

Club Spot

Blairgowrie Hill Walkers Reach Thirty



By James Tweedie (BDHC Publicity Officer and Web Master)

Photos by Club Members

In 1978, Mr K. Stewart, the District Community Education Officer, arranged a meeting for the 27th June, to gauge interest in the formation of a hill walking and/or rambling club for Blairgowrie and the surrounding area.

Interest proved to be strong and a second meeting and trial walks in July and August led to the formation of the Blairgowrie and District Hillwalking Club (BDHC) at a meeting on 7th September 1978 in the Hill Hall, Upper Allan Street, Blairgowrie.

Ten days later the first meet of the newly constituted club took place in Glens Doll and Clova. According to reports in the Blairgowrie Advertiser, "forty seven people attended and undertook two walks, one being to Mayar and Dreish (both Munros), the other, less strenuous, to Loch Brandy". This area is still a favourite for the club and is considered its home patch.

By the end of the first year the club had a membership of seventy, fifteen of whom were juniors. This number declined over the next four years to the lowest membership in the club's history, but there has been

a steady increase since. This probably reflects the surge in interest in outdoor activities in the 1990s. Over recent years, numbers have fluctuated around the seventy mark, providing the club with a good stable membership base.

This figure represents a good number of long-term members, indeed there are several current members who originally joined in the first two to three years of the club. In total some 200 people have been members of the club over the years.

At its formation the club's intention was to "cater for both the experienced and inexperienced walker in a programme of walks of varying standards and difficulties". This is as true today as it was 30 years ago.

The meet pattern of every third Sunday was instigated at the beginning and continues to this day, with two official weekend meets.

An important part of the club's aim has always been to educate its members in all aspects of hill-craft. The first two talks (in the months of November and December 1978) covered mountain rescue, safety, map reading



and navigation. Nowadays we hold two informative talks each year as well as practical training and courses in navigation, first aid and winter skills.

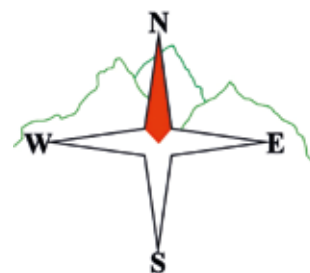
Each individual is encouraged to be responsible for their own safety on the hill and to be self-reliant. Affiliation to the Mountaineering Council of Scotland in 1995 allowed access to many training opportunities and the other strengths and resources of a national organisation.

To encourage self-reliance and personal responsibility the club does not have walk leaders, leaving members to decide which walk and conditions are appropriate for them (with guidance from more experienced members if needed).

As well as providing skills for its members the club helps several organisations both financially and with members' time. These include: Tayside Mountain Rescue Team; John Muir Trust; Scottish Rights of Way Society; Cairngorm Campaign and SARDA (Search and Rescue Dogs Association).

Above: March 2008 in Glenshee

Left: Club Members in 1979



"This is your chance to make new friends, keep fit and explore the Scottish Hills"

The Blairgowrie Advertiser of 22nd June 1978

The club has held a collection day for Tayside Mountain Rescue in Blairgowrie since 1990.

Many close and strong friendships have been formed and this has resulted in smaller groups of friends undertaking hill activities in addition to the club's normal programme of events.

The range of activities covers everything from low level glen walks, through hill and mountain walking to scrambling and lower grade rock climbing. This allows for walkers of most ages, capabilities and inclination.

Since its formation the club has visited and walked in all the mountain and hill areas of Scotland and climbed many of Scotland's hills in all weather conditions, ranging from Arctic to sub-Saharan. As part of our 25th Anniversary celebrations in 2003 we visited Kerry in south-west Ireland and returned to Glens Doll and Clova for a walk and meal at the Clova Inn.

The club holds a number of well-attended social events each year, some designed to raise money for the coach fund, to benefit the members and other people. The Club Ceilidh is a much anticipated event held every January and attracts a large number of locals; a quiz started this year looks set to be a similarly successful annual event. Other events include illustrated talks on subjects of hill interest and slide shows and competitions.

In our thirtieth year the club is going strong with several of the original members still very active and a good number of new members joining each year to enjoy the hills in the company of like-minded folk. We look forward to this continuing for the next three decades and beyond.

Munroists

On 6th June 1992 Iain Mitchell became the first club member to complete the Munros, closely followed in September of that year by Penny Barron. Since then a further eleven members have completed.



Top: 25th anniversary meet at Glen Cova, 2003

Middle: At Deuchary

Above: June 2008 and enjoying Ben Loyal

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, your history, your members' achievements or your forthcoming events. Simply send details to the Editor, Kevin Howett.

Website

In 1998 the club's website (www.bdhc.org.uk) was set up. This is a useful source of information about the club and its activities. It includes the programme of events and full walk sheets for upcoming walks as well as general information and links to sites of interest to hill walkers and outdoor folk. It also has a photo album area with members' photographs from walks and meets over the past few years (it's noticeable how much the sun shines in these photos, yet we always complain about the rainy weather we get).

Our "clubhouse"

The club has always used a bus or a coach as transport to most of its meets. Despite rising fuel and transport costs the coach remains a mainstay of the club and is often thought of as the "clubhouse". Whilst the committee is concerned about transport costs now, the minutes of AGMs show that this concern is about as old as the club itself.

Over the years the club has experienced many forms and conditions of transport, ranging from the "about to be retired as a chicken shed" type of bus up to the "please take your boots off before you enter" luxury type.

On one occasion when the electrics failed on one coach in Crieff when returning from a winter walk the members were forced to endure several hours in a local hostelry waiting for a replacement means of transport. Some have never recovered and insist on a pub being available at the end of the walk even ten years later.

There was also a time when a coach had to reverse 1km back down a single track road after discovering the lack of any suitable turning place in the farmyard at the end of the road.

But on the whole our "clubhouse" lets members chat, discuss, snooze, listen to music and generally do stuff that is frowned upon if driving your own car.