

The Cuillin Round

Map



Report

THE CUILLIN ROUND

Some thoughts and comments, following a successful completion of the round by myself, Yiannis Tridimas, on Wednesday/Thursday 14th/15th June 2000.

It has become an annual pilgrimage our group of fellrunning friends makes to Skye. Last year it was Rob who successfully completed the inaugural Cuillin Round. This year it was my turn. Having supported Rob last year I decided that this was a challenge I would like to have a go at.

We started arriving on Saturday and by Monday we were all there; some in Sligachan camp site (myself, Chris, Rob, Wynn, Steve, Rick, Wayne) the others in the Coruisk memorial hut (Paddy, Richard, Gordon, Wendy, Sari, Clare, Mike, Ronnie).

Sunday was a day of showers and I spent the whole day doing some serious reccing. The weather was not encouraging. Monday was stormy but the "Bella Jane" managed to sail from Elgol in the morning and take Paddy's entourage to the hut, where, for the next 24 hours, they experienced wind and rain as never before and saw the Mad Burn flow uphill!

There was no communication between Sligachan and Coruisk. Tuesday was quite bad, so I had a second day of

rest. In the afternoon Gordon and Ronnie, braving the weather, paid us a visit.

The forecast was for the weather to improve from Tuesday night and a decision was made for a possible early morning start on Wednesday from Coruisk. I packed my heavy sack and on Tuesday evening Rick and I took the long path to Coruisk. Rob followed later.

The weather was improving but not fast enough. At 2:30am it was still quite windy and the cloud was low. Rob and I then decided to postpone the start till midday. The area most suitable as night section is that between Glen Sligachan and Mam a' Phobuill (Glamaig to Marsco) and a midday start from Coruisk is needed for this. An early morning start from Coruisk could do away with the night section altogether if the whole thing was done in about 21 hours.

I had very little sleep that night. Wednesday morning looked promising and a midday start was on. So, following a couple of stormy days, myself, Rob, Richard and Rick set off up Gars Bheinn in near perfect weather and suitably reinforced by Wendy's porridge. We made very good progress along the ridge with only a few minor mistakes. The In Pinn was quiet (we just beat three roped climbers to it). Our two feeding stops were a delightful experience as we were spoiled with drinks and tasty sandwiches.

We traversed the main ridge from Gars Bheinn to Sgurr nan Gilleann in just under seven hours and that was after having thrown in the usual extras plus Sgur a'Bhasteir - a new top. Our time for this leg was about two hours shorter than scheduled and the whole team was in high spirits. Running along Glen Sligachan to the start of the second section I was thinking that the best was over and what followed was probably more demanding and less pleasant; I would rather be on the rocks all the time!

A longer stop was made at the next changeover point, where Wynn's homemade soup was consumed in large quantities. There was still plenty of daylight left as Steve, Wayne and myself set off up Glamaig, the most intimidating of all climbs in the round - worse than Yewbarrow in the BG. The wind was picking up now as the day was fading and by the time we got to Marsco we had gone through a few heavy rain showers with blustery winds. I put on extra layers to keep warm and gladly feasted on more of Wynn's soup at the bealach, where Ronnie and Chris took over as pacers. Our descent from Marsco had been slower than expected, on wet rocks and darkness - our fault perhaps for arriving there too early. Daylight came at Druim Eadar da Choire and with it the rain retreated; it all looked good. Progress was steady although not as swift now as I was going through my second sleepless night. Clach Glas was a bit drizzly and damp but the rest of our journey was dry with long spells of sunshine. Willink's gully was not as efficient as it might be expected, mainly due to the lower slopes of Bla Bheinn being heathery and rough. I must explore an alternative descent, probably a direct line down the SW top.

It was exciting to see so many of the team waiting for us on Sgurr na Stri, showing us the best shortcuts to it and treating us to drinks - I particularly enjoyed Paddy's hot tea and packet soup brew! They ran with us down this magnificent hill to the finish at the hut.

The attempt was a success in many ways: the time was good (apologies Rob) and I was completely free from injuries. The whole team functioned like clockwork. Rob, Richard and Rick did a superb job keeping up a quick pace on the ridge while carrying heavy packs. The two support groups of Sari, Gordon, Clare and Mike and Paddy and Wendy were just as impressive dispensing goodies with grand prix pit lane efficiency. Steve, my KIMM partner and Wayne did equally well in bad weather, Steve having to use map and compass in the showery darkness. Ronnie and Chris were very attentive at a time when I was slower than before and sleepy.

