



AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2009

CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

Most of us will have been affected in some way by the present economic crisis, and as a result, have had to review our individual expenditure and make cut-backs where necessary. In the same way, our Club is not immune to these day-to-day pressures, and in reviewing the Club outings over the past few months, it is evident that we have also been hit by a financial crisis, with fewer Members attending day trips against increasing bus costs.

It is not an unusual situation during the summer period for attendances to be low when Members are on holiday. Also, we have some early starts and later finishes to walks. Overall, however, the situation shows a worrying trend, and we currently have a £700 deficit on our bus outings. With only four trips remaining until the end of our financial year, it is unlikely that we will recover the deficit, and for the first time in several years, will show a significant loss on walks.

The bottom line is that we can easily survive one bad financial year, but cannot sustain such losses in future years without jeopardizing the future of the Club. I don't wish to appear to be scaremongering but we must face the harsh economic facts—bus costs will continue to increase as fuel prices and wages rise. Therefore, in order to continue as a walking Club, we must encourage as many people to attend outings as possible, and we need to seriously review our policy of summer trips—i.e. long bus journeys, early starts and/or late finishes.

All Members can help play a part by attending outings and supporting the Club. We are now asking Members to suggest walks for the 2010 season, and again consideration should be given to the location and duration of walks which will appeal to the majority of Members, thereby ensuring the survival of the Club for many years to come.

Discounts

Discounts are available at the following on production of your 2009 membership card, which you receive on paying your annual subscription:—

- *Blacks, George Street 10%
- Craigdon Sports, 5 St Andrew Street 10%
- *Millets, Union Street 10%
- Nevisport, 186 George Street 10% (selected lines)
- Graham Tiso, 26 Netherkirkgate
Up to 25% on Tiso *club evenings only*. The next is on Tuesday 3 November at 18:30—20:30, and others are expected to be on the first Tuesdays of March, June and September.
- Hilltrek, Aboyne 10%

*May offer 20% discount to SYHA members

Malcolm Insch

With sadness we report the death in August of Malcolm Insch, a former Member who loyally supported and enjoyed Club outings for many years. We express our condolences to his wife Margaret and family in their loss.

Congratulations

Alan & Fiona Wallace celebrated the wedding of their daughter Lynn to Robert Miller at King's College Chapel and afterwards at Elphinstone Hall on 19 September 2009.

Graham & Kath Sangster welcomed the arrival of their second grandson, Harry, on 26 June 2009 at Edinburgh Infirmary.

Winter Social Program

The Committee has been busy organizing a program of social activities for the winter period. Dates for your diary are:—

Thursday 22 October Informal meal at the Royal Hotel, Bath Street at 7:30pm. Details will circulate on the bus.

Tuesday 10 November Members' video and photo show at the United Services Club, Basement entrance, 15 Bon-Accord Square at 7:30pm. Contact Graham Sangster, who is co-ordinating Members' input and organizing time slots for individual presentations.

Tuesday 24 November Week's Hike 2010 planning meeting at the United Services Club, Basement entrance, 15 Bon-Accord Square at 7:30pm. **Frank**

Winter Safety Talk

Under the auspices of Mountain Aid, featuring Mick Tighe, professional mountain guide and long-time Lochaber Mountain Rescue team member and training officer.

Zoology Lecture Theatre, Tillydrone Avenue
7:30pm, Tuesday 17 November

Entry free

www.mountainaid.org.uk

info@mountainaid.org.uk

A Salutory Warning!

Not too many years ago, I was on a January bus outing to Spittal of Glenmuick, with another club who will be very keen to remain anonymous here. A note was passed round the bus stating that there was a significant avalanche risk (www.sais.gov.uk), so routes such as the Black Spout were inadvisable. Those on the bus took this advice, but some other members arrived in cars, and seem to have been unaware of the warning. A small party went up the Black Spout, and the last member of this party was fatally avalanched.

Ed.

North East Mountain Trust **Illustrated Talks**

Belmont Club, 218 Hardgate, at 7.30 pm.

Tickets at the door

£4.00 (NEMT Members & concessions £2.00)

www.nemt.org.uk

Thursday 22 October 2009

Niall Ritchie on *An Apprenticeship in the Scottish Hills*. A photographic journey of 25 years of climbing and walking in the Scottish hills and beyond

Thursday 19 November 2009

Nigel Hawkins on *Cherishing Scotland's Wild Places—the Work of the John Muir Trust*.

Thursday 17 December 2009

Eric Pirie on *Hypothermia*. The cause and recognition of hypothermia symptoms and how they can be treated both on the hill and when back in shelter.

Wednesday 20 January 2010

David Jarman on *New Twists for Old Hills*. "Hide the guide books, lose the GPS, get round the backs and sides of the Munroes and Corbetts, and discover unseen and untrodden delights, including Ben Macdui off-piste."

Wednesday 17 February 2010

Nicola Seal on *Lyme Disease—what the doctors don't tell you!* Given from the personal perspective of a Lyme Disease sufferer—the recognition, prevention and treatment of Lyme Disease

Wednesday 17 March 2010

Simon Richardson on *Ben Nevis—Britain's Highest Mountain*. The history of climbing on Ben Nevis, focusing on some of the exciting developments in recent years.

EDITOR'S CHAT

We hope all enjoy this Newsletter, and if you've any interesting articles or stories with a hillwalking theme, please send details to Editor Kris Howard or Secretary Heather Eddie for the next issue. We thank all contributors to this edition. Graham, Frank, Kris and the Internet supplied photoes.

For brevity, we reserve the right to edit submitted texts, but make every effort to retain the author's meaning.

Weather Forecasts

Met Office (Tayside) 09068 505323
Mountain Call East 09068 505324
Mountain Call West 09068 505325
Mountain Call Caithness/Sutherland ... 09068 505326
AA Roadwatch 09003 444900
BBC1 about 6:58pm
Radio Scotland Mon - Fri 7:05pm
Sat 7:04am, 10:04pm
Sun 7:04am, 8:04pm

Mountain Weather Information Service

www.mwis.org.uk/areas.php

Scottish Avalanche Information Service

www.sais.gov.uk

Midges www.midgeforecast.co.uk

Finally, if you have a good source, let us know.

krisbhoward@gmail.com

Ed.

Graham's Forecast Sources

(1)—Go into *Google* and bring up the *Met Office Weather* page. Click on *UK Weather* page. Scroll down to *Forecast* and click on *Mountain Area Forecasts*. Click on *Scottish East Highlands*. This will give you a comprehensive daily daylight forecast

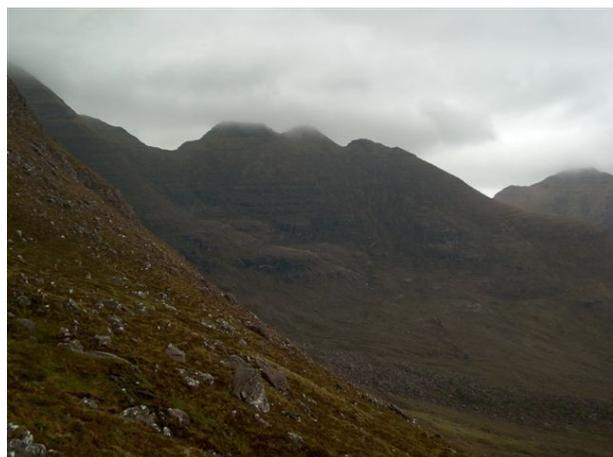
in our area for the next two days, including *Hazards, General Situation, Weather, Visibility, Cloud Base, Wind and Temperature at 900m and Freezing Level*. This forecast is regularly updated. You are also given a further, but less comprehensive, following three days' forecast.

(2)—Also, in *Google*, you can access the *BBC Weather Centre* page and click on *UK Weather*. This provides a UK radar weather picture. Click on *Scotland, North East* and *Go* to zoom in. You can then advance the radar map forward (or back) to show either *All, Cloud, Rain, Wind, &c.*, in one- or three-hour intervals. This is an extremely helpful and accurate web page, which I have used extensively over a number of years and can recommend its accuracy. **Graham**

Week's Hike 2009

A slightly larger group of eight set out on our annual Week's Hike, which this year saw us visit the north-west of Scotland to explore the hills round Torridon and Glen Affric. We were joined by Christine Brown, a newcomer to the Week's Hike, and later in the week, Rosemary Kelly joined the group at Glen Urquhart Hostel.

We again travelled by cars giving us flexibility in our program of Munroes and Corbetts. Torridon is well known for three major mountains—Ben Alligan, Liathach and Beinn Eighe—and while all were included in our draft programme, we were dependent on fine weather to achieve this aim.



Horns of Alligan

Weather during the drive west was pleasant, and we settled in at Torridon Youth Hostel, planning our outing to Ben Alligan next day. The forecast was for low cloud, rain and 60mph summit winds. This was how the day turned out, as we battled up the corrie onto Tom na Gruagaich, the first summit, and to Sgurr Mhór, the main top. A Horns of Alligan traverse was deemed unwise, so we descended via a

well engineered path around the base of the three rocky tops before descending to the moor and returning wet and windswept to Coire Mhic Nobuil car-park.

