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2008/09 SEASON 7

January 2009

Dear Members

A happy New Year to all. Some beautiful weather over the last days of the year to tempt you all out onto the hills. Unfortunately I chose the only clagged in day to 'wander' up the Cobbler with my daughter. Given the virus-filled state of my lungs, along with the general abysmal level of fitness, the last couple of hundred feet were a near-death experience. Those festering steps! Did the path makers assume every hillwalker has at least a 33' inside leg?

2008 - 09: DAY TRIPS

Remember to contact John Berry to find out where the Sunday meets are going or check your email.

2009: WEEKEND TRIPS

The intended programme is as follows:

23-24 January 2009	Tranearth (organiser Eunice)
3-5 April 2009	Ratagan (organiser Frank)
8-10 May 2009	Ling Hut (organiser John)
22-24 May 2009	Cannich (organiser Frank)
25-27 September 2009	Sail Mhor (organiser Sandra)
30-31 October 2009	Alex Mac Hut (organiser Sinclair)

All bookings for weekend trips must now be accompanied by a £5.00 per night deposit to the trip organiser to secure a place (i.e. £10.00 for a 2-night stay or £15.00 for a 3-night stay). The reason for this change is to supplement Club funds as many hostels now require either full payment in advance or a higher level of deposit. We have to plan well in advance (sometimes over a year) to secure locations and ensure variety in the Club's weekend meets. Early bookings appreciated to give ample time to adjust numbers, if necessary. Late cancellations will have to pay full accommodation costs, unless this is waived by the hostel concerned.

SOCIAL EVENTS

A couple of very successful events have taken place since the last newsletter. A curry evening at the Ashoka was well attended and enjoyed by all. Xmas dinner was held at Tormaukin, now confusingly renamed An Lochan at Tormaukin and again was very successful. A fair amount of walking was done in advance, the food was fine and good value. The drink remained pricey and Willimott reneged again on picking up the drinks bill. In fact he didn't even buy me a drink.

REPORTS

A couple of reports this newsletter some from the ubiquitous Steve Turnbull. Steve's tireless stravaigin of the hills is only matched by his tireless reportage of these stravaigs

Trois Biers et Une Panache' (reflections on a walk in the Auvergne and Cantal) (from collective memoirs)

Time has elapsed since Eunice, John, Chris and Steve walked 130 miles along the GR4 and deviation onto the GR 30 - time enough for the details of the journey to percolate into one's mind. John proposed and planned the walk following an enthusiastic traverse of Corsica in 2007. This walk would be very different in nature - no precipitous crags and shattered rock, no high altitude shelters, or dangerous ascents and descents. The Central Massif is a plateau of around 900 metres with three distinct highland areas reaching between 5,000 - 6,000 feet in height. The walk unfolded in layers through a rural canvass of hills, forests, woods, rolling farmland, moors, pleasant towns, villages and hamlets, abandoned or run down farm buildings and bells - the background orchestration of clanking bells hanging from the necks of cattle for much of the walk. The area shows signs of depopulation. We were blessed with good weather for the most part. John, Eunice and Chris have previous foreign long distance walking experience. For Steve, it was a new experience in two ways - (1) no previous mainland Europe backpacking experience and (2) being in the company of fellow walkers for two weeks. Walks such as this provide ample opportunity for discussion of serious and/or frivolous nature whether communally, in pairs or simply talking to oneself! For much of the journey, we were lost in our own thoughts, whatever those were. Ten days foreign backpacking calls for some early decision making on what should be carried - as little as possible. This is a concept with which Steve is unfamiliar! On arrival at Glasgow airport, John and Eunice's packs weighed in at less than 10 kilos (well done), Chris had a touch over 11 (Mmmm!) and Steve deliberately stood in front of the weigh machine so as to hide the 15.8 kilos digital readout (WHAT!!!) - and in spite of two attempts at home to reduce weight. "*I might need this if the weather is lousy or spare food just in case we run short!*"). In true KMC style, this ridiculous 'payload' (to which was added 2 litres of water, fruit and a kilo of dried apricots) was to provide much amusement (and a sore back) for days to come.

The journey started with a night in Clermont-Ferrand at the Station Hotel in a small single room with two double beds. Not much room for manouvre when one takes account of four adults and their half-emptied backpacks. We were using a guide book of 1992 vintage and things didn't go to plan at the start of day 1. The first hour was wasted walking in a great arc from Volvic railway station back to the.....station! The original

