



Junior Mountaineering Club of Scotland Edinburgh Section

Edinburgh JMCS Newsletter / Spring 2004

Summer mid-week meets 2004

Please note the wet weather alternative will be Ratho this Summer which will doubtless be more pleasant in warmer weather, as well as providing a bit more in the way of an outing with après climbing facilities ! Who knows they may even open up the natural rock routes that are contained within the complex. In the unlikely event of any of the outdoor routes being reopened check the website for amendments to this programme!

Guide Books

For all meets except Dunkeld, Kyloe and Bowden Doors the relevant guidebook is Lowland Outcrops.

For Dunkeld, you need Highland Outcrops, and for the Northumbrian venues, The Northumberland Climbing Guide.

Please feel free to contact Patrick Winter, by phone 0131 440 3183 or email patrick.climber@virgin.net for any information regarding these venues e.g. usual pub venue following the meet.

Thanks are due to Tom and Beryl Leatherland for providing tide-tables.

5 May	Traprain
12 May	Auchinstarry
19 May	Traprain
26 May	Rosyth
2 June	Hawkcraig Low Tide 20.49
9 June	Fastcastle Sea Cliffs
16 June	Kyloe - Northumberland
23 June	Traprain
30 June	Dunkeld
7 July	Bowden Doors -Northumberland
14 July	Hawkcraig Low Tide 19.31
21 July	Traprain
28 July	Hawkcraig Low Tide 18.35
4 August	Auchinstarry
11 August	Hawkcraig 18.20
18 August	Traprain
25 August	Rosyth
1 September	Traprain
8 September	Salisbury Crags followed by meal (Pizza Express)

Summer weekend meets 2004

When	Where	Contact	Notes / Further Info
Fri 28 th May- Mon 31 st May	Ardgour Camping	Stewart Bauchop 01383 861154	Campsite at Strontian or wild camping Coire Iubhair Never climbed on Garbh Bheinn? Now's your chance!
Fri 18 th June- Sun 20 th June	Skye – Coruisk Memorial Hut	Euan Scott or Patrick Winter 0131 440 3183	9 Places Book now, deposit required. Not a bank holiday. People must take the Friday and Monday off. Plan is to sail from Elgol. £5ppn + boat fee. The jewel in the crown of the summer meets! Get fit now for a traverse of the Cuillin!
Fri 9 th - Sun 11th July	Achnahaird Camp Site	Sue Barrie PMC (JMCS Perth) Secretary 01561 340673	Whole Club JMCS Meet – Organised by the Perth Section. Nice camp site with amazing views of Suilven, Stac Pollaidh & Cul Mor
Fri 23rd July – Sun 25 th July	Glencoe Lagangarbh Hut	John Fowler 0131 226 4055	6 Places – £5ppn See you on Agags Groove!

When	Where	Contact	Notes / Further Info
Fri 13 th Aug- Sun 15 th Aug	East Cairngorms Camping at Creag an dubh-loch / Ballater	Patrick Winter 0131 440 3183	Camping at Dubh Loch. Wet weather alternative is Ballater Regarded by many as Scotland's premier mountain Crag! Lets hope for good weather!
Fri 17 th Sept – Mon 20 th Sept	Peak District R O Downes Hut	Patrick Winter 0131 440 3183	8 Places – £7ppn Froggat and other craggs very near by!
Fri 1 st Oct – Sun 3 rd Oct	Lakes Salving House Borrowdale	Patrick Winter 0131-440-3183	2 Female Places & 4 Male Places (Provisional) – £5ppn Don't miss out on possibly the last climbing opportunity of the season!

Tiso's Spring Club Discount evening – Thursday 4th May 18:30 to 20:30

Tiso's Edinburgh, Rose Street – 15% discount off all products, 10% off books, maps, canoes, & GPS systems. Special "club night bargains".

AGM & Annual Dinner 15 November 2003

Held for the second year running at the Atholl Arms Hotel Blair Atholl, we were fortunate to have Paul Brian as our guest speaker. Other guests who joined us for the Dinner were Graeme Nicholl, representing Perth JMCS and Mark Brian from Lochaber JMCS, Paul's son.