Spirits were not high, as the forecast for the next two days was poor, though a change to better weather was forecast for midweek. Monday dawned overcast and dull with driving rain, so we decided on a coastal walk around Diabaig [Gaelic spelling of *Deep(w)ick*, from the Norse for *Deep Bay*]. Our enthusiasm was low, but a stop at an unusual coffee shop in lower Diabaig cheered us—we enjoyed coffee and cakes in an elderly couple's front room!



Liathach from above Annat

Tuesday proved better as the group set off to climb Maol Chean-Dearg from Annat. With improving weather, we enjoyed splendid views of Ben Alligan, Liathach, Beinn Eighe and Loch Torridon from the summit.



Maol Chean-Dearg

[My first Week's Hike was in 1985, and on the first day, Jimmy Davidson led us from Annat to the foot of Maol Chean-Dearg, round the right-hand (west) side of the hill, to the col with Meall nan Ceapairean, then up the south-east ridge to the summit of Maol Chean-Dearg. From the summit, Jimmy led us down a route

to the north-east that brought us rapidly to the Bealach na Lice, and back to Annat. This year, we followed Jimmy's route to the summit OK, but we failed to find Jimmy's descent route, and instead found ourselves back at the south-east col. **Ed.]**



Ben Alligan & Liathach from Maol Chean-Dearg

Wednesday saw us transfer from Torriddon to a new private hostel in Glen Urquhart, and the journey did not allow for even a short walk that day. The new hostel had wonderful accommodation in individual lodges—rather different to normal hostel life. The change in weather predicted for the second half of the week took place and we enjoyed good days in Glen Affric and above Loch Mullardoch during Thursday and Friday respectively.



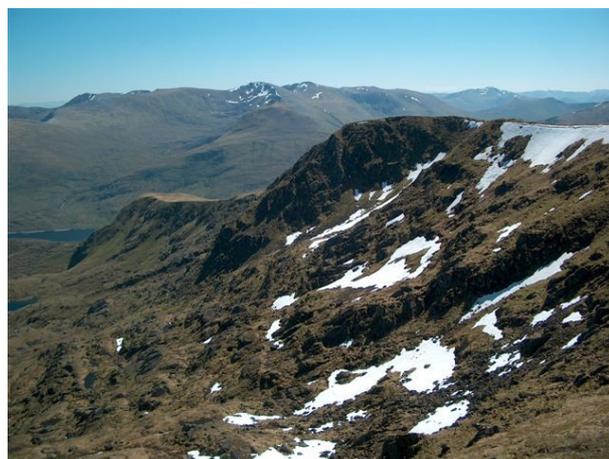
Waiting at Mullardoch Dam for Boatman

Karl, the Danish boatman at Loch Mullardoch took our party of six on a one-way trip nearly to the far end of the loch, where we traversed four Munroes—An Socach, An Riabhachan, Sgurr na Lapaich and Càrn nan Gobhar—returning to the dam at 9pm, after an exhausting but worthwhile day with exceptionally good weather. Christine chose this day for horse-riding in Glen Urquhart, while Grace went cycling and Rosemary sunbathed. (No, I didn't sunbathe—I did do some walking.) All had enjoyed a good day as memories were relived over drams later that evening.



Approaching Head of Loch Mullardoch

Saturday, our final walking day, saw a mix of short walks, cycle tours and rest-day excursions round Plodda Falls and Glen Urquhart before enjoying our traditional end-of-week meal at a restaurant-pub near the hostel. We relaxed over a few drams, pondering the excellent walking during the week and the exceptionally sunny weather in the second half. Our thoughts now turn to a venue for the 2010 Week's Hike, and perhaps this short review will encourage more to join us next year. **Frank**



An Socach

REPORTERS' NOTES

12 April: The Wirrens (Milden Lodge to Edzell)

With a great forecast, we anticipated an excellent outing. We had 36 out today, including seven newcomers. Jim was scheduled to be in charge, but had to pull out at the last minute, so Frank, Vi and myself split the workload, and everything went to plan. Our driver, Peter, had us at the Milden Lodge start point at 9:40.

After thirty minutes' walking under a blazing sun on the Hill o Wirren approach, jackets and fleeces were off. After a stiff pull to the summit, we had lovely views north-west to snowcapped Cairngorms. We

lunched on East Wirren with good clear views east to the Montrose basin and north-east to Clachnaben. A pleasant descent over short heather led to farm tracks, passing Edzell Castle *en route* to a welcome cuppa at Gordon's bus in Edzell. During thirty minutes' refreshments at Edzell's *Panmure Hotel*, we unwound and chatted with the newcomers. Peter had us home early after a most enjoyable 13-mile walk.

Graham



At East Wirren Summit

23 April: Claik Night (Health Board Club)

This very popular annual social event attracted 32 Members and friends. The staff provided excellent stovies with beetroot and oatcakes—two had the vegetarian quiche, and all in all, it was a pretty good supper and plenty of it!



Claik Night at Health Board Club

After much *claikin* while *munchin*, most of the company took Graham's quiz, this year in three parts (1) *Scottish Quiz*, (2) *Word-Name Associations* and (3) *In the Garden*. Margaret Chapman, our reigning quiz champion, lost her crown to Kris with an excellent score of 62 out of 100. Vi's lucky ticket number was won by June Lynch.

Our thanks go to Heather for printing and selling the tickets and to Vi for organizing the venue and food. Frank thanked Graham for composing the quiz once

again. It was good to see Members, old and new, blethering and talking shop—after all, that's what the *Claik Night* is all about.

Graham



Graham presents prize to Kris

26 April: Glen Doll to Glen Isla

Originally, 38 were booked on this outing, but late in the week, seven called off by email or phone, and five more were no-shows on the day. A 49-seater had been ordered, whereas a 33-seater would have sufficed. Some people need to be more responsible in their attendance commitment, as those present on the day had to pay the bus cost.



Girder Bridge over Prosen Water

Our driver, Gordon, had us at the Glen Clova start point at 10am. It was chilly and misty as we climbed the Shank of Drumfollow out of Glen Doll. Jackets

and fleeces were soon removed on the stiff pull up the Shank, but with a cold breeze and visibility down to 20m on the plateau, jackets were back on and zipped up to the chin.



In Glen Finlet

Conditions stayed misty as we descended the Kilbo path into the head of Glen Prosen for lunch near the Kilbo ruin. We crossed the Prosen Water by a single steel I-beam. A stiff ascent led to Glack of Balquhader. [*Glac* is Gaelic for a *defile*.] The Glack was like a mini Làirig Ghru complete with pools.



Margaret, Tracy, Alex, Linda & Mt Blair

A pleasant descent on short grass and heather led to upper Glen Finlet. In April 2005 (Glen Damff to Glen Finlet), we had great difficulty finding the path in the extremely dense forest, but no problems were encountered this time. An 8½-mile slog south with good views west to Mount Blair, led to a welcome cuppa at Gordon's bus in Kirkton of Glenisla. Refreshments were taken at the Glenisla Hotel, reflecting on the day's 15½-mile outing. We were back home almost on time.

Graham

10 May: Cairnwell CP—Spittal of Glenshee

With a number of no-shows, the thirty participants didn't need the forty-seater—another reminder of the need for accuracy in booking. We had hail showers and sunshine on the Club's first Munroes of

the season. The party split between east and west of Gleann Beag, the majority going west over Càrn nan Sac and Càrn a' Gheòidh, and down the ridge to the A93. Some opted for the new broad, steep track up Ben Gulabin and down to the hotel. This is an interesting Corbett, often bypassed for greater things. Today was a big day for Andrea Grant, who conquered her first Munro. Congratulations!—I hope there will be many more.

Vi



Group at Loch Vrotachan

Thirty were on the bus. The forecast was good for the morning but with a chance of snow above 700m in the afternoon. Walkers were almost evenly divided between the east and west route-sheet options. I opted for the west side. We ascended from the road up through the ski lifts for wonderful views north across Loch Vrotachan to snowy Cairngorm tops. The view down the huge, deep Coire Direach (*Cor Dyeerich*, perpendicular corrie—Watson, 1975) between the west flank of The Cairnwell and Càrn nan Sac was something special.



Andrea & Bill's first Munro

Several brief hail showers on the way to Càrn a' Gheòidh did not dampen spirits, as visibility remained superb between showers. Distant Perthshire hills could be seen from the summit. This 975m peak was Bill and Andrea Grant's first Munro—congratulations, both! We continued west to pointed Càrn Bhinnein for more great views to Càrn an Rìgh, Glas Tulaichean and Beinn Iutharn Mhór. A knee-trembling 489m

(1614ft) steep descent led to the floor of Gleann Taitneach, passing a huge herd of deer *en route*, and was followed by a pleasant walk to the Spittal of Glenshee Hotel for refreshments including their famous jumbo rock-cakes. We were back home early after a most enjoyable day. **Graham**



Huge Herd of Deer

[The Cairnwell Ski-Centre has been given a bilingual make-over, and looks very spick and span.

After the hail showers, the moors were seen to steam quite spectacularly. **Ed.]**



Steaming Moors

24 May: Spittal of Glenmuick circular

With the Weeks' Hike in progress and many regulars away on holiday, the turnout of 26 was really encouraging. The forecast was good, with dry weather all day, but breezy above 700m. Bill's sheet listed five routes, and most were taken up, but Alan and Fiona Wallace opted for a route to Bachnagairn in Glen Clova, returning by the Capel Mounth.

