

MUNRO MATTERS 2008

by Dave Broadhead (Clerk of the List)

I took over the List from David Kirk on 1 August 2007 and would like to take this opportunity to thank him for all his work over the past six years and for ensuring a smooth transition. The Clerk now enters details directly onto the SMC website so thanks also to the Webmaster, Ken Crocket, for his assistance and patience while I have been getting to grips with the technology. Thanks also to the third member of the team, the long serving Keeper of Regalia, Gordon McAndrew, who supplies the ever popular Munroist's ties and brooches. Over his six years tenure, my predecessor added an average of 208 Compleaters to the list each year, compared to an average of 189 registered by Chris Huntly over the previous six years. The trend continues to rise, with a record 257 for the year 1 April 2007 – 31 March 2008.

One of the main incentives of taking on the duties of Clerk is the prospect of receiving a steady flow of fascinating letters. The rules for registration are very simple, with the minimum requirement being a signed statement confirming that all 284 summits have been climbed. There is no application form or evidence required, though there are some guidelines on the Website which suggest that a few more details are appreciated, such as first and last summits, time taken, age, future projects. Fortunately, such a momentous occasion achieved after so many years of hard toil makes most Compleatists quite reflective and more than willing to share their thoughts and feelings and recount a few interesting stories.

So what is the average Munroist really like? Answering this simple question has become one of my little projects and already a picture is emerging from the contents of their correspondence. Based on a sample of 165 received since August, 81% are male, average age 54 years and 64% live in Scotland. Average time to Complete is 23 years, with an average of 16 people joining the summit celebrations. 18% Complete at the same time as their partner.

Over the years, there have been many attempts to explain why people go to the hills and Munroists give a variety of reasons. John Risk (3807) wrote that *it all started back in September 1978, escaping my home town of Dundee as far as the bus would take us and not aware for a while what Munros were*. Brian Endicott (4010) started in exactly the same way as myself - *I owe my introduction to our great outdoors to the Boys Brigade in the late sixties*. For others such as Andy Brydie (3974) it was clearly part of family life. *My first Munro was Cairngorm in August 1977, taken there as a small child by my father, Jim Brydie (99)*. Tony Goodings (3847) *bought "The Munros" and started using them as a basis for walking the dogs (one did 104 and another 77)*. Celebrities occasionally play a part, as reported by Stan Franklin (3830) who *started them at the age of fifteen on a sunny day when the whole of Gartocharn where I lived was taken up Ben Lomond by Tom Weir who lived in the village*. Colin R. Marshall (4019) recalled *my 2nd and 3rd Munros done in 1957-58 with the Edinburgh University Mountaineering Club, including Robin Smith*. Going to the hills is sometimes considered as "character building", though not apparently by many Munroists. Ronald Mitchell (3866) commented that *many of these early trips were with groups*

from Youth Camps from deprived areas of Aberdeen – first and probably the last Munro for many of these teenagers, while Edward Jones (3929) remembered my personal Munro round started when I was sixteen on an Outward Bound course at Loch Eil.

Many Compleaters recognise the unique nature of Munro bagging, combining as it does the pleasures of hillwalking with the compulsion of working through a list. Christine Robinson (3775) admitted *I never realised at the time it was going to become such an obsession*, a feeling shared by Eddie Malicki (3937) who confessed that *I wanted the “tick” but did not want to finish bagging, such was the addiction!* Fortunately, the thrill of ticking is easily balanced with other pleasures. Sue Dalton (3940) & Ian D. Thomas (3941) explained that *lists are a wonderful incentive to explore new hills, but we equally love travelling through the landscape and camping wild in the most beautiful country on earth. Our first Scottish mountain was Ben Nevis.....and we have had 21 “Munro bagging” holidays in Scotland since – mostly backpacking across the Highlands for two or three weeks in May, posting on supplies and collecting Munros and tops as we went. These have been some of our best holidays.* Presumably with a view to “putting something back” James Bussey (3865) described how *all of my Munro round was completed during my service in the Royal Air Force Regiment. We also spend several weekends at voluntary conservation activities each year, on John Muir Trust properties. We consider these to be an important part of our mountain activities.*

Having started collecting Munros, there seem to be many and varied targets for Completion. Mike Croft (3890) is just one of many who wanted to tie in with one of life’s milestones, *having walked 30 or 40 Munros over the years without really noticing it, I took it into my head to do them all after my 60th birthday.* There may, of course, be many obstacles on the way, such as Nigel Lack (3772) who *was not always sure I would climb all the Munros as I have a real fear of heights* . On a more serious note, one of the most satisfying and uplifting aspects of being Clerk is receiving reports from people who have used their round as a route to better health, and even overcome serious health problems to Complete. Alan Bilsland (3986) *was medically retired with heart problems back in 1999.....I started to target the Munros in line with a general attempt to improve and maintain good health. I am delighted to say that this was an extremely good strategy and I feel healthier today than I did eight years ago.* John Colin Smith (3910) wrote that *in 1999 I had triple by-pass surgery and since then have climbed 175 Munros plus 24 repeats.* However, the most remarkable triumph was recounted by Murray Elder (3897) who *had reached 82 – Dreish- but could not go on to Mayar – heart problems. In 1988 I had a heart transplant and climbed Stuic an Lochain in 1989. I completed this year (2007).....my heart surgeon was also present.* Lord Elder, as he should more properly be addressed, also informed me that *there are now three Munroists in the House of Lords. Chris Smith and Alan Haworth completed before joining the Lords.* (Making him the first Peer to complete.) Keep an eye out for ermine-trimmed cagoules!

