

Jacobites Mountaineering Club
50th Anniversary Journal
2023-2024



Front cover – Loch Avon, February 2024 by Stuart McLeod

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Journal Editor's Comment

2024 being the 50th Anniversary of the Jacobites, this year's journal contains articles from members past and present to celebrate the rich history of the Jacobites, as well as a diverse selection of articles on this year's escapades.

Thanks to Alan Walker for suggesting a republic of a remarkable 1978 Journal entry on Patagonia by Douglas Anderson, which captures the spirit of adventure that has been central to the Jacobite philosophy over the years. This article is well complimented by Nicola McNeil's article on the lasting friendships that developed in the early years of the club and went on to be an enduring source of joy over the past 47 years. Thank you also to Allan Robertson for writing an account of the inspiring life of the late Bill Runciman, who was a key figure in the Jacobites, and Scottish mountaineering in general, for a number of years.

Finally, thanks to all the current Jacobite members who have contributed their memories of the Jacobite history and latest adventures for this past year.

This is my final year as the journal editor so good luck to Stuart Mitchell as my successor for future editions!

Stuart McLeod

Contents

Annual Summary

New Routes – Mike Barnard

50th Anniversary Articles

Patagonia the Hard Way – Douglas Anderson

47 Years of Jacobite Friendship – Nicola McNeil

Bill Runciman Obituary – Allan Robertson

The Middle years – Ros Clancey

President's Speech at the 2024 Annual Dinner – Katherine Ross

Member's Contributions

After the hunt – Euan Cameron

Walking the Dolomites Alta Via 1 – Robbie Hewitt

A Marmot Ate My Rucksack and Other Tales from the Canadian Rockies – Catherine Jones

Scotland to Austria by bike – Karl Zeiner

Climbing in Sicily – Richard Birkill

Cruisey E3 – Martin Bagshaw

The Walker Spur – Stuart McLeod

Annual Summary

Autumn 2023

After the deluge at the annual dinner weekend that caused significant flooding in Strathspey and the formation of a moat at Ruthven Barracks, a select few Jacobites went on a foray south of the border to stay at Low Hall in the Lake District on the weekend of 20th October where some autumn hill walking and local beer was enjoyed.



Alison, Iain and Robbie.

From mid-November winter arrived in the Scottish mountains and some climbers enjoyed some early season winter climbing, mostly in the Cairngorms. Other climbers; Martin, Lucy, Michael, Bob, Anna and Stuart cleared off to the Anti-Atlas of Morocco where some beautiful sunny climbing was enjoyed.

Winter 2023-2024

The Christmas Dinner meet at Muir of Inverey on 15th December coincided with strong winds, so the Jacobites used their wisdom and stayed low in Glen Quoich, before enjoying a beautiful meal prepared to a rousing rendition of Wham! Led by Ken.



The New Year at Inver was joyous as always and the Jacobites made the most of the winter conditions. Alison, Sarah, Ken and Iain enjoyed a Corbett in the Fannichs. Anna, Sean and Kit sought out an esoteric ascent of North Gully on Sgorr Ruadh, and returned for some crampon retrieval the following day. Michael and Doug enjoyed climbing Ace on Fuselage wall, and just made it back for the Hogmanay dinner. Martin's timing was relaxed but not so impeccable as he turned up on New Years day just as most left.



Elsewhere on the winter climbing front there were decent climbing conditions and good weather at the turn of the year, particularly in Glen Coe where an ascent of Crypt Route was followed by sublime winter light.



The Braedownie meet in Glen Clova on 2nd February was a popular meet with light snow cover and spring like conditions made for glorious hillwalking in the Angus hills and a customary wreckage inspection on Carn an t-Sagairt Mor.

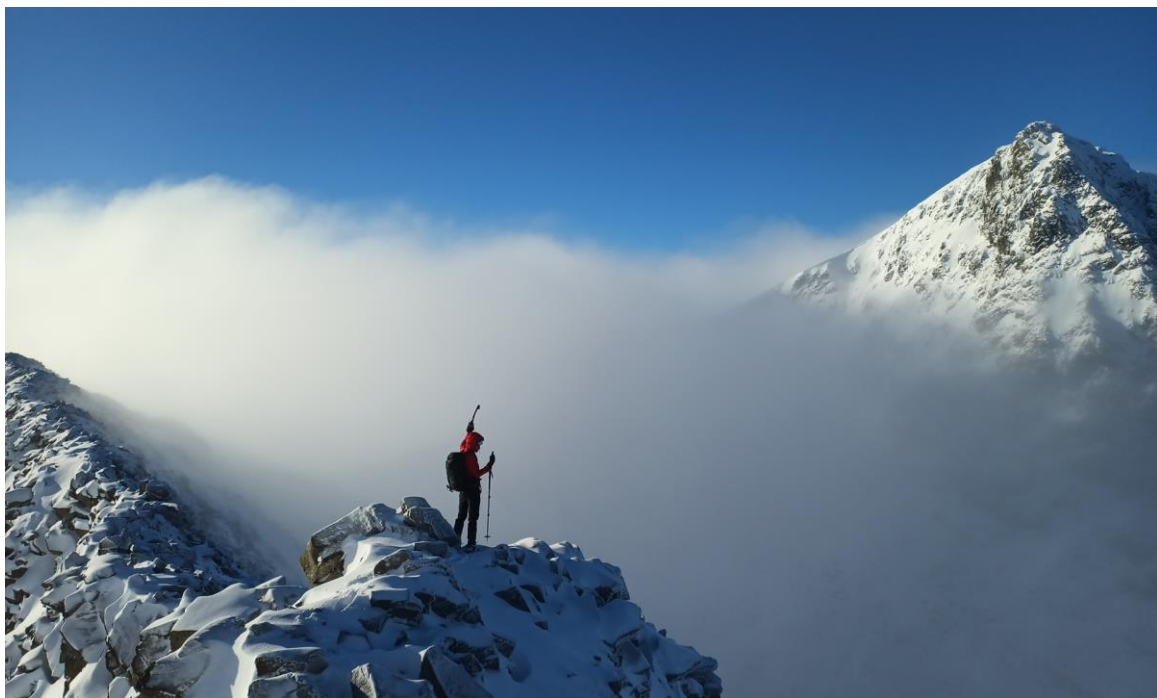


The meet to Inverardran on 16th February was a great: the Jacobites thoroughly enjoyed walks up An Caisteal and Beinn a Chreachain as can be seen in this photograph: the Fajitas were good too!



Classic scenes

Heavy snow directly before the CIC meet on the weekend of 23rd February rendered the approach to most routes unsafe, so the Jacobites sensibly opted for Carn Mor Dearg Arete and Ledge Route in beautiful weather. Miles' impeccable address to a chocolate haggis in the CIC topped off a fun weekend!



Ben Nevis from Carn Mor Dearg

Spring 2024

Spring got off to a great start on the Muir of Inverey meet on the weekend of March 1st. There was a fresh dump of overnight snow and good weather for the Jacobites to partake in a smorgasbord of activities in the Southern Cairngorms.



The novel trip to Loch Ken in Dumfries and Galloway on 15th March was less meteorologically blessed, but the Jacobites put in a stoic performance in the Galloway Hills and coast nonetheless.

The Jacobites were greeted by lashing rain on arrival at the Inver Easter meet on 28th March. Thankfully, this gave way to excellent spring conditions and views from Ben Damph Sgurr na Feartaig and Beinn dearg.



Beinn Dearg

The weekend of 19th April saw a fine trip to the beautiful Strawberry Cottage in Glen Affric. There was a group ascent of the misanthropic Beinn Fhionnlaidh via Carn Eighe and Mam Sodhail, whilst two Fionas did Mullach na Dheiragain and Sgurr nan Ceathramhnan.



The Glen Affric hills in mint spring condition

Sebastien Strong attended the Isle of Canna meet on the weekend of May 3rd at the ripe old age of 6 months: his first ferry journey. Some pleasant climbing was enjoyed by the Jacobites amongst the beautiful island setting enriched by abundant wildlife and culinary delights.

The Inver Work Meet on the weekend of 17th May was well attended and the helpers were rewarded with decent weather. Work on the water system, gable end pointing and walk way were carried out – thanks to all the Jacobites who helped out and to Munro for supervising!



The meet to the Inverie Bunkhouse on Knoydart on the weekend of 24th May was a belter! There weather afforded clear views from the summit of Ladhar Bheinn and for a relaxing pint in the Old Forge and a Ceilidh.



Summer 2024

Miles, Ken and Graham visited the mighty Clashgour Hut on the weekend of 14th June: they survived the shoogly mezzanine and had great views North to the Glen Coe hills and Ben Nevis.



The beautiful setting of the Loch Ossian youth hostel was the venue of choice for the weekend of 5th July where Beinn na Lap and a round of the Beinn a' Chumhainn to Carn Dearg circuit, whilst spotting an abundance of wildlife: things were no less wild back at the Youth Hostel on Saturday evening.

Autumn 2024

The trip to Kilmory Hall on Arran on the weekend of 13th September was an annual highlight for Ken. He tore round some scrambling on Casteal Abheal and Graham undertook a foray round the South Coast with a scrambling detour due to Bennan Head being impassable at high tide. The enjoyment of the meet was further enhanced by a trip to the Lagg Inn for some awesome beer, pool and an impromptu karaoke session with the locals.



The Jacobite year ended with the much anticipated 50th anniversary dinner celebration. Members past and present had an excellent time together at the Myreside Pavilion in Edinburgh. Alan Walker, Ros Clancey and Katherine Ross made excellent speeches to celebrate the community and achievements of the Jacobites over the last 50 years. A special thanks must also go to Richard Chandler and others who organised this great event!



The Jacobites enjoying the 50th Anniversary. Photo by Noel Williams

New Routes

By Mike Barnard

At the Round Tower (Aberdeenshire), Martin was *A Very Naughty Boy* (E3 6a) when he failed to take on the full challenge of the new 'Messiah' line. Perhaps this was understandable after the rigours of the lower section, which I just about managed to aid up on second.

In the summer I enjoyed a flying visit to Skye to team up with Lucy and my 71 year old friend Rick Graham, who had spotted a new 'king line'. This turned out to be *Before the Gold Rush*, a direct start to The Klondyker in Coire Lagan and featuring a big arête and even a short offwidth crack. E1 mountain routes in one's eighth decade – something to aspire to?!

Patagonia the Hard Way

by Douglas C. Anderson

In the beginning

The story really started in the winter of 1974 when I first read Eric Shipton's book "Land of Tempest". Shipton's writings gave the impression of one of the world's most fearsome places and perhaps because of this the prospect of encountering such a hellish wilderness became an irresistible challenge. However, in the meantime I decided to go to East Greenland for the summer of 1975 so the plan was put on the shelf along with other "good ideas". The Christmas after the Greenland trip I went to the Alps and on the way home I called in to see Shipton at his farm-house outside Edrington. I knew it was a dangerous thing to do because in all likelihood I'd get carried away and talk myself into something ill-considered. Thus it proved, and after a few hours of enthusiastic discussion I came away fired with the prospect of a mammoth, almost year-long, expedition.

For various reasons (mostly silly) the idea of sailing to Tierra del Fuego has always seemed very attractive and so it was that with great keenness I set about looking for a suitable vessel. At the time I had not a clue about sailing. My sea experience was restricted to looking over various harbour walls plus a couple of channel crossings on the Townsend ferry. Still "ignorance is bliss" they say and it does help you sleep better. The only thing to remember is not to get scared when realisation eventually dawns. Initially the prospect of converting an old Scottish trawler looked promising as at the time there were a lot on the market at give-away prices. However, time dragged by and I got no nearer converting my £200 overdraft into the £15,000 credit that was required, even at giveaway prices.

Eventually I came across Ian Rennie who had half a boat but no money. However, it was a start and in retrospect proved to be a real turning point for the project. By June '76 we were irreversibly committed and our departure was provisionally set for the 1st August 1977.



Eloisa, building – credit D Anderson

For the previous three years Ian had worked both weekends and evenings to lay the foundations for a massive 60 foot ketch. At the time its hull stood alone and empty at the

yard in Granton looking very impressive but distinctly unfinished. In fact it was hardly started. In the coming months vast quantities of materials and man hours were expended in an agonising effort to get her ready on time. [Archivist's Note: construction was concrete layered on a reinforcing frame of chicken wire] An unending procession of crises came and went. Naturally money (or lack of it) was our major problem and many hours had to be spent scrounging, borrowing and bowing to bank managers.

The launching of the Eloisa was an epic of the first order. Often working through the night in pouring rain we struggled with welders and great chunks of steel to get things prepared on time. On the morning of the great day a gigantic 150 ton crane arrived and we gave it a try. The plan was to lift the Eloisa onto a trolley, cut the rope and "whoosh" into the sea - simple as that. As with many master plans it didn't go quite like that. First a storm wrecked the slipway then the lifting gear fractured and the trolley collapsed and then (not having time to wait) the tide went out. However, despite such a catalogue of near disasters, two weeks' later the Eloisa was floating in the bay as though nothing had happened. After the launch and much to the chagrin of the harbour master, we took her into Granton Harbour to fit out. From the day of our arrival the harbour master made the utmost effort to get rid of us. It was, however, vital for us to remain and so we did, in spite of all he tried to do. It never actually reached the point of our being towed away by force but it came pretty close.

We had launched a month late and the Eloisa wasn't anywhere near ready at the beginning of July. Delays with materials held us up further. The masts had been stepped but they flapped about unsteadily in every breeze because the proper rigging hadn't arrived. Every second day the harbour master (or Adolf as we called him) would come down the pier ranting and raving about our presence. He would not believe that we wanted the Eloisa to sail just as badly as he did. Early September saw the Eloisa departing for Hamburg on her North Sea trials. The story of this ten-day trip is another epic, but one not to be recounted here.



Eloisa under sail credit D.Anderson

The crew returned battered and weak after a succession of gales, equipment failures and sea-sickness. When I looked down from the pier on the morning of her return the Eloisa already looked old and battle scarred, stanchions bent, sails torn and everything bleached and encrusted with salt. The tired crew stumbled around ashen-faced and incoherent as drunks.

The Voyage

In the days that followed, the three of us who had not taken part in the trials busied ourselves stowing the two tons of equipment and supplies and quietly tried to restore morale. Whose idea was this anyway? Suddenly we were away: after seemingly endless months of chaos the last line was cast from the shore. It was the 1st October and keeping with our normal practice it was cold, dark and blowing a gale (from the North West). The good ship Eloisa, although well down in the water with her load, moved quickly under the pressure of the following wind as we ran down the Forth. I was nervous (scared) so I kept myself busy. Being a crew of climbers with no knowledge of the ways of ships and sea, we found the early days a bit trying. In retrospect things went smoothly enough considering our ignorance of the business.

Equinoctial gales blew us down the North Sea coast and through the English Channel before setting against us and making a rough passage across the Bay of Biscay. A force nine blew out the clew of our storm sail and we had to lie a-hull through a bad night. By the time we reached Portugal we had a hole in the hull, two torn sails and leaking diesel tanks. The latter didn't look like being a problem as we had no funds for buying more fuel anyway. Unfortunately the spillage had contaminated the water supply and henceforth we had to carry half our rations in old beer barrels. By this time most of the crew were seasick and sick of the sea — dry land was the place to be!

