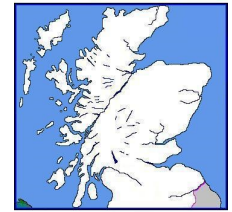


Nor' West News



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MEET REPORTS

ENJOYING SNOWY HILLS: Meet No 323 (Saturday 17 – Wednesday 21 February 2018)

This year's February Meet started as usual with Chris Knowles picking me up at Stirling railway station on the Saturday morning. This time we were making our way to



Killin where Chris had rented Lily Cottage as our accommodation for the Meet. The weather forecast for the day was reasonable so we planned to climb Ben Venue on the way. This would require only a short detour on the drive north. At a height of 2,391 feet, Ben Venue is a "Graham" situated in the Trossachs, a lovely, scenic area. Even though it is of relatively modest height, this Ben Venue is a very popular hill epitomising the Trossachs. I had already climbed it a number of times, as it is easily accessible from Edinburgh. On

another occasion Chris had climbed to the trig point in foul weather, only to find out later that the trig point is two metres lower than the actual summit.

There are two approaches to the hill – from Loch Achray to the east or Loch Ard to the south. The first route is through forest and can entail coping with tree felling, path closures and detours. I preferred the other route passing through woodland and alongside the Ledard Burn. Chris seemed happy enough to go along with my preference even though it is the longer route. But we agreed that, as it was only a quarter to twelve when we set off, we ought to have enough time to do the walk. The path was very muddy, evidence that there had been a lot of rain recently. Higher up this had fallen as snow and, when we emerged from the woodland, we saw the route was up a snow covered hillside. There was no view of the top of Ben Venue which was hidden by Beinn an Fhogharaidh which is one of its many subsidiary tops.

The path continued up to the foot of Beinn Bhreac (another subsidiary top) from which we had our first sight of the summit of Ben Venue only a mile away! This turned out



to be a very tough one mile, starting with a traverse over snow covered slopes which dropped steeply to the north. I felt comfortable enough crossing over this area as the snow felt too soft to slip. Chris preferred the reassurance of some extra friction and stopped to fit his micro-spikes on the soles of his boots.

After the traverse the going became easier as we descended to a large cairn where we found that the two ascent routes merge with each other. From there

we had a fairly steep climb ahead up through rocky outcrops. By then I was feeling out of condition and drained of energy. I put this down to having just recovered from a chesty cold and having done no serious walking for five months. Chris was ahead of me – as usual – so I resolved to force myself on and try at least to keep him in sight (which would be some slight comfort). But, as the route ahead steepened, I lost sight of him and made a laboured and solitary ascent to the summit where he was waiting for me. Chris asked if I wanted to stop but did not seem keen on the idea. I could understand why: he felt that way. There was a cold bite in the wind. So, we agreed to drop down to find a sheltered spot where we could stop and have something to eat. We descended to find a large cairn which we had passed on the way up and were able to enjoy a belated lunch. It is quite amazing the difference a bit of food can make – I felt my energy increase instantly. I would be able to make it back to the car!

We got back to the car at about 5.45pm as it was starting to get dark. It had proved to be a tough day, tougher than we expected. The drive to Killin was not without incident either. Chris startled me with sudden outbursts of cursing as the poor lad was taken by bouts of cramp. (Sometimes I suffer it after five-a-side football match: so I know how unpleasant it can be.) This happened twice, requiring Chris to pull up at the next passing place and get out to stretch his legs on both occasions. So we were pleased when eventually we arrived at Lily Cottage where we joined Chris's sister (Janet Eccles), her partner David Swainson and Janet's dog – an adorable spaniel called Ollie. Janet and David had made themselves at home and were just finishing plates of lasagne when we arrived. In no time we were sitting down at the table and tucking into our own generous helpings of lasagne. What a great way to end the day!



