

# Ben Nevis & Glen Coe

Two of Scotland's most famous place names, especially among walkers – Ben Nevis and Glen Coe – come to life in the southwestern Highlands. Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in Britain, dramatically overlooks the town of Fort William, while magnificent Glen Coe provides an awesome approach to an area graced by some of the most spectacular mountain scenery, and many of the finest walks, in the country.

In this chapter we describe three day walks to illustrate the wide variety of opportunities in the area. The ascent of 'the Ben' follows the main Mountain Track, where you will probably join many other 'pilgrims' and enjoy the camaraderie that soon develops between walkers. You're much less likely to have company along the low-level, historic Road to the Isles, through some of the remotest reaches of the area and following in the footsteps of long-gone cattle drovers. Then there's an exploration of perhaps the most distinctive of the many memorable peaks in Glen Coe, Buachaille Etive Mór, guarding the eastern entrance to the spectacular glen.

The northern half of the West Highland Way linking Glasgow and Fort William, Scotland's most popular long-distance walk, finishes in fine style through the region; you'll find a full description on p418. Fort William is definitely a walker's town and justifiably promotes itself as Scotland's Outdoor Capital. We hope these walks inspire you to linger and explore the area more fully.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Summitting **Ben Nevis** (p360), Britain's highest mountain and, on a good day, being treated to one of the finest views anywhere
- Following the historic **Road to the Isles** (p365) from remote Rannoch Moor to beautiful Steall Meadows and secluded Nevis gorge
- Exploring the lofty ridge and peaks of **Buachaille Etive Mór** (p370), the sentinel guarding the eastern entrance to Glen Coe

## INFORMATION

### When to Walk

Snow is a factor to be reckoned with to a much greater extent in this area than elsewhere in Scotland. However, by mid- to late May all but the highest reaches of Ben Nevis should be snow-free. At the other end of the season, expect light to moderate snowfalls from late October onwards.

### Maps & Books

OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 41 *Ben Nevis* covers all the walks in this chapter. Details of larger-scale maps are given in the Planning section for each walk.

*Walks Fort William* by John and Tricia Wombell describes 26 varied walks in the area. *Ben Nevis and Glen Coe* by Chris Townsend also has a good selection of routes. Alternatively, for mountain enthusiasts, there's Nick Williams' Pocket guide *Central Highlands*, which covers the Glen Coe area, among others.

### Information Sources

The website [www.outdoorcapital.co.uk](http://www.outdoorcapital.co.uk) is a rich source of information about a huge range of outdoor activities, while [www.visithighlands.com](http://www.visithighlands.com) is the site to visit for accommodation bookings.

### GATEWAYS

Fort William (p362) is far and away the largest town in the region. It's well served by daily Scottish Citylink bus services from Glasgow, Edinburgh and Portree on the Isle of Skye, daily First ScotRail trains from Glasgow and the *Caledonian Sleeper* service from London (daily except Saturday).

Glencoe is only other place of any size in the region but it could scarcely be called a transport hub, and isn't on the train line.

## BEN NEVIS

<b>Duration</b>	6–8 hours
<b>Distance</b>	9 miles (14.5km)
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate–demanding
<b>Start/Finish</b>	Ionad Nibheis Visitor Centre
<b>Nearest Towns</b>	Fort William (p362), Glen Nevis (p363)
<b>Transport</b>	bus

**Summary** A steep, stony path and a long day to the summit of Britain; an immensely rewarding walk with unsurpassed views.

There's something irresistible about climbing a country's highest peak, and hordes of walkers are drawn to Ben Nevis (1344m). The Ben tempts visitors with minimal, if any, walking experience and many discover they have taken on more than they expected. The mountain is a compelling presence above Fort William, often cloud-capped, and displaying a rugged profile from any and every viewpoint. The ascent is bound to be one of the more memorable events in any walker's career, so it's worth allowing a few days during which to stage your climb, to allow for the fickle weather.

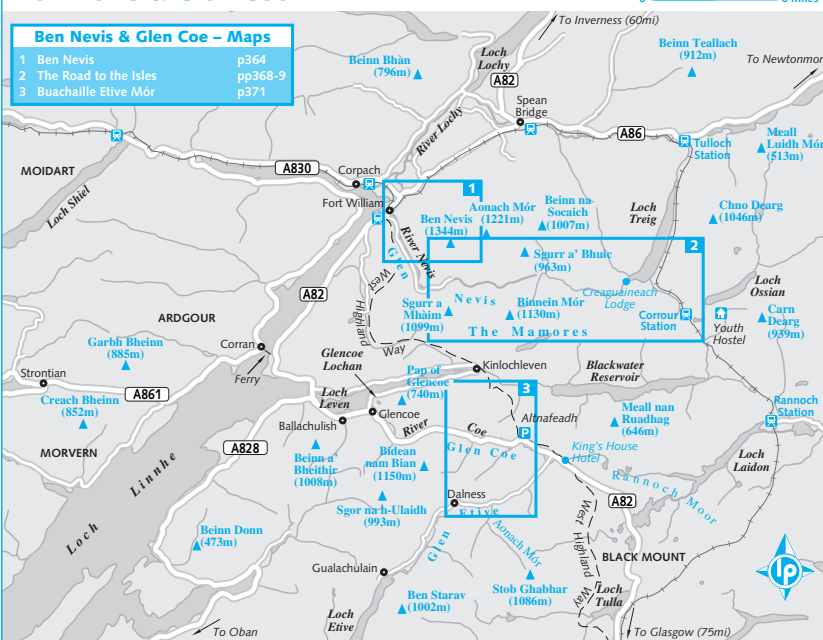
Despite, or perhaps because of its dangers, the mountain has a colourful history. During the summers of 1881 and 1882 one Clement Wragge, soon nicknamed 'the inclement rag', made a daily ascent of the Ben to take weather measurements for the Scottish Meteorological Society. In 1883 a weather observatory was built on the summit (it's now a ruin); today's path from Glen Nevis, known as the Mountain Track, follows the pony track constructed at the same time to supply the observers. The observatory closed in 1904 but a small hotel annexe continued in business during

### BEN NEVIS – AN EXTREME CLIMATE

Not surprisingly, the weather on Britain's highest mountain can be the most extreme in the country. The temperature on the summit is typically 9°C colder than at the foot of the mountain, and this figure doesn't take wind chill into account. An average of 261 gales per year rip across the summit and wind speeds well in excess of 100mph have often been recorded.

