

About bothy books....

Most of us, I believe, take time during a bothy overnight to read some of the content of the bothy book (although Dave Broadhead expresses below a different view). Except where hunger or cold & wet clothes and weather drive a different action, my own habit is to start reading the bothy book as soon as that first cup of tea is ready soon after arrival at the bothy, and I'm sure I'm not alone in this. The following articles have been written for the MBA Newsletters on the subject of bothy book content.

Corroul for better, for worse

Richard Genner

In various Newsletter and journal articles, I have referred to the interesting and uninteresting entries in bothy books sent to me (as Records Secretary) for retirement in the MBA archives. Completed bothy books continue to trickle in, one received recently being of particular interest.

Reminiscent of Corroul bothy books of years long gone* this one has a blue, padded, leather bound cover embossed CORROUR in gold lettering. The reason for such opulence lies in the first few pages – Hugh Thomas and Liz Cotteril left it there to mark the occasion of their marriage. Unusual perhaps but hardly worthy of a Journal article were it not for the fact that the first few pages are full of entries from Hugh & Liz's friends and passers-by of whom Sarah Walsh wrote:

We came, we saw, we ate & drank, and continued
The Bride & Groom must be thanked,
Their organisation could not be missed,
Now we're off to Braemar to get drunk. (though I think I may have mis-read that last word).

The explanation - Hugh and Liz had their wedding breakfast at Corroul. On behalf of passers-by, Dave Huston '*fae 'deen*', scribed '*Popped in on the way up sort of thing. Surprised the wedding couple. Gasp! I said. Have a whisky they said. Sorted says I. Smashing surprise*'. And Lesley King contributed '*On the way to Cairn Toul and heard tell of a wedding, so popped in for a celebratory dram - any excuse! Most welcome break.*'

Alex Cotteril '*wasn't a page boy*' he moaned '*but carried all the coal up the mountain.*' Of Alex and his fellow guests, Liz Thomas (the bride in case you lost the plot) wrote '*Thank you all for coming - especially the Sherpas*' before practising her new signature a few times. Becky Walsh was more honoured than Alex Cotteril, though less of a hill-walker. - '*Only 8 hours left until a steaming hot bath in the Invercauld Hotel. Personally not my ideal weekend (I'm 16 years old) however this is certainly one of the best memories I will ever have. What more could you ask for - great company, loads of food, warmth from the fire and loads of alcohol!! Thanks to the bride and groom for letting me be their bridesmaid*'

ADL Thomas mixed philosophy with enjoyment in his entry '*one frantic hour of crowded life is worth a whole age without getting a name*' - *congratulations to my father and Liz on their wedding and thanks for a belting weekend!*

The wedding party left no rubbish it seems, but left an invisible mark; '*Atmosphere of celebration, joy and peace - the start of something new. The happy couple have long gone (we met them two hours ago) but the sparkle lives on*' penned a Lesli & Susan [All these entries were dated 5.5.96]

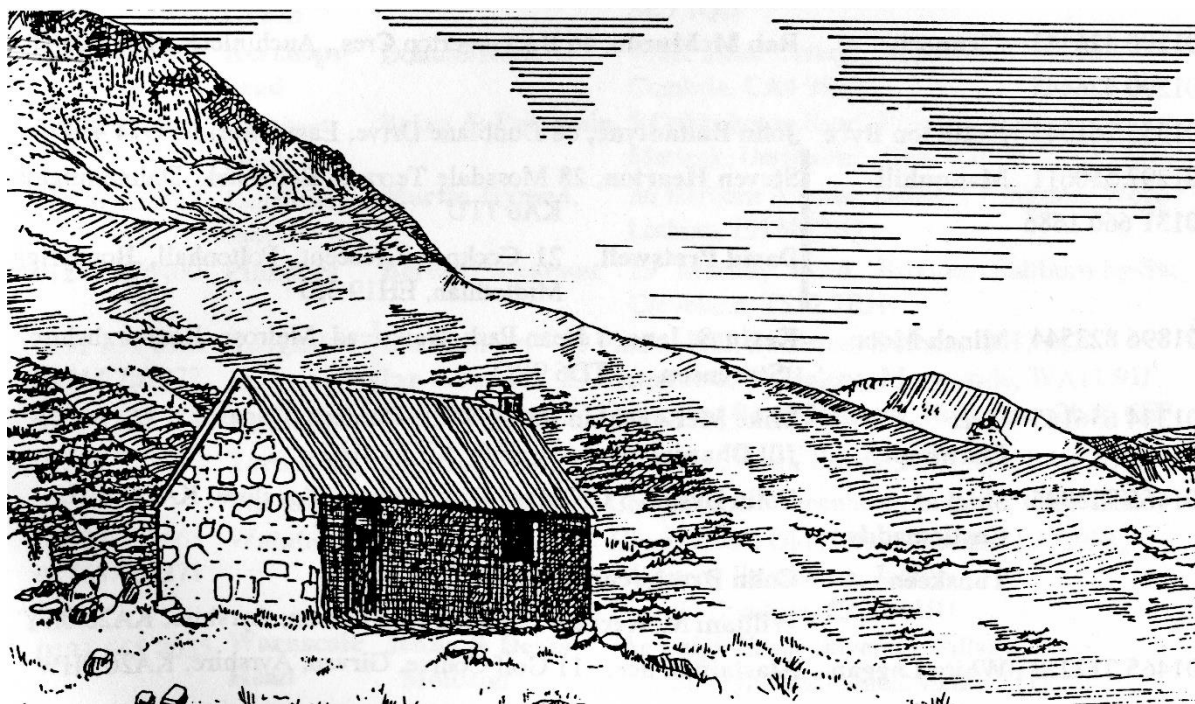
On 9.5.96 Moose wrote '*Moose & Bruce. Sitting waiting for Paul & Dave, Bruce got romantic when he read about the wedding and asked me to marry him. I'm afraid he was disappointed.*' Sorry Bruce that your rejection has been so publicly recorded.

The use of Corroul for a wedding party cannot be condoned of course - 80 pages of near A4 size filled in one summer bears testimony to the heavy usage that Corroul endures and readers are asked to ensure that the celebrations remain unique by not copying the idea.

But this is not the first bothies and wedding link. Doyens of the MBA, Bernard & Betty Heath are believed to have gone to Gorton bothy for a substantial part of their honeymoon, and whilst Mark Meredith referred to the front room as the Presidential Suite in his obituary for Blackburn of Pattack bothy (1993 Journal), it was clearly marked Honeymoon Suite when I was last there in 1985.

And of course we must remember that when 'our' bothies were homes to crofters, shepherds and stalkers, life was all work and precious little play, and many of our bothies will have witnessed a wedding night or two, simply because the newly weds had no time or money to go elsewhere.

