

The voice of Scotland's hillwalkers, climbers, mountaineers and ski-tourers

# Scottish Mountaineer

ISSUE 91 – SPRING 2021

## Return to the hills

What has  
changed  
since Covid?

Does your  
climbing kit  
cost the earth?





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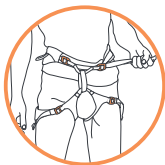
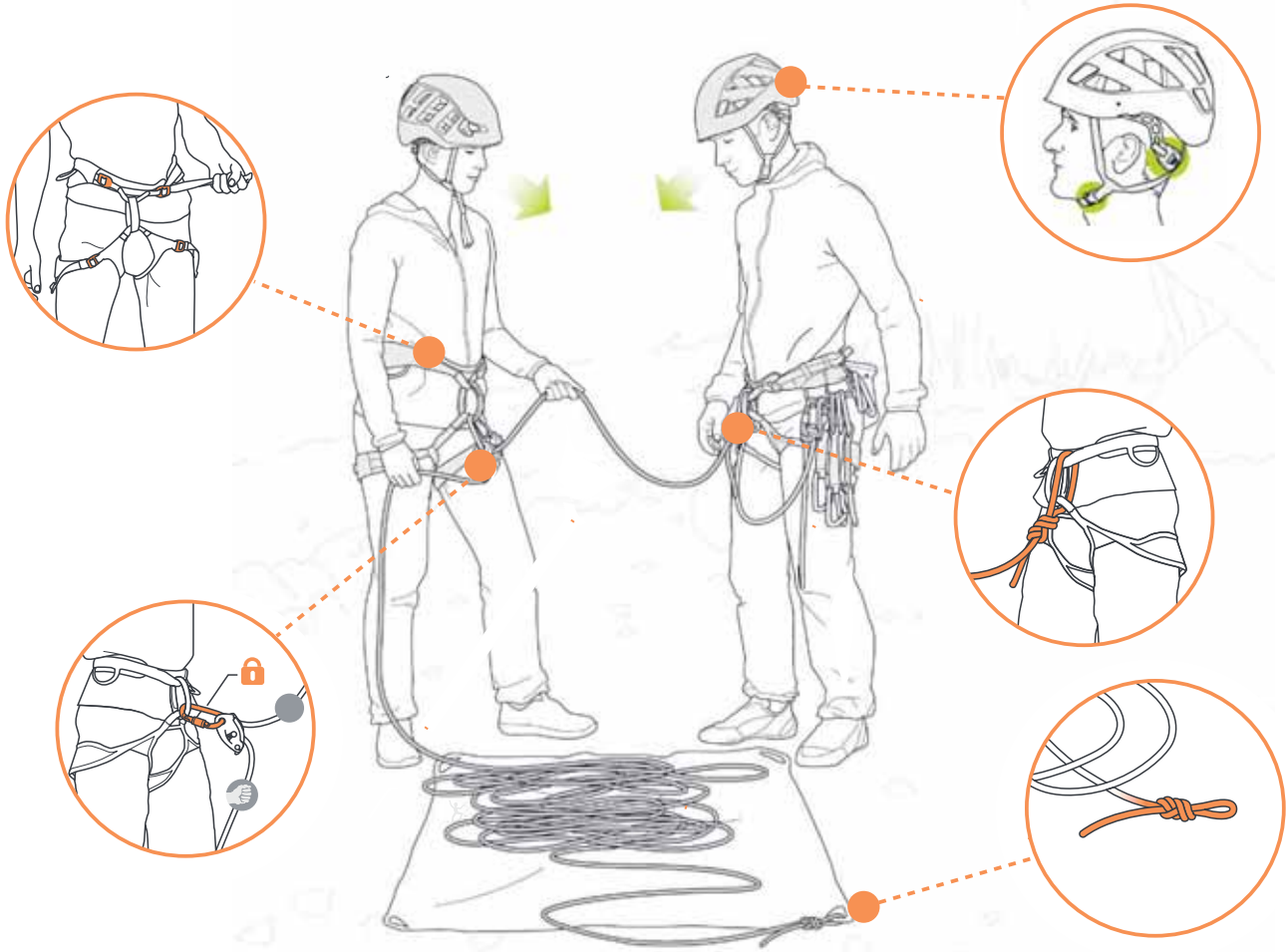




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Before climbing, climber and belayer must each check 5 key areas



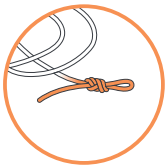
### Harness

- Waistbelt above the hips.
- Adjusted for a snug fit.



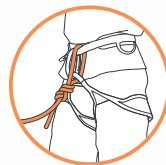
### Helmet

- Properly adjusted on head.
- Chinstrap fastened.



### Rope

- Knot tied in the end of the rope.



### Tie In Knot

- Tied in to the correct place on the harness.
- The correct knot.
- Knot finished & tightened.



### The Belay System

- Rope installed in the proper direction for the belay device.
- Carabiner connected to the correct place.
- Carabiner is locked.
- Belay device function check.



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## The newbies – threat or opportunity?

AS I write this I'm thinking about getting my rucksack packed for my first wild camp in what feels such a long time. Since childhood I've found something special about sleeping out under 'canvas', and it's a feeling that hasn't faded even as the body has got less pliable with age.

But a couple of weeks ago, heading into the hills for a day walk and seeing a number of tents pitched only yards from the road, I wondered what they could be getting out of it – and at the risk they posed to my own future access. After all, though our access legislation was hard fought for, laws which have been changed once can be changed again!

But in calmer mood I decided that what these roadside campers got from their activity was probably very much what I got from mine, but limited by lack of knowledge and experience. And the fires and the rubbish that they would no doubt leave? Well that might just be down to me to tackle as much as anyone.

There are people who just don't care, who can't be reached by anything other than enforcement, but most people do want to do the right thing. Education plays a vital role in that, but so does peer pressure, and it's up to those of us who camp with respect for others and for the environment to set an example – not just to show that this is how it should be done, but that doing it properly is more fun.

You'll read a lot about getting back to the hills in this edition of Scottish Mountaineer, and one of the messages I hope comes through loud and clear is that if we want to enjoy the hills into the future then we have to welcome newcomers rather than set up barriers. After all, we were all new to this once.



Neil Reid, Editor

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## 10 New Twists



## 22 Return to the Hills



## 30 Covid and Mountain Rescue



## 36 Relative Hills



## 32 Scotland's Walking Festivals










## 46 Mountain Equipment and Ethics



## 50 Mountain Literature



## Regulars

- 8  Mountaineering Scotland News
- 16  Conservation Matters
- 20  Access Matters
- 26  Mountain Skills
- 42  Get Climbing
- 52  Meet the Members
- 60  Out There

Front cover photo: Emma Mason and Michael Birtwistle from Dundee University Rucksack Club on the In Pinn in Skye in March 2017. Photo by Nick Carter, Alpha Mountaineering



## Going online to beat Covid

By Helen Gestwicki

OVER the past year most of us have made use of online technology to keep in touch. Being unable to continue the normal programme of face-to-face Mountaineering Scotland and Climb Scotland events, we have been no exception.

The whole staff team have adapted brilliantly and embraced technology to enable us to continue delivering talks, events and skills training, and engage with members and new audiences. In fact, since our programme of online events began in July 2020, we have reached well over 2,500 people through webinars (more than half of whom were non-members) and reached over 41,000 through live events on social media.

Heather Morning was the first brave soul to venture into the unknown with a Zoom webinar covering basic navigation skills. Having spent many years delivering training face-to-face, on the hill, it was a real challenge to be faced with a computer screen and 200 students she couldn't see! It was, however, a great success with really positive feedback, and we quickly realised this was a very effective way to reach a lot more people in a very efficient way, if not quite the same experience as our usual skills course format.

The next volunteer, Access and Conservation Officer Davie Black, gave a really engaging talk on 'The Nature of the Hills' in November, taking viewers through the history and important points of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, using examples of the work he is involved in day-to-day. If you have ever listened to Davie speak you'll know how much knowledge he has, and the feedback was again excellent and spurred him on to take more people for a virtual stroll up his local hill, King's Seat in the Ochils, during the second lockdown.

Unable to deliver our usually



popular winter skills lecture tour, Ben Gibson did a great job with two winter skills webinars, reaching record high audiences of 331 and 369 viewers (still to be beaten by the rest of the team!). Again, the attendees were a mix of members and non-

members of varying degrees of experience and knowledge, and Ben did well to pitch at the right level for both.

Along with the winter skills webinars, Heather, Ben and Robert Mackenzie (ClimbScotland) produced a

series of winter skills videos, with a lot of support from Tiso and Rab, for which we are extremely grateful. The videos took the viewer through the stages of planning, avalanche awareness, kit and clothing in a fun and engaging way, helping us reach over 80,000 viewers on Facebook alone – very powerful, I'm sure you'll agree!

Facebook has also been the regular venue for our mountain safety live Q&A events, hosted by Heather, which this year have included ones dedicated to ski touring, winter skills and a spring skills for the hills event to complement Ben's webinars and reach a slightly different audience.

The ClimbScotland team have also been making their presence felt online. The ScotRock podcast, produced by Calum McBain and Robert MacKenzie, had its first live online session early in 2021 in partnership with Tiso, featuring Iona Rendall, Hamish Frost and Molly Hughes, three young mountaineers who are all 'supported by Tiso ambassadors'. If you haven't listened to the podcasts yet, please do. They are available on Podbean and all major podcast platforms – just search for



ScotRock.

ClimbScotland have been working closely with the our counterparts the BMC and Mountaineering Ireland, and the Association of British Climbing Walls (ABC) on various projects to promote good practice at indoor climbing walls including hosting two webinars for climbing wall staff, attended by over 500 people, videos to support climbers returning to indoor climbing walls, and a 'better belaying' project.

And in partnership with Glenmore Lodge, Robert hosted the recent 'Intro to Rock Climbing – skills checklist and safe practices' webinar with experienced mountaineer and climbing instructor Stuart MacAlesse, aimed at supporting climbers to make the transition from indoor to outdoor climbing safely.

It was also great to catch up with over 30 of our affiliated clubs in a recent Zoom meeting, where we shared the 2021 club survey feedback, explored ways to support and promote clubs and club membership and discussed some of the current issues facing clubs as we come out of lockdown. The general feeling was that the online format really worked, and we are aiming to schedule more regular meetings to engage with clubs and share all the wealth of experience and good practice there is within them.

Now that Covid restrictions are easing and we can get back to more face-to-face events, the popularity of the online content and realisation that it is a fantastic way to reach many people we may not otherwise, means that online events are here to stay.

► All videos from webinars and Facebook live events are available on our YouTube channel: [shorturl.at/wyEMU](https://shorturl.at/wyEMU). The ScotRock podcast is at: [scotrock.podbean.com](https://scotrock.podbean.com)



SCAN ME

# Strategy review and member survey

AS we look forward to the future with a more positive outlook, directors have started work on the review of our current strategy and the development of a new plan that will help guide the direction of the organisation through to 2025.

This is an exciting time and updating and driving the overall strategy for the organisation is a key priority for the board of directors to ensure we maintain the focus on our existing priorities, while also looking at new opportunities to develop and grow the scope of the work we are involved in.

We have seen growth in interest in outdoor recreation and more people heading to the hills, pressures on the environment and access infrastructure. There are also significant concerns about the impact of climate change and how our landscape is managed. More positively, there is also the debut of climbing as an Olympic sport,

and our celebration of our 50th year as an organisation. All this offers us an important opportunity to consider the future of Mountaineering Scotland.

Getting members' views will be an important part of the process and we will be bringing our member survey forward this year to ensure your feedback helps to shape the future of the organisation. We will also be connecting with other partner organisations and key stakeholders over the next few months to seek their views on how we can work more effectively on behalf of the wider mountaineering community in Scotland.

► You can take part in our members' survey at [www.mountaineering.scot/membersurvey2021](https://www.mountaineering.scot/membersurvey2021) or by using this QR code.



SCAN ME

## Face-to-face on the hill

WE were delighted to be able to resume face-to-face safety and skills courses in April. The first set of courses – those run in April and May – sold out almost immediately, and business was expected to be brisk when booking opened for the remaining summer courses on 26 April.

Demand for training has been exceptionally high, probably reflecting the number of newcomers to the great outdoors as well as

response from people wanting to refresh their skills after lockdown, and we're looking at different ways we can meet that demand, including working with other partners.

In the meantime, however, keep an eye on our website at [www.mountaineering.scot/members/courses-and-events](https://www.mountaineering.scot/members/courses-and-events) for the latest news on which courses are available.

## Hillwalk Tours discount

EVER fancied doing a walking tour but been put off by the logistics and planning all the accommodation? We've teamed up with Hillwalk Tours to offer members a 10% discount on all their walking tours in Scotland, Ireland, England, Wales and Spain.

They've researched a number of multi-day walks, including the likes of the West Highland Way and the Fife Coastal Path, and



besides giving you full advice on the route will sort out your itinerary and accommodation. They also offer a luggage transfer service to keep your load light.

Find out more about Hillwalk Tours at [www.hillwalktours.com](https://www.hillwalktours.com) then use your discount code – MOUNTAINSCOT10 – when booking. (This discount cannot be used in conjunction with any other promotions or discounts.)

# New Twists for Old Hills #23

## The Coulin Forest

By David Jarman



An Ruadh-stac is usually climbed from this pass, as is Maol Chean-dearg on the right, with Beinn Damh beyond

**W**e all know where the Torridons and the Fannaichs are, indeed most mountain groups have 'brand names' with high customer recognition. But what of the fine group just further south, which we can't call The Coulins, for confusion with Skye? SMT publications variously label them the 'Ben Damph and Coulin Forests' - or nothing at all, lumped under Torridon. Hamish Brown ducks the issue - 'Strathcarron to Torridon'. WalkHighland

and other popular usage now go with 'Coulin Forest' - even though this strictly applies only to the north-east fringes - one side of one Munro!

These are all exciting hills, the five Corbetts as much as the three Munros. They are a compact group, readily accessible from either side and by one of our finest systems of hill tracks weaving through their grand passes in a loose X. They share a distinctive landscape signature, with red Torridonian sandstone and dazzling white Cambrian quartzite interleaved in over-thrust slices - with summits of each, regardless. Several are named red or black, even if largely white.

True, they have neither the long arêtes of Torridon nor the remnant plateau survivals of Monar - not being quite as high. Instead, they are deeply carved and scoured by corrie glaciers and the over-riding icestream, yielding striking crag-prows and awkward rock steps. They deserve a more distinctive brand name - the Hoover Hills, the Heinz Heights? In Gaelic, of course. All entries considered.

With obvious starting points all around them - Achnashellach Station for the Coire Lair group, Coulags for the western ones, Glen Torridon for the northern - we at #New Twists have been rather stumped in finding entertaining off-piste approaches. Until last year...

### Sgorr Ruadh

The centre, the pivot, the highest, and handsome with it. But memorable? Maybe Sgorr Ruadh suffers from being



The Coulin Forest - a distinctive group of rugged individual hills, seen here from Beinn Tharsuinn in West Monar



bagged with one or more of its neighbours, a bit of a pig-in-the-middle. But Wainwright of sainted memory made a virtue of taking one hill at a time, giving it space to breathe, the close attention it deserves and always repays. So here is a grand way to focus on Sgorr Ruadh as the sole goal, and see the pulsing heart of this group, nearly all on a good path; a simple day – yet mostly unfrequented.

Except we didn't actually mean to. For my just-teen grandson's third Munro (if he will live in London...), I lit upon Beinn Liath Mor, from the Torridon side for a change. My battered maps show a path up Coire a' Cheud-chnoc of the hundred hillocks – but the latest online OS extends it, with a dogleg back up to 550m, invitingly placed to get into Lochan Uaine and up the NW shoulder. Off we trotted, the old stalkers' path fettled up some years ago, if now deteriorating again. The made line does stop where the moraine field ends, but a well-worn trod carries on rather steeply up onto a broad smooth rib. We kept a watchful eye for the dogleg – and without troubling to check my superseded map, found ourselves entering vast, flat-floored Coire Grannda – not the Lochan Uaine pass. It actually took me a few moments – plus the shock of a mountain bike posse whooping in the other side, on the main TransCoulin track (evidently now a NorthCoast500-style mecca for the path-squidgers) – to realise that the ridge ahead was not BLM, but Sgorr Ruadh.

Having overshoot, this now looked a much more tempting goal on a bright day. Our Torridon path still



Raring to go - the hundred knockans behind the Ling Hut, path heading in



doesn't actually link up with the 'highway', but once on it we soon caught up the bikers, as they struggled with the sadly disintegrated zigzags up the headwall into the finest of the Coulin passes. All the others are named, why not this? Bealach Grannda then, sorted. The handsome lochan in the pass is also nameless – how about Lochan Amadan (for the Fool in the wrong place)?

A neat walkers' trod slants up the grassy slope which is the only chink in Ruadh's armour this side, onto the rugged northwest ridge. This staircase, red-and-white by risers, finally confronts a daunting little summit tower. Well, my grandson was glad of a chance to handle some rock, while I was glad not to have my vertigo put to a shaming test - simple.

You could of course take in BLM on the way back, its notorious west end bluffs probably easier in ascent than the usual descent. But we were happy to retrace our

steps, with superb prospects of Liathach – and to be quite sure there is no dogleg. OS do seem to be seeing things these days, on their remote imagery.

## Maol Chean-dearg

Here's one vital detail OS have now got half-right. A branch path crossing from Torrindon to Coulags, round the west side of MCD over Bealach a' Choire Ghairbh, has been clearly shown by OS since my 1950s One-Inch, and on the early 50k. Actually, the path from Torrindon heads south for nearby Bealach an Ruadh-stac, and ne'er the twain do meet, different estates having no need of a through link. Online OS 25k now shows this, but 50k still implies they join (hidden under the name). Happily, some saint has cairned a link.

So one summer day, traversing from Torrindon, in thick mist, gaining the path-head col, I tried this way and that, ever more confused. Neither big peak could be found, but Meall nan Ceapairean (677m) in between was a pleasant consolation. Oh, and third time back at the wrong bealach, there on the slab-cairn – a plastic lunchbox, lidless, cheese sandwich swimming. Did the owner...?

The regular ascent of MCD from the right bealach is a



Sgorr Ruadh from Bealach Grannda – the walkers' path slants up the grass



The tip of Sgorr Ruadh comes in sight entering Coire Grannda



Beinn Liath Mhor from Sgurr an Lochan Uaine, November





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# New Twists



mere trudge – although the initial quartzite rim has one of our finest rock avalanches below, sprayed across Coire Garbh. Hamish nonchalantly tosses off having climbed its north-east ridge from Bealach na Lice. It looks pretty formidable, but other reports are not to hand; my log suggests it is feasible for ordinary mortals, but so long ago it cannot confidently be attested a New Twist.

## An Ruadh-stac

Why 'red'? Who knows, when the entire 'stack' is solid white quartzite? Eventually I did manage up it, courtesy Ochil MC staying at Inver, on a Sunday morning (never a good idea), from Coulags by the usual path up Coire Fionnaraich to That Bealach – the east ridge proving less fearsome than it looks, if still a keen reviver of the faculties. A direct descent from That Other Bealach by Moin' a' Chriathair to the footbridge goes well.

So when last autumn, during a Covid lull, a friend dug up this option from her to-do list, a suitable New Twist had hastily to be found. A path from Lochcarron over to Kishorn seems to go unnoticed, straddling two maps. Its Bealach a' Ghlas-chnoic, 400m up, could offer a fair jumping-off point for an extraordinary bare-white 3 km of writhing quartzite folds and slabs – the satellite imagery is so seductive.

Be warned, the mapped path from Tullich up to the pass is worse than absent, it is a malign presence – never made, a folk- and beast-worn braided trod, in miserable stony and slithery ground. Worse still, the initial neatly waymarked detour round the back of Tullich Lodge fades into rank bushwhacking. No one comes up this glen any more – no bootprints, no bikes, no ATVs, even the deer hardly bother (no back-gate feeding...). But change the specs from grey- to rose-tinted, and see Gleann Bhuachaig for the lost-world paradise it has become (even the inevitable Death-of-River hydro access motorway hides behind the opposite brow).

