

The Ring of Fire

by Glyn Jones

The superb Galloway Hills provide the finest wilderness country in Southern Scotland. This compact group of four ranges is roughly delineated by these roads: Newton Stewart – New Galloway – Dalmellington – Straiton – Glentroot village – Newton Stewart. They cover approximately 300 square miles, most of which is in the Galloway Forest Park, the largest in Britain. In fact, The Ring of Fire only strays outside Forestry Commission stewardship in the far north-east where it traverses Knockower (19) and Black Craig (20).

Originally the route was covered by the Harvey map of the area at 1:40,000 (based on one produced for the Karrimor International Mountain Marathon). Its successor is the Harvey Superwalker waterproof map of the Galloway Hills (1:25,000) and would have been the ideal map but an information panel covers the area of Knockower and Black Craig! The alternative is to use the OS Explorer Maps 318/319: Galloway Forest Park North/South. All these maps contain information on forest rides and firebreaks which will help avoid wasting time thrashing around in forests, although felling debris can often present obstacles.

The Ring of Fire is a 24 hour challenge of approximately 45 miles and with at least 12,500 feet of climbing across 30 summits of the Galloway Hills starting from Bruce's Stone in Glen Trool (GR 416 803). As it is a circular route it may be completed in either direction. It traverses the three main ranges: the Minnigaff Hills, the Rhinns of Kells and the Range of the Awful Hand taking in twenty one tops over 2000 feet and classified as Donalds. The terrain is mostly trackless, can be tough in places, and access for rescue services into the remote centre is not rapid. Navigation skills and mountain experience are essential so don't be tempted to treat the walk lightly by stinting on equipment, food, or fitness. There are no facilities however basic on the round. There are four bothies located on lower ground within reach of the route which provide a useful safety net in an area devoid of permanent habitation. It should be noted that the Forestry Commission campsite at Caldons near Loch Trool is now closed. Ample car parking exists at Bruce's Stone while public transport is infrequent and four miles distant at Glentroot village.

	Summit	Grid Ref	Height (ft)		Summit	Grid Ref	Height (ft)
1	Muldonoch	425 785	1844	16	Cairngarroch	515 914	2158
2	Larg	425 757	2217	17	Bow	508 928	2010
3	Lamachan	435 769	2352	18	Corran of Portmark	509 936	2042
4	Curleywee	455 770	2212	19	Knockower	516 943	1675
5	Red Gairy Top	473 750	2040	20	Black Craig	506 953	1732
6	Millfore	477 755	2152	21	Shiel Hill	417 945	1665
7	Cairnarroch	492 776	1825	22	Craigmasheenie	415 929	1768
8	Darrou	507 803	1624	23	North Top	401 919	2160
9	Little Millyea	512 811	1900	24	Shalloch on Minnoch	405 907	2520
10	Meikle Millyea	517 828	2455	25	Tarfessock – north	894 408	2285
11	Milldown	511 839	2415	26	Tarfessock – south	892 402	2050
12	Millfire	508 847	2450	27	Kirriereoch	420 869	2579
13	Corserine	498 871	2668	28	Merrick	427 856	2764
14	Carlin's Cairn	496 884	2650	29	Benyellary	415 839	2360
15	Meaul	501 910	2280	30	Bennan	405 823	1844

A short history

- 1990 - June First completion of the Gallo Way in approx 22 hours including a 4 hour bivvy plus picnic stops!
- 1991 - July First Gallo Way event, loss made; launched as a peak-bagging challenge which can be done at anytime.
- 1992 - August Gallo Way event becomes Rings of Fire with the addition of a shorter event to supplement income. Two courses – Gallo Way becomes Bruce's Crown reduced to 42 miles and Heart of Granite at 25 miles. Still run at a loss so made biennial. Bruce's Crown is a reference to the Robert Bruce's guerrilla warfare campaign from the Galloway wilderness which was instrumental in him gaining the crown of Scotland.
- 1993 Article for the Long Distance Walkers Association raises interest as a challenge.
- 1994 - August New less arduous course of 20 miles devised for Heart of Granite. Bruce's Crown re-measured at 42 miles. Rings of Fire event breaks even.
- 1996 - 10 April Improved record of 14 hours 44 min for the Gallo Way by Glyn Jones. Between 1992 and 1996 the record changed hands between Glyn and Ronald Turnbull six or seven times! All were solo, unsupported attempts.
- 1996 - August Rings of Fire now an established event with an excellent group of helpers and marshals plus Raynet support. Surplus made to cover previous losses and make charity donations.
- 1997 - 25 Feb First winter completion of Gallo Way in 17 hours 24 min by Glyn Jones although it did not fall within his "winter" criteria of being within six weeks of the solstice and being in snow and ice conditions.
- 1998 - August Very successful Rings of Fire attended by well known names. Satisfactory income and new records set. Organisation handed over to Colin Butler for a further four well organised events.
- 2000 - 2 Jan New winter record of 16 hours 35 min set by Glyn Jones this time fulfilling his strict winter criteria.
- 2000 - 2006 Four very successful events (2000, 2002, 2004 and 2006) organised most competently by Colin Butler even after moving some distance to Helensburgh.
- 2012 The Gallo Way renamed The Ring of Fire and recorded as a peak-bagging round on the gofar web site. The Ring of Fire title refers to the metamorphic aureole round the granite intrusion in the centre of the area.