



Nor' West News



The NeWSletter of the Nor' West Sgurramblers

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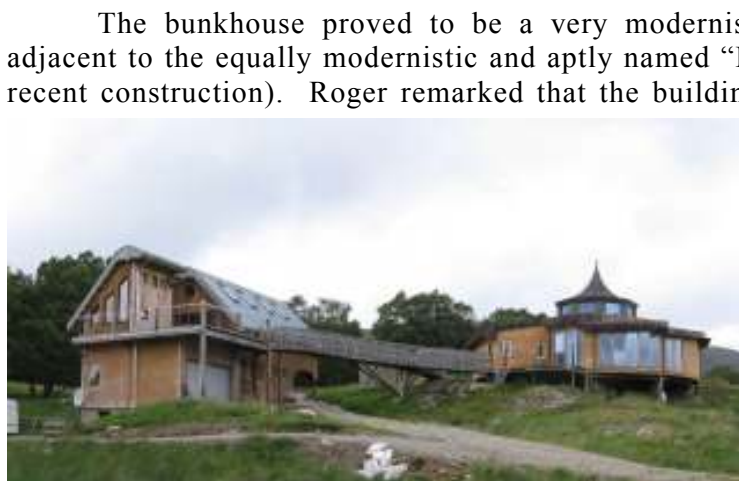


MEET REPORTS

The Joys of Scottish Summer Weather.

Meet No. 271 (Friday 9 – Sunday 18 July 2010)

Roger Reeves and Brian Billington came to pick me up on the first Friday after spending Thursday night at Alston youth hostel in Northumberland. And I was grateful for their help in packing a mountain of food into Roger's car. I had been concerned that Roger might not have sufficient room for all my goods but, to my relief, he demonstrated that he has got packing down to a fine art. We arrived at the "My Highland Bunkhouse" near Newtonmore in the late afternoon. Hugh Toal, our guest on the first part of this NWS meet, arrived shortly after us.



The bunkhouse proved to be a very modernistic structure, built the previous year adjacent to the equally modernistic and aptly named "Round House" farmhouse (also of very recent construction). Roger remarked that the buildings were like something out of "Harry Potter" but, thankfully, he stopped short of extending the analogy from the buildings to those who attended either part of this two part meet. A long winding track led from the road to the bunkhouse which only sleeps seven. Five of us had booked for this part of the meet: so we had it for our exclusive use. At £70 a night it was good value. The bunkhouse was also in a lovely location off the Newtonmore/Laggan road, though not the easiest place to find. The farm was primarily used for breeding Highland Cattle but also had ducks and chickens. It took a little time to find Roy (the owner) who proved to be very helpful. His English accent made it easy to detect that he was not a local but clearly he had invested a lot of time and money in the design and building of the architecturally striking buildings. He had also invested much effort in establishing a prize-winning herd of cattle.

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Time passed as we settled in but, when Paul Cassell had still not arrived at 7pm, we became a little concerned – and we were starting to get hungry! Unable to contact Paul directly – mobile phone connections were being temperamental – Brian contacted his wife in Sussex and ascertained that he had been trying to contact us. He had been in Scotland for two days, climbing Ben Starav in good weather on the Thursday and then having a long day in thick cloud on Ben Oss on the Friday. He had not got back to Tyndrum until 7pm and, unable to reach the bunkhouse in time to eat with us, would eat en route. We were relieved when he arrived belatedly at 10pm. His arrival had been delayed further by difficulty in finding the bunkhouse which he had passed several times but not identified because it was poorly signposted. He was pleased to have found us at last and to be plied with several cups of tea.

Roger was the early bird and had already been up for some time when we started to stir at 7am next morning. Paul had plans for an easy day on A' Mharconaich – his last Drumochter hill this round. Roger was set on bagging Creag Mhor, a Corbett next to Bynack More. Brian and Hugh were heading for Ben Macdui, although Brian's primary objective was to visit Carn Etchachan – a Munro Top. I had decided on a trip to the summit of Carn Dearg – a Munro which I could reach by walking from the bunkhouse.

I had a mile and a half walk along the road to the entrance to Cluny Castle from which a good track took me two and a half miles to the River Calder. The river was wide but reasonably shallow and I had no difficulty in crossing. But the path on the other side was rather indistinct. A mile further on I was faced with another river crossing but at the point where the path crossed it the river was too deep and I had to go some way upstream before I found a suitable place to cross. I now had two options – I could try to find the path again, continue to Loch Dubh and work my way up onto Carn Dearg or I could head straight up onto the ridge. My instincts told me to start gaining height so I took the latter option. I was pleased to have done so for I had an enjoyable walk along a well-defined ridge (unusual for the Monadh Liath) to reach the top of Carn Dearg which was in cloud. At this juncture I saw other walkers for the first time that day. They had approached the hill from the other direction. It would have been good to go on and climb the two neighbouring Munros – Carn Sgulain and A' Chailleach – but this would have made it a very long day. In addition, I had to get back to the bunkhouse to feed four other hungry walkers. So I headed back the way I had come and was relieved to find that I was not the last to return.



