

All the Cairngorm Munros (THE RIGBY ROUND)



The author elsewhere in Scotland

The Cairngorm mountain range is situated in north east Scotland and contains 18 mountains exceeding 3,000 ft/914m (“munros”), five of which fall into the top six highest mountains in Scotland. It is famed for its high arctic like plateaux and corries and is the snowiest region in Britain. In 1988 Mark Rigby made the inaugural round of all 17 munros (as there were at that time) solo and unsupported in 22h 44min covering 75 miles and 19,000ft. In 1997 Angel Peak was elevated to Munro status. Only a small handful of attempts have succeeded in completing the round, which I first began harbouring ambitions to have a go at myself in 2008.

In 2009 work got in the way of a planned attempt. In June 2010 I had to abandon after 11 munros when I pulled a calf muscle and in May 2011, when I had three consecutive weekends earmarked, the weather was dreadful. In preparation for the 2011 Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc I had a training week in Scotland planned in late July/early August with the intention of several long days out and climbing as many large hills as possible. I didn’t have any fixed plans of where to go; I was going to try to follow the better weather. I managed a good day in the Arrochar Alps followed by two wet, poor visibility days in Crianlarich and on the Loch Treig munros. The weather forecast suggested more pleasant conditions in the east so I packed up and headed for the Cairngorms. With a great deal of ascent in fairly tired legs

already I was not seriously contemplating an attempt on the Rigby Round but I thought I could perhaps have a long day out following the first half of the route.

At 2am on 3rd of August I departed from Cairngorm Lodge Youth Hostel (Rigby’s start and finish point) towards the first Munro, Braeriach (1296m), via a bouldery gully known as the Chalamain gap. At 900m on the north ridge of Braeriach I ascended into thick clag where the visibility dropped to about 5m and it was out with the map and compass to locate the summit, which I did 2h 26min after departing Cairngorm Lodge. I didn’t have a schedule and wasn’t actively recording my times but I knew that I had arrived at the summit in about the same time as Rob Woodall who completed the round successfully in 2008. I departed the summit on a bearing to Sgor Gaoith, above Glen Feshie, as it began to get light, careful not to wander over the huge cliffs on my left in the cloud and dark. At 900m I descended below the cloud temporarily and crossed some really awkward, boggy and undulating terrain above Loch Einich before heading back into it for the climb up to Sgor Gaoith (1118m). By now it was light but the thick clag stayed put as I traversed the Am Moine Mhor bog wilderness on a bearing to the next munro, Mullach Clach a Blair (1019m). Half an hour later and the clag began to dissipate on the way to Monadh Mor (1113m). I skirted

round the northern edge of Tom Dubh and climbed by a stream towards the summit where I left my sack for the out and back to Beinn Bhrotain (1157m). I arrived at Corrouir Bridge at 11.11am, in the spectacular Lairaig Ghru, after traversing a further three munros (Angels Peak (1258m), Cairn Toul (1291m) and Devils Point (1004m). I took the opportunity to bathe my feet in the river, have a guacamole and tomato roll and apply some suntan lotion before heading up a steep, heathery gully onto munro #9, Derry Cairngorm (1156m), which I’d last climbed with Spyke and Mike Nelson on Spyke’s munro round in 2010.

Before I knew it, after a tough, hot 500m climb, I had arrived on top of Ben Macdui (1309m), the highest point in the Cairngorms, and was feeling on good form. At this point I had anticipated calling it a day and heading back over the plateau to Cairngorm and an afternoon nap but the day was glorious, I was over half way and the remaining eight munros were beckoning in the distance. I made my way to the col just to the south of Creagan a’ Choire Etchacan and dropped my sack again for the out and back to Derry Cairngorm (1156m).

The water from the outflow of Loch Etchacan was very welcome and refreshing: I was drinking litres and litres of the stuff, which was fortunately very abundant en route. I stopped by the tors on top of Beinn Mheadhoin (1182m) to sort my food out and phone home to let them know about my plan to carry on (Rigby left notes at certain summits to “help localise [his] dead body to a specific location if necessary”). I was mildly concerned about the descent from Beinn Mheadhoin into the Lairaig An Laoigh because the map suggested it was very steep and craggy in places but I took a bearing straight towards my next objective Beinn a’ Chaorainn (1083m) and found a good heathery line with not too many boulders. A quick chat with a walker, as I crossed the path by the river, was followed by a pretty brutal climb straight up to the summit. It was then four km across more bog to the smallest munro on the round, Beinn Bhreac (931m), which has a good view south towards the Linn of Dee. This is sort of an out and back and I thought of dropping my sack by the Allt Clais nam Balgair river but the paths are numerous and less well defined and I had visions of not being able to find it again.

