



“Mountain Thyme”

Autumn 2023



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

Kerry Lindsay President

Since the last edition of Mountain Thyme, there has been a BBQ, a train ride, a change of location as no bus was available, a successful trip to An Socach (third time lucky) berry picking and a coastal walk. The additional opportunities to come together in a blend of social activities and walks has been truly wonderful and I've thoroughly enjoyed getting to know members better through these events.

As a club, we've also come together during a very sad period whereby we lost two members, Oliver, who was relatively new to the club and enjoying getting to know everyone, and Patrick, a long-standing member and very much respected member of the club. My sincerest condolences go to all members as we mourn their passing.

A highlight for me had to be the trip to Corrour. Although the weather forecast was terrible and there was some trepidation that we may get there but not get back, the day was fantastic from start to finish. The feeling that you were arriving in the 'back of beyond', was pretty accurate! The scenery was stunning and with the day ahead looking good, everyone set off in good spirits. It was brilliant to see over 30 members out for this special trip. One group climbed, what looked like from the bottom, a fairly ok Munro, Beinn na Lap, but the weather soon decided to come in and the top was freezing. *(Just like the day when Rhoda completed her Munros in 1994! Note from editor)*



Beinnna Lap 2023



Rhoda (1994)

On the route down, one of our founding members, Iain Mitchell, took us all on a detour to test our moral fibre, that saw crossing the railway line then being defeated by the river! The expression, 'drowned rat', has never been more appropriate to describe as we squelched into Corroul station.

Other groups enjoyed walks to Loch Ossian and climbing the Corbett Leum Uilleim. We all reunited to enjoy a fantastic meal at the Corroul Restaurant before embarking on the train trip back. The committee is already trying to think of where we can go on our next train trip!

As we approach our 45th anniversary it is playing heavy on my mind that I, along with all committee members, have a responsibility to ensure that the club is still running in another 45 years! While we do everything we can to attract new members, I very much welcome any thoughts from members on ideas that they have for bringing on new members to the club. During a recent conversation with long standing member, Rhoda, she advised me, on her first walk with the club she rocked up wearing her hush puppies, orange socks and pink jacket! This was swiftly followed by a trip to the shops to get kitted out, and many years later Rhoda is still a very active and admired member of the club.

While I'm not advocating people rocking up wearing their hush puppies, I think our meet secretary, Bruce, might have something to say about that, I would ask you to actively encourage people to come along and give us a try! They never know, 45 years later they may still be part of this club that has become so well loved by me and many others.

My extended thanks to Jane, for the continued fantastic work on producing our club magazine and giving her time so freely to do so.

ONICH WEEKEND

Kerry Lindsay

Rain and midgies didn't dampen the spirit of the Onich/Inchree weekend. The first members arrived on the Wednesday evening and set off on Thursday to walk up Glen Nevis Gorge. They were almost able to touch a low flying RAF jet as it weaved through the glen. Robert was the only one daring enough to cross the Glen Nevis Rope Bridge!



Midges



Kerry gets her man.

The Friday saw an extended group take off from near Kingshouse following the West Highland Way to Kinlochleven. The camaraderie on the route was great with people from all nationalities joining together to complain about the midgies.

The Saturday saw nearly 20 of us set off to conquer Jinty's last Munro, Carn Mor Dearg, accompanied by Jenny and Jed, Jinty's daughter and son.

The weather forecast promised wall to wall sunshine with a good old fashioned Scottish breeze and it didn't disappoint. The views as we emerged from the forest line were outstanding and the words a wise person once said to me came to mind, 'don't forget to look back'. It quickly became one of those walks where you couldn't help but stop and look back, so stunning were the views down to Fort William and across to Mull and Rum.

As a female of a certain age, to be able to be there to witness Jinty complete her Munro round was awe inspiring to say the least. As someone who still has a significant amount more to do, the clear sense of achievement that day was definitely enough to give one a kick up the back side!



Guard of honour for Jinty's last munro



On top with Jinty

The celebration on the top and the sheer sense of celebration from people out with our group who arrived at the top can only be described as joyous

and demonstrated the sense of community between walkers. The feeling of team spirit was felt throughout the club members that day as everyone pulled together to ensure we all arrived at the top together and arrived at the bottom together. As let's face it, it was not an easy climb!

Quick, and I mean very quick, showers were had by all, to arrive for our evening meal at Roam West on time at 7.45pm. There were not many empty plates that is for sure!

