



The Munro Society

NEWSLETTER

No. 14, December 2008



Ladhar Bheinn from Corran. Photo: Derek Sime

The President's Blog

A significant milestone in the *Society's* existence has been reached with the "*completion*" of a "first round" of Mountain Quality Indicators. The MQI project moves on, and we have now obtained at least one assessment for all 284 Munros. This forms a valuable and unique record to be used to monitor change over time and to highlight

problem areas. The "*completion*" was achieved during a wet weekend in Knoydart in late September with MQI assessments being carried out on Ladhar Bheinn and Meall Buidhe (and a second assessment on Luinne Bheinn thrown in for good measure). We were very keen to get round all the Munros prior to publication of the Phase 1 report and this is now on target for spring 2009, in time for the

AGM. The success of the project is in large part due to the hard work and dedication of John Burdin, who has put an enormous amount of effort into the task over the last five years. The project will of course continue and our next aim is to obtain MQIs for all Munros in all four seasons, an altogether more daunting task, particularly for those hills remote from the main centres of population. We are very keen to get more members involved in this project and are actively looking at ways to make this easier and more attractive. We will need much assistance in this task, especially from members lucky enough to live near the great ranges of the North-west Highlands. The "*completion*" therefore, to paraphrase a Churchillian quotation, marks not the beginning of the end, but merely the end of the beginning.

Not entirely unconnected with the MQI Project, I visited Knoydart recently, and I have shamefully to confess that it was my first time on the peninsula since the community buy-out, and the setting up of the Knoydart Foundation – indeed my first visit to Inverie since Corbett bagging days of the early nineties. It was good to see the great sense of community spirit that exists and the very real sense of making a difference. The evidence of sensitive improvements and sustainable lifestyle is everywhere - for example, the new ferry terminal which opened a couple of years ago, the rhododendron clearance work, the logging of non-native species and replanting with indigenous trees in Inverie Wood, the upgrading of the hydro power scheme which has minimal impact on the landscape, the very helpful information given about stalking activity, the genuine welcome extended to walkers, the thriving "Old Forge" - the list goes on. Next year is the tenth anniversary of the buy-out and there will be a great deal going on – a good excuse to go back perhaps, which is one good reason, if any were needed, that the *Society* has arranged a revisit weekend there in June (details elsewhere in the Newsletter).

The *Society's* revisits continue to be successful, and I was able to join the Braemar weekend

last June at Rucksacks bunkhouse, having walked over from Glenmore Lodge. It was midsummer and therefore the weather was predictably mixed, but as usual the convivial gathering was in keeping with the *Society's* tradition. It was particularly good to welcome two new members attending the meet and also to be able to celebrate David Bunting's *completion* of the Tops (details in News about Members).

While I didn't make it to Patterdale, I understand that the Goretex and Paramo gear was discarded in favour of wet suits and flippers – while we can guarantee good company, we can't guarantee picking a dry weekend. Come to think of it, there weren't that many to choose from in the monsoon that was 2008, and with impeccable timing, the Patterdale weekend coincided with the Great Flood that all but washed places such as Morpeth off the map. Read about both revisits elsewhere in the Newsletter.

Indeed, the only real summer weather I can recall was a fortnight in August and that was the Alps! However my Alpine trip pales into insignificance compared to the more adventurous wanderings of our intrepid membership with mountaineering exploits in the Ukraine, Morocco, Tuscany, Andorra and Bhutan all described in the pages that follow. This Newsletter could be justifiably be subtitled "*International Edition*". I really must get out more!

There is another *completion* from within our membership which I think merits mention. Although not exactly hot off the press, as it was done in 2006, Roderick Manson achieved a triple *completion*, of the Grahams, Corbetts and Munros, in a single, continuous coast-to-coast walk. He is one of only three people who have achieved a triple *completion* in a single outing, and it must have taken a significant amount of forward planning and self-discipline. The ever-modest Roderick has now, at last, been persuaded to tell the story, entitled "*The Angus the Shepherd Walk*" elsewhere in this issue.

Talking of *completions*, the total now registered with the SMC had reached 4206 the

last time I checked the SMC website. The exponential increase continues, reflecting the continuing popularity of doing a "round". This has implications for the hills themselves of course, for example increasing erosion on footpaths, built or otherwise – something which we record in the MQIs and will be monitoring over time. The other implication for the *Society* is that, with over 4000 qualifying for membership (most of whom will still be around, due to the relatively recent growth in the numbers), our actual membership is only around 250. While we would obviously never expect to see 100% of those eligible joining the *Society*, we could perhaps aspire towards a more modest 10%, which would mean around 400, initially at least. With more members we would have greater potential influence, be able to carry out more activities relating to mountain quality initiatives, and be in a position to improve the quality of what we are able to provide for members. There is a good chance that most members know at least one Munroist who is not a member, so why not encourage them to join?

One activity which we could perhaps do more on is height verification of marginal Munros and Corbetts. On the future of the heighting exercise, which was of course stalled last year due to lack of funding, Iain Robertson (our heighting coordinator) and Fred Ward are currently in discussion with a group of surveyors who have recently established the heights of a number of hills furth of Scotland, and have had their results accepted by the Ordnance Survey, so we may be looking for volunteers again soon - watch this space!

For those who have not yet obtained a copy, the *Society's* latest video (DVD actually) is currently in stock. The subject of the interview is founder member and first President, Irvine Butterfield, and the interviewer is Irvine's successor as President, John Burdin. We are once again very grateful to Jim Closs for putting in an enormous amount of work on this – the third in the series.

Preview showings of the DVD were given at the Annual Dinner in Strathpeffer in October

and a significant level of interest was expressed, with Irvine being on hand to sign copies. The Dinner itself was another great success, culminating in a talk from John Mackenzie (see Anne Marie Foot's article).

We have a fairly full agenda lined up for the AGM day in 2009. After the necessary formal AGM business, we have tried to line up a good variety of topics to interest everyone, culminating in the evening annual Munro Lecture, to be given this year by Cameron McNeish. Anyone who knows or has heard Cameron will know that we will be in for a stimulating evening, attracting we hope a good number of non-members to his talk.

Finally, recognizing that the Newsletter and the website form the principal means (and for many, perhaps the only means) of communicating with members, we are very keen to improve the level of this communication. Starting in 2009, the Newsletter will be sent out three times a year, in April, August and December. This will be a challenge for us all and particularly for Anne Marie Foot, the editor. It will be all the more important to have contributions for the Newsletter from members – I am sure that everyone has something to say that will be of interest, or entertainment value (or even both), so please keep the contributions coming in.

Angus Campbell, our Webmaster, along with Peter Willimott, is working to improve the website, with some significant upgrading having already been carried out, so if it's a while since you clicked on it, give it another try, www.themunrosociety.com.

Good hill days to all.

Derek Sime

News about Members

□ DAVID BUNTING *completed* the Tops on Eagle's Rock on the White Mounth, climbed along with Creag a'Ghlas-uillt and Carn a'Choire Bhoidheach, from Keiloch, near Invercauld, on Monday 16th June 2008. Congratulations on this worthy achievement! The matter was the cause of some celebration and a toast at the Braemar meet at Rucksacks bunkhouse.

□ RODERICK MANSON achieved a triple *completion* of the Grahams, Corbetts and Munros, in that order, in a single walk, on the 16th and 17th July 2006 (you heard it first in the TMS Newsletter!), and is one of only three people to have managed to *complete* all three lists in one outing. (See also the splendid "The Angus the Shepherd Walk" elsewhere in this issue). Belated congratulations!

Letterewe Munros

My friends Derek and Scott each had five Munros to *complete* - Ruadh Stac Mor and A'Mhaighdean plus Meall Buidhe, Luinne Bhein and Lhadar Bheinn in Knoydart. Leaving the best till last as it were!

After a rather miserable expedition into Shenavall for the Fisherfield hills there was a fundamental objection to any more "bothy nights." So a one-day expedition was required because of time and cost constraints. Bikes then, but was the path playable?

Certainly when I last used it in 1993, it most certainly was not, but rumour had it that the path was now much improved. But was it? I was determined to consult the collective knowledge of *The Munro Society* and so sent out a fiery e-mail to several members of good standing. The response was very good and two options were regarded as being viable for a single day trip - bikes from Poolewe or take the ferry from the old Loch Maree Hotel to near Letterewe House (at extra cost) and over the hump to Carnmore. Bikes it was then!

So on 15 August 2008 we set forth with two cars and four bikes to Poolewe. Whilst the others took B&B accommodation, I slept in my RAV4 in a perfect spot on the banks of the River Ewe (the shortest salmon river in Scotland running only from Loch Maree to the sea at Poolewe). Prior to that we heard the worst music ever in The Poolewe Hotel but nevertheless had a reasonable meal.

We started out at 7 a.m. the next day following a good road as far as Kernsary, then an excellent walking path all the way to Carnmore Bothy a distance of 18km. Well engineered drainage channels every 10 metres or so between Kernsary and Carnmore pose a significant challenge for bikers and we all came off at least once. We eventually left the bikes 13km out from Poolewe walking the last 5km to the bothy. The weather was good with no wind and excellent visibility.

