



# Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue CIO

Newsletter January 2020



## Chairmans report - Andy Harbach

I'm writing this introduction on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, and by the time you read it Christmas and the New Year will have passed. I hope you all had a good time, and hopefully it will not have been too busy for those members who are remaining in North Wales over the festive period. On 14<sup>th</sup> December Moel Siabod Cafe hosted a Christmas quiz to raise funds for the Team. Quiz master Mike Lees provided an entertaining evening as usual, with a range of fun games, shout out questions, and traditional quiz questions. The event raised £400 for the Team, and we are extremely grateful to Siabod Cafe for their continuing support.

At the end of November we hosted three members of other mountain rescue Teams for our peer review. The Friday night was a meet and greet session. On Saturday we spent eight hours going over a set of questions related to our team and how we operate. This was a very detailed session covering all aspects of team life from rescue to equipment and how we look after team members. Sunday was a full team exercise in icy conditions where we had a simulated rescue of a climber on Milestone Buttress. After a long weekend we will have a lot to consider about how we operate and where we can improve. The observations of the reviewers will be made available in the New Year, and we will also have our own notes from Saturday. I would like to thank our external reviewers (Tim Cain, Owen Phillips, and Chris Cookson) for taking time to visit us and ask probing questions. Jo Worrall was our official scribe for Saturday and spent a lot of time patiently taking notes of our discussions. Tim Radford and Tim Lamberton compiled our answers to a written question set prior to the review, and spent a lot of time organising the event. Finally thanks to all of our members who contributed either by answering questions, or attending the exercise.

As you will have seen in previous reports, Heather Beale is standing down as Treasurer at our AGM in March. Following a posting on Facebook we have received a number of applications from people who will be highly qualified to fill the position. The Trustees will discuss the candidates, and make a recommendation to the AGM. Thanks to everyone who has expressed an interest in taking on this important job.

Finally, my thanks to all our support group members for their continuing support.

## May 2019 Breamar Trip report - Jude and Clive

May 2019; the long-awaited Scottish Highlands weekend was here at last. In the winter months, I had enjoyed researching and planning this trip with the aim for members from my mountaineering club, Bremex, to wild camp and bag some Munros.

### Saturday

Nine members, including myself, set off from the Linn of Dee carpark (near Braemar) to walk to Corrou Bothy, Eastern Cairngorms. We were heavily laden to various degrees, as different people had different aims. My partner and I were intending to wild camp for 4 nights and bag at least 7 Munros so we probably had the heaviest bags. Someone else was carrying little more than a day sack as her intention was to camp overnight, let her partner carry out the overnight kit, and continue to walk through the Lairig Ghru.

Good forestry tracks led up the Glen Lui all the way to Derry Lodge, our first way-mark, and within an hour we were there. A few dozen bicycles were parked at the Mountain Rescue base, left by people doing a long day walk, and we wished that we could have taken advantage of those. My technique to take my mind off the 18kg pack was to try and do mental maths. Something that is not my forte, but trying to calculate what my load was as a percentage of my body weight, kept me occupied for some time. Then I got to thinking there must be a 'golden ratio', a formula to work out when you are definitely carrying too much. Or maybe I could just listen to my joints going Ahh!

Showers of drizzle had dampened our spirits a little, and we put aside our plan to bag a Munro, Carn a Mhaim, on the way in, (by leaving our big packs by the glen path and 'nipping up and down'). Instead, our main objective was to arrive at the bothy and get our tents up before it started to rain properly. After 4 hours of walking, we saw the bothy was surrounded by quite large patches of flattish grass, and pitching was duly achieved: we had all chosen a site to our satisfaction.

That evening we settled into our surroundings and enjoyed the shelter of the bothy to make our evening meal. Though basic and small (sleeping platform for 3) we managed to find seats and got to know our fellow walkers. That night 14 tents were pitched around the bothy, plus 6 people decided to sleep in the bothy. I wonder if this is a record? Now knowing how popular the bothy is, I can clearly understand why the Mountain Bothy Association took the trouble of building compost toilets and am so grateful - as the impact on the locality would be awful.

