

ClubSpot

The Edinburgh JMCS (Junior Mountaineering Club of Scotland)

By Patrick Winter

All photos: JMCS Edinburgh



The inaugural Club Meet under the Narnain Boulders in Arrochar, 29th August 1925

The Past

The idea of forming the JMCS was conceived by Arthur Rusk who, together with R. N. Rutherford and Archie Hutchison, decided upon the name and the constitution while stormbound in the Mutthorn hut in Switzerland, in July 1924.

The initial motivation was the professed aim of providing “an association for mountaineers in which they might meet kindred spirits and find among them those who could teach them the rules of the game. It would be a club in which the members would learn the rudiments of mountain craft and it might also become a ‘feeder’ for the senior club, which requires conditions of membership”.

If this were not high minded enough, Rusk believed that mountains were not chance phenomena but existed to “influence the lives of men and point a way, endlessly up and beyond the low levels where for the most part man’s course is run”!

Burdened, perhaps, by this weight of expectation, seven stalwarts spent the night of 29th August 1925 bivouacked under the Narnain boulders in Arrochar, and the following day the JMCS held its inaugural meeting with thirteen people present. The weather was so bad that Rusk remained inside his sleeping bag for the duration of the meeting and conducted business from there (an inspiration and example to all club officials!).

The original members apparently all hailed from Glasgow but, as might perhaps have been expected, the club soon bifurcated into separate Glasgow and Edinburgh sections, the Edinburgh section being formed ten days later, in September 1925. Other sections were later formed, and

there are now five autonomous sections - based in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Lochaber, London and Perth (in alphabetical order to avoid causing any offence!).

Whimsical notions of re-enacting the first meet by a club bivouac at the Narnain boulders followed by a day of climbing on the nearby Cobbler have been mooted from time to time but so far these suggestions have been received with underwhelming enthusiasm. However it will surely be *de rigueur* when we reach our centennial year in 2025.

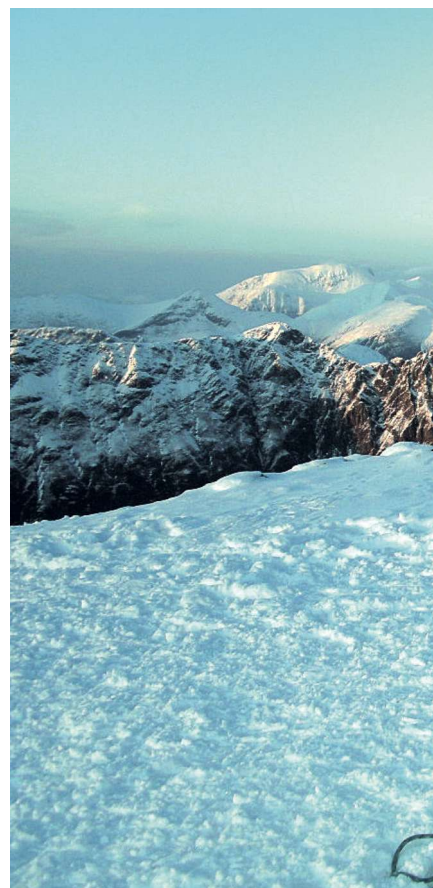
The club can boast many distinguished forebears amongst its ranks, including Jimmy Marshall, Malcolm Slesser, Donald Bennet, Graham Tiso, Dougal Haston and Robin Smith to name but a few.

The Present

Nowadays we do not have as many luminaries in our midst as yesteryear, but we still have a solid body of experienced mountaineers with a love of the outdoors. Currently the club has about eighty members, based mainly in and around Edinburgh, although we have members throughout the UK, and abroad.

Our activities focus mainly on summer and winter climbing, but members also participate in a wide range of outdoor activities, including hill walking, sea kayaking, mountain biking and ski mountaineering. Our membership includes a large number of Munroists and the odd ‘Corbetteer’. There is even at least one member known to be bagging Grahams, but to spare his blushes he shall remain nameless.

