

THE GWYDYR MOUNTAIN CLUB NEWSLETTER – EXTRA!

May 2025: Editor Dave Gray



Introduction

Welcome to the May Newsletter! Maytime is Munrotime and this is an Extra! edition with an article from John Simpson, our 5th Munroist, on his experiences. Many thanks to John, and also to Christy, Gill Eccles, Helen Grant, Mike Doyle, Pete Smedley, Ray, Sue Taylor, Teresa, and as ever DLJ for help with this edition. Please let me have material for the next edition, the final deadline for that is **May 25th**.

Looking Ahead

Here are the upcoming meets venues for March and April, details are on the Club Website. The meets list is constantly being updated, please **check it out regularly** on the Website. Meets added to the programme since the last edition are in bold as a reminder **in case you've missed them...** As a reminder, the full lists of future outdoor climbing meets that kick off in May, plus regular **indoor climbing** at the Boardroom, is now on the website.

6 May	Gallaghers – Talk on Torre del Paine Trek
7 May	Climbing Meet – Dyserth Castle Slab
9-11 May	Hut Weekend (Inc. Snowdonia Slate Trail 2)
21 May	Climbing Meet – Penmaenbach Quarry – Last Butt One Level
24-31 May	Scottish Meet – Glencarron Lodge
30 May – 1 June	Hut Weekend
3 June	Gallaghers – Talk on Air vs Ground Navigation
4 June	Climbing – Castle Inn
7 June	Wirral Walk – Mike Mc's 80th Birthday
18 June	Climbing – Nant Dulas
20-22 June	Hut Weekend (Inc. Welsh 3000s and Snowdonia Slate Trail 3)

Venues in Focus

The **Glen Carron** meet opens up a big and varied field. I've had a couple of holidays there and here are some thoughts from my logbooks – things may have changed a bit but probably not much. Torridon is clearly nearby but I've concentrated on things nearer to hand.

'Stephen Katz', Bill Bryson's ageing anti-hero on the Appalachian Trail, famously said 'What I look for in woman these days, Bryson, is a pulse.' My equivalent in Munro terms is when the SMC Guide says 'Not a very interesting hill' – which means it's one I might get up, and such is Moruisg, one of my relatively recent repeat Munros in Glen Carron.



I did it in June 2018 from the layby at GR 083521 then the stalkers path, and east up the west shoulder. Going down over the Corbett of Sgurr nan Ceannaichean, its north ridge, and back to the path.

The photo left is the summit and NW corrie of Moruisg, and the hill commands good views.

Clearly the palates of the SMC are somewhat jaded after their lives of Tea With Kate, Munro book launch parties, beard launch parties etc!

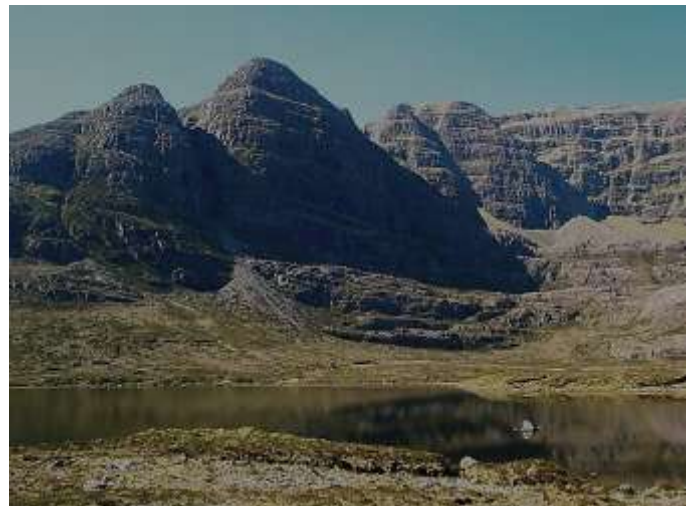
To the north of Glen Carron is the Coulin Forest which has a fine network of good stalkers paths. From Coulags there is for example a wild 10 mile walk to take in the Munro of Maol Chean-dearg. This is the most usual route up the hill. Here's a view that opens up, to the north east ridge of An Ruadh Stac. To the north there's a huge panorama of the Torridon mountains.



