

Club Spot

Moray Mountaineering Club

By John Henderson Photos by Moray MC



History

It was the evening of 15th November 1931 when Mr Edwin Davidson, an accomplished mountaineer, called some people together to discuss the possibility of forming a mountaineering club in Moray. As a result, a meeting was duly held in the Masonic Hall, Elgin on 27th November 1931 and under the chairmanship of Mr Finlay Mackenzie as President and Edwin Davidson as Secretary, Moray Mountaineering Club was formed.

The secretary was then called upon to give a brief outline of the aims of the Club, which were "to encourage mountaineering and to form a bond of union among lovers of the hills". Twenty-eight members were enrolled on the night and the annual subscription for adults was fixed at five shillings.

The first Field Meet of the Club took place on 21st February 1932, when twenty-seven members journeyed by bus to Meikle Balloch on the Cabrach Road. They walked across the moor to Scout Hill (1987ft), Cairn Allt a' Chlaiginn (2035ft), Cook's Cairn (2478ft), Carn na Bruar (2240ft) and thence down Glen Suidhe to Tomnavoulin – 16 miles and 2000ft of climbing.

Notwithstanding the cold weather and frequent snow showers, the outing was voted a success and afterwards the party had tea in the Aberlour Hotel. The cost of the outing was four shillings, including tea.



Mount Temple in the Canadian Rockies

To commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the very first Club Meet, a walk following exactly the same route was undertaken in February 2007. Thirty-eight members turned out, some in period clothing, and although the weather was cloudy and wet, an enjoyable high tea was had at the Aberlour Hotel. The cost of the outing was £19.99, including tea.

The President in 2007 was Tish Carter, the first female President in the history of the Club, who said: "It was a great pleasure for me to serve as President of the Club and to be part of the 75th anniversary celebrations." In November 2006, a commemorative dinner was also held and the guest speaker was Mr John McKenzie, President of the MCoFS, who shared his own experiences and knowledge of mountaineering in the north of Scotland.

In the early years, the Club also organised weekend trips, and one of the most popular was to Aviemore, where they were accommodated at Glenmore Lodge, by kind permission of the Forestry

Commission. A report in The Moray Mountaineering Club Journal of September 1935 recalls a weekend at Easter 1934, when forty-two members turned up.

Deep snow did not deter a climbing party who set out to climb *The Vent* in Coire an Lochain. Heavy going to reach the climb meant that the first pitch was not started until 2pm, and it was 8pm before all the party got on to the plateau. They got back to the Lodge just before midnight, where the Housekeeper, Mrs Cameron, was still miraculously able to provide dinner. The pudding, unfortunately, was burnt to a cinder!

Another letter from one of the early MMC Club Journals questioned whether there should be some sort of qualification before anyone could become a full member of the Club. It was not enough merely to pay a subscription and show some ability in hill craft. The Ladies Climbing Club of the time was quoted as not allowing full membership until two meets were attended, a certain number of Munros

"He who has time must be told that all the beauty of Glencoe will not be found from the road side".

Written in 1824 by Dr John MacCulloch

were climbed (several in winter), and a climb was led. The MMC letter (curiously signed "Ben Rinnes"), goes on to suggest that before full membership could be earned, new members would have to have climbed twenty Munros (five in snow), have attended five Club meets and led parties at two of those meets! A tall order, which is not enforced today, but we do insist that guests attend at least one Club outing before handing in their membership application.



***This wretched Club it is a pest,
It lures me from my Sunday rest,
To flounder over bogs and heather,
And climb high hills in any weather.
To rise at all unearthly hours,
And show my best resistance powers,
By scrambling over rock and boulder
To some elusive spur or shoulder
With promise of a view at last
Is met with mist and icy blast
And 'stead of far flung distant land
I see an inch from where I stand!***



Later Years

In some respects then, it might be said that the Club has changed little since 1932. The Club has managed to maintain its original name and logo and the committee still adheres to the basic constitution and rules that were thrashed out all those years ago.

