

EMC in the 1980s

This is a personal and partial account of one person's involvement with EMC, mainly in the 1980s but drifting a bit later. It makes no pretence to being a full or objective history.

Some background may help to explain my idiosyncratic route to EMC. I grew up in Stonehaven, of farming stock, and from an early age I regularly went on long walks. Sunday was walking day (also a day with no cooked, as distinct from reheated, meals). Walking routinely included hills. Early holidays in Banchory (all of 16 miles away) invariably involved climbing Scottie and wandering over the Hill of Fare.

I climbed my first Munro (Mount Keen) on a school outing and also walked the Lairig Ghru with the school, crossing from Linn o Dee to Loch an Eilean on a day of gales (the return over the Lecht memorable for having to haul fallen trees off the road to let the bus squeeze pass). Scout hikes taught me to use map and compass and on one camp at Linn o Dee half a dozen of us, in our mid-teens, were allowed to wander off with no adult supervision to climb Ben MacDui. (In the event we wasted so much time larking about that we got no further than Derry Cairngorm.) Would that kind of freedom be allowed now?

At Aberdeen University the Lairig Club introduced me to hills all across Scotland and holiday jobs as a grouse-beater and stalking pony-man gave me detailed knowledge of the massive Invercauld estate. By this time I had discovered the joys of solo walking. One rest day from grouse beating was filled by a circuit of Beinn a'Bhuird and Ben Avon.

All this ended when I went off to Oxford – plenty of cycling and the strange attractions of punting, but not a hill in sight. Oxford University Mountaineering Club meant rock-climbing excursions to Wales or the Alps – not my scene. Later, settled in a job in Edinburgh I did some occasional walking and camping with friends but the hills largely faded from my life for ten years.

When I decided to get more active I started looking around for a suitable club. My first choice, the Glenmore Club, did not last long – too few walks, too little challenge. Next came the All the Year Ramblers who had something on offer every week, usually with a hired bus every fortnight. Their practice of walking fixed routes in parties with a designated leader could be restrictive but the buses penetrated to remote areas and the A+ walks (sometimes led in those days by EMC's own Martin H) could be challenging. Their regular weekends away, plus a full week in May, offered more flexibility and *laissez-faire*.

It was Martin who dragged me along to an AGM of the Ptarmigan MC, in those days a high-prestige organisation with a waiting-list for membership. Martin had tipped me off that some vacancies were coming up and being present at the AGM allowed you to short-circuit the waiting list. The great advantage of the Ptarmigan's monthly bus was that, as long as you could find a couple of like-minded souls to accompany you (and you avoided the cardinal sin of keeping the bus waiting), you could design your own walk anywhere off the bus's fixed route.

There's an obvious direction of travel here, towards increasingly wild, unregulated and occasionally solo walking. So it's not surprising that I was attracted by rumours about EMC, with their regular weekends away and unstructured approach. I planned to go on what was by all accounts a brilliant week of camping at Skiag Bridge in July 1983, then shot myself in the foot by arranging an unbreakable meeting at work. So it wasn't till November that year that I finally made it to my first meet, at the Carn Dearg Club hut, a slightly grotty structure concealed deep in a wood in Glen Clova. There I met a number of kenspeckle characters, some of whom are still on the EMC scene. Not knowing anyone else, and not sure how parties actually got formed, I achieved my goal of walking alone on my first day.

On my second meet, at Milehouse, I was duly impressed by EMC sangfroid. One guy went off on his own, on a snowy day, to climb Braeriach and did not return till several hours after dark. No one seemed much surprised or alarmed. Since I had now been at two meets and had not done anything disastrous (see below), the Treasurer informed me that I was now eligible to join EMC and looked expectant. So I became a member of EMC.

