



Teresa and Bryn complete the Munros on 25 April 2019

The Gwydyr Mountain Club Newsletter

November 2019

Editorial by David Lane-Joynt

This is a Scottish newsletter. The biggest and wildest mountains in Britain are in Scotland, and every year the Club organizes meets in Scotland. Teresa organizes a regular meet over the late May bank holiday, and there are other meets in Scotland. Last year Bill Morrison organized a meet to the fabulous area of Torridon, and we have his account of this in this issue. This year he organized a Glencoe meet.

First we celebrate Teresa and Bryn's achievement in completing the Munros in the remarkably short time of 6 years. Maybe I can persuade Teresa to write an article and give us the story of their Munros.

We then catch up on last year: Bill and Dave Gray give us an account of the Torridon meet.

We have had a break since the last newsletter, during which time the members have been doing all sorts of exiting things. So get your pens –or word processor- out and let me have an article.

I know that several of you have had walking/climbing holidays abroad and I have seen some great photos on Facebook. So for the next issue I plan a series of articles on this. I will write something about the mag-

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nificent New Zealand Southern Alps. Our Chairman and Helen were in Corsica doing the GR20, so we would love to know more about that. Others were in Saas Fee in Switzerland, and then there was Sue's trip to Sierra Nevada.

There is plenty of material, so let me have your articles please

In This Issue

| | |
|---|----|
| Competing the Munros | 2 |
| Torridon—April 2018 By Bill Morrison | 4 |
| Torridon—Other Walks—April 2018 By Dave Gray | 11 |

The Final Munro by Editor

On 25 April this year I received the following email from Teresa

“Bryn and I have today "completed" the Munros...the last one being Sgurr a Chaorachain (or in English pronunciation sgoor a hoorahen!!). Fantastic weather, fantastic hills (we did Sgurr Choinnich too), and quite an emotional end to an epic 6 year journey.”



Many congratulations.

At the end of May 26 of us gathered for the Late May Scottish Meet in Aviemore. To celebrate Teresa and Bryn’s achievement, we all trekked up to the top of Cairngorm carrying suitable bottles to drink their health. The weather was suitably Scottish (wet!)



The late May meet in Scotland is a regular feature in the Gwydyr calendar. I first went in 2012, when a select group of 5 of us had a memorable week in Torridon. The following year numbers really took off for the famous week in Arran when Geoff's loaf of bread was launched out to sea. In 2014 it was Knoydart, then Ullapool in 2015. In 2016 we had an almost unheard of full week of sunshine in Skye. It was Aviemore in 2017, Tain in 2018 and back to Aviemore this year. Many thanks to Teresa for organising all the meets since 2015.



Stony walking in the Lairig Ghru

Despite the mixed weather this year, a whole range of walks were achieved, ranging from Chris Harris's epic Carn Toul—Braeriach traverse to something more modest.

The elite group of Chris, Helen Grant, Richard Smith and Mike Wallis set out on a 24 mile circuit up the extremely rough boulder field in the Chalamain Gap and then on to include the 4 Munros of Bod an Deamhain (The Devil's Point), Cairn Toul, Sgor an Lochain Uaine and Braeriach. They were followed by Teresa, Bryn and John Simpson ("Simmo").

It sounds as though it ended up as a race, but they certainly achieved a very challenging walk.

The rest of us were busy doing something slightly more modest, but everybody managed to get some good walks in. On Thursday evening we all got together for a meal in the Winking Owl (right). On the final day most of us finished with an ascent of Sgor Gaoith (1,118m), with fine views across Loch Einich towards Braeriach,. Chris then led some of us on to the neighbouring (well relatively) Munro of Mullach Clach a Bhlair (1,019m) to complete an 18 mile day.