What a team! Many thanks to you all.

Special thanks to Rob, who, with Paddy, designed the Cuillin round. Although its length of 34 miles is short by 24-hour round standards, it is a superb round with special qualities. It requires rock climbing ability and a head for heights, as many of the climbs are quite exposed.

Yiannis Tridimas

19/06/00

.....and now Rob's view of things:

This year it was Yiannis Tridimas's turn to do the CR. In fine style, he added a peak and sliced over 2 hrs from my Round, completing in 21:22. Being half-goat he has an unfair advantage.

This being Skye, we had to wait till Wednesday (14 June) for a weather window. The plan was to start from Coruisk at 3 a.m., with Yiannis, Rick Houghton and I walking in from Sligachan the Tuesday evening. In the event, the weather was still stormy so after a brief half-waking conference we recalculated for a midday start. Not that any of the Main Ridge support team were complaining - least of all I, who had overdone the Marilyn-bagging the previous day and hadn't arrived at the hut until after midnight.

In shameful sacrilege and to Paddy Buckley's evident disgust, we exchanged the Mad Burn for a more direct ascent of Gars-bheinn, with myself, Richard Lamb and Rick Houghton in desperate pursuit of the merciless Contender. It is becoming a tradition that Main Ridge support get to do the whole ridge - undeniably a privilege, although not without its share of suffering at today's speed of travel. Soon the first big Munro is out of the way, I make my first unforced errors going to and from the brutal little tower of Caisteal a' Garbh Choire and make amends in the tricky Andy Hyslop traverse out to Sgurr Dubh Mor and the T-D Gap bypass. In a bid for survival I sit out the outlying Sgurr Sgumain; by the time I've had a drink they're back with me again and in no time we're on cloud-girt Sgurr Alasdair, then we're scrambling up exquisite An Stac, hoping it's still too cold and windy for the In Pinn punters. Indeed we (they - I sit this out too) have no competition: whilst waiting I chat with a single party who are roping up ("...they can't all three have fallen off - they're not roped..." Rob that was tactless....)

Just before Sgurr na Banachdich is our first support party, with lashings of hot soup and Possibly the Best Tuna Sandwiches in the World. Not wishing to re-live last year's routefinding disaster, in the mist we count summits carefully, yet still have to fight to keep the right line on the descent to where to our relief, the unfeasibly steep Sgurr Thormaid rears out of the mist. In contrast to my Round last year, the weather stays dry for this section and we romp along the fabulously airy crest of Sgurr a' Greadaidh and the splendid in- your-face climbs of the Mhadaidh tops. At Bealach na Glaic Mhor, despite being over 2 hrs up on schedule, we are met by Paddy Buckley and Wendy Dodds - legends both, although the soup and victuals are real enough.

Yiannis and I are both a bit scared of Bidein Druim nan Ramh. Him because his arms are too short, me because ... well, it's a scary place. Today, in perfect conditions, cool and dry, this best of Cuillin peaks goes like a dream. I puzzle my way down the Diff downclimb, Yiannis bounces down, Richard long-arm Lamb reaches across to the critical hold with heart-breaking ease.

With an embarrassing amount of time in hand, Yiannis doesn't need much persuading to take 15 minutes out from the Sligachan peaks to take in an extra: Sgurr a'Bhasteir. Suits me too - I've not been there before. Then we skitter off down the Lota Coire scree to find the easy way up the Basteir Tooth. Not so easy - I don't even try to keep up, instead spending time eating, retrieving Rick's Mars Bar, arriving at The Nick just in time to meet the other three descending the Tooth, and to seek the delicate little climb up onto Am Basteir. Its East Ridge has just fallen apart - a recent rock fall forces a messy little bypass, but soon we're threading the superlative West Ridge of Nan Gillean. Nicholson's Chimney (or was it its neighbour?) provides great entertainment - we practice our techniques of bridging, chimneying, thrutching, head-jamming, knee-banging.... Then I point out that we're on for a sub-7 hour Main Ridge (including extras). We're on the airy summit of Sgurr Nan Gillean just 6:57 after leaving Gars-bheinn (a breathtaking average of OVER 1 M.P.H.!!!). Then, as if we've already finished, wives and kids are phoned, views are admired, food is nibbled, Ground Support at Slig is alerted to our imminent arrival and we head off for Knights Peak Except that I miss this out too, on the pretext that I have to recce an alternative superdirect descent route off Sgurr na h-Uamha. Even so, it seems no time at all before YT and his 2 surviving pacers are at the summit. I warn Yiannis - I think the descent will go but it's seriously steep and won't be any quicker... As aforementioned, we have time in hand, and Yiannis is game for a challenge. Rick and Richard demonstrate our folly by re-climbing to the top, descending the usual way and still getting down before us. But we have a fine time crab-crawling our way down hundreds of feet of steeply angled gabbro slabs before finally succumbing to the grassy wastes of Coire

