

The
Ceunant
Mountaineering
Club



Newsletter
Spring 1983

Editorial

Sorry it's been so long. A signed list of excuses is available on request. It seems that the only way to get a newsletter out regularly is to make it a very modest affair, more of a news sheet just to keep members informed, so perhaps next year's editor might try this. Especially in view of the available funds.

We have spent a lot of money this year and anyone visiting you can see where it has gone. A tremendous amount of work, especially by Ian and Derrick, and in very unfavourable conditions much of the time.

I hope this can be printed before 19th March when we have the Annual Dinner at the Church House Inn, Torver and the AGM on 23rd March.

The Annual Dinner

Date: Saturday March 19th, 7.30 pm.

Venue: Church House Inn, Torver, Coniston Tel 282

Cost: £7

Menu

Minestrone soup

Seafood Platter

Roast Silverside of Beef
with Horseradish sauce,
Mushrooms, vegetables.

Sticky Ginger Pudding
with Cream!

Accommodation at Hotel:- 2 double rooms,
1 family room with 2 double beds
1 family room with 1 double and 1 single bed.
@ £6 per person per night, reduced terms.
Camping and Tranearth Hut.

The Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 23rd March @ 8.00 pm
at the 'Bulls Head'

FLYING FRECKLE (2)

(1) 9.00 o'clock, south on the M6. Three lanes 'chocka' with H.G.V's and long vehicles, black nothingness, stair roads of rain, buffeting high winds and due to a caked inside windscreen, visability down to 30 feet - and we are doing 110 m.p.h. At what G force do locked arms and legs collapse in a decelaration from 110 m.p.h. to 0 m.p.h. in 30 feet ? Bank's Bitter tastes cat the second time down. There are supposed to be five stages to dying; the last being resignation; nausea, dizziness and an inability to speak, all are ^{also} present. In future I promise that I will always take the worst lead; I will never drink; I will never covet a mates attractive wife; I will be good kind and thoughtful to everybody - anybody.

(2) 11.00 o'clock south on the M6 - absolute anarchy - cars all over the place - the police have just started to switch all traffic to one side of the motorway and our bladders give painful cramp after a two hour wait and four pints of Bank's. The post-comatose respite after drink has worn off and the Kraken begins to awake. His neck muscles stiffen, his lower lip starts to quiver; the eyes begin to roll and the car drifts ever slowly inwards, forcing the opposition to give way, or suffer his steel kiss. We approach the bollards closing off the inside lanes. Wham - we're through 50 - 70 - 90 m.p.h. down a clear road - no excavators, no trenches, we're free. Up the slip road, round the top and away. Cars stop, turn off, lights flash; darkened figures in other cars grimace and curse, all to no avail, 75 m.p.h. through town and nothing can stop the release of pent-up tension our hero suffered on the M6.

We pick up a tail - a white Marina Estate, that we overtook on the inside - the surgical boot descends harder still. A long 4 wheel drift as we go round the corner into the cul-de-sac and rocket to the end, fiercely braking onto his drive to stop 6 inches from the garage door. The white Marina handbrake skids, blocking the road and stops. The four of us leap out - me not knowing whether we are in for a punch-up or a steeplechase over the garden hedges.

"O.kay lads, calm down - it's the driver we're after" -
The Police. They throw him in the back seat of their car.
Two minutes later he's out, with that stupid gaelic grin
on his face. Because they couldn't find the charge sheet,
they had let him go - he had been sitting on it !

(3) Five pints in the ^k and Dr. Jeckyll takes
over - no music, no talking or distractions. We drift off
into the deserved and peaceful slumber that we know follows
'Freckles' minor bevvy. No traffic about and two hours
for the forty mile crawl to Tyn Lon. The car has stopped,
our sublime peace is broken. The darkness is pierced by a
blue flashing light. We've been stopped for driving
suspiciously slowly. Expletive. ~~deleted~~ gets out of the car.
"Extremely sorry for any inconvenience caused officer.
I was on my way to make a lecture tomorrow at Bangor University
when my exhaust blew slightly. Therefore, I thought it
prudent to continue my journey at reduced speed". The Corwen
Clod buys it. "Freckle" gets away with it, yet again.

