

## A Tale of Two Bothies.

After five days with the Bothy Loons, I needed a spot of solitary and a fresh challenge: also to give the old bike after a break of too many years - a proper outing. Taigh Seumus a' Ghlinne Bothy lies up Glenduror, in amongst the pines. Delayed by a cuppa tea at Jim's (Area Organiser for the SWH&I Region of the MBA) meant I arrived at the road end in the gloaming: by the time the bike was loaded with kit, vitals and half a bag of coal, it was dark and then the rain began!

Distances in the dark are always confusing and with a map so old that it still showed the Ballachulish Ferry, I blundered back and forth, up and down hill for far too long on bike and even on foot before the low silhouette of a corrugated-iron roof appeared out of the mist. Wet and by now very tired and very hungry it was a relief to get out of the rain, strip off only to discover not only was I not wearing socks, but there were no dry ones either! Luckily the steel-plate Dowling stove with a dash of coal soon fired up and the billy sat on the top, bubbled away with the evening meal. Though quite bare and basic inside, it was draught-free. A large throne-like wooden chair provided comfort and the wind outside, a kind of musical accompaniment as the tin roof vibrated.



Morning came, but slowly and dimly. Outside, snow covered the surrounding hills and peaks. The clouds rolled in bringing yet more rain so exploration was limited to the local area. Finally, dry warm clothes were exchanged for wet ones and with a final cuppa I was off, free-wheeling down the glean, seeing at last the trees for the wood, the swollen burns and the sign posts I'd missed in the dark!

Wills' Bothy lay further south in the Borders. Dedicated and restored in memory of Will Ramsbottom, scholar and climber, by his friends, once maintained by the MBA, it nestles in the bight of Roughley Burn on a flat below the railway embankment: the disused Waverley Line to Hawick and Edinburgh, shut by that villain Dr Beeching.



Once again, I arrived in the dark and in the rain and thus began another minor epic of finding a way to the bothy. No moonlight tonight and no street lamps – this was an empty land of few villages and houses. One turn off, north of Newcastleton, an 18C model village, brought me, by the dim light of my head-torch to railway lines, a shuttered station and a number of wagons – all still and silent, but nearby a lengthman's hut with fireplace, but having come this far I was determined to find the bothy! Further south, off Steel Road I found another route onto the embankment. Here, I dumped the car and saddled up with the other half bag of coal.

Progress was slow, battered by gusts of snow and wind and an uphill gradient; through deep cuttings, over exposed embankments and round slow bends. Eventually the track widened to what had once been Riccarton Junction, where once there was a whole community of workshops, houses and school; all to service the railway and without any road access to the outside world.

Following the track onwards I was lucky to spot a footpath down to the left. I could hear the burn in spate so it had to be near and sure enough at the bottom, a gable end poked out of the stygian gloom, but no welcoming lights.

Inside was like a fridge as I stripped off and quickly changed into dry socks and more. I remembered the bothy as having lots of furniture and a stove in each room: now there was nothing; bare it looked and bare it felt. The coal spluttered, but never glowed in the remains of an old range. No heat there, so a quick meal and warmed inside, I climbed the steps into the roof space and lay out on bare boards.

In the grey light of the following day I found the log book and inside a surprise: a report of a Grand Reunion last October of Messrs Ron Bartle, Dick Philips, Raymond Bottomley and Bernhard Heath, who in September 1958 made the first un-assisted crossing of Iceland by bicycle. Bernhard was of course a founder member of the MBA and Dick is well known for his Iceland Ventures. The bad news was discovering there had been a stove till recently, but it had gone, probably the same way as the wheelbarrow, used to carry cut logs in. Apparently, like many bothies off forest tracks in Kielder and Galloway, Will's too was suffering the attentions of the Neds of Newcastle, on drug and booze--fuelled jollies.

It was a bleak house. Breakfast: a billy of scolding porridge, mugs of tea in the grey, stony gloom of the interior, a cold light filtering down through the trees. Abandoned by the MBA and trashed by the Neds, it's likely this will be another bothy lost to us soon.

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