



Cioch Mountaineering Club (Dunfermline)

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Meet Report: Invergarry Lodge 11th / 12th March 2011

With contributions from Neil Anderson and Dave Paton

Jim Donald went up early on Friday and climbed the big Bauchaille on the way to Invergarry. Mags & Steve and Jim D were already at the hostel when Michelle and Neil arrived at 6 pm. The last car to arrive was Olly, Vicky and Big John who parked up after 10 pm. The full list of Cioch attendees was:- Neil and Michelle; Jim D; Mags & Steve; Sharon and Andrew Rankin; Olly, Vicky and Big John; Bill & Joyce and Karen; Mary Jones, Iain Robertson; Dennis and Brian M; Pamela; Graeme H; Stuart and Dave P. Call offs were: Ian Hay, Gillian, Rhona & Alan Clapperton. Simon failed to turn up (or maybe just wasn't allowed out to play?).

With much snow on the ground but a forecast for light winds, most people set out with optimism. The actual wind conditions turned out to be anything but light, and with people finding the going very unpleasant in low cloud and strong wind, most people achieved less than they had hoped for [*Looks like I made the right choice to go skiing in Norway then!*].

Graeme, Stuart, Dave P, Neil, Sharon and Andy Rankin set out to do Gleouraich and Spidean Mialach in a clockwise direction. Conditions weren't too bad up the stalkers path to around 700 m, but above this, visibility was reduced and the wind speed became unpleasant. In his blizzard goggles, Stuart carefully led the group safely past icy sections before the final grind up the steady gradient to the 1035 m summit of Gleouraich, which was reached at noon. With no respite from the driving wind at the cairn, the traditional summit lunch stop was forgone in favour of descending to the next col. Unfortunately however, the col proved no better a place to stop and the decision was taken to abandon further ambition for Spidean Mialach in favour of an early exit from the hill. Those of Neil's group who had iced up eye brows and eye lashes (yes some forgot their goggles) were particularly keen to leave Spidean Mialach for another day.



Dave P contributes his view of the day as follows:

The blue skies and light winds forecast turned out to be anything but with strong winds, clag, snow showers and near whiteout conditions being the reality.



Things actually started off fine with the going initially pleasant and we were looking forward to some good views later in the day as the cloud lifted. It didn't take too long to realise that this was a trifle optimistic and those that had them were soon putting on ski goggles. The wind at one point was strong enough to blow Sharon off her feet. It was a bit of a pull to reach the summit after that, although nobody fancied hanging around as it was difficult enough to stand.

From the summit we set off west, battling with the wind and struggling against the constant blast of icy spindrift blown up from the northern corrie. The going at this point was tough and Andy, showing a bit of brotherly concern, asked if Sharon was OK. To which she replied "Of course I'm not F***** OK !!!!". A side of Sharon to which I'm sure he was unaware (at least she didn't point THAT finger!).

It wasn't long afterwards that we decided enough was enough and decided to bale out, abandoned our plan to do Spidean Mialach. Even the decent was hard going through deep snow and I don't mind saying I was glad to get back to the car (the pain in my hip didn't help).

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Olly, Big John, Vicky and Dennis parked beside the Loch Quoich dam and attempted Gairich but all eventually turned back. Vicky and Dennis were first to make the sensible decision and turned back on the flat section before the final climb. Olly and Big John carried on and became "a bit misplaced" meaning that Vicky and Dennis had to wait a couple of hours in the car for them to arrive back.



Steve and Mags attempted Sron a'Choire Ghairbh. The going was ok until they emerged from the forest on the way up to the col between the two munros. They then found deep snow and a strong wind which they persevered on through until the fourth zig zag on the stalker's path winding its way up Sron a'Choire Ghairbh. By this time they were wearing their snow goggles and face masks and visibility was extremely limited so they also decided on the sensible option of turning back. There was no sign of their ascent tracks by the time they got back to the col.

Pamala, Brian, Jim D and Michelle attempted a Corbett [*sorry no info on which one!*] but turned back.

With everyone safely off the hills, TV coverage of the two international rugby matches kept a large number of the group entertained in the early part of Saturday evening before the excellent kitchen and dining facilities at the hostel were pressed into service for supper. Steve and Mags went out for a celebration dinner at the Invergarry Hotel to mark Mags's birthday. Neil, Jim D, Sharon and Andy Rankin couldn't resist the temptation to try out the hotel restaurant either. Graeme and Pamela must have known that no walking would be done on Sunday so drove south on Saturday evening.

