

## FISHING & SHOOTING

ALASTAIR ROBERTSON

🐦 @Crumpadoodle

Well don't you think it's interesting? Demanded the daughter. Er ... yes... absolutely... says I, rummaging about the cranium for some clue as to the subject of this interest. The fish, the fish, she snapped. Aha... the fish... very interesting. But as I keep reminding the womenfolk of the house I am only a bloke. I cannot deal with two things at once, viz: read last week's Sunday newspapers and simultaneously know what everyone else in the room is talking about. (You would if I said you'd won the lottery, says her mother. But that's different.)

And the fish was interesting in that the daughter seems to be acquiring an understanding that if you are going to kill something, you should eat it as well.

She has, as mentioned, acquired a boyfriend who fishes and keeps whisking her off to rivers like the Naver which she declared "absolutely beautiful" and which my wife, on looking at the photos, declared "ghastly tundra."

### If you kill something, you should eat it

No one in the daughter's party seems to have caught much on the Naver. But she has now caught a fish on Lake of Menteith. I know naught of the Lake of Menteith, other than it is hugely stocked with rainbows and brownies but even that doesn't guarantee anything like a mega return.

The average catch for an eight hour boat trip is 5.8 fish, which can of course mean someone else is catching 20 while you just keep losing flies. But that's averages for you.

So did she use those horrid fluorescent flies that look as if they have been made out of shredded track suits and trainers and which are, supposedly, deadly for rainbows? She wasn't sure. But they fished deep, they fished on the surface. They fished behind the boat, in front of the boat and probably underneath it, and eventually she caught (he didn't. Ha!) a rainbow just under three pounds which is a goodly fish.

And so she brought it home and announced that we would smoke it in the smoker she had given me for Christmas, which is particularly good for pheasant bits. So we split the fish, salted it and washed it off and patted it dry and sprinkled in a thick layer of oak sawdust I'd asked the joiner to keep when he was routing out the new kitchen worktop (If moving house and childbirth are the two most stressful events in life, re-doing the kitchen is a close runner up.)

And it was fantastically good and she made smoked rainbow pâté with horseradish. So she had caught it, smoked it and eaten it. Not sure she'd gutted it though. But then, what's a boyfriend for?



PHOTOGRAPHS: PHIL WILKINSON; HILTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES



# Happy returns

As Hawick Common Riding marks 500 years, Teri exile Richard Webber takes a ride he will never forget

**F**or 13 miles southwest of Hawick, the A7 carves a slender grey ribbon through southern Teviotdale to the secluded MossPaul Inn, running parallel to the English border that writhes some 12 miles to the south-east. As a Hawick native (or "Teri") exiled in London, I know the road well. But for once I'd be deserting the Tarmac to head cross-country on horseback to MossPaul and back in one of several "ride-outs" that form the backbone of Hawick's annual Common Riding, the first in the season's string of such festivals across the Borders that mark the mounted defence of these verdant valleys during wilder times.

As with many Common Ridings, Hawick's is inextricably linked to 1513's martial blunder at Flodden that saw James IV's army cut down by an underweight English force. Hawick's massive sacrifice comprised most of its men aged 16 to 60. But civic pride was healed a year later when the apparently defenceless town's remaining youths routed an English raiding party at nearby Hornshole. This act of bravery and defiance is feted annually by the Common Riding

through song, ritual and ride-out, the most challenging of which is said to be the MossPaul route.

Six months ago I didn't know gaskin from girth, but Hornshole's quincenary provided the motivation to learn. Alongside an outright lack of experience, barriers to success included back problems that forced me to assume a thigh-burning half-squat "light-seat" position to protect my spine above walking pace, and that the bulk of my weekly lessons consisted of Womble-dodging on Wimbledon Common, not leaping burns and galloping windswept uplands.

The eve of the ride-out was marked by a dinner, open to those who'd already won their bronze Mosstrooper's badge by completing the ride-out and first-timers alike.

Welcome encouragement came from electrician Ross Gibson, 24, this year's "Cornet" – the man with the lead role during the Common Riding: "When you ride back into town tomorrow night, you'll feel like you've won the World Cup and an Olympic gold medal in one," he says.

The next day, some 200 riders – including 2013 Grand National

Hawick Cornet Ross Gibson leads out the MossPaul ride-out at this year's Common Riding, main; the procession through Hawick in June 1935, below





ROBIN HOWIE

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winner and Galashiels ex-Braw Lad Ryan Mania – mustered behind the High Street. I'd been allocated an unfamiliar horse: a tall, handsome grey mare called Xena – a “kicker”, no less. Just before we trailed out of Hawick under a damp noon sky, a lady rider only just clung on as her horse reared up ahead of me. Hip flasks were shared to calm nerves.

