

www.schools-hebridean-society.co.uk

SCHOOLS HEBRIDEAN SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT

1978

Directors of the Schools Hebridean Co. Ltd.

R.P. Weatherly BA (Chairman)	
P.E. Caffery, BEd	M.W. Rayne, BSc, FRAS
J.F. Cullingford, ARCM	J.S.K. Round, HA
N.T. Deeley, BSc	P.N. Renold, BA
P. Liver, BA, DMS	J. Turner, BSc
J.M. Hayward, B Med Sci, BM, BS	G. Macpherson, MSc, NICE

Hon. Advisers to the Society
Bishop Launcelot Fleming, K.C.T.O., P.R.S.E.
S.L. Hamilton, MBE
D. Nethersole-Thompson
A.J. Abbott, MA, F.R.G.S.

The Schools Hebridean Society is wholly owned by the Schools Hebridean Company Limited, which is registered as a charity.

Report Editors Dave and Angie Crawford
12, Heights Road Upton, Poole Dorset



OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

DIRECTORS

Chairman	Roger Weatherly
Secretary	Peter Liver
Treasurer	Jim Turner
Director of Expeditions	Nick Deeley
Officer Appointments	John Cullingford
	Paul Caffery
	Mike Hayward
	Gavin Macpheraon
	Mark Rayne
	Phil Renold
	John Round

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

Transport	Gerald Smith
Equipment	Craig Roscoe
Projects	Donald Campbell
Boats	David Lennard-Jones
Conference	Mark Hopwood
Report	Dave and Angie Crawford
Recruitment and	
Secretariat	Mary Jones

EXPEDITION LEADERS 1978

Raasay	Roger Weatherly
South Rona	Mike Hayward
North Uist	Simon Atkinson
South Uist	Dave and Angie Crawford
Rhum	Humph Southall
Knoydart	Jim Turner

1979 EXPEDITIONS

Islay)	
Lewis (Mealiata))	
Jura)	Leaders to be appointed
Lewis (Tamanavay))	by Conference
Rhum)	
Loch Shiel)	

C O N T E N T S

	PAGE
Editorial	i
Chairman's Report	ii
Obituary	iii

Section One

Raasay Expedition 1978	1
South Rona Expedition 1978	10
North Uist Expedition 1978	21
South Uist Expedition 1978	29
Rhum Expedition 1978	41
Knoydart Expedition 1978	49

Section Two

The Rhum Goat Count	55
Condition of Trout	56
Breeding Shearwaters	58
Meteors	61
Distribution of Vegetation	63
Geology of South Rona	64
The Haggis	65
Common Shore Crab	67
Sea Shore donation	68
Mute Swans on Uist	70
Animal Size	73
Past Expeditions	74

- i -

EDITORIAL

In producing this year's Annual Report we have, in fact edited very little and have reproduced reports almost exactly as what they were wrote. Many of the problems in producing such a magazine arise from our inability to decipher some of the contributions - so apologies to those of you who find glaring errors in their articles.

As relative newcomers to the Society it has been very rewarding for us to produce this report and we hope that what it contains will give the impression we received when reading the contributions - that the SHS provides a wealth of opportunity which is used to the great advantage of those who Join its ranks.

Although this year hasn't produced as many projects as last year, those which were submitted (nearly all of which we have included) seem to our inexperienced eyes to have been worthwhile.

There are many interesting articles on general activities which contain some valuable insights into the general "feel" of an SHS expedition - certainly it seems to us that the warmth and camaraderie shine through.

Thank you to all those who sent In articles and to the leaders who re-typed quite a lot of material to make our job easier. We hope you will gain as much from reading this report as we have in assimilating it.

DAVE AND ANGIE CRAWFORD

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Every year the Society receives help from very many firms and individuals. So many In fact that it is not possible to mention them all here. We would, however, like to express our very sincere thanks to all those people without whose help our activities would not be possible.

The Editors would like to record their personal thanks to Mr. Alan Goddard of Marley Building Supplies Limited, who courageously lent them a brand new electric typewriter with which to type this Report.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Am I writing this the evenings are drawing in. The time has come to take a look of the 1978 expeditions and begin winter planning for 1979. By the time you receive this report it will be Christmas, and our leaders will be appointed. The Executive Officers will be sorting out food and equipment and Mrs. Mary Jones will be telling us how many places remain to be filled on each expedition.

Many people ask how the Society operates (we often ask this ourselves). Essentially there are two committees, the Board of Directors and an executive Management Committee, the former to make appointments and take policy decisions and the latter to administer the day to day running of the Society. Sometimes they meet Jointly - otherwise over a weekend - in all four or five times a year. I, of course, am chairman only of the Board; and since it is the Management Committee which does all the work I would like to say a big 'thank you' on your behalf to Nick Deeley, who has made such a tremendous contribution as MCM chairman this past year.

Of course, all the 'backroom staff' give freely (and I mean that) of their time and energy, and without them, expeditions could never take place. This is what makes us unique, and, incidentally, it explains why our fees are lower than our competitors! But no account of our activities can be complete without mentioning the lynch-pin of all things SHS - Mary. Mrs. Jones records, circulates, duplicates, remonstrates ... in short she is fantastic! Long may she continue.

Financially we remain solvent, under Jim Turner's leadership. However, with a lot of boating equipment to renew we have a great deal of expense this year, and the Appeal must work! In the belief that it will, we have REDUCED some of the fees to keep the expeditions open to as many people as possible. Please do your bit to support the Appeal, and ensure through recruitment that all the expeditions are filled.

You will find in the accounts of the 1978 expeditions the usual pleasures, experiences and recollections. It has been another good year. Admittedly the weather has not been kind, but them

sometimes grows in the bad weather a special kind of expedition spirit - and nothing can quench that. I hope you all heard Derek Cooper's excellent account of the Raasay expedition on Radio 4; this was later followed up with articles in 'World Medicine' and 'The Sunday Times'. It means places will be under pressure in 1979 - so if you haven't booked already, do so now. Which reminds me, I must see if John Abbott's son has applied...

ROGER WEATHERLY

OBITUARY ANTONY WHITEMAN

It is with the greatest regret that we report the death of Tony Whiteman in a road accident last September. This was a matter of a few days after his return from South Uist; he had also been on Jura in 1977.

Tony will be remembered for the great commitment he gave to the Society and for his enthusiasm. All who came across him will have been struck by his enjoyment of the islands and the great zest he had for life.

Tony will be sadly missed, especially by those who were with him on this year's expedition, to which he made an outstanding personal contribution, and we extend our deepest sympathy to his family.

Following discussions with his family, a special fund has been created, called The Antony Whiteman Fund, to perpetuate his memory. The income from this fund will be used to assist expedition members who would otherwise be unable to Join parties. Already many members of the Society have contributed, and further contributions should be sent directly to the Chairman}

Roger Weatherly, 10, Newborough, Wimborne, Dorset.

STOP PRESS

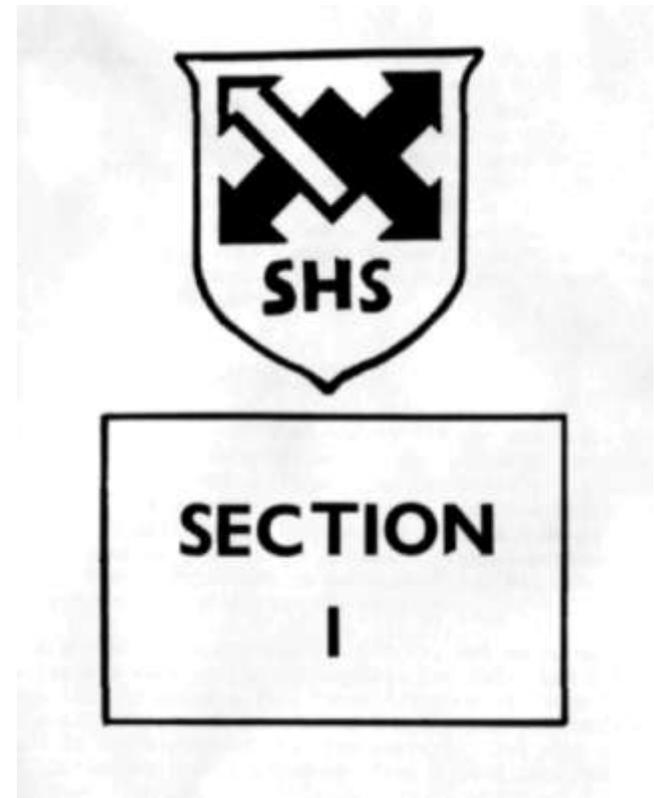
COLIN MOSS

As this report was being printed we learned of the death of Colin Moss in a shooting accident late in November 1978.

Colin was an active and enthusiastic S.H.S. expeditions:-, first as a member, from 1972, and later as an officer, from 1975. He represented a progression essential to the Society-from participant to organiser, member to assistant leader. On such people we depend and we are deeply saddened by his premature demise.

Colin was never more content than when directing or initiating outdoor pursuits, and his great strength and cheerful disposition made him a powerful element on every expedition he joined. In recognition of his contribution to the Society, and as a tribute, a division of the S.H.S. Discretionary Fund will be dedicated to Colin's memory; donations should be sent to the Chairman. We extend our sincere sympathy to Colin's parents and to his family- Bay we take his enthusiasm to heart and thus perpetuate his memory within the Society.

ROGER WEATHERLY



R A AS AY 1978

LEADER: Roger Weatherly

ASSISTANT LEADERS: Roger Butler, Mike Dodge, Jon Gooding, Paul Hillman, Alan Howard, Neil Hyde, Chris Venning, Richard Young.

MEMBERS: Tim Chappell, John Clayton, Quentin Elvidge, Rob Greenwood, Denis Hetier, Mark Jacombe, Jim McCarthy, Neil Marshall David Mason, Michael Meier, Tim Ratcliffe, David Rolinson, Simon Salt, Andrew Smith, Adrian Thomas, Peter Thorpe, David Thorpe, Stuart Walker, Ian Williams, Mark Woods, Richard Young.

LEADER'S REPORT

I can say without any doubt that Raasay '78 was the wettest expedition I have ever been on; we had one properly sunny day. But on that day we scored a 'first' for the Society - a half hour radio broadcast was recorded on location. This was later put on Radio 4 all over Britain on 18th October, and part of it was repeated on 'Pick of the Week'. It was a great experience, not only because Derek Cooper was so accommodating, but because the members responded splendidly to the occasion.

No-one can say what 'expedition spirit' is, but we certainly had it! The leaders were partly responsible for this, and I want to thank them all for being a fine team; everyone was very tired at the end of the expedition and the reason was the leaders' unflagging commitment to the expedition and the members. But what of the members? Listening to the broadcast tape I near time and again, "Before I come I couldn't do this now I can".

Who can value such growth and added confidence? No-one can cause them to happen - but when they do we are deeply affected, and we rightly feel our experience is the richer. I think we all knew the privilege of this specially 'Hebridean' experience on Raasay.

But philosophy apart (!) - what did we do? For a start there were six bivvies, which took quite a bit of doing. We also rounded up Calum's sheep, swam, played football, climbed, watched birds, walked endlessly, canoed, studied shore-line pollution, and entertained the village children for twenty-four (hectic) hours. As always on Raasay we were overwhelmed by the kindness of the islanders, especially Calum Macleod, Mrs. Rutherford and Mr. and Mrs. Hohler.

While we may have felt that we were somehow launching an invasion, we found ourselves received as welcomed guests!

It was fortunate that we had good canvas, for there was a nasty south-easterly gale which could have flattened the camp. The site is beautifully sheltered from the north and west, but faces east almost at sea level: Brochel Castle, some fifty feet above us on the cliff, must have been a miserable dwelling with the wind in this quarter. The sea was interesting too - in the morning it might be still and lifeless, but by 3.00 pm the shingle could be roaring up and down the beach. Inevitably the changeability of the weather limited our canoeing. However, in some respects it suited the ornithologists. The reversal of the wind brought in some interesting birds, and the generally low cloud gave us good, if fleeting, views of eagles and other birds of prey. Seals and otters were also visible from time to time.

Climbing was probably the most exciting activity - Neil and later Chris led this to great effect. Many people tackled it for the first time, and everyone enjoyed it. As Blake wrote (though not perhaps with this in mind) 'Great things are done when men and mountains meet'. Another activity which must be recorded is Rob's tremendous piece of engineering at the Hohler's cottage - the flight of stone steps must be the most durable (and possibly the most welcome) memorial we have ever left.

One more thing must be said, for there is a sadder side to Raasay life and we experienced this too. We were moved as Calum recalled the ninety inhabitants at the north end early in the century; today he is almost alone. We remembered in our quieter moments that the solitude and peace we enjoyed had been paid for in the past, sometimes with much suffering.

As we wandered one evening through the ruins at Screapadal, within view of our campsite, I know my mind turned to those who had once lived there - who doubtless had also seen otters and heard the sea on the shingle. What would they make of us? Taking a last look at our site when the transitory camp had gone, and seeing the obvious respect everyone had shown - no litter, no damage, no initials carved I imagined I heard them say "Well done" - or were they my own words in the wind?

