

THE SMC'S CLERK OF THE LIST

A short history

By Dave Broadhead

2019 SEES THE CENTENARY of the death of Sir Hugh Munro and The Munro Society asked me to contribute the following piece to a special publication to celebrate this anniversary.

Ever since publication of Hugh Munro's momentous *Tables giving all the Scottish Mountains exceeding 3,000 feet in height* in the 1891 edition, the Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal (*SMCJ*) has been the principal repository of information relating to what A. E. Robertson went on to describe as THE MUNROS. In the short term, much that followed focussed on mistakes and anomalies in THE TABLES rather than attempts to climb them all. When Munro died in 1919, just three summits (out of 538) short of his own Completion, only Rev A. E. Robertson (1) had finished a Round, some 18 years earlier. A new set of Tables, based on Munro's revisions, were published in 1921, following which the SMC appointed a MASTER OF THE TABLES, James Gall Inglis, to supervise future revisions. In due course Rev A. R. G. Burn (2) finished the first Round of Tops in 1923, J. A. Parker (3) the first Round of Furths in 1929, while in 1947 J. Hirst (9) and Mrs. J. Hirst (10) became the first couple and the latter the first lady Munroist. In the same year E. W. Hodge (11) became first English Munroist. These fascinating facts tended to be reported in a rather desultory fashion among Miscellaneous Notes tucked away at the back of the *SMCJ*. As far back as 1892, Hely Almond had made a shrewd observation about the newly formed SMC, writing that 'members may be divided into 2 classes. Those [the Ultramontane] whose ambition is to climb the in-accessible sides of peaks, who look upon a quarry wall with fond enthusiasm... and those [the Salvationists] who like to know they are safe and celebrate an ascent with a good deal of noise and fuss about it when they come home'. Munroists tended to fit into the latter category and have traditionally been treated in the *SMCJ* with what Robin N. Campbell has politely described as 'a measure of wit and gentle deprecation.'

Twenty out of the first 30 Munroists were SMC members but it fell to E. (Eric) Maxwell (30), a member of the Grampian Club, to create the first List of Munroists. He was the second person, after P. N. L. (Philip) Tranter (45) to finish 2 Rounds of Munros and the first to finish a second Round of Tops and continued to maintain his List until 1970 when schoolboy M.G. (Mike) Geddes (100) became the youngest Munroist. As the annual tally of Munroists continued to rise, for a while the new Master of the Tables, J. C. (Jim) Donaldson (43) and various *SMCJ* Editors tried to keep the List in order. Listing the latest Munroists under the heading 'The Compleat Eleat' in the 1985 *SMCJ* there was a hint that all was not

well: 'The following tidal wave of compleaters has been received in the usual mis-order along the time dimension. No apology or even sympathy is offered to misplaced members of this now far from exclusive club.' With Munroists now totalling 444, K. V. (Ken) Crocket took over as *SMCJ* Editor in 1987 replacing W. D. (Bill) Brooker who took on the role of CLERK OF THE LIST, declaring that: 'In keeping with modern practice the List is now stored in a computer.' To further reduce confusion, the List was now compiled in order of notification rather than by date of Completion.

Around the same time Gordon M. McAndrew (450), a member of the Cairngorm Club, designed a special Munroist's tie and brooch with a logo based on the Arms of Sir Hugh Munro and duly approved by the Court of the Lord Lyon. As KEEPER OF THE REGALIA he supplied these items with great efficiency until his death in 2016. In 1989 the Clerk's annual report 'Munro Matters' first appeared in the *SMCJ*, still under the general heading of 'Miscellaneous Notes' until 1992 when it finally featured on the contents page, reflecting the growing interest in what was now increasingly referred to as 'Munro bagging'. With tongue very much in cheek, in *SMCJ* 1991 Bill Brooker contributed an article entitled 'Rampant Munrosis: the Scottish Disease' in which he suggested 'the oft-derided peak-bagging activities of many salvationists and even some dedicated ultramontanes were symptoms of a new ailment which was to affect large numbers of Scottish hill-goers in the years ahead.' He went on to describe various forms of this ailment such as Polymunrosis, distinguished by multiple Rounds or Munro Matrimonialis, a simultaneous husband and wife Completion. The origin of this unusual spelling used to describe finishing a Round, based apparently on Isaac Walton's classic 'The Compleat Angler' is much more obscure and far from universally accepted.

