



ClubSpot

The Stocket Hillwalking Club

By David Laing

All photos: Nick Bramhall

The "Stockets" were proud to celebrate their 30th anniversary last year. The club initially recruited members from the Stockethill area of Aberdeen in 1979 but now draws from across the city and beyond. They had very close ties to the local Community Council in the early days, but now retain only a loose affiliation.

An urban myth has stated that the Stockets run up hills. This is not true but probably arose because quite a few hill runners used to walk with the club. Members have varying levels of fitness and ages range from twenty-something to seventy-something. We generally have between forty and fifty members, with about twenty coming along to each walk. Some are very active hill people who spend every weekend up peaks under their own steam, some walk with multiple Aberdeen clubs to maximise their bagging activities and others only walk with the Stockets. New members are always welcome, and word of mouth recommendations always help.



On The Saddle

Monthly day-walks are the most visible activity of members. The Deeside Hills, Glenshee, Cairngorm Massif, Clova and Perthshire are all visited regularly. OS maps 44, 45, 37, 38 and 39 are probably used the most. Contracted coaches are used whenever viable, but like most organisations are limited by bus driver working hours. Hills and passes may get repeat visits every few years but given lateral thinking new routes can always be investigated.

Our day-walks are led and we usually have easy and harder options available. For example the easy option may only attain one Munro or Corbett or even a 'Scottish Hill Tracks' pass while the harder option may go for multiple peaks and a longer walk to the bus.

The choice is important as we don't want to dissuade inexperienced members, newcomers or those not as hill fit as they have been. A recent

innovation is the introduction of Saturday walks into the programme.

Each monthly walk has a host who appoints a leader, shows attendees the route on the bus, welcomes newcomers and does a number of other small things to manage the walk and make things run smoothly.

Twice a year the day-walks become a little more bespoke. The midsummer walk is one of these strange events the club does really well. We meet up in the Atholl Hotel about 10pm, have a drink or two before taking the coach into the night for a start point over one hundred and fifty miles away. The walk then starts about 3am and finishes twenty miles and nine hours later. Previous routes have included Glen Tilt, Kinlochewe to Poolewe and the Lairig Ghru. Here the BBQ is set up, the beer is opened and the weary rest their legs before the food is ready. After this celebration of staying awake the bus takes us back to Aberdeen via an ice cream parlour.

Our Christmas party walk is the highlight of the year for some; ageing members come out of walking retirement just to get to another Stocket party. We do a winter day-walk followed by showers, a fancy dress parade with aperitifs, Christmas dinner, raffle, cabaret turns and dancing in a Dee or Donside venue till the midnight bus home.

Weekend meets allow members to escape away to bunkhouses and hostels for a couple of nights. Participants find these a great way of exploring the Highlands, having a mini-holiday, bagging a peak or two and getting to know other members better.

Three formal weekends are organised each year and they are often as popular as the day-walks. Glen Coe, Torridon, Ullapool, Skye and Kintail have been the most popular in recent years. A communal meal is prepared together on the Saturday night after members have walked or fished! The weekends are fun and no matter how



On Clachnaben



The Mither Tap



In the Sidlaw Hills



Lochnagar Ladder



bad the weather, exercise will be taken and alcohol will be investigated. Sundays generally feature shorter walks due to the drive home.

A Burns weekend is a January feature, but others remain unthemed. In addition to formal club events, Munro or Corbett completions may require a weekend away or at least a party and get advertised to all members.

The last couple of years have seen new initiatives from the Stockets. The first foreign trip was to the north coast of Majorca where excellent and varied walking was enjoyed, as were the drinks on the sun terrace before dinner each evening. These trips are loosely organised so that members can choose to get tans, drink wine, climb hills and eat good food under sunny skies.

This year there have been sailing and walking trips to the west coast. These trips use members' nautical experience to hire yachts and sail to the hills of Skye, Knoydart and beyond. Options are to stay afloat and admire the hills from a new perspective or go ashore to walk or climb.

Beyond walking the club also has semi-regular pub nights, the odd BBQ and surprise social events. Members often go out walking together as friends, sometimes forming lasting relationships either in pairs or as new walking groups. The Stocket Club has launched many members into a lifetime of walking, exploring and much more.

Despite the age of the club we are still keen to show people the beauty of Scotland's hills. New members will find us friendly, helpful and informative. They may see us skinny dipping in mountain streams, throwing snowballs, snow running, cursing tarmac or experiencing horizontal Glenshee rain.

Either way we'll probably smile and buy them a drink after a walk. The Stockets have many tales to tell about past presidents, weekends, parties and walks either great or disastrous. The easiest way to find out more is to join and become a Stocket – have a look at our website.

www.stockets.org.uk

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