

Nor' West News



The NeWSletter of the Nor' West Sgurramblers

Issue No. 233 – January 2008



SALUTATIONS

This is an experimental multi-coloured version of the NeWSletter. We thought that it was about time we tried to exploit more widely the presentational and editorial facilities of the modern computer. But we were unsure how best to go about this.

The version you are reading is only an experiment and whether we continue with it, adopt a different approach or revert to the old black & white version is up to you. Even if you think that the new approach is justifiable in principle, you may be able to identify a better layout, a better format, better colours, or a font (type, size, spacing, etc) which you would find easier to read.

Please let a member of the Committee know what you think about the need to give the NeWSletter a fresh appearance and about better ways to achieve that objective.

You will see that we have also included some sample colour photographs and issued the document in pdf format. If you would like to see such photos in future issues, we will need your help in finding suitable examples! But, unfortunately, colour photos make a larger demand on memory than can be accommodated in attachments to e-mails unless the whole document is converted into pdf format. So, subject to you comments, we would need to transmit further issues of the NeWSletter in that format if colour photos are to be included. Do you think this is a good or a bad idea?



MEET REPORTS

“GO” NORTH “YOUNG MAN..”: Meet No 252 (Friday 7 - Wednesday 12 September 2007)



The original plan was to hold this Meet near Newtonmore. But, by the time the “Final Booking Date” came, only Colin Bradley had indicated any interest and his preference was for somewhere in the Western Highlands. After some unsuccessful attempts at searching for accommodation on the Internet, Colin managed to find a cottage in Garve where the available dates tied in with his

need to fly from Liverpool to Inverness. So it was at 12 o'clock on a sunny Friday afternoon that Colin met me at Inverness railway station. It was a pity we would not have time to do a walk that our day as our priority had to be a shopping expedition at the branch of Morrison's which is conveniently situated next to the railway station.

When we arrived at Garve we were met by the owner of the cottage. She showed us where everything was but (until Colin reminded her) forgot to ask how we were to pay the money we owed her. The facilities of the cottage were luxury compared to those of the youth hostels and bunkhouses we normally frequent. There was a kitchen and dining area, a living room with Sky TV, two bedrooms and a bathroom. All this - along with central heating - meant that we should have a comfortable stay.

Our plan for the Saturday was to climb either An Riabhachan (a Munro on Colin's list of quality hills) or An Sidhean (on my list of Corbetts still to do). The



approach to these hills was to be from Glen Strathfarrar, which meant obtaining permission (from the keeper of the locked gate) to take our car along the glen. The keeper turned out to be a friendly and co-operative woman who took note of the car registration number and provided us with a pass. We were pleased to find out that the latest return time was 7pm, which we hoped would give us enough time to climb a hill. On the drive up the glen

we saw the gamekeeper and stopped to ask if our intended hills would be free of stalking. He confirmed that no stalking would be taking place on An Riabhachan but could not advise about An Sidhean as this was on a different estate. So we drove on to the Loch Monar dam where we could see that the hills to the North, including An Sidhean, were shrouded in dark, gloomy cloud. Luckily, the gate to the track over the dam was open; so we were able to drive across and park a mile further along the glen. Although the cloud was well down on An Riabhachan, there was a sufficient glimmer of brightness to make us decide that it would be our hill for the day.

What with the drive from Garve and slow progress along the glen, it was 10.45 when we started our walk. We followed a good path alongside the Uisge Misgeach and then a stalkers' path up to Loch Beag and Loch Mor. From the map the two lochs enclosed in a coire looked likely to be a picturesque place to stop for lunch and we found a spot giving a view down to Loch Mor. But the slopes above us were covered in cloud which would rise slightly, only to fall again. So we decided to go on as far as the bealach to see if conditions improved, Colin, who was ahead of me, caught a glimpse of a fox - a rare sight in the Scottish hills - but, by the time he had told me, it had disappeared. When we reached the bealach, the cloud lifted briefly but only sufficiently to reveal the slopes of Sgurr na Lapaich to our left. We headed up the East ridge of An Riabhachan and, to our surprise, this turned out to be an interesting and well-defined ridge. This was some compensation for the lack of views. Mindful of the time, we pressed on to the summit which we reached at 3 o'clock.