route (as we were soon to discover on many other occasions) had changed - this particular deviation was due to active volcanic ash quarrying operations. The second route finding sortie proved successful and we thus started out on a 20 mile trek through woodland (Eunice tripped over a tree root early on and took a tumble), up steep sided ancient volcanoes (the Auvergne area contains over two hundred extinct volcanoes), through overgrown craters and around cinder tracks on crater rims, more woodland, open fields and hillsides bearing south towards the Puy de Dome. More than once, did we divert from the track looking for the small red and white flashes marking the GR route - these could be on posts, trees or painted on rocks on the ground. Some were immediately obvious while others were indistinct and we had to keep our eyes peeled for the next 10 days. A map (Institut Geographique National sheet 49 or larger scale maps) and guide book 'Walks in Volcano Country' by Alan Castle were never far away from the top of the sack. It was a very warm day and late in the afternoon after mile on mile (or should we say, kilometre après kilometre) we struggled up the steep slopes to the summit of the Puy de Dome (1,464m) and relished a couple of beers in a café - where the warcries "*Trois biers et une panache*" and "*et moi aussi*" were born. We spent time watching hang gliders before concluding the day's march - another 6 kilometres through forest ending at the hamlet of Laschamp. There, we met a wonderful lady who not only provided excellent accommodation but also whistled up a filling meal after hours. Day 1 had been long and tough and a few injuries needed tending including blisters and sore shoulders. Steve concluded that a fleece had to be worn to pad his shoulders regardless of the heat and over the course of the next days, his generous offers of mixed nuts and raisins and other edibles were largely ignored. "*No thanks....Steve's just trying to reduce the weight of his pack!*".

The journey length varied from day to day, none being as long as the first day. Day 2 meandered through woods and fields, forest and open countryside. There was no rush and lunch was planned at a small village where the prospect of a beer to quench the thirst on this hot day seemed appropriate. Alas, the hotel was closed and the odour from the local cesstank forced us to move on to shelter from the heat by a hedge in a field. Although our destination was not far from here, the last few kilometres seemed endless. We checked into our first gites d'etape - a converted farm building in Pessade. Under the shade of an umbrella, we relaxed with the daily *trois biers et une panache* - several times over. Steve, for one, enjoyed the third day's hike, over undulating open countryside and onto high hills and along a ridge. There was a huge bar-code on the hillside. This turned out to be one of a number of public arts dotted around the district over the summer. It crossed our minds that all Scotland's high hills should be bar-coded and that to prove a successful climb, the bar-code would have to be scanned into a personal log. We dropped down into the pleasant spa town of Mont Dore for the night staying at a quaint old hotel - in a small single room of course. The hotel had character - like something from a period film in Paris. There was a brisk climb out of the town up to the head of the valley leading to Puy de Sancy next day. We (after an interesting discussion) opted to use the cable car to take us towards the summit at 1,885m - a journey of some 4 minutes. The alternative would have been a slow grinding plod up a steeply graded path with many calories expended! Wimps!!! From the summit, it was plain sailing along the crest, down a gritty steep track (the only one we encountered) and on to Super-Besse (a purpose built ski resort). This appeared to be a ghost town at this time of year until we discovered the small centre where a 2 star hotel (2 rooms) was booked followed by a few beers and a good meal in a tavern. John had spotted a series of lakes on the map lying to the east of the GR 4 and was keen to see them. This idea

had been drip fed to us and it would add an extra days walking. We decided to go for it. The next day, therefore, we headed east onto the GR 30, a pleasant enough march through varied landscapes including a marsh with a planked walkway running through it, endless fields of tuneful cattle ending in the small town of St Genes Champespe. The gites d'etape was the town's community centre and it was very well appointed. We were the only occupants for the night. To entertain the UK visitors, the town put on a show to celebrate the local saint - with a donkey race, a fair and a super fireworks display in the evening which we had a grandstand view of from the balcony of the gite. Good food in the local hotel. It rained hard that night and the ground was wet and the atmosphere clammy the following morning.

The anticipated splendour of the lakes was a disappointment. They had nothing to commend them so we continued along the lakeside and headed back west to join the GR 4 again. This involved a long walk through forest on muddy tracks before breaking out into the countryside and a slow march across fields which had been churned up by cattle - hard going. Steve - *"I found this to be the hardest day with the pack weighing me down and I was suffering from pins and needles in my left leg later in the day on account of it"*. Meanwhile, Eunice was keeping up with John who generally walked up front stoically suffering in silence from her blistered feet. Steve's blister caused by wearing Josh's socks instead of his own on day 1 had improved thanks to the use of Compeed plasters. We reached a point where the two GR routes were supposed to meet but from our angle of approach this was not obvious in spite of seeing what looked to be a signpost near woods. After some doubt about the direction we were taking, Chris and Steve followed John and Eunice on a route which turned out to be the GR 4 heading in a southerly direction. After nearly two kilometres, we all turned around and walked back north eventually dropping into the town of Egliseneuve-d'Entraïgues which had a fine gites d'etape - the best we stayed at. We had the building to ourselves (again) - a hot shower revived weary bones and perked us up for a good meal at a small hotel - a local dish of trouffade.

