

Route(s)	Kintail Ridge (Sisters and Brothers)
Elevation(s) (ft/m)	Sgurr Fhuaran (3,501ft/ 1067m) Sgurr na Carnach (3,287ft/ 1002m) Sgurr Na Ciste Duibhe (3,369ft/ 1027m) Saileag (3,148ft/ 956m) Sgurr a'Bhealairch Dheirg (3,399ft/ 1036m) Aonach Meadhoin (3,284ft/ 1001m)
Date(s)	May 24 2018
Partner(s)	Solo
Elevation gain/loss (ft/m)	7,124ft / 2171m
Distance (miles)	14.4 miles / 23.17 km
Total time (hours/mins)	11h 55m (not including initial walk and hitchhike)
Equipment	Trekking poles, snacks, water and a go-get-em attitude!
Weather Forecast	Mostly sunny
Weather Actuality	Mostly sunny – quite hot with the occasional light breeze
Flora/Fauna	N/A
Wildlife	A fox and grouse. Later while driving to hostel wild boar and deer.
Starting Point/Trailhead	Cluanie Inn – hitchhiked to Shiel Bridge and started from there
Grade/Rating	Mostly Class 2 (steep walking with some scree and rock) one or two sections with a few Class 3/ 4 moves
Accommodations	Car camped night before and slept at Loch Side Hostel that night
Tourist Attractions	N/A
Motto for the day	N/A

Day 1	
Daily 1 Distance	14.4 miles / 23.17 km
Daily 1 Elevation	7,124ft / 2171m
Day 1 Daily Time	11h 55m (not including initial walk and hitchhike)
Leave Cluanie Inn carpark	7.25am
Shiel Bridge	8.15am
Summit of Sgurr Fhuaran	1.10pm
Summit of Sgurr na Carnach	1.45pm
Summit of Sgurr Na Ciste D.	2.45pm
Summit of Saileag	4.45pm
Summit of Sgurr a'Bhealaich	5.40pm
Summit of Aonach Mead.	6.30pm
Arrive Cluanie Inn carpark	8.15pm
The Story	

Well! Yesterday my almost hallucination, Jason told me that the Inn at Cluanie offered a shuttle service to the start of the ridge run. So when I ate at the inn last night I asked and I was told that as of two weeks ago the Inn was under new management and they were no longer offering that service. *But of course.* The young woman I was talking to told me to hitchhike up the road. My look must have

prompted her to add that it was common and loads of people do it. *Fuck it. Why not?* So that night I had a brief conversation with Kyle and told him that I was planning to start walking up the A87 road towards Shiel Bridge and that I'd try to hitchhike in the morning. *You know. In case I went missing or something.*

I passed a restless night in the car. It is not so much the fact that I was worried a spider might be lurking in there. I was just tired enough to let that slip from my mind fairly easily. It wasn't even the cramped up position that got me. No, it was more the fact that the back seat is so darn firm! I had to keep rolling to try and not put pressure on one side too long. I must have passed out at some point because when I came too there was a grey tint to the skies and the clock said it was way too early. I managed to close my eyes and rest for quite a while longer, but was finally prompted to consider being more awake when I realized that I had Kyle's phone and I wasn't sure if he had set a new work alarm on mine. So I gave him a quick call, but it turns out that wasn't necessary as he'd already set an alarm. *How very adult of him.* I changed into the clothes I'd laid out the night before and slowly got myself put together. Once that was done, I turned the GPS on and headed towards the road.



I would like to note that I have not hitchhiked before this. I'd heard enough horror stories, true or otherwise, to generally avoid it and/or proceed with caution. But this day, it made the most sense and, at least according to the local lady, it wasn't illegal and in fact was fairly common. *Time to try something new.* I was fairly self-conscious about holding my thumb out. I can't quite pin down why that might be, but I was a bit nervous and shy about it. I made it maybe a mile before someone pulled over. At first, I wasn't entirely sure he was stopping for me. I took in the fact that it was a white van and found that slightly amusing before I opened the door and told the nice gent, Ally, where I was headed. He told me it was along his route, he looked congenial enough, and so I hopped in! It was remarkably easier and more personable than I was expecting. *Though to be fair I don't even know what I was expecting.* Suffice it to say, it was a memorable and pleasing first experience. We briefly touched on films done in the area, he pointed out that part of the Harry Potter

