



Routes

Reverse of the Front Cover



Bla Bheinn North Summit, Skye

Routes

A Range of Scottish Backpacking Itineraries
for youth groups of all capabilities
from beginner standard to
the highest levels of challenge



Front Cover Picture: Climbing from the Shelter Stone to Loch Etchachan: Route 14

Back Cover Picture: Crossing Scotland, Route 28: Upper Glen Feshie, - also Route 23

Routes:

This book has been written in response to the difficulty that officers attending the National Expedition Training Course at Carronvale seem to have in finding good routes for backpacking expeditions. So I have drawn on past experience to describe routes which it is hoped will offer expedition leaders a wider choice. Perhaps just as importantly, reading this book will hopefully give inexperienced leaders some guidance as to how expedition routes, usually for weekends, are constructed for parties with varying levels of competence, and suggest how to plan the logistics of transport, timing, supplies, and overnight stopping places.

The routes described cover a wide range of lengths and types. At least one of them is just an afternoon walk, - but at the other end of the scale there are some that are organisationally demanding and very long. A wide range of difficulty is also included and carefully spelled out in each description, from low risk/easy navigation routes, - to those at the other extreme that not only need experienced leadership and mental toughness from the participants, but are also absolutely not for vertigo sufferers. It will be for you to judge what your party should try to do.

Those reading this book to find routes for Duke of Edinburgh's Award training or testing should exercise caution, for many of the routes included do not suit the specific needs of D of E training, and will not be suitable for unaccompanied boy parties, or easy to supervise. Where a route has been included with D of E compatibility in mind then the text will say so.

I also hate the thought of expedition work causing pain and misery to the participants. If your boys don't regularly end up having a laugh like the one on the photo on the right, then you are the one who has got it all wrong, - not them!

Accuracy Warning: The content of this book is the way I remember each route as it was when I last did it, which wasn't necessarily all that recently. Things change; bridges get washed away; paths change location or fade away; trees get planted; fences get built, etc. If you go out and do these routes then please tell me if the detail has changed. But remember that whether the book is right or wrong, - the responsibility for how you then deal with the situation you find, - is all yours: Its called leadership! To notify changes please e-mail gordon.fleming@blueyonder.co.uk.



Using this Book: Only a very basic sketch map accompanies each route described, because an O.S. map can't be used for copyright reasons. So you're going to need to obtain O.S. maps or Harvey's maps to follow the route descriptions properly. Please note also that for economy of space, not all the sketch maps in this book are orientated North and South. Those that are not have had a North point added. *An appendix at the back of this book lists the maps you will need for each route.*

I recommend that you drop hints before birthdays and/or Christmas that you would like to be given Memory Map for your computer, and specifically the two packs that will give you 1:50,000 map coverage for the whole of Scotland. For any serious expedition planner this system is worth its weight in gold, not just because it gives you all the maps, but because it allows you to blow-up maps on the screen, be given exact map references instantly, obtain route distances and heights climbed with great ease, and do a fly-through of each route in 3D oblique. However, - one little word of warning: The Memory Map route properties tool will quite often exaggerate the amount of height to be climbed. Indeed sometimes it will be spectacularly wrong, so make a point of blowing up the scale on your screen and following each day in detail, counting the contours as you go. Despite that weakness, Memory Map is great, - and everybody should have it! For difficult areas you would do well to go out and buy the 1: 25,000 map sheets for these areas, - or you can get them via the Memory Map "Selections" package.

Flat Kilometres: You will find the amount of effort required by each route described as a number of 'flat kilometres'. Those of you who have read the Boys' Brigade Expedition Manual will be familiar with this concept, but for those of you who haven't read it yet, (could that just be a hint) - the explanation is as follows: Expeditions consume time and energy both in walking distance and climbing uphill, and these two factors combine in random proportions on different routes. So to be able to compare different expeditions, - and individual days, it is useful to have some sort of standardised measure that gives you a simple yardstick for the physical demands and time involved. The 'flat kilometre' is just such a standardised measure. What it does is to assume that a horizontal kilometre and 100 metres of climbing both take 15 minutes for a young *backpacking* party to carry out, and so are roughly equivalent. So if the height climbed in a day is converted to the equivalent distance (on a basis of 100m climbed = 1 kilometre) and then added to the distance walked, you end up with a measure of total effort called 'flat kilometres' Examples: 16 kilometres + 450m climbed = 20.5 flat kilometres; 10 kilometres walked + 1050 metres climbed = 20.5 flat kilometres. Its not perfect, - for days that are all distance will feel harder and take longer, but it is a decent rough guide to what you're getting yourself into.

Gordon Fleming May 2013

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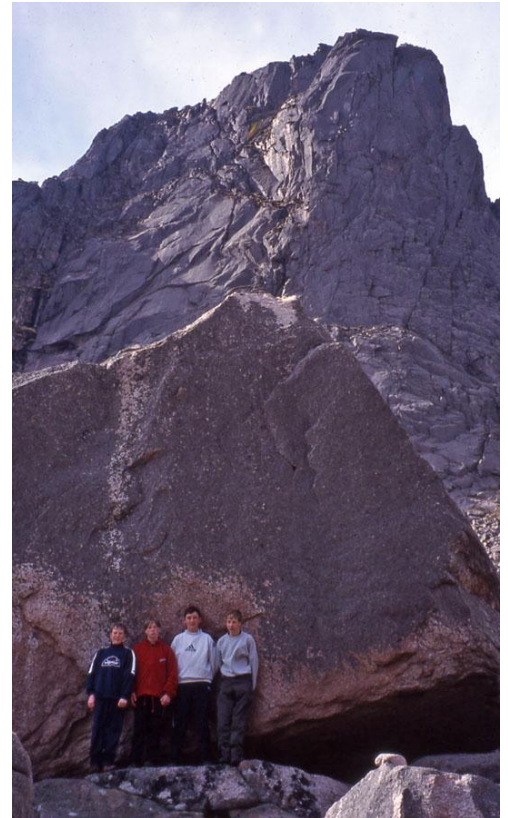
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Section A: Routes for Beginners.

"You never get a second chance to make a first impression!"

It is assumed that beginners are a few months either side of their 13th birthday, with no practical knowledge of what they are about to experience. They will be physically immature and within the typical group some will have grown early and be fairly robust, while others will still be small and lacking in strength and stamina. By the time they are 12-18 months older most of these imbalances will have sorted themselves out but it would be a shame to exclude anyone or simply to lose a year waiting for that to happen.

Beginners!

When you first take them out they will be slow and very unskilled in all that they do, and your trip plan needs to allow for that. Their rucksacks will be packed badly; their waist straps won't tighten, their clothing won't be right; their boots and socks will be uncomfortable; they will be hopeless at campcraft, etc., etc. No matter how much theory you teach them in classes they will still insist on finding everything out the hard way, (*Ooooooh yes they will!*) - and that means that you will need lots of spare time on a first trip.

Ooh, yes they will!



You will surely want to take them all out, and not exclude anybody, but the problem will be to find something for them to do that will neither sicken the weak, nor bore the strong.

It isn't quite as hard to achieve as you might think. The key points are likely to be:-

- Get them out camping on a wild campsite for at least one night. That in itself is a substantial novelty during their first few expeditions.
- If possible choose a camping location that is a short backpacking distance from the end of the vehicle journey, so that they get a first experience of having to pack and carry a full expedition rucksack, - but not very far, so as

to give the little ones a break. For a first trip, I would suggest at least 5, - but no more than about 8 kilometres.

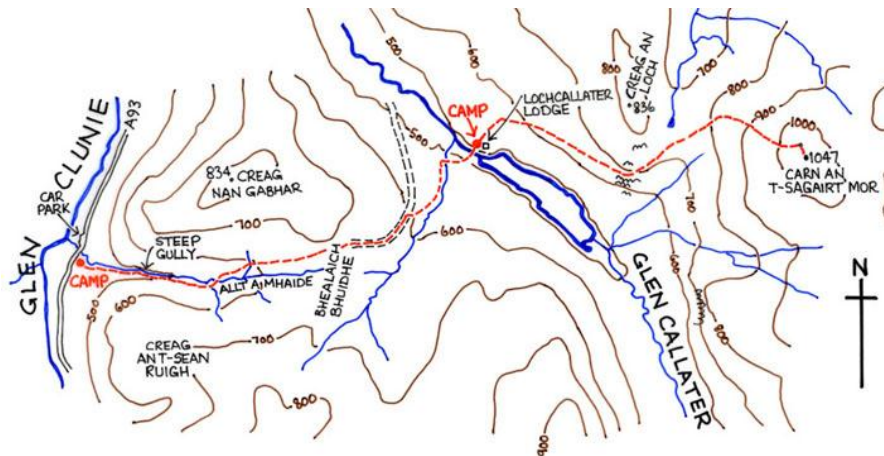
- From that campsite have a day mountain climb available that is interesting and doesn't need them to drag a heavy rucksack with them. Remember that you are trying to grab their enthusiasm at the outset, - not grind them into the dirt!
- Look for something on or around the route that offers real interest for kids.
- Pick dates for a first trip that are decisively before the midgie season. Again you don't want to put them off. The second weekend in May is about right.
- Within safe limits have some interesting water close to your campsite in which they can at least paddle. They will say they want to swim but you don't really need to win that argument: At that time of year their enthusiasm will vanish rapidly as the water gets to ankle level, - and their feet go blue!
- Of course you have no control over the weather. But try to have a couple of route options available on different sides of the country. Close to the day of departure, opt for the one that has the best weather forecast for the weekend. It's about making a first impression, and spending the weekend soaked and miserable isn't going to make them want to come back.

Above all concentrate on having fun when you're out there on that first trip.

You can even have fun when its wet: -In this case, - puddle jumping!



Route 1: Bomber Mountain (Glen Clunie to Carn an t-Sagairt Mor)



This is a favourite weekend itinerary for beginners. It contains all the right ingredients in just about the right balance. There is one brief terrain hazard that lasts about 5 minutes in each direction but, despite many years of trying, we haven't lost anyone yet, and with a little supervision you won't either.

Your starting point is by the side of the A93 in Aberdeenshire, about 5.75 kilometres north of Glenshee Ski Centre, (or 9km south of Braemar) at map reference NO 140834. There is a layby on the

west side of the A93 where your vehicle can be left. Driving time to the starting point is about 1hr 30 mins from Dundee or Perth, and maybe about 1 hr 45 mins from Aberdeen.

There is decent camping ground on the east side of the A93 right at the starting point, and a good water supply, so the option is available to you of driving there on a summer Friday evening and camping on the Friday night as well as the Saturday, - if you would like to give them two nights of camping experience. The only real downside is traffic noise, for the road will only be about 50 metres away from your tents. However as a lesser burden there is also sheep-noise. Being awoken by a loud baaaaaa just outside your tent, is a natural hazard of this route!

On the Saturday morning there is no great rush to start off, - which means you can comfortably travel there by car on that day. Or if you have camped overnight, then the basic teaching of cooking, cleaning, tent folding and packing can be done at relative leisure. The well-grazed grass is short, so there is no major risk of fire. Once packed, your initial task is to backpack up the gully of the Allt a Mhaide to the pass of Bhealaich Bhuidhe which in terms of height is about 280 metres above the camp site, and then descend to Loch Callater Lodge, which is normally unoccupied. There you will find

decent camping ground by the end of the loch, and also "The Stables" bothy, - maintained by the MBA, which lies behind the Lodge. The distance is 4.5km and the total height to be climbed is 280m. With a beginner party you should be able to get to Loch Callater Lodge in about 2½ hours, including rests. But don't push it; you're in no hurry.

Just about the only point of the route where you need to be really vigilant for safety starts about 3 minutes after you leave the starting point. The path terraces up the south side of the steep gully of the Allt a Mhaidhe, and while there is no reason why anyone should fall off the path, there is a section of just a few hundred metres long, low down in the gully, where anyone who does fall off the path is likely to tumble to a pretty messy fate.

So you need to give your boys a briefing on behaviour and care before entering this section, - and you should keep anyone who is a bit wobbly (*remember they are small and carrying rucksacks, - which makes them even wobblier*) close in front of you and within grabbing distance. I do recall one spindly boy, - a bit like Bambi on ice at 13 years old, who needed close control on this section, but most boys will stroll through it and not bat an eyelid.

Above the ravine you cross the burn easily, and then face a much more open climb to the pass. The path is a bit broken and hidden in the heather and there are false trails to drag you in slightly the wrong direction. The thing to remember is that the vehicle track at the top of the pass (*coming from the other direction*) is not in the middle of the valley, but well



to one side towards the north shoulder. So as you face uphill and climb towards the pass, you should tend to err consistently to the left and away from the valley centre. With luck you will find the stronger footpath that exists high on the ascent, and that will lead you onto the end of a rubble vehicle track just east of the pass summit.

High on the climb to Bhealaich Bhuidhe: Note how far the path is to the north of the valley centre.

Descend the rubble road on the far side of the pass, until it bears left at about NO 171838. At this point you need to leave the road and strike straight downhill towards Loch Callater Lodge, which you will see below you. Again there is a somewhat heather-hidden and broken path, on the north-east side of the Allt a Bhealaich Bhuidhe. The path crosses the stream by a little bridge near the bottom of the slope, and leads through the ruins of ancient shielings at about NO 175842 on its way down to Loch Callater Lodge.

Immediately across the vehicle bridge over the Callater Burn turn right across a low mound, just before you reach the fence around the Lodge, and you will find a small area of camping ground on heavily grazed short grass, - tight between the fence and a tiny grit beach at the end of the loch. The camp site is often contaminated by sheep droppings, which are easily

swept away, but you do need to maintain decent hygiene standards on this site because of the potential e-coli risk, - although we have never actually had a problem during the course of many uses of this site. Alternatively you could camp inside the fence surrounding the Lodge, where there is campable ground at a higher level to the northwest of the main building. That site is a bit rougher, but doesn't have sheep droppings on it.



Loch Callater Lodge looking back from the Carn an t-Sagairt Mor track

The bothy is behind the main Lodge building and fairly well marked. There you should find a yellow handled spade, which is your toilet provision. The water supply is an improved spring located maybe 60 metres along the track that leads south eastwards from the main lodge. The spring is not visible from the lodge or the bothy.

You will probably arrive and be set up on this site by mid-afternoon. At this stage in their expedition career the boys will be happy to explore and get used to the novelty of tent life for a couple of hours before it is time to make the evening meal. You can cook outside on the ground without a fire risk for the grass is very short, -

or if the bothy is empty you could take your cooking equipment and food across to the bothy and let them cook for the first time on a table, with the stoves protected from the wind. They're a good deal less likely to kick the stoves over or drop anything if you do that!

If it's a really nice day and they want to get into the water then you will find shallow water and a sand/grit shore at a spit of land a few hundred metres south east of the lodge at NO 182842. (*You can see it on the photo above*). Otters live in this vicinity so be careful of their habitat!

During the afternoon you should start to drop reminders that the next day is going to be a good deal more physically demanding, as it indeed it will. Get them to bed early, and don't let them lie awake chatting until 02.00. Get them up sharp the next morning, maybe about 07.15, and don't take prisoners if they are slow to move!

What you are going to do on the second day, usually a Sunday, is to leave your camp standing where it is and do a half-day walk to climb the 1047m high Carn an t-Sagairt Mor, which is a big rounded dome of a mountain, standing high above your camp about 3km to the east. That isn't as hard as it sounds for your camp is already 500m above sea level. There is a good strong path nearly all the way to the summit. The attraction for the boys, apart from climbing their first Munro, is that the summit is covered with the widely scattered wreckage of a Canberra jet bomber, which has smacked the mountain top rather hard at a shallow angle with, we fear, rather melancholy consequences for the crew. However there are wings, wheels, the gleaming wreckage of jet engines and all sorts of assorted debris scattered widely over the mountain, which for boys results in a very attractive scavenger hunt. The second half of the day is to return to the campsite, have a late lunch, pack up the loads and then return over the Bhealaich Bhuidhe to where the car is parked. So it is important to start early and be back promptly, or you're going to be late home!

The boys should each take a substantial snack and a full drinks bottle with them to climb Carn an t-Sagairt Mor. Go 60m northwest along the track from the lodge to the vehicle gate through the fence, and immediately beyond that gate turn sharp right and goes straight up the hillside north-eastwards on a strong path. At the 560 metres level the path turns sharp right again and crosses a stream. That stream is the last drinkable water you will find on this route until you get back to it on the return journey, so check that drinking bottles are full. The path then rises gradually as it terraces south-



eastwards along the hillside, and works around to the north east onto a shallow pass below Carn an t-Sagairt Mor. Then it turns south east and goes fairly straight up the mountain as a stony track following the remains of an old wall. At about NO 203846 the main path turns sharply to the SSE, goes through an ancient gate and terraces around the mountain on its way to Lochnagar. However you need to go straight-on up the mountain, for which there is also a path. Ptarmigan inhabit this area. Please don't scare them, and ignore any that appear to be injured – its a deception tactic to lead you away from their chicks! Loose dogs are the worst possible news for bird life in this area: do not take them with you!

Carn an t-Sagairt Mor seen in the distance from Bealach Bhuidhe

Aircraft Wreckage at about NO 208845

Fairly high on the ascent you will start to encounter pieces of aircraft wreckage, mainly to the right of the path. On the summit there are two cairns, about 150 metres apart, with the more southerly one being fractionally higher. A large aircraft wing lies a little way down the slope to the north-east of the north summit cairn in the ballpark of NO 208845. Walk towards the south cairn and then bear to the right of that cairn to the vicinity of NO 208842 and you will find the two jet engines and a piece of fuselage, well separated and part buried in small craters in the bedrock. Further right still and down below a rock band at about NO 206843 there is a main wheel and tyre from the Canberra. The return to the campsite and then to the car is a simple reversal of what you have

already done, albeit that you will have difficulty persuading your boys that they don't want to carry half a Canberra home with them!

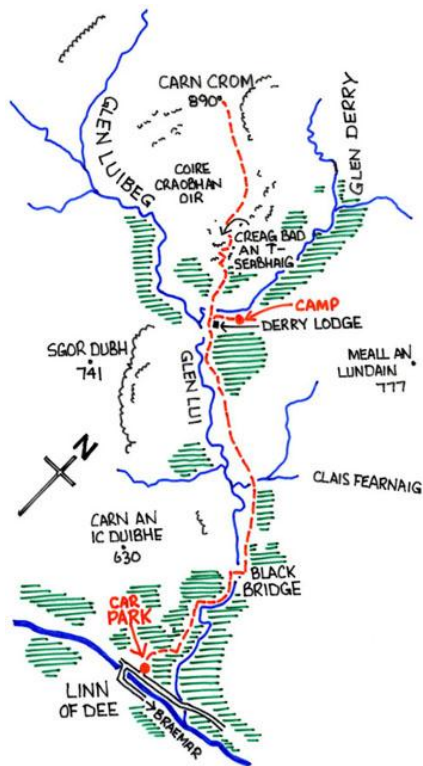


The return walk from Loch Callater Lodge to Carn an t-Sagairt Mor, -with 30 minutes for exploration at the top, should take about 4 - 4½ hours including rests. So your schedule for the day might be to leave the campsite at 09.30, return there from the hill climb at about 13.45; spend 1¼ hours packing (*oh yes it will, - at least!*), leave Loch Callater Lodge at 15.00, and arrive at your car at around 17.00/17.15. The amount of climbing to get to Bhealach Bhuidhe is less on the return because Loch Callater Lodge is at a higher altitude than the point where your vehicle is parked.

On the way home, if you are going south, it is "traditional", - at least it is with us, to visit Mr Lee's Chinese Chip shop in Blairgowrie. (*Going south, cross the Ericht Bridge, go right at the lights and then left onto the one way street just beyond the gardens in the town centre*) If you are going north then there is a takeaway adjacent to the main road junction in Braemar.

Descending the Allt a Mhaide gully towards Glen Clunie on the way home.
The steep section that needs care is lower down the gully.

Route 2: Derry Lodge and an Ascent of Carn Crom



This is also a route suitable for a first trip, based again on a very modest backpack into a campsite and an unburdened ascent of a hill, before backpacking back out to the vehicle.

The route goes into the southern edge of the main range of the Cairngorms. The starting point is the public car park in the woods about 200 metres beyond the bridge at Linn of Dee, on the minor road from Braemar. Driving time is maybe 1¾ hours from Dundee or Perth, and maybe slightly less than that from Aberdeen. There is a charge of around £2 to be paid for parking at Linn of Dee, so have some brass and silver money available.

The track through the forest to join the Luibeg and Derry Lodge track is well signposted and you face about 5.5 kilometres of flat walking in an open valley along a rubble road that can be a bit dusty in dry conditions. The path crosses the Luibeg river via the "Black Bridge", - which isn't black, (*but then again the nearby "White Bridge" isn't white.*)

Derry Lodge path beyond the Black Bridge,- just visible above the blue karrimat

With a party of beginners and all the fiddling with rucksack loads, boots and sore feet/wrong socks that is often involved, it might even take you as much as a couple of hours to get to the boarded-up and slowly deteriorating Derry Lodge at the edge of the Caledonian Pine woods. Beyond the lodge lies the wooden mountain rescue

building, - which has a payphone on the near end outside wall. Immediately past the Mountain Rescue building, turn sharp right and go up the valley on the nearside of the River Derry.



Within a couple of hundred metres you will start to see good camping places near the riverbank. The trick here is to find a site that isn't under the fall line of one of the big Caledonian pines or their heavy branches, but since all of the trees lean a bit to towards the northeast - away from the prevailing wind, the angles to avoid are pretty obvious. The water in the River Derry has always been drinkable without causing any problems. This is one of the genuinely scenic camping locations in Scotland, in among the open historic pine forest, now being slowly regenerated with the selective use of protective fencing. It is a popular wild camping location and at weekends there are likely to be other parties camped on various sites in the vicinity, on both sides of the river. If some of the most popular places are taken then look around and you will get a decent site. There are no toilet facilities.



A camp on the recommended location near Derry Lodge

The boys will find a lot that is of interest in the vicinity, but make sure that they aren't destructive. There is a great big open pinewood to explore, and there are a few fairly innocuous bathing holes if the weather should be appropriate. The closest one to the campsite is just below the wooden footbridge over the river, about 200 metres downstream of the campsite, but actual swimming amounts to about 3 strokes! Another reasonable place to get into the river involves a short walk of less than 3km up Glen Derry on the west side of the river, to just upstream of the metal footbridge at NO 039958. This might be a good activity for a Saturday afternoon after you have set up camp.

The forest teems with wildlife, far from all of which is harmless, although you may not be lucky enough to find it. I have seen adders twice in the rocky heathery terrain close to the campsite and one evening was confronted by a macho capercaillie defending his territory, *(-and you don't take-on those tyrannosaurus turkeys)*. Also at quite a few points further up the valley on the west side of the river there are dome shaped brown anthills teeming with great big wood ants that would certainly give you a very nasty nip if you annoyed them, but are fascinating to watch. *(Be aware that they'll be exploring your boots within a couple of minutes)*. One morning we even awoke to the Cairngorm reindeer herd grazing close around the tents, on one of its more extended wanders.

You will of course have picked a good weather weekend for this, - because you have beginners with you. So on the Sunday in good weather you should leave your camp standing and aim to do an unburdened hill climb. Ideally you would go to Derry Cairngorm, but for beginners that would almost certainly be too hard and take too long, given that they

would then have to backpack out to the car. Perhaps the best choice is Carn Crom, 890m high to the immediate northwest of your campsite, and an excellent viewpoint. For beginners the walk to the summit will maybe take 2 hours plus rests and breaks, and the descent should be about an hour. 4 hours in total would be distinctly generous.

Looking down on the Derry Lodge area from Creag Bad an t-Seabhaig

On the west side of Derry flats, more or less opposite your campsite, a path winds its way up the 'nose' of Creag Bad an t-Seabhaig at the end of the long ridge of Derry Cairngorm, but it isn't marked on the map and you may have to cast around a little to find it. The path zigzags up through the little crags onto the ridge line. You'll need packed lunches, drinks bottles, and suitable reserve clothing, in day bags. Once on the ridge-line it is a fairly simple matter of following dry ground and short vegetation on the crest line and such paths as you might find, up the increasingly stony ridge to Carn Crom. Then reverse the route to the campsite.



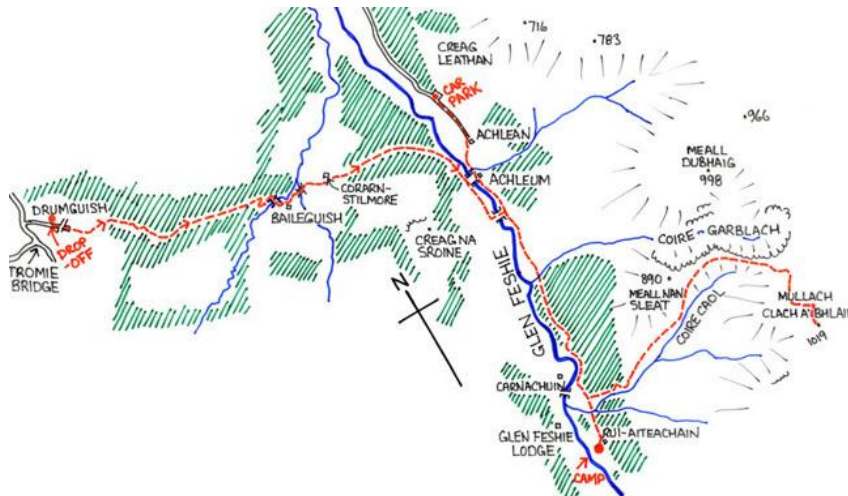
Back at the campsite you have to pack-up and then walk down the valley to your vehicle. Given the incentive of reaching the car and the chip shop, boys always go back down the valley faster than they came up it! If you want a break from trudging down the hard and dusty road then turn left as soon as you have crossed the Black Bridge and follow an overgrown path through heather between the wood and the river bank, which will bring you back onto the rubble road a bit further down. In late summer you may well pass beehives at NO 064909. The bees won't bother you if you don't bother them. Just don't panic and swipe at any of the, hundreds of bees zinging past your head; - it annoys them and makes them want to "phone a friend!"



Your timetable for the day might be to get up at 08.00; leave to climb Carn Crom at 09.30; be back at the campsite by 13.30; pack-up and leave by 15.00; be back at the car by 16.30 and reach takeaway food in Blairgowrie around 18.00, which with due allowance for eating time would give you an arrival time at Dundee or Perth before 19.00. Arrival time in Aberdeen would be similar.

A late autumn day on the bare, dry ridge leading to Carn Crom

Route 3: Tromie Bridge, Ruigh Aiteachain, Mullach Clach a Bhlairst, and Auchlean



This route again follows the beginner format of a *fairly* modest amount of backpacking to a base camp, followed by the ascent of a mountain on the second day, and backpacking out to the car also on that second day. However in this instance the first day's backpacking distance is a little greater at around 13 flat km. equivalent, which probably amounts to around 4½ hours for a young and inexperienced party. To counter-balance that, the Sunday walk-out is made shorter. While one member of staff accompanies the party at all times on the Saturday, one vehicle is driven by another member of staff to

a different parking point to shorten the Sunday walk out. The driver can then re-join the main party after 2-3 hours, (explanation below) Because of the vehicle re-positioning, it will save time on the Sunday evening if the party is using one vehicle, e.g. a 7 seater or a minibus. Alternatively you can both start and finish at Achlean and have a shorter walk.

Within reason, this is a fairly weather-resistant route. The backpacking is all on sheltered valley ground, the bothy is available as a safe place to cook in bad weather, and there is nothing in the ascent of Mullach Clach a Bhlairst that would stop you from climbing it just because it turned out to be cloudy or windy, - although you wouldn't sensibly ask beginners to do it in wind, cloud and persistent rain! The walk on the first day starts near Tromie Bridge on the B970 road in Speyside about 4km east of Kingussie. This starting point is about 2 hours from Perth, and maybe an hour from Inverness. It is probably 2½ hours plus from Aberdeen because the Cairngorms get in the way! The walking party is dropped just beyond Tromie Bridge on the minor road to Drumguish and the vehicle is then driven 17km in a loop via Feshiebridge to the Auchlean parking area in Glen Feshie at NN 853977. This isn't quite as drastic for the driver as it sounds, for Auchlean lies close to a point that the walking party will pass after about 2½ hours walking, and the vehicle

driver can easily backtrack on foot to meet the group in the vicinity of Corarnstilmore (*If he has any sense he will conceal his rucksack in the woods on the west side of the river before he backtracks, and collect it later in the day.*)

The new footbridge at NN823983

The route from Drumguish follows obvious forestry tracks until at about NN823 983 you cross a new footbridge across the Allt Chomhraig, - not yet marked on the map. A new path line then leads over a second footbridge crossing a tributary and heads towards Corarnstilmore, which is now just a set of drystone animal ponds. The route continues on through broad forest roads to join the main road up Glen Feshie, - which is private - but tarred. Note carefully that at NN 8495 9650, shortly after joining the tarred road, you have to leave the road and cross the River Feshie via a good solid bridge and then follow a narrow footpath up the valley on the east side of the river. As of October 2010 the pretty but utterly derelict bridge further up the valley at Carnachuin had



finally collapsed and while signs at the site said that it would be replaced – it had not been done by that date.

Looking back North: The bridge across the Feshie at 8495 9650

Assuming that you arrived at Tromie Bridge at maybe 11.30 on a Saturday morning, your party could meet up with the vehicle driver again a little beyond Corarnstilmore at around 13.30. After crossing the bridge at NN 8495 9650 you will find the path on the east bank of the river to be a narrow line through heather and on a boggy peat base. It then soon crosses a side stream which you might not get across with dry feet during wet weather. Immediately south of that crossing, there are path options low down beside the river, or higher along a narrow ridge on the edge of a forest. The higher line is the better of the two but supervise your beginners well, because of the high steep bank on the west



edge of the path. In one or two places the path ends up with sloping foot placements on this bank and it would be easy to roll a long way down this steep bank if you slipped.

Going North on the high bank, near the stream crossing just south of the bridge over the Feshie

There is one more stream crossing a few hundred metres short of Ruigh Aiteachain which may well get you more wet feet if you take it directly but, again in late 2010 there were three primitive little bridges crossing it in stages about 50 metres upstream.

From Tromie Bridge a beginner party will probably take over 4 hours to get to Ruigh Aiteachain, and they will not then need much entertaining for a couple of hours in the late afternoon, before it is time to prepare the evening meal. Ruigh Aiteachain is one of the great bothies. It is in good order, has a generous supply of firewood for its fire, and it has a decent, if rather unusual, toilet in an outbuilding. More importantly it has good camping ground all around it, so your beginners can camp, (*bad midgies in high summer*) but have the backup of the bothy and its toilet facilities if necessary. If the



bothy isn't busy you can let the boys socialise in the bothy in the evening. Cards is the typical evening activity. Be resolute, in the face of the pressure that you will get from the boys, - that the only fire you permit will be in the bothy fireplace.

At the edge of the Coire Garbhlach cliffs

On Sunday morning you should get up at 07.00, and prepare for an ascent of Mullach Clach a Bhlairst, which is a great whale of a mountain immediately east of the bothy. The ascent of the mountain and return is the equivalent of about 17 flat km, for which you would need to allow beginners around 4½ hours including breaks, although they will probably do it in less. Thus if you leave Ruigh Aiteachain at 08.30, you could expect to return there at around 13.00. The ascent route starts about 725m.



north of the bothy, and then follows a rough vehicle track up the north side of Coire Caol. There are no terrain hazards during the ascent. The best view is when, above 830m, the track terraces along close to the cliffs dropping into Coire Garbhlach. In bad weather you'll need to use a compass to find the summit on a featureless plateau.

Ruigh Aiteachain

The time needed for the hill climb is why you have taken the vehicle to Achlean to shorten the walk out on the Sunday.

On the last occasion we walked back out with a beginner party, - which was going quite well, it still took just under 2 hours to get to Auchlean. You might expect to leave Ruigh Aiteachain at around 15.00 and reach your vehicle at Auchlean, at around

16.50. If you are using two vehicles, and one of them is still at Tromie Bridge, then it might take about another 45 minutes to fetch that vehicle around to Achlean before driving home.

There are both a chip shop and a Chinese takeaway in Kingussie. Otherwise the best chip shop down the A9 is on the East side of the main street in Dunkeld. This, trip is more demanding than Routes 1 and 2 in this book, so you probably wouldn't want to use it if there should be a small beginner in your party, - unless you both start and finish at Auchlean.

Stream crossing on the Achlean path



Section B: A Second Trip: Just a little harder.

The selection of routes in this section starts from the assumption that all of the boys in the party have already done at least one expedition in which they have carried a fully loaded rucksack for the first time, - but not for very far. However the most important point of this isn't so much that they have gained experience, but that you have seen them perform as individuals and have formed a view about how strong/weak, capable/feckless, mentally positive/negative they proved to be when first asked to go out and make an effort.

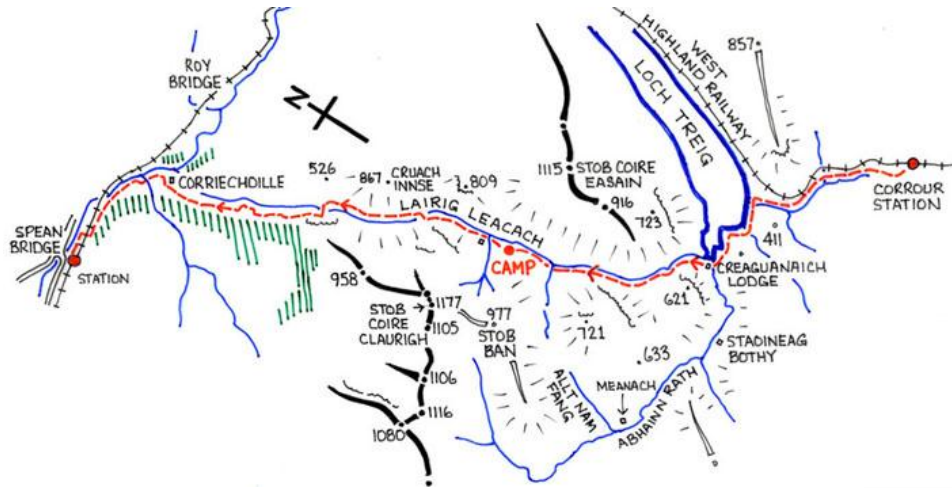
Presumably those who didn't like the hard work on the first trip or two, won't want to go on the more demanding trips. Presumably also anyone who behaved badly, dodged his share of the work, or moaned when the going got tough, - won't readily be invited by you to take part again. There does come a point when, for the good of the group, you need to start to axe those who will undermine its collective quality of performance. To be fair you might want to give them a second chance, but probably not a third if they don't mend their ways! The selection process isn't about excluding those who lack physical strength, - although you may sometimes have to hold the most physically immature back by a year and put them out with a group that is a little younger. You'll find that exclusion criteria are nearly all about attitude, sense, and behaviour. A group will almost always rally to the support of a smaller *friend*, often by offering to carry a bit of extra weight, provided that the weaker member is keen and determined, and gets on well with the others. The key word is "friend". *(But note that boys rarely show much sympathy for the unfit or overweight, and can be merciless with the lazy!)*

Subject to the above criteria, the set of routes in Section B starts to raise the profile either by asking the party to backpack for a markedly greater distance in the weekend than was the case in the Section A routes, and/ or by taking them out into terrain in which reasonable safety requires them to display more personal competence and sense. These routes should be suitable for adult accompanied parties on their second trip, - at an average age of perhaps around their 14th birthday.



Luibeilt in Upper Glen Nevis looking towards Aonach Beag

Route 4: Corrou Station, Lairig Leacach and Spean Bridge



On a second trip we need to raise the threshold in terms of the physical effort they have to make. On their first trip you only asked them to backpack a total of about 10-15 km in two days. A week-end for the more physically mature might involve 40-45 kilometres of back packing. At this stage we want to get them doing something midway in between these extremes and Route 4 totals the equivalent of 28.5 flat kilometres of

backpacking. However this route has two other good things going for it: It will be their first expedition travelling by train, and it will be the first time they finish at a different place from where they started.

The train journey brings a real novelty and new experience into it for them and it need not be expensive. Get your Company to take out a family railcard in the name of two officers (*and no, they don't have to be a family!*) and the fares become very low. The only real downside of this route is that the sole homeward train on a Sunday doesn't leave Spean Bridge until 17.51, arriving in Crianlarich at 19.25. Thus you would be looking at an arrival home at 21.00 in Perth or Stirling, 21.30 in Dundee and somewhere closer to 22.00 in Edinburgh or Glasgow. However that isn't a problem if you know its going to happen and parents are expecting it.



Just off the train at Corrou

Sadly because of the train times, this weekend route doesn't work in reverse for a start at Spean Bridge by parties coming from the north or north-east. What north-originating parties can do is to pick up the train at either Rannoch station or Bridge of Orchy, both of which are closer for their purposes than Crianlarich. Glasgow parties can use the train for the whole weekend and start and finish at Queen Street, bearing in mind that the train leaves at 08.21 on Saturday morning (*Dumbarton 08.48, Helensburgh Upper 09.06*) and doesn't return to Queen Street until 21.27 on Sunday evening.

