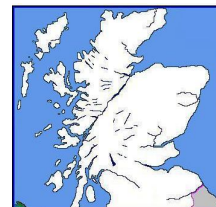


Nor' West News



The NeWSletter of the Nor' West Sgurramblers

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MEET REPORTS

Roaming Many Hills: Meet No. 285 (Saturday 7 – Sunday 15 July 2012)

Having driven up from Bristol to the previous meets I had attended, I decided that this time I would try flying to Inverness and hiring a car instead. As I sat in Bristol airport, tucking into a chicken balti and a pint of beer whilst watching the qualifying for the British Grand Prix, I decided that this was a far more civilised way to travel. Thrashing my car up and down the motorway to Scotland could be a thing of the past. Petrol prices being what they are, the cost of the two options was similar. I was sold on the flying option.

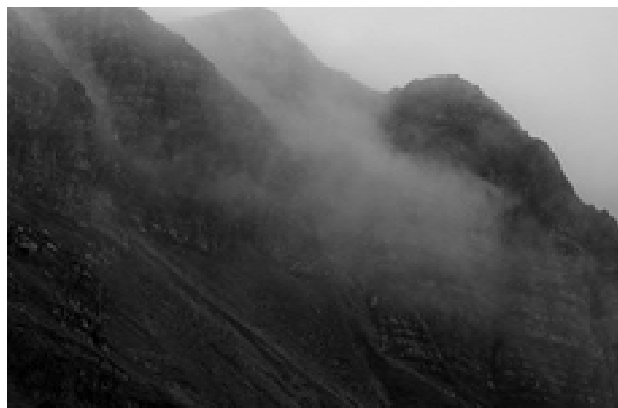
After picking up the hire car from Inverness airport I made my way to Fort William and then on to Banavie and the “Chase The Wild Goose” hostel, trying to think why the hostel has such a strange name. None of the literature I found there provided an answer to that question. If anyone can enlighten me, please send an email with the explanation.



At the hostel I was greeted by Chris Knowles who had arrived minutes earlier after climbing Beinn Trilleachan. He and the rest of the group – Brian Billington, David Douglas and Roger Reeves - had spent the Friday night at Glencoe Youth Hostel. Roger and David arrived next, having caught the Corran ferry and climbed Sgurr Dhomhnuill (a Corbett in Moidart) earlier that day. But Brian had left the others on the Saturday morning in order to mount a determined independent attack on three Munro Tops on the north ridge of Sgurr nan Ceathreamhnan, which he had yet to climb, his attempts in 2011 having been thwarted by appalling weather. He planned to catch the Citylink coach as far as Eilean Donan Castle and then make his way via Dornie to stay in the bunkhouse at Whitefalls Retreat in the tiny community of Camas-luinie in Glen Elchaig.



My planned walk for Sunday had been to tackle the Aonachs. However, the sound of rain on the roof as I woke and a glance out of the window put paid to that idea. Instead a decision was made to start the week with a gentler walk. Stob Ban and Mullach nan Coirean were my chosen Munros for what would be my first day in the Glen Nevis region. As I drove through the glen, I could only guess what the views were like as the cloud base was around the 500m level. My imagination would have to conjure up the views that could have been on offer. On arrival at the car park I was greeted by an unexpected sight - a pay and display machine. I hadn't banked on this and was not carrying any change. Luckily another walker was there just kitting-up and he managed to change a £5 note for me. Parking sorted, walking gear on, it was now time to leave the midge-infested car park and get on to the hills. As I only travel up to Scotland once a year, the first hill of the meet is always a good time to gauge how well the legs are working. After an hour of walking, the legs were still going strong and I was up to the cloud base in good time and into the clag. Stob Ban appeared every now and again in the breaks in the cloud, which made for some atmospheric views of the hill. The cloud meant that there were no views to speak of when I reached the summit: so there was no need to hang around for long - a quick sandwich and the obligatory photo of the cairn and I was on my way. As I traversed to Mullach nan Coirean I met the man from the car park who was doing the same walk but in an anti-clockwise direction. Pleasantries having been exchanged, I was soon on my way again - up to Mullach nan Coirean and then back down to Glen Nevis. On the descent there were a few ominous signs that my right knee was going to give me trouble that week. This was a concern as my right knee is my "good" knee.