Reproduced from Newsletter No. 123 December 1997



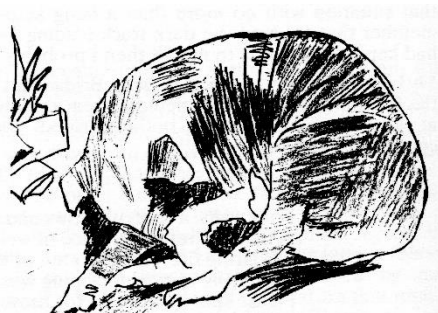
Corrour bothy, drawn by John Mitchell

Farewell to High Office - An extract

Richard Genner

1994 was a bumper year for receipt of bothy books into the MBA's archives. The content is frequently not good but I do review each bothy book received. The content is relatively unchanging, the top three topics being : 1. The state of the weather; 2. The condition of the bothy user; 3. What hills or walks the bothy user has just done.

Moaning about the weather is, of course, a British habit. The fact that bothies in wild and lonely places attract more than the average amount of wild and wet weather does not prevent the moaning. Only the Dutch are philosophical about it. 'It is wet, I am wet but your hills are so beautiful that I do not care' wrote Johan van Veen in *Culra* bothy book. Writing at *Glenpean*, David Watson of Glasgow at least put some thought into his complaint about the weather: 'probably the principal problem is the phenomenon of persistent, nay perpetual, perpendicular precipitation which is particularly prevalent, indeed, permanently present in these parts.'



An exhausted Shona, after floundering from Dalwhinnie to Culra through 2ft of snow, by her master Douglas Hutton, from *Culra* bothy book

Even hot weather is moaned about: 'weather is fantastic but a little too hot for carrying heavy sacks' - Martin Charters; 'came in over the ridge - perfect weather, too hot in fact' - Charlie Scott;

'excellent weather, if anything too warm' - Mary Porter (all these at *Culra* during different summers); 'weather is too hot' - Kerry Summers at *Lairig Leacach*. Nevertheless MBA workparty members should take comfort from the frequent grateful thanks expressed in the bothy books for the opportunity that 'our' bothies provide to escape the worst of the weather.

Most entries relating to the bothyite's physical condition indicate a tendency to overestimate physical condition and underestimate the difficulty of the walk or climb to be undertaken. I have yet to read an entry where the bothyite confesses to 'lightly swung off a 60lb pack and completed the day's walk with 20 press-ups, 10 tummy pulls and 10 chin pulls on the branches of a nearby tree'! Maybe these gladiators of the bothy world are the ones just signing their names in the bothy books. Inevitably 'what we have just done' has a sameness to it given that opportunities for variation are limited - 'our' bothies tend not to move very far. Even the water-ward 2ft slip at *Luib Chonnal* was nipped in the bud by Mick Tighe's superb work on the Allt Chonnal.



Drawn 30 August 1988 in the Knockdamph bothy book, artist Paul Warner (and digitally cleaned up)

Food is an occasional theme in bothy books. While the tendency is to boast about the large amounts of food (and alcohol) carried in and consumed, it is usually the references to dehydrated food that provoke the wry smiles. P. Spooner in the *Suardalen* bothy book sums it up: 'when some-one invents a lightweight dinner plate with steak, mushrooms, onions, roasties and all the trimmings, that doesn't take a lot of fuel to cook and doesn't go off after a week in the bottom of my rucksack beside my dirty socks, then and only then will my stomach enjoy coming away with the rest of me'.

Bodily needs - the consequence of all that food and drink - have attracted considerable correspondence in the MBA Journal lately. My wife's ratings list for a bothy includes the proximity of trees, and not for reasons of fuel supply. Our toilet correspondence has not discussed privacy yet, but Angela Lorimer did in the *Glenduror* bothy book, and the despoilers of her privacy were not human: 'this is torture! I'm a woman and desperate for the loo but the midges are in full parade out there AND it's starting to rain!' Perhaps this is why the MBA membership has never remotely approached 50% female.

Another bothy user reflects on the midge problem in repeating an old adage: 'the midges around here are a compassionate lot - kill one and immediately a thousand turn up for the funeral!' D.L. Stewart writing in the *A'Chuil* logbook has a solution to the midge problem: 'if the natural forest were allowed to re-establish itself, the transpiration of millions of trees would effectively act as drainage for the thousands of acres of peat bogs, thus cutting down the breeding environment for midges.' This is actually an extract from a longer entry about the rights and wrongs of current highland estate management, a subject which does occasionally provoke debate in the bothy books.

Some perceive Munro-bagging to be a problem. At *Suardalen*, a Mr Webb (once of Edinburgh University MC, he confesses) proposes a drastic solution: 'take a large quantity of soot (say several



A unflattering drawing of Sarah and Jane Aculler from Knockdamph bothy book, possibly a self-portrait by one of the girls

million tonnes) and sprinkle it evenly over the north polar ice cap. Black absorbs solar heat and will melt the ice cap, thus raising the sea level. A rise of 3 metres will remove such nuisances as Beinn a' Chlaidheimph, Beinn a' Chleibb, A' Glass Bheinn (perhaps), Ben Vane, Craig nan Damh, Ruadh Stac Mor and everything new in Knoydart, thus promoting them to the status of Corbetts and reducing the number of Munro-baggers on the hills.

Bothy book artwork is rare but the illustrations accompanying this article are taken from the *Knockdamph* and *Culra* bothy books. What would we do without photo-copiers? And finally from the bothy books (and in case the editor forgets his annual puzzle), Nichola, apparently a teacher from Fort William, asks bothy users

to solve the problem: $8(x-2)^2 + 3x = (4x-1)(2x+3) + 5$. In the next entry, Victoria Bell, aged 8 finds this too easy and poses a more serious problem: 'What do you get when you pour boiling water down a rabbit burrow?' Fortunately answers to both puzzles were given at the back of the bothy book (and can be found in the Website PSs below).

Reproduced from MBA Journal No. 111, December 1994

And an older article, which reveals some other topics of interest in bothy books:

Culra 1978 - 1980 : A bothy book review (by the MO)

Dave Broadhead

Apart from the wet days when you don't want to put your nose outside the bothy door, or an odd moment when you feel at a loose end, when do you ever try to read the bothy log book? I usually just flick through looking for any familiar names among the screeds of scribble that rapidly fills them up. However, on a quick MO's check-up of Culra recently, I noticed that the old book, rather battered and starting to fall apart. With plenty of material accumulated in the replacement book to satisfy anyone who enjoys browsing, I decided to take the old log book away home, to study at my leisure without straining my eyes in the poor light of the bothy.

I have since discovered that MBA policy is to leave the old book where it will be of most interest, in the bothy where it belongs, and one of the first entries commented: 'Bit disappointed to find only a virtually brand new log book' is it not possible to leave the previous book?' [Undated]. I suppose the main purpose of keeping a log book in a bothy is to record rather than entertain, and like most log books, this one is mainly brief comments on the weather and hills climbed, destination and route details. Very often the worse the weather, the longer the comment, for the combination of wet weather and bothies seems to stimulate people with the urge to write. Unfortunately the quality of the contribution is usually as poor as the weather which brought it on. One writer [on 24/9/78] carefully wrote out six pages of assorted folk songs, but with few exceptions the most informative and entertaining comments are the briefest.

