

Killin 25th Feb - 2nd March 2023

Day 1 - Beinn Ghlas, Ben Lawers, An Stuc

Sunday 26th Feb

Chris and I started out at NTS car park with low mist still lingering in the valleys, but with a forecast of high pressure for the week, we were confident we would be in for some clear views later in the day. We left the car just before 9.30am, and with 3 munros in our sights we couldn't hang around. It was a steady footpath for the first hour, leaving the deer fencing and new plantation, with views of open moorland ahead of us. We crossed the bridge over the burn after 500m, and then headed up the valley until we passed the path junction where the return leg path re-joins. We then followed the line of the ridge avoiding the rocky outcrops on the right, and headed in a NE direction steeply up to the summit of Beinn Ghlas, our first summit and munro of the day. And thankfully just before reaching the summit, at c.900m we emerged through the cloud so that by the top we were enjoying relative warmth and sunshine, exactly as per the forecast prediction; with higher temperatures at higher levels - very strange. Plenty of photos were taken of the 360 deg views, but could not wait too long with a -3 degC temperature.



A short 100m descent took us down to the corrie before the 200m + climb up to the higher (and highest in the area) Ben Lawers at 1214 m (a fraction under 4000ft). Plenty of hardened and icy snow made the final steep steps quite tricky. So at this point we fitted our microspikes, and also seeing a half-dozen other hikers already at the summit gave us the confidence to blast out the final few steps.



After a brief rest and capturing the perfect alpine conditions on camera we started the steep descent in the direction of An Stuc , our 3rd and final munro. Care was taken on the initial section with patches of hardened snow and icy surfaces, again making microspikes essential, but once reaching level ground at Bealach Dubh (at 941m) it was a straight forward but steady climb up to An Stuc. (c.1117m).





There were wonderful views of Glen Lyon and beyond, as well as a sneak peak down what is a scrambly and steep descent in the direction of Meall Garbh, but as we'd heard it was an extremely icy and slippery route at the moment, then that challenge would have to wait for much better conditions (although 1 or 2 were attempting it that day). Therefore it was an about turn, at around 2.45pm, for our long return route. Some off-route contouring was possible in order to bypass a re-ascent of the peak Ben Lawers, which gave the bonus of a good close-up sighting of a Ptarmigan in winter plumage. We then picked up the path again before Beinn Ghlas for the return back to our starting point, arriving as the sun was setting around 6.15pm.

Total Duration 8'30"

Distance 16.5 km

Ascent 1500m

Day 2 Ben More ,Stob Binnein

Monday 27th Feb

For the 2nd day's adventure, we left Killin taking the road to Crianlarich, and pulled up in layby just before Ben More Farm. We set off around 9.30am, discussing whether to take the High Road (direct up to Ben More via the steep path on the nose of More) or the Low Road ! (along Benmore Glen) . We opted for the latter in the hope of catching some early sun. It was a lot colder than the

previous morning, around -2 deg C as we set off, but still and misty, with a possibility of a temperature inversion so hopefully the peaks would be peaking through the mist.

We followed the Benmore Burn along a gravel vehicle track, listening to songbirds in the woodland until reaching a bridge crossing the burn just after the woodland and fencing had finished. We had to navigate carefully to find an indistinct path on the east of the burn, but by now we were out of the shadow cast by Ben More ridge and enjoying some warmth from the early sun and followed this heading further up the glen to the point that we were exactly in line with the bealach (Bealach-eader-dha Bheinn) positioned between Ben More and Stob Binnein that we were now intending to aim for.



We left the burn, and headed due east while searching for any sign of a trail as we took on the steep climb. A trail gradually became apparent which provided some guidance but was intermittent at best, and we carefully made our way up to the bealach between Ben More and Stob Binnein. As we enjoyed our first proper rest and snack, the mist thickened, turning a very pleasant sunny morning into a damp and cold experience. However as we turned south for the climb up to Stob Binnein we emerged through the cloud, and shortly after, while looking back over, we were rewarded with a very clear broken spectre. For the first time that day we heard voices travelling through the cloud, and as we reached the summit of Stob Binnein (1165 m) we bumped into about 4 other hikers, who had travelled up from different directions. By now we were looking down on a sea of thick cloud, with only peaks above 900m in view. The summit of Ben More, in a northerly direction seemed so close and clear against the sharp blue sky, with the rest of the mountain shrouded in cloud, and with the sound of distant voices on the other peak seeming much closer due to the eerie atmospheric effects.



We made a quick descent down loose rock to the bealach and then took on the climb to Ben More, where we had to negotiate “the boulder problem”. This was either scrambling a 10ft high wall, involving a high step and hand pull, or a snowy/icy route around the ledge, careful to avoid sliding down a steep descending snow field to the right. I opted for the short climb, Chris opting for the snowy narrow path. We enjoyed great views from the summit of Ben More (1174m , just 11m higher than Stob Binnein) while enjoying some warmth since again we were experiencing higher temps at 3000ft than lower levels with the effects of the temperature inversion. We had to take care in picking up the start of the path for the route back, which involved a slow, long, and steep descent on a path that was severely eroded in places, and definitely in need of repair, returning to the car around 5.30pm just as the light was fading.



