



AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2005

CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

We again approach the end of a hillwalking season with the good news that numbers on outings are increasing, and with a healthy membership, we look forward to many more successful seasons. Our thoughts now turn to the winter social scene, and the Committee have organized a program of activities detailed in this newsletter. We hope you support these events.

In spring, we reported the Club had a £1000 bequest from Jim Brebner's estate. The Committee discussed a number of suggestions for best use of these funds. The one finding most support was to construct a simple bridge across the Geldie, south of White Bridge *en route* to Glen Tilt. On the 5 June outing through Glen Tilt, heavy rain significantly raised water levels, impeding members crossing the Geldie. Stone piers on either side of the water mark the position of a former bridge. We are not looking for a fancy structure, merely a simple single or double wire bridge crossing for walkers. An initial approach to landowners Mar Lodge Estate met with a negative response. The factor thought a river crossing here would detract from the *wilderness* nature of the area, but we are pursuing the matter and will write to the estate formally with our proposals. We will also canvas support from other conservation groups such as the Scottish Rights of Way Society and Upper Deeside Access Trust (UDAT) to gain support for this suggestion. What do members think about this? We welcome your views.

Obviously, £1000 is not a huge sum for such a project, but like similar ideas, appeals can be made to other clubs and outdoor organizations for extra funds, and hopefully, the total will increase. Look how quickly Bob Scott's Bothy was rebuilt! Watch this space for more information.

NEXT YEAR'S WALKING PROGRAM

The Committee will shortly plan the 2006 program of outings and again we ask your help to produce an interesting, varied selection of walks for next year. Please use the attached form to suggest outings, all proposals to be submitted to Secretary Heather Eddie or any Committee Member by 9 October. We would appreciate full details of start and end points of the walk, with six-figure map references if possible, and include your name in case clarification is needed.

WINTER PROGRAM

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

Thursday 27 October 2005:

Informal meal at Royal Hotel, Bath Street, 7.30 for 8.00pm. A booking deposit of £5 per person may be required. Further information with a menu will be circulated on the bus for those interested.

Thursday 10 November, 2005:

Week's Hike meeting at New Telecom House, 7.30pm.

Sunday 4 December, 2005:

Walk - Glentanar circular, 9am start.

Sunday 8 January, 2006:

Walk from Linn of Quoich to Keiloch, 9.00am start, followed by meal at Inver Hotel.

Sunday 5 February, 2006:

Walk from Donview car park over Bennachie to Rowantree car park, 9.00am start.

Wednesday 8 February, 2006:

Annual General Meeting at New Telecom House, 7.30pm.

An illustrated talk will also be given by Graham Sangster, date and venue to be advised later.

While the above walks are already scheduled in the 2005 program, we remind members that we walk throughout the year, and look forward to seeing you on these pleasant short winter walks.

TISO EVENTS

Discount nights - first Monday each month, 6.30-8.30pm.

Wednesday 21 September
Glenmore Lodge on *Need an Adventure*, at Tiso's store, limited tickets available.

Tuesday 18 October
Guy Grieve on *Alaskan Adventure*, £5.00/£3.50

Tuesday 22 November
Thomas Huber on *El Cap (Yosemite) and other Big-Wall Climbs*, £6.00/£4.50

Tuesday 10 January
Pete Hill on *The Scottish Winter Experience*, £3.00

The above three illustrated talks take place at Aberdeen City Hotel, Market Street.

NORTH-EAST MOUNTAIN TRUST

Tuesday 4 October
Bob Reid on *Haute Route Variations - Ski Mountaineering in the Alps*.

Thursday 10 November
Roy Dennis on *Re-introduction of Mammals and Birds to Scotland*.

Friday 25 November
Joint ceilidh with John Muir Trust, Station Hotel. Further details later.

Tuesday 13 December
Simon Richardson on *Modern Developments in Scottish Winter Climbing - a Personal Perspective*.

Thursday 12 January 2006
Jill Matthews of Scottish Natural Heritage on *National Nature Reserves in the 21st Century - The Changing Rôle of Protected Areas*.

Tuesday 14 February 2006
Alistair Lawson of Scotways, on *Peru - Trekking in the Cordillera Blanca, following an earthquake*.

Thursday 23 March 2006
Windfarms and wild land - is consensus possible?
A debate on a controversial topic with Martin Mathers of Scottish Power and Davie Black of Ramblers Scotland. (N.B Venue for this talk only is the United Services Club).

Time:- 7.30pm
Admission:- £2.50 (concessions £1.50).
Venue:- All at the Belmont Club, 218 Hardgate (except for 23/3/06 which is at the United Services Club, 15 Bon-Accord Square). 218 Hardgate is 50 yards south of the Holburn Street-Great Southern Road roundabout.

DISCOUNTS

Discounts are available at the following on production of a signed 2005 membership card, which you receive on paying your annual membership fee.

Blacks, George Street 10%
Craigdon Sports, 5 St Andrew St 10%
Millets, Union Street 10%
Nevisport, 186 George Street

10% on selected lines

Graham Tiso, 26 Netherkirkgate
Discount only on club sales nights when up to 25% discount is available on selected lines (6.30 - 8.30pm, first Monday of each month).

