



Nor' West News



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MEET REPORTS

A “BEER ON LOAN” NEW YEAR”: Meet No. 254 (Saturday 29 December 2007 – Wednesday 2 January 2008)

I'm not sure whether a Sgurramblers Hogmanay Meet has previously been held south of the border. But, as only David Douglas and myself were interested this time and neither of us had his own transport, the Lake District seemed an ideal venue, being conveniently located approximately the same distance from Edinburgh as from Stoke. A tentative plan had been made for us to meet at Penrith railway station but this proved impractical, my journey being on the West Coast Main Line and this a holiday period. So, having reached Penrith later than intended, I travelled alone by coach to Keswick then by local bus to Longthwaite in Borrowdale. En route there was little to see of the scenery on a damp dreary afternoon.



As I expected, David had arrived at the Youth Hostel an hour earlier: so, as soon as I had dumped my stuff in the dormitory, a pot of tea was on the go and we settled down to discuss our walking plans. One piece of good news was that David had heard from Chris Knowles who intended to join us on the hills the following day. The Youth Hostel was certainly very different from the last time I stayed there on a Sgurramblers AGM Meet many years ago, when we had been inflicted with a badly behaved youth orchestra and young ladies invading the male dorm in the middle of the night! This time there were small bedrooms and a lounge with open fire and very comfortable easy chairs most of which, unfortunately, were occupied throughout our stay by members of a large party from the Vale Royal and Knutsford Ramblers Group.

Sunday was still dull although, as only the highest fell tops were in cloud, our expectation was for a reasonable day. At least it wasn't raining continuously. Chris arrived quite early to find that we had only just finished our hostel breakfast so he had to wait a while before we were ready to leave. As Chris is collecting the “Wainwrights” we were quite happy to go along with his suggested route taking in High Raise and Ullscarf along

with a couple of lower tops he'd not been on before. From the hostel we walked along the road through Stonethwaite leading to a path beside Greenup Gill. Here we were joined by a chatty local whose first objective, Eagle Crag, was the same as ours. He struck uphill near the junction with Langstrath however whilst we, preferring to attack the hill from behind via a less scrubby route, continued up the valley for a further kilometre or so. The summit itself was a rocky knoll which we reached easily only to see our earlier companion already striding away southwards towards Sergeant's Crag, which was to be our second Wainwright of the day. The route from this to High Raise was pathless but easy going over gently rising boggy moorland.

High Raise proved to be our busiest top of the day, in fact the only summit on which we encountered other walkers. The windbreak already full, we sat by the cairn for a bite to eat and were joined by a couple, very obviously from Lancashire, the more talkative female half of which seemed vaguely familiar to me. When the wind flipped my map case over revealing my name on the back she said "Eee, ah thought it were Brian Billington.". I had been with Dot and Barry on a walking holiday in Norway's Jotunheimen mountains in 1982



but had had no contact with them since a weekend reunion later the same year. What an amazing coincidence! Lunch over we struck out northwards across dreary moorland to Ullscarf before some tricky navigation, aided by my Harvey's map, brought us to Dock Tarn and the steep path down a wooded slope back to Stonethwaite and on to the hostel where Chris joined us for tea and cake before heading homeward.



After an excellent hostel evening meal David and I were fortunate in securing a couple of armchairs by the fire in the common room, where we tried to sort out the logistics of our transfer to Derwentwater Hostel the following night. We were not at all keen on having to carry all our personal kit on our backs over the hills! Having confirmed that the hostel manager at Longthwaite was happy for us to leave our large rucksacks there until later in the day, our plan became clear. We would catch the morning bus to Grange, walk the ridge on the west of Borrowdale south to Dale Head and drop down to Honister. From there we could return to collect our luggage before taking the early evening bus down the valley again to the other hostel. Simple!

