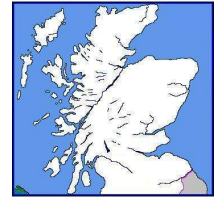


Nor' West News



The NeWSletter of the Nor' West Sgurramblers

Issue No. 175 – July 2018



MEET REPORTS

EASTER IN PITLOCHRY: Meet No.324 (Friday 30 March – Wednesday 4 April 2018)

On Good Friday morning Meet organiser Chris Knowles picked me up from Morecambe in his car but - thanks to congestion on the A9 - it was 7pm, almost two hours later than expected, before we reached Pitlochry SYHA hostel. Roger Reeves and David Douglas were already settled in, having climbed Meall Dearg (a Graham situated a few miles west of Dunkeld) in icy conditions on their way from David's home in Edinburgh. The four of us had been allocated a 6-bed room so I was grateful to be able to bag a lower bunk.

We were expecting a guest – Marco Wright – to join us but discovered that, because he had booked independently, he had been allocated a bed in another dorm. Marco arrived later and, introductions over, Chris served up an excellent veggie lasagne which he'd brought from home and which was greatly appreciated as by then we were all quite hungry. Before retiring we talked about hills which might be tackled during the weekend, bearing in mind the discouraging forecast for deteriorating weather from the Monday.

At breakfast next morning there was unusual unanimity, everyone going along with Roger's suggestion that Meall a' Mhuic (a Graham) should be our first outing. After a long drive through Aberfeldy and the undulating minor road along Glen Lyon, the toilet block in the Meggernie Estate car park at Innerwick provided welcome relief as we prepared for our walk. Walking back along the road past the impressive war memorial, we turned onto a good track beside the burn for a few hundred yards before a boggy path on the left led to a confusing junction of three streams, generating brief discussion as to the correct way ahead. Consensus achieved, we headed onwards up a gently



rising track across the south-west side of our hill. Perhaps the walking was too easy since our desire to quickly gain height caused us to overshoot the start of a path heading up the south ridge of the hill. A short retreat led to its discovery and the more serious ascent began.

As we headed upwards we were surprised to see a couple descending towards us. The Grahams are certainly becoming more popular! After a brief exchange of greetings we



continued onwards. But it was not long before the path came to an end and we faced a slog through rough vegetation. With my gammy leg this proved something of a trial for me. But, eventually, I joined the others on the breezy summit where, following the inevitable photo opportunity, we moved onto leeward slopes to enjoy a bite of lunch. The way off was straightforward if equally rough but we did at least discover how we had missed the path on the way up. A patch of gravel we had taken to be a turning place for vehicles was in fact the start of the path, which

made a sharp left turn and ran parallel and slightly above the main track before heading up the hill. In the hope it might assist others heading this way we built a cairn at the junction.

Back at the hostel, having enjoyed tea and biscuits and an opportunity to relax from our exertions, there was a serious battle in the now much busier hostel kitchen where Chris rustled up another excellent evening meal. As Sunday was expected to be the best day weather-wise, decisions were made before retiring to bed. Chris opted for Meall na Meoig (the Corbett marking the highest point of the Beinn Pharlagain ridge at the west end of Loch Rannoch) which had been his main reason for his choice of venue for the Meet. Marco indicated a willingness to join him, whereas the rest of us decided to head in the same direction to tackle Stob na Cruaiche, a Graham situated beside the long trail westwards from Rannoch Station to Glencoe.

Next morning, greeted by bright sunshine, we were all away quickly after breakfast. Having booted up at Rannoch Station, Roger, David and I headed towards the forest on the far side of Loch Laidon, pausing only to photograph the snow-wreathed mountains

across the water. Little could we guess at this stage how much better our photo opportunities would be later in the day. David had gleaned information from the new SMC "Grahams" book about an "All Terrain Vehicle" track, not yet on the maps, leading through the forest then directly towards our objective, which should undoubtedly provide easier walking than the boggy east ridge. After two kilometres or so of easy forest walking we had no problem locating where the forest track dropped down to cross a stream. After a steep climb through the woods and a brief rest once clear of the trees, we continued on the ATV track



parallel to the forest fence, easily followed until we reached a tall marker pole. At a height of around 550 metres, however, the track disappeared under snow, seeming to follow a valley with steep snow banks to the left. Suddenly Roger, who was in the lead, disappeared up to his waist in a snow hole, having just missed a hidden plank bridge over a gully. From then on he preferred to stick to clear ground whereas David and I, both using trekking poles, found the snow slopes rather to our liking.