(4) Why is it that wherever we go we seem to find the lock-ins ?
It's five o'clock, we've been at it since one with that
Scots nutter at the Ness Cliff Hotel. The summer weekenders
are playing wagon trains all the way down the A5 and though
we take them in the hundreds, there ^{are} ~~is~~ always more in front.
We are on the offside ~~of~~ lane when a white BMW with a blue-tit
on top is bearing down at a combined speed of - oh my god !
we swerve in - ~~as~~ ^{he} does the same, breaking and mounting the
verge. He stops, we continue, yet faster. We see the light
go on in the fading distance; he's doing a three point turn.
We go even faster; after another dozen crettings, we charge
off down the slip road into Wellington, take the rear car
park of the pub and slide down very low in the seats, till
opening time and darkness many hours later.

THE TROTTERNISH RIDGE

(A totally Biased Viewpoint)

By: Mark Hellewell

At the end of a good week in Skye recently, (the club meet at Glenbrittle), I decided that what was needed was a good 'do' and I certainly wasn't to be disappointed in my choice when I decided on a good long walk along the Trotternish Ridge. This rather fine ridge walk, about which it is not easy to find anything written in the multitudes of Scottish mountaineering guides that would actually inspire anyone to get up and walk its length, is for most visitors to Skye 'near and yet far' seen in part or entirely from the road but not ventured upon, being as it is overshadowed by the magnificent Black Cuillins which are so demanding of one's attention.

Starting at the northernmost point in Skye it follows the airy crest of the ridge which runs southward to Portree along the twenty miles of hills that form the backbone of the Trotternish Peninsula. It involves some 7,500' of ascent, taking in eighteen peaks some of which are un-named of which five are over 2,000' and nine are over 1,500'! Although this wouldn't constitute a Munro Baggers outing it certainly on the other hand wouldn't go as a Sunday afternoon stroll, in fact when I announced my intentions of doing it I was accused of being a masochist. The ridge has unfortunately got a reputation of being a connoisseur's bog trot, which is a little unfair because although there are some boggy sections these are limited to the initial flat walk-in and one or two of the bealachs. In fact if you can tear yourself away from the rough gabbro of the Cuillins, this gently sloped sheep cropped greensward might well provide a welcome break for your feet.

It would seem to make sense to start the ridge from the north end, and this is best achieved by co-opting some kind (unsuspecting) volunteer to drive you up there and either pick you up later at Portree or have your own vehicle parked waiting. After the statutory late start we set off from Glenbrittle to the north end of the island to Connista from where I was to start. The weather was unusually hot so a quick stop in Portree for sun tan lotion was in order. Driving along the scenic coastal road north of Portree, the ridge remains in view all the time on your left and, if after reaching Connista you haven't been put off by what you've seen then I can only say that you deserve everything that's coming to you. In fact by the time we reached Staffin and still no end in sight we both thought the same thing "Damned long, wot!" or words to that effect.

We arrived at Connista (don't blink) shortly after 11 O'clock, a quiet little place; a few thatched crofts, one or two cows, and a talkative cuckoo to greet us. After stuffing a few goodies into my new bum-bag and liberally applying insect repellent I set off in shorts and ankle socks (and boots) into the midday sun at 11.15 am. Leaving the quiet little crofts on Connista behind me I followed the Kilmaluag river for a while until it branched off into bogland over which there are no tracks and it is best just to take a bee-line to the north face of Scurr Mor, the first peak of the day. Wandering across this peat troughed heather covered bog you might think you've missed the right path but alas there are none - not even a vibram boot print to be seen anywhere.

Scurr Mor, your first peak of the day, provides a nice little warm up, grinding up its steep grassy north face will probably kill you, (if you don't die of sunstroke as I nearly did, Noel Coward hit the nail on the head, come back rain all is forgiven!) Fortunately, the going gets easier from here on and after you've taken five on its flat grassy summit, a pleasant stroll takes you across and up to Meall na Suiramach from where a little detour to its eastern edge provides you with a birdseye view of the quivang and its strange and interesting rock buttresses and pinnacles reputed

to be the weirdest rock architecture in the U.K. Pressing on downhill (a brisk run to liven you up) now takes you to the Uig-Staffin Pass, the only breech in the ridges defence where it has been possible to build a road across it. A stream here provides the last drink you will find on the ridge until you reach a small stream before ascending the Storr but this you will have to share with the sheep and doesn't taste too good. At this point I unwisely refused a drink offered to me by some passing tourists, I nearly didn't live to regret it not realising the scarcity of water from thereon.