Even if skies are clear when you set out, don't be complacent, as the weather can turn arctic all too quickly. The mean annual summit temperature is below 0°C and snow often lies on the mountain until early summer; the summit is only a couple of hundred feet below the level of the permanent snow line. If the views are superb, count yourself lucky – on average the top is cloud-covered six days out of seven.

## Ben Nevis & Glen Coe



summer until 1918. In 1911 a Model T Ford was 'driven' to the summit as a publicity stunt – a feat that took five days.

A race to the summit was created as a distraction from the daily grind at the observatory. The first timed and recorded ascent was in October 1895: two hours 41 minutes for the return run from Fort William. The race has now become an institution, the **Ben Nevis Race** ([www.bennevisrace.co.uk](http://www.bennevisrace.co.uk)), with up to 500 runners entering the annual 'Ben Race' on the first Saturday of September. In 2006 the records stood at one hour and 25 minutes for men, and 18 minutes longer for women, both set way back in 1984.

### PLANNING

No walk up the Ben should be undertaken lightly. You start virtually at sea level and the ascent is continuous, all the way to the top. You should be well prepared with warm, protective clothing and plenty of food and drink. Navigating off the top is notoriously dangerous – sheer gullies cut into the plateau very near to the line of the path. Ensure that you have the bearings

needed to descend from the summit plateau in safety (see the boxed text, p362). Perhaps it is no surprise that among various theories about the meaning of the word 'Nevis', one has it deriving from Gaelic and Irish words meaning 'dread' and 'terrible'.

### Alternatives

It may be more convenient to start at the SYHA hostel, about 1 mile further up Glen Nevis; this path meets the Mountain Track above the hostel. Alternatively, if you have your own transport and are coming from Fort William, you can join the path from the car park at the end of the road near Achintee House. The daily weather forecast is posted on a notice board next to a local map. Climb a stile beside a gate; within 100m bear left up the wide path (the Mountain Track).

If you don't want to go all the way to the summit, or if there's snow, ice or cloud high on the mountain, a path from just above Halfway Lochan to the CIC hut affords splendid views of the awesome cliffs of the Ben's northeast face. This option is described in the Alternative Route (p365).

### GETTING DOWN SAFELY

The most hazardous part of the Ben walk is the descent from the summit plateau. Particular care is needed if there is snow on the ground or in poor visibility. To reach the top of the Mountain Track safely, use the following bearings:

From the trig point, walk 150m (probably about 200 paces) on a grid bearing of 231 degrees. Then follow a grid bearing of 281 degrees. This should take you safely off the plateau and onto the path. Do not forget to allow for magnetic variation, which is given on the recommended maps, and must be added to the grid bearing.

Two useful leaflets, *Ben Nevis Safety Information* and *Navigation on Ben Nevis* are available from the tourist office at the start of the walk.

### When to Walk

The best months for an ascent are July and August, by which time the summit plateau is normally free of snow, although it should be safe from June until late September.

### Maps & Books

The walk is covered by Ordnance Survey (OS) Explorer 1:25,000 map No 392 *Ben Nevis & Fort William*, and two Harvey maps: Superwalker 1:25,000 map *Ben Nevis* and 1:12,500 Summit map *Ben Nevis*.

Local leaflets covering this route include *Ben Nevis – Walking the Path from June to September*, produced by the Glen Nevis Ranger Service, and *Great Walks No 2*, produced by Fort William & Lochaber Tourism.

### Guided Walks

The John Muir Trust organises walks in the area; contact its **Nevis Conservation Officer** (☎ 01397-705049) or the Ionad Nibheis Visitor Centre (opposite) for details.

### NEAREST TOWNS

#### Fort William

pop 9910

Near the head of Loch Linnhe and famously in the shadow of Ben Nevis, Fort William was established as a garrison for the king's troops during the 17th century. These days it promotes itself, with considerable justification, as Scotland's Outdoor Capital, an unrivalled destination for walkers, climbers and outdoor-sports enthusiasts.

### INFORMATION

The **tourist office** (☎ 01397-703781; fortwilliam@visithighlands.com; Cameron Sq, High St; ☒) stocks maps and books, and can help with accommodation bookings. Pick up a copy of

Highland Council's *Public Transport Timetable – Lochaber*.

### SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

Among the clutch of outdoor gear shops in town, the easiest to find is **Nevisport** (☎ 0845 257 1344; www.nevisport.co.uk; Airds Crossing; ☒ daily), a short stroll from the train and bus stations. Its **café-bar** (snacks to £6, mains to £13; ☒ lunch & dinner) offers standard dishes and makes a feature of big steaks; as you'd expect, the atmosphere is very relaxed and congenial.

**Morrisons** supermarket is next to the train and bus station.

### SLEEPING & EATING

The nearest camping ground is in Glen Nevis (opposite).

Although some of the town's streets are wall-to-wall with B&Bs and guesthouses, accommodation can be hard to find during July and August, so it is advisable to book well ahead, especially if you want to stay in a particular hostel or B&B.

**Bank Street Lodge** (☎ 01397-700070; www.bankstreetlodge.co.uk; Bank St; dm/s/d £12/27/46), in a handy central location, has en suite rooms and small dorms, and a kitchen.

**Calluna** (☎ 01397-700451; www.fortwilliamholiday.co.uk; Heathercroft; r per person £15) is run by a highly experienced mountain guide and his wife. They offer comfortable accommodation in modern, semi-detached, self-contained apartments, available for short stays or week-long bookings.

**Lime Tree Studio** (☎ 01397-701806; www.limetreefortwilliam.co.uk; Achintore Rd; s/d £40/70) is, refreshingly, more an art gallery with rooms than a conventional B&B; its walls are decorated with the owners' Highland landscapes.

The **Grog & Gruel** (☎ 01397-705078; 66 High St; mains £10-15; ☒ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner daily) claims

to offer the best range of Scottish real ales anywhere. Match one or two of them with a pizza in the Alehouse, or steaks and seafood in the traditional pub-style restaurant.

**Crannog Seafood Restaurant** (☎ 01397-705589; Town Pier; mains £13-19; ☒ lunch & dinner), with an uninterrupted view over Loch Linnhe, is a great place to go for a celebration seafood feast. The maritime menu includes local mussels and langoustines.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Fort William is on the A82, 146 miles from Edinburgh, 104 miles from Glasgow and 66 miles from Inverness.

