

Beinn Dearg Revisited

It was with some trepidation I approached the summit of Beinn Dearg in August 2002, it was a far cry from my last abortive attempt in October 2000 and in reality I had been just short of the top by 50 feet but that was a far different day. It was the day the clocks changed, the weather was truly appalling, dull with hardly any visibility with a constant drizzle. My companions that day were faster than I and I did suggest they go ahead I wasn't Munro bagging and I would meet them on the way down, however conditions worsened as I reached the rocks near the summit, the wind was driving so hard and was now accompanied by snow and fog, I attempted to put up my hood and in doing so I had been going round in circles, I realised then that I was in trouble, where had the path gone? I tried to whistle for help but no one came or possibly heard me.

Had I continued to travel up I may have seen my companions, but decided the best plan was to try and find a path somewhere, visibility then was almost nil and the snow had covered all traces of any paths. I continued walking down, avoiding all the boggy areas as much as possible, somewhere I had heard it was possible to follow streams as all water travels down and I decided this was what I would do, I crossed over several streams which were going nowhere and eventually I was following a bigger stream I could see a path on the other side snaking down the hillside I would try and cross the stream when it was possible to do so, however there were no safe crossing places and it was very muddy underfoot and darkness was beginning to fall, I knew I had to get away from the water and began to climb up the hillside.

When I arrived at a place with a large rock to shelter by I called my daughter from my mobile phone to alert her I was lost, it was 3.40pm. She contacted the services and I was advised to stay put, it was now quite dark and any movement would have been foolish. I climbed into my orange survival bag, very cold and extremely wet, I had loads to eat and drink but I was too miserable to open my rucksack. My family kept in touch via my mobile and I knew that Rescuers were already looking for me, my mobile was my link and I had calls from the Police, Gamekeepers and others, my last call was at approximately midnight and I was advised not to sleep, then all contact was broken, my phone was dead.

Snow was falling all around, it was so cold, and all I wanted to do was close my eyes and sleep, the survival bag may have kept

the elements off me but it so very damp and I was now shaking with cold and couldn't stop. I tried to convince myself to think warm which wasn't easy. I had been told to whistle every few minutes which I did, with one hand outside the bag, the other hand tightly grasping the bag to my neck in an attempt to keep out the draught. Suddenly I heard this mournful sound that spooked me and I was a little afraid. I didn't know what it was at the time but realise now October is the rutting season for the deer and that was the sound.

How not to sleep when it is essential you don't in few easy lessons

- Think of a girl's name beginning with A – 3 names, there are hundreds but the brain can't think, by the time I got to G, I was truly fed up with that one, next game all the nursery rhymes/Christmas Carols – sing if you want, that kept the spooks away.
- Don't get too comfy, jam the rucksack in the small of your back so you can't rest your head on the rock.
- Keep moving inside the bag so you can still shiver.

Daybreak came gradually. I'm not sure at what time it was but it was interesting to see the wildlife, I was surrounded by deer I don't think they knew I was there but I bet there were a few sore heads with all my whistling. I saw several birds which, at the time, I thought were capercaillie, now I am not so sure that was what they were.

I looked over to one of the hillsides and I was convinced I saw two people, one shading his eyes, I leapt out of the survival bag, waved it in the air and whistled like mad, they didn't move, as daylight broke I could see it was just shadings of green and brown but to me in the half light it looked like people standing. At seven o'clock I heard a helicopter and it passed over me and once again I went through the ritual of waving the bag – no luck.

Some time later another helicopter to my left appeared, again out with the bag, this happened on two further occasions I decided I would wait and if another passed over and didn't see me I would start walking. I was so very cold and was now shaking and shivering non stop. At 11am I suddenly spotted two figures in red directly in front of me on the other hillside, I whistled and one obviously heard me because he called to his companion and they looked my way but as I was on higher ground they weren't seeing me, then the helicopter was there right above me, I was throwing the bag in the air, whistling like crazy and I presumed no-one had seen me, and turned my

attention again to the red jackets, but the helicopter turned and landed.

Soon I was aboard the helicopter and I was told it was by chance one of the crew thought he had seen something out of his side vision, probably the orange survival bag. I did appreciate that warming cup of tomato soup but ended up wearing most of it as I couldn't stop shivering and whenever I tried to drink I was splashing it all over, but my knight in shining armour held my hands steady so I was able to drink – the best tomato soup in the world.

I was taken to Raigmore Hospital, Inverness, given all the tests and was allowed home later that day to a very relieved family, I discovered I had made the headlines in the newspapers and on television. I was lucky, very few people manage to walk away without it being public knowledge who they were.

I now take this opportunity to thank everyone who gave their time in looking for me, The Tayside Mountain Rescue Team, Tayside Police Search & Rescue, RAF Kinloss. I hope I have learned from the experience and this will be a lesson for others, even though I was adequately clothed for the hills I did fail the test, I wasn't able to navigate, I depended on my companions. To walk the hills you must be totally self reliant.