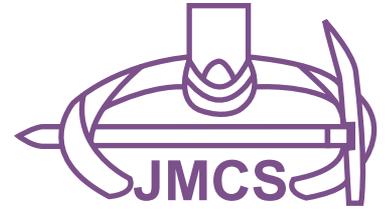


JMCS

Winter Newsletter 2021

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2021

JMCS 2021 Contents

Kalymnos, 9 - 19 October 2021

Bryan Rynne

Finally, after 18 months of Covid restrictions, it seemed possible to have a holiday abroad, so Bruce Macrosson and I booked a last minute trip to Kalymnos. Admittedly, it had been possible to travel for some time before we arranged this trip (and Bruce had been abroad), but having cancelled at least half a dozen holidays since Covid started I was reluctant to go through all the booking process only to then go through all the cancellation process (Easyjet still owes me money from a year ago...). However, by September things finally seemed to be looking promising:

- we had Boris' assurance that everything was fine (despite the exponentially increasing UK case rates, which appeared to indicate the contrary - possibly Boris, like most journalists, does not know what 'exponentially increasing' means);
- if we could avoid contracting Covid from our fellow British travellers on the journey we would be fine in Greece (whose Covid rates are a small fraction of the UK's).

So, we felt that it was time to go.

Somewhat bizarrely, to my mind, Bruce had never been on a sports climbing trip before, tending to go on trips where cold and snow was likely to be an impediment, so the obvious place to go seemed to be the current sports climbing Mecca: Kalymnos. There we would be guaranteed wall-to-wall sunshine (snow was unlikely) for the entire trip, as well as fine cuisine and ice-cold, tasteless lager. What more could one ask for?

As usual with Kalymnos, the most awkward bit was getting there. I managed to find a direct return flight, but in order to have more than a week out there we needed to fly via Gatwick on the way out. And, as usual, the flight landed in Kos too late to continue to Kalymnos that evening, so we spent a night in the ferry port Mastichari, before getting the ferry to Kalymnos the next morning. There we were met by the apartment owner who whisked us off at high speed to our apartment in Masouri (at considerably higher speed than I felt was wise, but





Bruce at Trois Ilots

no doubt he 'knew the road', and it probably saved us about 2 minutes).

We stayed in Eleni's Studios, which is very close to the town centre, but far enough up the hill above the main road that we could not hear much noise from the bars. The apartment was good (one of the better ones I have stayed in, although mostly they have been good), and it was very convenient for shopping and the restaurants.

Once settled in we walked off to a local crag for the afternoon. By now most people will have a fair idea of what climbing in Kalymnos is like

so I won't say much about that here. We had a week of mostly dry, sunny weather with temperatures of about 20-24 degrees.

Despite expectations we had rain on two afternoons (in 5 previous trips I have never known it to rain), but this did not last long. On the first occasion we simply walked back to the apartment and had our lunch there, then walked back to the crag, while on the second occasion we had deliberately chosen a crag with a large cave and so simply sat there and had our lunch while it rained (we had got a taxi there, so returning to the

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craggs seemed considerably busier than I have ever seen them before, and the taxi driver concurred with that.

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apartment was not an option).

We also had one relatively cold, windy day (a bit like Scotland in mid-summer...) on which we opted to go for a walk up to Prophet Elias, the highest point on the island. Not the greatest of walks, but there would have been a good view over the entire island from the summit if it hadn't been for all the low-lying clouds (so, again a bit like Scotland in mid-summer...).

We did get a good view looking down to Kalymnos airport, which has been hewn out of the summit of a small mountain. Built on a gentle slope - no doubt to enable arriving aircraft to

slow down, and departing aircraft to gain sufficient speed to take off. The sight of this convinced me that flying to Kalymnos from Athens was not an option I wanted to consider.

So, apart from the day walking, we climbed every day. We more or less alternated between walking up to one of the local crags above Masouri or getting a taxi to Arginonta. The walks were usually about 20-30 minutes, while the drive was similar and cost Eu25 return - it didn't seem to depend on the distance... I haven't shopped around for taxi drivers - I know one chap who is reliable: when he says that he will pick you up at a certain time in

the middle of nowhere he does so, so I have stuck with him!

