

July Meet Report

The July meet was to be held in Braemar this year, three attendees, David Douglas, a potential new member Neil Glover, and myself. Neil had offered to drive all of us to the meet.

Neil arrived in Morecambe early on Saturday morning, and I was pleased to see he had a series 5 BMW, so we would have a comfortable drive up to the highlands, a far cry from years ago, when I used to head north of the border in my Morris Marina, when it would be on a wing and a prayer whether the car would manage the whole journey without breaking down.

We picked David up outside Stirling Railway station, and from there drove to Blairgowrie to pick up supplies for the meet.

The holiday let which David had booked for us turned out to a comfortable little terraced cottage, just at the end of Braemar high street.

As David and I had been to Braemar many times before we were quite happy to go along with Neil's Munro bagging plans – he had four days mapped out, which would add to his tally of 25 that he had bagged so far. Neil was hoping to have completed his round by the time he was 70 in 14 years time.

The MWIS forecast for the following day was for sunshine and showers with a moderate wind, which were to be the weather conditions for much of the week.

We decided that a good start to the week would be the Glas Maol group of four Munros, starting just to the north of the Cairnwell pass. As the day of our first walk was a Sunday, we decided on an early start as the car park we had in mind was quite small, and no doubt we would have plenty of company. As it happened we were not early enough and even though it was well before 9am, there was no space, so we had to head back down the glen to find an alternative spot, which would mean an extra quarter of a mile walk. The route we were following was one we had taken from the Walk Highlands website, an excellent resource for all things Scottish mountain related. Carn an Tuirc was the first objective of the day which was reached by following a path on the north side of the Alt a Garbh Choire, and then a steep path to the 1019m summit. I was feeling quite pleased with how relatively easily we had reached the top until I realised we had only ascended 500m, due to our high starting point. The route followed easily from here first east and then south to the second Munro of the day, Carn of Claise. More easy walking on a good path led us to the third and the highest Munro of the day, Glas Maol. There was quite a crowd in the summit shelter, human and canine, but we managed to squeeze in for a late lunch, although this was interrupted when the predicted showers arrived, and we hastily put on waterproofs, before setting off for Munro number four- Creag Leachach. By now the view ahead had disappeared in the clag, as had any sign of a path. A short stretch of trackless terrain led us to the ridge leading to the top of our final hill of the day, via a couple of false summits. Time for another break to finish lunch. Our return took us back the way we had come until we reached a path, that allowed us to traverse around the side of Glas Maol, and thence towards Meall Odhar, and a ski access track which took us back to the road. From here we still had about three kilometres to walk back to the car, and by the time we reached it, my feet told me we had walked every inch of that, despite that we had climbed four Munros with somewhat less ascent than it would take to climb one Munro from sea level. We finished the day off with a meal of chilli con carne prepared by Neil.

The forecast for the following day, although mostly dry was for much higher winds than on the previous day, so we decided on a Munro free day, which would be shorter and lower than the hills on Neil's wish list. The hill in question was 743m Geallaig hill, just north of Ballater. As the weather was predicted to be somewhat better in the afternoon, we settled on a post lunch start. The drive took us just past Balmoral castle, and then north to Glen Gairn, which in keeping with walks in this area was high enough to mean we only had 380 m of ascent to reach the summit. The route followed a well graded track all the way to the top, where we stopped for a while in the well constructed wind shelter. The views to the south were extensive with Lochnagar, on objective for later in the week, about 15 km distant dominating the skyline. Rather than returning the same way, we took another stony track south east, then back north to reach the road about a mile from our start

point.

Our third day of walking saw us continuing with Neil's Munro bagging campaign, with three more easy Munros – The Cairnwell, Carn Aosda, and Carn Geoidh. Starting at 665m, the ascent of The Cairnwell must rank as the easiest climb of any of the Munros. The start was somewhat confusing and it took a while to locate the right path, which went via a restaurant not too far above the road.

Certainly not the most inspiring of scenery due to all the skiing impedimenta we had to negotiate, but it was easy walking keeping well away from the east facing slopes, down which there is a black ski run, which David told us he had skied some years previously albeit rather slowly.

We didn't linger long at the summit, which has been ruined by an enormous communication mast, which can be seen from several miles away down in the glen.

Next on the agenda was Carn Geoidh, which necessitated us retracing our outward route for about half a kilometre, until we could traverse underneath a top we had come over earlier on. The character of the terrain was completely different now, with a much wilder and remote feel to it, more what we're used to in the highlands. To reach Carn Geoidh we had to cross over the subsidiary top of Carn nan Sac. David had asked earlier if we would like to go beyond Carn Geoidh, to the deleted Munro of Carn Bhinnein. This is a Deleted Munro, that is one of many, that were originally on Munro's list, but have been deleted at a later date, not because they were found to be below 3,000 feet, but because various leading lights in the SMC decided that they were not worthy of Munro status, so should be demoted to tops.

There was a sketchy path in places, the last section being very steep, which took us to the summit of this deleted Munro, probably infrequently visited, apart from those bagging Munro tops.

