



The Gwydyr Mountain Club Newsletter Mull & Skye May 2016

PROMOTING AN INTEREST IN MOUNTAIN ACTIVITIES

Mull Trip

For the first week in May, Reg arranged for us to go to the Isle of Mull. He had booked the splendid Macquarie House (former residence of Lachlan Macquarie, founder of the state of New South Wales in Australia) on the Gruline estate. There were eight members staying in the house

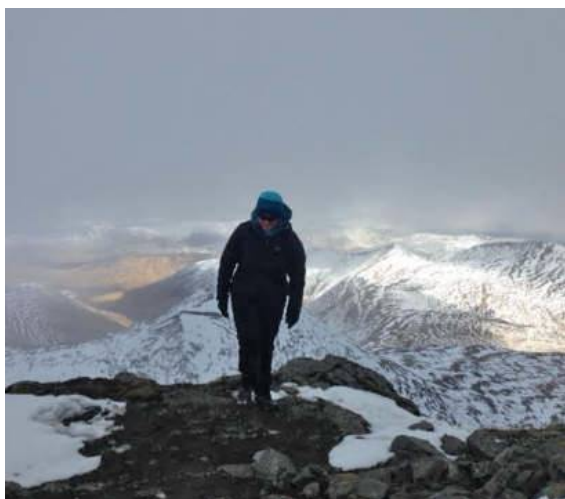
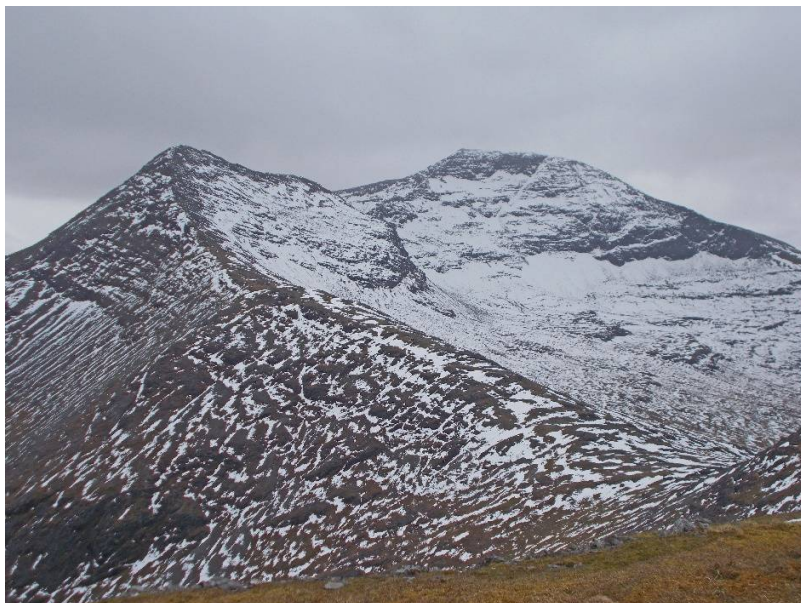
(Helen & Glenn Grant, Hew McDermott, Angela Price, Reg Cromer, Bob Chamberlain, James Allen and Pete Mann).



In addition there were five more staying in more modest but cosy accommodation in one of the estate cottages (Millie Wright, Janet Coates, Dave Gray, David Lane-Joynt and Ronnie Davies. See Millie, Ronnie and Dave Gray on the left

We arrived to find Mull covered in snow (who said it was spring?).

The Macquarie House party, who had travelled up a day earlier than the cottage party, decided on Saturday to climb Ben More by the more adventurous route up the A' Chioch Ridge. This is described as "straightforward scrambling" in some descriptions, but with slushy wet snow all over the place, it was anything but that. Glenn managed to fall over more times than he cares to remember, and had the bruises to show for it. When they got to the narrow bit of scrambling, Hew and Angela decided that discretion was the better part of valor and descended from the ridge in completely the opposite direction to the cars. They were saved a long walk back to the car by Pete, who came looking for them.