Assuming you are to join the train at Crianlarich, you should be able to park on the station access road. Your train leaves at 10.21, (*Sat. 10.58 other days*) and you can either buy your tickets in advance or get them on the train. There is a small café on the station platform. When the train arrives it may split into a front half and a back half. Make sure you get on the correct half or you can expect a fine journey to Oban on the wrong track! The train should then drop you at Corrour at 11.21, and leave you literally standing in the middle of an awful lot of nowhere. You walk north off the end of the central platform, turn left (west) and join the track leading north westwards towards Loch Treig. Describing the first 2 km of this path as 'wet' might be the understatement of the third millennium, and you'll find all sorts of old planks and boards laid out in the bog to help

you stay on the surface. On one classic occasion the only ground above water was the railway embankment.

Going south to Corrour Stn. in the wet

Once you reach the combined bridge where the rough road and stream both go under the railway at NN 341681, your route becomes a recently improved rubble road and descends steadily to the south end of Loch Treig. Follow the track around the south end of the loch to Creagunneach Lodge, cross the Abhainn Rath by the bridge, and set off up the valley of the Lairig Leacach, via the west bank of the Allt na Lairige. The path is variable, but not too bad. Start looking for a campsite once you get to about 1km short of the bothy. There are quite a number of reasonable possibilities, although the grass tends to be a bit long, so take care to avoid grass fires.

The track up the west side of Lairig Leacach



Don't go all the way up to the bothy, which is a rather mean little building without good camping ground near it. Leaving Corroul at 11.30, your party might be at Creaguaineach at around 13.30 for lunch, and at its camping location by 16.30. Your total effort for the day is 14.5 flat kilometres.

A Camp in Lairig Leacach, not far south of the bothy

Sunday is about 14 flat kilometres equivalent, and nearly all distance rather than height, so it might take a young party as much as 5 hours including rests to get to Spean Bridge station. The only complication on the route is crossing the Allt a Chuil Choirean just before the bothy. In most conditions you won't get across this burn with dry feet. You can either sacrifice your trainers or, remove your socks and the internal sole liners from your boots, then put your boots back on your bare feet and wade across. Then shake the water out as best you can, put on yesterday's used socks, and put your boots back on. Your used socks will soak up much of the water in the boots. Wring them out after about 5 minutes, then put them back on, walk another 5-10 minutes, and repeat twice. After that you can put the dry sole liners back in your boots and change into your good dry socks. They won't remain entirely dry, - but they won't go squishy either. The rest of the day involves following a fairly



simple gravel track over the pass and down to Spean Bridge, with the last part on a quiet public road.

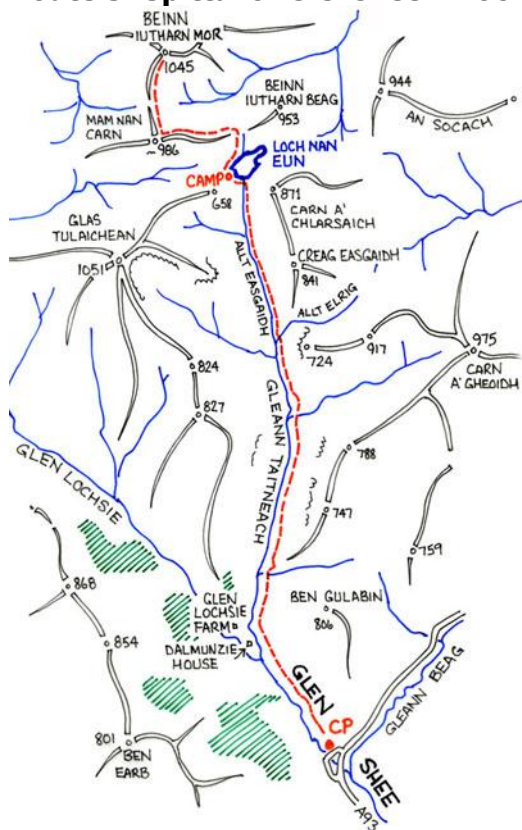


If you are off the campsite by a little after 11.00 a.m. then you should be in Spean Bridge well before train time, and there is both a food/snack store and a chip shop in Spean Bridge. The directions to the chip shop are in the big car park. Be sure to wait for the train on the correct platform. In this case usually the south side platform for southbound trains.

Note: This route could be done from Spean Bridge to Corroul: You would just stay on the train a bit longer on the first day.

The last section down into Glen Spean

Route 5: Spittal of Glenshee – Loch Nan Eun and Beinn Iutharn Mor



This route again follows the principle of a moderate back-packing journey to a remote high campsite, with the pack-free ascent of a mountain on the Sunday followed by backpacking out to the starting point. However the backpacking element is at a markedly more demanding level than their first trip, and there are two short (*but avoidable*) sections of footpath high in the Allt Easgaidh gully that are not for the unstable! Because of the high altitude of the camp site this route is maybe best left until early June before you do it.

Your starting point. The path starts just at this end of the hump bridge.

The starting point is the loop of bypassed road at Spittal of Glenshee on the A93 north of Blairgowrie. You should find a parking place for your vehicle fairly readily at about NO 109702. The starting point is about 70 minutes from Dundee or Perth, and maybe 2 hours from Aberdeen. Your backpacking day starts from that point and takes you to the shore of Loch Nan Eun at 790m above sea level, where you will find camping ground on a tiny promontory at NO 0628 7791. The distance is about 10km but there is also about 500m to be climbed including some ups and downs on the valley track. You might expect a relatively young party to take a little over 4 hours plus rests, - maybe getting towards 5 hours in total, to get to the camping location. The campsite is exposed, so your tents need to be the real deal!



Follow the rough vehicle track through fields along the north side of the Shee Water in a north-westerly direction in upper Glen Shee (*Note that the 'main' Glen heading towards the Ski Centre is actually called Glen Beag*). This involves about five gates. The second gate is faintly marked "*Beware of the Bull*", and there is indeed sometimes a bull in the field, but the route is well used by walkers and the security measures are so derisory that there can't be a significant risk (*short of going across and shoving a stick up the bull's nose!*).



Gleann Taitneach looking North West

In Gleann Taitneach the vehicle track fords three substantial side streams, which are negotiable with dry feet in average conditions, but which might be a hazard after prolonged heavy rain. At NO 078 758 you cross the last of these, the Allt Elrig, and the track supposedly ceases according to the map. However there is a well marked footpath up the east side of the Allt Easgaidh, branching right from the vehicle track a few hundred metres beyond the Allt Elrig crossing. This footpath offers nice walking in its lower section but becomes steeper and increasingly muddy and rocky as it rises. Above about the 600m level the track winds up the steep east side of the gully, and has a couple of sections that

need close supervision of boys by their officers. In particular the very last ascent to Loch Nan Eun, - to the right of a waterfall, needs focussed close supervision. (*N.B. You can avoid this by a detour much more widely to the north east*) Cross the loch outlet stream and turn left to follow the loch shore westwards for a short distance to a very obvious promontory, at the far (north east) end of which there are slightly squidgy sites for two or three tents, so make sure your groundsheet *are* waterproof. When following the shore in the late Spring beware of big snowbanks extending into the loch, - because the loch water undermines them and they can crevasse without warning to a depth of 3 metres, at as much as 10m back from the apparent shore. This isn't theory; the writer has been the (spectacular) victim of such a trap!

Allt Easgaidh gully: Stay right of the burn going to the col at right centre



Getting towards the top of the Allt Easgaidh Gully



the south ridge to the col and, rather than re-ascend Mam nan Carn, contour eastwards around the mountain back to the gully that you ascended from the camp site. The return to the campsite should take about 1 hour. Don't try to shortcut back to your campsite via steep slopes on the east side of Mam Nan Carn, for the vegetation here is exceptionally lubricated and very slippery (*and therein obviously lies a tale for another time!*)

The camp site on the promontory at Loch nan Eun

Glas Tulaichean south-south-west of your campsite, at 1051m, would be another good option, and the ridge to it starts at the back of a mound behind your camp site.

On the Sunday there is a choice of four or five nearby Munros for you to ascend, - but you won't manage them all. One choice would be to pick up Mam nan Carn (986m) en-route to Beinn Iutharn Mor. Go due north from the south-west corner of the loch over peaty tussocks to make an easy ascent of the stream gully between Mam nan Carn and Beinn Iutharn Beag. Go to the *very* top of this gully and you will find a path starting left up Mam nan Carn, and it is a fairly easy stroll to the summit. Then descend north-north-westwards by about 70m to the col between Mam nan Carn and Beinn Iutharn Mor, and climb the south ridge of Beinn Iutharn Mor to the summit. The effort involved is about 6.75 flat kilometres to the summit, - which should take about 2 hours in total, probably less. Descend back down



Once you're back at the tents, pack up your camp and walk out to your vehicle. The walk out to the vehicle is about 10km, and takes about 3 hrs 15 mins, because the descent of the upper half of the gully of the Allt Easgaidh needs care and tight staff supervision, especially at the very first descent near the waterfall.



Looking south from Ben Iutharn Beag towards Mam nan Carn on the left and Ben Iutharn Mor on the right.

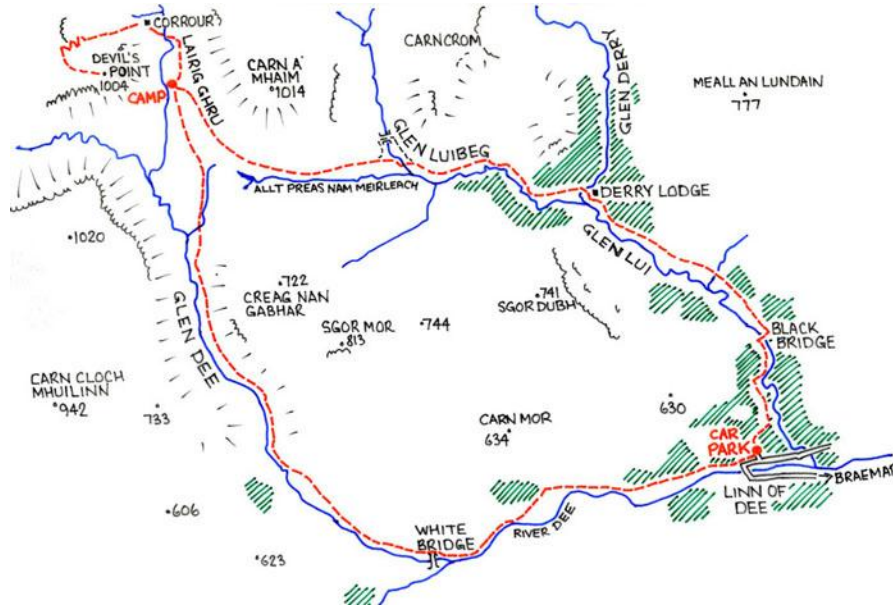
Your schedule for the day might be:- up at 07.30; off the camp site at 09.30: reach the summit around 11.30; be back at the campsite around 12.45; leave the campsite at about 14.00; reach the car at 17.15; be at the takeaways in Blairgowrie at about 18.00. *(While the schedule above follows the timing rules, we do have a written record on file of a BB group which also climbed the adjacent Carn an Righ, and was still back at the campsite in not much over 3 hours.)*

The total effort involved in this weekend is about 35 flat kilometres, of which 25 flat kilometres is backpacking.

The summit of Mam nan Carn looking across Carn and Righ towards Beinn a Ghlo in the distance. *(The horizontal pose isn't exhaustion, - merely an attempt to get down below the quite literally freezing gale!)*



Route 6: Glen Dee and Devil's Point



This route provides a moderate backpacking effort over two days totalling around 30 flat km. of total effort for the weekend. However if combined with an ascent of Devil's Point on the morning of the second day, the total effort rises to close to 40 flat kilometres for the weekend making it more appropriate to a slightly older and physically stronger group. The backpacking is all at valley level so the weekend remains valid in most weather conditions. However do note that because the valley level is typically more than 500m above sea level and the surrounding mountains are up to 1300m in height you do need to watch the weather conditions

and not commit a young party to this route early or late in the season if there is a cold snap forecast.

The other significant point about this route is that it is basically circular and is valid in either direction; clockwise or anti-clockwise. It is described below clockwise, with the inclusion of an ascent of Devil's Point and it has to be admitted that the route has a good deal more purpose to it if that ascent is included. However even if the ascent is avoided it does take the boys to the heart of big mountain terrain, and through attractive scenery. Perhaps the biggest downside of not including Devil's Point is that the working time on the second day is a bit short. On the other hand the addition of Devil's Point might leave you a little pushed for time.

Once again your starting point is the public car park at Linn of Dee, which is about 1hr 50mins drive from Dundee Perth, or Aberdeen. Remember to have coins for the parking machines - £2 per visit recently. Walk out of the car park to the south and go west on the public road and continue to White Bridge on the flat gravel road that goes west along the north side of the Dee valley. You should be able to make good time on this. Beyond White Bridge there is an improved path for



for a short distance, but it soon becomes a rather tiring combination of boulders, bog and heather, with only a few short improved sections.

Just beyond White Bridge, heading towards Glen Dee. This section of the path has now been upgraded.

You are looking for a camping location within about 500-750 metres of Corrou Bothy, on the east side of the Dee. There aren't many good sites, but the photo below shows tents pitched more or less in the location described. I would advise against trying to camp beside the bothy because it is such an overused area, especially at weekends. Depending on where exactly you camp, the day total is about 16.0 flat km, and I would expect a young party on its first 'long' backpack to take over 5 hours.

Nearly all the possible camping locations in this area have long dead yellow grass on them in the Spring which, when it dries out in a breeze, is extremely combustible. Dangerous grass fires are a real risk on dry breezy days so exercise great care as to where, and under what supervision, you do your cooking. Remove dry grass from the vicinity of stoves, keep a good amount of water close by, and supervise cooking closely. This isn't just a theoretical risk, - but that's yet another story for another day! Draw your water from a side stream as waste leakage from around Corrou may be contaminating the Dee.

A camp just short of Corrou bothy,
- visible in the distance at left centre



On Sunday if the weather is good, leave your camp in place and walk north to Corroul bothy, behind which a track ascends to the col north of Devil's Point and then to the summit of that offshoot of Cairn Toul. Devil's Point offers great views of the Cairngorms. Don't try to climb Cairn Toul on this expedition; that's too much for youngsters and would take too long. The round trip from your campsite to Devil's Point is about 10 flat kilometres of effort and you should be back at your campsite about 3-3½ hours after starting out.



Then pack up your camp and continue to follow this circular route clockwise back to your vehicle. Climb straight up the slope east of your campsite to pick up the Lairig Ghru – Luibeg track. When you reach the Luibeg river, you should be able to cross on the stones in most water conditions, but in flood conditions there is a metal bridge just a little way upstream. Beyond the Luibeg crossing, the path gradually becomes a gravel vehicle track, and is easy walking. At about NO 035934 the route used by most people tends to turn half left and cut directly over boggy ground to the footbridge over the River Derry.

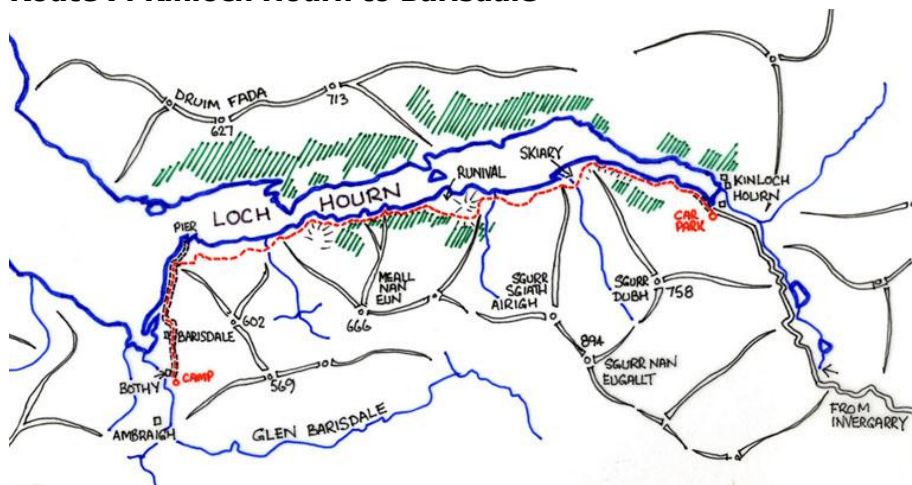
The woods at Derry are a good place for a break before you continue south down Glen Luibeg to your car. The total effort from campsite to car is about 13.5 flat kilometres.

The schedule for your day is likely to be: up at 07.00: off site to climb Devil's Point at around 08.00: back to the camp site at 11.15: Backpack off the campsite at 12.45: Back at the car 16.45: Mr Lee's at Blairgowrie 18.15.

The total effort of the weekend is about 40 flat kilometres including Devil's Point, or 30 flat kilometres without it.

In Glen Dee, looking north towards Devils' Point on a wet day

Route 7: Kinloch Hourn to Barisdale



This remotely located route in Knoydart might seem like a long way to go for a relatively inexperienced group, - but not if your BB Company is located in Fort William, Inverness or other places in the North. However even for those from further afield it offers a quality option for those weekends when the weather forecast for the east and south of Scotland is bad. Indeed the route was used in just this way by the writer's Company as a last minute alternative, with the result that we obtained a weekend of great weather during a period when

mainstream Scotland resembled - a main stream! In combination with an ascent of Ladhar Bheinn (Route 30) this becomes the most arduous weekend in this book, but the section described here is a modest effort in great scenery and suitable for an inexperienced party. Being low down it would also be good at the ends of the season.

You have to drive to Kinloch Hourn, which is at the very end of a long minor road that leaves the A87 Skye Road west of Invergarry, and then bumps and wriggles its way for 35 kilometres to Kinloch Hourn. The road is an adventure in itself. Don't try to go fast (*especially towards the west end*) for it is very twisting and only about 2.5 metres wide. If you hurry you will either roll the vehicle off the road, or bottom out on the bumps and tear the exhaust off. The last 3 or 4 kilometres plunging down the valley to the end of the loch are not for nervous drivers, and must be superb going downhill on a bike! From Central Scotland the drive to Kinloch Hourn is at least 4 hours. However there is no problem if you don't get to Kinloch Hourn until maybe 2 p.m. on the Saturday, because the effort required is only about 14.7 flat kilometres to Barisdale, which is a camping location and bothy at the end of Glen Barisdale further west along Loch Hourn.

Parking at Kinloch Hourn costs £2, payable at the little tearoom in the farm courtyard. The beautifully engineered footpath follows the south shore of the sea loch westwards, initially by hugging the steep shoreline on artificial ledges, but then rising a fair bit over big outcrops between Skiary and Runival.

The track hugging the shore not far west of Kinloch Hourn.

Beyond Runival the track heads for the shore low down and squeezes along the very steep shoreline on a thickly vegetated and heavily engineered track poised above the 'fjord', with deep water seen below you hard against the shore. At one point a little wooden bridge carries the path over an otherwise uncrossable gap. The path runs through rich natural vegetation, often with fish



and occasionally otters to be seen in the loch below you, and there is a lot of high bracken and heather- sometimes chest high and tight against the track edges. The downside of this is that there is a high risk of picking up ticks from constant brushing against this vegetation. Wearing long trousers would certainly be sensible but some of the more extreme advice to be found on the internet is over-the-top and far from foolproof. You will do better to dress normally, but sensibly, and conduct a tick inspection in the evening backed by a comprehensive scrutiny on return home. Last time we did this route the party went home with a total of four ticks still attached! Be aware that ticks can be very small – sometimes not much more than 1mm in diameter. See the appendix to this book for better tick management information.

The ascent beyond Skiary

Once you are past the steep shore section below Meall Nan Eun the track rises again before dropping to the shore of Barisdale Bay. Join a good rubble vehicle road and turn south along the valley for about 1.5km until you pass the modern keeper's house and arrive at the camping ground adjacent to the bothy.

A few estate vehicles operate on the road to and from the pier on Loch Hourn, from which the local people use motor boats as easy access to Kinloch Hourn and across the loch to Arnisdale.

Looking down westwards to Runival



Low beyond Runival



There is a good supply of campable ground opposite the bothy, inside which is an honesty box asking you to pay £1 per night for the use of the camp site, or £3 per night for a stay in the bothy, - which has electricity, toilets and a tap water supply. For an inexperienced party the opportunity to cook on the tables in the bothy kitchen presents a safer opportunity to work with camping stoves.

Don't camp close to the dry stream channel that crosses the camp ground, - for it flash fills at a remarkable speed during heavy rain! The noisy electricity generator in the end of the bothy building tends to get turned off in the late evening, - and so is not likely to disturb you, - but it will waken you when it gets

turned on at 07.00 in the morning! If a persistent background noise bothers you, camp a little further away, beyond the dry stream gully.

The steepening sea shore looking west under Meall Nan Eun



Your return home on the Sunday is a reversal of the Saturday route, but you might want to do a little exploration of the Barisdale valley before setting off for

home. However plan to be off the camp site en-route to Kinloch Hourn by around noon, for that will then see you leaving the car park around 4pm, - giving a Central Scotland return time after 8pm, - and if you route via Fort William for food, maybe closer to 9pm.

The camp site at Barisdale, looking south to Luinne Bheinn

In summary you end up with a total effort of around 31 or 32 flat kilometres for your weekend including a short local walk at Barisdale, and you have the benefit of toilets and the backup of a bothy available to you at your camp location. The scenery is truly outstanding and the track is full of variety and interest. As long as you observe tick bite safety procedures it's a fine weekend!

Barisdale looking northwest across Loch Hourn to Beinn Sgritheall:
Camp site and Bothy, - right of centre, about 1/3 of the way up the photo.



* The spelling of Barisdale in this chapter is as used by the locals, and not as shown on the Ordnance Survey.

Looking east up Loch Hourn from a point west of the tight shore path below Meall Nan Eun. The challenge that the path faces in finding a route along the shore is obvious.



Section C: For the Basically Competent but not yet Mature

After two weekend outings your group should be starting to develop practical competence, and have a decent grasp of what is expected of them. You also should by this stage have a better understanding of their individual strengths and weaknesses.

So Section C comprises routes that are either just a little short of mature effort, or which include terrain that needs you to have a little confidence in the individual performance of the boys taking part.

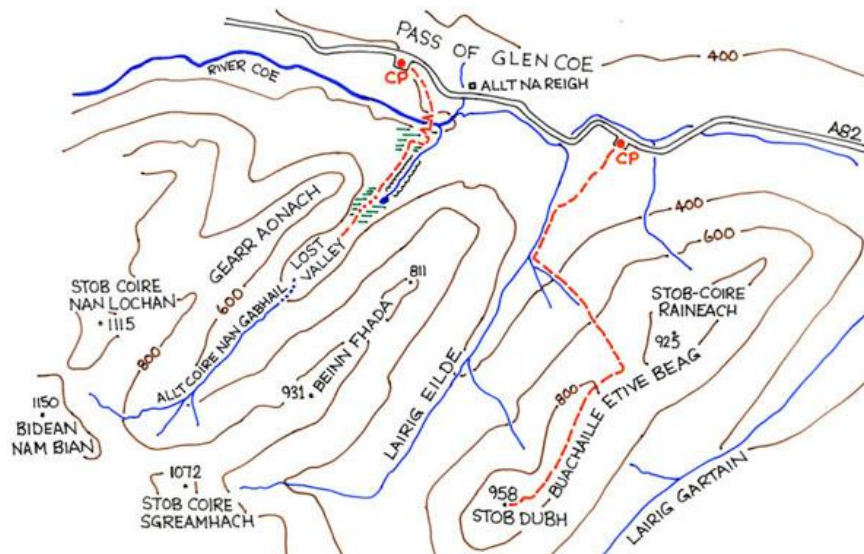
It is assumed that you have used the knowledge gained in the first few expeditions to remove anyone from your group who is a risk because of behaviour, attitude or ineptitude, - for the routes from this stage on may not deal kindly with boys who don't at least achieve a basic pass mark in these respects.

With regard to who should do these routes, - your knowledge of them should now be sufficient to let you judge the capabilities of them as individuals.

In the Lairig Leacach below Stob Ban, - one of the Grey Corries mountains (Route 10)



Route 8: Lost Valley and Buachaille Etive Beag



Continuing the theme of winning hearts and minds early in boys' expedition careers, this trip breaks all the rules about giving them backpacking experience, - in that it doesn't give them any! But what it does do is to take them to situations in 'real' mountains that will grab their imagination. This trip would be included in Section B, except that it contains terrain hazards that require you to have "pruned" your group for sense and stability before tackling it.

Start by driving to Kingshouse Hotel at the east end of Glen Coe, parking your vehicle near the hotel and backpacking 1.1 km eastwards down the Black Corries track to a very decent camp site at NN 2679 5505.

You will need a forecast of decent West Coast weather before you do this one, which makes it a good alternative for a last minute change of destination if more easterly routes are 'clagged in'. Getting to the camping location takes about 2hrs 15 mins from Perth, and probably about the same from Stirling. However you don't need to be all that early in arriving on a Saturday, and it will be ok to have set up your campsite by lunchtime. Your Saturday afternoon outing is to Coire Gabhail, on the south side of Glen Coe. Drive to the car park at NN171568. Make sure your boys are aware of the risk of being 'taken-out' by trunk road traffic that gets very close to the edge of this often-crowded car park. (*At least one visitor has been killed in this way.*) Nobody calls Coire Gabhail by its proper name: This is the legendary "Lost Valley", and the ascent into it takes you through one of the most extraordinary pieces of landscape in Scotland. I know of no other 'walk', - certainly no other half-day walk that gives boys such a buzz as this. Don't do it in icy or flood conditions.

At the lip of Lost Valley, looking south to Bidean nam Bian

All you need with you is a drink bottle and some snacks, but they need to be in day-rucksacks, because the safe passage of this route needs both hands to be available. Descend the path south-eastwards from the car park to the footbridge over the gorge at NN173564. This is accessed by a wooden stepladder (*not too steep*) down the gorge wall. Cross the bridge and follow the path up the rocky ledges on the far side of the gorge. Keep your party together while you negotiate the short section just beyond the bridge, which needs just a little care, especially on the way down.

Then the excellent path winds upwards through regenerating pine and birch woods until it reaches the start of the great canyon leading into Lost Valley. From about NN171561 there is a section of perhaps 200 metres where the path follows a ledge above a cliffed drop into the valley bottom. Brief your boys to stay strictly in single file and place their feet carefully on this section. Beyond the ledge section the path enters into the bottom of the canyon, and winds its way up bouldery debris, which gradually becomes bigger until you find your way apparently blocked by a jumble of boulders, some immense, and many covered in moss. A birch wood grows in and on these great boulders and the reason for the name "Lost Valley



starts to become apparent. The stream will still be visible for a while as you ascend, but it disappears after you reach a sizeable pool. Upstream of that pool the stream goes underground, - lost in the labyrinth of rocks, not to be seen again for some time. The 'easy' route goes left and crosses the pool on stepping-stones at this point, but for most fun don't go that way. Stay in the valley centre and start to explore your way up the great boulders, - searching for a way through caves, over the rocks, and by climbing up little corners. It goes on like this for some distance and involves route finding and the use of the hands. You may be a little concerned about safety issues, but with a little sense they are minor - and this is adventure: Is that not what you're supposed to be giving them?



The great boulder that stands astride the entrance to the main floor of Lost Valley

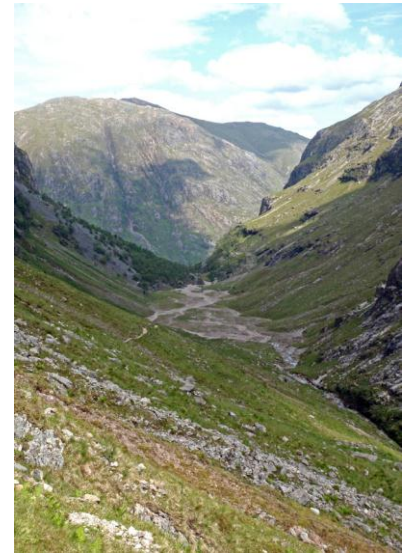
Lost Valley looking north from where the stream sinks underground.



After maybe 20 minutes of these minor acrobatics the ascent will start to level out, but you will still be ducking branches, scrambling over boulders and following dry shingle overflow channels. Then suddenly in the space of about 30 seconds you will emerge into the open, and onto the completely flat shingle and grass floor of a beautiful and narrow hanging valley surrounded by immense rock walls on both sides, - with the great ridges of Bidean nam Bian blocking the far end. This spectacular, secluded, and very quiet place has no equal. They will want their pictures taken here and you will have difficulty stopping them climbing to the top of huge boulders and burrowing into caves, but if this doesn't get them keen on the great outdoors then nothing will !

On the way back down there is an easier route on the east side of the canyon. As you leave the flat floor of the valley, you can either duck and wriggle around corners to the right (facing downhill) until you find the strong, and relatively easy path going down that east side, or you can pick up the same path on a line even more strongly to the right before you leave the flat floor of Lost Valley. That path then crosses the stream back to the west side at the pool where you lost the stream on the way up. Get the boys together again before you get to the ledge section on the way out and reinforce the care warnings. Then do that again before you reach the sharp rocky descent just above the bridge over the gorge, where again they need to be careful and where an adult should go down first and then position him/herself downslope of the outcrop to 'field' anyone who looks uncertain. Overconfidence and carelessness are the only real threats

Looking north into the main floor of Lost Valley from the Stob Coire nan Lochan track



Just above the col on the ridge of Buachaille Etive Beag, looking towards Stob Dubh



On the Sunday it is suggested that you climb Buachaille Etive Beag; the little Buachaille - not the big one. It is of course a Munro, and a fine and distinctive free-standing mountain. There is an uncomplicated route to the summit and it is a superb viewpoint. However you will save a lot of grief later in the day if you pack up your camp in the morning before climbing the mountain. So pack-up, then drive to Glen Coe and leave your cars in a parking area on the south side of the A82 at NN187563.

The muddy track south-westwards over the Lairig an Eilde starts from this point and you should follow it for about 1.25 kilometres to about NN180553. Cross the Allt Lairig Eilde and go straight uphill towards the obvious col southwest of Stob Coire Raineach. The slope is fairly steep, but in no way difficult and you will find a track for much of the way.

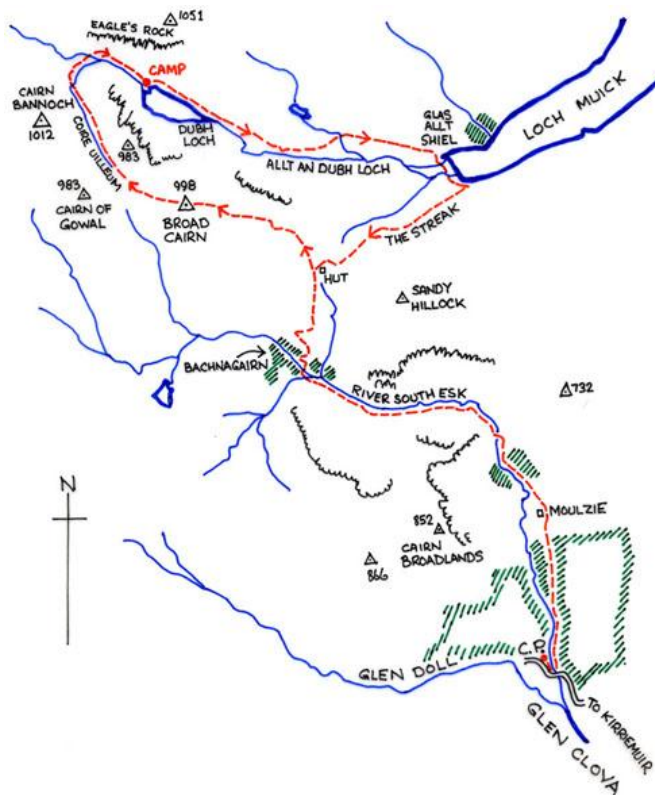
When you reach the col, turn right (south-west) and keep climbing onto the more or less flat ridge of Buachaille Etive Beag and continue to the summit cone of Stob Dubh. The ascent from the car park should maybe take 3 hours. The summit ridge is stony, but not in any way narrow or exposed. The views from the top are superb. The descent should take about 1½ hours. Tell them to take their time descending the steep and slightly loose path from the col back down to the valley. Anyone who starts running on this slope will find it hard to stop. (*We have seen this!*) Your round trip time is likely to be around 4½ hours.

Your schedule for the day might be: Up at 07.30; off site in the car at 09.30, start walking 10.00, summit 13.30, back at the car 15.15. Leave immediately, to reach Perth or Stirling around 18.00, - via the best burger van in the World at the summit of Glen Ogle (*until about 5pm*). Otherwise go to Callander or Crieff for take-aways. If going north, or north-east, then the food will be at Fort William, Fort Augustus, or Newtonmore



The view West towards Bidean nam Bian from the ridge of Stob Dubh

Route 9: Glen Doll – Broad Cairn – Dubh Loch - Loch Muick - Glen Doll



This route involves harder effort again and some of it is carried out in rough high-mountain terrain that is pretty exposed in bad weather but, with decent skills, reasonably navigable in these conditions. Don't send unaccompanied inexperienced parties on this route.

Drive to the public car park at Glen Doll via Kirriemuir and Glen Clova. The journey takes about 1 hr 10mins from Dundee and about 1hr 30 mins from Perth and Aberdeen. The car park costs £2 in a coin meter.

Cross the bridge over the South Esk and turn north up the gravel road to Moulzie and Bachnagairn. The route to Moulzie is easy walking on a forest extraction road. At Moulzie go to the right of the buildings. When you reach the wood at NO 282783, the map is wrong and the track actually skirts around the wood on the riverside and then crosses the South Esk at a substantial footbridge. Beyond the bridge the gravel road starts to get progressively stonier as it rises towards Bachnagairn, which is a fine spot with waterfalls in a larch woodland that has once been commercial forestry but is now more or less natural. A good break point is just at the far side of the Roy Tait bridge, above the main waterfall.

Beyond Bachnagairn follow the track due north to the west of Sandy Hillock. This track has been re-engineered by the National Park in the last few years and rises in zig zags before heading towards the little wooden pony hut

at NO 256 808. Just short of the hut there is a new path line towards Broad Cairn going straight up the slope in a north-north-westerly direction avoiding an old environmentally damaged track just beyond it.

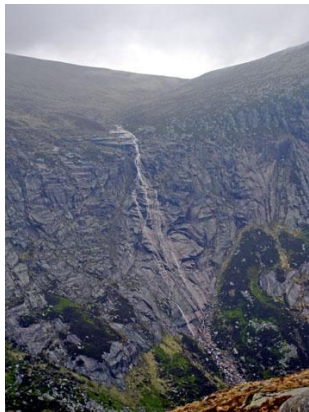


Climbing up towards Sandy Hillocks, above Bachnagairn.

You will rise onto a flat broad skeletal ridge of mainly flat granite stones and grit, and towards the far end of the flat section you face the ascent of the jumble of large rounded granite scree and rock outcrops that form the summit cone of Broad Cairn. You can simply pick your own way up this if you like, but there is a path trending a little north (right) of the centre line of the ridge as you face it going up. The summit of Broad Cairn is a small tor of horizontally jointed granite slabs. You will probably have your lunch break on Broad Cairn, and even if the weather is unkind you can usually get out of the worst of it behind the downwind side of the summit tor.

Descend gently from Broad Cairn to the west-

north-west over the rocks, which quickly ease to better walking ground, and look out for a scratchy path on the hard bare surface. To your right you will see the top of the immense cliffs of Creag an Dubh Loch, which in their centre section are quite vertical and over 300 metres high. You may well want to walk over for a closer look, but take care!



North West from Broad Cairn across the Dubh Loch cliffs



At about NO 233 817 you need to leave the path, turn right (north-north-westwards) and descend Coire Uilleum Mhoir, (*only named on the 1:25,000 map*) west of Creag an Dubh Loch, which leads you down into the Dubh Loch valley itself. This descent is trackless and wet and you need to show some skill in picking a line close to the break of slope between the valley floor and its east side, where the going is generally a little better. At the bottom of this valley you need to turn right (south-east) to descend towards the Dubh Loch itself. However do not attempt to cut the corner as you make that right turn or you will find yourself getting onto steep ground and broken cliffs below the Dubh Loch crags. Stay close to the Allt Coire Uilleum Mhoir stream until you are into the Dubh Loch valley itself before

Eagle's Rock Waterfall seen from Coire Uilleum Mhoir



The campsite at NO 2321 8319.

going across to the edge of the Allt an Dubh Loch river. Facing you to the north will be the spectacular waterfall from Eagle's Rock. The river descends over rock steps and wide bare granite slabs, which are great fun to walk on but too risky for descent by laden and inexperienced boys who have yet to learn hard lessons about the adhesive limitations of various types of mosses and algae, and would suffer deep-seated injuries! There is an intermittent path going down the valley on the north side of the river starting fairly close to the river slabs and gradually easing away from the stream towards the north shore of the Dubh Loch. The best camp site yet found in this area (*photo left*) is at NO 2321 8319, but it will only take two tents easily. Otherwise you can continue down the valley until you reach further campable ground at

around NO 2357 8298, at the back of a grit sand beach on the north-west shore of the Dubh Loch. This site is OK but a little rough, and wet in places, and the water supply is further away (*don't use the loch!*). The setting of both sites is spectacular, if a bit desolate, with the huge cliff of Creag an Dubh Loch dominating the area.