IMPRESSIONS OF A FIRST EXPEDITION

I first discovered the SHS through looking at a notice-board -a thing I rarely do, despite the furious reprisals of outraged masters when I miss house cricket finals, soccer matches etc, etc. This particular notice-board sported a notice (surprise, surprise,) saying:

SCOTTISH HEBRIDEAN SOCIETY ADVENTURE HOLIDAYS IN THE HEBRIDES FOR FULL DETAILS SEE such and such a master

I approached the appropriate master and soon found myself the owner (or, at least, tenant) of a wad of information, including last year's report. I read through it, "H'mm," I thought,

"This sounds like FUN!" Oh, if only I'd known

Seriously though folks, I decided to apply - my first mistake.

Even when the three menacingly bulky 'circulars' (what a strange shape for a letter, I thought) arrived, saying "tick along the dotted line in block capitals" or "date of birth (where appropriate)" or "have you ever been to Scotland before? If not, which parts of Scotland?" I still didn't give up all hope and commit suicide on the spot - my second mistake!

And, as for actually going to Scotland - that was my biggest mistake of all!!!

My first impression of Raasay (or Rheaesseaigh as the locals spell it) was of emptiness - to get there I had to undergo a journey that included twelve, sleepless hours in a tiny train compartment, two ferry journeys and climbing half-way up Glamaig at Sconser (heaven knows why!). The whole island is practically deserted, particularly the north end where, naturally, we camped.

My first SHS meal was a shock for which I was totally unprepared -I will pass over most of it in silence, as I did when it was served up to me. However, I must mention the milk. It was a sort of off-grey (miles off-grey) colour, with little black splodges in it, "Ah!", I said, wisely. "Those little black splodges will be condensed milk which has super-condensed and therefore refuses to liquefy" "At least", I added, tasting it, "I hope so".

"Naw", said an earthy voice, "Them's midges."

I wonder how much condensed milk (plus little black splodges) it would take to turn the Inner Sound permanently off-grey? An interesting project for some intrepid future camper maybe.... Among the high points in SHS lunacy I might mention -grave digging above the camp site (Roger Weatherly tried to make us believe it was a rubbish tip, but we weren't to be fooled) swimming in ice that was so cold it had melted (Pardon? - Ed) sitting (all four of us) in a box (4' x 6'x2') while it poured down, eating midge sandwiches.

Many other memories occur to me - all happy. I had a great time, found a real friend and left half my kit on the island! Yet I wish there had been more of it to remember, since I had to leave after only a week - much as I then regretted and much as I still regret -due to prior commitments. However, next year I hope to return, to terrorise the inhabitants of Colonsay, or Rhum, or Eigg or wherever it may be, for two weeks, not just one.

Finally, may thanks to all, in particular to Roger Weatherly and his 'sidekick' Alan (Flasher) Howard, and everyone else on that camp, especially the other lads in Tent E; Michael (of course) Mike Dodge, Andy, Dave and even Quentin.

TIM CHAPPELL

P.S. Sorry, Quent!



BIRD REPORT FOR RAASAY

During the time spent on Raasay 68 species were seen by nine members of the expedition.

The island has many varied habitats, ranging from forests to moorland and cliffs. Golden eagles were seen on several occasions from Dun Caan and also once from Scrapperdeal. A merlin was seen near Inverariah flying low over the ground and a peregrine falcon was reported on Fladday.

Red-throated divers were heard most days and as many as three were seen at a time. Black-throated divers were well represented with counts as high as nine near Scrapperdeal.

Gannets were seen off-shore every day diving occasionally into the sea. Red Grouse were plentiful on the moorlands and snipe were on the marshy area north of Dun Caan. On the northern end of Fladday waders were quite numerous. Redshanks, curlews, whimbrels and oystercatchers were all present and a flock of twenty golden plovers landed there for some time.

The following is a complete list of the birds seen:

Black-throated diver	Snipe	Swallow
Red-throated diver	Curlew	Raven
Pulmar	Whimbrel (5)	Hooded crow
Gannet	Redshank	Great tit
Cormorant	Arctic Skua	Blue tit
Shag	Great b.b. Gull	Coal tit
Heron	Lesser b.b. Gull	Long tailed tit
Mallard	Herring Gull	Wren
Eider	Common Gull	Treecreeper (1)
Buzzard	Black headed Gull	Mistle thrush
Golden eagle (5)	Kittiwake	Song thrush
Peregrine (1)	Arctic tern (4)	Blackbird
Merlin (4)	Black guillemot	Wheatear
Kestrel	Guillemot	Stonechat
Red grouse	Rock dove	Winchat
Oystercatcher	Pigeon	Robin
Ringed plover	Skylark	Whitethroat
Golden plover	Meadow Pipit	Willow warblers
Goldcrest	Rock Pipit (2)	Greenfinch
Spotted flycatcher	Pied Wagtail	Twite
Dunnock	Grey Wagtail	Bullfinch
Chaffinch	Crossbill	Yellowhammer (1)
House sparrow	Starling	

IAN WILLIAMS & JIM HEARTLY

YOUTH AND EXPERIENCE (aging a bit) SEE SHS THROUGH TO
VICTORY

SHS 5.....RAASAY 4

And so Alan Howard, the axing midfield general (that's how he wanted me to describe him) is still to play in a losing SHS football team, but he pushed his luck this year against the big men of Raasay. The years are beginning to tell and those delicate touches that were highlighted in two historic victories over Colonsay were no longer visible - hardly surprising since the entire SHS team played in climbing boots! Indeed, controversy still rages as to whether Alan really was younger than the Raasay goalkeeper.

The kick-off was delayed when it became clear that extra policemen would have to be ferried over from Skye to deal with crowd trouble. These problems overcome, play commenced in gathering darkness.

Past his peak or not, that Howard bloke can still welly the ball when need be, but his goal that opened the scoring was more a case of aiming at a Raasay player, missing and accidentally kicking the ball (the sort of tactics employed at Oldham Athletic). Nevertheless, it was 1-0. The goals then came freely - 1-1: 2-1 (scored by Jake): 2-2: 2-3: 3-3 (scored by Quentin) and 3-4.

Ten minutes left and Alan Howard's unbeaten record is at stake. This is where I could drone on with loads of ego-boosting comments about how I scored two goals and rescued the SHS from the dead. All I'll say is that I scored two last year as well - one for each team! This year though they were both in the right end and champagne celebrations were in order well into the night.

But what is football without the supporters? Here Jim deserves a mention for shouting himself hoarse even after everyone else had been lured back to the schoolhouse at the thought of the evening meal. And where else could you have heard one team talking in Gaelic, one in English and some strange supporter shouting happily "Allez France, Allez France!" Stupid boy!

Team: Ian Williams, Alan Howard, Mark Woods, Roger Butler, Quentin Elvidge, Mark Jacombs and Giles Hetier.

(No, we didn't have four players sent off - it was seven-a-side.)

ROGER BUTLER

FOREST BIVVY

LEADER: Roger Weatherly

BOYS: David Mason, Simon Salt, Adrian Thomas, Dave Thorpe.

We set off from the Brochel campsite on Tuesday at about 10.00 am. We walked down towards Inverarish and at around 4.00 pm arrived at the large picnic table by the forest. After a good rest we decided to pitch the tents there, but the ground was too hard and stony. We retreated into the forest a little way and, in a clearing barely big enough; we pitched the two lightweight tents.

Salty, who wasn't feeling too good, turned in early, while the two David's, Roger and I went in search of Alan's bivvy site - it was easily found by a small loch. We couldn't find anyone and so we went down to the shop to store up with provisions. Then we returned to the table near our tents and had a mean supper of stewed tomatoes, meatballs and powdery potato. Just as we were clearing away we heard whistling - we thought it might be an emergency call as it was coming from within the woods, but after a while it stopped.

At about 10.00 pm David, Dave and I decided to turn in, Roger, however, went to look for some Blue Tits. He returned twenty minutes later with the District Nurse and her dog, Sally. He had met them coming up the road looking for us and demanding a cup of coffee. David, Dave and I got up when Roger returned and it was while we were pulling on our boots that we again heard the whistling. This time Roger timed it; there was a definite six blows to a minute -the international distress signal.

The Nurse got a little frantic at the sound of the whistle, she dragged Roger into her car (! - Ed) and sped off down the road in search of whoever was lost. The three of us waited by the side of the road for about two hours. Eventually they returned - they had found no-one and had discovered that Alan's camp was deserted.

The four of us decided that it would be pointless to go and find the "whistler" in the blackened forest.

Salty was better the next morning and so, without looking at Alan's camp, we packed our gear and walked along an old track through the forest to the old mine. The mine was abandoned just after the first world war and had been excavated by German prisoners of war. The main part of it was in two sections, up the hill and at the bottom. There were two shafts both of which, unfortunately, were flooded.

We could see some of the old narrow gauge lines which the trucks used to use and the mountings for winding gear which brought them up. We returned to camp at about 5.00 o'clock to find that Alan's bivvy had returned early due to illness, leaving the tents behind. (Meanwhile, what of the phantom whistler? - Ed)

ADRIAN THOMAS

CLIMBING ON RAASAY

I think that most people's recollection of climbing will be a successful trip on the rocks by the campsite. This involved climbing up a Jug-covered slab to a tree and then descending. An unusual sight included two leaders having a go, Paul will no doubt remember being tied-off half way up. Gymnastics were also employed by Denis and Gilles on the overhang by the slab.

Apart from this introduction a reasonably sized crag was found at Maell Bragg, about three miles from the site. This provided a real climbing situation, with a more serious and exciting position. Two crash lines were climbed with a grade of Severe 4a, and were renamed 'le premiere' and 'regurgitated protoveg'. A notable pastime was the various attempts to see who could hit the rucksacks with boulders!

Despite the small amount that was done, due to my laziness with regard to the weather, I hope that everybody will have another go on their next expedition.

NEIL HYDE



HEBRIDEAN ETIQUETTE

1. How to show your appreciation of the food

(Not usually applicable until expeditioners have been free from civilisation for at least a week and have forgotten what real food is like)

- a) Scraping the plate for at least an hour after the meal is finished.
- b) Chewing the cup to squeeze out the last delicious drops.
- c) Refraining from throwing the cook in the wet pit.

2. How to show your appreciation of the food

(Applicable at all times)

- a) Throwing it very obviously in the wet pit.
- b) Throwing the cook very obviously in the wet pit.
- c) Using it to mend holes in the tent.

3 Table Manners

- a) Always use a spoon to pick out the midges.
- b) Scraping the plate is polite; licking it is rude.
- c) Offensive subjects (such as projects) should not be discussed at table.
- d) Do not remove sheep ties while eating.

4 Personal Hygiene

- a) Don't wash - a layer of dirt prevents sheep ticks and midges biting.
- b) Keep away from people who do wash - they are still civilised.
- c) Keep your feet as far away from yourself as possible.
- d) Clean all leaders at the end of the expedition.

SOUTH RONA 1978

LEADER: Dr. Michael Hayward

ASSISTANT LEADERS: John Cullingford, David Ellis, Mark Hopwood (CA), Dick Light, Jamie O'Brien, Ray Snook, Richard Williams.

MEMBERS Mark Anderson, Stephen Ashmore, Timothy Bennett, Richard Bissell, Richard Bradshaw, Timothy Brown, Christopher Dalton, William Frost, Richard Gardiner, Simon Graham, Antonia Graziano, Robert Hester, Simon Lorrimer, Michael Moorhouse, Nigel Priddey, Ian Rolinson, Aladair Saunders, Iain Scarbrough, Paul Taylor, Paul Thirwell, Stephen Van Wyck, Mark West, Raymond West, David Wilkinson, Jason Williams, Michael Young.

LEADER'S RECOLLECTIONS

The scene: The Committee Room, University College, London.

"Well gentlemen, I think I've found a leader for this one,"

"But Rog, I don't know whether I shall be able to have the time off,

I'll be starting a new job then, and, in any case, I shall be far too busy this year to do all the paperwork!"

"Well gentlemen, I think that confirms the situation, Mike will be leading the South Rona expedition."

The scene: The Board Room, Sheffield Royal Hospital. Grey haired consultants and wizened professor's peer over their half-moon gold rimmed glasses.

"Well Dr. Hayward, we've asked you a lot of questions, would you like to ask us anything?"

"Yes sir, if you give me the job can I have the first two weeks off to go to an uninhabited island called South Rona?"

Surprisingly enough, I got both.

The Journey from Boston gave us all a chance to get to know each other and as usual tested the leader's panic threshold. "Will Mr. David Crawford, leader of the South Rona expedition please report to the area manager's office". Ever get that feeling of deja vu? Twelve hours and several copies of Playboy later we arrived at Inverness where we indulged in that great SHS tradition - "The Last Breakfast".

The Inverness to Kyle line is in a way an epitome of Hebridean life. Ever battling against bureaucracy and threatened closure as well as the natural hazards in the harsh winter months, time matters not here (or even less than it normally does to British Rail) as the guard leans out of his window and passes the time of day with one of the inhabitants of those hamlets with charming unpronounceable place names. There are no platforms here, so out comes the step-ladder. We clatter over a brimming brook, through the cutting and there it is - Loch Carron in its full splendour, a sight that even makes the card players look up, the hush only being broken by the pop of a Newcy Brown tin.