Frank

EDITOR'S CHAT

I hope you enjoy reading this Newsletter. If you have any interesting articles or stories with a hillwalking theme, please send details to Editor Kris Howard or Secretary Heather Eddie for publication in the next issue. I would like to thank all contributors to this edition. Photos were supplied by Graham, the Hendersons, and Sue McHardy.

For the sake of brevity, the Editor reserves the right to edit texts submitted, but every effort is made to retain the author's meaning.

REPORTERS' NOTES

24 April: Glen Damff circular



Willie Robb and Margaret Cameron
Broken footbridge in Glen Damff

8 May: Ochil Hills



Descent from the Ochils to the Forth Valley

It was a bright clear crisp morning for a pleasant but long drive to Blackford, where all but three of the party decided to do the through walk. There was a steady climb up Kinpauch Hill, then down Glen Bee to the reservoir, where most had elevenses. It was quite a long way round the reservoir to Blackhills Farm. Weather continued dry and sunny with a keen wind on Skythorn Hill, where again we took a welcome rest and cup of tea. Upwards and onwards, walking on clumps of tussocky grass was tiring on legs and ankles. There followed a long descent on a very narrow path parallel to the Gannel Burn a long way below in the valley. A very steep zigzag track led down to Mill Glen, thence to Tillicoultry and the bus. Lovely and warm in the late afternoon, it had been quite a challenging hike.

Alex

22 May: Ordgarff circular

From a dull start on leaving Aberdeen, the sky brightened towards Corgarff. The walk was dry and bright at first. Most decided to reverse the

walk, heading for the highest top, Cárn a' Bhacain first. The rest of us followed the route sheet.



Group near Corgarff Castle

At our first top, we took elevenses with the weather holding fine, but setting off again, the sky darkened and the heavens opened with hailstones and a blow-through of snow. We saw the first party coming down from the top and decided to skirt the hill and continue down. We descended a very wet area with peat bog to climb in and out of. Slippery burnt-out heather with long woody stems impeded us. Finally we were on the track, and found shelter under a 1753 military bridge. We continued onward and downward, still in rain with thunder and lightning. The bus and Allargue Hotel were a welcome sight.

Alex

5 June: Glen Tilt



Falls of Tarff in full spate from Bedford Memorial Bridge

Thirty-one members and guests did this classic walk from Lynn of Dee to Blair Atholl, clocked at 23 miles by GPS. The driech weather was of little consequence when faced with crossing the Geldie and Bynack Burns in spate! Walkers were variously prepared, with solutions including wading through in bare feet, in boots without socks, feet in one to three poly bags, and long detours upstream. The best seemed to be SCUBA divers' neoprene

bootees! David Garwood had the scariest moment, seeing his wallet floating away downstream. Fortunately, he retrieved it, but Lizetta was not amused! Nevertheless, the walk was well worth all the discomfort. After our experience, the Committee decided to approach the National Trust about reinstating the Geldie bridge. Colin Chapman

19 June: Lochindorb



Margaret, Colin, Claire, David and Wilma
Lochindorb Castle

There was a good turnout on a dull but very warm day to walk from Grantown on Spey to Dava. A slight uphill start had us all discarding sweaters. Following a track for some way, instead of heading for Drumroy at the head of Lochindorb, we decided to stay high to cross Cárn nan Gabhar, Cárn Ruigh Chorrach and Craig Tiribeg. It was very wet under foot, spongy, springy, unpleasantly tiresome and strength sapping. Then it was downhill but not a lot better, through long heather, with the loch on our left. One or two decided to drop down to the loch-side via Corrycharcle, and on to the road, but most carried on down to the Easter Limekilns track, thence to the road leading to Dava and the waiting bus. By now, the sun was shining and a cheerful gathering were seated to enjoy a cuppa! Then it was homewards with a stop in Dufftown for our usual. Alex

3 July: Blair Atholl circular

Setting off on a fine morning, there were various walks from Blair Atholl. Fifteen set off for Beinn Dearg, another group chose the low-level walk around Glen Banvie, including a visit to the *House of Bruar* shop, and three of us opted for Beinn Mheadhonach. We crossed Old Bridge of Tilt and headed north up Glen Tilt to Gilbert's Bridge. The route was interesting, with a couple of packhorse bridges across streams west of the Tilt. A beautiful long ridge led us to the Corbett summit. Good views opened to Beinn a' Ghlo and Ben Vrackie, while westward we saw the stony top of

Beinn Dearg, and Schiehallion and the Cárn Mairg group to the south. The weather was sunny, but grew colder as we reached the top. On the descent, a heavy sleety shower with strong wind soaked us. There was no shelter on the hillside, but we soon reached the glen where the sun dried us quickly. On our early return to Blair Atholl, we had tea and refreshments at Tilt Hotel before the main party returned, and we left on time for Aberdeen. Overall, it was an excellent day enjoyed by all, and a first for the three of us who climbed Beinn Mheadhonach. Alex



At summit cairn of Beinn Dearg

17 July: Spittal of Muick circular



Rainbow on Loch Muick

The weather was warm and dry but for a few periods of light drizzle on the hills. Six went to Lochnagar, one did five Munroes, four took the Capel Mounth, and eight were up Broad Cairn and Cairn Bannoch. Others went round the loch, with various deviations. It was a very pleasant outing. All were back by 6.20pm, and the bus departed early. Alex



