

Route(s)	Aonach Eagach
Elevation(s) (ft/m)	Meall Dearg (3,127ft/953m) Sgorr nam Fiannaidh (3,173ft/967m)
Date(s)	April 13 2019
Partner(s)	Kyle Finnegan
Elevation gain/loss (ft/m)	+ 3,689ft / 1124m - 4,186ft / 1276m
Distance (miles/km)	5.44 miles/ 8.76 km
Total time (hours/mins)	6h 40m
Equipment	Helmets (unused), rope (unused), harnesses (unused). <i>Basically, used water and sandwiches.</i>
Weather Forecast	Dry. <i>So, go, go, go!!</i>
Weather Actuality	Blue and dry. Slight breeze to start the morning increasing to strong gusts.
Flora/Fauna	N/A
Wildlife	N/A
Starting Point/Trailhead	Grid reference NN174567
Trail Conditions	Excellent. Generally clear (couple small patches of snow). The north side had a few semi-frozen sections of earth but the path was unobstructed.
Objective Hazards	Some minor exposure. <i>And somehow Kyle managed to launch a rock at my head while very nearly on trail. So, some of that too apparently.</i>
Grade/Rating	Mostly a walk with some (US Grade) Class 3 and 4 scramble moves.
Accommodations	N/A
Tourist Attractions	N/A
Motto for the day	"If you can't do it in gale force winds you shouldn't try it in Scotland!" <i>Or "It is blowin' a hoolie up my ass!"</i>

Day 1	
Daily 1 Distance	5.44 miles/ 8.76 km
Daily 1 Elevation	+ 3,689ft / 1124m - 4,186ft / 1276m
Day 1 Daily Time	6h 40m
Rise and Shine	<i>Too early! I forget!</i>
Depart Home	Est. 6.45am
Depart Car	8.40am
Meall Dearg	11.05am
Sgorr nam Fiannaidh	1.35pm
Clachaig Inn	3.20pm
The Story	

The weather was looking dry and fairly warm for the weekend, so Kyle and I mobilized to take advantage. I'd love to say we executed these maneuvers with military precision, but this was our first time getting out together in an age so there was a bit of faffing about, finding everything, and getting it packed. We also thought we might want to car camp out, so we packed all our overnight kit as well. Then there was the typical morning routine when Kyle tried to pry me out of the warm bed, and I

grumbled about it until I was in the passenger seat and telling him to put the radio on if he felt like noise. *But the point is, we made it happen!*



We did get a fairly early start, by UK standards, as I was a bit worried about parking. I'd been out the previous week and Simon had pointed out the start parking lot, and it was quite small. We rolled up and got a spot though. Then it was boots, packs, action! We started slow and steady as we took the meandering switchback trail upward. We passed a group that left shortly before us, they appeared to be a guided group. I'd seen several advertisements for people who'd guide it. This initial part was where we saw the most people. We passed another two gentlemen but then got passed by two others. The trail itself was clear and easy to follow. There was a couple of short scrambly sections, but all fine. We put on jackets just before gaining the ridge as the breeze had steadily picked up to be gusty. We gained the ridge, which is marked by a cairn, and snapped a couple of photos before setting out. It is an easy to follow trail from this initial cairn point on Am Bodach over to Meall Dearg. Then from there following the path to Stob Coire Leith. There was a bit of down scrambling between Meall Dearg and Stob Coire Leith including weaving down through some scrambly sections. It was steep and required use of our hands for short sections. I could see where it might be considered exposed in some instances, but just dry rock it felt solid and fine. On the summit of Stob Coire Leith I packed up my poles in preparation for the scrambly sections that appeared to be in our near future. *And, so it was.*

The initial descent off of Stob Coire Leith was an easy walk. But it is between Stob Coire Leith and Sgorr nam Fiannaidh that the pinnacles are located, so there was a fair bit of up and down scrambling to be had. For the most part the path was straight forward along the ridge. There was one point where we weren't too sure, and as I'd been informed that the walk route was primarily on the north side, so we edged that way. We could see a path people had taken down to where a cord anchor was established.



