

Route(s)	A'Chailleach and Sgurr Breac
Elevation(s) (ft/m)	A'Chailleach (3,271ft /997m) Sgurr Breac (3,278ft /999m)
Date(s)	July 17 2018
Partner(s)	James C. Graeme S.
Elevation gain/loss (ft/m)	+/- 3,551ft / 1082m
Distance (miles/km)	11.4 miles /18.35 km
Total time (hours/mins)	5h 35m
Equipment	Trekking poles, snacks and water. <i>Spare batteries!!</i>
Weather Forecast	Variable between sources. Possibly sprinkles, possibly overcast.
Weather Actuality	Woke to rain, it tapered off as the morning progressed, but rolled in and out for the afternoon. Mostly dry but had one spell of misty rain walking.
Flora/Fauna	Thistles, lovely yellow flowers that looked like stars
Wildlife	Deer, sheep. <i>James claims he saw a fish – that remains unconfirmed!</i>
Starting Point/Trailhead	Just north of Loch a Bhraoin (layby near junction of A832 and loch access)
Grade/Rating	Walking
Accommodations	Forest Way B and B
Tourist Attractions	N/A
Motto for the day	N/A

Day 1	
Daily 1 Distance	11.4 miles /18.35 km
Daily 1 Elevation	+/- 3,551ft / 1082m
Day 1 Daily Time	5h 35m
Rise and Shine	5.00am 4.40am
Depart BnB	8.00am
Leave car	8.30am
Summit of A'Chailleach	10.40am
Summit of Sgurr Breac	11.45pm
Arrive car	2.05pm
Thankfully arrive Dunblane	5.50pm
The Story	

Following up on the suggestion that I look into MeetUp to find individuals and groups for hillwalking, climbing and general adventures, I found myself with two gents from MeetUp headed north towards Ullapool to try for the Fisherfield Five Munros. Six, if you include the Corbett summit. It seemed a bit serendipitous, as I had been eyeing this cluster of five for the last several weeks. It was one of the northerly ones I hadn't done, and I have been trying to get some of these ones done in the good weather and long days so that during the winter I could enjoy the home court summits. So, when James reached out to suggest it as a possibility, I jumped on the opportunity. Being excited to get out made me more flexible in my approach. I typically don't like to shell out for lodgings every night. I like to avoid the expense and maintain a high level of flexibility by sleeping in my car, in a tent, or just popping into a

hostel as needed. But, James didn't seem keen on the idea, and in the spirit of the thing I didn't think to fight it too hard. That being said, I seriously weighed the option and cost of driving up myself and sleeping in the car!! The day before heading out James dropped me a line and said he was brining along another guy he had met called Graeme. I didn't put too much extra thought into it beyond registering the comment. Monday afternoon saw Graeme and James calling me while trying to find the flat... I had to quickly scramble to look up a map of our area as I don't know all the names of the streets! *Still consider myself new to the area!!*

Fortunately, Dunblane isn't a very large village and they weren't that far off. It took no time for me to lock up the flat and throw my bags in the back of the giant white van. *Stranger danger! Two unknown guys and a giant white van!* We were on the road North in no time at all. I was sat in the middle seat with James on my left and Graeme on my right. Instantly James jumped into a friendly conversation, but it took Graeme a while to warm up, and he didn't add as much to the conversation. James kept peppering me with questions on what I'd seen and done in Scotland, and when the references started getting more obscure I had to remind him I'd only been here for two months! We pulled over to have a spot of tea at the Dobbie's Garden Center in Inverness. I hadn't actually been in a Dobbie's this size before, nor been in one of their cafes, but this was quite nice! *Noted for future stops!*