The next day's walk was also quite long but at least the guide book stated there was a gites d'etape and restaurants in Lugarde. Now firmly back on the GR 4, the path often followed a course between fields along narrow (often overgrown) lanes. It would be fair to say we were very disappointed in the condition of parts of the route. There appears to be little or no maintenance and the absence of other long distance walkers indicated the route is not well used - at least at this time of year. Also, there were numerous ingenious fences barring the way - odd gates and openings which needed a good IQ to solve the puzzle. Half way through the walk, we stopped in the valley town of Condat for a beer and a patisserie. There was a climb out of the valley the top section of which, through forest, was hard work on steep gradients. At last, we reached Lugarde, dumped our gear in a care-worn gites d'etape, drank down two beers and discovered the restaurant was closed (forever!). Nobody had a thing to eat other than nuts and raisins and we'd been eating these constantly for days. A miracle happened! but not of the order of the loaves and fishes - Steve pulled the ingredients of a meal from his pack. A TV celebrity chef might have conjured up some thoughtful and mouth watering delicacy from the packets of cous-cous and tin of sardines. Regrettably, without a cooking range and with few utensils and no imagination, we had to put up with cous-cous and sardines 'on the rocks'. Certainly not a banquet but enough to feed us for one evening. We met a

young Frenchman (walking part of the GR 4 south to north) and we joined him in conversation at a bar later.

The following day (a Wednesday) is one we shall not forget in a hurry. The early morning visit to the boulangerie produced nothing more than a stale baquette (*"Monsieur, you should have ordered your bread yesterday!"*). It was edible, if a tad crunchy! The lanes leading to St Saturnin were in atrocious condition, ankle breaking rocky surfaces, but at least the thought of the shop in the village kept us moving in anticipation of stocking up. Nope!! Wednesday was closing day!! Onwards and upwards we passed an old chateau used as a farm and standing on guard were two dogs who didn't like the look of the intruders in their domain. The snappy terrier bit Eunice and Chris fended off further attack. Around the corner in an open field we sat down so Eunice could dress the wound (it had drawn blood) and we could have a bite to eat - *"Elevenses"* Iain would say. Steve - *"John was sitting behind me to the right and I was conscious he was saying something but it did not register. I was too busy searching for that huge slab of fruit and nut chocolate I'd been carrying for days"*. *"The bull, a bull's coming..."* or words to that effect is what we eventually heard. We turned around to see this enormous Saler bull snorting away and advancing towards us. This registered all right! *"Where the f*** did he come from!"* We were on our feet, food in mouth, quickly picking up items strewn around our bags and moving hastily onto the road with John saying *"Don't run, don't run!"* Steve - *"I walked smartly still pushing things into the pack cocking my head to the right to see where the monster was and seeing where everyone else was - ah, good, it's rolled onto its back and is behind a wire fence (of one strand)"*. This must be a bull's ritual as it was back on its feet bellowing away and at us again - almost cartoon like. *"There's a gap in the wire - sh**!"* It chased us from his fiefdom stopping only when it reached a cattle grid. Even then, it leant forward in threatening posture snorting. Later, Eunice and John met an English woman walking her dog who assured Eunice that the dogs in this area would not have rabies! Well, at least, that was re-assuring. An eventful day but it was not over yet and there was still a long way to go, including a tramp over many miles of moorland and some hills aiming towards the next highland hills around Puy Mary. We arrived at the stone buron (old shepherd's house) in the late afternoon and bought local produce nearby for a meal. Several other people were staying (French and Belgian). The ground level of the buron was barrel vaulted and dark inside lit by dim lights and candles - a long wooden table and wood fire. Giving the impression of being in a medieval inn. The dormitory was entered from the back of the building and was snug. Heavy rain overnight.

Puy Mary mountain (1,783m) was shrouded in mist the following morning though it was not raining. A French couple suggested we follow them on a path which they had previously used which bypassed the main part of the ridge and the gash called Breche de Rolland (which would have provided some mild scrambling had we climbed it). This proved to be a relatively short day's walk in the mist over the high hills and down into another ski resort at Super Liorent. The place was dead with little open for business. We shared a drink with our new French friends then went in search of accommodation. There was very heavy rain late in the afternoon so we checked into a hotel (2 rooms again) and had a fantastic buffet meal that evening listening to Mirieu Matthieu and assorted 'camp' entertainers - favourites of our gay host. Luckily, the next day was fine again and there was an early hard slog up steep ski slopes to the summit of Le Plomb du Cantal with good views north to Puy Mary and the route we'd walked in mist. We enjoyed this day's walking over these elevated hills and later over moorland with fine views and

were in good spirits. Steve - *"I was well used to the weight of the backpack by this time finding no difficulty on the steep ascents and descents. It was the long level marches earlier in the journey which were the most uncomfortable"*. More often than not, the pace of John and Eunice meant they walked up front while Chris and Steve strolled along in order at the back at their own pace sometimes chatting about the day's observations and life in general and at other times, lost in personal thoughts. Steve - *"I often have good ideas at these times when one's mind is relaxed and inventive but I usually forget the detail of what it was I was thinking of later on! Maybe I should carry a dictaphone"*.