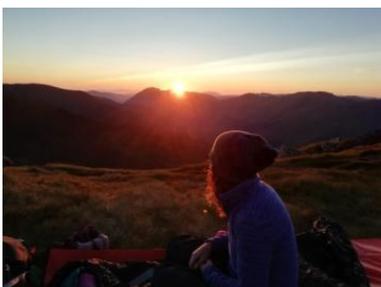
While some members had to leave the next morning, a group of seven decided to get the Corran Ferry passenger service to enjoy a very low level walk the following morning to ease recovery. However, about 6 miles later, many legs were sorer than they started in the morning!

Overall, a great weekend and a huge inspiration to be there to see a fellow member achieve the status of becoming a Munro Compleator. Congratulations Jinty and thank you for letting us be a part of your day.

JINTY'S LAST MUNRO

Jinty Smart

Climbing Carn Mor Dearg was as much an emotional experience for me as it was a physical one. I had never properly thought about completing, it had always been in the far distance, something I hoped to achieve in the future. Yet suddenly here I was, in the bar at Roam West, gathered with my family and friends on the Friday evening of the club weekend planning my final ascent. I was filled with a mixture of excitement, anticipation and anxiety. I was so touched, and delighted, that everyone there planned to accompany me up the hill and when my daughter showed me the Google image of the weeks forecast with rain every single day except for the Saturday which was full sun, I knew it would be a great day. And so it was, one of those golden days you cherish for always!



Jenny at Sgurr Nan Gillian



Jinty and Jed on Am Bastier

I first heard about Munros as a child when I went hillwalking with my dad. He was in the SMC and involved in the preliminary discussions back in the 60s when the SMC thought that climbing all the Munros might become a thing (the term Munro bagging hadn't been invented then). He dismissed the idea out of hand and told me he doubted it would catch on! However, my interest was piqued, and I naively planned to be the youngest person to climb all these hills. Unfortunately, the teenage years got in the way and put paid to that!

My real Munro journey started with an impromptu climb of Glas Maol one sparkling November day with a young Jenny and Jed as we drove by, on our way to Braemar, so it was especially meaningful for me to have them both with me on my final hill. Back then I was an accident waiting to happen, full of enthusiasm but little knowledge. However, in the intervening years although I have learnt so much about navigation, appropriate equipment choices or sensible route planning I have also discovered "me" and what I am capable of.

My Munro journey took me to all corners of Scotland, and I have had such adventures climbing them. I have climbed them from tents, bothies, canoes, and caves, slept on the top of many and watched the most incredible sunsets and sunrises, got lost, got soaked, experienced elation and terror, laughed and cried and made good friends along the way.

All these memories accompanied me on the way up the hill and as I basked in the warmth of companionship and congratulations from our group and everybody else, we met along the way I began to realise just what I had achieved. My one sadness was that our good friend, Patrick was not there to join me. He got me up the Inn Pin and it was only after that ascent that I knew I had a chance to complete my Munros. However, Saturday 16th September was his birthday and I know he joined us in spirit, he certainly provided a wonderful day for it!

PATRICK HAMILTON

Norman Smith

I recently circulated an email notifying members of Patrick's death on 1st August. However, as he had been a regular attender for over 20 years, something a little longer seems appropriate. He joined the Club in August 2001 and I remember it well. Ian Cameron, who was Meet Secretary at the time, took me aside at Linn of Dee before the walk and asked if I would mind taking a new member with me on what was to be an extended A walk. We were intending to do the two Munros Beinn Bhreac

and Beinn a' Chaorainn -yes, we did do big walks in those days! It was, and is, against Club rules for new members to go on A walks. However, Ian explained that he was quite a forthright character who insisted (with no evidence) that he was a Mountain Leader, Munroist and also had extensive experience in the Alps and New Zealand. Fortunately, he was telling the truth, and he could easily outwalk any of us. I also found him to be good company and it was the beginning of a lasting friendship. Anytime I wanted to do a bigger walk than offered on the walk sheet, Patrick was the first person to ask for company. Two that I recall were the Tyndrum Corbett which was done at breakneck speed as he didn't want to be embarrassed by holding up the bus. (This was a habit of his.) The other, which I couldn't consider doing now, was to nip up Carn a' Chlamain as a small diversion added to the Club through-walk from Linn of Dee to Blair Atholl. The great thing was that we could find enough to talk about on these long routes. He was a very intelligent man with a broad general knowledge as well as his PhD in Entomology. I learned a fair bit about midges, ticks and cleggs from him. He had also been a science teacher before taking early retirement in his fifties during one of those misguided drives to reduce the teaching work force. His other skills were sailing and major DIY. He had built his own house after retiring before selling it and moving to the eastern part of the country.

