



“Mountain Thyme”

Spring 2020



Mountain Thyme is published by

Blairgowrie and District Hillwalking Club.

The editor welcomes comments and contributions from all members.

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PRESIDENT'S INTRODUCTION

Ian Cameron

Well, who would have predicted this a year ago! We have found ourselves globally in a position more akin to a Steven Spielberg movie than life as normal, whatever “normal” is/was. This Silent Killer is one of the worst enemies’ mankind has encountered in living memory and crept up on us under the cover of ignorance. This has perhaps highlighted what a fragile lot, we humans are. Is this our “wake up call”?

Firstly, I hope you, your families and friends are all well and have been able to avoid this dreadful virus which has descended upon us. I would like to thank everyone for staying local and for keeping our rescue teams quiet. It means more to them, than perhaps we know.

Only by acting as a community can we get ourselves back to a position where we can enjoy the hills together. We, in our Club, are all very much missing the hills, as is everyone else who enjoys them.

Here in Scotland the situation is still no different to what most of the world has experienced recently with limited access to exercise, somewhat different to what we were accustomed to. Mountaineering Scotland, Scottish Mountain Rescue, Police Scotland, and Mountain Training Scotland have formed a Mountain Safety Group and have joined resources to advise the Scottish Government on a course of action to allow us to safely return to the hills. We can be sure that this group will give the best advice available and should be respected when it is fully announced. In the meantime, the Scottish Government advice is clear, essential travel only, limited driving for our exercise. (please note this advice may have changed in the rapidly changing situation, since time of writing).

You may ask, “What if I live local to a hill, can I go up then?” The advice would appear to me, to be slightly more complicated but essentially no, not up a larger hill. The advice is to stick to paths and tracks lower down. Mountaineering Scotland have advised us not to try and interpret the advice in such a way as to enable us to continue with our hobby at the moment. Do not look for loopholes, think more in the spirit of what we are trying to achieve as a community.

No one sets off for a day in the hills expecting to be rescued. However experienced and knowledgeable you may feel you are; statistics show most rescues are the result of simple slips and trips. Possibly, there are

dangers incurred by “staying at home” but the consequences of an injury are significantly greater in the hills. It is a question of resources required. Mountain rescues are resource intensive. If you are injured at home, you can either transport yourself for treatment or if more serious you will be attended by 2 fully equipped ambulance crew members in one vehicle.

It only takes one slip, trip or fall in the high hills and our Search and Rescue teams’ services will be required. That means 10, 20, 30 team members (depending on the incident) coming to help, a helicopter crew coming to assist, an ambulance on standby, Police coordinating and before you know it you have brought up to 50 or more people out.

Even if rescue teams have sufficient PPE, it is not designed for use in the outdoor environment or when undertaking hard physical activity. So, not only you, but the MR team and their household, when they return home, are at a greater risk.

It may be the case going forward after restrictions are eased for some time to come, that our transport to destinations needs to be revised. Coach travel may not be advisable unless some form of Social Distancing can be maintained. Once we are out on the hill we should be able to manage the situation and maintain distancing.

I am fortunate to live so close to the Sidlaw hills with quite easy access, within permitted exercise times, to enjoy a moderate level of enjoyment in these low-level hills. I know other members have walked, trodden, and re-discovered so many paths in and around Blairgowrie.

No one has escaped the pressures set upon us by this virus and some will have felt it more than others. I have been furloughed from work since late March and now have a cleaner car, a tidier garden and better fed garden birds, than if this had not happened. So, in my own Mothers words, “It’s an ill wind that blows naebidy any guid”, or perhaps as William Shakespeare put it “An ill wind that bloweth no man good – the blower of which blast is she”. But let us not be distracted from our own small goals and achievements and acknowledge the good work that all the front line and essential workers have carried out, and also for the sadness and grief of those who have lost loved ones. Let us all hope for a return to some form of “Normal” soon, but in the meantime,

The message is clear: Stay Safe, Stay Local, Stay Well.

BDHC HILL WALKING PROGRAMME FOR 2020-21

Bruce Henderson

I am writing this piece for the latest edition of Mountain Thyme whilst still in “lockdown” with no idea of when the Club’s activities may resume, nor what form they may take, however be assured that the committee have devised an interesting programme which will be available on the Club web-site soon, and of course published in your membership card.

