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Easter in Scotland, and me.

How I started on this annual habit and did my first Munro.

Note: 2023 marks the fortieth anniversary of my first Easter Scotland trip with PB, etc.

My first taste of the Highlands of Scotland came long before I met Phil Broughton and his chums. I was always an outdoors fan and I was also something of what is now called “a free range” child with the result that I became somewhat less than disciplined in later life. That was the way with working class parents in Lancashire. Also, children of my age were free to do a lot of things that now would be considered to be absolute no-nos. I became a Boy Scout, went to camp, led hikes in the Lake District, did an overnight wild camp with another scout in Wasdale when I was about 13 or 14, led a number of patrol camps when I was the same age and when I was 16 wild-camped on Saddleworth moor with another 16-year-old. I also had a motorcycle at 16. By that time, I had collected all the Wainwright Lake District Guides that were available (he was still writing at least one of them) and had climbed many 3000’ summits in all sorts of conditions, plus many lower ones including things like Jack’s and Lord’s Rakes, and led one or two Scout Camps in Borrowdale; we had a favourite camping spot at Seathwaite near the path that leads up to Base Brown and on to Great Gable. Not to mention several trips to North Wales and Tryfan.

None of this mentions Scotland, so having explained a bit about what made me, I will get to the point. The Highlands came to my attention first when I saw a picture in what was probably a W A Poucher guide book sometime in the early to mid 1960s. It was the classic view of the Cuillins taken from the road from Broadford to Portree. After seeing it, I thought that the Lakes were tame compared to what seemed to be real adventure shown in that photo.



So, I was never afraid of some adventure. My boss in 1983 was Dave Wharton. We had become friends and had developed a rapport. When he invited me to join him on a trip to Cluanie Lodge I jumped at it. Looking back on the opportunity, Dave had needed a companion and I was probably a poor substitute for Gordon Cooper who was busy with something else. This had been the case when Dave invited me to join a trip to the Alps 6 months earlier. Frankly though, I was flattered because I had known about the outdoor activities of Dave and his colleagues for some time. They had been in the hardware development group at ICL in Manchester where we had worked. They had always seemed to be very serious about their mountain adventures. I worked in a different department where we had a very modest hiking group though our boss, Gordon Adshead, was known for his intense bagging of Scottish hills. By 1982 a number of engineers had left ICL, including, Dave Wharton and Richard Bosworth. Dave had become my boss when I joined the same company as him (Richard was a founder of their Manchester office, Dave and I were in Hampshire). I had known them peripherally via my job. I also knew Phil and Gordon Cooper in the same way, but they had not left the company. Outside work, I had met Richard and Mandy via Dave on some occasions. I cannot remember the details, but I know that I had been to their house in Manchester.

This 1983 trip was not my first experience of the Scottish Highlands by any means. I had been on a school trip to the Loch Awe area in when I was about 15. We had stayed in a big old house in Lochgilphead. I believe that it's now some sort of youth centre. (If still available for

general hire it might be a good spot for us, but that's a side issue). I had also been on a camping trip to Skye in 1975 and I had driven around the Scottish coast in 1974.

So now to 1983. Dave made it clear that we were going from Hampshire where we lived to Manchester on Thursday, we would sleep at Phil's house, load his car and set out at about 6:00 am on Good Friday. Breakfast would be in Stirling, then we would head towards Glencoe and camp near there for one night, climb a peak, then continue to Cluanie. I would share Dave's tent. Brian Saville (I also knew Brian from ICL) would be a fourth person in the car. I surmised beforehand that I would probably be sleeping on snow and would need an insulated mat (in those days a Karrimat - I still have it) and thermal underwear. I had a good sleeping bag. Dave and Phil would provide most of the camping equipment. We would use Phil's company car. As Brian was still an ICL employee he was a second driver.