**Scottish Citylink** (☎ 0870 550 5050; www.citylink.co.uk) buses provide services from Glasgow (three hours, three daily), Edinburgh (four hours, three daily), Inverness (two hours, six services Monday to Saturday, two Sunday) and Portree to the Isle of Skye (three hours, three daily).

**First ScotRail** (☎ 0845 755 0033; www.firstscotrail.com) operates the *Caledonian Sleeper* service from London Euston to Fort William (13 hours, daily except Saturday) and the service from Glasgow (3¾ hours, three service Monday to Saturday, two Sunday). From Edinburgh, change at Glasgow Queen St.

### Glen Nevis

The village of Glen Nevis is really just a collection of amenities 2 miles from Fort William. It can be extremely busy in summer.

### INFORMATION

**Ionad Nibheis Visitor Centre** (☎ 01397-705922; ☒ Easter–mid-Oct) is 1.5 miles up the glen from Fort William. It stocks leaflets with advice

for Ben walkers, maps, books, basic walking equipment, trail snacks and drinks. Displays feature the geology and history of Ben Nevis and the surrounding area. Up-to-date mountain weather forecasts are posted here (and at the SYHA hostel). A voluntary fee is requested for use of the car park.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Glen Nevis Caravan & Camping Park** (☎ 01397-702191; www.glennevis.co.uk; sites for 2 £10) has an incomparable location and top-class facilities, so is swamped in summer; reservations are recommended.

**Glen Nevis SYHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 004 1120; www.syha.org.uk; dm £14; ☒) has a few small rooms and several largish dorms, and is ideally located for the Ben.

**Achintee Farm** (☎ 01397-702240; www.achinteefarm.com; dm/d £11/26, B&B d £30) combines a very comfortable B&B in the old farmhouse, a spacious hostel in which most of the rooms are twins or triples, and **Ben Nevis Inn** (mains £8-14; ☒ lunch & dinner), where you can choose from an extensive menu emphasising local products.

**Cafe Beag** (☎ 01397-703601; mains £6; ☒ lunch & dinner) offers pretty basic but inexpensive fare, while **Glen Nevis Restaurant & Bar** (☎ 01397-705459; bar mains £9-15, restaurant mains £10-18; ☒ lunch & dinner) does standard bar meals, leavened with daily specials. For something more imaginative, try the restaurant.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

**Highland Country Buses** (☎ 01463-710555; www.rapsons.com) operates a service between Fort William and Glen Nevis (20 minutes, eight services Monday to Saturday, four Sunday).

### LOOKING AFTER THE BEN

The Ben Nevis Estate went on sale in 1999 and the **John Muir Trust** (JMT; www.jmt.org) snapped up the property for around £500,000. The estate extends east into the Grey Corries and west past the upper Glen Nevis gorge. The Trust is a member of the **Nevis Partnership** (www.nevispartnership.co.uk), committed to sustained environmental and visitor management of the Ben Nevis massif and Glen Nevis, in particular through footpath repair projects.

Aware that, in many people's eyes, the Ben's summit had become Britain's highest rubbish tip, the JMT organised several clean-up days, on one of which the remains of a grand piano were unearthed. It turned out that it had once been lugged up there to raise funds for charity. The summit had also become a popular place for leaving mementoes of people who had died on the mountain, a controversial practice, with many walkers and climbers believing that the mountain was being desecrated. In response, the JMT opened a Garden of Remembrance near the tourist office in August 2006, where the memorials placed on the summit were brought together.

## GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

See p363 for details of the Highland Country Buses service through Glen Nevis.

By car, take the A82 east out of Fort William (towards Inverness), going straight on at the roundabout to follow the minor road signed 'Glen Nevis' to Ionad Nibheis Visitor Centre.

To reach Achintee (an alternative starting point), head northeast along the A82, turning off along the road to Claggan Industrial Estate, then follow signs to Achintee, where there's a car park at the end of the road.

## THE WALK

### Glen Nevis to Halfway Lochan

1½–2 hours, 1.5 miles (2.5km)

From the car park at the Ionad Nibheis Visitor Centre, take the signposted 'Ben Nevis Path' and cross the suspension bridge over the River Nevis. Follow the river bank upstream, then turn left and climb alongside a stone wall to reach the Ben Nevis Path (Mountain Track), where the climb begins in earnest. Gain height steadily on a good path, across the slopes of Meall an t-Suidhe

(Hill of Rest) and past the junction of the steep path up from the SYHA hostel. Continue on over a couple of footbridges; after about 40 minutes the path turns into Red Burn Glen. As the gradient eases a little, the path zigzags sharply then levels out as **Halfway Lochan** (its correct name is Lochan Meall an t-Suidhe) comes into view.

This is a good place to take stock. Is the weather still OK? Are you? From here to the top and back takes around three to five hours. If in any doubt, enjoy the view and go back down, or take the alternative route (opposite) to Allt a' Mhuilinn and back.

### Halfway Lochan to Ben Nevis

2–3 hours, 3 miles (5km)

Just east of Halfway Lochan the path turns right at a junction (the Alternative Route, described opposite, diverges here) to reach Red Burn Ford. The ruins of Halfway House, used in association with the summit observatory, are nearby. In days gone by walkers were charged one shilling (5p) for walking to the summit, the proceeds being used for path maintenance.

The much rougher path zigzags steeply up across stony slopes. The gradient eases at around 1200m and the path forks beside a large, circular stone shelter. The right-hand path is easier, but either will take you across the plateau to the summit cairn and trig point. Take care on this final section as the last bit of the path goes very close to the edge of the cliffs and gullies on the north face of the mountain. Keep especially well clear of any patches of snow. In poor visibility, don't lose sight of the summit cairn until you're ready to descend.

The summit of **Ben Nevis** isn't perhaps the most scenic of places, with the remains of the substantial walls of the observatory, several cairns and an emergency shelter, as well as the trig point – all set in a boulder-strewn moonscape. However, the views are exceptional, with the islands of Mull, Rum and Skye to the west and a myriad of mountain peaks as far as the eye can see.

### Ben Nevis to Glen Nevis

3 hours, 4.5 miles (7km)

To return you must retrace your steps. Remember to watch out for the dangerous summit gullies that cut into the mountain near the path and, in poor visibility, use the bearings listed in the box on p362.

### ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: BEN NEVIS LOW-LEVEL WALK

4½–5 hours, 8.5 miles (13.7km)

This route offers a pleasant alternative if you don't want to go all the way to the summit or if there is snow, ice or cloud on the upper part of the mountain. Follow the directions for the main route as far as Halfway Lochan.

From the path junction above Halfway Lochan follow a well-made path that leads north. A short distance along, bear right at a junction (the excellent path to the left goes down to the lochan) to follow a much rougher but clearly defined path north then east, overlooked by the magnificently rugged cliffs of the Ben's northern face. The path leads into the long, deep glen carved by Allt a' Mhuilinn, with the impressive Coire Leis at its head. Continue across the steep, boulder-strewn slope to the stone-built, private **CIC hut**, complete with a small wind generator. It is used by the Lochaber Mountain Rescue Team, one of the busiest

in the country. The views into the deep dark gullies and precipitous cliffs below the Ben's summit are truly awesome. Retrace your steps back to Glen Nevis.

## THE ROAD TO THE ISLES

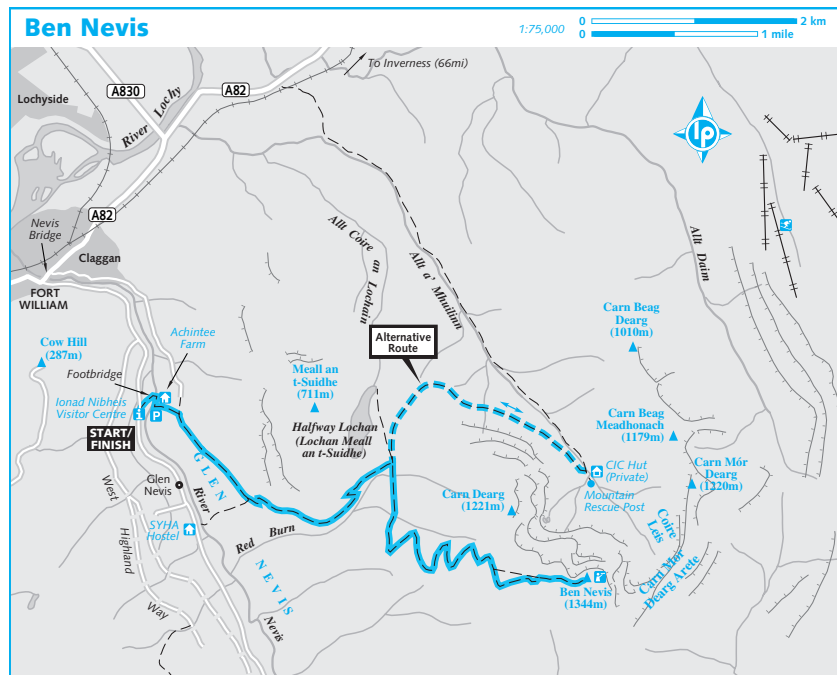
<b>Duration</b>	6½ hours
<b>Distance</b>	14.5 miles (23.5km)
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate
<b>Start</b>	Corour (p366)
<b>Finish</b>	Glen Nevis upper car park
<b>Nearest Towns</b>	Fort William (p362), Glen Nevis (p363)
<b>Transport</b>	train, bus

**Summary** A long and remote low-level walk, crossing some rough and wet ground, following a historic route from the wild expanses of Rannoch Moor to spectacular Nevis gorge.

The Road to the Isles means, to most people, the 46-mile route following roads westward from Fort William to the fishing port of Mallaig on the west coast. For walkers it means something just a little more adventurous – the eastern section of this ancient route through the western Highlands, linking central Scotland to the Isle of Skye via Fort William. It was a route much used by cattle drovers (and cattle thieves) heading for the cattle trysts (fairs) at Crieff and Falkirk. Armies, their quarries and refugees have also marched and fled along this route.

An old Scottish song about the Road to the Isles runs: 'By Loch Tummel, and Loch Rannoch and Lochaber I will go'; the walk described here goes through the heart of Lochaber. It starts at Corour Station (see the boxed text, p366), which, at 408m above sea level, is the highest station on the British rail network. Surrounded by the wilds of Rannoch Moor, it is probably also the most remote, being 11 miles from the nearest public road.

The route follows a right of way all the way to Glen Nevis, past the southern shores of Loch Treig, across wide, grassy, treeless moorland framed by comparatively low peaks. Once you cross the watershed, the scenery becomes much more dramatic, as the lightly wooded glen narrows right down to a mini-Himalayan gorge, the spiky Mamores ridge soars steeply to the south



and the rugged Grey Corries and mighty Ben Nevis tower above to the north. Simple bothies at Staoineag and Meanach can provide shelter, temporarily or overnight if you bring all the necessary equipment. Both are open and free to walkers year-round.

## PLANNING

This route is best done from east to west, to capitalise on Corroul's elevation, and the views are better going this way.

### When to Walk/Stalking

This route passes through Corroul and Grey Corries–Mamore Estates, where stalking usually takes place between mid-August and the end of October. Nevertheless, you are free to follow the right of way at any time.

### Maps

For detailed coverage of the route consult OS Explorer 1:25,000 maps No 385 *Rannoch Moor & Ben Alder* and 392 *Ben Nevis & Fort William*.

### Information Sources

The main tourist office in this area is in Fort William (p362).

### NEAREST TOWNS

See Fort William (p362) and Glen Nevis (p363).

### Corroul

Corroul begins and ends at the train station, a surprisingly busy place when trains arrive and depart, being popular with walkers, hostellers and train spotters keen to watch a steam train that passes through during summer.

### SLEEPING & EATING

As there are only two choices here, it is advisable to book ahead, as you might be unlucky if you turn up unannounced.

**Loch Ossian SYHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 004 1139; www.syha.org.uk; dm £13) is 1 mile east of Corroul station. As an eco-hostel, it has many environmentally friendly features. Bring your own sleeping bag and supplies.

