

The Etive Munros Round

1st/2nd September 2017

Glen Etive, just south of Glen Coe, is regarded by many (including myself) as one of the most beautiful glens in Scotland. If you've not been there you may have seen glimpses in films such as *Skyfall*. It's surrounded by fantastic hills on both sides, including 16 Munros, with the iconic Buachaille Etive Mor being the most renowned.

In 2014, I made an on sight, anticlockwise attempt but the weather was poor and, quite frankly, I had underestimated how tough some of the terrain and route finding was. This did not discourage me, if anything the challenge and the beauty of the area fuelled my determination. After several recies I concluded that a clockwise round (starting over Beinn Fhionnlaidh) would make the most sense for me so that the steeper, more chossy passages would be climbed rather than descended.

The route starts from the gate at the

entrance to the private road to Coileitir (NN137 468) at the S end of the Glen. On 1st September 2017, I timed my departure to arrive on the summit of Beinn Fhionnlaidh (#1; NN095498; 959m) around dawn. I was keen to see the descent to the River Creran in daylight, which is guarded by a set of crags with only one obvious way through at about 750m. I was fortunate with the weather, there being a light breeze, generally good visibility, and wisps of clouds on the tops.

I was soon over Sgor na h-Ulaidh (#2; 994m; NN111518) and beginning my traverse of the S side of Stob an Fhuarain. I forgot that I had to stay above c. 840m so had to climb a little to avoid the steep gullies as you approach the E ridge. The descent to Bealach Fhionnghaill is waymarked by old fence posts, which can be followed to navigate the way through the crags and terraces. There are a couple

of sections of down climbing, which require some care.

The sun was fully up, it was getting warm and I was joined by a couple of Golden Eagles as I crossed to Bidean. The ascent to the shallow slope south of Stob Coire nam Beith is steep and chossy and passes to the W of the crags above Gleann Fhaolain. There are occasional false trods but there's no path that I've been able to discern.

I was treated to stunning 360° views as I topped out on Bidean nam Bian (#3; 1150m; NN143542) and traversed the ridge to Stob Coire Sgreamhach (#4; 1072m; NN154536). It was around 9.30am and not another soul in sight! The descent to the col above the Lairig Elide is a lovely part of the round – very runnable with great views of the hills to come later.

The ascent to Stob Dubh (#5; 958m; NN179535) is also on steep, chossy, pathless ground. I suspect this is not a great place



to hang around because of all the fresh, loose lying rock. My objective was to quickly navigate a way through the various gullies onto the S flank without losing height. It's all worth it to be rewarded by the view down Glen Etive, one of the most spectacular in Scotland.

Stob Coire Raineach (#6; 925m, NN191548) is an out and back so worth leaving your sack at the foot of the climb if conditions permit.

To get on to the Buachaille Etive Mor ridge I climbed an obvious, direct and chossy gully, which brought me out roughly 100m SW of the Stob Coire Altruim summit (941m). I enjoyed another out and back to Stob na Broige (#7, 956m; NN190525) and then collected my sack before heading on to Stob Dearg (#8, 1021m; NN222542), the fabulous summit above Glen Coe. I stopped there for a while to admire the views across Rannoch Moor, to eat and to mentally fortify myself for the descent to Glen Etive and the 900m climb to Creise! For the descent, I retraced my steps to the cairn that marks the change in direction of the main path from SW to W towards the Coire na Tulaich col. From here I descended S on a faint and loose path/scree (care required) and then continued down further rough ground to my only food stash just N of the River Etive/ Allt Fionn Ghlinne junction (NN226524).

At this point the Etive is shallow to cross, never reaching more than knee deep in the few times that I have done it, even after quite high rainfall.

There are no two ways about it, the ascent to Creise is a steep, relentless plod, crossing numerous gullies and rough ground all the way. Higher up the terrain becomes more chossy with abundant loose scree between crags and it's a welcome sight when the



climb starts levelling out to arrive at the summit (#9; 1100m; NN238507). The out and back to Meall a' Bhuiridh (#10; 1108m; NN251503) feels a bit gratuitous with this being an "Etive Munros Round" as it barely has a foot in the Glen. However, it was always in my plan and is one of the smaller detours for a Munro, so I did it!

The weather started taking a turn for the worse as I made my way to Stob Ghabhar (#11, 1090m; NN230455) - the wind begun to increase, the skies greyed over and the clouds started rolling in. My compass was out as I skirted Sròn nan Giubhas, until I joined the path on the final climb to the summit. On my first attempt in 2014, I took in Stob a' Choire Odhair but it is not a trivial out and back. It's also definitely not in Glen

Etive so I felt justified (and slightly relieved) leaving it out this time. It's an optional extra for someone much fitter than me!

I departed Stobhar Ghabhar on a bearing but soon picked up the fence posts and the path heading towards Stob a' Bhruaich Leith (941m), where I stopped for more food and to survey the rest of the route, which was pretty much clear apart from some of the tops. From the col with Meall Odhar (890m) I contoured directly to the col at the foot of Meall nan Euan (#12; 928m; NN192449), negotiating a route through the crags. This section would be quite tricky in the dark.

