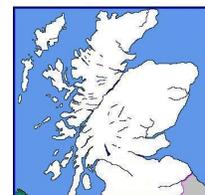


Nor' West News



The NeWSletter of the Nor' West Sgurramblers

Issue No. 178 – April 2019

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IN MEMORIAM

Steve Perry
(A warmly remembered past Member)

Died from injuries
resulting from his fall on Ben Hope
5 February 2019

NOTA BENE

MEET No 334: Alpine Tour

Dates: Late August 2019.

Area: Monte Rosa.

Accommodation: Alpine Hostels.

Programme: A walking tour of the splendid high mountains of the Italian Alps.

Meet organiser: Chris Knowles.

To date, no-one has indicated an interest in joining this trip. If no interest is shown in the near future, Chris proposes to remove the tour from the programme.

MEET No 335: Fort William

Nigel Saxton – the Meet organiser – intends to book self catering accommodation in the Fort William area but needs early notice of interest from all potential attendees.

Provisional Dates: Saturday 7 – Saturday 15 September 2019.

If it is possible that you may wish to attend this Meet, please inform Nigel by no later than the end of April

MEET REPORTS

MIXED WINTER WEATHER: Meet No 329 (Friday 18 - Thursday 24 January 2019)

After driving through some miserable, grey, sleety weather, Janet Eccles, Ollie (the cocker spaniel) and I arrived at Osprey Cottage, Carsluith on the Friday. The cottage proved to be warm and comfortable and very well equipped.

Next day we headed for the Mull of Galloway and did a figure of eight walk taking on both sides of the spectacular coastline – a distance of 11.7km with 480m of ascent. The Mull of Galloway Visitor Centre was in a particularly attractive position, perched above the spectacular cliffs



On the Sunday we enjoyed another coastal walk, starting from the lovely village of Isle of Whithorn. We followed the road to St Ninian's Cave, then walked along the coast via Burrow Head back to Isle of Whithorn – a total distance of 17km with 300m of ascent. When we returned to the cottage, we found that Chris Knowles had arrived after taking in an ascent of Criffel on the way. As it was his birthday, we decided to go out for our evening meal at the Ellangowan Hotel in Creetown - not a very inspiring place but famous for being used to film the bar scenes for the 1973 film “The Wicker Man” (starring Edward Woodward, Christopher Lee and Britt Ekland).

Monday morning dawned to heavy sleet showers. So we decided to do a low level circuit of Loch Trool. On arrival at the car park at the western end of Loch Trool, the weather was remarkably calm and the walk along the southern shore of the loch revealed



some lovely reflections in the glassy waters of the loch. Reaching the eastern end of the loch, we extended the walk by continuing on the cycle track by the side of Glenhead Burn, and returning to Glenhead on the wet and tussocky Southern Upland Way track. This path provided some very good views up Sheil Burn towards Lamachan Hill, an unconquered Graham for Chris and a possible future trip. We then returned to the car park along the northern shores of

Loch Trool, having walked a distance of 15km with 575m of ascent.

The weather looked reasonably good next morning, though the cloud was down to a fairly low level. With snow showers forecast for later, we decided to go for Cairnsmore of Fleet, the car park at Muirfad being only a short drive up the A75 from the cottage. The route up through Bardroch Wood was straightforward, but we were soon into the cloud and



nearing the summit we were hit by a hail storm stinging our faces. On the descent, the clouds did part momentarily to reveal views over the Cree estuary. We had walked a distance of 12.75km with an ascent of 700m - and one Graham bagged!

There was a change in the weather on Wednesday morning, with clear blue skies. But snow showers the previous day had frozen solid overnight. After some debate, we decided to go and see if the

road up Glen Trool was passable, with a view to having a go at Merrick. However, after driving up the A75 and turning off on to the A714 past Newton Stewart, the road conditions deteriorated rapidly and it became clear that attempting to drive up the Glen Trool road would not be feasible. So we returned to the cottage for a cup of tea. In the afternoon we did a circular walk up behind the cottage to Kirkmabreck Church, across to Balloch Burn woods near Creetown, then taking a lower path back to the cottage – a distance of 11.4km with 340m of ascent.

Temperatures were above freezing on the Thursday morning but Chris was determined to return to Glen Trool to have another try at conquering Merrick. Janet and I had a word with Ollie and he did not seem very impressed with another snowy walk, having hurt his paw doing Cairnsmore of Fleet on Tuesday. So, while Chris went on his way alone to Glen Trool, Janet, Ollie and I had a more leisurely day doing another coastal walk from Brighthouse Bay near Kirkcudbright. We were back to the cottage by 4 p.m. Chris returned at about 5.30 pm after a successful day trailblazing through the snow to the summit of Merrick. After his exertions, Chris then did a fine job preparing our evening meal of chicken and prawn balti to round off an enjoyable week.



David Swainson

MORE MIXED WEATHER: Meet No 330 (Saturday 2nd – Wednesday 6th March 2019)

The weather forecast for the first day of the Meet was that there would be a dry start before rain came in from the west at about two o'clock in the afternoon. If Chris Knowles and I were to do a walk, an early start was to order! Chris suggested climbing Mor Bheinn en route to Killin where we would be staying. This was a Graham I had climbed before but I was keen to get back to hill-walking again, having not done much for a while and happy to climb anything.