The rest of the drive passed uneventfully with conversation and beautiful scenery. As we approached the last stretch of road to the B and B though, James mentioned something about some woman possibly following him up to Ullapool. It had a decidedly odd tone to the conversation, so I wasn't quite sure what to make of it. In the end, I attempted not to take it too seriously. But, when we pulled up to the B and B there was a woman sitting on the lawn furniture, and James muttered something about it being her. I didn't quite catch it and wasn't sure what he meant. But turns out that it was the woman he'd mentioned following him. *What am I supposed to make of that? Safest approach – step back and reserve judgement! But I really hope this doesn't turn into some crazy love soap!* We stopped in at the B and B to let the owner know we were there and get shown to our rooms. You know it is a safe area when it's just an open house; no keys or anything. A very come and go approach. We didn't bother to unload our bags, instead we opted to drive into Ullapool and figure out the food situation. James mentioned something about one of the restaurants in the town having good food, but I was more tempted to grab food at Tesco and head back to the B and B and use the bunkhouse kitchen to cook our own food. It sounded less expensive. This trend meant that James told me I was cheap! *Well... I probably should just own it! But staying in a B and B was a big concession!!* At any rate I needed to grab a sandwich for the next day, and considering how long it might be, I thought the others might want to have some snacks in their room, in case we got back well after restaurants closed. While on this shopping trip, it came to light that the gents were planning on carrying between six and eight liters a person. I was incredulous. I was so surprised I thought I was being teased. I truly didn't know what to make of it, and I know that showed. Graeme also told me he was planning to bring six apples. I had to choke down the laugh that was bubbling up! *I couldn't believe it!* Six apples were what Kyle tried to bring on his first overnight with me, and I gave him no end of grief about that. In all my days I never thought I'd meet another person who'd do something similar. I jokingly told Graeme the story, and told him that if he wouldn't eat six apples in a normal day it probably wasn't worth it to bring that many.

It took us a while to get our plan sorted but figure it out we did. *Cheapskates prevailed!* We took our food back to the bunkhouse and cooked up some dinner. I thought it was lovely! We got to visit with the other bunkhouse dwellers and relax around the property. I found a Pub Quiz book on the shelf and had fun reading off the questions. I butchered the pronunciation of 'Ayrshire' and all the Scottish people had to look at me to figure out what I was saying. But, tit for tat, because when one of the gents took a turn

reading the questions I had to really concentrate on what he was saying, and more often than not, I asked him to repeat what he'd said! *Like two different languages... except I'm the only one floundering! Sigh.* I was enjoying the company, but eventually we did leave the bunkhouse and head back to our rooms in the B and B to try and get an early night. But, for whatever reason, I really couldn't sleep. I laid in the dark for a while and every so often would check the clock. The hours ticked by. *Ugh. A long trip on no sleep... just great!*

I finally managed to nod off sometime after one in the morning. I'd set my alarm for five, but someone knocked on my door at four forty. *Grr... good thing I'm on my best behavior around new folks.* I laid there for another few minutes, but knew I wasn't going to be able to fall back asleep, so I read for a little bit and then crawled out of bed. I'd laid everything out so all I had to do was put on my clothes and grab my backpack in the morning. It took me all of a minute to change, and then I decided to poke my head out the curtains to see what the day had brought us. It was wet out. At first, I thought it was just the ground; that maybe it had sprinkled overnight and was drying now. *Negative.* It was a hard mist bordering on rain. Considering I wasn't keen on starting a very long day wet, this wasn't a very promising beginning. Compounding matters was Graeme's relative newness to the outdoors and lack of proper kit. The kit issue wouldn't have been a big deal if the weather was going to be good, but he was wearing white jeans that morning and if they got wet right at the start, or at any point in the day, it could make for a bad situation. I didn't know either of them well enough to dally with that, so I voiced my opinion to wait half an hour to an hour to decide on what the weather looked to be doing. *And that is when it all went to hell in a handbasket!*

Graeme did not take this change well. As I was sat in my room, I could hear him talking to James about how we'd been negative, negative the whole trip, and he was sick of hearing it. *What the actual hell?* He went on and on. I eventually forayed into their room to get a better look and step out their side door to the parking area. I'd stepped outside earlier, and it was enough to know that it wouldn't take long for someone to get wet. It'd be that slow soaking type of rain, but there was enough precipitation to do the trick, and no telling when or if it'd change. Now, it seemed to be slowing down a little and there were some breaks in the clouds. It was promising, but now Graeme was refusing to go. James was being very solicitous and trying to speak kind words and talk him into it, but I could tell he was just as bemused as me, except I wasn't going to humor Graeme. When James asked me to talk him into going, I deferred. *There was no way I was talking someone out of a tantrum, to do a trip they weren't well equipped or prepared to handle! If this slight setback caused this reaction, what would an actual problem do? Negative. Leave him!*