Forsaking 'path' and bealach, we wandered on up into Coire Mhic Fhearghais, a basin-full of sithean knolls, lovely dry moraine up to a fine waterfall, beyond which a maze of lunar quartzite terrain invites roaming at will. Indeed the col is Cadh' an Eiididh – notch of the web. Curiously, the largely-vanished fence is briefly a solid stone wall across it.

The south ridge is simple – just a handful of visitors



soon make a neat little corkscrew line in the debris. Ice has crossed even the summit, sprinkling Torridonian erratic cobbles – which support a rich, old-gold lichen in counterpoint to the amethyst variety sparkling on the quartzite.

And that writhing slabscape is perhaps even better seen from above and traversed in descent – with a fine pair of lochans on the west. Just don't bother with that path, short-cut it.

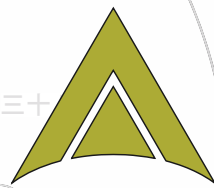
## The Carrons?

That is just a sample of the New Twist possibilities in this favourite group – and none have actually been within Coulin proper, yet. An obscure stalkers' path can be found starting out the back of the estate yard, up through a handsome native pinewood, but then rather deteriorates. Still it gets you quite steadily up to 500m – from where unexpected delights can be pursued, off-piste. Even unto Beinn Liath Mhor.

Which brings us back to that vexatious name for this group. Have you noticed how often our mountain groups are on the north side of the loch or glen they are named after? The Affrics, the Mullardochs, the Farrars. So why not the Carrons, for this splendid group north of Loch, Strath and Glen Carran? Better still, The Carrans (for so 'Strath Carran' is now given by OS, helping distinguish it from the others).



Loch Cadh' an Eiididh and An Gorm Loch mark the foot of the great quartzite outcrop, beyond, the vivid green of Cnoc Glas exploits the more fertile ground



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# Conservation Matters



Hiker on footpath through wooded glen towards Beinn Eighe ridge, Torridon. Photo: Mark Hamblin/scotlandbigpicture.com



Great spotted woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*) in pine woodland in winter. Photo: Peter Cairns/scotlandbigpicture.com



Dotterel (*Charadrius morinellus*) adult male displaying with wings raised in breeding habitat on upland plateau of Grampian mountains, Cairngorms National Park. Photo: Mark Hamblin/scotlandbigpicture.com

## Rewilding - and why it matters

By Davie Black, Access & Conservation Officer

REWILDING is a buzz-word nowadays: a growing movement that seeks to change the way land is managed. Many people think of the Scottish hills as 'wild' but in reality they are all managed in some way – for forestry, sheep farming, electricity generation, hunting grouse and deer, and not forgetting all the recreational activities we enjoy.

All this has an effect on our landscapes and wildlife – and not a good effect. A report called *The State of Nature*, published in 2019, demonstrated that the abundance and distribution of Scotland's wildlife has, on average, declined over recent decades, and there has been no let-up in the net loss of nature in Scotland. This is despite legislation, regulation and policy, all designed to protect the natural environment.

Now there are growing calls for a new way of managing the land – rewilding.



### Why rewilding?

How often do we hear birdsong in the hills? How many different calls can be heard as we climb? How many different butterflies or dragonflies can be seen in summer? We may not realise it but the experience of mountains has been diminished through the years. It is difficult to imagine what it was like in the past, what the mountaineering pioneers of earlier times would have seen and heard on the way to the summit. We are the poorer for it, but we can imagine what it could be like in the future.

The Scottish Rewilding Alliance offers this vision of rewilding:

*A Scotland where nature is reawakened. Where a rich tapestry of native woodlands, wetlands, wildflower meadows and grasslands is stitched back together. Where land and seas teem with life. Where people feel connected to the natural world, wherever they live. And where nature-based enterprises support thriving communities far and wide.*





## What it is and what it isn't

Rewilding, at its heart, is visionary, yet practical in its application. The essential central idea is to make more space for natural processes. It is seen to have a place from mountain-tops to urban parks, from coastlines to gardens, from rivers to derelict 'brownfield' sites. It is also a concept that provokes different reactions.

Some see it as a threat to traditional ways of using the land, calling it land abandonment, with scare stories of carnivores carrying off lambs. Others see it as the cure to the woes of wildlife decline, where a natural order is restored and looks after itself.

As ever, the truth lies somewhere between these two extremes. It is a way of relating to the land – not making wilderness, but bringing more wildness to what we do. Few would deny that more abundant wildlife would be a good thing; the question is how this can be achieved. It shouldn't affect mountaineering practice, although it may make the experience different from the way it has been over past decades.

## Climate and biodiversity crises

What definitely has made, and is making, a difference to the mountaineering experience is the double whammy of climate change and the biodiversity crisis.

The climatic space that wildlife inhabits is changing at a rate faster than it has in the past. This all puts strains on the natural environment: a complex set of relationships between species that has to adapt, and quickly. It's a gloomy prediction for the uplands, which cover more than half of Scotland's land area, but the evidence is there for all to see.

Rewilding is a call for a new way to stop the ongoing decline, a new way of looking at the mountains and moors. Some landowners are already doing it, changing traditional ways of working to allow trees to grow where they will, rivers to meander as they will, and wildlife to find the space to feed and breed.

## Natural Solutions

Let's look at the bigger picture here, and rewild the imagination. Bogs and trees are a simple yet effective way of providing more shelter and food for wildlife, and to store away the carbon that drives climate change. It does however take time to make bogs wetter,



Perched female Black darter, *Sympetrum danae*.  
Photo: Mark Hamblin/  
scotlandbigpicture.com



Young scots pines regenerating on flanks of Ryvoan Pass, Glenmore Forest.  
Photo: Peter Cairns/  
scotlandbigpicture.com



and for scattered trees to become a proper woodland. You may wonder why hillwalkers would want wetter bogs – and won't more trees obscure the fantastic views?

Natural, functioning wet peatlands are fantastic wildlife habitats for birds like golden plover and curlew and invertebrates like the craneflies the birds feed on, and golden-ringed dragonflies zipping along above the heather. They are also great at storing away carbon, and plant remains slowly rot into peat, as well as absorbing rainfall and reducing flood risk downstream where people live.

It has always proved difficult to make much economic return from bogs – they're rubbish for growing trees, drain them and they just dry out and crumble away, and they're easily damaged by heavy grazing. But now their value in rewilding is becoming clear. Block the drains and let them do their thing.

Natural woodland stores carbon away as long as the trees grow, and is great for wildlife – finches and crossbills in the canopy, red squirrel and pine marten, deer jinking behind trees, and the small bees and hoverflies that pollinate.

Natural treelines are open and wide-spaced, from alder and aspen on glen floor to straggly stunted shrubby pines and junipers stretching up to high altitudes. We don't see enough of this type of woodland in Scotland, letting some parts of the forest just grow, storing carbon, improving soil, shading burns and rivers, and giving wildlife shelter and food.

## Socio-politico-economic dimension

The wild Scottish mountains are not a

wilderness, and haven't been for a couple of thousand years. Historically and currently, livelihoods have been made in the mountains, while shaping the look of the land. Rewilding is not about wildernesses, and it's not about removing people from nature. We are part of nature, not apart.

Rewilding does not look back to pick a historical period and recreate it. It's about adjusting what we do to allow more room for nature, to understand the natural processes and their benefits, and to continue to use and enjoy these resources, but in a different way than we do now, because the science shows we are damaging the nature that we depend on.

## Why we should care about this?

Rewilding isn't a single solution that will work the same everywhere. As a society we still need to grow and harvest timber and graze livestock, amongst other things. The mountains are big enough and wild enough to give nature a freer hand, without abandoning resource harvesting – be that forestry, grazing, hunting, recreation.

Rewilding cannot be forced on anyone or any community; everyone has to buy into the reasons for it – the global need to store away carbon from the atmosphere, to allow nature to breathe, to recover. That means adapting what we do, while retaining what we culturally value.

As mountaineers we all need to look at how we do what we do – how we get to the hills, our cumulative effect, the kit we use – it all matters – and to take the time to appreciate the wild and what it means. Rewilding as a state of mind.

► For a quick overview have a look at the short animation on the Scottish Rewilding Alliance website: [www.rewild.scot](http://www.rewild.scot)

# Counting hares

## Citizen science project launched

By Davie Black

VOLUNTEERS are wanted for the first on-the-ground national survey to shed light on distribution and numbers of Scottish mountain hares. There is concern about the current conservation status of mountain hares in Scotland, with the available information on populations presenting a mixed picture, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions. The picture is further complicated by natural fluctuations in the population, whereby numbers can vary dramatically over periods of about a decade.

NatureScot (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage) has been working with a range of organisations to develop and pilot a new mountain hare monitoring scheme, based on night-time counts using spot-lights along fixed transects in set areas. However this method is labour intensive and only practical in terrain



that is not too steep or craggy, which means it is restricted mainly to the central and eastern Highlands, leaving extensive areas in the west and north-west where other approaches are necessary.

One option, devised by NatureScot along with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), the James Hutton Institute

and The Mammal Society, is to involve the legions of Munro and Corbett baggers normally roaming the hills, many of whom have a keen interest in mountain wildlife already.

You won't have to be a wildlife expert to take part, so long as you are able to identify mountain hares. To participate, you will need a smartphone with the free Mammal Mapper app downloaded and installed – go to the App Store or Google Play and search for Mammal Mapper. This can be used to record

mammals during walks anywhere in Scotland. It contains an ID guide to help identify mammals, plus a section on upland birds which can now be recorded too.

Rob Raynor, a mammal specialist at NatureScot, said: “Many people enjoy seeing mountain hares in the Scottish hills. Our priority is to make sure they remain a common sight. To do that, we need a better understanding of the existing population. This national survey will give us a better picture of mountain hare numbers, both regionally and nationally, and support decisions about how to maintain and conserve our native population.

“We'd like to encourage hillwalkers and anyone with an interest to contribute their sightings. We have an online training video and guidance within the app, so participants who aren't certain if they'll be able to tell the difference between mountain hares, brown hares or rabbits can feel confident about their identification once they're out in the hills.”

Mountain hares are easy to identify in the winter and early spring, with their white or mainly white fur, but from late spring to autumn they have greyish fur and can be confused with the brown hares and rabbits which live at lower levels. Generally speaking, though, in the central or eastern Highlands, although there are areas of overlap between these species, most hare-like animals seen above about 400m in moorland habitat will almost certainly be mountain hares. In the North West, where mountain hare habitat extends down to sea level in many places, mountain hares can be found at lower altitudes.

Unlike many other surveys of plants and animals, this project will not be restricted to a particular season, and will welcome observations the whole year round. NatureScot is keen to encourage as many hill-goers as possible take part, as and when regional Covid travel restrictions allow, to ensure that we build up a good understanding of how mountain hare numbers vary across the whole of Scotland.

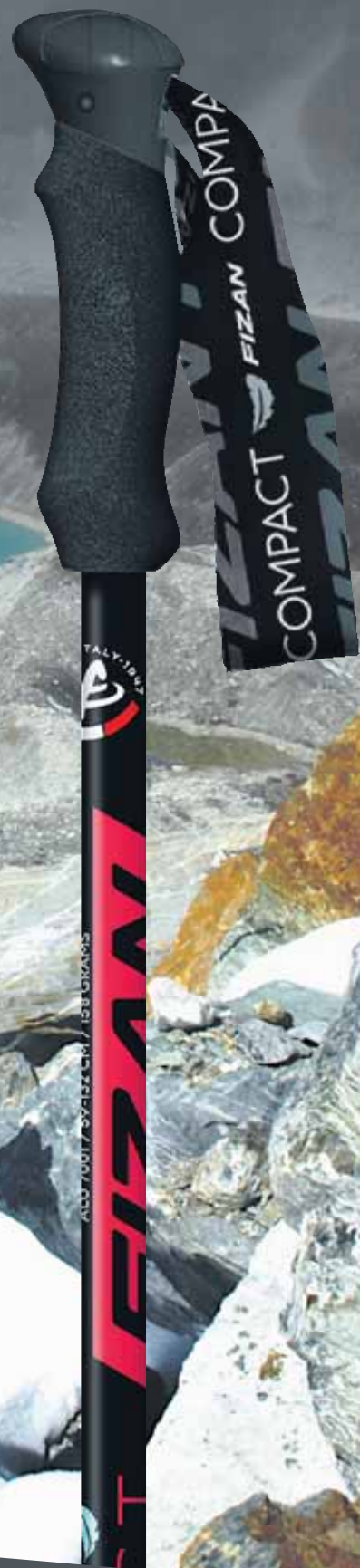


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# Access Matters



## Finding a way through the trees

By Davie Black, Access & Conservation Officer

THE expansion of forest cover in Scotland is a key target of the Scottish Government, both as part of the Climate Change Plan and to secure a supply of wood for the future. With huge annual increases in forestry plantations planned, and the vast majority of it encircled by deer fencing, at a minimum of 1.8m high, can we be assured that the informal routes to crags, summits and tops remain unplanted and fencing can be easily crossed?

Once approved and planted, these new or expanded woodlands will be around for decades to come, so access and landscape issues need to be considered at the planning and design stage.

### Scale of the planting

Forestry and Land Scotland, the agency charged with delivering the Scottish Government's target, approved 13,500 hectares of new tree planting over the past

year. This is an annual target, gradually increasing to 18,000 ha each year from 2024. That's nearly 70 square miles of forest, or about the area of Aberdeen city, planted annually.

The bulk of this will be forestry in private ownership, with grant aid available for designing, planting and fencing. Most of it will be commercial conifer forest, but with a significant amount of broadleaf woodland able to grow to maturity, although there will be commercial hardwood plantations in the mix. The target for new native woodland is 3,000–5,000 ha each year.

It is estimated that a new native woodland can capture 300–400 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per hectare over 50 years – although this is variable, as tree growth rate and wood density varies between different tree types. The Scottish Government's intention is to increase tree cover from the current level of 19% to 21% by 2032.

### Safeguarding access and landscape

Access through new plantations should be assured through the various levels of strategy and policy statements and regulation criteria, found on the Scottish Forestry website. Key to our interests is the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) approach to sustainable forest that states: "In Scotland, the provisions of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 must be complied with, including access rights to woodland; people must not be obstructed from using their access rights responsibly."

One often overlooked piece of guidance lies within the Scottish Outdoor Access Code which states that putting up a high fence over long stretches of open country without providing gates, gaps or other access points might be considered unreasonable (SOAC section 4.9). Wild deer are recognised as a threat to tree growth, so extensive fencing will be an integral part of woodland expansion,

along with culling the deer population.

## Main Issues

The key points of new plantation design affecting recreational access are:

- Protecting and maintaining existing informal routes in popular usage. These are often no more than a line of trodden vegetation, with no formal designation, but are well documented in walking guidebooks and on various websites.
- The visual impression of walking through tall dark corridors of conifers if sufficient distance from the path is not designed in the planting layout.
- The effects of dense softwood plantings on path surfaces as the trees are planted and grow, casting a heavy shade if too close to popular routes.

## Here are a couple of examples:

Firstly, a problem arose on the hills above Glen Orchy, on the route to Beinn Bhreac-Liath and Beinn Udlaidh, two Corbetts.

After slogging up through the small, recently-planted conifers, the route along an open ridge to the summit of Beinn Bhreac-Liath was obstructed by a high deer fence bisecting the ridge, with no gate or ladder stile. Two points arise here – the ability to follow the route as the densely planted trees grow, and the difficulty of crossing a two-metre high fence, especially with a backpack and in the wind. It is difficult to do much retrospectively if the planting layout along the route and fence crossing points aren't included in the submission for grant aid funding.

A walker going up Beinn a' Chaorainn, by Loch Laggan, fortuitously met the Estate Manager who informed him of plans to plant millions of trees on the estate below the hill, and erect an extensive fence. The paths up the hill had already been damaged by vehicles involved in surveying and preparing the ground. A timely word resulted in the forestry consultant noting where access points would be required. This included a commitment to include pedestrian gates in the proposed deer fence, with the walking routes left free from planting, and cut-up ground restored.

## The planning process

This sort of thing should be picked up early in the forest design stage, before any work



commences. The key document to ensure that access and landscape is adequately covered is the Forest Design Plan, which states the intention of the planting scheme, the on-the-ground conditions, and what is proposed to happen and when.

These plans are vetted by Scottish Forestry's Woodland Officers, who check a whole range of potential constraints. However they are increasingly hard-pressed, with annual targets going up each year, and recreational access is very often confined to a desk study of existing routes, which can rely predominantly on statutory defined routes such as core paths, rights of way and long-distance routes. An informal route from the roadside to the top of a Corbett, for example, may not be picked up despite the fact that it is in regular use.

Consultation on proposals is part of the process, and Mountaineering Scotland does sometimes receive proposals for comment directly from forest consultancies for new plantings or forest restructuring, where we point out any informal routes to summits. There is a Public Register on the Scottish Forestry website for all proposals for planting or felling, but it can be very easy to overlook proposals or miss comment deadlines.

We do provide information on popular routes for both walking and climbing when we know about significant forestry proposals that may affect them but this awareness can be variable across the country.

A lot depends on local estate workers knowing the routes in popular usage, and the

forest management companies being sensitive to these informal routes and accommodating them in forest design at an early stage. It makes sense to take these popular informal routes into account as the foresters won't want a succession of hillwalkers clambering over high fences and beating a path through the young trees.

## Possible solutions

The challenging part for us is catching new forest proposals that may have an impact on recreational access, and making helpful comment in good time. It is important for Woodland Officers, and the forestry consultancy companies, to be aware of routes or paths in popular usage and not to rely on formally defined paths. At the very least forest designers should be aware of Munros and Corbetts and have a copy of the walking guides to hand, that show where access is likely to be taken.

Here is Mountaineering Scotland's challenge to the forestry planning business: given that the Scottish Outdoor Access Code says that putting up a high fence over long stretches of open country without providing gates, gaps or other access points might be considered unreasonable, what would be considered reasonable? Here's a starting suggestion – how about a stile at least every kilometre, or 15 minutes walking time?

If any foresters are reading this, get in touch and we will be happy to talk about deer fences across the hillside and how to cross them.

## Contacts

Scottish Forestry: 0131 30 5250,  
email: [Scottish.Forestry@forestry.gov.scot](mailto:Scottish.Forestry@forestry.gov.scot)  
website: [www.forestry.gov.scot](http://www.forestry.gov.scot)

Forestry and Land Scotland: 0300 067 6000,  
email: [enquiries@forestryandland.gov.scot](mailto:enquiries@forestryandland.gov.scot)  
website: [www.forestryandland.gov.scot](http://www.forestryandland.gov.scot)

# Return to the hills

## What has changed since Covid-19?

**After months of lockdown and uncertainty we were delighted to be able to return to hills further afield in April. But there was nervousness too. Along with lockdown and relaxations had come tales of conflict and overcrowding in the outdoors. What were we going to find when we went back? Stuart Younie looks at how the outdoor recreation landscape has changed over the past year – and what we can do to help protect our access and enjoyment of it.**

**I**t was the day everyone had been counting down to with mounting impatience. Following an unexpected but very welcome announcement, Friday 16 April turned out to be the day when we could all return to the hills. This was an especially important day for those living in the cities and smaller local authority areas who could now enjoy the physical and mental health benefits of getting back to the outdoors.

After over a year of some form of Covid restrictions, and with limits still in place, it was never going to be normal. But what exactly were we going back to? The hills themselves are the same of course, but

what has changed as a result of the last 12 months as more people have turned to outdoor activities and a new found appreciation of the countryside as an antidote to the impact of lockdown?

Evidence over this last year shows a major increase in the number of people going to the hills, and particularly visiting established and even less-publicised rural beauty spots on or near the road network. Many of these have traditionally been used as access points to the hills. For example the car park at Linn o' Dee in the Cairngorms is the most suitable access point for a large number of iconic Munros and classic long-distance walks. It has also been a long-established honeypot





Above: Even where a campfire does not spread, it causes an unsightly and damaging scar.



Left: Just two sets of feet, but when added to many hundreds of others they help to make a boggy mess.



Opposite bottom left: Ochills Mountaineering Club show the way with a club spring clean on Dumyat.

Opposite bottom right: The Adventure Harlots make sure a #TakItHome bag is a part of their regular hill kit.

site for non-walking tourists, and suffered overcrowding at peak times even before Covid.