Unfortunately, Ian Carr (the geologist) and myself chose the wrong way to reach it and ended up wrecking our new inflatable dingy and having a bad set-to with some rocks. Ian needed 30 stitches; I had about ten. The "good idea" came under heavy criticism again. However, this episode proved to be another turning point and things were to improve from now on. The sea grew calmer, no one was sick anymore and the sun shone. By the time we reached Rio I think we had even learned to sail (although that's probably open to debate).

The big Ocean didn't bring much excitement except when the engine room flooded and the pumps jammed. We spent a lot of time sunbathing, eating and reading, now and again taking a turn on the wheel or changing sail. One morning I cooked 40 flying fish for breakfast. Rio must be the rock climber's paradise — sun, cheap booze and plenty of beautiful women (good hard granite too). When we could drag ourselves away from the visions on the Copacabana beach (not very often), we entertained ourselves on the truly massive intown crags. Dick and Willie climbed a hard pillar on the precipitous west face of Sugar Loaf Mountain. Appearing suddenly on the summit, they startled a crowd of tourists by devouring oranges from a bird table in an attempt to quench their thirst. Then followed a struggle to get down on the cable car without any money.



Eloisa in South Atlantic, credit D.Anderson

When the attractions of the Rio flesh pots had worn off we set sail again Southwards, intent on making the 2,500 miles to the Straits of Magellan in one hop. January winds were strong and mostly from the South and South West; this meant a good deal of tiring and uncomfortable beating into the wind. Now being so near our objective, it was very-frustrating, when time after time we would have to reduce sail or lie a-hull while gales blew us back the way we had come. On the morning of the 25th day out from Rio we passed under full sail through the first narrows and into the Straits of Magellan. It was an exciting start to the day. With all sails set and reaching on a flood tide the Eloisa was making a good 14 knots. On the shore a herd of guanacos watched us pass and around us a school of dolphins played. A group of Magallenic penguins scattered from our bows. Only 40 miles from our landfall, our first Patagonian storm sprang out of the West and threatened to blow us back out into the Atlantic. With some difficulty we managed to come under the lee of a small point on the Southern shore, and rode the storm out at anchor. The prospect of losing our hard-won ground and again having to beat into the straits meant we kept a keen anchor watch through the night. After 18 hours the wind subsided and we motored through the second narrows and the last miles to Punta Arenas.

Tierra del Fuego

It was early February and we now had only a hundred miles to go from Punta Arenas to our first operational base at the head of Seno Agostini in the Northern Cordillero Darwin. In Punta Arenas we learned that the famous old Everest pioneer Bill Tilman and the crew of the En Avant (a converted Dutch tug) were missing somewhere in the South Atlantic. This came as a bit of a shock to us as the En Avant had left Rio only three weeks before us and we had followed its track until 300 miles off the Falkland Islands. However, we couldn't add anything to the mystery as we had seen nothing and the weather we had experienced would not have been bad enough to send a seaworthy vessel to the bottom.

After a few beers, Dave (our Cobber from Bonnie Melbourne) and I went off to the Institute of Patagonia to study the aerial photographs which can be viewed there. This is a practice I can thoroughly recommend to expeditions visiting the lesser known regions of Tierra del Fuego and the Patagonian Andes. The photos, both obliques and verticals, were taken by the U.S. Air Force in the 1940's and a study of them can save many wasted hours in the field. We spent two full days sifting through the library but the effort was well rewarded with information about landing sites which would give easy access to the interior ice. This type of information is very valuable in these regions because the persistent poor visibility and almost impenetrable forest make reconnaissance extremely difficult and time consuming.

At two o'clock on a cold morning we left Punta Arenas with our customary panache. Ian Carr arrived two hours late utterly gutted after a farewell party given in his honour by the locals. The delay made us miss the tide which in turn meant we ran aground ten yards off the pier — much to the amusement of the assembled crowd. At dawn we were sailing South West off the infamous Cap Froward (the Southern most tip of Continental South America). Heavy clouds darkened the sky ahead and grey mountains blocked the horizon above a black choppy sea. The 'Pilot' describes these coast lines as perhaps "the bleakest and most inhospitable on earth" but such was our anticipation that neither that nor the heavy rain could dampen our enthusiasm. A sudden "Willi Wa" (fierce squall) struck the Eloise and helped us fairly scud the remaining miles that day.



Credit D. Anderson

In the evening we motored into a very beautiful inlet, on the Western shore of Canal Magdalena and anchored for the night. It is said of the weather in this region that "each year there are 300 days of storm; on the remaining days the weather is merely unpleasant". Our next day was to be the exception which proved the rule. On leaving the inlet we motored across water like glass beneath a warm sun shining in a clear sky. The blue waters

were studded with small white icebergs and emerald green forest clad the shores. Above the forests towered great peaks each crowned with spectacular ice mushrooms. On such a day these fjords are the most beautiful in the world.

The 9,000 foot Monte Sarmiento stood dazzlingly clear, its dramatic face reminding us of how technically difficult these peaks can be. Monte Sarmiento was climbed, after many unsuccessful-attempts by a strong Italian team in the 1950's. As the day drew on the Eloisa slowly pushed her way through ever thicker drift ice towards the ice foot at the head of the fjord. A number of sea lions peered disbelievingly at us from adjacent ice floes as though astonished. So with this marvellous introduction we began our long sojourn amongst the unclimbed peaks of the Cordillera.

The weather closed in a few days later but left us with enough time to establish ourselves on the main ice at about 3,000 feet. We placed our main high-level camp in a vast ice basin surrounded by a circle of peaks and serac walls. Dave and I were the first to score when, after a four-day blizzard the weather cleared and we set off on skis to a high col to see if it would give access to the rest of the range. Conditions were excellent and we twisted our way through the many crevasses with no trouble.

The approach was ideal, being not too steep and relatively safe. However, from the top it was obvious that the descent on the other side was definitely not for Granny with her 80lb. pack. Great hanging sheets of ice dropped in three giant steps 4,000 almost vertical feet into the head waters of Broken Fjord. Although this was an undeniable impasse we now found ourselves in a good position to attempt a peak to the South. Without debate set about tackling a fine ice arete that ran from the col towards the summit.



Credit D. Anderson

We moved slowly at first both nervous after our long absence from technical climbing. It was straightforward enough, although steep in places (65°), and very exposed. Most of the time we moved together on good ice with just the odd runner as a gesture to the mammoth drop. The situation was magnificent in its isolation and as we tip-toed up our senses were sharp and alert both to the beauty and to the danger. As we gazed out from the summit over the snow clad peaks of the Cordillera, their tops glowed red in the setting sun. Descent meant climbing down because we didn't have enough equipment to abseil. Dave went first and then I had to shut my eyes before I could pluck up the courage to back over the edge onto the face. From the Col we were rewarded with brilliant skiing conditions for our return to the tent. Dave reckoned they would be calling on him any day to star in the new version of Down Hill Racer (the pattern of body shaped impressions alongside his ski tracks were part of his novel technique).

Two nights later Dick and Willie staggered into camp after a long grind up from the anchorage in a blizzard. The following day was fine and they went off to attempt a spectacular knife-edged peak we called Cerro Cuchillo. Dave and I went off for our third attempt on a 500 foot ice wall which blocked access to another col. On the first attempt we couldn't find the wall owing to the weather and on the second we were scared off after the first 100 feet by bad snow and falling stones. We really felt it was "shit or bust" this time but of course it turned out to be quite easy with only one avalanche causing us to move a bit quickly. We decided to fix a rope on the descent for hauling gear later. After about 400 feet we ran out of rope and had to abseil the last hundred feet using a chain of crabs, slings and bits of old tat. This caused some problems because it was dark and the last 20 feet were overhanging.

Continual storms plagued us but we managed to establish a camp on the Col and used it as a base for climbing two other peaks. Eventually, tired of the bad weather and the creaking of the crevasse in which the tent was pitched, we retreated to the snow basin. Lowering gear down the ice wall was tricky and on one occasion a load became stuck. I abseiled down to free it and, not realising that a lot of slack rope had accumulated, I kicked it. Off it went to impact on the glacier below. Not a major problem, except that the load contained Dick's skis. Thereafter he had to make do with one and a half skis, the half being made serviceable by hammering a new tip out of an old porridge tin.

Only one peak in the area remained to be climbed and this had already foiled two attempts by Dick and Willie. As we descended Dick pressed me to join him for one last shot. He assured me he had the mountain really sorted out and it would be a "cinch" this time. I wasn't all that keen, but it was a matter of principle with Dick (being a determined type) so I agreed. Dick, having climbed three-quarters of the mountain before, and seen no real difficulties above, reckoned it could be done (up and down) in only six hours. Fifty feet beyond his high point we hit a 300 foot overhanging ice wall (previously unnoticed). After ten hours we struggled onto the summit in the dark with snow falling thickly. My life's most horrific abseils followed, the last two taking us 300 feet to the bottom of a groaning and piss-wet crevasse. Fate saw us safely out onto easy ground by 3.00 a.m. (having spent 20 hours on a 6 hour climb).

Meanwhile those left with the Eloisa had added another two peaks to the score without incident. For a few days we pottered about gathering scientific things for people. One seaweed collecting spree almost ended in disaster. The sudden appearance of a sea lion disturbed Willie's concentration so much, that he inadvertently stabbed our inflatable with his Bowie Knife. With me at the oars and Millie with his finger over the hole we paddled back to the Eloisa as fast as dignity would allow.

Patagonia

We sailed West through the English Narrows to where the Magellan Straits meets the Pacific and then turned north into the Smythe Channel. As caution and our laziness dictated we made our daily runs as short as possible. We would anchor early and go ashore to satisfy our curiosity about the surrounding country. In this way we were able to climb an interesting peak on Peninsula Brunswick from our anchorage at Port Gallant. Port Gallant is the old anchorage used by Fitzroy's Beagle 150 years ago when surveying the Straits.

The climb went without problems and when we reached the summit rocks we discovered the mountain's capping stone consisted of a 20 foot wall of beautiful quartz crystals. From the top we could see many unclimbed peaks on Santa Innes and Desolation Island. But it was only a brief glimpse because they were soon shrouded again in their almost perpetual mantle of storm cloud. At the end of the day our descent was hastened by a magnificent 2,000 foot standing glissade which took us almost back to the Eloisa.

At the Northern end of the Smythe Channel an 8,000 ton freighter sits aground with its stern in the air testifying to the need for vigilance in these waters. We were now headed for Puerto Natales and the dreaded Kirke Channel which boasts a 14 knot current running through a narrow gap, made even narrower by three tiny inlets. A description of its first exploration makes it sound quite a gripper:- "They approached it cautiously through slack water but were caught by a violent counter current which drove them, quite out of control, so close to the larger island that for thirty yards their masts brushed against the overhanging, trees. Beyond the island she was caught by another current which sent her racing back through the very narrow middle strait, spinning as if on a pivot."

Not wishing to take this problem lightly we anchored in a seemingly sheltered bay so as to come upon the narrows early the next day. However, the night itself was not without adventure as very soon we became aware that our chosen bay was not as well protected as we might wish. Sudden "Willi Was" would come screaming down between the surrounding hills striking the Eloisa and heeling her over violently. It was very dark and the shore hardly visible although only 50 yards away. We were all tired as we sat down to eat when a change in the yacht's motion, and then a wave slapping over the coach roof, sent us tumbling out on deck. The anchor had dragged and we were drifting rapidly before the wind. The utter blackness and flying spray limited visibility to the wave tops a few yards ahead. No land could be seen but you could sense it all around. Our winch was out of action so we had to haul the anchor and 250 feet of chain by hand. Five of us sat in the bows, bracing ourselves against the seas, and heaving on the chain. After three hours of anxious searching and

careful sounding with the lead we found the bay again and stopped (this time with two anchors).

Next day the Kirke Narrows proved unexciting after the night's debacle and we made the remaining miles to Puerto Natales by early afternoon. We were encouraged to extend our stay in Natales by the fact that soon after arriving we were blown hard aground. The absence of tides at Natales makes floating off a problem so we sat where we were for a few days until we could summon the effort to unload the holds. Later with the help of a fat seaman called Nelson, and his cutter, we attempted to tow the Eloisa off. Half the town came to watch or lend a hand; those who couldn't make it were kept us informed of progress by periodic bulletins on the local radio. Eventually after many failures Nelson solved the problem by gunning his 40 ton cutter out across the bay until the 100 yards of slack hawser suddenly snapped tight and wrenched the beleaguered Eloisa into deep water.

Ian Carr and Dick had by this time used up their leave of absence from work and conscience and bankruptcy were forcing them home. To take their place Anthony Walker and Andrea Mountain had arrived from Blob's Cerro Torra base camp and were waiting eagerly to put to sea. Fools rush in . . .

So we sailed again, this time with Nelson as escort, back to the Kirke Narrows. We spent the evening at anchor with Nelson and his crew toasting our departure until we were all plastered.



credit D.Anderson

Next day we steered an erratic course to the north. From now on we averaged over 60 miles a day stopping at night only as darkness came. Seno Profundo, Puerto Beuno and Bahía Elizabeth were some of the bays in which we sheltered at night. We travelled always under leaden skies with rain and many sudden storms. It was early winter now and the cold kept everybody below apart from the helmsman who had to dance a jig round the wheel to keep warm. The continual bleakness had a depressing effect on us all and I often pitied Charles Darwin and the crew of the Beagle who had spent so many years in these waters. On April 15th we dropped anchor in a small bay at the head of Seno Eyre. It had been a slow day of nosing carefully through the ice-strewn waters. The land around the anchorage was particularly beautiful with the massive snout of the Piox XI glacier in the background.

In the meantime we were struggling with our problems — bad weather, bad navigation and Willie's hernia. The hernia although occasionally painful for Willie didn't really delay us which is more than can be said for my navigational error. Some mental blank caused me to add the magnetic variation instead of subtracting it and the resultant course difference was 32°. Although embarrassing for me it did provide us with some magnificent views of Fitzroy and Cerro Torre which we wouldn't otherwise have seen. The weather was mostly bad and required navigation by compass. However, sledging conditions were probably better than would be experienced in the summer months. The lower temperatures gave an unexpectedly good surface and it was possible to haul our 300lb. sledge on all but three days when an exceptionally severe storm pinned us down. On the first day of the storm we tried to move as usual, but after great difficulty in packing the sledge we found that our combined efforts ground to a halt after only 100 yards. Such was the depth of new snow, that dragging the heavy sledge was impossible. We tried relaying loads but visibility was less than 50 yards and the high winds blew the tracks over in 5 minutes. Walking with the wind was possible but returning into it was exhausting and frost bite was a real danger, so after a further hour we quit. Three days later we dug out our equipment and continued the journey.

We sledged towards the Paso Marconi from which a glacier led down to the Rio Electrico and the Pampas of Argentina. Just after the pass we left the sledge and skis because the ice became steep and broken. We camped our last night on the ice just above an ice fall and in the morning descended without much difficulty to the lower glacier.

In the past 30 years this ice mass has descended six kilometres into the fjord and is now in danger of obstructing the entrance to Sono Exmouth. We had chosen this fjord as our first base in our attempt to cross the continental ice. The aerial photographs suggested that here we stood the best chance of access without a protracted battle with forest or the terrible serac barriers that are characteristic of the glaciers flowing westward. Unfortunately, the fjord was badly charted and despite careful sounding we struck a sand bar at the entrance. The sand bar may have been caused by glacial debris and pushed to its present position by recent movement of the glacier. We kedged off easily enough only to run aground ten minutes later. This time it proved more serious and it took some hours of hard work to get clear. At the head of the fjord where the Rio Trinidad enters a small bay we ran aground again. Luckily this was suitable for the site of our base so we stayed put. The rain continued

to fall day after day without a break and it was trying work breaking the trail up through the soaking forest to the Ice Cap. Even so we managed to relay all our requirements up in four days (instead of 20 plus, usually the case in these parts).