Roger had found his way to Creag Mhor but had climbed Bynack More inadvertently en route. Paul had made an easy ascent of A' Mharconaich in low cloud but (happily) no wind. Brian and Hugh were the last ones back after a long day walking first to Ben Macdui and to Carn Etchachan, and then – as Hugh was keen to bag another Munro – continued to the summit of Cairn Gorm. Regrettably, Brian paid a heavy price for undertaking this long walk in new boots which had inflicted severe blisters on his heels.

On the Sunday Brian concluded reluctantly decided that it would be prudent to have a rest day in the hope that this might reduce the discomfort caused by his blisters. Paul decided to follow part of Roger's route of the day before, driving to Loch Morlich and walking to the summit of Bynack More. Roger set off on a long drive to Rannoch station in order to bag Meall na Meoig, a Corbett in the empty land called the Rannoch Forest. Hugh was keen to get more Munros under his belt by driving to the Drumochter pass and climbing Geal Charn, A' Mharconaich and Beinn Udlamain. I was happy to join him. The day looked quite promising, with patches of blue sky and sunny intervals – in marked contrast to the previous

September when Paul and I had climbed Sgairneach Mhor and Beinn Udlamain in low cloud, drizzle and strong winds. Would I have a good day on the Drumochter hills for a change (?), I wondered.

Hugh drove us to the car park near the cottages at Balsporran (isn't that a lovely name!) and we headed up the gentle northeast ridge of Geal Charn. Initially the shape of the mountain could be made out but hopes for a view from the top were quickly eliminated as a large blanket of cloud settled onto the ridge.



There are a series of cairns on this ridge and on a few occasions we were fooled into thinking that we had reached the summit. Finally we reached a large cairn and realised that we could not climb any higher. So I took a summit photo for Hugh before we worked out a compass bearing to take us down to the bealach. The wind was starting to pick up and, as we descended, we were hit by a sharp shower of rain. But the rain stopped as we reached the

bealach and we found ourselves out of the cloud and with views down to Loch Ericht. The wind was strong by now and I was getting the feeling that the hills did not want us to be there. But from this point it was only a 700 foot ascent to the top of the ridge and then a half a mile to the summit of A' Mharconaich. So Hugh and I agreed to continue. However, when we reached the ridge we were fully exposed to the strong wind. And, as we approached the summit, we felt that there was a possibility of being blown over. Thankfully, Hugh did not bother with a summit photo and agreed that we should about turn and head back down the way we had come. He decided that he would wait for a better day to climb Beinn Udlamain and I assured him that, together with Sgairneach Mhor, it would be a good hill walk in less unpleasant weather.

On the Monday Roger had a long drive again – this time to Kinlochleven to climb Garbh Bheinn, another Corbett new to him. Brian, Hugh and I had planned a long walk to a range of hills situated in remote countryside between Loch Laggan and Loch Ericht. Hugh and I wanted to climb three Munros – Beinn Eibhinn, Aonach Beag and Geal Charn. Brian, still intent on adding to the list of Tops he had ascended, was set on climbing Sgor Iutharn, a subsidiary Top of Geal Charn and lying off the ridge about a mile from that Munro near the eastern end of the ridge. (Although the weather did not look promising, he was to be lucky enough to reach this Top in relatively good weather). Paul was feeling tired after four full days walking but thought he might walk into this area and see how he got on. As bagging all the Munros would make it a long day, he set off from the bunkhouse at 8am whilst the rest of us were still having breakfast. Roger left next but our party of three did not get away until 9 o'clock.



When we arrived at the car park by the side of Loch Laggan we were surprised to find Paul waiting for us. When he had arrived there the cloud level had been just above the summits for a brief period but thereafter dropped lower and lower as time passed. So he had waited for our arrival in order to let us know that he had decided to have a rest day. It did indeed look murky and uninviting but we decided to set out anyway. We followed a broad track for to the ruined cottage at Lubvan and then took a rather poor path for about three miles to the Allt Cam. Hugh and I considered crossing the river at this point in order to traverse the ridge from west to east, starting with Beinn Eibhinn. But the river was too deep

at this point and we decided to continue eastward along the glen (in company with Brian) until we found a more suitable crossing point. The first viable opportunity presented itself a mile or so further on below the slopes of Geal Charn and it made sense to climb this hill first. It was a hard slog up 2,000 feet of grassy hillside to the summit which we reached at 2pm after four and a half hours of walking. But it was worth the effort for the tops were now clear of cloud and we could see that we had some good ridge walking to look forward to.

Brian headed off alone to bag his Top, leaving Hugh and me to take a more leisurely walk along the ridge to Aonach Beag and then to Beinn Eibhinn which could be seen beyond



and to the left of it. This is a fine, sharp ridge and looked impressive. Collectively our three chosen peaks are quite close to each other and it took Hugh and me only 30 minutes to get to the summit of Aonach Beag. Given the remoteness of these hills, I was quite surprised when various parties of walkers appeared from the direction of Corroun.

