



## AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2004

### CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

As another hillwalking season draws towards its close, we can reflect on a successful period for the Club. Hike attendances were higher, particularly during summer when numbers usually drop due to holidays, and turnout of new walkers on recent outings is also encouraging. Let's keep up the good work of building our membership. Summer weather was disappointing compared to last year's heat wave, and experts tell us we can expect wetter summers due to global-warming climate change. After recent floods and landslides, I was not surprised to hear that August 2004 was the wettest month for many years, but we were fortunate on our outings with some exceptionally fine dry days. Our *local reporters* comment on individual walks below and I hope this evokes memories of fine days in the hills. With autumn approaching, the Committee has prepared a winter activities program detailed elsewhere in this Newsletter, and we look for your support in attending.

### REPORTERS' NOTEBOOK

25 April: Corriemulzie circular



Celebration at Summit of An Socach

A well attended walk on a lovely day saw walkers heading for Morrone and Sgòr Mòr. I was pleasantly surprised to see a large party heading for the top of An Socach at top speed; little did I know Glenmorangie was flowing for those reaching the summit, a great incentive. Kris Howard was celebrating 20 years with the club. Well done!

Other walkers returned with suntans and deer antlers. I saw an antler in the distance but on reaching my trophy, I found it still attached to a dead deer.

Everyone was back at the coach early, lying in the sun exhausted, and more Glenmorangie was

administered medicinally. Refreshments were taken in Ballater to finish a perfect day. *Bob Will*

9 May: Mount Battock and Clachnaben



A Welcome Cuppa after a Fine Day's Outing

Starting at Millden Lodge in Glen Esk and finishing at Miller's Bog car park, the walk was not far from Aberdeen, with no Munro in sight (well, maybe in the distance). Thirty-seven enjoyed this through walk, which has a reasonable path most of the way, and at least three routes to the top of Mount Battock were found. The weather started not too bright, but in the afternoon became very warm for so early in the year. *David*

23 May: Culbin Forest

Though many regular walkers were on the Week's Hike, there was a good turnout. It was a lovely warm sunny day, and shorts were worn, but some

nasty midge bites were suffered in part of the forest. The beach and sea looked great, with quite a number of people enjoying various water-sports at the mouth of the Findhorn. *Heather*

6 June: Linn o Dee circular

Twenty-three walkers, a good turnout for an early start, divided into three parties to tackle Ben Macdui, Beinn Mheadhoin and Beinn a' Chaorainn, respectively. The weather started promisingly, but approaching Loch Etchachan, cloud and rain appeared. However, the weather cleared at lunchtime and remained excellent thereafter. All returned to the bus in time for refreshments at Ballater. *Jim*

20 June: Airlie Tower to Clova Hotel



Negotiating a Deer Fence

The weather was mainly dry with a cold northwest wind. Those seeking the easier option down the Minister's Road actually had the harder route. The path from Elf Hillock was blocked by forestry, forcing the group onto a steep rocky descent outside the plantation to pick up the path where it exited the trees. *Sally*

4 July: Drumochter Hills

Only seventeen attended this 7.00am start. Sunshine and blue skies were in evidence as we dropped off two groups. One tackled hills east of Drumochter Pass, while the second, larger group

alighted at Balsporran Cottages for hills to the west.



Lochs Ericht and Pattack

The entire second group climbed Geal Charn (917m), and a short stop at the top afforded interesting views along Loch Ericht to Dalwhinnie and southwest to Ben Alder.



