

Route(s)	Stob Coire Sgreamhach, Bidean nam Bian
Elevation(s) (ft/m)	Stob Coire Sgreamhach (3,517ft/1072m) Bidean nam Bian (3,773ft/1150m)
Date(s)	June 27 2019
Partner(s)	Solo
Elevation gain/loss (ft/m)	+/- 4,074ft / 1242m
Distance (miles/km)	7.63 miles/ 12.28km
Total time (hours/mins)	7h 10m <i>Definitely a lot of socializing happening!</i>
Equipment	Standard day pack, poles, an extra liter of water (3L total)
Weather Forecast	Bluebird again!
Weather Actuality	Bluebird! <i>Another unicorn day!</i>
Flora/Fauna	Definitely didn't see anything up high and dry but I imagine if I'd have looked there would have been loads down low!
Wildlife	<i>Someone's dog popped out at me! 'Bout as wild as it got.</i>
Starting Point/Trailhead	Grid reference NN170569. A large and popular lay-by off ****
Trail Conditions	Good condition and easy to follow – perk of being on such a popular path! One bridge and one river crossing. The water was low enough to just hop rocks though. Up higher to get to the bealach it was gravelly dirt and loose rock but easy enough going.
Objective Hazards	Warm!!
Grade/Rating	Walk
Accommodations	Slept in Betsy my beater beetle in Kinlochleven.
Tourist Attractions	N/A
Motto for the day	<i>It's another Scottish Unicorn!!</i>

Day 1	
Daily 1 Distance	7.63 miles/ 12.28km
Daily 1 Elevation	+/- 4,074ft / 1242m
Day 1 Daily Time	7h 10m
Rise and Shine	7.30am
Depart Kinlochleven	Est. 8.15am
Depart Car	Est. 9.25am
Stob Coire Sgreamhach	Est. 12.30am
Bidean nam Bian	Est. 1.30pm
Arrive Car	4.15pm

The Story

Well. That was a night. It wasn't the most comfortable night in my car, but we all made it. And judging by the spider web on the dash, I had company. *EWWW!* Not encouraging at all! I got up, put on my clean hill clothes, got behind the wheel and drove into Kinlochleven to stop at the Co-op and grab a bite for breakfast and a few snacks for the hill. Once that mission was accomplished, I drove out of town and headed for the massive layby on the side of ****. Since this was a last-minute change of plans, I doubly didn't know much about the route. I knew it went up through the popular Hidden Valley, but that was



about it. Most of it I could imagine in my head though, so I wasn't so fussed. The terrain is similar to all the other terrain around it and these are all basically hillwalks. If not, I could evaluate as I went. *No biggy!* I followed the GPS out, pulled over at the huge layby and got out to start sorting my kit. I got one of the last parking spots! *Woot!* I pulled up next to a gent's white van and briefly got talking with him. He mentioned he was taking two clients out rock climbing. After a bit I pieced it together – I knew the person he was taking out. *Random!* Also, it

oddly made me feel like I was making a home here. Back in Washington it felt like I knew enough people that I was only ever a degree or two separated in the climbing community, but now I just don't know anyone, so it was a warm feeling to have a small piece of that for a moment. Between talking, eating and packing, I was moving pretty slow. I finally got all kitted up and Mary arrived. My suspicions were confirmed! I knew his client! As they drove off to get a little closer to their goal, I turned on my GPS and noticed the batteries were nearly dead. *Dammit! How was that possible?* Should have a good 12-16 hours battery life. I did forget to charge it last night, but I wouldn't expect it to be so low. I checked my bag and couldn't find spare batteries. *GREAT.* So, I could either go with the map, which would be fine, I just wouldn't have the takeaway data, or I could put my massive several pound battery brick in my backpack and charge the GPS while I walked. *Why not?* I chucked the brick in the bag, hooked up the cords so it would charge while still hanging off my pack, and headed off down the path.

It is a pretty straight forward. Basically, a short descent from the parking lot to the trail, I followed it left (East) briefly and then took a fork to the right, down towards the river. Crossing the river is pretty interesting. There was a metal grated staircase that drops down closer to the river, and then a solid bridge to cross over it. Immediately across the bridge, the trail starts heading uphill. It was another warm day and I had opted to wear trousers again because I was so scared of ticks. In hindsight I might have gone for shorts. It took no time at all for the sweat to just start rolling off me. I mean just dripping. It felt muggy! The trail initially follows along the right side of the river. It is very straightforward and easy to follow. As soon as the path got close to the river again, I started dunking my buff. I had three liters of water again today, but I was definitely going to have to be mindful. Partway up to the Hidden Valley, the trail crosses the river. It was quite low, so it was easy to just walk across. I don't know if the water would ever get high enough to be an issue, but today it was shallow. At this point I ran into an American couple and briefly walked and talked with them as we made our way to the Hidden Valley. It is actually a very pretty spot. The path comes into the valley high, so you get a good overlook and then it drops down a short distance onto the flat valley floor. It's a combination of rock and grass that turns rockier as you approach the uphill side. Easy going. Just aim for the river at the head of the valley and the trail passes to the right of it. That is where I picked it up. It is also marked by a few cairns along the way and a larger one where the path picks up again. I started the hot, slow trudge uphill. I could see the path as it went up to the beallach. *Lord there was no shade to be had anywhere!! And I could see heat waves coming off*



the dry and rocky hillside.