I went with a group on the main path to Fox's Well for tremendous views of the Northeast Corrie from the Muckle Pap col. We climbed the Ladder (or was it the new staircase?) to the plateau. A pleasant, breezy walk led to lunch at Lochnagar summit. We returned by another new staircase down the Glas Allt to the falls above Loch Muick, and were back at the bus after a 13-mile, 6½-hour extremely enjoyable day.



At Muckle Pap Col

Alex Barbour and Linda Henderson ascended a snow-filled Black Spout, no mean feat! All were back on time, and refreshments were taken at Aboyne. Stephen, our driver, had us back home on time after a lovely outing. **Graham**



At Glas Allt Bridge

7 June: Linn o Dee circular

Only sixteen were on the bus today. Just as we were ready to start, Tork arrived in his car. He had forgotten it was a 7am start and turned up at Duthie Park for 8am to see familiar cars parked but nobody about. He quickly realized his mistake and arrived at Linn o Dee within minutes of the bus. Ten set off for Beinn Bhreac and Beinn a' Chaorainn, Ela climbed Beinn Mheadhoin on her own, and others did Clais

Fhearnaig. We left Linn o Dee at 18:15 and were back home at 20:30 after a pub stop at Aboyne. Alan



Pine Tree Pollen Collects in Puddle Margins

Tracy, Tork and I disturbed a snowy owl on the slopes of Meall an Lundain (NGR NO.063.940). It circled for a while, and we had good views with binoculars, but no photos unfortunately. This is a large, all-white owl with an impressive wingspan of about 1½m. Normally it lives in the Arctic and is a rare visitor to Britain. On average there are three sightings a year, but up to six were recorded in the Outer Hebrides in 2006, and according to the 17 September P&J, another was seen there recently. A pair of snowy owls bred on Fetlar in the 1960s and early 1970s. The snowy owl is now famous for its rôle as Hedwig in the Harry Potter films. Colin



**Bob Scott's Bothy # 3, & Tigh Beag (Wee House)
Pines scorched by Conflagration of Scotty's #2**

Only sixteen were on the bus today, probably due to Members being away on holiday, a group doing the West Highland Way and the 7am start. Excitement for the ladies started in Aberdeen, when they viewed two naked men wading across the Dee opposite the Inverdee football pitches. [I'd better insert a paragraph break here—Ed.]

Gordon pulled out all the stops and had us at Linn o Dee car-park in under two hours. The route sheet

suggested four walks, most of which were taken up. I went to Beinn a' Chaorainn by way of Meall an Lundain and Beinn Bhreac. In Glen Lui we met a guy from Northumberland with three beautiful, friendly Siberian huskies. I also chatted to three walkers from Northern Ireland who were staying at Braemar YH. They were most impressed with their first visit to the Cairngorms. They left us in Glen Lui heading for Derry Cairngorm by way of Loch Etchachan.



A Snowy Owl



At the Summit of Beinn a' Chaorainn

From Beinn Bhreac summit, views of Derry Cairngorm, Ben Macdui, Corrie Etchachan, Beinn a' Bhuid and Ben Avon were magnificent. It took five hours to reach Beinn a' Chaorainn summit, and after descending into Glen Derry, it was a long tiring walk back to Gordon's bus. Rain just two miles from the bus slightly dampened our spirits, but a welcome cuppa on arrival revived us, and we headed for chips

and refreshments at Aboyne. We were back home almost two hours early after a most enjoyable 18½-mile day.

Graham



Linn o Dee

21 June: Tomintoul—Cockbridge

With a few regulars missing for various valid reasons, the turnout of 27 was quite good. Two people turned up without booking, but were welcomed as seats were available. We don't want people turned away from a full bus, so please let the booking secretary know your intentions. Hamish was in charge today.



An Extra Hillwalk!

Margaret Leslie was picked up at Alford en route to Cockbridge, where problems struck. Our driver had to ask us to get off the bus on the Lecht as he couldn't make the climb with a full load. Twice we

had to alight to let him make the ascent to the summit. [We had an unexpected extra hill-walk!]. Vi said "at's the first time in thirty years I've hid ti get off the bus." We eventually made Tomintoul after dropping walkers off at Blairnamarrow for the shorter option.



At Tolm Bùirich Summit

At Tomintoul, we commenced our route south half an hour late. The weather was glorious, with not a breath of wind or cloud in the sky. The views down Glen Avon were superb. Some walkers went further south to go by The Eag to Cockbridge. I went with a group over Tolm Bùirich (692m) with terrific views of Ben Avon, Beinn a' Bhuid, Beinn Mheadhoin and Cairngorm, then south to the Don and on to the bus at Cockbridge. Refreshments were taken at the Allargue Hotel to unwind and *clai*k with others on our day's outing. Our driver had us back home just ahead of time after a most enjoyable outing. **Graham**



Muirburn Patterning at Corgarff

[I was part of the Blairnamarrow party. Long before the Allargue Arms came into view, we became aware of something very noisy going on. What sounded like a World War I re-enactment turned out to be clay-pigeon shooting. Fields on both sides of the road were in use, and the yard where we usually park the bus was full of shooters' four-by-fours. There's

nothing quite like the peace and quiet of the Scottish Sabbath!
Ed.]



This Clay Pigeon Got Away!



Shooters with Ear Protection

5 July: Làirig an Laoigh (Linn o Dee—Glenmore)



Elevenes near Derry Lodge

The scheduled walk was the old drove road and public right of way through the Làirig an Laoigh, though Members found various alternatives, including the more famous Làirig Ghru, which Ela was keen to show to two Polish friends. For most of us there was now the familiar trudge to Derry Lodge and on up Glen Derry to where the path forks, left to Coire

Etchachan and straight on to Làirig an Laoigh. Here four Members took an alternative route via Loch Etchachan, the Shelter Stone, Coire Raibeirt and Cairngorm.



Visible Contour Related to Glen Roy Phenomena?

The rest of us continued through the impressive Làirig an Laoigh pass down to Fords of Avon. We crossed the river without difficulty, and lunched at the refuge. The group divided once more for the last part of the walk, with some diverting up Creag Mhór (895m) before rejoining the path on the east flank of Bynack More to the Bynack Stable bridge, and into the Glenmore Forest Park. Twenty-three took part in the outing and enjoyed generally fine weather, apart from some light drizzle in the afternoon. Schedules were adhered to (just!) and included a welcome stop for refreshments in Dufftown.

Colin



Beinn Mheadhoin from Glen Derry

Colin was in charge. Despite the 7am start, 23 were on the bus. We welcomed Ela Król's two Polish friends, and Ian Grassie's nephew, Martin. It was a lovely warm sunny morning when we got off Henry's bus at Linn o Dee. Sun-cream, tee shirts and shorts were the order of the day as we commenced walking just before 9am. Elevenes were taken at the bridge above Derry Lodge.

Ela's party headed for the Làirig Ghru by Luibeg, while the rest walked up Glen Derry to another pit-stop at the Glas Allt Mór. Linda, Alex Barbour and the Grassies turned into Corrie Etchachan heading for the Shelterstone, Coire Raibeirt, Cairngorm summit, Coire na Ciste and Glenmore.



At Làirig an Laoigh Summit

The main party went up the refurbished path to the head of Glen Derry and through the Làirig an Laoigh to have great fun on wobbly stepping stones before lunch at Fords-of-Avon refuge. Tork, the Wallaces, Frank and Margaret Cameron took in Creag Mhór (a Corbett) *en route* to Glenmore.



Margaret & Graham Crossing Fords of Avon

The rest continued on the main path over the north shoulder of Bynack More to the site of Bynack Stable and on to our coach at Glenmore for a very welcome cuppa in glorious sunshine.

All walkers eventually returned to the bus and we departed slightly late. We had thirty minutes for refreshments in Dufftown before Henry had us back home half an hour early. This was a classic outing and though most commented on tired legs and aching feet, all remarked on a wonderful through-walk.

Graham

[For some reason, the bus wasn't parked at the road end by Glenmore Lodge, but a mile short at the Visitor Centre. I felt really pleased at completing this 19-mile walk, and got Ela to photograph my 20cm, 8" hip-replacement scar! Note—no indecent exposure was involved! **Ed.]**



At Bynack Stables Bridge



Lochan Uaine at Ryvoan Pass

19 July: Allanaquoich circular



The Punchbowl

Twenty-one attended this outing to upper Deeside for several walks, including the ascent of Beinn a' Bhuid south top, Creag Bhalg and Clais Fhearnaig, and low-level walks. The Punch Bowl, a huge pothole

created by swirling waters, was a *must-see* before parties set out for the day's objectives. We enjoyed reasonable weather with only a brief shower at midday. A party of tigers ascended both south and north tops of Beinn a' Bhuid, while others chose routes on the sheet. Almost all returned early, and we departed on time at 7.30pm for refreshments at Braemar on the way home.

Frank

2 August: Achlean circular



At Mullach Clach a' Bhlàir Summit

Unfortunately, some bookings did not turn up, leaving only sixteen participants. Our Booking Secretary got stuck in Ireland, and our President and Treasurer were on holiday, but Fiona, Alan and Graham—just home from the Tour de Mont Blanc—attended with a spring in their step! Our driver was unfamiliar with Northeast roads. It was a good day out—the countryside was beautiful and there were plenty options for walks of any length.