The Dubh Loch cliffs viewed from the lochside campsite

The total effort on the first day is 20.2 flat kilometres, and should take about 6½ hours. The next day's return route to Glen Doll starts by walking south eastwards along the path on the north side of the Dubh Loch. You have to cross a small boulder field to reach it and the first kilometre or so of the path along the loch shore is frequently broken by wide boggy drainage runnels. The soft bits are badly churned up over a considerable width and you will have difficulty in getting past them in a clean state. Progress will be a bit slow. However from about the east end of the loch the path improves fairly dramatically and then descends towards Loch Muick in pretty good order. It is easy walking in fine scenery and you should make decent progress. As you get down near the Royal shooting lodge of Glas Allt Shiel, look out for a short side path dropping down the slope and use it to cut the corner to join the path that runs southwards around the west end of Loch Muick. This is something of a tourist path for day visitors. As you reach the south side of Glen Muick look out for the start of a path turning very sharply back to the right and



A rest on the Streak: Loch Muick below



terracing diagonally up the very steep hillside in a westerly direction towards Sandy Hillock hut. You will see this path as a straight rising slash across the hillside even from a distance. This very distinctive path is known as “The Streak”, and you have to go up it! It may be hard work but it is attractive countryside. At the top of the Streak you emerge fairly abruptly onto flat ground and have about a 900m walk to the day’s high point at Sandy Hillock pony hut where you rejoin the path that you came up the day before. The rest of the route is then a reversal of the first part of the first day to get you back to Glen Doll. The total effort on day 2 is 19.2 flat kilometres and it is likely to take a young party a good 6 hours including rests. Prudently you might allow a bit more.

At a total of 39.4 flat kilometres equivalent over two days, this the most strenuous back- packing route so far listed, but it wouldn’t be hard for a



mature party. On the journey home there is a range of takeaway food shops in Kirriemuir, and a McDonalds at the A94 interchange on the A90 Forfar by-pass.

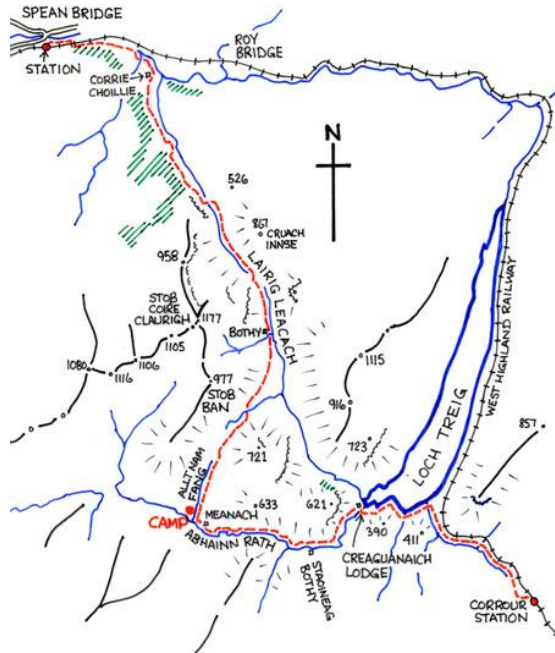
This route works equally well in reverse if the forecast suggests that Sunday will be a better day than Saturday, and you might then be able to ascend the upper Dubh Loch valley by climbing the bare river slabs, - which is good fun.



High on the Streak

Descending to the Roy Tait bridge at Bachnagairn

Route 10: Corroul Station to Meanach, and either Spean Bridge or Fort William



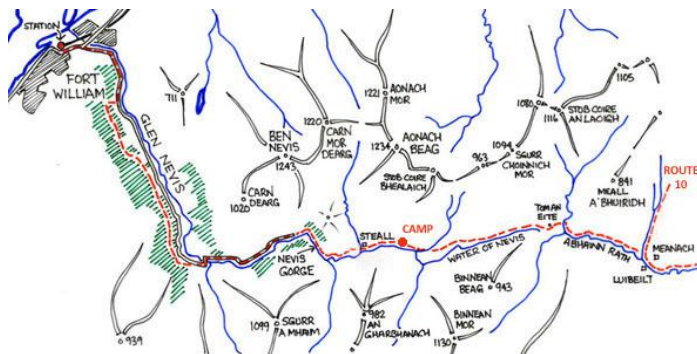
East side of the Allt nam Fang is surprisingly good and strong and you should have little difficulty with it. The only real obstacle tends to be the last burn just before the Lairig Leacach bothy, which is the same issue as is faced here by Route 4. Total effort for the weekend is 36 flat kilometres – a decent effort for an immature party, perhaps 14 year olds.

Meanach Bothy as you will see it when approaching from the East

These are extended variations of route 4 and the start is the same until you reach Creaguanach Lodge. Then you turn left to follow the North bank of the Abhainn Rath westwards along a track that is not too bad but a bit up-and-down and intermittent. Your objective for the day is to camp in the vicinity of NN262687 where there is decent camping ground in among old sheepfolds. The total effort for the day is 14.2 flat km., which on this slightly awkward track will probably take around 4½ hours. Having left Corroul Station at around 11.30 you should be finished at around 16.30. On the last part of the walk you will see the bothy of Meanach in front of you beyond some very wet flat ground, so choose your route carefully. Meanach is a reasonable bothy and an optional night stop for you in bad weather.

The second day to Spean Bridge station is markedly longer than in the case of route 4, amounting to 21.8 flat kilometres in total, with an expected time of about 7 hours. Thus with the last train being 17.51 at Spean Bridge, you would want to give yourself a couple of hours spare as a hedge against delays, so be away from your overnight camp site before 09.00, - which probably means getting out of bed by 07.30. The track north-wards up the





However there is a substantial variation of this route which sees the party finish at Fort William and catch the same train home, - which leaves the Fort at 17.37 on a Sunday.

Pass Meanach on day 1 and regain the river's edge, going west, where you will find a reasonable, if fractured track near the north bank. When the Abhainn Rath swings northwards, follow it a little way on its east bank to cross where the stream splits into a number of channels. Then continue west into the upper reaches of Glen Nevis, where the path starts to deteriorate and is very boggy. The best line seems to

be close to the north bank of the Water of Nevis. A decent camping location will be found at NN 2241 6912 where the debris fan from a gully has created some flatter and drier ground, - albeit a bit stony in places. Total effort for the day to this camp location is about 19.5 flat km, but the path is a bit slow and muddy in places so, having come off the train at 11.30, don't expect to be at your camp site until after 18.00. The next

day starts with about 3 kilometres of truly horrible boggy and broken path, which you will not cover quickly because of the number of diversions to get around the swamp.



Looking West towards Steall from the point at which the track becomes stony

However the track then transfers to a stony line higher up the hillside for the last kilometre or two leading to the ruins of the old Steall building at NN 187688, where camping is also possible on decent quality sites.

The camp location at NN2241 6912.

West of Old Steall the path is much better, and faster, through to the gorge of Glen Nevis. Be very wary if the boys spot the wire-rope bridge (*n.b. not on your route*) at NN 1779 6850. While it looks great fun - and is, - the relationship between the foot cable and the hand cables is such that there is no way back if you lose your footing when the foot wire starts to oscillate (*and it does!*). Near the far bank there is then the considerable risk inherent in an early bath, - in a deep stream.

The wire-rope bridge leading to New Steall across the Nevis, East of the Gorge

Once through Nevis Gorge, follow the narrow public road downhill with a little care, until it crosses the Nevis Water at a double bridge. A few hundred metres beyond that at Achriabhach (NN142684), bear left where an obvious and broad forest road slants diagonally uphill. This attractive and safer forest track, with much better views, parallels the main valley road all the way to the outskirts of Fort William at about 50 metres above the valley floor, and you can cut back down to the valley floor at several locations, the last of which is the final few metres of the West Highland Way. The total effort for the day is about 21 flat km. If you leave the campsite around 10.00 you should be in Fort William by 16.15/30, i.e. about an hour before the train. McDonalds is just beyond the station on the far side of Morrison's car park.



Total effort for the weekend at around 40 flat kilometres doesn't look like all that much, but it may take longer than the standard calculation and be harder on the feet and muscles because it is nearly all distance and has more than its fair share of broken paths and bog. As with route 4, this route would work in reverse, from Fort William to a finish at Corrour Station where, perhaps unexpectedly, there is a nice café inside the private hostel.

On the forest road in Glen Nevis.

Section D: Full Effort Routes of 2 Days / 2 Days plus a Friday evening

From this stage onwards, the routes described require a reasonable level of fairly mature physical robustness and sense from the participants, together with a commensurate level of technical competence, and experience of the environment. Typically the boys involved will at least be physically mature 14 year olds, or older .

That means that they should now be packing their rucksacks skilfully, for waterproofing as well as load balance; erecting and dismantling tents competently and quickly; carrying the right kit; wearing the right socks; bringing the right food; not being a lethal fire hazard when cooking, - and not being found without waterproofs, gloves and a hat in the middle of a storm!

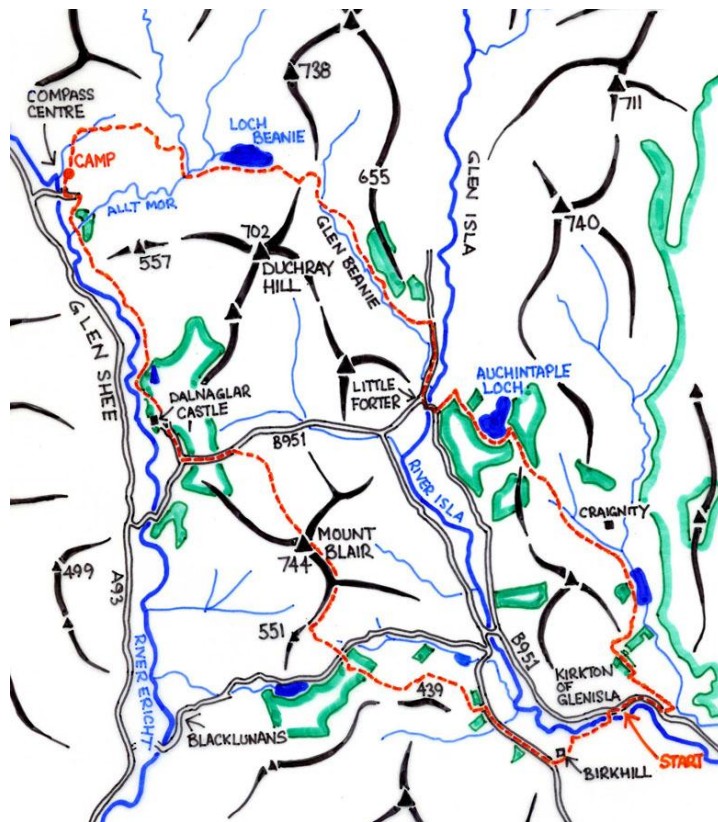
If you think that the above list involves undue cynicism, consider that we recently found an 18-year-old D of E candidate who admitted afterwards that his mum still did all his expedition shopping and packed his rucksack. He was never entirely sure what was in it until he opened it after departure!

Sadly he had passed!

Above Kinlochleven:
En-route to Luibeilt



Route 11: A Circuit of Glen Isla and Glen Shee



This, the first of the “full effort” routes included in this book, - amounting to 43.75 flat kilometres over 2 days, is suitable for use early and late in the expedition season because it is largely carried out in relatively low risk country and at modest altitudes. The highest point is the crossing of Mount Blair at only 744 metres, but it is nevertheless a great viewpoint.

However the route is quite complex at times and requires the navigator to keep his wits about him especially on the first day, going north out of Kirkton of Glen Isla.

The 1:50,000 Ordnance Survey map isn't really very good for this route and you are advised to use 1:25,000 O.S. Explorer maps 381, 387 and 388. Happily these maps are also of value for a large number of other quality routes, so they will be a good investment.

The basic nature of the route is that it starts at Kirkton of Glen Isla where you leave your vehicle, and follows the ridge line between Glen Isla and Glen Shee over the top of Mount Blair, to gain the Cateran Trail and follow it up Glen Shee to the Compass Christian Outdoor Centre, where you can camp in better-than-average comfort for the night, -with the caveat that you have to get permission from the Centre in advance. They are generally very



welcoming to BB Expeditions, but you can't take them for granted! On the second day the route goes east past Loch Beanie and over a low pass, to then descend Glen Beanie back into Glen Isla. At Little Forter in Glen Isla it regains the Cateran Trail and follows that over a ridge into an unnamed valley east of Glen Isla and then south to Kirkton of Glen Isla and your parked vehicle. While not at a high level, nor in remote wilderness, this route is a robust effort, with a fair bit of awkward ground to be covered, and the first day was found to be more tiring than had been expected.

The path down to the bridge at Kirkton of Glen Isla

The route description is as follows: Drive to the small village of Kirkton of Glen Isla via the B954 and B951 from Dundee, or the A94 from Perth to Meigle and then the B954 from just short of Meigle. It's about 30 minutes drive from Meigle. When you reach Kirkton of Glen Isla continue to the far end of the village where you will find a substantial free public car park, usually empty, - at the village hall and play park. There is also a public toilet.

The bridge over the River Isla

Start the expedition by walking north up the public road for about 140 metres to find a signposted narrow descending path on the left, (*shown above left*) which then crosses the river at a bridge (*shown on the right*). With a slight dog-leg to the left just over the bridge, continue straight away from the river for 85 metres and then turn sharp right to walk west, parallel to the river, for another 85 metres or thereby. Then you will see a signpost and arrow pointing left to a path going straight up the hill. **Ignore it!** Instead bear a little right at this post – closer to the river, and find a fairly broad track continuing WSW through scrub woodland along the edge of an embankment parallel to the river, for a further 550 metres or so, until it reaches an



unlocked wooden 5 bar gate at NO 207600, leading into an area which has recently been woodland, but has been clear-felled. On the map this may still be shown as woodland. Go through the gate and turn left, uphill, and make your way up the near edge of the felled area as best you can until you are level with the house named Birkhill on the map. Then bear diagonally right over the deep stream gully. You will find you can walk around the top end of the fence on the west side of the felled area to get straight onto the Birkhill access road rising up to join the public road at NO 204597, at the gate (*shown on the left*), which is also not locked.

Looking back down the Birkhill access track. The house is behind the trees.



The point where you leave the minor road

Once on the quiet public road follow it NNE for just under 1 kilometre, until you reach a track beside a timber building (*photo on the left*) at NO 1941 6048, going left (*West*) between two patches of woodland. Turn up this track for 120 metres until you reach a wall along the top edge of a field on your right. Turn right to walk NW along the top of the field. You can in fact walk along easy ground inside the field before cutting through holes in the wall onto the very rough ground outside it. At NO 1908 6080 you will cross a stream entering the woodland, which comes down the hillside diagonally via a straight, and obviously artificial, ditch that has been cut to create a water supply source. There is a rough track on the right side of the ditch that goes

diagonally uphill. Follow that ditch-path uphill on a heading just north of West for a little over 500 metres until you see another ditch, branching left and more directly uphill, on a heading a little south of west. Follow that. Then from the vicinity of NO 181608, follow a third (linked) ditch, on the best ground you can find, towards a gap in a stone wall at NO 1790 6087. Once through the wall continue forward to a new metal gate into woodland at NO 178610, and follow that track downhill to the public road between Brewlands and Blacklunans. The road junction is a good place to take a break.

Looking from the Brewlands-Blacklunans road towards Glack of Barnettts



The photo on the left is what faces you looking north from your rest point. You have to cross the wall and barbed wire fence on the far side of the road- which isn't too difficult if you take your rucksacks off and hand them over first. Then you need to climb towards the notch in the ridge on the horizon, which is called "Glack of the Barnettts" on the Explorer map, and is on the south ridge of Mount Blair. The ascent is mainly up reasonably dry grass gullies and not difficult if you choose your route wisely. There is no track. High on the climb, and a little left of the direct route to the low point on the ridge, you will get through a long stone wall via the gateway shown in the photo on the right. However the very last few metres of the climb onto the ridge contains a nasty little



section, perhaps only 10 metres high, which is very steep at the back of the gully leading to the lowest point on the

ridge. Anyone slipping on this short section could get hurt, so the wise course here would be to climb a more regular slope to one side of the Glack of Barnetts.



Once on the ridge, stay on the east side of the wall/fence that runs up the ridge line and you will find a narrow, but well established, path as a thin line through the heather around 3-5 metres from the wall. Follow this path to the summit of the hill which is very clearly marked by big aerals. At a left-turn point on the ridge you will need to cross a joining fence at a stile and continue right of the wall until you reach the summit.

On the south ridge of Mount Blair

Beyond the summit a broad track runs straight down the north side of the hill, and becomes a little vague lower down before reaching the B951 road at a gate. Walk west down the B951 for about 900 metres to its junction with the very minor road leading to Dalnaglar Castle, and turn up the castle road.

A little short of the castle, signs indicate the Cateran Trail as branching to

the right and you follow the Cateran Trail route markers northwards up the east side of Glen Shee. It is easy walking, past Dunmay and the now semi-derelict Broughdearg farm. On leaving Broughdearg, going north, continue straight-on over a big field on an improbable and vague route – not signposted, which then becomes clearer, and leads to a substantial footbridge over the Allt Mor in the vicinity of NO 1345 6763. The track beyond that takes you around field edges to join the gravel road to Inverreddrie a little below the farm itself.

The camp ground at Compass Outdoor Centre

Turn left down the Inverreddrie road until it meets the Compass Outdoor Centre road and then go up to the Outdoor Centre. You will of course be expected at the Centre *(because you made that arrangement in advance - didn't you!)* and they will almost certainly lead you down steps to a generously sized flat grass camping area to the rear of the main complex. There are rubbish bins near the camp ground and water is obtained from an outside tap on the wall of the sports hall, which is also where the toilets are located. You would be wise to have a collapsible water carrier in your kit, for the distance from the tap to the camp site is maybe 150 metres. The staff may also offer the use of the Sports Hall





showers, and there may be a chance to put wet clothing in a drying room if you have had a really bad day. The Outdoor Centre staff are friendly and helpful and while they don't ask for payment, you should protect the B.B.'s ability to use this site in future by behaving particularly well at this Christian Centre, leaving the site spotless, and making a reasonable donation when you depart. I suggest at least £2 per head, - and more than that if you have used showers and drying facilities as well.

The Allt Mor bridge

The first day of 22 flat kilometres took the inaugural party of 14 year olds about 7½ hours, which was distinctly slow. However route finding was difficult in the first half of the day, and much of the going was quite heavy. Seven hours ought to be more than enough for a capable party,

which will have the benefit of the route guidance given in this book.

The second day starts by leaving the Compass Centre north-eastwards via the gravel road beside your camp site, and out the back gate. Despite a confusion of inaccurate tracks shown on both scales of O.S. map, a rough vehicle track will lead you clearly NNE to a path junction at NO 1424 6914, where you should be sure to turn right. The track then swings SE across the valley, deteriorating as it goes, to cross the Allt Mor at the footbridge shown in the photo (*above left*). Follow a steadily worsening track along the south side of Loch Beanie through a soggy landscape and very wet ground. At the SE corner of Loch Beanie there is a gate, and a fence going up the edge of the valley floor to the pass which is 500m to the SE. Go through the gate and follow faint track marks parallel to the fence running up the valley side until it meets a fence across the top of the pass.

The track on the north side of Glen Beanie, near the head of the valley

Once over the fence across the top of the pass, turn sharp left to follow that fence to the NE side of the valley. On slightly higher ground you will find a path in the vicinity of NO 1690 6835 that leads SSE, and then drops onto the valley floor beside the Glen Beanie Burn. Cross the stream immediately and look for a good, but initially faint, path starting in the vicinity of NO1724 6800, which follows a dry shelf along the east side of the valley, gradually becomes a gravel road, and takes you to the Upper Glen Isla minor public road north of "The Hillocks". Follow the



Glen Isla minor road heading for Bridge of Forter



public road, *(shown on the left)*, down Glen Isla to Bridge of Forter. About 100 metres past that bridge, turn very sharp left uphill on a gravel vehicle road, signposted as the Cateran Trail, and follow this road for about 500 metres to a junction where the dominant road swings very sharp right, but arrows for the Cateran Trail point straight-on via a less well marked road. You can choose to follow the Cateran Trail markers, which will lead you in a high loop over "The Knaps", or you can follow an unofficial route around the south side of Auchintaple Loch which will save you 2.0 flat kilometres.

For the unofficial route, turn sharp right at the junction, and follow the road towards the south side of Auchintaple Loch. You will come across a wooden road gate which appears to be locked – but isn't. You just have to find out how to slide a long timber bar lengthways through sleeves on the back of the gate and it will open easily. Just past the Boat House, drop down towards the water's edge when a high fence and gate block the road ahead and follow a faint line between the edge of the fence and the loch shore for a few hundred metres until the fence ends and a strong track re-appears for you as it comes out of a gate. Follow this track anti-clockwise around the south side of the loch and along the top of the earth dam on the SE side of the loch. At the far end of the dam you will see a high fence up a heather bank ahead of you. Don't head for that, but continue a good 200 metres north, up the east shore of the loch, before turning uphill to the east. You will then find that you can join the Cateran Trail beyond the end of the fence and go through the fence at an approved gate. While the short-cut is not the official footpath, there are no locked gates on it, and no signs telling the public to keep out.

Crossing Auchintaple Loch Dam



Once you have rejoined the Cateran Trail at about NO 1987 6462, continue south following the Cateran Trail markers, bearing left uphill at the first track junction, and then being careful to spot where a new official route turns right, away from the gravel road, and goes downhill just before a gate, at around NO 2034 6385. This new path drops into a marshy valley where it is easy to be fooled into following the valley bottom by false trails left by others who have got it wrong before you. In fact the path crosses the valley bottom diagonally and follows a higher line on the west side to gain a better path at around NO 2080 6304. This steadily strengthening track will take you along the west shore of Loch

Shandra and then fairly sharply to the SE uphill, down, and then up again, before starting its final descent to Kirkton of Glen Isla at NO 214 613. This track is only marked on the very latest 1:50,000 map. The track goes SE down a ridge to East Mill Farm at NO 2216 6044 from which a farm road runs down to the B951, leaving you to finish the route by walking 600 metres back up the public road to the car park.

The second day totals 21.75 flat kilometres and took the inaugural party around 6¾ hours, which was probably a fair time for a 14 year old group.

This route is carried out in attractive scenery, has plenty of variety, and is never very remote. It could be criticised for having short lengths of public road to be walked at 5 points in the weekend but, as road walking goes, these are about the most innocuous roads that you could choose to walk on, - and indeed three out of the five road sections are officially classified as part of the Catevan Trail. So while route finding has its difficulties on day 1 in particular, the overall hazard level is pretty low and civilisation is never far away if support is needed. Mobile phones do work on parts of the route and especially on Mount Blair and in Glen Shee. There is also a landline phone at Compass Christian Outdoor Centre if a supervisor should need to phone to check on a group's arrival. The point you would want to be most clear about when briefing a group to follow this route, would be to make sure they select a safe line at the top of the Glack of Barnetts gully. Having said that, the inaugural party did get up the steepest section without drama, but there is enough risk element at that point to make it worthy of circumvention.



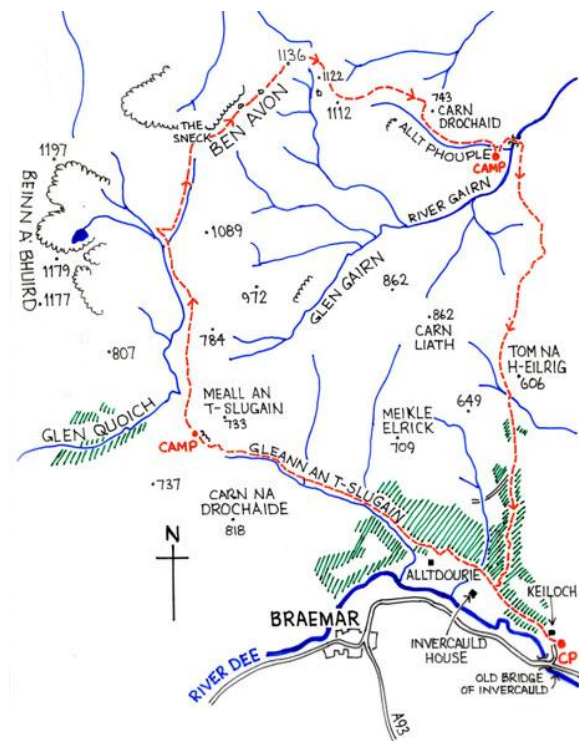
It's fun to stay at the

Consternation was caused on the journey home by the lack of easy access to a convenient fast food outlet. For those going to Dundee or the North East, a diversion via Kirriemuir would be best, while those going West might be best to go follow the A926 from Alyth to Blairgowrie and eat there.

Lastly, the thought that they would be camping at a Christian Outdoor Centre provoked the inaugural group into their version of the YMCA symbol, as you will see on the left.

Contact Compass to ask for a camping permission, they have a good web site, and their phone number is 01250-885209.

Route 12: Invercauld – Slugain Glen – Ben Avon – Glen Gairn – Invercauld



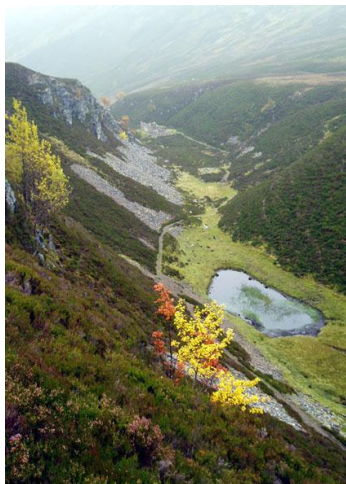
Quite a number of Scottish mountains are sufficiently far from road access that they are difficult to climb as a single day outing, which of course gives them potential as weekend expedition routes. One such mountain is Ben Avon (*pronounced Ben A'an*) north of Braemar.

As a backpacking expedition it needs a long Friday evening plus a weekend to carry out this clockwise route across the summit of Ben Avon. Grab takeaway-food en-route during the Friday evening and arrive early at the visitor car park on the access road to Invercauld Estate, just a few hundred metres up a side road east of the Old Bridge of Invercauld. The car park charge was £2 in 2007 and there is a toilet in the car park. The driving time from Dundee is around 2 hours, and probably about 1½ hours from Aberdeen.

Walk north-westwards on the main estate road as far as Alltdourie, where you need to be careful to branch left and pick up the Glen Slugain gravel road which is offset about 200 metres to the south west of the road that you were on until then. Continue west-north-westwards in good walking conditions, although the track slowly starts to reduce in quality and rise on the north side of the stream as the valley narrows. At about NO 130949 a footpath branches left to follow the floor of the narrow steep-sided valley, while a rough 4x4 track follows a higher line to the north and wriggles its way along the crest of the steep drop. Both tracks are OK, but you might be better to follow the

valley bottom footpath. The valley provides a very sheltered steep sided hollow which has a water supply, and a flat floor at several points. It can take a couple of tents beside a pond in the vicinity of NO 119953, but there may be other better options slightly further east if you rake about a bit.

If you walk to this point on a mid-summer evening you are liable to find yourself setting up camp in the last of the twilight, for the 12.5 flat km from the car park is liable to take 3½ hours. Don't take water from the pond adjacent to the campsite! There is a spring source about 50 metres west of the pond. The site is peaty and needs care if the boys aren't to drag black mud into the tents.



The campsite in the Slugain Glen. The tents go just at the far end of the pond.

Your task on day 2 – usually a Saturday, will be to backpack northwards to the col between Ben a Bhuird and Ben Avon and then cross the summit of Ben Avon to descend into Glen Gairn for your second night's camp.

The track north from your campsite is excellent and allows good progress. When you reach the confluence of the Allt Dearg and the Glas Allt Mor, take advantage of the zig-zag that lets you climb into the Glas Allt Mor gully more easily than taking it head-on. Continue north up the path, which persists further up the Glas Allt Mor gully than is shown in the map. It eventually more or less peters out, but the going remains very reasonable if you continue to head directly for the col at the head of the valley, which is called "The Sneck". Fill your drinks bottles before the stream dries up as there is no water on the summit plateau. At the Sneck there is a good view steeply down into the Slochd Mor. This can be a good point for a break, if you go a fraction down on the north side of the col to get out of the wind.

After your break at the Sneck, turn right and climb the loose granite-gravel track eastwards and then north-eastwards onto the Ben Avon summit plateau. On the section just after the col you need to place your feet carefully if you are not to lose energy due to your boots slipping on loose grit. On the plateau it becomes a matter of simply proceeding along the line of monolithic Granite Tors, known as "Barns" in the Cairngorms. Some of them are indeed the size of barns although that surely isn't the derivation of the term. The boys will want to climb to the top of the barns and you'll be no fun at all if you try to stop them!

Looking down on the Sneck from the track to the summit of Ben Avon



At a shallow dip at NJ 141025 you need to turn sharply to the south-south-east along the spur ridge that contains the Clach Choutsach barn. However your purpose is not to visit that monolith, - although you can if you want, but to find a good line off the mountain to the south. The best route is pretty well to follow the Aberdeenshire boundary as marked on the map, to the col just short of Carn Drochaid. The 1:25,000 map suggests that you might find a path going diagonally down the slope from about NJ 157017 to ease the brief steep slope down into the col, but we didn't find that path and it isn't critical. Overall this is probably the easiest descent angle on this face of the mountain. At the col before Carn Drochaid, ignore any path staying level on the slope and turn right (south) to follow the easiest line you can find down beside the Allt Phouple to Glen Gairn. As you exit from the Phouple valley into Glen Gairn you will immediately find a large area of excellent camping ground at around NJ 1775 0078. The total effort for the day to get to this camp site is 21 flat kilometres which including breaks and barn-climbing sessions, should take you around 6½ hours.



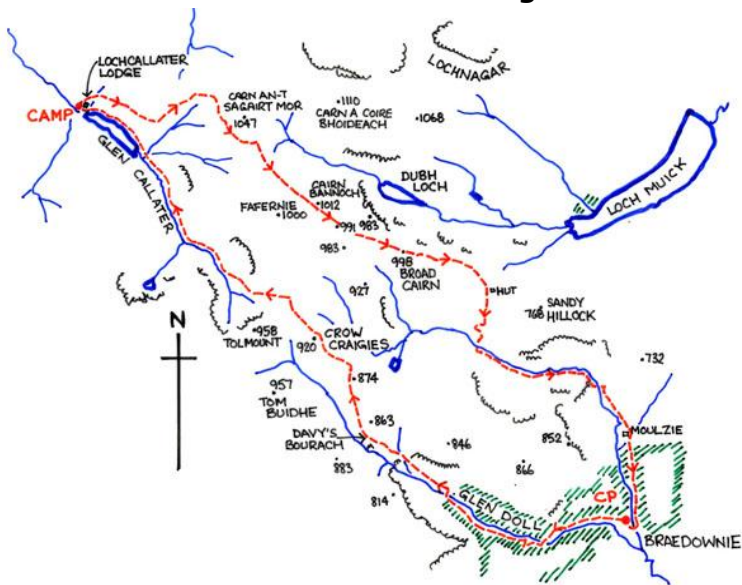
The bridge over the Gairn at the start of day 3.

On day 3 you only have to go 200 metres north-east to find a sound footbridge over to the south side of the River Gairn. Once over the bridge go another 200 metres south-east to pick up a gravel road going due south up and over the hills to Invercauld. Drinking water is not plentiful on this route towards its southern end, so fill your bottles early and never walk past an opportunity. The remainder of the day is simply a matter of following a very decent track, with the only attempt to deceive you being at NO 179946 where a new road, - unmarked on the 1:50,000 map, goes downhill and south-westwards and looks like the main route. Your route is the apparently less well-used line keeping its height and going due south.

Further on, as you near the main estate road, watch your map carefully as the best way to go isn't always in the most obvious direction. However downhill is always the right choice. Once on the main estate road just follow it back to the car park. The total effort on this last day is only 14.5 flat kilometres which should take you about 4½ hours.

So if you leave the campsite at 11.00 you should be back at the vehicle by 15.30 and at Blairgowrie by 17.00 or Aberdeen by about 16.30. Total effort for the full weekend is 48 flat kilometres, which makes it a very respectable overall effort, but apparently easier because of the distance covered on the Friday evening.

Route 13: Jocks' Road–Callater Lodge–Carn an t-Sagairt Mor–Broad Cairn–Glen Doll



path via a new bridge at the end of the forest. Climb out of Glen Doll on the Jock's Road path until you pass the rough shelter at NO 232778 known as Davy's Bourach. Not far past this shelter the path starts to rise to the right, messily, up the side of Cairn Lunkard. Don't stay down in the upper valley of the White Water beyond this point. The rather horrible muddy track at this point climbs north-north-westwards over the shoulder of an unnamed hill spot-heighted 874, but by the crest of the shoulder is in much better and drier condition.

Looking back down Glen Doll from a little east of Davy's Bourach

This route again starts and finishes at Glen Doll visitor car park at the head of Glen Clova, about 1hr 10 mins north of Dundee. It is a high ground / full effort route with extensive crossings of the exposed plateau, much of which lies at over 900 metres. Navigation in cloud is demanding if you are not to get lost.

From the car park at Glen Doll, follow the forest road towards Glen Doll and take the rightward branch at NO 269759. There is a worthwhile option to continue past this junction for a short distance on the Corrie Fee track and then branch right beyond the White Water to follow a new and much more open track on the south side of the White Water to regain the original Glen Doll



Then the path drops a little in height to circumvent a boggy area centred at NO 227793, and at about NO 229793 turns steadily leftwards from north to north-west. The path is not all that well marked in this area and may be invisible if there is late Spring snow underfoot. It is vital that you make this turn at the correct time and place, - and if the cloud is down you should be exercising good dead reckoning navigation to find it. A GPS would be handy. You wouldn't believe how many previous parties have failed to make this turn and blundered down into the trackless bogs above Loch Esk, where they end up hopelessly confused, and convinced they are in Glen Callater. (*- too often followed by the wail of sirens and the thud of rotor blades!*)

Once it has turned to the northwest, the path climbs about 70 metres on a line just west of the steepish north east escarpment of Crow Craigies, and passes to the east of that summit. There is a reasonably well-marked track as far as square with the summit of Crow Craigies, but beyond the summit the track grows ever fainter until it more or less disappears by about NO 218804. Not far beyond this you have to make a sharp left turn on featureless ground to descend into Glen Callater, and there is no path to follow. Thus in bad visibility you should start dead reckoning navigation from square with the summit of Crow Craigies, using a compass bearing and pacing to predict the turning point. (*If in doubt, actually go to the summit and use that as a starting point.*)

Just at the top of the steep descent into Glen Callater, looking north-west



If you are both good, - and lucky, you may pick up a widely spaced line of rusty metal posts about 1 metre high that mark the route around the turning point and for a little distance either side of it. However you wouldn't have to be far off line to miss them entirely. If you do end up following the posts in cloud, then you should smell a rat if they suddenly vanish. It might mean that you have overshot the turn and that the 'next' post was actually 50° off to your left. If you do find the turning point then you'll see that someone has built a little cairn there in recent history. However if visibility is poor and you don't find the markers then you should make a decisive turn towards Glen Callater on dead reckoning and proceed on a compass course over the peat hags to the top of the steep drop into that valley.

You may not have much luck finding the indistinct path down into Glen Callater either, although it is more easily found on the descent because you are looking down on it and so it isn't hidden so much by the heather, etc.



Once down into the valley head for around NO 2038 8130. From about that vicinity onwards, - and not very far from the main valley stream, you should find a narrow footpath that has been much improved on an unobtrusive basis and is in excellent condition. However you might have to hunt a bit to find it. The rest of the route down the valley is routine, and you should follow the north-east shore of Loch Callater to Loch Callater Lodge, where you will be camping for the night. For details of camping at Callater Lodge see Route 1, on pages 12 and 13. The total day is 21.6 flat kilometres, which should take 6½-7 hours.

In Glen Callater 1.5 km short of the lodge, which is just visible beyond the loch

The second day involves returning to Glen Doll by a different high route, a little to the east of the first day. Go 75m north-west along the track from the bothy to the vehicle gate through the fence, and immediately beyond that gate turn sharp right and go straight up the hillside north-eastwards on a strong path. At the 560 metres level the path turns sharp right again and crosses a stream. That stream is the last drinkable water you will find on this route for some considerable time, so check that drinking bottles are full. The path then rises gradually as it terraces south-eastwards along the hillside, and works around to the north east onto a shallow pass below Carn an t-Sagairt Mor. Then it turns south-east and goes fairly straight up the mountain as a stony track following the remains of an old wall. At about NO 203846 the main path turns sharply to the right (SSE), goes through an ancient gate, and terraces around the mountain on its way to Lochnagar. That is the way you should go. This path proceeds more or less horizontally anti-clockwise around Carn an t-Sagairt Mor at about the 960 metres level. About 1¼ kilometres past the gate, stop on the south-south-east side of the mountain at about NO 211838.

On the second day path at around NO 195846

At this point you can choose to be a Munro-bagger and leave your rucksacks while you make the short ascent to the summit of Carn an T Sagairt Mor. The return trip will maybe take you 30-40 mins. Once back at



your rucksacks, you need to leave the path and go directly south-south-eastwards across the high ground towards Cairn Bannoch. While it is not marked on the map, there is a track leading in that direction on hard level bare ground that is good for walking, - but entirely devoid of shelter. With a little care not to be led astray by false trails, head for a line just on the west side of the little summit cone of Cairn Bannoch. Visit the summit as you pass it. You will never collect an easier Munro!

