

Jacobites Mountaineering Club



Journal 2021-2022

Front cover – North Face of the Eiger by Tim Elson.

Committee

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Journal Editor's Comment

It was great to see the Jacobites getting back to full activity this year, and thanks to everyone for providing a wide variety of exciting and interesting articles for the journal. Many thanks to the Jacobites who filled me in on some of the goings that I missed, and to those who have provided photographs to remind everyone of the good times that were had!

Stuart

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Annual Summary

Autumn 2021

The Autumn of 2021 was characterised by strong winds, beautiful cloud inversions and a dense programme of Jacobite meets. The first meet of the new club year took place 15th-17th October at Inbhirfaolain in Glen Etive. Club members enjoyed fine views whilst Corbett and Munro bagging on the Saturday in particular, before retiring to the hut for a game of 'Munro Madness'. This meet has been summarised in the Inbhirfaolain article by Ken Humphreys.

On the meet to the Raeburn Hut from 6th-7th November an adventurous group cycled into Culra bothy, on which the advantages of wellies as cycling footwear were strongly established in wet conditions: as explained in Chris Davies' Cycling to Culra article.

The Ardbreckish House meet from 12th-14th saw Chris D enjoy a cycle to Loch Ard from Aberfoyle and Beinn Sgulaire was ascended by Tom and Katherine on what was a period of exemplary cloud inversions.



Lucy Spark on Garbh Bheinn – Skye. Photo by Bob Durran.

To round off the Autumn meets programme, Alex B underwent a solo survival exercise at the Braedownie meet in Glenclova on 27th-28th November, which he summarised thus: *"There are literally hundreds of fallen trees in Angus after the storm, many roads have been blocked. No electricity or landline in Glen Clova since Friday. Both roads below Clova Hotel have been blocked till Saturday night (and are still quite icy, I nearly got stranded today). Braedownie is a nice modern hut, but without electricity the only things that are functional are a wood stove (hard to cook on due to its shape!) and a backup water tap. Not your usual JMC meet this time".*

The end of November also saw the first snows of winter which signalled the start of the winter climbing season with Tim Elson climbing the Migrant and Stuart McLeod climbing Central Crack Route: both in Coire an Lochain of Cairngorm.

Winter 2021-2022

Repeated storms brought fleeting winter conditions which clung on in the highest hills during subsequent thaws: this made for challenging conditions for hillwalking and climbing alike.

On the first weekend in December, Tim Elson and Stuart McLeod climbed Grooved Arete on Aonach Mor under deep snow which culminated in a two hour cornice tunnelling session in the dark.

On the weekend of 10th-12th December, Ken H cooked delicious pork and chicken roasts with accompanying gravies at the Inver Christmas dinner meet, whilst Chris B and Catherine J provided the amuse bouche and Guy cooked splendid cloutie dumpling. The meet was accompanied by bad weather but was notable for the wealth of items left behind in the drying room: some intimate.

The New Year meet at Inver saw, Pam, Alison, Iain K and Graham P mainly burning logs.

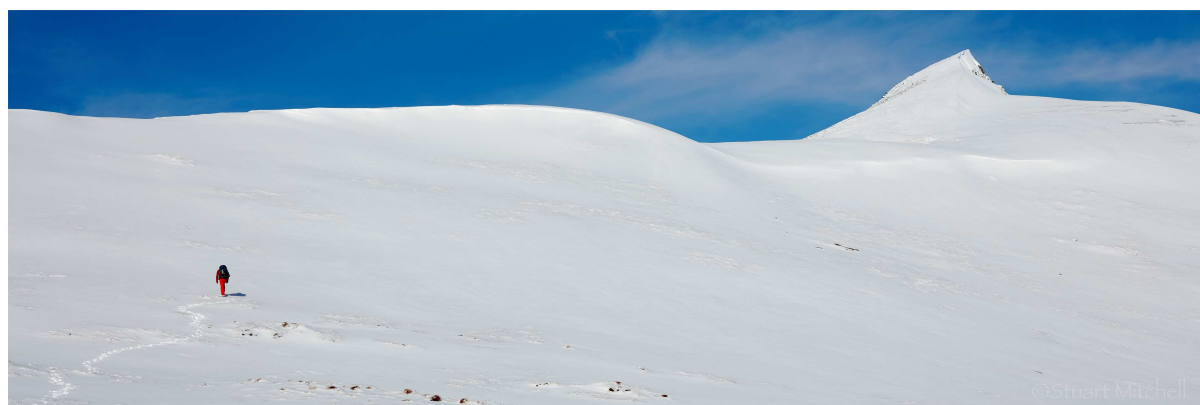
On the to Roybridge, 22nd-23rd January, Jacobites ascended the of Munros at Loch Triage and Glen Roy Corbetts mainly in the clag. Democracy in action saw Caroline Watt's request for another hill in the rain outvoted.



Graham, Ken and Sarah having a good time in the wet on the Roybridge meet.

The CIC hut was stormbound for the February meet on 4th-6th February with significant avalanche hazard. Nevertheless, Martin Bagshaw did his first winter lead on the Douglas Boulder climbing with Shauna. Miles and Jim also attended this tricky meet.

There were hints of clarity and winter conditions on the Inverardran meet, 4th-6th February, but the Invergarry meet on 18th-20th February provided the winter breakthrough that everyone had been waiting for. Jacobites enjoyed excellent views down Loch Hourn and beautiful winter conditions on Ciste Dubh in particular.



Ciste Dubh – photo by Stuart Mitchell.

The winter climbing was unabated through the winter, but often winter was only to be found on the highest tops between storms, so careful route choice was needed.

Nevertheless, Jacobites completed memorable ascents of classics across the country: Gargoyle Wall, Scabbard Chimney, Menage a Trois and Cherokee Chimney to name but a few.

Spring 2022

More settled conditions prevailed at the start of March for the Laganlia meet on the 4th-6th, where Jacobites enjoyed some beautiful walking and climbing in the Cairngorms. Further West, Jacobite climbers enjoyed excellent conditions and weather on Ben Nevis and the Aonach's in particular. Shauna and Dan climbed Minus 3 Gully into Northeast Buttress, Martin and Miles had a beautiful day on the Whiteline and Stuart M climbed Sickle, Minus 2 and three routes on Aonach Beag East face.



The Glen Coe meet on 18th-20th March, saw more beautiful Spring conditions appreciated by all. Fiona Z, Adrian, Kasia, Cathy Southworth and Joanne introduced newcomer Manuela to the use of ice axe and crampons in good conditions on the Bidean Nam Bian Massif.

On the Muir of Invereye meet, 1st-3rd April, Mike S enjoyed a cycle on the flanks of Culardoch and Bynack Lodge. Stuart, Sally, Christina and co. appreciated beautiful views over to Cairntoul from Carn a' Mhaim.



The summit of Carn a' Mhaim – photo by Stuart M.

Catherine J, Chris B, Richard and Co walked through the Caledonian pine forests and up into the remaining spring snow on the summits. However, these pleasures were as nothing, compared to the Italian themed meal that was to come!

During the Easter meet to Inver, 15th-18th April, Jacobites enjoyed a smorgasbord of activities that is typical of the season: a traverse of Beinn Eighe was the most popular itinerary; Martin, Michael and Stuart climbed the Cioch Nose at Applecross; Graham P took his new tent on a solo backpacking trip to Glenuaig. There was also much drinking, followed by a discussion on the relative merits of the metric system.

The trip to Jura Village Hall, 29th April-2nd May coincided with variable visibility but the Paps of Jura provided a memorable outing for Alan, Iain, Allison, Paul, Chris, Fiona Z and Chris.

The Inver work meet took place 20th-22nd May. The waterpipes and walkways were maintained as well as some painting and decorating, many thanks to all who helped with this important work.

The meet to Rum Bunkhouse, 27th- 30th May afforded some excellent views as many Jacobites had a wonderful outing on a traverse of the Rum Cuillin. Stuart, Sally, Ann, Ros, Katherine, Chris, Ross, Julie and co had an impromptu encounter with members of Carnethy Running Club on the Ainshval summit.



A Jacobite traverse of the Rum Cuillin – Photo by Stuart M.

Summer 2022

The Summer of 2022 was notable for intermittent heatwaves punctuated by unstable weather in the mountains.

The first trip of Summer on 10th-12th June to the Climber's Club Hut in Roybridge was during an unstable weather window. Fortunately Pam brought along a 'Shop' game to keep everyone amused. Ken shrewdly started a sex shop and there followed much cheating by everyone. Steph and Ross did also manage some Corbetts.

The Jacobites were not deterred by a 5 hour driving detour to get to the Blackrock Cottage for the 24th-26th June meet. Jenny C and Ross C made the most of the mixed weather with a fine ascent of Curved Ridge.



The long weekend at Inver from 29th-31st July afforded 2 good days of beautiful views over Torridon and surrounding hills. Alan M added to his Corbetts with Beinn Dearg and Baosbheinn. Richard C enjoyed Moruisg, Sgurr Nan Ceannaichean and Fionn Bheinn.



The Jacobites enjoyed an entertaining weekend to Ronan Cottage in Poolewe from 19th-21st August. On the mountaineering front, Ben Lair, Ben Alligin and Sail Mhor were ascended and on the extra-curricular side Cathy Scheib's karaoke machine and Glo's yoga class rounded things off nicely.

Autumn 2022

Ardvuilin House provided an excellent base from which the Jacobites explored Ardgour from the 2nd -4th September. David L, Ann, Iain K, Alison B, Jenny C, Ken H, Catherine J, Chris B and Jaime took an excellent summit selfie on a windy Carn Na Nathrach. Amanda McKay and Luis had an enjoyable climb: Mullenium Direct on the Indian Slab.



The Smiddy meet from 16th-18th September was somewhat dank, but this did not deter Graham P, Ann, Christina and Co from traversing An Teallach.

Finally, Glen Affric provided magnificent surroundings for the 2022 Annual Dinner meet from 30th September to 2nd October. Over 40 Jacobites stayed at the Glen Affric Holiday Park and enjoyed Lochinver Pies, a Ceilidh and general merry making in the Cannich Village Hall. A special thanks to Ros for suggesting this venue and leading the organisation of this meet!

As well as the merry-making, the Affric Munros provided some mountaineering entertainment in early snows, whilst the Affric forests provided a beautiful backdrop for the cyclists.



Congratulations

Fiona Zeiner completed the Munros on Spidean Coire nan Clach, Beinn Eighe, on 23rd July 2022 during her 50th birthday celebration trip. Fiona was joined by 17 people for this summit, most impressively by Elmar, her 82 year old father in law. Fiona's article, A Jacobite Round details this 18 year Munro bagging journey – congratulations Fiona!

Joanne Thin also completed the Munros this year in a more opportunistic way. Excellent Spring conditions on the Jacobite Glencoe meet in March presented the perfect opportunity to summit Stob Coire Sgreamhach, and so finish her round – congratulations Joanne!

Alan McClelland finished his Corbetts on 29th September 2022 with a trip into the Fisherfields for the Beinn Deargs. The round took 6 years and Alan was rewarded with beautiful views and a Brocken Spectre on the final summit – Congratulations Alan!

Lucy Spark gained the Mountaineering and Climbing Instructors award this year. This is richly deserved after the years she has spent becoming an accomplished climber and the help and inspiration she has given others along the way – Congratulations Lucy!

Also on the climbing front, in March 2022, Tim Elson realised a lifetime ambition of climbing the North Face of the Eiger via the Heckmair route. He completed this climb with Alex Mathie of the Alpine Club. Congratulations to Tim on this fine achievement. Further details may be found in Tim's North Face of the Eiger Article.

Dave McHugh Award

The Dave McHugh award honours the memory of Jacobite member Dave McHugh who was tragically killed in a road accident on the way to ski in Glencoe in 1987, along with his travelling companion, Lin Merritt. His parents donated an original painting of the Aonach Eagach Ridge to his club in his memory to be given as an award for special achievement, endeavour or enhancing the reputation of the club.

Karl Zeiner has an impressive list of personal achievements, and he has made a sustained contribution to both the Jacobites and to mountain sports in general. As well as being a seasoned hill-goer, he has run or cycled his way through some impressive events including double-Iron Man and the UTMB, as well as training others to reach their own goals.

Karl has always been a force for good in the club, always a friendly and encouraging face- and he made a real difference during Covid in keeping the club going via the Zoom-pubs and then the Pub-in-the-Park. In recognition of these individual achievements and sustained contribution to the Jacobites, the 2022 McHugh award goes to Karl Zeiner !

A Jacobite Wedding

Long-standing Jacobite members, Iain Kinnel and Alison Beresford were married at a lovely wedding at Moffat Town Hall in August 2022. Congratulations to Iain and Alison and wishing you many happy years together!



President's Speech

By Lisa Ferrero

Good evening, everyone.

Its lovely to see you all here, in person, and it's great to stand here and say that the club has had a fabulous year with lots of new members and well attended meets, and it all seemed...well...almost normal!

On the subject of being here, I'll dive straight into a first thank you, to the amazing Ros and her Lochinver pies. Thanks to all the volunteers for prepping and for tidying up tomorrow (That's a hint by the way). To Ros and team!

Now I'd like you to picture the scene...

A bunch of engineers, a firefighter and a mountaineering instructor are sitting round a roaring fire with their feet up after a long day in the hills..... smelly boots steaming by the fire, and favourite tippie in hand...

Now don't worry- it's not the start of me trying to tell a joke. You'll understand later.

Right- before we go any further, I want to make clear that I wrote this next bit before I knew who'd be on committee next year.

I'd like to congratulate one of the engineers in question. Katherine Ross has been amazing at adapting our activities throughout the Covid times to keep the club doing as much as we could when we couldn't go on weekends away. And this year she's been juggling her meets secretary duties with studying for her Engineering Chartership Exams. So I'd like to congratulate Katherine Ross C.Eng on getting her chartership, and to thank her for all her efforts, and obviously for stepping up to the plate for next year too .

And of course, a big, big thank you to all of this year's committee, who have given so much of their time, and made my life pretty easy this year, and to next year's committee for stepping up. So, if you could all raise your glasses to the committee!

Next, we have a few mountaineering related achievements to celebrate. This summer Fiona Zeiner combined her 50th birthday bash with a jaunt up Spidean Coire nan Clach in Torridon for her final Munro. Also a little birdie tells me that Joanne Thin completed in March this year, in a somewhat unplanned way when the Glencoe meet presented the perfect opportunity to nip up Stob Coire Sgreamhach.

Now to a mountaineering achievement of a different kind – I'd like to congratulate Lucy, who I know loves being the centre of attention (sorry Lucy). I remember what must have been one of Lucy's first ever lead climbs, down at Hawkcraig on a Tuesday evening. And now after working hard to get her instructing certificates while single handedly running a primary school, this year she has made the leap away from her little school in Fife to instructing on Skye, with some supply teaching in the quiet season. So, if there's anyone who's tempted to

do their Munros but just thinks 'there's no way I can do the In Pinn', then I'm sure Lucy would be happy to help you prove yourself wrong.

So, to Lucy Spark MCI, thanks for all the support and encouragement you give others, well done for daring to make what is a big change, and good luck with your future career and adventures.

And that segways quite nicely into this year's McHugh Award, which this year is very much about supporting and encouraging others.

As most of you know, the McHugh award was donated to the club by the McHugh's in memory of their son, who died in a car crash along with another club member Lin Merritt. The award is given each year for outstanding achievement, whether that's personal Mountaineering achievements or services to the club.

This year's recipient has very much shown both personal achievement and contribution to both the club and to mountain sports. As well as being a seasoned hill-goer, they have run or cycled their way through some impressive achievements including double-Iron Man and the UTMB, as well as training others to reach their own goals.

Karl has always been a force for good in the club, always a friendly and encouraging face and he made a real difference during Covid in keeping the club going via the Zoom-pubs and then the Pub-in-the-Park. Unfortunately, Karl can't be here tonight, but I'm happy to say the 2022 McHugh award goes to Karl Zeiner!

And now I must mention the event of year. The JMC dating service has come good once again, and in August this year Alison and Iain tied the knot, once Iain had overcome a slight but rather important mental block, and remembered what his own full name was!

So, to you both, congratulations, and to Iain Donald Geddes Kinnell, here's a little something for you in case you're ever in doubt.

The second silly award for this evening goes to a relative newbie, who's naturally bubbly nature shone though, or should I say bubbled through, on one of her early meets with the club. So, to Cathy Scheib, everyone was very impressed by your dedication in washing your outdoor gear, even on a walk in the rain, but we advise an extra rinse next time. And I believe Ros has a little something for you.

Now to finish, I'm going back to my little story, a bunch of engineers, a firefighter and a mountaineering instructor.

No need to put your hands up, but how many of you would have pictured them as a bunch of guys? I know I would, unless I was thinking about the Jacobites at the time. On one of the meets this year, I do remember sitting next to a couple of K/Catherines, Fiona, Amanda, Lucy and a few others and thinking 'where else would you find a room where most of the engineers present are women, and the firefighter is too'.

Now don't worry, I'm not going to get on a feminist soapbox or anything, but this year, while sitting through a Mountaineering Scotland zoom-meeting, which was about as exciting

as it sounds, I got to thinking about what makes the Jacobites different to many other clubs, some of which are really struggling to attract members. And one of the differences that has always struck me is that the club has a really high percentage of women compared to many other clubs, and to mountaineering in general. Its actually 50:50!