It will be obvious from the account so far that my 'use' of EMC was idiosyncratic. Throughout the whole period I was also an active member of the AYR and the Ptarmigan, so I used EMC mainly for long weekends away, wild camping and solo walking. The solo thing was partly from choice but partly also because, having a dislike of ice, exposure and slopes above a certain gradient, I prefer to avoid committing myself to parties where I might be the weakest link. But idiosyncrasy did not seem out of place in EMC in the 1980s – it might even be considered normal. Quite a few members were into solo walking, backpacking and bothying, sometimes because they had their list of hills to tick, sometimes for the sheer enjoyment of solitude. I can recall several meets where everyone met up and then went their separate ways to do their own private thing. Many people were actively Munro-bagging. A few had completed their Munros and moved on to Corbetts. A while later, folk started talking about Grahams. All this ticking obviously influenced the way people used the club: some people completed their lists and moved on to new things; some developed new obsessions; some drifted away. Personally, in 1992 I moved out of my bachelor pad to live with my girlfriend. I continuing attending meets for many years afterwards but walking in general and EMC in particular became less central to my life.

Given the general club ethos it's not surprising that some planned meets never happened and others were moved at short notice to a different location. For some reason now forgotten I once opted to make my own way to a meet at the head of Loch Arkaig by taking the train to Glenfinnan and backpacking over the bealach to Strathan, only to find no one else in sight. I was sitting in my tent the next morning trying to work out the best line of escape when another EMC straggler fortuitously turned up with a car. Since the weather looked unpromising we opted to retreat to Loch Lochy hostel and potter around there. Does this count as a meet that never happened or just one that moved?

Recruitment

Given this do-your-own-thing ethos it's not surprising that club membership had its ups and downs. There was at least one financial disaster when the club booked the White House at Barisdale and scarcely anyone (no one?) turned up. This led to a motion at one AGM to wind up the club due to lack of interest. This was indignantly rejected and the club soldiered on. Recruiting new members was a constant problem, both attracting people's attention, then getting them to return a second time. The atmosphere at the club's weekly pub nights did not always help. These happened every Thursday in a changing succession of pubs that was influenced by the quality of the beer, the amount of empty space and – above all – the absence of muzak. (Obviously there was some wishful thinking here: pubs with good beer tend not to be empty). During the club's lowest days a pub night might consist of two or three grizzled and grumpy old codgers huddled in a corner, slagging off absent members and cracking non-PC jokes. (I don't think the term 'PC' existed in the 1980s but the jokes certainly did.) Not all potential new members found this congenial.

Similarly, meets were not always welcoming. I can't vouch for the following tale but it has the ring of truth. Two or three potential new members turned up on one bunkhouse meet, all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. Next morning the established members went through the usual motions, occasionally grunting to one another as they ate breakfast and prepared flasks and pieces. All of a sudden the bunkhouse was empty except for a group of baffled newbies, completely ignorant of what was happening. Not surprisingly, none was ever seen again.

There was also an opposite danger – unsuspecting novices or even dozy veterans might be hijacked into joining some project very different from what they had planned. One charming old member was particularly skilled at not taking no for an answer. He had long since completed his Munros, and possibly his Corbetts as well, but he was then struck with guilt at having omitted a few Munro tops. So he was always on the look-out for someone to join him in tackling ever more obscure and distant tops and it needed advanced bargaining skills, or a thick skin, to avoid his clutches.

There was no planned progression for newcomers (modern-day sports bureaucrats would be appalled). Individuals either swam or sank. A strange woman turned up at Invergarry one Easter with no winter gear. Someone lent her a spare ice-axe and she completed a challenging day on the Five Sisters of Kintail. Later in the weekend she fell out with her driver and stomped off in high dudgeon to make her own way back to Edinburgh. There were no after effects but it's not hard to see risk factors here.

Not all potential new members fully appreciated the EMC challenge. On another trip to the head of Loch Arkaig (a favourite destination in those days) I was offered a lift by a woman who was keen to upgrade from the Ramblers to EMC. Six of us met up in the pub at Spean Bridge. It was dark by the time we set off on the last stage and it quickly became clear that my driver had never encountered the Loch Arkaig road, or anything like it. It was a bit like travelling with small child, except that she was driving – a constant plea 'Are we nearly there yet?' I tried to strike a balance between honesty and reassurance but she quickly lost faith in

