



# ELLON HILLWALKING CLUB

## Newsletter September 2013

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### Programme:

**Monday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2013**

**Cycling in Southern India – Barbara Wyatt**

**Station Hotel Ellon 20:00**

**Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2013**

**Cairngorm and Ben Macdui**

**Focal Pt Gordon Spence (01358 788998)**

**Community Centre Car Park 07:00**

### Cairngorm and Ben Macdui (OS Sheet 36)

#### Mike Taylor

On a good day, this must be one of the best walks in Scotland. The views are spectacular and the route crosses the arctic wilderness of the *Cairngorm Plateau*. There are good paths onto and off the plateau but the walk across requires good navigational skills in poor visibility.

*Cairngorm* (blue hill) used to be one of the easiest Munros to climb, as the top of the ski chairlift at the Ptarmigan restaurant came to within 160m of the summit but since the funicular railway was built, there is no access to the summit from this point. *Ben Macdui* was for many years thought to be the highest mountain in Scotland - especially by the locals - but is now known to be the second highest. There are a few suggestions for the origins of the name but the favoured one among the writers is *Mhac Dhuibhe* - hill of the sons of dubh, the black one. The Duff family owned much of the mountain until the middle of last century and 'Duff' is a common anglicisation of dubh.

Our walk starts at the ski centre car park from where we head west down some steps and over a bridge. The path crosses below the northern corries. The first corrie is *Coire Cas* (Steep Corrie) which carries snow far into the summer called *Cuidhe Crom* (Crooked Wreath). The next is *Coire an t-Sneachda* (Corrie of the Snow) in which there is a great mound of glacial debris high up on the east side. Separating this corrie from the next one, *Coire an Lochain* (Corrie of the Lochans), is the *Fiacail Ridge* (Tooth Ridge). This stony ridge is one of the few narrow rock arêtes in the Cairngorms and is an interesting ascent involving some easy scrambling - which becomes difficult in winter. Some members of the club plan to use this ridge as their way on to the plateau. The non-scrambly route will keep to the lower paths and then, after crossing the stream coming out of *Coire an Lochain*, go up the ridge of *Miadan Creag an Leth-choin* onto the plateau. The path continues above the steep slopes down into the *Lairig Ghru* on to *Lochan Buidhe*. The route across the tundra to the large cairn on the top of *Ben Macdui* can be difficult to follow when the mist comes down. If it does, watch out for *Am Fear Mor Liath* (the big, grey man) who (which?) frequents this mountain - especially when walkers are tiring!

The route to *Cairngorm* starts by retracing our steps to *Lochan Buidhe* but keeping to the right hand path which passes closer to the lochan. It crosses the headwaters of the *Feith Buidhe* which runs into *Loch Avon*. The rim of the northern corries is then followed on to *Cairngorm*. If your energy is running out the *Fiacail a'Choire Chais* provides a way back to the car park without climbing *Cairngorm*. If *Cairngorm* is climbed the return goes first to the Ptarmigan Restaurant then down the *Sron an Aonaich* to the car park.

The walk is about 18km with 930m of ascent - 6 to 8 hours depending upon conditions and mood of party. It is a demanding walk which should be within the capabilities of fit members of the club. It could require the use of some navigational skills, depending on conditions.

If you're interested in taking part in this outing, please let Gordon Spence (01358 788998) know by Thursday 12 September.

### Forthcoming Events

Oct 20<sup>th</sup> An Socach  
Oct 26/27<sup>th</sup> Bunkhouse Weekend – Loch Ness  
Nov 17<sup>th</sup> Cannes Glen & Bar Supper  
Dec 15<sup>th</sup> Cruidhie Crom and Little Pap

### Active Aboyne – Mountaineering Talks

Active Aboyne is running two excellent evening talks in the Deeside Community Centre, Bridgeview Road, Aboyne: Friday 13th September at 7.30pm:

*Stephen Venables on "Everest", this being the 25th Anniversary of Stephen's ascent by a new route on the Kanshung Face, as well as the 60th Anniversary of the legendary first ascent by Hillary and Tsensing.*

Thursday 19th September:

*Sandy Allan on "Nanga Parbat's Mazeno Ridge", reliving last summer's 18 day epic traverse with Rick Allan.*

The talks, each priced at £13, can be booked on line from <http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/activeaboyne/>.

Anyone booking both talks prior to 30th August can do so at the combined ticket price of £20, but only through the Mid Deeside Office, the Victory Hall, Aboyne AB34 5HY.

The Aboyne-based outdoor clothing business [Hilltrek](http://www.hilltrek.co.uk/) is sponsoring both events.

Full details of the programme are on <http://www.activeaboyne.co.uk/>.