Carnmore bothy is wind and weatherproof, with an earthen floor and several sprung bed frames but no fireplace. It's possibly a 1 or 2 star bothy. To my mind it would only be enticing in bad weather and a tent would be

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my own personal preference. Staying in the bothy, you'd only save the weight of the tent as you'd need everything else like sleeping bag, stove etc.

Beyond Carnmore the path continues very strongly beside the Allt Bruthach an Easain and on to Fuar Loch Mor and then the col between Ruadh Stac Mor and A'Mhaighdean. There is a good howff about 70 metres SE of the col.

Clear as it gets with my best views of the six Fisherfield and Letterewe Munros, An Teallach, Beinn Dearg and the Hebrides.



Carnmore Bothy. Photo: author

We did the hills, then headed back to the col for lunch and then retraced our long route back to the bikes and Poolewe where we arrived at 6 p.m. having done 52km and climbed 1500 metres in 11 hours. We also risked the music in the Poolewe Hotel for the sake of a few beers, but thankfully there was no entertainment!

In summary:

- There's a great walking track between Kernsary and Carnmore and onto the col between Ruadh Stac Mor and A'Mhaighdean.
- In good conditions it's possible to cover the 51.4km, 2300 metres in 11 hours with bikes but is hard.
- A better option could be to camp at Carnmore away from the bothy before or after the hills.
- Another option would be to take the ferry from the old Loch Maree Hotel and over the

Bealach nan Sac and Bealach Mheinnidh onto Carnmore but this would also be a long hard day!

My friends Derek and Scott duly finished their Munro rounds in Knoydart on 12th October 2008. This trip for nine men and a dog incorporated the Bruce Watt ferry from Mallaig to Inverie, the Knoydart Foundation hostel and an amazing musical night in the Old Forge pub in Inverie.

It may be of interest to note that the route for Meall Buidhe and Luinne Bheinn took 11 hours, was 30km and contained no less than 3080 metres in ascent. Unless my Garmin 60cx was wrong!

(Thanks to the following members of The Munro Society for their input: Iain Robertson, Findlay Swinton, Glen Breaden, David Bunting, Eleanor Hunter, Derek Sime.)

Geoff Carson

The ascent of Hoverla

The Carpathian Mountains which lie within the borders of Ukraine are tucked away in the south-west corner of the country and reach their highest point at Hoverla 6721ft.

The Carpathians are actually a long, broad backed mountain range stretching from Poland to Romania and marking the borders that divide Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine and Romania. Hereabouts national borders have been changed quite frequently over the years, usually at the whim and fancy of some political big wig. For example Lviv was previously Polish, and the area in which Hoverla lies was not all that long ago part of Romania.

Now wishing to get to the top of Ukraine's highest hill may seem a rather strange thing to aim at. However let me set the backdrop to this little piece of British eccentricity.

It is often said that people can always say exactly where they were when they first heard of two epoch making events of the 20th century. The first was the assassination of President Kennedy, the second the death of Elvis Presley. Now I assert that these events in

and of themselves were hardly earth shattering, that is of course unless you happened to be Kennedy or Presley. After all, as soon as Lyndon Johnson could be located America had a new President, and there were multitudes of singers anxiously waiting to fill the shoes of Elvis. To illustrate the first point there is a story told of Calvin Coolidge, the 30th President. He was in Washington, having left office, and a friend pointed to The White House and asked him who lived there, in his famed laconic manner Coolidge replied, "Oh, they just come and go." Now let me ask you this question, "Where were you when you first heard of the collapse of the Berlin Wall?" I know exactly where I was and I would press the point that this was truly one of the major events of the last century. Consider that to most of us living in Britain about half of Europe was a no go area, and the whole landmass from the Baltic to the Sea of Japan was under the domination of The Soviet Union. It was on hearing what had taken place in Berlin that I decided there and then, that eventually I would visit these previously forbidden territories. It was in this way that in September 2008, Diana and I found ourselves on the way to Kiev for our annual three-week break.

All along I had said that one objective of the holiday would be to get to the summit of Hoverla, I knew it wasn't going to be easy, but the attempt would be fun.

The first thing was to get to Ivano-Frankiv'sk. This didn't prove too difficult and was managed on the overnight sleeper from Kiev, arriving in our destination on a rather cool but sunny morning at about 8 a.m. Next, we knew we had to get to Vorokhta. We scanned the line of shabby mashrutkas, and there leaving in about five minutes was just what we wanted. It was a ride of about three hours as we tumbled out of our transport into a mass of milling humanity, swirling dust and the chatter of Russian. The first thing was to find some place to stay. Diana approached a group of idling men, as a result of which we set off along the decrepit road, being assured that the place to which we'd been directed was two

kilometers. Experience taught us that this last point could mean anything from two to ten! Soon however we were joined by a lady, she asked if I could speak German, I told her I could, but she couldn't! So it was all systems go in Russian. She was most concerned that the place we were headed for was very "drogo" expensive, and she would take us to someone she knew who would put us up. The lady of the house, Vasiliny, spoke only Russian but we could stay there at the equivalent of £2.50 each per night. To wash we had to draw water from the well, and the toilet facilities were equally primitive, these being down a lane to a couple of huts that had pit toilets in them.

Vasiliny explained that next morning we'd need to stand by the road for 7 a.m. and a mashrutka would pick us up. It did, and after about twenty minutes we were unceremoniously dumped by the side of the road where we were to wait for a school bus which would take us to the end of the road. The end of the road was marked by a barrier, which turned out to be the entrance to the National Park. However we had to wait for the attendant to arrive before we could pay the pittance of an entrance fee. In the meantime however great hilarity was had at our expense by a group of men when they learned we were going to go to Hoverla.

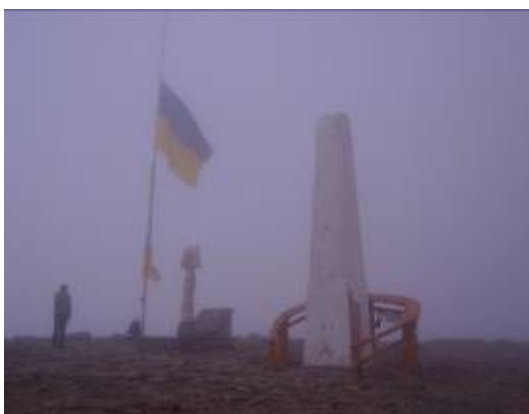
Once beyond the barrier there was an eight kilometre walk to Zaruslyak along a dirt road which ran alongside a dirty looking river and with thick woods on either side. Every now and then some dishevelled vehicle came along and each time I assured Diana that this was going to be our lucky number as I tried to hitch a lift. But this just wasn't going to be my lucky day! Zaruslyak turned out to be no more than a timber yard, small shrine and large Soviet era hotel that was closed due to renovation. At the entrance to the forest was a brightly painted finger post saying, in Cyrillic, "To Hoverla", and informing that it was a further four kilometres.



Fingerpost saying "To Hoverla". Photo:author

Through the forest it was fun trying to spot the red and white track indicators that had been painted on the trees. Once out of the trees the gradient steepened and we gained some appreciation of the surrounding hills. However things were not looking too promising and further up everything seemed to be covered in dense cloud. The track was very pronounced as it went steeply through waist high, tough vegetation which ended very abruptly and we faced a hillside which for all the world could have been anywhere in the Cairngorms. The final 1,000ft or so were very steep and I was surprised to hear Diana say, "Oh, we're there."

On the summit we felt quite at home, we were in cloud and it was drizzling. From a flagpole fluttered the blue and yellow Ukrainian standard. An enormous white plinth was alongside as was an Orthodox cross and a marble tablet in which were engraved the names of all the Ukrainian counties.



The summit of Hoverla. Photo: author

We made some bread and cheese sandwiches and were soon joined by a family of three, and then by three young people all carrying enormous rucksacks which were full to the gunnels. I made some effort to speak to the family, here my German came in useful, and I learned from the lady that this was her second visit. They chose to descend by another route, but we retraced our steps.

On a good day the view from the summit is supposed to be quite spectacular, allowing you to see as far as the Marmarosh Alps in Romania. Perhaps the next time it'll be better. Back at Zaroslyak two stallholders had set up shop. One, a lady, was trading in refreshments. We patronised her. The other, ran by two men, were selling all sorts of trinkets, amongst which was a certificate to say you'd climbed Hoverla! He asked us to buy one, but I told him as best I could, that that would be a very unBritish way of going about things.

Parked nearby was a rather posh looking 4x4 which had been there when we set off, and which I assumed to belong to the aforementioned family. Diana now realised why I'd been so anxious to speak to them and why we'd hurried so to get down. I didn't fancy repeating that eight kilometer walk and was going to hitch a lift from them! We'd been going about twenty minutes or so when they came rumbling along. Sure, they stopped, and we got in. What a lovely family we decided they were as they dropped us right at the door of our digs.