scenes were done around these parts, then on to Scottish actors or American actors playing Scottish roles. And then somehow on to the local wildlife. He told me there were wild goats and then pointed some out in Shiel Bridge. I wanted to know if they were really wild; they looked small and they were just sitting on the side of the road. My first thought was domesticated, free roaming goats. I then teasingly told him that goats in the Cascades follow you to drink your wee and he told me that was TMI with a laugh. Really nice gent. He was on his way to act as a tour guide and driver in the area.

He dropped me off just on the west side of Shiel Bridge. It was a little further than I was hoping to go but

there were not a lot of markers en route so it was as good as anything and saved me a couple hours I'm sure! It was here, right at the very start that I made a critical error. I should have crossed the bridge at Shiel Bridge. *Because the name wasn't an indication at all.* I walked back towards the south east side of Loch Shiel and then turned left through a metal gate. I walked down to the river and it was significantly deeper and wider than I was expecting.

I walked along it heading generally in a south, south easterly direction because that looked like it received the most foot traffic. Much later, and from much higher up I'd see that I was near the crossing marked on the map, *which I'd helpfully forgotten about*, and that if I'd turned left and followed it a short way, I would have been able to cross on a bridge. But, as it stands, I ended up following the river for a while and it showed no signs of getting any narrower in the near future and was so deep in several sections it was certain to be a swim. *Too early and not desperate enough.* I finally came to a spot where it looked like it might be possible to wade, but it was still deep. My initial estimate was that it'd reach crotch level. Impatient and not wanting to spend too long puzzling over the river situation I decided to pull off my boots and wade it. Covered in muck and likely other organic farm materials, I tied my boots together and let them hang around my neck trying to ignore the slimy muck necklace. I estimated that the deepest part of the river would be the initial five feet or so, at least, from what I could see. I started wading and it dropped off a lot quicker than I'd thought. *Well... it was an estimate not a guarantee.*

I danced around the edge a bit, tried to stand on a slimy log to get a little further out and on to the rocky looking middle section, but to no avail. I finally told myself to stop dancing about and just to do it. And on that sage internal advice, I waded in. And it went up past my belly button. *Crap! I hope it doesn't get deeper!* I thought about turning around but I was wet now and I'd still have the same problem, so I pressed on. The middle of the river was a little less deep and had a solid rocky bottom but also had long strands of vegetation flowing with the current. *River seaweed?* I have no idea what type of vegetation it is, but it was actually quite pretty and tickled on my legs. In this middle section I stumbled over a rock and pitched quickly forward. I managed to catch myself with the poles before going in entirely, but one bot paid the price and was completely flooded. *Charming. Looking forward to that squish for the rest of the day.* It was about this point that I noticed the bottom of my pack was dragging in the water. *Shite!! I hadn't even bothered to check to see if anything needed to be put in a bag or moved higher up. Lord I'm a real planner. What type of wet surprise was I going to be rewarded with?*

I got to the far side and it looked to get deeper again. And it was. But I was in it now, so I forged on while trying to hold my boots higher. I made it out onto the bank on the far side and was able to mostly dry off my legs and get the mud off them. Then I did a little investigating into what got wet. Fortunately, my spare clothes were mostly in a dry bag and my food was in a plastic bag (albeit not sealed) and a lot of it would dry. The map, which had been in a mesh pocket on the outside, did get wet though. However, it wasn't soaked and I thought if I left it mostly alone it'd probably dry fine. *Good thing I didn't pay the extra couple of quid for the waterproof ones. That'd be way to practical!*

And with that start! I decided to just bail on trying to find the 'trail' and head straight uphill. I've grown mostly used to not having great trails here anyways. And with that, I began my slow ascent uphill punctuated periodically by shrieks and squeals as I had to get spiders and various other creatures off of me. I was hoping to get a lot of the elevation out of the way before the sun really came out, but alas, it was fully out now and warming up fast. But offsetting the laborious start, I was pretty chuffed to spot a fox on the hillside above me. He was absolutely gorgeous!! I mean just stunning. I think it is the first time I've seen a fox in the wild and I was impressed. We must have sensed each other around the same time, there was a pause as we both stared at each other and then he took off uphill. It was a shame. I

know he couldn't stick around all day, but he was just so beautiful, and I enjoyed looking at him and sharing this moment outside with him. He looked healthy as well. Lovely coat and larger than I expected. Later I walked past a couple of carcasses. One sheep and one unknown (although possibly another fox). *This must be the unused side of the mountain!* It was on this hillside that I thought I discovered a tick on the back of my leg as well, something that'd plague and worry me for the rest of the day...