I gave some serious consideration to how badly I wanted these peaks. *What is wrong with me?!* But in the end, I figured I was here and had the time, so I might as well give it some effort. I did end up stopping at numerous little streams on the way up. I kept soaking my shirt and buff. I did notice two people on my right-hand side (west side of the valley) attempting to scramble up the rocky cliffs. One of the gents looked to be struggling. I

kept on a weathered eye on that for a bit until I'd passed them. *Curious.*

I did not encounter as many people on this section. It appeared most had stopped when they reached the valley. As I slowly worked my way hill, I debated on which peak to aim for first. I typically like to go for the furthest and highest first, so that the more time and energy consuming endeavors are done while I have that time and energy! But this was really one half-dozen or the other. I wasn't planning on doing much deviating today. In fact, I was going to keep it crazy simple and follow the same path out. High up the trail turns a bit rockier with some loose scree. I didn't find it bad, but I could see where people who aren't as confident on that type of terrain might want to go a bit slower. I think it probably looks worse than it is. Once I topped out, I grabbed a quick sip of water and then veered left (East) to go up the closer and lower peak of Stob Coire Sgreamhach. About halfway up, I was startled when a dog, right above my head, on a rocky outcropping, started barking! The two people yelled down that the dog was friendly. *I told them I didn't mind dogs, so it was fine, but dang! That dog got the jump on me for sure.* After that, I just continued to slog uphill. I contemplated the fact that I felt like I was melting on a lunar landscape! It had that 'devoid of water and life' feel about it. At the summit cairn I indulged in some water and a snack before turning around to go back the way I'd came. I retraced my steps to the bealach and then immediately started up the other side for peak numero two! I was hoping to use my downward momentum to help carry me partway up the second. On the descent I could hear people yelling down the valley. That urgent kind of yelling you get that is amplified by the rocks around you. I wondered if it was coming from the two guys who I saw scrambling earlier. There wasn't any way to know for sure, and I didn't see anything from my vantage, but it definitely tweaked my ears and had me a little on guard.

The way up Bidean nam Bian is just a walk, but at least the terrain has some more interesting features. I took a longer lunch break about halfway up this side. I used that downhill momentum to get here and planned to use the fuel to finish it out! *I was surprisingly hungry toady!* Plus, I had a pleasant little vista. After that, it wasn't too long to reach the summit, which was a bit heavier on the traffic side. There were people coming up from another side. I really just tagged this summit and started the descent. I briefly

spoke with people on the way up, on the top, and on the way down. It was getting busier! *Or, I'd just found where everyone likes to go!* Once I arrived at the beallach I saw one of the gents I'd passed on the way up, who was part of a group of young men, was waiting there. He was kicked back and completely relaxed. I asked if I could intrude on his peace and he seemed friendly enough, so we got chatting. Turns out he and the other adult, Francis, in the group were leading the five teenage guys. I learned they were all from Ireland and over for a backpacking trip to celebrate their graduation. This guy had sent the others on to do the summit while he relaxed a bit. As we chatted, they came back down and one of them was yelling it wasn't just a ten-minute trip. We exchanged stories and talked for a bit. I had a good chuckle when one of the kids swore and Francis said, "not in front of the lady." I told him that was a very gentlemanly action, but unnecessary in my case. Not long after, Francis swore and I jokingly said "Language, Francis!" and the young kids laughed. But perhaps my favorite interaction was when the other leader said he only climbed with people who could tie knots and then nodded his head suggestively at Francis. One of the kids asked if he (Francis) could tie knots, and he looked up, and in a perfectly dry and indignant Irish accent he said, "I can tie me own shoelaces!!". That sealed the deal for me. I liked them! But I had spent quite a while visiting, and I needed to get going as I was planning to drive back to Dunblane tonight. I said my goodbyes and skipped off downhill. The initial drop down required a little bit of handwork to balance myself, but it was fun! I would have liked some more of that. After that, I picked up the pace and tried to get into a good gear to keep going. With the exception of few stops to get my buff wet again, and one other stop in the valley, I made a beeline down. Being back in the shady trees was bliss.

Simple and straightforward back to the car. I had managed to eat almost all my food and was just about out of water, so I was really looking forward to my drink and remaining snacks in the car. When I arrived, a guy asked me if I'd seen a group of Irish lads. I could only imagine it was the group I'd talked too a couple hours of back. *I mean, how many groups of Irish lads would be here today?* But just in case, we briefly compared notes, and I determined it was the same group. He wanted to know how far back they were. I told him I thought they'd easily be another hour or two behind me. He seemed a little concerned because it was so late and hot, and they still had to hike up the road to get to their camping destination. I wished him luck and dipped around the side of my car to change. After that, I grabbed my drink and sat down on a rock and just downed it! *So thirsty!!* I didn't wait around too long though, because I still had the two-ish hour drive home, and then I needed to repack to come back and climb the next day. It was a tough drive as I was sunkissed, pleasantly worked, and could easily have napped. So, AC on, music cranked up, and singing to some tunes, I drove off into the sunset!

Lessons Learned

The Irish are fantastic!