A suggestion of a path now leads up to Biod Buidhe 1500' passing on the left an isolate little peak called Cleat a perfectly shaped hill and probably one of the least climbed. However, whilst admiring the view, watch your step for your route now follows the top of a line of 500' cliffs which accompany you for most of the day. The quiet untrodden isolation of the ridge now starts to become apparent as you pass from Biod Buidhe down to Bealach nanCuisichean to start the longest pull up of the day to Beinn Edra at 2006'. To your left below the cliffs is four miles of trackless bog separating you from the coastal road and to the right is a similar distance also to the sea of rough sloping hillside, not quite so boggy but no less inviting. At this point in the day I met the only other ridgewalker of the day, doing the same as myself in reverse (no he wasn't walking backwards!) I reached the trig point on the summit of Beinn Edra at 3 o'clock in the afternoon to take a welcome dinner break. Feeling now that I was well on the way I sat for half an hour in absolute quiet and stillness as not a breath of wind disturbed the peace. In the distance through the haze was the Storr, the highest point of the day. I told myself the day would be as good as complete once this was reached. So with renewed vigour I set off running along the tops and down and up many small bealachs until the longish pull up to Baca Ruadh 2091 slowed me to a stop, the ups and the downs of the bealachs were now becoming more up and more down.

Only Hartaval 2150' now lay between myself and the Storr, the scenery here was quite impressive as I peered over the cliffs down into desolate corries which remain virginal and trodden only by the sheep, a few carcasses of which lay below as I walked the tops of the cliff to serve as a grim reminder not to get too complacent about choice of footing. Had it been a clear day I would, I'm sure, be telling of marvellous views across the coastal waters of the Hebrides, little islands like blobs of meringue, boats here and there chugging along their way, sun shimmering across the water Lewis and Harris on the horizon, but no, none of that, just haze, not even a glimpse of the cuillins.

Hartaval soon passed behind and I was jogging down towards the distant sound of running water at Bealach a Chuirn. This pleasant spot marks the start of the Storr, that well known summit which sits above the old man of Storr and its accompanying pinnacles (recent epics on the funny end of the rope— mainly downwards, spring to mind ... next time!) Looking up at the Storr 750' above I felt in need of a drink so after surveying the poor excuse of a stream I found some water without sheep droppings in it and drank as if there was no tomorrow then colled me feet in it. Psychological warfare was the order of the day now, it was getting late in the afternoon and I assured myself with every step I made upwards that once the summit was reached the rest of the ridge was easy and mainly downhill.

My face must have been a picture, Ben Dearg identified on the map as 'a bit of a slope before running down to the pub' now loomed up ahead as a 500' scree slope at a considerable incline. I descended quickly from the Storr and reached the foot of this, the ridges last fling, and started up, steadily, I thought it would be hard work, I was wrong, it was harder, it nearly killed me; I stopped several times and completed it on all fours (I wasn't going to tell you that!) Anyway, that really was the last hard bit and it didn't take long before I was standing on top of Pein a Chleibh 900' the very last hill of the day at 6 o'clock on the dot

feeling very good indeed, eight hours from first to last peak. All that now remained was a run down the hillside to Portree two and a half miles below and unwrap that pound note or two wrapped in cling film in my bag. The night was young and it takes a long while to work across the whisky shelf at Carbost.

In conclusion, this ridge walk will stand out in my memory always as a classic, I wouldn't have missed it for anything. To have done it during the same week as completing the main Cullin Ridge was a double bonus.

THE HIGH LEVEL ROUTE

Jan de Montjoye

The classic High Level Route is probably the best known ski tour in the world and as such is very popular. It traverses eleven cols and makes its way through some of the most spectacular and, remarkably, still remote areas in the Mont Blanc and Pennine Alps.

