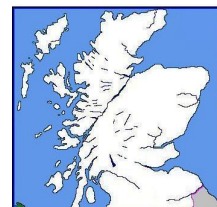


Nor' West News



The NeWSletter of the Nor' West Sgurramblers

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IN MEMORIAM

Steve Williamson

Died from his injuries resulting from
his fall in a gully in the Carneddau
8 January 2011

I first met Steve about ten years ago on walks organised by the Clwydian Ramblers group and it was obvious that he was a very capable walker and mountaineer. During a weekend in the Yorkshire Dales I discussed with him my love of the Scottish mountains and how I had been going there for a number of years with an ambition one day to complete the Munros. He expressed an interest in coming to Scotland with me and Colin Bradley, and we had a great week at Invergarry that included walks on the South Glenshiel ridge and other mountains in the area. This whetted his appetite for the mountains of Scotland.

Colin Bradley had informed me about the Sgurramblers and both Steve and I decided to join the group and attend a meet at Braemar and Pitlochry in May 2009. I had a number of Munros in both areas I needed to complete and, as these were rather remote mountains, a mountain bike was needed. This was Steve's first experience of combining walking with cycling. We had some memorable days - on Ben Avon and then on Beinn a' Bhuird on a very wet day - with problems crossing rivers and poor visibility and constant drizzle and low cloud! We completed others during that trip including An Socach, Beinn Iutharn Mhor and Carn Bhac on much brighter days. And we had some great fun cycling down the tracks back to the car.

A man with grey hair, wearing a red jacket, a blue shirt, and a maroon headband, is sitting on a grassy hillside. He is holding a silver thermos. Next to him is a large blue and black backpack. The background shows a steep, grassy hill with some rocks and a waterfall visible in the distance.

and I together with plan our next Scottish Steve decided to join the order to increase his

On Saturday 8 January 2011 the group had a scramble organised by Ole Wen and Carnedd Dafydd in Snowdonia. Unfortunately, the cat was winched from the site, in the Ogwen Valley, by a Sea King and flown to Ysbyty Gwynedd in Bangor but sadly died.

John Elwyn Williams

SUNSHINE, SNOW, SHORTBREAD & STAG'S BREATH: Meet No.275,
(December 2010 to 2nd January 2011)

There were increasing amounts of snow on the hills the further North we travelled next day until eventually arriving at Craigower Lodge in Newtonmore after a trouble-free journey. Chris Knowles and Hugh Toal had arrived a few minutes earlier so, after settling into our dormitory, we relaxed over a pot or two of tea in the comfortable sitting room where maps were produced and possibilities for the following days discussed. In true

Sgurramblers' fashion, however, no firm decisions were reached and, having spotted a suitable "window of opportunity" in the rather busy kitchen, Chris (who had kindly taken charge of our catering) set about preparing the evening meal. Owing to a water leak, the larger kitchen in another part of the building was out of action; so "our" kitchen would be very busy at meal times until several groups of skiers departed on New Year's Eve.

Wednesday dawned bright and crisply cold with cloud low on the hills. With the possibility of icy roads Chris was not keen on driving; so he decided, along with Hugh and myself, to tackle the two "local" Monadhliath Munros - A' Chailleach and Carn Sgulain. The other Brian had his heart set on Corbett bagging and headed for Meall na Leitreach by the Drumochter Pass.

Having left the Glenballoch road at a small plantation, we found that the route alongside the Allt a' Chaorainn was unpleasantly boggy at first. As we neared the end of the track we noticed two other walkers ahead of us and it was while trying to spot where they intended crossing the part-frozen burn that I noticed a small cairn indicating a steep, narrow path to the left of the track. Following this we were surprised to come upon a rickety footbridge of which I had been totally unaware the previous couple of times I'd passed this way. Traversing across the hillside, heather deep in snow, was not pleasant but we soon passed the bothy and headed upwards until eventually A' Chailleach's tall summit cairn emerged through the mist. A young walker who had overtaken us "old 'uns" a short while before kindly took group photos for us.