With kilts in evidence and some very attractive gowns worn by the lovely ladies of the club, we assembled in the traditional Highland dining room, which sports multitudinous stag's heads and a minstrel's gallery. The excellent turnout created a splendid atmosphere of bonhomie as we noshed and gurgled our way through three fine courses.

But all good things must come to an end, the vigorous tapping of a wineglass brought the President to her feet to give a brief resume of the activities that the bold and derring-do members of the Edinburgh JMCS had indulged in over the last year, in various parts of the world.

After thanking those in the club who had given of their time and energy during the past year, the President then introduced Paul Brian. A most interesting and amusing after dinner speech then followed, Paul regaling us with many anecdotes of his considerable climbing career including his involvement with the Lochaber Mountain Rescue in the TV show Rock Face. There was much laughter and warm applause at the end of his contribution to the evening.

The fifty strong group then adjourned to the bar meeting again at breakfast, a fine day for walking or cycling in the Perthshire hills.

See you all again this year!

(Helen Forde)

Winter Season Meets Reports 2003/2004

Inbhirfhaolain, Glen Etive – 20/21st December 2003

Members Present: Susan Jensen, Patrick Winter, Ruth McArthur, Brian Finlayson

This meet was a pleasant pre-Christmas 'get away from it all affair' based in a cosy hut half way down Glen Etive.

As is fairly usual for this time of year now, no good climbing conditions prevailed so hill walking was the order of the day.

On Saturday - a wintry day - Susan and Patrick ascended Ben Starav, passing to our surprise an encampment of Iranians on the ridge! Meanwhile Ruth and Brian made an ascent of Beinn Chaorain, a fine rugged hill in the vicinity.

Back at the hut a log fire was enjoyed and a sumptuous meal.

Next day, the weather turned on us and a planned ascent of the Pap of Glencoe was abandoned, in favour of coffee at Calendar. By this time however the weather had improved so we all decided that an ascent of Ben An would round the weekend off nicely – and it did!

Muir of Inverey, Eastern Cairngorms – 10/11th January 2004

Members Present: Susan Jensen, Neil Cuthbert, Patrick Winter

A poor to indifferent weather forecast and perhaps some residual New Year hangovers may account for the low turn out for this meet. Not to worry all of us had a room to ourselves in this large spacious hut.

Climbing conditions were poor, but Neil and Susan managed an ascent of Crumbling Cranny (II), and interesting finish to the left branch of the Black Spout.

Patrick made an exploratory visit to Creag An Dubh Loch, followed by an ascent of Broad Cairn.

We woke next day to inclement weather and hill-walking plans did not materialise.

Burns Night @ Jock Spot's – 31st January 2004

Was this to be the last supper? Would there be an occasion again in the wee mountaineering hut when drink would be taken and the verses of the immortal Bard intoned?

As there is no answer to this at present, a small group, owing to limited bed spaces descended on Jocks armed with copies of Burn's poems, whisky, haggis and neeps.

When we finally sat down to eat those amongst us who had been on the hill were conspicuous by our ruddy cheeks but by the time the toasts were drunk it was difficult to tell.

We ate well, Helen Forde and Brian Donaldson danced a version of the Gay Gordon's and everybody recited from Tam O' Shanter. The candlelight played on people's faces the ballads were sung and the amber nectar was shared.

It was a good night celebrating Rabbin Burns with the JMCS.

(Helen Forde)

Ling Hut, Torridon – 30/31st January 2004

Members Present: Neil Cuthbert, Susan Jensen, Simon Fox, Stewart Bauchop, Patrick Winter, Francis Winter, Bryan Rynne, Ruth McArthur, Dave Amos, Sally Dipple

High pressure throughout the week and a promising forecast for the weekend plus the lure of the North Western Highlands resulted in a good turn out for this meet.

Excitement mounted on Friday night as clear skies and moonlight illuminated the much-celebrated Torridon peaks in their winter mantle. The path to the Ling Hut had to be taken with care; it was icy in many places.

Next day Susan and Neil ventured to the Horns of Alligin intent on climbing a gully called Diamond Fire. Sadly the route had too much avalanche prone snow and not enough ice.