We retraced our steps down to the bealach and then descended to the lochs. By then it was drizzling, so we were glad when we picked up the stalkers' path again and dropped below cloud level. Conditions began to improve: there were breaks in the clouds and brief glimpses of the sun, though the cloud still sat on the tops of the hills.

We were back at the car at 5.45, in comfortable time to get back along the glen before the 7 o'clock deadline.

The forecast for the Sunday was that there would be rain in the afternoon. Therefore, what we wanted was an early start and a short hill walk. Bac an Eich – a Corbett above Inverchoran – fitted this description. This hill is situated in deer-stalking country with stalkers' paths right round it. And, as there is normally no stalking on a Sunday, it was a good day to tackle it. We parked at Inverchoran and then walked along a good path in Gleann Chorainn. The path crosses over the river in the glen and this can present difficulties if there has been a lot of rain. But this time there was no problem in crossing. We made our way through a forest for a short while before reaching open hillside. Then it was a steady climb up onto the ridge from where we got a view of the fine features of the hill. Steep slopes on the East side plunged down to Loch Toll Lochain below – in contrast to the more gentle slopes on the West side of the hill.



At the top we were greeted by a strong wind. The cloud level was above the summit but the tops of the Strathfarrar Four to the South were obscured by cloud. So, with little reason to linger at the summit, we headed down the Northwest ridge. Our aim, as suggested by the SMC Corbetts guide, was to make it a circular walk rather than simply going back the way we had come up. What the book fails to mention is that this line of descent takes you into a deep gorge and you have to clamber up a steep heathery slope to get out. Luckily, over the years successive walkers have chosen roughly the same route of escape: so there was a faint path. Future Corbetteers be warned!

After the challenging descent of the hill we soon reached a good path running alongside the River Meig. We stopped for lunch opposite the impressive Scardroy Lodge which was on the other side of the river. It would be a lovely spot if the sun had been out: but the skies were grey and overcast, and it looked as if it might rain. So we continued down to and alongside Loch Beannacharain, into a forest, and then back to our starting point at Inverchoran. It had been an interesting and varied walk – but longer than expected – and it had stayed dry apart from the occasional drizzle.

Better weather was forecast for the Monday, so our plan was to drive to



Achnashellach and then climb Sgurr Choinnich and Sgurr a' Chaorachain. These are two fine Munros that Colin had been keen to climb for a long time – but only in good weather! Thanks to road improvements in recent years, we enjoyed a quick drive from Garve to Achnashellach and parked at the Achnashellach Forest car park. The midges were out in force: so we hurried to put on our boots and made a speedy start. We followed a good track running alongside the Allt a' Chonais and soon had good views looking over towards

Fuar Tholl, Sgorr Ruadh and Beinn Liath Mhor. Not that we cared to linger to admire the view and any stop meant being surrounded by midges. Soon we reached the wire bridge across the Allt a' Chonais. This bridge has only two rather loose wires, one to edge your boots sideways along and one to cling onto. The river was too high to consider wading across: so the bridge was the only option. I went first and made the mistake of trying to stand upright which caused me to lose my balance. But I recovered quickly and, leaning slightly forward, reached the other side feeling rather disconcerted

by the swaying motion of the wires. Once I was safely across, Colin followed without any great difficulty: but we were both glad that we would not have to cross that bridge again on the way back.

We headed for the Bealach Bhearnais and, from the bealach, worked our way up the West ridge of Sgurr Choinnich. Half way up Colin met an overweight American



who was sitting down, admiring the views. Whilst waiting for me to catch him up, Colin talked to the American and learnt that he was not going any further due to a problem with his knee. Then we continued upwards, enjoying the steep ascent which went over some rocky steps. Just before reaching the summit we found a sheltered spot for lunch – not that there was much wind but with a bit of shelter, it was rather pleasant basking in the sun which appeared, disappeared and re-appeared from behind big white clouds.

