



Nor' West News



The NeWSletter of the Nor' West Sgurramblers

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MEET REPORTS

GLEN NEVIS: Meet No. 314(Saturday 10 – Wednesday 14 September 2016.

I met Chris Knowles at Stirling railway station at 10 o'clock on the Saturday morning for the start of (what would be) a predominantly Corbett bagging Meet. This would be Chris's fifth trip to Scotland in 2016 and, on the journey up, I was interested to hear how he had been getting on with the Corbetts. He had three new Corbetts in the Braemar area which he was keen to climb during the Meet. The first of these was Monamenach which could be climbed conveniently by taking a slight detour to Glen Isla. We also had a lovely afternoon to climb it, with blue skies and sunshine. We parked at Auchavan, at the end of the public road in the glen, and followed a track to a col at 2,000



feet. From there it was a pleasant walk to the summit at 2,647 feet. It must be one of the easiest Corbetts to climb as it took less than an hour and a half to get to the summit from which we had excellent views up to the higher hills to the north.

By the time we arrived at Braemar youth hostel it was only half past three and we were pleased to find it was open, giving us time to unload our luggage and food provisions. Once unpacked there was time to relax over tea and biscuits until Reception opened at five o'clock. Before booking in we were joined by Rob Sturgess who had first contacted NWS a number of years earlier whilst living on Exmoor. He had moved recently to Penrith and had driven up that day for his first Meet.

After discussing the possibilities that evening, we opted to tackle Glas Tulaichean next day. This was a Munro from which Rob had had to turn back in 2015 when he encountered stalkers, despite having checked with Dalmunzie Hotel who had assured him that no stalking was taking place! We parked at the Dalmunzie Hotel and walked along the

track of the old railway which used to link Dalmunzie with Glenlochsie Lodge (a former deer-stalking lodge now in ruins). From the lodge we followed an unsightly track which led almost to the summit.

As we approached the trig point we passed a hillwalker going in the opposite direction. She was the only other walker we saw that day. Unfortunately, no views were to



be had from the top as the cloud level was around 3,000 feet. However, the hill itself proved to have many interesting features – such as the numerous ridges which fan out from the summit, like the fingers of a giant green hand.

On the way down we followed a different ridge which proved to be more aesthetic than the one we had ascended because we had a view looking down into the attractive Glas Choire Mhor as well as following a path which was

considerably less obtrusive than the track we had taken going up. Back at the hostel we replenished with tea and considered possibilities for the following day. In the evening I got into conversation with a chap who was on his third round of the Munros and second of the Corbetts, Grahams and Donalds. It's interesting the folk you meet in hostels!

On the Monday morning we were sorry to learn that Rob would have to head back home to look after two dogs for a friend. Originally this had been planned for the Wednesday but circumstances had changed and his friend needed Rob to “dog-sit” a day earlier. It had been a long way for Rob to come just to climb one hill; but at least it was one which he had been keen to do, having been unsuccessful previously. For Chris and me it was back to bagging Corbetts and we drove over to Ballater to climb Morven. Eventually, after driving through Ballater and along a series of minor roads, we parked near the deserted farmhouse of Balhennie. This approach provided us with the most direct and quickest ascent of Morven which can be climbed from a number of directions. We followed a track passing the deserted farmhouse and then picked up a path which headed up diagonally across the lower slopes of the hill. This led us to an unsightly track which we followed up the east ridge. Back on a path again, and heading up the ridge, the walking became more enjoyable.

If the number of cairns is anything to go by, Morven must be a popular hill: we passed a fair number on the climb to the summit. But we did not see any other walkers all day and enjoyed the solitude of the summit despite a strong south-westerly wind. The cloud level was low, which was a pity as the views would have been



extensive due to Morven's isolation. With the low cloud and the wind, it was not a day for lingering at the top; so we headed back down the ridge and then followed a different but more direct path back to Balhennie.

The forecast for the Tuesday was for rain in the west of Scotland but becoming increasingly dry the further you went east. Luckily, Chris's last Corbett in the area was Conachcraig, which is very much in the east. So we were optimistic about the potential for a dry day and possibly even a bit of sunshine. And, if conditions were reasonable, we wanted to do Lochnagar as well. We parked at the car park at the Spittal of Glenshee. This cost £3 which we did not begrudge paying, being cheaper than Lake District prices. Of more concern were the midges, forcing us to change hurriedly into our walking boots. But we were no longer bothered by them once we had started walking. We followed the track to the Allt-na-Giubhsaich and then the Lochnagar footpath through a small area of lovely pine wood. The path took us up to the col between Conachcraig and Lochnagar - at which point we left the path and climbed to the top of Conachcraig.