I met Chris at Stirling railway station and we drove to Comrie, the planned walk starting a mile out of town. The first couple of miles involved following a series of private

roads and tracks through woodland and past the grand looking Aberuchill Castle. It was more like a stroll through a country park than embarking on a hill climb until we reached the edge of the woods where the real start of our climb began. We decided to follow the line of a stream which would take us to just below the ridge. Initially the going was made easy by following animal tracks through the heather but, as we got higher, the slopes steepened and progress was slowed considerably by deep banks of heather. To make matters worse, it started to



drizzle. I stopped to put my waterproofs on, at which point I lost sight of Chris who was some way ahead of me. But, with nothing else for it, I persevered, wondering if Chris had managed to find an easier route of ascent.

Once I had attained the ridge the going became easier; and then I spotted Chris so my mood improved. I joined Chris at the summit and found that he had started to eat his lunch while waiting for me. Though we were both happy to have reached the top, the prospect of an arduous descent and the deteriorating weather conditions were the most pressing subjects of our

conversation. After Chris had finished eating, we headed down to the col between Mor Bheinn and Ben Halton (a Graham Top), from which we found an easier route of descent down to the track which we had followed on the way up. By now the rain had set in and two rather bedraggled souls were grateful to strip off and gain the shelter of Chris's car.

The rain continued until we reached Maragowan, our holiday cottage in Killin - an old property, built in 1814 but well maintained. With one bedroom containing a double bed and the other bedroom containing a bunk bed, it would be ideal for a couple with two children. It also offered more relaxed accommodation for our small NWS Meet than the "By the Way" or Crianlarich hostels.



Shortly after arriving, we were joined by Ian Dale (a prospective member) and we happily exchanged greetings before Ian broke the bad news that he had injured his foot while renovating a house a few days earlier and would have to refrain from walking the next day. In addition, we learnt that one of the tyres on his car had developed a slow puncture. So, before settling in at the cottage, Ian made a quick job of changing the wheel. Then, spare wheel fitted, wet clothes hung up to dry and all electric heaters full on, we could all relax over tea and biscuits and spend some time discussing the hillwalking options in the area.

Chris and I were out of our beds at our “normal” getting-up time of 7 o’clock next morning, both keen to make the most of the day. Ian joined us later when we had finished our breakfasts and were making sandwiches. But it was still raining and, since finishing the walk in rain the previous day had been unpleasant enough, we were not in a great hurry to set off in the rain again. However, the forecast was that it should become dry in the afternoon and this gave us encouragement to find a suitable Graham which could be climbed quickly. Fiarach, which lies south of the A82 between Crianlarich and Tyndrum, met this requirement perfectly. So, when the rain stopped at midday, Chris and I headed off to Dalrigh to climb that hill.

Having parked at the car park at Dalrigh - a very popular starting point for Ben Lui, Ben Oss and Beinn Dubhcaraig - we headed along the old road, crossed a bridge over the River Cononish and then followed a track to cross a bridge over a railway line at the edge



of a conifer plantation. It was a steady, rather non-descript climb up Fiarach but the summit area was more worthy of note as it had a series of lochans and knolls. The summit cairn was perched on the edge of a craggy spur and in better weather could have provided a tremendous view of the Crianlarich hills and the Ben Lui range. Beinn Dubhcaraig was in view but, unfortunately, the tops of the higher hills were largely covered in cloud. As it was unlikely that we would be there again, we

returned by the route of ascent, stopping briefly when Chris asked why I was heading towards Tyndrum rather than Dalrigh and I explained that I was following a bearing to the forest and the bridge over the railway.

Back at the cottage, we rejoined Ian who, having tested his injured foot in three different pairs of walking boots, considered that climbing a hill the next day was not a possibility. But he assured us that it was good to simply be back in the Highlands and a welcome break from work. (The “working” members of the club, like Chris and I, could relate to this!) Chris cooked salmon for dinner that evening, a dish which has become quite popular on NWS Meets.

On the Monday, encouraged by the NWIS forecast that there was little chance of rain that day, Chris and I decided that revisiting two Munros - Meall Greigh (3,284 ft) and Meall Garbh (3,668 ft) - should provide a good round. My recollection of previous visits to these hills was one of damp conditions and low cloud; so to do them on a bright, sunny day would be a treat. Parking on the A827 alongside Loch Tay is limited and our only option was to park at the Ben Lawers Hotel. When parking there in the past we had met a rather hostile response from the proprietors, even though we had given the bar our custom after the walk! When the proprietors realised that Munroists were desperate to climb in the area, they decided that setting a parking charge of £5 per walker would be a useful money spinner. That charge is



expensive by Scottish standards but cheap when compared to the Lake District or Snowdonia. On this occasion we were happy enough to pay it for what would, hopefully, be an excellent day's walking.

