



Nor' West News



The NeWSletter of the Nor' West Sgurramblers

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BREAKING NEWS

WHEN IS MUNRO NOT A MUNRO ?

As widely reported in the Press and on numerous websites, the Munro Society has undertaken new measurements (using the most modern technology) of a number of Scottish hills whose heights had previously been measured as on the borderline between Munro and Corbett status. The results announced recently are that:

Sgurr a' Choire-bheithe	913.32m	remains a Corbett
Ben Vane	915.76m	remains a Munro
Beinn Teallach	914.60m	remains a Munro
Sgurr nan Ceannaichean	913.43m	is now a Corbett

These measurements are understood to have been endorsed by Ordnance Survey and the Scottish Mountaineering Council. The decisions may give rise to mixed feelings amongst those enraptured by the prospect or achievement of “completing” a round of the Munros only to find the list has changed. All have some merit - whether or not they are Munros. Sgurr a' Choire-bheithe would have been an attractive addition to the Munro Tables. Ben Vane has some interesting crags and is served by a foot-worn path which demands the walker's attention. Beinn Teallach is less interesting but its demotion would be mourned by many of those who have made the effort to walk over its grassy slopes.

But it is the demotion of Sgurr nan Ceannaichean (elevated to Munro status only in



1981) which has attracted nearly all the public comment. This is a hill which looks shapely only from near Gerry's Place and is more attractive as a position from which to photograph hills to its north and west. It is a relatively dull slog up the endless zig-zags on its southern face and its flat summit plateau has little other interest apart from deciding which of the cairns is the designated summit. Even so, it may remain a more attractive approach to Moruisg than the even duller northern approach to the latter. Those who have “completed” the

Munros may well feel a sense of “loss” now that it no longer has the magic status which ensnares Munro baggers and in which many of those who have climbed it could take the

associated sense of pride. For those who intent on Corbett bagging, the demotion will matter only if they have not already climbed it whilst Munro bagging.

MEET REPORTS

'They All Went Sailing Across the Lake ...': Meet No. 265 (Friday 3 – Sunday 12 July 2009)

I was due to pick up Brian Billington at 11.15 am at Lancaster station on the Friday but was somewhat late. This was due to the fact that, packing at the last minute (as usual), I didn't have enough clean socks to last the week and had to make an unscheduled visit to Matalan to buy new socks. For the first time in living memory Brian's train was on time: so he was waiting for me on the platform when I arrived.

The first night of the meet had been scheduled for the Great Glen Hostel, formerly Loch Lochy youth hostel. We were curious to see if many changes had been made since it's days as a youth hostel but found it largely unchanged apart from some repainting, a new kitchen floor and free internet usage. It was nice to see that the original wardens were still running the place. When we arrived Paul Cassell was busy in the kitchen cooking the evening meal. He had driven to Scotland on the Thursday and spent Friday bagging Creag nan Damh and Sgurr an Lochain on the South Cluanie ridge. David Douglas, Roger Reeves and Kay Miyake were drinking tea and making inroads into the meet's biscuit provisions. Kay was on the meet as a guest.



After a very enjoyable meal of pork chops cooked with grapes and strips of red peppers, we got down to the business of discussing the next day's walks. Roger, who had brought his bike with him, planned to climb Carn na Saobhaidhe - one of his remaining 25 or so Corbetts – on the east side of Loch Ness. Paul wanted to revisit Aonach Meadhoin, starting from the Cluanie Inn: David agreed to accompany him. I decided my own Corbett tally of about 100 needed a boost: so, having checked which hills were accessible from Loch Lochy, I plumped for Beinn Loinne. Brian and Kay decided to join me. So all five of us parked next to the Inn before setting out. It is quite a straightforward plod from the Inn onto the foot of the ridge leading to Beinn Loinne. The weather was quite well behaved,



and with high cloud we had good views of the nearby hills at the eastern end of the South Cluanie ridge and of the hills (on the other side of the loch) which Paul and David were climbing. As we gained height we were accompanied by the eerie cry of the Golden Plover which even I (something of an ornithological ignoramus) recognized. Not far from the summit we were treated to the sight of a small herd of deer moving across the skyline, a first for Kay who had only been hillwalking in Scotland on one previous occasion.

