

## M is for MUNROS [the latest instalment in the A—Z of Scottish History]

...or mountains, if you are not an avid mountain climber! Scotland is famed throughout the world for her rugged mountain landscape, so it is no surprise that the locals have been fascinated by these silent giants for millennia. Scotland categorises her mountains by their height; Graham's are the smallest mountains coming in at under 2500ft, then we have the Corbetts which are between 2500ft and 3000ft and then the Munros which are over 3000ft (914.4 m). Scotland is also home to Britain's tallest mountain, Ben Nevis, which stands at 4,413 feet (1,345 m). Mountain climbing is so popular in Scotland that the Scots have created a name for the sport of climbing all 282 munros; munro bagging, with over 7,000 people (as of 31 December 2021) to have reportedly accomplished the feat. Personally, I've only managed a measly five!



The Scottish Mountaineering Club met for the first time on 11 February 1889 in Glasgow, due to popular demand, but Scottish mountaineering began long before then. Records from the late 16th century show people were scrambling Scotland's peaks and by the late 18th century notable peaks like Nevis and Ben Lomond were considered essential items on the itinerary of the adventurous traveller.

The earliest account of a woman hiking for leisure in Scotland dates back to c. 1770 when travel writer Mary Anne Hanway wrote of a "young Scotch lady that walked up [Ben Lomond] in the morning and returned to dinner without appearing tired." However, women who had a desire to explore the outdoors had to overcome the usual societal barriers of the time; ladies who hiked alone were "viewed with suspicion", but those who hiked alone with a male guide caused "a social outcry at imagined impropriety".



The Ladies Scottish Climbing Club 1909

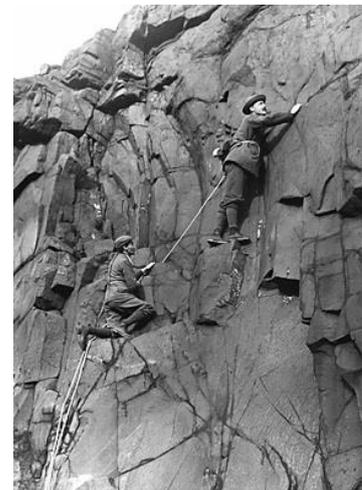
Nonetheless, by 1908, female mountaineering was so popular that The Ladies Scottish Climbing Club (LSCC) was formed. What makes the female climbers all the more impressive is the attire that they climbed in, with their long skirts and heeled boots, making the climb all the more dangerous. Many women found the sport a welcome escape from the shackles of domestic life where they were burdened with the expectations of managing the household and dressing in a certain way. Glasgow woman, Jane Douglas, born in 1848, seems to have made it her life's ambition to defy these expectations as she worked tirelessly to champion female education and

became the first Western woman to reach the Chang La Pass (5,360m). She wrote:

*“One of the joys of the expedition was getting away from dress with its worries as distinguished from mere clothes, and many a time after returning to civilisation I longed to be in the desert again, where the crows and the goats did not care what I wore”.*

But where did the name ‘Munro’ come from I hear you ask! Remember the little mountaineering club that was formed in Glasgow in 1889? Well Sir Hugh Munro was an original member and in 1891 he wrote, after decades of debate, a definitive list of all mountains in Scotland over 3,000ft using maps and by taking barometer readings at the summits. The list originally comprised 538 peaks with 282 classified as “Munros”. The first person to complete all 282 Munros is said to be Rev. A.E. Robertson in 1901, but some are sceptical that he completed them all. The first confirmed completion was by Ronald Burn in 1923.

One of Scotland’s great mountaineers was Harold Andrew Raeburn, born in Edinburgh in 1865. Living under the shadow of Edinburgh’s Salisbury Crags, Raeburn soon took to the vertical world of rocks and ice, joining the Scottish Mountaineering Club in 1896 and becoming their lead climber after only a few years. Raeburn christened some of the most challenging routes in Scottish mountaineering, including several on Nevis which are categorised as ‘severe’ in terms of difficulty and has left behind a legacy of routes which can be found across Scotland.



Harold Raeburn  
—Salisbury Crags

According to Lord Mackay, Raeburn was “physically and mentally hard as nails, trained by solitary sea-cliff climbing after birds’ haunts, he was certain, unyielding and concise in every movement, both mental and physical.”

For me, quite like the ladies of the LSCC, getting out on the hills is a form of escapism, to get away from whatever is weighing on you and breathe in the wild mountain thyme. In the words of another climbing great, Jane Inglis Clark (1859-1950)

*“the troubles of life seem to fade away in the presence of the everlasting hills. We may go out tired and worn in mind and body; we return renewed and restored: health re-established and friendships strengthened.”*

Kyle Granite



**Our Author, Kyle .....**

A young and carefree (childless!) 'Freckle in Time' on the summit of Buachaille Etive Mòr, 2014



This plaque commemorating Hugh Munro is in Kirriemuir, Angus