



Cioch Mountaineering Club (Dunfermline)

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Meet Report 1: Strathspey Mountain Hostel, Newtonmore, 12th & 13th January 2018

Contributed by Calum Craigie

7 members attended: Jim D, Dave, Brian, Geoff, John W, Steve G, Calum

Saturday Walks: Brian and Dave: Carn an Fhreiceadain
 Steve: Carn Dearg (Monadhliath)
 Jim D: The Sow of Atholl
 John W: Mullach Clach a'Bhlair
 Geoff: Beinn Lurgy
 Calum: Winter Skills Course

Strathspey Mountain Hostel isn't everyone's favourite venue for a club meet but in January when daylight hours are short and the roads can be treacherous it provides the ideal compromise. The hostel itself has lost most of what character it had with the removal of the living room fireplace a couple of years ago but there has been some investment in the bedrooms as the mattresses and duvets had been renewed since our last visit.

When it comes to hillwalking in winter I put myself in the "all the gear but no idea" category. I've carried the ice axe and crampons on numerous occasions but never actually had any call to use them. However being cognisant of my own limitations I decided to book onto a Winter Skills Course for the weekend in an attempt to gain the skills and confidence to enjoy the hills in winter.

I had to meet the instructor, a German chap called Andreas, and three other students at 8:30am in Aviemore for introductions and to ensure we carried the right equipment up the hill. First thing I found out was that my boots are graded as B2 but my crampons are C1. Andreas told me that although they fit I should really be using a C2 crampon that had a rear clip. He compared it thus: "it's like your gran trying to drive a BMW". That didn't really make any sense as my gran always caught the bus! Next to fail the test was my ice axe. It is still very shiny through lack of use, has a strap attached and without any grip. Finally, my chosen rucksack wasn't really winter material as it was too small and also didn't have any compression straps for storing the ice axe. Fortunately, Andreas had a full stock of equipment to borrow so we grabbed his gear, jumped into the cars and headed up to the hill.



We drove up to what was an ice rink of car park at the bottom of Coire na Ciste. The wind was blowing hard from the south east so the best thing to do was to get into the corrie for the course. We learned about pacing in the car park and then used this to help with navigation as we followed the ridge line up Creagan Dubh. Eventually we reached a small gully that had some steep hard packed snow which was perfect for the initial kicking in ascent and descent using the ice axe pick for support.

We then moved further up the hill and found some deeper snow to practice more techniques with and without crampons, cutting steps, digging and inspecting snow pits. Finally, at the end of the day we

started to learn about arresting slides with the ice axe. All good fun!

Back at the hostel the other walkers were assembling after their walks and had stories of varying degrees of success. Jim D had had a short but successful day on The Sow of Atholl at Drumochter. Steve and I had done two of the three Monadhliath munros two year ago so Steve was back to climb Carn Dearg. John had an aborted attempt at Mullach Clach a'Bhlair having walked up Coire Fhearnagan to where the wind was too fierce to carry on. Geoff had succumbed to a bug and wasn't able to head out on his planned walk down Glen Feshie.

Brian and Dave had completed the local Corbett, Carn an Fhreiceadain. The wind above 550m was a constant 50mph which severely impeded their progress. Crampons helped with the grip on the path and also across



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to the summit trig point. Overall it was a solid 6 hours to complete.

After the usual evening of flat beer and excessive banter (apologies, I may have got that the wrong way around) I was up early for the second day of my course. The forecast was for even higher winds so we drove up to the ski centre and were lucky to find a very good patch of snow fairly close to the centre above the path to Coire an t-Sneachda. The morning was all about arresting slides and falls in all positions and scenario – on my back, front, head first (front and back), with ice axe and without. As Andreas put it – we had to learn what to do when the “compass hits the fan”!



In the afternoon we retreated to the Glenmore Visitor Centre for a hot drink and to discuss planning a winter day out and also some theory of avalanche awareness and what to do in the event of ever witnessing someone getting caught in one. It was a good session and we had a chance to benefit from Andreas's experience.

Overall it was a really enjoyable course with a very efficient, I did say he was German, and engaging instructor.

Meet Report 2: Glencoe 16th to 18th February 2018

Contributed by Dave Paton

It's been a while since I put 'pen to paper' to write a meet report. So it's about time that I put that right.

We've been struggling to get people on the meets, which is a pity. Only five people went on the Newtonmore meet and despite poor weather we all managed to get out and do something (Jeff walked to the Coop!).

For February Olly had booked six beds in the Glencoe Hostel. I remember being there about 20 years ago, thinking it was pretty basic and we never went back. The good news is that it has undergone something of a transformation and it is now pretty neat.

Usually I prefer when we have sole occupancy, this of course is now proving to be difficult with the number of people committing to meets. However, we all quite enjoyed sharing with what turned out to be a pretty sociable and international bunch of people (they included Irish, French, Poles and Rumanians!).



The forecast for the weekend was not too good and the avalanche forecast meant that the higher slopes, particularly on the North East slopes, were in a pretty dangerous condition. The four of us who were there (Stuart, Chris, Dave T and myself) opted to head for the Pap of Glencoe. It seemed to be a popular choice on the day, we were among the first on the hill but it got quite busy as the day went on.

The prospect of a good day seemed unlikely as we sat in the car at the start of the walk with the rain hammering down on the roof. We sat for about 15 minutes and made move when it seemed to relent.

That turned out to be the last rain we had all day!

The slog up to the coll was pretty uneventful despite getting into some pretty deep snow. The Munro tops and the Pap were all shrouded in mist but we did get some good views down Loch Leven to Ballachulish and Ardgour beyond. All the while we were getting tantalising glimpses of blue sky and the wind was behaving itself.

Being early on the hill meant that there was a fair bit of fresh snow to get through, but Chis and Stuart made a grand effort and made it a bit easier for us older guys. Once on the Pap itself we opted for a fairly direct and steep route up to make it a bit more interesting (although to be fair, not that difficult). The snow was quite deep and soft but it didn't take too long to reach the summit. Disappointingly we had no view from the top, however, there was not much wind on top and we were able to enjoy our time on the summit. For the decent we chose a more gentle route and found a bit of shelter to sit and eat lunch. Back at the coll it was disappointing to look back to see that the summit was now clear and in sunshine, if only we had spent another half hour in bed!

After another pleasant and sociable evening in the Hostel Dave, Stuart and myself decided to head for home (me with a promise to get a bit fitter and to be able to walk for more than one day in the weekend). Chris headed for the Ballachuilish Horseshoe, but turned back before the summit. When I spoke to him the next Thursday he planned to head back up that weekend to get it done.



Altogether it was a most enjoyable weekend in good company. It's just a pity that we cannot persuade more members to come along. They are really missing out on some good times.

The photo below was taken by Richard Christie on the 4th of February on the way round to the summit of Stob Ghabhar from Stob a' Choire Odhair



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