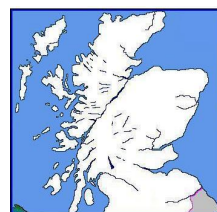


Nor' West News



The NeWSletter of the Nor' West Sgurramblers

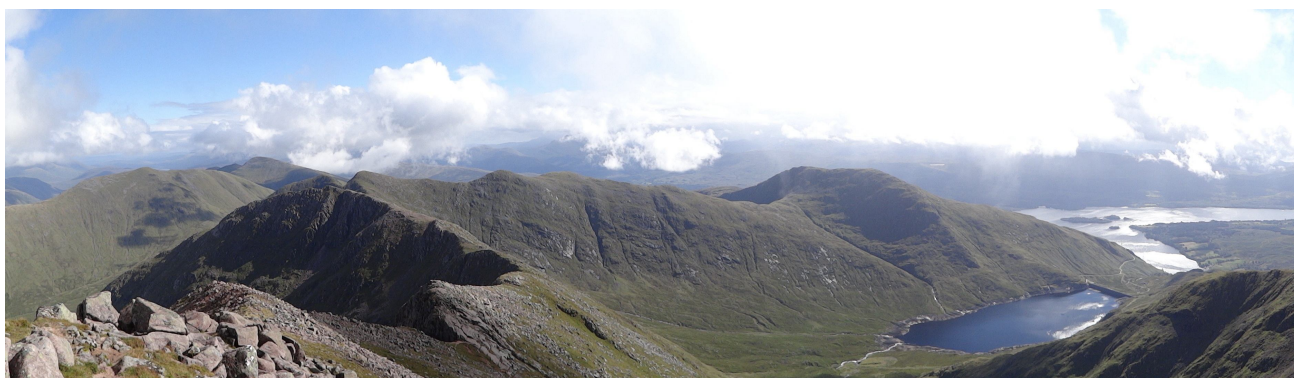
Issue No. 157 – January 2014



MEET REPORTS

A SCOTTISH AUTUMN: Meet No. 293 (Friday 7 – Tuesday 10 September 2013)

When I reached Glencoe youth hostel on the Friday evening I discovered that Chris Knowles, Ian Caudy (a new member), Paul Cassell and Rich Wherlock had arrived before me. Rich had already spent a few days climbing in the area in generally good weather, gaining some splendid



views of many of the big hills in the area – including Stob Diamh from Ben Cruachan. Later that evening David Douglas joined us, having used public transport to get there from Edinburgh.

The forecast for the weekend was grim and the Saturday morning certainly lived up to it. Rain hammered down and, with a miserable prospect, there was some disinclination to get going. But Ian and Rich were not to be deterred and headed off for Sron na Creise, whilst Paul drove some



way southeast, where the weather looked less miserable, to tackle Beinn Sgulaire. Chris and David delayed further - muttering about waiting till they were kicked out when the hostel closed - before setting off to climb Beinn na Guacaig from near Inchree. Meanwhile I headed along the A82, just east of the Meeting of Three Waters, and in the grey dampness started to climb the north-western ridge of Buachaille Etive Beag. As I gained height the weather began to dry and, with excellent timing, just as I arrived at the summit of Stob Coire Raineach the clouds rose to afford smart views towards the Aonach Eagach.

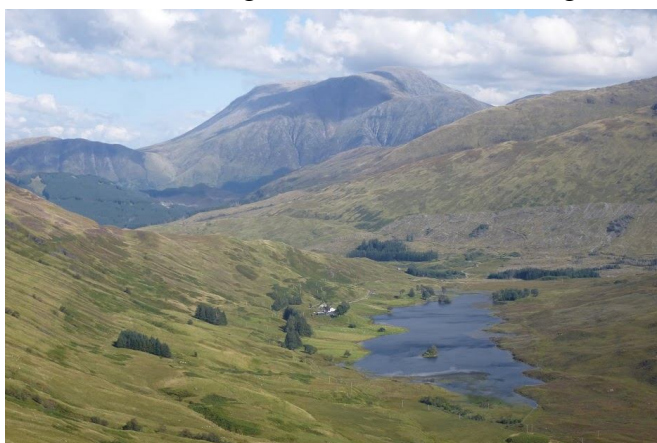
I then had a pleasant wander along to the southern peak of Stob Dubh, by which time the



cloud was much higher giving distant views in all directions. There were blue skies to the north, though my eyes kept being drawn to Glen Etive where I hadn't been before but hoped to visit later during this trip. Retracing my steps along the ridge I could chart the progress of an incoming rainstorm from some distance away. Just as I got back to the bealach I took the rare step of putting on full waterproofs before any rain had landed and beat the downpour by 30 seconds. The rain was intense though fairly brief and left an enjoyable descent which included looking down on rainbows in Glencoe, as other spells of moisture swept in. As I

was down reasonably early, I drove along the coast towards Port Appin and was rewarded with marvellous views and, as on the hill, had some solitude to replenish the soul. There's something extra special in being able to combine time on mountains with time by the sea. From grim beginnings to a very nice day out.

