

Trip Report: The Arrochar Alps

Date: 17th-20th October 2013

Group: Les (weekend co-ordinator) and Mike Arrowsmith, Hugh, Jim G, Mike Hiscock, Colin

Route: See below

Total Distance: See below

Total Ascent: See below

Weather: Wet, Wet, Wet

A three night trip to Arrochar Alps on Loch Long near Loch Lomond to undertake some Munros and Corbetts, staying at The Arrochar Hotel. From the off we knew that we were in for rain and wind on the tops and possibly very cold. The prediction was very true with the group constantly shrouded in wet weather gear almost all the walking time.

Thursday:

An uneventful 5 hour journey saw the vanguard party of (Car one) Mike and Selina Willis, Les and Mike Arrowsmith, and (Car 2) Jim Grant, Jeff Ewing, Hugh Anstey, Mike Hiscock, arriving at the hotel. Apart from the untimely death of a small bird of prey which flew into the Willis' car and a very expensive lunch stop at Lockerbie services (most of us will not be frequenting a certain coffee chain again), the party arrived fairly fresh at the Arrochar Hotel. Despite my fears that the hotel would be a little below our usual standards (!) we were all presently surprised and especially relieved that we all had rooms over- looking Loch Long and with views of The Cobbler.....well, we should have but for the low cloud which never lifted!

As we all know, next to the hill walking the next love of the BUMS is good beer (hard to find in Scotland, not least a decent pub - sorry Colin, harsh but true). However a short walk down the loch side found us in The Village Inn <http://www.villageinnarrochar.co.uk/village-inn/home/villageinn.html>. This pub became the BUMS HQ for our stay.

After dinner the first group were joined by Tony and Lynn Quinn and Colin - all working people who had more important fish to fry on a Thursday. Night caps were taken and plans were made for a high level walk the following morning with stern orders to be ready to walk at 9.15, latest.

Friday:

Walk with options, taking in Beinn Narnain (926m), Beinn Ime (1011m and the highest in the Alps) and hopefully The Cobbler (884m):

Breakfast with a group of 11 is always going to be a bit chaotic and our chairman was a little agitated to find that he would not be served till the whole party was assembled. I soon took control of this and a selection of breakfasts was brought in. Packed lunches also a little tardy but nevertheless we were present and ready to roll at the appointed time. The hotel staff were very accommodating.

The skies were very grey, tops of mountains shrouded in mist and the threat of rain very high on the weather forecast.

Route finding from the car park was very simple, though a right turn after 2 minutes saw us all becoming very quiet as we trudged up a near vertical path to the point where Mike A and Hugh were to leave us and head for The Cobbler (Ben Arthur). The Narnairn party had to keep on flogging up a vertical vague path which culminated in some easy though steep scrambling. For those of you nervous about exposure there was no problem here as we could hardly see our hand in front of our face and no views were to be seen, therefore fear factor gone completely! The group remained silent (too puffed to speak) and eventually the top trig point was secured with only ghostly outlines of huge rock towers perhaps in our imagination.

The temperature at this time, due to a prevailing north easterly wind and lashing rain, had dropped like a stone and we were feeling the cold. We stopped for a hasty lunch at the bottom of the Col where a decision had to be made whether to tackle Beinne Ime. We soon agreed this was a step too far with the prospect of worsening weather, so made our way towards confluence of paths, one of which would take us to The Cobbler if we decided to carry on.

On meeting the junction of paths we also met Mike and Hugh, just completing their descent of The Cobbler. They said that the path they had come down would only take you about 20-30 minutes to the summit. Once the group heard this there was a sudden change of heart which saw Colin, Lynn, Tony, Jim and Mike H ascending! The rest of us had had enough of cold fingers and meandered down a lovely path beside the river Alt a'Bhalachain, finally meeting a very gentle zig zag path down, almost directly leading into a lovely warm tea shop serving Earl Grey and scones.

*This Cobbler, although under 3,000 feet (900m) is considered the home of Scottish Alpinism and many a famous mountaineer will have cut their teeth (and their legs) here. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Cobbler.

There are actually 3 summits in one with the highest one comprising of a small rock tower perched above the corrie. The tower is a grade 2 scramble, difficult enough in dry conditions but when wet can be treacherous. At the top is The Argyll Needle which climbers need to

thread themselves through to attain the actual top. It was not clear to this author who had actually achieved this as there was much bragging amongst the young pups in the group. The only certain thing is that Jeff and I did not get anywhere near it! Never mind Jeff- the mountains are always there. The rest of the Cobbler group descended by the same route a while later and straight to the pub where they were located 2 hours later, still smugly discussing their success. So smug were some of the group that they imbibed a little too much of the excellent Bitter and Twisted ales at the pub and I am afraid I have to report that one or two descended into *lairyness* which continued into the night. (I must point out there was no actual physical contact but he who shouts loudest.....)

(Def: Lairy - British slang: Displaying an aggressive attitude in order to provoke a fight, argument or any verbal or physical confrontation.)

Saturday: a late breakfast was planned as the weather suggested 100% risk of precipitation or rain as Tony calls it.

Cracking idea by Mike to walk up to the Loch Sloy dam- a low level walk on easy paths. This we did and the dam was immense as we had a coffee break under its arches and speculated on what would happen if:

- a) The dambusters flew past
- b) The wall burst at that moment.

Lynn and myself were duly rattled by this thought and we were glad to be leaving. On the way up we had spotted paths back to Arrochar, so we decided to lengthen the walk and carry on to Arrochar.

Gentlemen Mike W and Hugh opted to return and collect one car and then meet us on the return walk.

SLOY FACTS:

- Some Scots pine trees in the peat near Loch Sloy have been carbon dated to 4000 years old.
- Loch Sloy was the first of Scotland's hydro- electric schemes.
- 21 men lost their lives in the construction work

With the whole group now back together (and luckily as it turned out when Hugh and Mike lost their way slightly), dripping wet, soggy through and through we made our way, guess where to? Yes, that's right- The Village Inn. It was only 3.00 and we would be back to have our dinner there at 6.00 but the footy scores where on, a fire was lit and the Bitter and Twisted was still flowing. Dinner taken and another lairy night in prospect this author returned at 10.00 to her bed where she was serenaded by a female singer (!) in the hotel bar - as, unluckily the Arrowsmith's room was above.

Driving home crammed in the cars with dirty washing and smelly boots is not to be recommended but thanks to the three drivers- Mike W, Jim G

and Tony for getting us there and back safely with only one dead kestrel giving up its life to the cause.

The group had a great time, despite abysmal weather conditions which meant we couldn't see where we were going or any views. However the challenge of climbing Scottish peaks is good enough for any BUMS. They are steep, high and generally big with paths that just vaporise often. Well done to all the navigators, especially Mike H, Jim G, Hugh and Mike A.

Lesley