

CELTIC JOURNEY

The schoolmaster who took 15 English boys and girls to the West Highlands had a purpose; to let them see a different life—and they did. The fifteen had a purpose too; to have a grand holiday, and a lot of fun—and they had.

Photographed by RAYMOND S. KLEBOE



The Highlands Welcome Young Southerners With Rain

Nine boys and six girls, from Steyning in Sussex and Quorn in Leicestershire, go by train to Inverness, then to Garve, and cycle to Ullapool. And this is the weather they wake to—with 30 wild miles still to go.



Last Wet Lap to the Hostel
Through peat-bog and over a burn to the hostel, because the bridge has been washed away.

SCHOOLMasters are earnest men, and when I asked Donald Hughes, science master of Rawlins Grammar School at Quorn, in Leicestershire, why he was taking fifteen boys and girls to the far West Highlands, he had his answers pat, in schoolmasterly order. It would be educational—these urbanised children would see a different, harder life; they would do their own work, which would be good for youngsters used to having things done for them; "and of course," he added, "it will be a holiday." I was gratified to find that his charges reversed the order, and showed all the normal symptoms of allergy to education.

Four boys and six girls under Hughes and Miss Graham, history mistress, were from Rawlins Grammar School, which is co-educational. Five boys under their mathematics master, William Lewis, were from Steyning Grammar School for Boys in Sussex.

They had looked forward to this holiday for some time, and boys and girls had prepared for it according to form. The boys had studied maps and



A Comedown: They Finish the Journey by Lorry

Leaving Ullapool for Achiniver, opposite the Summer Isles. Into one lorry, under makeshift cover, go 14 children, 16 cycles, 18 packs.

Before the Day's Pleasure, the Day's Work
Arrived, they all take turns at hostel chores. On lamp fatigue this morning are Willie Cook and Brian Springham—with adviser.



Wet Coats Festoon the Hostel Outhouse

Cooking, washing up, bed-making keep everyone busy before breakfast. Wet coats festoon an outhouse. Austrian Hedi Schnabl turns the coats over to dry.

had chosen kit that would stand up to wear and weather, though the lad who brought a steel helmet took a dim view of the West Highlands. The girls, who mostly showed a feminine disinterest in maps, had studied mirrors, and chosen kit that would stand up to inspection. The two school parties got to know each other on the long night train run to Inverness, and the cycle and lorry journey from Garve to the Youth Hostel at Achinivver, near Achiltibuie, which is in Western Ross, on the lonely Coigach coast opposite the Summer Isles. It is a country of Macleods, Macleans, and Mackenzies.

It was an interesting experiment to dump these youngsters in the Highland wilds—and of course Hughes was right. This holiday was an education. Achiltibuie was good for these children, and maybe they were good for Achiltibuie. They learned a lot of new values. They had taken green fields for granted; now they were among crofters to whom the smallest piece of pasture is precious, won with toil from a barren earth. They had looked on buses and the shops around the corner as part of the natural pattern of life; now they were sixty road miles from the nearest railway at Garve, there was

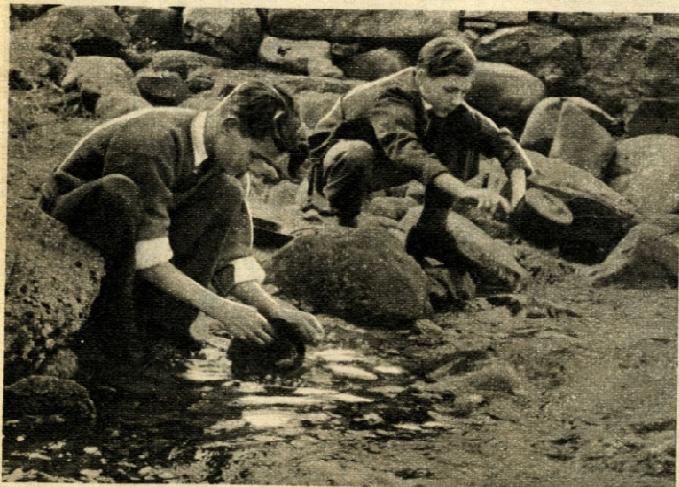
Shortening the Job That Nobody Loves

They know the rule—no start till the evening's potatoes are peeled. So Ginger and Ken Slimming help Mona Austin and Jean Moores.

one bus—and what a bus!—in the day, and if they wanted anything but the commonest necessity they would have to order it from Inverness, on the other side of Scotland. They learned that just living can take a lot of time and work.

Ages were from 14 to 17. That is to say, the boys were all just boys, and some of the girls were at an age when they can be so suddenly and disconcertingly women that one sympathised a little with 16-year-old Ginger, a deep-chested lad with what the novelettes call a rough-hewn face. I think Ginger privately considers girls regrettable, though

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Work for Everyone Makes Longer Pleasure

This was a boys' job, and called for sand and elbow-grease. Washing the dishes in the hostel kitchen was left to the girls.



The Boy, the Girl, and the Bike

Where Brenda Harris was, there was Brian Springham, very much at her service. Both are from the same school.



The Climbers' Reward: A Bird's-eye View of the Summer Isles . . .

They've climbed Gona Mheall's 2,000 feet. Below lie Achiltibuie, and the Summer Isles, and on the horizon the hills of Lewis and Harris. Enjoying it all are Hedi Schnabl and Betty Stewart.