Glas and the boggy run-out along Glen Sligachan.

Now the midges make their own contribution, ensuring the changeover is kept brief. Somewhere there is a group photograph, the 3 pacers unrecognisable under layers of cagoul and balaclava in an effort to exclude the aerial piranas. Then it is Steve and Wayne's turn to suffer. Richard, Rick and I collect the debris of flasks and food and wander dazedly back towards Sligachan, not quite sure what has hit us.

Overnight my sleep is disturbed by some nasty rain squalls; I wonder how it is, traversing out to Belig in the dark; how the Clach Glas - Blaven traverse is going; how the new route off Blaven is working out.

Thursday afternoon it's no great surprise to see Yiannis arrive back at Slig, having finished the Round at Coruisk that morning and then walked the 9 miles out; I'm only slightly bemused to learn that over 2 hours has been sliced off my time of last year. So much for the myth that the Cuillin Round is difficult. Next year it'll be done in bedroom slippers, blindfolded. Someone buy that man a dram.

Rob Woodall

Schedule

THE CULLIN ROUND

Completed by Yiannis Tridimas on 14th/15th June 2000

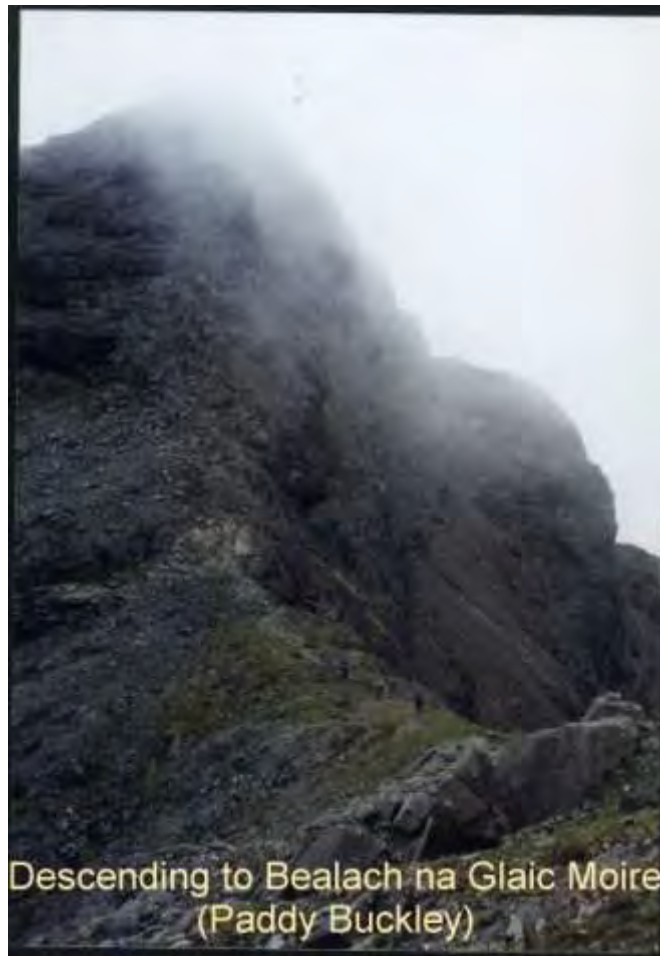
top no	description	height m	ascent m	descent m	stage km	stage miles	split times	clock	support
	Start: JMCS coruisk hut	15						12:01	pacing/navigation: Rob Woodall Richard Lamb
1	gars bheinn	895	880		2.40	1.50	01:05	13:06	
	dip	835		60	0.32	0.20			
2	sgurr a'choire bhig (465191)	875	40		0.16	0.10	00:08	13:14	Rick Houghton
	dip	773		102	0.64	0.40			
3	sgurr nan eag	924	151		0.56	0.35	00:16	13:30	
	bealach a'garbh choire, south	797		127	0.64	0.40			
4	caisteal a'garbh choire (454202)	828	31		0.16	0.10	00:20	13:50	
	bealach a'garbh choire, north	799		29	0.16	0.10			
	dip	886	87		0.40	0.25			
5	sgurr dubh mor	944	58		0.16	0.10	00:26	14:16	
	dip	886		58	0.16	0.10			
6	sgurr dubh an da bheinn	938	52		0.24	0.15	00:09	14:25	
	bealach coire an lochan	855		83	0.40	0.25			
	base of T-D buttress	840		15	0.16	0.10			
	bealach sgumain (449207)	921	81		0.24	0.15			
7	sgurr sgumain	947	26		0.16	0.10	00:18	14:43	
	route avoiding Bad Step	910		37	0.16	0.10			
8	sgurr alasdair	993	83		0.16	0.10	00:09	14:52	
	top of stone shoot	956		37	0.08	0.05			
9	sgurr thearlaich	984	28		0.08	0.05	00:05	14:57	
	bealach mhic coinnich	892		92	0.24	0.15			
10	sgurr mhic coinnich	948	56		0.16	0.10	00:18	15:15	
	top of rotten gully	804		144	0.48	0.30			
11	top @ 44642150	860	56		0.08	0.05	00:17	15:32	
	dip	844		16	0.08	0.05			
12	an stac	954	110		0.24	0.15	00:08	15:40	
	dip	938		16	0.08	0.05			
13	sgurr dearg: in pinn	986	48		0.08	0.05	00:06	15:46	
	dip	966		20	0.08	0.05			
14	sgurr dearg - cairn	978	12		0.08	0.05	00:12	15:58	
	bealach coire na banachdich	851		127	0.40	0.25	00:07	16:05	