We had great views over to the pointed summit of Bidein a' Choire Sheasgaich and to its neighbour Lurg Mhor - both very isolated Munros which we were pleased to have climbed in the past.

We did not stay long before climbing to the summit of Sgurr Choinnich, making a steep descent to the bealach below Sgurr a' Chaorachain and then ascending to its summit. There is only one kilometre between the two summits but I think that most walkers who have made their way up down and up between them would agree with them being classified as two separate Munros. Along the ridge, we could see Bidein an Eoin Deirg,



a very fine Munro Top, shaped like a giant fang. The natural inclination on seeing such a sharp peak is to go on to climb it. This was exactly what Colin and I had intended to do. From Sgurr a' Chaorachain' summit it seemed that there would be very little effort involved but a little further on it became apparent that a long gradual descent would be followed by a steep ascent to the top of Bidein an Eoin Dearg. Colin felt that it would be best to turn back as doing too much that day might spoil what we chose to do next day. It

would certainly have added a couple of miles to an already long day: so, with some regret, we returned to the top of Sgurr a' Chaorachain.

Ideally we wanted to head directly North from this point and then work our way back down to the glen we had come along at the start of the day. Steep slopes and crags made this problematic and we had to follow the North-easterly ridge before finding a suitable route of descent. Back at the car we were attacked by the midges again but it did not detract from an enjoyable day's walk on two fine Munros.

The weather forecast for the Tuesday was uninspiring. If anything, it seemed likely to be better towards the East. Not wanting to drive all the way to the Cairngorms, the best option would be to climb Ben Wyvis. This was not on Colin's list of interesting hills and it was unlikely that we would get any view from the top. My motivation for choosing Ben Wyvis was that it was on my list of hills to be climbed in my second round of the Munros. I had first climbed it in 1985 on a similar dull and cloudy day.

From the map the East side of Munro was the most interesting - containing both crags



and a loch – but this meant a long drive. So we agreed on the usual approach from the West, parking near Garbat and following a path alongside the Allt a' Bhealaich Mhoir through the forest. We soon reached the edge of the forest where we stopped for a short rest. As we were now on about the 1,000 ft contour, we had some views of nearby forests and smaller hills and of the Loch Glascarnoch dam near the Aultguish Inn further to the West. But we had

no views of the Munros to the West, which were covered in dark cloud. Even the top of Little Wyvis (764m) was in cloud. Our route rose steeply to An Caber (a Munro Top) and then along a gently rising ridge for 2 kilometres to the summit.

There was no one else at the summit when we arrived there and we were able to make ourselves comfortable and eat our lunch out of the wind in the stone shelter surrounding the trig point. An assortment of walkers arrived and left as we lunched. First were a couple in jeans and trainers: they were in good spirits and pleased to have made it to the top. In contrast, another couple arrived in good walking gear, consulted their GPS and wandered off in the direction of Tom a' Choinnich (another Top further along the ridge). Without even a view to be had of any of the corries on Ben Wyvis, we resigned ourselves to going back the way we had come. Just as we were approaching the edge of the forest we met a walker coming up the path. He was out for an afternoon stroll and only going as far as the bealach between Ben Wyvis and Little Wyvis. He seemed to be a local who knew these hills well and he told us how we could have returned by a different route, descending from Tom a' Choinich and then following a track through the forest to join the path we were on. I felt slightly annoyed to learn of this as I think that it is always better to return a different way if a suitable route is to be found. But I will know next time!

My thanks go to Colin who took on the role of meet organiser admirably, arranging accommodation and providing food and transport.

