

Travel **MUNROS**

By Murray Scougall

FEW would argue that some of the most beautiful sights in Scotland can be seen from the peak of a Munro.

But there aren't many people who would climb the hills under cover of darkness in order to experience those views at their most beautiful.

According to Alan Rowan that time is at sunrise, when an orange hew drifts over the blanket of clouds and brings the peaks alive in magnificent colour.

For the past 20 years he has enjoyed nocturnal walking across many of Scotland's hills.

"I had done a wee bit of walking as a kid, but when I started working nights I took it up again quite seriously," Alan, from Carnoustie, explained.

"I would start work at 5pm, so I'd go out during the day with a couple of colleagues and climb a hill.

"By the time I was up to 40 Munros, it was becoming hard to find the time to do the more far-flung ones.

"So I decided when I finished work at midnight, I would drive to a Munro so I could begin climbing at first light.

"My two friends weren't keen on doing it, so I went by myself.

"When I got there around 2am, I realised it was already quite light due to the moon, so I decided to just start walking.

"For the next 15 years I did a walk around 10 or 15 times a year."

Now on his third round of Munros, father-of-two Alan has also done the Corbetts (peaks between 2,500ft and 3,000ft) and is in the process of completing the Grahams (peaks between 2,000ft and 2,499ft).

"The point of it all was to be up top and seeing the sun rising.

"I remember on one occasion it was raining heavily when I started off, but when I burst through the clouds it was beautiful. When I went into work the next day my



■ Alan Rowan delights in daybreak from Scotland's peaks.

Munro morning glory

Sunrise joy for writer Alan

workmates couldn't believe I had a tan."

The university lecturer says safety is always at the forefront of his mind and he never takes chances.

"I always leave notes or a route

with someone and I need to call by a certain time. I carry a head-torch too. You have to know when to cut your losses.

"I didn't actually tell my wife, Alison, what I was doing. She

thought I was travelling to the hills and then walking them in the morning.

"There was no point worrying her – she would never get to sleep knowing what I was doing!"

The 60-year-old has written a book about his experiences exploring Scotland's hills under the stars, called *Moonwalker: Adventures of a Midnight Mountaineer*.

Alan will talk about the book at Portobello Book Festival on October 4 and Dundee Literary Festival on October 26.

Dark Sky at night, revellers' delight

By Murray Scougall

IF climbing Scotland's hills in the dark sounds a little too adventurous, how about a trip to Galloway's Dark Sky Park for some Sanctuary?

That's the name of a special arts event taking place this month deep in the renowned forest, where there will be experiments with sound, light and space.

For 24 hours, a site-specific radio station – The Dark Outside FM – will play previously unheard music from artists based around the world.

The sound files will be destroyed afterwards.

There will also be light installations, including Robbie Coleman's dramatic 100ft neon light sculpture called Enclosure, and the Dark Skies Lounge will host what is described as explorations of the paranormal and strange psychic phenomenon.

The unique event takes place around Murray's Monument on September 27 and 28.

Hundreds of art and music enthusiasts are expected to come from far and wide to spend the night in the forest and take part.

Artist Robbie said: "The Dark Sky Park is an incredible place to spend the night, looking at the stars and listening to music that's never been heard before.

"It's an exciting place to create experimental work."

Keith Muir, head of tourism for Galloway Forest Dark Sky Park, said: "How often do you get a good reason to take a drive to the countryside in total darkness and listen to music?"

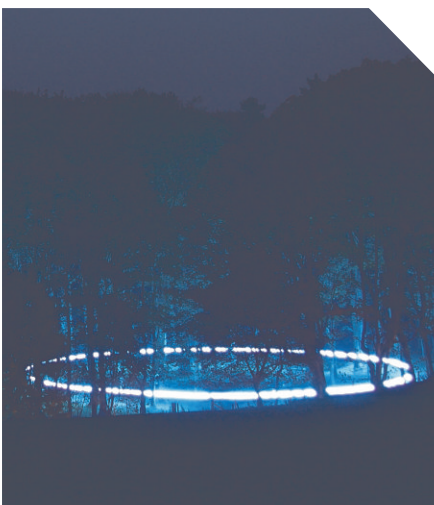
"The visitors who come to be part of an event or see the art works all contribute to making the south west of Scotland the premier destination for environmental art, which further enhances the new Unesco Biosphere status in the area."

Jan Hogarth, from arts group Wide Open, said: "This is one of the most exciting art collaborations to happen in the landscape of Scotland this year.

"There will be amazing music that no one else will ever hear, most of it composed for this event, a dramatic light installation and the chance to enter the world of the paranormal.

"And all taking place in a remote forest in the Dark Sky Park in Galloway."

Food and refreshments by the famous Moniaive Green Tea House will also be available.



■ A magical night is promised at Galloway's Dark Sky Park.