The Eloisa then left us (Willie, Dave and myself) to attempt the crossing of the Patagonia Ice Cap to Argentina while she in turn made the passage north to Valparaiso. With only our active crew they were a bit short-handed for the voyage and it turned out to be very arduous. It was expected to take 10 days, but in the event of major engine and steering failures plus a series of northerly gales delayed them. It wasn't until the 28th day that they made port.



Credit D Anderson

On that final afternoon we got entangled in a maze of very complex crevasses and it required some nerve-racking teetering along narrow ice aretes to escape. Towards evening we stumbled off the glacier's snout onto terra firma, 12 days after leaving the West coast took us a few more exhausting hours clambering over moraine and boulder fields to reach an ancient shack (Peidro del Frial) where we crashed out for the night.

The valley of the Electrico is not exactly the tourist hub of South America but some climbers do penetrate there in the summer months. Then, in May, it was absolutely deserted. For the next two days we ambled slowly through open birch woods deep in golden leaves, a welcome change from the jungle of the West coast. Not even the resident population of wild horses were encountered although we occasionally stood on evidence of their passing. On the second afternoon we descended an escarpment and forded a last river to reach the Pampas. At a little but two very surprised Gauchos entertained us with lamb stew and tea. I gratefully accepted a cigarette having run out a week before on the Ice Cap. Our reception here greatly surpassed our later treatment when we struggled nearer civilisation. It seemed that our little adventure was not destined to excite the approval of the Argentinian border patrol who took considerable exception to our arrival. These gentlemen can, I feel, be best described as, "lazy, dirty, undisciplined and pig-ignorant megalomaniacs". Of course I am biased. My view of them was coloured by the fact that we were searched, interrogated, forced to work, locked up and finally robbed at their instruction. After that they shook us by the hand and gave us 30 days to leave the country which we did, arriving in Valporaiso three weeks later to rejoin the battered Eloisa.

47 years of Jacobite friendship

By Nicola McNeil

In September 1977, the Jacobites had a meet at Loch Coruisk on Skye. Some travelled by boat from Arisaig and some from Elgol to camp or stay in the hut. It was a glorious sunny weekend and my first introduction to hillwalking and became the start of a 47 year friendship. Dorothy and I walked down to the boat at Elgol and met Wilma, recently returned from Canada with Roy, and Carole, an experienced walker from Aberdeen. Some members rushed to complete the Cuillin ridge in such good conditions, including Pav, Roy and Tony, while others took up water supplies or explored the delights of the terrain, our newly met group doing the latter. It was quite an introduction to hill walking for me!

Wilma, who was a P.E. teacher, decided we could do with getting fitter, so the four of us were detailed to meet outside the Commonwealth Pool every Thursday night for a spot of training. We began by running through Hunter's Bog and doing 10 lengths of the pool, but Wilma soon upped the stakes and had us running the whole way round Arthur's Seat and doing 20 lengths of the pool. From there we would adjourn to Henderson's for a meal and thence to the Covenanters for the weekly Jacobite get together. She was a tough task master but it paid off as we were then so much fitter for the meets over the next few years. The Jacobites were the source of infinite pleasure (and pain) as we scaled various peaks, explored wonderful terrain and made many good friends, including Andrea and Alison. We dreiped over bad steps, navigated a lot of mist, heard cuckoos while camping in Glen Rosa, walked Glencoe in moonlight while at Lagangarbh hut, camped in Knoydart, scaled Torridon peaks, joined Tony Bloomfield on Creag Meggaidh for his last Munro, with Willie Jeffrey carrying the champagne and cake, saw reindeer in the snow at sunset on top of Ben Macdui and walked out via Derry Lodge in the dark, and on all occasions with Wilma giving us encouragement.

In 1980, Wilma married Roy, Andrea married Tony and I married Iain, all club members. Iain and I left for the Pacific for 2 years. On our return, several of us had children which made getting up hills tricky. Five or six of us would then meet regularly to get up a hill or two, trying to add to our tally of Munros or just to be in the hills. From this group, the Walkie Talkies were born - Wilma, Dorothy, Andrea, Alison and Nicola, with Carole joining us at times, although latterly meeting some of us through music or geology. We have continued in the spirit of the Jacobites, exploring hills and the outdoors throughout Scotland, also staying in touch with other fellow Jacobites. In recent years as we have got older, various health issues have meant we go up hills less and more often take to our bikes, but always do a lot of talking. We treasure our times away together, and owe a lot to Martin Plant (founder member) and the Jacobites, for giving us great experiences and bringing us together for all these years.

Thank you!

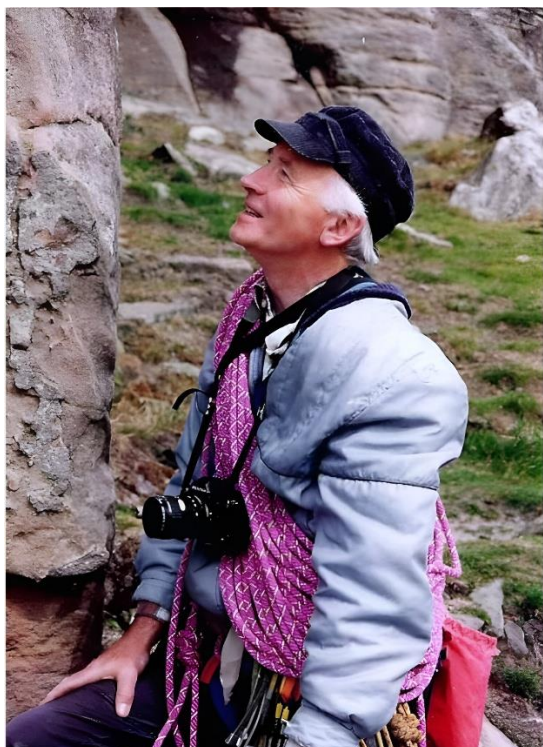
Nicola McNeill, Dorothy Degenhardt, Wilma Henderson, Andrea Bloomfield Alison Bramley and Carole Ross



Walkie talkies on the Forcan Ridge in 2006 (L-R) Nicola, Andrea, Dorothy, Alison and Wilma

Obituary - Bill Runciman j.1985

By Allan Robertson



Bill Runciman Photo: Ivor McCourt

William Chisholm (Bill) Runciman was born a son of the manse in war torn Greenock in 1941, and died on 9 December 2023 at Cameron Hospital, near Windygates, Fife, at the age of 82.

Bill's rich and varied life included roles as police chief superintendent, charity director, hill walker, climber/mountaineer, potter, Rotarian, and occasional "adrenalin junkie".

The mountains, and the great outdoors generally, were part of Bill's life from an early age, at least at a distance. In his recently found written account titled "*Progress in Mountaineering; Scottish Bens to the Himalayas*", he recalls growing up in Greenock and having a clear view, from his attic bedroom, over the River Clyde to the hills west of Helensburgh. On a clear day he could even see The Cobbler.

It was not until his forties, following his (first) retirement, that Bill would take up mountaineering in earnest. Bill joined the Jacobites MC in 1985. He was a keen and active member eventually becoming President in 1987/1988. Having started his mountaineering career late in life Bill was keen to catch up. Ascents of various routes quickly followed including Cioch Nose in Applecross, Central Buttress in Coire Mhic Fhearchair, on the Trilleachan Slabs in Glen Etive, The Old Man of Hoy with his cousin Neil McAdie, and winter routes on Ben Nevis and Creag Meagaidh – a truly eclectic mix for such a late starter.

Several of Bill's adventures were captured in written accounts in the JMC Journals over the years which I have enjoyed reading again, in retrospect. These included a successful ascent of The Old Man of Stoer in May 1985 – and an amusing description of getting a soaking on the Tyrolean traverse on the retreat as a result of what Bill described as "*calculations of the state of the tide being less than perfect*". His mastery of the traditional mountaineering literary understatement already evident.

Mountaineering took Bill to the European Alps, climbing the Matterhorn for his 60th birthday – a personal ambition and which resulted in another JMC Journal article titled "*Matterhorn Minutes Matter?*" - and twice to Nepal. In 1998 he attempted Imja Tse (6,165m, aka Island Peak), reaching the high camp (5,600m) before bad weather forced a retreat at the eleventh hour. In 2012, Bill had a more successful trip to Mera Peak (6,476m), on this occasion taking part in medical research, examining the effects of altitude on climbers, and raising sponsorship money for CHAS (the Scottish children's charity).

Closer to home he completed a large number of the Munros in both summer and winter, although the exact number was unknown even to Bill, with his list of "ticks" lost in the flit from Edinburgh to Charlestown.

While his climbing skills were well up to scratch, his navigating skills left a bit to be desired at times, and he was extremely grateful to the farmer's wife near Glen Orchy who, after a Bill "*detour*", gave him a lift that saved him at least a 10 mile walk back to his car.

Bill's JMC Journal articles were often reflective and thought provoking. In his 1988 article titled "*Tails You Win*" he recalls leading his first VS – *Sword of Gideon* in Applecross with Dave Dickerson in June 1987 – going bouldering in Torridon later that evening, brimming with confidence, taking a flyer, and ending up in Raigmore with an arm broken in three places, a dislocated elbow, and a broken heel bone for good measure. His recovery with the assistance of the physiotherapist (with whom he seems to have had a love/hate relationship), his eventual renaissance on a frozen Grey Mare's Tail the following winter, and his reflections on the perverse sport of climbing, makes gripping reading.

Another from the 1989 JMC Journal titled "*The Quality of Mercy*" in which he recalls an episode during a week-long stay in the CIC hut in what appears to have been pretty deplorable weather. Bill reflects, with great humour, on the dilemma faced by the incumbents in the face of, on the one hand a plea for assistance and access from a pair of bedraggled washout campers, and on the other the need to comply with the draconian hut rules on such topics. Common sense (and mercy) prevailed.

Again in 1990 Bill wrote a highly informative essay "*On the Usefulness of Scottish Flora to the Mountaineer*" in which he dissected the relative "*slip and cling*" factors of various native plants in Scotland (heather won hands down). Bill was after all a passionate gardener, his garden in Charlestown winning "*Garden of the Year*" three times in the local competition.

Bill's literary talents extended to poetry too as his "*To the Inver Mouse*" aptly demonstrated (with his sincere apologies to the Bard duly noted), the first and last verses of which went as follows –

*“Wee sleekit, cowrin, timrous beastie,
Is there a panic in thy breastie?
If not, foreby there should be
for we are deeved
You’ve scunnered Jacobites a plenty
and we are peeved”*

*“But mousie, all is not in vain.
We thocht of ways to spare your pain.
And built yon bridge owre by the lane
And wish you grace.
To move with wife and every wain –
To Jerry’s Place”*

My most vivid recollection of climbing with Bill was on a week-long JMC meet to the CIC hut in March 1987. Bill and I had a marvellous day on Tower Ridge – Bill leading the crux through the Gap with coolness and composure. The whole week was dominated however by the culinary exploits of four non-JMC members with whom we shared the hut. As Bill later recalled *“Four Frenchmen with thirty eggs, serving freshly cooked crepes; fresh lobster tails flambeed in cognac; fresh rabbit from France etc. etc. So you once carried up a chicken? Big deal!”* Our compatriots were none other than Godefroy Perroux and his three clients.

Bill also joined the Scottish Mountaineering Club (SMC) in 1988. During the 1990s he gave service as the SMC’s representative on the Scottish Countryside Activities Council (SCAC) and played a part with Donald Bennet in formulating the Access Concordat that anticipated the 2003 Land Reform Act. He was also a trustee of the Scottish Mountaineering Trust from 2001 to 2004 and served as a director of the SMT Publications Company 2003–2008.

On JMC club matters, Bill played a key part in the leasing and renovation of Inver Croft at Achnasheen in the late 1980s. A major undertaking for the club. Bill played an enormous part in that; helping build the bridge, the raised walkway, and installing much of the plumbing. Access to the Croft needed the consent of two estates and Bill's diplomatic skills were invaluable in securing these. During the renovation at Inver Croft, Bill also contrived to sever the signalling cable for the railway line between Achnasheen and Strathcarron. That Inver Croft is still flourishing today is a testament to Bill's efforts and advice. Trains still run between Achnasheen and Strathcarron to this day.

Bill was the recipient of the JMC Dave McHugh Award in 1992, the Club’s highest accolade, given to the member who had done most for the Club. I recall it being partly about the immense effort he had put into JMC matters over the years and Inver in particular. It was very well deserved.

Bill gave an address at the JMC 30th Anniversary Dinner in 2004, in which he talked informatively about the early years of the club, having researched the matter in painstaking fashion as befits his earlier career, and helping to dispel some of the myths that had entered the club lexicon over the years, mostly around the origin of the club and its name.

Bill's earlier life was equally varied. Bill joined Edinburgh City police in 1960, starting on the beat on the south side of the city. His career choice apparently linked to family heritage; his maternal grandfather Hugh Chisholm being Chief Constable of Sutherland. Selection for a new accelerated promotion course was followed by his promotion to sergeant and secondment to Edinburgh University, from which he graduated in law in 1974. Ten years later, he became Chief Superintendent of the East Division, for Mid and East Lothian, covering a period of social unrest. Bill would often entertain friends with stories of his time in the police. These included during the 1984 miners' strike, delivering concessionary coal in police cars to retired miners' families with the consent and active involvement of the NUM pickets. His diplomatic skills were put to beneficial use.

Charity work of one sort or another was to take up much of Bill's "first retirement" on leaving the police force in 1988. Bill became Director of the National Playing Fields Association, Scotland – at a time when the charity nationally became a fighting force to combat playing fields being sold off to developers. Bill found a new career purpose within charities that struck a chord with him. He travelled around Scotland, often with the family in tow, to inspect playing fields. Trips which he combined purposefully with his love of the northwest. He was proudly responsible for renovations to the old playing field in Lochinver, next to the Culag Hotel, where the Assynt Highland Games are held each year.

A family move from Fairmilehead, Edinburgh to Charlestown, Fife followed in 1993 when Bill was appointed secretary-treasurer of the Carnegie Dunfermline and Hero Fund Trusts, a role he was to fulfil until 2002. Colleagues there remember his diffusive good humour, well-earned trust, and never being outwardly annoyed or upset about anything. That, and a love of documenting with a fountain pen!

Bill's diverse interests also extended to pottery - started in his thirties. He attended classes for three years at the Edinburgh School of Art and was to become a skilled and active hobbyist in the craft for over 50 years. That said, Bill – the perfect gentleman - would always acknowledge the joint venture nature of his endeavours, with Bill throwing or forming the pots, and creating the glazes, but Eileen (his wife), a real craftsperson herself, decorating the pots, before returning them to Bill for final firing. This long standing interest culminated in the achievement, by distance learning, of a BA Hons degree in Ceramic Design from the Glasgow School of Art. Bill was an active member of the Scottish Potters Association and a big part of the local Cone 8 Potters Club at Charlestown.

Each year, Eileen and Bill set up a stall at the Charlestown and Limekilns Gala Day, to give both youngsters and adults a chance to get their hands on the clay and create a pot, later to be returned, glazed and fired. At Potfest Scotland (a pottery festival - nothing to do with illegal drugs Bill hastened to add) he would happily engage with the public and demonstrate on the wheel, teaching budding potters the fundamentals of throwing. For a time, he even took his table-wheel to the Victoria Hospital Hospice, Kirkcaldy, providing for patients there, a new or recalled skill opportunity.