Glen Clova from Capel Mounth

31 July: Achlean to Loch an Eilein



Misty Braeriach from Glen Einich



Loch Gahmna



The Castle on Loch an Eilean

With a good forecast, thirty walkers were out today. An accident on the main Aberdeen-Inverness road diverted Gordon's coach, and we reached Achlean 45 minutes late. Eight walkers came with me to Braeriach, most of the others went to Sgòr Gaoith with Alan Wallace, and a few went on the low-level forest walk to Loch an Eilein. The forecast was completely wrong with wind, rain and misty conditions throughout the day above 1000m. Navigational skills and GPS technology were needed to guide us over the featureless Braeriach plateau, but we eventually reached the summit. We did not hang around in poor conditions, heading for Rothiemurchus forest by Sròn na Lairig and on to Loch an Eilein. With almost nine hours of very hard walking, it was a challenging day to say the least!

Graham



Refreshments at Dufftown after a long hard day

14 August: Clunsklea to Killiecrankie



Margaret, David, John and Ian
Pitlochry from Ben Vrackie

There were three options: Ben Vuirich, Ben Vrackie and Pass of Killiecrankie. It rained most of the outward journey, so for once the 32 of us were not complaining about a three-hour bus trip. My choice of walk was Ben Vuirich, and as we unloaded at Clunsklea, the sun came out and stayed with us all day long. We had a lovely, gentle ascent of Ben Vuirich. There were stunning views on all sides. The descent was varied, interesting and very pleasant. Sadly, there were no refreshments at Killiecrankie, so a cup of tea in sunshine sufficed. Vi

28 August: Linn o Dee circular

Three routes were planned: a longish low-level circular walk to Corrour Bothy via Derry Lodge and White Bridge, Sgòr Mór and Sgòr Dubh, and Beinn Bhreac and Meall an Lundain. In view of the wet weather, some members opted for shorter walks though two climbed Derry Cairngorm. This trip had a turnout of 23. Vi had a good day, finding a full bottle of wine on the way to the bus in Aberdeen, and a cyclist's cape near White Bridge. Several groups of young people were seen on the walks, fulfilling their Duke of Edinburgh award challenges. Hopefully, they were not discouraged by the wet weather and will continue hill-walking in the future.

Colin Chapman

THE 'DISASTROUS' WEEK'S HIKE OF 2005

This was not so much a complete major disaster, but a series of minor and not-so-minor disasters.

Take the first day, Saturday. Frank Kelly, chief driver of the minibus, was just a little later with pick-up times than he intended. In a way, this was good, because everyone was ready, bags often standing out in the street. Ian Grassie had his bags on the stepped pavement outside Gilbert McCurdy's house. Disaster number one struck

when a bag containing a bottle of whisky fell over, breaking the bottle. None of the contents could be salvaged, and by the time the minibus arrived, there remained only a damp patch on the pavement. The rest of the party was picked up without incident, and after coffee and rowies at Vi Walker's and a pause at Brodie for lunch, arrived at Gerry's Hostel around 5pm. All were thankful that the first cottage Sally Henderson (very much the alternative driver) turned in at, where dogs barked loudly, was not it. Gerry was not in, but with instructions pinned to the wall to *Come in and make yourselves at home*, we did. The view of Sgurr na Feartaig from the upstairs bedroom commandeered by the women promised a good day to come.



Sgurr na Feartaig from the hostel window

Sunday's programme was Beinn Liath Mhór, Sgurr Ruadh and maybe Fuar Tholl. There was a lower circular route from Achnashellach for Bill Marr; David and Lizetta Garwood joined him after deciding very wisely that the steep slopes of Beinn Liath Mhór were not for them. By the time stragglers were on the first top, hypothermia was almost setting in for early arrivals. The Munro summit was still a mile and a half away along the ridge beyond a couple of small summits.



Torridons from Beinn Liath Mhór

Halfway along, Rosie Grant was afflicted with severe cramp - disaster 2. Despite drinking tonic water, the cramp kept returning. Completing the ridge was out of the question, so Moira West, Vi and Sally escorted her back. Kris Howard met them as they retraced their steps to a suitable bealach for the descent down a steep corrie to the path in the valley below. He provided salt tablets to add to the painkillers already administered to poor Rosie to help her cramp. Kris saw the great view out to the Torridons and islands that cloud hid on his previous visit.

Rosie made it to the valley path just before the forecast rain set in, and carried on down to the minibus. Meanwhile, the others went round to Sgurr Ruadh but gave Fuar Tholl a miss, as clouds darkened and bouncing hailstones turned the ground white. On the descent, rain really set in, and they were well wet on reaching the minibus.

Crossing to the other side of Strath Carron on Monday, the target was Moruisg and Sgurr na Ceannaichean. With clouds sitting firmly on the tops, Moira, Sally, Kris and Bill would walk up into the corrie between the two, whilst the rest headed straight up Moruisg. The stalker's path to the corrie was conspicuous by its absence on passing under the railway. The boggy terrain saw us picking the route that seemed driest. Kris found the path eventually, but was driven back to the bus by midges.