So why is that?

I remember (many aeons ago now) one of my earliest trips to the Jacobites pub must have been just before the AGM, because quite a few of the guys in the club were trying to convince various women to stand for president. And not out of any tokenism, but because they thought it made sense that the mix of presidents should reflect the members of the club, not just because they climbed the hardest or talked the talk. And now, after Ros being the 2nd (after a long gap), when it comes to women presidents, it's been a bit like London buses.

Now I realise you want to get back to enjoying yourselves without me waffling on, so I'll get to the point. I'm not saying that the club was or is perfect, and in some ways its very un-diverse, but I do think you should all take a moment to be proud of creating this very welcoming, supportive and non-elitist place, and I think one bit of evidence for that success is the number of women joining and playing an active part in the club.

So, my last toast is to all of you, to members past and present, for making the Jacobites a wonderful club. To the club!

Jacobites Making Club Annual Report

By Pam Van de Brug

Anyone interested in making or mending their things, at randomly arranged times, in people's homes, in the pub, on meets or online during pandemics, is welcome to join Jacobites Making Club.

Not so randomly, in April 2022, a Messenger chat titled 'Shh... don't tell Alison' began. Henceforth JMC members met in secret to make bunting for the wedding of Alison and Iain in August. Members nearly gave the game away several times. To cover their tracks, they held a fake Making Club meet-up to include Alison and put her off the scent. The bunting was a successfully surprise and a beautiful addition to Moffat Town Hall on the day. The bunting included Iain's tartan and Alison's wedding dress fabric. Later this year the bunting triangles will be made into a quilt for Alison and Iain.

Alison's own wedding related making efforts were extraordinary and included her own wedding dress, a crocheted mini-Alison and Iain, and a 3-tiered mountain wedding cake. Other folk got involved in growing sunflowers, potting plants, flower arranging, cheese curating, poster designing, wedding photography, hall setting up and remote creative direction via WhatsApp. All agree that Iain's finest wedding making was the curation of the fine selection of beer, gin and whisky!



Climbing New Routes

by John Sanders, Mick James and Mike Barnard

Catcairn Bushes stacks

There are two stacks here – Catcairn Stack and Heathery Stack. There are no previous recorded ascents. New routes have been logged on UKC -

https://www.ukclimbing.com/logbook/crags/catcairn_bushes_stacks-29835/#heathery_stack

Approach notes:

Turn off the A1 at Burnmouth and follow the A1107 into Burnmouth for 300m then turn right to Lower Burnmouth. Follow the single-track road steeply downhill to the harbour and continue along the shore front. Pass the first row of houses and park on the left at the railings before the second row of houses. From the parking place, follow the coastal path south for 1.5 km, past Lamberton Holdings to the end of the field overlooking a small pond. Follow the fence line seaward to the top of a grassy embankment. Descend this to the stony beach. Turn right and head south to the stacks.

Heathery Stack

Calvin's Chimney 30m VD

F/A 20/01/22 Mick James, John Sanders

30m. The north end of the landward stack is split with a deep chimney. Climb the slabby rib on the left. Move right to enter the upper chimney. Exit onto the summit ridge. Follow the rib to a block belay and abseil sling. It is possible to continue along the summit ridge to another block belay and abseil sling.

Parson's Nose E1 5a

F/A 25/01/22 Mick James, John Sanders

30m. Start at the left end of the west face below a protruding nose. Climb up and left to gain holds near the edge of the nose. Move up and right to easier ground. Continue up to a steep step with horizontal breaks. Climb the step moving slightly right to gain large but loose holds. Gain the summit ridge and continue to a block belay and abseil sling. The main summit is further south along the ridge which also has abseil slings.

Baggywrinkles HS 4a

F/A 25/01/22 Bruce Kerr, Malcom Davies, Rab Young

25m. Start 10m right of Parson's Nose. Climb a series of horizontal breaks trending left to gain a ledge below a steep step. Climb the step moving slightly right to gain large but loose holds. Gain the summit ridge and continue to a block belay and abseil sling. The main summit is further south along the ridge which also has abseil slings.

The Futtock Shroud E2 5c

F/A 25/01/22 Malcom Davies, Bruce Kerr

27m. Start left of centre of the east face of the landward stack below an obvious right to left slanting crack. Climb the crack passing a thin section (crux) to gain better holds up and left. Finish on a ledge below a right trending grassy ramp. Either abseil off a block halfway up the ramp or continue up the ramp to move left to grassy terrain. Go up then move right round an edge to grassy slopes leading to the summit (a further ~15m). Block belay and abseil slings.

Catcairn Stack

It Ain't Easy Bein' Green Diff

F/A 20/01/22 John Sanders, Mick James

15m. Climb the corner in the middle of the west face of the seaward stack to a notch on the summit ridge. The top is to the left. Move right to along the summit ridge to an abseil sling. Descend back down the west face.

Boulder Ruckle Ridge Diff

F/A 20/01/22 Bruce Kerr, Rab Young

20m. Climb the south ridge of the seaward stack starting on the right. Climb up to the right of the ridge. Move left and pull over some large loose flakes to gain the ridge follow this to the summit ridge and abseil slings.

Fin Fan VS 4c

F/A 25/01/22 Mick James, John Sanders

25m. Start below the right end of the overhang on the seaward face of the seaward stack. From the lowest end of the overhang pull up and left to gain holds on the lip of the overhang. Move right and onto easier slabby ground. Go up and right heading towards the notch on the summit ridge. Climb a short wall and a flaky bulge to gain the notch.

Beach Stack

This stack is at the Rooks north of the Soutar.

Point the finger HVS 5a.

F/A Mick James, John Sanders

12m. Climb the landward side of the stack via a short crack. Step right and climb the corner and pinnacle above.

Finger Licking VS 4c 12m

F/A Mick James, John Sanders

Climb the crack line in the centre of the seaward side moving right at half height

Cummingstone

500m west of the main stack is a small stack with a big rock pool on the east side.

Rock my pool S 4a 7m

F/A Mick James, John Sanders

Teeter over the rock pool and climb the east face at the south end.

Gardeners World S 4b

F/A Mick James, John Sanders

Climb good rock on the South side of the stack until imminent soily death forces you left to join Gardeners Choice

Islay Split Wall Geo

Red Snapper HVS 4c

F/A Mick James, John Sanders

Take the direct line up to the porthole passing a bulge at half height. The steep wall above has many holds, of variable quality.

Shetland New Routing

by Michael Barnard.

The trip was hit with strong westerlies all week which hampered access to most of the premier cliffs, but on the best weather day we all went back over to the Bressay sandstone crags which had given us a fine day in 2021. Lucy and I headed over to Mirki Wall, the seaward face of which I recalled looked to offer a least resistance line of about Severe standard. Lucy was game for an attempt but doubted my suggested grade, and a few goes to get started confirmed this! As it was, the first pitch gave some fine devious climbing, starting with a step across a channel and zigzagging about to avoid the steepness, even including a brief stomach traverse; all very traditional. By this point Big Bob's (Robert Durran) decision to swap climbing partners for the day was looking like a fortuitous move, and this was further confirmed on Lucy's pitch above, featuring a bunched-up traverse which I found pretty awkward. The name Mirki Manoeuvres (HVS) seemed appropriate.

Later in the day, Dave and Lily's attempt at a new super route, ground to a spectacular halt when the former "got too excited" when performing a rock-over. Some shouting ensued, and onlookers were worried for a while on hearing the news that he might've dislocated a hip, but Lily was dispatched up a neighbouring route and thankfully he was able to follow and take it a bit easier the rest of the trip. Unfinished business!

A Jacobite Round

By Fiona Zeiner

(14th August 2004 – 23rd July 2022)

“Could someone take my photo? This is my first Munro...”

In retrospect, I realise that a few of my companions probably thought “Oh.... We didn’t realise you were quite that inexperienced....”

I’d moved to Edinburgh to start a new job in 2003, and joined the Jacobites in the early summer of 2004, mostly picking the club because it had a decent website, as far as I can recall. Unfortunately, there hadn’t been much by the way of official meets over the summer, so when Andy Duncan and a group of his friends from Birmingham organised a trip to do the Ring of Steall, and invited some Jacobites along (I think to fill up the hostel) someone kindly blagged me along too. So, when we got to the top of An Gearanach there wasn’t a lot to be done about the fact that we were on a rather long and committing day out with a total novice. Fortunately, it was a lovely hot August day, and so there was no great time pressure. I don’t remember having any issues with the more exposed sections; the thing that did take ages was the descent from Sgurr a’Mhaim – I think most of the group went off ahead, got the cars from the Upper car park and then picked up the slower people in the Lower car park. So I went straight to 4 Munros on my first day out!

My first proper meet was to Strawberry Cottage (this was the occasion on which someone asked Graham, who was also fairly new to the club at that time, if he had a waterproof jacket with him... no one who was there on my first Munro was also there on my Last, but Graham was.) We climbed Mam Sodhail, which was an early indication of something that was going to become a feature of my round; I would end up climbing a lot of very remote mountains fairly early on, while it took me a lot longer to get to some of the easier ones (especially those that are usually done in day trips from Edinburgh). The extreme example of this is that my second-last Munro was Ben Lomond!

Other early memories are of a walk over the Grey Corries from the Roybridge meet: my first time in crampons (the old club ones, that were held on with very long leather straps that couldn’t be cut because they had to be useable by people with different sizes of feet) and my first cloud inversion and Brocken Spectres.

Because I’d just moved to Edinburgh, I didn’t really know anyone, and so I didn’t have anything better to do than go on meets, so I did, a lot. I wasn’t particularly hill fit to start with, and I hated getting left behind, so I started going to the gym and running on the treadmill set to maximum slope. That, and going on lots of meets, improved my ability to go uphill. I also wanted to have a go at rock climbing and ended up getting involved with a women-only group that met at Alien Rock on a Monday evening. One of the members of that group was practicing for her Mountain Leader assessment, and in 2006 she arranged for a group of us to go into Fisherfield, and, on a different occasion, the Ben Alder area. All this hill going meant that when a bunch of us did the 5 Sisters of Kintail on a meet at Glen

Lichd House in March 2007, Sgurr na Carnach was my 100th Munro, just over two and a half years after my first.

Not long after that I met Karl, and while this was in general A Good Thing it did slow my rate of bagging down somewhat! It took me over 4 years, till August 2011 to reach 150 and another 4 years to get to 200 on Ben Macdui in August 2015.

However, as a result of meeting Karl, I also started to get into triathlons, and running in particular, and I started to get fitter. A lot fitter. There's a photo of me on that first Ring of Steall walk, flat on my back in the sunshine, tired out. If you had told me then that I would be returning to run over those hills, and not just to run the route I was walking but starting from Kinlochleven, so that I would be climbing onto the ridge twice, I would not have believed you. Yet that is what I did in 2018, taking part in the Ring of Steall "Skyrace". That had been a bit of scope creep from my initial idea, which had been to bag *one* Munro while taking part in a hill race – I managed that in the Stuc a' Chroin race, but then somehow ended up doing the Glenshee Nine race (6 new Munros and 3 repeats) and the Ring of Steall as well.



I also carried on backpacking. The women's climbing group had broken up for various reasons, but I kept in touch with one member, Susan, and she and I meet up once a year for a backpacking trip. Our trips together included the South Glen Sheil Ridge (camping high at both ends of it), the Beinn Deargs, a round of Loch Mullardoch, a rather wet expedition into the Fannichs, a trip into Glen Affric Youth Hostel and another to Knoydart. However, my most memorable remote camp has to have been on a different Knoydart trip, where Fiona S, Pavla and I walked in to join a Jacobites meet: on the morning of the second day, having

camped on the ridge just short of Sgurr Mhor, we woke to clear blue sky and a temperature inversion filling the valleys beneath us with mist.

I also have good memories of a solo trip into the Cairngorms which included the circuit of Garbh Coire over Braeriach, Sgor an Lochain Uaine and Cairn Toul. I've enjoyed walking on my own, though my records say I've only done 24 Munros solo. I don't feel that I'm any more at risk because I am a woman, but being out in the hills on your own does carry additional risks and so I am fairly cautious when it comes to what weather I will go out on my own in. One of the results of walking with the club is that I've been up hills with many different people – there are over 150 names in my database (plus a catch-all "Jacobites Group" for good measure!).

One thing I learned fairly rapidly was that scrambling and exposure was not my strong point. I have been grateful for the patience of a good many club members for getting me up and down all the Munros on the Cullin Ridge – fortunately I did the Inn Pinn while I was still climbing regularly. I do regret having taken the escape path round the scramble on An Teallach and would like to go back and do it properly! I did the Aonach Eagach as a "client" for Lucy while she was training for her MIA award; having done it once on a rope I'd quite like to go back and do it unroped.

Other special memories include an Easter trip to Strawberry Cottage where we enjoyed a lot of late-lying snow under clear blue skies; various spectacular days in the Cullin, and the time I took the opportunity to stay in the CIC hut because no climber wanted the space. After going up Ben Nevis via the Carn Mor Dearg arete in blue skies and snow, I woke up in the middle of the night needing to pee. This was before the toilet was added to the hut, so I had to go outside – only to get a spectacular view of the North Face cliffs under a full moon.

My 250th Munro came 5 years after my 200th, in August 2020; but by then I had the bit well between my teeth and a firm deadline to try and complete around my 50th birthday in July 2022. There were points during the pandemic where it looked like that was not going to be possible, but fortunately things opened up again and by the end of 2020 I was up to 263, leaving a year and a half to do 19, which I duly managed, and so on the 23rd July seventeen people joined me on Spidean Coire nan Clach, one of the two Beinn Eighe summits, to see me finish my round. The most notable person to join us was my father-in-law, Elmar, who was determined to take part and who demonstrated that being 82 is no barrier (though he does have a lifetime of activity behind him, including an ascent of Mont Blanc when he was much younger).

So, what's next? I've always tried to prioritise good days out and spending time with people over simply bagging – one result of this has been a willingness to go for Corbetts if that's what others are doing. I've done 60 of them, including both of the demoted hills (Beinn a Chlaidheimh and Sgurr nan Ceannaichean) while they were still Munros; some you might expect like Foinaven, or the three Quinag summits; and some that I did with someone (usually Guy) who was on a bagging mission. I don't see myself making a concerted effort to go after Corbetts in the short term, though, although there are some I'm keen to climb like the Beinn Deargs in Torridon and Fisherfield. I'd like to go back to some hills that I didn't

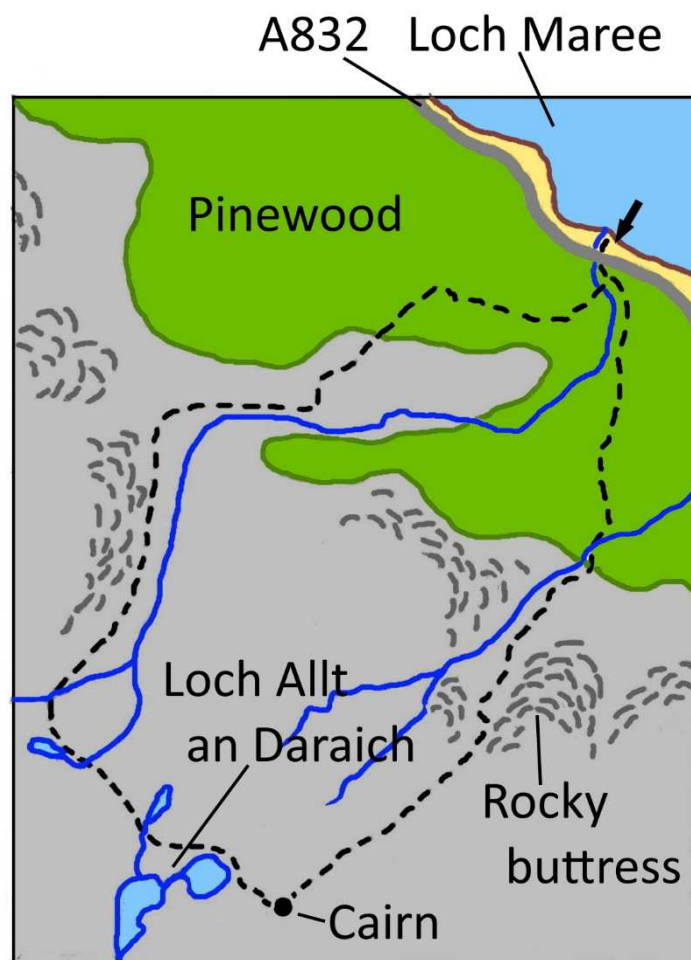
have the best weather on (Ben Cruachan comes to mind), and there are places that Karl has never been, like Fisherfield. I've promised Susan, too, that now we've stopped bagging things for me we can go after summits for her. Graham got me interested in Tops – I've recorded 108 of them which might be an underestimate: whether I ever get to all of them is a different matter. I'd like to do some more solo backpacking, too, before I get too old to carry lots of weight up and down hills. Most of all I want to carry on enjoying the hills, and the people I share them with, whatever the weather.



A Short Walk from Inver

by Alan Walker

At Invercroft there is a folder of walks suitable for those days where the weather is poor for the tops, or for the day after the night before. Only one of them starts directly from Inver, and that is definitely neither short or suitable for clearing a sore head – it traverses the skyline view of Carngorm and Moruisg.



