wine
But this behaviour is really way out of line,
A true Jacobite has his eyes on the prize,
Way up high, above the cloud it lies,
Go beyond where no man has gone before,
And forget the Landrover – it's just a bore!
Go west young man, where the grass grows green
And the Lassies the bonniest you've ever seen
But we're happy here with our Jacobite throng,
In our heroic exploits, we'll let you lot tagalong!
Especially the pres, he's awesome this year,
I'm off to the bar now to buy him a beer.

Cross Country Skiing – Norway 2019

By Fiona Shepherd

A group of us have been cross country skiing in Norway for several years now. We started off going with a guide from Roybridge, doing hut to hut trips over 2 weeks in remote locations. None of us are particularly good skiers, and carrying our gear, food and emergency equipment, made these challenging, but rewarding trips. Our guide retired a few years back; since then we have been on a couple of Norwegian Tourist Board (DNT) trips and in 2019 we decided to do our own independent trip to Skarvheimen - a range of mountains to the north west of the Hardangervidda plateau.

The DNT have an excellent hut system, which can be used for walking in the summer and skiing in the winter. There are several types of hut - catered (they cook you very good food), self catered (you eat canned/packet food kept at the hut and pay for what you eat) and non catered (you bring your own food). The huts have gas cookers and wood (for wood burning stove), but only the catered huts have running water, the others you have to melt snow. The catered huts are really proud of their cooking and use local produce. One we visited, even had its own micro brewery! All huts provide bedding, but we each carried sleeping bags and mats for emergencies, and a shovel and axe.

For skiing, some of the routes are marked with branches (kvisteruter - 'branch-marked routes' in Norwegian), others are not marked. For walking, I think all routes are marked, but it's hard to tell when they are covered in snow.

Routes in the Skarvheimen area are all kvisted, and most of the huts on our route were catered. The route we picked followed part of a DNT trip and we planned to leave a day earlier than the organised trip so we did not have issues with accommodation (one of the huts only had 16 beds). The plan was to catch a train from Oslo to Finse, head north, then east, then southwest back to Finse over the space of a week, visiting 6 different huts. We included a couple of days' contingency for detours and bad weather.

We were rendezvousing in Oslo Airport before taking the train. All went to plan until we arrived in Oslo. Unlike British Rail, the Norwegian train line will not sell tickets if there are no seats, and the train was full, so we had to get the 11pm train, arriving in Finse at 4am. We stumbled ½ km from the station to the hut in a

blizzard, then slept on the hut floor for a few hours until breakfast. Due to the blizzard conditions, we could not ski to the next hut, so had to hang about in Finse all day, only going out to ski round the hut to try our gear. The following day's weather was slightly better, so



Kvisteruter

we decided to try getting to the next hut (Geiterygghytta) – otherwise we'd have used our contingency before we'd set off, and there was a risk that we may not be able to complete the trip. The wind was from the west, so once we'd climbed the hill and turned east, it was behind us, and helped us along. We now expected to be travelling at the same time as the DNT trip, so changed our plans and decided to do the majority of the route in reverse, so we avoided staying at the small hut at the same time as the DNT trip.

We arrived at Geiterygghytta late afternoon. It wasn't that far, but we needed to get our ski legs back. The warden asked about our plans and advised us not to do the route in reverse as a lake we planned to cross was not safe as the ice was not thick enough, so we reverted to our original plan. Luckily the DNT trip did not leave that day, so we were still a day ahead of them. The weather cleared, although it was still strong winds, they were coming from the west and we were heading east. We continued on to the next few huts, making good progress.



The weather worsened again towards the end of the trip, with a forecast for snow/rain and gale force winds from the south west. We were supposed to be heading back to Finse down a south west facing valley, but the weather was going to make it nigh on impossible. We spent most of the evening round the map discussing possible options. Given the forecast and our skiing ability, options were limited, and it looked like we might have to take a taxi. Then someone

remembered the leaflet for the ski resort Geilo. Geilo was 28km away, this was more than we'd skied in a day on this trip, but it was our only option. We got a taxi to a nearby ski resort, then skinned up a long and steep piste to the plateau where we managed to find the cross country ski trail that took us to Geilo. Luckily, we were not on a ridge - while the strong winds pushed us along, the gusts pushed us over. Turning uphill to slow down didn't work either: my friend, Andy, unintentionally skied uphill for about 200m. It was getting dark by the time we zig zagged down the piste at Geilo, we were tired, but had had a fun trip.

DNT website <https://english.dnt.no/>. DNT Hut map <https://ut.no/kart#3.73/64.51/10.89>

You need to join DNT to get discounted rates (and a key for the unstaffed huts).

A new mountain chapter calling

By Cathy Southworth

Cathy describes her journey to leading Scouts in the Scottish Mountains. This article was published in the Scouting Regional Newsletter.

“The mountains are calling and I must go” – John Muir

It was one of those crisp January days in the Pentland Hills, my local haunt for running, cycling and walking. I chanced upon my friend, Scout leader at 25th Braids returning with a flushed face group of scouts from walking. We chatted about the wondrous effect of the outdoors and I blithely offered my help on future walks as an accompanying adult. Little did I know that 18 months later I would be qualified as a Summer Mountain leader and organising scout walks into the mountains myself!



“It's a grand thing, to get leave to live” – Nan Shepherd

Like Nan Shephard I've spent much of life feeling my most alive in the outdoors. I have designed most of my weekends, holidays even my work commute to take me outdoors, being active in nature. I am at my happiest creating and experiencing big mountain journeys, whether running, walking or cycling. I find it difficult to express what draws me to these experiences, but what I know is that something special happens. They leave me feeling more connected, spirited and inspired and when they are absent, I sense a loss.

“It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves” – Sir Edmund Hilary

My early days as a Girl Guide and Venture Scout, tramping in The Lake District, Lancashire and Yorkshire fed my outdoor flame. I have fond memories of campfires, singing and adventures that gave me experience, confidence and friends. As I have grown older, I have felt a need to contribute to the growth of our young people in the outdoors; To help equip them with the skills and experiences they need for a life-long connection with wild places and outdoor activity.

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” - Lao Tzu

Here then lay my opportunity when my friend contacted me after our chance meeting, suggesting I should apply for a Terrain 1 (Summer) permit. Classed as an Adventurous Activity in scouting, a permit scheme exists to equip and assess adults for leading under 18 groups hillwalking. The beauty of these schemes is that there is flexibility to meet your needs and stage of development. Through a discussion with one of the (friendly) regional assessors, you can plan a progression that works for you.

Above all, recent personal experience in mountain environments is key. For me this was the easy part, remembering all of my journeys and logging them was not! Once I started, though, I enjoyed reliving the memories and it built my confidence seeing just how far I'd come.

It seems strange to say (my friends think I'm mad) but I really enjoyed the Terrain 1 assessment that involved two days on the Ochil hills. In a small group, we covered all of the skills outlined in the syllabus. Much of the days' focus was on navigation and once in your stride this proved to be a learning experience as well as an assessment.

I get a lot of pleasure from navigating well; finding my way when momentarily lost, locating a control on an orienteering course, planning a perfect route. I hear many people say 'I can't navigate' or 'I'm no good at navigating' with a conviction that it is an innate trait. Like much that we learn, navigating on the hills is just a set of skills to hone and practice. Often its poor teaching that makes us feel it is our lack of ability and confidence plummets. Luckily, now there are some fantastic courses to boost our confidence the other way, for example, Glenmore Lodge, Mountaineering Scotland and within your Scouting training menu as well.



After being awarded my Terrain 1 permit it was with intrepid excitement that I started plans for some Terrain 1 outings that included the Pentlands (the highest peak being in terrain 1 territory) and Ben Venue. I knew immediately that I was going to go for the Summer Mountain leader award. This is the nationally recognised qualification for leading people in the mountains in summer conditions, which in scouting would provide me with a Terrain 2 (summer) permit.

Glenmore Lodge was where I undertook my one week training and then a year later, my week-long assessment. It was a hugely rewarding experience and I am immensely grateful to scouting for part funding. With the end goal being qualified to lead and supervise young people in the higher and more remote mountains, there is no doubt that the process has developed me as a person and mountaineer. This coming not just from the skills I learnt, but the people I met and enriched me.

“The top of one mountain is always the bottom of another” – Marianne Williamson

For me, this year was the opportunity to put all of this development into practice and lead some walks in some wild mountain areas. With the unexpected always expected in life, the year has instead afforded some time to reflect, sort out kit and look forward to a return to the hills.

My hope for writing this article is that it encourages some of you reading to make a personal (or an unsuspecting friend or family member) step towards leading scouts on the hills. That by sharing my experience it makes it seem not just a possibility but also a rewarding and life-enhancing journey to begin.

Useful links

Syllabus for Hillwalking Permits in scouting: Assessment Checklist for Hillwalking Leadership

<https://members.scouts.org.uk/factsheets/AC120913.pdf>

National Awarding Body: Mountain Training <https://www.mountain-training.org/>

Climbing in Namibia

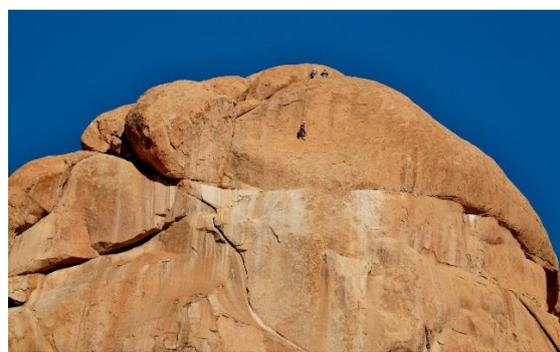
By Robert Durran

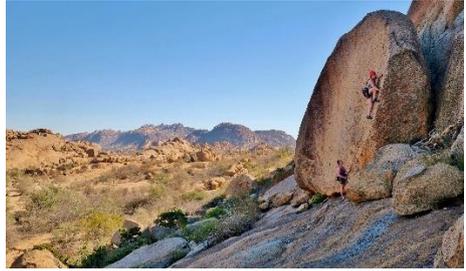
Last summer Lucy Spark, Zoe Strong, Shauna Clark and myself had a fabulous trip to Namibia. The main objective was to climb on the superb 600m high granite pyramid of the Spitzkoppe and on the neighbouring domes of The Pontoks, which rise from the arid plains of Damaraland. We made successful ascents of the classic alpine-like Normal Route on the Spitzkoppe and of the long modern route To Bolt Or Not To Bolt on the Pontokspitze as well as enjoying some shorter routes in the area. We also visited the Omandumba area of the Erongo Mountains where walls and domes provide a variety of single-pitch routes in idyllic wildlife-rich surroundings.

As well as climbing, we visited the vast Etosha National Park in the north of the country where many of Africa's iconic animals can be readily seen. At the end of the trip I travelled alone to the Namib Desert in the South, visiting the famous area of Sossusvlei and then on to the remote, unfrequented and staggeringly beautiful Tiras Mountains.

Namibia is a wonderful, friendly and safe country to visit with extraordinary landscapes, plentiful wildlife and some really great climbing. (but very few climbers!).

Here is a selection of photographs from the trip.





Lockdown Cycles

by Ailsa Murray

Introduction:

Well, 2020 doesn't need an introduction to anyone and I'm sure it is a year we won't be forgetting in a hurry. I started writing this towards the end of my furlough period in June just before midsummer 2020. Everyone will have their own musings on this 'historic' time so this is just a personal account of the time and how I misused it!

For better or worse, when it became apparent that we were going into an extended 'lockdown' period, I decided to pack up some belongings and head over the hill to D Mains to



sit out the time with my folks. It felt like preparing for a Jacobites meet when I loaded the bike (this was to be the best-decision ever made) and rucksack into my car on the 22nd March with added trepidation, wondering when I'd be returning!! Immediate cabin fever set in together with the realisation that I was returning to teenage days, the last time I resided with family was age 11 before leaving for high

school in Lerwick. Help!! Trying to keep perspective on the evolving global pandemic, I resigned to take each day as it came. The major bonus of the situation was immediate access to a garden and some form of nature. I appreciate that many people didn't have this option although it did come with caveats. Being over the right side of Corstorphine hill allowed quick access to cycle route 1 which passes through Barnton and beyond. North and west Edinburgh was going to be my new playground for the foreseeable future and like many others, daily cycles became the route to keeping some form of sanity. At this stage there was no stipulation on permitted distance, just to 'stay local' by foot, bike or wheel (mobility) so having downloaded the Strava App onto my phone I set off exploring. The intention was to keep a daily diary of outings but this lapsed so I've just divided the piece to describe what became my favourite lockdown explorations.