The crossing to Carn Sgulain proved tricky, requiring compass bearing in mist over featureless snow. The steep slope down to the Allt Cuil na Caillich had new snowfall on a frozen surface; so we traversed south-west to avoid using our crampons and, after crossing the stream, climbed upwards until iron posts of the ruined fence which follows the ridge came into sight. These were to be our guide eastwards to the summit. Coming

upon two other walkers standing beside a small cairn and assuming it to be the top, it was only after Hugh had had his celebratory photograph taken that we realised the ground beyond was still rising slightly. The summit, surmounted by a rather larger pile of stones, was indeed a couple of hundred yards further on. From here we set off eastwards, following the ruined fence at first as far as Am Bodach before descending over rough ground to a reasonable track alongside the Allt na Beinne. With darkness rapidly falling we eventually reached a housing estate on the outskirts of Newtonmore, where shortly before the main road we came upon a rowdy group of (elderly!) locals hanging around a Fish and Chip van. Chris had sped onward to buy food at the Co-op but Hugh and I quite fancied the easier option. So I nipped back to check the chippie. Yes, it was only there that one evening and would close at 7.00pm. So, having persuaded Chris, we returned to the bunkhouse to inform Brian Lee. He had returned some time back having achieved his objective. After freshening up we went back to the Fish and Chip van - very busy and clearly a regular distraction for the natives on Wednesday evenings.

Surprisingly on the Thursday we agreed on a common objective and parked up by the Post Office in Dalwhinnie intent on attacking The Fara, a Corbett above Loch Ericht. With sunshine bright on the tops we were still in shade as we trudged along the track beside the loch with dense forest to our right. Passing the impressive "gatehouse" to the Ben Alder Estate I dropped behind, keen to try out my new camera, and was astonished when a large

4x4 pulled up, and the lady driver - presumably one of the staff from Ben Alder Lodge - stopped and offered me a lift to the end of the road. Although I would have enjoyed the look on the faces of my companions had I sped past, I sadly declined as we would be leaving the track only a short distance further on. A wide firebreak shown on the 1:25,000 map was not too obvious until we scrambled up a steep bank, only to be faced with an intimidating deer fence. But fortunately there was a gap where the fence met the woods at the south end. The climb up the firebreak was wearisome, very steep and wet with snow melt. But at last we were clear of the trees and could pick out in the snow above the line of a wall which led directly to the summit. This was an ideal spot for lunch though disappointingly our view was limited by a light mist.

For variety we decided to descend by the northeast ridge, a rather messy, convoluted route. But all went well until we reached the slopes above the Allt an t-Sluic. Chris had read a route description suggesting it was possible to cross the river and follow a good track on the other side whereas Brian Lee suggested a more direct route through the forest. So we split into two pairs. Chris and I realised on gaining sight of the swollen, iced over river that the forest option was the only sensible one. Hugh and Brian having a head start, however, we did not see them again until we were arrived back at the car an hour later.



The kitchen was as busy as ever while the evening meal was being prepared. I got chatting to a couple of other walkers who had been out on the hills that day with the result that I was offered a finger or two of “Monkey Shoulder”, a blended malt whisky which (surprisingly!) I’d not sampled before. Later, after we had eaten, we decided to take a walk to the Glen Hotel to check that the reservation which Matthew had made for us to eat there the following evening was in order and particularly to let them know that our group would be one short since they were bound to be particularly busy. They were busy enough on 30th.

On the morning of New Year’s Eve the group divided again. Having parked together at Dalnaspidal Lodge, Brian and Hugh set out for The Sow of Atholl. Chris and I headed for



Meall na Leitreach on the opposite side of Loch Garry, which Brian Lee had climbed two days earlier. We were surprised to find a stalkers’ track easing the climb to almost 700 metres, with a straightforward plod across gently undulating ground to the summit cairn. With cloud drifting around 3,000 feet we enjoyed good views on the descent and were surprised at our impeccable timing on spotting the other pair arriving at the sluice dam a short distance ahead of us. As a result we were back at the car together and decently early back at the bunkhouse - so early in fact that the staff

member cleaning the kitchen made a pot of tea for us. What service!