Shortly after joining the Club, he and I found ourselves at the inaugural meeting to set up Blairgowrie Open Duke of Edinburgh's Award Group. He became a stalwart volunteer leader and, as the Group's only Mountain Leader for many years, he was involved in supervising all our three-day Silver and four-day Gold Expeditions.



Patrick –teaching a Silver DOE group to cross burns



Patrick discusses route



Patrick with other DOE leaders (all BDHC) Silver Qualifying 2007

I was with him on Mull, Rum (twice), Cairngorms (many times), Ardgour, Jura, Skye and many other routes through our mountains. The Gold Practice from Spean Bridge via Laraig Leacach, Loch Treig and Blackwater Reservoir was the most eventful of many eventful trips because he nearly didn't make it back. He had taken the minibus round nearer to the finish and had arranged to meet us at Meanach bothy by walking up Glen Nevis. Heavy rain and snowmelt (it was April) created high water levels in the burns and rivers. We were forced to set up camp early at Loch Treig because it was too wild for the kids. Leaving Jinty to supervise, I walked beside a raging Abhainn Rath to meet Patrick at Meanach bothy, the planned rendezvous, and tell him we had changed plans. He wasn't there so I waited as night fell. When what little firewood there was burned out, I went to bed assuming Patrick hadn't been able to cross the river and had got into his tent. At 10pm the door burst open. An absolutely drookit Patrick burst in, shouting "Why isn't there a candle in the window?" He had decided to try and get to Meanach by getting high enough up the hillside so he could cross the burns. This was a greatly extended walk above the snow line. He fell into a few of the burns but managed to drag himself out. Only by his great stamina, navigational

skills and pure good luck did he make it to the bothy. There were no candles. I made him strip off, get into his sleeping bag and take the soup I was heating. Next morning, when it got light enough, I noticed his down sleeping bag was sopping wet round the middle. He'd been too modest to take off his wet pants! On the walk down to meet the group next morning after the storm I had to lend him my Lekis because he was in great pain. He confided that it was the hardest thing he had ever done and didn't think he was going to make it. Nearly killed by too much determination. He had a huge input to the DofE group expedition planning and organising. He was also treasurer of the Support Group which buys the equipment. Many of the expedition routes were planned and recce'd by him including our most adventurous in 2008. We had four fit lads who wanted a challenge involving big hills for their gold expedition. Several routes suggested by Jinty and the boys fancied, were knocked back by the DofE office in Perth. Eventually Patrick came up with a route involving all eleven of the Munros in the Mamores. The Award Office still wasn't keen but after a personal visit from Patrick they gave in. I wish I'd been there! Patrick's favourite mountains were the Cuillin.

For many years he was involved with the management committee of the Glen Brittle Hut. In the summer he would spend several weeks there as resident warden so that when he wasn't trying to sort the water supply, he could get some time up the hill. I did six of my Cuillin with him and always felt very comfortable under his guidance except when his glasses became a handicap during rain. I remember an ascent of Sgurr a' Ghreadaidh going straightforwardly until, near the top in thick mist, he said, "Sorry Norman, the rain is fogging my glasses too much. I can't see. Just look for the worn bits on the rock. That'll be the route." Latterly, we would meet up for a short 2-3 hour walk once a week. Initially to help me recover fitness post Covid and then just for the crack. He'd withdrawn from DofE because he felt he wasn't up to it anymore. This didn't stop him from coming to the Ericht Alehouse on a Wednesday evening to meet the other leaders but even this became difficult recently because of his speech difficulties. Jinty and I had a high regard for Patrick. He could be grumpy, dour and thrawn, but he could also be great fun, with a terrific wry sense of humour. He would have been 81 on 16th September. We miss him.

MAR LODGE AND FIFE ARMS PRIZE

Bruce Henderson

When my wife, Morag, won the Club draw for a tour of Mar Lodge and the estate, followed by afternoon tea in the Fife Arms Hotel in Braemar, I was delighted, not for her good fortune, nor for the cakes and scones, but because I had been reading Andrew Painting's excellent book "Regeneration" which is the story of a highland estate being restored to its natural glory, and this was the opportunity to see first-hand the changes which had been made on the estate.

So it was in early August that we met with the Townsends and the Richards at Mar Lodge itself to be given a tour of the premises by ranger Ben Dolphin. The current building is the third such building on the site, the first two were destroyed in a flood and a fire, with the Stag ballroom, a separate building, having survived the fire and now sits adjacent to the lodge "resplendent" in its display of 2430 stag heads dating from the 1800s to 1932. Definitely something from another era, and not to everyone's taste!