Cramond and North Edinburgh:

Early on I found myself back over Roseburn direction, like a pigeon with a built-in homing device. One obstacle stood in the way of my new temporary home, Corstorphine Hill. You can either hit it straight on at Clermiston road or take the 'being kind to yourself option' up Murrayfield Avenue. Either way it helped to clock-up the 'Strava' height gain and justify the post-cycle goodies. When energy was low, I



stayed closer to home, being lucky to have a nearby coastal option at Cramond. This could be extended into a local circular up the hill from Granton, in through Trinity and along Ferry road

before hanging a sharp left onto East Fettes Avenue with the grand city vistas of the old and new towns laid out in front. These quickly disappeared behind the bungalow lined streets of Craigleith or Craiglang to 'Still Game' fans. With a few ups and downs along the way this reminded me that I must be passing through quarry country. This modest local circle finished with a home straight along the Roseburn-Cramond cycle path to emerge conveniently at DMs Tesco. (16km)

Queensferry, The Bridge, West Lothian and Fife:

Every route seemed to have its crux and the route to Queensferry and beyond was no exception, you have to pay the price if you want to get to Fife! The aptly named 'Cramond burner', a short sharp little killer just over the old Cramond brig always seemed to test the will power, my burner speeds varied between 2.17 and 3.03. Strava liked to remind me 'trending faster' 😊 though it wasn't 'all stick' and it did dish out the occasional PR and 123 fastest to keep the motivation going.

Not to excuse my timings but I should mention that all this road cycling was being done with a mountain bike which was much happier heading along a rubble track towards a distant Munro.

Heading to Queensferry, there are a couple of options, the high road or the low coastal trail round Dalmeny Estate to complete a varied circle using both routes 1 and 76. We were to repeat this little circular as an enjoyable evening club outing later on, with a couple of much appreciated outdoor beers from local club residents.



Sometimes I was a little braver and continued onto the bridge to dip my toe into the green and pleasant Kingdom of Fife. Making sure to recross to Midlothian before night descended. Strange things can happen when crossing bridges after dark, as our friend 'Tam' knew fine well! (31km)

Feeling confident from this wee sortie over the bridge I decided to extend the cycle further



along the Fife coast. I find expeditions, no matter how small, always work better with an end goal and some extra motivation so having arranged to visit a pal in Kinghorn for some 'SD' cake I set off again. Leaving the sights of Inverkeithing behind I turned right to pick up the Fife coastal path. This should have all been familiar territory as many years ago we had done a more adventurous bike-camp trip along this path up to St Andrews. Well memories do fade in time and a couple of wrong turns added some extra kms onto the day before finally reaching the destination. Luckily there was still some rhubarb cake waiting though not as much time left to enjoy the company before heading back

on the saddle for the return journey. Now this would have been a great opportunity for clocking up Strava miles if the mobile battery hadn't run dry by this point! Sometimes it's just nice to go along for the ride.(76km)

Returning to the south side of the Forth I'd just like to mention a couple of great trips done in the company of friends. The first one picked up the canal path heading west around the West Lothian bings before stopping for cake fuel then turning northwards downhill towards the Forth. A pit-stop at Blackness Castle to take in the spectacular view from this promontory helped spur us onto the final wooded coastal section round to South Queensferry where we picked up the familiar route 1. (49km)



The second outing, also around W Lothian had the added bonus of enjoying the company of



a 'local Uphall guide'. Unsure of what to expect around the environs of Livingston, I kept an open mind. Just as well as passing by 'The Pyramids' and a site of an ancient stone circle complete with sacrificial slab were not amongst my initial thoughts. I really enjoyed this circular which also dipped down near

the picturesque river almond and offered great views south over to the west Pentland skyline. Definitely a place to return to for further exploring. (32km)

Kirkliston and circumnavigations of Edinburgh airport:

Circumnavigations of Edinburgh airport became one of my regular outings during lockdown. They often began gently enough on the doorstep through Davidson Mains park but quickly changed gear when encountering the first obstacle, 'Clermiston Rd north climb'. No time for messing around here, head down till the sharp right and downhill for Drumbrae leisure centre. This mountain bike was going to have to prove itself over the next few months. At least at the beginning the roads were quieter and weaving down Drum Brae to the PC World roundabout was an unexpected joy. Continuing west along Glasgow Rd I passed the NHS 'thank you' displays and was reminded of the real reason of lockdown. After negotiating the Gogar roundabouts, I picked up the A8 route. This section has many highlights: crossing the RBS bridge, 'Gogar go go', 'going round the bends' past a quiet Turnhouse to finally reach that familiar 'View o the coo' at Ingliston. The sight of rows of planes parked up on the runway certainly told a surreal story. Passing the fields of barley, I mostly enjoyed these runs myself encountering the occasional



fellow cyclist on route. One evening however, a group of small deer, perhaps Sika, caught my attention, and paused to take a peek through the crops. I decided on a sharp right to connect

up with Newliston Road, passing the 'Bark and Fly' kennels on the right and following the bends along the River Almond to Kirkliston. Turning right again takes you onto a long straight section, 'Doggers Descent'. Perhaps more aptly named 'Joggers Descent' during lockdown days where local folks had 'claimed' the road for their daily activities and yellow hammers enjoyed some unusual quietness nesting in the roadside hedges. I liked this arrangement of sharing the road space and wildlife got a look in too. I wonder how long it will last?

Further on there's a nice wee 'Airport Detour' down to join the plane spotters at the bridge. I did wonder what there was to 'spot' at this moment except the regular DHL planes keeping our supermarkets stocked and online orders fulfilled. On the opposite side, Carlowrie castle was set back amongst its leafy grounds. A nice quiet single track continues round 'Whoooooo Corner' where I noted potential bramble hunting ground for later in the season. Eventually this road joined back with the main 'Burnshot Chicane' segment. On the lookout for serpents and boy racers I kept alert. The home stretch was in sight now with great views over to the Pentlands again. I gave greetings to the friendly lambs before descending the 'Hazardous diversion' towards Cramond Brig, Barnton and back to the start. (26-31km)

Pentlands mountain bike:

After some relaxation of restrictions, I crossed the line to south Edinburgh to share a proper off-road route and in-person meet up with a pal I hadn't seen since lockdown began. I had been cocooned in my spacious north Edinburgh bubble so this foray back over the hill was a bit of a culture shock at first, but was the trip my mountain bike had been waiting for. We picked up the canal path initially which then connected into the Water of Leith. Although it was a familiar route after enforced lockdown it was exciting to re-explore as it wound its way along the water up to Balerno and the reservoirs beyond. We bumped into a local Jacobite together with new baby arrival out for some sun. The hill up towards the regional park now loomed straight ahead. Being near the hills again felt good and more like being in some higher alpine range than our local Pentlands. The bike let loose through the Howe and along past Loganlea reservoir where we stopped for an SD lunch. We continued to the corner of Glencorse reservoir where we headed up between Bell's Hill and Harbour Hill before making the long descent towards Currie to re-join the Water of Leith. Strava congratulated me that day on my longest ride but has since deleted the record!

Tour de Forth:

To finish with how could I not include the 'Tour de Forth', a culmination of six months of lockdown cycles. My earlier explorations over to Fife had planted the idea to look at further afield routes when I came across this route. A charity event held annually in aid of 'Cash for Kids'. Surely, it had to be easier than the 'Tour de France'! The classic route is 97.3km and there's a shorter 44km 'Nouveau Route' that stays around the West Lothian side. We opted for something in the middle, 80km, crossing over the Kincardine bridge as the mid-point. Having recruited a couple of willing companions we set out one glorious Sunday morning in early September to complete the loop. Starting from Cramond Brig, we decided on a clockwise direction, basically following route 76. Someone mentioned the wind would be at our backs on the way home which sounded a good plan though we couldn't have asked for a calmer



day. The first section along to Blackness was already familiar but I wasn't sure what came after that. Bo'ness, Grangemouth and Alloa don't spring to mind as popular beauty spots. Shame on me, this section along the south of the Forth was surprisingly picturesque and full of historical interest and I have to admit I probably enjoyed it more than the north side for this unexpectedness. We did pass by some familiar haunts from work such as Kinneil House and even the Antonine Wall before crossing the Kincardine bridge. With golden hay bales scattering the landscape and blue skies ahead, it felt more like Provence than the Forth Valley. The energy levels were needing a boost by the time we arrived in

Culross so an outdoor cake and refreshment were very welcome. The temperature seemed to get warmer in the late afternoon and water a little scarce. This stretch before Rosyth really hugs the coast through limekilns.

By now the legs were tiring for the homeward section over the Forth bridge but somehow managed to push on through Dalmeny to end back at our start point. A very enjoyable and satisfying day, just a pity Strava ran out on me, that would definitely have been my longest trip. I'd recommend it to anyone!



Well, it's now September and I still haven't upgraded to a road bike. This trusty little mountain bike has been a life saver through these times and I certainly won't be abandoning it when I finally make the leap to something faster. Hopefully then Strava won't remind me anymore, 'trending faster'.

Botanical mountaineers

by Alan Walker

No, this is not an article about botanicals to make your gin taste less like industrial ethanol, although the best additive, juniper berry, is a hill and mountain plant. Nor is this about how to volunteer to help the Royal Botanic Garden of Edinburgh or Scottish Natural Heritage, by mounting an abseiling siege down big gnarly cliffs, searching for Tufted Saxifrage or Alpine Blue Sow-thistle (rare, endangered plants that you have hopefully missed with your crampons).



Tufted saxifrage, keeping a low profile high on secret crag X.

This is about flowers. Flowers for fun, flowers for interest, or at the very least a patch or two of colour to brighten a dreich day of trudging up Munro number 89. That is, eighty ninth in order of height, Meall nan Tarmachan.

One side of that fine mountain is the best site in Britain to find mountain flowers, mainly because the National Trust for Scotland has put an electric fence around a craggy hillside to deter hungry deer. Also, because the mica-schist rock is not only rich in alkaline minerals and this makes a rich soil that plants thrive on, but the rock is crumbling rotten,

thus rock-climbers don't need to be fenced out as well. Another good rock for plants is solidified volcanic ash, rich in minerals, but dodgy for gear placements. Geology is a good sideline for botanists - you can do it in wintertime whilst the plants hibernate.



Moss campion and Mountain avens thriving on a cliff of volcanic ash in Snowdonia.

Yes, alright, but what are these plants, and how do you take an interest in them without knowing their names? You need "Identify Mountain Flowers of Britain and Ireland". I wrote it myself, with much help from other sources. In case you think I am now going to review my own book let me explain that this is FREE, to download onto your mobile or tablet. You can view it in



Page 39 for Cowberry, an edible berry, as good as bilberry.

splendid technicolour, or even make a paper copy using a high street print-shop (not free, but cheap for a paper book). This is for non-specialists, it covers none of the rarer plants, but it does have a map and diagram for each of the 104 species covered.

But what is a "Mountain Flower", how can they be defined? Well, about 20 of these one hundred common plants are known as montane species, or arctic-alpines. They are true specialists of the tops, often forming cushion like clumps of leaves with small bright flowers to attract the surprising number of insects that live up there

as well. They are more common in places other than Britain, such as at 2000 metres up in the Alps, or places like southern Greenland or Svalbard.

Others fall into a category probably best described as rock inhabitants. That is, plants adapted for making a living where most others cannot, hanging onto rocks or gravel. Thrift, or Sea Pink, is the classic example. On mountain tops it is common as a flower diminished in size and colour, whilst at the sea shore it is tall, vigorous and brilliant pink.



Thrift on summit of Carn Gorm, the hill next to Moruisg, seen from Invercroft.



Thrift at the sea-shore by Poolewe.



Wood cranesbill, often in big clumps on hillsides where the soils is rich.

Another anomaly are those plants with Wood, or sylvatica, in their name, such as Wood crane's-bill, *Geranium Sylvaticum*. This is a splendidly showy plant, common on the lower slopes of hills far from any wood (at least for five hundred years or so). Are these truly woodland plants marooned up a hill? Possibly they were first associated with woods where they also thrive, and named without regard for their true distribution (wide areas of hill country in England and Scotland, as the maps produced by the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland show).

Oh, and for that download, go to: www.alanwalker.com for your 16Mb pdf (remember the middle 'r', us Alan Walkers are as common as Tormentil - that chirpy wee yellow flower on every hill). Brighten up your day on the hill!

The Sierra Nevada

By Adrian Proctor

In early September 2019, I landed in San Francisco after a 12 hour flight from Manchester, at the start of my big 5-week adventure in the USA. The plan was to tour many of the National Parks and explore the Sierra Nevada. One area of particular interest was the eastern Sierra. The main Sierra peaks are more accessible from the east, and there are a number of access roads that allow excursions in to some of the most dramatic and beautiful places, without the need to camp out.

Camping is a bit of a pain there – not only do you have to worry about wild animals like bears, but you also need a permit for overnight trips in many areas. They do need to manage access to some areas at particular times of the year, but mostly they could just let people do their thing – there's a fair bit of kickback just now at the permit system.

I had a small campervan which was my bed and my food store as well as being my wheels, and that worked pretty well. The big ones are ridiculous – they are slow and guzzle fuel, but my one had a nice high clearance for driving on the off road tracks that I wasn't insured to be on and it could put on a burst of speed on those big long roads across the desert.

You are only allowed to camp on camp sites in the national park, but in the national forest you can park up pretty much anywhere. I did patronise the odd camp site early on in the trip and where I had to, but otherwise I found places to park up for free.

Despite its name, the Sierra Nevada is actually entirely in California. The west side is much wetter and heavily vegetated, with forests in many places. The east is much drier and more arid – very much a desert environment. It's only 100 miles to Death Valley from there, the hottest place on earth, and the lowest point in the lower 48 states, at 280 feet below sea level. The Sierra also contains Mount Whitney, the highest point in the lower 48 states, at 14,505 feet (4421m), so a real contrast as you gain height.

