

Route(s)	Ben Starav and Beinn nan Aighenan
Elevation(s) (ft/m)	Ben Starav (3,537ft/1078m) Beinn nan Aighenan (3,150ft/960m)
Date(s)	May 23 2019
Partner(s)	Solo <i>Oh! And Betsy my beater beetle car!</i>
Elevation gain/loss (ft/m)	+/- 5,105ft / 1556m
Distance (miles/km)	10.75 miles /17.3km
Total time (hours/mins)	7h 20m
Equipment	Trekking poles
Weather Forecast	Grey clouds in the morning, partly sunny in the afternoon with winds of 20mph.
Weather Actuality	Grey clouds all day, mist bordering on light precipitation most of the day and winds I'd estimate at 20-30mph with wind gusts higher.
Flora/Fauna	N/A
Wildlife	A solitary frog! <i>Otherwise weather was too shite even for the insects!</i>
Starting Point/Trailhead	NN137468
Trail Conditions	Generally easy to follow, though a couple of rocky sections where it was a little less clear, but still easy enough to find the threads.
Objective Hazards	Aside from wind and some wet slippery rocks, not really!
Grade/Rating	Walk
Accommodations	<i>Car hotel!</i>
Tourist Attractions	N/A
Motto for the day	<i>"Let's raise this roooooof!"</i> shouted repeatedly at the clouds!

Day 1	
Daily 1 Distance	10.75 miles /17.3km
Daily 1 Elevation	+/- 5,105ft / 1556m
Day 1 Daily Time	7h 20m
Rise and Shine	5.00am 6.00am
Depart Car	7.00am
Ben Starav	9.45am
Beinn nan Aighenan	11.30am
Arrive Car	
The Story	

Desperately needing a mental break and escape, I checked the weather forecast, picked a location, and packed for a couple days in the hills. I figured I'd drive up Wednesday evening so I could A) take advantage of the early daylight hours and B) keep myself motivated to do it! I stayed and had dinner at home with Kyle and then packed up and headed for the Glencoe area. It is about an hour and a half from our place to the ski resort, and an extra half an hour down the single-track road to where the path starts. I figured I'd camp right at the start so all that would be required in the morning would be me getting out of my sleeping bag and getting my boots on. I wouldn't have to faff about with directions or getting motivated. I found the spot easy enough and as I was the only one there. I had ample space to



park and get myself situated. By the time I pulled out my sleeping bag and settled in with my kindle book, the sky was a dark grey color. By the time I'd shut off my electronics and was contemplating trying to sleep, the sky was completely dark, and it was nearing midnight. Before I could get as far as sleeping though, my car was suddenly illuminated with a blinding white light. *Hope it's not aliens!!!* More than a little startled, and heading towards freaking out, I sat up to try and figure out where the light was coming from. Fifteen

yards or so from the car, on the single-track road, was a truck with an industrial grade spotlight mounted on the roof. I could just make out it was a truck as the light was blinding to all else. I waited for the truck to drive on, hoping I wasn't going to have to engage in some sort of encounter in an already creepy situation, and with no cell service. The truck sat there for a minute or so with its light on my car. It honestly felt like the driver was pondering the situation. That is the only way I can interpret and describe it. Otherwise, why stop? Why keep the light on me? *This would happen to me while I was solo camping!* I was relieved when it drove off. I could see its progress down the road as its spotlight kept rotating and sweeping both sides of the valley. *What the hell was that?!* If I was having trouble sleeping before, that certainly didn't help. But I thought to try to find my big girl panties and settled back in again. A few minutes later it looked like a light mist or faint light streaked in front of the passenger side door. *That's it!!! Hallucination or not, this place has freaked me out!* I hastily shoved my feet into my shoes, hopped in the driver seat and tried to call Kyle. I figured if necessarily I'd drive back to the main road and some semblance of reception and try to sleep there. *If I could sleep at this point.*

I ended up seeing a couple of guys camped around a campfire around ten minutes back down the road and pulled over and asked them if they minded if I crashed near them. They seemed a bit surprised, but not bothered, so I parked the car and let Kyle know, and then settled in to try to sleep. It took me a little bit to settle down the spike in adrenaline, but when I did fall asleep, I slept pretty well. I woke up around the same time my alarm went off at 5am and decided I needed a little more than four hours of sleep so I set it back for 6am. While I rested, I was vaguely aware of a faint pitter patter of precipitation on the car windows. *Ugh, no really?* As I started getting ready and stowing my sleeping gear, I noticed the car was slightly rocking in the wind. *No really?* I managed to drag myself out of my warm sleeping bag and drive back down to the trailhead. I scanned the open skies and noted there were quite a few dark clouds in the area and precipitation looked imminent. *Was any part of the forecast true?* I held out hope that this was the early morning dark clouds and that it would clear in the afternoon, so I kitted up and headed out. I hit the trail at 7am. It was a very straight forward approach. I walked around a gate and followed a dirt road down to a bridge over a beautiful river gorge, and once across the bridge, turned right and followed the track until I came to another gate with a sign that said something about respecting privacy and taking a path around the fenced property. *Fine, fine.* So, I curved left and followed a somewhat



muddy path across some raised wooden structure. The path is very clear around the property and once around it follows a fence line all the way to a river. The only place I paused was along the fence line; right where it became quite boggy there was a stile for crossing to the other side. I debated which way to go. The correct way, and the one I took, was to continue along on the downhill side. Once at the river there is a tree with a stone seat/monument. I crossed here. There is no bridge, so it is rock hopping or wading. The water was fairly low, in my mind at least, so I was able to hop across. I did use my poles though as a couple of the rocks were just at water line. The weather had lightly started misting at this point. Not enough that I wanted to put on a jacket, but enough that if it continued in this trend, I'd have to think about putting something on.