Moira waits for the mist to lift off the bealach. Moira and Sally reached the bealach at the back of the corrie in time to see the ghostly figures of Vi, Rosie and Ian pass in the mist. As the mist lifted, Frank, Gilbert and Jim Henderson arrived to encourage Moira and Sally on to nearby Sgurr na Ceannaichean, but as the cloud was clearly going to lower again, the temptation was refused and Moira and Sally descended by a ridge. The rain came on

as small groups converged on the minibus. Kris and Bill were already there, and disaster 3 had occurred. The sliding door on the side of the bus had jammed and would not open. No one had seen David and Lizetta since late morning. We waited and waited with no sign of them. We were about to return to Gerry's to drop off the bulk of the party when they were spied coming from the opposite direction. Jim, with binoculars, gave a running commentary on progress over the bog for the benefit of the rest, who could not see through steamed up windows. David and Lizetta had done Moruisg, looked into Moira and Sally's corrie, decided they did not like the look of it, and gone back over Moruisg to come off a ridge the other side.

Tuesday was the day for walking from the hostel. Kris took the minibus into Inverness for repair and refuelling. David and Lizetta, feeling the strains of Moruisg, went along for the ride, as did Bill. Five enthusiasts did Sgurr Coinnich and Sgurr a' Chaorachain, while Moira, Frank and Sally climbed Sgurr na Feartaig across the river from the hostel.



Bridge to Sgurr na Feartaig

The enthusiasts boasted their bridge was superior, as it had no planks!

The day was fine and warm. Targets were achieved and views admired. Frank tripped over a tree root coming down through the woods and fell

heavily on one shoulder. Disaster 4, it troubled him for the rest of the week.



Sgurr Coinnich and Sgurr a' Chaorachain from Sgurr na Feartaig

With the door of our red minibus repaired, we were ready to move on to Ullapool on Wednesday. The enthusiasts ascended Fionn Bhein from Achnasheen while the idler group had morning coffee at the Hotel and admired the sights. The coffee and hot chocolate was fine, entertainment provided by a visiting coach tour, but after a couple of hours watching two families of ducklings on a pond from the minibus in intermittent rain, boredom set in. After a round of *Minister's Cat*, the café behind a gift shop, though pricey, was deemed a preferable place to wait. When the others arrived back, we learnt a *slight* mis-navigation in the cloud had taken them off their intended route, hence the late return (disaster 5). After tea, coffee and a fine piece, we were ready to drive to Ullapool Youth Hostel, surveying the Fannaichs on the way.



Ullapool bay in the evening

The metropolis of Ullapool had a supermarket, allowing restocking of food supplies, and many eateries for those not wishing to cook. Frank caught a lovely alpine glow over the bay - Sally's is not quite so good.

Thursday was intermittently wet and decidedly windy, with white horses on the sea outside the hostel. Up to four Fannaichs could be ascended that day, but with cloud right down it was a case of walking up the valley, and deciding what to do later. Kris wisely stayed in the minibus to read. Bill, David and Lizetta walked as far as Loch a' Bhraoin in a dry interval. The path up the valley was very boggy, but we were accustomed to that. Intentions of reaching the bealach waned as rain increased. Jim, Ian and Gilbert, found by the others eating elevenses/lunch in the remains of a house not marked on the map, decided to go on and completed Sgurr nan Clach Geala and Meall a' Chrasgaidh. The rest crossed the river to go down a path marked on the map on the other side. It was not quite as boggy as the first, but feet were wet already. With relief, a bridge over the river was found where the map said.



Bill and David greet wet returners

Apart from the weather, there was no disaster this day, though as we watched a Belgian car drive off on the wrong side of the road, everybody expected one.

The forecast for Friday was dry. Hooray! David, Lizetta, Kris and Bill were dropped near Corrieshalloch gorge to take a lower route to Lochdrum where the bus would be parked. As the rest drove away, we saw a sign for a relocated path. Would this prove a disaster for the four? No, Kris dealt successfully with the woman at the house, who let them past on the original route. The relocated version would have been shorter but muddier. The cloud was above the summits, so Moira and Sally decided to make a major effort to conquer at least one Munro, having failed to do so every other day. This they did, reaching the summit of Beinn Liath Mhór Fannaich, but left the enthusiasts (except Jim who was feeling the strain

of daily Munro-bagging) to cross a col to Sgurr Mór.



Ian, Frank, Rosie and Moira on Beinn Liath Mhór Fannaich

On the way down, Sally found a nest of cold eggs, probably ptarmigan from last year. A well marked one was selected, carefully wrapped in a woolly hat and put in the now empty piece box. The ground was boggy again, so there were many frogs. Back in Ullapool, Vi and Rosie tested out a hotel for the group meal next day. Rosemary Kelly joined us, having driven from Aberdeen for a walk next day. Sorting the piece box, Sally found the egg and laid it carefully on a table. Someone nudged the table, and the egg rolled on to the floor and smashed - disaster 6! The hostel had filled for the start of the Spring Bank Holiday weekend, and earwigging on a group of Glasgow women psychoanalysing themselves was fascinating.

Saturday's walk was a coastal route, recommended by Cameron McNeish, so that Rosemary could join the rest, who were fed up of slogging up boggy hills. Stac Pollaidh was an option, but the rain poured down as we drove past, ruling it out. When we reached the seaside, it was still raining.