Highway 395 is the main artery on the eastern side of the Sierra range, and this links a number of small towns, where you can buy food and anything else you need - such as a small tool and a tube of super glue to extract the bit of plug that Lexie bust in the socket of the stereo.

I've put lots of pictures on my Facebook page, and these are set to public access so that anyone can view them if interested.



One of the first places I went was called Virginia Lakes. The starting point for my hike was the end of the road at about 3000m, among a series of pretty small lakes. The trail from here

headed up over a pass, from where an easy ascent of Excelsior Mountain (3791m) could be made. This was an acclimatisation day for bigger things to come.

The initial part of the walk felt a bit like Scotland, except that there were no midges and it was sunny. It followed a good trail as far as a col, and I met quite a few other hikers. One guy looked a bit like Shrek – he was scary. It's one of the access points to the Pacific Crest Trail, which seems to be very popular over there. It runs from the Canadian border to the Mexican border and takes about 5 months apparently, so quite an undertaking if you like that sort of thing. However, once I left the trail and headed up onto the mountain, I never saw a soul. People don't seem to go up the hills much there – they just trog along the trails. But I was happy to have the hill to myself.

From the ridge, there was a fantastic view – good looking mountains as far as the eye could see. There isn't a lot of vegetation, but the different colours in the rocks and the stark landscape were amazing. To the south east, the rock type changed abruptly to the granite that is associated with the Yosemite area – big domes of bare rock and dramatic ridges.



The walk itself was very straightforward, although I realised that I was at altitude – everything seemed like harder work than it ought to.



It's possible to access Yosemite from the east via the Tioga Pass – this is the tourist mecca, and is far busier than any of the other parts of the Sierra. It has to be visited, I guess, just to experience the amazing rock formations and the scale of the place, but the hundreds of

people do diminish the experience. So, I'm going to skip this, and move on to the Palisades.

The Palisades are much more alpine-style mountains. The walk in is about 9 miles, so it's a long day to get in, out and do something. You walk in past First lake, Second lake and Third lake (they're very creative round there with names), then eventually you end up on the side of the glacier. Some of the peaks have climbable ridges, but there's a hell of a lot of loose rock. The glacier is mostly covered in huge boulders, so getting anywhere across the glacier is hard work, especially if you only have kahtoolas. Some fine looking mountains though, and

proper alpine terrain – definitely worth another visit with a mate and some gear! Apparently, some of the ridge traverses here are quite Skye-like and well worth doing.

I spent the day wandering around on the glacier to try and reach an easy peak, but I basically ran out of time – traversing the huge boulder fields was just taking too long. So, I contented myself with exploring and just enjoying being up there.

The descent was quite amusing too. With some crampons, it would have been easy, but I



decided that the best policy was the gap between the glacier tongue and the rock wall. Much of the first part could be scrambled on the rocks beneath the edge of the glacier, but then it got a bit more awkward, so I ended up with my back on the ice and two feet on the rock, rucksack on my front, sort of shuffling my way along. Eventually I found a hole under the glacier and a way out of the bottom, but not quite the descent I'd planned.

Next I headed south to Onion Valley, another access road leading up to around 3000m, making some of the higher peaks accessible in a day. My objective was University peak (4105m), partly as preparation for Whitney and partly as a stunning mountain in its own right in a beautiful area. The first part of the walk followed the Kearsage Lakes trail, which wanders through a beautiful area with several small mountain lakes, then after about 8 miles, up over a col and down to the Kearsage lakes themselves. Once there, I could see my ascent route, which the guidebook assured me was only a grade 3, but it looked like it might have its moments.

A scramble up loose scree onto a broad col was followed by a ridge which started easily, but gradually got steeper and more exposed. It was essentially a pile of huge rocks. I kept expecting to reach an impasse at any point, but actually there was always a way. It felt pretty remote and out there, but I found my way up to the top. This was Sept 30th, and I was only the 3rd person in the summit book in September. I imagined the peak being in Scotland or Wales – it would have been mobbed on a day like that.



Sitting there on the top with my sandwich it occurred to me that I still had to get down. Three options really – reverse the ascent route (not enough time), try the south ridge and get down the col which looked like it was full of snow and likely icy or go for the east ridge and work my way down one side or the other. The book suggested that it was possible either way but didn't give many clues as to how. So I descended a Skye-like ridge initially and then found a rocky gully which got me down, but via steep scree and boulders, which took a while until I got to the smaller stuff lower down, where I could scree run without breaking my neck. There then followed a bit of a bush whack until I got back to the main trail again. A long day and a great prep for Mount Whitney, which now had to be done.

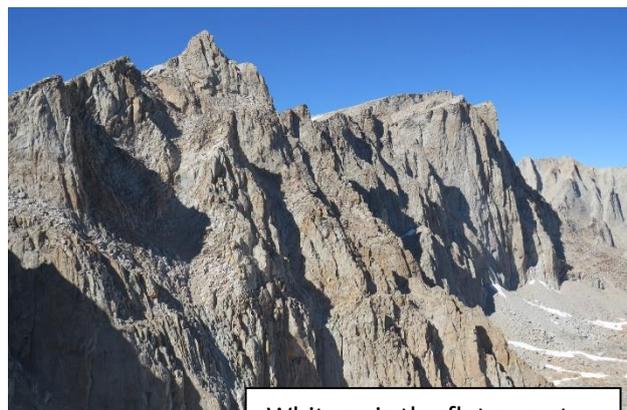
I managed to get a permit for a day on Whitney. They guy in the visitor centre said it normally took 2 days so of course I had to try and do it in one. This turned out to be an excellent move



actually – no tent and no other camping gear made it a lot less effort! I even managed to get a night in the camp site within walking distance of the start. So I spent the evening stuffing my face and getting my bag ready for an early start. The guy said to start at 1 am to do it in a day, so I set off at 6, as it was getting light and I could see where I was

going. The total ascent is about 7000 feet or 2200m and it's about 23 miles round trip. There's a pretty good trail all the way up, and no technical difficulty at all. The trail winds up through forests initially, past a couple of lakes and then rises above the tree line and up into a broad corrie. Then there is a section with 99 zig zags up to the main ridge. This part is quite steep

and the altitude starts to kick in. I passed a few guys sitting by the side of the path who clearly weren't going a lot further. I reached the ridge about 11. I started passing all the guys coming down from the top after their early starts from the high camps. Apparently, it was Baltic up there at 9 am. There was a short descent and then a slightly rough trail section and a long flog up to the summit, which seemed to take longer than it should have done – summit time was about 1pm. The top is kind of flat and uninspiring – there's a



Whitney is the flat one at the back on the picture

hut up there and a plaque in the rock. I sat and ate some food for a few minutes, took the requisite pictures and then headed down.



The hut on the summit



View on the way down



After Whitney, I had a lazier day and walked in to the Cottonwood Lakes. These are a relatively flat path, about 5 miles or so, but a lovely place to wander around and enjoy the sunshine.

There are loads of other peaks in this area, but time was pressing, so I moved on and headed round the bottom end of the Sierra and up to a small place called Silver City, which was at the end of a 21-mile driveable road/track, in among the Kahweah mountains. It had a place where you could buy food and a drink (though drinks were stupidly expensive). Apparently, the local warden had left for the season a couple of weeks earlier, so no need to pay for any of the camp sites. They didn't have any facilities anyway, so the only reason you'd use them would be to find a bit of flat land to park your van.

I had a bit of a late afternoon reccy when I got there and decided on a plan for the next day. Up one trail to a col, over a ridge across three summits and then down another trail.

The ascent of the first col was a bit steep and loose, but once I got past that, the ridge improved. It felt pretty remote up there – never saw a soul all day. The first two peaks were all pretty loose, broken rock, but the third was much more solid – it was a big pile of rocks a bit like Tryfan, but huge ones that weren't moving.



View along the ridge I'd just come up from peak 3.

It was a pretty hot day and there was no water on the ridge, so I'd taken plenty with me. I enjoyed a nice lunch sitting on a big slab, looking out into the wilderness – beautiful peaks with no one there. The third peak felt like a proper mountain, and it took longer than I



Peaks 2 and 3 from the descent path

thought to get down the slabs and across the ridge between there and the other trail. This then headed down towards a pretty lake in the corrie below the mountain in a series of ridiculously long zig zags. I must admit I got fed up and cut a couple of them off – I wasn't the first! I walked almost 20 miles that day and a fair bit of up and down, so I got back to my van pretty knackered. Definitely a good place though and more to do up there, so will return one day.

The next thing to explore was Sequoia National Park. The Giant Sequoia trees are a pretty impressive sight. Some of the oldest ones are thought to be 2000 years old. The outer bark is thick and fibrous and contains very little sap, so is fire resistant, which is how these trees survive the forest fires. It also contains tannins, which prevent disease and rotting and repel insects. They also have very extensive root systems, which make them pretty stable to wind and able to survive periods of drought.



They only grow in groves on the western side of the Sierra, at an altitude of about 1500 to 2000m, where the climate is cool enough and wet enough for them to flourish. The photo shows a sense of scale. The oldest trees tend to be quite short and fat (a bit like climbers?) because the tops get struck by lightning. Taller trees tend to be much younger.



The final place I visited in the Sierra was King's Canyon. This is almost a southern but much less well frequented version of Yosemite, and still has the big granite walls and scenery. I only had a day there, but enough to see that it would be a great place to go back with some ropes and a climbing partner. I walked 5 miles or so up to a waterfall and just enjoyed the amazing scenery.

I did achieve quite a bit in the time I had in the Sierra, but felt I only really scratched the surface. There are definitely more holidays here and fun to be had – I will be back! Any takers?

Oh Shit!

By Adrian Proctor

'Oh shit!' seemed to sum up the situation quite well. Back in May 2018, the work meet has been a little easier than the previous few, as the walkway construction was finished back in 2017. So, the plan had been to do the maintenance jobs required on the Saturday, have a chilled out evening and then go hiking/climbing on the Sunday.

Having got a bit hot sitting outside the hut, I wandered round the back, beer in hand, and as I walked past where the septic tank is buried, I noticed that there was a small river of



something not very nice coming out of the top, under the lid. I went to find Alan and had him stand there and watch while I flushed one of the loos. Sure enough, a flow came out from under the lid. So, our great scientific minds brought us to the conclusion that the discharge pipe must be blocked.

'Do you know where the discharge point is?'

'I think it's over near that clump of grass somewhere!'

So, I soon discovered a pile of rocks which was obviously the soakaway and found the end of the pipe. We flushed our loo again, and nothing came out. So, we went for another beer and a discussion as to what to do.

It appeared that our plans for leisure on Sunday were not to be realised. We had a look around the hut, to see what we could find that might be useful, and came up with about 10 rods which screw into each other – the sort that chimney sweeps use. Alan also produced a plunger, which could be screwed on the end of a rod.

As we didn't have enough rods to do more than about a quarter of the pipe length, we tried shoving them up from the end first, got all 10 rods in, pulled them out and only six came back. Cue more swearing.

So, at that point, Matt and Sabine were dispatched to Inverness to acquire the proper kit for the job. Meanwhile, we thought we'd better try and retrieve our lost rods. So, we worked out roughly where the last rod was and dug down to the pipe.

It took an hour or so to dig a pit – the earth at the hut is glacial till, so full of boulders. So we found the pipe and then ensued the discussion as to whether or not to cut through it. We decided we had no option, so we did, and eventually managed to retrieve our lost rods.

We then realised that, when Matt and Sabine got back, we'd need another pit, close to the septic tank, so that we could attach the plunger. Thus, a further excavation began and once



again eventually unearthed the pipe. It then occurred to us that if we cut it there and the first bit of the pipe was clear, we might very quickly have a hole full of poo. So, we decided to use the bilge pump which we used to use to clear airlocks in the water supply to draw down the septic tank to the spill level by pumping it out onto nearby grass – maybe not the best of ideas, in hindsight! Well, there was a mess anyway so a bit more didn't really matter, and it's full of nutrients.

About this time, Matt and Sabine returned with a new set of rods which actually screwed together properly and a decent looking tool for clearing a pipe which screwed on the end. So, we went for the lower section – drove the pipes through to our pit, attached the plunger onto the end and pulled it slowly back. This worked a treat, and my wellies were soon up to about 2/3 depth in a sort of black sludge. Lovely. But the pipe was clear.



On a roll now, but of course sod's law said that there wasn't quite enough length to reach between our two pits, so a third pit was required. It was just as we had prepared the second pit for action

that the commissioning engineer, Mr Pearson, decided that he needed to make room for his second lunch, so sent us an offering to see if the system worked now. Fortunately, it didn't.

Anyway, the exercise was successfully repeated twice more, and the section between the tank and the first pit was rodded clear as best we could, so then we patched up the points where we'd cut the pipe as best we could and tried the system out again – and it worked. So, we left the pits open but covered over (one still is!) in case we needed to revisit, moved some stones around at the discharge point to hide what's happening there and went home to de-louse ourselves. A certain odour pervaded my van for a week or two afterwards.