### Sunday

On Sunday morning, I peeped out of my tent early and spotted a Ringed Ouzel bobbing about the turf in search of food. It was only the second time I had seen this shy bird in my many decades of mountain walking and it was the first of many Cairngorm flora and fauna species that we encountered. The rain had continued, quite heavy overnight, and throughout breakfast individuals told of massive puddles in tents and moats encircling. The best story was of the occupant of the tent who was acting as a dam and when they shifted, the body of water rushed below their groundsheet and deluged the tent further down the slope!

It continued to drizzle as we bade farewell to Rhian who was walking out via the Lairig Ghru, to Aviemore. Then we started to ascend the good path alongside the stream to bag Devil's Point, Cairn Toul and Angel's Peak (Sgor an Lochain Uaine). The path was good until we started to ascend to the 1213m top on the way to Cairn Toul. The granite boulders made the going hard work but at least navigation in the low cloud was not a problem as we were following the cliff edge. Trailing azalea was very common on the higher reaches of the mountain, with its tiny pink flowers, and occasionally we saw a prostrate evergreen shrub that we took to be juniper. The rain and boulders continued and in addition a freshening wind took up. The second top of Cairn Toul had a summit cairn to shelter in, which we were really glad of by then. A sudden downpour of rain saw me take out my secret weapon - a pink, floral folding umbrella - this provided the best shelter to avoid soggy sandwiches - and earned me the nickname of 'brolly dolly'. The other nickname of the day was earned by Lizzie who was

trying out a substantial poncho. This was not the best item of clothing for a wet and windy mountain, and so she earned the nickname, 'El Poncho'!

More staggering over boulders, being pushed by gusts of wind, saw us to the top of Angel's Peak, the third Munro of the day. Our return route was much the same but with contouring below the summit of Cairn Toul. This turned out to be a large contouring route as nobody fancied the ridge path of boulder hopping while the wind had become even stronger. What we hoped might be a route on lumpy grass, turned out to be more rock fields, this time for variety, a smaller version of the ridge boulder fields. Rocks small enough to always move and twist your ankle at every step. We were all very cold, and wet to the skin by now and constantly being blown off balance, wishing for the final descent path at every step. When we eventually walked over the rim and looked down into the glen at our tiny tents beside the bothy, we came into the full force of the wind. Without speaking to each other, we all knew our thoughts turned to - how could our tents stand up to this wind overnight?

The bothy became our sanctuary, a damp, drippy place where stoves were quickly lit to provide most-welcome hot drinks and hydrate ready meals. Our moods gradually changed as some people enjoyed their dry change of clothes and others (who like to travel light) steadily warmed up and let their body heat dry themselves out. Fellow hikers joined the party and we were regaling each other with adventurous tales and sharing much laughter. Some inevitably based around our new nicknames. I was most impressed by the recount from a pensioner couple who were doing a long leg of the National Scottish Trail. They were walking – self-sufficient for up to 6 days and to keep the weight down were only eating Mug Shots for their evening meals. They had had a tough day with 4 river crossings and I really admired them – 'True grit'!

A big lesson that I had learnt whilst high up the mountain that day, is to prepare by looking at the 'big picture' of the weather forecast, much beyond the initial days of the trip, because the strong wind had not been forecast yet it may have been lurking out in the Atlantic. If I had looked more widely I would have had a better idea how long it would blow for. Nobody in the party had had a mobile signal while they were high up so we were no wiser about the wind situation. As I lay in my tent listening to the wind and counting the wee hours go by, I resolved that if it was still blowing in the morning, then we would break camp and walk out. Cutting our trip short by half.