In spite of the guide book assurance there was a choice of hotels in Valuejols, the penultimate night stop, one hotel had closed for business and the other appeared to be closed for the season. Were we stuck? Chris's knowledge of French was considered best so he was allocated the job of phoning for a taxi which took us to St Flour. This was journey's end and we missed one day's walk. Still, John had perhaps foreseen this and had added the detour to St Genes Champespe. We spent two nights in another single room in the historic centre of St Flour - this was blessed with a toilet/shower area with a curtain but no door. We'll leave your imagination to this one. We spent Saturday exploring the fortified town striking off individually or in groups, meeting up having coffee and wandering off again. It was bliss putting backpacks onto the train to Clermont-Ferrand the following day in the knowledge it wouldn't have to be strapped to one's back again (until perhaps the next time). Our last day was spent looking around Clermont-Ferrand. John and Eunice teamed up and Steve and Chris decided to wander separately. Steve - *"I visited the square near the cathedral and sat in the sun at a café writing up notes of the journey for some time sipping coffee and relaxing. Chris came along later and saw me sitting there - we had a beer then decided to follow John and Eunice who had caught the tram to Ferrand - an interesting old part of the city with narrow streets and quaint buildings. We returned to Clermont and sat in the shade in the square in the lower part of town watching the world go by - more beer and an ice cream"*. We all returned to the square later so we could sit out on that pleasant warm evening and enjoy the setting sun and relive amusing recollections of the past two weeks - we waited for John to peruse all the eating establishments before sitting down and enjoying wine and good food.

And finally, came the last test! Was it possible to catch the only flight to Glasgow from Paris? The simple answer was No! The flight from Clermont was delayed and we were held on the plane for some time at Paris because there was no ground crew available. When we did get off, we missed the shuttle bus to the main terminal and hence the check in for our flight. Fortunately, there was a later flight to Edinburgh which we booked onto and thanks are due to KMC Thunderbirds to the Rescue (Meg for taking us all to Glasgow Airport for the outward journey and Anna for picking us up in Edinburgh). It was an interesting trip in more ways than one and different to the experience of other long distance walks - more in the style of the Southern Uplands Way perhaps.

A Dash of Panache

by Eunice

Well you will all have just read the no doubt edited story of our adventures in the Auvergne - now for a different tale - what it is like to go on holiday with 3 guys - the

bird's eye view.

Firstly, we didn't talk about handbags or shoes or styles or fashions (not surprising really) and I wouldn't have anything to add to such a conversation. We did talk about ATM's - those lovable machines that give you money just because you have a little plastic card. This discussion did lead to a further one about how high a pissoire should be. I had nothing to add to that discussion either! Riveting stuff!
Trains and railways featured greatly - different kinds of trains and railways from here to there and there to here.

And as for sound effects particularly during the night! Beer and wine probably has a lot to answer for. I don't think the couscous and mackerel we ate one night helped either - but I will be eternally grateful to Steve for bringing them for it was those or nothing.

Avoiding the dog s*** in Claremont Ferrand was great fun especially in sandals. If you ever go there girls wear your wellies.

When we had to share a hotel room we asked for 4 beds but usually got 1 double and 2 bunk beds. I think they drew straws to see who was unlucky enough to share the double bed with me - Please note, in our individual sleeping bags. I did get the top bunk in one occasion, John and Chris sharing the double bed - who drew the short straw there I'm not sure.

Everyone's underwear was on display as it dried hung on the end of the beds, door handles, radiators and curtain rails. We Brits are clean people.

All of us had "some French" and usually at least one of us had understood what had been said to us. This was actually a lot of fun and between us I think we did exceedingly well with the exception of Super Besse where they speak a language all of their own - I guess a bit like our Doric.

Gallons of paint must have been used over the years maintaining the red and white dashes which mark the correct direction along every GR route. On this walk a new sign had been introduced, one I had never seen before, a red and white cross indicating "not this way". It took the eagle eyes of all four of us and constant vigilance to ensure we were following our route. A French ploy I think to ensure team spirit.

Team spirit also prevailed when it came to beating off mad dogs and potentially dangerous bulls.

All in all Grande Randonnees are an adventure, a setting off on a journey into the unknown and a sense of achievement when completed - all made more enjoyable in good company. Well enough drivel, I must go and do something useful

Inchnadamph and the North West (September 2008) Steve

The hostel at Inchnadamph is a favourite with the KMC and Frank booked places there for this year's late September weekend. When the newsletter published this proposed

trip in 2007, my mind was set a-thinking! (forward planning is, after all, my occupation). I could see there was an opportunity to link some leave with the KMC outing. Unlike the recent French trip which had been organised by John and I basically just turned up, this trip was itemised with a definite daily goal in sight. Setting off the preceding Sunday, I drove to Inverness and then into Strathconon west of Maryburgh - a pleasant glen which lies in the hinterland between Cannich and Garve. At this time of year, I conveniently forget that the stalking season is in full swing but realise my plans may have to be adapted. On the walk to the first hill (Bac an Eich - bank of the horse - 849m), the gillie came out of his lodge and asked where I was bound. He was friendly and I indicated I would use the book route to the summit which was fine. He informed me stalkers would be out on the hill the following day so he would have an idea as to the location of deer. The walk was straight forward in clear weather. Near the top, the clag rolled in enveloping me in mist and rain. The long grass and heather which was dry on the ascent soaked me on the descent (total for the day 4 hours 25 mins). Someone must have heard my prayers as this was the only rain I encountered all week while I was walking on my own! I settled down by Kinlochewe that night after a good pub meal - a cold night with a clear starry sky.

