



# CLUBSPOT

## Edinburgh Mountaineering Club

Above: Hill walking in Knoydart

Right: Leading out on the frozen waterfall of Eas Anie

Far right: Steep ice

### The Early Years

**E**dinburgh Mountaineering Club was established in the early 1950s, with founding members including James (Jimmy) Thin, great-grandson of the founder of James Thin Bookshops, a central feature of Edinburgh life for many years until 2002. Jimmy Thin was at the centre of this business for over four decades and was described as a “bustling and athletic figure” and “man of letters, mountaineer and descendant of the Edinburgh Enlightenment”. A champion of wilderness, he had bagged every Munro apart from one which he was saving for his 80th birthday.

Other former members are believed to include Bill Wallace, who became a very prominent member of the Scottish Mountaineering Club and was its Secretary for many years, Wally Mykura the noted geologist, Margaret Roberts, also a member of the Ladies Scottish Climbing Club, and Myrtle Simpson.

Without car ownership, the 1950s and ‘60s were the era of the bus meet. Trips went to places relatively near to

Edinburgh such as Arrochar and Pitlochry, but also Glencoe and Glenshee. However, bus meets began to wane as more private transport became available. This was a sensitive transition time. For a while the continuation of bus meets depended on a fruitful liaison with the Edinburgh JMCS. A comment in the JMCS log book in 1966 notes “How long before the scavenging car meets move in” accompanied by a picture of a skull and crossbones. The same log book records later that year an “experimental car meet – very well attended – the shape of things to come”. The joint bus meets were to continue as the basis of activities until 1966 when only 13 people travelled to Arrochar.

With the abandonment of bus meets, consideration was given to combining with





the JMCS, but after much discussion the Edinburgh JMCS constituted itself as an independent club in November 1967 and the EMC is described as proceeding on its own way “concentrating more on the family and social aspects of mountaineering and open to mixed membership”.

The EMC was clearly ahead of its time in equal opportunities and has traditionally attracted independent and formidable women who can more than hold their own in the mountains. The club has had several female Presidents. Even in the 1970s, allowing women to join mountaineering clubs was thought to be progressive. One current member recounts enquiring politely on her first meet whether one of the female members was Mr X's wife and receiving the withering reply “No, I am a woman in my own right”.

However, men and women still had separate accommodation – the delights of mixed alpine bunks and dorms being a step too far. One former EMC member recalls a meet in the late 1960s where there was an ‘extra’ woman. After much debate it was announced by an elderly female committee member that X would sleep with the men as “she had been to the continent”.

By the early 1970s, membership of the EMC was quite low, with a transition between the original founder members and newer members. Most of the older group dropped away at this time and, typically, meets only had around a dozen people. The main character from that time was John Winham, who died in 1996, a veteran of the British Antarctic Survey who seemed immune to cold. This was also the era when the current longest standing members (of nearly 40 years!) John Watson and Kenny Robb joined the club. John holds the record as longest continuous member, with Kenny due to take over if John ever stops paying his membership fee. Kenny is, however, the most active EMC member ever, rarely missing a meet over his 39 years in the club and earning the nickname ‘Keeny’. There can be few people in Scotland who have such a depth of knowledge of the hills, including an encyclopedic knowledge of most of the very best wild camping spots and an eye for a scrambling line. Keeny is also the club's most experienced Alpinist, with 35 seasons under his

belt and many 4000-metre peaks, including the Zinal Rothorn and Dent Blanche in his 60s.

Amongst Keeny's other achievements are over 100 ascents of Ben Nevis, many by classic summer and winter climbing routes.



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The EMC developed a reputation for regular weekends away and an unstructured and relaxed laissez-faire approach often involving solo walking on meets as members pursued their own goals. The focus was on walking rather than climbing. A bit of rock- and ice-climbing got done but it was not a major feature at meets and the standard was perhaps not all that high.

