

8.7 A Posthumous Completion

Robin N. Campbell¹

AS NOTED in my recent article about Munro,² Sir Hugh died with three Tops to go; Carn an Fhìdhleir (Feshie), Carn Cloich-mhuilinn and the Inaccessible Pinnacle, the first two Tops being Munros in the 1891 list. When carrying out the research for this article I formed the opinion that something should be done about this regrettable state of affairs. Light-hearted and tasteless discussions with friends explored the possibilities and eventually arrived at the goal of constructing an effigy of Munro and transporting the object to the three missing Tops. I believe it was my friend Paul Brian who made this ingenious proposal, but he may well wish to deny this now.

In 1991 I found myself in the position of having to address the great gathering of Munro-baggers on November 23rd³ with little to say, so I resolved to set the effigy project in motion. It was late October before I managed to acquire a kilt (Hunting Fraser) and Glengarry bonnet at affordable (Oxfam) prices. The Munro tartan is a red and yellow abomination which would put the most somnolent deer to startled flight. I cannot imagine that Sir Hugh would have worn it on the hill, surely he would have preferred the douce and furtive hues of the Hunting Fraser. Once these essential items had been obtained, construction of the effigy could proceed with some confidence that it would be completed. However, I took the precaution of paying a visit to the grave at Lindertis – to seek permission, as it were. No ominous event occurred, so I thought it safe to proceed.

I fashioned a mask for the head, using gauze strips loaded with plaster over a clay mould of Sir Hugh's face, and painted it with tempera-based colours. Latex hands were found in a joke shop: rival manufacturers of these curious products obligingly offered different hands. Ears were fashioned from Fimo clay. Limbs and head were made from stuffed tubular bandages, fixed to a trunk of supernumerary pillows and reinforced with coathanger wire. A visit to the barber provided hair for wig and whiskers, and amusement for the staff. The effigy, when finally assembled in early November, weighed 30 lbs., stood about 5ft. tall and had cost about £100. If I say so myself, it bore a tolerable resemblance to Munro and was sufficiently life-like – or death-like – to frighten visitors to my house severely. It was too bulky to fit in a rucksack but, protected by plastic bags and folded in Z, it could be strapped to a packframe. We were ready.

On Sunday 10th November, we left Forest Lodge in Glen Tilt, accompanied by my colleague Dr Helen Ross, in darkness and steady rain, at 7.30 a.m. The approach to Carn an Fhìdhleir involves climbing over a shoulder of Carn a' Chlamain to the Tarf Bothy, which we reached around 10 a.m. The weather meantime worsened considerably, the rain turning

¹ *SMCJ* 1992, XXXV, 121-122.

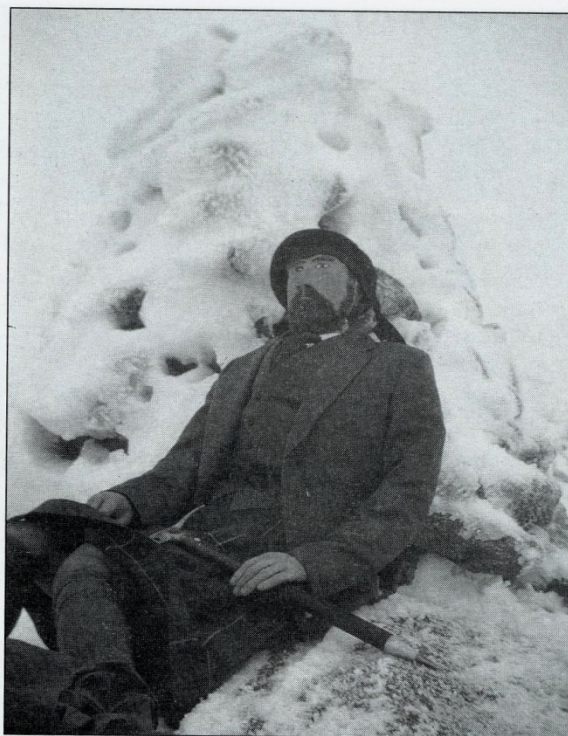
² See Chapter 1.7

³ This well-attended and popular event took the form of a dinner in the Roxburghe Hotel, Edinburgh. It was organized by Bill Brooker, the Keeper of the List, with the purpose of celebrating the Centenary of the Tables, and all recorded extant Completers were invited. It is likely that a similar event will be organized to celebrate the Centenary of Robertson's Round in 2001. On this future occasion the Roxburghe Hotel will hardly suffice: perhaps the multitude might just squeeze into Murrayfield or Hampden Park!



