



Saturday 11th - The party assembled at what turned out to be a very comfortable and well-appointed converted cottage in Elphin, in the Assynt region of NW Scotland. On the way, Mick got up very early to get to Dalwhinnie, and climbed Geal-Charn and Carn Dearg from Loch Pattack, enjoying 3 hours of steady snowfall. Ben and Little Wyvis were ascended by other members en route. The day was cool and windy with a few snow-flurries on these tops, but the weather was clearly improving, and in the evening we had good views from the hut across to Suilven. There were still significant snow patches high on the hills, but these disappeared over the next few days. After a gourmet supper (thanks, Bob), the party retired, mostly in the hut, but it was agreed that to preserve discipline and morale the president should have separate quarters, so he pitched a tent round the back.



Sunday 12th We awoke to sunshine which basically continued all week. Various parties went off to ascend Cul Mor (Helen, Michael, Bob, Rory), to climb Glas Bheinn (Mick and Richard), to visit the Eas Coul Aulinn waterfall (Britain's highest), and to traverse Ben Mor Coigach (Chris).

All parties had magnificent panoramic views and there was general agreement later that with good weather in late spring, NW Scotland is as fine as any landscape anywhere on the planet. As an added bonus, dry weather meant that the going on the hills was generally excellent.



Towards Suilven West Summit

Later Bob cooked for us again (everyone else catered one night), and before doing so CLEANED THE OVEN! – so he definitely gets the hero of the week accolade.

After supper, plans were made for early starts tomorrow.

Monday 13th A Smith party plus Richard and Chris wanted to traverse Suilven W to E, so a car was left at the east end, just N of Elphin, and the party were dropped off at Glencanisp Lodge; they had an excellent but long and tiring day, visiting all the tops.

Meanwhile Mick and Bob went off to bag the Munros of Sgurr Ban, Mullach Coire Mhic Fhearchair and Beinn Tarsuinn (Mick had only 19 left to do at the beginning of the week, and had clearly got to the “wee bit single-minded” stage of Munro collection.



Chris, Richard and Helen, Suilven summit

Bob perhaps unwisely admitted to having prospected some of the route, so was co-opted). Again they had a very long day – this was not improved when Mick and his mountain bike unexpectedly parted company, but the resultant knee damage didn't prevent him from completing the expedition.

Finally Rory climbed Meallan Liath Coire Mhic Dhugaill, an unexpectedly interesting hill with rocky corries, lochans, mountain flowers (mountain azalea, mountain everlasting) and a close view of a mountain hare.

An unfortunate wardrobe mishap on descent involving trousers resulted in a large increase in ventilation, and consequent embarrassment to the owner; the damage was fortunately only to dignity and trouser seat.

Back at the hut we compared days, listened to cuckoos and watched a set of red deer stags with antlers in velvet hopping over fences.



Mick
on the
slabs of
Sgurr
Ban

Bob on
Beinn
Tarsuinn



Tuesday 14th Unsurprisingly after the heroics of the previous day, some of us were, not to put too fine a point on it, a bit knackered – so we decided to have a trip to Handa Island. We drove to Tarbet, then got the ferry across the bay. The sea was beautiful – blue/green and very clear – and the reserve staff now put on waders and run a sort of wheelbarrow-like landing stage out to the boat. Rumour has it that on a

previous visit one YRC member, disdaining assistance to get ashore, suffered total immersion. After a briefing at the visitor centre, we wandered up to the North edge, through nesting arctic and great skuas, skylarks, and many heath spotted orchids. There were impressive cliffs with nesting guillemots, razorbills, fulmars and puffin, and a huge sea stack with a flat grassy top.

Many lizards were seen (here and throughout the trip).

We were amazed by Richard's mating dance to entice a puffin (just to be clear, he wanted to photograph it) but the puffin was less impressed – I think he missed the bit where you offer her a fresh raw sandeel in your beak. Back towards the visitor centre, we saw a seal “bottling” and eider squabbling. All in all a very interesting “day off”.



