



Star Letter

The winning letter published this month in Bivi Talk to win a Victorinox "SwissChamp" Swiss Army Knife (RRP £49.95) is Trevor Rigg.

Send your letters to: Kevin Howett, The Editor, Scottish Mountaineer or email kev@mountaineering-scotland.org.uk



Energy Watch

Dear MCofS,

I was disappointed, but not surprised, to read that all the correspondents you print in the May edition of the Mountaineer perpetuate the common perception that renewables equal wind power. Wind power is a renewable form of energy but not the only one. This perception is not surprising either, given that the government seems to have gone hell for leather for wind at the expense of alternatives.

The criticisms of the shortcomings of wind power are all valid. Perhaps the major issue with energy production is base load, in other words a constant and reliable source of power. Wind clearly will not serve that purpose, neither will photo-voltaics or solar but tidal power will, just as hydro-electric does at present. As one of your correspondents acknowledges, we need a mix.

Your correspondents are right to say that base load at present is more than well enough supplied by nuclear. Then the self-deception sets in:

[i] That sources of nuclear fuel are "readily available in stable countries". Well, yes, from half way round the world! Emissions free? How about the energy consumed to mine it and to get it here? And what happens when it runs out? Nuclear is a finite resource like fossil fuels.

[ii] That nuclear waste is "managed safely and securely". Waste storage, at best, has been "managed" by a variety of methods, each as controversial as the other, and none safe,

neither for our collective security nor environmental health.

Nuclear, while producing vast amounts of energy "invisibly" and compactly, produces dangerous long-lasting, life-destroying by-products, presents huge security problems and facilitates proliferation of fissile and unstable weapons-grade material.

[iii] Nuclear power is "competitive compared with fossil fuel carbon generation". That depends on how you cost it. I think the author of that comment has conveniently forgotten the exorbitant cost of decommissioning nuclear plant, the enormous, largely unknown cost of maintaining "safe and securely managed" storage facilities for spent fuel for thousands of years. I think a fairer comparison might have been with hydro-electric and hydro-electric wins hands down!

Renewables are a valid alternative to nuclear and fossils if we develop the full range of renewables at our disposal. The problem at present is that we are fixated by wind and the chimera of nuclear as the panacea for all our problems.

Yours,
Trevor Rigg, Edinburgh

Ice Axe Awareness

Dear MCofS, David Foster made some rather uninformed assertions in his letter in the May 08 issue, concerning my article in the Feb 08 issue, and I wish to comment on these.

Firstly, we were all carrying ice axes and, with a combined experience of more than 50 years in our party of three, we are quite well aware of when, where and how to use them. They were in fact required on some sections of the ridge on the day in question.

Secondly, the incident where one of the party slipped occurred near the bottom of a grassy, boggy hillside, on virtually the last patch of snow, which was so wet and soft that I'm doubtful if an ice axe would have helped. There were very few rocks around and my companion was rather unlucky to slide over one which protruded slightly from the snow. It requires a huge leap of imagination to say that he was "lucky to avoid serious injury". It would perhaps have been a little safer to avoid the snow completely at this stage but the grass, running with snow melt, was almost as slippery. True, I did describe the incident in a flippant and light-hearted way, as I do not consider it serious – and I was trying to make the article a little more entertaining!

If there is a lesson here it is that even on the warmest spring days, when it may be tempting to leave the ice axe (and crampons) in the car, it is still easily possible to encounter difficult snow conditions, especially on routes which involve steep slopes or narrow ridges. However, I believe most walkers know this, and if it is true that using poles on snow "does not seem to cause many accidents", I suspect it is because the majority of walkers, especially those who regularly walk in snowy conditions, are not as naive and foolish as David Foster suggests.

Yours,
Alastair Govan

Alladale

Dear MCofS I read the excellent report by Jayne Glass on the Alladale project in the May issue of The Scottish Mountaineer which I found at Aultgish Inn. Have you considered the poaching aspect at Alladale? It seems to me that the proprietor is likely to be concerned about people hoping to shoot a bear or a

wolf or some such. I think he would be justified in such a fear. I also think he might have plans to offer big-game hunting, in which case he will be doubly concerned about poachers. In this context, an electrified fence would make perfect sense. I dislike the whole matter and I doubt that the proprietor is likely to be giving the whole story. So, even if he is currently disclaiming any big-game aspect, I would expect it to be considered in his business planning.

Best regards, John Beattie

Radios for the Glens

Dear MCofS

I have an issue regarding radio reception in weak areas, like the glens. For mobile phone, it is easy with Vodafone and satellite. Radio is not so easy and I think will get harder with DAB.

I wonder whether MCofS readers have any knowledge of which radio models – old fashioned or new digital – perform best.

Ten years ago my Ford worked well. My present vehicle, a VW Camper, has a Sony, which a local dealer assured me was as good as you get, but in weak areas it only gets long-wave, with a seriously annoying whistle.

My amateur radio knowledge suggests that you would do best with a 300m long aerial. In Norway I found that ten metres of wire clipped to the aerial helped, but you can't really drive round like that! In the old days it was possible to buy 3m fibreglass aerials but these days people have tiny short 20cm aerials. There must be lots of mountain folk who long for a current weather forecast, if not the news and football, so who knows what works best?

I am sure a lot of folk would be interested.

Regards, Rod Dalitz,
Edinburgh