A Mystery Plank



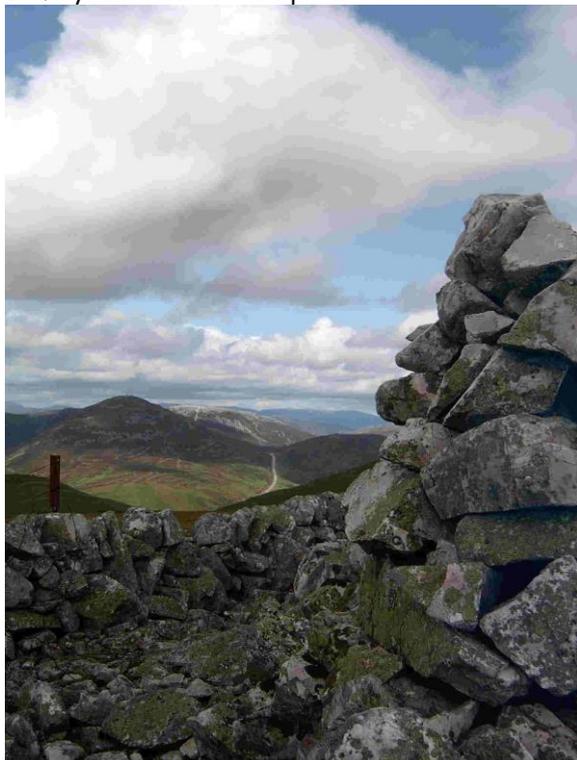
Cairns

Rain clouds appeared and soon we were enclosed in rain and mist. We traversed the bealach to A' Mharconaich with only fleeting glimpses of the Pass and hills beyond. We put on cagoules and

over-trousers, and headed to Beinn Udlamain and Sgairneach Mhór, the fourth and final Munro. The rain eased off as we crossed the river at Coire Dhomhain and headed back to the bus on the A9.

All groups returned by 5.30pm, allowing half an hour at Pitlochry for a drink or chips before returning to Aberdeen. Frank

18 July: Cairnwell CP to Spittal o Glenshee



The Devil's Elbow



An Open Gate

Those on the bus divided into three parties, one taking the Cairnwell ridge, another taking the Glas Maol ridge, and a third walking over Ben Earb. One soul explored the Ben Earb ridge, which the official route carefully avoided. Kris



Elevenses at the Summit of Glas Maol

1 August: Coylumbridge to Linn o Dee



Fiona, Alan and Dave at the Shelterstone

At 7.00am, 27 of us set off for Coylumbridge. Fifteen decided to tackle the Lairig Ghru. Eight went for a high-level traverse taking in Cairngorm, Ben Macdui and either Sròn Riach or Carn a' Mhàim. The rest came with me through the Lairig an Laoigh by way of Fiacail Coire Cas, Coire Raibert, Shelterstone and Fords of Avon. It turned out a beautiful warm sunny day after some early morning mist patches. Having left Linn o Dee on time, refreshments were taken at Aboyne.

Graham

[By coincidence, the City Council Club also caught a 7.00am bus to walk from Coire Cas to Linn o Dee. Unfortunately, after dropping them off, their bus was involved in a collision with a police car near Tomintoul, and the police took the bus with its

contents for investigation. An identical bus turned up at Linn o Dee, but without their gear!

While waiting for Graham's party near Derry Lodge, a large dragon fly settled on my shirt to finish its lunch, which appeared to have been a moth. Ed.]

15 August: Ben Avon



Builders on Carn Liath.

On a glorious warm bright sunny day, a good turnout of 39 divided into three parties, doing Ben Avon, Carn Liath & Culardoch, and the Gairn circuit, respectively. The Carn Liath party suffered a severe midgie incident on exiting trees below Little Elrick! Vi

[The party that climbed Ben Avon via the Slugain and the Sneck reported the path much improved in places, presumably financed by charges collected at the new Keiloch car park.

I spotted an adder with black and cream markings, resembling an old-fashioned shopping-bag handle coiled up. Having seen each other, we moved off smartly in opposite directions!

The suspension footbridge where the Bealach Dearg crosses the Gairn is now unusable, and has been replaced by a plank bridge 100m upstream. The water was not particularly high, but the planks were only a foot clear of the water, so I am confident the next spate will wash it away!

We passed a signpost that would have benefited from some punctuation. It warned us to *keep dogs on leads lambs and birds*. Coincidentally, there was a dog running loose near the top of the Bealach Dearg.

The toilet in the new Keiloch car park was decorated with laminated covers from the *Angry Corrie* magazine, including the one satirizing the introduction of parking charges on Deeside! Ed.]

