

Route(s)	The Shiel Ridge (plus some) Traverse
Elevation(s) (ft/m)	The Saddle (3,314ft/ 1010m) Sgurr na Sgine (3,104ft/ 946m) Creag nan Damh (3,012ft/ 918m) Sgurr an Lochain (3,294ft/ 1004m) Sgurr an Doire Leathain (3,314ft/ 1010m) Maol Chinn-dearg (3,219ft/ 981m) Aonach air Chrith (3,350ft/ 1021m) Druim Shionnach (3,238ft/ 987m) Creag a'Mhaim (3,107ft/ 947m)
Date(s)	May 26-27 2018
Partner(s)	Kyle Finnegan
Elevation gain/loss (ft/m)	+9,128ft / 2782m and -8,475ft / 2583m
Distance (miles)	21.5 miles / 34.6 km
Total time (hours/mins)	1d 3h 52m
Equipment	Overnight kit (no technical gear)
Weather Forecast	Mostly sunny
Weather Actuality	Mostly sunny – quite hot with the occasional light breeze turning into windy the first night with a moment of gale force wind the next morning
Flora/Fauna	N/A
Wildlife	Deer, grouse and a beautiful large crow (possibly raven)
Starting Point/Trailhead	Unmarked layby
Grade/Rating	Vast majority was a walk but there were a couple scramble moves one section on the Shiel Ridge may have been Class 3 and the gulley off of east side of Sgurr na Sgine had a Class 4 section
Accommodations	The Great Glen Hostel
Tourist Attractions	N/A
Motto for the day	N/A

Day 1	
Daily 1 Distance	10.3 miles / 16.58 km
Daily 1 Elevation	+6,614 ft / 2016m and -3,862ft / 1177m
Day 1 Daily Time	11h 56m
Leave Layby	9.30am
Summit The Saddle	12.50am
Summit Sgurr na Sgine	2.50pm
Summit Creag nan Damh	6.25pm
Summit Sgurr an Lochain	7.45pm
Arrive 'rando ridge camp'	8.30pm
The Story	

I spent the majority of Friday morning holed up at the Loch Side Hostel just north of Fort Augustus, but eventually decided to mosey on down to The Great Glen Hostel to check in for Kyle and I. Once there I checked in, dropped off my food in the fridge and then decided to head off in search of food which

turned out to be real epic journey. First, I went to Loch Oich Food which is a little café up the road, but they had just stopped serving food. Back in the car, I continued driving a little bit down the road and saw a sign for tea and dinner at a local castle hotel, so I pulled in and followed the road to the end and quietly made my way into an unmarked door to try and find where the restaurant was located. When I did locate it, the gentleman told me they were serving tea and all they had was scones and tea. *Great... so I was between tea and dinner and it was going to be nearly impossible to find a salad or a sandwich!* Back in the car and little further up the road I stopped at another hotel and restaurant that advertised all day food. The only thing was, when I went to order they were out of the fish cakes. *Sigh. Just please!! Bring me some food!* I ended up with a lovely balsamic salad and cheese and tomato sandwich. After that I drove back to the hostel and crawled into my bunk and read a little. Periodically I had to put the story down and close my eyes. I was still tired. I hadn't gotten much sleep last night and after a big meal and cool soft corner I was starting to succumb. Kyle arrived about a quarter after nine and we filled up water, made a pizza for the next day, visited with some people in the kitchen and eventually showered before getting into bed. That night I really crashed and when the alarm went off the next morning I rolled over and told Kyle I needed a favor. I needed him to let me sleep half an hour more while he packed up. *Haha.* Yes. That did happen. And yes. Kyle obligingly let me rest. I had gotten some of the best sleep I'd had in a long time and I was so reluctant to get out of bed.