There were several things that I did not know. The most significant was that Phil's car was to carry much of the food for the whole week. There were to be 13 people staying at Cluanie. I knew some of them - basically Richard and Mandy, plus our party. I was to meet Mandy's children for the first time - Caroline, Anna, Melanie. So, a lot of food! The car was a Vauxhall Cavalier, we had rucksacks, camping gear, ourselves, plus lots of groceries and other provisions. I assume that the wine and beer were brought by others. Richard must have brought a lot of stuff too.

Loading the car was an adventure... first the boot was filled, then Dave and I got in the back, and we were buried under "stuff". Then Brian got in to the front passenger seat and he was buried in more stuff, finally Phil got into the driver's seat and we were off.

In those days Phil was a fast driver. We were in Stirling in time for breakfast at 10-ish, in Glencoe at or around noon, and immediately on the way up to the Hidden Valley. Of course, any stop for something as simple as a change of drivers involved unloading and reloading "stuff". I cannot remember if Phil drove the whole way on that day or not, but certainly for breakfast we were all extracted from underneath the mountain of things.



Dave and Phil had set their sights on Bidean for the bagging trip. We left the car in Glencoe at one of those parking areas on the left-hand side of the A82 and hiked up to the Hidden (or is it “Lost”) Valley which was where the MacDonald clan used to hide their rustled livestock back in the days at the time of the Glencoe massacre. As predicted, there was snow on the ground. We set up camp just behind that huge rock that stands at the entrance to the valley. Then we climbed the hill on the left side which is called Beinn Fhada (there are other summits with this name). On the way down I was introduced to glissading. So much fun that we spent much of the rest of the afternoon doing it.

I was to share Dave’s Vango Force 10 tent. Brian and Phil were to use Phil’s tent, which was slightly bigger I seem to remember. Dave’s had a wedge shape. Dave had also cut back his Karrimat so that it was shorter than mine and, as was his habit, reduced the amount of gear that he carried. For dinner that evening we had tinned something or other. We also had a couple of Camping Gaz stoves for cooking. It was COLD. So cold that the gas pressure was too low for the stove to work properly. Phil then lit a second stove and with its weak flame warmed up the first one so that the pressure increased enough for some heat to be released. Very dangerous, I’m sure! Eventually we had tepid whatever it was for dinner.

It snowed that night and it was very cold, but the Karrimat and the close proximity of the two of us in the small tent did their job. I think that I slept very well. After digging ourselves out and having some breakfast we headed for the target - Bidean Nam Bian. I think that we also went for the adjacent summit of Stob Coire Sgreamhach (no matter if we didn’t because I did it

again later as it was Jesper's last Munro). If you know that route you will recall a steep bit up to the col between the two Munros. I can remember Dave telling me off because I was ruining the steps in the snow. I was wearing blue gloves that were soaking wet and the dye had run turning my hands blue.



Anyway, it was even more cold on the summits of course, I can remember us being huddled together while having lunch, but I had bagged my first Munro (or two). Good ones too!

After a quick decent we broke camp and headed for Cluanie. There I met Dave Kee, Jeanne Constable, Dave Brough, and Bob Muir. Plus, Mandy's daughters of course - the younger ones saw my blue hands and I was forever known to them as "Frankenstein"!

The rest of the trip was memorable for many things like a snow storm on the Saddle, The Five Sisters of Kintail, the South Ridge of Kintail, and Ciste Dhubh. One big memory was the morning routine. Dave, Phil, and I would be first out of bed. I was detailed to bang on every door and deliver tea. Also, there was a massive breakfast for everybody: porridge, bacon, eggs, baked beans, tomatoes... Making lunch was a team effort with mass production of buttered bread (always white), mixing orange squash, using those old margarine boxes for sandwiches,

chocolate biscuits, and of course Mr. Kipling cakes (some things never change). Big communal breakfasts have gone. Whatever happened to the nightly Boggle game I wonder.

It was a great week. It started my Easter Scotland habit. Only broken by COVID and some gaps after I first moved to the USA.