For some reason I had a bit of a hard time determining exactly where I was along the ridge and where I was gaining it. As it stands, I came up just north of Beinn Bhuidhe and ended up having to ascend that in order to try and better gauge which initial bump of the ridge I was on. *Ugh!* Sgurr Fhuaran looked discouragingly far away. I followed a trail, of sorts, upward towards Sgurr nan Saighead, another point along the ridge, but opted to traverse under the summit instead of going directly over it.

I was already suffering and I hadn't even attained the first targeted Munro summit. I was so thirsty too. I knew I needed to hydrate better than yesterday so I just embraced the fact that I was going to have to melt snow in my bottle as I walked today. With that decision made I didn't hesitate to just drink my water. No holding back, well, I always keep some in reserve. Which meant that on the north side of Sgurr Fhuaran it was time to fill up a bottle with some snow. I knew it'd take time to melt, and hence time before it might be drinkable. The issue was, I had two bottles with small mouth openings and it took an age to fill it with snow. I kept thinking of how it was taking up an inordinate amount of time to take care of this relatively simple task. I only managed to get one bottle mostly full before I called an end to this break session. I could see smatterings of snow patches along the ridge in various places so knew I'd have other opportunities. *No time to stop moving!* The trail from the northeast side of Sgurr nan Saighead to Sgurr Fhuaran was more defined. It was just below the summit of the first Munro, Sgurr Fhuaran that a gent caught up to, and flew past me. I also ran into a woman just gaining the summit from the other side. *Well okay! This seems to be a more popular destination than yesterdays!!*



I only briefly stopped on the summit to send Kyle a quick text message, mark the summit on the GPS, take a photo and grab a snack before heading off. I was going a lot slower than I'd anticipated so I'd have to try to move a little faster or in today's case ... just keep moving! Descending the south side was a bit loose and rocky, but overall fine. It actually reminded me of the Cascades a little. *Chossy!!* It was the next peak that I enjoyed the most. It had a short scramble section and it felt

great! Sgurr na Carnach's north side had some fairly solid rock that was fun to scramble up. It was only a few short moves, but I really loved it. Felt a little bit like being back in my natural environment. Where my mind and limbs work in unison; out of instinct and habit. It's just natural. Making this second

summit, I felt like I was finally making some progress. It took less than an hour between these summits, which was encouraging. Two down and four to go! Similar situation coming off of the south side of Sgurr na Carnach; a bit loose and rocky in some sections but walkable. In one or two places I lost the thread of the trail in boulders or larger rocks, but fortunately there were enough people in the area I could usually set my sights to them and follow where their trail generally lead and pick up the threads. It was here I ran into a nice gent who was in long black sleeves, dark polyester looking pants and black gaiters. I gawked at him and asked how he wasn't overheating. I was in shorts and my lightest long sleeve shirt and I was warm. My clothes had, for the most part, dried. He told me he had lived in Zimbabwe for a time and this was just pleasant. *Fair enough!* We briefly chatted for a while until his companion caught up with him, and I realized I better keep moving.