On the club's meet at Inver July '22 I found another excellent Short Walk. The Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve has two locations alongside Loch Maree for visitors. There is a "Mountain Trail" developed as a circuit of about 6 km, ascent of 530m, and needing 4 hours. Its high point is at 550 metres, well situated for superb views into the depths of the ridges and summits that are Beinn Eighe, also Slioch and the Fisherfield peaks rising beyond Loch Maree. The lower slopes of this walk are as good an experience of Caledonian pine forest as to be had around Cairngorms, and these are well tended by Nature Scot (a.k.a. Scottish Natural Heritage).

The route follows a path constructed for this purpose, clearly marked on the OS 1:50,000 map. It is not tame in its first section which above the woods goes steeply through terrain of quartzite slabs and minor buttresses. Not a place to be in wet, misty or freezing conditions despite the ample marker cairns, but interesting in the good weather you will need for the views. Once higher ground is gained the walk is easy over open rocky ground and then back down through the forest.

* From Kinlochewe follow the A832 going northwest, soon passing the main visitor centre for Beinn Eighe Reserve on LEFT. Continue for about 1.5 miles looking for a second sign on the RIGHT for the Reserve and parking next to Loch Maree. To access the paths from the carpark, go through the underpass by the river. Then follow signs for Mountain Trail, avoiding Woodland Walk which will be where you finish the walk. Go clockwise to be ascending the rocky sections. Head south through the Coille na Glas Leitire, with its birches soon giving way to pines. Cross the bridge over Allt an Mhic Eogheinn.



* The path heads up what seems improbably steep terrain but continues to be well constructed until out of the woods and onto open slopes of quartzite rock. The path here becomes vague in some parts: follow the line that goes closer to the prominent rocky buttress on your left looking up-slope.

* Once level with top of this buttress the angle eases and the path becomes distinct and easy, leading leftward through a cleft and out above the buttress to direct views of Slioch and Kinlochewe.



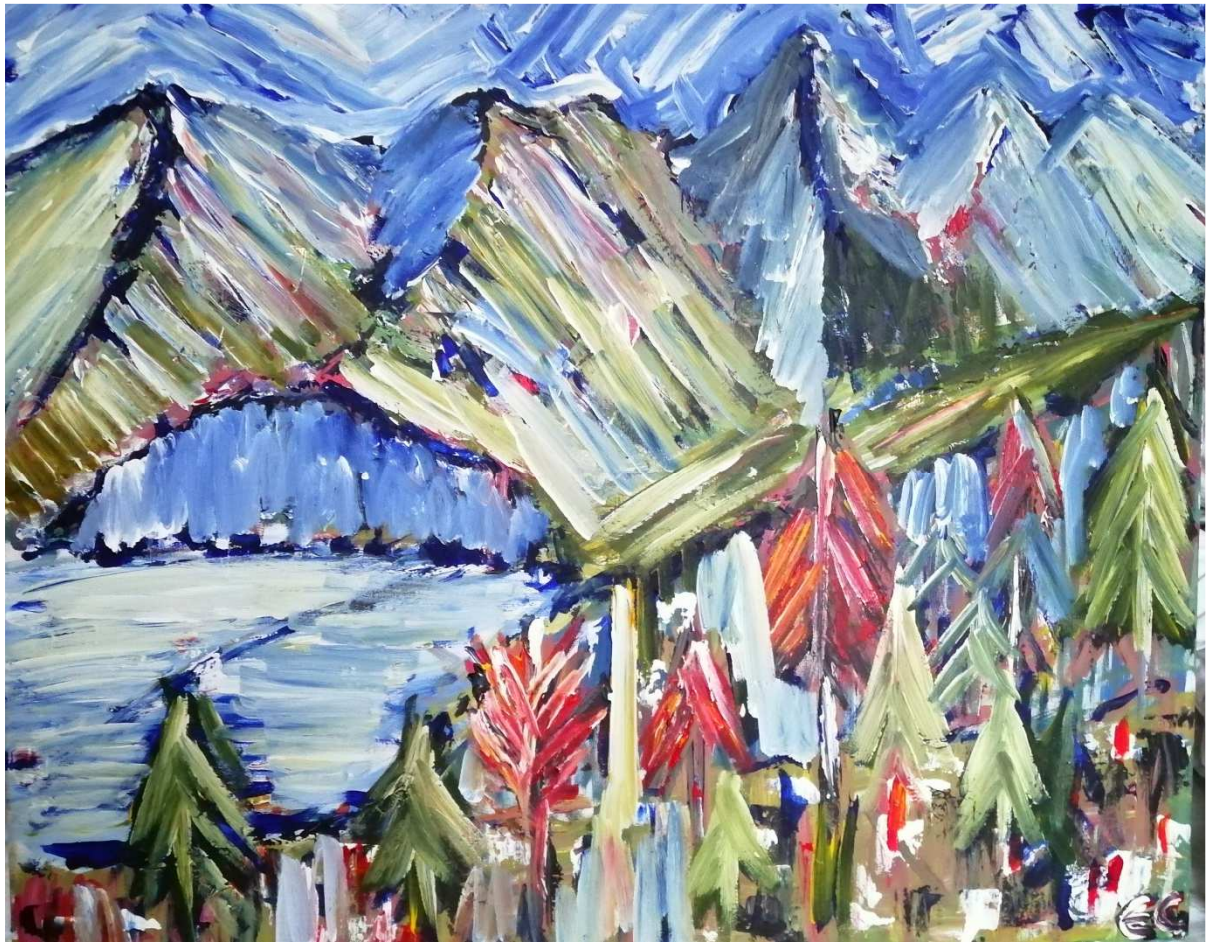
* The high point of the walk, at Leathad Buidhe is marked by a summit cairn. From here stroll past Loch Allt an Daraich, where the cairn-fairies have been particularly busy.



* The path trends northward now, crosses the Allt na h-Airighe, and eventually descends in the Coille again, where it joins the Woodland Trail leading back to the carpark.



The Five Sisters of Kintail



by Euan Cameron

An Autumn Meet - Inbhirfaolain – Glen Etive.

By Ken Humphreys

15-17th October 2021

Chris D, Mike B, Hannah Schlordt, Colin Edwards, Scott Sutherland, Ken H, Amanda McKay.

I had met Amanda at the Jacobites pub night in the Old Bell and mentioned that I was taking the Friday of the meet off work to maximise better weather and bag another hill. Amanda mused for a moment about just getting off a night shift at 8 am then thought how bad could it be? Very good as it turned out with a clear run up the road and bright, mild weather. I had come up with a plan to bag a Glen Etive Corbett, Beinn Maol Chaluim, direct from the hut – perfect, avoiding finding a parking space.



Beinn Trilleachan (of the famous rock-climbing slabs) to the South.

We arrived down at the hut with time to spare before dusk. Colin and Scott had arrived and made a great job of getting the wood burner going. This was so warm and efficient – a great addition to Inver should the opportunity arise!

Inbhirfaolain is in some ways the opposite of Inver – electric plug sockets but no running water. Water cooler bottles were used to collect enough supplies from the nearby stream for the

I had estimated timings but from the map you don't quite picture how rough the ascent would be. The lower slopes are blighted by felled forestry and higher up a tortuous zig zag around broken crags, all at a relentless steep gradient.

The views from the summit ridge made the effort worthwhile with the paps of Jura and Ben More of Mull brightly illuminated. At the top, the forecast colder weather arrived but we lingered to take in an amphitheatre of higher peaks, starting with Bidean nam Bian to the North to



weekend. The loo is a compost drop, accessed via outdoor stairs at the end of the hut. Large bags of sprouts in the cooking supplies suggested it would be well used...

Colin and Scott had had a more difficult trip down Glen Etive due to the hydro scheme construction workers driving back to Glencoe and beyond at the end of the working week. Michael joined us later in the evening after a good days' tree felling.

On the Saturday, everyone had different ideas and I thought we would be scattered to the five (for five of us) winds. In the end, Angela joined Michael to climb two Munros in Stob Coir'an Albannaich and Meall nan Eun. Scott had bought his bicycle and opted to cycle to Loch Awe and Colin decided to climb Stob na Broige, starting at the hut. I was continuing my Corbett mission on Stob Dubh and its Graham neighbour, Beinn Ceitlein.

The track up the Allt Ceitlein is much improved in terms of mobility by the hydro developments but visually diminished due to the industrial scale of the surface plastic piping. Stob Dubh is one of the steepest hills I have climbed and gives good views. The return on the East side is a lot wilder, scrambling down a dry river bed then bog trotting until the hydro track.



Back at the hut, everybody enthused about a good day. We all had great views in the morning and had got back just before the rain started. Colin had to walk about 1.5 km along the twisting Glen Etive road to the start/end of his hill which made it harder work than expected.

We all coordinated well around cooking and sat down to chat or read. Knowing I had a small captive audience, I thought I would inflict a self-created game which I had made for my last Munro party in 2013.

It's called 'Munro Madness' and involves a map of the Munros. You throw a dice to move around the country and on landing on a mountain symbol, have an opportunity to 'climb' your Munros in that area by answering a question.

The winner is the team that is first to complete their 'Munros' on the Skye Cuillin. Amanda and Colin took on Scott and Michael. Both were strong teams but despite some last-ditch efforts, Scott and Michael took the prize.

On the Sunday the weather was as dreich as anticipated so we all opted for an early return to Edinburgh after cleaning the hut. Thanks to the hut secretaries for booking and to all who made it an enjoyable weekend.

A Trip to the Jotunheimen, Norway

By Ros Clancey

It was a cool, grey and windy evening when the bus dropped us off at Gjendesheim. This was the starting point of our trek in the Jotunheimen, a covid-belated trip that had been planned to mark my brother's 50th birthday. We'd arrived in Oslo the night before at the height of a heatwave, treating ourselves to an overnight at an airport hotel and carb-loading on a magnificent breakfast buffet before setting out in the searing heat to obtain gas canisters and thence the four hour bus trip North.

I had never been to Norway, and like anywhere new for the first time you try to visualise what it might be like. My best guess had been the Cairngorms in April, and as the bus wound up the lonely road this didn't feel too far off the mark. Certainly a Scottish feel, but on a much bigger scale. A two-mile evening hike up to the Bessvatnet lake awaited. Our packs were pretty heavy – a tent and stove each, all our food for the trip, and enough warm clothing that could cope with the potentially wintry conditions that we were likely to encounter. About 16kg I reckoned. We would be spending most of our time well above 1000m and we had our sights set on Norway's two highest peaks, Glittertinden 2457m and Galdhopiggen 2469m if conditions were favourable. Being August, it was a way off the 'simmer dim' but the leaching away of light as we heading on to the lake was very gradual, as indeed was our progress. The wind blasted across the lake and in the last vestiges of light we saw a hut – maybe a bothy we thought hopefully. A fishing hut, it was locked, and so we wrestled with our tents in the wind and hunkered down for the night.

The wind eventually dropped overnight and early in the morning I poked my head out to see a spectacular sunrise, and, despite the lack of sleep, I felt the rising excitement of the trip ahead.



We were late setting off, enjoying a leisurely brew in the sun. Our first full day of walking took us over a pass to the head of the Russvatnet lake where a bridge crossed a rushing outflow. We continued along beside the lake on a high track, and up to a higher pass crossing a snowfield. With great excitement we spotted our first reindeer, first of many that trip. A long, rough and bouldery descent followed. We were heading to make camp at Glitterheim, at the base of Glittertind, the first of the two highest peaks that we hoped to climb. Once down from the path a tedious and tiring boggy trudge awaited around the head of the Nedre Steinbuvatnet, and with the light fading as we sought a camp site, the late-start-late-finish pattern was established. But we had found a beautiful spot amongst blueberry and crowberry beside the fast-flowing Glitterbekken rushing down from Glittertind. Again we lingered in the bright sunshine of the morning, and watched a magnificently-antlered reindeer zig zag his way down the slope above us seeking out silvery reindeer lichen, almost arriving at our campsite. With daypacks we made the thousand metre bouldery ascent of Glittertind. Although cold, the weather was reasonably settled but cloud shrouded the permanently snow-covered top, and with a little difficulty we found the summit, marked in a traditional way as I later realised, by a willow stick.

The next sunny morning we left our campsite on a good track along a wide valley basin. The landscape was vast and beautiful and our spirits were high, lifted further by the sight of reindeer galloping at full pelt along the wide basin, sending sprays of water up. Such a beautiful wild place! We climbed up rocks to a long col that ran past a series of small lakes, each requiring laborious clambering over snow-edged boulders. We disturbed a small flock of ptarmigans in summer plumage. Finally opening out ahead of us was a vast and gravelly tundra plain, that stretched for several miles, pitted with lunar-like rocks. As we crossed, more reindeer passed at a distance, one cantering at high speed in one direction and then back on some kind of mission. Finally, and somewhat wearily, we dropped down a steep and awkward descent to Spiterstulen, opting to use the hut campsite as a good base for making our ascent of Galdhøppigen the next day and to get a shower!



The weather was mixed as we set off up the 1400m climb up Galdhoppigen, a light rain falling from grey skies but it was forecast to clear up a bit. My brother was low on energy and progress was slow. In an effort to avoid the bouldery slopes we veered onto snowfields but back to the boulders as they became frozen higher up. The boulder fields steepened to some easy scrambling and we attained the ridge. My brother had had enough so we agreed I would continue and he would turn back. The clouds cleared a little and views started to appear as I progressed along the long ridge, now with a glacier falling away beside me, finally heading up a snowfield to the rocky summit and magnificent stormy-looking views. Back at camp we treated ourselves to a celebratory beer in the hut. The weather was changing, and with it our plans for the final days of the trek. Instead of a higher pass and the Besseggen ridge, we opted to take a longer lower-level route over two days out to Gjendebu and to take the ferry along the Gjende back to our starting point at Gjendesheim. This would still give the option of at least heading up one side of the Besseggen ridge on the final day as a day walk if the weather improved. I was glad that we had managed the high peaks.

The first day was showery and a big river crossing augmented by the rain awaited us. We were prepared – my brother with crocs and I with sandals. The route continued up a pass and past a series of small lakes surrounded by Mordor-like mountains with Tolkien-esque names. One lake in particular, Troget, was an awkward and slippery boulder hop, and we were engulfed in clouds of flies – none biting, but nevertheless unbearable. We sought – and found- an open campsite catching a breeze and looking out across the final lake. A wild and remote landscape for a camp, and, getting up in the night, the moon sailed in and out of ragged clouds.



Our final through day was for the most part unremittingly wet. The route passed around a small lake and over a small col to a much larger lake, but the terrain was complex with rocky knolls and in the mist some good old-fashioned navigation was required! A long walk beside the aptly-named Langvatnet awaited with numerous streams in spate pouring off the hillside. None of these were uncrossable but by now with wet boots we just got on with it. As we reached the end of the lake, finally the rain eased and we could feel the sun glowing through the cloudy mist. The final 5km walk out to Gjendebu was a tough one and I was definitely running on empty. Although the sun had come out, the track was hilly. We made an exhausted camp by the ferry point for the trip up the Gjende lake to our end point the next day. In the night, the reflection of the moon on the lake was beautiful. Our ferry ride to Gjendesheim was in glorious sunshine with the lake a postcard fjord blue, and on disembarking we walked a few hundred yards to find a camp spot beside the water. We had a day to climb to the top of the Besseggen ridge, a popular outing. The clouds returned but we had glimpses of the famous view of the two lakes (one turquoise one blue) as well as a sighting of a reindeer herd. We shipped out the next day, back to Oslo on the bus. The calories needed versus the weight carried had been difficult to manage and we were much depleted, and on arrival in Oslo pizza and beer were the order of the day!



Cycling in Iceland

By Alexey Borodnikov

The start of the journey wasn't smooth. The flight to Reykjavik was early on Tuesday morning, so on Sunday evening I gave the bicycle a bit of maintenance: new brake pads, added sealant into the tyres and changed the front chainring to a smaller one - same as I used for my Badger Divide bikepacking trip in Scotland. The gears seemed to shift fine on the bike stand, quick test ride around the neighborhood - and at the first hill the derailleur got into the spokes. Apparently the chainring and the chain were exactly as I've used before, but I forgot that I had to adjust the B-tension screw when I changed the chainring last time. The derailleur itself survived, but the hanger was definitely bent. The bike manufacturer could ship a new one and even had next day delivery, but it would still arrive on Tuesday afternoon, so it'd be too late. Morning visit to a bicycle shop, they did not have a spare for this model, but they would try to straighten it back. By the time I got a call back from the shop I had already been offered a spare hanger with a pick-up in Montrose or even another gravel bike with a pick-up in Morningside. Luckily the mechanic managed to straighten it. Word of advice: if you don't have a spare hanger for your bike, go and buy one now!

Next problem was how to pack the bicycle for the flight: usually I fly with a bike in a padded soft bag, but this time I was planning a local one-way flight from Reykjavik to Ísafjörður in Westfjords on the second day in Iceland and the folded bag was too big to cycle with. So I wrapped the bike with some bubble tape and a camping mat, put it in a thin nylon bag and prayed to all cycling gods hoping it would arrive in a single piece. And it did! There is a special bike pit outside of Keflavik airport for assembling bicycles with most necessary tools available. Despite a strict notice on the wall that all boxes and bicycles would be removed, it was full of boxes, some of them with a notice "Please do not touch" and expected date of return flights. It looked like you could leave your box there and pick it up (or another spare one) on the way back, and later I even met people who did it, but when I came back for my return flight the pit was completely cleaned up with only some pieces of cardboard left that I used to enforce my thin bag.