So, overall, a good time was had by all. And by 'all' I should say that the restaurants and crags seemed considerably busier than I have ever seen them before, and the taxi driver concurred with that. This was presumably due to pent-up demand being unleashed after Covid.

A limited crag rating
Although I said that I won't say much about the climbing, I thought that I would give a list of crags that I think 'must' be visited and also those that ought to be avoided.



This list is based on operating in the 6a-6b+ range, and is listed in roughly descending order of merit.

Of course, there are a large number of other crags on Kalymnos, many of which I have been to over the last 10 years, and mostly they are good, but are not sticking out in my mind, perhaps due to the passage of time...

Must visit:

- Trois Ilots - big crag, tremendous routes, mostly 30-35 metres, and about 20 minutes walk from the apartment. In shade until about mid-day; hot in the afternoon. In my view the best crag that I have been to on Kalymnos, although obviously I haven't been to every crag on Kalymnos.

- Arginonta Valley - smaller than Trois Ilots, and not quite as good, but still very good. Shade all day, so a great crag to go to when the heat is getting too much.
- Arginonta - this is a bit of a mixed bag, but there are some good climbs at the bottom end near the road, and also on the Infrared Wall (colloquially known as 'the 6b wall'), which has an excellent line of, er, 6b routes.
- Poets - this is another short walk in. Good climbs and worth visiting, but I think not quite as good as at the preceding crags (although, I didn't go there this year, so I may be misremembering a bit). Still well worth a visit.

- Telendos Wings for Life, 6a, 11 pitches Not hard, but a tremendously fun day out.

Avoid:

Gerakios, Kasteli, Dolphin Bay, North Cape. I can't be bothered writing notes describing why these are awful. Very poor quality by Kalymnos standards.

However, there are a lot of crags a long way from Masouri, in the north of the island, and also on Telendos, that I have not been to, so this is a limited selection of easily accessible crags. I obviously need to get further afield next time!

And, as a final note, Bruce thoroughly enjoyed himself, has seen the light and plans to return soon.



It has everything you'd expect from a Greek climbing destination: huge limestone caves complete with tufas, big long grey slabs and everything in between



Crete - The Quiet Kalymnos

Roo Finlayson

So first off, it's not as good as Kalymnos as a pure climbing destination – but some of it is very similar, it doesn't have the crowds and you can fly direct from Edinburgh, so happy days. It hasn't been 'Rockfaxed' or similar, so other than a few Germans kicking around, there's not very many people there, probably for that reason. With the combination of a few guidebooks and some free apps on your phone (listed below) you can

figure things out pretty easily. In terms of the flights, it takes just over 4 hours to Heraklion. When to go? We went in early-mid October and it was perfect.

Unfortunately the airport at the other end is dire – built in the 1970s and not fit for purpose. The Cretans are well aware of the situation and are building a new one not too far from the capital, but it won't be finished until 2025 at the earliest, annoyingly. Queuing in this

hell-hole, in the warm, with hundreds of other holiday-makers is a relatively minor inconvenience for a week or two of high-quality, quiet climbing, in my view. The beaches, the food and the cultural sites all add to the appeal, and yes, there are plentiful excellent rest-day activities on-demand as a result.

It has everything you'd expect from a Greek climbing destination: huge limestone caves complete with tufas,

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It's a big island (it would take six hours to drive across it from end to end)

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big long grey slabs and everything in between, across the grades (3s to 8c). The grading is a touch harder (more realistic?) than Kalymnos, perhaps because it's an older venue on average – but as long as you bear that in mind, you'll have a lot of fun on a lot of classics. It's a big island (it would take six hours to drive across it from end to end) with a lot of venues scattered around but handily, the best of the climbing is concentrated South West of the capital Heraklion in Central Crete, so if only going for a week, go there.