Not an exercise I would like to repeat any time soon, but we probably should every few years! But don't tell the new custodian until after they've been elected!

Outer Hebridean High Point Cycle Challenge!

By Cat Trebilco

In August 2020, I undertook my first solo cycle tour on the Outer Hebrides, and set myself the challenge of cycling the Outer Hebridean Way, and climbing the highest summit of each of the 10 islands I cycled on. After a couple of sea swims, I also added in going for a wild swim



each day. While neither the cycling nor any of the individual hills would be a particular challenge in themselves, the cumulative effort, logistics organisation, and doing it on my own was scary enough to justify it being An Adventure!

Below is a summary in numbers and stats, with highlights and lowlights from my adventure (holiday.)

Travel

- Days: 9
- Trains: 2 (Haymarket to Glasgow, Glasgow to Oban)
- Ferries: 3 (Oban to Castlebay (5.5hrs), Barra to Eriskay (40mins), Berneray to Harris (1hr))
- Being nicely collected by Phil at the end, followed by an additional week's holiday on Lewis: 1
- Islands cycled on: 9 - Vatersay, Barra, Eriskay, South Uist, Benbecula, Grimsay, North Uist, Berneray, Harris & Lewis (or 10, if you count the Isle of Harris and Lewis as 2 separate islands - although they are one landmass with 2 different names)
- High points reached: 9 (I am counting Harris and Lewis as one landmass for this - I climbed the Lewis High point the following week with Phil and friends, but it would have added 3 long days to my bike tour to cycle there and back)

Journey Stats

- Highest point reached: 799m (An Clisham summit – the only Corbett in the Outer Hebrides)
- Lowest high point – Grimsay – unnamed 20m mound on a moorland.
- Kilometres cycled: 439.6km
- Height gain on the bike: 4082m
- Maximum speed on the bike: 54.7kmph (34mph!)
- Kilometres walked: 85.3km
- Height gain on foot: 3669m
- Wild swims: 8 (2 lochs, 5 sea swims and 1 cold shower!) – yes I'm counting the cold shower as a wild swim, as I was too knackered to go down to a very sea-weedy looking bay, and I'm pretty sure the water was straight off the hillside anyway.

Accommodation

- Nights in Hotels: 3
- Nights in hostels: 4 (would have been all in hostels where it not for COVID) - Scaladale Outdoor Centre opened up especially for me, as I'd managed to book on their online system even though the centre was official closed due to Covid – this meant I had a slightly creepy experience in a deserted hostel, mouldy food in the fridge - hence the cold shower mentioned above.
- Nights with (previously unmet) friends: 2 – I was lucky to get an offer of accommodation at the end from a lady who is in several 'women in adventure' type facebook groups with me, and who does a similar job with Western Isles Council as I do for Edinburgh. She then put me in touch with a vague acquaintance of hers when I was struggling to find anything open in Leverburgh on Harris due to Covid.



Injuries

- Midges bites in my cleavage on Day 9: 42 (how, I do not know! Was wearing a sports bra, long-sleeve top and fleece)
- Unexplained bruises: 18 - so, the ones on my shins are from the pedals, I get that.... But on my thigh above my knee? And just on my right leg.... How did I get those?
- Bees/flies stuck in my helmet: 3 - I did not realise this is an occupational hazard of cycling but quite alarming when it happens, presumably just as much for the bee as it was for me, given the loud buzzing going on.

Animals

- Golden Eagle sightings: definitely 5 (on Clisham - possibly the two I saw in the morning were the same 2 out of the 3 I saw in the evening as in a similar place) – amazing sight to see one take off about 20metres ahead of me and soar into the sky and play in the thermals just above me for 20 minutes.
- Buzzeagle sightings: 1 (still not sure if it was a buzzard or Eagle – which, according to the internet, is one of the evidence measures that it's a buzzard. When it's an eagle, you just know. Or you just ask yourself, is its wingspan as wide as Darth Vader is tall (over 6ft))
- Seal sightings: loads at Butt of Lewis and Quidinish. I named one Ron. (RonSeal.....)
- Dolphin sightings: 1 sighting, of 3 dolphins (Oban ferry)
- Naked men sightings: 1
- Cyclists who overtook me actually on the road: 1 – quite pleased by this – I thought I'd be really slow due to fitness, and also all the kit I was carrying, but turns out I overtook more people than overtook me.



Highlights

- Swimming on Vatersay Beach at the start of the tour – stunningly beautiful white sand and turquoise waters all sparkling in the sunshine.
- Reaching the lighthouse, seeing the crashing waves which reminded me so much of my spiritual homeland of Cornwall despite not being able to visit this year. All mixed up with feelings of achievement, pride, and both joy and sadness it was over.
- Seeing a Golden Eagle take off 20m away – simply stunning to watch.
- Having the cloud clear on Clisham – after a morning of being eaten alive by midges on the muggy-ist, stillest day, which meant 4 hours walking with my midge net on, unable to stop for even a second to eat or drink without being swarmed by the little f*ckers, I sat on the summit of Clisham, having walked the horseshoe route only ever seeing the tiny section in front and behind me – suddenly the cloud cleared in a stunning temperature inversion, and then proceeded to show me different sections of the view in every direction. Well worth the wait.
- Having 9 sunny days with no rain – call me the Good Weather Fairy! (or a Lucky B*tch)
- Eating cake every day – one of the joys of being on the move all the time is the calorie deficit! Cake was even more appreciated after the previous 3 months of lockdown on a diet to lose 3 stone.



Lowlights

- Those pesky midges on Clisham. I do like to think I got my own back with a mass-midgy-murder the next day on my bike ride to Callanish – it was so misty and midgy that morning, my damp shin seemed to make midges stick to it as I freewheeled along, so when I arrived at Callanish, I had over 100 dead midges stuck to my shins.
- The bog, with midges and buzzy flies back from Hecla – after climbing the Beinn Mhor/Hecla horseshow on South Uist – a stunning ridge walk with fabulous 3600 views – the last 2 hours nearly ruined the whole day - across a pathless bog, with midges, but also some buzzy flies which continually circled round my head for 2 hours.
- The closed bakery on Benbecula – I cycled past this bakery, carpark full of people, highly recommended in the guidebook, to climb Rueval, promising myself that I'd stop on the way back past a few hours later for cake. Unfortunately, due to Covid, it had early closing hours and was shut. Very disappointing.

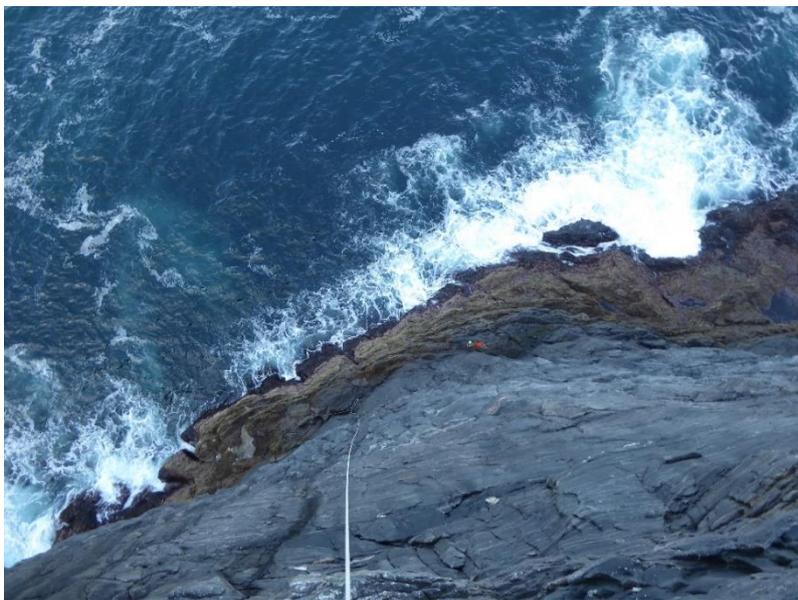
Overall

Overall, it was a fabulous trip – just the right balance of adventure and holiday. I can highly recommend the Outer Hebrides – a warm welcome, beautiful beaches, deserted hills, some stunning walks (too often dismissed as not Corbetts or Munros) and based on my experience, wall-to-wall sunshine. Full blog posts of my trip are on my Reach the Peak and personal facebook pages.

Climbing Mingulay 2019

By Lucy Spark

With 100m sea cliffs and perfect Lewisian Gneiss, Mingulay has some of the best climbing in the world. The island was inhabited until 1912. Now only the National Trust warden lives here in the old school house through the summer months. We were incredibly lucky to be the only climbers on the island for a week in July with almost perfect weather. Enjoy the photos.



100m abseil on
Dun Mingulay

Franklin approaching the crux on pitch
2 of Sula, E2 5b





Michael on Call of the Sea, E3 5c



Nathan on Cuan a Cheo, E1 5b



Looking North from the Highest point on the island, Carnan, 273m

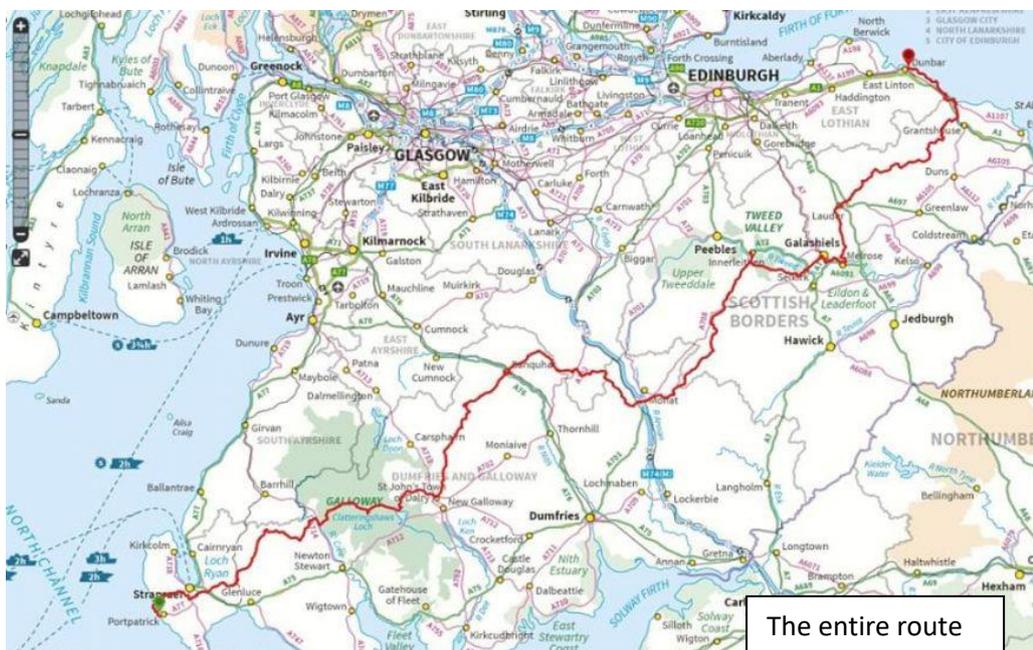


Scott's coffee - in high demand all week!

Fastpacking the Southern Upland Way (14-21 July 2019)

By Karl Zeiner

Earlier this year I was trying to decide what races I wanted to do. Nothing I saw really inspired me though and while chatting with my wife Fiona one morning the idea of running the Southern Upland Way was born. At the time I didn't know that there was a race along the route too. I only found this out when I started to research the idea in a bit more detail. I also wasn't sure by what means I wanted to complete it. I was quite surprised when looking at maps how remote the route was in places; finding places to stay wouldn't be easy. Initially I wasn't too keen on staying in bothies as it would require carrying more kit. I'd only done one 2 day fastpack so far which was in the Cairngorms last year with Fiona and included a tent.



The Southern Upland Way is a 212 mile (355km) long distance walking route from Portpatrick on the south west coast of Scotland to Cockburnspath on the North Eastern tip of the Scottish Borders. It is one of the widest West-East stretches across Scotland. To give you a sense of how far west the route starts: When crossing the M74 motorway which is the Western Road link between England and Scotland you are already over half way along the route.

The Southern Upland Way website features suggested distances and places to stay off the route where accommodation owners pick walkers up to take them to their overnight stay. I didn't fancy that. I wanted to use my own 2 feet to move forward from the moment I left the start at Portpatrick until I reached the finish. Thus, I wanted to ensure that my overnight stays would be as close to the route as possible,



ideally on the route. The bothies therefore became a must. After initially rejecting them I started to relish the idea as they added to the adventure.

Fiona's parents live in Dunbar which is roughly 10 miles along the coast from the finish of the Southern Upland Way with the John Muir Way Link path running between them. The Southern Upland Way finishes in the village of Cockburnspath which has very few amenities and just as many transport links (apart from being on the A1). Adding the link up to Dunbar seemed to make for a more suitable finish. More than that, I was going to finish there on Fiona's birthday to add extra impetus to the final day.

Looking at the mileages and the possible overnight stops I had concluded that I would attempt the route in 8 days including the extra 10 miles to Dunbar. Walkers typically complete the route in 2-3 weeks. I would stay in hotels (1 night), B&Bs or similar (4 nights) and bothies (2 nights). The chosen distances per day varied from 35 km (22 miles) to 64 km (40 miles).