Well, not fifteen minutes later, as I took the first branch in the trail, marked by a cairn, and began to ascend, the moisture became

enough that it was starting to soak into my wool shirt. So, on went the rain jacket, but because it wasn't that cold and I was ascending, I pulled the pit zips open. *I mean... at least pretend for a minute that either way I was going to get soaked in a sort amount of time. Whether it be rain or sweat, at this point, it was in the cards.* The precip continued on and I had to stop and put on rain pants. I was glad I'd thrown them in my 'anything could happen in Scotland' bag. I typically don't like walking in them, if possible, but the wind was picking up and it was blowing the precip at me, so it was soaking in more. At a certain point I entered into the clouds and visibility was obscured. For whatever reason, I was absolutely sucking wind today. I mean, I know I'm out of shape, but it was a surprise to what degree! *Yikes!!* With the weather being so pooppy, and me being out of shape, I considered bailing, but figured I'd at least give it to the first summit and evaluate from there. But it did feel a bit odd. It might have been lingering creepiness from the night before, but walking through this rocky landscape, with a sharp drop off on my left and a rocky trail, through soupy clouds, alone, felt very... bizarre. Perhaps isolating as well. Odd to feel so alone in such an otherworldly environment I suppose.

I felt I was moving quite slow, but I gained the first summit of Ben Starav at 9.45am. I briefly dropped my pack to pull out a snack. Apparently, my Nutri-grain bar for breakfast wasn't enough. I was definitely off a bit today. I'd drank two thirds of a liter of water and was a bit hungry. No quite standard. *Ah well.* The day was windy and wet enough for me to not want to stop long enough to need a jacket, which basically meant a few minutes. After that, I skipped off in a south-easterly direction and followed it over to a slight raise where the trail appeared to fork. I double checked the GPS and took the left fork which headed in an eastern fashion, down a steep looking dirt path. From this point over to Stob Coire Dheirg,

there was a bit of a rock ridge to scramble on. It was a load of fun! I bet it'd be stunning to photograph... if I could see anything! *At all!* I did have a sense I was blindly feeling my way along the ridge at this point, because I was so socked in by clouds, I couldn't tell what was so far ahead and try to pick a clean line along the wet rocks. Ah well! It wasn't too hard to follow the path down to the beallach. Once I got to that elevation, I got a sneak peek at the terrain around, as this was just below the cloud level. I spied the path that wound around west side of Meall nan Tri Tighernan. I weighed how I was feeling and weather etc. The wind had died down on the descent to the beallach, which was in keeping with my initial thought from the morning which was that the wind came from the west. As soon as I started out down towards the saddle, the wind picked up again and I realized how tiring it can be to fight against wind while out walking. The path over was straight forward, and despite the weather, had some lovely qualities. I bet it is stunning on a nice day! It was a nice combination of path and rock hopping. *Though since I couldn't see more than twenty meters in any direction, I can't comment too much on the general environs.*



I reached the summit, and whether as a result of the flat white lighting or not, I walked around the top to make sure the summit cairn was the actual summit. It didn't quite feel it in the white haze. But the GPS and general eyeballing suggested it was, so good enough for me. I didn't bother to stop here. I just turned tail and headed back down. I was lost in my own world, trying to decide if I should press on to try and hit another summit, or just bag it, when all of the sudden two

figures popped over the top of a rise right in front of me! I was quite startled! I'd been alone all day and really felt it. I briefly chatted with the two gents, who were generally following the same path I was, except they were for sure going on to Glas Bhein Mhor. I was still oscillating. They confirmed there was a good path off on that side as well. Poor guys probably thought I was an idiot – out there alone, in shoddy weather, and asking about the route. They asked if I had a map, which thankfully, I could confirm I did have this time! We both lamented about the weather, although they were a bit more stoic and said something about how it was 'that' bad. *Sure, Noah's Ark hasn't gone floating by... but still! Not 'the worst' and pleasant are a bit afield from each other, in my opinion!* They continued on their way, and I headed back towards the beallach. When I got there, I stopped briefly and hunkered down on the side of a rock to grab a bite and make my final decision. I was essentially wet through on top. My trousers were dry under the waterproofs, but my gortex jacket was about as waterproof as a sieve. If I stayed out longer, I'd probably have to add or change a layer. I was just on the tired side today, and I knew I'd have to come back for the far side two, and adding Glas Bhein Mhor on works from either side, and would likely take the same amount of time. I opted to descend. I lambasted myself for a good way of the descent and was just waiting for the clouds to clear up and make me doubt my decision even further. But overall, I was okay with it. The trail back was very straight forward with one gorgeous spot where it

passed right above the start of a rocky gorge. Simply stunning view straight down it. It didn't take me too long to retrace my steps back to the river crossing, and then along the fence line. It was as I was walking here, that my mind started to drift and take in the sights, sounds, and feeling of being outside. There was a spicy sweet smell in the air. That smell you get after it's rained on a warm day, but on vegetation. Almost like spicy honey. It was beautiful. It likely had something to do with the fields of purple flowers and rain, but it was peaceful and restorative. Once back at the car, I sorted my kit in the back. Wet clothes in the Tesco's bag! Then I did a quick look around and didn't see anyone, so I stripped down to change! I thought about spending another night out, but with the weather forecast being so shoddy for today and the wind still buffeting the car, I decided to head on back home. And I was rewarded by a nice sun bath the next day instead!



Lessons Learned

Don't go grocery shopping first thing after a hill walk! And definitely don't eat that random jar of artichokes!



