

Chapter 59

1958 – 1961 Bannockburn / Jordanhill College – 1960/61

It was Mr Dickinson's idea to give final-year students the opportunity to share his recently developed enthusiasm for canoeing and hill-walking. Thus he arranged accommodation for two nights at Auchendennan Youth Hostel, near Balloch and one night at Rowardennan Youth Hostel opposite Luss, both on Loch Lomond; then two nights at Ardgarten Youth Hostel at the head of Loch Long. Apart from the water-sport, climbing 'Ben Lomond' and 'The Cobbler' was also scheduled.

Auchendennan Youth Hostel, Balloch, Loch Lomond



Day one was planned as canoe orientation in the deceptively quiet waters of Duck Bay just across the fields from the hostel. Day two's target by canoe from Duck Bay was Rowardennan Youth Hostel about halfway up the eastern side of the loch with an agreed route [weather permitting] comprising paddling northwards via the island of Inchmoan for a morning picnic cuppa and more capsizing practice there, before heading on to Inverbeg on the western shore for a picnic lunch stop. Thereafter a swift crossing to Rowardennan was recommended before changing into hiking kit for a brisk walk to the summit of Ben Lomond and back in time for supper. Day three, again weather permitting, on this most fickle of Scottish lochs, was return by water again to our base at Duck Bay, skirting the more easterly isles and the largest island Inchmurrin in the process.



Typical Means of Transport



For those of us with little or no experience of canoeing in relatively narrowly beamed canoes [most of us] far less any canoe of any shape or form, the lengthy orientation session on the first afternoon and evening contained much frustration for the uninitiated who usually took such great pride in performance of balance activities like walking on one's hands etc.! And of course even the shallow water was extremely cold in its welcome for the umpteen 'cowped' novices it received at regular and irregular intervals. Luckily the sun was quite warm, so getting drookit

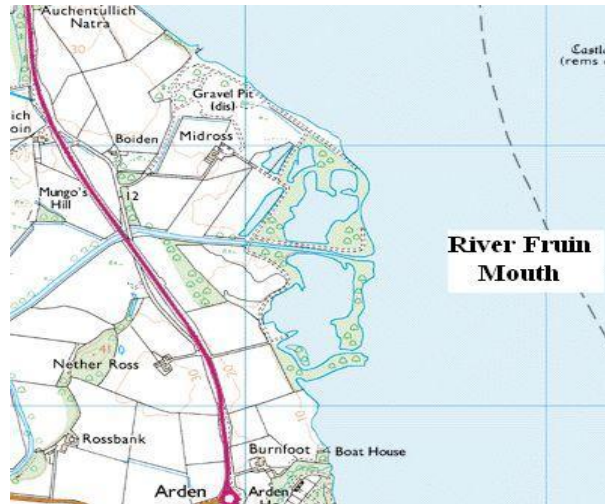
and remaining so for hours did not invite pneumonia to any large extent. In retrospect it was all rather hilarious, but not a great laughing matter at the time. Basic skills were indeed mastered and the slower learners allocated to a more skilful partner in double-canoes for the challenges ahead. The cold shower at the hostel before dinner actually felt quite warm in comparison. And with the glow returning to our bodies most were ready for an enjoyable evening of socialising.

But 'Dickie' had other ideas! He challenged any who dared to meet him at the Bay at 11pm kitted for canoeing, but warned them to bring the tents, sleeping bags and torches he had hidden in his van. The brave (or foolhardy) were about to undertake a trip by canoe up the shoreline a couple of miles in the darkness to the mouth of the River Fruin and there pass the night on whatever dry land they might come upon in the pitch black!



