



ONWAY UP
A party of mountain skiers in the Cairngorms



CHALLENGE
You need to have a relatively good level of fitness

THIS WEEK



In a rare moment of stillness, the quartzite rocks of Arkle and Foinaven are reflected in Loch Stack. Laid down by vigorous tidal currents in tropical seas about

545million years ago, this hard and often brilliantly white rock forms a prominent cap to several mountains, which include An Teallach, Beinn Eighe, Liathach, Canisp and Quinag.



TWIST IN THE TRAIL

The annual Highland Trail 550 long-distance endurance mountain bike event has just got tougher, as it will cover 560 miles instead of the previous 430 miles. On May 24, self-supported riders will set off from Tyndrum, at the southern edge of Rannoch Moor and head north towards Sutherland. The already difficult route, which takes days to ride, now includes an additional loop in the remote terrain of Assynt. See www.highlandtrail.net/

TAKE THREE..

Waterproof outer jackets and warming inner jackets are a great combination for outdoors life.

SAVE

Hi-Gear Trent 3-in-1 jacket
Ideal for trail walks, the outer is a waterproof fabric with fleece inner. From £24.99 (with a GO Outdoors Discount Card), www.gooutdoors.co.uk



SPEND

Jack Wolfskin Mountain Creek 3 in 1 jacket
The outer jacket is made from Jack Wolfskin's Texapore 4x4 fabric, while the inner is a fleece, £140, www.cotswoldoutdoor.com

SPLURGE

The North Face Amplitude Triclimate Jacket
A technical performance jacket with a waterproof, breathable exterior and a quilted, insulated interior that zips out, £199, www.craigdonmountainsports.com



BOOTS MADE FOR WALKING

Outdoor brand Teva is set to launch a top-of-the-range hiking boot, the Riva Peak Mid eVent. Priced at a competitive £140, the three-season, full-grain leather boots come in male and female fit and boast a sturdy Vibram sole. Teva have added a soft Shoc Pad in the heel and a Mush-infused insole to bring flip-flop comfort to a walking boot. The eVent membrane is both waterproof and breathable. See www.teva.co.uk



SANDISON'S SCOTLAND

BRUCE SANDISON IS A JOURNALIST, ANGLER AND AUTHOR OF A STRING OF BEST-SELLING BOOKS ABOUT SCOTLAND'S OUTDOORS. HE LIVES IN SUTHERLAND.



RELATIONSHIP WITH ANN'S FIRST TERRIER HEATHCLIFF WAS A TRUE LOVE STORY

Like many of my fellow Scots, I got it right on Friday, St Valentine's Day – the patron saint of love, young people and happy marriages, the day when we men express our tender love for the women in our lives.

A means of maintaining said happy marriage is encapsulated in the lines, "To keep the marriage happy/ And fill the loving cup/ Whenever you're wrong admit it/ And whenever you're right shut up." I learned this the hard way. For instance, when I said "I do", nobody told me I would spend the rest of my life sharing a bed not only with my wife Ann but also with a succession of Yorkshire terriers.

However, I also discovered that we shared a love of other things, such as fishing and hill walking.

The discovery that Ann was an angler came as a shock. I had been boasting about my piscatorial skills when she produced a photograph of a brown trout caught in a Cairngorm stream, the Allt Druidh in the Lairig Ghru. "Two-and-a-half pounds, it was," she said.

Serious hill walking also came as a bit of a shock to me, and to Ann's first Yorkshire terrier, Heathcliff (all her dogs are given Bronte names).

During his time with us, Heathcliff scaled more than his fair share of Munros, Corbetts and MacDonalDs, always positioning himself behind Ann with me bringing up the rear.

His worst moment, and mine, came when we were climbing Quinag (808m) in Assynt on a windy September day.

There is a narrow ridge on the descent from Spidean Coinich, the most southern of the three peaks that form the mountain. For safety's sake, we decided to traverse it on hands and knees, rather than upright. Ann went first, then her faithful hound, then me.

In the middle of the ridge, Heathcliff stopped, turned and came back towards me. I knew exactly what was going on in his furry mind – he had decided enough was enough and was heading for the car.

I grabbed him as he tried to slink past and stuffed him unceremoniously up my jumper. When I reached Ann, she cried out: "Where's Heathcliff? What's happened to him?" "Safe, Ann, safe and sound," I replied as I laid the tattered, ragged bundle of brown and gold into her arms, his hairy face twisted into a hideous, white-toothed grin.

The only other time the little dog balked at the prospect of a long walk was when he was 16 years old.

We were all set to climb to the high point of the Foinaven Ridge, Ganu Mor (914m) in northwest Sutherland, but Heathcliff, on the lead, refused to move. Ann guessed what the matter was, opened the car door and slipped the lead.

Heathcliff shot back into the car and purposefully snuggled down on his rug. Point taken.

Meall nan Tarmachan (1034m), Creag Meagaidh (1130m), Ben Hope (927m), Carn Ghluasaid (957m), Sgurr nan Conbhairean (1110m) and Ben More Assynt (998m) and many more were all ticked off on Heathcliff's list before he slipped his lead for the final time.

Appropriately, he lies buried on the slopes of Ben More Assynt, his last Munro, but lives on in our memories.



DOGGED Ann Sandison took Heathcliff atop many a mountain