

EMC – THE NINETIES AND NOUGHTIES

Following a period of relative stability and attendance on meets by mainly long standing members of the club, the late 90s brought in another phase of the EMC with an influx of younger members, several of whom are now “long standing” members. This was mainly welcomed by existing members but inevitably it brought some tensions and challenges to the existing way of things.

The pub night was weekly at Scott’s Bar followed up at closing time by late night adjournments to Champagne Charlies. A change of venue to the Wally Dug resulted in some memorable Thursday evenings.

The meet booking policy came under severe pressure at this time with members resorting to extreme methods to get on prized meets such as Invercroft, the Whitehouse at Barrisdale, Rum or Jean’s Glen Feshie Hostel with its famous three course “Martin Wishart style” meal. Meet organisers would be phoned up at shortly after midnight to catch the first day of booking, or even more unpopular the crack of dawn. For potential newbies getting on a meet was a major achievement. It was not long before the newbies rebelled and the booking policy was changed to allow for a 4 hour booking window between 6pm and 10pm on the first night of booking - a policy that has survived to this day.

This led to some further tensions with some existing members feeling that they were being deprived of “their place” on meets. It would also be fair to say that meets started to become more boisterous. Big hill days were still the order of the day, but members (young and old) were now burning the candle at both ends and partying well into the small hours. Sundays often became a write-off. A meet at Jock Spot’s in November had members dancing outside to Abba all night in an incredible warm Fohn wind. That meet resulted in a complaint to the committee although, it was noted by the newbies that the wife of the member making the complaint had been one of the main protagonists. A riotous dinner meet at Glen Spean Lodge Hotel required the President to write a letter of apology to the hotel. One member allegedly managed to spend the night behind the hotel bar at another dinner meet after getting locked in. The contrast on some meets could be dramatic with folk doing crosswords and reading in a “quiet room” adjacent to the alternative attractions of rowdy darts/pool sessions and even on one occasion a fire eating display.

The AGM that year was a bad tempered affair. One member complained that people in the club were behaving like “b....ds”. The club also considered a motion to stop advertising. A certain long-standing existing member made a passionate appeal to members to vote against the motion. “Did the most successful companies in the world stop advertising just because they were successful – “No!” he implored the group. It was to no avail and with an unprecedented turnout for an AGM the motion went through on a narrow 13/12 majority and the club’s presence in Climber magazine was no more.

Things settled down a bit and by the end of this period there were 4 EMC marriages, 3 long term relationships and 6 EMC babies. But as happens with any club, people moved on and drifted away from the EMC, a number of long standing members also

drifted away. With no advertising, new and especially younger members were thin on the ground and often did not return after the pub night or a first meet, the club perhaps having too much of a feeling of cliques due to the absence of new blood.

The pub night was no longer a focal point. Attendance dwindled and it became even more off-putting for potential members. A decision was taken to have the pub night once a month in an attempt to encourage existing members to make an effort to attend. The viability of the traditional New Year meet became questionable. The club started advertising again but the damage had been done and it would take time to reinvigorate the club. This also coincided with a particularly sad period in EMC history in 2005 when the Club President, Lesley Armstrong and Meets Secretary, Alastair Hughes both died of cancer at a young age. Lesley after a 5 year battle with lung cancer, continuing to come on meets between treatment, climbing Kilimanjaro and ticking off Corbetts, latterly with one lung. Alastair died within one year of being diagnosed with lymphoma, never able to return to the club due to the brutality of the treatment.

Those newbies who did break through and join in this period generally found what they were looking for in the EMC with its continued ethos of loose organisation, big adventurous days, the chance to make the transition from hill-walker to mountaineer and the longstanding acceptance of obsession and idiosyncratic ways. For example, one member's penchant for spam and smash and penguin biscuit sandwiches (white bread and flora essential for the full effect)

The late noughties saw a further revival of the club with the re-establishment of an indoor climbing evening at Alien Rock every Wednesday and outdoor climbing in the summer evenings. With the pub night only being once a month this proved a popular way for people to get to know other members. An active and enthusiastic climbing group developed and attendance at meets started to increase again. The return of Fiona Murray to the club also helped to establish the summer and winter climbing activities. In 2009 the Club had its first alpine meet in Saas Grund and a number of other foreign trips have been organised by members including sport climbing trips and cross country skiing trips to Norway.