The route up to Sgor Gaoith



The summit of Sgor Gaoith

Torridon by Bill Morrison

Introduction

Late April 2018 found a group of us, each making our own way, up the A9 heading for a week's walking in Wester Ross. Dave Gray, Lindsay Fooks, Helen & Glenn, Richard and Kay, Ronnie and myself, had signed up for some trekking and scrambling adventures in the unique Torridon landscape. These highlands are characterised by their large 'sea to summit' Munros. Their signature steep slopes, multiple rock terraces and high ridges create an impressive mountain landscape carved out of the hard, metamorphosed sandstone by relentless erosion and glacial action.

Most of us were staying at the Scottish Mountaineering Club's Ling hut (below) conveniently situated at the foot of Beinn Eighe. The hut is separated from the main road by a small lochan and can be accessed only on foot via a path that skirts the water. Consequently it feels suitably remote - in keeping with its surroundings. The hut itself was basic but comfortable with a large bunk room, a dining room come sitting area, a well equipped kitchen and a toilet. Sadly no wash block, if you wanted to scrub yourself you needed soap and a bucket!



Over the course of the next 5/6 days we did a number of walks, some were moderate/low level treks, some Grahams and some Munros. We enjoyed all kinds of weather, wind, rain, mist, sleet, snow and sun. All in all it was a great experience with good company and fine walking.

I hope these notes give the reader a flavour of our trip, both the walking and the landscape, and perhaps lay the seeds for a visit of their own.

Maol Chean-dearg (*Eng: Bald Red Head*)

On our first day the cloud base was low with the summits of Liathach and Beinn Eighe hidden high up in the mist. We decided to split into two groups, one led by Dave Gray went off for some low level walking whilst Ronnie and I decided to trek up to the ridge behind the hut. If the weather cleared, as we hoped, there was the potential to attempt one of the Munros in the Coulin Forest between Torridon and Strathcarron.

From the hut a good path runs south up and over a low rise of glacial till. Passing a waterfall it gradually winds upwards towards the head of the valley. The walking was fairly easy to start with - the path largely being in good condition. Eventually however the track faded away to nothing and we found ourselves marching up a boggy slope with banks of mist drifting around us as we approached the ridge.

We eventually made the ridge some 3 hours after setting out. Here we stopped and refuelled with

some lunch. As we'd hoped the mist started to clear and we could look down over the dark moorland of the Fionnna-abhainn river valley. (see below) The two Munros: to the west Maol Chean-dearg and to the east Sgorr Ruadh, were now clearly visible



We had made a late start on our first morning and by now it was early afternoon. However the cloudbase had lifted and we decided to summit Maol Chean-dearg (CMD). It was going to be a long day. Should we get caught out by either the weather or nightfall our back up plan was to use the Coire Fionnaraich both situated lower down in the valley.

Close up CMD is revealed to be a steep sided dome of Torridonian sandstone. On its north side it plunges via a series of crags and terraces down to a lochan. The normal walkers' path lies further south but given the time and having surveyed the route we decided to scramble up the north side of the mountain. At this point the weather was good and the scrambling fairly easy so with much traversing of the numerous sandstone terraces we eventually reached the mountain's crest and from there it was a quick walk to the summit (Ronnie approaching the summit—picture below)

On the top the air was clear and the light perfect, the views could only be described as staggering. In every direction there was a panorama of Scottish peaks. To the south we could see the mountains of



Lochaber and pick out Ben Nevis and the Carn Mor Dearg arete - about 50 miles away as the crow flies. To the south west were the Skye Cuillin and northwards the snow capped peaks around Loch Fannoch were bathed in afternoon sun.

However, as we sat ate some snacks the clouds started to sweep in again. We watched them rolling up Glen Torridon

from the south, eventually reaching us and reducing visibility down to a few yards. Getting off the mountain by the way we came was out of the question, too dangerous with the number of cliff walls and gullies, so we decided to descend via the west flank. Finding the route required compass navigation and then some scrambling down onto the lower slopes till we reached a path running past Loch an Eion at the base of the mountain.