The Monday was the brightest day of the week with sunshine. I was away up the excellent path that leads towards the north side of Beinn Eighe fairly early. The path peters out and one has to navigate across bedrock and a shattered bouldery moonscape leading to Ruadh stac-Beag - small red conical hill - (896m) - see page 182 of the corbetts book. It is defended by steep sides and cliffs and the final ascent calls for a climb up steep boulder scree on its southern side. Care is required for the descent and I was glad I climbed it in good visibility otherwise I could imagine the hill being quite daunting. The second corbett (Meall a' Ghiubhais - hill of the fir tree - 886m) is more straight forward from the col up steep grassy slopes (total for the day 6 hours 45 mins). I recall Liz saying she liked these hills and I now appreciate why. Easy access and good views of the Torridon hills and Beinn Eighe massif, the Flowerdale Forest hills, Loch Maree, Slioch and the corbetts north of the loch (my target for the following day). That evening, there was a sunset to die for and I watched the ever-changing lighting effects from Gairloch until the sun disappeared beyond the horizon. Magic! I had time to visit the Solas Contemporary Gallery where the artisans produce watercolours of west coast landscapes and modern ceramics. I bought a large framed watercolour print entitled 'Gathering Clouds over Baosbheinn' for Anna's birthday (www.robhowardwatercolours.co.uk and www.lynbecket.com for further information). Small gallery but a visit is recommended.

Next morning, I used the bike to cycle the 6k from Poolewe to Kernsary Lodge. It is a good 3 hour walk from here to the summit of Beinn Airigh Charr - hill of the rough shieling - (791m) using a stalker's track which wound its way to within a few hundred feet of the airy summit. The early part of the day was still and clammy. From the summit, one can see Fionn Loch and the Fisherfield munros to the north. Beinn Lair - hill of the mare - (860m), further to the east, was hidden by mist at the time. I'd seen a vehicle parked near the main track earlier but no sign of stalking activity though there were a great number of deer dispersed across the hillsides. I followed the south western ridge line towards Loch Maree to a point where one can descend to the moorland safely and approached a series of bedrock extrusions where lunch was planned.

Sitting on the highest rock was a great raptor watching me as I drew near. I am no expert but I judged by the size and colouring that the bird was a sea eagle - magnificent creature. It flew off leaving me to my sandwich and contemplating the most appropriate route to Beinn Lair. In the wilds, it is often difficult to judge distances accurately as the landscape is painted on a wide canvass. It took longer to reach the summit of Beinn Lair than imagined. I left the summit at 3pm and did not climb the 'graham' (Meall Mheinnidh) which lies between the two corbetts as suggested in the Corbetts book. It's a 7 mile or so trek back to Kernsary Lodge from this point and I joined the stalkers path which cuts over the hill towards Fionn Loch then west under Scotland's longest continuous mountain cliffs along a well made track back to the bike. The only people I saw were two folk planning to camp at the eastern end of Fionn Loch. On the north side of Beinn Airigh Charr is a landslip - part of the cliff face has sheered off and tumbled into a mass of enormous jumbled boulders. My notes record "arrived car at 7pm tired but happy! - total for the day 10 hours 15 mins". The night was spent by Gruinard Bay.

Wednesday was to prove another big effort burning off lots more calories! Rather than walk in to Shenavall bothy from the north to climb Beinn Dearg Mor - big red hill - (910m) and Beinn Dearg Beag - little red hill - (820m), I thought the bike might prove useful for a cycle along the track by Gruinard River. Richard had been wondering whether this was a good route. While this proved useful for the first 6k to near Loch na Sealga, there is a tiresome walk over undulating ground from the western end of the loch and the path is indistinct in many places. Not at all well used. Wilderness country this and it took nearly 3 hours walking with no height gained to reach the point where one strikes south from the loch steeply up into the corrie between the two mountains. I felt more lonely in this location than anywhere else on this and, indeed, other trips, including on Beinn Lair - the clouds began to obscure the nearby An Teallach munro tops so I decided to climb Beinn Dearg Mor first as its summit would surely vanish if the cloud continued to sink. The path is steep but emerges onto a narrow elevated summit hemmed in by cliffs on three sides. A golden eagle perched on the exposed tower near the summit cairn watched me. I stopped in my tracks and admired it and felt privileged to be so close to it (20 yards) in its territory - it turned its head and dropped silently into the abyss. Back to the col and the climb through boulders onto the smaller of the two corbetts. It might be possible to continue westwards along this undulating ridge but I saw many cliffs and crags on the approach walk and decided to play it safe and returned by the same route cutting off a corner of the moorland on the lower slopes of the mountain with a descending traverse to the loch. I simply put my head down on the way back breaking the long walk into sections, stopped for a nibble by the end of the loch and watched some very large brown trout jumping clean out of the water to catch insects. Total for the day 9 hours 50 mins. I stopped in Ullapool to replenish groceries and have a fish and chip tea prior to driving in the dark to the eastern end of Loch Stack near Achfary on the A838, where I spent the night.