There were magnificent views of high mountains to our left but it easy identification only became possible when we reached the crest of a spur and we could see a triangular face with two tops beyond. Quite clearly this was the Big Buachaille, with the gash of Glen Etive to its left. And suddenly everything else fell into place with Creise, Meall a' Bhuiridh, the Blackmount and then the Achaladair Munros ranged from right to left. But there was no



time to waste: our own objective still lay ahead. The ground got easier, with scattered rocks and low crags, and it was not long before we reached the summit. Settling down in the sun for lunch on the summit rocks, slightly higher than the trig point and a few metres away, we enjoyed the broad vista of mountains now in view to the north beyond the Blackwater Reservoir. Ben Nevis and the Aonachs were peeping over the Mamores ridge and then there was a wide sweep eastwards to the Grey Corries and Ben Alder.

For a second time we did not have the Graham to ourselves as four people were spotted heading up the ridge from the west. Wearing fell-running shoes and lightly loaded, they had trekked over seven miles from Kings House in Glencoe. Although they departed quite quickly in the same direction, it was a while before we decided to make a move from such wonderful viewpoint. There is little to say about the descent, returning the way we had come; though, whilst stopping to photograph the hole Roger had fallen into earlier, I managed to do the same. For some reason he found this highly amusing. Back at Rannoch Station we were surprised to find a fair number of deer grazing alongside the road (on food which had been put out for them) and oblivious to all the people about.



Chris and Marco had an equally enjoyable day on their Corbett, one of the few Chris had had left to 'complete'. But the weather forecast for next day was not good, with strong winds expected on high ground in the afternoon. The fact that the other two beds in our room had been taken proved to be further bad news when the new guy above me turned out to be a stentorian snorer. Having tried shaking the bunk vigorously many times to minimal effect, I was rather upset the next morning when Chris tried to blame me as the culprit who had kept him awake!





Although Monday morning started overcast, it was not too bad. Even so I had had enough of the hills and decided on an easier day. Prompted by a leaflet which David had brought with him, I caught a bus to the National Trust information centre at the Pass of Killiecrankie, and walked back to Pitlochry along the River Tay. Hoping to avoid the threatened storm, Chris and Marco headed for a snow-wreathed Ben Vrackie immediately above the town as this should be a fairly straightforward climb when starting from the hostel.

Roger and David, intent on bagging Grahams, chose Beinn na Gainimh, located between Aberfeldy and Crieff. They faced a 25 mile drive to the start at Newton Bridge in the Sma' Glen. Seeing them setting off, a friendly local warned them of the storm expected later. They made good time, however, following a track along Glen Almond then onto the shoulder of their hill. Steep ground followed to a subsidiary top, levelling out for the final few hundred metres to the summit. They quickly returned by the same route. Fortunately, everyone returned safely from their various escapades: the worst of the forecast conditions did not arrive until the following day. Marco would be leaving on Tuesday morning so Chris had arranged for us to eat out at the 'Prince of India' restaurant where we had an excellent meal with no reason to complain about the quantity of food provided. As we retired to bed, plans for Tuesday were somewhat fluid in view of the severe weather in prospect.

On a dismal morning, with steady, light rain and low cloud on the hills, we wished Marco well for his homeward journey. The remaining four of us had our separate plans. Roger, still driven by the desire to tick a list, headed for Newtyle Hill, a sub-2,000ft Marilyn. Walking from the Loch of Lowes visitor centre near Dunkeld, he engaged in heather bashing in snow to reach the summit. More ambitious was David's 12 mile walk along tracks through the forest east of the A9 to the National Trust centre at Killiecrankie, returning via the River Tay path. I took the train a few miles south to Dunkeld and played tourist. Actually, this involved a fair amount of walking, taking in the cathedral, the National Trust's "Hermitage" woodland (by the river Braan) and the Birnam Oak (an ancient tree from the old forest of Birnam Wood, immortalised in Shakespeare's "Macbeth"). Chris spent the day around Pitlochry.