A short distance from the Ben Lawers Hotel we left the A827 and walked along the private road to Machuim Farm, and then followed a track past a number of shielings and alongside the Lawers Burn. In due course, we left the track and headed up the grassy slopes of Meall Greigh. Although we were enjoying some sunny spells, they were



interspersed by squally showers. What had been falling as rain in Killin over the previous few days had been falling as snow at higher levels and I estimated that the snow level was down to about 2,500 feet. As we continued to gain height, we became increasingly battered by a strong, westerly wind which also made the squally showers unpleasant. But we persevered and were relieved when the summit of Meall Greigh appeared. However, we considered that it would be unpleasant and foolhardy to continue to Meall Garbh. So,

after Chris had taken a few summit photos, we returned the way we had come. Lower on the hill side, after a shower had passed, we stopped to have lunch. By then the tops of the hills had become clearer and Ben Lawers, An Stuc and Meall Garbh looked splendid covered in snow. We did not encounter any further snow showers after lunch; so we continued slowly back down to the Lawers Burn, pausing to catch some final views of the magnificent hills high above us. Only one Munro climbed out of the two intended but it was still worth the £5!

Back at the holiday cottage, we caught up with Ian's news. He had driven to Comrie and arranged for a garage to replace his spare wheel the following day. As he had found it painful even just walking round Comrie, he had decided to head back home, once his car had been sorted, to see a doctor about his foot injury. More enjoyably, we all had a good dinner at the Falls of Dochart Inn that evening.

Cloudy conditions were forecast for the Tuesday, with the possibility of showers but little in the way of wind. Chris reckoned that the best of the weather would be most likely found in the east. It had been a long time since he last climbed Schiehallion so he suggested it as our hill for the day. After saying farewell to Ian, Chris and I drove to the Braes of Foss for an ascent of Schiehallion. We were spared the £2 cost of parking as the ticket machine was not working. Due to the popularity of this hill, a very well constructed and maintained path took us over the grassy moorland and up into the cloud which hung down to about 2,000 feet.



Along the way we met a few other walkers who were the first we had seen on the Meet. The path progressed higher over stony ground, covered by fresh snow, the route ahead being indicated by the occasional cairn. We reached the modest cairn at the summit,

stopping for lunch in the absence of any wind. With no alternative option for varying the route of descent, we followed the path back to the car, pleased that the forecast showers had not materialised. Dinner that evening was tomato and basil soup, followed by a kidney bean balti - a Chris Knowles speciality: a tasty and healthy meal.

We were up at 7 o'clock next morning. The final day of the Meet had arrived. But horrid, sleety conditions were to be viewed from the living room window and ruled out any possibility of a walk on the way home. Chris dropped me off at Stirling railway station before driving home to Morecambe.

My thanks to Chris for organising another enjoyable winter Meet in Killin. Thanks also to Ian for his good company and interesting accounts of the many and varied places he had been. Not put off by his lack of walking opportunity this time, Ian has joined NWS and we hope he can make it along to another Meet in the near future.

David Douglas

FORTHCOMING MEETS

MEET No 332: North West Highlands

Dates: Sunday 19 – Saturday 25 May 2019.

Area: North West Highlands.

Accommodation: Self catering cottage near Durness.

Bookings: The limited number of beds in the cottage have all been allocated.

Meet organiser: David Douglas.

MEET No 333: North East Highlands

Dates: Saturday 29 June – Saturday 6 July 2019.

Area: North East Highlands.

Accommodation: Helmsdale hostel.

Programme: Many attractive but seldom visited hills are readily accessible.

Transport: If coming by car, please advise the Meet organiser how many passengers you can take and your approximate route and time of journey.

Maps: OS 1:50,000: 16 & 17.

Food: Food will be provided by the Meet organiser from an evening meal on the first Saturday to breakfast on the last Saturday, unless requested otherwise. Those who prefer self-catering will need to bring and cook their own food.

Bookings: The number of beds available is limited and will be allocated on a “first come, first served” basis. Members wishing to make reservations should telephone or e-mail the Meet organiser **immediately**.

Meet organiser: David Douglas.

MEET No 334: Alpine Tour

Dates: Late August 2019.

Area: Monte Rosa.

Accommodation: Alpine Hostels.

Programme: A walking tour of the splendid high mountains of the Italian Alps.

Meet organiser: Chris Knowles.

To date, no-one has indicated an interest in joining this trip. If no interest is shown in the near future, the tour will be removed from the programme.

MEET No 335: Fort William

Nigel Saxton – the Meet organiser – intends to book self catering accommodation in the Fort William area but needs early notice of interest from all potential attendees.

Provisional Dates: Saturday 7 – Saturday 15 September 2019.

Area: The Mamores and adjacent areas.

Please inform the Meet organiser by no later than the end of April if you may wish to attend.

MEET No 336: AGM Meet

Dates: Friday 18 – Sunday 20 October 2019.

Area: Lake District.

Accommodation: Wasdale youth hostel.

Programme: A return to the always enjoyable northern hills.

Meet organiser: Chris Knowles.

Please inform the Meet organiser by no later than 15 May if you may wish to attend.

MEMBERSHIP

We welcome one new Member – Ian Dale.