### Monday

A calm morning greeted us and we felt smug as we said goodbye to the remaining 6 of our party who were walking out to their cars today. As we breakfasted we watched the cloud lifting off the Devil's Point and Ben Macdui on the other side of the glen. The lifting cloud revealed a light scattering of overnight snow on the latter and made it seem even higher and more daunting. Our objective, Ben Macdui, was now clear and we turned our thoughts to finding a path – as there weren't any marked on the maps. From reading reports from other walkers, they favoured ascending by the Allt Clach nan Taillear and this is where we found a good, albeit sketchy at times, path. Steep and unrelenting but it did the job and soon we were at the stream source on the plateau, a few 100m west and we passed a curious ruin of what possibly had been a bothy and soon enough we came to the trig point. Almost surreal birdsong met us, as we approached and we noticed a snow bunting sitting on the pillar, oblivious to us, but intent on singing his heart out. This natural overture was a celebration of the wonderful clear views we had and we both felt privileged to be on Cairngorms highest point in such good visibility. The metal viewfinder disc helped us identify the mountains around us and especially the impressive corrie of Braeriach across the Lairig Ghru.

We descended quite a way back down the stream path, around patches of old winter snow, and then contoured across to pick up the ridge path to Carn a Mhaim. This was an entertaining ridge of small rocky tors, never enough rock to use your hands but enough to obscure the ridge and peak curiosity of what was next. What had been snow flurries on the summit of Ben Macdui now turned to showers of rain and the reward was a rainbow over the bothy in the glen. Quite a spectacle as we peered down the sheer cliffs.

Back at the bothy, it was apparent it was going to be a quiet night for a change as there was only a Belgium backpacker and the two of us. He told of his scary airplane landing at Inverness the other night as the pilot took 3 goes to land the plane in the extremely windy weather. The delay had meant he had missed his bus and he was very grateful to a fellow passenger who offered him a lift to Aviemore. This innate kindness he attributes to most of the Scottish population and compared his homeland fellows less favorably. I must say I can agree with the assumption that people associated with mountains and hiking are a generous lot.

That night I decided to sleep in the bothy as I would have it all to myself and would not have to listen to any wind rustling the tent. However, for an hour and a half I lay there trying to get to sleep and to no avail. The bothy seemed like a dark, cold cell. A very late arrival galvanized my decision, especially when he said he wanted to light the fire and make something to eat. I quickly dressed, packed up my sleeping kit and scurried into the night to my tent. My partner was not too grumpy as I bundled into the tent and settled down. Soon the familiar pitter-patter of drizzle eased my mind and the murmur of the stream became a lullaby. I realized the tent was a cozy haven and soon fell asleep.

### Tuesday

Once again, we watched the early morning low cloud lift from the mountains to reveal a bigger dusting of fresh over-night snow. The Belgium hiker was quite alarmed and we shared with him our recently gained knowledge of the stream path up to Ben Macdui. His route, which he had drawn on his map, went straight up the mountain face so I did my best to describe how arduous the boulder fields are and to persuade him of the benefits of a path in the Cairngorms.

We efficiently broke camp and packed up as we wanted to move further south down Glen Dee and set up camp at the base of Beinn Bhrotain. Here we would be well situated to complete the long day to bag this nearby Munro and its remote neighbor, Monadh Mor. As part of my research, I had studied Google Earth to see if a path had been worn on the west side of the River Dee and sure enough others had had the same idea. It was this sketchy path that we initially set out to find. The bothy had served us well but moving camp also had the benefit of giving us a head start on the long walk out along Glen Dee. The river crossing in Glen Geusachan was easy enough as it hadn't rained for a few days and the morning's snow flurries didn't really count either. We were soon pacing around in the heather checking for lumps in our new camping area. I have not often pitched onto heather and I learnt that the bouncy mattress effect was a bonus, however the ends of broken woody stems are really sharp and threatened to puncture the base of the tent. Finding faint paths, river crossings and making camp all took time and it wasn't until 1pm that we started our ascent of the first munro.