Next morning the hills were clear again although it was cloudy and I climbed Ben Hee - fairly hill - (873m) and back in 3 hours 25 mins. The old stalker's path which follows a gully towards the summit has been washed away in no fewer than seven places by the stream which obviously draws its waters from porous rocks higher up. There was plenty of water flowing in spite of little rain. There was a long drive east along the A838 then north to Tongue and Ribigill for Ben Loyal - legal mountain - (764m), a hill I have long

wanted to climb. This hill was one of a set of water colour paintings produced by my mother's uncle from Lenzie (William Douglas Macleod) who was commissioned by British Railways in the 1950s to paint landscapes which adorned railway carriages under the luggage racks. I set off at 2.25pm in sunshine along a good track heading towards the great rock prow of Sgurr Chaonasaid which is avoided on the east by a path and winds up peat slopes to the ridge. I mentally noted from the Corbetts book that one easily bypasses a second summit (Sgor a' Bhatain) on the east before reaching the summit tor of An Caisteal. From the route of my ascent, I saw a large tor and struggled up a steep grass bank towards it thinking it to be the second top referred to in the book. I was surprised to find no larger summit beyond it and therefore navigated around the tor finding a path onto slabs which led to the summit trig point. Orkney could be seen in the haze. I was trying to be careful all week walking over boulders, scree and peat hags. There were small indents and holes in the ground and these can easily defeat an unsuspecting experienced walker. On the way down I raised my head for a second to spot a place for a wee snack while continuing to walk, stubbed my foot in a hole and promptly fell full length skidding along damp grass on one knee ending up with my head ramming the side of a dry peat hag. I wasn't hurt but it was a reminder that accidents can easily occur - if the peat had been a rock!!! I didn't dwell on this and had the planned snack instead. Back at the car at 6.30 (total 4 hours 5 mins). I drove west around Loch Eriboll, stopping for a meal at the Sango Bay Oasis (pub) at Durness for a meal, ending up back at Loch Stack for a second night.

On the Friday, I climbed Beinn Leoid - sloping hill - (792m) in the morning (total 4 hours 20 mins) using the excellent stalker's path from the A838 east of Loch More - a hill which sits in the hinterland north of the Conival/Ben More Assynt massif. I met a gillie and his client climbing up the zig zag path from the road as I dropped back to the car. I'd heard and seen deer all over the place and assured them they would probably not be disappointed. I am not sure what they thought of my presence since I was wearing a colourful bandana. They were followed up the path by two young lads leading ponies and they stopped to talk. One of them was impressed that I'd already climbed Beinn Leoid that morning and even more impressed when I said I was off to climb the corbett to the north. He was correct in thinking I was nuts! Anyway, he assured me there were no stalkers on Meallan Liath Coire Mhic Dhughail - grey hill of MacDougall's corrie - (801m) that afternoon which was good news. I used the bike again and the climb to the corbett with the huge name was made easier using a good stalkers track to gain height, then a diversion across moorland and some tedious peat hags on a rising traverse with a final steep pull to the summit. I arrived back at the car in 4 hours flat just as the clouds obscured the summit. Fired up by a successful week and some hard walking, I drove south to Inchnadamph to join my KMC colleagues thankful of a beer and a blether about the past week and the prospect of walks over the weekend. Frank and Linda had driven up by Attadale Gardens to collect some plants of interest.

The weather broke on the Friday evening and there was heavy rain which persisted well into Saturday. Frank was keen to climb the four northerly munros over the weekend and persuaded Eunice to chum him on a trip which took in Ben Hope and Ben Klibreck on the Saturday, which they achieved in a very good time when you take into consideration the long drive. Richard (down to fewer than 10 corbetts to climb) also drove north that day and climbed Ben Hee. Jean is steadily reducing her corbetts too and was keen to climb

two in this area - she, Iain and Sue climbed Breabag. Liz and Linda went off on separate country walks, Linda searching in vain near Achiltibuie for a broch. I went to Ullapool to kill time, bit the bullet and purchased some Paramo trousers, later driving to Desolation Road near Braemore Junction and walked along Loch a' Bhraoin and climbed Creag Rainich - bracken crag - (807m) in damp but improving conditions to test the new breeks - super lighting effects that afternoon and a huge complete rainbow over the loch. One of the reasons why I am enjoying climbing the corbetts is one sees the landscape from a different perspective - excellent vantage points to see neighbouring munros - in this case, good views of the eastern edge of the Fisherfield mountains with their enormous exposed slabs. Near the loch and hidden in a gully was an 8 foot high Larsen trap with a stinking rotting deer inside. It was hidden from view and I must admit I thought it was designed to capture raptors. The customary communal meal later on completed a satisfying day for all concerned.

