

Campsie Amble By Sinclair Steven

Time: 06.50

Setting: Black sky. Black rain. Black wind.

Mood: Black. Why am I doing this? Why go out from the warmth of bed, wander about in driving rain, sweat into a sodden cag and see nothing?

07.10. Have to leave in about 50 minutes. Get dressed. Have breakfast. Make and pack sandwiches. Assemble all the stuff I need and pack sack. Unpack sack. Unwrap sandwiches, smear on another smidgeon of mustard. Repack sandwiches. Repack sack. Wasted six minutes. Retrieve boots and gaiters from hut. Consider boots. Get out Cherry Blossom from cupboard and polish boots. Another eight minutes gone. Finally crack open door, hunch against wind and rain and load car.

Traffic lights at green. Slow down...third...second....there you are... red. Always a long delay here. Green. Move on, slowly. Woodhead. Paperboy approaching. Might to want to cross road. Must be about thirty yards away, better slow down, just in case. Past the Puffer... 08.04. Close enough to 08.00 to feel aggrieved the buggers haven't waited for me. I said I would be here. Into the car park. Damn...damn...damn, the buggers have waited. Christ, you can't rely on anyone these days.

Plan A was The Brack. Abandoned because of inclement weather i.e. it's pishing down. Plan B (Peter's) is an amble over the Campsies. No-one has a map of the Campsies. It's Groundhog Day. Gone into oblivion are memories of previous Peter-originated 'ideas': the Grey Mare's Tail diretissima; the stroll around 'Beinn Hump' in Glen Nevis involving a vertical ascent of a waterfall and a trip half way up the Ben. Apparently Peter now has an interest/obsession with land slip and there's a new one at Strathblane. Well whatever turns you on. In most middle-aged men it's a trim female figure and firm young flesh, but this is Peter. Perhaps as other aspects of your physical life 'slip', libido etc. massive mountain ejaculations come to have some kind of symbolic significance for you. Anyway off to Strathblane we head, John B, Peter and self, if not clueless certainly mapless.

As we wend our way up past the landslip (Peter, I am sure, I spotted drooling) John excitedly draws our attention to a hovering 'peregrin'. This magnificent creature in its two variants, the Emperor Peregrin and the King Peregrin, is peculiar to the Campsie Fells. It is breathtakingly exciting to watch its 45mph stoop, stunning any targeted rodent, vole or occasional pheasant, before battering its prey about the head until dead, with its webbed feet. (And yes I know, a vole is a rodent, but I needed the rhythmical addition of another noun for effect) Those whose pass-time is scuba diving in the Blane and Glazert Waters can also thrill to the peregrin's flowing, swirling 15 knot pursuit of baggy minnows and other denizens of the not-so-deep. Unfortunately the species is under threat, not only from collectors keen to augment their collection with its 50gm egg which it uniquely carries ensconced between its feet and belly when in flight (sadly the population also suffers depletion at the 'feet' of those peregrins who neglect to lay the egg aside before kicking their prey to death), but in addition, from the depredations of the Less-than-Common Seal, accidentally introduced to these waters by a purblind fisherman from furth of Scotland.

Just as we crest the ridge the mist rolls in necessitating consultation of the map which none of us has. Three compasses, one GPS, but no map. We head north across the thin covering of soft, wet snow aiming (rather broadly I thought) to end up on Dumgoyne. The path divides. Hesitation. Thought. (Not a lot right enough.) Go right. Fifteen minutes pass. Another path division. Right again. Ten minutes. This time a path crosses ours. Oh good, four choices this time! That way.

'We want to head north-west,' says Peter. 'What does the compass say?'

'North-east.'

'Close enough.'

The path seems to curve back on itself, but a fainter track heads off into the white wastes. Do we take it? If Frost had written his poem 'The Road Not Taken' up here, it would be thirty ruddy verses long, not four! Finally a cairn or something looms (if something so small can justifiably be said to be capable of looming) at the top of the rise. Right we're here. Where's here? God knows. Present analysis of the situation. We don't know where we are. We don't know where we are going. Ergo wouldn't the wise move be to head west, down hill, out of the mist, towards the road? Reluctant agreement. Head west. Find track... with line of boot prints in the snow! Comforting feeling of justification and assurance spreads. We're not lost. He's going somewhere. It's probably where we're going. Discard GPS and compasses, back to fundamental basis of navigation: follow someone else's footprints!

Twenty minutes later, amazement. Dumgoyne looms (it does a better job of looming than earlier cairn) out of mist just about where it would have been if we had known where it was.

Stop for bite of lunch. John looks at me. 'Do you really want to go up?'

'No. Just as happy to walk round it and back to the car and a pint.'

Peter interjects, 'Now that we've found it we're as well going up it'

One in favour of going up; two in favour of going round. KMC democracy at work. We go up. No view. There's a surprise. Treacherous mud makes descent worst part of the day. Then back along the pipe track. Final obstacle of the day. Kissing gate and can't be bothered unslinging sacks. I slip through. Slight wriggle of torso and out other side. John follows. Brief jam, but sharp intake of breath and he flows through. Peter moves forward. Positions self in V and swings gate back. Jams. Forward movement impossible. Backward movement impossible. Firmly lodged like a cork in a bottle of his favourite rioja. Ah well comes the time to us all when not just the land slips, but everything else slumps to the power of gravity.