SMCJ 1993 reported that numbers registered had risen to 1144 and that Christopher M. (Chris) Huntley (903) was taking over as Clerk. There was also a suggestion for the formation of 'An Association of Compleat Munroists to hold an annual meeting of members to appoint officials and provide the opportunity for a meet, dinner or whatever form of occasion seemed appropriate'. The Munro Society (TMS) was formed less than ten years later and the report went on to explain: 'The SMC sees The List and The Tables as part of its own remit within its Journal and Guidebook publishing activities. However, close liaison between the Club and an Association could be maintained by the Journal Editor, the Master of the Tables and the Clerk of the List.'

When I reported my own Completion to Bill Brooker in 1989 (David J. Broadhead 690), he replied with a personal handwritten letter. Chris introduced a template giving each individual's unique number, details of the *SMCJ* and how to purchase a tie etc and from July 1996 a signed and dated certificate was available to those who supplied an A4 self-addressed envelope with the correct postage, which continues to be very popular.

Four years later Chris also produced Corbett Completion certificates but these have a much lower uptake. Corbetteers obviously do not need this incentive. In 1996 the SMC also went online with a website <www.smc.org.uk> which soon included a complete copy of the List and by 2000 included photo-galleries, showing Munroists and Corbetteers on their final summit, another popular feature developed by Webmaster Ken Crocket.

With Munroist numbers up to 2520, David Kirk (2014) took over as Clerk in 2002 and continued the tradition of highlighting the most interesting and most amusing snippets of the year's correspondence in 'Munro Matters' citing 'letters that have moved me nearly to tears, had me in knots of laughter and sent me reminiscing on my own best days on the mountains described.' When I took over the Excel spreadsheet that constitutes the List in 2007, numbers had soared to 3770. Two years later the online List was expanded to six columns (Munros, Tops, Furths, Corbetts, Grahams, Donalds) and I discovered that 19 people had already achieved FULL HOUSE and climbed every single hill (including the Donald Tops) listed in the definitive 1997 edition of MUNRO'S TABLES and other tables of lower hills revised by Derek A. Bearhop. The total is now 55 as this has become an increasingly popular target for aficionados of our Imperial Lists. By the time I passed responsibility for the List on to Alison Coull in January 2019 the number of Munroists had climbed to 6464, almost doubling during my tenure. Reflecting on the privilege of reading almost 3000 Completion letters plus Amendments, I can confirm that climbing Munros appeals to a wide range of people, united in a tremendous feeling of achievement when they reach that final summit. Replying to all these letters has also provided an opportunity to promote the activities of the Scottish Mountaineering Trust (SMT) and TMS by including information flyers. The List has changed a little over the years in that titles are no longer considered appropriate, with ideally a forename and middle initial to reduce confusion and of course for couples, ladies first. Some Munroists choose not to register and I respect their decision but appearing on the List is a unique way of achieving immortality. People have written years after the event when they realise their grandchildren want to look them up and it is never too late.

The SMC has always tried to take its responsibility for Munro's Tables and the List seriously. While the Clerk is primarily responsible for issuing numbers and certificates and adding names to the List fairly and accurately, helping people to celebrate their achievements has always given me the most satisfaction. Enjoy your hills.

Thanks to Robin Campbell for checking my facts. His 'Munroist's Companion' (SMT 1999) remains an indispensable source of information on the early history of the Munros and Munroists.