

## MUNRO MATTERS 2009

by Dave Broadhead (Clerk of the List)

With climbing Munros well established as a national pastime, the seasonal flow of fascinating letters continues despite the credit crunch and ensuing recession, and the List keeps growing. Many thanks to everyone who has written to me. The following report gives a flavour of the correspondence which makes my job so interesting and enjoyable.

### STATISTICS

Comparing the year 2008-2009 with the previous year (in brackets) shows some interesting variations. The total number of 227 Completions was a drop from last year's record figure (257). Of these 21% (19%) were women and 12% (18%) couples. 55% (64%) were resident in Scotland, average age 54 (54), taking an average of 21 (23) years and celebrating their Completion with an average party of 14 (16).

### STARTS

Martin McNicol (4097) was born into an SMC/LSCC family and introduced to the hills by a galaxy of stars of the era. He remembers as a young boy celebrating the late George Rogers (109) last Munro, the only SMC President to Compleat while in office. In a similar vein, Gordon Ingall (4153) *"was fortunate to grow up in a keen outdoor family, my father being a rock climber with the "Fell & Rock".....with a home library including a set of SMC District Guides and an old buff SMC journal listing Munro's Tables."* Charles Kilner (4108) climbed his first Munro *"aged 5 with my parents – a wet day, wore small wellies."* Scott Girvan (4206) *"started my Munros while still at school climbing Ben More (Crianlarich). This was almost my last as I found the hill to be an unremitting trudge."* Sandra Taylor (4210) started on Beinn Dorain which *"nearly killed me."* Jim Presly(4188) vaguely remembers *"my very first Munro was as a young Boy Scout away back at the end of the 1950's, Mount Keen."* Alex Taylor's (4253) first Munro *"was done with Dingwall Academy's hillwalking club, in a time when interest was expressed by raising your hand and turning up the next day – no need for parental consent, health & safety seemed to be organised through common sense(well we had no accidents)."* Barbara (4113) and Iain Campbell (4114) *"were inspired by Muriel Gray's "First Fifty" and thought it would be fun to do 50 before50."* On Completion their combined age was 126. Douglas Crabbe (4115) was *"inspired by "Scottish Mountaineer" magazine to do something positive when a close friend was diagnosed with terminal cancer."* By Completion 18 months later he had raised £8,500 for Maggie's Centres. David Bibby (4117) *"had my first Munro trip over the Queen's Jubilee celebrations in June 1977, traversing the Carn Mor Dearg arête to climb Ben Nevis to see the bonfire."* Angus Swanson (4139) *"was looking for something to do on a summer Saturday and decided to climb Buachaille Etive Mor fully equipped with some ancient old work boots and coat."* Mike Reynolds (4168) *"started on the first "Boots Across Scotland" charity event."* Victoria Fuller (4169) started *"in the Cairngorm Mountains.....following an "adventurous" hot air balloon trip, where we had crash landed the previous year. I had no experience of the hills but having walked out in one piece, I was determined to find out more about them."* Sheryl Harvey (4228) started by *"heading up Ben Nevis on a "rest day" on a cycle trip from Glasgow to John O'Groats."* Malcolm & Denny Robinson

(4196 & 4197) *“didn’t mean to climb Munros. We didn’t actually know they were there. What we really intended to do was to continue our long continuous walk northwards after the Pennine Way.”* Thirty years later their Munro Log *“runs into 3 volumes in Lever Arch files of handwritten diaries and photos.”* The five closely typed pages of “Preface and Summary” they sent me make a fascinating read. Having achieved his target of Compleating in his 64<sup>th</sup> year (remembering the Beatles song “When I’m 64”) Andrew Botterill(4195) gives the following *“three recommendations to any young person contemplating “doing the Munros”: live in Scotland not the south of England, start in your twenties (and keep going) and retire early from the day job.”*