We were glad to have the reduced weight of a day sack on our back as we ascended steep heathery ground alongside the burn, Caochan Roibidh. This was an interesting route without any sign of being trodden. The burn cascades over rock slides and in a dry summer I expect it offers an easy way up. The granite is very coarse and grippy and although the angle is steep it would be good sport. Without a path we continually looked for the best line and eventually walked via the Coire Caochan Roibidh to gain the flat-topped ridge. The rewards of a

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**Russ Hore - [russ.hore@ogwen-rescue.org.uk](mailto:russ.hore@ogwen-rescue.org.uk) - Editor**

pathless route are often flora and fauna and on this day we saw a mountain version of King Buttercup, lizards, deer, Ptarmigan and a full nest of eggs. The nest was remarkably camouflaged, nestled in the coarse grass. We were only alerted to it when the startled bird flew off at the last minute. The squawks giving us quite a fright as well. Even though I knew it was just ahead of me and was taking great care, I almost trod on it.

Just after ticking off the first munro, Beinn Bhrotain, we descended again by a boulder field to the bealach and here we fell into step with another walker who was also on his way to Monadh Mor. We quickly strode over the plateau and enjoyed a chat about Speyside distilleries. What was curious about the next summit was our personal approach. We were in the presence of a real purist, of the degree that I had not encountered before. I am very happy just to be in the vicinity of the highest point. However, this chap touched the top rock of the cairn and then proceeded to check with his app where the actual highest rock was. To our amazement he paced out 5 metres South-east and was comparing the rock he was now perched upon with the cairn. This was our second day with fantastic clear views and we took special interest in the view to Cairn Toul and its neighbours: to retrace in our minds the ankle-breaking traverse we had done in the foul weather, two days before. Nobody lingered for long on the summit as the wind chill was about minus 6. As we strode back we discussed and compared our return routes. 'The Purist' was going to descend steeply from the bealach into Glen Geusachan, then follow the riverside path back to his tent, much further down Glen Dee, at Chest of Dee. We would just retrace our steps, but omit the final part of the summit ridge. I wondered if we were making the right choice as ours was evidently without a path for any of it. I was tempted as I looked down from the bealach and remembered comments from blogs that I had read, it being 'dangerously steep' but it looked okay with a narrow zigzag path. The only gain we had in retracing our steps was that it would be shorter and indeed we got back to our tent more than an hour before the other fellow walked passed. It had been a long 10 hour but satisfying day; breaking camp, following an almost none-existing path suggested by Google Earth, making a river crossing, finding a new pitch amongst the heather, ascending to bag 2 munros without any path and being treated to lots of wildlife sightings. After a quick evening meal, I had no need of a lullaby from the stream.

### Wednesday

The next day greeted us with the cold start we had become accustomed to and to prove a point Jack Frost had been at work and coated the tent. Now that we were further south along Glen Dee though, the hills to the east were lower and the sun was soon warming us up and melting the ice. I took advantage of this magical hour, because there was not a breath of wind, and I had a full head-to-toe wash in the nearby stream. I had been wondering how I could possibly present myself to the civilization of Braemar, as we wished to spend a good hour or two in the trendy café having 'real' home-cooked food of the most delicious kind. This splendid solution felt invigorating and totally natural in that environment.

Following the River Dee as it winds down the glen, revealed the Chest of Dee, which is an impressive gorge. The Purist's tent was still there, pitched on a wide patch of grass surrounded by a wide meander – an idyllic spot. We commented more than once to each other how the character of the river changed as we hiked the 10 kilometers to Linn of Dee. At times, it is very wide and shallow and surely is one of the best locations for fly-fishing, changing again at the Linn of Dee to charge through another rocky gorge. As always, the landscape evolves and we noticed new deer fencing around the river and its banks, in order to protect the new stands of native trees that had been planted. It will be some time before I am lucky enough to visit this magnificent glen again and I look forward to admiring the young saplings, which in turn will enhance the area and bring more wildlife.