The trail up Sgurr na Ciste Duibhe from the north eastern side was fairly moderate and okay to follow. I'd occasionally lose the threads, but I'd generally pick them up again quickly. *I mean, it is a ridge... so just stay on the ridge for the most part. And take the path of least resistance, because it is almost a guarantee that is what everyone else did!* Another quick summit. The basics and then I quickly nipped off down the east side with the trail about 100ft below the summit where there was a patch of snow. Time to try and fill up again. But, I was feeling more creative in my problem solving at the moment. I pulled the clothes out of my dry bag and just scooped a bunch of snow into that. I then planned to fasten it to the outside of my pack and let the sun naturally melt it while I moved and then I could strain that water through my buff and viola, water! It seemed like a good idea, but as it happened the water leaked out of my super-sil 'dry' bag. *Hm. Not as advertised then. Not so dry.* In the end I was able to get a little bit of water from it so I'm still grateful for giving it a go. Maybe next time I'll use a plastic bag. But with the chocolate Jaffa cakes melting in the food bag I didn't want to risk putting them just 'in' my main back. *Sounded like a chocolatey mess waiting to happen.*

I followed the trail down to a dip and realized that in order to follow the trail along the ridge I'd have to gain and go up and over Sgurr nan Spainteach. *Noooo!!* All of this up and down was taking a lot of effort. It wasn't a straight forward gentle curve type of ridge. It had features. There was a short couple of scramble moves (I'd say Class 3 or Class 4 but with good holds and placements) on the west side, but easy enough. Again, the ridge offered more ups and downs than had been obvious on the maps I looked at. It wasn't hard going, it just took a little more time and effort to navigate around and I was very conscious of time. I wasn't worried about daylight. It stays light out until quite late this time of the year, and I had the headlamp if I needed it. I was hours and hours away from even considering that. The real motivating force was the fact that I was hungry and I wanted more than the two Pot Noodles I had in the car. In fact, my stomach had been absolutely roiling for parts of the day. Sometimes it felt like driving hunger, and then occasionally I wondered if it was due to the twice warmed over protein shake, unrefrigerated sweaty cheese or the possibly questionable snow; all of which I'd ingested this very day! *How fast do tick bites, if that is what that thing on my leg is, cause problems?!*

But this was a critical decision-making moment along the ridge. *No time to lose my head!* After dropping to the low point from Sgurr nan Spainteach there was a bail option; a trail that headed back down to the A87. The choices were, bail now or continue along the ridge. Weighing into the decision, I was already running a bit tired and these peaks would be spaced a bit further apart. From a distance it looked like they might have more defined smooth trails which would help. *YOLO. I am here.* And with that introspective though, I pressed on. It briefly crossed my mind that this was entering a bit of murky territory considering as I wasn't feeling my best. Between being nauseously hungry, a little dehydrated and having had a handful of nose bleeds I knew I was running a bit rougher for the wear and being out alone meant I'd really have to keep tabs on myself and make sure I didn't push to incapacitation. *House*

rules! No passing out unless you have a buddy of course!



After this 'halfway point' of sorts, and with the 'Sisters' side of the ridge complete, I only saw two people for the rest of the day. A couple in the distance and one gentleman I briefly walked past who grunted some sort of a greeting in acknowledgement of my presence as he passed. Other than that, I was very much alone. And left to my own brain to distract me. I got lost in my own thoughts. Just a haze of imaginative storytelling, contemplative questions and random musings. My

mind was free to wander where it wanted. My body however, it needed to keep moving and stay on the trail. Blissfully, it was more moderate on this section both with regards to the general terrain grade and the trail. I had rationed one pack of Sport Beans for the first half and now I pulled out the second pack and began nibbling on the beans two or three at a time. They were great little pick me ups. By the time I reached the summit of Saileag I just wasn't in the mood for much. I sent Kyle a text message that said something to the effect of 'on the 4th'. I knew he had been loosely following along with my progress and would be able to figure out where I was. I think in my haze I may have sent one or two rife with complaints as well. But I've blocked that out already. The distances between the peaks was still occasionally disheartening, but there were a couple moments when I'd surprise myself and have gained more on the uphill than I anticipated. It was a weird back and forth. Disheartened versus determined. Plus, once I was this far the best thing was to continue all the way. At the end of this there was an Inn, with food, and if there was any justice or divine power in the universe at all, I'd make it before they stopped serving.