**Corroul Station House B&B & Restaurant** (☎ 01397-732236; www.corroul.co.uk; s/d £26/52, breakfast £3, mains £8-15; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is a friendly, relaxed place offering pleasantly unfussed accommodation and satisfying meals in the former station waiting room. It hopes to open the refurbished bunkhouse in 2007.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

**First ScotRail** (☎ 0845 755 0033; www.firstscotrail.com) trains from Glasgow (three hours) and Fort William (50 minutes) stop at Corroul. There are three trains Monday to Saturday, and two Sunday. First ScotRail's *Caledonian Sleeper* service from London stops

## THE WEST HIGHLAND RAILWAY

The West Highland Railway (WHR) runs between Glasgow, Fort William and Mallaig, through some of Scotland's most wild and spectacular mountain scenery, which is also some of Britain's finest walking country. From Arrochar & Tarbet, Crianlarich, Bridge of Orchy, Spean Bridge and Glenfinnan stations you can set off on a seemingly endless range of wonderful mountain walks, direct from the platform. There are several opportunities for circular walks, or you can get off at one station, do a good walk, then catch the train again from another station up or down the line. From Fort William station it's only a few miles' walk to Britain's highest peak, Ben Nevis.

Possibly the most intriguing place to get off the train is at Corroul (above), in the middle of Rannoch Moor. Work on the line began in 1889 and up to 5000 men were employed in its construction, laying foundations of brushwood, ash and earth across miles of bog to support the tracks. It's a tribute to the railway's Victorian engineers that the line is still used. From Corroul there are plenty of peaks to climb and remote glens to explore, including the Road to Isles (p365) walk described here.

Beyond Fort William the magic is undiminished, with the line passing through the rugged country around Glenfinnan and going on to Mallaig, from where it is a short ferry ride to the Isle of Skye.

For a walker this railway is an absolute gift, and for any visitor to Britain a ride on the WHR is a must.

## CATTLE DROVING

The Road to the Isles is the most famous of the routes used by drovers on their way from the north of Scotland and the Isle of Skye to the markets in the lowlands. Its destination was Tyn-drum, about 10 miles south of Rannoch Moor and a key stop for the cattle droving trade during the 18th and 19th centuries. Herds of small, black Highland cattle and their drovers, who had usually trekked hundreds of difficult miles to this point, sometimes swimming across tidal narrows to reach the mainland (mostly from the Isle of Skye) and then crossing mountain passes and traversing remote glens, moved on from Tyn-drum to the trysts (cattle markets) at Crieff or Falkirk, northeast of Glasgow.

Cattle often continued on foot with their new owners across the border into England and the drovers had to start the long journey home. The cattle rustling, thieving and celebrations that accompanied the marches are still commemorated today.

here on request (11½ hours, daily except Saturday). The platform at Corroul is so small that only one door of the train can be opened to let passengers off; the conductor will tell you where best to sit.

### GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

To reach the Glen Nevis upper car park from Fort William, take the A82 east out of Fort William (towards Inverness) and keep going straight at a small roundabout to join a minor road signposted 'Glen Nevis'. Continue up the glen to the large car park at the end of the road.

If you haven't left a car here or haven't arranged to be picked up at the end of the walk, it's a 1.5-mile walk from the car park to the lower falls car park, at the end of the Highland Country Buses' Glen Nevis route (see p363).

## THE WALK

### Corroul Station to Creaguineach Lodge

1½ hours, 4 miles (6.5km)

From Corroul Station, on a clear day, you may enjoy a preview of Ben Nevis and its satellites. Cross to the western side of the railway line and follow the track leading northwest, signposted to Fort William (and other destinations). Old railway sleepers help to keep your feet dry across some soft spots and several small burns.

About 20 minutes out, cross a substantial bridge over Allt Luib Ruairidh and join a wide, firm vehicle track linking Loch Ossian (and the SYHA hostel) and Loch Treig. Soon the track descends steeply to the shores of **Loch Treig**. This is actually an artificial loch, contained by a dam at its northern end. The

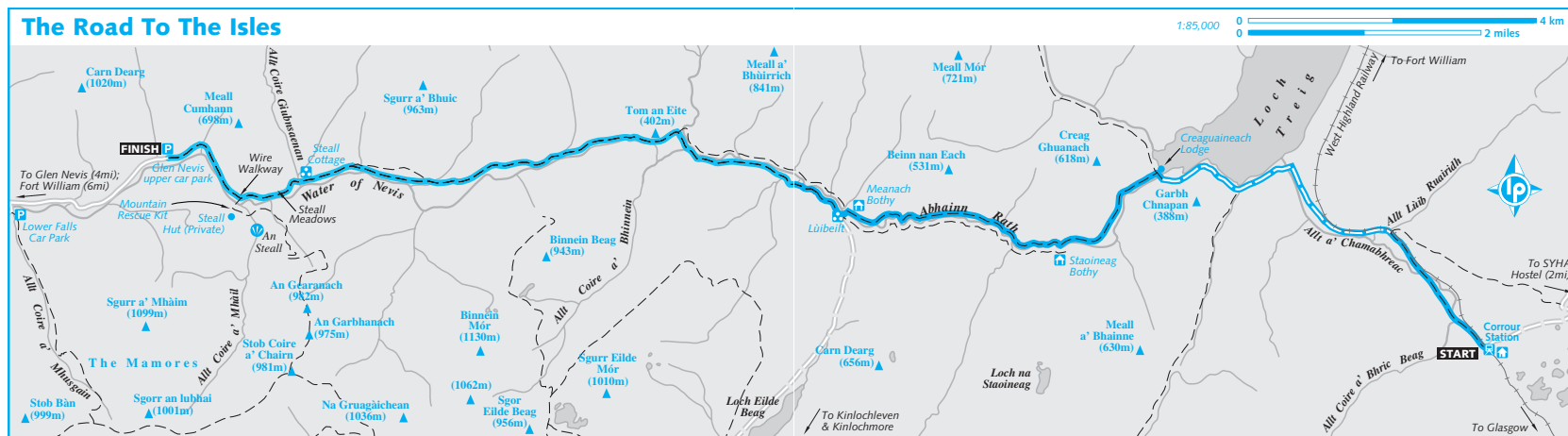
level of the original loch was raised as part of the hydroelectric power scheme to supply the aluminium smelter at Fort William. Opened in 1929, the scheme also involved a huge 15-mile-long tunnel through Ben Nevis to the prominent pipes on its western slope carrying water towards the turbines in the power station at the smelter. There are excellent views of the Mamores and shapely Binnein Beag ahead – you'll pass below this peak about three-quarters of the way along this route and it acts as a marker against which you can measure your progress.