Following the easing of the first lockdown in July 2020, many challenges arose in popular destinations as the number of visitors far outstripped the infrastructure and facilities available, and highlighted the urgent need for further investment and public education on issues such as littering, inappropriate parking, fires, camping and human waste disposal.

It's no doubt true that some of the pressure on the countryside in post-restriction periods will ease as other attractions open up – football, pubs, shopping – but most seem agreed that many who have 'discovered' the countryside this last year will keep coming back, with as much right as those of us who have visited the hills long before the impact of Covid-19 took hold.

We all tell ourselves we exercise our access rights in a responsible manner, but do we need to change our perception of what responsible now means? Not just under SOAC but as we all learn to live with the virus and also interact with one another again. What may be responsible for a single person, can at some point become no longer responsible as more and more people start doing the same. The 'take only photographs, leave only footprints' philosophy falls down when the single track of footprints through the grass becomes a muddy swathe as hordes of people follow the same line, each

leaving only their own footprints.

So what to do?

First of all, one result of the very obvious challenges of last summer has been an increased focus on people pressure and visitor management in the highlands and other popular locations from a number of local authorities and Government agencies. Encouragingly, they don't appear to be going down the road of byelaws or restrictions on camping. Instead, campaigning by Mountaineering Scotland and other organisations for more investment in rangers, infrastructure improvements and better public education and national campaigning by VisitScotland, NatureScot and Keep Scotland Beautiful has been successful.

Parking and traffic management is another story with Temporary Traffic Orders and Clearways being used again this summer to deter high volumes of informal (and sometimes inconsiderate) parking which has a consequential impact on access in popular access points and locations like Schiehallion and several places around Loch Lomond. Both the popularity of these places and also the restrictions on car sharing are exacerbating the pressure on current car parks and, while providing some additional capacity may help in the short term, is providing large carparks in rural areas the long-term solution?

It's a tough one to crack and it's not going to work everywhere but looking at better and more integrated public

transport in places with high volume of visitors may be the way we have to go and challenge the culture of relying on our car as the preferred mode of transport. Talk of encouraging the move away from cars to travel hubs with shuttle bus access and better walking and cycling routes has already begun in many areas and this can only be viable if people change their behaviour as part of a much wider agenda to help tackle climate change.

It's important to maintain the current momentum and keep up the pressure to ensure Scotland takes a long term investment in improving facilities and infrastructure improvements so that we all enjoy the countryside with minimal impact on the landscapes and scenery that attract people in the first place. Outdoor recreation has to be an integral part of the country's green recovery and we want the new Parliament and succeeding ones to recognise that a public that is encouraged to interact with our environment is more likely to fully engage with measures to save it – and also play a key role in kickstarting the economy, particularly in rural areas.

It's an approach that Mountaineering Scotland is fully committed to. Our role has traditionally been to promote responsible walking and climbing through encouraging and providing skills and safety training. Partnering with other organisations through the Mountain Safety Group, that work continues, with very active public messaging through the traditional media and social media.

## Sofa to Summit

We're also working on a new project - 'Sofa2Summit', providing online learning targeting new participants who aren't necessarily aware of the traditional sources of advice, and we are looking at other ways we can increase our reach to that new community of interest in the outdoors by working with other outdoor sports.

However it's not only about safety. Litter and irresponsible camping were two of the problems highlighted from last summer which caused outrage not just among the local residents directly affected, but among the outdoor community in general.

Mountaineering Scotland's award-winning campaign TakItHame - now in its third year - encourages people not just to avoid dropping litter, but to pick up litter they find when they can do so safely, and also to start thinking and changing behaviour on issues such as reducing the amount of single-use plastics they carry into the hills.

Similarly, in 2020 we launched a considerate camping campaign, to distinguish between wild camping and other types of informal camping, with advice for the inexperienced on how to camp responsibly.

Pressure of numbers is seen most visibly around the periphery of mountain areas, with many people not straying too far from their cars, but more people are heading into the hills too, and upland path maintenance and restoration are issues which are likely to be increasingly prominent. We recently partnered with the BMC for the Mend our Mountains fundraising campaign, benefitting footpaths within the two national parks in Scotland, but those represent a fraction of the mileage of footpaths already under unsustainable pressure.

Government agencies and stakeholders such as Mountaineering Scotland clearly have a continuing role to play in protecting both the environment and our rights to enjoy it, but each of us can play our own part.

First of all we need to remember that although cases have reduced, the coronavirus has not gone away. Social distancing rules mean bothies still should not be used, for example, and holiday accommodation will not be back to normal for some time, so there will be additional pressure on popular camp sites and informal camping spots.

By avoiding choke points and opting for quieter locations, less well known




Erosion like this on Beinn a Ghlo has been tackled by the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland, supported by our Mend Our Mountains campaign, but many, many miles of path across the country are in a similar state.



Wild camping: remote, low impact and far more satisfying than in crowded roadside beauty spots.

look through social media will show the wildly contradictory replies that genuine pleas for information sometimes receive. We have all learned from others, so it's good to have an opportunity to pass on the favour. If you meet with others who are less experienced and need a helping hand or some advice, then why not share a friendly bit of knowledge and some encouragement.

Remember, too, that it's not just what you say, it's what you do, so maybe now is a time when we need to be particularly aware of our own behaviours and to avoid cutting corners, to do everything properly and set a good example, taking a pride in our own stewardship of the hills that will hopefully influence others.

Above all, now that we've got over the shock to limbs which have languished too long in lockdown, and hopefully got our hill legs back again, let's enjoy ourselves out there and remind ourselves how much we love Scotland's mountains. 

or more remote, we will not only be helping to ease the pressure, but will also enjoy a quieter experience of the hills away from the crowds. So the coming months will be a good time to do some exploring, getting into those corners we've been promising ourselves for ages and finding our own hidden gems.

It's not about isolationism though. People with little experience of camping or walking are often eager to learn more but just don't know where to get the knowledge they seek - even a cursory



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# Mountain Skills

## Getting back in to practice

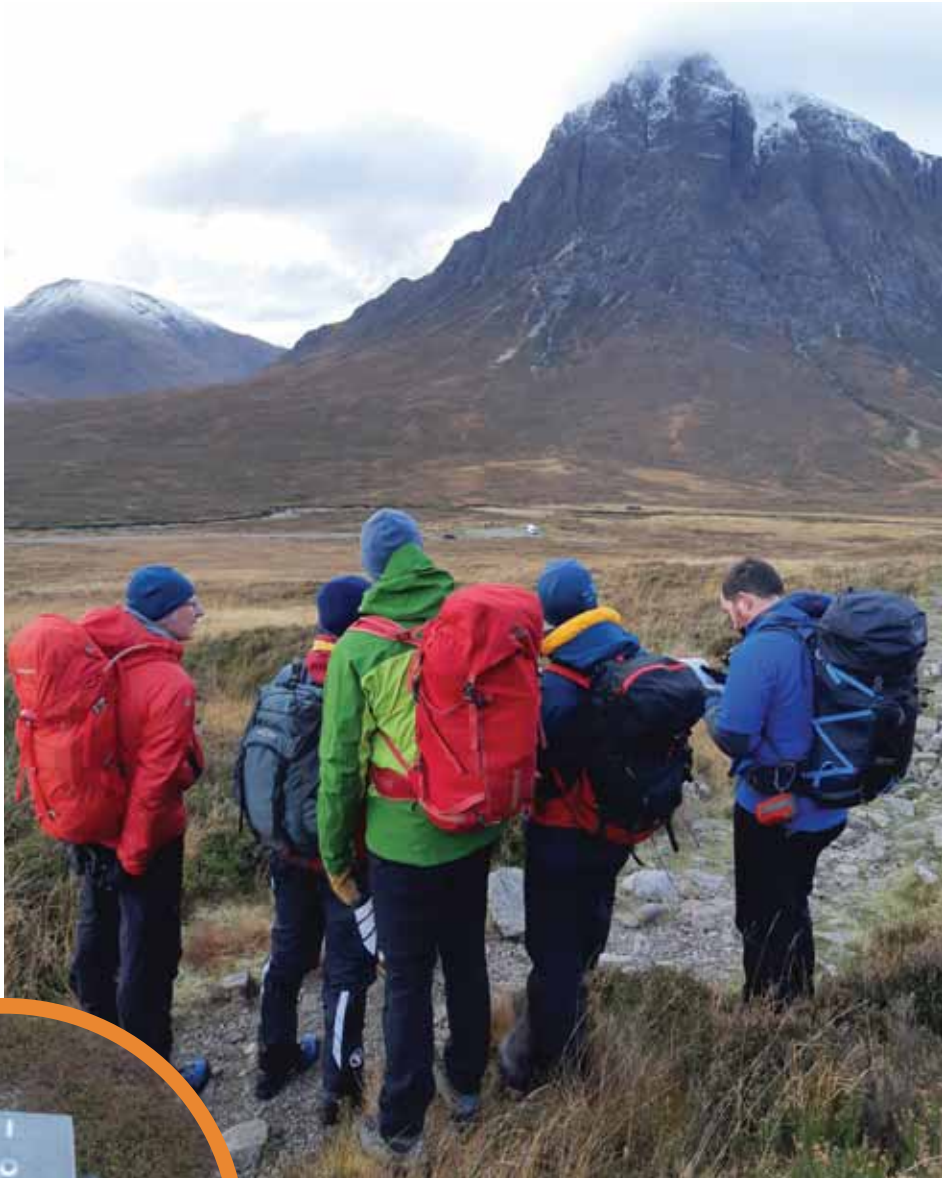
**Ben Gibson, Mountain Safety Adviser, looks at skill fade and how to get over it**

BOXERS call skill fade 'Ring Rust', meaning not just time away from throwing punches but, also time away from being in the ring against an opponent, the pressure of competition, the lights, the crowd cheering (or booing!), and the awareness of being in an enclosed 16ft square.

Sound familiar? Whether you call it ring rust or skill fade, it's something that all of us will have to be conscious of as we return to the hills after months of enforced absence. So what exactly is it?

In a simple sense, skill fade is a reduction in ability or efficiency in a skill or learned behaviour due to lack of practice over a period. An example would be taking a compass bearing. The brain may recall how to perform the task eventually but may struggle when trying to carry it out in a white-out, in the driving rain or when it's getting dark.

An example of skill fade for me was my ability to play a strong game of chess with a friend. Initially, I was getting destroyed (on a regular basis!) but, over time with more playing and reading into the art of playing chess (opening moves, particular sequences, and end game strategy) I improved and gained confidence to win against a better



player, which eventually I did. However, it has been some years since I played regularly at that level and I would now feel very unsure of my ability to hold off being annihilated.

Skill fade can happen for a number of reasons, but most recently we have all been affected by the Covid pandemic, with enforced time away from the mountains and little opportunity to practice and keep skills and fitness fresh.

If we jump the gun and head out for a big hill day it may feel like really hard work: we'll lack hill fitness, be unused to carrying a pack, lack confidence in navigation, and probably be over ambitious. There's a real potential for

getting caught out or having an accident.

Some will find it easier and quicker to get back into it than others, depending on where levels of skill, knowledge, experience, and fitness were prior to restrictions on outdoor adventures. But regardless of your ability, it would be prudent to think how you can ease yourself back into it and get back to that happy level of confidence that enables you to enjoy a big day in the mountains.

### How can we get skills back?

Getting back your hill fitness is a good first step. Don't be over-ambitious. Start steadily and ease back into it. Maybe start with a few shorter days that require minimal effort and with a lighter pack. Try to incorporate some short, steep hills to get the lungs and legs burning with that familiar feeling of long uphill trudging.

Gaining confidence may mean taking



it gradually and adopting a very planned approach. Do your homework, and plan your adventures at home first. Get out on fair weather days where navigation can be kept to a minimum or at least be kept simple. Don't go straight for that massive day: start small and gradually work up to longer days.

Visit familiar ground. Go to an area you know to start practicing your navigation skills – and don't practice everything at once! Allow your brain to get comfortable with performing a few skills at a time and don't overload your brain. For example, on one day practice setting/orientating your map and measuring distance and save pacing and timing for another day. You can also go with someone else to practice your navigation and help build each other up with mutual support. Encouragement and positive re-enforcement are a big help in gaining confidence with your navigational skills.

You can start your preparation before setting foot on the hill. Recent research is suggesting that watching videos of skills can help in learning and practical use. (See a ukClimbing article here - <https://rb.gy/7ffzvv>)

Mountaineering Scotland and Glenmore Lodge You Tube channels are great for those crucial little reminders on navigation, what to pack and other hard skills, such as aiming-off, slope aspect, tying a figure-of-eight knot and much more.

[www.youtube.com/c/MountaineeringScotland/videos](http://www.youtube.com/c/MountaineeringScotland/videos)

[www.youtube.com/c/glenmorelodge/videos](http://www.youtube.com/c/glenmorelodge/videos)

And of course you can take advantage of your Mountaineering Scotland membership and jump onto one of our mountain skills or



navigation courses. These can be found on our website: [www.mountaineering.scot/safety-and-skills/courses-and-events/courses](http://www.mountaineering.scot/safety-and-skills/courses-and-events/courses)

Wherever you are in your outdoor adventures, remember to enjoy yourself, stay safe and look forward to a positive future, where we can all spend quality time in the mountains surrounded by good friends and create new memories.



# A scrambler's checklist

By Sandy Paterson

WHY go scrambling? There are so many reasons people scramble: it allows them to tick off some of the more technical Munros; it is just the joy of moving through technical terrain without the stop-start nature of rock climbing; it allows access to some iconic days out like the Aonach Eagach or Tower Ridge, and it is also a great way to get into the mountains during early summer when perhaps the mountain crags are still damp from winter or the rock is still a bit chilly for climbing. I certainly look forward to spring scrambling adventures.

When it comes to the start of the spring and picking routes there are lots of factors to think about:

## Grades

The starting point for many is what grade the scramble is. Just like rock climbing, scrambling has its own grading system, but it is not quite as defined as the rock climbing grades. So, what does it all mean? Here is my take on the grading systems.

**Grade 1** – This is a step up from walking, where the hands are needed for balance rather than having to pull on anything in a climbing sense; the consequence of a slip or trip could

be still very serious. There may be harder sections, but they can be avoided. Examples might be Ledge Route on Ben Nevis or the Fiacail of Coire an t'Sneachda via the bypass route.

**Grade 2** – This could be similar terrain to Grade 1 but more continuous or very committing, or it could have a few harder sections where you might have to actually pull on your arms a little. Examples of this grade might be the Aonach Eagach in Glen Coe or the Forcan Ridge on The Saddle above Glen Shiel.

**Grade 3** – These routes will have sections which would often be classed as rock climbing. What makes them different to a full rock climbing route is that the climbing sections will be interspersed with easier scrambling terrain. Examples might include Tower Ridge on Ben Nevis or Afterthought Arete above Loch Avon in the Cairngorms.

However, it is not just the grades you need to think about when going scrambling. What is the rock like? What is it like to climb in the damp or wet? Cairngorm granite and Skye gabbro are fine in the damp, Skye basalt is horrid, so thinking about the rock type and the weather in your planning is a good idea. Also what is the

wind doing? Is your route sheltered or is it high and exposed like the traverse of Liathach? And how fit are you feeling? Is it a long day out like the full traverse of An Teallach or a shorter route like Curved Ridge on Buachaille Etive Mor?

## Technical Skills

It is important to think about your technical skills and whether they match what's needed for the route you are planning on doing. For many, the joy of scrambling is the flowing nature of the day, not having to stop and start and deal with technical ropework or belays. This means you will often solo the route. Do you have the movement skills to travel safely through the terrain involved? Building up slowly on less serious terrain or even getting some coaching is a good idea so you know what you are comfortable with.

At times you may want to use a rope. Do you know how to build belays and place gear? As a rock climber this might be something you are quite familiar with but if you are getting into scrambling from a walking background then perhaps it will all be new to you. As a rock climber do you have the hill walking experience of navigation and appropriate equipment?



Far left: Lurgainn Edge on Cul Beag (Grade 3): A steep approach and broken start give way to perfect rock in an amazing setting.

Above: Up high on the West Spur of Meall Ceann Na Creige, at Diabeg

Left: The Fiacail of Coire an t'Sneachda - approaching the col before the majority of the scrambling.

## Association of Mountaineering Instructors

The Association of Mountaineering Instructors (AMI is the representative body for professionally qualified Mountaineering Instructors in the UK and Ireland.)

AMI members are highly experienced mountaineers who have undergone rigorous training and assessment to qualify under the Mountain Training UK (MTUK) Mountaineering Instructor scheme. AMI is committed to promoting good practice in all mountaineering instruction. By employing an AMI member you will be in the very best of hands. Look for the AMI logo as assurance of high quality instruction.

[www.ami.org.uk](http://www.ami.org.uk)

**Sandy Paterson** is a Mountaineering Instructor based in Scotland working in both summer and winter running Scotch on the Rocks Guiding ([www.sotrg.co.uk](http://www.sotrg.co.uk)) who deliver summer and winter Mountain Leader Training and Assessment. When not running his own company, he works as the Development Officer for AMI.

## Equipment

What do you need for a day's scrambling? To start with, normal hill walking equipment might be all you need or choose to take, but as the routes get harder and more serious there are other items you can take to make your day safer and easier.

**Footwear:** Scrambles can be done in your usual walking boots but if you are doing lots then perhaps a pair of approach boots like the La Sportiva TX4 Mid or the Scarpa Mescalito Mid will provide better grip on rock and be more sensitive than a traditional walking boot. However, they are not as good on damp grass and will certainly wear out faster.

**Helmet:** Whenever I go scrambling I put a helmet in my rucksack and wear it on the scrambling sections, no matter what grade. What's the point of leaving it at home when it might just be the bit of equipment that protects you from a simple slip or trip. As you get onto the harder scrambles there is a greater chance of rocks being dislodged from above, especially if it is a busy route, so

a helmet becomes more important.

**Rope:** If I don't plan to use any technical equipment, I might still pop a rope in. It can be used for an abseil or to protect a little downclimb if the weather turns and I have to retreat from a route.

**Climbing equipment:** The final specialist kit I might take is some climbing equipment. This could be just a harness, sling and krab, or I could add a small climbing rack like half a set of nuts, a few cams and some slings and extenders. This is the sort of thing I might carry on a Grade 3 climb and use for the rock climbing sections and then put away for the scrambling sections. Rock climbers will most likely have this but for someone from a walking background it might be more equipment to invest in, as well as gaining the knowledge of how to use it safely.

No matter what grade, rock type or mountain you choose to visit to scramble on this spring and summer, enjoy them all with the appropriate experience and skill. It is an amazing way to travel through the mountains and enjoy the great outdoors.

# COVID and mountain rescue

By Tom Adams (SMR Statistician) and Andy Morgan (SMR Statistics Support)

**T**he past 12 months have been a novel experience for many of us, and mountain rescue has been no exception. Keeping rescue teams operational while controlling the spread of the virus has involved a great deal of work behind the scenes. Patterns of incidents have also been quite different, resulting in an operating environment which has been challenging at times.

Lockdown measures were announced throughout the UK on 23 March 2020. Across the country people guessed what was coming, with many heading out to the hills before restrictions came into place. In a pattern that was to repeat itself throughout the year, the weekend immediately before lockdown was one of the busiest on record for Scottish Mountain Rescue (SMR) teams, with 22 callouts over three days.

The safety of volunteer team members, as well as the casualties they attend, is always of prime importance. This has been amplified during the pandemic, when any contact with an infected person could mean whole teams having to self-isolate. As a result, rescue teams had to hurriedly introduce appropriate measures to cover their activities.

Adaptations to callout response have varied between teams, depending on circumstances, and have included social distancing, limiting numbers attending callouts, using personal vehicles to ensure social distancing, and wearing personal protective equipment. This has made a tough job even tougher. Ewan McKinnon, Team Leader of Arran MRT said: “The period after the first lockdown was challenging for us as we had to quickly adapt to a new way of working with social distancing and PPE without having the chance to train in the previous four months.

