

Harry's Stone

The on-going story of EVMC members love affair with the Munros. . . .



A lone figure blunders along the misty Fionn Bheinn above Achnashellach having spent the last hour not quite certain of where he was. Another figure appears out of the mist – not an apparition but a rapidly approaching fell runner with a sense of direction. A conversation ensues pointing Richard, our confused hero (for it is he), in the right direction. The fell runner bids farewell and disappears off down the hill into the mist below.

The following Wednesday, Richard heads to the Aggy for a quiet pint. Across the bar sit the massed ranks of the EVMC. Among their ranks, Richard notices a vaguely familiar character and suddenly, the penny drops. Last week's fell runner was none other than the legendary Harry Blenkinsop so a conversation ensues and, after further liquid refreshment, future joint Munro trips are planned.

Harry did his first Munro in 1964 but as the motivation for this just happened to be competing in the Ben Nevis fell race, he doesn't really count this as his starting point. Harry counted his first Munro as an ascent of Buchaille Etive Mor, ten years later.

His final Munro was Ben Hope (24.5.1994) where he removed a rock from the summit cairn to present to Richard with the fateful words – "Better take the bugger . . ." and so, a tradition was born.

Richard takes up the story in 2001, the fateful Foot and Mouth year.

"When Harry completed in 1994, I was presented at the club dinner (at the Haweswater Hotel) with the rock from Ben Hope, mounted on a plinth made by Jon Bardgett at the Newton Rigg workshop. This was by way of encouragement for me to complete the Munros, and return the rock to Ben Hope. This I did in 2001, and substituted a rock from my final Munro, Ben More Assynt, two days later. I presented this to Chris Kenyon with similar encouragement, for the next aspirant Munroist, at the following club dinner.

However Chris was still short of the total when Paul Goulding completed on Beinn Eibhinn in 2020 so it was passed onto him and then become a trophy held by the most recent club compleater:"

Paul takes up the story:-

"My first Munro was Stob Choire Clauridh on the Grey Corries in 1966 at the age of 18, climbed with a friend from school. We hitch-hiked up from Nottingham sharing a kernmantle rope around the neck and a virtually non-existent rack of gear. We traversed the Grey Corries after a night in the Lairig Leacach bothy – almost derelict then with rotten planks of wood on which to sleep, inside those big sweaty plastic orange bivvy bags (no room for a sleeping bag inside my dad's old Bergen rucksack). We continued over Aonach Beag and dropped down to the Glen Nevis hostel, pretty exhausted after a very hot day, only to be woken by the warden at about midnight to be asked to join the rescue team to search for some missing German walkers. We were chosen on account of the rope, which suggested we were the only proper climbers in the place (my experience at that point was a few routes on Stanage and a couple of climbs on Shepherd's).

We searched all night, the walkers were eventually found, and after a slap up breakfast 'on the house' we were invited to stay at the CIC hut, from where we climbed Observatory Ridge. From there we hitched north and traversed the Torridon peaks, courtesy of Poucher (there is some grit to this day embedded in the spine of my "The Scottish Peaks" from dropping it into Loch Coire Mhic Fhearchair as I was gazing at the Triple Buttress).

So not a bad introduction to the Highlands, but I was never a bagger as such – despite keeping a tally on the map up on the attic wall. For a remarkable 35 years or so I went on an annual camping trip with a good friend, for many years exclusively in winter, and steadily wandered at will, whether Munro, Corbett or Marilyn, until, upon retirement 10 years or so ago I realised I only had about 70 Munros left to do, and finally decided to complete the task. As I'm sure all Munroists would agree, it makes for a wonderful life."

Paul could not reasonably be expected to return the stone to Ben More Assynt, so Richard's stone was passed onto Jane and Gary who continue the tale:-

"A chance encounter and a subsequent conversation with Jim and Kate in their van in Glencoe in 2016 (on our way home from Mingulay) had led Jane and me to examine diaries to ascertain how many Munros we had both done to that date. It turned out to be 70 (out of 282). So began a

retirement project to complete, that ended with an ascent of Seana Bhragh – along with my brother, Russell, and German Shepherd, Rona (on her 75th Munro) - in May 2022. Richard's rock from Ben More Assynt was left at the summit, to confuse future geologists, and a piece of schist was collected and passed on to Al Davis".

I climbed my first Munro in 1965 – not that I was aware the enormity of what we had done. Three sixth formers from Carlisle with Dan Archer, our Maths teacher, for a fortnight in Glencoe and Glen Shiel. Hills were climbed most days but the word Munro was never mentioned. All the hills we climbed that fortnight are now lost in the foggy clouds of memory apart from The Saddle in Glen Shiel. I had a raging toothache all that week but the excitement of Forcan ridge gave some relief. Fairly quickly, hill walking gave way to climbing and, for the following 45 years, I ignored Munros and was even dismissive of the concept of bagging them. Oh, the arrogance of ignorance!

I saw the light around 2010. A good friend was close to completion but needed help with the last few scrambly and remote ones. A long day in Fisherfield opened my eyes – 14 hours in remote wilderness and not seeing a soul all day. This day had a Damascene effect . . . I had a quick count up of my Munro tally since 1965. Not having logged my hills, there was much uncertainty. Yes, I had been up Beinn Eighe but had I done both Munros – almost certainly not. Looking back over a lifetime in the Scottish hills, I could only be certain of a tally of 30 Munros. So began an urgent campaign while the knees were still working.

This gave me a brilliant few years of solo adventures (just me and Tara) to areas of Scotland completely new to me. As new areas were visited, the jigsaw of hills gradually came together into a bigger picture of Scotland. My last one was Sgurr na Lapaich, a lonely hill overlooking Loch Mullardoch. At least Jane&Gary's stone has a brilliant view.



The next compleater was not certain. Chris had four to go and Howard just one but he wasn't in a hurry to finish so I hung onto the stone waiting for progress reports.

But then, Howard "just happened to be up north" close to Fionn Bheinn and quietly completed (without the stone).

So now it was over to Chris

"There is a select group known as golden Munroists - people who have taken 50 years or more to complete the Munros. I am definitely part of this group, I did my first summit in 1969 and my last in May 2025 - no sense in rushing these things!

The highlight has to be the Cuillin, closely followed by Torridon. I agree some Munros are more exciting than others but I would not really describe any as boring as there is always something - good views, good company, getting lost in a snowstorm on Ben Chonzie. Doing all the Munros also takes you to parts of Scotland I had never been to before and I got to know Scotland much better. Downsides - midges and bogs!

Ron and myself went up to Scotland in May 2025. I didn't really think I was going to do all my four remaining Munros so I didn't take Alan's stone with me. However the weather was great so after doing three summits in the Ben Alder area we decided to go for my last one - Carn Mor Dearg. Alan kindly posted his stone up to Scotland - to the next-door neighbour of a friend of ours in Kinlochleven. So Alan's stone was duly taken up Carn Mor Dearg by Ron and myself and placed on the summit cairn. Photos were taken and toasts drunk with whisky then we took a stone from the summit to be given to the next person to finish the challenge - and so the story continues!"