Meanwhile a drama was developing on neighbouring Liathach as Simon and Stewart followed a party of three up George (III). Stewart's account of this episode is printed elsewhere in this newsletter.

Bryan and Ruth opted for a winter ascent of one of the finest Corbetts in the North Western Highlands, Ben Dearg that misses Munro status by just a whisper. In deep powder the steep sided ridge of this mountain can only be gained by a determined and tenacious party, Bryan and Ruth managed it but did not have enough time to make the summit.

An exhilarating day out nonetheless, as the heights of Ben Dearg are an excellent vantage point to view the dramatic landscape of Torridon and the distinctive but less visited hills to the north.

Francis and Patrick meanwhile were off to Applecross for some unfinished business, namely an ascent of the A'Chioch Ridge of Beinn Bhan (II).

Blessed with good visibility, little wind and frozen turf this was an excellent day out. There was just time to visit the summit of Beinn Bhan. To the west a fiery sun was throwing out great shafts of light just above the snow covered peaks of the Cuillin – a wondrous sight.

Also in Applecross, Sally and Dave part of our group but resident at the Kinlochewe Arms Hotel climbed the intriguingly named The Six-track Mono Blues II, a gully accessed from the Bealach na Ba and reported reasonable conditions.

Next day the weather turned nasty but undeterred Neil and Susan walked into Coire Mhic Fhearchair and were rewarded by quite a spectacle, the waterfall from the coire was frozen and resembled 'great Roman columns'. Everyone else headed for home.

Altogether an eventful and much enjoyed meet!

Blackrock Cottage, Glencoe – 21/22nd February 2004

Members Present: Dave Amos, Paula Muir, John Fowler, Helen Forde, Stewart Bauchop, Simon Fox, Patrick Winter, Francis Winter, Eddie Gillespie, Thomas Beutenmuller

A settled high pressure system and steady winds blowing in from the North meant hard frozen if thin conditions in the high gullies. Friday night saw the regulars congregating at the Kingshouse before retiring early in anticipation of good conditions.

Saturday

John and Helen headed up into Stob Coire Nan Lochain and round the top via NC gully. Very thin conditions reported. Patrick and Francis, Dave and Paula all opted for Aonach Mor where many of the gullies were in fine condition. Pat and Fran did Right Twin whilst Dave and Paula opted for Tunnel vision and then Left Twin with Paula enjoying her first lead on ice.

Stewart and Simon made an early start for the Ben and climbed Tower scoop under thin conditions. A broken pick forced an escape up Gardyloo gully which was interesting with an unusual through route and a narrow ice chimney near the top.

Meanwhile Eddie and Thomas were at work in Coire na Ciste next door, Thomas reports:

"intended to climb 'Glover's Chimney'. As there were at least two parties queuing we had a look at 'No.2 Gully buttress', which looked a bit thin. Eventually we ended up on the route 'Hesperides Ledge' (III). This route starts to the right from where Comb Gully narrows. The first belay was not very good and there were dozens of people above us in Comb Gully, peppering us with bits of ice. The first pitch had a rather exposed crux step over some mixed ground on it. The following three pitches took us to the summit of the Comb and we ended up at the top of Green Gully! "

Sunday

Sunday dawned cold and clear so Stewart and Simon slept in and had a leisurely breakfast at about lunchtime. John and Helen set off to have a look at an icefall on Creise.

Dave, Paula and Pat, Thomas and Eddie all made an early start, returning to Aonach Mor. Thomas writes:

"went up Aonach Mor. We took both the gondola and the chairlift, which was a treat after our 11 hour outing the day before. We were on top of Easy Gully in about half an hour, formed an orderly queue and then down climbed to the bottom of the buttress. As 'Jet Stream' looked thin we joined another queue, this time for 'Icicle Gully' (III). The route was quite steep for Grade III, but Eddie took me up it safely. A bit more snow would not harm that line. The cornice was a vertical wall of neve, about 10 metres high! After this final

obstacle was overcome we had to rush a bit to catch the last gondola at 5 PM. I usually quite enjoy the ride back down, taking in the view and reflecting on the day: The walking to climbing ratio had been very even that day.”