In poor visibility, navigation is difficult after you leave the Carn an t-Sagairt Mor path. You are advised to fix your position as accurately as you can below Carn an t-Sagairt Mor and aim at the summit cone of Cairn Bannoch on a precise compass course and dead reckoning pacing. You could then take a short compass/pacing course to the minor top marked 991, about 600 metres to the south-south-east of Cairn Bannoch, and from there take a compass course to Broad Cairn. If the weather is sufficiently bad that it imperils your party's safety, - e.g. cold gale driven rain, then you have the option of continuing about 250 metres further along the path around Carn an t-Sagairt Mor, and dropping south-eastwards into the head of the Dubh Loch valley which you could follow downhill to Loch Muick on a much more sheltered line, and then cross to Bachnagairn via the Streak.(see Route 9). If the river is not in flood you could shorten this alternative by leaving the Dubh Loch path at NO 251822, going briefly south to cross the river, and then going south-east across the flattish ground at around the 620 metres level to climb the mixed terrain hillside towards about NO 255815, and thence down to Bachnagairn. This isn't difficult, but don't try it if the river is high. While sheltered, this alternative would be a long day.

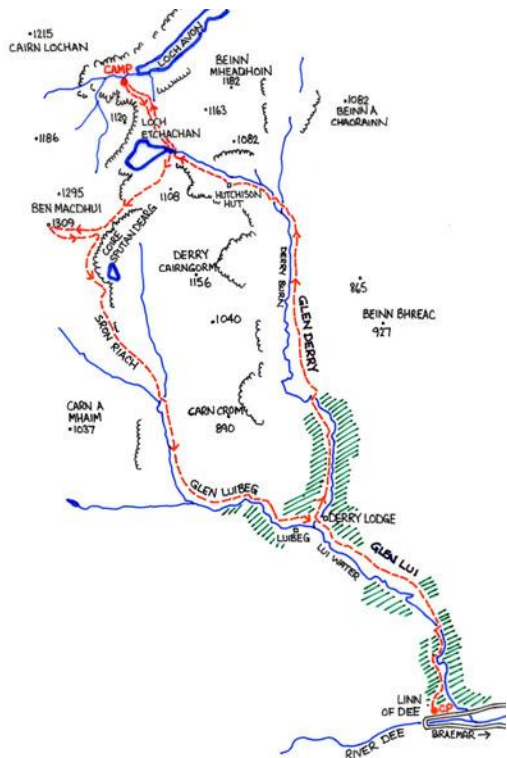
Once you reach Broad Cairn the rest of the route is a reversal of Route 9. The total effort for the day, not including a visit to the summit of Carn an t-Sagairt Mor, is around 23.6 flat kilometres, which should maybe take 7½ hours. The total for the two days is just over 45 flat kilometres, which is a lot for an immature party, but OK for most 15 year olds. The defining characteristic of this route is the amount of time spent at high altitude on very open, exposed ground with few sharp landmarks and no easy alternatives. On the other hand you can collect no less than 3 Munros on the second day with little effort or delay. In cloudy conditions this is a tough test of the ability to navigate well, but equally is an easy way to get impressively lost if you fail that test. Don't put a boy party on this route unaccompanied in cloud, if you aren't very (very) sure of their dead reckoning skills.

(Note: Boys of such focus and skill are every bit as plentiful as hens' teeth.)

Looking south-east from N0230818 to Broad Cairn. This path is often less distinct. Note: The party shown is actually heading north west.



Route14: Linn of Dee – Shelter Stone- Ben Macdhui -Sputan Dearg and Luibeg



This is a real high country weekend, that includes camping in one of the most dramatic locations in Britain, and includes the option of an ascent of Britain's second highest mountain, - Ben MacDhui. It is therefore quite demanding.

The starting point once again is the car park at Linn of Dee, and the first part of the route takes you up Glen Luibeg to Derry Lodge. At Derry Lodge you cross the River Derry at the footbridge and go up Glen Derry by the footpath on the west side of the river which then crosses back to the east side at NO 0398 9579. Continue up Glen Derry on a good path and you will pass through a large tree regeneration paddock just before the path starts to rise up the slope towards the northern end of the valley.

Hutchison Memorial Hut, Coire Etchachan

Then watch out for the branch to the left where the Coire Etchachan track leaves the Lairig an Laoigh track, and take that left branch. Shortly thereafter cross the Derry river via a two plank footbridge, and follow the rising track on its gradual left turn into Coire Etchachan. The track has been rebuilt and is very good condition.



Hutchison Memorial Hut in Coire Etchachan (often just abbreviated to "Hutchy") will come into view and your route goes right past its front door. The hut is solid and in reasonable condition, but it comprises one small room where, at a push, maybe half a dozen people could sleep on its floor.



Stepping stones at Loch Etchachan outlet

Beyond Hutchison Hut the track crosses the burn and then goes straight up the slope towards Loch Etchachan. This stone and granite gravel rising path, while never difficult to walk on, was eroding the landscape in 2006, but work had started on its improvement. Hopefully it is much better now. Near the top of the ascent, the path crosses a rounded granite outcrop before arriving at the outlet from Loch Etchachan. At more than 3000 feet above sea level, Loch Etchachan is the highest loch of substantial size in Britain.

Cross the stepping stones over the loch outlet to reach the north-east shore, - they normally give you a fighting chance of keeping dry feet. Then go north-westwards towards the descent into the Loch Avon (Loch A'an) trench.

The path rises slightly for a short distance, and then becomes confused and difficult to follow exactly as it falls gently over the stony ground leading towards the edge of the Loch Avon descent. This section is also quite wet and a bit of jumping from boulder to boulder is sometimes needed to get over flooded ground. Closer to the start of the steep descent, the path gets its act together again and is fairly easy to follow. The view down to Loch Avon will open up in front of you, but the path then steepens quickly and becomes very loose. This steep loose path is also just a little bit exposed on your right over a short section, as you go downhill near the top of the drop. This would not be a good place

to slip. Keep your group close enough together to avoid the risk of being struck by falling stones dislodged by the back members of the party, but spaced out enough that anyone slipping won't dislodge anyone else. This is when you, as staff, need to let the most capable boys in your party get on with it, while you stay with, - and probably station yourself just below, anyone that you think might be a little nervous on steep ground. Happily the path soon turns diagonally across the steep slope in a more westerly direction, and eases as it descends below the cliffs of Cairn Etchachan towards the formidable Sticil Face in front of you. Towards the bottom of the slope you pass to the right of a large greenish pond and the path winds around some big steep moraines to a substantial grass area on the valley floor at NJ 003 017, which is where you should camp.



Just at the top of the steep descent to Loch Avon

At the Shelter Stone campsite looking west to Hell's Lum Crag



You will find a path snaking through the giant granite boulders to reach that grass area by crossing a narrow stream. The total effort for the day is $22\frac{1}{4}$ flat kilometres, which should take a little under 7 hours. The campground is rather tussocky grass and it tends to slope just a little bit more than is ideal, but you should find a reasonable tent site without much difficulty. One word of warning is to go north to obtain your water from the main stream in the valley, and not from the small stream that you crossed to get onto the campground. The reason is that the nooks and crannies in the vast boulder field have had a tendency to be used for toilet purposes for many years, - and that's where the water comes from to feed the small stream!

You will now be camped in one of the most spectacular mountain locations in Britain, massively overlooked by cliffs, (see page 7) and never quiet because of the roaring of the white water streams that tumble into it. To the south of your campsite lies the great field of jumbled granite blocks, - many of them the size of small houses, which have fallen from Sticil Face or Cairn Etchachan at some point in history. Among these boulders there are a number of caves that have been improved into very rough shelters. The most famous of these is the "Shelter Stone" - a 1700 tonne rectangular boulder with a space underneath it

that can sleep four or five people, - but into which you can squeeze about ten as emergency refuge from a bad storm (*as we have proved*). The Shelter Stone usually has a log-book for you to record your visit. Boulder scrambling is great evening entertainment.

Camped below the Shelter Stone, -which is top left

Sunday is a fairly big day and you need to get up early. I would suggest 07.00 as a rising time, so you want to do this in high summer when there will be good daylight well before that time. Try to get moving no later than 08.30. Re-ascend the path to Loch Etchachan that you came down the previous afternoon, and follow it back to the crossing of the outlet stream at NJ 013003. Then turn uphill to the right and follow a path ascending the hillside to the south west towards the top of the north edge of the Coire Sputan Dearg cliffs. If you started at 08.30 you are likely to get to the col at the top of Coire Sputan Dearg at about 11.15. Your main route to finish the day is then southwards along the top of the cliffs,





At the top of the Sputan Dearg cliffs

and down the ridge of Sron Riach to Luibeg crossing. However, the summit of Ben Macdhui lies only 75m above you and about 800m to the west. To 'bag' that mountain you should pile your rucksacks in a heap at the col, and proceed to the summit unladen. Climbing to the summit and returning to your packs should take about 40mins, so with a rest break you might expect to set off southwards along the top of the cliffs at around 12.30 and reach Luibeg crossing at around 14.15, which should probably be your late lunch stop.

From Luibeg it is a simple walk of 2½ hours via Derry Lodge back to your car. Assuming you leave Luibeg at 14.45 that would get you back to your transport at around 17.15, and to takeaway food in Blairgowrie before 19.00. The total day effort is 26.5 flat km.

There are plenty of options on this second day. If time does not permit you could delete the ascent to the summit of Ben Macdhui. If the weather is bad you could return back down the route by which you arrived on the Saturday. If you need a really bad weather variation to avoid high ground, then you could go eastwards along the

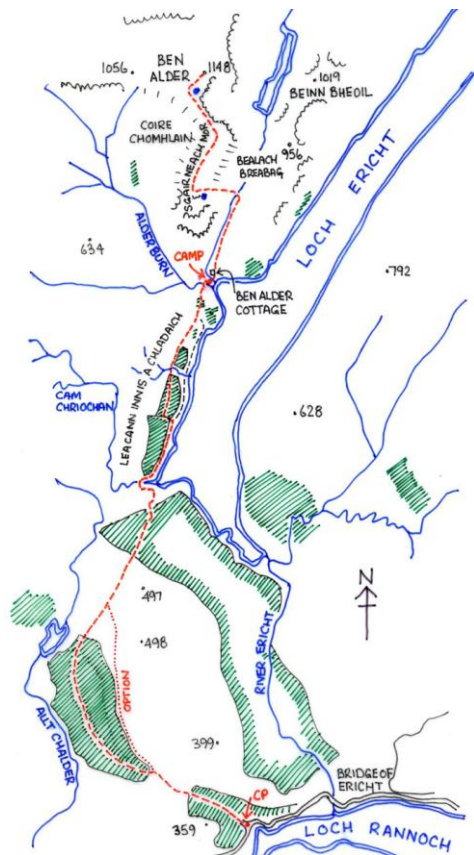
south shore of Loch Avon and then turn south down the Lairig an Laoigh, - but the path along the loch shore is not great.

The total effort for the weekend including Ben Macdhui is just under 49 flat kilometres. Thus it is a robust effort. If you do the whole trip, the boys will come back having climbed Britain's second highest mountain, having camped in one of the country's most spectacular locations, having visited the famous Shelter Stone and having had great boulder scrambling opportunities. They will also know that they have worked hard! You can't ask a lot more than that from any weekend.

On Sron Riach - the south ridge of Macdhui



Route 15: From Rannoch to Climb Ben Alder.



Ben Alder is one of Scotland's great mountain massifs, but also one of the most remote, with a walk-in of at least 15 kilometres to the base of the mountain from any direction. Thus it makes an excellent candidate for a backpacking expedition to the base of the mountain, followed by its ascent. There are three optional starting points namely the west end of Loch Rannoch, Dalwhinnie, and Luiblea bridge in Glen Spean.

The route described here from the west end of Loch Rannoch, has the option of being a hard two-day effort, or a moderate three-day trip. It is described here on a two-day basis.

Drive to the west end of Loch Rannoch. The B8019 road is very twisty and slow after it leaves the A9 just north of Pitlochry. Locals advise following the A9 to Calvine and using the B847 via Trinafour to Kinloch Rannoch, and then the B846 along the north shore of Loch Rannoch. The drive from Perth could well take two hours. Pass a new house at Tigh an Uillt at the far north-west corner of the loch, go round a left-hand bend and park a little way up the very wide bell mouth leading uphill onto the Rannoch Lodge Forest road on your right at NN 506577.

A typical fence ladder crossing on this route.

Walk north-westwards up that forest road, which exits the forest after 1¼km and then approaches the gate into a second forest about another kilometre further on. At the entry to the second forest at NN488588 you have the option of a footpath outside and above the east edge of the forest, or you can continue to follow the slightly longer road through the forest. The footpath outside the





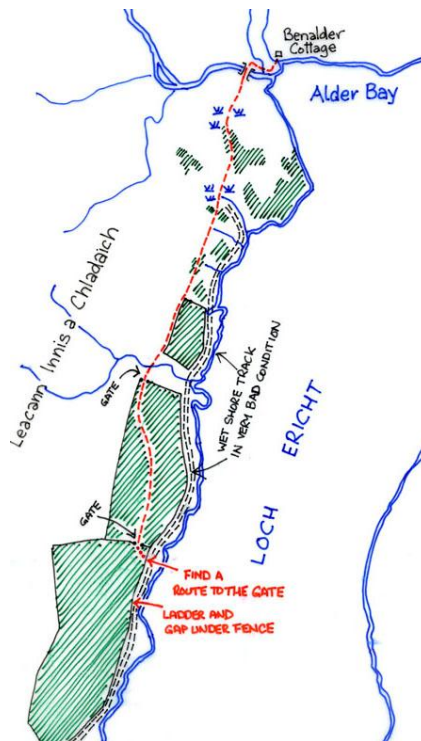
The shore track alongside Loch Ericht. It may look good, - but this is not the way to go! Ben Alder is seen in the background.

forest is very wet, and while the forest road is a bit dull, it is the better choice. On this entire route almost all the gates are locked but you are provided with ladders or pass gates. As you leave the second forest at NN479608, - your way out consists of an obscure lifting hatch in the fence just west of the road gate. The route all the way to Loch Ericht is an excellent gravel road, but you do have to climb a succession of vertical ladders beside each

locked gate, of which there are 4 before you reach Loch Ericht. As you near Loch Ericht, bear left on a gravel road just short of a new dark green estate garage/office building, and follow that road to a light vehicle bridge across the Cam Chriochan at NN485641. It will take you between 2 and 2½ hours to get to this point.

See the map on the right: Try to follow the red dashed route set back from Loch Ericht

Beyond the Cam Chriochan, the vehicle track hugs the shore line and deteriorates progressively on a base of saturated peat. The remainder of the route to Ben Alder Cottage is extraordinarily wet and the shore vehicle track has simply been churned into a morass. So the best walking route is not to follow the shore track, - which is a desperate struggle, and is not accurately marked on the map. There is a better track further inland leaving the shore somewhere around NN 491652. However extensive new fencing, to protect the Caledonian pines against deer, has disrupted access to the inland route, and you may have some difficulty in finding a way through or over the fence lines. It is worth the effort to find a way to a new metal gate through an E-W fence across your route at about NN491654. For some obscure reason this gate is 20-30 metres (distance) uphill of the original track. Find that track and it will give you



reasonable walking conditions northwards for about 1½ km until you exit onto the open moor via another metal gate. From there follow a fairly straight line towards Ben Alder Cottage over wet ground, routing via a succession of little treed knolls on which the ground is always drier. There is a faint path for much of the way. The ground is very wet – but it's a lot better than the shore!!! The bridge over the Alder Burn is an impressive piece of cable-stayed timber engineering, but getting onto the bridge is interesting, as you will see from the picture on the left!



The wire-stayed bridge over the Alder Burn, near Ben Alder Cottage

Your overnight stopping point is either by camping near Ben Alder Cottage where there is excellent camping ground, or by living in the bothy itself, which is in good condition, and provides a toilet spade. Ben Alder Cottage reputedly has a poltergeist that haunts the inhabitants at night, but we didn't see it, - just the mice. Your total effort to get to Ben Alder Cottage is about 17 flat km, which should take about 5 hours.

On the second day leave your camp standing, climb Ben Alder and then return and backpack back out to your vehicle. The return trip to the top of Ben Alder from your camp is about 20.4 flat km and your return to the car is a further 15.6 flat km, so you face a total day of around 36 flat km, with some of that on bad ground. You should be away from the campsite by around 07.30, - on the Bealach Breabag path running north-north-eastwards. Ben Alder is defended by steep rocky slopes above the Bealach Breabag so at around the 750 metres level it is best to turn sharp left and head due west to gain the Sgairneach Mor ridge above a tiny lochan at NN 496695.(next page) Once on that broad stony ridge you can follow it at an easy angle to Sron Bealach Beithe, and then go round Garbh Coire to the summit of Ben Alder. The summit plateau is very stony. The easiest descent is back the way you came up. The long slopes on the south-west side of the mountain are not good as a descent route. Also be wary of a straight descent from Sron Bealach Beithe to the pass of Bealach Breabag, because that very steep



Looking south down onto Ben Alder Cottage from Bealach Breabag



line is broken by small cliffs. Another longer option would be to go due west from Ben Alder summit and descend the west ridge to Bealach Cumhainn from which a 4.5km path leads back down to Ben Alder cottage.

Looking down on the little lochan at NN496695 from the Sgairneach Mor.

A simple ascent and descent via the route described above takes about 5 hours, which would hopefully see your party back at the campsite around 12.30. The likely time to get away from the site to start the backpack home would then be around 13.45. The most recent party took 4 hrs 40mins to get back to the car.

If following the inland route southwards from Ben Alder Cottage, note that you enter the forest via the second metal gate that you come across. If you go through the first one you will quickly

confront a deer fence across your route, and have to re-trace your steps. Check for signs of regular gate use!

The above timing would see you at your vehicle around 18.30. Including a food stop en-route, the party should then reach Perth at around 21.00, - which is a late finish.

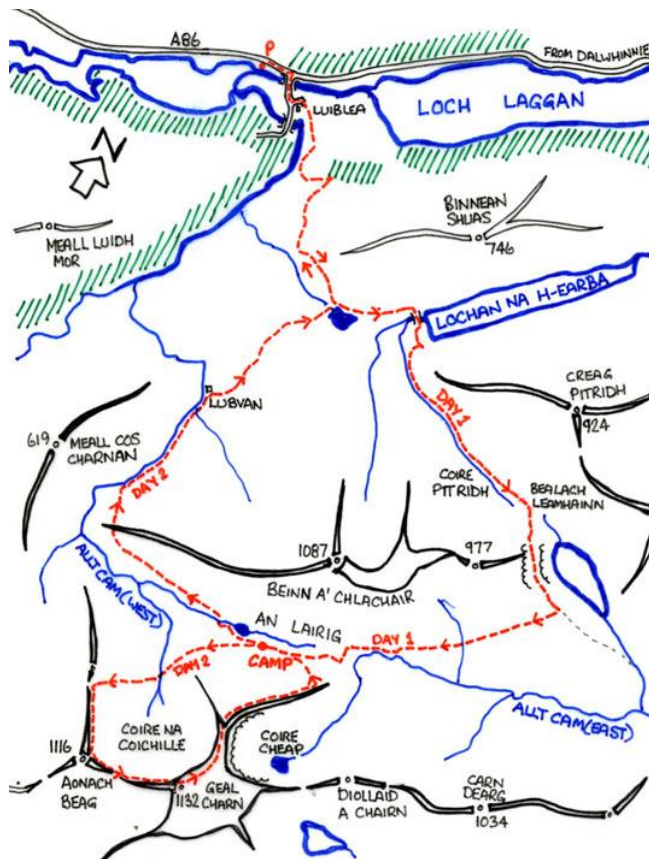
The recommended takeaways are at either Aberfeldy or Dunkeld. The total effort over 2 days is 53 flat kilometres, which is a good effort even for a mature party. The 36 flat km second day is not for the fragile.

This is a much more comfortable trip over 3 days, with the three days being 17 flat km, 20.4 flat km and 15.6 flat km respectively. However as a remote high mountain trip, and with some awkward routing through trackless wet ground, it is not advised for unaccompanied groups

*The summit plateau of Ben Alder early in October 2009.
The summer expedition season officially finished the week before!*



Route 16: Hidden Mountains in the Central Highlands



This route penetrates deep into the great block of big remote Munros between Loch Ericht and Loch Laggan, and puts the party into a position to climb two of them before returning via a different route. It is solid weekend's effort, suitable for a reasonably robust party that can cope with slightly awkward ground. There is a considerable sense of achievement to be had from climbing two secretive, big, and fairly remote hills.

The starting point is Luiblea bridge across the River Spean, branching from the A86 on Lagganside. The parking at the junction is often full, but a second parking area about 250 metres further west on the main road is rarely busy. The driving time to Luiblea via the A9 is a little over 2 hours from Perth.

Head south from Luiblea bridge and then bear left at the first track junction to follow a substantial gravel road to the west end of the double loch, known as Lochan na h-Earba, which is a little over 6 flat km from the car park, taking perhaps 1 hour 50 mins. As you will see from the photo, *(next page)* this is a beautiful spot with its surprising big sandy beach. *(but with no very easy place to put a tent in case that's the way you were thinking)* The 1:50K OS map is wrong about paths at the end of the loch and in fact a gravel road branches about 45° right just after the bridge over the loch outlet, which is the way you should go. Look carefully for the Coire Pitridh track branching right again from that gravel road, for the start isn't all that clear. The track up Coire Pitridh has been



improved and widened and, as hill paths go, is more or less of motorway standard, - and often well used. Make the long haul up that track to the top of Lairig Leamhainn, - noting that the path doesn't cross the low point of the col, but climbs a little way up the south-west shoulder before following a broad ledge between two cliffs. (*photo p.124*) Continue south-east down this path which slowly loses its quality. You need to find a very sharp turn to the right onto another path at NN 4995 7915, to then follow that path diagonally downhill south-westwards into An Lairig. However a word of caution: Your 'new' path is the decaying remnant of what must have been (*from its physical form*) once a busy path many years ago, - but which is now slowly disappearing through disuse.

Lochan na h-Earba

SW to Geal Charn from the path described on the left

So your first task is to find the start of the path, - which isn't all that easy. I suggest that you get exactly to the grid reference for the path junction using a GPS and then start to look around you. The junction is almost unmarked, but if you look south-west from the right spot you can see the distinct channel of the path about 30-40 metres ahead of you. Follow this route and don't be put off by it deteriorating into soft green marsh over a few short sections. Persevere and you will pick it up again. It isn't quick walking, but you should be able to follow the line pretty well until the path more or less disappears at around NN4844



7755. However stick to the same general line until you hit the river, where you should emerge close to a good camping site at NN4830 7740. Sadly this site isn't in the right place for you! You will find both the river and a series of ox-bow ditches recessed deeply into soft canyons in the peat. They're difficult to cross. So go west generally on the north bank until you reach the watershed, where there is a big patch of drier grassland sloping all the way up to the south side of the valley, where there are ruins of shielings a little way up the south slope.

A camp at NN 470607



At the watershed you should cross to the south side of An Lairig, find the path along the south side of the valley (*look around – it is there!*) and follow it westwards. You need to camp near or a fraction east of the Dubh Lochan, on pretty unpromising ground for camping. However there are tolerable, but far from wonderful sites literally on or adjacent to the path in the vicinity of NN470767, with side-stream water about 30 metres away. (See the photo on the previous page)

Climbing to Aonach Beag north col, in Coire na Coichille

Geal Charn

Day 2 consists of two separate phases. Phase 1 is to get up sharp, leave your camp standing

and make an unburdened ascent of the two mountains to your south, namely the shapely Aonach Beag and the great whale of Geal Charn. The effort is 15.5 flat km and the time we took to do it was 4 hrs 25 mins. Then on return to the camp site you will need about 90 minutes to eat, rest and pack, before starting an 11.8 flat km backpack back to Luiblea via the West Allt Cam valley. Thus starting out at 08.45 in the morning ended with us getting to the car park at 18.10 in the evening, - but in all honesty we might well have done it 30 mins. quicker, and we should have started out earlier!



The route followed on day 2, - which proved satisfactory, - started with a diagonal steady ascent west-south-westwards into (*and across*) Coire na Coichille (*where extra water is available*) to gain the north-west ridge of Aonach Beag via a shallow gully in the vicinity of NN455749, - just left of a little cliff of stone 'squares'. There are no problems in following the ridge to Aonach Beag, then eastwards across the col to Geal Charn. Go north from the summit of Geal Charn to find its north east ridge at the edge of Coire Cheap and descend that north-east ridge, which does not present any significant problems. However do not cut downhill to the left from the ridge to shorten your route back to camp until you are well down the ridge, as the

Approaching the col between Aonach Beag and Geal Charn



slope down into the valley is quite steep and boys who are not good at steep ground could get into big trouble if they slip, especially in the wet. Stay on the ridge line if in doubt. There is a good mobile phone signal on the summits. *(Hello Mum, I'm on top of a mountain!)*

The north east ridge of Geal Charn, - descending into An Lairig

Once back at the campsite, pack and depart westwards, initially on an annoying track over eroded peat, which drops or rises about 500mm every 3 or 4 steps. It is slow and awkward going. This fairly faint track curves over to the river just beyond the Dubh Lochan. Cross the river to the north bank within a few hundred metres. Once on the north bank you face about another 1.5 km of bad ground, - and slow going. Traces of faint track are hardly worth searching for, and you will do best simply to follow what looks like the best line to

you, - somewhere around the break of slope between the valley floor and valley side. If you are lucky you will pick up a gradually improving, - but never strong, track which holds its height as the valley floor falls away, and so ends up quite high above the river as it rounds the end of the western ridge of Beinn a Chlachair. Somewhere in the vicinity of NN 444770 this faint track dies and the right move then is to head north-west downhill into the steep gully of the western Allt Cam and find a robust track very near the river bank. *(NB There are two "Allt Cam" streams in An Lairig. One flows east to Loch Pattack. The other flows west then north to Luiblea: Hence the reference to the "West Allt Cam")*

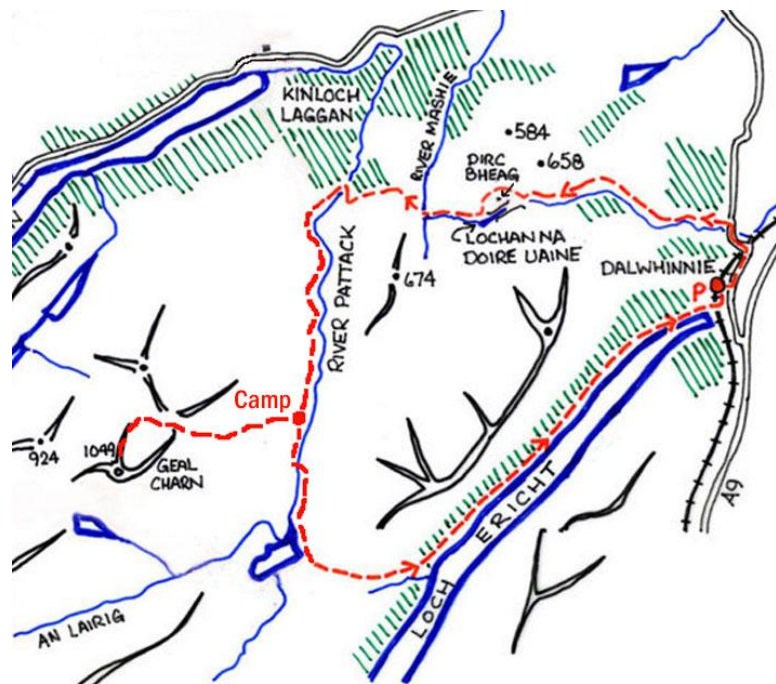
Once established on the strong track in the gully of the West Allt Cam, the return to Luiblea is fairly elementary. For other contexts you may wish to note that there is good and quite extensive camping ground adjacent to the ruins of Lubvan, from which a substantial gravel road can be followed to Luiblea.

The weekend is a substantial 47 flat kilometres with a fair proportion of awkward ground, eased a little by the first part of day 2 being done without a pack.

The gully of the West Allt Cam, heading north towards Lubvan



Route 17: From Dalwhinnie into the Pattack, plus an ascent of (East) Geal Charn



This is a route for a robust party of competent individuals, but with options for younger parties of lesser skill and strength. The 1:50,000 map is short on important detail for this route and not very accurate. 1:25,000 Explorer Sheet 393 is much better. The route starts and finishes at Dalwhinnie railway station and therefore includes the option of access by rail, - without any need for car transport. On day 1 the route makes quite a challenging crossing from Dalwhinnie into the valley of the Pattack and then goes easily south up the Pattack to camp below the more easterly of the two mountains in this vicinity that are both called Geal Charn.

Then on day 2, the tough-guy option is that the party gets-up early, leaves its camp standing, climbs Geal Charn and, on return, packs-up and walks out via Loch Pattack, Ben Alder Lodge, and the north shore of Loch Ericht. The first day is 21.5 flat km, about one-third of which is on trackless, and sometimes challenging ground. Day 2 involves a 3½ hour (return) ascent of Geal Charn and then a 16.5 flat km backpack

out to Dalwhinnie. In total the second day amounts to around 33 flat km, and is likely to involve 8 to 9 hours walking, about half of which will be without a pack. There is, of course, the option of not ascending Geal Charn in which case the second day is easy, - at just 15.5 flat km. Including Geal Charn the overall effort is a tough 54½ flat km in two days. Without Geal Charn it is around 38 flat km, which would be classed as a moderate effort for a mature party, but more tiring and slightly slower than normal on day 1 because of some of the terrain.



On arrival by car, park at the far end of the very minor public road leading past the railway station, - just short of the private level crossing on the Loch Erich track. If travelling by train (*using your Family Railcard to keep the cost sensible*) you are likely to arrive at the adjacent station at 12.22 on a train that connects comfortably from Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Start by walking back down into Dalwhinnie and following the A889 road north, past the Distillery and then up a short steep hill still following the road. Your route then properly commences at the A889 junction with a gravel vehicle track going left up the valley of the Allt an t-Sluic. This is the start of a signposted right of way to Lagganside which is not at all obvious after Allt an t-Sluic Lodge, but that doesn't matter because you won't be using it! Follow the gravel road to Allt an t-Sluic Lodge. Branch left below the lodge, still on a gravel road, - until it ends after another 300 metres. Just beyond the road-end you will see a 1 metre high wooden signpost beside the footpath. At this point turn sharp right and go diagonally up the slope until you find another, rather rougher, gravel vehicle road at a higher level. Follow that gravel road until it fords the stream, but remain on the north bank, as the road fords back again onto the north bank shortly afterwards. However when the road fords to the south side a second time you should cross the stream. Stepping stones are not hard to find, - a short distance upstream. Continue on the gravel road on the south side of the valley until that road ends as it (*but not you*) goes through a forest gate at NN6105 8690. Turn right (*north*) here and head briefly towards the main valley stream.

Descending the west side of the Dirc Bheag

Within 30 metres or so you will come across faint vehicle tracks heading west in wet ground. Follow those tracks for a short distance until they disappear, then cut across to the bank of the main valley stream. Cross to the north bank when convenient and walk westwards close to the stream, on its north bank. This is fairly easy walking on trackless short grass, but with a lot of little side gullies to cross – which won't cause you much difficulty.

You will now be walking west-south-westwards towards an impressive looking set of rugged little peaks separating 3 passes at the head of the valley. The left and centre passes are the spectacular Dirc Mhor and Dirc Bheag, while the rightmost is a much more amenable looking unnamed pass heading northwest, with a wood-pole power line running up it. The most direct route to your destination is the Dirc Bheag (*unnamed on the 1:50,000 map*) in the centre, which contains Lochan na Doire-Uaine on its west side. On the 1:50,000 map it looks like an innocuous and attractive pass, but in reality it's a salutary lesson in how little the map sometimes tells you about what you will actually face!

The Dirc Bheag is a spectacular little rock canyon filled with a jumble of boulders from the cliffs above, - and with these boulders covered by blaeberry, heather and birch trees. Traversing the Dirc Bheag without injury is a challenge, and if you are going to take-it-on then you need to be confident of the sense and stability of all the boys in your party, because you'll be too busy avoiding personal injury to look after them! There is an easy low-risk option, which is to follow the wood pole power line to the north of the Dirc Bheag, and circumvent hill 589 (*588 on the 1:25,000 sheet*) on its north side. However for a capable party, Dirc Bheag is very much more interesting and more adventurous. Last time through we saw an adder in the valley, and the mix of jumbled boulders and vegetation in the Dirc Bheag is ideal snake environment, so you might not want to go putting your hands down any holes!

If following the Dirc Bheag, enter from the east by following the valley floor as much as possible. You will be forced up the steep north side at one or two place, and it will need care, - but get back down onto the canyon floor as soon as you can. As you start the steeper boulder section to the top of the little pass, there are faint indications of previous passage. Warn your party to look out for trap holes between the boulders, - covered by vegetation. Clamber up onto the boulders at the top of the pass, amid the echo of your voices from the cliffs above. You will find yourself looking down on the little Lochan an Doire Uaine which fills the west side of the canyon from edge to edge.

The initial descent to the west (photo p.71) is steeply down big boulders and then onto scree falling into the water on the north shore of the loch. Work your way carefully along this sometimes unstable scree until it eases to become steep heather. If you stay close to the water's edge there are a few track indications. Towards the far end of the loch, stay close to the shore, and the ground flattens to become tussock grass. At NN 5815 8628 the map indicates an exit stream



Mashie Crossing, with the wet track visible on the far side.

from the lochan, but in reality it is a dry gully which then develops into a stream a little further down. Follow a line above this stream gully, down tussocky trackless grass until it reaches the River Mashie, at the bottom of a deep gully. As you will see from the photo on the left, crossing the Mashie with dry feet is not a problem in average water conditions. On the far bank you will see a crude vehicle track heading straight away from the river. Follow that track which is shown on the 1:25,000 map, but not on the 1:50,000 map. This is initially a messy, and sometimes faint track through wet peat, but somewhere around NN 560 866 it suddenly becomes a fully formed – and obviously quite new, vehicle track in excellent condition which

you then follow to the bridge across the River Pattack at NN 5535 8685.

After crossing the Pattack the route follows this river upstream on its north side for the rest of the day, on decent quality grass/ gravel vehicle tracks. This is a very empty landscape. In a June weekend with the hills busy, we didn't meet a single other person for over 30 hours.

At NN 5440 8156 you arrive at a vehicle bridge (*not marked on the map*) across the Allt a Mheallain Odhair side stream, and this is the point from which a path reputedly branches to the west towards Geal Charn. Happily there is an almost infinite supply of excellent dry grass camping ground in this vicinity, with a good depth of soil, (*busy moles!*) and you will almost be spoiled for choice. The day amounts to 21.5 flat km, but is harder work than that would normally imply because the route is trackless for much of the first half of the day, including the crossing of the Dirc Bheag. Our last party took 6 hrs 45 mins including rests and breaks, but it felt more tiring than you would expect.

Camping near the bridge at NN 5440 8156: Good sites. Geal Charn hidden in the low cloud in the background.



Thus, if you arrived on the train at 12.20, you might expect to arrive on your campsite at around 19.15. On a summer's evening this will not be a problem.

The upper bridge over the Pattack at the start of the walk home.

If you intend to pursue the demanding option on day 2 then you need to be out of bed by 07.00 and ready to leave camp for the ascent of Geal Charn (1049m) by 08.00. On the occasion when this route was researched, bad weather on day 2 prevented an ascent of the mountain. An ascent via the more westerly of the two north ridges of Geal Charn looks advisable, as the ridge nearer to your camp site looks steep. Follow the Allt Dubh to the 823m col south west of Meall Bhuidhe, and then turn south south west to follow the ridge crest. You could expect the ascent and walk back to camp to take around 3½ hours, giving a return to camp by 12.30 for lunch, and a likely time to leave site for the backpack to Dalwhinnie of about 14.00. The southbound trains from Dalwhinnie are at 15.53, -



which you could catch if you don't do the ascent of Geal Charn, and at - 19.58 weekdays/ 19.39 Sundays, which you should catch quite comfortably if you do go for the Geal Charn ascent.

The return route is 16.5 flat km of easy-fast track and can be done in an undemanding 4½ hours. From the camp site go south on a decent 4 x 4 track for a short distance to cross a deep part of the Pattack on a very unusual bridge (*above right*) which is still ok but sadly decaying. It is evident from the state of the track south of the bridge that vehicles have stopped crossing the bridge, for the track immediately deteriorates and becomes wet and boggy as it continues south until it gets past decorative stone pillars with little pyramids on top, (*see photo left*) just short of Loch Pattack. There are indications on the 1:25,000 map - of a parallel track slightly higher up the hill but we didn't see it.

From Loch Pattack the track is excellent and turns left in an anticlockwise arc to be heading north east by the time it reaches Ben Alder Lodge. The walk north-eastwards up the side of Loch Ericht from Ben Alder Lodge is along a gravel road that is almost as good



as a tarred road, - for this is an area in which the ultra rich have built fairytale Disney castles and holiday lodges. At one point the vehicle road loops uphill, but you can follow an older and lower road line, now partly overgrown, which saves you the height. It passes through a strange repository of cut granite stones.



The boat ramp

If travelling by train, your food opportunities on the way home will be limited to the trolley on the train. If travelling by car, the best southbound takeaway is the chip shop on the west side of the main street in Dunkeld, - which is well above the usual standard.