On Sunday, Eunice and Frank climbed Conival and Ben More Assynt which were in mist. Iain and Jean went off in search of new walks. Liz, Linda and I toured the byways of Assynt (Stoer peninsula, Raffin lighthouse, Clachtoll broch, Achmelvich beach, Lochinver, Achin bookshop at Inverkirkaig for lunch, a tour around the Inverpolly nature reserve road and Achiltibuie where the lighting conditions over the sea were nice). Richard and Sue headed home. On Monday, in uncertain weather, Iain and Jean climbed Glas Bheinn so Jean could complete her northern corbetts, Eunice climbed Geal Charn near Drumochter on the way south, Frank, Linda and Liz walked on their way home and I climbed Beinn Liath Mhor a' Ghuibhais Li - big grey hill of the coloured pines - (766m) south of Loch Glascarnoch and east of Braemore Junction to complete my corbetts lying to the north of Torrindon. Another good KMC September outing and a very satisfying trip over the week with many top quality mountains climbed.

Sunday 23rd November 2008

by Eunice

This was the day four of us had volunteered to be rescued by the Lomond Mountain Rescue Team. Although I was prepared for cold weather, on opening the curtains and seeing the snow lying I added a few more thermal and fleecy layers. I left the house looking and feeling like the "Michelin Man". Soon we were all up at the Crow Road car park where we met Ronnie Newton. Peter and Ronnie had liaised beforehand about the scenarios and where we should be while we waited to be rescued. The volunteers to be rescued were Peter, Richard, Donald, myself and Alec a friend of one of the LMR Team. The scenarios were that we had started out as a group of five and when one person, Richard (well there's a surprise Ed.), had started to feel unwell and developed chest pains we had decided to quickly leave the hills and return to the cars. Unfortunately Alec was to hurt his ankle and was only able to move slowly. Donald was to stay with him. Both casualties in due course became unable to proceed and so we became two parties each with a casualty, each requiring to be rescued.

So off we set and tramped to our appointed spots, Peter, Richard and I to a hollow below Locket Hill and Donald and Alec further over nearer Meikle Bin. We were in place by 9.45am and Donald and Alec soon after.

It was reasonably warm inside our four man bothy bag and the chat was great. Richard had brought some whisky in a hip flask - which helped to keep those two warm! The time passed quickly and by 11.25am we could hear voices outside. Once they had spotted us the team who had done a sweep search across the hillside were incredibly efficient and focussed. Four or five immediately took charge of Richard asking him questions such as "Was he cold?", "When did the pains start?", "Had he had them before?", "Had they worsened?", "Was he aware of having heart problems?", "Was he on any medication?" etc etc. He said this felt a bit strange because he alright after all but was having to think what his answers should be. They administered oxygen and wrapped him in what looked like a body bag with just his face showing.

Meanwhile Peter and I were also questioned about how we felt. The people accompanying casualties are also potential casualties and are also required to be monitored. In real life they could suffer delayed shock or hypothermia. After convincing them that we were fine, two people were allocated to us to walk us off the hill. While all this was happening the team were in constant contact with their control vehicle. The decision was made to stretcher Richard off the hill and Peter and I departed with our escort.

The wait in the control vehicle was extremely interesting and informative. Only once we had arrived did get any news of the other two. They had not been found yet. The rest of the team had been split into smaller parties, each searching a designated area as designated by the controllers at base. We were able to hear the various groups reporting which areas they had searched unsuccessfully. They were then allocated another area. All of this was co-ordinated and monitored and each area and search was recorded. Time was passing and they still had not been found. Later they told us they had chosen not to use their two man bothy bag but had each used a bivvy bag and were warm and comfortable.

Richard meanwhile was secured and wrapped into a stretcher with runner - a bit like a sledge- and was sledged off the hill. We returned a little way back up the hill where Peter assisted in bringing the stretcher down. It is hard work - so the more hands the better. Richard being bound and defenceless and grinning like Cheshire cat, I gathered up snow and threatened to rub it into his face. On our return to the control vehicle the monitoring of Richard continued. Meanwhile the search for the other two was ongoing and the plethora of gear so far used was checked, counted and packed.

Then unbelievably a real rescue call was received by the team and Donald and Alec were told to make themselves visible (Ronnie had their telephone numbers) because the practice would have to be called off while they prepared to depart for Conic Hill where a person had slipped/fallen and had an injured leg. Some of the Rescue team departed for Conic Hill to commence this real rescue while the other having now "found" Donald and Alec made their way off the hill. There was also the possibility that a helicopter would be despatched for the casualty and that LMR Team would not be required but the controllers had to wait for confirmation that that was happening. This did come through and those who had already set off for Conic Hill were recalled (to the pub - not to the Campsies). Ongoing was the checking and packing of the considerable amount of gear

which must be ready for any future callouts. We all joined them in the Fintry Inn for soup and sandwiches. Here they thanked us for being there for them that day. Wrong way round I thought. I had thoroughly enjoyed the day, learnt a lot and appreciated even more the time they put in on our behalf. I was so impressed by their enthusiasm, their efficiency, their methodology - a practised art- and their willingness to give up their time for us for practice or real incidents.

A Scud Roon Durisdeer Sinclair

Conscience pricked by committee comments about low Sunday turnouts, even (if not particularly) by committee members, I more or less promised John I would be there on the 21st to head south for Durisdeer. Early Sunday morning the weather could only be described by a word or words whose use would render this report unacceptable to Charmian's server. Nevertheless ignoring weather and a throat which felt as if it had lost a round with a razor wire fence, I struggled up, out and off to St Mary's driven by my sense of loyalty not to leave John on his own. Sense of stupidity it turned out as Eunice was already there to keep him company.