It may seem to have been a long way to come just climb a rather undistinguished hill on a very forgettable day weatherwise. However the joy was in the fact of just getting there and it set the tone for the rest of our holiday.

Robert H. MacDonald

The Angus the Shepherd Walk

For many years before I started climbing mountains I was a passionate conservationist; a conservationist being someone who believes that nature knows what is best for the wild

places whereas an environmentalist "knows" that they do. Even now, I do not "do" mountains: I visit them, climb them, and try to understand them but never "do" them. I visited nature reserves; an approach to conservation I have come to believe is fundamentally flawed, much as I now visit mountains. In a way, I now move in three dimensions when I used to move in only two. With my current efforts to climb all deleted Tops, Corbetts and Donalds, perhaps I can even claim to be moving in four.

Horizons changed in 1991 when I was given a copy of the SMC Munros book for my birthday. Even then my first Mountain was something of an afterthought. Having driven from Aviemore to Durness and taken the minibus for a quick look at Cape Wrath, I walked round Kervaig Bay, played nine holes at Durness Golf Club, took a boat ride round Smoo Cave then set off up Ben Hope in thick mist at about 5.30 p.m. It took about two-and-a-quarter hours with a drive back to Aviemore to follow but at the curiously late age of 29 it was enough.

Over the next two years or so my approach broadened. I started climbing the Tops, Corbetts, Donalds, Marilyns and Grahams. I started climbing hills purely because they had interesting names like Crown of Scotland or the ubiquitous Barf. I developed the idea of finishing the SMC lists in reverse order of height. The Donalds were completed in December 2001 on Whitehope Heights by which time I had expanded on the idea of completing Munro's Tables on Seana Bhraigh by adding first the Corbetts (Carn Ban) and then the Grahams (Carn a' Choin Deirg). From there it was a short step to realising that, with the walk out at the end being fairly huge anyway, a coast-to-coast effort would give the whole enterprise meaning beyond the mere detail of triple-completion. I had come to value more those walks which linked mountains in ways I found meaningful, particularly the long walks ("long" being over ten hours in my book) which I found tended to give me a better feel for the mountains.

There were of course many highs and at least as many lows over the years. The memory of six glorious hours on the crest of the Rum Cuillin ridge above a static cloud inversion with not a soul to be seen tends to compensate for falling waist deep in a peat bog on Jura in November (a week after being released from hospital with kidney stones) with the car three hours walk away, the Islay ferry a further hour away and my digs and a desperately needed shower half-an-hour beyond that. Generally the most memorable and rewarding walks were the longer ones. The further I got from anything remotely resembling humanity both in time and place the closer I could get to the heart of the archetypal "total mountain" and pick up echoes of wild places somehow less distant like visions of circles of sounds.

As is ever the way where a meticulous and all-embracing plan has evolved over the years the Walk (it had now attained capitalised status) was hit a couple of hours before the off by the one thing I had not anticipated - the support vehicle from Northumbria driven by friends wishing to join me on the last Munro broke down at Motherwell. Fortunately, the original concept of the walk as a solo outing had gone by the way when brother Garry and Irishman Brian Ringland, who managed his own triple-completion around Beinn Sgritheall two years earlier including a distinct finish for non-Munro Tops, decided they were coming along too. Unfortunately there was no way of contacting Brian before reaching Ardgay.

Ultimately we needed transport when we reached the west coast so Garry and Brian generously volunteered to take both cars the sixty miles to Inverlael, dump one for future use and drive back to meet me 9.2 miles (we measured it) inland at The Craigs. I dismiss on their behalf as unworthy the base suggestion that a saving of 9.2 miles over hard tarmacadam provided additional impetus to their generosity.

While all this was going on, I waded on to the tidal mudflats of the Dornoch Firth about midway between Ardgay and Bonar Bridge and at 9 p.m. precisely set off west. Even in a light t-shirt, conditions were oppressively

clammy and debilitating as I made good time to The Craigs. Unfortunately I was there by 11.30 and had to wait a further half-hour inside the phone box to escape the only midge infestation of the walk before the cavalry arrived and we got moving again at midnight. We stopped briefly for a chat with a transient denizen of Alladale Bothy curious to see what three passing eccentrics (he was very polite) were doing out there at quarter past one in the morning. Then the real mountaineering began. The gentle incline to Carn Alladale was fairly firm with short springy vegetation which meant progress in the semi-light was steady rather than spectacular but by daybreak we were comfortably on our way along the unduly extensive ridge to Carn a' Choin Deirg to complete my Grahams. This was reached at about 4.15 a.m. and despite manifest tiredness there was no further option for leaving it for another day. I have no plans for second rounds of anything, still less of all three lists. The col to the west was broad and replete with an unhelpful mix of bog and peat hags to sap morale. This continued much of the way up the other side before the ground became merely springy and energy-absorbent. Being a walker in the "fast but not strong" mould, this did not commend itself to me and even less to Garry who was carrying a leg strain. Although cloud was massing and the wind increasing to match, it was still mild as we followed firmer ground to my Corbett completion on Carn Ban at about 8.30 a.m. This train was no longer even pretending to keep to any allegedly predetermined timetable. Continuing westwards we took the inner line of the rim above Coire Mor which may have involved, in retrospect, rather more ups and downs than a more southerly line but which seemed a good idea at the time. The going could best be described as rough with the wind around 50 m.p.h. The cloud remained considerably above the summits until the final push up the final Top, Seana Bhraigh itself. This was reached at 12.45 p.m. on Saturday 17th June 2006, gatecrashing the final Munro celebrations of two Invernessians who

were generously dishing out whisky. Anyone who knows the brand is requested to get in touch, as Brian really liked it. I'm teetotal so I missed out.

Views were limited for a while after leaving the summit with occasional showers to enhance the meteorological experience but we did see it from afar before the long descent to Inverlael. This was, to be honest but diplomatic, a tottering terminal glide largely due to me being utterly drained. The sight of Little Loch Broom provided some degree of incentive and a little over twenty hours after setting off an impromptu paddle concluded the walk. It was rough, exhausting and fluctuated between soporifically hot and perishingly cold but the mountains were well chosen, iconic both to the occasion and the overarching concept of the walk and the experience was rewarding beyond words and beyond completions. It was a pleasing coincidence that I was the same age at completion as Sir Hugh was when he published the tables.

We spent the night, a late one by the time we got there, at Tongue Youth Hostel because the completion experience as envisaged when I dreamt up this epic of lunacy demanded one last symbolic gesture. The next morning we returned to Ben Hope to revisit the first Mountain I ever climbed fifteen years and five days before. Progress was a little less rapid though the conditions were much the same - cloud about 1,500 feet, wind pleasantly cool, visibility from the summit unimpressive - but the purpose was served of closing off one cycle of my mountaineering existence and opening another with different and hopefully deeper emphases and understanding.

The weather was immaterial; any discomfort or tiredness of mind and body temporary and transient. That which passes, passes like clouds. The totality of the weekend experience and the presence of as good companions as anyone could wish for made the realisation. Life has no better to offer than this!

Roderick Manson

Adventures on a Moroccan Munro* (Oumzra Cries Tears of Snow)

Hamish Brown in 'The Mountains Look on Marrakech'¹ describes an end-to-end trek of the Atlas Mountains he completed in 1995 with Charles Knowles and Berber companions Ali and Housain. Ali (Ali Elouad) was the key member of that party and now has few equals as a guide in the Atlas. In pages 198 - 199 Hamish mentions later attempts made on a fine three-pronged mountain Oumzra (3451m). During a bivouac on one of these trips a Peter 'snored all night and never knew of the conditions' whilst Hamish 'shivered hour after hour in squalid misery' during a snowstorm. I'm that Peter and this is the story of our adventures.

Oumzra lies to the west of the Toubkal massif. Peyron² writes, "Given the relative remote location of the peak it is hardly surprising that few parties have tried it" and, an approach from the north "would give the venture the proportions of a major exercise". In 1997 Liz MacFarlane, Hamish, Ali and I set out to climb it. The weather in summer is almost guaranteed; we didn't bother to take tents.

Three of us hitched from Marrakech via Asni to the high point on the Taroudannt road, the Tizi n' Test (2092m) where Ali materialized

fortnight when we had been trekking with mules. After a bivouac we were up at first light, leaving the sacks whilst we bagged Ourgoult (2900m). The weather was perfect and we lingered on the summit. Ali raced ahead to have a brew waiting for us on our return to the sacks.