## SCARES

Richard Laing (4176) had to be *“helicoptered off Creag Mhor in April 2003 having collapsed with heart problems. Two of my sons ran 10km to raise the alarm and the Royal Navy from HMS Gannet were superb.”* Peter Robinson (4187) *“had just got back into serious hillwalking by 2004 when I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. After surgery I was determined to regain my fitness and set about the Munros with a real enthusiasm.”* Under the heading of “My Assent of The Munros” John Milner (4184) starts his story by explaining *“In 2001 there was foot and mouth disease in England and we were not able to go walking for 4 months. Then we heard that we could walk in Scotland.”* This cloud had a silver lining, not like the one covering Cairn Gorm. *“I went to take out my compass again to check my direction only to find it was gone. After searching for 45 minutes .....I decided to call the mountain rescue.....I did eventually find my way down with instructions from the leader of the rescue team, John Allen, over the mobile phone.”* John now plans to visit all the Tarns in the Lake District, well below cloud level. Joyce J.K.Stewart (4233) and Elizabeth Stewart (4234) introduced themselves as sisters-in-law, married to brothers. Their Compleation was blighted by bad weather and worse, on Stob Ghabhar *“on probably the worst day for rain this year. At least we got a view from the top and some sun to go with the champagne and whisky. Unfortunately a friend fell on the descent and broke her ankle. We had to call the Mountain Rescue helicopter.”* Golden Munroist Christine Russell (4201) was sometimes *“curtailed by serious orthopaedic problems. After each operation (shoulder reconstruction, disc removal, spinal fusion etc) a few tears were shed when I got to the next top.”* James Gardiner Marshall (4249) *“started doing the Munros after recovering from a bad ski injury on left leg.....not bad going as I was told by a surgeon I might not walk without a limp”.*

## SUCCESS

On Ben More (Mull) Paul Goodman (4131) *“took the last step with another old companion, too ill to join us in person, “walking” with us on the end of a mobile phone.”* On the same hill, Andrew Gillespie (4126) *“celebrated with a wee dram of Highland Park from my hip flask, using silver quaichs to hold the precious liquid.”* Over on Skye, Derek Grieve (4025) *“even managed to play the bagpipes on the summit and one of my mates and I both wore our kilts”* on Blaven, while on Schiehallion Bev Edenden (4161) *“was piped on the summit(using a mini music system).”* Tom Lawfield (4084) *“did most of the round solo in two trips, for environmental reasons by public transport and not having a tent, used my bivvy bag instead. I am 22 years of age does this make me the youngest solo?”* Ralph Whiting (4094) belongs to a group called the “Pill Ptarmigans” and informs me that *“there has been a Pill Ptarmigan expedition to the Scottish*

*Highlands in the last week of May every year since 1989.*” Morris Rodham (4142) a clergyman from Leamington Spa, was accompanied by his wife on Ben More (Mull) where “*we celebrated with a small bottle of champagne and a dance move called “Supergirl” which involves me throwing her up onto my shoulders while she adopts a “supergirl” pose.*” Having “*started by doing Lochnagar on my own in 1960 at the age of 16 in welly boots and a raincoat*” John B Donald (4182) “*thoroughly enjoyed every one. They have been walked, run, summer and winter climbed, cycled, boated, skied, snowboarded and the last one(Sgorr Dhonuill) by pushing a pram with my 8 week granddaughter, half way up.*” With so many outdoor interests it is not surprising that John was able to persuade 84 people to join him! Rose and Robert Hancock (4240 & 4241) reported that “*as a link to our other passion in life, that of campanology, we celebrated our Completion in the ringing, with eight others, of a peal on the ten bells of All Saints Belltower, Inverary, comprising 5,284 changes in 3 hours and 41 minutes.....the tower top giving clear views that day of Ben Ime and Beinn Bhuidhe*”. Simon Winton (4247) dashed a Round in 18 months, raising £ 33,000 for the National Association for Colitis and Crohn’s Disease. He was joined on his final summit, Glas Tulaichan, by 79 others, an impressive sight in distinctive red NACC T-shirts. This Completion was also unique in that Simon’s parents own the mountain and the surrounding estate.