Undaunted we set off in a southerly direction for a change into the depths of South Lanarkshire. John not having his GPS turned on, we missed the turnoff for Durisdeer (perhaps driving through Durisdeermill should have been some kind of indication we were in the whereabouts of the place) but never mind, another turning, another approach and there we were parked outside a parish church bigger than the village it served. Fifteen minutes or so of listening to the essential Burt Bacharach and Ian and Jean arrived accompanied by a dog which seemed considerably more kempt than Ian himself.

Off we sauntered up the Kirk Burn through a holocaust of rabbit remains until John pointed out the map indicated the remains of a Roman Fortlet on the other side of the glen. Ah that should be interesting, they all agreed. I, considering the amount of height gained to be sacrificed (something one only does in the direst of emergencies such as a friend losing a limb) and the site in question being a Roman fortLET i.e. wee and coming at the end of 2000 years of erosion, decided against said investigation and continued sauntering up the very good path we were on. From my position of superior altitude it was illuminating to watch my colleagues skittering over some barely discernible mounds, like a compost heap, and then militarily taking to the Roman road leading in a Roman straight line up the glen until it degenerated into a bog. Ah Time Team should be here...

Reunited at the top of the glen we ascended Durisdeer Hill. The dog/bitch Sana or something like it was the name (by this time the ears were overspilling virus) sent up a grouse and then showed herself a true KMC member by scurrying about aimlessly in all directions once the bird had flown. From Durisdeer Hill we slogged over Little Scaw'd Law and finally on to Scaw'd Law itself. Taking shelter behind the accompanying wall for a hurried lunch I noted, by the way, how little shelter a drystone dyke offers to the kidneys of the flu infected. John meanwhile, with the light of the inveterate bagger in his eyes, noted that just to the north was the Graham/Graeme or something of Ballencleuch Law. Just before that short phrase beginning with P and ending with two fs could cross my lips the light went out (that happens often with John) and he muttered 'Another day'. I myself was mildly amused by the incongruity on the one map section of the tweely romantic Glenvalentine and the more robust Meikle Shag.

Stepping through the wall to begin our descent we met the full blast of the wind hurling rain and hail painfully into the face but fortunately only for a few minutes. Final return to the cars and exiting the village, by the shortest route this time, through a ford which we sensibly let the Keddiemobile test first for depth. A good day out with the club.

Tulloch Station Lodge (October 2008) Steve

KMC's last annual weekend outing is normally held in November. This year it was arranged a little earlier staying at the Station Lodge, Tulloch - a new venue for the club. Unfortunately, the weather in late October was not being too kind. The temperature dipped dramatically and there was a lot of precipitation. The forecast for the weekend was not good, to say the least! Nonetheless, seven brave KMC folks turned out.

Steve drove north early on the Friday with an open mind about what might be achieved with such a forecast. You just have to go for it! In the late morning, he climbed the Fara - ladder - (911m) near Dalwhinnie. Squalls were coming in from the west and at one stage he resembled a snowman climbing the slopes to the summit in soft new snow which was two feet deep in places near the summit where drifting had occurred. Steve met David and Jennifer Short at Garva Bridge in the early afternoon and with David climbed Meall na h-Aisre - hill of the defile - (862m) - a bit of a slog through wet sticky moorland. The KMC folks gathered at the station bunkhouse around teatime contemplating the miserable forecast. Nobody got out for a decent walk on the Saturday, some of us electing to visit Fort William to kill time or visit various outlets or museums. The weather was as miserable countrywide.

Sunday was a little better but with frequent squalls. George and Helen went for a waterfall walk, Alistair went for a walk in the Leanachan Forest near Spean Bridge, while Ian and Fay found a suitable walk en route homewards. Steve joined David and Jennifer for walks in Glen Roy, first climbing Carn Dearg - red cairn - (834m) on the east side of the glen, and after lunch climbed steeply up the ridge of Beinn Iaruinn - iron hill - (800m) where snow and a heavy hail shower blew in from the west. John, meanwhile, travelled west along the Glenfinnan road intending to climb Gulvain but the strength of the wind forced him to turn around when he reached the first top. Steve stayed another night alone in the bunkhouse. There was more heavy rain overnight.

Next day, it was a little brighter and Gulvain and the other high hills in the region were snow covered to 600m. David and Steve drove up past Corriehoille Farm to the old forestry plantation on the north side of the Grey Corries and walked in to climb Cruach Innse - hill of the meadow - (857m) and Sgurr Innse - peak of the meadow - (809m). They reached the summit of Cruach Innse as the cloud shrouded the mountain and a snow shower started making for an interesting descent through the crags on its southern side in fairly deep snow to the col. Sgurr Innse is defended by crags and steep sides but the weather improved sufficiently to make the ascent and descent with no difficulties encountered. So endeth the KMC weekend outings for 2008 and we look forward to the 2009 season starting with Tranearth in January.