His decline in recent years due to dementia was met with typical bravery and fortitude. The final cruel twist is that Alzheimer's robbed his mind of a mountain of fine memories.

Mountaineering friends would visit and try and help Bill recover those memories over a coffee or a lunch, pouring over old photographs or artefacts. At Bill's funeral, Chris, one of Bill's sons, gave a very touching eulogy titled "Good for Chat". The background to that was while in hospital for a hip replacement, Bill found out that one of the doctors had scribbled those very words on his end-of-bed medical notes. He was pretty chuffed about that.

Those whose lives were blessed by the presence of Bill, even just briefly, will remember him as an unassuming, solid, all round nice bloke, and fantastic company in any situation. He was always approachable, generous with his time and knowledge, and willing to give his advice and pass on his experience when it was asked for. Bill was a popular companion on the hills, with a positive attitude, good tales to tell, and a great sense of humour, exactly what is needed halfway up a frozen mountainside in January.

In the 1986 JMC Journal, Bill wrote a moving obituary for Dave McHugh, a JMC member who, along with fellow member Lyn Merritt, had tragically been killed in a road accident. The words Bill wrote then about Dave's untimely death equally apply in Bill's case and I make no excuses for quoting them directly –

"The death of a friend is always a tragedy. The death of a man who has belayed you safely on climbing routes is especially poignant and meaningful for your life as in his hands and now the bond is broken. We go on climbing, remembering a man whose love of the mountains was intense. Whose quiet good-humoured companionship was both a reward and a pleasure, and whose memory will be rekindled as we each tread the shared paths of yesteryear. The hills are a common personal bond, in them we see, reflect and remember."

Bill was on record as having said that the finest experiences he had in his lifetime – besides a happy marriage – were on the ropes with his mountaineering friends. The sentiment is mutual. Bill will be missed.

Bill is survived by Eileen, his wife of 58 years, his two sons, Chris and Steve, and four grandchildren.

Jacobites 50th Anniversary – The Middle Years speech

by Ros Clancey

I was honoured to be asked to talk about the ‘middle years’ of the Jacobites club history. I joined the Jacobites in May 1996 on a Thursday night in the Royal Circus Hotel, where the club met at that time, and the next day I was heading to Skye to join my first meet. My first impressions were of a very confident, welcoming, active and thriving club and in those early years I even remember committee elections being contested! Although I cannot claim to have been involved in every activity, at every level, I’ve been an active member ever since then, and served on the committee many times as meets secretary and once as President. But where to start in looking back on the middle years? It’s a long period to look back on and do justice to. The obvious place to start was of course to consult the club journals. As Alan has already said, these have been of the greatest importance in documenting the history of the club. Thankfully I have copies of most of the journals going back to 1995 when the club celebrated its 21st birthday, and have spent several enjoyable evenings looking back over these, reminiscing and marvelling at the energy of the club and its members, not to mention the quality of writing. I thought for tonight, it would be nice to pick out some key areas and themes that struck me as the years progressed, to give a flavour of the breadth of club activity during this period and to pay tribute to the sense of adventure of its members participating at every level.

I turn first to climbing. The journals, particularly from the mid-nineties through to the early two thousands, have provided an incredible and impressive record of how active members of the club were in this sphere. They provide a log of summer and winter routes ascended in a season, and a log of new routes put up by club members, which run to pages, as well as some inspirational articles of particular climbing adventures. Jacobite climbers were active in all areas and in all grades. In Scotland - the Cairngorms, Lochaber, the Northwest and Scottish islands including Mingulay, Shetland and Orkney - and further south, in the Lakes, Cornwall, Pembrokeshire and Lundy to name a few. I’m not sure if it is definitely a term, but the concept of ‘Scottish adventure climbing’ certainly came to the fore during this period, with some wonderful articles chronicling ‘Stack Attacks’ with tyrolean traverses. I must also mention that the club has always had a strong sense of welcoming and fostering beginners to climbing with the regular Tuesday evening indoor and outdoor climbing, and with the regular Easter sport climbing trips to warmer climes, which has helped to mentor and develop those with a passion to climb.

As long as I have been a member, having a regular and varied programme of weekend meets has been at the heart of the club and has helped to sustain active membership. The active core of meet attendees shifts as the years progress and members come and go. Meets have supported the many aspirant munro and corbett baggers amongst the club and during the middle years there were a number of completors, myself included. There are some great articles during the period, of epic days out for example in the pouring rain in Kintail, and some great accounts of extended backpacking trips for example in Knoydart. Worthy of mention too, in 2001, in an uncanny premonition of events of 20 years later, the club’s freedom in the hills was curtailed by the Foot and Mouth outbreak. The journals have

provided a record of each meets year and attendees, and something of what people got up to. It wasn't always all about the mountains though, and there were certainly some lively evenings too, some of which have become the stuff of club legend (I leave you with the mention of chilli Sauce....). Programmes of winter slideshows given by club members became very much established and, as well as entertaining us all on a dark winter's night, also raised money for mountain rescue. The Inver Xmas dinner, annual dinner and Burns supper were stalwart fixtures throughout the period with some fine presidential addresses, immortal memories, toasts to the lassies and replies to the laddies, all recorded for posterity in the club journals. Jacobites have always enjoyed some humour and have even been moved to poetry...who can forget Colin Crabbie's 'There's a caravan in front of me'.

During the period, members of the club were also very active abroad. Jacobites were frequently drawn to the Alps and the Dolomites, Norway, the States and Canada, whether for climbing, via ferratta, mountaineering, skiing, ski-touring, snowshoeing and walking. There were also some notable expeditions chronicled in the journals too, including the Lemon mountains in Greenland, Mount Kenya and to Kyrgystan. Pumori in Nepal held a particular fascination for Jacobites with at least two eventful expeditions mounted in the late 90s.

Reading through the journals of the middle period, I was struck by the diversification into other outdoor activities as the years progressed. There has always been a keen ski-touring fraternity in the club, and Guy's ski-touring year is an annual journal fixture, and, sadly, something of a chronicle on climate change and the rising snowline. Mountain biking and fell running also gained prominence during the period, and some notable running challenges and big rounds such as the Ramsay Round were undertaken. Watersports also came into vogue, kayaking both in its own right, and as a means to facilitate Scottish adventure climbing, and provide interesting ways to access mountains. Also sailing trips, including a trip to St Kilda, and, for the more esoteric, to facilitate an overnight stay in a cave in Jura.

No account of the middle period would be complete without mention of the significant developments at Inver. During the mid 2000's the future of Inver was at something of a cross-roads, and the subject of much discussion. The overwhelming conclusion was to double down on it as an asset to the club and to invest. Longstanding and current members pulled together to revamp the layout, knocking through into the somewhat redundant club room to create a new kitchen area. Solar panels, battery and wiring were installed. A business plan, with a programme of works for each year was devised, introducing further improvements. A second toilet, insulation, a drying room, mattresses and then, in stages, the infamous Inver walkway. It paid off, and bookings of Inver by other clubs increased, not to mention the greater enjoyment of it and use by club members. Discussion about replacing the open fire with a wood burning stove was always, quite literally, a hot topic, and debate rages on to this day!

Unlike some clubs, a distinctive feature of the Jacobites is that it has always been intergenerational, and I wanted to make mention of the 'Jacobits' phenomenon during the middle years, or, as some may have referred to it before, the 'Jacobites breeding programme'. For several years, Jacobite families swelled the ranks of the annual Roybridge

meet and got together for their own adventures, introducing their young 'Jacobits' to the mountains, and adjusting to life with little ones in tow. I found many inspirational articles of Jacobit adventures and the co-operative pooling of resources, and insights into sometimes devious childcare negotiations to allow the parents some fun too (not sure if the Dads maybe got the upper hand over the Mums sometimes). An insightful outdoor log for pregnant women and expectant fathers provided tips for those contemplating starting a family.

So there you have it...a whirlwind resume of the middle years....I think I'd like to finish with a reflection, that it says a great deal about the Jacobites that everyone is here because the club has been important to them at different stages of their life. And finally, I'd like to end where I began, with the 21st birthday journal and the introductory article by founder member Martin Plant....

"The Jacobites were founded to be open, friendly and active. There is always the danger that organisations become staid, elitist or lose their initial fire. The best antidote to such atrophy is to continue to welcome newcomers. These are vital, and as past experience shows, have always been one of the reasons why the Jacobites have made it through the first 21 years. I hope the next 21 are just as good"

I think we can all agree they were!



Martin Plant

Jacobites 50th Anniversary - President's speech

by Katherine Ross

I joined the Jacobites in February 2016. I had met someone in the club (who has since moved away), went along to the pub and immediately went on a meet. The meet was to Muir of Inverey and on the Saturday a moderately big group of us went and did Beinn a' Bhuid in the Southern Cairngorms. The weather was like this the whole weekend – so far the only time I've got sunburnt in the Highlands in February. I thought: "Great! I've found a club that can organize great weather!"



Obviously, I couldn't not mention Inver, being such an integral part of the club. This (photo next page) is not how it looked the first time I visited, for the Christmas dinner meet in December 2016... instead, it was dark when we arrived on the Friday night, very wet, and with such strong gusts that I was having to sit down when they hit to avoid being blown off. However, although I wasn't thinking it quite so clearly at the time, I was very grateful that the walkway was there to keep me out of the bog beneath. The walkway has been a labour spanning a number of years, and its upgrade was orchestrated by Adrian Proctor in 2016. The aim was to widen it and raise the section at the bridge to try and avoid it becoming submerged as it had done in 2015. Some work meets later, and the upgrade was complete! The improved access has played an important role in securing repeat bookings of Inver from other clubs, such that it's now fairly self-sufficient.



In 2020 and 2021, the club was subject to the Covid lockdowns, and we were not able to go away on meets. Instead, we did what we could, going for day walks to local places like, the Lammermuirs, the Pentlands, Arthur's Seat, Glensax. We've also had a successful backpacking meet near Spittal of Glenshee, with good weather... ..Mostly.

This was also the time when we really got into orienteering. We'd been doing it a bit before, using the permanent courses in and around Edinburgh, however during Covid we discovered the MapRun app which uses smartphone GPS instead of having to have controls on the ground. All sorts of courses were being set up and this opened up lots of new options. We got so into it that when the nights drew in, we carried on in the dark.

Of course, we weren't able to meet at the pub either but Karl Zeiner, who was social secretary at the time, did a great job of keeping us connected by hosting the "Zoomerland" on Zoom and meeting outdoors in parks.

We've also had a few themed Burns' suppers since 2016 including one celebrating Nan Shepherd who wrote so poetically about her experiences of the Cairngorms in "The Living Mountain" which she wrote in the 1940s. We also had Cuillin and Ben Nevis themed suppers. These have been a nice opportunity to add some variety to the standard Burns' celebrations.

So, thinking about what makes the Jacobites special, our (relative) diversity has to be up there. Yes, in some ways we're not diverse at all, however the number of women playing active roles in the club, and being encouraged to do so, is really great. That along with the lack of entry criteria and openness to new members of all skill levels makes it feel like a really welcoming environment.

Dave McHugh Award

The Dave MacHugh Award was set up by the parents of Dave MacHugh, who was sadly killed in a road accident in 1986 while travelling to a weekend outing with fellow Jacobite Lyn Merritt. Criteria for the award are broad but it's generally awarded for outstanding personal achievement or activities which bring honour to the club. This year, I'm awarding it to Lisa Ferrero for a combination of reasons. Lisa has been an active member of the club for some years now and has always been a friendly face, willing to help newbies. Additionally, she took it upon herself to reinstate the club's CASC status (that is Community Amateur Sports Club), giving us some tax exemptions. In terms of her own achievements, Lisa took part in the OMM last October – for anyone not aware, this is a mountain marathon, and these are a bit like backpacking crossed with an orienteering race across a large mountainous area, in October. She placed 4th (I heard) in the women's long course along with buddy Claire. Well done Lisa!



After the hunt – Euan Cameron

Walking the Dolomites Alta Via 1

By Robbie Hewitt

This year was the first summer holiday for Robyn and I, as a married couple. Robyn was adamant she wanted a holiday where she could lie in the sun. I was typically adamant that I would prefer the exact opposite. So like all good marriages, we compromised on a hut to hut trek in the Italian Alps in early August when it would 'likely' be sunny. Win-win.

The route I chose was the AV1 or Alta Via Uno which is one of ten such crossings running north to south across the Dolomites. As it is the least technical and most scenic route, it is the most popular of the ten. The English translation is 'The High Route' and after reaching the first hut, the route doesn't dip below 5000ft until the last day, reaching as high as 9000ft at one point. The altitude itself wasn't an issue during the trip and it definitely benefitted our fitness when we returned to the UK after the trip.

Our itinerary for the trek was as follows:

Day 1 - Bus from Dobbiaco to Lago di Braies, then walk to Rifugio Sennes

9.4km 🧑‍🌲 920m ↗ 300m ↘

Day 2 - Rifugio Sennes to Rifugio Lavarella

10.4km 🧑‍🌲 530m ↗ 570m ↘

Day 3 - Rifugio Lavarella to Rifugio Lagazoi

14.8km 🧑‍🌲 1325m ↗ 630m ↘

Day 4 - Rifugio Lagazoi to Rifugio Scoiattoli

8.2km 🧑‍🌲 350m ↗ 850m ↘

Day 5 - Rifugio Scoiattoli to Passo Staulanza

15.3km 🧑‍🌲 450m ↗ 1170m ↘

Day 6 - Pass Staulanza to Rifugio Vazzoler

15.3km 🧑‍🌲 690m ↗ 740m ↘

Day 7 - Rifugio Vazzoler to Rifugio San Sebastiano

11.5km 🧑‍🌲 650m ↗ 750m ↘

Day 8 - Passo Duran to Malga Pramper

12.2km 🧑‍🌲 530m ↗ 390m ↘

Day 9 - Malga Pramper to Rifugio Bianchet

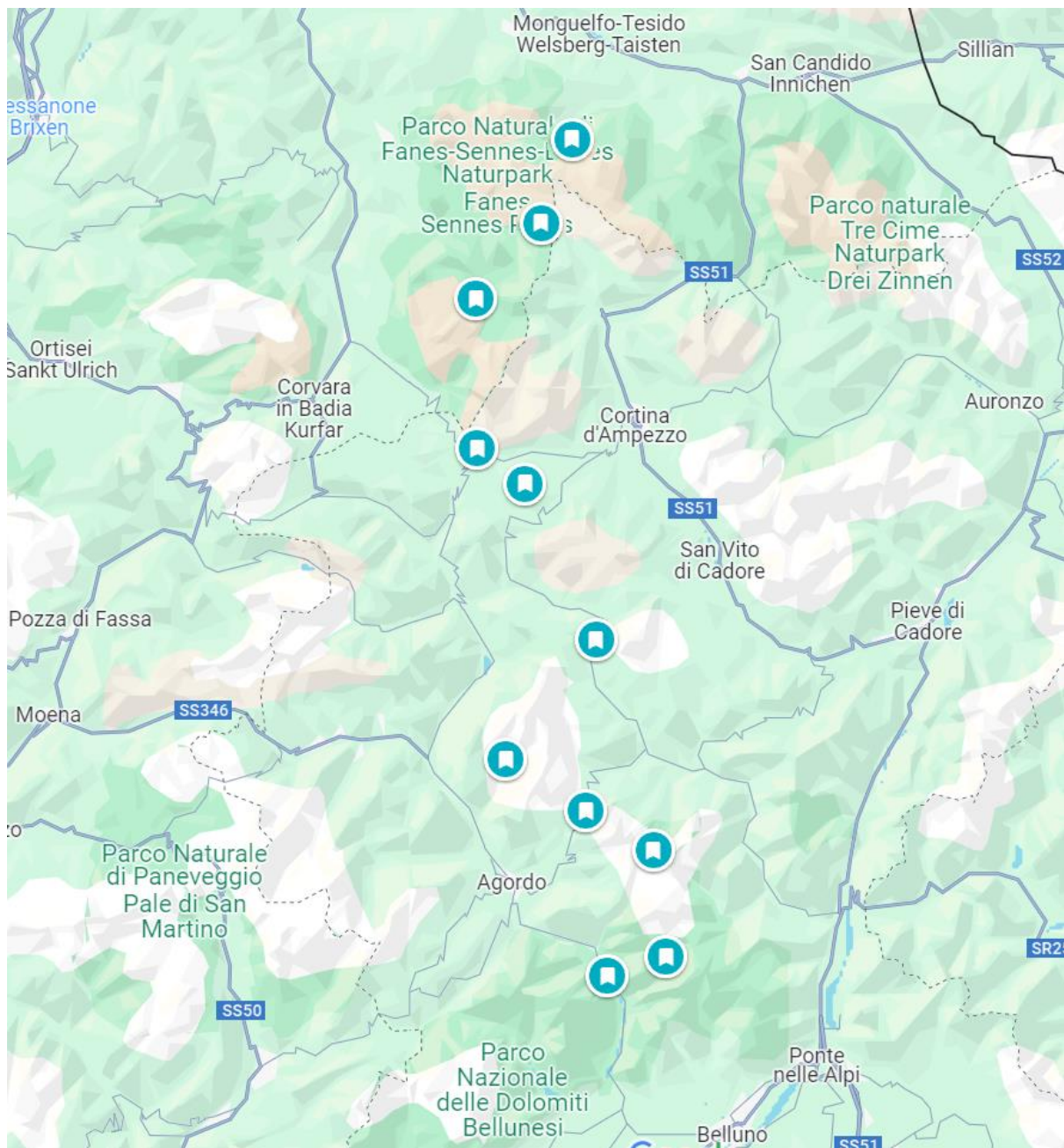
13.6km 🧑‍🌲 1125m ↗ 1420m ↘

Day 10 - Rifugio Bianchet to La Pissa bus stop, bus to Belluno

7km 🧑‍🌲 70m ↗ 770m ↘

Here is a map with google pins for the huts we stayed in

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/FNvVg331xqrnt8b78>



We booked the trip through a travel company called Alpine Exploratory who booked all of the huts and provided route cards, gpx files, Tabacco maps and a fairly in-depth guide with kit list etc. Since this was our first time in the Dolomites and our first hut to hut crossing this was really helpful. With the benefit of the experience of using the huts and discussing with other people on the trail, this option probably costs double what it would cost if you book the huts and plan the trek yourself. However, as it is a very busy trail, the huts book up quite early, some as early December the previous year, so we probably would have been stung by that if we attempted it ourselves.

Day 1 - Bus from Dobbiaco to Lago di Braies, then walk to Rifugio Sennes

9.4km 🚶 920m ⤴ 300m ⤵

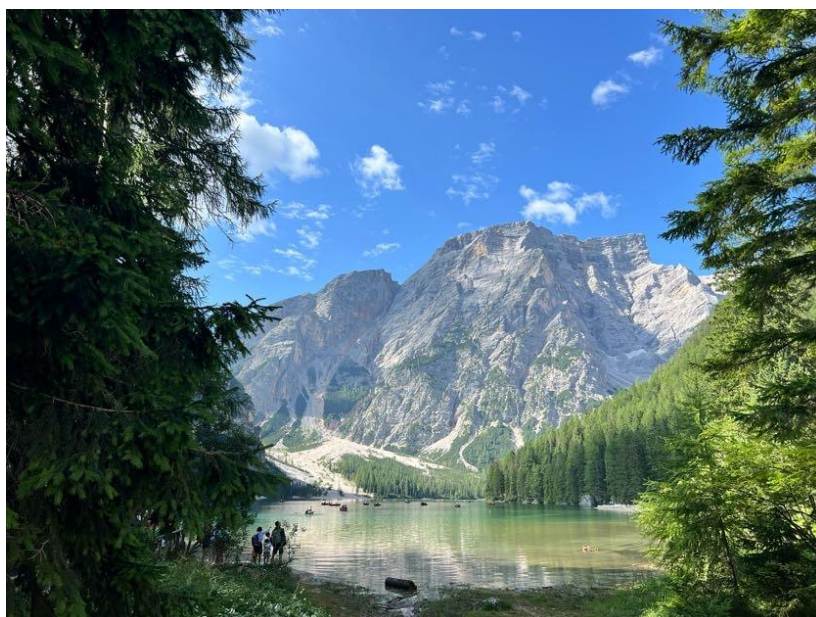
We flew into Venice the previous day and got a bus to Cortina D'Ampezzo and then another to Dobbiaco where we stayed overnight. The next morning we got a bus at 8:30am to Lago di Braies which took around 45 mins, to begin our trek.



Looking south from Dobbiaco to the valley that takes you to Cortina.



The lake is really beautiful, if a bit touristic as there are many people who just get the bus to walk around the lake. After walking around the lake the route starts proper and smacks you in the face with 890m of ascent in 6.2km.



After the ascent we were greeted an amazing view of the Dolomites and we stopped for lunch at the small Rifugio in the bottom left of the photo called Rifugio Bella. After lunch with a view it was a short walk to the next Rifugio where we would stay for the night. This stretch was the only point in the entire route that we got caught in some rain, but even that was fairly short lived and the skies cleared again to give us this view from the bar with our well-earned pints.



Day 2 - Rifugio Sennes to Rifugio Lavarella

10.4km 🚶 530m ↗ 570m ↘

This was a relatively short day which involved a lot of descent early on in the day to Pederu refuge (pictured below) which is serviced by a road so it was quite busy with day trippers and cyclists. Nevertheless it was a very cool spot, this photo is taken on the descent to the hut in the morning.



After a quick coffee stop we then tackled the days ascent to Rifugio Lavarella which is one of three rifugios based around a small lake with really nice views and good pasta.

Day 3 - Rifugio Lavarella to Rifugio Lagazuoi

14.8km 🚶 1325m ↗ 630m ↘

This day was one of the bigger days of the trip and ended at the highest point in the trek at Rifugio Lagazuoi. An early start gave us a really nice view looking back at Rifugio Gran Fanes as the sun caught the mountains in the background.



After this a stroll through a valley and then hike up to Forcella Lagazuoi gave amazing view of Lago Lagazuoi and the descent/ascent ahead to Rifugio Lagazuoi which was barely visible in the distance. The views from the hut were spectacular and were probably the highlight of the trip. One photo doesn't do it justice.



Day 4 - Rifugio Lagazoi to Rifugio Scoiattoli

8.2km 🧑‍🌿 350m ↗ 850m ↘

After the long day prior, this day was a bit of a stroll. We didn't opt to do it but there were a number of World War 1 tunnels that you could take down to the Passo Falzarego if you wanted. Instead we took the long route round past Tofana di Rozes which has one of the more popular Via Ferrata in the area. The main views of the day were across the valley to Cinque Torri which was right next to our rifugio for the evening.



The lush green meadows that run up to the base of Cinque Torri gives it an allure that doesn't seem befitting of such small outcrop in the vastness of the Dolomites. Rifugio Scoiattoli was right at the top of the Cinque Torri chairlift and as such was bit of honey trap for tourists. Since we'd arrived pretty early that day we decided to take a wander down to another Rifugio that sat in the shadow of Cinque Torri but and was a little more traditional. We enjoyed a beer and played card games here until it was time to head back up to the other hut for dinner.

Day 5 - Rifugio Scoiattoli to Passo Staulanza

15.3km 🧑‍🌿 450m ↗ 1170m ↘

The start of Day 5 was a rough path that skirted round Averau and ended at Passo Giau before the main ascent of the day to Forcella Giau and then Forcella Ambrizzola. The view back to Cinque Torri from the first section rewarded an early start as the sun lit up Cinque Torri and the peaks behind us.

The view from Forcella Giau was equally special with the sweeping green meadows and strange rock formations giving off Jurassic Park vibes. From the next Forcella, there were really nice views back down to Cortina with Croda di Lago in the foreground at the base on the mountain.



The day ended at Passo Staulanza at the foot of Monte Pelmo which is one of the highest peaks in the Dolomites.



That evening there were biblical thunderstorms with sheet lightening and rain that you can see starting to brew in the background of the previous photo. We spent a good hour sitting on the balcony of our room watching the sky light up and listening to the thunder.

Day 6 - Pass Staulanza to Rifugio Vazzoler

15.3km 🚶 690m⬆️ 740m ⬇️

Day 6 was one of the best weather days we got, although given the steep incline to Rifugio Coldai we'd have preferred an overcast day. The clear skies did offer amazing views back to Monte Pelmo and the area that we'd walked through the previous day.



After reaching Rifugio Coldai and stopping for lunch a short ascent reached the view viewpoint for Lago Coldai which sits in the shade of Monte Civetta.



From here we were racing the storm clouds to Rifugio Vazzoler and another biblical downpour started around 5 minutes after we checked in. Once the downpour finished however we were treated to some really cool light at dusk that left a pink hue on the mountains.



Day 7 - Rifugio Vazzoler to Rifugio San Sebastiano

11.5km 🚶 650m ↗ 750m ↘

This day was fairly short and offered wider views back to the Monte Civetta range after reaching Col de l'Ors.



From here it was mostly contouring to reach Rifugio Carestiato for lunch but on the way we were treated to seeing some base jumpers flying past us. From the rifugio it was a short walk down to Passo Duran which had two huts Cesare Tome and San Sebastiano. It was a fairly quiet pass without much traffic and had a cool little church that looked like something out of a Dr. Zeuss book.

Day 8 - Passo Duran to Malga Pramper

12.2km 🚶 530m ↗ 390m ↘

This was the best day of the trek mainly because of the hut at the end. It was actually a bit of a detour from the normal AV1 route as the usual stop off is Sommariva al Pramperet, however it was full so we were booked into Malga Pramper which was 300m descent and 2km off route.

I'm so glad that we did detour though as the hut was amazing, it was a working dairy farm ran by a family (mum, dad and daughter) plus another girl who was working there for the season. The cows, chickens and ducks were free to roam the hills and the grounds of the hut. All the food they served was from the farms produce and we got to watch the farmer bringing the cows in a milking them which they do every 12 hours.

They served a day old fried cheese made from the cows milk which was incredible. I am Vegan mainly for welfare reasons however seeing how the animals were kept and treated I was happy to eat their milk and egg based food.

The bunkhouse was really nice too and we were sharing with a family of five Californians who were super friendly which made the whole experience even better. It was such a nice time that I took barely any photos however I did take a video which I've linked below which really shows it off <https://photos.app.goo.gl/HnbaBKCqZhRWASgVA>



Day 9 - Malga Pramper to Rifugio Bianchet

13.6km 🧑‍🌾 1125m ↗ 1420m ↘

This was effectively the last day of the trek as the final day is simply a downhill walk to the bus stop. After the bulk of the days ascent and descent we arrived at the first stop off, Rifugio Pian De Fontana with stunning views back up the hill from whence we came.



From here we had to descent and ascend quite steeply to cross another valley which provided views back to the hut across the valley. Thereafter it was a descent through some woods where we eventually emerged to the view of our last stay, Rifugio Bianchet.

Day 10 – Rifugio Bianchet to La Pissa bus stop, bus to Belluno

7km 🧑‍🌾 70m ↗ 770m ↘

This was really just a race down the valley to make the 11:00am bus which we duly did along with most of the other people that stayed in the hut. From here we got the bus to Belluno and then the train on to Venice where we had a couple of nights booked to chill before our flying home. Whilst it doesn't have the grandeur of the Dolomites Venice is still beautiful and we had a really nice view of the canals from the alley that our air bnb was on.

A Marmot Ate My Rucksack and Other Tales from the Canadian Rockies

By Catherine Jones

Our trip to the Kamnik Alps in Slovenia in 2023 was so amazing, that going to the Alps again in 2024 was not possible: it could not have been as good. So we decided to go somewhere new to us. So in July 2024, we went West, not East, out of Edinburgh and to Calgary—no not the one on Mull, further west, Calgary, Alberta, to go backpacking in the Canadian Rockies. In Calgary, we got over jet lag, got some bear-proof canisters, bear spray and bells, filled a hire car with food and drove to Lake Louise. After a couple of day walks from there (Fairview Mountain, Mount Niblock (a really good scramble, where we teamed up with a random German who learnt a new word that day: cairn)), we went north to Bow Lake and went up Observation (1000 m of ascent up loose scree). After a night at Mosquito Creek hostel we set off from Helen Creek, for a 5 night backpack trip looping round to the Siffleur Valley, with a plan to get up Mount Willingdon (3373 m) on the way round.



Mount Willingdon

Over the morning and early afternoon of the next day we walked into a vast landscape of a scale that felt much bigger than that of the Alps or Scotland, with sunbathing marmots, verdant flower meadows and colourful shale mountains. Late afternoon it was clear we were not going to get across Dolomite Creek. Late spring snow and a warm early summer had pushed up water levels. The water was fast flowing and silty, so we could not see the bottom, and the river bed was clearly boulder strewn. Down stream was fast flowing with big boulders: a swim would not end well. We spent some time looking at this river, was there anywhere we could possibly cross? The sensible answer to this was no. We were about 18 km from the road, no phone signal and probably no-one else was in the valley we were in. If it went wrong it would be serious. We poked about on the river bank we were

on to see if we could bush whack without crossing the river (the path crossed the river again a few kilometers further on), but that was also a no go. We also knew that if Dolomite Creek was this high, then the “difficult” crossing of the Siffleur River the next day could well be totally unpassable and if we could not cross that we would have to cross back over this river. Plan B was enacted, which was to walk back out to Helen Creek, bag Cirque Peak on the way, stay at Mosquito Creek overnight. Then walk in to Devon Lakes from there, and link back up with our original plan to camp at Devon Lakes and go up Mount Willingdon. We had the camping permits, so we would only forfeit the night we had booked at the Siffleur River backcountry campsite.

We went back up the valley a bit to find a campsite and got the tent up. At this point a thunderstorm came in and it started raining. Everyone warns you about bears when you go to the Rockies. Nobody mentions the mosquitos. The mosquitos were horrific. We had both reacted badly to bites at the start of the trip, huge welts that left bruises, even with repellent and antihistamines. We ate dinner in the pouring rain, being eaten by mosquitos and trying to not be dismayed that we had to change plans. At least we had not drowned in a river or been eaten by a bear.

We had bear-proof canisters, but for 5 nights out, we also had some food in dry bags to tie up trees with a rope. We spent 20 mins in the rain being eaten by mosquitos trying to throw a rope over a branch to then hoist the dry bags up into the trees, away from the bears.



