



# ClubSpot

## Inverness Mountaineering Club

### Sixty years young in 2010

By Robin Forrest (President)

All Photos: IMC

An Early IMC Meet



#### Origins

In retrospect it seems odd that the self-styled "capital" of the highlands, by far the largest town in what is by far the most mountainous region of the British Isles, had to wait until 1950 before it could boast of having its own club devoted to mountaineering.

Aberdeen's Cairngorm Club started as early as 1887, a couple of years ahead of the SMC. Dundee's Grampian Club was up and running by the late 1920's, and the Moray Mountaineering Club came along in the 1930's. There are vague tales of a "Highland Mountaineering Club" active between the wars, but details are scarce.

Maybe it was down to the traditional Highlanders' indifference to exerting themselves among their own hills except for strictly practical purposes – herding cattle perhaps, or maybe rustling their neighbour's coos instead.

Whatever the reason, it wasn't until April 1950 that a group of likeminded would-be outdoor types got together and held a meeting in an Inverness hotel, at the end of which a motion was passed that "this meeting [should] form itself into a mountaineering club."

This was duly minuted, and as minutes of a meeting need a committee to approve them one was duly elected; and as a committee has to have a Chairman, one Donnie Cattanach was elected as the first President of the Inverness Mountaineering Club (IMC).

Intriguingly the minutes record that the said Mr Cattanach "became indisposed" during the course of the proceedings. It is certainly the case that the Caledonian Hotel, and the various other Inverness hostelries which has served as the IMC's home base over the



Inverness  
Mountaineering  
Club Est. 1950

In Kintail



In Glen Coe



years, was not a temperance establishment.

So far so good! But having established a mountaineering club some mountaineering had to be done, and so the first meet - to the Cairngorms - took place on the 30th April 1950. Unfortunately there is no surviving record of it. Cairngorm itself seems a likely destination, a more energetic proposition than with no ski road, so it was to Cairngorm that a party of IMC stalwarts, including several former presidents, took themselves in April 2010 to recreate this momentous occasion. It should be noted that nobody became

"indisposed", at least not until the celebratory dinner in the evening.

#### Activities

The IMC has always prided itself on being a club devoted to mountaineering in the widest sense of the word, open to everyone, whether their main interest is in climbing or mountain walking, and whatever the extent of their ambition.

These days members may be casual hill walkers, Munro baggers, or dedicated summer or winter climbers. Many members also take advantage of the ever widening range

The Inaccessible Pinnacle on Skye



Scrambling on Skye



of outdoor pursuits available – mountain biking, hill running, sea kayaking, and caving. However, traditional mountaineering activities are still the mainstay of the club.

As you might expect, several members are complet Munroists, a number of whom are also sneakily working their way through the list again. A select few have also completed the Corbetts and the Grahams, while one energetic member has ticked off the hills on all three lists plus all the Munro tops, a feat all the more remarkable given

that he claims never to venture onto the hill if the weather is less than perfect.

Early IMC meets were day meets. A bus would be booked for Sunday, leaving Inverness early, with the return trip timed to avoid the evening church services and so escape the wrath of the Sabbatarians who wielded such influence on highland life in those days.

Indeed, a meeting of the Synod of the Free Church in Inverness once publicly castigated "the cult of the open-air Sabbath" with people "stravaiging aimlessly over the hills, returning tired and jaded and unable to face the trials of the week."

Eventually some members began to acquire cars, which extended their range of activity. Former President Cam MacLeay recalls that when he first joined, one of the few car owners, a gentleman with the traditional highlander's laid back attitude to bureaucracy, had never bothered to obtain a driving licence, which led to long detours as he tried to avoid passing through anywhere which might have a police station.

Although the days of hiring a club bus are long gone, day meets are still popular. However, our weekend meets are probably the core of IMC activities, and although we don't often venture south of the highland line (why would we?), you are likely to stumble across us almost anywhere north of it.

A weekend in Skye is guaranteed to be popular. A recent 60th anniversary year trip to the Cuillin saw no less than eight members, one of them new to climbing, top out together on the Inn Pinn in wet and windy conditions.

Camping meets predominate over the summer with outdoor centres and club huts featuring extensively at other times, always meeting up again in the evening to enjoy each other's company.

The IMC is not the sort of club which appoints walk leaders, or offers specific routes at various levels decided in advance. Anyone looking for this is likely to be disappointed,

but a newcomer can always rely on having someone to go with. Several members are ML holders, and most of the more experienced members are happy to help with a bit of navigation practice or general hill craft if asked.