Helen on Ben More



Hew, Angela, Pete and Helen

The remainder of the party then reached the summit for a memorable day out in the hills

On Monday, we all took the ferry (yes, that is it in the middle of the photo on the right) over to the beautiful island of Ulva. We visited Sheila's Cottage (below), a traditional thatched cottager where apparently Sheila McFadyen lived until the early 20th century. She must have been tough as it is very basic.

We then split up into small groups to walk around the island and enjoy the stunning sea views, before visiting The Boathouse (the island tearoom)



There were a lot of interesting walks during the rest of the week. Tuesday was wet, but we managed a walk around the coast near Tobermory (the photo right shows David, Ronnie and Janet taken by Dave Gray)

A group drove down to the South-West corner of Mull and took the ferry over to the historic island of Iona, where they visited Iona Abbey, an extremely important religious centre in the early middle ages, and a focal point in the spread of Christianity throughout Scotland.



Our thanks to Reg, who spent the week fishing, for organizing the week



A view of our accommodation at Macquarie House from across Loch Ba



Looking across Loch Ba from the grounds of Macquarie House, and showing just how wintry it was when we arrived

Skye Week

The Scottish meet over the late May bank holiday has become a regular and very popular part of the Gwydyr calendar. This year Teresa booked us into the Sligachan bunkhouse on Skye, within walking distance of the famous Cuillin Ridge in the Black Cuillins.

The event proved to be so popular that we booked the adjacent cottage as well, and with 26 people on the meet we had almost 25% of the club membership there. With 12 Munros on the main ridge plus Blabheinn, two strong parties set out for the challenge of completing the traverse of the ridge

The Traverse of the Cuillin Ridge by Teresa Peddie, Bryn Roberts and Simon Clark (submitted by Teresa)



Nothing will prepare you for the Cuillin ridge. We researched, read, you-tubed, and asked those who had done it before....

But that didn't prepare us for the mighty Cuillin Ridge..... The technical difficulty, the exposure, the concentration, the physical and mental exertion, the complex route finding

And yet it is the best thing I have ever done.

Don't underestimate it, respect the terrain, be well equipped and prepare....and you stand a chance.

They say the In Pin is the most difficult Munro...several of the other Munros on the ridge are equally or more challenging.

Our initial goal was to traverse the ridge in one day, however we soon reviewed our goal to suit the difficulty of the terrain...as long as we completed it in the week, we would be happy with that achievement

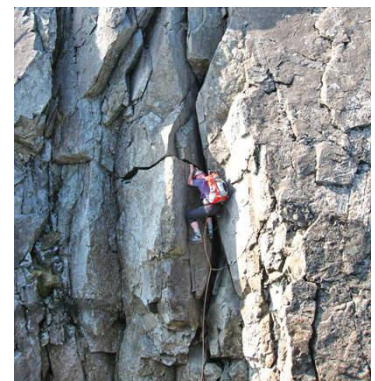
DAY 1 (Monday)

We set off from the car at 3.00am, and after a hard pull up to the first Munro, Sgurr nan Eag, which involved scrambling and route-finding, we were rewarded with a magnificent view of the whole ridge, with the extra bonus of an inversion. What a fantastic moment.

The route finding to the 2nd Munro, Sgurr du Mor, was very complex, with a multitude of steep scrambly options.

We then headed towards the TD gap, where a grade 3 scramble with several 100 m of vertical drop lay below us...very scary

The Gap itself required an abseil and a climb (right). The slippery chimney with no handholds was beyond me, and after half an hour of trying, and with very bruised legs, I accepted defeat and sought the bypass route, down the steep and loose TD gully, and up round the back of Alasdair.