A number of Compleaters send copies of fascinating data bases and spread sheets detailing their entire round, while others choose to highlight some facts they consider significant. Wraight Shepherd (3921) did not have to travel very far, as

apparently from my house below Stirling Castle I can see 13 Munros and I have just identified another Top in front of Ben More. Others made light of much more arduous journeys just to reach the hills, such as Jonathan Massey (3935) who noted *most of my Munros have been climbed on weekend raids North of the Border, and I have counted that I have made 88 Munro bagging trips to compleat my quest!* Anyone just starting their round and wondering what they might be letting themselves in for might like to consider the following:

It has taken me 54 trips to Scotland (from Reading) to do the round, and it involved 170 hill days. I estimate I walked for around 950 hours covering 2490 km and climbing 171,350m. I also used a bike for around 160km in total. Alan McCaffery (3871)

106 days walking in 4 years and 9days.

1359 miles walked or cycled and 509,476 feet ascended.

Most Munros in 1 day 9.

Number of aborted walks 1.

Number of times climbed wrong mountain1. Ken Mathewson (3926)

58 trips to Scotland from South Yorkshire

Walked 1,800 miles

Climbed 720,000 feet over 153 days in 24 years. Martyn Goodwin (3938)

To achieve the compleation I have walked some 1704 miles, climbed 565,337 ft (169,601m) and spent 1,075 hours on the hills. I have never stayed overnight on the hills which meant some long days. J. A. S. Stewart (3952)

- *It has taken me 13 years to complete the round*
- *Average number completed per year = 22*
- *Most climbed in one year = 55*
- *Least climbed in one year = 4*
- *I have made 50 trips from Surrey to Scotland*
- *Have spent a total of 156 days on the hills*
- *I am still married!* Richard Braithwaite (3954)

All the more remarkable then are the achievements of those Compleaters from overseas, such as Stephan Jung (3828). *Being German I could visit the Highlands only for an average three weeks holidays.....walking all these hills was a special experience I will never rue, even though I now live in the German Alps.* Not content with the Munros, Johan de Jong (1423) from Holland has finished the Corbetts and started on the Donalds. Most foreigners make things a bit easier for themselves, like Laila Kjellstrom (3843), *Swedish but have been living in Edinburgh for 22 years.* Fellow Swedes Pauline (3955) & Ake Inghammar (3956) wondered *my husband Ake seems to be the first Swede who has completed the Munros and Furths? By the way, what do you call a Munroist who has completed the Furths?!!* Living in Beaulieu helps and this delightful couple dropped their details off in person, just in time to join the Clerk for afternoon tea. Another couple, Bob Boyce (3836) & Ingrid Baber (3837) wondered *Ingrid is German and I am Canadian, are we the first foreign couple to do all the Munros together? However, both of us have been living in Scotland longer than*

Germany or Canada! This is clearly an area with a lot of potential for achieving “firsts”, but the Clerk is too busy adding to and amending the List to keep such records, so was also unable to help Maggie Carr (3850) who *was born in Zimbabwe. We do not expect that she is the first from this country to Compleat, but would be interested to know how many others there have been.*

Climbing Munros has of course always been popular with couples, and the correspondence indicates that this continues to be a romantic activity. Note that in keeping with good manners, the Clerk has adopted a “ladies first” policy when allocating numbers to Complete couples. Kevin Luton (3858) *proposed to Susan at the summit of Seana Bhraigh in 2005 and we were married in 2006.* Things developed a bit more slowly for Robbie McFedries (3880) & Sheila Mitchell (3879) who described how *I climbed my first Munro and developed a real love for the outdoors. A year later, I met a girl who, when we climbed our first Munro together (her first hill), I was delighted to note she also shared the love of the hills. We married a few years later and slowly we began to believe that maybe one day we could compleat the Munros.* In the best romantic tradition this story had a happy ending when, on Completion, *I kissed my wife THEN we kissed the cairn.* Jenny (3958) & Steve Shepherd (3959) also planned a happy ending as *Jenny’s 1st Munro was Steve’s 49th and all previous 48 were then repeated to enable Jenny to catch up (true love runs deep!).* Roderick McKay (4004) found an interesting way of showing the effect of a non-climbing wife on his progress. *This graph just shows you – getting married slows up everything!*