The terrain was frozen dirt and quite steep. It wasn't my favorite. It was certainly doable but had that slightly unpredictable quality about it. We descended maybe ten meters to look where this path was going and it just didn't feel right, so we backtracked up to the main part of the ridge and scrambled up a short steep rock section to where we intersected the path again. To be honest I think the easiest way was staying directly on the ridge. And that was the approach we generally took from that point on. The pinnacles were an absolute hootenanny! I had one moment where I realized we hadn't put our helmets on, and then in a real euro moment, just decided to go with it as the route generally felt good under foot and hand. And it honestly wasn't that long. It'd be over before we knew it!

And such was the case. After the pinnacles it is simply a walk up to the summit of Sgorr nam Fiannaidh. There were a couple of patches of snow, but they could be avoided if one so desired. Which I did not. At the top of "the peak of the Fiannaidh warriors" (thanks for the cultural info WalkigHighlands!) we decided to have a quick snack before moseying off. We tried to find a sheltered side to hunker down as the wind was quite cool. It seemed to be changing directions and swirling about, but we found something that wasn't being hit as hard, so we settled down there. I wasn't really hungry, so I had some water and curled up in this little rock seat that was perfect for napping. Honestly could have kipped there if I was intent on that course of action. Alas, I hadn't bothered to put a warm layer on so after ten minutes or so I started to get antsy to get going again. We kitted up and got moving again. As we walked off, the wind really started to pick up in strength and started to physically buffet us about more on the gusts.



Kyle and I reached a fork in the path marked by a large cairn. I told him to go ahead and pick a way, I was leaving it in his hands. Up and over the last hump and probably off towards Kinlochleven or down to the left which probably took us to Clachaig Gully. Kyle chose left and down. *So, note it be!* The wind was really starting to buffet us



around at this point. I skipped off down the rocky path to get a better view of what was below us. I had been told that Clachaig gully could get a bit rough, which acted as both a warning and an enticement. *In either case, curiosity was involved! Isn't that typical?* And as it turns out, veering left took us to the Clachaig path. It switched back on an arm just to the side of the gully for the most part. It was steep in a few sections and involved a few scrambling moves. I'd say predominately Class 3 (US Rating). I used my hands to stabilize myself on a couple sections, but the tricky part was probably more the dirty sections with loose pebbles that made it a bit unpredictable under foot. The movement started to come back to me, and I was moving a bit head of Kyle to keep scouting out the route where it became steeper in sections. Plus, just keeping us moving! Right on the last bit of down scramble part, before it turned to a gravel like trail, I heard Kyle's cry of surprise before the distinct sound of a body impacting the ground. *Crap!* My immediate thought was "Is he hurt?" followed quickly by "How hurt?" immediately by "Can he still walk

off? *Ohh, he better!*". As I was thinking those things, I was sprinting back uphill towards him as he was just out of my sightline. I could hear his angry mutterings and just before I got to where I could see him a rock launched past my head. *What the hell?!* For a moment I thought Kyle had thrown it in a fit of pique and I was torn between amusement and annoyance at the possibility of having a rock chucked at me. Turns out it was an accident and it must have gotten launched when he slipped. He was bruised up good, but nothing broken or sprained, so back on his feet and away we went. I could tell he was really over it, but fortunately we were mostly down at that point. We walked off towards the Clachaig Inn.

Some days I wish for a more remote, rugged existence but it amuses me greatly that there are so many restaurants literally at the end of routes here in the UK. Kyle was pretty battered, he had bruises that were more along the lines of contusions, so we decided that he'd stay and watch the bags while I trekked up the road to pick up the car. We figured it might be easier for one person without a bag to catch a lift as well. One female person! And, after about a mile I caught a lift with a nice gent who had done the ridge before and sympathized. It was only a short drive, but he was very nice, and he had a sweet lady dog crashed out on the back seat. I hopped out, and as I was getting in my car, I offered to drop another hitchhiker off down the road. He was going in the opposite direction but told me it was only a couple of miles down the way. I figured I'd pay it forward. Then I turned around and headed back to Kyle and the advertised 'good food' of Clachaig Inn. And in all fairness, they had an impressive selection and it was tasty! We debated spending the night out, but a series of events brought us to the decision of heading home! *And so, we drove off into the sunset and towards our comfy bed!*

Lessons Learned

Not off the top of my head!