We started from Argentiere in what can only be described as the worst conditions imaginable - blizzard, heavy snow and white out. From the Grand Montets, a brief descent down the pistes leads down on to the Argentiere glacier, which is crossed to the bottom of the Chardonnet glacier which forms the first of many uphill stages. A long flog leads to the col du chardonnet. This was the first time either Roger or myself had used skins, and can best be described as entertaining!

The descent from the col was very steep, and we waited until the guided party behind was caught up. They set up an abseil, so we used their rope. The reason for the abseil was soon apparent when I felt my feet, still with skis attached swinging free in a large bergschrund. The next problem was to find the Fenetre de Saleinaz in the increasing white out-notoriously difficult, but once again we followed the guided party who had very little difficulty. My respect for the guides was growing!

The Fenetre de Saleinaz was taken on foot and led onto the Plateau du Trient, a large expanse of nothing with the Trient hut somewhere in the mist on the other side. We found it, again with the help of the guides - even more respect. A long first day.

The next day was one of the easier stages, and, apart from abseiling down the Fenetre du Chamois, presented no problem. The descent of the Arpette valley to Champex in superb powder snow was just reward for the previous days hard work, and in addition the weather had started to clear up. After a short ride we spent the night in Bourg St. Pierre.

The main central section of the High Level Route now lay ahead of us, and loaded with lots of food and too much of everything else, we set off in the morning for the Valsorey hut, on the shoulder of the Grand Combin. Its a long way and the final slope is very prone to avalanche in the afternoon. We arrived at the hut quite late, having passed an enormous avalanche, that had just swept the slope, in blissful ignorance.

The weather had turned nasty again but the following morning dawned clear and magnificent views of Mont Blanc were enjoyed. The route immediately began to show its teeth. After a brief ascent on skis, crampons were donned and the final ice slope up to the Plateau du Couloir was hacked into submission with ice axes. From here a short descent, and subsequent ascent led over the Col du Sonadon onto the Durand Glacier which was descended to the rocky valley of the Val de Bagnes, from which the Chanrion hut can be reached by half an hours easy ascent.

The weather began to take on a pattern i.e. clear mornings and misty afternoons.

The Chanrion hut was the biggest so far and was quite crowded. However, we were relieved the following morning to find that not everyone was going our way. Todays stage, number five, provides the most monotonous day, with a very long flog up the Glacier d'Ottemma - 10 kilometers of pain! This was where we wished we hadn't brought sleeping bags and stove and petrol etc. The actual angle of ascent was very easy and, therefore, should have been straightforward, but with rucsac straps biting into already sore shoulders and with the sun frying you alive, it proved very exhausting to say the least! Towards the top of the slope the angle eased and for a further two hours we were convinced we were at the top of the col - a cruel deception. When eventually we could begin to see down the other side of the col, the track immediately shot off to

the left and started to go steeply uphill - this really was the end. Another hours ascent and a long traverse landed us, exhausted, and in the middle of a blizzard at the Vignettes hut, which was even more crowded than the Chanrion. Luckily the majority of the people were day trippers from Arolla although some of them were H.L.R. candidates who had taken the Verbier Variation, thus omitting some of the more serious sections.

After a long rest we devoured our food - about three hundred weight of pasta and Tesco's minestrone soup and retired, very gratefully for a good nights sleep before the four o'clock start, necessary for stage six.

Stage six, though the longest, seemed quite straightforward - on the map. We left the hut early, only just behind some French guides, and settled down to a steady pace in their tracks. It was misty. Gradually the tracks began to turn to the left - strange, they should go straight up to the Col L'Eveque! Suddenly the mist lifted and almost immediately two French guides skied back down the glacier, looking very embarrassed and proceeded to hammer out a trail up to the correct col! We followed and burst into brilliant sunshine and immediately had to strip off down to sweaters.

The descent that followed was superb light powder snow and provided the best "off piste" conditions so far. It did not last long, however, and soon we had to start ascending again to the Col de Mont Brule. After a further removal of clothes and an even shorter descent it was uphill again to the Col de Valpaleine, the longest of the three uphill sections. The view of the Dent Blanche, Dent d'Herens and Matterhorn, from the Col however was incredible and made everything worthwhile. We really spent too long taking photographs and consequently the snow from the Col down to Zermatt had become very heavy and quite dangerous. However, we skied right into the village and just a quick walk brought us to the Bahnhof, the traditional stopping off place for High Level Routers. After a very much needed shower we had an enormous meal in Zermatt and went back to the Bahnhof for a good nights sleep.