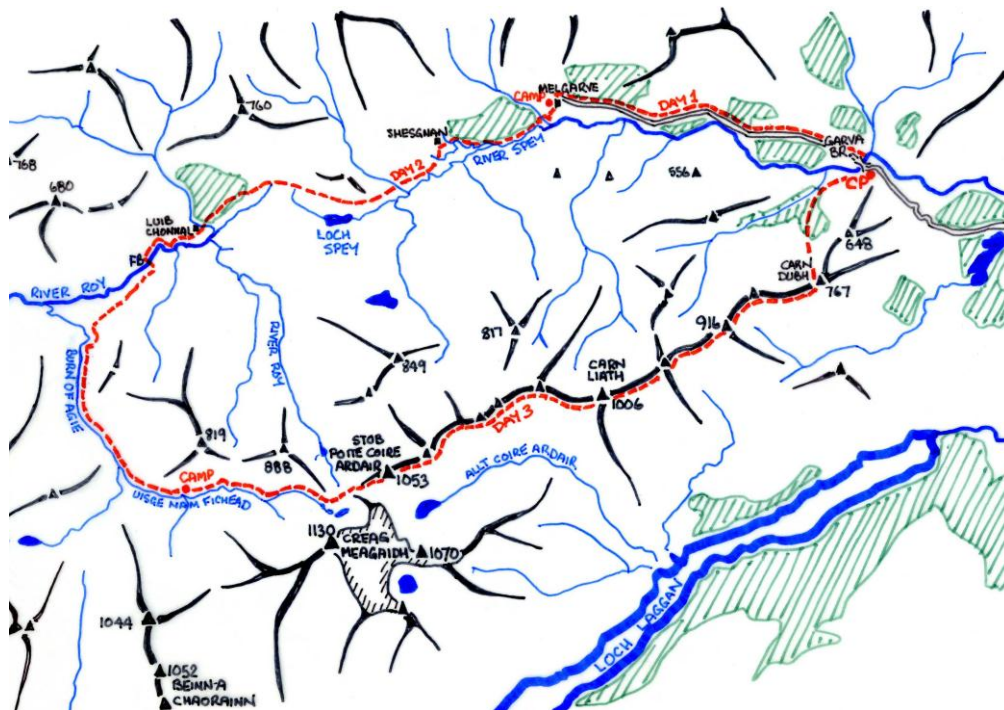
Overall this is a demanding weekend for a robust and capable party if the ascent of Geal Charn is included, in which case both days contain interest and challenge – due to the crossing of the Dirc Bheag on the Saturday and the long day including the hill climb on the Sunday. The campsite is excellent and there is little chance of being bothered by other people in this quiet and empty landscape.

If the weather forecast is not great, - or there are low temperatures/snow at high level in the Spring or Autumn, - then it offers an interesting low level circuit if the ascent of Geal Charn is avoided. It can also work for a young party, - because you can avoid the Dirc Bheag as indicated previously in the text, but without the Dirc Bheag it is may be a little dull.

Looking back down Loch Ericht from near its Dalwhinnie end.



Route 18: Upper Speyside, Glen Roy and the North Laggan Ridge



North of Loch Laggan, a very long ridge at high level separates the upper Spey valley and upper Glen Roy from Loch Laggan. This, the North Laggan Ridge offers more than 10 kilometres of walking in a "straight" line, most of it at over 1000 metres in height. The views to be had are spectacular to both the north and south.

This back-packing route enables a party to transit at low level to the far end of the route via the valleys of the Spey and Roy, and put itself in a position to return to their starting point by following the whole of the North Laggan ridge

on one day. The whole route is not wisely able to be tackled in two days, but it can be done in a weekend by a party that is prepared to make a couple of hours effort on a Friday evening to reduce the Saturday workload to a sensible level – sensible that is in the context of then having to make a substantial effort on the ridge on the day after that.

It is not a route to be attempted unless the forward weather forecast for the traverse of the North Laggan Ridge is good in both terms of visibility and exposure to cold/wet, - for there is no hiding place on the ridge once you are on it and attempts to leave it before the far end would involve long and exhausting wades through trackless vegetation.



With these caveats this is an excellent and challenging route that amounts to 52 flat kilometres over 2 full days, including about 2 hours walking on the evening of arrival.

Drive via the A9, to Dalwhinnie if coming from the south or to Newtonmore if coming from the north and follow the A889 or A86 Trunk roads respectively to the little village of Laggan. From Laggan follow the very minor public road west to Garva Bridge (*gated*), where there is a car parking area, which is rarely busy. In any case this car park is exactly at the point where you will want to arrive when you come off the ridge at the end of the journey.

Reaching Melgarve

If, in a summer's evening, you were to pass Perth by 18.45 on a Friday you could expect to be parked at Garva Bridge before 21.00. Walk westwards along the private road – surfaced for nearly all of the way, to Melgarve. It is about 7.6 flat km. of effort and should take less than 2 hours. At Melgarve there is a good MBA bothy with particularly good living quarters upstairs, and this allows an easy night for a party arriving in the last of the light at perhaps 22.30/22.45. Have a good supply of candles to light the bothy interior and bear in mind that you will be sleeping on a hard wooden floor. You can camp immediately outside the bothy if your preference is for a "softer" bed.

The next day consists of going west along the main valley to the Spey/Roy watershed, and then a short distance down the Roy valley before turning south, uphill, to camp north of Creag Meagaidh exactly on the 600 metres contour. The day's effort measures 21 flat km., which would normally be a fairly modest day, but in this instance is made perhaps 45 minutes longer by around 5 kilometres of trackless walking in deep vegetation towards the end of the day. It would be prudent to allow about 7 hour 15 mins in total.

West of the Shesgnan Burn, heading for Luib-chonnal



Luib-chonnal



From Melgarve a substantial vehicle track goes west alongside the Spey to a cottage called Shesgnan, which is in good condition, but locked and in use by the estate. From Shesgnan the path becomes vague for a short while as it crosses a big wide flat grass area. Head, without difficulty, for the south end of old stone sheepfolds at around 432945 beside the Shesgnan Burn. This is another good camping location and was used as such by the party researching this route. There is an obvious stream crossing point for vehicles about level with the sheepfolds. Beyond that the track is briefly vague but you will pick up a strong, but badly made, vehicle track if you continue forward a short distance. North of the west end of Loch Spey, the rough vehicle track becomes a very decent footpath which is followed slightly downhill towards a large wood marked on the map, - but it is in fact a regeneration plantation which is still

largely open ground. Close the gates properly as you go through! Just beyond the far end of the wood (*beware of the lime green bog!*) you arrive at the quite excellent MBA bothy of Luib - chonnal. Sadly for you it is in the wrong place for an overnight stay, - but it may be a good lunch stop. You will by now have crossed two large side streams coming down from the north (*The Shesgan and the Chonnal*) which might be a dangerous obstruction in time of heavy water – and certainly would be in time of flood! This isn't a route for wet conditions, but in average conditions the crossings are simple.

The bridge at 383929

On leaving Luib-chonnal, heading south west, the path is faint and hard to find, - but just continue forward in that direction until you hit a substantial vehicle track at the river side. (*which is now the River Roy*). Follow that vehicle track westwards. About 1.5 km from Luib-chonnal you will find an obvious footbridge at 383929. You now have a choice that is a bit of a "no brainer."



If you cross the footbridge then the next 5km or so will be deep and trackless until you reach the footbridge across the Burn of Agie at around 372899. To be fair the going isn't *too* bad in the trackless section. On the other hand, in order to stay on a path all day you would have to walk an *extra* 7 kilometres to cross the Roy via the bridge at 342919.



So cross the first bridge! Once over the bridge go up the steep bank onto flatter ground at a slightly higher level and then walk south-westwards, fairly horizontally to meet the canyon of the Burn of Agie at around 372915. When you arrive at the canyon's edge you may find a scratchy track climbing over a steep outcrop at the edge of the canyon. Don't use it, - because the grass footholds in the bank are undercut, - and it's a long way to the canyon bottom! Make the effort to turn uphill earlier and follow a safer line.

On the trackless section towards the Burn of Agie

Then follow the east bank of the Burn of Agie uphill and southwards until (*in theory*) you rejoin the footpath at a metal bridge across a rock canyon at 383929. In fact you will hit a path before you reach the bridge: It would seem that common practice is to boulder hop across the burn below the bridge in most conditions.

Continue south-east up the path, which is vague and broken and gradually fades out. You will pass quite a few attractive camping locations on the stream banks but persist in going up the stream edge until you are forced to cross it by a high eroded triangular bank running straight into the water. However just beyond that distinctive feature, the valley of what is now the Uisge-nam-Fichead, opens out into a flat basin at the 600 metres level where you have a choice of good camp sites at 392884.

Campsite at 392884. The "high eroded triangular bank" is seen right-rear.

The next morning you face a day of 23.3 flat km to get back to your vehicle. The last descent to the car on that day – about 450 metres in height, is trackless and needs time and care, - so allow extra time for that. The party investigating the route took just over 7 hours for this day.





Start by continuing to follow the main stream up the valley centre heading east. The streams are all deeply cut into high-sided gullies, and you will find easier going on the open slope above and away from the gully edges. At 406883 follow the side stream heading slightly north of east, and leave that stream at about the 850 metres level to head straight towards the famous "Window" – i.e. the deep gash between Creag Meagaidh and the North Laggan Ridge. An important warning is to make sure that you have full water bottles before you leave this stream because this will be your last access to water until the end of the day. On a warm day you should be carry at least 1 litre of drinking water when you start climbing out of the Window.

Left: The Window, seen from the West

From the Window, which is at about the 940 metres level, turn left (*north*) and ascend the path to the summit of Stob Poite Coire Ardair – your first Munro of the day. This ascent will be your introduction to the loose surface of angular stones which will be uncomfortable and a little slow underfoot during the first half of the traverse of the North Laggan ridge. Boots with transversely stiffened soles (*i.e. decent walking boots!*) are desirable on this type of ground.

Climbing out of the Window to Stob Poite Coire Ardair



Continue east along the ridge, which is nowhere difficult or narrow. Along almost the entire length of the ridge there are old rusty steel fence posts at fairly wide intervals, and in the eastern half of the ridge these are interspersed with aged timber posts bleached so white by the years that they look as if they have been painted.

There are many minor summits on the ridge, so take care to be clear about which one you have reached: It's easy to get it wrong. However your second Munro, Carn Liath is fairly distinctive. East of Carn Liath the ridge becomes

Reaching Carn Liath summit





broader with a much softer surface that gives easy walking as far east as the unnamed summit of 903m on the map. At that point the ridge starts to descend and below about the 850m level it changes in nature to become much “lumpier” and stonier with gullies and hollows running both along and across the ridge line. However that poses no problems although it might be a bit confusing in bad visibility.

Left: The descent line. Bear left diagonally down the open slope in the right-centre and head for open birch woods seen left-centre of the photo and just visible above the ground nearest the camera

Before you reach Carn Dubh (767m) start to drop diagonally down to the north from the ridge line aiming in the general direction of 512934, where you will see an open birch woodland.

Take your time on this trackless descent and continue down on the best lines you can find until you can turn straight towards Garva Bridge along the bottom edge of the steep slope. Don't try to go right to the far end of the ridge and down Stac Buidhe – it is much too steep.

For essential services on the journey home – there is a decent public toilet beside the main road in Dalwhinnie and Dunkeld Chip Shop is our recommended place to eat.

The Cliffs of Creag Meagaidh facing Coire Ardair. This is the view from the west part of the ridge.



Section E: Three Days or More

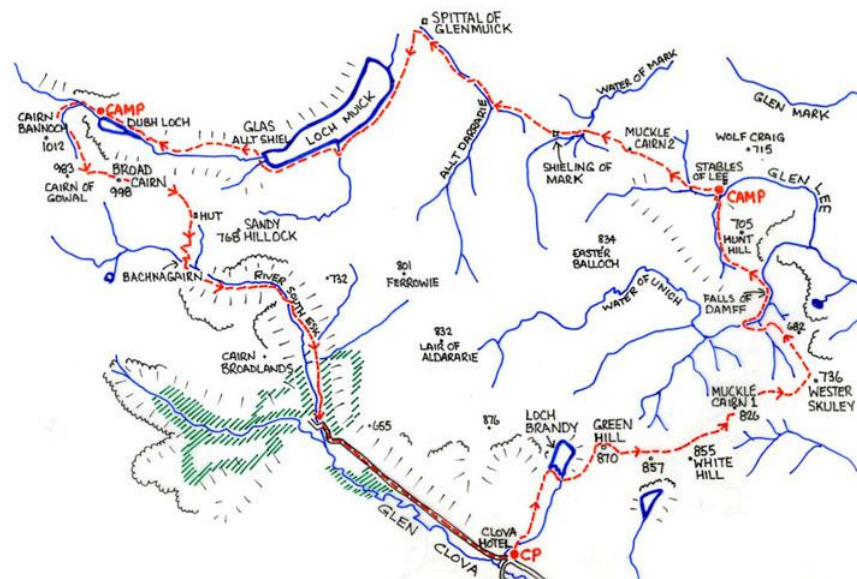
One of the great frustrations of expedition planning is the stranglehold imposed upon route design by only having two days available at the weekend. Two-day trips of any distance often force you to go out from a car parking location on one day, and then walk back to it the next. Finding meaningful routes that don't just go out and back the same way is not easy, - unless you use the train, as often advocated in this book. One other way of eaking out your weekend is to start on a high summer Friday evening when, especially in the North-West it isn't even wholly dark at 11.30p.m.

But even those tactics are limited, and thus any blocks of three or more days that you can put together are greatly prized, for they let you go to more interesting places and do more interesting things when you get there. The school summer holidays are the obvious opportunity to assemble periods of 3 or more days for expeditions, but there are also quite a few Monday public holidays between April and the end of September that you may be able to utilise for longer expeditions. Look out for these and plan early for the boys' families may have other intentions for these holidays.

When the going gets tough.....
Just arriving at the Loch Avon campsite on a bad day



Route 19: Clova Hotel- Upper Glen Esk- Glen Muick- Dubh Loch-Broad Cairn - Glen Doll



This is a circular 3-day route starting and finishing at Clova Hotel, in Glen Clova, Angus. Drive to the hotel car park via Kirriemuir. The journey takes about 1hr from Dundee and maybe 1hr 30 mins from Perth and Aberdeen.

The route starts with a 640m steep climb north-north-eastwards to the top of Green Hill, behind Loch Brandy. The path up to the south-west corner of Loch Brandy has been greatly upgraded and widened, and that is the way you should go. Just as you reach the loch a new linking path will take you to the right, across the 'front' of the loch, to join the path up Broom Shank to the summit of Green Hill, (870 m). From Green Hill you go south-east on the Shank of Catstae path for a short distance before

branching left to follow a path just on the north side of the (flat) crest line, leading east-north-eastwards towards Muckle Cairn. In cloudy conditions this left branch towards Muckle Cairn is easy to miss.

The path you then follow across the plateau is often quite faint, and the landscape features are so rounded that it is very easy to mis-identify tops such as White Hill and Muckle Cairn. If visibility is bad keep a tight grip on your dead reckoning navigation. However, on some sections of the plateau path, single large stones have been placed beside the path at intervals as markers to assist in following the route. Once you get the hang of it they are quite helpful. In 2008, a substantial post and wire stock fence was in the course of construction along the crest line from east of Muckle Cairn towards White Hill, and almost certainly further west now. It is unlikely to be an obstruction, but it will ease navigation.

A Team Huddle near Muckle Cairn on a cold wet misty day.



Follow the path past Muckle Cairn to Wester Skuley, then turn sharp left to head for the col at the head of the Shank of Inchgrundle and then contour west of Cairn Lick at about the 640m level to pick up a vehicle track running down to the Water of Unich. You are advised not to shortcut this section because of very bad walking ground of peat hags and deep heather on the north slope of Muckle Cairn. Then follow an indistinct path on the north side of the Burn of Slidderies to Falls of Damff. Continue about 350 metres past the Falls of Damff, keeping your height, and then start to look for a reasonable line left (north-west) across the col to the head of the Burn of Damff. The valley of the Burn of Damff is trackless and the vegetation is quite deep. You should be able to pick up some reasonable conditions close to the burn itself, - but look out for wet bits. Happily you only have 2¼ km



Falls of Damff

to go down the Burn of Damff until you reach the junction with the Water of Lee at the Stables of Lee.

This is your overnight camping location and you will find reasonable, but not great, ground for tents in the vicinity of NO374814. The total effort for the day calculates at 23.7 flat kilometres, but it will feel more like 26 or 27 as a result of the amount of deep trackless terrain, and you might want to allow more like 8 hours than 7. Next morning, gain the rough vehicle track just west of the Stables of Lee, and follow that west to the Burn of Badrone, and thereafter take the right branch that goes straight up Muckle Cairn No.2. *(This route crosses two different hills, - not far from each other, which are both called Muckle Cairn).*



At about NO 385 789 near Falls of Damff and about to turn left over the col ahead

The top of the hill deteriorates into dry peat hags as you approach the start of the slope dropping beyond it towards the Water of Mark. The descent lines to the valley in front of you are all dominated by peat hags, wet bits, and long vegetation, but it might be worth staying a little north of the South Grain

burn and following the most direct line to the edge of the Water of Mark that you can find. Once across the Water of Mark, follow the north bank upstream to the Shieling of Mark, a tiny bothy in excellent condition located in one of the loneliest and most unfrequented places imaginable. There isn't a path leading to the bothy, even right outside the door. However it makes a good place to take a break, especially on a bad day. The 'book' time to the Shieling of Mark is about 2½ hours, but it could take more because of the bad ground.



Shieling of Mark

A short steep bank lies behind the bothy on its west-north-westerly side. Go straight up that trackless bank by the best line you can find and then take a course to hit the south tributary of the Burn of Mohamed at about NO 330830. Then follow that tributary downstream. You should start to pick up bits of track, gradually strengthening, and well established by the time you reach the junction with the Allt Darrarie, from which there is a reasonable and increasingly strong path down to

Spittal of Glenmuick, where there is a small visitor centre (*no food or drink on sale, but proper public toilets which you may wish to frequent*). Total time to Spittal of Glenmuick from the camp should be 3½ to 4 hours.

Near Shieling of Mark, - Lochnagar in the background

From Spittal of Glen Muick you have a choice of two routes, either by the north-west or south-east shore of Loch Muick. The south-east shore route is more natural and more interesting. The north-west shore route is the gravel road leading to the Royal lodge at Glas Allt Shiel, and is therefore a dirt track fit for a Queen. You would expect most parties to want to favour the south-east side, but after two days of peat hags and trackless ground you may find a hunger in your party for some decent quick, easy, walking and the north-west side might win the vote! Either way, you start out via the south-east shore track, and branch-off right at the near end of the loch if you want to go to the north-west side. The paths are generally excellent. The two routes come together again about 700m beyond Glas Allt Shiel on the north-west side and then climb westwards up the Dubh Loch valley on a sound track, which remains good until close to the near end of the Dubh Loch itself. After that it deteriorates badly along the shore of the loch, being broken frequently by transverse boggy runnels coming off the slope above. Progress will be slowed and you are liable to get a bit muddy! Just at the west end of the loch you have to cross a small field of granite boulder scree, just before reaching a decent, if lumpy, campsite at NO 2356 8298, behind a little grit beach.





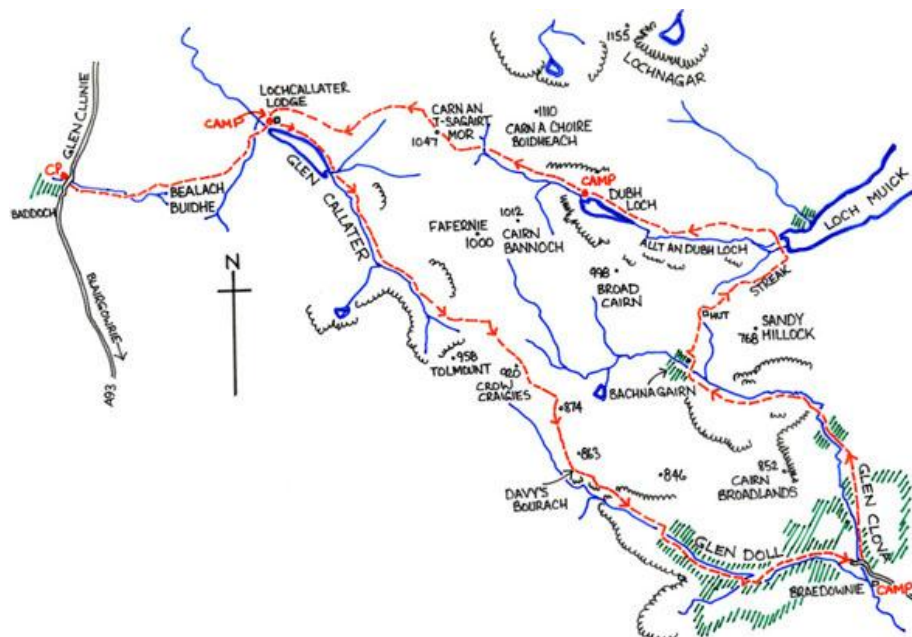
Just reaching the east end of the Dubh Loch

The last section from Spittal of Glen Muick ought to take 4 hours and you should be able to do it in that, because it is nearly all on excellent paths. The total day's effort is 25 flat km, which should take 7½ hours, but may well take 8 or more, because of the bad ground in the first half of the day. The third day is a reversal of the first day of Route 11. Start north-westwards along the north bank of the Allt an Dubh Loch. There are scraps of path close to the bank. If it is a dry day then get down onto the wide dry river slabs and work your way up those, dodging the water and the slimy bits, and climbing the little rock ledges. This is excellent fun as well as being the easiest way to get uphill. However don't push yourself close to the adhesion limit. *(You'll find out!)*

Stay on the slabs or the north bank, - up a couple of rock steps until you have cleared the end of the Dubh Loch cliffs and are beyond the Allt Coire Uilleum Mhoir, and then turn very sharp left to follow the west side of the Uilleum Mhoir stream on a gradual climbing anti-clockwise turn into Coire Uilleum Mhoir. Ascend the valley floor just at the break of slope, to avoid the worst of the wet ground. That will bring you out onto the short dry ground of the track from Cairn Bannoch to Broad Cairn in the middle of the 3-way col between Cairn of Gowan, Broad Cairn and Creag an Dubh Loch. From that point climb to the summit of Broad Cairn and then descend to Glen Doll via the hut at Sandy Hillock, and Bachnagairn. Back at Glen Doll there are public toilets. Then you face a 5km trudge along the road back to your vehicle. The third day's effort of 23.5 flat kilometres should take 7 hours. In the interests of traffic safety the driver could leave his rucksack - and the rest of the party a few km short of Clova Hotel, and go on alone and unladen to fetch the vehicle. It's what we did!

The total effort over the three days amounts to around 72 flat kilometres, which would be quite a robust schedule in most circumstances, but even more so in this case because of the amount of heavy slow trackless ground between the top of Muckle Cairn No.1, and Spittal of Glen Muick. This might well be a good training expedition for an unaccompanied senior group with an officer supervising at check-points. An officer could check the group at around Muckle Cairn No 1 (by walking up from Glen Esk), then again at Spittal of Glen Muick, and then again at the hut at Sandy Hillocks as they come off Broad Cairn. There is good mobile phone reception on the summit crossing from above Loch Brandy to Muckle Cairn, - which offers another less energetic way for a supervisor to check that his charges aren't lost!

Route 20: Glen Clunie – Glen Doll – Dubh Loch – Callater and Glen Clunie



This 3-day route is a different way of combining much of routes 1, 8 and 11 with a few tweaks. It suits a summer weekend with a Monday public holiday added on.

Arrive at the starting point of Route One, during a Friday evening, and backpack to Loch Callater Lodge to camp on the Friday night. This will maybe take you 2 hours.

On the Saturday morning head for Glen Doll via Jock's Road, by reversing the information given in the Route 11 description. It is easier from north-west to south east because Glen Callater is 300 metres higher up than Glen Doll. However since there is a general camping prohibition at Glen Doll you need to phone the Glen Doll

Ranger Service before leaving home (01575 - 550233) and get their permission to camp. (*They will specify the site.*) They are usually OK about this for official youth organisation parties. If you decide to start the trip on a Saturday morning then it is still a feasible effort on that day, but you might opt for a slightly easier start from Auchallater. The Saturday total effort is about 19 flat kilometres from Loch Callater Lodge, or 25.5 flat km from Auchallater. If the Rangers allocate you a camp location out towards Moulzie, which is likely, then you will have maybe another kilometre to walk. It would therefore be prudent to make full use of the toilets at the main car park before walking out to the site!

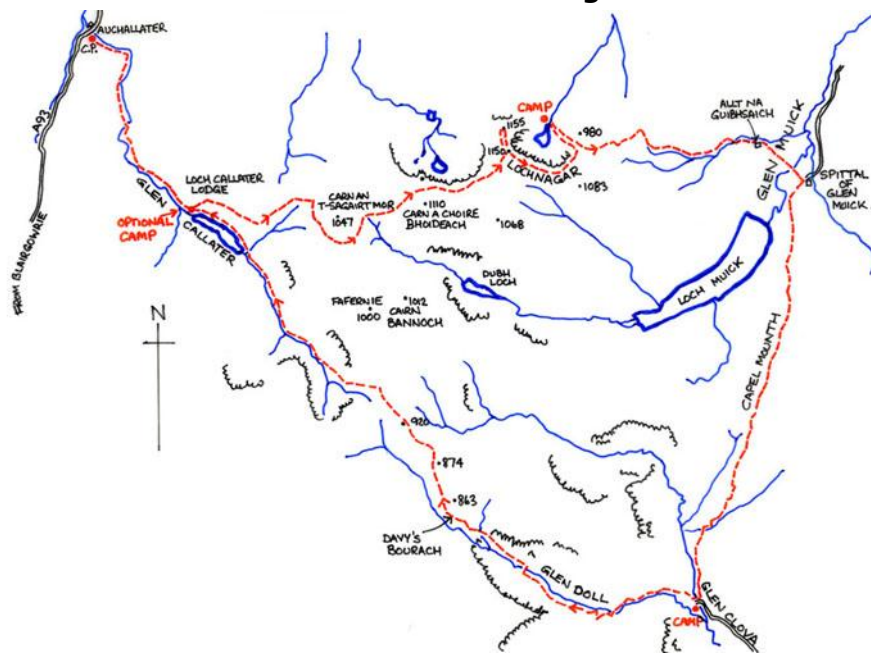
On the Sunday your task is to get to the campsite at the north-west end of the Dubh Loch. You could follow the first day of Route 9, which is a 20.6 flat km day via Broad Cairn, or you could reverse the second day of Route 8 which, in this opposite direction is 22 flat km. There is a third option whereby the party gets to map ref NO 253813, and heads north east across level ground to NO 256815 before descending north-westwards to cross the Allt an Dubh Loch at about NO 251821. The slope down which you have to go is fairly steep vegetation and broken small cliffs, but with care it should not pose great problems. However don't follow this route if rivers are high or you might find it a bit difficult to cross the Allt an Dubh Loch. This shortcut reduces the total day's effort to 17.5 flat km, and probably takes an hour off the time.

The third day, probably a Monday, requires the party to return to its starting point. Leave uphill to the north-west by (*in dry conditions*) walking up the bare rock at the edges of the Allt an Dubh Loch. This opportunity finishes at around NO 229833. From there you need to continue to ascend the upper Dubh Loch valley in a north-westerly direction. This will look a bit daunting on the ground because this section is very wet with a lot of peat hags etc. However look out for the remains of an old stone wall/fence line on the north side of the main stream and somewhere towards the centre of the valley. If you find that, it will give you reasonable going straight in the direction that you require. In the vicinity of NO 217839, turn left and climb directly westwards towards the Lochnagar – Callater path which is at about 970 metres on the south-south-east side of Carn an t-Sagairt Mor. This is a good path, but you won't see it until you are virtually standing on it because you will be looking up the slope, and the path is hidden when viewed from below.

Once you hit the main path you then have a choice of three options. You can just turn left and follow the path, or you can go straight on up over the summit of Carn an t-Sagairt Mor, or you can drop your bags on the path at some point on your way around the mountain and visit the summit unburdened. The path to Loch Callater Lodge is then just a reversal of the morning of the second day of Route 15, and the return from there to the transport is either straight down Glen Callater, or the second day of Route 1. Total effort on the third day is 15.8 flat km if you use the shortest route to Auchallater, and virtually the same if you backpack straight over the summit of Carn an t-Sagairt Mor and descend on the other side. Dropping your rucksacks and climbing Carn an t-Sagairt Mor without them comes out worst at 17.5 flat km, albeit a little of it done without bags. Add about 1.5 flat km if you are finishing in Glen Clunie at the far side of the Bealach Bhuidhe.

The total route over 3 days amounts to around 63 flat kilometres depending on which of the options that you decide to follow, which makes it a respectable effort, but not too arduous. It is interesting country and scenery and you can pick up 2 Munros if you go via Broad Cairn and Carn an t-Sagairt Mor. With day 3 being quite short there is no reason why you should be late home, and the takeaway food options are well detailed in the descriptions of other routes in this area.

Route 21: Glen Callater- Corrie of Lochnagar - Glen Doll - Jock's Road, Glen Callater



This is a classic high-level route, and it is fairly demanding in terms of both effort and exposure to weather and hard navigation if the cloud is down. It includes crossing the summit of one of the great Scottish mountains – Lochnagar, and camping on a dramatic – but peaty, site in the north-east corrie of that mountain.

The route starts at Auchallater in Glen Clunie, as described as an option for Route 17, with access details fairly similar to route 1.

The route on the first day is from Auchallater to Loch Callater Lodge; then left up the hillside and onto the Lochnagar path via Carn an t-Sagairt Mor. However in this instance you continue on the main path around the head of

the Dubh Loch valley and up onto the high plateau running from Carn a Choire Bhoideach via the Stuic to Lochnagar. Even on a good day this very high section of route to the summit of Lochnagar, and then beyond that summit, is an exposed place almost continuously at over 1100 metres and devoid of shelter. From Carn a Choire Bhoideach the navigation in bad visibility is also difficult due to the lack of distinctive ground features and it does require you to walk straight towards the top of one of the biggest cliffs in the country!



Walking towards the summit mound of Lochnagar with the main summit tor being the small cone beyond the snow

This is not a route to be persisted-with in bad conditions, as the exposure to weather and the navigational problems all reach their worst late in the day, when the party will be tiring, starting to get careless, and looking for shortcuts. So this is a route that deserves a decent weather forecast and it isn't at all suitable for situations with "press on" imperatives, - such as D of E assessment expeditions.

Assuming that you have started the crossing from Carn a Choire Bhoideach in reasonable weather you will find the underfoot conditions to be good, and the vegetation very short and skeletal. From the col at the head of Coire Boideach (photo left) you will see the summit mound of Lochnagar rising ahead of you. In difficult

conditions you can bear to the right at about NO240851, and turn just to the south of east along the base of the summit mound until you hit the very well made track down the Glas Allt burn, which offers a good escape route down to Glas Allt Shiel on the shore of Loch Muick. However be very sure that you don't turn too early and go down Coire Boideach which will lead you over the edge of the Eagle's Rock cliffs!

If going up onto the summit of Lochnagar you will find that the final slope is a mix of heather and frost-heaved horizontal bands of granite stones. Head towards Cac Carn Mor, which is a big cairn, but beware of the fact that the summit mound is spattered with cairns. Cac Carn Mor is not the summit: It is in fact Cac Carn Beag, - a tor located 475 metres away on a heading just west of north. The straight line between the two tops clips the head of the huge cliffed gullies of the Black Spout, incised back for some distance from the cliff edge. In spring-snow beware of huge cornices filling in these gullies so that they look like safe level snow even quite far out into space beyond the cliff edge. A sensible guideline when within about 25 metres of the cliff edge is not to walk across any snow if you can't see surface boulders sticking up out of it!

This is why! – a late Spring photo of the Left Branch of the Black Spout





The summit tor of Cac Carn Beag sits at the edge of a steep slope leading north-eastwards down towards the outlet of the corrie loch, - which is your camp location. However that slope is very steep and loose immediately below the summit tor, and also often sustains a dangerous icefield long into the Spring. The descent line to the north-east is less steep closer to the top of the West Buttreass cliffs - but very bouldery, and below about the 850-870 metres level on that ridge, where you will want to turn down right towards the loch outlet, there is an unhappy combination of steepness and heather that hides trap holes in big granite scree. Descent routes to the west of the summit are not an option as they lead you the wrong way into remote country, and its also very heavy going down there!

Lochnagar summit looking towards the North East Corrie. The track skirts the edge of the cliff gullies.

The most prudent descent route to your campsite is to walk anti-clockwise around the head of the corrie until you reach the Meikle Pap col at NO 258858. Then turn left and descend as best you can towards the stream outlet of the corrie loch. You should be looking for campable, albeit peaty ground, at NO 2532 8631. Be sure that your tent groundsheet is genuinely waterproof!

The camp site in the corrie of Lochnagar

The psychological threat posed by this route, is that the most demanding physical and navigational conditions arise when the party is high on exposed ground and tired. The total effort for the day amounts to 28.6 flat kilometres, - so the group tiredness level will already be substantial when they reach the summit. Then, from that summit, they are offered a tantalising glimpse of their camping location almost straight below them, - to which there is a higher risk shortcut in comparison to the recommendation that they should go the long way round to get there. In bad weather the temptation to cut down the north-east face from the summit can be almost overwhelming. *(and we admit to having been so overwhelmed on occasion.)* The likely total time is 8½ to 9 hours.

There would be some merit in backpacking to Loch Callater lodge on the evening before the first full day and so reduce the first full day by about 6.5 flat kilometres. Having got there, enjoy the spectacle of being camped in the corrie of Lochnagar. There can be few more impressive settings.



Lochnagar in April



Your objective on the second day is to get to Glen Doll via Allt na Giubhsaich and the Capel Mounth. In contrast to the first day this is nearly all simple walking in undemanding conditions. At the very start of the day you need to climb back up to the Meikle Pap col before descending eastwards towards the col below Conachcraig. You may be tempted to try to avoid that ascent by going around the north side of Meikle Pap. We have tried it and it isn't worth it because of the heavy going. From the col west of Conachcraig descend the rubble road to

Allt na Giubhsaich and then cross the valley to Spittal of Glemuick where there are public toilets. Leave Spittal of Glen Muick on the south shore track towards Loch Muick and then branch left, - uphill diagonally after about 450 metres, onto the Capel Mounth path to Glen Clova. This is an uncomplicated piece of easy hill walking, - but it does go on a bit.

The high crossing ends with a steep but simple descent into Glen Clova and the down the valley to the Glen Doll Ranger Centre. Again, as in the case of the previous route you should have applied to the Glen Doll Ranger service for a camp-site and they should be expecting you. The total effort for the second day is 22.6 flat kilometres, which should take less than 7 hours. Try to agree your campsite location in advance, for it may be near the foot of the Capel Mounth descent.

The third day is the same as the first day of Route 12, which is 21.6 flat km to Loch Callater Lodge, plus an additional 4.5 flat km from there to Auchallater giving a total day of 26.1 flat km, which is likely to take about 8 hours including rests so you'll need to be off-site from Glen Doll before 09.00. Homeward times and takeaway food sources are as for route 1, but with a few minutes more driving time.

Over three days this route totals 77.3 kilometres, which is pretty strenuous. Given the high level exposure of much of the walking, the potential for difficult navigation and the length of the route, this is a venture for a fit and physically mature group, and it contains too many risk elements for unaccompanied D of E parties.

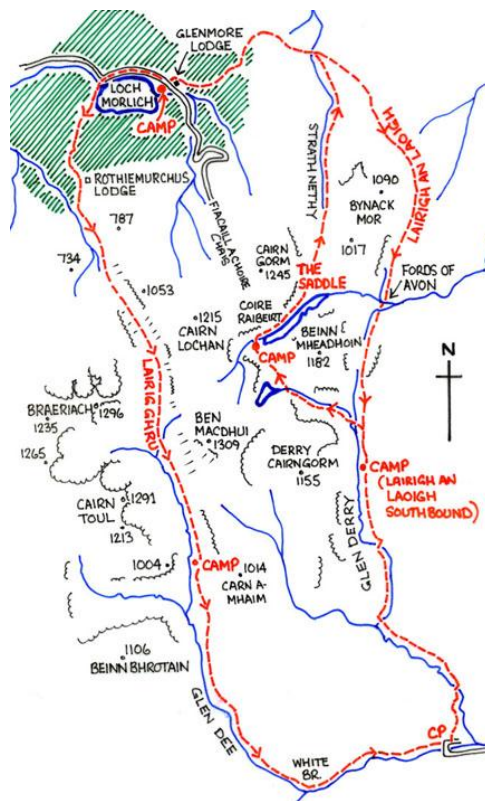
Route 22: Linn of Dee - Shelter Stone - the Saddle - Ryvoan - Glen More, then either Lairig and Laoigh – Derry - Linn of Dee, or Lairig Ghru – Luibeg - Linn of Dee.

This route comprises a 4-day crossing of the main range of the Cairngorms from south to north and then back again. The route can be carried out clockwise or anti-clockwise and it is also possible to start from the north end and go north-south-north. The description here is south-north-south and anti-clockwise, if you return via the Lairig Ghru.

Travel to the starting point, and the first day, is as described in Route 13, - 22¼ flat kilometres to the camp site below the Shelter Stone which should take about 7 hours.

Day 2 has two possible options. In both cases, the party starts out eastwards along the north shore of Loch Avon, but if climbing Coire Raibeirt to cross the West shoulder of Cairn Gorm and descend Faicall a Choire Chais to the White Lady Shieling, the route follows a diagonally ascending path from NJ005019. Alternatively it continues along Loch Avon side to cross "The Saddle" into Strath Nethy and reach Glen More via Bynack Stables and Ryvoan Pass.