Next day all went according to plan, apart from the weather. Before we reached Manesty and the steady climb to the ridge we had to stop and don waterproofs which we wore for the rest of the day. At Hause Gate we turned south on an easy but badly eroded path over the summit of Maiden Moor, in mist now, and on to High Spy. Just before the summit cairn we were surprised by a group of teenage lads emerging from a gully on the right: the crags drop sheer there into the Newlands valley so I have no idea where they had come from. As they were heading our way we let them get in front but at the foot of the south ridge they turned and headed off back towards Newlands. David and I however faced a steep climb to Dale Head, our highest top of the day: so we took advantage of the shelter by Dale Head Tarn for a quick bite of lunch first. A quick check of the compass on our final fell set us on the path down to Honister Pass. After a short stretch of road, we followed a path to Seatoller and on through Johnny's Wood. There was a final sting in the tail as the route traversed a rocky section of river bank with a chain fitted for support. Shortly after we were back at the hostel. There was plenty of time without needing to rush for the bus but sadly we would miss the mulled wine due to be served at half past four!

It was already dark as we walked up the drive to Barrow House, better known these days as Derwentwater Youth Hostel. The building felt chilly inside but it turned out it to be



a good move with a much more friendly atmosphere than the other hostel which had been dominated by the one large group. And that night it was Hogmanay! After an enjoyable evening meal, including local trout, we were persuaded by the warden to take part in a New Year's Eve Quiz. David and I teamed up with four walkers from Cambridge. As well as general knowledge questions there was a picture round, identifying local landmarks and a series

of cryptic clues to Lake District place names. Hill walkers had a distinct advantage with such offerings as "Meteorological young sheep". The final round was a quiz sheet whose answers could be found within the building on pictures, posters and notices. One item - the last one our team needed to finish - proved particularly difficult to find until I spotted that a local outdoor equipment shop whose website address we had been asked for were sponsors of the MWIS weather forecast. We were done just in time as there was shameful business afoot. The same clue was holding up many teams and I noticed a couple of minutes later that some degenerate individual had scribbled out that vital piece of information. Time was up, however, and it turned out that our team were the winners and were awarded a box of chocolates! After taking a few each we shared the remainder with everyone else who had taken part.

By now midnight was approaching and glass of wine in hand (thanks, David) we trooped with everyone else down to the shores of Derwentwater to enjoy 14 different fireworks displays visible around the lake. We devoured a mince pie - courtesy of the hostel staff - and then went to bed.

The less said about the following day's walk the better. The rain only abated late on in the afternoon. We began beside the artificial cataract behind the house, created by a former owner by diverting the beck. From Ashness Bridge we headed for Walla Crag on whose summit we met a man with his young son for whom this was his first Wainwright. I was happy to take a photograph for them. We then trudged uphill onto cloud-topped Bleaberry Fell and southwards taking a convoluted course through peat hags to High Seat, quite naturally our high point for the day. From there we headed south again, below the cloud now to High Tove which we later discovered Wainwright had described as "the wettest fell in Lakeland". I couldn't possibly disagree with him. Descending westwards the scenery improved as we came in sight of the village of Watendlath below.

We had a bite to eat beside the tarn before we headed down the road to Ashness and back to the hostel. We became concerned during the evening meal about the absence of our former teammates from Cambridge, aware that they had talked of climbing Scafell Pike that day. It was after ten o'clock when they returned having lost their way in mist on the Corridor Route and finished up on Lingmell by mistake. One of them had taken a tumble in the dark and was badly shaken. Although very late the hostel staff helpfully produced a meal for them.



Our Meet was now at an end and the following morning we caught the bus into Keswick and whiled away a few minutes in a bookshop before taking the coach to Penrith. David's train to Edinburgh arrived on time. Mine, as always, was late. I'm grateful to David for arranging the bookings. The hostel food was quite excellent and good value, though one of us did feel it somewhat deficient in quantity.

And if you wondered what the title of this report was all about, I did mention the cryptic place name clues in the New Year's Eve Quiz. I'm sure you'll work it out.

Brian Billington

NEVER MIND THE WEATHER: Meet No. 255 (Friday 15 – Monday 18 February 2008)

While packing my rucksack on the Thursday night before the Meet, I envisaged a rather long journey by public transport to Crianlarich. So I was glad to receive a phone call from Mike Ridley, that evening, to say he would be travelling via Stirling and could give me a lift. Not only that, Mike was hopeful we could manage to fit in a half-days walk. This seemed like a good idea as the forecast for the Friday was sunshine and showers. Saturday looked like it might be a potential write-off, with persistent rain. Sunday looked more promising as the weather was expected to return to sunshine and showers.