It didn't take us too long to grab our kit and get out the door as we had most of it laid out the night before. We loaded all of the extra water and spare clothes into the back of my car and the packs in the back of Kyles then jumped in our respective cars and headed towards Cluanie Inn. We quickly dropped my car at the Inn and then drove the rest of the way down the road to the start for The Saddle. Fortunately, there was still a space available at the layby. Again, a quick turnaround as we turned on the GPS, grabbed our packs and headed a

short way down the road to the beginning of the trail. And I must say, this trail was a gem. It was a proper trail and it was so nice to be on a 'trail' again even if just for a minute. It weaved and switched its way uphill. We could see a party ahead of us, and once we stopped to put on some sunscreen and grab water, a guy came up behind us. He offered us some pointers and advice on the route, and actually stopped a little further ahead to share some more information he had forgotten to share. I love that friendly spirit of comradery outdoors. As we approached, I eyed the route. It looked like a ball, but the question was if the scramble would be difficult or not. I didn't particularly want to start something with overnight packs that'd be hard to back down or bail from, especially considering we brought no technical gear. We continued walking up to the base of Forcan Ridge. We ran into a group taking a break there and briefly stopped to chat with them and figure out what we wanted to do. It was clear to me that the southern side looked a little milder and all data indicated there was a route up that side as well. In the interest of not carrying our packs up and down the ridge we went over to the south side trail and

dropped our packs. Kyle and I each used a buff around the neck to carry a little gear. I had the camera and GPS while Kyle hooked a water bottle, sunscreen, and lip balm to his. We then worked away to a south-eastern arm of Forcan Ridge and ascended that to Sgurr na Forcan. It was a fun scramble. Not technical. Once on the ridge proper we followed the trail over to The Saddle. I very much enjoyed this bit of ridge. It wasn't too difficult but had a few scramble sections to add a little spice. I could see a few places where there were crampon marks on the rocks. *That had to be spicy!*



The gent we'd met earlier had suggested that there were several contentious sub-summits, but we were having a hard time identifying what they might be. We walked over to one potential, marked in on the GPS and then followed the trail back down to make a loop back to where we left our packs. I had been a bit paranoid about leaving the packs in case someone should come along, but fortunately, they appeared untouched. *Trusting soul that I am.* We slung the packs over our shoulders, which were suddenly much heavier, and headed off towards the tarn between the summits. From the tarn we headed south-southeast uphill to gain the ridge. There was a trail, but we lost it for short bits at a time on the uphill. Once on the ridge it was easier to follow up to the summit. There was a patch of snow up top, which we stopped to put in one bottle to start the melting process. *No time like the present for a little future planning!* Just below the summit we ran into a gent and his dog. The dog's name was Munro. *How cute is that?!* And he was a

sweetie. I threw a little snow from my hat into the air and he chomped it out of the air. After a brief chat we hopped the remaining few feet over to the summit and sat down for some food and water. I walked off to the north side to take a look down to see if there was an obvious descent path. It looked doable, but not preferable. With that in consideration I walked to the south side and took a look there. I came across a faint path, but it could have been from game just as easily as people. It did go along side the top of a gully, and the gully looked, from what I could see, doable. There was one 'drop' in the middle that I couldn't see, but it looked like it might go and it looked a little less exposed than the north side. With all that in consideration I hiked back up to where Kyle was sat on the summit stoop and we discussed the options, and had little oranges with our very dry sandwiches. My preference was the gully and Kyle didn't seem to have a real opinion either way so to the gully it was. *He best be careful with all that trust he places in me!*