29 August: Dorback Lodge to Tomintoul

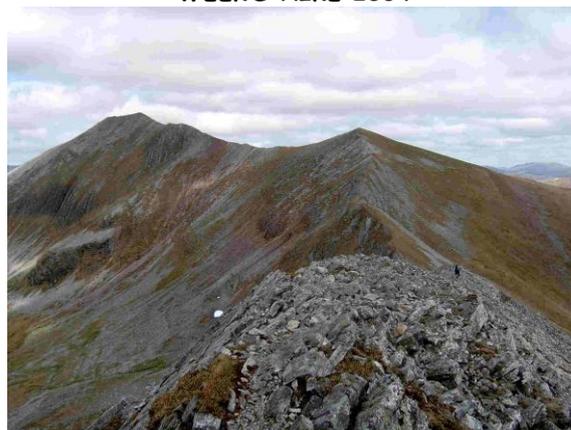
Twenty-five attended for an old favourite, the Ailnack Gorge. The day was bright with a cool wind that proved rather gusty on the summit of Geal Charn (821m, 2092 feet). Soon after leaving Dorback Lodge, the first shower came and we put on cagoules and overtrousers.

Dark clouds gathered over the Cairngorms as we followed the long ridge of Geal Charn to Geal Charn Beag before descending northeast to the Ailnack. The sun reappeared, though squally showers hit us several times before we passed Delnabo Lodge on the way to Tomintoul.

The Ailnack Gorge was very scenic, but the narrow path is now rather overgrown, requiring care to avoid tripping or slipping on wet woody heather stems. All walkers returned in time for drinks and chips in Dufftown. Frank

[The Geal Charn ridge affords a spectacular view across the trackless wastes of Caiplich to the northeast wall of the Cairngorms, a panorama from Ben Avon in the east to Bynack More and Cairngorm in the west. In particular, the north face of Ben Avon is laid out in all its many-torred complexity of corries and ridges. It must be some fifteen years since this walk was first recommended. Paul is to be congratulated on achieving the impossible by driving the bus to Dorback Lodge! Ed.]

#### WEEK'S HIKE 2004



Binnein Mór from Na Gruagaichean

The Week's Hike this year took us to Glen Coe and Lochaber, to explore a variety of mountains, glens and lochs on the West Coast. Our party of twelve was based at Glencoe Youth Hostel for eight nights amid splendid scenery.

Proximity to our first objective obviating transport, we walked from the hostel up Gleann

Leac na Muidhe to climb Sgòr na h-Ulaidh (3260 feet), one of the less well known Munroes in this area. The weather was beautiful and set a pattern of glorious days for the rest of the week.



Ben Nevis from Na Gruagaichean



Loch Leven from above Mamore Lodge



The Glenfinnan Viaduct

We climbed the Corbetts of Ben Resipol in Sunart and Rois Bheinn in Moidart, and the Munroes of Ben Starav in Glen Etive, Sgurr Thuilm in Glen Finnan, and Binnein Mór and Na Gruagaichean in the Mamores. The weather broke on Saturday, and we endured heavy rain and mist as we explored

Glen Coe's Hidden Valley, but overall, it was a great week enjoyed by all. Frank

### TOUR OF THE VANOISE

A Hut-to-hut Trek round France's First National Park

The *Parc National de la Vanoise* (PNV) was established in 1963, the first in France. It lies between the upper valleys of the Isère and Arc in the Savoy *departement*, and adjoins Italy's *Gran Paradiso National Park* along a nine-mile common boundary. The parks were twinned in 1972, and together constitute Western Europe's largest nature reserve.



Stepping Stones across Lac des Vaches below Grande Casse Glacier.

The PNV covers 205 square miles of high mountains and deep verdant valleys, ranging in altitude from 4,100 to 12,600 feet. There are 107 peaks over 10,000 feet, and a network of around 310 miles of footpaths, many only snow-free from mid-June to late October.

There are 42 refuges in the Park, totalling some 1900 beds. With these numerous manned huts strategically placed throughout the National Park, lightly laden trekkers can stay in simple comfort each night without having to resort to carrying tents, food or cooking equipment.

The Park is protected from outside exploitation and, despite a small amount of summer farming, there is no permanent habitation. Consequently, the Park boasts a tremendous abundance of wildlife and more than 1000 species of alpine flora.