The walks this year are scheduled to include a Fife Coastal walk from Lundin Links to Elie, as well as hill-walks to areas as diverse as Glen Lyon; Monadhliath; Glen Dochart; Bridge of Orchy; Glen Esk and the Trossachs.

Our September weekend this year was scheduled for the Island of Rum but has been cancelled. The Spring weekend for 2021 being to Galloway area, possibly using Newton Stewart as the base, and Gairloch for the September 2021 weekend.

There will also be a full range of social activities including a BBQ; Slide show and calendar evening; Speaker night (yet to be finalised); Little’s lunch in November and quiz night in January.

NOTES FROM THE TREASURER

Richard Townsend

A look at the club accounts for the year to February 2020 involves a step back in time to a normality which we have, at least for the present, taken leave of! My comments below reflect on what I would have said at our AGM in March, but I appreciate that we are at present faced with a degree of uncertainty as to when and how our activities will evolve through the year.

At the AGM in March 2019 I commented that, without any surprises, whether from higher costs or unexpected dips in fund raising, we should make a small surplus in the coming year. In the event our funds in the bank, adjusted for creditors, declined by just over £500 during the year ending February 2020.

What were the main differences that led to the decline in funds? While the Little’s Restaurant event saw a fall of £180 in funds generated, the

biggest single factor was an increase in the coach subsidy of £513. In February the committee discussed the funds decrease over the year. While the funds in the bank, at around £5,500, could fund an annual deficit of around £500 for some time, it was accepted that it would be prudent to consider options to both raise funds and reduce costs.

We would like to see more members on the coach trips to reduce the subsidy. With this in mind we wish to avoid an increase to the fare, at present £12 and unchanged for the last few years. One option is to have one or two extra car rather than coach day trips, given that the average subsidy for each coach trip was around £130 in the last year.

A new fundraiser has been negotiated by the club to succeed the boat raffle. This unique prize consists of a half day (3 hour) guided tour for up to six people with a Mar Lodge Estate Ranger, with an opportunity to see inside the interior of the Lodge and the Stag Ballroom (not normally open to the public) and a relatively short walk in nearby Mar Forest involving a talk about the work the NTS carry out on the Estate and in particular the 200 year plan to transform the Estate's pinewoods. Also included is a voucher for cream tea for up to six at the Fife Arms Hotel in Braemar.

Mountaineering Scotland have confirmed that membership fees for 2020/21 are for Adults £17.55 and for Youths £10.25. The committee has not as yet determined BDHC membership fees, nor requested payment of any fees given the current uncertainties.

In conclusion, I'm normally wary of any "crystal ball" stuff, but even more so at present. We are in uncharted waters (maybe on very misty mountains with no compass is the more appropriate metaphor!) For the time being from a financial perspective, just as with other club matters, we must wait and see how events unfold and when and how we emerge from our current state of suspended activities.

TWIXT MEET BALLATER

Ian Cameron

The BDHC Twixt meet this year was located in and around the Ballater and Royal Deeside area and was spread over three days, 27th - 29th December. Some of the 16 attending members had planned to include a walk en-route to Ballater on the 27th, but because of the inclement weather, thought better of it, and left the walking for the following two days.

On the 28th there were two main walking groups, with the larger group leaving from our base at the Deeside Inn in Ballater on foot and heading very briefly into Glenmuick to Bridge of Muick. From here the party then followed tracks and paths to reach higher ground and over grouse moors to the summits of Cairn Leuchan, Craig Vallich and Pannanich. From here the group descended back to Bridge of Muick and returned to Ballater.

The second group on the day travelled by car to the Spittal of Glenmuick and commenced their walk from the visitor information centre. From here they headed west and gradually climbed to the summit of Conachcraig continuing over the central and north tops before dropping down to the west and following a land rover track back to Clais Rathadan and returned to the starting point at Spittal of Glenmuick. On both walks there was a strong cold wind, but there was no rain making for a fine day out in both areas.



Ballater



Ken and Roddy on Conachcraig

Both groups re-united for refreshment before a fine meal was served in the dining room at the Deeside Inn. The evening concluded with an informal, light-hearted and fun quiz in the lounge.

On the 29th again there were two main walking groups with the larger group starting a low level forest walk at the old military bridge at Invercauld and following several tracks through Ballochbuie Forest and returning back over the Invercauld bridge to their starting point.