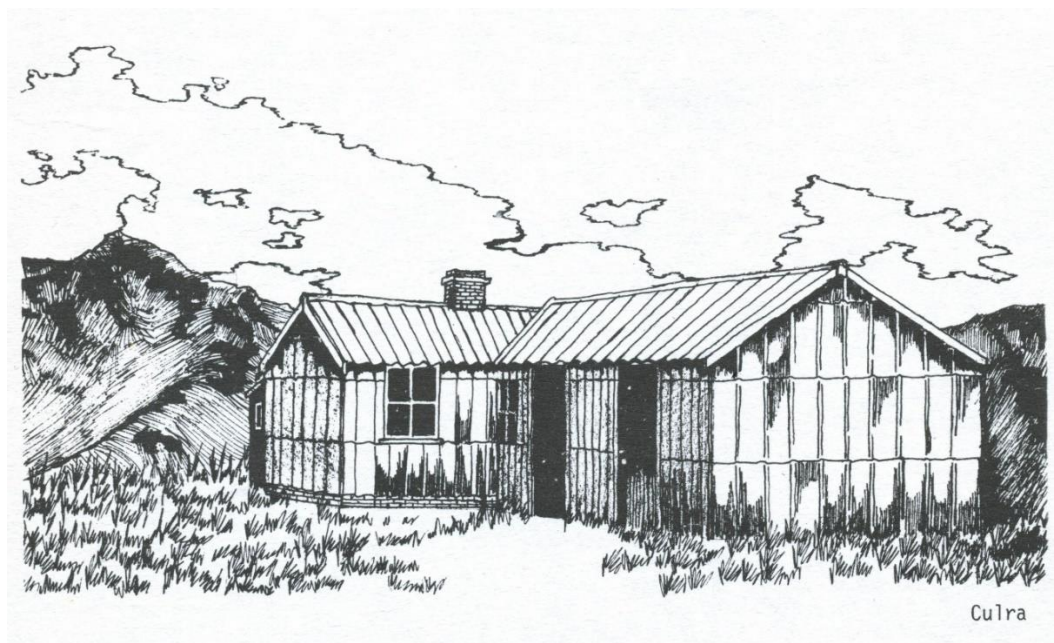
Many people were kind enough to comment on the quality and good condition of the bothy, thanking other users, the Estate and particularly the MBA. Complaints appear too, about writing on the walls, rubbish in the fireplace, bottles on the mantelpiece and other people sharing the bothy, particularly those with radios.

Culra seems to have attracted crowds to compare with "Sauchiehall Street [22/7/79] and "Piccadilly Circus" [20/6/80] and evidence of the much discussed conflict between large and small groups also appears on several occasions. Commenting on the presence of a large party from a well-known English public school, a small party from the West of Scotland recorded: 'Had a variety show at night - jokes, songs, sketches, some of the material very original. The speeches of Ally Macleod by the

Sports Master met with rapturous applause.”[22/7/78] Continuing next morning: “...the ---- people still with us. Luckily they passed the night in tents. Sixteen Dutchmen passed through today.” However a happy ending to this encounter is noted the next day: “The ---- people left this morning, a nice bunch.” [24/7/78].

The writer finishes after 3 nights in the bothy : “many thanks MBA. I must rejoin. Buried most of the bottles and cleaned up.” [25/7/78]. It could have been so much worse: “... the ex ---- University OTC Pipe band arrived complete with pipes.” [26/6/79].

With its central location and easy access, Culra is indeed heavily used, mostly by hill lovers, Munro baggers, trans-Scotland transversers and even a few geologists and botanists. There are also more esoteric attractions: “Heading for Bealach Dubh to see crashed WWII aircraft.” [28/7/78]



How do all these different people, from all over the world, find out about Culra? “It was after reading an article in the November issue of The Scots Magazine 1969 which prompted us to visit here....” [4/7/78]. Reading some entries, one wonders (as a member of the local Mountain Rescue Team) if the writers are fit to wander the hills unaccompanied: “You certainly have to get off the train quickly at Dalwhinnie.” Obviously a good story behind that one, the writer having taken the train from Kingussie via Blair Atholl. He continues, having eventually arrived at 2.00am: “A most luxurious bothy. For a while I thought it was Ben Alder Lodge.” Having given up the prospect of a day on the hill “Not much good for climbing today,” this writer makes himself useful where he obviously feels more at home: “guess I’ll wander over to Blackburn and pick up the odd firebrick.”, and the next day “Firebricks in place and the fireplace pointed.” [28/7/78]

An MBA member, needless to note, and not the only one to take on unplanned improvements: “Found the horseshoe on the floor and nailed it over the door (right way up).” The advantages of as bothy over other forms of mountain accommodation are summed up in one grateful comment: “After 3 nights freezing in my tent in Loch Ossian, it was like being at the Ritz last night here in Culra - especially on the luxury beds.” [9/5/79]. With their unique mattresses, these beds draw considerable comment, not always favourable: “Spent a very smelly night - 5 to a bed.” [12/3/78] Not so unusual, the inevitable bothy mouse also draws some comment, some of it obvious, some of it useful: “beware of the mouse - it’s nocturnal.” [4/6/78] and “Several disturbances by large mouse during night. Finally removed by playing ceilidh band on cassette.” [12/3/78] - I must remember that one. “The mouse appears to be a vole...” [15/5/80] Well, the one I saw on my last visit looked like a rat, as I duly noted in the log book.

Pests apart, some of the most interesting and worthwhile comments record local wildlife. "Saw a wildcat on Lancet Edge and a pair of Golden Eagles over Geal Charn." [2/10/78] If I were lucky enough to have a day like that, it would stick in my mind long after the book had crumbled to dust, so I will keep my eyes open on future visits.

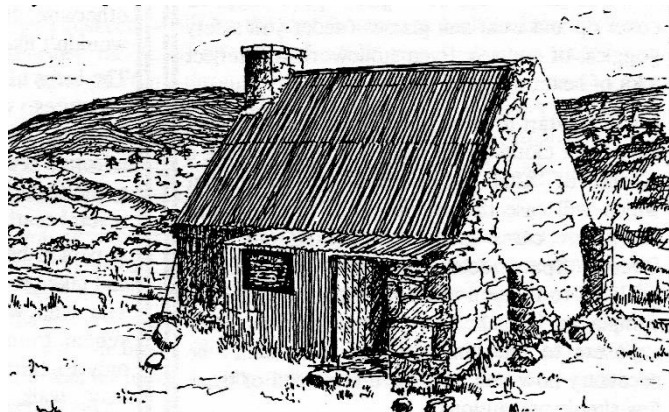
Bad weather is not the only thing that can take some of the pleasure out of bothying: "... forgot the stove, so it is cold soup for us." [12/4/78] - they probably didn't even try to light the fire having read of so many failures. Some seem to court the prospect of hardship: "Attempting to augment my few provisions with fishing - not much success so far, so it could be cold brose again!" [22/8/78] The writer, from Glenrothes, obviously had a special affection for Culra, since his entries appear dotted throughout the book. He sums up the place thus: "Good place to forget the wicked world's ways - including football!" [7/6/78] Perhaps this is why Culra attracts people from all over the world: "My new husband and I came to Scotland from California, USA for our honeymoon, and ended up at this substantial bothy." [22/7/79] However a visitor from Holland made what, for me, was the most moving comment, which brought a lump to my throat: "Today I have to leave the hills and finish my holidays" [1/8/78] A feeling we all must know as we make that final entry in the bothy book.