Chris suggested that we climb Ben Chonzie on the Sunday. This would be a new Munro for Janet and David, and an easier walk for Chris and me after our strenuous day on Ben Venue. So the four of us and Ollie piled into David's car, drove the 20 miles to Comrie, then 4 miles up Glen Lednock and parked at Invergeldie. Starting at 720ft, we headed up a good track covered in snow. The walking was easy and pleasant even though the cloud level was well down on the hill. We did not expect any views and there were only intermittent

glimpses of the surroundings. At 2,600 feet the track ended on the shoulder of the hill.



Ample footprints in the snow meant that the route ahead was obvious. As we progressed along the flat plateau to the summit it became noticeably colder. The wind was not strong but it had a piercing, cold bite. So we took some quick summit shots and then returned back down the way we had come up.

After enjoying one of Chris's specialities for dinner, thoughts turned to a choice of walks next day. The forecast was for rain in the morning but brightening up in the afternoon. This thwarted any plans for a "hill day" though we hoped we might find some minor hills to climb in the afternoon. David suggested a forest walk in the morning. So we had some loose plans when we retired to bed on the Sunday night. Contrary to what we had been expecting there was no sign of rain when we woke on Monday morning. But, of course, it could still arrive and the forecast is rarely wrong, just sometimes a bit out with timing. Glimpses of blue sky gave us encouragement to climb Sron a' Chlachain (1,700ft), a small hill above Killin. The ascent opened up excellent views of the village, Loch Tay and Tarmachan ridge. With occasional glimpses of sun, the thought crossed my mind that that the Tarmachan ridge was mocking us from its lofty position. Indeed, it would be a lovely place to be in these conditions. We stopped for a while at the top of Sron a' Chlachain to admire the views and I managed to doze off.

After lunch back at the cottage, we piled into David's car and drove to the car park in the picnic area at the head of Glen Ogle. From there we followed a track which zigzagged uphill to a communications aerial. One kilometre away, through heather and across boggy ground, lay the top of Meall Buidhe (2,358ft). Classified as a Graham, this is a hill which Chris and I had climbed before on separate occasions. We enjoyed the walk up the track in sunny conditions but, when we reached the aerial, cloud had descended on the hillside. Little appetite was shown for proceeding to the top of Meall Buidhe: so, content with the views we had enjoyed so far, we went back down to the car.

It had been a strange sort of day, with things turning out differently to what we had expected. We had expected a forest walk in the rain in the morning but found ourselves enjoying the views from Sron a' Chlachain. In the afternoon we had looked forward to views from the top of Meall Buidhe only to find it covered in cloud. So it was good to end the day sitting down to another of Chris's meals, certain that it would be up to its usual high standard.



The forecast was good for the Tuesday: but would it be correct? We were hopeful as we drove past Duncroisk in Glen Lochay to climb Meall Ghaordaidh. The parking area was rather limited. Happily, we were only the second car there, but we were joined by a third car shortly afterwards. We headed up the track running alongside the Allt Dhuin Croisg. After a mile we followed a fork in the track leading up to the broad shoulder of Meall Ghaordaidh.

At this point we were overtaken by the occupants of the third car, young and fit and moving at pace. We made steady progress up the snow covered hillside and the sun was starting to appear from behind the clouds. By half past twelve we had almost idyllic conditions – sunshine and blue sky – and stopped for lunch, enjoying the view across to the Tarmachan ridge. Shortly after setting off again we met the two occupants of the first car who were on their way down. We stopped for a short chat and were interested to discover that they were from Holland. Chris noticed that their walking gear was of the highest quality and very expensive.



Small outcrops of rock ahead indicated that the summit was not far away. Following numerous footprints, our route ahead was clear. Soon the trig point at the summit was in sight but we were exposed to a strong, northerly wind from which we had been completely sheltered up to that point. After some quick summit shots, we descended the way we had come. The snow was fairly soft and yielding, which made for an enjoyable descent. Back at the car, everyone seemed to have enjoyed the walk though I am not sure about Ollie. I could never figure out whether his whines were expressions of protest or pleasure!