In 1716 when Martin Martin wrote his 'Description of the Western Islands of Scotland' he said of South Rona - "This little isle is the most unequal rocky piece of ground to be seen anywhere; there's but very few acres fit for digging, the whole is covered with long heath and some mixture of grass. Most of the rocks consist of the Hectic Stone and a considerable part of 'em is of a red colour. There is a bay on the south-west end of the isle." As we entered this on a rather cold and wet afternoon things didn't seem to have changed all that much and as many of us remarked during the expedition, it seems incredible that any community managed to survive here at all. Not that we had that much time for sightseeing on that afternoon as we unloaded the equipment off the 'Puffin' across a foot gap and onto, an extremely slippery, seaweed covered Jetty. "See you on Friday 11th" shouted the skipper as he slammed the throttles into reverse - "No, No!", I cried, "Thursday 10th!", but my words were drowned by the engines. Worried looks on the lads' faces.

South Rona is by no means a Chairman's site and from the roll-on-roll-off camp at Tobar Fuar, the trek to Dry Harbour came as a bit of a shock to some. That first night resembled the Everest expedition's march through Nepal - a long line of people with poles, tents, ground sheets and food carried high as they navigated the 1¼ miles and 270 feet to the camp site. The following morning our efforts were rewarded as we looked out over the Icelandic's to Skye. The air was so clear that even without binoculars the pinnacles below The Storr could be well seen. Despite the work that was still to be done, what else could we do except sit and survey this wonderful bay which was to provide us with fish, seals, gannets, porpoises and even killer whales.

A leader's work is done when the expedition arrives on the site (P.N. Renold - Colonsay '75) and with such an accomplished set of leaders this was largely true. The never tiring Dick was out nearly every day showing people the ropes (groan - Ed) whilst Ray maintained a fairly good likeness to a drowned rat for much of the time!

People explored the tidal pond, the tern colony, the various ruined villages, and the consecrated cave with its makeshift pews, alter stone and font. The Wilkinson/Wayward bird hide, equally Heath Robinson, nonetheless enabled us to obtain a magnificent close up view of a shag's nest and the mother feeding the chicks whilst reminding us that herring gulls are just as avid egg collectors as humans but for different reasons. Another different but remarkable sight must have been coming down off the cliffs in the mist of the early morning to make out the outlines of the Naval base with its huge portakabin, sheds, pier, slipway, helicopter pad, all illuminated by the orange glow of neon street lamps. Come back Alasdair MacLean - all is forgiven!

The expedition will be as much remembered for events that took place around the camp site itself. Who will forget finding a pan full of yesterday's left-overs deemed by John as suitable for "pepping up" the soup of the day, or his pizzas on the last night (An SHS first I believe). The everlasting competition between Dave and Paul for the biggest fish (3½ lb Pollack) provided us with a fourth course to nearly every meal. After a disastrous first night our singing, again under John's instruction, improved immensely as did the standard of bridge, although I don't think the calling ever came up to green beige card table (again another SHS first). Trying to balance on the Ashmore-Saunders furniture occupied most of us for many a happy hour; however, more craftsmanship was displayed in the few repairs that we undertook to the manse to make it more habitable both for ourselves and, hopefully, future SHS residents.

The others have already left for Big Harbour and I am sitting here surveying a deserted camp site. Above the call of the oyster-catchers I can hear the sound of the inflatable coming back for the last load of equipment and I know that all too soon these reflections will become almost surrealistic as we clatter over the points back into Euston. We have left behind bleached grass, muddy patches, smoke crisps from the end of a fire, and one pair of grey socks. In a year the land will have forgotten us; but for how long will we remember our experience?

MIKE HAYWARD

SOUTH RONA NATURE REPORT 1976



In this report I am going to describe, with the aid of illustrations, the observations made on the South Rona trip.

The boat journey from Kyle to Rona got underway after loading (and chasing strays) and proved quite interesting. Black and common guillemots were everywhere, quite a few of them with their single offspring. They seemed quite alarmed, only diving when the boat was almost on top of them. Fulmars, cormorants and the occasional gannet were seen flying past, plus the general array of black-headed, common, herring and lesser and greater black-backed gulls.

On reaching the campsite the first think that took my eye was a small colony of common gulls (about six or seven pairs) and with them some oystercatchers. Whilst I was watching the colony a butterfly passed and settled nearby; on closer inspection it turned out to be a painted lady which later proved to be a fairly common species of the island, along with small tortoiseshell gatekeepers and what I believe were meadow browns. I sighted a small tortoiseshell on a patch of nettles in the campsite; on taking a closer look I discovered it was laying eggs, which rather surprised me as it was late in the season. The rare find of the expedition was a fritillary, I have no idea which type. I was kicking myself for not knowing more about lepidoptery and for having no books on the subject with me, but to the best of my knowledge I Identified it as a Queen of Spain.

Getting back to birds, in the hills, as always in the Hebrides, were meadow pipits flocking in the rocks and cliffs as the house sparrow does around our roof-tops. Wrens, Willow warblers, robins, blackbirds, blue and great tits and chaffinches were the common occupants of the woodlands which covered every well sheltered valley on Rona. Curlew were spotted along with long-tailed tits and golden eagles - I didn't see all three species which maddened me somewhat. Stonechats were reported heard but I regarded this with some doubt and, being over confident at the time, I shot someone down in flames, saying that stonechats didn't come this far, only later to be shot down myself with the evidence that they do - sorry Mike! I still believe though, that he and others heard wheatears because they have a very similar call plus the fact that stonechats prefer fields rather than bogs and rocks. Hooded and carrion crows were common and often confused with the common buzzards which hunted the island mostly to the north.



On the first Sunday Dave and myself led a bivvy to what became known, regrettably though inevitably, as 'Tern Island'. The intention was to find out what types and numbers of young and adult birds were on the island. I had the intention of walking across, but discovered that the tide did not go out far enough. The plunge that followed was cold and appropriate though unprintable comments were raised by Dave and myself on entering the icy Atlantic. On reaching the island we found many dead chicks and broken eggs, evidence of the pair of herring gulls which had been hanging around with their one oversized chick, constantly chased and dive-bombed by the terns. There were both common and Arctic terns, the only visible difference being the common's black-tipped beak. Sea urchin and crab shells lay among the rocks near the shore, evidence of gull's feeding, and the odd godling which a tern had dropped. The other interesting find was a plaice, which we tried to catch (unsuccessfully).

On another bivvy to the north of the island I saw two birds that I had not seen elsewhere on the island. One was a pied wagtail and the other a twite. I did not identify the latter at first and it was at the back of my mind for the rest of the expedition, and it was only on the journey home, when I was looking through one of my books, that I came across it. The way it sat, redpoll like, only without the red forehead, it could be nothing else but a twite. Another bird not previously seen on the expedition was a great skua, which I sighted on the return trip to Kyle.

Well, I could go on forever writing on the things seen and found, and I wish I could for it was an interesting trip, but time and space cut me short. So, I would just like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their friendship and help - many thanks.

JAMIE O'BRIEN

Snippets: "Alisdair's a very articulate speaker isn't he? -Just like a lorry."
"Here, these new tools are good: how's this thing work?"

CLIMBING ON SOOTH RONA

South Rona provided plenty of opportunities for rock climbing; in fact there were only a few days when some of us weren't out on the rocks. This was facilitated by having several spots near the camp suitable for climbs, some to the north of the site and some on the gully on the path leading down to Big Harbour. There were good abseiling points here and on one occasion even the expedition leader was enticed out to come and show us how it should be done!

The climbing bivvy was a great success. We started out at midday with the clouds very grey above us, looking like it would inevitably rain during the day. Once we had pitched camp on the southern part of the island the clouds opened. There was nothing for it but to attempt at least one climb that day, so Dick Light took myself, Nigel Pretty and Rich Bissel to try a fairly easy first climb. The rest kept warm by the fire. As we finished and returned to the bivvy site another group would go out to the face. This worked well until it came to Antonio's turn, by which time he was so wet that he refused to go out and climb, and who could blame him?.* That night we held the Solitaire championships, but everyone was tired and soon asleep, helped by the pitter-patter of rain on the flysheets.

Next morning the sky was clear and everybody completed two or three more climbs ending in a difficult overhang which most people managed to complete. Mark Hopwood, who said he hadn't done much climbing before, was very good and newcomers like Paul Thirlwell and Rich Gardiner soon learned the correct moves by watching Mark and instructions from Dick. The rock was extremely sharp; fortunately Mike's services were not required, but many people had blisters by the end of the day. Belaying became difficult when the weather turned against us once more, but this was soon overcome by having people relay the messages. Nobody fell, but some had to be lowered off the face after getting stuck half-way up! Altogether a great bivvy and enjoyed by all.

We had started the expedition by reconnoitring the island for suitable climbing areas. There are lots of crags which we noted down but didn't have time to try out and besides these we feel that future expeditions will be able to find others.

IAN ROLINSON AND DICK LIGHT

THE SURVEYING BIVVY - OR HOW NOT TO UNDERTAKE ONE

On the morning that we left we had an early start at 12.00 o'clock and staggered off under the load of our packs heavily weighed down by a cunning ploy of the CA to get rid of excess tins of tomatoes. At Big Harbour we were in need of a three-quarters of an hour rest and, having filled our water bottles, we trudged off towards Doire na Guaile carrying three 'small' marquee poles and a dozen large pegs for the surveying. As we walked on the conversation gradually dwindled due to exhaustion and the concentration needed to avoid the bogs that conveniently crossed the path every twenty yards or so. At last we saw the tents of the party that were also using this site and, spurred on by the sight, increased our pace to a staggering three miles per hour. We arrived just as the teapot was being emptied.

The other party left and we were left up to our own devices. It was a superb camp site; the tents encircled a central bog and we were perched on grass hummocks surrounded by knee-deep heather. The water supply was a quarter of a mile away and so very convenient for washing.

We decided to leave the survey until the next day, and went to bed early hoping for an early rise. After our midday breakfast the following morning, or should I say afternoon, and the hike to the stream to wash up, we didn't feel much like doing a full scale survey and decided to do it from the camp site. Just as we began the midges came out in force and so we were reluctantly forced to take cover in our tents. We attempted it again in the evening, but the mist rolled in from the sea and the midges got worse. In an attempt to discourage them we lit a fire of wet heather, but then all agreed we would rather die of insect bites than suffocate from smoke. After this hard day's work another early night was called for. We woke up a little after sunrise, 11.43 am. The sugar had by now run out, and because of the risks of possible hypoglycaemia we thought it better not to attempt any more than the walk back to Dry Harbour.

Just before we left, after striking camp, we brewed a nice cup of cold, sugarless tea and, greatly refreshed, waltzed off, sad to leave the site after this enjoyable (? almost chairman-like) bivvy.

TIM BROWN

FIVE GO TO DOIRE NA GUAILE by Enid Blyton

The bivvy consisted of four members and the leader, who was to have been Ray Snook and this is how the bivvy got its name. Unfortunately the weather took a turn for the better and Ray decided to make use of this to do some canoeing. Mike 'Obelisk' Hayward most valiantly took his place.

Having arrived and set up camp Nige made his mark, this time as our cook, and prepared a strange meal by cooking everything in the one tin allotted to us by the SHS equipment officer. Fortunately the sponge pudding could be cooked in its own tin, otherwise it would probably have gone in as well. The walk to perform the natural consequences of this meal led to the spotting of grey seals down in the bay a half-mile away and we went to investigate. What an evening, sitting there on the rocks with nothing to disturb us except the noise of the oystercatchers, and the splendid view across to Applecross and the hills behind Loch Torridon in the background. The seals gave us an hour's entertainment before Will and Nige decided they would go in and join them, when they quite sensibly submerged from view.

Our interest then turned to beachcombing - Mike becoming almost ecstatic when he found a fish box which would increase the load he had to carry back to Dry Harbour. He was also crowned with the leader's hat, an oil rig safety helmet still in remarkably good condition. After sitting round the fire and consuming seconds of sponge pudding we turned in for the night.

The following day, having explored the southern tip of the island we were taking one of Mike's infamous 'short cuts' when crawling round a ledge on an otherwise vertical cliff face, we bumped into a shag's nest about ten feet in front of us. We watched the mother and her chicks for a minute or two but then the mother began to get restless and we retreated but came back a couple of days later fully armed with materials to make a hide.

We started back in the late afternoon. Mike having actually added to his already overladen frame with the fish box, some drift wood and Rich Bissell's sleeping bag. This brought it up to the Hayward standard (i.e. not less than 501 lbs), but not quite up to the 74 lbs of tinned tomatoes which he carried from Big to Dry Harbour for which he was awarded the L. Fleming Prize for Insanity on Expeditions!

JMH from an original theme by TIM BENNETT

BOTTLE COLLECTING ON SOUTH RONA

South Rona turned out quite a few nice bottles, amongst which were twelve white pot preserve jars which are now selling in my local antique shop for about two pounds. Also found were two very nice ink bottles, a 'liquid coffee*' bottle and an extremely old fashioned Lea & Perrins bottle.