The second group travelled to Braemar and started their walk in the village following the Clunie Water south for 1km to the Braemar Golf Club. From here a steep ascent was made to the summit of Morrone (or Morven) where magnificent views were reported looking down on Braemar and along the Dee Valley. Glimpses of sunshine and a cloud base just above the local summits were accompanied by very strong, cold

winds and again there was little or no rain. Apart from numerous red grouse on all walks and a flock of chaffinches near the golf club, there was little else in the way of wildlife to report. The weather was much as forecasted and any lingering patches of snow were very small and easily avoided. Grateful thanks was extended to Terry and Elizabeth for organising the event and for finding such a pleasant and comfortable base for accommodation and for arranging the evening meal.

WALKING TO SUILVEN

A long dog walk

James Tweedie

It had been a few years since we had climbed Suilven. That time we had been staying at Clachtoll campsite (highly recommended IF you can get in past the hordes of NC500ers!) north of Lochinver through midsummer and had walked in from the Lochinver side with our dogs, Tangles and Barney, in the afternoon of a glorious summer's day. Due to the late start we had the hill almost to ourselves as most walkers had descended when we got there.

Now, in June 2019, we were staying at Clachtoll again, both dogs (and us) were older but the track and paths remained the same length! We had been at Clachtoll for a week "enjoying" a cold, windy midsummer's week, with rain and sunny periods – not what we had envisioned after the previous year when the club had visited Knoydart with wonderful warm (or rather hot) summer weather at the beginning of June.

We had already walked out to Glencanisp Lodge on a short circular route out from, and back to, Lochinver and had discovered a couple of changes since our last visit. The car park at the end of the tarred road out to the Lodge now allowed overnight parking of Campervans for a donation. And there was now an "honesty" shop in an old building at Glencanisp lodge (ice cream, chocolate bars, biscuits and a variety of hot and cold drinks).

We decided that it would be good to use the parking facilities to stay overnight after a walk to Suilven and back.



After our final night at Clachtoll we drive to Lochinver, buy some supplies (including a couple of the famed Lochinver pies) and head up the narrow road to the Glencanisp car park. The weather has decided to change for the better and we are presented with a mostly clear, sunny, though breezy day when we leave the van for the long walk out to the hill. The walk is every bit as long as we remember – though spotting butterfly orchids beside the track and watching numerous dragonflies flitting about the trackside bog helps pass the time. The dogs are happy to be trotting along with frequent pauses to sniff an interesting clump of grass or heather.

Butterfly Orchid

As usual on this route, the North West prong of Suilven does not seem to get any closer until we pass the Suileag track end where we are within a couple of kilometres of the point at which the path branches off from the track towards the hill itself.

We stopped for a (much needed) short break, at the top of the uphill slope, 200 m after the bridge over the Abhainn na Clach Airigh before descending along the track to the start of the hill path in a small gully.

This is where we find the third change since our last visit. There is now a well built path that makes its way across the rising, rocky, boggy ground up to Loch na Barrack and Loch a' Coire Dubh just below the hill. To our surprise this continues all the way up the steep slopes and screes on the final route to the ridge at the Bealach, making the ascent markedly easier than our previous visit.



The new path ascending from the main track

When we reach the ridge the views in all directions are spectacular and there are quite a few people making their way to and from the NW summit. As the weather is so good and we're in no hurry we decide to see how far we can get along the SE ridge (towards the scrambly top of Meall Meadhonach – the “shark's fin” end of the hill) – but only get to the start of the 691m ridge before we are stopped by a short steep rock scramble that we can't get the dogs up – so we take turns, one of us staying with the dogs, the other going along the airy ridge to above the final gully before the SE top. Great views of the rocky outcrop of the top but obvious that we can't attempt the final part.



The spectacular "sharks fin" of Meall Meadhonach

We return to the col and head up the rocky ridge to the higher and broader top of Caisteal Liath (the highest point on Suilven) with its superb views across the pock marked terrain of gneiss outcrops, heather moorland and lochs towards the seas to the west and north west. The wind is fairly strong on the top so we shelter in a “cutting” and have our lunch whilst taking in the view. There are a few other people on the summit by now.



At the summit - it's a bit breezy!



Tangles chills on the beach!

Then it is time to retrace our steps and descend the gully from the Bealach. We're glad of the "new" made path most of the way down which make the descent through the scree and steep grassy slopes much less of an effort than the last time we'd done it. After descending from the coll we stop for a break and a paddle at Loch Na Barrack – A tired Tangles takes the opportunity to collapse on the beach.... Barney does the sensible thing and cools his paws in the water. We take our boots off and paddle in the refreshingly cold water as well – It will be a long, hot walk out.