The club has had very few accidents in the hills. One member broke his ankle on a New Year meet in the Fannichs and managed to crawl back down to a shepherd's cottage. The caring side of the EMC was shown in his phone call back to base. "Oh Alan you do pick your moments, we have just started our dinner".

In another accident, a young doctor member of the club was killed in an avalanche on Beinn a'Ghlo walking on his own in winter – the incident described in Bob Barton & Blyth Wright's "A Chance in a Million" as notable for the benign nature of the terrain on which the avalanche happened.

Today the club is in a very healthy state with a full programme of well attended, sociable and friendly meets. There is a balance of hillwalking, climbing and other mountaineering activities and regular Munro and Corbett/Graham compleations. The club has a continual flow of members and a good range of ages across its membership. A recent trend in membership is that the club has become more

international, attracting new and potential new members from Poland, Finland, America, Spain, France and Italy

**Alison C
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Footnote

A Chance in Million by Bob Barton & Blyth Wright, published by the SMC Trust, Second Edition, 2000.

Glen Tilt is an age-old route from Atholl to Deeside in the east, or, in a northerly direction via Glen Feshie or the Lairig Ghru, to Speyside. In much the same way as the Lairig, its length splits a mountain range in two, with high summits on either hand. The best known and highest is Ben a'Ghlo, but there are other worthy goals for the hill-walker and a number of bothies provide basic accommodation. In winter, excellent ski touring is available, but the area does not lack steep slopes, which must be treated with care.

These hills, although accessible, are spacious enough for solitary wandering to be enjoyed. Not, however, on January 19 and 20, 1982; on these dates 100 searchers were scouring the hillsides, helicopters flew constantly overhead, civilian, Police and RAF teams along with SARDA rescue dogs combined in a massive operation, in the hope of finding one missing walker.

This man, a doctor, had set out from home on the previous Thursday, the 13th, and had not arrived back on the Sunday as intended. Although with only the scantiest information as to his plans, the Police found his car on Monday and the huge search was initiated. Weather conditions had been deteriorating over this period, from the fine, cold winter conditions of the week before and Tuesday's search took place in atrocious weather. It was thought that the missing man might have intended going over Beinn a'Ghlo to the remote Tarf bothy and the day's search took place mainly on the slopes of that mountain. It drew a blank.

By now, hope for the missing doctor was at a low ebb. Even if he had been suffering only from some relatively minor injury, his chances of surviving such a prolonged exposure to bad weather, were not good. Nonetheless, Wednesday saw a renewed effort and with better weather, more teams, dogs, and helicopters combed the area.

The day wore on with nothing found when one team from Tayside, searching along the north-west ridge of Beinn a'Ghlo, found some footprints. They were partly melted due to the thaw but were the first possible link with the missing man.

These footprints traversed the side of the hill in a roughly horizontal line. As the search moved along in this direction, the footprints suddenly disappeared. Almost immediately items of equipment were found; a rucksack side pocket, primus stove, and other small items. A few minutes later, the search was at an end. Some distance downslope, the doctor's body was found, almost completely buried in avalanche

debris.

This sad find only confirmed the searchers' worst doubts, but all of them expressed considerable surprise that such a tragic event could take place on this insignificant-looking slope. The average angle was about 30-35°, although the starting zone, in a shallow gully, may have been slightly steeper. The thaw of the previous couple of days had altered the snow features somewhat, but the main dimensions of the avalanche were clearly visible. The crownwall at that time was no more than 30 cm high and only about 6 m wide. The victim was found about 50 m below this point, quite near the foot of the avalanche tip, which was approximately 17 m wide by 33 m long.

What can one learn from this unfortunate case? Clearly the hazards of solo winter mountaineering are again highlighted. More than that, the danger presented by local steepenings on otherwise fairly gentle slopes is brought out, along with the desirability of keeping to ridge crests in doubtful conditions. Perhaps the doctor had unintentionally diverged from his route or perhaps, like the rescue team, he thought the slope looked harmless; we will never know that, but if he made any error, its consequences were surely out of any proportion.