I followed the trail up to Sgurr a'Bhealaich Dheirg (the fifth Munro for the day). As I neared the summit it became rockier and I could tell that the true summit was slightly off to my left. *If I had any doubts about it being the summit they would have been eradicated by the massive cairn tower.* Initially I wondered if it would prove troublesome or difficult to navigate the last rocky section, however, it was not difficult in the least. If I wasn't so tired I might have even enjoyed playing around on the rocks a little more. As I was, I didn't even bother sending Kyle a text message to say where I was. The reception had been reducing the further I moved along the ridge and at that moment it didn't seem necessary to let him know. Instead, I touched the summit and used my momentum to keep moving forward. Once again, I allowed my brain to wander as my legs pulled me forward. And once again, the trail was straight forward over to Aonach Meadhoin. Again. Quick summit. I opted not to text Kyle again both because of time and because I honestly didn't know which summit I was on. I find it harder to keep track of the peaks when I cannot say or spell the Gaelic names! The question now was, should I descend off the south side of the mountain where there supposedly existed a trail and walk across the green space back

to the A87 and then the last mile or so along the road to the inn, or go up and over the adjacent summit of Sgurr an Fhuairail and then down into the next valley which I knew had a track that essentially lead to the inn's door. In the spirit of the days desire to reach the inn and having weighed the variables I opted to go up and over. It was here that I ran into a small herd of deer that were grazing at about 800m on the south east arm of Sgurr an Fhuairail. They weren't very keen on me and took off downhill. Sadly for them, it was the same direction I was heading so they'd just have to keep descending. My initial thoughts were to cut right (south east) to try to minimize the distance but as I headed that way I couldn't quite tell if it'd end in a drop off so I ended up switching back to my left and around a deep cleft in the mountain to follow the deer down. *Hey! The deer likely know best here!*

Overall the terrain was fairly moderate. Mostly grass, moist in some areas but nothing too severe. I was able to descend quickly. *Bail, bail, bail!!* Once down in the valley I picked up the threads of a road on the west side of the river and followed it down until it became a more defined road which I then followed right back to the inn. I didn't have a watch on and hadn't looked at my phone in a long time but I knew from the shadows in the valley that it was later in the day then I'd gotten back to the car yesterday so had a general idea that I was hitting right up on what could be closing time. Worried that I'd miss it by just a minute or so I walked to the car, ripped off my gaiters, collapsed my poles and shoved both things under the car. I'd risk someone stealing those dirty used bits of gear for some dinner! Hands down! With that thirty second delay I walked into the inn still wearing my muddy boots a sweat soaked shirt, dropped my backpack at the counter and ordered fish and chips without looking at the menu. I waited with baited breath to hear 'kitchen is closed' but the guy took my order and I was extremely pleased! I then grabbed a table. Set down a couple items so someone would know I was there and then scooted off to the parking lot to quickly changed into some street clothes and put everything in the car. Once done, I shot a text message to Kyle that simply said 'At Inn' so he wouldn't worry. *This suffer fest was heavy on the suffer and light on the fest!*

I then enjoyed a lovely dinner and ran into the gent who had lived in Zimbabwe and another three gents discussing their next Munro targets. I mentioned to one I might take the next day off and possibly go see a doctor to see what the bite on my leg was. He said he was a doctor and asked where the bite was. I said it was near my knee. And he shouted over to his friends "Hey! She's got a rash but it's above the knee!". *Gee. Thanks. Misrepresent embarrassingly to the whole pub louder please!* He then told me he'd never seen a tick bite and he didn't think they were common. *Well, someone needs to get their facts straight because all of the posters and general consensus in the area was that they were out there!* Either way, I was too happy to have a full belly to do anything besides chuckle. Then Kyle, excellent man that he is, sent me a message and told me if I drove 35 minutes east there was a hostel bed with my name on it!

I was running a bit tired but managed to get myself there and was quite pleased that on the drive over I saw what I believe was a few wild boar and a couple little piglets. Also deciding to be in front of my car were a deer and two birds. *But everyone managed to escape unscathed this night!* When I got to the hostel the receptionist initially couldn't find my room and there was some confusion because she thought I was part of another party but luckily we got it sorted. I went upstairs, dropped my bag, jumped in the shower and crawled into bed. I opted to sleep in minimal clothing because it was a ladies dorm and my legs, which I hadn't bothered to put sunscreen on, were a little crispy on one side. *Surely someone heard my moans of pleasure! That shower and bed divine! Nothing like a day well-earned and a body hard worked!*

Lessons Learned