“Our callout procedures have changed a lot since the start of the pandemic. We now try to deploy the minimum number of team members required to safely carry out the rescue. We can no longer gather in our team base, and have to travel in our own vehicles where possible to keep contact to a minimum. PPE is not comfortable and is especially challenging on a hot summer day. There is also a lot more work after callouts to ensure all



vehicles and equipment are deep cleaned and disinfected. Despite all the changes the team have adapted very quickly and are ready to safely respond to any callouts in as safe a manner as possible.

“2020 was a quieter year for Arran, we attended around half the number of callouts we would during a normal year but they were concentrated in the three months following the first lockdown being relaxed.”

With warmer weather and a lack of midgets, the second quarter of the year is typically one of the busier times of year for teams. Spring 2020 was remarkably sunny, but despite this April to June 2020 was the quietest quarter on record, with teams recording only 64 incidents through this period – against an average of 207 over the previous five years. This is evident in the bar chart, with incidents from April to June being well below the average the previous five years. There were very few mountaineering incidents over this period. Non-mountaineering incidents were also reduced in comparison to previous years, despite a boom in walking and cycling in areas local to people’s homes. There were some well publicised incidences of lockdown breaches which led to mountain callouts, but in general people heeded government guidance during this early period.

Iain Nesbitt, Team Leader of Dundonnell MRT said: “With the first lockdown back in March 2020 callouts became a more prolonged affair, with more information being required from Police Scotland before deciding on a plan of action. In the first few months of the lockdown if I could task a rescue helicopter I did, but if the callout required boots on the ground, then deciding on numbers of personnel and also a rendezvous point close to the incident was key. The RV point had to accommodate all the rescue personnel’s cars, as team transport at that time was limited to one or two persons per vehicle. Once rescuers started to arrive at the RV everybody observed social distancing and put on their PPE. Callouts became very sterile and banter-free zones.

“When deploying hill parties, I tried to make sure that these are made up of people from the same area, to try to reduce any possible cross-infection to other communities that our members came from. Transporting rescuers onto the hill took longer, again due to trying to keep social distancing in effect.”

In Scotland, the restrictions were relaxed to allow people to travel outside their local areas for leisure and exercise

in early July. Given the difficulties in travel outside the UK, many people chose to holiday closer to home, and many areas of the Scottish countryside saw unprecedented visitor numbers. Hill based activity during this period reached very high levels in response to months of pent-up desire to get out. This was very clearly reflected in the numbers of callouts in the third quarter of 2020, from July to September, which in contrast to the previous three months was the busiest quarter on record for many SMR teams, with 315 incidents in total, against a five-year average of 215. An almost total lack of foreign casualties was noted, with less than 1% recorded from outside the UK (typically around 10% of those rescued are from abroad). The foreign casualties in 2020 were from France alone; previous years have seen up to 20 nations represented.

This high level of incidents was not uniform across the country, and appeared to reflect those areas closer to population centres. Particularly high numbers of incidents were observed in Aberdeenshire, Moray, Forth Valley, Tayside, Fife, and to a lesser extent Dumfries and Galloway. While areas such as Highlands and Islands and Argyll did see a slight peak, this was broadly comparable with previous years.

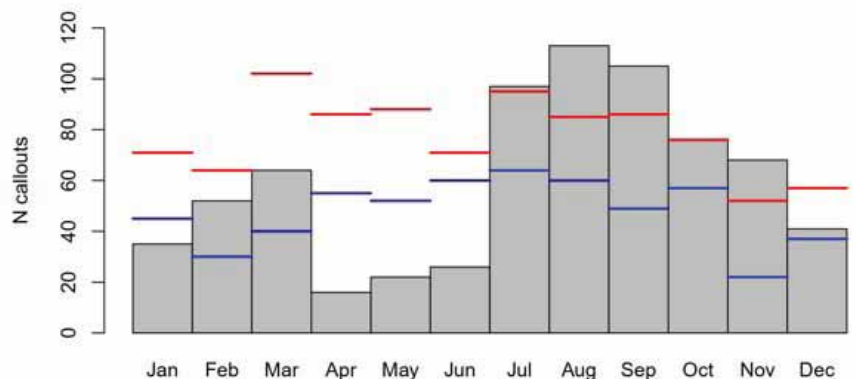
David Dodson, Team Leader for Lomond MRT, said: “Ironically, with a significant portion of the year spent under lockdown, 2020 has proved to be

Lomond MRT’s busiest year ever, with 50 call-outs, beating the previous maximum of 38 in 2018. There is no doubt that we have seen a new type of person in the hills, desperate to escape the strictures of lockdown. Many fell foul of being inexperienced, ill-equipped or just plain unlucky, and required help from Mountain Rescue.”

The pandemic also limited the extent to which teams could train. David added: “Since many of our team live in or around the north of Glasgow – a hotbed for the virus – we felt that training as a group could not be justified, so practical training was stopped. We have only recently resumed training in the outdoors, a full year after the start of the pandemic, as skills faded and hill-fitness became a real concern which potentially could seriously impact the efficiency of the team.”

All considered, 2020 was as strange a year for mountain rescue as it was for anything else. It seems likely that the changes introduced to help deal with the situation will stay with teams, as well as new collaborations between agencies which will hopefully lead to enduring improvements in the way operations are managed. Perhaps this year will be similar to last in terms of activity and mountain rescue incident patterns. In any case, hopefully we can all get back out on our hills soon. In the meantime, stay safe!

The SMR Annual Statistics Report will be published in May 2021.



SMR team callouts in 2020 by month (grey bars). Minimum (blue) maximum (red) number of callouts for the same month over the previous 5 years is shown by horizontal lines.



# Scotland's Walking Festivals

## What is their future?

By Gil Martin, Chairman of the Drovers' Tryst



▲ Top: A lower level walk visiting abandoned settlements in Strathavon, with Moray Walking Festival

Above: A ridge walk with the Drovers' Tryst.

▶ It's not all about the hills. Enjoying the pipe band in Crieff.



Scotland has a rich heritage of outdoor activity events and the walking festivals held each spring and summer have been a feature of outdoor leisure for 25 years. They are often largely charity events and complement the commercially organised outdoor walking groups in providing a more leisurely and flexible walking environment.

In a typical year more than 20 festivals take place in Scotland, from early spring through to the autumn, ranging from one-day or weekend events up to week-long festivals. Events vary in size but most have between 10 and 30 walks taking place over a number of days, usually around a weekend. These walks and related activities cater for a wide range of abilities and interests but the essence of each event is to get people outdoors and safely onto the hills, get some exercise, and enjoy the landscape and scenery in the company of friends and like-minded people.

The activities take many forms and include the traditional Munro and Corbett hills or lower level walks through the glens. Other walks and events focus on the natural environment, local history or other outdoor pursuits such as cycling, riding or kayaking. When the day is done there is always an opportunity to sample the local hospitality or engage in a variety of evening events including talks, films, music and drama for those who have energy before the next day on the hills. And what festival would be complete without an evening ceilidh to reminisce on the week's exploits?

Most outdoor festivals are run as charity organisations and many have been active for up to 20 years. Starting from small beginnings they are now well-known events in their own right that attract visitors year after year. They contribute to their local communities by providing a focus of activities that attract visitors who stay over and spend locally. They are run almost exclusively by volunteers who put in unstinting effort to organise and plan each event and provide leadership and guidance on the day. Planning



# “THOSE FESTIVALS THAT HAVE DECIDED TO RUN IN 2021 ARE DOING SO WITH SHORTER EVENTS, REDUCED NUMBERS AND A CHANGED FORMAT.”

takes place months in advance to ensure that volunteers are engaged and a suitably balanced walk programme evolves that provides the right mix of challenge, choice and enjoyment.

A highlight of these volunteer group's efforts is when the walk and events programme goes 'live' on the festival website with the expectation of walk booking to come. Scotland's spectacular highland and island landscape and scenery provides a fitting canvas for well-known events such as the Arran Mountain Festival, Crieff's Drovers' Tryst, the Borders Walking Festival and the Moray Walking and Outdoor Festival to highlight just a few.

Benefit to the local community is not easy to estimate as the festivals help and engage in so many different ways. But it is not unreasonable to suggest that a typical festival might attract up to £20,000 spending in a local community, in addition to the unseen benefit from volunteer time and effort. Across Scotland the enhancement from walking festivals can be multiplied many times and is an important element for many small rural communities during the summer months. In addition to commercial and economic benefits the festivals bring volunteers together and see businesses and the public engaged to promote their community.

Participation in walking festivals is open to all and the ticket prices are set low to attract as many as possible. The walk programmes are designed and organised to provide variety and interest to a wide audience. In most cases the walks and activities are graded by level of difficulty with details of walk distance and duration. They vary from a 5-6 km walk around a historical site to 25km circuits taking in three or four Munros, where walkers would be on the hill all day. Visitors choose which walks to attend with many deciding to take multiple walks, stay a few days and perhaps take a rest day between more arduous outings.

## The effects of Covid

The Covid pandemic in 2020 decimated the walk festival events with almost all cancelled or significantly curtailed. This meant that a number of festivals incurred costs such as insurance, website and advertising with little or no income. Though little different than the issues facing any other business in 2020, there has understandably been some reluctance from many of the volunteer and charity groups to risk holding similar events in 2021. So the number of walking festivals this year is down to about a third of the normal number. Those festivals that have decided to run in 2021 are doing so with shorter events, reduced numbers and a changed format; and are also holding walks over multiple weekends rather than a single week long programme.



# Hill walking



Planning for 2021 has been challenging to say the least. As elsewhere, the whole uncertainty of the course of the pandemic, the speed of contagion, new virus strains and the effect and duration of lockdown measures has put considerable pressure on the efforts of festival volunteer organisers. For some events the 2021 season is just not viable because there is insufficient time to organise the event or issues such as venues, transport or volunteer availability make planning impractical. It is little wonder that a number of festivals have been pushed back to later in the year to allow for the easing of lockdown measures, increased travel and to take account of the positive effects of the vaccination programme.

For those festivals that have announced a walk programme and are taking bookings through their websites, such as the Drovers' Tryst, there has been a welcome early surge in interest. The Drovers' Tryst walks were 40% booked out within two weeks of going live. While this bodes well for some festivals it also points to the pent-up desire for walkers to travel and get outdoors when restrictions are eased.

It is clear that tourism in Scotland will be different in 2021, if only in the expected volume of visitors. With the strong likelihood of there being continued restrictions on international travel and uncertainty over just how travel will be organised and monitored, be it vaccine passports, traffic light systems for favoured countries or possible quarantine, it all makes for a confusing and potentially expensive choice for two weeks in the sun; if it takes place at all.

So the 'staycation' becomes an option. Scotland is an obvious favoured destination, but has insufficient capacity to accommodate millions of UK tourists in the short summer season. We are likely to see large numbers of visitors wanting to visit the more remote parts of the country – and who can blame anyone after a year of uncertainty, health concerns and multiple lockdowns? However, if the summer of 2020 is any indication of visitor numbers and the effect of uncontrolled access to the picturesque parts of the Highlands and Islands we are likely to witness high levels of congestion, possible damage to property, pressure on livestock and wildlife and immeasurable amounts of litter.

There is no easy answer how to control access in a countryside that prides itself in being open and accessible to all. Nonetheless positive measures can help reduce the worst of what might happen even if they result in unusually high numbers of visitors. There is no doubt that calm and




Top: On Cruach Ardrain with the Drovers' Tryst

Above: Walking group on An Caisteal

consideration will be required to see visitors having an opportunity to relax and recharge, and people will have to be responsible and understanding about issues of access to the countryside, congestion and litter.

Walking festivals can help, albeit in a small and focused way, to give visitors access to the countryside and enjoy the wonderful landscape that Scotland has to offer. By joining an organised and guided walk visitors can ensure safe access to the hills, led by an experienced leader who knows the area, hill environment and walk conditions.

In 2021 there will be fewer Scottish walking festivals, but for those that do take place it will be an excellent opportunity for walkers to revisit the places they have greatly missed over the last 12 months and hopefully have the opportunity to renew old friendships and make new ones.

The box shows festivals currently planned to take place in 2021 subject to the prevailing constraints regarding meeting up, social distancing and travel. For the latest details of the walks and events on offer go to the respective walk event websites listed below. 

## SCOTTISH WALKING FESTIVALS 2021

Galashiels Walking Festival, 23-25 April, [www.galawalk.co.uk](http://www.galawalk.co.uk)

Arran Mountain Festival, 14-17 May, [www.arranmountainfestival.co.uk](http://www.arranmountainfestival.co.uk)

Ballater Royal Deeside Walking Festival, 15-21 May, [www.walkballater.com](http://www.walkballater.com)

Crieff and Strathearn Drovers' Tryst, 29-31 May and 17-19 July, [www.droverstryst.com](http://www.droverstryst.com)

Moray Walking and Outdoor Festival, 17-23 June and 16-22 September, [www.moraywalkoutdoorfest.co.uk](http://www.moraywalkoutdoorfest.co.uk)

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Relative hills

# IT'S ALL RELATIVE

**Height isn't everything, as the Marilyn's show**

By Barry Smith and Jenny Hatfield



**M**ost people have heard of the Munros, the 282 mountains in Scotland over 3,000ft, listed originally by Sir Hugh Munro over 100 years ago.

Fewer are familiar with the Marilyns, the 1556 hills in Britain with a 150 metre drop on all sides, ranging from Ben Nevis (1345m) to Maol Domhnaich (Muldoanich) (154m) in the Barra Islands archipelago in the Outer Hebrides. The Marilyn list was compiled by Alan Dawson, who published 'The Relative Hills of Britain' in 1992, and the journey through the Marilyns takes the mountaineer to every corner of Britain.

Nearly 7,000 people have registered as completing the Munros, but only 11 have completed the Marilyns – and only one woman: Jenny Hatfield. For most a more realistic target is the Marilyn Hall of Fame (HOF) open to anyone who has completed 600 or more Marilyns. There are currently just under 400 members of this group.

**Jenny Hatfield writes of the trip that was crucial to her completing the list**

The St Kilda archipelago lies 65 kilometres west of the nearest land in the Outer Hebrides, a lonely cluster of islands and rock stacks washed by the wild weather and seas of the Atlantic Ocean. It became one of Scotland's six World Heritage Sites in 1986 and is one of the few in the world to hold mixed status for both its natural and cultural qualities. The larger islands of Hirta, Dun, Soay and Boreray all rise to over 150m and so have Marilyn tops. In addition, the two sea stacks, Stac Lee and Stac an Armin are both tall enough to qualify. So with six Marilyns in total, the St Kilda Isles present an inviting and extraordinarily challenging goal for all Marilyn baggers. Day trips to the main island of Hirta run from Lewis and Harris during the summer months, weather permitting, so Hirta's



Summit of Dun

# Relative hills

highpoint, Conachair (430m), makes a relatively easy target. But what of the other five St Kilda Marilyn's?

My first experience of the group, in September 2015, was unforgettable. An early morning start at Leverburgh, loading camping gear onto one of Sea Harris' boats, The Enchanted Isle; then a bumpy crossing, with the islands slowly coming into view on a grey horizon. I was on a three-day excursion with the Relative Hills Society (RHSoc), which organised the trip through the local boatmen and the National Trust for Scotland, which oversees the wellbeing of the one million breeding birds on the islands. It was a trip of a lifetime, a trip I had been longing to make since reading about the life of St Kilda Islanders way back in my teens. The islands certainly lived up to expectations. History and wildlife abound, and the sheer cliffs and rock formations of these ancient volcanic isles are breathtakingly spectacular.

The campsite is a simple field, along from the old village street, surrounded by dry-stone walls, storage cleits and sprightly Soay sheep. We had brought all our supplies with us for the three days and had permission to camp: no shops on Hirta! But there is a small shower and toilet block, and one of the old croft houses is now a museum, filled with wonderful photos of life as it used to be before the villagers left in the 1930s.

We were a group of twelve, all keen to reach the tops of Hirta and the three outliers. However, the weather was not encouraging. For us to be able to land on Dun, Soay and Boreray, tide, wind, and swell all have to be taken into account. There are no landing stages and few points on the steep, rocky shores suitable to pull a small tender up safely. The waves were washing into Village Bay, and even Dun, just across the bay, was out of bounds. Nevertheless, we had plenty of time to explore Hirta, with views to the north-east of pinnacled Boreray, with its two massive sea stacks in attendance, and to the north-west of Soay, and the sheer climb we would need to make to reach its summit.

Next day dawned misty, but just calm enough to make the tricky landing on Boreray. Microspikes on the feet are essential when making the leap from tender to slimy wave washed rock. A short scrambling section leads to a vertiginous, mist-soaked grassy slope. Proceed with caution! The summit ridge, once reached, was narrow and rocky, though with no major difficulties, and we were soon at the cloud-cloaked summit, Mullach an Eilein (384m).

The weather improved enough for a landing on Dun in the afternoon: different in character to Boreray but with its own challenges. Slippery rocks, deep vegetation around the now deserted puffin colony, then a steep, knife-edge ridge to reach the grassy summit, Bìoda Mor (178m).

That just left us Soay for the final morning. Another early start, packing the boat ready to leave for Leverburgh, and then we were off. The views of Dun with its rock arches, and the dramatic cliffs of Hirta thrilled us on the ride round to Soay. Then the hard work began: a relatively easy landing, but then a short climbing section before heading up into an area of precipitous scree and rockfall. The knack was to get out of this as soon as possible, heading across to grassier slopes, dotted with cleit shelters built by the hardy St Kildans. Once up the steep side of the island,



the top was plateau-like, grazed by Soay sheep, and the summit, Cnoc Glas (376m) was easily reached.

I was fortunate enough on that trip to reach the top of the four main islands: four St Kilda Marilyn's conquered! But what of the other two, the infamous sea stacks, Stac Lee (172m) and Stac An Armin (196m)? I say infamous, because it is recognised that simply getting landed on either of these rocky outcrops is a huge challenge, even before you start the climb. Access to the stacks is only possible during the winter months, when the gannet colonies have vacated. Getting a suitable weather window between mid-October and early March is pretty unlikely. But luck would have it that towards the end of October the same year, such a weather window arose.