Meanwhile Paula and Dave completed Jet Stream (IV) under thin conditions.

CIC Hut, Ben Nevis – 26/27th March 2004

Members Present: Eddie Gillespie, Thomas Beutenmuller, David Small, Linda Corlett, Dave Amos, Patrick Winter, Euan Scott, Graham Tough (guest

Conditions on the Ben were far from ideal for our annual pilgrimage to the CIC hut but all eight places were filled and everyone travelled hopefully.

On Saturday it was mild and claggy, the snow line was receding and any ice, melting.

Eddie and Thomas plumped for Tower Ridge (IV) which was probably the most popular route of the weekend on the Ben.

David and Linda had a look at Number Three Gully Buttress (III) but withdrew due to very poor conditions and instead took a walk up the CMD arête to the summit of the mountain.

Euan and Graham went for North East Buttress (IV), another popular route for this weekend.

Dave and Patrick decided to have a look at the conditions at the base of Glover’s Chimney (III). Our hope was that there would be sufficient ice to get up the first pitch, because after that the route should go in just about any condition. Luckily there was enough ice and we topped out at Tower Gap just as Eddie and Thomas were approaching, so another hold up for them. They can’t have been pleased but they didn’t complain!

On Saturday night some of us were kept awake by high winds that were still present in the morning and which deterred all residents in the hut from attempting any routes that day.

Eddie, Thomas, Patrick and Dave headed down the hill and visited the Ice Factor for two hours of highly enjoyable if somewhat sanitised ice – climbing. You could just close your eyes and imagine you were on Point 5!

Let’s hope for better conditions on the Ben for next years meet.

Mirror, Mirror On The Wall – Helen Forde

Who is the fairest of them all? Last summer in Switzerland the title might well have gone to the Grande Miroir in the Vaux Alps, above the Rhone Valley.

Well known for its superb, characteristic limestone slab, 450 metres high, unique in the Alps, the Miroir d'Argentine has two great classic routes - the Normal and the Direct being the most popular. 1922 saw the first ascent, while in 1946 Pidoux and Mercier made the first unwitting speed ascent in espadrilles in a truly amazing two hours. "We were pushed a bit since bad weather was coming in, but speed was not our aim, we just like to climb efficiently."

Admirable aims indeed; the Scottish team of Fowler and Forde sans espadrilles mais avec le meme temps mauvais wanted to do just that. Having spent the afternoon in preparation at Solalex, a tiny hamlet 1469 metres high, by looking through binoculars at the complex criss-cross routes, making a detailed drawing of the Miroir and verifying the weather we drove back to camp and set the alarm for three am.

Thoughts spinning thinking about tomorrow, visualising Haston and Bonnington setting off in the dawn towards the Miroir in the 1960's with the same quandary, the climb faces North-East so early starts are often cold, but waiting for sun can mean benightment.

Waking at three, a blur of activity sees us back at Solalex waiting for enough light for the steep walk-in, across the river, then an hour's slog to the base of the Miroir. We are very aware that the weather is to break about midday, with at least 14 pitches to the summit then a lengthy descent to the valley below.

Gearing up, we are charmed by the sight of three Chamois on the rocks below, as the rosy glow of daylight touches Alpine peaks, equally charmed by the realisation we had beaten everyone up, stepped onto to the first pitch in happy anticipation. Vertical cliffs alternated with serious scrambling and as the race against time dictated perfect route finding, John led until we reached the limestone slab.

From this glorious vantage point the Miroir really was the fairest in the land. Great swathes of stone fissured by deep cracks lured the eye upwards, ever upwards to the window between the serrated peaks where the sun was just pointing its dazzling alpine rays. The green pine trees far below had been in my paint box yesterday whilst the lines of ascent owed their being to a charcoal pencil.

Musing on this Alice in Wonderland strangeness of climbing through ones own drawing, I shared the enormous pleasure of alternate leads up and across the magnificent Miroir d'Argentine passing through the golden shafts of sunlight streaming from the summit. From our now 2000 metre vantage point we

could see the Restaurant du refuge far, far below, that meant beer, but the threatening clouds as promised were rolling in, so speed was vital.