Arriving at the hostel, I realised that I did not have the security code for the front door and that there was no-one around to let me in. As the others were unlikely to be back for a couple of hours, I took the opportunity to doze in the car whilst listening to the Murray v Federer Wimbledon final. In due course the others arrived. Chris had driven along the shores of Loch Arkaig to climb Sgurr Cos na Breachd-laoigh (a Corbett to the north of Glendessary Lodge). Roger had made the identical road journey but had climbed Bidein a' Chabair (a Corbett at the western end of Glen Dessary). Unfortunately for David, Roger had left the hostel early in the morning and David's boots were still in his car! So David had had no option but to spend a day of leisure in Banavie.

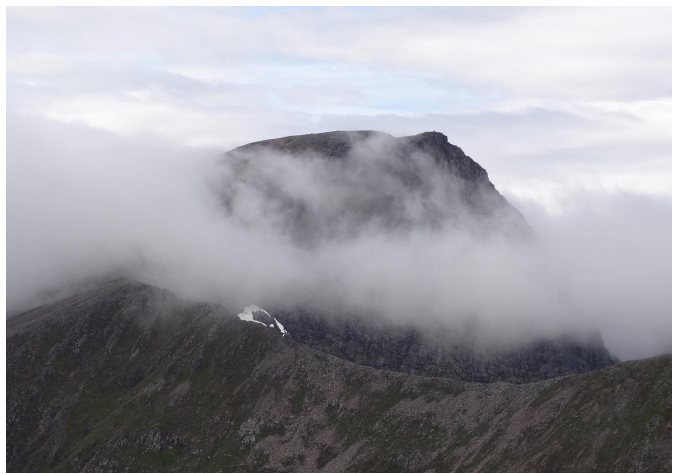
Monday came and with it more favourable weather conditions. So Chris drove to Glenfinnan where he climbed Sgurr Ghiubhsachain and then continued to along the ridge to Sgorr Craobh a' Chaorainn (both Corbetts). Roger went off alone hoping for a good day as he planned to take on a mammoth excursion to Ben Aden - totalling 18 miles and 9 hours 40 minutes of cycling and walking.



David and I had decided to head for Aonach Beag and Aonach Mor. I found it a pleasant walk through Glen Nevis and past the impressive Steall Falls to the foot of Aonach Beag. But then it was a long slog to the summit of Aonach Beag. The cloud base

was again low and, instead of taking an unappealing path straight up to the summit, David and I mistakenly followed what must have been a sheep track which contoured round the hill. But the

clouds did break for five minutes – just long enough to provide us with some spectacular views of Ben Nevis. I had hoped for views of the Grey Corries but the "stubborn blanket of cloud" (as David put it) stayed with us until it was time to descend into Coire Giubhsachan.



Our chosen route down into the corrie was steep to say the least. I couldn't help wondering what type of boots David was wearing as he seemed to make descending look incredibly easy (with his arms folded) whilst I was using all my concentration just to stay on my feet. On reflection, descending via the bealach between Aonach Mor and Carn Mor Dearg might have been the better option. After the steep descent, it was an enjoyable walk back down to Glen Nevis



with some fantastic views of the Mamores ahead of us.

Tuesday was a transition day, as we were leaving the Fort William area to stay at Ratagan youth hostel. En route, Roger and David headed along Loch Arkaig to walk into Glen Dessary where Roger bagged Carn Mor (a Corbett) whilst David walked further to the northwest to climb Sgurr nan Coireachan (a Munro). Chris headed west to Loch Ailort to climb An Stac (a Corbett). I chose to bag Sgurr nan Coireachan and Garbh Chioch Mhor (two of the three Munros to the north of Glen Dessary) as these lie conveniently between the two hostels. Glen Dessary was proving to be a popular destination that day.

