

“A Childhood at Rannoch”, Part 4

Selected articles from the Rannoch School magazines

Introduction

In what respects was Rannoch School special? What did it teach teenagers to do that would later help them in life irrespective of how well they performed in their exams? The Rannoch School Services were an integral part of the Rannoch School education and experience. All the Rannoch School boys were expected to join one of the services and learn how to put out a fire, rescue somebody from the hills, treat somebody with first aid, chop fallen trees into firewood for the elderly of Kinloch Rannoch or build a bridge, for example. Pride of a job well-done, lifelong friendships formed, dealing with situations with efficiency, maturity and ingenuity, the experience of helping to avert some local disaster and knowing what to do when first on the scene before the local services from Pitlochry, Aberfeldy or sometimes even Kinloch Rannoch could get there were immeasurable and have stayed in many a former Rannoch School boy's memory.



The Services Assembled, c. 1970, photo by Duncan West

Initially, I only intended to include “The Forestry Service” from the 1971-1972 “Rannoch” magazine. The article was well-written and gave a good overview of what that service did at Dall and for the local community. But then Steve Paterson (1968-1974, Cameron House and Dall) visited my father in the north of England and they obviously chatted about the Mountain Service, which James Fotheringham (1968-1974, Cameron House and Wade), Steve's best friend, had been in. When I next telephoned my father at the beginning of December 2017, I was given an enthusiastic account of an incident the MS was involved in many years ago. “When did that happen?” I inquired. “Sometime in the early 1970s.” was my father's reply.

So, I took a closer look at the Rannoch Magazines. The whole MS report for the school year 1971-72 was interesting to read and included a similar incident about rescuing sheep, with the MS afterwards even being rewarded for their successful efforts with a pint of beer at the home of the estate manager of Dunalastair Estate, a Mr. Dunlop. Then, my eye wandered over the school year reports from the other services and I realized they were all worth including. In fact, they provide us with an excellent overview of what the services did, how they contributed to local life and were appreciated by the Rannoch community.

I later found the MS incident my father had mentioned to me in the 1973 – 1974 Mountain Service report for the year, but that will appear in the forthcoming chapter “The Mountain Service”.

Between the last “Rannoch Record” 1967 -1968 and the first “Rannoch” magazine for the school year 1971-72 there was a break of 3 years. Most of the 1971-72 Year Book Committee were Fourth Formers, though many of the articles written were from boys from all parts of the school as well as teachers. The Year Book Committee included Michael D. Glen as Editor in Chief, Fraser R. Cattell as Deputy Editor, Ali B. Afshar contributed photographs, Angus P. Stewart some art work and Timothy H. Dean poems. We should thank them for continuing the Year Book tradition after the demise of the “Rannoch Record”. I’m certainly glad they did so. The Committee was helped by members of staff and Mr. Dickinson, Mr. Ward, Mr. Orton, Mr. and Mrs. Jarvis, Miss McAuslin, Mr. Mangin and Mr. Pallister are all mentioned as proof readers and “Consultants”. As always - the Rannoch magazines have been archived by the *Rannoch Association Trust* and are available as pdf scans from www.exrannoch.com.

January 2018, Barbara Grimm-Zaluska

The Rannoch School Services

Ambulance Service

First of all we are very glad to have Mr. Wilkie, the new Geography Master, in charge of the service after Dr. Hodson’s departure last year. The local Doctor, Dr. Caldwell, has very kindly given up his Tuesday afternoons to lecture to us on the essentials of first aid.

We have not been on as many call-outs this year as we could have done, had there been a master in charge. While there was no master in charge there were five or six boys who went to Bridge of Earn Hospital in masters’ cars. This was either because the masters did not like driving the ambulance on such long journeys or because it was thought that the patient could be taken to hospital more quickly and more smoothly in the back of a car.

The service has two crews who are familiar with first aid and could help in the case of a bad accident. On June 29th boys from the service will sit their first exam, one sitting his second exam and one sitting his third exam.