The top of the gulley was wide, dirt mostly on the left (north) and in the middle and grass on the right. The dirt was hard, compacted and had loose rocks on it which made it exceedingly difficult to maneuver down so we mostly stayed on the grass and that went absolutely fine. There were two 'steps' in the gulley that required a little negotiating. The first was a short step that we were easily able to slide and scramble down (perhaps five or six feet) the second, however, was a little trickier. It was a fairly vertical drop of eight to ten feet without a clear way to descend. To the right (south) a section of rock jutted out and there was a chockstone jammed between it and the side of the gulley. There was a short tunnel Kyle tried to squeeze into but it was just small enough he couldn't quite make it work. *Lord!! Do not need him getting stuck in a crevice. What an awkward rescue call and wait that'd be!!* Well, with two of the three options explored we looked towards the wall on the left. It looked a little more broken up like it might be down-climbable. For whatever reason, I could see the way across and down, and it didn't look too bad, but I didn't quite like it. Kyle opted to go first, sans a pack, to test the route after I pointed out the way I was looking at. Although I did caution him to test every hold, a fall, although probably not fatal from here, could still be extremely painful and injurious. Good thing he tested them, one was loose. Other than that, he was able to skidaddle over fairly quickly. *Okay. So it goes. But what about the packs and poles? Should I just chuck them down?* I straddled the chockstone and used it to hold me in place as I leaned down and tried to lower it via hand. The concern was that if I let go it'd still fall quite fast and I didn't want it to get too out of control. I needed a couple feet and it might be a little easier to drop it to Kyle. I pondered on this conundrum then decided to girth hitch a couple of my buffs together and try to lower it, Kyle added one of his to the mix and with three girth hitched together I was able to lower it enough that it only had to drop four or five feet down to Kyle. *MacGyver-ed the shit out of that!!* Unfortunately, the scraping across the rock caused the stays in Kyle's backpack to pop free. *Oops!! Casualty!*



With the packs and poles down it was my turn to scramble down. Kyle helped guide me from below, and once down, I grabbed my pack and made a beeline for the grassy slopes below. I don't know how long I'd been holding it, but it felt like forever! And this little bit of excitement just pushed it to the immediate! I literally just left Kyle and ran down yelling 'Don't look' behind me! *Phw!* All the tough business successfully taken care of, we could now focus on finding our way up and over Sgurr a Bhac

Chaolais which would then drop us to the start of Shiel Ridge. From across the way I thought we might be able to traverse around the point and avoid the elevation gain, and it might have been possible, but it looked like we might have to go around two 'ridges' of sorts, and side hilling for an age gets old, so we decided to go up and over. And that worked just fine. Besides being cross-country the going was fairly straight forward. The descent from Sgurr a Bhac had a faint trail which was nice to follow. We were fairly quiet as we ducked our heads and tried to close the distance over to the next summit. Kyle and I had

separately, and then mutually, agreed it'd be nice to get at least two peaks done today. *Spooky! We are rarely on the same page!* Just as we reached the saddle between the two points on the ridge we encountered a gentleman coming off. He seemed a bit desperate to be done and asked us where the trail to go down was. Having not come up that way we couldn't definitively point him in the correct direction, but we did check the GPS and tell him it should be right over a short bump on the ridge. *Poor chap!* But his low point meant our bodies had to shift gears again and start cranking out the uphill. Sport beans to the rescue. Kyle and I shared a few beans and set a slow but steady pace uphill. The trail was easy enough to follow; mostly ran alongside old iron rods stuck into the rock that appeared to be the remains of an old fence. A little higher on the ridge we ran into a couple we'd seen at the hostel and a few other guys who were descending. They indicated that there was a tricky steep icy spot coming up before the summit and to be careful. *Okie dokie.* We came across a steep descent, almost like a scramble but it didn't have any ice on it, albeit a small snow patch at the bottom. *Was this it? I think I slept through the hard part!* It had to be, because there was nothing else of variety along the trail to the summit of Creag nan Damh. While on the summit we ran into another fairly large group of people who were taking a break. Kyle and I, on the other hand, were not much interested in a break, instead we snapped a couple photos and continued along the ridge.



