

WINTER IS (NOT) COMING

PRESIDENT WELCOME:

Dear Gumclub, I too am sad about the apparent lack of fully committed winter conditions. Things were hopeful on the Fort Augustus meet when everyone walking on the Saturday started to think they should have brought crampons. Kincaig saw parties in Lochain, Sneachda, Cha-No, Hells Lum (sunbathing) and various bits of the plateau. There was absolutely no conditions controversy, broken crampons or forgotten harnesses. And Spean Bridge, shockingly, involved no parties on Ben Nevis (unless you count the people bouldering at Polldubh), but remote Munros were bagged from the West Highlands, semi circles of Steall walked, Ring of Steall also walked/ran, Uilleann pipes played, rainbows, a spectacular cloud inversion, brocken spectres but only a dusting of powder. Fingers crossed that there will be some more snow on its way. Meanwhile Happy Christmas and best wishes for 2017!

GUMC ACTIVITIES:

FORT AUGUSTUS MEET – Emily Donoho

It was the meet we didn't think would happen. This year's chronic bus driver shortage finally bit us in the ass when it looked as though no one could drive a minibus and it turned into a car only meet, which would have been fine if the half dozen or so cars that had appeared at Torridon and the Lakes had made the

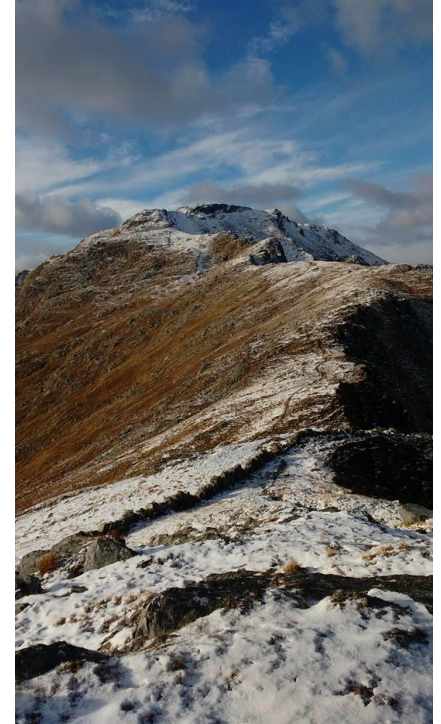


journey to Fort Augustus, but they never materialized. There was my car and James' car. We almost called it off. Then there was more faff: Geoff's car was in the shop, Geoff's girlfriend's car broke down, I almost offered Geoff my car but the mighty Volvo once again took to the road and James took a minibus, Andy decided late he would come to the meet with Geoff and drive the bus back to Glasgow. That means three bus drivers at the meet, so if someone falls into a hole or twists their ankle drunkenly dancing, the bus isn't stuck. We don't do anything in the GUMClub without the greatest amount of faff possible.

We'd never been to Fort Augustus. It's centrally located, an hour from everywhere. "Everywhere" encompasses some of the most spectacular mountain country in the Highlands: Affric, Mullardoch, the rough bounds of Knoydart, Kintail, but it means you cannot sensibly shuttle people around on the minibus and your drivers have to be willing to drive – a lot. James and I had set our sights on a mountain alongside Loch Quoich called Sgurr a'Mhaoraich, and told everyone without their own means of transport that they were going down that glen.

The day had started off well, the sun shining over Loch Ness. The peaks wore snowy caps and looked as high as the Alps or Rockies. James drove the minibus to Loch Quoich, and after being escorted over the final bridge by two Highland cows moving at a stately speed, we led our herd of 14 people up the mountain.

There's a distinctive and beautiful geography in this part of the Highlands, the glens from Glen Carron to Glen Quoich like Glen Affric, Glen Cannich, Kintail, Strathfarrar; sweeping narrow ridges, pyramids of rock and ice, and steep flanks plunging into wide, glacial glens and lochs. As we gained the snaky ridge of Sgurr a'Mhaorich, we found ice underfoot and several centimetres of snow lying on the tops above 900 meters. The ridge in front of us narrowed to a knife edge, with some blocks barricading the middle of it. No one had crampons or ice axes, as we hadn't expected winter. Sometimes, when you approach a scary feature on a mountain, it turns out to be less scary than you thought. Sometimes it doesn't.