The summit having been attained I made a mental note to record it in my copy of the Corbett guide when I returned. Although I managed to climb all the Munros without making any written record of which ones I had climbed, I feared that, with the advancing years, my memory was becoming less and less perfect and might lead me to forget some of the less memorable Corbetts. After a straightforward return to the Cluanie Inn, we decided to take some refreshments in the aforementioned hostelry. While we were sitting outside in a state of post-Corbett relaxation, Paul and David arrived having climbed their target hill via the Bealach a' Choinich and Sgurr an Fhuairail. They duly joined us for post-walk drinks before we all set off to spend the Saturday night at Ratagan youth hostel which sits by Loch Duich affording striking views of the Five Sisters.



My plan for the second day's hillwalking was to visit Glen Arnisdale and bag two Corbetts - Beinn na h-Eaglaise and Beinn nan Caorach – next to Beinn Sgritheall. I was joined again by Brian and Kay. As Paul was feeling off colour, he took a day off to go shopping for food for the next few days of the meet. David decided to join us whilst Roger went off to Glen Elchaig to add Faochaig and Aonach Buidhe to his list of Corbetts climbed. Our day started with a steep drive over Mam Ratagan with glimpses of the Five Sisters ridge in my rear view mirror. On the drive to the parking place we passed a house, which Brian told us had once been occupied by Gavin Maxwell, author of the book “A Ring of Bright Water”.

We had agreed to climb our chosen hills by starting with Beinn nan Caorach. Reaching its south ridge, we were unsure whether to ascend it or take the longer gentler way up it's east ridge. I couldn't remember what the Corbett guidebook had recommended but we weren't in any particular hurry and agreed to go for the latter. The summit (achieved some time later) afforded fine views of Beinn Sgritheall in one direction and over Loch



Hourn in the other. A fairly short descent led to a bealach from which we climbed a fairly steep narrow ridge following a line of fence posts. We then had the choice of dropping down the south ridge or descending to the bealach between our next Corbett and Beinn Sgritheall. I remembered the former route as recommended by the Corbett guidebook, so we went that way. In retrospect the other route may have been preferable as the south ridge turned out to be steep, rough and tedious, with

a lengthy slope of tall bracken to negotiate near the glen floor. We lost sight of the diminutive Kay on several occasions as she disappeared amongst the bracken. We crossed over a bridge a short time later, where a sign advised us we would be crossing at our own risk. But, as it seemed in fairly good repair, we thought we would chance it rather than get closer to a sizeable herd of highland cattle, giving a rather fearsome looking bull a wide berth.

On the Monday we were moving on to stay at Ullapool youth hostel, some 80 miles distant. Paul's ailment had worsened and he wasn't fit to undertake any walking. Roger was cycling and walking solo again, this time into Attadale to bag Beinn Dronaig - a very remote Corbett. Brian wanted to climb Bidean an Eoin Dearg – one of the Munro Tops on his “to do” list. As I had not climbed two nearby Corbetts (Sgurr na Feartaig and Beinn Tharsuinn), it seemed an ideal chance for us both to do some bagging starting from the road near Craig. David agreed to accompany Brian on his walk, and Kay came with me. We made a prompt start in the morning as the drive to Craig and walk combined would make for a long day. The skies were overcast as we climbed steadily through the Achnashellach Forest, although for the moment it was dry. Kay and I parted company with Brian and

David where our route took us over the Allt a' Chonais. The map showed a bridge over the burn but it was in such a dilapidated state that we thought it would be better to boulder hop the burn. Happily, this was quite shallow, so we easily managed to cross dry shod.

The map shows a stalkers' path to the summit of Sgurr nan Feartaig nearby but it was not in evidence there and we ascended 100m or so before we located it. As we headed towards a line of crags on Sgurr na Feartaig's lower slopes we were accompanied by distant rolls of thunder which at this stage didn't seem too threatening. The rumbles were louder as we reached the cairn on the summit, although still nothing to worry about. The descent to the Bealach Bhearnais was steep and bouldery and we were relieved to reach the bottom where we had a belated lunch. By this stage it had started to spit with rain, although nothing too serious. Our way to Beinn Tharsuinn was by scaling a fairly steep, grassy rake, followed by an undulating ridge. By the time we reached the summit of this Corbett the thunder (which had been rumbling for the last few hours) increased in intensity: but, as there was no lightning in evidence, we felt fairly safe. But the rain had changed from spitting to torrential, and the breeze had changed to a strong wind. So, after a brief photo session, we quickly put on waterproofs and made our escape. Even then it was a while before we could lose much height as we had the ridge to traverse again. The wind had dropped by the time we returned to the Bealach Bhearnais but the rain was still torrential. Reaching the Allt a' Chonais we made a rather half-hearted attempt to find the bridge marked on the map. But no bridge was in evidence in the place where we would have expected it to have been. I assumed that it was no longer there, which seemed likely as I remembered it being rather dilapidated the last time I crossed it some years previously. The downpour during the last few hours had swollen the burn to such a degree that it was impossible to cross without our feet getting even wetter, although I might have managed it if I'd had gaiters and ski poles.