Dinner that evening was in the Ben Lawers Hotel, being the nearest eating establishment to the cottage as well as reasonably priced. Ollie was allowed in the restaurant with us and his behaviour was so impeccable that you hardly noticed that he was there.

Wednesday morning arrived which meant a return home for Chris and me. Janet and David, being retired, would be staying at the cottage for another two nights and leaving on the Friday. Janet and David planned to climb Ben Venue, the hill Chris and I had climbed on Saturday. With another good forecast and even less wind, Chris and I intended to climb



Stuc a' Chroin before making our journeys home and Chris had worked out a novel way to climb it from Glen Ample, ascending the north-west ridge. This looked an excellent way on the map but it proved to be not so good when we came to see it as getting up onto the ridge looked likely to be slow and laborious. It seemed far easier to get onto the north-west ridge of Ben Vorlich and enjoy an exhilarating walk to the summit, which is what we did.

Thanks go to Chris for organising a very good meet and to everyone for their company. We managed to climb a hill each day in the finest of snow conditions.

David Douglas

FORTHCOMING MEETS

MEET No 324: Pitlochry

Area: Central Highlands.

Area: Dates: Friday 30 March – Wednesday 4 April 2018.

Accommodation: Pitlochry youth hostel.

Programme: There are a number of more testing mountains in this area and some are likely to still be snow-capped.

Transport: If coming by car, please advise the Meet organiser how many passengers you can take and your approximate route and time of journey.

Maps: Consult the Meet organiser for advice.

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

Equipment: **Check before journeying whether it is advisable to bring crampons and an ice axe.**

Bookings: **Please contact the Meet organiser as soon as possible to find out whether any places are still available.**

Meet Organiser: Chris Knowles

MEET No 325: North West Highlands

Dates: Saturday 19 – Saturday 26 May 2018.

Area: North West Highlands.

Accommodation: Self catering cottage near Ullapool.

Programme: An opportunity to climb some of the attractive hills in the North West Highlands.

Transport: If coming by car, please advise the Meet organiser how many passengers you can take and your approximate route and time of journey.

Maps: OS 1:50,000 Nos 15, 19 & 20.

Food: Will be provided by the Meet organiser, unless requested otherwise, from an evening meal on the first Saturday to breakfast on the last Saturday.

Bookings: **Please contact the Meet organiser as soon as possible to find out what places are still available.**

Meet organiser: David Douglas.

MEET No 326: North East Highlands

Dates: Saturday 30 June – Saturday 7 July 2018.

Area: North East Highlands.

Accommodation: Helmsdale Hostel.

Programme: An opportunity to climb some of the attractive but seldom visited hills in the far north east. A bike would be useful to get to some of the more remote hills.

Transport: If coming by car, please advise the Meet organiser how many passengers you can take and your approximate route and time of journey.

Maps: OS 1:50,000 Nos 16 & 17.

Food: Will be provided by the Meet organiser, unless requested otherwise, from an evening meal on the first Saturday to breakfast on the last Saturday.

Bookings: **The booking deadline has passed but those wishing to book belatedly should contact the Meet organiser who will attempt to obtain places.**

Meet organiser: David Douglas.

MEET No 327: Inveraray

Dates: Saturday 8 – Wednesday 12 September 2018.

Area: Argyll.

Accommodation: Inveraray Hostel.

Programme: An opportunity to climb a large variety of hills.

Transport: If coming by car, please advise the Meet organiser how many passengers you can take and your approximate route and time of journey.

Maps: OS 1:50,000 Nos 50, 56 & 63.

Food: Will be provided by the Meet organiser, unless requested otherwise, from evening meal on Saturday to breakfast on Wednesday.

Bookings: **Please contact the Meet organiser who will attempt to obtain places in respect of requests received up to 31 May.**

Meet organiser: David Douglas.

MEMBERSHIP

We welcome two new members – Janet Eccles and David Swainson.