

Trip Report: Glencoe Weekend at the Clachaig Inn

Date: 4th-7th October 2007

Group: Caryle and Rob, Colin, Les and Mike, Richard C, George, Jim G, Jim and Jean, Chris and Chrissie, Mike and Selina, Tony and Lynn, Elena, Frank, Bob and Jenny

Route: See below

Total Distance: See below

Total Ascent: See Below

Weather: See below

Arrived at the Clachaig Inn on Thursday evening and made plans for the weekend's activities. Predicted strong winds on top put an end to ideas of conquering Aonach Eagach, temptingly close but infamous for perilous ascents. A decision to take on the Mamores from Kinlochleven proved a popular move and all 20 set out the next day.

Friday 4th

Pleased to say everyone was keen to get off in the morning except Lesley! But we all arrived in Kinlochleven in good time and found the handy car park at the start of the walk to the Grey Mares Tale waterfall without difficulty. First navigational challenge accomplished.

Next was the difficult bit of actually finding an escape from civilisation and choosing the right path up the hill. After three quarters of a lap of the wheelchair route we branched off to follow the south bank of the Allt a Churmhainn (allt = brook, burn or stream). Unfortunately we soon had our first casualty of the day after half an hour when Chrissie opted to turn back as she was not feeling well. We all felt terribly sorry for her as the weather was beautiful and it promised to be a good day.

The walk up began in the trees and gradually as we gained height these gave way to tussock grass and heather. The gradient was sustained but not too steep and everyone seemed happy plodding on with few breaks which was great as we soon covered a good distance and gained height almost imperceptibly (well it felt like it to me!).

Our first landmark came after about 2 kilometres at 450m when we met the land rover track from Mamore Lodge to Loch Eilde More (big loch of the hind) the loch coming into view as we climbed higher after crossing the track. Our route now took us diagonally up and round the shoulder of Sgor Eilde Beag (little peak of the hind), seeing and hearing the occasional deer as we went, and into Coire an Lochain (circular hollow of the little lake) where we picked up a traversing path heading north deeper into the Mamore Forest. By this time the leader had been

promising a coffee break "just round the next corner, out of the wind" for the last hour at least. The out of the wind bit never came and Jim and I were the first to come to the "planned descent" into Coire a Bhinnein (mountain corrie).

Jim's words still ring in my ears;

"Have we got to go down there?"

"Yes Jim and up the other side" I said.

"They are not going to like that! What about this path up here" he said, pointing to Sgor Eilde Beag.

Point taken the plan was quickly changed before any one else arrived.

"Ah we have decided we can have a coffee break just up here behind this low shoulder out of the wind." Salvaged!

Coffee turned into lunch as it was 12.15pm by this time and Colin of course broke out the statutory pork pie, genuine produce of Scotland bought in the local Spar.

As a special treat I had arranged for a herd of deer to frolic across the opposite hillside and everyone seemed to enjoy seeing them, apart from Jean who will be visiting Specsavers when she gets home! The object of our labours sat before us and presented a profile of a gracefully rising ridge sweeping round from behind us culminating in the summit pyramid of Binnein Mor (big mountain) 1.13 kilometres vertically above our start point!

Lunch packs empty and we set off again upwards heading for a low point on the ridge. Soon we came upon my next surprise which had taken a bit more sorting out than the deer; a Ptarmigan. The hard part had been getting one the right colour to match the surrounding rocks. We spent some minutes getting really close and getting some photos for the Spot the Ptarmigan competition, see attached. Rob is not allowed to enter as he knows what they look like.

A short pull later and everyone was out on the broad ridge. The big boys had to go to the top of Sgor Eilde Beag which they said wasn't worth it when they returned so the ones who had waited felt rather smug.

Onwards and upwards we strolled past a subsidiary top at the junction of three ridges where again some chose to wait while others went on a short out and back to Binnein Mor which is a Munroe.

One of the Munroe baggers was George "Robey one munroby" who opened his account with this one, only 283 to go!

George had been one of the last to set off for Binnein Mor and struggled a bit on the rocky ground so at one point I think we had some of the party on one Munroe and some on the next! Inevitably some people had a cold wait on the next summit, Na Gruagaichean (the maidens).