Finally I would like to express the service’s thanks to Dr. Caldwell, Nurse Young, and Mr. Wilkie who have been very patient with us.

R. Martin

P.S. The service extends its thanks to the Ambulance for passing its M.O.T.

Building Service

Surely the greatest achievement of 1971 was the erecting of the foot-bridge over the Dall Burn, near the gym. The foundations were completed, and the Bridge was brought across in three sections. The Building Service then firmly secured it in place and added the finishing touches, such as levelling slopes, and cutting steps.

The second achievement was to finish bricking-up the foundations of Dr. Wallace's Biology Laboratory. Having finished this, we thoroughly coated the whole thing in wood-preserver, so that the building looked completely different.

Another project done by two members of the Service more recently was to paint the outside of the swimming pool in white paint. We also painted the outside of the hut located beside the gym and taken over by the B.S. a short time ago.

We give out thanks and gratitude to the Master in Charge, Mr. Anderson, who helped us and encouraged us with great enthusiasm and determination.

D. Randell

Community Service

The winter term of 1971 was one of the most promising terms the Community Service has had in its history since it started in the summer of 1969. To start with Mr. Scott was in charge, but he eventually handed over to Mr. J. Dickinson who now is the Master in Charge of the Service.

The Service undertook a wide variety of jobs such as cutting and delivering logs to the older people of Kinloch Rannoch. We also opened a Hot Dog stall on Saturday evenings after the Film, and it was a great success. However our most important moment of the term came at the end, when we held a party for ten old people from the village, and we went on to take them to see the performance of "Oliver" in the gym. So the winter term was very busy in the eyes of the Community members.

With Spring came warmer weather so there was no need for us to deliver logs any more, and we reverted to jobs around the School such as cleaning of the Sanatorium windows, much to the delight of Nurse Young and Nurse Ellis. We also continued the Hot Dog stall which turned out to be even more successful than the previous term. We finished off the term with an outing to Perth which was very much appreciated by all the Service.

This now takes us up to the Summer Term of 1972, and so far we have undertaken such jobs as building a dam for Mr. Jarvis, which, to our disgust, was washed away the next day. We have also been looking after the athletics track and field event areas. With the service progressing so well and the numbers rapidly increasing, we look forward to an eventful and successful 1973. One final word of thanks to Mr. J. Dickenson, without whom the Service would not have survived as it has done.

R. Stokes

Fire Brigade

We returned in September '70 to find our “hose-hanger” tree on the Chapel lawn cut down; apparently it had been about to fall down anyway. A less satisfactory tree adjacent to the Fire Station was chosen as a temporary replacement. Berets were issued, and replacement serge jackets and trousers obtained from London.

Firemen Stewart and Wilkie attended an 18 hour course at Perth, and were promoted to Leading Fireman. The Brigade owes a lot to their ability and enthusiasm. L/Fireman Stewart took over as driver.

Progress was made with a new Fire Alarm system, reported elsewhere in this magazine.

Dall and Wentworth houses were checked for means of escape; a little ingenuity was displayed, and it proved possible for everyone to escape regardless of the site of a single fire. However, some routes were difficult, and extra ropes have been installed at strategic points.

In June '70 a fire covering nearly 100 acres was controlled and extinguished near Rannoch Station; the School and village Fire Brigades were backed by some 80 non-brigade boys from the school, and the fire was under complete control before the Aberfeldy and Pitlochry appliances arrived. A study fire caused by a smoker was rapidly controlled; and a fire in the old Biology lab, started by smouldering paper left in the waste bin, was controlled before much damage had been done.

BFC extinguishers were installed around the school; they are suitable for any type of fire and have controllable discharge; the fumes are less harmful than those from carbon tetrachloride. They have to be checked by weighing from time to time as some irresponsible nitwits think they make rather good “water pistols”. This immature joke costs £6.50 every time an extinguisher is emptied and might well cost lives.