Reproduced from MBA Journal No. 71, December 1984,
drawing by Alan Westley from our June '81 Newsletter

Empty Bothy Books

Robert McMillan

Last November, my pal George Ellis and I decided to go to Aviemore for a bit of walking. We intended to visit the memorial to Richard Maxwell who was killed near Ypres in 1915. We went to the Glenmore Forest park and walked through dramatic scenery to Ryvoan bothy. Whilst we were there, George, who was suffering from too much juice the night before, went to talk to Hughie.



Ryvoan, drawn in the late 1990s, artist unknown

Meanwhile I had a cup of Earl Grey and sat on the bothy floor to read the bothy book.

I opened the book and to my surprise it was empty. With the number of people walking and cycling by the bothy no one had bothered to make any entries in the book. A 1997 book and the first entry was November 1998. So we were the first. Why don't people record their visit in the book as often these days?

While George was getting the cobwebs blown away, I drew a picture of the bothy before we set off to find the memorial, which we eventually found. We stopped off at the bothy on the way back, and checked out the bothy book out of curiosity. There was one person sitting by the fireplace, but still no entries in the book apart from ours.

On the way back to the lodge we saw a baby reindeer being taken for a walk on a lead. It was a grand weekend and an easy and interesting walk, which I recommend.

Reproduced from Newsletter No. 129, June 1999

Website PSs

- * Bothy books sent to the MBA's care are now in the MBA archive at the A K Bell Library in Perth, and can be accessed under the arrangements for all the MBA archive. There is a collection of Corroul bothy books held at Dundee University I believe, but I am vague on the detail.

- x = 10/13 - Nicola actually gave the wrong answer; and A hot cross bunny!
- § MBA policy has now changed, too many completed log books were quickly disappearing (frequently burnt it is believed) and the record lost for ever. Full bothy books are now to be sent to the MBA archive. My own preference is to photocopy the last year's worth of pages (and any other interesting pages), to bind them, and return this copy to the bothy as soon as possible after removal, before sending the original to the archive.
- ◇ Possibly this was Richard Maxwell Dyet, Driver 72600 of the 30th Battery, Royal Field Artillery, who died Sunday 1st November 1914, and is commemorated at Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Leper, Belgium. Panel 5 and 9.

Richard Dyet lived with his mother in Corsehill. He died in the First Battle of Ypres. Like the three other Kilwinning men who died in First Ypres, he has no known grave.

[Content new to Version 2 from here](#)

Reverting to Corrou and turning back the clock

No Sunshine Falls on Bothy Walls

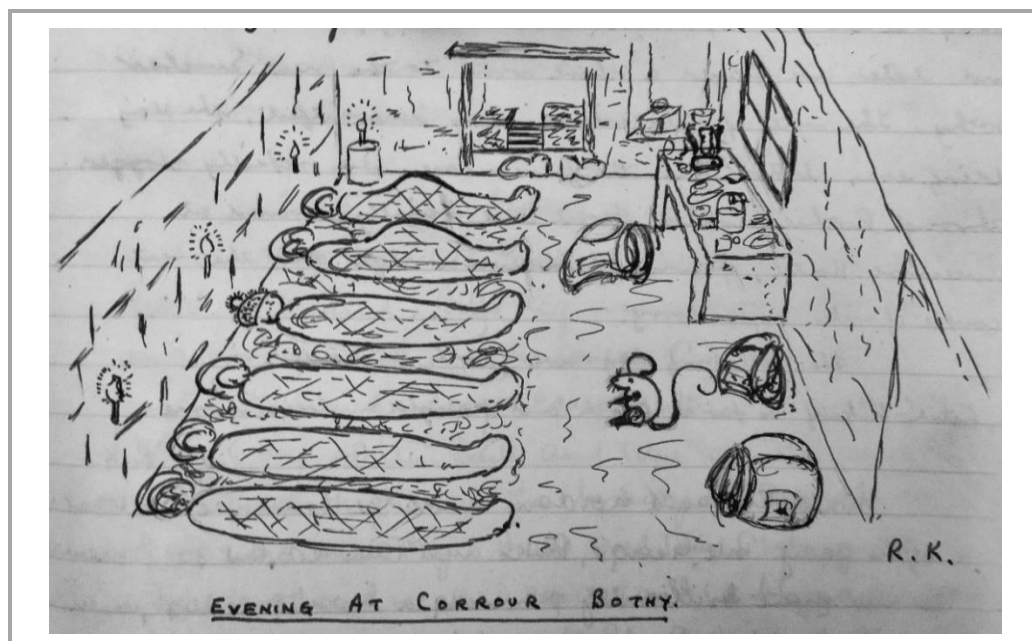
*No sunshine falls on bothy walls
Nought but the wind and the rain
But our spirits soar, as the primal roar
For we'll soon have dinner again*

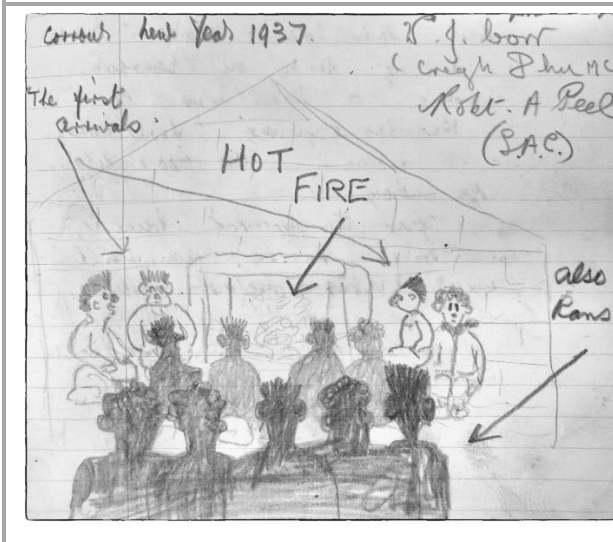
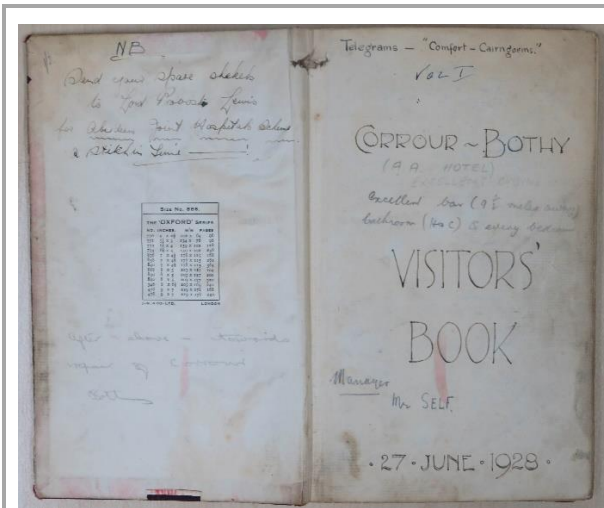
*We meant to see Angels Peak
But a gale is raging there
Yet we have food and life is good
So what have we to care?*

