

Finishing In Style!

Champagne and Cordon Bleu cooking to celebrate at Doune Stone Lodges a completion of 53 years in the making. Loony Bin (OK, Luinne Bheinn) was the climax to a long and diverse path to my final Munro, from 14,000ft Colorado peaks via many Corbetts and more recently Kilimanjaro.

Born and raised in Dundee my father Bill loved the hills and took every opportunity to take my brother and I up them as often as he could, starting with Driesh in 1959 as my first Munro. As a family I believe we rented every house in Glen Prosen for holidays. Many memories of Captain Scott's Cottage being snowbound up to the tops of the telephone poles probably started my love of snow and ice climbing.

My first Munros were therefore in Angus and joining a club meant meeting some great personalities, one of whom always said he liked to climb with me because I was slower than he was!

Winter climbing in Glen Doll, often staying at the Youth Hostel, was where I learnt to play squash. Setting up the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme in the 60's with the Rover Scouts introduced me to other rock stars who took me to Skye in 67 and winter 69 (an Austin 9 and a motor bike and side car), ice daggers were all the rage, with moleskin breeches which when frozen solid reduced your thighs to red raw hunks of meat! The most vivid memories of these days of doing Munros in winter were of our Bedford van hitting black ice just south of Kirriemuir and going on its side for 100 yards removing all paint, creating havoc in the back as ice axes and crampons flew around! But I was most upset by battery acid burning a hole in my Paddy Hopkirk padded rally jacket, the only warm thing I had!

The main influence to keep me in the hills was my Dad's love of walking the glens whether Tilt or the far north and our annual trip to Kinlochbervie to stay at The Garbut. Mum was a patient driver and would often drop us off so we could walk thru' and do a group of hills, picking us up ten hours later or the next day when we did the Fannaichs.

Then a prolonged absence from my beloved hills, Toronto beckoned and with my wife Sue Hobbins and our two children, we had lots of cross country skiing in Algonquin Park. In those years our trips to Scotland were only for a few days with not a Munro to be had. 1984 saw us back in the UK - time to refresh my skills! I hadn't really done any snow and ice for a while, so off to Glenmore Lodge to the winter skills course for a week, a great experience remembering how to stop when falling off (only once on Ben Lui main gully!) I was told my wooden shafted axe was anti-diluvium so I left it there and it is now on the wall, I think! (On completing the Munros at Doune in April 2012, it was especially nice to have our host Alan Robinson present me with his wooden shafted axe and it will always remind me of our early days on the hills).

A routine developed with regular companions, often at a club hut Glen Etive. Midges and rain were the constant problem, exacerbated with too much malt, so that, especially in November, it was exceedingly difficult to get up early enough to get a full day on the hill! I remember one occasion on which I was successful and we had a magnificent traverse of the Black Mount to Inveroran in deep but crisp snow on the Sunday before catching the last plane to London. Starav seems to feature regularly as the sobering-up-hill on the Sunday. If I've been up it once, I must have done it over a dozen times and never been bored.

Further north, we kept the Torrison Hotel afloat in its early days buying dinners and occasionally staying. An especially memorable occasion was when we stayed in the hotel and I was presented with a painting of Glen Etive with the wee Buachaille as the backdrop.

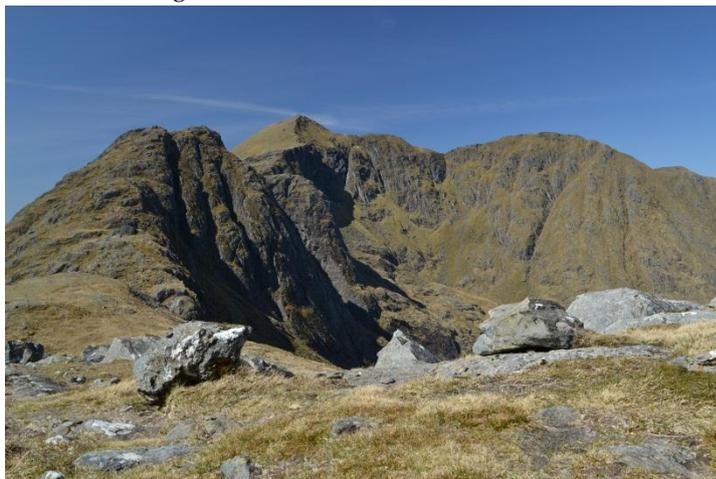
Gradually it dawned that I might get there – to climb all the Munros! Luckily John Burdin’s love of Knoydart gave me the opportunity. After watching a couple of his trips to Doune clash with my diary, I saw the opportunity to do the last three Munros which had been a step too far when I did the other Knoydart hills in the early 70s. With the announcement of another trip for April/May 2012, knowing that Sue and I were off to Brisbane, Australia for a few years in early 2012, meant I could schedule one of my trips back to the UK to include a completion. My excitement grew and Knoydart was blessed with fantastic weather. While the rest of the UK was under heavy rain as an anticlockwise swirl brought all the Atlantic rain to the south and east, we basked in sunshine for seven days! Blue skies, blue seas and a swell never more than a few inches were ever present. With