I returned to my room and could hear him grumbling from there, again. My name came up several times. *Great.* Finally, I went back to their room. Enough oscillating. Time to make a decision. It was getting on in the day, so we were quickly passing our window to do the longer trip. Graeme was mostly ignoring us, laying on his bed with a book, insisting he wasn't going to come. For accusing us of being negative, he sure wasn't putting out the positive vibes. *Whatever.* With him refusing to come, and the day getting on, I suggested we either do three of the peaks, to make it a slightly shorter day, or redirect to somewhere else. Again, James tried to entreat Graeme to join us if we did something shorter, but he refused. I quite literally felt like we were dealing with a child. Poor James didn't want to leave him and take the car. I did not have such objections. Finally, finally! We decided to do A'Chailleach and Sgurr Breac. With that decided, I approached James and suggested we just call the trip and drive home afterwards. He agreed, ran it past Graeme, he also agreed. *Thank God.* The proprietor was very understanding and let us cancel that night's reservation. As I loaded my kit into the van, I realized Graeme was already silently sitting in the front seat. *Haha, is this for real happening?!* I downloaded the

directions to the start and navigated us to the layby. Once we'd pulled over and got out, Graeme announced he wasn't going to go. *Seriously now. I'm getting whiplash.* He looked at me and told me he didn't want to be around us! *What am I supposed to say to that?* I wasn't keen on him leaving us at the start because we'd have to estimate our time, and I just didn't have good information on this absolutely random route we'd picked to make that estimate. But, he wasn't yielding, and I just wasn't in the mood, so James and I cobbled together an estimate of four to five hours. I made sure to grab my wallet, phone and house keys, just in case... I didn't know this guy at all, and he was proving to be very erratic. At least with those things, I knew I could get home! Then, in accordance with how the day was going, when I went to turn on the GPS, it looked like it had already been turned on at some point and the batteries were, essentially, dead. At least James had a spare set. *The fates were having a right laugh! Anything else?!*



With that, James and I began to walk off towards the trail, and Graeme took off down the road in his white van. *Phw!* The air was suddenly much clearer. At about the same time we left, a nice Irish gent had set off for a day of hillwalking. We had a brief walk and chat until our paths diverged. We walked through the forest, across a bridge, and briefly walked on a track, before we reached a small cairn comprised of sandy colored stones. This marked a faint track that headed in a

south-westerly direction. We turned off here and began to ascend. The track is fairly easy to follow and worked its way uphill, through a brief rocky section, before leveling out into a boggy section. James was moving at a good clip. I felt bad having to stop every so often to catch my breath or ask him to rein it in a little. *It sucks being the out of shape one! Nice little reminder in humility!* Thankfully, the dry weather meant that the conditions were not too boggy, but it was evident with the dark rifts of exposed land that it had the potential to be quite wet. We lost the thread of the track, every once in a while, but always managed to find our way back. Just head uphill along the northern trending arm of Toman Coinnich. The trail stays on the west side and traverses just under Toman Coinnich to the 'bealach'. James explained that meant the low point between two high points. *Got it! AKA col, pass, or saddle!*

I think I was able to make up my speed a little on the traverse and moving over some of the slicker rock sections. It was along this traverse that we had two RAF planes fly low overhead. The roar from them was incredible. At this point, I was starting to get hungry. I had only had a cup of cereal for breakfast and a protein shake. That distracting and uncomfortable level of hunger... so, I mentioned to James I'd like to



briefly stop at the bealach to grab a bite, but not to worry, I could walk and eat! Minutes after I said that, I felt a sprinkle. The clouds had been rolling in and out, but it seemed, now, precipitation was imminent. I stopped. I wanted to make sure everything was put into a dry bag and put on my jacket. It was pretty good timing, because I'd bent over and was just getting ready to close the dry bag, foregoing the jacket for the moment, when the rain came. I barely had time to get my

jacket on, and by that point, it was already partially wet. Nothing to do for it now! I put my pack back on and moved to catch up to James, who had stopped higher up. He was pulling on his rain jacket. We continued along the path to the bealach, on the west side of Toman. From this point, we veered west and ascended a well-defined track, up through the misty clouds towards A'Chailleach. It was a straight-forward ascent up to the top, where a rock cairn pile marked the summit. We each touched the top, added a rock, and then spent a brief moment looking around at the clouds and taking pictures, before heading back downhill. It had mostly stopped raining, but there was still a moisture in the air. In no time we were back at the bealach and heading up Toman. The trail here was a little more diverse. It was clear people had taken different ways, and so right at the start there wasn't a 'clear' track, but a hundred feet up or so, a more distinct path formed. The terrain isn't difficult though, so if in doubt, heading straight up the ridge shouldn't pose any problems. We touched the top of Toman where we each added a rock to the pile. James was able to balance his so it looked like a sharp triangle facing the sky. It looked really artsy, so I tried to balance a rock similarly and it ended up knocking his over. *Yikes! I need more zen cairn practice! Or perhaps just his joinery skills!* Enough of that now. We continued on the track towards Sgurr Breac.