*As the wind fowls through the Larig Ghru
We sit in comfort dwell
And you can bet, we'll ne'er forget
Our stay in Corrou Hotel*

Alexander B. Donald Corrou Bothy Book Volume 1: 7.8.1928

Reproduced in MBA Newsletter No. 2002, September 2002



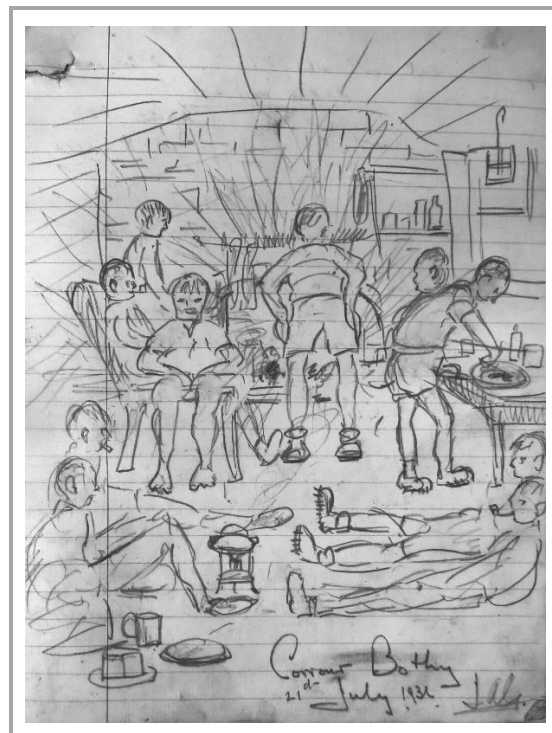


This one titled *We are nine plus Tyke* (which is a Yorkshire term for a terrier)

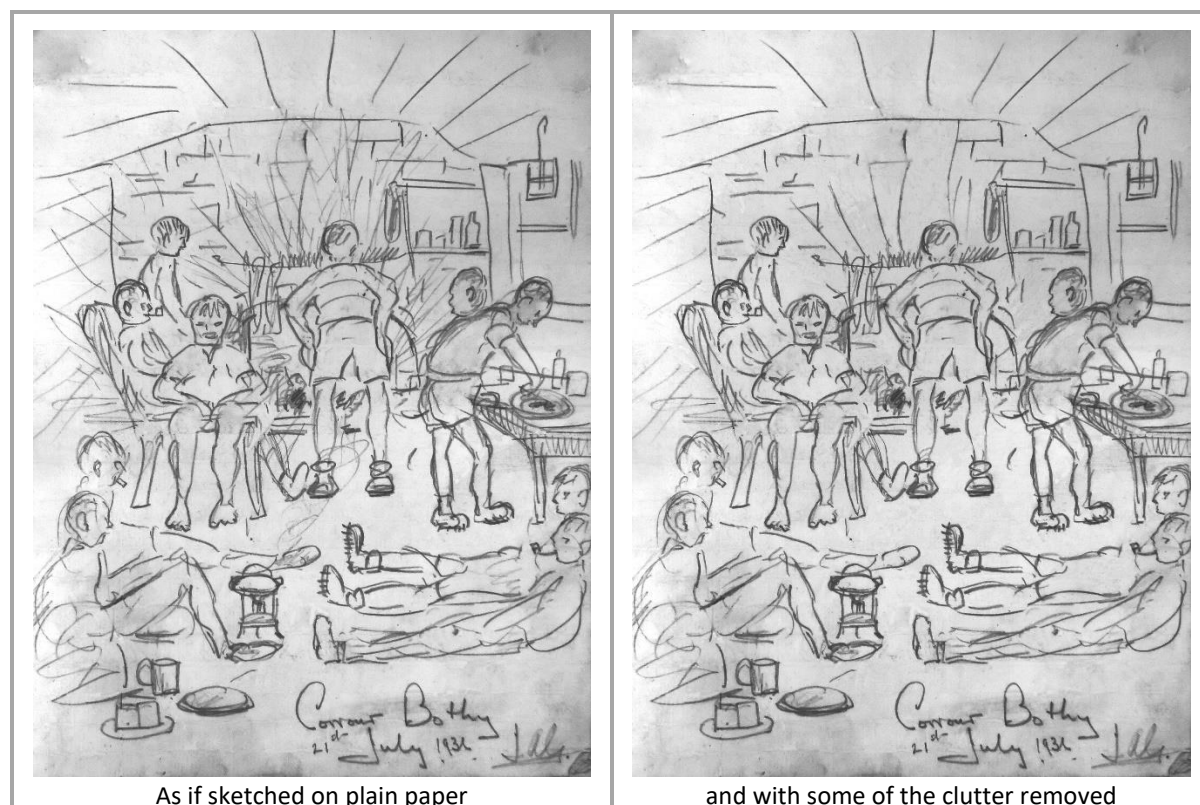
These drawings are reproduced from MBA Newsletter No. 216, Spring 2021 with the following explanation provided by Andy Mayhew, Newsletter Editor:

Ralph Storer's new book Corrou Bothy - A refuge in the wilderness provides a comprehensive history of Corrou and is packed full of accounts of visits from the 19th century through to bothy book entries of recent years. In the process of compiling this excellent book, Ralph came across a number of old drawings in the bothy books, some of which were even publishable !

As I (Richard Genner) prepare this page of Version 2 of the MBA Website article, the coronavirus pandemic is on-going and Lockdown 3 applies to the four home nations in one form or another. But children have just gone back to school, I had my first inoculation two weeks ago - there is an end in sight and a new normal in prospect.



Meanwhile those of us sat at home (retired or furloughed) have to keep busy. So I've used some image manipulation software to clean up the last shown drawing from the Corrou 1936 bothy book, removing in the drawing left below the bothy book's vertical and horizontal page markings. Flushed with the perceived success of this, I have then removed further freehand lines drawn on the sketch to give a cleaner image on the right below. Judge for yourself if this has been worthwhile.



The artist's signature can be seen but not deciphered. What can very definitely be said is that it is very unlikely that either the artist or his ten companions would have imagined that the sketch (and all the other sketches) would have survived to be reproduced in a book about the bothy 85 years later, nor that ordinary people like Ralph, Andy and I would have the facility to scan, digitally transmit and digitally clean up and enhance the sketch, all IT processes the sketch has been through.

Thanks to Ralph's efforts during his research for his book, most of the Corrou bothy books have been reunited at Dundee University Library, where they may be viewed by arrangement with library staff.

