

Route(s)	Meall na Aighean, Carn Mairg, Meall Garbh and Carn Gorm
Elevation(s) (ft/m)	Meall na Aighean (3,219ft /981m) Carn Mairg (3,415ft/ 1041m) Meall Garbh (3,176ft/ 968m) Carn Gorm (3,376ft/1029m)
Date(s)	June 24 2018
Partner(s)	Kyle Finnegan
Elevation gain/loss (ft/m)	4,338ft /1322m
Distance (miles)	11.8 miles / 19 km
Total time (hours/mins)	6h 50m
Equipment	Trekking poles, snacks and water! And on this occasion – sunscreen!
Weather Forecast	Mostly sunny low 20sC
Weather Actuality	Bluebird day! Don't think I even saw a cloud!
Flora/Fauna	N/A
Wildlife	Standard road pheasants and sheep
Starting Point/Trailhead	Inverar (Camusvrachan)
Grade/Rating	Walking
Accommodations	N/A
Tourist Attractions	N/A
Motto for the day	N/A

Day 1	
Daily 1 Distance	11.8 miles / 19 km
Daily 1 Elevation	4,338ft /1322m
Day 1 Daily Time	6h 50m
Rise and Shine	8.30am
Depart House	9.20am
Leave car	11.00am
Summit of Meall na Aighean	1.05pm
Summit of Carn Mairg	2.00pm
Summit of Meall Garbh	3.20pm
Summit of Carn Gorm	4.20pm
Arrival car	5.40pm
The Story	

This Scottish summer has been treating us mighty fine! Another lovely weekend meant another opportunity to get outside that we absolutely could not pass up. Since it was such a nice weekend, and history told me we weren't going to get up in a hurry, we opted for a cluster of four Munro summits near Inverar. The drive would be about an hour and a half, or so, by my estimate, and it looked a little more removed from the mainstream, which meant, hopefully, we'd be able to find some parking. My morning predictions proved to be true. The sky starts to lighten around 3.30am these days; by my estimates anyways. And, by 5am it is generally bright. I woke up, and it was bright, but given that that might mean it was only 5am, I decided not to investigate further and just laid around. *What was the hurry really?* It's light 'til nearly 11pm these days; or so it seems! Per usual, Kyle was up and moving first.

I could hear him rattling around getting things ready, which prompted me to get up and start organizing everything. Since we just needed daypacks, and the weather was generally looking skippy, it was easy to grab what we needed, make a couple sandwiches and go. On our way out, we decided to grab our trail tennis shoes. I like the ankle support of my boots, but it seemed like it might be nice to mix up the footwear a little bit. So that is what we did!

The drive out was uneventful. We briefly debated the place of onesies, toys, and other flippant dress choices worn in the outdoors. Inspired by what appeared to be an adult, in a onesie, on the side of the road! This idea of wearing 'funny' or 'goofy' attire, trying to 'up it' and be 'sillier' or 'different' is something I've only seen in the last couple of years. I mean, I remember people bringing battery powered lights or piñatas to training weekends, but nothing like what is happening now. Why is that? What is this generally pervasive shift in the approach and thinking to being outdoors? Is it shifting the emphasis from actually enjoying the outdoors to more of a chase for notoriety? Something to be pondered. And, so it was.

We made it out to Inverar without difficulty and we got the last parking spot in the turn off location! *YES! Rewarded for our unhurried approach.* It was clear once we stepped out of the car that the bugs were a little more prevalent then we'd experienced so far. We have been warned that it can get pretty dire, but so far, we'd been very lucky. *I mean... luckily a good Scottish breeze is pretty common here and that seems to keep them reasonably at bay.* We opted for the tennis shoes, grabbed our packs, and headed off. The GPS and map were telling me different things with regards to where the trail started. At first, we went left (west) along the road, past a telephone booth and a cottage but then the GPS started to say we'd passed it so we backtracked and up a small lane where Kyle asked the owner where the trail started. Turns out it was literally right where we'd walked. We missed it by feet. *Auspicious beginning if ever there was one!* As we were heading back that way we ran into another gent who I'd seen wandering around while we were getting ready. He was having trouble finding the start. But we pointed it out to him. Turns out there was a gate and a sign. *Yiiiikes! What was wrong with all of us?* He pushed on past and kept going while Kyle and I stopped to don our gaiters. The grass looked fairly high and we wanted to use them more as bug and plant guards. For the best, because on the way down I got hit above the knee by something and it stung! The trail wound around past a couple of gates, and then through a depressing logged and clear-cut section of forest. Once here, just continue to follow the faint path and ascend upwards. It intersects a section of gravel road. From there, we followed the road. Now the question was whether or not we go left to Carn Gorm, which is what the sign indicated at the base. *Why would a sign indicate the way a set of peaks should be done?* It had a clockwise loop indicated. Not in the mood to fuss around looking for where that trail branched off, Kyle and I decided to follow the road upward and go 'anti-clockwise'. We caught up to the gent we'd met before as he was trying to follow the track. It wasn't that hard... When we talked about branching off, he asked about us going the other direction. I affirmed that we probably would, and he decided to head off looking for the Carn Gorm path. *What rule followers!! Lord. Mix it up a little! Haha, that said, we might pay for that sentiment later!*