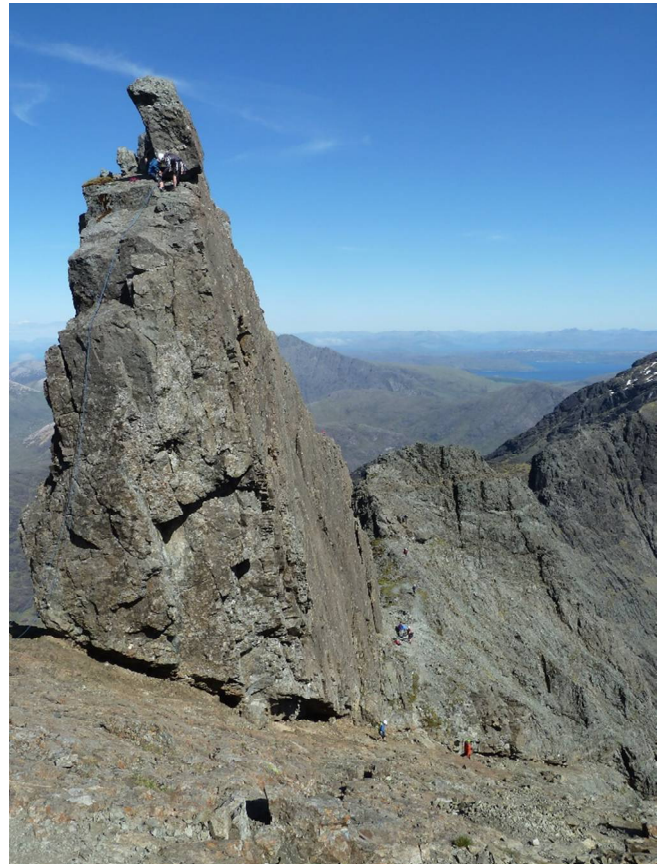


From Alasdair, Sgurr Thearlaich stood between us and the next Munro, Sgurr Mhic Choinnich. A challenging grade 3 scramble took us to the summit, but the descent required 2 abseils, down steep sloping slabs into a gap.

To ascend Sgurr Mhic Choinnich, we had the option of a climb, (Kings Chimney), or a scramble, (Collies ledge), We chose Collie's ledge, which was relatively simple although exposed in places, and a short scramble then took us to the summit. The descent was straightforward

A hard pull up Sgurr Dearg lead us to the base of the awesome In Pin (right). The 2 guys before us going up without a rope persuaded us to try the same. However in the end, I needed the security of a rope part way up! The flat platform at the top was a welcome sight after the exposure of the ridge. The In Pin actually wasn't technically difficult; you just need a head for heights! The abseil down was straightforward and the small overhang at the bottom posed no problem.

So 13 hours after we started we had reached only half way!!! Going down was a welcome relief, but not without its challenges, we had a further abseil to come! In hindsight, it would have been better to continue to Sgurr na Banachdich as the route off from there was pretty straightforward.



DAY 2

Another 3.00am start, and a more straightforward ascent to the ridge, and Sgurr na Banachdich was the first Munro of the day.

The onward path to Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh involved a grade 3 scramble over Sgurr Thormaid. Again difficult route finding to bypass the 3 teeth on the left. An easier than expected grade 3 scramble took us to the summit.

Sgurr a'Mhadaidh was more straightforward, and we gained the summit at 8.45am!

Progressing from there was very challenging as you have to navigate a huge boulder in your path, (over the top, not below, as this is very exposed) severely sloping and exposed slabs, and a few tricky gaps, before facing the intimidating traverse of a further 3 tops.

DAY 3

The goal was to finish the last 3 Munros on the ridge today. However, we had to contend with the first bad weather and the tops were shrouded in clag, and the wind was howling.

A non-technical ascent to Bealach nan Lice, between Am Bastier and Bruach na Frithe, and a relatively straightforward walk up to the summit of Bruach na Frith.

Back at the Bealach, we bypassed the Basteir Tooth (right) by dropping down to the left below the cliffs of Am Bastier, followed by a steep rocky scramble up to the Bealach a Bastier, we then ascended back towards the summit. One last obstacle in the way on the ascent, a deep gap that you have to avoid by descending to the left before the gap, which again presented a route-finding challenge. Some further scrambling and we reached the summit



The weather prevented us completing the final Munro, Sgurr nan Gillean, as the route took us onto an exposed narrow ridge with a gap to step over, which we could not achieve safely in the high wind.

DAY 4

We decided we couldn't leave Skye without finishing the last Munro on the ridge☺, so while everyone was driving home, we made our last attempt of the week, climbing Sgurr nan Gillean from Sligachan via the SE Ridge.

