



The Moonwalker

Nocturnal hiker Alan Rowan sees Scotland's mountains in a whole new light

by NICK DRANEY

SOME people join a gym, play the odd round of golf or maybe enjoy a stroll by the river – but for Alan Rowan, climbing Munros in the middle of the night is his way of keeping fit. He has finished two rounds of Munros, many in the dark hours, and also includes all the Corbetts in his list of achievements, as well as the 3,000ft summits in England, Ireland and Wales. However, there is no sign of him stopping any time soon – he has only 30 more Munros to do before adding a third full circuit. Van Gogh sums up Alan's attitude to walking at night. On his website is written the artist's quote, "I often think that the night is more alive and more richly coloured than the day."

Alan adds, "It is seeing it differently; it is almost like an inverted day." ☺

His nocturnal walking began in 1994 when he was sports editor of the *Daily Record* and he climbed Stob a' Choire Mheadhoin and Stob Crichean above the Great Glen. Now in semi-retirement, Alan says, "I had this time when I used to finish work at midnight but when you went home you never slept and it felt like wasted time. I had done about 50 Munros, and the plan was to drive up in these 3000 hours after work to Fort Williams, I was going to have a rest in the car and start in the morning. But when I got there the light was beautiful so I went and did it. It was quite exhilarating and it just went from there."

Sometimes moonwalking may be a more apt name for what he does, especially when it is a long, dark night in poor weather. Alan concedes, "Sometimes it feels like sleepwalking. It is almost like autopilot, you concentrate on your feet, but when the sun starts coming up that changes the walk."

Alan enjoys having a list of hills to tick off



It is the daylight which Alan has in mind when choosing a mountain to climb at night. "Although it is called moonwalking it was more about seeing the sun. You always pick good weather to go and have your breakfast at the top to see the sun rise."

Alan lives in Carmacastle and enjoys easy access to the Angus Glens, but when his night walking began, his wife Alison and their two daughters were unaware of the journalist's nocturnal habits.

The 60-year-old who now works part-time as a lecturer says, "My wife knew I was going walking, she just assumed I was doing it in the day. It is not the sort of thing you say – 'Have a nice night, I'm away up Ben Nevis'. That just wouldn't work so she was basically unaware for years."

Now she knows she thinks it is "all a bit crazy", according to the *Munroist*.

While you might expect some peace and quiet with a lack of other walkers, the noises and dimly lit scene

"You pick good weather, and have your breakfast at the top to see the sun rise"



Daybreak over Beinn a'Chlo

after dark can be something of a surprise, for Alan as well as the animals inhabiting Scotland's high places. "The sights and sounds are slightly different. At night you are more attuned to water. It might be miles off but you always hear it, even if you can't see it."

Alan has documented his adventures in a book, *Moonwalker: Adventures of a Midnight Mountaineer*. He includes an occasion when he came across "the deer Grand National".

"They looked stunned to see somebody coming up at three in the morning; they had obviously never seen a soul at that time of the day."

"We got caught with a couple of stags once – they were downwind of us and they didn't see us in the dark. We were quite close to them and they panicked, and so did we a bit!"

In respect of whether a stag might be around the corner, is it really safe?

Alan says, "If you are walking up and you know where you are going, you are quite confident, the head torch comes into play and you are looking at your feet."

Safety comes into play as well and you don't take any dart chances."

Alan shows no sign of giving up and hopes to finish his third round of Munros by the end of the year. Also high on his list of "must do's" is the sugarloaf mountain of Salween on the west coast of Sutherland.

He says, "I feel it would be a lovely walk to do by moonlight. With the moon above it, then as you reach the summit, the sun coming up, the shape of Salween would be incredible."

Continuing to tick lists, including the Grahams – mountains between 2,000 and 2,500 feet – keeps Alan going.

"It is nice to have a target. When I did some of the Munros before I didn't have as much of a view, so a lot of it is going back and seeing other things or doing it in different directions or different seasons." ☺



It started as a stroll after work...