That being said, I think the trail was better marked to start on the Carn Gorm side. We followed the gravel road up until it curved around a corner. It was good it went around a corner because Kyle had stopped to clench his legs. *Obvious indication, he had to poop. This is what being married is. I can tell he has to poop without asking.* Might as well stop now. So, after a short, but necessary potty break, we broke from the road. The GPS and map were at odds once again, but trails follow ridges; it is usually the natural order of things. So, we cut the hundred feet or so uphill to intersect the mellow and wide arm, and voila, picked up a trail. We kept our gaiters on, although it was getting hot! The grass wasn't very high, but I'm a little paranoid about ticks, if I'm honest. And then, Kyle decided to add that there were little spiders crawling around everywhere. *Jeez. Thanks. That was an observation I did not need to hear!*

We followed the trail and occasionally saw wooden posts with yellow and green paint on them to indicate the trail. The odd part to me was that the posts were in random locations. They didn't seem the most thought out placements. But, perhaps I'm missing some crucial insight here. We briefly stopped for some water and to roll down our gaiters on the way up Meall na Aighean. Along this arm the bugs were thick. At one point, I waved my arm and hit a fly they were so thick around our heads. They were even landing on us and just sitting. *Uck.* Thankfully, the higher we climbed, the fewer we encountered, and a breeze began to pick up. But, I got in a few good rants and curses before that happened. *A lady has got to express herself when the occasion calls for it.*



We followed the trail for the most part, up to the false summit, and then over to the actual summit, which is a little rockier. Standard approach with a little food, water, and a selfie. I complimented Kyle on his improved sandwich for this trip. It was a lot moister than the sandwiches he brought on the Shiel Ridge trip. *Bravo.* From this point we could see a very clear trail from this summit over to Cairn Maig. *Brilliant!* From this angle Carn Maig looked rockier and generally more fun. Turns out that it is actually just a trail all the way over, but I appreciated the visual differences with the smattering of boulders and light-colored stone. On our way over, we ran across a couple streams with a thin trickle of water that I was able to use to saturate Kyle's hat and my buff. *Delicious coolness! Nature is such a giver!* As we finished the last steeper bit up to the summit, I told Kyle my mind had taken a philosophical bend and was thinking about how nature has a way of stripping off the thin veneer of social conditioning we all carry. He later told me he was actually having a moment and was fighting with himself on whether or not he wanted to even continue. *Oops. So, I guess he wasn't in the mood for those musings!* But, good on him, he pushed through and I never would have known if he hadn't said anything.

On the summit of Carn Maig we followed the GPS to the summit listed but noted that there was a cluster of rocks, not far away, that looked near equal in height. Just for fun, we left our packs on the summit cairn and went over to investigate. I took the GPS and we marked them. Turns out the rock outcropping was 5m shy of the true summit height. *There you go!* While mucking about I stepped on a loose rock that turned up and smacked my ankle. *Ouch!* And it was on my sometimes wonky and misbehaved ankle/tendon. *Naturally, of course.* We also ran into a couple doing the 'clockwise' loop and briefly spoke with them for a bit before grabbing our packs and heading off. This was a longer section of ridge that ran to Meall Garbh. There was a nice section of track to follow and it was very moderate. It was right at this midway point that we ran into the gent we'd seen that morning. We briefly stopped and had a chat. He told us the views from Carn Gorm were some of the best he'd ever seen. *Well hot*



