



ClubSpot

East Kilbride Mountaineering Club

The first forty years

By Jim Watson

All Photos: East Kilbride MC

How many climbing clubs have seen their entire membership appearing in court together? Yet, on 25th November 1969, such was the start of East Kilbride Mountaineering Club

The East Kilbride of '69 was rapidly becoming a concrete jungle that was swallowing the surrounding countryside at an alarming rate. Keen to recharge their batteries at weekends, a group of walkers and climbers based at the town's National Engineering Laboratory were making regular trips to the Highlands and decided to formalise their activities and broaden their membership by founding a mountaineering club within the town. A public meeting was called and took place in the Police Court of the Civic Centre with more than forty people signing up on the first night.

From our appearance in court things moved quickly and the first hill meet took place on 14th December – a bus trip to Arrochar with the more experienced members leading parties up the Cobbler and Ben Narnain in rain and slush (some things haven't changed). With the bus fare set at 12/6 (62p) for adults and 8/- (40p) for under 18s, the bus hire of £17 was easily met and a profit of £3 was made.



The programme of indoor meets got underway in January 1970 with a talk on route planning and map reading from the local Territorial Army. The first camping weekend, also in that January, was to Glen Coe. The minibus broke down, the tents got ripped in the wind and it rained the whole weekend, so it was not surprising that the February camp saw only five of the more indomitable (or foolhardy) spirits turning out.

This highlighted a funding problem as all transport costs were shared between those attending a meet, so the bus fares varied widely. Why didn't we simply go by car? Well, out of forty members, only four had a car and even then, four with winter camping and climbing gear in a VW Beetle was always a squash.

It was to be another three years before an annual barn dance raised sufficient funds for buses to be subsidised and standard fares introduced. Those

early barn dances were just that, a dance in a barn. A work party with brooms and disinfectant cleared out what the winter's livestock had left behind; straw bales formed the seats; the dancing was on a flagstone floor and you don't want to know about the loos.

The early meets also highlighted a need to improve the skills of the less-experienced members. With three members already acting as part-time instructors at Garelochhead Outdoor Centre, this was quickly addressed.

Talks were given on rope handling and climbing techniques, on winter skills, and on navigation. Practical sessions included navigation exercises and visits to Loudoun Hill on summer evenings.

A grant of £25 from the East Kilbride District Sports Council was frittered away on two ice axes, a 150ft climbing rope, four hemp waistlines, 20ft of webbing for slings and six karabiners.



The use of Club equipment was free on official outings and, between meets, items could be hired for 2/- (10p) per weekend or 4/- (20p) per week.

Training has continued to be central to the Club ethos and when, in 1990, Tommy Kilpatrick, a keen mentor of novice members, collapsed and died on Buachaille Etive Mor, The Tommy Kilpatrick Memorial Training Fund was established to assist



those wanting to take outside training courses. Internal training continues and, as a mark of progress (?), map and compass courses are now augmented by GPS teach-ins.

By the early 70s the Club was looking for a bothy and, in the summer of 1973, we secured the lease of the Old Stable in Glen Croe from the Forestry Commission for a princely £22 per annum.

While always basic in its accommodation, the bothy was to be a popular feature of Club life for the next 12 years. Sadly, it was never popular with other clubs – wrong area? Too close to Glasgow? Who knows? Eventually it succumbed to vandalism and our own desires to go further afield; the lease was surrendered in 1986.

While Scotland has an enormous variety to offer the mountaineer, every mountaineering club eventually turns its sights beyond our shores and looks to the higher peaks. So it was in 1972 that two members of East Kilbride Mountaineering Club trekked through the

Drakensberg Mountains of South Africa and a first recce was undertaken in the Chamonix area of the Alps.

Since then there have been Club trips to the Alps, to the hills of Majorca and Tenerife, and up Kilimanjaro. Meanwhile individual members have explored the Rockies, the Karakorum, the Tatras, the Alps, the Atlas, the Pyrenees and two even honeymooned with a three-week backpacking trip through the Taurus Mountains of Turkey.

Another inevitability in a Scottish mountaineering club is that there will be those who collect summits and here EKMC has to admit to more than a dozen Munroists and a whole platoon of Munro baggers struggling in their wake. Some are known to be chasing elusive Corbetts and at least one member has completed all the tops of Donald's Tables of the Southern Uplands.

So what has changed and what remains after forty years? A whole box of maps has been replaced by a single computer



disk, but get your printout wet and the ink will run. Novices now turn up with high tech walking boots rather than work boots from Millets. The polyurethane-coated Peter Storm cagoule, permanently lined with condensation, has been replaced by Gore-Tex and Páramo but with a twenty-fold price increase.

Everyone walks with a stick – or are we just all getting older? We certainly have fewer youngsters in the Club now, but that perhaps reflects increased affluence and car ownership – they don't need a club.

The monthly bus trip has always been at the heart of EKMC and the bus continues to be well-supported. However, gone are the poorly ventilated and often unreliable buses of the early days, when condensation from fifty sets of damp clothes dripped from the roof on the way home.

Now we travel in air-conditioned luxury but it must be recorded that the back of the bus still cannae sing!

Through all this change one constant remains: just one of

the founding forty from the Courthouse has continuous membership; Dick is now well into his eighties, rarely misses a bus trip and has occupied the same front seat on the bus throughout the Club's history. Rumour has it that this seat will be bequeathed in his will but the name of the lucky legatee is a well-guarded secret.

And finally we are all growing soft in our old age – the wet-weather winter camping trips have been replaced with weekend breaks in luxurious hotels and the 40th anniversary will be celebrated at the Balluchulish Hotel. We are already looking forward to our 50th.

Club Spot

Does your club have a story to tell? Use this feature in Scottish Mountaineer's Members News section to highlight your club activities, history, achievements or forthcoming events. Simply send details to the Editor, Kevin Howett

