

Route(s)	Sgurr Mhor And Tom na Gruagaich (Beinn Alligin Traverse via 'The Horns')
Elevation(s) (ft/m)	Sgurr Mhor (3,235ft /986m) Tom na Gruagaich (3,025ft /922m)
Date(s)	June 27 2018
Partner(s)	Solo
Elevation gain/loss (ft/m)	4,051ft/ 1235m
Distance (miles/km)	6.95 miles/ 11.18km
Total time (hours/mins)	5h 50m
Equipment	Trekking poles, snacks and water! Sunscreen!
Weather Forecast	Sunny mid 20sC
Weather Actuality	Sunny and post trip online temperature read 28C <i>A definite heat shimmer was seen! Hot!</i>
Flora/Fauna	N/A
Wildlife	Two large birds of prey circling and a beautiful dragonfly. Other than that – nada!
Starting Point/Trailhead	Parking lot a couple miles west of Torridon
Grade/Rating	The vast majority was walking, in fact it can almost all be done as a walk. The initial climb up towards the horns had a couple big steps that might be considered Class 3. The three 'horns' themselves had a couple Class 3/ 4 scramble moves, however, they were not exposed.
Accommodations	Torridon Youth Hostel
Tourist Attractions	The General Store - Torridon
Motto for the day	N/A

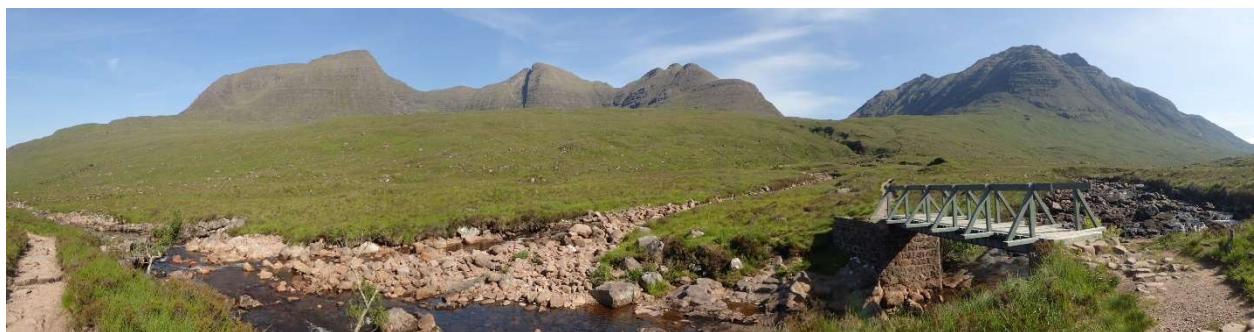
Day 1	
Daily 1 Distance	6.95 miles/ 11.18km
Daily 1 Elevation	4,051ft/ 1235m
Day 1 Daily Time	5h 50m
Rise and Shine	7.00am
Depart Hostel	8.30am
Leave car	9.10am
Summit of Sgurr Mhor	11.30am
Summit of Tom na Gruagiach	12.30pm
Arrive car	3.00pm

The Story

No alarm clock needed today! Noisy roommates getting ready – I could literally hear someone swishing mouthwash for what had to be ten minutes... and the sharp tones of a baby screaming served instead. It is probably for the best that I was forced to get moving though. I had expected to be up earlier given how early the sun rises, and I was hoping to get going before the sun got too hot. Alas, that was not to be. By the time I booked another night at the hostel, had breakfast and finished various other tasks it was nearing 8.30am. I was able to load the link Kyle sent me the night before which would guide me to

the start of the route, which was helpful. It was easy enough to find with the GPS pointing the way! It is, no surprise, a single track road getting out there, but it is well maintained and easy to travel. And, in actuality, there is a nice car park at the start. I hopped out of the car, mindful to watch what the spiders on my side mirror did. *This is getting ridiculous!* I wasn't planning to rush through getting ready, but after the first couple of fly bites I quickly got my shit together, locked the door, and practically ran out of that parking lot. The parking area is in a lovely treed space, and the trees continue for a short distance which kept it artificially cool, but as soon as I stepped out into the sun, I could tell it was going to be a hot day. I decided to do the Beinn Alligin loop starting with the 'horns' first. I have absolutely no idea what standard protocol is, but I'd rather do the 'possibly more difficult side' on the uphill than the downhill. *Plus, there was no trail sign here telling me which direction I should make this loop, so naturally I was lost and left to my own devices. Shucks.*