An Ruadh Stac is a Corbett and a tough scrambly one. The Corbett that I enjoyed the most in this area was Fuar Tholl. We did the hill by the stalking path from Achnashellach and came back from the summit to that path by the NW ridge. The picture left is of the main corrie on Fuar Tholl.

Pictured right is Corbett Beinn Bhan on the borders of Applecross. I've done this twice, once as a very quick out and back across its plateau from the Bealach na Ba road in poor weather. The second was from Kishorn bridge and across the moor to go up the north-side ridge of Coire na Fhamhair which is a very mild scramble. This route discloses the huge cliffs on the east side of the hill, a route in the SMC guide of the time.

There is route on the Walkhighlands.co.uk website which looks good too, but I would



be tempted to consider doing it the opposite way round so as to climb up the steepest piece. Either way their route avoids any scrambling.

There are lower hills – including Grahams – in the area too.

At low level a very pleasant walk is the shortish coastal circuit from Leahcanashie on Loch Carron round by road and track to Reraig (see right) and back to the start by the forest track.

There are also low level routes to be made around the Coulin Pass.



Sue Taylor's **Snowdonia Slate Trail** section hike has got off to a good start (see more below!) and is planned to continue this month. So here's some 'sidelines on slate'.



As a roofing material Slate and Tile are in rather a standoff – slate's better looking and lasts longer, but is more expensive in the first place.

The rise of slate as a widespread roofing material began when gunpowder started to be used for blasting, and canals and railways came onstream to transport this heavy product inland. Up till then outside its immediate source

areas it was normally used only for the most prestigious buildings, for example the renaissance royal Chateau de Chenonceau on the Loire (*photo credits Wikipedia*). The use of both slate and tile helped urban development enormously – by superseding thatch which frequently caught fire and sometimes spread it to a whole town.

It has more unusual uses – for fencing and sheepfolds in Wales for a start, on my last caravan trip I went to Croesor where you can see these near the slate trail.

Always up for the strange and wonderful, the Japanese (and others) use slate to make the dark counters for the traditional board game 'Go.' Traditionally also the white counters are made of clam shell.

Go was invented in China probably before 584BC but spread to Japan, Korea and then the world. Looking up Go introduced me to an unknown world – a game where experts are said to be able to think 40 moves ahead, games can last days or even months, and the number of permutations of admissible moves has been calculated to handsomely exceed the number of atoms in the visible known universe.



Need to cut junior's hair, skin a seal and then cut up the cooked meat, or maybe build an igloo? Well the well-equipped Inuit or other High Arctic operator might still use an 'Ulu' knife, whose blade would be typically made of slate in times before contact with Western technology. Modern working ulus are usually made of steel.

An ulu is said to be easier to use on very hard material such as bone, and easier to use one-handed, than Western style knives. They come in various sizes, and it's possible that their adaptability to so many types of damn hard work around the igloo is why the Inuit sometimes refer to them as 'women's' knives'. Mmm...PC or what?



This is the blade and handle of a historic Alaskan ulu. (Photo credit findingmyalaska.blogspot.com)

More familiar perhaps is the picture of the US person exercising their second amendment rights by blasting harmless birds out of the sky.

Taking us though to more previously uncharted territory courtesy of www.outdoorlife.com in which we read: 'If I try to purr on a diaphragm I can make a sound, but it won't be a turkey call. On the other hand, with my slate call I can purr, yelp, cutt, cluck, tree cackle, and even kee-kee run without much practice'.



OK folks, keep calm and read on...what this guy – I think it's probably a guy – is talking about are tools for making noises like lady turkeys to lure gentlemen turkeys onto his gun(?s). In other words a 'turkey call' and up with the best are those with which a piece of wood is scraped on slate.

The model pictured comes highly recommended. Available for around £32 on *Amazon*. The thing that looks like a powder puff is the slate element.

I reckon our American might reasonably argue though that wandering round a forest in Illinois armed to the teeth is probably less crazy and less life threatening than some of the stuff we Brits get to around slate.

See if you agree with me. Go on to YouTube sometime and search for 'Ffestiniog gravity train'. And you can choose from scary videos both short and long!