The club organises an evening meet every Wednesday throughout the year, and a group of us also meet most Monday evenings. During the



summer months we visit local crags such as Traprain Law and the Hawkcraig, and when the evenings are long enough we go further afield to, for instance, Dunkeld, Auchinstarry and Northumberland. Over the winter a regular contingent frequent the various local indoor climbing walls (and the nearby pubs afterwards).

Weekend meets also take place throughout the year to most of the major climbing venues in the UK. In winter we generally stick to the Scottish Highlands, but may consider going south for a change if we have any more winters like the one just past! However, in the summer we regularly go south of the border to the Lakes, Peak District, North Wales etc.

Outwith the organised meets, members visit a diverse range of climbing venues, both at home and abroad, including the Alps, the Dolomites, the Pyrenees, Norway (ice-climbing in Rjukan, and ski-touring have become extremely popular in recent years), and further afield to places such as Patagonia, Yosemite, the Himalaya, Greenland and Tasmania.

A trend in recent years has been the rapidly growing



Never under-equipped; after SC Gully, Feb 2010



The Cosmiques Arete, Chamonix



popularity of trips to warm and sunny European climbing venues, which coincidentally happen to produce fine wine (recent destinations have included several trips to Burgundy, Cote du Rhone Villages and Languedoc; despite extensive research we have been unable to locate any climbing in Bordeaux, but certain members are still searching).

Both sports-cragging and long multi-pitch venues have been visited (so long as the other criteria are satisfied). Overall, our annual slide show in December bears witness to a diverse and eclectic range of mountaineering activity each year.

Club Huts

The club has two huts in the Highlands, one in Dundonnell, in Wester Ross, and one near Newtonmore. In addition, the club enjoys reciprocal rights arrangements with the Fell and Rock and Oread clubs, allowing JMCS members access to their club huts.

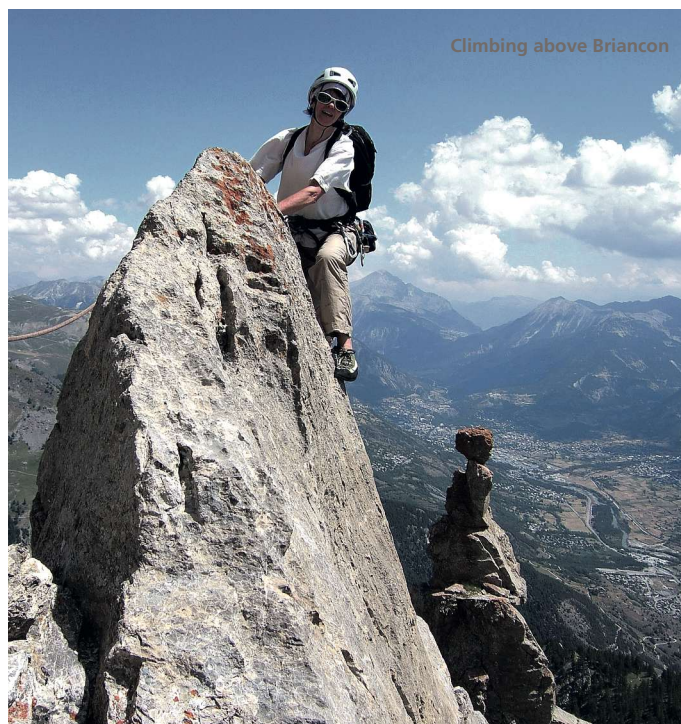
The Dundonnell hut, 'The Smiddy' was established in the late 60s and was made possible by a memorial fund to

Jim Clarkson (a prominent club member) who died in 1961 on an ascent of Carn Mor Dearg. As its name implies, the hut was at one time a blacksmith's forge and all renovations over the years have done as much as possible to preserve the original character and features of this unique building. For example, the bellows and anvil remain, and are almost *objets d'art*. The total cost of refurbishing the Smiddy in the late 60s was put at a mere £860!