Colin & Alan in Ruigh Aiteachan Bothy

The hill of choice was Mullach Clach a' Bhlàir, meaning *Summit of the Stone of the Plain*. We had good views from the long gentle climb that led to a disappointing heap of stones, aptly named *a stone on a plain*. The walk completed, we had a cup of tea, and were home in good time.

Vi

Only sixteen were on the bus for this 7am start. Call-offs, non-attenders and Members on holiday, accounted for the low turnout. We departed on time, had a comfort stop in Dufftown and started our walk from Achlean car-park just after 10am. Most opted for Mullach Clach a' Bhlàir, including myself, but Moira, Linda and Margaret Leslie chose to tackle Càrn Bàn Mór.

It was overcast but dry, and we soon reached the foot of the steep track up the edge of spectacular Coire Garbhloch to the flattish summit of Mullach Clach a' Bhlàir (1019m), one of the most uninteresting of all Munros. Even the height of the summit cairn was such that you could almost step over it. However, it was a new Munro to most present, another tick.

A stiff, cool breeze on the summit chased us down to lunch late by lonely Lochan nam Bó, before descending a very overgrown, almost non-existent path to Ruigh Aiteachan bothy. A pleasant walk back through the forest saw us arrive at the bus for a welcome cuppa after almost seven hours of walking. All had enjoyed a good outing. A short refreshment stop was taken at Dufftown, and we were home 45 minutes early.

Graham

16 August: Inverey circular



At Càrn Liath Summit

Heather was in charge. With a fine but windy forecast, the 24 of us expected a good walk. Bill's sheet suggested three routes, and each was taken up, but Tork decided to go to Morrone, and Ela and Linda opted for An Socach but ended up on Beinn Iutharn Mhór. It was fine with blustery conditions all the way to Càrn Liath, Geal Chàrn and Càrn Bhac. Visibility was superb with great views north to Cairngorms and south to Beinn a' Ghlo. All were back at the bus on time for refreshments at Braemar's *Fife Arms*, reflecting on a good 14-mile outing.

Graham



Afternoon Tea at Auchelie



Heather on Tom Anthon mid-August

[The heather was at its best.

Ed.]

30 August: Thieves' Road (Glenmore—Kincaig)

With 22 on the bus and a good forecast until early evening, we anticipated a pleasant outing. Gordon was driving, and within 2½ hours, he had us almost to Loch Morlich, including a comfort stop at Dufftown.



Damage to Gordon's Bus

However, just before our start point, a large dog ran out into the road. Gordon slammed on the brakes and there was an enormous crunch. I was at the front of the bus to advise Gordon of our precise start point and got a full view. I presumed the

worst, but was surprised to see the animal race up the nearside bank. It was Gordon's bus that came off worst—the front faring was completely smashed and lying on the road. I think Gordon got a scare, but quickly resumed his normal self.



Loch Morlich



On the Cairngorm Club Footbridge



Loch Gamhna

We started our section of the Thieves' Road just before 11am, with superb views of forested Loch Morlich. We lunched by the river near the Cairngorm Club Footbridge, before walking to lovely Loch an Eilean and Loch Gamhna. Afternoonses were

taken at Inshriach Bothy. Colin Chapman pencilled comments in the visitor's book, and we followed forest tracks to Feshiebridge and our destination at Kincaig. At the bus, we soon had kettles boiling to welcome walkers with tea and coffee. To fill in time before our 5pm departure, we sampled refreshments at Kincaig's *Ossian Hotel*.



Feshiebridge Falls

After a comfort and chipper stop at Dufftown, Gordon had us back home just ahead of schedule. We remarked on an enjoyable 14½-mile outing.

Graham

13 September: Spittal o Glenshee circular



Late Elevenses at Glenlochsie Ruin

Gilbert was in charge. After late cancellations, only 21 took the bus today, and the maximum fare was charged. Most of Bill Marr's four options were taken up. Jim, Moira, Shirley and Margaret Leslie got off at Cairnwell car-park to walk the hills to the west.

From the Spittal car-park, ten of us went to Dalmunzie Hotel, then along the railway trackbed to Glenlochsie Lodge ruin. After very late elevenses, a stiff climb brought us to Glas Tulaichean summit. A warm sun had emerged, and extremely clear visibility gave fantastic views north to the Cairngorms and south to Beinn a' Ghlo. We took a late lunch on the grassy summit enjoying the glorious all-round

panorama. We descended north-east to lonely Loch nan Eun, and down Gleann Taitneach to our bus at the Spittal Hotel.



Late Lunch at Glas Tulaichean Summit



Tork & Hamish Near Loch nan Eun



At Glen Taitneach Falls

A large tour bus was parked at the hotel and we told Willie Robb he had no chance of purchasing his favourites, their famous rock-cakes. Willie dashed inside, got to the bar before even Vi—which takes some doing—and bought all the rock-cakes on view as a *kerry-out!* All were back on time, and ate in the hotel before departing to arrive home an hour early.

[This involved Gilbert making an executive decision that Kris would have a mere quarter-hour in the hotel!—Ed.] Those not out today missed a really super outing, wonderfully scenic. **Graham**

27 September: Wester Lednathie to Dykehead

The turnout was only fifteen! The day was dry and clear, and waterproofs stayed in backpacks. One stalwart worked out that the route-sheet walk was under ten miles, so an extra section was added to the start, a gentle ascent via Glen Uig and Glen Quharity, before turning east to ascend Cormaud, Monthrey and Catlaw, where most lunched *in-about* two rocky constructions like shooting butts.



Descending from Catlaw

With appetites sated, it was on over Long Goat and down past Clash and Nether Balgray to cross at Prosenhaugh, as some recalled there was no bridge at Glackburn last time they were down this way. After that, we followed the road to Dykehead. Including three students along for the day, most completed the fourteen miles in good time, but four missed the gate to Prosenhaugh and were recovered at Prosen Bridge, once everyone was refreshed enough. **Hamish**

The low turnout on this Aberdeen public holiday weekend was unsurprising. Weather was forecast to be dry and clear but breezy above 600m. Our president welcomed three young ladies from Aberdeen University who found us on the Internet.

Starting near Wester Lednathie, a route-sheet modification took us three miles through lonely Glen Uig before climbing Cormaud (507m), and the Monthrey shoulder to Catlaw summit (671m). The forecast strong wind drove us to lower ground by Long Goat (571m) for afternoonses at Clash Reservoir. A pleasant walk through lower Glen Prosen brought us to our bus at Dykehead's *Jubilee Arms* for refreshments. We were home on time after a lovely 14-mile walk in the Angus Glens.

Graham

11 October: Edinville—Dufftown Golf Club

Your Editor was in charge of a 33-seater bus with 32 passengers, so those who turned up without a booking were lucky to find places. An over-heating engine impeded the outward journey, necessitating one or two stops.



Distilleries Direction Indicator

The Ben Rinnes plateau was fog-bound—not particularly pleasant, but nothing like the *fell muckle scunner* that I recently experienced on Great Shunner Fell in the Yorkshire Dales. Walking solo and using the FKN navigational variant of *Follow Vi's Finger*, I found myself at a tor, which I deduced to be Scurran of Morinsh, so a short walk on a rough easterly bearing brought me to Scurran of Lochterlandoch, the summit tor of Ben Rinnes. My emergency GPS stayed in the bottom of my rucksack.



Ben Rinnes Summit Trig Point

The trig pillar was in a sad state, probably nearing the end of its life, but the top surface is now protected by a metal plate inscribed with a direction indicator. This indicator differs from others in that

the features chiefly indicated are the surrounding distilleries rather than the hills.

A swathe of vegetation has been trampled out from the top of the slope descending from the summit to Glack Harnes. A zigzag footpath has been constructed, and the gravel seeded with grass. No doubt heather will displace the lawn-seed in time.



Damage & Path Restoration on Ben Rinnes

There were three options from Glack Harnes car-park: (1) over the top of Muckle Conval, (2) the motor road round the right side of it, (3) forest tracks round the left. Having been on this hill recently, option (1) didn't appeal, and option (2) on the tar-road appeared no shorter than option (3). Someone who walked the roadway reported something unusual, a road-kill badger.



Rainbow Seen on Descent

The forestry track started on the open hillside above Glack Harnes, where it was vegetated over. The track led straightforwardly round Muckle Conval into moorland in what the map calls *Glach-en-Ronack*, presumably a misprint for *Glack-en-Ronach*. The track continued across a sheep farm, emerging onto the Glen Rinnes road just south of the bus parked at the Clubhouse. The expression *belt and braces* is well known, but there isn't a satisfactory extension

to three items—each farm gate was secured with a bolt, and a chain & hook, and a flip-over sleeve!