A short while after crossing the burn we met someone who had seen Brian and David earlier in the day. He told us that conditions had been pretty awful – obviously the centre of the storm had been much nearer to them. We had to wait for about an hour and a half for Brian and David and, when they arrived, they confirmed that the storm had been a cause of concern. They had made their way over Sgurr Coinnich and Sgurr a' Chaorachain to reach Bidean an Eoin Deirg in reasonable visibility but later in the afternoon they had been pinned down for about 20 minutes because of lightning. They had believed that the best thing to do was keep low and not move. In addition to having the lightning storm to contend with, they had had problems crossing the burn which had become even more swollen than when we had crossed it. As a result of the adverse weather conditions, it was very late in the evening before we reached the hostel where we devoured a belated meal. John Andrew and John Huddart had arrived earlier that day and departed next morning.



On the Tuesday morning Paul was still ill. The rest of us plumped for Arkle, a Corbett that neither Roger nor I had climbed. It was a long drive to Lone at the east end of Loch Stack – even longer for Brian, Kay and me, as I missed a right turn at one stage. When we reached the parking spot it was raining persistently, with no sign of any let up. This was the second time I'd parked there with the intention of climbing Arkle but had sat in the car and watched the rain instead. After a couple of hours of this, Kay decided to go for a short walk by herself. It looked as though Arkle would have to wait for another day.

Next day Paul was still too ill to attempt any hillwalking. Roger set out early for another long solo trek, this time taking a testing cross-country route to Beinn a' Chaisgein Mor. This Corbett shows its best features from the shores of Fionn Loch and is most easily bagged by walking in from Shenavall. But this means staying at the bothy overnight: so Roger decided to cycle in from Gruinard Bay, following the Landrover track on south side of the Gruinard river as far as its junction with the Allt Loch Ghiubhsachain. This proved to be far from easy going as the crags to the northeast of Cnoc na h-Earra go nearly down to the burn. Leaving his bike, he climbed diagonally up the very steep slopes, heading for the crags of Creag na Sgoinne, and eventually picked up the stalkers' path which took him down to the Allt Toll a' Mhadaidh and then up onto the northwest ridge of Beinn a' Chaisgein Mor. Here the gradient eased as he made his way to the summit of the Corbett. The return should have been easier but in cloud he veered too far northeast and found himself to the north of Loch Toll a' Mhadaidh. All in all it took him 8 hours 25 minutes.



The rest of us embarked on a long trek along the north shore of Loch a' Bhraoin into the Fisherfield Forest. During our drive to the Highlands Brian had told me that there were two Munro Tops that he wanted to climb - Mullach Coire Mhic Fhearchair's East Top and Sgurr Dubh on the southeast ridge of that Munro. These are some of the most remote hills in Scotland requiring long walk-ins. As it was some years since I'd been to this area I agreed to accompany him. David and Kay decided to join us. We parked on the A832 at the normal access point for the Fannichs and walked down the track to reach the north shore of Loch a' Bhraoin. Here the path seemed to have been much improved since I was there several years ago. It is a long way along the loch and, reaching its end at last, we rounded the lower slopes of Creag Rainich to be greeted by a good view of Sgurr Dubh. There followed a debate about which was the best way to reach its summit – either climb steep



grass slopes to the left or climb up besides some very impressive slabs and arrive at a bealach between Sgurr Dubh and the East Top. We decided on the latter and climbed up to the left of the aforementioned slabs which were even more impressive at close quarters. On reaching the bealach, I waited while the others ascended what they thought was the summit of Sgurr Dubh but which Brian later decided was not. By now it had become very chilly and I was beginning to wish I'd bought more clothes.