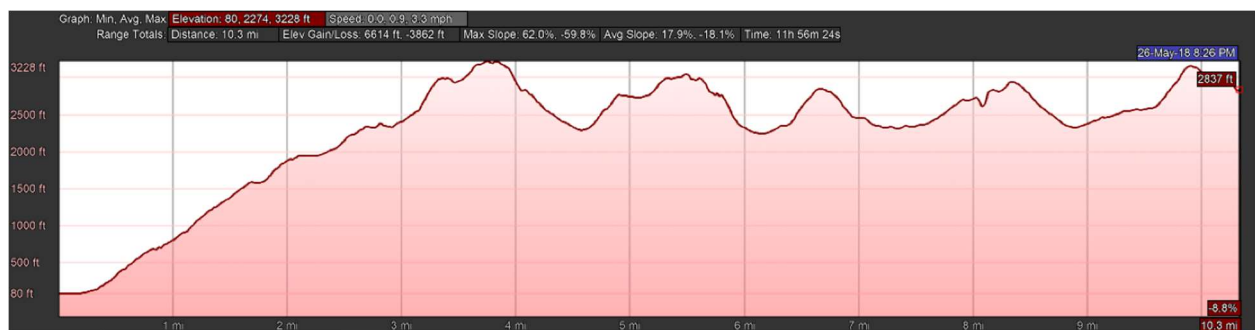
The trail along Shiel Ridge is quite defined and easy to follow. From Creag nan Damh we continued along down to the low point between mountains, and then we started on the uphill towards the high point between the Munro mountains, but at approximately 750m we veered right and traversed under the mountain. *Phw!* So glad for that bypass! At this point, the wind was picking up a little bit and the sun was starting to diminish in the sky, so we decided we'd head down to the saddle and look for a place that was sort of level and hopefully had some access to a patch of some snow that we could melt for water. There were lots of options, however, the tricky find was looking for a place out of the wind, which had suddenly kicked up. We initially tried pitching the tent on the south side of the ridge, but the wind was quite literally bowling the tent over. I was worried it'd snap the poles. I'd brought the lightweight tent for this trip as the weather was looking good, and not the massive expedition tent built for just about

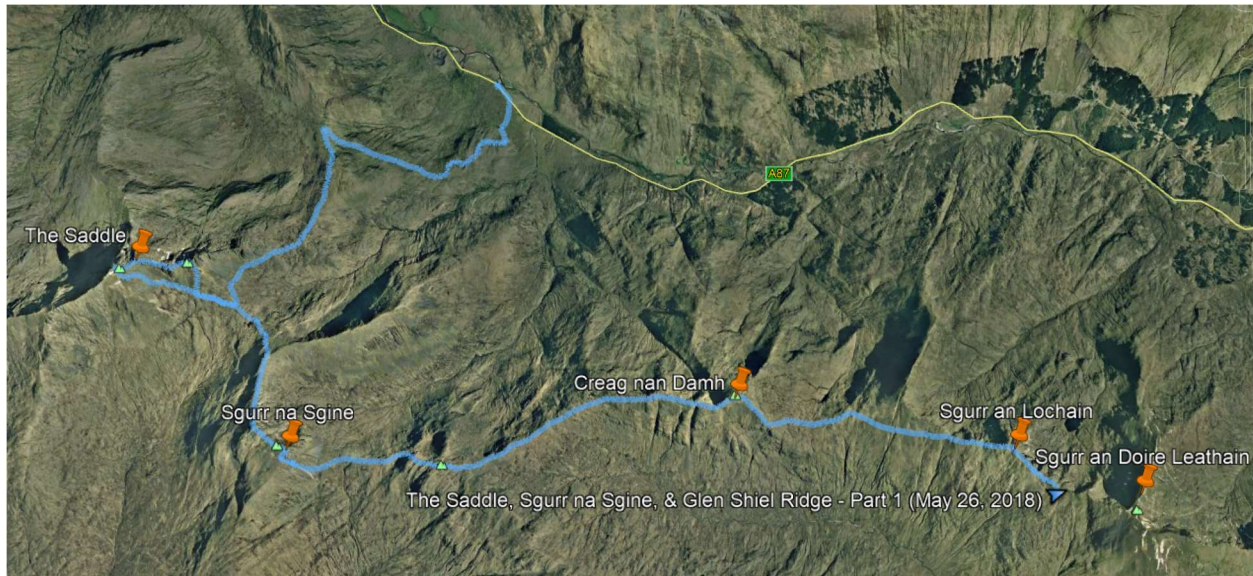
everything. But, to be fair, it was some strong wind! With a lot of choice words and snappish remarks, I got up and began looking for a place a little lower on the south side. I thought I spied something so came

