

Kidnapped

by JOANNE CARTER

'...having travelled the greater part of that big and crooked Island of Mull, from Erraid, fifty miles as the crow flies and (with my wanderings) much nearer to a hundred, in four days and with little fatigue. Indeed I was by far in better heart and health of body at the end of that long tramp than I had been at the beginning.'

So wrote David Balfour in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped*. After the Rucksack Club version of this excursion, I certainly have more respect for him and his journey. The idea was conceived during a trip with Ed Grindley, who had long thought it would make a good walking route. When the Craighallan connection was made - the Appin Murder cairn is situated a few hundred yards away from the hut - I was determined to make the venture into a Club meet. At first it seemed only remotely possible that the route could be done within a long weekend. But with patience, guidance from my Dad and a little poetic licence where required we thought it would be worth a shot. I was prepared for a spectacular failure, but thought that preferable to abandoning the idea. Once a possible schedule had been worked out for the walking, all that remained was to arrange the transport in between.

Shipwrecked we were not; but there was an increasing sense of abandonment as we transferred from the comfort of cars to the CalMac ferry (11pm Oban to Craignure), to a coach, to a cramped minibus, then on foot with sacks down a stony track, to finally arrive at the beach camp at 1am. An early start later that morning revealed the splendour of our campsite - white sands overlooking the tidal island Erraid.

Day 1 basically consisted of walking the full length of an OS 1:50,000 map (!), i.e. 35km from Erraid to Lochbuie, via Loch an Sgalain, Ardalanish, Standing Stone at GR 392/196, Shiaba, the cliffs of Aoineadh Mór, descending at Nuns Pass and Carsaig. My plan was to pop across the beach and simply 'touch' Erraid to give the walk a more authentic start. Mutiny, inspired by Marilyn baggers I suspect, saw most of the group swarming all over the little island. Thus, after less than five minutes, I might have

KIDNAPPED

imagined to possess over the party. Reunited we set out across the boggy grasslands, weaving our way around interesting hillocks and past old settlements. The general direction was East, indeed one small group navigating simply from the position of the sun took the very best line. The lure of the coast, a good trod underfoot and, OK, incompetent navigation from the leader led the majority of the party to visit a lovely little bay on the S coast with long views across the sea to the other Hebridean islands. I briefly considered bluffing that surely David Balfour wandered about a bit, but conscience dictated that I call a 'confession' break. Some mistook this for a coffee break and were surprised that, once I'd explained the situation, I set off at speed over the same deer fence we'd crossed some time earlier.

Onwards past a few occupied houses, where news that the sun followers had passed through 60mins earlier was actually a relief to me I had thought we'd lost more time. Still, my plan to have everyone fed and tucked up in bed before dark was looking doubtful - so far we had only covered one map fold and had another four to do. Lunch at a splendid standing stone proved restorative. The magnificent views ahead - Shiaba, Malcolm's Point and the cliffs beyond revealed a substantial part of the rest of the day's walk.

After wandering through the remains of Shiaba (a victim of the Highland Clearances) we reached the coast - this time intentionally. A little kudos was regained when my seemingly off route line - following the edge of a forest down to sea level and then back up to the cliff top - paid off. Other groups ahead had thrashed through the double-plough of new forestation so, despite losing less height, they had had to work much harder. A fine picnic spot atop the cliffs was used sequentially by each group. I believe there were variously 3 or 4 groups separated from each other by about the time of a brew stop; each briefly exchanged news, jokes and joshes with the next before moving on. In this manner we all vaguely kept in contact as we followed the land up and down along the cliff tops. Spectacular basalt rock formations, waterfalls, many birds and other wildlife were seen and admired.