Catching up with the others at the hostel I learnt that Chris and David had followed a sheltered route largely through woodland onto the slopes leading to the top of Beinn na Guacaig. The going had been poor at times but they had been rewarded with good weather and striking views of Ben Nevis. Paul had had a tiring day on the hills but had enjoyed fair weather. Ian and Rich had had a decent walk, covering two of the 3000+ ft peaks above the ski centre, with good views in the improving weather - though they bemoaned the dismal area of unused ski lifts and accompanying paraphernalia. There is something bleak and uninviting about ski areas when the snow is not about.



With Paul's departure on the Sunday morning we were down to five ('the not very famous five') and we all went for a wander in the Mamores. Starting at Kinlochleven (the intended route from Mamore Lodge not being available), it was found that, as so often is the case, the hardest navigation of the day was over the first 800 yards. Having eventually determined the right way we passed through woodland onto open moor with the tops and ridges shrouded in cloud. At least it was dry. Our intrepid party followed the well-worn path to Coire an Lochan and then up the somewhat less distinct route on the southern flank of Sgurr Eilde Mor, through fairly steep, intermittent boulder fields. Just like the day before,



as we got to the summit the clouds lifted and, whilst we had a bite to eat, they danced up and down revealing views and then hiding them again.

Setting off westwards there was a brief narrow section where I couldn't resist having a go at the edge. David bounded like a mountain goat down the worn, loose, steepish track, followed by the others teetering down it more gingerly – a contrast almost akin to the Bigg Market on a Friday night between lasses in heels unsteady on their feet, whilst the one with sensible shoes strides confidently on. Getting to the bottom of

the slopes, there was a conflagration after which Ian, Rich and I decided to deviate from the original route and head for the main ridge. But David and Chris chose to descend for a period before climbing Binnein Beag, - thereby having a day out on two distinctly separate outliers. Ian, Rich and I made our way across the grassy bowl on the south east of Binnein Mor and then had an enjoyable wander of about one kilometre (just over half a mile in real money) to reach that peak. The clouds had lifted off all but the highest peaks, providing extensive views all about us - the only problem being the head scratching as naming the odd peak required a bit of brain power. Binnein Mor was a smart place to spend a while and for me to explore a bit of the narrowing ridge extending a little to the north where getting a sense of exposure was an option (a bonus option to my day). I could also see and follow the progress of "Mallory" and "Irvine" on Binnein Beag. In due course we reached the



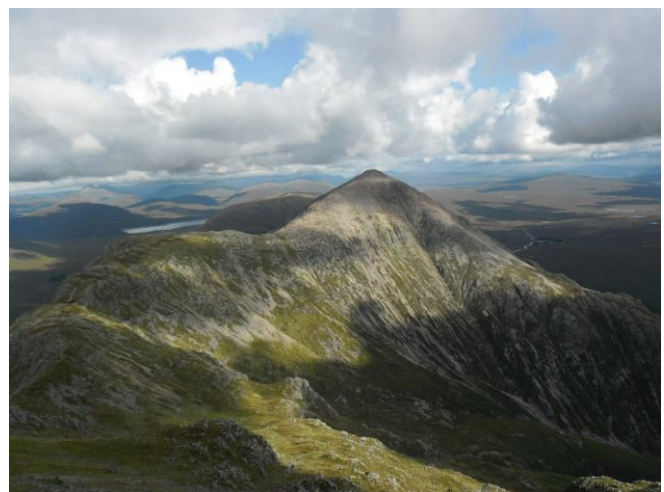
summit of Na Gruagaichean, pleased with having taken the option to go onto the main ridge. Having got there, it was tempting to stay on it for further peaks: but it was felt that doing so would make for a later than desired finish to the day.

Having eyed up possible descent routes during the day, we opted for heading down the south ridge on a bit of a path and then forged our way down the southwest shoulder over some rough ground. This took a bit longer than anticipated but gave us the healthy moral glow of being explorers. Much moorland led to a finish in the woods and the presence of midges as we got

to the car. It was a very enjoyable outing and new places for me.