### Club Hut

The EMC also acquired its own hut in Glen Lochay. Batavaime was used by informal agreement with the landowner, John Cameron. The club had free use of the hut on condition we kept the building in good condition. After rehabilitation by the club, the hut had gas lighting and cooking and, for a time, piped running water. There was a chemical toilet in the attached byre. For a time Batavaime operated as a conventional club hut, available for rent to other clubs, but over time usage declined and around 2001 the club voted to give up ‘tenancy’ of the hut.

Existing occupancy rights were transferred to a new group: the Batavaime Users Group (BUG). The hut continued in use until 2006 when John Cameron decided to retire and sell off his estates, at which point BUG was given notice plus monetary compensation for work done on the hut.

### Changes in the '90s

Following a period of relative stability, with attendance at meets by mainly longstanding members of the club, the late 1990s brought in another phase of the EMC with an influx of younger members, several of whom are now



becoming 'longstanding' members. This was mainly welcomed by existing members but inevitably it brought some tensions and challenges to the existing way of things as meets started to become more boisterous. The opening of the indoor climbing wall in Edinburgh at Alien Rock in 1996 also heralded an increasing interest in climbing activities, with the club starting to attract keen climbers and others who quickly transitioned into climbers. This period saw four EMC marriages, three long-term relationships and six EMC babies

Meets came under severe pressure at this time and the club voted at its AGM to stop advertising. But, as happens with any club, people moved on and drifted away from the EMC and the club went through another transition as existing long-standing members from the 1970s and '80s 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.

The decision was taken to start advertising again. However, the damage had been done and it would take time to reinvigorate the club.

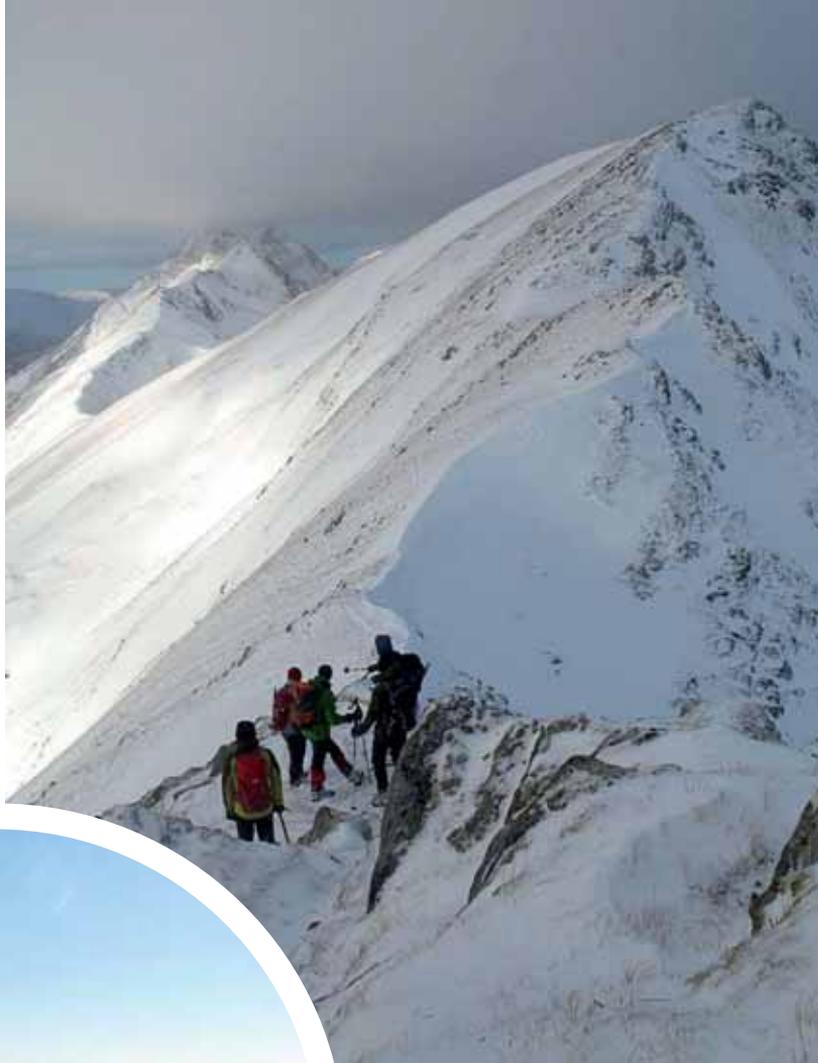
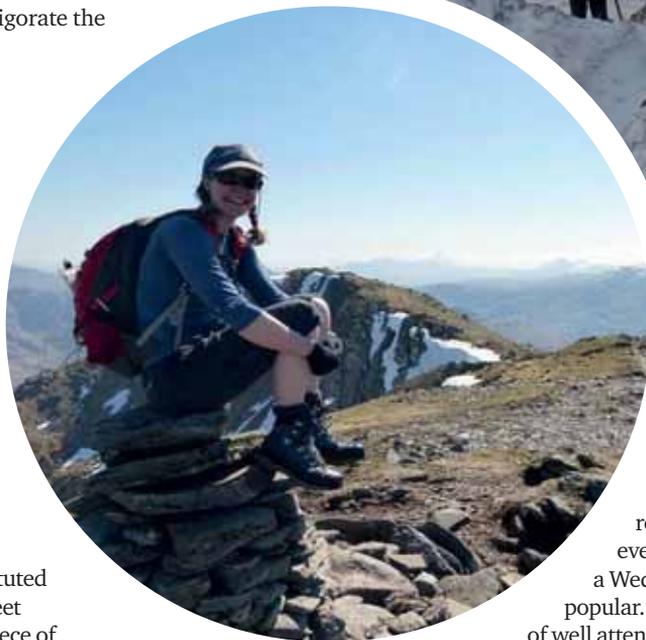
## Active Members