back and told Kyle to head a little further down while I filled up a Tesco bag full of snow so that we could melt it later tonight. We dropped perhaps a hundred feet or so down the south side and again began pitching the tent, but again the wind kicked up and it looked like it just wasn't going to happen. *Fuck me! It's fucking with us!* Having neither the time nor patience, we pulled the poles out and shoved our gear in the tent and decided that we could use it as a form of two man bivy. *Just the kind of tempting welcome home I was hoping for after a long day!*

As Kyle got the sleeping situation squared away I held down the pot situation and melted water. Because we did not have iodine or chlorine tablets, which are evidently the best and only way to kill cryptosporidium, a type of water born disease, we thought we'd try to boil the water. The only thing was we couldn't quite remember how long you were supposed to boil water to disinfect it. *Crap!!* I thought maybe a couple minutes, but it was taking so long to melt the snow and boil the water that we opted for circa one minute...*which I counted in Mississippi's, so it had to be long enough, right?* I then strained the water through a buff, to try to get out some of the bigger debris, and into a hard-plastic Nalgene, that I then let cool before distributing to our collapsible plastic bottles. What a production! We got circa three liters or so out of it after we'd boiled the water for dinner. I was calling it at 11pm and going to bed. If we needed more water tomorrow, we could melt some snow en route. Kyle had gotten me all worked up and paranoid about it, but I'd eaten snow the previous two days I'd been out, so I was choosing to be hopeful!

Even after 11pm the sky was still fairly light. I love this time of year!! We watched as the stars slowly came out and the wind began to pick up again. Alas, we were both tired, so after Kyle guy-lined out the tent a little tighter, we both crawled into the tent-bivy. Perhaps 'slid' is a more accurate term, because I felt like a walrus sliding across ice it was so slippery in there! The sleeping bag, silk liner, and artificial top of the sleeping pad made it supa-slick! Eventually, with a little wrangling, we both got in and somehow managed to drop off to sleep. I can't say if we slept great, because I know that I woke up several times in the night and would make sure Kyle hadn't suffocated on the tent fabric! *Trust him to do that to me.*





Day 2	
Daily 2 Distance	11.6 miles / 18.67 km
Daily 2 Elevation	+2,789ft / 850m and -4,894ft / 1492m
Day 2 Daily Time	7h 15m
Leave 'rando ridge camp'	6.15am
Summit Sgurr an Doire L.	6.40am
Summit Maol Chinn-dearg	7.40am
Summit Aonach air Chrith	8.45am
Summit Druim Shionnach	9.55am
Summit Creag a'Mhaim	10.45am
Claunie Inn	1.25pm

The Story

One of the many times I woke my brain recognized that the tent had a gray color to it. My cognitive thinking finally switched on to tell me that meant the sun was rising, it was morning, and it was time to get up. Not that we'd ever been too deeply asleep. I think the constant give and take of the wind rattling around the fly and whacking us in our face prevented the deepest kind of sleep. But Kyle and I had planned to get an early start to hopefully avoid some of the midday heat, and, perhaps, get out a little earlier. I scooted around under the tent fly and found Kyle's phone. I turned it on and it told me it was nearly five thirty in the morning. Definitely time to get up. There was a surprising calm and lack of complaints and grunts while getting up. It didn't take too long to get everything packed up and begin our walk over to Sgurr an Doire Leathain. It really wasn't that far, all things considered. Per protocol, it was a quick summit shot and GPS mark before we began heading off down the windy ridge. As we descended we got blasted with what felt like gale force winds. *Jaa-heeez!* I was physically getting buffeted around. I couldn't take a step because being on one leg would certainly knock me over. In fact, I had to brace on both legs and lean left into the wind to stay upright. In my head I was pretending to be Captain America with my shield up holding back the force of the wind. *What can I say? It is way too easy to get lost in my imagination!* It was slightly concerning though. If the wind stayed this strong it'd definitely make the rest

of the ridge a bit more of a trial. Likely do-able but requiring more effort for sure. As it was, the wind reduced in ferocity halfway over to the next summit. *Thank you, sweet lord!*