my promises. We made it in the end and pitched our tents in the dark. Unfortunately the midgets were out in full force and next morning it was raining. Two of the party headed off on some ploy of their own, so Pat, Alan F and I invited our PNM to join us in scouting out Sgurr na Ciche. She declined our offer and when we returned that evening she had vanished, never to return. (Over all this was a not untypical meet. On the Saturday the clag was right down to the bealach below Sgurr na Ciche, and the rain constant. Pat pushed on to tackle the hill alone but eventually retreated. Alan and I carried on to Sourlies bothy to eat our pieces in relative comfort, then had difficulty retracing our steps because the burns meantime had gone into flash-flood. Alan crossed one with a dramatic Alan Breck style leap from boulder to boulder while I insisted on plodding upstream to find something slightly safer. The next day was better and we enjoyed bagging a couple of Corbetts.)

On a camping meet at Cannich another aspirant lady volunteered to join one of the club tigers on a backpack into Glen Affric. She returned a couple of days later, footsore, alone and not best pleased. Her escort, finding her pace too slow, had left her to find her own way back while he went off himself on a solo ridge walk.

Another time I got a lift to the Ling hut with a potential new member who was clearly inexperienced – a couple of Ben Lomond type hills under his belt – but keen to learn. The next morning was typical Ling hut, with people standing around waiting interminably for kettles to boil so they could fill their flasks. Someone's attention must have wandered, because the next thing was an outbreak of muttering and cursing. Our novice had appropriated a full kettle of nearly boiling water so he could wash and shave in comfort. Public opinion was not favourable and I suspect he may have walked alone that day. I can't remember if that was the weekend I was traversing the Beinn Eighe ridge in shorts when a sudden storm blew in from the west. The sensation of gale-driven hailstones bouncing off naked flesh remains engraved on my memory.

One difficulty in attracting new members may have been the club's focus 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 not all that high. So the club held no obvious attractions for ice-tigers. The club owned a cache of equipment that members could borrow – ice-axes, ropes, crampons, etc. – but this was not much used. Some of the gear reputedly vanished in the carboot of an Irish doctor who turned up one Hogmanay at Ratagan hostel and entertained us with tales of derring-do on MacGillicuddy's Reeks.

Technological change

One inescapable message of this history is the extent of change over the course of thirty years. In the 1980s there was no GPS (so you needed map and compass skills). There were no mobile phones and social media (so it was much harder to arrange and rearrange meets, to report changes of plan and to summon help in an emergency). Fewer people owned cars and in the aftermath of the 1970s fuel crisis there was pressure to economise on petrol. Car-sharing to meets was commonplace, though one or two drivers were occasionally shunned because of their dubious skills or eccentric route-finding.

The ideal of car-sharing was somewhat undermined by one member, a nice enough guy who combined a shining desire to be liked with massive egocentricity. This led him to think that anyone who offered him a lift to a meet was also volunteering to act as his personal chauffeur throughout the weekend. It was difficult to persuade him otherwise without being seriously rude, so some drivers took to inventing excuses for not offering him a lift – which made it that much harder to offer a lift to anyone else either. There was a rise in the number of cars turning up at meets with only one occupant and this trend continued even when a change of job removed the offending party from Edinburgh and the EMC.

Accidents and emergencies

Single-car occupancy, along with the absence of mobile phones, had a bearing on the club's most serious accident during this period. On a meet at the Raeburn hut one member opted to leave a day early for an engagement in Edinburgh, doing a couple of hills on the way home. High above the Drumochter pass he stepped on a cornice, fell a few feet and broke his leg. Movement was so painful that he decided to stay where he was in the hope of rescue. Fortunately he was fully equipped and, having over-wintered in Antarctica with the British Antarctic Survey, knew how to handle low temperatures. Unfortunately, not being expected back at the Raeburn hut he was not posted missing. At home in Edinburgh his wife knew there was a problem but had no way of contacting either him or the hut. No other walkers chanced by. At daybreak he realised that he had to get out under his steam, so he dragged himself on hands and knees all the way to the A9 to flag down a passing vehicle.