Our final evening was enlightened by conversation with a lively young Australian lady who insisted on recording interviews with us individually for her online blog, wanting to know why we were there and what we thought about the town. We parted company on Wednesday morning, Chris and I heading homeward with a lengthy journey to Lancaster through blustery snow showers until we reached the English border. Roger and David were extending their time on the hills, spending a few days in the Ochills and Southern Uplands.

Grateful thanks are due to Chris for organising the meet and providing excellent 'home cooked' meals.

Brian Billington

DISTANT ULLAPOOL: Meet No.325 (Saturday 19 – Saturday 26 May 2018)



Six members of the Nor' West Sgurramblers, a guest and a dog arrived at various times at Lochbroom Lodge East at the start of the Meet - seven individuals with differing aspirations and objectives but all with a love of hillwalking. The six members were Val Bailey, Janet Eccles, David Swainson, Roger Reeves, Brian Billington and me. The guest was Nigel Sexton. Brian had stayed at Nigel's house in Kendal on the Friday night and they had then travelled up together. The dog, called Ollie, was an adorable and well-behaved spaniel belonging to Janet. I had searched for holiday cottages and booked Lochbroom Lodge East in November 2017. That booking had now come to fruition: it was no longer a plan or image but real and tangible. Everything seemed idyllic on a lovely summer evening with a view from the house across Loch Broom to Beinn Ghobhlach and An Teallach.

Val, Roger and I had been the last to arrive and shortly after we were visited by the proprietor who showed me important things – like how the heating, hot water and oven worked. After he had left we negotiated bedrooms and moved our luggage into them. Once we had settled in, Roger conjured up a tasty Spaghetti Carbonara. The high standard of cuisine was to be maintained all through the week. During the meal it emerged that Nigel had attended an NWS Meet sometime back in the 1970s but decided not to join then. It was hoped that he would enjoy this Meet enough to be encouraged to join.

Rain was forecast to arrive on the Sunday but not until the afternoon. Being the first day's walk, this did not dampen anyone's enthusiasm. David and Janet drove east to climb Ben Wyvis, hoping that the weather would be better in that area. Nigel also drove east, beyond Loch Glascarnoch, to climb Carn Loch nan Amhaichean, a Graham. He had brought his mountain bike which enabled him to cycle over three miles up Strath Rannoch to the foot of the hill. Roger, Val, Brian and I drove to the car park at Inverlael, planning to climb Beinn Bhreac (also called Meall Dubh), a Graham situated between Loch Broom and Seana Bhraigh. I was last there 30 years ago and climbed four Munros! This time it was a solitary Graham. We followed a series of tracks zigzagging through the Inverlael Forest. As we got higher, the forest started to thin allowing good views of Beinn Dearg and neighbouring Munros including an unmistakable An Teallach. The track eventually left the forest and took us onto open hillside. It petered out at



500m and we climbed heather covered slopes to the summit (667m). Beinn Bhreac is rather rounded and featureless but what it lacks in character is more than compensated for in views, a magnificent panorama of hills in all directions, albeit some with cloud capped summits. Seana Braigh stood out as it was nearly clear of cloud. In addition, going clockwise, we



could see Ben More Assynt, Ben Loyal, Ben Hope, the Beinn Dearg group, the Fannaichs, the Fisherfield mountains, then An Teallach, Beinn Ghobhlach, Ben More Coigach, Stac Pollaidh, and Cul Beag, Cul Mor, Suilven and Canisp.

Sheltering from the wind, we had a very long lunch stop, bunkered down behind the rocks and cairn, facing the views to the north. The day itself was rather cloudy and dull. On a bright sunny day the views would have been even better; but life is seldom perfect! Eventually we

headed down again, losing the views to the north. The sky darkened and there were spots of rain which did not come to anything. Back in the holiday cottage, everyone swapped news of their day. Nigel had had a good day with views from Carn Loch nan Amhaichean. David and Janet had climbed Ben Wyvis but did not get any views from the top which was covered in cloud. In comparison, it had been a lucky day for the Graham baggers!