The descent from the lochs to the main track is good – all the "difficult" sections we'd remembered from the previous time have good steps down or paths across them, so we reach the track in good time. Now it's just 7 kilometres of dry, dusty hard track back to the van! It seems twice as long

as on the way out in the morning, and the ascents and descents that you hardly notice on the way in become somewhat tedious. Both humans and dogs are getting tired and my water runs out about 2 km from the lodge!

Eventually we reach the Lodge and its welcome wee shop and we're extremely grateful to get ice creams and drinks. A group of students who'd climbed Suilven as well and had come off before us are there – and donate to the “path” fund for the maintenance of the path. We do as well – in appreciation of the excellent access it now affords to reach the Suilven ridge.

Then it's a short walk along the loch side back to the van and a good relax. Needless to say, the dogs (and us) are puggled. We all enjoy our evening meals and a good night's sleep at our almost-wild camp with only one other van in the car park.

A LOOK BACK IN TIME.

Sorry! We Climbed a Different Mountain!

Rob Robertson

May 1990. We were enjoying our Club Spring Weekend at Strathpeffer. On the Saturday Peter Kinnear had arranged for us to have access to the hydro-electric tracks to reach Fannich Lodge and we had completed an epic round of the Eastern Fannichs with seven Munros and three Tops on a glorious sunny windless spring day. The plan for Sunday 27th May was to complete the task by climbing the two Western Fannich Munros and the intervening top.

The day dawned bright and clear and two cars managed to drive away from the Hostel at a reasonably early hour. Some occupants of the other cars had been slower to surface and we arrived at the starting point at the head of the track leading to Loch a' Bhraoin. There were two problems. The other cars had not arrived and An Teallach was standing out clear and bright to the west begging to be climbed! After a bit of discussion – perhaps 30 seconds – we decided to leave a note on the bar of the gate and head west.



An Teallach from Shenavall track



From Sail Liath

The party consisted of Iain Mitchell, Graham Smith, Charlie Gilmour and Rob Robertson. We headed down to Dundonnell where we left Charlie's car and returned back up the Glen to Corrie Hallie. Leaving at 9.30 am we headed up the path to Shenavall up Gleann Chaorachain through the birches with the ever present cuckoos calling all around (they certainly seemed to be more common then). We cut off the path and headed north-east for the ridge hiding the big corrie of An Teallach. The elation at superb view of the corrie was tempered a little because progress was hindered by the steep sided sandstone terraces, magnificent as they were!

We stopped 11.10 to 11.25 and at this point Charlie decided to turn back because he was not feeling too good – perhaps the result of too much sun the day before. We climbed steadily up to the main ridge and arrived at Sail Liath at 12.30. The views north from here were magnificent although some of the ridges and pinnacles looked a bit demanding, hair-raising even.



Sandstone pillars of An Tealleach ridge



Corrag Buidhe and Sgurr Fiona and Bidean a'Ghlas Thuill

We reached Cadha Gobhlach for 12.30 – 12.45 and enjoyed glorious airy scrambling over the pinnacles, Corrag Buidhe and Lord Berkeley’s Seat. Having mastered the last big pinnacle we had lunch at 2.05 – 2.20 followed by a scramble up Sgurr Fiona at 2.35 – our first Munro of the day after five Tops! From here we had a fantastic view of the pinnacles and buttresses that we had surmounted. There were better tracks from here down and up Bidean a’ Glas Thuill, the second Munro and there was a steep track down to a col where we left our sacks to yomp out to yet another top, Glas Mheall Mor. Returning to the rucksacks at 4.30 we walked round the head of a valley to join the rough and stony zig-zag path to Dundonnell for 6.30.



Bidean a’ Ghlas Thuill from Corrag Bhuidhe *Sgurr Fiona and Lord Berkeley’s from Corrag Bhuidhe*

Charlie had driven Iain’s car down from Corrie Hallie and collected his own so we were able to drive straight back home from there – in those days we had to be ready for work on Monday and as always I was glad that Iain was good enough to do the driving after a long hard day! We had to face the flack a bit later when we discovered that the other group had not found our note, had not known where we had got to and although they had a splendid day on the Western Fannichs were somewhat less than ecstatic at our wonderful day on An Teallach.