Bothy Book Statistics

Bob Tateson

It was the end of another long, wet, cold day at Strabeg. Roger Hammond had unanimously been voted 'Man of the Match' for his ten hour stint on the roof; the roof was now watertight. All were now sitting, well fed, round a blazing bothy fire. After Roger had shown his versatility by entertaining us for half an hour creating steam and hot air from a patented, copper 'Zumba Spiral', the conversation turned, as it does, to "what is the point of it all?"

*'Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great Argument
About it and about: but evermore
Came out by the same Door as in I went.'*

Eventually our Chairman of Trustees, who had also demonstrated his versatility by acting as the ship's cook, suggested that some actual facts might help. "How can we know if the public appreciate what the MBA does or are even aware that we exist?". I suggested that a trawl through the

comments in the Bothy Book might fish up some useful data. As this was an indoor job and as the weather for tomorrow was forecast to be no better than today, I volunteered to be the trawler.

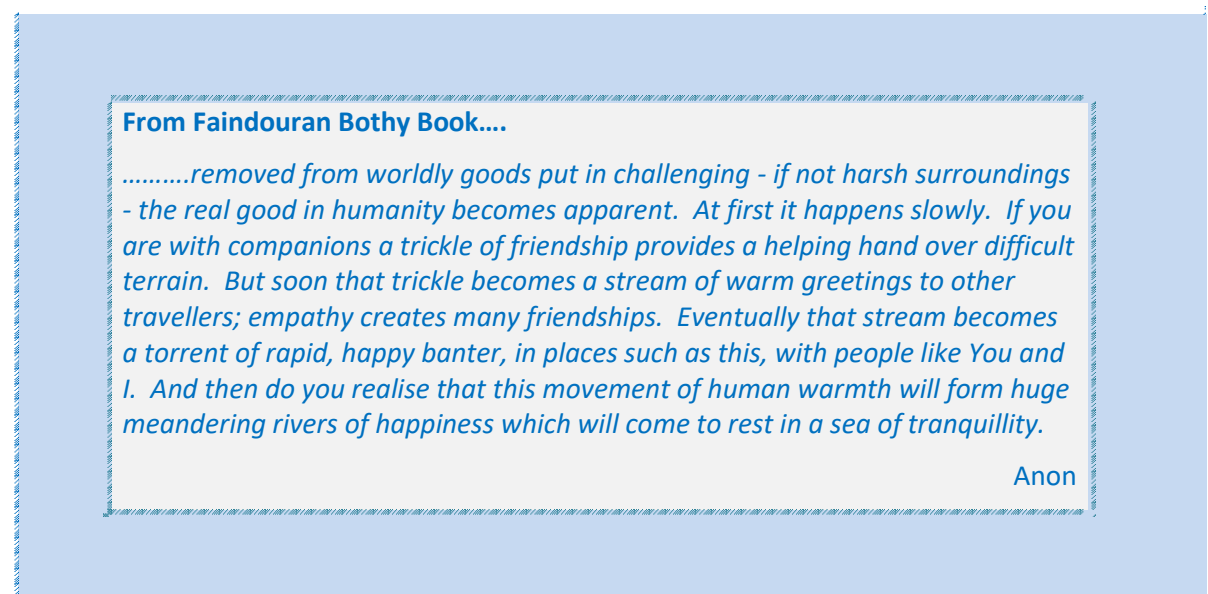
The precise question I was asking was "What proportion of entries in the Strabeg Bothy Book expressed thanks to the MBA or showed awareness that the bothy is maintained by the MBA?" However as the trawl progressed, I began to notice some reoccurring topics which were irrelevant but interesting. For instance, there were six references to visits, or planned visits, by the Swedish Ladies Netball Team. Thirteen dogs left their names. Less surprisingly, there were eight comments about the bats roosting in the porch and committing suicide in the sink. There was one wedding and three funerals. There was one entry each in Gaelic, Welsh and French.

So, did anyone thank the MBA?

In the book I looked at (2009 to April 2011) there were 265 comments. Of these nine percent thanked the MO either by title or name - "Thanks to Robert and Angie for looking after this place" and another six percent mentioned the MBA - "The MBA are doing a great job". One person thanked God thus - "Thank God for this bothy!" Admittedly the weather was pretty awful that day.

Is the bottle half full or half empty? If you gave 265 people a free meal, how many would you expect to say thank you after they had eaten? Should we despair that 224 people slept the night, sat down to write in the Bothy Book but never thought to say "Thanks!" Or should we rejoice that 41 people knew that bothies, unlike midges, do not generate spontaneously out of the moor and that people (MOs) and organisations (MBA) are responsible for these simple shelters?

From MBA Newsletter No. 181, Autumn 2012



From MBA Newsletter no. 159, Spring 2007
with a dose of playing with the capabilities of Microsoft Word.

Fact or Fiction?

Val Harrison
(Greg's Hut Association Secretary)

I don't really think I bothered whether I ever get to see TV or not. Give me a good book any day. Whether it's a biography, a cracking good novel or a travel book - or whatever - I can curl up with it and enjoy.

So when, recently, I got to read a multi-authored book, I really enjoyed it. It was packed with wit, weather facts, great descriptions, pithy comments, travel details and reflections on recent

experiences. Oh, and you can't buy it in the shops or on-line, in case I've whetted your appetite. And the next edition will come out sometime between September 2007 and March 2008.

Depending.

Yes, folks, it's the latest Greg's Hut Bothy Book.

Should you have ever wondered whether it's worth writing anything in a bothy book, let me assure you that, as far as Greg's Hut Association is concerned, it certainly is. We read every one from cover to cover. Wouldn't miss it! You get to find out all sorts of interesting things.



Greg's Hut on Cross Fell, from the MBA's 2018 Calendar by David Metcalf

Firstly, people comment on the weather, so, for example, we know what the pattern of snowfall is in any one years, the duration of storms, temperatures at different times of the year and how often it's foggy on top of Cross Fell. Then there's the Mountain Rescue teams, either on exercise or on a shout. The outcome of the search is often recorded by a visitor to the Hut who isn't part of the rescue effort. Like the entry on 15th May 2006: -

"The man who was reported lost has now been found. This made our lunch boil in the bag even better. Well done Mountain Rescue from Penrith."

We can get a good idea of the frequency and direction of human traffic. Many walkers are 'doing' the Pennine Way, and seem equally split between those going South to North and those doing the opposite. But it's the details about such things as this being the walker's *n*'th Pennine Way walk that are fascinating: -

"29.7.06. 10.45a.m. Half way from Alston to Garrigil on P.W. Last here 34 years ago (1972) with DH Palmer just after Greg's Hut opened. I'm now trying it from N to S (age 64)"

So thanks, Dave Morton from Rhum, M.O. and MBA member. We like to know who's who! In fact, a lot of MBA members sign in as such, and that shows how active we all are!