Wednesday 15th Another fine day. Parties set off for Stac Pollaidh (Michael and Helen, successfully ascended, plus the Knockan Crag geological trail), for Ben Stack (Mick, Richard, Bob and Chris – the peak was traversed, involving an interesting encounter with a fishing party, one resplendent in full highland rig – so much for tick prevention), and for Ben Mor Coigach plus shopping (Rory, involving a close encounter with a golden eagle on Speicin Coinnich, the first summit, and wonderful gorse in full bloom). The Stac Pollaidh party were rather alarmed to watch what seemed to be the start of a wildfire in a rather inaccessible location – cause unclear – but emergency services seemed to be en route to deal with it.



All parties enjoyed spectacular views of the surrounding hills. We were intrigued to discover from a chance meeting at the foot of Coigach that the Craven Pothole Club were also staying in Elphin.



Thursday 16th

Michael, Helen, Richard and Chris set off early for An Teallach, leaving one car at Corrie Hallie, and climbing the hill from Dundonnell; the first two traversed the Munro summits and returned to the Dundonnell car whilst the other two continued the traverse over the pinnacles, descending to Corrie Hallie.



Helen approaching An Teallach

Great Stack (top) and Stac Pollaidh

All were impressed to look down Lords Gully (first winter ascent 1923, JHB Bell and the YRC's own EE Roberts). Bob climbed Canisp, seeing ptarmigan, and with good views. This gave him a chance to try out his new lightweight paintbox and sketching set. Mick and Rory climbed Ben Hee, with good views to the north and east, and a very odd section of ridge fissured by landslips. It's reassuring to report that even Mick (who does not hang about when driving) dives off the road when confronted by a hurtling timber lorry round a blind bend.

Friday 17th Mick and Bob left early for another heroic day on the Munros, this time an ascent of the remote A'Mhaighdean and Ruadh Stac Mor from Poolewe.



View down Dubh and Fionn Lochs
from A Mhaighdean

The expedition was a success, with both summits collected, and fine views. This time Bob nearly came to grief on a bicycle approach – a near miss for a puddle faceplant.

Chris had a quiet day, with a trip to the beach in Gruinard bay, and Rory opted for a pleasant coast walk to the Old Man of Stoer and a visit to the bone caves on the flank of Breabag. He was relieved, stopping for a discreet pee break, to remove a tick from a VERY awkward place.

Helen and Michael visited the Tralligill caves, then climbed Conival; meanwhile Richard, already away up Conival, continued to Ben More Assynt.



Mick and Bob's very long day meant that they were late back and therefore missed Richard's culinary tour de force – an eventual triumph following near-disaster when he couldn't get a tin-opener to work, and had to resort to serious violence to open the main course. By the evening the weather was showing definite signs of deterioration.

Saturday 18th Overcast start to the day with rain forecast, so Chris, Mick, Helen and Michael opted for low-level walking, visiting the Old Man of Stoer, with the Smiths then following the now very popular NC 500 route east along the Drumbeg road.

Richard and Bob climbed Quinag. Rory potted up and down Canisp, just getting the view from the top before the weather closed in, and seeing a hare and several ptarmigan, one at very close quarters.

Sunday 19th We cleared up, packed up, and set off for home (apart from Mick, who was off to pursue more Munros).

Afternote:

While lunching by Stac Pollaidh's cairn, Michael spotted a dropped pair of climbing shoes, and was delighted to find they were his size and in good condition. Honesty compelled him to post on UKClimbing "gear found by Stac Pollaidh" and he was disappointed when within 20 minutes the owner had emailed him with their description. Still he did get a £20 reward.

This was an excellent meet, with good weather, good company, and a comfortable hut – which must surely have the best view of any club hut in the UK.

Many thanks to the SMC. We did well for wildlife, with regular sightings of eagles, cuckoos, ptarmigan and divers, as well as many seabirds, plus red and roe deer, hares, frogs and lizards. Interesting plants seen included mountain azalea and everlasting, creeping, netted and least willow, juniper, mountain avens, sundews, butterwort, alpine lady's mantle and holly fern.



Thanks to all those attending for making it such an enjoyable occasion. Rory Newman

Attendees:

Mick Borroff, Chris Hilton, Rory Newman, Bob Peckham, Helen and Michael Smith and Richard Taylor.