Despite much innuendo we descended via the Nuns Pass to the shore line. I am sad to report that our combined knowledge couldn't recall that the Nuns' Chorus came from *Il Trovatore*, nor could we convincingly hum its tune, the Slaves' Chorus just kept on coming out instead. On then to the habitations at Carsaig,

where many felt they'd had a good day's walk. The longest 5 miles imaginable followed. Infuriatingly we had a view of Lochbuie early on, then it didn't seem to get any nearer for 2 hours! Some weird combination of effects gave almost everyone very sore feet. The wet, the big boots, the loads, the tussocks of grass, whatever, it felt as though powdered pumice stone was interspersed between every fibre of your socks, as if, should your feet slide sideways just once more, the whole sole of your foot would surely skin off in one piece. The beach camp at Lochbuie was thus a very welcome sight. Folks arrived from 7-11pm, so most managed a good feed and a small toddy before nightfall.

Sunday dawned less promising initially; nevertheless, those who were determined to wear shorts did so anyway. Was this despite, or because of, the sheep ticks that Janet had spent most of the previous night removing from those very people's legs? Brian Cosby continued to impress. His minimalist gear still ran to comb and razor, but dispensed with such extravagances as tent, stove, spare food and clothes. His gaiters were one Tesco carrier bag! For anyone interested - after cutting in half, a handle goes under each instep and 2 lightweight elastic bands complete the ensemble. Gerry Gee impressed in an entirely different way. Firstly, he fell off his cooking rock and onto his cooker which, fortunately, had been turned off at least 2secs previously - so it just stuck to his skin rather than set fire to him. Secondly, he electrocuted himself, not once, but twice on the same deer fence. Thirdly, whilst concentrating very hard to avoid slipping on the greasy looking rock that was to be his landing spot across the river, he instead fell from the equally greasy rock that was his launching pad. The effect was identical, he turned turtle achieving complete immersion held down by his weighty rucksack in the coolish stream.

Day 2 was planned to take us the 22km from Lochbuie via Gleann a Chaiginn Mhóir and Beinn Mheadhon to Fishnish harbour in time to catch the last ferry across the Sound of Mull to Lochaline on the Morvern peninsular. So we ventured up the valley, across a main road, then into unrecce'd territory across new double-plough forest, over a hill and down to Fishnish. Many different routes were taken and most vowed theirs was the best. However, I remain impressed by Paul Riley's team who managed a swim, a leisurely lunch and still arrived at the ferry port ahead of the leader. Several missed an earlier ferry by a few seconds, this meant a substantial group made the crossing together, negotiating

KIDNAPPED

an insubstantial discount of 10p.

Reunited at the Scout Hut in Lochaline, we all enjoyed a meal together. Then we wrestled with the brain teaser posed by the logistics for Day 3 (Monday). The variables were: long walk + shorter boat crossing; short walk + longer boat crossing; maximum of 6 in each boat; 22 people; 3 cars at Craigallan; 7 cars at Oban; 2 groups hoping for an early start back to England. Two hours later the puzzle was deemed to be solved, so we went to the pub.

On Day 3 we would walk from Lochaline via Leacraithnaich to either Glensanda Quarry jetty, or over Beinn Mheadhoin to Kingairloch. From either landing a private boat would speed us across Loch Linnhe to Kentallan Bay; a brief row to the seaweed covered rocky shore, followed by a short walk to Craigallan and a visit to the Murder cairn would complete the trip. On the day I was very impressed how each wave of 6 highly focussed people left the Scout Hut at their appointed hour to reach their appointed port at their appointed time. Each group realised that failure would have knock-on effects for everyone else. Again I led from the rear. Monday was glorious from start to finish. All in their turn admired the MBA bothy at Leacraithnaich, the hospitality from the Glensanda Quarry folk, the magnificent views across to the mainland and, last but not least, the exhilarating (28 knots) boat trip. I wish I had seen Janet Sutcliffe riding the waves at the front of the boat from the classic figurehead position - what a finish.



*'I must say John....
I like the way you've
entered into the spirit
of the thing'*

*(courtesy of Doug
Lawrence*