Once you arrive on the north side of Cairn Gorm, your destination is the large public campsite at the east end of Loch Morlich. If you choose to go over Coire Raibeirt then the total effort for the day is about 15 flat km. If you go via the Saddle and Strath Nethy it is about 17 flat km. Neither amounts to a particularly hard day, but the Coire Raibeirt route is much more exposed to the weather and the second half of the day is spent among the detritus of a ski area, - even while rack railways and scheduled bus services run alongside your route. This hardly makes for the most uplifting of expedition experiences, especially since any boy who sees a bus going in the same direction as him will immediately want to use it and become demotivated. So the advice is to route via Strath Nethy. There is nothing particularly demanding in the route. The path is the usual



Cairngorm mixture of heather, rounded boulders, mud and grit, with perhaps more than its fair share of up/down stony bits along the shore of Loch Avon. Be sure you don't miss the path junction at NJ 015028 that takes you up to the Saddle. The Strath Nethy path is never far from the river, and rarely in doubt in the narrower southern section of the valley, but maybe needs a little careful watching when it gets out onto the flat valley floor in the last couple of kilometres to Bynack Stables. The route eventually becomes motor road. Walkers without cars shouldn't have too much trouble getting onto the Glenmore Camp Site, but it might be wise to check in advance by phone in the peak of the summer season.



East down Loch Avon towards the Saddle, - which is obvious!

You have come out on a 4-day trip, which would normally mean carrying a big load of food. However there is a restaurant near the Glenmore campsite that could sell you an evening meal and breakfast. Subject to a prior check that it still exists and will be open when you need it to be, you could reduce your burden considerably – and eat better, by buying an evening meal after the second day and breakfast on the third day. However remember that the site fees at Glenmore plus bought meals, will have a significant cost.

Day 3 requires you to go south on one of two routes. You can either turn west and go south via the Lairig Ghru and then either Glen Dee or Luibeg, - or you can go east to the Lairig an Laiogh, over the Fords of Avon and down Glen Derry. Both routes have the weakness that you have to go further on day 3 to find a workable camp site than you would really like, - so the third day is long and the fourth day is short. Of the two ways back, the Lairig Ghru route is less vulnerable to wet weather in that the alternative Lairig an Laoigh route requires you to cross the River Avon at the Fords of Avon. Normally it isn't a great problem, but if you can't get safely across then there's little option but to go back. Perhaps surprisingly there is little to choose in maximum altitude. The Lairig Ghru is slightly higher, but not much.

The Lairig Ghru path itself is quite good for walking at its northern end, then becomes a little more awkward as it crosses the stone fields around the top of the pass, and then is often both a bit lumpy and boggy in its southern section down towards Corrour. The strain of constant up and down careful foot placement can be tiring and it does slow the pace.

You are unlikely to find a feasible campsite north of Corrou, and it is suggested that you use the camp location described in Route 6, just south of Corrou. Using that campsite, the third day is about 24.7 flat kilometres with a lot of distance (*as opposed to height*) in the day and so you might expect it to take 7½ - 8 hours including breaks.



Day 4 is either the second day of Route 6, or a reversal of the first day of Route 6 via Glen Dee, amounting to about 13.5 flat km via Luibeg or 14.3 via Glen Dee, totalling 4-4½ hours including breaks.

A party on the north side of the Lairig Ghru, looking towards Aviemore

If the party opts to return via the Lairig an Laoigh, it goes back to Bynack Stables the same way as it came in, and then goes over the high ground to Fords of Avon. The path is never in doubt, and allows you to make good progress. The crossing of the Fords of Avon is not difficult in normal water conditions, but I don't have specific knowledge of what it actually is like in high water/flood (*-having had the wit not to go there in such conditions!*) You have to be aware that getting trapped at the Ford in very bad weather would leave you far from shelter and with little option but to go back all the way you came, - or down the Avon to Faindourain Lodge.

Last time we used this route we started searching for viable campsites after crossing the Avon, but found nothing until well down Glen Derry, over by the riverside in the general vicinity of NO 035978. Even here the grass is long and the sites are marginal. Ideally you would find a campsite near the ford to balance up the effort on days 3 and 4. If, like us, you find yourself obliged to continue as far as the flat part of the Derry valley to get a decent campsite then day 3 will amount to 27.25 flat km, and is likely to take around 8-8½ hours.

Day 4 is then an easy finish of only 10.5 flat kilometres, with only about 3 hours needed to walk down to Linn of Dee via Derry Lodge on an excellent path.



Just South of Corrou, looking up the Lairig Ghru

A hand-drawn map of the Glen Tilt area. The map features several blue lines representing water bodies: GELDIE BURN at the top right, BRUCE BURN flowing from the top right towards the center, THRF WATER flowing horizontally across the middle, and BRUNN A SHLO flowing from the bottom right towards the center. A red dashed line runs diagonally from the bottom left towards the top right, passing through or near several locations. Key locations include BLAIR CASTLE D at the bottom left, BLAIR ATHOLL below it, MARBLE LODGE on the red dashed line, CARN A CHLAMAIN above it, FOREST LODGE to its right, BRAIGH COIRE NA CONLAICH further up the red dashed line, BEDFORD FALLS OF THRF to its right, CAMP marked with a red dot on the red dashed line, ALLEN LOCH to the right of the camp, SYNNACK LODGE above it, and ALT ANT SENICH at the top right. Other points of interest include T7B, 835, 963, 1070, 1120, 975, CARN LIATH, and BRUNN A SHLO. Black lines represent roads or paths, some with cross-ticks indicating specific points or junctions. Green hatched areas are shown near MARBLE LODGE and along the lower part of the red dashed line.

In combination these valleys offer two options for three-day expeditions from Blair Atholl to Aviemore, or Kingussie, which are very practical in transport terms because you can either do it all by train using the stations at Blair Atholl and Aviemore/Kingussie, or you can drive to Blair Atholl, park your car there for the duration and return in the train from Aviemore to Blair Atholl at the end of the journey. If you use a family railcard, it won't cost much. The best train home on the last day leaves Aviemore at 16.35 to arrive in Blair Atholl at 17.21, - which is a good timing, - and if you miss it then there is another at 19.28. If you want to do these routes from north to south and finish in Blair Atholl then there is also a choice of early evening northbound trains back to Kingussie and Aviemore.

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Not far past the arch, the car park is signposted on your left at NN 8744 6631, directly opposite the start of the Glen Tilt track. Virtually all of the day involves walking up a very decent and quite smooth dirt estate road along the gradually narrowing and tightening valley of the Tilt, until by late in the day the valley forms a tight steep "V". Glen Tilt is fairly attractive scenery with a lot of white water in the river, and many waterfalls on the steep high valley sides. There are occupied estate houses at several points in the valley, - up as far as the cottage behind Forest Lodge.

Forest Lodge

Both before and beyond Forest Lodge the River Tilt descends successive rock steps as it flows towards you. Beyond the Lodge there are quite a number of campsite opportunities if they should be required, but the overall balance of the route needs you to continue further up the valley for some distance. At NN 971 775 the main vehicle track bears left uphill, while your route stays down in the valley bottom. The map shows your route beyond here as a footpath, but it is in fact a 4 x 4 track. This junction marks the start of the steep and narrow section of the Tilt valley, shown on the next page.

Continue along the canyon of the Tilt until the valley opens out at little at its junction with the An Lochain burn, which



runs out of Glen Loch to join the Tilt. Straight opposite the junction of these two streams you will find a very decent campsite on a low mound at NN9795 7833 abutting the foundations of an old shieling. This is probably the best place to end Day 1, at just under 21 flat km from the car park, or about 23 km from the railway station. It might take you around 6 hours including rests, but probably less because it's an easy flat track.

On Day 2 continue up the Tilt valley to Bedford Bridge (*more good camp sites*) across the powerful Tarf Water, which joins the Tilt from the West. The first five kilometres of Day 2 sees the steep defile of the Tilt ease back as you reach the watershed between the River Tilt and the Allt an Seilich, and the path is then generally wetter for a few kilometres until you reach a vehicle track towards the ruins of Bynack Lodge.

The recommended campsite location opposite the junction with Glen Loch.

The Great V-Shaped Canyon of Glen Tilt, seen looking back South from the Day 1 Camp Site



As you near Bynack Lodge bear left from the vehicle track in favour of the footpath up to the lodge on the west bank. Because the footpath stays west of the Allt-an-Seilich it involves one less very damp river crossing, - shown in the photo below on the left. In the immediate environs of the lodge there is good camping ground, - but not well positioned for this journey.

Bynack Lodge on a wet day

Just beyond Bynack Lodge you face the first of two awkward stream crossings in less than half-an-hour, - neither of which will give you much chance of keeping dry feet. The

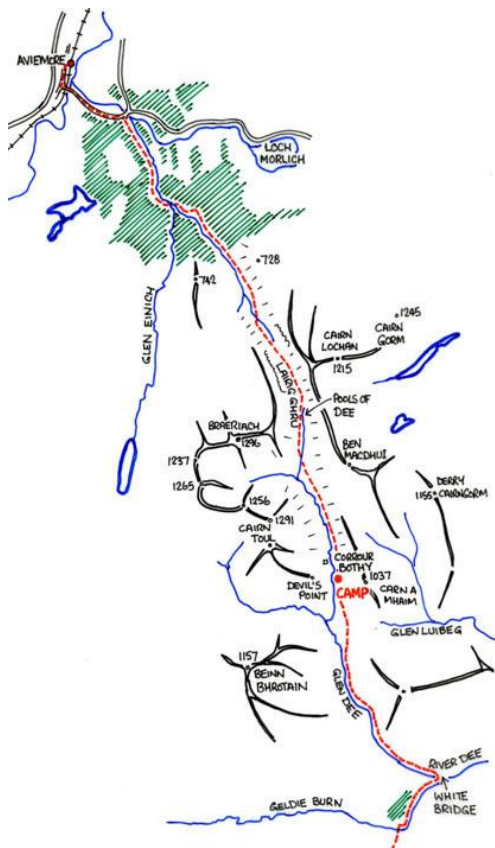


first of these, just north of the lodge, is the Bynack Burn. The rocks in this stream-bed are slippery and you stand an excellent chance of skidding off them with some risk of injury if you try boulder hopping. Wading is safer. The second difficult



stream crossing is the powerful Geldie Burn about 1.3km further north. Your tactics will depend on the water conditions when you get there. But if the water is average level or above then you might be best to wade across the Bynack in training shoes-on-bare feet, change back, -and then do the same again to get over the Geldie. *(If you decide to go for it in boots then Route 4, page 25 contains some advice.)* This is one situation in which walking poles are undoubtedly very effective, i.e. in giving support when crossing slippery river stones.

The Allt-an-Seilich crossing between Bynack Lodge and the Geldie Burn, - which you will face if you don't take the advice above. No chance of dry feet here then?



The Second Half of the route finishing at Aviemore

Given that these burns require wading most of the time, they will pose real dangers in case of flood, - with little option but to retreat, or to cross to the east side of the Allt-an-Seilich earlier in day 2, up near the watershed, and follow the east and then the south sides of the Geldie and the Dee all the way down to the bridge at Linn of Dee. However assuming all goes well, then immediately after crossing the Geldie you will reach a gravel vehicle track. This is where you can turn left to head for the Feshie (as described later), or go straight ahead down the side of the Geldie Burn to White Bridge if you are heading for the Lairig Ghru. The track to White Bridge is easy and there are sites next to White Bridge on which you could camp if necessary.

Cross White Bridge and turn left up Glen Dee in a north-westerly direction, with the rest of your day being as described within the top half of page 31, Route 6. Finish the day at the same camping location just short of Corroul. For photos see Route 6. Your total day is 24 flat km. It is nearly all flat distance and there are two crossings of rivers that will take time. So it may well take more than 7½ hours in total.

White Bridge looking towards Bheinn Bhrotain



Day 3 requires you to cross the Lairig Ghru, and go all the way to Aviemore Station in time to get a takeway and then the 17.35 train to Blair Atholl. The total day is 26 kilometres, which should take you around 8 hours including breaks. However you will want to give

yourselves a good time margin in case of delay, which means that you should really be away from your campsite at Corrour by not much after 08.00, - which surely means being out of bed by 06.45. The crossing of the Lairig Ghru has been described in route 19, albeit in the opposite direction. At the northern end of the pass, do not take the path to Rothiemurchus Lodge at NH951057, but continue down the valley in a north-north-westerly direction, and then left at the next path junction towards the Cairngorm Club footbridge and out onto the Glenmore Road at Coylumbridge.

The total effort amounts to around 72 flat kilometres in three days, which is a robust effort for the reasonably strong. Navigation is also just about as easy as it gets, - given that the route follows two deep straight valleys.



There is of course the alternative of turning west along the Geldie into upper Glen Feshie. From the crossing of the Geldie, go west along the vehicle track on the north side of the Geldie Burn for a little over 4 km., and then branch right before the

vehicle track crosses the Geldie, and follow a wet footpath that wriggles its way to Eidart Bridge. Shallow gullies draining the soggy moor to the north are a repeated disruption to quick progress and on a muggy late summer day the midgie population here will engrave itself on your soul! About 5 kilometres after joining this unhappy path you will reach Eidart Bridge, which is an attractive spot and beyond the Eidart things start to improve. Less than a kilometre beyond Eidart Bridge you will find decent camping ground at NN 9064 8849, where there is a building marked on the 1: 50,000 map. The 'building' is in fact a tin and timber open-sided animal shelter that is busy falling down, but there is a good area of flattish grass in front of it. At that point your day will have been 25 flat kilometres, taking around 7½ hours, maybe more if allowance is made for all the wading and foot drying. There isn't another good site for a little distance further west so this should probably be your campsite. I couldn't recommend camping here in the peak of the midgie season: There's a

lot to be said for doing this route before the end of May, or in late September. The downside of day 2 is that it leaves a long third day to get to Kingussie railway station, although the plus side of the third day is some very nice scenery (see the back cover), some decent paths and good places for breaks.



Eidart Bridge

Leaving your campsite on day 3, the first 2½ kilometres consists of a good path, - if you can find it among the heather and churned mess made by 4 x 4 vehicles operating beyond the end of their roads. However it is worth finding the path, which is sometimes on one side of the vehicle tracks, sometimes on the other, and sometimes a short distance up the hillside on your right, - on drier ground. At NN 885 891 there is a vehicle track at a higher level on the right and a footpath on a straighter line through the heather lower down. It's worth finding the footpath. Shortly after that you start to enter the scenic part of upper Glen Feshie, which is at its best from there to a little north of Ruigh Aiteachain.

At NN 8625 9013, - a place called An Cagain on the 1:25,000 map, the footpath has been washed away by the river eroding

the steep east sidewall of the Feshie valley. You get past this on new rubble paths across the raw slope on steep ground. It deserves a little care, but isn't a huge problem. Beyond An Cagain the path gradually eases and improves until it is on the flood plain of the valley, and you reach the bothy at Ruigh Aiteachain. This is one of the great bothies and is an excellent location for a break after maybe 2½ hours walking. Beyond Ruigh Aiteachain your remaining task is to reverse the first day of Route 3 to Tromie Bridge. Note that Carnachuinn bridge has gone - at least meantime. It is about another 13 flat kilometres to Drumguish, - near Tromie Bridge, and then about another 4.6km from Drumguish to Kingussie Station. So your total day is around 26 kilometres, and is likely to take about 8 hours. The best timed southbound train leaves Kingussie at 17.48. So assuming you want a full hour's safety margin in your timings, you will need to be off your campsite not much after 08.30 on day 3.

The total route is just under 73 flat kilometres, which is a reasonably demanding effort, and deserves a party with some stamina.

A hand-drawn map of the Glen Tilt area in Scotland. The map shows a network of roads and rivers. A red dashed line indicates a route starting from Pitlochry, passing through Glen Tilt, Glen Fender, Glen Carnraig, and ending at Blair Atholl. A blue dashed line indicates an optional exit route from Glen Fender. Key locations marked include Ois Carn A Chluamain, Forest Lodge, Braigh Coire Chruinn Bhalgairn, 1075 Carn Liath, 1004, 1129, Beinn A Ghlo, Loch Morag, Ben Crackie, Ben Crackie 841, Moulin, Pitlochry, Killiecrankie, Blair Atholl, and C.P. Old Bridge of Tilt. The map also shows Glen Loch and Glen Tilt.

For the purposes of this description, the assumption is that you will arrive by car or minibus and park your vehicle at Old Bridge of Tilt Car Park as described on pages 103 and 104. Otherwise you could arrive by train at Blair Atholl Station.

The general nature of the route is to walk up Glen Tilt on the first day, cross Beinn a Ghlo on the second day, and on the third day descend Glen Giraig and cross the upper slopes of Ben Vrackie to Moulin, and then descend into Pitlochry, where the vehicle driver will leave his rucksack with the group and catch the 15.21 or 16.47 train from Pitlochry to Blair Atholl – a 9 minute journey, followed by about a 25 minute walk to the Old Bridge of Tilt car park. The driver and vehicle should arrive back in Pitlochry in about 1 hour.

The big achievement of the route is backpacking across a large mountain with an opportunity to claim two Munro's with short (packless) diversions once you are at high level. It is therefore not a route to be pursued if the weather forecast for the second day is unfavourable. There is a shorter exit route straight back to Old Bridge of Tilt from Shinigag on the third day if flooded streams should prove a problem, and this is marked on the map on the left.



The first day proceeds as described in Route 23 until you reach a new and very substantial footbridge across the River Tilt at NN 9564 7630. Cross this bridge and there is an excellent small camp site on a semi-circular ledge well above the river, immediately on the far side of the bridge. The day's effort is 19.4 flat km. In theory this should take about 5½ hours but a recent party did it in 4 hours without trying too hard, probably because the track is good and flat.

The new footbridge over the Tilt, ----- and the campsite just over that bridge

Start day two by crossing grass pasture to gain the bottom of the Luib Mhor

ridge. There is a path of sorts to be found and the going is fairly easy and firm. Ascend the crest of the ridge southwards - with your water bottles well filled, for you will not find any more drinkable water until late in the day. This 600 metres ridge ascent will take you to the 1004m secondary summit of Braigh Coire Chruinn-bhagain (1070m).



At the col just south of the 1004m secondary top, drop your rucksacks and go on to conquer Braigh Coire Chruinn-bhagain, - about 900m distance to your south west. Then return to your rucksacks.

High on the Luib Mhor ridge

Once you have regained your rucksacks, turn east and descend to the col at NN9582 7266. Once again drop your rucksacks and go up east, and then north-eastwards to the three little summits of Beinn a Ghlo (1129m) and note that the true summit is the furthest away and not the one with the trig point on it. The ascent is fairly easy, but the summit plateau is covered in sharp and slippery scree, which is a bit of a trial. Then of course return to your rucksacks. The day continues by descending SSE down the valley of the Allt Bealach an Fhiodha, where you will at last find drinkable water at around the 750m level. Below this level there is a rough, wet and peaty path descending the valley through heather, initially



on the east side of the stream, but changing to the west side of the stream by about the 600m level. The path is a bit erratic and broken. Follow this path as it strengthens and contours around Beinn Bheag to eventually join a much better vehicle track in the vicinity of NN 949 686. Go west on the vehicle track to its junction with the Shinigag vehicle track, *(don't try the tempting shortcut over the bog)* and then turn south east at the junction and go to the bridge over the Allt Girnaig, - just west of Shingag. Immediately on the east side of that bridge go south for 325 metres through a field on the east side of a fence line, until you go through a gate and are faced by a crude log bridge across a burn. Just across that bridge there is decent ground for maybe 2 tents at NN94916703. The second day is a robust 27.25 flat kilometres, albeit with a small amount of that being done without packs. The underfoot conditions on the descent from Beinn a Ghlo are poor, so allow extra time for that. A total time allowance of 8½ hours for the day would be prudent.



The Beinn a Ghlo mountain group looking north from above Loinmarstaig. The main summit is 2nd right, and the pass from which you descend to the south is immediately left of it.

Day 3 starts by going a little east of south over very boggy ground to find a track winding uphill to the top corner of a fenced pine woodland at NN 94906655. You will then see the ruins of Reinakyllich in front of you. Pass the ruins, and then another small patch of woodland, on their west edges, and turn half-left at the far end of the woodland patch to head down the field to a wooden gate in the dry stone

wall – which has a fence on top of it. Immediately through the gate there is an alternative camp site on top of a mound, with a good water supply.

Looking back north towards the campsite at Shinagag from the wood at NN 949666. The camp location is just out of sight behind an embankment, below the centre of the photo at the end of the straight fence leading towards the camera.



Turn to the WSW towards Loinmarstaig on a track that becomes messy – and then improves. The track turns south to pass well above Loinmarstaig, before it descends WSW close to a deep gully with scalloped sides, goes past Loinmarstaig, and then crosses the stream on a solid vehicle bridge of flat boards. At NN 929654, beyond that bridge, turn left (south east) on a track climbing the edge of the scalloped embankment. The 1:25,000 map says that you will now enter a new plantation of young trees with an older rectangular fenced woodland beyond it, but in fact there was no evidence of new tree growth in May 2013. So go uphill to the south east corner of the older established woodland, to find a new metal gate at NN93046492. Immediately through that gate turn left, uphill, through a wooden gate that hangs on hooks, and follow an old track, steeply uphill at first, that is overgrown with heather but still fairly easily found.

The track descending into the scalloped gully near Loinmarstaig



Once higher on the hill this heathery track terraces southwards high along the shoulder of Meall an Daimh (722), and offers great views. It then drops to join a much stronger track at NN93286286. From there you climb south-east on a signposted path to Bealach na Searmoine and follow the Ben-Y-Vrackie tourist path down into Pitlochry. The last part of the journey down into the town is longer than you think. The



inaugural party took 5hrs 15 minutes to a finishing point at the railway station. The driver then caught a train to Blair Atholl for a single fare of £3.80, and walked the 25 minutes to the car park at Old Bridge of Tilt. He was back at Pitlochry station to pick up the party in exactly one hour. The two best northbound trains are at 15.21 and 16.47. Beware that the next one after that is 19.51!

The total route amounts to just over 64 flat km in three days. The first and last days are relatively modest. The second day is fairly demanding physically but is known to be within the capabilities of fit 14 year olds (*because two of mine have done it!*)

Climbing the overgrown track going uphill from NN93046492

The summit of Beinn a Ghlo on a cold August day.



The reason why you should respect flood conditions: - the Allt Girnaig at Shinagag bridge after just one night of rain! The picture doesn't convey the ferocious speed of the current.



Route 24A: A Circuit of Beinn a Ghlo: Blair Atholl to Pitlochry.

This 3-day route is a variant of Route 24, and has the same first and third days as Route 24 and the same camp sites. However the variant proved to contain significant objective and subjective hazards and should only be considered by a competent senior party.

The route was researched with a view to offering a low level alternative to Route 24 for use in bad conditions. Instead of climbing over Beinn a Ghlo on the second day this alternative continues up the south east side of Glen Tilt until it can turn south down Glen Loch to reach the head of Glen Fearnach and then turn south west around the south side of Beinn a Ghlo to reach Shinigag. There is no way across the River Tilt at the end of Glen Loch, which is why you need to go up the east bank of the Tilt to get into Glen Loch.

However, in practice, this exploration of what should have been a safer option than the second day of Route 24, delivered a very “adventurous” couple of hours negotiating the south east wall of the “canyon” of the Tilt. The journey along the south east side of the Tilt valley as far as the end of Glen Loch is carried out on a slope of extraordinary steepness – apparently exceeding 45° in places, on very narrow broken paths rarely more than 250mm wide (*no exaggeration!*). Anyone slipping on about 2 kilometres of exposed path would almost certainly not be able to avoid tumbling down the very steep slope with a high risk of a fatality occurring.

This is therefore only a route to be contemplated by the sure-footed and experienced. Unaccompanied boy parties must not be sent upon it. However if a suitably experienced and supervised party does wish to try it, the description is as follows.

From the campsite at NN956762, follow go a little way “inland” from the shore of the River Tilt to the footbridge over the Allt Fheannach, and continue north east along flat grass until the steep valley side converges onto the river bank. Find a route – with broken evidence of a path, very close to the river bank, and in a few places actually on the stones in the river’s edge. Continue to stick close to the water’s edge as best you can, usually with bits of path to be found.

The biggest difficulties commence at around NN 971774 as very steep rocky and treed slopes at the river’s edge force you up onto higher paths, perhaps as much as 60-70 metres above the river. A range of intermittent paths are to be found as ledges about 200-250mm wide on the uniform slope of around 45°. There is no point in going higher because the gradient is maintained to about 250 metres height above the river. The sense of exposure is significant and the dire consequences of a slip will be evident.

Towards the north end of the steep section. Much of the path is at a higher level on the slope than is seen here.



The gradient only eases as the side valley of Glen Loch meets the Tilt. Remain on the west side of the An Lochain stream in Glen Loch and work your way southwards up the valley on intermittent paths – but with reasonable underfoot going for much of the way. It is important that you find a way of crossing to the east bank of the river before you get as far south as Loch Loch. The inaugural party found a place to jump the river where it was deep and fast but only about 1.25m wide, - around 150m before reaching Loch Loch. *(First person jumps over without rucksack: Others then throw rucksacks across, - with two people swinging each rucksack. Then the others jump across once all the rucksacks are over).* Poor, but reasonably obvious tracks then continue to the south end of the loch, where a rough vehicle track commences, and continues South-South-East to a track junction at NN996718.

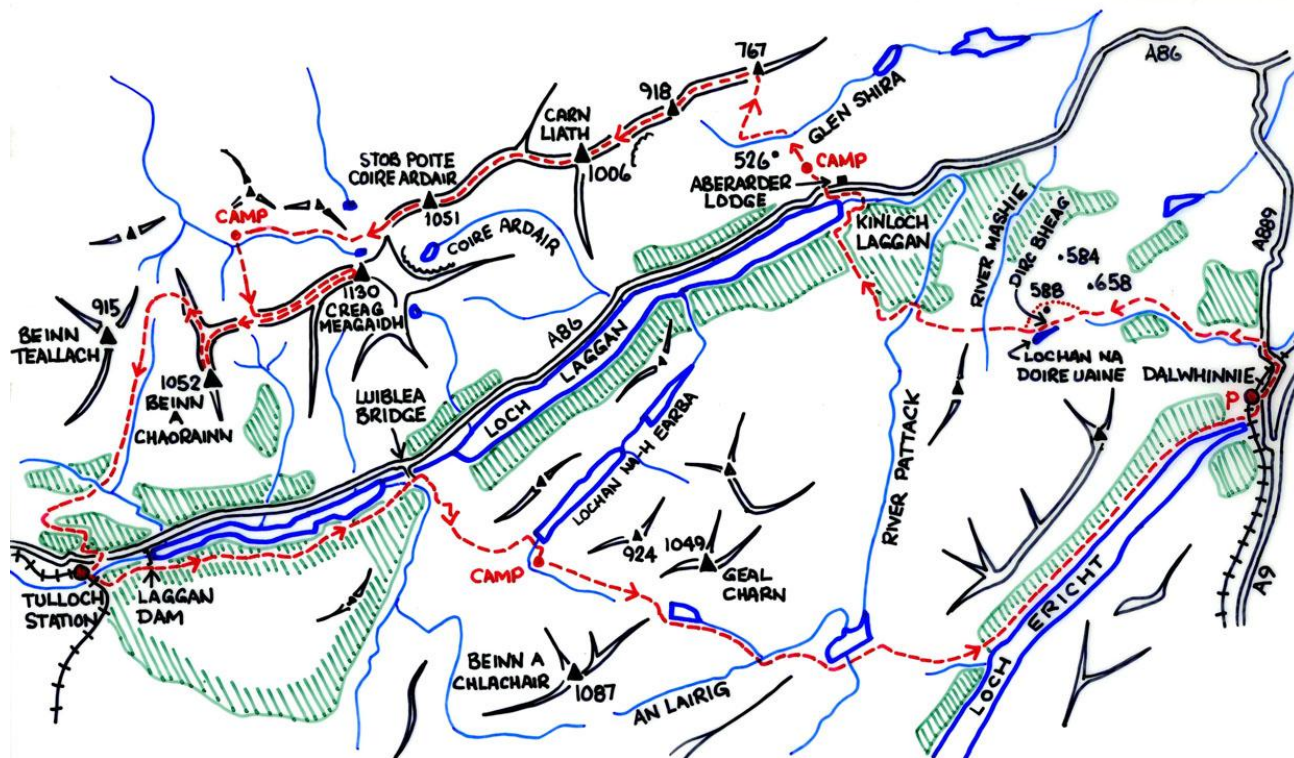
Turn west at this junction and follow a rough vehicle track uphill in a west-south westerly direction. If required, there is a good camp site near the remains of buildings at NN99347177. Follow the track over a low col, down the south side of Coire Lagain, and then down the direct route to Shinagag. Be careful to keep left when the path branches at NN957691. From there to Shinagag is straightforward and campsite details are as for Route 24. The day is just under 23 flat kilometres and took the inaugural party about 7 hours 30 mins, in very bad weather conditions.

It is of fundamental importance that you must not attempt this route with young or inexperienced expedition members, who have not demonstrated sure-footedness and confidence on steep ground. Indeed you might want to consider this description as more of a warning than a guide!

At the junction of Glen Tilt and Glen Loch, just past the end of the steep section



Route 25: Big Ridges in the Monadhliaths: 3 or 5 Day Options



This is a train travel 3-day, or a train/car travel 5 day route. It consists of walking from Dalwhinnie Station to the east end of the long North Laggan Ridge, and traversing 4 major Munros on that ridge to get to the independent hostel at Tulloch Station. From Tulloch the party can return home by rail, or go on for two further days across the Central

Highlands to return by car or train from the starting point in Dalwhinnie. The rail based 3-day option is described first. This is a demanding route and it requires an experienced and physically strong party. It had not been *entirely* 'test driven' as at the end of the 2011 summer season. Short sections where you will be the pioneers have been noted in the text.

It is also quite vital that you only start out on this route if the weather forecast for days 2 and 3 is good, although there are low level options if day 3 turns out to be bad.



The most practical train from the south comes through Perth at 11.19 and reaches Dalwhinnie at 12.25. From there the party has a walking day of just under 21 flat km., to a camp location at NN5279 9011, just north-west of Aberarder Lodge. The likely time for this journey is 6½ hours giving an evening arrival time of perhaps 19.30, which isn't a problem in a summer evening. Most hill walkers park their cars just before the level crossing at NN633847. But there is also a proper car park beside the public toilets on the A889.

Your 'real' starting point where the track branches from the A889.

The first day follows the A889 northwards past the distillery and up a steep hill.

Your route then properly commences at the road junction with a gravel vehicle track up the valley of the Allt an t-Sluic. This is the signposted right of way to Lagganside. Follow the gravel road to Allt an t-Sluic Lodge. Branch left below the lodge, still on a gravel road which ends after another 300 metres. Just beyond the road-end you will see a 1 metre high wooden signpost beside the footpath. At this point turn 45° right and go up the slope until you find another, rather rougher, gravel vehicle road. Follow that track until it fords the stream, but stay on the north bank as the track fords back again onto the north bank shortly afterwards. However when the track fords to the south side a second time you need to cross the stream. Stepping stones are not hard to find a short distance upstream of the vehicle ford. Continue on the gravel track on the south side of the valley until that track ends as it (*but not you!*) turns left through a forest gate at NN6105 8690. Instead, turn right (north) here and head briefly towards the main valley stream. Within 30 metres or so you will come across faint vehicle tracks heading west. Follow those tracks for a short distance until they disappear then cut across to the bank of the main valley stream. Cross to the north bank when convenient and walk westwards close to the stream, on its north bank. This is fairly easy walking on short grass, but with a lot of annoying little side gullies to cross – which won't cause you much difficulty.

You will now be walking west-south-westwards towards an impressive looking set of rugged little peaks separating 3 passes at the head of the valley. The left and centre passes are the spectacular Dirc Mhor and Dirc Bheag, while the rightmost is a much more amenable looking unnamed pass heading northwest, with a wood-pole power line running up

it. The most direct route to your destination is the Dirc Bheag (*unnamed on the 1:50,000 map*) in the centre, which contains Lochan na Doire-Uaine on its west side. On the 1:50,000 map it looks like an innocuous and attractive pass, but in reality it is a salutary lesson in how little the map sometimes tells you about what you will actually face! The Dirc Bheag is in fact a spectacular little rock canyon filled with a jumble of boulders from the cliffs above, - and with these boulders covered by blaeberry, heather and birch trees. Traversing the Dirc Bheag without injury is a challenge, and if you are going to take-it-on then you need to be confident of the sense and stability of all the boys in your party, because you'll be too busy avoiding personal injury to look after them! There is an easy low-risk option, which is to follow the wood pole power line to the north of the Dirc Bheag, and circumvent hill 589 (*588 on the 1:25,000 sheet*) on its north side. However for a capable party, Dirc Bheag is very much more interesting and more adventurous. Last time through we met an adder in the valley, and the mix of jumbled boulders and vegetation in the Dirc Bheag is ideal snake environment, so you might not want to go putting your hands down any holes!

If following the Dirc Bheag, enter from the east by following the valley floor as much as possible. You will be forced up the steep north side at one or two places, and it will need care, - but get back down onto the canyon floor as soon as you can. As you start the steeper section to the top of the little pass, there are faint indications of previous passage. Warn your party to look out for trap holes between the boulders, - covered by vegetation. Clamber up onto the boulders at the top of the pass, amid the echo of your voices from the cliffs above. You will find yourself looking down on the little Lochan an Doire Uaine which fills the west side of the canyon from edge to edge. (*Photo on page 71*)

The bridge over the Pattack at NN5535 8685 – looking back East

The initial descent to the west is steeply down big boulders and then onto scree falling into the water on the north shore of the loch. Work your way carefully along this sometimes unstable scree until it eases to become steep heather. If you stay close to the water's edge there are a few track indications. Towards the far end of the loch, stay close to the shore, and the ground flattens to become tussock grass. At NN 5815 8628 the map indicates an exit stream from the lochan, but in reality it is normally a dry gully which then develops into a stream a little further down. Follow this stream gully down tussocky trackless grass until it reaches the River Mashie, at the bottom of a deep side-gully. As you will see from the photo on page 73, crossing the Mashie with dry feet is not a problem in average water conditions. On the far bank you will see a crude vehicle track heading



straight away from the river. Follow that track which is shown on the 1:25,000 map, but not on the 1:50,000 map. This is initially a messy, and sometimes faint track through wet peat, but somewhere around NN 560 866 it suddenly becomes a fully formed – and obviously quite new, vehicle track in excellent condition which you then follow to the bridge across the River Pattack at NN 5535 8685. Up to this point the route description is identical to Route 16, but after crossing the Pattack the routes diverge.



Laggan beach

Go south-west up the far side of the Pattack on a good track but soon branch right around the end of a wood to head north-north-west towards Kinloch - at the east end of Loch Laggan. At NN544870 there is a locked wooden gate about 2.1m high, but easy to climb over. As you get closer to Loch Laggan there is a lot of forestry work and the tracks become grey extraction roads of crushed rock. At the shore of Loch Laggan turn right as you join the elegant drive of Ardverikie House and follow it north-eastwards to the bridge over the Pattack at Kinloch Laggan. As you pass the head of the loch a superb fresh water beach of fine sand lies beside the road. *(It's said to be the largest fresh water beach in Britain.)*

Cross Kinloch Laggan bridge with its 'Disney' gatehouse and go a short distance left along the A86. This road seems only to be driven by petrol-heads so face the oncoming traffic and be very alert! Beyond Aberarder lodge itself, find a rubble track going sharply uphill, and then up left through a wobbly gate to reach a junction of two rubble tracks about 200m beyond the main road.

Kinloch Laggan bridge with its imposing 'Disney' gatehouse.

At that junction the official sign points straight-on, but you need to turn left - north-westwards. This is shown as a footpath on the map, but is in fact a vehicle track. At a stream-crossing at NN5294 9010 look out for a little plank bridge on your right. About 120m past this stream, look out for a raised flat grass mound on your left, on the outside of a bend in the track. This mound of long grass will take a couple of tents, and you should be able to site a third close by. There is little stream about 20m further left.



The Day 2 climb to the North Laggan ridge is from centre right-edge of this photo to top left

On day 2 continue up the vehicle track past the little wood in the gully of the Allt Crunachdain. The vicinity of NN513911 is probably the best place to leave the track and turn diagonally up the shallow hollow of An Leacainn Dubh above you, due North towards the summit of Carn Dubh (767m). This slope is a mix of grass and heather as seen in the photo on the right. *(This actual ascent has not been done by the author but, as you can see he has looked down on it from above, and it looked ok.)* Before starting the climb, take a big drink and fill your (1 litre) water bottles to the top, for you will not find any more water for about 4 hours. Once on the ridge turn left and follow it up, west-south-westwards all the way to Stob Poite Coire Ardair, about 3 hours away. In all that time you will be mostly above 1000 metres and will add two Munros to your personal tally. The ridge is not difficult walking, - but is very exposed to any



bad weather, difficult to leave except at the ends, and increasingly stony towards its west end. Beyond Stob Poite Coire Ardair, drop south-westwards into the narrow col called "The Window" and then descend 3.5km due westwards along the north side of the Uisge nam Fichead to camp on good sites at the 600m level, in a flat basin at NN 392 884. The total day is around 27 flat km including 1000m of climbing, and should take around 8 hours.