Once back in the valley it was time to hydrate and fuel up for the long trek back to the hut. By now darkness was falling and the rain started, only light showers at first but getting heavier. We were well equipped with waterproofs so it was just a matter of head down and get on with it. The path took us back up to the ridge but from there on we had to follow a compass bearing as we traversed the boggy moorland once more. After a couple of hours we joined the path leading down to the hut. The walking was much easier after this but by this time the sun had gone completely and it was pitch dark. So with head torches on we trudged through the heather until we got 'home' some 13 hours after we set out. We were tired, wet and hungry but it was a great day out.

Beinn Eighe (*Eng: Fire Mountain*)

Beinn Eighe is in effect a mountain massif forming a long ridge with a number of spurs and summits, two of which are classified as Munros; Ruadh-stac Mòr (*Eng: Big Red Stack*) and Spidean Coire nan Clach (*Eng: Peak of the Corrie of Stones*). The weather being good with blue skies and the forecast very favourable, Helen, Ronnie and I decided to attempt a ridge walk and bag these two peaks.

There are several routes up and across the mountain. Our plan was to walk up through the valley of the Allt Coire an Anmoich river which runs between Beinn Eighe and Liathach, ascend to the corrie on the north side of the Beinn Eighe massif and make for the main ridge via the col, passing the triple buttress (below) on the way.



The summit looked clear from the hut and we set out early. No transport needed, we walked around the lochan, crossed the A896 and began climbing up into the river valley. A look at the map will show that the sides of this valley are very steep. The black rock and cliffs of Liathach and the high grey scree slopes of Beinn Eighe tower over valley floor, enclosing the path and amplifying the ruggedness and drama of the Torridonian landscape.

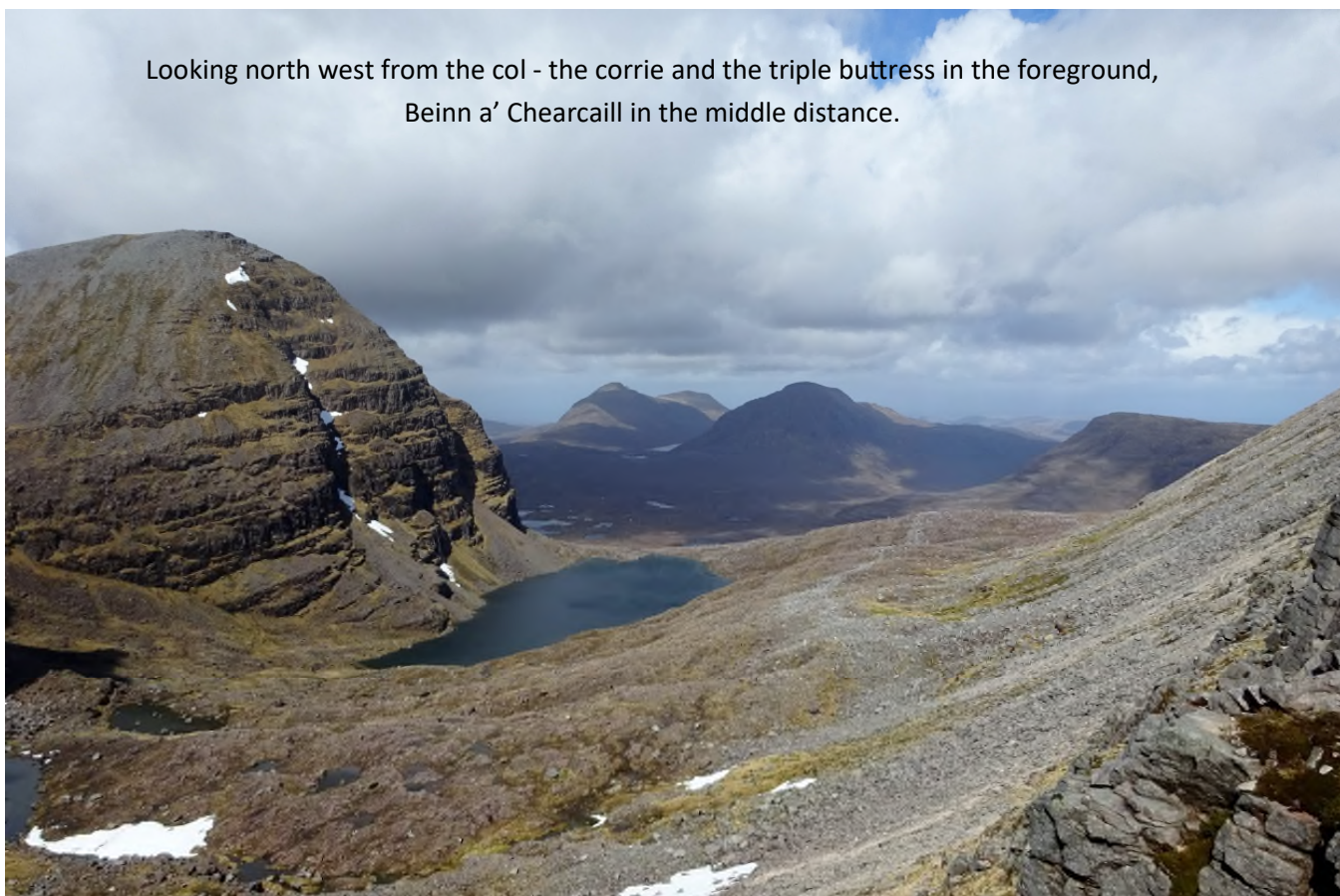
After an hour or so of walking we turned north, leaving the valley and taking the path heading upwards to the corrie. The Coire Mhic Fearchair corrie is worth a visit on its own. Scoured out the rock by glaciation it contains a small lochan dammed at its north-east end by a natural rock barrier. It is approached via a path from below. The outflow forms a natural waterfall over the rock dam whilst the corrie itself remains hidden - only coming into view once this obstacle is climbed. Directly behind the lochan, at the back of the corrie, is the impressive triple buttress of Còinneach Mhòr, itself a Munro top sited on a spur off the main ridge.