#### SLOWLY, SLOWLY

Ben Brown (4112) Completed way back in 1992, but waited until he had finished the Tops and Corbetts before owning up. Vivian Wright (4051) explained that her round had taken 32 years because “*I don’t have a car, the majority of the 284 being reached by public transport; as I usually walk alone and rarely enter cloud I have often had to make repeat visits to some areas.*” Occasional enquiries into obscure Munrological facts and records, often via the Webmaster, have prompted me to attempt to get this unexpected aspect of my job into better order, and I hope to have some FAQs on the website soon. I have always admired those who have been patient enough to stretch their Munro round and prolong the pleasure over almost a lifetime. To celebrate such achievement I propose to designate as *Munrosis longius aureus* individuals who have taken more than 50 years to Compleat. This year’s “Golden Munroists” are Howard O. Smith (4039) 51 years, Peter Dalrymple Hay (4058) 55 years, Gordon Ingall (4153) 51 years and Christine Russell (4201) 56 years.

#### SPECIALS

With the exception of the first two Compleaters, the List has always been strictly egalitarian, with no titles or qualifications recorded, encompassing people from all walks of life. This year our clerical pioneers, the Reverends Robertson(1) and Burn(2) were joined on the List by Jack Higham (4136) retired Canon Chancellor of Peterborough Cathedral; Ralph Godsall (4203) Canon Emeritus of Rochester, Priest Vicar of Westminster Abbey and Rev. Morris Rodham (4142). Richard Cooke (4103), Commander of the Order of the British Empire was another distinguished Compleater, while Alan (Lord) Haworth (2625) finished his Furths. Clair Hutchings (4105) was accompanied on her round by Crowdie, a border terrier, who has also Completed the Furths, with only a few remaining Tops to scamper up. “*We have had a fantastic time together. Sometimes she had to be carried, sometimes she rode in a basket on a bike and*

*other times she had to wear boots to protect her paws.*" Wilma (2162) and Ron (2318) Forsyth were a rare Corbett Completing couple.

#### STRIDE ON

One of my predecessors asked, out of curiosity, for Completers to indicate what they planned to do "post-Munros". This continues to elicit a wide variety of responses. Vivienne Rule (4226) wrote *"I'm getting myself a Labrador pup which I hope will accompany me on the hills, however I have no intention of ticking off any more Munros. Once was hard enough."* Craig Thomas Dunderdale (4179) had punctuated his round with ascents of Kilimanjaro and Mont Blanc, and was *"going to the Himalayas and hopefully climbing Mera Peak in 3 days time."* Kenneth Christie (1964) went on to do the Furths, in the course of which *"I had become addicted to winter outings, first climbing Raeburn's Gully in Creag Meagaidh.....culminating with Point Five Gully, my first Grad V. My biggest regret now is not having started this winter climbing thing 30 years earlier!"* He also managed to fit in an ascent of Elbrus, one of the Seven Summits.

#### SUNDRIES

In the course of his round of Munros, Tops and Furths, Duncan McPherson Smith (4087) has *"come up with my own system of classifying hills, based on geographical, topographical and subjective factors.....a total in Scotland of 325 hills with 463 subsidiary peaks (of all heights)."* He also enclosed a substantial paper defining "the Duncans". Eleanor Gledhill (4215) gave the secret of her success as *"over the years I've learned the most essential things to take are my cigarettes, ashtray and my i-pod. When I get fed up trudging up a hill, I have a wee break, have a ciggie and then put on my tunes."* Richard John Cooke (4200) did some analysis of weather for his Round and reported *"of all ascents 83% were in conditions where visibility was either okay, good or excellent. 36% were completed in what I might describe as perfect conditions.....It was not luck; more good planning. Once I retired I had the opportunity to go for the hills whenever I spied high pressure coming in."* Unbeknown to Catherine Gemmell (4141) her Completion was reported in the "Helensburgh Advertiser", under the catchy headline "The height of achievement". Presumably with the help of a high altitude mole, reporter Leslie Maxwell gave a remarkably accurate and succinct history and summary of the whole sport, complete with a colour picture of Catherine approaching the cairn through the now traditional triumphal arch of walking-poles. Michael B. Slater (358) reported an eighth round, commenting *"about 12 years ago I had a target of completing my seventh round by my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday; I've managed to slip another one in with two and a half weeks to go."* Robert H. Macdonald (375) finally added the Tops to his seven round tally, as did Steve Mann (1612) despite *"having taken up employment in Moscow in 2002 and living in the Russian Federation."* Ken Falconer (408) reported a second round *"as a non-driver, my first round was done almost entirely using public transport and a bicycle, which in those days one could put in the guards vans on the Highland trains without the need to make reservations in advance. This is less easy now, and I reached rather more of the hills in friend's cars."* Reporting Completion of his Corbetts, Tony Weetman (2342) calculated *"I took 135 days over 8 years, compared to 109 days over 5 years for the Munros."* Rob Woodall (816) is attempting to become the first person to visit all 6,100 surviving OS triangulation pillars in Britain, which makes Munro bagging seem a doddle.