The summit of Na Gruagaichean is actually two summits split by a defile which offered some moderate scrambling on the descent and tested Elaina's and Rob's vertigo control mechanisms, fair play they managed it and emerged to climb on to the second summit. They should be pleased with themselves.

Now it was time to descend and head for the valley. Bob suffered a nasty dose of cramp and was visibly in pain during the descent but soldiered on in the company of Jim W and Colin as they gradually lost height.

As we got lower the ground became a boggy and it was difficult to keep dry feet, a common problem in Scotland; seemed a shame as most people had dry boots until very near the end.

Once we met the land rover track it seemed like it was nearly all over just a couple of kilometres gentle descent back to the waterfall and car park. Frank and I had been behind with Bob and ran the last kilometre to catch up with the group just as they were zigzagging down through the woods. At this point about 300m from the cars Frank was overtaken by an unplanned incident. Rounding one of the tight corners he caught his foot in a tree root and suddenly was flying, but not for long! He plunged head first over the edge and down a 2m drop before landing heavily on his head and then rolling down the hill end over end for another 10m before finally coming to a standstill sitting with his head between his knees. This looked bad.

He was conscious but the red stuff which is normally on the inside was all over the place and he was clearly dazed. I used the only thing I knew to revive him, black humour and it seemed to work. I must say it was good to hear him start talking again as we tried to stop the flow of claret with a handkerchief. At first the cut on his head looked worst but closer examination revealed that his nose had taken the brunt of the damage and the skin was badly split from top to bottom, not a pretty sight. Pressure from the hanky helped stem the flow and soon he was on his feet.

We walked him slowly down to the car park where we met the rest of the group. Fortunately Mike knew the local witch doctor's surgery was only round the corner so he whisked Frank off for some Scottish plastic surgery. The doctor and his wife, the practice nurse, were superb and put Frank back together again in no time using cat gut and haggis skin.

The whole episode put a bit of a dampener on an otherwise great day out in the hills with a super bunch of people. Franks' return cheered everyone up again and although he was a bit subdued that night he did not seem to suffer any permanent damage.

Munroes climbed:

Binnein Mor 1130m/3707ft
Na Gruagaichean 1056m/3465ft
Distance 15kilometres/9.6miles

Saturday 5th

We wake to low cloud, soon to become a light drizzle. Forewarned plans had been made to explore the Lost Valley, an atmospheric, history rich hanging valley set above a beautiful walk/scramble beside a burn which flows into the River Coe. This valley was reputedly used by the Macdonalds to hide stolen cattle and further down the valley is the area those who escaped the first slaughter by the Campbells, fled to until they too were caught and killed.

History aside we had Frank's injuries and Bob's thighs to contend with so an alternative 'stroll' was organised from the Inn. This party walked into some beautiful woodlands alongside a small lake and were back in time for lunch.

The rest of the party, minus two veteran fell runners who decided to make the madcap visit to Aonach Eagach, headed for the Bidean nam Bian area to find the Lost Valley.

It was worth it. A scenic walk up the side of the burn led to the most amazing alpine type site with a flat boulder strewn area yawning as far as the eye could see (you had to be quick as the mist was descending).

We plodded on to reach the top of the corrie and a waterfall between Bidean Nam Bian and Stob Coire Sgreamhach, but due to appalling weather could get no further and retraced our steps back to the Lost Valley.

An early return to the Inn proved a great bonus as re-hydration commenced around the Rugby World Cup.

Saturday Night

Lord knows what the band was called but man did they rock. Collectively our party (being the largest and oldest there) filled the minute dance area. We were joined by some rather fine chaps of Scottish decent who seemed to be talking a different language on the dance floor—alcoholic haze I believe it to be!

Great fun and seemed to cure the Chairman's groin strain. Just the ticket after a huge hill walk. Even Big Jim was noted on the dance floor. But where was Mike? Caryle was heard to claim her legs were too stiff for dancing, oh do shape up dear.

A great weekend. Where are we going next year?

Bob