In July 2004, Linda Henderson, Arlene Johnston, Willie Robb, Alan and Fiona Wallace and myself, all from ATHWC, travelled to Modane in the Maurienne Valley of southeast France. Modane was the start and end point of our 100-mile tour of the PNV. Our route encountered wild dramatic

landscapes, was demanding in places and, with several passes in excess of 8,500 feet, ensured plenty of height gain and loss, the total ascent being over 24,000 feet.

Each day had challenges and rewards, but there were no true glacier crossings, no true scrambling sections, and no lengthy paths open to stone-fall or vertigo-inspiring exposure. Way-marks and cairns were mostly sufficient guides where the trail was indistinct, and in places, signposts were erected providing a rough indication of time to reach the next hut, col or village.

From Modane, we climbed steeply under cloudless skies through forest to the edge of the National Park. We contoured northeast to Plan Sec, a deeply cut glen containing two dammed lakes and fine views of an extensive mountain mass bearing the largest glacier complex of the region. From Plan Sec, an undulating trail crossed a mountain spur then turned north on a long but spectacular path high above the deep Doron Gorge.

At the gorge's northern limit, we descended to green pastures where we were caught in an electric storm with hailstones like golf balls. This did not last long and we continued south. We climbed to a gentle high plateau with glorious views across the gorge to the Glaciers de la Vanoise slung between snow-covered sharp peaks, La Dent Parachée and Point de la Rechasse.

We continued south, and raw mountain scenery was exchanged for a more pastoral landscape. The route broke out of the Doron Valley and headed east high above the Haute Maurienne with steep flower-filled meadows hanging from mid-mountain slopes.

We crossed into the Vallonbron Valley nestling in a quiet secretive glen-like terrace opposite the

glaciers of Point de Ronce guarding the road pass of Col du Mont Cenis on the Italian border.

Beyond Vallonbron, the path descended sharply to the Haute Maurienne Valley, and we waded through fragrant colourful meadows and woodland, eventually reaching the medieval stone-built village of Bonneval-sur-Arc, a charming place shunning all external signs of modernity.

A very steep climb up the Lenta Valley took us over the 9,100-foot Col de l'Iseran to Val d'Isère. We further climbed to the Col de Tovière and on west to the Col de la Leisse below the towering rock and ice walls of Grande Motte and Grande Casse: at 12,500-feet, the highest peaks in Savoy.

We were now in a fantastic high wilderness of towering peaks and glaciers, covered in alpine flora, with ibex, chamois, marmot, eagle and hawk. The route traversed northwest to the snow-covered Col de la Vanoise and a huge stepping-stone boulevard across Lac des Vaches, followed by a steep descent to Pralognan, capital of the area, for a decent hot shower without hole-in-the-ground toilets. We headed south for a huge climb up to the snow-covered Col de Chavière: at 9,200 feet, the highest col in the French Alps. Finally, there was a 6,000-foot knee-trembling descent over snowfields and forest to our end point, Modane in the Maurienne Valley.

Did we enjoy the trek?? *WOW!!!!*. The weather on our 12-day trek was kind to us, the camaraderie and banter was terrific, and the scenery, wildlife and flora had to be seen to be believed. But, most of all, and apart from the *vin de Savoie*, I thank my five companions for making this a truly sensational mountain trek, which I will *always* remember and treasure for all the right reasons!!!!  
*Merci et salut, mes cinq amis!!!* *Graham*

#### NEXT YEAR'S PROGRAM

The Committee will shortly plan the 2005 program of outings, and again we ask you to help produce an interesting, varied selection of walks for next year. Please use the attached form to suggest outings. All proposals should be submitted to Secretary Heather Eddie or any Committee Member by 10 October 2004. We would appreciate full details of start and end points with six-figure map references if possible, and your name in case clarification is needed.

#### SWEATSHIRTS

The Committee has explored the possibility of purchasing a selection of sweatshirts with our Club logo printed or embroidered on. We obtained a number of quotes from local firms, and are evaluating these to obtain best quality items at reasonable cost. Our final decision will depend on demand, and we will circulate a list soon to determine interest in purchasing sweatshirts, polo shirts and tee shirts.