Total Duration 8'00"

Distance 11.8 km

Ascent 1355m

Day 3 Meall Ghaordaidh

Tuesday 28th Feb

After 2 long days, a shorter one was in order, so we were happy with attempting just the 1 munro today. We drove up Glen Lochay, with the obvious and easy parking area (at 527363) already occupied by early walkers, so with very limited parking available had to squeeze onto the verge some 200 yards away off the very quiet single track road. We started at 10.20 (a late start after calling in at the Outdoor Centre in Killin) .

The start of the path was not easy to spot, but left the road just to the west of the bridge crossing the Allt Dhuin Croisg river, and headed up alongside the river and woodland, and crossing a couple of broken stone walls, for just over 1km before heading in a NW direction, leaving the river, where the trail continued up the gradual slope. The going was very pleasant, soft underfoot and a gentle slope all the way. If we had been in cloud or with reduced visibility , then careful navigation would be needed as this was not a well worn path but as the conditions were a repeat of our previous 2

days, no such problems. The last 500m of the climb became a little rocky with the path zig zagging somewhat, but nothing too demanding, and we reached the summit just in time to enjoy the views before the thin cloud moved in. Fortunately there is a stone walled enclosure at the top which provided useful shelter from the biting wind with a small trig cairn in the centre. Photos were taken, quick drink of coffee and noted it had taken us only 2.5 hours to climb the 920 m of ascent from the road.



Although we were ahead of time which may have allowed opportunities for further exploring, this munro is very much on its own, with just a single corbett (Beinn nan Oighreag) close by. In the absence of any other paths and also to save our energy for tomorrow's final walk we decided to retrace the same route back to the start. A wise choice!

Total Duration 5'10"

Distance 10.4 km

Ascent 924m

Day 4 Meall Greigh and Meall Garbh

Wednesday 1st March

The final and in my view probably the best of the 4 days! Having accomplished the 3 of the Ben Lawers munros, we decided it would make sense to tackle the remaining 2; Meall Garbh and Meall

Greigh, which extend eastwards beyond Ben Lawers and An Stuc. But this time we would approach them from the east side, a more sensible option as the descent in the easterly direction off An Stuc, we had been advised, was particularly tricky in the icy conditions ; no thanks! Also these last 2 are probably too long a hike from the NTS car park.

Therefore we parked at the Ben Lawers Hotel car park , which is the only suitable parking area for this approach , and permissible on the understanding walkers buy a drink or snack here at the end of the walk, or leave a £5 parking charge in the honesty box. There is limited parking here though, so it easily fills up in busy periods.

After a 500m walk along the road, we left the road at Machium Farm and started the steady climb through mixed woodland alongside Lawers Burn. The variety of woodland birds along here was wonderful (Siskins, long tailed tits, nut-hatch) and after a short while the views opened out revealing the splendour of the south ridge of Meall Greigh and the skyline ridge towards Meall Garbh. Careful navigation was needed when we left the path along the burn in a NNE direction to pick up a faint path leading up to the spur that took us onto the ridge of Meall Greigh. As we gained height and reached the freezing point level, (c.900m) the views across to the snow capped Ben Lawers and Lochan nan Cat were breathtaking. By we reached the summit of Meall Greigh (1001 m , and 7th Munro of the week) , the temperature was just below freezing point and with a biting wind hugging the ridge, we continued on with a short descent to the saddle. This gave us



tremendous views across Glen Lyon and further north, such that Rannoch Moor and the entrance to Glencoe were clearly visible. Further cautious steps across short snow fields led us up the ascent towards Meall Garbh, and after a number of false summits we reached the craggy and

frozen summit of Meall Garbh (1121m). Unfortunately the wispy and intermittent cloud that had just arrived partly hid the views along the ridge towards the steep climb to An Stuc.



If weather had been kinder at this point, we were thinking about having a closer look at the scramble to An Stuc from the base, but due to the damp and cold conditions that we were now in, we retraced our steps back down to the saddle between the 2 munros.

What was fascinating about this route and the conditions were the different types and quality of snow we encountered (no doubt all with precise descriptive names) , influenced by the wind direction, the altitude and the warming of the sun during the day, on some occasions taking our weight , and sometimes maybe not! It was already feeling warmer by reaching the saddle; time for another and final coffee break. Now back in the sun, we took the path (not marked on OS map) southwards past the new plantation enclosure to eventually hit the recognised path following the gulley down from Lochan nan Cat.



A gradual and pleasant descent, again following the Lawers Burn but this time downstream, took us back to the road at Machuim Farm , followed by a 15min and seemingly tiring plod back along the road to our starting point at the Lawers Hotel car park.

We did our best to honour tradition with a drink at the hotel but it was unfortunately closed, although I suppose it was out of season and mid-week. Another time!

Total Duration 6'50"

Distance 15.7 km

Ascent 1190m

Dominic Harrison