Joyce took the initiative to organise the 8-a-side trivial pursuit quiz, with Sharon and Iain R reading the questions and Olly making the most noise. This time Olly managed to be on a winning side while Andy and Brian managed between them to repair the untunable guitar belonging to the hostel. [*On the subject of Trivial Pursuit, I arrived home from Norway to a flood of emails arguing the rights and wrongs of some of the answers on the night – **the clue is in the name of the game – it is supposed to be trivial – it is not supposed to be taken that seriously and you need to accept the answer on the card!***]

With around 5 inches of overnight snow on car roofs, thoughts were pretty focused on road conditions for the journey home, so no one attempted any hills. Steve and Mags were first away, no doubt pleased with their choice of new vehicle. They found various stuck lorries just before Dalwhinnie but all were apparently cleared away by the time the rest of the Cioch members past that way.

The overall opinion is that the Invergarry Lodge was very comfortable. The dorms had adequate space, some with wash hand basins. The shower Neil used was very good, although he understands that a couple of people had brief interruptions to the flow of hot water. The lounge was large and comfortably furnished with a large TV, piano, accordion and guitar. The kitchen was well finished and quite modern. Neil is unaware of any complaints from the owners at any time during our stay, despite a noisy trivial pursuit quiz running quite late on Saturday. Parking was a bit tight but we managed.

Aonach Eagach Winter Traverse

by Dave Lockwood

"Wotcha fancy doing at the Christmas meet?" Simon's question brought flashbacks of fruitless 5am alpine starts, staggering up the Ben only to be rebuffed by incessant drizzle and the inevitable wet afternoons in Fort Bill. It seems like the Christmas meet is especially scheduled to take advantage of the most variable not-quite-winter weather and the anticipation of the evening's entertainment makes the temptation of the pub far more appealing than yet another wet mountain. It's not that I've never managed to do anything at the Onich weekend, it just seems that way. This year was going to be different though. The whole of Scotland had been gripped by an early start to winter and a decent dump of snow. The question was clearly rhetorical as the look in Simon's eye told me he had a plan.

Consequently, Saturday morning found us puffing up the steep shoulder above the A82 towards the Aonach Eagach. Actually the pace was almost leisurely by the usual standards as we were expecting a long day and potential unknown challenges, but I was still puffing. The snow on the west was nothing like the volume we'd had in the east but increased as we gained height until there was a couple of feet of powder with a crust of windslab as we gained the ridge. Trundling over Am Bodach we were dipping in and out of wispy cloud and fortunately there was no wind.

The first challenge was to find the abseil sling which would speed our descent off Am Bodach and commit us to the ridge proper. A quick rummage in the snow soon located a decent bit of tat round a large boulder – it did briefly cross my mind to swap it for some of our vintage stuff but time was of the essence – and next we're abseiling down iced rocks and into the nick at the start of the first interesting bit. This was a good indicator for things to come with a decent thickness of verglass on absolutely everything and some funky rime growing into any previous windward directions.

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The next section was pure enjoyment with us moving together over pinnacles in an alpine style. Very steady as the exposure is occasionally obvious and we're a couple of rusty old gits re-finding our rhythm. Just don't ask Simon about the looseness of my coils; if you don't know what that means then it's just an age thing, if you do know then I plead incompetence.

As the ground eased for a while, we coiled the rope quickly and pushed on over Meall Dearg as TBF (*tempest bastid fugit* – Geordie Latin for time flies) and we still had the rest of the pinnacles to negotiate.

This was getting quite tasty now as we'd hit our stride moving together again, the difficulty increased a bit, I'd sorted my coils and daylight was looking like a last time buy. Simon bagged the plumb by leading a heavily iced chimney which we had to pitch and belay.

Then we unravelled a bit, both conscious of impending darkness we got a bit twitchy; I dropped my water bottle down a gully; moving together got messy; Si was fiddling with his gaiters and I was pegging out as I'd forgotten to eat. Fortunately we've done a lot of this kind of nonsense together so we know when to just shut up and keep moving.

We cleared the final technicalities just as it got dark and Si shared the last of his liquid with good nature knowing we were still in for a bit of a shift.

The temperature dropped dramatically as we lost the light and gently sucking snow and jelly babies we trundled over Stob Coire Leith and Sgorr nam Fiannaidh. The jackets stiffened and stuck to our faces as I discovered my head torch was lifeless.

Knowing the danger of descending anywhere near the Clachaig we lumbered down to the col by the Pap under Si's pinpoint navigation and then spent a horrible lifetime stumbling down a path/streambed that deposited us almost at Glencoe village.

The sight of headlights from Jo's car was an immense relief. She'd stoically played pool with Bruce all afternoon in the Clachaig whilst waiting for us to appear with no contact. We forgave their hilarity at our shattered demeanor and gratefully accepted a lift. Thanks guys.



Foot Notes:

- ☺ **Situations Vacant #1:** After six years in post Dennis has intimated he wishes to stand down as Club Treasurer at the AGM.
- ☺ **Situations Vacant #2:** Richard C would like stand down from the post of Membership Secretary at the AGM.

If you would like to volunteer for either post please let any committee member know you are interested.

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