### October Bunkhouse Weekend (25 -27 October)

#### Loch Ness Hostel – Mike Taylor

We are trying somewhere new this year for our October weekend, the Loch Ness Hostel <http://bcclochnesshostel.co.uk/>

It is situated about 6 miles north of Drumadrochit on the Cannich road and is ideally situated for a walk in Glen Affric. A suggestion for the Saturday walk is Toll Creagach and Tom a'Choinich, which should take about 6 hours.

The cost is £17 per person per night. If you want to come, please let Mike Taylor (Loch an Eilein, Newmachar, ABERDEEN, AB21 0UQ) have £34 by the end of September. Beds will be allocated on a first come, first served basis on receipt of the £34, which is non-refundable.

### Jock's Road – Walk Report

#### Alan Murray

It was a full minibus load of walkers that set out for Glen Doll - thirteen of us including the driver. The weather was fair and the forecast good - ideal conditions for our traverse of Jock's Road from Clova to Auchallater.

This right of way was the subject of an action in the Court of Session in 1886-87, and in the House of Lords in 1888, when it was proved that it had long been the practice of drovers to take sheep from Braemar over the Tolmount to the market at Cullow, near Kirriemuir. It is for this reason that it is called Jock's Road as John Winter (Jock) was one of those who testified against the landowner, Duncan McPherson, who had attempted to close the path. Indeed, the legal battle that ensued resulted in the freedom for walkers such as ourselves to walk the Scottish hills but not without casualties; the Scottish Rights of Way Society, which mounted a defence of the case for access, went bankrupt during the process which went all the way to the House of Lords.

## Jock's Road – Walk Report

Twelve of us set off from the car park in Glen Doll leaving Gordon to drive the minibus round to Auchallater and walk in to meet us from there.

It was warm work as we climbed fairly quickly through the woods in Glen Doll - but as we left the shelter of the trees the wind soon cooled us down. A steady climb on a fine path took us up to a shelter, known as Davy's Bourach; the current shelter was built by Davy Glen in 1966. Bourach is the Gaelic word for a guddle, mess or shambles. The shelter is opposite the site of an older shelter, now demolished, marked by a small discreet plaque, erected by the Universal Hiking Club Glasgow. It was in memory of five members who died on New Year 1959.

These five walkers, "young but experienced" set out from Braemar at 11am on New Year's Day to walk over to Glen Doll to meet up with some friends. They had expected to arrive in Glen Doll around 6 pm which, although the last few hours would have been in darkness, shouldn't have been a problem as there was a good track for the final part of the journey. They were seen by a shepherd at 12:15 leaving the A93 and heading up Glen Callater, but none were seen alive again. A later study of the weather systems confirmed the men would have met horrendous conditions once they climbed out of Coire Breac on to the higher ground, with storm force 11 winds, deep and driving snow and a severe wind chill (-25C). The storm, considered the worst for many years, continued for two days and it was Saturday before police in Kirriemuir could be alerted to the fact people could be missing. Although a group of local men attempted a search on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> it wasn't until Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> that a formal search, co-ordinated by the police and involving RAF mountain rescue teams and members of other mountaineering clubs, began.

The 100-plus rescuers encountered horrific blizzard conditions and deep snow. Amazingly, they found the body of young James Boyle above the head of Glen Doll near Craig Maud. In the weeks that followed, Davie Glen, a well-known local character with a love and in-depth knowledge of the hills in the area, often went out searching for the bodies. He discovered the bodies of another three of the group over the following two months but the final body, that of Frank Daly, was not found until April 19<sup>th</sup> after the thaw was well underway. He was discovered in a metre of snow near the upper reaches of White Water. Davie later built the shelter, referred to earlier, in order to help avert future tragedies.

Although it was windy, we encountered no weather problems other than a stiff wind, and soon reached a decision point - to bag the Munros or just walk Jock's Road? Having been up Tom Buidhe several times more than I considered it reasonable to do so (given that it is number one in my list of boring Munros), I opted to miss the tops out, but there were those who hadn't done these hills before or didn't share my view and the party of twelve split into two groups of six - aiming to meet up at the head of Corrie Kander or slightly further down in the glen.

As it was, the two groups met up near the bottom of Corrie Kander having made their different routes down the corrie and, not much further on, we were reunited with Gordon who had driven round to meet us. From there it was a straightforward walk out on the excellent track to Auchallater on the A93 where the minibus was parked. It's not that often that this is walked as a through route due to the difficulties of getting transport organised and it was a treat and a privilege to be able to complete the walk which had been so hard fought over on our behalf by our forebears and had seen so much tragedy within living memory.

### References:

Peter Gordon, The Leopard Magazine, Aug 2010,

<http://www.leopardmag.co.uk/feats/289/how-57-shepherds-secured-freedom-of-way-in-scotland>

Kirriemuir Herald, 31 Dec 2008,

<http://www.kirriemuirherald.co.uk/news/local-headlines/fiftieth-anniversary-of-jock-s-road-tragedy-1-263523>



*Pictures:  
Ken Walker and  
Ingrid Taylor*