A truly horrible descent, but timing is all, safe in the refuge with beer in hand the first massive raindrops fell and two tres heureuse lapins smiled at each other and reflected on the Miroir.



An evening with George – Stewart Bauchop

09:00am The Bauchop / Fox team make a late start for the Northern Corries of Liathach. Stewart is carrying a large rack because he hasn't climbed on Torrison ice before and, being a new dad, isn't taking any chances. The wind has been blowing down from the Arctic all week and everything is hard frozen – the weather is clear and settled and the day looks like being a good one.

12:30am Walking up into Coireag Dubh Mor the ice is thinner than expected. We settle on "George Gully" a 230m long route graded III/4 which has a reputation for reliability. We pitch the first easy 100m up the gully as there is a rope above us kicking a lot of rubbish down.

03:00pm We catch a party of 3 on the first hard pitch. There is a poor build up and the team are having problems - we are delayed a while at the belay.

04:00pm After kicking the remainder of the ice off, their 3rd is hauled up and away and we embark on the pitch which eventually succumbs to a bit of back and footing and a haul up on a high boss of ice. The climbing is on the limit of our abilities but just about enjoyable.

05:00pm I lead up into the foot of the cave pitch and in the rapidly failing light take a belay. Trying to get comfy on the cramped stance I unwittingly create "the mother of all knots". Simon leads through this and works up and round a constriction through the roof of the cave, after some time the scraping stops – he has a belay. This is just as well since the big knot has eaten up all the remaining rope. Untying one of the half ropes I manage to detangle and tie on the rucksacks which disappear up into the gloom - it is dusk when we entered the cave, it is dark as we prepare to exit it.

06:00pm Headtorch on for the final hard pitch which goes ok up until the final steepening. Whilst protecting the hard moves to come I knock my helmet on a roof and loose the headtorch. Watching it rolling away down the ramp and off into space, still lit, I concede that this may not look very good from Simons belay.

07:00pm A bright moon is out however and I've a couple of very good runners so commit up corner line in the gloom and find a big spike belay to bring Simon up on. The hour is pressing on and we are committed to getting onto the ridge as quickly as possible to let our torches be seen from the hut. It is a nice night but we do not want to be responsible for a call out.

08:00pm We reach the top of Liathach in fine bright moonlight and assess the situation. Looking down to the Ling hut we can see several headtorches and assume both of ours (I carry an emergency spare) are as brightly visible back. We make a slow deliberate signal of 3 flashes, this is immediately repeated back to us, again as 3 clear slow flashes. We interpret this as "confirmed and understood" and relax, taking a few minutes to rest and eat.

Below us the corries of Liathach are rolled out under a big starry sky, all is well.

08:30pm Powder snow over verglassed rocks gives slow going and fatigue is starting to tell. Moving together alpine style down the ridge we descend "way up" a 250m long grade 1 gully which allows us to loose height quickly and safely. We glissade out the foot of the gully and back into Coireag Dubh Mhor – we've been going 12 hours now and it feels like it.

09:00pm Start on the long march back to the hut, a corona forms around the moon and I discover a cache of sherbet dib dabs inside my cagoule pocket. Everything is hard frozen so the crampons stay on.

12:00pm The Ling hut eventually appears around midnight - just about everyone is up and glad to see us back. Pat and Fran make us pasta and tea and the days events are recounted over a few drams.

Point Five – Susan Jensen

Getting hold of Steve was a last-minute bit of luck. After finding out that my Sunday would be free, I spent three days fishing around and finding that most people that I knew were either already heading off somewhere, not available, or not climbers and so not particularly interested in the fun that could be had with a sunrise start on Ben Nevis. A Friday afternoon email from Steve with a casual "what are you up to this weekend?" turned into an evening phone call covering the finer points of a Point 5 gully.