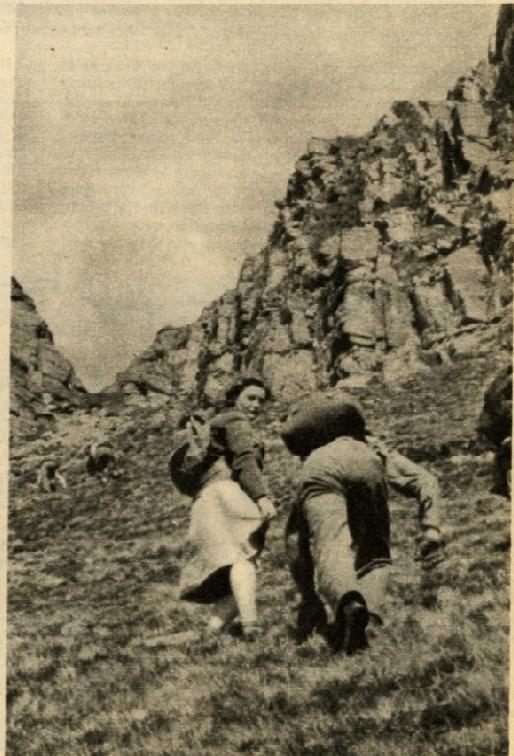
They Visit the Islands

Douglas Baxter (at the tiller) takes them on a motor-launch tour of the islands, tells them about farming problems in the West Highlands.

maybe in spite of co-education he just doesn't understand them, which is a rough-hewn weakness. Ginger's ambitions, in which he had plenty of rivals, were uncomplicated—to see everything, to be first everywhere, and to eat a lot.

There was some boy-and-girl pairing off, of course. When facetious schoolmates sought Brian Springham they would holler "Brenda!" and guffaw. Both were from Quorn. But I was glad to see some inter-school pairing, too, for they don't teach everything at Steyning. But there was no heartburning. Buckland, whose friends call him Smoky, and who insisted on climbing mountains in either (1) an ankle-length cape or (2) a fur-lined American leather jacket, became an unembittered misogynist overnight. "I was keen on that one," he said, flipping a careless hand at a girl arm-in-arm with a boy, "but it was no go." So he reverted philosophically to quartz-gathering, which, if it holds no ecstasies, holds no depths either.

Indeed young love raised its blushing head very little. There was too much to do, and there were



. . . And How They Earned It

Climbing the lower slopes of Gona Mheall. They finish four-footed up steep, loose scree.



An Outpost Exploration: They Visit Reiff, 50 Miles Below Cape Wrath, the North-west Tip of Britain

Here in rough weather the sea explodes a curtain of spray against a waste of rocks, but today tide and wind are wrong. This was a pleasure outing, but there were hours with a purpose too—peat cutting, gathering seaweed as fertiliser, digging, cow-herding, to let them sample the life of a crofter.

too many interesting things and people to see. There was peak-climbing, beginning with Gona Mheall, behind the hostel, and there were cycle runs to the little far clachans. There was one particularly glorious day when Douglas Baxter, who owns and farms part of Tanera More, largest of the islands, took them all on a motor-launch tour of the Summer Isles. There was peat cutting, which looks so easy till you try it, and gathering of seaweed for the potato patches, and cow-herding from scattered pastures, and a bit of digging, so that they might sample the life of a crofter. And there were illuminating chats with the people of the place. The visitors learned with some astonishment that here clothes and habitation are not necessarily pointers to accent and culture, and certainly not to manners. There is probably no rural people so educated as the Highland crofters.

The youngsters were not the only members of the party to learn something. Hughes and Lewis have revised their ideas on food intake in the young. They know now that when you're sixteen, and climbing mountains or cutting peat or just larking around in the open air, two pilchard sandwiches fill a quite negligible part of the available accommodation. Hughes began by making tea in teapots, and ended by making it in buckets. He began to think of food not in terms of kind, but in terms of simple bulk. And I learned that fifteen children are fifteen people, that girls of 16 or so have a habit, daunting to the male young, of mysterious silences, and that women are as foot-foolish at 16 as they are at 46. Imagine suede-topped shoes in a peat bog!

What do these young people think of the West Highlands and its crofters? I don't know, for youth hoards opinion, and is not articulate about natural beauty. But if they didn't talk about it, I'm sure

they carried home to the man-ordered South many memories of a prodigal, wild loveliness. They'll think of the high rocks singing in the wind, of the colours of the water among the islands—cold blue, and turquoise, and greens, and an unbelievable purple—and of the sad wondering eyes of the seals that surfaced to watch them. And of the little pastures, green cloths spread before the cottages on the grey-brown of heather or dark peatlands. And of West Highland rain, that can turn the clear little burns overnight to smoking, terrifying catar-

acts, and make the rocky hillsides spout.

And I'm pretty sure they will value more truly the amenities of a softer life. And though I hope they won't grow up to confuse culture with gadgets, they may reflect, though not in so many words, that a civilisation can flower in its plumbing too; though later, as they tread the city canyons and commute on the 8.15, they may remember Achiltibuie, and wonder if we don't pay too high a price even for plumbing.

FYFE ROBERTSON.



"Pass the Soap, Please"
The burns provide handy running water to those tired with a long outing.



"I Knew it Was Hungry"
"They always are," says Harry Woolley as Diana Kirby feeds an orphan lamb.