After an uneventful walk in, we were faced with the unrelenting ascent through boulder fields and slabs. The last bit of the ascent was a challenging grade 3 scramble but if you stay left of the ridge you can bypass the most exposed slabs. Descent wise, the exposed slabs slant dangerously, with few hand holds, so stay right to avoid.

Will we go back...most definitely, to do the ridge in 2 days with an overnight bivvi. This is very achievable with the right conditions, and the knowledge we have gained on the ridge over these 4 days.

The Traverse of the Cuillin Ridge by John Simpson, Tara O'Reilly, Chris Russell, Geoff Brierley and Mike Dagley (submitted by John)

The second party to try the traverse of the main ridge decided to adopt a different strategy. Their plan was to do the traverse in two days with an overnight bivouac.



We left slightly later (well around 0600) on Monday from Sligachan, parked at Glenbrittle and set off from the campsite (left) for Gars bheinn (right), which we reached about lunchtime.

We then made our way over Sgurr nan Eag to



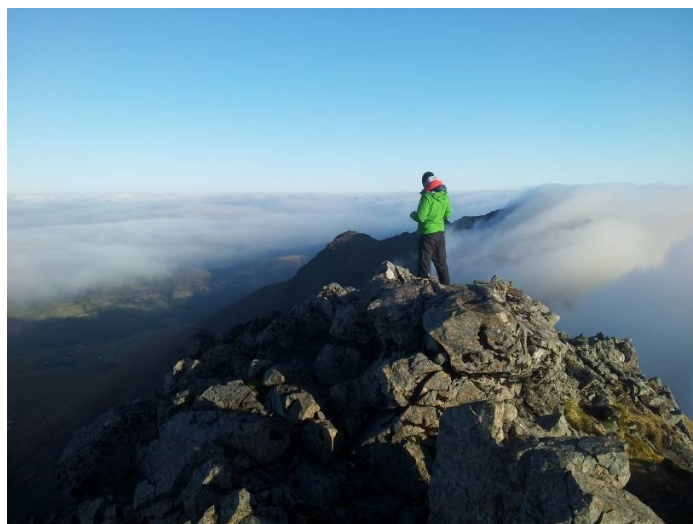
Sgurr Dubh Mòr. By this time it was obvious that progress was slower than hoped and Geoff, who had not been feeling well and Mike (looking out over the ridge below) decided to descend at this point



John, Tara and Chris then carried on to the TD gap. After an abseil down & climbing back out we made are way to the summit of Sgurr Alasdair. By this stage it was starting to get late so we decided to stop and bivi at the top of the Stone Shoot (see the late evening view looking towards Sgùrr Dearg).



Early the next morning (below) the cloud had come in, so we topped Sgurr Alasdair a second time to take in the morning sun

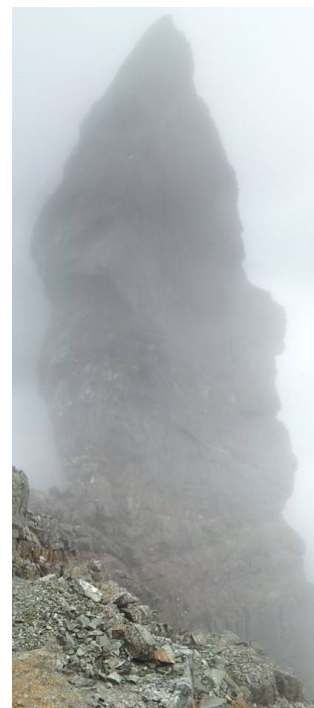


Tara soaking up the morning sun at the top of Sgurr Alasdair (left).

The low cloud had still not cleared, so we decided at this stage to walk off.



On Wednesday Chris, Tara & myself set out to go over the northern end of the ridge from Bruach na Frithe to Am Basteir and Sgùrr nan Gillean. The photo on the left is taken on the ascent of Bruach na Frithe.



As we approached Basteir tooth (right) the wind picked up and the cloud got thicker, so after lunching at the foot of the Basteir tooth we returned to Sligachan.