South over Lord Berkeley’s Seat to Corrag Bhuidhe and Sail Liath

TRIBUTE TO MARGO MURRAY

Dorothy Lothian

It was with complete disbelief that we heard about Margo's death on Friday, 24th January. Margo was involved with many groups in the area - Rattray Church, bell ringing, SWI, volunteer at Springlands coffee shop as well, of course with BDHC, our hillwalking club. There was a large turnout at her funeral at Perth Crematorium on 18th February.



Margo leading the way back to Linn of Dee

Margo was the perfect companion on the hills. She was a good reader of maps and landscapes so it was due to Margo sometimes that we did not get lost. After every outing she drew our route on her map so, if we were in that area several years later she could immediately point out where we had walked before.

It was thanks to Margo that once the "C" group had all retired we extended our hillwalking weekends. Our Spring weekend was based at Gairloch (at The Old Inn with a jacuzzi). When that had been booked,

Margo suggested we later travelled further north and book into Kinlochbervie. From there we could easily drive to Oldshore Mor and walk into the beautiful Sandwood Bay. No sooner suggested than organised. What a lovely walk we had and as always had a paddle when we reached the beach and the sea. Ever since, our hillwalking weekends have been extended.



Plodda Falls



Campsie Fells

Another memory of Margo was during our weekend at Inchnadamph. While crossing a burn she slipped and sat right down in the water. She was very wet! We all hunted in bottoms of our ruc-sacks for our spare clothing bags and we managed to completely kit her out with dry clothing. So she spent the remainder of the outing cosy and dry.



In the early days of the club some of us had climbed Ben Nevis from the campsite but Margo was not a member of the Club at that time. Several years later we were back in that area this time staying at Auchintee B and B, the house on the path up to the Ben. In the group were Margo, Margaret Y, Dorothy, Isa, Betty M and Sheena Stuart. We finally all

reached the summit where we waited for Rob Robertson and his group to arrive. I think it was his last Munro.



Ready to climb Ben Nevis



Margo and Team on top of?

As the hills seemed to get steeper and steeper we began visiting islands - from Unst to the Scilly Isles. Only last summer we were on Barra with days out to Vatersay and Eriskay. On Barra we managed to find friends of Margo's son, David.

In September we took Margo out for lunch to celebrate her 80th birthday and in early January we met to start making plans for this year. Sadly Margo died five days later.

Note from the editor: when I asked for help to illustrate the tribute to Margo I was very pleased to receive many photographs of happy days over many years. Some of the photographs come from Tom Morrison's collection and others are more recent. I decided to include all of the photographs as they show such a strong group of good friends enjoying the Scottish countryside. Only some of the photographs are labelled but they all reflect good times.



Wet weather gear going on in Glen Affric



Dorothy and Margo on Meikle Pap with Lochnagar in the background

COUL LINKS GOLF COURSE: APPLICATION REFUSED

John Mackay

In the 2019 Autumn issue of Mountain Thyme, I reported on ScotWays' involvement in the public inquiry for the Coul Links Golf Course application. At that time, we had contributed to a four-week public inquiry, and the outcome was in the hands of the two inquiry reporters to come to their recommendations. The applicant - the American golf tourism company Bandon Links, based in Oregon - aimed to construct a top-rank course at Coul Links, just north of Dornoch, as the basis of working with other local courses, including the highly-regarded Royal Dornoch, to create an international golf-tourism destination. There was much local support for this development and the initial planning application had been approved by Highland Council, but the site's high nature conservation importance inevitably led to a public inquiry and to strong opposition, led by national bodies such as RSPB and the Scottish Wildlife Trust, and with a very large number of individual objections.

ScotWays had not been involved in the early stages of this case, but we joined with Ramblers Scotland to give evidence at the inquiry on the importance of the site for open-air recreation, which was at risk of being ignored, given the prime focus of the case on conservation and development. It was useful that the recreation-access bodies did widen

the argument, given the recreational value of this site, and the risk of impacts on public access, should there be a consent. But there was also a reality that the decision would inevitably centre on the big conservation issues. Indeed, some arguments were traded between the recreation bodies and the applicant over the prospect of limitations on public access for bird conservation: but with the refusal, this issue has disappeared - at least for the present.