To reach the main ridge we had to climb up to the col formed by the Ruadh-stac Mòr spur and the ridge itself. Route finding around the lochan was fairly easy and brought us to a steep scrambling section at the back of the corrie. This climb was mostly scree, uncertain underfoot but manageable. The last 30m or so however required some more involved scrambling up the sides of an ice filled rocky gully. In places the rock had weathered into horizontal beds which made the climbing easier as these could be used like a ladder. Care was needed as this outcrop was rather unstable and it was only too easy for a careless foot to send large stones tumbling down.

The effort was worth it, once at the col the views across Wester Ross and over to the Sky Coullins were very clear. The weather was good and the sun shining. In the distance however, coming in from the west, we could see bands of snow being carried towards us, so it was going to be a mixed day weather-wise. The forecast had predicted showers in the afternoon.

The route to Beinn Eithe's first Munro, Ruadh-stac Mòr, involves a 'dog leg' off the col. The ground is mainly scree and loose rock and it was easy walking. In about 20 minutes we had reached the cairn - in time for the first wave of snow to hit. Sheltering behind the stones we ate some lunch and waited for the skies to clear. After a quarter of an hour the clouds blew over, the sun returned and we could take in the views over Loch Torridon and Skye. More bands of snow could be seen inbound in the distance.

Looking north west from the col - the corrie and the triple buttress in the foreground,
Beinn a' Chearcaill in the middle distance.



Retracing our steps we trekked back down to the top of the col to begin the climb up to the main ridge and onwards to the mountain's second Munro. Ascending the ridge proper entailed negotiating some large irregular patches of ice and snow at the edge of the col. The ground is very steep on all sides which made circumventing this ice field a slow and arduous journey over loose scree which crumbled easily underfoot. Walking poles were the order of the day here. Gradually we got ourselves up onto the ridge top via various routes. The ground levelled out and the walking became much easier.