Other Activities

Whilst inevitably the challenge of completing the traverse of the main ridge was the highlight of the meet, the remainder of the group were very busy indeed.

On Sunday most of us set out to climb Bruach na Frithe (958m) from the North-West ridge.



This is a pleasant climb and one of the easier ways of reaching the main ridge. The panoramic views from the top were spectacular



On Wednesday Sue Taylor and seven others made the long walk (8 miles) over Glen Sligachan to the beautiful Loch Coruisk

David Lane-Joynt was busy reliving old memories of Skye (see below). With Kevin McEvoy and Lindsey Fooks, he climbed up Sgurr Alasdair by the South –West ridge on Monday. On Wednesday he was joined by Chris Russell to take Kevin and Helen Grant up the Inaccessible Pinnacle. Although technically only a Moderate rock climb, the East Ridge route is described in the guidebook as “A sensational climb with good holds, but also

exceptional exposure – a wonderful combination if you like that sort of thing”.

The photos are of Kevin looking happy on the East Ridge, and of Chris abseiling down.



Dave Gray had a very busy week with

Sunday - ascent of Marsco (a Graham) by SE ridge with Helen Avison and Alan Bartlam

Monday - ascent of Beinn Aslak (a Graham) from Bealach Udal and coastal walk round Ardnish peninsula solo

Tuesday - ascent of Bruach na Frithe (Munro) by Fionn Coire and E ridge with Ray Baines

Wednesday - Talisker Bay/Fiskavaig coastal circuit solo

Thursday - Waternish Point coastal circuit with Sue Taylor

Friday - ascent of Sgurr na Connich and Beinn na Caillich (Grahams) from Bealach Udal with Pete Mann and Lindsey Fooks

Saturday - walk to Loch Coruisk by Glen Sligachan and camp wild in glen, solo.



Reg spent the week fishing. Neil Metcalf and Caroline Barker went wild camping. Whilst other members found the impressive array of Whiskies at the Sligachan Hotel to their liking

The full list of those on the meet is Helen Avison, Ray Baines, Caroline Barker, Alan Bartlam, Geoff Brierley, Simon Clark, Reg Cromer, Mike Dagley, Lindsey Fooks, Bryan Gilbert, Mike Gilbert, Glenn Grant, Helen Grant, Dave Gray, Chris Harris, Janet Harris, David Lane-Joynt, Pete Mann, Kevin McEvoy, Neil Metcalf, Tara O'Reilly, Teresa Peddie, Bryn Roberts, Chris Russell, John Simpson and Sue Taylor

Memories (by David Lane-Joynt)

Seeing our teams experiencing the ultimate of ridge scrambling that the UK has to offer, it took me back to May 1973 when I set out to do the ridge. At the time I was serving my notice in the Royal Navy, and was working with young ratings who had been selected for officer training. I thought it would be good training to take them on an outside expedition to do the traverse of the Cuillin Ridge. I obviously did not know just how hard the traverse is, even for experienced parties, and how infrequently you get really good weather in Skye.

So I got out my old slides from a half-frame camera and scanned them.

Our plan was to do the ridge from North to South (my guidebook described it this way) and descend to Glenbrittle at the end of the first day. I can remember starting from Sligachan and doing a route up to Sgurr nan Gillean. Like the Gwydyr week, we were exceptionally lucky with the weather. Coming from the North, we were able to abseil down most of the main difficulties at the North end of the ridge, and made good progress along the ridge so that we descended to Glenbrittle in reasonable time.

I remember the second day as being a very long one. It was a long pull up to Sgurr Dearg, and we then climbed up the shorter, but steeper face of the Inaccessible Pinnacle. At the time I was climbing to a reasonable standard, but it was quite polished even in those days and challenging in big boots. We were then able to solo down the easier East face. It was a long day to traverse all the way down to Gars-bheinn, although we were able to abseil down the TD gap (right). It seemed an even longer and tired walk back to the Glenbrittle campsite. I was 29 at the time and fit. I am sure that it would be beyond me now.