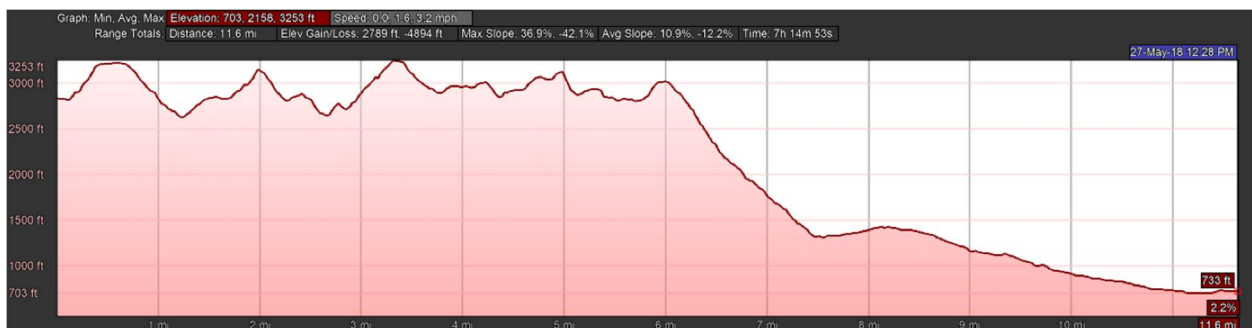


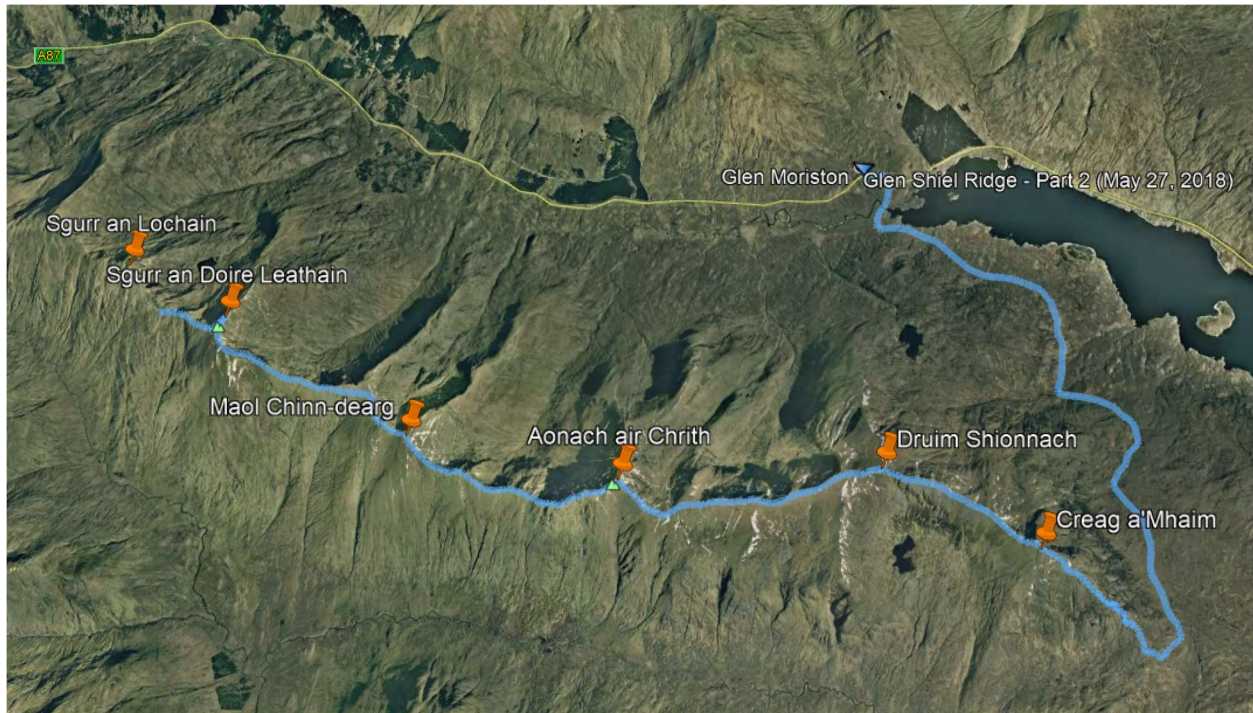
We made pretty quick work of Maol Chinn-dearg and Aonach air Chrith by following the trail. This side of the ridge had proven to be, for the most part, a little wider and gradual than the far side. All in all it had been a pleasant morning. We reached the low point and started the up and down climb over to Druim Shionnach, where we ran into two gents (a Canadian and Scot) who had camped at the base of the eastern side of the ridge and were trying to do it in a day. We had a lovely talk with Canadian gent, the Scot was fairly quiet, and bid them good luck. Not long after that we ran into a young woman they had mentioned. We got talking and she asked where we were from and we said 'Seattle' in our usual generalization and then she excitedly said 'No way! I'm from Bellevue.' We then started laughing and told her we lived in Bellevue! *What a small world?!* We exchanged stories and information and then proceeded on our way. Kyle told me he had dreamed of fish and chips the night before and we just had two more peaks before we could drop down and walk around to the inn! It was so close we could nearly taste it. Newly energized and laughing from our encounter with all the North Americans, we made the summit of Druim Shionnach in good spirits. We stopped to have a bit of a snack and down some water. I was trying to get a picture of Kyle and he kept moving around so I yelled 'Kyle! Focus!'. *Lord givem e strength! Some days..* That seemed to get his attention for a minute and I got a summit shot of him. From Druim Shionnach over to Creag a'Mhaim, it looked so easy and moderate, bordering on pleasant, that we were delighted. On the way over we ran into another solo lady and a couple. It was getting busier! And then we were there! The end of the line!



