

ESTC 'Buddy Weekend' 13-15th January 2012

...and the wind stopped blowing and the sun came out... so much for unlucky Friday the thirteenth!!

Far from being a portent of evil things, the 13th started with clear blue skies and a fair amount of sun – a fine contrast to the previous spell of weather. However that previous weather had left its mark – most of our snow had been scoured off the land and taken to... somewhere - probably the north sea. But 15 fine folk gradually began migrating magnetically to Lagganlia(th) at the open end of Glen Feshie where it meets Strath Spey in search of what little of the white stuff they could find.

The gathering in the fine accommodation of the Outdoor Centre began in the early evening and continued little by little right up to chucking out time from the fleshpots of Aviemore and Kingussie. For those who arrived early enough to make dinner in the humorously tight confines of the kitchen area, a quaint first night introductory game ensued: it was based, it seemed, on the "I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again" skit - "When ah were a lad ah lived in't 'ole... "!. Except in this version each person seemed to be trying to outdo the others with an account of the experience of the coldest, most uncomfortable place they had spent a night in.

The Saturday found the group splitting up into several teams with different targets: either heading up to the Cairngorm massif to find some snow to ski on; or walking up to Sgor Goithe.

The beginners amongst the skiers-in-search-of-snow spent part of the morning sorting and learning about the gear: fitting skins; adjusting bindings; etc before heading to the Coire Cas Carpark.

The walkers just got their gear and got going!



After a short trudge up onto the ridge to the east of the main carpark the skiers were able to don skins and skinned up a fair distance to a good spot for a first 'pitstop'. Further up, the party split into two groups: the very very new with freeheels and those

with Alpine touring kit. The beginners, under Lynn's excellent guidance, played on an area of slightly variable snow just to the side of the main piste, while the more experienced... made for the Ptarmachan restaurant and coffee!



Claire takes up the story of some of the walkers:

Saturday saw fantastic weather on the tops, Tony and Nicky very kindly took Mini and myself (Claire) up Sgor Gaoith to improve our winter skills. After a few kilometers walk up the mountain we found a suitable patch of snow to practice walking with winter boots, using crampons, cutting steps with ice axes and ice axe self-arrest. Continuing up we found the perfect lunch spot - sat on some rocks with a large snow cornice to the side. Tony saw this as the perfect opportunity to show us how you would go about building a snow hole in the cornice with his snow shovel and snow saw.



We then headed back down the mountain in the fading daylight. Once we hit the road Mini and myself headed away from the hostel to pick up the car and Tony and Nicky headed back to the hostel. After a kilometer and a half trudging along the road someone passed us heading to the carpark, Mini put her thumb out and we got a lift back to the car. We then headed back up the road to the hostel expecting to pick Tony and Nicky up. When we arrived back at the hostel they were already there, it was only after a few glasses of wine that it transpired they too had had a lift from the very same people who gave us one!

We were very grateful to Tony and Nicky for imparting some of their wisdom onto us.

It was just beginning to get dark when the skiers got together back at the Coire Cas Carpark... with some heading straight back to the Centre and others for a quick foray into Aviemore (the lure of a cappuccino in the Mountain Café called to me!)

Once back at the Centre the general melee of the meal preparation ensued. Much hilarity and even more rice was the result! Actually, a very fine vegetarian meal for 16 was produced with several people contributing dishes and a superb apple crumble and a carrot cake!



Sunday brought similar conditions to the Saturday – so some who had walked before now skied... and vice versa. Claire again:

Sunday saw Mini, Sally and myself head up to Cairngorm for some ski touring, we set off with our skis on our rucksacks until we found a suitable patch of snow to skin up. On making it to the top of the ski run we walked the remaining distance up to the top of Cairn Gorm where we had stunning views. The weather might not have been perfect for ski-touring but it was a great weekend to enjoy the beauty of Scotland. We had a quick stop at the cafe and then skied back down the mountain.

Others cycled up the strath on the west bank of the Feshie, while yet others headed up for Sgor Gaoithe – and found it living up to its name... it was windy.



After a fine weekend in pleasant company it was time to trundle back south along Strath Spey and so to home.