Guardedly, we led the group along the ridge, having discussions about being prepared to bail if we came across anything you'd need crampons and an axe for. The prospect of an early winter season was exhilarating; the prospect of not having crucial pointy things in our rucksacks at this moment was not. The path, in any case, dipped off the ridgeline, weaving around the blocks, and we clambered easily over a small boulder field to gain steep turf buried under soft powder on the final steep ascent to the summit.

We arrived at the summit cairn in time to see swirling clouds spitting snow onto the neighbouring Knoydart mountains and say to one another, "Oh, balls, the weather is coming in." A bracing wind raced across the ridges. There was enough time to briefly admire the crags on the Knoydart hills, the jagged coastline with its jumble of lochs and mountains, and the soaring lines of the South Shiel Ridge, before hurrying everyone off the summit, looking askance at the cliffs below us and wondering how the hell you breach them.

We followed the map and some other hiker's tracks to a vertical boulder field. Two hikers doing the traverse in the opposite direction popped out from a steep section. "What's it like?" I asked. "Steep, but alright," they replied.

Emboldened by two people who had survived the ascent, we cautiously picked our way down over boulders, made treacherous by a thin layer of ice and snow. Pick up one foot, brace on hiking poles, place the foot on the most horizontal rock I could find, rinse, repeat. In spite of having a number of people who had never descended dodgy terrain, no one fell off the mountain, and we reached the bealach between Sgurr a'Mhaorich and one of its outlying tops, then covered under the shelter of some rocks for lunch. No one fancied another windblasted ridge, so we descended into a boggy corrie, and a few kilometres of bog later, came across newly built tracks for lorries and diggers – Scottish Water was constructing a pipeline in that

glen – which were like motorways returning to the waiting minibus. The cattle escort, by this time, had moved onto different pastures.

No one had psych for big mountains on Sunday, and the forecast of more wind and snow on the tops didn't inspire anyone. One group elected to walk along the Great Glen Way to a viewpoint over Loch Ness near Drumnadrochit, about 11 miles away, while James and I took the minibus to Glen Affric with the plan to scale an epic 600 metre hill called Beinn a'Mhaodhoin, then if we felt ambitious, tackle the Nordwand of the pub in Cannich village.

Beinn a'Mhaodhoin sits at the feet of the Glen Affric range, just before the end of the public road at Loch Affric. We clambered up boggy, heather-clad slopes to gain a flat summit with small, rocky outcrops and views into the heart of the Affric and Mullardoch mountains. Clouds wheeled around soaring summits and perilous ridges while spindrift steamed off the snowy peaks. At times you could not tell snow from sky.

After summit photos, lunch (and in Caroline's case, yoga) we retreated out of the wind and sleet to the warmth of the bus, and surprised the café at Cannich, who were not expecting a minibus full of people in November. Then we drove back to the hall, collecting some of the Great Glen Way crowd from Drumnadrochit, who were sitting on a picnic table in a layby as we passed through. The rest of that crew, they explained, three exchange students with little Highland experience, had not felt fit enough to complete the walk and had turned back early.

"Did they know how long the hike was when they started?" I asked, and no one had an answer to that. Five pm came and went with no sign of our missing freshers. "Do they have phone numbers for anyone here?" No one had an answer to that, either. The Great Glen Way runs parallel to the A82 – surely if someone were injured or too knackered to move another step, they could crawl to the road, like Joe Simpson in *Touching the Void*. We cleaned the hall, and still, they did not appear. We contemplated the humiliation of a mountaineering club calling Mountain Rescue about some people missing on the Great Glen Way. Concerned now, we sent Mark and Sarah into the cold night towards the trail, a search party. Five minutes later, they reappeared with the missing freshers, who were exhausted, suffering from blisters, questioning life choices perhaps, but had made their own way back to the hall. Everyone safe and accounted for and drama averted, James and I raced off before we got immersed in more faff, anxious to make it to the Real Food Café before it closed. You must be mindful of your priorities in the hills.