The start of the stunning Agiofarago gorge

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Guidebooks:

- Greece Sport Climbing: The Best Of – covers 3 venues: Tersanas Cave, Plakias and Voulismeno Aloni – pretty good and worth having as an overview of Greek climbing although note it doesn't cover Kalymnos at all (has its own guides) nor Leonidio in detail (again has its own guide)
- Crete: Climbing in Chania – covers Therisso Gorge amongst other areas but was written in 2007 so it doesn't have a lot of the routes and

it's fairly useless (you are welcome to borrow it anyway) – use thecrag.com and/or download the app below instead

- Crete: Kapetaniana – we didn't go here in the end but would like to in future – guidebook seems OK but again from 2006 so might just be better using websites and apps (again welcome to borrow)
- Crete: Climbing from North to South – I didn't buy this one because it was relatively expensive to buy here, so figured we'd pick it

up out there but didn't – might be worth having for Agiofarago but the app worked just fine.

Websites/apps:

- AllClimb app – hadn't heard of it before but a local guide told us about this app and I'm glad he did – full colour photo topos of a number of the venues and GPS tracking so you can see clearly if you're heading towards the crag or not – this is a must-have for climbing in Crete



- thecrag.com was useful for Therisso Gorge topos and to confirm grades and descriptions at other places not well covered by UKC

The first week: out West

We went West first to have our honeymoon in a fancy hotel in Kolymvari. This was more of a beach week for obvious reasons (which are stunning, lagoon type things a la somewhere much more tropical). But I did manage to persuade Claire that we really ought to sample some of the climbing out this way while we were here too – rude not too really. The first of these was a gorge south of Chania, the cultural capital out this way. This has some excellent climbing across the grades with sun/shade possible at all times of day. We only tried one venue along the gorge and the climbing was decent.

The second venue was the enormous Tersanas Cave that would rival the Grand Grotto in Kalymnos, if only there were twice as many climbs and the grading was softer. A hard venue with the grades starting at hard 6a+, skipping to hard 6c+ then upwards into the 7s and the 8s. We didn't climb much there (3 routes) but it was just worth seeing frankly. You have to drive

Midway along the Agiofarago gorge

along a rocky road which leads to one of those gorgeous lagoon beaches, so it's busy, and a 40 min walk, which isn't. There's no one there as a result. If this was anywhere near civilisation, it would be utterly rammed, every day of the year.

We stopped at Plakias, south of Rethimno, on our way back East for the second half of the trip. This is a striking 'knife-cut' vertical piece of limestone that rises from the end of a nice beach. Annoyingly, it looks better than it climbs. There's lots of cracks in the face, so it climbs like trad which I like but most sport climbers do not. We were there on a hot day which probably exaggerated the polish but the grades are known to be hard – I climbed a route described as a sandbag at 6b in the Greece guide and was relieved to see it listed everywhere else as 7a afterwards. The climbing on the main wall is very good so it's worth a visit, e.g. the 5c+ and 6c classics were just that.

The second week: Central Crete
We had heard Agiofarago was the best venue in Crete so we went there first upon arriving to suss it out. We were not disappointed. This is a gorge, a sightseeing venue in its own right, with classic, varied climbing down





The sink hole of Voulismeno Aloni

both sides of a wide track, across the grades (4s to 8c) ending in a beautiful stoney beach. Sun or shade can be found at all times and if it rains, you can go climbing in one of the caves and keep the goats company. We went back again a few days later because it was so good. The highlights for me were climbing in the back of one of those caves up some tufa formations and climbing a 40m 7a that started out steeply on tufas then ended in a long, never-ending slab. Phenomenal. The last but not least venue we visited wasn't on UKC, well not until I put it on

there afterwards, which is insane given it's in The Best Of Greece guidebook and it's not far from the capital.

Voulismeno Aloni is "a circular sink-hole with climbing on most sides that can be climbed on in most conditions, most of the year, in a lovely setting. A bit of a tourist attraction in its own right so expect a few on-lookers". The grades seem about right rather than particularly easy or hard and there's very good climbing from 4c to 8c. Claire got up a 6b+ and I got up a 7b+ after a few goes, so it can't be

outrageously graded, albeit it was the end of a climbing holiday so we were relatively fit.