The Loch Rannoch Hotel allowed us to stage a practice in one of their outbuildings and much was learned from working in a new location. The Dunalastair Hotel had a “real” fire, but, we understand, the number 333 was rung for some time and elicited no answer. The Headmaster has asked that anyone wanting the school in any kind of emergency should instead use his own number, which is 332.

The Fire Engine has been listed “beyond repair” because of non-availability of spares, but possible sources of a Land Rover Fire Tender, or similar, are being actively explored.



Fire Station, 1979, photo by Simon Stoker

During the summer term the shortage of serviceable delivery hose became acute, but was rapidly corrected; new ex-services hose with unsuitable couplings was bought, and couplings from unserviceable hose installed; the unwanted couplings have been made into ashtrays and tourist curios, and are selling quite well in the village!

The B.B.C made a film about all three services in May 1971 and it was shown nationwide the



BBC Official filming of the Services, 1971, photo from Jonathan Hall

following day. The Daily Record wrote a good article about us, but the photos which accompanied it, showed five kilted firemen with helmets pulled forward holding a limp delivery hose caused some annoyance especially as the Editor had promised it would not be published. Another generally favourable article appeared in the Daily Express. Walkietalkies for all three services were obtained and used, after some problem with the licensing authorities, who did not understand the communication problems peculiar to this area.

To improve our potential usefulness, practices have been at the Barracks, and are scheduled at Dunan Lodge, Crosscraigs, Innerhadden, West Tempar, the railway station, the Bunrannoch Hotel, and the Moor of Rannoch Hotel. We are always glad of any chance to render help in the many ways open to a trained and equipped Fire Brigade.

The Brigade learned with deep sorrow of the death of Gregor Cameron on 2nd September.

W.H.J

Forestry Service

This year has been quite an active one for the Foresters. Senior members were recruited from certain lesser-known bodies. Myles Carter and John Irvine were welcomed to our ranks from the Loch Patrol; the Community Service lost good men in Keith MacGregor, Jonathan Carter and John Person and Angus (Mull) Stewart came from the Emergency Service.

The jobs we have done have been far-ranging and boys twenty years from now will appreciate better what we have been up to most of the time in the School grounds. At Bridge of Gaur the Service undertook a complex draining exercise and are happy to report that after we had demolished all the “pieces”, the tea Mrs. Chollerton served ran very freely indeed. We went back for more of the same one wintry day, pausing briefly to fell a tree that threatened the power line, and to reduce it to fire logs.

At Carrie Cokes helped to slake large thirsts acquired while we drove long slabs into some rather nasty ground. Moreover, it appears that the local farmer upheld his feudal rights to his bog-cum-rock outcrop, claiming that we were “thieving” some of his land. In any case his cows, ignorant of the new survey plan, set to work removing part of the fence as soon as the smoke (exhaust fumes) had dispersed. However, this set-back was not too serious this time, but any further interference will be severely dealt with in the future. Tasks in the school grounds included the usual pruning of trees and shrubs and supplying wood for distribution to Senior Citizens in Kinloch Rannoch. Contractor’s “lop-and-top” was extensively burned with the aid of a flame-thrower. Once, unfortunately, this did not prove to be quite so good an idea as expected, and we had a fire leap out of control at the rifle range. A ten-year-old plantation, including the Biology Study Area, was immediately threatened. Sun blazed down, the wind blew. The service was provided with some good practice in the art of fire-fighting. In this case necessity was the mother of invention. The Black Wood lay beyond! Before Mike Preston and Douglas Pickering raised the alarm and fire-brooms were brought, Dochy Davidson wielded a timber slab with considerable dexterity. The wind changed again. This time in answer to prayer. Now the Headmaster’s house lay in the path of the blaze, which, fortunately, was soon under control.

Possibly the climax of the year’s training for most people was the trip to Aberdeen for the Royal Scottish Forestry Society’s Open Day. After a night in the town the service, surprisingly enough, managed to attend the function without too much effort. Incidentally Aberdeen has good Chinese restaurants, and a convenient Youth Hostel, but it is advisable to have a scientist in the party (in case the Warden’s dog or his door lock gives any bother). But, to return to the subject, that Open Day was very interesting.