Lucky and perfect are not adjectives to be associated with the weather on Monday morning. Drizzle fell lightly but persistently and the hills were shrouded in mist. This was what had been forecast but there was a sense of relief that the weather was expected to improve next day. Roger had had in mind that Meall Doire Faid would be a suitable Graham to be bagged on a bad day as it could easily be climbed from Braemore Junction. But his attire that morning suggested that he had had second thoughts. I had begun to think that it was not a day for the hills. David and Janet thought the same and planned a coastal walk on the Black Isle, hoping that the weather would be better in there. Nigel prompted further discussion about Meall Doire Faid. He had climbed this hill before but was all for doing a traverse using two cars. I was impressed with his enthusiasm simply to do a walk even though the conditions were uninviting. I knew that I would regret missing out on the opportunity. Without much persuasion, Roger came round to Nigel's thinking. So Roger, Val and I headed off in Roger's car, followed by Nigel in his. Brian chose to stay in the warmth and comfort of the house, giving himself some recovery time for the next day.

We took the two cars to a lay-by where the walk would finish, left Nigel's car there and drove back to Braemore Junction in Roger's car. By this time it had stopped raining, giving us encouragement as we set off along a path through a forestry plantation. But the cloud was still bedded down on the hillside and no notable feature could be seen until we reached Horne Loch as it emerged from the gloom. From there we followed a good stalkers' path up to the col between Beinn Enaiglair and Meall Doire Faid, from which it was a short but steep climb to the summit. By then it was not so pleasant as it had



started to drizzle again: so we headed along the south-east ridge to Meall nan Doireachan. From this point we headed down the hill, careful to avoid two sets of crags shown on the map. Nigel was out in front doing a sterling job navigating and soon the road appeared below. Using two cars saved us walking back to Braemore Junction, which was most welcome in the weather conditions.

We were the first to arrive back at the house. Anticipating four wet walkers, Brian had put the heating on and offered kindly to put the kettle on as soon as we arrived. But the first priority was to hang up our clothes! A while later, Janet and David got back. Their weather had not been any better in the east so they had abandoned walking ideas and taken the opportunity to do some shopping in Inverness. Thinking back over the day, I was pleased to have climbed Meall Doire Faid. Even though we did not see anything, there was undoubted satisfaction to have done it.

Ever since we arrived, we had been looking at Beinn Ghobhlach which beckoned us four miles away across Loch Broom. So, it was time to climb it! Unfortunately, its location meant that we would have a 30 mile drive to get to it. But I knew it would be worth it having climbed it once before. It would be a new Graham for Roger, Val and Brian. The drive involved heading down to Braemore Junction, up past Corrie Hallie, and then taking a single track road to its end at Badrallach. From the end of the road we walked along the path which leads to the remote community of Scoraig. After two kilometres we left the path and headed up the

steep hillside to reach two lovely lochans nestled under the main up-thrust of the mountain. We crossed the isthmus between the lochans and then had another steep climb to the rocky sandstone ridge. By this time Brian and I had lost sight of Val and Roger who were well ahead of us. On the ridge the going became easier and more pleasant; and soon we were at the summit where Val and Roger were huddled out of the wind in a stone shelter. It had been a grand viewpoint for them to enjoy while they waited, with Sail Mhor and An Teallach prominent to the south. Beinn Ghobhlach is quite a complex little mountain providing some interesting options for our descent route. Roger could not resist taking in Cnoc a' Bhaid-rallach (a Marilyn) from which we headed straight back down to the car.

Back at the house, Janet and David were engaged in making prawn lasagne for dinner that evening. They had had a leisurely day driving round the coast to where the old SYHA hostel used to be at Acheninver. From there they had walked down the road to Achduart, along the road to Culnacraig, then back along the road to their car. Nigel was the last to arrive back having made the long drive to Loch Maree in order to climb Beinn a' Chearcaill, a new Graham for him. After the day's excursions we were ready for the excellent prawn cocktail which Janet and David had produced. Over dinner we made plans for the following day.