The membership has fluctuated over the years and currently stands at 110 – not far from the “120 keen hill lovers” as quoted in the first club journal of September 1935.

The success of the club is undoubtedly down to its ability to appeal to members of all ages by offering opportunities for regular monthly bus meets to the Scottish hills as well as weekend meets to the more remote areas.

The majority of members come from Elgin, a fertile seaboard plain between the Moray Firth and the Monadhliath and Cairngorm mountains, but all the other towns and cities along the Moray Firth are represented, from Buckie through Forres and Nairn to Inverness and beyond.

Although the monthly bus departed at the ungodly hour of 6am for most of the last 75 years, the later departure time of 7am was proposed and carried at the 2006 AGM.

Another interesting fact from old Club journals was the issue of numbered metal badges to members, which would be an invaluable means of identification when found amongst bleached and scattered bones on some

god-forsaken trackless and remote mountain!

Like any Club there is a natural loss of members who have completed all their chosen hills (topping out!) but one current member, Ken Ross, who joined in March 1966, still turns out on occasional bus meets. He says he can still recall an incident of an exploding stove in the tent on his first trip to Skye, with Davy Milne (in a Morris 1000) on a wet evening in Glenbrittle in July 1967. After getting blasted by the explosion and losing most of their exposed body hair, Ken ripped open the tent door and kicked the flaming Primus stove out, burning his foot in the process. He and Davy emerged smoking and singed into the midnight air, waking up the entire camp site in the process! Only the heavy rain prevented the tent bursting into flames. Remarkably, Ken still has his first Club meets card.

The Club syllabus has not changed greatly from past years. The popular locations of the Cairngorms, Torridon, Kintail, Fannaichs, Assynt, Glen Affric etc – which are all within a two to three-hour bus trip from Elgin – are visited each season. There are twelve bus meets and eleven weekend meets in the season, and in the winter there are monthly indoor slide shows, often with guest speakers, to brighten up the dark evenings.

The current committee is an eclectic mix of Turkish, Danish, French, Irish, English and Scottish nationalities, who

try to sell their enthusiasm for the hills to members and guests alike. The Club receives sponsorship from Glen Moray Distillery, which sits on the banks of the River Lossie in Elgin, and who generously provide bottles of their finest Speyside Single Malt Whisky for presentation to guest speakers.

In recent years club members have ventured more frequently overseas with trips to the Canadian Rockies (2003), Mont Blanc (2004), Italy (Via Ferrata) (2005), Matterhorn (2005), Kilimanjaro (2006), GR20 in Corsica (2007), the Atlas Mountains and Les Ecrins in France in 2008.

Climbing has always been a crucial element of Club activity and early journals of the MMC show that Covesea was a popular venue for meets in the 1930s. Further along

Top: Ray Harron on The Matterhorn, Alps

Above: A Torridon bus meet

Below: MMC meets 1965/66





SUNDAY BUS MEETS

Year	Route	Leave	Right	Flare	Time
1968	18--CORRIDOR S.S. (Laird Corrie)	4.00	20/-		
June 20--SEVEN and SANDWED	Lock & Ladder Throat Map	6.00	20/-		
July 10--KINTAIL	S.S. (Laird Corrie)	6.00	20/-		
Aug. 10--LARGI GARU	SEDS	6.00	20/-		
Sept. 10--BEN NEVIS	Lock & Ladder Throat Map	6.00	20/-		
Oct. 10--SHANNON FORK	S.S. (Laird Corrie)	4.00	15/-		
Nov. 10--DUNDEE	S.S. (Laird Corrie)	4.00	15/-		
Dec. 10--CARRACK	with Ben Nevis to be completed at 10.00	6.00	20/-		

THIS

Jan. 10--CARRACK	4.00	15/-
Feb. 10--CARRACK	4.00	15/-
Mar. 10--GLAN AFFRIC	6.00	20/-
Apr. 10--DUNDEE	4.00	15/-

Meet members on 1st D.S. Map (7th Edition).