The service was well-looked after by the R.S.F.S. members. We saw the results of selective tree felling and various ways of extracting trees from the forests. These were by tractor with double drum winch, the old traditional method using a horse, and a fairly new, apparently efficient technique, the “sky line”. There were various competitions which one could enter. Our mathematicians estimated the volume of a cord of pulpwood with commendable accuracy, but were pipped at the second decimal place of a square metre by a metrication expert. On the whole, a good time was had by all on this trip, despite the fact that we were taken advantage of at the Youth Hostel. Why, we could have shaped their ornamental hedge or rendered a whole tree to kindling in minutes, but he asked us to weed the vegetable garden! That just smacked of WORK (which is a word that’s somewhat foreign to the Service)! On returning from Aberdeen we played the part of the Good Samaritan by pushing a ditched car back onto the tarmac; “Knights of the Road” was our accolade this time.

On the night of the “I.R.A. All-Services Alert”, our “Chief”, Dochy Davidson, led the Forestry lads in the advance up the tracks to 20 Bell Street, which was ablaze. The power saw

effectively demolished all opposition from a tree, met with en route. We were proud to be labelled “Very Efficient” on this occasion.

Summing up, the Forestry Service has enjoyed a varied and worthwhile year. All credit and thanks must go to Mr. R. Fowler, the Master in Charge. Ian Mills has been our driver. Simon Maccullagh shored up the main entrance to the school by attaching it to two yew trees, thus ensuring the safety of the Mountain Rescue demonstrators on Parent’s Day. Last but not least, a putty medal on a wooden string goes to Angus (Kenya) Stewart, who learned so quickly the difference between “lopping” and “felling”!

J. A. Irvine

Loch Patrol

Although we were drastically behind with our maintenance at the end of the term, Sailing was able to commence as planned. The reason for the delay was due to the Cutter needing major repairs. These were carried out, and the boat was re-painted both inside and outside, and the engine was given a complete overhaul. When, finally, it was in the water and on Patrol it proved to be invaluable on many occasions.

As Sailing is now separate from the Loch Patrol Service it will in future be possible to devote all the Service’s time to the maintenance of the rescue craft, and enlarging the sphere of work carried out by members of the Service.

This year the “Reed-Walker”, after a couple of seasons of neglect, is being brought back to “life”. She was repainted at the beginning of term, and the engine is due to be overhauled. It is hoped that re-installation of the engine can take place next term.

The engine of the inflatable dinghy has also received an overhaul, and with this new lease of life has proved itself able to reach Kinloch Rannoch from the school jetty in twelve minutes.

The only “call-out” the Service has received (apart from assistance given to the school whilst on patrol) was a call from the local Policeman’s wife to “come to the rescue of an upturned boat seen near Loch Rannoch Hotel”. On arriving at the “scene of the disaster”, the “upturned boat” turned out to be a wreck nearly full of water, which had floated off a bank somewhere around the Loch during the very high waters of May. Tragically no survivors were seen!

M. T. A. Burnside

Mountain Service

Mountain Rescue Training

When recruits join the Mountain Rescue Service they begin by learning how to use, handle and carry the Thomas and MacInnes stretchers. Once they are proficient in this they graduate to searches, which usually take place during November. These involve the whole Mountain Service from the newest members to the veteran members.

After this the recruits do their theoretical training by learning First Aid and weather and compass work. They are also taken to Glen Coe where they learn to glissade and use the ice axe and practice snow and ice belays.

Sometime during the winter the whole Mountain Service goes out on a Navigation Practice, which takes place during the night on Rannoch Moor to make it more difficult and to increase proficiency in navigation. After all this and further practice in the use of knots and stretcher work the recruit becomes a fully-fledged member of the Mountain Rescue Team.