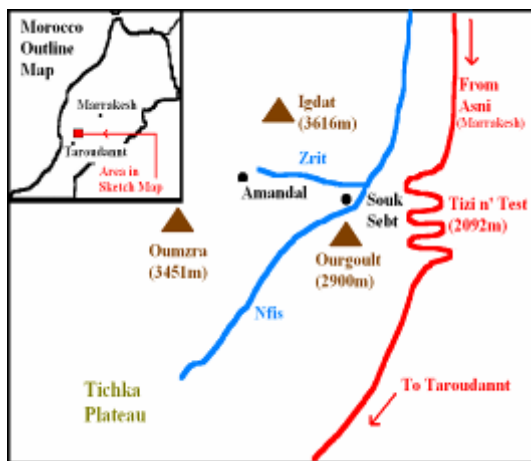
The weather seemed set fair, the previous day's clouds had burnt off and Hamish was looking for luxury! Ali ran ahead to a village to find a house we could stay in and perhaps rent a mule. By the time we arrived he'd made all the arrangements. There was just one snag: the house had no toilet and we Europeans were the centre of attraction. Liz quickly swallowed two anti-diarrhoea tablets! Although lacking facilities the friendly villagers looked after us well.

Next morning we left Ali waiting for the mule and started for the south corrie of Oumzra. After an hour the path deteriorated and there was a rock step. Would the mule cross it? We waited in superb sunshine until eventually the mule, muleteer and Ali arrived. Our fears were confirmed - the mule could go no further. It was unloaded and returned. We repacked sacks and headed into the corrie.

After a couple of hours we paused for a break beside the burn. Hamish decided we should "rest up here; cut down on gear and go for a high bivvy and the summit first thing tomorrow". We languished; our biggest problem was to avoid sunburn. We started up after a meal in the late afternoon.

As we climbed the temperature dropped and the wind got up to such an extent we were forced to bivouac. I kicked up a small wall from loose earth and stones as a shield from the wind. Liz was feeling cold and I lent her my jacket. I fell asleep almost immediately but woke once during the night as my protective wall seemed to be sliding under me. I ignored this and went back to sleep.

"Let's get the hell out of here!" was my greeting as I awakened recoiling from Hamish's boot. I understood why as I unzipped my bag and six inches of snow fell in. Liz was completely buried and a white bivvy bag slowly bent upright, turning green



from the hillside and joined us. We redistributed gear and headed west from the Test col. To the south, layers of cloud were very atmospheric. Although traveling light, the sacks seemed heavy after the previous

as the snow fell off. She emerged wearing my jacket plus her own!

Ali somehow made a hot drink before we descended to make a fire and breakfast in the corrie. Later the wind dropped and the sun broke through but by then we were already retreating to trek out for four days along the Nfis. "Oumzra cries tears of snow," said Ali, looking back at the snow-clad mountain.

In March the following year I was back in Morocco with Hamish, Ali, Mohammed a guide from Imlil, and four others including Munro bagger extraordinary Stewart Logan (then working up to complete his 10th round at the millennium). We spent the first week bagging Moroccan Munros* around Telout. Our second week was devoted to Oumzra.

We travelled by landrover from Marrakech to just short of the summit of the Tizi n' Test and headed down a steep track to the village Souk Sebt in the Nfis valley. Timing was perfect - as the landrover wended down to the Nfis we could see our mules arriving just half a mile away. They had walked for three days from Mohammed's village near the foot of Toubkal. The landrover returned whilst we began loading the mules to head northwest along the Zrit valley. The delightful villages in this remote area are seldom visited. Friendly people greeted us as we walked through before camping just above the last village, Amandal. Meanwhile Oumzra prepared for our visit - it rained! Next morning we headed towards the col 4000 feet above but still 1000 feet below the summit. It was dry but the cloud was down and there was little visibility. We were back by mid afternoon having only climbed about 2000 feet.

The night remained overcast but dry. In the morning we glimpsed the summit through the clouds. It was enough; we took day sacks and loaded bivvy equipment onto our strongest mule intending to get close to the col, bivvy, and then go for the summit the next day. We left before six but were not sure how far the mule would get. It managed to climb to within 1000 feet of the col before it had to turn back. We struggled on with full packs and established a bivvy site 300 feet short of the

col. By now it was cold, the weather was overcast but dry and the summit was clear! We decided to 'go for it'. Ali, Hamish and I paused at the col to spy out the site of the snow bivvy with Liz. The way led on up a scree gully to the main ridge with a short scramble along the final pull to the summit. At last!

The sky was threatening and the wind started to get up. Bivvy gear was in danger of blowing away despite being weighed down with rocks. Fearing a wild night we collected our gear and retreated to an azib (goat shelter) lower down. Fortunately it stayed dry.

Next morning we left early and reached camp by 10 a.m. By then the wind was so strong that the tents were in danger so we took them down and retreated to the village with Ali rushing ahead to arrange accommodation for us in a house. We arrived just as it started to rain. For about 24 hours the skies opened; the paths in the village were a foot deep with water, burns appeared on apparently dry hillsides, the river rose, thunder crashed, lightning flashed and the wind roared.

The storm stopped suddenly and we made a dash for it. I looked back and saw Oumzra



The author looking onto Oumzra. Photo: Bill Carr

sheathed in fresh snow. Ali smiled and repeated "Oumzra cries tears of snow". We were concerned that the bridge at Souk Sebt might be swept away; fortunately it was one of the few that survived. Our plan was to walk out along the Nfis valley but great

stretches of the track had been washed away and most bridges were down. Our mules would have to follow the landrover track up to the Test road, our way in.

Stewart and I were ahead and set off up to the Test road. We met a small lorry coming down with about 10 Berbers on the back, presumably to repair the roads. We waited at the café on the Tizi. "Hamish will have hitched a lift up on the lorry," I said. How right I was, but I hadn't reckoned on the mules hitching a lift as well! Eventually our party plus others, fourteen in total, and three mules set off in the dark on the back of the lorry to Asni. Our troubles were not yet over. After thirty miles the road ahead became impassable. However we had a comfortable night in rooms in the back of a café.

Eventually we reached Asni and stayed in a hotel for the night. The following day we had to walk and wade the last stretch of road to Imlil, but by then the weather had returned to the glorious Moroccan norm.

Peter Willimott

¹ Hamish M Brown (2007). *The Mountains look on Marrakesh*

² Peyron M (1989). *Great Atlas Traverse Vol 1 – Moussa Gorges to Ayt Bou Wgemmaz*

* Inevitably those of us with Scottish connections refer to the 3000 meter Atlas peaks as Moroccan Munros!

A Taste of Tuscany

Mid-June 2007 and I was en-route from Edinburgh to Italy for my first experience of the mountains of Tuscany. My companions were Mike Baughan [Newport-on-Tay] and Phil Bowers [Edinburgh]. Unfortunately Jim Closs [Edinburgh], who had done all the early organisation was forced to withdraw very early in 2007 due to urgent chemotherapy treatment. On arriving at Pisa we picked up our hire car for the 10 days – Phil was the driver with Mike 'in reserve' – I was excluded on age grounds! Mike has first-hand experiences of this part of Italy as his wife's family is firmly rooted in the Barga area of Tuscany. As usual I had studied maps &

guidebooks in order to plan walks and scrambles; Mike's walking experience enabled us to make the maximum use of our available time. My companions quickly got us from the airport to the Alpino Hotel in Barga. After a quick lunch we ascended Monte Palodina (1170m) about 10 miles W of Barga. A pleasant 300m ascent to the summit through mainly deciduous woodland eventually led to a steeper incline and on to an open summit grassland area with extensive views in all directions - westwards to the Apuane Alps the Apennine range in the north and east; the Serchio river valley being the dominant lowland feature running from N to S.

On Day two, Monte Tambura (1854m) was our 'target'. We parked at 800m near to marble quarries in the Valle d'Arnetola; several of which had closed down but at least two were still active! The Via Vandelli, an old mule track built to connect with the duchy of Modena, led up some 4 or 5 km with a long series of hairpin bends to the Passo at 1634m. En-route we marvelled at (and photographed) the fantastic floral displays in the rocky alpine meadows and beech woodlands; and also visited a couple of old marble workings. Nearing the Passo itself karst abysses & deep sinkholes were noted as well as the entrance to an old iron mine. Lunch at the Passo gave excellent views of Apuane peaks, several like Tambura, not far short of 2000m. There were also roads/tracks to and from marble quarries; indeed at least one where the road went through the peak to out of sight workings on the other side! After lunch I decided not to proceed up the "easy and rocky southern crest" to reach the peak. So whilst my companions savoured the panoramic views from the summit ridge I wandered back down towards the car with frequent stops to admire and photograph the best display of alpine flora that I have ever experienced. A superb day and a real appetiser for the week ahead.

On day three we headed north to the Orecchiella Park (part of the Apuan Alps Nature park established in 1985) to climb Pania di Corfino (1603m), a dominant limestone peak in the SE corner of the Park.

From the visitor centre we followed woodland paths/tracks heading E until we came to a small information centre adjacent to a fenced off compact 'botanic garden' exhibiting the typical flora associated with the various habitats on Pania di Corfino. Path 62 then ascended very steeply to the summit of Pania and the good weather assured us of great views as we had lunch. Pania has a mixture of steep exposed ridges alternating with less steep slopes allowing contorted beechwoods to reach almost to summit level before giving way to grass and rocky outcrops. Orchids were well in bloom and the excavating activities of wild boar were noted in both grassed & wooded areas at all levels of the mountain. We eventually 'found' the less severe downhill path to complete an excellent tour of Pania.