Some people are only too glad to get in out of the weather. For those of you who don't know, Greg's Hut is on the 700 metre contour line, so it can get a bit extreme at times: -

"13th - 14th Jan. I have never been so grateful for a hut in the middle of nowhere, leaning 45 degrees in order to stay upright, pelting hail and sleet and 90mph winds."

But, at other times, it can be idyllic: -

“8/9/06 Beautiful sunny day. Topping up my tan on the way to Alston!”

Having read the book, we do an analysis; numbers of visitors, overnights, foreign visitors, etc. Here below you can see our latest analysis. This is for the 44 weeks from the beginning of April 2006 to mid-February 2007.

Analysis of Visitors Book of Greg's Hut 4th April 2006 - 16th February 2007

Month	Entries	People	Overnights
From 4 th April 2006	45	85	18
May 2006	47	72	Nil
June 2006	56	92	5
July 2006	60	109	18
August 2006	59	99	3
September 2006	48	98	3
October 2006	28	44	4
November 2006	11	24	3
December 2006	13	20	3
January 2007	11	16	7
To 16 th February 2007	8	35	1
Total	386	694	47

We have not included the 14 dogs that are noted, but we have included the 9 children.

Age 4	Age 7	Age 8	Age 9	Age 13	Age 14
1	1	2	1	2	2

Visitors from overseas were

Country

Australia	6	Germany	1	Japan	1	USA	4
Canada	3	Ireland	1	Netherlands	8		
Czech	5	Israel	2	Norway	2		
Total							33

These figures show a continuous usage of the Hut all year round, and it seems odd that **sometimes** a winter month has greater numbers signing in than those in other seasons, but the figure of 35 people from 1st to 16th February, for example, included a party of about 30 Czech youngsters who appeared when one of our members, Dave Metcalfe, was at the Hut and could fill in the details for us. In fact, the only time when the Hut suffered a dearth of visitors was during Foot and Mouth outbreak a few years ago.

We even get people leaving messages for friends who they know are coming along behind them in a few hours or days and usually, the friend's replies. Some entries are in a foreign language, Dutch, for example. And people make interesting suggestions: -

“14/5/06 Did Sunday lunch in and on the stove. Lamb shank on a flat stone in stove, red wine, herbs rosemary and sage instant mash with carrots and mushy peas.....Fantastic.”

(He even told us where he got his lamb - McFarlen's Butchers, Middleton.)



At the time of compiling this website article, plans are afoot to reroof Greg's Hut. The original has served us well in this hostile spot, being over 50 years old

But there are a couple of mysteries, all good books keep you guessing.

Firstly, who is Ronald McDonald who seems to visit about every couple of months? Has anyone seen a clown along the Pennine Way? And secondly, was it REALLY the Deputy Prime Minister who wrote the following?...

"29/4/06. Took a drive up in one of the two Jags, just had to get away from it all for a while. Had a wild rampant night with the missus - Just don't tell Pauline I was here. Not going over Cross Fell as there are some nurses need sacking. Great Hut. Belongs to a Band C property bracket. Regards John Prescott."

Somehow, I doubt it!

From MBA Newsletter No. 207, Summer 2007

[Content new to Version 3 from here](#)

Two more articles about bothy book content have appeared in recent MBA Newsletters and are reproduced below. The first continues the theme of Val Harrison's article immediately above whilst the last article, from Barry Smith treads a different path to any taken so far.

Vital Statistics

Alan Forrest and Susan Aitcheson

Think of your favourite bothy and think of the times you've been there alone. Think of the noisy large group that crowded the main room but built a great fire and conjured up that amazing malt; or of the sound of waves on the shore or wind in the eaves and of delicious solitude. Is this a long time ago, or recent? Are things different now, and could it change much in the future? Are more people visiting? Just for the day or overnight? Is there more pressure on the paths, the fallen wood nearby, the places to do the toilet, more rubbish left behind? Or has it always been a mixed bag, and we're in danger of going NIMBY and looking back with rose-tinted specs?

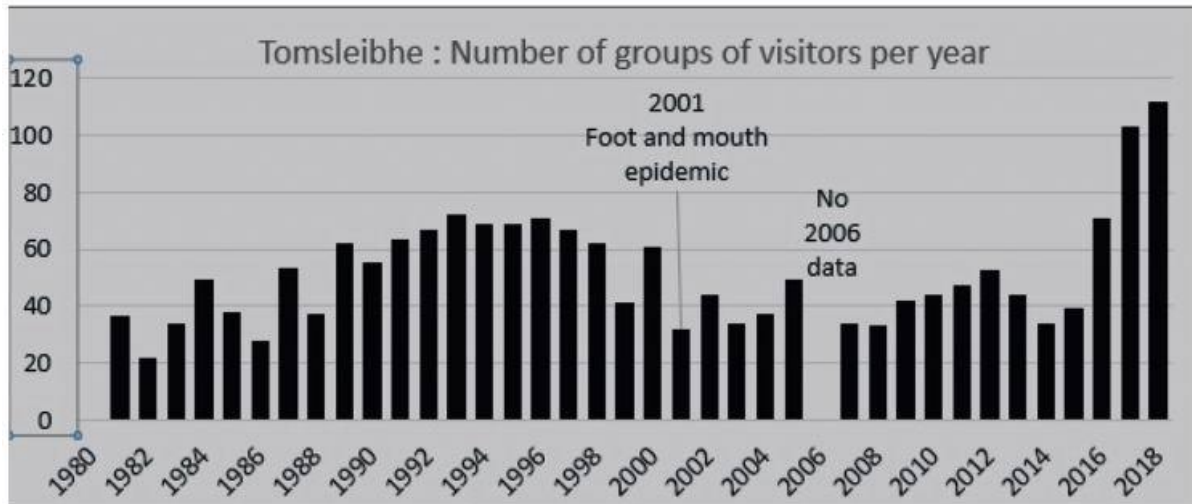
These are vexing questions that the MOs, landowners, and many bothy users are asking and they can affect the maintenance plans (do we build a toilet?) and even the viability of individual bothies. Without some facts to work on, it'll be hard to make the right decisions for bothies, and hard to avoid prejudices and extreme examples in the debate.

It may surprise you to learn that we do have facts already, right under our noses: the bothy books. You'll have seen these lying on the window ledge or table, and picked them up to write about your plans and give your views, bland or pungent. For some bothies the bothy book history goes back continuously to the 1980s, while other bothies have briefer or more patchy records, partly kept by careful MOs or in other archives, partly gone up the lum. But can we find enough data in the bothy books to tell us anything about past and future bothy use?

The answer is emphatically YES. Making good use of our Covid lockdown from actual bothying, and with the generous help of Peter Rowell and Jim Ross, we looked closely at the bothy books for several SWH&I bothies. We have found that, however incomplete, the bothy book record is a treasure trove of hard data that can tell us the numbers visiting, for how long and for what purpose, and let us pick out trends and patterns in use (just the numbers – all the data we use are anonymous). With a statistician on board (Alan) who can steer us around the problems of missing data (missing books) or under-recording (some people not writing in them), we're already producing historical plots and a dashboard of useful numbers for each bothy that we look at. We will go on to explore bothy book data with statistical modelling and projections of future use, and we are starting to compare bothies to see a wider picture of what is happening.