### WINTER PROGRAM

The Committee has planned winter social and walking events, and dates for your diary are:

Wednesday, 6 October 2004: Tiso's discount night, 6.30 to 8.30pm. Take your membership card for discount.

Sunday 10 October 2004: Please return hike suggestion sheets by this date.

Thursday 28 October 2004: Informal meal at Royal Hotel, Bath Street, 7.30 for 8.00pm. A booking has been made. The hotel wants a £5 deposit per person by 16 October and a menu will be circulated on the bus.

Thursday 4 November 2004: Week's Hike 2005 meeting at New Telecom House, 7.30pm.

Thursday 25 November 2004: Video and slide show by Graham Sangster, 7.30pm, venue to be arranged as United Services Club are changing their function suites, so we still have to establish if they can accommodate us.

Sunday 5 December 2004: Walk - Duff House, Banff to Macduff via Bridge of Alvah, 9.00am start.

Sunday 9 January 2005: Walk - Echt to Raemoir followed by a meal at the Feughside Inn, 9.00am start.

Wednesday 2 February 2005: Annual General Meeting at New Telecom House, 7.30pm.

Sunday 6 February 2005: Walk - Dinnet to Ballater and Seven Bridges, 9.00am start.

While the above walks are already in the 2004 Program, we remind members that we walk throughout the year and look forward to seeing you on these pleasant short winter walks.

### DISCOUNTS

The following shops give discounts on production of a signed current membership card. This is just the opportunity to replace any old or worn equipment, or to ask for that special early Christmas present!

Craigdon Sports, 5 St. Andrews Street .....15%.

Blacks, George Street .....10%.

Millets, Union Street .....10%.

Hilltrek, Aboyne .....10%.

Nevisport, 186 George Street .....10% on selected lines.

Graham Tiso, 26 Netherkirkgate.....discount on club sales night only, *Wednesday 6 October, 6.30 to 8.30pm*, when up to 25% discount will be available on selected lines.

### GIGHT CASTLE, METHLICK - ANCESTRAL HOME OF LORD BYRON

Gight estate belonged to the Maitlands till 1479 when it passed to William Gordon, third son of the second Earl of Huntly. The second laird built the castle in 1560. They were a dynasty of wild Gordons, a race crowded with murder and sudden death. William, the first laird, was killed at the battle of Flodden in 1513. The second laird was also killed in battle. The third was killed in a duel. The son of the fourth was hung for murdering the Earl of Moray. The fifth had four murders to his account. [*Gay Gordons* was originally *Gey Gordons*, meaning *wild*.] The story goes on from one generation to another till we come to the thirteenth laird, Catherine Gordon. Catherine's ancestry went back to King James I, whose daughter married the second Earl of Huntly.

The wealthy Catherine sailed from Aberdeen to London in 1786. While taking the waters at Bath, she met the penniless Hon. Captain John (Mad Jack) Byron, a notorious spendthrift and rake. They were married and spent the next two years in London, where their son George was born in January 1788.

From the outset, John Byron set about disposing of his wife's fortune through gambling and reckless spending. Having amassed huge debts in London, John Byron and his family fled to Aberdeen in 1788 to live at Gight. His behaviour there was wild, reckless gambling and drinking. He was chased out of Aberdeenshire, leaving Catherine and her son impoverished with huge debts. John Byron fled to France to avoid Newgate Prison, dying the following year. Gight estate was sold to the Earl of Aberdeen at Haddo [another branch of the Gordons] to pay off the debts. The castle was left uninhabited, and the roof taken off to avoid paying duties.

Catherine went to Aberdeen with young George, living in lodgings in Queen Street and Virginia Street while her estate was wound up. The trust gave her £150 a year and they moved to a rented flat at 64 Broad Street. Georgie Byron as he was known, was sent to church schools for those who could pay a few pence. An arts-student friend of Mrs Byron coached promising children for the Grammar School, and Georgie was accepted there in 1795 to learn Latin and the arts.

