

Rigby Round (18 Cairngorm Munros) –31 May, 2008

Completed by Rob Woodall, on-sight, solo, unsupported in 22:56.

This was very much a spur of the moment affair, although I'd studied the Rigby Round some years ago, having got hold of Mark's original article, and even devised an extended version which took in all the associated Tops and even a Corbett. (The enthusiasm of youth!)

The MRR came up in discussion with Eddie Dealtry following my Ramsay, and we hatched a tentative plot for next summer, with Eddie to do valley support as an excuse for a spot of bothying. Then on the Wednesday I noticed the weather forecast had reverted to the sunny-and-breezy mode which seems to be normal for Scotland during this amazing spring. Only two weeks after the Ramsay, but the legs had felt OK at the weekend, and if I didn't get round, it would make a good recce and at least I'd have a couple of remoteish trigs in the bag. Eddie was off to France, so it's just me.

Friday, leaving Peterborough at 3pm, I had a steady drive up, enjoying a fine salmon-sky sunset from the A9 at Blair Atholl, getting to Loch Morlich at about 10:30pm, put things ready for the morning, and grabbed 3 hours sleep.

Saturday 02:05, **Loch Morlich YH**. Planning a low level forest start via Rothiemurcus Lodge, at the last minute I revert to the road, jogging then walking as the gradient steepens, reaching the sharp L bend in about 20 mins. Here there should be a path R. Easy to find and well surfaced, it drops to cross a burn (bridge), climbs then levels off, easy running in the half light. Another burn – half-fill the water bottle. The Chalamain Gap is a fine feature but very bouldery and slow with the light still poor: Rothiemurcus would probably have been quicker. Beyond the Gap it is wide and rough; a better path joins from the L so maybe I picked the wrong line further back. Steeply down to the Lairig Ghru: the Sinclair Hut used to be around here. I eat some cake, fill my water bottle and mix 500ml of Hi5. The path heads up the E bank a short way, neatly stone-pitched, crosses the burn, then as per the 50k map I head straight up a vague stony path – 03:17 and fully light now. Up on the spur I soon reach the main path – neat little short cut. Long easy ascent, crossing the stony Sron na Lairige summit, frequently losing the path in the rocks, costing a few minutes. 04:29, **Braeriach** at last, much slower than Rigby's time, fine views and a rosy glow in the NE sky; cloud in the glens. Take a beeline SW, crossing several sizeable burns and a fair bit of stony ground: sticking to the snaky path may help here – or not. Set the compass vaguely for just N of Loch nan Cnapan and head down into a cloud-filled trough, with **Sgor Gaoith** standing impressive beyond. Messy undulating area with many streams and lochans; I'm a bit late turning R for Gaoith, which adds some distance and peaty ground. I later note that Rigby had similar entertainment here. A lovely path develops, following the rim of the magnificent Gleann Einich, the Loch directly below, with wispy clouds sailing in the intervening space. Gaoith's cairn 05:53 then grassy running to **Mullach Clach a'Bhlair** – not the most exciting spot but pleasant in the morning sunshine. Follow the incongruous landrover track, back into the mist, counting the bends, crossing a burn then setting a bearing to pass just N of Tom Dubh, past a tiny lochan then splash across the wide shallow Allt Luineag, now below the cloud. Contour S, mostly grassy with a patch of rocks, cross a burn, follow a tributary S – more water, Hi5; make a start on the Angel Cake. Cross a spur at about 1000m, descend a little to skirt below a boulderfield, decent grassy running, turn E for the Bhrotain col, then have to climb back up to avoid a steep snow slope. On reflection it may have been quicker to go over Leac Gorm, dump the pack and out-and-back to **Beinn Bhrotain**. As it is, I reach the col, don't think about leaving the pack, and head up the rocky path to the first trig of the day – a cylinder (i.e. Vanessa). Fine views – a few photos then rocky descent to col, path across Leac Gorm shoulder to the small **Monadh Mor** cairn, then mixed grass and stone, angling R on a beeline for the Angel col – bouldery in places but 2 nice snow slopes ease the passage. Long easy ascent of **Angel's Peak**, munching Angel Cake... Cairn stands on the brink of the superb

Garbh Coire, Braeriach just 2 km north but over 5 hours ago. Mark did these peaks in a different order – and this one wasn't a Munro in the pre-1997 Tables. Fairly rocky descent, good path to **Cairn Toul**. The N cairn is a fine place but the S cairn is better, although a slight detour I think. Descent slow and rocky at first, Stob Coire an t-Saighdeir is easier ground, then an easy slow slope most of the way to the saddle, with fine views S out of the Ghru and the diminutive (from above) **Devil's Point** an easy climb beyond. This time I'm tired enough to remember to dump the sack before bagging the boulder summit. Back to the col; a good track leads down past Corrou bothy. I study the opposite slope with interest – initial impressions suggest impregnability, but the 2 gullies should go.