After the long trot out of town everyone safely cantered the infamously lumpy Pilmuir field – known for emptying even seasoned

## Xena was fighting the reins, dragging me forwards

saddles – but I soon took an at least partially deserved ear-bashing from another rider after Xena lashed at his horse. Despite keeping my hands “soft”, she was also fighting the reins, dragging me forwards – especially precarious as she kept picking up speed downhill. No doubt a more experienced horseman would have managed her better, but fellow riders constantly offered invaluable wisdom: “Keep your heels down... Steady through the vennel... Park her in behind us down this hill.”

As we filed through a gateway, I rapped my shin off a post, then after a long trot through thick, steaming forest and loping canters over ditch-rippled pastures, my legs began to turn to jelly from the constant light-seat. After three hours' riding, Mosspace was close, but as we formed up behind the pipe band for the final yards, I'd resigned myself to the disappointment of bowing out.

But a sit-down and sustenance did wonders, so it was back up Meg's Hill to head for home. What was jelly became stone as cramp struck, but again, the trickiest parts were the steep descents. At the foot of one, a still, folded figure on the ground warned of their dangers, and cries of “loose horse” became more frequent. There were moments to take in the scene, though. Moments to appreciate the beauty of these rolling hills, and the hardship it must have meant to simultaneously cultivate and defend them.

When Hawick's margins appeared, spirits rose, aided by homeowners dishing out cups of booze. As the drums and brass of the Saxhorn Band led us into town, cheering crowds lined the street. It was a moment I'll never forget. If you ride, you should do this. And Teri or not, you'll be made welcome.

*The closing ceremony of Hawick Common Riding takes place today, [www.hawickcommonriding.com](http://www.hawickcommonriding.com)*

## The Walk

**E**arlier this year, Bert Mackenzie from Bo'ness wrote to me about a walk which, being so good, he and his fellow walkers thought should be a Robin Howie Walk of the Week – a relatively low-level sheltered walk, ideal for a stormy day. Starting from the RSPB Insh Marshes Nature Reserve, it involved a traverse to Glentromie Lodge, a

walk up Glen Tromie, a return on the east side over 640m Croidh-la, and then a descent to Tromie Bridge.

I know Glen Tromie well. Using a bicycle, the glen is my favourite approach to Meall Chuaich and the Drumochter hills, to Meallach Mhor, the Corbett further up the glen, and to the Gaick Pass. I had not covered the traverse to Glentromie Lodge and the long ridge leading to Croidh-la. I

have been unable to find the meaning of Croidh-la, though I have come across an alternative name, Cruaidhleac, possibly stone stack. I wonder if any Badenoch resident could help.

I did the Glen Tromie circuit with the Mountain Maid and Hare, on a day when the high tops had forecast winds of 45-60mph. The walk was thoroughly enjoyable – and, thanks to Bert, here it is.



### GLEN TROMIE

**MAP** Ordnance Survey map 35, Kingussie

**DISTANCE** 9 miles

**HEIGHT** 400m

**TERRAIN** Path and estate road then return by grassy ridge

**START POINT** Small car park by B970, map ref 779996, at head of track to Invertromie

**TIME** 5 hours

**NEAREST VILLAGE** Kingussie

**REFRESHMENT SPOT** Loch Insh Boathouse Restaurant, Kincaig



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### THE ROUTE

From the small car park by the B970, map ref 779996, at the head of the track to Invertromie (not the main car park further west), walk east along the road to a metal barrier on the right hand side and the start of the mapped path, in fact a grassy track, which heads south-east for the northern fringe of the Woods of Glentromie. The track gives a delightful stroll, albeit a bit muddy on our day, through the open birch woodland.

A gentle descent leads to the River Tromie. Head upstream to reach a gate and stile and the private drive to Glentromie Lodge. In the days before the bridge over the Tromie, this route had been the original cobbled carriageway to the lodge, where we heard the ghost story of the general who did not arrive by coach for dinner.

Cross the bridge to reach the Tarmac road of gentle gradient on the east side of the river and head south into the glen. Pass Lynaberack Lodge and so to the southern end of the wooded area, map ref 767939, that fringes the steep slopes beneath Croidh-la.

Leave the road and follow a rough track to the immediate juniper-covered slopes. The mapped path, vague to non-existent at first, gradually becomes more defined. Slant towards the fence which is then followed uphill, by now on heathery slopes. Pass a small cairn/shooting butt and, as the fence turns left, continue to a rocky outcrop with a small cairn at the southern end of the summit plateau. The fence reappears and runs parallel to the undulating summit ridge. Pass another bump, then on to the northern bump with a circular

concrete trig point – an understandable point for map makers. We had glorious views all round. However, with the blustery wind making walking difficult, we were glad to be only at 2,000ft.

It is a long gradual descent, parallel to the fence on the left, following the small meandering path through the short heather. The path then swings a bit to the right away from the plantation and fence. At map ref 789971, south-west of Maol a'Ghiubhais, head north on the path for the descent to Glen Tromie. (This path would be difficult to find if the route was tackled in reverse).

A gentle one-mile stroll leads to Tromie Bridge and the spectacular gorge of the river, then a careful walk along the B970 to return to the start point.