The last thing you'd expect to see out here is a house, but **Creaguineach Lodge**, beside the southwestern corner of the loch, just survived Treig's enlargement. Before you reach the lodge, you need to decide whether to continue along the northern side of Abhainn Rath, following the right of way and the wider path, or to stay on the southern bank, chasing a much narrower and rougher path. The latter route avoids having to ford the stream much further westwards, only a problem if it is in spate.

### Creaguineach Lodge to Meanach Bothy

1½ hours, 3.5 miles (5.5km)

If you choose the northern route, cross the substantial bridge across the burn. The intermittently rocky path wanders along at varying distances from the burn, shaded in places by clumps of beech and birch. About 30 minutes from the lodge, pass **Staoineag Bothy** on the opposite bank, easily reached via a line of stepping stones. The glen here is wide and grassy; within 1 mile it narrows tightly for a short distance and the stream bounces down in a run of cascades. Soon it widens into vast, flat grasslands with



the peaks standing well back; in places the path is less than obvious but signs of passage aren't difficult to find. **Meanach Bothy** stands all alone in the midst of this; it has two rooms and provides good, weatherproof shelter. Across the river, Lùibeilt is a forlorn, roofless ruin, among a wind-lashed group of trees. A rough, yet driveable, track leads south from Lùibeilt to Kinlochleven, about 7 miles away; an escape route if necessary.

### Meanach Bothy to Glen Nevis upper car park

3½ hours, 7 miles (11.5km)

A track leads west from the bothy to the stream, where it's possible to hop across; alternatively, continue upstream on a narrow path until you find a suitable ford. If you do cross here, pick up a rather rough track leading northwest; about 1 mile beyond Lùibeilt the track becomes a path and soon fades. The easiest going is close to the stream. You are now nearing Binnein Beag, which comes into view again on the left. Far ahead is the massive Aonach Beag, with the outer peak of Sgurr a' Bhuic, which you'll soon pass to your right.

Cross Allt Coire a' Bhinnein and head north along the western wide of Allt Coire Rath for a couple of hundred metres to pick up a path leading generally west. It cuts across the slope of **Tom an Eite**, an amorphous lump lying above the narrow watershed between the east-flowing Abhainn Rath and the Water of Nevis. The path, generally easy

to follow, heads downstream in a fairly determined fashion. After 1 mile or so there is, theoretically, a choice between an upper level (and drier) path, and a lower, more clearly defined one, but the parting of the ways is very obscure. Unless there's been a lot of rain recently, the lower path isn't too bad, and you can easily keep your feet dry.

As you leave Binnein Beag behind, many more fine peaks in the Mamores come into sight and there's a dramatic view of Ben Nevis' northeast profile. Eventually you reach the ruins of Steall Cottage and a substantial footbridge over the burn that drains the corrie between Aonach Beag and Ben Nevis. You soon discover the origin of the cottage's name, across on the far side of the Water of Nevis; the beautiful **An Steall** waterfall, a skein of cascades down more than 100m of rock slabs. Steall Hut, also on the other side of the river, is private and reached by a bridge comprising just three wire ropes – try it if you dare, and imagine negotiating it in high winds with a backpack filled for a week's stay! There are usually plenty of people about here, with the falls being a popular destination for a short walk from Glen Nevis.

The path leading out of this sanctuary starts at the base of the cliffs, still on the northern side of the glen. The river takes an abrupt turn to the right and surges down a steep, rocky gorge, the bed of which is filled with massive boulders. A well-constructed path, with a few bouldery sections, clings

to the steep, wooded slope of the glen. At a sharp turn back to the left there's one last excellent view back up this dramatic gorge to An Steall. The path brings you out at the Glen Nevis upper car park. Unless you have been able to arrange a lift, it is another 1.5 miles down the road to the bus stop at the lower car park.

## GLEN COE

Glen Coe is one of the most popular destinations for walkers and climbers in Scotland and one of the most dramatic glens, especially when approached from the east, along the A82. You descend from the vast, open spaces of Rannoch Moor, pass the pyramidal sentinel of Buachaille Eive Mór and drop into the Pass of Glencoe, a notch between Am Bodach (at the eastern end of the awesomely rugged ridge of Aonach Eagach) and Beinn Fhada. Below, the valley floor is pancake flat and no more than 500m wide. To the north, sweeping up from sea level to more than 900m, the ramparts of Aonach Eagach are so steep that you must crane your neck to see the top. To the south the massive buttresses known as the Three Sisters throw shadows across the valley. Partly hidden behind them are the tantalising peaks of Bidean nam Bian and Stob Coire nan Lochan. The view is one of the most arresting in Scotland – and that's just from the car or bus!

The history of Glen Coe has its dark side. It is known as the 'glen of weeping', not because of the rainfall levels (though this is one of the wetter areas of Scotland) but because it was the scene of an infamous massacre of local members of a sept of the MacDonald clan by soldiers led by a Campbell in 1692.

In 1935 Glen Coe became one of the National Trust for Scotland's earliest land acquisitions. Aonach Eagach and Signal Rock were purchased, and two years later the mountains on the south side of the glen were donated to the Trust. The estate now covers approximately 2.1 sq miles. The Trust's mandate is simple: to protect the natural and cultural heritage of the area and to ensure open access for walkers.

## ENVIRONMENT

For geologists, too, Glen Coe is an area of great significance. The event that confers such significance occurred towards the end of a period of volcanic activity 60 million years ago. A circular piece of the earth's surface, roughly 6 miles in diameter, fractured and sank into the hot magma below, a phenomenon known as cauldron subsidence. The discovery of the cauldron in Glen Coe marked an important development in geological knowledge. A small quarry near the Clachaig Inn exposes the fault line of the cauldron, which then follows the prominent gully west of Achnambeithach Cottage.

Around 25,000 years ago, Glen Coe was blanketed by ice. Lairig Gartain and Lairig Eilde's classic U-shaped valleys – visited on the Glen Coe & Glen Etive Circuit (p373) are outstanding examples of glacial action.

## BUACHAILLE ETIVE MÓR

<b>Duration</b>	5½ hours
<b>Distance</b>	6.5 miles (10.5km)
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate–demanding
<b>Start/Finish</b>	Altnafeadh
<b>Nearest Town</b>	Glencoe (right)
<b>Transport</b>	bus
<b>Summary</b>	A surprisingly easy ascent leads to a superb walk along the ridges and over the summits of the most distinctive mountain in Glen Coe.