A camp site in the flat basin 3.5km west of "The Window"

On day three, climb south to Bealach a Bharnish between Beinn a Chaorainn and Creag Meagaidh, which should take about an hour. Then dump your rucksacks at the col and do a packless ascent of Creag Meagaidh via its west ridge. It should take about two hours from the col to the summit and back again. Then regain your rucksacks and climb the east ridge of Beinn a Chaorainn. Drop your rucksacks again at the 1000m contour, go south to the summit of the mountain and return to your rucksacks. This should take about another 2 hours in total. Thus you should be ready to start descending the north ridge of Beinn Chaorainn around 5

hours after leaving your camp site. The descent via Tom Mor to Tulloch station should then take about a further 3hrs 30 mins giving a total day of 8hrs 30 mins. This is a really tough day of 30 flat km., however 12 flat km of that effort is

carried out without a rucksack. It can be reduced by 2 hours by opting not to do the ascent of Creag Meagaidh before tackling Beinn a Chaorainn. In bad weather you could even go straight from your camp site to the low pass at Tom Mor and then down to Tulloch Station in less than 4 hours. *(The Bealach a Bharnish/Beinn a Chaorainn section has not yet been "test driven" but has been observed from nearby, and should not pose any major problems other than the weather.)*



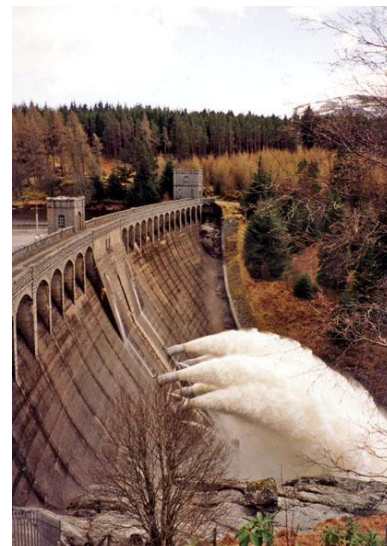
Tulloch Station looking south from the A86

At Tulloch Station, you will either be staying the night, or catching the train. If you started your day really early, you could get the evening train south from Tulloch at 18.09 on weekdays, *(check the time!)* getting into Glasgow Queen Street at 21.19, with connections still available after that time to Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen, - although they do reach those places very late *(well actually very early-the next day!)* indeed. Alternatively stay the night at Tulloch Station Independent Hostel. Before leaving home you

should have booked *(website)* yourself into this hostel for the night at a cost of £17 each at 2013 prices. If going home the next day then the 12.14 southbound from Tulloch will allow you a lazy start to your day. Tulloch Hostel serves meals at reasonable extra cost.

Laggan Dam Sluices. You won't be crossing below the dam if these are open!

If continuing on the 5-day expedition then you will certainly need to stay the night at Tulloch Station hostel, and your food logistics will be greatly eased by buying dinner, breakfast and a packed lunch from the hostel before you go on your way the next day. On day 4, go down to the River Spean east of the station, and cross by boulder hopping. The river bed is a jumble of massive boulders and it will be easy if the dam is shut. However beware that you won't get across the river if the sluices or spillways at the dam are open. That doesn't happen often, - but expect it after persistent wet weather, and in the Spring when melting snow overfills the dam. So don't opt for this route in a wet April or May! If you can't get over the river, see the alternative at the end of this section.



Assuming that you do get over the Spean, you then need to battle uphill, east-south-eastwards through the forest, some of which has been felled, for about 750m distance to reach a substantial forest road at about NN368800. It is easy and quick walking once you reach the road, which has a fine grit surface and is easy on the feet., follow the forest road eastwards on the south side to Luiblea, where you should then turn south to reach the south-west end of Lochan na h-Earba, and seek a camp site in the vicinity of NN463809. *(The author has not camped at this location but he has walked past tents in this vicinity. If it happens, it must be possible!)*. Day 4 has deliberately been kept down to the equivalent of 18.4 flat kilometres because the previous days were so hard. However the downside of an easy Day 4 is that Day 5 becomes 27.5 flat km across the Lairig Leamhainn, around the south shore of Loch Pattack to Ben Alder Lodge, and then along the shore of Loch Ericht to Dalwhinnie. The Allt Cam, at the far end of Lairig Leamhann is boulder strewn and crossable with dry feet in most water conditions. Its crossability in very heavy water is not known.

The Allt Cam, at NN 519787: Plenty of rocks for boulder hopping.



Day 5 is long, but it is virtual all easy walking on good paths and gravel vehicle tracks, and navigation is simple. Dalwhinnie station is not served by as many trains as larger settlements. You are very unlikely to catch the 15.50 southbound *(16.22 Sunday)* *(unless you are off-site that morning at 07.00)* and if you miss it, the next is at 19.57. *(Always check up-to-date timings for yourself!)* There is no takeaway food at Dalwhinnie, but there should be a trolley on the train. Of course if you're travelling by car, train times are not an issue.

This route offers the ascent of four big Munros and fine ridge walking in demanding high country. - but also a fair proportion of trackless terrain and a number of river crossings that might pose problems. It would be wise to

choose this route after generally dry-ish weather, and to expect wet feet on a few occasions! The total effort over the first three days, is 78 flat kilometres, but it might seem harder because of some rough going. Over five days the total effort is 123 flat km. This is not a route for the fragile and would be a foolish choice if the forecast looked dodgy for the second and third days.

Route 25 Variant: An alternative last two days if the River Spean can't be crossed.

If the River Spean should not be crossable at Tulloch due to high water, then the fourth day becomes markedly longer.

Leave Tulloch Station north westwards up the minor road. Join the A86 and walk west down the verge of the main road for just under 1 kilometre before turning left down the minor road leading to Inverlair and Fersit. Follow this road all the way to cross the River Treig and reach Fersit. From Fersit there is an option of two tracks leading north north eastwards and then combining as a substantial dirt road towards Laggan Dam. This circuitous route will bring you back to the point you would have reached on this dirt road after crossing directly from Tulloch, but it will have added 8 flat kilometres to your journey and taken about 2 hours 15 mins longer than the direct crossing.

You then follow day 4 as per the main route description, via Luiblea to the Lochan na h-Earba camp location as previously described. If you camp here, your day will have been 26.5 flat kilometres. A better camping location, - but more effort for you on both days 4 and 5, is at Lubvan, - as described on page 68.

On day 5 you need to be up and away early, for you now face another 27.5 flat kilometres to Dalwhinnie Station. Happily it is virtually all on tracks that permit easy quick movement. Cross the Lairig Leamhainn and the Allt Cam in accordance with the main route description and continue to Dalwhinnie.

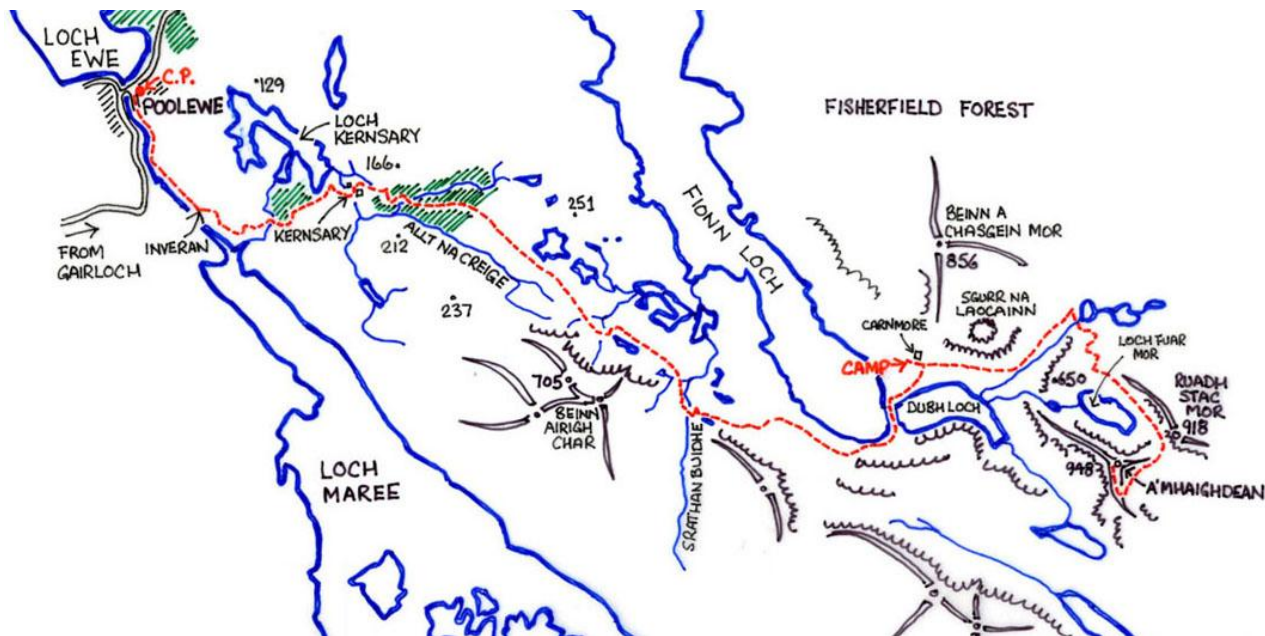
Passing the end of Lochan na h-Earba. The camp location at the end of day 4 would be a few hundred metres ahead of this photo location and then another few hundred metres off to the right



Descending the south side of Lairig Leamhainn. The view is back up the track northwards, and along the ledge between the cliffs.



Route 26: A' Mhaighdean (pron. A'Vayd-jin) from Poolewe



In August 2009 this route was researched in truly foul weather for the purposes of this book, but the party was eventually forced to retreat from A' Mhaighdean in a storm at about 100 metres below the summit. However they easily did enough to provide a good guide for future parties. The bottom line is that the walk from Poolewe to Carnmore and back is a good and pretty-well risk free 2-day expedition of about 42 flat km for any age group, and the scenery is spectacular. However the actual ascent of A' Mhaighdean is rough and difficult and needs both accurate navigation and good personal security on steep ground by all members of the party. A' Mhaighdean is a much-prized Munro, - so remote that few people have seen it, and located in the heart of Letterewe Deer Forest, some 16 km as the crow flies south east



of Poolewe. The shortest walk-in, - from the north, to Carnmore Lodge which is the logical 'base camp' location for the mountain, is just under 21 flat km from Poolewe. This means that a full day's backpacking both to and from the 'base camp' is unavoidable.

The drive to Poolewe from Central Scotland is about 190 miles and at least 4½ hours, via Inverness, Conon Bridge and the A835 Ullapool road, with a left turn at Garve onto the A832, then right at Achnasheen up the west side of Loch Maree. With a reasonably prompt start you might be in a position to start walking at around 13.00, which in high summer would make it quite feasible for you to get to Carnmore the same day. BB Companies in the north of Scotland are in pole position for access to this route! Our experience was that Poolewe to Carnmore took 6½ hours 'strolling' in, but only 5 hrs 20 mins coming out on a foul day with no incentive to stop! Allowing 6 hours should be comfortable for a capable party.

Going South below Beinn Airigh Charr

When arriving from Gairloch by car, cross the main bridge over the River Ewe and immediately turn right. Then equally immediately find a long term car park on your left (*no charge*). Walk south along the road on the east bank of the River Ewe on a surfaced road, which quickly becomes a private road. It remains surfaced and well maintained as far as Inveran, where you bear slightly left onto a good gravel road and continue eastwards to Kernsary. There is an alternative, rougher, footpath starting from Sron dubh on the north east edge of Poolewe via the north east shore of Loch Kernsary, but there may not be easy parking at Sron dubh.

Looking south from the higher ground approaching Strathan Buidhe.
Carnmore is the (tiny) white speck above the loch and left of centre

From Kernsary follow the vehicle track uphill a little and branch right into the forest on a gravel road going south-east on the far side of the Allt na Creige. Once in the forest, - muddy in places, you will come across a sign telling you to continue for 800 metres to a new and better path to Carnmore than is shown on the map. Then quite a bit further on you will find a second sign telling you to continue on the forest road, - but still for 800 metres! Clearly one of them is wrong!





The last rise after the Dubh Loch causeway, on the way into Carnmore

So just stay on the forest road until you come to a fairly obvious well-used footpath bearing slightly right at a point where the forest road swings uphill to the left and becomes less distinct. The signs tell you to look for a cairn, which in truth is a rather miserable little heap of stones among the bracken on the right. Exit the forest at a gate at GPS reference NG 9102 7889. You then follow a quite superb and well-drained footpath which follows a line along higher ground some way to the east of the Allt na Creige. There is no risk of losing your way and the path continues to provide good walking towards, and beyond, Loch an Doire Crionach which it passes about 50 metres on its east side. As you approach the Strathan Buidhe valley, look for a new and easily found path cutting across the mouth of the valley to regain the original Carnmore path on the south side of the gully. Once across Strathan Buidhe, the path

commences a long gentle descent towards the south end of Fionn Loch, which it crosses on a concrete causeway, and then rises over a low mound to Carnmore Lodge. There are tent sites at the end of the causeway; just outside the gate leading into the Carnmore Lodge grounds, and about 200 metres north of Carnmore Lodge itself, close to a very rough bothy with a messy dirt floor which could not be recommended for sleeping in, but which does provide a place to cook, and eat, out of the wind and out of the midgies! Be warned that the midgie population here is formidable and you would be well advised to be armed with lots of serious repellent – such as 50% Deet, - *and* a flykiller spray, if you intend to go here in the midgie season. (*The flykiller is to clear your tent interior once they get into the tent on your clothes: otherwise they'll bite you all night!*)

On day 2 your camp remains in place while you carry out an unburdened ascent of A' Mhaighdean. The Letterewe and Fisherfield mountains are extraordinarily rough and bare of soil cover, and composed (*we believe*) of ancient gneiss in their lower part and almost equally ancient hard sandstones and conglomerates in their upper parts.

The camp site and bothy 200m north of Carnmore Lodge



This means that you will be climbing over a lot of bare rock and very rough scree ground. In terms of the skeletal nature of the terrain, these mountains are not much less bare and awkward than the Black Cuillin of Skye. So foot and leg injury is a significant possibility and you would be well advised to be carrying proper means of insulating a casualty pending



rescue. A Mhaighdean is described by the official Munro guide as a "*cliff girt bastion*", - and so it is. The east and west faces are formidable, while to the north there is a long rock ridge that would be a great day for a very capable party, but you would need to be sure of yourselves. The only real 'weakness' in the mountain's defences lies well to its south side up an open grass slope of a rather less steep gradient,

South over Carnmore Lodge to A' Mhaighdean:

Heading for the col: Loch Fuar Mor behind

To ascend the mountain by this, - the "trade" route, walk to the east from Carnmore, climbing the fine stone path up the side of Sgurr na

Laocainn diagonally into the valley of the Allt Bruthach an Easain. Then go north eastwards on this same track until just beyond a col, and turn right at a reasonably clear path junction at NH 002775, towards a broad ledge on the west side of Ruadh Stac Mor, and well above Loch Fuar Mor. A fairly distinctive stony path then continues south along a shelf at about the 670m level, becoming a scree gully tight below the upper slopes of Ruadh Stac Mor that reaches the col between Ruadh Stac Mor and A' Mhaighdean, at its east side. The path then swings west from the col across very lumpy bare rock ground towards the south east side of A' Mhaighdean but quickly becomes broken and confused after that. Be warned that the grass slopes directly towards the summit of A' Mhaighdean from the col, are very steep and carry a significant risk of injury from



an uncontrolled slide if anyone loses his footing in wet conditions, especially if wearing shiny waterproofs! The right tactic is to go decisively south on the A'Mhaighdean side of the col, staying down at about the 800m level until you can get 'round the corner' onto the broad, and less steep, south east ridge of A' Mhaighdean at about NH 012 748. *(The party researching this description failed to go far enough south and found itself facing an unacceptably steep final slope at about the 850metres level in thick cloud, rain, and a rising gale. Given the full storm they then faced on the descent, their decision to quit proved to be spot on. They live to fight another day!)* At the col an excellent emergency cave shelter, (photo left) - which would provide refuge for up to about 6 people, was found at GPS reference NH 01647 75384. (8m ref. accuracy quoted on-site by the GPS.)



The

ascent time is likely to be around 3½ hours via the route as described. Descent time via the same route is likely to be about 2-2½ hours. One very noticeable point was that the lower part of the ascent path was frequently crossed by oversized gullies which showed strong evidence of flash flooding and very powerful water flows. Clearly these bare rock mountains experience a very rapid rise in stream power during heavy rain. With that in mind it would be particularly inadvisable to set off up this mountain in sustained heavy rain.

A' Mhaighdean east face, seen across Loch Fuar Mor

On day 3 there is a 5½ to 6 hour backpack out to your car at Poolewe, followed in most cases by a 5 hour drive home. The party researching this route left Carnmore at 09.55, reached the car



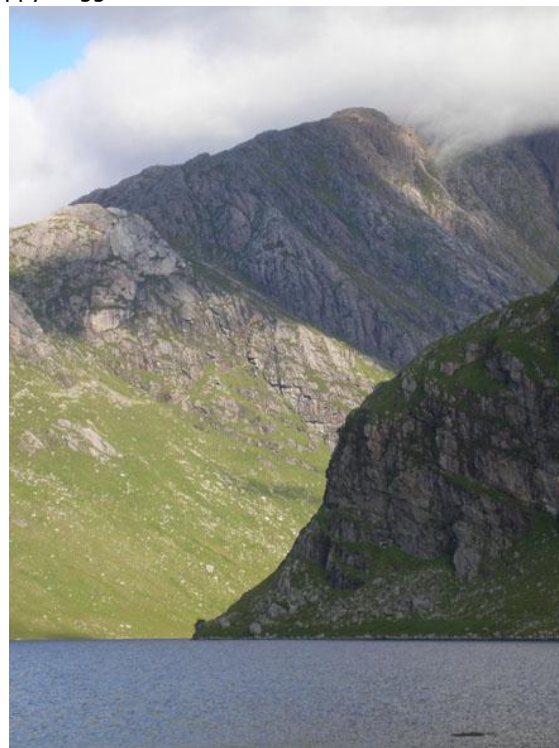
park at Poolewe at 15.20, and then spent half an hour changing and visiting the shop just across the bridge to buy drinks and snacks. There is also a public toilet in Poolewe, just past the Post Office on the west side of the river. They were back in Dundee on the dot of 21.00, including a 30 minute feeding stop at the Happy Haggis in Aviemore!



The causeway between Fionn Loch and Dubh Loch

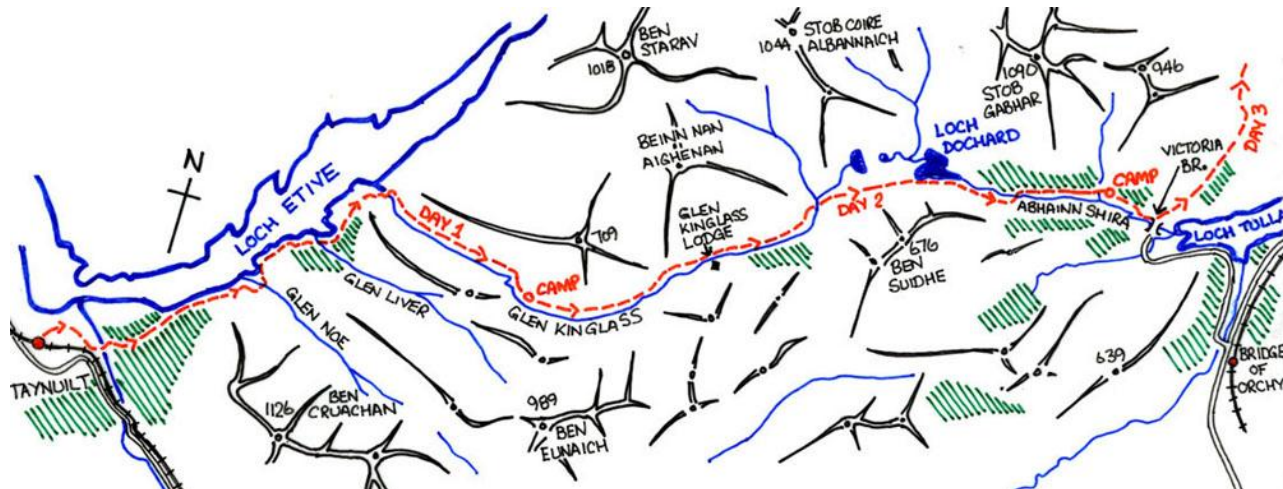
The total effort over the three days is around 60 flat kilometres, - which isn't demanding in terms of physical effort, but the remote location and difficult rough ground requires an experienced and self reliant party, unless you're just walking to Carnmore and back.

To our considerable surprise, mobile phone reception from several service providers was sustained over the first half of the walk to Carnmore and even at Carnmore there was a Vodaphone emergency service. Signal strength from several providers then improved on the first part of the ascent of A' Mhaighdean, but only when there was a line of sight back to Poolewe.



A'Mhaighdean north ridge seen across the Dubh Loch

Route 27: Sea Lochs and Great Big Vistas: Taynuilt to Rannoch Station: 4 Days



This is another "trains-pection" using your Family and Friends Railcard to allow you to do a long route in a "straight" line and still get back to your car at the end of the trip. Taynuilt is a village with a railway station on the Oban branch of the West Highland line. The finishing point of Rannoch Station is no more than "*what it says on the tin*", - but located on the Fort William branch of the West Highland line.

The Oban Train

If you drive to a common point on these lines at either Crianlarich or Tyndrum you can then use the Oban train to get to your starting point, and the Fort William- Glasgow train will bring you back to your car at the end. The train times work quite well. Those from the vicinity of Glasgow can do the whole thing by train. Starting and finishing at Tyndrum offers the shortest rail journey each way. However Tyndrum has two stations; Tyndrum Lower on the Oban line and Tyndrum Upper on the Fort William line, so you



would have a walk of just over 1km from the upper station to the lower at either the start or end of your expedition. From that viewpoint, Crianlarich offers a tidier solution. The route itself is very varied and scenic, but always on low ground (*- low that is, in relation to the mountains surrounding it!*) So it is suitable for use early or late in the season when weather conditions or snow cover might be marginal on high routes. Navigation is also fairly easy, and the overnight camp locations of the second and third nights are easily accessible by car, so it might well make a good D of E training route for an unaccompanied boy expedition supervised at arms length. A dry Spring would be a good time to do this, - before the midgie swarms start to stalk the vast wetlands of Rannoch Moor. Tick vigilance is needed on this route!

On day 1 your train leaves Crianlarich at 10.15/Tyndrum Lower at 10.24 (*later on a Sunday*) and arrives at Taynuilt at 11.02. Leave Taynuilt station via the pedestrian ramp eastwards to the main street from the north platform. Follow the next guidance carefully to find the rather obscure route from here to Inverawe House. Go north on the main street down a hill, over the River Nant, and past a housing cul-de-sac on the right. Turn sharp right (east) along a road for a short distance and then sharply back uphill to the left (north-west) to a little Catholic Church. Turn right (east) at the Church and go along the road towards Bonawe House, but bear gently right at some cottages before you reach that House, to follow a puddly and smelly vehicle track on the south side of Bonawe House, until that track makes a (second) sharp right turn at NN0170 3143. At that map reference go straight-on through a field gate with a rusty pedestrian pass in its



left corner, - but no obvious track in the field beyond it. Inside the field, turn left downhill directly towards the River Awe. Some planks along a fence line will help you avoid big puddles and a bog. As you near the river you will be astonished to find a spectacular pedestrian bridge, entirely unadvertised, and apparently almost unused - as evidenced by the absence of a track to it. Cross the bridge and, - treading carefully between the cows, go straight up the field beyond it on a faint track. There is no obvious way out ahead of you but one will emerge beyond a pedestrian gate at NN0202 3166 leading up steps to Inverawe Country Park's café/shop, and toilets. Go uphill north-eastwards on the surfaced road from the visitor car park entrance and then clockwise around that road to the south-east. Turn sharply back left uphill on a pink stone tarmac road at NN025317. This road, becoming gravel further up the hill, climbs past a new car park, and you then take the leftmost of two tracks through gates at NN028320. This first little bit of the route probably contains more ways of getting lost than the whole of the following 4 days!

The spectacular, but well hidden, footbridge across the Awe: Looking north.

Typical of Day 1. This July view is on the section from Glen Noe to Glen Liver



Your whole first day involves walking on a gravel and grit (and occasionally tarred) vehicle track, which makes for easy progress. There is a small amount of road traffic: - maybe half a dozen vehicles in the day!

While in theory this is a walk up the side of Loch Etive, your route is almost never level, and successive climbs and descents will mark your day. By the time you reach Glen Kinglass you will be back at sea level, but by then you will have climbed 300 metres and gone down the same amount. The upside of this is that you will get fine views up and down Loch Etive. After the bridge at the

mouth of the River Kinglass turn right and follow the track east-south-east up Glen Kinglass, through an old birch woodland at first. Camp in front of the open shelter at Narrachan. The grass is long and the ground is rough, but it is manageable and you can cook in the shelter. The total effort of the day is 21.5 flat km, for which 6 hours including rests and breaks is distinctly generous. If you start walking at 11.15 you should reach Narrachan at around 17.00.



Narrachan, with rough camping ground in front of it

On day 2 continue east up the valley past Glen Kinglass Lodge, but stay north of the river. Beyond the lodge the track is rougher and often on bare granite slabs. Towards the head of the valley the map shows a footbridge over the River Kinglass at NN1858 4023. Note that this bridge has key bits missing and crosses a powerful stream, but there's just about enough of it left for teenagers to view it as a challenge. You have to make very sure they don't try it! The badly signposted new bridge is at GPS ref NN18573992 and involves an unmarked sharp right turn down a new path from about NN1844 3994. Once across the river a faint track follows the river's edge up to the site of the old bridge and then crosses a horrible combination of bog and bare rock until it improves as a fair path up Coire Beith to the watershed. About 1.5km past Loch Dochard, you will find the footbridge shown on the left, which you should use to leave the vehicle track and cross the Abhainn Shira.



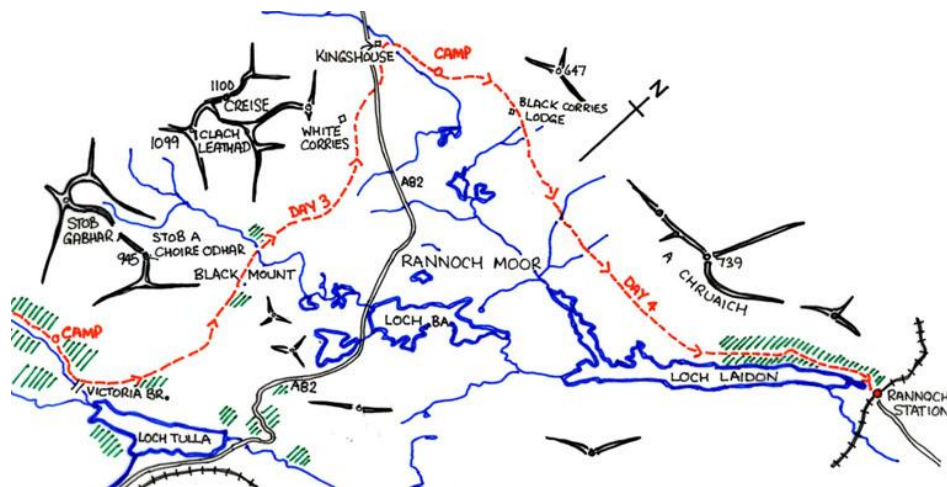
The Bridge over the Abhainn Shira at NN232417

Then follow a very boggy footpath across a deer-fence stile and continue parallel to the river through woodland. *(If you stayed on the vehicle track past that footbridge you would come across monster stepping stones in the Abhainn Shira, but there are a couple of gaps in the middle that are not jumpable. So during heavy water you must go via the footbridge.)* The footpath and vehicle track rejoin at NN238420 where the map shows Clashgour footbridge over the Allt Ghabhar, - but it has been washed-away by a flood. In normal conditions the crossing is a shallow boulder hop, but in case of flood the sign on the site advises of another bridge *(not shown on the map)* over the Abhainn Ghabhar about 800 metres up its west bank, to the north-west of Clashgour farm. Also at NN238420 you will find a good, (but maybe flood-vulnerable), camping opportunity in the wedge between the Abhainn Shira and the Allt Ghabhar. However that's a bit short of where you really want to finish your day.



Tent site short of Victoria Bridge. – Awkward to get to through long grass, - but OK.

So continue on the north bank towards Victoria Bridge on a boggy footpath along the sometimes undercut bank of the river to rejoin the vehicle track again just before Clashgour Hut. Just short of Victoria Bridge you will find a long-grass camp site at NN267421 on the river bank. Camp here and you will have had a total day of 23.2 flat km, which should take about 7.0 hours including rests, but actually took us 30 mins more than that in very wet conditions. The scenery opens



out as you get to the watershed, and a succession of impressive mountains occupies the north side of the valley for the rest of the day. The Abhainn Shira valley is noted for its spectacular dragonflies. Inveroran Hotel is near your camp site, and a potential source of extra food, if required.



Day 3, on the West Highland Way over the Black Mount.

The route on Day 3 turns left at Forest Lodge and uses the West Highland Way over the west edge of Rannoch Moor via the Black Mount and below the White Corries ski area to Kinghouse. This entire day follows the old pre-1933 Glen Coe road, - now just a good quality hill vehicle track. This is a magnificent open landscape with long vistas to the east and the great "Toblerone bar" end of Buachaille Etive Mor gradually dominating the view on your left as you near Kinghouse Hotel where bar meals are available for purchase if you want to use this tactic to reduce the food load that you have to carry. You are advised against trying to camp just north of the hotel. This location is heavily over-used and on past experience can be noisy (*drunken pub patrons wending their way back to their tents after closing time*), and a bit insanitary (*Don't ask*). It is

much better to go past the hotel and turn right down the Black Corries track where you will find a decent camp site at NN2679 5505 and an even better site at NN2728 5498. If you use the first of these sites, 1.1km past Kinghouse Hotel itself, then the effort for the day will be just over 20 flat km. On such a good track, 6 hours including rests is pretty generous.

The first site option for day 3, at 1.1km past Kinghouse Hotel.

On day 4 continue eastwards to Black Corries Lodge on a good gravel road, and around that Lodge by a footpath on its north boundary. Beyond Black Corries Lodge the vehicle track deteriorates, becomes very wet, and wriggles along fairly indirectly, a little south of a wood pole mounted electricity line, but it remains a fairly obvious route until, in the vicinity of the Perth and Kinross boundary, the faint vehicle track trends southwards and your fairly narrow footpath branches left to follow the power line.



The path initially stays about 30m south of the power line. You now need to focus on not losing the fading and very wet path, which gradually gets closer to the power line until it quite blatantly follows the power line from pole to pole for most of the rest of the way to Loch Laidon forest. That's the best advice you can get on finding the path: for the map is pretty nominal! This is heavy, slow and very wet going until you reach the wooden gate into a woodland initially composed of small trees. Something of a "vehicle track" appears, - but is still very wet. Soon thereafter you will burst out onto a dry forest road that will take you all the way to Rannoch Station. However this track does show a disconcerting tendency to go more uphill than you might expect.



Big Vista: Looking towards Glen Coe
from the middle of Rannoch Moor

The total effort of the day is 21.6 flat km. In May 2011 a young party took 7 hrs 20 mins to cover it. You have to catch the 18.37 southbound train from Rannoch Station. It would be prudent to leave your campsite about 8 hours before the train time, so you would want to be off site by around 10.30 that morning. Rannoch Station offers places to sit out of the rain and wind, and the station buildings contain a summer tea room for tourists, (not often open) - most of them arriving by car from the east. Tyndrum has several shops.



On the dry road inside Laidon Forest

The total effort involved in the 4 days is 86.4 flat km, which is not too brutal. Given the relatively low level of the route, the uncomplicated navigation, and the generally substantial nature of the track, this would be a good first long trip for a slightly immature accompanied party. With dire warnings, in advance, about staying away from the dangerous bridge, it would also be good training for a rather more experienced unaccompanied group.

Waiting for the evening train at Rannoch



Routes 27a and 27b: Variants, - each lasting two days.

Because there is also a railway station on the West Highland line about mid-way along this route at Bridge of Orchy, Route 23 can be divided into two separate 2-day weekend routes of quite different characters, - either by starting at Taynuilt and finishing at Bridge of Orchy, or by leaving your vehicle at Bridge of Orchy Station and finishing at Rannoch Station. However the extra distance to/from Bridge of Orchy makes these variations more demanding.

The route diagrams and descriptions are as for Route 23, except that you have to add the distance from Victoria Bridge to Bridge of Orchy onto the "Sea Lochs" part of the route and the reverse distance from Bridge of Orchy to Victoria Bridge to the "Big Vistas" route, - which you might otherwise describe as a Circumnavigation of Rannoch Moor.

The addition of more than extra 7 flat kilometres, from Victoria Bridge to Bridge of Orchy Station, onto the second day of the route from Taynuilt to Victoria Bridge would make that second day a long and punishing 29 flat km, unless you find a campsite further up Glen Kinglass than the site at Narrachan preferred for Route 23 as a whole. There is good camping ground opposite Glen Kinglass Lodge itself, but it would be just a little bit like camping in their 'front garden' and the

estate might not take too kindly to that! The lodge is also 6 flat km further on than Narrachan, which ends up making the first day a bit heavy. The photo on the left shows the Glen Kinglass Lodge environs. The rubble line across the centre of the photo is the far river bank.

Ideally you should be looking for a camp site about half way between Narrachan and Glen Kinglass Lodge. We didn't see anything obvious, and you should be aware that if you go on beyond Narrachan on Day 1, then you might just have to go an extra 6km.

The whole two day route to Bridge of Orchy amounts to about 52 flat km, so it isn't for the fragile. The best option will be to add distance to Day 1

Looking at Glen Kinglass Lodge from the East: Good camping ground in the foreground, - but you get the point about it almost being in their 'front garden'!



The second two-day option, starting at Bridge of Orchy is less affected by the extra distance because the Victoria Bridge to Kingshouse route proved to be a fairly easy 5 hours. The addition to the route is also only 6 flat km in this direction, so the total first day would become 26 flat km, on easy and quick terrain, and well inside 7 hours.

The camp site at the end of the day should remain the same as the end of day 3 of Route 23. Both these two-day options are quite good weekend expedition routes, with the added benefit of not involving high ground and therefore being suitable for early and late in the season, - when you would also dodge the midgies, and hopefully the ticks as well! Both routes are also simple in navigational terms as long as you follow the guidance in the route 23 description for the path from Kingshouse to Rannoch Station.



The two-day option starting and finishing at Bridge of Orchy is a total of about 48 flat kilometres. Between Bridge of Orchy and Victoria Bridge the West Highland Way makes an ascent over high ground before dropping back down towards Inveroran Hotel. There is also the slightly shorter option of just walking along the minor road instead. It isn't busy, but do exercise safe road walking procedures if that is what you decide to do.

One of the classic Scottish mountain views: - Approaching Glen Coe on day 3 of Route 24, *(-or the first day of the two day route from Bridge of Orchy)* with Buachaille Etive Mor increasingly dominating the scene. Kingshouse Hotel is just visible at the right edge of the picture.

Section F: Very Long Journeys

Crossing Scotland: Starting Day 6 at Melgarve in upper Speyside

Standard expeditions tend to be limited to a maximum of 4 days, - which is the duration of a Duke of Edinburgh's Award Gold expedition, and it is also about the longest trip for which a party can reasonably carry enough food within the limits of sensible rucksack weight and capacity. Route 21 manages five days only because meals for the equivalent of a whole day are purchased at Tulloch hostel on the third day.

However much longer trips amounting to backpacking holidays are entirely possible. Generally they require a more 'domestic' approach to practical realities by the party, such as finding opportunities for food re-supply, washing and drying clothes, - and taking rest days within very long journeys to allow the participants to recover from muscle and tissue damage and accumulated tiredness. A rough rule of thumb is that a party needs a day off after every 3-4 days of hard work, at a location where it can buy food, clean and dry clothes and recover in tolerable comfort.

This Section gives only a bullet point guide to a route crossing the whole of Scotland, and refers to a companion volume giving comprehensive information about that route.

However the important thing to note is that the Cross Scotland route is capable of being done in part, and different elements of it can be used to create a range of expedition routes of between 3 and 7 days.

Then again there are long distance routes in other parts of Scotland, such as the Southern Uplands Way - which also crosses the whole of the country, but not in such severe mountain terrain.

Be a little wary of some heavily publicised 'official' long distance routes. Some of them are over-used and over commercialised. Frankly in some cases they are the contrived invention of official agencies seeking to get you to spend money in their areas and simply very boring and not worth the effort.

The most popular 'official' routes also tend to suffer more than their fair share of poorly equipped and rather odd people doing 'challenges', - and pretty clueless at looking after the environment. You would do better to go out and design your own long routes, perhaps by combining and extending routes in this book: It will be a lot more satisfying and most importantly, - it will be your own!



Route 28: Crossing Scotland: 15 Days

It is entirely possible for a basically competent group over about 15 years old to backpack right across Scotland from West to East. Parties from the author's Company have done it twice, and others may have done so as well.

A companion book to this is entirely devoted to describing how to do that and to providing logistical information about how to set it up. It also describes what it was like to do it in 2008.

Since that book is just about as thick as this one, no details will be attempted here except the following bullet points:

- It starts at Shiel Bridge near Kyle of Lochalsh, which you can reach by Citylink coach, and finishes at Montrose, from where there are lots of trains home.
- The effort involved is 327 flat kilometres and it takes about 15 days of which 12½ are walking days, giving an average working day's effort of 26 flat kilometres.



The start of the Cross Scotland Walk at Shiel Bridge



- and the finish 15 days later at Montrose

- In 2008 the cost per participant was about £210, including fares, hostel and campsite fees etc.
- You need the assistance of parents or other officers to have support vehicles meet you at two or three points on the route to bring fresh clothes and food re-supply, -and to take away your used clothes.
- The basic route is Shiel Bridge - Glen Affric - Glen Moriston - Fort Augustus – Corrieyairick - Upper Speyside – Newtonmore - Tromie Bridge - Glen Feshie – White Bridge – Deeside – Braemar - Glen Callater -Jock’s Road - Glen Clova - Glen Lethnot – Edzell - Montrose.
- Ask for the book on CD by sending an e-mail to The Boys’ Brigade Director for Scotland, at Carronvale.