The route over the East Top to the summit of Mullach Coire Mhic Fhearchair was a pleasant walk on a well-defined ridge but the final slopes proved to be a trackless boulder field. At the summit we were surprised to find a walker sitting next to the cairn. He was deaf but seemed able to understand what we were saying by lip reading. As we sat eating a late lunch we were surprised to hear voices coming from the direction of Sgurr Ban and a few moments later three figures appeared out of the mist – a guide and two further clients walking the full length of the ridge from Beinn a' Chlaidheimh to Beinn Tarsuinn, planning to climb A' Mhaighdean and Ruadh Stac Mor next day. To have eight people on one of the most remote Munro summits in Scotland was rather unusual. Retracing our steps, we descended carefully to the bealach between the East Top and Sgurr Dubh. Here Brian decided to return to Sgurr Dubh to check if he had really reached its summit and if not, to climb the true summit. David went with him, while Kay and I continued our descent. The return to the car seemed interminable. Part way along the shore of Loch a' Bhraoin, Kay

phoned Paul to let him know our expected return time. Brian and David arrived back at the car not long after Kay and me, confirming that the first top they had reached was not Sgurr Dubh and that there was a higher one nearby which they had climbed on their second visit.

On the Wednesday Paul was still very unwell and Roger had to forego hillwalking in order to drive to Inverness to get a tyre changed. David, Kay, Brian and I decided that we needed a relatively easy day after the lengthy exertions of the preceding days. Glas Bheinn fitted the bill perfectly. This hill (to the north of Inchnadamph) just reaches Corbett height at 776m and is situated above Loch Assynt, giving good views of Quinag. We started our walk from the roadside at its highest point between the loch and Kylesku. I for one was grateful for this elevated beginning as my legs were feeling weary from the previous day's walk. We picked out a grassy gully running up to the summit ridge as the best route of ascent and found a good path there. It zig-zagged it's way up, then continued along the ridge through a boulder field. Reaching a sizeable cairn near a line of crags, we found two men sitting there and, at first, assumed this must be the summit. Checking the map we realized that the summit was nowhere near the edge of the summit plateau but somewhere in the middle. After a fairly short plod we reached a much larger cairn which was obviously the true summit. From there we descended the north ridge to find a succession of lochans of varying sizes. These proved to be a source of confusion and it took us a while to locate our target lochan which was bordered by a stalkers' path leading back to the road.



Thursday's objective was Beinn Lair. Paul was still too unwell to tackle any hills and, concluding that he would not recover in time to do any walking during the rest of the meet, decided to take a risk by driving home to Sussex. The rest of us drove off to Loch Maree to climb Beinn Lair from the south. Normally Beinn Lair is approached by a very long trek from Poolewe along the north bank of the loch. Fortunately an enterprising hotel



owner has made bagging the Corbett distinctly easier by taking walkers across Loch Maree in a rowing boat fitted with an outboard motor. Roger had arranged for us to meet the boatman at about 10.30 am at the Loch Maree hotel. When we reached the shore of the loch it looked a long way to the other shore where a cloud covered the top of Ben Lair. So we were rather alarmed to see that the boat was not only small but appeared to be rather dilapidated. I'm not sure whether giving us life jackets to wear inspired confidence or made us even more apprehensive. Having

finally figured out how to put the life jackets on, we set off across the loch. The surface of the water was fairly choppy at times and the small boat was rolling to what I thought was quite an alarming degree. Our boatman seemed totally unconcerned by this, even while he was bailing out the water which was leaking through the bottom of the boat by using what looked like an old mineral water bottle. We had to negotiate several islands and near one of these we spotted what we were told were Black Throated Divers, the first time I had seen any of these birds.

At this point I was rather surprised to see that we weren't heading towards the jetty at Letterewe from which a track leads up towards Beinn Lair. Instead we were dropped off at a beach about a kilometre from the jetty. The boatman showed us where we were on the map and suggested what he thought was the best way to approach Beinn Lair. As this would have involved going over a ridge and then dropping down the other side, we were not

convinced and preferred to head across the slopes towards the point where the path started. The terrain - a mixture of long grass, boulders and bracken - was very unforgiving and made for incredibly slow progress. In fact it took us about an hour to progress little more than a kilometre and we agreed that we should try to find a different return route. When, at last, we reached the track marked on the map leading up to the bealach between Meall Mheinnidh and Beinn Lair, it was well into the afternoon: so we decided a long overdue lunch stop was called for. The weather forecast had predicted that the cloud would lift above the level of the tops during the day: but, unfortunately, this was rather slow in happening and by the time we reached the bealach we were in thick cloud. We found this very disappointing as we had been hoping for views in to the Fisherfield Forest: instead we had to satisfy ourselves with views over the cliffs into the gloom.