On the Monday Dave, Ian and Rich were bound for Bidean nam Bian. I could see the appeal and I had enjoyed a couple of previous outings on this Munro. Chris headed for the hills above Loch Leven. For me though it would be Buachaille Etive Mor which - strangely - I had not been on before during my many visits to and through Glencoe. So this was the one to give a personal sense of completion of the hills around the valley. I took the route up through the north corrie on a warm day with high cloud, turning to blue skies and was quite impressed to note that from car to the summit of Stob Dearg took just over one and a half hours. Mind, it is a bit of a direct route. I lingered awhile up there, including looking for Crowberry Tower as Curved Ridge had always held appeal for me. Then I wandered happily along the broad ridge to the main peak, enjoying the all round views. I had passed and been passed a couple of times by a German lass I'd recognised from the hostel and we'd exchanged pleasantries. On the top we got chatting and ended up spending the rest of the day walking together.

All along the ridge I'd noticed a heavy rainstorm approaching from the north. But, as sunshine could be seen beyond, it was clearly going to be a short intense burst. Just as we reached the southern peak it got noticeably colder, the rain hit and it was a case of just hunkering down until it passed and then enjoying the stunning views - again with the eye drawn to Glen Etive. I overheard some blokes at the cairn talking during the rain and they confirmed what I thought I had heard them say. In the space of 15 minutes they had recorded the temperature dropping from 18C to 8C. Retracing our steps along the ridge to just beyond Stob Coire Altruim we took the path north and it looked as though it would be quite



a slog in reverse. As we got low down the rain moved in and accompanied us for the rest of the walk out. But it had been another good day of 360° views from tops and a ridge.

On the Tuesday the others set off homeward bound but I stayed behind to make my first foray into Glen Etive. Initially, on a lovely day, I spent some time by the side of the loch, admiring



the view of Ben Starav. In due course I headed up Ben Starav by the unrelenting north ridge and as I did the cloud built up and enclosed the top 300 feet. I arrived with visibility down to less than 50 yards, which was a shame as my impression was that there must be stunning views from up there. But I gave a rare outing to the compass and an interesting ridge ensued, to Stob Coire Dearg and then Glas Beinn Mhor. This was followed by one of those long walk outs, including much boggy ground, which reminded me of the end to many a day in the Highlands. From the views below the cloud base I could see there were clear skies to the

east and south which would have rewarded those who had taken in peaks on their journeys home.

I stayed another couple of days in the area, making my first visit to Ardnamurchan (in low cloud), exploring the coastal fringes and camping near the headland. I also popped over to Mull for a couple of hours by which time the weather had turned filthy. I made the drive back in heavy rain but pleased with an enjoyable and varied week which had included many good days for me. Mountains and sea do make a good combination.

Stephen Bass

WET AND WINDY IN WALES

Meet No. 294 (Friday 18 – Sunday 20 October 2013)

Booking a weekend in October for a mountain walk in North Wales is always a bit of a lottery - due to the weather - and this year was no exception! The 2013 Norwest Sgurramblers AGM was held at Kings Youth Hostel near Dolgellau. It is in an excellent location as it is possible to go north to the Rhiniog mountains, west for a good choice of hills around Bala or south to Cadair Idris. Such a variety of options provide a chance to escape the vagaries of the weather. The weather forecast for the weekend was not particularly inspiring – “wet and windy”.

Elwyn Williams

Kings hostel was somewhere I had never stayed before and the map made it look quite remotely located. I picked up Brian Billington at Chester railway station on the Friday and we had a pleasant drive past Dolgellau and onto the coast road. But the last couple of miles up a track from that road to the hostel were a stark contrast. The track was alarmingly narrow! Luckily, we didn't meet anyone coming in the opposite direction. When we arrived at the hostel we found Paul Cassell, Chris Horne and Roger Reeves settled in the



common room. David and Kerina Cheesman arrived later than expected having been delayed somewhat by an accident in Dolgellau. Three members who would be attending the AGM - David Douglas, Colin Bradley and Elwyn Williams - would not arrive until the following morning

Next morning, David, Elwyn and Colin arrived as planned and we were pleased to find that they had an MWIS forecast with them - although not so pleased to find that rain was predicted later in the day. As is not uncommon, we could not come to an agreement as to a walk for all of us to do. Brian, Roger, David Cheesman and I plumped for Cadair Idris, partly because it meant we wouldn't have to drive anywhere and could walk from the hostel. David Douglas, Elwyn and Colin decided on an ascent of Arenig Fawr. Kerina and Paul went off separately to "play tourist" for the day, visiting local attractions.