David Douglas

THE “BLACK” MOUNTAINS: Meet No 253 (Friday 26 – Sunday 28 October 2007)

This year's AGM was held at Danywenallt in the Brecon Beacon's National Park. Not wanting to miss an opportunity to bag Marilyn on the way - we don't have any back home in Norfolk! I made an early start on the Friday morning. Browsing the list I had come across Sugar Loaf which I thought was a nice name and not too far off route. I

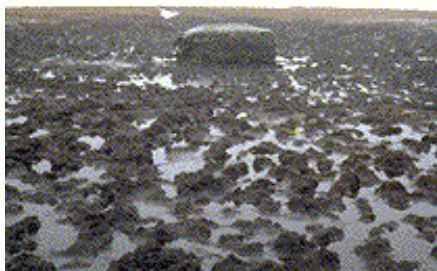


I found a parking place overlooking Abergavenny and, as it was only a couple of kilometres to the summit, I didn't bother to change into hill walking kit. I soon regretted this as it was very humid and somewhat sweaty walking in jeans. It was a simple walk through the bracken to the summit which was in cloud and smothered in small flies. So I made a speedy retreat from the trig point but had to stop to brush off a number of the annoying flies hitchhiking on me. On my way down I found a tarmac car park. I had parked my car on a grass area with other parked cars which I had thought

was the car park marked on the map. It was only a couple of hundred metres further along the road but had me checking my map. More map checking became essential in order to find the hostel which was hidden along a dirt road on the far side of a narrow road across a dam.

Paul Cassell was already at the hostel, having travelled down from the Lake District where he had been walking for a few days. As the hostel had no self-catering facilities and the nearest pub was some distance away, we booked a hostel meal. (I hope that it does not become one of David Cheesman's "norms" to select hostels with no self-catering facilities.) Mike Knight arrived later with Brian Billington and Chris Horne, and the hostel cooking staff rescheduled our meals so that we could eat together. The hostel sold bottled beer and the "Rhymney Dark" was rather nice. David Douglas arrived after we had eaten, having travelled intrepidly by public transport. David and Kerina Cheesman arrived after the rest of us had gone to bed, their journey having been extended because they had been disinclined to believe the hostel was over a dam and along a non-metalled road.

Next morning we discovered that the hostel had plumbing problems which meant all the hot taps in our dormitory block only delivered half a cupful of water every ten minutes. Mike wanted to do a walk close to the hostel so I pointed out Tor y Foel (a Marilyn nearby). Kerina and David decided to join him. I suggested Waun Fach for the rest of us as it the second highest hill in the area after Pen y Fan (which we had climbed on a previous AGM Meet.) It took a lot longer to drive to the foot of the hill than suggested by a brief glance at the map. There were extensive roadworks around Abergavenny, which made the town a virtual "no go" area. And, once past the town, the lanes we had to use were so narrow that we had to drive hard up against the hedgerow when an oncoming vehicle was encountered. My idea had been to place a car at each end of the ridge but, after a nerve-wracking drive to the relevant junction near the middle of the area of narrow lanes, Paul wasn't keen on braving the hedgerows a second time. In any case, it had taken us quite some time to drive that far and my idea was abandoned as it would take too long. So we took both cars to a car park at 500m near the top of the Gospel Pass.



It was not a very nice day. The cloud base was about 600m. And it threatened to rain. At this point Paul discovered that he had forgotten his boots but I had a second pair in the car: so he did not miss out on the ensuing walk in the clouds. From the car park we followed a path onto a hill called Lord Hereford's Knob or (in Welsh) Twmpa. As we approached the summit a topless man was pulling his trousers up after someone with him had taken his photo - strange things go on the hills in the Principality - and we moved swiftly on along the ridge not wanting to spoil other people's enjoyment of the area. Then we had to skirt round a group of motorcyclists and a herd of galloping ponies before we got to the ridge of Waun Fach itself. Diligently following an increasingly muddy path, we arrived at a large flat table-like rock on a very boggy and almost flat plateau. Here we spent a bit of time wandering about, peering into the clag, and wondering whether another part of the plateau might be higher. Paul thought he had spotted a fence which (logically) might lead to the true summit. But what had looked - at a distance - like a fence was in fact very tall tussock grass. So we retraced our steps to

the rock and then made our way back along the path to the cars - except for Brian who went around rather than over one on the tops on the ridge.