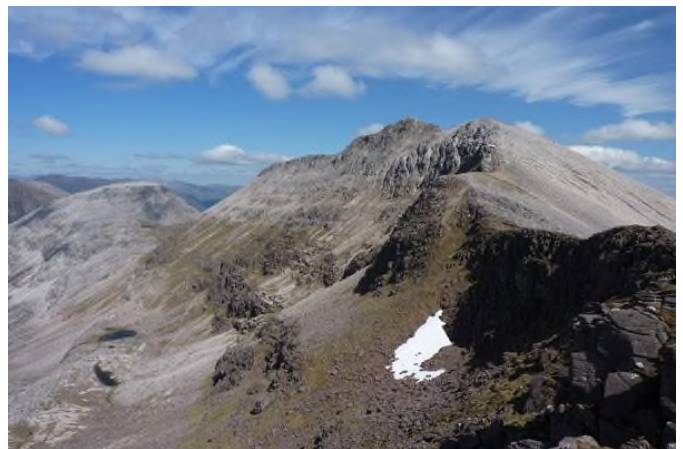


Helen and Ronnie on the main ridge

It was a couple of kilometres to the second Munro and the ridge provided varied terrain. At times it is some 20m wide, in other places it is more of a knife edge requiring scrambling over rocky pinnacles. The landscape on either side is dramatic. Looking north over to Ruadh-stac Bear, an outlier of Beinn Eighe itself, what struck me was the barren hillsides of these mountains. No grass, no heather or vegetation of any sort, just bare rock and scree. A beautiful, bleak landscape almost lunar in appearance. Clearly the height, exposure and steepness of the mountainsides makes it impossible for any plants to take root and thrive. No wonder this second Munro is called The Peak of the Corrie of the Stones. To the south we caught some excellent views of the Torridon Valley where, if you squinted, the Ling hut itself could be made out, just a small white dot in the distance. In the middle distance was Maol Chean-dearg and the other peaks of Strathcarron.



On the Ridge, looking back at Ruadh-stac Mhor (on the right). Coinnech Mhor on the left. From the corrie the ridge is accessed via the saddle in the middle of the photo.



On the ridge, looking east towards Spidean Coire nan Clach. Note the bare scree covered slopes - too steep and exposed for vegetation.

Our walk along the main ridge was accompanied by blue skies mixed with some heavy, intermittent snow flurries. On the way we encountered two German walkers who had ascended up via a path leading from the disused quarry on the main road. This was our planned descent route. The top of the path was covered in ice they informed us and treacherous underfoot. 'Be careful' was their parting words. With this information we set off to climb the summit of Spidean Coire nan Clach - a pinnacle perched on a narrow stretch of the ridge. It was a short scramble to the top where we paused to take in the view and eat before setting off on our descent.

Sure enough we had to negotiate an ice sheet at the start of our descent. Although only it was only 10m or so wide, the ground was very steep and slippery under foot. In fact much of the upper path had been washed away, presumably by the melting winter snow, leaving behind deep gullies filled with loose rock and, at lower altitudes, patches of wet grasses to negotiate. Negotiating these obstacles made the descent much harder than the climb up. It took about 90 mins or so to reach the road and by the time we were off the mountain my toes were throbbing in my boots. Thankfully Glen picked us up and spared us the march back to the hut. A great day out on the mountain. Beinn Eigh is much to be recommended.

Slioch (Eng: The Spear)

Slioch is a Munro situated at the south east end of Loch Maree, about 15 km or so from the hut. On our last day, Lindsay, Ronnie and myself decided to bag it, hopefully traversing the Slioch horseshoe ridge in the process. On the day the weather forecast was dry but with high winds expected above 500m. As usual the mountain weather forecast was right!