Some of the route I knew as it goes through the Scottish Borders towns and therefore the route leading from St Marys Loch to Traquair, onto Galashiels, Melrose and then to Lauder and into the Lammermuirs I had been on at least once on a bike with most of that in a multiday bike packing trip in 2018 along the Capital Trail.

The route further west though I had no knowledge of except for what the map, the SUW website and the SUW Facebook page would reveal.

It was going to be an adventure of an unknown dimension which made it exciting. It has been a while since I have started something where I wasn't entirely sure if I would be able to finish it. Rather remarkably, I can't claim to have specifically trained for this but went into it off the back of my generally pretty strong fitness.

In the weeks leading up to this I had been in the Pyrenees in May for the annual training camp I organise through DeZeiner Fitness which involved a large volume of cycling; Fiona and I spent a week in Northern Scotland bike packing and Munro bagging in June; we spent a weekend in Glen Affric running up and down mountains and along the glens (that weekend I did my first test run with a full heavy pack covering 30 km in poor weather conditions), and I did the Scafell Pike Trail marathon a week before the Southern Upland Way Run.

The trail race was my longest run of the year and I felt somewhat unsure about doing back to back 40 mile days on the Southern Upland Way with a heavy pack after already having done 2 days leading up to those.



The week was due to pan out like this:

- Day 1: Portpatrick to New Luce (planned distance: 34.2km; planned ascent: 682m)
- Day 2: New Luce to White Laggan Bothy (47.9 km; 1110m)
- Day 3: White Laggan Bothy to Sanquhar (64.1 km; 1602m)
- Day 4: Sanquhar to Over Phawhope Bothy (60.8 km; 2419m)
- Day 5: Over Phawhope Bothy to Innerleithen (38.9 km; 928m)
- Day 6: Innerleithen to Lauder (47.1 km; 1386m)
- Day 7: Lauder to Greenhope B&B (32.5 km; 840m)
- Day 8: Greenhope B&B to Dunbar (36.2 km; 740m)

The main items my pack contained: Spare clothing (long and short), spare underwear, running poles, waterproofs, hat, gloves, sleeping bag, sleeping mat, stove, pan, power bank, some food for the journey, first aid kit, map, coffee mug, 2 soft flasks, food for the bothy nights (couscous, rice, porridge and coffee), plus a couple of other bits. The pack weighed in at around 6.5kg. It felt heavy. This was more than 10 % of my body weight.

Getting to the start

I left Edinburgh at 11am on Saturday morning (July 13) to travel to Stranraer on the Belfast bus and then change there for a 20 min hop to Portpatrick. Total journey time from Edinburgh to Portpatrick was a touch over 5 hours and I missed out on seeing the Skiffie world championships in Stranraer.

I got to Portpatrick on a lovely late summer afternoon with vintage trucks rolling on for that weekend's vintage commercial vehicles rally. It made for a buzzing town that evening.

The Harbour House Hotel put me up for the night in a lovely top floor room in their annex.

Some photos along the way ...



Approaching Innerleithen



Eildon Hills



Great Adventure

The moment I finished, I truly could say that I enjoyed a large chunk of it. Why? Because it was a great adventure. It had an element of 'I am not entirely sure I can complete this.' which I don't have very often nowadays. At the same time, it was in many ways easier than expected, as I could get up every morning, put my trainers on and go again. The week had its highs and lows but the lows were never particularly low. I was overall very lucky with the weather. It was a stunning week and although I had no views from the highest point of the route the weather that day was very helpful to the eventual success of the week as a 2nd 40 mile day in the heat I had on day 3 would have proved very challenging.



Final stats: 8 days, 369.4km distance, 60 hours moving, 8755 m elevation gain

Questions & Answers

As I was approaching the end of my run I announced that I would be publishing this on my blog and asked what people would like to read about. A number of things have been answered above but I have decided to summarise the questions and answers below too.

Planning: this mostly came down to the SUW website together with using booking.com and google maps to see what accommodation is available along the route. The PC version of Viewranger works well for mapping the route from between the chosen overnight stops to get a pretty precise idea of the day's data for distance and elevation in particular and as this is on OS maps you get a pretty good idea of the type of surface too i.e. tarmac, land rover track, single track, etc. The info on the SUW website is designed for walkers so I needed the

Viewranger data to get a better idea what to expect but the website does cover accommodation and places to restock such as shops and cafes close to the route.

Sleeping: As mentioned this was a mixture of comfort and basic with bothies and thus sleeping bag and mat versus B&Bs and private bathrooms. Choices were made based on how



they fitted with the chosen distance. My aim was to try and do it in either 7 or 8 days as I felt I should be able to

cover that distance in that time. In places accommodation is sparse making this a bit of a challenge and I didn't want to add a tent to the equation. Cost was between £0 (bothy) and £80 (Harbour House Hotel in Portpatrick) per night.

Breakfast: Except at the bothies I had a cooked breakfast every morning. First bothy was just coffee and a chia charge bar and the 2nd bothy I had porridge and coffee.

During the day: This was generally a mixture of various cereal and energy bars and some jelly babies. Drink was just water with electrolytes. Occasionally, I'd stop for coffee and/or cake if the opportunity arose or even lunch such as in Melrose.

Dinners: These were all pretty big when not at the bothies as I was well catered for in the 2 places that cooked for me on site and otherwise had pub dinners or a fish and chips takeaway.

Some evenings I'd have a beer or a glass of wine.

Hydration during the day was between 1-3 litres of water with electrolyte tabs depending on distance, heat and thirst. I don't seem to have the need to drink much which is for something like this a benefit as I usually can get away with carrying small amounts.

In terms of food, you can see, most days I had a pretty big breakfast and dinner and then just ate a bit during the day. Many will feel that this isn't a lot considering what I did (350km in 8 days) and some of the days involving 40 miles or a bit more. My watch gave me an idea as to how many calories I was burning every day and on the 2 big days this was around or just over 3000 calories. Breakfast and dinner will have covered this mostly with the day food topping this up. There was no intensity in what I was doing. The running was very steady, the walking involved less effort and there were numerous breaks. Anyone reading this who is used to hill walking or multiday hut to hut walks in the mountains will have done similar in terms of nutrition – big breakfast, snacks/sandwich during the day, big dinner. Those days and my days were not much different except for distance covered.

Support Team: The only support plan we had was that Fiona would meet me after day 5 for a change in pack and to ditch the bothy kit. I also had a resupply of energy bars and a new set of running clothes at the time. I did get the opportunity on day 1 and 3 to have my clothes washed which I did. The rest of the time there was no support.

Clothing: I had 1 pair of running shorts, 1 pair of running tights, waterproofs, wind proof, 2 running t-shirts, 2 base layers, gloves, hat, cap, arm warmers, change of under clothes, 1 pair of trainers for the whole route (Altra Lone Peak). Kindly Rainbow's End and Newark Farm washed my kit and I had a full change of kit when meeting Fiona in Innerleithen.

Gear/Tech: I used running poles for a lot of the run. They are Mountain King Trail Blaze which I bought for UTMB in 2015. I have already mentioned that I navigated with the ViewRanger app. I carried one powerbank to keep phone and Garmin charged, together with a wall plug for where mains charging was available. For the 2 bothy nights I had a sleeping bag, thermarest (3/4 length), silk liner, stove, gas canister, pan, spork and a cafetière mug. I was also carrying 2x0.5L Salomon soft flasks.

Build Up/Training: Nothing specific at all apart from some active away time and a trail marathon.

Injuries/Niggles: A fair bit of detail in the report but main things were knees, lower back and quads but nothing sustained, nothing that wasn't manageable and nothing lasting. I also fell to the floor twice and had cuts and grazes to shins and knees.

What did I need but didn't have: Don't think there really was anything.

Most recommended item: The poles, it would have been a much harder 8 days without them.

Pacing strategy: Developed over time with how I felt comfortable with the poles: Descend running without poles, run flats and gentle ascents single pole, power walk steep ascents double pole. No specific run walk strategy but just what was comfortable at the time.

Worst moment: Running out of water on day 3 (but also in a positive way managing the time to finding water).

Best Moment: Completing Day 4, the 2nd 40 miler in 2 days and not stopping on one of the earlier options that day.

Day to day recovery: It is remarkable how well the body can get up day after day and go on and do things over and over again. My main recovery between stopping and starting was stretching, food and rest (sleep, or at least lying in bed). Every morning I was positively surprised how OK I felt. As the day wore on I'd feel more and more weary. I'd sometimes compensate this with 2 paracetamol and maybe some pro plus caffeine tablets which would give me a boost.

Mental/physical challenges/low points: Mentally the most challenging day was day 3 as it just seemed to go on and on and the heat was oppressive together with the water issue. Overcoming this was less of a problem as I just had to get on with stuff and work out where I could get water and the more I moved forward the closer the finish would get. I have been in the endurance game long enough to know that a complete breakdown is unlikely and the worst case is that we slow down until we find renewed energy. So mental lows didn't really exist. Physically my body held up well. It obviously ached a bit but nothing debilitating.

This is an excerpt of Karl's blog – for full blog see

<https://www.dzfitness.co.uk/2019/09/11/fastpacking-the-southern-uplands-way-14-21-july-2019/>.



St Malo to Nice – a solo cycle tour through France in September

By Ros Clancy

It's not often I find myself at a loose end for holiday plans, but in Summer 2019 I unexpectedly did, and wasted no time in filling the vacancy. For quite a while I had hankered after the idea of a long cycle tour through France. But all the organised trips were already full – so could I not just do this myself? I found a book 'France En Velo' and it all seemed very do-able. I love logistics, and was soon sucked in to the excitement of planning stages and before long I was committed! And speaking of logistics, a couple of key decisions needed to be made. Would I camp or go 'credit card', staying at guest houses, and how would I get me and my bike back? The first decision was easy – there were some long days – I hadn't done this much cycling back to back before and I was travelling solo – so being able to travel light, buy a dinner and sink into a bed every night was very appealing. The second decision was more problematic. How do you pack up your bike at the other end for transport whether by plane or train? In the end I opted for train – with the TGV service it was possible to get back in a (long) day to Edinburgh, but the bike needed partially dismantling and placed in a bag. Could I buy one over there? I spoke (badly) in French to a Nice cycle shop and investigated the Nice Decathlon – it didn't sound that reliable or promising. I found a lightweight option that I could take with me that I hoped would work. A few happy evenings were spent making mostly flexible reservations on booking.com (in case things didn't go to plan). I made up a spreadsheet to keep track of my bookings and the cancel-by dates, and the mileage of each leg. A train and overnight ferry from Portsmouth to St Malo was booked, along with an early morning TGV Nice to Paris, the Eurostar to London and London to Edinburgh. I was all set!



The route I would embark on totalled just over 1000 miles and 16,000 metres of ascent. I planned to do it over 16 days, including a rest day part way through. This would also act as a buffer in case of any mishaps. Luggage was kept to a minimum – two small rear panniers, a handlebar bag, top tube bag (my 'baguette bag'!) and saddle bag for tools. Even so, when I set off, it took a while to get used to the heavier handling. I also decided to get a proper bike fitting to be sure that the bike was set up correctly for me and invested in a super-comfy saddle. Although I had a Garmin, I love a real map, and took a full set of 1:200,000s. Over several evenings I marked up the route on each one. This would also be handy in case of any enforced changes of plan. I also investigated the rail network for any plan Bs – fortunately none of these were needed!

Date	Destination	Mileage	Ascent(m)
Wed 4th	Ferry		
Th 5th	Vitre	84	1357
Fr 6th	Brissac-Quince	90	1040
Sat 7th	Parthenay	87	884
Sun 8th	L'Isle Jourdain	68	780
Mon 9th	Brantome	76	1430
Tues 10th	Les Eyzies-de-Tayac	72	1267
Wed 11th	Les Eyzies-de-Tayac	Rest Day	
Thurs 12th	Gramat	62	1111
Fri 13th	Entrayagues-sur-Truyere	67	904
Sat 14th	Mende	74	1514
Sun 15th	Pont d'Arc	75	1008
Mon 16th	Chateauneuf-du-Pape	50	700
Tues 17th	Sault	42	967
Wed 18th	Moustiers-Ste-Marie	70	1296
Thurs 19th	Castellane	51	1441
Fri 20th	Nice	58	740

It was with a certain amount of trepidation that I set off for Waverley one early September morning. The bike felt heavy and difficult to steer, and I felt worryingly wobbly on it. But heading down Market Street I received an unexpected boost, bumping in to my brother and two nieces on their way to school! It was wonderful to have a good send-off hug and I felt a lot better and, after successfully navigating London, by the time I had settled in to the ferry I felt in expansive holiday mode, treating myself to a glass of wine or two with dinner. However, on arrival at St Malo in the morning the doubts had set back in. Could I really do this? The diffident weather mirrored my mood – it was cool and a bit drizzly. I loaded up at a bakery – mustn't run out of calories. I was, however, looking forward to Cancale, famous for its oysters (not known for their calorific content) eaten freshly-hulled at the quayside, and the weather did not dampen my enthusiasm. It took a while to gauge the distance on the map but as the morning progressed, I was pleased to realise that I was making better progress than I thought. However, this did not allay an underlying anxiety that pervaded the first few days of the trip – would I manage to cover the daily distance I had set myself, and this made me reluctant to stop apart from a brief photo or snack – must keep going was the mantra.