As my flight was early and I did not have any plans till the local flight the next morning I decided to cycle from Keflavik to Reykjavik. The shortest road is only 40km but it's busy so instead I made a lap around Reykjanes peninsula keeping to minor roads. Just a mile west from my route was Geldingadalir valley where the latest volcano eruption took place in 2021. The eruption stopped in September 2021 but started again in August 2022 just a month after my trip to Iceland, what a shame that I missed it!

The airport for the local flights is in the centre of Reykjavik, so it was an easy spin from the camping next morning. Local flights in Iceland are amazing: the end of check-in is 15 minutes before the departure, there are no security controls and, most importantly for me, you don't need to do anything with a bike to get it on board. You just leave it with wheels, pedals and even bikepacking bags attached and it is rolled into the luggage compartment of the plane!

The Westfjords is a large peninsula in the north-west of Iceland. With the coastline heavily indented by dozens of fjords and surrounded by steep hills, it feels a bit like Norway. The roads are a mixture of tarmac and good gravel, there are few people living there and there is not much tourist traffic as it is a bit away from the Ring Road going around Iceland, so Westfjords are reasonably popular with cyclists. The road from Ísafjörður goes through a 5.6-mile tunnel that has a junction in the middle and the last leg of it has only a single lane with passing places – quite an experience on a bike, luckily there is not too much traffic in it!

My first camping spot was next to Dynjandi – a 100-meter-high waterfall with multiple cascades. The next day brought more hills and several free hot tubs. Imagine cycling in a fjord at least 10 miles away from any village and finding a warm open swimming pool in the middle of nowhere! Another one was a couple of miles away from Tálknafjörður village and it appeared to be a popular spot with the locals for evening socializing.



Dynjandi waterfall

From the Westfjords I took a ferry to Stykkishólmur in Western region. Arriving at the camping in the evening I was surprised how busy it was with lots of big jeeps and motorhomes. Thinking that after the relaxing Westfjords I finally got into the tourist traffic, I managed to pitch a tent somewhere between two cars, but in the morning it appeared that there was an all-Icelandic harmonica festival right next to the camping with “some nice music and dancing” as the friendly local told me. Sounds a bit like Icelandic version of ceilidh.

From Stykkishólmur I was thinking of either making a lap in the Snæfellsjökull National Park (West) or heading towards Kjölur in the interior (East). The forecast was showing a fresh

westerly wind, so the decision was easy, and the interior option won. A funny moment was when I stopped in Búðardalur village for lunch (well, a very late lunch – the advantage of polar day is that you can cycle any time of the day, so my schedule eventually moved towards the evening) and tried to find anyone in the restaurant who could speak Icelandic to translate a bus stop notice. The waitresses were from Italy, the cook was from France and the visitors were all tourists, so there was none who could understand it. Later chatting to the Erasmus exchange students from Germany (“Actually there wasn’t my specialty in Reykjavik Uni but I wanted to go anyway just for the location”) I was told that this is pretty common as there are lots of foreigners working in the country during the high summer season.

At the end of the day the wind changed from westerly to northerly, the temperature dropped to +4C and it started to drizzle. I arrived at a small camping in a hamlet with literally several houses, quickly put up a tent and tried to get myself warm. Surprisingly there were many young people around and there was some noise like music from a car, but still it looked peaceful. It took me a while to realize that it was the site of an electronic music festival - if it were in the UK, I’d much quicker realize that it wasn’t a great spot for camping! Anyway, it was too noisy to sleep, so I had to get out of the dry tent into the rain and cycle for a couple more miles until I found a half-suitable camping spot at the roadside.

Kjölur (road F35, “F” stands for “Fjall” or mountain in Icelandic) is the shorter and easier of the two major inland routes across Iceland. It is 120 miles long and all rivers are bridged. The longer and rougher F26 road is also popular with cyclists on mountain bikes, and I was also considering it (albeit on a gravel bike with 40mm tyres), but it appeared that I came to Iceland too early (end of June) and it was still officially closed. Not sure what is the legal side of trespassing a closed road on a bicycle but practically it means epic ford crossing, streams flowing along the lava sands, snow, ice and any other obstacles that transform cycling into massive hike-a-bike, so I wisely chose the easier F35 option.



Kjölur

In the midpoint of Kjölur there is Hveravellir, a geothermal grassy oasis with various hot springs. Some look like mini-geysers and there is yet another hot pool – very useful when the temperature dropped nearly to zero late in the evening!

My original plan after Kjölur was to head towards Landmannalaugar, the area famous for its hiking trails, hot springs and sceneries reminiscent of Zabriskie point, but it appeared that the mountain road out of it towards the Ring Road was also still closed. Besides, the forecast was predicting a massive storm coming from the West in 1-2 days so instead I headed to the Golden Circle and stayed closer to Reykjavik.

The Golden Circle is a popular tourist route consisting of Gullfoss waterfall, Geysir valley and Thingvellir national park. Geysir itself (being the origin of the English word geyser) is currently dormant, but the neighboring Stokkur erupts up to 15-20 meters around every 10 minutes.



Gullfoss waterfall

Tired after being a good tourist and visiting Gullfoss and Geysir valley, I made a stop in a local swimming pool in Laugarvatn. That's another nice thing in Iceland – almost every village in Iceland will have a public outdoor swimming pool with lanes (the water is warmer than in UK indoor swimming pools so it's comfortable to swim outdoors), a bunch of hot tubs and a sauna. Very useful for tired cyclists!

Clean and refreshed after the pool I headed to Thingvellir. It is a rift valley where North American and European tectonic plates tear apart (by 2 cm a year!). Also it was the site of the annual parliament of Iceland for many centuries. With the largest freshwater lake in Iceland and lots of birds around it feels very Scandinavian. The freshwater rift is called Silfra and recently became popular for diving and snorkeling – note the special dress code with one fin on top of the head!

Next day the forecast was predicting heavy showers in the evening, but I still had 3 days before the return flight, so I headed north via Kaldidalur. Kaldidalur is the shortest (25 miles) of the mountain tracks traversing the highlands and leading to Hallmundarhraun lava field and Husafell resort. Husafell looked way too posh for a cyclist (although they did have a nice all-you-can-eat buffet offer, again very useful for cyclists!) so I headed further west until I came to the next camping. The camping owner said he felt rain was coming and offered me to pitch a tent inside the old greenhouse – a very useful option as the rain indeed started in a couple of hours. The next day was like a usual Scottish winter storm: cold, soaking wet and strong headwind. I gave up the idea of cycling all the way to Reykjavik via minor roads and headed to the closest bus stop on the Ring Road. Still, it took me nearly 3 hours to cycle 20 miles across the headwind and the scariest was the last mile when I had to join the busy Ring Road and cross a bridge with a heavy crosswind. In the evening at the kitchen of the Reykjavik camping I was surprised to meet both the German Erasmus students I chatted to in the Westfjords and the Belgium cyclist I camped next to in Stykkishólmur all planning to leave Iceland the next day proving again it's a small world!

The last day was for sightseeing in Reykjavik. Sightseeing did not last long as I came to Nauthólsvík geothermal beach and spent there most of the day soaking in warm pools. Hot water is pumped into the lagoon making it warmer than the ocean and there is a hot tub and sauna – a very popular place with the locals.

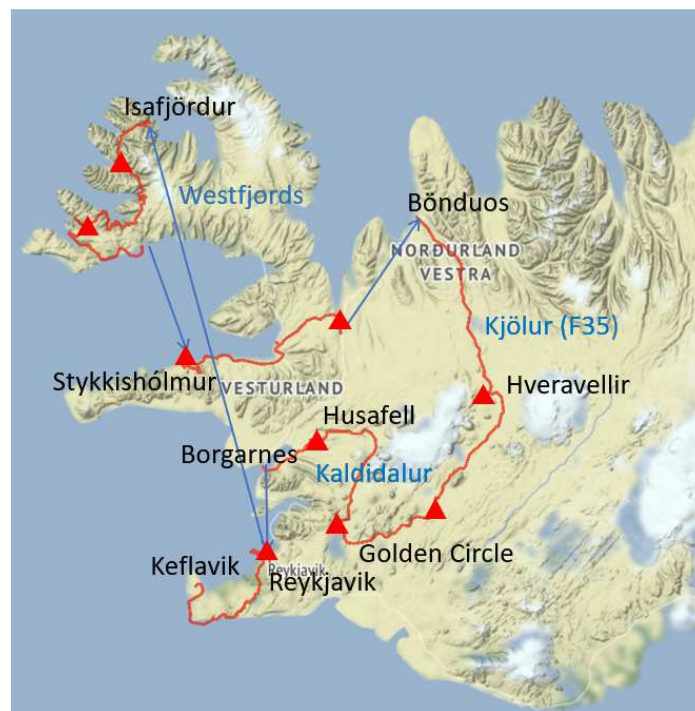


Nauthólsvík geothermal beach in Reykjavik

Overall, I had 10 cycling days (plus a day in Reykjavik), cycled 560 miles, took one local flight, one ferry and two bus lifts along the Ring Road due to weather and limited time. Very lucky with the weather – except for 1.5 days of storm everything else was much better than I expected or feared. Amazing trip and hopefully I'll be back to Iceland – there are still so many things to do and see!

Useful resources:

1. cyclingiceland.is - Excellent offline PDF map showing everything you need for cycling: type of road surface, expected amount of traffic, distance, available services, major climbs, fords etc.
2. road.is – latest information about roads: open/close status, traffic, weather, webcams etc. There are also very useful statistics about approximate opening dates of mountain roads. Generally, if you plan to head to mountain roads it's better to go after the middle of July.
3. en.vedur.is – Icelandic Met Office. Extremely important to check the wind forecast when e.g. you are deciding to cross the island from north to south or the other way around!



The Route

Cycling into Culra

By Chris Davies

We left the Raeburn hut very early at 9am, heading south along a quiet road towards Dalwhinnie. We were keen to find a path off the road and over to Loch Ericht but the local railway crossing had been closed to the public, with the threat of cameras if we tried it. Hmm.... So, after venting some anger we gave up and carried on south for another mile before finding a public underpass. Following a wet sandy gravel track down the Northwest side of the Loch the group risked splitting up for the rest of the day as half the group didn't think the other half could have got so far ahead, so waited around a bit for them to catch up, before giving up and carrying on to the realisation they did get so far ahead before thankfully waiting. After leaving Loch Ericht we headed towards Ben Alder through a water soaked plain. Then risked life and limb crossing a dodgy looking swing bridge with two large bikes, before half the group came to realise why the rest of the group were wearing your garden variety green wellies, as we had to wade through large puddles and streams that lined the subsequent loch edge. Once we had passed the loch, we came to the lovely looking and largish Culra bothy that had an equally largish scary sign warning of asbestos, so half the group took the sound advice and stayed outside whilst the rest had a brief look inside. After stopping outside the bothy for a brief lunch we carried on towards our circumnavigation of Ben Alder as the rain decided to briefly settle in. As had been a week of rain, a number of ever enlarging streams had to be crossed. On reaching one that was just a bit too wide and a bit too fast flowing we took the wise choice of giving up on Ben Alder, especially as half the group didn't have wellies. On nearing the edge of the loch once more, half the group decided to try an alternative route to avoid the excess water and dodgy bridge again, which luckily worked out other than briefly flying over the handlebars but luckily with a soft landing. Once the group had re-joined, we headed Northwest on our new non Ben Alder circular route for the day. As the sun was starting to set, we were treated with a large herd of deer running through a field ahead of us. Once we had left the valley we had been in most of the day we entered a woodland area from which we descended down a winding woodland gravel path to Loch Laggan. As light was now quickly fading we decided to double time it on the main, but still nicely quiet, road back to Raeburn for around 5pm.



A tale of Twos in the Vanoise (Attempts, Covids, Dads and ski tours)

By Lisa Ferrero

After close on 3 years of planning, we finally went on our ski tour in the Vanoise this year. The first attempt was in March 2020, and as tales of travel bans in Italy started to spread, we naively thought “Ah well, we’ll just go to France instead”. Unsurprisingly, in the end we had to admit defeat and then me and Walt caught Covid around the date we should have been travelling anyway.

March 2022 (take 2), déjà vu, ¾ of the group managed to catch Covid just before the trip! After some hurried rearrangements, I (brandishing my newly clear Covid test) headed out to meet my dad for a few days’ piste skiing, giving Walt and my friend Claire hopefully enough time to recover. My dad, who had barely skied in a decade, was very pleased to get some practice cafe-skiing (mellow skiing on blue/red runs interspersed with regular coffee and sunshine) before heading off into the wilds with a big rucksack.

Having downgraded our plans to allow for post-Covid lung capacity and a shorter duration, the tour ended up looking similar to mine and Claire’s previous trip to the area in 2007, when Claire’s Dad kindly allowed two newbies to tag along. It therefore seemed apt we took a (different) Dad with us, but this time we did the planning, and he tagged along. How times have changed!



Lisa in earlier ski touring days.

Day 1: Le Fornet lifts to Refuge de Prariond

I had slight concerns about this so-called 'easy' day, as I remember both me and Claire rolly-poly-ing and nose-plowing down the Col Pers on our first trip. This time I needn't have worried about skiing skills. Wow it was bare! After down-climbing the rocky section we had a taste of the current snow conditions (hard, occasionally crusty) as we tried to remember how to ski with big rucksacks on. The new hut is really nice with spacious dorms, but has the odd foible, such as one toilet for 40 people (in winter anyway). On the plus side, I got to practice/inflict my French on a semi-captive audience in the queue for the loo!

Day 2: Col de la Vache

Meant as an easy warm-up, it was an effin' cold and windy skin to the col, and us post-covidites definitely felt the altitude. The tables were turned on the way down though as Dad got to practice falling over and we mostly stayed upright, if not stylish. Back at the hut, we looked up and saw another group coming down no more stylishly than us, which made us feel better....until we found out they were British too!

Day 3: Grande Aiguille Rousse (3482m)

Seeing the forecast, we gave in to Claire's unsubtle hints that she wanted to go up a big pointy mountain, and so picked 'the' big peak of the area. Although still too cold to soften the snow much, it was a stunning day. The wind vanished by the time we stepped off our skis and abandoned the bags below the col for a somewhat breathless cramponned jaunt to the summit. After some 'interesting' crusty snow on the upper section of the descent, the lower descent could almost be described as 'spring snow', which is much better for your ski ego! Looking over at the other side of the valley, it was scary to see how little snow was left, and this was technically the start of the season. The marmots and chamois were out already!



Back up to the Col Pers

Day 4: Col Pers - Pont de la Neige - Col de Fours – Ref. du Fond de Fours

A 2-col day, we left the refuge to retrace our steps up to the Col Pers, and passed briefly through the ski area down the Pont de la Neige. For a change, we got to complain it was too hot as we skinned our way up in the afternoon sun up to the Col de Fours, from where we could see the forecasted weather starting to roll in, but we managed an enjoyable descent to the hut in time for beer and galettes outside. The refuge is a funny but welcoming little place, with an unheated dorm separate from the main building, and the loo quite a long way down some steps cut in the snow. Thankfully, they've upgraded the insulation in the dorms since we last stayed, and it was a full house that evening so plenty of body-heat.

Day 5: Col du Pisset – (Glacier des Roches Blanches) – Ref. De la Femma

Due to the forecast, the plan was just to take the shortest route to the hut. It was a pretty nice skin up, with soft snow falling and enough vis to not be a pain. When we got to the col, the sun briefly came out, the vis cleared, and Claire suggested maybe a trip up the Mean Martin (which we'd failed to get up last time) might be nice. Dad and Walt looked unconvinced. Oh go on then, I said, secretly keen as well. After a brief misunderstanding, where Dad thought me and Claire weren't confident to go without them, and I was thinking the same about him and Walt, me and Claire headed off up the ridge to find the traverse over to the normal ascent. We got to the lip of the bowl just as the cloud came back in. What on the map looked so straight forwards now looked stupidly steep, in my head anyway. A brief clearing below allowed us to scope out a backup option for wimping out downwards if required, so we tentatively traversed our way across, me generously letting Claire go first. Meeting the main route, we jumped into existing tracks and bravely followed them up the glacier in the murk. As we neared the ridge, Claire conceded that maybe the summit wasn't such a good idea, and we compromised on reaching the rocky col as our high point for the day. We were rewarded for our slog in the clag with some lovely fresh snow on the way down- shame we couldn't really see where we were skiing!



Cake eating at Ref de la Femma

Day 6: Nowhere much.

Having at some point annoyed my knee in the murk the day before, looking out at the clag outside I was quite happy to rest. As the cloud level dropped further, Dad hurriedly offered to keep me company. Walt and Claire came back after a short ski to report we hadn't missed much as it was thick as a bag! Much omelette and cake were eaten.

Day 7: Col de la Rocheure – Val d'Isere

Despite the forecast, we needed to ski out, so followed the guardian's advised route, Claire doing my share of the trail-breaking as my knee was still sulking going uphill. As we peered down into the cloud on the far side of the col, I thought I'd repay her kindness by going first, as I'm less prone to getting travel-sick or falling over sideways, which are common side-effects of skiing in a whiteout. After throwing snowballs down the slope before every sedate turn (to get some idea of the slope angle 3 meters below!), I got to the bottom in time to see the cloud clear, and the others got to ski it in relative luxury. Back in the murk, after getting stuck in hollows you couldn't see and a lot of consulting the GPS, it was a cold ski out, but in nice snow, back to civilisation and a big mug of chocolate viennoise.