The weather had started to clear up and we were getting lovely views. There is just something about a ridge, partially shrouded in clouds, that is tempting and ethereal to me. The clouds continued to rise and dissipate, so that by the time we were on the summit of Sgurr Breac, we had good views. I knew we were on a bit of a schedule, but it was just too nice to feel rushed. We put our packs down and I immediately rummaged around for my Tesco wrap. *This womanly figure requires calories! Haha!* I could have happily laid down and just watched the sky, and enjoyed the moment, but I could sense a type of restless energy about. Whether it was knowing we needed to be back sooner rather than later to meet Graeme, or James not particularly caring to have a long stop. I understood. Typically, I don't hang around long on summits. But, there were no bugs, it was a lovely temperature, and I was just happy to be outside! *One moment longer...* A few pictures, a snack, and we were away again, down the east side of Sgurr Breac. There is a good track down this side. A bit rocky in some sections, but clear and easy to follow. I could see the trail that'd head downhill towards the cars down in the valley, and it looked solid. I rarely find such trails here in the UK, but it was very well defined. As the fates, who were absolutely

laughing at us today, would have it, my stomach was playing up a bit, so I had to take an 'extended party separation' at this bealach. James took his own and then tried to text Graeme to let him know we were on the way out. By the time I returned, he asked me if I'd read a book. But with his accent he had to repeat it a couple more times. Then he said maybe it was a humor thing, to which I said if I'd understood him, it would have been funny!



The rest of the way out was uneventful. We followed the trail down and out. There were no turn offs or any junctions. A few streams and one river to cross, but all small or low and very manageable. James was talking about swimming in the river, and I mentioned we probably didn't have time for that, at the moment. *Curmudgeon that I am*. But, I told him I'd share the wipes I brought with me. We got to the car at 2.00pm. I think five and a half hours is a respectable time, and a good guess on

our part for time! Initially, it looked like the van wasn't there, and we both had an 'uh oh' moment. But, fortunately, we turned a bend and could see it next to a bunch of other cars. *Phw!* I honestly don't think I would have been that surprised if we'd gotten out to find no car. As we approached, I asked James if he'd sit in the middle to start. He understood, joked about me not wanting the cold shoulder, but being a sport about it, agreed. I told him if we stopped along the way, I'd trade with him. It was awkward approaching the van first and saying hi. I wasn't sure what to expect at this point. Graeme acknowledged me, and then James and I slipped our stuff into the back and changed into street clothes, before climbing into the car. James asked him a few questions, but the most that was said was that he had gone and got a coffee with Rosalind in Ullapool before coming back and just sitting at the start. *Uhhh... okay*. After that, he might have said ten words for the three and a half hours back to Dunblane. *Awkward!!* That left James and I to converse for the entirety of the time. He started to teach me some local lingo and teased me about my inability to pronounce things correctly. *In all honesty, it seems I'm shockingly bad!* At some point Graeme pulled out a bag of nuts, but didn't offer to share. It was really beginning to feel like childcare. *Who doesn't at least offer to share?!* Towards the end I started to get tired, and I think in proportion with that, I was finding it harder and harder to understand James! *Poor guy!* And then I got the news that Kyle was running well late from work and there'd be no food on hand! *Grrr!!* But, to be honest, I was just glad to get out of that uncomfortable van. I tried to say a good bye to Graeme, but he just looked at me. *Feel goods all around then*. I promptly went inside and made myself a half a sandwich before jumping in the shower. *Ahh... I felt so much better!*

I sent James a brief communication later, just to check in, and learned it wasn't quiet after I left! Sounded like there was a lot on Graeme's mind. After learning that, I felt a little bad for him, but it still didn't excuse the behavior. It was so disproportionate to anything that happened, that it bordered on

disturbing. But, all said and done, it was an adventure, and I had a good time out in the hills with James. And, I didn't disappear in a white van! *But, like a good girl, I'd texted Kyle the plate numbers before departing... just in case!* All of that in consideration, I think it still weighs in on the positive side! Memorable for sure!