Standing sentinel at the head of Glen Coe, Buachaille Etive Mór is one of the most distinctive landmarks in Scotland and the appeal of this mountain for walkers is unmistakable. The initial appearance of the mountain, when viewed from the A82 to the east or from the start of the walk, is one of an impregnable pyramid of buttresses and chasm-like gullies. But looks are often deceiving and a steep, but fairly straightforward, ascent can be made via Coire na Tulaich. The summit, commonly referred to as Buachaille Etive Mór, is actually Stob Dearg (1022m). From this high point, the ridge continues to the west and southwest, connecting another three summits: the sharp cone of Stob na Doire (1011m); Stob Coire Altruim; and the second Munro on the ridge (and the most southerly peak), Stob na Bròige. With deep valleys on either side, the views and feeling of space from the ridge and summits are exceptional.

Once you've gained the ridge from Coire na Tulaich the walking is quite easy, with only a few short ascents required to reach the various summits. The route described here continues along the ridge and across Stob na Doire, then descends into Lairig Gartain via Coire Altruim. Total ascent for the walk is 1080m.

## PLANNING

The route is described in a clockwise direction for aesthetic reasons, although it can also be done in the opposite direction.

Snow can lie at the head of Coire na Tulaich until well into spring. At any time the high ground is exposed to strong winds and can be blanketed with thick cloud for days on end. Make sure you check the weather forecast before setting out. The ability to use a map and compass is essential.

## Alternatives

As a short option you can simply return down Coire na Tulaich after reaching the summit of Stob Dearg, a walk that will take about three to four hours.

If you are chasing the Munros, Stob na Bròige (956m) can be reached on a side trip before the final descent. Add an hour or so for this jaunt.

## Maps & Books

This walk is covered by OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 41 *Ben Nevis* and the Harvey Superwalker 1:25,000 map *Glen Coe*.

Chris Townsend's *Ben Nevis & Glen Coe* is a reliable guide by one of the most experienced walkers in Scotland.

## NEAREST TOWN

### Glencoe

pop 360

Glencoe is a picturesque village at the western end of Glen Coe. Fortunately most of it is bypassed by the A82, so it remains fairly quiet, separated from the heaviest traffic.

## INFORMATION

**The National Trust for Scotland Visitor Centre** (☎ 01855-811307; www.glencoe-nts.org.uk; ☒ Mar-Oct), 1 mile east of the village, off the A82, is an award-winning eco-building, and houses displays (£5) about conservation issues and local geology. Videos explore the Glen's natural and cultural history, and a shop stocks a good range of walking guides and maps, including the NTS' own *Glencoe* guide. There is also a **cafeteria** (mains to £3; ☒ 10am–5pm) offering soup and packaged sandwiches. The daily weather forecast is prominently displayed. A diverse program of guided walks and other events is staged from the office; bookings are advisable.

## SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

**Mountain Sports Equipment** (A82) stocks outdoor gear and maps. There's a small **Spar** supermarket in the village.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Red Squirrel Campsite** (☎ 01855-811256; www.redsquirrelcampsite.com; Leacantium Farm; sites for 2 £7), beside the River Coe, offers the rare opportunity to sit around the perfect midge repellent – a campfire.

**Glencoe SYHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 004 1122; www.syha.org.uk; dm £14; ☒) is about 1.5 miles east of the village. It is popular, though the largish dorms give it an institutional atmosphere.

**Glencoe Hostel & Bunkhouse** (☎ 01855-811906; www.glencoehostel.co.uk; camp sites for 2 £10, dm £10; ☒) is 1¼ miles east of the village. It offers a variety of hostel-style accommodation and has a compact camp site. There's also a small on-site shop.

**Clachaig Inn** (☎ 01855-811252; www.dachaig.com; s/d £38/84, bar meal mains £9-15) is 2.5 miles east of Glencoe. The inn really comes into its own during the evening, when most outdoor folk in the area congregate in the climbers' bar. The selection of Scottish real ales to wash down the very generous meals is bewilderingly wide and all too tempting; there's the added attraction of regular live music.

The isolated **King's House Hotel** (☎ 01855-851259; www.kingy.com; s/d £35/30, bar meals £7-11), a few miles southeast of Altnafeadh, is the closest shelter and watering place to the walk described here. It is one of Scotland's oldest licensed inns, dating from the 17th century; it was used as a garrison by government troops after the Battle of Culloden in 1746.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

The A82 linking Glasgow and Fort William slices through Glen Coe but bypasses the village.

**Scottish Citylink** (☎ 0870 550 5050; www.citylink.co.uk) buses between Glasgow (2½ hours, three daily) and Fort William (30 minutes, three daily) stop at the Glencoe crossroads. **Highland Country Buses** (☎ 01463 710555; www.rapsons.com) provides a service between Fort William and Kinlochleven via the Glencoe junction (40 minutes, at least seven Monday to Saturday, three Sunday).

## GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The walk starts and finishes at the parking area beside the A82 at Altnafeadh.

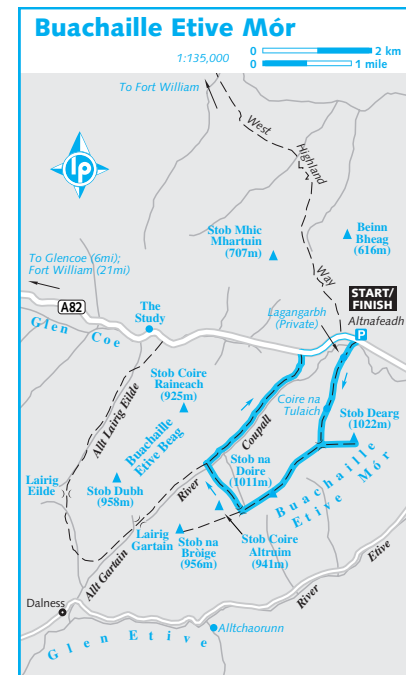
Scottish Citylink buses (see above) will stop at Altnafeadh if you request this unscheduled stop when you board.

## THE WALK Altnafeadh to Stob Dearg

2 hours, 2 miles (3km)

From the parking area follow a wide 4WD track to a large footbridge. Continue along a good path past Lagangarbh Cottage and gently upwards into Coire na Tulaich. Ignore a path going off to the left (this leads to the many scrambles and rock climbs on the buttresses further east) and follow the path along the right bank of the Allt Coire na Tulaich, which will probably be dry in summer. Higher up, the ground becomes steeper and the stream bed is choked with boulders. The path climbs to the right, onto easier ground, heading for the scree slopes above. Once on the scree, stick to the right, where a well-constructed path leads to the top of some small rock outcrops below the rim of Coire na Tulaich. After that, it is a short scramble to the top and you emerge suddenly on the ridge between Stob Dearg and Stob na Doire (1½ hours from the start).