Catherine and Chris on the top of Cirque Peak

Next morning it was sunny, not raining and we had what was quite frankly a delightful walk back up to Dolomite Pass. We saw a ptarmigan and her two chicks, several marmots and ground squirrels. From the top of Cirque Peak we could see a plume of smoke in the

distance. We also met a group of women from Hinton (near Jasper, ~200 km north). It turned out two of their group had not joined them in the hostel at Mosquito Creek, so they thought we could probably have their beds in the hostel (which is what happened). We got down to Helen Creek and got to the hostel, to find out that Jasper Village had been evacuated due to a huge wildfire. This was the smoke we could see from Cirque Peak. The group from Hinton had to work out how to get home, now that the roads were shut. Worse, one of their group lived in Jasper Village. At this stage, the impression was that they thought it unlikely the fire would get to Jasper Village. However the fire had “jumped the highway” (width of a large dual carriageway).

Next day we walked into Devon Lakes, over the pass between Quartzite Peak and Watermelon Peak. A very faint path got us through the woods up from Mosquito Creek, and cairns guided us up to the pass. Down the other side into the Siffleur Valley was 200 m of steep choss and scree, which eventually dropped us onto grassy meadows with amazing flowers. The flowers were in general amazing. So was the wildlife: marmots, ground squirrels, tree squirrels, frogs, ptarmigan, grouse, eagles, chipmunks, pikas were all seen on the trip. As for bears, we saw two from the car just north of Lake Louise, but (thankfully) none when we were on the hill. In general, the park authorities did a good job of keeping people away from known bear habitat.



Chris at the top of Mosquito Creek valley

It was so smoky that night that ash was falling on the tent. This was ash from a fire that was at least 180 km away. We would find out when we got back to Mosquito Creek (and had some internet signal at the hostel, there was no signal in the hills) that the fire reached Jasper Village that night. We also would find an email from Parks Canada telling us that our

Random and Backcountry permits were no longer valid due to the fire (which we could not receive until 4 days after it was sent).

Overnight the daytime temperature dropped by about 25 degrees. The weather had been forecast to be poor and it was. We stayed in the tent for the 8am thunderstorm. There was a fresh dump of snow on Mount Willingdon. To get to the top is (according to the guidebooks) a tricky scramble. So we went for an explore of the Devon Lakes, corries and Siffleur river valley instead. It was cold enough to be snowing at our campsite (~2000 m). The cold weather continued for the next day, for a very nice (but cold) walk over the Pipestone Pass and over Molar Pass to the backcountry campsite at Mosquito Creek.

Three big advantages of backcountry campsites (formal, designated areas for camping) over random camping ("wild" camping permitted in certain areas of the Parks, generally a long way from the road) is that you get provided with picnic tables for cooking, some sort of mechanism to keep food away from bears (lockers, or metal wires to hook bags onto and winch up high) and, best of all, composting toilets.

From Mosquito Creek we planned to go up Mosquito mountain. However after about 2 hours of tramping about in the bog in dense woods calling out to the bears, we decided finding a way through the trees without any of the paths marked on the maps actually existing was just silly. So instead we went up an unnamed, spiky peak above Molar Pass. It was unnamed but did have a book ("register" to use the local lingo) in a box on the top to write names in. It was probably the best hill we went up all holiday: amazing meadows of flowers, brilliantly coloured shale rocks and a very cool scramble to the top. We went down, collected our stuff from the campsite and walked out to the hostel at Mosquito Creek.

Mosquito Creek hostel has facilities akin to Inver Croft, but fewer taps and no flushing toilets (it has composting toilets). It does however have a very nice wood burning stove and a sauna. We did not try out the sauna as by this point we had gone a week without a shower, and washing in the river would have involved being eaten alive by mosquitoes. The good news is that if you stay at Mosquito Creek Hostel, you can get a shower at Lake Louise Hostel (20 mins drive away). So the next morning, before we went on to Banff, that is exactly what we did.

Banff was like Aviemore on steroids. People queued to take photos of themselves beside a big, wooden sign that says "Banff". This "tourist attraction" even has a car park. Banff also has the railway. If you camp there, be prepared for the trains that blow their horns at 3am, 4am, 5am. The only way to sleep through it is to go up Mount Rundle one day (1500m of ascent), and then the next day go up Cascade Mountain: 28 km and 1540 m of ascent. Banff also conveniently has a bar next to a bus stop for the campsite bus. The campsite bus is an entertainment in its own right. Free into town, \$2 out of town. Cash only. One bus driver spent the entire 15 min bus trip into town explaining this, and explaining how to get on a bus at a bus stop.

After a couple of days of recuperation in Banff eating proper food and being exposed to mainstream tourism, we needed to get back into the wilderness again. South of the Banff National Park is Kananaskis. From Kananaskis Lake we walked into British Columbia,

camping at Northover Tarns. As mentioned, everyone warns about bears in the Rockies. Nobody warns you about the marmots. There were many marmots at Northover Tarns. They seemed totally unbothered by us. They were, as they should be, very bothered about the local eagle that came by, which tried and failed to get a take-away marmot dinner. The marmots were so unbothered by us that at about midnight, one came under the flysheet of the tent and (we found out in the morning) had a good nibble of Chris's rucksack! Tasty sweaty rucksack straps!



Campsite at Northover Tarns

After surviving the attack of the marmots, we attempted to scale Mount Northover. This is quite a serious scramble, and is written up as such. It got to the point, about 100 m vertically from the top, where we really would have liked a rope, so we called it quits. We did try again from the col on the other side, before going along the main Northover ridge, but it went from vertical scree to vertical, loose, rocky choss. So we decided to not go that way either (and were quite glad to have not got up the other way, as coming down that would have been very sketchy). The main backpacking route round the Northover Loop to Three Isle Lake campsite was a good consolation though: a narrow ridge above a glacier, a walk but only a foot wide in places. The walk down to Three Isle Lake was teeming with ground squirrels and chipmunks, and more flowers. Our last night out camping, we shared a picnic bench with a group from Vancouver, exchanging stories of backpacking and hill adventures in North America and Europe.



Catherine on the ridge of Mount Northover

We went to Canada looking for adventure and need to explore somewhere new. We did not expect it to deliver on the level that it did. The wildlife, the flowers, the geology, the feeling of being in the wilderness, other hillwalkers and backpackers we met at campsites and hostels, it was all amazing. We did not do everything we planned to due to weather, water and terrain, but it was certainly an adventure and we will be back to explore more of North America's mountains and wildernesses.

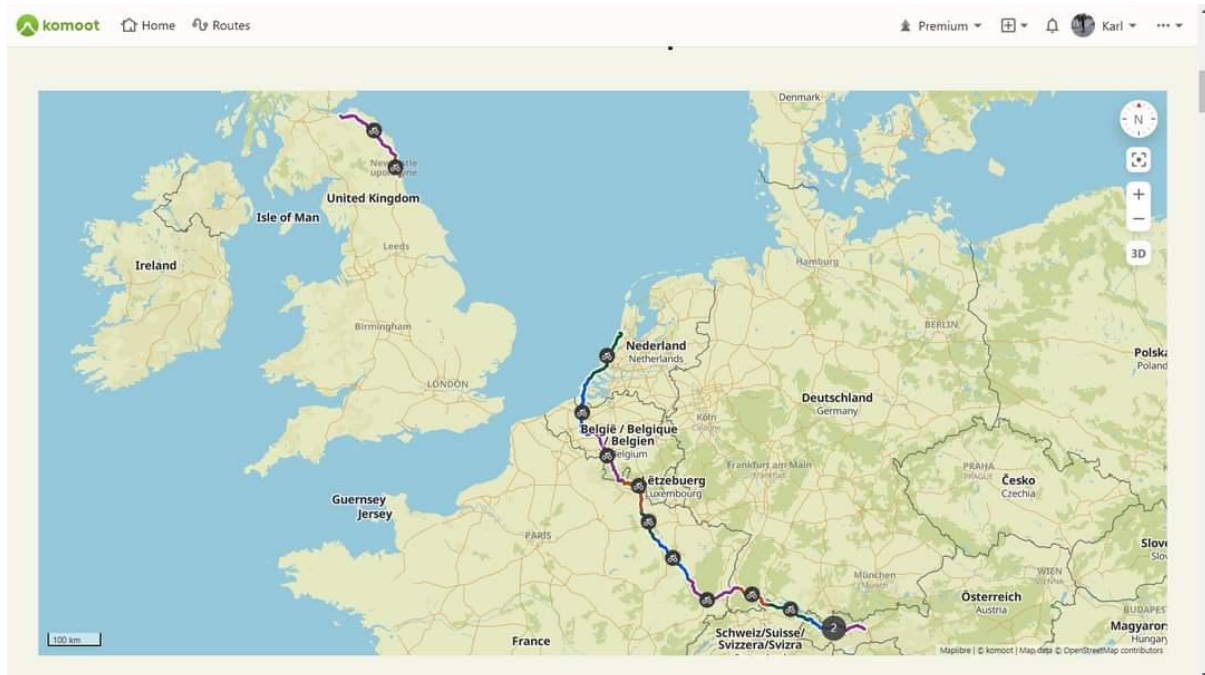
Finally, I can't finish this without thanking Alistair and Gail Des Moulins for their ideas, tips, suggestions and knowledge of the mountains and trails in the Canadian Rockies, and their hospitality when we stayed with them at the end of the trip (which included showing us many photos for where we should go next for North American adventures).

Scotland to Austria by bike

My cycle trip from my house to my parents' house – Musselburgh to Birgitz

By Karl Zeiner

I turned 50 in January 2024 and although I can't quite remember how the idea came up, I decided to cycle to my parents' house in Austria to mark my half century. The lead up – the weeks and months before – was marked with route planning, getting kit, upgrading the bike and fretting about lots of things.



Planned Route

I'd never done something like this before. The longest bike trip had been 3 days, this was going to be nearly 2 weeks. Then I'd decided to set a specific date for arrival, leaving no room for error and, encouraged by others my daily average mileage would be around 120-130km. The total planned distance was around 1600km.

I chose to go in September as the schools would be back in most places and everywhere hopefully a bit quieter and maybe cheaper. That definitely was the case for the ferry to Amsterdam which is the first thing I booked and effectively got the ball rolling.

The route would take me from Scotland through Northumberland to the ferry at Newcastle. From there across to Amsterdam, then along the Dutch Coast to Belgium to cover some of the cobbled climbs of the spring classics. The Ardennes National Park was next from where I followed the river Meuse and on to the Moselle before crossing the Vosges mountains to the Black Forest. After crossing that I went through parts of Switzerland along the shores of Lake Constance before entering Austria for the final leg to my parents' place.

The trip started on Monday Sept 2 with a 147 km ride from Musselburgh to Amble on the Northumbrian coast where I stayed with Alison, my sister-in-law. This first day was pretty

warm but with very low cloud and mist. There wasn't much visibility for most of the morning. I stopped for lunch in Duns and meandered my way through the country lanes of Northumberland passing by Ford Castle and coming through Alnwick before dropping into Amble.

The day gave me a feel for what to expect in the coming 2 weeks. I hadn't rushed out of the house but wanted to get to Amble by 6pm so kept on the move throughout the day except for the lunch break in Duns. It felt like a pretty hard day with over 1500m of ascent and a fully laden bike. The following day would be short though.



Ford Castle

On the 2nd day I only had a ride of just over 50km from Amble to the ferry at North Shields. The weather couldn't have been more different than the previous day – sunny and warm. I had a café stop early on and had a chat with a fellow cyclist who was on his way to Malaga in Spain having started in Inverness. We rode together for a bit following the NCN1 along the coast. The route felt pretty built up for a lot of it but with some great coastal views, nonetheless. I got to the ferry mid-afternoon, checked in and made my way to the top deck which had an outdoor bar – it was that kind of weather. Heading out to sea felt more like a Mediterranean cruise than a North Sea crossing. I was hoping for more of this kind of weather in the coming days.



Tynemouth Castle on the Northumberland Coast

The crossing from Newcastle was very pleasant both because it isn't a particularly busy ferry and because it was calm at sea.

We got into Amsterdam (Ijmuiden ferry port) just before 10 am. The weather was calm, warm and slightly overcast. The plan was to ride along the Dutch coast towards Belgium. The first half of this was marked by dunes and beaches as well as coming past the Dutch F1 circuit at Zandvoort before reaching the outskirts of Den Haag.

This was my 2nd time cycling in The Netherlands after hiring bikes in Amsterdam 2 years ago. The experiences were different. Dutch inner-city cycling can be very busy, but in the suburbs and countryside it is more relaxed with the same degree of high quality infrastructure.

The afternoon was a bit of a rush. I wanted to get to my final destination – a small town called Burgh Haamstede – by 6pm; my accommodation was actually 3km out of town. With the ferry only getting in at 10 am and me then taking the early part quite easy enjoying my first bit of cycling in mainland Europe time was starting to run out to get to my destination on time. Thankfully the wind was in my favour as well as getting onto the one ferry crossing I had to do to cross the Maas. A car and passenger ferry, with bikes going free until 7pm.

Islands, canals and dams were next as well as lots of roads cutting through farmland. I got to my B&B at 6:30pm (a sign on the door said to please check in by 6pm – oops). Checked in, showered, got changed and jumped back on the bike to do the 3km into town for dinner (pizza and beer). Just shy of 140km for the day but pretty flat – around 500m of ascent vs. 1500m on day one.

The next day (Day 4) I decided to set off before breakfast was being served in the B&B because I had a ferry to catch to get over the Westerschelde. There were quite frequent ferries but I didn't want to cross too late leaving me with too much to do on the other side. The plan when across was to ride through the Belgian flatlands heading for the hillier area

on the border between Flanders and Wallonia known for the cobbled spring classics in professional cycling.



Obligatory Dutch windmill picture

The B&B owner kindly made me some sandwiches to take on the road as I would miss breakfast. I headed out into a glorious day and the wind was favourable blowing me all the way down to the ferry so that I actually caught an earlier ferry than planned. This helped with the rest of the day along with me having included the 10km ferry crossing into my mileage.

The day was split into 3 with the Dutch islands, the Belgian flatlands and the Cobbled Classics. The Cobbled Classics refer to professional bike races in Belgium/Northern France in March and early April which include a lot of cobbles (both on flat sections as well as climbs).

The Belgian Flatlands were well flat; I cycled through fields, small towns and along the Schipdonkkanaal. Nice, but flat, which meant no respite when cycling, so I was quite glad when I got to the cobbled climbs of the spring classics even if it did mean mastering gradients of up to 22 %. Pleasingly I got up all of them. I did the Koppenberg, came down the Paterberg, rode up the Oude Kwaremont and rode down the Kanarienberg which was great fun. After the top the of Oude Kwaremont I came across a road which had the names of each winner of the Tour of Flanders printed on it – male and female.

After the rush of the morning, I rolled into Ellezelles, where I was staying for the night, before 5pm allowing for a nice relaxing evening. I was only due to check into my Airbnb by 6pm so settled down in the town square at one of the local bars for a beer in the late afternoon sun.

Just shy of 150km for that day with around 800m of climbing. After 4 days I'd covered nearly 500km and was starting to find some routine. An 8 am start seemed to make sense as well as trying to get to my destination by 6pm at the latest. This allowed me to get myself sorted on arrival, have a shower, get changed, do some stretching and massage and go for dinner.

Breakfast was trickier as I'd stay in Airbnbs at times which meant bed only. In Ellezelles I bought some snacks for the next morning and the onward journey.

The next morning I did start out with just coffee though with the aim of finding a boulangerie in Geraardsbergen where the last cobbled climb of my route would be. I decided to do the climb first and then failed to find breakfast after that as I was already on my way out of town again. As I crested the climb it also started raining heavily so I decided to bash on. I found a van selling pastries around half an hour later and with that breakfast was sorted.