The previous evening during dinner we had been discussing navigational mistakes. Chris joked that you didn't really need to be able to navigate whilst walking the Munros anymore as the paths had become very well defined. So it made me laugh when I came across a signpost informing me that I was heading towards the "Hill Path to Munros". Maybe he's got a point! After following said signpost, it was a fairly straightforward walk to the Bealach nan Gall - again in the clag. As there were no views on offer again, I decided to liven things up by listening to my MP3 player. This may not be one for the purists but it did seem to have a positive effect on my mood: and this meant that I was able to get up and down my chosen Munros in no time. A couple of champagne corks on top of Garbh Chioch Mhor were clear evidence that someone had recently compleated their Munros. After all that effort, surely it wouldn't have been too



hard for them to take the corks back down with them as a memento. Back down in Glen Dessary I was relieved to see no sign of the infamous parking attendant waiting for me near the farm. So it was back on the road again and off to Ratagan. Reaching the hostel, I found that Brian had arrived already. I was pleased to congratulate him on completing his Munro Tops and to listen to his tale of derring-do.

Rich Wherlock

I was delighted to be able to confirm that I had completed the Munro Tops at last. And I should like to express my most sincere gratitude to all those Sgurramblers who have helped me over the years, with transport and companionship on the hills. I couldn't have completed the Tops without their help. All-in-all, my final solitary endeavours went well. There had proved to be a reasonable path following the River Glennan as far as the bealach overlooking the tiny community of Camas-luinie. And I had returned by the same route,

walking over the pass from Camas-luinie to Dornie, and then caught an afternoon bus to Shiel Bridge at the end of my solo trip.



The trek into Glen Elchaig had been relatively easy, though low cloud on the hills did not bode well on the rougher descent through bracken and heather to the bunkhouse at Whitefalls Retreat. A note on the door informed me that Willie (the proprietor) would be back later and I could pick any bed upstairs (bedding provided). There were eggs and

bread in the fridge and a bike could be chosen from any of those in the barn! With the foot of my target mountain ten miles away the latter had been an essential requirement but, sadly, I found that the two bikes most suitable in size had 'problems' with their gears. Still I would have to make the best of it and, after chatting with a very friendly Willie later, I retired early to bed.

The drumming of rain on the roof on the Sunday morning served to delay departure on what should be, hopefully, a significant and rather special climb. Having allowed myself a day in reserve, this particularly important ascent could have been left until the Monday: but that might be risky if the weather worsened. The rain having ceased by 9.30, I decided to go for it and set out on a rather unreliable bike round to Killilan and onto the excellent estate track up the glen. I had been instructed by Willie that, if I had problems with the bike, I could just "leave it at the side of the track and" Willie would "get the estate to pick it up" - which wouldn't be a great deal of help to me in getting back! In the event I discovered that changing to a low gear caused the chain to jump off but there were not too many steep uphill sections requiring me to get off and push. So the ten miles to Carnach were covered easily.



An initially good stalkers' path heading towards Sgurr nan Ceathreamhnan's north ridge became more difficult to follow higher up on soggy moorland approaching Creag Ghlas. Reaching the height where I had rock rubble underfoot made a welcome change for once. After a slight drop it was an easy climb to the first Top (Stuc Fraoch Choire) which, sadly, was wreathed in cloud. I had just a brief glimpse into an impressive corrie below before the clag closed in again. The climb up to Stuc Mor was straightforward but a rocky descent to the

next col required care. Hesitating at the foot of my final Top, with only 80 metres of ascent to achieve 'completion', I was horrified to feel a twinge of cramp! Consequently I took the final short distance fairly slowly. But at last the summit of Stuc Bheag (the 227th Top) was attained. I had planned, after a rest and bite to eat, to continue to Ceathreamhnan's West Top. But, having visited this twice before and wary of continuing threats of muscle cramps, it seemed more sensible to turn back along my route of ascent, dropping off the west side of the ridge when the terrain looked favourable. By then fatigue was setting in and undermined the enjoyment of a view of an impressive waterfall on the Allt Coire Easaich beside the steep and



rather treacherous path lower down. Reaching Carnach at last, it was a tiring cycle ride back to the Whitefalls Retreat. I had just enough energy left to knock up a quick meal and have a chat with Willie (who seemed impressed with my achievement) before falling gratefully into bed.