After short rest at the top we descended to the col and followed the path up Lochnagar. Chris observed that we must operate at different body temperatures as he had stripped down to his t-shirt whilst I still wore my fleece. I conceded that it was quite warm but knew that it would be cooler higher up. In any case, I was comfortable enough by the time we reached the col just beneath Meikle Pap. At this point we were starting to enjoy the many fine features of the majestic mountain. The famous corrie, with its great granite cliffs rising up from the loch below, had come into view. It was

absorbing walking along the rim of the corrie with the cloud billowing up from below.

We continued along the edge and up to Cac Carn Mor from which Cac Carn Beag, the highest point, came into sight. We were soon at the trig point which stands proudly on top of a granite tor. This time, as you would expect, we did not have the summit to ourselves, having to share it with two locals whose north-east accents were unmistakable. We perched ourselves just below the trig point for lunch. I found it quite cool and put on my anorak, making me the odd one out as Chris and the other two blokes were in t-shirts. It was pleasant in the absence of any wind. To vary the route of descent, we returned by the Glas Allt and alongside Loch Muick. It had been an excellent day's walk though the sun never quite came out.



Wednesday arrived and it was time to head home. As Chris had bagged his intended Corbetts, I ventured to suggest a couple of Grahams we could climb on the journey south. The first was Beinn nan Gaisimh and the second was Meall Dearg, both on the road from Aberfeldy to Crieff. Going by the descriptions in the Andrew Dempster guide, it seemed that Beinn nan Gaisimh would be quite a tough proposition: so we opted for Meall Dearg. The latter is rather unkindly described as a fairly nondescript little hill with few redeeming features. But I enjoyed it near the top where it got a bit more steep and craggy. The rest of the journey homewards passed through some scenic countryside, such as the picturesque Sma' Glen. All too soon I found myself back in Stirling.



go to Chris for organising an enjoyable Meet with a good variety of walking, and to both Chris and Rob for their company.

David Douglas

It had been a successful Meet for all – three new Corbetts for Chris; one new Munro for Rob; and one new Graham for me. But the reward of the trip is not just bagging but also about re-visiting hills like old friends. My thanks

HONISTER HAUSE: Meet no. 315 (Friday 14 – Sunday 16 October 2016)

The venue chosen for the 2016 Norwest Sgurramblers AGM was Honister Hause youth hostel on Honister Pass at a height of 1167 ft. I arrived at the hostel just before 9am on the Saturday morning to find that seven others - Roger Reeves, Ian Caudy, Brian Billington, David and Kerina Cheesman, David Douglas and John Andrew - had arrived the previous day. Roger had already left to climb Grasmoor, which was enveloped in clag, in order to increase his tally of Marilyns. Ian left shortly after I arrived. He was heading for Seat (between Haystacks and High Crag) and reported later that he had enjoyed good views, especially looking down on Buttermere as he neared the summit. Seat is one of the 541 Birketts (a list of all the hills over 1000ft in the Lake District, compiled by the climber Bill Birkett) which Ian is in the process of compleating.



I was happy to join the rest who had decided to climb Great Gable via Moses Trod. In days gone by I had considered it to be cheating to climb a hill from such a lofty elevation as Honister pass. But as I've got older I'm grateful to have a start point of over 1,000 feet. The walk started by passing through the car park of the Honister slate quarry, which also has a side line in guiding people on a via ferrata along various airy

traverses crossing the face of Fleetwith Pike. As we walked past there was a group gearing up with harnesses ready for their trip.

To gain Moses Trod we had to walk along a track which at one time would have been the route of a tram line for transporting slate from the quarry. Eventually we gained the start of Moses Trod which is named after Moses Rigg, a 19th century quarry man who supposedly used this route to transport illicitly distilled whisky hidden in loads of slate (either in sledges or pony panniers) from a still in the quarry down to Wasdale Head. How much of this has any basis in fact is open to debate. After about half a mile we came to a fork in the path, which resulted in some discussion as to which branch we should take. The majority opinion was in favour of the lower path. The weather conditions at this point were less than perfect, although no worse than the “late morning showers” which the MWIS forecast had predicted. And at a point on the traverse below Brandreth it was one of these showers which prompted us to put on waterproof over trousers. Great Gable was



occasionally visible but Pillar and the High Crag to High Stile ridge were hidden by cloud. This didn't give much encouragement that there would be a view from Great Gable.