Conclusion:

It's a good spot and I would thoroughly recommend it to those who have been to Kalymnos and/or Leonidio and enjoyed but didn't enjoy the crowds. We will be back, although maybe after they've built the new airport! Of course by then it'll probably be 'Rockfaxed' or similar and be much busier as a result, so we may reconsider that decision and get back there sooner.



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I decided that for skiing it would be optimal to head anti-clockwise, I am still not sure if this was the best idea or not.

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The Pentland Skyline

Oli Warlow

Ambitions were firmly set on local challenges this winter, and after a good few days in January and February doing laps of Scald Law and the Kips, I decided to have a go at a “Pentland Skyline by ski” if conditions permitted. The skyline route is a fell race starting and finishing at Hillend, heading clockwise down to the Kips, before crossing over and back along the Northern string of hills. I decided that for skiing it would be optimal to head anti-clockwise, I am still not sure

if this was the best idea or not.

My opportunity came in mid-February. Unfortunately work commitments meant that I couldn't take advantage of the best midweek snow, so I had to make do with the slightly less than ideal weekend conditions. I set my alarm early on Saturday morning and left The Steading at first light (about 7.30am), skinning up Caerketton over Hillend Hill. I was quickly overtaken by a couple of Lycra clad skimo

speedsters (skimo is the race format of ski touring with super lightweight carbon everything and will be a new winter Olympic sport in 2026), leaving me feeling slightly burdened by my big bag full of sandwiches and warm clothing.

The crampons (only needed twice in the day) had to come out for the last steep part up to the ridge of Caerketton, and I was greeted by an arctic blast on the summit ridge - these winds were to be a feature of the day. It was a bit of a



My legs were definitely starting to feel it now and the longer steeper descents I had been looking forward to were proving heavy going.



battle, but I managed to make my way against the wind along to Allermuir where I found the skimo pair. They explained that they were abandoning their skyline attempt because it was too cold! I couldn't help but feel a little bit smug in my sallopetes and puffy jacket. The run down to the tank track was the first proper bit of descent and I realised it definitely wasn't going to be a day for quality skiing with wind blown sastrugi snow making the prospect of quality turns wishful thinking. A few hours later I had made it over Capelaw, Harbour, Bell's and

Black Hill, finding a little bit of shelter in Green Cleugh to recharge slightly. I had to convert to hiking mode with skis strapped to my back for the short steep climb out of the Cleugh - apart from a river crossing, this was the only part of the route I couldn't ski.

Once over Hare Hill I could turn back east, with the wind now thankfully behind me for the larger and more technical hills on the south side of the range. Up and over the Kips I needed to get the crampons out again on the scoured icy snow to

climb Scald Law. I was rewarded with a very well made igloo on the col between Scald Law and South Black Hill, a welcome respite from the wind for me to tuck into my packed lunch.

My legs were definitely starting to feel it now and the longer steeper descents I had been looking forward to were proving heavy going. From the top of Turnhouse I took an alternative route to the fell race, choosing the long descent to the western tip of Glencourse reservoir where there had been good accumulations of snow in the



Lunch stop in a Pentlands igloo!

northwest facing stream beds. It was the best run of the day for sure, but I would have been glad of less miles in my legs at that point, having to stop every few turns for a breather.

A short jump over the river and yet another fence to climb and I could skate down the road alongside the reservoir, choosing the direct but steep ascent of Castlelaw starting from Kirk Bridge. Once on top the wind was starting to die down, so I had a very enjoyable traverse back across to Allermuir and the final climb of the day to my first summit, Caerketton.

I spent a few moments as I always do in the Pentlands, enjoying the view and appreciating the transition from sea to city to hills. Skins off for the last time and heels clicked in, just my last big descent to enjoy. My aching legs were relieved when I reached the ski centre and they could enjoy a nice end of day cruise down the road to the car.

A few stats - 31km, 9.5hours, 2600m ascent, 21 transitions (changing skis between uphill/downhill mode).

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Hot rock on the Costa del Arbroath

Stuart Buchanan

Summer 2021 for us was characterized by a lot of family climbing in Scotland with Isla (11) and Fergus (9). We thrashed our way through waist high bracken on Ben A'an, chilled out in the sun at Benny Beg, watched as the mist disappeared burn off the peaks during a stunning traverse of An Teallach, and even did some new routing on sea cliffs in the Northwest.