The first few days were some of the longest. A revelation – who knew that Brittany is not flat, but hilly - but my legs were fresh. I enjoyed glimpses of the coast and fields of garlic, a crop big in this area. Into the Loire it warmed up, and the distance took its toll but was enlivened by sights of the river itself. That night I stayed opposite one of the largest of the Loire chateaux and dined outside. A wedding was about to take place. The third day felt like one of the longest – many long straight Romanesque roads yet with imperceptible rises. Village after village with Romanesque churches – I often stopped to photograph. On arrival in Parthenay that evening, tired and wabbit, I went round and round in maze-like circles in the medieval centre looking for my accommodation. Arriving, exhausted, my host was keen to chat, and was not deterred by my lack of fluency. A generous aperitif was offered and my

legs practically buckled from under me. Later at a nearby restaurant I demolished a risotto. It was Saturday night on the town but I had got used to my table for one. I left early on the Sunday morning, it was on the cool side and the roads were quiet. On the outskirts of town a poor cat had just been run over. I peeled off into the countryside and quiet rurality. Today was a shorter day. I thought I might ease off and even stop for lunch, and had a likely spot in mind. But it wasn't a great call – the hotel was closed and I realised that the rather scruffy café was a bit of a 5 minutes off the motorway job. I felt ridiculously uncomfortable when a man struck up conversation and for the first time felt acutely vulnerable, a single lady pedalling down miles and miles of quiet country roads, clearly alone, and spent the next hour of pedalling looking over my shoulder. But that night, sanctuary, a beautiful spot by the meandering La Vienne river. Although it was cold, I had a swim in the swimming pool. The lovely family, worried that there might be nowhere open for me to eat (it was Sunday night after all, in rural France) had prepared a cold picnic tray and I enjoyed dining outside. And if you are thinking that this is somewhat food-obsessed then that is the reality of cycling and the life of a cyclist!

On a cold and grey morning I was heading into Poitou-Limousin through Confolens, and into a more rural landscape. Romanesque architecture seemed to give way to the Limousin cow and before long I found myself in the Dordogne. Brantome and the Perigord – the food became more earthy and beautiful Dordogne farmhouses with their distinctive roofs caught my eye. Imperceptibly the landscape was turning a warmer golden colour, and my excitement grew when I glimpsed the first limestone cliff. I was heading south! I passed the Lascaux



caves, close to my next stop at Les Eyzies-de-Tayac, where I would finally have a welcome 'rest' day. I reflected on my progress so far. In 6 days I had covered 462 miles. My derriere had just about adjusted to the saddle, but psychologically I needed this day off. A small place, quite touristy but peaceful, and I enjoyed a visit to the Musee National de la Prehistoire with its stunning collection of Neolithic material – this was the home of Cro Magnon man and known as the 'cradle of mankind'. Mentally

refreshed, I was raring to go – the Mediterranean was beckoning.

The next phase of the trip continued through the Dordogne and the sun grew stronger and the cycling hillier. There were many pleasant autumnal reminders including orchards of fig and walnut trees. The day's route took me up the fabulous hilltop village of Rocamadour with its stunning views. Quite a climb in the heat. I found it hard to stay hydrated. It was a relief to reach Gramat – a workday town for the French, but nonetheless charming. I bought a small bag of local walnuts to take home for my mother (yes there was still a bit of room in my panniers and I didn't mind the extra weight). The following day I passed into the region of Lot. I had noticed a loud clunking noise from what may have been the bottom bracket and hoped I was not going to have a 'mechanical'. I found a cycle shop in Figeac and tried to explain in French to the shop owner. He shrugged and looked uninterested – he explained he had a bad shoulder so could not examine it, but didn't seem to think there was anything untoward. I decided to press on.

I felt very much in the South now. I had abandoned my bakery strategy a while ago – tiring of its stodginess – and embraced the French way of life with le picnique – a demi baguette, a

saucisson (which became less appealing as the days wore on), fresh figs and a local goats cheese. I was living the dream! The route was growing hillier as I moved valleys and then down to follow the Lot river to its confluence with the Truyere at Entraygues – a stunning ride. On the way, I decided to stop at a village and post home the maps that I no longer needed. After overnighing in a wonderful medieval chambre d’hote, and a meal by the river, I headed to Mende, the capital of Lozere. Today was one of the bigger days of climbing – a total of 1,544 m of ascent and 75 miles. By now I was more confident of my ability to ‘make it’ and was much fitter too of course. However, towards the end of the day I found myself hitting a bit of a wall. I needed to stop frequently and break into my emergency dextrasols. On arrival in Mende, slightly wabbit, I once again seemed to have difficulty locating my accommodation for the night. In fact it was right under my nose, next to the cathedral, where a full-scale wedding had just taken place, the bells ringing and confetti fluttering. It was Saturday night and the place was buzzing. Finding somewhere nice to eat a well-earned meal and a glass or two of Rose was not difficult.

Mende was a bit of a milestone as from here on in I was heading into the final third of my trip and into areas that I knew well from previous climbing trips. I was really looking forward to exploring them by cycle. Today was another climb, up to the Col des Tribes, before a long and fantastic descent through the Cevennes with stunning hilly scenery everywhere before heading into the Ardeche. As I pulled out of Mende, I was amazed to hear Yorkshire accents. A large group of cyclists on an ‘end to end’ trip gradually pulled past me, shouting friendly northern greetings. They had a support van and



I found them further up the climb. They insisted I join them for the day’s snack stops, lunch, and then a group meal in the Pont d’Arc where I was also staying. I found the day almost overwhelming. Up until now I had not encountered any other cycle tourers and felt very much alone. I found myself talking nineteen to the dozen. Throughout the rest of the week our days sometimes coincided and it was nice at times to have some company, although I still wanted my trip to have its solo character. The following day I had plenty of time to cycle the Gorges d’Ardeche. It was scorching. I stopped frequently to take pictures, looking enviously at the tiny kayaks in the bottom of the gorge. I wished I had taken a day off to join them. Perfect weather for it. I was heading for Chateauneuf du Pape, a bit of a treat stop. However I had not factored in that it was a Monday. Most things were closed. However, there was a swimming pool, a treat in itself, and there was much rehydrating to do. I enjoyed cycling through the vineyards the next morning, a reddish early morning light on the famous Chateauneuf du Pape oval stones. Today was a highlight. I was bound for Sault, at the foot of Mont Ventoux, and would be cycling the Gorges de la Nesque. A quick café and croissant in Focalquiers then here I was again in the heat of the midday heading up the climb. But I didn’t mind. The views were fantastic. Heading on to Sault, across lavender fields, with the white-capped Mont Ventoux drawing nearer, I was reminded of my cycle ascent of this a few years ago on a cold early spring day, and how chilled I was by the time I arrived at the bottom. Not sensible.

I was drawing nearer to the Mediterranean and the end of the trip was approaching. But there were still a couple of fantastic highlights to come. The Verdon Gorge, another big climb, and thunderstorms were forecast from the middle of the day. I set off early, feeling very strong on the climb up in the cool of the morning – it was still sunny but a haze was drawing over. There were eagles wheeling about in the thermals. Photos were taken but the clouds were starting to mass and I pressed on – there was a high plateau to cross and I really wanted to be over this before anything started. Some distant rumbles spurred me on. Soon it would be time to test my new ultralight waterproofs. The monsoon descended but I was safely down in the valley with 10 miles to go. The waterproofs and overshoes passed with flying colours as I pedalled on in the torrent. The only serious rain I encountered on the trip – I was very lucky. And so to the final day of the ride, from Castellane to Nice over the Col de Luens and a fabulous down-hill switch back of gorge riding with mountain views everywhere and into the Gorge du Loup. My first glimpse of the Med in the distance, the route grew more and more populated until I was by the sea! It was almost over – a last few miles to ride along the sea front. I could hardly believe I had made it as I bowled alongside the Promenade des Anglais and the Quai des Etats-Unis. I looked longingly at the ferries bound for Italy, Corsica and Africa and realised that although I had run out of land I didn't want to stop. The sense of momentum and journey had become addictive.

Once at the hotel in downtown Nice near the station, feeling hot, tired and a bit bad tempered, I set to the task of dismantling the bike ready to take on the train early the next morning. I had an audience. With the bike dismantled, I realized that I was going to really



struggle even the few minutes to the station. I went out to buy a cheap wheely suitcase. That evening I found a lovely pavement restaurant, and celebrated with a kir royale aperitif. After a hot and mosquitoey sleepless night, at 5 in the morning, the concierge took pity on me and, deserting his post, helped to carry my luggage to the station. So far so good, but I realised when the TGV arrived at the Gare de Lyon, I would have to get a taxi rather than the underground to Gare du Nord for the Eurostar. On arrival I was caught completely unawares by a

hustler who whisked my luggage onto a trolley and set off at high speed to deposit it at the Eurostar gate, then aggressively demanded 10 euros (which I refused to pay and a scene ensued). I cursed myself for not being more alert. At the other end, moving the luggage from St Pancras to Kings Cross was a slow process. I toyed with the idea of putting the bike together (there is a bike station area at Eurostar for this purpose) but I had managed to lose a vital bolt from the pannier rack. However, there was time to slowly heave the luggage to Kings Cross and a lovely stroke of luck when I bumped into a work colleague catching the same train back up to Edinburgh, where I arrived about midnight.

I was on a high for days after I returned! Full of euphoria and physical and mental energy, a long cycle tour is highly recommended. As a first, and solo, cycle tour I was really glad that I had opted to credit-card tour, but another time, with a companion or two, it would also be a nice option to camp, and to take more time to explore. And I would definitely rethink the return strategy. Different routes and trains in France have different rules for bike transportation and another time I would take longer to return, using regional trains where the bike can remain assembled if necessary.

Climbing in Oman

By Michael Barnard

The Christmas / New Year period in Scotland is, in climbing terms – almost without exception – unremittingly dire. In rough order of likelihood, it tends to be either (a) warm and wet, (b) warm and dry, (c) cold but stormy, or (d) lovely crisp clear weather with bomber neve on the hills (but immediately following a big thaw so there's next to no snow to speak of). It can also be a time of flash floods or, occasionally, so much snow it isn't possible to get in to the crags.

Against this backdrop, going elsewhere to climb becomes rather attractive for those who can bear to drag themselves away from family reunions and excessive gluttony, and I jumped at the chance to join Robert, Lucy and Alis in sunny Oman. Tales of good quality limestone (though perhaps oxymoronic), fine rocky mountains, friendly people and next to no rain whetted the appetite for a trip away from my usual haunts.

Oman Air provided a good service and I arrived in Muscat Airport on the first morning in reasonable spirits considering my paltry half hour of sleep on the overnight plane. Robert was in a similar boat and together we drove out towards the mountains in a state of relaxed lethargy (Lucy and Alis were due in five days time). The sun's power encouraged further sleepiness and after a couple of brief stops we were lazing around camp by mid-afternoon.

Robert had been to the country five years previously and had enjoyed a day rock climbing on Jabal Kwar, so with an easy approach from a high village, that seemed a good option to start



off on the following day. For the first stage of the trip before the girls arrived, we had hired a normal road car and so some care was required in negotiating the steep approach track. With base of car hopefully still intact, we set off to the sounds of cockerel, goat and Arabic chatter.

Unfortunately, the climb was rather wandering and didn't live up to expectation, but we were back down early and ready for the short drive round to the north side of Jebal Misht ('comb mountain'). At around 2000m height, this is a superb peak with its indented towers which give it its name and massive main face and

protrusion. At various stages of our trip the hill was compared to Grandes Jorasses, the prow of Shiva and a couple of larger Himalayan giants. Sadly, the main face lies due south of the summit and the classic big route of the area, French Pillar, is consequently unclimbable to Brits. Robert had planned to attempt it on his previous trip and after a soul destroying slog up the easy side to cache water just below the summit, had managed to climb two pitches of this 1000m route before dwindling water supplies and baking heat suggested a tactical retreat. His cache is apparently well hidden and presumably still there for his next attempt.

We knew in advance we'd have to target north faces to have any chance of success, and a fine unclimbed shady buttress on the easy side looked like a good objective for the morrow. An early start saw us up at the crag in good time to scout around for attractive lines. The left

edge of the cliff was a bit easier angled and provided a fine crest for a few pitches before more ledgy ground led up to below a steeper wall, clearly the crux of the climb thus far. Robert was dispatched up a vertical crack; this looked like a great pitch and a fine lead until he was stopped below an incut cave which hadn't been visible from below. One abseil later, I was tied in and starting up another line of weakness linking two crack systems. A balancy exit from the first crack gave some pause for thought, but with decent protection I had no excuse and we'd found a way through the barrier. Easier ledge systems led up onto the summit ridge where we decided to dispense with the rope. A short distance later we came upon an unclimbable wall. Shit! With time marching on, searching around for other options seemed unwise and we started descending the face via a slanting groove, very fortuitously placed. A combination of scrambling and short abseils took us past steeper ground, just before darkness arrived for the walk down.