I left the parking lot and walked back over the stone bridge across a river and then immediately turned left (northerly) onto the start of the trail. The trail walks along the right side of the river as it passes through the trees. Eventually the trail reached a bridge, I crossed it, but immediately dipped back down to the river to dip my hat in the water. It was already hot, and I needed to stay cool and try to be mindful of how much water I was consuming. *Basically, rationing had already begun.* From here I followed the trail as it meandered uphill, eventually crossing a second bridge. When I reached an obvious fork in the trail (marked with a large cairn pile) I took the left fork, which leads to the base of a ridge and then weaves back and forth up the ridge. I could see two people higher above me working their way through the rocks. *Excellent! I could conserve brain power by following them for a bit.* As I worked my way up, I periodically stopped to take in the views and breath heavily. It is a stunningly gorgeous part of Scotland. In fact, I was trying to decide if it was my favorite! The area was so green, punctuated by gray rock bands along the hills or rocky summits, rivers meandering down towards the sea, and the open spaces broken only occasionally by one or two resolute trees on the hillside. The water was clear and inviting. The whole atmosphere was peaceful and alluring. *Well, that is until I was sweating it out on the uphill of course. Then all romantic and poetic thoughts left me.*



I caught up with the couple ahead of me. A nice German couple. We both stopped for short breaks in the same area, but I finished a little quicker so off I popped. The terrain was generally a mixture of rock and grass with a few sections with rock steps that required my hands. Possibly a couple Class 3 moves here and there. I crested out on a slope and found a small cairn to my left and the 'three horns' to my right. I followed the track right and noticed the trail split here. One trail stayed low and looked to traverse under the horns and another went up and looked to traverse over the horns. I wasn't entirely sure what to expect either way, and in truth it could have been an exposed low traverse as well, but I opted to go up and over the horns. *I'm here. Why not?* The uphill to the first 'horn' was rocky and required the use of my hands in several places, but I'd say it stayed 'fun' and it wasn't exposed. I had to lay aside my poles once or twice to use my hands but that just kept it interesting. I reached the top of

this first horn, marked it with the GPS and continued on my way. The descent wasn't initially obvious to me, aside from the fact that it wasn't a wide ridge and I had to go a certain way. I slowly picked my way down the path of least resistance, but it was certainly a little steeper here. In fact, it was probably the steepest part of the day. I downclimbed my way down several rocky shelves with a combination of stemming and scooting. *Boot scootin' baby!*



The next two horns followed in much the same fashion. I stopped on the third horn to grab a bite to eat and have some water. Ever innate in me to 'just keep moving', I was feeling quite relaxed today and ready to enjoy the scenery. That and I need to fuel. The next bit of uphill to the summit of Sgurr Mhor looked significant from my current perch. I enjoyed a bit of sandwich and my electrolyte and sugar drinking mix before packing up and heading down. There was a trail that started off from the top and was fairly easy to follow, but it did get a little fragmented and lost in the rocks down slightly lower. It was a 'pick your own adventure' section. I slowly picked my way down through the rocky bands towards the trail below. I actually rather enjoyed this section. It was fun, interesting and brought in some variety. That being said, I did manage to knock my Nalgene bottle out of the mesh side pocket of my backpack but was fortunate it didn't go far, and I was able to slip it back into the pocket. Losing a bottle would be a bummer but losing the water inside would be the real hardship!

It was on this descent that I saw the German couple a short distance ahead of me. They must have taken the lower traverse. I caught them on the uphill towards Sgurr Mhor. I have to say, the day started hot and the initial climb really felt hot, but this last section towards the summit of Sgurr Mhor felt like it might have been the hottest. Or, at least it was where the heat was felt the most. I kept trying to tell myself to wait – I could finish off the last of the first liter on the summit. But alas, I did have to take a little sip on the way. Nature did provide a distraction however, in the two circling birds overhead. I couldn't tell what they were, but the dance they were putting on was lovely. As I approached the top I could see another gent there, and so I stopped a little east of the summit cairn, so I could sit and visit with him. Turns out he was out on a day trip from Aberdeen. I gave him some Werther's candies and he snapped some photos of me. There wasn't a hurry, so I sat there and enjoyed the view and the conversation while munching on some snacks. It was just too nice. Too comforting not to be out.