But one of the most interesting discoveries was a day at the seaside, sport climbing on the sea cliffs of Arbroath with grandad (David Buchanan). The climbing is well documented in the Scottish Sports Climbs guide, with 100+ routes along the quarried cliffs, on the edge of Arbroath. We drove, but there are hourly trains from Waverley and there is little difference in total travel time between rail and road.

We parked on the end of the promenade under a cloudless sky with a fresh westerly breeze. The approach followed a cliff top path, with little

eroded trails down to the climbing. The cliffs themselves are quarried sandstone, in places with large platforms at the bottom for gearing up. However, Fergus still managed to roll his helmet into a rock pool. Fortunately, he was still light enough that I could dangle him by his ankles so he could reach to pluck it back out!

We didn't see any other climbers, but lots of sea anglers were using long rods and lines with multiple hooks to pull up mackerel six at a time. With the baking sun and sparkling sea it felt very reminiscent of some of the sea cliff climbing around Calpe, right down to the littering.

In the morning we visited Sector Cartoon, which promised short easy routes at 3+ and 4 on pebbled sandstone. However we found these steep and undergraded climbing. Or perhaps we were just rusty? The afternoon we went to Sector Mini, described as a secteur d'initiation.

The routes here were much more

Isla climbing "Cow and Chicken" 3+ but undergraded!



After that, it was sadly time to go home, but not before we enjoyed fish and chips overlooking the harbour in the sunshine.

amenable and we enjoyed various short 4s and 4+s. Unfortunately I think the guidebook missed an approach description. After some scrambling around, we found the best approach by descending a grassy ridge on the East side of the Mermaid's Kirk, an impressive tidal bowl.

After that, it was sadly time to go home, but not before we enjoyed fish and chips overlooking the harbour in the sunshine. A perfect way to end a perfect day at the seaside.

It did feel like we barely scratched the surface with our visit. There are a huge number of routes here at all grades, and I definitely plan to return - how can one resist a three-star route at grade 5 called "Silence of the Clams"?



The author (r) and Alan Taylor camping at Loch Awe, 1972
(photo - David Meldrum)



“

In those days – despite our huge ambitions - we travelled light; not that we were economising on what we took, we just didn't have very much.

”

Then and Now David Small

1. THEN.

In July 1974, having recently sat our Highers, my schoolfriend Alan Taylor and I hitchhiked to Glen Nevis for the start of what we hoped would be an epic tour of western Scottish mountain areas. We aimed to account for the Munros around Glen Nevis, then have a further ticking spree in Kintail and Torridon, with a final traverse of the Cuillin Ridge to end on a high; we

would also include some rock climbing along the way.

In those days – despite our huge ambitions - we travelled light; not that we were economising on what we took, we just didn't have very much. One big rucksack took everything - tent, sleeping bag (I don't think we bothered with a mat), primus stove,

mess tin, spare clothing (a nylon cagoule and a jumper), food and climbing gear. The gear was minimal and primitive; a hawser laid rope, a sling and a screwgate each (for belaying and abseiling) and a handful of nuts plus karabiners; the era of quickdraws was far in the future. I think Alan had a harness and a pair of rock boots but I had neither – I



Looking east to Sgurr a'Mhaim

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In those days you could wild camp just about anywhere in Glen Nevis, provided it was accessible from the road and not in, or adjacent to, somebody's garden.

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rock climbed with the rope tied round my waist (using a bowline – the figure of eight knot was, as far as I was concerned, far in the future and I had never heard of a clove hitch) and wearing my four seasons mountaineering boots. We did both have helmets; mine doubled as a motorcycle helmet for going around Edinburgh on my Honda 90.

In those days you could wild camp just about anywhere in Glen Nevis, provided it was accessible from the road and not in, or adjacent to, somebody's garden. The most popular spot – although never really busy –

was directly across the footbridge from the Youth Hostel and that was where we based ourselves.