It took only a further 30 minutes to get to the summit of Beinn Eibhinn where we stopped to admire the views down to Loch Ossian and across to the Glencoe hills in the distance. Shafts of light illuminated some of the scenery whilst other parts remained in shadow. By this time the long walk was beginning to take its toll and Hugh had to swallow some painkillers to alleviate knee problems.

Given the need to find a safe way to cross the swollen Allt Cam below, Hugh and I returned along the ridge up to Aonach Beag and then working our way down its steep slopes to the place where we had crossed the river on our outward journey. Initially, there were still good views across to Ben Alder but then the weather began to deteriorate and we had a spell of rain. Just before we reached the river we met up with Brian again. He had bagged his Munro Top and then returned to traverse the ridge to Aonach Beag before descending to the glen. After crossing the river we had another long



walk over some rough ground and were grateful when we reached a good track. Brian had to stop for some time for sufficient repair work on his blisters to get him through the final three miles to the car park. We reached the car after almost eleven hours of walking, only to be attacked by a swarm of midges. It had been a long but enjoyable day in the quest to bag our target Munros and Munro Top. Back at the bunkhouse a late dinner of haggis, supplemented by wine provided by Roger to celebrate bagging his 200th Corbett, was enjoyed by all.

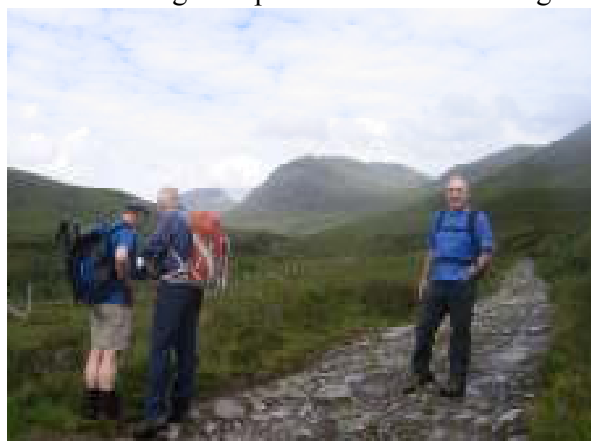
On the Tuesday morning Hugh headed back to Kendal, leaving the rest of us to drive up to the Bearnock Country Centre – a group of custom-built holiday cottages and bunkhouse - in Glen Urquhart where we were to join up with Elwyn Williams, Steve Williamson and two guests who were attending the remainder of the meet. Preparatory purchases to cater for this enlarged party necessitated a major shopping expedition to Tesco's in Aviemore. This took some time and my thanks go to Brian for his help in store and to Paul for transporting another mountain of food from Aviemore to Glen Urquhart in his car. This also allowed Roger to spend the day bagging another Corbett – Bac an Eich – en route.

The second part of the meet was held in Glen Affric but there had been some problems in securing accommodation as the backpackers hostel on the old military site had been shut down! We were told that the closure was due to 'Health and Safety' concerns (what else!). As this was found out by chance only about a week before the meet, David Douglas had had to scramble around for somewhere else. Fortunately he had been able to find an extremely new and comfortable hostel at the Bearnock Country Centre, a few miles away in Glen Urquhart. This turned out to be fine place to stay with comfortable rooms and an adequate kitchen, although it appeared to have been opened in a rush before final touches to some paintwork and facilities were made. But the only significant problem was sorting out the drying room— always an essential facility in Scotland. Glenn Affric has been described as one of the most beautiful glens in Scotland. This was my second visit to the area and I was looking forward to adding a few more Munros to my list and enjoying the scenery and views. It turned out to be an interesting few days and some excellent days out on the mountains.



Six members had planned to attend this part of the meet – David Douglas, Roger Reeves, Brian Billington, Paul Cassell, Steve Williamson and me. In addition, there were two guests – Dafydd Morris from Anglesey and Dennis Harrison from Chester - who, we trust, will have enjoyed some good walks with the group. But the day after arriving at the Glen Urquhart hostel our numbers were whittled down to five. Brian and Paul decided that they would not stay but return to their homes. Brian was particularly distressed to have to do this because of severe blistering of his heels, which had been caused by wearing new boots over the previous few days - always a mountain walker's nightmare! Roger was doing his own thing by walking in to the youth hostel in Glen Affric for a few days to add to the dwindling list of the Corbetts he had yet to bag.

The agreed plan for the remaining five of us was to make our way up onto the big hills



to the northwest of Loch Affric in order to bag three Munros - Mam Sodhail, Carn Eighe and Beinn Fhionnlaidh. These hills lie on the same ridge rising high above Loch Affric and bagging them all makes for a long day. And so it proved. Indeed, it took about four hours to reach the ridge beneath the summit of the first peak (Carn Eighe) as we had decided that it would be best to use the path which starts near the junction of the Abhainn Gleann nam Fiadh and Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin. Taking this route meant that we could avoid the need to cross the river. And it turned out to be a very

wise decision as the river was in spate.