Although I won't claim either the weather or the snow was 10/10, we had a great time. It's a very flexible area for touring, and it was just so nice to be back skiing hut-to-hut in the alps. Here's to the next trip!



Walter having a good time.

27 years of stack attacks

By John Sanders

Beginnings

In September 1995, I was sitting in my apartment in Edinburgh when I got a call from Mick James.

"Get ya ass in gear." Says he, "we're off to climb a sea stack."

"What's a sea stack?" replies I.

and that's when the fun began...

Four of us headed off to climb The Souter on that evening 27 years ago. Sssssssimon, Jamie Thin, Mick James, and yours truly.

We didn't have a clue what we were doing.

Jamie slipped and fell in the sea, hurting his back.

"Yes, yes," we said, "just sit there quietly while we climb this stack, and we'll get you some medicine when we're done."

We abandoned the climb at 21.00 due to total darkness and the fact that we only had one head torch between us.

We finally got Jamie some medicine at 23.00 just as they were calling last orders...

The first year of the stack

Following that failed first attempt on The Souter, I decided to climb at least one sea stack for every month of the year in 1996. Obviously, this decision was well thought out, in fact, I seem to recall it took around ten or eleven pints.

Having made the commitment, it was time for action.

In the event we actually climbed 13 sea stacks that year –

- The Midden, Fastcastle
- The Fiddler, Skye
- Am Bodach, Cape Wrath
- The six stacks at Latheronwheel, Caithness
- The Witches Hat, Duncansby Head
- A'Chailleach, Cape Wrath
- The Old Lady, Macleods Maidens, Skye
- Pinnacle No 1, Cummingston

So, having set the bar, there was no way that the second Year of the Stack could have a target of less, or even the same...

Enter 2022, the Year of the Stack 2

2022



Malcom Davies on the first ascent of an E2, 5c, somewhere on the North Berwick coast – Stack X, Jan 2022

We started the StackAttack in January, having found two previously unclimbed stacks on the North Berwick coast. I've no idea how I'd missed them before, they were in sight of the horrible, rotting pile of choss I'd climbed with Ross Jones back in 2005 – The Maidenstone.



The Maidenstone – clearly a solid, safe, indestructible rock formation...

That aside, Malcom Davies, Bruce Kerr, Rab Young, Mick James, and I had some fun over a couple of days, bashing out new routes. Less than 40 miles and an hours drive from Edinburgh. It demonstrates that you don't have to drive hundreds of miles to find a new adventure and have fun.

Al and I decided to have a couple of weeks in Cornwall during March, a wee holiday at The Count House at Bosigran.

On the way down I took the opportunity to climb The Horn of Plenty, a sea stack near Bude. Number three for the year.

Then it was off to Skye to climb The Old Lady, Macleod's Maidens. Followed by a wee trip to Isla and an ascent of Soldiers Rock. This was particularly interesting because of the logistics of accessing the stack by sit-on kayaks, docking and trying to stay reasonably dry. A stunning stack, and a great lead by Big Dog, Mick the Mad.

This pile of poo should defo carry a government health warning. If you ever consider going to climb it, then take your medicine before, not after, the attempt. Lots of medicine is recommended. Also, a Psychiatrist...



Big Dog, Mick the Mad on the first ascent of The Parsons Nose, XS 5a. No gear, hard climbing – Stack Y, Jan 2022

When we left Skye, Mick and I drove over to Cummington and climbed the four stacks in the bay there. Not so technical, with easy access at low tide, and another new route claimed by the Big Dog.

Back in Edinburgh, we decided to repeat some of the new routes that I'd done in the mid 2's on the North Berwick coast, and as it happened Mick got another new route in as well, on one of the Rooks. We climbed two of them and Breeches Rock.



First ascent of Loose Breeches, HVS 4c, Breeches Rock, Burnmouth

Off to Gairloch, with the Stein family, (Phew, loadsa miles) for a first ascent of a rotting pile of Choss that had two previous ascents by different routes near Port Erradale. It was Cat Steins first stack, and I suspect the first ascent by an 11 year old. She said afterwards that she thought it was O.K....

The goal for this year was 14 stacks at least. We hit that goal in July, it will be interesting to see what the final total is.

- Two previously unclimbed stacks, North Berwick coast – stacks X & Y
- The Horn of Plenty, Cornwall
- The Old Lady, Macleod's Maidens, Skye
- Soldiers Rock, Islay
- The four stacks at Cummington, near Elgin
- Two stacks at the Rooks, near Fastcastle head

- Breeches Rock, Burnmouth
- New route, sea stack, Port Erradale, Gairloch Peninsular



Soldiers Rock, Islay – a proper sea stack

And in case you've counted, although we've done 14, I can only remember 13 of them... I'm still able to climb stacks, but my memory certainly isn't what it used to be

Have fun, Peeps...

The Eiger North Face

By Tim Elson

I started climbing with my twin brother at the indoor climbing wall in Bristol when we were teenagers, and a lot of our family holiday as children were walking holiday to either the Lakes or North Wales; we really just considered climbing as an extension of hill walking. We knew how to hill walk, we were learning to rock climb indoors, we really wanted to start climbing outside, after that it seemed obvious we would try bigger and bigger mountains. We both devoured the climbing books in the school and local council library and the made a big impact on us we really wanted adventures like the ones we read about in the books. On a family holiday to the lake district at the time when we had just started climbing indoors, my aunt asked me while walking up a very wet and windy Coniston Old Man what was the ultimate climb I wanted to do; that was easy "Eiger North Face" it was in all the books everyone had a total epic, if they made it at all.

Therefore, I have had about a 25 year obsession with climbing the Eiger North Face, in the past I have driven out to the alps with the intension of climbing it, and then climbed the North Face of the Monch which is the mountain next to the Eiger as well as a lot of other routes in the alps, but it was only in March 2022 that I finally got round to having a proper go at it. My friend Alex and I had booked the week off, a year in advance, to try the Eiger, with the idea that if you don't put yourself below the mountain to try it you will never get up it. Booking a specific week a year in advance was very much a roll of the dice as to whether we would get anything done, it might just snow or be too warm or not have stable weather, a good deal of luck would be needed to even have a try. Two weeks before the planned trip I heard that some friends of friends had climbed the face, this led to a growing nervous anticipation before leaving for the holiday - I obsessively checked the weather forecast each day and magically it looked like the stars were aligning, there was 7 day's high pressure forecast for when we arrived in Switzerland. I met Alex in Interlaken in the Saturday the 19th of March at our Airbnb and spent Sunday morning sorting our kit before getting the train then cable car up to below the Eiger and a lovely camping spot with the north face looming above. I would like to say we relaxed there but we both got more nervous and were keen to get started on the route.



Difficult Crack.

The aim of our first day was to reach Death Bivi, a ledge about halfway up the face in terms of height, but before the main difficulties. It gets its name from the Mehringer and Sedlmeyer team who made the first serious attempt on the face in 1935 and perished after being stuck in a storm for days on their high point of the ledge. We assumed we were going to be slow as we were not acclimatised and it was Alex's first climb of the year, so we planned on a leisurely three-day schedule with a second planned bivi on the summit. Waking at 2am and leaving our camp at 3am we reached the difficult crack - the first "proper" pitch - at first light. I lead this and didn't find it too bad which I took as a good sign for the rest of the route. Alex then did a long pitch to the start of the Hinterstoisser traverse. I found the climbing Hinterstoisser traverse very surreal, as I kept needing to pinch myself (metaphorically) that I was actually climbing on the North Face of the Eiger! I was very glad there was a fraying fixed rope there to ease the difficulties as the slab is very blank, without the fixed rope or ice build-up it would be a very difficult pitch and I can see how in the 1930s it became a trap for the Hinterstoisser team.

Climbing the Eiger seemed to have a much heavier psychological load than anything else I have been on. Having read the White Spider¹ multiple times as a teenager, as well as stories from other epics and tales from friends all added to its foreboding mystique that weighs around your neck on every move. It also leads to knowing what should come next, the swallow's nest, the first icefield, the ice hose (which was very thin, fragile, bold and Alex's lead) the second icefield then the flatiron. We ticked off those way markers and arrived at Death Bivi at around midday. Although it is the biggest ledge on the route it didn't seem very appealing to spend much time there as there was an abundance of literal shit. We had a brief conversation about whether we should stop and stick to our plan of bivi-ing there before deciding that was a bad idea.

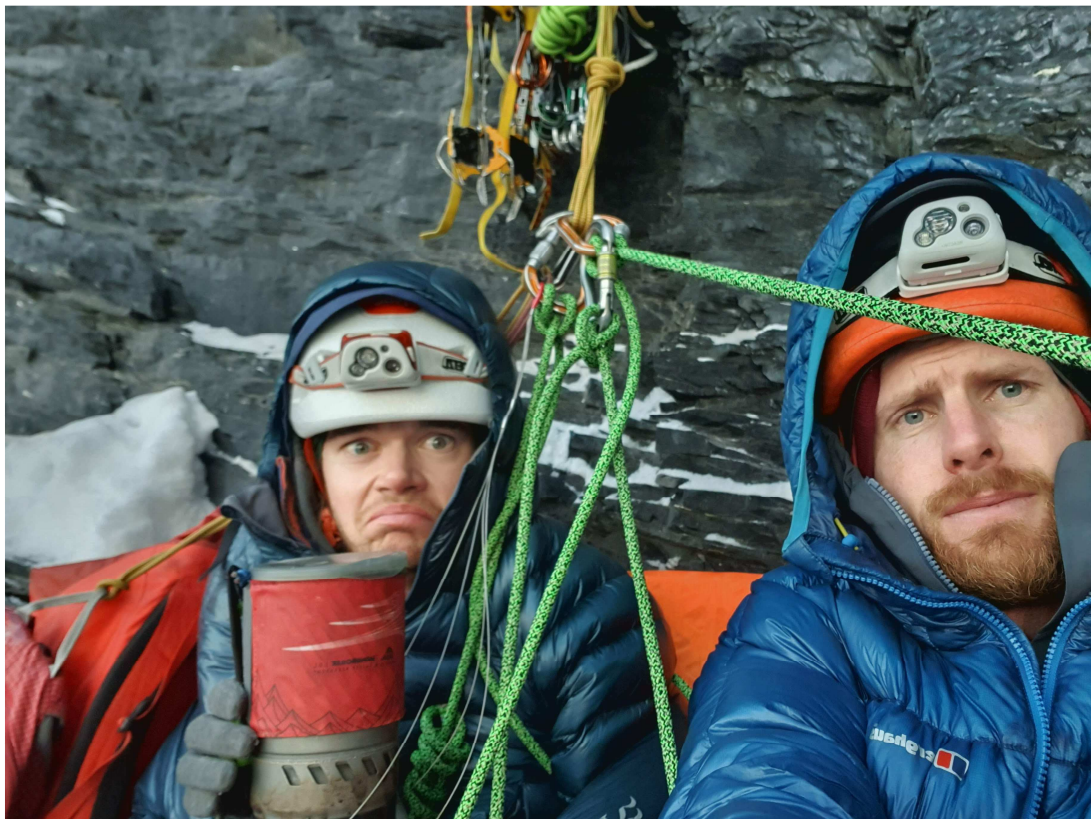


Tim Elson on Hintertoisser Traverse – Alex Mathie's photo.

¹ The White Spider by Heinrich Harrer; is the classic book about the history of the Eiger North Face.

Again, following the stories from the White Spider, we crossed the third icefield and started up the ramp; I belayed Alex on one of the easier pitches near the bottom of the ramp idly thinking to myself that everything was going very well when Alex suddenly hurtled through the air and hit the slab around the corner from the belay. At that moment I thought he must have broken a leg and I heard a lot of swearing, but I could not see him as we were separated by a rib of rock. After half a minute Alex confirmed that he was ok just very annoyed and that the front binding on his crampon had pinged off, luckily we had a spare with us. Alex had absent-mindedly pulled on a bit of gear, and it had come out and the next two runners ripped leading to quite a long fall. Alex was furious with himself for not checking the gear in an effort to go quickly.

The fall and getting sorted out lost us a chunk of time and as we got to below the waterfall chimney, we were caught by a Swiss pair trying to do a fast time on the face (they had started at 8:30am) so we let them past. I led the waterfall chimney, so named because in summer it is either a waterfall or an ice pitch depending on the time of day. For us it was pure rock and I found it a much tougher pitch than I anticipated. After that Alex led a hard slab pitch to avoid the snow mushroom where the ice bulge normally is. One more pitch to the brittle ledge and as it was starting to get dark, we stamped out a good sitting ledge in some snow and settled down for the night. I had bought a warm sleeping bag, for once, so despite the sitting position had quite a good night sleep. An American team on a ledge next to us did not, as they had one sleeping bag between them, a Neoair that popped, and they didn't seem to have a stove which in quasi-winter on the Eiger didn't seem very sensible - they had been trying to do 'an in a day' ascent.



Alex and Tim having a good time at the bivi.

On the second day we started to get ready at 6am (first light) but it was a good hour and a half before I set off up the first pitch of the day, the brittle crack. I made a mistake here and climbed a section without my gloves on and got very cold hands, eventually I developed blisters on my fingers a week later though no sign of frostnip or frostbite. The Traverse of the Gods came next, it is a very scary position traversing above the void and looks improbable but turned out to be straightforward to climb and this got us to the bottom of the famous White Spider icefield. From a distance the tentacles of ice that spread from the icefield look like the Spider's legs; it was a worrying place to be as we encountered our only bits of rockfall of route and I climbed past a fairly large patch of red snow in the middle of the icefield. The pitches once more flowed with nothing being too difficult but a lot of it being a bit fall off-able, insecure and often not really as well protected as one would wish. We marvelled at the route finding of the first ascensionists as there are a lot of clever traverses and improbable looking sections that turn out to not be as bad as they look.



Looking down the Ramp Ice field from Brittle Ledges

As these things do, the face seemed to just keep going and going until we reached the start of the summit icefield where we met the sun and then had some calf burning ice to reach the summit ridge and a very strong southerly wind. After putting down jackets on we made our way along the final knife edge ridge to the summit which was a bit tenuous as rogue gusts of wind kept threatening to knock us off balance and send us back down the north wall. We arrived at the summit at about 2pm and then descended the west flank which was a bit horrible as it was a mixture of isothermal snow which we kept sinking to our knees in and the odd slab covered in scree.

It was only when back at the Eigergletscher station that we celebrated our success, although by that point we were feeling both tired and very relived, the Eiger north face is one of the most oppressive places I have ever been. It is the weight of history plus the knowledge that the further you climb up the more difficult it would be to get back down with all the traversing and cunning route finding that the Heckmair route entails.

Back on the Coniston Old Man don't think my aunt really believed I'd ever climb the Eiger, as a teenager I had lots of unrealistic goals; however that goal stuck and I have to pinch myself sometimes to remember that it's no longer a daydream but something I have climbed.



Summit happiness

Provence Climbing Trip

By Amanda Mackay

Finally in April 2022, after two years of postponement due to the pandemic, Jacobites: Ros, Jill, Alistair, Thomas and myself plus some friends finally reached the Provence area of France for a two week climbing trip arranged by Adrian. Based in a villa near to the village of Fuveau, we were perfectly situated close to the motorway, giving us plenty of options for crags to explore within an hour or so.

We all arrived on the Saturday, some of us having left Scotland in Adrian's van on the Friday morning, and the first crag on the hit list to explore was the closest one, Mont Sainte-Victoire, the following day. This is a huge expanse of rock which faces south and has many sectors at all grades, plus some very long multi-pitch climbs. After a 20 minute walk from the car park, we were straight onto the rock. Some trees at the bottom of the crag provided a little shelter from the sun as it burned brighter and hotter as the day went on. Slabby and extremely polished would be my comments for this crag and a few missing bolts plus one popping out of the rock certainly upped the excitement for the day.

The following day we headed out to Chateauvert where the group split and climbed different sections of the crag. There were plenty of options for routes of all grades on a set of lovely buttresses in a wooded valley, which were south facing and well-sheltered, which would make the crag a good option should the mistral be blowing. However, on this occasion it wasn't, and it was bloody roasting!



Then the next day we had our first foray into The Calanques in the area of Sormiou. Winds were a little high that day so rather than sticking to the cliffs by the sea or on the col, we headed to the central section of Colline de Lune, where the South face provided both shelter and a good range of climbs at all grades. After a good day of climbing, we headed down quite a steep narrow road to the small village and beach at Sormiou for a well-deserved beer.

After three good days of climbing, a rest day (of sorts) was on the cards with one group going for a long hike along the Sainte-Baume and others going for a road cycle. It was a bit windy again that day, so probably a good time for a break from climbing! Next up was a trip down to Calanque d'En Vau where there was a fair walk in from the car park to reach the crags on a sweltering day. Some had elected to just do the walk in and enjoy some beach time. A group comprised of Jill, Alistair and friend David climbed a multi pitch overlooking the beach and took some incredible photos. Thomas and I elected to climb Le Pouce via the three star Le Pouce Integral route, which did not disappoint. A dip in the sea after the climbs followed by the long walk back out meant a late return that evening.