	rest						00:06	16:11	food/drinks:
15	sgurr banachdich: sron buidhe	878	27		0.16	0.10	00:03	16:14	Sari, Gordon, Clare, Mike
	dip	860		18	0.08	0.05			
16	sgurr banachdich: south top	917	57		0.11	0.07	00:04	16:18	
	dip	901		16	0.11	0.07			
17	sgurr banachdich: centre top	942	41		0.11	0.07	00:05	16:23	
	dip	917		25	0.11	0.07			
18	sgurr na banachdich	965	48		0.16	0.10	00:09	16:32	
	bealach thormaid	888		77	0.24	0.15			
19	sgurr thormaid (441226)	927	39		0.08	0.05	00:10	16:42	
	dip	890		37	0.03	0.02			
	three teeth	902	12		0.05	0.03	00:03	16:45	
	dip	847		55	0.08	0.05			
20	sgurr a'ghreadaidh: south top	969	122		0.40	0.25	00:12	16:57	
	dip	945		24	0.11	0.07			
21	sgurr a'ghreadaidh	973	28		0.11	0.07	00:04	17:01	
	eag dubh	887		86	0.24	0.15			
22	top @ NG446233	905	18		0.08	0.05	00:06	17:07	
	an dorus	847		58	0.16	0.10			
23	sgurr a' mhadaidh	918	71		0.24	0.15	00:08	17:15	
	dip	860		58	0.16	0.10			
24	sgurr a' mhadaidh: 3rd top	894	34		0.08	0.05	00:12	17:27	
	dip	866		28	0.08	0.05			
25	sgurr a' mhadaidh: 2nd top	887	21		0.08	0.05	00:05	17:32	
	dip	871		16	0.08	0.05			
26	sgurr a' mhadaidh: 1st top	896	25		0.08	0.05	00:05	17:37	
	bealach na glaic moire (453238)	760		136	0.32	0.20	00:06	17:43	
	Rest						00:06	17:49	food/drinks:
27	bidean druim nan ramh: west top	847	87		0.40	0.25	00:09	17:58	Paddy, Wendy
	rock bridge	826		21	0.08	0.05			
28	bidein druim nan ramh	869	43		0.08	0.05	00:04	18:02	
	dip	823		46	0.08	0.05			
29	bidein druim nan ramh: north top	852	29		0.08	0.05	00:11	18:13	
	bealach harta	760		92	0.08	0.05			
30	an caisteal (461244)	830	70		0.48	0.30	00:16	18:29	
	gash	766		64	0.16	0.10			
31	sgurr na bhairnich	860	94		0.16	0.10	00:14	18:43	
	dip	844		16	0.16	0.10			
32	bruach na frithe	958	114		0.48	0.30	00:11	18:54	
	dip	902		56	0.16	0.10			
33	sgurr a' fionn choire (464252)	930	28		0.24	0.15	00:08	19:02	
	dip	866		64	0.48	0.30			
34	sgurr a'bhasteir	900	34		0.40	0.25	00:09	19:11	
	dip	866		34	0.40	0.25			
35	top @ 46452525	905	39		0.08	0.05	00:07	19:18	
	foot of Collie's route	760		145	0.24	0.15			
36	bhasteir tooth	915	155		0.16	0.10	00:16	19:34	
	the nick	890		25	0.03	0.02			
37	am basteir	935	45		0.06	0.04	00:07	19:41	
	bealach a'bhasteir	833		102	0.32	0.20			
38	sgurr nan gillean	965	132		0.32	0.20	00:22	20:03	
	dip	860		105	0.16	0.10			
39	pinnacle ridge: knight's peak	913	53		0.08	0.05	00:22	20:25	
	dip	730		183	1.12	0.70			