It was a nice approach along the east ridge of Carn Eighe which had some narrow rocky sections and proved quite interesting. The weather was fine with excellent visibility and wonderful views down to Loch Mullardoch in the north and Glen Affric in the south. From Carn Eighe we could see all along the ridge to Beinn Fhionnlaidh in the distance. It was then a long trek – first down and then up - to reach the summit of this Munro which is a bit of an outlying mountain. But it was worth the effort due to the closer views we gained - of Loch Mullardoch to the north and more distant views towards Iron Lodge in the west.

Leaving Beinn Fhionnlaidh we made our way back along the ridge and found that it was possible to contour around Carn Eighe on the way to Mam Sodhail. This reduced the amount of re-ascent but still required quite a considerable amount of effort as both Munros are over 1180 metres and big mountains! Having reached Mam Sodhail we made our way down into Coire Leachavie on a welcome stalkers path before the completing the long trek back to the car – a great day out in weather that you dream of in Scotland.



The weather deteriorated on the Thursday. Low cloud and drizzle meant that there was little chance of any views. So, intent on climbing Toll Creagach and Tom a' Choinich, we chose the same starting point as the previous day and made our way up alongside the Allt Toll Easa to the Bealach Toll Easa. By this time it was raining steadily and visibility was poor as we trudged up the ridge to the top of Tom a' Choinich which seemed an interesting mountain with some steep drops on some of the sides. We returned to the bealach and then carried on to Toll Creagach across some pretty featureless terrain in low cloud and rain. So it was a welcome sight when the summit cairn came in view. All that remained was a gentle descent down the south ridge to pick up the path that we went up in the morning.

Our targets on the Friday were An Socach, An Riabhachan, Sgurr Na Lapaich and Carn nan Gobhar. Climbing these four Munros (which border the north shore of Loch Mullardoch) is a big undertaking and a very long day out. But we had done our planning. An interesting



character called Carl (from Denmark) had a boat and we paid (bribed?) him to take us half way up the Loch and drop us off at the foot of Coire Lungard. He told me that he had moved to the area from Denmark about 30 years previously because he loved the deer and decided to stay in Scotland to shoot them! He seemed to be a little surprised to see us because of the poor weather but we were a committed lot. This expedition would have been even more difficult without Carl and his boat. An Socach is rather an inaccessible hill: the trek westwards along the lochside to reach the foot of its southeast ridge is about seven miles and

(according to Carl) on a very unpleasant path!

Setting off up Coire Lungard, we suffered some low cloud and drizzle again and we made the mistake of not crossing the river by the bridge lower down. But we succeeded - with a little difficulty - in crossing the river higher up and made our way up onto the south ridge and up to the summit of An Socach. There followed a long trek to An Riabhachan over several tops. This was a challenging navigation exercise in the mist. The descent down the rocky crest of its east ridge was also an interesting experience. Reaching the bealach we made our way up onto Sgurr na Lapaich. The descent of the southeast ridge of this mountain proved to be another testing exercise due to wet slippery rocks but eventually the bealach was reached. The final ascent to the summit of Carn nan Gobhar was made in improving conditions and there was even a view of some sorts. We resisted the temptation to carry on to the deleted Munro of Creag Dubh but dropped down to the welcome stalkers' path in Coire an t'Sith. Even so, it was still a bit of a trek back to the car. In total it took us ten hours to complete the round. It was a shame that the visibility was so poor and allowed no real views of the ridge until the end. But I would definitely recommend using Carl and his boat – the

trek along the loch side would not have given me any pleasure – particularly if undertaken at the end of a long day.

Sgurr na Ruaidhe, Carn nan Gobhar, Sgurr a'Choire Ghlais and Sgurr Fhuar-thuill had been pencilled in for the final day of the meet. But the weather forecast was even worse than the previous day - with high winds (60mph gusts) predicted as well as the usual cloud and rain! As the round of this group would involve another fairly long day we decided to give it a miss and instead investigated the “north face” of the Slater’s Arms pub for lunch before walking down to the Dog Falls and then up to viewpoint of Glen Affric. The glen had



changed a fair bit since my last visit due to the trees being allowed to regenerate. The Forestry Commission and the National Trust for Scotland have made commendable efforts to restore the Caledonian Forest there. Glen Affric has received a number of accolades over the years. It has been designated a Caledonian Forest Reserve and a National Scenic Area. It has also received full National Nature Reserve (NNR) status. But the planned mountains were left for another day and I am sure they will still be there next year for us to

enjoy rather than getting blasted off by the wind this year!

John Elwyn Williams

This was a meet enjoyed by all despite the variable weather conditions. Particular thanks go to David for demonstrating yet again his organisational and catering (for the masses) skills.