There is a dry way through here somewhere!
Rosemary with guides

Some set off regardless along the cliff path to complete the walk in an anticlockwise direction. The less enthusiastic set off clockwise with the road section first - at least it would be drier underfoot. Bill and Kris, the least enthusiastic, stayed in the minibus. Kris had a good book. After a while the rain eased off, and the clouds lifted to reveal good views of surrounding hills and the Summer Isles. The two groups passed on opposite sides of a small valley, waved, and carried on.

They returned to the minibus at about the same time with feet very wet from the boggy terrain. The name of Cameron McNeish was being muttered very darkly by some. But here was a real disaster. Bill had slipped while out of the minibus for essential purposes, and hurt his arm. He was shivering, so it was into the bus as fast as possible to get the doors shut and the engine going to warm him up. Back at the hostel, it was hard to tell whether it was a break or a bad bruise, but it was clearly painful when Bill moved his arm. He was given a scarf to use as a sling, and a makeshift meal was prepared for him since he didn't feel up to joining the rest for the traditional meal out on the last night.

On Sunday morning, Bill's arm was no better. We helped him dress and pack, and made his breakfast. Once the gear was loaded in the van, we set off for home, and called at Strathpeffer for lunch, but except for a bike shop, Strathpeffer was closed for The Sabbath (disaster 8), so it was on to Brodie again, before dropping everyone off at home. Bill's gear was carried up to his flat for him, but he said he would manage after that. It turned out he had broken his arm close to the shoulder, so he was strapped up and given a more efficient sling.

And what about Gerry's hostel? We were expecting an enigmatic warden, and so he is, but can he build a fire! He spends ten to fifteen minutes carefully arranging paper, card, sticks and logs in the fireplace before lighting it to produce a hot log fire that burns for a couple of hours. Since we were the only ones in after the first night, we could consume the drams normally partaken in the minibus comfortably seated round a log fire. Luxury! We were warned the kitchen was small, and so it is. The maximum that can work in it together is four, so we took turns and coped. The drying room is very efficient. Otherwise, the place is basic but has all one needs, including midge

screens and midge-collecting lights for summer evenings.

More Munroes have been bagged on other Week's Hikes, and the weather could have been drier... but we enjoyed the week, apart from Bill's arm. That was a disaster. Sally

ANOTHER CLUB AT GERRY'S

On 15-17 August 2003 there was a meet at Gerry's, reached after a 3.5-hour drive from Aberdeen and a final dash through midge swarms, where we were greeted by Gerard in inimitable style. "Oi, watch what you're doing with that Leki pole!" The hostel accommodates 24, 14 in bunk beds on the ground floor and 2 rooms of 5 beds each upstairs. The somewhat cramped kitchen is more than made up for by the hours of wonderment to be had admiring Gerard's unique, and sometimes recognisable, décor.

Evening entertainment was provided by Gerard himself, who after discovering that he had miscalculated how much water he would need for 24 guests, told everyone to leave. A quick call to alternative accommodation showed that it was either full or too expensive, and on the basis that the place was full and Gerard was not going to turf people out, we settled down to eat and watch proceedings. After much huffing and puffing, fetching of water in 5-gallon containers, getting everyone to re-park their cars and exchanging some snappish words with a combative lady, Gerard declared himself satisfied that he had enough water to continue in business.

PYRENEES TREKKING ON THE GR10

The GR10 is one of the classic long distance footpaths in Europe. GR stands for *Grande Randonnee (Big Walk)*. The entire length runs from Atlantic to Mediterranean, covering 866km (538 miles) through the French Pyrenees. To walk the whole route takes two months, but I chose to trek the spectacular 200km central section, including some of the best mountain scenery in Europe. This was a vehicle-supported trek, with bags driven from one valley to the next. Sometimes we stayed overnight in mountain refuges, and had to carry two or three days' necessities.

In July 2005, I flew to Toulouse in SE France to meet my fourteen fellow trekkers and two guides. They were a mixed bunch from Australia, Indonesia, The Emirates, California, Dublin,

Glasgow, Edinburgh and England. We were all strangers at first but great companions in the end.

The GR10 winds its way along the Pyrenees, taking in foothills and villages as well as high and wild areas, the daily change in scenery making this arguably *the* classic European long distance route.

The wooded lower hills were often covered in beech woods interspersed with oak, silver birch and hazel, home to wild boar and buzzard. The middle hills were mostly common land where villagers' livestock roamed free. Here we saw vultures and kites galore. But it was high among the glaciated peaks that the Pyrenees really came alive. Glacial action has created a rugged landscape of lakes, cirques and waterfalls. There was an abundance of wild flowers and butterflies even in late July. Marmots and chamois were seen on rocky outcrops and pastures, and the lonely lammergeyer and eagle were spotted soaring above higher peaks - a truly magical area.



Lac d'Aubert in Neouvielle National Park

The GR10 passes some of the Pyrenees' most famous scenic highlights. We trekked beneath the north face of the 3219m high Vignemale (highest peak in the French Pyrenees) and its glacier, and marvelled at the 430m high *Grande Cascade* waterfall, and the huge limestone walls of the Cirque de Gavarnie (largest of its kind in Europe). In contrast, the journey among the abundant

glacial lakes of the Parc National de Neouvielle was a magical two-day through-walk with *wild camps* - cold water and basic toilets.