Taking that leap onto Stac Lee must be the most memorable moment of my life. Unbelievable; an ambition come true. It is a brooding lump of a sea stack, imposing even from a distance, and close up, downright frightening! Again, there were twelve of us on this expedition organised by RHSoc using the Sea Harris Company. All were competent climbers. Our climbing gear had to be ferried across to us via tender from The Enchanted Isle. I climbed in a rope of four, with a narrow scrambling ledge to start. Then the crux pitch: exposed and out of balance, but not too difficult technically. Beyond that, a narrow slanting gangway, littered with loose rocks. Finally we were out onto the slopes leading to the summit. This area would be white with gannets in the summer months. All that remained now were their untidy nests and



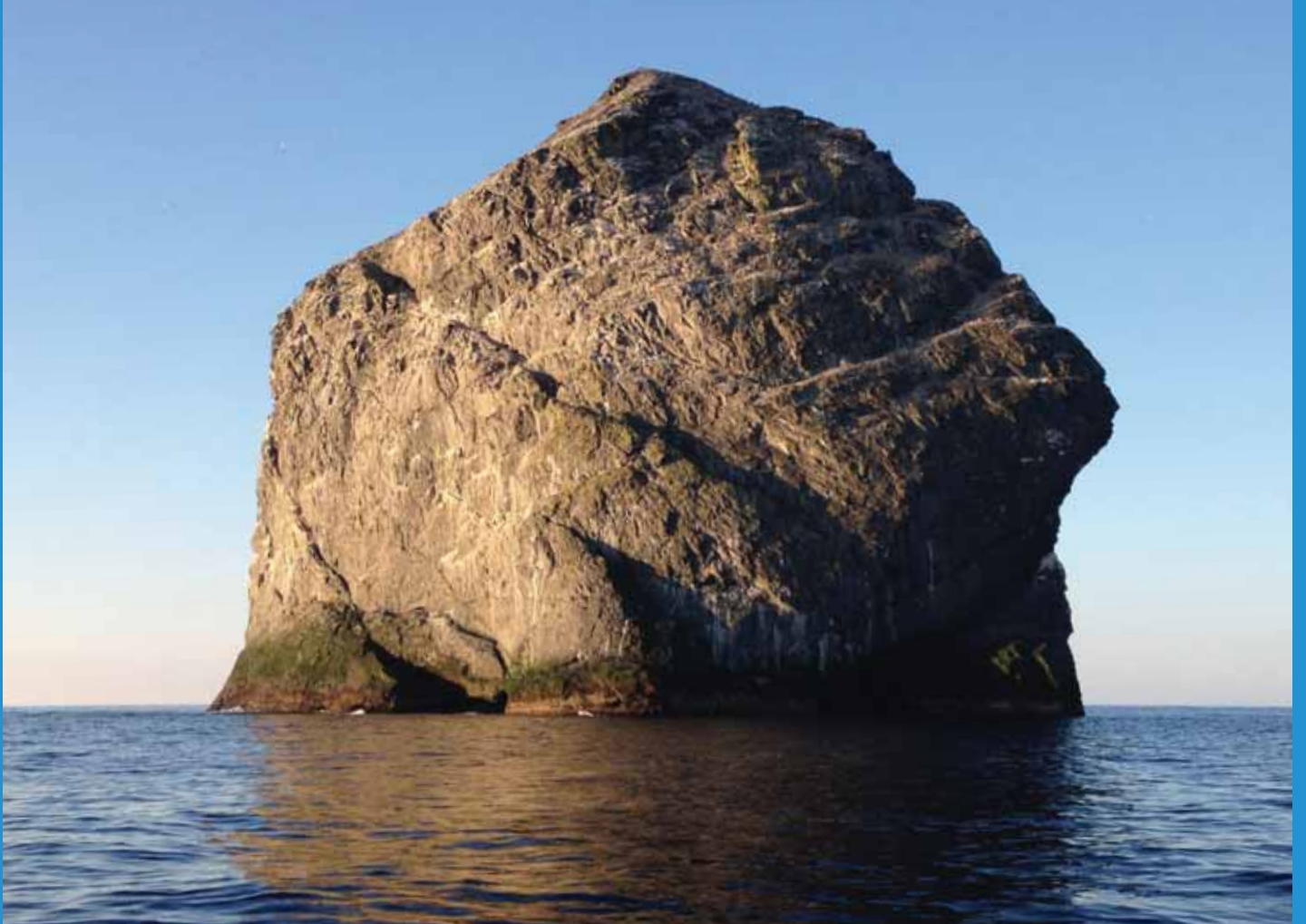
Stac an Armin at sunset



Impressive Boreray



Imperious Stac Lee





## The Relative Hills Society

The Relative Hills Society (RHSoc) was formed in 2016 from the RHB Group which originated in the late 1990s based on Alan Dawson's 1992 book 'Relative Hills of Britain', a listing of the Marilyns. RHSoc subsequently affiliated with Mountaineering Scotland in 2019 and currently has 200 Members around the UK, the majority of whom are 'Marilyn baggers', albeit with interests in other Lists such as Humps, Tumps, and SIBs.

The Society publishes an annual journal, *Relative Matters*, as well as regular newsletters keeping members up to date with events. The journal includes reports of members' adventures during the year together with articles relating to Relative Hills. It also includes the Marilyn Hall of Fame, listing those who have climbed 600 plus of the 1556 Marilyns.

The Society arranges trips all over Britain with our speciality being St Kilda and other Scottish islands. An annual dinner is held where awards are made to those who have passed various bagging landmarks and we have recently introduced awards for completions of English and Welsh Marilyns and Humps for our members south of the border. Find out more at [www.rhsoc.uk](http://www.rhsoc.uk) or email [rhsoc@rhsoc.uk](mailto:rhsoc@rhsoc.uk).

smelly guano. Step by careful step we weaved around the nests, steeply approaching the top most point. Reaching that summit was like a dream, something I had never imagined I would be able to achieve.

We stayed the night at Village Bay and were back out early the next morning for Stac an Armin. The weather was starting to break down. No sunshine, and the swell was picking up. The most difficult part was getting landed, and the initial roped climb up near vertical rock to the grassy terraces above. There were further easy scrambling sections, interspersed with grass and plenty of guano. The view from the top across to the north end of Boreray was breathtaking, with all its monumental rock spires and pinnacles.

The return journey on The Enchanted Isle, skippered by Seumas Morrison, to Leverburgh was equally memorable. Arriving as the last light of the day slipped away I rested content in the knowledge that I had cracked the Kildan Marilyns. With just under 500 Marilyns remaining I knew I could, with a lot of good planning and hard walking, become the first woman to complete this challenging set of hills.

### Barry Smith writes:

There are over 200 Marilyns on islands round Scotland and the logistics of organising a trip to some of these is difficult. The Relative Hills Society is planning trips to Scottish islands later this year, assuming COVID restrictions allow. There are potential trips to St Kilda (islands and stacks), Scarpa and Islay (April 2022). If



Soay from Hirta, showing landing point and ascent route



Top, down: Jenny Hatfield climbing Conachair, Village Bay and Dun in background

On the pier at Village Bay

Boreray from Stac an Armin

Landing on Dun



**“STEP BY CAREFUL STEP WE WEAVED AROUND THE NESTS, STEEPLY APPROACHING THE TOP MOST POINT. REACHING THAT SUMMIT WAS LIKE A DREAM, SOMETHING I HAD NEVER IMAGINED I WOULD BE ABLE TO ACHIEVE.”**

you are interested in becoming a member and joining any of these trips, go to the website [www.rhsoc.uk](http://www.rhsoc.uk), or email [rhsoc@rhsoc.uk](mailto:rhsoc@rhsoc.uk).

The Marilyn's stretch the length and breadth of Britain, from Saxa Vord on Unst (the most northerly island in Shetland) to Watch Croft (White Downs) in Cornwall, the most southerly hill. Cnoc Glas on Soay (St Kilda) is naturally the most westerly, while Detling Hill in the North Downs is the most easterly.

The Marilyn's include many historic hills which tell the story of Britain over the last 10,000 years. On Breabag in the far north of Scotland, there are caves which people lived in 8,000 years ago. On Penycloddiau in North Wales, remains of the largest and most complex hill fort in Wales dating back to the Bronze Age, are visible. Arthur's Seat overlooking Edinburgh qualifies as a Marilyn and has its own remarkable history, as do many other Marilyn's.

Although the Marilyn's were the first Relative Hills list, further lists have now been completed including the HUMP's. These have 100 metres of prominence rather than 150 metres so there are nearly double the number of hills, 2,983 in total. Remarkably this list has been completed by Alan Whatley and Rob Woodall. They ascended their final HUMP, the Old Man of Hoy, an extreme rock climb, in 2018. The Relative Hills Society is not expecting many others to complete this list!

Other Relative Hills lists include the TUMP's (30m of prominence) with over 17,000 hills, and the SIB's (significant islands of Britain), as well as a number of international lists. If you want to explore Britain there is no better way to do it than to start climbing Relative Hills.

▶ St Kilda is the UK's only mixed World Heritage Site, recognised globally for its culture and wildlife including the huge colonies of seabirds. The National Trust for Scotland, which owns and manages the archipelago, can advise on access to ensure that you do not disturb nesting birds or other wildlife and habitats. Details of how to join are at [www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/st-kilda/planning-your-visit](http://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/st-kilda/planning-your-visit)





# Get Climbing



Do  
our  
Buddy  
Checks!  
NOT A MYTH!!!



WHILE we are all aware of how skill fade may affect us when we get back climbing, now is the perfect time to talk about all those bad habits we see on climbing walls and at the crag. It's a chance to challenge how we do things and make sure that when we start practicing these skills again, we are doing it correctly.

We all have bad habits: things we have picked up on our own, or have been shown by others. These bad habits and the excuses we hear for them often lead to myths about what's right and what's wrong. We should never be afraid to challenge these myths, to find out the truth about what really is best practice, and make sure that we are keeping ourselves, our partner, and others safe.

Let's start by saying that a lot of these myths or bad habits aren't necessarily unsafe. A well-practised method may not be 'by the book' but if it's done well and practised regularly it can be just as safe. If what you do falls into that category, great; but you should always be open to learning new ways and new ideas.

## Buddy Checks - important?

Are buddy checks really that important? Yes they are. Recent research shows that most climbing accidents could have been avoided by doing your buddy checks or partner

# Myth Busters

## What's a myth and what's best practice?

By Robert Mackenzie

checks. Unfinished knots, undone harnesses, belay devices wrongly set up, can all be avoided by checking each other before the climber leaves the floor.

## Standing a long distance from the wall.

What are the myths?

### *It's easier on my neck*

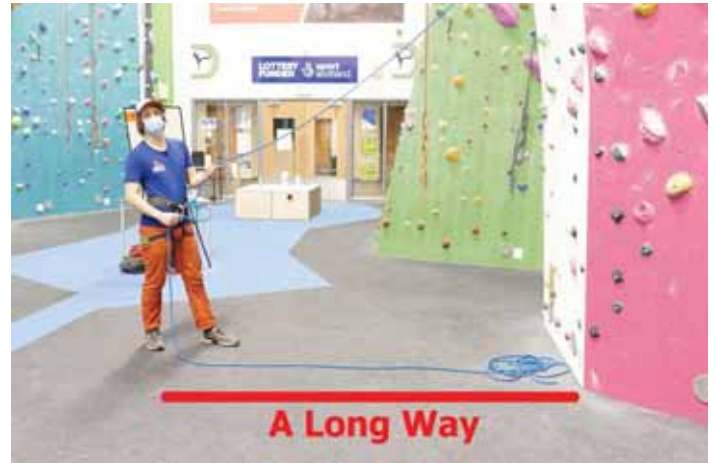
If a climber is on a steep overhanging wall, we often see the belayer walking further and further out as they climb. This keeps the belayer under the climber and means they are looking straight up the whole time. It's much easier on your neck to stay close to the wall and look out, instead of up. Belay glasses are also a fantastic way of easing pressure on your neck without the need to walk away from the wall.

*I need to be able to see my climber clearly*

On most climbing walls you can easily see your climber while standing close to the base of the wall. Even if they do go out of sight, you don't need to be able to see them. You can feel when the rope goes tight if they need slack, or if the rope goes slack you can take in, and with good communication a climber can let the belayer know what they need. Talk to each other more.

### *I can give out loads of slack*

Being a mobile belayer, feeding out and taking in slack by moving in and out from the wall is a great thing. It's good to be well practised in being able to move. But how far out do you need to be? In reality a climber can only take around 1.5m of slack at a time, maximum. Therefore a belayer only needs to walk in around 1.5m. It's internationally recommended that a belayer shouldn't be further than 1.5m - 2m from the base of the wall. That allows you to give plenty of slack and still keep your climber safe.



Standing a long way from the wall just adds a large amount of rope into the system. In a fall, if the belayer was to get pulled in, this could make a fall bigger than it need to be and potentially cause a ground fall.

### How much slack do you need out?

“I need lots of slack out to give my climber a soft catch”

Having loads of slack out doesn't automatically make the catch soft, it just makes the fall bigger. The distances between the clips in climbing walls stay roughly the same the higher you go. Therefore, every fall should be roughly the same size and force,

no matter how high up the climber is. A soft catch comes from a good dynamic belay that can be done with minimal slack out. It's recommended not to have a loop of slack dangling below the level of your belay device. Any more than that and you're just making falls unnecessarily large and could result in a ground fall.

### Should I tie my knot up through my harness or down?

We hear this discussion a lot. Which way is better? Tying up through the loops on your harness or down?

Does it matter as long as both loops on

your harness get threaded? No, it doesn't! The best way to tie your knot is by practising and getting good at the way that you want to do it, and always make sure that the rope gets threaded through both loops on your harness.

### Want more myths?

There are loads of myths and bad habits out there. Keep an eye on the ClimbScotland social media pages for our Myth Busting videos. Perfect belaying and perfect climbing are huge topics. If you have questions or want to check on something you do, something you've seen or heard, ask a staff member at your local climbing wall, or contact the ClimbScotland Team.

## Head of performance for GB Climbing

THE BMC has announced Lorraine Brown as the new Head of Performance for GB Climbing. With more than 20 years of experience working in the UK High Performance system for sports, Lorraine brings vast experience and knowledge from working in pioneering leadership roles at high profile organisations such as Sport England, Paralympic GB and the English Institute of Sport.

GB Climbing is part of the British Mountaineering Council (BMC) and its mission is to raise performance across all competition climbing disciplines, and develop a successful and sustainable pathway of home-grown athletes. Further funding for GB Climbing, and the new Head of Performance role, was secured in December 2020 from UK Sport, its third commitment of funding to GB Climbing. This builds on the existing investments already made by the BMC and Sport England.

Lorraine is currently Head of Managed Sports at the English Institute of Sport (EIS) and manages the UK Sport and National Lottery funded GB Climbing Medal Support Plan, working with Shauna Coxsey and

her team to ensure they are best prepared to compete at the Tokyo Olympic Games. Lorraine has a considerable background in Olympic and Paralympic sport, having previously been a Performance Director for GB Handball in London 2012 and Great Britain Wheelchair Rugby at Rio 2016; Tokyo 2020 is the sixth Games that Lorraine has had an interest in.

Lorraine said: “I am excited by the opportunity to work with the competition climbing community, listening and learning from all disciplines, athletes, coaches, staff, stakeholders and partners, to shape the future of GB Climbing. I look forward to sharing my experiences of working as a performance director within the successful UK High Performance system to help create an environment where athletes, coaches and staff can thrive. Ultimately, our goal is to achieve sustained success on the world stage and, over time, across all competition climbing disciplines.”

Paul Davies, BMC interim CEO, said: “We are excited to see Lorraine inspire and connect with the UK's competition climbing

community at all levels, and drive forward the vision and ambitions of GB Climbing, in turn supporting the BMC and its members more broadly. With her wealth of experience and expert knowledge of the workings of elite sports we know that GB Climbing is now set up for success and we're really pleased that Lorraine will take GB Climbing forward to Paris 2024.”

Sport Climbing is due to make its long-awaited debut at the rescheduled 2020 Olympics in Tokyo and Shauna Coxsey is poised to be the first ever GB Climbing athlete selected to compete at an Olympic Games. Lorraine has been overseeing the Medal Support Plan for Shauna and will continue to do so up to the Games after which she will move more fully into GB Climbing to support the transition of all GB Climbing related activity from EIS into the BMC.

Shauna Coxsey said: “Myself and my team have worked closely with Lorraine since late 2018 and she has brought a wealth of experience in planning and preparing for the Olympic Games. I wish Lorraine all the best as she takes on the new challenges in her role.”

# Bouldering with babes

By Calum McBain

WHEN Liusaidh's arrival surprised me and my partner, Bekah, three-and-a-half years ago, with all the attendant worries of being new parents, one of our main concerns was how this was going to impact on our climbing. Being relatively young, we didn't have many friends with children, let alone climbing friends with children. As a result we've spent the past few years flying by the seat of our pants, trying to juggle the often selfish demands of climbing with family and work – and also the addition of baby Innes just under a year ago! Something we've both grown more fond of – especially with having kids – is family bouldering sessions.

Trad climbing and sport climbing with kids are both still possible and we have done both but I think, ultimately, the amount of climbing done and the level of child contentment are both a bit higher with bouldering. The ability to go from being a diplodocus looking for food in a tree, to having a quick two-minute go on your project is really handy. Being stuck on a trad pitch for 45 minutes while everyone on the ground is midway through the worst meltdown of the week ... not so great. There's also the issue of kit, or more accurately the metric tonnes of it needed for doing trad or sport, and the even bigger issue of generally having to lug it all uphill to a crag. Ropes, baby tent, cams, nappies, climbing shoes, favourite dinosaur toy... The list is endless.



The beauty of bouldering is that all you really need are climbing shoes and a pad; everything else can be, and has been forgotten but you can still climb.

With the kit sorted, it's just like a normal session on the boulders with kids, right? Well, not quite. I learned through the battering ram

approach that if you think you'll get just as much climbing done as normal then you're setting yourself up for disappointment. Treat family bouldering sessions more like a fun day sharing the outdoors. Some days you won't get much climbing done, other days you'll get a bit more. Obsess less over your own project and think more on how fascinated little ones are with the world around them.

A real highlight for me was taking them both for night bouldering sessions. It was

a chance for us to tackle some projects in good conditions, but what I really remember is Liusaidh being taken aback by the stars while snuggled up in a sleeping bag, or playing dinosaur shadow puppets against the boulders. Don't beat yourself up if your days don't look like the Instagram-worthy pictures you see splattered over social media.

Getting to boulders isn't too much of an issue sans kids but does need a bit more prep with them. We usually take two or three boulder pads, a rucksack (stuffed inside boulder pad) filled with climbing stuff and kids' stuff and a buggy if the terrain suits for Innes (if not she goes in a carrier). Liusaidh



Above right: All under the one roof.

Above far right: Who needs a child carrier when you have a bouldering pad?



Liusaidh looks out of sorts while Bekah and Innes shelter under an overhang.





Grabbing for a hold? Or shadowplay?

Below: Bouldering mat or a child's raft upon the ocean?



now being able to walk is both a blessing – as she can manage a 30-minute walk in and out to a boulder – and a curse, trying to keep her out of too much trouble at the bottom of the boulders. We've also stuffed her inside a

pad for a few emergency exits with looming torrential rain.

It pays to scope some boulders out before committing with the family. Generally you want a reasonable walk in, a lack of cliffs for toddlers to fall off, and some okay flat space for playing. We've had great days at Farr boulder, the Ruthven boulder, the lower tier of Brin, Glen Lednock boulders and Torriron's Celtic Jumble. We're actually pretty blessed with a load of venues that work year round, and anything in Strathnairn in nice winter days has got to be one of our favourites.

It's never going to be as easy as letting your kids run wild at the local play park but there is something special about taking little ones out bouldering. In contrast to artificial play parks, bouldering gives a glimpse into a natural world of fun and potential found on rock, water and grass. The intent of our trips may have been bouldering but it often evolved into playing in the dirt, hide and seek in the grass and splashing in rivers and lochs. Through a child's eye these places may once have seemed mundane but their meaning has become deeper through bouldering and play.

# Scottish Paraclimbing Club update

By Louise Flockhart, SPC Volunteer

FOLLOWING the long-awaited easing of restrictions, the Scottish Paraclimbing Club is delighted to announce that we will be able to meet up as a club once indoor group exercise is permitted, probably from mid-May.

Both members and volunteers can hardly wait to get back to our weekly Thursday evening meet-ups and once more tackle the huge walls of our home venue, EICA Ratho. After a year of climbing the walls at home, there may be new people who feel inspired to climb the walls for real! Over the hiatus we've had contact from those who are looking to get into climbing with the club, so we hope to see new faces at the wall as well as welcoming back the old hands.

We're sure that all of our members will agree that club nights have been greatly missed over the past year. Upon return we'll make sure everyone is refreshed on safety and gently eased back into climbing – so don't worry if there have been a few too many Netflix and popcorn nights! It will be fantastic to catch up with everyone and hear their tales from the past year.

Some club members have taken advantage of this time away from climbing to do a

variety of things such as snowboarding, hillwalking and cycling. In particular, massive congratulations are due to Eirik, who moved back to his homeland of Norway at the start of the pandemic and recently qualified

for their national paraclimbing team. The club would love to take credit for this amazing news, but it is all down to Eirik whose psyche and hard work has taken him to the next level in competition climbing.

In addition to our weekly indoor meets, we are hoping to run outdoor sessions as soon as we can. The recent spells of gorgeous spring weather evoked memories of our trips to Blackford

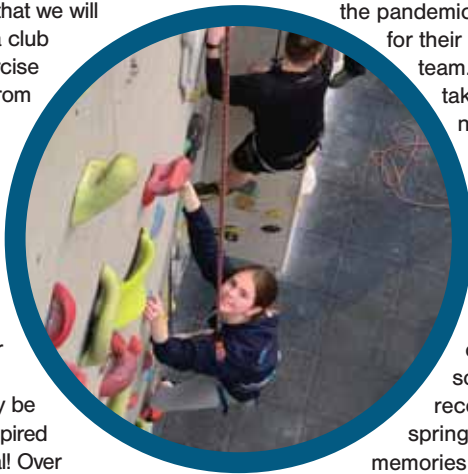
and Ratho Quarries. Excursions have proved popular in the past, so we're excited to be able to get out again and brush up our outdoor climbing skills. It's certain to be hugely enjoyable, and we can (fingers crossed) soak up the sunshine.