### SADLY

John R. Taylor (4158) wrote *“to request the inclusion of my brother in law, Alastair Boyd (4157) and myself onto the Compleaters List. Alastair sadly passed away aged 50 (only a month after Completion) whilst ascending Meall a Choire Leith, leaving a wife and three young children.”* David Gemmell (1645) also passed away last year, one of the five members of the largest simultaneous Completion in 1996. A Catholic priest, he was probably the only Monsignor to have done the Munros. I have also been asked to note the passing of David Unsworth (1192) in tragic circumstances at the early age of 32, and well on his way to finishing a third round.

### SORRY

To Steve Perry (3114) whose continuous winter round between December 2005 and March 2006 was omitted from “Munro Matters”. Steve thus became the first person to accomplish two continuous Munro rounds, both in aid of “Cancer Research UK”. Jeffery Quinn (3393) also reported a continuous round *“starting on 1 April 2008 on Ben Hope and finishing 22 June on Ben Lomond (83 days) aided with my campervan as refuge every night. I hope to raise over £ 3,000 for Childrens Hospice Association Scotland”*. Belated apologies too, to readers of SMCJ 198 (2007) whose table of Amendments at the end of “Munro Matters” has the dates of multiple rounds printed upside down! Adrian Snowdon (4185) enclosed a copy of the email he had sent to all his hill-going friends because *“I decided it would be better to climb my final Munro alone.”*

### SIGHTS

Fiona Reid (4081) and Michael Watson (4082) concluded *“We’ve seen some amazing sights over the years, some of the highlights include:-*  
*-Traversing the Lawers Ridge in winter above a perfect temperature inversion.*  
*-Being joined on the summit of the Devils Point by a Golden Eagle.*  
*-Perfect weather and no midges on the Fisherfield six.*  
*-Witnessing a fogbow on Beinn Liath Mhor.”* Julian Stark (4110) *“could have sworn I met Jude Law on Sgurr nan Ceathremhnan.”*

### SITES

As well as the ever popular photo gallery which accompanies the List online at [www.smc.org.uk](http://www.smc.org.uk) a number of Compleaters have sent details of their own sites as follows  
[www.hill-bagging.co.uk](http://www.hill-bagging.co.uk)  
[www.prog99.com](http://www.prog99.com)  
[www.munrodoug.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/index/html](http://www.munrodoug.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/index/html)  
[www.mennim.com/munroindex.html](http://www.mennim.com/munroindex.html)  
[www.scottishhills.com](http://www.scottishhills.com)  
[www.pipedtothetop.com](http://www.pipedtothetop.com)  
<http://website.lineone.net/~munrover/index.html>  
<http://mountains.dontexist.com>  
<http://paul.sammonds.com>  
[www.ancientbrit-adventures.com](http://www.ancientbrit-adventures.com)

### SUMMARY

My favourite for this year comes from David Childs (4159) who wrote: *“It has been interesting to note the changes in the hills over the time I have been walking them*

*(started 1982), footpaths and trods were few and far between in the first ten years or so and now one seems to automatically look for a route along the ridge or to the top without thinking. I must of course accept some responsibility for the erosion of the hillsides in my outings and have been conscious of the effect of human impact on the mountains. In the overwhelming sense of enjoyment and wonder they have given me I hope that I have treated them with respect and reverence."*

Enjoy your hills.

Dave Broadhead, Clerk of the List