The rain continued for most of the morning. Even if it hadn't rained it wasn't the most exciting part of the trip. A bit of a transition day. I was riding along a probably 10km straight road for a while with quite a bit of traffic. Nice bike lane for me though. One of the few busy roads I was on in nearly 2 weeks of cycling.

The afternoon was drier with more sporadic showers and better countryside. The hills got bigger, the towns more interesting. I was cycling along back country lanes, gravel roads and cycle routes on disused railway lines. Having spent the first few days hardly getting above 100m above sea level I was now reaching the lofty heights of over 400m and was heading for the Ardennes National Park and the Meuse and Semois Rivers. I rode for a few km with a Belgian bike packer who was out on a 2 day adventure from his hometown of Namur.

After encountering a young fox while riding through the dunes in the Netherlands I came across the sounds of wild boar just after starting the climb out of Couvin in the South of Belgium.

The day ended with a descent into the Meuse valley to my final town for the day – Revin. I had now entered the 5th country of my trip, after Scotland, England, The Netherlands and Belgium, I was now in France.

I was staying at a chambre d'hote (B&B) called 'The Squirrels'. The owners were lovely but did make me clean my bags before taking them to my room (they had quite a lot of dirt from the rain earlier in the day). I took the opportunity to clean and oil the bike too.

They booked me into a local restaurant for dinner which made for an excellent ending to the day. This was the biggest day so far on the trip with just over 150km and over 1700m of climbing.

I was expecting similar on the next day so wanted to get away early and asked if I could leave before breakfast or have breakfast early. Not having breakfast wasn't an option and when I saw what they'd laid on for me I understood why. I had my very own breakfast buffet full of local delicacies.

The 6th day would take me from France to Belgium and back to France following the Meuse and Semois Rivers. The early morning was misty but the mist burnt off soon for a sunny and hot day – the hottest day of the trip.

The Meuse and Semois Rivers wind themselves through deep valleys up to 250 m high. There are excellent cycle paths along them and in part through the hills following disused

railway paths and tunnels. I chose to follow the cycle paths at times and go over the hills at other times to get the views from higher up too and it was worth it for both perspectives. It was a day for a good lunch stop in a hill top village overlooking the valley while the sun was beating down.



Bridge over the Meuse, France

The temperature that day edged towards 30 degrees but I was enjoying the ride and the scenery. There was a lot of up and down early on with the 2nd half of the day actually being flatter, relatively speaking. I'd gone from the windy Meuse in the Ardennes National Park to the straighter Meuse River south of the Ardennes. I was heading upriver. That said the day did end with some lumpy bits especially to get to my final destination that day. The Airbnb I'd booked was in the ramparts of the small town of Dun-sur-Meuse and the climb to the rampart nearly finished me off. It was worth it though for the view from the accommodation.



View over the Semois Valley, Belgium

Finding dinner was the main challenge of the day most days. In this case I was given the phone numbers of 2 restaurants. Call the first one – closed for holidays, 2nd one full. That was it apparently for options. So I wandered into town to see if there was anything else. I came across a takeaway and a pizza machine. I risked the pizza machine and was rewarded with a surprisingly good pizza which I ate on the patio of the Airbnb washing it down with a local beer supplied by the Airbnb and paid for with an honesty box.

For scenery this was the best day of the trip. I'd like to revisit the Ardennes National Park to explore it more. 146km for the day and another 1600m of climbing took me to an overall for the trip of 800km and therefore pretty much halfway. I was feeling good and the next day would be a relative rest day with a flat 80km on the cards.



Cycling through the French Countryside

When planning the route I was hoping to build in a full rest day but with the arrival date fixed this became impossible and I therefore ended up with a rest day that included 80km of cycling albeit in a pretty flat part of the route. Unfortunately, there was a bit of headwind even if in general terms it wasn't windy.

The headwind that day though was frustrating as with it being flat there was no real respite. That said it was a beautiful warm and sunny day and I trundled down along the Meuse Canal as well as the river stopping at various WW1 memorials before arriving in Verdun for lunch. Verdun being the site of the longest battle for the 1st world war.

The 2nd half of the day was more of the Meuse River and more war memorials. The nice thing about the 'rest day' was that I started riding at 10 am and finished at 4pm. My lunch break was well over an hour with a detour to see Verdun cathedral.



Verdun, France

I finished the day in a town called Saint Mihiel and it was the only time I'd stay in a hotel. Although well situated this one was a bit odd; no staff to be found at check in (keys on the desk, with a list of names and room numbers). Never saw anybody that evening or next morning for checkout. I took my bike to my room which was on the ground floor.

The town itself was nothing special but did have their town fete on when I arrived, although it was just finishing. I was hungry and had to wait until beyond 6:30pm before I could get some dinner. It was Sunday evening so many places were closing or staying closed so it was another pizza, the 3rd of the trip. I was due to stay with friends later in the trip and messaged them to say that if they were planning pizza for when I was there that I'd already had my fair share on that trip.

The next day I returned to covering in excess of 100km with 130km on the cards. Due to lack of staff at the hotel, I decided not to bother with breakfast there and made my way to the town centre boulangerie. My route left the river Meuse behind and cut across some local hills to the river Moselle and the foot of the Vosges mountains. This was day 8 now and therefore into my 2nd week. The rest day hadn't been as restful as I'd hoped and this one started a bit frustrating as a detour took me onto a busy road for about 10k before I managed to escape that.

Thereafter though I had some nice French countryside to ride through getting my first glimpse of the Moselle in the town of Toul. However, the story of the day was about lunch.

Lunch on my ride didn't always happen, on the fourth day it was one of the rolls from the B&B, on the fifth day it was a few snacks I'd bought in the supermarket the evening before. On this 8th day it looked like it was going to be one of those snack days, i.e. the rest of my breakfast croissant.

I came through a town around 12:30 and thought it would be good time for lunch. There was nothing open, on a Monday. French villages, which was all I was due to cycle through otherwise seldom have anything – no cafes, no bar, no shops, no restaurants. So, I'd resigned myself to not finding anything until I'd get to my final destination at Epinal. Not

long before 2pm I descended into the village of Xirocourt, and slammed on the brakes at the sight of an open restaurant. I ended up having a delicious 2 course meal before heading onto Epinal.

The weather that day was a bit fickle with showers in the morning and again in the afternoon. The middle bit was dry.

The day ends with a food story too, but first a bit more about accommodations. I generally picked B&Bs, Airbnbs or Chambre D'hotes as they were mostly private rooms with a family or a small business and this allowed me some contact with local people. I wanted to avoid a hotel with no contact (see the hotel in Saint Mihiel). What I'd done made for some nice conversation and for some interesting ways of communicating. My host in Epinal spoke no English and I had some broken French that I could use, so we mostly conversed through a translation app on his phone – it worked. I was staying in a room in the back of his garage.

What I hadn't realised when booking how far into the suburbs this would be and the option for dinner at a restaurant serving local cuisine didn't look likely. It was also raining heavily so I wasn't keen to go far. When asking my host for my options he suggested Burger King or an American Diner. I opted for the American diner and even though not great it was filling. The 130km that day took me to over 1000km for the trip.

The next day – day 9 – was planned as the longest day of the trip with 168km planned and the first time I'd ascend to over 1000m above sea level. I managed to get away at 7:30am this time and found a boulangerie in town for breakfast croissants which I devoured in a bus shelter an hour later. This would be most of my nutrition for the day along with some dried mango and cereal bars. The route out of Epinal took me upriver along the Moselle as I gradually ascended to just over 400m to a town called Saint Maurice sur Moselle. Here the road turned off for the main climb of the day up the Grand Ballon d'Alsace, a popular climb in the tour de France. The climb was 9km long with a steady gradient of 7-8 % average topping out at just under 1200m above sea level. There were not many views en route due to it being forested and when I got to the top it was quite misty too.



Top of the Grand Ballon d'Alsace, France

Although this was a big climb compared to anything else I'd climbed so far the day as a whole had less climbing in it compared to some of the other days. I was around 65km in when over the top. Unfortunately, just after starting my descent my planned route had a 'road closed' sign on it. The detour added a good 10km to my day. The plan was to stay at my friends Daniela and Sven and their family in Freiburg (Germany) that evening and I was hoping to get there by 6pm. It was Sven's birthday, and they had a few friends invited round for a BBQ. Thankfully once I get back down to the valley the route turned North East and I had a tail/cross tail wind from Giromagny up through Lauw and passing Mulhouse to the North. I crossed the Rhine via the Rheinbruecke near Hartheim and then rode North to Freiburg. I rode up to my friends' door and rang the doorbell bang on 6pm. An excellent birthday evening and BBQ was had. A 183km single day with a big mountain pass after 8 days of cycling, I felt surprisingly good. The next day I'd tackle the Black Forest.



Rheinbruecke, German/French Border

The forecast for my ride through the Black Forest didn't look good with a front coming in from the Southwest. I originally thought I'd have a wander round Freiburg for old times' sake – I'd spent 2 years there in the early 1990s - but the best part of the weather was going to be early on so I decided to get on my way as soon as I could. My route through the Black Forest came to 110km for the day but had nearly 2000m of climbing in it, with the main climb of the day coming at 20km, a 600m climb over 6km over the Rinkensattel. The previous day's climb was quite cold although the weather was pretty nice. The weather this time had already turned by the time I hit the climb but when I topped out I was pretty warm. Most of the day there was a continuous drizzle with heavier squalls coming through on occasion. Up until this point my bike behaved exceptionally well. Coming up the climb the cranks/bottom bracket creaked quite badly but some extra oil at the summit sorted that. Thanks to riding tubeless a puncture that started the day before self-sealed itself. I'd also relubed my chain a couple of times during the ride.

Even though it was raining it was pretty warm but the cloud was fairly low so I didn't get the best views but the route itself was nice again with disused railway tracks, farm roads and back country lanes. Although I'd crossed quite a few borders most of them came and went unnoticed so when I turned the corner at Stuehlingen I was surprised to see actual

border infrastructure. Then I remembered that Switzerland wasn't in the European Union. That said, there were no controls there either. The final 2 hours of the ride were very wet.



Rheinfalls, Switzerland

The plan was to visit the Rhein Falls at Neuhausen before riding on to my accommodation in Schaffhausen. I started to question doing that and just get home and dry instead but as the route was pretty much taking me past the Falls, I decided in the end to detour, take the picture and ride on. At this point my Garmin which was giving me turn by turn navigation decided to call it a day so I had to navigate my last 2k by phone in the heavy rain. As the saying goes: When it rains, it pours – or something like that.

The evening was uneventful, due to the heavy rain I dived into the first restaurant I could find (an US-Mex restaurant) instead of finding something authentic.

By next morning the rain had stopped, the temperatures had dropped and the plan had changed. There was some bad weather heading for Austria, the Eastern Alps, Poland and Slovakia. I was already aware of this but had hoped until the previous evening that it would come a day or two later. The forecast was for it to snow down to 1000m from Friday morning (Day 12 of my ride). On that day I was due to cycle over 2000m via the Silvretta Hochalpenstrasse. With that forecast this wasn't going to happen and I decided to pretty much finish my ride at the end of day 11 and take a train through the mountain range that I'd planned to go over.

So, day 11 would take me from Schaffhausen on the Rhine through Switzerland and along the shores of Lake Constance to Dornbirn in Austria. It was a pretty nice day even if cold and I was cycling through rolling hills in the Swiss apple growing region; it was harvest time too.

When I hit the shores of Lake Constance, I met up with my cousin Agnes for a late lunch and we then rode together to the Austrian border where we parted company. I rode on to Dornbirn to spend the night with my friend Georg and his family. We spent the evening catching up and also trying to get myself and my bike booked onto a train to Innsbruck. My final full day was 120 km long. This took me to a total of just over 1400 km for the entire trip.

The next morning I cycled from Georg's house to Dornbirn station, sorted train tickets out and got on a train a couple of hours later. During the train journey I had regular thoughts of if the weather was better than expected and I could have done some riding to, no it is really bad and that would be a silly idea. When I got off the train in Innsbruck it was around 7 degrees and pouring down hard. I donned all the cycling kit I had (pretty much) for the final 12km to my parents, house which is roughly 300 m above Innsbruck.

About 10k flat and 2k of climbing. As the climb started the rain stopped. By the time I got home I was over heating as opposed to frozen to bits.



Outside my parents house, Birgitz, Austria

My mum thought I'd want a hot drink and a bath but a cold beer was more on my mind in the end. The bad weather had a good thing to it. Arriving a day early meant that I made it Levi's christening, my sister's boy.

The journey was amazing, even though it didn't end quite as planned but that is part of these kind of adventures. I finished with 1450km ridden in 12 days, 71 hours in the saddle and nearly 13000 m climbed.

Sicily Climbing

By Richard Birkill

Last April a small group of Jacobites headed to Sicily to climb. In no order, Adrian, Amanda, Blanca, Ken, Neil, Robbie, Dan, Christina, Richard and Ros. I'll start from the second week as that's when I joined.

Sicily offers excellent climbing around the San Vito Lo Capo area where we were based. The second week was off to an excellent start with Ken's not being able to find the Italian for orange juice, settling on beer instead. Much to the amusement of the waiter. Most of the climbing was near the sea on outcrops during the morning, while retreating to the many cave like sections in the afternoon sun.



Robbie and Dan climbed a multi-pitch route on Monte Monaco, yet no one asked them for a hold brush during the week. I must look like I know what I am doing!



Some Cruisy E3s

By Martin Bagshaw

'The war on terror' used to be a favourite oxymoron of mine. I now have a new one...

In more recent times, a certain Mr Stuart McLeod once paraphrased, and has helped to perpetuate this paraphrasing of a remark I once made when picking out a climb on Vulcan Wall on Syke. This is a venue that is quite densely packed with routes of the E3 grade, and some wonderful grippy rock. With fading light, the coveted but notoriously stiff 'Uhuru' was definitely out of the question. So we needed to pick something 'more cruisy', (as I put it), like 'Creagh Dubh Grooves'.



'Uhuru', Skye. Not a cruisy E3

Although I climbed my first of the grade possibly well over a decade ago (if you count a misprint/sandbag/ plagiarism swerve in the Pembroke Rockfax guidebook), E3 has become my 'goldilocks grade'. By that, I mean generally not too desperately hard, and certainly not too easy to onsight generally what I am looking for when trad climbing. Having written that, I have fallen off two this year, both with other Jacobites on belay!

At the grade in question, I find that concentration and care are demanded, but probably not in such great quantities that I am not sketching out so much that I am wanting my mummy to come save me, unlike the situation in the below photos. Remember: guidebooks can be wrong.



'Rockablock', Pembroke. Not a cruisy E3 if you are a fledging E1 leader, looking for an HVS warm up. The author sporting a single rope and borrowed rack, naively pushing on through. A good reminder that reputable guidebooks, and Rockfax guidebooks, may contain misprints!