There's no doubt the last year has been tough, so no matter how the climbing goes we are super excited to come together again as the Scottish Paraclimbing Club and have some (non-virtual!) social interaction. Get in touch with us at: [scottishparaclimbingclub@gmail.com](mailto:scottishparaclimbingclub@gmail.com)

And follow us on social media at:

Instagram: [@scottishparaclimbingclub](https://www.instagram.com/scottishparaclimbingclub)

Facebook: [Scottish Paraclimbing Club](https://www.facebook.com/ScottishParaclimbingClub)



# Mountain equipment and ethics

Is your climbing kit costing the earth?

By Neil Reid

**W**e all love a good browse through a well-stocked outdoors shop. And reading reviews of the latest foul-weather gear, with promises of staying warm and dry through days of driving rain, almost inevitably reminds you of the last time your own kit let you down.

Honestly? It's only lack of a magic credit card that has prevented me having to upgrade my gear cupboard to a gear room. But the growing awareness of our collective and individual impacts on the environment is making many think twice about that new jacket or fleece, or to look more into what's going into that sleeping bag purchase. It's no longer enough to check the effectiveness, weight and price of our outdoor kit: environmental impact and effect on climate change have become additional considerations.

Anything made from synthetic materials will have a cost to the environment in production of the yarn (ultimately, it's oil from the ground) and in the manufacture of the fabric and in chemical treatments to improve its performance, not to mention the manufacture and transport of the finished garments.

Even natural materials such as wool, down, cotton and leather come with issues, whether in the environmental impact of growing and processing, animal welfare, or – as with synthetics – the working conditions of those

involved in the production process.

So what to do? Everything we wear or use has some sort of impact, after all. Walking and climbing in Scotland's mountains at any time of year demands a high standard of clothing and equipment, with much of the kit we're now calling problematic having been developed specifically for the weather and conditions we have to face in this country and which can so easily become fatal if we're not properly equipped.

But with more and more manufacturers responding to customers' environmental concerns, a garment or a sleeping bag's green credentials are much easier to establish, and for many people that becomes as much a factor to consider as effectiveness and cost.

It's far from perfect yet, of course. Each brand will promote their green credentials, but a jacket which boasts of using recycled materials may also use harmful chemicals, or one that is particular about avoiding long-lasting chemicals may not perform as well in heavy weather. Durability is another factor to consider: the longer something lasts, the less impact it has on the world.

This whole area is far from straightforward, and it's up to customers to keep the pressure



Mountain Equipment's Earthrise sleeping bags, using recycled down.

A well-used Paramo jacket, still going strong 10 years on.



## “WITH MORE AND MORE MANUFACTURERS RESPONDING TO CUSTOMERS’ ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS, A GARMENT OR A SLEEPING BAG’S GREEN CREDENTIALS ARE MUCH EASIER TO ESTABLISH.”

on manufacturers and retailers, demanding higher ethical standards along with high performance.

Mountain Equipment is one brand tackling the issue of waste and recycling. Its Down Cycle Project has seen the introduction of clothing and sleeping bags made from 100% recycled down. Mountain Equipment is working in partnership with French company re:down, taking material from European used products destined for landfill. The down and feather is removed from the general waste and then washed, sterilised, and sorted. Most of this recycled down is destined for domestic bedding products but a percentage of the highest quality material is suitable for Mountain Equipment’s Earthrise products.

The recycling is carried out in Hungary, at a facility powered by solar energy and with extensive waste water recycling to further reduce the process’s environmental impact. Mountain Equipment believes there are large numbers of used and unwanted down jackets and sleeping bags languishing in people’s homes, many of them beyond repair, and in the long term it wants to start taking back those used down products, recycling them, and reusing the down in new products.

Paramo has long boasted its green credentials, and in 2016 it signed up to the Greenpeace Detox commitment, which lays out the basis for excluding hazardous chemicals from the production of all products. In line with this commitment

Paramo avoids the use of PFCs, a family of chemicals used for their water and oil repellent properties, but with some very undesirable properties and not broken down by natural processes, building up in the bodies of animals.

Using an alternative road to waterproofing, Paramo works with UK firm Nikwax to use PFC-free fabric finishes. Paramo also works in partnership with the Miquelina Foundation in Bogotá, Colombia, which gives opportunities for women at risk of prostitution and drugs, who are offered training and employment, homes and childcare. And they tick another box with their recycling scheme, giving a discount in exchange for old, unwanted garments which can then be resold or recycled.

The North Face also has extensive information about sustainability on its website, which states the company is trying to replace PFCs and is working with other companies to reduce the environmental impact of its manufacturing and supply chain, as well as using recycled

materials. Other companies like Rab are moving more towards using recycled materials for their garments, and are aiming to become carbon neutral as a company, as well as supporting environmental projects around the world.

Tent manufacturers such as Hilleberg aim to avoid using harmful chemicals in their products or production, and highlight longevity as a way to avoid excess production, and well-known clothing

brands such as Montane talk of a direction of travel: ‘From reducing the environmental impact of the materials we use to demanding the highest ethical standards in our supply chain, our journey towards sustainability is ongoing.’

These companies represent just a small sample of the clothing and gear manufacturers who are recognising that outdoor people are not just consumers, but are more and more prioritising sustainability and the future of the mountain environments we love.



Rab’s Downpour Eco Jacket – recycled and recyclable.

# Green thinking

It's up to all of us to keep up that pressure for change. Although manufacturers have responded by moving towards more sustainable and ethical processes and products, there's still a lot of work to be done. Even finding out the relative sustainability or environmental impact of different products can be beyond the average buyer, with manufacturers each concentrating on different measurements and boasting membership of a bewildering number of trade bodies whose credentials would all need to be researched to get the whole picture. So some uniformity might help.

In the meantime, before you buy, it's worth visiting the company website to see what it says about sustainability, ethics and the environment – some are very definitely more aware and active than others. Of course another big question you should be asking is - do you need to make the purchase at all? Many manufacturers are realising that the 'this year's colours' mode of selling can't go on, and are using an article's longevity as a selling point.

## Making it last

Increasing the lifespan of garments is the mission of Bluebird Exchange, a social enterprise based in Edinburgh which exists to ensure outdoor gear spends as much time as possible outdoors, keeping people dry as it was intended.

"We do that through re-use, repair and maintenance," says founder Stephen Cousins. "We generate profits from the sale and purchase of second-hand outdoor products on our marketplace and then use this to fund environmental and social access projects."

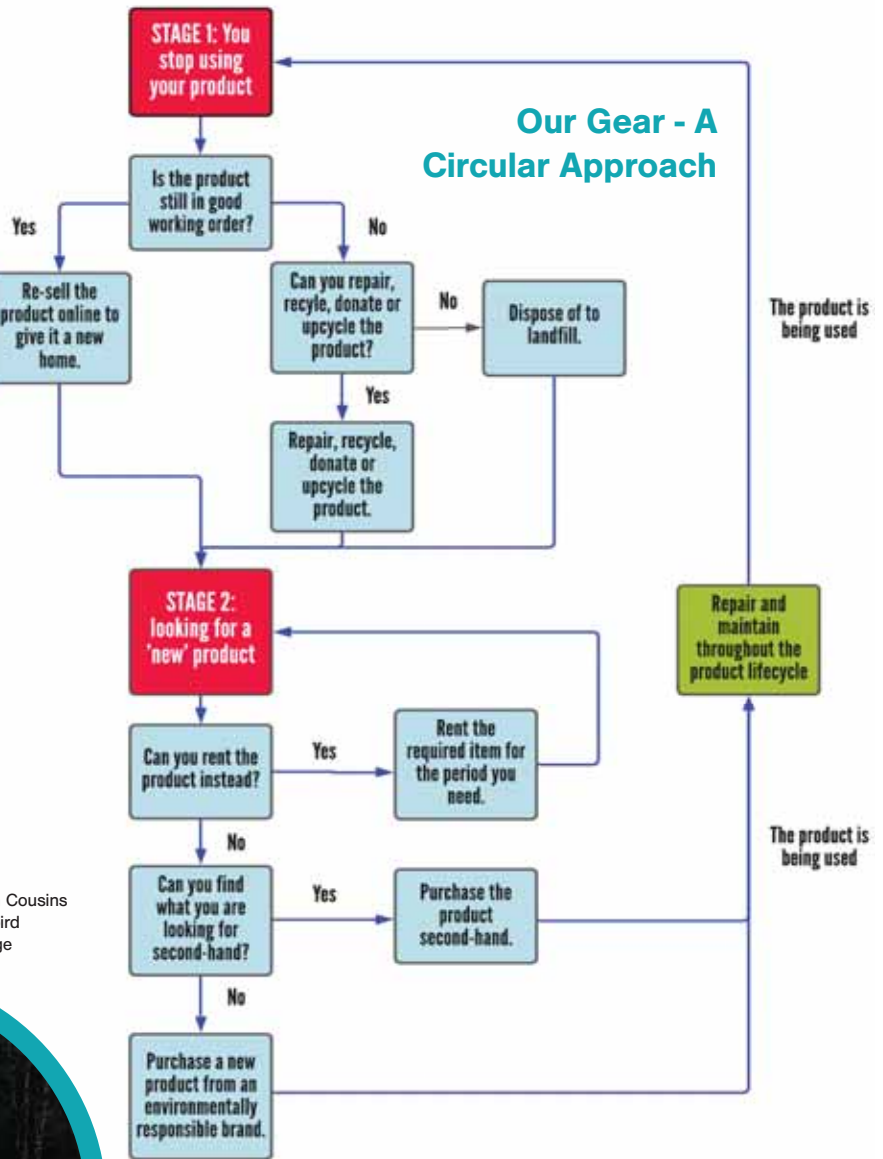
The Bluebird concept is a response to the existing 'take-make-dispose' mentality, where the collection of raw materials leads to high energy and water consumption, emissions of toxic substances and disruption of natural resources such as forests and lakes. Product formation is also often accompanied by high energy and water consumption and toxic emissions. And when products are discarded, space is taken up from natural areas for landfill, and toxic substances are often also emitted, with some of the waste remaining for hundreds of years.

Bluebird argues that substantial reductions in the overall carbon footprint and use of resources can be obtained simply by extending the life of garments and then by repairing them for resale or properly recycling the components.

Stephen Cousins said: "We understand



Stephen Cousins of Bluebird Exchange



that people might get tired of their outdoor items or maybe want to upgrade their equipment. This doesn't mean that item has been thrown away or buried in a cupboard forever more. Likewise, it doesn't mean you have to go out and buy a new product as a replacement.

Our business model is centred on facilitating the re-use of outdoor products by providing a safe, secure marketplace for the outdoor community to buy and sell their equipment and clothing and also accepting donations of unwanted items."

Bluebird was originally set up in France, but started up in Edinburgh in August 2020. It takes donations of gear to sell online and generate revenue. Although Covid has so far meant it can only pick up donations from the Edinburgh area, this will change. It has an agreement with Scottish Mountain Gear, who repair or recycle items no longer fit for use.

Bluebird hope to open a shop later this year, but already have an online gear marketplace where people can sell used gear, subject to a commission. All profits are used to support social projects, such as

redistributing donated children's outdoor clothing to outdoor education providers so that kids are properly kitted out for outdoor experiences.

There is without doubt a growing feeling among hillgoers that equipment companies need to be more environmentally aware, and equipment users need to become more demanding in order to make choices which are less harmful to the environment as well as maintaining high quality. It will be fascinating to see where this leads over the next decade.

## Websites for companies and organisations mentioned in this article:

- [www.mountainequipment.co.uk](http://www.mountainequipment.co.uk)
- [www.paramo-clothing.com/ourethics](http://www.paramo-clothing.com/ourethics)
- [www.greenpeace.org/international/act/detox](http://www.greenpeace.org/international/act/detox)
- [www.thenorthface.co.uk](http://www.thenorthface.co.uk)
- [www.hilleberg.com](http://www.hilleberg.com)
- [www.bluebirdexchange.co.uk](http://www.bluebirdexchange.co.uk)



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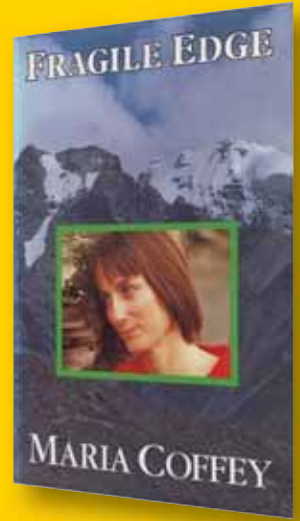
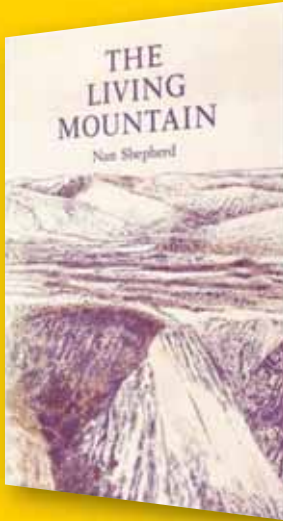
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## A TREASURE TROVE

### Why we need more mountaineering books by women

**B**etween International Women's Day and International Book Day, there seems to have been a lot written recently about the relative absence of women in mountain literature.

But focussing on the rarity in itself misses the point. Back in the 1700s, in full misogynist mode, Samuel Johnson said: "A woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all."

The real point here is that Mr Johnson was utterly wrong: we should be hearing more mountain "preaching" from women, not because it's a novelty, nor even in the name of equality, but because, on the evidence so far, their sermons are in fact "done well" and as valuable and relevant as anyone's.

In my own book-cases there is no separate section for women writers but even amid the occasional chaos on the shelves there are some books I can always locate within moments. One is the now almost obligatory *The Living Mountain*, by Nan Shepherd. When I discovered it in the mid-1980s it was still a little-remarked piece of Cairngorm esoterica and I started reading with no expectations. To say it was an eye-opener is an understatement: it totally changed what I expected from books about mountains. This was less

about adventure and physical challenge and more about understanding of and intimate connection with the landscape. It opened up a new way of thinking about the mountains, which resonated with me even as I was starting to dip my toes into the adrenalin surge of rock climbing, subtly altering my appreciation of those vertical thrills.

Not that adventure and derring-do is missing from women's writing. Another of my early heroes was Gwen Moffat. (She still is, to be honest. A couple of years ago I was totally starstruck when I had an exchange of emails with her about a review she was writing for *Scottish Mountaineer*.)

Her autobiographical *Space Below My Feet* is chock-full of adventure, but then how could it be anything else? Reading this and other of her books such as *On My Home Ground*, it is clear she saw her whole life as an adventure to go out and take: army deserter, climbing vagabond, mountain rescuer, guide... Inspiration by the bucket-load. Another of hers worth seeking out is her racy history of mountain rescue, *Two Star Red*.

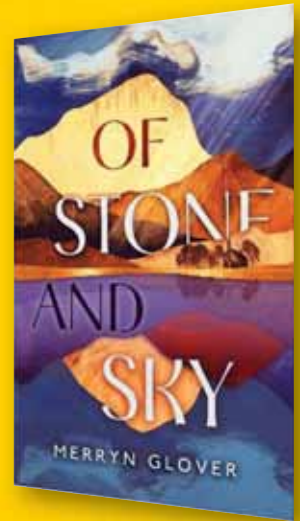
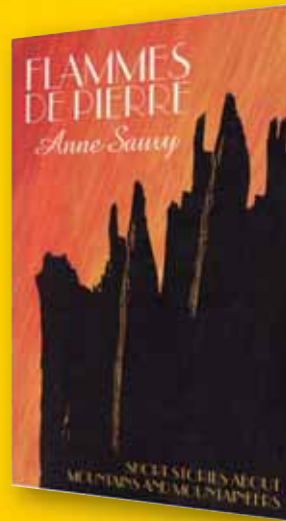
There are more modern mountain rescue adventures in *Mountain Rescue: Chamonix Mont Blanc*, by French mountaineer and writer Anne Sauvy, who spent a whole summer season with the world's busiest mountain rescue team, not just writing about the technical descriptions and the

thrills of the rescues, but addressing the philosophical questions raised by the risk and reality of death in the mountains.

Those were questions also raised by Maria Coffey, who had been the girlfriend of Himalayan climber Joe Tasker, who disappeared on Everest with Pete Boardman in 1982. *Fragile Edge*, written about the journey she and Hilary Boardman made to the foot of Everest, explored questions of love and loss for those left behind – until then an almost taboo topic, but one addressed again in one of her later books, *Where The Mountain Casts Its Shadow*, with valuable though sometimes uncomfortable insights.

Men aren't the only ones who can leave grieving partners though. Alison Hargreaves, who died on the descent from the summit of K2 had not long previously written *Hard Day's Summer*, about her feat of climbing six classic north face routes in the Alps over the course of one summer – all solo.

Another British woman who died on K2 was Julie Tullis, whose *Clouds from Both Sides* underlines the tragedy of her death, being an utterly vivacious account of a life not so much lived for adventure, but lived with such an adventurous spirit that adventure was inevitable, from early climbing days at Harrison's Rocks to her climbing and filming partnership with Kurt Diemberger, which saw her become the



# FROM THE HEIGHTS

first British woman to climb an 8000-metre Himalayan mountain. If you want an inspiring tale infectiously told, this is it.

On a more light-hearted note, the gallus iconoclast Muriel Gray was a glorious burst of colour and irreverence at the start of the '90s. Accompanying her widely inspiring The Munro Show on TV was *The First Fifty: Munro-Bagging Without a Beard*, which managed to take the absolute mince out of 'establishment' mountaineers and mountaineering without taking itself too seriously either. Despite the dodgy '80s fashions she defiantly sported, it's a book that has aged rather well and her enthusiasm and love for the mountains still comes across loud and clear.

She was far from the first woman to write about her adventures in the hills though, and one of the best reads from earlier generations is Dorothy Pilley's *Climbing Days*, published in 1935. Born in 1894, she began rock climbing in Wales just before the outbreak of World War One and moved on to the Lake District and Skye before becoming a successful Alpine climber in the 1920s, making first ascents, first female ascents and first guideless female ascents, all described confidently but without fuss in her memoir. Also one of the founders of the Pinnacle Club, her legacy went beyond her writings.

Women climbing in the first half of the 20th century was also treated in fiction, with Elizabeth Coxhead's controversial at the time *One Green Bottle*. It's a great read, about a working class girl who in post WWII Britain discovers rock climbing and

opens up a whole new world for herself, challenging social mores of the time. But although its attitudes were sufficiently forward as to attract the condemnation of the then Bishop of Chester no less, many have found the ending – a surrender to her 'place in life' – unsatisfactory.

Other women have turned to the fictional side of mountain literature, although only two more featured in the otherwise excellent *One Step In The Clouds* anthology of mountaineering novels and short stories where I first read *One Green Bottle* (whose editors, ironically, were both women – Audrey Salkeld and Rosie Smith).

One of those women who are featured in the anthology is Anne Sauvy, mentioned above for her book about mountain rescue on Mont Blanc, who had already, in the 1980s, published at least one collection of short stories in English – *Flammes des Pierre*.


And just in the last month Scottish-based author and poet Merryn Glover, who recently wrote for this very magazine on rock climbing on The Cobbler, has published *Of Stone and Sky*, a novel which, if not in the traditional mountaineering vein, has the Cairngorms so much at its heart that it certainly merits a place in my mountaineering bookshelves.

Current trends are encouraging. *Waymaking* was an acclaimed anthology specifically gathering women's adventure writing, poetry and art, and, for any doubters who had missed out on most of the books mentioned above, a read of last

year's *To Live!* by Elisabeth Revol would dispel any notion that 'women's books' were all a bit soft and touchy feely. This account of death and rescue on Nanga Parbat is as adrenalin-filled and edge-of-your-seat reading as anyone could ask. Incidentally, this was a nominee for the Boardman-Tasker Award – the premier mountain literature award – which for three out of the last four years has been won by female authors.

It does appear that women are becoming more evident in the constant stream of new books about mountains and mountaineers, as both publishers and readers open their eyes to the strength and depth the genre gains from diversity - everyone writes about their own mountains after all, and if you only have the same types of people writing, you have a tendency to get the same types of book.