On our first day, the weather not looking good for Munro bagging, we went up to Polldubh (bus, hitching or walking – I can't remember) for some cragging. I suspect we didn't have a guide book but just chose something that looked to be about V Diff.

Which is how I found myself rather uncomfortably trying to trust my big boots on sloping holds on what I now think must have been Gambit (Severe) on Sheep Fank Wall, with the absence

of placements for our limited selection of nuts making me long for the more familiar routes back home on Traprain Law (in 1974 the friction at Traprain was good!!).

That is one of two distinct memories of climbing which I have retained from that far-off holiday. The other is of leading the slab and overlap pitch of Flying Dutchman (S) on Pandora's Buttress and pausing for ages trying to work out how to get over the overlap safely (given that I probably had no gear on the slab at all). I looked down to the foot of the crag and saw five or six upturned faces all watching with



The contorted north east face of Stob Ban

distinct interest to see what was going to happen next. They, like me, knew that I was either going up under control or falling back down. Well, since I am writing this today, it must have been the former and not the latter.

The cloud was staying low on the hills and our grand ambitions were being eroded. Matters were not helped by a visit to Fort William's High Street on the evening of my seventeenth birthday. In the early 70's Highland licensees were not too concerned about serving under age drinkers; they seemed to

know in advance if there was any real chance of the police turning up. So we had more pints than were good for us and staggered up the road in disarray; at one point I lost Alan and eventually – after a lot of floundering around in the dark, headtorches being another thing we didn't have - found him asleep under a static caravan, well short of our campsite.

After this debauch we felt we had to re-assert our credentials as hill walkers, so we decided on a big couple of days, to be undertaken whatever

the weather; we would start with Ben Nevis and Carn Mor Dearg, then on to the Aonachs and over all the Grey Corries before dropping down to Staoineag bothy, where we would spend the night before a return walk which would take in all the Mamores from Sgurr Eilde Mor in the east to Mullach nan Coirean in the west. For lightness, we would leave the stove behind and our only sustenance on this epic trip would be a loaf of bread and a tin of peaches.

We were, of course, young and fit, but



the fact that we could even think of attempting such a journey shows we were also foolish and naïve.



the fact that we could even think of attempting such a journey shows we were also foolish and naïve.

Fortunately, our grand scheme fell at the first hurdle; in thick cloud, we went wrong trying to navigate to the CMD Arete from the summit of the Ben, only realising we were lost when we found ourselves looking down the forty foot corner on the North Eastern Buttress. Our bubble of ambition completely burst, we returned to Glen Nevis and, soon afterwards, the weather showing no signs of improving, went home.

2. NOW.

In late June 2021 Linda and I drove

our campervan into Glen Nevis. It was laden with kit for kayaking, walking and climbing. It would be inaccurate to say that we had everything bar the kitchen sink, because of course there was a kitchen sink in the van.

In the Glen, all the places a van could pull off the road were marked “no overnight parking” – wild camping was also banned - and all the commercial sites with any facilities were full, but places in a field were on offer at £15 at night, so we settled for that. The weather forecast was good, and I was uncertain exactly which of the Munros in the westerly Mamores I had or had not done, so we aimed to spend a few days in the Glen to allow me to tick them off, to do a bit of climbing at Polldubh and then go on up to Torridon.

On the morning after our arrival the weather was humid but fine, so I set off up the most westerly of the Mamores, Mullach nan Coirean. There were only a few midges about, but I was followed most of the way by a cloud of black flies which would try to land on me whenever I stopped. Fortunately, Munro height was just above their comfort zone so I could

enjoy a rest at the cairn unmolested. Then I carried on along the ridge to Stob Ban with its rocky north easterly side looking a fine winter venue. The views of the Ben and the myriad other peaks of Lochaber were superb. My last walk in the Mamores had probably been six or seven years ago and I could not understand why I had not returned sooner – they are fine, big hills.

At the next summit, Sgurr an Iubhair, the ridge divides; the left turn requires an “out and back” return trip to Sgurr a’ Mhaim, but as it includes the Devil’s Ridge very few people miss it out. The Ridge is one of those places where you can walk with a foot either side of a knife edge and a big drop on both sides, with some avoidable scrambling thrown in from time to time along the way if you want.