Paul Cassell

UPS AND DOWNS IN THE DOLOMITES: Meet No. 272 (Tuesday 31 August – Tuesday 7 September 2010)

The flight to Venice out of Manchester on our first day was scheduled to leave early and necessitated very early reveilles to get to the airport in time for all the security checks, etc. The newest check was to enter a clear glass box - a bit like a “Dr Who” Tardis - to be ‘sniffed’! Having passed security, our group of four – Chris Knowles, Brian Lee, Guy Hindley (a guest) and me - met up at the departure gate. As some of us hadn’t met before, Guy introduced himself to me and then we had fun finding Chris using mobiles - only to discover that Guy and Chris were standing next to one another!

We arrived at Venice airport slightly early after an uneventful flight. So we had plenty of time to undertake the long road and rail journey to Cortina d’Ampezzo. First, this involved getting to the train - a somewhat tortuous bus journey in busy traffic and through some road works that seemed to take forever. Still it gave us the chance to get to know one another a bit better! The train journey to Cortina took about 2½ hours and was interrupted at one point by the need to transfer to a bus service - just like being at home! In this case the need to travel by bus was a great bonus as it meant that we had much better views of the surrounding scenery. Eventually, after transfer to a second bus at the railhead, we arrived in Cortina around 5.15pm. By this time we were all starving: so we found a restaurant only to discover that



meals weren't served until 6pm. We made do with Apple Strudel and drinks before tucking in heartily to various Italian specialities. Suitably fortified we set off to find the Hotel Larin - no mean feat as the hotel was about 2 kilometres outside the main town. But it was a splendid building - very clean double rooms with plenty of space and showers. Oh what heaven! - as we were to find would not always be the case. We discovered later that Chris was breaking us in gently to the wonders of the rifugio system of huts on the Alta Via 1. So we had a splendid room (which we did not need to share with others) and a good breakfast on the Wednesday morning before being picked up by a taxi to take us to the start of the trek proper.

The taxi took us to the Rifugio Dibona, which sits below the steep face of Le Tofane. Travel by taxi not only avoided a long and tedious walk/climb up winding roads and tracks but also allowed us to concentrate on important things like the splendid views and ensuring that the driver avoided the steep drops to the valley below us. On arrival the driver helpfully pointed out the way to our next rifugio - the Rifugio Lagazuoi, perched at a height of some 2700m on the end of a high ridge - where we were to have lunch. So we set off gaily only to decide after walking a few hundred yards that it might be a good idea to take a glimpse at the map. Having done this we spent a little while deciding where we were and which track to take. As we hesitated several others walked straight past us on the only viable route going west. Deciding that lunch called, we selected a track and headed off to be reassured after a short distance by one of these 'new inventions' called a 'signpost' which miraculously had all the track numbers on it.



Just below our lunch stop at the Rifugio Lagazuoi there were a series of dugouts and other defensive workings left over from World War 1. Apparently the Austrian troops held this high ground and had very secure positions with outstanding views down onto the ground held by the Italian troops. However, as the temperature could easily fall to minus 20°C, life for the Austrian guards was very tough; and eventually the supply line for their rations was cut, leading to their withdrawal. The Rifugio Lagazuoi, apart from offering good food, provided an excellent viewpoint. As the weather was sunny and warm (apart from a biting wind), we took the opportunity to play at being David Bailey - especially Brian with his super camera - before (eschewing a possible descent via a WW1 tunnel) returning on the path to the Passo Falazarego. We crossed with civilisation (a few buildings) briefly here before we set off again, taking paths 424 & 440, on the long ascent to the Rifugio Scoiattoli situated in a striking position next to the Cinque Torri.



On the Thursday morning we decided to split into two pairs, each taking slightly differing routes to the next hut - the Rifugio Citta di Fiume. Brian and I were keen to take on a 'simple' via ferrata, whilst Chris and Guy preferred to follow the standard paths. So Brian and I set off to the Rifugio Nuvolau situated near the top of our 'simple' via ferrata - oh! but life is not always 'simple'. We stopped to take in the views there, which the guidebook said

were amongst the best on the trip, before starting our descent of the via ferrata. Leaving the rifugio on the correct track and following the guidebook's information, we found a short assisted downwards climb and this was accomplished very straightforwardly. According to the guidebook, this was to be the first stage of a 300m descent - the ensuing stages comprising (in succession) an assisted downward climb using a wire, chain and ladder, and then a final wire to reach a winding path to a meadow and a path to the Passo Giaou. Well,

let's be generous, the guidebook was only partly wrong about the lower sections of the route. The key ladder was missing and the winding path was very narrow! As a result, although we found the wire and chain, we ended up on 'the stone chute from hell' where the ladder had presumably fallen away in the winter. But we were a long way down the route by then and decided to continue. It was with some relief that we reached the bottom of the stone chute and emerged onto an assisted path. Looking back up the route of descent, we realised that it had been a memorable adventure. Despite nearly killing each other with bouncing rocks, Brian had managed to get some good photos.