Turn to the east and climb steadily for 20 minutes over stony, frost-shattered ground to the summit of **Stob Dearg** (1022m). There



are fine views to the east across vast Rannoch Moor, and to the north and northwest across the shapely summits of the Mamores to the unmistakable, whale-backed profile of Ben Nevis. Closer to home, the eye is drawn to the steep northeast face of Stob na Doire, which is the next mountain on the agenda.

### Stob Dearg to Stob na Doire

1 hour, 1.5 miles (2.5km)

Descend back to the top of Coire na Tulaich and head west and then southwest across a lovely, broad ridge with many small lochans filling the depressions between grassy hummocks. Ten or 15 minutes of walking on this ridge should see you at the base of the short, steep haul to Stob na Doire. A well-defined path shows the way to the small summit cairn on **Stob na Doire** (1011m). The vista to the west across Bidean nam Bian now dominates and there are also excellent views south into Glen Etive. To the southwest the Buachaille Etive Mór ridge continues to Stob na Bròige, and immediately below, in a col, you can make out the red erosion scar of a path heading down into Coire Altruim.

### Stob na Doire to Altnafeadh

2½ hours, 3 miles (5km)

Descend steeply to the col; from here you can do a side trip to Stob na Bròige to the southwest for good views of Loch Etive, or start heading back to Altnafeadh. The return journey to the summit is a little more than 1 mile, involves just over 200m of ascent (approximately an extra hour of walking time) and the terrain is quite easy.

From the col, the descent into Coire Altruim is steep but quite straightforward, except for a few wet, rocky steps towards the bottom where a little care is needed. Allow an hour to reach the River Coupall, which may be difficult to ford if it is in spate. If so, simply follow the river back to Altnafeadh and cross it on the footbridge used at the start of the walk. If the river is low, cross over and follow the well-defined but boggy path that takes you to the A82, just a few hundred metres west of Altnafeadh (one hour from the col).

## MORE WALKS

### BEN NEVIS AREA

#### The Mamores

This shapely mountain range lines the southern side of Glen Nevis and offers Munro baggers a challenging circuit, including the knife-edged Devil's Ridge and magnificent views of mountains both near and distant. Known as the Ring of Steall walk, it starts and finishes at the upper car park in Glen Nevis and takes in Sgurr a' Mhàim, Sgorr an Iubhai, An Garbhanach and An Gearanach.

You will need to allow around eight hours for this moderate-demanding 8.5-mile (13.5km) walk, which involves a total ascent of around 1500m. Consult the OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 392 *Ben Nevis*. The best of the several guides to the Munros is the Scottish Mountaineering Club's (SMC) *The Munros* by Rab Anderson and Donald Bennet.

### GLENCOE LOCHAN

Part-hidden by tall forest just north of Glencoe village (p370), the eponymous Glencoe Lochan sits at the foot of the western end of the ridge bounding the northern side of Glen Coe. On fine days its waters display beautiful reflections of the distinctive profile of Sgorr na Ciche, better known as the Pap of Glencoe. Three colour-coded, waymarked walks around the lochan and through the surrounding forest, owned and managed by the Forestry Commission, make for a pleasantly easy-going afternoon. The walks start at a car park at the end of a rough track, branching from the minor road at the Bridge of Coe at the eastern end of the village.

Follow markers for the blue route steeply up to a lookout for fine views of peaks in western Glen Coe, and in Morvern and Ardgour across Loch Linnhe. Soon, descend steeply to a junction and turn right to follow the lochan's shore. Cross the outlet and a retaining wall to a junction; turn right and go down to the car park. This 1.8-mile (3km) walk should take about 45 minutes. Although a map is scarcely necessary for this stroll, the OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 41 *Ben Nevis* is useful for orientation from the viewpoint.

### The Grey Corries

The Grey Corries lie at the eastern end of the massif crowned by Ben Nevis. A string of graceful, conical summits is linked by a high-level ridge that provides an exceptionally fine walk. The approach is quite long, however, and you will need eight or nine hours for the traverse to Beinn na Socaich, or 10 hours if you go on to Sgurr Chóinnich Beag. Start and finish at Corriechoille, 2.5 miles east along a minor road from Spean Bridge. Unfortunately, public transport (from Fort William) will take you only as far as Spean Bridge. The nearest facilities are here and in Fort William (p362). For the truly heroic, how about the Lochaber Traverse, beginning at Corriechoille and traversing the Grey Corries, Aonach range, Carn Mór Dearg, and finishing with an ascent of Ben Nevis. All in one day of course! Consult OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 392 *Ben Nevis* and the SMC's *The Munros* by Rab Anderson and Donald Bennet.

### GLLEN COE

#### Glen Coe & Glen Etive Circuit

This 10-mile (16km) moderate, low-level walk offers an introduction to the wildness and ruggedness of Glen Coe. Following rough and, in places, wet paths (historic rights of way) that circumnavigate Buachaille Etive Beag, the walk starts on the A82

at Altnafeadh (for access details, see p371), from where it is necessary to follow sections of an old road and the main road verge to the signposted start of the path, 2 miles to the east. The exceptionally scenic route crosses two dramatic passes, Lairig Eilde and Lairig Gartain, and involves 600m of ascent. Consult OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 41 *Ben Nevis*. The walk is described in *Walks Fort William* by John and Tricia Wombell.

### Bidean nam Bian

The ascent of this, the highest mountain in Glen Coe (1150m), is one of the Glen Coe classics. The route squeezes through the steep-sided glens that separate the Three Sisters – the towering buttresses enclosing the southern side of Glen Coe – then climbs onto the main massif and its fine rocky ridges. A 6-mile (9.5km) circuit from near Allt-na-reigh cottage on the A82, involving 1150m ascent, should take six to seven hours. Best done clockwise, the route goes up the tragic Lost Valley (associated with the infamous massacre of Glen Coe), across high ground via Bidean's summit and Stob Coire nan Lochan and down Coire nan Lochan. Carry OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 384 *Glen Coe* and consult the SMC's *The Munros* by Rab Anderson and Donald Bennet.

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