The return regular of outdoor climbing meets in May plans to include Last Butt One Level at **Penmaenbach Quarry**. The name makes me smile! The Rockfax entry on the website <https://www.ukclimbing.com> describes it as ‘...a good little spot that has plenty of easier slabby routes as well as a few steeper offerings. The bolting is very good. The rock on the whole is reliable but needs a bit of care in places.’ Sounds far from Last to me!

My eye was caught by a couple of recent news items on venues, not directly related to meets as such.

Firstly Christy’s post which Facebook users will have seen on the **Newton Stewart Walking Festival** in May, more details are on their website <https://www.walkfestnewtonstewart.com/> . Galloway is a superb area and well worth a visit any time. I had a trip up there this spring staying just 15 miles south west of Dumfries that gave me day or shorter trip access to great hill and coastal walking. Where Christy’s based further west is even better.

Then also on Facebook was a post from Derbyshire Council heralding a new bike trail called the **White Peak Loop**. This looks like quite an extension to bike (and therefore walking!) trails in Derbyshire. If you click on the link:

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/leisure/countryside/access/white-peak-loop/white-peak-loop.aspx> you’ll get the info. Right at the bottom of the page is a link to a map that gives you a very good overview of the Derbyshire Council trails.

A quick glance indoors now at **Adele’s upcoming talk** on trekking around the **Torre del Paine**. No easy matter that, one of my old work colleagues did it a good few years ago with her (soon to be X!) boyfriend. They had very bad weather and at one stage said boyfriend lay down in the freezing rain in the middle of nowhere and said he wanted to die. Wendy kicked him until he got up again and they made it to safety. ‘The course of true love...’ and all that...!

Grand Days Out (and In) – Recent Meets Highlights

I guess most members will have seen Pete’s email reporting that the **Wirral Blue Plaques** evening walk went well, with plenty of participants and good weather. Pete mentioned the detour to see to the blue plaque to railway engineer Thomas Brassey.

If you drive down Saughall Massie Road from the Upton By Pass towards West Kirby, beyond the Fire Station you go over a new bridge over the Arrowe Brook. Now by passed and on a small one way road nearby is the old sandstone bridge and that it seems is where Brassey started out.



The old bridge is Grade II listed, because per the historicengland.org.uk website: ‘Saughall Massie Bridge represents significant national interest as the first bridge constructed by the pre-eminent civil engineering contractor of the C19, Thomas Brassey, at the starting point of his career. This contract provided Brassey with the opportunity to construct a simple but elegant road bridge, enabling him to hone the talents that he later adapted and transferred to his work on the railways and his more grandiose and substantial structures...’

The site goes on to say the bridge was commissioned by Chester County in 1829 to reduce the isolation of Saughall Massie, in the hope of reducing crime in that isolated community!

The plaque on the new bypass bridge commemorates a USAF test pilot, Lieutenant Jay Frederick Simpson, who died in 1944 when trying to emergency land a new P47 Thunderbolt fighter which had caught fire in flight. The site <https://www.saughallmassie.org/> has more details.

Helen Grant writes 'Thanks Sue and Steve for organising the **Snowdonia Slate Trail** this weekend. We did Sections 1 to 5 over 2 days total 31 miles 4500 ft ascent .Great weather and great company 😊xxx'

Sue Taylor takes up the story...

'The relatively new Snowdonia Slate Trail opened in 2017 and passes through the slate workings and quarries of Snowdonia. Rather than do the trail in one, we decided to complete it over 3 hut weekends. Steve very kindly reccie'd the route and worked out the stages. 18 people came along.

Day one took us from Port Penrhyn to Llanberis (13+ miles). Day two was from Llanberis to Rhyd Ddu (16+ miles). Positioning cars at the start and end of each day was a bit tricky to work out but we seemed to get everyone where they needed to be.

Although most of us will have been on sections of the Slate Trail, the first two days took us to on new paths and tramways with incredible views of the big boys of Snowdonia. We couldn't have asked for better weather. The dry spell also meant the bogs were pretty easy to navigate. Route finding was straightforward until we went wrong of day 2 and had a minor back track to get back on route.

Unfortunately, Steve took a tumble on a lane down to Llanberis. Nurse Jane immediately sprang into action and ambulance man Sven took Steve to Bangor for 5 stitches to his elbow. Compeed was popular as blisters took their toll, particularly on day 2, so we finished the stage slightly worse for wear than we started.



