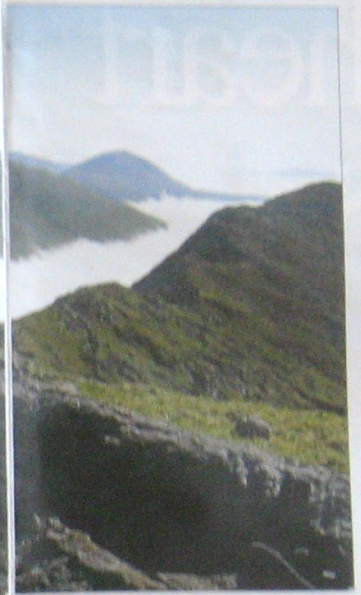


thegreat outdoors

by Jack McKeown
j.mckeown@thegreatoutdoors.co.uk

The joys of bagging Munros by moonlight



MUNRO BAGGING is nothing new. It's regarded as something of a rational pastime, in fact. But midnight Munro bagging? That's a little more unusual.

Alan Rowan started climbing at night when he was sports editor for the Daily Record. "I didn't finish work until midnight," he explains. "I couldn't go home and straight to sleep afterwards. I was doing a high-pressure job and your mind is buzzing afterwards."

"One night I finished and decided I'd use that hour to drive to Fort William. My plan was to use that couple of hours of being wide awake to drive up there, then get a few hours' sleep in the car and climb in the morning."

"But I got there and it was so beautiful at that time of night that I just sat off there and then. I rose up the mountain as daylight began to break and got to the top in time to watch the sunrise. It was a sensational morning."

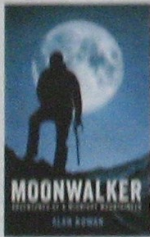
His first night-time Munro was completed in 1994. By 2000 he had summited all 282 Munros and all of the Corbetts — peaks between 2,500 and 3,000 feet, of which there are 449.

He has now climbed the Munros twice and is working his way through them for the third time.

"Not all of them were done at night," he stresses. "But a lot of them were — I would get out 10 or a dozen times a year and climb a few peaks in a night."

info

Alan Rowan features on Monday's episode of The Adventure Show on BBC Two Scotland at 7pm. Moonwalker: Adventures of a Midnight Mountaineer is released on May 15, published by BackPage Press.



Above and right: the majesty of Scotland's mountains is even more memorable by moonlight!

He says night-time climbing is quite a special experience.

"I wear a head torch but it's amazing how seldom you need it switched on," he says. "Moon and starlight are quite often enough and your eyes adjust to the darkness quite well."

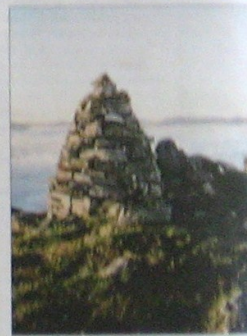
Alan (59) was born in Dundee and now lives in Carnoustie. His journalism career started at DC Thomson, publishers of The Courier, as a reporter on its sister title The Evening Telegraph.

After a near-40 year career in journalism he took early retirement in 2009 and now works as a part-time lecturer in sports writing at the University of the West of Scotland.

Alan would not recommend night-time climbing for everyone. "It is a very special experience but there are a lot of caveats," he says. "If you're new to it make sure you do it in spring or summer when it's only dark for a couple of hours. If I'm going out in winter I make sure I don't climb any north-facing slopes."

"You also need to be an experienced climber. I've done safety and survival courses. And you need to be very prepared — plot your route carefully, have enough warm gear with you, know how to use a compass and a map, and let someone know where you're going."

"There are a group of around a dozen of us who formed a hillwalking club. Whenever one of us is out they text their route to someone. Each time they reach the



summit of a mountain they text the word 'tick'.

"That way if they don't check in then we know the last point they were at before we went missing."

Climbing in Scotland's high and remote places remains Alan's favourite pastime, and he is fortunate in now having the time to indulge his passion.

"I'm a granddad now so I do my share of babysitting," he says. "But I still get away often — sometimes for two or three days at a time."

"I sometimes camp but I prefer to travel light so I usually stay in a hotel — Scotland has an absolutely fantastic network of hotels these days."

These days, most of his mountains are climbed in the daytime... but he still likes to keep his hand in at midnight mountaineering.

"I got into climbing at night because my job involved unacceptable hours," he continues. "Now that I'm retired I don't do as much of it. But it's a special feeling so I still get out there a few times a year."

Since he retired Alan has been penning a book on his late-night rambles. Moonwalker: Adventures of a Midnight Mountaineer will be published in May, and Alan is planning a launch event at his local Waterstones in Dundee.

In the meantime, BBC Two Scotland's outdoors programme The Adventure Show has taken an interest in Alan's activities.

Monday night's programme features Alan leading an interviewer from the show up Schiehallion.

"We headed up there on a beautiful night," he explains. "The idea was to get to the top in time to film the sun coming up, but we were too early — so we had to huddle in shelter for a couple of hours. It was -10 up there so that wasn't fun. It was worth it for the glorious sunrise though."