But if we accept that there is an imbalance in the sexes when it comes to the mountaineering shelves and want to address that, then we need to do more than simply bemoan the lack of women writers and mountaineers and can't just sit and hope some more will step up to fill what's perceived to be a vacuum.

Rather we should shout about what's already there. And rather than let these women, these authors and mountaineers, languish as little-remarked historical curiosities, we should celebrate them more, as they fully deserve. We should ensure they are kept in print and read like other classics of the genre, and hold them up as examples to inspire future generations. 



# Meet the **Members**



## CLUBSPOT

# Air Na Creagan Mountaineering Club

By Steve Morley, Secretary

THE initial idea of forming a North Ayrshire mountaineering club came about during a meeting of a small group of like-minded individuals at the much-missed Corrou Station bunkhouse in January 2001. Over the next year the outline of a club constitution was created and by January 2002 the club had 20 paid-up members mostly from the North Ayrshire area. The first official club weekend meet took place in February of that year back at the Corrou Station bunkhouse.

The club grew quickly and by the late 2000s had over 80 members. For a variety of reasons, but particularly the rise of social media leading to fewer people joining traditional clubs, that fell to around 25 in the mid-2010s. However, a concerted recruitment campaign embracing the same social media that led to the decline has seen a steady rise to a current membership of 51. There is a mixture of ages and experience as well as a near 50/50 gender split. While we don't have an official junior section we do allow youngsters to participate as long as they are accompanied by parents/guardians – it is,

after all, only by encouraging young people to enjoy the great outdoors that clubs like ours will thrive.

Most of our members live in North Ayrshire although we do have some from the rest of Ayrshire and indeed from other parts of the country. Members take part in a variety of hillwalking and mountaineering activities in both summer and winter and the club

organises day walks and weekend meets throughout the year. In normal non-Covid times we also meet socially on the third Monday of each month at the Red Squirrel pub in Stevenston. During the lockdown we have been meeting virtually via the club's Facebook page. Members also of course benefit from membership of Mountaineering Scotland.





We often get asked where the name of the club came from. I don't think any of us can really remember exactly but we think it was from a desire to have something a bit different from the usual geographic based club names. The Gaelic Air Na Creagan translates as 'on the rocks'— of course this relates to the mountaineering activities of the club and has no connection with Scotland's national drink!

Unlike most clubs, we don't have a scheduled programme of walks (other than weekend trips) but have a more ad hoc approach of arranging walks depending on weather conditions. We'll look at the forecast a few days in advance and decide which day (usually Saturday or Sunday but sometimes midweek) and area (West Highlands/East Highlands/Southern Uplands/Arran) looks best. We then post this on our Facebook page so members can arrange car shares if necessary.

Over the years we have had some memorable trips including a particularly wet Bank Holiday weekend on Knoydart in May 2006, when 24 of us descended on Inverie. Despite the weather we made the most of it and still enjoyed the wildness of the Rough Bounds - and the wildness of a Knoydart ceilidh! More recently we have had weekend trips to Skye, Rum and Eigg as well as forays south of the border to the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales.

Being in North Ayrshire we are lucky to be able to visit Arran on a regular basis as an alternative to making long journeys north. There is something special about being able to relax on the ferry with a CalMac breakfast rather than driving up the A82 or A9. For a time we had access to a Church of Scotland bunkhouse in Sannox. Sadly a change of ownership means that we can no longer





use it but we had many great weekends there with big hill days followed by great social evenings in the nearby Sannox Bay Hotel. We still go over for day walks, a regular in summer being the traverse from Lochranza back to Brodick via the ridges connecting Caisteal Abhail, Cir Mhor, Beinn Tarsuinn and Beinn Nuis.

Another regular haunt is Lochaber, where we have had many memorable trips, including one to Kinlochleven in June 2014 when a group of six of us completed the traverse of all ten Munros in the Mamores. It was a very long day but very satisfying, and we will be forever grateful to the MacDonald Hotel for providing us with a late dinner well beyond the time normally expected in the Highlands. Another winter weekend in Glen Coe saw us involved in our only mountain rescue incident when one of our members badly injured her knee coming down from the Buachaill. Thankfully everyone was well equipped and all ended well – indeed, despite being helicoptered off the hill to Belford Hospital and having a full-length plaster cast, the injured member still managed to make it back to the Clachaig for last orders that evening!

As we approached our 20th anniversary we had booked Loch Ossian Youth Hostel in January 2021 for a return to the place where it all started. For obvious reasons we



had to cancel this. Hopefully, once things get back to some sort of normality we will be able to arrange a belated celebration.

One positive aspect of the Covid crisis has been the discovery of fine hills much nearer to home, some of which are every bit as challenging as those further north. Last summer when restrictions were lifted we spent much of our time travelling south to Galloway to avoid the parking chaos around the honeypot hills in the north. Over the winter while we have been restricted to North Ayrshire it has been great to have the relative wildness of the Clyde-Muirshiel

Regional Park on our doorstep. Indeed, for a few days in February you could easily have mistaken the Muirshiel moorlands for the Cairngorm plateau!

Despite recent issues with the pandemic, the club continues to provide a focus for like-minded people to get together and will hopefully do so for many years to come. New members are always welcome.

▶ More information can be found on the club's website [www.craggy.org.uk](http://www.craggy.org.uk) or Facebook page [www.facebook.com/groups/212242012192018/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/212242012192018/).

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# your view

**SIGG** 



Each edition we select one photo taken by a member to win a Sigg Gemstone, the flask whose double-walled insulation keeps hot drinks hot and cold drinks cold. Gemstone products are copper-coated on the inside and the flasks have an ultra-thin inside body which is made using a special spinning technology, which is why it weighs 30% less.

To be in with a chance of winning, just send a high resolution jpg image (at least 1MB in size) to the editor at [neil@mountaineering.scot](mailto:neil@mountaineering.scot). Let us know where and when you took the photo and who's in it, and we'll choose a winner. (The winner's name and contact details will be sent to SIGG for the purposes of dispatching their prize.)



**David Blighford** took this great black and white photo of a moody Beinn Sgritheall dominating the landscape with the menacing forms of the Skye Cuillins rising behind, taken from Sgurr a'Mhaoraich just before a snow shower obscured the view – a view that lasted long enough to earn David a Sigg Gemstone flask.



This photo by **Edith Kreutner** shows her mountain companion overlooking the hills of Glencarron.







**Anne Butler** captured this classic view of Cairn Toul and Angel's Peak from the eastern side of the Lairig Ghru, with the clouds stretching back to infinity behind.



**Richard Baker** said: "Distant views of Ben Nevis are a feature of many mountain days, but this view from Streat is one of my favourites. It reminds me of a beautiful spring day on one of the finest Corbetts."



**Tommy Edwards** from Edinburgh sent in this image. "I was walking on the slopes of Sgurr na Coinnich on Skye for work and captured the image. It was absolutely freezing being in the shade, and all the streams and waterfalls were frozen solid. I consider myself very lucky to have been able to continue working during the lockdowns, especially when it was in the hills."



Coire Lagan in the Cuillins from Sgurr Mhic Choinnich, by **Keith Thomson** from Stirling.



When needs must... Under lockdown, even your editor didn't get very far. A day up West Lomond is as high as it gets in Fife, but at least the view was clear towards East Lomond and across the Kingdom.



**Helen Grant** took this at the summit of Carn Chois in Perthshire during a January 2021 circuit of the Loch Turret Dam, taking in Ben Chonzie.

# Twenty Years On

By Julie Cribb



TWENTY years ago I went to the park with my youngest daughter and watched her play for several hours with hardly a break. She ran up the steps of the slide and slid down over and over again. Occasionally she came over for a sweetie, a sandwich or a drink.

I counted how many times she played on the slide each hour – around 40 times – and counted the number of steps up – 15 steps, each about 15 centimetres high. That night after Hannah fell into bed exhausted, I calculated roughly how high she had climbed while we had been at the park. It came to 648m!

We went back to the park a few days later and this time I watched more carefully in case it had been a one-off. It wasn't! This was the little girl we left at home with grandparents when we took her brother and sisters into the mountains at weekends.

I wondered if next time, if we chose our Munro carefully, Hannah could come with us and see how she got on. We chose Geal Charn, West Drumochter on a not very nice day in June 2001. Under absolutely no pressure at all she completed her first Munro, completely under her own steam. Her walk report was published in *Scottish Mountaineer*

in May 2002. She was two years old.

Twenty years on and we are in lockdown. Hannah is looking through old scrapbooks and finds her article. A plan is born. The weekend after her 22nd birthday, with travel and exercise restrictions eased, we set off as a family once again, but this time to complete the West Drumochter circuit.

It was a stunning day. Early morning mist soon burnt off and by the time we reached the first summit the views all around were amazing. After the obligatory family photo at the cairn Hannah found the exact same spot where she had been photographed all those years ago. She even managed the same pose, holding the

original article from the magazine.

This time however she went on to A'Mharconach, followed by Beinn Udlmain and Sgairneach Mhor, notching up 13.5 miles, 1,140 metres of ascent and ten hours on the hills. On the way home in the car, instead of falling asleep, we all sang along to a 1960s playlist and then sat down to a very large Chinese takeaway meal. Thoroughly well deserved.

The moral of this tale? It's incredible what children can do when they want to and if you give them the opportunity to do amazing things outdoors they will always have that experience to go back to.



OBITUARY



## Ian Rae (1946-2021)

IAN was born in Birkenhead. His late father Willis Rae was a Scottish exciseman and mother Barbara, now 100, a native of Liverpool. When Ian was 14, his father became exciseman at the Glenmorangie distillery in Tain. This was a very fortunate appointment as many of us who enjoyed the clear spirit conveyed to remote bothies at New Year will attest.

Ian's father was a keen mountaineer and took Ian to the hills from an early age. Ian completed the Munros (many with his sister Pat) in 1971, and is number 104 in the list. By the time he went to Aberdeen University in 1964 he was already an accomplished rock climber. He climbed mostly with the local Etchachan Club. Ian made the ascents of

many classic Scottish rock and ice routes and also went to the Alps with his regular climbing partner Jamie Furnell and fellow students such as Allen Fyffe.

Ian moved to Glasgow for postgrad studies in geology and joined the infamous SCUM club, climbing with another Aberdonian, John Bower, and the young John Mackenzie. In 1970 he was on Mammoth, the first winter route to thread a way through the Central Slabs on Creag an Dubh Loch, which turned into a largely nocturnal ascent! He spent two years teaching in Jamaica and immersed himself in the reggae culture, cricket and scuba diving. He visited the Andes with his fiancée Jane and climbed many of the highest peaks in continental USA and a few choice summits in the Canadian Rockies.

Based near Stirling, Ian continued to climb, mainly in winter with Raymond Simpson and Rob Ferguson, but when his two daughters were born he enjoyed family holidays in the mountains. He was an exceptionally warm and caring dad who loved nothing better than being with his girls and making up stories to entertain them.

Over their married life, Jane and Ian trekked and climbed across the world from Kenya to Iceland and on their retirement achieved their ambition of reaching the Everest and Annapurna base camps and visiting Bhutan. They had walked and climbed the highest summits in almost every European mountain range between the Julian Alps and the Picos de Europa and many beautiful and little-known

ranges in between. They climbed most of the classic Dolomite peaks using via ferrata.

Ian discovered skiing in the 1980s and his compact build and natural athleticism made him a very competent telemark skier. He skied extensively in the higher mountain ranges of Norway with John Inglis and on a series of trips skied to the summits of the highest mountains in Scandinavia. They were particularly proud to have skied the six tops of the Cairngorms in a day in April 1987.

Ian was a font of knowledge, always generous with maps and information. He illustrated his geography lessons with slides of geological and mountain features. He was a popular teacher and returned to Aberdeen in the 1980s as principal teacher of Geography at Hazelhead Academy. His work preparing papers for the exam board made use of his knowledge of mountains and friends across Scotland, whose locations featured in some of the questions he set. He also authored the Higher Grade Geography book for Leckie and Leckie.

By 2012 he had completed the Munro Tops and Furths and, together with John and Neil Cromar, went on to complete the Corbetts and a second round of the Munros.

Ian was great company, cheerful and interested in other folk and what they had been doing, always ready to share a drink, a tai chi form, dance to a reggae rhythm, or discuss the beautiful game. We will all miss him but none more so than Jane, Jenny and Heather, to whom we send our sincerest condolences.

**Raymond Simpson**

## your view

### Mountain bikes and compromise

THE Two Wheels on the Mountain article in Scottish Mountaineer Issue 90 was thought-provoking and reminded me how I felt about the bikes I met when trekking the Colorado Trail a few years ago. All bikers coming up behind me dinged their bells or called out, and slowed down, while I stepped off the track to let them pass with cheery greetings exchanged. I was able to step off the track well before bikers coming towards me, and they passed by without them needing to slow down. The Colorado Trail Foundation website has some guidelines for biking on their website at Mountain Biking - Colorado Trail Foundation suggesting bikes yield to hikers and horses, but in practice it's the other way round.

Sections of the trail are in land designated as Wilderness, and bikes are banned by law. This law is backed up by significant sanctions, and I saw no bikes on these sections. As a result, I didn't have the persistent nagging tension of constantly keeping aware of what's coming

at me from both directions, so it was a more relaxed and pleasant hike in those sections.

I looked up some references to biking on long distance trails in the USA and found that most of the issues referred to were social, with some reference to practical issues like wheel erosion. A couple of quotes are:

The rationale for banning bikes from wilderness has more to do with bikes ruining other trail users' experience of a primitive landscape.

In general terms, bicycle use .... is not consistent with the overall objectives of the trail. When the trail's mission was outlined in the late 1960s, it was designed to provide "scenic, primitive hiking and horseback riding opportunities.... There weren't many mountain bikes around back then.

There is much discussion about prohibiting mechanised (e.g. bikes) as well as motorised transport on US trails. For example, the Pacific Crest Trail is open for equestrian and pedestrian traffic only.

Many years ago, I saw a barrier-gate, a bit

Send your letters to: The Editor, Neil Reid, Mountaineering Scotland, The Granary, West Mill Street, Perth PH1 5QP  
**neil@mountaineering.scot**

like a security turnstile, placed on the Great Glen Way specifically to stop bikers at a very narrow passage. On the West Highland Way I recall a narrow gap between rocks beside Loch Lomond which would probably stop most bikers. However, I don't believe that barring bikes is practicable anywhere in Scotland, or desirable. Creating more policing on the hills would be a step backwards and confrontational.

With the growing demand from hikers, trail runners, bikers and now e-bikers and mobility scooters, I suggest that compromises will be required by all. Bikers will have to slow down or divert off-track to get by runners who are not always going to want to lose time to stop to let them pass. Hikers will be required to stay alert and step aside for runners and bikers. Hikers, bikers and runners will have to watch out for e-bikers. At the end of the day, hikers will always be able to enjoy going places on their own which none of the others can access (Danny MacAskill notwithstanding!)

**Ian Wattie**



# Out There



## Remote Postman's Path improved for walkers

A centuries-old route across the remote hills of north-west Scotland, once used by the hardest of postmen, has been given a major upgrade to make it safer for all kinds of walkers for many years to come.

The Postman's Path skirts the coastline around the Scottish Wildlife Trust's largest wildlife reserve, Ben Mor Coigach. Thanks to funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, through Coigach & Assynt Living Landscape Partnership Scheme (CALLP), and from Ramblers Scotland, the Trust has been able to make significant upgrades to the path.

The Postman's, or 'Postie's' Path runs for about seven miles (11 km) along the coast between Achduart (NC049078) and Blughasary (NC136012), taking in magnificent coastal views. It is one of three traditional routes that people used to take around Ben Mor Coigach - or around 'the rock' (A'Chreag) which is the traditional name given to the hill.

The path was named in recognition of the postmen who 'took the rock' twice a week, to bring mail to and from the Coigach communities, starting in the 1860s. It is now a much loved and popular walk for locals and visitors. Some sections of the path were quite degraded and needed considerable repairs to improve access and safety for people

while still protecting important habitats and landscape features of the wildlife reserve.

The path improvement work was completed by ACT Heritage and managed by the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland. To be in keeping with the landscape, local stone was used for the repairs and this had to be transported by helicopter to key points along the path. A number of waymarkers were also airlifted and positioned to help guide walkers. Scottish Wildlife Trust has installed two interpretation panels so that visitors can discover more about this fascinating area. There is a car park at Blughasary.

Trust staff and volunteers will continue to look after the path and carry out maintenance work whenever it is needed. Reserves Project Officer Michelle Henley said "The Postman's Path takes you through a wonderful landscape full of local history and abundant wildlife. We are delighted with these footpath improvements which mean the route is now safer and easier for people to navigate. But as with all upland paths, it is still important that walkers are properly equipped for a full mountain day when taking this route."

► For more information about the path, visit the Coigach & Assynt Living Landscape website at [www.coigach-assynt.org](http://www.coigach-assynt.org)



## Diversions from Coire Cas car park

REPAIRS on the Cairn Gorm funicular have now started, and path diversions will be in place for the remainder of the year from the Sheiling down to the car park.

Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd has put up some panels (illustrated) for orientation around these areas. There will be further signage provided by Balfour on site as well.

The Cairngorm Mountain Ranger Service has advised that people should check the signs before starting out from the car park, as where they intend going will affect which side of the car park they should start from.

# Ambassadors for conservation

## How we can all prevent damage to footpaths

WITH record numbers expected on the hills this summer, the National Trust for Scotland is asking everyone to be conservationists. The NTS, which cares for some of the country's best-known scenic honeypots, is looking forward to seeing people returning to some of Scotland's finest landscapes once travel restrictions are lifted.

But the sheer number of people, combined with social distancing, has the potential to undo some of the conservation pathwork the organisation has completed in recent years. However, if people can follow simple guidance, and experienced walkers set an example for newcomers, much wear and tear on the path network can be avoided.

One of the simplest ways to help is: if you're taking the path, then stay on the path. Helen Cole, Property Manager and Senior Ranger Naturalist at Ben Lawers NNR, explains: "This isn't aimed at discouraging people from walking where they choose – the access legislation is very clear on that. This is about not walking alongside the path."

Walking on the edges of or beside a path causes braiding of paths, spreading erosion across the ground on either side. "Whether it's walking alongside a companion when the path is really only wide enough for one, or walking off the path when passing others, when lots of people are doing this

the damage can be extensive. Better to walk single file or, if letting others pass, just step off the path and wait until you can step back and continue your journey. And if experienced walkers and climbers, who understand the reasons behind this, can avoid causing erosion along the course of paths, perhaps their example – or even advice – can help less experienced walkers to learn."

Helen stressed that this is not about discouraging people from leaving the path network altogether. "We want people to engage with nature and enjoy our incredible landscapes but to do it responsibly. We all have a part to play in being ambassadors for the mountains we love."

Last year saw more visitors than ever take to Scotland's hills, as people craved fresh air and freedom after a long confinement. Counters on some paths recorded twice the number of visitors compared to the same period the previous year. This footfall brought with it well-documented challenges, and resulted in increased trampling damage on the most popular routes. The National Trust for Scotland's mountainous properties were particularly vulnerable, including as they do 46 Munros (including five of the ten highest), equally beautiful summits on Arran and the upland landscape at Grey Mare's Tail in the Borders.

Over decades, pathwork on NTS properties has done much to combat erosion and bring what was once a worsening situation under control. Path maintenance is an ongoing process, but repeated trampling on the verges of and beside paths wears away the vegetation, allowing the weather to tear at the exposed soil creating scars.

Vegetation becomes increasingly fragile with altitude and mountain plants are very vulnerable to trampling. Footpath lines are defined, within existing areas of damage, to be as sustainable as possible, enabling repeated access without leaving further trace. This often involves reducing the gradient, and therefore the speed of run-off, by zig-zagging. So, tempting though it may be, shortcutting or bypassing zigs or zags risks extending damage to less robust areas which can contain rare plants, structures, or animal life. These might survive the footprints of an individual but not of the many who follow.

The increased pressure on the hills last year demonstrated how quickly restorative works can be reversed. At Ben Lomond and Ben Lawers NNR visible damage developed within a couple of months, often as folk walked along the edge of paths. This was frequently initiated by stepping aside to let others pass at a safe distance, then failing to step back on.