The main catalyst for this trip for Robert had been the annular eclipse forecast for Boxing Day morning, and we planned to make the long drive south to view it. With that in mind (and with the late finish from Jebal Misht) a shorter day was called for. Wadi Ghul is one of the many steep sided dry mountain valleys in Oman, but is something special in that its upper section opens out into the spectacular 'Grand Canyon of Oman', with the highest hill in the country, Jebal Shams ('sun mountain), sitting above. We had no plans for that summit today, but a pleasant two pitch crag located low in the wadi looked to provide a good shorter venue. And it did, but perhaps we should have heeded the guidebook's warning about this being best approached with a 4x4 vehicle! After some loud scraping noises, we quickly parked and walked the rest of the way.

This is definitely the first crag I've visited with a date plantation at its foot, and old shoes are recommended for the wet mud! After scrambling out of this and on to the starting ledges, we chose to start with 'Ersatzprogramm', a quality HVS route with an undercut jam crux on pitch one and a fine crack and traverse on the upper pitch. In terms of providing information, the climbing guide to Oman generally leaves quite a bit to be desired (with things like a single line on a photo for a 700m route),

but on this shorter crag Mr Oberhauser had done a reasonable job and the photograph clearly showed space for a potential new line! The crux groove was a fight all the way, thankfully with Robert close at hand for moral support (and with only a few wee pebbles dislodged in his direction), and at the top I felt quite chuffed to



scrape through on sight. That evening we visited a traditional-style restaurant, where Robert ate camel and a concerned waiter sprayed my cut-up arm with disinfectant. We also made an emergency garage visit where the mechanic extracted a small rock from the engine of our poor over-used car, then refused any payment!

With the long journey planned for the eclipse, Robert got a few hours driving out of the way that night before we turned off the motorway to look for somewhere to camp.

A side road and dead end offered a quiet spot and we were soon in our tents with the doors open for another starry night. We were woken in the morning by a couple of guys walking past on their way to work – we were camped right next to an unfinished flyover! After a leisurely breakfast we left the 'Roadworks Camp' and continued the long drive south.



Roadworks camp

The expected left turn towards the coast never materialised and we ended up doing an extra 200+ miles down and round to regain where we should have been. It seems a major town is missing from Robert's map (or its name has changed) and this is perhaps why we missed the turning.

The centre of the eclipse was in an area of coastal sandy desert, quite different to where we'd been elsewhere in the country. The wind was strong and made cooking difficult, with sand blowing everywhere, but in the morning it seemed to have calmed down and we woke up early in anticipation of the spectacle. Cloudy!



'One ring to rule them all...' (the eclipse)

It looked like we had been thwarted, Scottish style! But gradually we noticed a few gaps in the cloud and so there was a faint glimmer of hope that we might see something now and again. In the end it worked out perfectly as there were quite enough gaps but always a thin layer of cloud

so we could view it directly and indeed Robert got some great photographs. Next on the list was a morning swim in the nearby Indian Ocean – if only our seas were that warm! And a deserted beach too, that is until some local fishermen arrived by launching their boat straight out of the water. Their catch was some dark spotted flat fish which Robert might have bartered for, had they had better English.

After the mind-numbing experience of the interior motorway of the previous day we took the much more scenic coast road back north to Muscat, where we switched vehicles and picked up the other two. Tonight we were bound for Wadi Bani Alf, a spectacular 'glen' for which 4x4 vehicles are mandatory. The two finest natural features here are the Snake Gorge and the 'Gorgette', the latter a mini-canyon with some sport climbing on its side walls and camping spot below its entrance. We all did Lagerkoller, a two pitch line of VS standard from which one can amble up to the mountain village above, then scramble easily back down the Gorgette – a mini day out. Next day we all headed for the Snake Gorge (probably named for all the twists and



The approach to Snake Gorge

turns) for which to enter one has to wade the narrow section. The water is only about thigh deep and not too cold – a delightful approach!

While Lucy and Alis went for 'A Day at the Office', Robert and I chose 'Zahnburstl', a "brilliant and demanding climb". It was certainly demanding, but after a traverse pitch on friable rock we were questioning the first adjective. With the next pitch looking like more of the same except with the strong possibility of a fall directly onto the belay, we chose discretion rather than valour. Thank goodness we took the big hex! Our concerns about how the others would manage the abseil descent after their route (they only had 50m ropes) were soothed on finding out that they were also retreating. Ah well, you can't win them all.

A drive up to the top of the wadi and over the pass took us back down to the restaurant and 'hypermarket' to stock up for the next couple of days. The plan was to sleep out on the summit of regal Jebal Shams (2997m). The walk up takes about six hours carrying bivi equipment. Happily the path is well marked throughout and with a 9km walk for c1100m of height gain, is nice and gradual. There are dramatic views down into the 'Grand Canyon' and the ridge between the two summits is also photogenic if you choose to walk near the crest.

Cloud was billowing about and provided me with my first broken spectre since my first year hillwalking! The cloud sank down into the glens during the night and during the morning sunrise we were above a cloud inversion – truly a special experience.



The day after our descent, the girls dropped us off for the short walk up to Jebal Fokha (mountain of the backside!). The plan was to try 'Melanome', a rather ominous-sounding name for this good looking line up a series of cracks at UIAA VII- (E2-ish). Robert led the first pitch without incident, but I could see I'd have to be careful starting up the next one until I got some decent gear in. This I did, and I was just starting to enjoy it when a large block on which I had both hands detached itself and I went flying. My first thought was whether the block would miss me. This was immediately followed by whether it would miss Robert, a rather more important concern. Thankfully it did (though not by much), and my gear held so I didn't fall too far. That was a bit too close for comfort!



Sunrise from Jebal Shams

I managed to find a safer belay stance, bring Robert up and continue up the rest of the pitch, but the next pitch had more nasty looking blocks on it and with no belay out of harm's way we called time on that crag, our annoyance at the rock

quality starting to surface. The block had missed our bags by a matter of metres but Robert's water bottle was now leaking due to shrapnel. With plenty of time to kill at the pick-up point until the others returned, we sat down at a picnic table in the shade behind someone's house. The guy came out, saw us, went back in and came out with dates, water and Arabic coffee! Maybe it wasn't such a bad day after all. Meanwhile, the girls had gone to climb in Wadi Ghul and visit the nearby village. The highlight of the day, at least in the telling, was a misunderstanding between Lucy and a local villager. They were in a date plantation and Lucy was trying to ask him about dates. "Ah yes, we could go to Jebal Shams or Wadi Nakkar?"

With our renewed worries over the general quality of Omani rock, I was keen to revisit Jebal Kwar where Robert had done a quality route on his earlier visit. At least Lucy and I could team up and set off for that route in the knowledge that it was good. And it was, once I had worked out that the guidebook topo for the first 'crux' pitch was incorrect and I didn't have to climb past death blocks without pulling on them. The correct



Travelling in style

way was really nice and about UK 4b. Lucy skilfully managed to avoid the 'jump' on the penultimate pitch by leaning into the gap then calling for a tight rope!



Crest Route on Jebal Misht

We needed something good to finish off with, and on our Jebal Misht day Robert and I had seen a brilliant line up the crest of the main ridge leading up to where we had descended on that day. The crest is split by a corner which we climbed in three pitches, with Robert safely ensconced in caves or off to the side throughout – he wasn't taking any chances! Above this, he led a nice groove to belay level with the base of the barrier wall of our earlier route. We could have walked right from here towards the other line, but a miniature ridge leading to a wide crack right on the crest had to be tried. The ridge was easy and the crack an awkward thrutch, but what a position! This

was proving a lot easier than expected – most welcome – and with no cul-de-sacs

encountered we joined the shared upper section several hours earlier than we had last time. But what about the unclimbable wall? There was an easy way, just to the side.

Oman is a lovely country with friendly people and nice weather (just be sure to go in the winter!). The climbing isn't world class and the walking will be very hot in the sun, so it is worth not being tied to just one activity. Lucy and Alis went snorkelling with big green turtles – as good as it sounds – before meeting us and on our final day we all became tourists and visited the Beehive Tombs (dating back to the Bronze Age), Nizwa Fort and the Souq.

Glenshee Roads – The Immortal Memory of Nan Shephard

By Cathy Southworth

Verse one

Almost heaven, Choire Etchachan
Silent dark loch, rock-strewn plateau
Climb of ecstasy, to the final peak
For Nan immensity, in her mind achieves

Chorus

**Glenshee roads, take her home
To the place, Nan belongs
Scottish Cairngorms, mountains mamma,
Take her home, Glenshee roads**

Verse two

'bove Gleann Eanaich, 'lone, expectant,
Senses heightened, dazzling blue vision
Glitter-white mountains, as far as eyes can see
Nan is besotted, and so her love begins

Chorus

Verse three

I hear her voice in the mountains that surround me
The words remind me I'm not alone in how I feel
And being in this place I get a feeling that I've come back home
To myself, to myself

Final Chorus

**Northern roads, take us home
To the place, we belong
Wild Scotland, mountains mamma,
Take us home, Northern roads**

Camera Trap

By John Burns

"I'm knackered," Bill slumped into a chair at in the far corner of the bothy and began rolling a joint. "I swear that camera gets further away every time we go there."

Bill always moaned about walking anywhere so Ian ignored him and felt in his pocket for the memory card in its small plastic case.

Bill lit his spliff and inhaled slowly relishing the heavy aroma of weed. "I'm no going next time. It doesnae take two of us."

Ian flipped the lid on the laptop and slipped the memory card in the side as he lowered his lean frame onto the rough wooden chair. "You know the rules. We both have to go."

"Who's tae bloody know," Bill snapped, smoke belching from his mouth with each word. "This bloody bothy is miles away from anyone. There's no even a phone signal for Christ's sake. We could take it in turns. No cunt would know."

Ian tapped the touch pad on the computer and watched as the screen came to life. "I'd know."

"For fuck sake," Bill snarled, scratching his thick dark beard. The smoke barrelled from his nose in two parallel lines. "Ten days in this bothy's too long. No electric, no running water, no internet, no phone. It's a bloody derelict house."

"I like being here. It's peaceful here in the hills," Ian barely looked up from the glowing screen.

Bill grunted. "You can keep peaceful. I could be home with the widescreen watching the footie. If they didn't pay so well to look for they damn cats I'd be out of here I can tell you."

The pair fell silent, the tension between them filling the room as the light from the bothy window caught the smoke from Bill's joint. Ian focussed on the screen as the icons for each short video on the memory card appeared.

"Is there many?" Bill asked as he rose from the armchair.

Ian scrolled to the bottom of the screen. "One hundred and fourteen."

"Oh for fuck sake. Youse are welcome to that," Bill stomped across the room and headed for the kitchen calling over his shoulder as he went. "You want some tea?"

Ian sighed. Bill was calming down as he always did after a few minutes and a joint. By three in the afternoon Bill got twitchy, needing his first blast of weed. At first Ian found that irritating but now he just accepted it. Bill couldn't function without weed, that was just the way it was.

Ian clicked on the first twenty second video the camera trap had shot. Nothing moved in it. There was the log leaning at an angle and the bait sitting untouched. He searched another six, same thing nothing moved. That was the trouble with camera traps, too sensitive. The slightest movement could set of the motion sensors, or a tiny change in temperature caused by the sun on the log would trigger the heat sensor. Nothing for it just to go through all of them one by one. Twelve slides in, there was a movement in one of the videos. Perhaps it was an ear, possibly a leaf. As he watched something moved on the edge of the frame, there

was definitely something slightly out of shot. Ian held his breath. A Roe Deer walked over to the log and sniffed at the bait.

“Shit,” Ian allowed himself the little curse. Bill’s constant trickle of obscenities made Ian want to swear less but every once in a while, he let himself use a profanity. If you swear all the time what’s left to say when things are *really* bad, he’d said to Bill. Bill had shrugged his shoulders, cursed again and taken another pull of weed. There was no reasoning with him.

A mug of tea landed next to the computer attached to Bill’s arm, “What is it.?”

“Roe deer,” Ian yawned.

Bill plodded over to his seat. “It’s always Roe Deer.” For once he didn’t swear.

“Or Squirrels.”

Bill laughed, “Oh aye, I forgot about the squirrels.”

Or maybe the wind, or a blue tit Ian thought, or any of the hundred things he’d seen trigger the camera over the last month. Sometimes it was just nothing at all.

There was the hiss of a beer can opening from Bill’s corner, “I’m needing this I can tell you.” Bill poured half the contents of a can of Punk IPA down his throat in one go. The heady scent of the craft beer filled the room.

Ian was about to open the next video when the low charge warning popped up on his laptop. “Oh no, now the power’s gone.”

“It’ll be that connection again. Needs checking,” Bill didn’t move, he was in the process of rolling another joint and it was obvious he had no intention of going anywhere.