I'd led my first grade IV ice with Steve a fortnight before, seconded some reasonable and some desperate mixed routes the weekend before at the Glenmore Lodge Performance Climbing Seminar, and so knew that I was completely capable of at least giving Point 5 a go, if the weather was reasonable. If I chickened out, Steve could take the scary bits and I'd duck the falling ice and verbal abuse - directed at the climb, of course.

Saturday night I drove from Aviemore to Fort William, stopped at a friend's house for cup of tea, conversation and condition reports since they had been out on the hill quite a lot that week. By all accounts, the possibilities were good, the ice was there and in good condition, if a bit lean.

The usual stern advice was mildly echoed - if there are more than two teams ahead of you, don't do it - you'll just get beaten by falling ice. And if the wind changes to anything but the north, you'll be hammered by spindrift, with some debate about whether it would really be Point 5 without some spindrift. Ok, ok. We'll go have a look. And an early start.

Stayed in a lovely, posh log cabin with Steve and some of his mates near Torlundy. Bags packed, asleep by 11.30, up with the alarm at 6, into the car by 6.35, walking up from the North Face car park by 6.50. What a treat to stay so close to the mountain, an extra half-hour in bed.

Clear skies, sunrise over the Scottish Highlands, and windless. Looked like another one of those perfect Scottish winter days was going to be ours, reminder of the brilliant day on Green Gully. Passing the CIC hut, the crowds (at least 8 other people) largely dispersed to destinations other than ours, except for a pair that were making their slow way up to Point 5, about 15 minutes ahead of us.

Mindful of the slope below the route that made the news last week, we geared up and walked to the base of the climb over avalanche debris, passing the couple that we had seen, and who were still gearing up. We waited for them to start. And waited.

An Italian team of four arrived, undressed, re-dressed, geared up, chatted, discussed routes, ate, looked around the corner and swore gently as the first couple had barely started. The Italians opted for the left hand side, moved onto the route and quickly out of sight, occasional bits of ice and spindrift as remnants of their passage.

We stood in the queue. After an hour of waiting we started. The first pitch had a nice, easy textured icefall, obvious good screw placement, followed by a steeper pitch. I headed up and got to the bottom of the steeper section, and brought Steve up to kill time - and to let him have that section - as the first pair still hadn't finished it. Waiting was a part of the theme for the whole climb. Steve did the second half of the first pitch, both of us getting into it, anticipation building. That's one-third of the hard stuff done, not too bad.

We stood at the bottom of the Chimney pitch, with my turn to lead, looking up I said "Doesn't look all that bad, I'll have a go". Textured ice, pockets of neve in the ice dimples, places for crampon purchase and semi-footholds, second-hand tool placements as well to guide. It was far from virgin ice; I'll take the lead, and take the lead from the others before me. With caution, of course.

It turned out a bit steeper than it looked. Every axe swing whistled with "don't move on a bad placement", "every placement a belay" and the ice cooperated nicely. Some tricky moves, high steps, a rather large hole in the ice to avoid dropping myself into, axes placed for dear life. The ice was good for screws but I had no desire to hang around long enough to place one - the BD turbo express was sunk in earlier in the pitch - until a foothold allowed a rest and a placement: only two ice screws on the whole thing. The ice kept pulling me up, I kept moving, the chimney closed in.

Only one legendary spindrift torrent appeared, and of course in the narrowest part of the chimney as I was struggling to remove a well-placed pick. A good foot ledge held panic at bay, left pick planted, right pick immobile in spite of pleadings and solid thumps - stop, breathe, relax shoulders, start pleading and wiggling the axe again, stop, breathe - then the spindrift freezing cheeks and filling sleeves but that stubborn pick - the bare rock walls were leverage to an improbable step above the placement in the hope of - yes! released, moving on. Far above the last gear, the angle eased slightly and someone had kindly provided two pieces of tat for grateful runners. The chimney continued up to a belay, two nuts and a couple of pegs, then a loud whoosh of breath and adrenaline and a "Steve - safe!".