Standard protocol, this was a quick summit, and then we headed off down the trail which wound its way down the southeast side of the mountain. The heat of the day was making itself felt and we were keen to get to the inn and get some food and water. Once we hit the road the excitement grew! We still had a way to go, but this was, essentially, the last leg of the journey. As we walked we periodically stopped to dunk our buffs in any running water and wring them out

over each other's necks and heads before wearing them as cool bandanas and neck wraps. My feet were starting to protest, which I'd generally ignore, but the worrisome part about this go around was the fact that one pain point was near my ankle on my right foot, and it felt suspiciously more like a muscle or tendon issue than it did chaffing. Since I had injured that area previously, I became concerned and had to dial back the speed a little bit. *MmmMmm no you will not!* By the end I was limping along slowly. Not long after, we caught our first sight of the inn, and I sent Kyle along. He wasn't keen on leaving me, but I was wearing bright pink, and I told him I would be in sight on the road the whole time if he was concerned, but that it might be helpful if he got to the car and started pulling out our change of clothes, wipes, laundry bags etc. He scooted off, and by the time I caught him at the inn, I don't think I was much more than ten minutes behind him. But dang! Getting those boots off felt so incredibly good. Second to that was using some of the wipes I had to 'clean off'. I felt like a whole new person by the end of that. And with that fresh perspective and new outlook on life, Kyle and I got a table outside at the inn and without even looking at the menu I ordered our fish and chips, grabbed a big bottle of water and put my feet up! *A painful end to a glorious day but man, was it good to be here!*





Lessons Learned

1. The wind has a habit of just lamblasting you out of nowhere in Scotland. Be prepared!
2. Always bring chlorine/iodine tablets!