They were all found at the settlement near the campsite, the villages at Braig and Doire na Guaile have not been searched. The bottles are difficult to date. The population of Dry Harbour declined rapidly after 1900 and the final exodus took place in 1921 when seven families moved from Dry Harbour to the adjoining Island of Raasay. This makes the collection at least fifty-seven years old and some items may be much older.

All this work did not go without toll on Mike's suturing equipment.

CHRISTOPHER DALTON



ORIENTEERING ON RONA

On this expedition we had two events, the first one being seven miles long and the second four - all this on an island only six miles long by one mile wide! Both were run in teams of two and just to make sure we enjoyed them Mike made them compulsory.

The first took place in the area between the two harbours and had ten check-points which could be visited in any order. Some teams found navigation no problem since most of the markers could be spotted from 300 metres - through binoculars! The winners were Robert and Paul Thirlwell.

The second course was held so that Tim Bennett and myself could substantiate our claim that 'we could win the next one'. It was held to the north of Dry Harbour in an area technically more demanding than the first because of the undulating terrain and lack of any paths. A novelty on this course was that three of the leaders competed and surprisingly managed to finish, though with some difficulties on the way round! Binoculars were prohibited on this occasion much to the chagrin of some; Will Frost and Paul Taylor gave up at No. 3 and then, trying to find their way back to camp, ended up at marker No. 8! Checkpoint 11 fooled a lot of people because it wasn't where it was marked on the map (absolute drivel - JMH). Despite still being ahead at No. 6, Tim and I were just pipped at the post by Ray Snook and Mike Young (and, boy oh boy, we never ceased to hear about it! - JMH) with Ian and Steve coming third.

Some of us are worried about our amateur status after these events, since we accepted prizes - a Bar Six for the winners of the first event and half a block of Dairy Milk for the first two teams in the second event.

Don't tell the A.A.A. (or the CAA).

ALI SAUNDERS

Despite Tim and Ali's bad luck they did display a remarkable amount of physical fitness and ability to read a map and compass. Three miles (as the crow flies) and 1000 ft. of climbing in 73 minutes is very good going, especially in that sort of terrain and when wearing heavy walking boots. Well done, after all you were beaten by a Royal Naval Observer!

MIKE HAYWARD

CETACEAN SURVEY

A survey of whales, porpoises and dolphins in the North Atlantic is being carried out to provide information on their distribution and movement. My brother and I wanted to help, if we could, with this survey organised by the Department of Zoology, University of Aberdeen, so we wrote off to get the necessary forms and information. As it turned out, our expedition was the only one to report any sightings as the Raasay expedition, two weeks later, was unlucky.

In all six different sightings were reported and a total of 6 common porpoises, 6 killer whales and 5 dolphins were seen.

The first sighting was of porpoises and dolphins off the west coast, then later three porpoises were seen playing in the bay by the Naval Station at the north end of the island. The final ones were the most exciting when killer whales were seen moving south down the east coast, fountains of spray coming from their blowholes.

MICHAEL YOUNG

CONVERSATION

"No, we're not the Scouts...Well, we're a funny sort of organisation called the Schools Hebridean Society. No, nobody ever has. No, not one particular school, the apostrophe goes after the S, we take people from all over the country. Yes - absolutely splendid. Well we go canoeing, climbing, fishing, orienteering, bird watching: indeed, it does keep then out of mischief. Yes there are a lot of tents but there are 34 of us... Oh, I'm sorry about that, our wet pit is rather near the path I suppose, but I'm sure little Johnny will recover. Oh, he thought he'd like to come on one next year, hang on, I'll just give you this address in South Devon. No, I wouldn't say that the lighthouse is exactly just around the corner - yes the Navy is rumoured to be on the island somewhere. And those are the walkie-talkies you communicate with the folks back on board --mmm super. You wondered what those orange tents were inside that ruin over there? - oh well, never mind. So you've got to be going now, yes isn't it awful, I quite agree, if you don't start the cocktails before one then you don't sit down to eat 'til at least half-past-two

MIKE HAYWARD

NORTH UIST 1978

LEADER: Simon Atkinson

ASSISTANT LEADERS: Ian Arrow, Nick Copley, Neil Cornick,
Micky McCoy, Steve Randall, Ian Shortman, Pat Thompson.

MEMBERS: Tim Baxter, Simon Bell, David Bentley, Paul Bloomfield, Craig Butler, Robbie Byrne, Richard Cleaver, Kevin Cooper, Paul Evans, Andrew Fawthrop, Andrew Griffin, Philip Jones, Geoffrey King, Austin Madeleine, Ian Marshall, Matthew Myers, Matthew Nettleton, Paul Nichols, Billy Orr, Gary Robinson, Eamonn Thompson, Dominic Townshend, Douglas Warburton, Tony Ward, Gareth Woolmington, Nicholas Young.

LEADER'S REPORT

Steve Randall and myself started out from a very sunny Taunton railway station - " I hope that this is the sort of weather that we'll be having on the Uists. " I said, hopefully. Whoops! I should have kept my big mouth shut.

We arrived at Euston and to my great surprise everybody was present and even more surprised to find that all the sleeper bookings were correct. This was too good to be true, something had to go wrong, it always does. It did - we arrived at Crewe to find that the train from Bristol, bringing an expedition member, was two hours late. A message was left for him to carry on to Glasgow and off we went. Amazingly he arrived in Glasgow only five minutes after us.

The majority of the party arrived at Eaval cottage at midday but because of the tides the equipment did not arrive until about six in the evening. Neil, Steve and Pat had the unenviable job of entertaining the lads for six hours and due to the obvious lack of food I understand that the price of sweets became somewhat inflated.

One of the most "popular" pastimes commenced on the second day on site - swimming in the Loch was invigorating and certainly woke one up in the morning. Fishing also began and a steady stream of midget trout started to appear. The most unusual catch was a spinner that had been lost the previous day, the new spinner was used immediately, rewarding the finder with a trout first cast.



Although the weather was rather disappointing we managed quite a lot of activity, everybody climbed Eaval at least once, but I think Steve Randall probably holds the record even if his favourite phrase was "Oh - the rock is much too wet for climbing." I think that very nearly every expedition member managed to either canoe, sail or travel in some sort of boat, some members never seemed to be away from the water. Ian Marshall deserves special mention for his marvellous display of how to sit and paddle in a canoe which was the wrong way round. The canoeists were certainly kept on their toes, especially when the leader decided to give them an initiative test when he and one other leader walked to the other side of the sea loch. The canoeists probably wouldn't have bothered but for the fact that they had been for provisions.

The highlight for most people on the expedition were the extended bivvies. I shall never forget the "torture" of the round-North-Uist-road-walk, each one of the fourteen participants managed to obtain sore feet (usually in the form of blisters), sore ankles and sore knees. Road walking is particularly gruelling, especially when Messrs. Rudall, Cornick and Fawthrop set off at a terrific pace. A most memorable experience - particularly waking up at three in the morning in a bivvy bag, soaking wet and freezing cold. Pat Thompson, however, seems to "enjoy" this activity.

While this walk was taking place Nick, Ian, Ian and McB were entertaining the remainder of the expedition on a canoe /Harvey Wallbanger / Walking /Sunbathing (? - Ed) bivvy. Sleeping in water under the sand was a favourite pastime enjoyed by many of the lads.

As in recent years cricket was played and enjoyed, but there was a new activity which became most popular - Hebridean Football. The "ball" was a rather large buoy (much larger than Kevin Cooper) and eight rather bemused leaders took on twenty-six blood thirsty young men. Needless to say a good time was had by all.

Veil* the two weeks passed by all too quickly but everybody seemed to have enjoyed their experience on this marvellous island. I would Just like to thank the lads, the hardworking leaders, the SHS administrators and the Islanders for making a most splendid expedition possible.

Final notes for all expedition members: -

- 1) Tents usually do leak when the doors are left open when it is raining.
- 2) Always get into a canoe the right way round.
- 3) Never fall asleep on ferries.

ORNITHOLOGY REPORT

The birdwatching on the expedition was excellent, although we did not seem to have the usually high number of birdwatchers. We covered large areas of the island and were rewarded by fine views of hen harrier, golden eagle and short-eared owl. All the birdwatching done was Just casual. The time of year made it unsuitable for a good project to be carried out.

The first major camp outing was a stroll up Eaval. This was greeted with a grunt of complete exhaustion from some of the "larger" members of the party. Once on the top we were able to enjoy a great view of most of the island and Harris. The wind on top of Eaval was so strong that some of the smaller members had to be tied to rocks to prevent them blowing away. Several ravens were observed and they showed complete control over the wind and were able to utilise it to their own advantage. We could also see several pairs of swans on Loch Obissary.

The next trip undertaken by the birdwatchers was along the coast of the bay and out to Bugh Moraig on the coastline. On the way we saw many herons which were all fishing among the large beds of seaweed. There was also a large number of shags hanging their wings and several black guilemots well out to sea. As we neared Bugh Moraig an eagle came out of the mist. This was a very large bird, probably a female, and we were able to watch it for a short time. When we eventually reached the coast (it took some time) we sat down and looked out to sea. There was a large number of gannets, (adult and immature), fishing. Several were seen to dive from great heights straight into the water. An incredible sight. There was also a large number of herring gulls present and several pairs of fulmars nesting on the rock face.

The ornithologists also undertook an eagle hunt. This is now a traditional society jaunt, usually ending with the same result. We set out with high spirits which were soon dampened by a heavy shower of rain. We did, however, get a glimpse of an eagle disappearing into the mist. There was also a brood of kestrels and merlins present in close proximity. This area was just below the Eaval peak and well round Loch Obissary. Two eyries were seen but neither appeared to have been used this year. We also visited a cave at the far end of Loch Obissary. All the caves seem to be used by large numbers of rock doves. There was evidence of several nests in the cave we visited. On the return journey two female hen harriers were seen.

Several birdwatchers were present on the round-North Uist-road walk, which was a great experience for all members. Bivvying out at nights was uncomfortable but definitely bearable. All members who went on this walk should feel proud of what they achieved - it was certainly hard-going.

Our first stop was at Balranald bird reserve. This area of North Uist is really good for birdwatching. It is particularly good for wild fowl and waders. There are also a great many birds stopping in the area while passing through on migration. The area is made up of two main parts: marshland and machair. While there we saw grey-lag geese, mallard, teal and large numbers of mute swans. We also saw turnstone, redshank, dunlin, sanderling and curlew.

We were also lucky enough to see hen harriers which come off the moor to hunt on the machair. Large numbers of corn buntings were present but the corn crakes had left (unfortunately). Mr. Charles Pickup, the warden, gave us a talk on the island and was very helpful. To him we extend our thanks.

We saw a pair of buzzards near Lochmaddy. Many divers were seen on the walk and around the campsite in general. Identification is very difficult while these birds are flying, but I would have thought that most were red-throated divers. While lying in our bivvy-bags we heard greenshanks regularly - they seem to have accumulated in this area.

I think that this expedition had a lot to offer and that most members gained something out of it and I hope they learned a lot. I know I did.

PAT THOMPSON

Some leader' observations: "If you lot had brains you'd be dangerous"

"The Society Chairman: is he still operational?"

THE FISHING RACE

After a certain amount of stick from the leaders over the amount of trout being caught it was decided that they should put their rods where their mouths were. So, the 1978 North Uist fishing race was staged, leaders against men!

The choice of Lochs was to be ours - with the rules being anything, any size, anyhow. We chose the acclaimed Loch ne Cabin (I think) which is connected to the big salt water Obissary where all the fish are supposed to be. We reached the Loch at about 3:00 pm with everybody agreeing to stop fishing at 5:00.

We set up around the opening with Obissary while the leaders went on a bit. The choice of tackle was wide and varied. We used ledger and worm, spinner and fly while the leaders used spinner with the unknown Micky McCoy using imitation crabs on a handline. He didn't catch any fish, but had a long sleep.

We nearly went into an early lead with Dave Bentley, who unfortunately lost a monster when his fly broke. However, first blood went to the leaders when they pulled out a mammoth five-inch, 3 ozs brown trout. The celebrations could be heard for miles and everybody thought we would face yet another humiliation.

This must have woken us up, as at about five past four Gary Robinson struck what to us was gold. He reeled in a nice sized brownie off a nearby reed bed. When he caught another in the same spot ten minutes later it was decided to congregate around this bed with ledger and worm and send the spinners further on down.

This tactical change proved to be the right one as Matt Nettleton reeled in two. Matt Myers one, Smiler two and myself getting two. The final tally was nine fair-sized trout to us and one to the leaders.

A later visit to the Loch proved to be even more profitable (and quieter) with Pat Thompson pulling out six, myself eight and Dominic Townsend one,

PAUL NICHOLS

SAILING ON NORTH UIST

This year's expedition on North Uist started with something we were to do a lot of - moving the Harvey Wallbanger. To get her to Baymore from Loch Eynort we had to bodily lift her onto the lorry transporting the rest of the gear, not an easy job but the rest of the expedition promised to be plain sailing (groan).