Attention: For each Meet, please be ready by 10.00. Please bring your own lunch. Please bring your own water. Please bring your own map. Please bring your own compass. Please bring your own whistle. Please bring your own first aid kit. Please bring your own bivvy bag. Please bring your own sleeping bag. Please bring your own tent. Please bring your own stove. Please bring your own fuel. Please bring your own gas. Please bring your own food. Please bring your own drink. Please bring your own toilet. Please bring your own bin. Please bring your own rubbish. Please bring your own litter. Please bring your own fire. Please bring your own light. Please bring your own sound. Please bring your own smell. Please bring your own taste. Please bring your own touch. Please bring your own feel. Please bring your own hear. Please bring your own see. Please bring your own smell. Please bring your own taste. Please bring your own touch. Please bring your own feel. Please bring your own hear. Please bring your own see.

the coast, the hard orange sandstone cliffs at Cummingston (94 climbs) became popular in the 1970s, and MMC members were responsible for many of the first recorded routes along this coastal area in the 1950s.

Cummingston has some of the driest, sunniest weather in the whole north-east of Scotland, and it is also free of fog and high seas. The most popular routes get the sun in the evening, and it remains an enjoyable setting for a relaxed evenings climbing and bouldering. In the winter

route put up by Richard Frere in 1945. "Coincidentally," says Ali Erginsoy, the Club's current President, "Savage Slit was my first ever mountain route, although I didn't know of the historical link at the time."

One MMC member, a pioneer of the big long distance expeditions, was John Hinde, who in 1968 organised an RAF Trans-Highland Winter Expedition from Ben Hope to Ben Lomond. In nineteen days they covered 328 miles taking in forty-eight Munros, and this was before Goretex was invented! He also completed his Munros in this year.

In later years John compiled the accident reports for the Mountain Rescue Committee of Scotland. He died suddenly in 2002, but the day before, on his way home to Findochty from Braemar, he climbed Bennachie with a friend.

Another prominent Club member is Dave 'Heavy' Whalley who recently retired from the RAF, having spent all of his thirty-five years involved in Mountain Rescue. He was Team Leader at RAF Leuchars and Kinloss and Senior Team Leader during the Lockerbie disaster.

He was Base Camp Manager of the successful RAF MRT 2001 Everest North East Ridge expedition, and he has been on more than thirty other

expeditions in the Alps, Iran, Turkey, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Tibet.

He has completed the Munros seven times, once with his dog Teallach! His best advice, if you have an accident in the hills, is to forget counting the number of blasts with the whistle to summon help. He says "Just keep blowing the damn thing until someone turns up!"

Club member Graeme Bartlett, a Scottish International Fell runner, was one of a team of seven runners in 1993 who ran over all 277 Munro peaks in a relay which took eleven and a half days. Their target was 277 hours, but bad weather slowed them down and they missed their target by just seven hours!

And Finally

A New Club website was created eighteen months ago and this has been hugely successful in keeping members informed of all club events and activities. There are also more than 600 photos on the site to remind us all of those great days in the hills and to provide inspiration for everyone to walk more or climb in 2009! The Club website can be found at: www.moraymc.wordpress.com

"It is not just the beautiful we seek. The tremendous draws us irresistibly"

months, a variety of indoor walls at Lossiemouth, Kinloss, Inverness and Aviemore keep the fingers and thighs in trim.

Members of the Moray Club also pioneered a number of the early routes in the Northern Corries of the Cairngorms, most notably *Savage Slit* (Severe), a classic

Above left: Toubkal Summit, the highest point of the Moroccan Atlas Mountains (4167m) September 2008

Top: A weekend meet at Barrisdale Bothy

Middle: MMC member Edna Cameron celebrating her completion of the Munros

Above: An extract of the club's bus meets