Beer prices in the Clubhouse were gratifyingly low—Colin suggested that all our walks should end here. With everyone re-hydrated and toileted thanks to the Clubhouse, and no strong desire for a Dufftown chipper stop, we were home about an hour early. **Kris**



Belt & Braces Gate Security

Bill Stuart

24/5/2009 Walk

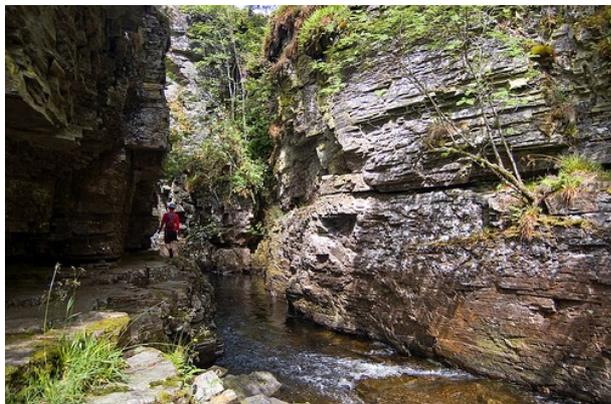
Died Lochnagar, 16 August 1953

Many have seen Bill Stuart's memorial at Fox's Well en route to Lochnagar summit. I had a long chat with Stan Stewart, and was amazed by his story of participation in that tragic day in 1953. I asked him to put pen to paper to record those events. I'd like to thank Stan—putting his thoughts onto paper may have been quite traumatic for him. **Graham**

Before I start, I should like to point out that this is not my idea—I was asked by Graham to explain the circumstances regarding the monument at Fox's Well on the path to Lochnagar.

The story starts at Lochend Bothy on the shores of Loch Muick—the bothy no longer exists. A group of four climbers, including myself, spent a Saturday night there, and we had a confab to decide which rock climb in Lochnagar's Northeast Corrie would be attempted on Sunday. Bill Stuart was keen to make

die of old age about 1698 and was buried at Inverey. The ruins of the old castle are still visible a short distance north of the cottages in Inverey, and the old burial ground a short distance north-west of it.



The Colonel's Bed

I visited the Colonel's Bed within the last ten years and could still go down the steep route to the river's edge and north along the gorge to the cave-like feature, but more recently, a massive rock fall has destroyed access to the Colonel's Bed. Kris told me that this was still the case, when he visited the site on 16 August 2009. The descent to the water looks dangerous, and no longer connects to the Colonel's Bed.

Graham

Altanour Lodge is named after the *Alltan Odhar*, meaning *dun streamlet*. Both are pronounced *Altan Ower*. This supposedly haunted, ruined hunting lodge lies at the head of Glen Ey in a small isolated plantation of spruce and larch trees.



Altanour Lodge circa 1960

Inverey Gallows Tree

This tree on the south bank of the River Dee, a short distance west of Victoria Bridge was used as a gallows. The date of its last use is not known, but in *Wyness* (1968), the author recounts the story of a curse against the Farquharsons being fulfilled in 1806

when the direct male line of Farquharson come to an end. The curse, as he relates, was against a Farquharson laird who had sentenced a Lamont of Inverey to death for cattle rustling and sheep stealing.



The Gallows Tree

The tree might have remained alive for years, but its roots were undermined by digging of gravel at the roadside and it fell into the pit. It is now dead but held in its original position by steel wires, and has been so since 1925 at least .

Graham

Johann von Lamont Monument

In 1934 the Deeside Field Club erected a granite memorial at Inverey in memory of Johann von Lamont, Bavarian Astronomer Royal. Von Lamont was born John Lamont at Corriemulzie near Inverey, on 13 December 1805. The son of Robert Lamont (forester to James Duff) and Elizabeth Ewan, his education began at school in Inverey.

In 1817 his father died, and John was sent to be educated at St James' monastery (Scots Benedictine College) at Ratisbon (Regensburg or Rengschburg), Germany. He began to work in astronomy and joined the Bogenhausen Observatory. He took his doctorate in 1830, became the observatory's director in 1835, and professor of astronomy at Munich University in 1852. At the observatory he created a star catalog with about 35,000 entries.



Von Lamont Memorial, Inverey

matching the eleven-year sunspot cycle discovered by Heinrich Schwabe. He calculated the orbits of the moons of Uranus and Saturn, obtaining the first value for Uranus's mass.

He died, single, in Munich on 6 August 1879, and his considerable wealth was used to found scholarships in sciences. His many honours include FRS, FRSE and title of nobility from the King of Bavaria. A crater was named *Lamont* after him on the Moon and on Mars.

The Inverey monument is inscribed on the front with the expected details, and on the other three faces with a representation of the constellation Orion, and Verse 2 of Psalm 19 in Gaelic, English and German—

*Day unto day uttereth speech,
And night unto night showeth knowledge*
—which I don't find very enlightening.

Verse 1 is familiar, from Haydn's *Creation*:-

*The Heavens are telling the glo-o-o-ory of God,
The wonder of His work Displays the firmament.*

Kris

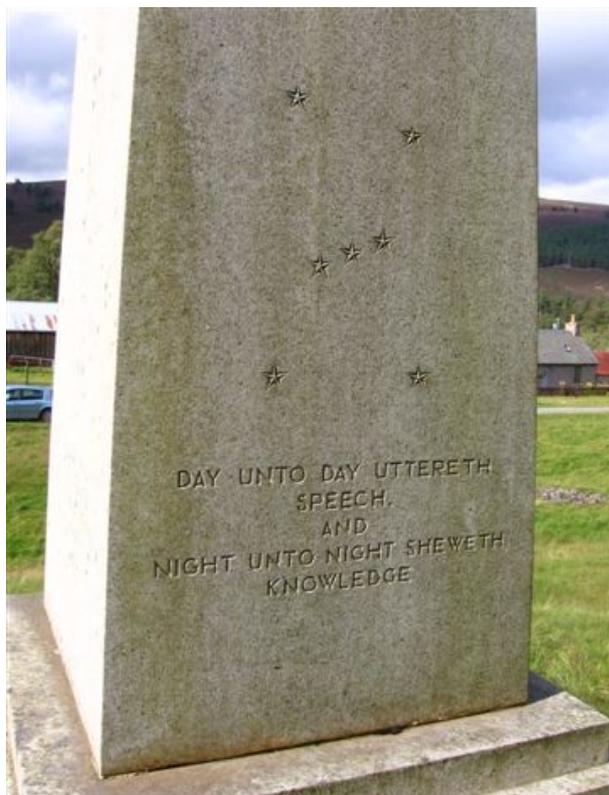
Làirig an Laoigh

5/7/2009 Walk

Làirig an Laoigh (pronounced *Laarig Looee*) means *The Lui Pass*, distinguishing it from the Làirig Ghru or Druie Pass.

This walk today took me back to February 1963 when my late pal Gordon Haxton and I, with a very settled weather forecast, decided to cross-country ski the Làirig an Laoigh. Strachan's bus took us to Braemar followed by a walk and ski by way of the Canadian Bridge (since removed) and Glen Lui to Derry Lodge (now boarded up).

We overnighted in Derry Lodge, and after an early breakfast, skied north over snow-covered Derry flats with blue sky, sunshine and no breath of wind. There was no need for trudging through deep snow as the snow pack was firm and we gained the top of the Làirig an Laoigh in large zigzags without having to remove our skis. A wonderful *schuss* through the snow-filled valley had us at Fords of Avon in relatively no time at all. Again there was no need to remove our skis as the snow covered the Avon, letting us ski across easily. The weather remained calm and cloudless as we lunched at this idyllic spot. Views all round were magical with the mountains covered in snow, and you could have heard a pin drop in the utter silence. We eventually gained the shoulder of Bynack after a fair pull up from the low ground below the Barns to allow us another great downhill ski to Bynack Stable (now demolished).



Reverse Side

His most important work was on the magnetism of the Earth. He performed magnetic surveys in Bavaria and northern Germany, France, Spain, and Denmark. He discovered a magnetic ten-year cycle, roughly

We overnighted at Ryvoan Bothy and awoke to another glorious, crisp cloudless morning. We had a quick breakfast of Heinz beans and black coffee heated in tin mugs on a meths stove. A leisurely ski through the Pass of Ryvoan past frozen Lochan Uaine brought us to Glenmore. A hitched lift into Aviemore and a rail journey to Aberdeen via Inverness allowed us time to reflect on a wonderful Cairngorms south-north traverse, not repeated by me until our 5 July 2009 outing. The walk brought back many lovely memories, which in 1963 I was unable to capture on film, as neither Gordon nor I owned a camera.

Graham

The Thieves' Road

30/8/2009 Walk

This outing took us from Glenmore to Kincaig, covering part of the Thieves' Road, which stretches from Moray to Lochaber.

When Lochaber clansmen journeyed north-east to plunder the fertile lands of Moray in the 18th century, they chose a forested route that avoided major centres of population. The route became known as the *Rathad nam Mèirleach* or Thieves' Road. It is a long-distance cross-country route across the breadth of Scotland, passing through the heart of the Grampians. Even today it crosses only one road (the A9) in its near 100 mile (160 km) length, and it remains one of the most historic and challenging expeditions in the highlands.

The Thieves' Road went from Moray south to Abernethy, through the Ryvoan Pass to Glen More and Strathspey, down to Dalwhinnie and along Loch Ericht, across the Bealach Dubh to Ossian, Corroul and the head of Loch Treig and finally into Lochaber via the Làirig Leacach or Glen Nevis.