Anyone staying in Ullapool is spoilt for choice when it comes to deciding which quality hills to climb in the area. That was the pleasant dilemma that David and Janet seemed to experience as they considered various possibilities for Wednesday's walk, eventually deciding on Cul Mor. The choice was a bit easier for those of us intent on bagging Grahams. Val kindly suggested that we should consider Grahams I had not done before. Beinn Bheag and Groban were "on my list" as well as being on Roger's and Nigel's: so that was the walk decided upon. These are two quite remote hills located between the Fannaichs and the Fisherfield Munros. So good views could be expected! Brian decided not to join us, choosing to explore the area immediately around the house.



Our walk started from a lay-by just north of the track to Loch a' Bhraoin. This was the same track that I had walked along a number of times over the years in order to climb some of the Fannaichs and the Fisherfield Munros. We followed the track past the end of the loch and stopped for a bite to eat, gazing at Beinn Bheag and Groban, considering which to climb first. The SMC guide suggests doing Beinn Bheag first but the Andrew Dempster book advises climbing Groban first. Roger thought that it would be best to climb the furthest away first and everyone seemed happy with this. We left the path and followed the west bank of the burn which leads towards the Bealach Gorm between the hills. After some boggy ground, we left the burn and climbed steadily up the hillside. The angle relented and Beinn Bheag's summit was soon reached. There were two "possibly summit" knolls about 100m apart. The largest cairn was on the easterly knoll; so this was the one we headed to. But we were not convinced that it was highest and walked the short distance to the westerly point which did seem to be higher. This vantage point, at any rate, provided the best viewpoint with outstanding views of one of the most impressive wilderness areas of Scotland. Particularly special were the views towards Lochan Fada, with the pointed, craggy peak of Slioch beyond, the eastern Fisherfield Munros, and the glen containing Loch an Nid, with An Teallach at the head of the glen.



We had to leave that view behind and head for our next objective, Groban. This involved a steep descent to the Bealach Gorm, with an equally steep ascent to the summit. Although Groban is slightly higher, it is a little further away from most spectacular hills, and the views were not as good as those from Beinn Bheag. Again, it was hard to leave the summit. But we finished off the remainder of our lunches and then headed down following the track alongside Loch a' Bhraoin. Back at the car we checked the time and found that it was 7.20pm. We had started walking at 9.30 am. So it had been a long but classic day in the hills and certainly not a day to hurry! Inevitably, dinner was late that evening but Brian did a sterling job, making smoked haddock chowder from memory.

Another classic hill walk was in store the following day for Val, Roger and me. This time we were heading north to climb Ben More Coigach and Sgurr an Fhìdhleir. It would not be the first time these peaks were climbed on a Meet. In fact, I had climbed them on two previous occasions – on the basis of their merit rather than height. On both occasions the approach had been from the east. But this time we had a longer drive round to the road end at Culnacraig in order to approach the hills from the west. This opened up the possibility of doing a round of all the massif's seven summits. Brian joined us on the car journey so that he could walk and explore the coastline while we climbed the hills.

After a relentless ascent from almost sea level, we reached the high summit ridge of Ben More Coigach. This was a good place for us to stop for a rest and enjoy the views out to the Summer Isles. Once we had regained our breath, we followed the exhilarating, narrow



ridge which contained numerous sandstone towers. These could either be scrambled over or avoided, depending on how adventurous you felt. A large group caught up with us on the ridge but they stopped for lunch, so we pressed on to the top of Ben More Coigach and had the summit to ourselves.

The fine peak of Sgurr an Fhìdhleir lay ahead and, after a short rest, we headed down to the col and then up the rocky slopes to the summit, with sheer drops to Loch Tuath below. Stretching ahead to the north was a unique landscape of dramatic hills rising abruptly amid a jumble of lochans. For the first time this week we did not have a top to ourselves as we were joined by a lass who seemed quit new to the pleasures of hillwalking in Scotland. She was thrilled with her achievement in climbing Sgurr an Fhìdhleir but had no intention to continue to Ben More Coigach! We could see that the large group of walkers we met earlier were making their way up from the col, so we decided it was a good time to make a move. We dropped down to the col between Sgurr an Fhìdhleir and Beinn nan Caorach (a minor top), ascended the latter and then followed the ridge back down to Culnacraig to complete the circuit.

