**ACFA The Early Years**

The hasty establishing of the Association, and subsequent hectic winter of 1989/89 to meet British Coal’s time table, left us in an exhausted but expectant state. What happens now and how to do it. The small committee that had been formed sought to retain and bind the enthusiasm that existed and been demonstrated by the Dalmellington project. Without a continuing project all could so easily have dissipate.

Trips and walks to places of interest were held from time to time and generally proved popular.. Those with specific knowledge of the sites visited often gave talks and if a tea room or cafe was encountered these were explored too. These developed into weekend visits, occasionally longer visits abroad and assumed the title ACFA Jollies.

At that time corporate images and branding were prominent. Company logos were being modernised and new ones created and in the spirit of the time it was felt ACFA should join in. A competition was organised for a logo and Dennis Topen’s simple design of the initials in a triangle capped by a smaller triangle all over a ranging pole was unanimously chosen. It has featured on many sweatshirts over the years and been displayed on every ACFA publication.

In the autumn of 1990, ACFA was invited to carry out a survey of an area being prepared for forestry planting. During the deep ploughing of the moorland, in South Ayrshire near Barrhill, the Forestry Commission noted patches of land containing cairns of stones in the peat. Some appeared as patches of stone on the land surface with stone piles all the way through the peat to the natural ground surface. ACFA was commissioned to survey the land which was done over a weekend in November. The ploughing had been deep and during the previous days the weather generally wet resulted in deep muddy trenches only a few meters apart with substantial upcast riggs. Movement around the site was hard work but the task was completed with the aid of a theodolite and pair of what were little more than kid’s toy CB radios. It was an eventful weekend that produced lasting yarns often still recounted. The lady who slipped and fell in a very wet patch and spent the rest of day in sodden clothes till she finally got home. She was fortunate she waited till the Sunday before falling. Leslie, our chairman and leader was suffering a bad cold or mild flu, and felt miserable. A keen amateur photographer, he took lots of photographs, only to have his miseries compounded, when he discovered a lack of film in the camera. The budding romance that could have ended when the chap who was invited to come for dinner in jubilation, and much too fast took his car over a recently installed cattle grid, ruptured the sump and seized the engine. No mobile phones then, she was stood up and had four hours to fume. The AA recovery was a local franchised garage, in the dark, in heavy rain, steering the car without lights on a fixed metal tow bar for 60 miles was memorable.

In 1991, ACFA was asked by the Museums Officer of Skye and Lochalsh District Council Highland Region to carry out a field survey of the east side of Raasay. He arranged accommodation in Raasay House, 3 tier bunks and shower room with duck boards below which you don’t want to know about. The catering was by Carol Swanson and Ian, her boss at the time. It was sumptuous and the superb standard was maintained all week. the weather too was glorious. Wet gear was superfluous and the necessity for sunscreen lotions great but the shop keeper’s response was “there’s no need of that here”. We were recalled in succeeding years to do further sweeps on Skye but not to Raasay. A ground swell of opinion grew, probable evoked by rose-tinted memories as to when we were returning to Raasay to complete the survey of the island where the more interesting west side remained undone. Eventually a tentative enquiry was made of the hotel but the reply was not followed up. Through a personal contact the use of the Youth Hostel was obtained, and we returned in 1995. What a change. The weather was more normal, even with some snow. The building had been closed all winter and not prepared for reoccupation. The stone cottage was colder inside than out and soon the walls streamed with condensation. Anne Macdonald did the catering superbly on an old cast-iron range surrounded with drying socks and damp trousers. Her thick soups that had simmered all morning were beyond description for lunch.

One lunch time John and Scott slipped away to investigate the hotel. We had a nice pint with sandwiches in the bar, not high class but very acceptable. We were entertained by the village idiot playing pool and quietly assessing us. After a while,being gently interrogated he admitted he is Angus, the Proprietor, who had not heard from us following his quote. We learned that plans were afoot to upgrade the hotel, install heating and showers in all rooms and that negotiations on term were welcome and the bar would have McCallan on the gantry. Things were promising for 1996.