When the day of Completion finally arrives, and a triumphant party gather around the final summit cairn, there are often noteworthy moments. A celebratory alcoholic drink is usually shared and drams enjoyed this year included Bowmore, Lagavulin and Tobermory. Mike Smith (3992) and his party chose an unusual way to celebrate. *On the way down, when we found a relatively flat piece of ground, we played boules, the girls winning by a short head.* Unfortunately, the generally poor summer weather dampened a number of celebrations. Derek Nonhebel (3877) seems to have been particularly unlucky and complained that *from a weather point of view it (Bynack More) was the worst weather I have experienced on any of the Munros.* Ben More (Mull) remains a popular finish and proved a highlight of the round for Robin Paton (3779). *Flying my own aircraft from Strathallan airfield, Perthshire to Glenforsa airstrip on Mull, making a rapid ascent/descent of Ben More and flying back – all within 8 hours.* Friends of John Rogerson (3943) composed and recited a very entertaining poem which started thus:

*Auld hill-baggers hang aboot,
But needna’ fade awa’,
If time an’ tide permit them still,
Tae face the wind an’ sna’.*

*Foor life doesna’ end on yon last Top,
There’s plenty left tae dae,
Just close yer eyes an’ tell yersel’
Auld Munroists nivver dee.*

For friends of James R. Stewart (3979), things did not turn out quite as expected. *A memorable day, slightly spoiled by one of the two drivers being booked for speeding, driving out of Fort William on the way home!*

Once all the fuss is over and the new Munroist sits down to notify the Clerk of the List, mulling over future hill plans produces an interesting variety of responses. Davina Lavery (3780) is fairly typical. *Climbing all the Munros has been a fantastic journey. I feel so lucky to have got to parts of Scotland that I might not have otherwise visited. I look forward to seeing even more of Scotland as I try to complete the Corbetts.* For some, there is a hint that their new challenges may not be met with quite the same enthusiasm. Alex Thomson (3776) noted with some regret *I have also begun to climb the Corbetts and now wish I had had the foresight to climb more of them in passing.* Dave Malia (3778) is set on greater things and reported *I have at last walked all the Munros....I have no intention of doing them again or the Corbetts.....I climbed Ama Dablam last October and hope to go to Argentina over Christmas to walk Aconcagua.* Dave Hewitt (3907) editor of "The Angry Corrie" clearly likes a focus for his bagging. *Perhaps the most unusual feature of an otherwise fairly mundane round was that the Saddle (Compleation) was also my 1000th Munro. The landmark I'm working towards just now is a calendar round on Ben Cleuch – to have been up it on every date. Currently have 39 "gaps".* Many Compleaters seem content to sit back and enjoy the feeling of satisfaction neatly summed up by Richard Williams (3841) *Cost, around the price of an average brand new car!! Plus £10,000 worth of knee surgery (both worth every penny.) Commitment – difficult (that rain/mist, them midges, that long drive home to Wales, them pronunciations!) Generally some of the best scenery in the country. Don't think my age and knees will last for all the Corbetts, but will do some of them. Have now completed the three M's Matterhorn, Mount Blanc, Munros.*

Thanks to all who have made the effort to write and notify the Clerk. Sadly, a significant number of Munroists prefer to remain unlisted, though some eventually have a change of heart, like Chris Osmond (4002) who admitted that *after much thought, I have finally decided to "come clean" and own up to being a compleater. I have completed the Munros twice and the Furths once.* Some write immediately, while others are a bit slower off the mark, like Bill Cook (4003) who explained *I saw from a recent item in "The Angry Corrie" that you have taken over as the keeper of the list. It reminded me that perhaps it was time to put my name down – a little late. I completed on 6 May 1990.* Most choose to receive tangible evidence of their achievement, like Ruth Swanson (3932) *As instructed, I am enclosing a SAE. I would like a certificate, please. (Simply to have something to show off to my grandchildren!)* Unfortunately, the new postal rates for A4 envelopes has caused some confusion, so please check!

In the last batch of letters received someone, who will remain nameless, sent back his certificate and asked to be removed from the List, while David Roeder (4026) finished with my favourite summary for the year of what it is all about. *I've walked with family, friends, solo or just shared a route with strangers were going the same way at the same pace providing companionship and conversation, particularly welcome in times of poor visibility. I've seen the inside of many a cloud, had just one*

poor Brocken Spectre and one temperature inversion (Bens Hope and Klibreck). I've slept at 900m, awoken covered in ice (in June) and not seen a soul in 46 hours. Having visited them all, the Munros are like old friends, but always remember that you visit on their terms and they might just bite back.

Once the Clerk has finished with them, all the correspondence is passed on to the archive in the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh. So please keep the letters coming and take your place in history.

Enjoy your hills.

Dave Broadhead, Clerk of the List