

The Barrowman

It's clear from your newsletter contributions that a fair number of club members enjoy branching out beyond the weekly HF outings, trekking in this country and travelling abroad.

If you're looking for inspiration how you might stretch yourself further on the hills and extend your appreciation of the world's high places, you might order up a few adventure holiday brochures to see what's on offer, or you could spend some time with John Barrowman.

John's hillwalking experience in Scotland and throughout the world is awesome, though you'll only find out if you make a point of quizzing him. Even then, you have to imagine where you just know the heartstopping moments must have been, because he won't talk it up, even a bit. Ian Pinkerton has made a start for you and recorded some of the more momentous moments in John's walking career.

The first time John completed his Munros was on 19th August 1989. The hill of the moment was Beinn Teallach. Most baggers stop at that but. Not John. Off he went again and, five years later, he was on top of Geal Charn (Drumochter), celebrating for a second time. On 16th July 2002, on the massive Liathach, with its two Munros Spidean a' Choireileith and Mullach an Rathan, on a fair weather day, a bit damp, a bit misty on the tops, he made the achievement for a third time. A hat trick. In between, there was the small matter of climbing all two hundred and twenty one Corbetts.

And according to those who've walked them, they can be every bit as difficult as their bigger brothers, with a lot more travelling involved.

Beinn Bhan, in Applecross, was the last one of these on 10th October 1998.

Out of that incredible accomplishment there was one day in May 1997 which gave John particular satisfaction. It was a complete traverse of the Cuillin Ridge: eleven Munros in thirteen hours on a very warm day, arriving back "weary but cheery". Not surprisingly, he has fond memories of a pint of Guinness in the Sligachan Hotel at the end of it all!

John's hillwalking hasn't been restricted to Scotland. And it hasn't always ended in success. He's had his share of bad luck. But he seems to have always known when to quit, which is why, possibly, he has achieved as much as he has.

In 1996 he travelled to Northern India and climbed Saddle Peak (15,700ft) in the Himalayas. The party also intended to attempt on Nanda Ghunti but they were prevented by poor weather. Adverse conditions thwarted John again a year later, in Argentina. The summit of Aconcagua (22,833ft) had been the target but they had to settle for the high camp at 19,555ft, when high winds gripped the mountain.



There was more disappointment a year later in Russia. Not the weather this time, but the elements just the same. Fire. The plan was an ascent of Mount Elbrus (18,570ft) and all the preparation had gone well. They were acclimatised to altitude and reached the refuge camp at 12,600ft. They decided to spend one final day acclimatising before the climb to the summit and returned to camp that day just before fire broke out, spreading throughout the entire building. John lost every bit of gear he had and was forced to walk to the nearest cable car, two hours away, down a glacier.

On a fine day in Africa, in 1999, John was successful at last. The 17,690ft high Kilimanjaro bowed to perseverance and he reached its summit. The volcanoes in Ecuador were not so obliging. Two erupted and forced a change in the itinerary. Despite this, John's party 'managed' four mountains, ranging from 12,800ft to 20,700ft. In Bolivia he climbed another two beautiful mountains in splendid weather. But bad weather returned on the last day, heavy snow covering the tents, and that was the end of climbing. His next stop was Patagonia, which straddles Argentina and Peru and takes in a wee town which goes by the name of World's End! But the big mountains there proved far too technical. The spectacular views had to suffice.

Along with some fellow Club members, John has also tackled parts of the Alps. And mention of Mont Blanc, Mount Rosa and the Matterhorn should be enough to impress you, if you aren't already breathless with admiration by now.

John has recently undergone hip surgery. Fortunately, the speed and extent of his recovery has been no less stunning than his roll of mountains and he's enjoying the hills of Scotland.

Ian Pinkerton