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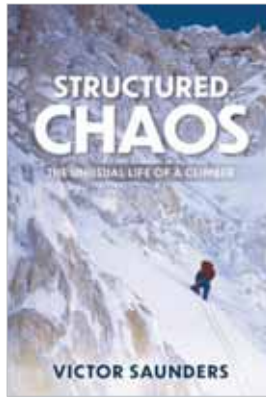
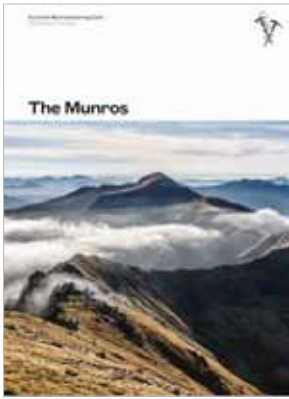
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**The Munros (4th edition)**  
**By Rab Anderson & Tom Prentice**  
 Scottish Mountaineering Club, £30

THE long awaited revision of the SMC Munros book provides information and inspiration in equal measure. The book stands out as the most comprehensive and authoritative Munro guidebook currently available. Not only is the book visually appealing, it contains greatly improved maps and longer and more detailed route descriptions.

The book includes routes for all 282 Munros and 226 Munro Tops and is the only guidebook that lists and provides routes to all the Munro Tops. It is a large format hardback book which is intended to be used for reference and planning rather than being carried on the hill.

There is a lengthy and detailed introduction encompassing the history of the Munros and a biography of Sir Hugh Munro. An appendix lists Munros and Tops with a column to record the date each hill is climbed. There are far more photos than previous versions, and all are well chosen to capture the character of each hill. Route descriptions apply to summer conditions only and the majority of photos reflect this and ultimately give the book a far more accessible feel.

The route descriptions aim to describe single day routes to the Munros and their associated Tops, with multi Munro routes described in logical combinations and pop-out boxes highlighting much longer excursions. The route timings are more realistic than in previous editions with allowances made for difficult ground or steep descents, and bike-assisted approaches are now given more prominence.

Contour-shaded maps are provided to illustrate each route. The maps give an excellent schematic overview of the route and will provide an invaluable tool for route planning. At £30 the price may appear rather steep for a guidebook but this book would become an invaluable planning tool for anyone interested in Munro-bagging.

**Anne Butler**

**Structured Chaos**  
**By Victor Saunders**  
 Vertebrate Publishing, £24

“MOUNTAINS have given structure to my adult life. I suppose they have also given me purpose, though I still can't guess what that purpose might be.” Vic Saunders starts the prelude as the book will unfold, with depth, insight, and a healthy dose of humour. I have read all his previous books so knew his style before I picked up Structured Chaos but was still taken in. He has honed his craft and his self-deprecating manner and open honesty are to the fore as usual but there is a wisdom here that has grown as he has aged.

The book is a chronological perambulation through his life to date (I'm hoping for a further volume as I refuse to believe he is ready to stop any time soon) from childhood days in Malaya to a reunion with Mick Fowler on Sersank. Along the way we are treated to accounts of them boxing in an East End skinhead pub, of epics in the Alps and Greater Ranges and stories of him losing companions to the deadly pursuit that, as he said to begin with, has given his life purpose.

There is much to be learned here for enthusiasts of British alpinism over the last half a century. The culture of 1970s British climbing is well captured. Where this book stands out is as a testament, not to expeditions undertaken and mountains summited, but rather to the importance of friendship. The enduring nature of his relationship with Mick Fowler is particularly striking and quite moving. Vic ends the main body of the book with a quote from Colin Kirkus: “...going to the right place, at the right time, with the right people is all that really matters. What we did was purely incidental.”

Structured Chaos is a great book. I'd recommend it to anyone who has an interest in expeditions and in climbing, but mostly in friendship. I feel more appreciative of my own friends having read it and expect that you will too.

**Al Mackay**

**Regeneration: The Rescue of a Wild Land**  
**By Andrew Painting**  
 Birlinn, £20

SET in Mar Lodge Estate in Upper Deeside, this book marvellously evokes the Cairngorms landscape. It is the story of that landscape and of what makes it up: the thin tapestry of plants and animals that clothe the massive geological landforms. It is also a story of people and their relationships to land and wildlife.

Andrew Painting is an ecologist for the National Trust for Scotland, who own the estate, but this is not a dry book for academics. His deft use of anecdote and humour lightens this narrative of a landscape that has been used and over-used as a resource for centuries, so that the theme of the book – regeneration – has become imperative.

The book is divided into three aspects – the woods, the moors and the mountains. Water isn't forgotten: it winds its way through each section, with the melting of high snow patches, swift coursing over rock and gravel, and the softness of bogs.

Each chapter focuses on a theme: a particular animal or plant, or snowpatch, or footpath, to illustrate an aspect of the land and its management. What comes through in the book is how people are essential and central in the story of the land and the wildlife that lives there. He doesn't duck the difficult debate of Highland sporting tradition and wildlife conservation.

In the end, this is a tale of hope. It is the story of the small and often overlooked aspects of nature such as green shield-moss as much as the grand and iconic Scots pine. It is a story of regeneration, restoration, reclamation. One 'r' is coyly avoided until the epilogue – rewilding. The author admits that “the concept of rewilding is not far off what has been underway at Mar Lodge for the last 25 years” yet the NTS is wary of calling it that. Such is the emotive charge with which the word is imbued. This book demonstrates the need for it, not just at Mar Lodge, but right across the uplands of Scotland.

**Davie Black**



## Savage Arena

By Joe Tasker

Vertebrate Publishing, £9.99

SAVAGE Arena was Joe Tasker's second book. He delivered the manuscript just before he and Pete Boardman left for the unclimbed North East Ridge of Everest, where they both disappeared, putting a premature end to not one but two shining literary careers.

Tasker was one of the foremost in a generation of intensely driven British climbers, forerunners in the move from large-scale expeditions to lightweight Alpine-style ascents of increasingly difficult routes. In Savage Arena Tasker writes briefly about his beginnings in rock climbing and Alpinism, with an account of a winter ascent of the North Face of the Eiger, before the main meat of the book, his battles with four Himalayan giants: Dunagiri, the West Wall of Changabang, Kanchenjunga and K2.

Throughout the book a picture emerges of a climber who is completely obsessed by his need to climb harder and harder routes, and driven all the more by the conviction that he is failing to live up to the standards set by his companions. It seems to have been an insecurity shared by at least one of those companions, which may well have contributed to the degrees of danger and suffering they exposed themselves to.

For all the suffering and mental anguish caused by doubts as to whether he was pushing himself hard enough, this isn't a depressing book. Tasker was an excellent writer and conveyed well the thrill of overcoming fear, technical difficulty and weather to climb among these giants which he loved.

Gripping and exciting, this is a book which floored me when I first read it back in the 1980s and which I have revisited several times. I hadn't read it for a number of years when this edition came out and wondered if the rose-coloured specs of nostalgia had coloured my memories of it. But no. Savage Arena was a classic of Himalayan climbing literature then and it's still that now. Read it.

**Neil Reid**



## The Shining Mountain

By Peter Boardman

Vertebrate Publishing, £9.99

A reissue of the debut book by a first-class mountaineer and writer, The Shining Mountain is the story of Pete Boardman and Joe Tasker's 'preposterous' ascent of the West Wall of Changabang in the Himalaya.

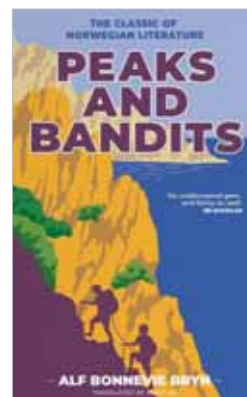
Where Tasker wrote about this ascent as just one part of his Savage Arena book (also reviewed here), Boardman goes into much more detail, with a blow-by-blow account of an ascent that many top climbers at the time – the mid-1970s – thought would be impossible, particularly for a two-man expedition. The telling of the tale is masterful, from the doubts and preparations to the actual climb, with a real edge-of-the-seat narration.

There are challenges in writing of a two-man expedition, especially when those two spend most of their days in isolation at opposite ends of a rope, and even more when it seems the two hardly communicated even when together. (In Savage Arena Tasker writes of returning from an expedition with Boardman to discover that his partner's anxiety at delays in the return to Britain were because he was due to be getting married! Presumably that hadn't been thought relevant to the climbing.)

But Boardman (as Tasker did) turns this challenge into an opportunity rather than a handicap, developing a gripping internal monologue with occasional contributions from his companion's notes, which adds depth and intensity to the physical description of the climb. It also has the effect of making the narrative more relatable for those whose climbing skills and daring are considerably more modest.

One grouse about this welcome new edition is that there are no illustrations. For a book which concentrates on just one route – and a route inspired by its appearance – it would be good to have a clear photo of the face with the route marked out. That's a minor grouse though. Even without photos, Boardman paints a memorable picture.

**Neil Reid**



## Peaks and Bandits

By Alf Bonnevie Bryn

Vertebrate Publishing, £15.99

THIS true tale of adventure in the raw, of first ascents, and deliberately difficult youthful mountain craft is a breath of fresh air. Given that the participants originated from Norway and South Australia but study in Zurich and travel to climb in Corsica at Easter, you can begin to see a complicated picture emerging. When you then realise that one of them is George Finch, for a time holder of the record for greatest height reached by a human, it piques the imagination.

With a fabulous turn of phrase on indisputably hairy mountain (and many other) situations, it is superbly understated in the telling. Most importantly it is a tale of human interaction with people of differing nationalities, be they Italian dock workers, hoteliers, police agents, students or Corsican bandits.

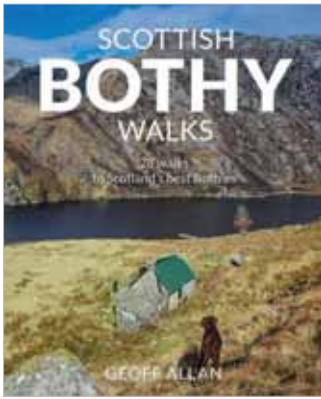
Although written over 100 years ago this book had me laughing from page one. Their problems with finance, kit and travel are ageless, but are accomplished without any of our modern 'conveniences' such as cars, credit cards, cash machines, computers or even phones (far less mobiles). It is enough to name the place and time and then to be there to meet people that you trust.

The stories within the main story frame are excellent, from eating rotten beef recovered from a glacier, to filling hats with crumpled paper to prevent injury due to falling rock debris. The evident truth of this book is that genuine adventure of any sort takes planning, courage and sheer guts, irrespective of the challenge and the time period in which it is set.

This small, light book is the ideal companion for those of you who, like me, prefer a 'real' book during those long evenings in the bothy or tent. Originally written in Norwegian by Alf Bryn, who, like Finch, became an accomplished mountaineer, it has translated into English very well, and I commend it to you.

**David Johnstone**





## Scottish Bothy Walks

By Geoff Allan  
Wild Things, £16.99

WHEN Geoff Allan completed his mammoth task of detailing Scotland's bothies in 2017, it became a surprise hit – testimony not just to growing interest in bothies, but also to The Scottish Bothy Bible's excellent writing and imagery. So it made sense that, having told people how to get to bothies, Geoff should next tell them what to do once they got there. And that's exactly what he's done with Scottish Bothy Walks.

As expected, it has its share of detractors among those who harken back to the completely mythical days when bothies were lovingly used and cared for by initiates only, but for the rest of us this is a perfectly logical and worthwhile successor, offering guides to 28 of the author's favourite walks to, from or past bothies.

It suffers from the drawback of all guidebooks, of the world moving on after publication, and here one bothy referred to – Peanmeanach – is no longer freely available. Equally, several bothies either new to the MBA or on their way to being completed, could have been included. But within those limitations, this is an excellent book, with the same high standards of photography, writing and presentation as its predecessor. Photos are both useful and inspiring, the mix of direction and background information is good, and the maps are clear for planning purposes.

It's likely to appeal most to less experienced walkers – few of the walks are obscure – but is no less valuable for that, and the selective nature means that in one book people can get a taster of some of the best our country has to offer while avoiding the crowds of the traditional honeypot areas. Not that those areas are neglected, but the choice offered gives plenty scope for exploration and future inspiration.

Neil Reid



## Wild Winter: In search of nature in Scotland's mountain landscape

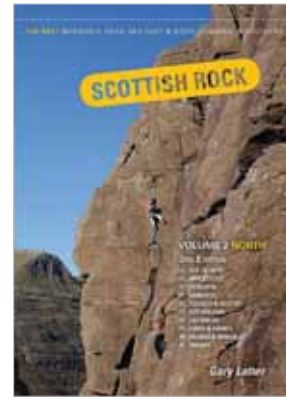
By John D. Burns  
Vertebrate Publishing, £9.99

JOHN Burns is passionate about wild places, and speaks from the heart, with self-deprecating enthusiasm and no shortage of love. In this book, he sets out to explore the wildlife of Scotland during the depths of winter 2020, with the threat of the pandemic looming ever larger on the horizon as the months go by. We all know what is coming, even if he doesn't.

The book is treated as a journal, describing adventures, failures and nature's mysteries, with a light touch. He populates the pages with characters that help him to enjoy a winter like no other. By the end we all want to go for a walk with Martin and his antique ice axe, talk joinery in a bothy with Neil, and watch for pine martens at James Roddie's hide. There are magical wildlife encounters, and new perspectives to be gained from some near misses with target species that frustrate his quest. He confesses that he is no wildlife expert, but he has keen observation skills, and a knack with his writing to draw us in to these moments as they unfold.

Burns is gentle with his prose but he has fire in his belly, and gives no quarter for the tweed clad hunters and estate managers who have shaped our land. He seeks out signs of hope amid a landscape steeped in death, and finds that there are places where wildness is making a comeback. Wild Winter isn't a long read, but there is plenty to chew over amongst the seven chapters. Recommended as an uplifting, touching and frequently humble appraisal of a beloved land, Wild Winter will appeal to those just discovering the highlands, and others who know them well.

Lucy Wallace



## Scottish Rock Volume 2: North

by Gary Latter  
Pesda Press, £29.99

WITH my original edition of Scottish Rock North used almost to destruction, I was pretty excited when the opportunity came up to review this third edition.

Scottish Rock North has always held a special appeal for me, and picking it up before a trip up the A9 always hits a different level of excitement. The guidebook covers the area north of the Highland boundary fault, which includes some of the best climbing areas in Scotland: Torridon, Skye, Assynt, Gairloch and more. It also covers single pitch, mountain routes and some selected sport venues. The guidebook really fits with the ethos of Scottish climbing, where you need to be flexible on objective to get the most out of the conditions and weather.

A big change for this new edition is the removal of the history sections to make room for more crags. I suspect I'm in the minority of people who quite enjoy reading about the history of areas but overall it's a sacrifice worth making to include some hidden gems. Super crag (Creag Rodha Mor), a taste of the Hebrides but without the ferry, and the Loch Maree sport crag (Creag Mhor Thollaidh) are particular highlights that have left me itching to get out. The book is logically laid out and intuitive to use, the first section of each area giving a useful map putting all the various crags in context. The actual crag and route descriptions are very clear, testament to the effort Gary has gone to in compiling the book.

For me a guidebook can be judged not only on the above, but on its ability to inspire and make you want to pick it up when sitting in the house dreaming of bigger things. Scottish Rock North definitely ticks the box here, every dip into the guide is rewarded with great action photos and good clear crag shots. Overall, highly recommended.

Calum McBain



## Never Leave The Dog Behind

By Helen Mort

Vertebrate Publishing, £8.99

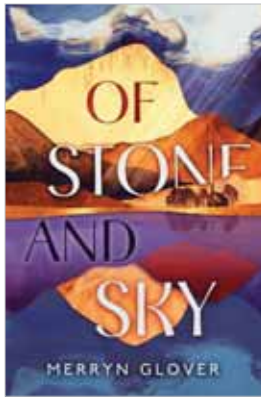
HELEN Mort asks early on in this lovely wee book “Are [dogs] guides, rescuers, climbing partners or avatars for our disconnected selves?” Over the next 120 pages she examines these different imaginings of our canine companions and puts together a wonderfully full exploration of how we, mountains and dogs interact. She draws on interviews with a number of mountaineering types and also on her own relationship with her two hill companion whippets.

Along the way she includes the sublime landscape poetry of Norman MacCaig, examining how landscape and by extension the animals that inhabit it can be part of us. The book is very well written with a lyrical flow I really enjoyed. She tells how being on the mountain with a dog adds to the experience, how they teach you “more clearly to see.” I was particularly struck by her assertion that “the outwardness of running with a dog lifts the inwardness of obsession.”

As someone whose love of dogs is coupled with a love of mountains and has spent many a hill trip with my now deceased pal Nell the Dug, I found much in the book I recognised. More interestingly though, I learned a lot too. I’d recommend this book very strongly to all of you who already share your hill time with a dog, and also to those who don’t. You may come to understand the first lot a little better. You might even find yourself a dog.

Helen ends her book with one of her poems, where she bemoans not being a dog “It’s not acceptable to roll in the mud until I’m musked in it. There are deer in the wood I’ll never see” and imagines what it is to be a dog. I’ll let her have the last word “One day I’ll set off past the meadow, down behind the beck, beyond the blunt profile of Silver Howe and nobody will call me back.”

**Al Mackay**



## Of Stone and Sky

Merryn Glover

Polygon, £16.99

THE first question is whether a novel about a missing person, more family saga than mystery, should be reviewed in a mountaineering magazine. The answer is an unequivocal ‘Yes’.

The plot of the novel concerns the disappearance of a Strathspey shepherd and a trail of his possessions leading into the Cairngorms. It goes back and forth in time examining the family links, stories and secrets which led to the disappearance, jigsaw pieces of prose gradually coalescing to reveal the whole picture – a detailed and comprehensive image which ranges from the glens to the summits of the Cairngorms. As the picture of the family is revealed, so is a wider and deeper picture of the land and the community, along with the history that made them thus and the issues faced by both in reaching to the future.

There’s nothing superficial or facile about Merryn Glover’s understanding of the land and the people either. She writes with a poet’s clarity and economy, each of the vignettes which make up the pieces of the jigsaw compelling in its own right and interlinking to create a picture of considerable beauty and power.

Her incorporation of issues such as land ownership and rewilding is subtle and unforced, and her depth of understanding of these issues is convincing. The people seem real and the places, though sometimes fictionalised, are sometimes instantly recognisable and always easily visualised by anyone familiar with the area. And though this remains at all times a novel, the descriptions of the land and the life which is a part of it, while never intruding, are painted with a degree of detail and feeling that ranks with the finest of nature writing.

Of Stone and Sky pulls off that rare feat of covering a breadth of subjects and views, in a meticulousness of detail, which, far from losing focus, pulls everything into crystal clarity for a big picture which is exceptionally touching.

**Neil Reid**



## Forth to Farne Way

By John Henderson and Jacquetta Megarry

Rucksack Readers, £12.99

IF lockdown has been good for one thing, it has shown that all the good days out aren’t necessarily in the mountains. Many of us have been discovering unexpected pleasures in lowland walking. Some of us have also discovered that routes in the lowlands can be harder to follow than mountain routes! There’s just so much choice at every path junction.

The Forth to Farne Way is a 70-mile (115km) pilgrim route, which starts at North Berwick on the Firth of Forth and heads south-east, mostly along the coast, to cross the border and pass through Berwick-on-Tweed to finally make the crossing to the island of Lindisfarne.

This guide to the route is everything you’d expect from Rucksack Readers: lots of information about the route, clear directions and points of interest to look out for on each stage of the journey. There are copious illustrations, great for both inspiration and reassurance on the way, and excellent large-scale mapping throughout which should be all that’s needed for route-finding. Most people will complete the journey in five to eight days, and there’s guidance on overnight accommodation, although the route can also be done over several shorter expeditions using public transport.

Those familiar with these guides will know it’s a slightly larger format than normal hill and rock climbing guides, but not so large that it won’t fit in a rucksack or jacket pocket (it’s on rainproof paper), and the larger page size means the maps are much easier to read and follow.

**Neil Reid**



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MATTERS**

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Emma Twyford on *Chupacabra* (EB/9 6c),  
Huntsman's Leap, Pembroke.  
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