Apart from this, the club's accident record was not bad, considering its sometimes anarchic organisation (it no doubt helped that most members had years of experience). Another solo walker went over a cornice on Beinn a'Chlachair and had a long fall, but managed to re-gain his bearings and make the long walk out to Kinloch Laggan. It was only the next day that continuing back pain drove him to A & E, where they diagnosed a hairline fracture in a vertebra. There were a few other minor avalanches, dislocated limbs and broken bones. My own most vivid experience was of dislocating a shoulder on the Sgumain stone shoot on Skye. A female companion supplied a spare bikini top to strap up my arm and then drove me to Broadford Hospital. There the doctors insisted on a general anaesthetic (I have odd-shaped shoulders) which kept me in overnight. I think I may have been the only patient in residence. I was discharged early next day, still in my hill gear. It was a glorious morning and I had no way of contacting Glen Brittle campsite, where everyone would already be out on the hill anyhow. So I got a bus to Sligachan and took the hill path to Glen Brittle, rucksack perched precariously on my good shoulder. I'm not sure if a contemporary hospital would be quite so relaxed.

Journeys

Meets generated some memorable journeys. There were plenty of delays and detours due to snow, ice and other hazards, and one or two near things, but I can't recall ever failing completely to reach a destination because of weather conditions. Sometimes the journey was more memorable than the walking. I remember one three-man meet to Wasdale Head in the

Lake District when the rain never ceased. We dutifully plodded up a few hills but our hearts were not really in it. The trip only came alive on the way home when Hugh drove us up the A701 at an illegally high speed blasting our ears the whole way with Fleetwood Mac. (Hugh may still hold some kind of night speed record for getting from Edinburgh to Mallaig to catch the early morning ferry to Rum.) This memory chimes nicely with a Wagner-inspired charge down Glencoe in Bill and Eileen's van to catch the last ferry at Corran (we missed it by minutes and had to face the long haul to Ardgour round Loch Linnhe and Loch Eil). It chimes in a slightly different way with another return from the Lake District in Winham's venerable Volkswagen camper van where the speed barely reached sedate.

Some drivers had their own ideas on route-finding or timing. Why don't we go via X on the way? We've loads of time to fit in an extra Corbett, or search for rare plants. (The membership included several active botanists.) On one occasion I was taken to Cannich via Glencoe and Fort William because my driver disapproved of nasty dual carriageways like the A9. It was a pleasant enough jaunt till I realised we might not reach Cannich in time for a restorative pint: in the end we made it with minutes to spare.

Sometimes things intertwined miraculously. May holiday meets in Glen Brittle have largely blurred in my mind but my return journey in 1989 remains unforgettable. I got dropped off in Dornie, cut across the hills and trudged the full length of Glen Elchaig. After a damp night's camping I had an airy traverse over An Socach and An Riabhachan to the upper reaches of Glen Strathfarrar where I found a classic wild campsite, on the banks of a burn, sheltered by ancient Scots pines, with a view straight to the summit of Sgurr na Lapaich. First thing next morning I bounded up Sgurr na Lapaich for the fun of it, then headed off down Glen Strathfarrar. Not having a map for the eastern section I completely underestimated the distance and the glen, for all its beauty, seemed interminable. I reached Struy Bridge just before afternoon closing at the bar, then set off for Cannich mentally calculating bus and train connections home. At Cannich I walked straight into a group of AYR friends returning from their own meet at Glen Affric hostel and got a lift right to my front door.

Club traditions

Looking back it's tempting to think that I joined the club at the end of an era: things had been grittier and more authentic just that wee bit earlier, in the 1970s perhaps. But I suspect this is a universal human fallacy: the grass is always greener in the irretrievable past. Anyway, I did just catch the end of one or two traditions. I went on one midsummer bivvy, driving up on the Friday evening to camp at Victoria Bridge. On the Saturday a couple of us did Beinn Mhanach, returning in time to have supper and join the rest of the group at the summit of Stob Ghabhar just before dark. It was a cold night with intermittent mist and drizzle, so after a quick dawn breakfast we set off to complete the Blackmount ridge. This is where it gets embarrassing. Walking in mist half a dozen highly experienced EMC members misread the map, descended too soon and ended up scrabbling around the cliffs of Coireach a'Ba. Eventually we extricated ourselves and found our way on to Clach Leathad. Things improved, literally and metaphorically, and we had a pleasant stroll over to Creise, down over Meall a'Bhuiridh to Ba Cottage and back to the tents for lunch.