Our route started just outside of Kinlochewe at the clachan of Incheril, an irregular collection of houses and small crofts situated in a bend of the Kinlochewe river, south east of the loch. From the Ling hut it is a straightforward 20 minute drive and there is a good car park at Incheril; well signposted and easy to find. At the top of the car park a path starts that runs along the northeast shore of Loch Maree. This provides an easy approach to Slioch of around 5 km. Of note along the way were the wild goats that would block the path, not giving up any ground until the last minute - a bit disconcerting at first!



Path leading from Incheril to Slioch, Sgurr Dubh on the right, the main peak in the centre of the photo hidden in cloud.

The plan was to start the ascent proper where the path crosses the southern end of Gleann Bianasdall but we were too busy chatting and enjoying the walk, we overshot this way point by half a km before we realised it. Rather than retrace our steps we opted to cut across the grassy lower slopes of Meall Riabhach to reach the Slioch path. This proved a worthwhile diversion as it took us past small two herds of red deer which, although wary of walkers, allowed us to approach within 50 feet or so.

Back on the path our route wound upwards, leading up into a wide corrie surrounded by the horseshoe ridge, the main peak lying to the north west. The ascent up to the base of Sgurr Dubh, the hill that forms the southern extent of the corrie wall, is steep but it caused us no problems. On reaching the corrie floor we came across a guided walking party who had just finished off their lunch and were heading out for the summit. Taking advantage of the large boulders and dry(ish) ground we also took a rest there, ate our lunch, and let the group get well ahead of us.

The walk through the corrie itself was fairly easy, the corrie floor is a gentle slope, boggy in places. A bit of route finding was required to avoid the worst of the wet ground and the path seemed to fade in and

out at times but nothing that posed any difficulties. The good news was that my feet were dry for once - the Beinn Eighe climb had finished off my leaky old Salomans and I'd had to break out a pair of Scarpa winter boots for Slioch. The soles were a bit stiff but at least they were watertight.

As we headed towards the northwest wall of the corrie. We could see the walking party in the distance strung out, climbing the wall towards the shoulder of the mountain. As we approached, instead of pushing on to the top the party started to descend again. The summit couldn't be that close surely? A check of the the map showed it to be a good 1 Km of walking and 200m of ascent the top. On their descent, the party took a different route, cutting across to the northern side of the corrie so we had no idea if there was a problem or that was their planned walk.

We climbed up to the shoulder reaching two small lochans that sit at the bottom of a steep scree slope which has to be climbed via a winding zig zag path. The corrie had provided shelter from the wind but now we were at around 700m and fully exposed to the forecasted high winds and buffeting. This was presumably why the party had turned back. However, not to be put off we started the next part of the ascent whilst being constantly hammered by the gale. Each of us were blown off our feet at some point. Despite this wind, the clouds had lifted somewhat and the views up the loch were very clear but it was difficult to enjoy them on that slope. We reached the crest and found a welcome wind shadow in which to shelter. The main peak lay ahead of us, but a short climb away



Loch Maree from the summit looking north east.

The trek up to the summit was a matter of 'get on with it' but on the top we found some further cover from the wind behind a stone shelter at the cairn. Time for a snack and a photo. Our original plan was to descent along the north side of the ridge via Sgurr an Tuill Bhain and thence back to the lochside. However, given the high winds and lack of any visible cover on the ridge we decided to retrace our steps back down into the corrie and

then back to Incheril.

On the way down we met a couple of walkers, one fairly elderly, who were struggling with the descent. They were trying to avoid the scree entirely but without map or compass were in danger of heading towards the cliffs at the corrie's edge. We told them to retrace their steps and follow us down which they did - so that was our good deed for the day. The descent of that scree slope was a bit more of a challenge than the ascent. The wind seemed to have grown stronger with significant gusts making walking difficult. I tend to find it harder going down hill anyway.

Once back in the corrie however, the wind dropped and the mountain showed us its more peaceful side once more. We made our way back, retracing our path up and making good time. Behind us we could see that the two walkers had got themselves down into the corrie and were also walking out. The rest of the journey was uneventful although that lochside path seemed to be one of those never ending tracks on the way back. We got to the car just as the sun was setting. It's a shame we couldn't complete the ridge walk but I'll give it another go next time I'm in Torridon.