The peat bogs on the traverse towards Beinn a’ Bhuird reminded me of environs closer to home and were a bit of a nuisance as you never knew when you would might end in up to the

knees. From Beinn a' Bhuid's summit (1197m) I decided to head towards the northern side of Cnap a' Chleirich to minimise undulation before dropping my sack again at about 1090m prior to descending to the col with Ben Avon. It was great to climb unencumbered to the fabulous summit tors on Ben Avon (1171m) and the most easterly point of the round. I had a brief chat with a walker who was collecting the numerous Ben Avon tops before heading back to collect my sack on the eastern flanks of Beinn a Bhuid. The next munro, Bynack Mor, is roughly 10km as the crow flies from Ben Avon and the route that has been used on previous attempts descends north from Ben Avon to pick up the path on the northern side of the River Avon, which is taken to the Fords of Avon. This looked like a bit of a dog's leg to me so I decided to go back over Beinn a Bhuid to the broad ridge that descends north from the summit. From there I took a bee line straight to the Fords of Avon, traversing very rough and boggy ground

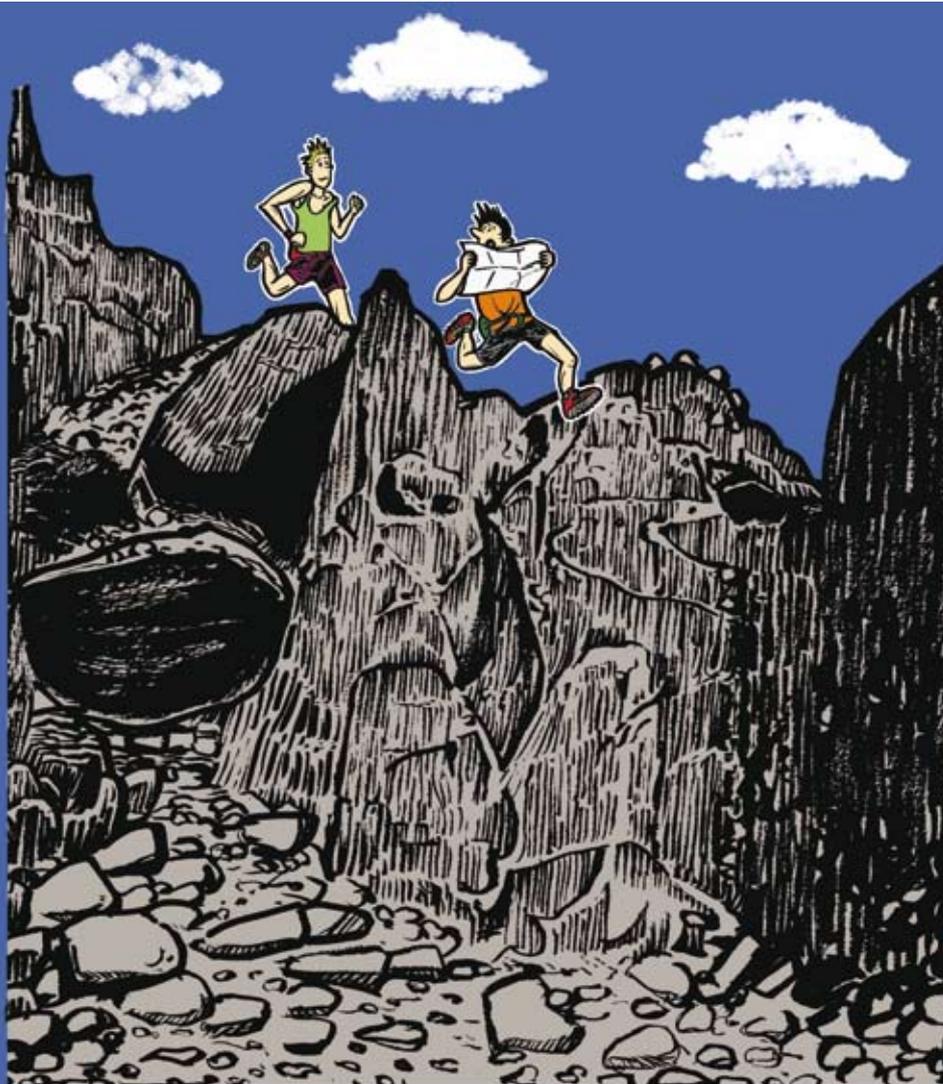
through Coire Ruairidh and round the northern flanks of the Chaorainn hills. I crossed the river about 400m east of the refuge, picked up the path, crossed the Allt Dearg and headed north before picking up a faint trod that climbs towards the large gully about half way up Bynack More's eastern flank. From there it was a straight forward ascent to the summit (1090m).

The sun was starting to set and I thought I would take a direct route over A' Choinneach to the Saddle. In hindsight this was a poor route choice and I would have been much better picking up the path to the east on better ground even though it meanders somewhat. From the Saddle it is a good 400m climb up to the final munro, Cairngorm (1245m). The first 100m on the path was pretty boggy but a good opportunity to fill up with water for the last time. I emerged on to the summit, just as the last rays of sunlight began to vanish behind the horizon, to spectacular views over the Cairngorm massif. I had to stop for a minute

just to soak up the enormity and beauty of it all and then it was just a question of following the trail of cairns to the Ptarmigan restaurant. I wasn't sure of the best way down from there so did what I normally do in the absence of information to the contrary and took the most direct route through bogs, boulders and heather to join the road just south of the Coire Cas car park.

I recollect thinking that I was making quite good time so decided to push on back to Cairngorm Lodge YH but in the dark missed the short cut that would eliminate the long hairpin bend taken by the road. I arrived back at the YH at 10.49pm, 20h 49min after starting out, having enjoyed a very good day on the hill.

The Rigby Round is usually attempted solo and unsupported and ideally without reconnaissance. The munros can be attempted in any order. If you would like to read more about this round then I would direct you to www.gofar.org.uk



*Jyson WITH APOLOGIES TO **asainnright!***

“According to the map the bad step should be right about here...”