Next day we drove to Fornovolasca (480m) which was founded in the 17th Century by a group of blacksmiths from Brescia who installed furnaces & forges to manufacture tools using iron ore from nearby mines. Fornovolasca is now a very popular tourist resort, being close to the Wind Cave complex of underground walks. Mount Forato (1223m) was our 'target' so we walked up a path which climbed SW to a pass at 900m – Foce di Petrosiana – after almost two hours. The woodlands were rich in chestnut trees (which are very prominent on the upland areas of Tuscany due to their annual flowering presenting a somewhat golden hue); here we also saw the ruin of a small water mill formerly used to obtain flour by grinding dried chestnuts. At the pass the weather started to deteriorate with the cloud level lowering to about 900-1000m and the wind increasing. The latter was a factor when, ascending the crest of the ridge running N to the twin peaks of Monte Forato, we came to the first stage of the via ferrata option. We then favoured a route by-passing the crest which led us through woods and then to the huge natural arch which connects the twin peaks. This arch is a unique feature visible

from many parts of Tuscany and, in clear



Natural arch. Photo: M Baughan

conditions gives unique framed views towards the coast and other Apuane peaks. Gaining the adjacent summit of Forato was simple; again cameras were busy despite the prevailing weather! We then traversed N along an attractive, in places exposed, ridge to Foce de Valli; here a path (route 130) took us east and downhill back to Fornovolasca. A fascinating day on this popular peak and as so often in Scotland, good weather would have made it even more memorable!



Summit of Monte Forato. Photo: M Baughan

The next day Monte Giovo was our focus. This section of the Apennines is characterised by steep slopes and cliffs facing east, whilst west facing slopes are easy-angled and grassy. We drove to Vetricia (1320m) and then followed 'path 20' ascending a wide ridge in the beech woods until reaching alpine meadows at 1600m and a junction with 'path 00'; turning right until arriving at the Porticciola pass (1710m). Here another right turn and followed

a very attractive ridge with an interesting alpine flora to the summit of Giovo (1991m). Lunch was enhanced by splendid views in all directions – to the north east and almost straight down an enticing lake, Lago Santo (1501m), surrounded by woodlands & at least five refugios. Leaving the summit we descended the north ridge to the Boccaia pass at 1587m with some lovely glimpses of Lago Santo en route. From the pass we headed west back to the Porticciola pass; a good path included acres of alpine meadows with a rich flora dominated by spectacular displays of various orchids in the damper areas. From Porticciola it was down to Vetricia somewhat quicker than on the morning ascent!



View of Monte Giovo. Photo: P Bowers

Next day we headed back to the Apuanes for a stroll round the environs of Monte Roccandagia (1717m). The spectacular north east facing limestone cliffs dominate the views from the village of Campocatino (1003m) and the surrounding alpine meadows and woodlands. We followed route 177; this path mainly contours round to the north side of the mountain. A short and easy day gave us a great opportunity to experience the flora, butterflies, bees, beetles, other exotic members of the invertebrate kingdom with stunning montane scenery in all directions. Yet again Phil was overworking his new SLR digital camera & straining to get views of flora & fauna from all possible angles. In particular of some lilies; these had also attracted the attention of a youthful and competent Italian female (from a small group of Italian alpinistes

who had traversed the demanding summit ridges of Roccandagia earlier in the day).

By next morning Phil's back had seized up, he was in considerable pain and felt unable to participate as planned in our 'rest-day activity', a visit to the city of Lucca and then meeting up for lunch with Moira Macfarlane, a former colleague of mine in Scotland who is now British Consul in Florence. Unfortunately when we got back to Barga we found that Phil was no better; but then Mike's family came to the rescue. They arranged for an ambulance to take him to hospital at Castelnuovo where he was X-rayed, seen by a specialist, given a pain-killing injection and then transported back to Barga.

Day eight and Phil opted out of an anti-clockwise circumnavigation of Monte Froccia (1709m) on paths at approx the 1500m contour. We drove south west to the village of Arni; a steep path took us slowly north east to 1500m and then round through meadows and woodland to the pass between Froccia & Monte Sumbra (1765m). It was very windy and cold at 1550m as we made our way carefully round the north side of Froccia towards the Sella pass. From here we selected a less steep descent south back to the shelter and warmth of Arni and passed a series of marble quarries – some still in operation – plus abundant floral displays on the resultant limestone debris. An interesting, and unusual, 6.5 hour walk.



Monte Roccandagia. Photo: P Bowers

On our last day the weather forecast was promising cool and cloudy conditions – still windy and with intermittent light rain and

drizzle. Phil decided a day based in and around Barga would suffice while Mike and I went back to the Orecchiella Park via a visit to the small town of Castiglione. A short walk in Orecchiella took us round some of the tourist attractions including animal enclosures, garden displays, shops etc. Next morning away from Barga soon after 6 a.m. to catch a flight from Pisa arriving in Edinburgh just after mid-day.

Overall the appetite had been well and truly whetted by this "taste of Tuscany".

THE BITER BIT!! A Postscript from Mike Baughan: On the Monte Forato summit we looked down on the mist swirling through the Forato Arch & then northwards to the inviting ridge we intended to follow that afternoon. CAI consider Monte Forato to be sufficiently challenging as to deserve a notebook located in a metal box set into the rocks of the summit cairn. We saw John assiduously writing "our entry"; for me it recalled another entry made 2 years previously in the summit notebook on Monte Vettore by John Alcock who referred to his being assisted by "three Scottish Sherpas". Members will recall John Burdin's mention of this in his article "An Apennine Affair" in TMS Newsletter No. 10 December 2006. and will recall the pleasure he took in adding to the Alcock entry: "At least the Scottish Sherpas knew the right date!"

That was nothing to the pleasure I experienced when reading John's carefully crafted Monte Forato entry which he deemed worthy of a new page in the notebook. But he got the date wrong!!

Following John's example in 2005, I could not resist adding for the benefit of Italian readers that John was a well-known, hugely-respected, and highly experienced Scottish mountaineer who could read a map... but was still finding his way around the calendar.

There are no midgies on Italian mountains, but 'John the biter' was well-bitten!!

John Burdin

Scotland the best

Many Munroists tend to enjoy traveling and visiting exotic locations around the world. However I wonder how many share my belief that wherever you are in the world, especially

if there is high ground around, it reminds you of the Highlands!

I have lost track of how many times Anne Marie and I have noted this fact as we stare at an improbably far flung summit ridge or a valley side in far flung Asia or nearer European destinations. Perhaps it will be a cloud formation (the comparisons often work in bad weather given this is what we are most used to!) or the fall of a ridgeline. Perhaps it will be the look or feel of the path below your feet. Either way, something jogs a memory and transports you back thousands of miles to more familiar sights and sounds.

As I write this we are enjoying the laid back delights of Luang Prabang in Laos. A truly wonderful and most un-Scottish like place. However afternoon cloud and a sharp shower and suddenly the mountains that ring the town appear to adopt a familiar hue!

This summer we visited the Pyrenees, specifically the area around Andorra. What a fantastic place this is and the walking is highly recommended. Granite mountains mean the tracks (and let's face it that's what we spend most of our time staring at) have a familiar feel and yet again we are remarking how like the Cairngorms it is. Indeed some of the scrambling we did could compare to the best Torridon or Skye days.

In the Himalaya perhaps the comparisons are stretched a bit thinner but in the lower hills they exist nonetheless. When trekking in Bhutan we even enjoyed freshly caught brown trout allegedly with Scottish ancestry. On the day after a violent storm in the Annapurna region, that caused us to turn round and fail to compete the circuit, some of our more vacuous companions favoured going on claiming to have seen worse conditions in the Highlands. In this case, I had to disagree.

I am sure I am not alone in suffering from this strange affliction and I am equally sure that it says a lot about my deep rooted love of the Highlands that you can visit many wonderful and varied places and still be reminded of your first love.

Julian Foot

The Thin Line

Not the red one beloved of nineteenth century British military planners but the one between a memorable day out on the hills and near disaster. Being a cautious walker, jotting down a route plan with compass directions to accompany the map, I always try to minimise danger and avoid the unexpected. The problem of course is that the unexpected is forever on the horizon once the horizon is filled with the Scottish hills.

Now that I have successfully *completed* the Munros and a good few Corbetts I can look back on occasions when the thin line was crossed and reflect on how things may have turned out differently.

Aonach Mor is a well known neighbour of The Ben and with its plethora of ski runs is probably visited by as many people. It was a cool misty day in February, the snow had been down for several days and the lower car park was crowded with 4x4s and crowds of skiers. My route led me steeply uphill just below the cable car. I was determined to tick off the hill despite the weather which, while unattractive, was not forecast to deteriorate and my route south east and then south to the summit not a difficult one.