The first trip made in Harvey, once we had towed it with the rest of the equipment to Eaval, was back to Baymore for the missing gas supply. This proved to be a very hairy trip navigating around rocks and islands and over reefs and sandbanks. We were to make it another three times. However, the real sailing was still to come.

Faced with the prospect of a tidal loch which dried out almost completely, we decided to take the Harvey overland. A couple of hundred yards north of the campsite lay a fairly large freshwater loch. No waves, but loads of wind - ideal. We set to work immediately and with everybody either lifting, pulling, pushing or skiving off the whole operation took less than half-an-hour. Once there, however, we had all day to sail whenever we liked. Unfortunately being a distance from the sea posed problems getting supplies from Baymore, but our hardworking, ever smiling bunch of lads took moving the boat in their stride - well, almost.

After a weeks uninterrupted sailing we decided to broaden our horizons again. It was time for the CA's bivvy, folks! Three parties set out to meet on Loch Obissary at the end of a couple of hour's journey north of camp. A canoe party, a walking party and Harvey Wallbanger plus loons. The heavy gear, i.e. food and the canoeist's rucksacks, were ferried by Harvey and crew to the north end of our sailing loch and overland yet again with the help of our walking party and into Loch Obissary. From there, accompanied by the canoeists and the walkers on the shoreline to a little beach on the east side of the loch.

This little beach, once peaceful and remote, became the Blackpool of the Hebrides. Basking in sun and midges we had two and a half glorious days playing around in the water; sailing and canoeing and, of course, eating - it was a highlight indeed.

Immediately following the bivvy, Harvey Wallbanger was taken back to camp and then to Baymore by our two heroic canoe leaders never to be seen again (not the leaders, Harvey!) A sad moment, especially for the sailing leader who was injured canoeing (silly sport) and couldn't go - shame.

Well, that was the end of our sailing antics. Everything considered we had a pretty good time. Lot's of hard work, but definitely worth it. I would like to say "thanks" to the other leaders and (dare I say it) men who made things so much fun on my first expedition. Only one last work - good old Seagull - honest engineering!

NICK COPLEY

ENTERTAINMENTS

As "Entertainments and Sports" leader I had little to do. The leaders were suitably entertained by the intellectual stimulus of the members and, as in show business, these merits were awarded, not by Oscars but by title. There were daily, weekly and camp awards. The winner of many of these coveted awards was Ian Marshall, D.O.D., W.O.W. The members kept themselves entertained in their tents!

The North Uist Sports Day was abandoned due to blisters and exhaustion, some of it nervous, however, the island was host to physical exertion. Firstly Hebridean Football - the lack of rules made the game comprehensible to the masses but the leaders showed better adaptation and won by 8 - 2, although outmanned by over 5:1, The game made use of the compulsory wellies as recommended kit.

Being officers we were, of course, gentlemen and the gentlemen's sport is cricket. Using a wicket that would put Lords to shame, the game proceeded with commentary provided by Tim 'John Arlott' Baxter, who rose to fame by becoming the only person to bowl the leader with a leg-break (bowed with a tennis ball!) The leaders were brilliantly led by Patrick Thompson who hit an unbeaten half-century out of a total of 120 in a 10 over match. His "leather soles" helped his running between the wickets. The boys were unable to match this excellence and needed 56 off the last ball to win.

In summary - North Uist put a smile on your face and muscles on your arms!

THE WALK AROUND NORTH UIST

We walked alongside Loch Obissary to meet a minor road at Sidinish. From there we walked until we reached the Post Office at Clachan-a-Luib. We waited until the Post Office opened and then had our lunch. We then walked until it started to rain, just outside Bayhead, and called a halt to shelter until it stopped. We carried on walking until we arrived at a place we thought was the turning we were seeking, but was proved mistaken and we rested near a church. From there it was not too far to the bird reserve.

When we got there the Visitors' Book was signed and we started to prepare our bivvy next to an old derelict church. The cooking was done in a small hut inside the church. After tea we went for a walk to the shore hoping to see a basking shark, not seeing one we returned to the bivvy site and turned in for the night. We had walked twenty miles.

Before we set off next morning, the Warden of the bird reserve gave us a talk on the birds one could see if one went at the right time. He also talked about the land distribution on the Reserve. We then walked until we came to Lord Granville's drive and paid a call on him - he gave each of us a 'coke'. We then walked quickly on to Sollas where we stopped for lunch outside the Post Office which was on a hill and we could see for miles. On leaving Sollas some of our party were unable to carry on either because of blisters or exhaustion, so they hitched a lift to Lochmaddy. Once there, we made our bivvy site at the main junction. After tea a few of us had a look around Lochmaddy and returned to go straight into a bivvy bag. Walked twenty-three miles.

We left the site at eight o'clock and walked continuously until the junction before Clachan-a-Luib where we had our lunch. We stopped the mobile groceries for lunch and then walked on at our separate speeds until we reached Siddinish. Again someone had to hitch a lift. We then walked back along Loch Obisary to the camp at Eaval. Walked 17 miles.

ANDREW FAWTHROP



SOUTH UIST 1978

LEADERS: Dave and Angie Crawford

ASSISTANT LEADERS: Pete Weston, Liz Briggs, John & Sue Jones

MEMBERS: Melvyn Rice, Tim Short, Caroline Hilton, Chris Young, John Stainsby, John Innes, Cordon Chisholm, Chris Prentic, Ros Dring, Miles Peters, Anderson Foster, Teresa Durrant, Cath Dalton, Julian Cotton, Steve Hodgson, Tony Whiteman, Janet Simpson, Alison Dickens, Anne Tooley, Stephen Keeling, Peter Sebire, Doug Payne, Chris Chandler, John Ringrow, Helen Sudlow, Richard Ledger.

LEADERS' REPORT

Working on the assumption that flattery and a few rounds of drinks will get you anywhere, the well-rehearsed Weatherly / Cullingford duo moved cunningly into action -"You're just the couple we're looking for," said Cullingford "Besides," muttered Weatherly into his beard, "we can't find anyone else!"

Like a 200 piece jigsaw puzzle, over the months from January to July the first 10 pieces fell together and suddenly, on July 24th, the other 190 miraculously slipped into place.

Our reception on the island was a wet and windy one and the sanctuary of the schoolhouse was most welcome. Thankfully the rain soon cleared and our camp was rapidly pitched after John Joseph had ferried all our equipment round to the site, which certainly deserves its reputation as being one of the most beautiful and well situated sites the SHS has the privilege to visit.

Doing your own thing was very much the order of this expedition and we all have fond memories of Steve (the mole) tunnelling for freedom, Angle and her penchant for standing waist-deep in bogs, Tim, who could fall asleep anywhere at any time (and did), Chris who ran everywhere, Doug who kept washing his clothes without removing them, Cath who wished she had never suggested it was easier to go uphill than down, Miles and his 'controlled rapid descents' from crags, Liz and her amazing demonstrations of how to sail backwards, and many many more.

Little serious project work was done with the exception of Ros and Teresa who spent almost their entire holiday completing their 'A' Level Geography field study project, Helen who pressed and identified all the flora she could find and John J. who winkled freely and often.

Our ornithologists identified 69 species including Great Northern Diver, Chaffinch, Golden Eagle, Greylag and Buzzard. Seals were a common sight and we heard reports of killer whales sighted in Loch Eynort.

Our only "hairy" experience was when the marquee blew down and the centre pole caught in the canvas, causing a 6' rip -et voila - no marquee. Fortunately the Army came to our rescue with a fully camouflaged World War I model complete with window blinds which added to the cosiness of our evening singsongs and ghost story telling sessions.

Beinn Mhor was the most popular walking route and, despite the bad weather, many enjoyable hours were spent plodding through gorse and mire. We spent a lovely day on the coast, watching Chris C. run up and down and various parties covered most of the island during our stay. We had two very successful bivvies. The first was extremely flexible and lasted five days (people went for a day or two, returned to camp and others joined our wandering party). This group seems to have met everyone on the island and sampled the delights of every inn. The second was a peaceful couple of days at Eaval cottage, soaking up the sun during the day and chattering round a roaring wood/peat fire in the evening (sorry Simon, we didn't leave much fuel!)

Our canoeists were out every day and moat evenings, either in the loch above the camp or in Loch Eynort itself - when the tide would allow. Their activities culminated in an exciting race which provided considerable navigational difficulties for some. The Harvey Wall banger also had a busy time, whether ferrying our fishermen to a likely spot or being used to acquaint members with the delights of sailing.

We thoroughly enjoyed the experience of South Uist 1978 and would like to thank all the members of the expedition for being such a lively, friendly bunch and giving us so much pleasure - we came away feeling richer for having met you. We would also like Mr. D.C. Greig for allowing us permission to visit the site, David McIntosh, the factor and especially Donald, John Joseph, Archie MacDonald, their family and friends for their generosity, help and kindness.

DAVE AND ANGIE CRAWFORD

A DIFFERENT WORLD - SOUTH UIST

The two mile expanse of deserted, hard, white shell-sand sweeps away into the distance. A lone fishing boat, laying lobster pots, progresses slowly through the cold Atlantic sea water that vividly reflects every shade from green to blue in the bright sunlight. The fishing boat is the only life one can see, no tourists, no seaside cafes and shops and most certainly no promenade, pier or boarding houses to be seen fronting what is probably one of the finest beaches in the British Isles.

This is only one small part of the rugged island of South Uist in the Outer Hebrides, unheard of by most people outside the Scottish Highlands, yet as big as the Isle of Man but only having a population of 2,000. This is where I spent part of the summer on the Schools Hebridean Society's South Uist expedition. We camped for almost three weeks by Loch Eynort, a large sea loch completely surrounded by mountains culminating in Beinn Mhor at 2,034 feet. Even the campsite was a mile from the nearest road; all the equipment was taken to the site by boat - we walked. The campsite was superb: fresh water from the two streams which flowed either side of the campsite, the opportunities for canoeing and sailing in the five SHS canoes and Wayfarer dinghy unrivalled on the loch, local climbing available and walks enjoyable but tough.

It is impossible to adequately express the deep emotional feelings I felt when canoeing on the loch on several evenings. It was warm with not a breath of wind nor a ripple on the water; utter silence but for the calls of birds, a number of herons and the many herring and black-backed gulls. Seals, a colony of which inhabits one of the islands on the loch, would regularly trail the canoes, visible in the crystal clear water, silently sliding underneath the canoe. Completely escaping from human company for two and a half hours before the light fades is an unbelievable feeling.

It was not all calm and idyllic. The Outer Hebrides, notorious for their gale force winds did not let us down. During one such gale, the wind sweeping down a valley between the hills, our main marquee was wrecked beyond repair, despite frantic, vain attempts to salvage it.

The surroundings can only contribute to the success of an expedition, which ultimately depends on the people. In this respect I was somewhat apprehensive before we departed, yet I need not have worried. In the self-contained community which the camp was friendships flourished in a very relaxed and informal atmosphere.

CHRIS CHANDLER

CLIMBING ON SOUTH UIST

On exploration the climbing prospects on South Uist, which had at first been bright, seemed very unpromising. Our leader, Pete (otherwise known as Artoo Deetoo) led a foray up the side of Beinn Nau Caorach towards a large dome of rock. This turned out to be sixty feet in height and fairly promising. Pete disappeared upwards in search of belays while I completed a traverse of the rock. Hours later Pete returned with the news that there were no belay points at all. We scrambled around for a bit while Doug threw his camera off the top to relieve the monotony.

We then walked across to a small loch on the slopes of Beinn Mhor (Loch Lang) in search of boulder problems.

On another foray we found a useful but small cliff on the banks of the stream near our camp. This was far more convenient, being only a short walk from camp, and we gazed for hours at an interesting view of Cath wriggling over short overhangs - happy were the days at this spot.

However, Gritstone (Steve Keeling) and I thirsted for greater exploits. On a hunch we paddled across the loch in a couple of canoes we stole from Liz to a fair mount Keall Mor. After whistling at seals we eventually made our landing and, as I tiptoed daintily barefoot over thistles Steve (debooted) explored the cliff. He returned to say he had found a climb, comparable in difficulty, but not in height, to Clogwyn du'r Arddu. Despite Pete's sarcasm we set off the next day ready for vast exploits. We climbed several routes, unlisted as far as we know. The first consisted of a reach up about 18' of broken rocks, a traverse to the right, working up to a blank and slightly outward leaning rock wall.

The second climb was more in pursuit of height. Up a relatively easy wall, over a grassy terrace and up an awkward tower which afforded good protection. Both these climbs were Gritstone's. The third was my climb - up to a blank wall diedre with a crack up it, about 2 cms wide. This did not afford any decent holds, but was good for runners.

We then came to what must have been the highlight of our climbs - an overhanging severe start to a smooth outward leaning diedre (open book formation). Gritstone led over the start and worked up the diedre with no protection until at about 28' up he

transferred onto the outward sloping blocks which kept falling off and carried up the edge to the vertical grass at the top. Then he transferred onto a slab embedded in earth (which moved when I came to it!) and up vertical heather. I would give this climb a moderate severe rating.