The following day we took a trip north to climb at Orgon. The crag was a nice short walk from the car park, but the temperature was heading up towards 30C that day. A few trees at the base of the crag provided a little shelter when not climbing or belaying but there was little escape from the sun on the wall itself, although Lexie's hammock strung between a couple of nearby trees did provide an extra option for chilling out! On return to the villa, it was BBQ time with Thomas as chef for the evening. David made a large batch of mojitos and there was plenty of great food and drink! The evening was rounded off with a bunch of games starting with Bannanagrams, then Jenga and then Twister, to much hilarity.

Unfortunately, Thomas and Lexie had to then leave at this point in the holiday, and after another rest day on the Saturday, some of us headed out on day 8 back to The Calanques to Morgiou for some more multi pitch climbing. Another incredible area, with fantastic rock and views all round. Ending up on the wrong route added in a little bit more excitement than expected for the day but, after a short traverse, everyone made it back up to the top of the crag without too much drama.

Next day we headed north to a small crag called Mouries, which is a dramatic fin of rock which sticks up unexpectedly out of the Provence countryside . There was not a vast number of options for routes here but fine for a relaxed day. Some of the routes were pretty tough for the grade. The most random part of the trip had to be the slightly eccentric couple who were walking their pair of cats down at the crag.

The following day Ros, Adrian and I headed to climb the multipitch ET at Bau de Quatre Ouro above Toulon. This was my personal highlight of the trip with a fantastic route on wonderful rock and amazing views over the city. The crag is on top of the hill and feels like a big serious route in a dramatic place.

The weather for the next few days was slightly ropey so some alternative activities were included with groups branching off to go cycling, visits to nearby towns such as Aix-en-Provence, vineyard visits and a hike up Tete du Grand Puech. With just one day and night left we opted on the final day to return to the local crag where we started at Sainte Victoire. A few single and multi-pitch options gave a great final day of climbing before the reality of having to head home (via a two day van drive for some of us) sunk in.

All in all, a great trip which set us up nicely for a summer of climbing in Scotland!



Never say never again.

By Stuart Mitchell

I'm not sure when I last went rock climbing. It was likely with an ex- work colleague called Len and was either at Castle Rock of Triermain near where we were both working or at Aberdour where we met a very short, very sociable and very scouse climber whom I persuaded to join the JMC by means which will not be divulged. Whatever, it was about 2006 or 2007. OK, I clipped some bolts about ten years ago but that doesn't count. That I'd completely lost all mental or physical ability is beside the point.

Through social media, I'd reconnected with a long-lost friend with whom I'd climbed a lot in 1989 when we were both barmen at the Clachaig. His name appeared on a mutual friend's Facebook page as someone who 'liked' my unfiltered political rants. Could it be him I wondered. Aside from the name there was a North Wales connection with our mutual friend. A bit of cyber-stalking revealed that it was indeed he. A message was sent, connection was made and several long phone calls catching up were made. The last time we'd met was at his wedding in Abergavenny in 1998.

Time passed with the odd message and I considered that it could easily go on this way until one of us donned the black tie to see the other off. Then he rang, out of the blue.

"Hey Stu. I'm retiring from the police in April. I've bought a huge Breaking Bad meth lab motorhome and I'm going on a Scottish road trip. We have to meet up."



Breaking Bad in Glencoe

We'd arranged loosely to meet either in Skye or the Cairngorms but the weather forecast was atrocious so we decided on Glencoe which seemed more appropriate. He called up the Clachaig to check we'd be welcome; he'd been sacked for demonstrable friendliness-without intent to the owner's daughter and I was barred due to an uncharacteristic and momentary lapse in politeness towards same owner. Thankfully neither the owner nor his daughter were around and enough time seemed to have passed.

I was really looking forward to seeing him as we'd got on very well, had a lot in common and it didn't sound like he'd grown up a great deal in the intervening decades. I figured we'd don waterproofs and go for a soggy hillwalk and a blether, enough to justify a massive bender in the Clachaig for auld time's sake.

I was wrong on several counts.

The first thing is that he hardly drinks any alcohol. He may still be one of the hardest bastards I've known but he can't take his ale. The other thing is, unlike me he still climbs regularly and is just as irrepressible as in 1989. We were going climbing and weather be damned. I'd packed my winter harness, (mainly because I can't quite fit into my 25 year-old summer one any more) my slightly derelict helmet and a belay device with a notion that we might do North Buttress on the Buachaille, a route I'd only ever descended in rock boots 30 years previously and had always fancied in winter. But really I just wanted to go for a walk, get pissed and catch up.

But a walk wasn't happening. Readers of my article in an earlier JMC journal about a slightly ridiculous ascent of Clachaig Gully may recall that my climbing partner and I had a habit of doing classic easy rock routes in terrible weather wearing plastic boots, full waterproofs and big packs as if we were mountaineers. Same guy. Some chat and negotiation about tomorrow's objective was had and while I'd really fancied North Buttress, the driving rain and high winds hammering the motorhome forced a more sheltered alternative, so I suggested Quiver Rib.

Quiver Rib for those unfamiliar, is a contender for the best Diff in the world. It sits at the left end of the Terrace Face, high on the East Face of Aonach Dubh which is my No.1 favourite crag. The route follows the right edge of the upper half of a feature called The Bow, a curvilinear fault which runs the full 160m height of the cliff and describes the double curved shape of an archer's bow. The line is clearly visible from the road and is surprisingly steep, exposed and in a situation out of all proportion to the difficulty. Access is by the Lower Bow, a Moderate route with an awkward start which then lies back and eases significantly. The Lower Bow is primarily used as a descent route from the terrace which caps the Weeping Wall, home to a number of very good routes that in better weather provide more fulfilling ways to the terrace.

We drove in my car to the carpark, leaving the Meth Lab parked in the old visitor centre carpark which is now a campervan overnighting area. Drama was afoot with blue lights in the Hidden Valley carpark. A campervan had rolled off the edge of the carpark and was on its side at the base of the slope. We didn't stop to offer help or rubberneck, the various emergency services plus a mobile crane appeared to have it all under control.

The walk in was nostalgic. I had been along that path dozens of times either winter climbing in Coire nan Lochan or going for a walk over Bidean, but mainly for cragging on Aonach Dubh. Details flooded back, especially the exposed sloping ledge along the landslip fan, surely a point where many casual walkers must turn back. The cliffs of Stob Coire nan Lochan were concealed by thick clag and the cloud base squatted on the top of Aonach Dubh, but the lower crags were clear. Once over the burn, the slog up to the base of the crags was short but steep. My legs are at least twice as long as Bryan's and by the time we got to the base we were, and I quote, "sweating like a seventies DJ when the doorbell goes."

While gearing up I considered how often I'd tied in and how it must be hard wired into me, like riding the proverbial bike. I fluffed the knot. I untied and started again, and fluffed it again, though in a different way to the first time. I got it third time and actually had to think about what I was doing. That woke me up and I got Bryan to check my harness, knot and belaying method even though I knew they were all perfect, what with the whole process being so hard wired into me, like tying into the rope apparently wasn't.

I'd done Quiver Rib three times previously. The first was with a young lad who was a customer at the Clachaig. It might have been the first multi pitch route I'd climbed without a more experienced partner holding my hand. Memories were vague, but I recalled placing slings on spikes as runners on the steep second pitch. I only had two slings then, very few nuts and no cams. I remember placing a sling, making a couple of moves and placing another sling, then stepping back down, removing the first sling and leapfrogging them as I went up. The second time was with two friends and I wore big boots (Galibier RDs for older cognoscenti) which is always satisfying and on the third occasion I soloed it, though I'd racked up a bit more vertical kms by this stage. This was in the late 1980s to early 90s, which is long enough ago to have forgotten a lot of things.

In an effort to reinvigorate a profoundly absent head for heights and scrambling I'd decided that if it seemed too wet to solo up the Lower Bow I'd lead that part, as the start is decidedly awkward, and I'd backed off it in the rain on my first visit to the cliff in my early days of climbing. Now, like then, I made the first couple of simple moves to big flat footholds and came to the impasse. I fiddled in a duff nut and looked around. I moved one hand then the other, surveying everything in reach for a positive handhold. Nothing gave me much confidence, not helped by the light but steady drizzle and my cold fingertips turning into prunes. The key of course was footwork, but the next big flat foothold was too high for me to comfortably rock onto. Maybe in rockboots in the dry, but this is a Moderate and if you're doing gymnastic moves then you've likely got something wrong. I tried one position then another, everything focussed on getting one step higher with at least one secure foothold. It wasn't happening. After a few more visualisations and half tested moves I said, "I'm not ashamed to admit that I haven't got this. I think you might be leading all day." This was no surprise to me and no disappointment to Bryan.

I can't deny a feeling of validation that even although he was wearing rock boots he took a while deliberating the starting moves. Ultimately though he figured it out, went for it and soon vanished upwards. He called down to say that it was definitely not a Diff in the rain. I informed him that this bit wasn't a Diff in the dry either, it was a Mod. He muttered something about sandbagging jocks then carried on. Less than a minute later he called down that it was time for me to do some climbing.

It took a bit of blind faith to get through the awkward start. OK, I've completely lost my head, I'm older, stiffer and creakier, lacking in strength, have no balance and am at least 20kg heavier but for goodness sake this is only scrambling and I can remember well enough how to move on rock. But it felt much less secure than I thought it had any right to.

The rest of the Lower Bow lies back and consists of ledge type holds and a little wandering around. Some of the rock had a thin cover of lichen. Testing demonstrated that pressure applied through a Vibram sole at anything much off perpendicular to the surface resulted in slippage, so the rest of the Lower Bow was done with greater delicacy and concentration than one might expect for such an easy scramble.

The grass terrace was now in front of us with the line of Quiver Rib soaring immediately over us, looking like the good clean rock route it is. It had been a while since I'd stood under anything like this and contemplated the world as seen from halfway up a cliff. To the right were many routes of very high quality: Archer Ridge, Arrow Route, Hesitation plus harder others, all on solid pink rhyolite which is, and I quote, "rougher than a Geordie hen night." To the left was the black dripping cleft which forms the Upper Bow, recorded in 1946 as a VDiff. I've never knowingly heard of anyone doing it. As it forms the drainage line of the crag it is permanently black, lichenous and wet, and looks to have better winter potential. Quiver Rib follows the right edge of this cleft, a position which intensifies the feeling of exposure and mountain seriousness.

Bryan led up with frequent comments about the quality of the rock and the value of the moves. Once he'd called 'safe', I changed into my rock boots. I was the first time I'd put them on in over a decade, during which time my right big toe joint had developed osteoarthritis which resulted in my forefoot being substantially wider than it used to be, with concomitant pain if subjected to the wrong kind of pressure. To my relief the boots went on, over thin socks of course, and felt not uncomfortable.



Bryan Smith unphotogenically dressed on P1 of Quiver Rib.

The ropes went up, came tight and it was climb when ready time. This was good honest rock, so solid that the passage of thousands hadn't polished out its inherent grip. I enjoyed moving around the line, finding the easiest way, move after smile-inducing move, proper climbing unlike the uncooperative scrambling lower down. There was a delicate and off-balance move midway up the pitch, one I suddenly remembered from previous ascents. It was like meeting someone you hadn't seen for years but couldn't remember their name or if you were on good terms or not.

Before I reached the belay I stopped to look around and down at the horizontal world which I had voluntarily left, and to contemplate this temporary and very particular environment I had entered willingly. I had complex emotions about being here, it felt like visiting a childhood home after decades away. Familiar yet distant. Anyway, I was quite happy, but having a rope above certainly helped.

On my arrival at the belay Bryan announced that it wasn't great. This was news to me, as I tend to remember belays you would confidently use to winch up a car. It wasn't actually that bad, a good nut and a probably OK nut of the sort that's best left unexamined. Now Bryan is an old slatehead and as such loves his brass micros. Back in the motorhome he'd asked if we'd need them and I'd opined that as it was an easy mountain route we'd only need bigger stuff. It was while sorting the ropes that we realised that he'd interpreted that as nothing smaller than a Rock 5. Unfortunately, placements for small nuts were plentiful but the compact rhyolite had little accommodation for bigger gear. Nevertheless, runouts were not of worrying length and the route was easy enough. Aside from this realisation, the

other factor of note during the belay faff was that the persistent drizzle had turned into soak-you-to-the-pants rain.

Bryan led up the steep second pitch and soon vanished from view. This pitch was the one I remembered. Big positive holds with little puddles forming in them, but steepness and exposure of the kind that makes you think it must be overhanging until you note that your weight is still firmly on your feet. The upper part of the pitch follows a rising traverse over the dank nothingness of the Upper Bow in a sensational position far beyond the pay grade one might unfairly assign to a mere Diff. I recalled my leapfrogging of slings from spike to spike, but as I moved up I took out the odd nut but no slings. I looked around for suitable spikes but saw none. Memory is an odd thing, but it is possible that my view of what constitutes a worthwhile spike for a sling runner has become more critical with experience.

We arrived at the top of the route, shook clammy wet hands and put on our boots and every bit of clothing we had. The rain had become heavy, both of us were wet and Bryan was beginning to shiver with cold. Getting off would be quick and painless I assured him, I'd descended from here loads of times. We walked along a faint path on a grass terrace as doubts started to rise in my head. Sure enough, we came to an impasse, a steep square cut rocky gully which could have been abseiled if there had been any anchors. Then I remembered that it was necessary to scramble much further up and go along below the top of the Aonach Dubh ridge. Further up the streaming rough rock, we came to another terrace. This one! Along we went but it soon petered out into vertiginous ground. We took verbal note that we were tired, cold and high up in Glencoe, in deteriorating weather and visibility at about six in the evening and resolved not to get overly stressed and risk making poor decisions. Following the easiest line we made our way further up and left until the cliffs below merged back into the hillside and what looked like continuous grass slopes appeared.

My recollection was a very straightforward if steep path went down under the base of the cliffs and indeed we came across this almost immediately. Familiarity. Guards down. And relax.

The path rapidly descended into a nightmarish wet scree. Saturated vegetation sheared off and the gravel runnel we were following was extremely unstable with wet mud mixed in. Brian opined that this was a watercourse and not a path but I insisted that it was actually a good descent route which I had done several times. Only further down did I recognise that I'd only ever been down it in dry conditions when it was stable and grippy. It was also at least 25 years since my last visit, back when I had a sense of balance and exposure didn't faze me. Subsequent erosion may also have rendered the path less suitable as a descent.

Occasional sections of the route had me crawling feet first, always maintaining five or six available points of contact: two hands, two feet and two bumcheeks. Some of the more tenuous bits of the 'path' were above drops which promised injury and embarrassment as well as a ride in a helicopter and a period in hospital at the very least, and of course guaranteed headline keywords of:

"Glencoe/injured/rescue/rock climbers/heavy rain/idiots"

Lower down in the middle of a long sloping ledge, on loose rubble above a serious drop I became gripped. I felt very much on the edge of security and entirely in the hands of the random physical forces of adhesion in the surface immediately under my feet. It was an odd feeling, one I'd not had to deal with for a very long time. I told Bryan calmly and openly. We know each other well enough to be above traditional male pride or shame even if individually neither of us are. We backtracked upwards for a short distance and traversed over more technical but less unstable and slippery rock onto more open grassy hillside which while steep, was soft enough to kick steps into so as not to fly off with the loose vegetation. A gap in the descending clag opened which revealed a clear route to the burn not too far below. We crossed via a steep scramble down and up, and once back on the main path it was a soaking piss-wet march back to the car where we both agreed that heated seats were an essential component of any outdoor person's vehicle.

We changed into dry clothes in the meth lab then went to the Clachaig to eat and have only a couple of contemplative pints. We agreed that we'd observed another of our ridiculously masochistic 'traditional' days, the first in over three decades. I didn't promise to be up for another one unless we dropped the requirement for horrendous weather, but inwardly I knew that I would forget this lesson and repeat the folly if subjected to the irrepressible Smith enthusiasm.

There's something you're not telling me.

By Stuart Mitchell

Another story from long ago. This happened during the very long hot summer of 1995.

"My name's Jamie."

We were turning off Holburn Street in Aberdeen, direction Royal Deeside. Nick, a geography PhD student with mad hair whom I knew vaguely; Jason, a good friend, fellow francophile and occasional epic-partner and, so it turned out, Jamie whom I'd never met. He was a friend of Nick's, a fellow geography PhD student and pilot of the tiny green Citroen the four of us were crammed into. The corner off Holburn Street to the A93 was off-camber and the little Citroen leaned so far over I expected the doorhandles to scrape the ground.

"So who's Gavin then?" I asked. The name Gavin had been bandied around the car since we left. Gavin was apparently mellow and ambient, and everyone loved him. Jamie seemed a very mellow and pleasant type so I'd assumed he was Gavin.

"Gavin's the car. Nick and I went clubbing, ended up in the ambient room and the DJ was called Gavin. I bought the Citroen the next day and Nick said it was an ambient car so I called him Gavin." So explained Gavin, sorry, Jamie.