The midsummer bivvy gave way to another, gentler tradition – the midsummer feast at the club hut at Batavaime. Different people would volunteer to pre-prepare different courses, which then had to be carried in from the road end at Kenknock. People would do their own thing on the Saturday, then gather for the feast in evening. The hut was often full. One year I rashly volunteered to sleep outside in a bivvy bag. After making the acquaintance of several thousand Batavaime midges I never offered again. Another year I conceived the daft plan of walking all the way from the hut to Beinn Dorain, with a straight ascent from Auch Glen, on what turned out to be one of the hottest days of the year. I eventually crawled back, sunburnt and severely dehydrated, just in time for the meal. Rarely has a feast tasted so good.

Another tradition I caught the end of was the club away-week in early July, coinciding with the Edinburgh Trades holiday. I remember a successful trip to Kintail in 1984, camping just across the river from the Cluanie Inn which provided a welcome respite from the midges. One highlight was a mass assault on the South Cluanie ridge. The next year the club went back to Skiag Bridge, less successfully than in 1983. For three days the rain barely stopped and some tents were awash. By Monday everyone was ready to quit. Pat seriously suggested driving down to England and walking Hadrian's Wall instead. In the event some folk went home while four of us straggled up to Durness hostel to dry out. Miraculously the weather started to improve, so we caught the ferry and then the bus out to Cape Wrath, then walked back to camp at Kearvaig bay. Next morning an RAF helicopter landed nearby to check us out, decided we were harmless and said we were OK to walk back along the top of the Clo Mor cliffs – a stunning seabird experience. This was followed by good days on Ben Hope and Ben Klibreck (and good evenings in the bar at Altnaharra), so the disaster of Skiag Bridge had a silver lining.

Some 'traditions' never really caught on, like Legs's midnight dip in Loch Duich, right in front of Ratagan hostel, to welcome in the New Year. Others, like Legs's fire-lighting skills and never-ending consumption of potatoes, became the stuff of club legend. Every organisation needs its myths. One of my favourites concerns a woman who used to turn up to meets with an elderly canvas tent. (For the benefit of younger readers, canvas tents were standard till about the fifties: from the 1960s canvas was largely replaced by lighter and more versatile fabrics.) On one dinner meet at the Inverarnan Hotel camping participants were asked to share a field with a pony. Our heroine emerged from the meal to find the pony feasting on her tent. (Slightly off topic, in the 1980s people heading for the Ben Alder hills could drive as far as Loch Pattack and park there at their own risk. The estate ponies, which roamed free around the loch in summer, had a fearsome reputation for rubbing against cars and chewing windscreen wipers.)

For many years the club's myths and legends were faithfully recorded, in those pre-digital days, in a series of club books, solid ledgers now sadly lost. Meet reports were written by a variety of individuals, usually someone who had actually been present, in a variety of styles that ranged from concise lists of attendees and routes to cryptic in-jokes and baroque extemporisations on some passing theme. The presiding genius of the books, and the most regular author, was John Winham (another veteran of the British Antarctic Survey) who also kept detailed annual statistics on attendances. (That is how I know that my life-total of EMC

meets now tops a hundred.) In his heyday Winham's caustic sense of humour had a big influence on the club's ethos, deflating pseuds and perhaps also deterring newbies. Children featured as 'gnomes' in Winham-speak and the books contained some barbed comments about the evils of allowing gnomes to attend meets (not a common occurrence but not unknown).

Dogs played a small but regular part in club activities. The most regular attender was Lesley Armstrong's collie Jessie, a dog of strong character who had her own favourites among the club members. Non-favourites approached her with some caution. Then there was Albert and Judith's Sam, a white poodle who could get very non-white after a day among the peat-hags. Bill B and Cynthia once took Cynthia's dog along a challenging route in the Lake District. When the going got tough, the dog was unceremoniously stuffed into a rucksack, head poking out the top. My best dog experience came in Knoydart when a lovely collie-ish dog followed me out of Inverie, refusing to be chased off. She followed me up the Mam Meadail, ranging all over the hillside, and turned back when I did. I later discovered that she was called Rona, loved hill-walking and hung around the village looking for some kind-hearted soul to give her a treat.

