

REFURBISHMENT of the "COALSHED" at BLACKROCK COTTAGE

GLENCOE - opened SUMMER 2015



The Ladies Scottish Climbing Club has leased Blackrock Cottage since 1947 and used it as a climbing club since then. This classic cottage, untouched for many years, is a category 'B' listed building, easily and widely identified, complimented by its backdrop of the Buachaille Etive Mor.

The opening on Saturday 24th October 2015 often called 'the great loo party' or

FROM CINDERS TO CHAMPERS

The dirty old coal shed is no longer there

With its debris, and cobwebs that caught in your hair.

You`d trip on the kindling, drop half the coal,

Or fall flat on your face with your boot in a hole!

And some will remember those days long since past

When the worst job of all meant that you would leave last;

To empty the elsan, the hole must be deep

Or unmentionable happenings were starting to seep.

So you got brownie points on a cold winter meet

As digging through permafrost was quite a feat.

Then came a cistern, a washbasin too

And along with the pumping, we now had a loo!

But now it`s a palace; when you open the door

It`s so warm, clean and posh, I could sleep on the floor!

If you go in the night, just think twice what you wear

For the sensor will spot you- and you`ll be in its glare!

Now, for the Grand Opening; if it is in my power

To persuade Jean to do it – the President`s Shower?!

Pat Brown

Background

The hut is full of character and history, and has been central to the history of the LSCC for well over 60 years. Many other mountaineering clubs have used, and continue to use the cottage for summer and, in particular, winter meets.

The 'rustic' feel of the cottage (no running water, coal fires only, no washing facilities or drying room) may still appeal to many, but the club felt that with the increasing emphasis on hut usage some essential work was needed maintain the attractiveness of the hut but importantly to provide upgraded facilities for modern day requirements i.e. washing and drying facilities. The proposed improvements were a combination of repairs/renovations and upgrade measures to our coalshed at the east

end of the cottage which housed our hand-pumped loo and was used as a general storage area for all sorts! Our intention was to house a drinking water supply, flushing wc, whb's with hot water, a drying room and a shower within the coalshed - easier said than done! The cottage and bothy would remain untouched.

Once voted in at the AGM by members, a sub-committee (Blackrock Improvement Group BIG) was brought together to facilitate the project. The authority of the owning estate had to be sought before any plans could go a-head.

Funding

The club was extremely fortunate to receive a substantial donation from a member which kick started the project. Other funding was investigated and we were successful in our bid to the Scottish Mountaineering Trust for a grant and loan as well as a water supply grant from Highland Council. It was soon clear that we had a short fall. This was ably remedied by a generous number of donations from members after a call for help was sent out. Thus our project was fully funded and we had a green light.

Then the story begins ...

An initial submission for pre application advice to Highland Council (Dec 2013) flagged up concerns over the coalshed floor, the need for a conservation architect and both listed building consent (LBC) and a building warrant (BW) application.

An architect was employed to draw up the necessary plans and submit initially the LBC (Aug 2014) followed by the BW (Oct 2014).

Our water supply and the integrity of the coalshed floor gave cause for concern.

Mid planning our original water source was compromised by the new developments upstream at Glencoe Mountain. After a hydrology report was actioned a new safe source was identified with a collection pool, settlement tank and piping required.

The floor needed an engineers' assessment carried out with trial pit's dug outside and inside the coalshed walls (Aug 2014). The recommendations were adopted into the architects' plans in order to preserve the integrity of the cottage walls.

Our architect worked tirelessly, seeking professional advice where necessary, to give us a set of plans to the club's specification and budget but also to satisfy any concerns from Highland Council regarding our Listed Building status. LBC was granted (Sept 2014).



Three contractor quotes were sought (Oct 2014) with our chosen firm finally being engaged in (Apr 2015).

Finding a stonemason, to carry out work to our interior walls, proved a challenge. We eventually sourced a tradesman in Edinburgh who could work within our timescale. Another hiccup was getting our existing woodwork treated before commencement, again, a local firm was found and employed to carry out the necessary treatment.

Work begins

Before any work could begin in earnest many years' worth of hoarding had to be sifted through and either disposed of or stored elsewhere. This took a few trips for members!

Once the coalshed was clear the first sign of activity was the soon to be dreaded (by the many passing photographers) portaloos appearing at the side of the cottage (May 2015). The hut was closed through the summer 2015 for the duration of our works. Our stonemason was next on the horizon with excavation and lime mortaring on the cards.

Late June saw our water supply installed by Glencoe Mountain personnel.

The main contractor was on site from July through August:

- excavating and re-laying our floor
- positioning partition walls, creating a toilet, shower and drying rooms
- fitting the dropped ceiling
- installing the water treatment equipment
- wiring heating, hot water, extractors, lights, shower and sockets
- tiling the floor
- fitting the tongue n groove panelling to the interior partition walls.
- installing all sanitary ware.

All work was done to a very high standard with great attention to detail.

As members started to pop in for a look they were amazed at the transformation.

Members then put the finishing touches to the interiors. Sanding, varnishing and painting.



Back To Business

After the annual maintenance at the beginning of September our hut was then ready for club lets with our first meet on the second weekend in Sept.

Into Oct 2015 and our water supply passed its testing and our BW was passed. A few snagging issues were cleared and accessories put in place.

Finally our portaloos were removed and the debris was gradually cleared.

The refurbishment was completed with the official opening on 24th October by J Hotchkiss (SMT) which members and contributors attended.

End Result

The LSCC and Blackrock have much more than an upgraded facility. The cottage proper remains as it was and looks the same from the outside but offers much improved health and hygiene conditions. It continues to be used by mountaineering clubs, their members and guests, enabling affordable access to the outdoors and encouraging them to participate in mountaineering related activities. The upgrades ensure that the LSCC can continue to offer this valuable facility in the future.



Vote of Thanks

The club would like to thank all those who made this refurbishment possible:

- the many members who made very generous donations
- the SMT for their grant and loan
- Highland Council for their water supply grant
- all members, family and friends who worked throughout the project to help make it a reality
- all our contractors for their standard of workmanship and efficiency.

*Adapted from articles written by Christine Shanks (standing by the water tank)
- our hut custodian during this time*