It was close to midsummer. Some good climbing partners and endless dry weather meant I'd had a productive few months. But I hadn't been into the mountains. It had mostly been the Aberdeen sea cliffs, The Pass (the real one near Ballater, not the Welsh one), Reiff and Diabeg. Unmotivated by anything with less than an hour's walk-in and/or under five pitches, Jason opined that it was about time I did a proper route and kindly invited me on a trip. He and two friends were going to drive to Loch Muick in the evening and walk up Meikle Pap overlooking Lochnagar. The plan was to bivvy on the top then be first on Eagle Ridge in the morning. His reasoning for inviting me was that two ropes of two made more sense than a single rope of three. I agreed, I had an aversion to climbing threesomes. I'd also had a nagging feeling that I ought to do Eagle Ridge; it had a reputation as one of the best mountaineering rock-climbs of any standard. It also had a certain place in my consciousness as a friend had died on it in winter a few years previously. Mountains, routes and places always assume a new and indelible, well, *ambience* when this happens.

We parked Gavin and left him to add ambience to the car-park. The walk up Meikle Pap was mellow. Nick and Jamie were good company with their non-stop stories about their travels in South America interspersed with amusing impressions of the various weirdos and characters they'd met. It was a perfect evening. Beautiful sunset, no clouds, no wind, no midgies, no noise. I think everyone even got a good night's sleep.

We were up around 0600, my noisy MSR XG-K sounding like a not so distant helicopter boiling water for coffee. Breakfast, take in the view and clear morning light but no fannying

about. Bags packed and down we went. We had a good view down the approach path but there was no-one coming up. No need to race to be first on the route.



Early morning on Meikle Pap. Nick with mad hair standing and Jason in red top not getting up yet.

We left our sacks just inside the lip of the corrie. We put our harnesses on, bejewelled ourselves with ironmongery and took a small pack for the seconds to carry the trainers and food in. Ropes around our shoulders, we picked our way down into and across the corrie then up into the maw of Douglas Gibson Gully. The steep stopper wall at the top which gives all the sport in winter seemed to be hanging over us. It wasn't of course, but we'd gone from sunny open mountainside into an altogether more ominous environment.

It turned out that no-one had a guidebook but the big open starting corner is easily recognisable from the photo in *Classic Rock*. All we had to do was find it, then the rest of the route ought to be obvious as it followed an increasingly sharp arete, supposedly on very sound rock with exponential choss not far away on either side. And there were always the crampon scratches, old pegs and abandoned gear if there was any doubt.

The four of us geared up at the base of the corner and I sensed some trepidation in my three companions. Normally chatty, they'd gone silent and awkward. Fair enough, this is quite an atmospheric place and after all we are about to commit to a long route. To the best of my knowledge Nick had done several high-altitude snow plods in the Andes and was an occasional cragger who did the odd VS. Jason was mainly a winter climber who would occasionally struggle alarmingly up a HVS, generally with all of his gear having fallen out by the time he got to the top. I didn't know anything about Jamie but he was a lean and fit looking specimen so I'd guessed he was at least up to Nick and Jason's standards. Not that it

mattered because I'd assumed that Jason and I would climb together, swinging leads. It wasn't a subject that had been mentioned, there seemed no need.

I tied in my ropes and passed the other ends to Jason. Awkward, shifty looks. The kind when someone has to tell you that you smell or that your partner's having an affair but they're all hoping someone else will speak first. Deafening silence.

"Erm...Stu. Ermm, we were, ermm...

<excruciatingly long and increasingly pregnant pause>

...we were thinking that maybe you and Jamie should climb together as you've done more climbing than us and Jamie's never done any roped climbing before."

An eternity of awkward seconds later, I screamed, "For fucking fuck's sake!!! REALLY???"

But silently, in my head.

Jamie didn't know how to belay. He'd never taken a bit of gear out, let alone put any in. And he was wearing Hi-Tec Trails. Not rock boots. Not even stiff, scrambling-capable approach shoes. He was wearing Hi-Tec Trails. For those of you too young to remember these things, Hi-Tec Trails were very soft padded training shoes styled into a hillwalking boot. They offered no support or protection for your feet and you could pick them up and fold the toe into the heel as easily as crumpling an empty crisp bag. They were almost everyone's first pair of boots for summer walking. I'd had a pair, who hadn't? They were shite, especially for rock climbing. I know this as I took my first steps on rock at Aberdour in a pair of Hi-Tec Trails. They were shite.

I gave Jamie a quick lesson in how to pay out slack, how to not prevent me moving upwards and what to do if the ropes suddenly started moving very fast accompanied by yells and/or thuds. The other two would keep him right. I wasn't overly concerned, I wasn't expecting to fall off.

As can be seen from the photo in Classic Rock, the first pitch is a slabby open book corner, has cracks for holds and gear and looks easy. It was slabby, the cracks wouldn't take any gear and it was awkward and not as secure as a friendly opening pitch to a classic Severe mountain rock climb had any right to be. When I got to easier ground I was slightly rattled. I was also quite pissed off as I reckoned that this would compromise the day. Jamie won't have a prayer of getting up this without me towing him like a fridge, I'll end up lowering him off, he'll go for a miserable walk on his own and Nick, Jason and I will do the route as a threesome which I hate as I'm prone to worrying when waiting on belays and it reduces the amount of leading everyone gets to do. It had occurred to me that that silver lining of me climbing with Jamie was that I'd get to lead the whole route but now it was looking unlikely. I also fully expected another team to appear while we were lowering Jamie and sorting ourselves out.

Not long after I'd called, "Climb when ready," Jamie appeared, grinning his huge grin, eyes lit up. "That was brilliant!" He'd run up it. We might be in business after all.

The rest of the route was the best of climbing days. Great situations, solid rock, some proper exposure, a couple of stiff pulls through bulges, a cosy yet exposed sentry box belay, sunny open slabs above the gloom of Douglas-Gibson, four cams and an axle stuck deep in a crack with its stem long gone and no use to anyone, wasting my breath shouting down to Jamie that "This next bit is pretty stiff, I'll keep you on a tight rope," because he had no trouble with any of it, just "Oh Wow!" or "This is Amazing!" all the way.

Pitch after pitch, Jamie seconded easily and quickly, always with big grins and laughter. He even got three stuck and abandoned nuts out, which still adorn my (admittedly neglected) rack. I offered them to him but he said, "I'm not a climber, you keep them."

The only sober moment of the day occurred on the easier final couple of pitches, when I realised suddenly that it was somewhere around here where my late friend had fallen off. He'd have approved of this though.

We topped out with at least a two-pitch lead on Jason and Nick. A noisy crowd from Aberdeen MRT, of whom Jason was a member, had caught them up and were giving Jason, a famously slow climber, hell about his lack of speed. The banter was as hilarious as it was savage.

"If I'd kent you were gony be here I'd have brought my axes and crampons."

Jamie and I lounged in the sun on the top of the spur on the other side of Douglas-Gibson which gave us a good view so we could enjoy the cabaret down below.

The four of us laughed all the down to the bags and all the way down the track to Gavin, and we were justifiably mellow and ambient by the time we got back to Aberdeen. Jamie was still grinning though, as was I.

Jason lived his francophile dream and got a university post in Bordeaux. Tragically he was killed while abseiling after a successful winter route on the Pic du Midi d'Ossau in 2000. We got some good days in before that though.

Jamie vanished into academia and I only saw him once again at Jason's funeral. I hope he got into climbing

Nick turned up at my 40th at Inver, still with mad hair. I haven't seen him since.

Skye High

by Martin Bagshaw

Why High?

From my somewhat naïve understanding, early September seems to herald an opportunity to get out and enjoy some of the better crags that Scotland has to offer; a time when the midges die down, and the distraction of the festivals of August is no more. After a spring and summer of mainly central belt cragging, being stormed off the Ben, a weekend of biblical midgings in Glencoe, and a couple of European trips which both seemed to coincide with the best weather, this time of year provided me with the high point of my first season of rock climbing in Scotland. I got the privilege of taking in some of the best routes Skye has to offer, ones that had been on the radar for quite a while, and in good company too.

Why Skye?

Mainly because it was dry! I originally had pencilled in a long weekend in North Wales with my main climbing partner from when I lived down south, but a nice high pressure system seemed to want to park itself over the north west Highlands and Western Isles, while Gogarth and Snowdonia were to be dished out on/off drizzle. So the pivot was made. A Mr Stuart McLeod was free and characteristically as keen as ever to get some good climbs in, so on a Tuesday evening, we set off. Driving out and returning in the rain, which we parted with and were later greeted by somewhere around Spean Bridge, added to the satisfaction of a decision well made.

The following climbs are some highlights from our five day trip, starting at Neist Point in the west, and taking a (sort of) clockwise direction around the island to Rubha Hunish, Kilt Rock, Sron na Ciche, and ending at Bla Bheinn.



Neist Point

Supercharger (Neist Point)

If the number of Americans taking photos of a piece of rock from a distance is a sound indication that it yields good climbing, then the quality of this route must be up there with the likes of the Freerider or Moonlight Buttress. I somehow doubt it. Nonetheless, when you see this cliff, rising elegantly out of the sea to a height of ninetyish metres, you are either compelled to stare at it, climb it, or both. So, although having its fair share of loose (but generally well held together) rock and average climbing, this one was definitely about the 'line' and the situation, though there were some nice moves going on too. My big black beast of an abseil rope got dusted off nicely, and we both felt fairly satisfied lazing around in the sun, and chatting to tourists once we topped out.



Stuart bidding me farewell



The crux of the main pitch



The final pitch



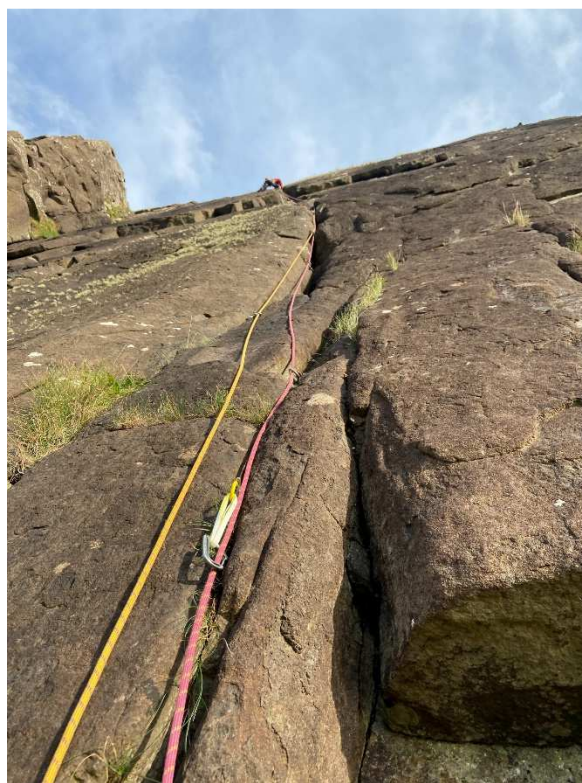
The prow of Supercharger

Whispering Crack (Rubha Hunish)

This one was probably my favourite of the trip. It was also the route that I had known of, and had stood out in my mind the longest, having thumbed through my copy of Gary Latter's *Scottish Rock – Volume Two* on many occasions and seen a picture of two stalwarts of Scottish climbing heading up this massive left slanting crack. I had also climbed its North Wales namesake, Joe Brown's great but inferior Winking Crack the previous year, so maybe I was subconsciously keen to pay homage by proxy, with want of a better phrase.



Whispering Crack



Heading up the main pitch

Discarding any preconceptions, the climbing was remarkably sustained, with lots of my favourite: hand jamming, but with lots of face holds for respite. Stuart led up the initial 4c pitch (definitely harder than 4c), and I sank most of my double/triple rack of cams into the subsequent pitch. I arrived at the top being very glad that two guys rocked up just as we were about to start the route, and built an abseil anchor to thread their climbing ropes through to descend it. The fifty metre ropes we were using just about got to their anchor on stretch! A blessing in disguise indeed.

Creagh Dubh Grooves (Sron na Ciche – Vulcan Wall)

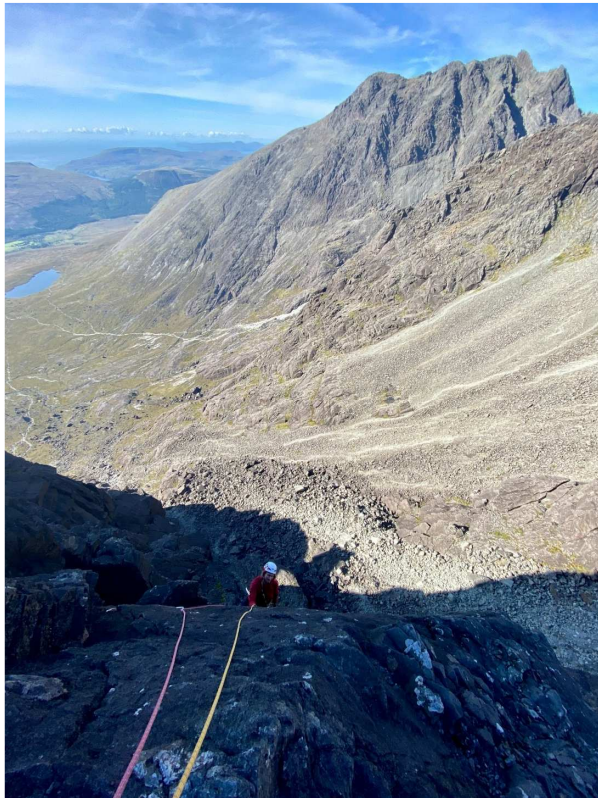
I think I can probably conclude that I am a sucker for aesthetics. As we arrived at Vulcan Wall, the main feature that caught my eye was not a crack on the main wall itself, but the two tiered groove, which turned out to be this route.

When we returned to the foot of the crag after having inched our (or mainly my) way up the first route of the day, Spock, it was around 5pm. Ambitions of trying our hand at the test piece of Uhuru were quelled; both pitches sounded quite hard, and I found the gear on Spock fiddly enough, so another route on this face with potentially more of the same type of climbing, coupled with the dwindling light no longer appealed. The obvious choice presented itself to us; those groove things on the right hand side, that that guide guy called Mike we met at the car park this morning, recommended to use and said might be dry. The Creagh Dubh Grooves.

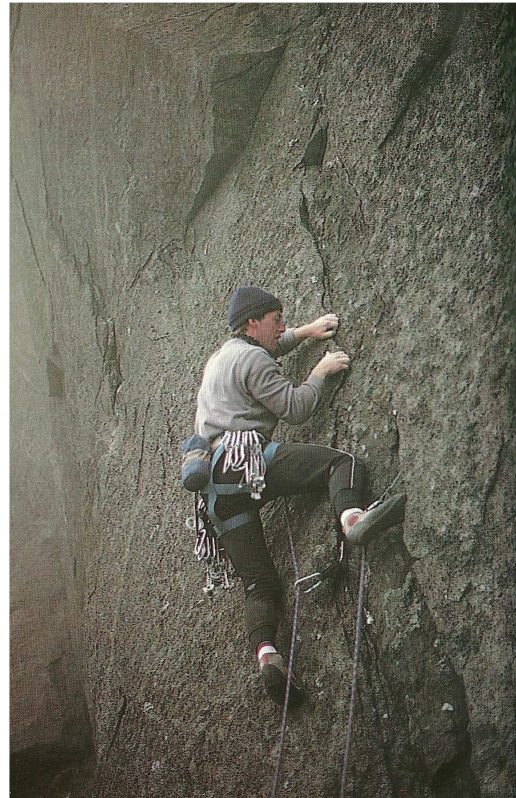


Vulcan Wall, with Creagh Dubh Grooves forming the open-book corner

The funny thing with corners is that it can be quite deceptive how hard they might be from the ground. Sometimes hidden holds appear, less obvious features reveal themselves, or particular body positions can make life easier for you. That was the case on some parts of this one, but what I was not prepared for was the number of small wires the first hard pitch ate up. Serves me right for thinking I would be audacious enough to link a ten metre pitch into a fifteen metre pitch. Anyway, after working our way around the wet parts, we soon topped out to a glorious sunset, and a great introduction to the Cuillin Gabbro for yours truly.



Martin Topping out on Spock.