We'll tackle the next sections on the 9/10/11 May hut weekend.'

Here's some of the views Sue mentions.

This photo is from Gill Eccles and shows the team descending towards Bethesda with Elidir Fawr in the background early on in the trip.

Now follow a number of shots from Helen...

The first shows a reconstruction of how dressed slates were sent from the initial processing plant down inclines to be shipped out by rail. I've not seen a shot like this before and it gets across just how hazardous quarry work could be.



And below we see the group later on, firstly with the Nantlle ridge in the background, and secondly heading south towards Moel Hebog.



Let's now turn south to **Cader Idris**. Here's a stunning picture from Ray of Cwm Cau

There was a strong turnout for the meet, and the team went up on the Minfford path. They also visited the summit hut where I camped out in the snow so long ago! Gill writes 'Thanks to Bill for a super day on Cadair Idris today, it was a great route up and around the summit and ridge. We were blessed with good weather, so clear views all around. 🌞🌄🌞'

Gill's photo below captures the scale of Cader's north scarp:



Occasional Section – Members' Personal News



Great news posted on Facebook by **Galloway Mountain Rescue Team**:

'Galloway Mountain Rescue Team would like to introduce our two newest callout members – Adam Hutchings and Christy Miles!

Both Adam and Christy yesterday completed a demanding and rigorous assessment, including day and night navigation exercises and first aid scenarios.

Well done to both of you – and welcome to the Callout List from everyone at GMRT!'

Congratulations to Christy who joins the line of several other members who've served in Mountain Rescue as team members or in other roles over the years.

Many thanks to those members who've sent me further information for the **Big List**. I've started work on the update; revised publication date though is still moving back as I've been promised more material and want to make the revision as complete as possible.

EXTRA!

COMPLETING THE MUNROS: REFLECTIONS...by John Simpson

On a day of weather so miserable that even munro completers stay indoors, our Club's 5th Munroist John Simpson took me through his campaign, which was crowned with success last year. I found it very interesting to compare and contrast his experiences and approach with mine a quarter-century ago.

Starting out

John's first munro on 3rd June 2012 was on what most people regard as the hardest of the mainland hills, Liathach in Torridon. John, David Lane-Joynt and Jeff did its two munros, sticking to the ridge itself, traversing the pinnacles with their scary drops.

Liathach – (photo credit - geograph.org)

John's ascent was on a Club Torridon trip in 2012. The traverse saw the magic moment when DLJ – then a mere stripling of 68 – was coolly downclimbing a particularly nasty pinnacle and turned round to survey the Lycra-clad youths gathered below. 'F**k me!' one cried - 'We all thought that you were young!!!'



Early Days

At the start, John told me, he had no ambition or intention of 'doing' the munros, it was just a case of enjoying new places and hills in the Highlands. Most of his early summits were with Jeff and Neil Metcalfe who wanted to do more of these hills. John's campaign started to accelerate and around the 60-munro mark he started to do more alone and develop firmer objectives.

He reckons a key point for him was that 'Going up 280-odd hills was just too big a meal to think about. I thought "let's do 100 and go on from there"'. The hundred got done and then 150, and a full on munro-bagger was born. This was very much how it was for me – a few hills, then more, then a target of a hundred, then everything on the mainland, then the lot.

Into to The Wild

I asked John which was his favourite hill. He said he didn't really have one, though Liathach would always be in contention.



In terms of walking in wintry conditions the Na Gruagaichean ridge on the Mamores was a great day out, with the hills covered in deep snow.

Na Gruagaichean ridge

The Cairngorms were a favourite area, he said 'I like the wildness of it, I like the far ones, the different terrain and country'. He did big days around Glen Shee and the White Mounth.

Unlike me, John didn't camp wild or use bothies much though on these longer trips. As a fell-runner and mountain biker, John was able to cycle in on long glen approaches, and combined that with the ability to cover a lot of ground running in a single day. 'A single hill that stands out from me was when I cycled into Seana Bhraigh from Oykel Bridge to the Old School House.'