Nigel was the first to arrive back at the house, having climbed Meall a' Chaorainn, a remote Graham up Strath Vaich. His use of a mountain bike eased a 16 mile approach and return. Janet and David were the last to get back having climbed Conival and Ben More Assynt. Nigel took a turn at making dinner that evening (Mediterranean casserole – very good and very healthy).



The penultimate day of the Meet, arrived. Over the course of the week Nigel, Roger and I had climbed all the Grahams we had hoped to climb in the area. Roger and I still had Beinn a' Chaisgein Beag to do but this is a remote hill situated between Gruinard Bay and the Fisherfield Forest. To walk it would have been a long day and we thought it best being left for when we had mountain bikes. So Roger, Val and Brian went on a boat trip to the

Summer Isles. Not being willing to part with the £35 cost of the boat trip, I decided to climb Ullapool Hill instead. Cost was not the only motivation as I thought of all the times I had stayed in Ullapool but never taken the trouble to climb the hill. Janet, David and Nigel joined me. Even though standing at the modest height of 302 metres (990 feet) the summit gave us lovely views looking down Loch Broom with Beinn Dearg and Sgurr Mor Fannaich the prominent mountains beyond.

After climbing Ullapool Hill, Janet, David and Nigel went into Ullapool to have a look round the shops. Having enjoyed a wee of peace and tranquillity on the hills, I did not feel ready for the bustle of even a small town like Ullapool; so I returned to the house. Shortly afterwards I was joined by Nigel who had only gone to buy some beer. He amused me for a while with some bad jokes and animal impersonations. “Never a dull moment” as they say. Val, Roger and Brian enjoyed their boat trip and visited Corrieshalloch Gorge afterwards.



Saturday dawned and it was time for us to make our various journeys south. Everyone seemed to have enjoyed and benefited from their week's walking. That was except for Ollie, the poor creature having hardly stirred from his blanket.

Many thanks go to Roger for organising the food and to everyone else for taking a turn in preparing a meal. The walking and the company were excellent. It was a week which flew by. Other highlights of the Meet included the accommodation, the high standards of cuisine and Nigel deciding to join Nor' West Sgurramblers!

David Douglas

FORTHCOMING MEETS

MEET No 327: Inveraray

Dates: Saturday 158 – Wednesday 19 September 2018. **NB This is a week later than originally planned.**

Area: Inveraray.

Accommodation: Please contact Meet organiser.

Programme: A large and popular hill walking area offering a wide choice of summits to visit and views to enjoy.

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: Consult the Meet organiser for advice.

Food: Will be provided by the Meet organiser, unless requested otherwise, from an evening meal on the Saturday to breakfast on the Wednesday.

Bookings: **Please contact the Meet organiser as soon as possible. The deadline for bookings has passed but he may still be able to help.**

Meet organiser: David Douglas.

MEET No 328: AGM Meet

Dates: Friday 19 – Sunday 21 October 2018.

Area: Snowdonia.

Accommodation: YHA Snowdon Ranger.

Programme: An opportunity to enjoy the high mountains of North Wales. The AGM will take place on the Saturday evening, followed by a show of photographs taken during the year (if members care to bring them). .

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 Land Ranger 115.

Food: Members will need to arrange their own meal on the Friday evening. Those asking the Meet organiser to reserve rooms should let him know in advance which other hostel meals they require. It is planned to purchase the evening meal at the hostel on the Saturday so that it can be arranged to fit in with the timing of the AGM. Those who prefer self-catering will need to bring and cook their own food.

Bookings: To reserve a place please e-mail the Meet organiser as soon as possible, advising dates and hostel meal requirements. A deposit of £40 should be sent to the Meet organiser by Friday 13 July: he will then advise what further payments will be required and when.

Meet organiser: David Cheesman.

MEMBERSHIP

We welcome two new members – Marco Wright and Nigel Saxton.