I don't think I've ascended to the summit from the col above the Allt Dochard the same way twice! It's a matter of weaving your way up through the crags but I

found I was "encouraged" round to the W side before heading SE to the summit. I surprised some deer on the way and they vanished into the clag only to be met again on my way back from the summit towards Meall Tarsuinn (877m). I was keen to contour round the side of this obstacle but it only saved me 50m of ascent and is rough going negotiating the crags, so probably worth sticking to the path. With some relief I arrived in the light at the foot of the climb to the E ridge of Stob Coir' an Albannaich (#13; 1044m; NN169443). I was mildly concerned about this because it wasn't marked on my map, could be tricky to find in the dark and is surrounded by steep, craggy ground. As I ascended, the light faded to darkness at the summit. However, I knew descending on a bearing in the clag to the foot of Glas Bheinn Mhor would be straightforward and then I would be on paths the rest of the way.

I really enjoyed the climb to Glas Bheinn Mhor (#14; 997m; NN153429) even though I couldn't see anything beyond my torch beam. It was so peaceful at the summit that I sat on the cairn for a couple of minutes to put another layer on and text confirmation of my location. I was rewarded with a temporary thinning of the cloud, bright moonlight and the dark, imposing shape of Beinn nan Aighenan in the distance. The clag soon returned. Had there been better visibility I would have contoured on the S side of Meall na Tri Tighearnan (892m). However, I hadn't been there for a while, couldn't remember the terrain and in my tired state I didn't want to be negotiating a route through crags so opted to keep on the path to the col at 767m.

I am a bit purist when it comes to hill navigation and endeavour to only use map, compass and altimeter. However, I have a GPS watch for recording my routes and descending from MnTT the low battery warning beep prompted me to continue recording the route on my phone. I mention this because the route is broken into two tracks, which are available to view on Strava. The climb to Beinn na Aighenan (#15; 957m; NN148405) was a series of false summits but finally the top appeared, I touched the cairn briefly and retraced my steps to the bealach below Ben Starav.

It was a pity to be climbing the Stob Coire Dheirg ridge in the dark when the terrain is so spectacular. However, even the swirling clag couldn't prevent my head torch from picking out the striking white rock band in the coire to my right. I reached the arête that leads to the summit area and took extra care with my footing as a slip here would not have been healthy! The clag dissipated as I reached the summit cairn (#16; 1078m; NN125427). The moon had gone but the sky was filled with stars; it was beautiful. I stopped for more food, to send another text and even make short post on Facebook (the





summit has 4G reception, unlike the Glen!). The disadvantage of saving the descent from Ben Starav until last is that it's very rough when you're tired, especially in the dark. I had to pick my way carefully through the summit boulder field and, even when you get through this, there are numerous rough path options designed to confuse and twist your ankles all the way to the bottom. I couldn't recall the correct river crossing point in the dark and there was enough water flowing to make me carry on downstream to the bridge. Finally, 23h and 20 mins, 73.2km (45.5 miles) and 7,600m (24,900ft) of climb after setting

off, I arrived back at the start, possibly for the first, non-stop completion of the Eive Munros Round?*

There's no doubt the terrain is much tougher going than the better known rounds. I made my attempt off the back of an already busy hill week (including a fairly hefty outing around Glen Affric two days before). I notice from my Strava traces that my actual moving time was quite a bit less than my elapsed time. So, with a bit more rest, discipline and less faffing, I reckon it should be pretty straightforward to complete the round in daylight in the summer.

**John Fleetwood completed a longer round in 2005 that took in the most of the same Munros plus other hills in the Glen Eive area (gofar.org.uk).*

		Grid Ref	Height above sea level	Split	Time	Cumulative Distance
	Gate at the entrance to the private road to Coileitir	NN137468	37m	0h 0m	4.00am	0km
1	Beinn Fhionnlaidh	NN095498	959m	1h 43m	5.43am	8.7km
2	Sgor na h-Ulaidh	NN111518	994m	1h 26m	7.09am	12.0km
3	Bidean nam Bian	NN143542	1150m	1h 52m	9.01am	17.3km
4	Stob Coire Sgreamhach	NN154536	1072m	0h 25m	9.26am	18.8km
5	Stob Dubh	NN179535	958m	1h 19m	10.45am	22.8km
6	Stob Coire Raineach	NN191548	925m	0h 27m	11.12am	24.8km
7	Stob na Broige	NN190525	956m	1h 17m	12.29pm	27.9km
8	Stob Dearg	NN222542	1021m	1h 18m	1.47pm	32.4km
	River Eive/Allt Fionn Ghlinne junction	NN226524	184m	0h 42m	2.29pm	34.9km
9	Creise	NN238507	1100m	1h 27m	3.56pm	37.4km
10	Meall a' Bhuiridh	NN251503	1108m	0h 33m	4.29pm	39.7km
11	Stob Ghabhar	NN230455	1090m	1h 55m	6.24pm	47.0km
12	Meall nan Euan	NN192449	928m	1h 33m	7.57pm	53.1km
13	Stob Coir' an Albannaich	NN169443	1044m	0h 58m	8.55pm	56.0km
14	Glas Bhein Mhor	NN153429	997m	1h 06m	10.01pm	58.6km
15	Beinn na Aighenan	NN148405	957m	1h 30m	11.31pm	63.0km
16	Ben Starav	NN125427	1078m	1h 32m	1.03am	67.1km
	Gate at the entrance to the private road to Coileitir	NN137468	37m	2h 17m	3.20am	73.2km