The reporters had a heavy task, given the volume of strongly contested evidence from both sides, much of it being highly technical. Their key conclusions, as adopted into Scottish Ministers' decision letter, were that there would be significant adverse impacts on the extensive dune-heath habitat (on which almost all of the course would have been sited) also on over-wintering birds. The proposal would therefore be in conflict with both local and national planning policy, and the expected local and regional economic benefits would not out-weigh the national and international significance of the site. This last point is important, as public policy for development on SSSIs requires that adverse impacts on nature conservation value are 'clearly outweighed' by benefits of national importance.

The refusal has been deplored by those for whom the prospect of hosting a global tourism attraction was seen as a huge prize for the area. As part of early discussions, SNH had offered the applicant the concession of allowing a limited part of the course onto the SSSI, this as part of a new layout located mostly outwith the conservation area. The applicant stood firm on getting all that it wanted but, had it accepted this compromise, it probably would now have a consent. That said, the current virus crisis does raise a question mark over global tourism travel in the years ahead, and the reporters did note that the proposal would not contribute to sustainable development - one of our arguments.

LOCKDOWN EXPERIENCE I: OR NOT THE 2020 MUNRO CHALLENGE:

Kerry Lindsay

2020 has to date been like unwrapping a present that you thought was a Rolex only to find it was a Casio bought from a street market in Thailand.

I ended 2019 with great plans for 2020 and one mighty big challenge – to climb 20 Munros in 2020 and raise funds for two charities, Royal Blind and Breast Cancer at Ninewells Hospital. The challenge alone filled me

with great trepidation but for a girl who had never been on a bike for years and decided to cycle from Dunkeld to Inverness, albeit over 3 days, I was used to crazy ideas and following them through.

I was also touched and delighted with the camaraderie shown by my fellow hillwalking group members who offered to accompany me on my jaunts and, if need be, pull me up!

Although the challenge may be on hold, forgotten it is not. As soon as the hills are open I'll be on them because let's face it if anyone was going to have to call out the mountain rescue it would be me! Therefore best to follow the rules.

I have to say I have been thoroughly enjoying my walks around Dunkeld with my eyes wide open to the beauty all around, helped by the fine weather.

From rekindling my love of Loch Ordie, the Mill Dam and Hermitage to finding new routes up Birnam Hill and discovering Craigie Barns and the Rocking Stone, it has been a playground of delight. I am thoroughly shamed I have lived here for over 31 years and had never discovered Lady Charlottes Cave, an error I have now rectified many times over.



Craigie Barns



Towards Beinn a Ghlo

It also turns out bad navigation runs in the family! While I have been exploring much of the area with my dad, it turns out he is as bad at navigation as me or thinking there's a short cut 'just around the corner'. Therefore quite often a 5 mile walk has turned in to 10 miles.

Walking with your eyes open, as opposed to head down cursing yet another incline, we have found many wonderful joys left by others, from painted stone, to fairy doors to a masked tree trunk, each made us stop and smile.



Birnam Glen

Red squirrels are also alive and well in the Dunkeld area and it has been a real treat to see one nearly every day of our walks.



Bluebells

This really is unprecedented times for everyone and my heart goes out to everyone affected by this horrible pandemic. One thing is for sure, when the hills do re-open I will appreciate them and the company I'm with all the more – that's not to say I won't still moan all the way up!

Until then stay safe.

LOCKDOWN EXPERIENCE 2: WHAT'S UP WITH THESE WELLIES?

Brian and Jean Ruffhead

Something strange is happening in the Glamis area since lockdown. On going out for our daily exercise through the local woods or along the railway line, on three separate occasions we have seen a single wellie boot upturned on a fencepost. Now these boots have not been thrown away because of being in bad repair or possibly leaking, as all are in good condition. Neither have they all been left at car parks where perhaps in a rush to get dogs and children into a car they never quite made it to join their other half. So why is this strange phenomenon happening now and not before lockdown? Is there a coded message here or is it a new type of signpost i.e. which direction is the boot pointing? It has not been possible to pair up any of the boots but the sizes are ladies 38 or 40.



Boot no 1



Boot no2

A well-known “scaffie” friend showed some interest as she is often lucky in picking up abandoned gloves and hats on walks but thinks she may have to wait too long to find a wellie boot for the other foot. There must be a few people in this area who are now having to walk without wellies so it’s good that up to now the weather has been so dry. Has this been happening in other areas?