We were back at the hostel early enough to hold a very brief AGM and to watch a slide show before our evening meal - and before the room we used was taken over to watch the world cup rugby union semi final where England beat France 14-9.

The weather on the Sunday did not encourage a further damp foray into the local hills and we all went home.

Many thanks to David and Kerina for organising the Meet in another remote hostel.

Roger Reeves

FORTHCOMING MEETS

MEET No 255: Southern Highlands

Dates: Friday 23 - Monday 26 February 2008.

Area: Loch Lomond to Loch Tay.

Accommodation: Crianlarich youth hostel.

Programme: An opportunity to ascend the Munros and Corbetts in the vicinity of Crianlarich when they are snow-capped and at their most attractive.

Transport: By train or car. Picking up arrangements will be made once the participants, availability of cars and routes are known. If coming by car, please advise the organiser how many passengers you can take and your approximate route and time of journey.

Maps: OS 1:50,000 sheets Nos. 50, 51, 56 and 57.

Equipment: **Crampons and ice axe are likely to be essential.**

Food: To be provided by the Meet organiser, unless requested otherwise, from an evening meal on the Friday to breakfast on the Monday inclusive.

Bookings: To reserve a place, contact the Meet organiser and send him a deposit of **£25** (cheques to be payable to him in person). He will attempt to reserve accommodation in respect of all bookings received by **24 January**. The balance will be payable on the Meet.

Meet Organiser: Mike Ridley.

MEET No 256: Central Highlands

Dates: Thursday 20 - Tuesday 25 March 2008.

Area: Glen Nevis to Appin.

Accommodation: to be decided.

Programme: The area in and to the West of Glen Nevis contains some of the finest Munros and Corbetts in Scotland. In snow some of these mountains can be challenging but there are other straightforward options as well - something to satisfy every interest and aspiration.

Transport: By train or car. Picking up arrangements will be made once the participants, availability of cars and routes are known. If coming by car, please advise the organiser how many passengers you can take and your approximate route and time of journey.

Maps: OS 1:50,000 sheets Nos 33, 34, 40, 41, 42, 48, 49, 50 & 51.

Equipment: **Crampons and ice axe are likely to be essential.**

Food: To be provided by the Meet organiser, unless requested otherwise, from an evening meal on the Thursday to Tuesday breakfast inclusive.

Bookings: To reserve a place, contact the Meet organiser and send him a deposit of **£50** (cheques payable to him in person). He will attempt to reserve accommodation in respect of all bookings received by **14 February**. The balance of costs will be payable on the Meet.
Meet Organiser: Alan Johnson-Harvey.

MEET No 257: Torridon and Gairloch

Dates: Saturday 16 - Sunday 25 May 2008.

Area: The mountains ranges of Wester Ross.

Accommodation: Loch Lochy, Torridon & Carn Dearg youth hostels plus Gerry's hostel.

Programme: A round tour by way of the Great Glen to Torridon and Achnashellach.

Transport: By car. Picking up arrangements will be made once the participants, availability of cars and routes are known. If coming by car, please advise the organiser how many passengers you can take and your approximate route and time of journey.

Maps: OS 1:50,000 Nos 9, 10, 15, 16, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, 33, 34, 40 & 41.

Food: To be provided by the Meet organiser, unless requested otherwise, from the evening meal on the first Saturday to breakfast on the second Sunday inclusive.

Bookings: To reserve a place, please contact the Meet organiser and send him a deposit of **£80** (cheques payable to him in person). He will attempt to reserve accommodation in respect of all bookings received by **21 March**. The balance of costs will be payable on the Meet.

Meet Organiser: Roger Reeves.

MEMBERSHIP

Subscriptions for 2008 are now **due**.



Wishing you all



A MERRY CHRISTMAS!

A HAPPY HOGMANAY!



A PROSPEROUS & HEALTHY NEW YEAR!