Our meal that evening at the Glen Hotel was quite good, though the “house red” proved something of a disappointment. An hour or so relaxing back at the Lodge left us in

the right spirit to face the rigours of a Newtonmore Hogmanay. But Chris decided to retire early, dedicated hillwalker that he is, planning to tackle two of the Drumochter Munros the following day. Brian, Hugh and myself left at 11.30 to join the torchlight procession as it set out along the main road led by a Highland Piper, a steady drizzle beginning to fall. Another procession from the opposite end of town converged with ours at the school playing field where a folk singer was performing. In spite of considerable numbers (where had they all come from?), shortbread and tots of 'Stags Breath', a whisky liqueur, was available for all. 'The Bells' at midnight heralded the traditional 'Auld Lang Syne' and an impressive fireworks display before everyone began to drift away. Back at the bunkhouse, we chatted for a while over a wee dram or two with a couple who were staying there with their two young children, finally retiring at around 1.30am.

I felt surprisingly alert on being wakened by my alarm at 7.15 next morning, though not half as surprised as Chris was on my appearance in the kitchen a few minutes later, ready to join him on the hill. Parking at Balsporran Cottages, the good track rising to the col between Geal-charn and A' Mharconaich made for an easy approach with no challenging navigation, which suited me fine after so little sleep. We had to don crampons traversing across the steep snow slopes of A' Mharconaich above Fraoch-choire, to reach the saddle leading to our first target, Beinn Udlamain. Another steep pull and we were on the more gently rising slope of the plateau leading to our first Munro of the day. By the cairn we met another walker who had set out from Melrose at 5 in the morning. He told of being stopped twice en route by police hunting for drunken drivers but he'd not had any alcohol the previous night. Even hills of Munro height were clear of cloud so we had great views as we set off in the direction of A' Mharconaich, crampons still essential on the frozen, wind scoured surface. After some discussion Chris and I agreed to return to the easy track for our descent, rather than following the mountain's steeper northeast ridge. Darkness was closing in when we finally reached the car after an eminently satisfying day.



Back at the bunkhouse we discovered that the others had also enjoyed their day, Brian bagging another Corbett- Carn an Fhreicheadain above Kingussie- whilst Hugh had explored the "Wildcat Trail" encircling Newtonmore on open moorland, through wooded glens and along the banks of the Spey.

It is a long time since we have been able to get onto the hills in such favourable conditions on every day of a New Year Meet. What a pity that the meet organiser was unable to join us, but we are grateful to Matthew for setting things up. Thanks also to Chris for handling the catering, not forgetting Hugh and Brian for their companionship. And my special thanks to the latter for stepping in at short notice to ensure I was able to get there.

Brian Billington

The proposed [**FEBRUARY MEET**](#) was cancelled due to members' inability to attend and an adverse weather forecast.

FORTHCOMING MEETS

MEET No 277: Northwest Highlands

Dates: Friday 20 – Saturday 28 May 2011.

Area: .The meet will be centred on accommodation in the Achnasheen and Glen Affric areas.

Accommodation: To be advised.

Bookings: **The last date for booking has passed and some accommodation is fully booked. If belated enquirers are willing to make their own accommodation arrangements and assist with catering and transport, they are advised to discuss their plans with the Meet organiser.**

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

Programme: This area contains a large number of very fine Munros and Corbetts - something to satisfy every interest and aspiration.

Maps: OS 1:50,000 sheets Nos 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, 33, 34, 40, 41 & 42.

Meet Organiser: Brian Billington.

MEET No 278: Grampians

Dates: Saturday 9 - Sunday 16 July 2011.

Area: The eastern Grampians.

Accommodation: Glen Doll Bunkhouse and Braemar youth hostel.

Programme: An opportunity to climb some the less visited and relatively remote hills in this area. Mountain bikes are likely to be needed to traverse some of the longer glens near Braemar and can be hired in Braemar.

Transport: By car. 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 36, 43 & 44.

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

Bookings: To reserve a place, please contact the Meet organiser and send him a deposit of £100 (cheque payable to him in person). He will attempt to book accommodation in respect of all requests received by 31 May. The balance of costs will be payable on the Meet.

Meet Organiser: David Douglas

NORWAY

Chris Knowles has offered to organise a meet in Norway in August 2011. He proposes a 10 day trek between mountain huts in the Jotunheim area of Norway. The dates will depend on the preferences expressed by those interested in attending.

If interested, please contact him as soon as possible.