40	sgurr beag	765	35		0.16	0.10	00:21	20:46	
	bealach a'ghlas choire	640		125	0.40	0.25			
41	sgurr na h-uamha	736	96		0.24	0.15	00:15	21:01	
	Glen Sligachan path @ 494283	30		706	5.44	3.40	01:08	22:09	
	rest						00:13	22:22	food/drinks:
	subtotals		3396	3381	25.73	16.08	10:21		Steve, Wayne
42	glamaig: sgurr mhairi	775	745		4.32	2.70	01:07	23:29	pacing/navigation:
	bealach na sgairde	415		360	0.64	0.40			Steve Cliff
43	beinn dearg mhor	731	316		0.96	0.60	00:40	00:09	Wayne Percival
	bealach mosgaraidh	507		224	0.64	0.40			
44	beinn dearg mheadhonach	651	144		1.12	0.70	00:29	00:38	
	dip	470		181	0.48	0.30			
45	ciche na beinn deirge	509	39		0.48	0.30	00:13	00:51	
	mam a' phobuill	290		219	0.64	0.40			
46	marsco	736	446		0.96	0.60	00:57	01:48	
	dip	617		119	0.64	0.40			
47	marsco SE top	645	28		0.16	0.10	00:10	01:58	
	bealach nam bruadaran	323		322	0.64	0.40	00:23	02:21	
	rest						00:09	02:30	food/drinks:
48	druim eadar da choire	489	166		0.64	0.40	00:16	02:46	Ronnie, Chris
	coire na seilg	345		144	0.64	0.40			pacing/navigation:
	bealach nam beiste	460	115		1.12	0.70			Ronnie Jackson
49	belig	702	242		0.64	0.40	00:56	03:42	Chris Taylor
	bealach nam beiste	460		242	1.12	0.70			
50	garbh bheinn	806	346		0.96	0.60	00:48	04:30	
	dip	636		170	0.48	0.30			
51	sgurr nan each W top	708	72		0.24	0.15	00:17	04:47	
	dip	686		22	0.16	0.10			
52	sgurr nan each	720	34		0.16	0.10	00:08	04:55	
	dip	686		34	0.16	0.10			
	(sgurr nan each W top)	708	22		0.16	0.10			
	dip	634		74	0.48	0.30			
53	clach glas N top	705	71		0.16	0.10	00:25	05:20	
	dip	680		25	0.08	0.05			
54	clach glas (534221)	786	106		0.16	0.10	00:21	05:41	
	dip	697		89	0.06	0.04			
	clach glas S top	714	17		0.05	0.03	00:14	05:55	
	putting green	695		19	0.06	0.04			
55	bla bheinn	928	233		0.48	0.30	00:30	06:25	
	dip	896		32	0.16	0.10			
56	bla bheinn SW top	924	28		0.16	0.10	00:05	06:30	
	Strath na Creitheach, stream (513215)	28		896	2.96	1.85			
57	sgurr hain	420	392		1.44	0.90	01:39	08:09	
	dip	335		85	0.48	0.30			
58	top above the monument (501203)	375	40		0.32	0.20	00:12	08:21	
	dip	335		40	0.32	0.20			
59	sgurr na stri E top	497	162		0.80	0.50	00:23	08:44	refreshments/pacing:
	dip	475		22	0.08	0.05			Paddy, Gordon, Sari
60	sgurr na stri: W top	494	19		0.08	0.05	00:03	08:47	Clare, Mike
	coruisk stepping stones	14		480	2.08	1.30			
	Finish: JMCS coruisk hut	15		1	0.40	0.25	00:36	09:23	
	subtotals		3784	3799	28.98	18.11	11:01		
	Totals		7180	7180	54.70	34.19	21:22		

