



# Nor' West News



## The NeWSletter of the Nor' West Sgurramblers

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### MEET REPORTS

**CURRY AND BANANAS:** Meet No. 268 (Monday 28 December 2009 - Saturday 2 January 2010)

The outside temperature registered minus 10 degrees as Chris Knowles, Brian Billington and I drove across Rannoch Moor. And it remained cold as we passed the white-coated sentinel of Buachaille Etive Mor and the snow bound slopes of the Aonach Eagach and the other mountains in Glen Coe. As the evening drew in a full moon provided an eerie glow to the sides of the hills - hopefully a promising start to the New Year meet. When we arrived at the "Chase the Wild Goose" hostel at Banavie we met David Douglas who had arrived earlier by train. Entering our room we found the beds had been made up and thought what a kind gesture from the hostel staff. Later we learnt that the gesture was David's! Thanks again David.

Tuesday dawned dull. Fresh snow had fallen during the night and, as we only had one vehicle, a single route for us all had to be chosen. Mam na Gualainn (796m) - a Corbett overlooking Loch Leven - was decided upon. From the lochside layby near Callert House we followed footsteps in the snow heading northwards towards the bealach west of the summit. By the time we had reached the bealach the party had separated, each taking his own route. At the bealach we rested and regrouped. We turned eastward and ascended the



snowy ridge towards the summit, following a boundary fence for the final half-mile. Once on top we found the summit very windy and cold: so, after taking the obligatory photographs, we descended to some rocks for shelter and a bite to eat. Afterwards we were able to slip and slide down through the soft snow. This made the return journey to the lochside seem a lot quicker (than the ascent): it was achieved in a couple of hours.

The next day, Wednesday, we decided on another mass attack on a Corbett, this time choosing Garbh Bheinn (867m) just north of the Aonach Eagach. Arriving at Caolasnac, we had a fairly good view of the northern

slopes of the Aonach Eagach. But as soon as we stepped out of the car we realised it was not going to be an easy day. The wind was very strong even at that low level and the aspect above was very grey and cloudy. From the roadside the route ascended a path which doubled as a streambed and the watercourse had frozen. But after a couple of miles the path led us onto easier ground and we followed a route parallel to the Allt Gleann a' Chaolais up to the bealach at 550m. We had decided on climbing to this bealach instead of taking the more direct route to the summit along the north-west ridge as the latter had looked distinctly uninviting when we set off. We stopped in the shelter of some rocks for a lunch break and to decide on the next moves. Whilst we were resting a couple passed us and began ascending the steep slope to the east, which would take them through some easy crags to the summit. As they ascended higher and disappeared into the mist we unanimously agreed on a decision – back to the car! The coffee and cakes at NeviSport tasted great.



Thursday morning dawned very cold again - minus 6 degrees by the time we were ready to leave - but the sky looked bright and promising. The day's route was to be up Meall a' Phubuill (774m), a Corbett overlooking Glen Mallie north of Loch Eil. Fortunately the road alongside Loch Eil was free of snow and the back road at Fassfern also was passable. We parked at Fassfern and followed the track through the forest alongside the River Suileag. After about an hour we reached the top of the forest and were able to view the prospect of our mountain. We continued northwards along the track, past a bothy and onto the stalkers' path until we came to a new bridge across the Allt Fionn Doire. After a short rest we broke new tracks through the soft snow, heading north-eastwards towards the prominent south ridge. This ridge was quite hard going in places due to the soft snow on steep grass but eventually the gradient eased and the summit came into view. At the summit cairn the wind was very strong but the air was so clear that we had some spectacular views



of the sun shining on Gulvain (a Munro to the west). Whilst resting on the summit four other walkers and three dogs arrived: so it was quite a crowd that made the steep descent back to the bridge, each settling into his own pace for the final three miles back to the road.

As it was New Year's Eve Chris had arranged not to cook that evening but for all of us to eat out at the Lochy Bar near Banavie Station. The meals and beer were great and the surroundings comfortable. Unfortunately the staff wanted to celebrate the New Year themselves elsewhere and closed the bar relatively early. So we returned to the hostel where we saw the New Year in with some drinks.

New Year's Day did not dawn on us until 8.00am. This may be a club record! However we were still the first, and (I think) only, group to rise that day. A heavy coating of ice on the car needed a lot of scraping before three of us could set off for Glen Loy to the west of Gairloch, Chris having decided to have a rest day! The Corbett selected this time

was Beinn Bhan (771m). However, we had only gone a few miles along the B8004 towards Glen Loy when we realised that this hill may not have been the right choice. On reaching the turn off to Glen Loy the car was unable to grip the road. An alternative start point further along the B8004 was considered but rejected when we saw the terrain we would have to ascend. But it was still fairly early so an alternative day was planned. Initially we drove to the Commando memorial near Spean Bridge and then to the Aonach Mor Ski Centre where we saw the start of the Aonach Mor fell race, followed by tasty bacon sandwiches in the café. The food gave us the strength to decide on a fresh objective – an ascent of Cow Hill, a prominent “mound” south of Fort William.

After several abortive attempts we made a successful entry into a car park below the West Highland Way and, after further circuits, managed to find a level parking space. We set off along the West Highland Way until the turn off for our hill where the route continued steeply up through iced pitches in the forest. Eventually we came out into the open with great views of Ben Nevis’s south-west faces. Ascending more soft snow and following a fence we gradually gained the summit cairn from which we had more great views of the Ben and of Sgurr a’ Mhaim. On the descent we investigated a “Keep Out” sign adjacent to a boarded walkway and found what looked like a spectacular bird hide overlooking Glen Nevis and the Ben. Watch that space.

All in all it did not amount to a great list of ascents for the meet but a good time was had by all. It was a pity the snow was so soft.

Thanks go to Chris for organising the meet and preparing the meals. Personally I am not too sure about the banana curry though!



Brian Lee

The proposed **FEBRUARY MEET** was cancelled due to unstable snow conditions and an adverse weather forecast.

### **FORTHCOMING MEETS**

#### **MEET No 271: Laggan & Cannich**

Dates: Friday 9 - Sunday 18 July 2010.

Area: The Central and Western Highlands.

Accommodation: The Pottery Bunkhouse (Laggan) and Cannich Bunkhouse.

Programme: A two centre Meet with scope for climbing numerous Munros and Corbetts. There is also the possibility of staying at Glen Affric youth hostel, for those interested in climbing some of the more remote hills.

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 25, 34, 35 & 42.

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

Bookings: **To reserve a place, please contact the Meet organiser who will attempt to book accommodation in respect of all requests received by 31 May.** The amount of the deposit will depend on the payments required by hostels/bunkhouses. The balance of costs will be payable on the Meet. **Early booking is essential**

Meet Organiser: David Douglas

## **ALPINE MEET**

Chris Knowles has offered to organise a meet in the Dolomites for a week in late August or early September 2010.

**The route will cover part of the Alta Via 1 (which is straightforward trekking) with optional stretches of Via Ferrata.**

The dates will depend on the preferences expressed by those interested in attending.

**If interested, please contact him as soon as possible.**