### Shenavall

The IMC has a longstanding connection with Shenavall bothy in Wester Ross. For several years before the formation of the MBA, club members were carrying out maintenance work on this most popular of highland howffs.

For several years now the MBA's Shenavall MO has always been recruited from our ranks and the IMC Shenavall work-meet is a well-established annual fixture. Alex Sutherland, a founder member of the IMC, researched the history of Shenavall for the club, and once enjoyed the privilege of a day's hillwalking with one Colin Macdonald, who was born in Shenavall in the 1890s when his father was a stalker there.

### The Next Sixty Years

Who knows? But it is encouraging that whilst some clubs are reportedly finding it a struggle to attract new members, and are becoming concerned about their ageing demographic, the IMC is going from strength to strength.

In recent years, membership has grown from an average of fifty to almost ninety, with most of the new recruits being relatively young and keen to get out on the hill.

Come April 2070 let's hope that the IMC will still be around doing what it was formed to do in 1950: "to facilitate and encourage the sport of mountaineering in the Highlands of Scotland."

### Come and Meet us:

The Inverness Mountaineering Club meets socially every Thursday from 9.20 pm in Nico's Bar, the Glen Mhor Hotel, Ness Bank, Inverness. Feel free to come in and say hello if you are in the area.



## Climbing with the IMC

By Monika Hoffman, IMC Committee member

**W**hen I came to Inverness from Germany in 2007 and joined the Inverness Mountaineering Club I had never climbed outside before, and had only been on a climbing wall twice. That summer with the IMC I went to the sea cliffs at Reiff north of Ullapool, a fantastic location with lots of different routes.

I got more into it and spent a lot of winter evenings at the climbing wall. I did my first lead climb at Cummington; the traditional location for the IMC's summer BBQ.

I love swimming as much as I love climbing and fortunately in Scotland the crags are never far away from the sea, a loch or a river. With the club on Ardverikie Wall for example – a beautiful day, a classic mountain route, a fantastic climbing team and on the way back a swim in Lochan na h-Earba with a sandy beach leading into clear water surrounded by hills and nothing else.

In the summer we often climb after work at Duntelchaig, the nearest outdoor climbing location but

not everybody likes it as some of the routes are overgrown and on a calm evening the midges can be unbelievably bad.

My first mountain route was Eagle Ridge on Lochnagar on an IMC camping trip. A beautiful route, but I couldn't then have led any of the pitches, especially the last one - going up that slab with a huge drop beneath you!

Every summer the IMC books a trip to the CIC hut on Ben Nevis and on my first visit we climbed the North East Buttress via Raeburn's Arete. Again it was a sunny day, a great team and that wonderful feeling of standing on the highest mountain in Britain having climbed a proper mountaineering route and not just walked up the tourist path!

This summer I had hoped to do the classic Tower Ridge but it rained the whole weekend and we didn't do any climbing – this is Scotland after all.

Recently, thanks to Simon Hayes, one of the IMC's most experienced and accomplished climbers, I was able to fulfil my ambition to climb the Old Man of Stoer. We took the

inland approach and when you come over the last little hill it is suddenly directly in front of you – I suddenly wondered what I'd talked myself into!

Going for a swim in the cold water somehow calmed my nerves - fulmars sailing past, cormorants spreading their wings to dry, and a nosy seal poking his head up to see what was going on. Simon led all the pitches.

But on the second pitch, balancing across the rock with a 30 metre drop, I got pretty scared and wondered "What am I doing here? This is a serious climb and you are a city girl; you only took up climbing when you were 34".

I thought I may have to back out, but Simon suggested I have a bubble. I could scream and kick as much as I liked but I still had to go up. And as there was no other option, I did.

The third pitch, which is supposed to be the hardest, I actually enjoyed the most. I felt in control, and that I was mastering the rock. But then climbing is such a graceful and beautiful thing on a physical, mental and spiritual level.

And then we were up, 70 metres above the sea on the summit – stunning views along the coastline, and what a feeling of achievement, of thrill, of joy!

Climbing can only be done in a team and the climbers in the IMC are great partners. They know what they are doing, make sure it is safe, and are incredibly patient, encouraging, and never patronising. I had a couple of falls and they made me climb again, lead again. When at the club's 60th Anniversary dinner I was awarded the IMC's "Golden Karabiner" for being the most improved new climber in the club I was very conscious that I wouldn't have achieved anything without them.

### ClubSpot

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.