KINCRAIG MEET – Caroline Schiller (Sunshine)

Day 1

5am: Rise and shine! Starting the day nice and early, we woke up and left the hall before the sunrise, with an admirable low amount of faffing around, which meant we could start our actual hike around 6am already. Through icy coldness, our team of six started the journey up and up and up to reach our first

Munro: **Ben Macdui**. As if it was planned, we were more or less on the peak at sunrise! Fascinating colours of red, yellow and orange surrounded us as we reached a spot for our second breakfast, on top of Scotland's second highest peak (1309m). We didn't stay for too long though, eager to see more (well, actually because our hands started freezing and it was too cold to stand around any longer), we continued to our next goal: **Derry Cairngorm**. After sharing gloves between each other to unfreeze the fingers, and walking in a rapid march to keep warm, we suddenly experienced the complete opposite: heat and sunshine! As we reached the top of the Munro, we could have swapped our gear to t-shirts and sunglasses – it was so warm! However, we decided not to sunbathe, but instead to continue our journey. Our adventure continued – taking us down and up again, across rivers and streams (nobody decided to go swimming, but surely the only reason from keeping us from jumping in was the fact that we still had a long walk ahead of us). We managed our third Munro of the day in the early afternoon: **Beinn Mheadhoin**. It was around this Munro when we met a magic white rabbit (let's call him Schneeflocke, because I am German and Schneeflocke means snowflake in German). Snowflake was white, beautiful, calm and simply magical. She didn't talk much German though, in fact, she didn't speak at all, but she also didn't seem to be scared of us. If you ever go up there and see her again, please say hi from us.

The final Munro of the day was **Cairngorm**. We reached it just before sunset, and descended the slippery slope (close to a skiing area) when it was more or less dark. Exhausted from hiking the four Munros, we were more than happy to finally reach the bus (probably just after 4pm). At this point I would like to thank Ruadhan for the amazing fruits & nuts he shared with us on the way down, giving us energy when we all felt a little tired, and Megan and Euan for the amazing photographs, Euan for leading our team, and Iain for providing great company. Thank you! 😊

Day 2

After a long day on Saturday, some of us had a well-deserved 'relaxation' day at the beach on Sunday. Relaxation with Mountaineers isn't boring though: we did everything from tree-



climbing, slacklining, Beach volleyball, Yoga (oooh thank you for joining me), and – YES – finally that dip into the ice-cold water. A most diverse, fun and exciting Sunday, with all the best people – and full of sunshine as well.

Honestly, one of the best weekends I have had so far. Okay, enough now. Thanks for reading!

SPEAN BRIDGE MEET – Roxanna Barry

Friday, 18:20, GUU. Growing concerns about whether or not we'll make it to the Real Food Café before they stop serving (we did). It was a quiet meet, with a less-than-full minibus and a couple of lonely cars. But nevertheless, top banter was provided (the norm of any GUMC meet, of course).

Saturday morning, we set off for Glen Nevis, dropping climbers at **Poldubh** and big-day-ers at the top of the road to conquer the **ring of Steall**. I then set off for a solo self-reflecting hike up to (the "other") **Stob Bàn**, happy in the knowledge I had a minibus to look forward to when I got down. The way was boggy, which didn't help with my motivation levels, but after a few white lies to myself about just how much further I had to go, I reached a snow-dusted ridge-like-thing, and then the summit. The weather was amazing, low wind and too warm for all the layers I'd decided to bring. The way back down was perhaps more interesting, bumping into the second sign of life all day (because the trees that I could have sworn were people were in fact just trees), who happened to be an ex-gumclubber, Maria. **Of all the mountains in all the towns in all the world, she walks up mine...**