The route along Loch Ericht into the interior is quiet and peaceful today, but when it formed part of the Thieves' Road it saw many a bloody skirmish between MacPhersons, MacGregors and Camerons.

The Thieves' Road crosses land where a person can disappear for days or more, and barely begin to know its remote mountains and vast plateaux, its sharp ridges and rock faces, its beautiful rivers and hidden lochans. It is in an area to savour.

My late walking and climbing companion, Gordon Haxton, and I took almost two weeks to complete the Thieves' Road in September 1964, starting at Bridge of Brown and entering the Ryvoan Pass by Dorback Lodge on our way through Glenmore and Badenoch to Glen Nevis. On our route we took in quite a few Munroes. Many walkers talk about the West Highland Way as being top of their list of Scotland's

long distance routes. I have walked both, and the Thieves' Road is, to me, the better option. **Graham**

[I've stayed in Loch Ossian Youth Hostel when it was full of young Germans doing the Dalwhinnie-Fort William half of the Thieves' Road. Evidently, this route is described in some German guidebook. **Ed.**]

Skiing in the Alps with GPS Technology

For many years, I have skied all over the Alps, North America and Canada. Many companions have wondered how far we actually ski during our vacations. This April, I took my GPS with me when my friend and I skied the *Portes du Soleil* area in the French Alps, based in the village of Avoriaz (1800m). With over 600 km of downhill runs, this used to be the largest downhill ski area in the world.



GPS Unit on Left Shoulder Strap

I switched on the GPS unit each morning, and after it accessed the satellites required for navigation, I let the tracking function run while I skied. This enabled the odometer to display the distance travelled from the top of the run to the bottom. I switched off the GPS while I was chair-lifted uphill, and back on at the top of the next run for the descent. This procedure was used repeatedly, allowing the odometer to accumulate the total downhill distance for the day. At each day's end, the total was noted down—24.1 km, 31.2 km, 44.6 km, 49.9 km, 51.4 km & 45.6 km—giving a total of 246.8 km or 153.36 miles—a *nae bad* effort for a pensioner! **Graham**

Fiona Wallace's Recipes

Sticky Toffee Pudding

Ingredients

155g dates
1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
240ml boiling water
65g margarine
165g sugar

120g plain flour
50g wholemeal flour
3 eggs
21g baking powder

Sauce

250ml double cream
60g butter
100g demerara sugar
A few drops of vanilla essence (optional)

Method

1. Soak dates and boiling water in a bowl overnight, add bicarbonate of soda when cold.
2. Cream together margarine and sugar; add eggs, flours and baking powder.
3. Add date mixture, pour into an oven proof dish, cook at 160°C for 1 hour.
4. Place sauce ingredients in a pan, boil until it thickens.
5. Cut sponge into required portions, pour over half the sauce and allow to soak into sponge. The remainder of sauce to be poured over pudding when serving.

The sponge can be frozen without making the sauce, then after defrosting, make sauce and add as in Step 5.

Tartiflette (Very Easy)

Ingredients

250g Reblochon
(from e.g., Mellis cheese-merchants, Rosemount)
½ pint double cream
100g smoked bacon or pancetta
500g cooked new potatoes with or without skins
(a waxy variety is best)
100g sliced onions (optional)
Salt & freshly ground black pepper
100g grated parmesan cheese
50g butter

Method

Butter an oven-proof serving dish.

Preheat the oven to 200°C.

After boiling, slice the new potatoes into the serving dish, layering with bacon and onions and season well.

Heat the double cream in a saucepan and pour over the potato mixture.

Stand the oven dish on a tray in case the cream bubbles over the edges.

Scatter grated parmesan cheese over the dish and put the reblochon (sliced, and with crust still on, uppermost) on the top.

Place in the oven for about 30-40 minutes or until the

dish is golden brown and bubbling.

Serve immediately with green salad and crusty bread.

I have also added mushrooms—you could do any variation of vegetable.

Fiona Wallace

Tour de Mont Blanc 18 July-1 August 2009

The TMB is recognized as one of the best of the world's classic walks. Nowhere else in Europe is there such a concentration of high mountains, spectacular glaciers and beautiful fertile valleys to provide such a variety of scenery and terrain. Deservedly considered to be one of the finest routes in the Alps, the circuit of Mont Blanc is a series of paths linking seven valleys surrounding the highest mountain in Western Europe.

I was invited to join Alan and Fiona Wallace, who had decided on this venture and already booked their Geneva flights. I had previously walked the TMB, once in each direction, and knowing the spectacular setting of this route, it didn't take me long to accept their invitation.

Our two-week adventure started at the village of Les Houches in France's Chamonix Valley (Vallée de l'Arve). The 170-km, 105-mile hike took us across three borders, from France to Italy to Switzerland, and back to France, covering about 10,000m of ascents and 10,000m of descents.

For much of its length, the route followed high paths with magnificent views of Mont Blanc (4808m), Aiguille Verte (4122m), Les Drus, Grand Jorasses, Mont Dolent and many more 4,000m giants. The trail crossed six high passes, sometimes beneath huge glaciers, raging torrents, often meandering through beautiful alpine meadows and picture-book villages.

Days averaged about 15-20km and eight hours of walking. The distances each day may seem moderate, but the height gains and losses were often huge. Many passes were over 2,500m, and at least six days involved ascents and descents of 1,000m or more. Our last day involved a knee-trembling descent of a vertical mile on the return to our starting point at Les Houches (1007m) from the peak of Le Brévent (2535m).

Though some stretches were extremely tiring carrying a large, heavy rucksack, the overall route is reasonably moderate, requiring no special skills or equipment, on well maintained paths with plenty opportunities to stop for photos and enjoy the stunning views (and often a cold refreshment as well!).

We were very lucky in having hot sunny weather with only a couple of short periods of light rain on the fourth stage of the trek while descending into Italy's Courmayeur. We did have two violent thunderstorms during the circuit, but they occurred after we had finished our day's walking, and we awoke to blue sky the following mornings.

The refuges we stayed in each night provided evening meals, breakfasts, refreshments, hot showers and comfortable dormitories. Some had to be seen to be believed for their quality, cleanliness and situation. In Italy, for example, the Rifugio Bonatti, built only in 1998, and named in honour of the great Italian mountaineer Walter Bonatti, would put some three-star hotels to shame. Its situation faces the rock and ice walls of the Grand Jorasses and Mont Dolent glaciers, and such was its remoteness, that staff and provisions had to be delivered by helicopter or pack horse.

Anyone attempting the TMB without vehicle support, should be prepared for a hard, testing walk, but will be rewarded with an adventure to remember for the rest of their life. Finally, I'd like to thank Alan and Fiona for sharing their holiday with me—it was much appreciated.

My video film of the TMB will be shown at our autumn social evening which hopefully will also include digital pictures by other Members of their summer 2009 adventures.

Graham

Fiona Wallace's TMB Diary

Saturday 18/7/09

We attempted the *Tour de Mont Blanc* with Graham Sangster (his third time). We flew Aberdeen-Amsterdam, got a snack of goats cheese sandwich, brioche with marscapone, orange juice. At Amsterdam airport we had a problem getting our wine bottles opened, but we succeeded. Flight Amsterdam-Geneva got a snack of ham & cheese sandwich, wine & water. At Geneva we got the Chamonix bus to Les Houches, we got dropped off at Chalet Aiguille. The landlady must have overbooked, and drove us to the Hôtel Les Melezes. We had a double & single room *en suite*—I didn't want this luxury till after I had done the TMB! We went to the supermarket for water and chocolate. Outside the tourist information there was cheese & wine tasting. Back for showers then out for tea, a pizza, then onto Coulazs for a nightcap, it was a lovely place. Back to hotel set alarm for 6.45am. We start tomorrow!

Alan's rucksack was 13.4kg; Graham's rucksack was 13.5 kg and mine was 10kg.

Sunday 19/7/09

Stage 1 Les Houches—Bionnassy—Les Contamines—Refuge Nant Borrant

Distance:—22km

Start Altitude:—1007m

High Point:—Col de Voza 1653m

Height Gained:—646m

Height Loss:—633m

We had breakfast, packed. There was low cloud when we left Les Houches. We made our way to Col de Voza (1653m), saw the train to Nid d'Aigle, we were hot so we took the legs off our trousers (that was the last time we had them on). We ventured onto Bionnassy (1314m), Le Champel (1201m), La Villette (1090m), La Gruvaz, Tresse (1020m) and eventually onto Les Contamines (1167m). There was a festival, the weather was absolutely gorgeous, we had tartiflette, fruit cocktail, beer & wine. We stayed for an hour, but then had to move as we were staying at Refuge Nant Borrant (1460m) another 1½ hours further on and another 300m ascent. A dog joined us part of the way. We carried on to Notre Dame de la Gorge (1210m), very pretty church, still upwards to Refuge Nant Borrant (1460m). We were given our dorm, we were sharing with three young guys who were training for a long distance race.

We had soup, bread and cheese. We saw others cutting up the cheese, and putting it in their soup, so I did the same—it was good. Then pork and potatoes boulangère, followed by apple tart. We had a few drinks, took photos, wrote up diary, I finished off the evening with a genepi and the best hot chocolate ever.

Graham's Saying of the Day:—"Plenty time, plenty time, nae hurry."