Accommodation

I booked the Ling hut through the Scottish Mountaineering Club website. The warden was very helpful and it cost £12 per night per person. We were lucky with the booking as there were no other walkers/climbers staying at the hut that week so we had the place to ourselves. A party did turn up on our last night (Friday). It's a good base for exploring the Torridon Hills, it's only drawback is a lack of a washing block. If you prefer something a bit more comfortable there are some good holiday cottages in the area, Helen and Glen stayed in a lovely place at the head of the loch, some 3 or 4 Km along the road. Torridon Youth Hostel is also to be recommended. Certainly a step up from the Ling with hot showers and a comfortable lounge area. Lindsay booked in there.

There is also a public campsite next to the Youth Hostel with a toilet/shower block. It's free and managed by Highland council. If you are thinking of going up there and want to do it 'hard core' it might be worth checking out. It looked OK to me.

Other Walks By David Gray

On this trip my own focus was the smaller mountains, all new to me, on the Scots 'Grahams' list: peaks of 2000'-2499' with a 500' all round reascent. These can vary in difficulty from the relatively easy through the rough & pathless to the very hard. (Many people reckon that Stac Pollaidh at just 2004' is the hardest UK mainland summit to reach in terms of its scrambling grade!)

On our first day we - Glenn, Helen, Lindsey, Richard, Kay and myself - enjoyed a low level walk around the coast on the south side of Upper Loch Torridon - just where it joins Loch Shieldaig. This was a beautiful walk which gave excellent views of one of these hills, a fairly typical Graham, the 2201' steep sided dome that is An Ruadh-mheallan (Eng: Little Red Hill).

Two days later Glenn, Helen and I spent a fine afternoon on this hill. Now why do I say this Little Red Hill is pretty typical of the Grahams? Well to begin with locating the start point was'nt easy. We used the SMC



An Ruadh-mheallan from Loch Torridon shore

guidebook to hunt for a layby with a seat on the single track, winding and rather hairy Diabaig road. Eventually we went for what was more like a roadside climbing stance and lo - hidden out of sight - there was one of the famed 'Strategic Seats of Scotland'. We'd arrived.

What's good about Grahams is they are generally stunted - they must have smoked ciggies back in geological time. You can often wait out the kind of murky weather we drove into that day and still do a lot of ascents in fairly short order when it clears. On cue, our waiting till late morning meant this murk changed into an afternoon of clearing, breezy and strongly sunny weather.

The change in the weather was very welcome because route finding, again fairly typically of Grahams, involved picking our way across rough country on faint paths from one landmark lochan to the next, backed up with compass bearings. Grahams often command fine views of the surrounding larger peaks

and this was no exception - a panorama of great seascapes, the mountains of Flowerdale Forest, the peaks of Beinn Alligin and Beinn Damph and in the distance the Coulin hills to the south of Loch Torridon. On our descent the Loch itself blazed in the afternoon sun above the remote and wild foreground scene



Beinn Damph and the Coulin Forest from Loch nan Tri-Eileanan

So a great day out! Other Grahams we climbed on what was a great productive trip were:

- Beinn a Chearchaill (Eng: Mountain of the Circle) a 2378' peak situated to the north of Beinn Eighe and accessed from the south west shore of Loch Maree - myself, Kay and Glenn
- Beinn a Mhuinidh (Eng: Mountain of Urination (sic!)) 2270', situated on the opposite shore of Loch Maree - myself, Lindsey and Glenn

Ronnie and I also managed a long low level walk along Loch Torridon's south shoreline. A beautiful and wild landscape with a real feeling of the Scottish wilderness.

The last non Munro day was bright but very windy, so Glenn, Helen and I did a final low level walk up the Coulin Pass to the Tea House bothy - a first bothy experience for Helen and Glenn



Helen and Glenn in the Tea House bothy