Host of our other exploits consisted of boulder problems or actually trying to find something to climb!

MILES PETERS



AN EXHILIRATING FAILURE

It was a typical wild Hebridean day - no rain, but relentless grey cumulus clouds racing across the sky, producing a wind to buffet those at ground level, as a small group departed from the SHS Loch Eynort campsite.

This was to be no afternoon stroll, and we all realised this as we steadily traversed the initial section of slowly rising peat bog towards the saddle of Beinn Mhor. The summit was shrouded in an ominous mist of thick cloud. The gradient steepened and the early pace abruptly slowed. The swampy peat gave way to heather covered scree that disguised ankle-breaking holes. With the exertion, condensation rapidly accumulated inside our waterproofs. The absence of wind on this, the leeward side of the mountain, gave a deluding sense of security. My thigh muscles began to ache. I gritted my teeth and continued. Already we were above the cloud base, certainly no day for views. The cloud thickened from the first few wisps into an apparently impenetrable mass, visibility no more than twenty yards. It was damp; my hair became matted. The full ferocity of the wind suddenly battered us. The gently sloping spur of mountain grass that led to the summit had been reached. Bracing ourselves against the wind the hike continued. Was this the summit? There was no trig point. After a short debate it was decided that this was, after all, only the subsidiary summit. The spur narrowed to a ridge several feet wide, with a sheer drop of several hundred feet on the eastern side. Innocently unaware of this, we arrived at the 2,034 trig point and rested. It was a mere seventy minutes since we had left camp.

Having ascended from the southern spur, we descended along the northern spur. In such conditions both time and distance were so deceptive - so quickly it seemed did we drop 1,000 feet to the saddle. The relief at returning below cloud level was quite evident when we looked back at the awe-inspiring sight of the sheer eastern cliffs towering into the cloud up to the shrouded summit.

Beinn Mhor conquered, Ben Corodale and Hecla to go. It would be pointless to deny that I was not a little apprehensive of the prospect of again ascending into mist. In such conditions several miles from camp any small mishap was potentially very dangerous. But this sense of responsibility was overwhelmed by a determination to fulfil the challenge of conquering the 'three peaks' of South Uist.

At the time the ascent of Corodale was quite frightening. Unlike Beinn Mhor it involved about seven hundred feet of scrambling up steep grassy slopes amongst craggy outcrops which periodically loomed ominously out of the mist. There was no customary stop on the summit, only an anxious desire to escape from the gloomy

BIVVY TO THE BALIVAHICH AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE SHOW
...AT HOSTA. NORTH UIST,

Members:- Cath Dalton, Alison Dickens, Caroline Hilton, Richard Ledger, Chris Prentice, Melvyn Rice, Tim Short, Janet Simpson, and Tony Whiteman.

We left camp at about 10.30 am on the day of the show, in order to reach Bornish post office in time to catch the airport bus to Lochboisdale.

At the main road the party split up. Five headed North and the other four of us walked the half-mile or so south to catch the bus which did not arrive. On enquiry we discovered that in the Western Isles the bus runs very much when it feels like it, or more accurately, when the aeroplane runs. The one we had hoped to catch had left at 10.00 am and was due back by about 1.00 pm -I began to suspect that we had read the timetable upside down.

The A865 is the main line of communications which connects the string of islands: South Uist, Benbecula, Grimsay and North Uist -running from Lochboisdale northwards through South Uist. In an uncomfortable ride in a mini it gradually unwound before us.

Individually or in pairs, and thanks to the kindness of all manner of passers-by, we reached Balivanich in good time. Four of us were picked up in an army landrover, while Tony and Alison were given a ride in the back of a lorry which had once carried a consignment of tar - it got on their trousers, their hands, their rucksacks...

We then discovered that the show was not being held at Balivanich as we had thought, but at Hosta on North Uist which meant that our plans had to be altered drastically. Not put off, we took to the road again.

I didn't actually see the show at all - by the time Janet and I arrived at Hosta most people were leaving, the produce had all been sold and the prize giving was almost over. However, there was still the ceilidh in the Lochmaddy Hall. I had hoped it would be the Lochmaddy Hall at Hosta, but actually it was the Lochmaddy Hall at Lochmaddy....nearly twenty miles away on the other side of North Uist. We had plenty of time to get there though, it didn't start 'til after the pubs closed.

After finding Cathy, Melvyn and Janet at the Lochmaddy Hotel (surprise, surprise - Ed) we made our way to a dilapidated wooden chicken hut which was our shelter for the night. The floor was a thick layer of well-rotted straw and chicken manure which was both comfortable and provided insulation.

All seemed set to enjoy themselves at the ceilidh, which was well under way with an accordionist and piper supplying the music. Cath and Richard managed to muster the energy to Join in, but the rest of us looked on from the side, or, in my case, dozed off in a corner (surprise, surprise - Ed) The highlight of the evening was the judging of the beauty contest. The winner was Flora MacDonald - who else?!

The next day we set out for West Gerinish where we intended to spend the night. On the way the factor of North Uist gave Cath and I a lift, he knew all there was to know about the islands, including the fact that a strange band were due to visit Eaval Cottage in the near future.

By mid-afternoon everyone had reached West Gerinish, with the exception of Melvyn who had returned to camp. Whilst enquiring about possible places to sleep a very helpful lady suggested the schoolhouse and took great pains to show us where we could find the schoolmistress who was also very helpful, getting us the key and lending us gym-mats to sleep on. What luxury!

The following morning the party split up again - Janet got up early to join the swan ringers on East Loch Bee (I had intended to help but didn't get up early enough). So, whilst the other six made their way to Balivanich where they were to spend a last night, I sat on the edge of Loch Bee with a fisherman who had booked the Angling Club boat and was enraged with Chris Spray and Co who hadn't returned it. We chatted for most of the afternoon about the infringement of swans' personal liberties and the Scottish National Party. I eventually set off for home and was given a life by a visiting Minister and his family who took me to visit the standing communion table in the Chapel at Howmore. Such tables were of Calvinist origin and intended to re-create the Lord's supper, with the attention of the congregation centred round a table rather than on an altar and are quite rare. I was dropped off at the Loch Eynort cross-roads and made my way back to camp.

Although definitely an unconventional SHS bivvy it was nevertheless a great success - we were all impressed by the unasked for generosity of the people we met.

TIM (TEA-BAG) SHORT

MUTE SWAN RINGING ON SOUTH UIST

(A 'scientific' report of this exercise is contained in the 'Projects Section' of the report)

The mute swan can be recognised as opposed to the Bewick or Whooper swan by the presence of a prominent black extension to their beak. It also has a smooth, gently curved neck. There is a very large mute swan population on South Uist, this being the only site in the Outer Hebrides with such a large colony.

Chris Spray, who is doing a three-year Government financed research project, asked our group as well as other students who happened to be on the island at that time to help him catch as many swans as possible, in order to ring them and find out other information concerning them.

Our first taste of swan ringing came when a small party of us set off for Loch Ollay, a long slim loch about half a mile north of the Loch Eynort/Ormaclute crossroads. On arrival there we were told to take it in turns to stand on one side of the group of approximately sixty swans. The reason for this was to prevent them from trying to escape when they were being singled off. After a short time of waiting to calm the birds and also see that all the stages were ready, the swans were caught one by one. They are caught by the neck with a specially shaped hook on a pole. This is very quick but careful work so we left it to the experts. After being caught the bird had its feet crossed and tied first so it could not run and then its wings tied under the medium wing coverts. From there we each took a bird, carrying it under our arms and supporting its neck to each of the stages.

The first stage involved tagging the bird with a pre-coded ring (metal) whilst the 'owner' received a numbered internally sterile bottle (the purpose of this is revealed at the penultimate stage). After the leg tag is put on another numbered plastic ring is glued around the neck. The yellow ring is just large enough to allow free movement of the neck but not big enough to come off. Incidentally this was the first time such a system has been used for tagging birds in Britain. The principle of the ring is so that any swan can be identified without being caught.

After ringing the swans are taken to be weighed on a spring balance following having their sex and age determined. The average weight for a mute swan is about nine kilos.

Another measurement which has to be recorded is the length of the wing from the start of the primary coverts to the end of the primary feathers. This is done after the weighing.

At the next stage the 'owner' parts with the bottle that he/ she was given at the beginning of the chain. A sterile hypodermic syringe is used to take a five milligramme sample of the swan's blood from the short saphenous vein in the tarsus. After the needle has been withdrawn a pad of cotton wool is sellotaped to the wound to seal it against infection while the clot forms.

Finally the length of the skull from the occipital bone to the end of the beak is recorded along with the length of the tarsus from the 'ankle' joint to the phalanges.

The whole operation in Loch Ollay was considerably easier than that of Loch Bee where canoes had to be used to round up the birds.

Our intrepid group set off early for the end of the road, since transport had been arranged for us and our canoes (which had been taken round the evening before). We could not take our inflatable as it was deflated, a clear case of holes in the aft chamber. After several trips we arrived at Loch Bee where there were only two usable boats available to take us across to the small channel where the swans were to be driven. As many as possible waded out and clambered aboard leaving a certain number - Steve, Ros, Teresa Janet and myself to walk overland to the site - after all the mud was only four feet deep in places]

After finding a small group of swan ringers crouched low behind a hillock we were told to be as quiet as possible. We were going to be the 'rear party' or 'back stops' and had to stand knee deep in Loch Bee holding catching poles in order to stop any strays escaping. By this time we were wishing we hadn't come in the first place - there's nothing worse than having water in your wellies!

(It was during the rounding-up process that Doug achieved his much acclaimed rugby tackle on a large adult swan, much to our amusement and the swan's surprise)

The actual process was the same as before - another successful day's ringing, but a very wet party returned to camp!

JOHN RINGROW

-RHUM 1978

LEADER:- Humphrey Southall

ASSISTANT LEADERS: Iain Colquhoun, Ken Hickmott, Tom Peacock, Bruin Thompson

MEMBERS: Chris Buckley, Tim Caldicott, John Carey, David Clarke, Adrian Davidge, Stephen Fenlon, Roger Hyde, David Knight, Graham Kramer, Simon Lord, David Nichols, Stephen Rossiter, Mark Schofield, Graham Tarling, David Thomas.

LEADER'S REPORT

Rhum 1978 can claim two definite achievements; we did actually get to Rhum (second time lucky for our many veterans of Loch Shiel) and we scarcely saw a midge while there. That much-feared creature, commemorated in song, SHS report covers and certain swellings, was missed only by Bruin, who had intended doing a project on them ("Och well, have tae be house-flies instead").

Our good fortune in this, as in many other matters, was due to our camping at Harris rather than at Salisbury's Dam, the Society's usual site. Exposure to the prevailing wind blew the midges away while we were snug in the shooting lodge. This palatial abode had such unheard of luxuries for an SHS expedition as hot running water and, dare one mention it, a bath. The site and situation of the camp must be among the finest in the Hebrides; the bay, The Rhum Cuillin and, a hundred yards from the lodge, the strange little Greek temple built as a tomb for the Bulloughs, former owners of the island. Highland cattle, Rhum ponies (one of whom had a rather unfortunate encounter with the leader's tent) and red deer were regular visitors, as were the Nature Conservancy staff, who gave many a weary traveller a lift along part of the seven-mile track to Kinloch, to sample the fleshpots.

Any expedition to Rhum must owe a great debt to the assistance of the Nature Conservancy and the generosity of their staff. In particular, I must thank the Chief Warden, Mr. Sutton, Angus the foreman and the Chief Stalker. A party our size is inevitably a nuisance and interferes with the normal running of the island as a centre of research, but they made us feel honoured guests. Perhaps the extent of our privilege was

summed up in an encounter with a day visitor to the island who only wanted to know if "Harris was beyond Marker 11" (on the Nature Trail, i.e. beyond a mile from Kinloch).

Our activities were somewhat limited by the weather, particularly the mist on the tops; only one party was able to complete the famous ridge walk, although the bird watchers indulged in various strange rituals in the mountains, including three bivvies to Hallival to see the largely fictitious Manx Shearwater; any bird which only lives in holes on the very tops of mountains on remote islands and only comes home on particularly wet and cloudy nights must have been created as a status symbol for masochistic ornithological loons (Bruin, take a bow.....) - how the leader was persuaded to join them for a night I will never understand. Ken and Tom managed to give all who wanted some climbing on crags near camp or on the west face of Ruinsival, while the select few were introduced to such arcane arts as prussicking and Simon Lord demonstrated the possibilities by going walking or climbing every single day of the expedition. Canoeing was limited by the lack of protected water but several members were able to make a quick tour of Loch Scresort on our way home.

Our main projects had been suggested by the Nature Conservancy; a count of the goats around the coast (repeating a survey made by the SHS in 1973), a census of the shearwater burrows on Trallval (the active ones being identified by smell) and a survey of the bird population of the Harris tree plantation. In the event, the last of these was done by Tim Reed, a research student at the Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology, Oxford, who stayed with us for a week; several members were able to assist him with his work of netting and ringing birds. Bruin supplied our anglers with a good excuse for staying around camp with his fish project while Buckles spent many happy hours looking at wee beasties through his microscope.