This was a tough trek, but the long days (9-12 hours walking) rewarded us with breathtaking high mountain scenery. The good weather undoubtedly contributed to the enjoyment of the trek with blue sky and, on some days, blistering heat, almost too hot for strenuous trekking.

Would I do it again? You bet - you are only 'young' once!
Graham

THE WATTERIE

This being the 21st century, some companions were surprised at hole-in-the-floor toilets in mountain refuges, but it is not so long since many of our toilets (*watteries*) were not too different. A local poet puts the issue in perspective. Graham

The Watterie

Isn't aa thing fine an comfy nou?
Ther's even carpets i the lou,
Bit saxty year ago, an mair,
The watteries were caal an bare.

Nae fancy-colour'd toilet roll,
Nae bonny pot - a timmer hole,
Ye'd nae fin ony carpet ther,
Some crackit waxcloth on the flair.

A timmer sheddie, sax by fower,
An leakin like the Eiffel Tower,
Wi cracks whaar howlin wins blaa in,
The ruif, a rousty sheet o tin.

In WC for watter closet,
Ye spent nae time on your deposit,
For fegs! ther wis nae comfort ther,
Bit caal on bits we hid tae bare.

Foo watter closet? That beats me,
For ilka een wis dry, ye see,
The fancy pot - a stable pail,
I'll nae ging intil mare detail.

Upon the waa, hung wi a threed,
The People's Freen wis ther to read,
It hid been torn up intae squares,
Sae ther ye sat an said yer prayers.

The seat was affen roch an crackit,
An files ye fun yer hin-ee hackit,
Ye jerkit up yer drawers an sark,
Five meenits - ye were back at work.

Bit nou-a-days they sit for ages,
Hostin, turnin ower the pages,
A cosy place tae sit an smoke,
A saft seat easy on the dock.

A dinna want aal watteries back
But Lord be here, the time they tak,
Ther must be 'ours an 'ours lost nou,
Wi gettin fowk a comfy lou.

THE TRADEGY OF BARRIE AND BAIRD

One option on our Linn of Dee outing was Corrour Bothy. This venue always reminds me of a tragic story my late father told me, about a disaster that befell two young climbers in 1927. I kept a copy of W D Bernard's article (Scots Magazine February 1980), and have edited his words to relate the tale concisely.

"Little more than 50 years have passed since Hugh Barrie and Thomas Baird lost their lives under tragic circumstances in the Cairngorms. This event caused something of a sensation in those days and aroused deep and widespread sympathy throughout the country. Theirs was an epic struggle for survival against overwhelming odds - the elements at their wildest on one of the highest and most exposed parts of the Cairngorm massif. It was a great battle, bravely fought and sadly lost.

"Apart from keepers, shepherds, and those whose occupation and way of life necessitated them frequenting the hills, comparatively few people indulged in hillwalking during the earlier years of the century. Since the late 1950's, however, this form of outdoor activity has become widely recognised as a sport in its own right and countless people now make for the hills at all seasons.

"Inevitably, accidents occur. People go improperly clad, with no idea of prevailing conditions or how to act in an emergency. It is not surprising that the hills, particularly the Cairngorms, take a heavy toll of life.

"While these tragedies are as harrowing as that of Barrie and Baird, they are so commonplace as to evoke little notice from the public, but at that time, the Barrie and Baird tragedy had a profound

impact on public imagination, becoming tinged with romance.

"Hugh Barrie and Thomas Baird, graduates of Glasgow University, arrived in Aviemore on Wednesday 28 December 1927, to spend a few days climbing the Cairngorms. A brief previous visit had whetted their appetite to spend longer in such grand surroundings and their ambition seemed about to be realised. In Aviemore, they made a number of purchases, then set about finding suitable cheap accommodation. Luck was with them and they found Mr and Mrs McKenzie's small croft at Whitewell a few miles SE of Aviemore. That evening they outlined their plans to their hosts. They intended to set out early in the morning for Corroul Bothy in the Lairig Ghru, use it as a base for a number of climbs, and return in a few days by Glen Einich. The McKenzies were most unhappy at the thought of two young men, with comparatively little experience of the mountains undertaking such a program in mid-winter, particularly as the weather was unsettled at the time and seemed likely to remain so for some days. They did their utmost to dissuade them from setting off, but to no avail. On the morning of 29 December, Barrie and Baird left the house on the journey destined to end in tragedy.

"The traverse of the remote Lairig Ghru pass is the finest and most exciting hillwalking expedition in Scotland. It was into this great wilderness of boulder and mountain that Barrie and Baird walked soon after leaving Whitewell. Despite a fair amount of snow in the Lairig, they made good progress, arriving at Corroul without mishap well before dark. After a comfortable night, they set out early next morning to climb Devil's Point using the path uphill behind the bothy, leading to a ridge giving easy access to the summit. In late afternoon, they returned to the bothy, and after eating, settled down to plan a more extended outing for the next day. These plans were made in vain, for during the night, there was a dramatic change in the weather, and they were soon experiencing the full force of a winter storm in the very heart of the Cairngorms. These mountains are very exposed to the cold, snow-bearing winds which blow from the north and east, and in consequence, receive abnormally heavy falls of snow. In winter, storms of great severity can rage, conditions on the higher ground becoming sub-Arctic with temperatures as low as -20°F . Hurricane-force winds can blow up suddenly, making it impossible to stand upright, with

blizzards making it difficult to breathe and impossible to see any distance ahead.