Stop at the footbridge for the first quarter of quiche and a Complán, then head up **Carn a'Mhaim**, aiming for the easier looking RH gully. Steep, deep heather, warm sunshine and sheltered from the breeze. Glad to reach the gully, grassy with lots of diminutive pink Trailing Azalea (seen on just about every summit today), steadily up to the ridge, pace-count my way to the summit (approx 300m distance) to get a fix on the descent point, for Posterity. Nice cairn, fine view; a couple are approaching from the Braemar side: tempting to wait and chat, but better not... Nice descent of an interesting ridge, rocky stretches but nice running. Then a 500m ascent to **Ben Macdui** – one of the biggest of the day! Overhaul a few folk on the path, then easy stable boulder slope; cold strongish wind on the plateau – a few quick pics of the trig (just a conventional Hotine type) then retrace steps a short way before following the main path NE, steep and rocky; happy to romp down a slow slope for 100m or so. Contour across a few boulders into a little col, where I find an unexpected path skirting the W slopes of Creagan a'Choire Etchachan heading for **Derry Cairngorm**. Warm sunshine: sit at the foot of the modest climb and unpack a little pot of tangerines – perfect. A sprightly elderly Scots couple skip past on their way down. Forgetting to leave the pack, I follow the path up then boulder hop across the little plateau to an attractive cairn, again narrowly avoiding a meeting with a couple arriving from the Braemar direction (presumably not the Carn a'Mhaim couple...). Carefully boulder-hop back to the path, skirt round aforementioned Creagan, descend to main (mapped) path – Coire Etchachan scenery of a very high standard. Take on water at the Etchachan outflow, stop partway up the ascent for a feed, then a nice run across the **Beinn Mheadhoin** plateau, overhauling a party of walkers just before the magnificent summit tor, with views back past Macdui to Cairn Toul, and forwards to the eastern giants – the Avon tors beckoning, now just 11km away. Skirting the top of a snow slope I cross a spur and am pleased to find an easy grass and heather line leading down to the Lairig an Laoigh. Then steeply up onto the **Beinn a'Chaorainn** plateau; path to summit. Bouldery ground, but I risk a beeline SE, which soon gives way to runnable grass and rock, then peaty ground which seems to go on a bit, before the **Beinn Bhreac** path appears. Again it occurs to me far too late that I could have dumped the sack for this out and back. Nice neat cairn with a remote feel – and a long way back and round to **Beinn a'Bhuird**, stopping at a good stream for Complán #2 of 3. A nice distinctive cairn, and grassy running leading gently down, past the N side of a fine tor, then steeply down a gritty path to the striking Slochd Mor col, looking magnificent in the late afternoon sunshine. Short steep ascent, then nice runnable path to **Ben Avon's** impressive summit tor, an echo of Mheadhoin; surprised to find a group of walkers at this stage of the day, 18:37. 2 Munros to go.

This is the most easterly point, and from here it's a long way down (north) then a long way west – over 3 hours to the next Munro. A steep spur with short heather makes for good descending at first, but lower down is deep heather and a complex of drumlins stretching N to the R Avon. I head for the Allt an t-Sluich which luckily has a deer track, rough and heathery but runnable in places. Then cross to W side of burn, cross boggy ground and pick up the stalkers path just before the suspension bridge – wobbly but fairly well stayed. 19:29. Oddly it doesn't occur to me until I reach the landrover track, that this track goes on for 9km – and is uphill. Luckily it's a combination of levelish running and steeper walking sections, and the legs are still working. A good place to be on such a perfect evening,

I tell myself. After an eternity (only 5km) I reach Faindouran Lodge, where Rigby sat out 2 hours of darkness and driving rain. This evening a couple of cyclists sit outside enjoying the still-midgeless early summer. I greet them cheerily (although not feeling cheery) then endure the rapidly deteriorating track, soon giving up and walking much of the remaining 5km. Studying the SW slopes of Bhuid I confirm that an idea I'd had earlier, to backtrack over Bhuid then descend, avoiding this long track section, would have worked fine. I later refine the idea further.

Fords of Avon, 21:06 – more folk about; a friendly Golden Retriever heads over to say hello, but I stay E of the Allt Dearg, soon picking up the path N. At a burn crossing I sit and mix the last Complan, and contemplate the slope opposite – heathery but a few grassy streaks – looks like as good a way up Bynack as any. Turns out to be boggy streams and wet slabs, but nothing difficult, and occupies the mind. Legs not too bad – just about eating enough, but lack of sleep is catching up with me. On the final climb to **Bynack More** I doze on a bed of Crowberry for a few minutes, before being woken by Ptarmigan calling nearby. 22:16 I've missed the sunset but there's a fine red glow in the NW. Seventeen down, one Munro to go. With slow going since Ben Avon, the prospect of sub 22 has gone – I'm probably looking at 23+. Easy grassy descent, cross A'Choinneach and follow an interesting grass and rock ridge SW to The Saddle. Beyond, a path, sodden with meltwater, leads up to the R, just followable in the half light, skirting beyond the crags which defend the direct ascent line to **Cairngorm**. The path disappears in the darkness but it's a straightforward climb around and then across a big snow patch, through a knot of rocks at the edge of the plateau, then the mast and summit cairn is just ahead – framed against a still-red sky, a minute to midnight.