When we returned to Carn Gheoidh for the second time, we found a large family group with two Cockapoo dogs, luckily the shelter was quite large, so we managed to squeeze in for some welcome rest. We spent a pleasant few minutes chatting to them about our various Scottish hillwalking exploits.

More backtracking was in order to reach our third Munro of the day – Carn Aosda. By now it had become quite busy with, surprisingly so for a non weekend day, I'm sure it wasn't anything like this 30 years ago, which is the last time I was on these hills.

Carn Aosda is an altogether pleasanter summit, than The Cairnwell, even though there is evidence of the skiing that goes on in winter here, the summit itself was relatively unscarred. We followed a broad track back to the road, where we treated ourselves to coffee and cake in the restaurant, much improved from last time I was here, when the drinks were served in polystyrene cups.

The day was rounded off by a meal of tuna pasta bake prepared by David and a trip to a bar conveniently situated only a couple of minutes walk from our holiday let.

The following day the MWIS forecast predicted gusts of 70 mph on higher ground, which discouraged us from another Munro day. Instead Neil devised a low level walk from the Linn of Dee to Derry Lodge, then returning part way to pick up a track to Glen Quoich and from there to the road and back to the start point, about 12 miles in total.

I decided not to join the other two for this particular walk – I wanted to give my feet a rest for the following day when we had an 18 mile walk planned involving Lochnagar. While Neil and David were away, I spent a relaxing day going to the local coffee shop, browsing through the wares in the local outdoor shop and reading. When they returned I was disappointed to learn that I had missed out on seeing Paul Murton filming scenes for his forthcoming TV series. The evening meal of Thai chicken curry was cooked by Neil.

The Thursday dawned bright and sunny for the longest day of the meet. When we arrived at the car park at the Spittal of Glen Muik, there were already a fair collection of cars – it was going to be a busy day on Lochnagar. The first kilometre or so was fairly flat before steadily climbing alongside the Alt na Guibhsaich, and after that towards the Meickle Pap. Along this stretch of the walk we were leapfrogging a group of young guys in their 20s – they would overtake us, then we would pass them as they stopped, this happened a few times until we reached the point where the path climbs steeply up a rough bouldery section onto a high plateau. After this we didn't see them again. It was at this point that I took the excuse to have a break and an early elevenses, while the others

took photos of Lochnagar's crags which had now come into view.

After the aforementioned bouldery section, there was easy walking to the summit trig point which occupied a very airy position above some steep drops. By now the blue skies and sunshine had disappeared to be replaced by dull cloudy weather, and eventually by persistent rain – luckily it wasn't too heavy, as we'd left our overtrousers behind to save weight. The next objective of the day was Carn a Choire Bhoidheach, unfortunately we had no view as the cloud had dropped by this point. Munro number three of the day was Cairn an Sagairt Mor, which we reached by skirting round Cairn an Sagairt Beag, and following a gentle incline to the top. By this time the cloud had lifted and the sun had returned and our way was clear to our next objective Cairn Bannoch, which we reached by skirting round Fafernie. The last time I was here was about 25 years previously, when we had ascended Cairn Bannoch from Glen Clova in early January in an almost whiteout, which made the navigation quite interesting. No such problems this time as the weather had returned to blue skies and sunshine, giving us very pleasant walking to Munro number 5, Broad Cairn. From here we had views along the length of Loch Muick, almost as far as our starting point.

From here it was still about 5 miles back to the car, but it was downhill all the way back to the car, which we reached 9 and a half hour after setting off.

The last day of the meet saw us heading off for Munro 13 of the meet, the 944m summit of an Socach. The last time I was here was over many years ago on an Easter meet, where we had low cloud and snow showers, much different to today, as we had high cloud and plenty of sunshine. It was a much shorter drive than yesterday, only about four miles from Braemar. Our parking spot was at the start of the glen which followed the Baddenoch burn. We were using another Walk Highlands route, which meant walking along a Landrover track for about two miles until we could strike up the hill. As we progressed along the glen we had glimpses of the communications mast on top of the Cairnwell, where we had been a few days previously.

Eventually we reached the point where we could leave the track and head up the south east shoulder of the east top of An socach on a good path, at first gently angled, then much steeper higher up. As we gained height the wind picked up, so by the time we reached the top we were glad of the stone shelter that had been built there. After a brief stop we followed the rocky ridge to the Munro, being treated en route to fine views of the Glen Ey Munros. Just before the final rise, we met a woman with dog coming in the opposite direction, and were interested to see that she took a path down into the glen, which was not marked on the map, and was not in the walk highlands description. After stopping to take a few photos on the summit, we returned to the col and took the path we had seen earlier, much preferable to trekking back along the ridge to the lower top. We were pleased to find that it came down to the end of the landrover track that we had come up on earlier. There followed a pleasant four mile walk back to the car, so ending the week's walking.

The day was rounded off by a visit by David and myself to the Hungry Highlander for fish and chips, Neil preferring a pizza from the Co-Op.

Thanks to David for organizing the accommodation, and to David and Neil for doing the catering, and of course both for their company.

Chris Knowles