Munro ready for Carn an Fhidhleir

to sleet and a lively westerly beginning to blow. Dr Ross gave it up about a mile beyond the bothy and Munro and I proceeded alone. On the final ascent to the summit the winds were so strong that at times, furnished as I was with a kind of sail, I dared not move for fear of being whisked away. Much snow had fallen and this became a whirling mass of icy spindrift in the fiercest gusts. We reached the cairn about 1 p.m. Since there was plainly to be no photo-opportunity, Sir Hugh declined to leave his cocoon, and so we immediately began to descend in the teeth of the gale. When we reached the Allt a' Chaoruinn the winds eased and it began to snow heavily. I have a decrepit left knee which acts up worse than usual in heavy winds and it was now providing me with a good deal of discomfort. We collected Dr Ross at the Bothy and left for the final leg around 3.30. Our progress was slow and painful, so much so that we were engulfed by darkness at the top of the pass. By the time we reached the edge of Glen Tilt our torches were more or less done for: the descent path could not be found and we slid down to the Tilt, for the most part on our backs. Parts of poor Munro extruded through the plastic bags in protest. As I limped towards Forest Lodge, I fancied I heard him murmur "Even worse than 1908", recalling his previous attempt to climb this troublesome mountain, which had foundered in thick darkness and torrential rain.



Munro exhausted after his ascent of Carn Cloich-mhuilinn

Although I had originally planned posthumous ascents of all three Tops, this unexpected onset of winter ruled out the Inaccessible Pinnacle, so we had to be content with an ascent of Carn Cloich-mhuilinn on the following Sunday. This was uneventful and, although the mountain was snow-bound and conditions at the cairn were far from ideal, Munro dismounted and I was able to take a number of photographs. Due to an oversight, we were obliged to celebrate his posthumous completion of the Munros with coffee. I remarked that since his earliest recorded Munro had been Ben Lawers in 1879, his completion time of 112 years would take some beating. Since he was now qualified to attend his own Dinner I smuggled him into the Roxburghe Hotel on the following Saturday. He occupied a table on his own and remained modestly shrouded by a dustcloth until I exposed him to the assembled baggers at the conclusion of my speech. Despite the atrocious bad taste of this outlandish stunt, it received a generous reception from the gathering. It was perhaps fortunate that no member of the Munro family had attended ...

Sir Hugh remains intact and patiently awaits his visit to the Inaccessible Pinnacle, to be celebrated in early June, this time with champagne. In the meantime I have not neglected his spiritual welfare: I offer him readings from the early Journals, usually taken from his own work, and an occasional verse of the Club Song. I trust that members will realise that although this posthumous completion served less worthy purposes at the Roxburghe Hotel, my motive in bringing it about has been to delight the Shade of Munro and to honour his memory.

Later ...⁴

Sir Hugh Munro, in the form of a full-sized effigy, completed his round of the Tops on Wednesday 10th July 1992 with an ascent of the Inaccessible Pinnacle of Sgurr Dearg. An attempt had been made on Tuesday 9th, in the company of Robin Campbell, Derek Pyper and Helen Ross, but unexpected bad weather sent the party back to the Hut. Wednesday offered better conditions and in the early afternoon Campbell, Munro and Ross set off for the summit. A passing climber, Mr James Kenyon of Accrington, was roped in for the final attack. Campbell, Kenyon and Munro ascended the Pinnacle by its East Ridge, while Ross remained below in order to take photographs. After descending, the party enjoyed a bottle of champagne before returning to Glen Brittle. Sir Hugh's traverse of the 538 Tops of his 1891 Tables was begun in May 1879 with an ascent of Ben Lawers. At the time of his death in 1919, 535 Tops had been visited. Carn an Fhidleir (Feshie) and Carn Cloich-mhuilinn were ascended last year, leaving only the Inaccessible Pinnacle to be accounted for. His round has therefore occupied a period of 113 years and must be considered as a strong candidate for the Slowest Completion of the Tops.



Munro about to set out for the Inaccessible Pinnacle with his guide and porter, Robin Campbell

⁴ *SMCJ* 1993, XXXV, 304.