Chilly wind now, but the way down is obvious, due N, closely cairned, then guide ropes lead down to the Funicular station. Here I lose the path – (in hindsight it goes R (E) of the building) - I follow the access track L, zig-zagging down easily although a little inefficiently. Glad to reach the relative civilization of the Coire Cas car park, I figure I might just sneak under 23h, if I push the pace a little on the tarmac. I look out for the mapped short-cut path 100m N of the first road junction, but there's no obvious sign of it in the darkness – worth rechecking. I push on along the road, noting wryly that at least the bottom end of the shortcut path is obvious. From here it was about 20 mins uphill and I've 20 mins left, downhill - so the 22:56 completion is fairly inevitable I guess, although it seems doubtful throughout much of that final 2 miles of road. Not for the first time I curse Mark Rigby for not starting at the top car park – not remembering until later that he travelled up by train and bike, hence the YH start and the hour of tarmac. Anyway I run past the car (forgetting to dump the pack) and onwards for the final hundred metres to the hostel entrance – glad and frankly relieved to finish, the enjoyment of the first 16 Munros progressively erased by the last 6 hours. But the satisfaction is easily restored by a night's sleep. Back at the car I open a Big BBQ can, down the cool tasty contents – which pleasingly stay down – then pull on the sleeping bag and sleep for 8 hours.

An easy morning around Aviemore, lots of eating and drinking, and a steady drive back. 15 hours driving for 23 hours on the hill – not too bad a deal, and very glad I seized the opportunity. Ramsay and Rigby within a month, both in perfect conditions – I can't believe my luck.

Clockwise / anticlockwise / route choices

A few considerations:

- Going anticlockwise as per Mark Rigby's inaugural Round, I found several nice snow slopes, thus avoiding some rocky descending. There seemed to be few if any available going clockwise, but these might have been a legacy of the unusually snowy April.
- Going clockwise, the long track beside the R Avon between Bynack and Avon would be taken in descent. But still a long climb to Ben Avon. Carn a'Mhaim to Corroul would be much nicer in descent – provided you can find the route. Bob Berzins went clockwise.
- Starting point – I used Loch Morlich YH as per Rigby, but the Coire Cas car park has also been used, and seems more sensible as it potentially saves an hour – 2+2 miles of mainly tarmac. Phil Clark's 2004 record (22:04) used Loch Morlich.
- Route choice – Western summits: Rigby did Cairn Toul between Braeriach and Gaoith, dumping his pack there: I followed Berzins' order, doing Toul later, between Monadh Mor and Devil's Point.
- Route choice – Eastern summits: the following order would be more efficient, certainly more enjoyable, swapping a Bhuid reascent for that long ridge/glen N of Ben Avon: Mheadhoin – Bhreac – Bhuid – Avon - (Bhuid) – Chaorainn - Fords of Avon – Bynack.
- Water sources – plenty: I carried no more than 1 litre at any point, usually half that.
- Stats: my route was 75 miles and 7012m ascent (Anquet). My recommended route is 72 miles and 6711m. Both use the Loch Morlich YH start and finish. No-brainer?

	Location	Elapsed	BST	Split time
	Loch Morlich YH	00:00	02:05	
	Lairig Ghru	01:12	03:17	01:12
1	Braeriach	02:24	04:29	01:12
2	Sgor Gaoith	03:48	05:53	01:24
3	Mullach Clach a'Bhlair	04:41	06:46	00:53
4	Beinn Bhrotain	06:35	08:40	01:54
5	Monadh Mor	07:07	09:12	00:32
6	Sgurr an Lochain Uaine	07:55	10:00	00:48
7	Cairn Toul	08:11	10:16	00:16
8	Devil's Point	08:45	10:50	00:34
	Corroul bridge (9 mins rest*)	09:10	11:15	00:25
9	Carn a'Mhaim	09:58	12:03	00:48
10	Ben Macdui	11:00	13:05	01:02
11	Derry Cairngorm	11:42	13:47	00:42
12	Beinn Mheadhoin	12:46	14:51	01:04
13	Beinn a'Chaorainn	13:41	15:46	00:55
14	Beinn Bhreac	14:24	16:29	00:43
15	Beinn a'Bhuid	15:42	17:47	01:18
16	Ben Avon	16:32	18:37	00:50
	R Avon footbridge (NJ126059)	17:24	19:29	00:52
	Fords of Avon	19:01	21:06	01:37
17	Bynack More	20:11	22:16	01:10
18	Cairngorm	21:54	23:59	01:43
	Loch Morlich YH	22:56	01:01	01:02

* many other brief stops for photos and to deal with food + 2 naps !

More info: <http://www.shr.uk.com/LongDistanceRecords.aspx?LongDistanceRecordID=10>