The first stone for the current lodge was laid by Queen Victoria in 1895, following the marriage of Princess Louise, first daughter of Edward VII to the Earl of Fife, but there have been properties on, or near the site since before the first Jacobite uprising when the Earldom of Mar was forfeited to William Duff, later Earl of Fife.

In addition to being a royal hunting lodge, the premises have been in the hands of Swiss hoteliers, American billionaires, and now the National Trust for Scotland who, as part of a 200-year plan, are transforming the landscape, its environment, flora and fauna back to where it should be whilst retaining an element of field sports.

If the estate itself was a child, it would have been in care long ago! Not the words of our guide for the day, Ben, but having seen how the landscape, its people (clearances took place here too), and its environment have been abused over the past 150 years, it is both inspiring and heartening to see the speed of restoration and how nature, given a chance, can thrive.



Mar lodge walk beside the Quoich with ranger Ben Dolphin

Mar Lodge estate is the largest National Nature Reserve in Scotland at 30,000 hectares and has eleven national and international environmental designations with more acronyms than you could shake a stick at. It encompasses 15 Munros from near Braemar in the east to Glen Tilt in the west, and from the river Dee to the top of Ben Macdui. 10% of all species found in Scotland can be found on the estate, it has the highest river source in the UK and the oldest Scots Pine, dating back to the 1450s. It is one of the coldest; windiest, snowiest places in the country, and is, of course, stunningly beautiful.

So, who says it's not special?

The Victorian practice on maximising deer and grouse numbers on an estate to the exclusion of everything else for “sporting” interests (a practice still prevalent today on some estates) was hugely damaging, and it is only now, after a slow start and much opposition from neighbouring estates, that having reduced the deer numbers to a manageable level the benefits are being seen, with new growth everywhere, as we found on our guided walk up the Quoich.

Plantlife, birdlife and invertebrates are now thriving and providing a hugely bio-diverse environment for the first time in years. Rare bryophytes including the giant panda of the moss world, the Green Shield Moss has been seen on the estate, Alpine Sow-Thistle, one of Scotland's

rarest plants has been recorded on the estate for the first time in over a century, downy willow and other montane plants are creeping up the hillside. Salmon are returning to the upper reaches of the Dee for spawning in greater numbers, hen harrier numbers and wader numbers are increasing, and the sound of bird song is everywhere. All this by reducing grazing pressure and giving nature a chance. A lesson for all highland estates.

I could eulogise for ages, but the draw winner, my wife, would never forgive me if I didn't mention the wonderful afternoon tea and service, we all had at the Fife Arms after our tour, to say nothing of the guided art tour of the premises.



Some of it I could appreciate, like the painting by Pieter Breughel the Younger in the dining room, and the Robert Burns chimney piece in the reception area, other pieces, shall we say were not to my taste - but that's art for you!

It would be remiss of me not to thank the Hillwalking Club for the opportunity to win this prize, Richard Townsend for arranging it all, Mar Lodge Estate and the Fife Arms hotel for their hospitality and Morag for inviting me!

With Christmas just around the corner why not treat yourself to the book which fired my enthusiasm for the work being done at Mar Lodge: "Regeneration – The Rescue of a Wild Land" by Andrew Painting.

KILTWALK

Sandra Cannon



Kilt Walkers

Club members often embrace Walking challenges – I was impressed by the training Sandra put in, involving long walks to build up stamina and coax muscles to accept endless miles of walking. Editor’s note.

In Sandra’s words, walking with her family: “We walked the Glasgow Kiltwalk, taking on the Mighty Stride which was just under 23 miles from Glasgow Green to Balloch and raised £4399.50 for Pancreatic Cancer UK in memory of mum.”

Well done all for completing the challenge and raising such a huge amount.

OLIVER WRIGHT

Megan Eggeling

Oliver Wright - an appreciation.



Oliver on the West Highland Way with Pat, Megan and Tom

It was with great sadness that we learned of the sudden and premature death of Oliver just days after our Club's outing to Loch Ossian. A member of BDHC for about a year, Oliver always impressed us in C group by his keenness to explore new territory, never fazed by the vagaries of weather or terrain. (Yes, even C group sometimes had its moments of tricky bits which Oliver approached with good humour and a proffered hand for any amongst us with a nervous disposition.)

Tom, Nina and I were very pleased to be able to represent the Club at the service of Celebration of Oliver's Life and afterwards to talk with members of his family over refreshments at the Dalmore Inn. They were very touched by our spray of heather (Jane had picked) and a photo card showing Oliver on various walks.