The hut has the attraction of being situated at the foot of An Teallach, arguably the finest mountain in the Scottish Highlands. In addition, the Fannaichs and the Fisherfield Forest are virtually on the door step, while Kinlochewe (for Beinn Eighe and Torridon) is fifty miles away. A multitude of recently developed traditional and sports crags are also nearby.

The Smiddy has always been popular with JMCS members and with mountaineering clubs from both north and south of the border. As an early historian of the club noted, "the hut has always claimed some keen devotees who would make the

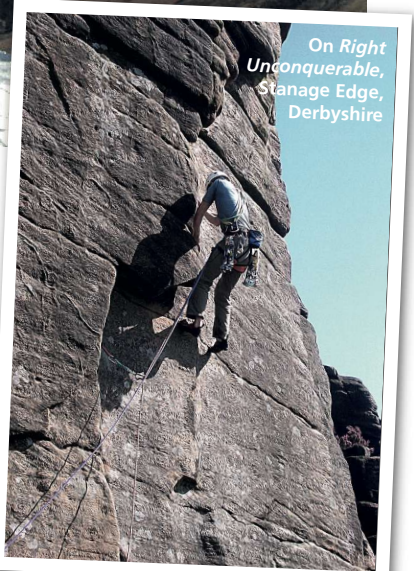
Climbing above Briancon





Via Ferrata, Dolomites

Alex Kelly above Glencoe, Feb 2010



On Right
Unconquerable,
Stanage Edge,
Derbyshire

220 mile trip from Edinburgh on a Friday night and return on the Sunday night enjoying a reasonably traffic free A9 with its associated hazards as a prelude and finale to an active two days in Wester Ross".

Recently, under the energetic stewardship of the present custodian Helen, hut bookings are healthier than ever. The Smiddy has also become a traditional venue at New Year for club members.

Significantly more than £860 has been spent on our new hut 'The Cabin'. This is situated in Balgowan, a small hamlet in the Newtonmore/Laggan area, and was offered to us for lease about five years ago, when we were on the point of vacating our previous hut in the area, Jock Spot's.

Since then a considerable amount of money (around £40k to date) and effort have been expended on refurbishing the property to render it suitable as a mountain hut. Much of the finance has come from grants, loans and donations. In particular, we would like to acknowledge considerable funding from 'Awards for All' and the Scottish Mountaineering Trust.

The main items of expense have been a new car park, access path, septic tank and complete interior refit, resulting in a well equipped kitchen/living room area, with accommodation for ten people.

The Cabin resembles a cottage/bungalow, and is situated on a hillside providing commanding views of the surrounding countryside. The hut was declared 'officially open' by our benevolent landlords on the day of our AGM in November 2009, as a sizable gathering braved inclement weather and a presidential address before being forced inside for toasts and further celebrations. The huge wood-burning stove delivered much-needed heat and cheer, as it also does after a cold day on the hill.

The Cabin is well placed for mountaineering and outdoor activities in the Cairngorms and the Central Highlands. In particular, a host of Munros are nearby. Also Creagh Dhubh, perhaps Scotland's best roadside crag is three miles away, while Binnein Shuas, home to the classic Arderwickie wall, is about fifteen miles away. The Northern Corries,

Ben Nevis and Glen Nevis (Pollidubh) are also within easy striking distance.

The Future

To conclude, after 85 years the Edinburgh JMCS is still thriving. A large contingent of 'veterans' are joined by a regular influx of younger members. Of course, we confidently expect that some of these younger members will recreate the founding meet under the Narnain boulder (hopefully, they will get out of their sleeping bags during the day) on the date of the club centenary in 2025 (the veterans will probably continue making excuses...).

Finally, it should be noted that the term 'junior' in the club name is a historical relic from a more hierarchical social era. It certainly does not reflect the age structure

of the club, and nowadays most members would be too polite to describe the SMC as the 'senior club', even though their average age is greater than ours!

For more information about the club see our website at www.edinburghjmcs.org.uk. New members are welcome – see the website for how to meet up with us.

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.