The snow was a foot or so deep and I climbed steadily up towards the top of the cable car where the lights of the restaurant appeared out of the gloom. It wasn't cold and I was sweating gently as I followed a ski run to the centre. The thick mist was a deterrent to the skiers and most appeared to be enjoying the après ski without the ski bit, even though it was only mid morning. The trappings of civilisation dumped unceremoniously on the mist-shrouded hill.

Having had a brief break outside the restaurant with a hot drink from my flask, I took out my compass and started slogging up towards the crest of the ridge from where I intended to turn south for the summit. The snow was deeper here, drifted up against the various fences and there appeared to be no skiers, which was hardly surprising as the visibility was now down to a few metres. I'd estimated my time to the ridge but the deeper

snow was making it difficult to be sure of progress.

I came to a ski run crossing my line of ascent from left to right and I guessed I must have been nearing the ridge. Perhaps it was this very presence that made me think I had some way to go which made me take a few more steps.

Then I was falling. I couldn't tell which way was up or down. Air and snow rushed into my face, my mouth and eyes. I remember having time to think "what the hell's happening?" I really couldn't work it out before I hit a soft snow slope, rolled a few more metres and came to a complete halt.

I was totally out of breath either from the air rushing into me during the fall or from being winded by the landing. I lay for a few moments in total confusion until my breathing returned to normal and then sat up and looked around. I was on a steep snow slope that dropped away into the mist below. Several outcrops of black rock punctured the snow around me. Looking up I could just make out the impressive cornice above. So that was it – I had walked too far and fallen through the cornice.

I took stock. Luckily I had fallen into soft snow missing the rock outcrops. I wouldn't be writing this now if I had fallen a few metres to the left or right. I could feel no physical damage even though I had fallen about 20 metres. Looking up, I could just make out the little hole I had punctured in the smooth cornice. My ice axe was still strapped to my rucksack, as the steady walk uphill hadn't suggested I would need it. The compass I had been carrying was missing. It was totally silent – no human sounds from above and so nobody to call out to.

Should I go down? I decided against this, as I knew the slope below was steep and rocky and maybe icy as well. OK so the only way was up. I very carefully took off my rucksack and unstrapped my ice axe, I certainly didn't fancy sliding or rolling any further down the slope. The snow appeared deep and soft but I wondered whether there would be sudden icy patches that would set me off in a downward

direction. Restrapping my rucksack I started back up the slope finding my compass after only a few steps. Things went well and I got to the base of the cornice without difficulty but what now? It felt a bit like being below a curling breaker on a beach with the snow gracefully arching up and out above my head. I had no idea how the snow would behave as I climbed back through it. Would it hold? Would it give way in a huge block and take me back down the slope? There was only one way to find out.

I thrust my ice axe deep into the snow at the base of the little chute my exit in the opposite direction had made. It went in with my arm up to my shoulder. I pushed my other arm into the snow and kicked in hard with my boots. Moving one limb at a time I gradually moved up and into the snow in what felt like a cross between climbing and swimming. This was now scary. The snow held and I inched further up, making a deep trough as I went. Eventually I broke through the last overhanging section and found myself lying flat on my face completely horizontal. I took a few breaths and crawled forward until I found the edge of the ski run. I still couldn't believe how close this was to the edge of the ridge.

When my heart rate and breathing normalised, I found my footprints from the ascent and followed them back down. The summit could wait for another day. After what seemed like only a few minutes the sounds and then the lights of the restaurant appeared out of the mist which if anything was now thicker. Here there were hundreds of brightly clad people laughing and joking and pottering around in the brightly lit snow. It seemed strange to suddenly come across all this cheerful activity after feeling so alone just a short distance away.

The thin line had been inadvertently crossed just one kilometre from this bustling activity of a family day out. I was cross but had survived with nothing worse than a migraine that came on rapidly. It was a timely reminder of just how thin that line is.

Adrian Chapman

Rucksacks, Braemar June 2008

This year's second "re-visit" weekend was to the southern Cairngorms. Accommodation at the Rucksacks Hostel was very comfortable with a choice of double rooms or dormitories. Although we did not take up all the places we had the hostel to ourselves which perhaps allows fewer inhibitions and certainly makes communal meals much easier to prepare and enjoy.

The weather on Saturday was excellent for walking with high cloud and good visibility. A varied selection of the surrounding hills were visited; four parties were out on Munros: Beinn a'Bhuird from the Quoich, Lochnagar from Loch Muick, Carn a'Mhaim and Ben Macdhuibh from Linn of Dee and Colin Walter's epic six Munro round of Devil's Point, Cairn Toul, Sgor an Lochan Uaine, Braeriach, Monadh Mor and Beinn Bhrotain. Two other parties did Corbetts and one party did a Graham. In addition, we were joined on Saturday evening by President Derek who had taken a high-level route from Aviemore.

As has been frequently noted, the highlight of these weekends is the communal meal on Saturday evening and Braemar was no exception. During the course of the evening the company toasted David Bunting who, during the previous week, had completed his Munro Tops.

The weather deteriorated overnight and Sunday morning was unprepossessing. The majority opted for a leisurely drive home, but the remaining seven were rewarded by improving weather as the day progressed. Colin Walter, intent on another epic, was forced to turn back by an unfordable river. Another party ascended Morrone, and though they did not see much, they did not get excessively wet. The remainder cycled or visited Braemar Castle.

It was thus a smaller party who dined on Sunday evening, but the standard of conviviality was in no way diminished.

The vast majority of those who have participated in a "re-visit" weekend come again and again! If you haven't been to one, perhaps you are missing out.

Iain A. Robertson

Munro Society Revisit to Patterdale

Up until now the various Munro revisits have experienced reasonably good weather, but all that changed at Patterdale - with a vengeance! A total of ten Munroists and guests managed to make it to the excellent George Starkey Hut in Patterdale on the Friday evening after battling through torrential rain and severely flooded roads. Alex Thomson and his brother-in-law Frank Benham (a guest who, as we learned later, had completed the Ben Nevis race ten times) managed to ascend a Corbett on the way down from the east coast of Scotland but the weather worsened the farther south they came.

In the morning the weather was still fairly foul and Ullswater had extended its shores up the valley to such an extent that the normal path from the hut to the east shore was under several feet of water and thus impassable. Thus eight of us had to make a considerable detour to gain the path to Sandwick and our intention was to circumnavigate Place Fell. After a couple of hours, six of us, Fred Ward, David Bunting, Iain Robertson, guests Olive McCann and Pat Johnson and myself felt that we had had enough and retraced our steps back to Patterdale to test out the drying facilities (which turned out to be excellent). Maggie Kift with her guest Janet Pheasey, being made of sterner stuff, completed the circumnavigation. In the meantime Alex and Frank, being made of even more stern stuff, had managed to climb Helvellyn from the West. Angus Campbell joined the party later that evening.

The weather improved somewhat on Sunday and Fred, Alex and Iain wandered up Skiddaw by the easiest route, Maggie and Janet climbed Helvellyn via Striding Edge while Angus topped out via the Red Tarn. David, Olive and myself completed a circular walk from Patterdale, past the Glenridding Youth Hostel and thence to Red Tarn and return to Patterdale. Our circuit was enlivened(?) by meeting some six hundred participants in a Triathlon, fortunately going

in the opposite direction to us so at least we could see them approaching and step aside to let them pass.

Most of the party headed homeward on Monday morning and, over the weekend, all of us made good use of the excellent food and ale provided by the White Lion situated within an easy walk from the cottage. All in all quite a pleasant excursion with everyone making the most of the foul weather and making new friends.

If I can finish with one of my typical RANTS. Why did only seven members of a club of some 240 souls turn up? The organisation of these events takes a considerable effort on behalf of the organiser and, particularly with Fred, our Treasurer, who has to try and renegotiate financial arrangements with the various Hut Custodians after, as happened in this case, the numbers attending fall well short of the numbers we booked originally.

Perhaps the couple of hundred members who, up till now, have not attended one of these events could express their views on the matter to the Secretary or to me.

Findlay Swinton (benulaf@aol.com)

Annual Dinner 2008

The 2008 Annual Dinner was held on Saturday 25th October at the Ben Wyvis Hotel in Strathpeffer. This was the second time in a row for this venue and we were served up our now traditional accompaniment of extreme weather. This conspired to prevent some people from attending, including committee member Glen Breden who was stranded on Skye. However, a healthy 73 made the long (for some!) journey northwards to be present. For your writer, the journey from home was certainly arduous – a wet and windy walk of 200 yards!

All present enjoyed the evening especially the after dinner address from John Mackenzie, the Earl of Cromartie. He gave a thoroughly interesting and passionate speech touching on a broad array of topics including some personal and unique insights into the delights of the often-maligned Ben Wyvis, the more exotic pleasures of Skye and the trials and

tribulations of his work on access rights in Scotland. Everyone enjoyed his slide images and his relaxed insights into his passion for the Munros.

