

UP TO SKYE THEN DOWN TO THE DALES Meet No. 344 (Sunday 9 – Friday 14 October 2022)

As usual, I met Chris Knowles at Stirling railway station for the start of the meet to Skye. Normally, the meet would have been held in September but Chris could not get anywhere booked for that month so the dates were put back to 9 – 14 October. This fitted in nicely with the AGM weekend from 14 – 16 October. Normally, we would have fitted in a walk en route but the forecast for heavy rain and wind negated this option so instead of getting to Stirling for 10am, I met Chris at 1pm. There was no sign of the wind and rain at this time but as we journeyed north and got towards Glencoe, the weather started to deteriorate. As we drove through Glencoe, conditions had become pretty atrocious. But it did clear up and by the time we got up to the Kyle of Lochalsh, we could see over to Skye. This reminded me of the old adage that if you cannot see Skye from the mainland, it is raining and if you can see it, it is going to rain. We journeyed over the bridge, joining Skye to the mainland, and on to the youth hostel at Broadford. It had not changed much since we last stayed there in 2017. However, one thing that has changed over the years is the cost of staying at youth hostels. The cost for Chris booking a twin room for us was £60 a night which seems very much the going rate these days. It was preferable than sharing a dormitory which would have probably not worked out much cheaper.



Anyway, enough about money! We were there to enjoy ourselves and sample some of the fantastic walking that the island offered, if the weather allowed it! Ben Aslak was a hill I was keen to climb and despite an unratified survey measuring it at 609 metres (which would mean it is not high enough to be a Graham) this minor detail did not deter me. It was an opportunity to climb a hill which was situated in the quiet and less frequented part of the island between Broadford and Kylerhea. Chris had climbed Ben Aslak before but was happy to do so again as we could have a late start and give the unsettled weather time to improve as the day wore on. We parked at the Bealach Udal, the high point on the Kylerhea road, which gave the advantage of starting at 279 metres. A squally shower greeted us when we arrived so we sat in the car and had some lunch while it passed over. We left the car and headed up to a minor top Beinn Bheag at 468 metres. We then made a steep descent to a dip before climbing up to a lochan which had previously been hidden from view. The route ahead comprised of small crags which we wound our way between to pick up an obvious grassy rake on the final section to reach the summit. We had excellent views looking over to Kintail and Knoydart though the tops of the high mountains were covered in cloud. Nothing was to be seen of the Cuillin which was well submerged in cloud as the weather was coming in from the west. After sampling all

the views had to offer, we descended the way we had come, encountering a shower which annoyingly arrived shortly before we got back to the car.



The mountain weather forecast for Tuesday was poor. This was confirmed when we looked out of the kitchen window of the hostel and could not see anything of Beinn na Caillich. If we had been looking out of the window for the first time, we would not have believed that there was a 2,400 foot hill just over a mile away! Definitely a day for a low-level walk and Chris had checked out a walk from the Walk Highlands website which we could do from the hostel. It was called the 'Broadford Marble Line' – an easy-going eight mile walk which traced the line of the railway line for the marble quarries at Kilchrist. The quarries ran from the early 18th century until the last quarry closed in 1912. One of the features of the walk was good views of Blaven and the surrounding hills but any views were totally absent on this day. As Chris commented, we would not have been doing this walk if it had been a good day for views.

As Wednesday looked like it was going to be the best day of the week, Chris was keen to climb Beinn Dearg Mhor, a Graham which forms part of the Red Cuillin. I had enjoyed climbing this hill two years ago so was more than happy to repeat it. However, it was not an encouraging start to the day so we waited for the weather to improve and set off from the car park at Sligachan shortly before midday. Being a popular spot with tourists, there was no shortage of footpaths. When I had climbed the hill previously, I failed to pick up the path leading off from the Glen Sligachan path. Having learnt from my mistake, we picked up the correct path up the side of the impressive Allt Daraich gorge. Soon we were on open hillside, away from good paths and bustle of tourists, where we encountered some incredibly boggy ground which was made all the worse with all the rain there had been of late. Chris lost his footing and took a stumble. I did likewise a minute later though mine was the worst with the bog going up my leg and over my gaiter. The going improved as we started to gain height to the foot of the ridge which is named Druim na Ruaige.



The poor walking lower down was more than compensated by an exhilarating walk along the well-defined ridge to the top of Beinn Dearg Mheadhonach (which means Middle Red Mountain). From there we descended to the Bealach Mosgaraidh before making the final climb to the summit of Beinn Dearg Mhor (meaning Big Red Mountain). One of the advantages of the Red Cuillin is the views they give of the Black Cuillin. We had benefited from the late start, with breaks in the cloud and sunny intervals. The views over to Sgurr nan Gillean and Blaven were particularly impressive with the cloud flirting with the summits. While we stopped for lunch at the top, we discussed the best way off the hill. Previously, I had continued down the ridge, descending steep scree slopes to Coire na Sgairde and then returning to Sligachan. However, the weather had been a lot drier then. We agreed that conditions from Coire na Sgairde would probably be boggier than those we had on the way up so decided to go back the way we had come. As we ascended from the Bealach Mosgaraidh, we met a young couple going the other way and stopped for a chat. The young bloke, who had a local accent, said that after Beinn Dearg Mhor, they were considering going on to Glamaig. This was not a hill Chris and I had good memories of, remembering the steep and stony ascent that we had accompanying Roger Reeves on his last Corbett. But they looked quite competent walkers and, judging by the appearance of their trousers and gaiters, had negotiated the boggy ground better than us. We wished them good luck and proceeded the climb up to Beinn Dearg Mheadhonach and then down the ridge. After our initial folly, the bog was carefully circumvented and we were soon following the welcomed path back to Sligachan.



One of the “must see” places on Skye is the Quiraing, on the north of the island. Even though I had visited it on three previous occasions, it is a place I could never tire of. I remembered my first visit on the October 1983 meet with Keith Pennyfather (the club’s founder member), Paul Davies and Paul Flynn. I think it had been a bad weather alternative for a wet and misty day. This had a familiar ring about it for Chris and I 39 years on with heavy rain forecasted for Thursday. However, there was a small window of dry weather predicted, as the morning progressed, which would allow us to fit in a walk to the Quiraing. It would also be Chris’s first visit. It took about an hour to drive the 45 miles from Broadford to the large car park at the summit of the minor road between Staffin and Uig. A parking charge of £3 gave us three hours to fit in the walk. It was all in total contrast to when I first visited, when we found a small area in which to park at the side of the road. Thankfully, the landscape remains the same although, no doubt, the path Chris and I followed had become worn over the years with some rough and rocky sections and one minor scramble, which would deter some tourists. Soon we were up among the stunning rock formations which had been formed by a great series of landslips. It is possible to continue through the towers and pinnacles and do a complete hill circuit by returning above the escarpment. However, with the forecast in mind, we decided that could be left for another day and returned to the car park the way we had come. On the way back to Broadford, we stopped off at the Sligachan hotel for a coffee. By this time the rain had truly arrived, requiring a quick dash from the car to the hotel to avoid getting a soaking.



Friday arrived and it was time for us to depart from Skye. We were not sorry to leave for it was raining! One meet ends and another one begins as I had the AGM weekend at Ingleton to look forward to. On Chris’s way back home to Morecambe, he kindly took a detour and dropped me off at the youth hostel. Many thanks to Chris for organising the Skye meet and for carefully tailoring the walks to suit the fickle weather.

David Douglas