After a while I did bestir myself to get going. I walked over to the cairn, put a rock on the pile, and then skipped off in the direction of Tom. Because the day was getting warm and I wanted to get out of the sun, I decided to get my hustle on for the downhill and picked up the pace a bit. I slipped a handful of times but didn't manage to go down fully, so I used that momentum to keep up my hustle shuffle. I did pause as I passed the massive cleft in the ridge. It was quite picturesque. I understood why there were so many pictures of it online. *Ah... why not? I'll snap the same shot!* The track is straight forward and clear. The ascent of Tom was fairly straight forward as well. Because the terrain was a little rockier, I lost the thread of the track a few times. It seemed there were a couple places where one could veer right off the ridge onto grassy terrain and over to the notch (essentially bypassing the summit), but I chose to stay on the rocks and follow the ridge direct. I could see evidence people had done that; it seemed more direct, and more importantly in this case, it seemed like a little more fun! I used my hands a few times but

there were ways you could go to avoid doing so, if you wanted. When I reached the top, there were two women sitting near the trig and the conversation I stumbled upon was morbid for sure. The younger woman was asking whether you would die if you fell off the edge. I went over to the trig and rested my bag on a rock and put my back to the trig. I waited for a bit before interjecting into the conversation, and giving an affirmative to a question she never asked me – If you fell off the cliff side you'd probably die. *Just so we were all clear on that scenario!* We briefly got talking about where I'd come from and where they were going, standard mountain pleasantries. It got interesting when the older woman told me I was on a different mountain. *Crap!! Is that possible?! Could I be that off?!* Fortunately, it took me less than ten seconds to realize that she was the one confused. *Phw! Thank goodness!* Perhaps worrisome, she told me she'd been there at least twice before, and she still had herself on the wrong mountain. Good thing it was a clear route!

I had been rationing my water and had a little sip before stripping off my lightweight shirt and walking in my sports bra for a bit. *Time to get some sun on this pasty stomach of mine.* I skipped on over to a slightly lower point across the notch to take in the view. I could see the ocean on one side and hills on the other. It was a good vantage of the route. The German couple had caught up to me at this point, they bypassed the summit and stayed at the low point between, as marked by a cairn. They asked me if I knew the way down, and I indicated I thought it was straight down from the cairn and told them the trail was supposed to stay on the right side of the stream and eventually the river. I left shortly after them but ended up passing them. *Go time!! Descend, descend, descend!* It was hot, so I stopped to dunk my hat and buff in the stream. Of note, there was a stream that began quite high, so water was available for the majority of the ascent/descent at this time. I had water in the car though, so I was only inclined to



stop to cool myself off. I did pull my shirt back out and submerge it all the way in the stream and pulled it back on. Lord, it was cold to start and then it felt amazing. It was essentially dry by the time I made it back to the car. One more quick stop to throw on my black gaiters, to try and prevent bug bites and I was on my way. The 'clegs' or horseflies started to come out in force again. One bite bled! It was not pleasant, but I was able to quickly throw my bag in the car, throw on my Tevas, and drive off. I had the

windows partially down and the air conditioning on, and it was delightful. I was in such a happy mood I pulled over and asked a guy walking towards Torridon if he needed a lift. It was just too hot to be walking on tarmac – good Samaritan and 'we're all in it together' moment in action. I stopped at the general store to grab a few food ingredients and an ice lollie. As I was checking out I heard a woman saying that her husband was having bike trouble and was up the road. I asked if he could take off the front wheel and if it'd fit in the backseat of my car, and she said it probably would. I offered to drive back up the road and see if I could give him a lift. Just as I was leaving town he came coasting in. They were a nice couple. But after that, it was time to head back to the hostel and call dibs on a shower before everyone else started to arrive back from their activities. *A magical combination of happy experiences and pleasant sensations!* In short, a glorious day!

Lessons Learned

It can actually get hot in Scotland!