Before we started dinner, our President Derek Sime gave an introduction to the proceedings including a lighthearted resume of his fellow committee members who were in attendance. Derek was also able to welcome Irvine Butterfield who we were delighted to see at the dinner following a period of ill health. Members were also able to view the new video that has been recently been completed about and featuring Irvine and which is now available for sale.



The Earl of Cromartie addressing the dinner.

Photo: Charles Murray

To give the meal an authentic highland start, we enjoyed the piping delights of the young and talented Jamie Mackintosh who piped members and guests to their seats.

As we have spent the last two years in Strathpeffer I am sure that it is time to move on. It is surprisingly difficult to find appropriate venues that can accommodate our numbers at a reasonable charge so if any members have suggestions, please draw them to the attention of the Honorable Secretary. No doubt it will be a longer journey for me next year!

Anne Marie Foot

(For more photos of the dinner, please visit the web site).

The President's Walk

As is the tradition of the Society's Annual Dinners, 2008 at Strathpeffer was no exception

and despite a prolonged period of decidedly inclement weather, a walk was arranged for the Sunday, to blow away the cobwebs as it were (blow being the operative word on this occasion). A number of aspirants expressed moderate enthusiasm at the Dinner over a glass of wine, but this had dwindled by the following morning, perhaps due to the message of foreboding on the weather forecast given by the after dinner speaker, but more likely due to the rain lashing against the windows of the Ben Wyvis at breakfast time. In the event, only three made the ascent of Meallan nan Uan in Strathconon (Peter Willimott, Bill Taylor and Derek Sime – the last named having no escape from the venture!). A fine day was had with blue sky and sunshine . . . albeit only very briefly between the frequent heavy showers of horizontal rain, sleet, snow and hail.

At least the forecast for wind speed had ostensibly dropped to half its value the previous day (from 120 to 60mph), but since the party was all but blown off the bealach between Creag Ruadh and the summit, with the hail stinging through outer shell clothing, the actual speed was undoubtedly significantly greater. At least the *risque d'orage* did not materialize. However even the three stalwarts admitted defeat and decided to call



Meallan nan Uan. Photo: Bill Taylor

it a day on Meallan nan Uan leaving Sgurr a'Mhuilinn for another visit. Despite all the elements hurtled down however, a most

enjoyable, if a tad challenging, outing was had.

Derek Sime

Book review. *The Wild Places* by Robert Macfarlane; Granta Books. £8.99. First published 2007

Macfarlane is concerned to establish whether any truly "wild places" still exist within the British Isles. This involves him in a number of different journeys to places where he believes wildness might be found. Whether or not one accepts his definition of wildness is immaterial; to accompany him on his travels is to see the familiar and unfamiliar through the eyes of an acute and shrewd observer. He has a well-developed sense of place and a skill with words, which allows him to instill appropriate images in the reader's mind. Were it merely for the evocative writing, this book would be worthwhile reading. One is indeed indebted to him for the descriptions of situations many would choose to avoid. Swimming in pools and rivers at decidedly chilly times of the year and a winter night deliberately spent on top of a Munro, for example.

Macfarlane makes use of different time-scales to define the character of his chosen locations. Events, which have shaped current landscapes, are selected from hundreds of years of human history. Reaching further back he cites climatic change and glaciation as the reason for the advance and retreat of various flora and fauna. Finally and ultimately he brings out the evolutionary changes, which set down the bedrock upon which all else depends.

But the book is not solely descriptive; there is an unfolding story as well, for Macfarlane's concept of wild places changes as his pilgrimage progresses and his perceptions are modified by experience. This is a refreshing and thought-provoking book concerning matters of considerable significance.

Those who enjoyed Macfarlane's first book, *Mountains of the Mind*, will not be disappointed by this one.

Iain A. Robertson

The Lindertis Diary

□ **Island status restored.** Following the pronouncement in the Scottish Island Explorer magazine that Skye had lost its island status with the building of the bridge and that therefore the only Munro on the islands was Ben More on Mull, we note with some bewilderment and not a little satisfaction that in the following edition of SIE, there was a feature on visiting the 227 Marilyn peaks on the Scottish Islands. Closer scrutiny revealed that SIE proudly proclaimed no less than 51 of these peaks to be on Skye, and a splendid photograph of the Old Man of Storr accompanied the article. The logic of declaring that there is only one Munro on the islands, yet in the following edition accepting that the 51 Skye Marylins are island hills is a little obscure and one can only hope that a wave of common sense has swept over all at SIE, such that the island status of *Eilean a'Cheo* will no longer be contested in its columns. As if to prove the point, our Vice President was unable to attend the Annual Dinner in Strathpeffer, in October, being stranded on Skye, as the bridge was closed due to high winds and no ferries were operating. Despite man's best efforts to tame it, Skye definitely remains an island.

□ **Matters speiliological.** Member Alan Brook submitted a most interesting MQI on Ben More Assynt, with a strong geological and speiliological influence and undoubtedly this is first MQI featuring a (partly) subterranean route! Coincidentally a news item appeared in the media a few days after this MQI was received, referring to an 11,000 year old skeleton of a bear found in the caves at Inchnadamph on the route to the "Ben", and this cutting has now been attached to the MQI held on file. MQIs have many aspects, and, in these economically challenged times, just like share prices, MQIs can go down as well as up.

□ **MQI footnotes.** The two Munros which had thus far eluded the attention of the *Society* included Ladhar Bheinn. Having climbed it on four occasions previously, but always from Barrisdale, our surveyor was intrigued about (and taken in by) the route suggested, from

the comfort of the coffee table, by a well meaning mentor, using Inverie as the starting point (which of course would give a more logical route on Luinne Bheinn and Meall Buidhe the following day). On the morning of the ascent, a fellow B&B guest, bearing the scars of experience, cautioned over the marmalade pot of a long and by no means straightforward route, culminating on Sgurr Coire Coinnichean. Undaunted, setting off by way of Folach and An Diollaid, albeit in mist and continuous rain, our naïve assessor, thinking that there was ample time to explore (having gained the summit in time for an early lunch) proceeded to take in the northern outlier of Stob a'Choire Odhair. However, that decision came to be regretted later when the seemingly endless rugged undulations of the ridge over Bealach Coire Dhorrcail and Aonach Sgoilte were negotiated, with an eventual descent being made just short of Mam Suidheig. The Rough Bounds indeed. The following morning, after relating the ten and a half hour epic between spoonfuls of porridge, the battle scarred sage boomed out "I did warn you". Perhaps inspired by an old Phil Cunningham CD* listened to while driving to Mallaig the previous day, our reporter stumbled across the perfect pseudonym for this route, on account of its Bucking Bronco character – the Palamino Ridge. The name may catch on.

* The Palamino Waltz, Phil Cunningham (Green Linnet 1989)

☐ **The Corbett Munro Society.** At the Braemar meet, an intimation was read out after the evening meal on the Saturday, from one of our most loyal revisit weekend attendees to the effect that good wishes were extended to all present, with an apology for absence on this occasion due to a previous engagement "bagging Corbetts in Kintail" (at which cries of "Shame" were heard echoing across the room). Certainly no Corbetts would be visited by those present, at least none that they would admit to. Come to think of it, judging by the apparent popularity amongst our old baggers of chasing these lesser but oft better defined heights during the revisit

weekends, one might be forgiven at times for concluding that they had joined the J Rooke Club rather than the Mun Soc.

Mountain Quality Indicators (MQIs)

As mentioned on the Blog, the assessments of Ladhar Bheinn and Meall Buidhe in Knoydart (with another MQI of Luinne Bheinn), on 27 and 28 September, mean that all 284 Munros have now had at least one assessment, and the Phase 1 report is in preparation, for publication in spring 2009, in time for the AGM. The next aim is to assess each Munro in all four seasons. This will obviously be a task of far greater magnitude, although it has already been achieved on a number of hills.

Currently, the number of hills having a report for different seasons is as follows -

- All 4 seasons 5
- 3 seasons 16
- 2 seasons 70
- 1 season 193

There is therefore much to be done! Keep the reports coming in.

John Burdin/Derek Sime

In Brief

☐ **Cairngorms National Park boundary change consultation.** *The Munro Society* has submitted comments on the boundary changes proposed, to bring some of the Perthshire hills into the Park area, broadly welcoming the proposals, on the basis that inclusion within the National Park should offer these hills (including several Munros) greater protection than they currently enjoy. The response also suggests that the use of mountain ridges as boundaries in this context appears flawed, as it currently divides mountains such as Carn an Fhidleir and An Sgarsoch. It also stresses that conservation should take precedence over economic development when determining the boundary. A full list of the proposed boundary changes as they affect the Munros is given as an appendix to this Newsletter.

☐ **Early Munroists DVD series.** The subject of the third DVD in the Early Munroists series, produced by Jim Closs on behalf of the *Society*

is our first President, Irvine Butterfield, with John Burdin doing the interviewing. Copies are now available, at a price of £10, plus £2 postage and packing. Members requiring a copy should send a cheque, made out to *The Munro Society*, to John Burdin, Tayview, 15 Ardestie Place, Monifieth, Angus, DD5 4PS. As videos are becoming less popular, this is only available on DVD. There are also still a few copies of the Jim Cosgrove and "In the Beginning" productions available.