Ian sighed and rose from the computer. Outside the bothy the summer sun was still high in the sky. It would be another hour before it dipped below the hills. Then the air would grow chill and they would have to light the wood burning stove. Ian was lean and fit and covered the few hundred yards of rough ground between the small stone dwelling and the bank of photo electric cells with ease. Ian knelt behind the cells and picked up the wire that led back to the bothy. He unwound the gaffer tape and pushed the two metal sections of the connector together. Ian looked back at the doorway of the stone built cottage nestling beneath the green hills. The door opened and Bill’s stocky bearded figure emerged, beer in one hand joint in the other. Bill grinned and gave the thumbs up sign calling something indecipherable. Ian laughed, pleased that Bill had managed to rise from his chair long enough to check that current was flowing.

For the next hour and half Ian checked through the video captures from the camera. Most had nothing in them save the log and its bait, but Ian had to watch all of them in case there was a sign of a cat. By now Bill several cans and a number of joints in to his evening relaxation was snoring in his chair. As he started to check the last twenty or so videos, getting into night shots now, Ian realised he was beginning to feel hungry. He glanced at the time, it was six fifteen.

“Bill! Bill!,” Ian called to the sleeping figure.

Bill opened one eye, “What?”

“It’s gone six.”

Instantly Bill began to rouse himself and reached for his jacket simultaneously. “For Christ’s sake why didn’t you tell me?”

“It’s not my fault if you’re tanked up and spark out is it?”

Bill had his jacket on by now and was heading for the door. “She’ll want to know why I’m late. I’ll tell her it was your fault.”

Ian smiled, “Send Beth my love.”

“Piss off,” Bill headed off to walk twenty minutes up the hill to get a phone signal and call Beth, his wife. This was his daily ritual. Ian realised long ago that for all Bill’s macho brashness he was devoted to her. Even when rain swept down the glen and battered the bothy roof he would mutter obscenities at having to perform the duty, pull on his waterproofs and set off to make the daily call. It was all an act, he was desperate to talk to her. In the rough room where they slept, Bill had stuck a picture of himself and Beth taken only a few weeks before their wedding three years ago. It was taken in some pub but Ian couldn’t remember which. She was dressed in a simple print dress and looked pretty, a big open smile on her face, beautiful blue eyes and her dark hair tied back. Ian remembered the day well; Beth was looking out of the picture with her head slightly tilted, the way she often did. Bill looked more than a little drunk and had his heavy arm draped around her shoulders a big grin on his face. He might look a bit of an oaf, but no one who looked at that photograph could be in any doubt that Bill was as in love as it’s possible to be.

Ian clicked on the next video clip but only half watched it. He was growing bored and wondered just how many clips he’d watched in the time he and Bill had been setting the camera traps. Then a movement on the video caught his eye. It was on the edge of the screen and only appeared in shot for a split second but it looked like an arm. A human arm. Ian checked the timer, 3.34 AM. Ian replayed the video. After a few attempts he was able to freeze the image just as the arm appeared. It was a grainy shot. Perhaps it was an arm, or maybe something else.

“Who would be there at that time of night?” Ian muttered to himself.

It was a long way up the glen beyond the bothy and the camera was buried in the forest. He and Bill had been there hundreds of times but sometimes, if the mist was down, even they had to double check how to get there. Ian watched the video over again. When he froze the frame, whatever was in the image looked less like an arm, maybe he was imagining things. Then when he played the video, he realised it was more the way whatever it was moved that made him think it could be somebody’s arm. Ian watched the remainder of the videos but saw nothing unusual. At one point a badger tried to climb the log to get at the bait. He failed because it was too steep, it was deliberately set that way, but that was nothing unusual.

The bothy door rattled and Bill walked in looking happier now he’d spoken to Beth.

“Take a look at this,” Ian blurted out before Bill had entered the room.

Bill’s eyes brightened, “Jesus don’t tell me we’ve got a lynx at last?”

Bill was already bending over Ian’s shoulder staring at the screen. Ian shook his head, “No not a lynx. It looks like somebody’s arm.”

Bill ran his fingers through his thick dark hair puzzled, "Arm?"

Ian pressed play, "Well it could be."

Bill squinted at the screen on the laptop. He could see the log leant over against the stump, the small tray of bait half way along its length.

Then something moved in the corner of the screen "Is that it?"

Ian nodded.

Bill sighed and sat down in his chair. "That's no an arm," he said dismissively.

Ian snapped back, "Well tell me what it is then?"

Bill was already rolling another spliff. "It'll be Red deer."

Ian looked at the image again. "People say the camera never lies but it lies all the time."

The shape was blurred, something close to the camera. Ian played it twice more. To him there was something human about the movement on the screen

Bill was methodically laying out his weed, tobacco and cigarette. The burly Glaswegian was careless and clumsy about everything he did except his joint rolling. About that he was meticulous. "I wonder if we'll ever see a lynx. Three months since the tracking collars packed up. No one on this project has caught so much as a glimpse."

Ian snapped the laptop shut and almost raised his voice, "They're here. I'm sure of that."

Bill licked the cigarette paper and expertly rolled joint closed it one adept movement. If he sensed the anger in Ian's mood, he didn't show it. "Ah well you're the zoology professor. I'm just here to make sure you don't fall down a hole. What would I know?"

The last three days of their time in the glen were uneventful. The weather broke and filled the coire above them and the woods below with a soft rain misting the air and shrinking the world to a few hundred yards between them and the dank walls of low cloud. On days like these the wet seeped into everything. The bothy stank of a damp and even the stove couldn't dry the place out. Bill became increasingly morose, counting down the last of his beer ration and the nights until he could get home.

On the final day of their shift Bill rushed about collecting his belongings and packing them away into his rucksack and a big red, waterproof grip. "Have, you seen my Mp3 player?"

Bill was always looking for something, he lost things all the time.

Ian was finishing his porridge, without looking up he pointed to the mantelpiece above the old black iron stove.

"Oh Christ, there it is," Bill stuffed the small silver player into a rucksack pocket and zipped it closed.

Ian savoured the last mouthful of porridge, sighed and leant back in his chair. "Of course, the chopper might not get in, what with the mist."

Bill rushed to the window and peered out into the grey wall of rain. "Oh Christ don't say that. I'm going stir crazy here."

Ian smiled to himself, it was difficult to resist teasing Bill sometimes. "Relax they'll be here in an hour or so."

It was two weeks later, while Bill was out calling Beth, Ian first saw the woman on the screen of the laptop. She was standing with her back to the camera looking at the log. The shot on the camera card was taken in the early hours of the morning but the night vision picked her up. It wasn't clear but you could tell it was a woman. In the pitch dark she had walked through woods and spent almost ten seconds staring at the log. Hard to say how old she was, anything from 17 to 40 but she was there alright.

Bill came back into the bothy, noisy and blundering about as usual. "Bastard horsefly got me on the arm while I was talking. Right through my shirt."

Ian didn't answer. He sat staring at the screen.

Even Bill noticed. "What is it?"

Ian swivelled the laptop round so Bill could see the screen. "You better see this."

"Bloody hell," Bill watched the shot three times over. "Three AM!"

"Pitch dark," Ian nodded slowly. "How could she even find it in the dark?"

"Who is she? Bill looked hard at the screen.

Some faded memory stirred in Ian's mind. Something about how the woman had stood.

The next day, when they went up to the camera trap they searched for any signs or traces of the woman.

Bill stared at the ground where she had stood. "There's nae marks. Not a blade of grass has been moved. Nothing."

"Weird," Ian joined him and peered about at the bushes.

"There'd be a mark," Bill was confident of his tracking abilities. "A footprint. The grass flattened. Something."

"Maybe she came in a different way."

"There is nae other way," Bill waved at the thick forest around them. "I don't like this."

Ian could see Bill was shaken. "Maybe it's some echo warrior girl looking for the lynx."

Bill snorted and pointed to the ground. "Aye, who can fly. Let's get out of here."

Bill was quiet in the bothy that night. No joints. He just sat and stared until it was time to phone Beth.

When he came back from his call he was agitated. "I've got to go home. Something's come up."

"What..." Ian tried to ask.

Bill cut him off. "I've got to go. I'll walk out. If I'm quick I'll catch the bus from the end of the glen. Hitch even."

In ten minutes Bill was gone. He had thrown a handful of things into his rucksack and marched off down the glen.

In the silence of the bothy Ian watched the video of the girl over and over. There was something familiar about her but he couldn't work out what. Something about the way she held herself perhaps. He couldn't see her clearly enough in the night vision.

The next day Ian walked up the glen alone. It was warm and a gentle breeze kept the midges and horseflies at bay. He should have phoned in to the office but the project manager wouldn't be too impressed by Bill storming off and Ian didn't want to get Bill into more trouble than he already was. There was no ghost girl on the tape from the night after Bill had left. Ian was relieved if he was honest. The thought of a woman wandering the woods in the darkness while he slept wasn't best way to lull yourself to sleep.

Ian detoured the few hundred yards to the small hillock where it was possible to get a phone signal. He dialled Bill's number, the phone rang for a while and then went to answer phone. There was a sudden stab of pain in Ian's left arm. He looked down and a horsefly was biting into his arm.

Back at the bothy Ian began to tidy up. Bill had left his jacket hung over the chair and when Ian picked it up something metallic fell from one of the pockets and clattered under a chair.

"Oh damn," Ian bent and reached under the chair, fumbling with his fingers for the object. His fingers tips found something smooth. Ian pulled it out, it was Bill's phone.

Ian looked at it in disbelief. Bill was always casual about his things but leaving his phone was incredibly careless even for him. Ian glanced at the screen. No calls. How could there be? There was no signal in the bothy. Ian put the phone down and set about setting the stove and the putting the kettle on. He hardly dare admit it but he was beginning to miss Bill's grumpy presence. The bothy wasn't the same without the smell of weed. Ian went over to Bill's beer store, opened a can and sat down. Another long night.

By the next morning Ian had made a decision. He couldn't cover for Bill any longer. He would walk over to the small hill where he could get phone reception. By now Bill would have realised he'd left his phone and tried to call him, perhaps letting him know when he'd be coming back.

Ian was walking up the small hill towards the spot he knew he'd get a signal when he realised he was sweating. He was rushing. Why there was no urgency in this? Ian had a sudden sense that something was wrong. He pulled his phone out, except it wasn't his phone, he found Bill's in his hand. Bill never locked his phone, claiming it was too much trouble. Ian switched the connection on and waited while Bill's phone beeped with three days of texts, emails. But there were no missed calls. No messages from Beth.

Call Beth. That's what he'd do. Bill would be with her and they could try and sort this out. If Bill came back now they could keep the last few days absence from the job to themselves. Ian opened Bill's phone. There was Beth smiling back from the contacts list. Ian fumbled with the phone and opened the recent calls list by accident. The list was empty. No nightly calls to Beth at six o'clock, in fact no calls at all. Ian stood, puzzling at the absence of calls when he felt a sharp pain in his arm.

He slapped his elbow. "Bastard!" A horsefly dropped dead into the grass.

Ian called Beth. A man's voice answered, furious. "Where the fuck are you? Tell me you bastard. Tell me!"

Ian hung up without answering. There had been desperation in that voice he thought, even fear perhaps. One thing he was certain of, it wasn't Beth or Bill. He opened his own phone and watched the missed calls come pinging in. None of the calls could be from Bill, he knew everyone who called him. Reluctantly he called the office and got hold of his boss. There was silence on the phone while Ian explained what had happened. He knew what was coming. Don't go to the camera site. Stay in the bothy. Chopper in tomorrow to either replace Bill or take Ian out.

"Okay, yes. Okay. I understand," he heard himself saying.

Back in the bothy he lit the small gas ring and watched the steam rise from the kettle. Might as well check out last night's camera card. It would be some consolation if he spotted a lynx, on this, probably his last night in the glen. The first thirty files showed nothing but the baited log and one shot of a badger trying to steal the bait. Then he saw her coming out of the darkness. The young woman. She turned towards the camera and her eyes shone in the reflected light.

Ian tried to search her features but the image was too dark. He searched the next ten files. Nothing.

He was finishing his tea when a thought crossed his mind. "The video editing software. It might help him to see her better."

He took the file with the image of the girl, waited until she was in full shot and then turned the brightness right up. Beth's face stared back at him out of the screen. She was looking at something out of shot. Her head slightly to one side in that way she had.

Ian began searching the other video clips. Beth was in all of them. Alone at first and then a man entered the shot. He was only there for a second and Ian didn't recognise him.

Then the last video file.

Ian watched Beth standing with her back to the log and staring at something beyond the camera. Then Bill's thick set figure walked into the shot. He and Beth were arguing. Ian turned up the sound, but all he could make out was muffled voices. The argument was escalating. The Bill raised his arm and lashed out. Beth went down. Bill turned, wrenched the camera from its mounting. Blackness.

By the time he reached the path through the forest to the camera Ian was blowing hard and sweating. He pushed his way through the forest his stomach churning. Ian walked into the clearing. There was the baited log. Same as it always was. Ian looked at the grass beneath the log. No sign of anyone being there and most important of all, no Beth. Ian leant against the log. He realised his legs were shaking but the fear had gone from him. He had half expected to find Beth laying beside the log. That seemed ridiculous now.

Ian turned and reached for the camera and there was Bill. He was eight feet from the ground. His body hanging from the tree, swinging gently in the warm breeze.



Inver Croft – Euan Cameron