At a crossing beneath the chute we took a very narrow and unassisted path which wound its way down to the meadow. Here we discovered a sign which included lots of Italian words and the one key English word 'Close'! We decided that a strong coffee was in order so we headed for the Rifugio Passo Giau.

Having taken refreshments, we set off again, climbing up to the top of the Passo Giau through wonderful Alpine scenery - meadows, cows, horses and lots of bells. We had another break at the top of the pass before descending a few hundred metres. Then we faced a further climb up the path to the Col Ambrazzola and a descent to the Rifugio Citta di Fiume. We expected Chris and Guy to have reached this hut sometime ahead of us after taking the same path to the Col Ambrazzola. So we were somewhat surprised to see them suddenly appear walking towards us away from the col. Their sense of direction had fled and they had turned right instead of left, not having seen any of the many signposts that would have helped. After some discussion we all made our way to the col and down to the Rifugio Citta di Fiume and yet more refreshments. Although sited in a splendid position below Monte Pelmo, standards had fallen on the hut front at this rifugio. The bedroom was shared with two Germans who, having tried to keep us awake with their head torches at night, complained that they were trying to sleep when we got up for breakfast!

After a reasonable breakfast, but lacking any cereal, we set off on the Friday morning in somewhat middling weather towards our next stop – the Rifugio Sonino al Coldai – where



we planned to have lunch. I had hoped to do a via ferrata on Monte Civetta on the way but bailed out after speaking to the guardian at the rifugio, who advised against it because the weather was due to be pretty bad in the afternoon - with rain, wind and snow above 2000m. We had left the Rifugio Citta di Fiume on a pretty, wooded track in bright warm weather: but, unlike previous days, there were grey clouds in the sky, suggesting that the forecast could be right. As usual on the trek we started by losing some height and then worked up an appetite for coffee and cake by climbing

back up to the Rifugio Sonino al Coldai at 2132m. This rifugio marked the northern end of the Civetta range of mountains and, after being suitably fortified, we left it to make our way down and round the western face of the range.

Along this part of the route the signposts were best ignored unless you're a masochist, as we were repeatedly directed to the Rifugio Tissi, a hut perched on a pointless summit some 200m above our heads. Even our passion for coffee and cakes didn't extend that far. So we had a short break below this hut whilst we watched a German film crew make fools of themselves. They were making a movie of a group of 3 'walkers', all carrying packs which were of a hugemongous size but appeared to be as light as a feather! These 'walkers' bravely skipped along the paths, repeating each section several times - just to please the camera from what we could see. Still it provided more opportunities for Brian to show them how it should be done as we headed off to the Rifugio Vazzoler sitting under a steep limestone mountain face. At this rifugio we indulged yet again in well-deserved eats and drinks and hot showers. And we found that we had gone back "up in the world" in terms of accommodation: we had a room to ourselves and good washing facilities. But we were made to feel a bit like Oliver Twist because, when we asked for another bowl of tea, we were told it would cost 2 euro! Guy and I paid up as, even with continental tea, we needed the liquid. Breakfast eats were equally limited. You rather felt you were on an expedition in the remote wilds and that everything was rationed!



In view of the limited rations it was as well that the Saturday was to be a 'shorter' day. In addition, the weather forecast was still not good and the brief showers of Friday were promised to turn into something more serious. We left the hut, descending again through a wood and along a narrow path which hung to the mountainside below the Moiazza Sud. In winter many of these paths become ski runs again. But we had wonderful views as we headed for the Forcella del Camp. At this point we turned east towards the Rifugio Brunto Carestiallo, and stood and watched a group of climbers on the southern face of the mountain. Then we moved on past the start of several vie ferrate. After lunch I walked back to look at the start of the Via Ferrata Constantini, which consisted of a wire which appeared to go to the top of the climb. After another relatively short walk we arrived at Rifugio Passo Duran, to just miss a series of heavy downpours. There we had our own bedroom, free hot showers, and wonderful food (which included fresh fruit and vegetables). Funny how little things can really make your day.

On the Sunday morning Chris warned us that we faced one of the longest and hardest days of the trek, with long ascents and a final descent (which would take over 2 hours) to the Rifugio Pian de Fontana. We started off by walking down a road before taking a track past a farm to climb around Mount Tamer to the Forcella del Moschesin and the Rifugio Prampere.



At the rifugio we enjoyed lunch in glorious sunshine which was to accompany us on the steep ascent to the top of the Cime de Zitaat (just below 2450m). From this cima we set off again on a long descent to the Rifugio Pian de Fontana. Now you'd think that, this being the last hut on our route, this rifugio would be well equipped and spacious. Well you'd be wrong. On arrival the guardian was extremely relieved when we told her that we had made a booking as the hut was full, so full that one of the wardens had to give up his bunk in our 'dorm'. Our 'dorm' was in fact an empty barn with iron bunks squeezed into every available space and no other facilities. Even the electricity was off! Apart from this we had the luxury of either a cold shower or an open-air bath (also cold). And the guidebook again misled us into believing that there would be a roaring fire in the main room. Oh how it lied! We sat all evening, wrapped in every

conceivable piece of clothing we could muster, awaiting what would surely be a 'special ritual fire lighting' only to go to bed without seeing the warm roaring fire!