After an attack of scarlet fever in 1797, his mother took him to a farm near Ballater. These holidays with excursions to the mountains gave him his life-long love of mountains and their scenery. [Around this time, Balmoral estate, including the steep frowning glories of dark Lochnagar, was in the hands of another branch of the Gordons.]

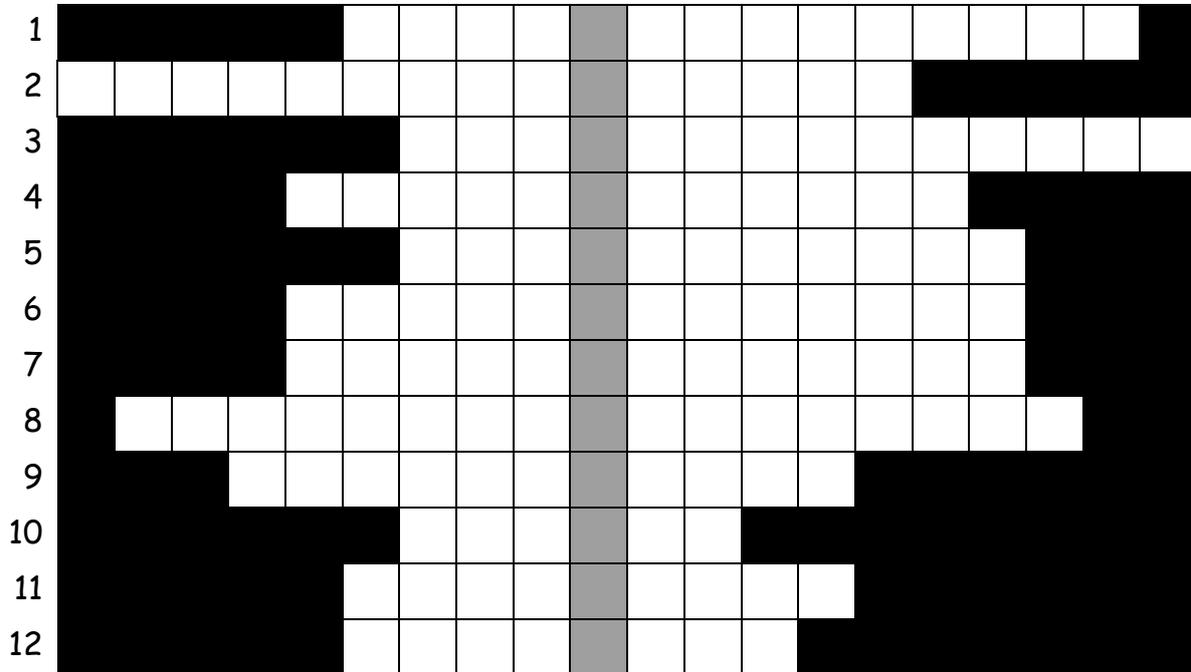
This idyllic lifestyle ended on the death of his great-uncle, the fifth Lord Byron, and Georgie succeeded to the peerage. Aged eleven, his mother took him to Newstead Abbey, Nottinghamshire, ancestral home of the Byrons, who were also known to be a little unstable.

Later in his wild life, Byron was dubbed *mad, bad and dangerous to know* - little wonder!

Robert Will

**CROSSWORD**

Find answers to the twelve clues below to reveal a local landmark in the shaded column



1. *Green Hill* between the Glen Shee and Glen Tilt areas.
2. This Cairngorm Munro translates as *Hill of the Rowan*
3. *Blue Hill of Derry*
4. *Hoof or Claw Hill* in Knoydart
5. Big area of Munroes southwest of Roybridge
6. *Hill of the Mastiff* (Cairngorms)
7. Named after Sheriff Alexander Nicolson who made the first recorded ascent in 1873 (Skye area).
8. *Hill of the Ptarmigans* (Perthshire hills)
9. *Hill of the Boar* (Cairngorms)
10. Translation from Gaelic is *Thorn Bush* or *Bramble* (Angus glens)
11. Translates as *Brindled Greyish Upper Part* (Cairngorms)
12. Gaelic for *Awesome Hill* (Northwest highlands)

Graham