When the path started to lose height and crossed a fence, we realized we had chosen the wrong path at the previous junction and were in fact about 50m below Moses Trod. To rectify this we followed the line of the fence uphill to pick up the correct route. Eventually we reached a point where we had to leave Moses Trod (for the 230m climb to the top of Great Gable) and stopped for refreshments. Then we took a well graded path towards the summit, becoming quite spread out as our height increased. I have been down this route on several occasions but never up it, though I remembered a short section of easy scrambling two thirds of the way up. I followed John up this and waited for the others. Next was Brian who had taken a route to the right of the scramble; but of the other three there was no sign even after we had waited some considerable time.



Most of the route was in view below and we were quite perplexed as to what could have happened to them. At one point we did consider going down to see if one of them had sustained an injury. We also thought that perhaps they had found a different ascent route and, with this in mind, we set off for the top. A few yards from the summit I was asked by someone who was descending if I was part of a group of six, and that, if so, the other three had been waiting for us on top and had eventually decided to take the path down to Windy Gap en route to Green Gable. I set off in some haste to catch them up, asking the person I had spoken to if he would pass on the same message to John and Brian as they were not far behind me.

Taking a bearing down to Windy Gap, I followed the rough stony track down for about 50m until I caught sight of David Douglas and shouted to him to wait. After about five minutes there was still no sight of Brian and John, which was a cause for some concern - and also incredulity that we could manage to lose each other twice in one day. When there was still no sign of Brian and John, we asked a passing walker if he would inform them where we were when he reached the top. While we were waiting Ian came up the track from Windy Gap. Having climbed Seat he had decided to extend the day with an ascent of Great Gable. Eventually Brian and John arrived. It appeared that the man who had passed on the message to me had not told them the same thing and they were not sure where I had gone.

All six of us now re united, we set off down to Windy Gap and thence the short climb to Green Gable. We asked



someone who was on top at the same time if he would take a group photo of us - something which we'd not been able to do on Great Gable. But we couldn't include John as he'd already set off for Brandreth. By now the weather had improved and all the tops were clear. There were even shafts of sunlight penetrating the thinning cloud, making for some better photo opportunities. We regrouped on Brandreth and this time asked the same man who'd taken the

photo on Green Gable to take a photo of all six of us.

From Brandreth we enjoyed even clearer views and took more photographs. It was then a short easy stroll to Grey Knotts, with ever improving views. By this time Ian had caught us up. After descending a short distance from Grey Knotts we had a choice of following the path directly down to the hostel or following a slightly longer, but less steep and rocky, path down to the track which we came in on. It had been a much longer day than expected due to our inability to stay together. But the "silver lining" of this "cloud" was that we experienced the better weather which did not arrive until later in the day.



There was still plenty of time for afternoon tea and biscuits with Roger (who had bagged his Marilyn) and Paul Cassell (who had arrived at the hostel while we were out walking). That evening we enjoyed an excellent three course evening meal (supplied courtesy of the hostel staff), and this was followed by the AGM where we discussed next year's Meets programme. The day was rounded off by a viewing of pictures from the year's Meets, of my last year's trek in Nepal, and of Dragonflies in Roger's garden.

Only four of us were staying for a walk on the Sunday, although we were joined by Guy Hindley who had been with us on a meet to the Dolomites some years previously. The weather predictions for the day were somewhat worse than for Saturday, with heavier, more prolonged rain. Taking this into account, as well as the fact that some of us would be travelling home later in the day, we chose a short walk up Castle Crag in Borrowdale, with the possibility of extending this to do a round trip taking in part of the Allerdale Ramble. We took three cars down to a spot between Rosthwaite and Stonethwaite where I knew there



was some roadside parking. From there we walked along the road heading towards the youth hostel and then took a track which follows the west bank of the river Derwent. Eventually we left the track for a path which climbed steadily towards our chosen hill. After climbing a stile we stopped to put on overtrousers as the drizzle earlier on had become a persistent downpour. It was then a short walk to the top on a path which ascended in zigzags through a quarry spoil heap to the 950ft summit.