Monday 20/7/09

Stage 2 Refuge Nant Borrant—Les Chapieux

Distance:—13km

Start Altitude:—1460m

High Point:—Col de la Croix du Bonhomme 2483m

Height Gained:—1316m

Height Loss:—929m

Alan & I had a broken night's sleep, Graham slept for 9 hours, lucky him. We had breakfast, then uphill to Refuge de la Balme (1706m), then onto Col du Bonhomme (2329m), had a break, then continued up over Col de la Croix (2483m) and onto Refuge du Bonhomme (2443m) for a drink. I saw a pack horse at the refuge, I think we should get one. A steady

descent into Les Chapieux (1554m) with a few stops along the way. We are staying at the Auberge de la Nova annex—the place is very busy. Our beds are up a steep ladder. We had showers and enjoyed a refreshment in the sun before dinner. We were to eat outside—lucky the weather was good. We shared a table with two Swiss and three Flemish guys. Dinner was soup, sausages & polenta—we had seconds of the sausages—then crème caramel. Bart, Ralph & Frank, the three Flemings, were going to Rifugio Elisabetta like us tomorrow. We walked back 200m to our dortoir, I went to the toilet before ascending to my bed. When I got up to the room, Alan & Graham said the dortoir was locked, and only after knocking on the door, the old woman in her nightie came to open the door.

I had a noisy night's sleep with Graham's snoring—it even vibrated along the wooden beds—I had to get up and hit him.

Graham's Saying of the Day:—"Bangers were good."

Tuesday 21/7/09

Stage 3 Les Chapieux—Col de la Seigne—
—Rifugio Elisabetta

Distance:—15km

Start Altitude:—1554m

High Point:—Col de la Seigne 2516m

Height Gained:—1004m

Height Loss:—258m

Though we breakfasted early, we didn't rush to get away as it had been raining and overcast. We had a hard 2½-mile slog along a tar-road, past Ville de Glacier (1789m), onto Refuge des Mottets (1870m)—we had an Orangina. We had a zigzag path to Col de la Siegne (2561m). We are now in Italy. We had great views from the col. We walked past La Casermetta (2365m). We marched on and Graham assured us the refuge was just round the next corner. Several corners later, we saw the refuge, and the sting in the tail was a steep climb up to it. We saw the three Flemings—they cheated by taking the shuttle bus, and they were getting their luggage taken on, though it didn't come till 10pm because the road was shut for the Tour de France. We had a drink outside, then showers—you are allowed twenty litres of hot water each. I had a lie down before dinner while Alan took photos outside. Dinner was at 7pm—we shared a table with five Spaniards and one Italian, who were doing the glacier route. We had minestrone, bread roll, pork steak, mashed potatoes, green salad, fruit & wine! I bought postcards and wrote them after dinner. The next table were playing Uno, Graham joined them, they got

very noisy and they were almost thrown out, and that was at 9.30pm! We went to bed not long after.

Graham's Saying of the Day:—"It'll be just round the next corner"

Wednesday 22/7/09

Stage 4 Rifugio Elisabetta—Courmayeur

Distance:—18km

Start Altitude:—2195m

High Point:—Mont Favre 2430m

Height Gained:—460m

Height Loss:—1560m

I had a better night's sleep, and enjoyed a lovely breakfast with delicious bread. I gave some painkillers to Ben who had a sore knee. It was overcast when we left. It was downhill for a while, then steep uphill. We saw two marmots boxing on the way to Rifugio Maison Vielle (1956m). It was raining. We had lunch—Alan had mushroom tagliatelle, I had spaghetti carbonara. We put on our waterproofs, but it wasn't that bad. We had a steep descent to Courmayeur, we arrived at the Pension Venezian, a room for three! We have showers then a wander round the town, great no rucksack. Met our three Flemish friends and said goodbye as they were going by bus and a short walk up to Rifugio Elena. We had a drink at the Bar Giornali for a well deserved pint. I wrote some postcards. We had dinner at a pizzeria, where we met Ashley & Dom from Edinburgh. Alan & I had Wiener Schnitzel, green salad & chips; Graham had pork escalope. We went back to the pension for a nightcap, it is like being in a time warp of the 60s!

Graham's Saying of the Day:—"Soggy knickers!"

Thursday 23/7/09

Stage 5 Courmayeur—Rifugio Bonatti

Distance:—12km

Start Altitude:—1226m

High Point:—2025m

Height Gained:—860m

Height Loss:—nil

The weather is overcast and we climb up to Rifugio Bertone (1989m), we arrive when the rain starts, we have lunch, minestrone, bread and Fanta. We met the young couple, Isobel & Lorenzo at the refuge, they stay on to play cards, they are camping. We don waterproofs and carry on an undulating path, saw the Mont Blanc tunnel, the path is very muddy in parts. We arrive at the beautiful Rifugio Bonatti (2025m), we see the Australian man & his wife, they are carrying on to Rifugio Elena to camp. This is our last night in Italy as we go into Switzerland

tomorrow. We see Isobel & Lorenzo, but we can't persuade them to stay overnight, they are also camping and are going to carry on for an hour. Isobel asked if I had two boyfriends—that beats any of Graham's sayings. We make up our beds and have showers (twenty litres of hot water). We have a drink and play cards till dinner, the rain started and we thought of the people that carried on. We met up with Ben & his girlfriend at our table for dinner, Ben has a bandage and a knee brace, there was also a couple from Tel Aviv and another girl on her own. Dinner was lovely—brochette, soup, cheese, bread, croutons, main course:—chicken stew, green lentils, carrots, followed by blackberry tart. It is still raining and glad we are inside, hope it clears for tomorrow.

Graham's Saying of the Day:—"I'll sleep tonight"

Friday 24/7/09

Stage 6 Rifugio Bonatti—Grand Col Ferret—La Fouly
Distance:—20km
Start Altitude:—2025m
High Point:—Grand Col Ferret 2537m
Height Gained:—895m
Height Loss:—1410m

Today blue skies and warm, we have a great breakfast, this is best place we have stayed so far. It is incredible to think everything has to be helicoptered in or taken up by back pack. When we leave the refuge we saw a little kitten chasing butterflies. We had a lovely balcony walk with stunning views, we could see where we came over the Col de la Seigne on Tuesday. We descended into Val Ferret and up to Rifugio Elena (2162m), we had a drink and a bag of crisps. We met Isobel and Lorenzo, they had both fallen in mud last night and were going to ask at the refuge if they could wash their clothes. We climbed up to the Grand Col Ferret (2537m) and crossed into Switzerland. A descent down to La Peule (2071m) for beer and wine. We carried on to reach La Fouly, we found our accommodation, Les Girolles, we have the place to ourselves, it is in a time warp. I thought of The Shinning or Psycho films. We had showers and intended to have a drink in the hamlet before dinner, but just as we were about to leave, the heavens opened. We stayed at the gîte, we had beer and wine before dinner and we got Doritos to nibble. Our starter was salad, egg, pork pie, pâté, salami, tomato, grated carrot, mozzarella and bread; main course was chicken curry & rice, green-beans, carrots and salad, fruit & cream. The rain continued, we played nomination whist, then sevens, then pairs while we sampled the wine and beer.

Graham's Sayings of the Day:—

"Beautiful tea, scooped the lot"

"Puir mannie, he was delighted to see us"

Saturday 25/7/09

Stage 7 La Fouly—Champex
Distance:—15km
Start Altitude:—1610m
High Point:—Champex 1466m
Height Gained:—420m
Height Loss:—565m

I had a good night's sleep, we had breakfast, it is so sad that no-one else was there. We had a steady walk through trees and pretty hamlets of Praz-de-Fort—some of the wooden buildings were built in 1706—and Issert, where we had an ice-cream. We carried on to Champex Lac (1466m) and arrived mid-afternoon, we are staying at Club au Alpin, the weather is lovely. Alan and I had a wander round the village and lake. We met Ben and his girlfriend waiting for a bus to Geneva. We returned to the inn, had showers and did some washing. Dinner was at 6pm, outside if the weather holds, which it did. We had soup, chicken & mushroom in a sauce with spaghetti, lettuce, damson cake.

Alan & I had a walk round the lake, it reminded us of Canada.

Back to the inn for a beer, hot chocolate & genepi

Graham's Saying of the Day:—"I could eat a scabby horse"

Sunday 26/7/09

Stage 8 Champex—Alp Bovine—Col de la Forclaz—
—Trient

Distance:—18km
Start Altitude:—1466m
High Point:—Collet Portalo 2040m
Height Gained:—742m
Height Loss:—682m

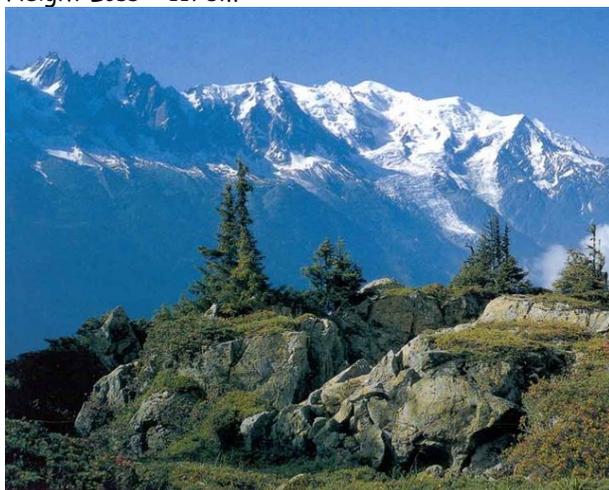
We woke to a warm day with blue skies. We are taking the Alp Bovine route, and not the harder Fenêtre D'Arpette. We started off downhill through Champex D'en Haut, Champex D'en Bas, Plan d'Au, we then had a steep climb up to Alp Bovine (1987m). *En route*, we stopped at a large stone and enjoyed the magnificent views. We had a drink at the Alp, we spoke to some Americans who are doing the Tour. We went onto Collet Portalo (2040m) and down to Col de la Forclaz (1526m). We stopped for a beer before another half hour walk to Trient.