Another hill he rated highly for its wilderness appeal was Ben Alder in the West/Central highlands. He had a great day there and felt good to be 'in the middle of nowhere'. The great Scots climber and writer Bill Murray was with John on this. In his (classic!) book '*Undiscovered Scotland*' he wrote 'Of all the remote un-get-at-able mountains in Scotland, Ben Alder ranks among the first.'

In this wide and wild area John did 6 munros in day...the drop off Ben Alder and the ascent of Beinn Eibhinn was interesting to say the least. Ben Alder was in cloud so finding the bearing off was fun...the route up Beinn Eibhinn south east slope was quite hard! I stayed at Newtonmore and cycled into in from Dalwinnie to Culra Bothy.'

Commuting Jim, but not as we know it

Ben Alder got us onto nearby Ben na Lap, which overlooks the magical Loch Ossian. John took the train to Corroul, Britain's highest railway station, on a snowy and windy winters day, and had to be back at 11.00am to catch the train down. Corroul is in a big area with no public roads. He made it by 10 minutes!



Loch Ossian – springtime magic

The train and John's speed on the hill also came into play to do the other Loch Ossian munros, Sgor Gaibhre and Carn Dearg. John did these in early spring, and running back along the loch he was impressed by the fact it had been wintry on the tops but the rhododendrons at the bottom were in flower.

I asked John whether he would have done anything differently on his trips. He said the only thing really would have been to take a bit more warm clothing. In remote Fisherfield he slipped crossing the swift Abhainn Gleann na Muice and went in up to his waist while travelling light – he feels he was lucky that this was on a day in summer and he could dry off relatively easily.

A lunchbreak before the river crossing



Strategic approach

When one gets deeper into 'doing' the munros the question of how best to plan what to do and when comes up.

Unlike a lot of people John deliberately avoided 'clearing' areas until towards the end of the project. He wanted to leave reasons to go back to places again, and to leave relatively easy single hills for something to aim for wherever he might be. This chimed with me. I was always keen to do a 'quick single' but tried not to leave more difficult things as the last peak(s) in an area.

John was also careful to stay in synch with the likely conditions. He'd do the easier/less remote hills in the winter, to give a shorter day from the road, and tried to save the longer more remote ones for the summer.

John and I agreed that for someone living in England a very large part of the effort is not in the hills but in the car, putting the time in on the long drives north. When I started out with my friend Bob, we never considered a peak 'done' till we'd driven carefully and safely home. Statistically the most dangerous thing we did was the driving!

The Cuillin

Which brings us on to other dangerous things i.e. Skye munros.



On his first trip, John was with Chris Russell and a few other friends and they made an attempt on the Cuillin ridge. A couple of people dropped out, and the others bivvied on Sgurr Alasdair. Unfortunately, the next day dawned very misty, and they decided to descend, only to get a frustrating clearance once they reached the bottom.

John was able then over time to do the easier summits on his own, before a second trip during which he finished the harder climbs, for which they roped up, were accomplished. The Inaccessible Pinnacle was climbed by Richard Smith, David L-J, Steve Birch and John.

Richard on the Inn Pinn

John climbed Am Basteir and Sgurr nan Gillean by its west ridge with Richard Smith, Steve Birch, and Helen Grant.

Sgurr nan Gillean

Both times on Skye John enjoyed very good weather.



Completion and the future

John left Ben Lomond, the southernmost munro' for his final hill of the project, as it was easily accessible. His ascent on 3rd July 2024 was on a family holiday with his wife Jackie.



On the summit ridge of Ben Lomond

Our much missed Scots friend Pete Mann would put on his most Scots air to say 'You're nae doing the munros laddie unless you're doing the Tops!'. En route to completion John racked up over a hundred of the Tops, and his speed and stamina allowed him to take them in provided they involved shortish diversions. He always remembered Pete with a smile when he did a Top.

So future interest in the Scottish hills involves doing more of the Tops, and also quality munro summit reascents using different routes if possible from first time round. The Grahams in Scotland also appeal to John, he feels the Corbetts whilst being fine hills aren't such an attractive proposition as their height plus their 500' reascent make them feel slow to pick off. The lower 2000'-2500' Grahams give better 'availability' with respect to the weather and are generally shorter days out.

John's also interested in doing more of the Wainwrights in the Lakes and recognised the word Ethels too! So maybe more days out in the Peak...

John Simpson with Dave Gray

February 2025