We learned that Oliver had lived and worked as a teacher in several countries, France, Brunei, Morocco and sundry Gulf States including Saudi Arabia where he'd had the daunting task of teaching English to reluctant AirForce cadets whom he won over in his quiet way with professional skill.

On retirement to this area of Perthshire, Oliver became an active member

of the Country Dancing Club, the Tennis Club and the Ramblers and we understand, played a mean game of Bridge!

It was always a great joy to walk the hills and dales with Oliver. We will miss his pleasant companionship along the paths of Scotland's magnificent walking country he so enjoyed.

ELIE TO ANSTRUTHER ON THE FIFE COASTAL PATH

From the blog – by Ian Richards

It is a very rare occurrence to note that there was virtually no height gained on a BDHC outing, but this was the case on the part of the Fife Coastal path that was walked on the day.



The weather forecast had not been good but in the event the group only experienced one heavy shower and that was soon after setting off from Elie as the walkers made their way to St. Monans, the first of three village harbours to be visited during the afternoon.

Curlews were much in evidence along the route as were gulls and the odd shag or cormorant along the sea edge. A little egret was also spied at one point. Fortunately, the group saw no evidence of the awful toll that avian flu has taken along the east coast this year.

This part of the coast is rich in historical buildings and evidence of man's endeavours such as the famous windmill and salt pans just outside St. Monans. The group passed close to Lady Anstruther's Tower, built in 1770 as what can best be described as a stone bathing hut. This allowed her to maintain her modesty and bathe in the sea in total privacy accessing it via a private path down to a small beach.

Approaching Pittenweem a slightly more modern bathing facility in the form of the tidal swimming pool was being enjoyed by some hardy swimmers.

The walkers had hoped to see sightings of dolphins but if they were around, they certainly didn't make themselves known on the day.

A total of 25 members completed the walk to Anstruther, just ahead of another heavy shower. This outing was both a fine walk and a social event, the conservatory (restaurant) had been pre-booked at the Bank(hotel). With grand views over the harbour and across the Firth of Forth, everyone enjoyed a really good meal together to round off another enjoyable, if slightly unusual, outing.

SNIPPETS

Jane Clark

BBQ

Many thanks to Bruce and Morag Henderson who hosted the club's annual BBQ in the big garden at their home in Balmullo, Fife. Before tucking into a great spread, Bruce led a group to the top of Lucklaw hill where we had excellent views towards Fife, Angus and Perthshire



Bruce pointing out features from Lucklaw hill

Blueberry picking

Many thanks to the Thomson family who opened their blueberry fields and encouraged charities to pick blueberries with donations going to the club – the club provided marshals on a sunny September morning and raised £410 for club funds. Note, two more pickings planned!

Picture shows Bruce with novel way of attaching his luggie

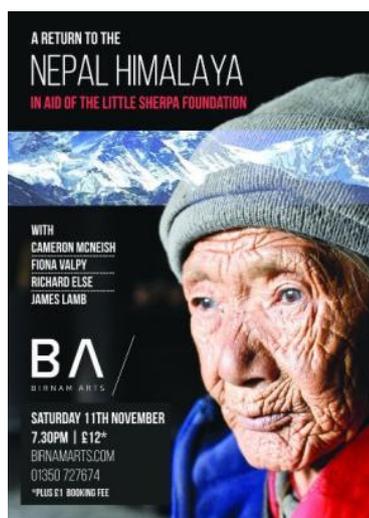


Congratulations to Ian Richards

In July, Ian Richards was awarded citizen of the year by Blairgowrie and Rattray Development Trust, in recognition of his hard work with many community groups – well done Ian we appreciate your longstanding service to our Club.

Future events

James Lamb the Little Sherpa Foundation



Members may be interested to know that James Lamb is having another event in the Birnam Arts on Saturday 11 November 7.30pm. Tickets are £12. James spoke at our club night last year enthraling members with his talk about the Little Sherpa Foundation – here is another chance to hear him speak and hear updates.

Little Sherpa Speak

45th anniversary

To celebrate 45years of BDHC we are holding a lunch in Little's Restaurant on Saturday -tickets available from Evelyn Menzies

Club night

The next club night is on Friday 6 October at Blairgowrie golf club where the photographs for the club's calendar will be judged, and club members will have a presentation of walks 2022/2023

CLOSING REMARKS

Jane Clark editor

As autumn arrives and we look out warmer gear, we have a full programme of walks and events to keep us busy for the rest of the walking year. After each walk, we place a write up in the Blairie and a piece on the club's website, blog. There are also bits on Facebook and for members, a what's App page. Look out for the club's calendar which will be ready soon – or better still come and join us – you can see our walks on the website www.bdhc.org.uk