"The severe blizzard continued to rage with unabated fury throughout the following day while the temperature dropped steadily. By nightfall, a severe frost set in and conditions became truly Arctic. Their boots froze, and they had to sit on them for a prolonged period until they thawed out sufficiently to be worn. Their Primus stove failed to function. Their food was running dangerously low, with no means of restocking. Their situation was becoming desperate. They must have realised that with conditions steadily deteriorating, their one chance of survival was to leave the bothy at daybreak, regardless of weather.

"It is easy to imagine the thoughts tormenting them during the tedious day of confinement at the bothy. Face to face with the greatest crisis of their lives, their confidence in their own ability to control their destiny must have rapidly melted away as they realised the frailty of man when pitted against the remorseless fury of Nature in her wildest mood. How bitterly they must have regretted their failure to accept the McKenzies' advice.

"On Sunday, New Year's Day, they awoke to a bright, sunny morning, with the surrounding tops standing out clearly against an azure blue sky. The forecast was not good however: a red sky towards the east, and great storm clouds massing ominously on the horizon, heralded by another blizzard. Perhaps these signs passed unnoticed for by 8 o'clock they were on their way.

"The route they planned to follow, was to make the ascent to the ridge behind Corroul Bothy, and crossing over Cairntoul, strike the summit plateau of Braeriach, thence making the descent into Glen Einich. This walk from Corroul to Braeriach has been described as the finest high-level 3.5 mile walk in the UK, and can be accomplished under reasonable conditions in around 2 or 3 hours.

"About 10 o'clock the storm broke. The two climbers would have reached the higher ground by this time and would therefore be completely exposed to merciless hurricane-force winds and blinding snow. The movements of the two men up to this point were briefly recorded by Baird in his diary, though the last entries were scarcely legible, no doubt due to numbed fingers unable to control the pencil. From the time of their arrival

on Braeriach, we can only surmise what happened. They certainly must have been reduced to crawling, and when descending Coire Bogha-cloiche immediately the north of Coire Dhondail, they lost contact with one another due to darkness, the storm, or a glissade. Had they been able to keep together, they might well have reached the safety of the Upper Bothy, near the head of Glen Einich. The movements of the two men since their departure from Corroul can only be surmised, but certain clues cast light upon their progress. It would have been natural for them to descend from the summit of Braeriach into Coire Dhondail rather into Coire Bogha-cloiche, which is much more precipitous. The fact that their rucksacks were found in Coire Bogha-cloiche, at about 3000ft suggests they came down by the more hazardous route.

"Baird reached the foot of Braeriach near the bothy before he stumbled in deep snow, bruised, battered and completely exhausted, never to rise again. He was in a most pitiable condition, the skin of his left hand completely worn off, several fingers badly lacerated, his right knee injured. His breeches were badly torn at the knees, suggesting had been forced to crawl a considerable distance. By cruel coincidence, the storm played itself out about the very time Baird fell and a great calm fell over the glen. He was found next day by two men out for a leisurely walk up Glen Einich. They carried him the short distance to the bothy before one returned to Coylum Bridge for the police and doctor. The news of Baird's death was widely reported, but the main talking point now was the whereabouts of Hugh Barrie. Was he still alive or had he perished in the same way as his friend? A large search party gathered in Glen Einich the next day to search for the missing climber, a great effort which proved fruitless due to deteriorating weather. Another search party from Braemar was turned back by bad weather before they could reach Corroul Bothy. It was now clear that Barrie must be dead. No one could survive so long in such conditions. It was a case of waiting until winter snows melted.

"On 24 March while walking in Coire Bogha-cloiche, a Rothiemurchus estate stalker found the rucksacks of the two men lying about 300ft apart. This discovery pointed to the fact that Barrie was probably somewhere between the corrie and the foot of the mountain. Next day, a search party's Labrador retriever found Barrie in a peat-hag where he had fallen. The body was in a wonderful

state of preservation despite the passage of almost 3 months.

"After keeping the world waiting, the mountain had at last yielded up its secret and revealed the mystery of the lost climber.

"During the legal process of settling his affairs, a sheet of paper with a poem in the deceased's hand was found expressing Barrie's wishes for a last resting place. Here the element of romance enters the story.