I met Linda at the top of Sgurr a’ Mhaim – she had come up more directly from Glen Nevis – and we had some lunch before I went back along the Devil’s Ridge to head east again for Am Bodach. By now the demands of the day were making themselves felt and I could not believe that as a teenager – way back when – I had

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My feet were at war with the tarmac as I walked down the road back to the van at Polldubh.

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Linda on top of Sgurr a'Mhaim.

imagined I could do all this and much more in a day, two days in a row, with not a lot to eat.

From Am Bodach there is a steep, loose descent before more aggravating ups and downs take you over two or three more Munros – depending on the age of one's Munros Book – to the final, Alpine scale descent via lots of zig zags back to Steall at the head of Glen Nevis. My feet were at war with the tarmac as I walked down the road

back to the van at Polldubh.

That evening we were more than ready for a craft beer or two in the pub at Achintee – better drink, in lesser quantity, and in a finer location, than I had allowed myself when I was 47 years younger.

Next day we climbed on Pandora's Buttress and I had another trip across the slab of Flying Dutchman up to the overlap. This time I was wearing rock shoes and had a small nut in the slab,

with a cam around the level of my waist, so I was quite relaxed as I took a few seconds to work out what to do, and nobody was looking up from below with morbid interest in my fate. After that we did, as we had planned, go on to Torridon, and had a sunny and successful few days there.

So, in a number of ways, the 2021 trip was more successful than the one in 1974 – or perhaps it just went more according to plan. Anyway, I would not have missed either of them.



The nearest bike shop is 20 miles away

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We made plans, and equipped with an overnight pass from our wives set off from Fife late morning of Saturday, 19th June

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Cairngorm Bivvy Cycle - June '21

Thomas Beutenmuller

The sleeping out on top of hills saga continues, with the slight variation of adding two mountain bikes to the mix: After all, if you look at the Cairngorms on the OS map No 36 you can't help but wonder how good these landrover tracks may be, and would it not be possible and less soul-destroying to cycle rather than spending hours and hours trotting along them? My

fellow Corbett bagger Stewart and I had spoken about another bivvy on the summit of the rather remote hill Creag Mhor and we were planning to get to the bottom of it by cycling from Tomintoul to Faindouran bothy, which is situated just to the north of Beinn a' Bhuid. We made plans, and equipped with an overnight pass from our wives set off from Fife late morning

of Saturday, 19th June, promising that we would not be back too late for our respective father's day dinner the following day.

It is hard to drive past Braemar without a browse in the Mountain Shop and do some carbo-loading in the adjacent café. But why was it raining? The weather forecast had

not mentioned any downpours. After lunch we carried on with our drive to Tomintoul and we had to admit that the road cyclists tackling the brutal gradients on the Lecht Road faced the greater challenge than what we would, however, we would score higher in the 'remote location' ranking...

Once nearing Tomintoul we were relieved to see a significant improvement in the weather. The huge landmass of Ben Avon and Beinn a' Bhuid must have stopped the rain clouds from moving North.

It was four o'clock by the time we got to Tomintoul and after shouldering our rucksacks which contained our bivvy essentials we set off. I had cycled as far as the Linn of Avon two years ago, so found the road to the Queen Victoria viewpoint without a problem and from there we only had to follow the private road along the river to Inchrory Lodge. It was a nice and easy run on mostly good road surfaces. Past the Estate buildings we zoomed down to a bridge where a footpath veers off south towards Loch Builg. We had good views along the glen towards the West and it was apparent that the route would be more undulating from now on. Things looked



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The next thing that happened was that Stewart announced that he may have a puncture. Unlike the road cyclist on the Lecht we could not call in the support vehicle...

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The view west from the Linn of Avon

wilder, more remote. Another couple of miles and we had the choice between pushing the bikes along a narrow path along the river or push them up a steep incline for a good quarter of an hour. The latter turned out to be the faster option, as it was followed by an exhilarating descent back to the river and brought us to the pony hut, a shelter at the point where a path runs South towards the Garbh Coire of Beinn a'Bhuird. The track got markedly rougher from this point onwards, but it was still okay to cycle on.