Note: Times include some short unscheduled stops and routefinding delays

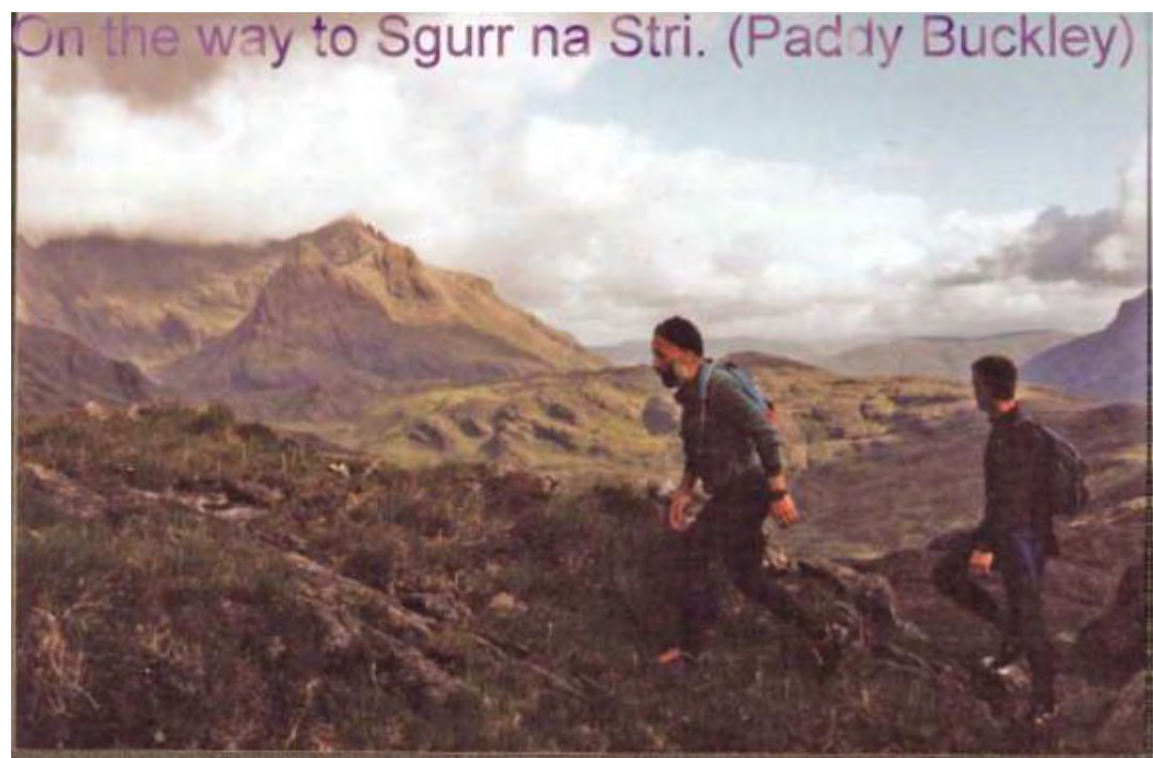
Photos





Resting at Bealach na Glaic Moire. (Paddy Buckley)







Sgurr na Stri (Paddy Buckley)







The finish