We arrive at Gîte la Gardienne and were welcomed by the owner's wife. We have a room for six but no one else is in with us at present. We had showers, then Alan & I have a wander round while Graham enjoys a seat in the sun. Before dinner we enjoy a welcome drink from the owner (we got charged for it on the bill!), the glasses had little animals in them, his bother-in-law made them. There are another two guests, they are doing the *Haute Route*, we eat with the couple in their kitchen, ham & melon to start, salad, pork, potatoes & vegetables (Alan had seconds), Cheese, about twenty different types, cow, sheep and goat. Alan & I shared a plate with a taste of them all, apricot dessert, we had a bottle of Gammy 2007. A Russian-American couple arrived half way through the meal. To finish the meal, we had the opportunity to taste a liqueur, a choice of five. Graham had one but gave it to Alan. We both enjoyed the Edelweiss best.

Graham's Saying of the Day:—"I wouldn't do that with a big rucksack."

Monday 27/7/09

Stage 9 Trient—Les Frasserands
 Distance:—13km
 Start Altitude:—1279m
 High Point:—Col de Balme 2191m
 Height Gained:—1069m
 Height Loss:—1178m



Mont Blanc

We had a steep climb out of Trient, on the owner's recommendation, there were blue skies and it was hot. We got good views of the Fenêtre D'Arpette (2665m) and the glacier. We reach Col de Balme (2191m) and back into France. We see Mont Blanc for the first time, spectacular views. We have a drink at the refuge before going down to Col des Posettes. We took the lower balcony route. It was a hard slog downhill because it was so hot. We eventually arrived at Le Moulin and we are in

dormitory for six. We have two upper bunks & one lower bunk—the first time we have been in a full room. We have dinner—bread, salad, stuffed tomatoes in curry sauce & rice; rhubarb & berry frangipani. We spoke to five Newcastle friends who were starting from Les Houches the next morning. After dinner Alan & I had a drink outside, while Graham joined a group watching a video on their Moroccan holiday. Instead of Alan having to climb over Graham to get to his bunk, I shared my bunk with him. During the night we had thunder & lightning, not a good sleep.

Graham's Saying of the Day:—"You won't get a better night than that!" (referring to our evening at Trient).

Tuesday 28/7/09

Stage 10 Les Frasserands—La Flégère
 Distance:—9km plus Lac Blanc visit
 Start Altitude:—1417m
 High Point:—Refuge Lac Blanc 2352m
 Height Gained:—933m
 Height Loss:—505m



Aiguilles Vertes & Drus from Lac Blanc

For breakfast we get croissants as well as bread, very nice, the weather was cloudy but at least no rain. We have to walk back on ourselves for about fifteen minutes, then a steep climb up, but not as bad as yesterday. It is also a bit cooler. The route we take today misses out the big ladder section. We saw chamois. We go up to Refuge du Lac Blanc (2352m). It has a short ladder section—I'm not happy! When we get to the Lac, Alan went all over the place taking photos—great views of Mont Blanc. We had soup, bread & a drink at the refuge, very busy, saw the Americans again, they finished today. They stayed at hotels and bused to and from the paths. We wandered down to Refuge de la Flégère (1875m), we can still see Col de Balme from yesterday. We have bunk beds again, two lower and one upper bunk, we give Graham a bottom bunk, Alan

& I will probably share again. We have a drink outside and enjoy the views of Mont Blanc, great weather. We have showers before dinner at 7pm, tuna & rice starter, tartiflette and cold meats. We all had different sweets, Alan had apple pie; Graham had chocolate mousse and I had cream cheese & blueberries, Gammy 2006 and a vin blanc. There are people staying here that we have seen off and on during the Tour. There were only fourteen of us staying in refuge, it can hold 72 people, so I take a bottom bunk all to myself.

Wednesday 29/7/09

Stage 11 La Flégère—Le Brévent—Les Houches

Distance:—17km

Start Altitude:—1875m

High Point:—Le Brévent 2526m

Height Gained:—772m

Height Loss:—1546m

When Alan woke in the morning, he could see Mont Blanc from his bed, not a bad view to have. We get croissants for breakfast, this should be our last day of the Tour, we have a long day ahead, the temperature was 28°C, blue skies. We have an undulating, contouring path till Plan Praz, then zigzag up to Col de Brévent (2368m), I saw sign in white paint which I thought said GAS, it was actually GR5, we called it the *gas route*. We still had a bit to get to the top of Le Brévent (2526m) including another ladder section. We had a drink of Orangina and took lots of photos before continuing down to Bellachat (2152m), we have another Orangina, very hot. It was downhill all the way including a handrail section, the metal handrails were roasting hot. We passed the zoo and reached Les Houches station at 4.45pm, a train arrived at 4.57pm to take us to Chamonix, we finished the Tour! We had to find accommodation and by luck I had asked Ashley & Dom which hotel they were staying in Chamonix, it was the Richmond, after a short walk we found it, we get rooms for the 3 nights. It was great to get a bit of luxury and we emptied our rucksacks, had showers, pity no bath, but I'll survive. We met Graham and now we can celebrate! We go to the Rond Point to have a well deserved pint, we go to the National Café for dinner; Graham had ham & cheese omelet and chips, Alan and I shared steak, chips & salad; veal in white sauce, mushrooms, more beer and wine. After dinner we go to Choccas for a nightcap.

Graham's Saying of the Day:—"I'll sleep tonight, my feet are like puddings."

Thursday 30/7/09

We have breakfast, lots to choose from. You have to boil the eggs yourself. Today we are going to Aiguille du Midi by cable car, the first cable car takes you to Plan de l'Aiguille (2317m), Graham stayed there while we took the second cable car up to Aiguille du Midi (3842m). We spent about an hour, watching the climbers roped together going on to the snow, it is the closest we'll get to the top of Mont Blanc. We could see Col de Balme, but unfortunately it was a bit cloudy at the tops across the valley. We went back to meet Graham, we then did the balcony route to Mer de Glace. We saw walkers on the glacier, had a beer before taking the cog railway back to Chamonix. We changed out of our boots, had a walk round Chamonix, looked at the shops, we met Ashley & Dom, they have one day to go, they had rest days, unlike us. We return to have showers, then go to the Rond Point to meet Graham, Ashley & Dom for a drink, then the 5 of us go for a curry at Tigre Tigre, we have the set menu. The three of us have a nightcap at *The Pub*, I was very tired, late night 11.30pm.

Friday 31/7/09

Our last full day in Chamonix, after breakfast we have to find an Internet café to arrange our transfer tomorrow. The Chamonix bus couldn't take us, eventually we got the transfer organized, we get picked up at 12.30pm at the hotel by Mountain Drop-Offs. We split up for the rest of the day, Graham went off on his own, we had a MacDonald's. As we bought a two-day lift pass, we took the cable car to Plan Praz (2000m), we have a seat on the grass, great having no boots or rucksacks. We take the cable car to the Brévent (2526m), spent about ½ hour taking more photos, cable car back down to Plan Praz, we have a beer and sit in the deck chairs. We return to Chamonix and found Graham at his local, the Rond Point, he had a walk either side of Chamonix. Later we were meeting Ashley & Dom and some other couples who were finishing today for a drink. After the others left, Ashley & Dom plus us three went for a Chinese at the Golden Dragon, we all enjoyed the meal and we got a shot of fire-water in little cups, they had erotic pictures which disappeared after you drank it. We had a nightcap at Choccas, late 11.45pm.

Saturday 1/8/09

It was a lovely day, blue skies and warm, we had a morning to spend in Chamonix before going home. We pack our rucksacks before going to the market, bought cherries, we also bought 2 tee-shirts with Tour of Mont Blanc, we have an ice-cream. We returned to the hotel and while sitting outside we

saw a plaque—"Edward Whymper, the famous Alpinist lived here in 1896." The daughter of the owner told us one of their ancestors was a guide to Edward Whymper. Our transfer arrived on time and we checked in, taking a note of the weight of the rucksacks, Alan's rucksack was 13kg; Graham's rucksack was 12.5 kg and mine was 10kg. We flew Geneva to Paris to Aberdeen, we arrived at 9.15pm

and Graham's wife, Kath, picked us up, Skye [Graham's dog] was in the car as well. When we got home it was a case of unpacking the rucksacks to repack our day-sacks as we were walking tomorrow with the Club, a 7am start! I'm only going because it is a new Munro to us, Mullach Clach a Bhlàir.

A good holiday once again.