Other highlights: Fred 'n Dave Tables Inc. (don't worry if the top is four feet up, we can always raise the seats), visiting the Sea Eagles (magnificent creatures and an experience for which we must thank John Love, N.C.C. ornithologist, the winking game (beware the evil eye of the Hickmott), the castle (something I missed due to a crazy dash up Askival as it was my last chance) and the day Tom finally issued our chocolate ration (a quarter pound each). I have wanted to visit Rhum for a long time; now I want to go back.

HUMPH SOUTHALL

CLIMBING ON RHUM

Climbing on Rhum started off in the usual way with two small expeditions to a clump of smallish rocks, on the right a mile or so along the track to Kinloch. The rocks provided plenty of V. Diff. climbs of about forty feet, quite enterprising for the beginner - all were top-roped.

Abseiling proved to be the main attraction on these excursions. On the second one the traditional method of abseiling was abandoned as Tom had forgotten how to do it! This was only a minor mishap as we managed to complete a good thirty foot abseil with his descender on the same forty foot crag, and Humph took many photographs of folk in compromising positions.

The next in the series of climbs was an abortive attempt on the West face of Runsival, led by Ken with Adrian and Tim. They completed one of the buttresses before being driven off by mist and rain.

Later on that same week Ken led another team to the virgin (at least to the SHS '78 expedition) mountain of Runsival, and after several disguised rests (checking the guide book) we, the intrepid three, namely Ken, Humph and me, dined below North Buttress, after which we scaled it with due pomp and ceremony via a route called 'Slab and Groove' - 100' V. Diff. (The North Buttress is on the left hand skyline when viewed from Harris Lodge. Above it, leading to the summit are the nine pitches of the Giant's Staircase). Two ropes were used between the three of us. Only one difficult step was encountered where we had to use our knees, and afterwards the buttress was successfully navigated.

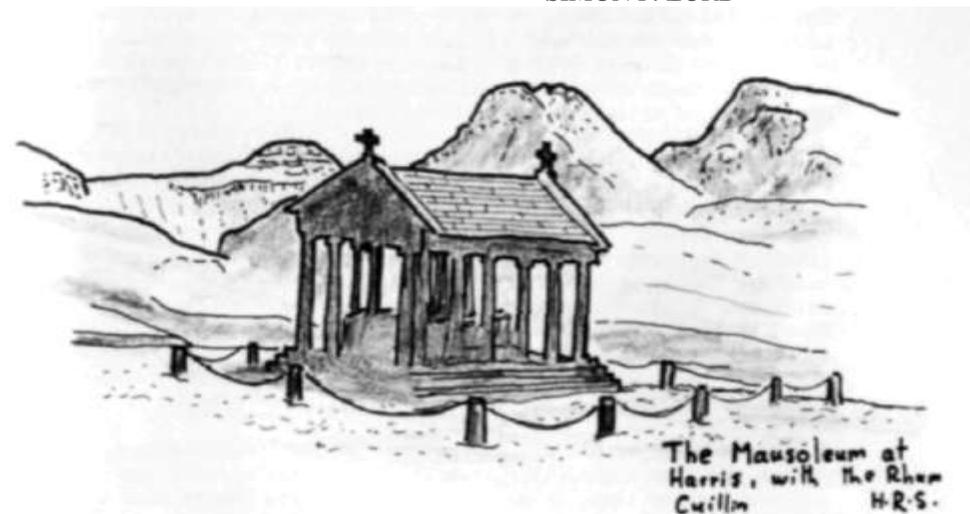
We then turned our attention to the Giant Staircase, 600' V. Diff., comprising the nine rock steps of about 70' each. Four were V. Diff., three Mod. Diff. and the last two difficult scrambling. It proved less difficult than it looked, but even so it took us three hours. The last two steps were done in mist as it decided to spoil our adventuring. We arrived at the summit of Runsival, complete with its metal girders, at 6.00 pm. At the expense of our knees we descended rapidly as we were meant to be in camp some 1.500" below and three miles away at 7.00 pm.

The remaining attempts at climbing took place on the loose and "guano" covered cliffs near Harris. One particular one proved amusing. Everyone fell off it except Ken and the versatile John. Humph was overtaken by an attack of cowardice, not wishing to test either the sea or Ken's belay.

Ken and I tried some pegging up an interesting groove. Ken placed the pegs in first and then let me ascent them after him. Whilst I was clipped into the top peg, my life resting on it, he confessed that it was his first attempt at pegging. Feeling a little anxious I descended as rapidly as I dare, pulling the pegs out with the crabs.

Anyone intending to go climbing on Rhum in future years would be well advised to take along a copy of 'Rhum' by Hamish M. Brown (published by Cicerone Press) and a harness, as there are great climbing possibilities on An Stack and the Prow of Askival which the weather prevented us from visiting.

SIMON F. LORD



ORNITHOLOGY ON RHUM

Justifiably, Rhum is renowned for its unique diversity of bird life. It contains well over a hundred-thousand pairs of Manx Shearwaters breeding above 2,000 feet on the rugged mountainous slopes. As a bold project John Love pioneered the second attempted re-introduction of White-tailed Eagles to Britain. Isolated pockets of woodland abound in Warblers, Thrushes, Tits and Finches. The northern moorland looks ideal for Sandpiper, Greenshank, Golden Plover and Dunlin. Southern sea cliffs harbour a great range including Fulmar, Kittiwake and Auks with Eagle and Peregrine as an added boon. Inland lochs attract Red-throated Diver with their associated streams attracting Dipper and Ring-Ouzel. By the stony tracks one sees and hears Meadow Pipit, Stonechat and Twite; above you can observe some magnificent Raven aerobatics. Rhum is indeed a paradise!

Our ornithological activities were of a restrained nature, primarily because of the weather; there were no globe-trotting excursions to 'tick off' as many birds as possible. Instead, our nucleus of seven boys - John C, Adrian D, Graham K, Dave N, Stephen R, Hark S and Graham T - concentrated on studies of the Manxie. One study involved a census of their burrows on Trallval, another had us crouching on Hallival observing their cacophonous midnight home-coming, most of them to feed their single plump chicks. Tim Reed trapped birds in the Harris plantation as part of his PhD research on tran and inter-island land bird movements; an account of this is given by Graham Kramer.

However, much else was noted. Red-throated Diver frequently flew up from sea to loch to feed youngsters. On Loch Fiachanis Dave and Mark got within feet of a pair of Red-throats. Also seen here were Dipper. Finest sighting on the coast was of a probable immature Peregrine harassing a Common Gull near Harris. On the same day Eagles were seen by two separate parties above the great Fiachanis coire. Merlin were seen flying over the summit of Orval by Dave N and Dave C. Buzzard, less common than Eagle (!), were seen occasionally above the Kinloch wood, one of these sightings being of a Buzzard-Sparrowhawk chase over about 600 metres of tree-studded terrain east of Kinloch.

A sabbath visit to Kilmory Bay produced Sanderling, Redshank, Dunlin and Common Sandpiper, all feeding on the edge of the progressive ebb tide. As an

extra our quiescent leader took a dip in the sea and no more was seen that day! (Odd, Bruin was not with us that day -Ed.)

Unfortunately, many of the sea birds had departed from the cliffs, notably the Auks. However, Herring, Great Black-backed and Common Gulls were abundant. On the Harris Bay cliffs some Shags still had unfledged chicks in the nest; these were probably the youngest breeders of the shag colony. Eiders and Red-breasted Merganser fed off Kinloch. Tim's project in the Harris plantation resulted in the sighting and often trapping of Sparrowhawk, Song Thrush, Meadow Pipit, Blackbirds, Willow Warbler, and Spotted Fly-catcher; here unfortunately the first of the woodland colonising tits -the Coal Tit - was apparently absent. Species recorded in other woodland plots, such as the Kinloch wood, included Blue and Coal Tits, Goldcrest and Wood Warbler (heard by Graham K).

An exciting sighting of a Jack Snipe was recorded on the 23rd of August by Mark S and Dave N south-east of Papadil on some wet moorland. It was clearly identifiable by pointed tail lacking white and by characteristically dropping to the ground after disturbance.

On the top of Trallval we were fortunate enough to see a Ring-ouzel, probably a male, going by the broad white crescent across his breast. Another singular observation was of a juvenile Cuckoo fluttering above the heather just below Coire Dubh.

All too frequent visits to Kinloch resulted in numerous sightings of Meadow Pipit, Twite and noisy Stonechats - the extrovert males 'tacking' front prominent heather tops. These birds have very long breeding seasons, rearing as many as three broods from mid-March to the end of August.

I felt that ornithologically the expedition was a success, not so much in recording a great number of species but by giving us all a fond appreciation of some of Rhum's exclusive bird delights. Warm thanks are due to Bob Sutton, John Love, Iain Black and Andy and all resident Conservancy staff.

BRUIN THOMPSON

THE MANX SHEARWATER BIVVIES

Enthusiasm, whipped up by Bruin, for the shearwaters resulted in three bivvies to Hallival to watch the nocturnal home comings of these birds. The site of the bivvies was the Mil deer stalkers hut 1500 feet up on the northern slope of Hallival. This hut has to be seen to be believed; a large plywood box, lashed to the ground against the wind.

The first bivvy (Bruin, Iain, Mark S. Dave N and myself) was a small disaster. Strong gusts of wind rocked the hut and fierce rain rattled down from all sides. We ventured out of the hut at about 11.00 pm and fought our way up the mountainside, yet we only lasted ten minutes before giving up. No 'manxies' were seen or heard that night; however, a couple of useful conclusions were reached: One - shearwaters do not come in on nights of climatic disasters and two - the hut leaked. We did succeed nevertheless, in enlightening some tourists we met by explaining that the thousands of burrows lining Hallival did not belong to rabbits. The manx shearwater was from then on referred to as the 'flying bunny'.

The second bivvy (Bruin, Humph, Graham T, Stephen R, John and Chris) was more successful; the hut remained dryish and, more important, shearwaters were seen and heard. The party sat up on Hallival from ten until one in the morning experiencing the sound and occasionally the sight of adult birds flicking through torch beams and diving straight into their burrows while chicks flapped down the slope practising their flight.

The third bivvy was a consolation trip for survivors of the first with the substitution of Roger Hyde for Dave Nichols, and was probably the most successful in terms of Manx Shearwaters. Not only were they seen and heard but also felt; we were all hit by the birds as they flew into us, disorientated by our tilly lamp and torch beams. We sat, tense and thrilled, in an atmosphere of wails and caterwalling as dozens of birds flew home.

For all of us who went up Hallival on the last two bivvies it was an exhilarating and memorable experience. I can still hear the weird, eerie call of the shearwaters flying over Harris lodge and the campsite up to the mountains in the dark. A very, very strange bird.

GRAHAM KRAMER

THE HARRIS PLANTATION

About a quarter of a mile inland from the campsite exists a moderately sized plantation which was the focus of part of our project work. The plot is one of several areas fenced off from deer and planted by the Nature Conservancy in reforestation experiments. A variety of trees and shrubs are clumped around the plantation with long, ungrazed grass and herbs completing the plant cover.

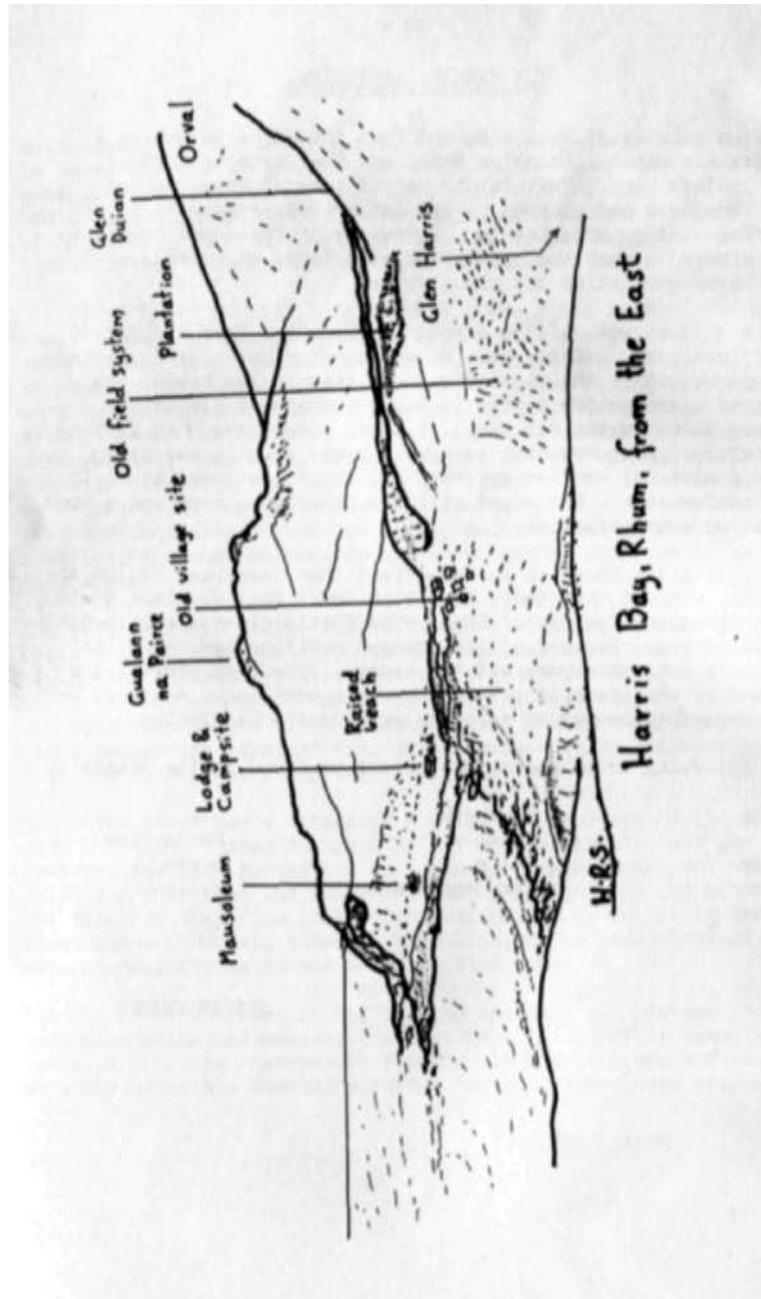
For the first week of the expedition Tim Reed from the Edward Grey Institute, Oxford, visited us to carry out a bird ringing program within the plantation. Relatively few birds were caught; seven meadow pipits (a large passage of pipits was taking place during our stay), a young song thrush and a young blackbird. A sparrowhawk escaped capture when it was blown into a mist net and bounced out, failing to get tangled up in the narrow mesh. Robin and willow warbler were seen and a wren heard on many occasions.