Overall, this trip had provided all that we had wanted and much more. Not only the Munros ticked but the whole shared experience of being out in the wild for a prolonged time. We have much to be thankful for. I can't wait to start planning next year's!

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### WEMSI - Soraya Cherry

It's a cold, crisp winters day in the Cairngorms. A low-lying mist creeps through Glenmore Forest, enfolding the Scots Pines in a icy muffled silence. Just off a forestry track next to Lochan na Frithe, pitched on the only bit of flat frost hardened ground is a blue casualty clearing tent. The silence is engulfing, the calm before an anticipated storm. The Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and Wilderness Physicians (WPs) are tired and cold with adrenaline pumping through their veins. They've spent a morning triaging multiple casualties with a whole host of injuries – both medical and trauma. It's hard to differentiate reality versus scenario – emotionally the EMTs and WPs are fully engaged with this pseudo realism. Theoretically this is a scenario. A crackled explosion followed by a burst of deep red smoke emits from the casualty clearing tent where currently a 40 year old male with hypothermia and an unknown male with an in-field tracheotomy are being treated. In a matter of seconds a female casualty is ejected from the tent screaming as she runs straight into one of the EMTs, an amputated hand, with the remaining wrist oozing blood. Simultaneously, the unknown male with an in-field tachymetry sustained huge abdominal trauma; the 40 year old male with hypothermia now has severe chest and airway burns and is struggling to breathe.

Several other casualties are crying out for help. You wouldn't be wrong to assume that this scenario is starting to resemble a nightmare, a multi-casualty nightmare. This is it, resources are stretched, equipment hasn't or can't be restocked, the EMTs are all assigned to different casualties and the Bronze command is required to make a decision on which casualty gets the first helicopter out.

This is the **Wilderness Emergency Medical Services Institute International (WEMSI-International)** course. Internationally recognised as one of the top courses for wilderness and remote medicine. The WEMSI faculty consists of wide range of experts across the spectrum from expedition, emergency, guide and rescue specialists. The knowledge and proficiency of the instructors is phenomenal, with cutting edge research presented and discussed throughout the eight day course.

The WEMSI-International course has its roots in the USA, until the first course was run in Ireland in 1997 where OVMRO's very own John Evans attended. John came away from the course completely enthused "verging on the evangelical" about what was being achieved with the WEMSI- International course. John along with Dr Jel Coward and Eric Pirie resolved to bring the



EMTs and WPs dealing with a casualty  
in a scenario  
©Charlie Beale



course to mainland UK and in 1999 the first course was held at the Aberdyfi Outward Bound centre in North Wales. The following year the course moved to its current home at the Sport Scotland centre at Glenmore Lodge in the Cairngorm mountains.



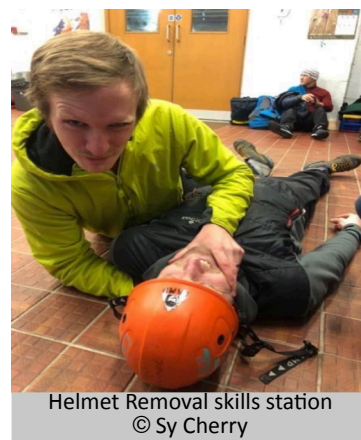
Ensuring casualties are kept warm in group shelters whilst receiving treatment  
© Sy Cherry

Through John Evans' interest and passion for wilderness medicine, Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue Organisation has a close link to the WEMSI-International course. Since his unexpected death in 2009, Ogwen members have benefitted from the John Evans Legacy Fund which was set up by WEMSI-International in his memory. This Legacy fund gives the team a discounted place on the WEMSI-International Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)/Wilderness Physicians (WP) course every year. This connection had lapsed in recent years but has now been re-established.