I had climbed Cadair Idris on three previous occasions, although this side of the mountain was new to me. After some discussion Brian, Roger and I decided that we would tackle the hill via the Pony Track with a possibility of descending via the Fox's Path. I had checked on the Internet before we came away and had read that the Fox's Path was best avoided because for the most part it was very loose and unstable - although you can't believe everything you read on the net. The weather looked promising for the moment as we followed the river bank. And, when we reached more open ground, we could see most of the high ground around Cadair Idris but the summit was in mist. After crossing a minor road, we started on the Pony Path proper. This headed in a vaguely southerly direction, coming out to the west of Cadair Idris at the start of a 5k wide rampart of crags running west to east in which about the only break is the Fox's Path.

The weather was unseasonably mild, feeling more like summer than late autumn. And the warmth was reinforced by the fact that we were sheltered from the southerly winds by the steep ground in front of us. The path meandered up in well graded zig-zags, quite suitable for the ponies that would have toiled up it in years gone by (carrying those too idle and too rich to walk). Meanwhile we had to make do with "Shanks' pony". At about 600m we reached the col between the Cadair Idris massif and Tyrrau Mawr to the west. At the same time we were hit by the wind we had been sheltered from that far. So it was time for another layer of clothing. The path skirted round Cyfrwy which stood between us and Cadair Idris and here the mountain, which up until then we had had to ourselves, became very busy. We were overtaken by several faster moving parties. As we



gained height the cloud, which had until then been clamped firmly over the summit, began to lift. And as the trig point came into view the summit became cloud free. Just below the highest point we reached the shelter in which we had planned to eat our lunch. Unfortunately the people who had beaten us to the top had had the same idea: so we had to make do with sitting on the wall outside, where we discussed our descent plans. The consensus of opinion was that we would take the Fox's Path. We were swayed to do so by talking to a park warden who was standing just outside the shelter. He told us that this path was not too bad apart from a short section at the end which was rather steep and loose.

At the top the Fox's Path was very well constructed and not nearly as bad as I had expected from what I had read. So we made good progress as we started steadily down the path towards Lyn y Gadair. But we realized more fully that the park warden was correct when we reached the last section of the path. Not only did this increase in gradient but it was also very loose. By this stage we had become spread out and it was necessary to go very slowly and carefully to avoid knocking rocks down onto those below. We re-grouped by Lyn y Gadair and decided it was time to put on overtrousers as the occasional spit of rain experienced earlier in the day had changed to a steady downpour with unusually large drops of rain. But we were grateful that we had lost the wind which would have made it far worse.



Our route involved crossing a couple of streams which were quite swollen by the recent heavy rain, and I wobbled about on almost completely submerged rocks wishing that I had brought my trekking poles as they would have made life easier. But my new Goretex-lined boots allowed me to cross dry shod. By the time we reached the road the rain had stopped and we were pleased to discover that the Gwernan Lake hotel was open for drinks. So we all partook of a pint (or more in some cases) of Butty Bach - which apparently means "little friend" in local dialect. Leaving the hotel we had to walk about a mile along a narrow road to reach a track which took us back to the hostel in about another mile. In the event it took longer than expected as our navigation went somewhat awry. After passing a farm we got onto a path which was not marked on the map and realised something was not quite right when we saw that the river was flowing in the opposite direction to what it should have been. After a bit of head scratching and the use of Roger's GPS we found that we were on the path that we'd gone up on earlier in the day. From there it was a few minutes back to the hostel where after de-booting we found that everyone else had returned and we were able to listen to their accounts of their travels.

Chris Knowles

Arenig Fawr (big high ground) is a favourite of mine as it is very accessible and a good height - 854 metres. Its relatively solitary position means that in good weather the views are superb including every major mountain summit in the Snowdonia National Park - the Rhinogydd to the west, Snowdon to the northwest, the Clwydian Hills in the northeast, east to the Berwyns, south east to the Arans, and southward to Cadair Idris. Overall it is one of the finest panoramas in Wales.



very long to reach the summit cone, the OS trig point and a wind shelter.