Three is the magic number for big shots too! As a glowing endorsement of E3s, a Mr Steve McClure once wrote (in the below linked article), *'I still think E3 is my favourite grade and if I'm in a new area this is what I will be looking for in the guide'*. I would have thought that at least E5, more like E6 or E7 would have been his 'golidlocks grade', given his climbing CV! Anyways, if anyone can be bothered to type the following url into a web browser, you will see four of Big Steve's favourite E3s. As a side note, the only one on his list that can be deemed cruisey has sadly been affected by rockfall (more on this later), and another one is nowadays regarded to be E4:

(https://web.archive.org/web/20071024173458/http://www.planetfear.com/article_detail.asp?a_id=104)

Flavio	31 Jul, 2021	AltLd	P1+2 in a oner was fantastic, but not enough refresher for the typical Etive style of P3+4. 30min to nutkey out 2 good wires deep behind the veg, but then the earth on the slab hindered padding. Quested a little above a sideways RP1, towards the 40m of gardening to come (unless the tussocks are key holds?) but decided against a Glattering down of Agony. Downclimbed and lowered Hammer P5 belay and seconded clean. Needs a good scrub. Continued up remaining pitches on a bollocks Gazza mystery tour. with JendeHoxar
JendeHoxar	31 Jul, 2021	AltLd	with Flavio
Rob Greenwood - UKClimbing	23 Jul, 2017	Lead O/S	Unforgettable. P1+2 are the most eye catching, but P3+4 provide the real test. Bolder than your average E6! with 1 partner

Comments from a couple of very strong and prolific climbers the ukclimbing.com website on Steve McClure's first E3, 'The Pinch', on Etive Slabs, which he climbed with his dad. A poor choice for a first E3 by all accounts, and one I don't think I'll be touching with a bargepole. I believe Flavio's comment refers to the guidebook writer, Gary Latter...

The 'Cruisy' E3s

Before I babble on to the extent that I might do if giving my first ever JMC slideshow, here are a few 'cruisy E3s', or ones that felt softer to me at the time of climbing them. As well as 'cruisability', I have gone for quality and memorability here interesting or exciting climbing on good quality rock, unusual crags, and great views and exposure. Not Cambusbarron, and certainly not Traprain, in summary!

Diamond Smiles, Lower Sharpnose Point, Cornwall One of my favourite crags anywhere. Take a load of Ratho fitness and midsize cams to plug and go before you get too pumped. Unlike at a most UK crags, you can end up placing more cams than nuts at this wonderful and unusual venue.



Two of the three fins of Lower Sharpnose Point

Creagh Dubh Grooves, Vulcan Wall, Skye. The one that started it all! Great, grippy rock, and possibly more like E2 if fully dry and you split it at the midway stance, or if your name is Michael Barnard. But E3 on paper and the interwebs, and we all know that that is what counts!

November, Cloggy (Clogwyn Du'r Arddu), North Wales. Make sure you lead the middle pitch for the E3 tick. This route made me fall in love with the crag. Well, this and doing the second pitch of Great Wall as a first of the next grade the following day. Go there during a heatwave and enjoy the shade of this expansive north facing cliff, camp out, and have a swim in Llyn Du'r Arddu.



'Neptune', Dalbeg, Lewis

Sailing the Aegean, Greek Buttress, Morocco. Another nautical name, but nowhere near the sea. I sold this one to Stuart by saying that it must be cruisey on account of the name the word 'sailing' sounds calm and serene, right? Therefore, we should climb it and climb it we did, with Stuart doing a great job leading some long and sustained pitches.

Comes the Dervish, Vivian Quarry (Dinorwic slate quarries), North Wales. It sounds like with rockfall in recent years, this route could be renamed 'Goes the Dervish'. A friend remarked this one is easier than 'Vector' at Tremadog, and I tend to agree, though the bold start requires a bit of care. A brilliant, and probably safer substitute if you like hand jamming would be 'Dinorwic Unconquerable', also in the slate quarries.

The Nazgul, Scafell Crag, The Lake District. Quite reasonable for a Lakes E3, although a bit bouldery and intense for a few moves. Make sure you lead the crux second pitch, though the following two pitches are very good too.

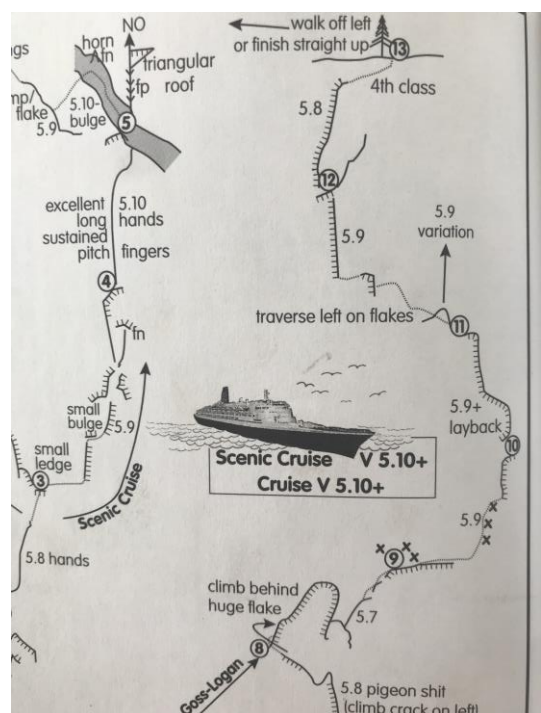


'The Nazgul', Scafell Crag, pitches two and three

Flagrant false advertising (and one that got away)

The Scenic Cruise, Black Canyon of the Gunnission, Colorado, USA. OK, it is probably quite obvious that this six hundred metre long route with sustained hard climbing is going to be no cruise, a conclusion Michael and I came to on a recent trip to 'The Black'. Coupled with cold mornings, us moving a bit too slowly on shorter routes, and a deteriorating weather forecast, we figured this one best wait for a future visit.

No, we did not climb it, but given the name and the topo illustration in a guidebook I borrowed, I just HAD to include it...



The Walker Spur

By Stuart McLeod

It was on a chance encounter at the Ratho climbing wall that Olly casually asked me if I would like to climb the Walker Spur with him, and I gladly accepted. The Walker is a classic route up the North Face of the Grand Jorasses in the French Alps, the Grand Jorasses being one of the Alpine North Face trilogy along with the Eiger and Matterhorn. Being a sizable outing, we decided to get to know each other's climbing a bit better as we had only climbed together twice before: once in winter and once at Aberfeldy, and neither outing anything like the Walker. The summer's preparation that followed was highly enjoyable in itself, with a series of climbing trips to Arran, the NW Highlands, the Western Lakes and Gogarth. As it happened, Olly was excellent at climbing granite as a result of having lived in California for some years, and this would be highly useful since the Walker is made of granite.



The aptly named Blankist route on Goat Fell



A Dream of White Horses at Gogarth

Having conducted our acclimatisation climbs basically at sea level, we started to feel pretty confident of our chances on the Walker, and we were keeping a close eye on conditions in the Alps. The summer was unlike the heat waves of the previous few years and there was some temperamental weather, however, a high pressure started to look likely towards the end of August. No sooner had we booked last minute flights, than the forecast changed to rain and snow for 2-3 days, which was not an excellent update given our plans.

Nevertheless, we headed out to Chamonix and decided to make the most of it one way or another. We did a warm-up route in the Aiguille Rouge before heading up to the Cosmiques Hut to sit out the bad weather and hopefully acclimatise a bit if nothing else.

There were very few people staying in the hut during the storm funnily enough, which made for a relaxed ambiance and plenty food. On the third day the weather cleared, and the sun dried the rock tout de suite, since this was the Alps rather than a mud clad North facing cliff in Scotland. So, we climbed the Rebuffat-Baquet route on the South Face of the Aiguille du Midi which is a classic rock route in its own right, and it was a joy to climb.



On the Rebuffat-Baquet with the Grand Jorasses in profile on the right.

We were concerned to know if the snow had affected the Walker and how long it would take to clear, but the Guardian of the Leschaux Hut was bullish, albeit we understood that there was ice high up on the route at the Red Chimney in particular.

The next day we set off back down to the campsite in the valley and repacked our bags for the Walker, before heading straight back up on the Montanvers train for the walk-in to the Leschaux Hut. The anticipation had been building for some time and was reaching a crescendo by the time we were packing the gear and making final preparations. Olly summarised this well as a feeling of pre-exam stress: in the next few days we'd be sitting an exam alright, on the topic of what we had learned in the mountains over the past decades.



View to the Grand Jorasses from Monteverv



Departure from Leschaux at 9am

After a crowded train ride, the quiet gradually increased as we headed first down the via feratta to the Mer de Glace and then onwards to the Leschaux Glacier. It was a deceptively long way to the hut and on arrival beneath it we came across some unconventional looking mountaineers: it transpired that they were crystal hunters who were there to mine crystals out of the mountains. We dined on the balcony of the Leschaux with the Grand Jorasses as a backdrop and learned that one Italian pair intended to set off at 1am for the Walker: they were the only ones attempting the route the next day as we intended to spend another night there. We had a great nights sleep as the Leschaux hut is at 2431m so over 1000m lower than Cosmiques, and this was followed by a leisurely breakfast. However, Olly had learned from the guardian that the hut would be full this coming evening and there were several teams who intended to try the Walker the next day. It took him a while to broach the subject, but about 8:30 he asked if I would be up for just setting of now? At that, Tom Livingstone, who was also staying there, turned around and commented that it was not the worst idea. Thus endorsed, we decided to head off at this unconventional start time: and it felt great to be on our way after all the pent-up excitement!

Down the fixed ropes through the choss onto the glacier, then we headed at first straightforwardly up the glacier towards the Grand Jorasses. On approaching the Walker the glacier terrain becomes more complex and route finding more speculative, but we made our way to the right of the toe of the glacier and found that we could access the spur that way.

The first section of climbing is quite moderate and trends left over the loosest rock on the route. We continued on a rising traverse left all the time looking up for the Rebuffat Corner which should allow access to the rest of the route. However, our progress was pensive as we did not want to overshoot and the whereabouts of the corner not so obvious to us. It

would have been uncool to have to head back to the hut with our tails between our legs, having been unable to find the route! Then a breakthrough, we spotted a line and some pegs zig-zagging above us and this was to lead neatly to the Rebuffat corner, the first main difficulty of the route.



The Rebuffat Corner



The 75m Diedre

Olly steadily made his way up the Rebuffat Corner and then stepped right into the Allain Corner on beautiful granite. Above there was some easier ground which led rightwards until the next difficulty was encountered: the 75m diedre. This was another beautiful rock feature on good rock which then led us up via some slightly iced slabs to the pendulum pitch. Having endured an epic pendulum pitch on the NW ridge of the Grand Charmoz the previous year I was not looking forward to this, but it was mercifully mellow by comparison.

At the top of the pendulum pitch we found a ledge which was just large enough for two people to sleep flat side by side and it was replete with snow. The Leshaux guardian had advised that we may find such luxurious lodgings at this point and since it was dusk we decided to bivi here.

Despite our very late start, the first day had gone quite well. On reflection it had been good to have this first part of the route to ourselves as fumbling around on the first loose section with several teams around would have been unpleasant. The subsequent technical pitches were bottlenecks that would have likely led to queuing or feeling harassed with other teams about. According to our topo we were 15 pitches into the route with only another 22 pitches to go to the summit.



Our luxurious bivi ledge at dusk

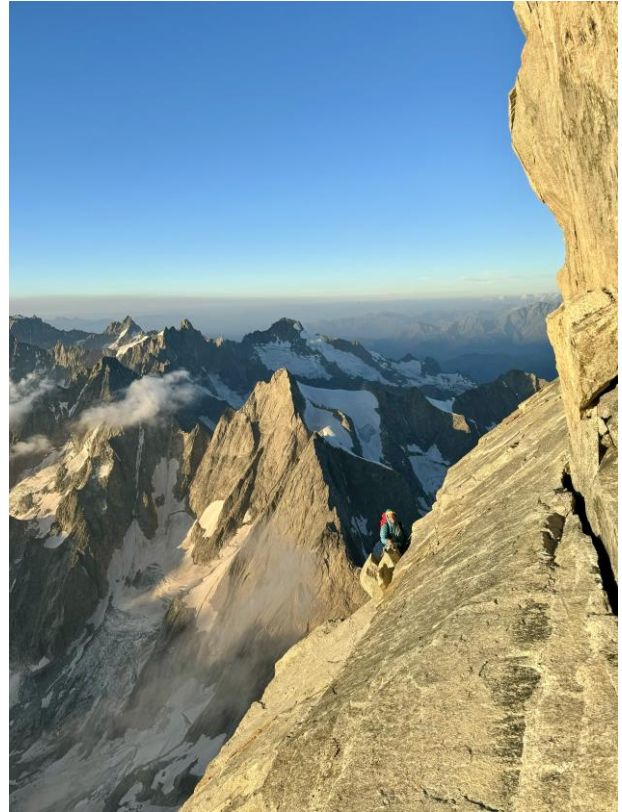


The Grey Slabs

After a pretty decent nights sleep we woke at dawn and started up the Grey Slabs. This was a rude awakening as we thought the initial pitch to be the hardest of the route. It was quite delicate and a little run out, but Olly's training on the Blankist back on Arran, stood him in good stead and he led us through these difficulties with aplomb. Thereafter, the route finding was not entirely trivial for a while but many pitches of excellent climbing followed towards the crest of the spur and onwards to the triangular snow field and the Red Chimneys.

I suppose a key aspect of climbing the Walker is deciding which compromises to make in terms of gear according to the conditions which are likely to be found. We read that sometimes the Red Chimneys are bare, loose rock, but we had understood that they were covered in thin ice at this time, so brought two ice axes each for the occasion: one ski touring axe and one more substantial axe. We had only two ice screws for glacier travel, as we were not expecting the ice to be thick enough to take screws, and we didn't fancy carrying them up the preceding granite anyway: in retrospect we wouldn't have changed this in the conditions we found.

For footwear we had B2 boots and light steel crampons with string connecting the front and back sections to save weight. I had thought these suspicious, so tested their front pointing on a wall in my back garden before heading out, to avoid discovering a latent inadequacy 1000m up the Grand Jorasses. Thankfully, on the mixed and ice pitches that followed, they felt very secure and I never gave them a second thought, although the fragility of the ice and sparsity of gear did give pause for thought on occasion.



Starting up the main pitch of the Red Chimney Above the Red Chimney in evening light

The Red Chimney was the final tricky section of the route and as dusk fell we debated whether to bivi on or just below the summit. Quite a wind had picked up which was cooling at 4000m, so we decided to bivi where we were rather than bivi in the summit snows.

The accommodation was far less accommodating than the previous evening. I found a rock which looked like an armchair but upon sitting in it, I felt it was determined to eject me. Turning to the side it took on a more accepting demeanour as a chaise longue, but it was reassuring to be tied in nonetheless. Olly found a scoop which he excavated a little and wedged himself in for the night: it was an uncomfortable bivi. Every time I awoke, I could hear Olly groaning and straining as if he was wrestling or fighting someone. Before dawn he said he did not think he could stay in that stress position much longer and was happy to leave the 'fighting bivi' whenever I was ready.

As recompense, the sunrise from the 'fighting bivi' was sublime, with views across to the Vallais Alps including the Weisshorn and the Matterhorn, that soon diminished the discomfort of the bivi. We made our way over some final easier rock and ice to the summit.

Belaying just below the summit, it suddenly dawned on me that we had climbed the Walker Spur. It had been such good climbing such an absorbing experience that I had kind of stopped thinking about which route we were on. It was only brought back home to me on seeing the summit of Point Walker. After relaxing a while on the summit drinking tea, we descended into Italy to end a magnificent trip and wonderful experience.

Thanks to Olly Stephenson for suggesting this adventure and being such an excellent climbing partner on this great route.



Sunrise from the 'fighting bivi'



The summit of Point Walker