The WEMSI-International course is intense; a gruelling schedule saw the aspirant EMTs and WP's start their day with lectures from 08:15 on all aspects of mountain medicine (ranging from trauma and head injuries to thermoregulation and neurology) and expedition medicine (extending from routine bites and stings to expedition mental health and altitude).

The lectures were cleverly pitched and planned so

that health care professionals (doctors, paramedics, nurses) increased their skill set by the same magnitude, just in different avenues, as non-health care professionals (mountain rescue, mountain guides, expedition leaders, fire service). The afternoons often included skills stations varying from fish hook removal and foot care to packaging casualties, splinting and drug administration routes. Evenings were spent outside, going through gruelling simulations where all participants were expected to put their newly acquired knowledge and skills to the test! The day would end by 2200, where all students, tired and cold, would end up in the bar for a wind down before bed.



Helmet Removal skills station  
© Sy Cherry

Three of Ogwen Valleys' casualty carers; Charlie Beale (Training Officer), Sy Cherry (Cas Care Officer) and Steve Mullan (MREW Cas Care Certificate holder) were selected by committee to attend the WEMSI-International course this November to boost their continual professional development and broadening their knowledge base. Charlie, Sy and Steve have returned to North Wales with their competence and confidence greatly increased and bring with them new ideas and viewpoints which can aid healthy discussions for continuous improvement within the cas care group. This is a course that you don't want to miss.

### Proposal for the formation of a Specialist Ski Group within OVMRO

At a recent meeting of some of the members, it was proposed that the Team should form a new, specialist, group of rescuers. These would be specifically trained for the more demanding winter jobs for example on the Carneddau. Below I detail the Purpose, Training and Equipment requirement for this new team.

Where sufficient snow cover exists, the specialists would be flown to the top of Llewelyn complete with downhill skis, a ski-based stretcher, cas tent, plenty of food. ( ...and a small supply of internal rewarming liquid, preferably imported from Ireland.) The Team would then ski down to the incident site and effect a rescue if at all possible using the ski-based stretcher. If not they would have sufficient provisions to maintain a forward command post for some time until reinforcements arrived. If this was going to take some time, air drops of food and rewarming liquid could be arranged.

If the clag was down or the chopper was not available these members would have a second set of equipment to allow them to ski uphill to a cas using skis with skins attached. For the more remote areas a skidoo and trailer could be purchased. (Treasurer - Would the fund-raising stand for that?). Obviously this would allow a greater supply of food and internal rewarming liquid to be carried and allow a better and more comfortable forward command post to be established.

Obviously the members selected for this task would need to be highly motivated and skilled members with the necessary skills. To keep these skills up to date, regular training trips would have to be made to the Alps or as a second choice Scotland. Several such courses exist at the very reasonable price of £350-00 including accommodation but plus food and refreshment. To ensure realism in the training, supplies of rewarming liquid could be either taken with the training party or purchased on site.

The members chosen would require some specialist equipment where no expense should be spared. The following list shows a breakdown of a typical set of equipment each member would require with an approximate cost per item;

<u>Item per person p.a.</u>	<u>~Cost/£</u>
Rewarming fluid (3 bottles Jamesons)	95
Other stuff	1312
Total	1407

Although this may seem a large sum the specialist team would probably only consist of at most three members, thus giving a grand total of only £4221 p.a. If handled with care the skis etc. could last for more than one training season and thus reduce the overall cost. The specialist ski suit would have to be hard wearing and to push the team image would be embroidered with the name of the specialist team and if space allowed OVMRO would be added on the front with a special Velcro patch for the members name.

Discussions are still continuing but the name for this specialist team is proposed to be The **Ogwen** Langlauf and **Downhill** Fast **Alpine** Response **Team** (**S**pecialists). I look forward to other team members input and suggestions, preferably by April 4<sup>th</sup> 2020..