We will be sharing our findings with the MBA shortly and we hope soon to expand our coverage to other bothies. In the meantime, our message is simple: **preserve bothy books - they are valuable and irreplaceable records.**

As a taster, here's a chart of visitor numbers to Tomsleibhe, Mull, over almost 40 years - from a record provided by Jim Ross, MO for all that time. Recently the number of visits has been rising, but it also rose in the 1990s and fell back again - will it be different this time round?



From MBA Newsletter No. 212, Summer 2020

From a bothy book

Barry Smith

The following account has been extracted from the Glencoul bothy book for the period 1st July 2017 to 24th August 2019. It appears on the penultimate page of entries is a piece dated, most strangely, 4.2.1962....

"Do not stay at this bothie for long, if at all. Never venture out alone at night as in the depths of winter these two rooms are the only sanctuary from what lies around. This is a cursed land.

I discovered this last night. I had journeyed long and far crossing the wide, open moorlands from the lone house at Corrie Kinloch. The way was rough, low winter light and a [illegible] fog obstructed my view. It was late evening when I saw the glimmer in the distance and, hoping it was a settlement, I doubled my speed and ventured in great haste to my supposed relief. It was not to be, for I had stumbled across this house, abandoned and lost in this desolate place.

I was very lucky that I first found this bothie, and not the House - dare I call it that? - which does adjoin this place. I do not know what would have happened if I had ventured in there. Cold and in low spirits, I huddled in the corner of this very room under my sodden blankets awaiting the onset of my sleep.

I do not know exactly what happened next, for it is not rational for me to explain it, nor can I fairly identify things which took place in that state I was in. However, this I know. I know it to have happened and I know, as unlikely as you may think it, that it was true, an ethereal and non-natural occurrence.

The single candle which had been lit - I know not by whom - and had guided me to this place was extinguished in an instant. The light of the moon outside illuminated a most frightening sight outside the window staring in. There were eyes: a flash of moonlight illuminating them, glassy and unflinching. Next a moment later they were gone. No sound was there but my scream - for I did scream - and then there was nothing and the darkness returned.

I fastened the door closed and covered the window with my blankets. I was unaware of what had

shocked me but I knew it was not human form. I slept in pieces, never settling and always on edge. I resolved to inspect the surroundings in the morning and try to obtain a rational explanation of what I had experienced.

The following morning - this morning I note, though it feels much long ago than that - I awoke to see a cloud of thunder and torrential rain. Keen to leave the bothie I left my bag and walked down through the torrents out to the island in the bay. I noticed that given better weather, this must be an idyllic place.

It was then that a flash of lightning came down upon the stack above and illuminated the House yet again, like I must have experienced the night before. I saw the House and therein the upstairs window I again saw the eyes that had so haunted me the day before. Glowing, angry, full of wild abandon. It was watching me. It was there.

Only a foolish man would walk in this terrain in that weather. How was I tempted to do just that! I would have to wait for the rain to lighten and my path to be discovered. I consoled myself that even if these eyes, this creature I was envisaging, was indeed real it would not approach me further. I made my way into the bothie and securely bolted the door. I began to examine my surroundings looking for signs of people, that it had been recently occupied. Everything I discovered indicated the opposite. Then the sounds began...." [and that is how the story ends] .

There are then seven blank pages before the last page of the bothy book where entries continue; and the last of which:

"Stopped in. Looks just the place for an axe murder so gone to Glendu." Josh and [illegible].



Glencoul bothy and adjoining house, photographed by Barry Smith.

From MBA Newsletter No. 219, Spring 2022

Finally, why have bothy books (or logbooks as they are known elsewhere in the world)? The following (slightly préciséd) article about logbooks in New Zealand's Backcountry Huts (also known in

NZ as Trumper's Huts, trampers being the NZ term for hill walkers; and in many other countries as Wilderness Huts) has come to hand. Whilst written about bothy/backcountry hut practice on the other side of the world, virtually every word, well every sentiment, applies to our bothy books.

New Zealand's Hut's Logbooks

Unlike tracks or bridges, huts hold a record of the visitors who pass through them in the form of hut logbooks, which include details of past trips, events, people and experiences. This informal record provides a sort of cultural history, particularly for lesser used huts, where logbooks may span a decade or more.

Hawke's Bay hunter and bush poet Lester Masters knew the value of hut logbooks for recording stories, and in the 1950s installed logbooks and holders in several Ruahine huts; the one for Ellis Hut featured two skulls on the cover. He neatly summed up their purpose with this ditty:

*Please write down brief what you have seen,
Tell of the weather and the chase,
The luck you've had, and where you've been,
Then park the book safe in the case;
So that maybe when some man's son
Comes drifting in from off the spur,
He'll read what you have seen and done
When you were here in days that were.*

Palmerston North trumper Tony Gates continued this tradition with a beautifully etched logbook case for Howletts Hut, engraved with the Ruahine Tramping Club's logo by Fred Lemberg. Gates has also collected much poetry and quotes from Ruahine, Kaweka and Tararua hut logbooks, ranging from the sublime to the crude. There's nothing quite so enjoyable as arriving at a hut, perusing the contents of its logbook, and gleaning any amusing entries about past adventures and follies.

Hut logbooks on Stewart Island/Rakiura make frequent references - not usually complimentary - to mud. A Canadian trumper drew a picture of Yoda from Star Wars in one logbook and wrote, 'Worry NOT tired trumper, mud is friend of Jedi. It makes you strong in the mind. Hmmm ... Yes!'

Sometimes there is even a broken dialogue between successive hut occupants. One of my personal favourites came from Middy Hut in Mt Richmond Forest Park. One disgruntled trumper made this plea: 'Please don't be an idiot. Don't leave your rubbish around this nice hut.' The next entry read: 'Ahhh, Grasshopper, so much Anger.'

Many early huts, notably mustering huts, often did not have logbooks, and instead visitors scrawled their names on the walls. Hideaway Biv and the Old Waihohonu Hut remain good examples of this, with graffiti preserved on both, inside and out.

Other huts had logbooks right from the outset. Archives New Zealand holds a copy of a logbook dating between 1914 and 1930 from Cape Defiance Hut, an early tourism hut on the West Coast built in 1913. Two members of the Beaglehole family visited the Franz Josef Glacier in 1917 and wrote in the Cape Defiance logbook 'An entirely new and beautiful experience.'

Hut logbooks can be a rich source of informal backcountry history, but until recently there has been little consistency over preserving them after they become full. Some historic ones are held in museums, DOC offices, libraries and archives, but many have simply been thrown away. Bill Keir recently began a hut logbook inventory, which is accessible online.

Written by & © Shaun Barnett (from the book *Shelter from the Storm*) co-authored with Rob Brown and Geoff Spearpoint

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The whole lot contributed to the MBA website by Richard Genner with the support of Andy Mayhew. Version 3 December 2023.