The Rogue pitch was a funny one - first glance is of a smooth, solid chandelier, and I saw Steve's glance at it while coming up the Chimney pitch, eyes slightly widen, then back to concentration on the task at hand, of getting up to the belay. Gear handed over, he made clean work of the pitch. The first part easy angled and a good place for an ice screw, with the crux on the steeper section. The second look at the pitch yielded a left side to be more accommodating than it would have you believe - relief rock for bridging, and good placements until the moment they are most welcomed - to pull over the top. Spindrift covered the underlying neve, but with a solid placement off to the side, a mantelshelf and commitment, Steve cleared it, and headed up to the next belay with a whoop.

We were still behind the other pair and doing a lot of waiting, so I headed up the first of the less-tricky pitches - a short icefall and then snow slopes, the occasional rest on my axes, and set up a belay at the end of the ropes. As sociable as it was to be climbing with them, we wanted to top out before dark and it was already after 4pm. Steve came up and with the agreement of the

other team, he took the gear and moved on through. Taking coils, we moved together up the snow slopes and occasional bit of ice for the last two or three pitches, putting in runners and watching the open, blue, cloudless sky get closer and closer. The cornice had been carved out by the Italians and I knew Steve was at the top and heading for the summit by the whoops and yells and exuberance pouring back down into the gully. Tiredness dissolved away as I found the last couple of axe placements in the reassuring solidity of the cornice and pulled over into the sun setting behind a rime-covered summit shelter, occasional clouds over the rest of the mountains of Scotland slowly melting into sunset colours. It was a beautiful evening, it was 5.20 and we had done it!

We sang all the way down, adrenaline turning into hunger, thirst and a desire to be off the Allt a'Mhuillin path before too many more of the icy patches brought us down. The car park was almost empty at 8pm when we arrived, jubilant, tired, hungry and almost looking forward to a rest day at work.

Tarf in 2004 – Mary-Lucy More

(An account of a Scottish Ski trip, 17/18th January 2004 – the Stuart Buchanan, and David & Mary-Lucy More.)

Do you fancy a weekend in the Tarf Hotel David says?

“Great!” says I.

“Cool!” says Stuart.

How right he was!!

The Tarf Hotel is a lodge on the Atholl Estate, now managed by the MBA, splendidly isolated at 19 kilometres North of Blair Atholl. It appears to be used by the lonely traveller, and has certainly improved since David & I last stayed there in March 1980. Queen Victoria passed by in 1861 – she crossed at the Falls of Tarf, with two pipers preceding her up the glen!

Stuart did look pretty cool when we picked him up at 06.00 hrs, and he dozed in the car until dawn at the foot of Beinn A’Ghlo. We had stopped to assess the snow cover, which in the morning light looked perfect for the traverse into Tarf. Obviously there was no snow in the car park behind Blair Atholl, but in true Scottish Skiing tradition we would carry the skis to the snow.

I gave Stuart a small polybag ration of food, and a Glenmorangie bottle box to add to his rucksack. His eyes lit up at the sight of the latter, and he asked what was in it. “Fuel” was the simple reply.

“This feels quite light for a climbing sac” said Stuart, cheerfully pitching his 18 kilo sac onto his back.

The five mile walk from Old Blair through the Blairuachdar wood in the sunshine was very pleasant, and after crossing Gilberts Bridge we struck up the hillside finally reaching skinnable snow at 350m. Skis were put in their rightful place on the ground, and after a quick snack we were ready to start skinning.

“Oh!” said Stuart, now looking not so cool, “my binding wasn’t like that last time I looked at it, my boot won’t fit”. My trip into Tarf in the perfect weather was melting in the sunshine, until David came to the rescue with brute force and a Leatherman!

By 11.00 we were skinning up the slopes, enjoying the views, and wondering where the other skiers were and what their snow conditions were like. Sunglasses made the sky even bluer, and a cool breeze stopped us overheating as we reached the summit of Braigh Clais Daimh (870m), in nice time for lunch. Once carefully seated to maximise the views a thin layer of cloud descended, so lunch became only functional and we were soon on our way again heading further north to Aonach na Cloiche Moire (910m). Map and compass were more useful now, and altimeter persuaded us we had

reached the correct spot. While checking his watch Stuart realised he had lost the strap pin. We searched valiantly in the snow with echoes of “haystack” and “needle” in our ears, before he admitted defeat, grateful that he still had the watch.