Mary Doune

twelve on the trip we met on the pier at Mallaig and were taken by Andy Tibbetts on the “Mary Doune” across to Doune. For those who haven’t been to Doune Stone Lodges, it is in a lovely location that is unique, friendly, family run and fattening!!! The lodges are well presented with homely touches of books, maps, and photo albums. Everywhere you turn is evidence of the love that the Robinsons (Mary and Alan), the Tibbetts (Andy and Liz) and the Davies (Martin and Jane) have invested in the welcome, the food and attention to the entire experience.

So in which order should I finish? Andy was the first to say that Graeme, the “Gripper” boatman, should take me up Loch Hourn the next morning and drop me off to do Ladhar Bheinn. So it was, that on the Sunday morning, Graeme (ex-navy and from Suffolk and Kent) took me round the North end of Knoydart and dropped me off in a little dinghy near Barrisdale (he didn’t even have to anchor the big boat, the water and wind was so still). A stiff climb up the ridge to Coire Dhorrcail gave spectacular views north to Beinn Sgritheall and west to the Cuillin ridge.



Ladhar Bheinn

As I ascended a RAF rescue helicopter clattered below me into the Coire dropping smoke flares to test the winds as the pilot practiced hovering in and around my mountain! The winch man gave me the thumbs up and off they went after ten to fifteen minutes of practice, bringing back memories of several occasions over the years where I have seen them, but thankfully never been a passenger.

Indeed one of our new friends in Brisbane, Brian Murdock, a retired mountain rescue pilot has a beautiful oil painting over his mantelpiece of his chopper over Cairn Gorm! There were only 6 other people on the hill, all coming the other way having walked in from Inverie, which was my way out. A magnificent sunny walk down the valley ensued. The rest of the team went on the “Mary Doune” to Rum. How jealous I was that I missed this treat...

Monday morning was cloudy, wet and quite windy, especially on the tops, and Andy suggested that the shelter of Loch Nevis was the best target for the day. So, joined by Derek Sime, Pam MacLean and Douglas McEachan, we were dropped off at Camusrory and hiked to the top of Mam Meadhail (where Pam and Douglas left us to walk down to Inverie), then up to the penultimate Munro, Meall Buidhe (946m), and its SE Top. The clouds were low and snow still on the tops meant a frozen right ear as we went west along the summit ridge followed by a frozen left ear as we retraced our steps to carry on round the ridge, in what felt like 30mph winds. Mostly in cloud we reached the top of Druim Leac a'Shith (839m), then followed the ridge N to Luinne Bheinn (939m) – at last my completion of 284 Munros!! Even the weather was celebrating because as we neared the summit the clouds cleared and we had magnificent views to W, N, & E. including Muck, Eigg, Rum, Canna, & the Cuillins on Skye; other mainland peaks which stood out included Beinn Sgritheall, The Saddle, Ladhar Bheinn, Ben Aden, Sgurr na Ciche, etc. Then down a lightning scarred ridge to Mam Barrisdale (448m), a long walk (two and a half



Meall Buidhe



Luinne Bheinn

hours) to Inverie where Andy met us with the Doune minibus, all smiles for the drive back.

With champagne all round, everyone assembled to hear a speech from John and the presentation from Alan Robinson, of his wooden axe, followed by a great meal including lamb from Muck and a bottle of Talisker. To round off proceedings, Liz produced a cake bearing the inscription "Congratulations Graeme – 284 not out".

Three days later we were off to Loch Coruisk and Derek Sime persuaded me to start my second round! So Bla Bheinn it was straight up from the beach near Camasunary with unparalleled views of the Cuillin Ridge.



Loch Hourn and Beinn Sgritheall

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Photography by Derek Sime**

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