❑ **The Munro Society car stickers.** We have had a number of *The Munro Society* car stickers produced. Anybody wishing to purchase one, please send £1.50 (including postage) to *The Munro Society*, Anne Marie Foot, Braeriach, Ardval East, Starthpeffer, Ross-shire, IV14 9DY.

Interestingly, at the Annual Dinner one member purchased two of the car stickers. One of these he is sending to his friend who lives in Lynchburg, Virginia. Knowing full well that she will display it only too proudly on the windscreen of her truck, in the full knowledge that it is probably the only one in America. Doubly pleasing to the lady is the fact that she is a descendant of immigrants who bore the name Munro and can even trace her lineage to President Monroe!

❑ **Bird atlas mountain training day.** When you are in the hills, does seeing a ptarmigan or hearing a raven add to the enjoyment of your day? You may be interested in a bird survey training course aimed at hillwalkers and other outdoor enthusiasts, which is being run by the British Trust for Ornithology in collaboration with the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. The course will cover some bird identification and show how everybody can contribute to conservation by taking part in the Bird Atlas 2007-11. Receiving your bird sightings from the uplands is crucial to the success of this important project. The course is taking place at the NTS Glencoe Visitor Centre on Saturday 9th May 2009 and will include a chance to get outside and hopefully see some birds. It is free to anyone that would like to contribute to bird surveys. If you are interested contact Robin Anderson at BTO Scotland:

robin.anderson@bto.org or 01786 466560. This course is being run as part of the *Building Bird Monitoring in Scotland* project funded by SNH, The Gillman Trusts, BTO and SOC.

2009 Dates for your diary

❑ **AGM 2009.** The 2009 AGM will be held in the Birnam Institute on Saturday 18 April and will commence at 1400 hrs.

As usual there will be a full afternoon programme, featuring a talk from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) on the Bird Atlas project, with emphasis on montane species, and the launch of the MQI Phase 1 Report, led by John Burdin. There will also be another chance to view the Society's latest DVD. The **Annual Munro Lecture** in the evening will, on this occasion, be given by Cameron McNeish, who needs no introduction. As usual, the evening lecture will be open to the public, and it is hoped that it will be well supported. The price for the evening talk only is £8.

Members wishing to attend the full AGM Programme, including the evening buffet and lecture, should complete the form at the end of this Newsletter and send it to the address shown along with a cheque for £25 made out to *The Munro Society*, to arrive not later than mid March.

❑ **Glencoe meet.** The first TMS weekend for 2009 will be to Glencoe from Friday 13th to Monday 15th March. Accommodation has been reserved at **Glencoe Mountain Cottages**, which belongs to TMS member, Dave Baker and his wife, Christine. The cottages are extremely well appointed (see www.glencoemountaintcottages.co.uk) and are ideally situated for a host of Munros, Corbetts, Grahams, etc. By popular demand, there will be a communal meal on the Saturday evening. The cost for three nights will be £47, including the communal meal. Places will be allotted on a first come basis and priority will be given to TMS members, though it may be possible to accommodate guests as well. In the first instance, payment should be made for members only, but you may submit names of potential guests. There is one double room that would suit a married couple.

Booking form at the end of the Newsletter.

☐ **Knoydart meet.** In June we are bound for Inverie for the nights 19, 20 and 21st, when we are booked into Torrie Shieling. This is a lovely, privately-owned hostel situated some 10 minutes behind the village. I personally recommend the accommodation. It is above average, which is reflected in the cost of £60 for the Meet. This does not include a communal meal, but a meal will be arranged at "The Old Forge" on the Saturday evening for interested members. Travel and ferry details will be supplied to those who sign up.

Booking form at the end of the Newsletter.

☐ **SKYE.** Glen Brittle proved a popular choice a few years ago, so the Memorial Hut has been booked again for the 4th, 5th and 6th September. The probable cost will be £32 including a Saturday evening meal. (An application form for this Meet will appear in the next Newsletter).

Please note that these weekend Meets are always booked for three nights i.e. Friday, Saturday and Sunday. This does not preclude however any member who might wish to attend for two nights only, but please note that the full cost stands as shown. It has been encouraging to see more new members coming along to these events. Given the time and relaxed nature of the get-togethers, it provides a great way to get to know fellow members. Please consider joining one or more of the Meets. We look forward to your company!

☐ **Letters / Articles**

Letters or articles (1500 words max) intended for publication in the next Newsletter are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor (email preferred), and sent to the Hon. Secretary email address as given in the contacts section below). We are extremely grateful to all the regular contributors but wish to encourage other members in sharing their experience on the hills. Possible topics could be bad weather days, their favourite hills, and navigation errors! The date for submission to the next Newsletter is 28th February 2009.



The Munro Society

Office Bearers and Contact Details

President: Derek G. Sime

Vice-President and Meet Secretary: Glen Breaden

Hon. Treasurer: Fred Ward

Hon. Secretary: Eleanore Hunter

Committee Members: Angus Campbell, Anne Marie Foot, Walter McArthur, Findlay Swinton, Peter Willimot, Roderick Manson

Honorary President : Robin N. Campbell

Ex Officio

John Moore (Archivist)

Iain A Robertson (Heights co-ordinator)

John Burdin (MQI co-ordinator)

The Munro Society contact details:

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12 Randolph Court

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✉ themunrosociety@usa.net

www.themunrosociety.com

**CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK : BOUNDARY CONSULTATION - MUNROS AFFECTED
BY THE PROPOSED BOUNDARY CHANGE –**

SECTION	MUNRO	HOW AFFECTED	CURRENT POSITION
5	A'Mharconaich	Southern slopes and Boar of Badenoch will be included	Only northern slopes included
5	Beinn Udlamain	Eastern slopes including summit will be included	Entirely excluded
5	Sgairneach Mhor	Northern & eastern slopes will be included (including summit), along with the Sow of Atholl	Entirely excluded
5	A'Bhuidheanach Bheag	Entirely included (including Glas Mheall Mor)	Only North western slopes included
6	Beinn Dearg	Entirely included	Entirely excluded
6	Carn a'Chlamain	Entirely included	Entirely excluded
6	Carn an Fhidleir	Entirely included	Only northern slopes included
6	An Sgarsoch	Entirely included	Only northern slopes included
6	Carn Liath	Entirely included	Entirely excluded
6	Braigh Coire Chruinn-bhalgain	Entirely included	Entirely excluded
6	Carn nan Gobhar	Entirely included	Entirely excluded
6	Carn Bhac	Entirely included	South western slopes and Carn a'Bhutha excluded
6	Beinn Iutharn Mhor	Entirely included (including Mam nan Carn and Beinn Iutharn Bheag)	Western slopes excluded
6	Carn an Righ	Entirely included	Entirely excluded
6	Carn a'Gheoidh	Entirely included	Southern slopes excluded
6	Cairnwell	Entirely included	Southern and south-eastern slopes excluded
7	Glas Maol	Entirely included (including Meall Odhar)	Western slopes excluded
7	Creag Leacach	Entirely included	North western slopes excluded

In summary, 18 Munros are affected. -

8 Munros not currently in the NP will become part of the NP, of which 6 will be included in their entirety and the remaining two in part.

Additionally, 1 will have an increased proportion within the NP, and 9, currently only partly within the NP, will now be entirely within the NP.

Derek Sime

The Munro Society

Booking Form for Glencoe Mountain Cottages, 13th to 15th March 2009

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Telephone

e-mail

If places are available, I wish to reserve a place for the following guest(s):

.....

Please send to:

Please make cheques payable to *The Munro Society*.

Send to Iain A. Robertson, 33 Vasart Court, Perth, PH1 5QZ,

tel.01738 625022, e-mail iain-robertson@usa.net

.....

The Munro Society

Booking Form for Torrie Shieling, 19th to 21st June 2009

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Telephone

e-mail

If places are available, I wish to reserve a place for the following guest(s):

.....

Please send to:

Please make cheques payable to *The Munro Society*.

Send to Glean Breden, St. Columba's, Somerled Square, Portree, Isle of Skye. IV51 9EH

e-mail seanabhraigh@hotmail.com

The Munro Society
AGM 2009
Saturday 18th April
The Birnam Institute, Birnam, Perthshire

Programme

13.30 AGM

15.00 Tea/coffee

15.15 British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) project

16.00 MQI Phase 1 Report

17.00 Showing of the Society's latest DVD

18.00 Buffet

19.00 The Munro Lecture - Cameron McNeish

.....
The Munro Society
AGM 2009

I wish to attend the AGM in the Birnam institute on Saturday 18th April at 13.30 Hours. Cost £25 for the whole day.

Name.....

Address.....

.....
Please make cheques payable to *The Munro Society* to arrive no later than mid March 2009.

Send to Fred Ward (Treasurer), 3 Willow Drive, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 6AY. Tel 01539 727 747.

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