During that futile search the cloud had lifted and at last we were able to appreciate where we were, and even see down the Feith Uaine Mhor to Tarf. The snow looked excellent, particularly on the southern slopes of Braigh Sron Ghorm, and our eyes picked out descent lines to take us to the door of our accommodation. With skins off and into downhill mode, we all looked pretty cool gliding down the slopes in the winter sun, ignoring the weight of the rucksacks and enjoying the feeling of space and freedom. The angle eased and after following the rivers’ edge we were all too soon at the door of The Tarf Hotel with its familiar AA sign. No sign of life though; we had the place to ourselves, and at least this year we had arrived in daylight!

We had the choice of three rooms, and as we unpacked Stuart gleefully noticed David & I had carried in two tubs of Pringles. He carefully positioned his Glenmorangie box alongside these in anticipation, and chuckled when he found his hip flask. Maybe the dried food wouldn’t taste so bad after all.

We settled in as the daylight faded, and soon had a brew on. I decided to change for dinner by taking off my waterproofs and putting on my duvet jacket and fleece hat.

Stuart found some firewood and suggested we light a fire. “Of course”, David said, “that’s why we carried these in!” pointing to the Glenmorangie & Pringles boxes. Stuart tried not to look disappointed as the respective boxes were opened to reveal wood and coal for consumption by the fire!

The evening passed, and with hip flasks duly emptied, we settled in for the night, not bothering to lock the door or put the cat out: other guests may yet arrive. Stuart pulled off his boots, duvet, and a couple of fleeces and rustled into his winter sleeping & bivvy bag. David & I put on the only wearable things left in our sacs: gloves and lightweight summer sleeping bags, and positioned our inner boots as pillows.

Alarms were set for 06.30, but Stuart knew he could get an extra 20 minutes while we got our boots on, fumbled with frozen contact lenses, and collected the Sunday papers & croissants.

Inevitably, in true Scottish Skiing tradition, the Sunday weather was totally different to the Saturday: the wind had got up, and the temperature risen to above freezing. Stuart did look cool when I handed him his first hot drink, and I had also been pretty cool all night!

It didn’t take long to pack up and tidy the hut, and by eight it was light enough for us to set off. The first hurdle of the day was to cross the Feith Uaine Mhor. There was not enough ice for us to use the techniques practised on the Faindouran trip, so skis had to be taken off. David & Stuart threw theirs carefully across to land on the far bank. In the interest of marital harmony Mary-Lucy threw her skis into the river! As all uphill skiers will know it is

essential to keep the skins dry to stop the snow balling-up on them, however the soaked skins seemed to perform as well as the boys' dry skins – probably because the snow was so wet anyway!

The cloud descended as the team ascended, and Stuart's light weight was not the advantage it could have been, when a gust of wind blew him over! There is something to be said for a light rucksack and plastic boots after all!

The altimeter, map and compass served us well again as we eventually found the col to the east of Carn a Chlamain, and tentatively took skins off. David disappeared over an improbable looking edge, and on following it seemed to be a tempting, if slightly steep, wide gully. However as the cloud cleared we saw that the snow ran into boulders after only 50 metres. Once these were negotiated it was simply a long, steady traverse of snowy heather down the Allt Craoinidh. The first one down has the tricky job of choosing the best line and wondering how many boulders his skis are going to run across, and how many heather branches are going to garrotte the ankles. The last one has the advantage of knowing that the route is okay as the other two have survived, but the disadvantage of the skis running faster on the flattened snow, so steering and sudden stops are not an easy option. These techniques cannot be taught in the Alps or Norway, but are unique to Scottish Skiing!

The snow became unskiable at about 400m, so the skis were strapped back onto the sacks, and we wandered down the path to the road near Balaneasie bothy. A two hour trudge alongside the river Tilt, got us back to the car at 16.00. By then Stuart wasn't so sure that his sac was light, and our feet were definitely not cool!

For the statistically minded: 38 kilometres round trip; 1700 metres ascent & descent.

A great trip, which was originally Brian Donaldson's idea; let's hope he can join us for the next one!