The forecast for the Monday was again for poor weather, ruling out my hope to take on a final via ferrata. Even the experienced Germans who joined us for the evening meal said it would be suicidal! The morning dawned bright and sunny – joke! All around us we were surrounded by that thick mist which, when you looked out from the hut, could almost be mistaken for snow it was so white! As there had also been heavy overnight rain we decided to take the 'short' route down to the bus which would take us to Belluna to catch the train to Venice. This 'short' route involved a brief ascent followed by several more hours of descent. You could tell how high we were because it took some 5 hours to get down to the bus stop. However we couldn't do this without our usual pit stop: so part way down we woke the warden of the Rifugio Biancetto and ordered our usual coffee and cake. It was 9.30am but he still seemed surprised to see anyone! Then we made a leisurely descent to the bus stop where we met some twelve others who were also going to Belluna. As far as we know only one person decided on the via ferrata that day, the rest of us preferring to stay alive! Guy informed me that, when the bus arrived, it took some 7 minutes to get everyone aboard.

Our journey to Venice was fairly uneventful - although, because we caught an earlier train, there was some confusion about changes. But we arrived around 5pm at the youth



hostel on the small island of La Giudecca to take in the view of the Basilica di San Marco towering above the buildings on the main island across the strait. Then, after enjoying the luxury of hot showers, we tried to make ourselves presentable (difficult when you've only a few clean clothes and only smelly boots to wear) before taking to the town - well our side of it - for an end of trek meal. As it would have cost some 13 euro to cross over to the main island, we had decided to save our coins and eat locally, only to find that we had to pay a lot

more for our meal than we expected!

We got up early next morning to start the 2 hour trip to the airport which we reached in plenty of time to do the usual booking in, etc. We arrived back in Manchester to rain - what a surprise!

All of us would like to thank Chris for his wonderful organisation and a great holiday!

Steve Williamson

SHARING GLENCOE WITH THE MIDGES: Meet No. 273 (Friday 3 – Monday 6 September 2010)

John Andrew and I reached Glencoe youth hostel late in the afternoon on the Friday, following a leisurely journey from Teeside, to find David Douglas and Hugh Toal arriving at the same time. Following a lengthy check-in procedure we established that Paul Cassell had arrived the previous day to do some Munro bagging on his own. John and David went off to the Co-op to purchase vitals for the Meet and, in their absence, Paul appeared. He had spent a sunny day bagging Sgurr Eilde Mor (again). When John and David returned the usual tea and biscuit ritual was duly observed, after which we all repaired to the Clachaig Inn for a pleasant dinner and "to satisfy the inner man". Suitably refreshed, we returned to the hostel for yet more tea and biscuits and to discuss ideas for Saturday's outing. John proposed a visit to Buachaille Etive Mor and this was well received, particularly by Hugh who had harboured the

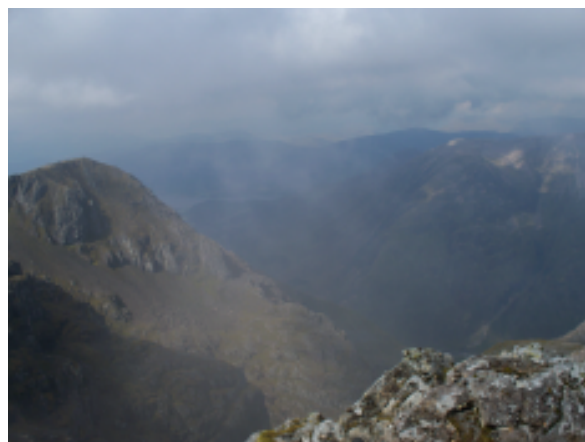
desire to bag this magnificent mountain since embarking on his Munro quest. Paul elected for a day off.

Saturday dawned fine and bright. Both weather and ground conditions could not have been better for a day on the hill, particularly one of such classic proportions as our chosen climb. So David, Hugh, John and I set out for “The Great Herdsman of Etive” in high spirits. Our walk-in via Coire na Tulaich was enjoyable enough as we scrambled up the wall of the



gorge beside a burn that disappeared underground from time to time. The initial ascent culminated in a scramble up the scree gully to the corrie head where we paused before making our ascent to the summit of our first Munro of the day - Stob Dearg (1022 metres). We rested on the summit to take in the magnificent views over Rannoch Moor and were joined there by a couple of more intrepid climbers whose ascent had been via the Curved Ridge.