LOCKDOWN EXPERIENCE 3

Jane Clark

Members have been making the best of lockdown taking advantage of extra time at home by tackling many overdue household and gardening tasks. I hear reports of scaffolding outside houses, lots of painting and decorating and all sorts of DIY jobs being completed. Plenty baking, cleaning and emptying the backs of cupboards/freezers and reading books, finishing crosswords, jigsaws and Sudokus. There should be some slim dogs as they are walked and walked!

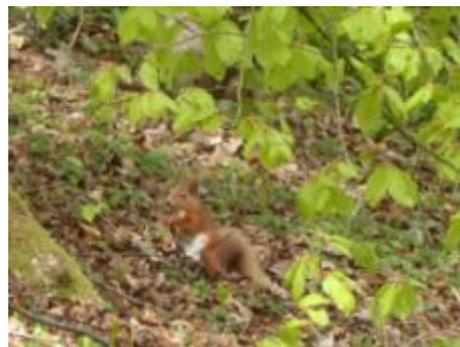
As you would expect in a walking club, members have exercised regularly finding new walking and cycle routes around Blairgowrie and Dunkeld. Curiously Martin took advantage of the quiet roads to walk from Meigle to Coupar Angus and back observing details of the countryside normally missed when travelling by car.

Indeed on my daily walks I have noted first sightings this year of various flowers and taken time to stop and look at wildlife. Wonderful bird song and so many sky-larks. I have spotted squirrels on most woodland walks. I must pay tribute to those who provide and maintain the Blairgowrie path network as I have found many new paths and explored areas not visited since I was a child growing up in Blairgowrie. Perhaps my best “spot” was an otter on the Ericht or maybe the crested grebe on Fingask loch, or wagtails by the river, or golden saxifrage by the Ericht, or the

green veined white butterfly or the carpets of bluebells or...the list is endless!



Otter on the Ericht



Red squirrel near Cargill's leap

Certainly I miss hill walking and the club but, for the time being, I can cope with such good local walks.

FIFE PILGRIM WAY AND FIFE COASTAL PATH

Jane Clark

When planning this edition of Mountain Thyme I thought I would be able to share with you my experiences of completing two long distance walks in Fife. However, my plans are on hold due to the corona virus restrictions, instead I shall share some notes from the walks so far and complete the account in the next edition of Mountain Thyme, when I hope, I will have completed both walks.

Fife Coastal Path

Linking the Forth and Tay Estuaries, the Fife Coastal Path runs for over 117 miles through the varied landscapes of Fife. The route links some of Scotland's most picturesque former fishing villages as well as the home of golf - St Andrews with its ancient University. In between are miles of golden beaches, attractive woods and nature reserves but the route also threads its way through industrial towns such as Kirkcaldy and Leven. History is everywhere, from the winding gear of the former coalyards to ruined castles and the Pictish and prehistoric carvings in the Wemyss caves.

Over the years, the club has tackled stretches of the Fife Coastal Path including the chain walk at Elie, With my Edinburgh walking club I walked key sections around Aberdour, and I have completed the western

sections of the path from Kincardine to Inverkeithing but there were large gaps and I decided to complete the missing links and, where possible, to walk eastwards.

Jean and Brian Ruffhead wanted to do some “interesting” short, day walks. Thus we explored the scope of the Ruffheads coming from Glamis by bus or car to join me in Fife travelling by public transport from Edinburgh. For example, taking advantage of Fife’s good bus and train networks I could get a train to Leuchars station (non stop from Haymarket) where the Ruffheads collected me and we drove to a point to drop the car and then catch a bus to our start point where we would walk back to the car! Fun working out the logistics but with the help of the “Traveline Scotland app” and our bus and rail passes we made it. A coffee stop, often with cake or a scone preceded most walks. One of the extra pieces of homework (as well as location of toilets, weather forecast and bus times) I needed to do was to check the tide times – after we had an “interesting short scramble” to reach one of the high tide routes. We were very lucky to have good weather for almost all of our walks although the wind made a tricky descent into Pettycur.



Brian and Jean on the Fife Coastal path near Anstruther

As Brian says “We really did enjoy the Fife Coastal Path and many highlights but what springs to mind at the moment is East Wemyss and in particular, the story of the old mine, the memorial and the caves. What really brings it all out of course is reading Val McDermid's A Darker Domain. Also at East Wemyss was that memorial to the tragedy of the three fishermen who drowned in 2016”.

In total I have walked about 80 miles of the coastal path (60 miles with Brian and Jean) visiting some historical and scenic areas on the way. I still have about 36 miles to do from St Andrews to Newburgh so if anyone wishes to join me please let me know.