Despite all the references to pubs as places to meet up, drink and shelter from the elements EMC in the 1980s did not (with one or two exceptions) have a serious drinking culture. Two or three pints in the pub was the norm. Things changed later, with a shift from beer in the pub to bottles of wine back in the hut. This led to many convivial late-night conversations, late rising the next morning and one or two minor confrontations between sober types planning an early start and party animals who only wanted to party. There were one or two memorable parties. I recall a lively ceilidh in the village hall on Rum where EMC encountered a group of students from Cambridge. The night ended (so I am told) with high jinks high on the roof of Kinloch Castle. Another meet went to the old Morgan's Den bunkhouse at Corroul station (eating in the old signal box). On the Saturday night EMC got absorbed into a Halloween party organised by locals in the neighbouring restaurant. There was dancing and drink was taken. On the way home one group of estate workers reputedly drove their Land Rover off the road. On Sunday it rained. Not much walking was done.

Dinner meets went on much as now, switching in date between spring and autumn. Some were outstanding (the Onich Hotel springs to mind), others average. The most gruesome in my experience happened in a pseudo-baronial pile west of Newtonmore, which had only recently opened as a hotel and closed not long afterwards. Those who did not want to pay the full whack bothied at Jock's Spot a mile along the road. The hotel was freezing, the red wine was freezing and the schoolgirl waitresses did not know how to coordinate courses. The evening ended with a cold trudge back to Jock's Spot. At the Atholl Arms in Blair Atholl one year we had extremes of weather. The Saturday was a glorious ice-clear day which ended with the setting sun and rising moon casting pink, mauve and blue shadows across a snow-clad Beinn a'Ghlo (but those who returned early had used all the hot water). On Sunday a ferocious blizzard drove everyone home straight after breakfast. One member skidded into a snowplough and wrote her car off.

Batavaime

Mention of midsummer feasts brings up the key role of the club hut at Batavaime, near the head of Glen Lochay. This had been acquired some years earlier by informal agreement with the landowner John Cameron (for a time reputedly the largest sheep-farmer in Europe). The club had free use of the hut (a traditional but-and-ben) through a gentleman's agreement on condition we kept the building in good condition. After rehabilitation by the club, the hut had (slightly suspect) Calor gas lighting and cooking facilities and, for a time, piped running water, though the latter eventually succumbed to winter storms. There was an Elsan toilet in the attached byre. For a time Batavaime operated as a conventional club hut, available for rent to other clubs or interested groups (a useful source of club income). (A contemporary list of Scottish climbing huts lists Batavaime as 'Well equipped. Sleeps 12'). There was a locked gate at Kenknock three miles down the glen but the club was allowed to borrow a key so that one vehicle could drive up to every meet (limited to one meet per month?). Everyone else had to walk in. These restrictions were strictly enforced. On one occasion my girlfriend and I, staying on after an official meet had ended, thought we might do a seamless switch with the authorised vehicle. Unfortunately John Cameron, out shooting in the glen, noticed the switch and insisted on our turning round, parking outside the gate and walking back to the hut (in the rain).

Relations with the owner sometimes came under strain. Some joker (not I think from EMC) tried the wheeze of cutting the chain on the gate and adding his own personal padlock, hoping the estate would not notice. The estate did notice. A more serious incident followed when the club's resident alcoholic wanted to spend a weekend at the hut with some mates. Since they could not legitimately access a key and could not be bothered walking in, they tried to reach the hut by driving along the hydro road higher up the hill and then cutting down a rough track behind the hut. Their car went off the track and had to be retrieved by the estate, and EMC came close to losing the hut. Eventually a compromise was reached, stipulating that the hut was only for use by club members and (maybe) the occasional friend.