Colin, David and I started from the minor road up a grassy track heading south west. And it was not raining! As the track turned southeast it levelled off with the waters of Llyn Arenig Fawr soon coming into view. By the lake we came to a bothy and turned right through a gate at the rear of this building to cross the dam. Then we climbed steadily along a rising path on the crest of ridge with the reservoir on our right. It did not seem to take

At the summit - known as Moel yr Eglwys (bare hill of the church) - is a memorial to eight American aircrew who died when their Flying Fortress bomber B-17F #42-3124 crashed nearby on 4th August 1943 while on a night time, cross-country training flight. They were from Illinois, Kentucky, Ohio, California, New York, Michigan, Idaho and Pennsylvania and were all killed. Some of the wreckage was still scattered across the hillside 300m from the memorial location. If the plane had been 10 metres higher it would have missed the summit! A group of caring people erected the memorial shortly after the end of WWII to pay tribute to this unlucky crew.



Every year a group of Bala citizens climb the mountain and place a floral wreath at the monument.

The views from the top were quite good and while we were having our lunch nearby the sun came out briefly. We discussed the idea of continuing our walk but, as the forecast was for rain early in the afternoon, it was decided to descend by the side of the old quarry. Arenig Fawr has a number of clearly defined ridges and it is important to get the right one off the mountain! About a kilometre from the end of our descent it started raining. So we were happy to get back to the car and return to the hostel for a hot cup of tea and biscuits.

Elwyn Williams

Tea and biscuits were followed by the AGM where we discussed our plans for the following year. The evening meal of curry was provided by the hostel. Sunday morning dawned grey and wet, which was a good enough reason for most of us to head back home without a walk. Roger was staying on in Wales for a few days, based in Llanberis, in order to tackle some more hills. And David was planning an ascent of Cadair Idris by the same route as that which we had taken the previous day.

Thanks are due to David and Kerina for organizing the meet.

Chris Knowles

FORTHCOMING MEETS

The programme of planned meets for 2014 was included in the Minutes of this year's AGM. Full details of the first three meets are given below.

MEET No 296: Southern Highlands

Dates: Friday 28 February - Monday 3 March 2014.

Area: Pitlochry

Accommodation: Pitlochry youth hostel.

Programme: An opportunity to ascend some of the many Munros, Corbetts and Marilyn's in the area when they are snow-capped.

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

Maps: OS 1:50,000 Nos 42, 43 & 56.

Equipment: **Crampons and ice axe are essential.**

Bookings: To reserve a place, contact the Meet organiser who will advise what deposit is required. He will try to reserve accommodation for bookings received by **15 January**.

Meet Organiser: Mike Ridley.

MEET No 297: Inveraray

Dates: Thursday 17– Tuesday 22 April 2014.

Area: Argyll & Loch Awe to Crianlarich.

Accommodation: The former SYHA hostel (now privately run) in Inveraray.

Programme: This area contains some very fine Munros, Corbetts and Grahams. In snow some of these mountains can be challenging but there are other straightforward options as well - something to satisfy every interest and aspiration.

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

Maps: OS 1:50,000 Nos 50, 56 & 63 (to cover the Grahams).

Equipment: It will be advisable to bring crampons and an ice axe if there is not an early thaw.

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

Bookings: **To reserve a place, contact the Meet organiser and send him a deposit of £100 (cheques payable to him in person).** He will attempt to obtain places in respect of all requests received up to 31 January. The balance of costs will be payable on the Meet.

Meet Organiser: David Douglas.

MEET No 298: Southern Highlands

Dates: Saturday 17 – Saturday 24 May 2014.

Area: The Southern Highlands.

Accommodation: Kinchellie Croft near Roybridge.

Programme: Climb some of the great variety of Munros, Corbetts and Marilyn's in the area.

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

Maps: OS 1:50,000 Nos 50, 51, 56 & 57.

Food: To be provided by the Meet organiser, unless requested otherwise, from an evening meal on the first Saturday to breakfast on the last Saturday inclusive.

Bookings: **Accommodation is limited and cannot be guaranteed unless booked very early**
If you wish to book, contact the Meet organiser as soon as possible..

300th MEET

The 300th Meet is due to take place in Glencoe from Friday 5th to Monday 9 September 2014. All members are asked to help celebrate this notable point in the club's history by attending the meet or by attending a celebratory meal - at a hostelry yet to be selected – on the Saturday evening.

The meet organiser – David Douglas – asks every member to contact him as soon as possible to let him know either that they hope to attend the meet and/or the meal or that they will not be able to join in either..

MEMBERSHIP

We welcome one new member –Ian Caudy.

A revised membership list containing the latest detailed information will be circulated separately.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions for 2014 - **£15** per person - are now due.

Season's Greetings

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