

February Meet Report

Saturday 26 February.

Awake 06.15 to leave 30 minutes later. A great sunrise as we leave Morecambe. Up M6 & on the A74 to climb a dark wet Beattock summit. It is much better at Stirling railway station where we collect David Douglas. After passing Callander we park by Loch Lubnaig so as to take a track through super woods that take us into Glen Ample. **How great to be in the Highlands once more.** After 2 kilometres wind and rain arrive as we make a rising traverse across slopes on the East side of Graham Sgiath a' Chaise. I lead us to reach a very windy top at 13.00 hrs. We go down steep rough slopes back into the valley and shelter in a pine forest where there are four legs (off below the knee) of a red deer. We return via the estate road back to the steep track above the river. To the car for 3.00 pm. Rain is heavier as we drive to Killin with the Falls of Dochart in spate, and shop at the Co-op. We find our accommodation of Fern Cottage and I light the log burning stove. Chris gets the Central Heating to work and cooks us a meal of vegetable lasagne. Later he shares a twin-bedded room with David so I am alone – just as well as my FreeStyle Libre system has alarms that go off regularly throughout the night.

Sunday 27 February

We get up to the sun! After breakfast Chris drives us to Loch Earn through mountain grandeur and along its length to Comrie. This is in absolute contrast to the news coming through about the invasion of Ukraine. David sleeps until we reach a car park 5 miles down Glen Artney. Setting off at 10.00 we take a single-track road to a bridge over the water of Ruchill. Here we push over rough ground on the south side of the river to a bridge over the Allt Ollach. We now head towards the nose of Am Beannan which becomes really steep as we climb to its summit at 574 metres BUT the landscape is magnificent with views to snow-capped peaks on all sides. To the NW tower Ben Vorlich, Stuc a' Chroin, and Beinn an Each whilst to the west is Ben Ledi with Loch Venachar showing to its southern slopes. Snow enhances these hills (as it always does) by adding to their scale and size. We now cross snow at a less steep angle to gain Meall Clachach before rising through snow drifts of increasing size to reach the cairn making the summit of a Graham named Uamh Beag. A pause here, before the wind begins to chill us and then Chris leads us off East beside a fence. Our route now involves negotiating an area of peaty ground dissected into upstanding portions between broad cavities clear of grass and filled with snow drifts. The consistency of the snow drifts is very erratic – varying from being hard enough to take our full weight to of such softness that we sink knee deep. With footing of this nature the distance of a little more than 4 kilometres to the adjacent top of Beinn Odhar and on to the Donald of Creag Beinn nan Eun takes a lot more time than predicted by Chris' guide book and involves climbing ten metres or so up to the top of about thirty peat hags as they are called in Derbyshire. **It is a relief to arrive at**

Creag Beinn nan Eun from where Chris leads us down towards the Findhu Glen by heading NNW and then almost due north. David and I walk together for this descent. Evening is approaching and the soft light and solitude is much appreciated. We spot Chris waiting for us at a bridge which facilitates a crossing of the Corriebeagh Burn and then to the church beside the single-track road in Glen Artney, It is only a few strides along the road to regain the car at 16.45 after nearly 7 hours on the move. Chris drives us back to the cottage at Killin. I light a fire before he cooks us a great meal of Mediterranean vegetable quiche – splendid.

Monday 28 February

Low cloud and showers influence the choice of routes for the day. By 10.30 we are parked close to the Eastern End of Glen Tarken and take a broad estate track up into Glen Tarken. When it encounters the main river pouring swiftly out of the glen which needs to be crossed without a bridge Chris and David agree to by re-climb Creag Each whilst I go north 2 kilometres to where it narrows and I am able to jump across. This is just above where a large tributary flows out of a gorge. I make my way up steeply beside the gorge before angling over heather to reach the top of Graham Creag Ruadh at 3.00 pm. Short showers sweep down on the descent Lochan na Creige. The outflow from this tarn I follow down with sightings of many minor waterfalls until the estate road on the east side of the glen appears. This leads me to a quick wading of the river. I go speedily as I have promised to be back by 16.30 and eat every single snack so arrive on time to be 'saved' by David. We visit to the Co-op at Killin and then return to Fern cottage for warmth, washing and eating of pasta sauce with pepper and courgette.

Tue March 1st

The sky clears and we awaken to morning sun shining down on to a hard frost. In fact, it takes a good 10 minutes to clear it from the windscreen of Chris' car. We are away early to drive along the NE side of Loch Tay so as to access Glen Lyon and park at Invervar. By 09.00 we are on the move gaining height on a path beside the Invervar Burn. Once we are clear of tree the plantation on the west side, we cross the burn and begin to climb Carn Gorm using a path on its SE slopes. As we ascend our route is increasingly across fields of frozen snow until this reality becomes a constant. Across Glen Lyon the summits of the Ben Lawers group tower white into the blue sky. Up we go to reach the cairn making the top of Carn Gorm. Here views previously out of sight open up with

Loch Rannoch below us, Schiehallion so distinctive to the NE and a panorama of white peaks stretching northwards into the distance. With snow adding another dimension to the scene, this moment represents Scottish hill walking at its best. We continue to enjoy ourselves as we make our way across numerous high-level undulations to reach Meall Garbh and then a snow-capped plateau two kilometres east which lies on the approach to Carn Maing. Time is pushing on. We decide to make it back into Glen Lyon so make a sustained knee cracking descent down a long broad ridge named on the map as Meall a' Barr. The size and number of snowdrifts diminishes so that they are intermittent to non-existent by the time we drop out the sun that is setting behind Ben Lawers. At last, we regain the broad path used in the morning, which leads us down to Invervar for 5.30 pm. Light fades as Chris drives us back to the cottage in Killin then it is fire and excellent food cooked by Chris – kidney bean Balti.

Wednesday 2 March

Rain is forecast to arrive about noon so we set off early park beside Loch Voil and be on the move by 09.20. Chris leads us briskly on a forest track that rises steadily amid mature pines to a point at about 1,500 feet where we emerge to survey the eastern slopes of The Stob where black crags stand in contrast to drifts of steep hard snow. Chris decides not to continue so David and I push upwards and become more aware of the wind from the SE. We pick a way clear of snow wherever possible to a high col between our objective and its southern outlier named as Stob Caol. The last kilometre is testing on account of the power of the cold wind and the amount of very hard snow. The summit of our Graham is at the north end series of rugged lumps with the cairn standing at 752 metres – just below the racing cloud. To return we reverse our outward route – knowing that it keeps us clear of difficulties. On reaching the forest track make fast and easy progress down to Chris and his car, arriving there 13.20 as heavy rain begins. Back at Fern Cottage we tidy up begin to pack and for our evening meal walk out in the rain to the nearby Capercaillie restaurant.