To reach the summit we had to leave the cliffs and head south but we found the summit cairn without much difficulty, not least because it was enormous and could be seen from some distance away even in the thick mist. After taking summit photos, Brian suggested returning via the southwest ridge, which would be quicker and would make for some variation. The boatman had suggested we phone him when we started on the return from the summit but we decided this was rather premature as, judging by our outward journey, it would take some considerable time to reach our pick-up point. Roger phoned him when we were a fair way down the track towards Letterewe and at this point Brian set his GPS to return us to the beach. Luckily, on the return trip we managed to find a path which made things considerably easier than our outward journey.



The boatman was waiting for us when we arrived, and from what he said had been there for quite some time. I was relieved to see that the wind hadn't strengthened during the day, and so was hoping for a fairly smooth return trip across the loch. After struggling to remember how the life belts went on we loaded ourselves in to the boat. This time I sat by myself at the bow of the boat, which meant that I was actually coming out of my seat on occasions as the boat pitched up and down in the choppy parts of the loch. For some reason the boat seemed to be rolling more violently than on the outward trip, and my apprehension wasn't improved when the boatman's improvised bailer fell in to the loch. Totally unperturbed, he fished a bottle of mineral water out of the bottom of the boat, drank the remaining contents and, with one hand on the tiller, used the other hand to cut the top off the bottle to produce another bailer. During the journey across the loch the boatman regaled us with tales of ferrying people across with waves four feet high, after the wind had strengthened during the day. I think in such circumstances I would have opted to walk out to Poolewe. It was with no small sense of relief that I stepped onto the jetty next to the hotel, deciding that I wasn't really a natural sailor. That evening, rather than cooking a meal, we decided to go to Ullapool's "take away" for fish and chips, or in my case Venison burger and chips.

Saturday was to be our last day of walking, and it looked as though weather-wise we were going to go out on a high point with a fine, dry sunny day forecast. Roger was obliged to have a rest day. His knee had been causing him an increasing amount of serious discomfort during the meet and the problem had become so bad that it made further hillwalking out of the question. But he agreed to drive David to Glen Shiel, where David planned to climb two of the "Brothers". Brian had on his wish list some unclimbed Tops on Ben Wyvis and I had the adjoining Little Wyvis on my Corbett bagging list. As both could be climbed from the same starting point, we decided on this as the day's walking plan, with Kay joining me.

I had not been looking forward to climbing Little Wyvis after reading the Corbett guide book's description of it as an insignificant outlier of Ben Wyvis. However, on such a lovely sunny day any hill would be enjoyable. Brian's route followed our own for about a mile, until he took a left fork on the track towards his first Top of the day. Kay and I continued on a good track until it was time to cross the burn we had been following – simple enough as it had been fairly rain-free over the last few days. We followed a path of sorts, which brought us out on to the north east ridge of Little Wyvis. Reaching the summit our hill seemed small compared with the bulk of the neighbouring Ben Wyvis which loomed over us. The air clarity was excellent and we had fine views not only of Ben Wyvis but also of Beinn Dearg far to the north and the Fannichs to the east. Although it was bright and sunny, there was a brisk wind, which didn't encourage a lengthy stay on the top, just long enough to admire the view and take a few photos. We had a long stop below the ridge, soaking up the warm sunshine: there was no need to hurry because Brian's day was far longer than ours. Back at the car we passed the time reading, sleeping and listening to the radio until Brian returned following his successful ascent of the Ben Wyvis Munro Tops.



Thanks go to Paul for organizing the meet, even though he was unable to undertake much walking, and to Kay, Brian, David and Roger for their excellent company

Chris Knowles

A “SCOTTISH” AUTUMN IN PITLOCHRY: Meet No. 266 (Friday 4 – Sunday 6 September 2009)

A report on this Meet will be included in the next NeWSletter.

FORTHCOMING MEETS

MEET No 268: Hogmanay

Dates: Monday 28 December 2009 - Saturday 2 January 2010.

Area: Glencoe to Fort William.

Accommodation: Provisionally either Glencoe youth hostel or Inchree (Onich) bunkhouse.

Transport: By car. If coming by car, please advise the Meet organiser how many passengers you can take and indicate approximate route and times of journeys.

Maps: To be notified.

Food: To be notified.

Bookings: [Although the target date for booking has passed, the Meet organiser may still be willing to cater for additional numbers if accommodation \(which gets booked very early for Hogmanay\) remains available.](#)

Meet Organiser: Chris Knowles