A mile or two short of Faindouran

bothy we saw a group of cyclists who were camping in a dip towards the river. I was surprised to see such a big group there but with limited opportunities to go abroad this year the Cairngorms may have become a more attractive staycation destination.

The next thing that happened was that Stewart announced that he may have a puncture. Unlike the road cyclist on the Lecht we could not call in the support vehicle.... Stewart managed to pump the tyre up and we carried on to the bothy. The tyre was down again and we had to get it fixed. When I say

'we' I mean Stewart: One of his other hobbies besides mountaineering is to take his Norton motorcycle apart and put it back together again, so I was not overly concerned that a little puncture would be a big issue for him to fix. I remember that I was quite impressed with his multitool: He unfolded it and pulled self-adhesive patches out and it also had many more functions. Whilst I cooked myself some noodles on my camping stove Stewart got to work and patched up his inner tube. We were done with cycling for the day anyway and would see on the way back tomorrow whether the patch



A look at the map showed me that we were over 600 metres above sea level already. Another 300 metres or so would see us at the summit of Creag Mhor.



would do the trick.

A look at the map showed me that we were over 600 metres above sea level already. Another 300 metres or so would see us at the summit of Creag Mhor. The weather held out too: Not a heatwave but certainly not rainy. And as we were only a few days away from the summer solstice there was no shortage of daylight either. So we set off up some gentle slopes. The ground was very dry and we were at the summit of Creag Mhor just after eight. The summit is an impressive rock tor.

After we'd been to the highest point we looked for a bivvy spot which we found just to the East of the summit. It has to be said that Stewart and I have a certain amount of routine in sleeping on mountain tops, so we were quickly established in our respective bivvie bags. We had a nice night up there, but I felt something was missing in comparison to the night on Ross Bheinn last year: I.e. no sea views and no stars...

The next morning dawned bright and clear as the sun was quite high in

the sky by 5AM already. There was no reason why we should not be on our way, especially as we were aware of the promise to our families to be back home in good time for once. We packed our gear and walked back down to Faindouran where we sat in the sun and put the kettle on. Stewart checked his tyre and gave me a thumbs up. Phew. After a leisurely breakfast we mounted our bikes. It had just gone past seven o'clock. I am not usually an early morning person but it was nice to be out and about on this sunny morning.

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We flew down the slopes and covered a huge distance in very short time without too much effort. This meant that we were back in Tomintoul by half past nine.

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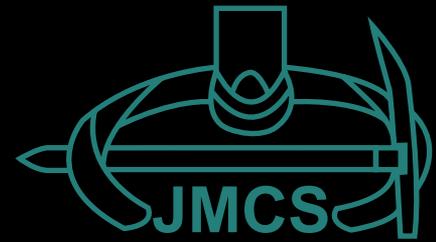
The cycle back to Tomintoul was the highlight of the trip for me: What had taken us more than four hours the previous day we dispatched in just over two-and-a-half hours. All the hill climbs from yesterday were exciting descents today, with just a few short climbs. We flew down the slopes and covered a huge distance in very short time without too much effort. This

meant that we were back in Tomintoul by half past nine.

As I said before, it is hard to drive past the Braemar Mountain Shop, which meant that we found ourselves at the same table in the café again and were ordering more or less the same food and drink items like 24 hours earlier.

To reflect on this quick trip I would like to say that it is great to use a mountain bike to get to the bottom of remote hills. I don't think I would like to cycle further than where the landrover tracks end, both as my technical skills level would not allow this and because of my fear that I would cause erosion. My next plan will be to go for another big Cairngorm cycle, but maybe without the hillwalk. For example, do the classic tour of circumnavigating Beinn a 'Glo. Or the tour from Corgaff Castle to the Linn of Avon and then return via Loch Builg and Corndavon Lodge. Maybe next summer. For now it is time to get the OS maps out and look for more landrover tracks.

Written during an overnight stay at Alysinnia bothy in Glen Kinglass, with my mountain bike parked outside.



2021