MacInnes stretcher being used by the MS. Photo by Jonathan Hall, 1968-70

A. B. Thomson

Rescue Work

The Rannoch Area is not renowned for its mountaineering and climbing accidents, and we have to go far afield to find victims to rescue! Skiers are by far the easiest prey, and during their season, we frequently gather at the Glen Shee slopes with two fully equipped teams. Even here people have managed to keep out of our clutches recently, and have avoided being tripped up, frightened, or directed onto treacherous slopes by our eager rescuers. The school ski-races are the highlight of the “Glen Shee season”; for these we have two teams standing by on the slopes, waiting like a pack of wolves – could the sight of us put people off having accidents?

In the summer term 1972 we had our major technical rescue operation, involving the rescue of a victim who had been trapped on the ledge on Craig Varr (a local cliff) for almost a week before being spotted. This rescue involved a lower down a vertical cliff face. We were all rewarded on that occasion with a pint of beer by the gamekeeper whose sheep we had rescued.

Later that term the more serious side of our work made itself apparent to us when we were called out to help sweep search for an ornithologist who had been missing for four days in the Glen Garry area. As with previous sweeps we met with no success, and only after several days was his body found, when it floated to the surface of a lochan in which he had drowned.

The service was formed originally by the School, for the locality and the School. I am pleased, that recently we have not been called out to rescue our own Rannoch Boys – and I hope we never will.

P. B. Sweet Escott

Rock Climbing

In the last three years rock-climbing has flourished and developed considerably thanks largely to A. L. W. (Note: Andrew Wielochowski, Staff 1970 – 1975)

At first we went to Dunkeld where rock climbs ranging from difficult to Very Severe were undertaken. Since then we have found minor rock faces near Kinloch Rannoch which are now used for training.

We have covered much ground in Scotland as well as venturing into North Wales and the Lake District. In Scotland we have climbed Tower Ridge, Slav Route and the North East Buttress on Ben Nevis. Glen Coe has provided us with many interesting climbs such as Agag's Groove, Fracture Route and the Chasm on the Buachaille Etive Mor. Lower down the glen Clachaig Gully has been climbed several times. Recently the Etive Slabs at the head of Glen Etive have had a few visits. Creag Dhubh near Newtonmore has proved a useful place for harder training climbs.



The MS training near Kinloch Rannoch, photo by Jonathan Hall, 1968-70

But the M.S. Tigers have not stopped here, for they made an expedition to North Wales in summer 1971. This was such a success that it was repeated on half term holidays. A meeting between the M.S. and ex M.S. members was arranged at Langdale in 1971. This was also such a success that it is hoped to repeat it each year.

The trip to North Wales was a five day expedition. We left on Thursday evening and arrived on Friday morning after an all-night drive. We camped below Tryfan which we climbed there and then by the Grooved Arete. The next day we went to Clogwyn d'ur Arddu on Snowdon, but had to cut the climb short owing to technical and meteorological difficulties. More climbs were done on Tryfan on the last day. The weather was good throughout.

We were not so fortunate in the Lake District, however, and after having been told that the weather would be superb, we arrived to find it raining and this continued during our climbing of Centipede and Middlefell Buttress on Raven's Crag.

We look forward to our next meeting with the Old Boys at Langdale and hope to introduce more people to the sport in the coming year.

J. E. G. Carr

The Winter Months

In the Mountain Service much snow and ice climbing has been done. We have tackled Raeburn's Gully on Creag Meaghaidh and Tower Ridge on Ben Nevis during the winter. Routes have also had winter ascents on the Buachaille and in the Cairngorms. For these climbs we have a stock of ice axes, crampons, pitons, ice screws, ice daggers and hammers.

My most memorable climb was Raeburn's Gully, which I did with A. L. W. and Fotheringham. According to the guidebook this climb should take four to six hours in reasonable conditions, but it took us seven hours as the weather was exceptionally bad. In spite of this we enjoyed the climb very much as it was a great challenge to us.

To train for snow and ice climbs such as these I went to Meall Buidhe, where I was taught the basic techniques and usage of the ice axe. Mr. Dave Challis has greatly helped the service by showing slides of his expedition to the Peruvian Andes and also by helping to lead school expeditions.

A. B. Richards