After arriving back safe and sound and warm in the minibus, and after a mini yoga session, we headed over to **Heather-hat boulder** on promises of boulder- mats being left there. Reclining on the boulder-sofas (the no.1 mat-use if you check the user manuals), we could see team-keen, Ted and Victor, on the last pitch of *Storm*. Soon enough, they were clanging and clanking their way over, the classic trad-gear-music ringing across the Glen. Time for some bouldering! Vic quickly completed '*Maisie Gunn's Magic Midgie Cream*' (that name though) and the whereabouts of the Ring of Steall crew was pondered for a while, before a wild Giddy appeared, alone... This was somewhat worrying as he had set off with three companions. Turns out their lack of neon-orange-and-blue-color-coordination was just too much to bare, so Giddy had sauntered off in search of more savvy-mountain-attire-companions (and instead found



us). As night descended (around 4pm), Team-keen focussed on a proj, '*Killer Instinct*', equipped with head-torches and phone-torches, while Giddy used his power-scream voice to try to locate the other two 'lost' climbers, who managed to walk right past our lit-up boulder, drawn to the minibus like midges drawn to anyone trying to have a pleasant camping experience. Finally, as Ted killed '*Killer Instinct*', it was decided a trip to Morrisons then a trip back up the Glen was the best option, as the remnants of team-Steall were nowhere to be seen. Back in the minibus with a bit of **Mariah Carey**, three head torches were spotted in the distance, so instead of Morrisons we sat by the side of the road (not in the middle of the road) in the bus with some Christmas tunes (it's December after all).

Saturday evening was a marvel. Ted and Giddy teamed up to cook some fancy three course extravaganza, while everyone else sat around with fancy wine (and even port - GUMC got classy). Also, Spean Bridge, it seems, caters to those who are **slackl-inclined** (sorry not sorry), with the kids park having two perfect wooden beams, with no apparent purpose other than to set up a slackline between.

Sunday was **actually sunny**, and after a few early drop offs, the casual-crew made the long hike over to the legendary **Tregaskis household**, where certain ex-gumclubbers Callum and Ina had freshly baked goods and a football-loving dog to play with.

The main events of Sunday, however, take place on the **journey home**, and my, what a journey it was. James drove us to Tyndrum, where I refuelled on coffee and sugar, anticipating a sleepy *but uneventful* drive. How naïve I was. Soon enough we came across an inconvenient '**road closed**' sign for the usual way back to Glasgow. After deciding it was probably just some 'youths' (sort of), we drove round it and followed the confident-looking car in front past two more 'road closed' signs until we reached a road block with a lorry, which was a '**no actually, the road is fucking closed**' sign. Defeated, we U-turned. After what seemed like a year, we arrived in **Stirling**. With heavy eyes, I desperately needed a coffee-and-fresh-air break, so followed the first signs for 'services/Edinburgh'. Unfortunately, there was no 'road closed' sign this time, just some cones blocking off the 'services' exit, leaving us driving towards **Edinburgh**. A quick stop at the next turn-off, and we would be heading back to Glasgow! But no, the fun didn't stop there... tricky road navigation got the better of us, and instead we ended up driving back to... **Stirling**. Finally, signs for **Glasgow**, and this time I'll stick to them. "What more could possibly happen?" I hear you ask. Tired-Roxy forgot to fill the minibus with fuel, got lost driving round the main building in the minibus, didn't get to bed until 1:30 and slept through 2 of the trains to Bridge of Orchy the next day, missing her Clashgour-pilgrimage.



CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

Dum, Dumb and Dumber go to Dumby (18th December) – Roxanna Barry

Plan: Get up on Saturday morning, go to Dumby, climb some boulders.

Reality: Wake up around 14:00, go to GCC instead then have a curry.

Revised Plan: Get up early-ish on Sunday morning, go to Dumby, climb some boulders.

Reality: Get up late morning, have some coffee, have some tea, go to Dumby, climb two routes, watch some cloud draw in, climb one route in the rain, go back to Glasgow for an overpriced late lunch at Siempre.

Shenanigans brought to you by Magda Kowalska, Laura Martin and Roxanna Barry (a.k.a. Dum, Dumb and Dumber).