damn! Guess we'll find out! Just to the east of Meall Garbh, at a low point on the ridge, there was a tarn (if water supply was an issue). Fortunately, we were doing well on water, so, we pressed on. But a good notation, it looked big enough that it might be useful year-round. By this point I could feel my need for water and food catching up with me. We hadn't had breakfast and we'd shared the first of our two sandwiches. On the summit of Meall Garbh we stopped for a spot of late lunch, near the oddly post-apocalyptic summit cairn. People had piled up old metal

fence posts and pieces, and then on top of that, someone had balanced some rocks to make a cairn, and over the top someone had tied two pieces of metal together with a worn red bandana. It had a very 'what-the-fuck' modern art feel to it. But I kind of liked it! There were a lot of rocks to sit on, so we just enjoyed the lovely views and chatted while we shared the second sandwich. *Mmmm so good!* Solid fuel stop, as indicated later by the fact that both of us felt better than expected on the last bit of uphill up Carn Gorm. From Meall Garbh we descended and then traversed under An Sgorr on a trail.

As we reached the summit of Carn Gorm, we first encountered the trig, which has fallen onto its side. It was such a perfect seat!! *They should all be pushed over!* Even though we didn't have to, Kyle and I sat down on the trig, just to take in the moment. The views were not earth shatteringly wonderful, but they were excellent to be sure. It was peaceful to look out onto a sea of rolling hills. Like coming home. Fun fact, the trig doesn't mark the actual summit here. It is about 30 yards from another rock pile that is marked as the summit both on the map and the GPS. But, seeing as you hit both while making the loop, it doesn't make much of a difference. We snapped a selfie and kept going. It was getting hotter. The day had been fun, but it was time to descend. We followed the trail off of Carn Gorm, as it headed south down an arm, briefly before veering east downhill. The trail ran just to the left of the forest line. But, if in doubt, all you have to do is go downhill until you hit the river, cross it, and you'll find the road. Fortunately for us, on this day, there was no doubt, so we just followed the trail back down to the river and a bridge. The trees mercifully provided some relief from the direct barrage of sunlight. I could feel my skin starting to heat up a little, which meant I was probably starting to get a little sunburnt. *Unh.* We weren't going to be out long enough for it to matter much, and we'd be in town tomorrow. No sense fussing about with it all. Once we reached the rusted, dilapidated bridge that crossed the river we stopped and dropped our packs. I was tempted to get in and swim, but I knew if I took everything off I wouldn't want to put it back on again. Instead, I settled for sitting on a rock in the middle and rubbing the cool water all over my arms and legs. *God. It was bliss.* Delightful, peaceful, natural bliss. Just pure contentment with a moment. Kyle was on the fence, but I'm sure my pleasurable sighs got the best of him, so not long after, he was on a rock letting the cool water run over his arms and legs. *I think we were both better people after that stop.*



The bridge crossing was something else though. It probably shouldn't be used for much longer, if at all. It's rusted, with the rail missing on the right (south) side. The wooden planks are faded, and one was broken though. The wire mesh placed over the boards looked okay. *But really. What was it going to do?* Hold all my weight on rotted beams? Now, let it be said, it looked easy enough to cross the river without the bridge at this time, maybe not during snow or higher water levels, but I was sure we could pick a way across. Kyle seemed to think this was

the better option, and not in the mood to fuss about with it, I said I'd go first. If it really buckled under my weight, which I suspected it truly might, he might want to reconsider. I walked with my feet on the outer rails. No sense putting weight on the middle, faded beams when one had clearly already broken. As my weight transferred from foot to foot, the bridge most certainly swayed. *Excellent.* It crossed my mind that at least it wasn't that high... but I still didn't think getting trapped under a metal beam, in a river, sounded at all tempting. But, all went well. Kyle waited zero seconds to start and I heard him giggling as it really swayed under his weight. And that wasn't the last bridge to cross. The gravel road had an old wooden bridge that was covered in wooden pieces, so it made it hard to tell if it was sound or not. But, there were sections that looked suspicious, so again we walked on the side where we could hold a railing if needed. *Who knew this was the obstacle course side?*

The rest of the walk out was uneventful. We walked past an old ruined 'mill' by taking a slight deviation, but other than that, we were back at the car in no time. It was hot, so we drank the liter of water sitting in the car, rolled down the windows and high-tailed it back home, all the while talking of milkshakes and showers.