The late 'noughties' saw a further revival of the club with the re-establishment of an increasingly well-attended indoor climbing evening at Alien Rock every Wednesday and outdoor climbing in the summer evenings. The presence of several IT types meant the club was also one of the first clubs to have its own website and, now, a Facebook presence. E-mail communication was substituted for the traditional list of meet attendees, scrawled on a piece of cardboard and passed round at the pub. An active and enthusiastic climbing group developed and attendance at meets started to rise again.

The return of Fiona Murray to the club from a climbing career break also helped to establish the summer and winter climbing activities. During her career break Fiona climbed some of the hardest mixed dry tooling routes in the world for a British female and featured in the Hot Aches movie *All Mixed Up*, climbing M10+. Fiona was an early enthusiast for dry tooling and dominated the female section of the annual Scottish Tooling Competitions for many years. In 2013-14 two female members of the club also joined the SMC, the first to do this since founder member Bill Wallace.

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, cycling and cross-country skiing.

Despite periodic concerns that mountaineering clubs may be less popular and perhaps even outdated in today's internet friendly world, the club seems to be more vibrant than ever, with a constant stream of enquiries from potential new members.



## Current Activities

Generally people seem to like what they find and the club is also becoming more international, attracting new members from the EU and other countries round the world. The evening climbing activities on a Wednesday are particularly popular. There is a full programme of well attended, sociable, friendly meets and a balance of hillwalking, climbing and other mountaineering activities. The club has

also retained its 'family' feel, where everybody knows each other. There are regular Munro and Corbett completions and an active Graham-bagging section. The club has a good range of ages across its membership. There are also now a number of active hill runners in the club, including Irish Internationalist Sharon Bird and Scottish hill running veteran Martin Hulme.

Current president Tim Day said: "The club now sees a wide range of activities by members. Many members will have got their first taste of higher-grade scrambling or graded Scottish winter climbing with the club, and it's almost a club tradition that there will be a mass 'grade I gully initiation' for non-climbing hillwalkers at some point in the winter, conditions permitting."

In recent years the club website at [edinburghmc.org.uk](http://edinburghmc.org.uk) seems to have been the main channel for people to discover the club, and anyone interested should consult the detailed information about how the club functions available there. As meet organisers' reports are also available online, potential new members can form a good idea of what they might be getting into.

Above: High above Glen Shiel

Left: On Meall Bhuidhe in Knoydart