*When I am dead
And the strange spark of life that in me lies
Is fled to join the great white core of life
That surely flames beyond eternities,
And all I ever thought of as myself
Is smouldering to dust and cold dead ash,
This pride of nerve and muscle - merest dross,
This joy of brain and eye touch but trash.
Bury me not, I pray thee,
In the dark earth where comes not any ray
Of light or warmth or aught that made life dear,
But take my whitened bones far, far away
Out of the hum and turmoil of the town.
Find me a windswept boulder for a bier
And on it lay me down,
Where far beneath drops sheer the rocky ridge
Down to the gloomy valley, and the streams
Fall foaming white against the black beetling rocks,
Where some tall peak, defiant, steadfast, mocks
The passing gods; and all the ways of men
forgotten.
So may I know
Even in death that comes to everything
The silent swish of the hurrying snow,
The lash of the rain, the savage bellowing
Of stags, the bitter-sweet, knife-edged embrace
Of the rushing wind: and still the tremulous dawn
Will touch the eyeless sockets of my face,
And I shall see the sunset and anon
Shall know the velvet kindness of the night,
And see the stars.*

"A large burial cairn can be seen near Whitewell on which the inscription reads:

In proud and affectionate memory of Hugh Alexander Barrie M.A and Thomas Baird M.A. who lost their lives on 2 January 1928, while climbing these hills.

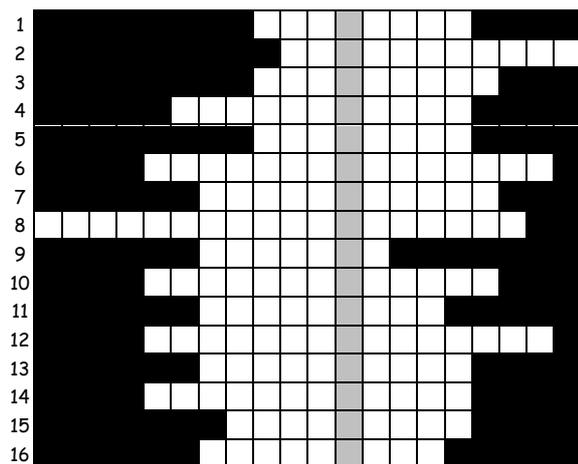
"The tragedy of Barrie and Baird demands our sympathy, but also great admiration. It is hard to comprehend the awful ordeal they endured. They

certainly passed through Nature's Hell, and in so doing, displayed the admirable qualities of courage, love of adventure, endurance and perseverance.

"I hope that the retelling of this tale will serve to keep the memory of two valiant hearts evergreen."

CROSSWORD

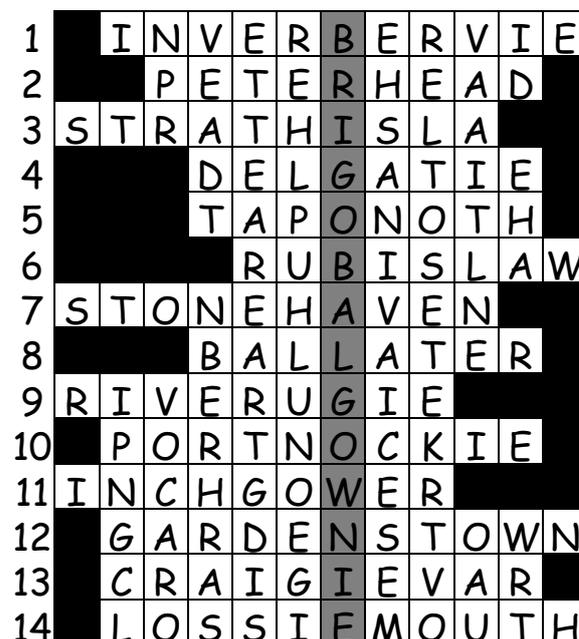
Answer the 16 clues below to reveal a local landmark in the grey shaded area (all answers are in the Cairngorms).
Graham



1. Vast stretch of peaty moors stretching from the Dorback Hills to Glen Avon.
2. This means *Yellow Bog Stream*.
3. Highest hill on the north side of Glen Clova.
4. This *Naked-Sided* glen lies between Glen Esk and Glen Clova.
5. Has a vitrified iron-age fort on its flat summit.
6. Here stands the highest continuous rock face in the Cairngorms.
7. These hills were known locally as *Monadh an Fharaidh*.
8. One of the most remarkable rock features to be seen above the Shelter Stone.
9. Last place in Aberdeenshire where Gaelic held out as everyday speech until about 1930.
10. Means *Glen of the Little Pinewood*.
11. At 4241ft, this mountain is by far the sharpest of the high Cairngorms.
12. This *Green* or *Delightful Valley* runs from Loch nan Eun to Glen Shee.
13. This *Red Hill* lies NE of Bruar Lodge.
14. This *Marshy Glen* is hemmed in between Feshie and Lairig Ghru.
15. This through route goes from Aboyne to Tarfside in Glen Esk.
16. The *Great Moss* of the Cairngorms.

SPRING CROSSWORD SOLUTION

Answer the 14 clues below to reveal a local landmark in the grey shaded area.
Graham



1. Once famous for its linen industry, but now better known for its chipper.
2. The *Blue Toon*.
3. Established in 1786, near Keith, it regards itself as the oldest Highland distillery.
4. This castle, near Turriff, was the home of the Hay family for 700 years.
5. Famous for the vitrified fort on its summit.
6. Rumoured to have been the deepest man-made hole in Europe.
7. *Steenhive*.
8. Western terminus of the Deeside Line.
9. Flows into the North Sea at Peterhead.
10. See the Bow Fiddle Rock here.
11. Buckie's local distillery.
12. Known in Grampian as *Gamrie*.
13. 7km south of Alford, this castle was completed in 1626.
14. Home of Scotland's Royal Naval Air Station.