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Firbush 2001

Mr S Pattman

Abstract

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Firbush 2001

An intrepid band of members gathered in the society rooms on Friday 27th April. They were to venture far from the bright lights of the city, away from civilisation. Their destination was a place noted for its isolation, scenic beauty and the fact the bar closes at 11pm. Let me enlighten you about this epic adventure.

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After negotiating the Friday evening rush hour traffic jams we headed for the rolling hills of the Trossachs and with the directions from Firbush-veteran Iain Lindsay we arrived at our weekend base. On arrival we made our way to the sleeping quarters. Each room has two bunkbeds and our first activity allowed us to demonstrate our domestic skills by make up the beds. Junior President Andy Vale had staked a claim on an upper bunk and we were joined in the room by Iain Lindsay and a tardy Simon Finch. His late arrival in the Finch-mobile had been attributed to a stop-off for chips, a last taste of carry-out for 2 days (!), rather than the fact he had become hopelessly lost in the Scottish countryside.

All the travelling was thirsty work and the proximity of the bar (out the door, 5 yards ahead, turn right down the steps) made this a natural first stopping point. Once suitably refreshed dinner was served featuring an incredibly rich scotch broth followed by some cold meat. Following dinner it was back to the basement bar where any excess energy was burnt off in various games. This involved novel use of cornflakes packets and various strains of "yeah-hah" were audible echoing around the south bank of the loch into the early hours.

I have heard Firbush being described as a 'boot-camp' and the persistence of the individual ringing the bell at 8.30am was beginning to make me empathise with this view. If I had any doubt where I was the snow capped mountains and the loch were definitely not reminiscent of Edinburgh. A hearty breakfast awaited and I noted the irony of the centre for sport and exercise serving and cholesterol rich fry-up, however it was quite likely that we would need every calorie we took. True to the boot camp analogy we were rounded up at 0915 hours to be given our 'orders' for the morning. Unfortunately the foot and mouth situation prevented any munro-bagging this weekend and the group split themselves between windsurfing, sailing and kayaking.

The kayakers were led to the aladdin's cave, know as the stores where we were issued with lurid coloured waterproof tops and dungaree like wetsuits.

Don't they look a
right pair



Even if you were a complete novice you couldn't help but feel the part. Following a land based demonstration of some basic techniques by Jez (master of the drinking games) we hit the water, some of the group literally. Navy-boy Andy Vale mastered the kayak instantly and he headed off for the high seas almost completing a couple of laps of the loch before the novices had left the harbour area.. The bracing fresh winds aided our voyage to the foreign territory of 'Fir-tree Point' were we docked a stretched our legs. Perhaps it was a combination of the fresh country air and the after effects of a couple of shandys the previous night that cause Simon to take a dip in the loch. In a show of fearless bravado he dived Baywatch-style into the freezing waters and show off a few of his synchronised swimming moves. He quickly left the water and despite his proclamations that other people should have a go, the prospect of lying on the bank and soaking up a few morning rays was far more appealing. We were soon back aboard our vessels speeding through the choppy waters back to the harbour. Ali took Simon's recommendation too literally and he decided to take a swim in the middle of the loch. Perhaps he thought it would be quicker to swim back! To be fair, I don't think it was a premeditated dip. After a display of considerable dexterity, ably assisted by Jez he managed to climb back aboard his vessel and the flotilla headed back for the safety of the harbour.

"those with energy to burn"...all of them!

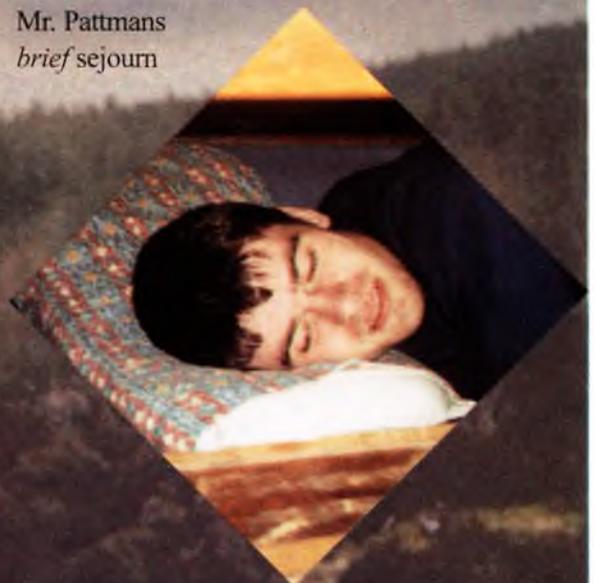


The inevitable rafting-up manoever was performed and Jez demonstrated how (easy it was) to walk on kayaks. Somehow I managed to find a hole between the kayaks to fall through and plunged into the freezing waters. The rest of the group successfully negotiated the task and careful placement of feet avoiding both limbs, hands and water was the key.

After a brief sejourm for lunch to allow the circulation to return to frozen limbs we were again offered a diverse range of activities, both water and land based. I plumped for a land based challenge and dragged myself off for a popular student activity - sleeping. Mountain biking, kayaking, canoeing, sailing and windsurfing occupied those with energy to burn.

I emerged from my quarters to discover some rare rays of sunshine present. Various vets, perhaps longing for some work to do (or animals to abuse) were attempting to diagnose the problem with a lame duck. Despite being lame it was incredibly well-fed, benefiting from the crumbs of cake dropped. Another hearty meal awaited us that evening. The discovery of a slightly date Blockbusters quiz game provided an amusing diversion. The classic line, "Can I have a 'P' please, Bob?" never loses any of it's comedy value. Mr (and Mrs !?) Cavannagh provided worthy competition although the consistency in the level of questions asked was slightly suspect.

Mr. Pattmans
brief sejourm



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Again I awoke to the dulcet chimes of the breakfast bell. After the fry-up we gathered to chose the activities. The lack of wind dissuaded people from windsurfing, but I thought I would give it a shot and joined Simon in donning the heavy duty wetsuit and the caps which looked like surplus from a circus. I think clowns would perhaps have made a better effort of windsurfing. The lack of breeze reduced it to an exercise in standing up and balancing on a board. The best option in the end was simply to lie down on the board and gently drift along the loch. The reassuring presence of the speedboat meant that even the most useless of surfers would be safe on the water. Before long it was time to head back in for lunch, and just then the wind arrived and I appreciated that windsurfing requires considerably more skill than simply standing up.

The afternoon provided an opportunity to have a go at mountain biking. Using the centres multi-gear bikes meant that steep gradients no longer presented a challenge and the greatest difficulty was stopping on the heavily gravelled tracks. The highlight of the ride was the 'Terror run'. Basically it is a steep descent down a path designed for walkers, which is strewn with large rocks, quagmires of mud and the small matter of a deer fence straddling the path halfway down, round a blind bend. It was a real test of reaction, nerve and sanity. By the time I reached the road my arms felt like masses of jelly. Fortunately all riders and bikes escaped injury from this extreme activity.

Back at HQ the bikes were given first class treatment after their pounding. Hosed and oiled they would be spared any more abuse for a few days at least. A final carbo-loading meal of mounds of pasta was provided before we headed back to the big smoke. A weekend break? I felt like I deserved a couple of days rest after such an intensive 48 hours. It has to be said this annual event is not one to be missed - so look out for it next year and sign up early!

Finally a big thank you to the staff at the centre for providing and supervising such a diverse programme of activities, Simon for organising the weekend and to the folks who went making it such a memorable trip.

The beautiful but cold Loch Tay

