

# Scotland Meet – CAIRNGORMS, May 2013

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The large display of mountain bikes outside the hut gave everyone who hadn't been before a hint about Cairngorms travel arrangements, from the posh affairs with hydraulic thingummies, through Ed's hand-me-down version to my own ramshackle, bought-cheap-for-the-week object. The off-side pedal fell off on Tuesday.

This was not a sudden conversion to serious mountain biking you understand, but most of the Cairngorms lie at the top end of very long glens, all of them blessed with rough estate tracks, up which a bike saves hours at the expense of battered buttocks - I write with feeling.

The usual suspects gathered on Sunday evening, less Nicky and Ben – vehicle failure, Roger – medical, but soon to become much worse, and Jamie - unaccounted for. It's a belter of a hut set close to the river in a beautiful pine forest, and though it might have its midge problems in summer the little beasties were too cold to annoy anybody. There's always a downside though - the nearest crag, Creag Etchachan is upwards of six miles from the road, and about the 3000ft contour, though with a little extra effort you could walk the ten miles to the Garbh Coire and do two Classic Rock routes - winter ascents as it turned out. There were still vast snowfields all over the place and the high, north facing corries were full of the stuff.

So, a place to appreciate the unique beauty of the big, rolling plateaux of the Cairngorms - or, as it turned out, to overdose on Munros. I thought I'd done a shift by snatching five on the way to the meet, but Ed rolled in on Sunday evening and announced he'd done 15 since Friday - we missed each other by an hour on Beinn a Ghlo.

Monday started wet and got wetter but a determined, or mad, team of Mike, Jon and Dean set off for a round of Beinn Avon, Beinn a Bhuid and Beinn a Chaoruinn - pretty impressive considering they couldn't pronounce their names. Alas, the weather steadily got worse and they retreated, with a bivouac, to the hut on Tuesday, where there was a mammoth cock-up and they found they were locked out. The Secretary showed his criminal skills and forced an entry by a rear window, so

a second bivouac was avoided. In the steadily increasing rain of Monday Pete, Jude, Geoff and Alan had a walk over the local moors, and Ed - sorry about this - drove all the way down to Ballater and ticked off Mount Keen - the most easterly Munro, remote, and not renowned for its excitement. John B set off for two collectors' items above Glen Derry but gave up after Beinn Bhreac and miles of bog in the rain. Austin and I drew on our vast experience and stoked the fire.

Distinct improvement Tuesday - it wasn't raining. Ed set off for An Sgarsoch and Carn Ealar, the two most remote Munros, involving a 7-mile track - rough - to the ruins of Geldie Lodge, then a long, very long, plod. I followed later but shed a pedal at the four-mile mark so returned, awkwardly, to the hut in time to assist in the criminal activities of the Secretary. Later a cycle-less ascent of Beinn Bhreac ensued with the reward of a sunny evening stroll back down Glen Derry, until I was run over by Jamie on his mountain bike. He'd just passed Jon and Dean heading back for another night under the stars - or, more likely, clouds - somewhere up the glen. Keen lads, these - need watching. The rest of the team bagged a Corbett, no less, Morvern at the back of Braemar, celebrated in poetry by Byron, but that hasn't saved it from having a radio mast stuck on top.

I'm afraid I got a bit out of touch after this, 'cos the weather continued to improve and everybody felt obliged to do summat, but I remember on Wednesday Ed, Nicky and Ben - car better, arrived Tuesday evening - cycled the 7 miles to Altanour Lodge ruins and did the 5 Munros around it in Ed's case or 3 by the others 'cos they's already done two of them. I cycled my restored bike, but unrestored bum, to Geldie Lodge ruins and did An Sgarsoch and Carn Ealar in pain, and Roger - temporarily restored to health, arrived Monday - did Lochnagar. Pete set the week's height record by going up Beinn MacDuibh amidst vast snowfields and tottering cornices: it seems odd that the second highest top in Scotland only got one ascent whilst obscure humps were ascended by all and sundry, but reflect that most had done MacDuibh before and were off elsewhere ticking lists. How sad is that? Well, ask Mike - he was off from the top of the Glenshee road bagging the tufts of heather round about that manage to stagger to the magic height. John B cycled to Derry Lodge and climbed the Devil's Point - Gaelic name Bod an Diamh which has a more earthy meaning than 'point', if you get my drift.

Thursday I spent most of sunbathing but had an evening stroll up the local hill for piccies. Alan did a long - everything's long in the Cairngorms - walk round a Glen Ey circuit; Pete's team did the round of Loch Callater, with Munros: Mike and Dean went to Lochnagar and arrived back very late with a Chinese take-away: John B did Beinn a Chaoruinn whose bogs had defeated him on Monday: Nicky and Ben did Beinn Bhreac, see my previous remarks re heather humps: and Ed must have done something major 'cos it's what he does. Roger and Jon went paddling - fairly innocuous you might think, but Roger doesn't do innocuous: the seriously gashed foot which looked horrible enough to be going on with turned out to be broken when he got it back to Dundee. And all he did was slip on a bit of rock in the river. Nearly forgot Jamie, who drove round to Dalwhinnie - just a couple of hours drive - and ticked off all the Munros around Ben Alder. A very long day - suggestions that he did it because Ben Alder is the only hill he can pronounce will be treated with the contempt they deserve.

So the party broke up in glorious weather on the Friday morning, some to abuse more Munros over the weekend, some for home, and Pete and Jude went on a holiday in the van. Another holiday. Altogether a most enjoyable meet - fine hut, good company, reasonable weather and hills which, if lacking the drama of the West coast have a unique atmosphere of their own. But you need a bike.

I'm conscious that I haven't included everybody's dramas in here, especially Dean and Jon who seemed to spend most of the week sleeping rough, but if you've stuck with it this far you'll have realised the article is far too long already - and my memory isn't what it was. Alas, as a result of the stony cycling, neither is my bum.

Mick Biggin – May 2013