The route is also capable of being tackled in bite-sized chunks if you want to cross Scotland in several stages. However some days only have merit and meaning if they are part of a crossing of the whole of Scotland, - for why else would you want to spend a day walking along busy roads from Edzell to Montrose!

The Cross Scotland route includes parts of routes that are in this book. These parts include:

- Day1 of Route 3 – Tromie Bridge to Ruigh Aiteachain
- A reversal of the third day of Route 22 (Kingussie variant)
- Day 1 of Route 19 – Jock’s Road, but from Auchallater
- Most of the first day of Route 18 – Clova Hotel to Muckle Cairn.

This isn’t an ‘official’ route. It is entirely unsignposted. In places it is trackless ‘jungle’, and there are at least two sections where anyone poorly equipped or unable to navigate could get into a lot of trouble. Odd people doing pub challenges please note!

Section G: Awfully Big Adventures

Let's be very clear about one thing. I am not saying that the following routes are "safe": They are at the back of this book for a reason. This is serious adventure on terrain that contains both objective and subjective hazards, and safety is critically dependent on competence and personal maturity. So plan well before you decide to do these and don't blame me if these routes bite you, - for you have been told!

However they are terrific adventure and hopefully you'll find the right reasons not to forget them if you do them. You will need good weather, and it will help if you can respond quickly to windows of good weather when they are forecast.

Choose selected parties of sensible, and capable people whom you know well, who have been well briefed/trained beforehand for what they are about to do, and who won't let you down in terms of fitness. If you have boys who go wobbly in steep places - this is not for them!

Above all don't take daft wee laddies to these places. It would be preferable if they returned home carrying their rucksacks as opposed to being in them!

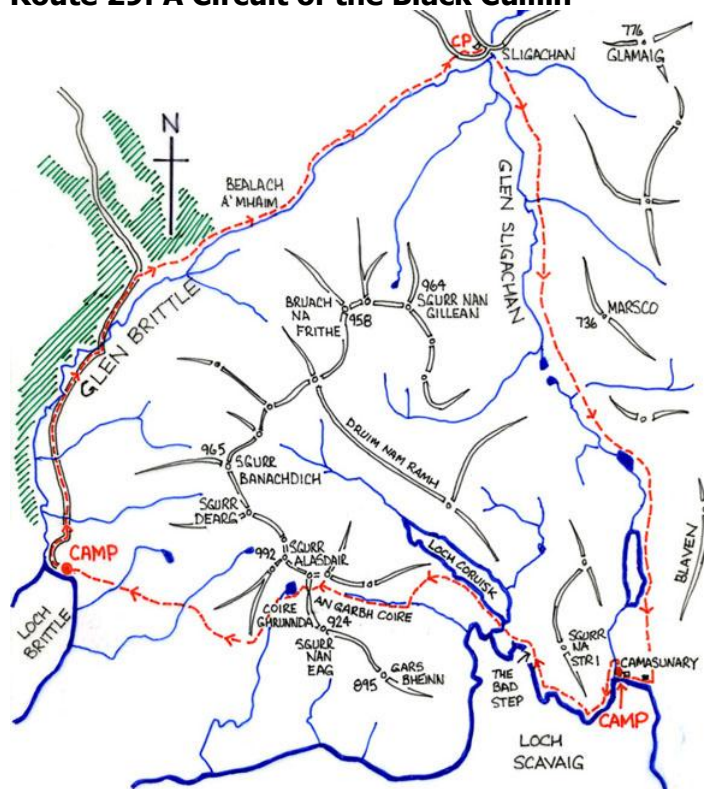
Lots of photos have been included to give you some idea of what is involved

Above Loch Coire Ghrundda en-route to Sgurr nan Eag

This picture isn't actually *quite* on Route 29, but that route does go down to the loch at bottom left from just off-shot to the upper right



Route 29: A Circuit of the Black Cuillin



This three-day route comprises two simple short and utterly innocuous days, separated by one of the two hardest days listed in this book. The second day of Route 30 may be more arduous, but the middle day of this route is not only physically demanding, but contains an array of substantial physical and technical hazards. So why include it? Well maybe because this is the most spectacular and unforgettable backpacking route that you're ever likely to do in Scotland!

However before you even *think* of doing it, my advice is that officers should have carried out an advance reconnaissance of the route and gained first hand knowledge of two sections in particular, namely the crossing of the Bad Step; and the descent route from Loch Coire Ghrunnda to Glen Brittle. In the case of the Bad Step, you won't be able to judge a boy's ability to cross it if you don't know exactly what he will be up-against before you take him there. In the case of the Coire Ghrunnda descent, - you could get into an awful lot of trouble if you don't find the correct way down.

The other thing to bear in mind is that this is a route to do when the forecast is unmistakably set fair for the north-west. The Black Cuillin are magnetic and so the compass is unreliable, especially on summits

and ridges. A GPS might help, but in this cliff and scree terrain a GPS might well be screened from satellite view by huge rock walls and it won't find you the safe way through a labyrinth of giant boulders and little cliffs: This is a Mark 1 Eyeball job!but to our tale as Burns famously said!

Your starting point is at Sligachan Hotel on the east coast of Skye, about 14 kilometres south of Portree where, on the southwest side of the hotel, there is parking on an abandoned piece of the old Dunvegan road. The drive from central Scotland to Sligachan is maybe 5 hours. However if you make a reasonably sharp start in the morning you should arrive in time to set off down Glen Sligachan towards Camasunary by around 2.30 p.m. The 14.4 flat kilometres to Camasunary beach are very scenic, but flat and not in any way demanding, so you should maybe arrive at the beach by 18.30. On the final approach to the beach from the north, stay well to the east side of the valley until you reach the shore. The apparent short cut towards the bothy looks good - but is actually a bog. Once you reach the shore, just east of the buildings called Camasunary on the map, (Cam-as-ooo-na-ray) walk westwards along the head of the flotsam littered beach until you reach the vicinity of the white painted bothy at NG511188, shown in the photo below. The bothy is big, in very good condition, and usually clean. You can live in it, but you may prefer to camp on the short dry smooth machair grass west of the bothy, and just use the bothy for cooking and socialising in the evening. The water supply is drawn from the main river west of both the bothy and the campsite. Go well up the river with your bucket to get water, for it is tidal for a good few hundred metres back from the beach, and you don't want a bucket of brine!

On the second day, pack up your kit early and make a sharp start. Theoretically this day is 24.3 flat kilometres and equally theoretically should just take 7½ hours. However that calculation is meaningless in this case because of the severity of the terrain. On the last occasion we did this route in perfect conditions and it took 10½ hours.

Your first problem arrives immediately. You have to get across the substantial Abhainn Camas Fhionnairigh (river/sea inlet) just west of the campsite. Anecdote has it that some rather too puritanical protesters burned down the suspension bridge many years ago as protest against excessive improvement of the wilderness. *(It becomes more understandable when you know that there was also a crazy proposal at that time to dynamite the Bad Step to make it safer).* You therefore have to get across the river, so proceed upstream maybe for as much as 300 metres to look for the best opportunity.



Camasunary Bothy

Intermittent tracks will give you clues. However there is rarely a way across with dry feet! It might be a good decision to put your training shoes on your bare feet and choose to get them soaked rather than your boots. Anyhow you will take a bit of time to get

across the river and changed back into dry socks and boots. Once across the river the path turns downstream again to start circumventing the great rock cone of Sgurr na Stri above you, with its boiler plate slabs falling to sea level in places. The path is alternately wet and rocky, goes up and down ledges, and generally stays within about 20 or 30 metres of sea level. There are a few 'red herring' tracks that come to dead ends. In particular, one convincing track somewhere near Rubha Ban suddenly ends at a geo (*a narrow vertical chasm in the shoreline into which the tide penetrates.*) You have to backtrack a few metres and climb up a couple of rock ledges to get over the head of the geo. In this way the path continues gradually turning clockwise around Sgurr na Stri. The scenery has no equal, - but do watch where you're going!

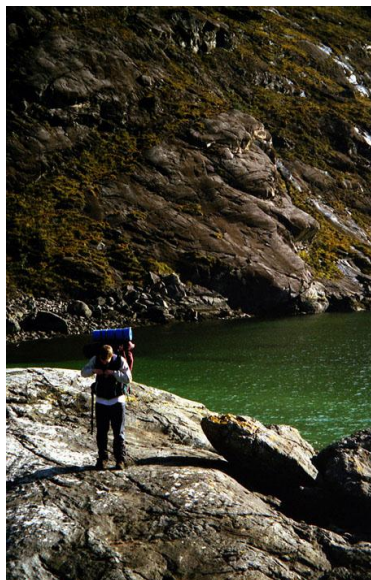
Heading for the Bad Step in a freezing April. This party will exit via Sgurr Hain and not over the main ridge!



The promontory of Rubha Buidhe is crossed via the neck on its north side and the path then quickly works its way back down towards the steep shore for the remaining 800 metres or so to the Bad Step. Just short of the Bad Step you have to climb up a little to get over the top of a big slab that falls into the sea, and then descend quickly beyond it, more or less to sea level, as you reach the even bigger slab of the Bad Step itself.

This famous/notorious obstacle is a sloping smooth Gabbro slab running from high on the mountainside straight down into the sea- with no way round it, - either above or below. Whatever you do, don't go higher here or you really will get into bother. As you approach from the south, get down fairly close to the water, and find an obvious slight overhang, that has a detached block below it that you can walk along. Follow that out towards its seaward end and you will find a very short vertical crack leading up onto the sloping slab itself. Looking across the slab you will see a gently rising split with a prominent lower lip offering a way across. If you can't see the split then you're in the wrong place. Pull up the short vertical crack until you are standing on the bottom lip of the crack in the sloping slab, and "walk" up and across the slab via that crack, which widens and eases a little as you go. Just beyond mid-point in your crossing there is a tiny ledge

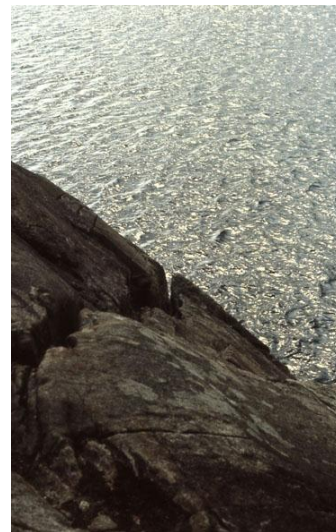
(from which the photo was taken below right). Beyond that, one crack continues upwards, and another crack trends onwards and downwards. Your way from the mid-point is, of course, - down!



Looking back across at the Bad Step slab.

The crossing crack starts low on the right side and rises diagonally left.

This is no place for the nervous or unstable. The required skill level doesn't amount to much more than decent physical competence; - but carrying a rucksack across this slab does cause the wearer to become more unstable. Increased protection for the boys in the party might best be provided by the officers making multiple crossings to ferry the boys' rucksacks across so they can then cross unburdened. Alternatively, or in addition, limited rope protection can be offered from a seated belay position at the little ledge just beyond the mid-point (*photo below*). But the belay is very much to one side rather than above, and there is no rope anchor at the ledge. (*In this case, we don't have an anchor that keeps the soul!*) If you want to do this, mainly for the confidence boost that it would provide, then a **30m** x 8mm walkers' protection rope plus a few tape waistbands and karabiners is enough, - but you all need to know what you're doing.



Once across the Bad Step the tension will ease a bit, and there will be a real buzz in the group. You then continue north in among the jumbled boulders next to the shore to the tiny bay of Loch nan Leachd, which on a good day will be one of the most stunning natural landscape experiences of your life. The bright green clear water, the formidable scenery, the cries of the birds echoing off the cliffs, and the smell and sound of the sea make for quite a combination. Photos are too one-dimensional to do it justice. You will want to take a break here, but beware of the tendency to linger too long, for there is much yet to do!

Looking back down the Bad Step slab from the little ledge at the mid-point

The difficult bit! You are travelling from right to left.



you are ascending south-westwards in the wide gully leading to the lowest level of An Garbh Coire. (*See the photo on page 151*)

As you near the 180 metres floor level of the corrie, there is a tendency to want to keep gaining height to your right (west), so you can cut the corner towards the upper corrie. DON'T. The siren call of this shortcut across the smooth rock slabs leads you onto ever more exposed ground above drops on your left, where you might earn a Degree from the School of Hard Knocks. Instead stay fairly well down on the lower corrie floor and head towards about NG 472199, losing a little height, before turning uphill to the west and picking a line fairly close to the stream to ascend into the upper corrie.

Just entering the upper tier of Garbh Coire with the Caisteal standing on the pass in the upper left-centre

Leave by the path going north-north-west along the gully between Rubha Port Sgaile and the main massif of Sgurr na Stri, until you reach the Scavaig River, - the shortest river in the UK. Cross the generous stepping-stones and follow the muddy rough path north-westwards along the south west shore of Loch Coruisk. You need to get up into the lower floor of the multi-tiered An Garbh Coire, the lowest floor of which is above you to your left at about the 180 metres level.

The best way to do this is to stay along the loch shore to about NG 481205, and then start to climb in a steady leftward turn until



The upper corrie is ascended westwards straight towards the huge block of Caisteal a Garbh Coire (*The Castle of the Rough Corrie*) standing astride the pass above you. You will find yourself in a fierce landscape of big jumbled scree up which a fitful path can sometimes be traced by scratch marks on the rocks. The stones here are multi-coloured, jagged, and the most abrasive you will ever have encountered. This is painstaking hand, foot, and shin-skinning stuff. By the time you reach the pass your fingertips will be wafer thin. If you are wearing gloves they will soon have holes in them. If you like your boots polished and shiny, - just forget about coming here! The other disconcerting thing about these big stone blocks is that they are surprisingly low density and often quite easily moved if you pull up on them. Some types are quite metallic (*which is probably why the compass is dodgy in the Cuillin*), and make a dull musical ring when they fall against each other. Just be a little careful not to pull a great big rock down on yourself because it is lighter than you expect, - but not exactly polystyrene foam!

Dan Hine high in Garbh Coire, approaching the crest of the pass



The track, - where traceable, turns left very high in the corrie and reaches the pass of Bealach a Garbh Coire on the south side of the Caisteal. An even more



spectacular view opens out to you across the Cuillin Main Ridge and westwards to the Minch and Atlantic.

Moving on, you should initially go fairly straight down towards Loch Coire a Ghrunnda until clear of a small rock outcrop, and then diagonally left to the south east corner of the loch. The descent is nowhere exposed, but it is down a steep slope of big wobbly blocks mixed with loose scree, so it should be taken painstakingly to maintain safety. (See Page 142)

The west side of Bealach a Garbh Coire seen from Sgurr Sgumain. Your line down from the right side of the Caisteal is (in this view) slightly left to mid height and then diagonally to the right corner of the lochan.

Again there is a broken twisting path of sorts, although the “path” does require a vivid imagination and a bit of a hawk-eye to find it. Down at the loch, follow the shore westwards around to the west side, where its outlet stream exits. Do not, repeat DO NOT, attempt to descend Coire a Ghrunnda until you reach the outlet stream. If you have lots of time and it's a hot day then there is some great swimming to be had at around NG 4515 2016, as you can see on the right.

Swimming in Loch Coire Ghrunnda

Once you reach the outlet from the loch, cross the outlet stream and you will find a bare-rock and rubble path descending south-westwards. However don't be too quick to just follow the path, for there are false paths a little lower down that trend too much into the corrie centre, where there are formidable slabs and overhangs. The trick is always to favour the right (north east) sidewall as you face downhill and circumvent rock corners and drops by staying just a little uphill to the right where the descent lines are

easier. As said at the outset, an advance reconnaissance from Glen Brittle to find the ascent line into Coire Ghrunnda would be very wise before officers later come to lead a party down it. You will emerge from the main difficulties as you descend below the 600 metres level. Facing downhill, keep right in the lower corrie and look for a path on the right going straight down what *almost* amounts to a gully fairly close under the cliffs of Sron na Ciche. You will find a fairly well marked path going down that “gully” (*if you don't then it's the wrong route again*) and it will bring you out onto the Glen Brittle track on the shortest possible line. The path along the bottom of Sron na Ciche was very muddy when we last used it in 2003, but there was a great deal of improvement work underway between there and Glen Brittle, and most of the track to Glen Brittle is now veritable motorway! If this seems like over-improvement, then you needed to see the mess it was before the works were done! Also some of the track upgrades are on lines that may not yet be reflected by the maps, but almost anything going west-north-west will get you there.

The lip of Coire a Ghrunnda. Now do you appreciate why it's a good idea to know the way down this before you try to do it in anger?!



Glen Brittle Campsite



Glen Brittle campsite is a commercial facility, open from April/May to late September and it has a respectably stocked shop, usually with frozen bread in the freezer. It is a midgie prone site and I would recommend using the tent pitches just inside the fence at the back of the beach. *(but they'll still get you!)* Glen Brittle beach is excellent and clean, but composed of fine black volcanic sand, which gives it an unusual dark colour.

On day 3 your route is easy and undemanding. You walk northwards up the quiet public road in Glen Brittle to the point where that road climbs uphill out of the head of the valley and then turns sharply to the north-north-west. Just short of where the road spirals sharply uphill you will find the Mam path leaving the road on the right, going slightly downhill at first, steadily to the crest of the very gentle Bealach a Mhaim (The

and then traversing below a plantation before climbing Mam), and then downhill by the edge of the Allt Dearg Mor (The Big Red Burn) back to your vehicle at Sligachan.

The whole day is 17.5 flat kilometres and should take you about 5 hours, which with a decently sharp start in the morning will give you a reasonable amount of time to get back to Central Scotland that same day, - if that's where you should be going!

If you're hungry then Seamus's restaurant bar at Sligachan does great meals. Otherwise it's the chip shop in the car park at Kyle, -or Mc Donalds at the Fort, - probably both!

Crossing the Mam, with Glamaig, one of the Red Cuillin, in the background, - and the white dot of Sligachan Hotel between Mike's head and his rucksack



Looking from Sgurr Hain (on variant route 29A), across Coruisk to Route 29 in Garbh Coire on a cloudy day. The dashed red line roughly indicates the subsequent route from Coruisk into the lower part of Garbh Coire.



Route 29A: A Variant Avoiding the Bad Step

Many parties will feel that the Bad Step involves just a little too much “adventure”. So here’s an option that lets you avoid that part of the route.

When walking down Glen Sligachan on the first day, there are a few rough opportunities to camp about 6km south of Sligachan, in the vicinity of the Allt nam Fraoch Coire, either near the Camasunary path around NG503238, or a little to the west towards the centre of Strath na Creitheach. You may have to rake about a bit to find a tolerable site.

That reduces your first day to barely 7 flat kilometres. Your second day then becomes 27 flat km, south-south-eastwards across the Sgurr Hain ridge by an undemanding path that only needs you to show a little care for slippery basalt dykes in the otherwise painfully adhesive gabbro. That path takes you down to Loch Coruisk at the stepping stones over the Scavaig River. From there you pick up the route description earlier in Route 25 and follow it over Garbh Coire and Coire a Ghrunnda to Glen Brittle.

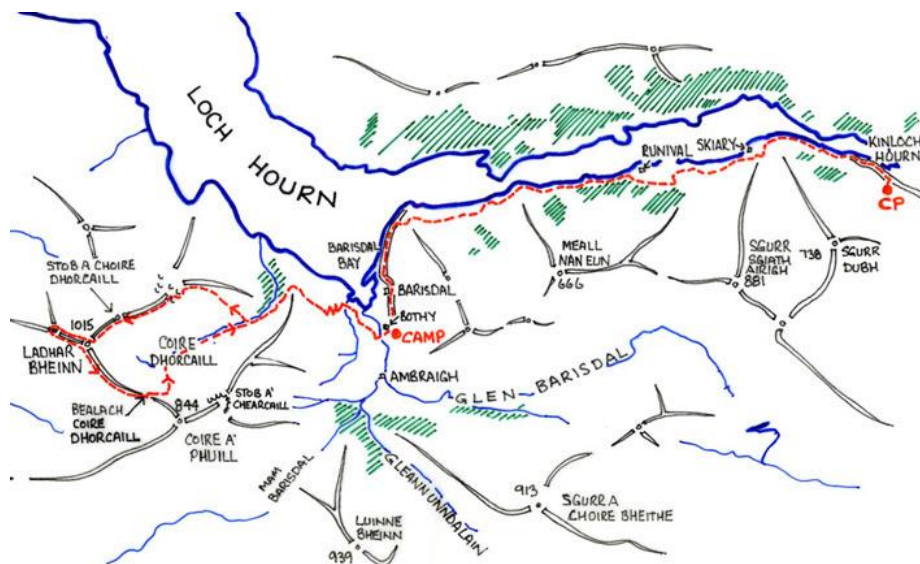
Given the easier nature of the terrain, it seems unlikely that this variation would take any longer than the route via Camasunary and the Bad Step.

When you arrive in Coruisk, do drop your bags at a convenient point and go a little south to see the Bad Step for yourselves.

Glen Sligachan: A sunset photo looking north-west to Sgurr nan Gilleann, from near the point where you should camp on the variant route.



Route 30: Ladhar Bheinn from Kinloch Hourn



Whereas the preceding route around the Black Cuillin is technically *very* difficult, and *quite* arduous, - this two day route is *very* arduous and only *quite* technically difficult. It is also different in that it follows the classic expedition format of back-packing into the base of a remote mountain, climbing that mountain unburdened, and then backpacking out to the transport. But the second day is certainly a real toughie!

The mountain in this case, Ladhar Bheinn (pron. Laarven), is one of the great Scottish mountains, - remotely located within the extraordinarily rough and steep Knoydart mountains,

defended by cliffs and steep slopes and offering a spectacular ridge crossing to reach its summit where, on a good day, the views extend right out across the Western Isles to the Atlantic horizon. (*If you stare west and tell the boys you can see America, then someone will nearly always fall for it!*) This is only a two-day route for a fit party with a lot of endurance, and good personal security in steep narrow places, but like the Cuillin route it is very rewarding.

The first day of Route 30 is identical to Route 7 earlier in this book. See that description for travel arrangements and details of the walk to Barisdale. Equally the backpack back out to the car park is the same as the second day of Route 7. However that's only part of the second day of Route 30! Get settled in at Barisdale and go to bed early, - for Sunday is a really big day. Camp well away from other tents and well away from the generator so that evening noise doesn't keep you awake. If other campers keep you awake, you won't feel bad about disturbing them at 06.00 the next day!

On Sunday morning get up no later than 06.00, and be ready to leave by 07.00. You now have to climb Ladhar Bheinn from sea level, which makes it close to 1100 metres to the top, and there's even a little height to climb on the way down. The return trip is going to take you something like 7 hours, so you won't be back at Barisdal until around 13.30-14.00, and are unlikely to be ready to start backpacking out to the car until closer to 15.00, - which will get you back at the car after 18.30. Then you have a 4-hour drive home, plus a stop at McDonalds in Fort William. So leaving camp at 07.00 is the latest starting time you can afford! Pre-warn parents not to expect to see their sons until at least 23.00.

Beware of guide books extolling the virtues of ascending and descending Ladhar Bheinn by what is called the "Circuit of Coire Dhorrcail". This involves either climbing or descending the exceptionally steep nose of Stob a Chearcaill on the south east side of Coire Dhorrcail, or trying to get round it by some fairly hairy slopes in Coire a Phuill. It is best avoided. More rewarding and impressive, - but actually less risky, is an ascent of the mountain by its north east ridge, called Druim a Choire Odhair, which then rises at high level to a spectacular crossing of the narrow Ceum a Leth-Coise ridge.

The steep nose of Stob a Chearcaill. You don't want to get involved with this!

Make sure the party has day bags (*usually emptied main rucksacks*) with drinks bottles and a generous supply of high energy action snacks, such as nuts, chocky bars and sandwiches, - and get a decent but very quick breakfast in you before you start. Leave the campsite southwards by the road bridge across the Barisdale river and immediately turn sharp right to follow the path along the drier edge of the soggy flood plain, - going north-north-westwards until you are quite close to the loch and then west to the valley edge where you may have to jump the burn. The path then climbs a steep hillside covered in deep bracken and heather, and there are quite a few false trails. From about the 80 metres level the well made track zig-zags up a shallow gully until it levels out, contours north-westwards around the hillside, and then descends slightly into the gully below Coire Dhorrcail. Once through the narrowest part of the entry gully the path starts to rise into the corrie and remains good until around NG 853 044, after which it deteriorates and gradually vanishes. The decaying track continues to point fairly directly up the corrie, but don't follow it. Instead go right and drop a little to cross the Allt Coire Dhorrcail at about NG 850 043. After heavy rain this may not be possible and it would be unwise to try. This is not a mountain you should seek to climb in very wet conditions. Once over the stream, head directly north-west up the pathless mountainside with a view to emerging onto the lower part of the ridge at around NG 843 050.





You will find that the broad ridge top here comprises big flat plates of rock separated by annoying steep sided little hollows that slow your progress. As you look in front of you up the ridge, a steep rise faces you, composed of a mixture of little cliffs mixed with grass ledges and grass gullies. Have a careful look at it and then work out an ascent line that avoids exposure above drops. This is entirely possible and with competent route selection you will get to the top without drama. At about the 700 metres level you will then emerge again onto a broad and fairly level ridge of lumpy rounded bedrock, which will gradually steepen. There is something of a track above 700 metres. Above 850m a great narrow prow rises above you sharpening to an arête. This may make some of your party a little nervous. *(Are we going up that!?)*

Ceum a Leth-Coise

However with an average level of survival instinct in placing their feet they will soon find that this airy situation looks a lot more daring than it actually is. Pick your way along this magnificent arête, followed by a short descent to a little col just before the final climb up to the East summit of Ladhar Bheinn. The narrow level summit of Ladhar Bheinn is like the ridge of a tent, with high points at either end, -about 500m apart, and a slight sag in the middle,- *(although there is another little high point in between that slightly spoils the purity of that comparison).*

Working up the steep broken ground to the 850m. level



Mark crossing the Ceum a Leth-Coise arête in thick cloud



The highest point is the East summit, but the trig point is at the West summit where you will find a *(now shattered)* circular concrete trig point, which had a little electronic transponder attached to it by a cable in 2007. Looking back eastwards from the West Summit of Ladhar Bheinn

On a good day the views are fantastic. However don't hang about for long, because you don't have time to spare. There are two descent options. One is to go back the way you came up. The other is to go south-eastwards from the East summit around the head of Coire Dhorrcail to the col of Bealach Coire Dhorrcail, and descend into the corrie from there. There isn't a huge time difference between the two. If you want to descend via Bealach Coire Dhorrcail, then turn half-right at the East

Summit and follow the ridge south-eastwards behind the Coire Dhorrcail headwall.

There is a bouldery loose track that descends this ridge fairly sharply. Pay attention to your foot placement here. Further down this lumpy ridge you will have to get down a couple of simple rock steps, but it is easy and not a significant problem.



From the East Summit towards the Bealach,
- beyond the next rise.

When you reach Bealach a Coire Dhorrcail, the first thing you want to make sure of is that you are at the right col, for there are several other little hollows that could be mistaken for it. A GPS check would do no harm here. Now you need to turn left from the ridge and descend the head of the corrie. As you look down the gully, you will see steep broken ground, but with a fairly clear descent line trending well rightwards as you face down into the corrie, and very faint indications of previous use, *(but which might have been our vivid imagination).*

Descending the headwall of Coire Dhorrcail
from the Bealach



Descend, trending right, to get below the north-west face of Stob Dhorrcail. This diagonal line is the easiest ground, and will protect the people at the front of your party from stonefall generated at the back. Traversing well out towards the south side of of Coire Dhorrcail allows you to circumvent short cliffs that block the direct route lower down, and it also



allows you then to look back across the line and see where they are! Once you can pick out a clear way down into the corrie bottom, work your way back into the corrie centre and walk down on the south side of the main stream. It's a waste of time and energy trying to find a track until beyond the junction of the main stream with the Allt Tarsuinn. Thereafter return to the campsite by the route you used coming in. You will be fairly shattered by the time you get back to the campsite, and will need a rest plus food and drink before tackling the 3½ - 4 hour backpack to the car. Now you will find out just how mentally strong your party really is. Once their hearts and minds know they have to do it, their legs have no choice but to follow!

Leaving the lower part of Coire Dhorcaill

Realistically you will need 75-90 minutes at the campsite to recover, eat, pack-up and get moving. The walk back to the transport is then a case of gritting your teeth and getting on with it. Once back in the car it is important for the tired driver to set himself up for a safe journey home. A can of Red Bull pre-positioned in the glove box helps! A good first objective is to get to Fort William. Food may be important there, but to stay alert the driver is also advised to consume a large McDonald's coffee. This chewy stuff is good for keeping a driver wide-awake for another 3 hours! It is wise to get the boys to phone home from Fort William, for much of the remainder of the route south has no mobile phone reception, - and Mums can get just a bit excitable at 11 o'clock on a Sunday night!

Just how hard is this day? Well the mountain climb on its own amounts to the equivalent of 26.1 flat kilometres on difficult and often trackless terrain, - but only carrying a day bag. Then there is a further 14.7 flat kilometres with a full rucksack. That's a total of nearly 41 flat kilometres equivalent, involving around 11½ hours of walking and climbing. If you don't think that's hard enough then your name clearly *is* Gunga Din! More than one senior boy, having done this trip, has failed to raise the motivation to make it to school the next morning!

Just leaving Barisdale for home. Spot the tiredness!



Ladhar Bheinn seen across Barisdale Bay: Your route to the summit (rear 2nd right) enters from the left at mid-height, drops into Coire Dhorcaill and then up the narrow ridge on the right, -which looks like a pointed summit from this end-on perspective.



Maps for Each Route:

These are the recommended maps for the routes in this book:

- Route 1: 1:50,000 43 Braemar, and 44 Ballater: Recommended is Harvey's 1:25,000 Lochnagar and Glenshee
- Route 2: 1:50,000 43 Braemar
- Route 3: 1:50,000 35 Kingussie
- Route 4: 1:50,000 41 Ben Nevis
- Route 5: 1:50,000 43 Braemar
- Route 6: 1:50,000 43 Braemar
- Route 7: 1:50,000 Loch Alsh and Glen Shiel. OS Explorer 1:25,000
- Route 8: 1:50,000 41 Ben Nevis, or Harvey's Glen Coe
- Route 9: OS Explorer 388 1:25,000 Lochnagar, Glen Muick and Glen Clova, or Harvey's 1:25,000 Lochnagar
- Route 10: 1:50,000 41 Ben Nevis
- Route 11: O.S. Explorer 1:25,000, 381 Blairgowrie etc, 387 Glenshee etc, and 388 Lochnagar etc.
- Route 12: OS Explorer 404 1:25,000 Braemar, Tomintoul and Glen Avon
- Route 13: OS Explorer 388 1:25,000 Lochnagar, Glen Muick and Glen Clova, or Harvey's 1:25,000 Lochnagar
- Route 14: 1:50,000 43 Braemar and 38 Grantown and Cairngorm
- Route 15: 1:50,000 42 Glen Garry
- Route 16: OS Explorer 1:25,000 393 Ben Alder, Loch Ericht and Loch Laggan

- Route 17: 1:25,000 Explorer 393 Ben Alder, Loch Ericht and Loch Laggan
- Route 18: OS Explorer 1:25,000, 401 Loch Laggan and Creag Meagaidh
- Route 19: 1:50,000 44 Ballater or Harvey's 1:25,000 Lochnagar and Glenshee
- Route 20: 1:50,000 43 Braemar and 44 Ballater or Harvey's 1:25,000 Lochnagar and Glenshee
- Route 21: 1:50,000 43 Braemar and 44 Ballater or Harvey's 1:25,000 Lochnagar and Glenshee
- Route 22: 1:50,000 43 Braemar and 36 Grantown and Cairngorm
- Route 23: 1:50,000 43 Braemar, 36 Grantown and Cairngorm and 35 Kingussie.
- Route 24: 1:50,000 43 Braemar, and 1:25,000 Explorer 394 and 386.
- Route 25: OS Explorer 1:25,000, 393 Ben Alder, Loch Ericht and Loch Laggan, and 401 Loch Laggan and Creag Meagaidh
- Route 26: 1:50,000 19 Gairloch and Ullapool. Explorer 1:25,000 433 and 435.
- Route 27: 1:50,000 50 Glen Orchy and 41 Ben Nevis. 1:25,000 377 and 385 recommended as additions.
- Route 28: 1:50,000, 33 Loch Alsh, 34 Fort Augustus, 35 Kingussie, 43 Braemar, 44 Ballater, 54 Dundee to Montrose.
- Route 29: Recommended is Harvey's 1:25,000. Skye –The Cuillin
- Route 30: 1:50,000 Loch Alsh and Glen Shiel. OS Explorer 1:25,000, 413 Knoydart and Loch Hourn advised for the mountain.

Appendix: Tick Risks and Their Management

The Insect and the Bite

A "Tick" is a small roundish/pear-shaped blood-feeding insect, often black in colour, which attaches itself to large warm blooded animals - including humans. It burrows its sharp jaws into their skin and sucks their blood over a period of several days until its abdomen is swollen with that blood, and then it drops off. However they are very difficult for you to pull-off because of their barbed jaws - like a fish hook but very tiny. In size, a tick can be as small as 1 millimetre across, - and therefore difficult to see. However a big adult tick can be anything up to 6 millimetres across, - maybe even bigger. Happily the ones that have bitten us recently have all been very small, and therefore less of a risk.

A tick usually gets onto you by climbing up the stalks of tall plants such as heather and bracken, and then dropping onto your clothing or skin as you brush through that long vegetation. Up in the mountains their usual blood source is deer, hence the reason why the main Scottish tick is called the Black Deer Tick. Once they land on you they crawl towards warm soft parts of your body, seeking an easy place to dig-in. Thus your upper legs, groin, waist and upper arms are likely target areas. However they can, and will, bite you almost anywhere, so you have to check everywhere. We have experienced tick bites on shins, ankles and shoulders as well as the areas mentioned above. You will not feel a tick biting you. It injects a local anaesthetic as it does so, and you won't feel any irritation at the start, - but will later. Thus you are unlikely to have the slightest idea that you have a tick on you unless you check your skin, - and get others to check the bits you can't see – including your head. It is possible that a tick could bite you and drop off again without you ever knowing it was there.

You won't like the idea of an insect feeding off you anyway, but the worse news is that some ticks can transmit a bacterial infection called Lyme's Disease. The better news is that:-

- Far from all ticks carry the disease. *(The writer's company has experienced quite a lot of tick bites over the years and nobody has caught Lyme's Disease yet)*
- Even if the insect carries the disease there is very little risk of you getting it until it has been attached to you for more than 24 hours.
- If you do catch Lyme's Disease then reasonably early treatment with common antibiotics from your Doctor has a high level of success in curing it with no harm done.

So don't panic if you find a tick on you, and don't treat it as an emergency! You haven't been bitten by a King Cobra!

However there is a need to check for ticks regularly, - say each evening, during an expedition that is passing through long vegetation, - and then remove them promptly. The method of removal is to grip the tick with sharp tweezers right at the skin surface, and pull it off without squeezing its abdomen, - so that you don't inject infection into yourself. Sharp-pointed good-quality tweezers should be standard equipment on each expedition.

You also need to be aware of the symptoms if you should ever be unlucky enough to contract Lyme's Disease. The first symptoms would not occur during the trip, - but sometime from three days to about three weeks after the bite. If, during the few weeks after removing a tick from yourself, you get any of the following symptoms then you should go promptly to your Doctor and tell him you suspect Lyme's disease from a tick bite. **Don't ignore it: It won't just get better.** The real danger arises if you leave it untreated, when it could eventually cause you serious health damage. The Doc will probably tell you that it isn't Lyme's disease at all, - but it's better to be safe than sorry. The main symptoms are: -

- The site of the tick bite (sometimes, but not always an itchy red spot) gets surrounded by an expanding circular rash. 75% of infected persons experience this rash between 3 and 30 days after the bite. The rash gradually expands over several days and may form a ring up to 30 cm (12 inches) across.
- As well - or instead, the patient may experience tiredness, chills, fever, headaches, aching muscles and aching or swollen joints. Note again that you may experience these instead of the rash. So the bottom line is that if you suffer what feels like a virus illness (i.e. cold or flu) within a few weeks of a tick bite, then you should go to your Doctor and tell him about the tick bite and the symptoms.

Finally:

Climate change is making ticks more common but, thousands of people work in the Highland countryside all the time and get bitten all the time without huge epidemics of disease occurring. Nor is it anything new: This writer was first bitten by a tick in 1964!

The theoretical defences against ticks tend to be impractical. Some sources advocate wearing long trousers, long socks, and long sleeved tops all the time even in hot weather – then taping your trousers to your socks and spraying chemicals all over your body and clothing! Frankly that amount of overheating and chemical application is likely to be more of a hazard than the ticks! Even then it isn't a guaranteed defence, - because we have experienced bites at neck level from ticks dropping from tall bushes. We are just going to have to recognise tick bites as a natural expedition hazard, and learn to manage the risk. So long as we check for them regularly, remove any we find, and go promptly to the Doc if we get a rash or viral illness symptoms then there shouldn't be too much cause for concern.

Inside of the Back Cover

Back Cover Photo. Going East in Upper Glen Feshie, south of Ruigh Aiteachain