On the Tuesday I spent a relatively short day making an ascent of Sguman Coinntich (a Corbett above Killilan). There were excellent views over to Sgurr nan Ceathreamhnan at the head of the valley and I took numerous photographs of my previous day's area of conquest before heading west to catch a bus to Shiel Bridge and rejoin the others at Ratagan youth hostel.

Brian Billington



On the Wednesday Roger and Brian drove west into Arnisdale in order to climb Beinn a' Chapuill (a Graham next to Beinn Sgritheall) and later indulged themselves with a pint in the Glenelg Inn (once the local of Gavin Maxwell) on the way back to Ratagan. Chris drove off to park his car near Morvich and then, in a day of drizzle and mist, he walked over the bealach between Ben Fhada and A' Ghlas-bheinn to climb up to the remote summit of Sgurr Gaorsaic (a Corbett). Never having been to the west of coast of Scotland before, I had



an inordinate amount of walks from which to choose. But my mind was made up for me by viewing another walker's spectacular photos of the Five Sisters from the previous day. Hopefully, David and I would get the same views. Chris dropped us off below the Bealach an Lapain at the start of our walk but, unfortunately, the inevitable happened - it began to rain and the clag descended. So we started the long walk up to the ridge in full waterproofs, followed closely by a seven men from Yeovilton (a well known air base in Somerset). They did not take kindly to me

asking if they were RAF seeing that they were actually Navy! Once on the ridge, it was an energetic walk over the peaks, with some mild scrambling in-between to liven things up. Every now and again, I'd get a teasing glimpse of the ridge in front as the clouds briefly cleared.

When we reached Sgurr Fhuaran, the final Munro of the day, David and I waited for nearly 15 minutes hoping the clouds would clear - but it wasn't to be. So we started the descent back to Loch Duich along what turned out to be a very well constructed path.

Thursday was a rest day for Roger and Brian. They occupied themselves by eating fish & chips at Hectors in Kyle of Lochalsh and visited Eilean Ban where Gavin Maxwell once lived. This island now houses one of the piers of the Skye Bridge. It was not such a relaxing day for Chris who drove off to tackle the twin peaks of Sgurr a' Bhac Chaolais (officially a Corbett) and Buidhe Bheinn (which is the same height a little further along the ridge) to the south of Glen Shiel.



With one eye on attempting the South Cluanie ridge on the Friday, I decided that a less strenuous walk was required on the Thursday. So David and I made the short drive to Gleann Choinneachain in order to climb Ben Fhada and A' Ghlas-bheinn. It was clear from the outset that my legs were not full of energy that day and it was going to be a bit of a slog. It was a pleasant walk

up the glen. For once the sun was out and there was good views all around. David and I decided to head for the Bealach a' Sgairne (instead of taking the path up to Ben Fhada) as we thought there might be some sign of a path heading up to the summit from there. But there was no evidence of the path: so we turned our attention to A' Glas-bheinn and followed the well-defined path to the summit. This was my 50th Munro, a small milestone which I marked by eating a giant Kitkat. Mother Nature decided to mark the occasion by blowing in a rain cloud! On the way back down to the bealach the sun returned and we decided to make the most of it. That meant not heading for Ben Fhada but taking off the packs and settling down at the head of the glen for a well earned snooze instead. Thirty minutes later we were ready to head back to the car. As we came off the hill two young girls spotted us and rushed across the bridge to offer us biscuits which we both gratefully took. A snooze in the glen and biscuits - not a bad way to end a walk.

As I was not going south with the rest of the group next day, we dined that evening in the Kintail Lodge Hotel. To our surprise, on our arrival we were ushered to the conservatory area of the restaurant, which was clearly the reserve of the more discerning diner. (The Sgurramblers' reputation precedes them?). The only problem was that four of us had spotted "venison pie" on the specials board and this was not available on the more exclusive menu we had been given. Thankfully, Brian asked for it and the landlady grudgingly obliged. She wasn't too impressed when three more of us ordered the same.