The plantation shows to us the effect that deer have had on the island; without them there is little doubt that woodland would be a prominent feature of Rhum. The Harris plantation, though still growing, because of its exposed position has shown that climatic conditions are not too severe. The deer prevent any spread of the trees by grazing down any seedlings, as shown by the apparent absence of saplings outside the plantation.

The following trees and shrubs are to be found in the plantation:

Alder	Hawthorn	Oak
Ash	Hazel	Scots Pine
Birch	Holly	Rowan
Broom	European Larch	Willow
Gorse		

GRAHAM KRAMER



KNOYDART 1978

LEADER:-Jim Turner

ASSISTANT LEADERS: Alan Smith, Judith Smith, Liz Wallace, Colin Smith, Janet Mott.

MEMBERS:-Colette Armitage, Brian Barnes, Julia Coate,

Nicholas Hazlitt, Michael Johnson, Ian Macleod, Judith Pielou, Julie Salt, Nicola Steam, Christopher West, Mark Bankes, Rosemary Clegg, Ian Gartside, Susan Irons, Richard Juckes, Angela Newton, Nicholas Roberts, Sue Scanlan, Stephen Webster, John Charlesworth.

LEADER'S REPORT

The expedition to Knoydart was an adventure from the start. Thanks to British Rail half of us reached Mallaig very late, but thanks to the efficiency of our hired boat operator, the journey from Mallaig to our camp went without a hitch. I suppose that anyone who has to live with the disruptions caused by the Hebridean weather finds British Rail no problem.

The site of our camp was at Shamadalain in a north facing bay on the west edge of the Knoydart peninsula. In days gone by when the sea was a highway Knoydart must have been a very different place with numerous crofts around its shores - there's a man living in Inverie (the main settlement on Knoydart) who remembers when the beach in Sandaig bay was completely covered with boats on the sabbath. The main attraction for us on Knoydart were the mountains which we climbed enthusiastically. Three of our number succeeded in ascending over 10,000 metres during our stay. We picked whimbrels from the mountains, we sunbathed on the mountains, we became enshrined by clouds on the mountains and we saw the far away islands and Ben Nevis from the mountains.

The boats were used every day - people fished from the rubber dinghy (even feeding the entire expedition on one occasion), learnt canoeing techniques and explored the coast by canoe.

We met people who live on Knoydart and we met other visitors to the place. The district nurse who lives at Aior was our main contact with the outside world and we were grateful for the numerous cups of coffee - to say nothing of all the medical attention we received.

Not much project work was accomplished, but with so many expedition members with exams just completed who can blame them?

Browsing through the signing-out book I see that birds were listed, flowers identified, geomorphological features noted, meteorites plotted, trees scrutinised, winkles' routes mapped, rubbish collected and panoramic views sketched. The following entry described what two members (of the same sex I hasten to add) did on 31st July - "Direct to MR 729048 for shower, back by 12.00 midday." As always, the time for departing came too soon, and so on Saturday, 12th August we waved goodbye to Knoydart and the Hebrides for another year.

CLIMBING ON KNOYDART

The climbing on the expedition didn't start until about half way through, when we decided it was time we actually did something. First to suffer from our assaults were the small outcrops and boulders near Airor (715 054). We found various types of climbs to varying degrees of difficulty. This site, however, having only a limited number of routes, was soon exhausted and since everyone interested wanted to do some climbing of greater length and interest, we decided to go to Roinn na Beinne (737 025). It was a very misty day when we set off and remained so all day. Needless to say, we were wandering around long after we should have been at the crag. Eventually we stumbled across Alan Smith and Mark Bankes who were going to bag yet another peak (Beinn Bhreac), so Brian Barnes went with them to see the crag, while the rest of us, discouraged by the weather, returned to camp.

The next day Sue Irons, Colin Smith, Brian Barnes and myself went to the elusive crag which Brian had been raving about the evening before. As it was a clear day, we managed to get there without much trouble. While Colin showed Sue the ropes (and some rocks as well), we tried to put up some routes. After trying three on damp, mossy rock without success, I managed to lead a wide crack about 35 feet high. It was quite straightforward until the top few feet which were negotiated by using a large flake which was wedged in the crack. When Brian got to it, he started to pull up on it, but instead of his body rising, the block moved downwards. This came as some surprise to him as I'd just been standing on it, and an alternative method of bypassing the flake had to be found. To save other SHS members and to satisfy his own destructive urges, Brian insisted on abseiling down and removing the flake. (We now wish to notify the Ordnance Survey that the map needs amending -not only is part of the crag missing, but there is also a sizeable crater in the ground.)

While we were there, we decided to try an artificial climb using pitons. A carelessly hammered in piton caused me a great deal of trouble as it took me nearly forty minutes to remove. The whole climb must have taken about an hour and a quarter (all twenty-five feet of it).

Anyway, we enjoyed the day and Brian became known as Blaster Barnes and I earned myself the name Knock-em-in Nick.

We planned to return the next day. but due to the distance involved (it's uphill all the way) and the fact that Liz Wallace (our Camp Administrator) had seen some good climbs at Camas Garbh (746 085), we decided to go there. Before you reach Camas Garbh, there is a miniature version of the Old Man of Hoy (the Old Man of Knoydart, fifteen feet high). The first route up it was done in wellies, showing its extreme severity. Also en route is a smaller outcrop (745 082), which yields some good practise climbs, including a very good overhang problem (if you like that sort of thing).

The rock at Camas Garbh itself isn't very good and needs treating with caution, but we did manage to find some routes, the best being quite exhilarating and at fifty to sixty feet high and overhanging most of the way, quite difficult.

That Just about covers the places we climbed at, except for perhaps the ruined bithy at the camp. Apparently no climber has really accomplished anything unless he (or she) can traverse all the way around it, without using the ground for feet, or the top of the wall for hands. I can proudly claim to have done one and a third revolutions of this classic problem.

The climbing that was done on the expedition was certainly enjoyed but the lack of reasonably sized crag fairly nearby ended all hopes of more serious climbing without several days away from camp.

NICK ROBERTS BRIAN BARNES

10.000 METRES ON KNOYDART

After the visit to Knoydart last year, we heard that this was excellent walking country; so a goal was set for the walkers amongst us (the idiots!). Our ambition was to climb a total height of 10,000 metres (for those of you who can't yet understand foreign measurements - more than the height of Mount Everest). Rules had to be made to the effect that height climbed on hikes was only included, after all some people must have almost reached this total with trips to the "smallest tent" (it's the beans that does it!)

The first major contribution to the height score was made on a trip round the coast to Croulin (784 095) and back to Samadalan via Ha Cruachan at 595 metres and Meall Gaothar at 422 metres. A pleasant walk and excellent breaking in for the days to come.

Next was a bivvy with one night out of camp. An odd looking route was chosen, but there was reason behind our madness, in that we arrived at the loch half-way up Ladhar Bheinn, an ideal bivvy spot; with roof sized stone slabs provided free of charge. The route was up Chuachan and Meall Coirean t -Searraich, right down into the valley (heartbreaking!) and up to the loch on Ladhar Bheinn. The next morning we reached the top of Ladhar Bheinn, our first Munro, and back to the campsite via a superb ridge off the big one and on to Beinn Na Caillich.

Another bivvy followed shortly after going to Sourlies bothy (a luxurious place) in order to do Sgur Na Ciche, the Scottish Matterhorn at 1040 metres. The journey to Sourlies was via Inverie, over Druin Na Cluin-airighe, the ridge behind the campsite and then Beinn Bhuidhe at 855 metres.

The way back was over Meall Buidhe (Me ol' Buddy) at 946 metres and via Man Uidhe, breaking all known records for time in walking boots, from Inverie to Samadalan. As time was getting short for the expedition the final bivvy was thought up. This was a trip into Barrisdale (the place where RAF jets and locally owned bi-planes do amazing things like landing on 100 yard runways and screaming over cols about ten feet from the ground).

The Journey was over Aonach Sgoite, a superb ridge walk with an unbelievable view (the first time the mist had really cleared). To the west we could see South Uist, putting visibility at about 40-50 miles, and all around on the mainland. It was hard to believe we were on the same island as England, a beautiful mountain landscape stretching for many miles around us.

The way back from Barrisdale, after a night under the stars waking up to the munching of grass by Highland bulls, was our last day's walking, and included our fourth Munro, Luinne Bheinn (renamed Loony Bin as we decided all those standing on the summit deserved to be there!).

At the end of the expedition it was worked out that three lunatics (including myself) had achieved the 10,000 metres goal and several people came very close, despite none too sunny weather on certain days. Heights climbed over the 10,000 were:-

10,550 by Mark Bankes

10,500 by Alan Smith

10,060 by myself

SUE SCANLAN

Sit on a knoll, by a stream, and think of nothing,

View the panoramic landscape before you, but don't look at it. Look up at the sky, out to sea, and behind you at the mountains, and realise how small you are. On the celestial scale you're no bigger than a fly which is eating the left-overs of your spam sandwich. Think twice before you swipe at it. Try to imagine what part of the divine scheme you fill, which piece of the jigsaw you have to put in place. Will it be a plain blue bit, part of the sky which no-one notices except if it's not there; or will it be the bell on the locomotive, so vital for its efficient functioning? There's no escaping.....

The water's singing; a song -- for me? for you?

The moor is calling; as only it can do.

The wind is blowing; refreshing yet still cold.

And I'm not knowing the answer when all is told.

RICHARD JUCKES

SOURLIES BIVVY 1ST-4TH AUGUST

Still suffering from the effects of Ian Gartside's party the evening before, sixteen of us set off from the site at Samadalan towards Sourlies Bothy, sixteen miles away, on the Tuesday morning.

We were all heavily laden with sleeping bags and spare clothing, not to mention the large size cans of sausages and baked beans. Luckily it wasn't raining or very hot which made it a bit more bearable, but even so, some of us found it a struggle.

To save time and energy, we decided to avoid the road to Inverle and instead walked along the steep side of one of the many mountains of Knoydart; this was not easy. When we did eventually reach the road we were faced with an unavoidable downhill trot to Inverie where we stopped for a short rest. From Inverie It was 'easy', we just followed the path which led us to a monument, past a fast flowing river and also through a field of cows. Once past the cows, it was uphill for about three to four hours; this was the worst part of the whole walk there. We could see the top from the beginning but for the first two hours it didn't seem to get any nearer. There's nothing more depressing than a never ending walk.

When we did reach the top we were faced with the fantastic view of Sgurr-na-Ciche (1040 metres). At that time we didn't realise that within the next two days we would have climbed it.

Sourliea bothy is owned by the MBA (Mountain Bothies Association) and was very small. In fact it was a squash to fit in nine people -imagine the trouble we had with sixteen of us and five others. We arrived there late Tuesday evening at about 9.00 pm, after going down a steep zigzag path crossing a river via some unreliable, loose rocks and walking across a salt marsh.

After a very uncomfortable sleep on the floor I had a restful Wednesday, while a small group climbed up Sgurr-na-Ciche. Later on that night Jim turned up after his cooker was set on fire, which he had lent us for the bivvy. Why Jim came is still a mystery. On the Thursday It was my turn to climb Sgurr-na-Ciche. We reached the top an hour earlier than the first group which is amazing. Unfortunately all we could see at the top was mist and the occasional mountain peak appearing through the mist, but you had to be quick to see it. We walked clown following a compass point. Then on the Friday we walked all the way back to Samadalan.

ANGELA NEWTON