Although this hill does not appear in Bill Birkett's "Complete Lakeland Fells" list (due to its lowly height), it was accorded the status of a separate fell by Wainwright who claimed that to have included it in the High Spy chapter would not have done it justice. There is a war memorial to the "Fallen of Borrowdale" affixed to a rock outcrop which marks the highest point. Apparently there are some superb views of Skiddaw from there but we were denied these due to the low cloud. After a quick group summit photo, hoping the camera didn't get too wet, we retreated down the slag heap path. Brian and I decided to return to the car the way we had come; but the others opted for a different route which took them down to the Allerdale Ramble, completing a round trip back

Thanks go to David and Kerina for organizing the Meet in such a splendid location, and to everyone else for their company.

Chris Knowles

FORTHCOMING MEETS

The provisional programme of Meets for 2017 is included in the Minutes of the 2016 AGM. But there have been some subsequent amendments to the details of the earliest Meets. The latest available details of the first four Meets are given below.

MEET No 316: Southern Uplands

Dates: Saturday 7 – Sunday 14 January 2017.

Area: Southern Uplands.

Accommodation: Please consult Meet organiser.

Programme: An opportunity to climb a variety of hills in the Southern Uplands when they are 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: OS 1:50,000 Nos 72, 73, 78 and 79.

Equipment: **Crampons and ice axe essential.**

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

Bookings: **To reserve a place, please contact the Meet organiser as soon as possible.**

Meet Organiser: David Douglas.

MEET No 317: Southern Highlands

Dates: Friday 17 – Tuesday 21 February 2017.

Area: Southern Highlands.

Accommodation: Please consult Meet organiser.

Programme: An opportunity to climb a variety of hills in the Southern Highlands when they are 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: Please consult Meet organiser.

Equipment: **Crampons and ice axe essential.**

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

Bookings: To reserve a place, please contact the Meet organiser who will advise what deposit is required. **He will try to reserve accommodation for bookings received by 15 January.**

Meet Organiser: Chris Knowles.

MEET No 318: Glencoe

Dates: Thursday 13 – Tuesday 18 April 2017.

Area: Glencoe.

Accommodation: Glencoe Youth Hostel.

Programme: An opportunity to climb a variety of hills in the area.

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: OS1:50,000 Nos 41, 49 and 50.

Equipment: **It will be advisable to bring crampons and an ice axe if there is not an early thaw.**

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

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

Meet organiser: David Douglas.

MEET No 319: Easter Ross

Dates: Saturday 6 – Saturday 13 May 2017.

Area: Easter Ross.

Accommodation: Self catering cottage near Conon Bridge, Dingwall. **Number of places limited to 6.**

Programme: An opportunity to climb some of the attractive but seldom visited hills in Easter Ross.

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: OS1:50,000 Nos 20, 21, 25 and 26.

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: To reserve a place, please **contact the Meet organiser as soon as possible**. Some places have already been booked in respect of requests received.

Meet organiser: David Douglas.

MEMBERSHIP

We welcome two new members – Rob Sturgess and Val Bailey.

A revised membership list containing the latest detailed information will be circulated separately.

Subscriptions for 2017 are unchanged at **£15** per person (see AGM Minutes) and are now due.

Membership numbers have been dwindling slowly in recent years and, because there has been a poor response to advertising for new members via the BMC website, affiliation has been transferred to the Mountaineering Council of Scotland. It is too early to assess whether this will be more effective in attracting new members.

So, in order to acquire a small but steady flow of new members, it would be helpful if all current members would make a personal effort to interest friends, colleagues and people in their communities in joining the NWS. [Chris Knowles can provide advertising material.]

When seeking new members it should be emphasised that:

- a. Members are encouraged to inform a committee member, before each annual Meet programme is determined, which areas and hills they wish to visit so that formal dates and locations provide (as far as possible) the opportunities they desire.
- b. Members are free to walk where they please and with whom they please (or alone, if they prefer) during a Meet.
- c. Contrary to any impression created by frequent reference in NeWSletters to lesser hills, there are many existing members who are very ready to engage in Munro bagging.
- d. Members are free to contact each other directly to arrange to walk together at times and in places outside the formal programme. [NB. The NeWSletter editor suggests that news of these more independent activities would be of potential interest to all members and would be pleased to include accounts of such trips in NeWSletters.]