

## Skillshare Weekend Report

By Alex Zawalnyski



'Didn't there used to be a ski resort around here?' Coire Cas, Cairngorm (Photo Lynn)

A party of sixteen ESTC members (plus Skye the Dog) spent the weekend celebrating the Plowman Poet and the (Snow) plow turn. That is, we had an early Burns Supper, at the Glen Feshie hostel, as part of the Skillshare weekend. The hostel is a quiet annex with view overlooking the Cairngorms beyond the nearby field. (Remember to close the gate so the sheep don't get in).

Saturday morning saw us gathering at the Cairngorm base station. While the peak of Cairngorm was lost in the clouds, the lower slopes were peppered with ski tourers, Winter Skills groups and those learning to ski. The ESTC split into three groups: one to refresh the essentials of skiing; one to try and find a steep slope to practice some advanced skills; and one to practice avalanche safety.

The slopes were hard packed and icy; conditions were made all the more difficult with flat light making the slope difficult to read. The wind, too, complicated matters. The groups parted ways for an hour or two before meeting back at lunchtime. From here most members skinned to the top of the Ptarmigan, or thereabouts, and had a long run down. A solid, low tuck was essential to pierce the wind whipping up the slope. Skiing became more frenetic as hot chocolate caught our imagination.

The January sales were too irresistible for some, so a brief trip to Aviemore was required. The real highlight of the evening was the Burns supper (masterminded by Lynn) and the plethora of puddings on offer. We decided that the hostel was too small for the use of bagpipes, and opted to progress straight to the eating part of the night. Before long the conversation turned towards the conditions for the following day. Return to Cairngorm, or risk Drumochter seemed to be the prominent suggestions.

As the snow conditions were rather unforgiving, some members opted for a winter hill walk, while others skinned to the summit of Geal Charn. There was a short walk-in before the snow was consistent enough to allow for skinning. Before long the hill widened into an expanse of snow; some of it tantalisingly powdery.



'There's plenty of snow if you know where to look' Geal Charn (Photo Brian Carson)

A quick turn around was needed at the top of Geal Charn for the wind built and built as the day progressed. The covering of snow was wide enough to provide a welcome relief from the icy confinements of Cairngorm.



Anthony, Sofie and Alex bag a summit (Photo Brian Carson)

All in all, two very different, but very enjoyable days in the Scottish hills. The weekend welcomed in a number of new members who were welcomed warmly by the existing members. The weekend highlighted how important community is for an activity like ski touring; whether it be avalanche safety, route selection, or peeling potatoes for a Burns Supper.