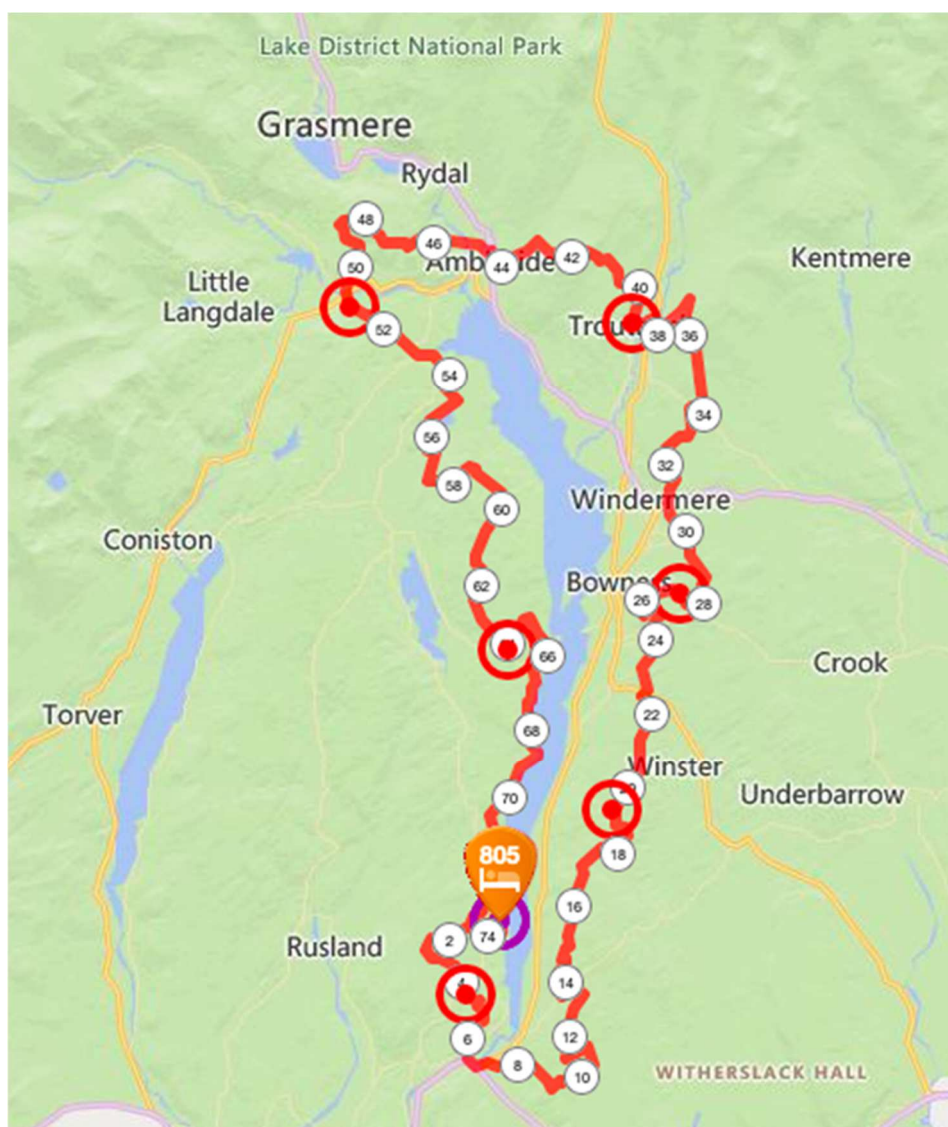


The Vulcan Wall has provided entertainment for many Jacobites over the years – here Bruce Kerr is enjoying the Conjuror.

Ultra Baby!

By Stephanie Droop

The route of The Lap. It's held every six months: clockwise in spring; anti-clockwise in autumn.



The short version

It's a gorgeous route and the weather was perfect. It's cool to be around so many runners all doing the same thing, enjoying the buzz and community of the event. It's cool to cover such a distance and see so much scenery. It's cool to get the biggest runner's high ever!

The long version

6am start in mild muggy darkness, lines of runners breathing hard already up the first forest inclines, queuing at gaps and fallen logs. Bathed in sweat for the first 5km till the first water

stop. Breakfast of bread and cheese. The next leg was 18km past beautiful lily ponds with ducks and swans. Light now, runners spacing out.

I always have this thing about not being a “real runner”. I’m always at the back of the pack at hill reps, and my figure is a bit shorter and fuller than that classic tall slim speed type. I’m a hobbyist, I just do it for fun at the weekends. Of course it’s that same old imposter syndrome as in professional life. If you go down that hard definition route then where’s the line, who is ever a real runner? And does anyone truly ever feel like they belong? Anyone who runs is a runner, full stop. But there’s something about that identity of Runner that’s more serious

I’d bought new shoes and not run in them yet. I needed them because although my hill shoes are grippy they are hard and narrow, and hurt after a while. But it was also an act of superstition: I hadn’t trained, so hoped this symbolic investment would give me confidence. I spent half an hour one evening at home trying out different lacing techniques. But I hadn’t run in them.

Running now, the shoes felt foamy and unwieldy on the rocks and roots. I rolled an ankle already and started to worry. On roads it felt like all my energy was soaked up by the road, like nothing transferred to give me purchase.

At the first viewpoint I sat down, gulped a paracetamol and tied my shoes tighter. The breeze was perfect. With retied shoes I set off with a boost, running properly now on narrow wooded trails. I was overtaking walkers striding steadily with poles, then the same ones would overtake me when I was taking a break. We all have different strategies... but maybe theirs was better... Then I saw one lady trip over and bash her lip while trying to eat a sandwich on the go. Maybe I’m fine to sit and eat after all.

Sums and numbers loom large in the mind. The day before I couldn’t escape the crushing enormity of that number, 75km. I mulled different estimates (2.5 full munro days, almost two marathons) and reckoned it might take 16 hours. What if I wasn’t capable. You can’t escape that number. Even during the event the mind is constantly recalculating: what time I might make, whether I’m going too hard. When did I last eat, when did I last have electrolytes, vitamins, paracetamol. You think, silly human, can’t you ever stop planning and just live in the moment? But the hours start to pass, and if you don’t roughly keep track of these things you might regret it.

I was feeling pretty bad for the 10km before the halfway drop station and I started worrying in earnest about my strategy. Walkers with poles overtook me, assuring me I’d get a second wind. I wondered how many winds you get: what if I’d already used mine? What if I’d started out too hard, what if I was burning out. I’d been stupid to try to do this without adequate preparation. What if my fatigue is real! I was serious when I said I hadn’t trained: I was drained after a work trip to Toronto a month ago. I did a bunch of hillwalking, camping and swimming which made me happy in the outdoors at least, but that doesn’t count as running training. Then I was sent home from trying to give blood. They said my hemoglobin was too low and I wasn’t to go back for a year.

That day I took a supplement and thought nothing more of it. I went for my first run for months, but I aimed too high and hard, and I crashed with total fatigue. Luckily my friends were swimming nearby so I came off the hills and cried on their shoulders. They assured me I was just having an off day and unlikely to be coming down with a chronic fatigue illness (I was blowing things out of proportion).

So after that I started eating meat again and rested for two weeks. The silly thing is, I know about iron and I'd been eating green leaves and sprouted lentils every day, citrus at the same time, etc. I guess I hadn't appreciated just how much iron you burn through when tanking up hills. I resolved to be more systematic about vitamins and minerals.

Back to the story.

The race was very well signposted with lovely little blue arrows, and very well provisioned every 15km or so. Bread, cheese, crisps, nuts, chocolate. Kind people poured out flat coke and electrolyte solution. At the halfway village hall our drop bags were waiting with the Savlon and clean socks we'd packed earlier. I didn't need them but I did offload my battery pack, trowel and ton of snack bars. I had prepared for a remoter race and now I could run a bit lighter. Not by much though, as by regulations we had to carry waterproofs, warm layers, hat, gloves, buff and emergency survival bag. Although I don't know how most people fit all that in their tiny little bags. My pack felt huge! And nobody checked our kit after all.

The mood at the halfway stop was polarised. There were some very glum faces. "The bit coming next is horrific", the guy next to me said. "It's just one awful hill then another. We've hardly done any of it". I moved away towards some others who were hyper and cackling manically at me, "Where's that smile?! You've lost your smile!". I forced my mouth to move around. "THERE IT IS!! THERE IT IS!!" he shrieked. This time I giggled and beamed back for real and thanked the guy for raising my mood. Choose your environment wisely, kids!

My belly problems started at the halfway point. I knew to avoid eating fried vegetables before a run since one memorable time and I was usually fine if I stuck to simple sugary junk. Here it was either dehydration, irritation from too much coke on an empty belly, or the constant pressure of the waist strap of my bag. Internet tells me a third of endurance runners get the "runner's trots" caused by all these things. I had a slapstick episode worthy of any retro comedy show, involving firstly the head coming off the toilet brush and secondly the window key falling down a crack in the roof while I was trying to open it.

Fixed it though, set off again. Got my second wind.

It was a hill, yes, but not that big, and my bag was lighter too. I flowed steadily up it and poured down the other side. I got on an absolute roll. On the descent I overtook rakes of folk. I flew through Ambleside and to the next hill. One of the little bones on top of my foot was swollen and bruised under my laces. I ignored it for ages till I suddenly couldn't. Flopped down at the least muddy bracken, gulped ibuprofen and tanked on.

Lots of people were taking the view at the top of the next hill but I was on an absolute mission. Runners graciously got out the way as I vibrated down the steep steps in a kind of

high frequency wobble, gibbering my random chant of “Grim, ow! Grim, ow! Gravity doing its thing, ow!”

Forced down a flapjack at the next food station. Looked at the label: 18% coconut oil. Belly gonna be happy with that. And I’d left my trowel! Groan. Onwards.

The sun was getting low now: hot, bright and horizontal slanting through pine trees. So much beauty all around. Sheep and cows. Stone farmhouses. Snatches of songs fly into your mind, stay for some time, then leave again.

Locals along the way were touchingly supportive. People on the hills nodded approvingly and clapped encouragement. One guy who fell into step with me around km 50–60 said he’d wanted to stop in Ambleside but people were cheering him on so he felt he just couldn’t stop. We loped on. He pulled away on the ascents then I would catch him on the descents. We passed a man kneeling on the ground puking and sobbing, his buddy passing him water and looking at us helplessly.

I was starting to feel pretty bad. There were various pains all day of course, different ones becoming salient at different times, but they never took over my awareness. Rather they just coexist. But I was very grateful to arrive at that final way station and use the toilet.

The lady at the trestle table was coaxing runners to eat. “Come on, maybe a bit of bread and jam, wouldn’t that be nice?”. She had run it last year so she knew what we needed. Pukey man lay on the grass. His buddy shot on to the finish and would come back for him in the car.

Sums all the time. This is going well! Maybe I can make it by 8pm, not by 10pm. That would be 14 hours not 16. Wouldn’t that be amazing! 8pm became my new goal. I had to make it. It was 6.30pm when I left the last way station. I was tormented by the thought I was too late to make it by 8. I couldn’t think of anything else. I was being ridiculous. Silly human! The light was fading. The last descent was savage. I thanked all the stars I was there in time to do that in the light, and sent half a thought for all the poor souls behind who’d be doing it in the dark. 10km to go. Pretty much dark now but maybe I could make it without stopping.

Surely it must be close! I was in denial. Sigh. It could be up to 3km yet. Everything was in my bag. Had to stop and get the torch out. Proper dark now. Your focus changes with a head torch: Now you’re nodding your head about, casting among the hummocks for the next sweet little reflective glimmer of the arrow tag, recognizing it gratefully among crags and leaves. Every noise on the lake or in the forest sounded like the finish line. Surely it must be coming up.

And then come up it did. John from my running club (who I’d travelled with) was waiting with stories of how my tracker had gone dead for the last 10km but they knew I’d be there soon. He’d been back for 2 hours already and was in good spirits. But what’s the time dude? It was 8.23! That made my time 14.23. My first reaction was disappointment (silly human!) but it quickly changed to elation, that’s not a bad time at all.

I showered and stretched, mashed my quads with my roller, forced some food and drink, went to bed. Slept a few hours but mind too scattered. Body inflamed and twanging all over. Guts still horrible. So this is what irritable bowels is! Some people have this all the time, Jesus.

Impressions flying around. The mind busying away making sense of things. I couldn't stop thinking about my eyes in the mirror at the last toilet stop. They were teal-grey like pottery glaze and peaceful. They were totally present but... unstructured. I realised I hadn't been thinking about myself for hours on end in the race. Of course I'd been calculating timings, but that's all. I hadn't been building my personality and narrating my life. The look in my eyes in the mirror was of space and freedom. I see why people do this. That's the addiction: not the achievement per se, but this pure access to conceptless knowledge and to yourself. The funny thing is I only appreciated it later once the self-making narrative took over again with a vengeance. And since then my ego is in overdrive processing it all, of course with pride that now I know I can call myself a runner.

That's a dubious plus of course. I'm meant to be shedding identities, not gaining them. And "runner" is such a sticky identity. Everyone who's a real runner has a running pic as their profile on social media. Once you're a real runner you take it harder if injury ever stops you running. I'll have to remember to hold it lightly. It's funny how accessing a state of reduced self is followed in cycle by an increasingly sticky and conceited self. Maybe we need both modes or states.

Managed to calm down and relax by first light. There were still runners arriving until almost 24 hours after starting. The organisers were packing up and we left for a massive breakfast in Ambleside, then up the road home.

Addendum end November 2022

I wrote that report right after the race. It's best left as a snapshot because if I start editing I might pull the whole jumper apart, one thread at a time. But I never guessed that a week later my new, sticky Runner identity would dissolve when I had to retire halfway from Ring of Steall race.

It was going so well, I was full of energy and purpose. I ran up a Munro and down again. But on the flat in Glen Nevis I got totally sore in my hip and had to stop and go back on the support bus with a glum face. Apparently two extreme events a week apart is too much, who knew?! (Everyone apart from me, it seems).

The physio thinks it's a strain injury in the hip cartilage which often affects women who are super flexible from yoga and then take up something more heavy and dynamic. It's still not better; I've only just started doing 20-min rehab jogs 2.5 months later.

So it was an eventful first year of hill running for me! Now I know not to pile on races in race season just because I'm excited. I'm going to build up slowly and train properly, and *next* year who knows?

The Three Little Mountainers

By Graham Pearson

Once upon a time there were three little mountaineers and the time came for them to leave home and go to Inver for New Year.

The first little mountaineer brought enough kindling to build a house because it was the lightest thing to carry. The second little mountaineer brought enough logs to build a house. This took a little longer to burn than the kindling. The third little mountaineer brought enough coal to build a house.

One night the big bad Kaptain, who dearly loved to drink whisky and stoke the fire, came along and saw the first little mountaineer with his pile of kindling, and said:

"Little mountaineer, little mountaineer, let me drink your whisky."

"Not by the hair on my chinny chin chin!" replied the little mountaineer.

"Then I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll burn all your kindling!"

The Kaptain huffed and he puffed and he burned all the kindling and he drank all the first little mountaineer's whisky.

The Kaptain then came to the second little mountaineer with his pile of logs, and said:

"Little mountaineer, little mountaineer, let me drink your whisky."

"Not by the hair on my chinny chin chin!" replied the second little mountaineer.

"Then I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll burn all your logs!"

The Kaptain huffed and he puffed and he burned all the logs and he drank all the second little mountaineer's whisky.

The Kaptain then came to the third little mountaineer with his pile of coal, and said:

"Little mountaineer, little mountaineer, let me drink your whisky."

"Not by the hair on my chinny chin chin!" replied the third little mountaineer.

"Then I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll burn all your coal!"

Well the Kaptain huffed and he puffed but he could not fit all of the coal into the fireplace.

But the Kaptain was a sly old Kaptain and he climbed up on the roof to look for a way to get more coal onto the fire.

The little mountaineer saw the Kaptain climb up on the roof and heated up an urn full of water and placed it in the fireplace.

When the Kaptain found the chimney he started to drop bags of coal down it, but by now he had drunk two bottles of whisky, so he fell down the chimney and KERSPLASH right into the urn of water, and he had his first bath in years.

And they all lived happily ever after.

And Now For Something Completely Different

By John Sanders

What a relief, when lockdown finally ended, and we could travel again. So off we went to one of my favourite places, not just in Scotland, but in the entire world. Assynt.

Our primary goal was an ascent of Suilven, and therefore following an excellent days climbing at Reif, we rocked up to the public car park, just before Glencanisp Lodge, on Monday 13th September. At 06.30, surprisingly we were the first to arrive. The views from the summit, out to the Summer Isles were as spectacular as always. Great day, and great fun.

As we arrived back at Vera the Van, I spotted a guy coming out of the trees at the rear of the car park. It was then that I noticed the small path. I'm always up for a bit of discovery. *Wonder*



The view from the summit, out to The Summer Isles

where that goes? Thinks I. So off I trotted to find out. The wee track didn't go far. It ended in an open area behind the line of trees. This open area was obviously the local loo. Toilet paper in varying degrees of rot, lay everywhere, along with piles and piles of poo.

Not nice.

Not nice at all.

When Al and I started longer, multi-day hikes in America, or week(s) long river runs, we made the decision not to poo in the woods.

We're not bears, they don't have a choice.

We do.

We asked ourselves the question, *how can I help?*

So we started to use Wag bags. These are small, portable toilet bags, which yes, you guessed it... you poo in.

The problem is that they are made of plastic. Mmmmmm, so we're not leaving a mess in the countryside, but now we're adding to the global plastic problem. Bluntly, that didn't sit well with either of us.

Time for a re-think.

After some research, we found the answer. Enter the Green Elephant toilet replacement bag. 100% biodegradable.



The label says it all

They're cheap, easy (and safe) to use, and really do solve the problem. They can be purchased from a number of sources, this is only one -

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Portable-Replacement-Compostable-Compost-Certified/dp/B079N33LKC/ref=asc_df_B079N33LKC/?tag=googshopuk-21&linkCode=df0&hvadid=514128038074&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=10578105446454017498&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvmmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmldl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=1007326&hvtargid=pla-439381952802&psc=1&th=1&psc=1

So then we asked ourselves again – *How can I help?*

Well if you're reading this article, and just one of you decides to ask yourself the same question, and take action, then that's one less poo, that will end up out in the countryside.

Someone asked me one time, what I did with the bag, when I got home. I guess the answer is, that it's a personal choice.

I'm not happy with dumping it in the landfill refuse, at least not with stuff inside it. If we didn't live next door to the canal, then I'd bury ours at the bottom of the garden. They biodegrade very quickly. But given that we're right next to open water, burying is not an option. So, for me the solution is to empty the bag into the toilet, and then dispose of it (once emptied), into the landfill.

Like I say, it's a personal choice.

Have fun out there, peeps, and please ask yourself the question, then take action, and also spread the word.