Next morning Roger and David went off to Glen Roy to climb two Grahams – both named Leana Mhor and situated directly opposite each other on either side of the glen. They reached the top of the one on the west side but could not find a sensible way to cross the River Roy because the bridge mentioned in the Grahams guidebook no longer exists. So they abandoned their attempt to bag the Corbett on the east side. Chris and Brian were heading home to Staffordshire and Chris had it in mind to tackle Meall Dubh (a Corbett) en route. This meant that Chris would be driving through Glen Shiel: so I decided to take the opportunity

to leave my car at the northern end of the South Cluanie ridge and cadge a lift with him to the start of my walk just past the Cluanie Inn. It proved to be a long, gradual ascent to the first Munro on the ridge (Creag a' Mhaim) - nothing too strenuous and a good way to warm up the legs for the rest of the ridge. I was relieved to see that the skies were clear on what was going to be my longest walk of the week. Once up on the ridge the walking was straightforward with minimal ascent and descent between peaks. So I was able to keep up a good pace and tick off the Munros fairly quickly. But, as I descended the highest Munro on the ridge - Sgurr an Doire Leathain - the knee pain (which had been with me most of the



week) intensified to the point where walking downhill was incredibly painful and I contemplated continuing to Sgurr an Lochain but missing out Creag nan Damh (the seventh Munro). This would have been somewhat of a coincidence, as only that morning Chris had told me that, when he'd walked the ridge, the same thing happened to one of the guys he was walking with. On that occasion, the person in question decided to miss out Creag nan Damh and descend to the glen. But Roger quipped that you're not a proper Sgurrambler if you don't complete the seven in one day! So, with that in the back of my mind, I set off on the final ascents of the ridge. Going up Sgurr an Lochain and across to Creag nan Damh was no problem but the 800 metre descent the other side of Creag nan Damh was not something I was relishing. Luckily this was mid-July so I had hours of daylight left - which was just as well. I think my descent will go down as the slowest in history. I can't remember the exact length of time it took but it was painfully slow, in more ways than one. I was one relieved Sgurrambler when I got back to the road and into the car. I decided there that it was the end of my walking for the week. The knees could now take a well-earned rest.

As I had one more day left on the west coast, I decided to make use of it by taking the Glenelg ferry over to Skye and catching my first glimpse of the Cuillin range. Roger and David had a more energetic day climbing Beinn Mhic Cedidh and Beinn Odhar Bheag, leaving Roger with just two remaining Corbetts to bag next year.

My congratulations go to Brian on completing the Munro Tops and my thanks to Chris for organising another successful meet and maintaining his high standard of catering!

Rich Wherlock

Westward Ho!!: Meet 286: (Friday 7 - Monday 10 September 2012)

A report on this meet will be published in the next NeWSletter which is due to be issued on 1 January 2013.

FORTHCOMING MEETS

MEET No 287: AGM

Dates: Friday 19 - Sunday 21 October 2012.

Area: Lake District.

Accommodation: Eskdale youth hostel.

Programme: The AGM will be held on the Saturday evening, followed by a show of photographs taken during the year (if members care to bring them).

Transport: 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: It is planned to purchase all meals at the hostel. Those who prefer self-catering will need to bring and prepare their own food. Anyone asking the Meet organiser to reserve rooms for them should advise him which hostel meals are required on each day of the Meet.

Bookings: The Meet organiser has booked accommodation at Eskdale youth hostel for those who have already given notice of their intention to attend. **Those wishing to book belatedly should get in touch with the Meet organiser immediately.** If accommodation remains available, he will advise what deposit is required. The balance of costs is payable at the Meet.

Meet Organiser: Dave Cheesman

MEET No 288: Hogmanay

Dates: Friday 28 December 2012 - Wednesday 2 January 2013.

Area: Lake District.

Accommodation: Windermere or Grasmere youth hostel.

Programme: An opportunity to celebrate the New Year in the picturesque Lake District. A wide variety of walks of all standards are readily accessible from the hostel.

Transport: 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: Please consult the Meet organiser.

Bookings: **Chris Knowles has assumed responsibility for organising this meet.**

Accommodation is now scarce. Anyone who wishes to attend but has not informed the Meet organiser should email Chris without delay.

Meet Organiser: Chris Knowles.

MEMBERSHIP

We welcome two new members – Stephen Bass and Matthew Smith-Lilley.

Season's Greetings

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