Leaving Stob Dearg, we traversed the long ridge over Stob na Doire and Stob Coire Altruim before making the final ascent to the summit of Stob na Broige (956 metres) – our second Munro of the day. From this vantage point we had a splendid view of neighbouring hills and of Loch Etive. Our descent was by way of Coire Altruim and back along the banks of the Coupall river. It had been a fine end to a fine day, culminating with some of us adjourning to the pub whilst others returned to base for tea and biscuits - no prizes for guessing who went where! After a delightful meal prepared by David, we discussed Sunday’s mission and unanimously dismissed Hugh’s suggestion that we undertake a traverse of the Aonach Eagach ridge, having taken due notice of the adverse weather forecast and having a healthy respect for the undertaking. Paul decided to banish the demons which had dictated a rest day by returning to the Mamores Lodge hotel in order to walk out to Binnein Beag. The rest of us opted for the ascent of the two Munros on the Bidean nam Bian ridge via the Lost Valley.



We arose to the predicted weather - low cloud and strong winds – to discover that Paul had breakfasted early and departed already. We breakfasted in a more leisurely fashion and then drove off to bag our chosen Munros. Having parked high on the road through Glencoe, we set off through a thicket of trees and bushes into Core Gabhail (the Lost Valley). The walk up the Lost Valley was a magnificent experience, made even more so because of the foreboding atmosphere created by the gloom cast by scudding dark clouds. The Lost Valley is surrounded on three sides by high ridges which form an enormous amphitheatre. It is Alpine in nature and its far end narrows as it ascends steeply up a sheer sided gorge to the middle of the corrie headwall. Having climbed to the bealach above the centre of the headwall, we made our way up the shoulder of Stob Coire Sgreamhach, the most recent addition to the Munro collection. After a brief stay on the summit, we returned to the bealach and continued up the ridge on its further side to reach the summit of Bidean nam Bian itself, the highest Glen Coe peak. Then we retraced our steps to return to the cars via the Lost Valley in ever improving light though ever increasing wind. Hugh was setting a tremendous pace because of his need to return to work and family commitments that evening. One of the few advantages of retirement and having a grown family is that some of us need concern ourselves no longer with such matters!

Returning to the hostel we found that Paul was in excellent spirits, having had a good day in the Mamores. He had set off with some hopes of adding two or more Munros to list but the weather there had deteriorated and, as he made his way to the northern end of the range, all the summits were in cloud which then descended further to shroud all the hills in the area. Aware that increasingly strong winds had been forecast for the end of the day, he had settled for the ascent of Binnein Beag and decided against any attempt to add other Munros to his route that day. But he had felt in unusually good form and thoroughly enjoyed his long walk in and out of the area. On his return to the hostel, he showered and donned clean clothing. Then, having banished his demons for the while, he had attempted to take up my invitation to join John and me slaking our thirst in the Clachaig Inn. Unfortunately, unaware that the Inn has an inner bar, he had not found us. But he had downed a couple of pints on his own in the public bar before returning to the hostel again.



On the Monday morning, faced with a long journey home, Paul rose early to prepare our departure breakfast. After which, with fond farewells, we went our separate ways.

The last word must go to David, who not only organized a splendid meet but surpassed himself as quartermaster extraordinaire and master chef all rolled into one. We thank you David.

John Huddart

FORTHCOMING MEETS

MEET No 274: Re-union and AGM

Dates: Friday 8 - Sunday 10 October 2010.

Area: Snowdonia

Programme: A chance to enjoy the rugged mountains of Snowdonia. The AGM will be held on the Saturday evening, followed by a slide show if members care to bring their slides.

Accommodation: YHA Bryn Gwynant (Tel: 0845 371 9108) on the A498 after Capel Curig, opposite the start of the Watkin path to Snowdon summit.

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: Please contact Meet organiser for information.

Bookings: The last date for booking via the Meet organiser has passed but it may still be possible to secure a belated booking by contacting the hostel directly. **If successful in securing a booking, please contact the Meet organiser immediately to let him know.**

Food: **It is planned to purchase all meals at the hostel.** When booking, **please inform the hostel staff which meals are required.**

Meet Organiser: David Cheesman.

MEET No 275: Hogmanay

Dates: Tuesday 28 December 2010 – Sunday 2 January 2011.

Area: The Monadhliath and neighbouring areas

Programme: An opportunity to experience both a Scottish Hogmanay and winter hill walking, based on a bunkhouse surrounded by a large area (ranging from Loch Laggan and Glen Spean in

the west to Drumochter and the Cairngorms in the east) accessible by car and containing a wide variety of Munros and Corbetts.

Accommodation: Craigover Lodge, Golfcourse Road, Newtonmore.

Transport: There is a good rail service to Newtonmore. 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: **The Meet Organiser has had to pay a deposit to secure accommodation for up to 6 people and must pay the full costs by 16 October. So he needs immediate notice from anyone who may wish to attend and a deposit of £15 per person as soon as possible.** The cost of accommodation for 5 nights will be £75 per person. The balance of accommodation and food costs will be payable on the meet.

Meet Organiser: Matthew O'Neill.

MEMBERSHIP

We welcome one new member – Hugh Toal.

John Andrew has moved to a new residence. His telephone and e-mail addresses are unchanged.