



Club Spot

Paisley Hill Walking Club "New blood required"



By Duncan Walker Photos: Paisley Hillwalking Club

"New blood required. Must be stupid enough to go out in all weathers"

That's what the advert should have said. That would have been honest. Instead it read: "Keen hill walkers looking to share transport at weekends. Meeting arranged at Paisley YMCA". When my friend and I got there we found two twenty-one-year-old TA types and three fourteen-year-olds from one of Paisley's bigger housing schemes. Not exactly the breadth of experience I was hoping for. Thankfully it didn't take long for our numbers to swell. Two months later membership was up to thirty-four, all inexperienced and all keen as mustard.

Twenty-six years on and Paisley Hillwalking Club members still go out in all weathers.

We initially set out to offer cheap transport to hill goers in the Paisley area. We still do. Every second Sunday a small bus leaves from behind Paisley Abbey and heads off into the hills. No leaders, no pre-determined routes: only a given destination (unless you subscribe to Mr Bennett's book). It's an opportunity to explore the Scottish hills as far north as Drumochter and as far south as Glen Trool. What members do when they get off the bus is their own affair, just as long as they get back before it leaves.

We are always open to new members, whether novice or not. You will quickly make new friends and have a good laugh. New places and new experiences are the novice's reward. New opportunities and a wider perspective of the outdoors will follow. As will self-assurance in new found abilities and, hopefully, a desire to push your personal boundaries. Walking in good company and having someone else do the driving can get habit forming, and it's good for your health.

Paisley Hillwalking Club (affectionately: 'PHC') welcomes all comers, tall, small, old and young. Our lower limit for membership is still fourteen years. However, the Child Protection Act has forced us to amend that to 'Members aged 17 years or under may only participate



in the activities of the Club while accompanied by a parent or guardian'. Sorry folks but I am sure parents and guardians will be made welcome too.

As for the rest, fit and healthy will do. If you join brimming with experience then great: we will be the first to show you the error of your ways. Join as a novice then I'm sure you will show us the error of ours.

Some organisations wrap their members in cotton wool, supply responsible leaders to take care of their poor lambs, let their members bury their heads inside cagoule hoods, while others navigate the party out of danger. PHC prefers to train our members to look after themselves – give them the knowledge and confidence



Top: New Year traverse of Liathach

Middle: An Teallach From Beinn a'Chlaidheimh

Above: Donald's last Munro (Beinn Alligin)



required to take anything the Scottish highlands can throw at them and come out smiling.

Over the years PHC has attracted its fair share of weirdos: ornithologists, botanists, entomologists, astronomers, philosophers, photographers, poets, fell runners, masochists (sorry, that's a general term for hill walker), fitness freaks et al. One notable exception has been naturist, unless you include skinny-dipping at the end of a hot summer's walk.

And then there are the obsessed – these members whose world revolves around one aspect of what the great outdoors can offer: wilderness campers, rock climbers, bothy goers, ice climbers, mountain bikers (not on the bus), even sea canoeists (definitely not on the bus). We also get downhill and cross-country skiers, scramblers and weekenders, and of course, the real nut jobs, Munro and Corbett baggers.

PHC first affiliated to the MCofS in the 1980s and endorses its Participation Statement: "The MCofS recognises that climbing and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement."

Paisley Hillwalking Club isn't all that large, holding 100–120 members in any one year. In our twenty-six years we have introduced four times that number of people to the Scottish hills, most of them gaining much needed experience from the club before outgrowing us and going on to do their own things.

Those that stayed have added greatly to the PHC experience and supplied a wealth of history and stories that our journals can only hint at.

I did mention a bus. Only about a third of members are active bus users. The other two thirds use PHC as a networking hub for meeting others with a specific outdoor interest, arranging lifts, organising weekend trips to far-flung areas and arranging foreign travel.

Many of them take off to some of the world's higher ranges and more remote regions – not official PHC trips but arranged by like-minded individuals for their own perverse amusement. I believe last year saw visits to Slovenia's Julian Alps, French and Austrian Alps, Norway's Rjukan Telemark area, as well as Nepal and the South American Andes.

Throughout the year the Club also organizes weekend trips to huts, bunkhouses, hostels and campsites handy for hill areas outside the scope of our bus trips. We do draw the line at mass assaults on bothies, instead encouraging individual members to uphold MBA principles. "Leave it in better condition than you found it."

For those that like lists the Club boasts thirty-six Munroists and four Corbetteers to date, all of whom are still attending therapy to deal with their withdrawal symptoms. Unfortunately the Corbetteers are also Munroists and are officially beyond help.

Many of them get respite through helping the less experienced into the world of navigation and hill craft. All new members are encouraged to learn the rudiments of map reading, compass work and safety on steep ground, as well as taking care of themselves and their companions. We will even throw in ice axe arrest and the uncertain science of avalanche prediction. Take it from one who knows. Getting avalanched is no fun.

For more details, check out our web site: www.paisleyhillwalkingclub.org.uk



Above left: Early snow on Ben Vane

Top: Ceilidh on Sgurr na Sgine - Pat's last Munro

Middle: Creag Meagaidh

Above: 1984 – the winter that train passengers were stuck for days at Bridge of Orchy with the train in a drift. The club had to retreat from Tyndrum and took refuge in Killin YH

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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