Mike met me at Stirling and we were soon discussing the possibilities for an afternoon's walk. With no new Corbetts for me to do in the area and all Mike's target Munros being fairly lengthy days, we decided that Meall nan Tarmachan would be interesting and not too long a walk. However, when we got there and parked at the bottom of the hill, there was all the evidence of the showers and no evidence of the sunshine. From the comfort of Mike's car we surveyed the large snowflakes being blown about in the very strong wind and decided against Meall nan Tarmachan. Instead we drove further east to Kenmore where the weather proved to be considerably better, with no showers and even occasional glimpses of blue sky. Here we had to content ourselves with a forest walk. The best part of the walk was reaching the top of Drummond Hill (458m) where there is a clearing in the trees. From here we had a fine view of Schiehallion, its dark, rocky outcrops highlighted by a dusting of fresh snow.

Shortly after we arrived at Crianlarich youth hostel we were joined by a guest, Brian Lee. Brian had been a member of NWS in the early 1980s and was interested in renewing acquaintance. We were pleased to hear that he had used his time away from the group productively - completing all the Munros. Maybe NWS could provide him with new challenges?! We were expecting to be joined also by Paul Cassell but we received a message from the hostel manager that Paul was suffering from a heavy cold and had decided to retreat to his bed. This was a pity as Paul has been one of the regulars on the February Meet. That evening we had a hearty meal of spaghetti bolognaise and talked about our favourite pastime - climbing Munros.

The forecast had prepared us for the grim conditions we were to wake up to on the Saturday morning. Breakfast was a rather leisurely affair as we mulled over possibilities appropriate to the weather. Brian decided that he would head over to Arrochar where he might climb a Corbett or two. Mike and I, however, had no desire to climb any hills in the prevailing weather and decided to catch the train to Tyndrum to walk back along the West Highland Way. At least there would be large parts of the walk through forest which would afford some shelter from the wind and rain. Mike recalled having done the same walk on a wet February Meet some 25 years before. For me it was only a couple of years ago on a New Year's Meet. This section of the West Highland Way also has plenty of real history – going back to medieval times and Robert the Bruce - attached to it

Once we got to Tyndrum and were out in the open, it did not seem too bad. The south-westerly wind meant mild temperatures; and the rain was fairly light. But we were still glad that we had not ventured onto the hills which were covered in grey cloud. We did not meet any other walkers until we reached Kirkton Farm which is halfway between Tyndrum and Crianlarich. Four walkers had parked at the farm and looked as if they were going to attempt Ben Challum. A little further on a large group of about ten walkers passed us going the other way. They seemed more like West Highland Way hikers and were in good spirits (considering the conditions).

For the final half of the walk the path climbed up gradually through forest and there was little to be had in the way of views. At the highest point of the path there was a clearing in the trees and we stopped to make the most of the view down Glen Dochart. From this point the path descended steeply to Crianlarich and we were back at the hostel in good time



for lunch. Hopefully, the next day would be longer and more challenging. But this hope did not apply to the same extent to Brian who arrived back later that afternoon after climbing Stob Coire Creagach above Butterbridge. He had taken the short but steep ascent from Butterbridge and had come back the same way. From Brian's account, it certainly sounded as if it had been a challenging struggle to get to the top in the strong wind.

Sunday morning started with the weather we had been hoping for. Patches of blue sky could be spotted from the window of the hostel dining room, and this encouraged Mike and me to go for Stob a' Choire Odhair and Stob Ghabhar. Brian, in Corbett mode, intended to drive over to Arrochar again to climb The Brack and Ben Donich. As we drove towards Victoria Bridge we had a good view of Stob Ghabhar and could assess the snow conditions. There was not a lot of snow and we reckoned that it lay mainly above 3,000 feet. But we realised that we were looking at Stob Ghabhar from the south: the north side of the mountain could be a different proposition. So we decided to be safe and take our ice axes and crampons. When we arrived at the car park, there was only one other car there. A couple of walkers were finishing putting on their walking gear and were about to set off. They also had ice axes and would most likely be doing the same hill as us.