Over time use of the hut declined (there are only so many hills to climb around Glen Lochay) and around 2001 an EMC AGM voted to give up 'tenancy' of the hut. The precipitating factor was an MCoFS seminar on club huts, attended by the then EMC hut custodian, which among other issues discussed questions of legal liability. In various respects, notably the Calor gas system, the hut did not meet health and safety standards. It was doubtful if it could be upgraded by club members working on their own and the cost of having it done professionally was unthinkable. None of this mattered so long as everyone accepted the principle of 'come at your own risk' but the suggestion that individual club members might be legally liable for any injuries sustained stirred up a hornets' nest which the club's resident lawyers were unable to calm.

In the event some members were keen to retain the hut, so 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. The sale particulars (a remarkable work of fiction) promoted Batavaime as a highly desirable residence (it may or may not have been the home of the Gaelic poet Duncan Ban MacIntyre). The new owner, while not actually wanting to use the building, was unwilling to let it to anyone else, so links with the hut were finally severed.

Personal highlights

On one level the highlight of my career in EMC came when I was privileged to share a sleeping platform in the Raeburn hut with Sir Chris Bonington, but the night is memorable mainly for his loud snoring and constant fidgeting.

Inevitably there were shadows amid the brightness. I recall a fine summer evening camping at Steall meadows in Glen Nevis (another favourite haunt where, on another occasion, several tents were flattened by a gale in the middle of the night). Everyone had had a good day on the hill. Winham had struck lucky on some remote loch, catching several trout which he shared around. Someone had seen the mountain rescue heading out on an exercise. We sat around chatting and joking, sipping beer, watching idly as the mountain rescue reappeared wheeling a stretcher. All was well with the world. It was only an exercise. We only heard the story the next day. Some young kid from the south on England, on the first day of an Outward Bound course – his first ever day in the Scottish hills – had fallen off An Gearanach and been killed.

Another glorious Easter the club camped at Kinlochewe, on the long-vanished site at Anancaun. Most people wanted to cavort on the snow-covered Torridon peaks but I opted for a solitary remote backpack – Kinlochewe to Shenaval, Shenaval to Carnmore, passing below the cliffs of A'Mhaighdean to camp on the shores of the Fionn Loch, then over the hill to Letterewe and back along Loch Maree – a classic trip. Back at the campsite I awoke the next morning to find two policemen dismantling the tent next to mine. Its occupant – fortunately not an EMC member – had fallen off Liathach the previous day.

There are a few regrets. I still feel odd twinges of guilt at once deliberately abandoning a companion on the hill. On a September meet to Morvich I signed up to Alan B's scheme of bagging two remote northern tops of Sgurr nan Ceathramhnan – a chance to climb a favourite hill from a new angle and to tick off a missing Corbett on the way. Reaching the main summits was no problem but it was only looking down that I grasped the sheer quantity of descent and re-ascent involved. Alan was unshakable, so I promised to wait where I was and escort him home. After half an hour I knew this was a mistake: I was getting seriously cold, Alan was a long way short of his target and I certainly wasn't going to get my Corbett. So I turned tail for home. The light was failing as I crossed the Bealach an Sgairne and I completed the last couple of miles in the dark. Alan turned up several hours later. Having

successfully regained the main summit he had then absentmindedly gone south-east instead of south-west and only realised his error when he saw the lights of Alltbeithe hostel.

But the main regret is not having done more while I had the chance. There are so many highlights but there could have been more. If I had to pick only one it would probably be an Easter meet at the beach campsite at Achmelvich (coincidentally, my first meet as an independent car-driver). On the Saturday one party experienced the remoteness of Beinn Leoid, sprinkled with fresh snow, after hitching a lift up Loch Glencoul on a tourist boat. On the Sunday a slightly different party did a long traverse over Suilven from Inverkirkaig back to Lochinver. And heading home on the Monday I climbed Cul Mor with a Frenchwoman whom I had just met. Surveying the panorama from the summit out to the Summer Isles she commented 'There are many beautiful places in France, but nothing as beautiful as this'. In due course that Frenchwoman married another EMC member and became a naturalised Scot. *Ainsi va la vie.*