Fife Pilgrim Way

The Fife Pilgrim Way is a new long distance walking route that brings the northern and southern edges of Fife together.

This 64 mile long path takes the walker on a journey through history as it winds its way through the ancient Kingdom. It opened in July 2019 (we started on 31 July) and I have walked approximately 55 miles with two friends from Edinburgh. We travelled by public transport to the various start points again some intricate transport planning but plenty options allowing us to explore historical areas with plenty time before catching the return bus to Edinburgh..

As the name suggests, this pathway reflects upon the days when Fife was the one the many religious destinations within Scotland for pilgrims between the 11th to 16th centuries.

The Kingdom attracted many thousands of pilgrims from across Europe each of who made their way through the region on a journey of faith and discovery.

This modern day route follows some of the region's ancient pathways and gives the walker a chance to walk in the footsteps of these medieval travellers and to appreciate Fife's rich industrial past. .

We started at coastal village of Culross, although you can start at North Queensferry and the first stage is to Dunfermline where I visited Dunfermline Abbey – for the first time.



Setting off from Culross

Fife's modern day heritage

The rich industrial heritage of Fife is also celebrated as the walker passes through some of the areas that supported Scotland's heavy industry for many decades. The many mining villages that the route passes by stand testament to this time of incredible development as the region helped push forward the nation's industrial revolution.

Both routes are promoted by Fife Countryside Trust and are well signposted. The Pilgrim Way logo is a small badge copying the emblem used by the original pilgrims. It takes a wee while to "get your eye in" to spot the waymarks which are often small discs attached to lampposts, fences or gates. The Coastal Path logo is brighter, more visible but there are less of them. Good maps are available from the countryside trust.. There is a book to support the Pilgrim Way but it is not recommended to take it on the walk as it "does not tell you where the bus stops or toilets are located" it does provide fascinating insights to the historic sights on the way.

The Pilgrim Way uses many existing paths or quiet roads – some might find the surface rather hard- each section is roughly 10 miles long. So far, I have walked to Ceres the final 9.5 miles to St Andrews to be completed. In a nutshell, the Coastal Path is scenic and the Pilgrim Way is historical.

ODE TO SCOTLAND'S HILLWALKERS

Bob Ellis

*Hill walkers are a funny breed,
for starters they're a' aff their heid.
They shy of walkin' up the toon,
yet roam the hills wi' oot a froon.*

*They say the High Streets' far too
steep,
yet climb Munros wi' oot a cheep.
And carry a heavy pack,
up places like Mount Keen and back.*

*Through swirling mist they'll walk for
'oors,
o'er heather hills and grassy moors.
Half the time they dinna ken whether,
they're on the path or in the heather.*

*Occasionally they'll get some cheer,
An' maybe see a herd o' deer.
Other times, wet and wabbit,
they dinna even see a rabbit.*

*They'll hobble on wi' blistered feet,
through freezing cold and searing
heat.*

*Some may think this proves they've
guts,
others think they're just plain nuts.*

*When they stagger hame dead beat,
first thing they do is steep their feet.
They'll fa' asleep just where they sit,
too tired to sort oot their kit*

*Next morning, all stiff and sore,
they swear their walkin' days are o're.
But come next week, they're aff
again,
oblivious of last week's pain*

SOCIAL EVENTS

Evelyn Menzies

Past Events - Our annual quiz night was held on 17 January and we once again had a good turnout both from members and visitors. Thanks again to Roddy for being our quiz master and also to Evelyn Hood who set the questions. As usual there was a good raffle.

Our Christmas walk on 8 December started at the Rumbling Bridge, Dunkeld and finished at Bankfoot where everyone was grateful for the hearty bowl of soup at the Bankfoot Inn, especially those with wet feet after an "interesting crossing of a burn in spate."



Jane , head down and going for it

Looking Forward – very difficult to plan our supporting social events but for an indication of what we hope to happen, see articles from Ian Cameron, Richard Townsend and Bruce Henderson

CLOSING REMARKS

Jane Clark editor

This edition of Mountain Thyme reflects the uncertainty we all face during this awful pandemic. Every day the news is grim for individuals and as hill walkers we would love to be out on the hills. We are adhering to the careful advice from Mountaineering Scotland. I appreciate the contributions from members which demonstrate the breadth of interests in the club and our ability to not take ourselves too seriously.