I have climbed Stob Ghabhar and Stob a' Choire Odhair a number of times, enjoying especially the approach along Glen Kinglass – a lovely remote glen leading all the way to Loch Etive. The expanse of the Glen Etive hills lay ahead, their tops covered in dark cloud. When we reached the small, corrugated iron climbing hut, we turned off to follow the track alongside the Allt Toaig. Soon we caught up with the two walkers who had set off before us. We were making good time but I could not keep up with Mike who was always 5 minutes ahead. After about a mile and a half we left the track and followed a very good stalkers' path up the ridge of Stob a' Choire Odhair. At the top a very strong westerly wind was blowing and I joined Mike who had found sheltered spot just below the summit. Here we had a bite to eat before braving the elements again, heading down to the bealach below Stob Ghabhar.

From this bealach it is a very steep climb up a stony slope onto the south ridge of Stob Ghabhar. Thankfully there was very little snow on this part of the route which is tough enough as it is. At the top of the slope I reached the narrow ridge called the Aonach Eagach. Mike was waiting for me there. Happily, this Aonach Eagach has none of the difficulties or challenges presented by its famous namesake in Glencoe: but it is an exhilarating ridge none the less. There was no snow lying on the crest of the ridge but, where it merged



with the south-east ridge of Stob Ghabhar, there were patches of soft snow which did not require use of crampons or ice axes. The summit of Stob Ghabhar was reached safely and the ironmongery had not been needed after all. Compared to the top of Stob a' Choire Odhair the wind was not as vicious. We were also getting some sunny spells: so it was pleasant to enough to stop and admire the views. The good weather seemed quite localised, however, as the Glencoe and Glen Etive hills remained covered in cloud.

The normal route of descent from this summit is simply to follow the south-east ridge. But this would mean crossing the Allt Toaig and, given the amount of water in the river, this might not have been too straightforward. So we decided that it would be better to head west to Sron a' Ghearrain (a Munro Top), descend the south ridge and follow a stalkers' path down to Clashgour. As we lost height the sunny spells disappeared and we got an occasional shower of rain. This fell as fresh snow higher up on Stob Ghabhar making it very picturesque. Back at the car we changed quickly before the next shower of rain came in. It had been a good day's walk; and it was a new Munro for Mike.

Mike headed off home that evening, leaving Brian and me to stay at Crianlarich overnight. That evening I enjoyed Brian's account of a good day on The Brack and Ben Donich, finding his way through the surrounding forest without any difficulties.

My thanks go to Mike for an enjoyable February Meet.

David Douglas

FORTHCOMING MEETS

MEET No 257: Torridon and Gairloch

Dates: Saturday 16 - Sunday 25 May 2008.

Area: The mountain 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 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: Although the last date for booking has passed, the Meet organiser may be able to assist those who belatedly wish to join this Meet. For further information contact the Meet organiser.

Meet Organiser: Roger Reeves.

MEET No 258: Newtonmore and Cannich

Dates: Friday 4 - Sunday 12 July 2008.

Area: The Western Highlands.

Accommodation: To be advised.

Programme: A two centre Meet designed for Corbett bagging but with plenty of Munros within easy reach..

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 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, 33, 34, 35, 40, 41 & 42.

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 **24 May**. The balance of costs will be payable on the Meet.

Meet Organiser: David Douglas

MEET No 259: Tour of the Jungfrau

Dates: August/September 2008 - detailed dates to be decided.

Area: Bernese Oberland, Switzerland.

Accommodation: Mountain huts and dortoirs.

Programme: Described by Kev Reynolds as relatively easy, this highly recommended trek follows paths (over passes and peaks) which form a circuit below the Jungfrau.

Transport: By no-frills airline, then by train and bus. All participants will need to pay airfares in full at an early date: the earlier the booking, the cheaper the fare. Please telephone the Meet organiser to obtain further details.

Maps: Details are in the Cicerone Guide titled "Tour of the Jungfrau Region".

Equipment: To be advised.

Food: Food will be purchased in mountain huts and dortoirs (or restaurants nearby). Food for consumption at lunchtime will be purchased in local stores where accessible.

Bookings: In order to complete all the necessary enquiries and confirm the viability of the proposed travel and accommodation arrangements, the Meet organiser needs the earliest possible indication of interest. Available accommodation is likely to be in heavy demand by those preparing for and engaged in the Jungfrau marathon

Meet Organiser: Chris Knowles

MEMBERSHIP

We welcome one new member – Brian Lee. His address and contact numbers will be circulated separately.