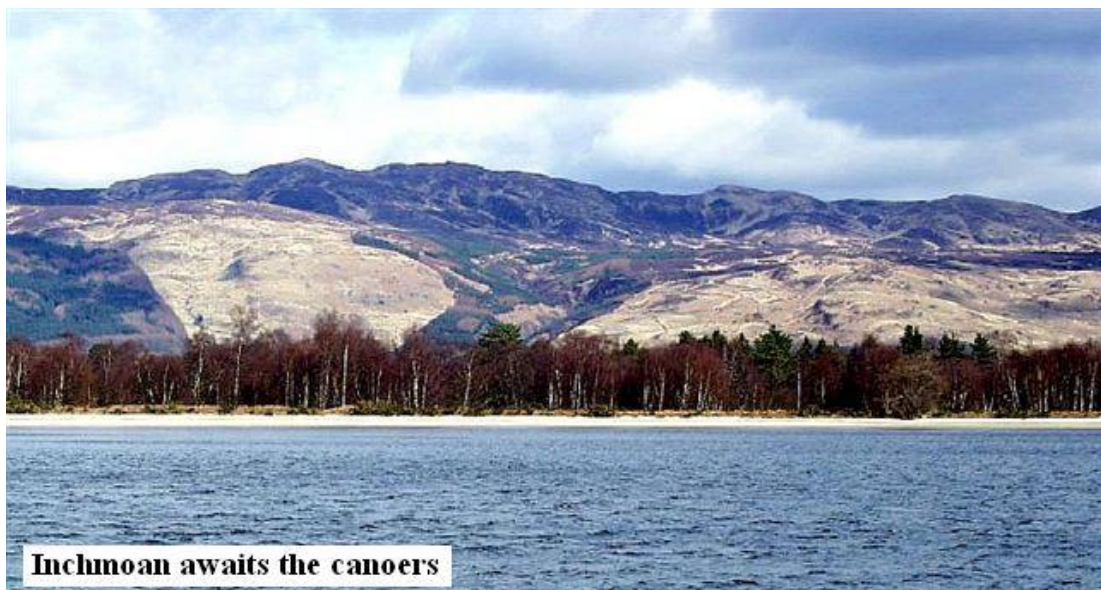
About twenty of us picked up the gauntlet and in high spirits set off like elephants linked trunk to tail.





It was serious business though. And I didn't really smile, far less giggle, at all, until we floundered on to what seemed like an amenable sand-bar type bit of ground and set up our tents Somewhat untidily it emerged in the light of day! But not only that came to light then, as we all found ourselves wide awake at dawn ploiteringly awash in our sleeping bags. Dickie however, had to be wakened. And we soon discovered why. He was lying high and dry on an inflatable rubber mattress. The joke was indeed on us. And we thus allowed him to add yet another notch of credit to his 'Lonsdale Belt' for this particular 'technical knock-out.' Breakfast has never tasted so good as it did that morning, even if it had to be self-made before seven and the other hostellers' appearances much, much later! My more sane self thought to itself as it crunched a tenth piece of toast and marmalade, "What a way to prepare for the predictably heavy physical demands of Day 2!" But being an SSPE man, you were always ready to expect the unexpected and find some way of coping with it. And this we proceeded to do in relaxed style ... but not as our schedule seemed to suggest as advisable!

Unsupervised, we thus spent 5 hours sun-bathing on Inchmoan

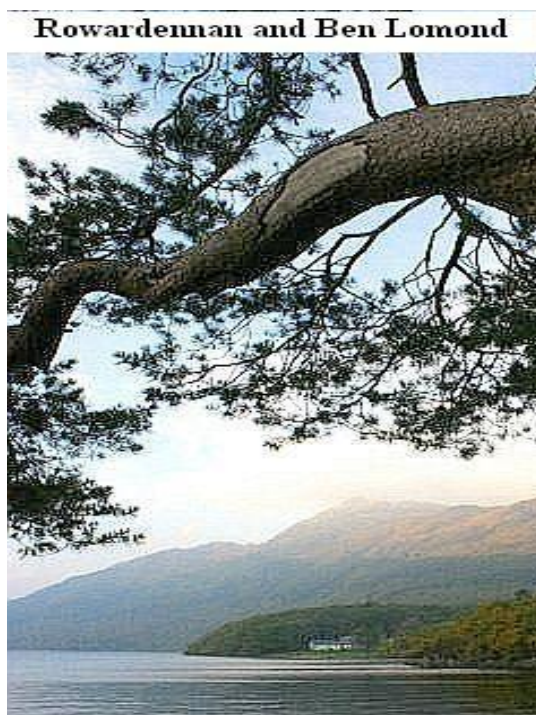


Then we got to Inverbeg in time for tea (not lunch)



Rowardennan beckons from Inverbeg

before carving out [unlike in the picture above] a somewhat choppy crossing to Rowardennan No hike up Ben Lomond was the unanimous decision, “and when any tutors who have promised to join us for the night do eventually arrive, we’ll leave a note with hostel warden that invites them to join us in the pub down the road to hear about the day’s adventures (or lack of them!).



Rowardennan and Ben Lomond

In the event, the two tutors who arrived were obviously land-lubber types, as, from their uncomfortable crossing by canoe to join us, they thought they had learned of some of the dangers we had been facing even getting to this pub let alone negotiating an exhilarating climb up the Ben before supper!

The beer consumed was copious, the singing, as usual, fantastic, but not even over-indulgence disturbed our sweet dreams that night A retaliatory notch in our belts had been gloriously gained! And so onward to Ardgarten YH and further challenges