Roger decided not to continue to Saas Fee as -

- a) he had no money, and
- b) he had thrown his boots in the river at the first possible opportunity!

He, therefore, was to return to Argentiere the next day and bring the car to Visp, where, hopefully I would meet him after skiing to Saas Fee.

Only purists and fanatics flog up from the valley on foot! I therefore, took the first Gornergrat train and then telepherique via the Hotalligrat to the Stockhorn. From the terminus a half hours walk puts you on top of the Stockhorn. From here it seems that every mountain in the Alps can be seen! Monte Rosa, Lyskamm, Breithorn, Matterhorn and in the other direction Rimphischorn and Strahlhorn and between them, the Adlerpass, the last of the eleven that form the High Level Route.

A quick descent in perfect powder snow led onto the Findelngletscher and once again the uphill slog began, luckily for the last time. The Adlerpass is the highest on the route at 12,460 feet, and is a real killer. But, as before, if you get your head down and shut off your brain it goes reasonably quickly. From the top of the pass it is possible to reach the summit of the Strahlhorn on skis in about an hour - but that is the last thing you want to do after the Adlerpass! Food. Then the best powder in the world all the way to the Britannia hut. Quickly uphill and over the Egginerjoch onto the Saas Fee pistes. The sudden change from serious mountain aspect to pisted mogul runs is a great weight off your mind, and soon a scruffy, unshaven sweaty figure, carrying large rucsac, ice axe etc. is burning off all the immaculately dressed piste bashers in one incredible fast, relaxing run into Saas.

No time to lose! Quick run to the bus station, just in time - "aller simple a Visp, s'il vous plait" - damn, they speak German here! Never mind, he got the message. There's Roger waiting. A long drive and into another world the next day.

THE ROUTE

Basically in seven stages from Chamonix to Saas Fee:-

1. Argentiere, Col du Chardonnet, Fenetre de Sateinaz, Trient Hut.
2. Trient Hut - Fenetre du Chamois - Champex, Bourg St. Pierre.
3. Bourg St. Pierre - Valsorey hut.
4. Valsorey hut - Plateau du Couloir - Col du Sonadon, Durand Glacier - Chanrion hut.
5. Chanrion hut - Ottemma Glacier - Vignettes hut.
6. Vignettes hut - Col l'Eveque, Col de Mont Brule, Col de Valpaleine - Zermatt.
7. Zermatt - Adlerpass - Saas Fee.

Note: The first and seventh stages can be split at the Argentiere and Britannia huts, but this is really unnecessary. Also Zermatt can be avoided by using the Monte Rosa hut though this makes the sixth and seventh stages longer and more strenuous.

EQUIPMENT

- Skins: "Stick on" are better. Clip on skins tend to form a build up of ice/snow around the clips, which has to be removed from time to time. Also snow tends to get between skin and ski.
- Harcheissen: These are serrated blades that clip over the ski and act as crampons in conjunction with the skins. We didn't have them, but on quite a few occasions, wished we had!
- Skis: These need to be very tough but light. Not too short. We used 'DYNAMIC RAND' 170 cms. long.
- Bindings: Ours were traditional 'MARKER' touring bindings. These, however, gave a limited amount of heel lift. More popular were 'ISER' bindings which gave unlimited lift - enabling very long strides to be taken. This is not to say that the 'MARKER' equipment was not satisfactory. It, in fact proved superior when in the "downhill" position.
- Boots: I used normal "piste bashing" plastic clip boots which were absolutely ideal. Crampons can be used with them very successfully, they do not get wet, they are comfortable and give much better control in difficult downhill snow conditions.
- Sticks: Nothing special, although large touring baskets are better than normal ones.
- Ice Axe &
Crampons: Essential.
- Sleeping Bag: Unnecessary.
- Stove: Unnecessary.
- Rope: Good Idea.
- 'PIEPS'
transmitters: Good Idea.