

In the beginning:

Hillwalking is an activity best done with pals -- or so I thought!

I had moved back to Scotland after many years working in Somerset and I wanted to get out and explore the Scottish hills. I knew a club existed in Blair but I could not work out how to join up and was it for me anyway? I persuaded anyone who showed an ounce of enthusiasm to go walking and on one such venture from Edinburgh to Ben Lawers I clambered onto the summit when lo and behold there was a large group already ensconced munching away. Standing up and surveying the scene was no-one else than Graham (Ping) Smith. I was greeted as a long lost buddy - I was at school with his wife Liz - and then realised there were some other familiar faces including Rob Robertson and, I think, Iain Mitchell.

That was it - I had found out who was in the club, they went out every three weeks, - very cunning (I had thought once a fortnight or once a month). Seeing such cheery folk encouraged me to find out more - much to the chagrin of my companion who thought he might just have a chance of being a little more than a hill walking pal! Competing against the serried ranks of B&HWC - no competition.

The next walk I could make was to Ben y Ghlo. What to take, wear, carry?

In those days I had only a flimsy day sack and a large framed rucksack (proudly adorned with badges of Girl Guide ventures - Adelboden, Elisinore, Enochdhu) but help was at hand. Another pal, this time an eminent ski mountaineer was in Scotland and could he come on the walk?

Well "*I don't really know what to expect and bring some gear*" said I. He arrived with a respectable sac. My elderly boots (bought in 1967) would do although I knew they gave me blisters - witness Ben Lawers. My anorak had been ski touring in the Alps and whereas it cut dash with skiers it was (so I found out) no match for Scottish downpours. Breeks, well, I can't remember what was the main layer, probably some cords or shorts but I found some ancient waterproof trousers (cast offs from my father's golfing days) and I could make sandwiches. All set.

Bill and I decided to share his sack and filled it with assorted woollen jumpers, hats, gloves, anoraks, food, sweeties and a flask of tea.

The walk was great and I wanted more. Mind you it was touch and go when Charlie Davidson said in a very serious voice *"We don't allow people to share a sack. You must carry your own."* As I was carrying it at the time poor Bill thought he would never be allowed back. He didn't ever return but I did and that was the start of a new lifestyle, new friends and a never-ending list of things to buy.

Jane